

Tributes and remarks on the occasion of John Dodge's 90th birthday

John Gibbons, Senior Minister at First Parish in Bedford

In African communities there is a special person called the *griot*. G-R-I-O-T

The griot is the tribal historian, storyteller, and praise-singer. The griot preserves the traditions of the tribe, the griot is a guardian of the culture, and the griot is usually one of the oldest men in the tribe. John Dodge: You are a Bedford griot!

You are our Town Historian. But you are no reciter of colorless names and dates. You bring color to our history, as when you recall the Town Meeting discussion about replacing a local bridge when a townsman scoffed and said this body of water was so narrow he could pee halfway across it. Declared out of order by the moderator, the man replied, "If I wasn't out of order, I could pee the whole way across!"

You literally bring color to our history when you sketch our historical buildings or hand color antique photographs. You tell stories about the time lightning struck the church and what you and your father did to protect it. You tell me about the minister with one leg. Not only do you tell us your stories, but you help others tell their stories as well, as when you hosted a panel of other veterans on Bedford TV, recalling memories of WWII.

When funny things happen in church, which is rather often, you say that laughter is what the world needs more of. You often speak of your love for this town and its people – you are a praise-singer – and your love for your son and daughter, for Connie, for your extended family, and your love and care for people you may never meet but whom you remember, all those who receive the winter coats you humbly collect every November for St. Francis House. The mission of St. Francis House says, "*We believe in the dignity of every human being and offer respect to all who enter the house.*"

John Dodge, you believe in the dignity of every human being and offer respect to all who enter your kind and smiling presence. To you, we return the respect with deep affection.

And, yes, you are one of the older guys in this Bedford tribe and today, Griot John Dodge, we confer upon you the degree of D.D., Doctor of Durability! And today, upon the occasion of your birthday, we salute you!

Gibbons's remarks concluded with a volley of STREAMERS!

William Moonan Chair of the Bedford Selectmen

On this august occasion, the celebration of your ninetieth birthday, I wish to extend to you my heartiest congratulations.

I want to thank you for all you have done for the Town to preserve its history, particularly through your work encouraging and aiding in the recording of oral histories before the opportunity to do so is lost. Your service as Town Historian has been greatly appreciated.

All of us in Bedford have enjoyed the historic photographs and line drawings that you personally hand-colored and generously donated to the Town. Your artwork has been hung in most of our municipal buildings and reminds us, even as we pay our taxes, of the way Bedford was and of the importance of preserving important pieces of that past as the Town moves into the future.

And I note with pride your charitable work collecting donations of money and winter coats for those in need, frequently sitting in the cold as voters walk into the polls. You have encouraged Bedford residents to open their pocket books and their hearts, making Bedford a better place. I thank you for adding this to Bedford's reputation.

For all these reasons, and for many not mentioned, I thank you for your contributions and offer my sincere best wishes for the coming years.

Selectman Michael Rosenberg

John Dodge, it's a privilege to wish you a happy birthday on your 90th. You're as much of an institution as the Town Common and the Town Hall. And I wish you another ninety years of good health, activity, and continued contributions to the quality of life in this town. Thank you.

Fr. Louis Canino, founder of Boston's St. Francis House

I hear there's a young man who's celebrating a special birthday this week. I remember this young man in the 1980s, when he walked into St. Francis House in Boston and he realized we didn't have any desks, except for maybe one or two for a staff of around ten people.

And here's this man who is so enthusiastic, so pleasant. He said, "Well, gee, I see you need desks and office equipment. I'll try my best to get some." And sure enough, this young man, at that time, got all the equipment we needed and we used for many, many years.

But come to find out, for this young man, that was only the beginning of a project for St. Francis House. He worked all these years, over twenty years, at the coat drive for the homeless. He raised thousands of dollars too, during the elections, also for the homeless.

John, you are one of the most dedicated people I've ever known. You are a gentle man. I wish you so many more blessings in your life. A great, great, happy birthday to a great guy. Have a great day and "Happy Birthday, John."