

# Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AUTUMN 2021



## Looking back at WANAMAKER HARDWARE

By Richard A. Duffy

After nearly a century, Wanamaker Hardware turned a page in the commercial life of Arlington Heights on September 2, with the retirements of brothers John R. and Mark Wanamaker, the third generation to run the family enterprise. It has been a bittersweet farewell, because the hardware store now begins its next chapter as part of R.W. Shattuck Hardware. Shattuck, established in 1857, is Arlington's oldest continuously operating business, led today by another third-generation hardware

dealer, John Wheatley III. The transition means that although the Wanamaker name is no longer on the storefront, customers are still greeted by familiar faces delivering the personalized and knowledgeable service that characterized Wanamaker Hardware for over 98 years.

The founder of Wanamaker Hardware, 31-year-old Chester Kingsley Wanamaker, had a background as a machinist at a tool manufacturer, and he perhaps learned a thing or two about

interior finishes from his father James, who was a plasterer by trade. In July 1923, Wanamaker opened a tiny retail establishment, occupying just a single storefront in a multi-tenant block at 1308A Massachusetts Ave. A family endeavor from the outset, Chester worked alongside his wife, the former Marion F. Hayden, who managed the office. Chester and Marion soon moved to 150 Forest St. and they later purchased a home at 81 Oakland Ave.

Wanamaker's timing to sell hardware in Arlington Heights could not have been better, amid an unprecedented residential building boom. Not only were many open lots filling in with houses that were a short walk to the Massachusetts Avenue trolley



These window displays were aimed at women customers, showing uses of paints for furniture, textiles, and other decorative crafts for the home. Also note the cage on the doorstep, containing natural sponges of all sizes.

(Continued on page 4)

# President's Corner

---

When Jason Russell lived in his house, he and all his neighbors heated their homes with wood fires in fireplaces. Fireplaces are inefficient—it is estimated that 15% of the energy in the wood result in heating the surrounding space. That is why colonial era houses burned about 40 cords of wood every year. A cord is a pile of wood that is eight feet long, four feet wide and four feet high. That is a lot of trees to fell, cut to size, and split!

Today, the Jason Russell House (JRH) is unheated except for the caretaker's cottage at the west end of the building. That is because heating this uninsulated JRH with a conventional gas or oil system would be prohibitively expensive. Fortunately, modern technology has come to the rescue in the form of a geothermal climate control system.

In late October, three-to-five wells will be drilled into the lawn of the JRH to a depth of 250-300 feet. The temperature at this depth is about 50°F year-round, regardless of the temperature at the surface. A liquid coolant solution much like the one used in cars will circulate in pipes between the wells and heat exchangers in the basement and attic of the JRH. In summer, the heat exchangers will cool and dehumidify air that will be pumped into both stories of the JRH. In winter, heat

will be extracted from the 50°F coolant and used to heat air that will be circulated in the house. It is lot easier to extract heat from coolant at 50°F than it is to extract heat from 20°F outside air. It is estimated that we will need to spend about \$3,500 annually in additional electricity to run the heat exchangers and air circulators. No fossil fuels will be burned on site.

This climate control system will help better preserve our 276-year-old treasure by holding the temperature to 68-74 degrees throughout the year, rather than having wider fluctuations. In addition to enabling the Society to show the JRH all year long rather than just April to October, the controlled temperature and humidity will allow us to display fragile artifacts that currently are in collection storage. Visitor and guide comfort will also be improved. None of this equipment will be apparent to the visitors to the JRH. Watch as we bring this 18th-century survivor gently, carefully, and economically into the 21st century! We are profoundly grateful to the Town of Arlington, the Community Preservation Act Committee, and Town Meeting, for appropriating the funds to make this possible.

– George H. Parsons

---

## News from the Museum Director

A little bit of pandemic down time from some typical activities offered much-needed time to write museum-related grants. I had considered that we might get perhaps one of them and was shocked to be awarded all of them! We have worked out the timeline and will be having a busy winter season as we undertake multiple projects in parallel with one another.

A \$75,000 earmark grant distributed through the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism will be used to further upgrade the museum facility to enable our planned program of changing exhibitions. Our first “co-curated” exhibition with the working title “A Few of Our Favorite Things” will open in Spring 2022. Our thanks to our state representatives, Sean Garballey and Dave Rogers, as well as to an energetic group of board members led by Patsy Kraemer, for their help with planning and oversight of the project.

We also received a highly competitive grant (\$39,306) from the Institution of Museum and Library Services to install high-capacity rolling shelving in one room of our collection storage area and to complete an inventory of the objects which will be rehoused. We are seeking volunteers who are willing to help

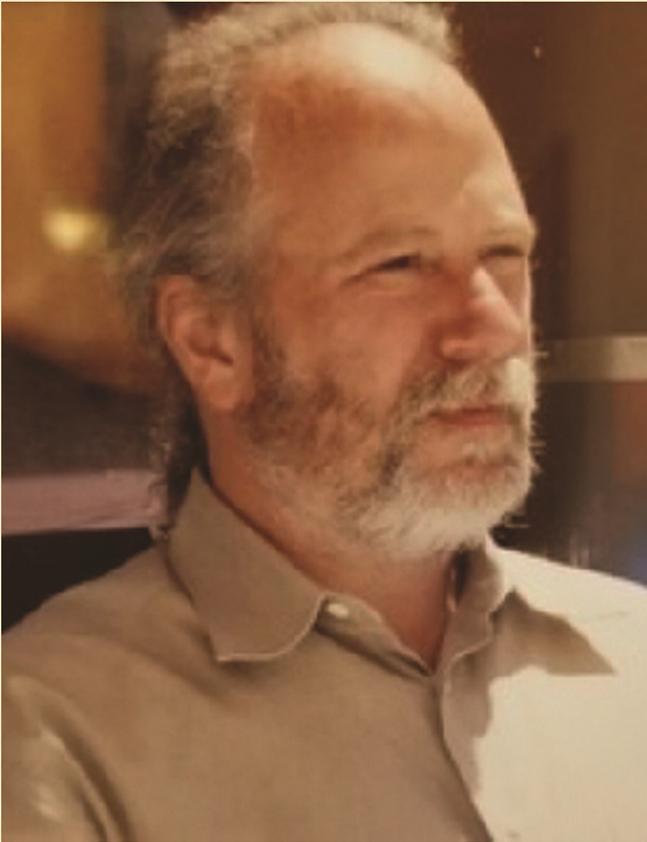
with moving collections and to work with inventorying objects. Please reach out to me if you're interested in lending a hand!

Finally, we were just notified that we were awarded a MassHumanities SHARP Grant in the amount of \$10,043 to help us recover from the impacts of COVID. The first impact of this grant will be the purchase of equipment to simulcast our lecture series this year. A Zoom link will be sent to the email on file for all members two weeks prior to each program. Reach out to us if you do not receive the link and are interested in attending remotely.

– Sara Lundberg  
sara@arlingtonhistorical.org

Note: In the Spring/Summer 2021 issue, there were two omissions from the list recognizing donors to the Society's Annual Fund. Jason Russell Circle member George Putnam Smith made his gift in honor of George A. and Elizabeth Abbot Smith. Silversmith donor Susan Lum is also sincerely thanked.

# In Memoriam: Bob Fredieu



On September 1, Bob Fredieu, president of the Arlington Historical Society from 2006 to 2010, passed away peacefully at his home, after battling pancreatic cancer. He was 64 years old.

Prior to his involvement with the Society, Bob and his wife, Rosemary Schulze, had literally made a significant and enduring mark on Arlington history when they rescued an 1840 Greek Revival home that stood at 48 Broadway. Richard Duffy recalls “I was a commissioner on the Arlington Historical Commission and the project monitor of the property. In 1996, the clock began ticking on a one-year demolition delay, and prospects for saving this treasure were bleak. Bob approached me with a preservation plan that broke the proverbial mold: they would acquire a small 1950’s ranch that was a non-contributing structure in the Pleasant Street Historic District, clear the site, and pursue a complex series of negotiations and logistics to relocate the home to 235 Pleasant St. in 1998. Almost from the moment it appeared in its new location, the house looked as if it had always been there. And despite being a major undertaking requiring remarkable tenacity and generosity, it was carried out in the low-key style that Bob brought to the Society as president.”

Doreen Stevens was museum director during Bob’s four

years in office. She especially remembered the day that Bob “showed up in bright orange coveralls, white masked, and slithered through the narrow, muddy crawl space under the entire Jason Russell House and Smith Museum to personally check on the status of the infrastructure. Other than a few unhistorical reptiles, I don’t know of anyone else who would have even considered attempting such a grimy, dangerous, distasteful task!”

“Bob would show up at 6:30 a.m., before the coffee was even ready, to help with whatever Society event was on tap. I could always count on him for all-hands-at-the-ready assistance, and for unexpected contributions, such as the Town Day when he gleefully ordered big blocks of ice so that kids could use real ice tongs to maneuver melting, slippery ice shards. Bob had a great time, the kids loved it, and I was a nervous wreck!”

---

*Bob had a great way of challenging assumptions that was always encouraging and motivating.*

---

Richard added, “Bob’s first year in office was during the 200th anniversary of Arlington’s incorporation as an independent town, so he was instantly busy with the special lecture series held at Town Hall, the opening of the major exhibit ‘Family Ties,’ and a roster of special events related to this bicentennial. This level of activity could have been a year-plus of distractions, but Bob maintained a sharp focus on the longer-term needs of the organization. Bob had a great way of challenging assumptions that was always encouraging and motivating.”

Doreen reflected on Bob’s impact, which continued as he fulfilled various roles in years after he left office because “he cared deeply about the Society, Arlington history, and people’s ability to access what mattered to them about that history. As president he wore his prestige lightly—jeans, not suits—and he had a delightfully quirky sense of humor that always included his listeners in a private chuckle about the human condition. It also illuminated the content of many a board meeting.” And there was the personal touch. “After the months of work on the ‘Family Ties’ exhibit, with the sawdust settled, the paint dried, and the gala exhibit opening celebrated, Bob and Rosemary knocked on my back door one quiet Saturday afternoon to deliver a special beribboned bottle of champagne in thanks. I still have that bow.” ❖

car lines and the steam railroad station, but also the recent westward extension of Summer Street from Brattle Street to the Lexington line had opened large sections of territory for development—the start of a new identity for Arlington as an automobile suburb. C.K. Wanamaker, as the store was originally known, grew so rapidly that by 1925 it moved to a double storefront at 1348-1350 Massachusetts Ave. That same year, the Wanamakers welcomed their son and only child, John Frederick.

Chester Wanamaker was actively engaged in community organizations until his untimely death at age 49 in October 1941. His widow, prominent in her own right as the president of the Arlington chapter of Zonta, the professional women's service organization, led the business. Sadly, Marion Wanamaker soon passed away in March 1943. John Wanamaker, just 17 years old, joined the U.S. Coast Guard and served through World War II. During this time, Wanamaker Hardware stayed in business under the management of career-employee Gerald "Jerry" Morgan.

In 1947, John F. Wanamaker had the foresight to acquire the lot at 1298 Massachusetts Ave., on the eastern corner of Davis Road, where he built a freestanding store that opened in 1953. The second level originally was a storage area, but it offered the potential to increase retail floor space for what would become the household goods department. Wanamaker served as president of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, acquired the Arlington branch of the Norfolk Paint and Wallpaper Co., and in the 1970s he turned the hardware store over to the management of his two sons as he undertook trade association and industry roles in the tools and hardware fields. John F. Wanamaker died in 2001.

The Wanamaker brothers grew the successful family business, introducing an ever-wider array of modern home-improvement items, and staying relevant in the trend towards increasing



A 1923 image of C.K. Wanamaker, at left, with employee Gerald Morgan.



John Wanamaker, wearing the latest in fashion to show-off the latest in paints.



From televisions to trellises, percolators to Pyrex, this was just one aisle of the old store.



This circa 1975 exterior view shows the angled awning that added a bold stroke of mid-century modern style to otherwise utilitarian architecture.



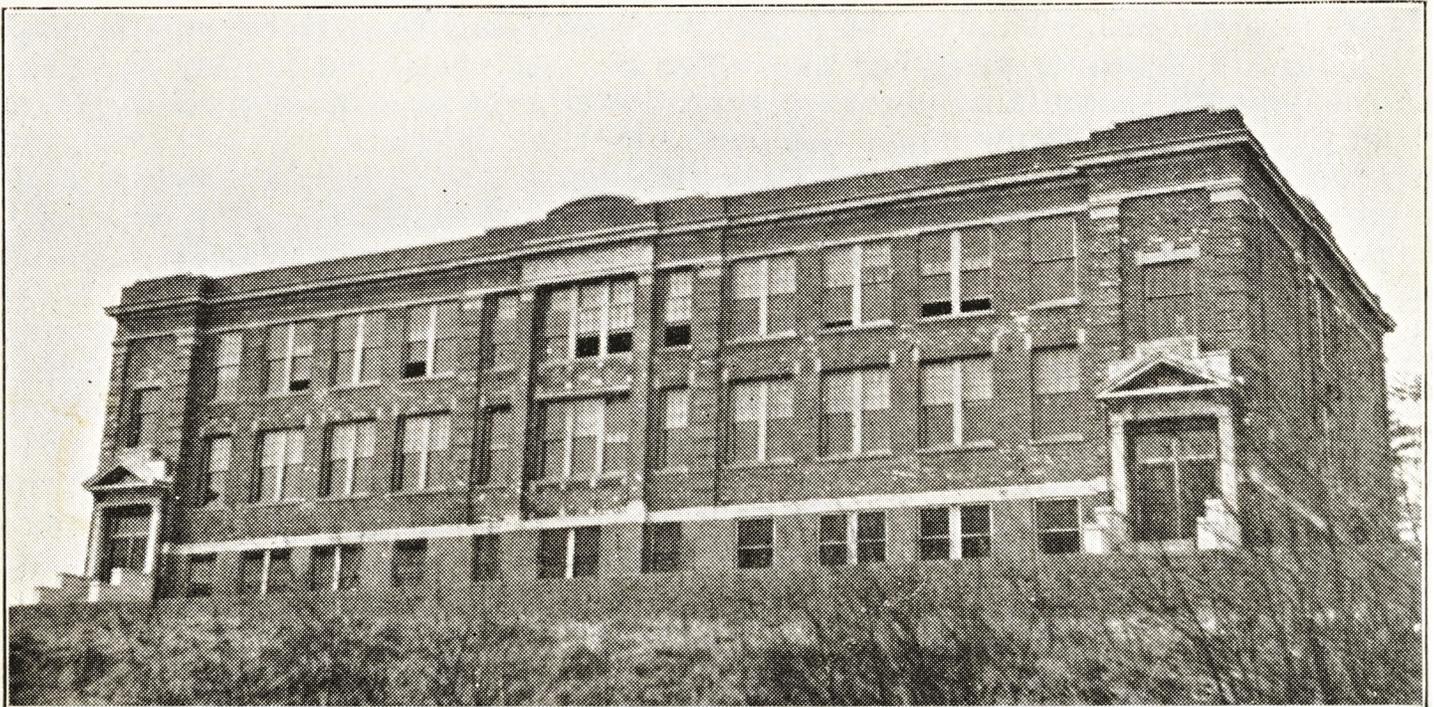
From ironing boards to ice skates, the other aisle of the old store also had plenty to offer. Circa 1950.

specialization in local retailing. The proliferation of both traditional and higher-tech products for inside and outside the home demanded shelf and sidewalk space that pushed out lines of business such as decorative lighting and sporting goods. It surprises more than a few to learn that at different points in its history, bicycles, fishing tackle, diving gear—even hunting rifles and ammunition—were regular stock items at Wanamaker.

Wanamaker Hardware thrived by maintaining a traditional hometown atmosphere while never losing sight of market changes, ranging from power tools and equipment to whimsical and practical small items displayed by the cash register. Mark and John Wanamaker leave their customers with countless fond memories of their half-century at the helm of their family business. And they depart with the special gratitude of the community that their legacy of local service will continue. The Wanamakers were the first in the Heights to voice a hearty welcome to Shattuck's. ❖

---

# Ottoson Middle School Centennial



The original building of the Junior High School West, present-day Ottoson Middle School, was completed in 1921. At their peak, there were also three other junior high schools operating simultaneously in Arlington: Junior High Centre, Junior High East (later Gibbs), and Junior High Industrial Arts; the latter's curriculum evolved first into programs at Arlington High School, then into the Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School.

*By Richard A. Duffy*

Arlington's first purpose-built junior high school turned 100 in 2021. Originally named Junior High School West, its construction represented full confirmation by the Town of Arlington that its experiment with the junior high school educational model had proven successful.

In 1915, Arlington became an early adopter of the junior high school movement in Massachusetts. With the current high school location set to open that September, the opportunity to easily repurpose the 1894 former high school building at the corner of Academy and Maple streets accelerated the decision to introduce a junior high school. Without this infrastructure, there might have been prolonged debates about moving away from educating grades one through eight in grammar schools.

The siting for Junior High West resulted from another idled piece of municipal infrastructure. The town-owned large parcel had been used for many decades as a source of gravel for street construction. It was known as "Crusher Lot" because of the steam-powered stone crusher located there, and that name endures in the Crusher Woods, rising behind the Ottoson School.

When it opened its doors to 209 seventh and eighth graders on September 26, 1921 (a delayed date due to construction-labor issues), Junior High West had twelve classrooms, with ten occupied. There were nine permanent teachers, and three

others (sewing, drawing, and science) who divided their time with Junior High Centre. The two unoccupied classrooms were used temporarily to relieve crowding at the nearby Locke School.

The population surge of the 1920s propelled other educational changes. Capacity constraints at Arlington High School led to moving grade nine to the junior highs in 1923; this "3-3" plan continued until 1960. In 1928, Junior High East opened while a major addition to Junior High West was underway. Despite "the junior high plan" having become mainstream among larger school districts in Massachusetts, debates persisted in Arlington of its value into the 1930s, focused on the higher cost of the model versus that of grammar schools.

In 1972, Junior High West was re-named in memory of its principal since 1938, A. Henry Ottoson. It transformed from a junior high to a middle school curriculum in 1989, a change that took place over 20 years after this concept was first discussed by the Arlington School Committee. That same year the Gibbs Junior High (formerly "the East") closed. It reopened as Gibbs Middle School for sixth graders in 2018.

In its centennial year, Ottoson enrolls approximately 900 students in grades seven and eight. And nearly a half-century after changing its name to the Ottoson, the battle cry of older alumni can still be heard: "West is best!" ❖

## Upcoming Lectures

Our regular location for our Tuesday 7:30 p.m. programs will be the Masonic Temple, 19 Academy Street (disabled access is at rear).



Tuesday, October 26

### WHILE YOU WERE AWAY: A TRIO OF DRAMATIC CHANGES

- Chuck Kraemer:  
Reimagining the Smith Museum
- Sara Lundberg:  
New role for the Assembly Room
- Robert Brazile:  
Geo-Thermal Climate Control for the Jason Russell House

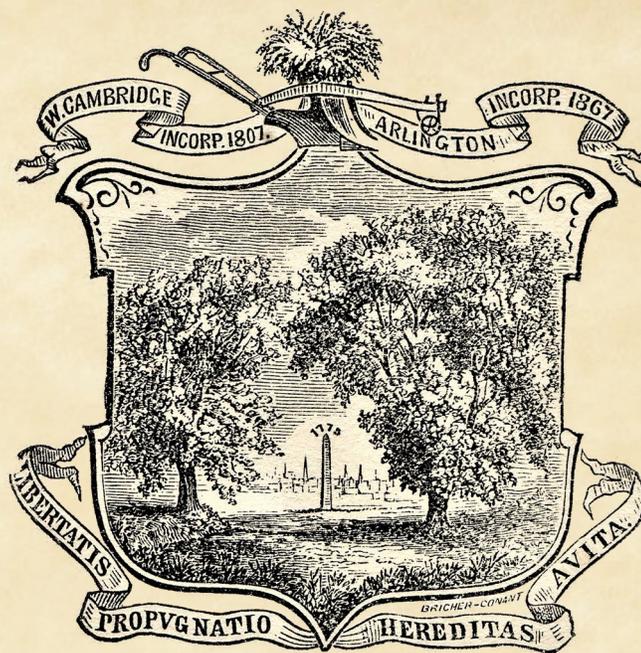


Tuesday, November 30

### BULLET-RIDDLED ARTIFACTS: CURATED OBJECTS OF MEMORY

Joel Bohy,  
Historic Arms & Militaria Expert

Gathering scholars and technologists in conflict archaeology, forensics, and material culture, Bohy led a multi-year study of battle damage at historic houses. The Jason Russell House was at its heart, revealing a surprising amount of new information.



## 150th Anniversary of Arlington's Town Seal

On March 4, 1871, the Town of Arlington adopted its first official seal, an event that could be considered the finishing touch to its change of identity from original incorporation in 1807 as the independent town of West Cambridge, to re-incorporating as Arlington in 1867.

Although Massachusetts law did not mandate municipal seals until 1899, this legislation merely followed a flourishing of such emblems of civic pride in the nineteenth century. Arlington's elaborately notched shield and its undulating banners disregarded the traditional circular shape of seals, instead presenting a floating design of neo-heraldic expression. The shield is helmed by a plow and sheaf of grain, symbolizing Arlington's renown as a center of agriculture.

The central image blends realism and symbolism in a view looking east down Massachusetts Avenue near the border of its first "mother town" of Cambridge. The pair of trees were still standing in 1871, proudly referred to as Arlington's "Gateway Elms." A large section of Charlestown had become part of West Cambridge in 1842, and the depiction of the Bunker Hill Monument may recognize that heritage. The placement of the year 1775 in the heavens lends a sense of honoring the lives lost at the start of the path to national independence. Lastly, the metropolitan skyline in the far background suggests the places from which Arlington came to be settled and grow into its own.

The originator of the seal's design is unknown; the signature Bricher-Conant indicates the prominent Boston engraving company that executed the final artwork.

The Latin motto has been translated variously as "The defense of liberty is our ancestral heritage," and "Let us be zealous to defend our inherited liberty." Google Translate renders an ultra-compact version: "Liberty's ancestral heritage." Perhaps it's time to crowd-source input from classics scholars for yet more takes on its meaning.

– Richard A. Duffy



Scenic farewell. On September 8, 2021, the day "Wanamaker" was removed from the 1953 storefront, a well-wisher stopped by in his 1952 Ford Customline Victoria.

## Contact Us

Office Hours:  
Closed due to COVID-19

7 Jason Street  
Arlington, MA 02476-6410

(781) 648-4300  
contact@arlingtonhistorical.org

Visit us on the web at  
www.arlingtonhistorical.org



## Menotomy Minutes

Editor: Richard A. Duffy

Layout: Elisabeth Carr-Jones

Contributors: Richard A. Duffy,  
Sara Lundberg, Carolyn Parsons,  
George Parsons

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

Lady's ring. Moss agate set in pearls.  
1854.



Arlington Historical Society  
7 Jason Street  
Arlington, MA 02476-6410

PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE