



MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

WINTER, 2012

Presidents' Overview New Exhibits and New Volunteers



It has been an exciting few months at the Medford Historical

Society. Since August, we completed the ceiling project, participated in CACHE's wonderful 'Medford on the Mystic Arts Festival' and offered many programs of our own including an historic bike tour, a poetry reading, a fundraising gala, a program on the Congregational Church of West Medford and a display of over eight new exhibit cases. Whew!

We saw many of our members at the programs and events, and it is always wonderful to meet and connect with the people who support us. There is more to come in the spring including lectures ranging from the archeology of Medford before European colonization to the more recent architectural history of three-decker houses. Of course, we would be remiss if we did not participate in the sesquicentennial celebrations of the Civil War, so look for a great program on Samuel Crocker Lawrence's collection of Civil War memorabilia in April 2012. More information on the programs can be found in this newsletter.

The exhibits committee which includes Ryan Hayward, Barbara Kerr, Dee Morris, Sue Gerould, Ruth Roper and me, all had a great time putting together the new display cases. Some of the old ones had been in place for more

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Treasurer Ruth Roper

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Stanley Eckstein Jay Hurd

Jim Kiely Luke Pomorski

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New Medford Neighborhoods Exhibit Features "Medford Hillside"

Ruth Roper

If you have not been to 10 Governors Avenue recently, you must come by and appreciate our newly renovated exhibit hall! The bright new coat of paint, replaced ceiling, and improved lighting have given new life to the room as well as solved the mold problem which had plagued us for years. The beautiful antique Victorian display cases

have been cleaned and lined with archival-quality muslin, thanks to a grant from the Medford Arts Council. What an improvement!

The main hall exhibit materials had been removed for safekeeping during the construction work. Once the renovation was complete, volunteers Ryan Hayward, Dee Morris, Kyna Hamill, and Barbara



Kerr worked their magic to assemble fresh, new interpretations of our ongoing exhibits – sharpening their thematic focus, pulling new items from our archives and storage, rewriting and re-matting photos and signage – shining new light on our classic Medfordiana and rediscovered objects from our basement collections.

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Hillside residents have experienced weeks of detours due to ongoing roadwork on Emery Street this fall. This 1896 picture, of Emery Street gives a glimpse of the road work of another century! This is one of many images in the new exhibit at MHS.



Neighborhood Exhibit *continued*

One new display case, donated by Tufts University, presented an opportunity to create a new exhibit, and it was decided to feature the various neighborhoods of Medford as interpreted by MHS volunteers. Our Director of Collections, Barbara Kerr, knew of my interest in Medford Hillside as I had been mining MHS files seeking clues about my circa 1872 Hillside home. She asked if I would like to curate the first of these proposed Medford Neighborhoods exhibits with a look at Medford Hillside.

Two excellent publications offered an introduction to the history of the Hillside. MHS member Dee Morris devotes a chapter to the Hillside in her 2009 book *Medford: A Brief History*. She tells of its progression from a forested wilderness to woodlot, farm and pastureland in the days when, the Middlesex Canal, then the railroad, cut through along the Mystic River. Only a handful of homes predate the Civil War, mostly clustered on Cotting and South (Winthrop) Streets. John Anderson's article in this issue describes 1860s Medford; by 1871, with the devastating war over and families anxious to settle down, the Hillside began to be subdivided for development. Many homes went up in the 1870s and 1880s; then, following an economic slump, another wave of building in the first quarter of the 20th century brought us most of the Hillside we see today.

The other invaluable historian of this neighborhood was Moses Mann, an early president of MHS, who ran the Riverside Woodworks carpentry business on Boston Avenue at the Mystic River. He also owned one of the first homes in this new 1870s development. In the 1917 *Medford Historical Register*, he tells the story of Hillside from his recollection as a long-time Adams Street resident. Finding this article was like striking gold, for my house is also on Adams Street, one of several by

the same builder (John Norton of West Medford) as Mann's home.

In these same years, photography grew in popularity, and we are fortunate that several photos of Medford of that time are in our collection. However, besides these few articles and photos, MHS does not have specific material artifacts associated with Medford Hillside to display. So I pulled out a box of some late 19th and early 20th century papers and items I had found in my own and my neighbor's attics during various renovations. Was there a story worth telling in the pile of tattered shop receipts, newspaper scraps, theatre stubs, toys, children's books, and random dusty junk? I examined them with an amateur archaeologist's eye for clues: odd pieces from some board game...a child's high-laced shoe...travel and celebrity souvenirs...a few paper soldiers and dolls...an 1896 calendar... I took a closer look at a temperance brochure from the Mystic Congregational Church found under a floorboard and was surprised and impressed by the passion of this zealous reformer. Who had read this? What side of this struggle were they on? And how did the pamphlet get under my attic floor? I went to the 19th century Medford street directories in the MHS collection bearing names found on these letters and papers and house deeds which I'd found in the Middlesex Registry. Who were these people? What might they have done for work? Where might they have gone to school? Did they marry, and were their descendants still local? Where are their graves? What did the old houses and streets look like while they lived?

With imagination and the added visual perspective of photos from MHS and Medford Public Library archives, a faint picture began to emerge of what life a hundred years ago might have been like in my corner of Medford Hillside. But my neighbors a century ago were not prominent citizens, so I found no biographies

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This photo was taken around 1902 at the corner of Winthrop Street and Boston Avenue looking north. It shows the Hillside Market on the east corner, now the site of Hillside Cleaners and the "College Cafe" a one storey building on the west corner, now the site of the Danish Pastry House. On the site where Hillside Hardware now stands, we can see the side of P.C. Chandler's drugstore where they had installed a soda fountain specialized in ice cream and soda fountain drinks.

Neighborhoods Exhibit *continued*

or articles or obituaries about the original owners of the house – just their names and occupations from city records. But there is a bizarre postscript to the story. After completing the exhibit, I discovered quite by chance, in a 1918 “psychical” journal, a startling message from the original owner of the house. George Pratt died in 1886, but in 1902 was reported to have spoken through a spiritualist medium, conveying greetings to his neighbors in Medford Hillside!

To say I was stunned by this coincidence (or, is it a coincidence?) is an understatement. After years of trying to find any details at all about this long-forgotten family, suddenly a message from Mr. Pratt himself! I can't help but wonder...was there some impulse from

the beyond pushing me towards telling this particular story?

Come see the exhibit to find out more about this curious event – reprints of this strange story are available to read in full, as well as the narrative interpreting the exhibited material from the shops and homes of Medford Hillside and the long-gone folks who lived there. Accompanying the exhibit is a notebook of photographs of the Hillside from the 1870s to mid-20th century, including several fabulous photos of children at play in the 1890s, taken by a Capen Street photographer in front of homes which still stand today. And if your family has roots in Medford Hillside, we would love to see your old photos and letters bearing historic news of this neighborhood!



Wallace Kountze reads a poem by Muriel Morrissey, sister of Amelia Earheart, "By the Gentle Flowing Mystic," at the October "Poetry on the River" Night.



Kyna Hamill helps Maria Daniels and her son locate their house on a 1880 Bird's Eye map of Medford at the Mystic River Arts Festival on October 22nd.

Upcoming Programs for Spring 2012

February - Ellen Berkland, Archaeologist for the Department of Conservation and Recreation and former Boston city archaeologist will speak about the archeology of Medford before European colonialism. Location TBA on website.

March 15 – “A History of the Three-Decker House” by Dr. Stuart Brorson, Medford Public Library, 7 PM.

April 17 – “General Samuel C. Lawrence: The Man, the Civil War Hero and the Collector”, Dee Morris and Allison Andrews, Medford Senior Center, 7 PM.

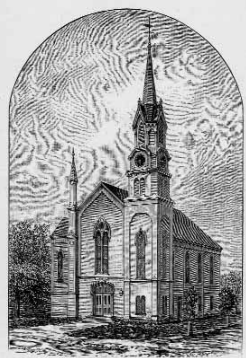
May 12 - Annual members meeting and reception, 10 Governors Avenue. 6:30 PM.



This year's successful 2nd annual fundraising Gala at City Hall in November was the place to be that evening.

Medford in the 1860s

John Anderson, Co-President



West Medford
Congregational Church
at Harvard Avenue and
Bowers Street, 1874

As part of MHS's continuing "Churches of Medford" program, I had the opportunity to speak briefly about our city as it appeared in the 1860s when the West Medford Congregational Church community began to form and plan, culminating with the building of a church in 1872 at the site of the present West Medford fire station.

Jerry Hershkowitz, one of our volunteer curators, suggested that I look at the official Medford Town Reports of the period which are housed in the library at the Historical Society. This was a fantastic suggestion as it opened the door to Medford 150 years ago, seen through the eyes of the civic leaders of the day.

In those days, Medford was not yet a city, but a town. Today, the City Council acts as our legislative body. In the 1860s the entire town was the legislative body and met annually to elect town officers, hear reports from all town departments and board of Selectmen, fix salaries, approve tax rates, and decide other matters. An example of an "other" matter was "To see if the Town will have a Bell rung daily, and at what hours, the ensuing year" [Warrant for the annual meeting, March 9, 1862] All the reports from the departments were typeset and bound in books. These original sources can be found at the Historical Society today! There's a wealth of minutiae in these reports, including the amount of taxes collected from each person and an accounting of every penny spent by the town. In hopes of understanding the "vibe" of those years, I focused primarily on the narratives written annually by the Selectmen.

The Selectmen's report for 1861 covered the first year of the Civil War and focused on the business aspects of supporting such a war:

The duties devolving upon the Board of Selectmen, during the past year, have been more than ordinarily arduous; occasioned, in part, ... by the distribution of the appropriation for Military Relief [support for families of soldiers], requiring, as it did, personal inquiry to be made in the case of each applicant for aid, so that the interests of the town might be protected.

Some citizens objected to town revenue being used to support the war. The Selectmen reported a lawsuit brought by "sundry inhabitants" of the town to enjoin the town from paying \$1,130.95 for the uniforms of the Lawrence Light Guard, as had been previously voted. (In today's dollars the \$1,130 would be closer to \$100,000.) The matter was pending before the

Massachusetts Supreme Court.

The remainder of the reports for 1861 cover mundane matters, such as insurance, appropriations for road work, the killing of 19 sheep by dogs in "Fell's Meadow," and a plea from the Selectmen for better office space: "...we beg to call the attention of the Town to the very inferior accommodations afforded for meetings...A single room of very straitened [sic] dimensions, is the only place where meetings can be held... Besides, the room is very damp and the ventilation from the windows very offensive. We recommend... [at] the earliest opportunity... to fit up suitable offices for town purposes."

A year later, things had changed. The year 1862 was disastrous for the Union cause. Hopes of a quick resolution to the war by capturing Richmond (the Peninsular Campaign) ended when 12,000 Union soldiers were killed or wounded in the Seven Days Battle of June 25 - July 1, 1862. Shiloh, Antietam, and Fredericksburg followed, with many casualties and inconclusive results. The Selectmen's report for 1862 reveals a somber but patriotic tone:

Few years, in the history of our ancient Town, have been as memorable as that just closed; and we deem the part which this Town has taken in aiding the government to crush the unholy rebellion, still rife in our land, of sufficient import to warrant us presenting...a somewhat minute account of military matters which have come within the scope of our official duties....few Towns, in the Commonwealth, have been more prompt in assuming a full share of all the varied responsibilities resulting from the peculiar condition of our beloved country.

The report goes on to document recruiting efforts. The Lawrence Light Guard was supplemented to a full complement of 101 and "sworn into the service of the United States in the Tremont Temple, Boston." In August, 1862, they assembled in Medford Square,

...took up their line of march, accompanied by the Boston Brigade Band, and escorted by Selectmen and Town Clerk and a large procession of citizens, under the direction of Thomas S. Harlow, Esq. Chief Marshall, to the depot of the B & M Railroad in Malden when they took passage for Camp Stanton. On their arrival at the camp, the Company partook of a bountiful collation furnished by the liberality of the citizens.

Given Medford's involvement in the abolitionist movement, it's interesting that the swearing in took place at the Tremont Temple, one of the few interracial churches. Camp Stanton, Maryland where the company trained eventually became the place where large numbers of African-American troops were trained, following Lincoln's emancipation proclamation.

A month later, another company, the Medford Light Infantry, with 96 men and a similar procession

marched to Somerville to board a train to Wenham where they were to undergo training. In addition, nearly two hundred other men volunteered to serve in various regiments, batteries, and cavalries.

Of these 400 men, 12 were dead by the end of 1862. Medford's population was less than 4,500 people (men, women, and children), about 1/10 of our present population. Almost everyone must have had a family member or friend in service.

The dispute over the \$1,130.95 for uniforms from the previous year was "quietly adjusted by private subscription." The Selectmen still did not have new offices since the room they had their eyes on was converted to a recruiting office.

During 1863, the war dragged on. Although the Union had notable victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg among others, it seems that the mood and morale in Medford darkened. The Selectmen's report reflects this air of resignation:

In submitting our Annual Report to the Town, we hoped to be able to congratulate you on the return of peace to our distracted country, but Providence has otherwise ordered. Our victories in the field the past year, have been such as to encourage us in the hope, that ere another year shall pass away, we may all rejoice in a reunited and happy country. But to insure a result so desirable, demands of every citizen his most earnest cooperation in furnishing the Government with men and means for a vigorous prosecution of the war. Early in the season the Town was called upon to furnish, by draft, 64 men; to obtain these ninety-six [names] were drawn...Of this number, one only reported for duty and is now in service...Nine furnished Substitutes... Seven paid commutation, \$300 each... Eight did not report ... Seventy-one exempted from various causes....

The Medford Light Infantry was welcomed home, "having performed the nine months' service, for which they enlisted." A welcoming reception was organized to meet them at the wharf in Boston where "the sick were furnished with carriages." After parades, speeches, and partaking of a "collation arranged by the ladies," the company was dismissed "and the ceremonies of the day ended, we trust, to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned."

In the fall, recruiting picked up, and 32 men enlisted. And, finally, the Selectmen's room was renovated!

When the Selectmen's report for 1864 was written early in 1865, the war was coming to end. There is a lot of information summarizing recruitment efforts. In all, 302 men were recruited and served a total of 421 years. Men enlisted for as long as 3 years and as short as 100 days. The town spent \$32,846 on recruiting of which \$19,000 came from the town and over \$13,000 was collected through voluntary contributions from 600 citizens, all of whom are listed by name and amount in the report. Some gave as little as \$1, others as much as \$380. Remembering that

President's Message *continued*

than 15 years! Ruth Roper took on the task of installing our new "neighborhoods case" which is housed in a beautiful new display case donated by the Tufts Gallery. This case will be dedicated to exhibiting the many neighborhoods of Medford. We invite members of MHS, who might be interested in showing off the history of their neighborhoods, to suggest the next location to be highlighted next fall. The exhibits committee can help with ideas about how to organize the display.

It is always great to see our members at the programs and events we offer, but we also encourage you to come by and see the new exhibits and main hall at 10 Governors Avenue. We are open every Sunday from 12:00 to 4:00 PM. We now have a dedicated group of volunteers including Jay Lordan, Cambia Davis and Beth Hayes to show you around the hall every Sunday, and of course, there is always someone there to talk about Medford History and our great old city. See you there!

—Kyna Hamill, Co-President

a schoolteacher's annual salary was only \$300 at the time, even a \$1 contribution was a significant sacrifice for many.

Interestingly, these reports do not tally total war deaths or wounded in any consistent manner. This contrasts sharply with today's wars, where running totals are constantly communicated to the public. In the 1864 report, the Selectmen list 15 dead, 2 missing, 11 taken prisoner, and 20 in hospital. All told, there were over 700 enlistments, but some of these must have been reenlistments. From the annual reports, I estimate that 50 to 60 men died. An equal number probably had serious injuries. Considering Medford's small population (770 houses), these are staggering numbers.

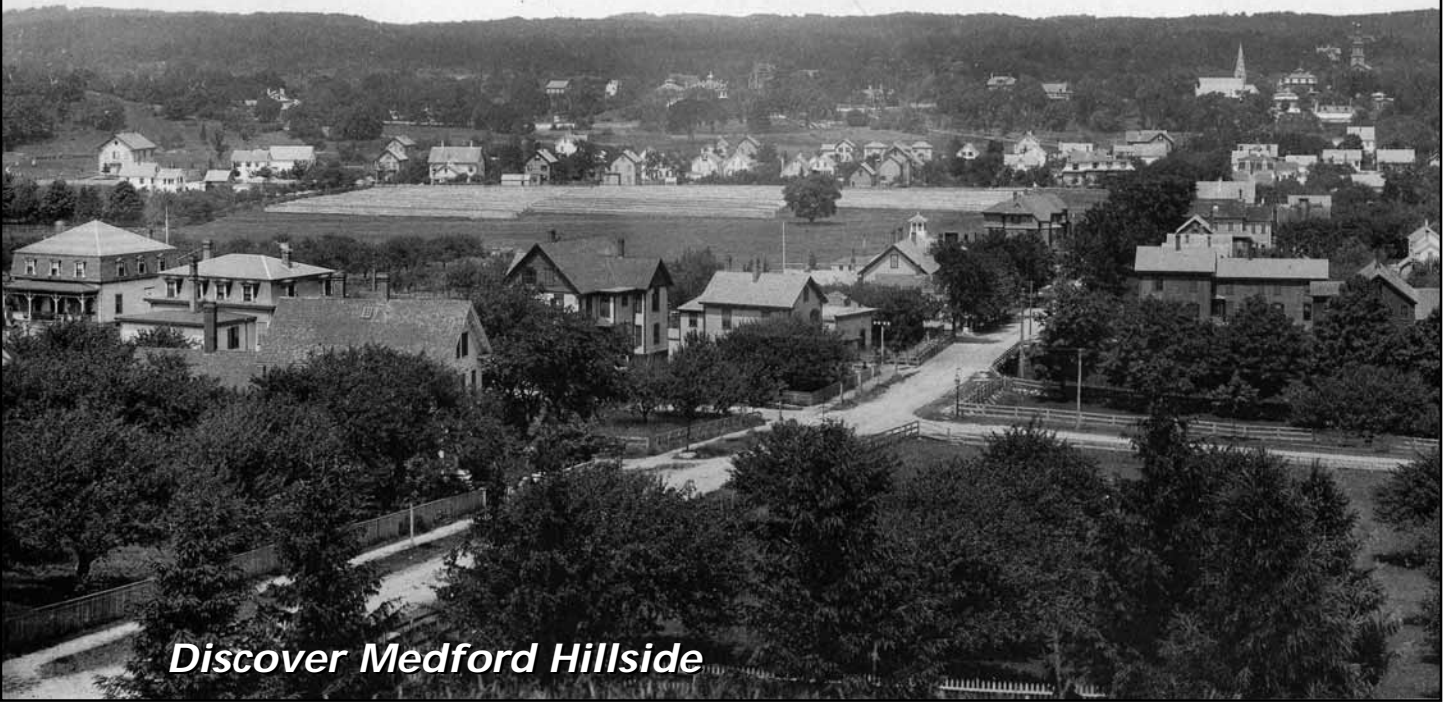
The reports from the School Committee provide a bright note in these somber times. The Committee writes each year about successes, its educational philosophy, and its dedication to the moral and intellectual progress of the children. Their interest in the education of the children is heartening and may relate in some part to the high childhood mortality of those years. The annual reports tally deaths in the city by age each year. Typical for the period, deaths in 1862 totaled 65, but of those, 29 were youngsters under the age of 10.

The reports of the School Committee from the 1860s are interesting enough for a future article and will include its version of the MCAS. Here are a few samples:

- "At 13 $\frac{7}{8}$ cents per pound, how many pounds of sugar can be bought for \$17 $\frac{6}{7}$?" (*Try that one on your calculator!*)
- "Why is it necessary to ventilate schoolrooms?"
- "Give the principal rivers which empty in the Ohio River."

I think we will find the 1860 high school exams humbling! I look forward to more research and sharing the results with you in the next newsletter.

View from Medford Hillside down Winthrop Street (then called South Street?). Note the farm land towards the river. (Any info that would make this more interesting would be appreciated.)



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