

IRON WORK FARM in ACTON, Inc.

P.O Box 1111

Fall Newsletter

September, 2000

Volume I, Number 2

The Iron Work Farm has had an active summer season, with considerable restoration and repair taking place at both the Faulkner House and Jones Tavern properties, and good attendance at the open houses. Holding two open houses at once means more work for volunteers, and we thank everyone who contributed their time as hosts on Patriot's Day and those end-of-the-month Sunday afternoons. Hopefully, we've all had some fun doing it, too! Also, many thanks to Judy Wright of South Acton for writing the attached article on the founding of the Iron Work Farm and the rescue of Jones Tavern.

Volunteer activities

While the buildings are only open during the winter by appointment, we still need people to help with leaf raking, gutter clean-out, house maintenance, and wood splitting for the second annual firewood sale. At the moment, we're looking for someone (maybe more than one person) who likes to do some simple sewing--the white cotton curtains that shield the first-floor windows at the Tavern are in tatters, and need to be replaced. For any of these jobs, call Co-President Tom Sikina at 264-9522.

Ongoing projects

Work at both properties this summer was guided by architect and Board member Larry Sorli. At the Tavern, the 1818 bedroom has been readied for paint and wallpaper, and the fire-damaged first-floor room in the west wing is being restored to its ca. 1845 configuration. Because of its late construction date, this relatively minor room will be used as office and storage space. We will probably preserve the fragments of interesting gray marbleized paint work on some of the woodwork in that room. Mike Godin, the carpenter who did such a great job on our last Mass. Preservation Projects Fund grant project, is doing the restoration of the west wing. He has also done some stabilization at the Faulkner House, where some rotted portions of the High Street side of the building are being repaired.

Sale items

Under Co-President Tom Sikina, IWF has produced full-scale, high-quality reproductions of the South Acton page from the 1889 Walker *Atlas of Middlesex of County* (in color) and the 1886 black-and-white lithograph birdseye view of South Acton. Framed versions of these can be purchased at Powers Gallery, 342 Great Road. Our *Mill Corner (South Acton Village)* has recently been reprinted, and other small items, including note cards and the three-part 1892 birdseye view of the town centers are in good supply. And don't forget the colorful Acton coverlet (double-woven afghan), which depicts twelve historic buildings and structures in Acton. We have a new supply of those, and have added as a new item boxes of note cards in the coverlet design. Call Co-President Michaela Moran at 263-3303 or 263-0216 to order any of these. All sale items will also be available at Oktoberfest in West Acton on Saturday, October 14.

IWF Calendar

October 14: Oktoberfest, West Acton. Look for the IWF table on Windsor Avenue.

October 29: last Sunday open houses of the season at Jones Tavern and Faulkner House, 3-5 p.m.

November 4, 11, 18: 2nd annual Firewood Sale of handsplit, seasoned ash and maple from the Faulkner woods: 16" split lengths. Suggested donation: \$150/cord; \$80/half-cord; \$40/1/4 cord; \$3/overnight bundle. Advance orders can be placed until Nov. 18 with Tom Sikina, 264-9522.

October-April: monthly Iron Work Farm meetings--second Wednesday of the month, 7:30 p.m. (location changes for the winter from Jones Tavern and Faulkner Homestead to private homes). Call IWF Secretary, Anne Forbes, at 263-2227, or e-mail her at forbes@ma.ultranet.com to be put on the contact list for these meetings, when we plan work on the houses, projects, etc.

a boarding-house dining room for employees of Tuttle, Jones, & Wetherbee--the large department store across the street in the Exchange Hall building), were ready for visitors--265 of whom signed the register that day. The Acton Minutemen visited the newly restored taproom in October, 1965, and were served cider and gingerbread from an old Acton recipe.

Sadly, on July 24, 1967, in a terrific thunderstorm, lightning struck the rear of the tavern and caused a fire that nearly destroyed the taproom and did significant smoke- and water damage elsewhere in the house. Since then, recovery has been slow. In 1969 an opportunity arose to purchase the 1707 Faulkner House, which the Iron Work Farm group voted to do. Mrs. Nylander's son, Robert, guided the restoration of both buildings until his sudden death in 1987 at age 45. The small group of dedicated volunteers has continued to make gradual progress in the daunting task of restoring and maintaining two historic buildings.

Today, there is renewed interest in completing the restoration of the Jones Tavern, yet there is still much to be done. Two Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund grants from the Mass. Historical Commission matched local fundraising efforts to enable much-needed repairs to the structure, and the two parlors and the "broad alley" stair hall have been restored and ready for viewing. Finally, on April 19, 2000, the house was open again for the public. However, the charred taproom, the rear wing, and most of the upstairs are still in need of restoration.

In a recent conversation, Mrs. Nylander expressed her gratitude for this new interest in the house, and said she is glad it is open for the citizens of Acton to enjoy. She is pleased that an architect, Larry Sorli, is now involved, and is looking forward to the day when the work on the house is complete.

Perhaps there is a metaphor for the town in the history of the Jones Tavern. What was once an empty building in a state of disrepair and neglect is now becoming, after years of hard work and dedication by a relatively small group of volunteers, a handsome testament to the rich history of South Acton's commercial and transportation influences on the town. The Jones Tavern represents the promise of beauty and history of this area that the founders of the Iron Work Farm in Acton saw on that fateful day in 1964. Their legacy lies in the preservation of this piece of Acton's history.

--The information in this account was taken from several sources: Mrs. Nylander's writings, an interview with her on August 21, 2000, conversations with IWF Co-President Tom Sikina, and the Acton Historical Society's *Brief History of Acton*.