

Bates Observatory Notes – Linda Grace, June – November 2012
Review/Timeline of Events and Activities

October 6, 1893 – NB Journal – “Bell Observatory”

Good deal of criticism to the elaborateness of the “Bates Tower” which is nearly completed on Bell Hill. The name above quoted, which has been given by some people, seems more appropriate when it is learned that all the expense above that of building a Gate House similar to those on “Gorge Dam” is being born by Mr. T.C. Bates. ...

November 17, 1893 – NB Journal – “Bates Observatory – On Bell Hill Now Open to the Public

Observatory now completed and open to the public. Large numbers of people coming. Large and powerful telescope has been placed in observatory for public use as well as two very strong field glasses. The constables of the town volunteered services to wait upon visitors. No such extensive and beautiful view can be obtained in our opinion anywhere in Worcester County.

November 17, 1893 – NB Journal – “A Generous Gift”

Letters to and from Water Commissioners and Theodore Bates’ letter enclosing \$1,000 check for to pay for the construction of the combined gate house and observatory on Bell Hill Reservoir.

1942

Observatory served as a Civil Defense Air Spotting Service during World War II. During that time it was not in great shape. During World War II Army Air Forces auxiliary volunteer spotters climbed to the top to report all aircraft flying overhead – we had a stove, electricity and a telephone that connected us directly to Westover.

October 7, 1985 Town Meeting

Article 5 on the Town Meeting Warrant to restore the Bell Reservoir Tower was defeated by a ballot vote. Yes – 45, No – 65, Blanks – 0.

1993 Annual Report of the Historical Commission and Town History Committee

Pictorial inventory of buildings within town boundaries in northwest and southwest sections have been completed. *Was Observatory included in this inventory?*

March 1997 – North Brookfield Historical Society Minutes

Historical Society discussed observatory and its present state of deterioration. Bud Lane will be contacted about the status of the previous efforts to preserve the tower. Damage will be assessed with Water Commissioner. Proposal for filtration plant could possibly eliminate this important landmark. Society will see if there are any funds and seek possible funding from State historic Agencies or grants. *No record that this was pursued.* Historical Society voted to express urgent concerns on the deterioration and possible loss of the observatory.

April 8, 1997 – Meeting of the Board of Water Commissioners

The Board reviewed a letter from the North Brookfield Historical Society regarding the repair of the Bates Observatory on Bell Hill. The Board asked Shiela to respond to them explaining that with the impending construction that will occur in the area, we have to wait but will be happy to meet with them upon completion of the construction to look into funding for the repairs.

April 7, 1997 – Historical Society Letter to Board of Selectmen

The Society is very concerned regarding the above and hopes the town can look into this matter and possibly get help from some source.

May 12, 1997 – Water Commissioners Response to Historical Society

As a result of current mandates regarding our water quality, we are anticipating significant construction to be conducted in that area and when these issues are finalized, the Board would be happy to meet with the Historical Society to look into funding and repairs.

May 29, 1998 – Graves Engineering Letter to Mass Historical Commission State Archaeologist

Thank you for responding to the solicitation for comments on the Water Treatment Plant. The construction project will eliminate the manmade reservoir and render the gatehouse (the foundation of the observatory) useless as it was intended to control the water distribution to the town from the manmade reservoir (to be filled in). The current condition of the structure is far less stable than portrayed in the enclosed photos taken 5 years ago. The structure itself is unstable and unsafe to be around. While the project will not directly affect the gatehouse, we cannot guarantee its protection.

June 23, 1998 – Letter from Senator Brewer to Jeanette Howland, Chairman of the Historical Commission

Offer of assistance to help expedite Observatory nomination to National Register of Historic Places.

June 30, 1998 – Letter from Steve Bergen – MHC National Register Assistant to Senator Brewer

Follow-up on inquiry about National Register Program. National Register nominations are based on comprehensive inventories of cultural resources. MHC does not have sufficient information to provide a professional evaluation of the historical or architectural significance of most properties in North Brookfield. If Observatory falls into one of three categories for exception 1) tax advantages for substantial rehab of income-producing property, 2) immediately threatened and would benefit from listing or 3) properties of demonstrated state or national significance, inventory form should be completed (along with photographs and other buildings on the property) and returned along with letter explaining reasons for property to be listed.

July 1, 1998 – Letter from Senator Brewer to John Krusell *Historical Commission?*

Correspondence and information forwarded regarding application process for nomination to the National Historic Register, including process and criteria. Following conversation with aide, Gregory Caille, regarding clarification at application process for National Historic Register.

July 1, 1998 – Letter from Senator Brewer to Board of Selectmen

Enclosing information sent to John Krusell (*Historical Commission*) regarding historic register application process (same as above letter)

July 24, 1998 – MHC Opinion – Eligibility for National Register

Historic District – North Brookfield Bell Hill Reservoir System / Eligible for Nomination

July 27, 1998 – Letter from MHC to Jeff Howland, Graves Engineering

Thank you for additional information – project is within close proximity to the *NB Bell Hill Reservoir System*, eligible for listing on the National Register. *The proposed project will have no adverse effect on eligibility of the Reservoir System – the project proponent shall incorporate into the construction document language which cites the Bell Hill Observatory as a significant historical feature and which specifies that construction of the new reservoir will protect observatory from further deterioration or damage. Also suggests project proponent explore with the town the possibility of securing the uppermost portion of the Observatory and explore fencing off the observatory to protect it from continued vandalism and protect against injury. (Water Dept did this in 2002)*

July 30, 1998 – Worcester Telegram “Bates Observatory Crumbling”

Jeannette Howland, Chair of the Historical Commission is working hard to preserve and rebuild the crumbling observation tower, which is in danger of demolition. Unless we can preserve it, it will have to come down. “It’s too much of a danger.” Project would require significant funds to redo the mortar holding the bricks and to repair the extensive water damage inside. *For at least 15 years, many have attempted at annual town meetings to get the Water Department and the town to allocate funds. No information found from BOS or Water Dept)*

September 28, 1998 – Letter from Leslie Scott, Admin Asst to NB Board of Selectmen to Senator Brewer

Inventory application and related information to the MHC regarding Bates Observatory for forwarding the MHC along with letter of recommendation.

September 29, 1998 – Letter from Senator Brewer to MHC

Letter of support for Bates Observatory on National Register of Historic Places, enclosing completed inventory Form B, photos, maps, Article re “Bates Crumbling”

September 29, 1998 – Letter from Senator Brewer to Leslie Scott, Administrative Assistant to Board of Selectmen

Contacted MHC expressing support and suggested MHC contact town directly regarding decision. If town does not receive a response, please contact and will make further inquiries.

October 19, 1998 – Letter from Mass Hist Commn to Jeannette Howland, Chairperson, Historical Commission

Bates Observatory at Bell Hill Reservoir inventory form was added to files and is available to public. (<http://mhc-macris.net>, NBK.914 and NBK.915). ***The Commission found the Bell Hill Reservoir System eligible for listing on the National Register as a National Register District. Eligibility does not constitute a nomination*** – Information regarding the program and listing process enclosed. Nominations are based on comprehensive inventories of cultural resources compiled on a communitywide basis by local commissions. MHC cannot consider a National Register nomination from the community at present because North Brookfield does not yet have a comprehensive inventory of its historic and cultural resources. In order to proceed a comprehensive survey and recommend applying for a survey and planning grant from MHC for FY99. ***Additional information was provided regarding possible exceptions if system merits more immediate consideration.***

December 2, 1998 – Letter from Gregory Caille, NB Historical Commission to Board of Selectmen

Update on steps taken on behalf of Town Hall, Bates Observatory and Inventory of Historic Buildings, sights and areas of interest. Bates Observatory is eligible for nomination, and MHC would also like to see work on a complete inventory of historical resources.

March 8, 1999 – Letter from Gregory Caille, NB Historical Commission to Board of Selectmen

Request to discuss Bates observatory to prevent damage during construction of water filtration plant, continuation of preservation plans and examine financial resources specifically for Bates Observatory, and also Town Hall and request for Town Meeting vote for nomination on the National Register of Historic Places along with the Town Hall.

May 3, 1999 Town Meeting

Article 23 on the Town Meeting Warrant by the North Brookfield Historical Commission to pursue National Register Status through the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Federal Department of the Interior seeking the consensus of citizens of North Brookfield to enhance the Application for National Register Status for the Bates Observatory at the Bell Hill Reservoir which can lead to grant opportunities for future preservation and rehabilitation efforts. Majority vote Yes.

1999 Annual Report

Commission's first report in 15 years (need to confirm). Voters approved Town House and Bates Observatory in May to be placed on State and National Register of Historic places. Claudette Marshall and Clarence Burley were instrumental in saving two maps from the landfill depicting the 1894 topography and viewable distances from Bates Observatory. The maps were fully restored and framed through private donations, presented to the town and are on display in the Haston Library. John Krusell and James Caldwell worked closely with Graves Engineering and the town Water Commissioners to oversee the backfilling around the Bates Observatory and take steps to prevent further erosion of the structure from weather and

vandalism. **Hope to start restoration in late Spring 2000.** Funding will be sought from grants and private donations.

November 11, 1999 – Worcester Telegram “Nosy Neighbor Puts North Brookfield On Map”

Two weeks from now Claudette Marshall and other members of the town’s Historical Commission will present to the town two framed century-old maps depicting landmarks visible from Bates Observatory.

December 15, 1999 – Building Inspector John Couture Letter to Water Commissioners

Visual Inspection – following should be addressed:

1. Backfilling should not exceed the base of the foundation of the tower
2. A structural engineer of record should evaluate the necessary procedures to insure structural integrity
3. Fence should be erected around the structure to avoid unnecessary liability on the town’s behalf
4. The door entering the tower should be secured property, or boarded over.

January 3, 2000 – Graves Engineering Letter to Water Commissioners

Reference December 15 letter from Building Inspector relative to Bates Observatory Tower regarding concerns in early phases of construction and efforts made to address them. Responses to Mr. Couture’s letter:

1. Filling of reservoir should be completed in less than a week. The request that backfilling should not exceed the base of the foundation of the tower is not safe as the tower was supported in the past by the water pressure of the reservoir. It is our opinion the tower may shift further and possibly collapse if the foundation of the tower is left open and unsupported.
2. During the design phase, the structural engineer of the project was asked to give a proposal to address the structural integrity of the tower. At that time the Board decided not to proceed with the investigation as the building appeared to be clearly unstable and in complete disrepair. Our position was to demolish the structure considered a detriment to safety of the site.
3. In the early states the Historical Commission requested the opportunity to restore the tower. After several discussions a construction fence around the tower was agreed upon once the reservoir was demolished. The Historical Commission contacted us about using its own mason to repoint the foundation of the tower. We agreed to allow the mason to perform this work, solely at risk, responsibility and liability of the Historical Commission, provided the work would not interfere with the General and Site Contractors. Those contractors are and will not be responsible for risk and liability of the mason or for any damage to the tower caused by their mason or normal construction activity. Since this work is not part of the Graves contract, nor any of the contractors employed by the Water Department, we have no further knowledge of the attempts to stabilize the structure.
4. Doors and windows have been boarded several times, but vandals continue to break in. It is our understanding that the door to the entrance is secured with a rather large tree stump, which braces it shut.

5. Our opinion on the tower remains the same; it is a hazard to public safety. It should be immediately restored to its original condition or demolished.

January 5, 2000 – James Caldwell, Co-Chairman Historical Commission Letter to Water Commissioners

Thank you for December 20, 1999 letter from Water Commissioners?? Cannot find letter. Upon completion of back fill grading, historic commission will secure the tower by removing loose bricks from the parapet walls and seal the top of the tower with shrink plastic and cover all remaining openings with suitable plywood to reduce water infiltration and further freeze damage. Greatest concern is opening to the lower tower intake. Suggest additional backfill to cover area completely to offer additional support to the rear foundation walls. Hope to approach WPI or similar engineering school to enter into working relationship for needed engineering experience; enlist masonry dept and steel fabrication depts. If a local voc/tech school to perform restorations, all to be funded through grants and fundraising. We will act as soon as possible regarding safety issues at the structure, and working together on mutually agreeable solutions for the restoration of the observatory and use of surrounding lands.

Undated Notes/Draft Letter? – James Caldwell – Co-Chair Historical Commission to WPI?

Tower maintenance neglected and during the 1970s vandals removed copper flashing allowing water to infiltrate parapet walls resulting in freeze damage to uppermost brickwork. Former reservoir filled to capacity with earth and forms a large, semi-level open space directly behind the observatory. The reservoir is surrounded by a small dirt access road and bordered by the new water filtration plant to its east. Beyond the plant is a sloping wooded area of about 5 acres with a seldom used dirt access road from North Main Street. Historical Commission hopes to adapt space into recreational space with walking/running paths and green space or possible soccer field. ***No record this was this ever sent?***

January 12-18, 2000 – Spencer New Leader “Comeback Now Sought for The Once Revered Water Site”

100 years after the tower stood as a symbol of the town’s pride and later a civil defense lookout and then forgotten and closed off, would make a re-appearance as a local focal point? It has not been used for over 50 years. During annual town meeting in June 1998, Observatory was in danger of being torn down as part of the water filtration project – plans at one time suggested the possibility of tearing down the observatory tower. Amendment to a related article to include funding for repairs necessary to stabilize the observatory, including replacing parapet walls, flashing and exterior brick work was not allowed and would need to be handled in a separate article at another town meeting. Plans underway to mark it on the Massachusetts Historic Registry; it has been turned down once before by the state as a historic register site. Recent talks by the Historical Commission with planning board, water department, recreation commission and other town departments will help find ways to make this come together smoothly.

January 20, 2000 – Worcester Telegram “N. Brookfield Preservationists Aim to Save Bates Observatory

Claudette Marshall, clerk of North Brookfield Historical Commission said group has applied to the Massachusetts Historical Commission to place the century-old landmark on the National Register of Historic Places. The bulk of the application was done by local commission member

John D. Krusell. *(There is no record of application for placement on National Register.*
Mrs. Marshall said that while plans calls for the repointing of the bricks and stabilizing the landmark from any further deterioration or vandalism, there is a plan to provide access to the roof, where thousands of visitors once had a 360-degree view. In Jan 5 letter to Water Commissioners, Caldwell addressed safety issues posed by the Water Department. Commission intends to secure the tower by removing any loose bricks from the parapet walls and sealing the top of the tower with shrink-wrap plastic. It will be spring before the Commission gets an estimate of just what it will cost to keep the historic landmark a place for residents and visitors alike to enjoy.

June 14-20, 2000 – Stonebridge Press “N. Brookfield to Get its Minutes of Fame

Clarence Burley’s interview with Chronicle to be featured in July in its “Towers of New England” program. (12 towers – 8 in Massachusetts, 2 in Connecticut, 1 in New Hampshire and 1 in Maine)

February 6, 2001 – Worcester Telegram “Windows of History/Students Help Save Dilapidated Landmark

Sometime this spring a dozen or so turn-of-the-century characters painted on plywood panels who might have once spent a tranquil summer afternoon at Bates Observatory will be made by students and placed over the tower’s windows.

April 2, 2001 Historical Commission Minutes

Letter sent to MHC. Greg unsuccessful in contacting Betsy at MHC. Date changed on murals for Bell Hill – no date set. Discussion of Bell Hill Tower

June 6, 2001 Historical Commission Minutes

Discussion of NR Report. Report on Panels by Jim.

September 5, 2001 Historical Commission Minutes

Panels will be on tower by next meeting – *Town House was eligible and nomination was being forwarded to Washington, D.C. No mention of status of application for Observatory.*

April 2, 2002 – Water Department Report of Expenses

Costs for Fence around Observatory were \$1044.72 and \$285.24

*** Bell Tower Restoration Committee had a chicken barbeque and raised about \$1,100 that was never spent before the committee dissolved and it was used to cover part of the fencing costs ***
(8/30/12 e-mail exchange between Donna Gauthier and Shiela LeBlanc)

July 22, 2003 – George Doane Letter to Members of Elected Panel in Charge of Bates Monument on Bell Hill

Requesting the names of two in town on elected panel to take charge of correction to damage at Bates Observatory on Bell Hill. If I should decide to mail a check, I believe I would need the names.

July 22, 2003 – James Caldwell, Chairman, NB Board of Selectmen Letter to George Doane

Friend, Tamara LaTourdette informed us of intent to bequeath money to North Brookfield.

August 28, 2003 - Letter from George Doane to James Caldwell, Chairman, NB Board of Selectmen

“pleased that you are taking such an interest in getting it back in good condition and I plan to help myself as you seem to have heard. I’ve no idea just what has to be done, but I suspect it’s quite a lot and may take some time to get the money to get it done. I also think the surrounding area should be beautified once the inside is renewed. Please use this money for repair work in the tower.”

November 4, 2003 – Thank you to George Doane from James Caldwell, Chairman, NB Board of Selectmen

“a few years ago when filtration plant was being added, no plans were made to keep Observatory intact. John Krusell and I (Caldwell) moved at town meeting to amend cost estimates to stabilize the tower but were voted down, *(no record)* but plans were altered to include tower. Grants applied for were turned down *(no records)*. The Historic Commission was asked to place the tower on the Historic Register but MHC showed little interest – more interest in establishing town historic districts.

April 7, 2004 – Letter from Ross Garner Law Offices (NY) regarding Doane Gift

Last Will and Testament of George H. Doane – after debts and specific bequests “the rest, residue and remainder of my estate, both real and personal, give, devise and bequeath to the Selectmen’s Office of the Town of North Brookfield to be used specifically for the maintenance, restoration and upkeep of the Bates Observatory, Bell Hill. (The Selectmen, as beneficiary, waived issuance and service of citation and consented for the court to admit to probate.)

October 8, 2004 – Receipt of \$20,147.71 from Doane Estate for the Bates Observatory

NB Schedule of Departmental Payments to Treasurer – Dept: Water Gift – October 25, 2004 #189-000-48000-000 *(one account under board of selectmen)*

November 3, 2004 – Letter from Water Commissioners to Board of Selectmen

Board of Water Commissioners requested clarification regarding money from the Estate of George H. Doane. Unclear which Board will be making decisions regarding the use of the money. If it is the Board of Selectmen, Water Commissioners request that they be informed of construction or repairs on the structure. If Board of Water Commissioners is to make decision, letter to Historical Commission will be forwarded for meeting to work on ideas toward restoration. *(no records of response or further activity)*

February 6, 2006 – Letter from NY Public Administrator of Estates to NB Board of Selectmen on Behalf of the Bates Observatory

Enclosing additional \$70,059.26 receipt from Last Will and Testament of George H. Doane NB Schedule of Departmental Payments to Treasurer – Dept: Bates Observatory Trust - February 9, 2006 – #461-450-4850-000 *(one account under board of selectmen)*

February 17, 2006 – Telegram & Gazette “N. Brookfield has Funds to Store Observatory”

Total donations from the estate of George H. Doane \$90,206, combined with an existing account, funds for the facility total more than \$100,000.

March 8, 2006 – New Leader Article “Bates Observatory to be Repaired with Grant”

Thanks to a generous private donation of George Doane, Bates Observatory will receive much needed repair. Tower was part of former water system serving as a gatehouse near the manmade reservoir. That changed when holding pond was filled in and replaced by holding tank in another location in 2000.

March 27, 2006 – Letter from NB Admin Asst to Selectmen to Doane Estate Administrator

Enclosing news clipping regarding Bates Observatory and Mr. Doane’s bequest to the Town.

April 11, 2006 – Letter from Schoharie, NY County Attorney to Board of Selectmen

Assignment of Judgment for additional \$8,727.14, the bulk of which due to Town of North Brookfield under Doane Estate. Firm will not pursue collection – left to North Brookfield to determine further action. (No action was taken to pursue additional amount.)

January 24, 2008 – R. Potvin Letter of Interest to Board of Selectmen

Request to oversee restoration including details on background, restoration/construction, RFP, Funding, Compensation, Qualifications and timetable: 1 year.

March 10, 2008 – Robert Potvin Letter to Water Commissioner

Plans for Restoration: Premises inspected by local brick masons, contact with Howe Lumber, two meetings with Selectmen and appointment to Historical Commission. The Historical Commission will vote and oversee expenses paid from the Doane Bates Observatory Restoration Fund/North Brookfield. *(not true, nothing spent)*. Two meetings took place with John Couture, North Brookfield Building Inspector. Full set of architectural and structural plans will be needed detailing restoration. Two Architects – John Salem (Warren) and Richard Klein (Oakham) have been contacted. Volunteers: Matt Benvenuti, Andy Caron, Brandon Avery, John Krusell and Jim Caldwell. Offer to provide a cable free weather station to be installed next to the radio antennas. TVA Electronics of Ware will install when it is purchased.

February 4, 2008 – Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Water Commissioners

Mr. Potvin informed the Board he has taken the lead on renovating the Bates Observatory, and the project will not interfere with the current water supply. He reviewed the bequest made by George Doane with \$90,000 earmarked for restoration, which will be a construction job and he will need a location to business, computer and phone. Mr. Potvin’s plan for the tower after restoration includes a meter and underground conduits for electricity, cable and telephone. Mr. Potvin explained he would like to see the tower restored the way it was and employed the way it was originally intended. Mr. Kularski indicated they would like to see it restored – in its current condition it is an eyesore. There are a couple of concerns if the general public comes to use the observatory – parking could be an issue. Mr. Potvin envisioned a small sign, indicating that 20 people a year would be a lot. He envisioned digital instrumentation with weather instruments and kids in town could learn about our legacy/heritage. Mr. Kularski indicated concerns about the steep banking. Mr. Potvin

indicated he had a lot of ideas for the banking and the stairs would have to be extended and would be looked into later. Mr. Kularski indicated view to Boston would require removal of trees. Mr. Potvin indicated he was looking into tree removal, if necessary.

February 4, 2008 R. Potvin Letter to Board of Selectmen

Initial inspection, measurements and planning: obtain permit, inspect interior for wood and brick work, interior measurements, basement and gate valve assembly inspection on first floor and agreement on use: public vs. private, meter needed for electricity, telephone and cable line through underground conduits, suggest local refined cabinetmaker (Alan Rock of West Brookfield) and Paquette Contracts for brick work

February 4, 2008 R. Potvin Letter to Water Commissioners

Taking charge of observatory, including a 5 page copy of letter to Selectmen (dated January 24, 2008) including plans for restoration. Sworn in as member of Historical Commission.

February 18, 2008 – Inspection of Bates Observatory by Robert Potvin

1. Formidable Challenge
2. All original woodwork intact – much rotten and water soaked or missing
3. Stairways rotten – climbing to the top is dangerous
4. Wood railings are intact
5. First floor windows are bricked in
6. Second floor windows missing – closed in with plywood
7. Tin roof is intact – Hatchway roof is stored in NB water dept.
8. Incredible views

March 4, 2008 – Telegram & Gazette “Group Begins Inventory of Heritage Landscapes”

Suggestions for the inventory include Horse Pond Reservoir, beach at Lake Lashaway, the North Brookfield Sportsmen’s Club and the Bates Observatory

March 4, 2008 – Letter to Water Commissioners from R. Potvin

Will require legal agreement, local tradesmen who will work on the project will hold town of NB harmless.

More than 50 years in disrepair. Used during WWII as strategic lookout for enemy planes and Boy Scouts used the observatory.

Recommendations for future use:

- Local weather observation with digital instrumentation
- Hands-on living museum with professional photos of NB past displayed on interior walls
- Seasonal picnic areas with tables where reservoir used to be
- Nature trails with walks from Main Street at New Braintree and Oakham Roads
- Astronomy platform atop tower with celestial telescopes
- Computers for internet research
- Classroom for earth sciences for field trips of elementary and high school students

Restoration Needs:

- Is foundation safe and secure?

- Some exterior bricks need replacing – weakest points 4 corners where bricks falling apart on top and replace pipe safety railing
- Windows need replacing – 24 custom steel-framed weather proof windows
- Wood Walkway and picket-type fence will need to be reinstalled, new flooring and interior stairs will be necessary
- New electric conduits inside and out to make building autonomous – consider solar panels?
- Running water is necessary
- Interior of building must be inspected and ceiling atop tower insulated
- Roof/waterproofing a new top floor – ceiling and door to the top level is a must

Alternatives to complete restoration:

- Estimates from local tradesmen for time and materials
- Seek bids from general contractors in the region
- Seek bids from historical restoration specialists
- Workers comp insurance
- General liability
- Bonding
- Funding: independent – tax dollars will not be sought
- 1 year to complete
- Deed out property to provide autonomy? Water Commrs will be approached for input.

March 10, 2008 – R. Potvin Letter to Water Commissioners

Planning stages of restoration going well. Historical Commission will vote and oversee expenses paid from Observatory Restoration Fund. NB Building Inspector, John Couture, advises full set of architectural and structural plans detailing restoration in areas to be rebuilt. Architects contacted. Would like to donate weather station.

March 17, 2008 – Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Water Commissioners

Robert Potvin was present to discuss the restoration of the Bates Observatory. Two brick masons have visited the site and he has talked with three architects. The plan is to get an architectural rendering and structural engineering recommendation. Next week he will make a presentation to the Historical Society. He is working with the Historical Society and the Historical Commission to go along with everything and they are. He has been in touch with George Doane's sister (Edith). She has written letters to him telling him about the way it was. Mr. Potvin will donate a weather station for the new building that will go along with the restoration. Mr. Potvin asked for copies of archives for his March 26, 2008 presentation. He is also working with the building inspector, suspecting it should only take a year. Mr. Nason indicated there was no problem providing it doesn't disrupt the workings of the Water Department. Mr. Potvin's request to use the lunch room, computer and phone line was not approved. Mr. Thomasian suggested a construction trailer. Mrs. LeBlanc asked if the Observatory had been placed on the Historic Register. Mr. Potvin did not believe that happened. Mr. Thomasian expressed his concerns about the existence of enough funds to complete the project - the unsafe structure cannot be left because we ran out of money. He indicated we are all in favor for it to be restored, but understands the cost factors involved.

March 26, 2008 – R. Potvin – “My Vision of Bates Observatory and Bell Hill”

Mr. Potvin envisions a “Bates Lookout Park” with Visitors Center behind lookout tower/restoration within one year. Surrounding area used for family recreation, selectively harvest mature conifer trees, display Bates and Town artifacts. Install walkway to observatory.

March 26, 2008 – Social Web – Historic Bates Observatory Past, Present and Future

Historical Society presentation by Bob Potvin of original documents and articles of Observatory. Discussion of history, current condition and plans for restoration.

March 28, 2008 – Worcester News Tonight

Robert Potvin describes plans for restoration and use.

March 28, 2008 – Worcester Telegram “Observatory Project Begins”

Meeting of Historical Society was serving to launch the project to restore the neglected tower. Restoration still in embryonic stage.

Spring 2008 – Upper Quaboag Watershed and North Quabbin Region Landscape

Inventory from Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program (*Various town entities represented*)

Bates Observatory . . . the windows have been boarded over and painted with a series of murals. Still owned by the Town of North Brookfield, the structure has fallen into disrepair and abandoned in lieu of large water storage tank to the east. The views have been obstructed by trees in several areas but remain open to the south and southwest. The former reservoir area has also remained open and is a mowed grass surface. The Town has been pursuing the funds to restore the building and recently acquired a significant amount willed to the project by a community member. The Observatory was listed as a Scenic and Unique Environment in the 2007 Master Plan.

Issues:

- The structure is in need of restoration and there is currently not sufficient funding for this endeavor
- Although located on permanently protected land, there is currently no level of protection on the building itself

Recommendations:

1. Nominate the Observatory to the National Register of Historic Places - this would provide opportunities for rehabilitation grant funds from the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) administered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission.
 2. Actively pursue funds for rehabilitation from a variety of private and public organizations and individuals including the MPPF administered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission.
 3. Pass the Community Preservation Act to raise funds for observatory rehabilitation, as well as other historic preservation, open space preservation and affordable housing projects throughout North Brookfield.
 4. The town should study the feasibility of the site and building as a cultural destination and scenic attraction. Several key views could be restored and a picnic/passive recreation area could be developed in the former reservoir area.
3. Heritage Landscape Inventory List from Local Identification Meeting –

Priority #1 – Downtown District: Town House, Library, Episcopal & Congregational Churches, Train Station, Bank, Fire House, Old Town Common, Amasa Walker House, White Overall Factory, Maple Street Cemetery and Gilbert Street Neighborhood

Priority #2 – Bates Farm Area: Bates Farm (Windemuth Farm, Bates Grove, Town Pond, Cobbler’s Barn, Natural Springs and Original Town Center

Priority #3 – Coy’s Brook Corridor: Coy’s Brook, Small Pox Cave, Cider Mill and Historic Stagecoach Road

Priority #4 – Bates Observatory

(NO PROGRESS SINCE 2008 beyond Downtown District activities – Priority #1)

April 11, 2008 – Robert Potvin Letter to Board of Water Commissioners

Observatory campaign underway. Friends of Observatory: Bud Lane, John Krusell, Debbie Dupre and Bob Potvin. Donations coming in – hope to raise \$100,000 this year for observatory and surrounding grounds. News media assisted in getting out the word. Request one-time exception for chicken barbecue fundraising picnic atop Bell Hill on July 4, 2008. Police officer will be present – activities will be around the tower, not near water treatment facility. NB Sportsmen’s Club invited to handle cookout and share profits pending Water Cmmr approval.

(record of donated amounts? One account under BOS)

April 14, 2008 – Board of Water Commissioners Meeting Minutes

The board approved Mr. Potvin’s request for a Friends of the Bates Observatory fundraising Chicken BBQ on July 4, 2008, indicating what they bring it must be brought out. Other business at the meeting included solutions to insure storage tank security, including gate compliance in addition to vent security and a hatch alarm.

April 15, 2008 – Board of Water Commissioners Letter to Robert Potvin

Event approved by Water Commissioners. What is brought in must be brought out – no access to water treatment facility. Suggest contacting town departments for necessary permits, etc.

June 10, 2008 – Senator Brewer letter to Robert Potvin, NB Historical Commission

Response to contact with his office regarding available grants to restore Bates Observatory. Mass Cultural Council matching grant programs and Mass Historical Commission information included. MHC 2008 Preservation Projects Fund & Survey and Planning Grant Program deadlines already passed, but Emergency Fund and application information enclosed.

October 1, 2008 – Robert Potvin Letter to Board of Selectmen (Bid Package)

- Request to hire Paquette Construction of West Brookfield
- March 16, 2008 – Paquette Contracting West Brookfield for initial discovery estimates including of 2nd floor walls, ceiling, roof and interior/exterior wall structure & repair. \$63,000 – excluding windows, doors, stairs and catwalk, concrete/brickwork
- April 25, 2008 - Dan Benoit (Worcester) April 15, 2008 – Restoration design, development, documents, bidding assistance and construction administration \$21,200 plus additional services at hourly rates ranging from clerical \$45.00 to Principal \$160.00 and reimbursable expenses. ***(appears inconclusive)***

- April 29, 2008 - Russell Swinton Oatman (Princeton) April 18, 2008 – drawings, specs and visits during process \$35,000 (*work plan not addressed*)
- May 1, 2008 – John Salem – submitted qualifications only (*no estimate*)
- August 14, 2008 - Michael Burke (Worcester) / Discussion with Couture – Engineering/Supervision Fee \$2,500 (*work plan not addressed*)
- Terry Cline, Swellright AIA (Oakham) – 30 photographs taken on 4/13 (*no response*)
- Steve Vandyke, Nault Architects (Worcester) (*no response*)

NOTE: Voting members of the Historical Commission on October 1, 2008 included: Robert Potvin (President), John Krusell, Brandon Avery, Michael Hubacz and Andrew Caron. The Restoration Committee on March 10, 2008 consisted of Matthew Benvenuti, Andrew Caron, Brandon Avery, John Krusell and James Caldwell.

October 14, 2008 – Selectmen Letter to R. Potvin

Would like a more definitive cost estimate and request for price cap for job in writing from Paquette. **Response:** Mechanical Engineer Michael Burke will evaluate details and scope – couple of days and use “cherry picker” to do inspection. *Price cap and quote in writing never received*

February 8, 2012 – Letter from Edith Doane to Board of Selectmen

Referring to brother’s bequest, in their day, the Observatory was a wonderful place to visit and lookout over the town. Today it is surrounded by trees, site of water plant and can no longer be used as it was intended in 1893 when it was built. Would endorse transferring money to support another need of the Town if it is possible . . . Town House needs attention, a national landmark. Funds should not sit in an account year after year when they can be put to good use. Brother would probably want the same thing had he known what has happened to Bell Hill over the years.

March 14, 2012 – Worcester Telegram “Bequest for One Tower May Save Another”

Various attempts over the past decade to preserve the crumbling red brick observation tower have fallen short. Tropical Storm Irene damaged bell tower in vacant Town House. It was removed last fall.

June 5, 2012 Letter from Brian Riley, Attorney at Kopelman and Page, P.C. in response to Edith Doane Letter

In response to Edith’s letter to change brother’s bequest to allow funds to be used elsewhere as needed by town, for instance, town house. It is possible, but requires assent by AG’s office. If over \$75,000, a cy pres complaint must be filed with the Probate Court for approval. Ms. Doane has no authority to implement change, but the AG has a way to handle such a change without going to Probate Court, only if amt is less than \$75,000. Will need some facts first: Has it become impracticable to carry out donor’s request at this point, and are we looking to come up something similar (example: one town received a 100-year old building for use as a town library that was not only too small, but the town had already constructed a new one. Approval was sought to use the old building as a museum, under the Historical Society, plus a few town offices. The AG agreed to the new use as “relatively consistent with the donor’s intent” and it was filed as a complaint in the Probate Court. The AG supported the new use and the court signed off.

- 1) We must first convince the AG that the use of funds is impracticable – is it so far in disrepair that the town is likely to pursue fixing it up?
- 2) Would the repair be so expensive that \$90,000 is not enough to even start?
- 3) Is there some way or organize an alternative use that comes close to Mr. Doane’s intent – something else at Bell Hill to preserve the area?
- 4) If the town does wish to seek permission to use the funds for other purposes (i.e., townhouse), we need to convince the A that this honors the donor’s original intent – Edith Doane’s wishes might have some persuasive effect
- 5) How specific was the bequest?
- 6) It is conceivable that the AG would not agree that using it on the townhouse is a good compromise, but it would be worth exploring
- 7) It is not easy, but certainly worth exploring if the Observatory repairs are not feasible.