

A Short History of the Bedford Museum

In 1912 the students at the “Stone Jug” School House posed outside for their class picture. They would be the last students to attend classes there since the building was built in 1829. The increase in cars and traffic on the main road that ran alongside the school had made it too noisy and dangerous for the children. In addition, the community had outgrown the one room and a two room school house was built in a quieter location at the corner of Court and Seminary Roads, near where the current Bedford Village Elementary School is located.

The school had barely shut its doors when the women of the Bedford Agassiz Society decided it would be the perfect location for a museum of local history. The women had scoured Bedford Village attics and trunks to borrow or acquire the objects that would become their museum’s attractions. In 1913, the tiny school house building was opened as the “Bedford Museum” to waves of visitors. The North Westchester Times reported, “Abandoned as a school house because it could not comfortably accommodate a score of pupils, the new museum was stormed by two hundred and fifty visitors the first day.” Inside the tiny building were all variety of relics and curiosities from times past, including a pair of Revolutionary War era iron tongs, billed as the “Tongs that Killed a Man.”

In 1916 a group of townspeople purchased the 1806 Methodist Church now known as Historical Hall to save it from being converted to a tenement building. That group became the first directors of The Bedford Historical Society. In 1918, the Society assumed responsibility for the Bedford Museum and has cared for the collections ever since.

Over the years the Society continued to acquire scores of objects, photographs and historic documents from local residents. In 1970, the contents of the museum were moved to the second level of the restored 1787 Court House and placed into more modern museum settings designed by Lino Lipinsky, former site manager at the John Jay Homestead. For the next 38 years the museum was visited by many but the exhibits remained largely unchanged.

In 2008, with the assistance of a Collections Assessment Program grant from Heritage Preservation, the Bedford Historical Society committed to refreshing the museum with new exhibits and interpretive panels to augment visitors’ experience. A full-time curator was hired and together with professional conservators, interns and other staff, the earlier exhibits were uninstalled, all the objects cleaned, the cases and walls painted and new exhibits were installed. The Museum is a work in progress, still retaining some of the earlier explanatory panels but all the objects have been safely reinstalled or stored for future display.