

**Groton Historical Society
Boutwell House
Groton, Massachusetts**

**Museum Guide
2019**

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GROTON HISTORY CENTER

Framing our story

Introduction to Boutwell House and Family

The Boutwell House was built in 1851 for the George Boutwell family. By this time, George Sewall Boutwell was already a prominent member of the Groton community. He was born in 1818 in Brookline and spent his childhood in Lunenburg. The son of a farmer, Boutwell was always driven to acquire an education. He only had five years of formal schooling, and four years while he studied as an apprentice, before, at age 16, he got a job teaching at a one-room schoolhouse, called the Pound Hill School, in the town of Shirley. This position was temporary, and Boutwell's next job was as a clerk in Benjamin Dix's store in Groton. He began in 1835 and, after six months, the store failed. During his limited time in Groton, he had begun to study law under to local attorney Bradford Russell. Not wanting to lose this opportunity, Boutwell took another job in town, this time as a clerk for Henry Woods in his store on Main Street. After two years, Boutwell told Woods that he was leaving to study at the Academy at Exeter, New Hampshire. At that point, Woods offered Boutwell a partnership in the store if he would stay in Groton and continue to work. Boutwell agreed and continued to run the store even after Woods' death in 1841. The Boutwell and Woods families would be brought even closer after Boutwell's marriage, as Mrs. Boutwell was a sister of Mrs. Woods. In fact, the two families lived together for a time before Boutwell built this house.

Boutwell's political career began in 1839, when he won a seat on the Groton School Committee. He had long dreamed of holding greater political office, but on his first run for the Massachusetts house of Representatives, on the Temperance party ticket, he was soundly defeated. This taught him that he had to align with one of the two major parties of the day, the Whigs or the Democrats. As he shared beliefs with both, his choice was ultimately made by Henry Woods' close association with the Democratic party. In 1841, on his third try, he was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives at age 23. He lost reelection in 1844, but won again in 1846, and served until 1850. In that year, Boutwell was elected governor of Massachusetts. To garner the necessary votes, Boutwell had been forced to create a political coalition between the Democrats and the Free Soil party. At age 33, he was the youngest governor in state history up until that point. Boutwell ultimately decided not to run for a third term as Governor, as he knew the coalition was falling apart. After the end of his second term in 1853, Boutwell returned to Groton and studied law, eventually passing the Massachusetts bar in 1862. But during this period, politics never left his mind. He recognized that a new party, instead of a political coalition, had to be formed to deal with the problems of the day, and in 1855, he became one of the 27 founding members of the state Republican party.

Boutwell could not stay out of the political arena forever, and at the outbreak of the Civil War he was appointed Massachusetts' military representative in Washington, D.C., by Gov. John A. Andrew. In 1862, he was appointed as the first Commissioner of Internal Revenue by President Abraham Lincoln. In the same year, he ran for U.S. Congress, and at the beginning of his term in 1863, he resigned as Commissioner of Internal Revenue. While serving as a

Representative, Boutwell, considered a Radical Republican, consistently advocated for black suffrage, and was ultimately instrumental in the passage of the 15th Amendment. Like many Radical Republicans, Boutwell was also disgusted by the actions of President Johnson, and eventually led the charge to impeach him in 1868. He was subsequently a member of the House floor committee that was sent to the Senate to convince them to remove Johnson, an effort that ultimately failed by one vote. In 1869, he was appointed Secretary of the Treasury under President Ulysses S. Grant. Boutwell would later say that he “had accepted the place upon Grant’s urgent request, command indeed, and not to gratify any ambition of my own.” After three successful years in the position, where his main focus was lowering the public debt, Boutwell decided to run for the Senate in 1872. With his victory, he handed in his resignation, which Grant reluctantly accepted, stating Boutwell’s tenure had given “satisfaction to the country.” His term in the Senate lasted from 1873 to 1877, after which he returned to his law practice.

Boutwell’s last political endeavor was the short lived Anti-Imperialist League, of which he was President. Boutwell, along with Mark Twain and several other prominent Americans, believed that the government’s imperialist course at the end of the 19th century was morally wrong, and in 1898 the League was founded. The movement never gained traction, especially when faced with President Roosevelt’s agenda. Boutwell served as President of the League up until his death in 1905.

On July 8, 1841, Boutwell married Sarah Adelia Thayer. They had two children, Georgianna Adelia, born on May 19, 1843, and Francis Marion, born on February 26, 1847. The Boutwells maintained a long-distance relationship while George held office, and we have many letters in our collection between them. Mrs. Boutwell, following a long period of ill health, died on March 8, 1903. Boutwell retired from his law practice on August 6, 1904, and died on February 27, 1905 from pneumonia. Newspaper obituaries touted his many achievements, and his close friend and neighbor Major General William A. Bancroft arranged his funeral. He left the house to Georgianna, who would never marry and donated the house to the Historical Society upon her death in 1933. Francis, who had married Caroline Eleanor Taylor in 1900, also lived in Groton until his death on September 4, 1910. Neither Georgianna or Francis had children.

Boutwell had this house constructed while running for governor. Now known as Boutwell House, it is set on the north side of Main Street in the center of Groton, Massachusetts. It is a 2-1/2 story wood frame structure with Italianate styling, consisting of the main block from 1851 and a series of ells added in two stages in the late 19th century. Features of the main block’s exterior include corner quoining, a water table at the base and deep eaves decorated with brackets, all elements characteristic of Italianate houses from this period. The front façade is three bays wide with a central entrance sheltered by a one-story, flat portico supported by square posts and topped by a balustrade. This was originally the main entrance to the house, but after the most recent renovation in 2016, the main entrance was moved around back.

The late 19th century additions to the house included an expanded kitchen and service area on the main floor, along with a new library for Gov. Boutwell on the second floor, and the first bathroom in the house behind that. The floor plan for the second expansion can be seen in the red drawing room, the first stop on your tour. These additions bring the house to its current size; however, the Society has done several renovations of the interior over the years.

In 2010, the Boutwell House suffered two very serious water pipe failures which flooded portions of the museum's exhibition and work areas. The Groton Historical Society's Board of Directors sought and obtained both a Community Preservation Act grant which was unanimously approved at Groton Town Meeting in April 2013, and a Cultural Facilities Fund grant which was awarded in November 2012 from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Both these grants were for physical renovations including new wiring and plumbing, plaster replacement, a fire suppression system and a new furnace. The most recent renovations to the interior of the house were begun in early 2016 and completed in November 2016, and include new carpeting throughout most of the house, as well as new paint or wallpaper in most rooms in the house.

Boutwell House Before Second Addition



The Drawing Room (Red Room):

The Drawing Room or main parlor is the largest room in the house, and was the main sitting area for the Boutwells. It was also used for receiving large groups of visitors, or for taking tea. This room is not only the largest in the house but also the fanciest; it features a large, marble fireplace and a ceiling medallion. The chandelier in this room is the largest in the house, and is also among the few fixtures that are original to the house. It was originally lit by gas, and was later switched over to electricity. The small knobs on the bottom were used to control the gas.

Over the mantelpiece in this room is a portrait of George S. Boutwell. It was done by Purdy, a well-known photography studio in Boston which went by the same name until recent times, and was a gift to the former Governor on his 85th Birthday. This is a photograph enhanced by painting or some other method of tinting. Outside of his political career, Boutwell was also very involved with many organizations in Groton and wrote several books during his life.

There are photographs of Boutwell, his wife, and his children on the second shelf of the left cabinet in the front of the room. In addition, this room holds rotating displays about the

Groton landscape, collections from the early citizens related to the establishment of Groton, Revolutionary War powder horns and 19th century hats. Please see item labels for additional information on items in the room.

Stair Hall:

As you exit the Red Room, notice how the staircase seems to sweep down into the hall. Each step on the staircase is unique in size and shape to create this effect, which made the carpet runner a true challenge for installers in the 2016 renovation as the runner had to be cut and edge-banded separately for each step. This carpeting was woven abroad specifically for this house during the renovation.

Your next stop is the second floor, which is not handicapped accessible. For additional information, please see the item labels.

Grant Bedroom (On the Right):

President Grant slept in this room when he spent the night in Groton with Boutwell, shortly after he had been appointed Secretary of the Treasury. It was later Georgianna Boutwell's room. The bed is a 19th century sleigh bed, and is the original bed that President Grant slept in on June 16, 1869. Boutwell remembered the occasion as such: "We arrived at Groton at about ten o'clock. The President was met by a very considerable number of the citizens. He was saluted by the discharge of an ancient, small-sized cannon, and he was escorted from the station to my house by the Groton Brass Band. The next morning, I gave the President an opportunity to see the town as far as it could be seen in a drive of an hour. He gave a public reception at my house between the hours of ten and eleven o'clock. In that time 3,300 persons, according to an accurate count, passed through the house and took the hand of the President." The bed was later used for decades by Georgianna Boutwell until she died in it in 1933. Other notables who slept in the bed include General N. P. Banks, Lowell Mason, and Wendell Phillips.

Five quilts were layered on the bed before the 2016 renovation. During the recent renovation, these were sent to the New England Quilt Museum in Lowell for evaluation through their MassQuilts Documentation Project. The quilts were made at various dates between 1830 and 1900. Valuable information such as fiber type and construction technique was clearly detailed on catalog sheets which are part of our Collection files.

The wallpaper was also added during the 2016 renovation. It contains 5 different colors which were silk screened onto the paper in a period pattern. For more information, please see the item labels.

Map Room (On the Right):

This was originally used as a small writing room or study by the Boutwells, and now contains maps of Groton. The large map is a hand-painted tercentenary map made for the Groton Historical Society by Dana Somes showing the center of town from 1930. Apparently this map was made prematurely, as the actual 300th anniversary of the founding of Groton did not occur until 1955.

Boutwell is known to have stood by the window in this room, which overlooks Station Avenue, to see trains arriving from Boston and to wave to guests getting off these trains.

Gov. Boutwell's Original Library in Rear of House



Governor Boutwell's Office (On the Right):

This room was originally Governor Boutwell's bedroom. It is currently set up as his library, which was originally at the rear of the second floor, in what is now the apartment. The desk and chair in this room belonged to Boutwell. Boutwell took the chair behind the desk home

with him from his partial term as U.S. Senator. This chair was restored in 2016 by John Brooks Fine Furniture of Groton. The bookcases contain Governor Boutwell's personal collection of books on military, political, and historical subjects, along with other Boutwell family books and period books from the Society's collections. The standing desk and stool came from the general store where he worked with Henry Woods during his early career. The store was in the brick building a few houses down on main street, which now holds the Natural Market.

Continue through this room, and take a left through the small passage. Your next stop is the room with burgundy walls.

Dressing Room:

This small room was originally a dressing room for Gov. and Mrs. Boutwell, and was conveniently connected to their bedroom by the small passthrough you just walked through. Notice the mantelpiece; unlike the mantelpieces in the downstairs rooms or the bedrooms, this one is made from wood, a good indication that this space was functional, and not meant for show. A Boutwell trunk, typically used to pack clothes when George was traveling to and from Washington, D.C., is in the corner. The cups, vases, and mirror on the mantel are Boutwell family pieces, along with the candelabra on the pedestals. The mirror belonged to Mrs. Boutwell's father Nathan Thayer of Hollis, NH. On the wall opposite the fireplace is a Boutwell family register.

Your next stop is on the stair landing.

Stair Hall, 2nd Floor:

Before you leave the second floor, take note of the three closed doors at the rear of the hall. The door opposite the door to the dressing room leads to the "toy room," which was originally the Boutwell children's playroom, and later served as a small bedroom. It is currently used for storage. Immediately outside the dressing room door, facing the toy room door, the door on the right leads to our research library, which is open from 10 am to 2 pm, Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, while the door on the left leads to the attic, which originally had servants' rooms and is now used for storage. The Boutwells, like most middle to upper class families in the late 19th century, employed a number of domestic servants, some of whom lived in the house. Sometimes, master and servant would form bonds, as demonstrated in Georgianna Boutwell's will. She left many pieces of furniture and silver to "my faithful servant, Nellie McCarthy," who served as her housekeeper for many years.

Your next stop is in the blue room to the left at the base of the stairs.

Blue Room:

This room was originally the Boutwells' dining room until the first expansion of the house in the 1870s, when the dining room was moved to its current location. After this, it became the front parlor, and was used by Georgianna Boutwell for receiving guests. The chandelier in this room is not original to the house, but is a restored period piece that was installed during the 2016 renovation.

This room is reserved as exhibit space and will change throughout the year. The website will contain current information for each exhibit.

Pass through between Blue Room and Dining Room:

This vestibule contains a pewter collection that dates from the 18th and 19th centuries. Pewter was common in America yet relatively little survives in good condition. Many pieces were melted down and remolded; we believe the smaller pitcher was made at the pewter works in Groton, now in Pepperell. This space is also partially used for exhibits.

Dining Room:

The dining room was created out of the original kitchen in the first expansion to the house in the 1870s. The wallpaper and period light fixtures were added during the 2016 renovation. The wallpaper pattern was special-ordered through John Burrows of Rockland, MA, and printed in the UK exclusively for the Boutwell House project of 2016. It is composed of 11 colors that were silk screened onto the paper. One of the upstairs rooms in the White House has the same pattern.

The furniture in this room is period and has recently been restored, but it is not original to the house. It was given by Yssabella G. Waters. Your next stop is through the door on the right at the rear of the dining room.

The Dining Room at the Turn of the 20th Century



China Pantry:

This pantry contains china that belonged to the Boutwell family. It was originally used as a serving pantry.

Kitchen:

Up until the mid-19th century American kitchens had large open fireplaces. Food was cooked over the open flame and items were baked in ovens built into the brick. Around 1850, cast iron stoves were being installed in favor of open fireplaces. Most of the classic ranges share a basic and efficient design including an easily adjustable burn time, simple clean out and an even baking oven. If the Boutwells did not originally have a stove, they no doubt had one installed shortly thereafter. The stove that is currently in the kitchen is a period piece that has recently been restored. To the right of the stove is the icebox. To the left is the laundry area. The sinks in the room are made of soapstone, possibly quarried in Groton, and were installed in the early 20th century.

At the back of the kitchen, on the left, is a small additional pantry with Shaker Baskets, Sieves, and Oval Boxes; these were all made to sell to the “World’s people”. All exhibit the attention to detail and quality found in Shaker craftsmanship.

Back Hall and Woodshed:

Now wheelchair accessible public toilet with motion detected lighting.

Thank you for visiting Boutwell House. We hope that you have enjoyed your visit. For FAQs, and more information on the Groton Historical Society, please see below.

Frequently Asked Questions

When was the Boutwell House built?

The house was built in 1851 for George Boutwell and his family. At the time, Boutwell was the Governor of Massachusetts.

Why did President Grant visit Groton?

Boutwell was Secretary of Treasury under Grant when he visited Groton to see the town and stay with the Boutwells in 1869. Boutwell remembered the occasion as such: “We arrived at Groton at about ten o’clock. The President was met by a very considerable number of the citizens. He was saluted by the discharge of an ancient, small-sized cannon, and he was escorted from the station to my house by the Groton Brass Band. The next morning, I gave the President an opportunity to see the town as far as it could be seen in a drive of an hour. He gave a public reception at my house between the hours of ten and eleven o’clock. In that time 3,300 persons according to an accurate count, passed through the house and took the hand of the President.”

What else did George Boutwell do?

He served as teacher in Shirley, Massachusetts; a storekeeper, postmaster, school committee member, town clerk and selectman in Groton; a Massachusetts state legislator and youngest Governor of Massachusetts from 1851-53; was first commissioner of the IRS under President Lincoln, and Secretary of the Treasury under President Grant among other public offices. He was also President of the Middlesex Agricultural Society and the Anti-Imperialist League.

How did the house become a part of the Historical Society?

George Boutwell’s daughter, Georgianna, bequeathed the house to the GHS which she helped found in 1894. When she died in 1933, the house was left to the society.

When was Groton founded?

Groton was founded in 1655. The land grant consisted of 64 square miles. Deane Winthrop, one of the petitioners, chose to name the settlement Groton, after his place of birth, Groton, England.

See timeline on Groton Historical Society’s website for more important dates.

What is the yellow block building at the back of the Boutwell House?

The building houses the Society's collection of large artifacts beyond the storage limits of the main house, including two fire engines, one of which is the 1803 Torrent; the town hearse; an Abbott and Downing stagecoach; farm equipment and machinery; and the town water pump.

Do I need permission from the Society to make exterior alterations to my house?

No. You need to talk to the Historic Districts Commission at 978.448.1109 if you own a house in one of the town's four historic districts or if your house is on the State Register of Historic Properties with the Groton Historical Commission.

Are there apartments in the Boutwell House?

Yes, there were originally two apartments but now only one apartment is currently occupied.

Groton Historical Society Background

The Groton Historical Society was founded in 1894 as a repository for archival material and artifacts related to the history of Groton. Boutwell House serves as the headquarters of the Society. Constructed in 1851, when George Boutwell was the Governor of Massachusetts, the residence continued as a family home while Boutwell's political career took him to Washington, D. C. and afterward he lived here until his death in 1905. His daughter, Georgianna, continued to live here until her death in 1933. She bequeathed the house to the Groton Historical Society who renovated the building as its headquarters, installed two rental apartments to offset the cost of operations, and opened the building as a museum to the public in 1939.

The Society uses the house as a museum to display artifacts relating to Groton and the Boutwell family. These objects, documents, photographs, et cetera date from the earliest days of Groton to the present. The collections and archives in the Boutwell House are valuable resources for those doing school projects, genealogical and local history research, and anyone looking for answers about the town's history, early families or architecture.

Office hours for Boutwell House are on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10 am to 2 pm. Additionally, it is open on several Saturdays throughout the year for Open Houses and also by appointment. The Society presents regular programs open to both members and the larger community.

The Society offers membership, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and offers various Groton-related publications for sale.

The Society has a solid base of local support. After more than one hundred years, the Society remains an important institution in town for tourism and background information on the region. It has a dedicated membership which is open to anyone and has a volunteer corps who staff and operate the House. It is fully accessible and welcomes and accepts volunteers interested in the work of the Society in the community.