

The Falmouth Historical Society

Meeting of the Board of Directors

Zoom Meeting—November 7, 2023

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

President's Remarks

David noted how he follows the adage that if something isn't worth measuring, it probably isn't worth doing. This led to his obsession with metrics. We collect quantitative data that allows us to track the work we are doing.

Viewed broadly, 2023 has been a repeat of 2022. That is to be expected because we are limited by the number of volunteers who do the work of the Society, and that number didn't change.

A closer look at the metrics shows this year's numbers are tracking slightly above last year. The Museum was open a few more days and saw more visitors. We responded to more queries from the community. When you are operating at capacity, "slightly more" seems like a lot. We need more volunteers.

This winter David plans to create descriptions for each of our volunteer jobs. We tell people that whatever life skills they have, we need them, but that's too ambiguous. He hopes that seeing the details of what needs to be done will encourage more potential volunteers to respond.

Town historical societies "do history." This year we've "done" a lot of history. Collections. Research. Education. Plus the admin, housekeeping, and groundskeeping required of a public charity operating a public accommodation. David is amazed by how much we have accomplished. He expressed his profound thanks to the Board and other volunteers who have given so willingly of their time.

Secretary's Report

Minutes. The October minutes were approved online.

Membership. Our active membership is 108. This is ten more than it was a year ago. Our membership has been slowly growing despite the continued loss of long-term members who now “reside” in Pine Grove. Falmouth Lions Club was upgraded to a gold-level corporate sponsor.

Treasurer’s Report

Finances. Excluding \$7,500 reserved for the scholarship, the Society has a balance of \$3,813 in its operating accounts and \$23,392 invested with Maine Community Foundation. Our accounts/tax payable is \$43. Our projected end-of-year balance is \$720. Our actual expenses are \$919 under budget. Our net current assets (excluding long-term assets) increased by \$12 this fiscal year.

This report includes a new line: the projected year-end gain or loss in operating accounts which is a deficit of \$1,569. This is how much we are spending beyond our means.

The current number is \$2,839, but we are eligible to receive a distribution of \$1,270 from the Foundation and that figure will increase in January. That puts us just a few hundred dollars in the red which could be reduced by sales. This is a far cry from where we were five years ago when our deficit was \$9,006. We have tightened our belt and brought in more income. Looking ahead, new donations totaling \$3,000 in a year would erase the deficit. \$5,000 would put our austere finances on sound footing.

Committee Reports

Programs.

FHS Table at the Polls. We braved the dank, windy, and dark day to man a table outside the high school. We experienced only a brief period of heavy rain and wind. Turnout was good and a substantial number of townspeople passed by our table. We had engagements (extended conversations about history-related topics) with upwards to twenty residents of Falmouth. Those who weren’t members went away clutching brochures. As an event where we “show the flag” and attract new members, this was better than expected for an off-year election during inclement weather when passers-by are less inclined to linger. Sales were light—only three books. Logistically, this event went smoothly. Lessons learned from past events left us better prepared than the other nonprofits.

Presentation on the Penobscots on Saturday, November 18th. This event is hosted by Falmouth Memorial Library who invited us to co-sponsor. David will bring brochures and newsletters. He will be ready to answer questions about Native People who lived at Falmouth.

FHS Table at the Merry Mix and Mingle on Friday, December 2nd. This seasonal celebration hosted by the town will be another “show the flag” event plus our last public opportunity to sell merchandise this year. David, Betsy, and Sue plan to man the table.

2024 Annual Meeting. We would like to make it a hybrid event this year. Betsy will see whether the council chambers at town hall are available and accessible.

We’ll follow the same formula as for recent years. We’ll begin with a business meeting that includes round-robin reports from officers and committees. This will be followed by two substantive presentations based on local history research during the past year:

- The Story of a West Falmouth Road. Presentations in recent years have focused on the Foreside and Falmouth Corner. It’s time to look at the other side of our town. In response to queries from the community, we recently researched two old homes on Mast Road—the Purington/Pride Farm and Huston homesteads. Add in the George Purington home near Blackstrap Road and the Lord homestead at the far end of the road and you have the story of an agricultural neighborhood. Like the Foreside, water-facing lots on Duck Pond (now Highland Lake) were carved out for seasonal camps. Today the large (100-200 acre) farms have become residential. Betsy and Sue will present.
- New Mainers Who Fought for their New Nation. This is the story of two Iverson brothers whose family fled Denmark when it was invaded by Prussia. The brothers answered the call to enlist in the US Army and served in Cuba. Iver Iverson’s home became the Falmouth Memorial Library. This story began with the cavalry saber carried by Iver in Cuba that was donated to the Library. The presentation will also cover how we reconstructed the narrative for these soldiers in the absence of detailed service records. David will present.

Looking towards spring, we want to get guided bus tours on the calendar for Falmouth Recreation. We would like to do one in spring and another in fall.

There was a brief discussion about handouts. We can include enlargements of the inset maps of the four Falmouth villages from the 1871 Atlas as a reference. During the tour, the guide will point out and discuss the institutions (schools, churches, general stores, post offices, firehouses, etc.) comprising the core of the villages.

Museum Operation & Exhibits. We had no visitors on October 10th, 3 visitors on the 17th, none on the 24th, and 6 visitors on November 12th. This brings our total for the season to 205 visitors. The Museum and Barn are now closed until May.

Collections. During the October Board meeting, David mentioned the technical challenges preventing our publishing the 1957 town plat online. Betsy suggested that we reach out to Maine Historical's Maine Memory Network. We are now members of MMN. As soon as David finishes studying the MMN guide to publishing digital materials, we will post the plat. MMN reaches a broader audience than our website and should think about what other unique artifacts we may wish to post.

Local History. We responded to an astonishing 8 queries during the past month. Our backlog is holding at 6. There were no additions to the website.

Communications. We will publish the winter newsletter in late December. It will include:

- Annual Meeting including abstracts for the presentations.
- Featured artifact: Edward Steele Dow violin.
- Reminder that the Museum is closed for winter, but Society work continues year-round.
- FHS joins MMN with details about the 1957 town plat.

An email blast will go out as soon as we have a firm date for the annual meeting. It will include:

- A link to the autumn newsletter
- Reminder that the Museum is closed for winter
- "Mark your calendars" announcement for the annual meeting

The same information will be posted on Facebook.

These three channels—newsletter by postal mail, email blasts, and Facebook posts—reach nearly all our demographic. We suspended plans to add “X formerly known as Twitter.” We are missing the younger people for whom TikTok is a preferred channel; to reach this group, we need a volunteer from that generation with the necessary skills.

Merchandise. Nothing significant to report. Sales have been lighter than expected. Stocks of merchandise are good.

Museum Buildings & Grounds. Ron has begun winterizing the Museum. He turns on the electrical heat which is set to just above freezing. This reduces the potential for any residual water damaging pipes. More important, it prevents freezing of the sump system within the building. Ron won’t shut off the water and drain the plumbing until he hears that everything else is done. Sue, Betsy, and Sally will finish readying the Museum for winter. The “Closed for Winter” signs are now posted on the drive and front door.

Ron had good news to report on the old sump pump. He was able to clean and repair the pump. He tested it at the Museum, and it appears to be working properly. This gives us a backup-supplemental pump.

The Museum was built on marshy ground and drainage has been a vexing problem. The new pump is working flawlessly and easily kept up with rainfall during a wet summer. Fred Howe observed that the ditch running along Woods Road may have been a factor. The ditch was affected by the installation of the sewer pipe earlier this year which left us wondering whether that reduced the volume of water going into the sump.

Development. Nothing significant to report.

New Business

Bank Account Admin. When we last shuffled officers, we submitted a package of paperwork to our bank updating the signatories. The bank lost the package. The old names are still on the accounts and the new treasurer’s name was added to only one account. This was only a minor inconvenience because we conduct all our business with the bank online (using non-person role accounts) or the debit card.

This week a question arose about a transaction and the teller wouldn't provide the information. We escalated the issue. The old names have been removed. David and Betsy's names are on all accounts. Experience has shown that we should have at least four signatories. David proposed that Rich (as VP) and Ron (as backup treasurer) also be added.

A motion was made, seconded, and the Board unanimously approved having David, Betsy, Rich, and Ron listed as signatories on our bank accounts. David will arrange to collect the necessary wet-ink signatures on the paperwork.

There being no additional new business, the meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Suzanne Farnham, Secretary