Remember when...

While most people enjoyed their holiday break and/or braved this winter’s blast in recent weeks, the Historical Society has remained busy responding to a variety of interesting contacts and opportunities that remind us of the important role that the Historical Society can and does play in preserving Bedford's history. In this issue of The Preservationist you will find articles on a few that we note here:

- The Society made an important acquisition of a patent awarded to Jonathan Bacon (a 7th generation descendant of one of Bedford's earliest settlers) that was personally signed by President Andrew Jackson. Mr. Bacon established a cottage shoe industry in Bedford in 1806 and later invented and manufactured mechanical devices that helped lift Bedford's citizenry out of its earlier subsistence agricultural economy.

- Last year marked the 70th anniversary of the World War II landings at Normandy in June 1944 and the start of the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. Late last fall an individual who lives in Normandy contacted the Society in their effort to reach the family of one of the Americans who had landed there – Abbott Reed Webber, Mickey Webber’s late husband. Read on …

- The Parker family on Old Billerica Road early in the 20th Century had enjoyed a very successful greenhouse business and had bred champion trotter horses there. The Little family later bought part of their land, which Paul Little farmed and finally converted to a golf course and ski area. His family has just donated a wonderful large panoramic photograph of Old Billerica Road as it was around the turn of the last century.

Experience has shown that preservation of our history requires time, patience and persistence in inquiring into things unknown. The more we inquired into the above and other stories, the more we appreciate the people who helped shape the community that we now enjoy.

Don Corey, president

The Bacon Patent that got President Andrew Jackson’s signature

The Historical Society is the proud new owner of a document with great historical significance both in and out of Bedford: the original patent for Jonathan Bacon's innovative Blinds Lever Fastener, issued in 1836. A. E. Brown, in his History of Bedford, claimed that Bacon's innovative invention, “has been for upwards of fifty years on the market, and has never yet been equaled by anything used for the same purpose.”

Many Bedford residents may not be familiar with Jonathan Bacon, but they will recognize his mansion with four white pillars near the corner of Great Road and Bacon Road, which was named for his family. Michael Bacon, Jonathan’s ancestor, was one of Bedford’s
The Bacon Patent

earliest settlers; Michael's house still stands on Old Billerica Road.

Jonathan was born and educated in Bedford. He was instrumental in promoting the cottage shoe making industry that thrived in Bedford during the early 19th century. Shoemaking helped Bedford grow beyond an agricultural economy, and was soon joined by other forms of manufacturing. He also developed and patented several innovations designed to make life easier, including a window sash lock (his prototype is already in the Society's collection), an improvement of carriage springs and his lever blind fastener. Bacon manufactured his patented inventions here in Bedford, and became a wealthy man.

It is not only the Bedford connection that makes this patent notable. This patent was issued in April of 1836, just eight months before the National Patent Office was destroyed by fire, along with the 10,000 patents that had been filed at the time. A notation on the reverse shows that it was re-registered by the patent office in 1838, presumably because this was Bacon's personal copy, refilled to secure his patent rights after the originals were destroyed.

Also exciting, this patent bears signatures of several significant, although somewhat controversial historical figures. It is signed by then Secretary of State John Forsyth, known for his advocacy of the withdrawal of recognition of Native American tribal sovereignty. It also bears the signature of then Attorney General Benjamin Franklin Butler, who founded New York University in 1831. Unfortunately, Butler also has the dubious distinction, as Secretary of War in 1837-38, of having Cherokee Trail of Tears army post, Fort Butler, named for him.

Most significant, though, this patent bears the signature of President Andrew Jackson. Although Jackson's large and prominent signature is rather faded, one can still see the characteristic flourishes of our seventh President, making this a document of both local and national significance. In addition to Jan van Steenwijk's detailed photographs of the document, Charles Mazel, the owner of the local business NIGHTSEA, brought in special equipment that uses different light sources ranging from ultraviolet to blue to green to see if we could enhance the very faded signatures through fluorescence.

At some point in its recent history, the patent was framed, and a Polaroid photo of an oil portrait of Jonathan was taped to the reverse, however, no provenance information was received with the patent, so we don't know when it was separated from the rest of Jonathan's possessions.

One additional mystery remains. Although the patent includes a long written description of Bacon's innovative blinds fasteners, Society members who have read this description find it difficult to visualize what these fasteners actually look like, or how they work. Based on additional research, we have surmised that the "blinds" may actually refer to interior shutters (a precursor to Venetian blinds), although it appears that the device could work equally as well on exterior shutters. If you currently live in a 19th century home, and still have some original interior or exterior shutters, perhaps you have a set of Jonathan Bacon's fasteners? If you do, let us know! We would love to have a chance to examine and photograph these fasteners "in action"!

Kara Kerwin
Late last fall the Society received an email from Thierry Ferey in Normandy, France:

“Im writing to you as I'm making some research about American paratroopers who were landed here on D Day, June 6, 1944. I’ve googled about one of these Heroes named Abbott Reed Webber and I found your website. I know, sadly, that Mr. Webber passed away several years ago but I try to be in touch with his family...

By way of my research, I try to connect the families of these brave Heroes who gave so much to our people in 1944, their courageous feats aren’t forgotten, my country is Free since this time? (1944) and I know that Freedom isn’t Free, many of Mr. Webber’s friends paid the high price by their own sacrifice ...”

We immediately passed the message to Doris (Mickey) Webber, Reed’s widow, and googled Thierry Ferey-Normandy. We found that he is a dairy farmer in Normandy, France, and over the years has researched records to reach families of men who served in the 101st Airborne Division. He has been able to bring closure to some families by answering some of their questions about the events on D Day. After talking with Mickey, we responded to Mr. Ferey that she would be interested in any information that he might have.

In his response (sent on Veterans Day 2014) Mr. Ferey wrote:

“Several years ago I received a letter from an American veteran of the 101st Airborne Division who was misdropped in the marshy land at St. Georges de Bohon where my family lived on D Day. He was there, completely lost and far from his objective with two other American paratroopers. One of these unfortunate men was Abbott R. Webber [who] was a medic, the other one was William Elliott …

Today, we are on a special day and we remember the Big Sacrifice that made all these so Extraordinary men on D Day …”

The plight of Sgt. Robert Reynolds, Cpl. Webber and Radioman Elliott is told in the book, D-Day with the Screaming Eagles, the accounts of many members of the 101st Airborne Division who landed in Normandy on D-Day. The three men avoided detection by the Germans and, after crossing ditches, canals and rivers, they finally reached friendly lines at Carentan days later.

In December 1944-January 1945 Reed Webber’s unit was engaged at the Battle of the Bulge, where 600,000 American forces withstood a German counteroffensive, but with the loss of almost 81,000 casualties and over 10,000 dead. Mr. Webber was shot in the neck and shoulder there. He was hospitalized in England in a body cast for months and permanently lost sensation in his arm. An AP article in the Boston Globe last years December reported on observances that were held in the Ardennes region and in Bastogne, Belgium to mark the 70th anniversary of that battle.

The American sacrifices have not been forgotten. At Mr. Ferey’s request we were able to provide him with a picture of Mr. Webber, taken prior to his deployment overseas. It was taken by his friend John Dodge at his home at the corner of South Road and Crescent Ave. In closing, as many of you know, John has his own WW2 story. Posted on guard duty in the closing days of the war, he shot at but missed a rabbit for his dinner, only to have a German unit come out of the woods and surrender to him! (German soldiers were very anxious to surrender to American rather than to Russian forces.)

Do you know what this might be?
Two sheets of wood, seemingly hand cut, about 1/4” thick.
Please let us know if you think what it could have been used for.

Please mark your calendar for these upcoming events.

Wednesday evening, March 25, 2015:
Sunday afternoon, April 26, 2015:
Tuesday evening, May 26, 6 pm:

Details will follow in our next Preservationist
The population of Bedford had increased slightly from 1208 in 1900 to 1231 in 1910. New occupations appeared that we had not seen before. There were now 2 telephone operators in town, Quincy Cole was a Plumber, and his son Lyman was an Electrician. The Stove Dealers and Tin Plate workers of years before adapted with the current times. Edwin Rand was building Highview Camps off Davis Road and ran the Oakland Boat and Livery business for people who wanted to relax and spend time on the weekends near the beautiful Concord River. Trolleys left Bedford Center and brought people to the Davis Road Camps and to Mr. Clark's dance hall pavilion across the road. In 1970 Louise K. Brown wrote; “In the simple days of the early century, before the wide highways piped the young away from home, and before the million-dollar industries of radio and television diverted their natural tendencies, fun was found in places near our homes and in customs now long forgotten.”

Those were great years in Bedford, and relatively quiet times. Harriet and Estelle Turner were Singers for Private Parties, and George Hensley ran a Catering business. Charles Jenks and his two sisters ran the farm at the Old Fitch Tavern and owned all the land that the High School and other municipal buildings sit on now. Shady Hill Nursery was very popular and became New England Nursery in 1912. John Kirkegaard was the Manager. Frederick Parker on Old Billerica Road had many people living at his properties to help with the day-to-day farm operations.

There were 11 men living in a boarding house there and working at the “Stock Farm”, including Andrew and Jacob Bierenbroodspot who had just arrived from Denmark in 1910. Arthur Parker owned the Stock Farm and bred his valuable Trotting horses there. Harrison and Irving Hodgdon lived on Webber Ave. and had 6 Boarders to help with their Livery business near the train station. Charles and Bridget O'Dowd lived on Crescent Ave. and had 9 children plus an 8-year old boarder whose parents were unknown. Charles C. Farrington opened his Print Shop on The Great Road with his wife Katherine. Fred B. Bartlett managed the Bedford House with his wife Ada and son Claude. George Skelton's grocery store was next door, and in the same building was Mudge Dry Goods store (see photo). Harriet Mudge was also still the Postmaster up until 1912; her sister Rebecca and Alice Fitch were Postal Clerks. The first “Letter carrier” that we know of was Frederick Davis. Ross Whiton and Edward Hamblen were the local Physicians. Immanuel Pfeiffer was a Veterinarian and Albert was a Dentist on Great Road at the corner of Brooksbie Rd. Louis Pfeiffer had a Wholesale Wool business on Loomis St. and was a prominent Republican politician. Henry Lyon's Grocery store and Cosmo Albani's Fruit store were in the Fletcher Block; the right half of the Fletcher Block had not been built yet. The Wah Wong Laundry was in the Fletcher Block in the 1899 Directory, but I'm not sure when they moved out.

From 1900 to 1910, Bedford had the usual Irish and Canadian people arriving, but less than in previous decades. New immigrants included 14 Danish people, along with 12 from Poland, 9 from Lithuania and 6 from Sweden. All of them found good employment in Bedford. There were only 4 people at the Town Poor Farm.

During the decade, Bedford was busy getting electricity installed throughout town. It was proposed at the 1910 town meeting to install electric lighting in the Union School House but the matter was “laid on the table”. It was approved at the next town meeting in 1911. Bedford was also still “macadamizing”, or paving, our roads and extending the water mains. Similar to today, 100 years later, the biggest town expenses were schools, road improvements and snow removal; the 1911 estimate for expenses of schools was $4,450, moving snow $4,000, roads and bridges $4,500, and street lights $1,500.
Thank you for your continued support.

December Donors:
Carol Amick & Bill Moonan, Donna Argon, Timothy and Karen Kalil Brown, Pamela Brown, Margaret Button, Margaret Button, Donald L. Corey, Paul and Andrea Couvee, Joseph C. Damery, William Deen, Lorrie Dunham, David Allen Fitch, Frank and Joan Gicca, Mary and Fred Hafer, Mary and Fred Hafer, Roy and Shirley Kring, John and Marie Linz, Donald and Barbara Marshall, Sharon and Thomas McDonald, Vincent & Joanne Orlando, Patricia Pellegrini, Heather and David Pullen, Kaye and Rick Spofford

December Member Renewals:

New Members in December
Margaret Button, Robert O. & Paula Fowler

January Donations:
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New Members in January
Chris Weisz, Dzidra J. Knecht, Janet Collins

February Donations:
Dr. Michael Garber & Family, Jack Fisher, Bob Bass & Lee Vorderer, Janet & Eric Humphrey

February Member Renewals:
Phyllis Cooke, Janet & Eric Humphrey

In response to the optional preference choices noted on our Annual Giving donation return form, most people selected “where most needed” or left it blank. However, “Museum” came in as the next most favored use of their donations. The Society continues to work with the town’s Museum Study Committee to again make the museum a reality.
Arthur and Frederic Parker arrived in Bedford in the early 1890s, and a brother Francis and sister Eleanor followed shortly thereafter. By 1910 they owned almost 400 acres along Old Billerica Road, from the Ireland/Goulding farm (167 OBR) north to the present Route 3 overpass and east to the Shawsheen River. Arthur's house (now 278A OBR) and the stable (now 278B OBR) where he bred champion trotters are on the west side of the road; Temple Terrace and adjacent streets have replaced his half-mile practice track. Frederic Parker's family lived in the Capt. Jonathan Willson homestead (261 OBR) on the east side of the road, and he built greenhouses for growing produce for the Boston market where Bedfordshire Condos are now located. Both men served as Selectmen, and Parker sons served in World War I.

In the early 1920s the Little family purchased the part of the Parker's holdings where the greenhouses were located. The greenhouses were destroyed in the Hurricane of 1938, but the Littles continued farming until it was no longer economical. Paul Little then established the Bedford Country Club golf course and Little Ski Area on the land until his retirement.

The panoramic photograph donated to the Society by the Little family is looking east toward OBR. The Michael Bacon /Leiby home (229 OBR) is in the center of the photo, and the greenhouses and barn to its right (south) mark the present location of Bedfordshire Condos. The houses and barns on the left side of the photo include the Capt. Jonathan Willson homestead and other houses, barns and outbuildings that were located around the sharp bends in OBR.

Enlightening additions...

We have again received new artifacts from a time past - thanks to our donors!

Ca.1890s. On the left is a gaslight housing donated by Don Corey. On the right is a gaslight mount, donated by Vern Rivet, that came from the Sweetwater Hotel. They make a perfect match.