

Secretary's Report - 2020

Dartmouth Historical & Arts Society

The past year has been both a challenging one and a rewarding one for the Dartmouth Historical & Arts Society. The year 2020 started normally, with the Society doing its business as usual. Donations of historical materials were coming in; the research team was making great progress on the Friends Records transcription project; new material continued to be added to our web archives, and we were finalizing plans to reproduce and replace the steeple on the cupola atop the schoolhouse. Our lecture series was drawing consistent crowds of people interested in local history to the schoolhouse several times a month, and lots of new material was regularly being added to the web page archives. We were proudly carrying on our mission of supporting, promoting, preserving, and distributing information about the Old Dartmouth region's historic and cultural diversity through our web archives, our research efforts, our lecture series, and other means.

In his January 2020 Research Committee Report, Dan Socha reported 697 transcriptions done, with two pages per image; 21 percent of the transcriptions were complete, but only 6.7 percent had been reviewed by volunteer readers; another 32 percent of transcripts were "in the pipeline" waiting to be reviewed. President Bob Harding suggested the society should seek a publisher for the Dartmouth Monthly Meeting material, and opened talks with the Colonial Society of New England towards that end. An Obadiah Brown Fund grant application was filed to assist with financing the research and publication projects. At the start of 2019, the Friends (Quaker) Records Project was just taking shape, with Dan Socha taking the lead on creating this online digital archive; at the end of 2020, a book publishing deal is in place, and all the records will soon be on the website, with a reading guide, index, and related materials available to aid historians, genealogists, and other researchers learn more about Old Dartmouth history.

But then, in March, everything changed with the widespread outbreak of the coronavirus. Our lectures and in-person meetings were canceled, and our already meager revenue stream took a hit from the loss of the collection jar donations. Fortunately, financial support for the ongoing Friends Record project did not wither and die... the project costs have been covered by grants, gifts, and donations, and the important work continues thanks to the electronic efforts of our dedicated project team and their volunteers.

A few new landmarks came about during this not so normal year. In August, Pam Cole first suggested we consider using ZOOM presentations for the suspended lecture series, and volunteered to do the first virtual lecture with part four of her Roots of Faith series, aired in October; Kathy Plant's interviews with Dartmouth elders began getting noticed on the website, along with postings of new genealogies and government records; some substantial donations to our physical collection of artifacts and ephemera were received and are scheduled for preservation or display when things get back to normal. I could go through the minutes of meetings throughout the year to note this or that small accomplishment, but that would be time consuming and a little boring. Instead, let's just say that we are coping with the new normal as best we can, and looking forward to continuing our work.

But we should also note that we lost much to the pandemic this year – we lost the fellowship of the directors, society members, and guests at our popular Sunday lectures; we lost a few elderly loyal supporters of the society, and a favorite lecturer; we missed the seasonal special events that helped us engage the community so effectively, like the community band concerts, the holiday open house, and the popular Come Back In Time event. We missed all the living history activities that help educate young and old about real history, real people, and real life in these parts in the days gone by. The

directors carry on their business these days via ZOOM meetings, and employ the internet to get their research and transcription work done. Perhaps the only potential benefit from the coronavirus epidemic is that it gives some folks more time to visit our website, and search through the remarkable archives that grow every month.

All of these efforts, initiatives, and accomplishments, taken together, all add up to another successful year of the society is achieving its stated education and preservation goals, providing important research materials, and protecting those historical “things” which tell such valuable stories about our collective past. As always, nothing would have been accomplished without the tireless efforts of our loyal board of directors, each contributing to the society as their special talents allow. We also thankfully acknowledge the financial support of our faithful members and lecture attendees, and a legion of community supporters who love history. Again, as always, we are especially grateful for the dozen or so directors who donate so much time and hard work to the task of keeping our collective history alive for future generations to learn from.

Respectfully submitted,
Robert Barboza, Secretary
November 2020