

The Parlor

Restored by the Bedford Historical Society to 1825-1840

This is the parlor, which was added by Oliver Abbott sometime after he acquired the house in 1826. Oliver was the fifth Lane to live here. When he was deeded it from his stepfather, Stephen Lane, it was a 26-acre farm, with a barn and outbuildings. Oliver improved the little house by adding this parlor, the bedchamber above it, back stairs, and an extension to the kitchen. He also rebuilt the fireplaces and chimney.

Oliver had tragedy in his life: his first wife, Mary, died of consumption just a month after their wedding. He married again to Mary Ann Buttrick, and they had five children. He must have had a good voice, for he was assistant singing master. He also served as a selectman, a magistrate, and as Bedford's representative to the state legislature. At Oliver's death, the children were still teenagers, too young to manage a farm, and so the property passed out of the Lane family and was sold to Hiram Dutton in 1843. The Dutton descendants lived here for about a hundred and twenty-five years. We'll tell you more about them upstairs.

The Murals: When Oliver Abbott built the parlor, he – or maybe his wife, Mary Ann – decided to have murals painted on the walls. The murals are done in the style of Rufus Porter, a very famous New England artist, who was living in Billerica at the time. There are five or six homes in Bedford that have remnants of his murals. Porter often painted in full color, as you can see in the book [**two books are on the card table**] although this room is in monochrome. (A sidelight on Rufus Porter – besides being a painter and muralist, he was a musician, an inventor and very interested in science. He began a magazine called “Scientific American” which is still in existence.) He published a booklet on how to paint a mural, and if you didn't want to hire him, you could buy the booklet and do it yourself.

Over the years, the murals were covered with many layers of wallpaper. Lillian Dutton, the last to live in the house, removed the thick layers at one point and found the murals. She covered them back up with just one new layer of wallpaper told to us by her daughter Olive, when she visited us. That was removed painstakingly when the house became a museum. This [**framed piece**] shows part of a scene that stuck to the back of the paper when it was peeled off. The mural underneath was in bad condition, [**show un-touched mural behind the east door**] so they have been restored by a conservator. We're very fortunate to have them!

Furnishings:

Fireplace Cupboard: We don't know what the cupboard over the fireplace was used for, but we use it as a bookcase for some of the Dutton's books. Some date back to 1841, and they are all inscribed to various members of the family.

Card Table: There was often a card table in a nineteenth century parlor. This one is hinged and can unfold. Whist was a popular game to play at the time.

Harvest Table: The harvest table under the west window is one that comes from a Lane descendant, Harry Mayo. Underneath, Job and Martha's great-great grandson wrote

“This table was bought by my mother before her marriage in the year 1823.
M.B. [Martin Benjamin Lane]”

Sofa: The Windsor sofa is a gift from the Bedford Historical Society. It was re-upholstered to complement the rug and the murals. At that time the horsehair seat cushion was removed. The sofa was bought by the members of the BHS upon Louise K. Brown's death. The Society had no place to display the sofa, and we were given the sofa and upholstered it.

Rug: The Afghan rug is over 100 years old and made of silk and lamb's wool. The rug has “Elephant's Feet” designs see the beast's big black footprints in the center? It was a gift from Bedford resident Barbara Marshall, who had it in her home in Switzerland when she was a child.

-Sharon McDonald, Curator