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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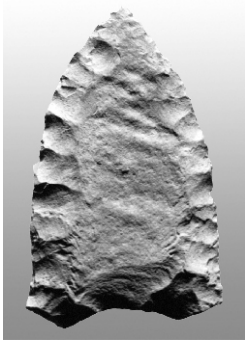
CARETAKERS

Bedford's Town Museum & the Historical Society's Role: by Don Corey



Artifacts from thousands of years ago to modern tools are housed in our archives.

Meetings in recent times have indicated a possible misunderstanding by some individuals of the relationship of the Historical Society to the Town of Bedford and its proposed operation of the Town Museum. This is intended to hopefully provide a better understanding of those issues.

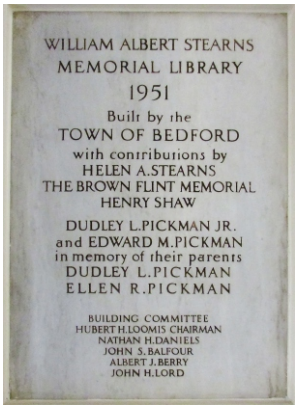
The Historical Society was established by the Trustees of the Bedford Free Public Library in 1893 to serve as the public repository for collection and preservation of Bedford's historic artifacts and documents, which otherwise would be lost. The Bylaws stipulate that, if the Society dissolves, "all financial and property assets shall be conveyed to the Trustees of the Bedford Free Public Library."

The Town Clerk maintains the official town archives, but the Society's collections constitute the town's heritage. The Society is Caretaker of the historic records of Bedford's people, properties, celebrations, civic organizations, and local knowledge that exists nowhere else. Its members are volunteers and serve as Custodians of the collections. The collections range from a spear point left here by a hunter shortly after the last Ice Age up to all but current records of organizations still serving the community, including the Bedford Minuteman Company and the Garden Club. The Society is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, and its operations are funded entirely through donations, dues, grants, bequests, and merchandise sales.

The Society has worked with the Town Clerk on multiple occasions to identify official documents that had been discarded over the years but were rescued by others and donated to the Society. Thousands of those documents have been transferred to the Town Clerk, filling significant gaps in the town's official archives.

When the Library's Bedford Room was re-organized and genealogical references and family records formerly kept there were discarded, the Society acquired them. The family records and the most relevant genealogical references were since merged with its much larger collections.

The Society works with DPW in various ways. Its Historic Town Map collection and its Old Burying Ground (OBG) Survey are now readily available to all on the town's website. The OBG Survey is the town's only complete record of gravestones and tombs of individuals buried there.



The Memorial Plaque, now in the basement stairwell of the Police Station

The rationale for the Society's occupancy of space in the Stearns Memorial Building – now the Police Station – has been obscured in recent years. The original building – Bedford's first Library - was paid for not from the tax levy but primarily by donations and bequests of generous "public spirited citizens." In today's dollars, those gifts would amount to many hundreds of thousands of dollars. When construction was almost complete, additional funding was required to complete the building. The Pickman family gave the money and requested the following consideration:

- **a permanent memorial be established to Dudley & Ellen Pickman, who had generously served the town as well as being among the Society's founders; and,**
- **a permanent assembly room be provided for the Society.**

At the 1951 Annual Town Meeting, the town voted unanimously to accept the gift in memory of the Pickmans and "for the particular purpose...of finishing an assembly room for the Bedford Historical Society", as well as to have a commemorative plaque made in token of the generosity of its citizens. The Society's assembly room, named the Pickman Memorial Room, became the Town Museum. The commemorative plaque was mounted prominently in the building.

This generous act of residents and the unanimous vote of Town Meeting were respected and upheld by Select Boards for over 40 years, including during my service on the Board when I was a Selectman. Regrettably, when the town needed the

continue on pg 2

continue from pg 1 **Caretakers**

building for the new Police Station, those previously accepted conditions were disregarded by the Select Board and town officials. The permanent Pickman Memorial was terminated, and the Town Museum was closed with no alternative arrangements to uphold the unanimous Town Meeting vote. The memorial plaque was moved to an obscure location in the secure part of the Police Station - the stairwell down to the jail cells, locker room and utility room. This plaque, the most tangible reminder of the extraordinary generosity of earlier Bedford citizens, is permanently hidden from public view.

Rather ironically, when the Society had to vacate its space in 1996, the collections were moved temporarily to Old Town Hall (vacant at the time) and they occupied much of the middle and ground floors. Also, at Annual Town Meeting that year, the Select Board added a warrant article to dispose of Old Town Hall. However, Town Meeting rejected it and instead voted to spend $100,000 on repairs to the building. Matching grants obtained by the Historic Preservation Commission and enactment of the Community Preservation Act allowed restoration of the building to be completed. Old Town Hall received a Mass. Historical Commission award as the best Adaptive Re-use Project in the entire Commonwealth that year. It has since become a valuable and attractive asset of the Town – all despite and over the initial opposition of the Select Board, Finance Committee, and Capital Expenditure Committee.

Meanwhile, the Society was given an office in the rear of the Police Station, where a portion of the collections were packed and stacked to the ceiling. Some large artifacts were also moved to the end of the corridor next to the office. Artifacts that remained in Old Town Hall were subsequently stored elsewhere. Unfortunately, despite the unanimous Town Meeting action, most of Bedford's cultural resources – of which the Society is only the Caretaker - have now remained in storage and hidden from public view for over 20 years.

When Town Meeting convenes, your support of the FY21 Annual Town Meeting article to re-establish a museum in Old Town Hall is urged in order to help remedy this situation.

From floor to ceiling, from wall to wall, Bedford's cultural resources are waiting to be shown to the public. *Photo: Kristine Moore*

Annual Meeting Cancelled; Search for new VP

The Bedford Historical Society's Annual Meeting to choose Society Officers and Board members, has been cancelled. Our next Annual Meeting will be held in **May 2021**.

The Nominating Committee (Marian Bryan, Julie McCay Turner and Carol Amick) reports that all of the Society's officers have indicated a willingness to continue serving until an Annual Meeting can be held. These officers are:

- Tom Kinzer, President
- Merri Lee Johnson, Vice President
- Jane Puffer, Secretary
- Janet Humphrey, Treasurer

The Nominating Committee also reports that Tom Kinzer, Jane Puffer and Janet Humphrey agreed to serve another one-year term, once elections can be held. V.P. Merri Lee Johnson has expressed her decision not to run for another term, requiring the Nominating Committee to identify a new Vice President candidate. *Any member of the Society, interested in this position, is urged to contact any member of the Nominating Committee.*

Three of the Society's 12 Directors are due to be elected. All three Directors, whose terms end in 2020, have indicated a desire to be re-elected to another four-year term. They are: Carol Amick, Julie McCay Turner and Lee Vorderer.

Carol Amick

Memorial Day 2020 By: Paul Purchia

Shawsheen Cemetery on an earlier Memorial Day

We certainly find ourselves living in extraordinary times. Freedoms which we enjoy and sometimes take for granted such as freedom to assemble, freedom of movement, freedom to worship, all have been temporarily put on hold as a result of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the traditions Bedford has proudly maintained over the decades has been our observance of Memorial Day; a day to honor those brave men and women who fought and died to keep America free. Sadly we have had to temporarily limit some of these freedoms for the greater good of our community as we slowly return to normalcy.

By now you may know that Bedford's Memorial Day events scheduled for Monday, May 25 have been canceled. These ceremonies and the annual town parade which take place every Memorial Day are possible because of the many dedicated individuals and civic organizations, including the Bedford Historical Society, who generously give their time and talents to honor our veterans.

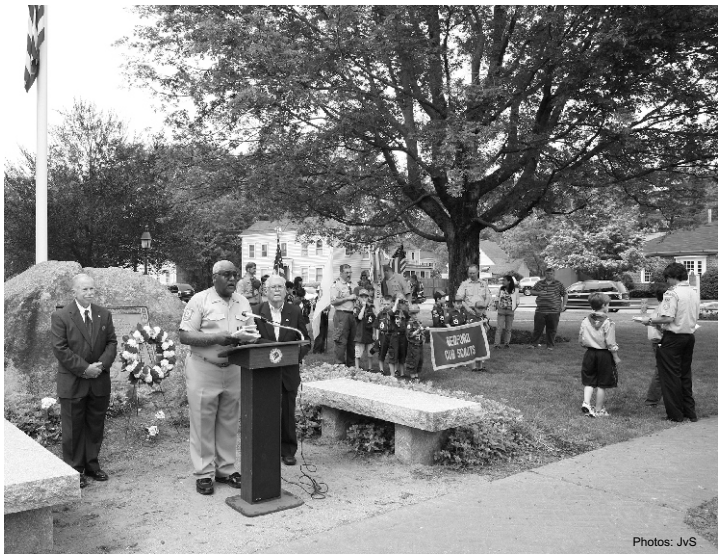
The Historical Society's presence on Memorial Day can be found at the many events that occur throughout the town. It can be experienced by listening to a morning talk in Shawsheen Cemetery and learning about the sacrifices made by Bedford troops during the Civil War. Many veterans of that conflict are buried in Shawsheen Cemetery near the Civil War monument. Or later at the Old Burying Ground, hearing about Revolutionary War veterans including former slaves, who fought, died and were laid to rest in the Old Burying Ground. Or when the parade stops at the WWI memorial on the Town Common to hear a Society member talk about veterans from Bedford who fought and died during the Great War.

Memorial Day is an observance that has taken place in our country for over 150 years. It was officially proclaimed by General John Logan, commander of the Grand Army of the Republic on May 5, 1868. Memorial Day is a federal holiday held on the last Monday of May to remember, honor, and mourn the military personnel who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces.

This Memorial Day is unlike any other we have experienced in our lifetimes. The COVID-19 pandemic does not allow us to safely gather and participate in these Bedford Memorial Day events. How ironic that we cannot come together as a community to honor those veterans who gave their last measure of sacrifice to protect our freedom to assemble, to worship, to speak.

Please keep our veterans and active military personnel and their families in your thoughts and prayers this Memorial Day, along with everyone who is keeping us safe in these challenging times. Bedford will come through this pandemic as the strong and caring community it has been since our colonial beginnings. On Monday, May 25 let each of us find time to remember and thank all those heroes who went before us to keep us free.

Have a safe Memorial Day.

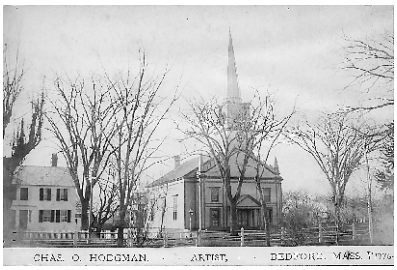


WWI Memorial on an earlier Memorial Day

The Images of Charles O. Hodgman

By: Kara Kerwin

Bedford's Charles Hodgman was a prominent early photographer shortly after its initial development during the mid-19th Century. This is the 2nd of a 2-part article on his achievements.



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Charles Hodgman was born in Bedford in 1835 and found his calling in photography early. He was a professional Daguerreian by 1859 and listed in directories as a photographer in the 1860s. He set up studios elsewhere in early years, but images of Bedford people and places made in those studios are included in the Society's collection.

Later Career

Hodgman returned to Bedford by the early 1880s, and we believe it was thereafter that he captured his most iconic images.

Many of the images that Hodgman produced in Bedford bear the title, "Artist" rather than "Photographer" next to his name. This is significant because during much of the 19th Century, photography was not considered an art form. Hodgman's earlier studio portraits and images of homes illustrate the idea of the photographer as someone simply capturing a visual record of a person or place. However, Hodgman's approach to his work seemed to change and develop upon his return to Bedford. He still photographed images that were reproduced commercially in several formats, such as this image of the First Congregational Church [1] showing the 1886 renovations including the pointed steeple. However, he also created images where the composition and tone created a sense of atmosphere.

This rather spooky image [2] is "the old Meade place", which was on land that is now part of Hanscom Field.

This rather somber image [3] of a woman in black standing among gravestones is Mrs. Mary Taylor Prescott standing at the grave of her brother in Carlisle's Green Cemetery.

People were frequent subjects of Hodgman's lens. This photo [4] of teacher Edith Lane and her charges at the West School, which still stands at 209 Concord Road, was taken during the 1885-1886 school year. The large group of Center School teachers and students [5] was taken on the steps of Old Town Hall, also in 1886. Donors of both photos were able to identify many of the people.

The group assembled for this picnic outing [6] was not identified. However, the Society has Lucy Flint's scrapbook, and a copy of the photo in her scrapbook allowed us to identify her husband, Lucius Flint, as the gentleman on the left with the moustache. They lived on Elm Street, and by 1887 Hodgman was a boarder across the street at Mrs. Cutler's house.

This photograph [7] of a large family gathering is one of a series acquired together. They lack identification except a small sign in one image that indicates this was probably a Hartwell family reunion. Hodgman may have been connected to that family through a woman named Hodgman, believed to be his cousin, who married Amos Hartwell in 1822.

Charles Hodgman died in Bedford in 1889 at the age of 54. The cause of death listed in the Bedford Town Report was cancer. This was a common ailment suffered by early photographers, as little was known about the danger of constant exposure to the chemicals needed in the work.

During his career, Hodgman created a valuable visual record of Bedford and its people. Unfortunately, as far as we know, he left no records of his work. He never provided a subject or title for his images, so unless this information was known by the donors, we are sometimes unable to identify the people and places he captured. Perhaps he underestimated the permanence of his work.

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Executive Director's Report
Kristine L. Moore

Due to the pandemic, I have been utilizing as much of Social Media posts as possible. I hope everyone who can is following the Society on one or all of these platforms. Don't forget about the Society's YouTube channel!

Thanks to Carol Amick and Bill Moonan we have "True or False Tuesday" for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. A True or False story written by Bill is posted with an image that either corresponds with the story or is a clue. Followers must guess whether the story is True or False. The post has quickly gained interest and the most recent edition, which was the naming of the Shawsheen River, was a huge hit.

On "What is it Wednesday?" we post a photograph or screenshot of an image in the Society's collection, with the image cropped if need be so it's not obvious what the artifact is. The challenge is to identify the object and what it was used for. This is posted around 9 or 10 on Wednesday morning and the answer is posted around 7 with the uncropped photo. That has been a big hit, and we've gotten some great guesses and even perfect answers.

We have also started a biweekly series where we show a photo of a historic home still in existence in Bedford and provide a brief write-up on the house. We're calling it "Historic House Sunday", and it is posted on all three Social Media platforms as well as shared via Constant Contact. It has been very well received.

I have put out several requests on Social Media for followers to keep in mind that we are in the middle of a historic event that future historians, researchers, and students will study, as current generations study the Flu of 1918 and beyond. I have been printing out and documenting news articles and have a folder in the office to document this history.

Screen shot of our new biweekly series: "Historic House Sunday."

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Thank You for Your Continuing Support!

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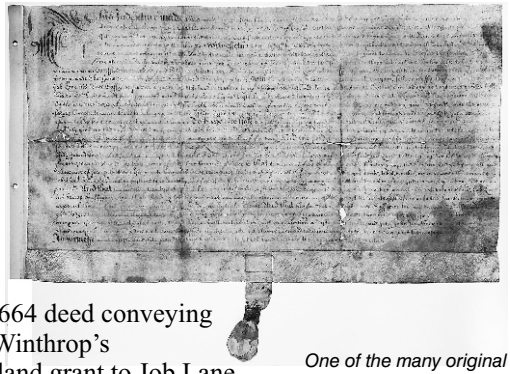
"Original 1664 deed conveying Gov. John Winthrop's 1,500-acre land grant to Job Lane, waiting to be displayed."

One of the many original documents owned by the Bedford Historical Society.

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The Preservationist.

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We Keep It Alive..!"

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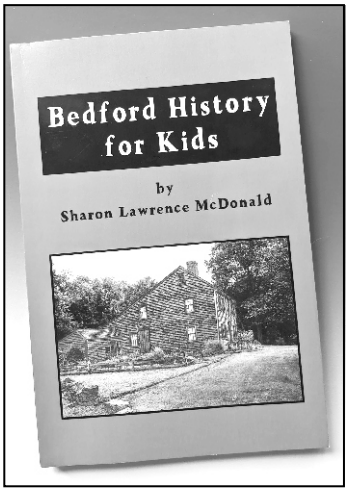
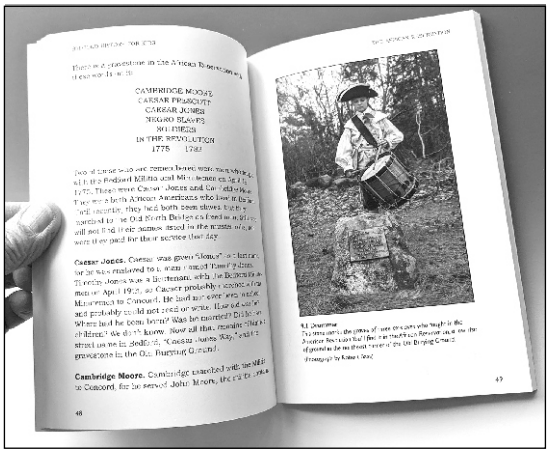
Bedford History for Kids





There's a new history book of Bedford out, and this one's for young people. Sharon McDonald, Bedford's Town Historian, has just written "**Bedford History for Kids**," and published it partly with a grant from the Bedford Historical Society. She's aimed it particularly at 10 to 14 year olds, but older and younger are grabbing it as well to find out about the crime of the Witch of the Shawsheen, the rowdy 1945 VE *[Victory in Europe]* Day outburst, an American Indian campfire 5,000 years old, and many other historical surprises.

It's just $14 including tax. To buy a copy for a young friend – or for yourself! – contact Sharon at kidshistory@gmail.com and she'll arrange to mail it you.

Among the many cancellations that resulted from the Covid-19 Pandemic were The Bedford Historical Society's Spring programs. The good news is, they've been rescheduled!!

Barbara Berenson's talk on Women's Suffrage, co-sponsored by the Bedford League of Women Voters, is set for Sunday, Oct. 25th. at 2 pm.

Stephen Collins as Walt Whitman will appear in March, 2021 as part of the Society's Annual Meeting.

Finally, Sharon McDonald, Bedford's Town Historian, will be offering her program about the true stories of some of Bedford's storied characters. More details to follow, but be sure to hold the dates above.

See you all at our Fall Programs

Lee Vorderer