This house is still standing on The Great Road, though it looks rather different now. Can you identify it?

Romancin’ the Rail

Calling all rail fans and travel bugs! This month’s history talk is just for you.

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

The ever-popular Bill Patton tells the tale of the Union Pacific, the Orient Express, and other legendary trains, illustrated with vintage art and photographs.

As always, we begin with coffee hour and a nice chat. Free and open to the public. Please bring a friend, a neighbor, and your family, too!

Mystery photo challenge

This month’s Preservationist features a number of photographs from the Society’s collections showing an assortment of unidentified buildings. We already know the identity of some of the buildings but others are a mystery to us, and we just can’t bear to have unlabeled photographs in our Archives. We challenge you to identify as many of them as you can. Results will be published in next month’s newsletter.

Please send your best guesses to Bedford Historical Society, 2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730, or else email us at bedford-history@usa.net. Thank you, and good luck!

Visit our web site: www.bedfordmahistory.org
We welcome new members

We have been joined by many new members in recent months. Welcome, all!

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Brown
Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Brown, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Leo Cierpial
Mr. John R. Comley III
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Feltman
Ms. Kelly Giaquinto
Ms. Julie Foltz and family
Ms. Jan Kalb
Ms. Suzanne Schmuhl Koller
Mr. and Mrs. Jim McGinn

The softball question. Where was this picture taken? For extra credit, what name is carved on the boulder?

Archives hours

Our room in the Stearns building (the Police Station) at 2 Mudge Way, where we maintain our Archives and business office, 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. Don’t hesitate to call us at any time.
School days, 1826

The year 1826 saw the beginning of the modernization of Bedford’s Schools. For the first time, the School Committee was in the driver’s seat.

It began with a new state law which provided that the School Committee, not the town’s minister, was authorized to examine candidates for teaching positions in the schools. No longer was the minister in sole charge of hiring teachers. The effect of this change was not as drastic as might have been intended, though, for the elected chairman of the School Committee in 1826 was none other than the town’s minister, Rev. Samuel Stearns. The other members were Deacon Michael Crosby, Benjamin Simonds Jr., Elijah Stearns, Esq., Lieutenant Mather Hayward, and Captain Joel Fitch, with Benjamin Simonds, Jr. as Clerk. As noted in School Committee records, in May of 1826 they met to hire some new teachers for the summer term. Later that month, “in conformity to a late act of the Legislature,” they filed “a report on the State of the Schools” to the Secretary of the Commonwealth. In June they met again “at the house of Mr. Thos. Hurd, Innholder in this town” to interview more summer school teachers.

The state of the North, South, East, West, and Centre schools was not all it should have been. Another duty of the School Committee was to visit each of the schools at the end of the summer and winter terms (there being only two terms in the school year) to conduct oral examinations of all the young “schollars.” The number of pupils at each level was noted, along with the subject matter on which they were examined. The youngest were tested “in the alphabet” and then “in monosyllables” (presumably reading them aloud), progressing through di- and trisyllables, “the Spelling Book,” “American Popular Lessons,” the Testament, “Dictionary,” and various readers. A shortage of books was noted in some schools in the reports for the summer term. The Committee appointed Benjamin Simonds to “make inquiry into the purchase of books” and to buy the ones most needed as soon as possible.

The results of the oral examinations for the summer term varied from school to school. The Centre School under Miss Sarah A. Stearns of Billerica, with 45 scholars, shone most brightly. The report states, “The School distinguished itself in a very creditable manner for audible and correct speaking, and passed all branches of the examination with alacrity... The behavior of the scholars... several of whom were only between two and three years of age, was remarkably correct on this occasion.”

Next, the North School, with a daily average of only 19 pupils, performed its examination tolerably well with “audible speaking, although its pronunciation in several instances was not as correct as would have been agreeable to the Committee...” This was attributed to the limited number of children and the relatively short 12-week term at that school.

At the East School, 22 scholars present, the oral examinations went on in “too low a tone of voice...” Some of the older pupils spoke in “a more elevated tone” but did so in voices “too thick and indistinct.”

At the West School, 22 scholars, the teacher “appears to have succeeded in advancing the progress of the Scholars as far as could reasonably be expected from her limited qualifications.” Faint praise, indeed.

The Committee must have been a little discouraged at this point, but their examination of the South School on September 21, 1826 brought some ease of mind. This was apparently a progressive school, for the older of the 22 scholars were so far along as to be studying history, geography, and even astronomy. “The recitations & the behavior of the school,” the report stated, “were such as to reflect great credit on the ability, qualifications, industry and fidelity of the teacher and efforts of the scholars. 9 males, 16 females, 25 total, daily average 19. Benj. Simonds, Clerk of the S. Comm.”

A collective sigh of relief can almost be heard 180 years later.

This house is still standing in Bedford Center. Do you recognize it?
Mystery photo challenge, continued

Can you guess where these photographs were taken? (See the challenge on Page 1.)

Let’s start with an easy one!

A hotel or inn? Where? Note the windmill behind the building on the left-hand side.

We don’t know this one. Do you?

This picture just joined our collection. It may surprise you. (Hint: note the building on the right and the rubbish in the foreground).

Another mystery. This might not even be a Bedford house. Note the distinctive fence.

This one will really test the Bedford history experts. (Hint: think of Dudley Road.)
Membership Application and Renewal Form

This is (please check one):
_____ A new membership
_____ A renewal

Name: ___________________________________
Address: ___________________________________
City: _____________________________________
State: ___________________ Zip:___________
Phone: _________________________________
Email: __________________________________

Dues

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

Amount enclosed: $ _______________

Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
2 Mudge Way
Bedford MA 01730
781-275-1212, extension 140

We would appreciate a self-addressed, stamped envelope to help us speed your membership card to you. Thank you!

Benefits of membership in the Bedford Historical Society

• Annual series of lectures on Bedford and local history
• 10% discount on BHS merchandise purchased through us or at the Freight House on South Road
• Seven issues per year of our informative newsletter
• Christmas party and potluck dinner at Annual Meeting in May
• Opportunities to meet the foremost experts on Bedford history
• The satisfaction of knowing that you are helping to preserve Bedford’s history

Starting your holiday shopping early? Bedford Historical Society memberships make a wonderful gifts!

Poor but proud enough to pose for a photographer. Did this house stand in Bedford? Who were this couple, their children, and the hired man?
Are your dues up to date? Please check the mailing label to see your membership status.

Can you identify these photos? The bridge is easy, but the tower and farmhouse are mysteries to us. (The tower is neither the one that stood at 51 South Road, nor the Bedford Springs tower.) Photo challenge, page 1.