Visit our Exhibitions in the Old Town Hall and learn about the Bedford Flag and other historic relics

The Preservationist

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

February 2025 *Published for everyone interested in our history* Volume 135, Number 1

Exciting new lectures in 2025, always free to anyone!

Carol Amick

Sunday, February 23, 2025, 2-3 PM

Old Town Hall - Great Room (3rd floor)

***"Before Brooklyn:** The Unsung Heroes Who Helped Break Baseball's Color Barrier"*

Our Guest Speaker, **Ted Reinstein**, Channel 5's "Chronicle" reporter, will tell the inspiring story of ordinary, everyday American who did extraordinary things to overturn an historic injustice. They were men and women, black and white. They were baseball players, journalists, Pullman porters, and political leaders with a conscience. They paved the way for Jackie Robinson and achieved a landmark victory. But they've remained largely unknown. *Until now*.

The event is free and open to the public. Reinstein's book, **Before Brooklyn**, is one of five books he has written, frequently using material he researched from his many assignments for "Chronicle," where he has worked since 1997.

Sunday, March 30, 2025, 2-3 PM

Old Town Hall - Great Room (3rd floor)

Peter Coppola - "**Colonial Secrets**: Building a Home in the Colonies." Our speaker, Peter Coppola, will showcase methods by which Bedford's ancestors built their homes. He will bring a number of antique tools to show during his presentation. Coppola has been an active member of the Burlington community, serving on the Burlington Planning Board, the Recreation Commission, and the Historical Commission. His hobby of woodworking evolved into antique tool restoration and furniture reproduction, which led to teaching and lecturing.

Sunday, April 27, 2025, 2-3 PM

Old Town Hall - Great Room (3rd floor)

Sharon McDonald - **"Job Lane's Neighborhood."** Bedford Town Historian and Society President Sharon McDonald presents another in her series of lectures about historical Bedford characters. This presentation begins in 1664, when Job Lane bartered for hundreds of acres of land between the Concord and Shawsheen Rivers and moved his family here. McDonald reveals engaging stories about the 17th century Lane family and their neighbors.

See March Lecture on Page 6

President's Message

Dear Friends –

I am sending you warm greetings from 16 South Road, our Society Museum. What a flurry! The Exhibit Committee is creating a splendid new show. This is our part in the big "America 250," the national celebration of the anniversary of the beginning of the American Revolution. "Bedford Answers the Call" will premiere on April 12, Pole Capping Day, and continue for nine months. Be sure to visit when it's ready!

Best regards –

Sharon McDonald

Mysteries in Nathaniel Page's History

Don Corey

Nathaniel Page (1645?-1692) was among the earliest settlers in Bedford. We know quite a bit about his neighbors Job Lane, Michael Bacon, and some other early Billerica and Concord families. Still, Henry Hazen's History of Billerica and A.E. Brown's History of Bedford have very little information on Nathaniel Page himself. Some vital records, i.e., birth year, marriage year, wife's maiden name, etc., are missing, and facts about his family's English background are very sparse. The Bedford Historical Society's archives contain Page family trees assembled over 100 years ago by descendants that, combined with New England Historic Genealogical Society and other resources, provide conflicting insights into the Page family. Extensive research by Sharon McDonald and DNA testing raises more questions.

The family trees held in the Historical Society archives tell the following story:

A tradition within the family traces its history back to Hugo de Pageham, the son of a feudal baron or knight. In the 13th century, Hugo performed an important mission for Henry III, King of England. He was knighted for his service, and his title became Sir Hugh Page.

Many generations later, so the story goes, a direct descendant, Richard Page (b.1553), married Frances Mudge. Their home was in the London area. Of their ten purported children, three who immigrated to America, are of interest to us:

- Their oldest son, John (b.1585), married Phebe Paine in 1620. They immigrated to America in 1630 in Governor Winthrop's fleet and settled in Watertown. Their son, Samuel (b.1633), married Hannah (Dean) by 1667, and they settled in Concord.
- Another son of interest, Thomas (b.1595), married, and had a son John (b.1629) who immigrated to Virginia. He became prominent there as Col. John Page.
- The greatest interest to us is Richard (b.1589), who married Elmira Whitecliffe in 1635, and they had 6 children. The youngest child was Nathaniel (b.1645). Nathaniel immigrated to America with his brother Nicholas in August 1675 and settled in Boston.

cont. on page 2

Research completed by Sharon McDonald raises questions about the accuracy of the traditional family history:

1. Family tradition said Nathaniel and Nicholas were brothers, but McDonald has not found evidence that they were.
2. Tradition says that Nicholas was born in Plymouth, England; however, church records researched by McDonald show the birth of a Nicholas Paige near Plymouth, England, in 1628, but no parish record of a Nathaniel has been found in or near Plymouth.
3. Y-DNA tests show that the John Page who arrived in Gov. Winthrop's fleet in 1630 is unrelated to Nathaniel Page's line. (The NEHGS Great Migration project suggests that he was "perhaps the John Page, baptized Boxted, Essex, 1586, son of Robert and Susanna (Syckerling) Page."
4. Y-DNA tests do not show a match between Pages in Virginia and Nathaniel Page's line.
5. Nicholas emigrated to Boston and married but had no children, so DNA matching with him is not possible.

The traditional story from the Page family tree continues: Nathaniel returned to England in 1677, where he married Joanna Merriam (b. 1644), a daughter of William Merriam. Their relationship, if any, with the three Merriam brothers who were among Concord's earliest settlers is unknown. Nathaniel's and Joanna's son, Nathaniel2, was born in England in 1679, so they had remained there for several years.

Cyrus Page standing in front of the Page Homestead, c. 1885

My own thoughts:

1. Nathaniel's wife, Joanna, is shown as Joanna Freeman Merriam in some family references. Middle names were not used in that era, but it was a common practice for widows and other women to use their maiden surname followed by their marriage surname. No confirmation has been found, but such wording could occur if Joanna Freeman had married a Merriam and been widowed, thus, a Merriam by marriage, not by birth. If so, her marriage to Nathaniel could have been her second.

2. Evidence of a previous marriage occurs in the birth dates of Joanna's children: Nathaniel and Christopher had two sisters, Elizabeth and Sarah. Family records show Sarah's birth in 1675 and marriage in 1699. Elizabeth's birth date is unknown, but she married in 1698. Sarah's birth predates Nathaniel's and Joanna's marriage; if the girls were born after Nathaniel2 they would only have been teenagers when married. That suggests they may have been Joanna's children from a prior marriage and were older half-sisters.

In 1686, Nathaniel was appointed Marshall or Sheriff of Suffolk County by Gov. Joseph Dudley. He was clearly a prominent citizen. In March 1688, Nathaniel bought the 200-acre former Timothy Brooks farm in Billerica from George Grimes, including houses, barns, etc. Nathaniel died in Boston in April 1692; whether his death at the age of about 47 was due to an accident or illness is unknown. (These last are verifiable by town records.)

Nathaniel Page's family history remains a mystery.

If you are a male with the Page surname, consider taking a Y-DNA test through FamilyTreeDNA. Your DNA may help trace the male ancestors of Nathaniel Page!

The 250th Anniversary of April 19, 1775

By Gene Kalb

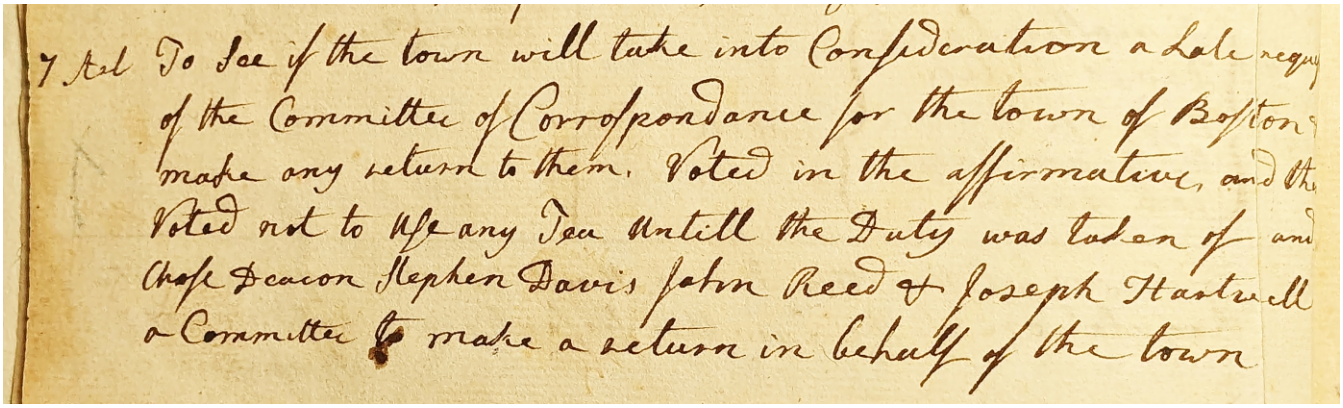
This spring will mark the Semiquincentennial — the 250th anniversary — of the events of April 19, 1775. On that day, the fomenting American Revolution finally exploded. You would be correct to say the war began in Bedford's backyard. Nearly all of Bedford's able-bodied men were involved in that first conflict. For this article, let's look at what was happening here in Bedford before "the shot heard round the world" was fired.

While it's easy to imagine Massachusetts Bay Colony as a quiet pastoral setting with farmers working the land, we know that surviving in those times was no small feat. In addition, there was the long, fierce, and bloody struggle among the English, the Native Americans, and the French to have control of America. According to the "Annotated History of the Town of Bedford," twenty-six Bedford residents participated in six wars between 1675 and 1775. Notable names on the muster rolls include Job Lane, Thompson Maxwell, Jonathan Willson, Eleazer Davis, Nathaniel Page, and Zachariah Fitch.

The cost of the French and Indian Wars was a major factor in what led to the Revolution. To pay for the war, the British imposed a wildly unpopular series of taxes on the colonies. Bedford Town joined the protest. In March of 1768, Bedford voted to "concur with the vote of Boston October, last, to encourage the produce and manufacture of the Province"; that is, to use homemade materials and not rely on imported British goods.

The protest and boycotts led to the December 1773 Boston Tea Party; Bedford-born Thompson Maxwell took part. The following March, Bedford Town Meeting voted "not to use any tea till the duty is off." *See original text below:*

Photo © Jan van Steenwijk


7 Artl To See if the town will take into Consideration a Lett[er] requ[est]
of the Committee of Correspondance for the town of Boston
make any return to them. Voted in the affirmative, and the
Voted not to Use any Tea Untill the Duty was taken of and
Chose Deacon Stephen Davis John Reed & Joseph Hartwell
a Committee to make a return in behalf of the town

Copy of the original text from the Selectmen Meeting, March 1773.
(General Book B,1773-1811,Town of Bedford Archives)

In June of 1774, the British closed the Port of Boston. This effected a stranglehold on the colony. The bell on the Bedford Common pealed, sounding the alarm to the town. Later that month, Bedford chose representatives to the Committee of Correspondence, a network of patriots working in opposition to the British government. When dissident leaders created an independent provisional government, Bedford sent four delegates. This Provincial Congress sent out the request that towns upgrade their militias. Some soldiers would receive special training and compensation for supplies. Those would become the Minutemen. By late March of 1775, the Bedford Minutemen and Militia were ready for action. Before dawn on April 19th, they were called.

To learn more of the story, visit the Bedford Historical Society's new exhibit, "Bedford Answers the Call," which will open in April.

We are grateful to all our members and donors who have renewed their memberships and have contributed to our Annual Appeal. Your generous donations and membership dues support our mission to discover, preserve, and share stories and artifacts from Bedford's history. Your contributions also support our work to develop exciting new exhibits, present interesting programs, provide educational programs for Bedford students, and offer internship opportunities for local college students.

If you haven't had a chance to renew your annual membership or contribute to the Annual Appeal, there's still time! You can mail a check to our office at 16 South Road, Bedford, MA 01730, or use a debit or credit card by clicking on the "Donate" button on our website at www.bedfordmahistory.org

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Jan van Steenwijk & Barbara Hitchcock
Alethea Yates & Lee Walus
Linda Young

In each issue of *The Preservationist* we publish the names of recent contributors. This list includes donors and membership renewals received before this issue went to print in early January.

Sandra L. Duffy

Introducing the Society's Board Members

Jan van Steenwijk

They keep the wheels turning. Our Board Members are responsible for ensuring all parts of its business function. They have diverse insights and control of all aspects of the organization. No, they do not sit all day long in the office checking everything that happens. That is our Executive Administrator, Sandy Duffy. On average, the Board will meet bimonthly. One of the standard items on the agenda is the Society's financial status. Other committees report on the museum's exhibitions, merchandise, and advertising and programs. Several times a year, we provide free lectures of historical interest, sometimes about Bedford yet, other times, lecturers will tell us about specific historical events. Being a Board Member is a huge responsibility, and it is always a volunteer position.

The 2024-2025 members shown here have diverse backgrounds and a genuine interest in the Bedford Historical Society.

The Society is always looking for people interested in being active members who can volunteer at various events, such as our yearly participation on Bedford Day. Spreading knowledge about this historic town gives one insight into what happened before our time and helps us collect information for the future.

If you would like to volunteer, contact President Sharon McDonald at: **info@bedfordmahistory.org**.

Carol Amick, Retired State Senator, Former CEO Goodwill Industries.

Joan Gicca, Board Member

Frank Gicca, Board Member

Gene Kalb, Lifelong Entrepreneur, Writer

Tom Kinzer, Board Member

John Linz, Engineer, Fincom member, Assessor, Amateur Genealogist

Julie McCay Turner, Co-founder The Bedford Citizen, Member Bedford Cultural Council

Sharon McDonald, Librarian, Author, Storyteller, and current President.

William Moonan, Board Member

Paul Purchia, Retired Entrepreneur, Veteran, Painter, Challenged Golfer.

Rick Reed, Retired Town Manager, Grandfather, Traveler.

Jan van Steenwijk, Former president Chamber of Commerce and Bedford Historical Society, Producer Preservationist.

Lee Vorderer, Teacher, Cook, Quilter.

Other Additional Board Members:
Kara Kerwin,
Jane Puffer
(pic. not available)

The
OLD TOWN HALL
16 South Road

The Bedford History Museum

www.bedfordmahistory.org

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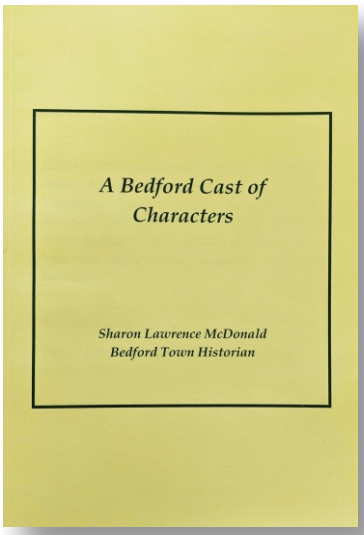
"A Bedford Cast of Characters"

Lee Vorderer



Sharon McDonald, Town Historian and President of our Society, has a new book out. Entitled *A Bedford Cast of Characters*, it introduces a dozen of the quirky people from Bedford's 18th and 19th century history that Sharon knows well. In this wonderful little book you can meet…

- **A scoundrel** - Jeremiah Blood, leader of a gang of thieves who operated in Bedford
- **A cheat** – Miriam Fitch, who tricked several gentlemen into a cellar beneath her husband's mill and ran off with their money
- **A free man** – Jefferree Hartwell, sold at the age of five as a slave to Joseph Hartwell
- **A pianist** – Ann Eliza Porter, who fell in love and followed her husband Joseph into the wilds of Wisconsin
- **A property developer** - Mary Alzina Hartwell Fletcher, who inherited a 50-acre farm in the center of Bedford

Some questions are answered (why is there a cow path in front of the Library and High School?); some myths are debunked (what kinds of charms did the "witch" cast?); and a very different picture of Bedford emerges (separate from minutemen fighting the British). *A Bedford Cast of Characters* was published with support from the Bedford Historical Society, and all profits go to the organization. It is available for $17 at the Historical Society office or at our monthly programs.

lectures, continued from page 1

Sunday, May 18, 2025: Musicians Al Petty and Deirdre Sweeney perform "Colonial Dance Tunes and Love Songs."Dressed in the clothes of 18th Century itinerant musicians, Sweeney and Petty will perform tunes from their extensive repertoire including 18th century tunes such as "Mr. Isaac's Maggot" and "Jack's Health." Their instruments include the flute, penny whistle, recorder and fife. The music was gathered from manuscripts printed between the 17th and 19th centuries and arranged in counterpoint. (A brief Annual Meeting of the Society will convene before the program.)

Mass Cultural Council
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