



MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SUMMER, 2012

Presidents' Overview: Spring and Early Summer at the Historical Society



In the old days, the Society suspended operation during the summer months, reflecting the fact that many of its members "summered" elsewhere. They escaped the heat of our area for the naturally "air conditioned" resorts or seasonal homes in New Hampshire, Maine, and Cape Cod.

Nowadays, few people have the luxury of taking off for a month or two, and consequently the Society carries on during the summer. Since the last newsletter, here is what's occurred over the past few months:

- On Patriot's Day, we participated in the dedication of a memorial to Paul Revere's ride.
- Working with the Friends of the Medford Public Library, we had a joint fund-raiser "A Taste of History" featuring Early American recipes and reminiscent of church suppers, a traditional New England custom.
- We had our annual meeting, electing our officers and board members for the coming year and honoring Larry Brown as volunteer of the year for his work running our first two annual gala events.
- Mr. Thoreau himself (as portrayed by Richard Smith) came to Medford

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Society Officers

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Corresponding Secretary **Donna Laquidara Carr**

Treasurer **Ruth Roper**

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Paul Revere, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Tom Convery

What is the connection between these three men--an eighteenth-century silversmith, a nineteenth-century poet and a contemporary local historian? As Longfellow might say, "Listen, and you shall hear..."

We all know, or think we know, about Paul Revere's famed ride. But much of what we think we know about the ride as a historical moment came from the Longfellow poem: "Listen my children, and you shall hear of the midnight ride of Paul Revere."

As it turns out, many of Longfellow's details are fictionalized, a bit like the Hollywood version of an historic event. The lanterns, "one if by land, two if by sea", were not a signal to Paul Revere, but rather a signal ordered by Revere to alert patriots in Charlestown. Revere was stopped and arrested after passing through Lexington, and the ride to Concord had to be completed by two other patriots. Longfellow was not the only one to embellish the story. Paul Revere would never have said "the British are coming" because at the time, we all thought of ourselves as "British." More appropriately, he would have said: "The Regulars are out", referring to the Regular army having left their barracks and being on the move.

If you would like a firsthand account of Paul Revere's ride, you can read a letter from Paul Revere in his own hand online at the Massachusetts Historical Society. You can easily find Longfellow's poem online too.

Regardless of the historical accuracy in his poetic rendering of Revere's patriotism, Longfellow deserves our respect as a patriot. He wrote the poem after a visit to



(above) James Cottom, a reenactor portraying Captain Issac Hayes at the window of his High Street home during this year's Patriot's Day festivities. (below) This year a new hitching post was dedicated at the site.

Old North Church and published it in January 1861 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Lincoln had just been elected, and everyone knew the Civil War was imminent. Longfellow, a committed Abolitionist, was no doubt interested in inspiring patriotism among the readers of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Would we complain about the details of Gary Cooper's



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Paul Revere *continued*

heroic portrayal of Sergeant York, World War I hero, filmed in 1941 on the eve of our entry into World War II? Both portrayals were meant to illustrate how the actions of individuals can have an important impact on history even though the details are slightly rewritten. Surely Longfellow had the same right to embellish the facts as we allow Hollywood today!

For many years, Paul Revere's ride has been reenacted on Patriot's Day, including his stop in Medford at the home of Isaac Hall, Captain of the Medford Minutemen. Paul Revere rides up High Street, stops in front of the Isaac Hall House (now the Gaffey Funeral Home) and rouses Captain Hall, who appears at the window in a nightshirt.

This year was special. Tom Convery, local historian and one of the few people in Medford to have served in the military during three wars, spearheaded an effort to memorialize this special locale. The former memorial, a hitching post on the sidewalk, was inadvertently destroyed by a snowplow in 2010 after a particularly severe snowstorm. Tom located a replacement hitching post that had been removed from Beacon Hill and worked with the city to have it placed further away from the street along with an informational plaque. Robert Grinley was instrumental in acquiring the post and Joseph deCroteau, proprietor of the

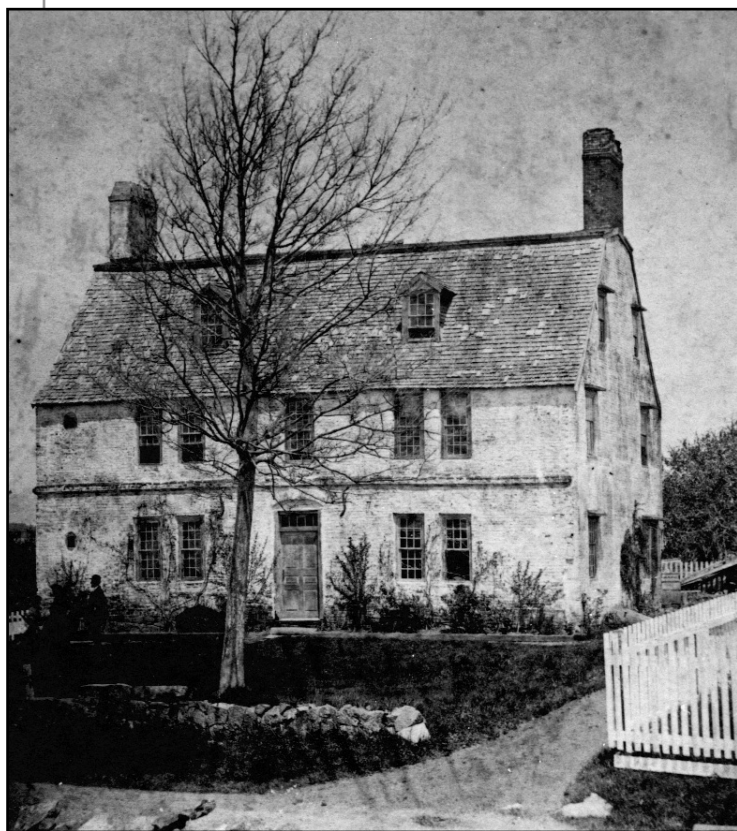
Gaffey Funeral Home, was essential in getting the post located in a safer spot. This year's Patriot's Day ceremony included a formal dedication. Please stop by and check out the wording on the plaque. It corrects some of the myths about the ride. Although we respect Longfellow, it's our job as stewards of Medford history to stick to the facts!

This effort was one of Tom Convery's many contributions to promoting history in Medford. His books and newspaper columns and participation in civic organizations over the years have been invaluable. As a result, the MHS Board voted to present a lifetime achievement award to Tom. We announced the award at our Annual Meeting in May and presented it to him on June 1st at the Medford Public Library. This was the first time this award has been presented for many years, the last recipient being Dr. Joseph Valeriani, long-time MHS President and co-chairman, along with Tom Convery, of Medford's 1976 Bicentennial Celebration.

The presentation of the award was recorded and can be viewed on www.madeinmedford.com as part of a new online service offered by Comcast. We hope to see more historically oriented material on the website in the months ahead.

Thank you Jack Dempsey for recording the event, and, once again thank you Tom Convery for a lifetime of work.

President's Overview *continued*



Peter Tufts House on Riverside Avenue before it was renovated ca. 1895.

and read a portion of his famous lecture on "Economy" again. The first reading was 150 years ago.

- For the second year running, we judged Civil War essays and presented prizes to St. Joseph School students as part of a contest sponsored by the family of John Lonergan, our greatly respected late President.
- In a ceremony at the Library, we presented a lifetime achievement award to Tom Convery (see the article in this newsletter about Revere, Longfellow, and Convery).
- Kyna Hamill conducted the first of three scheduled tours of the Peter Tufts House, plus a special tour for visiting descendants of Peter Tufts.
- We reached a major milestone in our project to catalog and digitize the collection of Civil War photographs. Thanks to the efforts of Allison Andrews and many volunteers, the entire collection has now been carefully examined, described in detail, and entered into a computer database using the professional museum software "Past Perfect."
- Peter Escott continued our program of outreach to third grade classes (see the article in this newsletter for comments from the students).

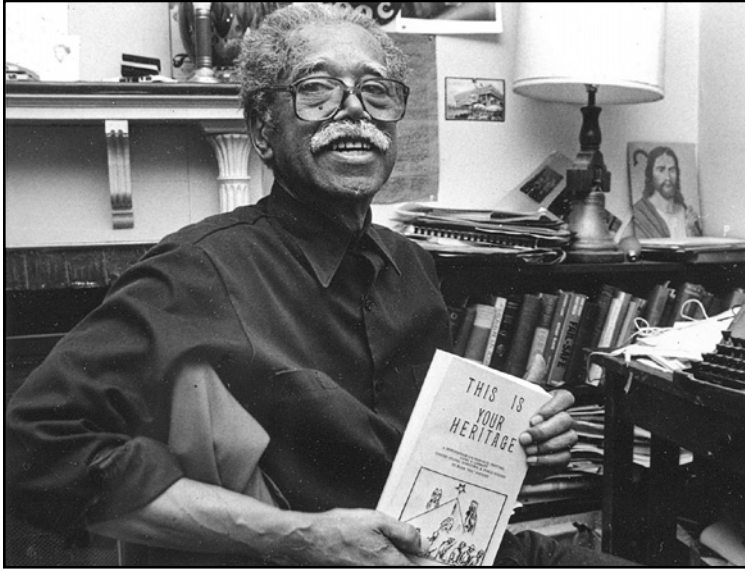
We have plenty of plans for the upcoming year, including another series of events as described in the newsletter. We are also in the midst of planning a major upgrade of our website. It will still include the current information on Medford history, but will focus more on what the Society is doing now and how members can participate.

We wish you a great late summer and early fall!

—John Anderson and Kyna Hamill

Mabray "Doc" Kountze at the Baseball Hall of Fame

by Jay Hurd



Mabray "Doc" Kountze holds a copy of his book, "This is Your Heritage".

On June 1, 2012, as part of the 24th Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Jay Hurd (MHS Board member) presented Mabray "Doc" Kountze: *The First Black Journalist to be Issued a Press Pass by the Boston Red Sox*.

Mabray "Doc" Kountze, born in 1910 to parents who had been born into slavery, was one of ten children. He was born and raised in one of the oldest African-American communities in the United States - West Medford, Massachusetts - where his parents, Hillard and Madeline, had relocated at the turn of the century. And it was here that his parents imbued Doc with "dedication to education, family, and public duty".

While a student at Medford High School, Doc began what would be a lifelong passion for and identification with journalism and newspapers. He began to draw cartoons and submitted them to the Associated Negro Press (ANP). His work was compared, favorably, to that of a fellow Medford resident, Eugene McGillicuddy (aka, Gene Mack). Gene Mack is known for his *Hall of Fame Cartoons of Major League Ball Parks*. Soon, Doc's artistic skill positioned him as the "de facto public relations agent for teams like the West Medford Independents." He would create posters for sports teams and events in the Medford/Boston area. Doc graduated high school in 1932, only 2 years before he would be issued his Red Sox press pass.

Doc received his press pass from the Boston Red Sox in 1934 and, as early as 1935, he dared to challenge the color line within major league baseball and the Boston Red Sox. He helped to arrange, in 1945, a Red Sox tryout for Jackie Robinson, Sam Jethro, and Marvin Williams. This "tryout" is now a piece of baseball history as the Red Sox did not sign any of

these players citing lack of talent. Jackie Robinson is known for breaking the color line of major league baseball as he signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. Sam Jethro was the first African American to be signed by the Boston Braves in 1950, 9 years before the Red Sox signed a black player (Pumpsie Green). The Red Sox were the last team in the major leagues to sign a black player.

Doc wrote for the black press in Boston (the *Chronicle* and the *Guardian*) and was also a regular contributor to the nationally known *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Chicago Defender*. Among his many journalistic accomplishments, Doc created the National Negro Newspaper All-American Association of Sports Editors (NNNAASE). He was a strong advocate for education, civic responsibility, and community. He shared these sensibilities in his newspaper

submissions and in his books, including: *This Is Your Heritage: A Newspaperman's Research, Sketches, Views & Comment United States, Hometown, & World History*, published in 1969; *50 Sports Years Along Memory Lane: Afro-American Sports History - Hometown, Local, National 1900-1950s* published in 1979. These books are invaluable to the study of African-American history, particularly as a study of sports is concerned.

Although he said of himself that he was "frail and sickly", and "Everyone was always telling me that I couldn't do this or that." he "just worked extra hard to prove I could." His attraction to sports and his eagerness to participate permitted his swimming, playing baseball, and playing hockey. With baseball, he quickly learned that a catcher was always in demand; and thus it was that he became the designated catcher for his neighborhood. His ability and his sensitivity allowed him to relate to the great catchers in baseball, especially those in the Negro Leagues and black baseball. Notably, he had great interest in Josh Gibson and Burlin White (whom he would meet and interview). He said: "I associated with Negro team players and coaches alike at the ground level and not high up in the press boxes."

Doc has been recognized on large stages, including a 1993 appearance at Fenway Park, when the Red Sox recognized the player of the Negro Leagues. Doc caught a ceremonial first pitch thrown by former Negro Leaguer Fran Mathews. Doc also received, the Griot Award from Boston College (Griot Award - for perpetuating oral tradition and history). And, in Medford, art and film festivals have been named in his honor.

It is important that Doc's legacy be firmly affixed in local and national history, calling attention to his name and achievements which remain overlooked.



"My Interests Were Dedicated to the Jingle Bells"

A Recap of Medford History Through Artifacts Presented to Medford Third-graders, with Thoughts and Thank-yous from Roberts School Students

~submitted by: Allison Andrews, Civil War cataloger and assistant to Peter Escott for the artifacts presentations

In telling a city's history, an artifact can say a lot, and we have lots of them in the Medford Historical Society collections. This spring we shared them again with Medford third graders in conjunction with their local history curriculum.

We visited with about 300 students in all, either at MHS or on-site at their schools. Our presenter, Peter Escott, is a retired teacher, active MHS member, and history enthusiast. He knows Medford having grown up here, and he has a special interest in the Civil War along with a broad knowledge of that era. From his teaching days, Peter remembers field trips to Old Sturbridge Village, how eager his students were to

participate in activities of daily life in early America, and how the visit changed the way students related to history. He saw a similar opportunity while working with the collections at MHS, and three years ago the presentations began to take shape.

For each classroom visit, Peter introduced the objects, explained their connection to Medford's history, and then let the kids examine them first-hand. The items were chosen to illustrate not only significant events and people, but also the ways of ordinary life. The students had lots of questions and even stories of things dug up in their own back yards. They quickly began to compare daily life then and now, observing

how things in their city have—and haven't—changed.

Among the items presented were Native American stone tools and 19th century shipbuilding tools, jingle bells, copies of slave letters, the oversized (by today's standards) key to the old City Hall, a brick from 1756, a sampler stitched by a child in the early 1800s, the window-shutter knobs from the house of Lydia Maria Child, an 1898 atlas of the streets of Medford, and a hand-held school bell once used at Medford High School (just one ring per student, please!).

Peter brought along early photographs from his personal collection and explained the various processes that led

(left) Peter Escott visiting the Roberts School. Native American tools are in foreground. (below) Peter shared his own collection of "Children of the Civil War" photographs. Note the patriotic costumes and drums.





Peter brought along some examples from the Society's collection of 19th century shipbuilding tools.

Thank you for teaching us a lot of things about how Medford was a long time ago. I think all the artifacts were interesting and cool, too.

My favorite thing was the bell. My second was the knives [Civil War-era knives in a sealed display box].

My interests were dedicated to the jingle bells.

...a house is still standing, somewhere, and nails were square shape.

up to the pictures we take today. These were a big hit. The kids were amazed to see photographs on glass (Daguerreotypes) and metal (tintypes), and 3-D images viewed through a stereoscope (an exciting invention from 150 years ago). He showed them pictures of children of the Civil War era which are rarely seen among Civil War photographs. Many of the young subjects posed dressed in miniature military costumes, holding a rifle or marching drum and displaying their patriotism.

All of the third grades (four public and two parochial schools) were invited to participate, and thirteen classrooms were able to schedule presentations which was all but one from the public schools. We hope to see all of them in the upcoming school year.

Education outreach is one of MHS's important goals. In development now are a video version of the artifacts presentation and a series of downloadable walking tours that highlight historical homes and important landmarks in each of the school neighborhoods. We thank the Pyramid Group of Cambridge for their continued support for our education projects.

We know that this year's program was well received by the comments and kind thanks we received from students at the Roberts School. Here are some of them:

I learned how Native Americans smashed the corn in that big dent in the rock ...it was my favorite because it was hard to make. ...it was like a mortar. It also looked like a bowl. I appreciated it.

My favorite artifact was the mallet because it had a splat of paint I think from the old days.

I didn't know what a mallet was until you guys taught me. Thank you for letting me touch the artifacts and old tools.

I liked the big map of Medford. It was cool to try and find my house.

I learned that pictures were not always made of paper and that they had scissors back then.

I liked the old telephone because... I have never seen one before. It shows how hard it was to call someone when all you have to do now is push buttons.

You did a good job explaining what the artifacts were. I like how you explained the details and how they would build things.

I learned a lot of things, and some I knew. I learned so much today. I will try to go again. I live on the Mystic River and I found some artifacts so maybe I can bring some in to your museum. I have lots of questions to ask you but when I go to your museum again I'll ask.

I hope you are having fun with all the other kids. Medford Historical Society rocks!

Thank you a billion. Thank you for coming. It was very nice of you. P.S. Come again

And finally, a few facts they mentioned which were just a bit "lost in translation":

The Native Americans built over 500 ships.

The 3-D machine [stereo photograph viewer] had the best effects, especially in the 1600s.

... the quill pen [used in 1892 to sign the Medford city charter]... I didn't know that George Washington used it.

And neither did we!

Thoreau Comes to Medford and the Middlesex Fells!

by Corrine Smith (Freedom's Way) and Kyna Hamill (MHS)

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was a complex individual, known as an author, a philosopher, a naturalist, an abolitionist, and a Transcendentalist. While he wrote his "Civil Disobedience" essay after spending a night in jail for failing to pay the state poll tax, he is most well-known for his social experiment of simplified living in the woods on the outskirts of Concord for "two years, two months and two days" between 1845 and 1847 as chronicled in his book, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*.

Though he claimed that he had "travelled a good deal in Concord," his hometown, Thoreau often journeyed into surrounding towns and throughout the landscape of central New England. On January 22, 1851, Thoreau delivered a lecture in Medford, featuring insights into his Walden experience, a lecture that would become the section on "Economy" in *Walden*, published three years later.

We have no proof that Thoreau visited what is now known as the Middlesex Fells that day or at any other time in his life, but we believe that he would approve of its existence and its preservation. On this hike, we invite you to ask him yourself! Through the services of historical interpreter Richard Smith, Mr. Henry David Thoreau will stroll through Middlesex Fells on September 8, 2012, from 1:00-3:00 p.m. This family-



Richard Smith as Thoreau addresses the audience at the Library on June 21.

friendly hike invites you to meet Mr. Thoreau and ask questions about what it was like to live in the woods in the nineteenth century.

The hike begins at 1:00 p.m. at Bellevue Pond on South Border Road. Since parking spaces are limited, please consider parking at Lawrence Memorial Hospital on Governors Avenue. If you park in the spaces farthest away from the entrance, you can walk along Massachusetts Avenue, off Governors Avenue, just 10 minutes from Bellevue Pond.

This program, *Walking with Mr. Thoreau*, is part of a new trail-based outreach of the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area, called "In Thoreau's Footsteps." Walking with Mr. Thoreau is funded by the Medford Arts Council, in partnership with the Medford Historical Society.



In Thoreau's Words:

"In Wildness is the preservation of the world." ~ WALKING

"Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps." ~ WALKING

"We need the tonic of wildness – to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground." ~ WALDEN, SPRING

"I think that each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, either in one body or several – where a stick should never be cut for fuel – nor for the navy, nor to make wagons, but stand and decay for higher uses – a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation." ~ HUCKLEBERRIES

"What are the natural features which make a township handsome? A river, with its waterfalls and meadows, a lake, a hill, a cliff or individual rocks, a forest, and ancient trees standing singly. Such things are beautiful; they have a high use which dollars and cents never represent. If the inhabitants of a town were wise, they would seek to preserve these things, though at a considerable expense; for such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education." ~ JOURNAL, JANUARY 3, 1861

MHS Programs for Fall 2012

Circle the Square:

Thursdays, August 16, September 20 & October 18.

MHS is proud to be partnering with Circle the Square, a new initiative to light up Medford Square with performances, crafts for kids, dining opportunities and participatory activities. MHS will be open from 4-8 p.m. and offering activities on Thursdays, August 16, September 20 & October 18.
<http://www.circlethe-square.org/>

Walking with Mr. Thoreau

Saturday, September 8, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Enjoy a hike in the Middlesex Fells with Richard Smith who will take the role of Henry David Thoreau and give us his view of the woods. This family-friendly program will begin at Bellevue Pond at 1 PM and last about 2 hours. Free to all. Due to limited parking, we recommend parking at Lawrence Memorial Hospital and walking to Bellevue Pond along Massachusetts Avenue, just off Governors Avenue.

The 4th Annual Medford Historic Bike Tour

Saturday, September 22, 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

This year we will be exploring some of Medford's longest living residents - the trees! We will seek out some of the most historic trees of Medford and learn about the historic movements in the city to save and preserve the trees.

Location: Begins 10:00 a.m. at Whole Foods in Medford; snacks and lunch provided. Free to members, \$5 for non-members.

Lecture: Eric Jay Dolin

Tuesday, October 23, 7:00 p.m.

Award-winning author Eric Jay Dolin will speak on his new book *When America First Met China: An Exotic History of Tea, Drugs, and Money During the Age of Sail*.

Co-sponsored by the Medford Historical Society and the Friends of the Medford Public Library.
Location: Medford Public Library, 111 High Street.
Free to all.

Save the Date for the Third Annual Medford Historical Society Fundraiser

Saturday, October 27, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

"Blast from the Past: Medford in the 50s, 60s and 70s"

Medford City Hall, more info TBA.

Lecture: The U.S.S. Quincy in the Pacific in 1942

Thursday, November 8, 7:00 p.m.

Bob Begin will narrate the history of the U.S.S. Quincy and its WWII crew from Medford, Everett, Chelsea and Cambridge who travelled from the Atlantic to the South Pacific and sank in a fierce night engagement with the Japanese in August, 1942.

Co-sponsored by the Medford Historical Society and the Friends of the Medford Public Library.
Location: Medford Public Library, 111 High Street.
Free to all.



(left to right) Paulette Paulette van der Kloot, May Markebruck and Dee Morris wait for the results of the raffle as they enjoy a "Taste of History" at the Medford Historical Society on May 4th. The fundraising event was co-sponsored by MHS and the "Medford Reads" Program at the Library.

Medford 1855 Project Completed

Thanks to funding from Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, the Society now has over 500 new cataloging records in the PastPerfect catalog. PastPerfect is a museum software program that allows small museums to create an online catalog. Volunteers have been adding to the catalog for several years, and this project represents a big increase in the number of cataloged items. The MFH grant also allowed us to purchase archival supplies so that all of the items included in the project are now labeled and properly packaged.

Beginning in January, catalogers Ryan Hayward and Luke Pomorski began work on Medford 1855 a project targeted at materials in the MHS collections that date from Medford's history up to 1855. During the grant period, the two catalogers created almost 600 records for everything from shipbuilding tools to town warrants to fire department records to 18th century foot warmers.

This inventory project is the first step in the development of an exhibit called Medford 1855, which will be based on the diorama, featured in the main exhibit hall. The diorama shows Medford as it was in 1855, and was created based on photographs, maps, and 19th century written descriptions. Using the information gathered in this cataloging project we'll be putting together an exhibit of items, photos and documents that tie in to the structures and people who made Medford's history in the mid-19th century. We hope to have the exhibit ready to go sometime in late 2013.

Thank you to Ryan, Luke, and all the other volunteers who helped organize this very successful project. This program was funded in part by Mass Humanities, which receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The crowd watches as Paul Revere makes his customary stop at the High Street home of Isaac Hall, Captain of the Medford Minutemen, (now Gaffey Funeral Home) Patriot's Day, 1976



Photo courtesy of Tom Convery

Look inside to find out more about Paul Revere.

Your Medford Historical Society Newsletter

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