



A Beacon History Sampler

Featuring ten of Beacon's favorite landmarks and historic sites, along with links to further research, articles, and recommended books.

Hello, curious readers!

What do the Greek goddess Hebe, a freed slave turned celebrated botanist, a revolutionary 19th century author, and a four-legged firefighter have in common?

They all called Beacon their home. Interested? Read on to learn more...

Madam Brett Homestead

Madam Catharyna Brett moved to the Hudson Valley in 1708. Ten years later, her husband Roger drowned, leaving Catharyna and their children to survive in a wild, uncharted land with little money and few friends. So what did Catharyna do? She built a grist mill, became an ally of the Wappinger people, and developed her land into a village- all in a time before women could vote!



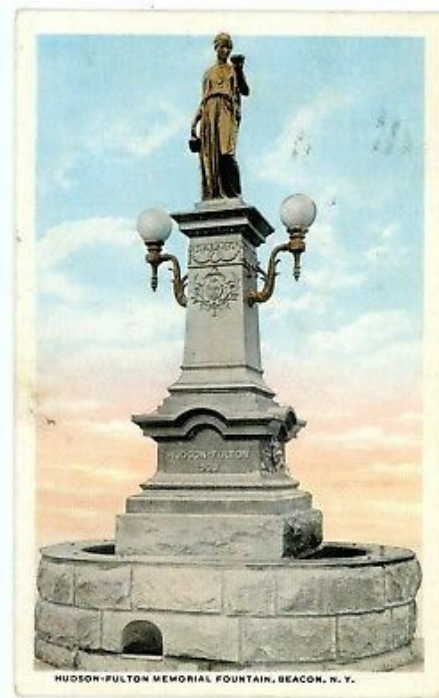
[Click here to read more about Madam Brett.](#)

[Information on how to visit the Homestead.](#)



Hudson-Fulton Statue/Hebe

The Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1909 was one of the biggest parties ever held along the Hudson River, celebrating the 300 year anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage and the 100 year anniversary of Robert Fulton's steamboat. Hebe originally stood on top of a fountain that was installed on Main Street to commemorate the event. That's right- the real fountain of youth!



[Click here to learn more about Hebe and her fountain.](#)

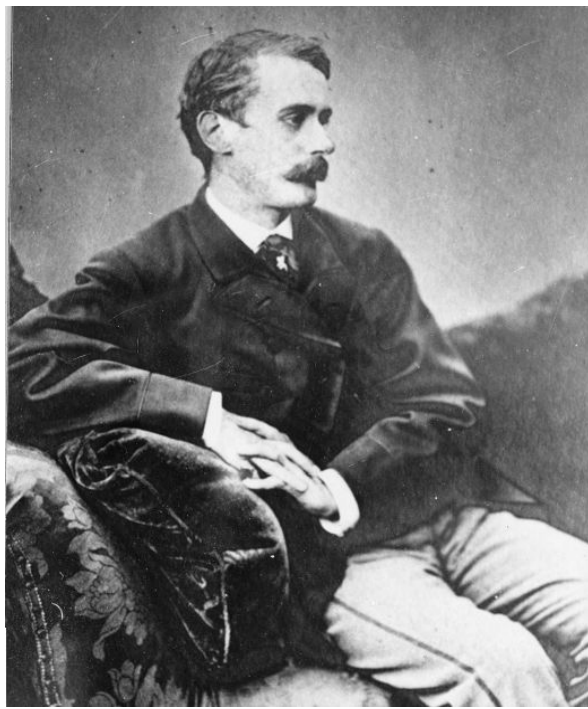
[Read the Original Program for the Hudson-Fulton Celebration](#)

[See pictures of how people celebrated in 1909.](#)



Joseph & Eliza Howland

General Joseph Howland and his wife Eliza Woolsey are Beacon's most special heroes. While they are mostly known for the library they started in 1872, Joe and Eliza's original claim to fame was the role they played in the Civil War, fighting for the Union. They later dedicated their lives to promoting education, advocating for human rights, and making the world a better place.



[Click here to learn more about the Howland Cultural Center.](#)

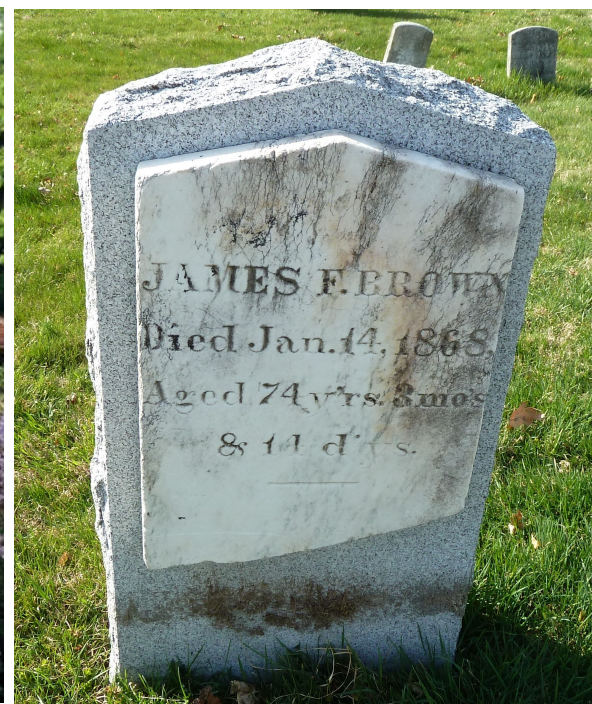
Read about [Howland's regiment](#) or [Eliza's family letters.](#)



James F. Brown

James F. Brown lived an incredible life: he escaped from slavery, avoided capture by befriending the Verplancks, taught himself how to read and write, and risked everything to return to the South to buy his wife's freedom.

He later became a prominent horticulturist and kept a journal for 40 years- the single most detailed document of what daily life was like here in the 1800s.



[Click here to visit James F. Brown's garden.](#)

[Read some of Brown's original journals.](#)

[Read about Brown's life story and horticulture.](#)



The School Bell

As Beacon has grown and changed, so has its schools. The Spring Street School educated generations of children until 1953, when a new school was needed. That school would be named for James V. Forrestal, an alum of Spring Street that went on to become the nation's first Secretary of Defense. The old school bell from Spring Street was placed out front in memory of Beacon's forgotten schools and is ceremonially rung for retiring teachers and graduating students of Forrestal.



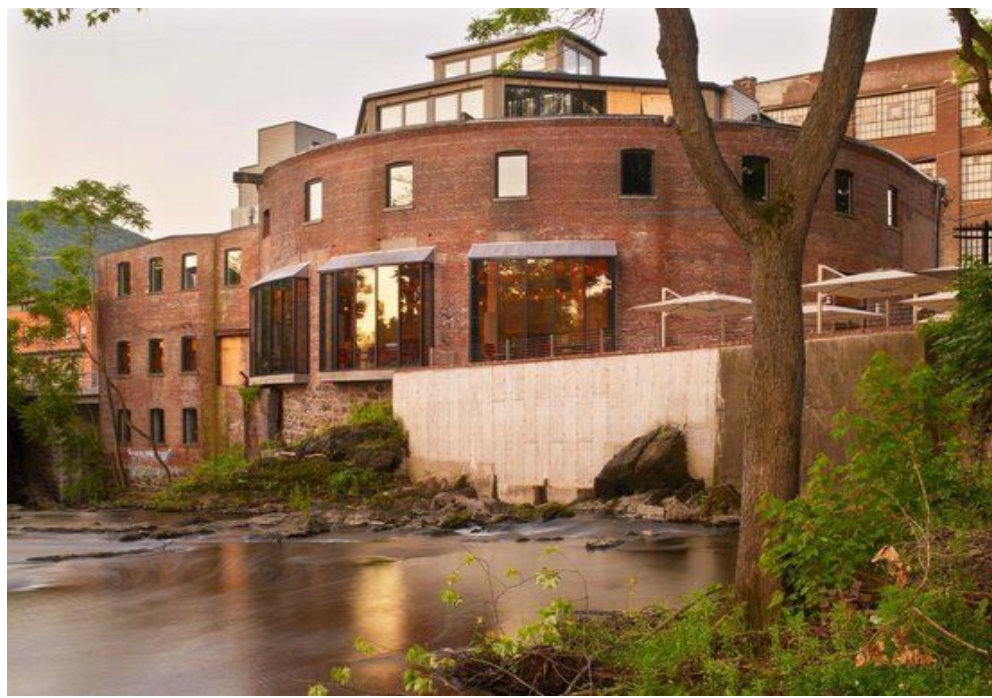
[Click here to read how the school got its name.](#)

[Learn more about James Forrestal, \(and see a picture of him as a student at Matteawan High School.\)](#)



The Roundhouse and Swift's Machines

Beacon is most famous for its hat factories, which earned us the nickname “The Hat Capitol.” But did you know the Roundhouse was originally America’s first lawn mower factory? The round shape of the building was to accommodate the forges needed to make all the metal parts. Why Beacon? Because Henry Winthrop Sargent, famous horticulturist and namesake of Sargent School, lived here and convinced his friend Horatio Nelson Swift to begin making them at his factory.



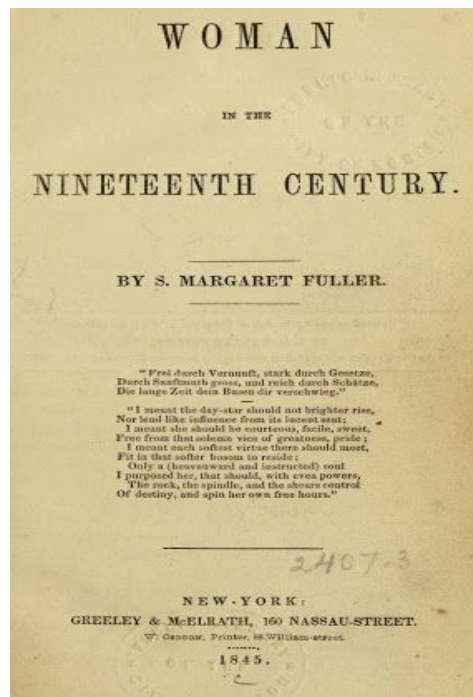
[Click here to read about Swift's Machine Shop.](#)

[Learn how a factory became a hotel and restaurant.](#)



Woman in the Nineteenth Century

Margaret Fuller visited the Van Vliet Boarding House in Fishkill Landing in 1844. It was there that she penned her most famous work, “Woman in the Nineteenth Century,” the firstmost piece of American feminist literature. When it was published in 1845, Fuller’s essay was celebrated by some as a work of genius and condemned by others as obscene. Today it remains one of feminism’s most important works. The marker in Polhill Park commemorates both Fuller and the Van Vliet House.



[Click here to read about Fuller’s marker.](#)

[Read “Woman in the Nineteenth Century.”](#)



Beacon's Fire Houses

For a little city, Beacon has had a long history with fires. Thankfully, we can rely on our trusty fire fighters to keep us safe!

Who were Willard H. Mase and Lewis Tompkins? Both fellows were prominent hat factory owners in their day. The recently closed Beacon Engine was our first firehouse, and was named "Beacon" before the city was!



[Learn about the old Tompkins Hose firehouse.](#)

[Read about how Beacon Engine fought fire with snow.](#)



Ben the Fire Horse

If you thought the last page was interesting, then you will definitely want to know about Ben, Beacon's most unique firefighter. Ben was the fire horse for Tompkins Hose, pulling their fire wagon from 1903 to 1918, when a shiny new fire engine was bought. Ben was Beacon's favorite animal hero and is still beloved by many lovers of history today.



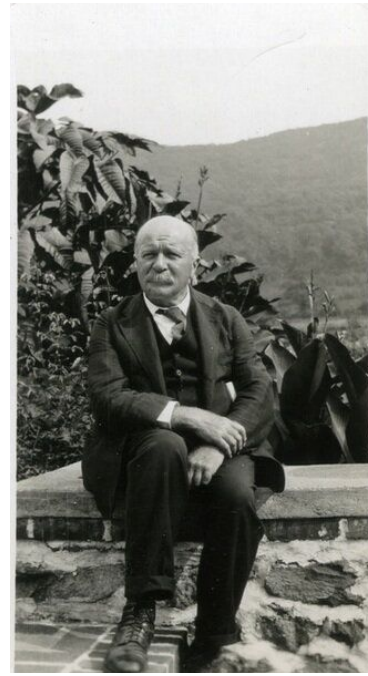
[Click here to listen to Ben's story.](#)

[Read more about Ben's adventures.](#)



Charles B. Stover

Have you enjoyed a summer at Beacon's University Settlement Camp? Then thank Charles B. Stover, former Commissioner of Parks for Manhattan. Hailed as "Father of the Playground," Stover was notoriously private and once disappeared for several months, telling no one where he went or why. He returned safely, resigned, moved to Beacon, and spent the rest of his life creating the perfect camp.



[Click here to read more about Charles B. Stover.](#)

[Learn more about Stover's summer camp.](#)



Still Curious about Beacon's History?

Consider reading “[Historic Beacon](#)” and “[Beacon Revisited](#)” by former Beacon Historical Society presidents Robert J. Murphy and Denise Doring VanBuren. Click on the titles above to learn more!

Still not satisfied? Our city has an endless amount of stories to tell. Come visit the Beacon Historical Society and explore our archives of photographs, newspapers, artifacts, and documents! Please consider following our social media to stay updated on how to visit, when to attend our tours and presentations, and discover ways to volunteer in preserving and sharing our historic treasures.

Thanks for reading- and thanks for your interest in our history!



Visit the [Beacon Historical Society Website](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).