

# Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING 2019



## The Battle Road Scenic Byway

by George Parsons

On April 19th, 1775, the now familiar cry of “The Redcoats are coming, the Redcoats are coming!” announced the march of the British regulars on Menotomy (as Arlington was called then), Lexington and Concord. The furious day long battle that ensued marked the beginning of the American Revolution.

Today, 244 years later, technology has moved on and we have a new way to explore the places, people and those events that happened so long ago. A committee, made up of the towns along the route of march of those British soldiers and the Minuteman National Park, was formed several years

ago and has been working to make the public more aware of the significance and the rich history of that corridor. The Committee is called the Battle Road Scenic Byway, and its signature accomplishment is to have created a website accessible on a smartphone that can guide visitors to various sites. A smartphone is a cell phone with internet access and the ability to interact with websites.

The URL for the website is [www.battleroadbyway.org](http://www.battleroadbyway.org) (or [www.battleroadbyway.com](http://www.battleroadbyway.com)) and if you click on it, you will be taken to the site that describes the route as The Road to Revolutions. The plural Revolutions is not a typo

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The Jefferson Cutter House will celebrate 30 years as a prominent feature of Arlington Center later in 2019, having been relocated from 1149 Massachusetts Ave. in October 1989. George H. Cutter, who was born in the house in 1841, wrote to the Boston Globe in 1907 that the house "was built sometime between 1835 and 1838 by my father, Jefferson Cutter [b. 1803]. He was in the woodworking business (turning, sawing, etc.). That he might display samples of his work, [he] had the fanciful front door and adjoining trimmings made."

# President's Corner

## Educational Outreach

As a historical society, one of our biggest missions is education. Consequently, we offer several educational programs to our membership and to the public at large. Our regular season of seven programs have been organized for eleven seasons by Patsy Kraemer, who creates a different thematic framework. "Winter Wednesdays," created by Sally Rogers and managed today by Colleen Cunningham, enhance our February mornings with abundant new learning. Doris Birmingham leads our comprehensive Jason Russell House tour program, which guides visitors from all over the United States through the Jason Russell House, and recounts the stories told by generations of Arlingtonians about the events in the opening hours of the American Revolution. An important component of the Jason Russell House tour program is our third-grade school activity run by Director Sara Lundberg. For several weeks during every spring, hundreds of students visit us. We provide a tour of the Jason Russell House, teach them about the events of April 19, 1775, and engage them with activities that illustrate daily life during the later Colonial era.

By now you likely have heard the sad news that local Realtor and fair-housing advocate Louise Ivers passed away suddenly in February. Louise was a longtime member of the Society and a former member of the Nominating Committee. Passionate about

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*Since education is at the core of what we do, I think this is a great way to honor Louise's life.*

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historic preservation, Louise also served the Town of Arlington for 14 years on the Arlington Historic Districts Commission. The "Louise Ivers Education Fund" was established at the suggestion of her family to receive donations in her memory. We are deeply grateful to her family for thinking of us. We will use this fund to support the public lecture series and the third-grade education program. Since education is at the core of what we do, I think this is a great way to honor Louise's life. If you want to remember Louise, or simply want to support our educational outreach, please consider this fund as a fitting destination for a charitable donation. Your contribution will be put to good use.

My best regards,  
Stuart Brorson, President

## Volunteer Spotlight



**Melinda Howard** has been volunteering at the Society for nearly two years, shortly after graduating from Mount Holyoke. Melinda is particularly good at digitizing records and indexing information into the database. Her careful attention to detail and accurate descriptions were immeasurably helpful when we released our online collection last summer (find it on our website [arlingtonhistorical.org](http://arlingtonhistorical.org)). Her favorite collections items to process are letters, especially when she can transcribe them and see a story that develops, find out about who is writing them, who is being referenced, and so on. But she also doesn't mind digitizing some of our more mundane -- yet still important -- records such as tax abatement records from the mid-19th century. ❖

## Contact Us

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

7 Jason Street  
Arlington, MA 02476-6410

(781) 648-4300  
[contact@arlingtonhistorical.org](mailto:contact@arlingtonhistorical.org)

Visit us on the web at [www.arlingtonhistorical.org](http://www.arlingtonhistorical.org)

The Arlington Historical Society is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization.

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



## 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 17,000 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 our website at [arlingtonhistorical.org](http://arlingtonhistorical.org).

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

## Recent Gifts of Note

**Medford Historical Society** donated a "Birds Eye View" map of Arlington in original packaging, a Town Report of 1897, and an invitation for the 10th anniversary of the granting of the charter for the Arlington Historical Society (1908) with a complimentary ticket.

**Michael Fuenfer** of Marblehead donated a World War II Air Raid warden armband.

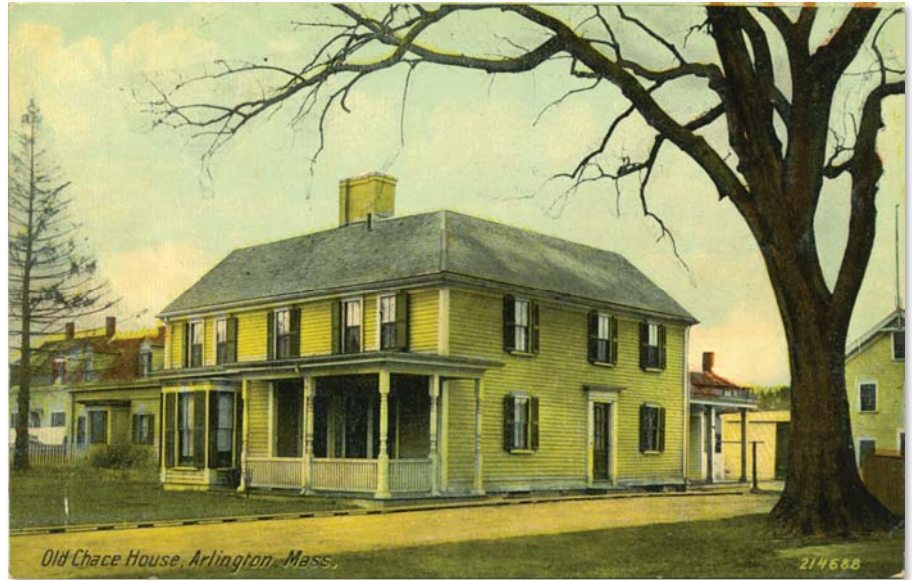
**Oakes Plimpton** donated various photos of Arlington farmers and farms.

**William Mahoney** of Champaign, IL donated a collection of miscellaneous ephemera including objects from the street and horse railroads, an advertisement for Woods Ice Tools, and a group photograph of a Russell School group.

# Pairing Past and Present

*by Richard A. Duffy*

This circa 1907 tinted postcard depicts the place the British Regulars next plundered following the battle at the Jason Russell House, diagonally across the street, on April 19, 1775. It then was the home of Stephen Cutter. The soldiers looted a year's worth of candles and set it ablaze. Fortunately, the fire was doused as the British continued on their violent retreat to Boston.



The house was acquired in the 1840s by architect-builder James Chase, who offered to sell it to the town in 1852 as the site to build the first town hall. Instead, this "eyewitness dwelling" to the first day of the American Revolution would live to be captured in photographs as a landmark building.



But in 1911, Fred Chase had his family homestead razed to build the Colonial Garage (later to become Time Oldsmobile). After a failed attempt in 1998 to construct an Osco Drug on the busy corner site, it was redeveloped in 2005 with the present cluster of residential condominium units. ❖



## From the Collection: Victorian Human Hair Mementos

Floral wreath made by Mary E. Alden in 1856

by Sara Lundberg

As part of our programming series theme this year “Nature – An Arlington Historical Perspective” we displayed some collections objects made from natural materials as part of our January program. A selection of objects on display received the most commentary from visitors – an example of a Victorian “fancywork” craft that was both mundane and unusual – decorative objects made from human hair. Visitors were surprised to find that this was not only a way of making a craft from found materials, but a common way of commemorating loved ones who had deceased.

The floral wreath shown above and at right is an example of the former – an item typically made from the hair of multiple people was a way to use easily found materials and a way to commemorate loved ones. Think of it as a sort of family tree. Note the various colors of hair included in the detail photograph of this wreath, including many gray hairs – this shows that it was made from the hair of multiple people. Patterns and the materials to make such works of art were commonly available in stores or women’s magazines. Hair made an excellent found material for such artistic ventures, it was an age where women took pride in their long tresses, and there were few other ways to pay homage to your loved ones. The magazine



Detail of Mary Alden’s hair wreath

*Godey’s Ladies Book* summarizes this combination of practicality and sentimentality best, “Hair is at once the most delicate and lasting of our materials and survives us, like love. It is so light, so gentle, so escaping from the idea of death, that, with a lock of hair belonging to a child or friend, we may almost look up to heaven and compare notes with angelic nature.” This wreath was made by Mary E. Alden in 1856; it was donated by Mabel Schwamb.

Hair jewelry was also common, more often a way to commemorate the deceased; it was sentimental and fashionable. It was commonly simply a brooch or locket with a braid or bit of hair woven inside a glass casing. They were sometimes surrounded by the silhouette of the loved one, a miniature painting, or a monogram. The two brooches seen here (next page, above right) are made of cut and woven hair, marked with the initials and last names of individuals being memorialized. The two are nearly identical except that one is marked “E.O. Putnam” and the other marked “S.E. Hardy.” They were donated to the Society by Mary C. Hardy. “S.E.” is likely her mother, Sarah Elizabeth Tenney Hardy who died in 1897 in Arlington.

Even more unusual and difficult to produce are items such as this beaded necklace with a cross (next page, bottom left). Upon first look it might appear that the beads are comprised of delicate wire, but they’re actually made of thin



strands of hair woven around a form that could later be boiled away to create a hollow cage of beads. It is complemented with gold beads and some of the beads are shaped into a cross. This unknown memorial from the Robbins Sisters Estate was likely made by a professional hair worker, and then assembled with gold components by a jeweler.

Also from the Robbins Sisters Estate, the two bracelets shown together to the right are made with bands of woven hair, finished off with precious stones and fine engraved metalwork. Our records note that the bracelets were “owned by Josephine and Eveleen Robbins.” Josephine and Eveleen are daughters of Amos Robbins and Adelia Martling. The two sisters died tragically within four months of each other – Josephine at age 32 and Eveleen at age 25. It is more likely that these objects were to commemorate the two sisters, but could have also been owned by them to commemorate another family member.

And the last object is similar to the Robbins bracelets, but also includes an image of the deceased inside a locket (shown in the two photographs at the lower right). The outside of the attached locket reads “Morrison” and the inside contains a tiny oval cut daguerreotype image of a person barely discernable through the tarnished, mirrored surface. The back engraving notes that “Clemmie Died on Oct. 1, 1854.” The photograph is difficult to ascertain, but could also be an example of post-mortem photography, since the family unlikely had a tiny locket-sized image made until the need arose. This practice might seem macabre to our modern sensibilities, but 19th century Americans had a different view of life and death. Funerals were up-close in-home affairs, and often the body was prepared by a family member. People were used to being in close contact with and tending to bodies, alive and dead. And it wasn’t necessarily about death itself, it was a way to commemorate a person with something that was immediately available and would stand the test of time. ❖



Two brooches donated by Miss Mary C. Hardy. Both are engraved on the back, one with “E.O. Putnam,” the other with “S.E. Hardy.”



Bracelets with bands of woven hair, engraved gold, and large yellow gemstone belonged to Eveleen and Josephine Robbins



Bracelet used to commemorate “Clemmie Morrison” who died in 1854.



Hair bead necklace from Robbins Sisters Estate

because in addition to being the site of the first battle of the American Revolution it has also been the site of multiple other revolutions in areas as diverse as literature, environmental awareness, technology and manufacturing.

Visitors to the website can explore interests such as history, the literature associated with sites along the route, natural features in the landscape and technology that has developed in this area over the past centuries. Under history one can search for various landmarks along the route. A search with the single word "Jason" produces an entry for the Jason Russell House. The



entry has a brief description of the Jason Russell House, its significance in the events of April 19th, 1775, a Google map showing the location of the house and a link that can provide directions on how to navigate to the Jason Russell House from anywhere the smartphone can get a GPS signal. The Google map also shows other locations near the Jason Russell House of historic significance such as the less well-known Lieutenant Gould capture site as well as modern amenities such as restaurants and pharmacies.

Keep this resource in mind when out of town visitors come to visit. It will give them a broader introduction to the history and resources available in this historic area. ❖

## Battle of Menotomy Re-enactment April 14



Join us on Patriots Day Weekend! The Jason Russell House will open for the Season on Sunday, April 14 at 10:30 a.m. with free tours. The Battle of Menotomy Re-enactment on the Jason Russell House lawn will be at 12:00 noon.

This year's re-enactment features the Menotomy Minutemen, the Acton Minutemen, Danvers Alarm

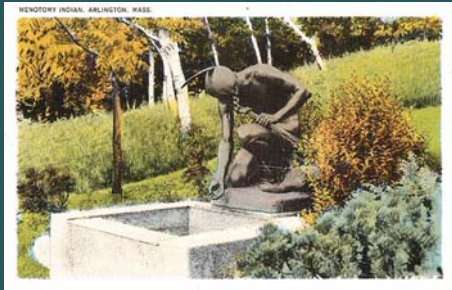
Company, Charlestown Militia of Gardner's Regiment, King's Own 4th Regiment of Foot, 10th Regiment of Foot, and 27th Regiment of Foot. The Parade will proceed down Massachusetts Avenue at 2:00.

The Jason Russell House will remain open until 4:30 p.m. and will also be open on Monday, April 15 from 1 to 4. Admission is free, but donations are appreciated. ❖



## 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 30**

### **POLISHING A MASTERPIECE: REDISCOVERING THE WINFIELD ROBBINS MEMORIAL GARDEN**

Lucinda A. Brockway

*Co-sponsored with Friends of Robbins Town Gardens  
Program held at Arlington Town Hall*

In 1938, the renowned Olmstead Brothers landscape architects were engaged to re-imagine R. Clipston Sturgis's 1913 formal design for the "town hall garden" and create a more naturalistic setting for the famed "Menotomy Hunter" statue. Preserving this landscape takes a special multi-focal lens that looks to the past, present, and future.



**Tuesday, May 28**

### **ARLINGTON ON THE MYSTIC . . . AND TO THE SEA**

Chuck Kraemer and Richard Duffy

The Mystic River and Lakes have a fascinating history of changes from the pre-Colonial era to the present day. The Arlington sections alone have been the scenes for sustenance, industry, recreation, transportation, and conservation. Video and slides showcase the stories.

## Thanks to Our Generous Supporters!

### **Jason Russell Circle**

Stuart Brorson & Colleen Cunningham  
Richard A. Duffy  
Estate of Philip Hagar  
Robert L. Fredieu & Rosemary Schulze  
Jerome Goldstein  
Patsy & Chuck Kraemer  
George & Carolyn Parsons

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Menotomy Minute Men  
The John Mirak Foundation  
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Nancy Tiedeman & Walter Mau  
Jean Yoder  
Meredith & Joseph Zona

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Marianne Balasz  
Peter Bloom  
John & Elizabeth Bilafer  
Geoffrey Birmingham  
Vernon Brown  
Richard de Neufville  
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Maryellen Remmert-Loud  
Jean Rosenberg  
Shirley Rossetti  
Sabin Russell  
William Russell  
Dianne Schaefer  
Arlene Siderski  
Alexander Toth  
Anne Winkler & Mike Kowalkowski

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## An appeal for restoration funds



A year ago the society was given a sideboard owned by Amos Whittemore, the genius who invented a machine to make cards for processing wool and cotton. Patented in 1797, his machine was lauded as “the only machine which ever had a soul.” Amos built a factory to make cards at a site now approximately occupied by the Whittemore-Robbins house. The wealth created by Amos's factory made West Cambridge a prosperous place during the dawn of the 19th century.

Amos bought his sideboard in 1814 from its maker, Abel Whitney, based in Cambridge. Its construction is mahogany veneer, with lots of Federal Style details. The sideboard passed through the Whittemore family for more than two centuries before it came to the Historical Society. This fantastic sideboard is now on display to the public in the parlor of the Jason Russell House.

Sadly, the sideboard is in need of work. One of the legs is loose, some veneer is cracking or broken off, the original pull knobs have been replaced with knobs which are not period-appropriate, and it needs cleaning. A local furniture conservator estimates that a full restoration will cost around \$3400.

A grant from the Arlington Cultural Council will cover approximately one third of the restoration cost, and the Collections Committee will contribute another third. That leaves one third to be covered by donations. If you are interested in period furniture, or enjoy the history of our local industrialists, please consider contributing to restore this magnificent piece of Arlington's industrial history. Contact Society Director Sara Lundberg for details. ❖

PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE

Arlington Historical Society  
7 Jason Street  
Arlington, MA 02476-6410