WELCOME to Our New Season of Free Lectures:

A variety of exciting programs has been arranged for the upcoming season of the Bedford Historical Society. Starting on Sept. 25 with Bedford resident and author Lee Yates describing her new book, Bedford, and ending at the May, 2014 Annual Meeting with Dave Downs' presentation on “Downsizing Your Historical STUFF.”

The diversity of the speakers and their topics is certain to provide for an electrifying year and please all our members and non-members alike.

Wednesday evening, Sept. 25 at the First Church of Christ, Congregational, 25 Great Rd. Refreshments from 7:15 – 7:45 pm. Announcements at 7:45 pm, followed by guest speaker Alethea “Lee” Yates on her new book, “Bedford.” (see review on pg. 2)

In addition the Society will honor this year’s winners in the National History Day competition. Bedford High School students have competed in this annual program, designed to promote the teaching and learning of history, since 2004. Winning students will describe their research and analysis presented in original papers, websites, exhibits, performances and documentaries.

Wednesday evening, Oct. 23 at the First Church of Christ, Congregational, 25 The Great Rd. Refreshments from 7:15 – 7:45 pm. Announcements at 7:45 pm, followed by guest speaker David L. Smith on the topic “In Accordance with Justice.” Smith will discuss the foundations of the U.S. Constitution and what our founding Fathers were trying to accomplish, and how the Civil War changed the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

A Saturday or Sunday in December from 3-6 pm at the home of Society members Carol Amick and Bill Moonan, 18 Crescent Ave., will be the Society’s Holiday Party. The date has yet to be set, so watch for party announcements in the Preservationist and via the Society’s email list.

From There to Here in 120 Years
By: Jan van Steenwijk

Thanks to people with great vision, we can celebrate the Bedford Historical Society's 120th Anniversary this year.

In 1890, the Bedford Library then located in what is now the Old Town Hall, housed nearly 8000 volumes for free circulation and a collection of antiquities, relics and articles of historic interest. Eventually, Trustees of the Library voted to keep the growing number of historic documents as a separate entity, yet had it remain under the auspices of the library.

Bedford’s Annual Report of February 1894 stated: “In April 12, 1893, pursuant to a vote of the Trustees of the Library Corporation, the Bedford Historical Society (BHS) was organized and officers were elected.”

At the first BHS annual meeting, bylaws were hand written and noted that the President of the Library, George R. Blinn would, for the time being, serve as President of the BHS. The positions of Secretary and Treasurer were filled by Abram English Brown and Mrs. M.A. Fletcher, respectively. The Bedford Historical Society had been formed.

Some of the Society's first relics were generously donated by residents who were aware of their historic value. Bedford's oldest citizen in 1893, Albert Bacon, on his ninety-first birthday gave the ancient violin used in the Bedford Church for half a century. Miss Ann C. Stearns contributed a black walnut case and a large collection of geological specimens. It was the beginning of the tens of thousands of objects that are currently catalogued and stored.

The hand-written bylaw from 1893, dividing the Library from the Bedford Historical Society.

We hope to see you all at the Parade and at our booth on Bedford Day - September 21st.

We always display some of our treasures and offer great merchandise - T-shirts, books, baseball caps, antique maps, Bedford flags, etc.
From There to Here, continued from pg 1

As the town grew, the Library needed additional space. Consequently, the Library and the BHS moved to the Stearn's Building, built with a large portion of funds donated by private citizens in 1951. The Library occupied the ground floor and the Society had its own space in the basement as well as its own entrance to Great Road. Despite not being nearly large enough to exhibit many displays, the Society

When the police outgrew the facility they shared with the Fire Department, they moved into the Stearn's Building in 1997 and the BHS lost even more space. We received a smaller office/storage space for our archives and the “private” entrance was eliminated. Access for the public today is through the Police station, which is rather awkward.

Ideally, the BHS's museum will be a gateway to the architectural richness of our historic neighborhood—the Fitch Tavern, the Old Burying Ground, the Old Town Hall, the “meeting house” on the Common. Members, scholars and anyone curious about our heritage deserve to be able to bring guests to “their” museum. Our archive transports local history into the 21st century. Now, 3rd graders on their yearly exploration of our history all come to the BHS to see things and hear about events and adventures of previous generations. In the future, we envision visitors of all ages and interests submerged in history as they explore the museum's exhibition gallery and demonstration areas. The adjacent archives and office would make it easy for staff to answer visitors' questions, oversee the space and install new displays. Lectures held in these spaces would attract history buffs and the curious.

The Society is proud of our past and wants to pay tribute to those who helped build Bedford into the special community that it is today.

Jan van Steenwijk

Vintage Postcards Reveal Insight into Bedford’s History

The Bedford Historical Society is pleased to announce a great addition to our merchandize: the book “Bedford” by author and long time member of the Bedford Historical Society, Alethea (Lee) A. Yates. The book is published by Arcadia Publishing’s as part of the Postcard History Series. The book boasts more than 200 vintage images and postcards of Bedford memories.

Before the post–World War II construction boom, Bedford, Massachusetts was considered little more than a sleepy farming community, yet it was host to a series of remarkable institutions. In the late 1800s, the Bedford Springs resort on Fawn Lake was a summertime haven for wealthy Bostonians. From 1902 to 1918, large crowds traveled by streetcar to Lexington Park in Bedford to enjoy its zoo, restaurant and rustic outdoor theater. In 1900, Bedford's reputation as a rural “temperance town” attracted a hospital for the treatment of alcoholism. Ten years later, the Willard Hospital was succeeded by Llewsac Lodge, a rest home and country retreat for women from the city. Proximity to Boston and the needs of both military and civil aviation led to the construction of the Laurence G. Hanscom Airport in 1941.

Today, Bedford is an integral part of the Boston area's high-technology industry while still retaining a small-town character that its residents cherish. Bedford gives readers insight into the past by allowing them to view rarely seen vintage postcards.

You can order your copy (copies) by sending us an email at: info@bedfordhistoryma.org or calling our office at: 781-275-7276

Volunteers Needed!

As is the case with any non-profit organization, we always appreciate the many volunteers who help us with the numerous activities the Society arranges every year. If you can spare a couple of hours once a while, please contact our office. We need additional volunteers for Bedford Day, September 21st, as well as throughout the season for our lectures, visits by school children to our archives and tours of Bedford’s landmarks.

Call the office at: 781-275-7276 - THANK YOU!

Larry Kimball and Mary Hafer in our first “museum.”
The Man Who Loved Animals

John T. Benson was an animal trainer, adventurer and zoo curator. Born in England in 1871, he was the son of a menagerie owner in Dewsbury, Yorkshire, England. John grew up surrounded by all kinds of animals. At the age of 8, he left home and joined the circus. Benson toured with the British Bostock and Wombwell Circus; travelling to Boston with them in 1888. By 1895, at the age of 24, he was running a private zoo at Norumbega Park in Newton. Benson became known for importing wild animals from India, Africa, and Thailand for exhibit in zoos and circuses around America. He participated in the development of a number of zoos, including serving as first Curator of the Franklin Park Zoo in Boston. He also became a local celebrity here in Bedford.

The Middlesex & Boston Street Railway came through Bedford in 1902, and it ultimately connected from Boston as far north as Lowell and as far west as Hudson. In order to bring more people out to this “remote” part of the new trolley line, in 1902 “Lexington Park” was opened at the Lexington-Bedford town line as a recreational destination for riders. The developer was Norumbega Park Company, which also owned the amusement park complex of the same name in Newton. Most of the park was actually in Bedford where the Perham/Woodland/Masardis neighborhood is now located. The entrance to the park stood on the Bedford side of the town line, and the office and ticket window were near Great Road. The dwelling at 3 Woodland Road was likely one of the park’s casinos and is the only remnant of the park still standing in Bedford.

Lexington Park had a picnic area, a carousel, restaurants, casinos, bowling alleys, a baseball field and a roller skating rink. Standing high above the Park was a free Observation Tower, from which the Wachusett Mountain could be seen. And about 1913, an open-air dance hall was opened. Lexington Park also featured an outdoor performance center. Billed as “the finest rustic theatre in America,” this was “where high-class performances, consisting of vaudeville, operas and musical comedies,” were featured every afternoon and evening. Three thousand people could fit into the audience, all seated in comfortable chairs. The natural beauty of Lexington Park led to slogans such as “Listen to the Murmur of the Pines” and “Breathe the Exhilarating Pine Ozone.”

John Benson brought his animals here and the crowds loved them. Promotional brochures described a Zoological Garden containing “the greatest collection of herbivorous animals in New England”; a Monkey House; an Aviary; and a Bear Pit. Pony or donkey rides were available for children, and camels were available for feeding by the public.

John Benson became a nationally recognized authority on exotic animals. President Theodore Roosevelt invited Benson on trips to Africa and the Black Hills of South Dakota in search of new specimens. Two bear cubs were born at the park in July of 1903 and given the dignified names of President Theodore Roosevelt and Kaiser Wilhelm. Lexington historian Richard Kollen notes, “Since this event predated the famous hunting incident that led to the stuffed bears named ‘Teddy’s Bears’, the Lexington Park ‘Teddy’ may be considered the first ‘Teddy Bear’.”

In 1906, Benson went to Pinehurst, N.C. for a "Sportsman's Show". The Herald prints the following, which is characteristic of Mr. Benson, and which gives a glimpse at the real secret of his success in his chosen calling: "...When he turned up for duty at the show, he brought along a Mother and baby camel. Nobody understood just why he brought them, for they were not exactly 'game birds' of New England. Mr. Benson accommodated them with a hitching rail and a bale of hay, however, and nobody found any fault." A newspaper reporter asked Mr. Benson why he brought in the camels, but even he reporter couldn't get a direct answer. The reporter persuaded other attendees to try to find out why Benson brought the camels along and it turned into a game. So many people asked Mr. Benson the question during the day, that he finally called the reporters together and told them the secret: he couldn't bear to leave them behind.

The National Humane Review reported the following in 1919: "Mr. John T. Benson, Manager of Norumbega Park has offered to assume charge of any "mascots" brought back by the soldiers of the 26th Division (Yankee Division) which they cannot care for on their return to this country. He has assured them that he will see that they are kindly treated and given plenty of food and exercise as long as they may live."

In 1922, Benson purchased property in Hudson, N.H. It was in Hudson that he began a quarantine farm, as a stopover for animals brought to this country for various zoos in America. The growling Lion that you see at the beginning of Louis B. Mayer movies was trained at Benson's animal farm.

By then buses had replaced the street railway and Lexington Park closed for good, so he opened his Hudson farm to the public as Benson's Wild Animal Farm, also known as: "The Strangest Farm on Earth." The Hudson, NH animal park survived three owners and many happy decades of visiting New Englanders, until it closed in the late 1980s.
In addition to documents and artifacts, we house thousands of photographs in our archives that tell the story of Bedford’s past.

Please come and see for yourself!
Letters to the Editor

Red Feather Candy

We were pleased to receive a delightful letter from Marjorie Jones of West Yarmouth, MA, regarding the Kimball family and their Red Feather Candy business. It was prompted by the May Preservationist article regarding the ancient Farley-Hutchinson-Kimball house at 461 North Road that the Society sold back to Paul and Nathan Kimball.

Marjorie Jones was a friend of Richard Kimball, a brother of Larry Kimball, and his family. Their parents – Charles and Edith Kimball – had owned and operated the Red Feather candy business that was run from their barn during the early 20th century. By coincidence Marjorie Jones’ grandfather wrote articles for the Lexington Times during the same period, first as “The Rambler” and later as “Along the Street with Will Rice”. She enclosed an article written by her grandfather about Red Feather Candy, and we are pleased to share a portion of the article below:

“A few days ago I was going along the North Road, Bedford, toward Billerica when my attention was taken by a gray sign bearing a red feather and the words “Red Feather Candy”. My sweet tooth immediately demanded attention so I turned to my companion and said, 'Do you like candy?'

'No. But if you want some candy I'll wait for you.'

We drove into the front yard of an old New England farm house built between 1700 and 1750. The front of the house was covered with a network of ivy, and the 'barn that was' had retained its old outer shell but the inside had been changed into a colonial type candy kitchen… I turned to my chum who didn't like candy and said, 'I'm going to ramble through this place. Will you pick me up as you come back from Billerica?'

'All right. Look for me in about an hour.' He stepped on the gas and was on his way. I stood in front of a candy sales room and kitchen that was as different from the usual candy factory as night from day. Instead of a brick structure in congested city streets here was a country farm far from the dust and smoke of the industrial world surrounded by fruit trees, open stretches of grass land, and disturbed by nothing more distracting than the breezes as they blew through the tall trees that surround the Red Feather Farm … A truly unique candy kitchen.

My presence had been noticed by Mrs. Kimball and she said, 'Won't you come in?' I entered and received a greater surprise on the inside than on the outside. It was not like a store at all. In front of me was an open brick fireplace mounted by a mantle holding a vase of Gladioli banked on both sides by colonial prismatic candleholders. At one side of the fireplace was a stand filled with Bulrushes and on the other side was a vase of Golden Rod while on a mahogany table at the other end of the room were two more vases of flowers. As much like a florist's shop as a candy sales room.

'Mrs. Kimball, I'm the Rambler of the Lexington Times. May I ramble through your Candy Kitchen and tell the readers of the Times how you make Red Feather Candy?'

There follows a detailed but clearly enthusiastic and loving description of the Kimball's candy making operations.

"My rambles were interrupted by an automobile sounding its horn in the yard. It was my chum back from Billerica. I bought a box of Red Feather Chocolates and a half pound box of Red Feather Caramels and jumped into the machine and went toward Bedford. At Bedford I went into Puffer's Garage and when I came out what do you suppose 'the man that didn't like candy' was doing? He had eaten all of the Vanilla Nut Caramels out of the box of caramels and had started on the box of chocolates.

'I thought you said you didn't eat candy.'

'I don't eat ordinary candy, but I sampled the boxes you left in the car and believe me, it's real candy. You can get some more, I'm going to take this home.'

I'm going to hold onto the next lot of Red Feather Candy I get. It's too good to lose.

Signed: “The Rambler”
Job Lane House 300th Anniversary

The Bedford Historical Society Congratulates!

The Friends of the Job Lane House (FJLH) are planning a number of activities to let the Town of Bedford know that this town-owned house museum is 300 years old this year. Based on architectural historians’ inspection of the house, we now believe that the oldest portion of the house (the eastern half) was built by Job Lane (namesake and grandson of the original settler) at the time of his marriage to Martha Ruggles in 1713. Some of the activities to celebrate this extraordinary event include:

The FJLH had a booth on the Common for the Plant Fair in May, where a large 300th birthday cake was shared with visitors to the booth. Children were shown some Colonial games that they might have played in those early days.

The FJLH had a 300th Anniversary Archaeological Dig in July as part of the Recreation Department’s Summer Programs. Based on a metal detector survey and old photographs, two small sites (1 meter x 2 meters) were selected on the north side of the house. The crew doing the digging consisted of the children who had enrolled, and all declared the experience to be a resounding success! Test Pit I turned out to include a portion of a flat stone floor from an earlier building as well as 83 artifacts including many nails and building materials as well as pottery fragments. Test Pit II yielded 153 artifacts: architectural artifacts, pottery fragments dating as far back as possibly 1710, a few pieces of coal, a few animal bones, and two personal items (a clay pipe stem and a piece of decorative aluminum, which may have been part of a box.) Some of the artifacts are currently displayed at the house.

The Garden Club sponsored an Open House at the house in late July, where the use of plants grown in the Lillian Dutton Memorial Herb Garden was shared.

An art contest is being held for any Bedford resident, ages 6 years to 106. Go to www.joblanehouse.org for more information on the art contest.

On Bedford Day (Saturday, September 21) the FJLH will have a booth where they again plan to share a 300th birthday cake with visitors.

Finally, a FJLH Birthday Party is planned for Sunday afternoon, October 6, 2013, at the house. Details were still being worked out as this goes to press, but will hopefully include live music, food, participation of the Bedford Minuteman Company and various presentations. Stay tuned!

Don Corey
On Top of Lilac Bush

Pony Outfit which Mysteriously Disappeared Found There

Between 5 and 6 o'clock Wednesday evening, Dec. 22, quite an excitement was caused by the statement made by Misses Alice and Hannah Pfeiffer that their pony which they had left in the driveway between the Bedford House and Skelton's store, while they were in the postoffice for a few minutes, had disappeared during that interval of time.

Immediately upon their announcement of the disappearance of the diminutive team a search was made for the missing turnout, by Officer Williams and their brother, Louis, but their quest resulted to naught. Thereupon our valiant chief of police was notified and he after making sundry deductions, as is his wont, went over the same ground explored by the Messrs. Pfeiffer and Williams and not finding the team on the earth searched the heavens and lo, his gaze was arrested by the uncanny appearance of a leafless lilac bush and on minute examination he discovered the pony calmly reposing on the top-most branches.

Mr. Kelly stated that the searching party preceding him was so near the team that he could have touched him by reaching and as the evening was unusually bright and clear he is at a loss to determine why they did not make the discovery. Mr. Pfeiffer replies by stating that he was “looking for a pony team, not for Tillinghast's aeroplane nor Hailey's comet.”

The Historical Society is very pleased with recent donations of Bedford treasures from a number of individuals, including the following:

- Lorrie Dunham has been slowly working down the incredible inventory of books and papers left by her late father Carroll Dunham, whose used bookstore was a favorite stop for many of us. The Society is grateful for the many Bedford-related documents, deeds and memorabilia donated by Lorrie.

- Bea Brown recently moved to Carleton-Willard, which required substantial downsizing. Contributions to the Society included some of her genealogy references, her late husband and Town Historian John's voluminous files on Bedford's history, and various objects including John's full-scale model of an oil lamp used for lighting the Common over a century ago.

- Betty Slechta's recent move to Carleton-Willard also necessitated painful downsizing. In addition to her late husband's extensive files of historic documents, Betty contributed to the Society – and to the Friends of the Job Lane House – a number of historic, beautiful and valuable objects that were left from her previous antique business.

- Last Fall Doris (Mickey) Webber had several strong young relatives bring a trunk down from the attic of her Maple Street barn. It contained a treasure trove of 19th Century books Webber photographs and papers that filled most of her dining room for some time thereafter. Family members, churches and other organizations, including the Society, have since benefitted from her generous donations to each.

- The Society is also grateful to Paul Dick for his contribution of numerous old town government publications, including many that belonged to his late father Earl Dick.

- Jane Ramsey, who was one of Hanscom's earliest women employees during WW2 and more recently retired from Bedford's Finance Department, has in recent years and weeks donated a wide variety of Bedford memorabilia to the Society.

- We also thank Cambridge Savings Bank and Carleton-Willard Village for their continued support.

"Thanks to all: And for our other readers, what’s in your attic?"
2013-14 Lectures cont. from pg 7

will start at 6:30 pm with punch and appetizers, and be followed by salads, main dishes, and desserts brought by Society members. Following the dinner, the Annual Meeting will be held to elect new Society officers and members of the Board of Directors. The election will be followed by guest speaker Dave Downs and his presentation, “Downsizing Your Historical STUFF.”

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Please become a member and help preserving Bedford’s History.

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

Come and see us.
Visit our website.
Visit our FaceBook page.
www.bedfordmahistory.org
Administrative Assistant:
Kara Kerwin
781-275-7276

CHAS. O. HODGMAN, . . . . . . BEDFORD, MASS.

Three families with their servants, a chair and ... a piano. Photo: ca 1897

“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.