

Old Stone News

*The Newsletter of
The West Boylston
Historical Society
Fall 2016
Volume 19, Number 2*

MEMBERSHIP

The dues for the calendar year 2017 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. We promise not to share them.

BUILDING AND GROUNDS



The buildings and grounds committee has spent a fair amount of time drinking coffee and chatting over the lack of things that needed to be fixed at the Historical Society. Hope your houses are in as good a shape as ours!!!

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

Welcome back to another West Boylston Historical year. And thank you to all who help support our society, from those who help with the upkeep of the buildings and grounds and those on the planning committee, to the Board of Directors, and of course the members who come to our programs throughout the year. A big thank you to those who contributed and helped at our Yard Sale in June that resulted in \$941 income.

The Board of Directors voted to change our dues structure and combine individual and family membership into one with dues of \$25 per year. There also seems to be a misunderstanding that only members can attend our Annual Meeting. Anyone may attend our programs. We believe our programs are well worth the price of membership. Our away trip was cancelled last year because of insufficient signup. We had planned on a cruise on the Cape Cod Canal this fall but had to cancel because of not enough interest.

We believe we have interesting programs for the coming year. Our October 12 program is sure to be an interesting program with David Gibbs, of the Sterling Historical Society, with the program "Early American Funerary". Our November 2 program will feature a Charles Dickens expert in WPI Professor Joel Brattin, a former Dickens Society president who will talk about A Christmas Carol. Our annual Holiday Open House, caroling and town Christmas tree lighting will take place on Dec. 4th. Father Walter Riley, Civil War historian, and a West Boylston resident, will present an Abraham Lincoln program on March 8. Inside Worcester's Movie Palaces will be our April 5th presentation with Marilyn Polito of Preservation Worcester. She will share memories of the many movie palaces that once were throughout the city.

And finally, our Annual Meeting will take place on May 3 with Patricia Perry who has educated and entertained us in the past with Bad Girls of History, Presidents' Wives, and a Victorian Christmas. This time it will be Under the Petticoats. She looks at day-to-day lives of our Colonial ancestors. How many skirts did one woman wear at a time? How often did they bathe? How did they use a chamber pot? These and other fascinating questions will be peeked at. We look forward to another great program from Pat Perry.

Historically in the Past, Neil Norum

Historical Happenings

Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2016 - 7:00 p.m. at the Bigelow Tavern

Early American Funerary - Customs and Rituals - David Gibbs, Sterling Historical Society

Wednesday, Nov. 2, 2016 - 7:00 p.m. at the Bigelow Tavern

Charles Dickens "The Christmas Carol" - WPI Professor Joel Brattin, Dickens Scholar, former president, Dickens Society Baronoski

Sunday, Dec. 4, 2016 - 3:00 pm - 5:00 p.m. Bigelow Tavern Holiday Open House at the Bigelow Tavern

Lighting of Christmas Tree on the Common immediately following open house

Wednesday, March 8, 2017 - 7:00 p.m. at the Bigelow Tavern

Abraham Lincoln - Father Walter Riley, Civil War Historian

CURATORS CORNER

I am happy to report that Don DeMarsh now has all the Keye's photos in our system and we are trying to identify as many as possible. Most of the photos in our 2017 calendar will be from that collection.

Fannin and Lehner have begun work on Section J of the cemetery. We had a most interesting surprise back in July. In order to straighten the grave stones, the bases sometimes have to be dug up as well. This happens to be the case when they were working on the stone of Zachariah Child. A pale blue broken bottle was unearthed as were a number of footstones and several gravestones. The footstones mark the end of a grave and have just the initials of the deceased. The gravestones faced west and the footstones faced east supposedly, so when the cock

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

www.wbhistory.org.



HISTORY BY THE INCH **George Calvin Rice and his "Beaman Memorial"** **gift to West Boylston**

This past spring of 2016, the Beaman Memorial Public Library became registered on the National Register of Historic Places through the United States Department of the Interior of the National Park Service. This was accomplished by the efforts of Beverly Goodale, and the West Boylston Historical Commission and Louise Howland, Library Director.

This historic event would not have been possible without the generosity of one well known Worcester resident with whom West Boylston owes its gratitude to, that person being Mr. George Calvin Rice.

George Calvin Rice was born on January 13, 1833, the son of Jabez and Mary (Pierce) Rice, he was born on his father's large farm at the Summit in Worcester. George's father Jabez was the son of Luther Rice of Northboro and Betsy Beaman of West Boylston. Betsy Beaman was the fourth child of Ezra and Persis Beaman. Ezra Beaman is known as the "Father of West Boylston" and his wife Persis was the daughter of Deacon Cyprian Keyes. Persis died on November 7, 1788 and within a few months Ezra married Mary Boylston, daughter of Richard Boylston of Charlestown MA.

Ezra Beaman was a man of character, he worked his way from lieutenant to Major in the Revolutionary War, he was a man of many trades and proprietor to one of the largest estates in Worcester County, he was a resourceful businessman, a mill owner, a farmer, and he also conducted a tavern, "Beaman Tavern" which was known through-out New England. Ezra was also instrumental in the negotiations along with others in the incorporation of the town of Boylston on March 1, 1786, (serving on the board of Selectmen), and again in the incorporation of West Boylston on January 30, 1808. Ezra served as Chairman of the Selectman, town treasurer, and town Representative for West Boylston, which he held these positions until his death on June 4, 1811.

George Calvin Rice wanted to present a memorial gift to the town of West Boylston in memory of his great grandfather Major Ezra Beaman, no such memorial had ever been proposed in Major Beaman's honor, and in the year 1911, the one hundredth anniversary of Ezra Beaman's death, George made a proposition to the town of West Boylston:

"Gentlemen: Knowing that the town of West Boylston is without a suitable library building, and being mindful that the town is desirous of having such a building, I hereby make the following offer:

"First: If, before the first day of May 1911, the town will purchase the triangular tract of land at the junction of Newton and Central Streets, and owned by Wayland A. Tuttle and agree to suitably grade the same thereafter, I will make a gift to the town of a building to be used as a public library, which will cost not less than twenty thousand (\$20,000) and agree to have said building constructed at once.

"Second: the said building is to be marked and known as the Beaman Memorial Public Library, in memory of my great grandfather, Major Ezra Beaman, who was one of the early inhabitants and prominently identified with the formation of the town".

The town voted to accept most gratefully the generous offer of Mr. Rice and quickly appropriated \$1800.00 for the purchase of the Wayland Tuttle lot and a building committee was appointed to set forth of the actual construction of the building. The building committee selected the architectural bids of Frost, Briggs and Chamberlain (who came up with the New England Colonial design) and the contractor bids of E.J. Cross Company.

The actual work was begun in July 1911 and completed in thirteen months. On September 6, 1912, the dedication of the Beaman Memorial Public Library took place with great fanfare. The public showed great interest in the new building and nearly 450 new library cards registered in the first year.

In 1913, George Calvin Rice sold his home at the age of 80 to the Worcester Country Club and the old farm; which had been in the Rice family since 1800, was transformed into the beautiful grounds we see today. The very same firms of Frost, Briggs and Chamberlain and E.J. Cross were selected in building the English Country Manor design of the Worcester Country Club.

George Calvin Rice died two weeks after his 92nd birthday in 1925, at his home at 875 Main Street in Worcester, he married for the first time at the age of 80 and left his wife Bertha (Maynard) and a nephew Francis B. Rice, who was the only surviving member of the Rice family. George Calvin Rice is buried in Mount Vernon Cemetery, West Boylston along with his Beaman ancestors.

Steven Carlson, Historian
West Boylston Historical Society

CURATOR'S CORNER Con't from Page 2

crowded on judgment day, the resurrected dead would arise facing the dawn. Early cemeteries were much more haphazardly constructed than they are today and we think that somewhere along the way, probably when mowing cemeteries became popular, stones were positioned in a more orderly manner, making it easier to care for the grounds. At this time most all the footstones disappeared and we had no idea where they went. At least some seemed to have been buried in mass. Every one that was found at this site is broken in half. Whether this is the condition they were found in or it made them easier to bury them, we will probably never know. The plan at this time is to bury them with their respective headstone. There is one footstone in this area that has been put back properly with its headstone.

So, the next time that you are at the cemetery, take a walk through Section J and see the progress as we strive to protect and honor our history. This work is all due, in no small part, to the support of the town through the Community Preservation Act.

Bev Goodale, Curator



Zachariah Child's grave stone



Pale blue broken bottle and footstone unearthed at gravesite.

LOOKING BACK

Excerpts taken from the Mary Cook scrapbook collection

September 21, 1899

THREE FOOT CELERY GROWN IN TOWN

Benjamin F. Bond cut a head of celery in his garden this morning that was 3 ½' high and weighing 3 ¾ pounds. He is a market gardener and lives on the common. He had a comparatively small garden covering but two acres with every inch of ground used and two crops of small vegetables are raised yearly. He has been a market gardener 12 years and his business is paying like never before. For many years he has been troubled by lack of water during the summer. Last summer he made an experiment which has proved successful. G.W. Patterson of Lake View bored an artesian well in the place 330' deep and the 6 week job cost \$1,000. The tower and windmill cost an additional \$200.

After the well was completed he placed 2 ½ tons of iron piping through his grounds and introduced water through these pipes then

attached sprinklers to water the produce at any time. His specialty is raising celery and three-fourths of his garden is devoted to it with approximately 1,500 plants in these beds, selling at \$1.50 per dozen wholesale and retailing at 15 to 20 cents per bunch. He also planted 1,000 tomato plants which yielded liberally. He does not plant potatoes or corn.

His prized possession is a tree he raised from a castor oil bean brought from Florida and planted last April. The tree is now 8' high and stocky. He is a thrifty hard working man and employs two men to help him. He attributes his good crops this season to the irrigation system and if it cost him twice as much, it would have been worth it.

Barbara Deschenes