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

October 2013 Volume 122, Number 7


## ***Welcome to our Free Lecture***

***October 23, 2013 at 7:15***

at the

Congregational Church - Great Road

### "The Foundation of the U.S. Constitution"

A discussion of the foundations of our U.S. Constitution, and what our founding Fathers were trying to accomplish, is the topic of this lecture meeting. Guest speaker David L. Smith also will describe how the Civil War changed the First and Fourteenth Amendments in his presentation, "In Accordance with Justice."

David Smith is the President of the Civil War Round Table of Greater Boston (CWRTGR), a non-profit organization established over 50 years ago to discuss all aspects of American history. The CWRT works with community groups, veterans, re-enactors, and historical and genealogical societies on Civil War projects, raising funds for graveyard desecration repairs, and preservation of historical sites and effects.

A Waltham resident, Mr. Smith is a member of the Waltham Historical Society, the Waltham Historical Commission, and the MA Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission, which has organized numerous special historical events to commemorate the events of 150 years ago.

***New start time for all meetings!***

The reception period for all of ***the Society's programs this year kicks off at 7:15 pm***, rather than 7:30 pm as in past years. During the social period, members and guests can enjoy the refreshments brought by Society hospitality volunteers, and visit with their friends.

This change in timing will enable the Society to stay within the room rental restrictions and allow guest speakers to end their presentations around 9 pm.

*We're always looking for volunteers to bring home-made or store-bought cookies, brownies, or other treats; please email the Society office at info@bedfordmahistory.org or call 781-275-7276 if you can volunteer.*

We're Building…but not on the museum of our dreams yet. A spacious place to showcase some of our incredible historic artifacts is still some years away from realization. Meanwhile, we are building an increasingly large archive. People frequently donate items we only hoped existed, and did not yet have in our archives. For example, look at the Wilson Mill photograph on page two. The only image we had until now is a painting of the Mill, so please check that box of family photographs you have stashed in your attic! You might find a treasure. We also encourage anyone who comes upon a Bedford related item on EBay, or somewhere else, to let us know.

We need your help... *See page three: we are asking if someone would let us use their home for our Christmas Party. For many years, Carol Amick and Bill Moonan have opened their beautiful residence welcoming our members to celebrate the coming holidays. The event is always a festive gathering and an opportunity to meet the people we may not have seen since last year's party. If you think that you could help us, please contact me at 781-275-7488 or call Carol Amick at 781-275-5278.*

*Jan van Steenwijk*

## Recent Acquisitions - connecting the dots... *by Don Corey*

The Historical Society recently received a large 19th century painting of the David Fitch house from a Fitch descendant. The house stands on Old Billerica Road opposite Carleton-Willard Village, which acquired it in 1993. The house was beautifully restored for their guesthouse and has been declared eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The site has a wonderful history. When Benjamin Fitch purchased Michael Bacon's mill on the Shawsheen River in about 1730, Benjamin built his home on this property. He and his wife, Miriam (Gray) Fitch – the famous "Witch of the Shawsheen" – lived there. The old homestead was badly damaged in a house fire at a much later date, and Benjamin's grandson David Fitch built the existing house in about 1800. The Fitch family continued to operate the mill until it was sold sometime after 1847, and they lived in the house until 1902, when Franklin P. Fitch (David's youngest grandson) sold the homestead and farm. He sold the farm to a Horace Wiggin, who appears in the 1910 Federal Census as a widower living there with two daughters. He sold the farm in 1916 to the Francis E. Willard Settlement House across the street, which helped working girls and women in need of assistance. The farm became a summer retreat camp for working girls, and the house had a wing added and became the Worthen Memorial Home as a nursing home for women who were unable to live independently. By the end of World War II, the building was badly in need of repair, so those activities were ended and the house was sold in 1946. It remained a private residence again, until 1993, when the Carleton-Willard Village purchased it.

Some time ago the Historical Society was given the cape that supposedly was that of

*continue next pg.*

*Recent acquisitions cont.*

the "Witch of the Shawsheen", Miriam (Gray) Fitch. The cape is wool and hand stitched in a style appropriate to the early 1700s. Several years ago Bob Slechta was able to trace the cape from its modern-day donors back to Miriam through Olive M. Fitch (Franklin P's sister), who had married George Hartwell. It seems likely that when the homestead was sold, Olive kept the cape and Franklin kept the painting of the homestead, which are now reunited at the Society.

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While perhaps not as dramatic, the Society also was recently given a photograph of the Wilson Mill on Vine Brook that would have been taken in the late 1800s. There are no other actual photographs of the Wilson Mill in the Society's collections, although the Society has copies of a painting of the mill by Edwin Champney that was made at an earlier date before the mill was badly damaged in a fire.

*The Wilson Mill in the late 1800s*

The Wilson Mill was built as a corn gristmill just after King Philip's War in 1676. This mill was a major employer here for centuries. A sawmill for lumber was later added to the corn mill, then in 1840, a paper mill was established, later a blind and sash factory, and then a paint mill. It was Staples Cider Mill in the 1890s. After a bad fire at the mill in the mid-1800s, it was estimated that 10% of Bedford's population lost their jobs. Regrettably, by the end of WWII the water-powered mill was no longer needed. With the construction of the Route 3 intersection here in 1953, remnants of the mill were almost entirely destroyed.

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*Bedford High students honored by the Bedford Historical Society for their outstanding performance in the National History Day competition are (l to r): Nick Chapman, Maya Biswas, Lindsey Currier, Lexi Ugelow, Ronia Hurwitz, Kira Perzel-Mandell, Jackie Nguyen, Michaela Simoneau and Remy Nikka. (Photo by Jan van Steenwijk)*

## Historical Society honors History Students

The Bedford Historical Society recently honored the nine Bedford High School students who participated last summer in the Washington, DC National competition for National History Day, which is designed to promote the teaching and learning of history.

The presentation of a check and the book, “Wilderness Town” about Bedford's early history, was made to each student by Society President Jan van Steenwijk and Marion Bryan, former Society President and part-time high school instructor who knows the students. The students were thanked for their interest in history and their work on this competition – researching subjects above and beyond their high school class work.

Five of the students – Maya Biswas, Nick Chapman, Lindsey Currier, Ronia Hurwitz and Lexi Ugelow, were named National Champions. For their project, these students designed a website about the Enigma Code – the name given to the German's enigma-encrypted communications used before and during World War II.

The Enigma machine allowed an operator to type in a message, and then scramble it by means of several notched “rotors” that displayed different letters of the alphabet. The receiver needed to know the exact settings of these rotors to reconstruct the coded text.

Germany believed their Enigma-encrypted messages were impenetrable to the Allies. But they were wrong: an Enigma machine was reconstructed by the Poles, who shared the secret with the British. Breaking the code gave the Allies important advantages, including their battles against Marshal Rommel's German army in North Africa.

The BHS students said they “stumbled upon” two notes about the Enigma Code in Sophomore History class, and wanted to know more. They designed a self-directed website with an enigma-like simulator and lots of history about the successful efforts by the British and French to break the code.

The other four BHS students who were honored did well enough at the State competition for National History Day that they were able to participate in the National competition. Remy Nikka, Jackie Nguyen, Kira Perzel-Mandell and Michaela Simoneau performed a 10-minute skit, acting out various historical incidents relating to the Manhattan Project – the development and use of the first atomic bombs in World War II. Students portrayed President Roosevelt, President Truman, theoretical physicist Robert Oppenheimer and Russia's Joseph Stalin in the competition.

Bedford High School students have competed in the annual National History Day program for over a decade, presenting their research and analysis in original papers, websites, exhibits, performances and documentaries. The Historical Society has recognized the achievements of the student participants over the past several years.

*Carol Amick*

## Lexington Park Feedback

The article in the last Preservationist about Lexington Park ("The Man Who Loved Animals") prompted a response from a reader, Randall Waleyko. The Society understood that the only building remaining in Bedford from Lexington Park was a residence (originally a casino) located at 3 Woodland Road. However, Mr. Waleyko has strong evidence that a former worker's cottage at Lexington Park was moved across Great Road to his family's property during the 1920s, after the amusement park closed for good in 1919. The Society would love to hear from others who may know of any other surviving remnants of the park.

*Don Corey and Mr. Waleyko discuss the origin of the cottage.*

## Historical Society helped celebrate the Job Lane House 300th Anniversary

At the celebration of the Job Lane House's 300th anniversary, Jan van Steenwijk on behalf of the BHS presented a check for $1800 to Sharon McDonald, President of the Friends of the Job Lane House. The money was donated through generous gifts from BHS members and other supporters in the name of Bob Slechta. Bob, who passed away in December of 2012, was a great supporter of the Job Lane House.

The Board of Directors of the BHS felt it was appropriate to donate the money to be used for the JLH Furnishings Fund. The Friends have long hoped to purchase a "dry sink" for the Museum's kitchen. This gift may help the Friends reach this goal.

*Jan presents the check from the BHS to Sharon McDonald while Judy Barber looks on.*

Four Centuries of Massachusetts Furniture unites eleven respected institutions in an unprecedented celebration of the Bay State's remarkable furniture-making legacy. From the early products of Pilgrims and Puritans to the studio furniture of today, the Bay State has achieved a remarkable record. The state's output of furniture includes grand objects in walnut or mahogany as well as decorative items made of less expensive painted woods or wicker.

The Society's furniture located in the Stearns building (Police Station) and the furniture at the Job Lane House owned by the Society, the Friends of the Job Lane House and private individuals, was recently viewed by representatives of the group with the purpose of identifying pieces having a local provenance and adding them to its inventory. We may be hearing more!

For more information on this venture and a schedule of future exhibits, programs, online education and publications, visit FourCenturies.org.

## *We Need You!!!*

The Bedford Historical Society holds its annual Holiday Party on a Saturday or Sunday in December, usually starting at 3 pm. It's a fun event that normally draws over 50 Society members. Everyone attending the party brings an hors d'oeuvre to share with others; the Society provides two kinds of punch (regular and "high-test,"), soft drinks and coffee.

***We're looking for a location for this year's party. According to Carol Amick and Bill Moonan, who have served as the hosts for the last several years, "it's a terrific party, because the guests bring all the food! All the hosts need to do is have their house decorated for the holidays!"***

If you are willing to host this year's event, please contact the office at 781-275-7276 or info@bedfordmahistory.org.

# *The Preservationist*

Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
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Bedford, MA 01730-1238

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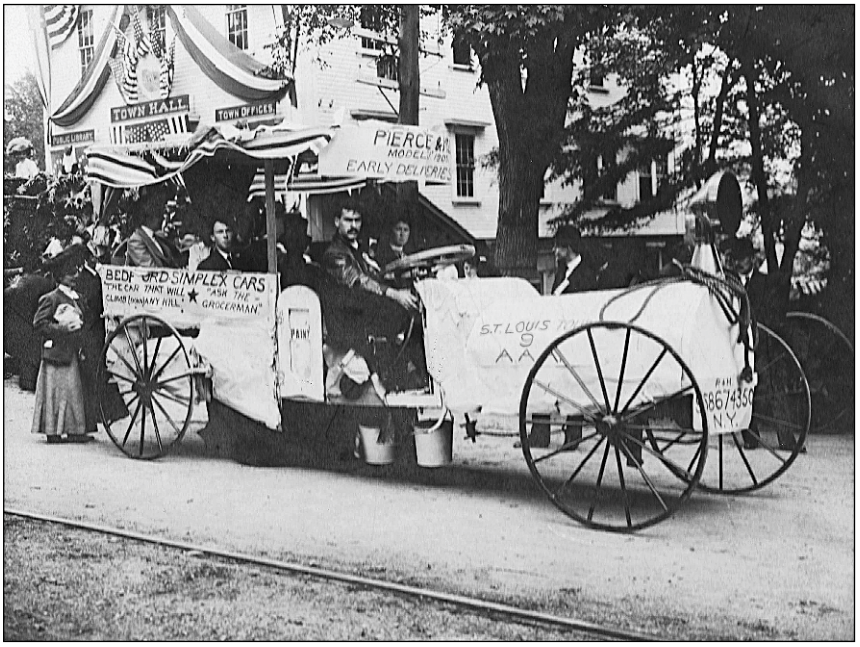
"We Don't Make History...
We Keep It Alive..!"

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

**Next Lecture: Wednesday, January 22, 2014**
**at the Bedford Library**

***"The History of Emerson Hospital"***

Emerson Hospital employee and volunteer Kenton Blagbrough will describe the 100-plus years of Emerson Hospital history in Concord, and of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Emerson (a nephew of Ralph Waldo Emerson). The family donated 80 acres and $20,000 to establish the 14-bed "cottage" hospital in 1911.




From the Bedford Parade, 1904. The sign on the side reads:
*Bedford Simplex Cars. "The Car That Will Climb (down) Any Hill"*
*"Ask the Grocerman"*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www.bedfordmahistory.org

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*The Preservationist.*
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Jan van Steenwijk
Contributing writers:
Carol Amick, Don Corey, Kara Kerwin.


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

Membership Application

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Dues

| | |
|---|---|
| _ Student: | $ 15.00 |
| _ Single: | $ 25.00 |
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