

Then and Now

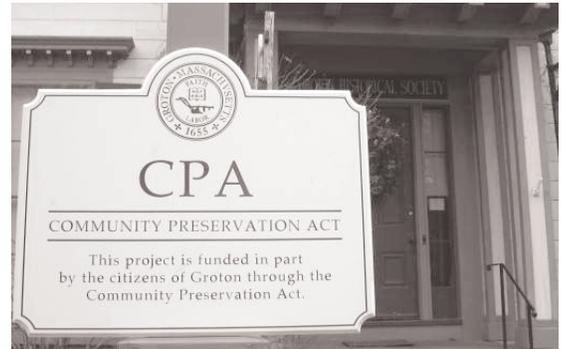
Volume 13, Number 1

February 2012

Repairing Boutwell House Step 2: Getting Construction Underway

*Alvin B. Collins, Project Manager
Boutwell House Rehabilitation Project*

Funding for this work comes from a CPA Grant of \$176, 525, awarded at Town Meeting in April 2011, and a grant of \$79,000 from the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund, presented by Governor Deval Patrick to the Historical Society at Tower Hill Botanic Garden on November 17, 2011. These state grants are provided by the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund, a program of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, administered through a collaborative arrangement between MassDevelopment and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which support building projects for nonprofit arts, heritage, and science organizations across the Commonwealth. GHS is one of only 54 cultural organizations statewide that received a grant this year to support repairs, improvements, and expansions. The State grant, says John Ott, GHS president, "will allow us to install a fire suppression system for Boutwell House, as well as a new furnace for energy conservation."



CPA sign sits proudly outside Boutwell House. Photo by Al Collins

The Boutwell House rehabilitation project is off to a great start. All of the preplanning has led to a smooth transition into the construction phase of the project, and with approval from the Historic Districts Commission, we have proceeded with most of the exterior items needing to be completed before cold weather arrived. Before work could commence permits had to be secured, and with the aid of Groton's Building Department, we have been able to secure all the permits required.

The Carriage House was the focus of our first piece of construction with both the rear roof and cupola roof being reshingled. The rear roof has been leaking for some time now, which has led to many sheets of roof sheathing rotting and in need of replacement. Along the sides and rear of the building, squirrels had chewed through the soffits and fascia boards to get inside out of the weather. Luckily, most of the nesting occurred within the soffits and was easy to remove as part of the replacement process. Since a lot of wood was replaced on both the cupola and the exterior of the building, the building will need to be repainted, which can probably be done in

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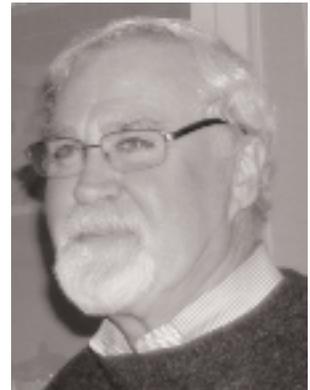
2 Main Street View/Reexamining The Past

When one thinks of a local historical society the words *insight*, *foresight*, and *delight* might not reflect the perception people carry of our small organization. Yet one of the responsibilities the Groton Historical Society carries is the obligation to remind its citizens, or those who do business in our community, of our town's past and its connection to the present.

During the past year in Groton people's lives have been altered by a variety of events and circumstances that are now a matter of record, but it is those varied and sometimes less than pleasant circumstances that give us our history and show the public character of our community. Over time citizens come and go, buildings come and go, yet the town remains with new faces and modern spaces replacing the old. It is good to occasionally reexamine the past to see where we have been and what we still have--and have responsibility for--that is truly important to the character of Groton. The record of the past written by people who cared just as much then as we do today about our town should not be lost or overlooked as time moves on.

So I quote a few poignant paragraphs of our town's history, from a letter written by William Lawrence to General Charles Bancroft on July 4th, 1905, on the occasion of the 250th Anniversary celebration of the settlement of Groton and printed in a pamphlet of Addresses delivered that day: Not being able to attend the celebration, Lawrence writes, "... with the scenes and people of Groton are bound up many of my happiest memories and associations. . . . The handsome face and kind heart of Aunt Eliza Green and the smell of her pies still seem to linger about her home as I pass it on my visits to Groton. . . . In the last 25 years the town has steadily improved in appearance. In fact if I might, how much more beautiful the town may be if every citizen would do his part toward making his paths, his barn and shed as neat, simple and attractive as possible. It is not so much a question of money as a desire to put a little thought and work into village improvements."

Lawrence goes on to say, "Groton has a history so great that it should stand to all who pass through it as a model Massachusetts village. Grateful for what the men and women have done in the past we should do our part toward the town, the Church and the nation in the future."



If we now 106 years later could take these words to heart and determine what each of us, either alone or together, can do to answer this seeming challenge, think what we might accomplish to make our town memorable to all who pass through daily.

The Historical Society is already renovating the Governor Boutwell House with the money from its citizens' CPA grant. Now with an additional award of \$79,000 from the Massachusetts Cultural Council's Cultural Facilities Fund for fire suppression and a new heating system, our hope is that by our look and from the smells emanating from our restored kitchen, with its 1890's Magic Hub Cook Stove, that the pleasant smells of Aunt Eliza's pies or bread can once again fill the air in this village, reminding everyone of what in one small way makes Groton home and this town ours, warts and all.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John H. Ott".

John H. Ott
President, GHS
February 2012

Visit us, Write us, Call us, Email us

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the spring as part of the CPA-funded project.

On the main house roof, work took place to help extend the life of the existing roof. Shingles were replaced and repaired as needed, chimney flashings were inspected and repaired, and a new roof hatch cover was fabricated out of a composite material that should never rot. All of the soffit dentals on the front and back of the house have been secured with special fasteners since most of the existing fasteners had been compromised due to age and many dentals were separating from the roof structure. Fascia and soffit boards that had come loose were also resecured with screws rather than nails, which should allow for many years with little maintenance.

While work on the Carriage House was taking place, Society members moved all of the collections that were housed within the soon-to-be construction zone to other areas in the main house for protection [see Packing up the China, on this page]. The moving allowed members to re-evaluate collections including the cataloging of items not formerly cataloged, the packing of some items deemed for storage, and the discovery of items that had been previously stored. The rear of the main house on both the first and second floors has been sealed off to minimize any dust infiltration that could occur during demolition and the reconstruction of bathroom areas.

New Kitchen Chimney, Other Masonry Work

In years past, the kitchen chimney had been taken down to



*New kitchen chimney under construction.
Photo by Al Collins*

the roofline and needed to be reconstructed in order to make the kitchen functional again. We were able to reconstruct the chimney according to the design on the 1894 plans prepared for the renovations to the rear portion of the house when Boutwell's Library was added. Happily, we discovered the chimney had been clay-lined at some point in time, and this allowed us to reconstruct the chimney to make it operational by today's building codes. As part of the chimney rehabilitation, we opened up the original baking oven and found pieces of the old kitchen wood burning stove inside. To make the new chimney truly operable, the

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Packing up the China

Bobbie Spiegelman, Curator

Regular visitors to the Boutwell House over the decades of operation might have noticed various displays of china located throughout its rooms--displays tucked into niches off the dining room or behind glass cabinet doors in the butler's pantry or even eclectically situated in the Toy Room on the second floor. The array of china may have even gone unnoticed, but once the Board had the mandate to prepare the rooms for renovation, the collection of hundreds of pieces loomed rather large as the prospect of protecting every item became a priority (see photo).

With piles of flattened boxes, wrapping paper, packing tape, and Sharpie markers in hand, Mike Roberts, Liz Strachan, and I handled each delicate object carefully as the three of us packed up and amended our catalog to reflect the temporary changes. We were very fortunate to have the services of Marty Dudek, a colleague of Mike's and an expert appraiser of china, through this process. We welcome his input as a new member of our Collections



Photo by C. David Gordon

Committee as we tackle the challenge of how best to highlight this aspect of our holdings in the near future.

The end result: 28 boxes filled with these precious items. As demanding as this project was to complete, it was an important step in appreciating the extent of this aspect of our collection.

4 *Construction Underway* continued from page 3

plan is to add a kitchen wood stove with a steel fire pan below it to protect the floor from falling embers.

The brick masons worked on repointing both the interior and exterior of the stone foundation, which has tightened up the house from both water and critter infiltration. The masons also reconstructed the portion of the foundation below the kitchen pantry, closing up the old bulkhead that led down into the basement at one time. Gutters have been added in various places to keep water runoff away from the house in an effort to make the basement drier. Round-style seamless gutters with corrugated downspouts have been used to keep in style with the era of the house while contributing to less maintenance over time.

Walls Come Down, Electrical Service Goes Under

Demolition of the kitchen bathroom, the two rear storage closets and the second-floor bathroom have now been completed. The new accessible bathroom on the first floor has been framed as well as the new second-floor office bathroom. Framing has also been put up to block in door openings that will no longer be used and eventually plastered over. The “door to nowhere” at the base of the attic stairs has been reopened and will serve as access into the new rear office/research area. By doing this, the small fireplace room to the right rear of the main house can be used as a very nice display room linked to the old front office room through the connecting closet.

Electricity upgrades will allow us to add outlets and lighting that will show off collections and operate office equipment. The foundation of these upgrades will be a new underground electric service from the street to the house. We were able to bury conduit piping just before the temperatures plunged into winter weather solidifying the ground. Two additional lengths of conduit were laid in the electric trench for future phone and cable wires as part of a

plan to rid the house of all overhead wires. Laying extra conduit is typical with underground electric upgrades, but additional funding will be needed to finalize this work. In the spring the driveway will be re-graded along with more soil added against the foundation to aid in rainwater runoff.

The outside of the house is buttoned up for the winter with interior work ready to proceed. Plumbers have been touring the house to determine the work necessary to upgrade all of the plumbing. A kitchen soapstone sink will be installed on the wall against the butler’s pantry and the handicap-accessible bathroom will be installed within the confines of the two rear storage closets. A new half bathroom will open into the old second-floor former apartment kitchen, which will become the new main office area. We are working with the fire department and sprinkler system companies to determine the best sprinkler system to protect the house in case of fire. In years past the belief was that a halon fire suppression system was the best system for a museum but it is now believed that a wet-type system better serves the collections, the budget, and the environment.

As work moves on, it will be important for Society members to determine exactly how Boutwell House will be used in the future. The way each room is to be used will determine what electrical and other needs must be provided for to attain optimum use so that the collections can be prominently displayed and enjoyed by all.

This series of articles by Al Collins detailing the Boutwell House Rehabilitation Project will continue in upcoming newsletters. See “Repairing Boutwell House--Step 1: Plan of Work” in the October 2011 newsletter for a comprehensive description of the planning and advance preparation that had to be in place before renovations could begin.



Optimism Sets Tone of 2011 Annual Meeting

Liz Strachan, Clerk

The Society’s Annual Meeting was finally held on November 13, 2011, after a freak October nor’easter made it impossible to meet on the originally scheduled October date. President John Ott gave his end-of-year report, officers and directors were elected, Michael Roberts presented the Society’s 10-year plan for strategic growth, and a lively discussion amongst all attendees followed.

John noted that the Community Preservation

Commission grant (of \$176,525) and the recently awarded Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Grant (of \$79,000) will together help restore the infrastructure of the Boutwell House and make it more weather and fire resistant and more secure. Despite these awards, many financial challenges remain. There is the need for a paid assistant to perform needed office work and make the Boutwell House accessible to researchers and other visitors; also the Society’s wonderful collection of artifacts and other materials related to Groton’s history need to be properly cared for

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and displayed. Because of these and many other needs, a fundraising effort will begin soon, led by Anna Eliot and a paid professional.

Officers elected at the meeting are John Ott, President; C. David Gordon, Vice President; Michael Flynn, Treasurer; and Liz Strachan, Clerk. Newly elected to the Board of Directors as member at large is Barbara Murray, who will serve as newsletter editor and who, along with David Gordon, will have the special assignment of creating new publications in keeping with the Society's mission. Appointed earlier to serve as Advisors to the GHS Board are Al Collins, CPA Project Manager; Valerie Jenkins and Ed Strachan helping with finances; and Ray Lyons, Counsel.

Organizational changes made earlier include a new Governance Committee, chaired by Liz Strachan, charged with updating the Society's Bylaws and reviewing the responsibilities of each standing committee. Also new is the Development Committee, chaired by Anna Eliot, and the Long-Range Planning committee, chaired by Michael Roberts. Directors who chair other standing committees are

Peter Benedict, Membership; Tom Callahan, Programs; Bonnie Carter, Publicity; David Gordon, Publications; Kris Kramer, Buildings and Grounds; Lili Ott, Hospitality; Bobbie Spiegelman, Curatorial/Collections; and Liz Strachan, Nominating Committee.

The Society's Long-Range Plan, created over the past year by Michael Roberts and his planning committee, sets forth the steps to achieve a vision for the Society as a vibrant organization actively engaging our community and beyond and fully realizing our mission. The current draft of the Plan, with goals for one year, five years, and ten years out, is posted on www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org, the Society website.

The attendees at this year's Annual Meeting exchanged many good ideas for upcoming programs and discussed ways to connect with and be more open to the community, including young people, and to take leadership in preserving Groton's landscape and town center. The gathering was held at Legion Hall on Hollis Street.



Happy Crowd Attends Nate Nutting Mill Site Program

Judy Adams, GHS Volunteer

On October 16, 2011, the Groton Historical Society celebrated Archaeology Month by sponsoring a walk to the Nate Nutting Mill Site off Indian Hill Road. Because our town was settled so early in New England history, and because it has largely remained out beyond the burgeoning development of the metropolitan area, there are many hidden remnants of that early settlement, such as the artifacts of the Nutting sawmill.

About 50 people came to this GHS program on a beautiful fall Sunday afternoon, gathering in a field on Indian Hill Road owned by Camilla and Arthur Blackman to look at a display of old pictures of Nate Nutting and his house, recent photos taken at the mill site, drawings detailing the operation of a water-powered sawmill, and a copy of a *NY Times* article describing a murder on that site on May 16, 1887, attributed to Nate Nutting. GHS member Judy Adams retold the story to the group, citing Virginia May's book *Groton Plantation*, in which May reports that Nutting killed a man in defense of himself and his property. Under pressure from the townsfolk, he was eventually let off with a verdict of justifiable homicide.

Visiting archaeologist Martin Dudek shared his knowledge of early sawmills before leading his enthusiastic audience on a short hike to the site.

There had recently been heavy rains, and water was rushing down the old stone-lined sluiceway built to serve the mill. Usually there is so little flow in this stream that it's hard to imagine enough water power to turn a wheel, suggesting that the mill was probably seasonal. While nothing is left of the old mill structure, large foundation stones are still in place as well as a huge jumble of rocks that probably supported the mill itself and the wheel. A large gear wheel lies in the brush alongside. The Nutting house foundation, overgrown with saplings, is nearby. Bricks from its fallen chimney are in the leaf mulch along with bits and pieces of household glass, pottery and metal.

Drawing on his 19 years of experience directing excavations at Native American and historic sites in New England, Marty described what the mill site would have looked like 125 years ago. He answered many questions and told the group that, due to the extensive remains, the Nate Nutting Mill Site might well qualify for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Fortunately the land is now conserved as Blackman Woods. The Walk in the Woods program ended with refreshments back at the field, including GHS Program Chair Tom Callahan's signature treat, homemade ice cream—pumpkin flavor this time.



6 Board Retreat Envisions Future of GHS

C. David Gordon, GHS Vice President

Every one of the Groton Historical Society officers and Board members participated in the day-long retreat held in the Parish House at First Parish Church of Groton on November 9, 2011. President John Ott established the topics of discussion, and professional mediator Sue Lotz deftly kept us on target. As we shared our thoughts in one big circle, breaking only for buffet lunch in the same room, we gained a clearer sense of purpose for the Society and made plans for how to help the Society move forward while Boutwell House is undergoing renovations and is closed to the public.

Lotz asked us each to tell the others: “What excites you about the Groton Historical Society?” Some spoke of having an opportunity here to discover historical materials and stories. Others found it exciting to be able to share with others the history they have discovered, adding that the organization has the potential to enhance that sharing. “Once we figure out how to use our collection, people will be overwhelmed with what we have,” President John Ott said.

Hopes for GHS Five Years From Now

Sharing our hopes for what the Society might have accomplished by 2017, five years from now, we envisioned seeing changes like these:

- Boutwell House will be in operation and “look great.” It will be a community center, a beehive of activity, with new displays bringing people back again and again and interesting programs yielding large attendance – all made known by timely publicity.
- A small staff of paid professionals will oversee day-to-day operations, but a growing cadre of volunteers will carry out much of the planned activities. More people will be participating in researching history and collecting oral histories as well as helping with visitors and planning programs and displays.
- The Society will run a battle reenactment once every five years.
- School classes will come here to get connected with local history and a few students will return to become research associates.
- We will have tied in with other historical resources in town such as the public library and with historical organizations in surrounding communities.
- People can connect via the Internet with historical materials and programs in other resource spots as well as in the Society’s own collection.
- New GHS publications are on the horizon, with preparation underway to update the *Groton at 350* book of

the town’s history and possibly adding a supplement to it every decade.

- Extensive renovations will be made to the existing carriage house to provide adequate space for meetings, sufficient space for displaying large equipment in our collection, or new space for an extensive exhibit devoted to agriculture.
- A grateful public will have donated funds not only for operations but also to establish a “healthy” trust fund.

Input on the Long-Range Plan

Discussion of hopes for the future brought out some that might be added to the Society’s new Long-Range Plan--adding property to the Society’s holding, perhaps not all located contiguous to Boutwell House; adding an administration and governance section, with an organizational chart and a plan for professional administration of the Society; adding provision for a volunteers program with its own coordinator; setting up a mechanism to establish coordination with other organizations and other historical societies and planning joint programs. Curator Bobbie Spiegelman suggested that provision needs to be made too about “the way we get money [and] how to write grants.”

Reconfiguring Boutwell House

Next on the Retreat agenda was tackling the huge task of working out “how to arrange, utilize, and manage Boutwell House to best tell Groton’s story and to serve our members and the visiting public.” We looked at floor plans for each of Boutwell House’s four stories and considered uses for rooms and heard about structural considerations that will determine what can or cannot be done in a certain area.

All agreed that the new public entrance to the building would be at the side porch. Tentatively, the red [drawing] room could become an orientation room for visitors and the smaller front parlor a room for displays. The kitchen, a natural center of life, and the dining room could be restored to their former uses. The first floor of the former apartment would offer a staff entrance and room for a handicapped-accessible bathroom. Other space needs are for a publications room and retail store.

On the second floor, restoration is needed in the Grant Bedroom, Governor Boutwell’s office (most recently used as an administrative office), and his library (previously the former apartment’s kitchen). New office and research space, as well as a staff kitchenette and bathroom will be carved out of that former apartment area also. Other small rooms on this level could be used for displays.

The Board Retreat ended with many questions still unanswered but with enthusiasm running high for the future of GHS.

A Sad End to the Groton Inn

This is an addendum to Deborah Johnson’s “Story of the Groton Inn,” which appeared in the October 2011 issue of this newsletter. Johnson’s account began with the bad news that the Groton Inn succumbed to fire on the night of August 2, 2011, and ended with the order of demolition issued to owner George Pergantis by Groton Building Inspector Milton Kinney on August 22, 2011. By presstime in October, we did not know if the order would be carried out. Now we do. The inn has been razed and the site completely cleared. Debris was trucked to Maine for disposal.

The demolition order called for the owner to “demolish the building and cause the immediate area to be leveled to conform to adjacent grades with inorganic fill.” Pergantis applied for a demolition permit on September 1, saying (as quoted in the August 9 *Boston Globe*), “I’m going to demolish everything. I’m not going to keep it. Every time I see it, I cry.” He hired local contractor Brian Lagasse of Lagasse Trucking to remove all traces of the heavily damaged structure. Demolition began on October 28 and was completed by November 4. The cellar hole was filled in and the site leveled according to the town’s demolition requirements (see photo).

Efforts of concerned citizens to modify the demolition order and to salvage part of the building were of no



Photo by Barbara Murray

avail. The chain link fence around the site has been removed, and we are painfully reminded that a grand and gracious witness to our town’s historic past has been lost.



Board of Directors 2011-2012

(and committee assignments)

- John H. Ott, President
- C. David Gordon, Vice President,
also Publications
- Michael F. Flynn, Treasurer
- Elizabeth Strachan, Clerk,
also Nominating/Governance

- Peter Benedict, Membership
- Tom Callahan, Programs
- Bonnie Carter, Publicity
- Anna Eliot, Development
- Kristin S. Kramer, Buildings & Grounds
- Barbara Murray, Newsletter
- Lili Ott, Hospitality
- Michael Roberts, Long-Range Planning
- Bobbie Spiegelman, Curator/Collections

Advisors to the Board

- Alvin Collins, CPA Project Manager
- Valerie Jenkins and Ed Strachan, Finance
- Ray Lyons, Counsel

Membership Form

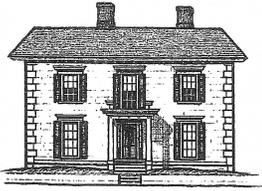
| | |
|--|----------|
| Annual Member-individual or family | \$35 |
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| Corporate Sponsor | \$250 |
| Sustaining Member | \$1,000 |
| Additional Tax-Deductible Contribution | \$ _____ |

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Groton Historical Society

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Groton, MA 01450

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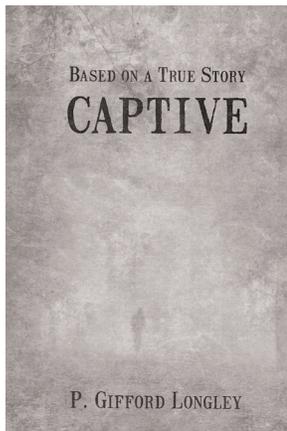
February 2012

Volume 13, Number 1

Upcoming Program

March 18: A Retelling of the Longley Massacre

2:00 PM • MacNeil Lounge • Lawrence Academy



Come join us on Sunday, March 18 at 2 p.m. in the MacNeil Lounge at Lawrence Academy to hear Peter Longley talk about his two novels, *Captive* and *Compelled*, based on the events of the 1694 Abenaki Indian raid on the Groton settlement. The novels retell the capture and life experience of John Longley, an ancestor of the author, who was taken into captivity.

Mr. Longley will present his story from the combined perspective of the importance of remembering this event in Groton's history as well as the need to bring it to life—to make it memorable so that the story will not again be forgotten.

Mr. Longley says he has documented the tale in a way it hasn't been told before—weaving in the culture of the times and the motives of those involved, and making it as if you are there as a witness, watching it unfold. His novels have recently been published and are widely available.

The program is free and open to the public.

See www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org for more details on this and other GHS programs.

