Things could be worse. This was the scene at 36 Great Road after a storm, possibly the great Ice Storm of 1921.

About your old and rare books

After taking a break for the winter holidays, we resume our lecture series this month with a talk by Ken Gloss.

The world-famous Brattle Book Shop in Boston, one of America’s oldest and largest antiquarian bookstores, was founded in 1825 and has about 150,000 volumes in stock covering a very wide variety of subjects. Proprietor Kenneth Gloss will present his popular lecture, “Is there value in your old and rare books?”

Following his talk, he will take questions. The audience is encouraged to bring books to the meeting for evaluation.

At 7:30 we have coffee, goodies, and a nice chat, then we start the meeting at 8:00.

**Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2010, 7:30 PM**

**Congregational Church**

**25 The Great Road, Bedford**

Free and open to all. Please bring a friend or three - all are welcome!
Archives hours

Our room in the Stearns Building (a.k.a. the Police Station building) at 2 Mudge Way is usually open at the following times:

Monday, 9 to 12 and 1 to 5
Tuesday, 9 to 12 and 1 to 5
Wednesday, 9 to 1

Other times by appointment. It’s best to phone ahead before you stop by because we do step out for errands now and then. Please call 781-275-7276.

In Memoriam

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Sarah Getty in late 2009. Our thoughts and prayers are with her husband, David, and family.

Memorial donations

We are grateful to receive gifts in memory of Mina and Larry Kimball from two gracious donors:

Nancy Walline Doty
Elsa Olsen Sullivan

Our generous friends

Our Annual Giving letter has brought a generous response from our friends:

Anonymous
Bedford Woman's Community Club
Carol Amick
Angelo and Gabrielle Colao
Jan van Steenwijk
Ellen and Lawrence Carlton
Aldie Johnson
Bea Brown
Patricia Leiby
Barbara Hitchcock
Helen Nowers
Doris Webber
Michael and Dawn Rosenberg
Stanley and Blanche Wentworth
Arthur and Marietta Ellis
Val and Nancy Asbedian
Carol and Steve Jamison
Frank and Joan Gicca
Martin Goldman and Dorothy Klepper
Cynthia and Charles Schwegge
Joseph C. Damery
Cynthia Rider
Mary and Mark Archer
Sue and Thomas Crowder
Constance Donovan Dodge
Bonnie and John Croteau
John Gerdes
Roger and Carol Little
Beatrice Falabella
Louise Maglione
Betty and Bob Slechta

We just couldn’t do what we do without the help we have enjoyed over the years from supporters like these. We are deeply grateful to all.
My, how we’ve grown!

Wow! We’ve gained 19 members since our last newsletter came out in November:

Janet Powers
Claude and Doreen French
Walter and Rosemary St. Onge
Joseph C. Damery
Laurie Venuti
Carol Connors
John and Marie Linz
Earl Sorensen
Patriot Pediatrics
Lorrie Dunham
Deb and Ron Smith
Cindy and Ron Taylor
Patrick Mahoney
Susanne Harrison
June and Richard Axtell
Bruce Blake
Beatrice Falabella
Lloyd and Ilza Gottlieb
Patricia Marcus
David and Heather Pullen
Elsa Olsen Sullivan

Welcome, all! We are so glad to have you with us.

One fine party

We had an excellent turnout for our annual holiday party at the home of Carol Amick and Bill Moonan. The highlight of the party was the tool-guessing contest. (Photos courtesy of Julie Turner.)
Winners of the tool-guessing contest are shown with Holiday Party host Bill Moonan: (l to r) Don Corey, Pat Pellegrini, Bill, Bob Schlecta (won first place!) and Joe Damery

Historical Society President Jan van Steenwijk expresses holiday wishes to the large group that attended the Society’s 2009 holiday party. The Amick-Moonans already have agreed to hold the 2010 party in their home.
The Great Bedford Liquor War, 1912-13

Just when did the people of Bedford begin the quarrel over liquor? Hard to say, but the arrival of streetcars in 1902 made it easy to reach Bedford’s sources of refreshment from nearby towns. Battle lines were definitely drawn by 1909 when, as the Selectmen stated in the Annual Town Report, “Early in this year it became necessary for this board to stop the illegal sale of liquor in Bedford... The appearance on our streets... of drunken and otherwise disorderly persons, many from other towns... was fast giving Bedford a bad name.” They instructed the police to chase out people who had come to town only to drink. All sales of alcoholic beverages were illegal, as Bedford had been a “dry” town for years.

The opening shots of the war were fired in 1912. A Bedford resident, an otherwise respectable working man with a family, was arrested on charges of “profanity” after having too much to drink. Some felt that his case had been handled improperly. A Bedford minister took up the cause and demanded that the Bedford police chief be removed from his job for his handling of the arrest and for failing to stop illegal sales of liquor. Battle lines were drawn. Soon the whole town was drawn into the Great Bedford Liquor War.

In fairness it must be said that both the police chief and the minister no doubt wanted what was best for Bedford. They differed only in the manner of bringing out a better state of affairs. Each man in his professional capacity had to deal with the effects of alcohol abuse and found existing conditions to be unacceptable. Alcoholism, then as now, was no joke; and a century ago there was not much of a safety net for the families of alcoholics.

But what to do about liquor in Bedford? Newspaper clippings, leaflets, and correspondence preserved in the scrapbooks of Charles Jenks can be seen as the spent shell casings of the artillery fired in the war.

First, the minister sent a circular letter to all Bedford voters, asking for a hearing in regard to the police chief’s handling of the arrest. The Selectmen responded with a circular letter criticizing the minister for his manner of making charges against the police chief.

Petitioners placed before Town Meeting an article to eliminate the position of Police Chief altogether. This was not as odd as it seems today. The position was still relatively new and not everyone thought it necessary to have a police chief in a community. A constable or two had always been enough.

Back and forth flew the charges, the letters, the petitions, and the leaflets. The fighting became so intense that the Boston papers began reporting the story in headlines such as these in March 1913:

Minister Accuses Bedford Police Chief
[Boston Journal]

Bedford Chief Hits at Pastor in Liquor War
[Boston American]

Bedford Pastor and Chief in Merry War
“Did anyone ever hear of ‘Darkest Bedford’? Has Bedford been bruited abroad as a community of crime?” [Boston Journal]

Some thought that the way to reduce illegal sales of liquor was to allow sales in limited, licensed settings. Under state law, a town the size of Bedford could have one establishment licensed to sell alcoholic drinks and one pharmacy licensed to sell liquor for medicinal purposes. An article to allow liquor sales in Bedford was presented to the voters. This, too, was controversial. One of the Selectmen who had given testimony before a state board in support of sales by pharmacies was so heavily criticized that felt obliged to send a circular letter to the townspeople.

Votes were cast on March 3, 1913. The supporters of licensed liquor sales won their bid to make Bedford
a “wet” town again for the first time in years, and a Selectman who had supported the police chief won re-election against an anti-chief candidate. This, too, reached the city papers:

**Bedford Will Try License, Abandons Policy of Two Decades** [Boston Globe]

**Voters Stand by Chief, Town Votes for License** [Lowell Courier-Citizen]

**Bedford Flops to License Column After Hot Fight for Town Election**
[unidentified newspaper]

The Boston Traveler and Evening Herald put it much more strongly in the headline over a profile of the policeman and the pastor:

**Victor and Vanquished in Bedford War**

A few days later, a Special Town Meeting voted to retain the post of Police Chief. The war seemed to be over. But it was not so simple. Another headline soon reported a complication:

**Bedford May Remain Dry Town in Spite of License Votes** [Lowell Courier-Citizen]

Although the town had voted to allow liquor licensing, it was up to the three Selectmen to decide which saloon, if any, could have the liquor license – and two opposed giving any license at all. The battle resumed, as reported in a long article in the Boston Sunday American:

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**Old Bedford Town Expected to Recover from its Bad Fall Off Water Wagon Last Tuesday**

One casualty of the war was a “Dry” Selectman who resigned his office, leaving one “Wet” and one “Dry” member. Who would fill the vacancy? The voters elected a “Wet” replacement, and soon the Bedford House hotel was granted a saloon license.

Boston newspapers seemed to find it all very amusing:

**Wet – Dry – Wet – Dry – Wet - Dry**
[Boston Sunday Herald]

**Bedford Oasis in Dry Desert**

“[T]he first legalized bar in this historic little town of 1500 inhabitants for 27 years will be opened in the Bedford House, under the lynx-eyed supervision of Mine Host Bartlett, proprietor.” [Boston Herald]

**Bedford Has a Wet Spot After 27 Years**
[Boston Record]

The “Wets” had won the final battle. The smoke cleared, the dust settled, and the combatants returned to the plough – after slaking their thirst with the beverage of their choice, no doubt. The Great Bedford Liquor War was over.

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(From the scrapbooks of Charles Jenks)
Fundraiser at Fitch Tavern, June 19

Hold the date and watch for more information! A lavish dinner fundraiser will be held on behalf of the Bedford Historical Society at the historic Fitch Tavern, during this year of the Tavern’s 300th anniversary.

Tavern owners Lea Ann and Michael Knight have graciously offered their beautiful antique home for the party, and will provide pre-dinner tours of the first floor.

Dress will be black tie or equivalent – or Colonial costume. More details will follow regarding food, music and ticket information.

Community outreach

Our lectures series is “on vacation” until February 24, but we continue to offer activities year-round:

Quilt display at the High School. We’ve installed our own Page Quilt, plus several lovely quilts on loan to us, in the display cases in the front lobby of Bedford High.

History tour to Two Brothers Rocks. On January 18 we led a group by ski and by foot on a history tour from Old Causeway Road to the Two Brothers Rocks. Attendees ranged in age from under 8 to over 80. A grand time was had by all.

Martha Sage returns. The Friends of the Bedford Free Public Library are currently sponsoring a six-part lecture series on the Civil War by Dan Breen. At the suggestion of Bob Slechta, Lee Yates will appear at the February 21 lecture to reprise her role (hoop skirts and all) as Martha Sage of Bedford, who spent a month with the Union Army during the Civil War.

Colonial Crafts afternoon. We are putting on a vacation week event on Monday, February 15 (Presidents’ Day). From 1-5 that day, kids and parents are invited to drop in to try some colonial crafts in the police training room.
Are your dues up to date? Please check the mailing label for your membership status

The Bedford Flag on parade some years ago. Can you identify these elegant reenactors?
(From the Bedford Minuteman Company Collection)