

MARCH 2024

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



The Billerica Historical Society members have been busy the last few months documenting the contents of the Time Capsule that the Society had sealed on October 27, 1923 and opened last October at our Annual Meeting. There were many photos, letters, Town reports, and newspapers from 1823 through 1923. Some of the artifacts are now displayed in the barn museum.

Our plan is to put current documents, photos, etc., into a newly purchased Time Capsule to be opened in 2124. We will be collecting materials through this year and plan to seal the Time Capsule at this year's Annual Meeting. Diane Douglas has contacted the Pixel photography group about providing us with "snapshots" of Billerica to be included in the Time Capsule. If you have something that could be included, please contact one of the Board members.

John Bartlett gave a presentation on the contents of the Time Capsule at the Billerica Senior Center. BATV recorded the presentation and it can now be viewed on BATV.

We sadly announce that Ann Stadtman is stepping down as treasurer of the BHS. She will soon be moving to Maine. Ann has served many years as treasurer, as recording secretary, and has been a tremendous help in cataloging artifacts, working in the gardens, helping with Christmas decorations, volunteering at our open houses and fundraisers, and in countless other ways. She will be greatly missed.



I have appointed Kerry Sullivan to be our new Treasurer once Ann leaves. Kerry has been volunteering for a few years cataloging artifacts. She comes with a background of working in archives previously.

We will be meeting with Tom Tringale, a former Board member, about supporting his plans for the commem-

oration of the 250th anniversary of Patriots Day in 2025.

We had a very successful Victorian Christmas Open House in December with many visitors from the community and beyond.

We will be resuming our monthly open houses on Sunday, April 14 from 12 to 3pm. The Billerica Minute Men will be present. We will have an Open House each following month on the first Sunday, from 1-3 PM. Come by to see the new barn museum.

With the barn restoration complete, we have applied for another Community Preservation grant. The Billerica Community Preservation Committee recently approved our proposal for restoration work in the front upstairs bedroom/library and the bathroom ceiling, the installation of stairs leading from the side yard to the barn basement, a patio outside the kitchen, and the removal of weeds around the barn. The next step is Town Meeting approval in May. Dick Hawes is overseeing this project

Using a Community Grant, we completed the new paver walkways in the front of the Sexton House. Rich Kunicki has applied for another Community Grant to upgrade sump pumps and dehumidifiers in the Sexton House basement. This will make the basement substantially drier and eliminate possible mold conditions.

Rep. Marc Lombardo has obtained a \$25,000 state grant for the Society. The Town is holding the funds and will reimburse the Society after we have spent \$25,000 on capital items. We greatly appreciate all the support Marc has given us over the years.

The Society has done very well with grants the last few years, but these grants can't be used for Sexton House operating costs. So we continue to ask you to be generous with your contributions. Thanks to all who have given generously.

Regards, John Bartlett
 President of Billerica Historical Society

What Happened on March 8, 1775?

By Cathy Burns

So here we are, on the precipice of spring and the 249th anniversary of the beginning of the American Revolution! Some may say, so what? Well, if you are a resident of Billerica or any surrounding towns, you should be aware that where we live, our ancestors had an important role in the events of April 19, 1775.

Ever heard of Thomas Ditson? Do you know why we have a Thomas Ditson Elementary School? Let me share.

Way back in 1775, tensions were rising in the colonies, and especially the colony of Massachusetts. King George III's soldiers were stationed in Boston and were trying very hard to crack down on those rebel colonists in Massachusetts. For their part, those that felt that the King was taxing the colonies unfairly were starting to talk about what they could do about the situation. Among many other things that they were doing was collecting firearms and munitions to be used if and when they were needed.

Meanwhile, everyday colonists were getting worried. They wanted to be prepared to defend and protect their families. Thomas Ditson was a concerned colonist living in Billerica. He decided to go to Boston to try and purchase a firearm, which was something that was highly discouraged. Good idea or bad, he was caught and was arrested, tarred and feathered on March 8, 1775. He survived and was able to return home to Billerica to recover. The town fathers of Billerica were enraged. But that's another part of the story.



A mere 5 weeks later, the residents of Billerica were notified that the king's army was marching from Boston and headed west to look for the firearms and munitions that were reportedly stowed in the town of

Concord, 6 miles from Billerica. Over one hundred Billerica residents, including Thomas Ditson, gathered and marched the road to Meriam's Corner, a couple miles from the Old North Bridge. As luck would have it, they arrived about the time that the King's soldiers were headed back to Boston, having been fired upon for the first time in history at the bridge.

Reportedly, the skirmish was bloody, and the Billerica contingent suffered two casualties: Timothy Blanchard and John Nickles. Timothy Blanchard was the brother of Thomas Ditson's wife, Sarah Blanchard Ditson. Some residents referred to this march and skirmish as "Ditson's Revenge".

If you are interested in exploring this man's actions further and the events in his words, there's a wonderful book entitled *The Tarring and Feathering of Thomas Ditson, In His Own Words* by Dorothy Columbus, a long time Billerica resident. The book is available at the Historical Society gift shop for \$10.

Special Patriots' Day Open House

Please join the Historical Society on **Sunday, April 14th from 12-3** when the Billerica Minute Men will "encamp" at the Sexton House and talk about the role of Billerica in the events of April 19, 1775.

Fridays at the Sexton House

There are currently six women volunteering on Friday afternoons cataloging artifacts.

Nancy Sheffer and Dorothy Columbus have been working with the textiles and have pretty much emptied an overstuffed closet of clothing, packaging each item carefully into archival boxes, now housed in the barn upstairs.



Nancy standing in front of the archived clothing collection, holding our Harriet Richardson dress.

Nancy has also been doing a lot of transcribing of materials from the time capsule.

Kerry Sullivan is learning about the roll of treasurer and working on thoroughly cataloging and preserving Rev. Cumings' sermons.

Ann Stadtman has been training Kerry in the role of treasurer and working on sorting boxes of miscellaneous items.

Cathy Burns has been transcribing and helping wherever she was needed.

Diane Douglas has been cataloging all the items that were in the time capsule.

Time Capsule Update

We are currently taking our time to collect items to be included in the new time capsule. You are welcome to help us with this endeavor. Do you have items that are significant from the past 100 years that you would like included? Do you have photos of Billerica from sometime during that period? Diane met with the Pixels photography club to propose collecting "snapshots" of what Billerica looks like now. So many of the items in that last time capsules presented "snapshots" in the form of letters, stories, essays, and photos. We would like "snapshots" of today. Do you want to help contribute to this effort? Do you want to photograph and capture "snapshots" of Billerica today? Contact Diane at SecDouglas@aol.com.

There is an essay contest going on in the high school. The students are asked to either write about Billerica 2024 or, write about what Billerica may look like in 2124.

Clean-up Green-up

In April, we will participate in Billerica Green Up/Clean Up Day, April 20, by cleaning our property along the Shawsheen River near the aqueduct. Come join us!

Dining to Donate



APRIL 20, 2024
7:00 AM TO 12:00 PM
AT STELIO'S
293 BOSTON RD, BILLERICA, MA
978-528-5780

Come and join us for breakfast!
Print and present this flyer to your server between
7:00 am and 12:00 pm
April 20, 2024
Stelios will donate 20% of your bill
back to the Billerica Historical
Society

Our next fundraiser will be Dining to Donate at Stelios on Saturday, April 20, from 7-12. Stop by and enjoy a great breakfast, especially after all the hard work "cleaning up" Billerica. Print out this image and show it to your waitress for the BHS to receive 20% of your bill. Thank you for supporting the society.

Vintage Tea Fundraiser

In May, the Billerica Historical Society will be hosting our annual Vintage Tea fundraiser on **May 18 at 3 PM**. Diane Douglas is coordinating this event. It is likely to sell out. Contact her at (978)807-4439 to purchase tickets or email her at SecDouglas@aol.com.



Help Support the Billerica Historical Society

Please consider becoming a Preservation Patron in one of the following ways:

Corner Stone	\$1,000
Landmark	\$500
Founders	\$250
Members	\$100



Last year, your various contributions raised over \$5,000. These donations allowed us to work toward balancing our Sexton House operational budget and was greatly appreciated.

2024 Membership Drive

It is time to renew your membership in the historical society. The dues are:
Senior is \$25
Individual is \$30
Family is \$50



Monetary donations can be sent to:

Billerica Historical
Society
PO Box 381
Billerica, MA 01821

Gift Shop

New items have been purchased for the gift shop including colonial replica toys to interest the younger set. Bring your children and grandchildren in to check it out. Nancy Sheffer is now in charge of the gift shop.

We also have T-shirts for sale. See the back page for more info.



**Clara E. Sexton Memorial
House Museum,
circa 1723
Headquarters of the
Billerica Historical Society**

36 Concord Road
Billerica, MA 01821

(978)667-7020
Billericahistory.org



BHS Officers and Board 2023-2024

Officers:

President	John Bartlett
Vice President	Richard Hawes
Treasurer	Ann Stadtman
Secretary	Diane Douglas

Directors:

Cathy Burns	Alec Ingraham
Mary Jones	Richard Kunicki
Michele DeParasis	



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Upcoming Events

April 14: Special Patriots Day Open House, 12-3

April 20: "Green up/Clean up" and Dining to Donate Fundraiser at Stelios

May 18: Vintage Tea Fundraiser, 3 PM

Billerica Minute Man T-shirts

The historical society is currently selling T-shirts with the BHS logo on the front and the list of the minutemen who marched to Merriam's Corner on April 19, 1775 on the back.

Sizes include:

Men's - Medium, Large, XL - \$20

XXL, and XXXL - \$25

Women's V-neck - Medium, Large - \$25

To order, send request, size, number of shirts, cost of shirts plus \$5 for shipping to:

Billerica Historical Society

PO Box 381

Billerica, MA 01821



Be Watching for:

Historical Lectures at COA

Billerica Historical Society
PO Box 381
Billerica, MA 01821