

HORSES N' HISTORY

(Proposal for a BRLA History Study Group)

At the BRLA Spring Brunch in March of 2009, the map committee presented the number 1 copy of our new trail map to the Bedford Historical Society. At the brunch a brief presentation was made that gave an overview of some of the history associated with the trail system.

During the preparation for this presentation, the map committee discussed the need to have an archive for information relating to the history of the BRLA and the trail system. The concern was expressed that we are losing valuable memories and knowledge as our older members pass on.



Subsequent discussions to consider what we might do and how we might go about developing some kind of record for the trail system have led to the development of a proposal for a history study group.

Initial discussions focused on the development of a history of just the BRLA trails. Early maps of the trail system show one room school houses, property lot lines, and owner's names. As the map committee worked with these maps in preparing the new one it was noted that it would be interesting to know some of the background associated with the different names listed on the early maps. This led to the idea of doing a study of not only the trails but of the development of the community alongside the development of the trails. From there it was an easy jump to add the idea of looking at the history of horses alongside the development of the community.

Horses have been an integral part of the history of our area for more than 400 years. The role that horses have played has changed over time. Horses have been used as modes of transportation, as engines of industry, tools of warfare, and as sources of recreation and sport. The community too has grown and changed.

History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future.

Robert Penn Warren

The question at hand then is "What would the study of horses and the development of our local community serve to accomplish?"

The concept behind the study group is that a study of the history of horses in the Bedford area parallels a study of the history of the development of the community itself. By looking at both we can learn more about ourselves and our community.

History has a funny way of slipping away. At the time, things that are considered 'historic' at some point in the future are just 'everyday'. There are often no written records of events, so the oral history and memories are lost with the passing of individuals.

It is easy in our fast paced world to be so focused on the demands of the immediate that we fail to take time to reflect on the past. This seems to be particularly true with the development of modern media formats which so powerfully compete for our attention. There has been a growing reconnection with all things local over the past few years. Producing local food and living in a sustainable way are popular themes. Many people seem to be striving for a reconnection to their local communities.

There also seems to be a longing for preserving our roots and the things from our past that make us who we are today.

We are fortunate in Bedford to not only have one, but four institutions dedicated to the preservation of local history. (Bedford Hills Historical Museum, Bedford Town Historian, John Jay State Historical Site, and the Bedford Historical Society.)

It is very hard to remember that events now long in the past were once in the future.

Maitland

The proposed history study group would consist of BRLA members and anyone interested in learning more about the history of Bedford and the local area. The group would meet once a month at which time the group would plan research projects and share findings pertaining to some aspect of local history.

Our hope is that this project will serve to accomplish several goals. We hope

1. To build greater awareness of the riding lanes and the value of horses to the community.
2. To provide a learning environment for community residents to learn about local history.
3. To create a permanent record of our history that can be handed down to the next generation.
4. To build an appreciation for the rich and interesting history of our community.
5. To provide resources to help train those interested in learning how to do local historical research.
6. To provide a centralized place for collecting resources and materials that might otherwise be destroyed when deaths occur or properties are sold.
7. To provide reference resources for the docents and historians of local historical institutions related to the contribution horses have made to the local community.
8. To enhance the public image of local historical institutions as a community resource.

As you are out on the trails this spring and summer take time to reflect on those riders and their horses that came before you. Consider the meal they had before they left the barn; the coat they wore. Where did they get the hay and oats they fed their horse? What wagon load of goods were they pulling? What race or event were they training for? What sweetheart or loved one were they on their way to visit. What fire was about to be extinguished by the pumper they pulled?

Professor Johnston often said that if you didn't know history, you didn't know anything. You were a leaf that didn't know it was part of a tree.

~Michael Crichton, *Timeline*

It is our hope that interesting findings produced by this study group will be published in future issues of this newsletter.

An organizational meeting is scheduled for 4:00P on Sunday April 10th at the Bedford Historical Society office located in the General Store at 612 Old Post Road, Bedford Village, NY, 10506. Please contact D. J. Haverkamp at djonline@earthlink.net or 914-232-7173 for more details.