The Bedford Flag, the oldest existing flag in the United States. On view at the Bedford Library.

The Preservationist

Bedford Historical Society, Inc. - Bedford - Massachusetts
Founded in 1893

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A lecture not to be missed!

Wednesday, March 23 at 7:15 pm

Congregational Church, 23 Great Road

"The American Chestnut Trees"

Wildlife Biologist, Curt Laffin

Less than 100 years ago eastern U.S. forests were dominated by large American chestnut trees. An estimated 4 billion American chestnuts – one quarter of all hardwood trees, grew in the forests before succumbing to a lethal fungus disease called chestnut blight. By the 1950s, American chestnut trees were reduced to short-lived stump sprouts.

Wildlife Biologist, Mr. Laffin will describe how the blight, imported to the US on Asian chestnut trees, is a fungus whose spores are easily dispersed via air, raindrops or animals. It is a wound pathogen, entering through injuries to the tree's bark that spreads to the underlying vascular cambium and wood, killing these tissues as it advances. The flow of nutrients is eventually choked off to and from sections of the tree above the infection.

He will bring a cross-section of an American chestnut for the audience to view and touch, and will describe how the American Chestnut Foundation is restoring this species - and in the process, creating a template for restoration of other tree and plant species. The Foundation wants to return the American chestnut "to its former niche in the Appalachian hardwood forest ecosystem," and describes its restoration project as a "major, multi-faceted effort involving 6,000 members and volunteers, research, sustained funding and most important, a sense of the past and a hope for the future."

Mr. Laffin is retired from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, where he conducted long-range planning for national wildlife refuges. He has served as a volunteer for the American Chestnut Foundation for about 10 years, giving talks throughout New England, and is also a volunteer for the Merrimack River Watershed Council.

Carol Amick

Presidents Message

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

- While the Historical Society's mission is to look way back, it's important to just look over our shoulders occasionally. The terrific turnout at our last meeting on Sunday afternoon, Feb. 28, for the talk on the highway we love to hate (Route 128) is a case in point. The Society has traditionally held its meetings on the 4th Wednesday evening each month, but we decided to experiment with an occasional Sunday afternoon meeting. Given the latest response, we intend to schedule them more frequently to accommodate those who are reluctant to drive at night and those who may just be at loose ends on a Sunday afternoon. We welcome your comments.
- The Society is also working to reach the community in a manner appropriate to the 21st Century. Under the leadership of our Executive Administrator, Kara Kerwin, and assistance of Sharon McDonald and Janet Collins, the Society's online "Virtual Museum" was substantially upgraded early this year and continues to have material added. Within the past month the Society's newly redesigned website has now gone online. Look for Kara Kerwin's article in this newsletter describing the new site more fully. Again, we welcome your feedback and suggestions.
- Don't miss Town Historian Sharon McDonald's talk on The History of Native Americans in Bedford that she will be giving at the Council on Aging on Wednesday, March 30 at 12:45 PM. She knows her subject and is a wonderful story teller!

Don Corey

A "Milestone"

In 1998 the Friends of the Bedford Flag was established to raise funds for the restoration of the original Bedford Flag, housed in the Old Library. A dedicated group of residents enthusiastically began a process that included membership drives, an auction and a very large yard sale. Members created merchandise; posters, note cards, stamps, t-shirts, bookmarks, the book *"The Bedford Flag, a national treasure*"and, 12x12" replicas of the Bedford Flag. The Friends bought fabric, cut it into squares, and serged the edges. The flag's design, the "Arm of God emerging from clouds to protect its owners" with its Latin text -- *Vince Aut Morire* (*Conquer or Die*), was printed on each square. The graphic design clearly indicates that it was a military flag, that in this case, was made for the Bedford Militia in or around 1710. Research showed that the original damask fabric was woven around 1704. We know from oral history and local legend that the Flag was carried to the Concord Bridge by the Bedford Minutemen in the

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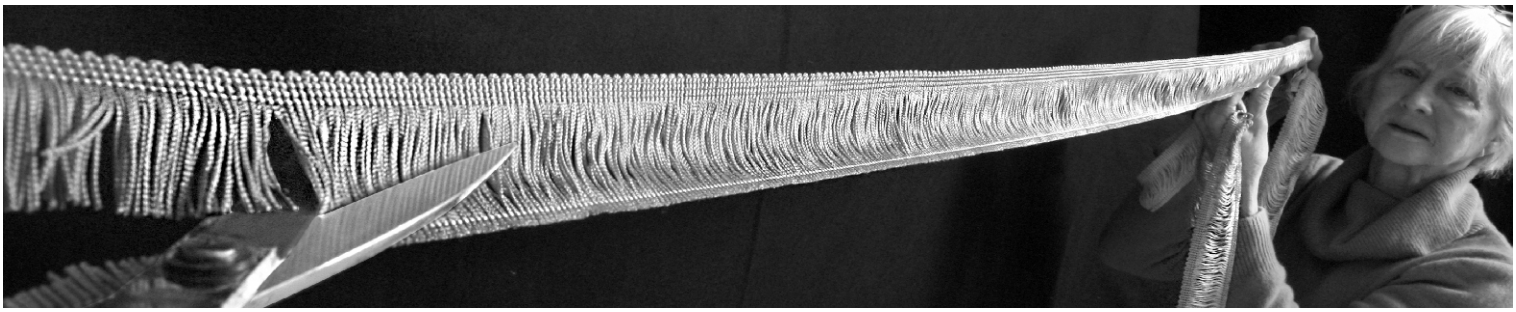
opening battle against the British in 1775.

Color separations were produced to make silkscreen "patterns" that would be used to print replica flags. Since the Flag was hand painted on both sides, it was a challenge for the contemporary printer to align the graphics on the front and back during the printing process. The next step was to sew fringe on to the flags' three edges, which turned out not to be an easy task. The only silver fringe we could find was 3- inches wide, but we needed only a 1-inch fringe. We spent many hours of trial-and-error trimming, but finally succeeded. Fabric moves, the fringe stretches and Barbara Hitchcock basted and pinned the fringe to the flags in order to hold everything together for the sewing machine. The first order of fabric placed would create 150 flags. The Friends enthusiastically believed that all the flags could be sold. And did they ever! It took about two weeks to sell everything, so we had to order more fabric.

Since then, the small flags have sold like hot cakes. When the Friends merged with the Bedford Historical Society in 2011, the BHS took over one of the bestselling pieces of merchandise it had to offer, and sales have been steady ever since.

We don't have an exact total number of flags produced, in part because some of the original bookkeeping documents have been lost, but sales receipts and the printer's records indicate that more than 2100 (that's two-thousand-one hundred!) Bedford Flags have been produced. I would like to give kudos and thanks to Barbara who for years, almost singlehandedly, spent many hours on the sewing machine attaching fringe to flags. "Just love that flag," she says modestly.

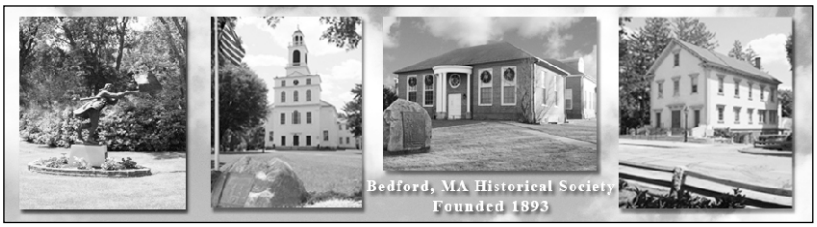
The flags are still being produced, although it is becoming increasingly difficult to find damask fabric that looks like the original. We encourage anyone who wants to support the Bedford Historical Society and this historic icon, to purchase one. Use it for yourself or as a gift.



2100 flags, each with 30" of fringe attached = "One Mile of Fringe"

Jan van Steenwijk

The Society's New Website



The new banner highlights some of Bedford's landmarks

Beginning a few weeks ago, people who navigated to the Society website would have noticed a change. After months of planning and development, and the invaluable assistance of Julie Turner and Paula Gilarde, we are happy to announce that our redesigned website is now online.

The new site, developed on WordPress, offers a more streamlined, responsive format that makes it easier to read on tablets and smartphones. The "Home" page now features a blogroll, which will allow us to regularly add new posts and announcements, and these posts will be searchable by topic or through a chronological archive. The site layout, including a new page banner designed by Jan van Steenwijk, mirrors that of our Virtual Museum, hosted on PastPerfect Online and overseen by Town Historian Sharon McDonald. On our new site, visitors can find a link to the Virtual Museum by opening the "Virtual Museum" page tab above the banner. The historic Lane Family Papers Collection, featuring document images and transcriptions, continues to be available for viewing on the adjacent "The Lane Family Papers" page tab above the banner. Our Events Calendar, in a Google calendar format, can be viewed in the right sidebar. Scrolling to the bottom of any page, visitors will find a Google map to direct them to our Archives, as well as links to our *Facebook* page, our *Ebay for Charity* page, and a "Donate Now" *PayPal Charity* button that allows us to accept donations and dues via credit card.

Please check it all out and feel free to contact us with questions or comments – our "About" page has an easy-to-complete "Contact Us" email form for your convenience!

Kara Kerwin

Joseph Fitch Homstead - Its History & Stories

By: Kara Kerwin & Don Corey

Shovel to separate ashes from hot embers in the fireplace or wood stove.

The Historical Society has received a glimpse of almost three centuries of the Joseph Fitch homestead's history through the generosity of Ned and Susan Leeming, who have donated many artifacts (most recently some last month) that were found in the house.

First, a bit of history. The Joseph Fitch Homestead, formerly at 27A Carlisle Road, was located within Governor John Winthrop's 1638 land grant. Job Lane[1] had acquired the Winthrop land grant in 1664, and upon his death a quarter was deeded to his grandson, Samuel Fitch[3]. Samuel's share was a parcel on the north end, where he settled when he married in 1695, and about 280 acres on the south end of the Winthrop Farm along the Old Concord Line (running west from Willson Park). When the town was incorporated in 1729, he became Bedford's first Town Clerk.

His oldest son, Joseph[4] (1702-1769), was a house-wright. He built Bedford's First Meetinghouse (1729) and probably Domine Manse (ca.1733). Joseph is also believed to have built the sawmill on Peppergrass Brook on his father's land, which provided lumber for the buildings constructed in Bedford Center around the time of the town's incorporation. The southern end of North Road that connected between Fitch Tavern on The Great Road and Job Lane's homestead (site is now 130 North Road) was built in 1734 and ran through Samuel Fitch's land, opening it up to development.

Joseph Fitch[4] married in 1731 and was believed by A.E. Brown in his History of Bedford to have built the house and barn at 27A Carlisle Road at that time for his own family. The east end of Carlisle Road was simply a cart path to the homestead until the 1790s when the road to Carlisle was built. After the death of his 1st wife, Joseph[4] remarried in 1750, and he and his 2nd wife left the homestead and moved to Davis Road.

After Joseph Fitch's departure in 1750, Deacon Job Lane[3] acquired the Fitch homestead as part of his farm at "the Neck" (so called) near Old Causeway Road, but he continued to live in his own homestead at 295 North Road (now the town-owned farm museum). The Fitch homestead then remained in the Lane family for over 100 years. His oldest son, Job Lane[4] had married in 1747, and he became owner of the homestead. Job[4] marched to Concord on April 19, 1775; he was seriously wounded and lost a leg. Job Lane[4] had 2 sons. The second son, Luke[5], inherited the property when his father Job[4] died in 1796. Job[4] had remarried in 1777 after his 1st wife died, and they had one daughter, Fanny Lane[5], who was born in 1781 (almost 13 years after Luke).

Samples of utensils, tools, buckle, etc., found & donated to the Society.

Luke Lane[5] married in 1791 but died of "a fever" in 1801 at age 33, leaving his widow with four children all under 10 years old at the homestead. His young half-sister Fanny may have helped with their upbringing, and she later acquired the property. She lived at the homestead until her death in 1827. Upon Fanny Lane's death, a cousin Eliab Bridge Lane[6] (1780-1853) purchased the homestead and land at public auction. In 1833 he added an abutting one-acre triangular parcel at the intersection of Carlisle Road and North Road (now the Northside service station).

Following Eliab B. Lane's death in 1853, the homestead was sold by his heirs to J. Quincy Blake. Mr. Blake's occupation as a jeweler and his status as a "gentleman" suggest that he was a man of considerable means and probably built the addition on the rear of the homestead. In 1862 he sold the property, and it was acquired by William Farrell (1810-1905). The Farrells lived there and farmed for decades until his death in 1905. One of their daughters, Lucy, married J. Bartlett Prescott, who started J.B. Prescott Dairy (later Bedford Farms Dairy) in the late 1880s. The dairy probably used part of the property for its operations.

In 1906 the property was bought by Sarah G. & Luther A. Ford, who lived there until 1918. It was then acquired by Stephan Kazarian, a weaver, and his brother, who split the property between the portions north and south of Carlisle Road. The first generation lived in the homestead, but it was vacant by mid-20th Century.

In the early 1980s Ned Leeming and his wife Susan wanted to restore an antique house, and in searching they discovered and fell in love with this house. They had it disassembled and moved to Harvard, MA, where it was painstakingly restored. In the process of carefully disassembling the house to relocate it, many treasures from everyday life in the house have come to light. From them, we can imagine what life might have been like over many generations.

Sections of tongue and groove, hand-planed panels taken from interior walls are still covered with wallpaper remnants, most with scrolling flower patterns that provide a glimpse of what must have been bright, cheery rooms. Glass canning jar lids, shards of pottery and china, along with an ancient wooden-handled knife and fork, are remnants of the many family meals served in the house over the years. Dozens of buttons that had slipped beneath the floorboards, along with belt buckles, beads

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

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Joseph Fitch Homstead - Its History & Stories

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and a broken pince-nez pair of glasses, provide more personal clues to the house's inhabitants. A pair of 18th Century work shoes, along with a small child's boot found inside the walls reveal an ancient superstition; these shoes were placed inside the walls during construction in order to ward off bad luck and evil spirits for the house and its occupants. Given that this home has survived almost three centuries, including its rescue by the Leemings, perhaps those occupants who left those shoes did manage to bring luck to the old homestead? Not only is the home enjoying a second life in an orchard in Harvard, but these small treasures, now available for viewing here at the Society, are preserving an enchanting glimpse of the families that called it home through the years.

This only 3/4"x1" tintype photograph was discovered when sweeping the parlor before dismantling.

Construction piece from 18th century shows how connections were made with hand carved hardwood pegs.

Parts of small children shoes from 18th century found inside a wall.

By: Kara Kerwin & Don Corey