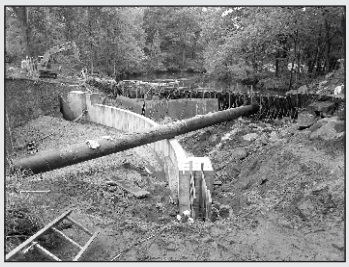


The Wilson Mill site, from 1676 is being renovated as a historic park

The Preservationist

Newsletter of the Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
Bedford - Massachusetts

Founded in 1893

February 2013 Volume 121, Number 1

Don't miss our next Lecture

Sunday, Feb. 10, 2 pm

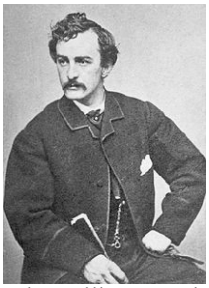
Congregational Church - Great Rd.

"Lincoln's Assassination"

The Historical Society's guest speaker at our February program meeting is no stranger to Bedford residents. Christopher Daley -- who presented a fascinating and educational lecture last year about Lizzie Borden -- will return to Bedford to speak on "Lincoln's Assassination." With all the interest in and Academy Awards buzz over the film "Lincoln," this presentation is certain to be entertaining!

Mr. Daley will begin his presentation around 2:30 pm. *Please consider bringing a non-Society friend to enjoy the hospitality and the le*cture – timed to coincide with the celebration of two historical presidential events in February: Lincoln's birthday and Presidents' Day.

Mr. Daley's lecture is a one-hour presentation about a national tragedy: the assassination of our 16th president, Abraham Lincoln. Daley compiled the documentation for his talk through years of research and travel. Beginning with the backdrop of the Civil War, it examines the plot, which was initially to kidnap Lincoln, and explains how that developed into assassination. Utilizing period and well as modern photographs, the assassination is recounted in stunning



John Wilkes Booth

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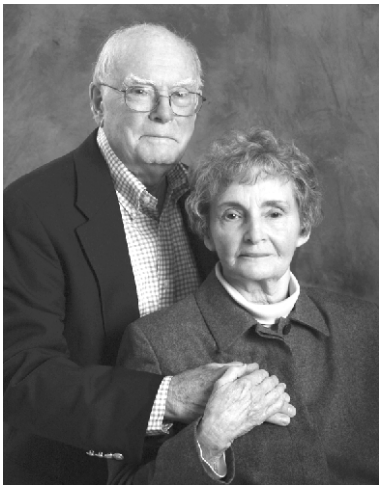


Bob and Betty Slechta, photographed in 2010.

A Dear Member Will Be Missed

Bob Slechta, who passed away in December at the age of 84, had a life full of tremendous achievement. He was one of the most thorough and meticulous researchers of Bedford history and an extremely hard-working member of the Bedford Historical Society. All of his activities, were accomplished in a quiet, unassuming way.

Bob's path to Bedford in 1959 followed military service in Colorado and residence in Arlington -- first to be close to employment at Tufts University, and later to commute to Boston University. As Associate Dean of BU's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and a Professor of Biology for over three decades, Bob impacted thousands of students with his unpretentious manner. He also conducted research that aided in the production of the birth control pill and was a forerunner of studies using stem cells.

Bob threw his considerable energy and intellectual curiosity into the Town he loved so much, especially after his retirement from BU in 1991. He joined a number of local organizations and Town committees, including Bedford's Historic District Commission (1991-2010; chair from '94-'97), the Historic Preservation Commission (1991-2012; chair from '04-'07), Friends of the Job Lane House (since 1990; Director from '98-2010), and Friends of the Bedford Free Public Library for many years.

His love of researching and documenting Bedford history led him to work, without fanfare, on a number of projects. These included:

- Leading a group of residents (1993-'95) in surveying and mapping the Old Burying Ground, correcting information about the Revolutionary War veterans buried there, and ensuring that a plaque was erected in their honor. His work was instrumental in obtaining funding from the MA Historical Commission that was matched with local Community Preservation Act moneys to repair and restore broken and deteriorated gravestones and tombs in the Old Burying Ground.
- Having completed so much extraordinary research on the Old Burying Ground, in 1998 Bob organized the Historical Society's program of walking tours of the Town's Historic District and the Old Burying Ground for all Bedford 3rd graders.
- Coordinating with the Town's Public Works Department in using former Town Historian John Brown Memorial funds from the Bedford Historical Society to reset many of the old gravestones. Bob also led volunteers in cleaning off lichens, dirt and moss from the ancient stones to restore their legibility.
- Assisting in collecting information for the Bedford Community-wide Comprehensive Historical Properties Survey (1996-'98).
- Playing a key role in the 1999 community photographic survey for the Town's Year 2000 millennium celebration.
- Leading a successful effort in the nomination of the Two Brothers Rocks historic site to the National Register of Historic Places.

Continued pg.2

Bob Slechta - 1928-2011 cont.

● Working with members of the Historic Preservation Commission and the Wilson Mill Park Planning Committee on the restoration of the Wilson Mill Dam historic site. According to the Rev. John Gibbons, Senior Minister of First Parish Church where Bob and Betty were members, Bob gave the Wilson Mill Dam renovations his personal inspection and approval only a few days before his death.

One of Bob's favorite local organizations was the Bedford Historical Society, and he and his wife, Betty, joined in 1985. But he didn't just enjoy the Society's many wonderful programs; he was an enthusiastic volunteer. He served as Society President from 1994-'97 and since 2010, was a member of the Board of Directors. He shared his knowledge of local history as a speaker for the Society and for countless other groups. He was scheduled to give a presentation entitled "Joshua Page: Builder of Bedford's Center," at the Society's upcoming March 27 program – all based on his detailed research.

Society member Don Corey, who worked with Bob on numerous historical projects for both the Society and the Town, considered him a

Bob Slechta giving Memorial Day talk at Old Burying Ground.

"mentor" for encouraging and aiding Don in launching his own love of historical research. Bob's "knowledge of Bedford's history, and especially of Old Bedford Center, was probably more extensive than that of any other individual now living," Don said.

Society member Bill Moonan, who served with Bob for many years on the Historic District Commission, said Bob "always knew facts about the buildings in the District that none of the rest of us did. He made us realize how these historic buildings were part of the fabric of our Town."

Those of us who knew Bob well were not surprised when he was named Bedford's Citizen of the Year in 2010.

Besides Bob's wife, Betty, he is survived by his son, Marc, daughter-in-law Pat and grandchildren Katie and John.

Bob's love of his family and friends, and his gentle and humble dedication to Bedford, will long be remembered. Everyone should have a Bob Slechta in their lives.

Carol Amick

"Lincoln Assassination LECTURE - cont.

detail. The escape and capture of John Wilkes Booth is fully documented in Mr. Daley's lecture. Included are photographs and video footage of where Booth hid and was killed. The lecture ends with a stunning description of the trial and execution of what is believed to be all the conspirators to the assassination: Mary Surratt, Lewis Powell, David Herold and George Atzerodt.

Ford's Theater in Washington, DC

A Great THANK YOU to all our Donors in 2012

The Society has two sources of income: Donors who support us with money to sustain our yearly expenses and others who make in-kind donations of important historic artifacts that help us grow the Society's Archives.

To all of them I thank you on behalf of the entire Society.

Bob ***Bass*** - Bea ***Brown*** - Bob & Peggy ***Browne*** - Nancy ***Campbell*** - ***Chip-in Farm*** - Angelo & Gabriele ***Colao*** -Ellen & Lawrence ***Carlton*** - Robert ***Clark*** - Donald L. ***Corey*** - Paul & Andrea ***Couvee*** - Joseph C. ***Damery*** - William ***Deen*** - John ***Dirks*** - Constance ***Donovan*** - ***Doubletree Hotel*** Bedford Glen - Roberta ***Ennis*** - Jack ***Fisher*** - Frank & Joan ***Gicca*** - Lora ***Goldenberg*** - Steven ***Hagan*** - Marguerite ***Hamilton*** - Carol & Mike ***Hand*** - Nancy & Harley ***Haynes*** - David & Francine ***Hennessey*** - Janet & Ellen ***Humphrey*** - Carol & Steve ***Jamison*** - Wilma ***Johnson*** - Gene ***Kalb*** & Linda ***Pollitz*** - Roy & Shirley ***Kring*** - Neil ***Leary*** - Patricia ***Leiby*** - Roger & Carol ***Little*** - Thomas ***MacMullin***, Crown Livery - Allen ***Marshall*** & Anne ***Bickford*** - Priscilla ***McGrath*** - Jan ***McGrath*** - Noreen ***O'Gara*** - Barry ***Patel***, Bedford Motel - Heather & David ***Pullen*** - Brown & Lois ***Pulliam*** - Robert ***Sawyer*** - Robert & Betty ***Slechta*** - Stephen & Susan ***Tutko*** - Frans ***van Berkhout***, Dalya's Restaurant - Barbara & Jan ***van Steenwijk*** - William ***Warren*** - Doris ***Webber*** - Stanley ***Wentworth***.

Jan van Steenwijk

Helen Nowers

We also mourn the loss of long-time Society member Helen Nowers. The Society remained one of her continuing interests, along with the New England Wildflower Society where she was active. Helen had worked with Bob Slechta, John Brown and several others in 1993-94 to complete the inventory and accurate mapping of all the gravestones in the Old Burying Ground, including names, dates and epitaphs. The bronze plaque in the Old Burying Ground with the correct list of Revolutionary Soldiers buried there is also a reflection of her contributions to that project. More recently she served very ably as the Society's Treasurer in 2003-4 and 2004-5, retiring from that position at age 90.

Wilson Mill Dam Reconstruction Completed

Wilson Mill Park, soon to be an additional place for recreation in Bedford.

John Wilson first built his corn mill on Vine Brook in about 1676, immediately following King Philips War. Until then, Native Americans had occupied the area east of Vine Brook in what is now Bedford and Burlington, and artifacts found in the vicinity of Bedford Street in Burlington show that a settlement existed there. Crosby Hill was actually Indian Hill for several centuries until it was renamed during the 20th century. During King Philips War the Indians burned the nearby Bacon's Mill, but after their defeat they were relocated and the area immediately opened up to colonial settlement. Wilson Mill was rebuilt several times over the centuries, including once after a major fire shortly before the Civil War.

After the mill's construction, the ancient road to Burlington followed Wilson Road and crossed over the milldam. When Burlington Road was laid out in the 1850s it extended from Old Billerica Road to the milldam, where it joined Wilson Road. The road over the Wilson Mill dam continued to serve the town for another century until Route 3 was built in the 1950s. Then the mill building was demolished and Old Burlington Road was dead-ended at the east end of the dam in order to construct the Route 62 interchange. However, stone foundations of the former mill remained evident below the dam.

In recent years the town acquired title to portions of the former mill site and open space on the north side of the millpond that it did not already own. The area has since been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and plans had been finalized to create a historic and recreational park with a canoe launch, trails, picnic facilities and other amenities. Unfortunately, extremely heavy spring rains several years ago turned Vine Brook into a raging torrent that toppled some of the stone ruins. The following year holes opened up in the road over the dam, and the dam was determined to be unsafe and was condemned by the State. Plans for the park were necessarily put on hold.

Construction of the new dam just upstream of the ancient dam took place over the past year and was recently completed. The project was entirely financed with Community Preservation Act funds. New stonework around the site has tied together with and stabilized the remaining stone foundation ruins. The road over the old dam has been stabilized and will continue to serve pedestrians and vehicles visiting the park. It is hoped that the other planned improvements can now be completed in order to have the park operational in 2013.

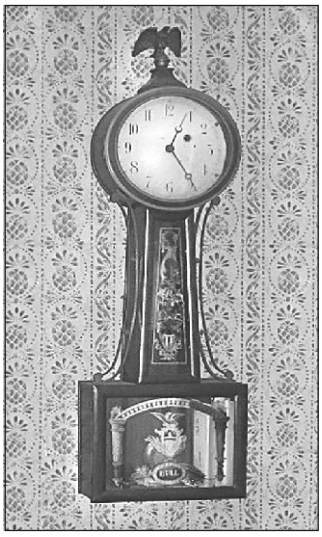
Don Corey

Kimball Property

Negotiations regarding the Kimball property bequest are nearing completion.

To summarize briefly, the Society accepted the bequest of Lawrence and Wilhelmina Kimball's real property at 461A and 463 North Road. The property has since been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and a permanent deed restriction has been recorded on the house to ensure its preservation.

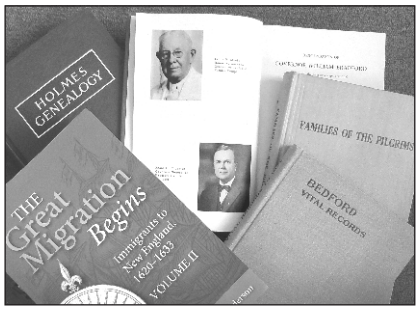
The Society also accepted into its museum and archival collections their tangible personal property as provided in their trust. However, their sons Paul and Nathan Kimball have a great desire to retain many of the personal possessions with strong family associations that were gifted to the Society, and the Board of Directors has voted to deaccession all but a few of the Kimball's personal possessions that are most relevant to the Society's collections back to the Kimball family. In accordance with the Society's bylaws, the written recommendation and record has been prepared, but "the items shall not be deaccessioned until thirty (30) days after public notice has been given in the Society's newsletter".



One of the many items from the Kimball house.

It should be noted that the Society lacks the capacity to even store furniture and other bulky items, and Paul and Nathan Kimball have expressed their willingness to loan any items to the Society upon request for display purposes.

Genealogy Resources at the Society



Over the last several years the Library has undertaken a project to define the scope of the Bedford Room that would keep it relevant and useful. Over many years the Bedford Room had become crowded with materials that had little relation to the Town. Genealogical resources in the Library that are specifically related to Bedford and its mother towns have now been moved to the reference and circulation areas, and certain genealogical websites are available online there.

As a consequence, the Library decided to discard bound volumes of N.E. Hist. Gen. Society and American Genealogist periodicals, Vital Records to 1850 of various nearby towns, and a number of other print genealogy books that were not specific to Bedford. Bob Slechta was alerted to the situation, and he and Don Corey were able to retrieve many of the books and add them to the Society's collection of related genealogical resources.

Residents and researchers are welcome to use the Society's resources as a supplement to those at the Library. Personal experience has indicated that online resources such as Ancestry.com are excellent for 19th and 20th century genealogical research, but various print volumes are often more useful in tracking earlier ancestors.

The Preservationist

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We keep It Alive..!"

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The Preservationist.
Design, production & photography:
Jan van Steenwijk
Contributing writers:
Carol Amick, Don Corey, Kara Kerwin.

From our archives

A message from an admirer to Louis Pfeiffer of the Bedford Safety Razor Co.

Add to Your Calendar

Lectures series in 2013:

Sunday, Feb. 10, 2013, 2 pm:
First Church of Christ,
Christopher Daley: "Lincoln's Assassination."

Wednesday, March 27, 2013, 7:30 pm:
First Church of Christ,
Robert Slechta: "Joshua Page: Builder of Bedford's Center."
(This Lecture will be given by Don Corey, based on the research by Bob Slechta)

Wednesday, April 24, 2013: 7:15 pm:
Library Meeting Room,
Richard Smith: "An Evening with Henry David Thoreau."

Wednesday, May 22, 2013: 6:30 pm
First Church of Christ,
Pot Luck Dinner, Annual Meeting, and Guest Speaker Joe McKenry: "Beneath the Streets of Boston: Building America's First Subway."

Help Needed for Refreshments!

Our Membership now runs with the Calendar Year - January-December

Please become a member or renew your membership

Membership Application

Name:_____
Address:_____

City/Town:_____
State:_____Zip:_____
Phone:_____
Email:_____

Dues

☐ Student:	$ 15.00
☐ Single:	$ 25.00
☐ Couple or Family:	$ 45.00
☐ Life - Single:	$250.00
☐ Life - Couple:	$450.00
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☐ Contributing:	$100.00
☐ Patron:	$175.00
☐ Benefactor:	$300.00
☐ Donation:	$

Amount enclosed: $_____

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