Off to a Great Start!

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2019 edition of the Bidwell House Museum newsletter. Thank you for being a member and for supporting all of the wonderful programs at the Museum! On May 26 the Museum opened for the year with an inspiring concert by local musician Diane Taraz. Through stories and songs, and dressed in clothing of the period, Diane movingly told the story of the slave Mum Bet, later called Elizabeth Freeman, who sued for and won her freedom in 1781. It was a beautiful performance and a wonderful way to start the 2019 season at the Bidwell House Museum! Coming up we have even more great programs for you to enjoy including our annual history talk series, the 2nd Annual Open-Mic Music Festival on June 30, the Bidwell Country Fair on July 6 and numerous guided nature walks through the summer and fall.

This year we are planning to stay open until the end of October so if you are going to be in the area for leaf season, make sure to stop by and take in all of the beautiful foliage on the Bidwell grounds. In this newsletter we are also happy to share with you a number of projects completed by our 2018 interns. Each summer the Museum hosts the Young History Scholar Intern program where local high school, and occasionally college students spend two weeks at the Museum learning about Museums, studying the Bidwell story, giving tours and writing short research papers. In this issue you will be able to read three of the completed projects from last year, starting with Joe Makuc’s research paper at right.

Enjoy this issue and make sure to visit the Museum this summer!

Bidwell’s Beverages:
Drinks at the Bidwell House, 1750-1784 by Joe Makuc

Highlights of Reverend Adonijah Bidwell’s 1784 death inventory includes six punch bowls, three tankards, five tea pots and four decanters.

This collection indicates that the Reverend recognized drinking beverages as an important activity, much as we might value a cold drink in the summer or a hot coffee today. But although this cultural weight is similar, beverages in eighteenth-century New England were radically different. The Reverend’s 1750-1784 tenure would have included a distinct drinking culture that suffered without our modern amenities and medicinal ideas, largely abstaining from water and milk, enjoying tea as a status symbol, disdaining coffee, and mostly drinking alcohol.

Without easy filtering and modern thought on illness, for example, the Reverend would have only consumed fresh water. Most New England colonists abhorred fresh water for multiple reasons. First, having brought over the European practice of polluting waterways, urban water sources contained disease-causing germs. New Englanders did not understand germ theory, but they understood that city water was often polluted and thus avoided drinking city water. Even in rural New England,
A Message From the President

Welcome to Bidwell: The Bidwell House Museum is your Museum of Early American History of the Berkshires.

I know that many of you have enjoyed tours of the beautifully restored and furnished 1760s house, led by knowledgeable docents and high school interns. Maybe you’ve attended the history lecture series with outstanding scholars. Perhaps you love the gardens—pollinators, heirloom native flowers, heritage vegetables. Or you like to walk the trails. Or bird watch. Or attend the Bidwell Country Fair with your family, or the Music Festival, or...

I could go on and on, and so can you! Bidwell has added many new programs and in-depth interpretations about the heritage and history of the Berkshires. Check out of the programs and our web site for current events. A recent addition is the Native American Interpretive Trail, developed in collaboration with the Stockbridge-Munsee Community of the Mohican Nation. Their ancestors lived here for thousands of years; their current members cherish the Housatonic and Hudson River valley which remains their sacred homeland today. Their history and their interactions with the European “settlers” is an important story and very relevant to Rev. Bidwell’s life in Township No. 1.

There is so much more to explore, interpret, and stories to tell. Whether you are a long-time member or a new member or just passing through—Thank you! If the Bidwell House Museum is new to you, Welcome! No matter who you are, or what you know about the Bidwell House Museum, you have a treat in store.

There are multiple ways to get involved as a visitor, member or as a volunteer. We look forward to seeing you at our events. And if you’d like to really get involved, we have lots of volunteer opportunities. Let’s make history together.

Thank you.

—Rob Hoogs, President of the Board of Trustees

Welcome Erin Hunt!

Last fall, when the Museum was looking for a new Winter Caretaker, we were lucky to connect with Erin Hunt. She moved into the caretaker’s apartment in November and spent the winter shoveling snow, cleaning the rooms and keeping a meticulous eye on the house. In the spring, when the Administrative Manager position opened after Lesley Herzberg was hired as the new Executive Director at Arrowhead (congratulations Lesley!), it was a natural fit for Erin to take over that position as well. Erin now works three days a week at the Museum, balancing this position with her part-time role as the Curator at the Berkshire County Historical Society at Herman Melville’s Arrowhead. She had previously worked at Hancock Shaker Village, Historic Albany Foundation, the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, and galleries in both NH and MA. She studied at Alfred University, the University of New Hampshire, and Plymouth State University, holding a BA in Art History and an MA in Historic Preservation. Erin is in the office on Monday, Thursday and Friday and has an enviable commute on those days! If you have not yet met Erin, stop by and say hi the next time you are at the Museum.

BIDWELL HOUSE MUSEUM SUMMER GARDEN PARTY

August 3, 4–7 pm

Join friends and neighbors in the vibrant gardens of the Bidwell House Museum for our annual summer fundraiser. Enjoy hors d’oeuvres by Old Inn on the Green and music by Eric Martin as we honor Museum Trustee and eminent local historian John Demos.

Tickets go on sale in July

For more information or tickets, contact the museum at:

413-528-6888 | bidwellhouse@gmail.com

We hope to see you there!
though, New Englanders disliked fresh water. Rural New Englanders sometimes placed a similar stigma on water for its uncleanliness in cities, and also found fresh water inconvenient to use because common sources—like rivers—often contained significant silt that would need to be strained out. Fresh water was inconvenient for New England colonists like the Reverend.

While New England colonists might have looked down upon water, water may have been the first drink of new settlements like the Reverend’s, as Township Number One would not have had mature apple trees for cider nor stills for grain in 1750. Although cold water was distrusted because of medical ideas, most water was consumed with at least grudging recognition of its edibility. The Reverend might have had water if he could not obtain a better beverage.

Milk was unpopular for similar reasons. New England colonists did not know how to pasteurize milk, and without refrigeration, milk spoiled quickly. Although the Reverend’s household were dairy farmers, and thus might have drunk milk more than most, they probably converted milk into more shelf-stable items like cheese and butter.

On the other hand, tea, coffee and hot chocolate were popular drinks for colonial New Englanders. First, these drinks were thought to be medicinal for their curative powers (which we understand today as caffeine’s effects). Second, these drinks were traditionally consumed in Britain after being imported from its other colonies, which made tea popular in New England’s upper and middle classes. The afternoon tea ritual particularly reinforced status with its display of fancy earthenware—such as the multiple teapots in the Reverend’s collection. The Reverend presumably had plenty of tea, although most colonists in the area did not.

The Reverend’s most common drink, however, would be alcohol. Like tea, New England colonists believed alcohol was medicinal for its stimulating and feel-good effects and colonists understood that alcohol did not spoil, which made it safer to drink than milk or water. Furthermore, unlike tea and coffee, many alcoholic drinks could be produced in New England. Although beer was popular, rocky New England soil inhibited the farming of grain necessary to produce beer. More commonly, New Englanders produced “cider” (what we would today call “hard cider,” as they didn’t drink non-alcoholic cider) from sour apples such as those Johnny Appleseed famously planted. Additionally, with the molasses imported from the Caribbean, New Englanders produced prodigious amounts of rum during the mid-eighteenth century. Rum and cider were probably mainstays for the Reverend.

Some alcohol was not produced in the colonies, however. Wine is a good example—Madeira wine would be imported to New England. But because Madeira was the only wine that would survive importation across the Atlantic without turning to vinegar, most colonists did not drink wine except perhaps in celebratory drinks like posset (a hot drink of curdled milk and wine). Hence, most New Englanders consumed rum, cider, and beer.

Thus, the Reverend’s drinking culture was largely informed by the alcohol produced in the colonies. He probably visited Captain John Brewer’s tavern (near the center of what is today Monterey) on a regular basis. Taverns were important civic centers, sometimes serving as town halls when a meetinghouse had not yet been built, and also as adult men’s recreational centers. At home, the Reverend probably drank alcohol throughout the day like most adults in America, who annually drank forty gallons per capita by 1790. While the majority of his drinks were probably rum, cider, and beer, he may have mixed drinks like flip—rum, beer, and eggs or cream heated with a hot iron until toasty and sweet.

It is important to acknowledge the silent toll of New England colonists’ drinking habits: many colonists, such as two of John Adam’s sons, died of alcohol abuse or drinking-related accidents. This is an element of the New England past that should be handled with respect, because alcohol’s toll is present today, and it would be wrong to condone 1700s levels of alcohol consumption. The history of beverages in New England is in large part a history of alcohol’s abuses in New England.

However, this history of the Reverend’s beverages also shows a culture in New England similar to our own. Although the Reverend did not have the advantages of our modern science and technology, he attempted to survive and enjoy himself through drinking a variety of beverages, much like people today. The Reverend Bidwell’s collection of drinkware speaks to the biological need of hydration, the psychological desire for pleasure, and the cultural weight of relaxation—as well as the inequity that made his sumptuous collection possible. In that regard, may this study of the Reverend’s objects remind us of the continuities between beverages then and now, and spur future research to uncover the beverage culture of other New Englanders than the Reverend.
Barnabas Bidwell and the Berkshire Heart of the Federalist Party by Hazel Richards

In the parlor of the Bidwell House hangs a portrait of Mary Gray Bidwell, wife of Barnabas Bidwell, the second son of Reverend Adonijah Bidwell. Mary Gray provided Barnabas with blood connections powerful Berkshire families, her grandmother was a Williams and her first cousin a Sedgwick. These ties would initially prove to be indispensable to Barnabas, as he became involved in local politics under the mentorship of the powerful and ardent Federalist, Theodore Sedgwick. Barnabas Bidwell began his illustrious political journey with the Federalist party, the same party that would also lead to his downfall.

Started four years after the end of the American Revolution, Shays’s Rebellion, 1786-1787, called by some the last battle of the American Revolution, began in Hampshire County. When it spread into Berkshire County, a local militia was mustered to Great Barrington to halt the rebellion. However, most of the militia voted to join the rebels instead. Barnabas Bidwell was one of the many property owners who did not agree with the rebels, saying,

_The Gentlemen of learning & the liberal professions, especially the Clergy, are universally for Government. Debtors are generally on the other side; and this class comprehends more than half of the people. Persons guilty of crimes, or who wish to commit crimes; Rhode Island Emigrants and almost all of the denomination of Baptists; men of warm passions & but little reason; men of fickle minds, fond of every new scheme and proud of an enterprising spirit, - such have pretty generally engaged in the Insurrection._

This condemnation by Barnabas Bidwell was reflective of the prevalent attitude of the Berkshires. After Shays’s Rebellion, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison toured the area. To the Federalists Thomas Jefferson and his Democratic-Republicans were abhorrent, threatening the stability provided by a strong and protected central government. It was Shays’s Rebellion that is commonly regarded as the catalyst for what would become the Constitutional Convention, and the Berkshires held tight to the party more dedicated to the establishment of a strong and lawful America. It was with this that the long entrenchment of the Federalist party in the Berkshires began.

The Washington Benevolent Society of the Berkshires was established in Pittsfield in 1811. The purpose of the society was to be a facet of the Federalist Party with members swearing to support the U.S. Constitution and to protect it “against the inroads of despotism, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy” with a strong emphasis on remaining true to the nation’s first president, George Washington. The Berkshire branch of the society had over 2,300, nearly the same as the population of Pittsfield, the most populous town at that time, while the Boston branch only had 1,500 names on its directory.

For the entire life of the Federalist party, Massachusetts was at its heart and in Massachusetts, Berkshire County was a Federalist stronghold. Thomas Jefferson referred to the state in an 1806 letter to Barnabas Bidwell as one of the three heads of the Federalist hydra, along with Connecticut and Delaware, but that Massachusetts was the most important head, the one whose death would bring the death of the other two. Massachusetts, however, was the last state that the Federalist Party relinquished control of, something that didn’t occur until 1823, four years after it had died out everywhere else. It was in local politics that they maintained influential in the longest, even after the party seemingly ceased to exist on a national level following the War of 1812.

Ultimately, it was the strength of the Federalist Party in the Berkshires that would cause the end of Barnabas Bidwell’s career in American politics. Even though he had been mentored by that fervent Federalist, Theodore Sedgwick, Barnabas had risen past local politics when he had a change of heart and joined the Democratic-Republicans. It was with them that he had gone to the state congress, and then the national House of Representatives where he was a part of Thomas Jefferson’s inner circle, until he went back to the state level to be the Massachusetts Attorney General. But then those local politics bit him back, for Barnabas Bidwell had been the Berkshire County Treasurer the entire time and the accounts were not adding up. Those die-hard Berkshire Federalists went after him, accusing him of embezzlement, an arrest warrant was sent out, but Barnabas was gone. He fled to Canada, the Berkshires were not safe for him due to their strong Federalist leanings and power. It was with the Federalist Party in the Berkshires that the second son of Reverend Adonijah Bidwell saw his beginning and his end, just as it was there that the party saw its beginning and end.
Shaker Design and Frontier Life  By Rodrigo Sanchez de Lozada

In the 17th and 18th centuries, starting a life in western Massachusetts was not an easy endeavor. A Settler of this region had his hands full, having to “build and furnish a dwelling house upon his lot 18-foot square X 7-foot stud at least,” as well as to farm his barren, rocky land.

Because of the isolation and the difficulty of travel, trade with artisans and inventors based in the main cities such as Boston was almost nonexistent. The Shakers, however—with their innovative and durable products—filled this void by meeting the needs of the townspeople and transforming rural life into something much easier and more comfortable than otherwise possible. The Bidwell House contains some furniture and a few objects whose origins can be traced back to the Shaker settlement in Tyringham which at its height spanned 1500 acres, from “Beartown to the main road, from Jerusalem to the Lee line - even to West Stockbridge.” These objects, including chairs and the candle-making molds used to create candles out of animal fat, are all intended to make daily life easier, more comfortable, and much more efficient.

The Shakers, or United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing, were founded in the 1700s in England but quickly moved to the colonies. Originally a sect of the Quakers, the “Shaking Quakers” or Shakers were given their nickname because of their ecstatic behavior during their worship. The Shakers believed in the equality of the sexes, a close-knit living community, and, most importantly, celibacy -- thus relying on converts to keep their population up. Shaker numbers quickly swelled as they offered a strong sense of community that would make daily life easier. Unlike the Amish, the Shakers always embraced technology and technological advancements to reduce labor and make daily life easier. Their inventions include the peg rail, the washing machine and the circular saw, among many other innovative products. Yet, Shaker furniture is what the Shakers are most famous for and, like their inventions, were driven purely by functionality. These items had no embellishments for the visual aspect of the design.

Shakers were known to be very hard workers and the quality of their products was world-renowned. The Shakers tell a story of an old Shaker sister who made mittens for the Shakers in Tyringham. Two twins from Tyringham would visit her every day, asking to buy some of her mittens (which were extremely soft and warm) until she finally agreed to sell them two pairs. The next day they came back asking to buy two more pairs for their brothers, and the old sister again agreed. A week later, they came back saying they had lost their mittens and so she again sold them two more pairs. When a week after that they came back saying they had lost their mittens again, the old Shaker sister got suspicious and consulted an elder who inquired in the town. The elder soon discovered that “the twins had no brothers but had a real profitable business in mittens started at school,” all because of the quality of those Shaker mittens.

One way in which the Shakers improved life was with their chairs. What separated Shaker chairs from those of other craftsmen was their quality of build and their unique slat-backs or ladder-backs. The slat-back, a Shaker invention, made sitting in a chair much more comfortable as it matched the natural curvature of the back. Slanted at an obtuse angle away from the seat of the chair, with the slight curve inwards, this design was soon copied by many other craftsmen and can even be seen in modern chairs today. An 18th century Shaker advertisement for their famous slat-backs read, “Our chairs offer the advantages of durability, simplicity and lightness” later adding that their “largest chairs do not weigh over ten pounds, and the smallest weigh less than five pounds, and yet the largest person can feel safe in sitting down without fear of going through them.”

Although Shakers specialized in specific crafts such as the furniture-making, they were a self-sufficient community and thus produced a wide variety of objects. The swift in the children’s room of the Bidwell house is one such item. The swift, which held the skeins of yarn in place as they were wound into balls, reduced the labor required to ball yarn and prevent it from getting tangled. Made of maple wood with a yellow varnish, the swift was very durable and would have made the prospect of knitting a lot easier.

Continued on page 6
Another useful implement made by the Shakers was the candle making set, one of which is present in the Museum keeping room. Because whale oil was expensive, most people relied on candles made of tallow, or animal fat, for illumination. This candle making set was a great way to maximize the use all materials as it used the animal fat collected by the spout on the side of the rotisserie, and by the canoe-shaped bowl at the bottom of the small meat grill, to make candles. Made of a pine wood frame with 12 pewter candle molds hanging below and 12 wicks on the side ready for insertion, this candle-making set would have removed the need to trade for candles and would prevent the animal fat to go to waste.

As life on the Massachusetts frontier was extremely difficult, Shaker products meant to reduce labor and make daily life more comfortable were widely embraced by all. Although the Shakers in Tyringham sold their land to a doctor from New York who renamed their estate Fernside, and the Shaker religion as a whole is dwindling, their legacy lives on. Without the ingenuity of the Shakers, everyday items such as the cooling fan and the washing machine would not exist. Ultimately, it was the Shakers that allowed “hinterland settlements” such as Township No. 1 to succeed all the while improving the quality of life across the frontier.

THANK YOU 2018 SUPPORTERS!
Your gifts make the Museum the gem it is today and preserve it for tomorrow!

Gerry and Hank Alpert
Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Alsop*
Karen Anderson and Cliff Weiss
Brian and Gayle Andreoli*
Ms. Elizabeth Andrus
Sally J. Arbolino*
Ms. Nancy S. Ashen
Friends of Berkshire Athenaeum*
Diane Austin and Aaron Nurick
Kate Baldwin
Maureen and Michael Banner
Meloney and Louanne Barkan
Donald L. and Maggie Barkin*
Peter and Joyce Barkin
Ben and Cheryl Barrett
Nancy Baumel*
Ms. JoAnn Bell and Mr. Douglas McTavish*
Dorene Beller and Lawrence Roth*
David and Deborah Bergeron*
Alice Berke*
Andre Bernard*
Bill Bernart
Dr. Bebe Bernstein*
J. Truman and Ludmila Bidwell, Jr.*
John Bidwell, Jr.
Victoria Bilski
Dr. Lawrence Birnbach and Dr. Beverly Hyman
Paula and John Bitner
Neal J Blangiardo
Mrs. Kelly Blau*
Jeanne and Murray Bodin
Dr. and Mrs. Charles Brandwein*
Judit and Simeon Brinberg*
Timothy Brock
Mr. Abbot Bronstein and Ms. Carol Ladewig
Robert J. Bugley*
Mr. and Mrs. Stan E. Bulua
Dr. Gary Burke and Ms. Phyllis Vine*
George and Susan Cain
Ann Canning
James Carlin
Pat and Eric Carlson*
Steven Levy and Teresa Carpenter
Ms. Maria Carvaisin*
Judith Chaote
John D. and Linda Clarke*
Richard & Pamela Clarke*
Donald and Ellen S. Coburn
Edward B. and Nadine Habousha Cohen*
Jerome Congress
Martha Copleman and Oliver Rosengart*
Anna Corcoran*
Oliver and Cynthia Curme
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Dalgleish*
Diana L. Deacon and Walter P. Ritter*
Allan Dean and Julie Shapiro*
Jim and Cindy Deloy*
Ms. JoAnn Bell and Mr. Douglas McTavish*
Dorene Beller and Lawrence Roth*
David and Deborah Bergeron*
Alice Berke*
Andre Bernard*
Bill Bernart
Dr. Bebe Bernstein*
J. Truman and Ludmila Bidwell, Jr.*
John Bidwell, Jr.
Victoria Bilski
Dr. Lawrence Birnbach and Dr. Beverly Hyman
Paula and John Bitner
Neal J Blangiardo
Mrs. Kelly Blau*
Jeanne and Murray Bodin
Dr. and Mrs. Charles Brandwein*
Judit and Simeon Brinberg*
Timothy Brock
Mr. Abbot Bronstein and Ms. Carol Ladewig
Robert J. Bugley*
Mr. and Mrs. Stan E. Bulua
Dr. Gary Burke and Ms. Phyllis Vine*
Gil N. and Debbie Schwartzberg
Stephen N. and June D. Seiser*
Karen and Melvyn Selsky*
Marilyn and Lester Shulklapper*
Elizabeth Silk
Mrs. Marion Simon*
Katherine and Lauren Smith
F. Sydney and Rosamond Smithers*
Evelyn and Michael Solomon*
Lonnie Solomon
Ms. Susan Souder
Mrs. Wilma H. Spice*
Sheila and Stuart Steiner*
Erica and Donald Stern*
Ms. Caroline Stilwell*
Lorna M. and David Strassler
Edward A. Studzinski
Ms. Sandra Swenson
Mr. John Szabolowski
Richard Tavelli*
Mr. and Mrs. Russell Taylor
Elizabeth Timlege
Frank and Arlene Tolopko
Nancy Torrico*
Karen and Christopher Traynor
Barbara and Richard Tryon*
Mr. and Mrs. Roger C. Tryon
Tyringham Free Public Library*
Katharine A. Walker and Russ Breeden
Kathleen and Joseph Wasiuk*
Ms. Malvina Wasserman
Kari Weil and Michael Roth
Mr. Christopher Aidun and Ms. Susan Weiner*
Roberta and Peter Weiss
Carol and Donald Welsch*
Mr. Kevin West
Allison Westphal
Noel Wicke
Mr. Michael F. Wilcox*
Richard Bidwell Wilcox and Dr. Joyce Butler*
Liz and Mark Williams*
Caroline Young*
Joann Zarnoch*
Cheryl Zellman and Marc M. Gordon*
Ellen Zimmerman*
Jeffrey Zuckerman*

* denotes 2018 members of the Museum
Spring/Summer 2019

Board of Directors

Rob Hoogs, President
Kathryn Roberts, Vice-President
Paula Leuchs Moats, Secretary
Franklin R. Kern, Treasurer
Brian Andreoli
Diane Austin
JoAnn Bell
Linda Codwise
Tom Ryan
Jim Herrup
Richard Greene, MD
George Emmons
Delight Dook
John Demos
Lindsey Codwise
Joan Bell
Jane Austin
Brian Andreoli
Franklin R. Kern, Treasurer
Paula Leuchs Moats, Secretary
Kathryn Roberts, Vice-President
Rob Hoogs, President

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