

Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUMMER 2017



A 19th CENTURY WALK UP TURKEY HILL AND NOW

The Appalachian Mountain Club publishes a monthly magazine, *Outdoors*, which is focused on hiking in the White Mountains. My interest was stimulated when they reprinted an article from their 1897 book: *Walks and Rides, In the Country Round About Boston, covering thirty-six cities and towns, parks and public reservations, within a radius of twelve miles from the State House*, by Edwin M. Bacon, published for the Club by Houghton Mifflin and Company in 1897, which was on the shelf at the Robbins Library. The text that follows was taken from the Turkey Hill walk:

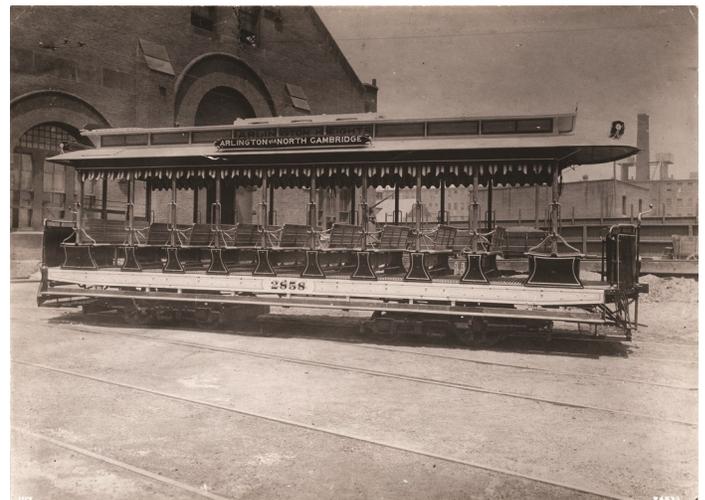
Arlington, Turkey Hill

Boston to Arlington (from Bowdoin Square) through Cambridge by electric car, 6½ miles; by steam car [Boston & Maine, S. Div.], 6 miles. Fare, electric car, 5 cents; steam car, 13 cents.

Arlington... occupies a broad valley and picturesque hill slopes. Its loftiest hill, Arlington Heights (310 feet), near the southwestern boundary, commands a widely extended view; and Turkey Hill, the second in height (200 feet), lies on the north side. Its jewel is Spy Pond, one of the loveliest pieces of water in a region of pleasant ponds.

The ride from Boston to Arlington Centre by steam car occupies about twenty minutes, by electric car forty-five minutes. The electric car ride is much the pleasanter, being mainly along the wide Massachusetts Avenue, well favored with trees through and beyond North Cambridge, passing historic spots, and as the town is approached affording agreeable views.

On the left side of the avenue the opening of Forest Street, at the right (where we are to turn for our rural walk to Turkey Hill and beyond, after we have "done" the Heights), is the Robbins Spring house, a popular bicycle stopping-place where water and other refreshments may be obtained. Arlington Heights is easily mounted by the



An open trolley car, such as this one, would have been used in summer to transport passengers along Massachusetts Avenue which is described here as being "well favored with trees through... passing historic spots... affording agreeable views."

fine road called Park Avenue. From the broad summit we have a brilliant view of the surrounding country in its frame of hills, with Boston and the harbor in clear outline, at the east, and in other directions Monadnock, Wachusett, and more distant mountain peaks. The most extended prospect is from the water tower... This hill was Circle Hill before a land company christened it Arlington Heights (in 1872), and at the time of the Revolution, and before, it was part of the chain of lovely elevations known as the Welsh Mountains.

Returning to Massachusetts Avenue and going back to Forest Street, we take the latter street and turn our steps northward. After crossing the railway, the street becomes a charming country road winding over highlands from

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President's Corner

Summertime represents a time when things at the Society pause to slow down a little bit... except for Jason Russell House tours, of course! Since summer is a season to take a pause, I thought it appropriate to report some facts and figures about our Society's past year to give you an idea of how we are doing as an organization. Special thanks to Sara Lundberg and Doris Birmingham who pulled these figures together for me.

- Total paid memberships: 234. This includes family memberships where couples are listed together and ignores the small number of life members. Therefore, the total number of individuals in our Society is larger, but is difficult to compute using our current bookkeeping methods.
- School groups (the 3rd grade program):
 - 360 children participated in our 3rd grade program this year.
 - Six out of Arlington's eight schools sent classes: Bishop, Dallin, Peirce, St. Agnes, Stratton, and Thompson.
 - Since each class must come on a separate day, we had 15 total visits.
 - To manage the large number of students, 18 member volunteers helped.
- Jason Russell House tour guide program (2016 season):
 - Total number of guide volunteers on roster: 30.
 - Total number of tours given: 153.
 - Total number of visitors to the Jason Russell House: 617. (Compared to previous years – 2015: 491; 2014: 531; 2013: 530.) The visitors included 60 children and 35 descendants of Jason Russell.
- Collections: We currently have 15,285 collections records in our database. It's not straightforward to correlate that number with the exact number of items in our collection (some records cover multiple items), but it does provide a measure of our collection's strength. (Compared to 12,440 records in January 2015.)
- Membership income this year: \$10,295. (Compared to last year: \$7,525.)
- Annual appeal donations: \$20,070. (Compared to FY 2015-16: \$16,492)

The figures show that we hold an important position in the town of Arlington, and are doing well as a society. However, our annual expenditures are around \$60K, of which about one half comes from yearly income (memberships and donations). The rest comes from our endowment. At the moment we are financially stable, but we rely on our endowment too much to guarantee our long-term future. Please bear this in mind when you receive your annual appeal request this fall. And if you are enjoying membership in the Society, please consider encouraging your friends and relatives to join!

Finally, I want to say a big thank you to all our volunteers—board members, trustees, and regular volunteers—who lend a hand to keeping the society active and vibrant. We would not be able to offer the quality programs and activities which we do without the many participants who freely give us their time and energy. I find it remarkable that we are able to do so many things on such a limited financial base; it's our volunteers who make it possible.

Stuart Brorson, President

Save the Date

An Evening In Arlington
Wine Tasting
September 22, 2017

Visit www.arlingtonhistorical.org/wine-reception/



We are pleased to welcome Meredith Affleck as a part time (5 hours per week) Office Assistant. She has made a living as an administrator in various fields, but has finally decided to follow a career path that uses all of her creative and professional talents. To that end, she has taken on a litany of part-time and contract positions as an office assistant, exhibit designer, graphic designer, researcher, assistant curator, and/or all of the above. In addition to the Arlington Historical Society, she is working on research and exhibit design at the Westford Historical Society, is the newsletter designer for the Textile Society of America, and is a public programs intern at Discover Portsmouth. She cares passionately about art, history, material culture, and being well organized.

- PHASE TWO GRANT AWARDED -

We are pleased to announce that we have been awarded another grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission through the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund. The fund supports the preservation of properties, landscapes, and cultural resources in the Commonwealth. This \$25,000 grant will help us to complete the urgently needed repairs and structural stabilization of the Jason Russell House, as identified in a study detailed in our Spring 2017 newsletter. A portion of the matching funds are provided by the Town of Arlington Community Preservation Act. If you would like to assist with matched funding by making a donation, you may do so by calling the Society office at 781-648-4300. ❖

JRH Guide Program is Fully Staffed

By Doris Birmingham

We were excited to welcome eight new guides to our volunteer ranks on Guide Training Day this past April 1, thereby giving us a total of 33 guides who will host weekend visitors to the Jason Russell House this year between Patriots' Day and Columbus Day. Many also assist Sara Lundberg with the third grade program, an important component of Arlington's public school social studies curriculum.

Guides are recruited through social and print media, flyers posted around town, and word of mouth. Their backgrounds vary widely. Many are retirees, but a significant number are still in the work force and generously donate an afternoon a month to welcoming our visitors. The group includes, not surprisingly, several teachers and librarians, but also, among other professions, engineers and computer experts, a town planner, an exhibition designer, a freelance writer, and a student. All share a love of history, an interest in learning, and the desire to share their knowledge with others.

We are extremely grateful to these individuals, who represent the most public face of the Society and who contribute so much in helping us fulfill our educational mission. ❖

A 19th Century Walk Up Turkey Hill and Now (Continued from page 1)

which are frequent picturesque vistas through the openings of the trees. Turkey Hill, rising in easy slopes at the right of the road, is soon reached. Following the cart-road which curves along the sides of the hill, and footpaths mounting it gradually, we come to the summit. Here is a rocky tip well shaded, but sufficiently open to disclose a wide prospect of town and country below. At the left lies Arlington in its fine setting; in front are fair fields, woodlands, hills, and vales, and beyond the outlines of distant mountain tops; at the right, stretches of woods, here and there broken by pastures and well-tilled farms. It is a less extensive view than that from the loftier Arlington Heights, but more diversified. The hill is used by the Signal Service. It is called Turkey Hill from the fact that once wild turkeys abounded here with other game, and it was a favorite hunting-ground.

The walk today is no longer pastoral as described above. Arlington is a suburban town, with our open spaces found only in parks, and long-distance views blocked by buildings. Development of Turkey Hill began in 1912 with Turkey Hill Terrace a 25 acre subdivision. The major landscape feature on Turkey Hill (351 feet, top of tower) is the two-million-gallon Turkey Hill water storage tank at the summit. It was built in 1945, and is owned by the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority

(MWRA). The tank is supplied by pumps located at the Brattle Court Pumping Station located off Washington Street. The Turkey Hill tank and Brattle Court pumps, the Spring Street Pumping Station and Walnut Hill Storage Tank (Lexington) provide a redundant system to insure reliability of our water supply. (This information was obtained from Mark H. Johnson, Director of

Metropolitan Water Operations and Maintenance, MWRA.)

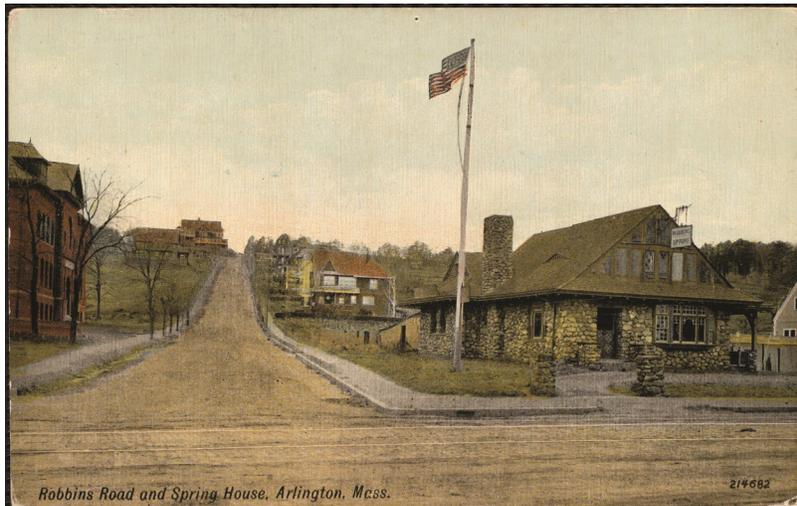
With the advent of cell phones and microwave communications, tall structures such as water storage tanks are used in cellular networks as a site for transmitters/receivers. Space on the Turkey Hill storage tank is rented to communications companies, and the MWRA shares the revenue with the town.

The walk from Massachusetts Avenue to the Turkey Hill Reservation is about a mile. You can get

there by car, on foot, or by taking the MBTA's No. 67 bus which operates between Alewife Station and Turkey Hill.

In our Society archives, there is a paper written by Edith Rice about the history of Turkey Hill, and read before the Society in February 1929. An annotation to her paper, dated 1950, indicated that plans were being made for the Turkey Hill water tower to be as attractive as the one on Park Avenue. We are still waiting.

Howard Winkler
Past President, Arlington Historical Society



Robbins Road and Spring House, Arlington, Mass.

The Robbins Spring House, built in 1894 on Robbins Road and Massachusetts Avenue was the headquarters for a bottled water company at the time of this article, which notes that it is "a popular bicycle stopping-place where spring water and other refreshments may be obtained."

About the Society



The Arlington Historical Society was established in 1897 as a collecting and educational organization. In 1923 it began operating the Jason Russell House, a major battle site of the first day of the American Revolution—April 19, 1775. Open weekends from April to October.

The Arlington Historical Society is dedicated to preserving the Jason Russell House and the Society's collections, and to discovering and sharing information about Arlington's history. The stories of individuals, families, and events associated with the town are interpreted in the Society's collections, programs, and Smith Museum exhibitions.

The Arlington Historical Society is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. Contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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Contact Us

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