Fire and the Future of Blood Farm

by Electa Kane Tritsch

When Groton’s historic Blood Farm was destroyed by fire on December 29, 2013, an important landmark was lost. Freedom’s Way’s Farmer’s Voices Oral Histories include an interview with Barney Blood in 2012, conducted by Tritsch as part of a project to preserve the agricultural history of Groton. Following the fire Electa Kane Tritsch met with the Blood family to provide the following update.

It takes about two minutes sitting with the Blood family of Groton to recognize that they’re a team – a deep-rooted team.

I had interviewed patriarch Elliot L. Blood Jr., now 90, two years ago for an agricultural study. Now I was back, sitting with Barney, as everyone knows him; his best-wife-a-man-ever-had Doris, and son Dick who manages the slaughterhouse that has been the family business for six generations. Between that first interview and now, a heart operation and a devastating fire have changed the landscape of family and property, but both are still standing strong.

Barney Blood remembers he was sitting by the same window late at night on December 29th when a face appeared, warning that there was fire down the way.

“You could see the flame shooting up,” he remembers. “It was awful.”

Fire apparatus from four towns could do little to put out the blaze of unknown origin, which apparently started small but had found its way to a small space heater where the gas fed the flame. “Just like a blowtorch,” Dick commented. “It only stopped when there was nothing left to burn.”

Today, collapsed roof sections and a scoured interior testify to the fire’s intensity. There is nothing left of the building that contained the processing plant, smoke house, meat lockers and retail operation except cinderblock walls and concrete floor.

The impact on the small local community was immediate and went continued on page 6
Management Plan Update: 
Great Things Happening in 2014

The Freedom’s Way Heritage Association (FWHA) is in the process of completing a required management plan, based on its enabling Federal legislation requirements. The Management Plan will describe the policies, strategies, guidelines, and recommended actions to be implemented by FWHA and its partners over the next ten to fifteen years. The Management Planning Committee and consultant, Heritage Strategies, have been busy. Since the beginning of the New Year, there have been a series of activities involving data collection, brainstorming meetings, and initial field windshield tours in our Massachusetts and New Hampshire communities. As FWHA transitions from the first phase of Management Plan development into another a significant amount of work remains to be done. The team is discovering and documenting new heritage resources and cultural activities daily. We will be sharing our findings with the 45 towns of Freedom’s Way, partners and constituents, both private and public, in the next phase. We look forward to your input and support.

Planned Activities for the Next 3–4 Months

The next four months will be the most critical phase of the development of the Management Plan. We will be focused on understanding our existing baseline and conducting a review of the wide range of existing historic, cultural, natural, scenic, recreational, and interpretive resources within the National Heritage Area. Once complete, the effort will transition to working with our partners to define the vision, goals, and potential opportunities for the heritage area. At certain milestones, we will be conducting partnership and public workshop events geared to obtain input and assistance in order to help FWHA define programs and projects within the heritage area during the next 3 to 15 years. The dates of the workshops will be announced in the coming months.

Feedback obtained through the workshops will be used to develop a series of strategies and alternatives for consideration and implementation. The Management Planning Committee and Heritage Strategies will prepare a set of draft strategies with the potential to address interpretive, education, visitation, and preservation enhancements. The draft alternatives and strategies will build upon and complement existing initiatives and the interests and capabilities of our partners.

Future Activities

The completion of a draft Management Plan is anticipated in early fall. Once published, partners and the public will have a final opportunity to supply comments to the draft. Once approved by the Freedom’s Way Board of Directors the plan will be released to the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior for their approval.

For additional information, please go to our web site at www.freedomsway.org or contact our office at 978-772-3654.

Management Plan Survey

As part of the Management Planning process Freedom’s Way Heritage Association created an on-line survey. Designed to provide information about our current activities the survey provides insight into future program and project development.

What Have We Learned to Date?

Overwhelmingly respondents value the heritage area’s natural resources including the rivers, landscapes, viewsheds and vegetation that make the region unique. Historic buildings and structures are important, as are the stories that link history to the present.

Favorite recreational activities are walking and hiking and respondents are willing to travel a great distance (up to fifty miles) to visit sites and attend programs. This is not surprising given that the Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area is 994 square miles in size!

Your feedback is Welcome!

Constituent input is an important component of the management planning process. The brief survey can be accessed on the FWNHA website, www.freedomsway.org. Please consider contributing your ideas and comments.
AUTHOR CONVERSATIONS

Crossed Swords & Job Shattuck’s Blood
February 23rd, 2:00-3:30 pm
Gary Shattuck, author of Artful and Designing Men, presents compelling evidence that past accounts of Shays’ Rebellion were somehow in error, providing the opportunity for historical events to be rewritten. Come discover how, Job Shattuck, well-respected veteran transitioned from peaceful town father to protest leader. Registration required.

Lawrence Library
Main Street, Pepperell, MA

VANISHING LANDSCAPES

Beneath Your Feet
April 25th, 10:00 am
Rain Date: April 26th
Join archeologist Kimberly Connors-Hughes as we look at the archeological remains of selected sites on the Trail Through Time in North Acton. What are we losing as the contour of the land changes?
Park at the end of Wheeler Lane off Route 27, or cul-de-sac on North end of Mildam Road, and take trail to Wheeler Lane.

Hidden History: Exploring Changing Urban Landscapes
May 22nd, 7:00 pm
Rain Date: April 26th
Four centuries deep, the landscape we live in today is packed with subtle clues. Reading these clues, the truth can be separated from legend for a clear understanding of a landscape’s history. Join us for a virtual exploration as historians Ryan D. Hayward, Preservation Collaborative, and Dee Morris, Historic Connection, discuss two historic neighborhoods in Medford & Malden.
Malden Public Library
36 Salem Street, Malden, MA

Seeking Wildness and Writing About It
March 29nd, 9:00 am – Noon
Explore Thoreau’s old neighborhood, walking where he once did, guided by author and naturalist Corinne H. Smith. Thoreau Farm Birthplace
341 Virginia Road, Concord, MA

Meet Henry David Thoreau
April 23rd, 7:00–8:30 pm
Join Thoreau (aka Richard Smith) for selected readings from Walking, followed by lively conversation on Thoreau’s ideas.
Lunenburg Public Library
1023 Mass Ave., Lunenburg, MA

Henry David Thoreau’s Western Journey: A Transcendental Travelogue
May 15th, 7:00–8:30 pm
Enjoy a travelogue tracing Thoreau’s last journey from Massachusetts to Minnesota, guided by Corinne H. Smith.
Acton Memorial Library
486 Main Street, Acton, MA

Thoreau on Slavery in America
June 12th, 7:00–8:30 pm
Historical interpreter Richard Smith will reprise Thoreau’s lecture Slavery in Massachusetts, delivered on July 4, 1854.
Maynard Public Library
77 Nason Street, Maynard, MA

Walking with Thoreau
July 10th
5:30 pm – At the Market
6:30-7:30 pm – At the Meeting House
Speak with Thoreau/Richard Smith at the Shirley Farmers Market. Then enjoy a reprise of Walking at the Shirley Meeting House.
Farmers Market & Meeting House
The Shirley Common, Shirley, MA

2 days, 2 places
WALDEN TO WACHUSETT WEEKEND
September 13th & 14th
From sunrise on the shores of Walden Pond to sunset atop Mt Wachusett, come celebrate Thoreau in two special places. Parking/entrance fees apply. DCR Walden Pond State Reservation, Concord, MA & Mt. Wachusett State Reservation, Princeton, MA

Thoreau’s Autumnal Tints
October 7th, 7:00–8:30 pm
Michael Frederick, Executive Director of the Thoreau Society, will offer a lively exploration of Thoreau’s fascination with the New England landscape and seeing Autumn’s beauty.
Reuben Hoar Library
41 Shattuck Street, Littleton, MA

For full listing and details of programs, please visit www.freedomsway.org
Patriot’s Paths – The Untold Story

Locally we can go deep into our history, and regionally we can go broad – crossing our town borders to collect evidence and provide context for understanding how each community in Freedom’s Way contributes to a larger, richer story of the Revolution. Working together now, we can better appreciate how our towns worked together then in united resistance to Britain.

—Jayne Gordon, Director of Education
Massachusetts Historical Society

With generous support from the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati, the Patriot’s Paths initiative worked with volunteer researchers from ten Massachusetts towns (Acton, Arlington, Bolton, Leominster, Medford, Pepperell, Shirley, Sudbury, Townsend and Westford) during the past year to research untold stories of ordinary people in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. These stories provide a remarkable record of New England life in the late eighteenth century and will form the foundation for future research.

Launched by the Freedom’s Way Heritage Association in 2013, Patriot’s Paths provides volunteers with expertise, networking opportunities and research methodologies that use local and national archives. Participants work with advisors from the American Antiquarian Society, Massachusetts Historical Society, and Minute Man National Historical Park, who share techniques on the use of vital, tax, valuation, diary, letter, and military records.

The researchers, an enthusiastic group of sleuths, include representatives from historical commissions and societies, re-enactors, preservation planners, interpreters, and educators. During the year they attended workshops, investigated interpretive resources, and conducted individual research.

Historian Mary Fuhrer serves as the Patriot’s Paths research and story coach. She assists volunteers as they research primary documents to create remarkable local stories highlighting individuals who were called to action in the years leading up to the alarm on April 19th. More than fifteen stories are in development and include: an ambitious young farmer charged with filling his local militia’s ranks; a young mother whose husband would be the first to die in the battle at the North Bridge in Concord; a stiff-necked loyalist minister; and a widow forced to beg for the town’s aid following her husband’s death to whom talk of liberty and slavery must have rung hollow.

In 2014, Freedom’s Way is pleased to have an opportunity to work with additional communities as we embark on the second phase of the project, Patriot’s Paths: The Untold Stories. Together we will broaden the documentary evidence of this unique period in American history — creating a richer, local, human story of how “ordinary” farmers and their families acted decidedly and prepared thoroughly for the American Revolution — changing the course of history.

Patriot’s Paths has enhanced our sense of place in history. Through this collaborative regional outreach our town has realized that we were among the first to take the risk of putting our sentiments into our written town records. We did not follow our neighbors blindly but chose to stand against tyranny as Acton.

— Kimberly Connors-Hughes
Iron Work Farm, Acton, MA

Visit www.freedomsway.org to read two Tea Stories from Medford, MA and Milford, NH.
SPOTLIGHT – Medford Historical Society

Partnerships are at the core of Freedom’s Way Heritage Association’s work to preserve and enhance the natural, cultural and historic resources of the heritage area. Local historical societies are important allies in our work and we are pleased to highlight the Medford Historical Society in this newsletter.

The Medford Historical Society is a place for those who love Medford’s history. However, in an effort to remind the public of their wonderful and curious collections documenting the cultural and material history of Medford, they recently added the title of “Museum” to their name. Come visit the Medford Historical Society & Museum any Sunday between 12-4 PM at 10 Governors Avenue.

Programs Spring 2014

Clock Talk and Appraisal
Wednesday, March 26 | 7:00 pm
Bob Frishman who founded Bell-Time Clocks in 1992 has repaired over 7000 clocks and sold more than 1600 vintage timepieces. In this lecture, Mr. Frishman will introduce the art and history of clocks and spend some time appraising your pieces at the end.

Antique Appraisal Afternoon
Saturday, April 5 | 1:00-3:00 pm
Do you ever wonder what that little chair in the corner of your garage is worth? Dust off your precious objects and bring them in to be appraised by professional appraisers from Kaminski Auctions of Beverly. This is a fundraiser for the Medford Historical Society & Museum.

Paul Revere’s Midnight Ride The Myth & the Man
Wednesday, April 16 | 7:00 pm
All of Medford knows that Revere stopped in the square during his infamous ride. Mr. Frank Rigg, a former Director of the Paul Revere House in Boston’s North End and retired curator of the JFK Library, will speak about the impact and legacy of Revere’s historic ride.

The Abolitionists: A Documentary Screening and Discussion
Monday, April 28 | 7:00 pm
“The Abolitionists” vividly brings to life the struggles of the men and women who led the battle to end slavery. At the showing, clips from the documentary will be show followed by a discussion. Hosted by Liz Ammons, Harriet H. Fay Professor of Literature, Tufts University.

For more information on the Medford Historical Society & Museum, visit www.medfordhistorical.org.

Fruitlands Museum Turns 100

On Saturday, June 21, 2014, Fruitlands Museum will kick off a year-long celebration of its 100th birthday with its Centennial Celebration – a day filled with children’s craft activities, curator talks, artist demonstrations, live music, refreshments and more. The next day, Sunday, June 22, the Museum will host a Farm-to-Fork Dinner in the field alongside the Native American Museum. Fireside Catering, part of the Webber Restaurant Group, will cater the dinner, which will feature locally sourced food. Details are available at www.fruitlands.org/solsticedinner.

September will bring an exhibit called 100 Objects, 100 Stories, 100 Years at Fruitlands, along with a companion book by the same name. The book and exhibit tell the story of Fruitlands’ first 100 years by showcasing the most popular 100 objects in the Museum’s collections and stories written by Museum members and guests.

Supporters can help fund the publication of the book on the online fundraising platform Kickstarter, now through February 23. The Museum will also host a four-day guided bus tour of the Hudson River Valley in September to explore the landscape painters whose work is included in Fruitlands’ large collection. Details for all centennial activities can be found at www.fruitlands.org.
well beyond economics, rallying family friends and concerned neighbors, local officials and long-time customers to offer all sorts of help. Even a month later, inquisitive passers-by stop for commemorative snapshots of the derelict building. George Moore, chair of Groton’s Agricultural Commission, is an avid fan of Blood Farm meat. “It’s aged properly and always delicious,” he commented. “It goes without saying that this is an important institution in the New England agricultural scene. Barney himself is an icon as well.”

It is early days yet, in planning terms, since the fire shut down 90% of the family’s business. Insurance adjusters, structural engineers, lawyers, Town boards, state representatives, USDA agents all have roles in the process of determining whether the business – one of only three USDA certified slaughterhouses in the region – will reopen. Blood Farm employs about a dozen workers, but dozens more livestock farmers, industry-related suppliers and truckers, retail and wholesale clients have been affected. For the once-a-year deer hunter who looks to Blood Farm as one of the only local plants that handles game, to the restauranteurs who prize the quality of the Farm’s locally raised meats, to a range of religious groups and research institutions that require specialized handling or products, the shut-down of operations has had a drastic impact.

Another factor influences the family’s decision to build or not rebuild. They have deep roots in West Groton’s history and those are very important. Richard Blood came to Groton about 1661 and settled in West Groton soon after. By the late 1800s Barney Blood’s great-grandfather lived in the ca. 1830 Federal house where Barney and Doris still live. He had a small dairy herd but, as Barney tells the story, the elder Blood also owned a few pigs, which he slaughtered from time to time down back. Neighbors began asking for his services but he was warned that new 20th century health regulations required licensing. Not one to pass up an economic opportunity over a piece of paper, Charles Edmund Elliot Blood became one of the first federally licensed slaughterers in Massachusetts.

He built his first proper slaughterhouse building in 1906 and over time, dairying was replaced by meat processing as the family business. When the smoke cleared from December 29th’s disastrous fire, that small, often-renovated original building stood untouched, an unexpected symbol of the family’s century-old business. The 1906 slaughterhouse, late 1800s stock barn, and the strong-featured 1830 brick house that anchors the 80-acre property together preserve the history of Blood Farm on the Groton landscape. The 1970s processing plant now standing roofless in the background seems a replaceable afterthought.

It is not an inexpensive afterthought. “We’re talking, soup to nuts here, a million dollars,” Dick Blood calculates. The family’s final decisions still depend on insurance settlements, state funding and federal support. But Barney draws an unexpected lesson from the crisis.

“Many people depend on us,” he muses. “I didn’t really appreciate that until the cards started coming, the phone calls…. We have lots of support.”

Dick is more down to earth. “Think of this: we sold 325 standing rib roasts alone on December 23rd. That doesn’t include any of the other cuts and the hams, the pork roasts. Since the fire we haven’t sold a thing.” He shifts impatiently. “I just want to go back to work.”

Barney’s next comment seems at first irrelevant.

“You know my favorite president? Harry S. Truman. He was a farmer, you know. ‘The buck stops here.’ That’s what he said.”

Electa Kane Tritsch is the principal of Oakfield Research of Concord, MA and specializes in historical research and cultural resource management planning.
Annual Meeting

Freedom’s Way held its Annual Meeting at the Concord Art Association on October 20, 2013. Prior to the meeting, attendees were treated to a tour of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery’s Authors Ridge by Jayne Gordon, Mass Historical Society and Corinne Smith, Thoreau historian and author, and the Old Hill Burying Ground by Lou Sideris, Minute Man National Historical Park. New Directors Tim Castner, Social Studies Teacher, Nashoba Regional High School, Wyona Lynch-McWhite, Executive Director, Fruitlands Museum and Sharon Bernard, Director, Fitchburg Public Library were welcomed. Outgoing President Peter Webb was thanked for his services and Margaret Bagdonas was welcomed as the new president.

For more photos of the event, visit www.freedomsway.org/friends/news.html

Looking Ahead to Patriot’s Day 2014 at Minute Man National Historical Park

Each year visitors travel by the thousands to Minute Man National Historical Park to celebrate Patriot’s Day, a special Massachusetts state holiday commemorating the opening battle of the American Revolutionary War, April 19, 1775. The holiday—officially observed on Monday, April 21, 2014—and the entire weekend, is celebrated with parades, reenactments and commemorative ceremonies.

For more information on events, visit MMNHP at http://www.nps.gov/mima/patriots-day.htm or The Battle Road at www.battleroad.org/