

Old Stone News

*The Newsletter of
The West Boylston
Historical Society
Spring 2014
Volume 16, Number 1*

MEMBERSHIP

The dues for the calendar year 2014 are now due. If you have received a due's envelope with this newsletter, it means that we have not received your dues. The Society needs and would very much appreciate your continued support.

CONTACT INFORMATION

www.wbhistory.org
Bigelow@wbhistory.org

We would very much like to have everyone's email address so as to notify you of changes when we need to reach you quickly and efficiently. It also saves us time and money. Please share. We promise not to pass them out.

BUILDING AND GROUNDS

It has been all about snow; plowing snow, shoveling snow and raking the snow off the roof. Thanks to Phillippe Chevalier, Aaron, Don and Norman for their perseverance.



Home of William Thomas, father of Robert B. Thomas

MISSION STATEMENT

"The West Boylston Historical Society collects, preserves and honors the history of the Town through programs, exhibitions, publications and maintenance of the historic Bigelow Tavern as its headquarters and museum."

From the President

Well this has been quite the winter and I am sure that most of you are hoping that the ground hog did indeed see his shadow and that spring is only about four weeks away. It has been a beautiful winter though, and most especially the surprise Saturday storm that created a world covered in cotton bolls, spectacular.

I hope that many of you got to see Channel 5's Chronicle piece on February 18, 2014, featuring Louise Howland talking about "The Old Farmer's Almanac" and its connection to West Boylston. The Beaman Memorial Library has a complete collection of Robert B. Thomas Almanacs. He moved to West Boylston as a young boy and lived on North Main Street. He is buried in the Leg Cemetery, just up the road from that house.

Well at any rate spring is just around the corner. Our first program of the new year is on March 5th. You will find full details for this and our other remaining programs elsewhere in the newsletter.

One sure way to chase away the winter blues would be attend a parade. West Boylston will be celebrating this year on St. Patrick's Day with the World's Shortest St. Patrick's Day Parade. Selectman, Michael Kittredge Jr. will be the Grand Marshall. It will be held on Sunday, March 16, 2014 at noon. It starts at Finder's Pub and ends at Keeper's Pub and will be complete with bands and step dancers. Don De Marsh will represent the Historical Society. It should be a fun event.

We are looking forward to seeing many of you at our upcoming meetings. Remember also that we are here on Thursday mornings from 9:30 AM to 12:00 PM. Stop by to say hello, do some research, or consider joining us as a volunteer. You are always most welcome.

Beverly K. Goodale

IT ALL STARTED HERE

Political tensions arose among the people of Massachusetts long before the battle of Lexington and Concord. In response to a number of bills by the British Government called the "Intolerable Acts", 4,622 militiamen from 37 towns marched down Main Street in Worcester; effectively shutting down the crown controlled county courthouse and effectively overthrowing British Rule. The date was September 6, 1774 and not a shot was fired.

As a result of that event, a consortium of historical and cultural organizations has banded together to make people aware of this untold story and the part the people of this area played in the American War of Independence. A daylong event is planned in Worcester on September 7, 2014. For further details go to

www.revolutionary1774.org

If you are interested in planning something at the society to bring this event to the attention of the townspeople, please contact Bev at (508) 835-3704. We have 25 Revolutionary Soldiers buried in our cemetery and many more West Boylston men fought in this war. Even though West Boylston was not a town at that point, we were part of the 2nd precinct of Shrewsbury.

**Do you have a revolutionary war soldier in your family from West Boylston?
We would love to document that fact and expand our knowledge of that person.**

CURATORS CORNER

Winters are a good time to get work done behind the scenes. Most Thursdays find Eleanor, Sandy and Don continuing to inventory the possessions of the Society. It is a slow process. We have added 1700 photos to our data base thanks to Don De Marsh and with permission of the Beaman Memorial Library. These pictures from early West Boylston are now available at the Society for your viewing pleasure. It will be a wonderful resource for us all. Thank you Don for making this happen and the Beaman Memorial Library. Don and Bev are also re-organizing the vault when time permits.

In other news, we have received a "wind tunnel" signed by the high school class of 1941, that used it in a school play. This was the gift of Nate and Lee Beardsley. We also received a "victrola" complete with a stack of early records from Nancy Robinson. This is a real trip down memory lane. Nancy also gave us some town maps. Thank you everyone and remember the society when you are cleaning out and come across memorabilia relating to the town or its families. Your gifts are always appreciated.

Be sure to check the Historical Society website for up to date information at:

www.wbhistory.org.



HISTORY BY THE INCH



The recent real estate purchase of land and building at the corner of Worcester and Franklin Streets by the Town of West Boylston, for the use of the new town hall, is indeed great news for the town and its citizens. The Town of West Boylston has had a 97 year absence of a town hall building. West Boylston has had buildings that have held town offices within said building in various locations in town through the years, but not an official building proclaimed as the town hall, since 1917.

The former town hall (located at the present site of the West Boylston Municipal Lighting plant on Crescent St.) had a very short lived life in town. The town hall was built when West Boylston was rebuilt after the taking of the old town for the Wachusett reservoir, and was dedicated on January 18, 1904. It was a very attractive modern building with complete updated modern features of the time period. It contained an assembly hall, town office rooms, grade 1 school room and housed the town's public library until 1912, (when the Beaman Memorial Public Library was built). The stock and tools of the Municipal Electric Light Co. were stored in the basement, and the building also contained the town vault for all important town records to be kept.

According to the December 24, 1917 Worcester Telegram & Gazette article, written by town correspondent, Mary Cook, "The West Boylston Town Hall was destroyed by the fire early this morning. About 2:30 O'clock, the night men at the Oakdale railroad station telephoned to the Central station. The alarm was given as soon as possible, but when the first men arrived at 2:45, one corner of the building was ablaze and in a short time the whole building was a flaming mess. Nothing could be done to save the building. There was a strong wind that carried the sparks to nearby houses of Edward Lovell, H. Hastings, Earl W. Reed and the Reed organ shop. Owing to the wet condition of the roofs and with the use of hand chemicals and snow, the fires were put out without any loss to these properties." The loss of the building was estimated at \$15,000 with an insurance of \$11,000. On December 27, 1917 the town vault, where the records of the town were kept was opened, and the contents were found to be in perfect condition. The town vault was constructed of brick and cement, with a stone and cement foundation, and was entered from the first floor by two steel doors with an air space between. The walls were about 20 inches in thickness.

Mr. Wood, state commission of public records was present at the vault opening along with Mr. Bailey of the firm Cooper and Bailey, architects, who built the town hall. The safe was opened by A.L. Purington of Worcester, an expert locksmith. Others present were town clerk, W.T. Holmes, town treasurer A.W. Hinds, selectmen W.B. Wood and William C. Pierce and auditor Edgar P. Neal

The town proceeded immediately to build an 18x20 foot building over the town vault; this building was constructed by Merrill Bros. and was used for many years to keep all the town's records in.

There were a couple of loses due to the fire. In the assembly room was a marble clock presented by the late Senator E.A. Cowee at the dedication of the building. The other big loss was the gilded eagle that graced the cupola and served as a weather vane. This eagle was an heirloom of the town, being formally on the high school building in the valley where the Wachusett reservoir is now.

On January 17, 1918 quite a large crowd of West Boylston residents gathered around the remains of the town hall to watch the destruction of the chimney, which was standing like a sentinel. At 10 O'clock in the morning, blasting of the chimney took place under the direction of Walter E. Chapman and assisted by George Rand, the final farewell to a short lived grand building.

Now, in 2014, we have a new town hall building to showcase for the Town of West Boylston's future generations to come.

Steven Carlson, Historian

Calendars

Thank you to all of you who bought our 2014 Society Calendars. We appreciate your support. They are about sold out.

Grants

We have just received word that we have been approved for a West Boylston Cultural Council grant for \$200. made possible by the Massachusetts Cultural Council. This will help defray the costs our Annual Meeting Program entitled "**Dangerous Dames - The Bad Girls of History**". We are very grateful to the council for this gift. I want to thank Neil Norum for putting the grant proposal together.

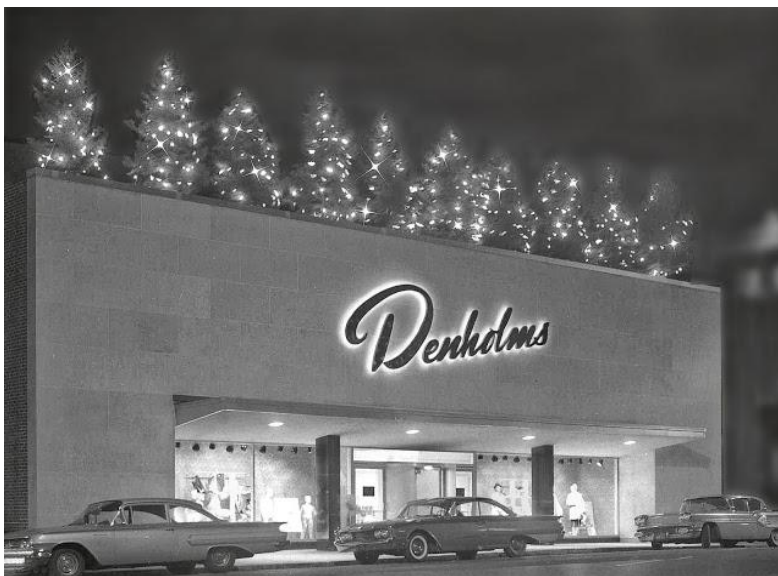
Coming Events

March 5, 2014 - Denholms: Worcester's Premier Department Store Featured Program

Christopher Sawyer, co-author along with Patricia Wolf of the 2011 book on Denholms' history, will present a program of stories and images of Worcester premier department store that closed more than 40 years ago on Thanksgiving eve 1973. Join Denholms' historian Sawyer, a collector of Denholms' memorabilia as he relives the glory days of Denholms and other stores which populated an exciting downtown.

The March 5th program begins at 7:00 PM at the Bigelow Tavern, home of the West Boylston Historical Society, 65 Worcester Street. Sawyer will entertain questions following his talk and sign copies of his book. Refreshments will be available following the program. Hostesses will be Barbara Deschenes and Mary Pusateri.

Denholms joined other department stores across the U.S. which closed over the last 50 years – Gimbels, Marshall Field, Filenes, Federal, Gafers among many others – as Americas' shopping habits changed.



A reminder of future West Boylston Historical Society programs

April 2, 2014 at 7:00 PM – Civil War Sacrifices – West Boylston's Fallen Heroes – David Lindberg, Civil War Historian

May 7, 2014 at 5:30 PM – Annual Meeting at The Manor

– Dangerous Dames – The Bad Girls of History - Patricia Perry, historical re-enactor