

# NEWS-LETTER

## DEDHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

PO BOX 215 612 HIGH STREET DEDHAM MA 02027-0215

Tel: 781-326-1385 E-Mail: [Society@DedhamHistorical.org](mailto:Society@DedhamHistorical.org) Web Site: [www.DedhamHistorical.org](http://www.DedhamHistorical.org)

Library Hours: by appointment; Museum Hours: Tuesday – Friday 12 pm – 4 pm

Both are open even-dated Saturdays: 1 pm – 4 pm

### JULY 2016

## MOTHER NATURE COOPERATES FOR SPRING SOIRÉE

Pleasant temperatures and sunshine arrived just in time for the Dedham Historical Society & Museum's Spring Soirée at the historic home of Anne and John Underhill. Over 120 guests enjoyed food, wine, and friendship. A special thank you to our hosts for the use of their home and spectacular gardens; Stanton Lyman for his architectural notes on the house; and *Chiara* for the amazing food. Special recognition also goes to the Worthington Committee, a group of women who volunteer their time and talents to organize our yearly social fundraising events. They took care of numerous details, from addressing the invitations to cleaning up after the event. The following pictures are courtesy of Patricia Hornblower.

Patrons supporting the Soirée included: Ed & Kate Cahill, Jamie Connors, Allison Durfee, Lolly & Jamie Dwinell, Andrea & David Gilmore, Kirsten & Greg Heger, Patricia Hornblower, Laurie & Bruce Rabe, Anne & Tom Underhill, and Marilyn Wales.



## A SPRINGTIME BURST OF ACTIVITY

Spring brought a number of group visits to our door, and we were happy to share highlights of our history. In May, an Advanced Placement U.S. History class from Mashpee High School visited with archivist Sandy Waxman, who showed them several documents relating to the Sacco and Vanzetti trial. Among the items that they looked at were original newspaper articles, as well as transcripts, photographs, and stenographic minutes from the trial.

In June, we hosted several third-grade classes that had recently completed units on local history. They participated in a “Then and Now” exercise, observing items that had been used in the past, including a hand-crank telephone, a candle maker, and an old-fashioned iron. The kids were intrigued by the objects and made insightful comments about the way commonplace things have changed over time. They also visited the Library/Archives, where Ms. Waxman showed them several old books, maps, and photographs.

Members of several garden clubs, including the Dedham Garden Club, visited in April to see our current exhibit, “Historic Gardens of Dedham.” In May we hosted a group from the Dedham Housing Authority as well as a group from Springhouse, a senior living facility in Jamaica Plain. While some of the visitors have lived in Dedham for many years, others were new to town and were fascinated to learn more about our rich history.



Guests from Springhouse

## LOUIS BRANDEIS: HIS CONNECTION TO DEDHAM

*“Dedham is a spring of eternal youth to me.*

*I feel newly made and ready to deny the existence of these gray hairs.”—Louis Brandeis*

Louis Brandeis (1856-1941) waxed poetic about Dedham after enjoying many summers at his house on Village Avenue. A member of the Dedham Country & Polo Club and the Dedham Historical Society, he recognized Dedham as a special place of inspiration. Among his activities, Brandeis was known for canoeing solo on the Charles River while wearing a suite and tie!

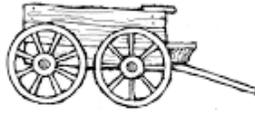
Brandeis discovered Dedham from his friend Samuel Warren, a Dedham native, whom he met while at Harvard Law School. Brandeis graduated first in their class, and Warren was second. In 1879, the two friends opened a law practice in Boston, now known as Nutter McClennen & Fish.

Brandeis practiced law in Boston for 37 years, becoming an advocate for the poor, as well as an opponent of powerful corporations and mass consumerism. Through his pioneering pro bono work, Brandeis earned the title of “the people’s attorney.”

One hundred years ago, on June 1, 1916, the U.S. Senate confirmed Brandeis’s nomination to the Supreme Court, and he became the first Jewish justice. He served for 23 years, retiring in February 1939. Brandeis is best known as a champion of labor, a social reformer, and a legal innovator.



Louis Brandeis



## FOURTH OF JULY MEMORIES



By Eleanor Palma

The Fourth of July celebrations in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were a little different from the one we will have this year. Dedham had celebrated the Fourth for decades, and most families stayed in town for the summer and were ready to join in the festivities. The exodus to the Cape and Islands had not yet begun, so teenagers were home and up for mischief.

For many years there was a small carnival in the park on the corner of East Street and Whiting Avenue, where the Middle School stands today. There were carnival rides, pony rides, games and food that drew many people. On the night before the Fourth, it was fun to meet friends there and enjoy the attractions. As darkness fell people would start for East Dedham Square. It was an easy walk for the young people, just a few steps down Mt. Vernon Street to High Street.

In East Dedham Square, before urban renewal, there were a great many stores. A vacant lot behind the buildings near Mother Brook was the site of a huge bonfire. It was built by members of the community and was quite sturdy, with wood blocks and logs holding it all together. Mill Lane would be closed to traffic. Around 10 pm, the wood would be doused with kerosene and the bonfire was lit. It gradually grew into a magnificent torch and the heat would drive people back. As the fire began to sputter, people would start moving up to Oakdale Square for the big event, the burning of the wagons.

It is not known when this event first began, but it was of long duration, dating back to the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The practice began when Dedham was still a farming community. Greenlodge, Riverdale, the Manor and the end of East Street past the Endicott Rotary had its share of farms. Young boys and young men would “find” some farm wagons and hide them. There were still many wooded areas where the wagons could be hidden. One popular place was the woods near Princess Street, now Rustcraft Road. As the holiday drew near, the wagons were filled with paper, cardboard, wood and other flammable material. The boys would gradually move the wagons closer to Oakdale Square, hiding them in yards and garages.

As the clock neared midnight, thousands of people would gather in the Square, anticipating the event. You would hear the noise of the wagons and the boys shouting before you actually saw the wagons. There were “pushers” and “guiders” to turn the wagons toward the traffic island in the middle of the square. As the wagons got closer, lit torches would be tossed in the wagons to get the fires started with a little help from kerosene. The wagons would come from all directions, including Cedar Street and Oakdale Avenue, but the most spectacular site was the wagons coming down the Sanderson Avenue Hill. A wagon careening down the hill all ablaze was a sight to see. Cheers and shouts would arise from the bystanders. The fires would crack the windows on the storefronts and melt the overhead wires, but at midnight it was all about having fun and watching a moving bonfire. The police would try to maintain order, but the boys always managed to disappear before they were caught. As the fire burned down, the crowd would slowly disperse and the fire department would come to put out the fires. The next morning the wagons would be gone, but you could see the melted tar and burnt wires.

By the early sixties, the police chief had banned the wagon burning and repeatedly warned that those who indulged in it would be prosecuted. It was no longer seen as a harmless prank, for now the practice resulted in damaged property and even injury. For a few years there were wagon burnings in the Manor, but people were concerned about safety and property damage. Eventually, the wagon burning melted into history.



**DHS IS A BLUE STAR MUSEUM**

The Dedham Historical Society & Museum is joining museums across the country to support America’s military families throughout the summer. As part of the Blue Star Museums program, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Society will offer free museum admission to active duty military personnel and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Society President Andrea Gilmore said, “The Dedham Historical Society & Museum is pleased to join in the Blue Star initiative by welcoming military families during the summer of 2016.”

## THE WATER LILY CHOSEN AS 2016 DEDHAM POTTERY DESIGN

The Water Lily design on Dedham Pottery pre-dates the move of the Robertson's pottery business from Chelsea, MA to Dedham in 1896. The earliest antique examples of the Water Lily design were made at the Chelsea Pottery U. S. and show a raised border design, with "CPUS" in an impressed cloverleaf. The company literature always refers to this pattern as Water Lily, not "Pond Lily," a term which erroneously found its way into certain modern literature about the design.

That the Water Lily design survived from that early moment in the pottery's history until the closure of the business in 1943 confirms its enduring popularity. It is likely that specific elements of the water lily design were borrowed from its common appearance in Japanese art that was popular during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Water Lily design has always been a component of collections of antique Dedham Pottery, and collectors today will find this museum replica the perfect complement to their own displays. The Society is currently taking orders for this plate. To

order, please see the special insert inside the newsletter.



**OPEN SATURDAYS: The DHS Museum, Gift Shop, and Library/Archives are open on even dated Saturdays from 1 pm – 4 pm.**

***This newsletter is a benefit of DHS membership. For membership information, call 781-326-1385 or visit [www.dedhamhistorical.org](http://www.dedhamhistorical.org).***

### WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS

Sean & Michelle Brennen

Denis P. Coghlan

Cindy & Scott Davidson

Christina DeYoung

Donna Ledwide & Kevin Castellanos

Sami & Jean Makhouta

Elizabeth McNichols & Brenda Cora

Mildred Mejia

Karen O'Brien

Kate & Michael Sweeny

Emily Torres

### PLEASE THANK OUR CORPORATE SUPPORTERS

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### DEDHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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