The Stearns Building on Great Road houses the Bedford Historical Society's archives.

The Preservationist

Newsletter of the Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
Bedford - Massachusetts

Founded in 1893

November 2013 Volume 122, Number 7

We Welcome Members of the Society to Our Holiday Party!

Saturday, December 14 from 3-6 pm 21 Elmbrook Road
(off Great Road)

Veteran Bedford Historical Society members John and Connie Dodge have graciously volunteered to host this year's Society Holiday Party. The event will be held at their lovely home, 21 Elmbrook Rd.

Every Society member (or family) is asked to bring an hors d'oeuvre to share with others. In past years the feast of appetizers has included shrimp, Chinese tidbits, cheese-and-crackers, Swedish meatballs, chicken wings, deviled eggs, small sandwiches, vegetables and dips, stuffed mushrooms, smoked salmon and other finger foods.

John & Connie Dodge

In addition, the Society provides soft drinks and coffee plus two types of punches: "naughty" and "nice."

While the wonderful refreshments are a great reason to attend this party, the opportunity for Society members and their guests to socialize in a relaxed, home-setting that is decorated for the holidays is what really makes this event special.

Hosts John and Connie Dodge are well known to the Bedford community and the Historical Society. John, who recently celebrated his 90th birthday, uses his position as Town Historian to relate stories about growing up in Bedford in the early 1900s. John brings a special lightheartedness to his volunteer service to the Town.

Happy Holidays - and THANKS!

It seems like yesterday that we celebrated the end of another year? Well, here we are again; time appears to go by faster and faster.

The Society has had a good year. We are grateful for the many new items that were given to us, adding to our ever increasing archive. Our friends at the Bedford Depot continue to help us sell our merchandise. Please visit their store on Loomis Street when you need a great Bedford-themed gift.

Despite volatile markets, our financial status is in a satisfactory balance, thanks in part of our finance committee, the sales of our merchandise, an increased membership and generous donations. We send a special thank you for a generous donation from the estate of Anne Abbott, a life time member of the Society, in memory of her husband, John Tucker Abbott. Anne passed away in August this year.

A well-deserved "thank you" goes to the many volunteers who have given their time to help out at the many BHS events, whether on Bedford Day or at our monthly lectures.

I hope to see all of you at our annual Holiday Party (see article on left), but in any event, on behalf of our Board, I wish you all pleasant holidays and hope that we will see you numerous times during the coming year.

Jan van Steenwijk

Bedford's Highways & Byways - What's in a Name?

by Brian Oulighan & DonCorey

Did you ever wonder how some Bedford Streets got their names? Many ancient ways have had their names changed over the past century or more as a result of Town Meeting action. I think every town has an Elm and Maple Street, a Pine and School St. - maybe a North and South Road. Here are some interesting facts about Bedford streets:

Bedford's 1866 map was the first to show a few street names. They included:

Spring St. - This was the road to the Bedford Springs Hotel. The name was officially changed from Spring St. to Spring Rd. in 1896, but we all know it as Springs Road (plural).

South St. – This was also changed from South St. to South Road in 1896.

Main Street – The name Main Street applied from the road's intersection with Pine Street (now Shawsheen Road) at the gate to Shawsheen Cemetery through the center of town and out what was originally named River Street leading to Carlisle. In 1896 Main Street became The Great Road.

The 1875 map showed River Street as Carlisle Road, but the name went back to River Street on the 1889 map. It officially became Carlisle Rd. in 1896. Some other interesting names on that 1875 map included:

Billerica Road – This isn't where you think it is – that was the name for what is now North Road!

continued pg. 2

Connie Dodge, known to so many residents as Connie Donovan of her real estate firm, has her own connections to Bedford history. Connie and some friends decided that Bedford needed to protect its historic "downtown" – the area surrounding the Town Common and the buildings running down The Great Road on either side of the Common. In 1964, she was successful in getting legislation approved by the Massachusetts Legislature that created the Bedford Center Historic District.

Connie and John invite all Historical Society members and their guests to their home for the annual Holiday Party. Everyone is invited!

Carol Amick

continued from pg.1

East Street – This road had been variously known as the Way to Bacon's Mill, Mill Street and East Street. In 1896 it officially was renamed "Old Road to Billerica" and we all know it now as Old Billerica Road. In order to add to the confusion, town maps and directories in the 1880s and 1890s showed that Brooksbie Road was called East Street as well during that period. It became Brooksbie Road in 1896.

Huckins Street - The road that leads to the Brother's Rocks and the Pickman lands was first called Chestnut Ave. Samuel W. Huckins settled here in about 1870. He was respected for his good judgment and held various offices in town. The road became Huckins St. until 1896, when it became Dudley Road.

Page Road – This ancient way was named for the Page family. Nathaniel Page settled here in 1688. His descendant, also Nathaniel Page, received the warning from Lexington couriers early in the morning of April 19, 1775, and alerted the townspeople that British troops were on the march. As Cornet of the Minutemen, he carried the Bedford flag at the Concord battle. The east end of Page Road has had various names – Grove Street is shown on the 1875 map. Where it formerly split near the Lexington town line, the road into Lexington was called Cummings Road, and the road to Burlington (now gone) was called Kendall Road.

Although its name wasn't shown on most maps, **West Street** was also an ancient way. It was renamed **Davis Road in 1896** for the Davis family. Dolor Davis had settled in Concord in 1655, and descendant Lt. Eleazer Davis of the Bedford militia lived on that road when he marched to the April 19, 1775, alarm.

New roads were built for more homes or for improved access to other roads due to Bedford's expanding population. In 1880, there were 931 people in Bedford - by 1980, the population was over 13,000. Some of the newer roads that appeared over a century ago included:

Loomis St.- This was built after 1874 as an eastern approach to the new railroad station. It was named after its developer, Elihu Loomis, who was a prominent attorney and judge in Bedford and Boston. Judge Loomis sons' Ralph, Hubert, Samuel and William served in WWI.

Lane Ave. & Winthrop Ave. - These short roads between The Great Road and Loomis St. were named for one of Bedford's largest families, the Lanes, and for Gov. John Winthrop. Job Lane purchased the Winthrop grant and settled here in 1664. In 1775, ten Bedford men named Lane marched as militia and Minutemen to the Battle of Concord. By 1940, only Edith L. Lane (74), Willis G. Lane (79) and Walter M. Lane (41) lived in Bedford.

Webber Ave. - Captain John Webber came to Bedford in 1760 and settled in East Bedford in the Danforth-Webber Inn (aka Shawshine House). He served in public office as Collector, Treasurer, and Town Clerk, as a delegate to important conventions during the Revolution, and as State Representative. Four generations later, Webber Ave. was built by Wallace Gleason Webber (founder of Paine Webber investment firm) in 1884.

Hillside Ave. - This road was built in 1888 and also developed by Wallace G. Webber. It was formerly called Stiles Ave. Thomas Stiles came to Bedford as a young man, served first as a store clerk and later became the proprietor. He was a Justice of the Peace and the Postmaster; was Town Clerk from 1846 to1863, and held other important town offices.

Sweetwater Avenue – In 1889 Town Meeting voted to accept "the doings of the Selectmen in the matter of laying out a road from the land of Dr. Wm. R. Hayden near the Bedford Springs Railroad Station to a point on North Avenue as per record of same filed with the Town Clerk". It was built for the cost of $2,000 and helped assure the success of Dr. Hayden's hotel.

Hartwell Rd. - This road was originally called Forest St. and was renamed for the Hartwell family in 1896. William Hartwell came to Concord in 1636 and in 1666 owned 247 acres in what is now Bedford. Forest Street and much Hartwell land were taken for construction of the Army Air Base in 1940.

Bacon Road – This was named for the prominent Bacon family. Michael Bacon built his mill in about 1663 and settled here in 1671. There were six Bacons from Bedford who served as Minutemen in the Concord fight.

Hartford St. - Named for Dudley Hartford, who came to Bedford in 1879. He was a florist in Bedford and Boston for many years. He was also a Selectmen and Assessor for the town in the 1890s.

Crescent Avenue - This street, formerly a private way owned by Charles O'Dowd that ran from South Street to Hartford Street, was laid out as a public way in 1904. Its original name, Crescent Street, was changed to Crescent Avenue very early.

Cutler St. - Named for the Cutler family. They settled at Cambridge Farms (now Lexington) in 1651, near the eastern part of Concord that became Bedford. The Cutler settlement was quite extensive. Thomas C. Cutler was Collector of Taxes for 25 years. Clara Cutler was a Bedford schoolteacher.

Fletcher Road - Named after Mary Fletcher, who inherited the land in this area and began its development in the 1880s. The street was originally known as Fletcher Avenue, and the area being developed was called Colonial Park. *The Fletcher house originally stood at the corner of The Great Road (now the Blake Block location), but she had it moved up Fletcher Ave.*

Phoners needed for Holiday Party!!!

Every year a group of Historical Society members volunteer to help call the entire membership as a reminder about the Holiday Party. ***We need your assistance with this effort!***

Each caller is asked to spend about 15 minutes making phone calls; many of the calls end up as voice mail messages because people are not home, but the effort to reach out to every Society member is an important part of planning the holiday event.

Volunteers are requested to contact either the Society's office at info@bedfordmahistory.org (or 781-275-7276) or Carol Amick at carol.amick@verizon.net (or 781-275-5278) to help in this effort.

Recent Society Events

Cub Scouts from Troop 194 visited the Society's offices with parents at the end of October. Kara Kerwin and Don Corey talked with them about family life in Bedford during the 19th Century. Some of the topics were: clothing (very young boys were often put in dresses!); toys and games (no video games); school lessons (try using a quill pen); and, chores (milking, helping make shoes, beating rugs, etc.). Some other items in the Society's collections that the kids saw included a canvas fire bucket, a child's crutch (Tiny Tim's?) and stilts.

An entire family of Fitch descendants, who came here from Indianapolis, Indiana, recently visited the Society. They were provided with an assortment of information and references to help them in their genealogical pursuit.

Don Corey recently gave a talk on Bedford's history at the Massachusetts Treasure Hunters Assn. Some of that group's members have participated in finding historic sunken vessels, and many members have the most modern metal detectors that are able to differentiate buried objects, i.e., coins and jewelry vs. bottle caps, and to detect items at greater depths than was possible previously.

New System of Street Lighting - from the 1904 Town Report

"One of the most notable improvements of the year was the introduction of electricity for lighting the village streets. The lighting system includes (63) sixty-three lights covering three miles of streets and has been in operation since July 1st. The advantages of a modern system of lighting are generally appreciated by our citizens and it is no idle boast to say that Bedford is now one of the best-lighted villages in Massachusetts. The Town has a five years contract with the Lexington Gas & Electric Company for maintaining the system at $16.50 per light per year."

This comes to $1,039.50 per year. It was a great deal, but it put the lamplighters, James Clark, Charles Flint and Samuel Carter, out of work. It cost the Town up to $400 per year to keep the gas street lamps lit and in good repair. By 1917 electric streetlights cost the town around $3,000 per year due to the expanded coverage.

MISS AMERICA 1940 – almost!

Among many notable people that have called Bedford home, we were reminded of one in material that was recently donated to the Society by Lorrie Dunham. It was a 1940 article about Polly Connors.

Polly's family lived at 23 Hillside Avenue and, after attending Bedford schools, Polly graduated from Lexington High School (as did all of Bedford's students at that time). She was voted the most popular girl in the class. After graduation she worked as a salesgirl and model, but also belonged to the Lafayette Club. The club was made up of girls who each year staged several plays locally. Girls took all the parts and dressed up as men for those roles. Polly played the title role in "Peg O' My Heart", which may have helped to set her on her path to fame.

Unbeknownst to Polly, her mother filled out the entry blank for the Miss Massachusetts competition in 1940 and sent it in. Even when she learned what her mother had done, Polly had no intention of going through with it, but her mother convinced her to carry on. She was one of 43 girls competing at the Riverview ballroom in Dorchester and won easily as a finalist. At the RKO Boston Theater she again won easily among the twenty-five finalists for the title of Miss Massachusetts 1940.

As noted in the article, "The judging in Atlantic City will last for five evenings – the girls being judged for talent, charm, grace, etc., in addition to beauty … and in all of these Polly is a champion". The material donated to the Society was silent as to the outcome of the national Miss America competition, but Google had the answer. Polly Connors was 3rd Runner-up to Miss Philadelphia for the title of Miss America 1940. Not bad for one of Bedford's very own!

THE GREEN MAGAZINE

BOSTON, SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 1940

Portrait of a Cinderella Girl

By George W. Clarke

SHE'S as Irish as a John MacCormack high tone . . . with the sunlight of the Curragh in her eyes, the sound of the wind over the rocks of Galway in her voice, and the ripple of Kerry brooks in her laughter . . . and she walks with the dignity of the Queens of the Auld Days.

Her name is Polly Connors. She's just 21—has been since last Jan. 11—and now, of all the girls in the whole of the Commonwealth, she has been chosen as "Miss Massachusetts," to take her luckiness to Atlantic City to compete for the title of "Miss America of 1940 . . ."

And with her she is taking the good wishes, the hopes of the whole of her Native State.

HOW she became "Miss Massachusetts," with a Fairy Godmother bringing her out from behind the counter of a department store to win the title, has been told . . . But here is the story of the girl, herself.

Her dad, Daniel Connors, worked for the city during the Curley regime, in the health department, and then they lived in Orient Heights, East Boston . . . but he died over so long ago, and his mother, Catharine, young and lovely, married again—this time Paul Sullivan, who now works for the Middlesex Bus Co.

They all live in Bedford now, which is between Lexington and Concord, at No. 23 Hillside ave., and Polly has three little stepbrothers—Paul, 12; Fred, 10, and Francis 8 . . . who are all pretty proud of Pretty Polly.

THEY'VE lived there for the last 15 years, and, despite the youth and charm of the now-Mrs. Sullivan, it's a kind of an old fashioned household, with mother baking all of the bread . . . and with fried dough for crispy mornings.

Polly says she can cook, too—but more of that later.

She went to the Bedford schools, after a short time in a parochial school in Lowell, and, finally, graduated from the Lexington High School . . . where she was voted the most popular girl in her class.

In school she studied elocution, and first appeared in a play while attending the Lowell school . . . in 1937 she went to work, and has been working as a salesgirl and model ever since . . . except for a little while, when she worked in a candy store.

SHE is, she explains, a member of the LaFayette club . . . and thereby hangs a little separate story, all by itself.

The club is made up of about 200 girls who, each year, stage three or more plays—such as "Daddy Longlegs," "Three Cheers for the Irish," "Rosie Wakes Up," and, most recently, "Peg O' My Heart."

All the parts are taken by girls, who dress up as men for the masculine roles. The shows are put on in the Cory Memorial Hall, Bedford, which has a capacity from 800 to 900, and are financed by the ticket sales—each ticket bringing 50 cents, with all disposed of in house-to-house canvassing by the club members.

Polly played the title role in "Peg O' My Heart," with an Irish brogue, and all and all . . . and was very happy doing it.

So now, for the time being, at any rate, it is her favorite play.

She also belongs to the St. Michael's Church, which also stages plays, but is of mixed membership, and employs a director. She likes the LaFayette club best.

POLLY herself is athletic, is a baseball enthusiast, and an expert tennis player . . . She is rooting for the Red Sox right now, hoping that they'll win a pennant, but has a very soft spot in her affections for Bob Quinn and his Bees.

She has a Prince Charming, but of course, and he is an athlete, a ball-player and a tennis player, too, which may account for her especial interest in those sports. Aside from that he's 24, and a linotype operator by trade.

They hope to be married no matter what comes of this career business, which as suddenly has come into her life.

Beautiful Polly Connors, who carries Massachusetts' hopes to Atlantic City beauty pageant. Will she become "Miss America, 1940?"

Continued on Page 9

The Preservationist

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"We Don't Make History…
We Keep It Alive..!"

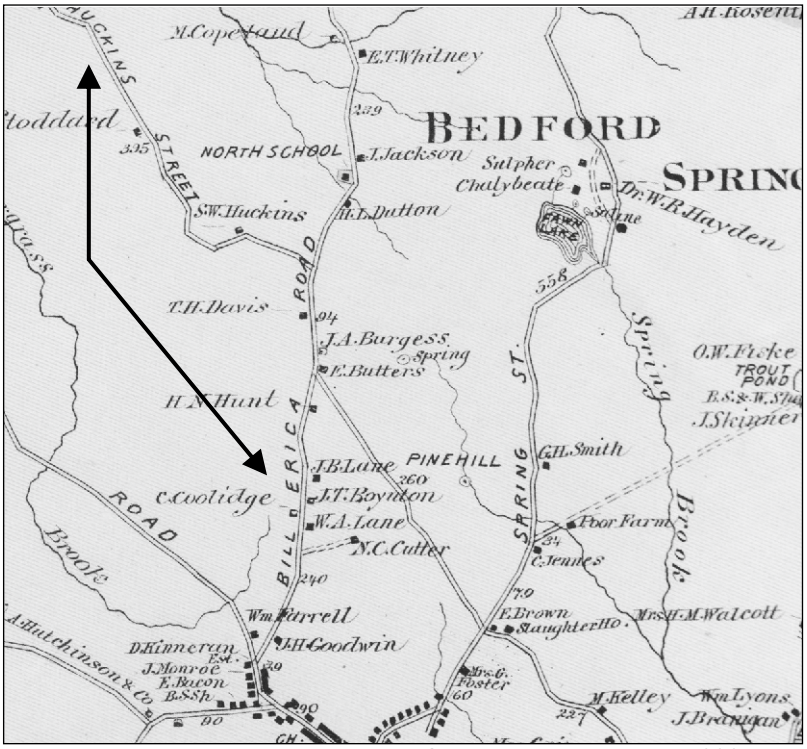
The Bedford Historical Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Support your Heritage.

Next Lecture: Wednesday, January 22, 2014
7:15 pm at the Bedford Library

"The History of Emerson Hospital"

This is an informative presentation about 100 years of history of Emerson Hospital by Emerson employee and volunteer Kenton Blagbrough. Mr. Blagbrough will describe the hospital's history, first as a 14 bed "cottage" hospital, to the facility we appreciate today. He will also describe the family -- a nephew of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who donated the land and money to build the hospital.

This is a great program to bring a friend; many Bedford residents utilize the services of Emerson Hospital and may find this program interesting.



Whatever happened to Huckins Street and Billerica Road???
(see answers on related story pp 1+2)

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Please feel free to visit our archives to browse though the many volumes of genealogical resources.

Come and see us.
Visit our website.
Visit our FaceBook page.

www.bedfordmahistory.org

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Membership Application

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Dues

_ Student:	$ 15.00
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