

Then and Now

Newsletter of the Groton Historical Society

Volume 13, Number 4

October 2012

Old-Time Electioneering Foreshadows Modern Politics

Judy Adams, GHS Volunteer

In early colonial days the instruments of politics consisted mostly of personal recommendations or endorsements, usually made by responsible citizens in favor of men whom they knew within their small communities. Then, as second and third generations moved out from the original settlements, their needs began to differ and they needed better representation in the governments which were still centered in their home towns. Support for candidates evolved from personal recommendations of friends to endorsements from committees, and modern politics was born.

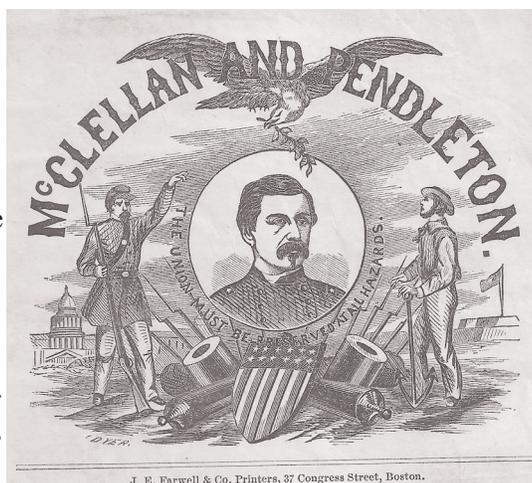
The Groton Historical Society's collection of political artifacts offers many examples of the tools of evolving politics. The advent of the printing press on this side of the Atlantic made possible much wider distribution of information about upcoming elections, the political parties and their candidates. The collection includes leaflets, monthlies, printed speeches and sermons, newspapers, and broadsides such as the one pictured here endorsing Massachusetts electors for George McClellan. McClellan ran unsuccessfully against President Lincoln in 1864. There is also an 1848 letter appeal for subscriptions to the newspaper "Emancipator," an instrument of the Liberty Party, with a notice about their coming convention at Faneuil Hall.

The collection also contains a fine selection of political buttons, some of which are in the current GHS display of election memorabilia at the Groton Public Library. While there is confusion about the origin of such buttons as we know them, it is known that a real coat button was cast in support of George Washington during his presidency, and Andrew Jackson's

likeness was presented on a button to promote his second run for the office. Some of the buttons in the GHS collection were formed in interesting shapes, such as two buttons from the 1896 election, a bicycle (with photos of Bryan and Sewall) and a bee (showing McKinley and Hobart). Unfortunately it is not known if these two buttons were significant as symbols in that particular election, won easily by McKinley.

Other unusual items include a potholder supporting Frederic W. Eddem, Republican nominee for state representative from the 11th Middlesex District; a bid for the

women's vote; and an interesting silk campaign ribbon. In 1840 when William Henry Harrison was running for president, he was pictured on a cream-colored ribbon that also showed his father's cabin in Indiana (see photo on page 4). The effect was to present Harrison as a common man, a man of the people, in contrast to the privileged position of his opponent, Martin Van Buren, who went down to defeat. There's nothing new about this political gambit!



FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORS.

AT LARGE.

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| 8. — ISAAC DAVIS, | Worcester. |
| 9. — WILLIAM H. FULLER, | Whately. |
| 10. — ABRAM PAIGE, | Springfield. |

Broadside from 1864 presidential election lists electors supporting candidacy of George B. McClellan and George H. Pendleton in a losing race against Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. From GHS Collection.

Entertaining a Factor in National Campaigns

In the late 19th century the telegraph expedited communications within political parties and strengthened them on a national level. In the collection there is a telegram to Gov. Boutwell from a New York Republican committee chairman arranging for Boutwell to speak in his area.

Huge public gatherings and social events for large donors were common in the 19th century. Items in the GHS collection tell about events very similar to those held today. Samuel Green, in his

continued on page 4

2 Main Street View: Looking Back—Moving Forward

As we approach this year's Annual Meeting, I thought it might be a good idea to take a brief look back at what our organization has accomplished this past year and then consider where we are going. Our Long-Range Strategic Plan for the next ten years remains our primary road map. Many of you had a hand in creating this forward-looking document.

A year ago we launched the Boutwell House Rehabilitation Project, with the hope that the renovation work would provide both operating cost savings and protection for this Groton architectural gem. The work now underway is made possible by a Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Grant and the generous grant of Community Preservation Act funds awarded at the April 2011 Town Meeting. Plumbers, electricians and demolition work have made great strides inside the house, and recently the side porch partitions were removed to make way for a new primary entrance to the house.

Volunteers Working on Many Fronts

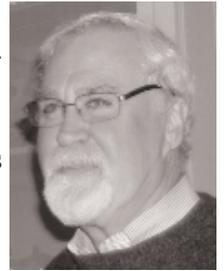
A cadre of volunteers has been assisting with the acquisition of things like stoves, sinks, lighting devices, and other necessary pieces that will make the house a home. In addition there have been many gifts to the Historical Society in the form of renewed memberships and contributions of collections materials such as books, maps, postcards, broadsides, and manuscripts, ever expanding the holdings of the Society for research and exhibition purposes. Volunteers



have also been donating their time to help visiting researchers with names like Shattuck and Farnsworth, who deserve our attention.

Others are cataloging our Boutwell papers, researching articles for college and

graduate student studies on our Revolutionary War holdings, and producing exhibits on topics like the Civil War, Birds of Groton, agriculture in Groton, and ephemera of past political campaigns (see pages 1 and 5).



Over the past year, volunteers have assisted with housekeeping, house cleaning, equipment repairs, and landscaping upkeep (especially after last October's terrible snow storm that damaged many of our trees). And, heeding the Society's mission to discover and tell the story of Groton's unique past, volunteers have also developed and executed a variety of public programs, in particular, tours to a sawmill site, a soapstone quarry, local farms, places associated with revered Groton conservationist William P. Wharton (see page 6), and Jane Nylander's talk on 19th-century Victorian house technology. Volunteers have also helped with membership mailings, the restructuring of our Life Membership program, and most recently, participated at Grotonfest with a demonstration of spinning by Bonnie Carter and timber framing (see photo on this page of Peter Benedict instructing a youngster in the forgotten art of hand-boring peg holes in a framing post). These are just two examples of what I like to call our "History is Us" initiative of letting people participate in hands-on activities.

The Year to Come

So what is left to be done and what lies ahead? A LOT! We have been operating without paid staff this year to cut our costs, and we still have a lot of interior work to do on the house and more money to raise. We are looking for new members to provide curatorial, archival, building, landscaping and educational help as we move forward to accomplish the goals in our Long-Range Strategic Plan.

We want to capture and celebrate the stories of the local agricultural, historical, and environmental changes going on around us. So think about working with us on these challenges and getting friends and family to join – come to our annual meeting on Tuesday October 30 at 7 pm in Legion Hall to learn more and become a part of the Groton story. See you there and thank you.

John H. Ott
President, GHS
October 2012

*Issue sponsored by Kris Kramer, Realtor, EXIT Assurance Realty 978.807.7317
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Alvin B. Collins, Project Manager
Boutwell House Rehabilitation Project

The Governor Boutwell House has hidden mysteries just as all older houses have. These mysteries are being uncovered during the renovation project currently underway. As work progresses with walls being opened up and spaces being explored, we are finding clues to how this house evolved. This opens up the mind to visions of life as it might have been years ago for the Boutwell family—the Governor, his wife, Sarah, and their children, Georgianna and Francis.

George S. Boutwell commissioned the construction of an elegant residence on Main Street in Groton in 1851, the year he was elected governor of Massachusetts. The front part of the house appears to be pretty much as it was then, but the mid section and rear portions have been altered through the years to suit changing needs of the family. Our discoveries have stirred up a host of questions about the early days of what is now the headquarters and museum of the Groton Historical Society.

The front main section has two floors with a beautiful center staircase appearing to be as it was back in 1851 but a few structural peculiarities make for great conversation. The first-floor exterior walls are roughly 14 inches thick compared to the second-floor exterior walls that are only about 6 inches thick. From the basement if you look up into the first-floor walls through openings around some of the heating pipes, you will notice the interior cavity is plastered. The walls not only have plaster on the inside of the rooms but also inside the exterior walls, and my guess is the second floor is similar. **Was this a form of insulation, a way to minimize air infiltration or a way to make the house quieter?**

The second-floor room over the front entry is very small with a large floor-to-almost-ceiling front window, making me wonder what the Governor used this room for. **Was it his smoking room or did he use it as a private space in which to gather his thoughts? Did**

the oversize window allow access to the flat roof over the entry portico for the Governor to greet guests?

The third-floor attic has finished rooms, but the attic stair steepness suggests these rooms were probably for house staff and not the Boutwell family. **How many staff lived up there?**

Mid-Section Mysteries

The middle section of the first floor contains the kitchen, butler's pantry, and dining room. Inside the butler's pantry, you can see where part of the floor has been patched in, covering over the area where the original basement stairs were. Those old stairs gave easy access from the kitchen to the cool basement where most likely root vegetables and preserves were kept. **Why were the stairs moved?**

Imbedded in the kitchen wood floor are wear marks from years of kitchen staff shuffling in front of the kitchen wood-burning cook stove. **Can you envision the hard work it took to prepare meals 150 years ago?**

Some time in the past, a side porch and pantry room were added to the house. They covered over the original basement bulkhead, making it necessary to access the basement through a new rear entrance door. **Was this done to make the west side of the house more aesthetically pleasing to important visitors?**

Back End Mysteries

Off the kitchen was originally a rear shed or barn that housed a woodshed and water cistern. **Was there also a privy or two, since indoor plumbing was yet to be introduced to the house?**

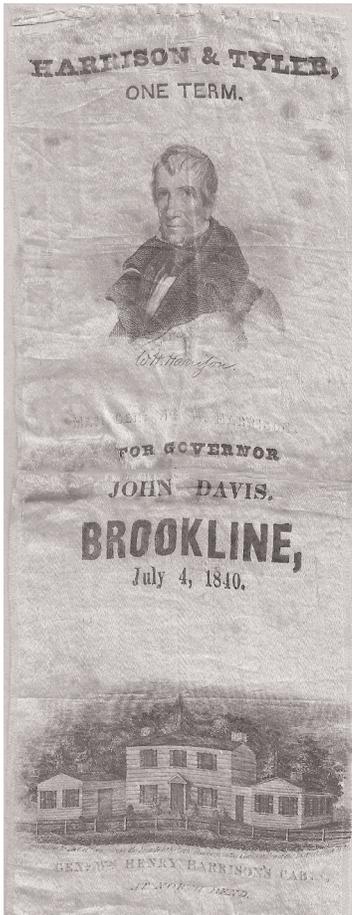
All of these early structures had been covered over years ago, but when we created a new ADA hand icapped-accessible bathroom, we exposed the old woodshed walls where you can see shadows of wood piled for use in the kitchen wood stove and house fireplaces. **How much wood did Boutwell use in a year?**



Gov. Boutwell's house mysteriously rendered on an old postcard published by G.E. Meyet and probably dating to the turn of the 19th century. Notice the fire hydrant by the sidewalk. Groton's first water company was formed in 1897. Postmarked 6 PM October 30, 1905, the card was sent to a Mr. Chas. Eldredge, Old Mystic, Conn. and received the next morning with the message "All well, lovely weather. See you later. Estelle."

4 Electioneering continued from page 1

1887 book *Collection of Papers relating to the History of Groton, Mass.*, described 4th of July celebrations in 1897 and 1808 which alternated under the auspices of the Democrats and the Federalists: “At that period the two political parties in Groton were very evenly divided,” Green wrote, “and partisan feelings ran high.” Again in June of 1869, when President Ulysses S. Grant visited Massachusetts and spent a night at the Boutwell home in Groton, there was a public reception the next day. Green reported, “Never before was there so great an assemblage of persons within the limits of the town.” Gov. Boutwell had just been appointed to serve as President Grant’s first Secretary of the Treasury. Originally a Democrat, Boutwell had helped found the Republican Party in 1854, with the goal of ending the expansion of slavery. An 1888 ticket to a Grand Republican Ratification Supper at Groton’s Town Hall, shown here, is part of the GHS collection.



Fragile silk ribbon from 1840 helped Whig candidate William Henry Harrison and his running mate John Tyler defeat incumbent Martin Van Buren, a Democrat, in the country’s 9th presidential election. From GHS Collection.

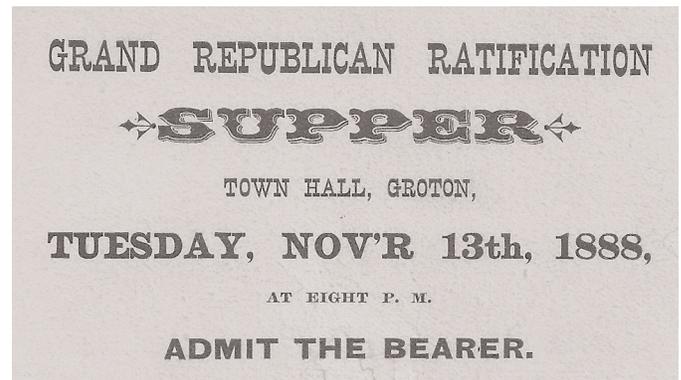
Seamy Side of Campaigning

George Boutwell had a reputation for scrupulous honesty, but this may have been rare among politicians even then. Caleb Butler, writing in his *History of the Town of Groton* in 1848, comments on “that ruling passion, thirst for office...[and] the facility of gratifying it by apostasy.” Clearly this craving for political power led to nefarious practices by others. Certain documents in the GHS collection bear witness to some of these.

In 1861 Republicans gathered in Convention at Groton Junction (Ayer). A broadside printed after the convention describes the informal nomination of J.M. Hollingsworth, Groton’s papermaker, for state Senate. It tells of “unfair and unprecedented means that had been resorted to for three years . . . [of] pensioned agents who had canvassed the District with

their bribes.”

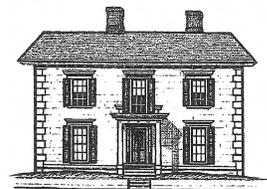
In 1873 when Boutwell was elected to the U.S. Senate over Henry L. Dawes, a U.S. Representative from Pittsfield, MA, it was not without coming up against campaign practices that are familiar to us today. A letter to the Hon. George S. Boutwell contains an all-too-familiar disclaimer on campaign practices: “The friends of Mr. Dawes were unscrupulous in their statements and sometimes the case was a good deal beclouded; [however] while the Dawes men have had a perfect organization from the start, we have used only efforts to contradict falsehoods and representation.”



Ticket holders joined in celebration in 1888 when Benjamin Harrison defeated incumbent president Grover Cleveland, though he won by electoral vote only, not by popular vote. From GHS Collection.

The years running up to the election of 1900 were complicated by the issue of the annexation of the Philippine Islands in 1898. President McKinley had adopted an aggressive policy and Boutwell formed a strategy in opposition to his reelection. Boutwell’s Anti-Imperialist League published leaflets supporting their position. Leaflet No. 23, in our collection, points out that military reports “forgot . . . to explain the President’s flagrant and repeated violation of law in his effort to bring on war.” “Washington does not represent the country” was Boutwell’s cry in 1899, according to Thomas H. Brown in his book, *George Sewall Boutwell: Human Rights Advocate*.

Even with campaign management software and multiple books on the subject available today, much of electioneering as we know it is an old story. ■



Bobbie Spiegelman, Curator, GHS

The fervor of the 2012 presidential campaign has inspired a search of the stash of election memorabilia owned by the Groton Historical Society, and the quest has been quite rewarding. There were the usual buttons and a few bumper stickers that were familiar, but upon closer examination, a broader perspective was revealed. Judy Adams, our dedicated volunteer and cataloger extraordinaire, discovered election news in Francis Boutwell’s folksy letter to his father who was residing in Washington, D. C., at the time of the 1884 presidential election (when Grover Cleveland barely defeated James G. Blaine). Young Boutwell expressed concern about the “Independents” in town—as many as twenty—and noted the use of the new voting machines that were sure to add more security to the process.

The earliest document to surface was a wordy 1837 brochure, distributed by members of the Whig party, to encourage voters to support the party candidates in the state election in order to send a message to Washington and the Van Buren administration that voting men were not happy with the way things were being run. In our day of quick sound bites, I can’t imagine anyone taking the time to read anything as verbose as this.

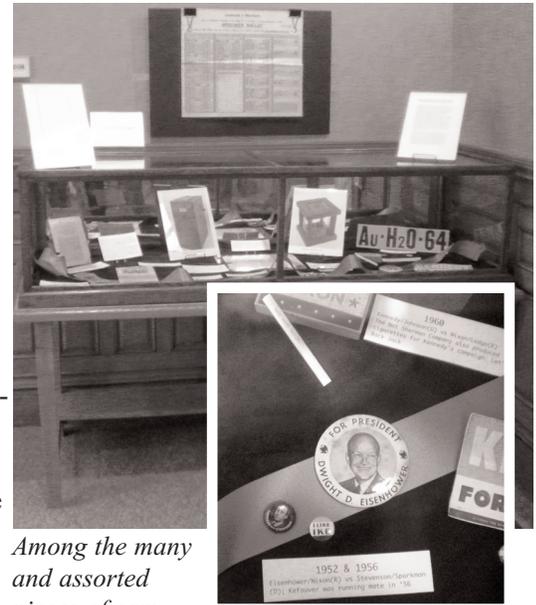
The most unusual find was in our collection’s campaign buttons. William Jennings Bryan, a candidate running for president in three different elections—1896, 1900, and 1908--had a flair for promoting himself, and Barry Goldwater had a name that lent itself to a creative bumper sticker (see photos). Nothing beat Nat Sherman’s presidential cigarettes and we’re lucky enough to have a box supporting Nixon in the 1960 campaign. There apparently was also one for John F. Kennedy that was stamped “Let’s Back Jack.” Eventually these would have been shunned, at least publicly, as the campaign to ban smoking had an early

start in 1970 when Nixon signed a law that banned cigarette ads on television and radio. He did indulge, but with a pipe.

There is a lot of compelling information readily available these days about presidential elections, perhaps too much. There is instant communication about candidates and

issues and an endless stream of information, some worthy, some frivolous. Some aspects of promoting candidates, however, seem to be timeless, as this exhibit of the Groton Historical Society’s election memorabilia highlights. Notice some of the issues driving the campaigns through the centuries and you might realize that some things never change (see Judy Adams’s story on page 1 of this newsletter).

We hope our GHS exhibit at the library (in the display case outside the Historical Room on the third floor) whets your appetite for more history, if only as an excuse to get away from the constant 24-7 barrage of sound bites of the current campaign. ■



Among the many and assorted pieces of campaign ephemera in the display, all from the GHS collection, are 15 different campaign buttons, from 1896 (William Jennings Bryan) through 1964 (Barry Goldwater running against Lyndon Johnson). Small photo shows array of items from 1952 to 1960. Photos by Barbara Murray.

Did You Know.....

... that during the years Gov. Boutwell lived at 172 Main Street with his family, the area immediately to the rear of the stately yellow house well known for its elegant, formal façade was farmland? As was typical of many residential lots in Groton, the Boutwells had a vegetable garden and crops such as rye and corn grown to feed horses and other livestock, a windmill that pumped water from three wells, a good-sized barn with carriage shed, wash lines for the family laundry, and fences. To the far rear, there was a farm road. It would have been common to see people outdoors working the land and doing other chores.

The “back forty” of Boutwell House looks very different today. The barn burned down in 1876 and was never replaced, and since the death of Georgianna Boutwell in 1933, the land has fallen into disuse and become overgrown with wild vegetation. Now, try to imagine how wonderful it would be to see this land restored and once again used, this time for the benefit of Groton’s citizens, especially children. This is exactly the vision of the GHS president, John Ott, and the current Board of Directors--the land reclaimed and trees thinned, a new windmill and fences built, gardens planted, and the area turned into an agrarian teaching site for all who are interested. Hopefully, with help and support of all who care about Groton’s history, it won’t be too long until the vision becomes reality.

--E.S.

6 Celebrating the Life and Work of William P. Wharton

C. David Gordon, GHS Vice President

One of the GHS's best outreach programs yet was the Midsummer's Eve Ramble on July 10 to three sites closely connected to Groton's foremost 20th-century conservationist and birdwatcher, William ("Billy") Pinkham Wharton—the Town Forest, the Wharton Plantation, and Wharton's own homestead, Five Oaks Farm on Broadmeadow Road.

Wharton was born in 1880 in Beverly, Massachusetts, and died in 1976 in Groton at the age of 96, having spent over 70 of his years mainly in Groton. Speakers Roy Johnson, William Conley, and Marion Stoddart conveyed details of the man they had personally known (see photo); Tom Callahan, as master of ceremonies, and Bobbie Spiegelman, the Society's curator, added what they had learned from their studies of the man.

Wharton was instrumental as part of a three-member committee (and also selectman at the time) in persuading the town to establish a Town Forest in 1922. It is dedicated to the memory of those from town who died in World War I. Wharton had been inspired by forest management practices he had seen on a visit to Germany involving the harvesting of trees in such a careful manner as to secure a perpetual supply of hardwoods. He influenced planning, preservation, and conservation on a town-wide scale as a member of Groton's first Planning Board in 1947. By the early 1950s this board had put in place a Conservation Land Use Plan and the Forest Management Plan for the Town Forest as well as working toward the creation of separate land-use zones.

A multimillionaire by the time he was 21, Wharton began buying up abandoned farm land adjacent to property



At our stop in the Town Forest and each of our later stops, Marion Stoddart and Leroy "Roy" Johnson spoke warmly of William Wharton, whom they both had known personally. Photo by Barbara Murray.

he owned on the shore of Baddacook Pond, where he had built a hut as his first dwelling in Groton. Here he could be close to nature and lead a contemplative life. --now known as Wharton Plantation--which grew to encompass 722 acres. In 1968 Wharton gave this land to the New England Forestry

Foundation which he had helped organize in 1944.

We learned from Tom Callahan that the hurricane of September 1938 and a devastating wind-driven fire raging for five days in April 1941 combined to destroy a considerable proportion of Wharton's forest plantation and this "nearly broke his spirit." Roy Johnson remembered picking up loads of trees at a Littleton nursery and bringing them to Wharton for planting as replacements for what had been destroyed. Johnson also recalled that a portable sawmill had been set up to handle the immense amount of downed timber. Men hired to run the operation lived in trailers at the site, and the sawn lumber was trucked to Fort Devens to be used in building barracks.

Birds First and Foremost

After he married, Wharton made his home at Five Oaks Farm on Broadmeadow Road starting in 1912. He became a gentleman farmer, Callahan noted, trying farming but soon giving it up. In the 1920s Wharton hired a farm manager and five or six hired hands to run a dairy and fruit farm operation. Eventually he sold the herd and leased the orchards to an apple wholesaler. At Five Oaks Wharton established a bird-banding station.

Johnson said he first met Wharton when he was a Boy Scout seeking guidance to earn a bird-watching merit badge. Actually, Wharton's deepest interest was in birds rather than trees, he said. Wharton could be working on a planting project but would stop to observe a pileated woodpecker. Wharton had been one of the first to receive a federal bird-banding license.

We learned that Wharton's legacy as a conservationist extended beyond the small town of Groton, reaching far across the nation to include Florida's Everglades National Park and the preservation of bison on the western plains. Wharton knew Franklin Delano Roosevelt from their shared schooldays at Groton School and thus had some influence in Washington when he went there to seek money for a study of Dutch Elm disease, which had struck locally. He served as a director of Massachusetts Audubon and was an incorporator of the Nashua River Watershed Association.

A fitting place to conclude this year's Midsummer ramble was a visit to Town Hall, where in the coolness and mosquito-free Selectmen's meeting room, we sampled strawberry shortcake topped by Tom Callahan's homemade ice cream. As a bonus, we were shown 1940 assessors' maps for Groton paid for by WPA funds and prepared under Wharton's direction as town assessor at the time.

What a rich heritage this man left behind for the town of Groton! ■

Clean-up Day at Boutwell House

Many hands made light work at Boutwell House on Saturday July 28, pulling weeds, trimming hedges, sweeping out the carriage house, cutting brush, and generally tidying up the grounds. Not so obvious but of equal importance was the work of sorting, packing up, and removing a array of items from our collection temporarily stored on the side porch—from stoves and ice boxes to vases, bowls, and book shelves. The porch is now bare and ready for transformation into a new entrance to our house museum. The work crew for this clean-up session included John Ott (with hedge shears), Tom Callahan, David Gordon, and Liz Strachan (intrepid weed pullers), also Peter Benedict, Anna



Eliot, Barbara Murray, and Lili Ott. For those of you who missed this outing, take heart. More clean-up days are coming. Photos by Barbara Murray.

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- C. David Gordon, Vice President, also Publications
- Michael F. Flynn, Treasurer
- Elizabeth Strachan, Clerk, also Nominating/Governance
- Peter Benedict, At Large
- Tom Callahan, Programs
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- Lili Ott, Hospitality
- Michael Roberts, Long-Range Planning
- Bobbie Spiegelman, Curator/Collections

Advisors to the Board

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

Boutwell House is temporarily closed for renovations. Please call or contact us by email with any questions.

TO REACH US:

Phone: 978-448-0092

Email: info@grotonhistoricalsociety.org

Website: www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org

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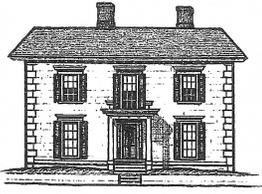
Boutwell House continued from page 3

The side entrance near the rear corner of the house leads into a hallway and second stairway to the upper floor. **Was this added to give the Governor outside access from his library/office addition to a waiting carriage?**

The hallway is built over the old cistern. **Did the house have town water by this time?**

A full bathroom was included in the library/office wing added on to the main house. **Was this the only bathroom in the house or was another bathroom added somewhere in the house?**

Old houses are fascinating but there isn't room enough here to talk about all of the discoveries we made during the renovation work that have raised questions about life in Boutwell House. When our work is finished and the house is reopened, you will be invited to tour the refurbished rooms and view exhibits that will give everyone the opportunity to experience these uncovered mysteries and journey back to the days when the Boutwell family lived here. ■



Groton Historical Society

172 Main Street, P.O. Box 202

Groton, MA 01450

IN THIS ISSUE

- Old-time Electioneering / Judy Adams page 1
Main Street View / John Ott page 2
Boutwell House Mysteries / Al Collins page 3
Campaign Ephemera at GPL / Bobbie Spiegelman page 5
Did You Know . . . page 5
Legacy of William P. Wharton / David Gordon page 6
Clean-up Day at Boutwell / Barbara Murray page 7
Board of Directors / How to Reach Us page 7
Membership Form page 7

Then and Now

Volume 13, Number 4 October 2012

Upcoming Programs

Groton Historical Society Annual Meeting

Tuesday October • 30 7:00-9:00 PM • Legion Hall, Hollis Street

Calling all Members! Join us for an informative and fun evening. Al Collins, Project Manager for the Boutwell House Rehabilitation Project, will report on the ongoing renovations and share photos he has taken to document all facets of the work, funded by a CPA grant from the Town of Groton and a Cultural Facilities grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The meeting includes election of officers and directors for FY13, acceptance of revised Bylaws of the Society, and President John Ott's report on the year's accomplishments and plans for the future. Light refreshments are included.

Harvest Home: Regional Celebration of Our Local Agricultural Heritage

Multiple Programs from Freedom's Way National Heritage Area

Thursday October 18 Barns Across 3 Centuries – a talk by Sue Tully

6:30 to 8 pm • Dunstable Public Library, Dunstable, MA

Saturday October 20 Meet Marie and Carl Hills of Kimball Fruit Farm

1 to 3 pm • Lawrence Library, Pepperell, MA

Sunday October 21 John Ott looks at 19th Century American Farm Implements

1 to 3 pm • Beaver Brook Association, Hollis, NH

Sunday October 28 The Future's in the Dirt – a talk by farmer/author Ben Hewitt

2:30 to 5:30 pm • Groton Dunstable Regional High School Black Box Theatre

See www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org or www.freedomsway.org for more details