

President's Overview



First I'd like to thank the membership of the Medford Historical Society for the confidence you've shown in electing me your new President. Also, I extend my thanks to the officers and board members who will serve along with me this coming year.

Another special thanks goes to the directors who have stepped down from their official roles, but continue to be involved in the Society. To stay vigorous and in touch with the community, the Society needs a constant influx of new members and officers. This means that after a time, officers and directors must step aside and take up new roles. Fortunately, the Society has many volunteer committees where members can match their interests and available time with the Society's activities.

Medford Historical Society was founded a little over 110 years ago, and it is approaching the centennial of its headquarters at 10 Governors Avenue. There is a great deal to be proud of as we appreciate these milestones. As well as being stewards of the building and collections at 10 Governors Avenue, the Society owns the 17th century Peter Tufts House at 350 Riverside Avenue. Additionally, the Society serves as a repository for records relating to Medford's history and is a valuable resource for people undertaking genealogical, historical, and home research. The Society presents public programs and works cooperatively with like minded individuals and organizations to promote understanding and appreciation of history.

However, as with all community based volunteer organizations, the Society needs supporters to volunteer time and financial resources in order to accomplish its goals.

As the year progresses, I invite members, direc-

tors, and officers to reconsider the mission, goals and activities of the Society. Although its cash resources are limited, the Society has many non-financial assets, a proud history, and many new members who are excited to be part of a growing and revitalized organization in Medford.

Our challenge is to continue to develop activities that attract volunteers and funding. To do this, I believe the Society must serve the interests and desires of the community. Suggestions from members include:

- Making the collections more accessible via the Internet. This project is already underway but could be increased in scope and speed.
- Conducting an inventory, by neighborhood, of historic homes and buildings.
- Commissioning an historian to document neighborhood histories.
- Collecting oral histories relating to the many waves of immigration into Medford.

These are only a few possible options, and deciding how to focus our energies and efforts is the point of revisiting the Society's role in the community.

Please feel free to call me at 781-395-5138 or email me at jwa02155@yahoo.com with ideas and projects in which you have an interest or a wish to participate.

With your continued support, I look forward to an exciting and productive year!

*John Anderson
President*

Society Officers

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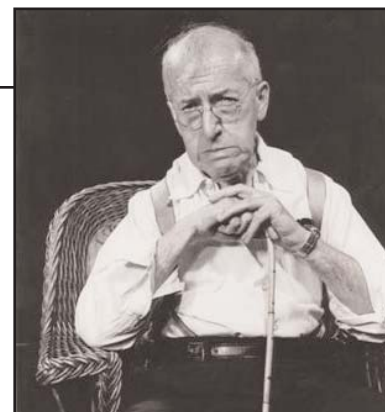
Directors at Large
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Jim Kiely
John Lonergan
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The Edward Finnegan Collection

Recently, the Society received a collection of materials from the life and career of Edward Finnegan (1899-1971). Finnegan was a teacher, actor, and writer, and in his 1971 obituary was described as "something of an institution in the Medford area." Finnegan graduated from Medford High School in 1916, and from Boston College in 1920. He went on to teach English, drama, and public speaking in the Medford schools for 44 years until his retirement in 1966. During his school career, Finnegan

also pursued a career as an actor, traveling with summer stock theatres during his vacations. When Mr. Finnegan retired in 1966, he didn't stop

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Edward Finnegan in *The Death of Bessie Smith*, Theatre Company of Boston, July 10-28, 1963.

Finnegan Collection *continued*

working; instead, he moved on to a second full-time career as a character actor. A brief profile of him appeared in the December issue of *Modern Maturity* saying, "An entirely new career at 65? Edward Finnegan of Medford, Massachusetts, found a highly interesting one waiting for him. After teaching school for 44 years, he was suddenly very much in demand as an actor." During this phase of his career, Finnegan appeared in dozens of classical and modern plays as well as television programs and the occasional film.

The collection provides a fascinating look into the life of a career educator and actor. In addition to photos, clippings, and documents about Mr. Finnegan's experiences in the Medford schools, the collection includes photos of his theatrical roles as

well as reviews and other theatre materials. Finnegan was also a playwright, and the collection includes copies of many of his plays.

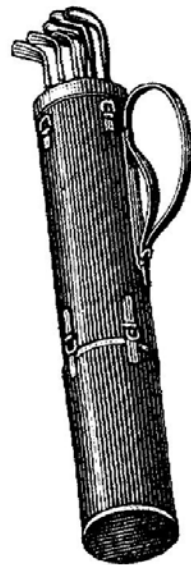
This is a great addition to the Society's collection not only for its Medford history content, but also as a record of an extraordinary Medford life. We would like to thank Mr. Finnegan's daughter, Elly Lehan of Chelmsford, for trusting us with the care of her father's story.



Finnegan as King Lear at Boston's Tributary Theatre 1947-1948 Seasons.

A Medford Golf Story

by Joseph McGonagle from the *Medford Transcript*, Tuesday April 22, 2008



It's that first day when finally know, finally feel, that the season is here. You don't have to look out the window or check the outside thermometer; your senses tell you the time is right.

The first step outdoors confirms it and the first full breath solidifies it. The first tee is calling and the fairways beckon — the golf season is here. After a winter of frustration, you can't wait to try the new set of clubs you got for Christmas. That "thwack" off the first tee is a better harbinger than the crocus or robin that you've made it through the snow and ice once more.

The checklist is gone over — clubs, golf balls, shoes and gloves.

Everything's in order. The bag is put in the trunk of the car but, just as you close the lid, you spot them out of the corner of your eye. The cruiser pulls up, tires and brakes squealing, siren piercing the quiet spring morning, the blue light flashing. Two dark uniforms spring from the car, revolvers drawn!!! "Turn around up against the car and spread 'em!" The body search is quick but humiliating. After all, you're standing in your driveway in front of all your neighbors! "You have the right to remain silent, you have the right..." Whoa guys, what's going on here??

Science fiction? Too farfetched? The revenge of some "golf widow?"

None of the above, and none too real, but the scenario is something that could have taken place in Medford if events of more than 80 years ago had taken a different direction.

This was back in the slower, quieter days of 1903 when the members of Arnie's Army (and

Arnold Palmer himself) were yet to be born. This was back when the blue laws were something to be taken very seriously and anything other than attending church on Sunday was looked at in askance by some people. A furor arose in the quiet community of Medford. The question was to golf or not to golf on Sunday and the controversy raged on in the town and in the pages of the *Medford Mercury-Citizen*.

The newspaper's report of the June Common Council meeting contained this resolve from Councilman John W. Enwright: "Resolved, that His Honor the Mayor be hereby requested to instruct the Chief of Police to investigate and report at once upon the alleged playing of golf on Sundays in the links of the Medford Golf Club, and if he finds that golf is played on Sundays, to take such measures as may be necessary to suppress it."

Champion of all future wives whose husbands actually think they can strike the small, white dimpled ball with skill, Enwright started on a one-man crusade to drive a Sunday stake through the heart of the most determined duffer.

The same article indicates Enwright's motivation. "He reviewed what it meant when he was a boy and played ball on a Sunday, the police force promptly broke up a game, taking the boys' clothing and summoning the lawbreakers into court to be fined."

So that was it. If he couldn't play baseball on Sunday as a boy, and good Enwright was determined to not let adults of his day have any Sunday recreation on their own, and the battle was joined.

The *Mercury-Citizen* of the next week carried an editorial signed, "Practical Politics." It stated in part the following:

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"Councilman Enwright maintains that the place for those who would play golf on the Sabbath is in church, and therein he reveals the real motive of his tirade against Sunday golf. This brings it down pretty close to the question of churchly control of the government. The action of the Medford Common Council in this instance is of much more interested and significance, therefore than appears on the surface, and is worthy of more than passing notice on the part of those who are sticklers for all the freedom of the individual that can be had without interfering with the rights of others."

From a little Sunday recreation, the situation had gone to a threat to the Constitution.

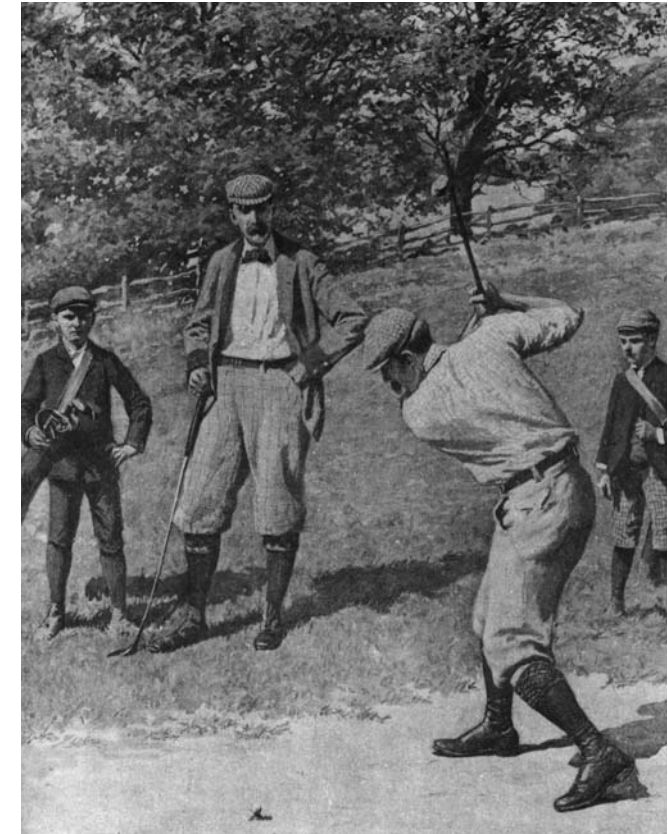
Also aligned against Enwright was A. Augustus Hastings, another member of the Common Council and as it happens, a member of the Medford Golf Club. Mr. Hastings had, perhaps, less altruistic reasons than the author of the *Mercury-Citizen* editorial for opposing Mr. Enwright. He tried to have the resolution tabled, but Enwright won the first battle of the war, influenced enough of his fellow council members with his "one law should apply to both baseball and golf" argument and Hastings' resolution was defeated and Enwright's passed by the same 10-6 vote.

Several churches in Medford joined the fight, coming in on Enwright's side. The Baptist and Methodist churches in West Medford and the Methodist Episcopal church on the Hillside passed resolutions which stated: "Resolved, the church and congregation heartily approve of the efforts being made by the members of the Common Council to secure the enforcement of the Sunday law. Second, the church respectfully urges upon His Honor Charles S. Baxter, mayor of the city of Medford, the importance of suppressing all violations of the Sunday law within the bounds of this city."

It seems that Mayor Baxter was between the rock and a hard place staring at a violation of the Constitution on one side and a vigilant of determined religionists on the other. Proving that he didn't become mayor of Medford by being slow-witted, Baxter did what human beings have been doing since long before currency was printed, he passed the buck. Baxter turned to the City Solicitor J. Mott Hollowell. He put Hollowell on the spot by asking for an opinion on whether Sunday playing of golf was legal. There was much at stake. Individuals found guilty of blue law violation could be fined \$50. Those in charge of a group could be fined "not less than 50 nor more than \$500 for each offense."

These were the days when a year's subscription to the weekly *Mercury-Citizen* (published on Fridays) was \$2; 10 cents bought a ticket to the Medford Boulevard Summer Theatre and mens' socks (hose) cost 9 cents a pair.

Hollowell acted quickly, and became the instant hero of the weekend hackers. He quoted the Bible but noted that in the state Legislature granted dis-



penations for the sale of tobacco and newspapers: "Under this legislative sanction I find that yellow journals of the most pronounced type, permeated with scandal and sensationalism, are every Sunday distributed and sold by Medford newsboys throughout the length and breadth of our city; while these boys and others are by law provided with an abundance of times to read and digest the stuff by being forbidden to occupy their leisure time on that day by taking part in any other work, sport, game, or play."

Hollowell added sardonic humor to his opinion: "An equally wise provision of the common law has likewise seen fit to grant unto the Lord's day a special privilege of being the only day in the week upon which one may cheat another in a horse trade and retain his plunder; for a learned judge since elevated to the Supreme Court of the United States has said in a comparatively recent case which is still law: 'No action can be maintained for a deceit practiced in an exchanged of horses on the Lord's day.'"

Hollowell noted that the state law changed in 1782 from a liberal to a strict interpretation of what could and couldn't (one man was convicted of hoeing the potato patch in his garden) be done on Sundays. Hollowell's research uncovered the 1632 law, which prohibited, among other things, "sports." Amendments made in 1692, 1836 and 1895 made the Sunday restrictions tighter and tighter.

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Golf Story *continued*

Medford's city solicitor had time to come to grips with the problem the mayor handed him: "The statue nevertheless if literally construed, is still harmonious with those times, when under contemporaneous laws four Quakers were hung on Boston Common: but it is somewhat out of joint with the ideas of the year 1903."Hallowell noted that skating, bicycling, yachting, rowing and canoeing all take place on Sunday, without arrests being made. He split a few hairs when he found a difference between "taking part" in a sport and engaging in a sport for recreation, and while noting that golf involves "skill of a certain kind"

likened two golfers to two bicyclists riding together with no outward evidence of a contest being waged. Hallowell passed his opinion along to the mayor and Baxter bailed on the opinion. The Medford police weren't called in, the Medford Golf Club on Pasture Hill (a nine-hole course that is now occupied by single-family homes and the Lawrence Memorial Hospital) went back to quiet Sunday recreation and duffers and hackers in Massachusetts had one J. Mott Hallowell to thank for their ability to pursue the little white ball seven days a week.

— *Joseph McGonagle is the former city clerk for Medford. In his retirement, he has been enjoying the pursuit of the little white ball.*

The Development of Oak Grove

by Jim Kiely



photo: S. Gerould

In walking through the older portions of Oak Grove Cemetery, one is struck by the naturalism of its roadway contours and overhanging oaks as well as by the process of discovery that take place while climbing its winding hills. These features and the cemetery's proximity to the Brooks Estate are clues to important nineteenth-century social developments that took place within Medford and across the country as a whole. To follow is a brief history of Oak Grove Cemetery and the historical context in which it was originally designed and operated.

In the seventeenth century, the Brooks family, who were then farmers, became the owners of a roughly triangular 400-acre land tract between the Mystic Valley Parkway and Winthrop Street – to use modern reference points. Through centuries of subdivision and land sales, the Brooks property was reduced to a few parcels near the Mystic River and

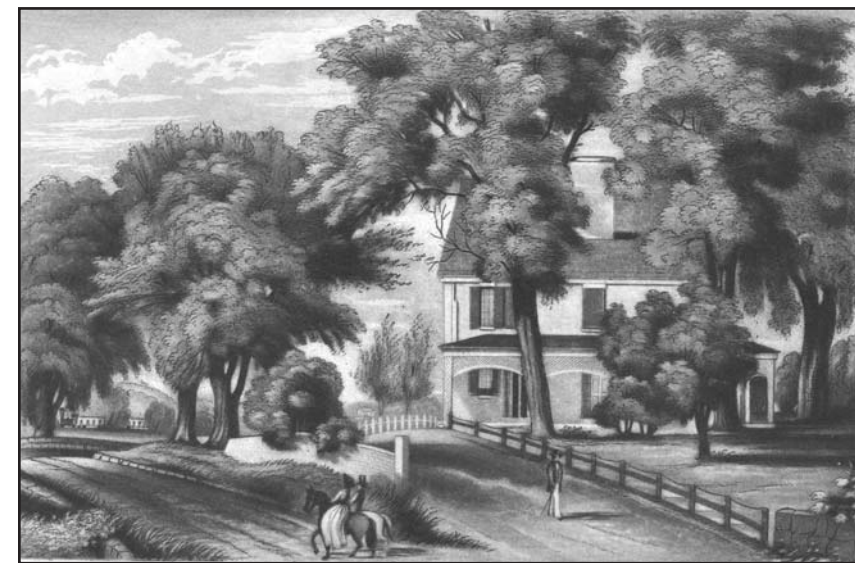
the Mystic Lakes. When wealth came to the Brooks family in the early nineteenth century, Peter Chardon Brooks I and his son, Gorham, restored the family property to nearly its original size through a series of peaceful buyouts. In the mid-1850s, Gorham bequeathed to his sons, Peter III and Shepherd, nearly all of the land comprising the family's newly reconstituted homestead.

At the time of the inheritance, the Brooks' land holdings were larger than they would ever be again. As quickly as the family had accumulated its property, Peter III, Shepherd and their uncle Edward began to sell or give it away for the greater public good. The process leading up to the first major land divestment had actually begun before Shepherd and Peter's father died in 1855 and eventually resulted in the establishment of Oak Grove Cemetery.

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Seven years earlier, in November 1848, Medford had created a five-member committee to find land on which the city could establish a new burial ground. Impressed, as many communities were, with the wooded beauty of the then new Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Medford did not want to construct a barren churchyard-type cemetery but a large, picturesque area that could serve as both an interment site and a park. This immensely popular, distinctly American design concept had actually originated at Mt. Auburn, which the city of Cambridge constructed in the 1830s. First championed by physician and horticulturist Jacob Bigelow (1787-1879) and then the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, Mt. Auburn was designed to serve a public health need and what Bigelow considered an innate human need to commune with nature.

With horticulturist Henry Dearborn (1783-1851), Bigelow developed a landscape plan that radically departed from the then-typical churchyard aesthetic, and with help from the Horticultural Society, he secured construction start-up funds from the Massachusetts legislature. When Mt. Auburn first opened its gates, it presented (and still presents!) vistas that evolved as visitors moved from place to place, paths and roads that conformed with the area's topography, trees and shrubs that grew in naturalistic patterns, and a pond that seemed to have been created by anything but human force. In 1850, the cemetery also contained a forest of some 30,000 North American and European trees and shrubs that had been selected from nurseries Dearborn had established to diversify the area's horticulture.



Home of Gorham Brooks in West Medford around the mid-1800s.

How popular did Mt. Auburn become? By 1853, its somewhat overwhelmed custodians instituted ticket sales to control the influx of visitors, many of whom would travel from different parts of the country to experience the cemetery. By any measure, Mt.

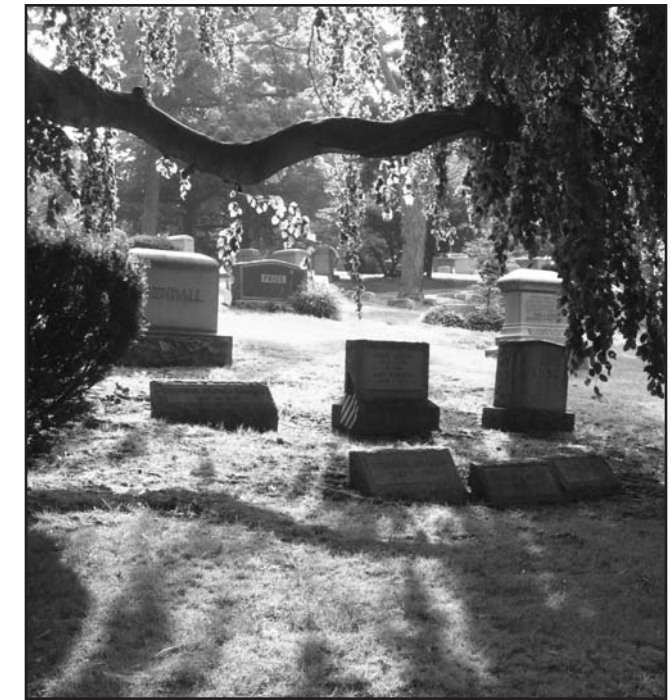


photo: S. Gerould

Auburn set the standard for American cemetery design, and Medford was just one of many American municipalities that wished to replicate it.

In March 1849, Medford's special committee issued a recommendation that the town spend up to \$550 an acre to purchase 10.5 acres of land from local resident Leonard Buckman. The city first approved the recommendation, but after purchasing the land in 1851, it opted to build an alms house on the property instead. In July 1852 the search committee was reconstituted, and one month later it recommended that Medford purchase 12 acres of

Brooks family land at the corner of Winthrop Street and Playstead Road.

Medford approved the \$5,000 purchase of Rock Pasture, as the Brooks family called it, in part because it shared many of Mt. Auburn Cemetery's physical characteristics. According to contemporary accounts it "had a varied surface of hill, valley and plain; was well covered with young oaks and beautiful forest-trees; its soil was dry and not liable to injury from rain..." In March 1853, Medford instructed the committee to prepare the property for use, which it did by, among other things, laying out pathways and erecting a stone wall at a total cost of \$7,510. Following an October consecration ceremony, the town raised approximately \$1,600 toward the bill

through the auction and private sale of burial plots to Medford citizens.

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Oak Grove *continued*

Rules adopted to govern this new patch of public land, christened Oak Grove Cemetery, indicate the extent to which Medford wished to preserve both its sanctity and its park-like nature. Written alongside rules pertaining to burial depth, plot ownership, exhumation and even the discharge of firearms were prohibitions on building tombs and monuments, and statements that encouraged plot owners to plant trees, shrubs and flowers. In sum, the final document stated, "the town of Medford will forever keep in good repair the fence, gates, carriage-ways, and footpaths of the cemetery, and make a secure place of burial for the dead, and an attractive resort for the living." On many occasions, enthused citizens approved financial measures to add and preserve landscape features, a fact in evidence today as you wind along the old cemetery's footpaths beneath ancient oak and maple trees.

By 1873, the cemetery had become too small to meet the demand for space, so Medford voted that a "proper committee be authorized to purchase the land of [the Brooks family] adjoining the cemetery, at a price not exceeding \$1,000 per acre." The pur-

chase was approved and executed in 1875 for \$21,700. When the additional 22 acres were added to the cemetery, the town extended its original set of rules and regulations across the entire property to create a coherent, picturesque whole.

In 1902, Shepherd Brooks gave the cemetery an additional 10 acres of land, which is located behind the former Gleason School on Playstead Road. This was the last parcel of land that would be added to the cemetery before Medford gained control over the last of the Brooks property in the early 1940s. The cemetery's original park aesthetic was not built into this 10-acre addition. Instead a grid replaced the winding roads and paths of the nineteenth century, trees and shrubs were planted sparingly and headstones were laid closer together. Later additions to the cemetery would follow the same suit owing primarily to the great increase in the number of Medford residents over time and the disappearance of open, available land. Nonetheless, for nearly 160 years Oak Grove has preserved much of what made its older sections noteworthy. That it borders the present Brooks Estate is a tribute to the family that made it possible.

MHS at River Day



Students from the Andrews Middle School listen as Beth Fuller (left) and Barbara Kerr (right) describe Medford's checkered history in the rum trade.

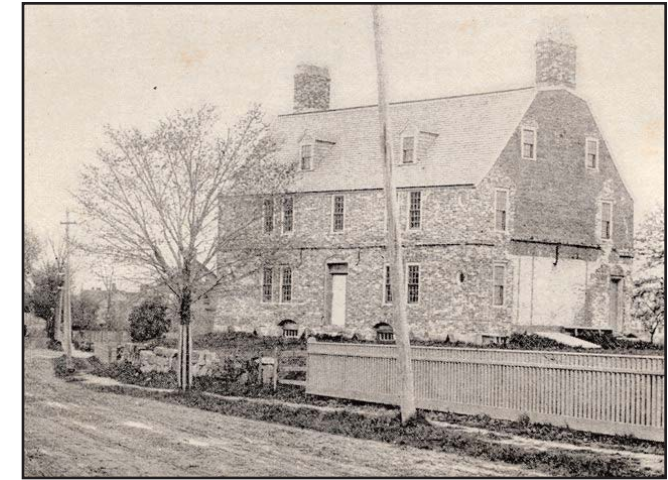
On Friday, May 30, board members Beth Fuller and Barbara Kerr (and a cardboard Johnny Depp) represented the Society at the Andrews Middle School's River Day. This is an annual event at the Andrews dedicated to teaching students about various aspects of the Mystic River as it flows directly outside its classrooms. Along with a number of other scheduled events, over 600 kids took their turns and listened to a short lecture about the his-

tory of Medford Rum with some pirate lore attached. DCR ranger Bill McBrine joined in the morning session with some information about early Medford shipbuilding and the triangle trade. We thank the Andrews PTO for inviting us to share in this very enjoyable, educational event. MHS looks forward to continued participation in future River Days and to possible collaborations with other Medford schools.

Summer Tufts House Tours

The Peter Tufts House at 350 Riverside Avenue is one of the oldest brick structures in the United States. This summer, the Society will be offering tours of the house for the first time in many years.

Tours will be offered on the following dates at 1:00 in the afternoon: Tuesday, August 12 and Thursday, August 14. Tours will meet at the house. If you are planning to come on a particular tour, it would be much appreciated if you would let us know in advance. Please be aware that this historic house is not presently air conditioned. To register, please call the Society at (781) 391-8739 or register online at medsignup@minlib.net.



News from the Society

Medford History Gifts

Need a gift for a special occasion? The Historical Society offers a number of books that make perfect gifts for the history lover, including: *Glimpses of Medford*, *Medford Then and Now*, *Medford in the Victorian Era*, *Old Ships and Shipbuilding Days*, and *The Incredible Ditch*. They contain vivid images and detailed information which bring Medford's rich history to life. The books cost between \$10 and \$20. If you wish to purchase any or all of these titles, the Society is open on Sundays from 12:00-4:00 pm at 10 Governors Avenue.

Temperature Monitoring

From August 2007 through January 2008, the Society took part in a temperature monitoring program sponsored by the Board of Library Commissioners. The final report came out in the early spring showing that the temperatures in the building fluctuate much more than is desirable for the health of the collection. To reduce these threatening fluctuations and maintain more constant temperature levels during both hot and cold months, the Board will be trying different combinations of air conditioning and heating to figure out the most effective way to set and maintain a constant, healthy temperature for the collection.

A Successful Reception

The Member reception on May 2 was a great success and a lot of fun. Over 70 people attended, many of who had never been in the building before! A number of new members also came to the reception and joined the Society that night. For many who attended, it was one stop among two or three that evening, so it seems the word is out that the Medford Historical Society is a must on many residents' "to do" list! Thank you to Beth Fuller and Vicki Halal for taking care of the hospitality, and thank you to everyone who attended. We hope to make this an annual event.

Display Your Pride in Medford's History

Consider the purchase of a historical marker displaying the date your house was built. They make great gifts.

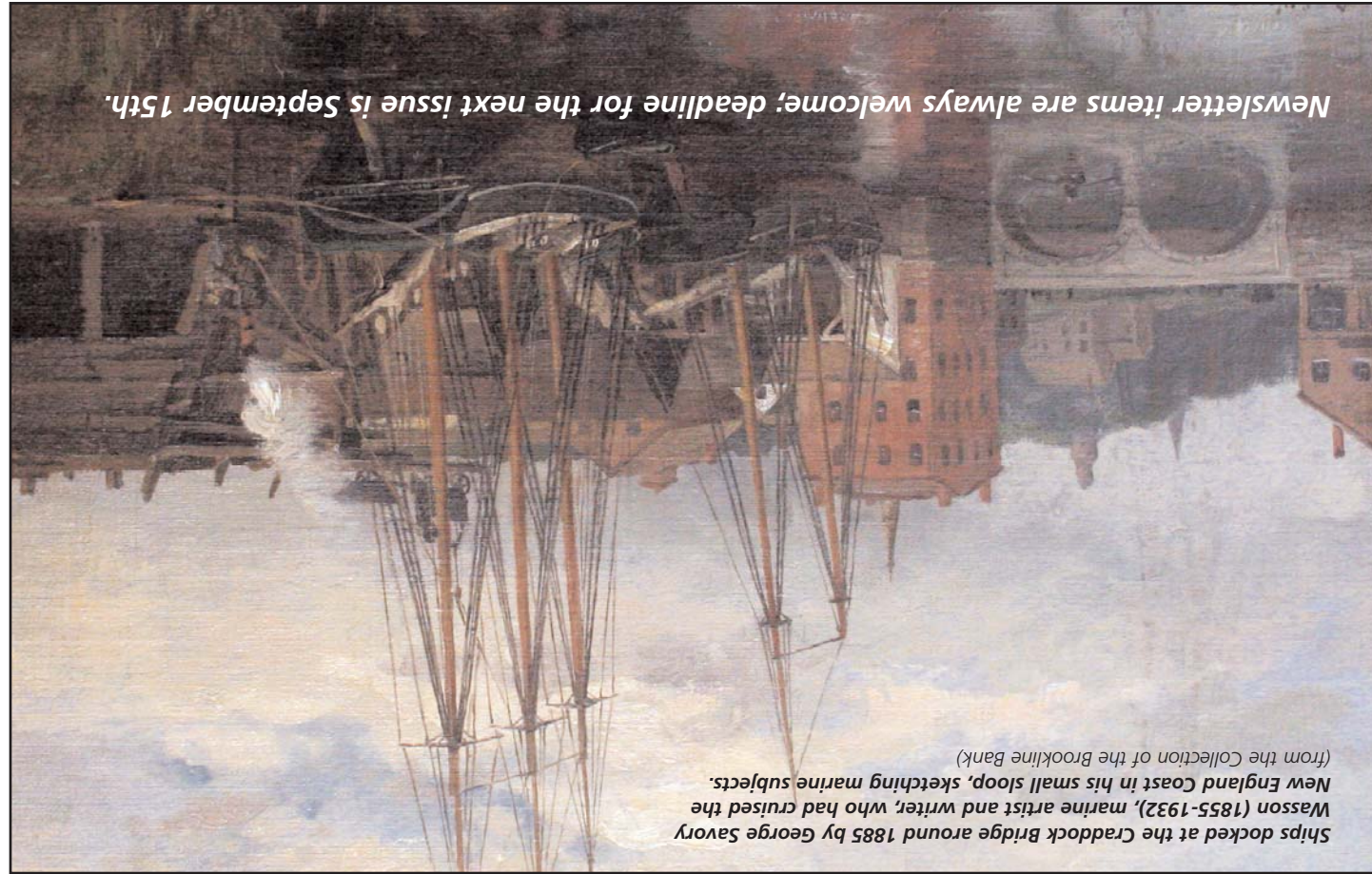
Your participation in this program will help to support ongoing historic preservation programs at the Society. It will provide information about the City's architectural development and build a sense of pride in our community. For more information and an application contact Sue Gerould at 781-393-8218 or gerould@comcast.net.

Wish List

We need a mini-refrigerator for the Society. If you have one you are not using or would like to make a donation so we could purchase one, contact Barbara Kerr at 781-395-7950 or bkerr@minlib.net.

Newsletter Submissions

MHS newsletter is published quarterly. We are looking for submissions for future issues. If you would like to submit an article about a topic of Medford history or a reminiscence about your personal Medford history, please send it to Vicki Halal at vickihh@verizon.net.



*Ships docked at the Cradock Bridge around 1885 by George Savory
Wasson (1855-1932), marine artist and writer, who had cruised the
New England Coast in his small sloop, sketching marine subjects.
(from the Collection of the Brookline Bank)*

Newsletter items are always welcome; deadline for the next issue is September 15th.



Medford Historical Society
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Medford, MA 02155

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Your Medford Historical Society Summer Newsletter