Conserving your art

Now that Summer is winding down, it’s time for us to launch a new lecture series. We have another great lineup this year. This month’s talk:

Carmichael Art Conservation. Time is cruel to works of art. They begin to deteriorate soon after completion. Varnish discolors; paint layers may crack or lift; and canvas becomes so weak it can easily be torn. Today, restoration has evolved into a sophisticated interdisciplinary profession known as conservation, which preserves and extends the life of the artwork. Theresa Byington Carmichael will describe appropriate treatment procedures and associated services and will provide advice on storage and display of artworks.

Ms. Carmichael is a Bedford resident who specializes in fine painting conservation. She has done extensive work for many museums, libraries, individuals, businesses and institutions.

Following her talk, she would also be pleased to provide a conservation examination of a few paintings if you would like to bring one to this meeting.

Congregational Church
25 The Great Road, Bedford
Wednesday, September 23, 7:30 PM

Free and open to all. Please bring your friends!
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.

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Bedford Historical Society, 2009-2010

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Frank Gicca (’10)
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Jan van Steenwijk (BHS President)

New members
We’ve gained several new members over the summer. Welcome, all!
Michael Donovan
Jane Morse
Ruth Burks and Gyasi Burks-Abbot
S. Levi Doran (a.k.a. Sam Doran)

Annual Giving
Donations continue to come in and are welcome at any time of the year. We thank the following people who have made contributions in the last several months to help do the things you like us to do, and that we so enjoy doing:

George Dalrymple
Paddy Wade
Ellen and Lawrence Carlton
Richard and Stephanie Davidson
Brown and Lois Pulliam
Sheldon and Gloria Moll
Ed and Evelyn Stickney
Lois and Don Brown
Art and Marietta Ellis

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:

Monday, 9 to 12 and 1 to 5
Tuesday and Wednesday, 9 to 1

Other times by appointment. It’s best to phone ahead before you stop by because we do step out for errands now and then. Please call 781-275-7276.

VACATION: Our office will be closed for vacation on Monday, October 26 and will reopen on Wednesday, Nov. 4.
In memoriam

Our membership roll more than just a list of names. It represents a collection of wonderful people who are our neighbors, our companions, our helping hands, and more than that, our beloved friends.

We have lost three within a few short weeks of each other. Mina Kimball passed away last month. Mary Ruetenik’s life recently came to a close. And last week, Larry Kimball left this life to rejoin his wife Mina after a very brief time apart.

A memorial service for the Kimballs is planned for a date to be announced.

A memorial service for Mrs. Ruetenik is scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 19, at 2:00 PM at the First Church of Christ, Congregational. A collation will follow the service in Upper Fellowship Hall.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Mary’s husband Ray, Mina’s and Larry’s sons Paul and Nathan, and their families.

Those who wish to share remembrances in the October edition of this newsletter are welcome to send them us at 2 Mudge Way or email us at info@bedfordmahistory.org.

From the President

First of all, I would like to express my sadness at having to say farewell to two of our faithful members. Within a very short time, both Mina and Larry Kimball passed away. The incredible dedication that they offered to our Society for so many years will be remembered with joy, respect and many good memories. Personally, I had the privilege to photograph the Kimballs in their home when I worked on the series about couples in Bedford. The many hours I spent in their company was an enlightening experience. Their warm welcome and fascinating stories invited me into their life and their long residency in Bedford. I will treasure them forever. Their kindness, generosity and wisdom gave our organization much, much more than just a family membership.

As the summer disappears, the bright light of long days is getting shorter, cooler weather is forecast...well the latter can be debated...and the Bedford Historical Society is preparing for another great season. As detailed in our new Yearbook, there are some wonderful scheduled items, which should satisfy any of our members. Terrific lectures and other events are on our calendar, in addition to the invaluable gatherings in social settings. We hope to see you all again and again. As always, bring a friend or two; we will make sure there are enough chairs for everyone.

At every Finance Committee and Directors’ meeting, I receive the same message from its dedicated members: we are doing fine...but! The greatest concern is the economy. Generous donations from the past have decreased significantly. We all suffer from having less disposable income, whether it disappeared from pay checks or investments, and that in return reflects the society’s income, too. During our brainstorming sessions, we all agreed that something has to be done. The Society is now on its path to being a real professional organization, meaning we need more money, because we, by the nature of it, have to spend more. The Finance Committee is extremely conservative with the Society’s money, and manages every month to surprise me with decent returns on our investments. But it still is a slow process and might, and I emphasize “might,” in the long run not be enough to sustain our needs.

One great idea that was brought to the table is to have some external fundraisers. The ones we have had at end-of-the-year auctions for our members are wonderful, and give a boost to our coffers. But maybe a greater event, where we can entice hundreds of people to attend, where the winning items are well worth spending some money on, will definitely create awareness and potential income. Those events should be accompanied with some great entertainment, which attracts people from all walks of life. The Directors have a few ideas, but we will need your input. Also, it’s not just the ideas we are looking for, but help from people who want to provide some hands-on assistance, whether it is participating on a sub-committee, hunting for event locations or fun entertainment, knocking on doors for auction prizes, or offering practical experience for a specific event. Please call any board member or officer (their names are listed on Page 2) with ideas and requests to volunteer. Remember, your input is very important. And your payoff comes with each successful fundraiser.

Jan van Steenwijck
The Dudley Rd. historic district

Often overlooked as one of our most significant historic sites, a stretch of Dudley Road in both Bedford and Billerica is expected to be added to the National Register of Historic Places. As shown in the map below, the proposed historic district of about 230 acres includes properties on both sides of the road plus a large portion of the Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge, including the Two Brothers Rocks.

Settlement in this area began quite early. In 1637 Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley and Governor John Winthrop were granted large tracts of land in what is now Bedford. Dudley’s tract of 1,000 acres included nearly all of the proposed National Register district.

Continued on next page

On this map

1. David & Elizabeth Pickman House - Altmann House
2. Walcott-Pickman House
3. Herrick Barn - Pickman Library House
4. Duane Carpenter House - Little Acres Farm
5. Pickman Summer Cottage - William Sorensen House - Little Acres Farms
6. John Stearns House - Maryknoll Fathers Novitiate - St. Thecla Retreat House
7. Captain John Stearns - Moses Greenwood House
8. Abner Stearns - Edward Pickman House
9. Herrick Greenhouse - Pickman Barn
A. Eileen Van Ausdel House
B. Margaret & Gilbert Oakley House
C. Donald & Diana Thomas House
D. Andrew T. Card Sr. House
E. 115 Dudley Rd, Billerica
F. 117 Dudley Rd, Billerica
V1. Coffin Conservation Area
V2. Altmann Conservation Area
V3. 226 Dudley Rd, Bedford
V4. 236 Dudley Rd, Bedford
V5. 240A Dudley Rd, Bedford
V6. Great Meadows Nat’l Wildlife Refuge
V7. Pickman Meadow
V8. 265 Dudley Rd, Bedford
V9. Altmann Conservation Area
V10. 96A Dudley Rd, Billerica
V11. Gov. Thomas Dudley Park
V12. Dudley Rd (rear), Billerica
V13. Dudley Rd (rear), Billerica
V14. Dudley Rd, Billerica
V15. Great Meadows Nat’l Wildlife Refuge
V16. Great Meadows Nat’l Wildlife Refuge
V17. Great Meadows Nat’l Wildlife Refuge

The proposed Two Brothers Rocks-Dudley Road Historic District (map by Kathleen Kelly Broomer, consultant)
The following article was written by Kathleen Kelly Broomer and presented to the Mass. Historical Commission as part of the National Register application process. Our thanks to Ms. Broomer, who also took the photographs, and to the Bedford Historic Preservation Commission. We are grateful to Ms. Broomer for her painstaking research into Bedford’s history. She has gone far above and beyond the call of duty to bring Bedford’s history to life.

**View Southeast from 228 Dudley Rd.**

The historic district encompasses about 230 acres on the Bedford-Billerica town line. The district includes stone walls, wooded suburban parcels, agricultural fields, and conservation areas. About 40% of the district’s acreage is open space. Dudley Road is a designated scenic road in both Bedford and Billerica.

The district developed around a Colonial-period sawmill that harnessed water power from Mill Brook. The site of the mill and mill yard are located in the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. The Stearns family, owners of the mill, settled in the area in the late 17th century. Capt. John Stearns built the oldest house in the district (96 Dudley Road, Billerica) facing south toward Mill Brook, with the rear of the house facing Dudley Road. The farm remained in the Stearns family until 1850, when the farm was sold to the Greenwood family, who remained here until 1978. Much of the property is still in agricultural use today. In the early 20th century, the Greenwoods operated a picnic grove and camp of summer cottages on the western edge of their farm — overlooking the Concord River — in the wooded area now known as Dudley Park and owned by the Town of Billerica and the Commonwealth.

**The Two Brothers Rocks**

Two Brothers Rocks served as boundary markers for mid-17th century land grants to the two leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley, whose lay grant lay to the north of these rocks, and Governor John Winthrop, whose land grant lay to the south. Dudley and Winthrop selected the two rocks to divide their respective grants, calling the rocks “Two Brothers” since the two men were related through the marriage of their children. The sale of Dudley Farm in 1652 is closely related to the establishment of the town of Billerica, of which Bedford was a part until 1729. The rocks are located on land added to the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in 1966.

**Mill foundations off Dudley Rd.**

77 Dudley Rd., the John Stearns House

Another Stearns family dwelling, the John Stearns House (77 Dudley Road, Billerica), is of mid-18th century construction and was the focal point of a large
dairy farm in the late 19th century. In 1911, this property was sold out of the Stearns family, concluding over 250 years of Stearns ownership in the historic district. The Archdiocese of Boston acquired the property in 1924 as a farm associated with St. John’s Seminary in Brighton, after which it was transferred to the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (Maryknoll Fathers), who operated a novitiate here and maintained the property as a working farm until 1964.

141 Dudley Rd., the Abner Stearns House

The Abner Stearns House (141 Dudley Road, Billerica) is a fine example of Federal-style architecture in Billerica. Described as a “mechanical genius,” Abner Stearns was associated not only with the family’s saw mill on the brook immediately south of this house, but also with the establishment of various industrial pursuits in Arlington. Agricultural production on this property largely consisted of harvesting fruit trees and cranberry meadows; an owner in the late 19th century ran a poultry farm here.

240 Dudley Rd., the Library House

This dwelling, known as the Library House, was a detached, ca. 1880 hay and horse barn on the Abner Stearns property in Billerica. In 1924 it was connected to the house to create a library with additional bedroom space above. In 1964, the wing was detached and moved down the road to Bedford, where it was converted to its present use as a single-family residence.

228 Dudley Rd., the Walcott-Pickman House

As early as 1809, individuals from Boston began purchasing property on the Bedford side of the historic district, establishing gentleman farms and country estates on the Concord River. Jabez Walcott, a housewright living in Roxbury, built this house (228 Dudley Road, Bedford) on the site of an 18th-century Stearns dwelling, as a wedding present for his daughter, Mary Walcott Emery. Estate development in the historic district expanded significantly under the ownership of Dudley and Ellen Pickman of Boston. In 1884, they acquired their first parcels in the district, including this house and the mill site. Their descendants remained here until 2006. Dudley Leavitt Pickman was a 7th-generation descendant of Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley, though it is not clear when Pickman learned of his ancestral connection to this area.

267 Dudley Rd., Duane Carpenter House

Dudley and Ellen Pickman resided in Bedford only seasonally, but employed and housed a staff in Bedford to manage the estate and associated farm operations year-round. Married employees and their
families lived on the estate in small single-family dwellings, while unmarried employees had living quarters in wing of the Pickman house or ancillary buildings on the property. The Duane Carpenter House, built across Dudley Road from the Pickman house, was the longtime residence of one of the farm foremen.

The estate included two working farms: one, in the historic district (now Little Acres Farm), provided produce and dairy products for all the households on the estate. A second farm, operated as an income-producing venture, was situated outside the boundaries of the district, on land developed in the 1990s with cluster condominiums.

The Pickman Summer Cottage was built across Dudley Road from the main house. Edward M. Pickman, the second son of Dudley and Ellen Pickman, lived here seasonally with his family until 1911, when the Pickmans acquired the Abner Stearns House on the Billerica side of the district, which became the home of Edward Pickman. The summer cottage then housed estate employees, the longest residents being the Sorensen family. William Sorensen, head caretaker of the Pickman estate for fifty years, lived in three houses on the estate, and resided here from the early 1940s to his death in 1974.

The latest of the district’s historic houses is the high-style Modern Pickman-Altmann House, built by David and Elizabeth Pickman. They established a view corridor through the evergreens between their house and the Concord River. This corridor now passes through two parcels of town-owned conservation land as well as a portion of the Great Meadows refuge.

Bedford Day, September 26

Bedford turns 280 years old this month and we will celebrate with the biggest birthday bash yet. Please note: this year, Bedford Day will be held a week later than usual.

Bedford Day is a twofer for the Society. With so many Bedford folk thronging to the center, we love to throw our doors wide and hold Open House for one and all. Come to our office at 2 Mudge Way (the police station building), 11 AM to 2 PM, to see some of our treasures and chat with the experts on Bedford’s history. Free and open to all.

Also, we’ll pitch our sales tent and load our tables at the Bedford Day fair, 10 AM to 3 PM. Please stop by to talk with special guest John Dodge, Town Historian; see special displays on Bedford’s dairy industry and a history mystery; shop our Bedford memorabilia and traditional children’s toys and books; and just generally join the fun.

Do you enjoy Bedford Day? Why not take a more active role with a shift behind the counter to lend a hand and meet the folks who stop by? We need booth helpers for shifts from 8:30-11 (setup), 11-1, and 1-3:30 (shutdown), or any part thereof. Please call our office at 781-275-7276. We can’t do it without you!

Bedford Farmers’ Market, October 19

Summer won’t really be over until the day after we take our sales booth out at the Bedford Farmers’ Market on Monday, October 19. We can use a few hands to help at the booth. Shifts are from 1-3 (setup), 3-5, and 5-7 (shutdown). To paint yourself into this sunny picture, please call our office at 781-275-7276.
Twenty-five years ago. Groundbreaking for the construction project to convert the former Page School into condominiums. Left to right: Ginnie Spencer, Barbara Clifford, Elmer Bartels, unknown, (rear) unknown, developer’s rep., (rear) unknown, (rear) Judy Barber, Carol Goldman, (rear) Angelo Colao, developer’s rep., Pat Ardito, unknown, and unknown. Can you identify any of the unknowns? (Photo courtesy of Angelo Colao.)