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

February 2019 *Published for everyone interested in our history* Volume 129, Number 1

Enjoy our Next Program

Sunday, February 24, 2019
Great Room, OLD TOWN HALL

→ 16 South Road - 2:00 pm ←

Refreshments from 2:00 followed by a 2:30pm talk by Sharon McDonald

Slavery in Bedford

Bedford's Town Historian, Sharon McDonald, will be the Historical Society's guest speaker on Sunday, Feb. 24, for a most fascinating topic: "Slavery in Bedford: Did the Underground Railroad Stop Here?"

After brief announcements at 2:30 by President Don Corey, Ms. McDonald's talk will begin.

In researching the history of slavery in Bedford, it stunned Ms. McDonald to learn that there were enslaved men, women and children of color living here in Bedford's early days. Who were they? Did they ultimately escape bondage? Did any of them serve in the War for Independence? And was Bedford a link on the nineteenth century Underground Railroad?

Town Historian and author Sharon McDonald is President of the Friends of the Job Lane House, and serves as volunteer Curator at the Job Lane Farm Museum and a volunteer Archivist for the Bedford Historical Society's collections. McDonald also is a member of the Society's Board of Directors.

Ms. McDonald is best known for serving as the Children's Librarian at the Bedford Library for 40 years. During her long 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. Ms. McDonald's second book, "A Meeting House & its People: The Story of the First Parish in Bedford," was published in 2017.

Carol Amick

Bedford Springs House Hotel

The Historical Society was recently contacted by our sister Society in Winchester with an amazing offer. Winchester was conducting an inventory of the archives in Sanborne House and came across a hotel register for the Bedford Springs House hotel. The register did not have any direct association with the town of Winchester, so their Society decided to deaccession it and offer it to our Society. We were delighted to accept and picked it up this past summer.

The Bedford Spring House hotel, located at Fawn Lake, was operated by Dr. William Hayden, who also employed the mineral-rich spring water in herbal remedies marketed through his company, New York Pharmaceuticals. The resort, which operated in the summer, attracted visitors who came not only to enjoy the bucolic Bedford countryside, but also to enjoy the health benefits of Dr. Hayden's springs and cures.

Register entries begin in May of 1884. Many visitors were from the surrounding area, coming from as close as Bedford, Billerica and Concord. The resort hotel seemed to be a destination for larger parties; often an entire page of visitors signed in together, all from the same local town. Even then, cycling seemed to be a popular activity, with quite a few entries for local cycling clubs, including the Somerville Cycle Club who held their annual outing and Ladies Day in June of 1891 and again in 1893. Shawknit Bicycle Club of Lowell passed through in June of both 1892 & 1893. After 1893, quite a few more clubs rode to the Spring House, including the Vesper Bicycle Club of Lowell, the Newtonville Cycle Club of Winchester, MA , the Commonwealth Bicycle Club of Boston, MA, and the Charlestown Rovers Cycle Club.

Surprisingly, many of the Bedford Spring House guests arrived from outside of Massachusetts. Visitors came from Birmingham, AL; Chattanooga, TN, Chicago, IL, Cool Springs, CO, Flushing, NY; Kansas City, MO; Mont Dora, FL; New Orleans, LA; New York City, NY; San Antonio, TX and San Francisco, CA. Our Springs also seemed to have had an international reputation, with visitors arriving from Antigonish, Nova Scotia; Dublin, Ireland; Liverpool, England; Montreal, Canada; St. John's Wood, London, England; New Brunswick, Canada and St. Petersburg, Russia. Some guest seemed opposed to the idea of providing their home address, including one C.D.V. Graves who, apparently stopped on impulse

cont. pg 2

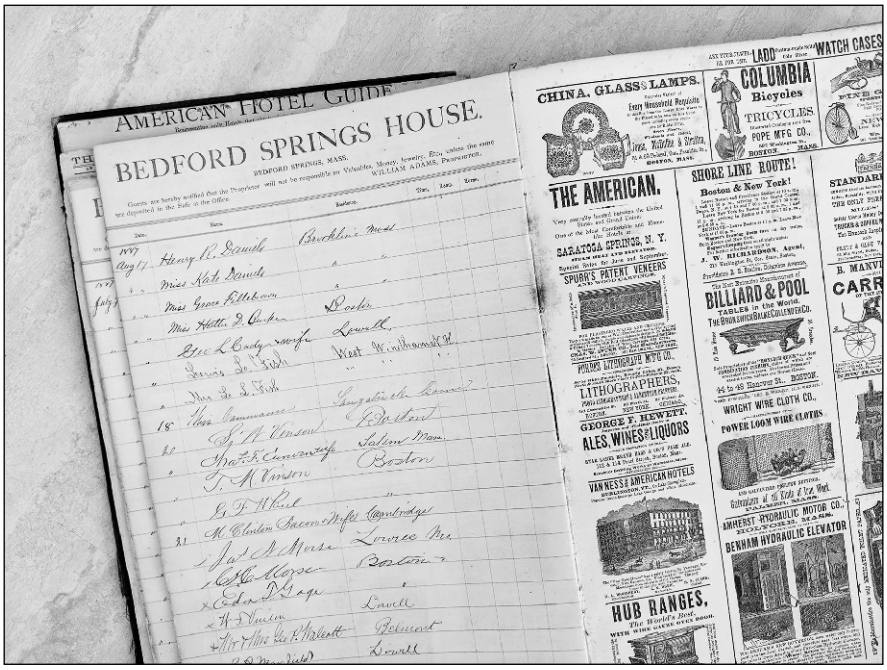
cont. fr pg 1 *Bedford Springs House Hotel*

as he traveled through, and recorded his residence as "On the Fly." Mr. & Mrs. Patrick Maginty listed their addresses as "Bottom of the Sea" and "Top of the Ocean" respectively. And, given the times, a few entries reflected those who were paid to come along, including Henry Buckle and James Blunt, who were listed as "Coachmen."

The register, which measures 11" x 16", was manufactured by Maynard, Gough & Co., Front Street Worcester. Its first few pages contain a listing of all hotels in the United States using Advertising Register Books purchased from members of the Hotel Register Publishers' Association. Lined pages bearing the name of the "Bedford Springs House, William Adams, Proprietor" in the header are interspersed with pages bearing advertisements for items every fine hotel might need, including elevators, metal skylights, silver plate, ales, wines & liquors, billiard tables, Columbia Bicycles and perforated roll toilet paper. Preprinted pages run out in July of 1891, but three loose bound ledgers are tucked in the back of the book, possibly because the management was anticipating the completion of the new Sweetwater Hotel, which would, of course, need a shiny, new guest register. Entries end on October 10, 1896. The last page bears a large inscription, written with a flourish in blue pencil,

"The Bedford Springs Hotel has gone out of date and a new and much better hotel has been erected, entitled the Sweetwater. This hotel is charmingly set on a beautiful lake covering five square miles. In this lake are found all kinds of bullfrogs and bullwogs, turtles and lobsters. Apply to W.H. Wingate, Man."

Kara Kerwin



This page from the Register is from 1887 and shows guests coming from Brookline, Boston, West Windham, NH, Lowell and Belmont.

The Society is Grateful for your contuing Support

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THANK YOU!

Lost & Found - Rufus Porter Wall Murals

Rufus Porter was a prominent painter of wall murals between 1823 and 1838 to decorate homes. He later founded Scientific American, and a museum in Maine is dedicated to his work. He lived in Billerica, and a few homes in Bedford (including the Job Lane House) still contain murals done by him.

The Jonas Monroe Homestead, formerly located on North Road in front of the Bedford Motel, had a number of such Porter murals. When the property was acquired by a hotel chain and the house was demolished in 1971, several of the wall murals were rescued. One was donated to the Historical Society and has been displayed in Town Hall Auditorium (Richard Reed Room) for a number of years. A second mural that had been stored in Rick & Kaye Spofford's barn for years was generously donated to the Society last year. Bedford's Facilities Department assisted in moving the massive mural to Town Hall, and in November it was mounted in the Auditorium on the wall adjacent to the entrance stairs. Despite its age, the mural is a striking piece of Bedford's history that contributes to the character of the Auditorium.

Rufus Porter mural, saved by the Spofford family, hangs in the Town Hall Auditorium

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Regrettably, another example of Porter's work in Bedford was recently lost. Joshua Page built the Bedford House inn that stood for about 150 years where the Fire Station is now. He also built the Second Meetinghouse on the Common and other homes on Great Road, Elm Street and Springs Road. He built his own home in 1823 and had murals painted on the walls in the hall and in several rooms. After his death, the house was moved in the 1880s from Great Road back to 13 School Avenue. Unfortunately, during the current restoration work on the house, the walls with the murals were removed, and the 200-year old murals were destroyed and replaced with sheetrock.

Forever gone...!

Irreplaceable murals on the first floor, the hallways and the bedrooms upstairs were destroyed.

Photos: Jan van Steenwijk

Our volunteer guides.
From left: Deb Edinger, Bill Hanna, Sharon McDonald, Jeannette Pothier, Leah Restino, Don Corey, Joseph Restino and sitting, Ellen Michaud

Job Lane House Meeting

The Society's October meeting at the Job Lane House was well attended. Sharon McDonald, President of the Friends of the Job Lane House as well as a Historical Society Director, organized the event. Tour guides in each room of the house gave visitors a colorful description of their surroundings and pointed out the many Society artifacts that are on display. Moving on to the barn, visitors were able to see and handle a number of Society artifacts from some of Bedford's early industries and occupations – dairy, blacksmith, cordwainer, wheelwright.

For those who missed the meeting or would like to visit again, the House will be open from 2 to 4 PM on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of every month from May until the end of October, as well as for other special events.

Annual Town Meeting

Annual Town Meeting will commence on Monday evening, March 25, 2019, in the High School Auditorium. This year one of the articles will propose Community Preservation funds for Old Town Hall renovation and restoration projects, ***including rehabilitation of the ground floor for a museum***. The project also includes funds for restoration work in the Great Room on the 3rd floor and installation of a handicapped ramp at the front door to again allow use of the historic entrance to the building.

This funding request finally moves us closer to realization of the Society's goal to ***re-establish a town museum***. Due to its long absence, many residents are unaware that the town had a museum in the Stearns Memorial Building from the time it was first occupied in the early 1950s until the museum was closed in the mid 1990s to accommodate conversion of the building to the Police Station.

Efforts have been ongoing ever since to have a new home for display of documents and artifacts from Bedford's rich historic and cultural past.

Registered voters are urged to come to Town Meeting to support passage of this important article.

Preserving the Past for the Future

The Old Town Hall on South Road would be a perfect place to welcome visitors to the Bedford Historical Museum

BEDFORD FARMERS SUE THE MIDDLESEX CANAL COMPANY - Brian Oulighan

View of the river from “Two Brothers Rocks” in mid 1800s. One of the last meadows is visible in center.

In 1795 authority was granted to dig a canal to connect the Concord River with the Middlesex Canal. In 1798 authority was granted to buy and hold mill seats on the waters connected with the canal and to erect mills on them. This opened the way to systematic encroachments by raising the dam, without the consent or even the knowledge of the land owners along the river until it reached over three feet above the old dam at the time of their purchase. The meadows then began to degenerate, which was directly due to the unjustified encroachments of the old Middlesex Canal Company, and it was greatly accelerated by an increase in the height of the dam in 1828. The dam flooded farmers' meadows as far as 25 miles away.

Bedford's historian, Abram English Brown, noted that "Manufacturers have been benefited by damming the Concord River near its confluence with the Merrimack, while the people of Bedford have seen their broad meadows depreciate in value by the overflow of the banks."

470 People from Sudbury, Concord, Wayland, Carlisle and Bedford that were affected by the Middlesex Canal Corp. along the Concord, Sudbury and Assabet Rivers signed petitions to correct the unauthorized encroachments on the rivers. Suit after suit was brought in the courts but the sufferers were confronted by able and skillful counsel, and they failed to obtain redress. Farmers who sued the canal proprietors in court lost their cases, mostly because they didn't have the clout that the Middlesex Canal Corporation had. The Mill Acts and the power of the corporation were too strong. Justice is slow when the farming interests sue, as against the power of corporate bodies or the manufacturing interests of the State.

PETITION OF THE TOWNS OF CONCORD, WAYLAND, SUDBURY, BEDFORD, AND CARLISLE, PRAYING FOR THE REMOVAL OF NUISANCES AND UNAUTHORIZED ENCROACHMENTS IN CONCORD RIVER - Testimony of some of the plaintiffs.

Oliver W. Lane called and sworn. Examined by Mr French.

"I live in Bedford. I am sixty-five years old. I inherited, and own, five acres of meadows in one lot, and about two in another. I have always resided in Bedford. As long ago as I can remember, the hay on the five acres was of excellent quality, yielding four ox-loads We moved it out with cattle exclusively. Where it bears any grass, now the grass is poor. Two acres in the middle are taken up, I suppose by the ice. The water there is sometimes two feet deep where it used to be dry. It is so soft that a team could not be driven from bank to bank. We used to drive all over it."

Benjamin Josiah Davis called and sworn. Examined by Mr French.

"I live in Bedford and always have. I am forty-five years of age. I inherited meadow land from my father. I own sixteen or eighteen acres two of which I bought. As long ago as I remember the land was good and yielded about a ton to an acre."

John W. Simonds called and sworn. Examined by Mr Mellen.

"I reside in Bedford. I am fifty-one years of age. I have always known the Meadows in Bedford and Carlisle - not so much from owning them as I have as a surveyor of land. The change has been great in the soil, texture of soil, and quality of grass produced. The wet meadow runs parallel to the River, extending back twenty rods. That bore pipe grass which has disappeared for the last fifteen or twenty years. On the higher line of meadows back of this I have seen a kind of red-top from Carlisle Bridge as far as I could see. The specimen I exhibit is a stunted one. The cedar lands connect the low lands of the Shawsheen and those of Concord River. These were

Cont. pg 6

Filling the Void

The Society lost a close friend and energetic member last month with Pat Leiby's death. She had served in various positions over the years and was the Society's Treasurer in recent years up to her death. Her Memorial Service will be held on Saturday, March 30, at 2 PM at the First Parish, 75 Great Road.

With our loss of Pat, a vacancy exists in the position of Society Treasurer. The duties have currently been added to Don Corey's other responsibilities, but a volunteer to perform the bookkeeping function until the Society's Annual Meeting in May would be greatly appreciated. An individual familiar with QuickBooks would be ideal to take on this assignment rapidly .

Please contact the office – info@bedfordmahistory.org or 781-275-7276 – for more information if you would consider taking on this assignment.

WANTED
Bedford Memorabilia

www.bedfordmahistory.org

Executive Director: Kathleen Fahey
781-275-7276
info@bedfordmahistory.org

The Preservationist.
Design, production & photography: Jan van Steenwijk
Contributing writers; Carol Amick, Don Corey, Kara Kerwin, Brian Oulighan, Sharon McDonald, Kathleen Fahey.

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"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.

cont. fr pg 5 ***Bedford Farmers sue the Middlesex Canal Company***

formerly valuable for timber. They now produce little or none."
Lyman Haines called and sworn. Examined by Mr. Abbott.
"I have lived in Billerica since 1832, except for three years. Except two years, I have lived within sight of the River. I am fifty-six years old. I own with Mr. Foster in Bedford about sixty acres each side of Carlisle bridge on the Bedford side. Most of them run down the river. I should think I had owned them twelve or thirteen years. There are cranberry patches on them. I first owned meadows in Bedford, about thirteen years ago. I never did before 1828. I bought my meadows for cranberries."

Many of the flooded meadows are now wetlands and part of the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. The engineers who built the canal were in an odd way responsible for its demise. The maps used to survey its path were used to plan the Boston and Lowell Railroad. The first track was finished in 1835 and freight shipments began immediately. By 1851, the Middlesex Canal collected its last toll, and it completely ceased operations in 1853. However, other corporate interests have since owned the dam and controlled its height.

You discover "it" in your attic; you find "it" in the back of that drawer; or when planting a new tree in your backyard, you find a piece of an old tool or maybe a thousand year old spear point. Give the Society a chance to look at it. Maybe someday you will see it on display in the future Bedford Museum identified as "Donated by...."

Continuing the Legacy.

Life's calling.
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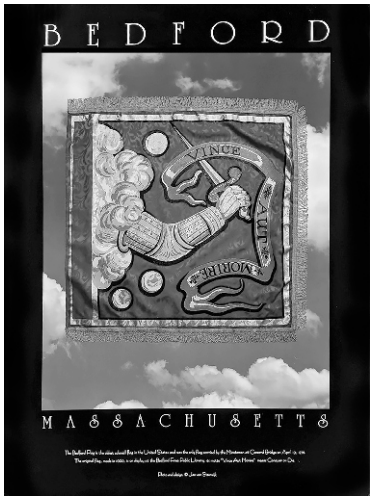
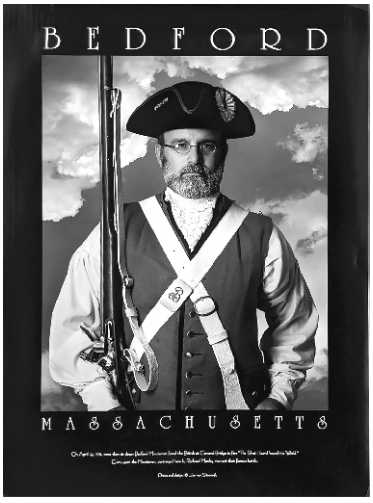
Limited Addition of Full Color Bedford Posters





Among the many great gift items the Society has for sale, these 2 posters - FULL COLOR - each 20x28inches - will make a wonderful statement about our town. One shows the Bedford Flag which was created ca. 1704 and the other a Bedford Minuteman. Each unframed poster is only $10.00 plus shipping