

# BEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## *stories*

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### Our Oldest "Citizen"

*The Historical Society does more than just protect and preserve  
the land surrounding The Bedford Oak*



*Internationally acclaimed photographer William Abranowicz is supporting the Historical Society by creating a series of photographs of our properties. Here he talks about making his first photo for the series which was of the Bedford Oak.*

We tell our members, "You make everything we do possible." When you read the story of how The Bedford Oak was protected from encroaching development over 40 years ago, you'll understand the long

history of preservation that originated in this community and how members have made everything possible from the beginning!

More than 100 years ago residents saved Historical Hall from development and created the Historical Society. The Society went on to protect The Bedford Oak, keep the Post Office from moving out of the Village, help create the historic district, acquire and maintain the landmark buildings in the Village, preserve the historic character of the Bedford Village and more.

As we continue our preservation and education efforts we wanted to share the journey with the community through a series of videos and photographs. Above is a short video shot by Jamie Edgar of [Hound Dog Media](#). The photo [William Abranowicz](#) shot of The Bedford Oak is featured below and a series of prints will be available in 2022.

***To thank our members for "making everything we do possible" we've sent you a postcard with a black and white version of the photo and a [chance to win](#) a serving board hand-crafted from a limb dropped by The Oak in 2013. Because we depend on you, please [renew your membership](#) or make an additional [donation](#) this year to support our preservation and education efforts. Thank you for your continued support.***

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## Long Live The Bedford Oak ~ c.1500



Photographed by William Abranowicz 2021

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A majestic and venerable white oak tree, "Quercus alba" stands at the corner of Hook Road and the old Bedford Road - now Cantitoe Street. It is estimated to be over 500 years old, its girth is more than 30 feet, and the spread of its branches is 120 feet from tip to tip. White oaks are among the longest lived trees, sometimes reaching 700 or 800 years.

The great tree has been a part of residents' life from Bedford's earliest days when 22 men from Stamford laid out the Village in



stands to the Town of Bedford in memory of his wife, Georgia Squiers Whitman.

During all of its long life the great Oak has stood tall and solitary - undisturbed by the activities of man or nature. All that changed in 1977 when 30 acres of neighboring land were sold to a builder who planned to

develop the property. Building one or more houses near the Oak would change the environment that nourishes it. The stream that feeds its roots would be diverted or eliminated, and pollution from sewage could poison its system. More than that, the tranquility that surrounds the great tree would be disturbed. The Bedford Oak needed help - in a hurry.

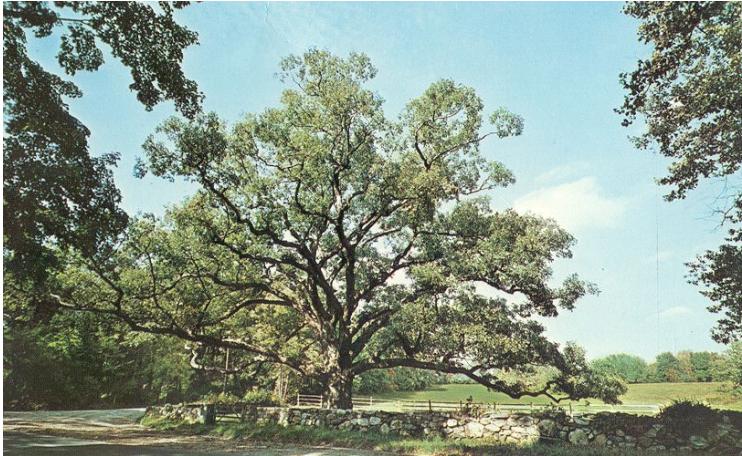


Fortunately help was not far away. The first to come to the rescue was A. Douglass Hall, President of the Bedford Historical Society. He conceived the plan of raising enough money to buy the land surrounding the Oak and thus prevent the encroachment by houses. He secured pledges from Bedford citizens that would lead to a general fund to save the oak but couldn't act quickly enough.

On May 8, 1977, Mrs. George C. Sharp was returning to her home

When surveyors were planning the route of the Harlem Railroad, legend has it that Mr. Smith, who owned the land, told them: "It is all right to survey, but if the railroad touches that oak tree, it can't come through here." The old Oak has stood fast in its corner through all the changes. In 1942, Harold Whitman deeded the ground on which the tree

from a meeting at Westmoreland Sanctuary when she noticed a bulldozer parked on the land behind the tree, ready to begin excavation for a house. Alarmed, Mrs. Sharp called the developer immediately, outlined her concern and made a proposal: Would he sell enough land - two acres - to give the tree breathing space and protect it from harm. The builder was sympathetic. Yes, he would, for a price - \$38,000. Without knowing where she would get the money, Mrs. Sharp then asked whether the builder would withhold the land from sale if she were to put up an option of \$5,000.



He said he would grant such an option for six weeks. With the help of several friends Mrs. Sharp quickly found the \$5,000 and gained the time needed to raise an additional \$33,000. The next step was to find a way to make the contributions tax-deductible. The Bedford Historical Society was not only

willing to receive contributions to protect the tree but also mounted a campaign to raise the money.

A committee of 30 was formed to *Save The Bedford Oak*. The campaign was energetic and the enthusiasm was equaled only by the response from the community. The *Patent Trader* provided a wealth of publicity - free of charge. News stories, pictures, editorials and appeals alerted townspeople to the threat to the Oak. The radio station WVIP broadcast announcements over a period of days. The garden clubs all swung into action: the Bedford Garden Club, the Rusticus Club, the Hopp Ground Garden Club and the Green Acres Garden Club all made generous contributions and members were active in the drive. Most of the merchants and business establishments in Bedford Village and Bedford Hills and many in Mount Kisco supported the effort. In addition contributions were received from the Bedford Association, Bedford Village Chowder and Marching Society, the Nathan Clark Ancient Fife and Drum Corps, the Bedford Village Chamber of Commerce and the Pound Ridge Land Conservancy.



Fritz and Billy Mitchell waiting for school bus under the Oak

Perhaps the most heart-warming response was from individual citizens, who showed their love for their Oak and their community. In all, 426 contributions, including those that had been pledged to Mr. Hall, were made - ranging from \$1 to \$2,500. And they were made in time! The drive to save the Oak raised \$51,000. The vital land was conveyed to the Bedford Historical Society on June 20, 1977. After costs and expenses, \$11,000 remained in the fund. This sum was held in reserve and has been used for expenses to preserve and beautify the land that belongs now and forever to the Bedford Oak. Each year, the field is mowed only once to keep the meadow a safe habitat for wildflowers and wildlife. The area under the tree itself is left alone to maintain the tree's health and feed its roots.

The great Bedford Oak stands tall and proud and alone as it has always stood throughout its long and remarkable life. It will give shade and beauty and long rich memories to all who live in the community. The Oak is a reminder that the people of Bedford value

and cherish their heritage.



From the Bedford Historical Society archives and edited from the booklet at The Bedford Store, *Long Live The Bedford Oak*.

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## BOARD FROM THE BEDFORD OAK LIMB DROP

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If you have any story ideas or memories you'd like to share, please contact us at [info@bhsny.org](mailto:info@bhsny.org).

Bedford Stories is made possible by the support of our members and fundraisers. Please support us by [renewing your annual membership, joining or making a donation](#). Thank you.