

Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING 2017



Update: Jason Russell House Preservation Study

During the winter Design Associates, Inc., of Cambridge and Nantucket has been working with the Arlington Historical Society to evaluate the physical condition of the Russell House. The firm has developed plans for immediate repairs to the north wall along with a prioritized listing of repairs down the road including a plan for maintaining the house after all the repairs are made.

Building on prior studies, the team of architect, engineer – Simpson, Gumpertz and Heger, Inc. and mechanical engineer – TE2, Inc., physically examined the building from top to bottom. Working with Westmill Preservation, a preservation

carpenter, clapboards and sheathing were removed from the north wall to exposed the framing and determine the extent of repairs required.

Floorboards in the kitchen were carefully removed to allow access to the crawlspace below so the foundations and the framing of the house and its connection to the Smith Museum could be explored. This crawl below the buildings revealed features such as the log floor joists and support posts made out of door jambs below the connector. Ladders were climbed to see the roof and gutters and get a closer look at

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This color-coded architectural drawing features the systematic plan outlined in the report.

President's Corner

Hello Society members,

This year, 2017, we celebrate Jason Russell's 300th birthday. There is some confusion about whether he was born in 1716 or 1717, since two different calendar systems – the “old style” and the “new style” – were at use in England and its colonies at that time. The English calendar system was rationalized in 1752, when the Gregorian calendar was adopted throughout the English world. As for Jason, some sources list his birth year as 1716/1717, which is a scholarly way of saying that he was born in 1717 under the “new style” (Gregorian) calendar. Assuming those sources are correct, 2017 is the year Jason Russell turns 300 years old.

*2017 is the year we celebrate
Jason Russell's 300th birthday!*

I sometimes reflect that if Jason built his house in the 1740s, that means he was in his mid-20s when he did that work – still a young man. The house is now over 270 years old and is showing symptoms of its age. Under the leadership of George Parsons and Paul Fennelly, and with untiring support from Sara Lundberg, the Society won two grants for preservation work on the Jason Russell House.

One grant came from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, under the "Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund". We were awarded \$25,000 with which we commissioned a "condition assessment report" from Patrick Guthrie, a preservation architect. The goal of this study was to examine the house from top to bottom, identify any problems, and address solutions to any problems found. Patrick has written an overview of his work, which appears in this newsletter.

The other grant we won is \$35,000 from the Town of Arlington's CPA funds. We used a portion of this money to match the MPPF funds which paid for the condition assessment report, and we will use the remaining funds for house repairs, including replacing the gutter which fell off the house over two years ago. We are grateful to now have the funding in place to make this important repair, and hope to have new gutters on the house sometime this summer.

Best regards,
Stuart Brorson, President



Kenton Rhoades and Chuck Kraemer have been helping to refurbish the Smith Museum entrance area with many tasks, including a new coat of paint.



Oakes Plimpton has been working on transcribing papers read before the Society in the late 19th and early 20th century. This work inspired Oakes to pen an article for this issue of the Menotomy Minutes (see next page).

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 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 our collections, visit our website at arlingtonhistorical.org.

Recent Gifts of Note

Charles “Phil” Allen of Lenox, MA donated a collection of papers from his ancestor, Almira Tufts Fessenden Whittemore, who was heavily involved in the Arlington Historical Society. This collection includes: Society papers read and reminiscences written by Almira, a photo album of various Arlington buildings c. 1912-1915, an 1827 poem by Eliza Cutter, a handmade magazine made by the students of the High Street School, and a collection of photographs and postcards featuring the homes of many in the Whittemore, Tufts, and Fessenden families.

Christopher Brown of Peterborough, NH donated a federal period mahogany sideboard, with original 1813 receipt of purchase, along with glassware, silver candlesticks, and snuffer, all originally belonging to Amos Whittemore.

June Smith of Needham donated a collection of items from the late Dr. Marilyn Flaherty (1932-2016) who had a distinguished 50-year career in the Arlington Public Schools and is best remembered as the principal of the Peirce School.

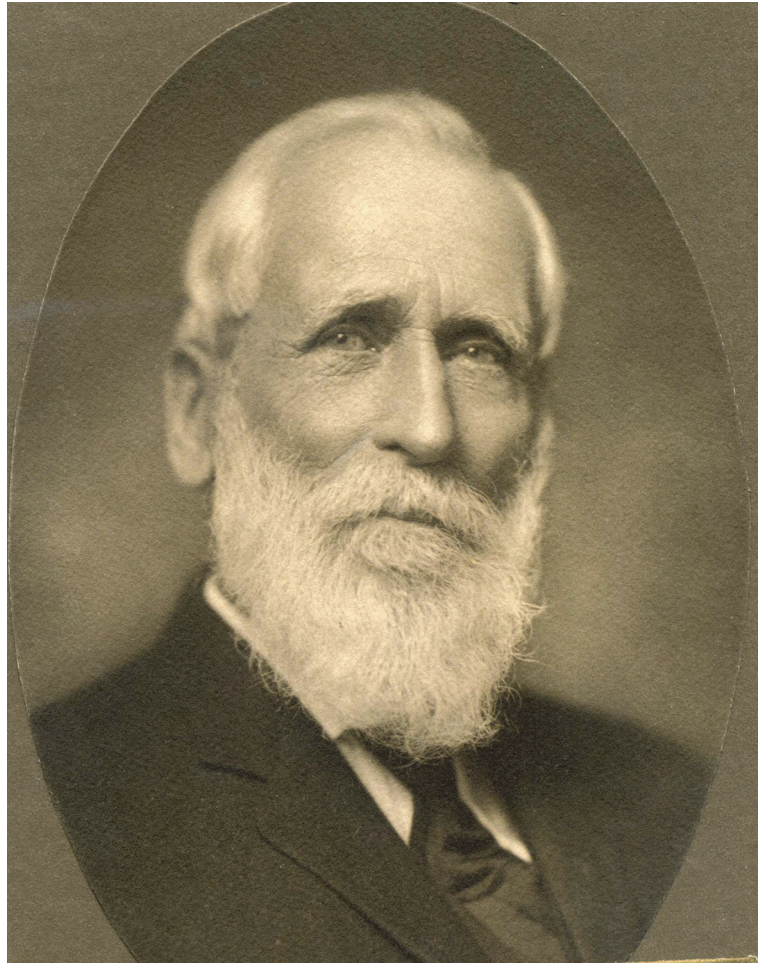


Photo of William Whytal taken from the album of photographs of 49ers now in the Arlington Historical Society collections.

The Gold Rush

by Oakes Plimpton

“Forty-niners” from Arlington? Yes, there were! That was the theme of the Arlington Historical Society’s program on January 31, 1928. In all 16 men of Arlington (then called West Cambridge) set forth for California. A number of journals about their adventures were read. It fell to this volunteer to transcribe some of them. It took one gold prospector 196 days to travel by sea from Boston to San Francisco. Others, particularly Thomas Emerson Russell, a descendant of Jason Russell, took the isthmus route, 19 days from New York to Panama, 6 days to cross, 19 days to San Francisco, and overland from there to Sacramento City and Marysville. Russell planned to stay there about a year. He wrote of his good fortune of gathering four pounds of gold. He promised to write further; unfortunately, he was never heard from again, and the family concluded he had been murdered by his partner!

Mr. William Whytal, who by 1928 was in his nineties, was one of the Gold Rush pioneers and later a grocer in East Arlington, displayed a photograph album with many images, assembled for the New England California ’49 Pioneers Association.

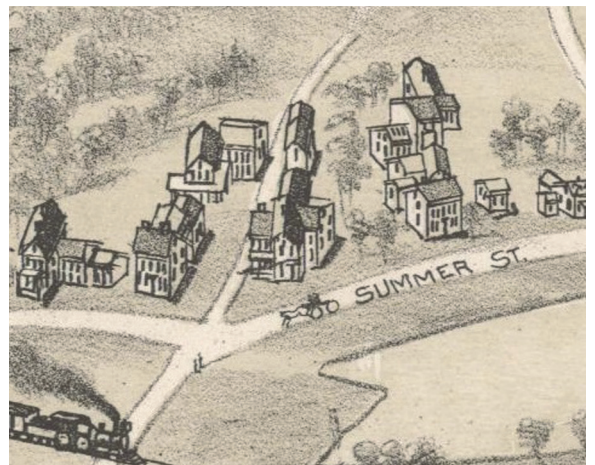
Probably the most thorough account of the journey to California was read by Mrs. Blanche Cutter Hatch, as told to her and her brothers by their father, Henry Clay Cutter.

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At age 19, Henry Clay Cutter, his brother James Russell Cutter, and their brother-in-law James Porter, set forth with the blessings of Henry's father "You'll get a quart of gold a day, boys, of course!" For protection, a much-trusted farm hand, Elijah Taska, was sent with them. Going to New York by rail, thence to Havana, Cuba, on the steamer Cornelius Vanderbilt, a side-wheeler; then on the steamer Falcon to the mouth of Chagres River, Isthmus of Panama. From there, they traveled in native dugout boats up the river—describing at length the awesome beauty of the jungle and all the monkeys and birds. Burros carried them over spectacular mountains to reach Panama City. Then, having arrived too late to catch the steamship to San Francisco, a group of 80 purchased an old Spanish windjammer, repaired it with the help of some whalers, and sailed for California. Got becalmed! More adventures followed. The two brothers got separated, but found each other again. James Porter was killed in an accident, and Elijah Taska was lost.

"San Francisco of those days was a town of scattered habitations—a battleground between law-abiding citizens and the most depraved desperados. Drunken brawls and gambling were everywhere. Vigilante justice prevailed. Food was scarce and 'high'. But the youthful gold-rushers were quite successful in their quest. Henry's easiest day's work was \$820 in a nugget found around and under a boulder in an abandoned mine. At the end of a year and a half, they were able to leave California having mined about \$5,000 apiece." They returned home by more-or-less the same route by which they arrived.

Naturally, they were welcomed home with celebration, and with their gold, they helped their father build a new home at 77 Summer St., which is no longer standing. James Russell Cutter stayed, but Henry Clay Cutter got restless and set forth again for California a year later. Henry took the train to Chicago, encountering returning gold rushers who told him the gold was mined out, Henry decided to stay in the fine farm country of downstate Illinois. His daughter Blanche Cutter Hatch traveled from Oswego, Illinois, to bring these adventurous times back to life. ❖



Two photographs of Henry Cutter show him at the age he set out from West Cambridge (on left) and as an older man settled in Illinois (top). The center photo depicts the house that formerly stood at 77 Summer Street, built using the gains from his California excursion. The house is at center, partially obscured by steam. In the lower image, the house is shown in the center of a small selection of the 1884 hand drawn "Bird's Eye Map" of Arlington.

Arlington's Arts & Crafts Architecture: A Walking Tour

Presented as part of Freedom's Way Heritage Area "Hidden Treasures" Program

Richard A. Duffy, historian and author

Sunday, May 21, 2017 at 2:00 p.m.

The "Craftsman Bungalow" most frequently comes to mind at the mention of Arts and Crafts architecture. But "hiding in plain sight" in the suburbs of Boston are fine examples of homes that amply demonstrate much variety within the style. Fortunately, Arlington has a concentration of these early 20th-

century dwellings within an area ideal to explore on foot.

Free, but pre-registration is required. Maximum 22 participants; a second session may be added. Register at www.arlingtonhistorical.org/walking-tour/

Meeting place to be announced to registered participants. Walk will be held rain or shine, unless heavy storm forces re-scheduling. Note: There is gentle-paced, uphill walking on moderate grades for part of the tour, with frequent stops. ❖

Mark your calendars: Battle of Menotomy re-enactment

The Arlington Historical Society is pleased to host the Battle of Menotomy on Sunday, April 23rd, 2017 at 12:00 noon on the Jason Russell House lawn. Following the re-enactment, Arlington will hold its Patriot's Day parade down Massachusetts Avenue starting at 2:00pm.

This year, Jim McLean, Captain of the Menotomy Minutemen and organizer of the re-enactment, says the battle will feature around 30 Colonial and 40 British soldiers engaged in fighting all over the lawn. There is no suspense regarding the battle's outcome, however - Jason Russell will be bayoneted at his doorstep.

Mark your calendars and plan on attending this beloved Arlington institution again this year. ❖



A re-enactor looks out of the Jason Russell House window, keeping an eye out for British "regulars" on the march during last year's re-enactment. Photo by Ron Richmond.

the chimneys. These investigations gave the team a better understanding of how the house was built, what has changed over the years and how time, weather and nature have affected the building.

After the site visits and several weeks of in-office work, a room-by-room analysis was prepared in the form of a multipage table which will give the Society a straight-forward tool for managing the maintenance and planning for repairs of the Russell House. A time frame for prioritized repairs was created as a separate chart listing what should be done and when. Plans, drawn with CAD software, were updated and color coded to indicate required work. Construction documents for the most urgent work at the north wall were prepared to support applications for grants.

Design Associates Inc., is finalizing the work as a report that will be issued to the Society as a print document, but also as an electronic document so that updates can be integrated more easily into the records for the Russell House.

It has been a great privilege to be invited to work with the Society on one of Arlington's most historically significant buildings.

~ Patrick Guthrie, Principal, Design Associates, Inc.



- Less Taxing -

No one likes paying taxes or filling out tax forms. At the Arlington Historical Society we have instituted a process where you can save on your taxes and help support the Arlington Historical Society at the same time. It involves the donation of appreciated stock.

My wife and I took advantage of this program in December of 2016 to make our annual donation to the Society. We own some stock that I got in my first job out of school almost 40 years ago. The stock has done very well over that period and is worth much more than what it cost us to buy. If we were to sell some shares of this stock to get cash to donate to the Society, we would pay capital gains tax on nearly the full current value of the stock. Note that this would also reduce the amount of the charitable deduction we could take on our income taxes.

Instead we called our broker who holds the stock and told him to transfer a certain number of shares to an account the Society has established with Fidelity. All our broker needed was the account number at Fidelity. The shares were taken out of our account at our brokers and they appeared in the Fidelity account in a day or so. The Society in turn sold

those shares on the open market and the proceeds were deposited into the Fidelity account. A check was drawn on the Fidelity account and made payable to the Society. No taxes were due on these transactions because it was a charitable donation to a 501 c(3) organization, the Arlington Historical Society. We also got a letter from the Society thanking us for our donation and we are using that letter as documentation for tax purposes. My wife and I took the full face value of the stock donation as a charitable deduction.

If you have stock that has gained value since you bought it and would like to support the Society by donating it, please contact Sara Lundberg at the Society and she will put you in touch with me and I can talk you through the process. If you have stock that has declined in value since you bought it, it would probably make more sense to sell the stock, take the tax loss and donate the proceeds to the Society.

As always in tax and financial matters, it is incumbent on you to discuss this strategy with your own tax and/or financial advisor to ensure that this option is the best fit for your personal situation.

~ George Parsons, Trustee, Arlington Historical Society

Upcoming Lectures

Our regular Tuesday programs are held at 7:30 p.m. at the Masonic Temple, 19 Academy Street (disabled access is at rear).



Tuesday, April 25

RUSSELL COMMON: FROM GREEN TO GREEN AND IN BETWEEN

Richard A. Duffy and Special Guests

Arlington's first public park was paved 90 years after its establishment to create acres of public automobile parking. But it has greened anew on Wednesday afternoons with the Arlington Farmer's Market. Hear about its past and present, with the special stories of its farm vendors.



Tuesday, May 30

STATES OF THE ART IN BUILDING AND PRESERVATION PRACTICES AT THE JASON RUSSELL HOUSE

Doris Birmingham

This year we mark the 300th anniversary of Jason Russell's birth, take a fresh look at his 1740 farmhouse: the alterations made by his descendants; its plight during the 30-year period after the last Russell moved out, and the Society's conscientious efforts to preserve it after rescuing it from the wrecker's ball in 1923. The science of architectural conservation and restoration was in its infancy, but evidence of the best practices of the era prevailed. Smaller restoration projects have continued to reflect the state of the art.

Thanks to our Generous Supporters!

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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.

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

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