

# Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2017



## Jason Russell House Preservation Study

As noted in our previous newsletter, the Society has worked to secure two grants to conduct a preservation study of the Jason Russell House. Funding from the Massachusetts Historical Commission is being matched by funding from the Town of Arlington Community Preservation Act. The objective of the project is to document existing conditions and to provide a prioritized treatment plan.

We are pleased to update members that the documenting stage is under way. This includes exploratory work on the north wall of the house to identify structural problems. This requires removal and replacement of the clapboards and digging a trench.

We will update you on findings in more detail in the spring newsletter. ❖

*Removing siding on the north wall revealed generations of repairs, some better than others, but has spelled out a repair path that saves the house without erasing history.*

Patrick Guthrie of Design Associates in Cambridge, Project Architect



Workers removed clapboards and dug an exploratory trench on the north wall of the Jason Russell House to further examine structural problems. December 20, 2016.

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# President's Corner

Hello Society members,

This past summer some members of the Society board participated in an exercise at Emerson College. One of our members, Brenna McCormick, is a professor of marketing there, and she invited the Society to become a study object for two student teams in her marketing/branding class. The two student teams spent time researching our Society as if we were clients of a marketing firm looking for an improved branding strategy. The students listened to a PowerPoint presentation about the Society, visited the Jason Russell House, reviewed our web presence, sent questionnaires to our membership, and interviewed a couple of members to see how the Society could become more effective participants in Arlington's cultural life.

A lot of good ideas came out of this exercise. The Society received two large study books from the student teams which document their suggestions. The books are available at the Society offices for your perusal. Alternately, please feel free to ask me about what we learned. I want to highlight one point they made which particularly resonates with my vision for the Society. Both student teams emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for members to engage with the Society through volunteering.

*Our Society runs on volunteers, and we have many openings where you can make a difference.*

Many of our members have arrived at their golden age, and are ready to "give back" to the community after years of participating in the work force. They now have some free time, and want to do something meaningful with it. Perhaps this describes you? Our Society runs on volunteers, and we have many openings where you can make a difference. Some activities are:

- Helping with special events, such as party planning, set-up & take-down.
- Publicizing Society events and programs.
- Organizing and cataloging our collection of historical artifacts.
- Maintaining the yard. The garden club maintains the garden, but I wish we could find volunteers to keep an eye on the yard, and perhaps cut down some of the worst of the weeds which grow along the stone wall surrounding the house.
- Supervising the maintenance of our buildings. You don't need to be, for example, a plumber, but we do need help from volunteers who can call the plumber when needed, and make sure the job gets done.
- Guiding visitors through the Jason Russell House during tourist season.
- Helping with the 3rd grade education program.

If you have a few spare hours and want to become more active in the Society, please consider helping in one of the above volunteer categories. For further information please contact our director Sara Lundberg, and she will be happy to give you more details.

My best wishes,

Stuart Brorson

Arlington Historical Society President



In addition to his role as an Arlington Historical Society Trustee, Pete Howard has been painting the house and museum exterior for many years.



In her role as our one-woman "hospitality committee," Jean Dolan is the unsung hero who provides delicious baked goods and other treats at the Tuesday night Society programs.

*Look for more Society volunteer spotlights in upcoming issues of Menotomy Minutes.*



## AHS Collections

In addition to our programs, the Arlington Historical Society is also a collecting institution. We house a significant collection of objects and archives, caring for over 13,000 individual items. We continue to catalog and digitize our collections and records so that they may be of use to scholars, researchers, and the public. If you would like to know more about some of our collections, visit our website ([arlingtonhistorical.org](http://arlingtonhistorical.org)).

If you would like to help with digitization, consider volunteering or donating today.

## Recent Gifts of Note

**Jeanne Meister** donated an 1840 letter addressed to Stephen Palmer Blake, who was out at sea. The letter consists of a long page, folded into a booklet. One letter is from Blake's mother, Ann Elizabeth Wyman Blake, with a shorter letter from his sister Sophia and a few lines from his brother Oliver.

**John Worden** donated a 1947 class ring from Arlington High School and a token from Suburban National Bank.

**William Mahoney** donated a collection of items, including: A 1924 Frost Insecticide catalog, a carte-de-visite and two "story writers" cards of John T. Trowbridge, a postcard from Ring's Sanatorium and one from Symmes Hospital, an advertisement for Hobbs' Pure Milk, and an 1866 carte-de-visite of Henry Wellington.



## Federal Period Card Table Restored

*by Doris Birmingham*

In an effort to discretely hide a couple of centuries worth of stains and scratches, the beautiful Federal fold-top card table in the parlor of the Jason Russell House was for years mostly covered with artifacts. Last winter, with the support of Town Day visitor donations, Melissa Carr of Masterwork Conservation cleaned its top and repaired minor damage to its intricate veneer inlays. The table is back on display, sharing the parlor with some other outstanding furniture pieces in the Society's collection.

Made in about 1805, this table is an outstanding example of the Federal Hepplewhite style with its delicate, square tapering legs, repeated use of oval and serpentine forms, and finely wrought surface treatment. While its body is of mahogany, its surface is enhanced with veneered panels of contrasting rosewood, birdseye maple and flame birch. The edges of the top and the skirt are accented with a diminutive Greek key pattern while the inlaid rosewood and maple panels are framed with 'stringing' made of wire-thin strips of contrasting wood.

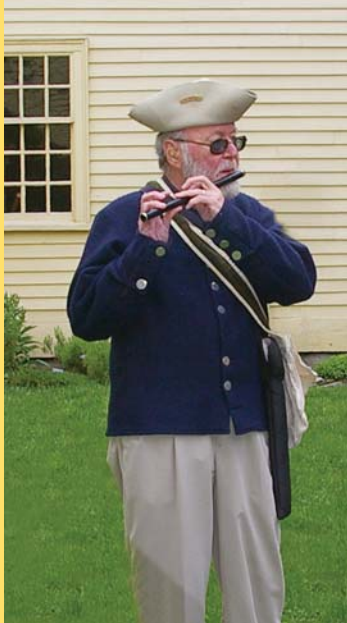
According to Ms. Carr, aspects of the table's construction as well as its overall style strongly suggest the work of the prolific father and son team of cabinetmakers, John and

*(Continued on page 4)*

# The William Mahoney Collection

by Jeanne Meister

Bill Mahoney, a longtime resident of Arlington, MA, has amassed a huge collection of artifacts from Arlington, West Cambridge and Menotomy. Bill, a former fife player for the Menotomy Minutemen, began collecting before the days of Ebay. He would travel with his wife Carol to flea markets, antique stores and sales, in many states, to find anything from our town. Collecting became much easier for Bill when he found Ebay, where he has purchased hundreds of items. Before Bill moved to Illinois in 2014, he donated his entire collection to the Arlington Historical Society.



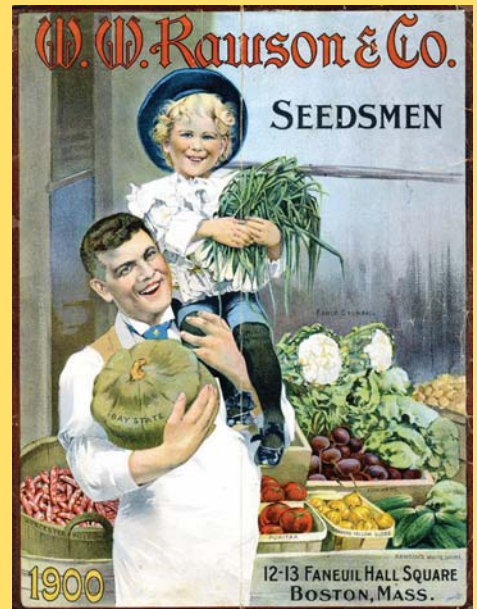
Bill Mahoney playing fife as a member of the Menotomy Minutemen.

Bill's collection included many photographs, tintypes, daguerreotypes, cabinet cards and cartes-de-visite of people from Arlington. Many of the photographs were unidentified and Bill would set out on a course to find out who these people were. Two of his favorite local photographers were Litchfield and Doane.

Letters, written to and from the people living here, are a precious addition to our collection, because reading them gives us a firsthand look at daily life in West Cambridge. One letter that I like the best was the account of the 1851 tornado that came through the center of town. Bill also collected a large amount of Town Reports as well as other ephemera. I remember seeing one item, a receipt from a blacksmith's shop in Menotomy. A lot of these items would have been lost if it were not for the diligence of Bill Mahoney to collect them and his generosity in donating them to our society.

Some other items that were donated by Bill were medals from the 1907 town celebration, photographs, books, seed catalogs from the Rawson Seed Company, political memorabilia and fire and police department photos and minutes from the meetings.

We are thankful to our longtime member Bill Mahoney, for the wonderful collection, which will provide tangible teaching tools about the history of Arlington for many generations to come. ❖



Catalog cover and inside advertisement for W.W. Rawson Seed Company, 1900.



Federal Period Table Restored (Continued from page 3)

Thomas Seymour, who were active in Boston in the early 19th century. The Seymours rarely signed their pieces, and the provenance on our table does not state the maker, so there can be no definitive attribution. Yet the Historical Society can consider itself fortunate to possess such a fine example of the American cabinetmaker's art.

The table was donated in 1959 by Marjorie Whittemore Allen of Acton. It came from the home of Grace and Omar Whittemore at 4 Water Street in Arlington. ❖



# An Active Season at the Jason Russell House

by Doris Birmingham

Jason's old house was host to more than 500 weekend visitors between April and October in 2016. In addition, about 125 local residents took brief tours on Town Day, and approximately 270 Arlington school children visited as part of their third grade history curriculum.

Our visitors were a diverse group. Among them were a sizeable number of Arlingtonians, many of them long term residents who were "finally" satisfying their curiosity about the house and its history. Out-of-town guests, including at

least 35 Russell descendants, were also numerous. In fact, our guestbook was signed by people hailing from 23 states and 4 foreign countries. Perhaps our most unusual tour for foreigners was one given by Colleen Cunningham in April to a group of Japanese students—in Japanese!

We are always seeking more volunteer guides. The guide training day for next season is tentatively set for Saturday, April 1. If you are interested in joining us and would like more information, please e-mail me: [dabirming@gmail.com](mailto:dabirming@gmail.com) ❖



## Remembering Phillip H. Hagar Sr.

by David Baldwin

I have known Phil all my life. He was my family's backyard neighbor in Arlington Heights. My sister and he were classmates at Locke School. An early memory of mine is being the pesky little brother bothering my sisters, brother, and Phil as they worked to construct a snow igloo. I remember being in awe of him and his pet rabbits. Fast forward twenty-five years, and I became reacquainted with him when he became President of The Arlington Historical Society.

Phillip reveled in being President of the Society. He devotedly ran meetings, organized fundraising events, and planned the future of our organization. His enthusiasm was contagious; and his energy appeared limitless. Phillip was a consummate educator; he was particularly proud of the "Arlington



350th Celebration" project in 1985 that brought in the Boston University Archaeology team for an educational lecture and later an archaeological dig at the Jason Russell House involving a "hands-on experience" for scores of history students from Arlington High School.

Bus trips to historic locations, sheep on the lawn for Town Day, pony rides to encourage young children and parents to visit... they were all part of his educational plan. Additionally, Phillip was devoted to our caretaker Mrs. Capes. He wallpapered her apartment, expanded her living space, and brought her to his summer home in Nova Scotia for vacation.

Phillip Hagar dedicated his heart and soul to make the Arlington Historical Society into a vibrant, energetic, and financially sound force to educate the youth of Arlington on the value of history to their lives. I miss Phil and his presence; his legacy will guide us into the future. ❖





## 2016 Wine Tasting

Written by George Parsons



In September, the Society held its second annual Wine Reception Benefit at the Smith Museum. Candles decorated the entranceway to welcome people from near and far, and bouquets of flowers provided lovely accents to the museum exhibits. There was a sampling of four delicious red and white wines from Spain, Sardinia and Italy. Menotomy Bar and Grill and members of the Society donated the appetizers.

The silent auction provided opportunities to bid on handmade items and art donated by Society members as well as gift certificates donated by local restaurants and shops. Thanks to Stu Galley, who was on hand to speak about his work transcribing Nina Winn's diaries of 100 years ago to the day. The event raised about \$2400 to support the Society's ongoing activities. Thanks to all who made this benefit possible with their labor and contributions. ❖



## Upcoming Lectures

Our regular location for our Tuesday 7:30 p.m. programs will be the Masonic Temple, 19 Academy Street (disabled access is at rear)



**Tuesday, February 28**

### **MOUNT AUBURN CEMETERY**

Rosemarie Smurzynski

Take a virtual walk with a most engaging docent through one of America's oldest and prestigious garden cemeteries, which remains in active use while growing in ways that are sympathetic to its historically significant landscape.



**Tuesday, March 28**

### **MASONIC LODGES PAST & PRESENT**

Alan Jones

Mystic Valley Lodge was created in 2004 through the merger of three historic lodges, located in the 1923 Masonic Temple on Academy Street, which in recent years has transformed into a community resource. Enjoy many images of predecessor locations, such as Munroe Tavern and Pattee's Bakery, and observe Masonic rituals allowed for public viewing.

## Winter Wednesdays

Wednesdays – 10 am at the Smith Museum of the Arlington Historical Society. Welcome to our seventh year of Arlington Historical Society members gathering for interesting talks and enjoying refreshments on mid-winter mornings!  
*Note: Please check our website ([www.arlingtonhistorical.org](http://www.arlingtonhistorical.org)) the morning of the scheduled talk for postponements or cancellations in event of inclement weather.*

### **Chuck Kraemer – Limericks**

**February 1st**

Limericks are rarely respectable.  
At most, they're merely neglectable.  
But as Kraemer will say,  
AABBA,  
Can often be downright delectable.



### **Colleen Cunningham – Local Chocolate History**

**February 8th**

Money really does grow on trees! From ancient peoples in Mesoamerica, to its spread to Europe and the colonies, to Boston area mills in the 18th and 19th and 20th centuries, to the current local artisan boom, we'll trace the development of chocolate from bean to bar.



### **Evelyn Corsini Alcorn – A Brief History of Arlington Friends of the Drama**

**February 15th**

With its roots tied to some of Arlington's most distinguished residents, Arlington Friends of the Drama is one of the oldest continually operating community theaters in the country. The presentation will include the theater's early history and productions, anecdotes, and past volunteers who went on to professional careers in the dramatic arts.



### **Howard Winkler – My Meeting With Alexander Kerensky**

**February 22nd**

In 1953, I was a 20 year old college senior and one of three members of a program committee that asked Kerensky to address our student group. For eight months in 1917, Kerensky was in the headlines as a member and then president of the Provisional Government of Russia, from the time the Czar abdicated until the Bolshevik (Communist) revolution. My talk will cover my meeting with him, and a brief history of this period of upheaval in Russia.





# About the Society



The Arlington Historical Society was established in 1897 as a collecting and educational organization. In 1923 it began operating the Jason Russell House, a major battle site of the first day of the American Revolution—April 19, 1775. Open weekends from April to October.

The Arlington Historical Society is dedicated to preserving the Jason Russell House and the Society's collections, and to discovering and sharing information about Arlington's history. The stories of individuals, families, and events associated with the town are interpreted in the Society's collections, programs, and Smith Museum exhibitions.

## OFFICERS

President – Stuart Brorson  
Vice President – Pamela Meister  
Vice President – Patsy Kraemer  
Treasurer - Alan Jones  
Assistant Treasurer – Angela Olszewski  
Clerk – Christine Bird

## DIRECTORS

Doris Birmingham • Linda Cohn  
Paul Fennelly • William Lyons

## TRUSTEES

Peter Howard • George Parsons

The Arlington Historical Society is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. Contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

## Contact Us

Office Hours:  
Tues-Thurs 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Carolyn Parsons,  
Doris Birmingham and Stuart Brorson.

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