Popular Music of the Gaslight Era

Our lecture series resumes this month with music scholar and performer John Root. As his web site (www.johnroot.net) explains: “Popular Music of the Gaslight Era (1890-1920) features a delightfully diverse repertoire of instrumental and vocal musical styles from the turn of the previous century. Everyone is invited to sing along and to experience the range of feelings evoked by this music.

“The songs’ lyrics offer insights into the customs, lifestyles, and values of these bygone days. Audiences also learn how America's multicultural diversity at the turn of the previous century created unique musical styles that continue to inspire and entertain singers and audiences around the world.”

Wednesday, September 26, 7:30 p.m.
Congregational Church
25 The Great Road, Bedford
Free and open to all
Please bring your friends!

Please visit our web site: www.bedfordmahistory.org
**The Preservationist** is published seven times yearly for the purpose of sharing topics of interest for the education and enjoyment of the Society’s members and the community in general. Comments, suggestions and contributions of relevant articles are welcome and should be addressed to: Editor, *The Preservationist*, 2 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730.

Alethea “Lee” Yates, Editor
(781) 275-3294 (home)
(781) 275-1212 ext. 140 (BHS office)
Email: bedford-history@usa.net

**Bedford Historical Society, 2007-2008**

**Officers**
Alethea Yates, President
Robert Slechta, Vice President
Phyllis Cooke, Secretary
Don Corey, Treasurer

**Directors**
Carol Amick ('08)
Norman Toti ('08)
Julie Turner ('08) - Board Secretary
Don Corey ('09) - Board Chair
Miriam Brown ('09)
Jan van Steenwijk ('09)
Marion Bryan ('10)
Marietta Ellis ('10)
Donald Jenkins ('10)
John Brown ('11)
Doris Crowell ('11)
Neil Leary ('11)

**Committees**

- **Activities:** Jeannette Pothier
- **BOD Liaison to Executive Board:** Don Corey
- **Hospitality:** Phyllis Cooke and Marietta Ellis
- **Membership Secretary:** TBD
- **Merchandise/Ways & Means:** TBD
- **Newsletter Editor:** Alethea Yates
- **Nominating:**
  - Wilma Johnson (appointed by Executive Board, ’08)
  - Carol Amick (appointed by Membership, ’09)
  - Julie Turner (appointed by President, ’07)
- **Program:** Cecile Walker
- **Sunshine:** Sharon McDonald
- **Welcoming:** Lois Jenkins
- **Finance Committee:**
  - Don Corey (Board Chairman, Treasurer)
  - Mike Seibert ('08)
  - Neil Leary ('09)
  - Frank Gicca ('10)
  - Alethea Yates (BHS President)

---

**Annual Giving continues**

The Society gratefully acknowledges contributions to the Annual Giving Campaign from the following members and friends. Every gift helps us achieve the Society’s mission of preserving and promoting awareness of Bedford’s rich history.

- **Bedford Funeral Home**
  - Therese Bluhm
- **Donald & Lois Brown**
- **George Dalrymple**
- **Dalya’s Restaurant**
- **Bob & Sarah Dorer**
- **Chuck French**
- **Clay & Marjorie Hurst**
- **Don & Lois Jenkins**
- **Roy & Shirley Kring**
- **Sheldon & Gloria Moll**
- **Cynthia Schweppe**
- **John & Lucia Stewart**

---

**New members join us**

The Society is pleased to welcome Ted and Terry Hansberry to our circle. We approached Ted this summer for some advice and not only did he give it, but he also signed up for membership on the spot! We are very appreciative.

---

**One hospitality helper needed for September meeting**

Our Hospitality chairs, Phyllis Cooke and Marietta Ellis, report that they will have enough food for the September meeting but would like one more person to help them serve and clean up. If you can help please call Phyllis (275-9354) or Marietta (275-0159).

---

**Archives hours**

Our room in the Stearns building (a.k.a. the Police Station building) at 2 Mudge Way 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. Please don’t hesitate to call.
Executive Director appointed

At the Annual Meeting in May, the Society’s members voted to accept the Directors’ recommendation to establish the part-time position of Executive Director. This position was created in order to address the many exciting new opportunities made possible when we succeeded in matching the Challenge Grant. The various tasks involved in putting this endowment to work go well beyond the existing job description for the Archivist.

At their September meeting the Board voted to appoint our current Archivist, Alethea Yates, as Executive Director. Her hours at the Society’s office in the Stearns Building (a.k.a. the police station) will remain Mondays 9-5 except lunchtime, and Tuesdays 9-1. An additional half day a week will be added later this year.

Opening on the Historic Preservation Commission

The town seeks someone who appreciates history to fill a vacancy on Bedford’s Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The HPC meets monthly in Town Hall, usually at 7:30 on the third Tuesday of the month. The HPC’s duties include managing historic town properties such as the Job Lane House and the Wilson Mill Site; applying for and managing grants for historic projects; nominating properties to the National Register of Historic Places; placing interpretive signs and plaques at historic locations around town; administering Bedford’s Demolition Delay bylaw; and more. The Board of Selectmen appoints commission members. Any registered Bedford voter is eligible to apply.

Think you might be interested? Please speak to one of the Commission members (Chuck French, Lee Yates, Neil Leary, Suzanne Schmuhl-Koller, Bob Slecht a and Don Corey), come and listen in on any HPC meeting (all are open to the public), or contact the Town Manager’s Office.

Cleaning sessions for gravestones in the Old Burying Ground

As part of an ongoing effort to repair and restore the monuments and tombs at the Old Burying Ground, Historic Preservation Commission members Don Corey and Bob Slecht a, along with Town Historian John Brown, recently attended a training session on cleaning techniques for gravestones. The before-and-after photos they took show the dramatic improvements that can made by removing lichens and the grime of years from some of these venerable stones. Bob plans to teach these methods to interested community residents this fall on several dates to be determined. If you would like to participate in this important restoration work or would like more details please contact Bob Slecht a at 781-275-7224 or rfsbys@verizon.net.
The family documents of Bedford

Editor’s note: The following is an excerpt from an article written by Archives volunteer Rose Pappert. We are grateful for her contribution to the newsletter.

Hobby historians John and Bea Brown have lived, breathed, and walked for several decades with the oldest family documents in Bedford. John and Bea were in on the discovery of both the Bacon and Lane family documents. The day the Lane documents were discovered, John Brown was sitting with Abigail Bacon (now deceased), an author named Abbott Lowell Cummings, Mary Hafer, and Ina Mansur, who was then president of the historical society.

That day, Abigail Bacon had set up a luncheon at her house. The group of friends already had an inkling that documents for the Lane family might have survived to the present, and they all met over lunch to compare facts. John Brown sat armed with a rumor that the last lady of the Lane family had not burnt the family’s documents, but that a housekeeper to the Lanes had run off and sold the papers. Mary Hafer had a typewritten manuscript from an old Mrs. Goodwin that suggested some Lane family documents might have been sold to a Doctor Stearns, known to have been in medical practice in 1893.

“Why, I know Dr. Stearns’ son Charlie! He’s living over in Billerica,” burst out Mrs. Bacon. Click; into place slipped the last puzzle piece of the mystery. The circle of history detectives sat there staring at one another, then Mrs. Bacon stood up and went to call Charlie. With a huge, “Hi, howdy,” Charlie Stearns invited them all to “come up and see” the papers, for he had them all in a box up in his attic. So, says Mary Hafer, they all jumped into a car and drove over to Billerica. Once the papers were safely stowed at the historical society, John Brown delved into the work of organizing and describing the papers on database. It was John who drew up the Lane family genealogical tree.

John has also spent a lot of time looking through and organizing Bacon family documents. One of the earliest Bacon family men had been a surveyor around the time of the Revolution, and had left behind a lot of old rough drafts of surveying maps. John began tinkering with coat hanger pieces, wood, and compass parts until he had managed to construct a set of surveying instruments similar to those in colonial America. Then, John went around surveying the Browns’ house lot with compass, plane table, and a coat hanger chain while Bea hovered by his shoulder. Here is more of Bedford’s personality! A bit of the frontier town lies dormant in Bedfordites today. Curiosity and historical pride spark ingenious effort, pulling community members together for common purpose.
Turmoil and tranquility at Shawsheen Cemetery

The older part of Shawsheen Cemetery was recently named to National Register of Historic Places as the result of a project by Bedford’s Historic Preservation Commission, aided by consultants Martha Lyon and Greg Farmer and by the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

The serenity and beauty of Bedford’s Shawsheen Cemetery today seem timeless but it was not always so. There were years of conflict, chaos, and confusion before an orderly calm settled over the final resting place of so many of Bedford’s citizens.

Opened in 1849, the Shawsheen Cemetery was an early participant in the rural cemetery movement that had been begun with the opening of Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1831. Like Mount Auburn, though not on as grand a scale, the Shawsheen Cemetery featured a rural location away from center of town and a spacious layout designed to assist contemplation. Further, its hillside setting provided a pleasant view of the surrounding countryside.

There were other advantages. Shawsheen Cemetery was from the beginning intended to be self-supporting. The sale of lots, plus the sale of wood from the site, were to cover all expenses. Shawsheen also offered something not available in the Old Burying Ground: family plots. In the older graveyard relatives were buried near one another only as a courtesy and as space allowed.

At its founding, then, Shawsheen Cemetery offered a park-like setting with a calming view, the comfort of lots where departed family members could be interred together, and a plan to make it all self-financing. All should have been serene. But serenity took decades to achieve.

The most pressing problems arose from the ownership system. Purchase of a burial plot was similar to the purchase of a building site today. The trees would already have been removed for sale but the buyer had full responsibility for everything else after the purchase. This began with having the tree stumps removed and the land leveled, grass sown and appropriate plantings made, and monuments installed. The buyer and his or her descendants were then expected to maintain the lot through the years, which meant mowing the grass, trimming and weeding the plants, and making repairs as necessary. Garden maintenance, even for those with the best of intentions, was hindered by the lack of a water supply.

Inevitably, chaos ensued. Some families were more attentive to their family plots than others and as the years went by some families moved away or died out, leaving plots untended. Further, the owners of adjoining family lots – and sometimes family members who shared ownership of a single lot – often disagreed over plantings to be made, monuments to be built, trees to be removed, and whether to have mounds or level soil over the graves. To add to the confusion, there was no overseeing authority to resolve conflicts. Shawsheen became a battleground with the owners bickering over some 400 lots that were crowded together on only 10 acres of land. To help bring some order to the chaos, in 1890 the town published Rules and Regulations for the Government of Shawsheen Cemetery and appointed a Cemetery Committee to administer them.

Enter Abram English Brown, who had just published his History of the Town of Bedford. He became Clerk of the Committee on Burial Grounds in 1893. Two years later he also became the Superintendent with responsibility for the day-to-day running of the Shawsheen Cemetery and the Old Burying Ground. He retained both posts until his death in 1909. His dominant role in running the cemeteries is made plain in the Cemetery Committee’s report for 1909 which states, “In the death of the late Superintendent and Clerk, Mr. Abram E. Brown, the Shawsheen Cemetery has met with a severe and irreparable loss. Since 1895 the Cemetery Committee has consisted of the same members and its work was divided, with Mr. Brown as the executive, and the other members as advisors as necessary.”

Brown took the challenges head-on. The problem of finding funds to maintain abandoned or neglected lots had been partially remedied by the establishment of perpetual care trust funds. A family could set up a fund, typically in amounts of $50 or $100, with investment income from the fund to be used to maintain the family lot. Brown, with his extensive knowledge of local families and their offshoots, was able to track down a number of cemetery owners and persuade them to set up trust funds. Still, tax appropriations were sometimes needed to maintain the cemetery.

Another challenge was that in a typical year more than half the burials were of persons from other towns. For example, in 1895 out of 26 interments only eight were of Bedford citizens; in the following year the numbers were 43 and 18. This increased the difficulties of maintaining the cemetery because few families out of-towners contributed to Bedford’s
tax base. It seemed unfair to ask Bedford taxpayers to cover expenses not supported by owners from other towns. Brown did his best to keep tax appropriations to a minimum.

Despite the difficulties that gradually decreased as a result of his work, he had a vision for the best that the Shawsheen Cemetery could be. He was especially interested in honoring veterans. Noting that Memorial Day celebrations were a fundamental part of Bedford’s community life, he carried out extensive research to try to locate and recognize the burial site of every veteran buried in either of the town’s two cemeteries. He then published all of their names in each annual Town Report to ensure that they would never be lost again.

He was also interested in making improvements to assist the comfort of visitors. The 1898 town report cites a need for an outhouse for out-of-town visitors and in the next year one was installed. Repeated attempts to install a water system were made during his tenure although none were successful until water mains were laid along Shawsheen Road just after his death. The main entrance leading up from Shawsheen Road being steep and slippery in winter, Brown urged the development of a new entrance from the Great Road. He bought an adjoining piece of land on which to build the road, then sold the land to the town. A Lane family member contributed the stone pillars flanking the entrance to the road.

Brown’s biggest dream for the Shawsheen Cemetery was to erect a chapel on the cemetery grounds. He began to raise funds, some as cash and the rest as pledges of funds to be paid when the full amount was raised. Plans for the chapel were drawn up (see picture). By the time of Brown’s death, though, only a small amount of money had been raised. Unfortunately, without his dedication and perseverance to carry it out the plan never came to fruition. It is a pity. The chapel would have been the most fitting tribute to the devoted efforts through which he more than anyone else brought tranquility at last to the Shawsheen Cemetery.

The chapel that Abram English Brown dreamed would be erected at the Shawsheen Cemetery.
Community outreach

In addition to our monthly meetings, we conduct a variety of other efforts to enrich the community and make more residents aware of who we are and what we do. Some recent and pending activities:

**Open House.** Despite the will-it-or-won’t-it-rain suspense of Bedford Day (it did, but only during the parade), our Open House in the Stearns Building was a smashing success. Several hundred people visited and admired our old photographs, muskets, the Witch of the Shawsheen’s cloak and other vintage clothing, 19th century textbooks, manufactured-in-Bedford goods, Native American spear points, and assorted other treasures from our collections, as well as viewing a DVD of Bob Slechta’s Historic Bedford Center tour. We feel that our Open House made more people aware that our holdings deserve a home in the Heritage Center we hope to open sometime in the next few years.

Because of popular demand on Bedford Day we plan to hold another Open House this spring, possibly on Pole Capping day. Watch these pages for details.

**Lecture.** Bob Slechta and Don Corey are to give a program on “The History of Bedford” at the Council on Aging on Friday, September 28, and again at Carleton-Willard Village on Monday, October 1. The COA presentation will be recorded on video by Bob Bass.

An outline of the presentation and computer slide show, plus a laptop and projector, are available to any other Society member who would like to make the same presentation to other groups in town. No experience necessary. Will train!

**Student history prize.** We have been in discussions with the Bedford Schools Social Studies Department about offering a history research contest, with prizes to encourage students to learn how to perform historical research and writing. Details of this exciting project are still being decided. Want to get involved? Please contact Carol Amick (781-275-5278, carol.amick@verizon.net) or the Society’s office (781-275-1212 ext. 140, bedford-history@usa.net).

---

**Membership Application and Renewal Form**

This is (please check one):

___ A new membership
___ A renewal
___ A gift subscription

Name:________________________________________

Address:____________________________________

City: _____________________________________

State:_______________________ Zip:__________

Phone:______________________________ Email:________________________

**Dues (please check one):**

___ Student: $3.00
___ Individual: $10.00
___ Couple or Family: $15.00
___ Supporting or Business: $50.00
___ Patron: $250.00
___ Life – Individual: $150.00
___ Life – Couple: $200.00

**Donation**

I would like to contribute the following amount to aid the Society: $ ____________

Total enclosed: $ _______________

---

**Bedford Historical Society, Inc.**

2 Mudge Way
Bedford MA 01730
781-275-1212, extension 140
Are your dues up to date? Please check the mailing label for your membership status.

Children distribute bagfuls of sweet largesse as the Bedford Day parade heads down Mudge Way.