

The Falmouth Historical Society

Meeting of the Board of Directors

Zoom Meeting—February 6, 2024

The meeting came to order at 6:35 p.m. Present were board members Betsy Whitcomb, David Farnham, Rich Meserve, Ron Scorsone, Sally Farneth, and Sue Farnham.

President's Remarks

David noted that this was the first board meeting following the annual meeting, thus making this the organizational meeting in accordance with the bylaws. There being no new board members, and the Society goals and objectives approved last year still being in effect, we can dispense with those items usually covered during the organizational meeting. While the president's remarks at the beginning of each meeting are usually brief, this time he will highlight two topics he believes are important.

But first, this year's annual meeting! David believes it came off very well. Council chambers at Town Hall are an ideal venue. The Zoom session went smoothly.

There was a brief discussion about our inability to use the room cameras and the sound quality for some of the speakers. David reported that he had raised the issues with the member of the town's staff responsible for IT systems. He learned that, for technical reasons, we wouldn't be able to use the chambers' microphones and cameras. Next year, we will bring a high-definition camera and microphone that can be placed in the horseshoe to provide video of the presenters along with better audio.

This year's meeting ran about 20 minutes longer than usual. This was partly due to it being "in-person." Speakers in the room were speaking at a slightly slower pace. The decision to expand relevant content in one presentation also added about ten minutes.

David expressed his profound thanks to everyone for making this year's annual meeting a success.

David emphasized the importance of the meeting as the one time each year when the Society shares what we do with the community. It takes a lot of work to pull the meeting together.

The formula we have used for the past five years seems to work: a brief business meeting with a round-robin of accomplishments by the officers and committee chairs, followed by two substantive presentations about Falmouth history based on original research by the Society.

Preparation of the history talks takes the most time. We must convert research on narrow topics into general presentations. This means additional research to fill in gaps and fact check the details. The effort is worthwhile. The stories about our town are what our community wants to hear.

The annual meeting showcases what our Society is all about. Links to the slides, minutes, and nearly verbatim speaker's notes are featured prominently on the website for all to see.

Our annual meeting materials reflects our:

- Competency. We are well organized with our administration and history-related programs running smoothly.
- Credibility. We are the place to which our community turns for authoritative information about the history of our town.
- Continuity. We have a solid record of sustained performance.

This is our biggest strength. Nothing attracts and retains members, volunteers, and donors like success.

David acknowledged that he gets on this soapbox after every annual meeting. The board members have already heard this, but he believes this topic is important and bears repeating.

Skills and Knowledge. David then shifted to one of the big lessons he has learned while working as a volunteer in the Society. His duties as an officer had the longest learning curve he has ever experienced. He had previously been an officer or board member for three all-volunteer nonprofits. He had considerable experience in management and senior staff positions of large enterprises. Even so, he felt unprepared for his work here. He gets repeated reminders of his profound ignorance. The most recent instances were during seminars about

nonprofit fundraising. Over time, David has come to realize that organizations like ours need people with uncommon knowledge and expertise.

We do history. We become amateur historians. Potential volunteers see this and are intimidated by our demonstrated knowledge of Falmouth history. They don't realize that most of what we know was learned as a volunteer on the local history committee. Then there are the volunteers who perform specialized functions such as bookkeeping, website maintenance, etc.

The health of our society—our ability to regenerate our capabilities in an organization that appeals strongly to people who have more life experience—depends upon having a well-structured program for bringing new people up to speed.

We need general training for all volunteers. We need detailed training for specific roles. We need clear documentation for key administrative processes. We need a “training officer” to oversee it all. A speaker at a Maine Archives and Museums conference described how establishing a such a program for volunteers improved recruiting and retention.

We haven't been sitting on our thumbs. We are developing training materials for property research. We are documenting our accounting and IT procedures. We need to do much more.

While our work calls for almost every imaginable skill, most people volunteer for a town historical society because they are interested in history. Volunteering as a docent, working with collections, getting involved with local history research, or managing content on the website or social media all call for familiarity with town history.

Handing a volunteer a copy of the excellent “Images of Falmouth” book and saying, “Read chapter one! We'll give you a quiz next week!” would trigger flashbacks to seventh grade and remind a volunteer of why they shied away from history ever since. We need to focus on fun ways to learn more about our town. That's what attracted many of us to our Society in the first place.

We need to make this a priority.

Falmouth History Tours. We have a pair of tours (East and West) highlighting historic features of our town. We offer guided tours through Falmouth Parks and Community Services, and we have self-guided tours posted on our website.

The tours are good, but we have discovered some typos and other minor errors. Questions received from our community suggest that they are seeking a more complete picture of life in Falmouth in olden times. Our two books—Images and Wallace—are structured around the villages of Falmouth. David suggested that we update the tours and take the same approach. By focusing on the places and people making each village a self-sustaining community, we can present a more complete and cohesive picture of life and times in Falmouth.

He took a stab at the tour for the “Village of New Casco” (the Flats and the Foreside). Initial reaction has been positive. The Local History Committee will meet later this week to begin fleshing this out.

Using these tours to take individual or small groups of volunteers on guided tours of Falmouth led by a member of the Local History Committee would be an enjoyable way for our volunteers to learn a lot about the history of our town.

David believes that fully developed Falmouth History Tours with supporting materials could be our most impactful product this year. A big part of our job is education—sharing the stories of our town. Beefing up the tours has the potential to substantially expand the reach of our educational programs.

Secretary’s Report

Minutes. The January board and annual meeting minutes were approved online.

Membership. Our active membership is 108. Renewals from our January mailing are flowing in.

Treasurer’s Report

Finances. Excluding \$10,000 reserved for the scholarship, the Society has a balance of \$4,648 in its operating accounts and \$24,600 invested with Maine Community Foundation. Our accounts/tax payable is \$188. Our projected end-of-year balance is \$1,042. Our actual expenses are \$1,225 under budget. Our net current assets (excluding long-term assets) increased by \$827 this fiscal year. Our projected year-end loss is \$767.

Committee Reports

Programs. Springtime is coming. We need to begin planning for the second-grade field trip. We have begun preparing for the bus tours. Betsy told the town that we would be participating in the Memorial Day parade. With more of our stalwart volunteers challenged to complete a mile-long march, Rich will see if we can arrange to have them ride in antique cars. The Museum officially opens for the season on Tuesday, June 4th. Weather permitting, we will have a table at the polls on June 11th.

Museum Operation & Exhibits. Spring cleaning of the Museum and Barn has been tentatively scheduled for Saturday, May 18th.

Collections. The committee plans to meet Wednesday at Sue's home to work on organizing the MMD collection. David noted that we need to get moving on getting the 1957 town plan posted on Maine Memory Network.

Ron reported that he has completed the routine software upgrades on the computer containing the master copy of the PastPerfect catalog. (The online copy is a subset of the master.)

Local History. The committee plans to meet Friday at Carol's home to work on the Falmouth History Tours. During January, we worked on five queries and have a backlog of six. There were no additional resources added to the website.

Communications. The Society used all channels under its control to communicate with the community before, during, and after the annual meeting. The messages reached our audience, but dispersion and engagement varied slightly from last year.

We reached 96 member households through postal mail. The mailing included the newsletter (with details about the annual meeting). We reached 80 members via email with 86% clicking on content in email. We reached 138 people on social media with 26% taking some kind of action (liking, sharing, etc.). We reached 245 people generating 982 views via the website.

Merchandise. Binders for the additional cookbooks arrived, so we are ready to replenish inventory.

We are ready to remove low-demand merchandise from the inventory. This will affect our financial reports. Sales inventory will be reduced by \$720 (about 20% of the total). This wipes out most of our gains in net current assets, but the treasurer is probably the only one who will notice.

Museum Buildings & Grounds. Ron reports the sump pump has been working properly following the minor incident when it was overwhelmed by the incoming flow during the storm on January 10th. The dehumidifier stopped running due to icing. Ron cleared out the ice and it should be working now.

Development. We received two more donations totaling \$3,500 from the Perkins family. The scholarship is now 50% funded for the 2025 academic year. We should receive one more donation for the current fiscal year.

As donations are received, they are applied to the scholarship until it is fully funded, and then to general support. Our priority is the scholarships. Some who donate later in the year are specific in how they want us to split their donations between the scholarship and operating expenses. We comply with those requests by rebalancing the donations of earlier donors. Consequently, the distribution between scholarship and general support shifts as donations arrive. Ron Perkins is aware of what we are doing.

New Business

Francesca Pound asked that we disburse the second installment of her scholarship. Rich shared the terms provided by the Falmouth Schools; the second disbursement would not normally occur until June. The board agreed that we would be willing to make the disbursement a few months early if there were extenuating circumstances. David said that he would follow up with Ms. Pound.

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

Respectfully submitted, Suzanne Farnham, Secretary