



*Bedford
Historical
Society* 

P.O. Box 491, Bedford, New York 10506

The Bedford Historian

December 2003

Voices from the Past: Oral Histories Project Begins

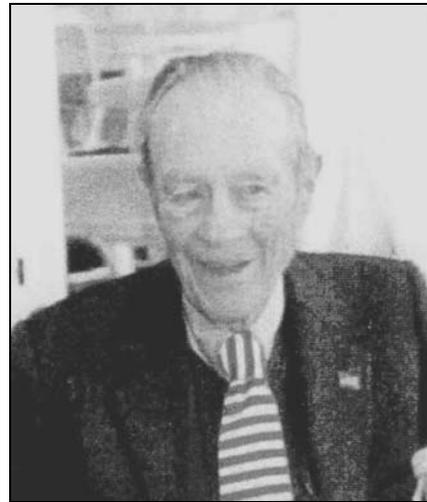
Town Historian, Historical Society and
Volunteers collaborate on collecting stories

Our Town Historian, John Stockbridge, embarked on a project to collect oral histories from long time residents. The project began with a meeting at the offices of the Bedford Historical Society and included people who would have the collective memory to make a list – a list of people to be interviewed, people who could tell the stories of their lives and memories of life in Bedford. We wanted stories would shed light on the history of Bedford from many perspectives. A list was made and it keeps growing. To date, twenty interviews have been made, recorded and transcribed and then edited by the interviewee to assure accuracy. Included here is an excerpt from the interview with Volney (Turk) Righter and Sue McMahon, and an excerpt from a group interview with Bill Banks, Millie Mullaney, Eileen Powell, Whitey, Joe Progreske and John Stockbridge.

Turk Righter on Prohibition

Sue: “Tell me about prohibition.”

Turk: “Oh, prohibition! Did any of you ever live during prohibition times? No. Prohibition came in 1919 when America had 2 million boys in the trenches fighting. And the anti-saloon league, which had already had prohibition in certain states like Alabama, were deathly afraid that the blacks would get drunk and do something wrong. So they willingly did that. So this wasn't too bad because the adjacent state did not have any problems. So you had to drop to the border or your friend would drive to the border. So everybody had all the booze they wanted, but it wasn't convenient and easy to pick up. So the anti-saloon league.... And you remember Cary Nation always had an ax. She had her picture in the paper walking into saloons and beating the... chopping, at the bar with an ax. So this was World War I when these young kids



Volney “Turk” Righter

obviously weren't going to vote for this type of thing. So obviously, the boys had been doing a little drinking in France when they were over there. And they came back here with great disappointment. And so the early days of prohibition were very crude. The business had not been organized - the gangsters weren't running this. If you were rich you could get some booze that had been dropped on the beach along Long Island someplace. But that was expensive stuff and sort of unreliable when the next shipment would come through. So the alcohol business got going very nicely. And a lot of people seemed to know how to make alcohol. And I was working in New York and out here. So I quickly learned how to get a five gallon can of alcohol. And you got it for how much money I don't know.... \$15 or \$20 I think. And then it came with this rope around it. And I remember picking this thing up from my fingers and almost losing my fingers on the way to Grand Central Station. And then I got it on the train. Then I had to get it off the train. Then I had to lift it in my car. And then weekends I would take it over to Bernie Till who lived at Round Hill in Greenwich. He and I are old, old friends. He had a beautiful cellar with new tubs. So we dumped the alcohol, and distilled water. I forgot the names of all the things we put in there. Glycerin and the red rooster Martini



Oral Histories Work Group

Lloyd Cox, John Stockbridge, Amy Hunter, Sue McMahon

drops - 25 cents. So you would have \$20 or \$30 worth of all this stuff. And then 25 cents went in to make it into real Gordon's Gin. Well, it was not much of a success. Then we would bottle it. And then we would sell it. Bernie Till and I were not two smart businessmen. But our costs with a fake label was 90 cents. And so we sold it to our friends for a dollar. And that didn't even pay for the gasoline. We were the most successful bootleggers around, but we were not making any money.

Sue: So you were the basis for social life in Bedford because you had the booze?

Turk: Right. We were very popular.

John: What kind of car did you have?

Turk: I had a very, very old La Salle that had belonged to my in-laws. It was a wonderful old car. It had been in the barn for about 10 years. I never got the smell of the barn out of it. But the thing ran and it was a great pleasure to have this."

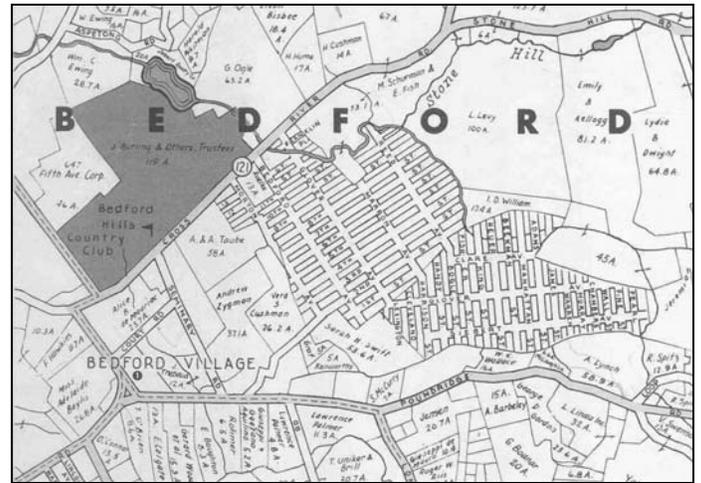
Bill Banks & Millie Mullaney: the development at Indian Hill

Millie: Does anybody know anything about the land on Indian Hill Road that was given away with soap wrappers? People used to send in soap wrappers and get a plot 10 by 20 or something.

John: Millie, this was in the Town's plans before the 1930's where there was to be a huge residential development

with streets lined up as if you were in Manhattan. I am hoping it was the Depression that cancelled all their plans, because Indian Hill would have looked just like Yonkers. But I don't remember the soap wrappers.

Bill: The soap wrapper part of it was that some soap company sponsored trips to the country. They must have been involved with individuals, somehow, in the ownership of the land. But they would give the coupons away when you bought the soap. And they would invite you to come up and see their new area which they hoped to develop. And they had a bus that would meet you at the train in Bedford Hills, I understand, and someplace where they stayed overnight, but I don't know that part of it. And a lot of the people from the City would come up here. It didn't cost you much to put some money down. They had sold out a lot of these lots. But because it was so far away, very few got around to developing the lots. And the way to get here, pretty much, was by railroad. You still had to get from the railroad to Bedford Village. In the 1890's when this started, cars were one per thousand people, probably. So there was no way to get around. And as a result, there were tax liens sold on these places. The tax liens were never paid. The Town foreclosed



and other people bought the tax liens. There was a mish mash of title work in clearing this place up. It was a lawyers' delight, I'll tell you that. I was involved in several of them during the 50's, when it was obvious that most of these people had disappeared. There were foreclosures going on to try to clear up this whole mess that was there. The Town cooperated in the sense that they foreclosed the streets. Because the streets were on the maps and they were public rights-of-way that would create difficulty where the mortgagees would be involved. Most purchasers didn't want to get involved. So the Town - I think under Supervisor Euendahl at the time - began the foreclosures. That cleared up the lots pretty well. With 4-acre zoning in effect since 1947, one had to combine about 60 lots for a conforming lot, since each parcel was 25' by 100'. I think the last one that was involved in this was Bill Carlebach. The road he lived on was Jingle Lane. He cleared up a lot of it.

Which by the way, during the 30's and 40's was part of Indian Hill. There was a cabin in there used by the Boys Scouts for overnights. That is what I remember about the area."

The oral histories project is still in the collecting phase. Transcripts of completed histories are in the offices of the Town Historian and the Bedford Historical Society. No plans have been made as yet to publish the histories but all options are being explored.

Why is this date important?

July 11, 2004

New York State and specifically the Hudson River Valley was a critical area during the Revolutionary War, especially in the year 1779. Throughout New York, important battles and strategies furthered the efforts of the colonists toward freedom. The summer of 2004 marks the 225th anniversary of those revolutionary events and many communities will be celebrating and commemorating the events of that year that are a part of their history.

Bedford is among those communities. **Sunday, July 11, 2004** is the 225th anniversary of the burning of Bedford Village by the British. To recognize this important date in our history, the Bedford Historical Society is in the process of planning an event. We encourage your ideas and participation and will keep you posted.



Col. James M. Johnson in costume

New Acquisitions

J. Farrington, Briarcliff, NY

- Colored Postcard, Bedford Road, Bedford Station, NY postmarked 1903
- B & W postcard, Entrance to NYS Reformatory, Bedford, NY, postmarked 1910
- Colored Postcard, Publis School #7, Bedford Station, NY, postmarked 1911 (now St. Mattias Church)

Monica Croft

- Pamphlet entitled "Sewing, Book 6" by Ruth Wyeth Spears, © 1940 Bedford Hills, NY

Sally Dinan

- Original invoice for repairs at the North Castle School from John McCabe & Son, Bedford, June 15, 1916, found in a house on Middle Patent Road during renovation in 1964

David Wray

- Pen & Ink Drawing of the Bedford Post Office by Barbara Wilson, framed

Elizabeth Hoffman

- Suggestions on Home Nursing, Ellen Morris Wood, published by the District Nursing Association of Northern Westchester County, 1903

Annual Meeting

*The American Revolution
in the Hudson River Valley, 1778*

James M. Johnson, Col, U.S. Army, retired

On April 8, 2003 the 86th Annual Meeting was held. Originally scheduled for March 6, the meeting had been postponed due to snow. The guest speaker for the evening was Col. James M. Johnson, military historian. A graduate of the United States Military Academy, with post graduate degrees from Duke University, The U.S. College of Naval Warfare and The Naval War College, he is currently a visiting Professor at Marist College. His topic, "The American Revolution in the Hudson River Valley, 1778", dramatically illustrated how important the New York area was during the Revolutionary War. Dressed in the full uniform of a Private in the Fifth New York Regiment, he brought to life the history of this area and showed the price communities like ours paid in wartime. His informative talk helped us better understand, not only the Revolutionary War, but also other wars, including the Civil and Iraq Wars. His excellent presentation initiated a lively question and answer session after his talk.



Linda de Menocal

Three Cheers for Linda

Linda de Menocal served on the board of the Bedford Historical Society for 12 years. She was secretary from 1993 to 1996 and president from 1999 to 2002. Linda led the Bedford Historical Society to a new level. Through her dedication and determination, we have redefined our mission and recommitted to an active presence in the town. The wheels are in motion for the further protection and preservation of Bedford and especially the Village Green. Much work has been done behind the scenes and the fruits of those efforts may never be recognized.

Linda's commitment to the revitalization of the original settlement can be seen in our involvement with the Town government in resolving the parking problems and in encouraging retail and service oriented establishments in town. It can also be seen in our collaboration with the Library and the Fire Department.

Her direction has led us to streamline our financial and administrative systems to increase efficiency and accountability. We have implemented a planned maintenance schedule for the care of all our buildings so that they remain structurally sound, historically correct and aesthetically pleasing.

These are just a few highlights of the past four years and they might not have come to pass had she not kept such a diligent and watchful eye on our activities. We hope she will consider returning to the Board at some time in the future and in the meantime know that her straightforward manner, her leadership and her great vision will be sorely missed.

THANK YOU LINDA



Building Preservation & Maintenance

Since our last newsletter, the following major work has been performed:

General Store

- New storm & screen door, new screens on windows
- Interior painting of second floor space
- Replacement of rotten window sill

Jackson House

- Painting of front porch and columns

Historical Hall

- Installation of fence to shield dumpster from street
- Complete painting of exterior including restoration of shutters
- New room darkening shades
- Replacement of one air conditioning unit

Lounsbury Building

- Painting of front porch

Post Office

- Installation of new handicapped ramp
- Painting of ramp and porch
- Removal of two trees in back

1787 Court House

- New custom made screen doors for front doors
- Restoration of both Jail cell windows

All Buildings

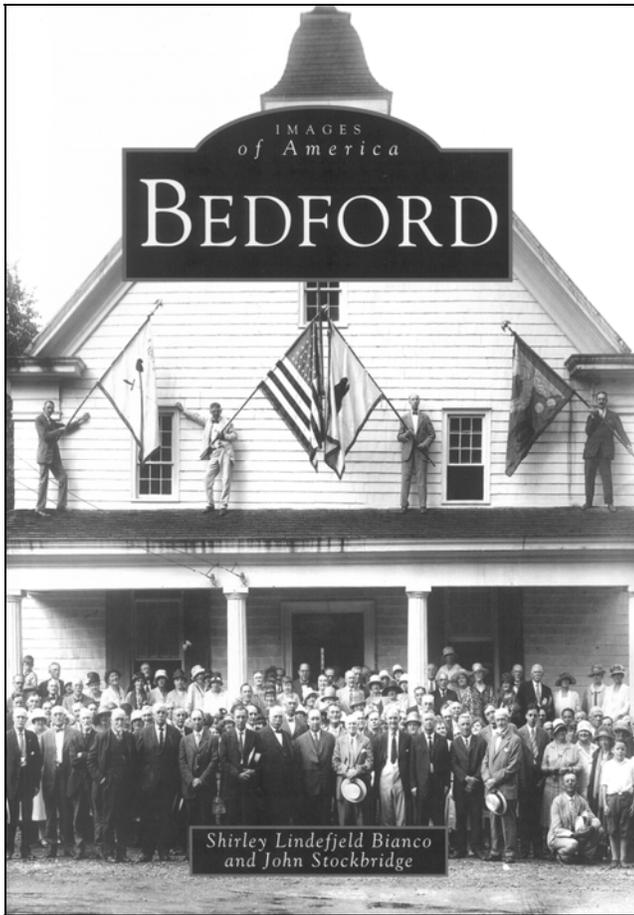
- Replacement of Fire Protection systems
- Installation of security at select buildings

Thank you to our School Tour Volunteers

Each year, we host local school children for a two hour inter-active tour at our historic sites. A lesson at the 1829 School House, a mock trial at the 1787 Court House and exploring artifacts through the centuries comprise our tours. Without the commitment of volunteers, this would not be possible. Thank you so much.

**Lloyd B. Cox, Linda de Menocal, Selby Ehrlich,
Ted Kovacic, Buff Lovell, Judy Mayberry,
Donna Marino, Nancy McVicar, Sallie Mundy,
Jane Padwee, Jim Woods.**

We would like to expand the number of tours we offer but we need more help. If you would like to help with our tours, please call the office.



Images of America:
Bedford

By Shirley Lindefield Bianco and John Stockbridge

The history of Bedford
told through vintage photographs.

Available Now

Signed copies available at the office
\$19.99

This will make a wonderful holiday gift.



SPECIAL THANK YOU

A very special thank you to Mary Farley Carnabuci for working many tireless hours to put our financials in order and get us fully Quickbook-ed!

Upcoming Events

March, 2004 – Annual Meeting

Spring 2004 – Local Artist’s Show
at Historical Hall

**July 11, 2004 – 225th Anniversary of
The Burning of Bedford**
Details to follow

October 16 & 17, 2004 – Annual Antiques Show

November 19-21, 2004 – Costume Exhibit
Details to follow

Grant Received

A grant was received from the Westchester Community Foundation at the request of Gretchen Jordan and Peter Menzies for general support. Thank you very much.

Law Day, May 1, 2003



The Law Day “Cast”

Bedford resident and attorney, Peter Mahler, in conjunction with the Bedford Historical Society, planned a special event at the Bedford 1787 Court House for the fifth grade from BVES in celebration of Law Day, May 1st. Judge George Sirignano, Town of Bedford judge presided while students from Fox Lane High School dramatized a “moot” court in which evidence and arguments on both sides were presented to the court and to the fifth grade jurors. The students then divided into small juries to decide the fate of young Jack Robinson. The day was very successful and educational and we hope to do it every year.



Rico Ascenzi

Rico Ascenzi stands outside the Bedford Historical Society office after shoveling the walk during one of last winter's blizzards. Rico is a lifelong resident of Bedford and carefully tends to the repair and maintenance of the Historical Society's buildings. "Handyman" is a term too limiting for the many services and projects that Rico cheerfully undertakes for the Society. In the office are two large pieces of Bedford Quartz mined by Rico's father who worked in the Kinkle Quarry on Middle Patent Road.

Historic Districts

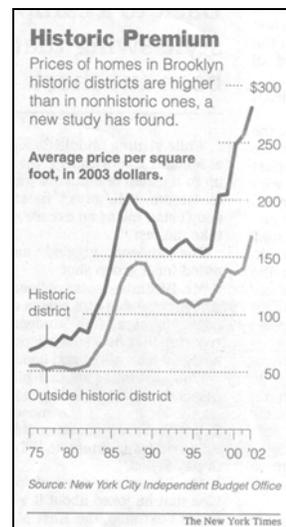
Living in an historic district can have its advantages. According to the chart on the right and its accompanying article in a September 26, 2003 New York Times, home values are enhanced by historic-district designation. The town of Bedford has two historic districts, one in Bedford Village and one in Katonah. The town has also formed a commission as per the Master plan to preserve structures and roads not within an historic district.

Bedford Historical Society
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Bedford, NY 10506
(914) 234-9751 – (fax) (914) 234-5461 – E-mail:
bedhist@bestweb.net
www.bedfordhistoricalsociety.org
Hours: Monday – Friday 9:30 – 5:30
Museum Hours: Thursday-Saturday 11 am to 2 pm,
May-November or by appointment

No Fire in Historical Hall

Thanks to the swift response of the **Bedford Village Volunteer Fire Department**, there was no fire in Historical Hall this year. While working in the storage area in the attic, Historical Society Board member, Jackie Farrell, and Executive Director, Lynne Ryan, smelled the smell of burning electric. Not taking any chances, they phoned the fire department. Within minutes, fire department members were inspecting every nook and cranny using infrared technology to look for heat behind walls. The source was finally discovered in the motor of one of the air-conditioning air-handlers. Electricity to the motor was shut off and a service technician called for repair.

Relief was the primary emotion felt after the discovery and gratitude for the quick and thorough action of our dedicated volunteers. In 1976, an electrical fire did start at Historical Hall and much of the building was damaged but again, thanks to our fire department, the building was saved and is enjoyed by many residents and visitors alike. There is simply no way to say thank you enough.



The Bedford Historian

Bedford Historical Society Board Members & Staff

The Bedford Historian is published by the **Bedford Historical Society**. The purpose of the newsletter is to publish articles of interest to the membership as well as to inform them of the activities of the Society.

The Bedford Historical Society was founded in 1916 with express intent of saving the 1806 Methodist Church, now Historical Hall, from being turned into a tenement. Our mission is "To discover, locate and preserve places and buildings of historical and antiquarian interest in the Town of Bedford, to discover, procure and preserve objects of like interest and whatever may relate to the natural, literary and civil history of the said Town, to establish and maintain collections of such objects, to erect and maintain historical monuments, tablets and boundaries, to stimulate and encourage interest in such work and to further all efforts looking towards the accomplishment of the aforesaid purposes or either of them."

To that end the Historical Society either owns or maintains the following properties: Historical Hall, "Little Jug" School House, Bedford Free Library, Jackson House, Post Office, Lounsbury Building, Court House, General Store, Sutton Clock Tower and two acres which protect The Bedford Oak – as well as holding five historical conservation easements.

The Society operates a local history museum on the second floor of the 1787 Court House, the 19th century one-room school house on the Village Green and houses other collections including Native American Artifacts and photographic archives in our offices.

Jeffrey C. Tweedy – Chairman
Shirley L. Bianco – President
Peter R. Ehrlich – Vice President
Jaclin B. Farrell – Secretary
Nancy B. Borner – Treasurer

Benjamin C. Branch, Jr.
Dina Clason
Keith Kroeger
Walter D. McVicar
Peter T. Michaelis
Eric S. Reimer
Missy B. Renwick
Dookie E. Tingue
Nancy M. Vincent
Linda B. Wilson

Lloyd B. Cox, Jr.
Director Emeritus

John Stockbridge
Town Historian

Lynne Ryan
Executive Director

Shirley Jordan
Bookkeeper

Americo Ascenzi
Building Superintendent

A note from the Executive Director:

Membership in the Bedford Historical Society is available to any and all who share an interest in the Town of Bedford and its heritage. Our mission is clearly stated above and for the past 86 years successive boards and members have worked to preserve the Village Green; acquire, restore and maintain our historic buildings; and educate students of all ages through lectures, tours and our museums. We are so grateful for the support of all our members. Without you, our mission cannot be accomplished. In the coming year, we have plans for new programs and special events. We hope to expand our education program and reach students beyond our local area. We also have a long list of projects to care for and improve the conditions of all our buildings. If you have not already joined the Bedford Historical Society, we encourage you to do so and become an active participant in the activities of the society and the preservation of this unique town.





The Lounsbery Building, 1906

formerly the Store of Harry W. Smith, later the Atlantic and Pacific Company
and now home to The Horse Connection and the Bedford Historical Society

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Bedford, NY 10506

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