The Michael Beacon House
Built approx. 1670

The Preservationist

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

Founded in 1893

October 2010 Volume 118, Number 2

A Trip to the Shawsheen River

Wednesday,
Oct. 27, 2010 - 7:30 p.m.
Meeting Room,
Bedford Public Library

Photo: Jack Brady, SRWA Vice President

Bob Rauseo, President of the Shawsheen River Watershed Association, will present a show about the Shawsheen River and its watershed for the Society's October meeting. Refreshments will be available starting at 7:30, followed by a brief business meeting.

Rauseo's talk will focus on the river's history, wildlife, scenic beauty, environmental concerns, invasive plants and cleanup efforts. He also will discuss the impacts on the river of the beaver population. This is a topic well-known to Bedford, which has been wrestling with beaver problems at Fawn Lake, which feeds Springs Brook -- a brook that discharges to the Shawsheen River between Page Road and the Burlington Road/Route 62 bridges.

The main stem of the river flows for about 25 miles from its headwaters at Hanscom Field in Bedford to its confluence with the Merrimack River in Lawrence.

According to legend and information from the Society's files, the name "Shawsheen" is a Native American word meaning "serpent" or "serpentine", which refers back to the meandering nature of the river. The river was given the name "Shawshin" by the General Court of Massachusetts on May 1644. In 1636 Matthew Craddock, governor of the colonial company in England, wrote to Governor John Winthrop in America expressing a desire to obtain a grant of two thousand acres of land "at a place called Shawe Shynn."

The Shawsheen River Watershed Association is a non-profit, all volunteer organization dedicated to protect, restore, and enjoy the river and its watershed. The Association hosts numerous activities for the public, including river cleanups, canoe trips and educational forums.

It encourages residents in the 12 watershed communities, including Bedford, to join the organization and receive information about the river through its newsletter and various events. Meetings are held monthly at the Tewksbury Public Library, and are open to the public.

The Fitch Farm - Field of Dreams

Many Bedford residents know that the Bedford Minutemen mustered at Fitch Tavern on April 19, 1775, prior to marching to the Old North Bridge in Concord to engage the British Regulars. Few are aware of the role that the surrounding Fitch farm has played in the town's development or of the generous acts of some of the tavern's owners.

A portion of the tavern was built as early as 1710 and the existing main dwelling house was complete by 1731. The heirs of the original owner, Benjamin Kidder, sold the house and farm to Daniel Rea in 1758, and his estate was sold to Jeremiah Fitch in 1766. It was he who became a tavern keeper there. When the alarm was raised in 1775, Jeremiah Fitch was also Sergeant of the Bedford Militia and marched with the others to Concord (presumably after serving breakfast!).

The 1758 Benjamin Kidder deed had described the

Continued on pg. 3

Because of some last-minute scheduling conflicts, a couple of the Society's programs have had changes in location or date since the 2010-2011 Yearbook went to press. Please substitute the corrected schedule, below, for the schedule listed in the Yearbook (available at the Society's office and at meetings).

Holiday Party

Sunday, Dec. 5, 2010. 2 p.m., home of Carol Amick and Bill Moonan, 18 Crescent Avenue: Holiday Party.

The Holiday Party is always a delightful social occasion, where Society members and prospective members can enjoy the holiday season, good food and excellent conversation.

Other Fabulous Lectures.

Wednesday, Feb. 23, 2011. 7:30 p.m., Fellowship Hall, First Congregational Church:

Historian and attorney Diane Rapaport will give an illustrated presentation about ***"The Many Faces of Early Colonial Slavery."***

Wednesday, March 23, 2011. 7:30 p.m., Fellowship Hall, First Congregational Church:
"Moving the Fitch Homestead from Bedford to Harvard."

Sunday, April 17, 2011. 2 p.m., Fellowship Hall, First Congregational Church:
"The Finest Hours: U.S. Coast Guard's Most Daring Sea Rescue."

Wednesday, May 25, 2011. 6:30 p.m., Fellowship Hall, First Congregational Church:
Annual Meeting and Potluck Supper and "The Career of Rufus Porter, Artisan-Entrepreneur."

Another Great Bedford Day

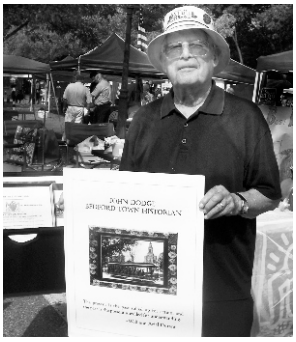
Sunshine, heat and humidity. Just one of those typical September days. Bedford Day was here and brought joy to a couple of thousand people. After the parade was over, the enthusiastic crowd arrived.

The Historical Society, as usual, had a booth to inform people about all the terrific things we have to offer. Our tables were full of wonderful merchandise for sale which attracted many visitors of all ages.

"Thank you" to our volunteers who helped set-up the tent very early in the morning, and to other dedicated members who took turns to staffing the booth. Kara Kerwin had already packed and sorted all the products. Kara's son Tyler, Barbara Hitchcock, Rose Ann Pappert, Marion Brian, Lois and Don Jenkins, Julia Whiteneck and Carol Amick were greeters, hosts and sellers.

Besides selling a lot of our products, to raise funds that help us sustain our activities, our staffers answered many questions from people wanting to know more about the BHS. Many names were written down, and brochures handed out.

Don Corey had, again, spent a lot of time to create a historic exhibition in the large meeting room at the Police Station. Of course, Don is the master in knowledge of Bedford's past, and his many visitors were in awe of the multitude of unique artifacts we have in our collection.



John Dodge, our Town Historian, brought many wonderful images of Bedford taken during "the good old days" making a welcome addition to our booth. "Wow, I remember that…" "Was that really like that…?" were expressions we heard over and over again.

Of course, one of the highlights was a special visitor to our booth – our own board member Bob Slechta, who was nominated as Citizen of the Year. This was a well deserved title, and we congratulate him, and his wife Betty, for this honorable award.

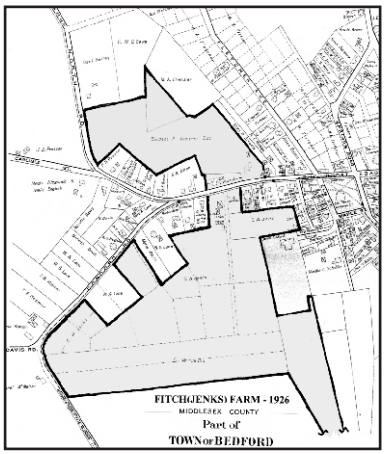
Thanks to all our visitors, who again helped make this a great day for the Bedford Historical Society.

Filed of Dreams - continued from pg. 1

farm as 2 acres with buildings on the north side of the highway (the tavern and outbuildings) and 45 acres south of the highway. The Fitch farm was expanded to the south in 1827 by the son of the Tavern keeper, also named Jeremiah Fitch. He had helped to acquire a church bell for the new meetinghouse (now First Parish) when it was built in 1817. When the Trinitarian Congregational Society split from the First Parish, Unitarian, in 1832, they had nowhere to meet. While Jeremiah Fitch remained a lifelong Unitarian, nevertheless he gave the land across the street from the Stearns' mansion to the Trinitarian Society for construction of their meetinghouse (now First Church of Christ, Congregational).He also donated the beautiful clock to the town that now hangs in the Great Hall at Old Town Hall.

In 1884 Charles Jenks moved to the farm to help care for his mother's sister, Caroline Fitch. Upon the death of his aunt Caroline in 1894, Charles and his two sisters inherited Fitch Tavern and the Fitch farm (then known as Stone Croft farm). Charles W. Jenks' contributions to

Bedford are well described in Ina Mansur's articles and elsewhere. A 1927 History of Middlesex County contains an extensive biographical sketch of Charles Jenks, indicating his widespread influence.

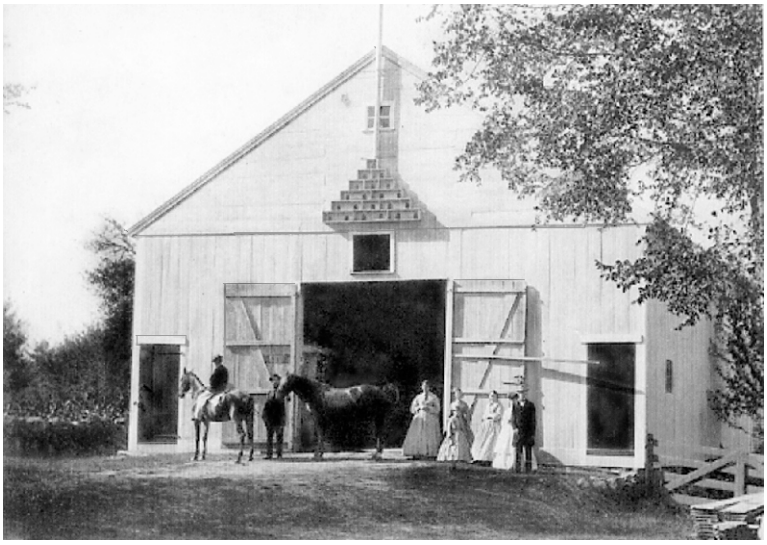


During his lifetime, Charles Jenks acquired substantial additional land adjacent to Fitch farm both north and south of The Great Road, including the Stearns estate next door to Fitch Tavern. The Bedford map shows the extent of the Fitch farm by 1926, totaling about 90 acres.

In December 1926 Charles Jenks conveyed a 1.94-acre "Knoll Lot" to the town for construction of the town's first Junior High School (now Town Hall). In April 1927 he conveyed a 16.5-acre parcel located off of Shawsheen Road (between the old reservoir and Shawsheen Cemetery) to the town to provide for both cemetery expansion and protection of its water supply. Upon his death on Christmas 1929, the town recalled the "two gifts ... which will always be a significant memorial of his thoughtfulness."

Charles Jenks and his two sisters were unmarried, and his brother, Henry, was the only one in that generation to marry and have children. After Charles Jenks' death, his three nephews inherited Fitch farm, and one lived at Fitch Tavern. Some Bedford old timers still remember him – Frederic Jenks.

In 1939 Frederic Jenks conveyed to the Town of Bedford 8.05 acres of land on the south side of The Great Road. It includes the land where Mudge Way was laid out and all of the land east of the road to Town Hall and Town Center. The barn (see photo) that stood at the present intersection of Mudge Way and Great Road was torn down, and the Stearns



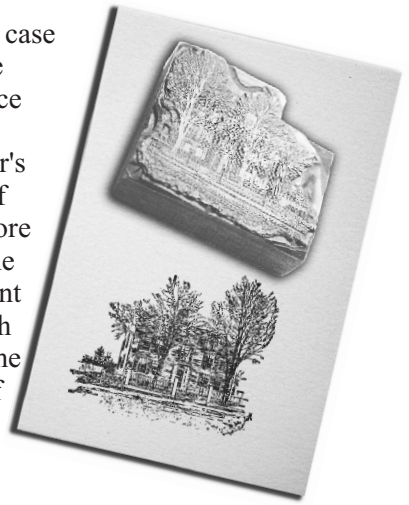
The Fitch Barn stood where Mudge Way is today

building (police station) and the Town Center-North Wing are now located on this parcel. Many people should recognize this area as that where the town just held its Bedford Day celebration!

Frederic Jenks' death in 1952 led to the sale of Fitch farm out of the family. His brothers,
Charles F. and Henry A. Jenks, and Frederic's widow, Elizabeth, sold the land north of The Great Road excluding Fitch Tavern early in 1953. Later that year, 43.13 acres of land south of The Great Road were conveyed to the Town of Bedford. The present Library, High School and many playing fields are now located on this land. This was the last of many generous acts of the Fitch and Jenks families that greatly benefited the town.

Finally, late in 1953, Fitch Tavern was conveyed to Frank Joslin and his wife Margaret, ending the Fitch family's association with the tavern. The subsequent owners have been David Reader and his family, and now Michael and Lea Ann Knight. All have contributed in many ways to Bedford.

The Historical Society's collections include a number of documents, plans, photographs and other memorabilia associated with Fitch Tavern, the farm and the family. Some are currently on display in the case immediately outside of the Society's office in the police station. Included in our collection is a small printer's block with an engraving of the tavern as it looked before an addition was built on the west end. An attractive print made from it is shown with the block (see photo). Come by and enjoy the display if you have an opportunity.

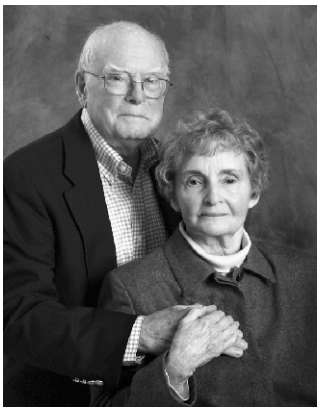


Don Corey

Bob Slechta

Bedford Citizen of the Year

By Carol Amick



Bob & Betty Slechta

As he waved to townspeople along the Bedford Day parade route, Robert Slechta – this year's Citizen of the Year, looked a little embarrassed by all the attention. That humbleness was displayed again when the Bedford Selectmen recently hosted a party in Bob's honor and praised him for his years of dedicated service to the Town.

In private conversations, Bob thanked people for the Citizen of the Year honor, but also humbly remarked, "Why me? There are a lot of people that do a lot for Bedford."

Bob Slechta is known for his fascination with history and the thoughtful, unassuming manner in which he quietly works for the organizations he loves. And one of those organizations is the Bedford Historical Society. A Society member for 26 years, Bob brings his thoughtful, attentive style to his current service on the Society's Board of Directors and the Executive Committee. In past years, he also has been elected to the demanding role as president, and filled in last year when the Society's Vice President had to step down.

As a Society member and Bedford history buff, Bob worked tirelessly with others on the restoration of the Old Burying Ground. Bob and other Society members (John Brown, Helen Nowers and others) performed research that resulted in the erection of the current bronze plaque showing the corrected list of Revolutionary War soldiers buried there. More recently, with funds provided by the Mass. Historical Commission that were matched with monies raised through Bedford's Community Preservation Act, and working with the Town's Public Works Department, Bob coordinated restoration of the Old Burying Ground tombs and gravestones.

In addition, using funds donated to the Society after John Brown's death, Bob organized the resetting of all remaining fallen or leaning gravestones and the cleaning of hundreds of gravestones to remove moss, lichens and dirt that had obscured the engraved lettering.

For many years, Bob has conducted tours of the Old Burying Ground, bringing to life the rich history of the people buried there. He also had conducted tours of Old Bedford Center, and has volunteered as a tour guide for all of Bedford's third graders in the Bedford Schools' annual "Walk of Historic Bedford," probably since the program began.

Bob's dedication to the Historical Society and to documenting Bedford's history is endless. He assisted with the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places of Two Brothers Rocks -- the boulders adjacent to the Concord River that mark the original 1637 land grants of Governor John Winthrop and Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley; he has shared his knowledge of Bedford's splendid history as a speaker for the Society's own program meetings, in addition to numerous other groups. These are just a few of the things that Bob has done for the Society and the Town.

Bob's attention also has been given to other civic and government groups. He has been a member of the Friends of the Job Lane House since 1990, and served on that group's Board of Directors from 1998 through this year. He has been an active member of the Friends of Depot Park and the Friends of the Bedford Public Library. He was appointed by the Selectmen and served from 1992- 2010 on Bedford's Historic District Commission and from 2000 – present on the Historic Preservation Commission.

Bob and his wife Betty moved to Bedford 52 years ago. He has Bachelor's and Master's degrees in biology from Clark University and a PhD in reproductive physiology from

Boston University, where he was a biology professor for 33 years. He retired in 1991.

In honoring Bob as Bedford's 2010 Citizen of the Year, Selectman Chairman Mike Rosenberg described Bob as a man whose talent and commitment to activities promoting and preserving Bedford's history "transcends his resume."

That is an excellent description of this humble Bedford history devotee, and the Bedford Historical Society is proud that one of its most active and dedicated members is this year's Citizen of the Year. Congratulations to Bob and his family!

Photos: Jan van Steenwijk

"It's Holiday Season..." (Well almost!)

While the holidays are not upon us yet, now is a good time to start practicing that terrific old song, "It's the Holiday Season." It is definitely time for all Society members to make a notation in their calendars that this year's Bedford Historical Society holiday party will be held on Sunday, Dec. 5 at 2 p.m. at the home of members Carol Amick and Bill Moonan, 18 Crescent Avenue.

Fifty-eight Society members attended last year's party, and enjoyed delicious hors d'oeuvres brought by members as well as two delightful punches provided by the Society and the hosts. Guests were entertained by a "guess-the-antique-tool" contest utilizing Bill Moonan's large collection of tools, and three prizes were awarded.

Society members are asked to volunteer as part of a coordinated telephone outreach service to remind members about the party and about bringing an appetizer.

Please email Carol Amick at ***carol.amick@verizon.net*** or call her at: ***781-275-5278*** if you can spare a few hours to make phone calls (a list will be provided) a week or so before the party.

Thank you!

Mrs. Jane Sutcliff hands over the beautiful cane

It's never boring to be involved with our society! A couple of times a month we get that surprising phone call or email; "We have something we would like to donate ; maybe it would interest you?"

Well, yes, of course we are interested! This call came from Lee Vorderer and Bob Bass, who's good friend wanted to donate an old cane and some pictures. So one afternoon, we visited the house on Fletcher Road where the 88 year old, very charming Jane Sutcliff, handed us a beautiful cane. The cane has an inscription on a Sterling band reading: *"This Handle made from Tree – Planted by GENL GRANT April 19 1875 – At Lexington Mass."*

The cane had been in her family as long as she could remember, but after moving away from Bedford, she felt that the most appropriate place for it was at the Bedford Historic Society.

In addition to the cane, we also received many family photographs.

Currently, Bob Slechta and Don Corey are researching the origin of the cane, and when we know the history behind it, we will have an in depth article with images in this newsletter.

A Novel Idea

When one walks into our archive that is hidden away in the back of the Bedford Police Station, a question always comes to mind – "how do they keep track of the myriad boxes filled with hundreds of photographs, artifacts, letters and documents?"

For many years, of course, terrific archivists wrote down every little bit of information that was available. First by hand in note books, later on index cards, and now everything is compiled in a computer program designed for museums.

Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go. It would be nice if, for example, all the hundreds of photographs we store could be cross referenced: look for *photos from 1898* and all the ones in our archive would pop-up. Look for *photos with people* and a report shows up immediately. Adding the type of photograph – Salt Paper Process – Colodion Process or Tin Type would be a great help for anyone interested in research.

Easily accessing and cross-referencing all the other valuables -- letters, documents, books, paintings and artifacts – would be fantastic. Many museums and historical societies already do this and information can be accessed by anyone looking for details about cultural and historic heritage. The technology is here; we just need the manpower and money to implement such an immense task.

We hope that, one day, we will have a great place to welcome visitors and can offer anyone, anywhere in the world access to the vaults of the Bedford Historical Society.

Jan van Steenwijk

Officers

Jan van Steenwijk, *President*
Julia Whiteneck, *Vice President*
Phyllis Cooke, *Secretary*
Don Corey, *Treasurer*

Please feel free to contact any of our board members if you have a question or suggestion, we always appreciate your input.

Directors

Frank Gicca - *Chair, Board of Directors*
Judie Toti - *Clerk*
Carol Amick
Joan Bowen
Bea Brown
Marion Bryan
Joan Gicca
Donald Jenkins
Neil Leary
Bob Slechta
Julie McCay Turner

Finance Committee

Frank Gicca - *Chair, Board of Directors*
Don Corey - *Treasurer*
Donald Jenkins
Neil Leary
Bob Slechta
Jan van Steenwijk - *President*

Web site:
www.bedfordmahistory.org
email:
info@bedfordmahistory.org
781-275-7276

The Preservationist
Bedford Historical Society
2 Mudge Way
Bedford, MA 01730-1238

Return address requested

PRSRT STD
US Postage Paid
Bedford, MA 01730
Non- Prof Org.
Permit No. 30

Are our lecture series in your calendar?

The Bedford Historical Society was founded in 1893 - Our Website: www.bedfordmahistory.org

The key to any non-profit organization is to have satisfied members.
We believe that our society has many good things to offer its members, including:

- Seven issues of our newsletter, "The Preservationist," a year.
- Free lectures by renowned speakers.
- High-quality merchandise.
- Tours and demos for 3rd graders.
- Exhibitions throughout Bedford.
- Promoting the Bedford Flag.
- A Holiday Party for members.
- Participation on Bedford Day.
- Old Bedford photos: Copies are for sale.
- Help with research.
- A professional website.
- Reach us on our website or FaceBook.
- Ongoing research about our past.

We take care of Bedford's past - for future generations.

Web site: www.bedfordmahistory.org
email: info@bedfordmahistory.org

781-275-7276

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

Did you know...
If you are interested in Bedford images, maps or photographs from our vast archive, please contact us, and for a small fee, we can provide you with copies.

Membership Application/Renewal

Please join us - and support our heritage!

Name:_____
Address:_____

City/Town:_____
State:_____Zip:_____
Phone:_____
Email:_____

Dues

_ Student:	$ 15.00
_ Single:	$ 25.00
_ Couple or Family:	$ 45.00
_ Life - Single:	$250.00
_ Life - Couple:	$450.00

Supporting or Business:

_Contributing:	$100.00
_ Patron:	$175.00
_ Benefactor:	$300.00

Amount enclosed: $_____

Please send check to:
Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
2 Mudge Way, Bedford, MA 01730-2138