

# Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2018



A circa 1910 panoramic view of Massachusetts Avenue, featuring the old Highland Fire Station building.

## Jason Russell House Restoration

by George Parsons

If you have been by the Jason Russell House recently, you may have noticed some changes in progress. These changes might seem minor, but they are nonetheless vitally important for the long-term well-being of the building. Viewed from Jason Street, you can see a large area of disturbed soil on the lawn between the entrance to the Smith Museum and the entrance to the house. Additionally, there is a new gutter on the side of the house facing Jason Street, replacing the one which fell off the house over two years ago!

These changes – and more – are the result of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds awarded by the Town of Arlington as well as Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) funds awarded by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. We first applied for CPA and MPPF grants in 2016 and received \$30,000 for a “Conditions Assessment and Preservation Plan” study by Patrick Guthrie, a long-time member of the Arlington Historical Commission and an architect at the firm of Design Associates, of Cambridge.

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Workers from Koster and Sons Excavating lay piping in the Jason Russell House yard. This piping will direct water from the new gutters and downspouts to a newly-constructed drywell beneath the lawn.

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# President's Corner

## Preservation progress

I am very pleased to say that our hard work is finally paying off. Over two years ago, the wooden gutters fell off the front of the Jason Russell House. They had been decaying for a long time due to neglect and the dual punishments of time and weather. Moreover, the house's north wall had slowly but inexorably bowed outward over the course of the years. This was caused because a portion of the sill, which attaches the house's frame to its stone foundation, had rotated outward, allowing the house's frame to sink, thereby bowing the wall outward.

Rectifying these problems on a 270-year old building were alarmingly expensive and would have burdened the Society's annual operating budget to the point of painful cutbacks on other activities and if we had to go it alone. I therefore am deeply grateful that members George Parsons and Paul Fennelly led the efforts to secure two rounds of grant funds from the Commonwealth (Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund) and one from the town (Community Preservation Act). Essential to these successes was the grant-writing work of Society Director, Sara Lundberg, with support from Alan Jones, Pete Howard, and Bob Fredieu. A progress report with accompanying photographs is given by George Parsons in this edition of Menotomy Minutes.

As president, I want to thank everybody involved for their hard work and dedication. I am very grateful for the amount of time and expertise devoted to this work by Society members who are, after all, volunteers. I invite all our members to stop by the house and admire the new gutters which represent the culmination of two years of hard work performed by these volunteers. Thank you, everybody!

My best regards,  
Stuart Brorson  
President

## Volunteer Spotlight



**Colleen Cunningham** is one of a select group of Society volunteers who wears many hats. Colleen has been volunteering as a tour guide with her husband, Stuart Brorson, for about 10 years, and in recent years has broadened her involvement. Colleen also works in the Society office, on various collections-related tasks, such as adding new collections to the database and digitizing documents and photographs. She also serves on various committees. Colleen is looking forward to directing the "Winter Wednesdays" program for the fourth year in a row this February. Colleen grew up in Arlington and continues to love learning about the town's history. ❖

## An Evening in Arlington

*by George Parsons*

In September, the Arlington Historical Society held its third annual "Evening in Arlington" wine reception benefit at the Smith Museum. Festive decorations greeted members of the Society and their friends. To wine and dine the almost 100 attendees, a sampling of four delicious red and white wines from California and Oregon and various appetizers were enjoyed. Menotomy Bar and Grill and members of the Society donated the appetizers. The silent auction attracted many bids on handmade items and art donated by Society members, as

well as a docent guided tour of Mount Auburn Cemetery. A professional garden consultation was bid on by a member and she was outbid by her sister! The sister ended up giving the member the item as a surprise birthday present—the best kind of "sibling rivalry"! After expenses, the event raised more than \$2,500 that will be used to support the ongoing activities of the Society. Thanks to all of those who made this benefit possible with their labor and contributions, and to all our attendees. ❖

*Editors note: In the autumn 2017 newsletter, text describing the 2016 event was mistakenly included in the final print. This is the updated text. We apologize for the error.*

## 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 our collections, visit [arlingtonhistorical.org](http://arlingtonhistorical.org).

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

## Recent Gifts of Note

**Richard Duffy** donated a collection of photographs, including a series of 1964 photographs of businesses in Arlington Center that someone had painstakingly assembled to make a panorama. You can find a blog article about these photographs on our website.

**William H. Mahoney**, formerly of Arlington, now lives in Champaign, Illinois. He continues to purchase historical photographs and works on paper about Arlington actively, which he donates to the Society. Among these recent acquisitions is the snow scene featured in the "Pairing Past and Present" article at right. Other items of special interest were a handwritten note by author John Townsend Trowbridge, two

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# Pairing Past and Present

by Richard A. Duffy



The older image was likely made during the winter of 1924, the last before the "triangle lot" bounded by Massachusetts Avenue, Broadway, and Franklin Street, would be cleared of buildings to break ground for the Central Fire Station. Tragically, the second house from the left in the foreground met the wrecker's ball. It was one of the rare "eyewitness houses" of April 19, 1775, belonging to Solomon Bowman. He was awoken after midnight by the sound of British troops marching towards Lexington, whereupon he mustered the local militia of "Minutemen," in which he served as lieutenant. In the background at 295 Broadway stands the Second Empire style mansion-house of market gardener and seedsman, Herbert Rawson. His home was moved to and still stands at 22 Franklin Street.



In the modern image, the celebrated, octagonal-shaped Central Fire Station holds its iconic place as a visual anchor in Arlington Center. Monument Park, which took its name from the Civil War soldiers' and sailors' memorial that is out of view in these images, went on to enshrine other lasting tributes to Arlington veterans of later military conflicts. Through the trees can be seen the former headquarters of the Arlington Gas Light Company at the corner of Alton Street, next to which was the showroom of Charles B. Perham's automobile dealership, later Arlington Ford. For the past four decades, these sites have been occupied as business offices. ❖



*Jason Russell House Restoration (continued from page 1)*

The Society now has a valuable and comprehensive document detailing the restoration and maintenance activities to prioritize preservation activities. When we shared this document with the Massachusetts Historical Commission they urged us to apply for additional MPPF funds to support actual restoration work. In June of 2017, the \$25,000 MPPF grant, an additional \$20,000 in CPA funding, and some of the Society's own funds, allowed us to hire Patrick Guthrie to oversee this project. The use of State funds required the Society to adhere to strict guidelines for advertising and selecting the contractor to do the actual work. White Builders, Inc., of Woburn won the competitive bidding process in October, and permits were in place to get work underway in early December. Two trees at the western edge of the lawn that had become overgrown and presented hazards to the Jason Russell House have been removed, and the stumps

ground down. These trees were dropping leaves and pine needles onto the house's northern gutters, clogging them. A new copper-lined gutter has been installed on the front of the house, with downspouts connected to a new rainwater dispersal system installed in the lawn to divert water away from the building.

Besides work visible from Jason Street, the house's stone foundation in the cellar has been repointed with fresh mortar, and a new load-bearing sister beam supported by six steel lally columns has been installed adjacent to the sill on the north wall facing Massachusetts Avenue. Failures in previous sill repairs had caused the sill to rotate, which, along with insect damage, threatened the structural stability of the house. A new white oak sill will be installed and tied to the existing floor joists that are now supported by the new sister beam.

Restorative painting on the sides of the house facing Massachusetts Avenue and Jason Street will have to wait for warmer weather in the spring.



Anthony Arkanson of White Builders prepares the roof prior to installing the new gutter. The new gutters are all wood, as required by our granting agencies. The wood is fir, and the gutter will be later lined with copper.



Two trees were removed from the yard adjacent to the Jason Russell House. They were removed because both trees were dropping needles into the house's gutter, clogging it. Moreover, one was leaning towards the house, and project supervisors worried that it might fall onto the house in a wind storm.



The Society has already applied for additional CPA grant funding to continue the restoration process as described in the Preservation Plan. The next phase will focus on the foundation and sill and windows on the west wall of the house, ceilings in the store room and caretaker's cottage, sprinkler and fire alarm systems, and covering the attic floor to keep dirt and debris from falling into the second floor of the house. We plan to apply for additional matching MPPF grants to support this work.

All this work is the direct result of the generosity of the Community Preservation Committee of the Town of Arlington, and the Massachusetts Preservation Project Fund. The judicious use of taxpayer funds to restore this unique part of the history of the American Revolution is gratefully acknowledged by the Arlington Historical Society, which has been the faithful steward of this house for public benefit since 1923. ❖



The Society was proud to display the distinctive "Preservation Works!" sign seen at other important project sites across Massachusetts.



The new lally columns in the basement of the Jason Russell House. These poles partially support the floor joists along the north wall of the house. Ordinarily, the joists rest on the sill of the house (atop the stone foundation wall). However, because the sill had rotated due to the house's settling, additional structural support is needed.



A mason from PMF Masonry repoints the foundation stones along the north wall of the Jason Russell house. Some of the old mortar had decayed to dust and sand, requiring remediation.



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commemorative coins, and colorful trade cards.

**Douglas Tatro** of Sterling donated a will, dated 1776, of William Cutter. Mr. Tatro told the Society Director that he found the will in his father's papers, but he has no familial connection to the Cutter family.

**Nina Louise Winn West**, who was born in Massachusetts but grew up in Emporia Kansas, donated a collection of items she received from her great aunt and namesake, Nina Louise Winn. The collection includes personal notes, cards, postcards, photographs, and other ephemera. This is a compelling addition to our already strong collection of Winn family items, and shows how the elder Nina was interested in staying connected to her distant family members, much as she had done earlier in life with her cousins in Illinois.

**Marilyn Woodworth** of Warren donated an 1871 book, *Letters From Two Brothers Serving in the War for the Union To Their Family at Home In West Cambridge*. The book contains reprints of letters sent from Warren and Eugene Freeman during the Civil War.

## Tour Guides Wanted for Jason Russell House

Although the Jason Russell House is "in hibernation," plans are already afoot for the 2018 tour season at the Jason Russell House, which starts in April. We invite you to join us by becoming a tour guide. Volunteering as a Russell House tour guide is a great way to deepen your involvement in the Society and to participate in Arlington's cultural life.

Guide training day is Saturday, March 24, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. It will cover the history of events at the house on the first day of the American Revolution, details about daily life during the

Colonial period, and the specific procedures involved in guiding itself. All guides work in pairs, so new volunteers will have mentor support. Guides can choose the dates for which they volunteer, usually one Saturday or Sunday afternoon a month.

For further information, contact the Society office via e-mail, [contact@arlingtonhistorical.org](mailto:contact@arlingtonhistorical.org), or call 781 648 2628. ❖



## Donate to the Annual Fund

Our yearly Annual Appeal is underway. With your help, we are able to continue our mission to educate the public about the interesting history of Arlington. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Society today. All donors will be recognized in the next issue of "Menotomy Minutes."



- Jason Russell Circle (\$1,000+)
- Goldsmiths (\$500-\$999)
- Silversmiths (\$200-\$499)
- Pewtersmiths (\$100-\$199)
- Friends (\$50-\$99)
- Other

Gifts at the Friend level or higher will be listed by category in our publications. You can donate by mail, securely online at [arlingtonhistorical.org/contribute/](http://arlingtonhistorical.org/contribute/) or by phone at 781-648-4300 (Tuesday to Thursday, 10 to 6).

**Thank you!**

## 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)

**Sunday, January 28 at 2:00 p.m.**

### THE CONJUNCTION OF ART AND LIFE: DECORATIVE ARTS IN THE SOCIETY'S COLLECTION

Doris Birmingham

\* Program held in Smith Museum

Enjoy a fresh look at some familiar pieces and become acquainted with some "hidden treasures" not on regular display.

**Tuesday, February 27**

### MAPPING PAST AND PRESENT

Adam Kurowski

Maps help us to visualize the relationships between places at a specific point in time. Come along on a journey through Arlington's past by way of historical maps and see how technology has changed our ability to map Arlington today.

**Tuesday, March 27**

### ALL THAT JAZZ: THE EXPLOSION OF THE SWING ERA FROM 1935-1945

Dan LeClerc

Folks in Arlington enjoyed swing jazz on the radio, and at nearby dance venues such as the Totem Pole in Newton and several ballrooms in Revere Beach. This multimedia talk features the rise of swing music with historic videos and visuals—from legendary performers of worldwide fame, to Boston's own Bob Batchelder Swing Band, the house band at Norembega Park on the Charles River.

## Winter Wednesdays—February 2018

### Wednesdays 10 am at the Smith Museum of the Arlington Historical Society\*

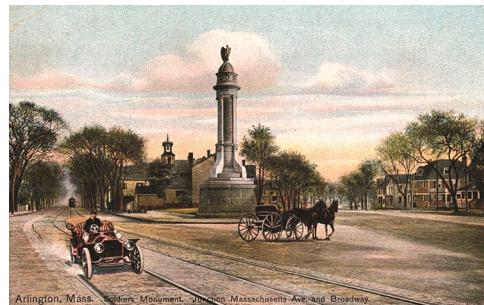
Welcome to our eighth year of Arlington Historical Society members gathering to hear interesting talks and enjoy refreshments on mid-winter mornings!

\* Note: Please check our website the morning of the scheduled talk for postponements or cancellations in event of inclement weather. [www.arlingtonhistorical.org](http://www.arlingtonhistorical.org)

### Richard Duffy – Penny Postcards from Arlington

February 7th

Add lots of nostalgic color to your February morning by enjoying vintage postcard images of Arlington. Lively commentary will enhance our understanding of the wide variety of views to be shown. Learn about the evolution of this communication device in America and how Arlington's examples are emblematic of the "postcard craze" of the early 20th century.



### Sara Lundberg – The Way We Wore: 19th Century Clothing from Our Collection

February 14th

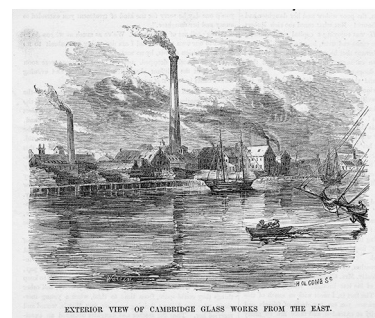
Did you know that the Society has a large and interesting collection of historic clothing? Just like today, fashion is often a reflection of other issues, such as labor, commerce, gender, and social class. Explore how 19th century Arlingtonians expressed themselves through dress, and the messages such clothing conveyed.



### Pat Deal – The Massachusetts Glass Making Legacy

February 21st

When a Federal embargo in the early 19th century spurred domestic glass production, Massachusetts took a lead in this industry. Companies in many communities produced household and decorative glass to supply the country and the world. Their legacy continues through enduring products, museums, and successor companies producing glass to this day.



### A History of the Arlington Police Department

February 28th

The Arlington Police Department is here for us every minute of every day, but how much do you know about its history? From 1853 when the Town hired its first (and only at the time) special police officer to arrest residents for gambling in town, to the tragic death of Officer Garrett Cody who was killed in the line of duty by his own service weapon, learn about the APD's ever-evolving equipment and the history of Arlington's law enforcement.



# 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
- Rosemarie Smurzynski

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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contact@arlingtonhistorical.org

Visit us on the web at  
www.arlingtonhistorical.org

AHS Newsletter team: Sara Lundberg, Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Carolyn Parsons, Doris Birmingham, Richard Duffy, and Stuart Brorson.

Submission Policy: The Society welcomes submissions to Menotomy Minutes. The deadline for submissions is the end of the month prior to publication. We cannot guarantee when or if your article will be published, and all articles are edited for publication. If you wish to submit an article, we urge you to contact the Society offices to discuss your piece prior to submission.

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