

## A RARE FIND

Long ago, nearby, a house stood near the Town center. Busy lives came and went.

Now the house belongs to the Billerica Historical Society (Society). Thanks to Clara Sexton, who was part of the Society at the time. Her husband, William, had passed away, Clara passed away on April 10, 1936, at 78 and she decided that she would give away her lovely home. She gave it to us, the Society.

Now, although we have loved it all these years, we have spent time and money, mostly through grants, to fix it up. That does not include all the work that has been done.

Digging into the past, Richard Kunicki and Richard Hawes found beds, purchased the rope, and the Society went to work. Rope beds were used as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, until the coil mattress was introduced in 1865.

We have no way of knowing who put the rope bed and the trundle bed in the barn attic, where they collected dust for many years. Until the Society was given the house, there would be no records kept. Lucky that they also put the bed ranch with it. Those are valuable now, as I see them advertised on websites.



What do you do today to simulate the scene as it would hve been? First you put a rope on the bed and trundle the bed. Then, you need a mattress. Straw seems to be the most available product today. We used Pillow Ticking for the mattress which keeps the straw dry to prevent mold.

The original version was likely solid-colored and made of rough cotton, flax or cotton-linen twill. To quote Ticking 101 – “*Ticking was developed as a sturdy, practical, canvas-like casing for mattresses and pillows.*” The term first appeared in the dictionary

in 1649.

The straw bale was purchased at O’Connor Hardware in Billerica, and it was huge. We discovered it was somewhat chopped up, when the men undertook the task. It came upstairs with the most straw it could hold, and it was like a ball inside the mattress cover. Long arms reached inside and pulled it more level, adding more straw. The flap nicely covered the straw, and it was tied. Good idea to put the ties at the foot of the bed to be able to reach inside to level the straw.

It feels comfortable, speaking for myself, having slept on such a mattress, but nobody dared try it. We are looking for bed sheet donations. One for the bottom, so the mattress does not rest on the ropes and the other for the top.

Next, we are going to research what blanket(s) we could use for the period of the bed.

The work took several months, but it shows the love the members have, to restore the past and preserve it. The work is never done. ~ Jeannette Pothier