The Bedford Flag, the oldest existing flag in the United States, ca. 1704 on view at the Bedford Library.

The Preservationist

Bedford Historical Society, Inc. - Bedford - Massachusetts
Founded in 1893

September, 2021 *Published for everyone interested in our history* Volume 131, Number 3

Enjoy Our Next Program

Sunday, September 26, 2021 - 7PM

"National History Day Award-winning High School Student Project & "The Society's Collections on the Move"

See page 4 for details

The Impact of Route 128 on Bedford

E. Ashley Rooney

The first Bedford settlers were generally farmers immigrating from Cambridge and Salem, although the early surveyors had described Bedford as "no way fit, the upland being very barren and very little meadow thereabout." Incorporated in 1729 by the mother towns of Billerica and Concord, Bedford was a small farming community of 173 houses by 1860. Luckily, Bedford Historical Society has saved many photos and records to tell its story, but one of the most interesting is the impact of Route 128 on the community.

Bedford in 1940 was a small, rural town with a population of 3,807. As Sharon McDonald says, "It was pretty much farming here, especially pig and dairy farming. In 1935, there were more pigs than people in Bedford." When I moved here in 1966, our garbage went into special containers for the pigs. As a New Yorker, I debated endlessly, would pigs eat coffee grounds? What about ham bones?*

Certainly, that is not the Bedford of today. There were three major change agents: the Veterans Administration Hospital in 1927, Bedford Army Air Field in 1941, and the construction of Route 128, also known as the Technology Highway.

The proposed construction began in the 1920s, when the state Department of Public Works sought to relieve the traffic congestion that came from the rapidly growing number of cars and trucks on Boston's streets. But Route 128 is more than just a stretch of highway bordered by companies; it is the result of the complex relationship between industry, the federal government, and academia.

New England in the 1940s

New England was the first industrialized region in the United States. (Note: If you haven't visited Lowell National Historical Park to view the exhibit and take the canal boat tour, do so.). By the early 19th century, New England was considered to be the fount of American industry. The concentration of industry in eastern Massachusetts was one of the many factors that led to the founding of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1861. Although the 44 colleges and universities in the greater Boston area are a great resource, it is MIT that has been closely tied to the creative growth of the region's new technology community.

Before World War II, spin-offs from MIT, such as Arthur D. Little, Inc., Raytheon, and EG&G, began to appear along with other successful technology companies such as Polaroid Corp. In 1927, the Veterans Administration Hospital moved into Bedford, supplanting three farms along Springs Road. In 1941 the State took land for the airport, and in mid-1942 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts leased the Bedford airport to the War Department for use by the Army Air Forces. The 85th Fighter Squadron and the 318th Fighter Squadron, who trained at Bedford on the Curtiss P-40 Warhawk, went on to combat in North Africa and Europe. Later, the base served as a site for testing new radar technology developed by MIT's Radiation Laboratory.

The war brought millions of federal dollars to the area's universities to support the war effort. The resulting successes, such as the perfection of radar, inspired the government to continue the funding of basic research when the war ended. Many small new companies and organizations developed to handle this work. The MITRE Corporation, which began in the computer laboratories of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) during World War II, became a private, not-for-profit company providing engineering and technical guidance for the federal government in 1958. The region saw development of a

**My predecessor, Don Corey, tells me that "Bedford's pig population peaked out in 1950 at 5,150, so that's about when there were finally more people than pigs in Bedford. It dropped rapidly after that: 498 pigs in 1955, 279 in 1960, and 100 in 1965."*

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defense-orientered research complex with strong ties to the academic community such as Lincoln Lab, MITRE, and Draper Labs.

Since 1945, the Army Air Force aimed to continue some of their programs in radar, radio and electronic research, recruiting scientists and engineers to this area. Its new Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratories (AFCRL) took over MIT's test site at Hanscom Field. By 1954, the Air Force's electronic and geophysics laboratories in Cambridge moved to Bedford. As it expanded, southwest Bedford changed forever. In *The Wilderness Yea*rs, Louse K. Brown points out that "hills were bulldozed away, valleys were filled, large stands of pine and oak were cut, and little trout brooks lost in the destruction."

In the following years, these organizations stimulated the development of a multitude of smaller firms, R&D contractors, and specialty hardware manufacturers in the area. Of course, other federal agencies such as NASA, Department of Energy, and The National Institutes of Health became interested in the basic research capabilities available in the region, and the advances in academe have continued to provide ideas for new products, improved processes, and entirely new industries.

The Construction of Route 128

Meanwhile, the construction of the proposed Route 128 begun in the 1930s was accelerated between 1949-1951. By late 1951, Route 128 was complete from Route 9 in Wellesley to Route1 in Lynnfield. Within a few more years, 128 completed its arc around Boston. As the state saw to the completion of the road, businesses were also seeing its potential, and real estate developers were building some of the first modern industrial parks in the nation and purchasing land for housing developments.

The invention of the transistor produced many semiconductor startups in the area, while the region was already a breeding ground for new computer developments. Some of the many companies that boosted employment in the region, such as Raytheon and General Radio, had been inventing and selling products for decades but had grown considerably with wartime spending. They and others were ready when the space race and the Cold War put a premium on technical talent, flocking to MIT and the environs that Route 128 served.

Back to Bedford

Before World War II, just 13% of Americans lived in suburbs. The end of the war in 1945 resulted in a tremendous demand for housing from the returning veterans eager to start families. Nationally, this culminated in the largest building boom in the country's history, and most of it was concentrated in suburbs like Bedford. Although the economy was doing poorly, those veterans that wished to settle down and start a family could do so with more ease, and those who that wanted to continue their education could worry less about the finances because of the GI Bill. For many vets, the bill meant a college education and a solid start in postwar life.

By 1950, Bedford 's population was 7,000; then Route 128 opened on August 16,1951. The first limited-access circumferential highway in the nation, it curved gracefully through acres of open land dotted with pig farms, orchards, and corn fields. The new highway suddenly facilitated an easy commute to MIT and Harvard or to Boston itself. All those skilled professionals had an easy commute to their jobs but could live in the green fields of picketed fence suburbia.

The peaceful green countryside suddenly heard the sound of excavators and hammers and saws. The approximately 100-acre farm owned by the Fitch family was divided into house lots. One of the best farms in town with lush pastures became the Bedford Shopping Center. The farms on Davis Road slowly disappeared. The Bedford Housing Authority, founded in 1948, was instrumental in setting up veterans' housing on the Elm Street Extension. New neighborhoods were built.

With the building of 128, Bedford began to receive an influx of newcomers, who had been drawn to the region's academic institutions and the burgeoning technology and the peaceful small town with good schools. The entire highway was completed to Gloucester in 1958. The construction of

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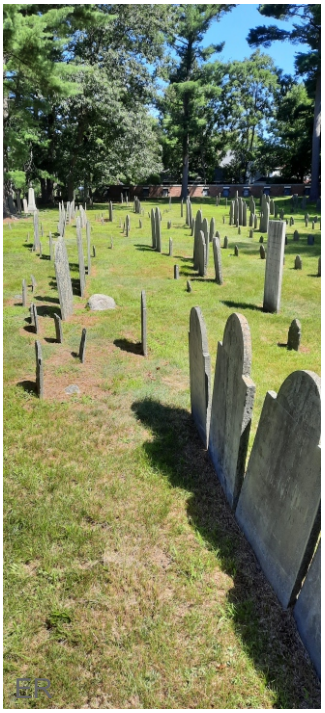
What's Your Favorite Historic Place in Bedford?

Sharon McDonald, Bedford Town Historian

I asked the Bedford Historical Society's Board of Directors if they'd be willing to name their favorite historic spot in Bedford. Here are their answers:



Old Burying Ground

Lee Vorderer, Clerk of the Board. It's the corner of the graveyard on Springs Road. The unmarked graves of the slaves there, opposite the finely carved headstones from the prominent Bedford families of the time, make a statement about power and the impact of lack of power that never fails to remind me how slave owners perceived their property.

Carol Amick, former Clerk of the Board. One of my favorite historic places in Bedford is the Old Burial Ground. I find its history – especially of the old burial chambers and Bedford's slaves - fascinating. The symbols on the gravestones have such interesting meanings. I'm particularly intrigued by the story of the Rev. Samuel Stearns family. After Abigail Stearns was buried in the "new" Shawsheen Cemetery, all the remains of the Stearns family members who were buried in the Old Burial Ground, including their free Black servant, Peter Freeman, were moved to the Shawsheen Cemetery, and the Stearns Tomb at the Old Burial Ground remains empty to this day. Really captivating!

Job Lane Museum

Kara Kerwin, former Administrator of the BHS. I would have to choose the Job Lane house. Perhaps it's because I've spent so much time in the archives with the Lane and Dutton family papers, but those family collections provide such insight to the history of the town. Touring the house can make you feel like you've been transported back in time, and I love the gardens and grounds. Bedford's history was built on families and their farms, so it feels like such a fitting place to reflect on the town's past.

Kristine Moore, Executive Director of the BHS. I think my favorite historic place around Bedford is the Fitch Tavern. I've been interested in the American Revolution and especially the events of April 19th since I was a little kid. When I had the chance to tour the house last year, I felt like I had stepped back in time the moment I stepped into the tavern area, perfectly preserved. Not only that, but I could clearly see the Minutemen awaiting their orders and I could hear Captain Wilson issuing his statement, "It is a cold breakfast, boys, but we'll give the British a hot dinner." Just standing in the tavern, its energy and history were obvious, and I definitely could feel them.

Fitch Tavern - Kitchen

Don Corey – at the stairways of Old Town Hall

Don Corey, Board Chair. Mine has to be Old Town Hall. I was appointed to the Historic Preservation Commission in 1996/1997, and rehabilitation of the Old Town Hall was the first project of that kind that we had undertaken. John Filios, Mimi Adler, Neil Leary, Joe Zellner, and I were on the committee; John was Chair, and I was Project Coordinator. Old Town Hall was still in service and an interesting place while I was a Selectman, but it had fallen into deplorable condition by the 1990s (abandoned by the town for over 10 years). I suppose that rehabilitation was a labor of love for me.

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Jan van Steenwijk, Board Member. I would take the Old Town Hall because we are in the middle of – maybe – again getting a museum in that old building. It was also there that the history of the Bedford Historical Society began. I have plenty of pictures of the interior, and even one of the prison, although without the doors because they were already discarded.

Old Town Hall

Two Brothers Rocks

Sharon McDonald, Town Historian. My favorite is the riverbank site of the Two Brothers Rocks. Their history goes so far back! Huge glacial erratics, they were surely a landmark for thousands of years to Indigenous People traveling the Musketaquid. They (and the little stream nearby) marked the boundary between John Winthrop and Thomas Dudley's 1638 land grants – the beginning of Bedford town. And today, they still stand by the Concord River, a peaceful mile's walk from Dudley Road through conservation land.

Dear Reader: *Have you begun to try to answer the question for yourself? Think about it, and then tell a friend. What is your favorite historic place in Bedford?*

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

Sunday, September 26, 2021

Old Town Hall, 16 South Road, Bedford
7:00 PM - Refreshments 7:30 PM - Announcements & Program

Bedford High School students who competed in National History Day will describe their projects in the **first half** of this program. The students will all receive awards from the Society.

National History Day is an annual initiative designed to promote the teaching and learning of history. For many years, it has been an important milestone for the Junior Class at Bedford High School. It is an exciting way for students to study and learn about historical issues, ideas, people, and events. Students initially participate in the District Competition, with winners attending the State Competition, and winners there attending the National Competition.

The **second half** of the Sept. 26 program will provide a **glimpse of some of the Historical Society's many interesting artifacts and documents and an update on the Society's pending move to the ground floor of Old Town Hall by Don Corey**, long-time Society member and current Chair of the Board of Directors. The program will include some of the most ancient artifacts and some of the most recent additions.

Society to Have New Quarters

Don Corey

From here

to there

At last, the Society will be moving to new quarters, the ground floor, in the Old Town Hall.

In 2017, the Select Board's consultant for the Town Museum recommended that the Society occupy Old Town Hall in 2017, and the 2018 Annual Town Meeting approved funding for rehabilitation of the ground floor to partially achieve this recommendation.

The 2021 Annual Town Meeting approved funding for expansion and rehabilitation of the Police Station, so both the Police Department and the Historical Society will be vacating the building for construction. We anticipate that the move from our severely overcrowded quarters will occur this fall.

The new quarters include an office, a room for archival and artifact storage, and a corridor that also provides access to utility and mechanical rooms. The total area is 1,200 square feet – certainly not big enough to display our wonderful collections but a step in the right direction.

Coincidentally, that is almost the identical amount of space that the Town provided to the Society in 1975 on the ground floor of the Stearns Memorial Library (now the Police Station). In the 46 years since then, the archival and artifact collections have grown substantially, thanks to donations from those concerned with preservation of Bedford's rich history.

BEDFORD DAY, 18 September, 2021

Bedford Day, a fun day for young and old. The Historical Society will once again join in celebrating Bedford Day on September 18, 2021. The Society will have its booth located opposite Town Hall near the food booths.

A blacksmith from Rock Village Forge, Dean Rantz, will be at the booth showing how tools and other objects were made in the "old days". A wide variety of merchandise, including Bedford Flags T-shirts, caps, books, maps, and other items, will also be available for purchase at the booth.

Come and visit us!

E. Ashley Rooney
the Preservationist's
new editor

President's Message

The Society is pleased to welcome Ashley Rooney as new Editor of *The Preservationist.* Ashley is a freelance writer and author who has published numerous coffee table books on a wide range of topics. She lives in Lexington, where she is involved with a number of local organizations including the Lexington Historical Society and the Lexington Field and Garden Club. A former Bedford resident, Ashley is also quite familiar with some of Bedford's history.

Donor/Member Renewal since May of 2021

Claire Anderson
Irma Carter
Todd Crandall: Donation made
in memory of Mary Hellen
Mary Drake
Arthur & Marietta Ellis
Bernard Fuller
Katherine Graff
Mary Hafer
Ken and Caroline Larson
Bedford Motel

October Program

Saturday, Oct. 24th @ 2PM, with a rain date of Sunday Oct. 25th

Just in time for Halloween, Lee Yates will be giving a Cemetery Tour of the Old Burying Ground on Springs Road. *Meet in front of Old Town Hall* to walk over to the Cemetery. More information will be made available as the event gets closer!

Once Upon a Time...

Jan van Steenwijk *Reprinted from our Preservationist, April 2015*

Primitive shoe found in the "ashtray" of the fireplace.

If you have been a member of the Bedford Historical Society long enough, you will remember that old house on the corner of North Road and Carlisle Road built in 1731. It was occupied until the 1970s when it became empty and was boarded up. Years went by; the house deteriorated and slowly became a postal address for creatures other than humans.

Then Ned and Susan Leeming fell in love with it, bought it, dismantled it brick-by-brick, board by board, all carefully numbered, and moved it all to their new property in Harvard, where it was meticulously put together again. During construction, they found many interesting things "hidden" in the walls, under floorboards, etc. One of the first items they found was a pair of primitive shoes left in the far end of the chimney's "ashtray," believed to be left by the bricklayers during the construction of the house. The Leemings donated them to the BHS. The shoes, simple folded leather, were probably made during the era when the shoe industry in Bedford flourished in the early 1900s. Many more artifacts found their way to our archives, thanks to the generosity of Susan and Ned.

AUCTION SALE

Horses, Carriages, Wagons, Harnesses, Blankets, Haying Tools, Farming Tools, etc.

In Bedford, Mass., on

SATURDAY, MARCH 3d, 1906

Farrell

Bedford

Household Furniture

Per Order EDWARD W. FARRELL

IRVING L. HODGDON & CO. - - - - Auctioneers

BEDFORD, MASS.

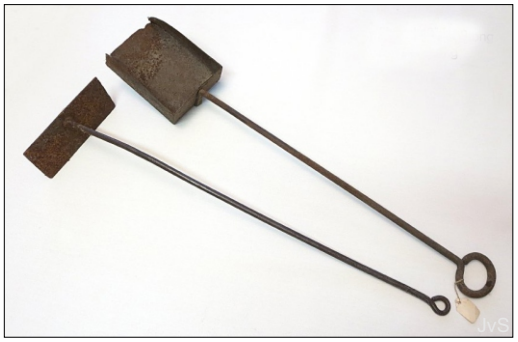
Bedford, February 23, 1906.

Remnants of children shoes

At our last month's lecture, Ned asked me if we would be interested in some more "old stuff. " Just in case my answer was positive (it was), he had brought it in his car's trunk. The results were two large boxes with remnants of many different pieces of wallpaper, some chimney tools, and two dilapidated posters along with other items. One poster printed on February 23, 1906, announced an auction of farm tools by Edward W. Farrell. The other shows remnants of a porcelain plate, a knife with a wooden handle, a handful of buttons, and a needle holder.

Again, we thank Susan and Ned Leeming for their thoughtfulness, their support, and donations. These items tell a story and make a wonderful link to Bedford's past. One day in the future, we hope to be able to display all of them in our own Museum!

Household articles



Fireplace tools

Director's Report

It has been a busy last couple of months in the Bedford Historical Society's Office. With the anticipation of the move to Old Town Hall, volunteer Janet and Executive Director Kristine have been photographing items in the collection that have been previously cataloged but did not have images attached in the Society's Museum Software, PastPerfect. This step will help the preparation for the move go much smoother and benefit the collection and research going forward.

The Bedford Historical Society's Social Media pages are growing! In addition to our Historic House Sunday every other 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 definitely a fan favorite! We have TriCorn Thursday; Flashback Friday has branched out to include other organizations around Bedford such as the Grange, Scouts, Garden Club, etc.; and finally Town Center Saturday. Our social media numbers are steadily increasing, but we'd love more interactions and growth.

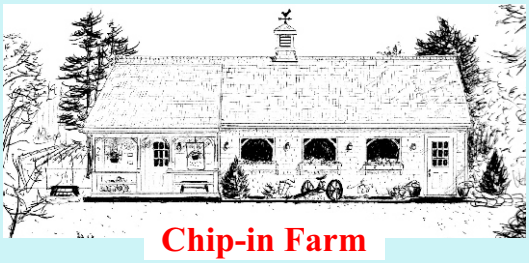
Our partnership with Bedford TV and the Friends of the Job Lane House paid off in a spectacular way. Videographers Matthew and Sid, supervised by Katie Duval of Bedford TV, recorded presentations from Roy Kring, Sharon McDonald, and Jeannette Pothier on the Job Lane House. Roy, Sharon, and Jeannette discussed various aspects of the history of the Job Lane House, the family, and what life was like in the 1700s.The short film was made available to students at the Lane School and is also available on both Bedford TV's YouTube Channel and the Historical Society's. We're hoping to see similar projects in the works going forward, an updated version of the Windshield Bedford Documentary and a longer version of the Job Lane House presentation.

We are still documenting the COVID-19 Pandemic and looking for additions to the Bedford Historical Society Covid-19 Archival Project to document the 2020 Pandemic for future generations. We are so grateful to those families and individuals who have reached out with items! We are still looking for photos from the quarantine, journal entries, memes, schoolwork, etc., for this ongoing project. This way we can tell Bedford's story and solidify its place in history regarding the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic.

Thank you all for your continued support of the Bedford Historical Society, especially over the last year.

Kristine L. Moore, Executive Director

www.chipinfarm.com



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Look for the PayPal "Donate" button on the bottom of our page.

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continued from pg 2 - The impact of Route 128 on Bedford

VA-Hospital Bedford

Route 2 and the widening of Route 128 to eight lanes occurred in the 1960s. The construction of the new Route 3 erased the Wilson Mill beside the lovely Vine Brook falls.

By 1970, Route 128 was no longer just the address of a random scattering of ground-breaking technology companies. It was successful enough to attract a multi-dimensional infrastructure of companies and organizations anxious for business. Entrepreneurs were opening new firms, existing companies were hiring many the economy grew again and again and again.

Attracted by the new start-ups such as Millipore, Thermo Electronic, Itek, and Digital Equipment, highly skilled professionals moved into Bedford. Other scientists and researchers went to work in academia, for the government or other commercial ventures. Bedford not only appealed to prospective residents because of the easy commute but because it was a quiet town with available land compared to the more crowded suburbs such as Newton or Arlington. And the developers seized on that opportunity.

128 Opening day

The postwar exodus to the suburbs was part of a vast reorganization of power and money that affected American business, race relations, and gender roles. Most conflicts in town were now between the newcomers clashing with the long-term residents. The newcomers wanted the bigger library, the newer schools, the sewer systems. As the new citizens became involved in town, the next phase of Bedford history began to develop. □

Mission Statement

The Bedford Historical Society, Inc. is a private non-profit organization founded in 1893. Our mission is to collect, preserve, restore, and protect objects, artifacts, historic buildings and facts relevant to the history of Bedford so that present and future generations may learn about and appreciate the culture and values of Bedford's past. The Society's mission is achieved through instruments such as programs, tours, exhibits, publications, and a future Museum to educate and ignite the curiosity and imagination of its visitors.

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.