

The Falmouth Historical Society Minutes

Falmouth Heritage Museum—November 12, 2019

The meeting came to order at 6:40 PM. Present were Betsy Whitcomb, Ron Scorsone, Rich Meserve, Erin Cadigan, David Farnham, and Sue Farnham.

Secretary's Report

The October minutes were reviewed and approved.

Membership. There are 107 active members, an increase of six since last month!

Treasurer's report

The Society has a balance of \$1,490 in its cash accounts and \$25,004 with the Foundation.

We cannot withdraw funds from the Foundation account until we get our nonprofit status restored, so we currently are paying only essential bills.

Our updated government filings were received last Friday by the IRS.

Old Business

Maintenance. The ramp and stairs are done, complete with new hand railing. Many thanks to Ron, Fred, and volunteer Ben Orcutt for their fine work!

Preparations for winter closure of the Museum:

- Ben Hoot has been contacted about discontinuing regular plowing. We will contact him if and when the Museum needs to be plowed. Snow stakes have been placed along the driveway.
- AAA (furnace contractor) was here this morning for routine fall servicing; the process of shutting down was discussed. Fred Howe knows how to shut down the water, drain the pipes, and add non-toxic antifreeze to the toilet.
- We will put up a "Closed for Winter" sign on the driveway.
- We expect shutdown to happen next week.

Annual meeting. The consensus is that the meeting went well. Attendance was better than expected with visitors from other town historical societies, a former congressman, and a member of the town council. Feedback from attendees was

positive. Thankfully, the two potentially contentious topics raised during the business meeting (closing the Museum for winter and Society finances) did not provoke debate. David observed that the presentations—focusing on the work of our volunteers—highlighted the vibrancy and relevance of the Society. Following presentations in the two previous years (“Falmouth Tercentennial” in 2017 and “Research by Local Historians” in 2018), our annual meetings illustrate the role of a town historical society in the 21st century.

Special meeting. The meeting went swiftly and well. The revised Articles of Incorporation were sent to the State House the following day and approved by the end of the week. Copies of the approved Articles were sent to the IRS and accepted by the end of the week. Now we wait with fingers crossed for the wheels of federal bureaucracy to turn.

Tidewater. Several members of the board attended the meeting for the Town Council to decide the fate of the Tidewater Farm buildings. The Town Council had seen our report and associated correspondence in which we determined that the buildings were indeed historic. The Council was effusive in their thanks for our research. However, they decided that the town did not have the resources to pursue preservation of the buildings and no “white knight” had come forward with private funding. The town manager was asked to come back with a plan that would salvage historic items for use in a new building. While large items such as beams would be more than we could handle, we have room in the barn for smaller items such as doors and hardware. We received informal advice that the Society—as the town’s voice for historic preservation—needs to be more visible at town meetings when topics related to historic property or similar issues are on the agenda.

FHS Table at the Polls. Anticipating a light turnout, the table was manned only from about noon until 6:00. We tried using a smaller table; we will go back to using a full-sized table in the future. Despite the modest turnout, our table still drew a steady stream of visitors. Sale of merchandise was slow because most visitors already had what we were offering. Two new features worked out well. Using a laptop and card swiper, we were able to process credit cards for sales and memberships (two new members!). We also brought small binders showcasing Society activities drawn largely from material presented at the annual meeting.

When visitors asked questions, out came the appropriate binder and that led to longer conversations.

Online queries. Cooler weather is bringing an uptick in queries from people researching Falmouth families or homes. We responded to five such queries this month. Two resulted in substantial contributions. Two online visitors are now planning summer trips to Falmouth to explore the areas highlighted in our responses. We are seeing that online queries often lead to Museum visits.

Outreach. David updated the presentation he gave at the annual meeting (“A Marriage Made in Boston”) for delivery at Falmouth by the Sea.

New business

Plans for continuing the Society’s work until the Museum reopens in May were reviewed.

Accessibility. We will still be accessible via postal mail, email, and the Museum telephone. Mail sent to the info@thefhs.org address will be forwarded to David. Voice mail left on the answering machine will be forwarded via email and text to David. He’ll forward emails to the appropriate board members for follow-up. On days when he is at his day job, he will probably not see notifications until evening. Any board members who would like to receive immediate notification of incoming email or telephone calls should let David know and he’ll add them to the auto-forward list.

Events. A member who is also a realtor expressed interest in learning how to identify the period of a home. She said this would be of special interest to realtors. We know other members who would like to hone their skills at recognizing period-specific features of old homes. At a recent SOLVE meeting, we met a member of another historical society who teaches such a class. Maine Preservation may know of others. This would be a good late winter event and potential fundraiser.

Outreach. Erin is working on the next edition of the newsletter. We’ll distribute it by postal mail to those without email addresses.

Erin will keep up a steady stream of postings on social media (depending upon accessibility to the Museum for Facebook fodder).

David plans to complete the “Marriage Made in Boston” story with a second presentation (“The Ugly Divorce”) so that we can respond to requests from the community with bicentennial-themed talks.

Collections. Ron will work on the catalog from home (also depending upon accessibility to the Museum for artifacts).

Website. David will move forward with enhancements. He plans to add three new sections:

- Guides to property and family history research. This will include much of the “local context” information we include in responses to queries from the community and will be accessible to all visitors.
- Virtual library of books and maps in the public domain related to Falmouth and will be accessible to all visitors.
- Condensed responses to queries from the community; these will be accessible only by members.

This will showcase our knowledge of local history and our expertise in local research, thereby building our brand as a friendly place to go for help researching family and property history in Falmouth and surrounding towns.

Merchandise. Discussions about the cookbook at previous meetings concluded that can self-publish the cookbook in mini-binders on pre-punched stock. Now we need content. The next step is to form a committee to review and update the existing recipes supplemented with Falmouth-related drawings and references.

Winter Meetings. We’ll skip the December meeting due to calendar conflicts and holiday events. The next meeting will be January 7th at the Farnhams’ home. David will send out a schedule for meetings in 2020.

The meeting adjourned at 7:52 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Farnham
Secretary