

## IN RECOGNITION

### Robert Wilder



In light of our Town's upcoming 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we dedicate this year's Annual Report to one of Brookfield's quiet unsung heroes and unofficial Town Historian, Robert (Bob) Wilder.

Born in Enfield, MA in 1938, his mother was an Eastern Abenaki Indian, and he is the tenth generation grandson of Mr. Thomas Wilder of Bunker Hill fame. Bob's family moved to the Brookfield area after Enfield was evacuated to make room for what we now know as the Quabbin Reservoir. As a teenager, he frequently visited the Warren Library, and began accumulating reference books regarding the history of the area, thus beginning a lifelong quest to chronicle the life and times of the Brookfield Plantation.

After graduating from Brookfield High School in 1951, he joined the Marines and served his country for nine years. He returned to Brookfield and resumed his interest in the history of our Town. After retirement he worked as a blacksmith at Old Sturbridge Village, even teaching the craft of shoeing oxen to others.

Bob has a real passion for our history and brings to life such issues as how most of the problems between the Pilgrims and the Indians revolved around land use. He expounds with authority on the French and Indian Wars —five in all, spanning 70 years—, the King Phillip's War, and how during the Battle of Brookfield, the Indians used cunning by attacking Brookfield first and severing the link between Boston and Springfield in the battles against the English. Then there is the historic value of buildings we use today, such as St. Mary's Church, and how it once divided and later reunited our community. Recently, he spoke about Brookfield's history during the King Philip's War. He told that Massasoit is buried here, near North Pond, and he recounted the story of bravery and hope of Mary Rowlandson and her children.

Bob has just completed his 46<sup>th</sup> map of the Brookfield area and can show what our area might have looked like when it was when under the sea, or covered with one mile of ice. His numerous tapes recounting our local history are archived at our own Merrick Public Library.

In addition to his wonderful work chronicling Brookfield's history, Bob has some lively stories that include such familiar names as his bunkmate and Red Sox hero Ted Williams, and Lee Trevino, golf legend and fellow Marine, as well as exciting experiences, such as climbing Mt. Fuji.

Bob, who is probably the only resident of Brookfield to receive a personal visit from a sitting MA governor, has been approached to set up a booth at our upcoming 350<sup>th</sup> Celebration. He makes one point perfectly clear: the Town of Brookfield is much more than just a collection of buildings — it's a spirit. Despite losses and fires, or whatever adversity we may have faced, the people of Brookfield have always come back together. We may be a small Town but we have great people in our community who know and care for each other.

It is our good fortune that Bob, his wife Nancy, his 3 children, 9 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren all live in the Brookfield area!