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

September, 2020 *Published for everyone interested in our history* Volume 130, Number 3

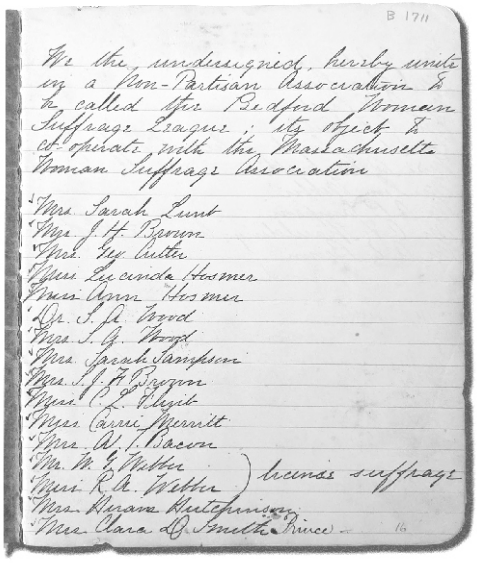
Enjoy Our Next Virtual Program
Wednesday, September 23, 2020 @ 7:15pm
"National History Day award-winning High School Student Projects"
& "The 1918 Flu Epidemic"
(see page 3 for details)

The Suffragists Who Lived Next Door

Sharon McDonald, Bedford Town Historian

When I was asked to write about Bedford's part in the woman suffrage movement, I looked to 1920, when the Constitutional amendment guaranteeing woman's right to vote was finally passed. But contemporary sources were terribly slim. It was fifty years earlier, in the later part of the nineteenth century, that Bedford had been a-sizzle with women's rights activists. At one time they had been called the most "persistent and faithful" groups in the state and the Massachusetts Woman's Suffrage League Convention was held here. I want to tell you about this small Massachusetts town's role in the movement.

My resources – plentiful - are the letters of Lucinda Hosmer. She frequently corresponded with the editor of the "Woman's Journal," a national weekly newspaper focusing on women's rights. Hosmer described a society of Bedford women who would meet in each other's parlors for an afternoon's discussion of the issues. Grape juice, not sherry, was the beverage – they were very strong on temperance. Attendance grew, and threatened to expand past most ladies' parlors entirely. A few times they met in the Town Hall, inviting the whole town to hear woman's rights activists from all over Massachusetts, including the noted Ms Lucy Stone. The Bedford group organized, becoming the Bedford Woman's Suffrage Society.



We the, undersigned, hereby unite in a Non-Partisan Association to be called the Bedford Woman Suffrage League; its object to co-operate with the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association

Mrs. Sarah Hunt
Mrs. J. H. Brown
Mrs. Ivy Cutler
Miss Lucinda Hosmer
Miss Ann Hosmer
Dr. S. A. Wood
Miss S. G. Wood
Mrs. Frank Sampson
Mrs. S. F. Brown
Mrs. C. L. Hyde
Miss Carrie Merrill
Mrs. A. L. Bacon
Mr. N. E. Webber
Mrs. R. A. Webber
Mrs. Abram Hutchinson
Miss Clara D. Smith

1888 Bedford Woman's Suffrage League Records

The Society sent petitions – many petitions - to the Massachusetts Senate, asking that women be granted their right to vote. Hosmer herself collected 13 petitions with nearly 100 names on each. She wrote:

I think it is a good idea to flood [the Legislature] with … the reasons women have for desiring the ballot, that they can no longer say "Women do not want to vote." When I hear a man say that, I always think he has been associated with over-burdened women or the lovers of fashion, and not with the far-seeing lovers of humanity and equal rights.

In 1869, the Massachusetts Senate granted women the right to serve on town school committees. {Their thinking must have been that women love children, so it's logical to allow them on the school board.) Ironically, women could not vote for school board members. Still, the Bedford Society annually picked a candidate from amongst themselves and sent her name to the men at Town Caucus. The first year, it was Carrie L. Bacon. When the men voted, Ms Bacon won a seat, and served a term on the school board alongside two male incumbents.

It was ten years later, in 1879, that the State Legislature made a grand gesture. Women would be allowed to vote, but only for their local school committee. To vote, of course, a woman had to attend the Town Meeting. Bedford's must have been a bit rowdy at times. The men stood around, hats on, smoking and spitting. But that first year, Ms Hosmer and ten others did go, and found that the men were sitting politely in their seats, hats off, and there was no spitting or smoking. (Well, one man tried to smoke, but he was stopped.) . When she passed out the ballots, she joked, it was like she was passing out ice cream. But the women did not consider voting a joke. The "Woman's Journal" quotes Lucinda Hosmer –

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Bedford's Museum

Carol Amick & Don Corey

The FY21 Annual Town Meeting article for funding to re-establish a small museum on a portion of the middle floor of Old Town Hall was not acted upon. Due to the pandemic, some articles, including this Community Preservation one, were postponed until a future Town Meeting.

Most of Bedford's cultural and historic resources – of which the Society is only the Caretaker - have remained in storage and hidden from public view for over 20 years since the Town closed space that was used as an historical museum in Bedford's first library, known as the Stearns Memorial Building. To provide some background for those not familiar with this project, the Historical Society was established by the Bedford Free Public Library Trustees in 1893 to serve as the public repository for collection and preservation of Bedford's historic artifacts and documents, which otherwise would be lost.

This first Bedford Library building 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 finish the building. The Pickman family of Bedford gave the money and requested the following consideration:

Bedford's Old Town Hall

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

In order to accept the Pickman money, the Town had to get the approval of Town Meeting. This occurred at the 1951 Annual Town Meeting, when the participants 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." The Society decided to use its new assembly room, named the Pickman Memorial Room, as a Town Museum.

Regrettably, when the Town needed the building for the new Police Station, those 1951 Town Meeting conditions were disregarded, and the Town Museum was closed with no alternative arrangements to uphold the unanimous Town Meeting vote.

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 larger artifacts were put at the end of the corridor next to the office. Other remaining artifacts had to be stored elsewhere. Unfortunately, despite the unanimous Town Meeting action which remains in effect, most of Bedford's cultural and historic resources – of which the Society is only the Caretaker - have now remained in storage and hidden from public view for over 20 years.

The rationale for the Society's request for museum space in the Old Town Hall – one of the many articles postponed at the 2020 Annual Town Meeting due to COVID-19 – is partially to fulfill the commitment made by the 1951 Town Meeting, but also to complete the Society's vision of providing a museum of historical artifacts, free for the people of Bedford, in space adequate to properly showcase the hundreds of artifacts and historical documents that tell the story of Bedford's history.

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 to records of organizations still serving the community, including the Bedford Minuteman Company, the Bedford Arts and Crafts Society and the Bedford 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.

When the postponed article is again before Town Meeting, the Society urges a "yes" vote to fulfil the Town's 1951 commitment and to offer a place where Bedford residents and Bedford history lovers, can visit and learn about the Town's fascinating history.

Bedford Historical Society Program Series - 2020-2021 Season

The Bedford Historical Society will offer "virtual" Zoom programs until a vaccine to fight the coronavirus is widely available. Society members and others who currently receive Society announcements via email will automatically receive notifications of every program, plus links to join the virtual Zoom meetings using their computers (a computer camera is required) or using their telephones to just listen to the program by phoning into the Zoom meeting.

Others who wish to participate in these virtual programs should contact the Society office (call 781-275-7276 or email info@bedfordmahistory.org) and indicate which Zoom program(s) they wish to join. They will receive an email or phone call prior to the program date with computer and telephone links to the meetings. There is no charge, and the public is invited to participate!

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020, 7:15 PM

The first half of this virtual Historical Society program will feature presentations by four Bedford High School students who produced three award-winning National History Day projects. One of the projects is available as a YouTube video, so the virtual program will begin with a showing of that video followed by a brief discussion by the student, Shana Wolckenhaar. Then the three other Bedford High students, Katie Krantz, Maya Driscoll and Emily Kociubes, will describe their exhibits. The students will all receive awards from the Society.

The second half of the Sept. 23 program will feature a YouTube video about the 1918 Flu Pandemic, with follow-up discussion with a representative from the Bedford Board of Health. They will discuss similarities and differences between the 1918 pandemic and the current coronavirus pandemic.

Picture from the 1918 Flu Epidemic

OCTOBER PROGRAM

Sunday, Oct. 25, 2020, 2:00 PM

Author Barbara Berenson will present a virtual power point program, "Votes for Women: MA Leaders in the Women's Suffrage Movement." She will tell the story of the national suffrage movement and the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution from the perspective of early Massachusetts suffragettes. This program is co-sponsored by the Bedford League of Women Voters.

Ms. Berenson is the author of Massachusetts in the Woman Suffrage Movement: Revolutionary Reformers (2018), Boston in the Civil War: Hub of the Second Revolution (2014), and Walking Tours of Civil War Boston: Hub of Abolitionism (2011, 2d ed. 2014). She is the co-editor of Breaking Barriers: The Unfinished Story of Women Lawyers and Judges in Massachusetts (2012). Ms. Berenson earned her undergraduate degree from Harvard College and her law degree from Harvard Law School, and she was a Senior Attorney at the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

Programs for the Remainder of the Season

A description of these subsequent programs will be provided in greater detail in future Preservationists.

November - Sunday, Nov. 15, 2020, 2:00 PM - Professor Patricia L. Fontaine (UMass-Lowell College of Education) - **"Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers and the History of Veterans."**

December - Saturday, Dec. 12, 2020, 4-6 PM - Virtual Holiday Party hosted by members Carol Amick and Bill Moonan **and** a YouTube video by Anthony Sammarco about Christmas traditions celebrated in Boston.

February - Sunday, Feb. 28, 2021, 2 PM - Town Historian and author Sharon McDonald - **"A Cast of (Historic) Characters" -** tales of some 18th and 19th Century Bedford characters.

March - Sunday, March 21, 2021, 2:00 PM - history teacher, author and lecturer Christopher Daley - **"The Wessagusset Incident" –** the murder in 1623 of Massachusett tribal leaders by Pilgrims.

April - Sunday, April 25, 2021, 2:00 PM - Ted Reinstein, journalist and reporter for *Chronicle,* Boston's TV news magazine - **"Wicked Pissed: New England's Most Famous Feuds."**

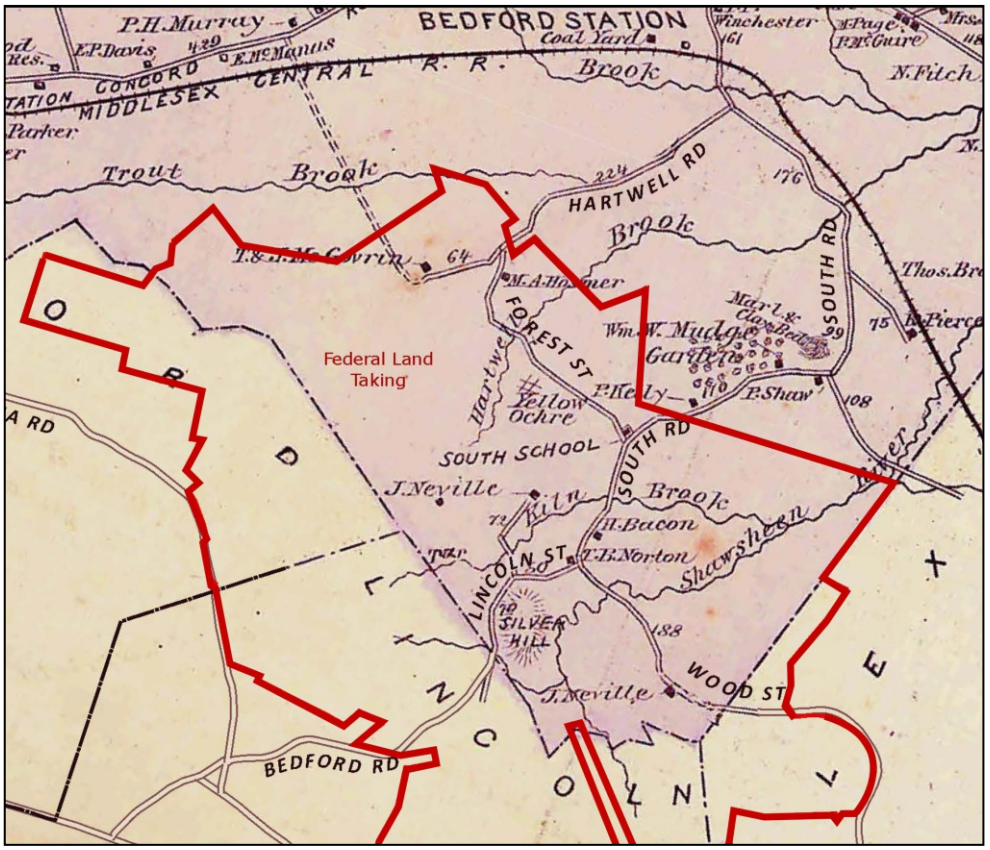
May - Sunday, May 23, 2021, First Church of Christ, Congregational, if in-person, 6:00 PM - **Society's Annual Meeting** & Lecturer and performer Stephen Collins - **"Unlaunch'd Voices, an Evening with Walt Whitman."**

Bedford's Lost Roads

by Don Corey

Bedford is rather unique in that some of its major roads follow early Colonial cart paths and Native American trails. Concord Road, a portion of Davis Road, Dudley Road, a portion of North Road, Pine Hill Road, Page Road and Old Billerica Road all generally follow Native American trails that existed when the first Colonists arrived in the 1630s. However, other early trails and cart paths that were vital to the settlement of Bedford have been lost in recent times.

South Bedford was initially settled in the 1660s by second-generation Concord families and new arrivals. Concord had been established in 1635 as the first inland town, with its inhabitants clustered near the Center for protection from Indians. However, by 1654 the town was divided into quarters, and a division of outlying land farther from the town center was made to families. Residents along Virginia Road in the east quarter, close to what became Bedford, included the Hartwell and Merriam families. Descendants of the settlers and new arrivals continued to move outward and to establish new farms.



Federal Land Takings 1941-1952 (overlaid on 1875 Bedford Map)

Israel Mead of Cambridge (now Lexington) married in 1669 and probably settled on the north side of what became Lincoln Road (see map) in that year. John Merriam (son of Joseph Merriam) was probably here on what became South Road in about 1663 near its present intersection with Summer Street. However, South Road north of that point did not even exist until after Bedford was established in 1729. John and Samuel Hartwell (sons of settler William Hartwell) were here in about 1664-65 at the north end of Forest Street. One of those homes would have also been a garrison house during King Philip's War in 1675-76.

Very soon after Bedford was established, South Road was laid out from the Meetinghouse down to tie into the road ending near the Merriam property. It provided Deacon Nathaniel Merriam with easier access to the Meetinghouse. Hartwell Road was also laid out from South Road to tie into Forest Street near the Hartwell farms. Those roads were vital links to connect the Billerica and Concord portions of the new town. Over the next 3 centuries, many more families settled in South Bedford.

Federal land takings on the eve of WW2 in 1941 and additional takings to accommodate longer runways for jet aircraft in 1952 resulted in the complete obliteration of Lincoln Road, Wood Street in Bedford, Forest Street and all but a small section of the original South Road (see map). Besides the disruption of many families and loss of the historic homes, Bedford's ochre mine (for making Bedford Yellow paint), the South School house, and granite outcroppings with imbedded garnet crystals were all lost. Only memories, photos and a few artifacts remain of that important portion of Bedford's history.

Executive Director's Report
Kristine L. Moore

Even with the pandemic, the Historical Society has been incredibly busy online keeping everyone engaged. We now have new segments online! From Historic House Sunday, (a virtual tour around some of Bedford's historic properties), True or False Tuesday (a story from Bedford's history is shared and people need to guess if the story is true or false), What is it Wednesday (an artifact from the collection is cropped to make identification difficult and shared with clues as to what it is), Tri Cornered Thursday (a photo pertaining to the iconic Tri-Corner Hat is posted), Flashback Friday (photos from the Historical Society's various events, programs, meetings, and displays are shared.), and finally Town Center Saturday (images throughout Bedford Center's history is shared).

Bedford, like many other towns is several lacking when it comes to documentation regarding the Flu Pandemic of 1918. We know it happened, we know Bedford was not spared, but we have no documentation to show how Bedford residents of 1918 dealt with the pandemic and more importantly how they overcame it. The Covid-19 Archival Project asks the public to help build a collection to document the 2020 Pandemic for future generations. We are looking for photos from the quarantine, journal entries, memes, schoolwork, etc., all ways to tell Bedford's story and solidify Bedford's place in History regarding the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic, to ensure this history is not lost.

For more information please visit our website or email us at info@bedfordmahistory.org or bedfordmahistory@gmail.com.

President's Report,
Thomas J. Kinzer

The everyday functioning of your Bedford Historical Society has proceeded during the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit at a slower pace. We've had restricted access to our office space, including our documents and artifacts. Executivetive Director Kristine Moore and, whenever possible, Society Volunteer Janet Collins, have achieved a lot. Kristine kept minimal but essential clerical and financial functions going.

More notably, Kristine has initiated new events on Social Media (Face Book, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter) and our website, despite having to cope with a serious website hack that forced a rehosting of the entire website last spring. One of the new offerings expands that BHS Christmas Party favorite, Bill Moonan's take on the popular Saturday “Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me” game from PBS. Kristine has also made good use of our small artifacts and our photos in, “What is it?” games. Every other week, she has sent out a short article about one of Bedford's older homes, its history, and its owners. These articles have been well-received. We've also put onto our YouTube list a number of our prior meeting videos, plus our video called, “Windshield Bedford.” We showed that one to great acclaim at our September 2019 meeting, with its star, Mary Hafer, in attendance to comment on it.

We now begin a new season of meetings and activities, unlike those of any time in our past. Program planning continues apace. We're eager to “see” you again, but for now we have to meet virtually via either Zoom or Google Meet. Will you join us? We hope you will, and I ask your patience for our first effort on September 23rd.

We've asked for Bedford residents to record and document experiences of their lives during these times of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the pandemic spread of its resultant COVID-19 disease. We were disappointed by the relativity scarcity of such records for Bedford and its residents for the Flu Pandemic of 1918-1919. Any contributions in this regard about our present time would be greatly appreciated, and you can help! A few contributors already have!

www.bedfordmahistory.org
Executive Director: Kristine L. Moore
781-275-7276
info@bedfordmahistory.org

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

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Bedford Historical Society, Inc.
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Bedford, MA 01730-1238

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continue from pg 1 *The Suffragists Who Lived Next Door*

And we see fraud, so rampant among our lawmakers, sapping the foundation of the morals of the people, making it easy for the big burglars and thieves at Washington to escape…. The common burglar, we can protect ourselves against by bars and bolts; but we are powerless against those in high places. How the good women long for the influence a ballot would give them in helping to right such wrongs.

Miss Eliza Bacon Webber, a determined eighty-year-old, was the first in town to register to vote. For several years, Eliza Webber was president of what was now the Suffrage League. She was famous for never missing an opportunity to lead a conversation around to woman suffrage. It seems possible that even people that agreed with her crossed the street when they saw her coming. But she was a fierce figurehead for the movement in Bedford. "To have strength of mind is not unwomanly," Hosmer wrote.

Eliza Bacon Webber, President of Bedford's Suffrage League

Almost all of the members of the League were also officers, including the men. (The group now included three men – the doctor, the newspaper editor, and Lucinda's influential cousin, Jerome.) Ms Hosmer was clear that the suffragists were not against men. They were against corrupt government, and they were determined to change that with their votes. To do that, they had to be equal to men politically. Hosmer was confident that it would happen soon when she wrote in 1876

I feel there has been a marked change in the feelings of the people generally, in this place since Mrs [Lucy] Stone and Miss [Matilda] Hindman have lectured here. The phase of ridicule, which I believe all reforms have to pass through, is well passed, and many who used to sneer and laugh whenever the subject of Woman Suffrage was introduced, now listen seriously, and, I think, a few more such lectures would quite redeem the town.

As you know, women had to persist for many more decades before they finally held a ballot in their hand. Most of the women in the Bedford Woman's Suffrage League, including Carrie Bacon, Eliza Webber, and Lucinda Hosmer herself, were long dead when the bells finally rang for Women at the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. But they had been "far-seeing lovers of humanity and human rights" as Lucinda Hosmer dreamed they would be. Their work was all part of the struggle for women's rights, and we bow deep bows to them today.

Mass Cultural Council

The Preservationist newsletter is supported in part by a grant from The Bedford Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.