We Welcome Anyone to our Annual Meeting, the last meeting for this Season.

On Wednesday, May 23rd, the Society holds its 119st Annual Meeting. The meeting begins with a Pot-Luck dinner and will follow with the election of Society’s Officers (President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer) to serve one-year terms, as well as three Board members to serve four-year terms. Following at 7:15 there will be a lecture.

Society members are requested to bring a salad, main dish, or dessert that can serve about eight people. Reminder phone calls will be made and emails sent to get a sumptuous array of foods for this final event of the Society's 2011-2012 season.

If you are willing to help with phone calls, please contact: Carol Amick at 781-275-5278 or carol.amick@verizon.net.

Repairing History

A few weeks ago, a neighbor of the Old Burying Ground (OBG), Carl Hanson, reported that there was a broken headstone in the southeast corner. Investigation revealed it to be one of our older slate stones with a date of 1775. Water had penetrated the exposed layers of slate at the top of the arch-shaped stone, become frozen and split off a piece measuring about 4” x 9” x 1/2” from the top of the face of the stone. It contained part of the incised wording, “Memento Mori”.

Not to worry! Kevin Duffy, who grew up on Fletcher Rd., is a gravestone carver and restorer and has worked in the OBG. He was called to the rescue and agreed to restore the stone by Memorial Day.

The damaged headstone honors the life of one of Bedford's less known military heroes, Solomon Stearns who was a member of the Bedford Militia under the leadership of Capt. John Moore. As the eldest son, he marched that fateful morning of April 19, 1775 to Concord with his father Edward. After the battle, Solomon elected to continue his service by marching to Cambridge and joining the Continental troops encamped there. Within days, he contracted “camp fever” and died on the following May 18, truly a casualty of the historic Concord fight. He was nineteen years old.

Bob Slechta
Our VA Hospital - then and now.

A community within a community, the VA Hospital on Springs Road has long been an important cultural, economic, and historical influence in the town of Bedford having been with us for almost 85 years.

As a response to the growing need for the care of veterans of WWI and previous wars, the World War Veterans Act of 1924 was passed and signed into law by our 30th President, Calvin Coolidge, in 1925 and among its provisions was an appropriation of $2,000,000 for a new hospital specializing in neuropsychiatric disorders in the Boston area.

After a search, Bedford was decided upon and the town voted to welcome the new facility to be built on Springs Road north of its intersection with Page and Pine Hill Roads and on property consisting of three farms totaling 276 acres: the historical Pollard-Smith-Howe homestead then owned by Society member M.K. Coleman which was moved to where it now stands at 180 Springs Road and is owned by John Comley of Cape Cod; the summer home of Dr. Harold D. Cross of Forsyth Dental School which was formerly Bedford's Poor Farm of 118 acres; a smaller farm owned by P. Elavitch.

The properties were bought for a total of $55,614 and construction began in March of 1927. By May of 1928, there were 17 buildings which had cost a total of $1,718,799 including the land. The hospital opened on July 17, 1928 with 354 beds and patients who were transferred from a leased hospital facility in West Roxbury.

Over the next several years, the VA facility developed into a self-sufficient community with its own housing for employees, farm produce, shops, swimming pool, golf course, etc. The influx of patients and employees to Bedford was largely responsible for its increase in population from 1362 in 1920 to 2603 in 1930.

The principal period of building lasted until 1950. As the hospital continued to expand, by 1940 there was a staff of 1000 and 1616 beds. In 1947 a new facility was built to accommodate 85 women veterans. After WWII, by 1953, a peak of 1800 patients was reached. Then, as a result of advances in medical treatment, inpatient care diminished and outpatient care increased so that, in 1977, there was a staff of 1300 with only 900 inpatients.

In 1965, the Veteran's Administration sold 38.2 acres to Bedford for $9,925 for the establishment of Springs Brook Park and, in 1973, conveyed to it an 11-car garage. Over time, additional land totaling about 100 acres was transferred to the town leaving the present VA acreage of 177 with 66 buildings and structures, 47 of which are of historical significance.

In 1978, during its 50th year, the hospital was renamed the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veteran's Hospital by President Carter in honor of Rep. Rogers' long service in the Congress (1925-61) and tireless efforts for the well-being of veterans.

In 1975, the hospital established the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center, one of ten in the U.S. and, over the years with cooperation of several local universities and medical centers, has become a leader in research and treatment of dementia and Alzheimer's disease as well as drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs. As inpatients have decreased and outpatients have increased, the hospital has established Community-based Outpatient Clinics in outlying areas such as Fitchburg, Gloucester, Haverhill, Lynn, Winchendon and Lowell.

The U.S. Dept. of Veteran's Affairs, within the past few weeks, has submitted an application to the National Park Service for nomination of the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital to the National Register of Historic Places. Bedford's Historic Preservation Commission was asked to review the application for the Town and reports that it gave its hearty and enthusiastic endorsement.
Memorial day

This year the Historical Society will again be participating in Bedford's Memorial Day, May 28, observances. Participants typically gather at the American Legion in the morning and then proceed to the Civil War monument in Shawsheen Cemetery. Don Corey will be speaking there about Bedford's citizens who made great sacrifices in that war. The observances will then shift to the Old Burying Ground, where Bob Slechta will recall the contributions made by Bedford's Revolutionary War soldiers, the Captain of the Bedford Minuteman Company will read the roll call, and Bedford's Black patriots will be recognized. Later in the morning a parade will form at Mudge Way and proceed past the World War I monument on the Common, where John Dodge will be offer remarks. The parade will then proceed to Veterans Memorial Park for the main portion of the observances.

Please check the town web site or the Bedford Minuteman for details regarding the Memorial Day program.

Our Collections

The value of your Historical Society's collections lies in its varied content. The Town archives maintained by Town Clerk contain the most complete official town documents, including many historic ones that individuals had recovered from trash and donated to the Society over the years and which have since been given back to the town to help fill gaps in its records. However, the Society's collections contain by far the most comprehensive personal and family documents, photos and ephemera, property records and deeds, speeches, sermons, celebrations, local civic and service organizations and other items that tell the much fuller story of Bedford's past.

This month the Society received the book, *Folk Art Murals of the Rufus Porter School*, as a generous donation from Donna Argon. The authors, Linda Carter Lefko and Jane Radcliffe, traveled extensively throughout New England during the past several years to document the work of Rufus Porter and his students in painting wall murals of New England landscapes between 1825 and 1845. The authors visited Bedford and recorded the murals still visible in the Job Lane House and several private homes, as well as the mural owned by the Society that was rescued from the Jonas Monroe House before it was demolished. It is now displayed in Town Hall. The Bedford murals are referenced in various sections of this beautiful and informative book, which is the most thorough and well researched on this subject ever published.

Thank You!

Another Society season has come to a close and summer is approaching fast.

Your Society has worked hard to spread the knowledge of our precious history; we, again, had a full calendar year with great lectures and involvement in numerous town events. We also gave historic lectures to several organizations about Bedford. The Society's presence is crucial to keeping new generations informed about Bedford's past which often is rich and uplifting.

Our collection grows slowly, but steadily. Each season we add new material to our archives. Members and non-members have donated artifacts, books and photographs, all of which are now cataloged and ready to be viewed by anyone who is curious about Bedford.

We hope that you enjoy this newsletter, which is sent to our membership seven times a year. We encourage you to contribute with anecdotes or articles, or just ask for a specific story you would like to learn about.

For me it is a privilege to serve this vibrant organization. My knowledge of this town has brought richness that I could not imagine when my wife and I moved here some 25 years ago. I thank our members and all who support our Society, helping us to move forward and to keep our history alive. Of course, I hope to see you all in our next season and I encourage you to renew your invaluable membership.

Jan van Steenwijk

Just a reminder

*We would like to remind our members that annual dues for membership run along with our program year, ending on May 31, 2012. Dues for the 2012-2013 program year are now being accepted. On the back of this newsletter one can find a renewal application or visit our website: www.bedfordmahistory.org/membership*
The Preservationist
Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
2 Mudge Way
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“We Don’t Make History...
We keep It Alive...!”

The Bedford Historical Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Please support your Heritage.

We wish you a wonderful and playful summer and hope to see you all again in September.

Photo by Lucy Flint - approx 1920s, from a glass-plate negative in the collection from John Brown.

Did you renew your membership?

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Come and see us.
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