

# Then and Now

Newsletter of the Groton Historical Society

Volume 14, Number 3

July 2013

## *An Afternoon in Georgianna's Parlor*

*Susan Slade*

*Outgoing President, Groton Woman's Club*

*One hundred years ago, in March, Georgianna Boutwell, daughter of Gov. and Mrs. George Boutwell, invited several women to her family home on Main Street to talk about forming a service club for women. It quickly became the Groton Woman's Club and thrives today, with Georgianna remembered as its founder. Her home, now known as the Governor Boutwell House, has been since 1939 home to the Groton Historical Society, which coincidentally was founded by Georgianna in 1894, nineteen years before she started the GWC.*

*Boutwell House has been closed to the public while undergoing extensive rehabilitation over the past 18 months. But when GWC president Susan Slade broached the idea to GHS president John Ott of holding the Club's centennial celebration at the house, the response was positive. And so it was that the Red Room (Georgianna's parlor) was given high priority for sprucing up in time to welcome the GWC on this auspicious occasion—a joint undertaking by two organizations that both owe their existence to the same indefatigable woman, Georgianna Boutwell. What follows is a warm first-person account of that memorable afternoon in Georgianna's parlor.*

The day finally came, May 17, 2013. After over a year of planning and reading old minutes, the interest and excitement was building. The day was picture perfect, sunny and warm with a slight breeze. Many of us had never been in the Governor Boutwell House so there was no previous visit to color our experience.

The plan was to have a box lunch first at the Union Congregational Church just down the street, so there would be minimal clean up and there would be more time at the Boutwell House. When we arrived we dedicated a granite bench, which was the Club's gift to honor Georgianna Boutwell (see photo). The bench sits near the top of the driveway, and the paver in front of it reads GROTON WOMAN'S CLUB FOUNDED BY GEORGIANNA BOUTWELL 1913 – 2013.

In reading the Club's early minutes, my imagination created pictures of the ladies who formed the Club and their desire to bring services to the people of Groton. What was it that led them to start this organization that has endured 100 years? In the beginning they met twice a month in Georgianna's parlor and always had music and served tea along with a speaker or some kind of program.

The first services they set up were hot school lunches and a well-baby clinic so that gave us a feeling of what was important to them. All this created the expectation of what it would be like to be in the room where it all actually began.

We had many more members attend on this lovely



*Standing by the granite bench dedicated on May 17 to the memory of Georgianna Boutwell, founder of the Groton Woman's Club in 1913, are (from left) president-elect Nancy Olson, retiring president Susan Slade, and John Ott, president of the Groton Historical Society. Photo by Ellen Hargraves.*

afternoon than we had expected. Inside the house Stuart Schulman on the violin and Susan Randazzo on the cello were performing music I believe the early members would have enjoyed. I walked into the parlor and faced the marble mantle which John Ott had decorated with flags and a photograph of Georgianna Boutwell, who was seventy years old when she organized the Club. As I turned and looked out over the ladies sitting there as I have for the last three years at every

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# Main Street View: "Can't We Go Any Faster?"

This used to be a line I heard from my children on long trips in the summer, followed by "When are we going to get there?" Both of these questions now roll off the tongues of Society members and friends who patiently wait to see our renovation project finished in the hope of finally, once again, getting to see and enjoy their museum, the



Governor Boutwell House. The truth is, however, the house still has a way to go to live up to what I perceive are the public's expectations given the town's investment. Not that there aren't a dedicated number of

people who have and still are willing to help, but the process is a tedious one -- scheduling work and finding the right materials, as well as trying to understand how best to use the collections while presenting a story that will engage visitors and students alike.

The house's great kitchen is nearly done, with period appliances now being installed. The room is plastered and painted and will soon be ready for use (on page 3 Al Collins describes what still needs doing to get us ready for our eagerly awaited Open House in October). The main parlor of the house--the Red Room--has already been put into service thanks to the Groton Woman's Club, which held its centennial celebration in the room on May 17th, under the watchful eye of its founder, Georgianna Boutwell. Her picture and the ceremonial gavel of those early days sit on the room's fireplace mantle (see Dave Gordon's photo at right). It was a wonderful affair utilizing the symbolism of the house's renovation to mark the Club's own rejuvenation and growth at 100 (on page 1 guest contributor Susan Slade recalls the excitement of the day). The simple elegance of the uncluttered front hall and the fresh air from the open doors made Boutwell House both inviting to enter and warm with the hospitality of the day. Outside, next to the driveway, is a splendid new granite bench given by the Woman's Club to mark its centennial and honor its founder, Georgianna Boutwell.

## GHS Office Ready to Go

Elsewhere in the house the new office areas are painted,

carpeted and now inhabited with office furniture donated through the generosity of Fidelity Bank in Leominster. Their contribution has saved the Society thousands of dollars and instilled a new air of professionalism about the premises. In addition, our new PastPerfect 5 Software Program gives the Society a greater ability to manage its corporate records, collections, membership and finances. Throw in a new phone system, a high-capacity copier and a few new work tables, and we will soon be ready to welcome researchers and genealogists, who have missed access to our archival holdings.

In the interim, we continue to offer programs for our members and friends, the most recent being a fascinating and informative Summer Ramble tour on July 22 of the Margaret Fuller sites in town with Nancy LeMay and others working with Judy Adams and Tom Callahan, our program committee.



Let me close by welcoming two new well-known local individuals to our board of directors, Patti Modzelewski and Stuart Shuman. They have jumped into the work of the Society bringing new energy and ideas to this long-standing Groton institution, which will celebrate its own 120th anniversary next year. Have a wonderful, safe summer and look for more information via the mail and our website on our summer activities and our plans for an Open House on October 5th.

*John H. Ott  
President, GHS  
July 2013*

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## Nearly There:

### *Boutwell House to Reopen in the Fall*

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

Both the Board of Directors and other members of the Groton Historical Society are breathing a sigh of relief as our massive renovation of Boutwell House is nearing the end. It has been quite an adventure orchestrating work related to both the town CPA Grant funded segment and the state Cultural Facilities Grant funded segment, both of which have impacted the completion of each other. CPA funding was initially spent to get the house to a point where it could accept the work funded by the Cultural Facilities Grant after which the rest of the CPA Grant funded work could be completed. Whoever thought it could get so complicated with both grants marching to a slightly different tune regarding the administration of each source of funding.

The new upstairs office rooms are complete and occupied, ready for volunteer staff to make the space their new home. All the walls and ceilings have now been painted, new carpeting has been installed and outlets and lighting have been replaced, making the work space bright and usable. We also have the addition of a new staff bathroom accessible from the office area. The original George Boutwell library cupboards inside this office space have been left in place with doors refitted and painted inside and out. The cupboards convey details of George Boutwell's existence, which adds to that special ghostly feeling as you walk through the house.

This space is now very pleasant and will be a productive area where the staff can now catalog the collections without feeling they are working out of a closet. This area will also provide research space for visitors eager to learn



*Boutwell House gleams with fresh paint, the work of Don Haberman and Son of Groton.  
Photo by Al Collins.*



*Our old soapstone sinks have been installed on a new cabinet, custom-built by Broughton Woodworks of West Groton.  
Photo by Al Collins.*

about George Boutwell, the Boutwell family and much of Groton's historic past. The rear set of stairs, now a welcoming approach to the upstairs office space, has received a fresh coat of paint. Don Haberman & Son Painting of Groton was selected to carefully perform all of the painting within the house and did a great job.

#### **Turn of the Century Kitchen a Gem**

Downstairs, in the midsection of the house, the kitchen and new ADA compliant bathroom have come together beautifully with new paint everywhere. With a functional accessible bathroom for visitors and a soon to be usable kitchen echoing a turn-of-the-century life style, this rehabilitated area should prove to be a focal point of the house once the public starts touring again. People will get a flavor of how daily food preparation was handled one hundred or more years ago. Children especially should like this area since it is so different from the modern-day conveniences they have grown up around. The accessible bathroom is to the rear of the house off the back kitchen hallway in what was originally an indoor woodshed. Remember that wood was the primary fuel way back when and a wood storage area had to be close at hand for those long cold winter days and nights. It also made for easy access to fuel the large cast iron wood-burning kitchen cook stove and the masonry beehive baking oven. The new bathroom and plumbing fixtures will allow use by any and all visitors without excluding physically challenged individuals.

Our new kitchen will soon house a fully restored HUB manufactured wood-burning cook stove, a pair of

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## *Boutwell House to Reopen Continued from page 3*

turn-of-the-century soapstone sinks salvaged from a farmhouse in New Hampshire and, if we can locate one, a period ice box. The soapstone sinks needed a period sink cabinet to sit upon so the services of Broughton Woodworks of West Groton were enlisted to design and fabricate the sink base. Beaded fir was the wood of choice used in the construction of the cabinet, with all of the construction details--wooden drawer slides, slotted wood screws and period hardware--mimicking details of the past. It was a complicated creation since the two soapstone sinks differ in size, requiring hours of documenting dimensions and configurations. The installation went perfectly and once the new period faucets are installed, the kitchen will come to life after years of being dormant.

### **Modern Safeguard**

The new fire suppression system installed throughout the house has been tested, filled with water and is standing by ready to be used should the need arise. This is one of those additions to the house we hope is never used but we can all sleep a little better knowing that the Boutwell House Collections are safer today than they have ever been in the past. Most of the fire suppression piping that had to be installed within public view has been painted to match the wall color, making it gently fade

away into the background. Our system is filled with an anti-freezing agent that will also protect the entire system from freezing, including attics and outside porches, should the heating system be down for an extended period of time due to power outages.

### **Finishing Touch**

Since my last update, work on the house interior has made rapid strides. The only work remaining is to set up the new HUB cook stove and complete miscellaneous plumbing and electrical work and window repair carpentry.

The Red Room (Georgianna Boutwell's parlor) at the front of the house was the first to be emptied of all boxes and extraneous furniture, then given a thorough cleaning and polishing to ready it for the first special event to take place in Boutwell House since renovations began nearly two years ago. On May 17th, the Groton Woman's Club, founded by Georgianna Boutwell, held its 100th anniversary meeting in most likely the same room that their first meeting was held 100 years ago.

Groton landscape architect Lorayne Black is designing an exterior ADA accessible ramp system that will be the finishing touch to this lengthy rehabilitation project. The ramp system will be constructed of earthen materials that will add a landscape element to the main driveway side of the house. The plan includes plantings that will complement the stately Boutwell House and should result in a very attractive new main entrance to the house accessible to all either by a set of steps or the new ADA accessible ramp.

If all goes well, we anticipate hosting an Open House at the refurbished home of Governor George Boutwell on October 5th with a day of festivities and tours of the house. Getting people back into Groton Historical Society's Boutwell House is of the utmost importance since all that has been done would have been done for naught, if people cannot enjoy what the house has to offer. ■



*Mike and other pipe fitters from Fire Sprinkler Systems, Richmond, NH, have installed a full fire-suppression system throughout Boutwell House. Photo by Al Collins.*

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## *Georgianna's Parlor Continued from page 1*

club meeting, everyone seemed different in some way. The singing of "America," which we do at every meeting, was the best I have ever heard. The thought in my mind was this is where it all began. We are full circle. I could not help but wonder what Georgianna would think if she were with us. The time had come to install the new officers, those who would begin the second century of the Club. The short ceremony seemed to have more meaning on that afternoon.

Now I am not usually one who would think about "spirits" being in a room and I thought if I said anything like that others would think I had gone off the deep end. But as the meeting was coming to a close and the ladies were preparing to leave, before I realized it, members were coming up to me to tell me how they could feel something in that parlor that was unexplainable. Members were talking about how they felt new energy to make the Club succeed to even greater accomplishments in the beginning of the second century. Was Georgianna there? I do not know, but if she was I hope she was pleased with the direction the ladies who followed her have taken what she created.

There have been many suggestions from members about meeting in Georgianna's parlor again. The one that I like is to have the installation of officers there every few years to give the new officers the experience of that unexplainable feeling in the room that many of us felt. ■

# Happy Birthday, John Tinker:

## Groton's First Entrepreneur

C. David Gordon

This issue of *Then and Now*, the GHS quarterly newsletter, comes, by happy coincidence, shortly after the 400th anniversary of the birth of one of Groton's original petitioners to establish the settlement that became the town of Groton. His name was John Tinker and he was born on July 13, 1613, in New Windsor, Berkshire, England.

Thanks to Michael Roberts, GHS board member, chair of the Society's Long Range Planning Committee, also chair of the town's Historical Commission, we have good information on Tinker's activities around 1655, the year Groton was founded. Mike, who is also a professional archaeologist, searched online and looked over the writings of Groton historians Caleb Butler, Samuel Green, and Virginia May to gather details for his talk on Tinker at our July 2010 Summer Ramble (held, would you believe, on the 13th, Tinker's actual birthdate!). Much of what follows is from Mike's presentation that night.

John Tinker immigrated to this country with his mother in 1617 at the age of 25, living first in Dorchester with his sisters, already settled here. Before his first year in the New World was out, Tinker had become known as a trusted "undertaker" (one who undertakes business for another) of important legal and business affairs for people. Between 1638 and 1653 he traveled to England several

times as the agent for some prominent people (among them, early American painter Augustine Clement and members of the Winthrop family, one of whom, John the Younger, served as Governor of Connecticut from 1659 to 1675). Tinker also had power of attorney to act on behalf of several other people.

Mike's research shows that, before his connection with the founding of Groton, Tinker lived in Connecticut, where, among other enterprises, he formed a partnership with two other men who saw a need that they felt they could supply. British Navy ships required tar for ship building and maintenance and had to rely on colonial suppliers since pitch-bearing trees in England had been destroyed. Back in Massachusetts, Tinker qualified to participate in the business affairs of Massachusetts Bay Company.

### Early Trader with Native Americans

There is also evidence, Mike says, that Tinker was trading with Native Americans by 1655, and in 1658 he had been granted a license from Mass Bay Company to trade for furs in both Groton and Lancaster. It's believed that he established a trading post for commerce with Native Americans near a trail and river fording point close to the homeland of the Nipmuc people. That would be the Nashua River, at Stoney Wading Place off Nod Road.

In Mike's presentation, he asked the audience to imagine "a narrower Nashua River at this point, a well-used Indian trail crossing the river at a nearby ford and a deep dark forest made up of huge maples, beeches, some pines and other species of the early New England forest." There was not much dead wood on the forest floor, Mike said, for the native people collected this for their many fires. "The Nipmucs knew this landscape as their homeland which they nurtured and which had nurtured them for thousands of years. To the immigrant colonist it was a savage, deadly and evil place not to be trusted but to be overcome and tamed along with its inhabitants. But to some early settlers it was the opportunity of a lifetime—John Tinker was one of these."

### One of Groton's Founders

About that time, Tinker joined with several other enterprising settlers to bring a petition before the Great and General Court for establishing Groton Plantation in May 1655. The names of the other petitioners can't be officially verified, other than Deane Winthrop, the first listed and credited with giving the new town the name of Groton after the town of his birth in Suffolk, England. Their names don't

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*The Tinker monument is, to the surprise of many people, a double-sided granite marker. The Tinker inscription, facing the river, dates to 1951, but on the reverse side is another inscription that dates to 1882 and commemorates the slaughter by Indians of two early settlers, John Shattuck and his son, also John.*

*The inscription on the Shattuck side of this unusual piece of granite reads: NEAR THIS SPOT JOHN SHATTUCK A SELECTMAN OF GROTON AND HIS SON JOHN WERE KILLED BY THE INDIANS MAY 8, 1709 WHILE CROSSING STONY FORDWAY JUST BELOW THE PRESENT DAM. The Shattucks were killed only 50 years after Tinker's heyday. Such an irony, that the stone should present the first inhabitants of Groton, the Native Americans, in both a positive and negative light. Photos by C. David Gordon.*



## Did You Know.....



that besides being a governor, a congressman, a Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, and a storekeeper, George S. Boutwell of Groton was also a farmer? Gov. Boutwell and his son, Francis, farmed 600-700 acres near Groton center. The farm was located on the land below Gibbett Hill and behind Hollis Street. It is written that in the fall of 1897, the Boutwell farm produced 2000 baskets of peaches to send to market.

--E.S.

## GHS Volunteer's Notebook: First in an Occasional Series

Judy Adams writes: As a research volunteer, I often sort through old documents at Boutwell House. Recently I was intrigued to find handwritten papers related to social issues in colonial Groton. Dated in the early 18th century, they described how the community dealt with indigents, illegitimacy, and indenture in a day long before welfare and Social Security as we know it. New England town policies concerned with these problems originated in the English Poor Laws of 1601.

I began to read about the 1601 law and, as usual in research, the bibliography in each book led me on to others. There were no acknowledged human rights advocates in those days, as, for example Gov. George Boutwell became more than a century later. The milk of human kindness did not always prevail, understandably, because the bottom line was the survival of isolated, self-sufficient communities.

Look for a glimpse into the origin of American social policy in a future issue of *Then and Now*.

--Judy Adams most recently helped program chairman Tom Callahan and guest speaker Nancy LeMay present a GHS summer program on Margaret Fuller, Transcendentalist author and onetime resident of Groton. In earlier issues of *Then and Now* Judy wrote about the Nate Nutting Mill Site (Feb 2012) and *Old Time Political Campaign Ephemera* (Oct 2012), both topics she researched in GHS archives.

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## John Tinker Continued from page 5

resonate down through successive generations in the town, unlike familiar names like Shattuck, Gilson, Dana, Blood, Nutting, and Tarbell that came with later settlers. So Tinker is not part of this legacy of multigenerational allegiance to the town. He is known, rather, as a single individual associated with this place at a crucial time, a time that was quite brief and even then shared with other locales.

Following the formation of Groton Plantation, in May 1655, Tinker and the other petitioners received appointments as Selectmen of Groton for two-year terms. In that same year Groton became an entity, Tinker moved to Lancaster. By 1657 he was appointed Lancaster's town clerk. The next year he moved again to New London, Connecticut, where in 1659 he served as town meeting moderator. Then in 1660 he became a deputy of the Connecticut General Court, the name, similar to that in Massachusetts at the time, for the colony's law-making body. In 1662, Tinker, at age 50, died "of unknown causes." Five months later the Connecticut General Court voted to pay expenses of his sickness and death, and he was buried in the Central Cemetery in Hartford, Connecticut.

But Groton does have a permanent memorial to John Tinker. In 1951, the Historical Society saw to it that a granite marker remembering Tinker was installed on a small triangle of parkland where Route 119 and Nod Road meet (see photos). The inscription reads: "JOHN TINKER AN ORIGINAL PETITIONER AND ONE OF THE FIRST SELECTMEN OF GROTON BUILT, PRIOR TO 1659, AN INDIAN TRADING POST ABOUT 500 YDS. EASTERLY OF THIS MARKER---THE FIRST SETTLEMENT WAS MADE NEARBY SOON AFTERWARDS."

Tinker was unique, says Mike, one who probably could be at home just as well in our era as he was in his own age. He was definitely not what you'd consider a typical frontiersman or settler. Mike says, "I was surprised to find that he was not a 'Leather stocking' pioneer but a quintessential colonial gentleman and entrepreneur equally at home in a deep woods trading post as in the Great and General Courts of Massachusetts, Connecticut and England."

Not a bad start, says Mike, for a town full of entrepreneurs. ■

# WANTED

Donated Antiques, Collectibles and Services  
for the

Groton Historical Society Antiques Auction

September 20, 2013 | Groton Country Club

Clean out your attic, basement and closets to find early books,  
old photos, prints, jewelry and other unique items.

**Groton Memorabilia is highly desirable.**

**Nothing is too big or too small.**

Description of Item: \_\_\_\_\_

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Estimated Value: \_\_\_\_\_

Tell us something about the item, e.g., Where does it come from? Has  
it been in your family for a long time? For what was it used?

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Please provide the above information and return this form to:  
Groton Historical Society | PO Box 202 | Groton, MA 01450  
978-448-0092

Please check one of the two boxes below:

I can drop off the item in the barn of the home of Lili and John Ott,  
545 Farmers Row, Groton.

I need the item to be picked up.

Your response is appreciated before September 9, 2013

## How to Reach Us

*The Governor Boutwell House will be  
reopening for business in the fall of 2013  
after having been closed for renovations.  
Please contact us with any questions.*

**Phone:** 978-448-0092

**Email:** info@grotonhistoricalsociety.org

**Website:** www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org

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## GHS DIRECTORS 2012-2013

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## GHS MEMBERSHIP FORM

Annual Individual / Family	\$35
Annual GHS Sponsor	\$75
Corporate Sponsor	\$250
Sustaining Member	\$1000
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Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

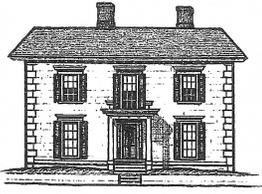
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## Groton Historical Society

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Groton, MA 01450

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## Coming Up . . .

Friday September 20: Antiques Auction to benefit GHS

5:30 PM at the Groton Country Club

We need your donations -- see page 7 for details

Saturday September 21: Grotonfest at Legion Field

10 AM to 5 PM: Stop by the GHS Booth

Saturday October 5: Governor Boutwell House Reopens

Check our website for details of this all-day celebration.

For more information about these events and other programs, please visit our website at

[www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.grotonhistoricalsociety.org)