The Bidwell House Museum

Newsletter **Spring 2012**

The Bidwell House Museum is a New England heritage landmark that uses the history of its land, house, and collections to re-imagine, re-create, restore, and research colonial and early American life in Western Massachusetts.

History Talks and More This Summer—Save the Dates!

Thanks to grant funding from the Tyringham and Monterey Cultural Councils, the museum will celebrate the third annual Township No. 1 Day, taking place on Saturday, July 7th. The popular free community day will feature local musicians, crafts demonstrations, walks, talks, baking contests and children's activities. It's a wonderful day to bring the whole family to the Bidwell House.

The festive Garden Party Gala will take place on Saturday, August 11, from 4 to 7 p.m. This annual event is the most important fundraiser for the museum and is a highlight of the season. The party is always held at a very special place – details of this year's location will be announced soon!

Great speakers are coming to the museum: Steven Paterwic will give a talk on the Tyringham Shakers; Yale Professor Allegra di Bonaventura will speak about working lives in colonial New England; Eric Rutkow, author of *American Canopy: Trees, Forests and the Making of a Nation*, to be published by Simon & Schuster this spring, will give a talk on the role New England trees played in bringing about American independence; and Professor John Demos will be back, by popular demand. These are just a few of the great events planned for the 2012 season. Details will be announced soon and posted on the museum website.

Forest Management at the Bidwell House Museum

The Bidwell House Museum has recently concluded a timber harvest of some of the woodlands at the museum, part of a long-term forestry program. To learn more about forest management on the museum's lands, please go to the museum's website: www.bidwellhousemuseum.org/bidwelltreeharvest.pdf.

On Saturday, June 16, at 10 a.m., Tom Ryan, Southern Berkshires Service Forester with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation will lead a walk and talk at the museum about forest management and forest health. Please join us!

"Historic Berkshires: An 18th Century Trail" Grant Received

The Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area awarded a $2,500 Partnership Grant to the Bidwell House Museum to develop an interpretive trail of 18th century houses open to the public in the Berkshires. There are six such properties, and all agreed to be supporting partners for the grant project: Berkshire Historial Society at Arrowhead, the Trustees of Reservations properties Mission House and Ashley House, the Sheffield Historical Society's Dan Raymond House, and the Great Barrington Historical Society's Dan Wheeler House. The museum will design and publish a new brochure as well as a web page to jointly promote these historic properties. The completed materials will be featured in a future issue of the newsletter.

The Plan for the City on the Hill

Township No. 1, Tyringham and Monterey, The Original "Hinterland Settlement"

Part 6: Carving a Settlement from the Wilderness

This is the sixth part in a series of articles about the early history of Township No. 1 and the Bidwell House Museum property.

Where did the early settlers come from and why did they decide to settle here? Many of the pioneer residents came from the already built-up areas in eastern Massachusetts that had been established over 100 years earlier and were heavily developed by the standards of the day. The land there had all been divided up and "improved" generations earlier and there was no room for new or expanded families. Homesteads needed to be large to sustain a family. People had already settled in the best farming areas along the Connecticut River, so when the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony decided in the mid-1730s to offer land grants in the western region along the disputed boundary with New York, many families were ready to take up the challenge.

Wealthy land-owners, merchants and investors were given the land in the four Housatonic townships. Most of the original proprietors of Township No. 1 came from Watertown, Mass. A few proprietors' families from Watertown settled here, but in most cases the proprietors sold or rented the land to settlers who would do the actual work. According to the terms of the grant, the township was to be laid out into about 60 (eventually 63) house lots and four public lots. Each house lot had about forty to sixty acres of land, the minimum needed to support one family on a subsistence basis. Within five years, each house lot was required to have a house at least "18 foot square x 7 foot stud" and "to improve five acres either by plowing or mowing or planting same with English grass."

That was certainly easier said than done, especially on the cold rocky ridges of Township No. 1. Imagine you are a frontiersman in this rocky wilderness in the middle 1700s. Where do you start? Set up camp and start clearing a small home site close to the road. Dig a shallow well for water and a pit latrine for wastes. Cut down large trees using axes or two-man saws. Maybe use some logs and limbs to make a primitive lean-to shelter. Dig a small cellar hole (used for storing fruits and vegetables) and build a rough stone foundation and chimney. Erect a small one-room house with a fireplace for cooking. If you're lucky, purchase a few panes of English glass for window panes. The work is all done by hand, with the help of family, friends, neighbors, and tradesmen working for barter since there was very little cash money. Skills and materials had to be shared by and with the community.

Meanwhile, you still need to hunt and fish for food and cut and split about five to ten cords of wood for cooking and for warmth. Women and young children forage for fruits, berries, roots and whatever else they can find to eat, cook meals, bake bread, do laundry, spin yarn, weave cloth, and prepare and plant a garden to grow food for the winter. Did your family try to stay in the "house" that first winter, or did you decide to stay with friends?

By the second year, you are clearing more of the land. An acre of woodland – a little over 200 feet square – could have 50 or more mature trees that you have to cut down. Then buck the logs into sections that could be hauled by oxen over that rutted dirt road to Brewer's Saw Mill a mile away to be milled into posts, beams, and clapboards. All those tree stumps need to be removed – usually by burning – and the cleared land plowed for planting of "English grass." You'll probably need to barter with a plowman and his team of oxen to do the plowing. That grass will feed some animals – a cow or goat, a horse if you're lucky. The chickens scratch around for themselves, or get a little of the corn left over after it's ground up in your mortar and pestle. Put up a lean-to barn and brush fence to enclose the animals; your neighbor will not be happy if your cow wanders over and starts grazing on his pasture. A good fence does make a good neighbor, to paraphrase Robert Frost.

By the third spring, your first crop of rocks is coming to the surface of your newly plowed field. Those rocks had been well insulated under a couple feet of forest litter, moss, humus and topsoil, but now that you've plowed, the frost is acting on them. Get a long limb to use as lever to pry out the rocks, and use a sled, or "stone boat" pulled behind your friend's draft horse to skid the rocks to a pile on the edge of the field. You can use those rocks to start building a stone fence next winter.

Somehow, amid all this hard work, you find time to raise a family and build a community. Your family gathers around the fireplace in the center of the house at the end of the day to enjoy a meal of corn, boiled meat, vegetables, cornmeal mush, washed down with cider or weak beer. On special occasions, you enjoy having succotash, a Native American meal made of corn and kidney beans cooked in bear grease. You swap stories or carve wood, while your wife and children make brooms, candles, spin thread or weave cloth. Since there is little illumination – oil lamps and candles are very expensive – you go to bed once the sun sets. You may

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Berkshire Tree Care Professionals Donate Services

Berkshire Botanical Garden organized a day of tree care at the Bidwell House Museum that resulted in $9,990 of donated arborists' work for the museum last fall. "I am enormously grateful to the five participating companies and to Berkshire Botanical Garden," said Barbara Palmer, Executive Director. "They generously provided staff and major equipment to remove dead and dangerous limbs as well as several large, aged trees near the house and walkways. This is a very large donation to the museum."

Dorthe Hviid, Director of Horticulture at the Berkshire Botanical Garden, led the organization of Arborists' Day, which is an annual tradition. She brought several staff members: Richard Demick, Scott Cores and Christine Caccamo (yes, "our" Chris Caccamo, former Bidwell resident caretaker and docent, who is now Head Gardener of Berkshire Botanical Garden. Congratulations on the new position, Chris!). The Garden's Executive Director, Molly Boxer, joined the event for a tour of the work and lunch.

Participating arborists were Steve Adams of Treecology, who initiated the donation when he performed music at the museum the prior summer and noticed the considerable need; Ron Yaple, Gary and Tony of Race Mountain Tree Services, who also planned the workday; two staff members from Webster Ingersoll; Winthrop Barrett of Barrett Tree Service, who wins the prize for most impressive equipment brought with his 35 ton crane; and Tom Whalen and Butch Namiot of Whalen Nursery, who also donated and planted two Green Mountain Sugar Maples to replace dear old trees that had to be removed. Thank you!

Everyone was treated to a hearty lunch outdoors, thanks to Jan and George Emmons, Sally and Steve Pullen, and Barbara Tryon – and Mother Nature, who provided her finest Indian Summer weather.

Please call these terrific companies if you need tree work done:
Barrett Tree Service, Inc., Sheffield
Race Mountain Tree Services, Inc., Sheffield
Treecology, Tyringham
Webster Ingersoll, Sheffield
Whalen Nursery, Great Barrington

The Plan for the City on the Hill: Carving a Settlement from the Wilderness ... *continued from page 2*

sleep on a "jack bed" built into the corner of the room so it needs only one corner post. You pull a trundle bed out from under your jack bed for your children, or they sleep on mats in the loft.

You may occasionally join your neighbors at Jackson's or Brewer's Tavern and enjoy a rum, small beer, or cider. (You don't drink the water; that's how you get sick.) You earn a little money by working to improve and maintain the roads – 1 pound 15 shillings for three days labor on the roads, and an extra 15 shillings if you use a pair of oxen. Your wife boils down the fireplace ashes to make lye for soap. Sometimes she cooks the remainder down to make potash for use in fulling wool or for sale.

And your family always gets into their best clothes to attend Sunday Meeting at the Meeting House on the hill and listen to a sermon by the newly-ordained Reverend Adonijah Bidwell. Life is good.

– Robert E. Hoogs, President of the Board of Trustees

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YOUNG HISTORY SCHOLAR SECTION

Museum Offers Young History Scholar Internships

Eleven local students—Sheridan McAlister, Serrin Doscher, Siobhanne Pope, Emily Halford, Gabriella Makuc, Joseph Makuc, Charlotte Lindsay, Isabel Lindsay, Catherine Twing, Jacob Edelman and Arthur Seltzer—joined the museum staff last summer as interns, continuing one of the most popular programs the museum offers, the High School Summer Internship Program.

Students participating in this program spend two weeks at the museum: in week one, the intern learns about the Bidwell family and colonial Berkshire history, the house, the property and the collection, and how docents give tours; in week two, each intern chooses a history topic to research and begins to give tours of the museum as a junior docent. Second or third year interns are sometimes offered longer internships and special project opportunities.

The 2012 season marks the seventh year of the internship program. Thanks to sponsorship by the Monterey and Tyringham Cultural Councils, as well as private sponsors and museum friends, the museum offers a $200 stipend to each intern who successfully completes the internship.

High school students with an interest in history, particularly local Berkshire colonial history, are invited to apply to become a Museum Studies Intern this summer. The application deadline is April 30, 2011. The application can be found on the museum's website at www.bidwellhouse-museum.org.

Following are research articles written by 2011 high school summer interns.

Bundling and Beige Silk:
18th Century Marriage Customs

by Catherine Twing '13

Last summer, I was lucky enough to participate in my second summer internship at the Bidwell House Museum. One day, while giving a tour to a very nice couple, the woman inquired, "I guess girls your age would be married, right?" I did not know the answer, so I did some research and became interested in the topic of courtship and marriage. I found most of my information in the books *Good Wives* by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and *The Reshaping of Everyday Life 1790-1840* by Jack Larkin. Here are some of the things I learned.

In the 18th century, nearly every girl married when she reached a suitable age. Although in the 1600s young women married in their mid teens—as was common in England—in the 18th century, women were married between the ages of 18 and 25. They married men four to five years older to ensure "reverence and obedience." A man did not usually get involved with a woman until he was able to provide for a family.

Although parents had the final say in who their daughters would marry, it was not arranged by the parents. Courtships lasted anywhere from a few months to several years. During a courtship, the two would get to know each other in an appropriate environment. One strange but common activity that took place during a courtship was a practice known as bundling. While bundling, the two would lie fully clothed in the same bed, often with a "bundling board" in between them, to see if they were compatible while staying modest. It may have been a way for parents to convince their daughter to like the man they want her to marry. It was more commonly a chance for two potential partners to be intimate without being inappropriate. Of course, many courting couples took advantage of the opportunities to be alone. When they decided to become engaged, those who could afford to would exchange gold rings. At the time, it was appropriate for either the man or the woman to propose.

Unlike today, marriages in the 18th and 19th centuries were not about love. Love was viewed as an immature, sexual emotion that was not seen as a good reason to marry nor a necessity for a successful marriage. One reason love was not important was because everyone was expected to love God more than anything else. Loving one's husband or wife might get in the way of one's relationship with God. Marriage was often entered into for reasons such as power, status, or wealth. Men also married for companionship and household help so that someone would do the housework while they were doing other work. In addition, there were legal reasons to get married. During the late 1600s, a rural Massachusetts town created a law punishing single men who wished to live independently. It became a burden on the town when able-bodied men who could be working for another family chose to live and work alone. Economically, it was wiser to have a family rather than to stay single. Widows tended to remarry shortly after their husband's passing due to the difficulty of running a household and raising a family alone. After her husband's death, a woman became the head of the household until she remarried or her sons came of age. Married women did not have property rights, but widows were often given a certain percentage of their husband's possessions or

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Bundling and Beige Silk

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wealth to take care of her family. If a man became a widower, the man would simply remarry and not much would change. Weddings held in rural New England were quiet, private events. They were usually held in the house of the bride and performed by a local clergyman. The clergyman was a symbol of the legal bond rather than a symbol of a religious bond. Guests would include the family of the bride and close neighbors. Often, if the groom's family lived a distance away, they were simply not invited. The bride typically wore simple garments of brown or beige silk, because white was not the custom at the time. In more urban places, weddings were large events with dancing and feasting that the entire neighborhood would be invited to. After the wedding, some newly married couples would visit family and friends who did not attend the wedding. Those who could afford to do so might go on a kind of honeymoon known as a "wedding tour" or "nuptial journey." Others would simply return to their occupations and begin life as a married couple.

Husbands wanted their wives to be capable, kind, and obedient. It was important for the wives to be attractive, but they were expected to be modest while in public. In God's eyes, men and women were considered equal. In society, they were not. Wives were expected to serve their husbands with almost as much dedication as they were required to serve God. Punishments for infidelity were also much harsher for women than for men. If a man was caught cheating on his wife, he and his mistress would be fined or lightly punished. If a woman was caught cheating on her husband, she and the man she was with could face death. Women were practically owned by their husbands and became one in marriage. Their names were a good example of how united they were legally. For example, if Mary Jones got married to John Brown in the 1700s, she might be called "John Brown his wife." Once married, women lost their identities, and any bit of independence they had. Although the legal bond was strong, like any other legal contract, it could be broken. Divorces could be performed in cases of adultery, desertion, neglect or cruelty.

A Lens of Clay

by Gabriella Makuc '12

The family dinners to which I'm accustomed are accident prone. Someone drops a glass cup while gesturing, the lucky one who's selected to clear the table drops a plate and it chips. Of course, the sacrificed dishware is not made by local artists. In 1750, though, that would not have been the case.

Imagine a form of art whose main use is utilitarian. Imagine a form of art that achieves beauty in balance and symmetry. Imagine a form of art in which imperfections become stunning designs. Step back to the 1700s and imagine no longer: redware.

Redware was the primary dishware of the eighteenth century; it comprised most plates, bowls, pans, cups, dye pots, and storage jars. Made of red clay, which is abundant throughout riverbeds in New England, it was shaped on a kick wheel, glazed with lead, and fired at almost 1800 degrees Fahrenheit. For added decoration, some potters would add splotches of manganese, which would produce brown or black streaks on the red surface during the firing process. Although it sounds like a long and arduous process, once a potter had established a rhythm, each pot could be molded in just a matter of minutes.

As beautiful and artful as it appears to us now, this was a survival craft to early settlers. When I first came to the Bidwell House three years ago, I was shocked to learn that redware, when chipped or broken, would be buried by the river. The colonists would then simply pay a peddler or merchant a few pennies for some more pottery. I couldn't believe that redware was treated like paper or plastic plates; it was too beautiful for that. But I've learned that in discovering this different era, it is crucial to open my mind and believe facts I never even would have imagined before. For example, potters would often only stay in the business for a few years—their shops burned down, they became exhausted, or villagers drove them and their fume-ridden ovens out of town.

When Reverend Bidwell occupied the home, redware would likely have been acquired from a close radius, as it was a local craft. However, the Bidwell House Museum today has an extraordinary collection that Hargis and Brush compiled from at least six states. A few of the potters are known, while many are anonymous; some of the state collections have identifiable similarities, while others do not. The thread that ties all of them together is their raw beauty and expression.

Through working on the redware exhibit last summer, I learned a lot, and not only about the redware itself. The day before the exhibit was to open, we were rearranging furniture and dishware in the keeping room to better display how redware would have been used and show its versatility. The set-up for a simple meal was being displayed using a table and chair, and, of course, some redware. Something about it didn't look quite right, though; it was not aesthetically pleasing. By sitting down at the table and arranging the dishware and candle as though I were really eating a meal there, everything was straightened out. Somehow, answering the logical question of what would make sense clarified the display. Perhaps that is the key to the beauty of redware: the artisans did

not think first how to make their work beautiful, but how to make it utilitarian. The beauty, which was not forced and in many cases not planned, followed suit in a subtle and stunning fashion.

Redware eventually gave way to stoneware, which was made from clay found outside of New England, and was more durable than its predecessor. However, it was still common well into the 19th century. As different as the times were in the days of Reverend Bidwell, through the lens of his dishware, we can better understand them in relation to our own daily lives.

The Queen Anne Highboy

by Arthur Seltzer '14

In the Best Parlor of The Bidwell House Museum, one of the most interesting pieces of furniture is the Queen Anne Highboy. The Highboy in the museum was built in the early to mid 18th century in New England, most likely Massachusetts. The Highboy is two pieces, the base, which consists of the bottom three drawers and legs, and the upper piece, which contains the top five drawers and the secret document drawer. The secret drawer is made to look like a piece of molding.

Though the Reverend Bidwell's death inventory does not say whether his Highboy would have had a secret document drawer or even if it was in a Queen Anne style, both are very likely. Queen Anne style furniture was coming into fashion around the 1750's when the house was built and furnished. One of the defining characteristics of most Queen Anne furniture is the S-shaped legs. It is probable that the highboy would have had the secret document drawer due to the fact that in the Reverend's day, there were no banks with safety deposit boxes or high security vaults. The actual security of this secret drawer has been debated. Seeing as a Queen Anne highboy with such a drawer would have been a very popular piece of furniture, it is very possible that this would be the first place any experienced thief would have looked.

The Best Parlor is a beautifully furnished room in the downstairs of the house next to the entry way. The exquisite paneling and paint staining in the parlor are original and quite breathtaking. In this parlor is the only fireplace in the house with its original untarnished bricks and hearth. The Queen Anne highboy fits in beautifully with the other pieces of fine furniture and the excellent woodwork.

Although in his death inventory Adonijah Bidwell had three highboys, and not all necessarily the same style, researching this specific piece of furniture took time and concentration, but was absolutely worth it. Learning more about the furnishings and history behind the house was really what made the internship as enjoyable as it was.

Crewelwork

By Emily Halford '14

The cloth bed curtains in the best chamber of the Bidwell House were embroidered with a complex design called the tree of life pattern. This piece is an example of crewelwork, a type of embroidery that was named for the slackly twisted, two-ply worsted yarn that was used. Crewelwork made its way to America with the colonists. The tree of life is a popular motif in Jacobean crewelwork in 17th century England, and this style of embroidery flourished in Colonial America in the 18th century.

Originally, needles were primarily made from bone, wood, or ivory. Embroidery was difficult because these needles were hard to maneuver. In the 16th century, the steel needle was invented. This new material made embroidery significantly easier, and therefore, much more widely used. In some English households, an embroiderer would be hired to live in the home to repair and make new embroideries, as well as to weave.

Although American embroiderers were inspired by the work done in England, American crewelwork was very unique. American designs were very simple compared to those done in England. The English also wanted intricate, flawless work—anything less was shredded and burned. American crewelwork was very open in style to reveal the hand-woven linen. Here, the work and expensive wools that went into making the linen were well appreciated. Another difference between the two styles is that English work usually used repeating patterns, while American embroidery was well balanced but rarely repeated itself. The animals, flowers, and trees found in American work were often different than those used in English work. This was simply because American embroiderers incorporated what they saw in their everyday lives into their designs, and the farmers' wives who did most of the American embroidery were exposed to different plants and animals than the professional embroiderers in England. The fact that American embroiderers were mostly farmers' wives also affected their work by forcing them to be more economical, which they accomplished by using what was called a Roumanian stitch. This stitch was useful because it wasted very little thread on the back of the work. Roumanian stitch was hardly ever found in English work.

When the industrial revolution began, roller printing and cheap woven fabrics ended the need for decoration by embroidery, and crewelwork disappeared. It is only recently that it has made a reappearance, but it is now used for recreation rather than necessity.

The Bidwell House Museum
P.O. Box 537, Monterey, MA 01245
413-528-6888 bidwellhouse@gmail.com
www.bidwellhousemuseum.org

- Read about the **early settlers** on page 2
- Know a student? Find out about **internships** for high school or college students on page 5.
- Learn about **colonial gardening**! Join the Garden Angels, the volunteer group led by Ruth Green, certified horticulturist, who tend the museum gardens. For more information, call the museum at 413-528-6888.
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