

MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



FALL, 2009

President's Overview



Before the Holiday season takes our attention, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the past calendar year.

It's been a great year for innovative programs, and I applaud everyone for his/her contributions and achievements during the year, including: *Faces of the Civil War*, the first exhibit from our Civil War collection in many years, *Brick by Brick*, a 10-mile historic bike tour of Medford, *Old House Ownership Basics*, part of a lecture series for homeowners, *Map Night* and *Antique Appraisal Night*.

In addition, we've been able to complete some repairs to our building on Governors Avenue and the Peter Tufts House. The most important project was repairing and rebuilding the chimney from the roofline up at Governors Avenue. A chimney inspection revealed that the mortar had eroded to the point that this repair needed to be done before the next winter. We hope this project is the first in a series to improve conditions in the building.

You'll also be receiving our annual appeal letter which provides more detail about our programs and plans for the coming year. Please give it your thoughtful attention and respond as generously as you can.

—John Anderson, President

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Jim Kiely

Kyna Hamil

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I'm in a What?

The Story of Medford's Historic Districts

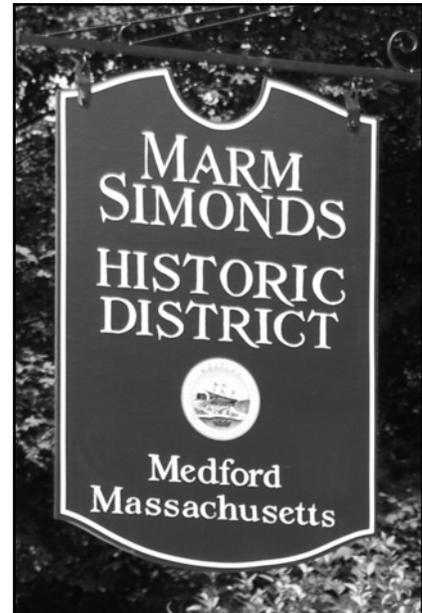
by Ryan Hayward, co-chair,
Medford Historical Commission

You may have noticed the six signs that have recently been put up in three different locations around the city by the Medford Historical Commission. They celebrate the city's three residential historic districts: one local district, one national district, and one that is both national and local. Some of you may even live in one of these districts.

At this point you may be asking yourself, "I'm in a what?" or "What's a historic district?" Let me take a minute to explain the two types of districts and the big differences behind them.

A National Register Historic District is part of the National Register of Historic Places, administered by the National Park Service. If a property, or district, has been listed, it has been deemed important to American history, culture, or heritage. Administration of the district is through the Massachusetts Historical Commission. It affords some limited protection for structures, but that protection is only triggered when federal or state funding is involved.

A Local Historic District designation is much more effective as a preservation tool. An area and its individual structures are first researched, then inventoried and documented for their historical importance. If deemed historically important, an entire area or individual buildings will be placed in a local historic district, which is subject to design review under the municipality's local historic district commission. The commission reviews any proposed exterior changes visible from the public



way and decides what is appropriate to the district. Medford has two local historic districts established in the 1980s. They are the Marm Simonds Historic District and the Hillside Avenue Historic District. Both are fine examples of a particular time period in Medford's history.

The Marm Simonds District encompasses the city's highest concentration of 18th century buildings and was once the location of the town center. Here were located the first and second meeting-houses and an important junction between the roads to Arlington and Woburn.

Jumping forward a century, the Hillside Avenue Historic District (also a National District) is representative of Medford's living large style when the town was serviced by two railroads, had several streetcar lines, was close to the newly established Middlesex Fells, and had just finished its great ship-building boom. The houses here represent Medford's wealthy residents near the turn of the century.

Medford's Old Ship Street National Register District is

continued page 2

I'm in a What? *continued*

representative of one of Medford's greatest industries, the construction of great clipper ships. Homes in this district were completed between 1820 and 1850 and are primarily in the Greek Revival style.

Do not confuse the district names with the district boundaries. For example, the "Ship Street District" (Ship Street is now called Riverside Avenue), includes a portion of Riverside Avenue, but also encompasses homes on all of Pleasant Street and portions of Park Street. Maps of the two local historic districts can be found online at medfordhistoricalcommission.com.

So what do you do if you live in one of these districts? The City of Medford Historical Commission strives to maintain the integrity of the buildings

through preservation of character-defining features. Though the City Historical Ordinance does require review of any planned exterior changes to properties in the local historic districts, not everything is under the city's control, with distinguishing features such as roof color and paint colors left to the homeowners. If you have questions regarding any planned changes to your home, please do not hesitate to make an appointment to speak with the Commission by calling 781-393-2519 or emailing medfordhistoricalcommission@comcast.net.

The historic district signs are a part of our community outreach as many Medford residents do not know there are historic districts in the city. The goal is to raise awareness, not just for district residents, but for all of Medford to be able to see these protected examples of our city's heritage and history.



The Republic of Trees Elizur Wright and the Middlesex Fells

by Barbara Kerr

If you watched the Ken Burns documentary, *The National Parks*, you learned quite a bit about the conservation movement that flourished in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Although the first parks were in the Western United States, conservation was also a local issue at that time, and the result of one particular conservation campaign, conducted by Elizur Wright, led to the preservation of Medford's Middlesex Fells.

Elizur Wright was born in Connecticut in 1804 and died in Medford in 1885. Wright led an interesting and

◀ A view of the Cascade in the Fells, taken in 1884.

busy life; he attended Yale, taught mathematics and natural philosophy at a number of schools, and in the 1830s became an ardent abolitionist. He moved to Boston in 1839 and became the editor of the *Massachusetts Abolitionist*. In addition to his political activities, Wright was an inventor and amateur naturalist. His great success, however, was found in the field of insurance. Wright is sometimes known as "the father of modern life insurance" because he developed mathematic formulae related to actuarial tables. He served as Insurance Commissioner of Massachusetts from 1858-1866.

In 1863 or 1864, Wright and his family moved to Medford where his house overlooked the woods of the Fells or "The Five Mile Wood" as it was commonly known at the time. Wright drew inspiration from the woods during his busy insurance career and at various times mentioned to his daughter, Ellen, the idea of creating a park to preserve the wild space he could see out the window.

After the Civil War, there was a building boom in the towns around as Boston transportation improvements made it easier to live outside the big city. Like many others, Wright watched the development with apprehension - growing towns inevitably led to shrinking forests. Like many of the philanthropists who saved National Park lands, Wright began to buy up property in the Fells to preserve it from developers. He also began to write.

From 1867 to his death in 1885, Wright published dozens of pamphlets, articles, and speeches proposing that the Fells area be set aside as public parkland. Like fellow natural philosopher John Muir, Wright believed that a relationship with nature was an essential part of human life. As he wrote in the 1880's speech called *Men and Trees*:

Animal and vegetable have a relation to each other as close as that of light and heat. They are utterly different and yet profoundly alike. The grandest man - poet, philosopher, or

Republic of Trees *continued*

statesman-feels himself a brother to the grandest tree. His heart expands in view of a well-ordered, happy society of men, women, and children, and hardly less so in view of the primeval forest filling the air with health and joy for all that breathe. For he knows that the republic of trees is the complement of the republic of men, and if the latter does not restrain itself and govern itself wisely in the use of the steel it has so lately discovered, it might as well go back to the stone age.¹

Wright's passionate defense of nature drew many supporters, and the Middlesex Fells Association was founded in 1880. The organization raised awareness and put pressure on the Legislature with a good result. "Partial victory did come in 1882 with the passage of the Commonwealth's Public Domain Act (also known as the Forest Act) in which cities and towns were allowed to take land to provide for the preservation and reproduction of forests and for the preservation of water supplies. The law established provisions for the management of future public holdings and got the issuance of bonds to cover expenses."²

The Public Domain Act was a rallying cry for those who wished to preserve Wright's "Republic of Trees". Support groups sprang up in all the towns around the Fells, and the movement spread to include other parklands in the Boston area. Unfortunately, Elizur Wright died in 1885 before his vision of the Fells became a reality, but his ideas persisted and were carried forth by local groups and local people including a Medford photographer named George Davenport. Davenport put together a portfolio of photographs of the wild places of the Fells and took a "magic lantern" slide show of the images to groups and lecture halls all over the state. Many of these images are preserved in the collections of photographs housed at the Society and at

the Medford Public Library.

While Davenport was raising consciousness, Charles Eliot, the son of the Harvard president, and a one-time apprentice to Frederick Law Olmsted, was approaching the issue from another direction. Eliot began to lobby for the creation of a statewide agency "endowed with the power to hold real estate free of taxes in every part of the Commonwealth for the purpose of preserving natural scenery for the use and enjoyment by its citizens."³

Eliot's efforts led to the creation of the Trustees of Public Reservations, which in its turn led to the creation of the Metropolitan Park Commission in 1893. As one of its first acts, the Park Commission purchased 4,000 acres of the Middlesex Fells, and Elizur Wright's children presented the Commission with the land that their father had purchased years before to honor his memory.

Sometimes it's hard to see the larger movement of history on the local scale, but the quest to preserve the Middlesex Fells was very much a part of the larger conservation movement of the 19th century. Thanks to homegrown natural philosophers like Elizur Wright, much natural beauty that could have been lost to development was preserved for future generations. So the next time you take a walk in the Fells, tell the trees that Elizur Wright sent you.

¹ Wright, Elizur, *Elizur Wright's Appeals for the Middlesex Fells and the Forests*, (Medford, Mass. : The Medford Public Domain Club, 1893), p.120

² Ryan, Michael, *Creation of the Middlesex Fells* (First appeared in the News of the Fells, Spring 2002, Published by The Friends of the Middlesex Fells)

³ Ryan, Michael, *Creation of the Middlesex Fells* (First appeared in the News of the Fells, Spring 2002, Published by The Friends of the Middlesex Fells)

Friends of the Fells <http://www.fells.org/> Creation of the Middlesex Fells by Michael Ryan www.fells.org/File/Creation_of_Fells.PDF

Lonergan Memorial Fund Established

John Lonergan, beloved past President of Medford Historical Society, passed away earlier this year. Though his loss is deeply felt throughout the community, MHS will be able to continue his good work through the numerous donations made in his memory. Thank you to all the following people who made contributions to this special fund.

John Anderson & Heather
Champigny

Bear Hill Golf Club, Inc.

Don Bennett

Helen Boermeester

James & Elizabeth Capomaccio

Patricia & Robert Covelle

David D. Cuttino

Lorenzo Depore

Nancy Feraco

Nancy Frabetti

Beth Fuller & Robert Paine

Sue Gerould & Will Tenney

John & Patricia Gibbons

Sharon Guzik & Jack Beusmans

Hingham Mutual Fire Insurance Co.

Robert T. Johnston

Barbara Kerr

Ann Longo

Tony Lucas of DSW Shoes

May Marquebreuck

Michael & Patricia Neri

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James & Elizabeth Owens

Gerald & Eugenie Potomiss

Roland & Carol Racicot

Clara Read & Jay Hurd

Samantha Smith Productions, LLC

Mary Sbuttoni

Fred Schlicher & Leslie Spieth

Philip Smith

Nino & Terri Susi



(left) Doug Carr and Audrey Stanwood introduce bicyclists to the history and current plans for the Brooks Estate. (below) At the Royall House visitors learn about Medford's links to slavery.



Medford Brick by Brick Historical Bicycle Tour of the Medford Brick Industry

by Kyna Hamill

On Saturday, September 26, approximately 55 avid cyclists gathered at Medford City Hall for a historical bicycle tour of Medford organized by the Medford Historical Society with the Medford Bi-Peds. Based on the historic brick industry in Medford, the tour covered over 10 miles and visited locations such as the Peter Tufts House, Royall House, Park Street Rail Station, Ballou Hall at Tufts University, the slave wall and the Brooks Estate.

We were lucky to have JRA Cycles of Medford and Whole Foods as sponsors of the ride. JRA donated a helmet, helped with bike checks and pumped tires before the ride, while Whole Foods offered refreshments and snacks at the end. Over \$100 in donations was also collected for future MHS programming. Thanks to Dee Morris, Ken Krause, Jerry Hershkowitz, and the volunteers from the Royall House and Brooks Estate for speaking along the tour.

In an attempt to obtain more visibility for the Society, activities such as the bike tour attracted people who might not typically be interested in local history.

On the tour, we welcomed cyclists from Brookline, Boston and even Quincy, some of whom had never even been to Medford before. With all the enthusiasm, we are sure to plan a second tour next fall. There are two other historic industries to focus on including ship-building and the rum industry, so there is plenty to explore.

Historically, Medford had large and valuable deposits of clay for the manufacture of bricks. In fact, between 1660-1750, it was the most important industry in Medford. There were clay deposits all over town, including between Arlington Street and the Mystic River, on the site of the old Medford High School on Forest Street, on Ashland Street, Fulton Street, near the Weir bridge, at the foot of Winter Hill, between Summer and George Streets near the Middlesex Canal, opposite Cousens Gymnasium on College Avenue and at the end of Riverside Avenue where the Stop and Shop is now. For more information on the historic brick industry, check out: <http://www.medfordhistorical.org/bricks.php>.

Peter Tufts House Tours

by Kyna Hamill

This summer, dozens of visitors stopped in for a tour of the Peter Tufts House, the stately two-story house at 350 Riverside Avenue. MHS President, John Anderson, and Board member, Kyna Hamill, took turns giving tours inside and outside the house. Among the many visitors this summer were longtime city residents who for years often passed by the house while driving down Riverside Avenue without

realizing its importance as one of the oldest brick houses in America.

The house was acquired by the Medford Historical Society in 1982, yet the ownership history goes back to about 1677. For many years it was erroneously named after Matthew Craddock, who originally owned the land in 1634, until it was proven that the house could not have been built before quicklime for mortar was

available in Massachusetts in the 1660s. It was likely built between 1677 and 1680 and named after Peter Tufts Jr., a military captain, prominent town selectman, and ancestor of Charles Tufts (donor of the land for Tufts University).

The house stayed in the Tufts family until 1728 when Edward Oakes of Malden acquired the eastern side. Ebenezer Cutter and his family owned it from 1735-81, Richard Hall in 1791, and various owners until finally General Samuel Lawrence purchased the house in 1887 as a wedding gift for his daughter. The house was then refurbished in a colonial revival style, keeping only the original ceiling beams and parts of the center hall staircase. The front porch was added between 1889-1900; and in 1892, when Medford was incorporated as a city, Lawrence designed the city seal to feature the house in the upper left corner. Now a National Historic landmark, the house offers excellent examples of early American exterior brickwork, including the distinct glazed Flemish bond pattern which incorporates the black, glassy surface of burned exposed headers into the design.

Recent maintenance of the house by the Society



included cleaning the gutters, replacing the flag and removing the old tour information sign on the front of the house. We look forward to seeing some of you at the next series of tours likely to start up in the summer months of 2010, so check upcoming newsletters for more details or visit www.medfordhistorical.org for updated information.

Medford Historical Society 2009/10 Program Series

Programming themes include: historical aspects of Medford's brick making industry, local architecture and the history of two local institutions along with the challenges of owning an older house and preserving its character. All of these programs are free and open to the public. If changes to this program listing are necessary a revised listing will be published under the Events Menu of the Society's website at www.medfordhistorical.org.

Saturday, January 16, 2010 **Greening the Older Home**

Sally Zimmerman, Preservation Specialist, Historic New England, Rebecca Williams, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Northeast Office, Christopher Skelly, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Historic preservation meets energy efficiency. Learn how to green up your older home without damaging its historic fabric. Panelists will present up-to-date information on insulation, windows, lighting, exterior sealing and renewable energy options. Program will begin at 10 a.m. at the Springstep building located at 98 George P. Hassett Drive (right next to Medford City Hall).

Wednesday, February 24, 2010 **Pottery and Brick Making in Medford**

Rich Hamelin of Pied Potter Hamelin Redware; Pottery researcher, Mass Cultural Council "Keeper of Tradition" and Early American Life Magazine's "Traditional Artisan" award recipient of over 18 years.

This talk will be about the people, language, history, materials, anecdotal stories and development of brick and pottery making in America from the early Colonial days through the 1930's with special focus on a who's who in Massachusetts and Medford (such as the Tufts family) clay working industries. Program will start at

7:30 p.m. at the Medford Historical Society headquarters located at 10 Governors Ave. in Medford.

Wednesday, April 14, 2010 **The History of Tufts University in Medford**

Anne Sauer, Director of the Digital Collections and Archives, Tufts University

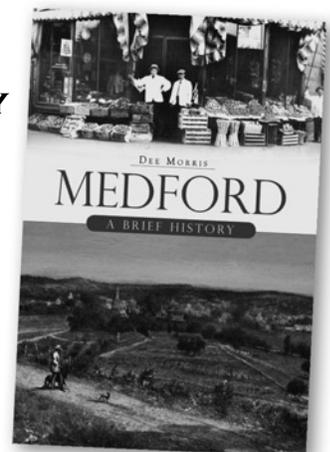
A walking tour of the Tufts University campus will precede the lecture at 6 p.m. beginning in front of Tisch Library. The program will begin at 7 p.m. in a room to be announced shortly in the Tisch Library located at the intersection of Professor's Row and College Ave near the Medford/Somerville city line.

Friday, May 21, 2010 **Annual Meeting, Election of Officers and Reception**

Election will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the Medford Historical Society Headquarters located at 10 Governors Ave. in Medford.

GET YOUR COPY OF THE NEW MEDFORD HISTORY

Looking for a gift for a Medford history buff? Come and meet author Dee Morris. She will be at 10 Governors Avenue to introduce and sign the first copies of her new book, *Medford, A Brief History* on Sundays from 12 to 4 p.m. from November 29th through December 20th.



See inside for our calendar of events.



36 employees of General Samuel Crocker Lawrence treat Gypsy Moth egg clusters in trees north of City Farm November 23, 1905.



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