

Annual Report 2003

“Aren’t we lucky to live in Bedford? This is really a special town!”

I was standing in the doorway of the old Stone Jug School House while people gathered for December holiday festivities on the Green in Bedford Village. The snow was falling in big flakes around a twinkle of lights surrounding the hamlet, and I overheard some neighbors speaking about our town. Yes, they are right, we are lucky to live in Bedford. Just 40 miles north of the bustling city we can slow down and take a breath of the fresh, New England countryside. The historic Green of Bedford Village, surrounded by well-tended 18th century homes, along with our neighbors, the 19th century, vibrant Katonah, and the 20th century growth around the “station” of Bedford Hills, all comprise the Town of Bedford today. They are surrounded by open spaces, farms, nature preserves, historical roads, historical sites, and are inhabited by people that care for their environment and their history.

The hamlet of *Bedford Village* represents the earliest beginning of our colonial country. All the new national issues of the day were heard on the Green, in the Court House, at the many taverns and in many of the neighboring homes. Looking around the Village Green today you can still visualize how it must have appeared in 1787 as the hardy villagers began rebuilding from a devastating war. The hamlet of *Bedford Hills* stands where the first “iron horse” rolled into town in 1847. It is now a bustling center where the commuters of our town still travel back and forth to New York City. The hamlet of *Katonah* is arranged around a well-planned center that is newer than its historic 19th Century homes. In 1892, NYC condemned the land of old Katonah for the Croton Reservoir and the villagers banded together to lay out a new town a few miles away where their old homes were moved. Today, Katonah stands as a model for a number of planned development projects nationwide. The Bedford Historical Society treasures history in our hamlets as our world changes. We want our town to grow and continue to be a place for people leaving the bustle of metropolis to be embraced by this historic and beautiful environment. But we also want to preserve what makes Bedford so special. A sense of this important founding history will continue as long as there is a Bedford Historical Society to protect it.

An article in the New York Times, Metro Section, Friday, September 26, 2003, caught my eye. The title, “Historic Districts Found to Lift Values” made an observation that the prices of homes in historic areas increased in value greater than homes outside of historic areas. The Bedford Historical Society in no way attempts to preserve history for the sake of house values, but we found it interesting that there is true economic value to the preservation of our historic structures and districts. We are glad to know that our work of preservation of historic structures and character does have a financial benefit for all who live here.

My hope for 2004 is to grow our membership so every household feels a part of this organization. The society is dedicated to newcomer and old-timer alike. *My challenge* is to bring in more ideas and increase participation from a broader group throughout the three hamlets of Bedford. You have our promise that we will continue with our mission responsibly and with enthusiasm! We want to hear from you as well. We want to hear from you on ideas for continued preservation. We want to hear from you if you would like to participate with us in any way. Please take a moment to return your enclosed membership card for 2004. If you can consider an increased membership level this year, we could use your financial assistance. Together we will continue our preservation of this beautiful town that we call home.

2003 – A Year of Change and Accomplishment

It was mid-year that I took over the Presidency from Linda de Menocal. She led the BHS through a 4-year period of major repair and restoration of our buildings. Linda also cemented a strong relationship with the Town to partner on many local issues affecting the vitality and health of our community such as adequate parking and waste water treatment. Along with board member, Walter McVicar, she launched a new program of education for our county schools to share the importance of early American history in Bedford with many of our children. Preservation and Education are the core of our mission and I have the good fortune of continuing this well laid-out path. Jeff Tweedy became the first Chairman of the Board in 2003. Having served on the board for four years, he has tirelessly worked on reviewing our bylaws, bringing our documents current and ensuring that our focus is centered on our mission. Our Vice President, Peter Ehrlich, has worked meticulously on 5 and 10 year plans for long-range policy and strategy for the Bedford Historical Society. His vision and leadership will focus us on our important work for the future. Nancy Vincent leads the board with her clarity and insight and oversees the administration of our operations. Under her direction, our board has become computer savvy and our website, www.bedfordhistoricalsociety.org, is informative and user-friendly. We welcomed two new members to our Board this year, Dina Clason and Keith Kroeger. The most important member of our team is our Executive Director, Lynne Ryan. She is behind all of us as we implement the mission of the Bedford Historical Society. She capably leads our organization in all its activities and events throughout the year. She also promotes our vision throughout the town and within county and state preservation and education communities.

Historic Properties Maintenance and Repair: Under the knowledgeable direction of Ben Branch, Peter Michaelis and Keith Kroeger, we examine the condition of our buildings and make plans for restoration throughout the year. This year we installed a new air conditioning unit at Historical Hall, replaced the handicapped ramp and porch at the Post Office, and began the restoration of the second floor windows at the Court House.

Collections: Jackie Farrell, Linda Wilson, and Nancy Vincent have initiated a formal inventory of all of our collections that will be maintained on a database. In conjunction with this effort, we have had our collections appraised by specialists in furniture and decorative arts, Northeastern Native American artifacts, and vintage costumes. It has been exciting to learn what treasures we have and the discoveries will be the topic for our next newsletter.

Insurance: For many years all of our insurance was handled through Lloyd Bedford Cox, Inc. However, the agency is focusing on personal property rather than commercial insurance. A change needed to be made and Lloyd Cox helped us through this transition. We are so grateful for all the years that Lloyd Bedford Cox, Inc. protected our precious buildings while being sensitive to our not-for-profit status. We are very excited that another Bedford neighbor, Mark Rollins of Rollins Insurance, Inc. has stepped forward to assist us in this very necessary protection.

Fund-Raising: This year's fundraiser was held at the home of Ellen and Eric Reimer. Under Dina Clason's lead, a committee of enthusiastic volunteers created an evening of food, fun and celebration to launch the publication of *Images of Bedford*. We thank the Reimer's for the use of their home and hope we didn't do too much damage.

Tenant Leases: Jeff Tweedy and Eric Reimer ably oversee our yearly leases and their renewals. We welcome a new tenant to the Jackson House Annex. Vles and Co. is an upscale gift store offering an eclectic assortment of gifts and natural products. One of the owners is Bedford resident, Karina Warshaw, who is a volunteer Bedford Village firefighter and former member of the Wetlands Board. Please come and visit.

Membership: Our members are what keep our Society alive. In 2003, our dues-paying membership was 442. All member mailings, reports and announcements are organized by Dookie Tingué and Missy Renwick.

BHS Antique Show: If you attended the 2003 Antique Show, you saw that it continues to be a gem in its field and keeps getting better each year. Missy Renwick and Dookie Tingué team up again on this very labor intensive production. In fact, work for the 2004 Show began the day last year's show ended. Net profits from the Antique Show have become an important component of our operating budget and assist in our daily maintenance and expenses of our historic buildings.

Volunteers: Our dedicated volunteers pick up the gap needed to open museums to the public and assist in mailings to members. We are grateful for the Education Program team organized by Walter McVicar as they allow us to present programs to school children from Westchester County who are learning about schools, government and life of an earlier Bedford. We are also appreciative of the weekly contributions of Betsy Hoffman and Joyce Vicenzi.

Images of Bedford: In 2003, John Stockbridge and I compiled a history of Bedford told through our wonderful photographs and images. The book allowed everyone to see these fragile images and read about our fascinating past. It was published by Arcadia Publishing and the first 1800 copies released in November of 2003 are already out of print. It will soon be in its second printing and available for purchase here at the BHS office or at many retailers in the area.

Upcoming Programs: Burning of Bedford: 2004 marks the 225th anniversary of Revolutionary skirmishes in our area. The entire Hudson Valley will be commemorating the historical events throughout the summer. July 11th marks the anniversary of the Burning of Bedford and the Bedford Historical Society will host a recreation of the event with festivities on the Green. Reserve the date of Sunday, July 11th to be in Bedford!

We have closed out 2003 successfully. We look forward to continuing the large task of preservation in our town. Our goals for 2004 include upgrading our museum and working on our large costume collection. Our buildings will continue to receive the same attention with major repairs and daily maintenance as needed. Enclosed is a 2004 membership card. Please take a few minutes to return it. We receive no funding from our local government so we thank you in advance for your important membership and continued support.

Respectfully,

Shirley Bianco
President

The Bedford Historical Society Mission: As stated in our 1916 Certificate of Incorporation

"To discover, locate and preserve places and buildings of historical and antiquarian interest within the Town of Bedford, to discover, procure and preserve objects of like interest and whatever may relate to the natural, literary and civil history of the said Town, to establish and maintain collections of such objects, to erect and maintain historical monuments, tablets and boundaries, to stimulate and encourage interest in such work and to further all efforts looking towards the accomplishment of the aforesaid purposes or either of them."

Properties of the Bedford Historical Society

Historical Hall (1806)
Bedford Free Library (1807)
School House (1829)
General Store (c.1838)
Post Office (c.1838)
Jackson House (c.1857)
Lounsbery Building (1906)

Properties owned by The Town of Bedford
Managed and maintained by the Bedford Historical Society

Bedford Oak (c.1500)
Court House (1787) and Museum
Sutton Clock (c.1890) and Tower (c.1940)