

Video: A look inside Fort Taber in New Bedford

We had a chance to film on the 2nd and third levels of **Fort Taber** in New Bedford during a living history camp as part of the continuing recognition of the Centennial Observance of World War I (1914 – 1918).

World War I, also known as the First World War or the Great War, began on July 28, 1914, and ended at 11:00 AM on November 11, 1918, (11th Hour of the 11th Day of the 11th Month).

The war was a global conflict mostly centered in Europe but saw significant fronts in Africa, Middle East, Southwest Asia, and in the Pacific Islands. More than 9 million combatants and 7 million civilians died as a result of the war, a casualty rate exacerbated by the belligerents' technological and industrial sophistication, and tactical stalemate. It was one of the deadliest conflicts in history, paving the way for major political changes, including revolutions in many of the nations involved.

10 Things to Know About Fort Taber

Smith Brothers Inc., Brewery: From their 19th century

start, surviving the Prohibition, into the 1950s

*The city once had a fair number of breweries and distributors.
(Spinner Publication)*

Yum. Beer.

I can't recall a time where there have been more breweries, microbreweries, or varieties. There is even, for the first time in history, such a thing as a beer snob.

We've all run into *that* guy – the one who asks you what your favorite beers are, and then promptly tells you why you are wrong for choosing that beer. He will then proceed to tell you what *your* favorite beers are based on genetic profiles of hops, obscure strains of barley, and the alignment of specific astral bodies and planets. While you sit there stunned by his obnoxiousness, he'll finish with a "You're welcome."



*The Smith Brothers
started brewing beer,
ale and stouts at 22
William Street in
1880. (Spinner
Publications)*

I don't know a heck of a lot about beers, I'm an oenophile – a fancy word for a wino. Whenever I am confronted by a beer snob, I tell them "That's all fine and dandy, but that's my

favorite beer because I like the way it tastes. Planetary alignment be damned." It's the same advice I give to people who ask me about wines. Let your tongue lead the way, not fancy formulas, company backgrounds or unneeded facts. What tastes good to you? Try a bunch – it's fun.

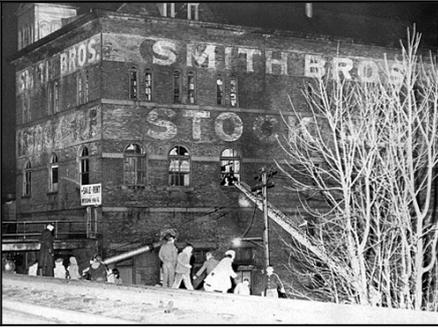
Anyhow, there was a much simpler time in New Bedford's history. A time when there were only a few breweries locally, and only a small number of varieties to choose from. Since Dawson's is the most well-known, I thought I'd highlight New Bedford's second best-known brewery: the Smith Brothers Inc.

Smith Brother's Brewery has quite a long history in the city. Brothers James T. and Joseph F. Smith started offering ale, whiskey, and beer in 1880 from a small storefront at 22 William Street – where Arthur Moniz's Gallery is today. They quickly outgrew this spot and moved the entire operation to 777 Purchase Street (near Family Dollar) in the late 1890s making locals pretty darn happy. They were said to specialize and produce superior stouts, bocks, porters, and ales.

That is until World War I rolled around. On December 18, 1917, the U.S. Senate proposed an 18th Amendment which would prohibit the production, sale, transport or purchase of alcoholic beverages. Almost a year later, on November 18, 1918, U.S. Congress would pass the temporary Wartime Prohibition Act to save grain for the war effort. This would ban the sale of any alcoholic beverage that had an alcohol content greater than 2.75% – pretty much everything. It would take full effect on June 30, 1919 and next day would be known as the "Thirsty-First".

Things would begin to get quite serious when on January 16, 1919, the 18th amendment was ratified as a part of the Constitution. By October, the government would enact the Volstead Act which would carry out the intent of this amendment, but allowed exceptions for manufacturers, specific industries, scientific research, or...ahem religious rituals. I

guess, the government wouldn't have bought that someone was a Beer-ist and practiced Beer-ism.



The third location for Smith Brothers Inc. Brewery at 425 Coggeshall Street was razed by fire in 1961. (Spinner Publication)

Sometime in this period between 1918-1920 – likely 1918, the Smith Brothers ceased operations. It isn't clear whether they continued to manufacture beer for industrial, scientific and religious use or not. I couldn't imagine there would be enough profits in that to keep a facility open.

Things go dark on the Smith Brothers until they are issued U-Permit No. MA-U-113 allowing the resumption of their brewing operations 1933 at 425 Coggeshall Street right next to the railroad tracks in a spot in between the JM of New Bedford Insulation and Metro Industrial & Marine Supply buildings are today.

In this first year, they had a number of labels: Smith Bros. Stout (1933-1937), Smith Bros. Light Dinner Ale (1933-1950), Smith Bros. Stock Ale (1933-1950), and Smith Bros. Pale Ale (1933-1950). In 1937 they added two more labels: Belmont Beer (1937-1943) and Elco Beer (1937-1943). Finally, three more in 1938: Smith's Ale (1938-1942), Smith's Bock (1938-1942), and Smith's Porter (1938-1942).

The Smith Brothers would cruise along turning a profit until the late 1940s when things began to slow down with the advent of World War II. The specifics are uncertain, but they did survive the war but limped along until they closed their doors for good in 1950. In 1961, a fire destroyed the facility and any physical record of its existence was erased from the city.

Of course, beer trays, labels, bottles, and other memorabilia can be found on auction sites, yard sales, and Craigslist. If you are interested in buying some memorabilia and have had no luck with these, there is an excellent beer site that offers memorabilia from every beer that has existed, including the Smith Brothers. You can see that site [here](#).

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New Bedford Streets; A Piece of Americana: Topham Street

Welcome to next installment in the New Bedford Streets; A Piece of Americana series. Previously we covered William Street, Kempton Street, Middle Street, Centre Street, Ashley Boulevard, Elm Street, Coggeshall Street, Mechanics Lane, Washburn Street and others. If you would like to read those or perhaps revisit them, they can be found by using the search bar to the right. You can also select the “Streets” category.

As usual, I'd like to re-iterate the importance of reader feedback, correction, and contributions. In the process of exploring these streets, I try to confirm or validate statements and dates by finding multiple sources. Unfortunately, if all those sources are making their statement based on an older, incorrect source, and there isn't any

dissenting information available, there's no way to know otherwise. So by all means, please join in.

In addition, when trying to validate some statements, often there is very little to no information available. I haven't decided which is worse – finding one source, or finding multiple sources, but not knowing if they were all founded on an inaccuracy. So help from local historians, those who remember, oral histories and anecdotes handed down through the generations, people with private collections, and even know-it-alls will help!

By all means, let us make this an open discussion to keep the “wiki” accurate.

Topham Street is a two block long residential street with history that goes back to the early 19th century. What is a Topham and how does relate to the city of New Bedford? What is so important that a street would be dubbed Topham?

Etymologically speaking, the word “Topham” is a compound of “top” and “ham.” “Ham” is a diminutive of hamlet, which is defined as “...a small settlement, generally one smaller than a village.” These hamlets or hams were unincorporated dwellings on the outskirts of town – people out in the “boonies.” These communities weren't large enough for a church, so were parts of a parish.



*Map of England,
showing the
region where the
Topham surname
emanated from:
South Yorkshire.
(Nilfanion)*

Topham is a hamlet on the River Went, in Skyehouse, South Yorkshire, England. Phew, that's a lot descriptors. let's just say that it's a quiet little hamlet in the North of England. The reason it is called so has been lost to time, but one explanation is that it was called "Topham" because it was a hamlet that was built on the top of a "hill" to avoid flood waters from the River Went, a tributary of the River Don. The area is very flat, and the area where Topham is built, is about 16 feet above sea level, so I use the term with some liberty.

Another explanation is that it comes from Danish-Viking word 'thorp or thorpe' which means village or farmstead and is relatively common in that part of England.

I'm not completely sure of the size of Topham "back in the day," but today Topham has less than a dozen homes in it and it appears they are all farms.

So how did we get from Topham, a small settlement of homes in England, to Topham as a surname? Well, it's a British "thing." Surnames didn't come into use until the 13th-14th century in England. Up to that time, you were known by who your father was, e.g. John son of John, your occupation, e.g. the Smith, the Tanner, etc. or by where you were from, John from York. These would eventually be shortened to John Johnson, John Tanner, or John York.

Locational surnames were especially popular for those who emigrated to the New World. Many British still recalled their

home towns fondly. They didn't necessarily leave because they disliked where they came from, but rather because of poor economic conditions, religious intolerance, or simply seeking new opportunities.

In the case of Topham, it appears the surname was chosen as a way to pay tribute Topham proper. To remember your roots and where you came from. Apparently people thought highly of this little part of the word, because Topham and its myriad of mind-boggling variations can be commonly found – almost ubiquitously so. There is Toppham, Tophamn, Tophams, Tophan, Tophann, Tofahm, Tophma, Topha, Toapha, Tophain, Thopham, Tophane, Tophm, Tophans, Tophqm, Tophal, just to name a few.

When it comes to the specific variations here in Massachusetts, you'll find Toppan, Tappan, and Topham. Trying to follow the lineage of one family is tough enough. Having variations is overwhelming and it's prudent to narrow things down.

Things get very messy, especially when the various Tophams intermarry with the Giffords, Rogers, Shermans, Pecks (via pilgrim **Joseph Peck** who came aboard the Diligent in 1638), Morses (of Morse drill "fame"), Crapos, etc.

The first Topham to come to the New World was Abraham Topham, baptized on April 10, 1606 in Calbridge, England, the parish of Coverham, about 70 miles from our Topham. 30 year old Abraham arrived in Yarmouth in 1637 aboard the "Mary Anne." He brought with him, his wife Susanna, children Peter and Elizabeth and their maidservant, 18 year old Anne Goodin. For unknown reasons this Topham, altered his surname to Toppan upon arrival.

Since the name of the street is not one of the Toppan or Tappan variants, that is what I'm sticking with. Especially since, Tappan is the word for the Lenape tribe that inhabited a region of New York at the time. End trail.

Let's speak of solely Tophams in New Bedford so we don't get caught in an ever expanding web of surnames and unrelated topics. The first Tophams in New Bedford are direct descendants of Mayflower pilgrims **John Rogers, Thomas Rogers** and **John Alden**.

These descendants spread out over Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Newport, Newburyport, and other parts of New England. The first one to turn up in New Bedford is Robert Carter Topham (1815-1889), born in Newport Rhode Island. His connection with the Pecks from the Mayflower are via his mother Mary Richmond Peck (1787-1822). He married Bathsheba Barton (1815-1892) on June 10, 1838.



Robert Carter Topham made his fortune supplying the city with lumber. (Spinner Publications)

It's difficult to find out the exact year that he and his wife removed to 89 South Second Street, New Bedford, but by 1850 he was referred to as one of the wealthiest residents of the city. How did he build his wealth? He owned an eponymous lumber company at 2 Griffin Street that benefited greatly from the booming whaling industry. He and his wife were endeared by locals for their charitable donations and advocacy for children.

Per descendant and New Bedford resident C.P. Sherman, he also volunteered as a fireman, was a member of the fraternity the

East Mason's Lodge, was on the city's Fireworks Board, and the Treasurer/Steward at the Fourth Street Methodist Church and Grace Church. On the topic of children, he and Bathsheba had two sons – Philip Morse Topham (1839-1897) and William B. Topham (1853-1914).

William, a lifelong resident of New Bedford, would serve as City Auditor for most of his life. Philip would serve on whaling vessels and as a mariner and in the Merchant Services until the start of the Civil War. Having a military bent he decided to enlist and saw fighting at Gettysburg as one of Abraham Lincoln's Minute Men in the 3rd Massachusetts Regiment. He would eventually transfer to the U.S. Navy aboard the U.S.S. Calypso, before returning to New Bedford to help his father run his business, as a clerk.

So, in all likelihood Topham Street got its name from one of its wealthiest, charitable, and philanthropic citizens who was active in the community: Robert Carter Topham. Robert passed away in 1889 and was buried at the Rural Cemetery and Friends Cemetery on Dartmouth Street.

Seven Almost Forgotten School Devices

Here is another installment in our *Who Remembers?* series. You can browse previous articles by using the search bar on the right or by clicking [here](#). These articles are strolls down memory lane. In some cases the buildings, but new businesses have replaced them. In other instances, the buildings or even the properties have been razed. Instead of a building, it may be a TV show, personality, or commercial that no one longer

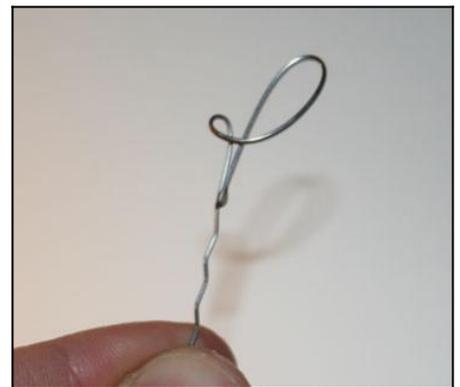
exists. Either way, it can't stop us from taking the Memory Lane stroll!

As always we would rather this be a discussion. No one knows this area better than those who grew up here! Please, leave constructive criticism, feedback, and corrections. We'd love to hear your anecdotes. Please share!

I was born in 1970 so went to junior high school in the early 80s and high school in the mid to late 1980s. These memories may be universal – made or done through the decades and not necessarily specific to one ten year block. I'm actually curious to know, so if you went to high school in a different decade, please let us know which of these you recall.

01. Paper Fortune Teller

First created from a 1928 Origami book, the fortune teller was an elaborately folded paper device that you would manipulate with your fingers. Wikipedia states that they were also called a "...cootie catcher, chatterbox, salt cellar, or whirlybird."



The annoying and painful, Bobby Pin Snapper.

(15minutelunch.com)

There were eight wedges that would be colored or numbered and each would have an answer or a message. The player would be

asked what it was that they wanted an answer to. There were various formulas or cycles that the manipulator would utilize to come to the answer. Sometimes it would as simple as asking for a number and a color. Other times, the number of letters in the color, would determine the number of times that the manipulator would cycle through the flaps.

Girls would as if certain boys liked them, or vice versa. You could ask if you were going to get caught and grounded, if you were going to get a good grade, or whether some good luck was coming your way. It's amazing how much time could spent, and how much fun could be had, with such a simple device.

Want to make one and wax nostalgic? Maybe make an adult version? Here is a page with easy to follow instructions and pictures.

02. Bobby Pin Snapper

The bobby pin snapper, sometimes called a "bee stinger," was the bane of girls throughout junior high school and high school. Every boy thought the way to a girl's heart was to pick on her. So, if picking on her was how you "told" her that you liked her, causing her pain with a bobby pin snapper surely would send home the message.

In spite of the fact that it never worked, boys continued to believe in it. Many, red faced from being smacked or embarrassed, boys. The "smarter" boys would pick up on the failure of the device, so turn on one another in a free-for-all bobby pin snapper fight. Perhaps, in an attempt to show some machismo that would impress the girls.

Which, of course, also failed. So, we tried other things like pinching, throwing gum in hair, and physical stunts that usually led to injuring ourselves. All the while, simply carrying books or passing notes would have been sufficient. Pass that one along to any teen boys you know.

Want to make one and torture someone?