

**President's Column****Chapter 2: The American Revolution in Medford**

by John Anderson



In the Spring of 2025, my column focused on events in Medford leading to the Battle of Lexington and Concord, taken from Helen Tilden Wild's 1903 book "Medford in the Revolution." Until her death in 1948, Helen was a pillar of the Society.

Picking up where I left off: In 1775, the Royall family, just before the Battle of Lexington and Concord, anticipating the worst, left Medford. New Hampshire's General Stark took their mansion for his headquarters. Less than two months later, many Medford men fought in the much bloodier Battle of Bunker Hill.

Wild describes Medford's participation:

On June 2nd, Colonel Reed (NH 3rd Regiment) was ordered to collect his regiment, part of which was in Medford, and proceed to Charlestown Neck. [The Neck, a mile long and very narrow, was the only land access to Charlestown.] On the morning of the 17th, Stark's regiment was ordered to cross Charlestown Neck... Under a galling fire from the British ships he marched

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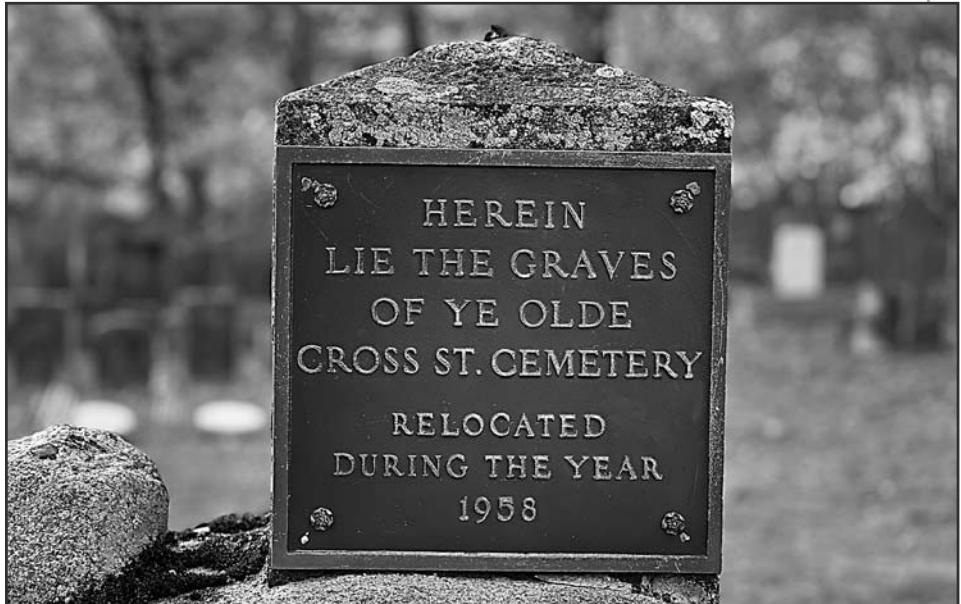
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Cross Street Cemetery

by Lucy Foulston



The first time I visited Oak Grove Cemetery in West Medford on a pleasant spring afternoon, surrounded by birdsong and immersed in the history of the former residents of Medford, my curiosity was instantly piqued by the above sign.

The walled and gated area contained at least 300 headstones, lined up in neat, but tightly packed, rows. Upon closer inspection I found that many of the stones were significantly deteriorated, but those that were legible clearly dated from the nineteenth century. I found myself wondering where Cross Street was and why the cemetery was relocated in the 1950s.

Modern day Cross Street runs from Salem Street down to Pleasant Street, just north of Riverside Avenue and is bordered by northbound exit ramp 23 of Interstate 93. The street layout of the area around Medford Square has changed dramatically since the nineteenth century, in large

part due to the installation of the highway. In the early 1800s, this area was dedicated to the shipbuilding yards when Medford was a major center for the manufacture of clipperships. The streets around this area housed many of the families involved in the trade, as well as a school and a church. Cross Street Cemetery was the final resting place for many of the key characters of mid-nineteenth century industrial Medford.

Due to the overcrowding of the existing Salem Street Burying Ground, the town selectmen established the need for a new cemetery in 1812. A location was selected on Cross Street and was dedicated in May 1816. The cemetery was in use until the mid-1920s, during which time over 400 graves were installed, memorializing at least 550 individuals. The popularity of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge led to a new "fashion" for garden

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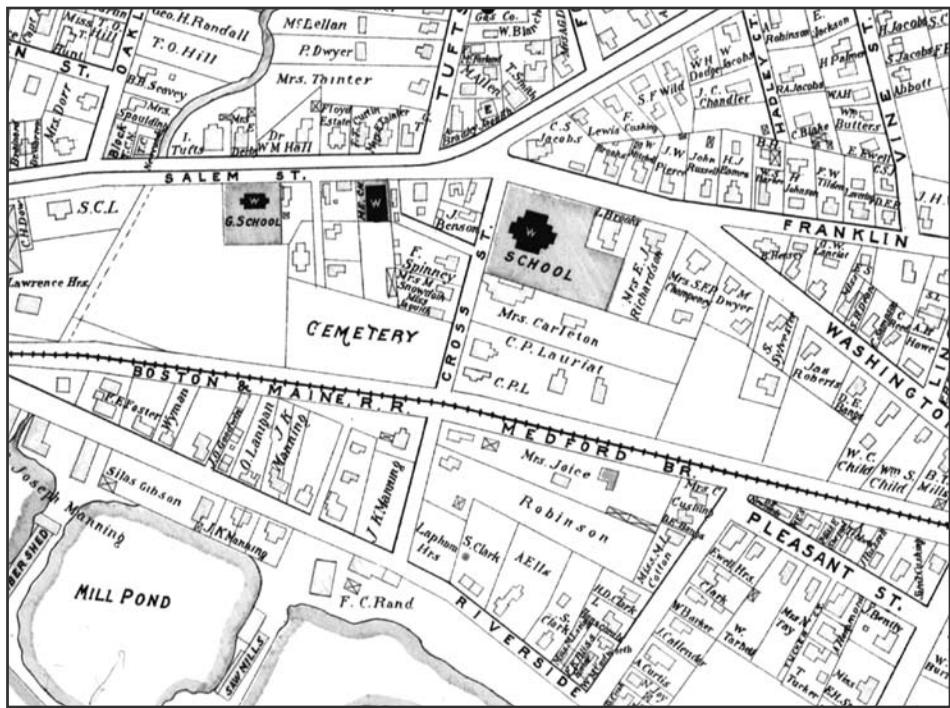
President's Message *continued*

his men across in military order... Major McClary of Epsom, NH, was sent back to Medford for bandages. He crossed the dangerous Charlestown Neck in safety on the outward trip, but, returning, he was killed. His horse found his way back to the Royall House stables... Medford was in sight of the battle and the glare of burning Charlestown. Uncertainty as to the fate of their own men made the watchers intensely anxious but when the wounded.. were brought into town, the women had plenty to do. The field hospital was established on the main road, just south of the [Cradock] bridge and the women helped the surgeons.

Also described by Wild, civilians and soldiers shared many of the same hardships during the war:

When Gen. Washington took command of the army it was concluded to station one thousand militia in and about Medford... These men were kept busy by constant alarms. Firing was kept up by British ships until September 10. As the cold weather came on, the need of wood in both armies made the guardianship of the "Charlestown Wood Lots" (Middlesex Fells) very important. The British ... were likely at any time to cross the Mystic to get wood themselves or to intercept any intended for the Continental Army. Powder was so valuable that all shooting for sport was forbidden, and game used for food had to be snared. From the time Whigs [Patriot sympathizers] were ordered out of Boston...Medford was one the havens for the homeless people of Charlestown and Boston... [British] Gen. Gage purposely sent out people infected with smallpox. Precautions were taken...but the next year a terrible epidemic occurred. Dr. Osgood wrote in his diary, July 9, 1776, "a melancholy day on account of small pox." Owing to insufficient food, the summer of 1775 was very sickly, and especially fatal to the little ones. Out of 56 deaths recorded, 23 were children.

The British evacuation of Boston on March 17, 1776, did not end Medford's participation in the war. British ships lingered nearby and Medford men constructed shore fortifications for protection. Helen Wild records the participation of 251 Medford men in campaigns including Quebec, New York, and Ticonderoga. She also lists 165 "Patriotic Citizens" most of whom had lent money to the government for military purposes or to pay enlistment bounties. She also listed Sarah Bradlee Fulton, a heroine who carried dispatches across enemy lines. The first official Medford census in 1790 recorded 1029 inhabitants. The population was considerably less in 1775, so this is an impressive level of participation by Medford citizens. ■



Detail from the Middlesex County Atlas, 1889, George H. Walker & Co, showing the location of Cross Street Cemetery and surrounding residential streets.

Cross Street Cemetery *continued*

cemeteries in the mid-nineteenth century, and accordingly, Oak Grove Cemetery opened on Playstead Road in West Medford in 1853. However, the residents around Cross Street continued to be buried at their old local cemetery until at least 1925 when it fell into disuse.

When the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) planned the installation of I-93 in the mid-1950s, it was clear that Cross Street Cemetery would be in the path of the new highway. In October 1957, the Medford Board of Health commissioned a survey of all the grave markers, and the Department of Public Works issued a permit for John H. Ward and Sons, to relocate all the graves to a dedicated space within Oak Grove Cemetery. While the extant records are unclear on this matter, it was always assumed that the associated remains were also relocated with the respective headstones. However, a recent press release from the Mayor's office sheds doubt on this point. In January 2025, NBC Boston news reported: "An examination of a former cemetery site next to City Hall in Medford, Massachusetts, uncovered 'cultural artifacts' apparently left behind seven decades ago...Skeletal remains were found... noting that it's believed 10 gravesites were uncovered."

With the discovery that at least some of the remains at Cross Street were not properly relocated to Oak Grove Cemetery, the City of Medford plans to undertake a wider excavation of this area to appropriately inter any human remains.

Cross Street Cemetery was in use for over 100 years during a period of incredible growth for the City of Medford. The population in 1800 was just over 1,000, but by the close of the century, it numbered more than 18,000. What can the stories of the people buried in Cross Street Cemetery tell us about this period of time in Medford's history?

Shipbuilding

Medford was the perfect location for the shipbuilding trade, as Thatcher Magoun, already an established shipbuilder, would recognize in 1802 when he established the first shipyard on the banks of the Mystic River. In addition to the tidal nature of the river, which allowed the newly built vessels to be floated down to Boston Harbor, there were abundant sources of wood, both locally and brought down from the Merrimack Valley via the Middlesex Canal.

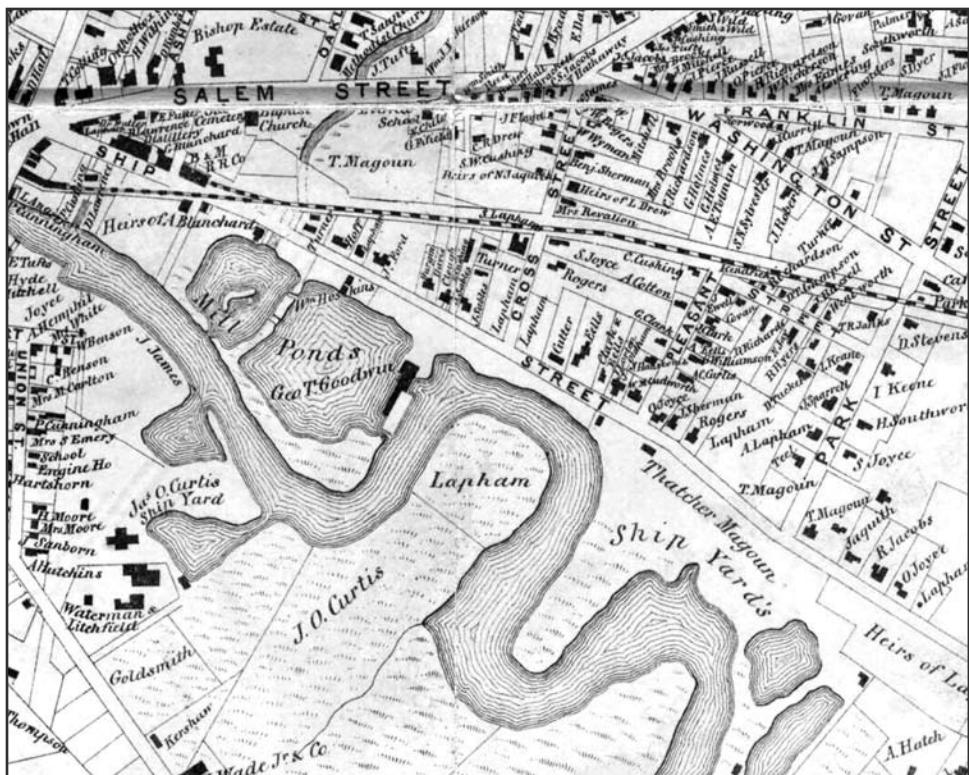
"Twice a day the tide surged in from the ocean, mingling its odor of brine with the pungent smell of molasses from the distilleries, and overflowed onto the whispering marshes, making at full tide enough depth of water to float an empty ship of twenty-five hundred tons."

Magoun would go on to build more than 80 ships in Medford and was soon joined by other men intent on establishing their own businesses. Before long, the waterfront along Riverside Avenue was teeming with shipyards, and the neighboring streets were home to numerous craftsmen. By the 1850s, there were about 350 men working in the Medford yards, "one fourth of all the shipbuilders employed in Massachusetts." Medford developed a solid reputation for good qual-

ity ships, particularly clipperships, the fastest cargo-carrying vessels of the day that would transport goods from as far away as Asia to supply the American and European markets with tea, opium, spices and other goods. In total, more than 500 ships were built in Medford between 1802 and 1873.

The burials at Cross Street Cemetery during the first half of the nineteenth century reflect this ship-building heritage of Medford. Calvin Turner was born in 1776 and would go on to establish, in 1805, Medford's second shipyard on Riverside Avenue at the end of Cross Street where at least 25 vessels were constructed. Turner, who died at the age of 73, in 1849, from a "putrid sore", was buried at Cross Street Cemetery alongside his wife Rhoda (1779-1851) and daughter Mary (1819-1853). Shipbuilding business partners Issac Sprague (1782-1851) and Galen James (1790-1879), and their families, were also buried there. James learned his trade from Thatcher Magoun and started his own shipyard with Sprague in 1817, the third shipyard in Medford, at the end of Foster Court. Their first vessel was built in 1816, named the "Bocca Tigris", and their last in 1842, the "Altorf". Galen James was also known as "Deacon James" for his work in the Parish Church, and was renowned for his frugal ways, even walking to Boston to save the fifty-cent stage fare. James' strong religious conviction and adherence to the temperance movement led to Sprague and James being the first shipyard to abolish the "eleven o'clock drink" or rum ration for the workers. Suffice it to say, this did not go over well with the men, although they did receive additional wages in compensation. Superstition within the trade also required

that liquor should be taken whenever a new vessel was launched - fortunately when the first of their ships was launched without a drink, all went as planned! Together Sprague and James built 63 ships, and they retired in 1849 having amassed comfortable fortunes.



Detail from the 1855 Walling Map showing the locations of the shipyards south of Riverside Avenue and Ship Street. Cross Street Cemetery was located in the open area opposite the house belonging to "Mrs Revalion".
Source: <https://tinyurl.com/2ky3te7u>

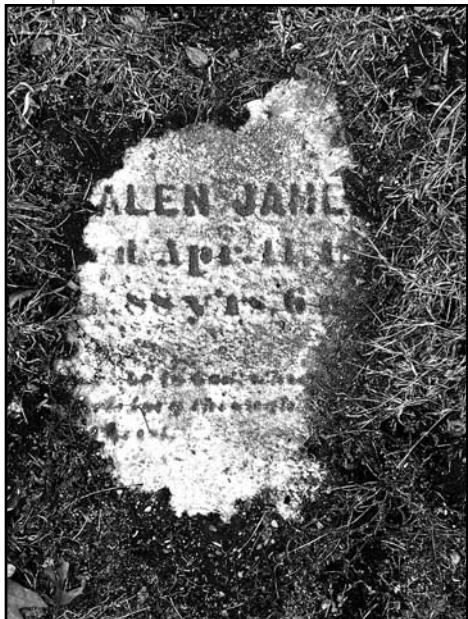


Photo by Will Tenney

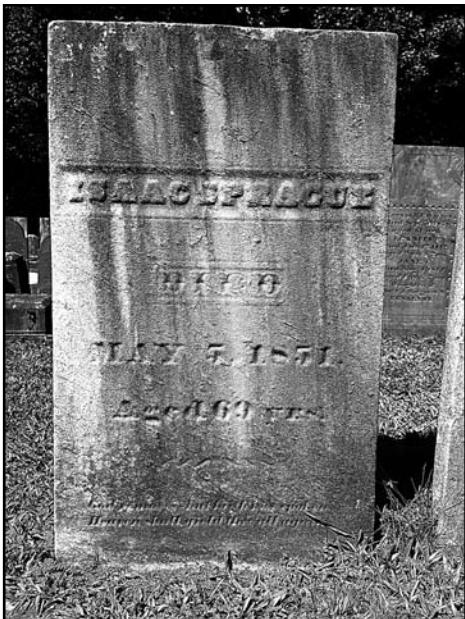


Photo by Lucy Foulston

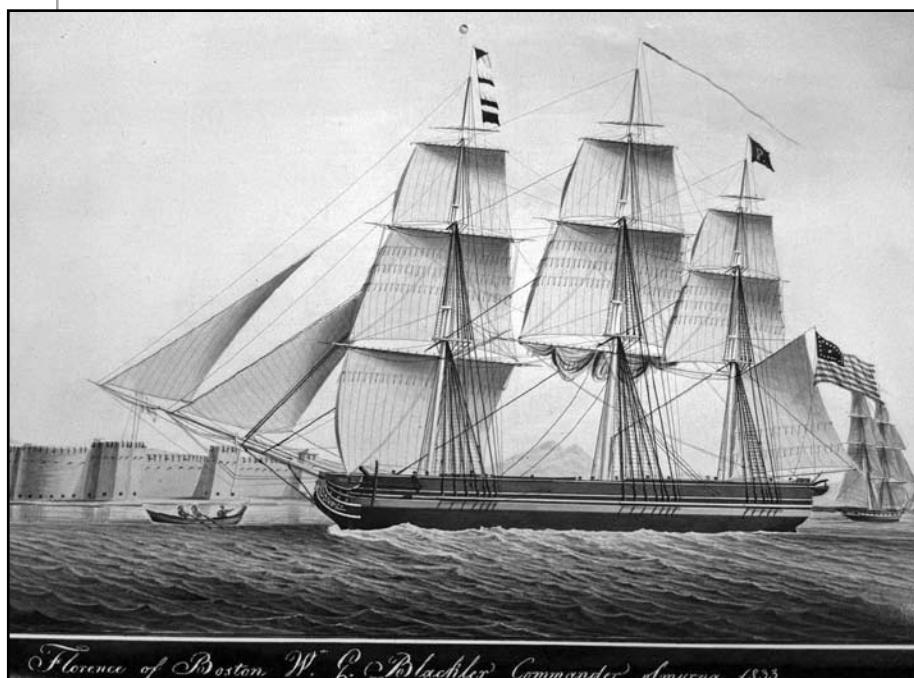
Headstones of Galen James and Issac Sprague, renowned shipbuilding partners, at Cross Street Cemetery. Unfortunately, the stone of Galen James has fallen over and is being overtaken by the surrounding vegetation. Without timely maintenance, it may completely disappear within a few years.

Many other men involved in the shipbuilding trade, and their families, are memorialized at Cross Street Cemetery. Eden Sampson was a caulk, responsible for making sure that the hulls were watertight before the vessel was launched. This process, called caulking, involves driving oakum (a material made from old rope) into the seams, and then sealing it with pitch (pine tar). While Eden and his wife Mary are buried in Duxbury, Massachusetts, where the family later relocated, he worked in Medford in the mid-1820s, when his son Seneca died at only 14 months-old, and was buried in the nearby Cross Street Cemetery.

Several of the men buried at Cross Street had the occupation of ship's joiner: skilled carpenters who would complete all of the woodwork on the vessels. Samuel Clark (1817-1902) was one of the

last men in Medford to have been involved in the shipbuilding trade when he died at the age of 92. He lived on Riverside Avenue with his wife Lydia and their children. Elisha Stetson (1799-1869) was also a ship's joiner, as indicated by his membership card to the local Mason's lodge, Hiram, from 1850. Benjamin Hopkins Samson (1816-1878) was a shipbuilder, whose son Captain Albert A. Samson (1840-1923) was a revered Civil War veteran who is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery.

Deaths related to the seafaring trade were also common during this time period. Munroe and Frederick Mason's headstones particularly stand out when walking around Cross Street Cemetery; Munroe was "Lost at Sea" and Frederick "Died at Sea". They were the sons of Andrew (1785-1866) and Grace Mason (1787-1864), who married in 1808 and had three children in Portland, Maine; Frederick, Munroe (1809-1825) and Mary (1819-1903). Munroe's untimely death was documented in a newspaper article of the day; at only 16 years-old, in 1825, he fell from the ship "Oxford", striking his head as he fell and was drowned before anyone could reach him. While almost no information is available about Frederick's cause or date of death, he was not with the family when they moved to Medford in the late 1830s, suggesting that he



Florence of Boston. W. L. Blackler Commander. Amurina. 1833.

The clippership "Florence", built by Sprague and James in 1831 for S. Gray and A. Adams, Boston. Painted by Sr. Corsini, 1833. Reproduced from "Medford-Built Sailing Ships. The 100th Anniversary Calendar of the Medford Historical Society".

perished at sea before that date. Munroe also has a headstone in Eastern Cemetery in Portland, Maine where he died, but it is clear that the family later erected headstones for both Munroe and Frederick at Cross Street Cemetery where the rest of the family was also buried.

Childhood Disease and Infant Mortality

The burials at Cross Street Cemetery provide a pretty bleak picture of life in nineteenth century Medford. A large proportion of the memorials are for young children who succumbed to childhood diseases, indicative of the poor sanitation and medical care of the time period. In 1800, 46% of children in the US died before their fifth birthday, but by 1900, this number had dropped to 24% through improved living conditions and better understanding of the causes for disease.

Parents Timothy Rich (1792-1874), a laborer, and his wife Fanny (1782-1862) would have been painfully aware of this fact. They had six children in the decade between 1812 and 1822, but only two of them survived to adulthood. Their daughter Sila A. Rich is remembered on what is likely the oldest headstone at Cross Street, dating from 1816 when the cemetery opened. She died at 13 months-old from fever and a “canker”, the term for the ulceration often associated with the bacterial disease scarlet fever. Her brother Charles S. Rich died barely a year later in July 1817, aged four months, and another Charles, born in 1820, died of fits at only

six months of age. At this time, it was not uncommon for subsequent children to be named for siblings who had previously died. Ezekial, another son, died in September 1822, aged 11 months, from dysentery. Timothy, who survived to 24 years-old, also perished in 1836, although his cause of death was not recorded. Stilman, born in 1818, had a family himself, worked as a laborer, and survived to the age of 54, when he drowned in 1872. Stilman was a Civil War veteran who has a Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R) grave marker in Oak Grove Cemetery; he enlisted in September 1862 at the age of 44 as a private in F company, 5th infantry Massachusetts Regiment, which was engaged in campaigning in North Carolina in 1862, before being mustered out in July 1863 at the rank of Corporal, at the end of his term of service. Timothy Rich outlived all of his children and was buried alongside his family at Cross Street Cemetery in 1874 at the age of 82, although his headstone is no longer visible.

Two twins, the Rogers, are remembered on a headstone from June 1845; they are unnamed and no gender is recorded, suggesting that they may have been stillborn. Their sister Theresa died of dysentery in 1848 at eight months. Other causes of childhood death for children buried at Cross Street include typhoid fever, heart conditions, consumption and “Dropsy on brain” (hydrocephalus).

The Revalyon Family

The earliest date on a headstone still visible at Cross Street Cemetery is that of Frances F. Revalyon who died in January 1812, at the age of two years and two months. Since the cemetery was not in use until 1816, this headstone must have been installed several years after her death, so it is unclear if she is also buried here. Frances' sister Jane Revalyon, is listed on the same headstone. She died in August 1814, aged just one year and two months. They were the daughters of Thomas F. and Margaret Revalyon (or Revallion), and their father, who died in September 1838, at age 61 is the first name on the headstone, suggesting that the two girls may have been memorialized at the same time. Thomas was a free-person of African-American origin, one of very few such individuals in Medford in the early nineteenth century. In 1830, the Revalyon household included eight of the 19 people of African descent living in Medford.

Thomas Revalyon initially lived and worked in Boston. In 1827 he purchased land on Cross Street in Medford and constructed a home for his wife and children, a family of eight by this time. Having trained as a barber he opened a barbershop at 14 Main Street in the mid-1830s. When Thomas died of consumption in 1838, Margaret continued to live on Cross Street, and her name can be seen on the 1855 Walling Map of Medford. Margaret is not buried with her family at Cross Street, and it is unclear where she was laid to rest when she died of old age in 1867.



Gravestone of Sila A. and Charles S. Rich, children of Timothy and Fanny Rich at Cross Street Cemetery.

Photo by Will Tenney



Photo by Lucy Foulston



Photo by Lucy Foulston

Gravestones (above left and right) of members of the Revalyon Family at Cross Street Cemetery.

The couple had 11 children and several of them are memorialized at Cross Street Cemetery with their father and siblings. James N., their eldest child, born in 1807, died at the age of 21 in 1828 in New Orleans, Louisiana, although it is unclear why he was there. On the same gravestone as James is his brother Thomas F. Revalyon, born in 1816, who died at sea in January 1833 on the whaleship Weymouth in an accident at only 18 years-old. Robert Revalyon, born to the couple in 1821, married Keziah Hill in 1843, and the couple had two children. Sadly Keziah died just three months after the birth of their son Thomas and was buried at Cross Street Cemetery. Keziah was the fourth great-granddaughter of Massasoit, the famous chief of the Wampanoag tribe who welcomed the Pilgrims in 1620.

While the descendants of Revalyon family largely moved away from Medford, by the late 1880s, a number of African-American families had moved to the city, establishing a vibrant community centered around West Medford.

Women

Women in nineteenth century Medford would have had challenging, and often short, lives. While Medford men were involved in industrial trades, their wives and daughters would largely have worked in the home, bearing and raising children. This was perilous in itself, and many women died in childbirth or had to bear the trauma of losing children to childhood disease. However, some women at Cross Street Cemetery stand out for their longevity.

Emily Parker Hartshorn was born in 1799, in Reading, and survived to the age of 80, dying from dropsy (edema) in August 1880. Emily was the wife of Amory Hartshorn, whom she married in 1817. Her husband died from consumption in 1850, aged 58, leaving Emily real estate worth \$900 on Main Street and Mystic Avenue. Emily still had her young sons at home and, as a widow, made ends meet by taking in lodgers. Emily's last will and testament from 1875 shows her leaving her legacy to her remaining sons Amory, Elbridge, Lewis and George. Her son Hollis,

who pre-deceased her, although his date of death is unrecorded, is also buried at Cross Street and has a G.A.R headstone, having served as a private in the Union Army in the Civil War from 1862 to 1863. Interestingly, Emily's headstone at Cross Street Cemetery can be seen in a photo that appears to date from before the markers were relocated to Oak Grove Cemetery in the 1950s.

Mary Smith Clark has the latest date of death, in 1925, of anyone buried at Cross Street Cemetery. She was born in October 1845 to Samuel (the ship's joiner mentioned earlier) and Lydia Clark. She had a twin sister, Sarah, who died of dysentery and fever in September 1848 at three years old. Based on census records Mary lived with her parents and aunts until they all passed away, leaving her head of household in 1920 at age 74. She lived with her younger sister (also Sarah), 66, at 150 Riverside Avenue. Like Mary, Sarah L. Clark never married, and she is variously recorded with the occupations of bookkeeper, treasurer and clerk. Mary Clark was an active member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, having been a descendant of several



Photos of Emily Hartshorn's gravestone at the original location of Cross Street Cemetery (from the Medford Historical Society Archives) and at its current location at Oak Grove Cemetery.

Revolutionary War veterans, including Robert Lenthal Eells, (1732-1800), who commanded a company from Hanover at the Lexington Alarm.

A walk through Cross Street Cemetery paints a rich picture of the lives of Medford people in the nineteenth century. The next time you visit, as Longfellow wrote in his poem *The Launching of the Ship*, listen out for the “Sound of hammers, blow on blow, Knocking away the shores and spurs” from the legacy of the shipbuilders echoing down the ages and the whispers of the stories the dead have to tell.

Key References and Further Reading

References to web pages are given in a reduced format (tinyurl) for ease of use.

- All genealogical records were accessed using Ancestry.com, including census and vital records for Medford, MA.
- FindAGrave.com
- The Archives of the Medford Historical Society, Medford, MA
- The Medford Public Library, Medford, MA
- *The eternal residents of Cross Street Cemetery* by Dee Morris, May 12, 2015 <https://tinyurl.com/y9duz6w8>
- *Skeletal remains found at site of old cemetery by Medford City Hall moved for I-93* by Asher Klein, January 9, 2025 <https://tinyurl.com/mw9e3uu>
- *Round about Old Medford, A Historical Guide-Book, Compiled by Ruth Dame Coolidge, Helen T. Wild and others.* Published by Medford Historical Society Medford, Massachusetts 1934. <https://tinyurl.com/55wmxkmp>
- *History of the Town of Medford, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, from its First Settlement, in 1630, to the Present Time, 1855* by Charles Brooks, 1855.
- Medford Historical Commission: *African Americans in West Medford: A Context Statement* <https://tinyurl.com/ms253r4w>
- *The Graveyard of Old Diseases* by Stephen Berry, Tracy L. Barnett, May 7, 2019 <https://tinyurl.com/27fek93m>
- Medford Historical Society and Museum: *Medford-Built Sailing Ships* <https://tinyurl.com/4td292pk>
- *The Naval Encyclopedia: The Great Clippers (1820-1870)* by Aloys Blanchard, February 27, 2020 <https://tinyurl.com/2rymmjar>
- *Old Ships and Ship-Building Days of Medford 1630-1873* by Hall Gleason, 1936 <https://tinyurl.com/3seerm9f>
- Medford Historical Commission: *Old Ship Street Area - Riverside Avenue* <https://tinyurl.com/vk5y6t2k>
- Medford Historical Society and Museum: *The Emerging City: 19th-Century Medford* <https://tinyurl.com/yp2ad-pd5>
- *Child mortality rate (under five years old) in the United States, from 1800 to 2020* <https://tinyurl.com/7rhuy5ha>
- *Twenty Families of Color in Massachusetts, 1742-1998* by Franklin A. Dorman, 1998. With special thanks to Dee Morris for informing me about the Revalyon family and for lending me her copy of this book.

MHSM Events Calendar

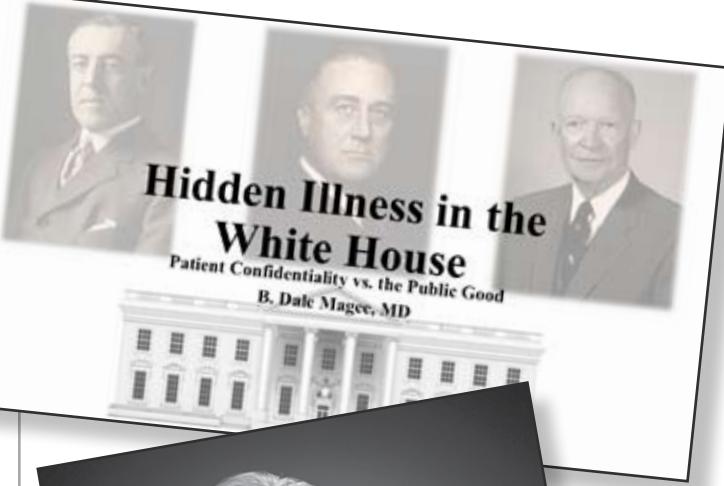
JANUARY

Hidden Illness in the White House: Patient Confidentiality vs. the Public Good

Speaker: B. Dale Magee, M.D.

Thursday, January 8, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Charlotte and William Bloomberg Medford Public Library

The presidency of the United States is a demanding job that requires intellectual, emotional, and physical strength. As time has passed, the size and the power of the Executive Branch have increased with more and more responsibility residing on that one person. All presidents have support staff that they rely on to help make decisions. When the president is ill, whose interests take precedence? The president who may have other issues or may be in denial? His staff who may be sacrificing their power? The citizens and the rest of the world who depend on a stable executive running the United States government? We shall explore three presidents: Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Dwight David Eisenhower to look at the specifics, the uncertainties, and the deceptions that not only occurred during their presidencies but also preceded their candidacies.



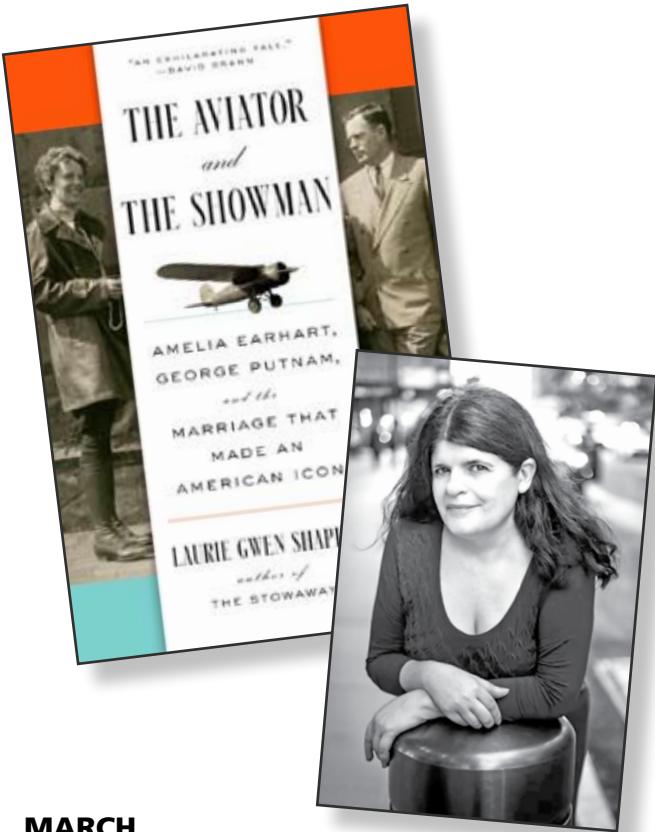
Hidden Illness in the White House

Patient Confidentiality vs. the Public Good

B. Dale Magee, MD

B. Dale Magee, MD

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MARCH

The Aviator and the Showman: Amelia Earhart, George Putnam, and the Marriage that Made an American Icon

Speaker: Laurie Gwen Shapiro, Documentary Filmmaker and Journalist

Thursday, March 12, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Charlotte and William Bloomberg Medford Public Library

The riveting and cinematic story of a partnership that would change the world forever...

In 1928, a young social worker and hobby pilot named Amelia Earhart arrived in the office of George Putnam, heir to the Putnam & Sons throne, and hit-maker, who was on the hunt for the right woman for a secret flying mission across the Atlantic. A partnership—professional and soon otherwise—was born.

The Aviator and the Showman unveils the untold story of Amelia's decade-long marriage to George Putnam, offering an intimate exploration of their relationship and the pivotal role it played in her enduring legacy. Despite her outwardly modest and humble image, Amelia was fiercely driven and impossibly brave, a lifelong feminist and trailblazer in her personal and professional life. Putnam, the so-called "PT Barnum of publishing" was a bookselling visionary—but often pushed his authors to extreme lengths in the name of publicity, and no one bore that weight more than Amelia. Their ahead-of-its-time partnership supported her grand ambitions—but also pressed her into more and more treacherous stunts to promote her books, influencing a certain recklessness up to and including her final flight.

Earhart is a captivating figure to many, but the truth about her life is often overshadowed by myth and legend. In this new account, Laurie Gwen Shapiro will emphasize Earhart's multifaceted human side, her struggles, and her authentic aspirations, the truths behind her brave pursuits and the compromises she made to fit into societal expectations. Drawing from a trove of new sources including undiscovered audio interviews, The Aviator and the Showman is a gripping and passionate tale of adventure, colorful characters, hubris, and a complex and a vivid portrait of a marriage that shaped the trajectory of an iconic life.

APRIL

Clippership Connector

Speaker: Amber Christoffersen, Greenways Planner/Designer, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Thursday, April 9, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Charlotte and William Bloomberg Medford Public Library

Learn about the Mystic River Plan from 2009, the larger Mystic River Greenway, the community-driven effort to initiate the project, and the design, permitting, and construction process that led to what we see today. The Clippership Connector is a new, half-mile multi-use path in Medford, that connects Medford Square to Riverbend Park and the existing Mystic River Greenway system. It provides a safe and scenic off-street route for pedestrians and cyclists, linking over 10 miles of contiguous paths between the square, Andrews/McGlynn Schools, and the parks along the Mystic River.

The project is a collaboration between the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the City of Medford.





*Discover Medford's cemetery
within a cemetery.*

YOUR MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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