The Preservationist

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

March 2007 Volume 114, Number 5

Building the water works. Construction of the town's water system in 1908-09 was a huge undertaking (see page 3.) In this photo, a steam engine is used in the construction of the reservoir off Shawsheen Road.

Tales from the archives

Wednesday, March 28, 7:30 p.m.
Congregational Church, 25 The Great Road
Free and open to the public. Bring a friend!

At this month's meeting, three Society members will tell tales of Bedford, using materials from our archives and elsewhere.

Don Corey will discuss the Native Americans that were in this area when the earliest settlers arrived. What tribes were here? Where did they live? What do we know about them? A.E. Brown's *History of the Town of Bedford* (1891) and the definitive histories of Concord (Shattuck, 1835) and Billerica (Hazen, 1883) were written when interest in Indian culture was minimal. The information provided was fragmentary and erroneous in some instances. Many more recent studies and reports have been completed that give a much fuller picture of the history of Native Americans in this area.

Don has assembled interesting information from some of these that provide a better understanding of Native Americans' role in the settlement of this area.

In observance of tax season, Town Historian John Brown will give a brief talk on "Taxes, 1796" concerning the building of Carlisle Road. Bedford

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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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TBD (appointed by Membership, '09)
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Sunshine: Miriam Brown
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Don Corey (Board Chairman, Treasurer)
Frank Gicca ('07)
Mike Seibert ('08)
Neil Leary ('09)
Alethea Yates (BHS President)

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was under court order to build the road, a task that brought daunting technical challenges and even more daunting taxation challenges.

Lee Yates will show a selection of some of the many wonderful items that have been donated to the Society during her tenure as Archivist. What do we collect? How do we go about adding to our collections? What don't we have that we should? Come and enjoy a look at a selection of items from "Bedford's Attic."

New members join us

We've gained two new members since our last newsletter:

Jean Prescott Moulton
Sarah Matos

Welcome, Jean and Sarah!

Prince Estabrook book for sale

At last month's meeting, Charles Price gave an excellent presentation on Prince Estabrook, a slave who became the first black soldier in the American Revolution and was among the first patriots whose blood was shed on Lexington's Battle Green. Price has been a Prince Estabrook reenactor with the Lexington Minute Men for many years. He worked with the late Alice Hinkle, a freelance journalist and Boston Globe correspondent from Lexington, who did extensive research and wrote a book on the life of this black patriot. The book was recently awarded the Carter Woodson Book Award.

The Society is offering for sale several copies of the book, *Prince Estabrook – slave and soldier*, that have been autographed by Mr. Price. Contact the Society office if you would like to purchase a copy. Copies will also be available at the March meeting. The price is $19.95.

Archives hours

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

Mondays, 9 to 12 and 1 to 5 - Tuesdays, 9 to 12

Other times by appointment. Please call 781-275-1212 x 140. Note: Our phone is answered by our "roommates," the Bedford police; just ask for our extension. Please don't hesitate to call.

Bedford and the water works project, 1909

At Town Meeting later this month Bedford residents will be asked to vote funds for the Shawsheen Well Field Pump House in order to carry out "preservation of the slate roof, and related exterior work on this historic 98-year old building on Shawsheen Road." This seldom-noticed building, which even the Water Works engineer of the day could praise only as "plain but substantial in appearance," is one of the few visible elements in one of the town's most complex undertakings.

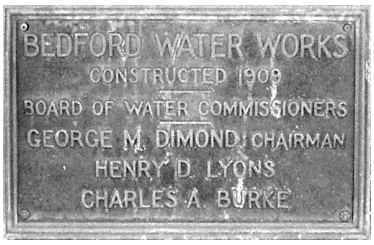
A lengthy report by the Water Commissioners in the town report for the year ending February 1, 1909 summarizes the work done on the arduous project. A town-wide water system was needed both to provide pure drinking water and to ensure a plentiful, reliable source of water to fight fires. To accomplish this, the town and the Water Commissioners had to carry out a wide range of tasks:

- determine the best source of water,
- drive a well,
- build a reservoir to feed the well,
- find a high point for a water tower to deliver water under pressure throughout the town,
- acquire land for the reservoir, well, and water tower,
- build a pumping system to send water from the source to the tower,
- lay water mains throughout the town,
- connect houses to mains,
- install fire hydrants,
- establish regulations for use of residential water and fire hydrants,
- put all the work out to bid, then accept bids and oversee the work, and
- find a way to finance it all.

Finding the best source of water was the first task. Locations along the Shawsheen River seemed the most likely. The Kenrick family, who owned land along the east side of Shawsheen Road, had on their property a small ice pond which drained into the Shawsheen River. Test wells were driven in several locations near the pond and it was determined that 150,000 gallons of water a day could be drawn from the brook running into the ice pond. Tests showed the water to be "of most excellent quality, being as pure as any water in the state used for a water supply."

There was a slight wrinkle in purchasing the necessary 49 acres of land from the Kenrick family. The family was in favor of the project but there was a trustee who was difficult to contact. To simply matters the town acquired the land by eminent domain with the intention of coming to a settlement with the family at a later date. Another small parcel of land was purchased from Frederick Mahoney.

The summit of Pine Hill was chosen as the ideal place for a standpipe (water tower). Acquisition of this property was simplified by an offer of the owners, Mr. and Mrs. James R. Poor, to donate the land to the town. This offer was gratefully accepted.



The 1909 Water Works building and plaque. Water Commissioners Dimond, Lyons, and Burke are commemorated for their work in providing Bedford with a modern, town-wide water system

Work began at the Kenrick ice pond to convert it to a reservoir. A dam was built to increase the water depth to 10 feet and the surface area to 2.6 acres. Below the dam, a well was built. The well presents an odd appearance today, being a low, circular structure with a conical roof standing on a tiny, overgrown island in its own small pond. This pond was designed as a supplementary source to feed the well when the normal supply from the ice pond was inadequate.

Construction of "Bedford Reservoir"

The water tower on Pine Hill was built to endure. "The standpipe is of mild steel 100 ft. high and 20 ft. in diameter and strongly riveted. When full it will contain 225,000 gallons… The foundations are of solid masonry seven feet thick…"

The Water Works building on Shawsheen Road must have been the engineer's pride. Though the modest little building was only 36 by 19 feet and unornamented except by curved roof brackets, it was impressive inside. It held "two units, each consisting of a 25 horse power Olds gasoline engine and a Smith-Vaile triplex power pump, of a capacity of 250 gallons per minute, or 15,000 gallons per hour…" Two duplicate units meant that one could back the other up in case of failure. "The gasoline engines can be started very quickly and in case of fire they should be started and kept running during the time the water is used from the hydrants in order to maintain the supply" to the standpipe, "thus ensuring a supply of at least 3,000,000 gallons… over four days…" The town would now be ready to battle a major blaze.

To complete the project, water mains had to be laid throughout the town. The bridge over the Shawsheen had to be reinforced to carry the main from the pump house on Shawsheen Road to the standpipe on Pine Hill. Fire hydrants had to be installed as well. Finally, some 60 lines had to be placed from the water mains to the basements of everyone who signed up for residential water service.

Work of constructing the water system had begun on May 29, 1908. Eight months later when the Town Report was published, the Water Commissioners could proudly state that they expected the system to be "put in operation before the month was ended." They admitted that "vexatious delays" had occurred toward the end of the project but still the work been carried on "as expeditiously as was consistent with good workmanship." It was quite an accomplishment.

Soon it was all over but the paying. The Town Report gave a full accounting of the expenses, from the $9,184.81 paid to Bruno & Petitti for laying pipes down to the $.46 paid to John Proctor for labor (we hope he got a nice lunch break as well). The total cost up to February 1, 1909 was $58,485.62.

Water pipes being laid

See next page for more photos

Ledge struck when laying pipes added to the challenge of building a town water system

Along with the steam engine, teams of horses were used in constructing the reservoir

Membership Application and Renewal Form

This is (please check one):

____ A new membership

____ A renewal

____ **A gift subscription**

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Dues (please check one):

__ Student:	$3.00
__ Individual:	$10.00
__ Couple or Family:	$15.00
__ Supporting or Business:	$50.00
__ Life – Individual:	$150.00
__ Life – Couple:	$200.00

Donation

I would like to contribute the following amount to aid the Society: $ _____

Total enclosed: $ _____

Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
2 Mudge Way
Bedford MA 01730
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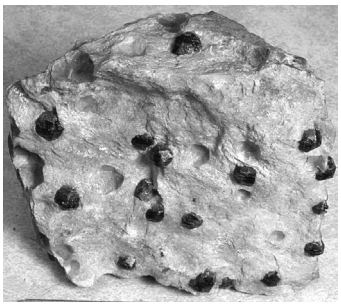

A few of the many museum objects in our collections. Beginning at upper left: (1) Bedford buttons and a decal: I Love Bedford, America's Oldest Flag, Bedford Community Playground, Welcome Spring 1978. (2) Not a raisin scone but a boulder embedded with "Bedford Rubies," sizeable garnets. (3) Pocket watch, one of several in the collection. (4) Slippers with pretty satin bows, part of our large collection of vintage clothing. (5) A pewter mug made in England and said to have been handed down from one Samuel Sage to the next for seven generations. (6) One of more than a dozen bandboxes in the collection, most of them handmade in Bedford. Our Heritage Center will one day provide a place to show many more of our Bedford treasures.