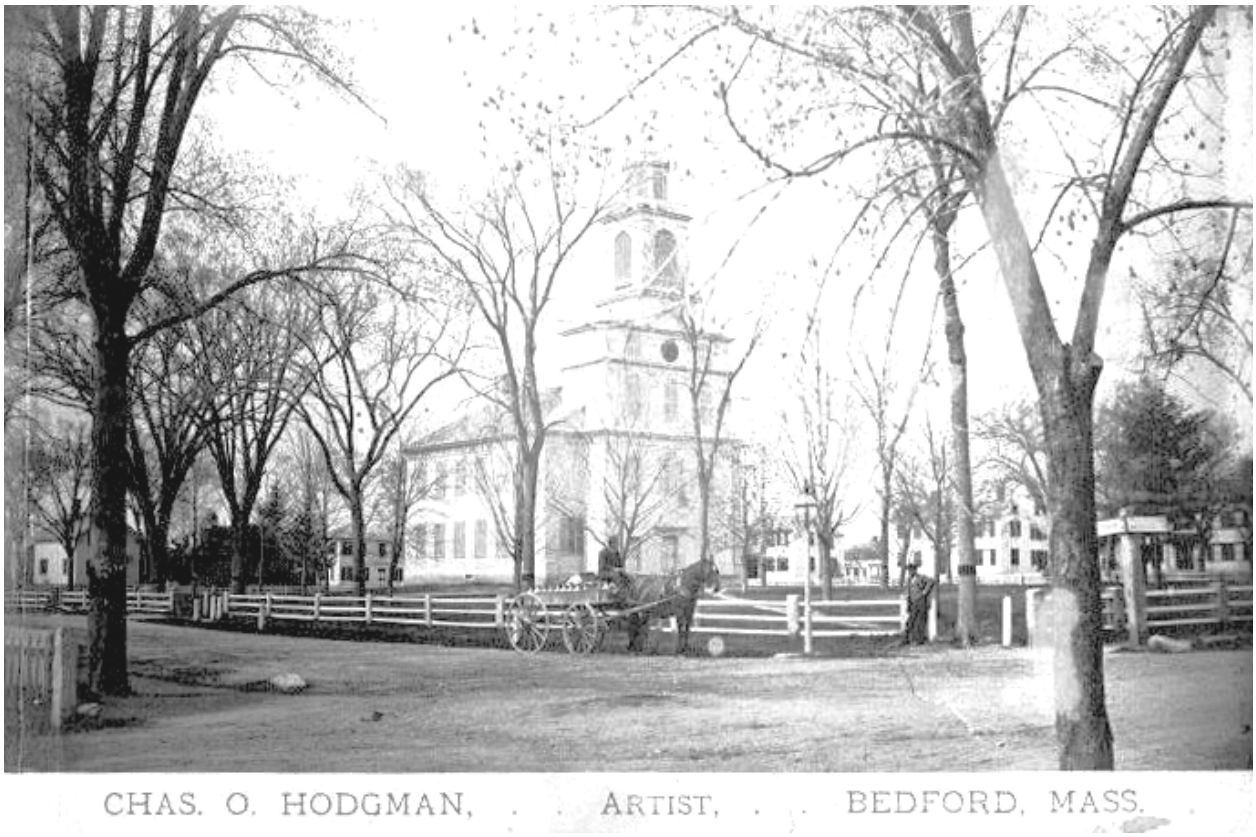
The Preservationist

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

March 2009 Volume 116, Number 5



A new view of the old Common. This image, with a grocery wagon approaching the center as a lounger looks on, is entirely new to us. (Courtesy of Marjory and Richard Davis.)

This month: Show and Tell

March is the month for our ever-popular "show and tell" meeting. This year we have three speakers:

Rodney Leskowski, a former Bedford resident and a collector of antique milk bottles, including many from Bedford, will give a short talk recalling Bedford's dairy industry.

Lee Yates will be Martha Sage again this evening and will recount some of Martha's further experiences in a Civil War hospital during the military service of her husband, Samuel Sage. Lee performed as Martha at the Three Apples Storytelling Festival last fall.

Don Corey will reveal what might just be the solution to a long-standing mystery: Where did the first Job Lane build his house on the huge tract of Bedford land he acquired from the Winthrop family? Don's detective work has led to a surprising answer.

Congregational Church
25 The Great Road, Bedford
Wednesday, March 25, 7:30 PM

Free and open to all. The building is accessible to the handicapped. Our meetings begin with coffee and a chat. Please bring a friend or two!

About our newsletter

The Preservationist is published seven times yearly 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.

Alethea "Lee" Yates, Executive Director
(781) 275-3294 (home)
(781) 275-7276 (BHS office)
Email: info@bedfordmahistory.org

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 1
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 our NEW PHONE NUMBER, 781-275-7276.

Bedford Historical Society organization, 2008-2009

Directors

Responsible for long-range planning and for large or long-term expenditures. (Proposed by the Nominating Committee, voted by the membership)

Miriam Brown (term expires in '09)
Don Corey (term expires in '09)
Jan van Steenwijk (term expires in '09)
Marion Bryan (term expires in '10)
Marietta Ellis (term expires in '10)
Donald Jenkins (term expires in '10)
Doris Crowell (term expires in '11) - Board Co-chair
Neil Leary (term expires in '11)
Judie Toti (term expires in '11) - Board Secretary
Carol Amick (term expires in '12)
Norman Toti (term expires in '12)
Julie Turner (term expires in '12) - Board Co-chair

Executive Committee Liaison to the Directors: Jan van Steenwijk, President (*ex officio*; no vote)

Executive Committee

Responsible for the day-to-day running of the Society.

Officers. **(Proposed by the Nominating Committee, voted by the membership)**

Jan van Steenwijk, President
(vacant) Vice President
Phyllis Cooke, Secretary
Don Corey, Treasurer

Committee chairs. **(Appointed by the President)**

Activities: TBD
Hospitality: Marietta Ellis
Sales Manager: TBD
Newsletter Editor: Alethea Yates
Program: Cecile Walker
Publicity: Bea Brown, Cecile Walker
Sunshine: Sharon McDonald
Welcoming: Lois Jenkins

Board of Director Liaison to the Executive Committee: Doris Crowell and Julie Turner, Board Co-Chairs (*ex officio*; no vote)

Nominating Committee

Responsible for finding candidates to serve as Officers and Directors

Wilma Johnson (appointed by Executive Board, term expires in '08)
Carol Amick (appointed by Membership, term expires in '09)
Julie Turner (appointed by President, term expires in '10)

Finance Committee

Responsible for the Society's investments. (Appointed jointly by the President and Board Chair)

Doris Crowell, Julie Turner (Board Co-chairs)
Don Corey (Treasurer)
Neil Leary (term expires in '09)
Frank Gicca (term expires in '10)
Don Jenkins (term expires in '11)
Jan van Steenwijk (President)

In memoriam

Word has just reached us that Society member Ted Rider passed away on December 13, 2008. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Cindy.

Open House on Pole Capping Day, April 11

April 11 will be a busy day for lovers of history, with four FREE events for all the family to enjoy.

(1) Pole Capping ceremonies begin at 10:30 with a parade to Wilson Park, the large traffic island where the Great Road divides into Concord Road and North Road. (Not sure what Pole Capping is all about? Visit the web site of the Bedford Minuteman Company, www.bedfordminutemancompany.org.) After the pole is capped and the liberty-loving perpetrator is arrested by the Regulars, the parade will continue to a reviewing stand in front of the Library.

(2) Old Town Line signs. Immediately after the parade, the Bedford Historical Society will hold a brief ceremony to 'launch' the new signs marking Bedford's original borders with Concord and Billerica. One of the signs will be placed adjacent to the Jenks Trail (the path with the double row of stone walls that runs along Mudge Way in front of the High School and Library), near the reviewing stand for the Pole Capping parade.

(3) OPEN HOUSE. From 10:30 to 1:00 the Bedford Historical Society will hold Open House in the building we share with the Police Department. We'll put out some of our best treasures and tell some of the best Bedford stories for you. Colonial muskets, the cape of the "Witch of the Shawsheen," a fine selection from our photograph collection, a new exhibit of milk bottles and memorabilia from Bedford's dairy industry, vintage clothing, and much more will be on view. Free and open to all. Our gift shop will also be open.

(4) Nature walk along the Old Town Line. At a time to be announced, Conservation Administrator Elizabeth Bagdonas will lead a walk through the Pine Grove Conservation Area off Davis Road to view landmarks along the Concord Old Line. Meet at Town Hall parking lot to carpool to Davis Road.

New member

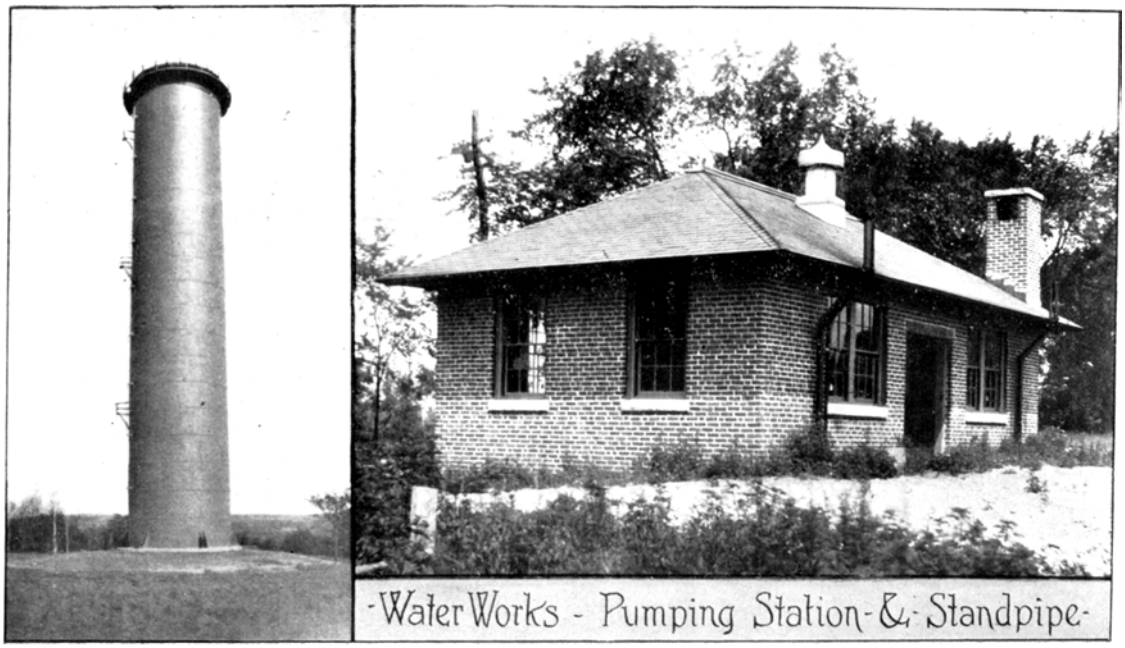
We are delighted to welcome our newest member:

Julie Braschler

Our heartiest welcome to you, Julie!

Our email address has changed

Please update your address book to include our new email address: **info@bedfordmahistory.org**. Thank you.



The water tower off Pine Hill Road and the pumping station on Shawsheen Road were new 100 years ago.

Bedford, 1909

One hundred years ago Bedford was a farming town with some deep concerns but also a great deal of civic pride. The annual Town Report tells the tale.

Bedford was a community of some 1200 people, according to the 1905 census. How much farming did they do? The report of the Inspector of Animals said, "Bedford has 48 stables in which are kept 279 cows, 13 bulls, 4 yoke of oxen, 59 young stock and 2 goats… We have 648 swine, 500 of which number are at the piggery at present owned by J. Newton Frost. " The Town Report also says that there were 308 horses in town. Added together, the horses, cows, and pigs outnumbered the human inhabitants.

Human statistics? There were 21 births; 11 marriages (for all but two, both husband and wife were from Bedford); and 23 deaths, only 9 of whom were born in Bedford. It seems that many people came to town from elsewhere, but those who were here didn't need to venture over the town line to do their courting.

Concerns

Sales of liquor in Bedford had become such a problem that the Selectmen were forced to take some very serious actions. They say in their report, " Early in this year it became necessary for this board to take steps to stop the illegal sale of liquor in Bedford [because of complaints] that young men were being debauched, that liquor was being furnished to men that should not have it and could ill afford to buy it, and that one home had nearly been wrecked through the too free use of whiskey bought in Bedford… [The] appearance on our streets… of drunken and otherwise disorderly persons, many from other towns, had a demoralizing effect and was fast giving Bedford a bad name." The Selectmen denied a liquor license to a drugstore where one had been able to buy alcohol for "medicinal purposes." They also cracked down on an express company that had apparently been bringing in liquor illegally. The police were instructed to chase out people who appeared to have come to town for no other purpose than to get drunk.

These actions seem to have had their effect but were so controversial that the Selectmen felt obliged to publish a supplement to the Town Report to explain their decisions in great detail.

The year 1909 also saw the death of Abram English Brown, the author of the *History of the Town of Bedford*, a reference work still very much in use today. He did so much for the town in so many ways that his loss was felt keenly. The Town Meeting of March 1 voted to accept a tribute to Brown written by Rev. George Piper. In their report the Cemetery Committee stated, "In the death of the late Superintendent and Clerk, Mr. Abram E. Brown, the Shawsheen Cemetery has met with a severe and irreparable loss." The Trustees of the library were also sorrowful, reporting "…we have missed the presence of Mr. Brown, who for many years served as trustee and clerk of the Library… In his death the Library has lost one of its staunchest supporters."

Bedford's schools had their challenges, the Superintendent noting in his report that the absentee rate had been nearly 10% throughout the year.

Moth control was a statewide concern. Gypsy moths and brown-tailed moths had become such a problem for forestry and orchards that the town spent $5,042.70 for eradication. Compare this to the $5,302.19 spent on the schools to sense the importance of the issue.

Civic pride

Self-government was strongly in evidence, with Town Meetings held on March 1 and 27, September 21, November 2, December 14.

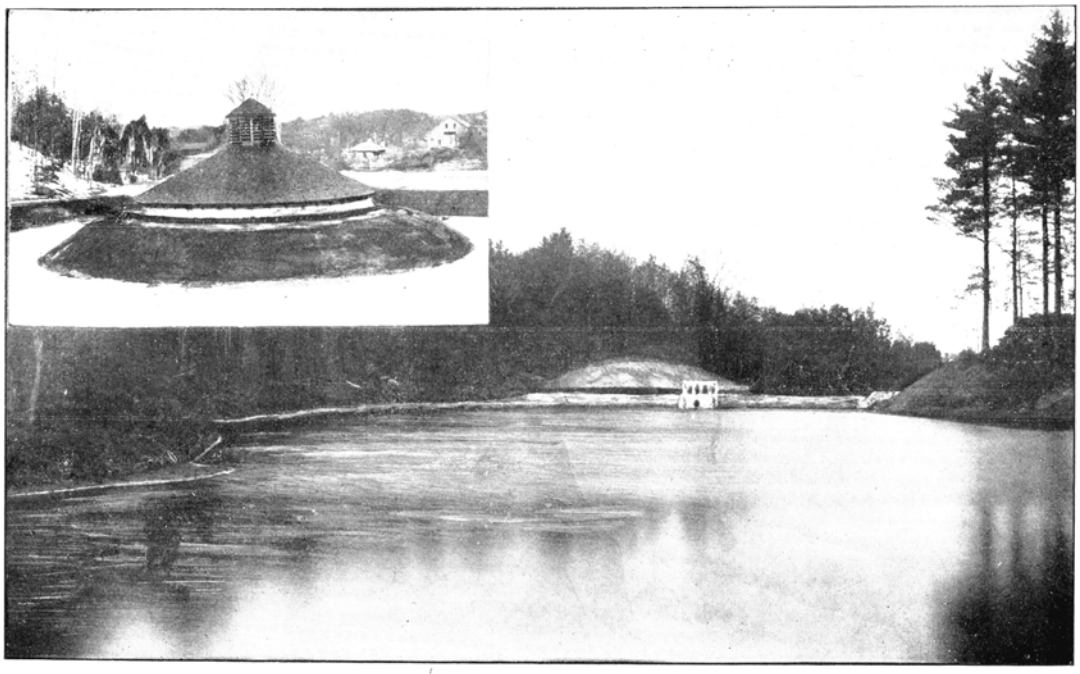
A new venture proved its value. "The sprinkling of the principal streets of the village during a part of June and the months of July, August, September and October was a welcome innovation and citizens who have suffered for years from the dust nuisance were able for the first time in many summers to enjoy freedom from the clouds of dust that have caused so much discomfort…"

The streets might have been unpaved, but they were well lit. "There are 93 lamps in Bedford's street lighting system."

"Value of Hydrant Service. For the first time in its history the Bedford fire department is now really equipped for fighting fire successfully. " Forty fire hydrants were in operation. This was made possible by the greatest source of Bedford pride that year, the inauguration of town water service.

It was a massive undertaking. A reservoir had to be dammed, a pump house constructed, a water tower constructed on a hilltop, water mains laid throughout town, and lines laid to individual houses and buildings.

With water being piped to the Union School, it was no longer necessary to operate a windmill on school grounds. It was put up for sale.



STORAGE BASIN AND COLLECTING WELL AND FILTER BED.

In 1909, Bedford's new municipal water system was a source of pride. This photo from the Town Report shows what we now call the "Old Res." It had just been built a short distance behind the pump house on Shawsheen Road. At the far end of the pond is the earthen dam that was built to enlarge a small natural pond into a suitable reservoir. The inset photo shows the well house in the middle of the small pond just below the reservoir.

Remember when?

No, we don't exactly remember when General George Washington visited the Penniman-Stearns House. In fact, if he did it was the best-kept secret of the 18th century. This intriguing photo is marked "Drama Group." We have no other information about it. The people in the photo appear to be professional actors. Was this a scene shot for a movie? Can anyone tell us about it?

Bedford Heritage Center grand opening

"Soft drum and fife music welcomes you when entering the newly opened Bedford Heritage Center. Classic furniture displays, artifacts from forgotten times and hundreds of wonderful images of people long gone line the walls. Text panels explain how people lived at the time -- from the establishment of Bedford to present days. The story of how Bedford was separated from Billerica because village people had to walk too far to go to church is also told. A gift shop offers wonderful mementoes; for instance, you can walk out with a tee-shirt with our name on it. We hope you will want to recommend this place to your friends and visitors."

What a nice concept and thought! But we are not there yet. It's still a dream for all of us involved in the Bedford Historical Society. We have the products, we have the history, we have the dream and we are aggressively raising funds to accomplish that dream. But we are still searching for a proper space that is adequate in size and at the same time affordable for our budget in order to ensure a long term investment.

One way you can help us realize our dream is to encourage your neighbors and "wherever-they-live" friends to become a member of the Society. Members are the necessary base that makes all our programs possible. Also, I know that many of you have already contributed artifacts, but please keep the Society in mind when you find an old photo album or an antique object in your attic, that might interest others. We will be happy to look at anything you might want to donate to see if it fits in our collection and, if accepted, to give you peace of mind, knowing that your family treasure will be appreciated for generations to come. Eventually, we can then bid everyone welcome to the newly established Bedford Heritage Center.

Remember that "the shot heard 'round the world…" was heard in Concord, but in Bedford we have an equally important history to tell. Welcome to the Society.

Jan van Steenwijk

History-loving house sitter available

At the last general meeting our speaker, George Quintal, gave a wonderful presentation on local men of color who served in the Revolutionary War, including several previously unknown Bedford residents. Mr. Quintal continues to do extensive research at the National Archives in Waltham, MA, on participants in various engagements of the Revolutionary War. One of his upcoming projects is about the participants in the Boston Tea Party (including Bedford's own Hugh Maxwell).

Unfortunately, from George's own home "down Maine," it is a very long commute to the National Archives in Waltham. He would be very grateful if anyone knows of a house-sitting opportunity for him in Bedford or the general vicinity of Waltham. If so, please contact Don Corey or Lee Yates or leave a message on the office phone (781-275-7276), and we will put you in touch with him. It would be greatly appreciated.

Two Brothers Rocks update

In last month's newsletter we stated that some work remained to be done at the Two Brothers Rocks by Eagle Scout candidate Dennis Warner. On a recent visit to the Rocks we were pleased to discover that the benches have been installed and all work is complete. Dennis is no longer a candidate but a full Eagle.

The Bedford DPW has also helped out at the site by installing the interpretive sign provided by the Historic Preservation Commission, and by removing the large tree that had been growing next to the Winthrop Rock.

The Rocks may be reached from a trailhead that begins at a small parking lot on Dudley Road just opposite Emery Road.

Now that Eagle Scout Dennis Warner has cleared the brush away and installed two benches, hikers and boaters have a convenient place to rest and view the Rocks and the Concord River.

A tree that threatened to split the Winthrop Rock has been removed by the DPW. Note the size of the stump in the foreground.

Membership Application and Renewal Form

Dues (please check one):

__ Student:	$3.00
__ Individual:	$10.00
__ Couple or Family:	$15.00
__ **Supporting or Business:**	**$50.00**
__ **Patron:**	**$250.00**
__ Life – Individual:	$150.00
__ Life – Couple:	$200.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Donation

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

Total enclosed: $ _____

Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730-2138
781-275-7276
bedford-history@usa.net

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Bedford MA 01730

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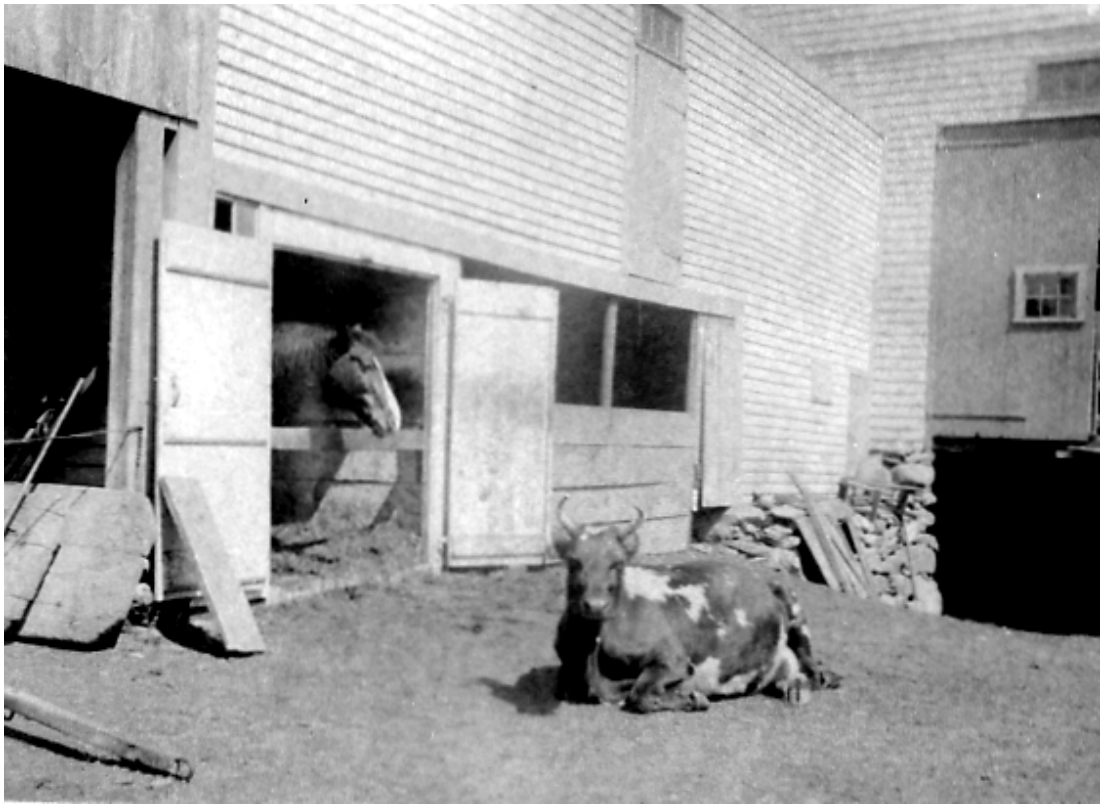
Are your dues up to date? Please check the mailing label for your membership status



A horse and cow share the sunshine in the barnyard of the Fitch farm. The barn stood across the street from Fitch Tavern, approximately where Mudge Way joins the Great Road. The farm's substantial acreage stretched southward beyond what is now Railroad Ave.