Enjoy our next lecture

Wednesday Evening, September 27
7:15 pm at First Parish in Bedford Church on the Common
75 Great Road

A refreshment period from 7:15 – 7:45 pm will kick off the event.

Two fascinating topics will be featured at the first program of the Bedford Historical Society's 2017-2018 Speakers Series. Bedford High School students who placed third at the National History Day competition will describe their documentary, and Bedford Town Historian Sharon McDonald will speak about the 200th anniversary of the Town's second Meetinghouse. Please note that this meeting will be held there.

Bedford High School seniors who won Third Place for their Senior Group Documentary at the National History Day competition – Lexia Cicone, Cordelia Houck, Natalie Knight and Georgia Michelman – worked throughout their junior year to hone their documentary, “Zora Neale Hurston: Taking a Stand for a Holistic Portrayal of Black Women and Black Culture in Literature.” After winning regional and state History Day competitions, they went to Maryland in June for the national competition.

Not only did the students take home bronze medals from National History Day, their documentary also was selected for a special viewing at the new National Museum of African American History and Culture, a Smithsonian Institution museum established in 2003 in Washington, DC.

Town Historian and Society member Sharon McDonald's talk will be the second presentation.

The first Meetinghouse was built in 1728 on the northwest corner of Bedford's “common lands” – where Elm Street and The Great Road intersect today – and served the Town well for 85 years as the location for Town meetings and church services.

By 1814, the Meeting House was in need of extensive repairs. A horrific storm in 1815, which felled large trees on the common lands, hastened the decision to build a new structure, and the second Meetinghouse was constructed in 1816-17 from lumber milled from the fallen trees and wood salvaged from the first Meetinghouse.

There is much to tell about the second Meetinghouse, and Bedford Town Historian Sharon McDonald will weave the story of this building and its use, so important to the Town's early history.

Mrs. McDonald serves on the Bedford Historical Society's Board of Directors, is a member of the Town's Historic Preservation Commission, Curator of the Job Lane Farm Museum and President of the Friends of the Job Lane House.

She is best known for her 40 years employed as Children's Librarian at the Bedford Free Public Library. During her association with the library, which houses the historic Bedford Flag, she was inspired to research and write her first book, “The Bedford Flag Unfurled,” published in 2000. Her second book, “A Meetinghouse and its people: The story of the First Parish in Bedford,” was published recently.

Carol Amick

President’s Message

The Society continues in its mission to collect and preserve cultural resources relevant to Bedford's history so that we and future generations can learn about and appreciate the people, the places and events that shaped our world. Historic documents, photographs and other artifacts are often donated by individuals who are grateful that their piece of history will not be forgotten, and the Society is equally grateful to add such treasures to its collections and to thus expand our knowledge of the past. We look forward with great anticipation to the re-establishment of our town's historical museum to display more of these resources, and we continue to solicit your support with such donations or with your membership and financial assistance.

Until the Society has a permanent Heritage Center, its general meetings during this program year will be held in several locations and on different days of the week in order to accommodate various preferences. Old Town Hall, First Parish in Bedford and First Church of Christ have each been scheduled for several meetings, while the programs will either be on Sunday afternoons or Wednesday evenings.

Meeting dates and locations are announced in these newsletters, on the Society's website, in the Bedford Minuteman and Bedford Citizen, on a Mudge Way signboard, and in emails to Society members. All meeting programs are open to the public. If you would like to be added to the email list, please email or call the Society office.

Don Corey, president
In the minds of the Bedford Town Fathers back in the early years of the nineteenth century, erecting a new meetinghouse wasn't an enterprise to be undertaken hastily. The poor condition of the aged original building (which had been built in 1728) had been an issue for years. The question of how to replace it came before Town Meeting repeatedly, but it kept being stalled in committee. It wasn't until the Hurricane of 1815 blew violently through Bedford, toppling a plentitude of timber, that it came to a vote. At that time, the Town found it fiscally sound to use the downed lumber, along with serviceable wood salvaged from the original building, to build a new meetinghouse. Expenses could be met by the sale of pews.

In 1816, they chose fellow townsman Simeon Blodgett to draw up the plans. It is not known what architectural expertise he had. It is clear that he did use “The American Builder's Companion” as a guide. The “Builder's Companion” was a popular handbook by New England architect Asher Benjamin. It contained plans for individual stairways, columns, ceilings, and also for whole buildings. Blodgett followed the design for Plate 57, “A Meetinghouse or Church.” He surely went to Boston to see the two other buildings using this plan: the Old West Church and the Charles Street Meetinghouse, which still stand today.

Joshua Page, a prolific local housewright, and Levi Wilson, his assistant, were hired to construct Bedford's Church. Sweat equity from many churchmen surely contributed to the effort. It was just over a year from the demolition of the old building to the dedication of the new building. Like the first building, the new church consisted of one large auditorium with a balcony running around three sides. It was without classrooms, fellowship hall, or kitchen. It boasted no running water or electricity, or even any heat. But unlike the mustard-yellow, barn-like structure that it replaced, the new structure was ivory-white, and had a fine façade topped by a steeple. The Town stipulated it was to be used only for religious, not government, business. Church and State had begun to separate.

It was not to be the meetinghouse shared by all the townspeople forever. In 1833, the church divided into Congregational and Unitarian congregations. The Unitarian First Parish, being at the time the majority, stayed in the meetinghouse while the Congregationalists built the First Church of Christ nearby. Though larger initially, as the years passed the Unitarians struggled to keep their parish alive.

At last, with the burgeoning population that the technology boom brought to Bedford mid 20th century, First Parish gained new energy and was strong enough to build a Religious Education addition. An elevator made the building accessible in the 1980s, and then in the 1990s a whole new classroom, kitchen and common room replaced the prior additions. The building has changed with its congregation's needs, but continues to be its precious spiritual home.
Ancient Bedford Document Transcribed

One of the oldest and most important documents in the Historical Society's collections has finally been transcribed for modern researchers.

In 1637, only a few years after establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony under Governor John Winthrop, the General Court awarded him a land grant of 1200 acres for his services. In 1638 Gov. Winthrop and Lieutenant Governor Thomas Dudley, who had received a similar grant, traveled down the Concord River from the town of Concord to stake their claims. They selected two large glacial boulders on the bank of the river, which they called the "Two Brothers" to mark their land grants. Gov. Winthrop's grant extended south along the river from the "Two Brothers" down to the Old Concord Line (Concord's original town line) and inland to about the present Willson Park in Bedford Center. Two Brothers Rocks are located in the Bedford portion of Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. They can be easily reached on trails leading from either Dudley Road or Old Causeway Road.

Gov. Winthrop never occupied his land grant, and in 1664 his grandson, Fitz John Winthrop, sold the land to Job Lane. Job Lane was the very first settler in this portion of Bedford that was originally part of Billerica, as well as one of the earliest settlers in the entire town.

The original 1664 deed for this conveyance was donated to the Society a number of years ago, but its age and condition rendered it almost completely illegible. However, two events this summer provided the breakthrough for its transcription. First, Jan van Steenwijk examined the document under different wavelengths of light and produced a reverse image (similar to a negative) that brought out much more text than was visible on the original (see pict. of original). Second, Don Corey discovered on a trip to the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds in Cambridge that the deed had been recorded at the Registry in 1706 and he obtained a copy of that document (also very difficult to read). Kara Kerwin completed a first draft with great effort, and she and Don were able to transcribe almost the entire deed using both source documents. Only a few phrases were illegible in both.

The transcription has been added to the other Job Lane papers that are posted on the Society's website.

Job Lane's estate was settled by his heirs in 1706, which would explain why the deed was recorded at that late date. That year a plan of Job Lane's land showing its division among heirs was prepared by Samuel Danforth, which is referenced in an entry on the Registry's copy of the deed. The Society has a very old copy of that plan which, based on the word "Entered" handwritten on the reverse side, appears to be the owner's original 1706 copy of the plan.

Don Corey

The Bedford Historical Society appreciates your support
Bedford in World War I - Veterans looked back in 1977

This year being the 100th anniversary of the United States entry into World War I, the Historical Society has remembered those who served with articles in each of its newsletters. This month we chose to include excerpts from an article written by Mike Rosenberg for the Bedford Minuteman in 1977.


World War I. It seems like an ancient story, a history lesson followed by chapters on the League of Nations and the Great Depression.

For a few Bedford individuals, World War I provides very real memories.

Gunnar Hemmingson of Anthony Rd. knows World War I was more than a story in a textbook. He was gassed during action in France in February 1918.

Earl Atwood Sr. of Ashby Pl. knows that Nov.11 was not meant to be a Monday holiday. He is also a veteran of the First World War.

Charles Stefanelli Sr., who has been a Bedford merchant for almost half a century, knows the names of the big battles are more than answers to a history quiz. He was involved in four of them.

Hemmingson remembers the three G.I.s whose names were linked with American Legion Post 221: Stanley Anthony, Hugh Hunt and William Hamilton. These three Bedford residents did not return from the First World War. ‘Hunt was the one I knew best, we worked together before the war,’ Hemmingson recalled. ‘He was an infantry runner; he died about two weeks after he arrived at the front.’

A member of the National Guard, Hemmingson was one of the first troops to begin training for America's entry on the Allied side. The private arrived in Europe in September 1917 and reached the front five months later. While serving with the 104th Infantry in France, he 'got a whiff of gas', a weapon that took such a toll in World War I that its use was addressed in subsequent treaties. After his release from the hospital, he joined the 304th Bakery Co., which supported the troops with 28,000 pounds of bread each day.

'I left the old country, Sweden, to get away from the service,' Hemmingson laughed. He also served 32 months during World War II as a Navy petty officer. His military experience actually spans well over 100 years; in 1915 and 1916 he was one of two National Guardsman to escort Grand Army veterans in parades. ‘Those Civil War veterans were about as old then as I am now,’ he said.

Stefanelli was 21 when he enlisted for service in 1917. He served in Germany and France with the 4th Infantry Division, six months before the Treaty of Versailles and six months after the end of hostilities with occupation forces.

He was in four major battles, including the Argonne Forest. A private and an infantryman, he shipped over from Devens after only four weeks of training in 1918. 'We were shipped from one front to another, before we knew what was happening,' he recalled. 'We carried rifles and grenades, and lived in foxholes. There was a lot of gas.'

Stefanelli said he was never wounded during his six months at the front. He keeps some souvenirs from 1918 right in his store: photographs taken during the occupation, showing the ruins of war, that serve as living history, as he does.
Villa Malta Kennels

Meet Ricco, Isolda, Rene and Champion Trista, awarded the prize for the best Maltese Brace at the 77th annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, held in New York in 1953. These dogs were bred here in Bedford, at the Villa Malta Kennels of Dr. and Mrs. Vincenzo Calvaresi. The Maltese is a very old breed. Bred to be small and affectionate, these dogs were said to be favorites of wealthy women in ancient Rome. However, although considered a “pure breed,” by the middle of the 19th century a lack of standards relegated the Maltese to the fringes of the purebred dog community. That did not change until the early 20th century, beginning in Beverly, Massachusetts with the Hale Farms breeding program founded by Eleanor Bancroft. It was from Hale Farms bloodlines, along with some dogs imported from Italy, that Dr. Vincenzo Calvaresi established the Villa Malta Kennels.

By all published accounts, including a February 14th, 1955 issue of Life magazine that featured Calvaresi and his dogs, the Villa Malta Kennels were here in Bedford, but where exactly we are not sure. Phone numbers on Villa Malta ads do list a Billerica exchange, so we believe the kennels may have been off North Road by the Billerica town line. If anyone remembers Calvaresi and his pups, please contact the office and let us know!

Dr. Calvaresi was instrumental in raising the profile of the Maltese. His breeding program refined the look of a champion dog. Villa Malta dogs were known for their distinctive round heads, and long, silky coats. Calvaresi was also known for his style and showmanship in competition. He and his wife would enter multiple teams of well-trained, impeccably groomed & matched dogs who would sweep across the competition ring, dazzling judges and spectators. Beginning in 1940 and through the 1950s, the Villa Malta Kennel produced over 100 champions!

In the 1960s, Calvaresi passed Villa Malta program on, and the kennel moved from Bedford. However, the Villa Malta bloodline is still considered to be one of the more prestigious among Maltese fanciers.

Kara Kerwin

Join Us! Clip and Mail:

**Member Application**

**Annual Membership Dues:**
- Individual: $25.00
- Couple/Family: $45.00
- Contribution: $100.00
- Patron: $175.00
- Benefactor: $300.00

Name: _____________________________
Address: __________________________
City: ____________________________ State: ____________ Zip: _________
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Return this with your check to:

Bedford Historical Society
2 Mudge Way
Bedford, MA 01730

Wish to pay by credit card?
Please visit our website at: www.bedfordmahistory.org
Look for the PayPal “Donate” button on the bottom left of our page.

It’s here again... Bedford Day, September 23

Bedford Day, a fun day for young and old. The Bedford Historical Society will again be presenting its very large Bedford Flag in the parade. The Society will of course also have its booth, located this year near the food booths opposite Town Hall. A blacksmith from Rock Village Forge will be at the booth showing how tools and other items were made in the "old days". Don't miss it!!

Come and visit us!

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Historic House Plaques Project

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has a program to assist more owners of historic homes install plaques that are intended to recognize the importance of preserving Bedford's older residences.

The town previously funded projects to identify its most historic community-wide properties. The Bedford Historical Society arranged for publication of that information in Historic Properties and Neighborhoods of Bedford, Massachusetts, Third Edition, 2015. The book is available in the Library, or a copy may be purchased from the Society. In addition, every home built before January 1, 1943, is subject to Bedford's Demolition Delay Bylaw, and all are eligible to have plaques. The plaques are symbols of Bedford's rich and diverse architectural history. They are simply a recognition of these older homes, and they do not carry any restrictions.

Interested residents who believe their home is eligible can complete an application and either mail it to the HPC or submit it to the Town Manager's office in Town Hall, 10 Mudge Way. The HPC reviews the applications for the correct year of the property's construction and, if applicable, the property's historic name prior to the plaque being ordered. Residents interested in obtaining a historic house plaque can visit the town's website - www.bedfordma.gov - and click on the HPC link under "Boards/Committees". More information can be found under "News" on the right side of that page, and an application is available on the left side of that page. Applications are also available in the Town Manager's office.

There are approximately 60 houses in Bedford that have plaques installed.