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

May, 2021 *Published for everyone interested in our history* Volume 131, Number 2

Join Us For Our Next Virtual Program and Annual Meeting
Wednesday, May 26, 2021 @ 7:00 PM
"The Music of World War II" – guest speaker John Clark
(see page 3 for details)

Memorial Day 2021

Paul Purchia

Another year has passed and we still find ourselves unable to gather as a community this coming Memorial Day. Freedoms which we enjoy and sometimes take for granted continue to be suspended for the foreseeable future in the ongoing fight to keep us safe and healthy during these challenging times. And yet again, we will continue to honor our fallen heroes this Memorial Day.

Over many decades Bedford citizens have gathered as a community to offer tribute to our veterans, and on Memorial Day we honor those veterans who fought and died to keep us a free people. This year, similar to last Memorial Day, all outdoor events scheduled for Monday, May 31 are being canceled following Massachusetts public health guidelines. And, similar to last year, our town observance on May 31 will be virtual, broadcast several times during the day on Bedford TV and available on YouTube.

Memorial Day has been observed in the United States for over 150 years. It was officially proclaimed as a nationwide day of remembrance by General John Logan, commander of the Grand Army of the Republic on May 5, 1868. He picked a day that was not the anniversary of any particular battle and it was known as Decoration Day. Declared a federal holiday in 1971, Memorial Day is 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.

Bedford's town ceremonies and annual town parade have been possible because of the combined efforts of many dedicated individuals and civic organizations who generously volunteer their time and talents. The Patriotic Holiday Committee is responsible for planning and organizing the Memorial Day town events and parade. Our committee is indebted to organizations such as the Historical Society who make Bedford's Memorial Day events both memorable and very special.

.Participants in an earlier Memorial Day observance

Prior to the global pandemic the Historical Society was actively involved in Memorial Day ceremonies and the many events that occur throughout the town. And the Society's involvement will continue after the pandemic is in our collective rear-view mirrors. A morning talk by the Bedford Historical Society near the Civil War monument in Shawsheen Cemetery highlights the sacrifices made by Bedford troops who are buried nearby. Later at the Old Burying Ground, a Historical Society member talks about Bedford's early patriots, including former slaves, who fought in the

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Ancient Nursery Rhymes

Sharon McDonald, Town Historian

London Bridge

My husband and I were talking about nursery rhymes recently. He likes "London Bridge is Falling Down" (while I, as a former children's librarian, have more favorites than a turtle has scutes.)

Ever Bedford-focused, I began wondering if Bedford's founding fathers and mothers recited nursery rhymes to their children. Of course, I can't be sure, but being second generation English in 1729 when Bedford was begun, they must have known many traditional rhymes. Here are some you might also know:

Did you ever play "Patty-cake" with a baby? It is found in England as far back as 1698. Surely Susannah and Nathaniel Page clapped it with their little ones, while a new red battle flag stood against the wall..

And I can picture Eleazer Davis dandling Eleazer, Jr. on his knee while his wife, Rebecca laughed at his attempt at the tongue twister. "Old King Cole was a merry old soul…and every fiddler had a fine fiddle and a very fine fiddle had he" has been recited for children as least far back as 1709.

Martha and Job Lane had eleven children. Tragically, only seven of them lived past infancy. They lived in the same house we see today. I think Martha hugged them all and sang a rhyme too harsh for us nowadays, but fine back then: "Three Blind Mice," a version of which dates from 1609.

And Tom's favorite, "London Bridge"? Old! You can check on this and your favorites, too. Borrow Peter and Iona Opie's scholarly "Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes," from the Bedford Library.

We Thank you for your Continued Support

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Jan van Steenwijk & Barbara Hitchcock
Phil Zuckerman

Bedford Historical Society Program

Plan to come to the Society's virtual Annual meeting on May 26, 2021 at 7 pm. There will be a short business meeting, and then we'll all hear John Clark and his

Great American Music Experience,
present
The Music of World War II

You'll see and hear performances of sentimental songs of love and separation, songs of heroism, and humorous songs from The Andrews Sisters, Glenn Miller, Johnny Mercer, Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Judy Garland, Vera Lynn, Kate Smith, Vaughn Monroe and Spike Jones.

John Clark grew up in a small town in Ohio, attended college in Illinois and graduate school north of Boston. In the eighties he worked in music publishing in Nashville.

Since moving to the Boston area seven years ago, he has taught adult education for Brandeis, Tufts, Cambridge, Brookline, Newton and Lexington. In 2020 he presented 180 American Music history lectures for senior living communities and Councils on Aging (and the occasional synagogue and library) in the Boston area. Last year he guest deejayed on the MIT station, WMBR.

John boasts a combined record and CD collection of over 8,000 recordings.

Historical Society meetings are still virtual. ***This meeting will begin at 7pm*** *via ZOOM. Should you log in early, you will be directed to our waiting room and once the host is ready, you will be invited into the meeting. If you would like to receive the login information, please email the Historical Society at:* *bedfordmahistory@gmail.com*

Thanks for all your contributions!

Don Corey, shown here in the Bedford Day parade, became Citizen of the Year in 2002.

Don Corey, our legendary, in-house Bedford historian, transformed the "Preservationist" into a sought after publication. As its long-term major contributor, Don reluctantly has decided to set aside his Historical Society pen and retire from his duties as its chief author and prime mover. Don's dedication to the Society has been constant, fruitful and groundbreaking. Its newsletters had traditionally been printed in black-and-white, but Don wanted to enliven the publication, so in 2016 he suggested that they print the annual town-wide editions in eye-catching color. It was a hit and people took notice!

I first worked with Don on the "Preservationist" in 2001. Since then, he has initiated and co-produced 91 issues of the newsletter, averaging 4.6 issues each year, and wrote more than 125 articles himself. As a Former President of the Historical Society, I appreciated his commitment to provide our readership interesting facts about people, places and events that enriched Bedford's long history. Luckily, Don will remain in the public eye as he will continue to serve on Bedford's Historic Preservation Commission. Thank you Don for your enthusiasm, optimism and wisdom that benefitted us all.

Respectfully, Jan van Steenwijk

Virtual Annual Meeting to Elect Officers and Directors and host guest speaker on MAY 26

This year's Annual Meeting will be a virtual one, due to the covid pandemic, and Bedford Historical Society members will be notified to join the special Zoom link for the 7 PM start on Wednesday, May 26, 2021.

After the election of Society Officers and Directors, President Tom Kinzer will give his report on the Society's activities over the past season. Then he will introduce guest speaker John Clark for a lively musical and historical presentation on "The Music of World War II." (see page 3 for more info)

Utilizing audio and video clips for the last program of the season, Clark will explore the stories behind the WW II songs and their impact on those supporting the war – both soldiers and those back home.

The Nominating Committee's slate of Officers, all to serve one-year terms, will include four incumbents:

- President: Tom Kinzer
- Vice President: David Spencer
- Secretary: Jane Puffer
- Treasurer: Janet Humphrey

The Nominating Committee's slate of Directors to serve on the Board, all for four-year terms, includes incumbents Don Corey, Joan Gicca and Frank Gicca.

All Society members are encouraged to participate in this year's shortened version of the Annual Meeting, without the traditional potluck dinner.

Directors report *Kristine L. Moore*

The Bedford Historical Society's Social Media pages are growing fast! In addition to our Historic House Sunday, (a virtual tour around some of Bedford's historic properties) we now have Tombstone Tuesday, where a different tombstone from Bedford is shared. We discuss the inscription and share information about the motifs that adorn the various headstones. What is it Wednesday is still very popular and is definitely a fan favorite! We still have TriCorn 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).

Our social media numbers are steadily growing, but we'd love for more interactions. Currently we stand at 662 for Instagram, 198 for Twitter, 22 Subscribers on Youtube, and 1,089 for Facebook. Again, plenty of room for growth there! We have some video projects developing as we work with the Friends of the Job Lane House and Bedford TV, which is very exciting, and we can't wait to share with everyone.

We are also still documenting the COVID-19 Pandemic and are still looking for additions for the Bedford Historical Society Covid-19 Archival Project 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.

This is all a way to tell Bedford's story and solidify Bedford's place in History regarding the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. Ensuring this history is not lost. For more information please visit our website or email us at info@bedfordmahistory.org or bedfordmahistory@gmail.com.

Vacancies on Town Committies

The Bedford Historic Preservation Commission and Historic District Commission both have openings that the Volunteer Coordinating Committee (VCC) is seeking to fill. If you would like to help your Town, you are encouraged to learn more about what these committees do by visiting the Town's website and/or contacting members of the VCC at:

www.bedfordma.gov/volunteer-coordinating-committee

Presidents Report

Thomas J. Kinzer

As our readers know, your Bedford Historical Society hopes for a vote in the Society's favor concerning a possible allocation of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds for the rehabilitation of Old Town Hall's middle floor, this vote to be taken at Bedford's Annual Town Meeting on May 15th, 2021. We have previously published articles on this topic in this newsletter. In March we received a lengthy and detailed letter from Mr. Richard ("Rick") Reed, Bedford's former Town Manager. Mr. Reed disagreed with some of the assertions made in those articles. Both Mr. Reed's letter and our response are too long to provide here, but we wish to acknowledge his concerns and the obviously large amount of time and effort he spent in researching the history of Bedford's Town Museum and the Society's efforts to create a new one for the public. This article acknowledges that several erroneous assertions appeared in those articles involving the Stearns Memorial Building and the size and location of the Society's and the Museum's location(s) therein. The Stearns Memorial Building was built as the new Bedford Free Public Library in 1951, was used as such until 1968, was then used for Town administrative offices until the mid-1980s, and since 1996 has housed the Bedford Police Department.

Firstly, we asserted that a unanimous vote at Annual Town Meeting in 1951 granted the Society and the Museum a "permanent" home in the Stearns Memorial Building. In fact, although that Town meeting vote granted the Society an assembly room in the new Stearns Building, the word "permanent" did not appear in that Town Meeting article. We acknowledge our misquotation.

Secondly, we had believed and had asserted that the Stearns Memorial Building was initially built largely with funds donated by townspeople. Mr. Reed provided information from Town archives showing that while such private gifts totaled $29,072.07, a significant sum in 1951, the Town provided an additional $30,437.10, yielding a total of $59,509.17. Thus, the split between private donations and Town funds was very nearly fifty-fifty. The Society acknowledges this error; it was not correct for us to say that the building was built primarily with donated funds.

Thirdly, the 1951 Town Meeting article specified that a memorial plaque acknowledging the Pickman family and others for their contributions to the Town of Bedford should be placed in the new Stearns Memorial Building in a place suitable for public view. We indicated in our articles that the plaque was no longer visible and had been moved. Mr. Reed confirmed that the plaque is still in exactly its original location. That location, however, is now behind the Police Department's security barrier and in a stairwell that only the Police would have occasion to use. Thus, the plaque has not been moved, but it is essentially inaccessible to the public. We regret whatever confusion our article created.

Several other issues that are mentioned in Mr. Reed's letter relate to space allocation and usage in the Stearns Building during different time periods. We believe that these represent differences of interpretation and opinion. These issues are too detailed to discuss here.

The Stearns building as seen from Mudge Way

Mr. Reed invested considerable time and work in putting his letter together, and we appreciate that effort. We realize that we made several mistakes in those articles; it is our goal to represent Bedford's history accurately, not just for events centuries ago but for our more recent past as well.

Our current goal is to find space for re-establishment of a Bedford Museum that can be opened in the near future. For that we request your help and support at Town Meeting on May 15th next.

WANTED

Please contact us if you have Bedford Memorabilia to share with us.

www.bedfordmahistory.org

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The Preservationist.

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Revolution and who were laid to rest in the Old Burying Ground. The parade stops at the WWI memorial on the Town Common where a Historical Society member recounts the history of Bedford veterans who fought and died during the Great War before the parade continues along Great Road to Veterans Memorial Park.

Patriotic Holiday Committee: Chair Paul Purchia (right) with 2018 Grand Marshalls Henry Miranda (left) and Don Corey.

Some Bedford citizens may not be familiar with Veterans Memorial Park or know how this beautiful park came into being. Veterans Memorial Park was established at the 1950 Annual Town Meeting under Article 52 which voted to establish a memorial park in honor of those Bedford men and women who served during WWII. The park was established on a portion of Page Field bordering Great Road on a parcel of land measuring 200 feet wide by 150 feet deep. Since the establishment of this memorial park, its purpose has been expanded to honor veterans of all United States of America wars and military conflicts. Memorial stones honor each of the 13 Bedford men killed in action during WWII (8), Vietnam (3), and the Iraq War (2). If you haven't visited this jewel lately, I urge you to do so.

Please keep our veterans and active military personnel and their families in your thoughts and prayers this Memorial Day. Take a moment to thank a veteran and all who continue to keep us safe in these unprecedented times. Bedford has remained strong through the dark days of this pandemic because it cares. We look forward with hope and resolve to gather again with friends and family to honor our veterans. On Monday, May 31 let each of us take time to remember and thank those heroes who went before us to keep us free. Have a safe Memorial Day.

Mass Cultural Council

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