

Then and Now

Volume 15, Number 2

Spring 2014

Newsletter of the Groton Historical Society [Est. 1894]

Cub Scouts Tour Boutwell House to Work Toward History Badge

Bobbie Spiegelman, GHS Curator

Over 100 years ago, Georgianna Boutwell regularly invited a few young Groton girls into the drawing room of 172 Main Street for an informal chat followed by cookies and milk in the dining room. Miss Boutwell and her guests might have been stiffly positioned on the black horsehair sofa, but the conversation was friendly and the anticipation of the proffered cookies made each occasion a valued one. Recently, the image of those century-old visits got revived in a different sort of way.

On Wednesday afternoon, February 26th, I welcomed a happy group of local Cub Scouts from Den 2, Pack 12, into that same drawing room try out the same horsehair sofa and hear about the history of the Boutwell House and Miss Boutwell's contributions to the town of Groton. Their visit was part of a badge requirement to visit a historic building in town. The boys enthusiastically offered their opinions about the comfort of the prickly sofa. They also examined the iron toy cart and horse that might have been driven by Francis Boutwell as a boy versus the modern-day Transformer creatures they might covet in their own toy collections.

A tour of the downstairs took the pack and their chaperones into the restored kitchen where the group marveled at its centerpiece, the classic cast iron Hub stove, and wondered about how the appliance might have been heated and what might have been prepared on it once stoked up.

The gleaming stove seemed to invite a tactile

Cub Scouts visiting Boutwell House were intrigued with the restored wood-burning cookstove in the old kitchen. Photo by Deborah Kennedy.

response from many of them as they fired question after question at me. They were very perceptive in recognizing the differences between the modern kitchens in their own homes and that of the original Boutwell House residents.



Attentive Cub Scouts heard GHS curator Bobbie Spiegelman (under the clock) explain the symbols on our state flag before trying out designs of their own. Photo by Deborah Kennedy.

Redesigning the State Flag

The second part of the visit took place in the newly restored workroom on the second floor where the scouts put on their vexillologists' hats [vexillology: the study of flags] in order to study the history of the Massachusetts state flag. We examined the different symbols on the flag and what each represented, and then discussed what elements might be used in a new design if one were required today. This got their creative juices flowing and they eagerly accepted the blank templates to get right to work on their assignment.



Latin words on the blue and white Massachusetts State Flag say By the Sword, We Seek Peace, but Peace Only Under Liberty. The design shows a Native American, Massachusetts, holding a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other, pointing downward to symbolize peace.

Georgianna would have been pleased to know that some of Groton's youngsters were once again being received at the Boutwell House and getting acquainted with her and all that she left to our community. ■



Main Street View: It Takes a Team to Raise a Historical Society

There is an old African proverb that says “It takes a Village to raise a Child,” and that is probably true in many places in the world. But what does it take to raise a town’s consciousness to the value of a historical society in its midst?



This is a question we are asking ourselves today so that we can develop an organization that will make a real difference to Groton in the future.

Outside of Boutwell House, you will have noticed changes we are making in the form of a visitor-friendly

walkway to the side entrance and new landscaping to enhance the historical society experience. The focus today within museums around the country is all about the visitor experience and customer service -- providing access to stories, collections and experiences that can’t be found anywhere else. For our Historical Society that means making Groton’s story and the Society’s collections the core of any visit.

How does one go about making this pledge a reality? Here is where “the team” replaces “the village” in making/raising a historical society.

In February, our Development Committee introduced Groton’s Town Clerk and several members of the Board of Selectmen and the Community Preservation Committee to the recent building improvements and to some of the special collections at Boutwell House. Documents, powder horns, paintings, maps and diaries are some of Groton’s powerful and impressive artifacts spanning more than three centuries.

Memorable in every way – “we want to see more,” one person said, and everyone will be able to when we hold another Open House in early summer. At this preview session for Town officials, Selectman Anna Eliot spoke wistfully of her first visit to the Historical Society walking there with her class from the Boutwell School and her vivid memory of all the wonderful objects in the dark cases. Others present remarked about the wealth of early materials in the Society’s possession and their good condition, expressing a desire to see more of the items recently found or rediscovered. We told our guests that our hope is to get everyone present to come back again and again for more Groton surprises.

Team GHS

The “Team” at the Historical Society is much more than just its board members, of course. It is made up of many citizen volunteers who work and invest their time on site helping to preserve and document the collections related to our town’s historic buildings, road markers, and events or to assist researchers in their studies of the same. One team member of long standing is Audrey Bryce who for 18 years has overseen the Society’s Sheedy Scholarship program within our local high school, encouraging college-bound students to write essays about town history in the hope of



Russell Burke (left) and Peter Cunningham look eagerly at treasured artifacts displayed at the February preview session for Town officials. Photo by David Gordon.

winning funds toward their college tuition. And what a job she and her committee have done over the years to attract young writers to explore new avenues of local history or to help launch the careers of future historians (see “A Hard Act to Follow,” page 3).

In short, GHS’s operation is due to a team of skilled curatorial, archival and outreach volunteers. They, along with our professional consultant Kara Fossey and guided by our Curator Bobbie Spiegelman, are preparing to greet our visitors and reintroduce our members to a well-refreshed and inviting Boutwell House, Groton’s own History Center. We invite you all to come home for a visit this summer and see it for yourself.

John Ott, President, GHS, May 2014

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A Hard Act to Follow: GHS Scholarship Chair Steps Down

C. David Gordon

For many years the Groton Historical Society has sponsored the Michael L. Sheedy Educational Fund Scholarship, awarded to one or two college-bound high school seniors with an interest in history who need some financial assistance with their school bills. After 18 years of overseeing the award process, longtime GHS member Audrey Bryce has informed the Society that she is stepping down. David Gordon interviewed Audrey recently to learn how she managed her awesome job so well for so long.

Finding the right person or persons to receive the Society's help in financing their education was a ritual of spring for Audrey Bryce from 1995 to 2013. Each year there was much to be done. First of all, Audrey would have to see that a committee was in place to go through student applications and arrive at a fitting choice to receive aid. Over the years she continually had to seek out new committee members. She alone, she said, had 18 years of experience carrying out the committee's work. And because no other person on the committee could claim that much experience, she was a natural to qualify as committee chair. Also since there were "no direct instructions" provided for accomplishing the task, she had to develop the routine and criteria for choice.

With a committee in place by early April, Audrey would provide application forms to the guidance counselors who would then let high school seniors know that such a scholarship was available. By early May the interested seniors would mail applications and a required essay on a historical subject to Audrey, and the committee's work would begin.

The committee used to receive between 60 and 80 applications, Audrey said, but in recent years the number of applicants has shrunk to about 25. That drop puzzled her, since over those same years college education costs have increased significantly. Accordingly over the years, the size of her committee dwindled from its original six or so members to last year's effort managed, she said, by Audrey herself and Bonnie and Earl Carter.

Committee members divided up the applications so that all read an equal proportion. At meetings held at Audrey's home, they would review and share assessments of the applications, narrow down the total to six or so finalists, and then decide on one or two recipients, depending on how many scholarships the Society had agreed to fund in a given year.

One rule Audrey followed was to set aside from qualifying any "big honors" applicants – those at the top of the class scholastically. Those individuals, it was felt, could most easily attract aid from other sources. The committee

would "go for the really good but more-needy students," she said. Another consideration was an expectation that applicants would use history studies as the basis for a career, although that was a "request but not a requirement."

Audrey's work did not end with the committee's choice of a recipient and informing the Society and school about that. For many years, Audrey said, she presented the scholarship to the student at graduation and later at class day celebrations when many scholarships were to be presented. Her presentation included a "thumbnail sketch" of the Groton Historical Society and "a pitch for Boutwell House" or brief talk about George S. Boutwell. She would always invite the graduates to visit the Society's museum.

Audrey's final effort each year was to inform the local newspapers of the award of the Society's scholarship and write a letter to those awarded scholarships inviting them to a meeting of the Society in the next year at which they could tell about their college experience and activities. Parents were also invited.

Audrey's incentive to work on scholarship awards came, she said, from the work of her husband, the late Charles Bryce. While residing in Salem, NH, he had started a *Reader's Digest*-sponsored "Dollars for Scholars" program. He received an award for having the best organization of such a program in the state. In his career in the U.S. Army, Charles had worked through the ranks to become a major before retiring. For a time he served as sports director at Fort Devens.

Audrey said she first came to a Groton Historical Society program when she read in the local newspaper that a woman was coming to show how to spin wool into yarn. Her granddaughter said she too wanted to see that program. Audrey also said her friend the late Nellie Sargisson "recruited" her to become a member. For a decade before helping find scholarship recipients, Audrey chaired the Society's Hospitality Committee.

Audrey has an abiding interest in Groton and its history. "I just love the town," she said. She likes reading books about the town and lives in an old house here. While she leaves behind an important position with the Society, Audrey is today Membership Chair at the Groton Woman's Club. Meanwhile, her dedication and hard work for the Society make her a role model well worth emulating. ■



Audrey Bryce

Coping with the Poor and the Shiftless in Colonial Groton

Judy Adams

In the early, isolated villages of Massachusetts Bay, survival of the community dictated that all able-bodied persons must support themselves and comport themselves for the welfare of all, the “common wealth.” Those who didn’t hold up their end were dealt with. Those who couldn’t were cared for. It was expected that the community, acting as an extended family, would care for the ill, disabled, aged, widowed or orphaned.

The early settlers brought with them customs practiced in England under the Poor Laws. For 200 years various legislation had been enacted in England (and on the continent, as well) until a reformed and refined law was passed in 1601. The poor, who had been dependent on feudal lords or church authorities, were now entitled to assistance from the government. In England inhabitants were taxed according to the extent of the local needy population.

The Groton Historical Society has many handwritten documents attesting to payments made to citizens who provided services for the (deserving) poor, for example:

- in 1769 - a Groton resident bargained with the town for the maintenance of a poor widow “with victuals & clothing in sickness & in health & at her decease to bury her decently”;
- in 1800 - Groton paid a citizen for keeping one of the poor for six months, including nursing for three months and boarding of the nurse.

In some cases the payment was made to another town: in 1792, the town of Lunenburg demanded reimbursement from the town of Groton “for sundries supplied” to a pauper whom they believed came from Groton. Groton repeatedly refused to pay the bill until the Court of Common Pleas testified that Groton was the pauper’s legal residence.

Men were required to assume financial responsibility for their illegitimate children. The Society has 16 such documents dated between 1757 and 1810, presumably only a percentage of the contracts that took place. One such, from 1807, lists a resident of Orange, father of a child born to a “spinster” of Groton, who was bound to the town of Groton for support of the child to age 18. The obligation also bound “his heirs, executors, or administrators.”

Apprenticeship was a solution for the support of boys who had no family to care for them. Though exploitation did take place, the town’s Overseer of the Poor was intended to prevent this. A document from 1802 tells of a Pepperell resident who took a Groton child as apprentice until he reached 21 years, allowing one month of schooling and contracting to keep him “decently” with two good suits of clothing and as “customary for an apprentice, if he proves well, give him a good pair of oxen.” The arrangement sounds generous, as the promise of oxen provides the young man with a means of support when the contract ends.

Proof of Residency Required

As can be imagined, if citizens were to be taxed for the care of the poor, they wanted to be sure these poor were legitimate residents. As early as 1662 the English had passed a Settlement Act which evolved until, by the late 18th century, it had become a complicated set of regulations based on the assumption that everyone had a home place to which they could be returned. Newcomers could be “warned out” if a charge was brought against them within 40 days; officials decided if these newcomers might be a threat to the community economically or morally.

The Historical Society collection includes 15 “warning out” examples between 1753 and 1804.

Continued on page 6

One Man’s Quest for Work

Concord March 5th 1812

Gentlemen permit an humble suppliant to approach you as on kined bended knees of his soul which acknowledges the question your correction for was in the broad road to destruction with out thought of the precious use of time and my golden portion of life I feel now that I can go to work at any business if calling you shall appoint the year round of my health admits and I will endeavor to show all had company for the future and I pray therefore that I may be Liberated now from my confinement.

Humble Suppliant
Ezekiel Nutting Jr.

To the gentle men
over sears of the
poor of Groton

“Gentlemen permit an Humble Suppliant to approach you as on bended knee . . . I was on the broad road to destruction . . . I feel now that I can go to work

at any calling you shall appoint . . . I pray therefore that I may be Liberated now from my confinement.”

It would appear that Ezekiel Nutting, Jr. (b. 1750—d. 1830) had become a burden on the town of Groton and was imprisoned at Concord, not necessarily for breaking any law, but because he was a “ne’er do well,” had not supported himself or had behaved in other ways that were detrimental to the community. On March 5, 1812, he was ready to mend his ways and beseeched the Overseers of the Poor for release from prison.

Boutwell Champions High Schools, Libraries, and Trained Teachers

Brian L. Bixby, Guest Contributor

Brian Bixby, born and raised in Groton, is the son of Isabel and Rudolph Bixby, a former president of the Groton Historical Society. Brian attributes his love of history to his parents, and as a professional historian, he has taken a keen interest in the life of Groton's only governor, George S. Boutwell. Many of you will remember his impersonation of the governor at the GHS Open House last October. Here he writes of Boutwell's strong views on district schools, public high schools, public libraries, and the need for a state agricultural college, revealed during his term as Secretary to the State board of Education in the late 1850s.



In 1915, signaling the end of the district school system, the town built a new elementary school on Hollis Street. Named the Boutwell School in tribute to the town's revered governor, who died in 1905, it serves today as the regional school district's Early Childhood Center.

It seems hardly a year goes by without our school committee being embroiled in another contentious issue. We all agree there should be schools, but what they should teach, what sort of facilities and staff they will require, and how much it will cost are frequently subjects of controversy.

Things weren't so different in the nineteenth century. Oh, the specific issues have changed. But the townspeople of Groton argued over their schools as much then as they do today. And George S. Boutwell often found himself in the middle of these conflicts.

As far back as 1647, Massachusetts had required towns to maintain a school. Groton was often not forward in this; the town was fined several times for failing to do so. Many other towns were equally negligent. However, in the years following the Revolution, Americans became concerned that their children get the education they needed to be worthy citizens of a republic.

In that era, Groton adopted the district system of one-room schoolhouses, as did many other rural towns. Farmers liked the district schools. The system gave them close supervision over their children and provided a convenient gathering place for other functions. In the words of one prominent politician, they were "little democracies." This was the sort of school Boutwell himself attended. If one wanted an advanced education, there were private academies in many towns, if you could afford them.

But the system of district schools came under attack by one of the great educational reformers, Horace Mann, who served as the Commonwealth's first Secretary to the Board of Education from 1837 to 1848. Mann regarded the system of district schools and private academies as dangerously inadequate. Attendance was spotty, teachers were amateurs with no training, and higher education was unavailable to many children. Instead, Mann advocated centralized public common schools, where children from all walks of life would receive a nonsectarian education provided by professionally trained career teachers.

Rural communities such as Groton objected. This was

the state interfering with local control of schools. These reforms would cost money, which the farmers could ill afford. And why should their children need so much education? Not a few objected that Mann was a city boy and a Whig who simply didn't understand their community.

George Boutwell was no city boy, and he had been a Democrat so long as the Whig Party existed. But he came down on the same side as Horace Mann. Far from seeing the district schools as "little democracies," Boutwell castigated them as "little nurseries of selfishness and intrigue" for the petty politics around their staffing and upkeep. When he followed in Mann's footsteps as Secretary to the State Board of Education, from 1855 to 1860, he made reform and abolition of the district system among his priorities. In his published speeches as Secretary, he echoed the call for professional teachers and public high schools and added the need for public libraries in every town and a state agricultural college (which would be established in 1863 and eventually become the University of Massachusetts).

It would take years before all these goals were realized. Groton was a town of farmers, not wealthy at all, and they did not immediately see the need for the institutions Boutwell wanted. But Boutwell pushed, sometimes directly, sometimes behind the scenes. He would be one of the first trustees when the public library was established in 1855, and again in 1893 when a building was finally constructed for it. A state law was passed in 1860, the last year Boutwell served as Secretary, requiring Groton and other towns to establish a high school. It would be another eleven years before the town erected a building for it, the Butler School. And despite repeated attempts to close them all, some of the district schools would hang on into the early 20th century. ■

Cookbooks on the Governor's Bookshelves?

Liz Strachan

Governor Boutwell's bookcases are nearly empty now, the contents having been removed, catalogued, and stored in boxes until his office has been rehabilitated and made ready to be restocked. His book collection reflects what would no doubt have been useful references for a public official who served in several different capacities. There are law books, military history books, annals of the U.S. House of Representatives, books on the impeachment of Andrew Johnson (for which Boutwell was a major player), and many more.

But tucked out of sight between these weightier volumes were two handwritten recipe books. One belonged to Lucy Abbott of Groton. The other contains recipes collected by the Governor's wife, Sarah Adelia Boutwell, and their daughter, Georgianna, beginning in 1867. There are many cake and biscuit recipes, perhaps reflecting the fact that they often hosted visitors for tea, especially during their time in Washington, D.C. Others are more practical, such as recipes for pickles, jelly, and applesauce.

Here are two recipes from the Boutwell recipe book (as written). Perhaps you'd like to try them.

HARD PICKLES, 1871

1 gallon vinegar
1 oz cinnamon
1 oz All Spice
3/4 oz Clove
3/4 oz Red Pepper
3/4 oz mustard
1 Tablespoon salt
A piece of alum the size of a large butternut

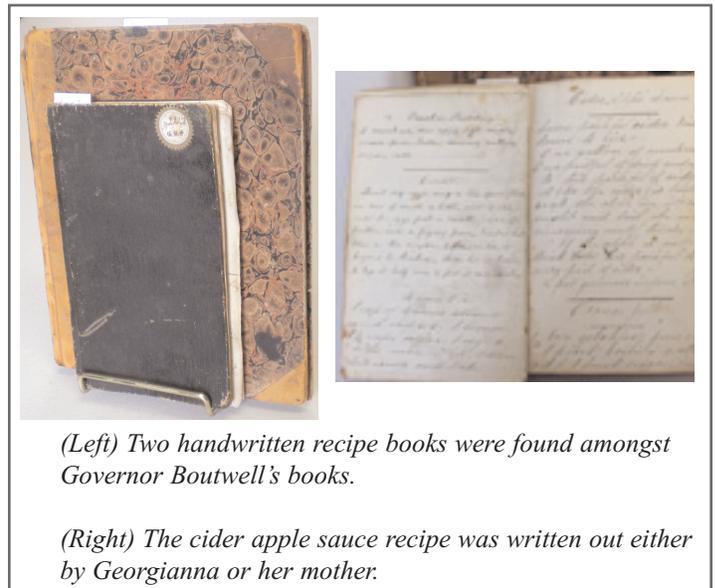
[*Note: there were no further instructions!*]

CIDER APPLE SAUCE

Seven pailsful cider boiled down to five
One gallon of molasses
One pailful of dried sweet apple to two pailsful of cider

After the cider is boiled soak the apple in it over night and boil the next morning until tender
If the apple is not dried take two pailsful to every pail of cider
A few quinces improve it.

[*Note: One imagines this was done in the winter after the cider was made and the apples were dried.*]



Poor and Shiftless *Continued from page 4*

“Warning out” served to tell people that they would get no town support. It could be followed by entering a “caution against” an individual or a family filed in the General Court. This was a legal mandate to leave town, as in this example: an 1804 certified copy of the September 1763 term of the Court of Sessions of Middlesex County indicates that the Selectmen of Groton entered such a caution against “One Samuel Corey and Elizabeth his wife with their two children, Chambers and Samuel who came each from Lincoln in the County of Middlesex.”

These procedures came to an end with the Acts of Settlement of the 1790s. Some towns had been more lenient than others, leading to confusion and uncertainty. Some towns followed the inhumane practice, morally

reprehensible to many, of auctioning off paupers in an annual “vendue.” Immigration and industrialization complicated the issue. The Industrial Revolution provided work opportunities early settlers had never dreamed of and the unemployed needed to be able to follow the jobs (see “One Man’s Quest for Work,” on page 4).

To take care of the deserving needy, workhouses and almshouses were tried in many towns, though without much success. This “indoor relief” required more organization and resources than most towns could provide, and the Town Poor Farm, where the poor could help support themselves, evolved. Groton bought land for a Poor Farm in 1822, thus bringing to an end the welfare system that colonial Groton had in place for nearly 200 years. ■

Old Artifacts, New Storage

Kara Fossey, GHS Exhibits Consultant

In June 1894, the fledgling Groton Historical Society accepted its first gift: a sword carried by Captain Asa Lawrence during the Revolution. During the following 120 years, the Society amassed a large collection of artifacts important and unique to the town of Groton, including a 1794 land deed for the Rocky Hill school house in East Groton, the key and lock from the jail in the old Town House where Job Shattuck was initially held for his participation in Shays' Rebellion, a brass candlestick used by Samuel A. Green, M.D. at Fort Wagner in 1863, the complete set of Boutwell family china, and a 1936 photograph of members of the Groton Garden Club planting lady slippers in the Town Forest.

For years, many of these pieces were housed in whatever containers were available: a crumbling cardboard box, a steamer trunk covered in labels, a locked painted tin box, and long-closed chests of drawers. Some years ago, the Society began to organize and consolidate these artifacts into archival storage. With an increasing number of items in the Society's collection, this continues to be an on-going task. As we rethink and repurpose the exhibits and rooms in the newly renovated Boutwell House, proper storage is essential to ensure that these treasures are protected and preserved.

In 1894, when the Society was established, there were no standards developed for museum storage and little knowledge about proper techniques and materials for preservation. Today, luckily, this is not the case and there are many products and references to guide us.

Delicate 18th and 19th century town documents are now being encased in museum-grade mylar sleeves and laid flat in archival document boxes. Old photographs are sorted by subject and slipped into polyester pockets, then placed in one of three different styles of archival photograph boxes. Our large collection of glass lantern slides are wrapped in four-flap enclosures before being arranged, on end, in reinforced metal-edged boxes. Fragile china and glass are nestled in acid-free tissue and gently placed in uniform storage cartons.

Before these artifacts are grouped in their appropriate boxes, they are carefully photographed by GHS volunteer Carolyn Perkins. These photographs are imported into our PastPerfect database to accompany their respective catalog records, which include description, provenance, dimensions, and condition of each item. By having a complete record of the society's holdings arranged neatly in proper containers, we will be in a better position to evaluate needs and priorities. Our archives and storage are becoming more navigable for volunteers and researchers alike. ■



(Left) An assortment of archival storage boxes.

(Right) Carolyn Perkins photographing artifacts for the GHS digital catalog.

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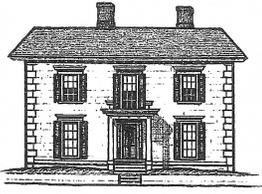
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Groton Historical Society

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IN THE SPRING 2014 ISSUE

- 1 Cub Scouts Tour Boutwell House
Bobbie Spiegelman
- 2 Main Street View: It Takes a Team to Raise a Historical Society
John H. Ott
- 3 A Hard Act to Follow: Interview with Audrey Bryce
C. David Gordon
- 4 Coping with the Poor and Shiftless in Colonial Groton
Judy Adams
- 5 Boutwell Champions High Schools, Libraries, and Trained Teachers
Brian Bixby
- 6 Cookbooks on the Governor's Bookshelves?
Liz Strachan
- 7 Old Artifacts, New Storage
Kara Fossey
- 7 GHS Directors / Advisors 2013-2014 / Membership Form

COMING UP... SAVE THE DATE

GHS Annual Summer Ramble—Tuesday Evening July 15, 2014

This year the Summer Ramble takes us to the Groton Conservation Commission's Rocky Hill area (near but not the same as the Mass Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary of the same name). There we will view the remains of charcoal kilns from the early 1800s -- one of the colonial industries based on natural resources in Groton. Our walk will be led by archaeologist Marty Dudek, whom you will remember from past guided walks to the Nate Nutting sawmill site off Indian Hill Road and the old soapstone quarry off Common Street.

The evening will wrap up with strawberry shortcake and Tom Callahan's homemade ice cream at another historic site in town. At presstime, we were still firming up the logistics of this special outing for the townsfolk of Groton. Be sure to check the local papers and the GHS website for details on starting time, bus reservations, and all destinations.

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Marty Dudek