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

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

Join Us For Our Next in-Person &Virtual Program

History Students Recognized and Lecture on the Battle of Midway
Sunday, November 21 - *see page 4 for details.*

A Holiday Story

E. Ashley Rooney

Ten years ago in the spring 2011, Massachusetts, as part of its policy to be sure that no one was homeless, began placing homeless families in the Bedford Plaza Hotel. Not every town in the Commonwealth is able to manage such a task, which requires understanding human needs, understanding the role of local government, and setting up a large-scale task force. But Bedford, which certainly is a small town, did so. As Ann Guay says, "some really wonderful things happened as a result of the efforts of many people."

Bedford Plaza Hotel serving Bedford's diversity community

The number of homeless families began with just a few and grew to 90 families from spring 2011 to spring 2016. They ranged from Haitian earthquake victims, Iraq refugees, and families from Dorchester and Fall River. The sheer number involved and the impact on a small community led to many issues such as health care access and emergency runs to local hospitals often with no transportation available to return to Bedford. Families could not cook their own meals. They did not have kitchens in their rooms and refrigeration was limited.

Many of the children returned to their schools, but some went to Bedford Public Schools. The staff worked tirelessly to meet the children's needs (many of whom were not English speakers) and to help their parents understand an unfamiliar school system. Then Assistant Superintendent, Mary Lou Salee states that this work made Bedford a stronger district, exposing the staff to a "greater ethnicity and economic diversity."

Community groups, including local churches and the Bedford Family Connection, arranged early on for members to cook meals for the families. More than 100 people regularly contributed to the Sunday dinners. Providing a meal for families to sit down helped create community, as well as share information about the Bedford community.

In the fall of 2013, Bedford's population was approximately 14,000: its proportional population of homeless families, specifically of children serviced by the school system, was the highest in the state.

State Representative Ken Gordon and former School Superintendent Jon Sills worked with the state to ensure that the number of families who resided in the hotel did not exceed an agreed upon number to ensure educational needs could be met.

Over the five years, Bedford Police, Bedford Public Schools, its Food Pantry, the Health and Recreation Departments, local churches and synagogues helped these families deal with the challenges of living in a hotel in a strange town. Bedford and Lexington congregations responded to the need by feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, and extending fellowship. The Housing Task Force led by Ann Guay, Tina Nappi, and Lisa Sackett worked to uncover hard-to-find skills such as pediatric dentistry, native language speakers, and advocacy.

Bedford Youth & Family Services director Sue Baldauf summarized the many efforts that resulted from the monthly meetings of state and local representatives and the Housing Task Force. These included the purchase of two washers and dryers for the hotel by local churches, the diaper and clothing drives, Charlie card distribution, toddler play and parent support groups, food drives, holiday gifts, occasional parties, preschool music and art classes, shopping trips, drives for school supplies and personal care items, summer lunch program, etc …

Ann Guay points out, "We learned not only about the families but also about ourselves. In theory, we want to help, but when we bring our own expectations to a setting they may not apply. For instance, I noticed there was a young mom who wore the same outfit over and over. We had collected and organized gently used clothing and invited people to come in to choose clothing. I put together some things for her, and she was horrified by what I had selected. My takeaway was that I was giving her what I thought she wanted when I should have asked her what she needed. I later learned that she took great pride in her appearance until the day her former partner burned all of her clothing.“ Then

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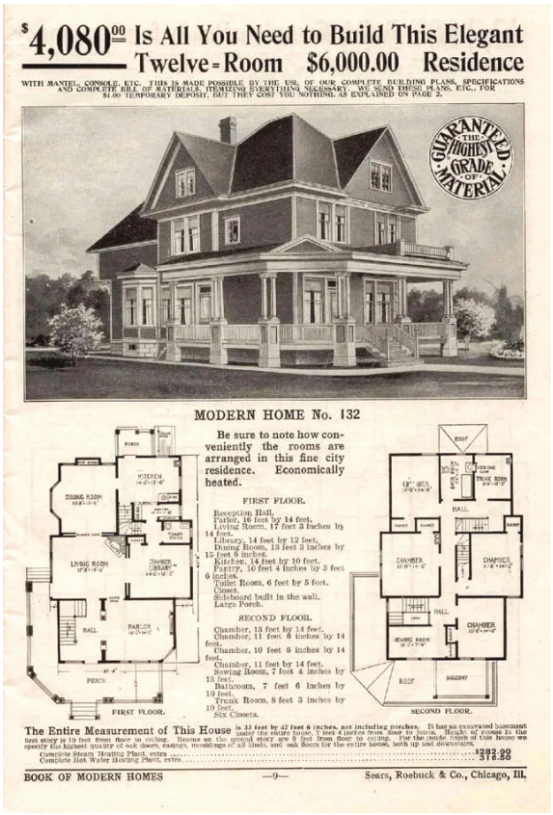
there was the day that Ann was giving out toothbrushes, and one five-year-old boy asked if he could have a second one. He hadn't had one for several months and was afraid he would run out later!

Bedford Family Connection's Sarah Scoville comments, "Christmas giving was particularly tricky. Families in Bedford wanted to give. They wanted to share the giving experience with their kids. However, what we found was that the families at the hotel really wanted gift cards. BORING for the giver, but so empowering to the moms who could get really what they needed and what their kids wanted. We tried to prioritize the hotel families' needs over the givers' wants. We hope it is all about empowering the families to help themselves and feel supported by the community."

Sue Baldauf sums it up: "We did not want to overwhelm these distressed families with too much kindness and generosity, making a transition to a permanent living situation more difficult by inadvertently encouraging unrealistic expectations or dependency. We learned some things through experience and found that providing resources, incentives, and the right kind of support held more meaning for the families, was more respectful of them, and also conserved volunteer time and energy."

The town of Bedford gave a great deal during these five years.

Happy holidays to you all.



The Good Old Days

Jan van Steenwijk

In 2021, when houses sell for millions of dollars, it is hard to imagine that in the 1920s, one could buy a prefabricated, 2-story 1,600 square-foot house that included indoor plumbing, heating, and electrical wiring for a mere $4,500.

It all started in 1906 when Frank W. Kushel, a Sears manager, was given responsibility for the catalog company's unwieldy, unprofitable building materials department. Because Sears mail-order catalogs were in millions of homes, the company had a distinct advantage over many of its competitors when promoting its “order by catalog” Modern Homes.

In 1908, Sears issued its first specialty catalog for houses, Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans, featuring 44 house styles ranging in price from $360–$2,890. The first mail order for a Sears house was filled that year. Sales exploded. As sales grew, Sears expanded its production with shipping and sales offices located across the US. Its ability to mass-produce the materials used in these homes reduced manufacturing costs, which allowed Sears to pass along the savings in lower prices.

Shipped by railroad boxcar, and then usually trucked to a home site, the average Sears Modern Home kit is composed of approximately 25 tons of materials with over 30,000 parts.

We know there were Sears houses built in Bedford and according to Mary Hafer, former president of the Bedford Historical Society, the last home, now demolished, was located at the beginning of Concord Road. If it still existed, it could easily sell for a million dollars! An original Sears House was sold in 2005 for $900.000.

Should any of our readers have more information on Sears houses in Bedford, we would appreciate hearing from you to create a follow-up article.

Bedford's Attic - Continental Currency

Don Corey

The September Historical Society meeting focused on some of the Society's oldest treasures. The meeting was the first hybrid in-person and Zoom presentation by the Society, and despite some initial technical glitches it was well received. The program included tools, clothing, furniture, musical instruments, deeds, plans, and other documents, many dating to and before Bedford's incorporation in 1729. Some date to the mid-1600s.

One of the topics was that of the Society's Continental and Colonial Currency collection. A question regarding issuance and relationship of the various currencies was not fully answered. This hopefully sheds more light on that subject.

A few technical issues were soon solved. From left: Tomas J. Kinzer, Don Corey and Lee Vorderer.

Continental Currency - *FRANKLIN 1/3 DOLLAR*

Massachusetts Currency - *5 SHILLINGS & 6 PENCE*

Massachusetts - *3 DOLLAR NOTE*

The Continental Congress started issuing paper money – known as "Continental Currency" – in 1776 after the start of the Revolution to fund the war effort. Continental Currency was denominated in dollars from $1/6 to $80, including many odd denominations in between. The Society's holdings include a 1776 Seven Dollar banknote and two 1776 One-Third Dollar banknotes. The One-Third Dollar design motifs were among those created by Benjamin Franklin. The obverse features the Sun shining on a sundial, with the Latin motto "Fugio" *(I flee/fly)* and "Mind your business," meaning "time flies, so mind your business." These are also known as Franklin dollars or Fugio Notes.

Individual colonies were simultaneously issuing their own bills of credit – Colonial Currency - to cover their war expenses. Cash in the British Colonies was denominated in pounds, shillings and pence, so Colonial Currency was so denominated during the Revolutionary War. The Society has a 1778 Massachusetts note for One Shilling and Six Pence and a 1779 note for Five Shillings and Six Pence. However, by 1780 Massachusetts notes were issued in Dollars. The Society has three $3 Massachusetts notes. Each has a hole punched in it signifying that it was redeemed by the State with interest paid.

The glut of paper money issued during the war without sound financial revenues soon led to depreciation of all paper money, but especially that of the Continental Congress. Great Britain contributed to this financial instability by flooding the market with counterfeit bills. Benjamin Franklin later wrote:

"The artists they employed performed so well that immense quantities of those counterfeits which issued from the British government…were circulated among the inhabitants of all the states before the fraud was detected."

The situation gave rise to the famous phrase "not worth a continental."

The situation has changed considerably over the years. Continental Currency on eBay is now offered for thousands of dollars and Colonial Currency offered for hundreds of dollars.

A Gift from the Past

Ned and Susan Leeming, the former owners of the Fitch House , once located on Carlisle Road, had taken the house apart brick-by-brick, board-by board, and moved it to the Town of Harvard in the 70s. There it was meticulously put together again. The Leemings recently sold it. As they were preparing for their move, they found this charming, probably 19th century baby's dress in the house. They returned it home to the Bedford Historical Society. The Society appreciates their continuing support over the years.

November Program

Sunday, Nov. 21, 2021 Congregational Church, 25 Great Road, Bedford

2:00 PM – Refreshments 2:15 PM – Announcements & Program

This program is in-person & Zoom, please call our office for the Zoom link.

Bedford High School students who won awards in National History Day will be recognized, receive awards from the Society, and describe their projects in the first portion of this program. **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.

Following the awards, Gresh Lattimore, Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.) will present **"The Battle of Midway – The Turning Point in the War in the Pacific."** That WW2 battle, where the U.S. Navy inflicted devastating damage on the Japanese fleet, has been called "the most stunning and decisive blow in the history of naval warfare." Mr. Lattimore will describe the key elements leading up to the battle, the essential role of intelligence and air power, the command decisions made, and the aftermath of the battle.

Executive Director's report

Things have been busy in the office. After Bedford Day, we had many donations, new members, and renewals to sort through. I took well over 1,000 photos of the setup, parade, and vendors around Bedford Day as well as some videos of the Parade and Dean Rantz, our blacksmith for the day. I will edit these videos, and we will share them on our YouTube Channel soon.

Society Volunteer Janet and I have been working on several projects in preparation for our expected move to Old Town Hall. I was thrilled to have several items mailed to the Society for the Bedford Historical Society's COVID-19 Archival Project. One included a letter that a local elementary student wrote to himself about his experience during the pandemic. This type of documentation will help tell Bedford's story during COVID and will be an irreplaceable historical document decades from now. The pandemic doesn't seem like history, but, like the 1918 Flu before it, someday it will be history. It's vital we document it now while we have the means and opportunity to do so.

Our social media presence continues to climb; "What is it Wednesday " has fast become our most popular Social Media post. I love reading the guesses from visitors to our Facebook Page. The guesses range from serious to fun, and the interaction is delightful.

Kristine L. Moore

www.chipinfarm.com

Chip-in Farm

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Celebrating 76 years of selling the freshest eggs in Bedford!

December Holiday Party - Saturday, Dec. 11, 2021 - 4-6 PM

Come, avoid a potential December snowstorm and join other Bedford Historical Society members at our virtual Holiday Party! Society members Carol Amick and Bill Moonan, who have hosted many years of our holiday parties, will be our hosts. We encourage all partygoers to hoist a cup of holiday cheer and socialize with the other guests.

The party will feature Bill Moonan's short stories about Our Town, an event aptly called, "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me -- It's Bedford History." Of three stories, which is true? Each of you, virtual guests, will get to select one as true. And there will be prizes! Then we'll share a video appropriate to the Holiday Season.

To receive your Zoom invite, please RSVP by December 8 to info@bedfordmahistory.org.

Bedford Day 2021 - a Rousing, Wonderful Event

After so many months of experiencing COVID restrictions, people from all over Bedford came out in force for the Bedford Day parade and fair. Many cheered for our man and woman of the year, Brown and Lois Pulliam; groups marched; children scurried after the tossed candy; and the people cheered.

The fair was busy. So were we! Our booth was located between Bedford TV and Dean Rantz, the Historical Society's blacksmith for the day, who worked on the forge throughout the event. Visitors to the booth bought merchandise, inquired about membership, and talked to Tom Kinzer, our President.

In sum, it was a successful happy event. *Lee Vorderer*

Donations/Renewals/New Members

Anne Dawson
Keegan Hellweg
M.W. Shepley
Veronica Chester
Carol and Steve Jamison
Jim Hagerstrom
Michael Cashman
Stanley Wentworth
Henry Donigan
Jennifer Griffin
Gerald Howell
John Higgins
Ann Swanson
Claire Anderson
Julie Chochrek

You continuing support strengthens our Society - thank you

Holiday Gifts

It's soon time to think about purchasing great gifts for the upcoming Holidays.

Please visit our website to chose from a large variety of Bedford-related items. We are now entering a very busy time as our archives are being moved, but we still want to serve you.

Platter with Bedford Motives

Bedford Flag with Fringe

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We Keep It Alive..!"

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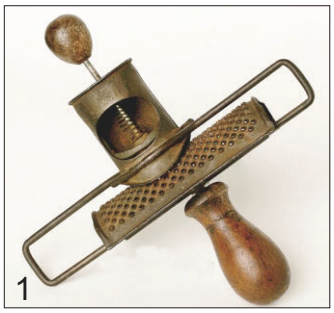
What is It?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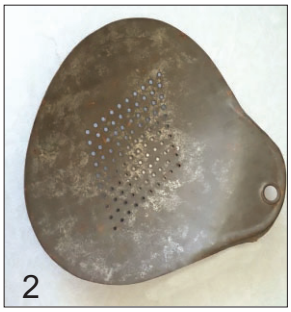
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"What is it Wednesday" is published on Facebook and Instagram every Wednesday around 11 AM. I drop hints or play on words to give clues as to what the Mystery Artifact is and to encourage the "History Detectives" to offer their best guesses. The answer plus a little history, when available, is posted at 7 PM Wednesday night. Once a week I share the object and the answer along with some of the guesses on social media and via our email list on Tuesday afternoons.

It has become a real hit; I believe it is our most popular Social Media campaign – even more favored than the Historic House Tours.

Try to guess before reading the answer below.

1. Metal and wood nutmeg grater
2. Tin scoop with holes, used to skim curds off the top of milk. Purchased in Bedford at local antique store.
3. Metal spring-loaded spoon
4. Spent shell casing, containing the enclosed note: "Brought home from World War I by Dr. A. Pfeiffer, 1918"

Here are a few of the guesses for the objects above:

1: Ye olde colonial Olive Garden parmigiana cheese grater.
2: A ventilated tractor seat for those who dine on Mexican food.
3: Whatever it is, my mother didn't have one.
4: A sorting top hat without the brim.

Kristine Moore

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.