

Falmouth Historical Society Annual Meeting

Online via Zoom—January 18, 2022

The slides are posted on the Society website at: <https://thefhs.org/FHS-2022-Annual-Meeting>.

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

Secretary's Report

Suzanne Farnham, secretary, noted that the minutes for the 2020/21 annual meeting were approved by the board so we would dispense with the reading of the minutes.

Minutes for annual and board meetings are posted online at the Society website.

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

The Society currently has 86 members plus three corporate sponsors. Our membership has stabilized around 90. Despite the pandemic, we have attracted new members. Unfortunately, about the same number of long-standing members have passed away.

Sue noted that the February mailing would include a newsletter, annual report, donation acknowledgements, and membership renewals.

Sue reminded the membership that two proposed actions involving the Society's Bylaws required membership approval and were on the agenda for this meeting.

The first was a proposal to temporarily suspend term limits for officers and board members. As with other nonprofits, the pandemic has impeded the Society's ability to hold in-person gatherings which is how we attract and recruit new members for the board. This proposed action would allow the incumbents to remain in their positions until we have replacements. The suspension would be lifted after some semblance of normalcy returns.

The second clarified the role of assistant treasurers. When financial matters are involved, some institutions examine our bylaws and board minutes to confirm that our actions are compliant. As currently written, the role of an assistant treasurer is vague. By improving the Society's financial administration, the treasurer's workload has doubled. We need to spread that work across one or more assistants, and we don't want push-back from financial institutions when we do.

There being a quorum of the membership present, the Society president returned to the podium.

The first proposal for consideration was the temporary suspension of term limits. A motion was made and seconded to approve the proposal as written. A vote was called. The members present voted unanimously in favor and the motion passed.

The second proposal for consideration was clarification of the role of assistant treasurers. A motion was made and seconded to approve the proposal as written. A vote was called. The members present voted unanimously in favor and the motion passed.

Treasurer's Report

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

He noted that we have an approved budget, but we also received donations specifically directed for items not covered in the budget. For example, MAJCO Roofing of Falmouth donated the \$700 repair to the barn roof ridge. When directed donations are added to the budget, the Society's actual expenses during 2021 fell within \$50 of allocated funding.

During 2021, the Society's income exceeded its expenses. More important, income exceeded expenses after deducting the \$3,000 for a restricted grant and \$5,000 withdrawal from long-term savings to cover contingencies over the next 18 months.

Two-thirds of the Society's expenses go to a single program: Collections. While the other two programs—Research and Education—consume lots of volunteer

hours, they do not incur significant costs. This will change when we can resume holding events. He added that volunteers are needed for the audit committee.

Committee Reports

The Society adopted a committee structure in 2020 to make it easier for volunteers to connect with their areas of interest.

Programs. Sally Farneth reported on efforts to support Falmouth Elementary School's history program. The Society is developing materials and exhibits illustrating life on a 19th century Maine farm and is preparing for visits this spring by second graders. The students will be able to see and touch farm equipment they would have used "back in the day."

The Perkins Family graciously funded a scholarship for a deserving graduate from Falmouth High School. The four siblings, the living children of Marion Perkins, Falmouth's town clerk in the 1960s, are all graduates of Falmouth High.

Ron Perkins had joined the meeting via Zoom; the membership thanked him and the other members of the Perkins family for their generosity and support to the Society and the community.

Nearly two years into the pandemic, the Society is still waiting for conditions to improve so we can resume holding events. Twice we've had to shelve plans due to a resurgence of Covid. Many of our members and volunteers are at elevated risk so we are taking all reasonable precautions.

Museum Operations and Exhibits. Betsy Jo Whitcomb related how the Museum had been in disarray at the beginning of the year. It had been closed for 20 months and half of the first floor had been cleared for repainting by Falmouth Scout Troop 93 as part of an Eagle Scout project. By July, a team of volunteers had put everything back in good order and scrubbed the Museum until it sparkled. It hadn't looked this good in years.

The Museum reopened in July after the state relaxed restrictions.

Following guidance from the state, masks were required within the Museum and multiple window fans were installed to improve ventilation.

The Museum was open Tuesdays (and by appointment) until the weather turned chilly in October. It hummed with activity while volunteers caught up on

accessioning and other Society business. A total of 33 visitors stopped by. The father of one family was a grandson of the Leightons who lived in the farmhouse that is now the Museum.

Collections. Ron Scorsone observed how 2021 had been a banner year for donation of artifacts. The Society received a dozen significant items or collections; details about the donations were presented following the business meeting.

Ron reminded the members that the Society Board—during a strategic planning session seven years ago—decided to migrate the catalog for our collections from ledger books and index cards to a modern, searchable, online database.

The project was slow to get started. The first choice for a catalog application turned out to be a poor match to the Society’s needs. A tech-savvy volunteer was needed to lead the project. The Society switched to PastPerfect for the digital catalog. It is the same application used by Maine Historical and many other town historical societies in the area.

Accessions from 2004 to 2019 have been transcribed into the database. Next comes photographing artifacts. This should make it much easier to find items of interest.

A long-term goal is to assemble a rotating set of thematic exhibits such as “Dairy Farming in Falmouth,” highlighting the impact of Danish immigrants during the late 19th century.

Local History. David observed that in an all-volunteer society, volunteers wear many hats; he is also co-chair of the Local History Committee.

At last year’s annual meeting, the membership heard about plans to make the Society’s website the place to go for information about the history of Falmouth and Ancient Falmouth. That effort is well underway. The “Research” section of the website now has links or copies of references Society volunteers use when researching queries from the community.

The Society responded to 40 queries from the community during 2021. These came from people researching the history of their families or property; from businesses and government organizations with questions about historical

significance; and from teachers and students wanting to know more about local history.

Some responses are Falmouth's version of "Finding Your Roots." In addition to answering the question, we explain how and where we found the answer along with local historical context. Many of these responses will be added to the "Members Only – Local Research" section of the Society website.

Communications. Part of the Society's job is sharing what we are doing with the membership.

We flunked.

We did all the things we were supposed to do. Newsletter. Email bulletin. Facebook posts. Website posts. Tables at public events.

The problem is our efforts were sporadic. One newsletter. Two email bulletins. Nine Facebook posts. We did keep the website up to date but posted only two "Falmouth Retrospective." The challenge is our shortage of volunteers.

Merchandise. Sue Farnham highlighted the new Falmouth-themed items. There is an attractive cotton canvas rope tote for \$24, and a fleece-lined winter hat for \$20 (tax included). While the Museum is closed for winter, merchandise can be ordered online at the "Museum Bookstore" section of the website, or by sending an email to the Society's "Info" address.

The revision to the Falmouth Cookbook is in rough draft. It has been split into two volumes: Savory and Sweet.

Buildings & Grounds. Ron Scorsone talked about maintenance of the Museum and Barn. A storm stripped shingles off a long stretch of the barn roof ridge. This had to be repaired before winter arrived. MAJCO Roofing of Falmouth did the necessary repairs. When they learned the cost was more than we had budgeted, they graciously donated the cost of the repair.

The locksets for the Museum and Barn entrance doors were so badly worn, we had trouble opening and closing the buildings this summer. Those have been fixed.

Pumping the Museum's septic tank is planned for spring. The driveway is not in the best of shape; we hope to find someone willing to donate or give us a good discount on reclaim asphalt or millings.

Technology. Ron Scorsone continued with details about activity on the Society's website. Visits in 2021 grew 39% over 2020 with visitors from Maine (about 1,000) growing by 20%. Fifty "geographically-confused" visitors from Falmouth, Massachusetts, and ten from Portland, Oregon, also checked us out. That isn't new; the Society regularly receives queries meant for Falmouth, Massachusetts, or Falmouth, Cornwall, England. Most visitors are looking for information about Falmouth. Pages with new content for researchers are consistently in the top ten.

Development. At the annual meeting two years ago, the Society's financial situation—both sides of the ledger—were identified as unsustainable and our most urgent problem. By last year's annual meeting, the situation was still serious but improving. We had cut our expenses in half and taken many of the steps needed to bring in more income, but we weren't out of the woods.

The Board of Directors has now laid out a roadmap for growing the Society's income. There has been progress on those concrete goals—not as much as hoped because some steps on the roadmap were heavy lifts for our band of volunteers. We are almost ready to approach local businesses seeking more support.

Meanwhile, Ron Perkins made a substantial unrestricted donation that put us over the top sooner than we had hoped; we're in the black for the first time since 2013. The Perkins family also made a substantial grant for a scholarship which they have pledged to sustain.

President's Report

David highlighted the Society's biggest challenges and accomplishments during 2021.

He began by framing the Society's sporadic communications with its members and the community as an obstacle to a return to full health. Everyone wants the Society to do more such as holding events and other traditional activities. That requires more volunteers who are drawn from the membership. New members are attracted by spreading the word about the Society's activities through newsletters, email, social media, the website.

The Society urgently needs volunteers to handle its communications. The Society is doing a lot. There is plenty of content. What is needed are volunteers who can convert that into easily understood English prose; and volunteers who are comfortable with modern tools such as Microsoft Word and Facebook. Anyone interested in working on communications should step forward. Please leave voicemail at 781-4727 or send an email to the Society's "Info" address. Help is needed!

David shared his excitement at how much the Society's small band of volunteers has been able to accomplish. The Society is doing the things expected of a town historical society and, for the most part, doing them well.

David observed that volunteer nonprofits have their ups and downs. As amateur historians, we know what is possible by looking at the history of our Society. We are slowly but steadily returning to what we once were—a society with twice the membership and a calendar full of events. We are well on our way to achieving that goal.

There being no new business, the business portion of the annual meeting was adjourned at 7:40.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Howe Farnham
Secretary

The business portion of the meeting was followed by two presentations illustrating what the Society is doing to preserve the heritage of our town and make it accessible to the community.

Your Town's Attic

Highlights from Acquisitions in 2021

Betsy Jo Whitcomb and Sally Farneth spoke about eight artifacts or documents from last year's trove of donations.

Researching Early Falmouth

Two Historic Sites on the Foreside (1633-1713)

David Farnham spoke about two of the forty inquiries received from the community last year.

Slides and summaries for the two presentations are posted on the Society website at: <https://thefhs.org/FHS-2022-Annual-Meeting>.

The annual meeting of The Falmouth Historical Society finished at 8:30 p.m.