



# MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SPRING, 2012

## Presidents' Overview



As you will see in this newsletter, MHS loves to collaborate. While

the Medford Historical Society relies on its volunteers and board to keep its operations running smoothly, more and more, we have realized the importance of our network of friends from other local organizations to keep us in the loop and to help support our programs. In this edition of the newsletter, you will see our connections with the Friends of the Fells, the Royall House and Slave Quarters, CACHE (Coalition for Arts, Culture and a Healthy Economy), the Medford Public Library and the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area. This past year, we also made connections with the Congregational Church of West Medford, Tufts University and the West Medford Community Center.

As a result of these partnerships, we have met new people, broadened our programming, and bridged gaps in the history of this community. To collaborate means to engage or work with one another willingly. We'd love to continue to work with other organizations in Medford, and also to make some new connections. After all, isn't that what a community is?

—John Anderson and Kyna Hamill

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Jay Hurd

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*Students pose in front of the circa 1895 Swan School at the corner of Park and Washington Streets. The building was later replaced with a brick one which still stands today as condos.*

## Medford's First MCAS

by John Anderson

A collection of Medford Town Reports, dating back well into the 19th century, is one of the great assets at the Society's headquarters. In our last issue, I wrote about the town's efforts to deal with the Civil War, including recruitment, supporting the troops, and welcoming them home. The tone of the reports was illuminating, starting with great enthusiasm, progressing to grim resignation as the war went poorly, and ending with relief and restrained jubilation as the war finally ground to a close at horrible cost including the life of the leader, President Abraham Lincoln.

While researching the *Town Reports*, I also read the reports of the School Committee and discovered what must be the forerunner of the MCAS! In those days, the School Committee was very hands-on. They visited all the classrooms

twice a year to hear student recitations. In their annual report, the Committee included commentary and advice for teachers, parents, and students. These are just a few samples from the report of 1857:

### Parenting:

*...fatal consequences result from bad home influences. When parents speak lightly or contemptuously of the teacher of their children; above all, when children at home are scolded and beaten, as if they were only animals, what fit preparation can such children have for the reasonable and benevolent government of the school-room?*

### Punctuation:

*Punctuation marks were very speedily named and defined in several schools, while in some we found a mortifying ignorance of them. Is their philosophy understood? Accurate punctuation is a truly a part of elegant writing as*

*continued page 2*

are words. It is a science found in nature, not only governing the modulation of the voice, but defining the limits of thought and expressing the deepest emotions.

**Penmanship:**

*Peculiar care should be taken in forming capital letters and figures. Health may be injured by a cramped position of the body. It has been said that a gentleman or lady may be known by the manner in which they place their body and hold their pen while writing. When some habit must be formed, it is surely worthwhile to form the best.*

**Pedagogy:**

*Thoroughness is indispensable to good scholarship. Children must be taught to go into a subject, instead of going over and round it....Only as many studies should be attended to as can be thoroughly mastered.*

In 1858, the School Board decided to supplement its classroom visits with written examinations, actually administered in the classrooms by members of the school board. These tests were taken at the High School and the two grammar schools. Grammar, History, and Arithmetic were given to all schools although the Arithmetic test was different for the two levels. Algebra was only given to the High School. The High School took the Natural Philosophy test, while the grammar schools took Geography.

Students had an hour to deal with each of the sections below.

**Questions in Algebra (High School only)**

1. A laborer worked seven days, having his son with him four days and received 27 shillings; again he worked nine days, having his son with him six days, and received 33 shillings. How much per day did he receive for himself, and how much for his son? (*Hint from Wikipedia: After the United States adopted the dollar as its unit of currency and accepted the gold standard, one British shilling was*



*worth 24 U.S. cents. Due to ongoing shortages of U.S. coins in some regions, shillings continued to circulate well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.)*

2. A. B. and C counted their money, and found that twice the amount of A.'s, added to that of B. and C., was equal to \$5.25; A.'s money, added to twice B.'s money, minus C.'s, was equal to \$3.00; the sum of A.'s, B.'s and C.'s was \$3.25, - How much had each?
3. A man bought a rectangular field at \$1.00 per square rod; the length was to the breadth as 5 is to 3; he built a wall around it which cost him \$2.00 per rod: the cost of the land and wall was \$6,640. *Required:* the dimensions of the field.
4. The carpet of a square room cost \$54.00; the cost per square yard was half as many shillings as there were feet in the length of one side of the room. *Required:* the size of the room.
5. A. and B. bought 200 acres of land for \$200, each paying \$100. A. says to B., "If you will let me select my portion of the land, I will take so much less than one half, that my part shall cost me 50 cents per acre more than yours." How much land will each one have, and at how much per acre?

**Questions in Arithmetic (for High School)**

1. If 10 men in 16 days can build a wall 30 feet long, 6 feet high, and 3 feet thick, when the days are 12 hours long, in what time will 40 men build a wall 300 feet long, 9 feet high, and four feet thick when the days are 8 hours long?
2. Smith bought a hogshead of molasses, containing 140 gallons, for \$50.00; but 40 gallons having leaked out, for what must he sell the remainder per gallon, to gain 10 per cent on his purchase?
3. Extract the square root of 68,121.
4. A room is 25 feet long, 20 feet wide, and 16 feet high. *Required:* the distance from one of the lower corners to the upper corner of the opposite side and end, (i.e. diagonally through the room).
5. The first term of an arithmetic sequence is 6: the last term is 101; the common difference 5. *Required:* the amount of terms, and the sum of the whole number of terms.

**Questions in Arithmetic (for grammar schools)**

1. If 84 loads of hay weigh 201 tons, 4 cwt., 2 qrs, what will one load weigh?
2. Reduce  $\frac{4}{7}$ ,  $\frac{3}{8}$ , and  $\frac{5}{11}$  to a common denominator.
3. Add  $\frac{3}{4}$ ,  $\frac{5}{6}$ ,  $\frac{3}{8}$ , and  $\frac{1}{12}$ .
4. Change  $7 + (\frac{5}{6}) / (\frac{3}{4})$  to a simple fraction.
5. What is the amount of \$75.75, for four years, 2 months and 27 days, at 6 per cent. simple interest?
6. Ten men can build a house in 63 days; but 3 of their number being taken sick, in how many days can the remainder build it?

**Questions in Natural Philosophy (High School only)**

1. What is Natural Philosophy?
2. What properties are essential to all matter?
3. Why is the south wind warm and the north wind cold?
4. What is the cause of a sea-breeze?
5. Why is it necessary to ventilate school-rooms?
6. What is gravitation?
7. A coach is to pass over a certain road. If the passengers are inside the coach, it will go safely; but if they are on top of the coach, it will upset. Why?

**Questions in Grammar (all schools)**

1. Of what does grammar treat?
2. Write three numerical adjectives.
3. Write three ordinal adjectives.
4. Compare the adjectives good, bad, happy.
5. Write a sentence containing a collective noun, and a pronoun and verb agreeing with it.
6. Write the following sentences correctly, in all respects:
  - He lay the Blame on me, but I set him Right.
  - Which is the Greatest, the Parent that govern with Moral Suasion, or the one which use Brute Force!
7. Write the lines neat, and lie the sheets loose in the middle of the table.

**Questions in History (all schools)**

1. What is History?
2. What are the sources of history?
3. What are the divisions of history?
4. What eras, in the history of the world, are often-est mentioned in conversation and books?
5. In what century was the American Revolution, and what are the names of the distinguished men who acted in it?
6. What was the “Declaration of Independence?”
7. What is meant by “American Congress?”
8. What is meant by “English Parliament?”

**Questions in Geography (grammar schools only)**

1. What is Geography?
2. What are the chief divisions of Geography ? and of what does each division treat?
3. Write the names and positions of the four largest islands in the world.
4. Give the boundaries of the state of Illinois, and name its three principal towns and a few of its rivers.
5. Through what oceans, and near what islands and capes, will a ship pass in going from Boston to Canton?

The results were thoroughly tabulated by class and school and published in the annual report. Considering

the difficulty of the tests, the students did quite well. High school students averaged 60% correct in the algebra, but only 43% in arithmetic. Success at Natural Philosophy was about 80%, Grammar about 70%, but History only about 50%.

At the two grammar schools, Arithmetic correct answers were less than 50%, Grammar about 70%, History about 50%, and Geography about 70%.

Perhaps written tests were as problematical then as now:

*But let it not be forgotten, that the pupils were unused to this mode of examination. Many wrote their answers on pieces of paper, or on a slate, and had not time to copy them before the hour had expired. So many allowances are to be made for the first trial, that we fear that the tables (of results) will lead some reader to wrong conclusions.*

And perhaps some questioned the whole rationale for the tests. Why else would the Board offer such a spirited defense?

*The constant and healthful influences of this system of examination, will appear to every reflecting mind. While the student is studying his lesson, he will say to himself, “I must understand this; because it may be the very question I shall be called to answer on the printed examination-papers.” So, also, the Teacher, when he hears this pupil recite this lesson, will say to himself, “I must be sure that this boy understands his lesson; for, this may be one of the examining questions.” The above tables show, in black and white, how far the children have understood the facts and principles in which they have studied in their text-books; or, in other words, how far they have been thoroughly instructed. We ask the most careful study of these tables by all our citizens; but especially by the parents of our children.*

Does this sound familiar? Once again, what’s new is old!

**Request for Assistance with Research Project**

Jay Hurd, Medford resident, baseball researcher, and MHS Board member, is currently preparing a paper on Mabray “Doc” Kountze. Mr. Hurd seeks assistance for this project from anyone who may have known or who has memories of Doc. A resident of West Medford, Doc was born in 1910 and died in 1994. He was the first African-American sports writer to be given a press pass by the Boston Red Sox and Boston Braves; he reported and wrote for *The Medford Transcript*, the *Medford Mercury*, *The Boston Guardian*, *The Boston Chronicle*, and *The Boston Greater News*; he authored *This Is Your Heritage*, *50 Sports Years Along Memory Lane*, *A History of the Colored Press in Massachusetts*, and *A Second Sketch of the Boston Guardian*. Additionally, he was a strong advocate for civic responsibility.

Mr. Hurd may be contacted at 781-396-0865 and/or [jbhbeisbol@aol.com](mailto:jbhbeisbol@aol.com).



*Mystic Camera Club in the Middlesex Fells, ca. 1893 (left), moonlight on Spot Pond, ca. 1899 (right)*

## Middlesex Fells and Early Photography

by Kyna Hamill

The Medford Historical Society was pleased to offer a historic hike in the Fells last autumn in a joint program with the Friends of the Fells. We learned about the history of the Fells and the people who made true the vision of a nature conservancy on the outskirts of Medford. During Mike Ryan's presentation on Bear Hill, he told us how Elizur Wright, Wilson Flagg, and George Davenport, helped create the Middlesex Fells Association at a large gathering on Bear Hill in 1880.

According to the *Medford Historical Register* of December 1936, it was Davenport, a Medford resident, botanist and co-founder of the Medford Historical Society who led the cause for creation of the Fells as a protected Reservation following the death of Elizur Wright in 1885. In 1889, Davenport began presenting his glass slides, *A Lecture on the Middlesex Fells*, advocating for Fells preservation to groups such as the Mystic Camera Club, the Appalachian Club in Boston, and Fells district cities. The Register stated that "this lecture aroused greater

public interest than any plan ever adopted to aid the Fells movement."

By 1893, the lecture had been published along with some of the images, and MHS houses two copies of it. It was never clear, however, what happened to the slides. After Mike Ryan mentioned this detail in his own talk on Bear Hill, I recalled seeing a number of glass slides in the Medford Historical Society's collection, and I immediately searched them out to see if they were the ones from the lecture. Behold! It turns out that our collection of glass slides includes some of the images that Davenport mentioned as well as some fascinating photos of the Fells taken by the Mystic Camera Club. In March, Mike Ryan and I sat together to scan and digitize over 100 glass slides. It is our hope that in the future, the Medford Historical Society and the Friends of the Fells will work together to offer the lecture and slide presentation to the public once again. In the meantime, you can see some of the photos that we scanned above. Enjoy!

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## This Spring at the Royall House & Slave Quarters

by Gracelaw Simmons

All are welcome on Saturday, May 12th, from 1-3 PM, at an Open House in conjunction with the library's



Community Read. The mansion at 15 George Street will be open with guides in each room ready to tell you its stories. Spend time in the Slave Quarters imagining life there in

the 18th century, viewing archaeological artifacts, and learning about the property's landscape. And be sure to visit the museum shop!

This year's annual benefit event on the museum grounds is scheduled for Saturday, June 9th, from 3-5 PM. "Giving Voice: An Afternoon with Playwright Lydia Diamond" will feature the author of *Stick Fly*, which recently debuted on Broadway, speaking about why her award-winning plays' frequent themes of race and class matter to today's audiences. The afternoon will include music, house tours, museum exhibits, and refreshments. Tickets are \$45 per person (\$35 for RH&SQ members) and can be purchased through the website at [www.RoyallHouse.org](http://www.RoyallHouse.org).

The 2012 tour season opens on May 26<sup>th</sup> and will continue through October, with tours on the hour at 1, 2, 3, and 4 PM every Saturday and Sunday. A modest admission fee is charged; admission is free to RH&SQ members.

## Henry David Thoreau Comes to Medford – Again!

by Maud Ayson and Kyna Hamill



Mr. Thoreau himself and as portrayed by Richard Smith (above)

*“Thoreau passed this morning and dined with me. He was on his way to read a paper at Medford this evening — his ‘Life in the Woods at Walden’ and as refreshing a piece as the Lyceum will get from any lecturer going at present in New England — a whole*

*forest, with forester and all, imported into the citizen’s and villager’s brain. Thoreau is himself a wood, and its inhabitants.”*  
—from Bronson Alcott’s journal entry, 22 January 1851

Nineteenth-century writer-naturalist Henry David Thoreau often traveled throughout central and eastern Massachusetts in order to conduct land surveys, to “botanize,” or to lecture. One of the themes found among his 75 lectures was the general topic of “Economy.” Given six times from 1849-1852, this presentation eventually grew into the opening chapter of his second book, *Walden; or Life in the Woods*.

Since *Walden* would not be released for another three and a half years, Medfordians back then could say they got a pre-publication preview. Most of them would not read the volume upon its release, however, since *Walden* did not gain widespread popularity until a century after its author dies. A re-introduction of the man and his most famous work will connect the people of Medford with a now world-famous thinker who has inspired movements for peace, human rights, and environmental conservation in Massachusetts and around the globe.

What began as casual planning conversations with the Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area has come to exciting fruition with five towns collaborating with Thoreau programs in Ayer, Concord, Fitchburg, Westminster, and Medford during 2012. The Medford Historical Society is pleased to be partnering with Freedom’s Way to present two programs celebrating Henry David Thoreau’s lecture in Medford in 1851. The Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area includes communities in Massachusetts and New Hampshire that share unique historical, natural and cultural resources. The region is home to a series of historic events that influenced democratic forms of governance and intellectual traditions that underpin concepts of American freedom, democracy, conservation, and social justice. These 45 cities and town share common themes that have contributed toward this special landscape of American history. Henry David Thoreau set foot in 39 of them, including Medford.

Society members, residents and friends can get to know Mr. Thoreau up close and personal at two separate events organized by Medford Historical Society and generously funded by the Medford Arts Council, a local agency supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

### **Words to Ponder - June 21 (7:00 - 8:30 PM)** **Medford Public Library (111 High Street).**

Mr. Thoreau himself (as portrayed by Richard Smith) will read a portion of his lecture on “Economy” for the residents of Medford. At its conclusion, he will welcome questions and discuss his reasons for living along Concord’s Walden Pond shoreline for two years, two months, and two days.

### **Walking with Mr. Thoreau - September 8 (1-3 PM)** **Meet at MHS (10 Governor’s Ave.)**

Richard Smith will reprise his lecture “Walking” on a leisurely entertaining ramble to the nearby Middlesex Fells Reservation. Designed for all ages, this family-friendly walk with Henry David Thoreau will share his singular teachings and love of the “wild” to be found nearby.

## MHS Programs Spring 2012 and Beyond

**Friday, May 4** - “A Taste of History” - a fundraiser for the Medford Historical Society and the Friends of the Medford Public Library. Sample sweets and savories inspired by Colonial and Victorian recipes. Beer, wine, and punch served. Tickets \$15 – on sale at the Medford Public Library. Fundraiser will be held at MHS at 7:00 PM. (10 Governors Avenue).

**Saturday, May 12** Medford Historical Society Annual Meeting. Reception at 6:30 PM; Members’ voting at 7:00 PM. (10 Governors Avenue).

**Thursday, June 21** “Words to Ponder”. Richard Smith, a Thoreau historian and interpreter will give this lecture on “Economy” as Thoreau might have done. Medford Public Library, (111 High Street) 7:00-8:30 PM. Free to all.

### Save the Dates:

**Saturday, September 8** “Walking with Mr. Thoreau”, a hike in the Middlesex Fells with Richard Smith as Thoreau. This family-friendly program will begin at the Medford Historical Society at 1 PM and last about 2 hours. Free to all.

**Saturday, September 22** The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Medford Historic Bike Tour. This year we will be exploring some of Medford’s longest living residents - the trees! Ride will begin at 10:00 AM, location TBA. \$5 donation suggested.

**Tuesday, October 23** Award-winning author Eric Jay Dolin will speak on his new book *When America First Met China: An Exotic History of Tea, Drugs, and Money During the Age of Sail*. Co-sponsored by the Medford Historical Society and the Medford Public Library. 7:00 PM, 111 High Street. Free to all.



View over Pine Hill, Middlesex Fells ca. 1899



**See Inside for Early Photography in the Fells!**

**See Page 5 for early May events.**

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