

From the President

It has been a strange year so far, with even more uncertainty looming. For the Franklin Historical Society, it has been “The Season that Wasn’t”. With no gatherings of more than ten people and social distancing mandates, monthly meetings were neither possible nor pragmatic, especially when the demographics of our membership put so many at risk. Museum “Open hours” of 10 am to 2 pm on Saturdays may yet happen before Labor Day, as only small numbers of visitors in the past have taken advantage of the opportunity to review the many interesting and varied exhibits the museum has to offer. Whether this relatively new tradition will continue is still yet to be determined, but would definitely not start sooner than the beginning of July. Just prior to that, on Sunday, June 28th, we will, at least of this writing, attempt our annual plant sale, with a storm door barrier between paying customers and cashier, mandated six feet separation in the sales area, masks, hand sanitizer, and a constant regiment of disinfecting common surfaces wherever necessary. Even if there is to be a “new normal” of social interaction and public behavior, the mission of the Society will never change. Our board and officers will continue to be dedicated to the preservation, reverence, and understanding of the past, always attempting to learn the lessons our history has to teach, and appreciate the inspiration our ancestors left as their legacy.

Despite the outward appearance of inactivity, the collections continue to grow, perhaps because the policy of “stay at home” has lent itself to a vigorous spate of “spring cleanings”, resulting in the inadvertent discovery of several treasures. Attics, closets, and basements have divulged boxes of vintage papers, correspondence, and photographs, much to everyone’s edification, and therefore to the enrichment of all who follow the Society’s e-newsletter and public articles. May that influx never cease, and may there always be something more to research and learn. If there is any message in this year’s letter to the membership, let it be to be vigilant to the wonders in your keeping, and make the right decisions to preserve and perpetuate the stories these objects, artifacts, and particularly photographs, can tell.

You will notice that in this roster is an attempt at creating an optimistic “Events List”, if continually changing circumstances will allow. First will be the Plant Sale, followed by open hours with restrictive rules in place, a resumption of monthly meetings, and even a possible limited opening, by appointment and with Society participation, of the Webster Birthplace, allowing some public visitation.

During a time when we are more intent on making history, and setting new standards and policies which may stay with us for longer than we can now imagine, the watchwords must be that the Society will not just endure, but grow stronger. As a watershed moment in time, we will look back at the “COVID 19 Crisis” as we did on other impactful moments in our lives, remembering those things that would not have happened otherwise. The indelible memories of Zoom meetings, our favorite TV shows broadcast from celebrities’ living rooms, people with masks everywhere one looked, and lines outside grocery stores, with senior shopping hours (although in retirement, who wants to get up at 6 am to buy eggs?!). Throughout all of this, can we be hopeful that this combined experience will teach us, as a society, to be more concerned for our fellow human beings, and cautious and better prepared for the future?

A question only time will answer.

As we peer towards next year and beyond, the Society must continue to develop the ideas that will leave behind a lasting impression for all. Therefore, among the added goals for which to aim are to help document the history of the mills along the site of the White Water Park, the contributions of the Proctor family on the land they once called home, and the legacy of the Peabody home as it expands into the next century.

Be well, stay safe, and may we all, sometime soon, be together again, swapping anecdotes, enjoying insightful programs, and laughing in the comforting, inviting, and historic environment of the Webster/Tay House, the home of the Franklin Historic Society.

Leigh A. Webb
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