The Preservationist

Newsletter of the Bedford (Mass.) Historical Society
Founded in 1893

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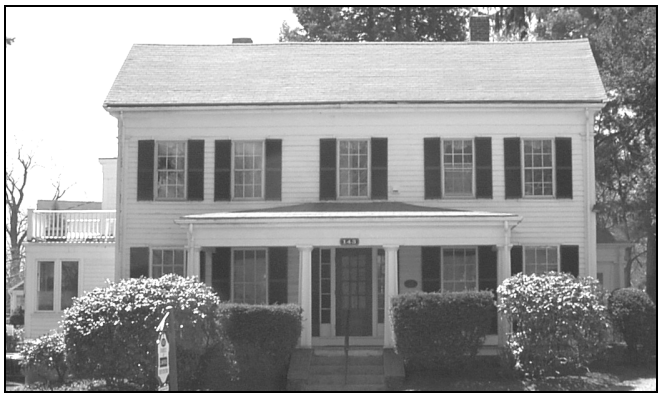

The house known as the "Old Parsonage" (left) was built at 93 The Great Road, on the corner of South Road. In 1927 it was moved to its current location, 143 The Great Road, on the corner of Bacon Road (right). Over the years many Bedford houses have been moved from the sites where they were built. See story, Page 4.

At our next meeting: Show and Tell Night

The annual March "Show and Tell" program will again feature the Society's own collections.

Society President Lee Yates will show items from the town's social organizations, past and present. Bedford has always been a let's-get-together-and-get-it-done community, as records spanning more than two centuries clearly (and entertainingly) demonstrate.

Town Historian & Citizen of the Year John Brown and Don Corey will talk about and display some of the Society's antique weapons. Back in the days when the world was a safer place (when people only had to worry about survival from wild animals, Indians, then Redcoats and later Confederates), weapons were developed that coped with the immediate threats. The Society has some wonderful examples of antique weapons left here by earlier inhabitants or brought back from distant battlefields.

As always, we'll begin with refreshments and social time. The Hospitality Helpers for our March meeting will be Bob and Betty Slechta and Carol Hand.

Free and open to the public. Please bring a friend!

Wednesday, March 22, 7:30 p.m.
Congregational Church,
25 The Great Road, Bedford

Auction at March 22 meeting

Four large pictures that we have deaccessioned from our archives will be auctioned at our March 22 meeting. We'll also action a book of car wash tickets donated to the Society by Bedford Car Wash. Come prepared to bid and buy! Proceeds will be used for maintaining, conserving, preserving or otherwise strengthening the collections.

New book available

Also at our March 22 we'll be offering for sale our latest publication, *Historic Properties and Neighborhoods of Bedford, Massachusetts*, $35.00 (member price $31.50).

The Preservationist is published seven times each year by the Bedford Historical Society for the purpose of sharing topics of interest for the education and enjoyment of the Society's members and the community in general. Comments, suggestions and contributions of relevant articles are welcome and should be addressed to: Editor, ***The Preservationist,*** 2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730.

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Bedford Historical Society, 2005-2006

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Robert Slechta, Vice President
Phyllis Cooke, Secretary
Don Corey, Treasurer

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Committees

Activities: Jeannette Pothier
BOD Liaison to Executive Board: Don Corey
Hospitality: Jeannette Pothier
Membership Secretary: Michael Seibert
Merchandise/Ways & Means: John Carlson
Newsletter Editor: Alethea Yates
Nominating:
Cecile Walker (appointed by Membership, '06)
Betty Slechta (appointed by President, '07)
TBD (appointed by Executive Board, '08)
Program: Cecile Walker
Sunshine: Ruth Pike
Welcoming: Donna Argon, Pat Corea
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Mike Seibert ('08)
Alethea Yates (BHS President)
Don Corey (BHS Treasurer)

Historic preservation articles at Town Meeting, March 27

Bedford's Annual Town Meeting begins on Monday evening, March 27, 2006, 7:30 PM at the High School Auditorium. There are a number of Community Preservation proposals dealing with historic preservation that should be of great interest to Society members. Included in Article 29 with various other Community Preservation recommendations are the following:

Rufus Porter Murals Preservation - These murals were painted on the walls of the Job Lane House parlor in the early 1800s. They are wonderful examples of his early work and are valuable and worthy of restoration.

Old Burying Ground Preservation - Except for routine maintenance, nothing has been done to preserve and restore the tombs and gravestones since the Depression in the 1930s. The Town appropriated $50,000 at last year's Annual Town Meeting in order to commence the most critical preservation work on the Old Burying Ground and had applied for a matching grant from the Mass. Historical Commission. The town has already received a grant but for only $35,000. This article is for additional funds to fully fund the priority work.

Depot Station Preservation Plan - Much work has been done on the Depot Park surroundings and the Budd Rail Car, and work will commence shortly on the Freight House. However, there are no current plans for restoration of the Passenger Depot. This article would fund a study of the depot and develop a plan for preservation of the exterior and options for interior restoration.

Article 31 proposes to establish a Stabilization Fund for preservation of all historic municipal properties. Over the years many (including Old Town Hall, Town Center, Job Lane House and Old Burying Ground) deteriorated seriously from lack of funding. Now that they are being restored and preserved, this fund would provide a long-term source of funds for their continued preservation. The advantage is that State CPA funds (currently 100% match) would be a source for some of the funds rather than being funded entirely by the town.

Please come to Town Meeting and participate!

Moving house

Chalk another one up for historic preservation. The big, white 1886 house at 190 The Great Road, with its unusual octagonal tower, was slated for demolition in 2004. At the request of the Historic Preservation Commission, the owner advertised it for sale to anyone who would care to move it to a new location. It seemed a long shot but this time luck was with the preservationists. The owner of a vacant lot diagonally across the road (a site with no intervening utility wires between it and The Great Road – another bit of luck) came to the rescue. Up went the house onto sturdy steel beams. On a quiet Sunday morning it was driven to its new location and set on a new foundation. With a large new wing and a smart coat of green paint, the old house now adorns Lane Avenue.

190 The Great Road raised from its foundation and ready to be moved, April 2005

The heavy power equipment that moved 190 The Great Road now seems absolutely essential for moving a house but, surprisingly, our ancestors got along quite nicely without it. Anyone who studies the houses in the Bedford Center Historic District will be struck by the number that were built elsewhere and moved to their current locations during the 1800s. In fact, house moving was quite routine in that era. According to an 19th-century resident of Concord, the favorite winter sports of Concord residents were "moving houses and suing the neighbor[1]."

A 1910 article in the *New York Times* confirms the house-moving habit. "In the old days of frame houses moving was going on continually. To travel in the suburbs without seeing a house being towed from an old foundation to a new was a rarity…"[2] By 1910, the *Times* reports, it was not only frame houses that were being moved. "Probably the most famous moving job was the removal of the Brighton Beach Hotel. The encroachment of the sea made its removal landward necessary… Another gigantic task was the moving of a whole row of brownstone houses from Putnam Avenue to Jefferson Street, in Brooklyn."

The old-time movers could do the job quite smoothly. A 1831 article in *The Farmers' Cabinet*, a newspaper published in Amherst, New Hampshire, reported as follows. "House Moving. The most important undertaking of this kind ever performed in New Bedford, was accomplished a few days since… It was the removal of Mr. Abraham Russell's large three story house… This commodious and ponderous edifice, with four stacks of chimneys and all the furniture, was moved about four hundred feet without injury; and so gentle was the operation that the clock in the house pursued its course without deviation, and regularly struck the hours as they passed."

A gallery of relocated Bedford houses

A small sampling of Bedford's traveling houses is given here. For fuller details and other examples please see our new publication, *Historic Properties and Neighborhoods of Bedford, Massachusetts* by Kathleen Kelly-Broomer (originally published as *Communitywide Historic Properties Survey,* 1998.)

13 School Avenue

In the early 1800s Joshua Page, a builder and tavern keeper, built himself a tavern on the corner of what is now the Great Road at Elm Street. He also built his own home a little to the west on the Great Road. This house was moved to 13 School Avenue around 1894.

[1] "A Favorite Concord Winter Sport: Moving Houses," by Leslie Perrin Wilson, Curator of Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library. Originally published in the *Concord Journal* and republished on www.concordma.com.

[2] "New Houses Built from Old Are Best," *New York Times*, October 30, 1910.

The house that now stands at 13 School Avenue was built as Joshua Page's own home. It originally stood next to a store on the Great Road, as shown above.

13 School Ave. today, just a few hundred feet behind its original location.

After its neighbor was moved to 13 School Ave., this store (now 47-51 The Great Road) was extended to fill the vacancy.

56 Springs Road

The second Center Schoolhouse was built in 1806 as the town's first purpose-built schoolhouse. The building was moved to 56 Springs Road in 1829 and converted to a two-family home. The eastern wing was a cobbler's shop that was moved from the back portion of the lot.

56 Springs Road today. The main part of the house began its existence as a school in the center of town.

10-12 Maple Street

10-12 Maple Street, also a former school

The Second Center School was not the only former schoolhouse to be recycled as a private home. The east end of 10-12 Maple St. (the left-hand end in the picture) was the 1792 South School, moved to this site and enlarged to the west in 1819.

371 Great Road

The house at 371 Great Road reportedly was built as a carriage house for an estate in Lexington and moved to Bedford in about 1950, during the construction of Route 128. This was not the only house that arrived in Bedford after being displaced by Route 128. According to the Historical Society member who lives at 15 Charles Street, her house originally stood on a bit of Lexington land now occupied by a Route 128 on-ramp.

371 The Great Road, originally built in Lexington, now stands at the corner of Pine Street.

6 School Way

The main portion of the house at 6 School Way was once a game room at 133 The Great Road, the Jonathan Bacon mansion. It was moved by John R. Comley around 1914. (He also moved 180 Springs Road. See below.)

6 School Way

25 Hillside Avenue

25 Hillside Avenue

The house at 25 Hillside Rd. was built by Nathaniel Cutler in 1847-48 and was moved to this site from 120 The Great Road sometime around 1912.

180 Springs Road

John R. Comley, the grandfather of the present owner of 180 Springs Rd., purchased what was known as the Pollard house from the federal government in 1929, on the condition the house be moved to make way for the development of the Veterans Administration Hospital. Comley moved the main portion of the house directly across the street from its original location, rotating it in the process so it still faced the road.

The main part of this house was moved across the street and now stands at 180 Springs Road.

In memoriam

The Society notes with sorrow the passing of member Betty Hammond. We recently received the following note from her daughter Elizabeth Hammond:

"Betty Hammond passed away on February 9, 2006 in Tucson, Arizona while visiting her daughter Martha. For any of you who knew and loved her, a Memorial Service will be held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 100 Pine Hill Road, Bedford on March 25, 2006 at 2 PM. Please feel welcome to attend and celebrate her life!"

Gifts

The Society gratefully acknowledges the following donations to help it achieve its goals and objectives:

John & Eleanor Filios

Edward & Leslie Lowry

Bedford Woman's Community Club
(in recognition of a talk given to the Club by Historical Society member Bob Slechta)

The Society also wishes to acknowledge its newest Life Member, Karen Frederick.

The Preservationist
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Moving day for the c. 1815 Proctor-Sage house, taken from 29 North Road to a new location just up the road in Carlisle, 1991. Relocation saved this historic house from the wrecker's ball. See story, page 4.