

# BEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY *stories*

November 2020 - Bedford Stories - Vol. 63

## **Sutton Clock Repair in the Works**

As you may know, a few weeks ago, the 1879 Sutton Clock suffered serious damage to one of its gears and cable. During the winding process of the time drum, the click didn't properly engage and this malfunction led to a number of the teeth on the ratchet gear sheering off and the cable snapping.

We spoke to several clock repair firms around the country and all agreed that we need to disassemble the entire clockworks to remove the ratchet wheel from the drum, have a new wheel created and then machine cut to exactly replicate the old ratchet piece. After this is completed, they will reassemble the clockworks and it will operate and look exactly as it has for the last 100+ years.

After reviewing multiple bids, we chose Essence of Time for the repair. They came to Bedford last week to disassemble the works and take the parts back to their shop in Lockport, NY. During this process we also discovered a damaged pulley that will need to be replaced and significant damage to the weightbox which will also need replacement. We are videotaping the process for our archives and to help the Clock Winders in the future. We will share the video when it is available.

While we are always prepared for repair and maintenance issues for all of the properties we preserve, this would have been a large expense to us in a year when revenues are down drastically due to the pandemic. Thanks to the generous support of our members and the community, the entire cost of the repair of the clock is covered!

*On this day in 1984 the Bedford Historical Society signed a 99 year lease with the Town of Bedford to care for the Sutton Clock & Tower. We preserve this unique Bedford landmark and 9 other properties with the support of our members. If you'd like to donate to help maintain all the historic landmarks we preserve, please visit our [website](#). You make everything we do possible!*



Broken ratchet wheel and drum removed for repair



Clock frame and gears to be cleaned on site



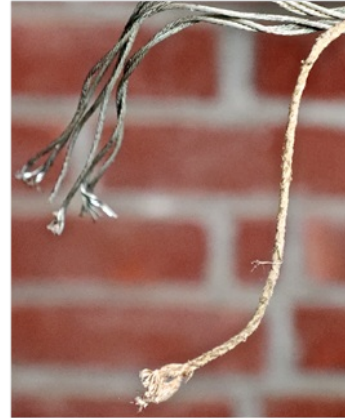
Clock parts to be cleaned and examined for wear



Damaged pulley discovered during disassembly



Damaged weight box to be repaired



Snapped steel cable with hemp rope to retain oil

## The 1879 Sutton Clock

*A timeless testament of love*

The Sutton Clock & Tower stands at the corner of Guard Hill and Succabone Roads and chimes on the hour thanks to a group of Clock Winders who take turns winding it.

The clock was constructed by the E. Howard Clock Company of Boston and was purchased by arts dealer James F. Sutton for his wife Florence Macy of Macy's Department Store fame. Legend has it that Mr. Sutton took his bride out to the red-and-green Victorian mansion in 1879 when there were cows, crickets and little else in



Bedford. Mrs. Sutton was homesick for New York City and told her husband the thing she missed most was the sound of

the Grace Church bells. To please his wife, Mr. Sutton had a clock installed in the cupola of their barn. The chimes matched the sound of the bells of that Lower Manhattan church.

The Suttons' clock survived a fire in 1907 and was stored in a carriage house until Mrs. Sutton's death. When the house was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer Wilson III, they dismantled the barn but preserved the clock and donated it to the community in 1939. A group of 50 residents raised \$3,000 to remount the clock in a new brick tower which was designed by Fredrick M. Godwin of Katonah and erected by the builders O'Brien and Kinkel. The tower and its 30 x 40 foot plot of land were then donated to the Town of Bedford.



Everyone in the community lived on that clock according to the late Wilhelmine Waller. "We went to bed by it, we cooked our meals by it. We did everything by it. It was almost like the Angelus in the Catholic countries, she added."

Until World War II the clock was wound each week by the Bedford police patrol. After the war the task of cranking it up was taken on by Craig Whitney, who lived nearby and performed the task for the next 20 years. In 1964, Mr.

Whitney enlisted others to help him - until he moved in 1978. Since then, the number of clock winders has grown to 12 and Vincent Morrow is now the Head Clock Winder.

It is a huge clock, an E. Howard time and strike model with a 550-pound bell. The actual clock has no mainspring; it is a pendulum clock, a mechanical timepiece that has been around since 1657, when it revolutionized clockmaking with its accuracy. Like a grandfather clock, the clock and chime at the Sutton Tower are driven by two sets of falling weights, which must be cranked up the tower by a pulley system. The swing of the pendulum controls the movement of the hands and the movement of the anchor escapement mechanism, which controls the rate at which the weights fall. The tower clock's weights are simply stones and rocks in boxes.



MUSIC: TREVOR MURPHY



While not the Sutton Clock, this is a similar  
E. Howard Time & Strike model at work

Throughout its long life, the clock and tower have proven to be amazingly resilient. In 1929 a new set of Roman numerals and minute marks covered in gold leaf were added. In 1956 a new mahogany pendulum rod was installed to replace one broken by vandals. The only major repair occurred in 1958 when it cost the Town \$1400 to have the entire clock dismantled, taken to New York and overhauled. It was then reassembled back in the tower again. The clock survived an initiative in 1957 to have it electrified and a movement to suspend the chimes in the early 1960s.

In 1984, the Historical Society began leasing the tower and maintains the clock for the benefit of the Town. The clock is accurate to this day and has outlived the company that manufactured it, the E. Howard Company of Boston.

Today 12 families - one for each month - volunteer their time to climb the ladder into the tower and wind the Sutton Clock to keep it chiming across the fields and neighborhood.

Compiled from our archives, a May/June 2013 [TownVibe Bedford article](#), a "[Keeping Time in Bedford](#)" article in the *New York Times* and a compilation by Kurt Harrison, former Head Clock Winder.



Aerial photos by Peter T. Michaelis

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