

MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

EWSLETTER

FALL, 2016

President's Overview:Our Second Hundred Years!

by John Anderson



This fall, thanks to all our volunteers, members, and contributors, MHSM will kick off yet another season of special programs as we celebrate

the 100th year of our headquarters at 10 Governors Avenue. We will begin in late September with a revival of the play Letters to Medford, presented by Two Roads Performance Productions. In October, MHSM will participate in many community events and proudly supports Cache in their efforts to promote culture and the creative economy in Medford. In November, Professor Margaret Ellen Newell will lecture on the enslavement of Native Americans. This aspect of our New England history has been largely ignored or forgotten. Details about these activities are further described in this newsletter as well as online.

At the May Annual Meeting, we said thank you to retiring Board members Joan Quigley and Stan Eckstein. We welcomed Jay Stott and Dan Menezes as new Board members. Jay Stott, who has already devoted many hours to our Civil Wars collections now expands his role from volunteer to Board member. Dan, interested in membership expansion, has already begun his work and

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Society Officers

President: John Anderson Vice President: David Fedo Treasurer: Ruth Roper

Assistant Treasurer

for Recruiting: Daniel Menezes Corresponding Secretary: Susan Fedo Director of Collections: Barbara Kerr

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Suzanne Ezekiel Mike Oliver Hallie Lee Jay Stott



Reprise on the Historic House at 21 Touro Avenue, South Medford

by Stephen H. Galebach, Medford Lawyer

This open letter from Stephen H. Galebach with an introduction by David Fedo has been condensed to fit into the newsletter. The full article is on the MHSM website.

This past January and February the Medford Transcript heated up with news about the potential sale of one of the city's most historic houses. An aroused South Medford citizenry debated the wisdom of selling this famous house at 21 Touro Avenue and approving the construction of two other dwellings on the property, located close to the long-ago site of the Middlesex Canal. Many argued before city officials that it would be yet another loss for Medford's history.

This house—originally named after Gardner P. Gates, the earliest known owner of the pre-1845 Greek Revival gem—was also referred to in the neighborhood as the 21 Touro Avenue House, which was named after Abraham Touro. Mr. Touro, who died in 1822, was described by current Medford lawyer and historian Stephen H. Galebach as a prominent Medford citizen, merchant, shipbuilder and philanthropist—

indeed, a 19th-century man for all seasons. It was likely that Mr. Touro and/or a member or members of his family owned property in the neighborhood prior to the building of the house, which Mr. Galebach speculates occurred sometime before 1845.

As it turned out, the Gates/21 Touro Avenue House, thanks to Tufts University (the seller), along with the urgings from neighbors, was not sold in February to a developer. Instead, the sale occurred this past April to a husband and wife team, Carolyn Crabtree and Julius Rose. The couple, who currently reside in a western suburb, are "excited to be moving to our beautiful home in Medford," which they say will happen this fall. Ms. Crabtree says she "comes from a very old New England family." Their new house now consists of 2,340 square feet, and includes four bedrooms, two bathrooms, and

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21 Touro Avenue continued

an expansive lawn. The online sales document boasts that the house "reclaims much of the grace and grandeur of the past," including "fireplaces in nearly every room," "hardwood floors," and a "lovely foyer entrance."

Of course, the value of the 21 Touro Avenue House to Medford goes beyond the physical. As Mr. Galebach points out, the virtues of the Touro family itself—of Abraham Touro and his siblings, Judah and Rebecca—were special qualities of people whose lives appear to be examples of living fully and whose names will be kept alive by the continuing presence of this unique Medford dwelling.

Here follows Mr. Galebach's insightful research article on the 21 Touro Avenue House and its owners and inhabitants. The letter, dated February 22, 2016, was addressed to the City Council earlier on February 16th, the Mayor, the Medford Historic District Commission, the Medford Historical Society and Museum, the Administration of Tufts University, and "my fellw citizens of Medford." (copies of detailed deeds were contained in Mr. Galebach's report, but are not included here).—David Fedo

Historical Research Concerning 21 Touro Avenue

The History of Touro Family Land Ownership Near Touro Avenue

In 1807 Abraham Touro, a wealthy Boston shipping merchant, purchased a Medford country house with about one acre of land, for the then considerable sum of \$1,590, from the widow of a prominent fellow Bostonian, Isaiah Doane. Touro apparently enjoyed his Medford acquisition, for he purchased at least four adjoining parcels of land during the next 15 years. These were on the south side of the Mystic River, and the five deeds together indicate that Touro's house was located between the Mystic River and the Middlesex Canal. A deed for an adjoining property references the "street leading from the great road to said Touro's dwelling house," which probably corresponds to South Street.

A detailed map of the Middlesex Canal shows it ran through what is today the Touro Avenue neighborhood, running parallel with today's Summer Street and slightly north of it. A more precise location of Touro's house can be determined from other deeds, which conveyed rights to a bridge described as "the bridge southerly from Abraham Touro Esquire's house." The Middlesex Canal map shows a bridge over the Canal in this part of Medford, at the south end of what is now Touro Avenue. Still another deed adds to the picture by describing "a lane running from said Touro's house to said Canal." The 1898 *Atlas of the City of Medford* shows a house at the southeast corner of South St. and Touro Ave. that

corresponds with a lithograph picture of Abraham Touro's house.

In October 1822, Abraham Touro died of gangrene after suffering a broken leg in an accident at the annual Boston military parade. His land in Medford and other places came into the ownership of his siblings Judah and Rebecca. While Judah and Rebecca sold off more than two hundred acres elsewhere in 1826, they added to the Touro family land south of the Mystic River in Medford from 1826 to 1830, including a purchase of 11 acres on Walnut Tree Hill, the present site of Tufts University.

In sum, there is solid evidence that Abraham Touro owned the land that is today 21 Touro Avenue. It is unfortunate that Abraham's home was demolished as reported in the "Medford Historical Society Papers", vol. 23 (1920). After Abraham's death, Judah or Rebecca probably owned his Medford lands, but their title to 21 Touro is not yet proven.

The Historical Significance of the Touro Family

Judah Touro is by far the most famous of the Touro siblings. Entire books about him can be found in the Library of Congress. When he died in 1854, Judah Touro's testamentary bequests were so generous to Jewish and non-Jewish beneficiaries alike that his will was published across America and around the world as an example and inspiration. A book about Jewish American patriots tells how Judah Touro's earlier donation saved the Bunker Hill monument project when its fundraising efforts had stalled. This book places him in the same league with Moses Montefiore, Baron de Hirsch and the Rothschilds, i.e., the most famous Jewish philanthropists of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is hard to find any American philanthropist more widely praised and admired than Touro, until perhaps Andrew Carnegie.

Abraham Touro, unlike Judah, has no book or Wikipedia entry devoted to him. But his life was actually no less exemplary. In fact, he set the example for Judah. Newspaper articles after his death in 1822 praised Abraham Touro for his scrupulous honesty in business, his amiable and hospitable character, and his generosity. Newspapers from Boston to Providence to New York City to Washington DC publicized the generous bequests of his will to Massachusetts General Hospital, synagogues in Newport RI and New York City, and homes for orphans and indigent children in Boston.

Abraham Touro was sufficiently prominent and wealthy to have his portrait painted by Gilbert Stuart, the famous portraitist of George Washington. MGH was so grateful for his \$10,000 bequest, an enormous sum in those days, that the hospital displayed Abraham's portrait in the main lobby. While Judah Touro left Boston to run a new branch of the family business in New Orleans, it was Abraham who was the mainspring of the business, with a fleet of ships based in

Boston. Abraham Touro may have used his Medford location, along the Mystic River, for ship building and repair. In any event, his Medford country home was in the heart of Medford's ship building district, near Stetson, Curtis and Magoun.

Abraham, Judah, and Rebecca's father, Isaac Touro, had been rabbi of the Newport synagogue when the Revolutionary War started. As a supporter of the existing government authorities, namely the British crown, Isaac left the colonies. He took his family to Jamaica, where he soon died. His widow Rebecca took the three young children to Boston, where she too soon died. Her brother, Moses Michael Hays, a Boston merchant, raised Abraham, Judah and Rebecca with his own family, inculcating in them Jewish precepts of honesty, hard work, and generosity that marked their later lives. Hays himself was a noteworthy individual. He co-founded the first bank established in the new Commonwealth, namely the Bank of Massachusetts. He was elected head of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. Serving as an officer under Grand Master Moses Michael Hays was Paul Revere.

When Was the House at 21 Touro Built?

There is solid evidence placing the date of construction earlier than 1845. In that year Capt. John King died, apparently at sea, and the probate of his estate reflects his ownership of this house, valued at \$3,500 (see John D. Clemson and Claire W. Dempsey, "Draft Form B Report for the Medford Historical Commission and Medford Historic District Commission", July 2015).

The same report concludes that the house did not exist when Capt. King bought the property in the late 1830s because the purchase price was only \$100. This conclusion, however, assumes that the \$100 figure reflected the market value of the property. There is good reason to question that assumption. King's purchase of the land, approximately 1-1/2 acres, was part of a complex transaction reflected in at least three deeds in 1838 and 1839, involving businessmen in Boston and Brookline who previously held a mortgage on the property. In such a complex transaction, it is entirely possible that \$100 was an arbitrarily designated nominal figure for this part of the overall deal.

It is equally possible that Abraham Touro bought this land in spring 1822 with the intent of improving the "messuage" described in the deed, namely a building plot or preexisting house. It is also possible that the Greek Revival house at 21 Touro was built after Abraham's death in 1822 for his sister Rebecca, who bought more land in the area in subsequent years, or for a trusted employee or associate of Abraham Touro who carried on his shipbuilding and ship repair operations in Medford after his death.

In sum, based on the currently available evidence, the only answer that can be given to the question of when the house at 21 Touro was built, is before 1845.



An 18th century portrait of Abraham Touro

Proposed Language for a Memorial Plaque at 21 Touro Avenue

This is the oldest house still standing on land once owned by Abraham Touro, a Boston merchant who established his country home at the north end of Touro Avenue in 1807. Touro was among the first to develop ship building and repair facilities in Medford along the Mystic River, which supported his extensive international shipping operations. He invested in the Middlesex Canal which traversed this neighborhood. After Touro's untimely death in 1822 from an accident at the annual Boston military parade on the Common, his last will and testament was published across America as an example of generous philanthropy. He gave large amounts to the newly founded Massachusetts General Hospital, to homes for orphan boys and girls in Boston, and to the restoration and revival of the Jewish Synagogue in Newport, RI where his father had been the Rabbi before the American Revolution.

Touro's surviving sister, Rebecca Touro, made this neighborhood her home in the 1820s, until she married New York City merchant Joshua Lopez. Abraham's surviving brother Judah Touro also owned land in this neighborhood while running a branch of the family business in New Orleans. By following Abraham's example of generous giving, Judah Touro became one of the most famous American philanthropists of the 19th century.

This house, built before 1845, exemplifies Greek Revival architecture, with columns similar to those seen at the home of shipbuilder Jotham Stetson at the corner of South Street and Maple Avenue and at the circa 1834 house at 48 South Street.

Calendar of Events

September/October:

Live Theater Performance, back by popular demand! Letters to Medford, A Play about the Future, According to the Past September 29 – October 8, 2016

Presented by Two Roads Performance Projects; Written by Kyna Hamill; Directed by Wanda Strukus. September 29 – October 1 & October 6 – 8 at 8:00 PM, October 1 & 8 at 4:00 PM at Medford Historical Society & Museum, 10 Governors Avenue. Tickets: www.tworoads.org \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors and students.

Inspired by a letter to the future written by Medford historian Reverend Charles Brooks in 1855, the play weaves together excerpts from historical and contemporary letters, and brings the past, present and future together in a tale that is both a charming ghost story and a spirited debate over history and the future. When the spirits of Reverend Charles Brooks, Lydia Maria Child, and Lucy Osgood, all figures with ties to Medford, return to see how the future has turned out. The play is adapted from the original letters from Medford's famous figures by Kyna Hamill and directed by Wanda Strukus.

Special Events

Thursday, September 29, 8:00 PM Opening Night Friday, September 30, 8:00 PM, MHSM reception follows the performance to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the groundbreaking at 10 Governors Avenue

Saturday, October 1, 4:00 PM, Talk-back with the cast after the 4:00 PM show with the writer, director and cast The performances are partially supported by grants from the Medford Arts Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

October 26, 2016

Author Lecture on Indian Slavery

Jointly sponsored by MHSM and the Royall House & Slave Quarters, Lecture by Ohio State Professor Margaret Ellen Newell, author of Brethren by Nature, Colonists and the Origin of American Slavery, Cornell University Press, 7:30 PM, at the Royall House & Slave Quarters

We have yet to learn enough as a society about the history of Indians in America, and, equally important, what their history says to us about our own history—including here in New England and in Massachusetts. Did you know that the English Colonists enslaved thousands of Indians, or that in 1641 Massachusetts was the first English colony to legalize slavery? Professor Newell's work opens windows into the world of enslaved Indians through their letters, diaries, newspapers and court documents.

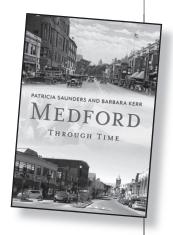
Brethren by Nature describes the Indian slave trade among New England, Caribbean and Atlantic economies, the link between Indian and African slave trade, and the lives and influence of Indian slaves in New England. Professor Newell has spoken recently in New Bedford, Massachusetts and at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

November/December

Medford Through Time Book Release

Sunday, November 6, 2016 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM 10 Governors Avenue

Authors Patty Saunders and Barbara Kerr will be at MHSM to introduce, sell and sign their new book *Medford Through Time* published by Fonthill Media. The book pairs vintage images of Medford places, people, and events with modern photos. Many of the vintage photos are



from the 20th century, so if you grew up in Medford you will see many favorite places! The book is on sale for \$23.00, and the authors will sign copies.

Medford Author and Holiday Gift Event Sunday, December 4, 2016, 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM 10 Governors Avenue

Holiday gifts made easy for the Medford history lover on your list! On December 4, a number of Medford history authors have been invited to be on hand to sell and sign their books. Featured will be the new book *Medford Through Time* by Patty Saunders and Barbara Kerr. Our holiday sale will also include other Medford history gifts, Medford map reproductions, framed clipper ship cards, jingle bells, and more!

January 2017

Exhibit: Stitching and Learning: Samplers from the MHSM Collection

January 8 - February 26, 2017

Opening Reception: January 8, 2:30 PM – 4:00 PM Exhibit hours: Sundays, 12 PM – 4:00 PM or by special appointment, 10 Governors Avenue

MHSM has many treasures and among them are embroidery samplers. Young women and children from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries learned to sew and embroider a variety of stitches and become dexterous with the needle as they created a needlework or darning "sampler." Good needlework was considered essential and an absolute necessity if you were wealthy or poor. Women made or supervised the making of all clothing and household goods and the decoration of these articles. It was a mark of honor to be admired for these skills. Join us for the exhibit opening reception on January 8, 2:30 PM – 4:00 PM at MHSM.

WATCH FOR MORE EVENTS

Additional programs are in the works at MHSM. Watch for Member email blasts and the MHSM website for special announcements and/or last minute updates: www.medfordhistorical.org. Follow us on Facebook and in the Clubs section of the *Medford Transcript*.

Twitter Feed from the Early 1900s

by John Anderson

Many of us share the belief that history is more than just nostalgia. The past, present, and future form a complicated relationship. There will always be disputes about historical facts but the narratives we construct and modify over time are perhaps even more important. Was the Civil War about slavery or state's rights? Did it reflect rival moral views or competing economic interests? Our interpretations influence our actions today and thus impact the future.

As part of exploring relationships between the past and future, we're delighted to welcome the return this September of the Two Roads Performance Project, Kyna Hamill's original drama *Letters to Medford*, 2016, subtitled *A Play About the Future According to the Past*. The play asks intriguing questions about how we look both forwards and backwards at our own history. In 2014, the play sold out for every performance. I suggest getting your tickets early!

Rick Leary, a long time member of MHSM, recently donated a number of Medford postcards. Most of them date from 1904-1915. The pictures on the cards show how much the city has changed in the last hundred years, not always for the best.

In the early 20th century, although telephones existed, most people did not have them at home. For a penny, you could mail a postcard anywhere in the US. Most of Rick Leary's donated postcards are unused, but the ones with messages provide a glimpse into the personal lives of long forgotten ordinary people. During a lecture at the Library in August on Sarah Bradlee Fulton, Dee Morris raised the question: How different are we from our predecessors who lived here 100 or 200 years ago? Reading texts about past wars, social movements, and political campaigns can give us ideas of the big issues of the day. However, I suspect that, just like today, most people focused on everyday things such their jobs, families, and the weather.

Postcards do not have space for long messages. In fact, most of the messages on our cards are less than 140 characters – just like a Twitter message (a tweet) today. Most of our used cards have two postmarks. The first indicates the date and time the stamp was cancelled and the second postmark is from the city or town where the card was received. None of the cards mailed within New England took more than a day to reach their destination. This isn't as fast as the internet, but it was probably at least as reliable.

Today's electronic messages use a modern shorthand, such as LOL (Laugh Out Loud) or BFF (Best Friend Forever). To save space, our postcard writers also employed a bit of shorthand. On one postcard the writer uses "soy," apparently to mean "so very." "Dear Mary, I received the handkerchiefs all right and I thank you soy much. They are soy pretty..." The writers also sometimes abbreviated or jumped right to the verb to save space, as in "Wanted to see you again."



Here are some sample "tweets" from our early 20th century postcards. I can't help but try and interpret them in terms of my life today.

- 1. Postcard of the old High School, 1909, addressed to a Miss Grace Sherman of Beverly: "Am expecting you out next Sunday morn. Was sorry you couldn't have come last week. Please send me a note Sat. I'll meet you at Spring St." Apparently no signature was needed. The writer got it all done with 113 characters. Was this a budding romance?
- 2. Postcard of Medford Square, 9/1/1934, addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Fred Hoxie, South Brewer, Maine. Hope, the sender, used 138 characters in this note to friends or relatives back home: "Wanted to see you again before I left but Sadie and Max came early so I couldn't. I miss the country and all of my neighbors. I'm working hard trying to get settled. Hope" With a date of September 1, could Hope have been enrolling at Tufts?
- 3. Postcard of the Medford Inn, 1910 to Charlemont, MA, a small town about 25 miles from Williamstown, MA: "Dear Sister: Ed will begin his crew job next Monday July 18 running from Williamstown to Springfield so you will see him oftener than I shall. My cold is better all are well. C." I suspect Ed worked for the railroad, I get the feeling his wife was perhaps none too pleased, but probably grateful he had a job.
- 4. Postcard of the old Medford Public Library dated 8/12/1909: "Dear Marina, My little kitty that you gave me died in a fit Sunday. She had four awful fits. She was perfectly well fifteen minutes before she died. Paul and I were all broken up all day. We loved her like a baby. She was the dearest kitten I have ever had. Do you suppose there is any chance of getting another anything like her?...Love to all" As two Siamese cats are sitting on my desk watching me, this one brought a tear to my eye.

When I read these messages, I felt a real connection to the past. It made me realize that in spite of the different clothes, music, technology, and customs, these people led lives and dealt with problems not so different from our own.



Staging Local, Staying Small

by Kyna Hamill and Brianna Randolph

For Medford-based Two Roads Performance Projects, staying local has always been important. Our mission is to support the creation of local art through site-specific performance and environmentally and historically-based dance and theater. Recently, the intersection of local history and theatre has created a unique set of challenges for us to serve our community while asking far-reaching questions.

In 2014, Two Roads devised an original play entitled *Letters to Medford: A Play About the Future According to the Past.* This professional production was developed collaboratively by co-founders Wanda Strukus and Kyna Hamill using historical materials from the Medford Historical Society and Museum. It garnered sold-out shows over six nights with a total audience around 200 people. For Medford standards this was a success and its popularity has invited a remount in the fall of 2016.

Letters to Medford was inspired by a letter written by the Medford historian, Charles Brooks, in History of The Town of Medford from 1630 to the Present Day (1855). This is no book club recommendation, but rather one of those lengthy tomes written by nineteenth-century gentlemen scholars that sit on the shelves of many New England historical societies, as it does at MHSM. At the back of the book, Brooks includes a letter offering hope for the people of Medford in the year 2055: "Looking through the glimmerings of the future, we now rejoice with you in advance over a progress in natural science, intellectual philosophy and moral truth." As a Medford resident, one cannot help but be swept up in its sen-

timentality. Brooks is all hope and positivism, values we lost even before cynical fake news ever came on the airwaves.

Still, it is difficult to resist the sentimentality of local history. It seems the smaller the community, the more space there is to expand and embellish local narratives. In Medford, stories of the Underground Railroad, Paul Revere's midnight ride, the origins of Jingle Bells and Lydia Maria Child's "Thanksgiving Day" poem endure as some of the most common narratives that distinguish the town's identity from say...Malden (this is the kind of local inside joke we love). Mixing one part fiction, one part myth, and one part truth, these narratives flourish in the festivals, parades, and plaques that have become the cultural landmarks of a city five miles north of Boston.

However, theatrical productions based on local history require objectivity on the historical figures, documentary materials, and local narratives that surface while doing research. The ability to engage a large audience without losing the singleness that locality provides can be challenging. In her essay on dramatizing local history, Carol Kammen states that the "local past is a fragile thing. With relative ease, selected tidbits enter into the public memory and right or wrong, they tend to stay there. It is far easier to add a new fact to what the public knows than erase an error from the local record."

Letters to Medford resists an interpretive model whereby actors embody historical characters to reinforce common historical narratives. Rather, we started with the letter to engage the voices of historic

local figures in order to ask big questions about the relationship between the past and the future. Using manuscript letters and historical materials, we also had the benefit of a great cast of actors including Matthew Arnold, Melissa Bergstrom and Nicole Howard who brought depth to their characters and will return to them in 2016. We also used letters to the future written in 2013, when students at an arts festival in Medford described their ideas of Medford in 2155. Surprisingly, the tone was anxious, pessimistic and gloomy: "Is Global warming still an issue? Is there equality for women yet?... Are you still racist? Homophobic? Has that been fixed?"

Nothing gets fixed in *Letters to Medford*, but we learned that the process of staging local history became greater than the story itself. Stay local, stay small; we are fine with that and we hope to see you there.

Letters to Medford: A Play About the Future According to the Past runs September 29 through October 8, 2016. Go to www.tworoads.org for more information.

 $^{^{\}rm 1}$ Carol Kammen. "On Doing Local History: Truth and Fiction," History News, 51:2 (Spring 1996), pp 3-4.



Matthew Arnold as Charles Brooks explaining Medford history.

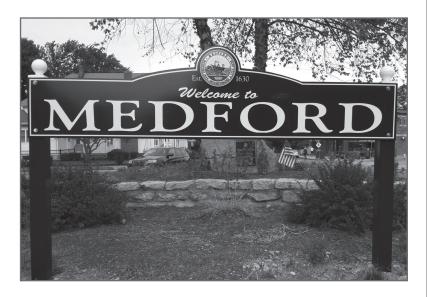
President's Message continued

NEW PATRON & CORPORATE MEMBERS
These organizations and individuals
join our longtime Corporate Members,
Pompeo Insurance and Tufts University:
Array Company, Artery Lock Service, Bates
Insurance Agency, CJ Doherty, Sheila Grant,
Attorney, Adam Knight, Medford City
Auto Body, Medford Historic Commission,
Medford Wellington Service, Mike and
Sheila McGlynn, Modern Hardware, Murphy
Brothers, Papa's Bar and Grille, Salvatore's
Restaurant, Michael Vining

NEW INDIVIDUAL & FAMILY MEMBERS Emily Annarelli, Francesco Castellano, Daniel & Renee D'Agata, Kelly Farina, Kathleen Kane & Neil Helme, Robert Maloney, Joseph McGonagle, Erin McNamara, Susan & Kevin O'Connor, Mike Paster, Lawrence Siegal, Maria Tomaszczuk, Mark & Lisa Tonello, Brian & Susan Tynemouth

Thanks to everyone for stepping forward to support Medford's Museum. After 100 years, the building needs a little work, but we are looking forward to the future!

John Anderson, President

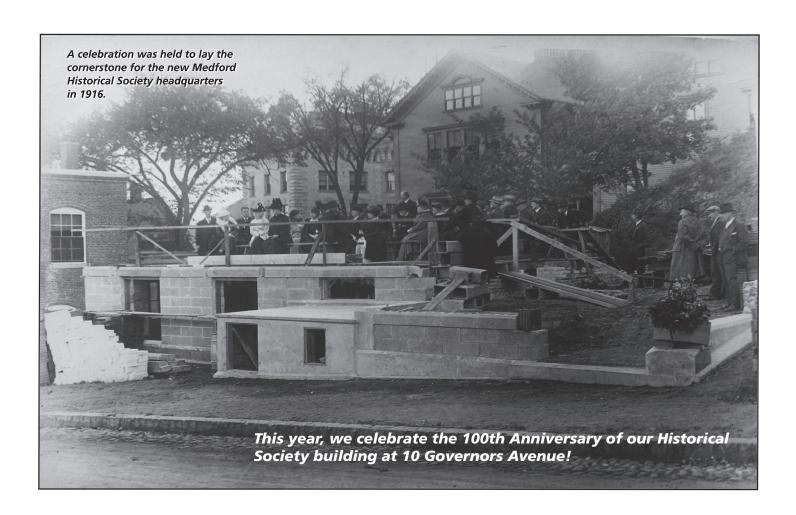


SPECIAL OFFER for NEW Medford Residents

Do you have friends or neighbors who have recently moved to Medford who would enjoy participating in the Society and Museum?

At the August Board Meeting, we voted to offer a free one-year membership to new residents.

There's a form in the newsletter. Just put your name on it, tell your friends and neighbors what the Society & Museum means to you, and ask them to mail in the form. Additional forms are available at our website.



Your Medford Historical Society Newsletter

Ветиви Ѕевиісе Ведиезтер

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