

Sharon Historical Society Quarterly Member Meeting, March 25, 2021

The Spring Quarterly Meeting of the Sharon Historical Society was held remotely by Zoom on March 25, 2021, from 7:00 to 8:30 PM. The topic was "The Sharon Historical Society, Past, Present and Future," featuring speaker Shirley Schofield on the Society's history. The meeting was informational in nature; no official business was conducted.

Approximately 45 people attended, including Chet Johnson, Dan and Marcia Shimshak, Jean and Ken Zaniewski, Jackie Chados, Jim Waldman, Hana Jenner, Rene and David Dearborn, Joanne Douglas, Morey Waltuck, Judy Bookbinder, David Nelson, Sally Waters, Marcia Tranovich, Gary Sullivan, Wilbur Edwards, Susan Drisko, Carol Gannon, Jim Zuis, and Joseph Blansfield, along with a number of others identified only by a first name, nickname, or phone number on the Zoom screen. Members of the board in attendance were Brad Larson, Debby DeBassio, Beth McGregor, Jan Parr, Doug Southard, Jimmie Keating, Maria Anderson, Marie Cuneo, Paul Lauenstein, Meg Winikates, Don Williams, Carolyn Weeks and Shirley Schofield.

Welcome and Introduction:

President Brad Larson opened the meeting with words of welcome and a brief overview of positive directions in the Society. He offered special appreciation for Don Williams, telling the story of his resurrection of the sign kiosk and attentive care of the building during its closure. Vice President Don Williams seconded Brad's assessment of the current good energy, and offered particular appreciation of Andrew Nebenzahl for his role in the process of bringing the Interim Board together. He stressed that lots of involvement and help are needed in the coming months and encouraged participation.

The Interim Board members briefly introduced themselves, noting their particular backgrounds, interests and what they bring to the Society.

Featured Speaker:

Long-time Historical Society member and past president Shirley Schofield gave a talk on the History of the Sharon Historical Society, highlighting some of the major events. Here follows a brief summary of parts of her fascinating presentation:

There were two antecedents to the present Historical Society. First was an early Antiquarian Committee, which gave documents and artifacts to the town and public library. The first Sharon Historical Society was formed in 1900 and lasted until 1923. This Society had a number of activities, including cataloguing gravesites and going on various rambles, and left materials to the town, now housed at the Sharon Public Library in its Historical Room.

Many years passed, until around the time of the national Bicentennial in 1976. Karen Goober had moved to Sharon and expressed interest in forming a historical society. Katherine Cartwright, the Gagnons, Sid Morgan, the Newells, the Goodyears and others formed a group which gathered beginning in 1981, meeting in members' homes. Karen Goober served as its first president and Claire Forman its second. They applied for and were granted articles of organization in 1982, around the time Shirley herself joined. Their chief goal was to preserve local history, and to that end they felt they needed to have a permanent home. They started having yard sales to raise money. Katherine Cartwright's home on South Main Street was the initial sale location. Karen Goober found an old Model A truck and got it donated to

sell chances on. They continued to hold sales at a red barn on South Main Street, owned first by potato farmer Joey Ruess[sp?] and then by the Kendall family, who allowed its free use. The barn proved to be an ideal site for traffic, and the Red Barn Sales, as they came to be known, made substantial money each year. The Society also held craft fairs, a transportation fair one very hot day on Moose Hill, trolley tours of Sharon, bus and walking tours, historic house tours, a silent auction organized by Dave Nelson, and numerous other events, including a quilt show and a viewing of old wedding gowns.

With a good amount of money raised, it was time to finally fulfill the goal of a permanent home. They initially sought to purchase an existing building, but all the houses they looked at would have required too much work and expense to adapt and bring up to code. They approached the Board of Selectmen; one suggested using a portion of municipal parking lot on High Street, on the site of the former High Street School. The town agreed to give the Society a 99-year lease on the land, and the Society embarked on building its own building, designed to its particular needs. A capital campaign led by Mel Leventhal raised enough money to avoid having to take out a mortgage to finance the new building. A groundbreaking ceremony was held, and the building, constructed by Can Four of Canton, was completed in September 1989, when it hosted a packed Open House. The Fitzpatrick family donated the bell, which is rung at the start of every yard sale.

The building now houses archives and artifacts on its upper floor, catalogued in a notebook and on computer; a museum display and gathering place on the main floor; rest rooms; and a finished (though still unheated) basement meeting space. All three floors are served by an elevator, and the building is fully accessible. Additional storage space was needed for large items, so in 2009 the Carriage House was built behind the main building. Based on plans provided courtesy of the Norton Historical Society, it was constructed and wired by students at the Southeastern Regional Vocational School, with lumber provided at a good price by the Sharon Box Company. It now houses historical agricultural and ice harvesting equipment and other tools, and since 2019 a passenger wagon from Moose Hill Farm donated by the Kendall family, making it truly a Carriage House.

Shirley highlighted a number of other Historical Society events and achievements over the years. One early example was an archaeological dig, assisted by Boston University archaeologists working with Bud Darrow, the Gagnons and others, to uncover the old Stoughtonham furnace. Located on what is now appropriately named Furnace Street, it was constructed in 1722, taking iron ore from the lake to make cannons and cannonballs for the Revolutionary War, some transported by oxcart to Dorchester to help defend Boston. The site was excavated and some artifacts recovered which can be seen at the museum. An application for listing on the National Register of Historic Places was accepted, and the site was marked by a sign (which unfortunately has now gone missing.) Digs were also held on Moose Hill near Walpole Street and the old knife shop on Ames Street. (Archaeological digs have since come under more regulations, so none have been done lately.) She also mentioned special occasions like the Society's 25th anniversary celebration, and regularly held events like the commemorations of Veterans' Day each November and the genealogical research assistance sessions offered by Rene and David Dearborn.

Current and Upcoming Plans

Nominations and Elections: Brad welcomed the presence at the meeting of familiar faces of those who have given much to the Society, including Jean Zaniewski, David Nelson, Hana Jenner, and Gary Sullivan, and introduced Maria Anderson, chair of the five-person Nominating Committee.

Maria noted that the Interim Board works cohesively, with everyone bringing something to the table, a situation which she wants to see continued with a strong slate of nominees and lots of participation at both the Board and committee levels. The Nominating Committee is committed to ensuring that the nomination and election process is open, transparent and inclusive; it will present a plan to the Board for approval at its April meeting and circulate detailed information in the next newsletter.

All members should have received a form in the February newsletter asking for their contact information, their interests in involvement, their recommendations for the Society, and their nominations of themselves or other members for positions. Everyone is encouraged to please mail or email that form back by the April 26th deadline. The newsletter and information/nominations form were sent both by both regular mail and email. But postal delivery had some glitches and we may not have correct email addresses for some members. So if you didn't receive the newsletter and form, please let us know, and please be sure to give us your best email address. A ballot will be included with the next newsletter (by regular mail and email), for return by June 1, and we don't want anyone to be left out.

The Pandemic Memories Project: Debbie DeBassio, chair of the project to collect memories of the pandemic year, thanked her committee and encouraged people of all ages to submit their experiences, reflections and creations. The plan is to host an exhibit, both at the museum and online, of "Prose, Poetry and Pictures from the Pandemic," and to archive much of the material for the future. Submissions can be made by mail to the Society's Post Office box, by email to SharonHistorical@gmail.com, or by other arrangements for things not suited to mailing. Please look for more information on the Society's website and Facebook page.

Questions and Comments: Brad left open time at the end of the meeting to entertain questions and comments. There were no specific questions, but a number of people offered positive comments about the meeting and the work of the Society in general. David Nelson concluded with a historical footnote about the Historical Society founded in 1900 and its chief leader, a Mr. Monk [sp?], some of whose notes we have. Apparently after he moved away sometime around 1916, the Society, having lost its spark plug, gradually dwindled and folded. Dave expressed his pleasure at seeing so many active, qualified people involved, reassuring him that the present Historical Society won't find itself in a similar situation.

The meeting ended with an invitation to all to become involved; to fill out and return the information and nominations form, to consider volunteering, to renew dues, and to offer a personal piece of history to the Pandemic Memories Project.

Respectfully submitted,
Elisabeth McGregor, Secretary