

The Falmouth Historical Society Annual Meeting

Falmouth Town Hall and Online via Zoom
January 23, 2024

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 108 members including five corporate sponsors. Alas, several long-term members passed away during 2023.

Treasurer's Report

David, as interim treasurer, presented the Society's financial condition.

The summary shows that the Society is solvent, it stuck to its budget during 2023, and its income exceeded expenses. As of December 31st, the balance in our operating accounts was \$16,601. During calendar year 2023, our income was

\$14,763 and our expenses were \$11,526. Our expenses were \$1,430 below budget but that includes a \$1,000 rebate for a prior-year expense making the actual difference \$430 below budget. Detailed financial reports can be found under the Documents tab on the Society website.

A closer look reveals that half of the funds in the operating accounts are grants reserved for the Marion Perkins Memorial Scholarship, so the Society's coffers are not as flush with cash as we would like.

During our monthly board meetings, the treasurer's report presents a list of financial metrics using "traffic light" (red, yellow, and green) icons. Nearly all the metrics are consistently "green" which is good. The one consistently "yellow" metric is "Projected Year-end Gain" which was a negative \$558 this month. That means we are spending a little bit more than we are taking in. We have an austere budget and stick to it. Our goal is to attract additional donations to put the Society's finances on a more stable and sustainable footing.

Carol Kauffman, a member of our Board and a former Society president, convened a meeting of the Audit Committee last summer to review our financial records for fiscal years 2022 and 2023. The Committee found that the Society's financial statements and governmental filings are complete and accurate. Their report is posted online under the September 2023 Board Meeting.

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.

We work closely with Falmouth Schools to support history education. Our biggest activity is the field trip to the Museum and Barn by Falmouth Elementary School second grade students. In 2023, we expanded the presentations. Teachers said the kids really enjoyed the visit and learned a lot.

Thanks to the generosity of the Perkins Family, last year the Society sponsored a \$5,000 scholarship for a deserving graduate from Falmouth High School. The

recipient was Francesca Pound, now a first-year student at UMass Amherst. 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.

Last year we participated in eight public events beyond the Museum. Five were in-person, two were hybrid (in-person and online), and one (the annual meeting) became online only when we had problems getting into town hall. We gave one public presentation related to the history of our town and co-sponsored two others with the library. At four 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. We broke the students down into smaller groups and cycled them through four stations.

The Museum was open to the public on Tuesdays (and by appointment) from early June until the weather turned chilly in October. It hummed with activity as we entertained a steady flow of visitors. More people are coming to the Museum with specific questions about places, people, or events in Falmouth. Most stay for more than an hour as we retrieve information to answer their questions.

Collections. Ron Scorsone, director and chair of the Collections Committee, reported that a team of volunteers made great progress reorganizing our large collection of documents. Material for some topics had been scattered across several filing cabinets or shelves. Visitors tell us our files contain pure gold—information found nowhere else. Now it is much easier to mine that gold.

We received the usual donations of books, documents, and artifacts, plus one gigantic donation of historical files from Marge Merrill Devine, a local historian and former president of the Society. Her papers fill fourteen bins and contain material she had accumulated during decades of research. Volunteers are now organizing her vast collection for accessioning, after which details will be transcribed into our online catalog.

One of our prized artifacts is the violin crafted by a local blacksmith more than a century ago. Descendants of the blacksmith recently visited the Museum to view

artifacts crafted by their ancestor. They were accompanied by a local luthier and dealer in antique instruments who shared fresh information about the instrument. More about the violin can be found in our winter newsletter.

During the coming year, we plan to conduct a full inventory of the collection. The Museum's digital catalog is accessible at the Society website under the "Museum" tab.

Local History Committee. David observed that in an all-volunteer Society, volunteers wear many hats. He is also co-chair of the Local History Committee. This past year added information about the history of Falmouth and Ancient Falmouth to the Society's website. We were especially pleased to add the 1804 "Galvin" survey of Falmouth Roads to our page of "Falmouth Historical Maps." This is the oldest detailed map showing Falmouth, Westbrook, and the Deering section of Portland. The original had been sealed in Maine Historical's archives for preservation. They took it out of the case long enough to make a high-resolution digital copy which was then posted on the Maine Memory Network and is available to all.

This spurred us to join the Maine Memory Network. The first item we plan to post is a high-resolution digital copy of the town plat for 1957. This map is invaluable when researching the history of property in Falmouth.

Last summer, our volunteers worked with Debi Curry of Maine Old Cemetery Association to build a comprehensive list of Falmouth cemeteries. Debi created a digital map using Google Earth showing the precise locations of 34. We'd like to make that accessible to the community as well.

We received roughly the same number of requests from the community as the year before. These came from people researching the history of their families or property; from businesses and government organizations with questions of historical significance; from teachers and students wanting to know more about local history, and even a few from the press.

Many of our responses 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 the 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. We know that our members want us to keep them informed about what we are doing and what we are learning about the history of our town.

Our level of communications this past year was about the same as the year before—better than it had been but not as good as it should be.

During the coming year, we will try to publish four newsletters. You have told us that you are most interested in stories about the history of Falmouth. There's lots for us to tell, although, at times we fall victim to writer's block.

We have begun making better use of Facebook which seems to be the most popular social media channel among our members. We don't have a monopoly on Falmouth History. When we see relevant items posted by other groups, we are now sharing those along with a brief explanation of why we found the item to be significant.

Summer is our busy season with visitors coming to the Museum. To keep our Board of Directors up to date, we send out an email covering "This week at the Museum." Several Board members have observed that these notes—some of which go into detail about what we discovered—would be of interest to the membership and we'll try to share more of that information this coming summer.

This is an area where a tech-savvy volunteer is needed!

Merchandise. Sue, as chair of the Merchandise Committee, reported that Falmouth Heritage Bookstore sold \$1,065 in merchandise last year. She listed the many places to purchase Falmouth-related books and our Falmouth-themed merchandise:

- Falmouth Heritage Museum on Tuesdays in summer when we are open.
- Falmouth Town Hall where there is a display case filled with our merchandise.
- FHS table at a public events including the Cumberland Fair.
- Online at the FHS website. We deliver locally in Falmouth and nearby. We also provide mail order in Maine and New Hampshire. We plan to add other states if we can find an easy way to handle the sales tax.

Buildings & Grounds. Ron, as chair the Building and Grounds Committee, reported that thankfully there were no horror stories about the basement in 2023.

The sump pump installed last year has kept the basement dry. We now have a backup sump pump that can be used as a replacement or a supplement should the need arise. The network-connected sensor has been continuously monitoring conditions in the basement including the water level in the sump. We also installed a stand-mounted, high-capacity dehumidifier which has kept humidity in the basement around 40%.

The snow and rain two weeks ago brought more water into the sump than the pump could handle. There was some overflow. Fortunately, we were alerted by the sensor and responded quickly. We had to mop up some water, but this was nothing like the catastrophic flooding in past years.

Ron listed maintenance work planned for summer:

- Scraping and painting the entrance door to the Museum.
- Treating the ramp (which has taken a beating during recent winters).
- Touching up the paint on the southern end of the barn where there has been some flaking.

Volunteers are needed!

Looking into the future, installation of the sewer line along Woods Road is complete. We are required to connect within the next ten years. The cost of connection is roughly equal to our annual budget, so we will be seeking a grant.

Technology. Ron, as a co-chair of the Technology Committee, reported on visits to the Society website—the Society’s digital museum with a growing online presence. He noted that there is usually a surge of activity around public events.

For those who come to our “brick and mortar” Museum to conduct research, we recently added a network-attached printer to make it easier for visitors to print or copy materials.

President’s Report

David noted that the committee reports have shown how a small band of dedicated volunteers is delivering what the community expects from its town historical society. We are “doing history.” We are doing it well. We are doing a lot with very little.

He observed that the Society’s operational tempo has plateaued. We are running at capacity. He understands that there are many deserving nonprofits in

Falmouth leading to “charity fatigue.” That said, if we cannot attract more volunteers and funding, we will be unable to sustain our current level and could backslide.

When we say the Society “does history,” that means remembering the stories of our town, discovering the stories that were forgotten, and sharing those stories with others.

A recent national survey revealed that there are 21,588 organizations in the United States that “do history.” Our Society is one of 9,190 organizations in the lowest tier which was dubbed, “Very, Very Small.”

Fortunately, Falmouth is a place where history matters. History is part of what draws people to Falmouth.

As president, David sees how the Society serves the community. He shared two recent examples.

He read in the news about a policy statement involving history issued by a local government. The wording in the statement looked familiar. They had lifted the text verbatim from our website. They were looking for facts and came to us to get them. That’s why we’re here.

In another case, we received a routine request for information about a historical event from the producer of television documentaries. We provided the requested information and suggested they contact Maine Historical.

We received a nice reply thanking us for our timely response. They mentioned that Maine Historical had punted to us. We blushed. Only then did we realize the producer was working for a filmmaker well known for telling a story from the perspective of those who were involved. We pointed the producer to an essay in a recently published book that provided a local perspective of the historical event. The next day she told us they had ordered copies of the book for the entire production team. The essay put the event in a fresh context. They weren’t sure how they would use this information, but it added depth to the story.

In just one of the many requests the Society receives from the community each year, we had gotten an indirect pat on the back from our flagship historical society, and we had turned up new information for a film being produced for PBS.

Our Society may be “Very, Very Small,” but it makes an impact.

David thanked everyone for helping us preserve our town's heritage and tell its story.

New Business

There being no new business, the annual meeting of the membership was adjourned at 7:45 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 our community, and the volume of requests is enough to keep us hopping. We received more than 50 requests last year and currently have a backlog.

For the Annual Meeting, we picked two we felt had broad interest. One delves into the history of a neighborhood on the western side of Falmouth—parts of West and North Falmouth to the west of Blackstrap Road. The other presentation reconstructs the narrative for an artifact belonging to the family that lived where Falmouth Memorial Library sits today.

The Annual Meeting of The Falmouth Historical Society finished at 8:40 p.m.