

The Falmouth Historical Society Annual Meeting

~~Falmouth Town Hall~~ and Online via Zoom
January 18, 2023

This was supposed to be a hybrid meeting. Everything was set up in the Council Chambers at Falmouth Town Hall for the first in-person annual meeting in three years. Due to a misunderstanding, we were unable to get into Town Hall after-hours. We hastily pivoted to an online-only meeting from another location and are glad that so many were able to join us via Zoom.

*The presentation slides are posted on the Society website at:
[https://thefhs.org/FHS 2023 Annual Meeting Slides.pdf](https://thefhs.org/FHS%202023%20Annual%20Meeting%20Slides.pdf).*

David Farnham, president, called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. He announced there would be a short business meeting, as required by the bylaws, followed by two presentations illustrating what the Society is doing.

All officers and directors were present in-person or online. A quorum of the membership was present.

Secretary's report

Suzanne Farnham, secretary, noted that the minutes for last year's annual meeting were approved by the board so we would dispense with the reading.

Members of the Society and community are urged to attend board meetings; the calendar is posted on the Society website. The board and committees meet regularly using Zoom.

Minutes, along with reports and presentation slides, for annual meeting and board meetings are posted online at the Society website under the "Documents" tab. For those thinking about becoming more involved, that's where you can learn more about what the Society is doing.

The Society's membership continues to grow slowly but steadily. There are 105 members including four corporate sponsors. Membership increased by 15% during the past year.

Treasurer's Report

David, as interim treasurer, presented the Society's financial condition on a single slide containing four charts. A detailed, eight-page financial report is posted on the Society website page for the annual meeting.

The summary shows that the Society is solvent, it stuck to its budget during 2022 (except for the sump pump calamity), and its income exceeded expenses.

The detailed report explains that \$5,000 of income was in a restricted grant for educational scholarships, \$8,391 of income was in a bequest from the late Hannah Russell that was transferred to the Maine Community Foundation to replenish the endowment, and much of the growth in long-term assets was the \$184,000 increase in land and buildings due to revaluation.

Those are large sums for a small nonprofit whose operating budget was only \$9,900. A closer examination of the financial report shows that the Society skates along the line between being in the red or black. At present, income is tracking with projections while expenses are \$800 above the budget (due to the sump issue), leaving the Society slightly in the red.

Carol Kauffman is recruiting volunteers for the audit committee.

Committee Reports

The Society has a committee structure to make it easier for volunteers to connect with their areas of interest.

Programs. Sally Farneth, director and chair of the Education Committee, reminded us that the Society has three program areas:

- Collections where we preserve the heritage of our town,
- Research where we discover lost and forgotten stories about our town, and
- Education where we tell the story of our town.

Sally reported that the Society works closely with Falmouth Schools to support history education. The current project will help teachers tell the story of the Aucocisco Band of Wabanaki who lived here before the arrival of English settlers.

Thanks to the generosity of the Perkins Family, last year the Society sponsored a \$3,000 scholarship for a deserving graduate from Falmouth High School. This year's scholarship will be \$5,000. The four Perkins siblings, the living children of Marion Perkins, Falmouth's town clerk in the 1960s, are all graduates of Falmouth High.

During 2022, the Society participated in eight public events beyond the Museum. Five were in-person and three were hybrid (in-person and online). We gave four public presentations related to the history of our town. At three events, our volunteers manned tables where people of Falmouth could bring questions about the people, places, and events in our town over the past four centuries.

Museum Operations. Betsy Jo Whitcomb, director and chair of the Museum Operations and Exhibits Committee, reported that the Museum and Barn were re-opened in May in time for Falmouth School second graders to come for a visit. They learned what life was like for children their age two centuries ago.

The Museum was open to the public on Tuesdays (and by appointment) from early June until the weather turned chilly in October. Over the course of an 18-week season, there were 155 visitors to the Museum. It hummed with activity while volunteers caught up on accessioning and other Society business.

Collections. Ron Scorsone, director and chair of the Collections Committee, reported that donations of artifacts, documents, and books returned to pre-pandemic levels. Volunteers were able to process the backlog of donations from the previous year. Some included entire boxes of historical documents.

All but the most recent acquisitions have been transcribed from ledgers and index cards into the Museum's catalog database which now lists 1,163 artifacts, books, documents, and photographs.

Last summer, Dan Rabinowitz of Falmouth Boy Scout Troop 93 gave the catalog a big boost as part of his Eagle Scout project. He went through the Museum and Barn, room by room, creating a spreadsheet listing every artifact along with identifying information and its location. He also photographed every artifact. This winter, volunteers will merge the inventory and photographs into the database making it easier for members of the community to discover items of interest in our collections. It will also make it easier for our docents to locate those items.

The catalog is a work in progress. It is accessible online at the Society website under the "Museum" tab. The online catalog is hosted by PastPerfect (along with those of many other museums in Maine).

Local History. David observed that in an all-volunteer Society, volunteers wear many hats. He is also co-chair of the Local History Committee. David reminded us that the 2022 annual meeting highlighted expansion of the Society's website with information about the history of Falmouth and Ancient Falmouth. The website

didn't grow much over the summer and there is a substantial backlog of material to add this winter. The research aids are accessible online at the Society website under the "Research" tab. The collection of Falmouth Historical Maps is a favorite of many online visitors. Last spring, the Society gave a presentation on the "Maps of Falmouth" at Falmouth Memorial Library; links to the slides and speaker's notes are on the home page of the Society's website.

The volume of requests from the community grew by more than 25% in 2022. These came from people researching the history of their families or property; from businesses and government organizations with questions about historical significance; from teachers and students wanting to know more about local history, and even a few from the authors and the press.

Many responses to those requests are Falmouth's version of "Finding Your Roots." We answer the question. We also tell the requestor how and where we found the answer, along with local historical context needed to understand the answer. When we have the time, these responses will be added to the "Members Only – Local Research" section of the Society website.

Communications. Last year we acknowledged that we weren't meeting expectations to keep our members and the community informed.

Members told us they wanted to receive a newsletter in their mailbox. The newsletter is now published and mailed quarterly.

For those of who prefer online communications, the website is kept up to date. Better use will be made of email and Facebook. This is an area where a tech-savvy volunteer is needed!

Merchandise. Sue, as chair of the Merchandise Committee, announced that the new edition of The Falmouth Cookbook is done! Four years ago, as the inventory of the 2004 edition ran low, The Society contacted the publisher about printing more copies. They wanted an up-front payment nearly equal to the Society's annual budget. We decided to self-publish. This gave us an opportunity to give the cookbook a fresh look and format. It took a committee of volunteers three years of hard work to assemble and edit the cookbook. Every recipe is a favorite of a family of Falmouth. Two volumes. 390 pages. 261 recipes. Feedback on the appearance, utility, and content of the new cookbook has been very positive.

Last year, the Society sold \$1,316 in merchandise. Our challenge is making it easier for people to purchase books and Falmouth-themed items. The Falmouth Heritage Bookstore is now open for business on the Society website under the

“Museum” tab. Today, merchandise is available for pickup in Falmouth. Next month, we expect to have mail order delivery.

Buildings & Grounds. Ron, as chair the Building and Grounds Committee, reported that last year was dominated by a single issue: the sump pump.

From the time the Museum was moved to its present location, it has experienced multiple episodes of the sump overflowing. Last spring, there was a catastrophic failure of the pump and its circuit breaker. The sump overflowed. ServiceMaster brought in their heavy-duty pumps to get it under control. Cleaning and sanitizing the basement was a major undertaking.

The Museum now has the most powerful pump available. A wireless sensor was installed to alert us when an overflow is likely. A larger evacuation hose will be installed to increase our pumping capacity. We are taking steps to prepare for contingencies. Keeping water out of the Museum basement has been expensive and time-consuming.

As planned, the Museum’s septic was pumped last fall. The town is running a new sewer line down the side of woods road in front of the Museum. When completed, we will be required to switch from septic to sewer.

Special thanks went to Rich and Sue who keep the Museum’s lawn and gardens looking nice.

Technology. Ron, as a co-chair of the Technology Committee, reported that access to the Society website had grown by another 20% over the previous year.

Not surprisingly, the website draws the largest number of its visitors from Falmouth, Portland, and neighboring communities. Nor is it a surprise that Falmouth history and the new research materials are the topics of greatest interest.

For a small nonprofit, the Society has a surprisingly large following on Facebook. Even more to our surprise, there are half as many followers from that “other” Falmouth on Cape Cod than followers in our hometown. Based on questions received, many of them don’t realize the Falmouth Historical Society they are following is 150 miles away to the north.

President’s Report

Volunteers. The Society’s tempo of activity has returned to pre-pandemic levels. We have undertaken substantial new efforts, but our pool of volunteers has not grown to match the expanded workload.

It has become a zero-sum game. For us to do more in one area, we must do less in another.

The Board of Directors sees this as an obstacle to returning our Society to full health. We want the Society to do more. This requires more volunteers than we have today. Volunteers are drawn from our membership. We attract more members through events and by getting out the word about all the cool stuff we're doing.

That's what we've been doing with the resources we have. We need more to do more! We've been working on a list of "want ads" for volunteers. It includes almost every skill imaginable. If you have spare time to give to a worthy nonprofit, we can use your help. Handy with tools? There is no shortage of items needing attention in an early 19th century "fixer-upper." Do you know your way around a P&L and balance sheet? We can use help with finances. Did you ever work in a library? We've got one that needs some TLC. Have you been researching your family tree? Join our squad of history detectives. Are you good at organizing things or activities? That's what we do.

Please contact us via email, or by leaving voicemail at the Museum. We need your help!

Finances. Unlike most other town historical societies in the area, we receive almost no financial support from the town. Most of our income is from dues and donations, and that money pays for operating the Museum and Barn. Our income covers the routine bills. Minor calamities—such as the sump pump failure—set us back. We are unprepared for major expenses like those we will be facing soon.

We were shocked to learn that converting from septic to sewer costs more than our annual budget. It looks as if we may have to paint the barn. We're looking at some other upkeep issues.

When faced with major upkeep projects, we first turn to local businesses and service organizations to see whether they can help with material or skilled labor. Several have been very generous.

For major expenses such as these, we will pursue a grant once we have definitized the scope and cost.

Accomplishments. As president, I continue to be amazed by how much our small but sturdy band of volunteers has been able to accomplish.

The committee reports show that we are delivering what our community expects from its town historical society. We're doing it well. We're doing it with limited resources.

Looking back at annual meetings over the past several years, you will see that we've gotten a little bit stronger, and we've accomplished a bit more in each succeeding year. This wouldn't have happened without the support of our members and our community.

Thank you for helping us preserve your town's heritage and tell its story.

New Business

There being no new business, the annual meeting of the membership was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Howe Farnham
Secretary

The business portion of the meeting was followed by two presentations illustrating the Society's research into local history.

We say our research is "community-directed." Most of it is done in response to requests from the community. We received at least 54 requests last year and currently have a backlog of four.

The requests come from everywhere imaginable. From students and teachers with questions about local history. From state and town government wanting to know if there is anything historical or historic about a building or land. From local businesses such as realtors who want to know if there is anything interesting about an old home they are listing. From other nonprofits—we fielded queries from the Library and Land Trust last year. Homeowners want to know more about their homes, and genealogists seek help with their family history. We even receive queries about local history from authors and the press.

We picked out two we felt had broad interest. One delves into the history of two neighborhoods on the Foreside. The other reconstructs the narrative for a family's distant ancestors—and shows how we peer into the mists of time.

Falmouth's First Summer Colony

The Casco Terrace & Amerescoggin Neighborhoods

The extension of trolley service from Portland to Falmouth Foreside in 1899 transformed the Foreside into a resort for nearby city dwellers. The Casco Terrace and Amerescoggin neighborhoods became the first summer colonies along the Foreside. This put the benefits of "rusticating" within the grasp of the middle class. A local resident asked if we could help them share this history with new families moving into the neighborhoods. The presentation tells the complicated story of how small farms and homes of sea captains became summer playgrounds for families ranging from Portland to Auburn.

An Early Falmouth Family

Our First Experience with Genealogical Tourism

A family researching their genealogy learned they were descended from Anthony Brackett, an early settler of Colonial Falmouth. They planned a trip from Wisconsin to see where their ancestors had lived and contacted us for more information. This was our first experience with "genealogical tourism." We provided them with details about their family along with a self-guided tour of sites in the area associated with their family. The presentation shares what we learned and the challenges we overcame while reconstructing the narrative for a family of Colonial Falmouth.

The annual meeting of The Falmouth Historical Society finished at 8:20 p.m.