

The Official Newsletter of

The Waltham  
Historical Society  
WALTHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

JANUARY 2015



*Sanderson Lecture Series*

7:00 p.m., Tuesday Evening

**JANUARY 13, 2015**

**Waltham Public Library**

735 Main Street

Waltham, MA 02453

*The Edmund L. Sanderson Lecture Series*

**Tuesday, January 13, 2015**

**Lecture Hall of the Waltham Public Library**

## **An Illustrated History of the Waltham Public Library and Its Relationship to the Community in Honor of its 150th Anniversary**

*by Morton S. Isaacson*



This year the Waltham Public Library is celebrating two block-buster anniversaries: the 150th anniversary of its founding (voted into existence by Town Meeting on April 3, 1865), and the 100th anniversary of the opening of the main section of the current library building on December 13, 1915. The first public lecture held in the new building's lecture hall, in January, 1916 – one month after it opened – was by our very own Waltham Historical Society. Therefore, it is fitting that the Society kicks off the library's year of celebration with a presentation on the library's history in that very same lecture hall. The talk will stress the people and places behind the historical facts, and the connections between the library's history and that of the greater community. Learn how many eminent individuals in the community were involved with the library over the years, and how many of the houses and other buildings associated with them are still standing in the city today as reminders of their contributions.

### **About the lecturer**

*Mort Isaacson moved to Waltham about 20 years ago, and, although interested in history all his life, had not then considered Waltham a very historic town. After moving here, as he drove around town, he began to notice that scattered about the city, mixed in with the more contemporary homes, were ones that appeared to be from a much earlier era. This led him to searching for the history of these houses – especially in the library's archives, joining the Waltham Historical Society, and writing a number of tour books for the society on the history of various parts of the city, two of which have been published and are for sale through the society. In addition to being on the board of the Waltham Historical Society, Mort is also currently a member of the Waltham Historical Commission, which administers the city's delayed demolition ordinance dedicated to historic preservation. He now considers Waltham a very historic place.*

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## Illustrated History of the Waltham Public Library's 150 Years

Although the Waltham Public Library was officially established in 1865, its history actually goes back much farther than just the 150 years we are celebrating this year – in fact, some 217 years to the founding of the Waltham Social Library Society in 1798. This was a subscription lending library made up of the yeoman farming families of what was then a rural agricultural town. This library continued in existence until 1846, at which point its collection of 800 volumes was put into storage in the Unitarian Church. When the Waltham Public Library was established in 1865, the Church donated this collection to it. During the presentation we will look at some of the society's original records, officers, and memorabilia.

The Waltham Social Library was founded by, and run primarily for, the old farming families in the town, many of which dated back to early colonial times. In contrast, the second tributary stream to the Waltham Public Library came from the new manufacturing and professional interests that arose at the beginning of the 1800s with the establishment of the Boston Manufacturing Company (BMC). The first BMC textile mill in Waltham was built in 1814, and by 1820 the company had already established a lending library for its employees called the "Manufacturers' Library". Then, in 1826 the company was instrumental in establishing the Rumford Institute for Mutual Instruction that was open to the whole town. This was a lyceum type membership organization which held regular lectures and discussions on science, the arts, and politics; and it maintained its own lending library called the Rumford Library. The fol-



*Rumford Hall at Main and Elm Streets*

lowing year the company built Rumford Hall on the Common where City Hall now stands for the free use of the Rumford Institute and its library. In 1830 the BMC donated the collection in its Manufacturers' Library to the Rumford Library. By the 1860s the Rumford Library had outgrown its facilities and finances and, consequently, the Institute offered its library's collection of 3,700 volumes to the town for a free town library. It was the acceptance of this offer in 1865 that established the Waltham Public Library. During the presentation we will also look at some of the Rumford Institute's original records, officers, and memorabilia.

The new town library was first housed in Bank Hall over the Waltham National Bank, in a stone, Greek Revival building dating from 1836 at the corner of Main and Lexington Streets. However, it soon became too large for this space, and in 1880 it was moved to the new brick Chester A. Welch Block at the corner of Moody and Charles Streets. During this period, in 1874, a collection of books on agriculture was given to the library by the Waltham Farmer's Club, a forerunner of our present day Waltham/West Suburban Chamber of Commerce.



*The Welch Block, corner Charles and Moody*

The present Waltham Public Library building owes its existence to a bequest made in 1894 by Francis Buttrick, one of Waltham's most respected citizens and the largest real estate owner in the city in the later decades of the nineteenth century. However, twenty years were to elapse before all the legal entanglements could be straightened out, a suitable site for the new library could be secured on Main Street, and construction could begin. This new building, called the Buttrick Library, was dedicated on December

11, 1915 and forms the front half of our present library structure.



*The Central House on Main Street*

The new site on Main Street had been partly occupied by the old Central House. Originally built as a farmhouse, the building had become a tavern at the close of the 18th century. In the early 19th century, it was rebuilt as a large temple-fronted Greek Revival building. It became one of the most well known taverns along the Boston Post Road in Waltham. The old Central House was demolished in 1914 to make way for the Buttrick building.

A community room, called the Art Gallery, was added to the north side of the Buttrick building in 1933, partly to house paintings done by Charles Woodbury. The room and paintings had been donated to the library by Annie and Mary Sears.

The most recent renovations to the library were completed in 1994 after a seven year effort. The Art Gallery was replaced by a new three story wing, doubling the library's space; and the Buttrick building was completely renovated resulting in the beautiful, unified building we enjoy today.



*Please note that this lecture is being held in the Lecture Gallery at the Waltham Public Library. Call 781-894-0062 or email [Waltham.historical.society@gmail.com](mailto:Waltham.historical.society@gmail.com) with any questions.*



## The Waltham Historical Society Fundraising Committee Needs YOU!!

The Society Fund-raising Committee has brought forth some ideas that we hope will stimulate interest in Waltham's history while aiding us in paying the bills.

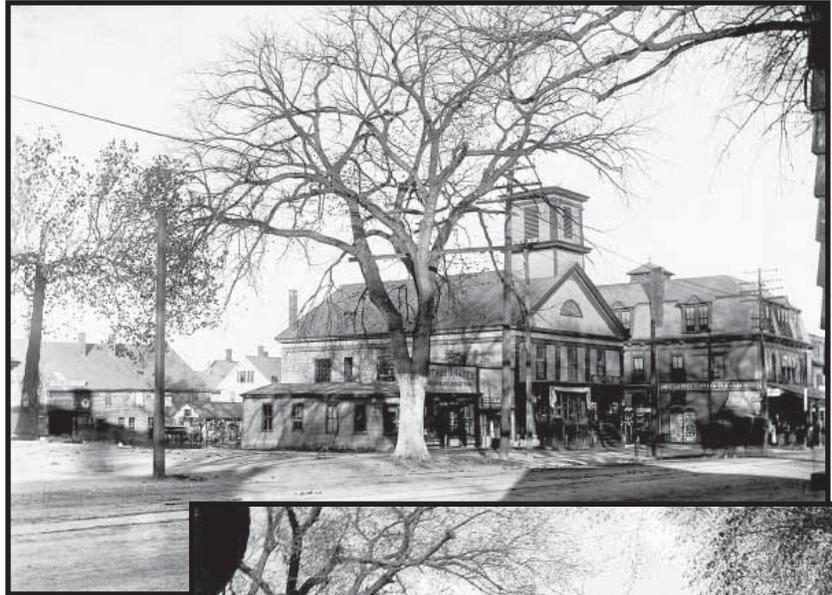
Al and David Smith are looking into cemetery tours. Mayor McCarthy has suggested creating Waltham clocks with clock images from around the City. Sheila FitzPatrick mentioned putting out a series of postcards and puzzles. Louise Hamilton has put forth the idea of an art show that includes Waltham artists, both current and past.

Jack Cox has offered to conduct a History of Waltham class next summer that will offer his highly popular high school studies to adults.

Other ideas include grant writing, educational outreach, and collaborations with other local non-profit groups.

If you're interested in getting involved, or you can help provide services to any of these ideas please contact us at [Waltham.historical.society@gmail.com](mailto:Waltham.historical.society@gmail.com) or 617-448-6706. We would love to hear from you.

## Images from the collection of the Waltham Historical Society



*The building on the left was called Exchange Hall and was originally the town's Universalist Church building. It was demolished along with the Central House to make room for the Buttrick library building. The building to the right of Exchange Hall is still standing.*



*The new Buttrick Building Library shortly after opening.*

## Become a Board Member of the Waltham Historical Society

*The Nominating Committee is seeking recruits to serve on the Board of the Historical Society. If you are interested in becoming more involved and helping make decisions on the Society's future please contact Joan Sheridan or Carol DiFranco, call us at 617-448-6706, or [Waltham.historical.society@gmail.com](mailto:Waltham.historical.society@gmail.com).*

*The Board of Directors of the Waltham Historical Society wishes to express our appreciation for the support of the individuals and organizations listed on this page. They have been very generous to the Historical Society this past year and we encourage you to thank them for their generosity by patronizing the businesses identified, and by expressing thanks to the individuals. Without this type of support the Society would be unable to continue our work in the community.*

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**"Thank you" to the Waltham Historical Society for preserving the City's rich history.**



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