

# Then and Now

Volume 15, Number 1

Winter 2014

Newsletter of the Groton Historical Society [Est. 1894]

## Packing Up

*Bobbie Spiegelman and Liz Strachan*

*The work of rehabilitating the infrastructure is done. The work of assessing the collection, visible and stored away, has begun, along with making plans to refurbish the display space in all parts of Boutwell House to bring it back to life as Groton's Museum. Two GHS board members, Bobbie Spiegelman and Liz Strachan, share personal highlights of their recent sorting and storing activities as the huge task of preparing to exhibit the Society's (and Town's) historical legacy gets underway.*

### **Bobbie Spiegelman writes:**

The Boutwell House rooms, largely unchanged for decades, became unrecognizable over the past two years as we stuffed every available space with artifacts, boxes and sometimes-unidentifiable pieces that were uncovered with the major overhaul of the interior. This rearrangement turned up scores of chairs, much to our dismay, and we realized that we needed to assess the collection to determine the condition, the provenance, the history and the relevance to Groton of each one in order to appreciate its value. I called on Doug Brown, archivist at Groton School,



master furniture craftsman and beloved shop teacher for generations of students, to help provide some background on the dozen chairs of varied style and size that I lined up along the wall of the upper hallway.

We examined the underside of the rush seats of several of the chairs, deciding whether or not they were in original or restored condition. Doug explained the finish on each and noted its



*Board on bottom of this padded chair held by Kara Fossey probably covers an opening for a child-size potty.*

rarity or commonality. We discovered the relationship between a 19th-century-era caned child's chair and the high chair, still sitting in the room once labeled the Toy Room; both were deemed in excellent condition with definite potential for display.

Our task is just beginning, as there are still many more chairs stashed in the attic waiting their turn to offer up some special detail or, perhaps a secret: the sweet little chair with the padded seat might have once serviced a young child in potty training.

### **Liz Strachan writes:**

Lately, our cadre of volunteers—Carolyn Perkins, Nancy Barringer, Bobbie Spiegelman and I—have been packing up and removing all objects from the second-floor room formerly used as the Society's office. We hope to remake the room into "Governor Boutwell's Office" and open it to the public. The room has been filled (one might say crammed) with books, maps, boxes of photos, ephemera, old ledgers, and other assorted remnants of Groton's past.



*The overstuffed former GHS office, once emptied, will be redecorated and furnished to look like the home office of Governor George S. Boutwell.*

Before packing up our collection of 26 old leatherbound guest registers from the Groton Inn, we leafed through some of them and saw that visitors tended to come from nearby towns, greater Boston, or other New England states, though there were many from New York and a few from

*Continued on page 3*

# Main Street View:

## GHS at 120 Years - A True Main Street Initiative

When we consider the age of things, time takes on two aspects. At 120 years something seems old even to those of us who are half the age, but when one thinks of the year



1894, the date appears relatively recent considering the Town of Groton has been around since 1655. This year the Groton Historical Society celebrates its 120th anniversary as it ends the long period of renovation of its 1851 headquarters, the Gov. George S. Boutwell House, itself 163 years old.

To the Society, which acquired the house in 1933 from Georgianna Boutwell's estate and then opened it to the public in 1939, it has been a mere 75 years since the House assumed its central place on Main Street. But however one looks at time there is no question that this organization has been a proud, purpose-driven, and permanent fixture collecting, preserving and sharing Groton history with its citizens and the community.

In recent weeks the Society's volunteers and its curator have begun the work of putting the House back in order, reorganizing and reshelving the collections. They have made wonderful discoveries of items that old closets, deep drawers, dark spaces, and time itself had hidden (see *Packing Up*, page 1). Yes the attic is a treasure trove of records, marble busts, portraits, and furniture. Among the gifts of past generations and Groton families are a signed lithograph by American artist Albert Bierstadt, glass plate negatives by turn-of-the-century photographer Richard Wright, and signed military swords with insignia that highlight the role citizens played in our local militia. Also coming to light are autographed books by state leaders and Presidents, beautiful dresses and women's accoutrements that any costume society would die to own, and colonial paper script that, had they been interest bearing, would remove any financial worry in the Society's future.

### Sharing the Town's Treasures

So the work that now has to be done is to find places and cases where all this material—the legacy of Groton's past—can be displayed, interpreted and made available. Fortunately for the GHS there are experts in the region,

well-known curators, collectors, specialists, and other museums willing to help us through this period of discovery and reflection on the future of these collection pieces. But however we proceed in trying to understand and steward what we have, it is going to take time, money and materials to do justice to it all.



*Scanned property deeds and old maps, two old Groton history books, and digitized glass slides of old houses in Groton were on display at the latest GHS program hosted by the Groton Public Library (see page 7).*

For 120 years people have entrusted the Society with things they valued and cherished, leaving us their treasures to be protected and shared with future generations. We have never had to buy anything with our limited funds, although as our collections grow, our need increases for conservation materials such as archival storage boxes and modern display cases. We are grateful for our many friends and families who understand that the GHS is Groton's Museum, is Groton's permanent Main Street Initiative focusing on saving Groton's past while celebrating the people and stories that make this town ours. Our thanks go out to all of you who have contributed to this long-standing preservation effort for Groton's treasures.

*John H. Ott  
President, GHS  
Winter 2014*

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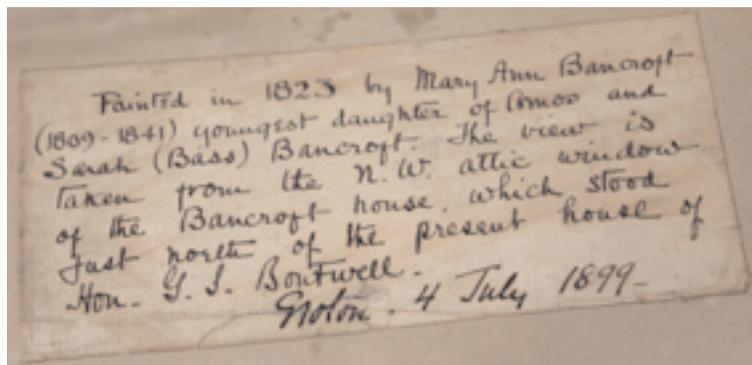
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## Packing Up *Continued from page 1*

farther afield. Some well-known names appear: a few Roosevelts; William F. Pabst, the Milwaukee beer baron; Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Auchincloss of New York; and Mr. Lincoln Filene, owner of Filene's Department Store. There were many entries that showed the name of the guest "and chauffeur", usually nameless. A few had a chauffeur and a maid. One signature was written in Arabic, reflecting the range of visitors from far and wide.

In perusing old "Selectmen Reports" (now known as Annual Reports), we read that during the Civil War years, Groton boys and men going off to fight were provided with train tickets to Baltimore, with uniforms, including underwear and socks, and

with other related items, all paid for by the Town. Some of the families of these men were given stipends to help them survive during their breadwinners' absences.



*Finding this young girl's painting of Groton in 1823—a true attic treasure—was an unexpected delight for our volunteer sorters and packers.*

Among other recent findings is a charming old painting by fourteen-year-old Mary Ann Bancroft (1809-1841), daughter of Sarah and Amos Bancroft. The Bancrofts lived just

north of the present Boutwell House. The painting depicts the view in 1823 roughly toward what is now the Groton Market and Filho's Cucina and shows the agricultural nature of Groton even in the center of town. This is an important find which we will, at some point, certainly have on display for viewing by 21st century Groton citizens. ■

## History Sleuthing

*C. David Gordon*

In the summer of 2013 the Groton Historical Society received a collection of 58 historical letters, notes, invoices, and deeds that longtime GHS member Eileen M. Friedrich of Groton had gathered before she died in July 2012. These items, along with a number of historical booklets, maps, typewritten notes from Friedrich's research in local history, and 33 old Groton Annual Reports were donated by Friedrich's family: Anita Louise Anderson, John R. Friedrich, Jr., Faye Eileen Friedrich, Claire Friedrich Ketelaar, Allan Thomas Friedrich, Christine Marion Grimshire, and Mary Kathleen Friedrich. John Friedrich's wife, Roberta Benson, brought in the materials.

Speaking for all the family members, Benson wrote, "When the family was clearing out her home after Eileen's passing, we discovered a number of items that we believe she would have wanted the Groton Historical Society to have." She added, "We hope these documents

and booklets will provide a value to the Groton Historical Society and help round out the other items that the society has already amassed over the years. We know that is what Eileen would have wanted."

Benson described Eileen Friedrich as "very interested in the history of Groton," one who was "an active member of the Historical Society." Benson said, "Some of her research was utilized in the historical books of Virginia May." [Note: Eileen Friedrich was on the GHS Book Publishing Committee formed in 1972 to edit and publish in two volumes May's extensive writings on town history: *A Plantation Called Petapawag* (1976) and *Groton Houses* (1978). Other members of the committee were Isabel C. Beal, Ruth T. Bennett, and Henry G. Hallowell, who served as chairman.]

As a member of the current GHS Publications Committee, I have had the privilege of transcribing the handwritten letters, notes, and deeds included in the

*Continued on page 4*

Friedrich bequest. To date I have typed out and computerized 35 of these documents. Yet to be transcribed are 23 more.

A singular example of the documents is a note from Groton historian Dr. Samuel A. Green, complete with his fine, flourishing signature (see photo). Green was making a small request of the publisher of the *Landmark* newspaper: “Dear Mr. Turner, Please send me copies . . . for April 8, and April 29, [1911]. There are two little items which I wish to scrap [sic].”

Most of the documents, though, revolve around the law practice and life of Asa Farnsworth Lawrence, Esquire, in the 1840s. [Lawrence was distantly related to the Friedrich family on their mother’s side. The Lawrence line

has been traced all the way back to 1191, according to Mary Friedrich.] Asa Lawrence was born February 7, 1790, and grew up in Groton. He had his law practice in Pepperell. For a time he served as judge in a court dealing with insolvency cases. In 1837 Lawrence married local girl Sarah Jane Bancroft, daughter of Dr. Amos and Sarah (Bass) Bancroft, who lived on Main Street just north of where George Boutwell was to build his house. Sarah Jane was born in 1808 and may have died in 1865.

Documents I have transcribed to date have come mostly from other lawyers contacting Lawrence by post. Some update Lawrence on cases or inform him about the need for him to meet with them or attend a court session. Others appear to relate to Lawrence’s dealing with business carried out for his father-in-law. A few encompass what Lawrence himself has agreed to purchase. None so far establish any back-and-forth correspondence having to do with a common case or situation. And most of the writers appear at this stage to be unknowns from Boston, Pepperell or Townsend, or Groton. A familiar name is that of Groton historian Caleb Butler, who signed his name as a witness to an agreed-upon transaction in one quitclaim deed.

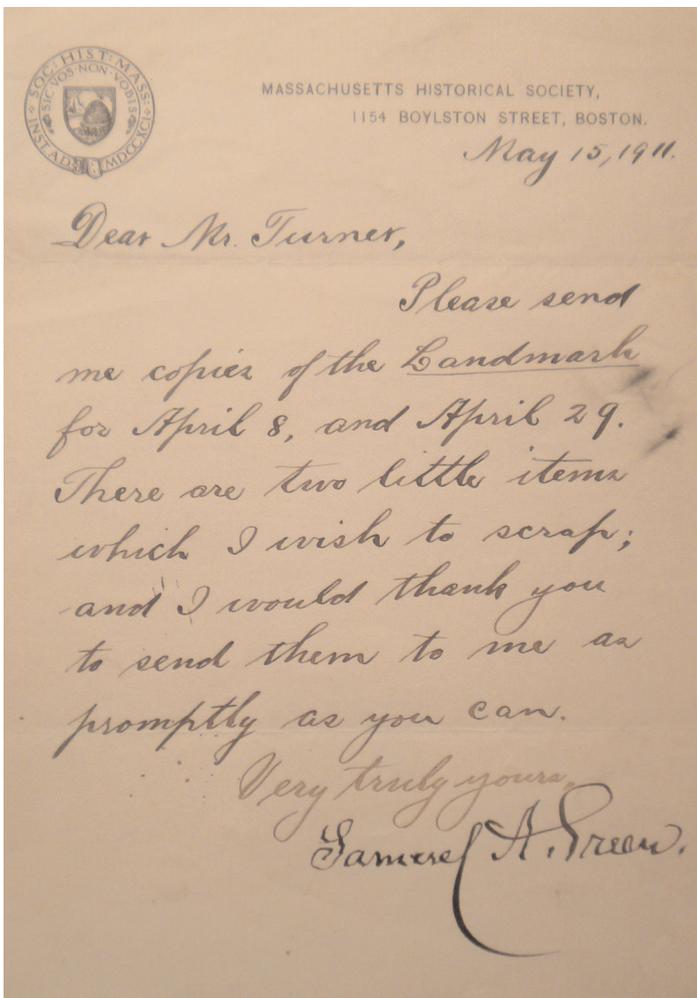
### Tricky Business

Transcribing handwritten documents composed over a century and a half ago is tricky business. But that’s what makes the job interesting. I admit there are gaps in my transcription of some letters. Often handwritten letters are not formed carefully or the ink has faded. Certain letters may be formed in a way different from how we do it—if we do it—today. Even the most beautiful, carefully penned words on the page might be hard to decipher. Then too, those 19th century writers didn’t seem to be much bothered by punctuation marks.

Often passages need to be read and reread again and again. I’m always cheered when I discover what one unclear word in a sentence actually must for certain be. These are “Eureka!” moments, and they keep me going, though I am not averse to asking for help.

One long passage in a letter commenting on how properly to commemorate the Battle of Lexington and Concord I have farmed out. It’s a passage in which the English is shot through with Latin words evidently from Cicero. I’ve turned to my family’s Latin scholar to see if he can figure how the English and Latin fit together and what they all add up to.

Meanwhile, this effort is the very essence of history sleuthing, and I love it! ■



The stationery used by Dr. Green is from the Massachusetts Historical Society, which he served as librarian from 1868 until his death in 1918. Green regularly kept scrapbooks of Groton events, hence the request for back issues of the local newspaper. Curious readers can read both editions of the *Landmark* online via the Groton Public Library website ([gpl.org](http://gpl.org)), which contains digitized volumes of Turner’s Public Spirit.

# Meet Our New Board Members

C. David Gordon

The three newest members of the Groton Historical Society's Board of Directors, elected at the GHS Annual Meeting on October 5, 2013, share a deep interest in history. The three—Judith M. Adams, Greg R. Fishbone, and Nancy F. Barringer—bring a diversity of talents and background to the Society.



Greg, Judy, Nancy.

Judy Adams says, “My interest in history was inspired by my grandmother who told stories of her late 19th century childhood in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom. She left us a written account which I edited for publication in the journal of the Vermont Historical Society.” In addition, Judy speaks of her own childhood having been spent in “an Arts & Crafts house built in Woburn by my grandfather in 1911.”

Thus, “it was a natural thing for me to follow my interest in history when I moved to Groton 22 years ago,” she states. “I have been volunteering for the GHS for quite a few years—sorting and organizing documents and ephemera, writing for the newsletter, and helping with programs.”

At GHS Judy is cochair of the Program Committee. Both Nancy Barringer and Greg Fishbone are members at large on the Board.

“I am glad,” Nancy says, “to join the Board of the Groton Historical Society and help the work to preserve our wonderful Boutwell House on Main Street and to publicize our town’s history to the community.” Looking back, she notes, “I have always had an interest in history, art and architecture. The past several years, I have volunteered at local libraries and community groups including Friends of the Trees and spend a good deal of time working at my church, St. Andrew’s in Ayer, where I am the Parish Historian. I recently joined New England Archivists.”

Greg says he “cultivated an interest in local history on school visits to Boston, Plimouth Plantation, and Sturbridge Village.” A native of Newton, Greg tells us,

“There is a lot of history in Newton, but you have to hunt for it off the beaten path.” By contrast, in Groton he has found that “the history is front and center, right at the surface in old houses, working farms, and even right in the center of town. Things have been preserved here that are long gone from other places, and the town is so much more exciting and interesting because of it.” He “moved to Groton with his wife and daughter after the entire family fell in love with an antique house on Main Street. Researching the house and its prior residents has become a long-term project.”

Greg is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University School of Law. He is “a practicing attorney and avid web designer who writes novels for young readers.” His most recent book, entitled *Galaxy Games*, has been published by Lee & Low Books.

Nancy was born in New Jersey and grew up in Framingham. She has earned a Bachelor’s degree from Framingham State with a major in European history and a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science from Simmons College. For one term, she says, she worked for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now Historic New England) at the Harrison Gray Otis House in Boston. There she was “surrounded by beautiful and interesting American artifacts.” Following



Judy, Greg, Nancy.

graduation, she “spent ten years working as a business and science librarian at various high technology companies,” work involving her in “a complete change in the research environment.” Nancy and her husband, George, moved to Groton in 1985. Their son, Ned, is in graduate school at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore.

Judy is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. She has “followed various careers over the years,” she says: “kindergarten teacher, pipe organ builder, church organist and music director, librarian, and the mother of two sons.” She claims love of “music, reading, writing, gardening and animals.”

We welcome Judy, Nancy, and Greg to the Society’s Board of Directors. Look for profiles of other board members in future issues of *Then and Now*. ■

# A Grand New Entrance

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

Work is well underway on the Boutwell House ADA accessible walkway that will allow everyone access to the house via its grand new entrance. As of my last writing, bids for the project were being received from three local landscape construction companies, all of whom were capable of constructing our walkway system according to the beautiful design from Landscape Architect Lorayne Black. After reference checks and price negotiations were completed, M. J. Cataldo Landscape and Construction Inc. of Littleton, MA, was selected to do the work. Cataldo Landscape is a reputable local company with years of experience in the construction of hardscape projects utilizing an expert crew versed in granite and concrete paver installation.

Granite and paver selections had been specified in the design plan we brought before three different Groton Town Committees—the Commission on Accessibility, the Planning Board, and the Historic Districts Commission—for their approval. The HDC, which has final say as to the aesthetics of projects within the town’s three historic districts, wanted to see the paver selection laid in a sample area correlating to the pattern Lorayne designed. Cataldo Landscape sent their installer to Boutwell House to set a design sample of the selected concrete pavers at the driveway side of the house for viewing by the HDC.

With HDC approval and a building permit from the town, we were off and running with the final phase of the Boutwell House rehabilitation project. The walkway required many pieces of select granite stone that had to be quarried and cut to specific sizes. Cataldo Landscape arranged for custom granite pieces to be quarried and cut by Swenson Granite of New Hampshire. Swenson is one of

production out longer than one would like. You guessed it—a delay in the production of our granite pushed the start of the walkway out into mid-November.

Days were getting shorter, temperatures were getting colder, and the threat of snow was in the forecast, but Cataldo Landscape insisted they could still do the majority of the walkway before winter was upon us and they did. Excavation started in November. Granite pieces were delivered and truckloads of appropriate soil needed to raise the grade in the walkway area were trucked in. Day after day and in between a couple of snowfalls, Cataldo’s crews installed granite slabs along the house side and then filled, compacted, and sculpted the earth to create the walkway base. Every night the entire area was covered with thermal blankets, ensuring the sculpted soils did not get damaged by the freezing temperatures and the snow cover we encountered.

Once the sculpted soils were in place, Cataldo’s expert installer, whose name is Tiago, started laying pavers in the complex pattern Lorayne Black had designed. Each day of the install, Lorayne and I would visit the site to ensure the finished product would be as specified. As in all projects, a few items had to be tweaked along the way to make everything come together in a unified way. No matter what we encountered or decided should be changed a bit, Tiago and Cataldo’s Project Manager Barbara St. Onge happily complied without hesitation.

All of the pavers on the walkway as well as the magnificent granite steps are now in place, but Mother Nature’s winter wrath has put a stop to the concrete walkway portion of the project until spring. When it is warm enough to work with concrete, Cataldo will install a concrete walkway from the street to the foot of the granite steps and paver walkway. When all is done, including the



*Tiago (with rake) and crew compact and sculpt soil and sand dropped from the bucket of a front-end loader. Concrete pavers finish the surface of the new ADA accessible walkway at the side of Boutwell House.*

the largest granite suppliers in New England, which in our case was both good and bad. The good is that they provide a high quality stone at a reasonable price but the bad is that the volume of granite they produce sometimes pushes

landscaping, we will have a true masterpiece of a walkway and grand entrance allowing all to visit, bringing new life to the beautifully rehabilitated Governor Boutwell House. ■

# Researching Your House's History

On Tuesday February 4, the well-informed guest speaker Carl Flowers told a crowd of 55 people gathered in Sibley Hall at the Groton Public Library how he discovered the history of his Groton homestead and how much pleasure it gave him. In 1980 Flowers inherited a 1722 house and soon began to trace its roots. He became so enamored of its nearly 300-year history that he wrote a book about it. He called the book *Groton's Anonymous Mistress*, alluding to various roadblocks he encountered in his research efforts.



*Carl Flowers (seated) autographing copies of his book Groton's Anonymous Mistress following his talk to a capacity crowd at Tuesday night's program.*

But his difficulties, revealed in his book, did not diminish his delight in finding numerous connections with real people from Groton's past and his old family homestead. Each connection, he told us, was found by following up all leads, even the dead ends, which often led him to the most interesting, even "mind-boggling" information. He found references to the Longley Massacre, Shays' Rebellion, and even to the Underground Railroad.

Flowers urged us to do the same, to follow all leads, even dead ends, if we set out to research the history of an old house. The process he recommended was to start with title searches, delving into old deeds. Then comes genealogical research and searching town records of births, marriages, and deaths, tax assessor records, and probate records in the State Archives.

Flowers is a retired history teacher and well versed in the discipline of historical research. His book contains many illustrations and footnotes, as well as four appendices about former owners of the property and deeds of transfer from 1711 to present day. [The book can be ordered online for \$14.99 from The Book Patch at: <http://tinyurl.com/grotonmistress> ]

## How to Start Your House Research

GHS Program Committee member Tom Callahan arranged for Flowers to present this program. Judy Adams, Program Committee Co-chair, prepared a handout listing accessible resources for DIY historical research, both books and online links. The list will soon be posted on the GHS website. Meanwhile here are some of the key resources.

- Groton Public Library ([www.gpl.org](http://www.gpl.org)):  
Historical Room and Groton Collection; Digital Collection
- State Library of Massachusetts: maps, etc.
- Massachusetts Registry of Deeds
- Groton Historical Society ([www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org)):  
Maps, photos, and 17th and 18th century handwritten land records
- Groton Town Hall ([www.townofgroton.org](http://www.townofgroton.org))

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Annual GHS Sponsor	\$75
Corporate Sponsor	\$250
Sustaining Member	\$1000
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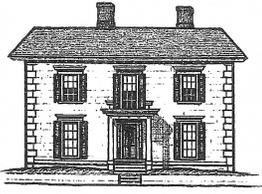
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## GHS is Open for Research — Call for an Appointment

The Governor Boutwell House is currently closed for renovations and assessment of its collections. Meanwhile we are open by appointment for photo and genealogical research in our refurbished workroom. Please call or email us for more information. And check our website often for updates on our plans for reopening Boutwell House to the public.



*Avid researchers Russ Harris (left) and Judy Adams sort through old photos and primary documents in the GHS workroom.*



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