

Franklin NH Historical Society Newsletter

February, 2019

As we look forward to the new year, so must we also peer backwards to review our successes, so that we may build on them, and to learn from projects which might have been taken further. Therefore this month is the year in review, 2018. What the Society accomplished, what still needs to be done, and areas which could be expanded to better utilize the strengths of the organization.

Donations continue to arrive on a weekly basis, including just this past month, Dick Berube was kind enough to add another "old" milk bottle to the Society's collection. This one, a gallon sized glass container with plastic handle from the more modern era (1970's) Franklin Dairy, probably existed just before the company ceased operations. Trying to rank one gift above another is virtually impossible, as all have an inestimable value to the Society. Without intending to take away from any of the wonderful contributions received, one series of donations did stand out slightly this past year. Glass negatives, found in the house once owned by O. A. Towne and now the residence of long-time member, teacher, and contributor to the Society Chris Lewis, were certainly extraordinary. Not all were able to be identified, as is the case of the image below of a residence, presumably in Franklin, which could have been the object of sale in Mr. Towne's real estate dealings.



These incredible (and fragile) negatives revealed much of Franklin never before seen, but also other sites (and sights) visited by Mr. Towne in his travels, such as the grand hotels and trains that serviced Old Orchard, Maine, in 1898 (copies of which were shared with that local historical society). Add the stellar collection of books, pamphlets and memorabilia related to Daniel Webster donated by Massachusetts lawyer Joseph Rondeau (with more promised!), and it was without question a banner year for donations to our archives.

The project to remove the vinyl siding from the north and west side walls of the Webster House

continued, and will hopefully conclude when the weather once again becomes welcoming and a supplier of a “boom” lift can be found to access the third floor section of the west facing wall. Below see some of the damage covered by the siding, and the entire area after repairs and restoration were completed.



Clearing the hill leading to the Stevenstown Fort Marker (just past the Webster Place cemetery on what was once the original River Road) and adding embedded steps was also successful, thought important to make more accessible part of Franklin’s distant past. Some maintenance will be necessary every year, but worth the effort if it means more residents and visitors can learn of the city’s roots.



Some time back there was a state sanctioned archaeological survey of that specific area, and it was determined that the stones buried along the ridge where the marker stands were indeed part of the fort's foundation walls.

The plant sale held in June was not quite as successful as the previous year due to the threat of inclement weather, but can certainly "grow" in 2019. The cookbook published by the Society with pictures and stories as well as recipes, was an unqualified hit, with a look towards future expansion if demand is sufficient.

Open hours on Saturdays, 10 am to 2 pm, from May to Labor Day, continue to lure interested parties, and will be offered again in 2019. Educational opportunities will be further explored, beyond the annual Daniel Webster presentation to fourth graders, by the educational committee whose members recognize the benefit to exposing Franklin's youth to the history that surrounds them, and the pride that can come with that understanding.

The annual field trip was held on a perfect day in August at the St. Gaudens Historical Site, but few members (photo below) were able to partake, suggesting a possible reconsideration of that approach for this coming summer.



One sad task of the Society has become a responsibility to document buildings which might be endangered. Examples are pictured below from Memorial Street, such as the steam laundry (already demolished), the tenement building on the corner of Canal and Memorial Streets, and the Griffin Hacksaw mill, now in a seriously forlorn condition. The photo below is from c. 1896, showing what was then the Mayo Knitting Needle mill, the steam laundry in the right foreground with the tenement hiding behind it, and the Griffin hack saw mill, before the peaked roof was reduced to a flat roof (courtesy of the Franklin Public Library)



The 1900 Proctor house, now in the hands of the Peabody Home, also has an uncertain future, with its original grandeur reflected in a wintertime painting (once hanging in the house, is now in safe keeping, thanks to John Benham) by Alexis Proctor.



Many of the 2018 programs concentrated on exhibiting photos and artifacts from the Society's extensive (and constantly growing) collections, allowing such items normally kept in storage to be seen and appreciated. Articulate individuals such as Ken Cushing and Jim Prew were among presenters who not only educated but entertained, and are exemplary of those speakers constantly sought out to bring new insight into the Society's monthly meetings. Lastly, the Society had to say goodbye to member Clarence "Herbie" Fife, and Jane Fredette, mother to longtime member Mary Foley, who both passed away in 2018. Although gone in

body, their contributions and spirit of preservation will continue to influence those whose lives they touched.

Every year poses new challenges and sets the bar ever higher so that even more can be done. 2019 will be no different. The Society hopes to see more faces at its meetings, eager to raise the banner of preservation, and appreciate what has come before, so we can all strive to make the future not only brighter, but worthy of this city's amazing past.