

# Stow-Info

NEWS OF THE STOW HISTORICAL SOCIETY

APRIL 2003

## Springfest Show on May 17

### THE WOMAN WHO OWNED 6000 HORSES

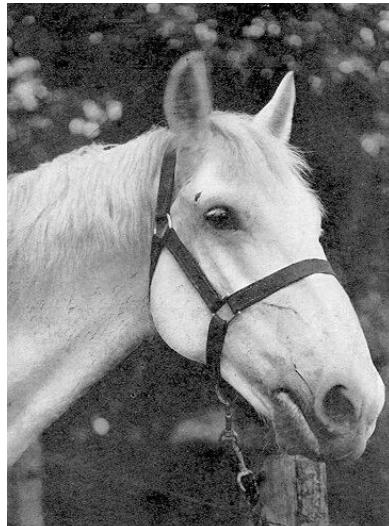
*...And there was something wrong with every one of them*

It was 100 years ago this month that a young woman started on a career in Stow that shaped her as one of Stow's foremost characters and also helped to shape the character of this town.

Miss Harriet Gertrude Bird and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Red Acre Farm will be the feature of this year's Springfest exhibit by the Stow Historical Society at the Town Hall on Saturday, May 17, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The highlight of the day will be a Tea at 2 p.m. with Tad and Caroline Bird, family members, as hosts. A book on the history of Red Acre Farm, published this month and written by Jean McCord of Stow, will be available at the exhibit.

On May 8, 1903, Miss Bird opened a horse haven on Red Acre Rd., with one black horse and \$8 in the treasury. The previous year she had acquired Red Acre Farm on the death of her father, John Quincy Bird, and immediately set about transforming the former summer home of her family into a charitable home for horses.

She had witnessed first hand the treatment of horses on the city streets of Boston and at horse auctions, and it was not a nice sight. Horses in those



*Booklet photo—Red Acre Farm Horses. Summer 1905*

days were the chief transportation for police, firemen, peddlers and in everyday business and farming. Red Acre Farm quickly became a haven for abused, neglected, and overworked horses, and this history continued for the rest of Miss Bird's life.

She died in 1965 at 91. In the intervening years Red Acre Farm was the place for rest,

(Continued on next page)

## May 10 Speaker

### FABLED LEGACY SURROUNDS US: OUR STONE WALLS

A new sense of pride and reverence for our fabled stone walls has been evoked in the new book, "Stone by Stone: The Magnificent History in New England's Stone Walls." The author, Robert M. Thorson, professor of geology and geophysics at the University of Connecticut, will speak at Stow Town Hall at 4 p.m., Saturday, May 10, combining his love of New England's stone walls and their history in his presentation.

The speaker will imbue you with a renewed appreciation of stone walls at the annual meeting of the Minuteman Regional Historical Societies. The Stow Historical Society will be host to the group that has been meeting annually for nearly 40 years. All who love our fabled stone walls are invited to attend.

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## 6000 HORSES (Cont'd)

good care and treatment for 6,000 horses.

### World War I Service

This kindly woman, with an indomitable will, extended her helping hand far beyond Stow, too. During World War I Miss Bird became active in American Red Star Animal Relief, an organization dedicated to serving horses in Army camps and on the battlefield. In today's world, it's hard to imagine a war fought with horses. This intrepid lady traveled throughout the nation, checking on the condition at the camps housing the thousands of horses needed for the war effort.

### Other Humane Efforts

As more and more cars entered the century, Red Acre Farm's horse population declined, but Miss Bird expanded her humane treatment efforts. A free animal clinic was established in Allston, Mass., and another in California, and a small island near Bourne, Mass. was purchased for a wildlife refuge. Moving into still another direction, Red Acre Farm supported the work of research scientists in the study of animal health, nutrition and disease, setting up

laboratories on Red Acre Rd. for this work.

### Red Acre Village

Miss Bird was recognized repeatedly for her work in the humane movement. Despite her far-reaching influence, she did not forget her neighborhood. Following World War II when servicemen were returning home to a severe shortage of housing, Miss Bird converted an unused hay lot next to the farm into Red Acre Village--10 lots with houses, for servicemen only. These beautifully crafted houses still grace Red Acre Rd.

### Hearing Dog Center

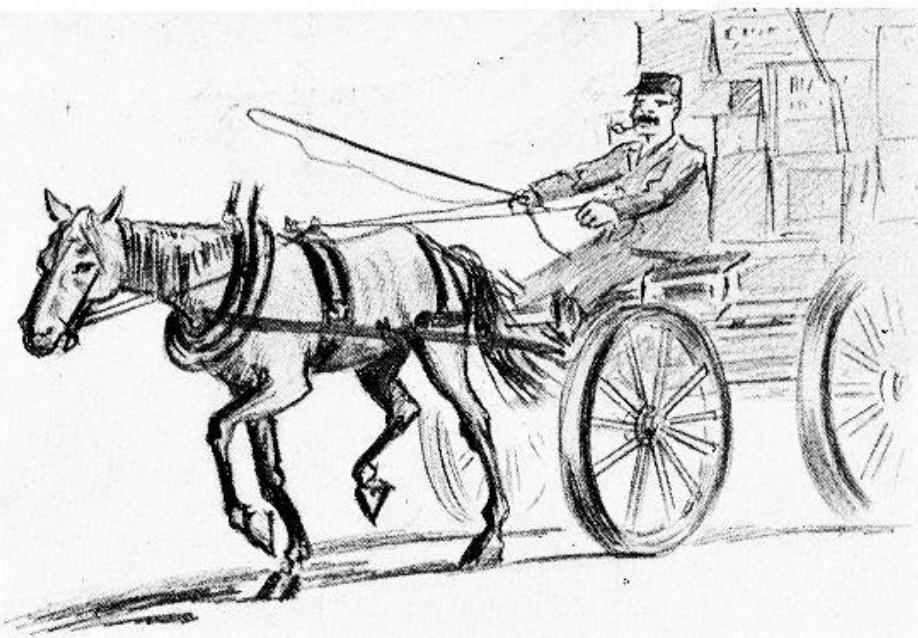
After the sale of the farmhouse in the early 1980's, Miss Bird's heirs started the Red Acre Hearing Dog Center on Red Acre Rd. in the former research laboratory buildings. Under the direction of

Caroline Bird, wife of Miss Bird's nephew, Walter (Tad) M. Bird, Jr., the center trained dogs to be companions and "ears" for deaf people. In a short ten years more than 100 dogs were placed. This center, however, ceased operation in 1993, and Red Acre moved in the direction of becoming more of a grant-making foundation rather than an operating institution.

Last year the foundation transferred more than 200 acres of its remaining property off Red Acre Rd. to the Stow Conservation Trust in a part sale-part gift transaction.

The original farmhouse, now the property of the Steege family, is operated as a riding and boarding stable. The former Hearing Dog Center building is now owned by the Kids-a-Lot child development center.

A MISERABLE EXISTENCE.



FIT SUBJECT FOR COUNTRY REST.

## ALL IT TAKES IS A WILLING HAND

Thanks go to Jean Roemer who got out a step ladder, a fine tip paintbrush and a bucket of latex paint and cleaned up the beautiful granite signpost at the corner of Great Rd. and Harvard Rd. The painted letters on the sign had weathered and were badly in need of attention. The signpost, adjacent to Jean's beautiful house, known as the Gates-Peck house, directs travelers to the town of Harvard. In 1842 that was a bit of a trip.

The granite post, 7 ft. high, has a 2 inch thick stone bolted near the top, and is inscribed with a hand with a pointing finger, mileage to Harvard, and the date of 1842. This is the only dated sign in Stow.

Jean also repainted an adjacent granite signpost pointing to the old Stow West School on Harvard Rd. There are more than 19 granite signposts along public roads in Stow, and each one is a treasure.

A report, written in 1966 by the late Joseph M. Perkins of Gleasondale, geological engineer, details the size and location of these posts. This research paper is in the Stow Historical Society files in the Randall Library. Additional information was added to the report in 1995.

The earliest legislation in this Commonwealth on the subject of guideposts bears the date of February 28, 1795. An act was passed requiring selectmen of towns and districts to erect guideposts at the corners and angles of roads in such towns and districts. Before that time, individuals in some places set up stones by the roadside, marking the distance and direction to an important town, and these persons often added their own initials as well as the year the stones were placed.



## NEW INDEX AVAILABLE FOR FRANNIE WARREN'S BOOK

A big thank you goes to Dorothy MacDonald, a member of the Ancient Documents Committee, who spent a good part of last year indexing Frannie Warren's book, "Recollections of Stow," published in 1990 by the Stow Historical Society Publishing Co. Dorothy, who lives in Hudson, traces her roots back to the Davidson house on Boxboro Rd. and is an avid genealogist.

If you would like an index, please call 978-897-5996. Additional copies of Frannie's book are on sale in the Town Clerk's office and at Randall Library.

### TREASURE HUNT!

When you cleaned out your attic during this long winter, did you find any items that the Stow Historical Society would like for its archives? Please call us at 978-897-5996.

### PHOTOS

Diaries

CARDS

MAPS

CHURCH, SCHOOL, CLUB RECORDS

### PAMPHLETS

Circulars

POSTCARDS

SCHEDULES

## STOW HISTORICAL COMMISSION TO OFFER FOUR SUMMER EVENTS

Four summer programs at the Stow West School are being planned by the Stow Historical Commission. The dates will be Sunday, June 22; Sunday, July 13; Sunday, August 10, and Sunday, September 14. The first three programs will feature demonstrations of early trades, and the September meeting will welcome Patty Selin in her role as school teacher at the old school. All programs will be from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

## THANK YOU TO DONORS OF GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

*Stan Sherman Play scripts by Alan Ferguson.*

*Phil Moseley Postcard of Fitzgerald's Corner*

*John Makey Picture of Skunk Rice*

*Betty Cornier Booklets from Leon Wetherbee's home*

*Thruston Hammer News clippings about George Shultz, compiled by Cliffy Addy. Shultz, former Red Acre Rd. resident, was Secretary of State under President Ronald Reagan.*

*Thruston Hammer Souvenir wooden keys from the dedication of Nashoba Regional High School, May 20, 1962. The donor was chair of the NRSD Committee at that time.*

*Dorothy Leggett Estate Photos, bills, letters and wooden sign from Indian Mill Farm on Gleasondale Rd., home of the Butternut Squash. Mrs. Leggett was the widow of Charles Leggett, originator of the butternut squash.*

*Hartley Family Hale School memorabilia*

*Joanne Veracka 1967 B.S.A. Town Directory*

*Don Rising Photos of the dismantling of the Carbury House on Great Rd. The 1800 house was reconstructed at a private historic house community in Lyme, Conn.*

*David Cobb Reproductions of five maps: 1830 Concord map; 1797 Map of eastern MA and march routes for the attack on Bunker Hill on June 17, 1755; 1797 MA map (German); 1830 Stow map, and an early MA map.*

*Eric Sonnichsen Photos of construction of Town Barn*

*Dorothy MacDonald 1833 Commissioning and 1837 Discharge Certificates for John Davidson, Jr., Second Brigade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Div. of the Militia of the Commonwealth.*

*Anna Wheeler Bosley Stow Grange medallions; Edward Wheeler diaries.  
Keizer, Oregon*

*Bette Stewart Shaw 4 Award of Merit school cards  
Medfield, MA*

*Little-known business-men  
of OLDE TYME*  
*stow*

*Herkimer Woodman...*



**WANTED: ALAN FERGUSON  
MEMORABILIA**

Playscripts written by Alan Ferguson, Stow's foremost Springfest playwright, are wanted by the Stow Historical Society. Stan Sherman has donated scripts to start the collection. You are asked to search your attic for copies of these scripts and while you are doing that, how about searching for old photographs of the plays and copies of Alan's whimsical cartoons. Alan was an original and dearly loved by his fellow thespians in Stow. Alan's widow, Martha Ferguson, still lives in Castine, Maine, where the couple moved a number of years ago.

**MORE ABOUT THE SPRINGFEST SHOW**

You might get a chuckle out of Alan Ferguson's cartoons (see above) to be part of the exhibit at the Stow Historical Society Show at Springfest, Saturday, May 17, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., in the Main Hall at Town Hall. Posters, maps, Stow history books, magnets, souvenir spoons, and other keepsake materials will be at the society's sale table. Old copies of the Stow Villager, first published in 1979, also will be on display and for sale.

In addition, members of the Stow Historical Commission will be on hand to answer questions about your old house, and a copy of the Inventory of Old Homes, compiled in 1982, will be available for viewing. The inventory contains information and photos of Stow's period homes. Patty Selin, schoolmistress at the Stow West School Museum, also will be on hand to tell you what school was really like in the 1800's.

## **SPEAKER MAY 10 -- LEGACY OF STONE WALLS (Continued)**

Each stone wall has a story to tell, a story of farmer and oxen and hard, muddy work. And every stone in every wall also has a story to tell, an older story of the land itself, of mountains and glaciers, of soils and seas. “The stone wall is the key that links the natural history and human history of New England,” Thorson says.

Thorson is an advocate of a strong statewide policy to keep our stone walls from the jaws of the bulldozers, developers, and construction companies.

Stone walls have taken a special place in our imagination. The two most recent books on Stow’s history both boast stone walls on the covers. Check out Ellie Child’s “History of Stow” and the Stow Picture Book in the Images of America series. In addition, the flag design voted most popular in the recent flag contest featured a stone wall. We can’t escape them.

### **Our May 10 Guests**

#### ***About the Minuteman Regional Historical Society***

The Minuteman Regional Historical Society, organized in 1965, draws membership from towns which sent minutemen to Concord in 1775. Towns are host on a rotating basis at the yearly meeting. Stow was host at the 1969 meeting with a presentation by Frannie Warren on “Early Industries up to 1830” and again in 1983 during our Tercentenary year with a presentation of a slide show on “This is Stow,” and a talk on “Early Boundaries.” A large map prepared for the talk by Frannie Warren showing Stow’s original boundaries is in the archives in the Town Vault.

Cookies, cheese and crackers, or fruit plates are needed for both the May 10 Stone Wall program and the May 17 Springfest Tea. Please call Patty Selin, 978-897-5357, if you wish to bake or bring any other treat for these events.

**Stow Historical Society  
Box 380  
Stow, MA 01775**