

MINUTES
ELIOT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING
McPherson Hall, First Congregational Church
FEBRUARY 6, 2023

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Attendance: 20 (14 in person and 6 by ZOOM)

Meeting opened at 7pm by President Tracey Graffam-Dixon

Program: Tracey introduced Janice (Jan) Cerabona who talked about the collaboration between the schools and our Society. Jan explained that it was teacher Esther Morrow who brought together the Historical Society and the schools working together to make the history of the town a part of student's learning. She worked with Ed Vetter, another member and president of the Society on several books - "Views of Eliot's Past", "Eliot's Brickyards", "Eliot's Historical Markers", and with other members of our Society worked with Jeanette Paul and Eleanor Zamarchi in the research and production of the Society's publication "Schools of Eliot." The two large binders of research information that Jeanette and Eleanor gathered are in the William Fogg Library. In 1983, teacher Donna Fernald took up the work that Esther had started and then, in 1995, Ann Shapleigh-Shisler took an interest and today continues to be a strong advocate for Eliot's history being taught at the elementary school level, with the hope to expand through all the grades in our school system. Ann reached out to EHS, early on, asking to help with research, finding speakers, helping to organize bus trips and experiences with the children, during these studies. In 1996 EHS acquired the # 8 Schoolhouse. We have a scrapbook, put together by Rosanne, that chronicles the restoration and associated activities, including fundraising, which Esther continued to be an integral part of. Terri Johnson, a first grade teacher at Eliot Elementary, worked with the children in producing a quilt that they gave to be auctioned off, and was the first fundraiser held for the schoolhouse restoration. Paul Johnson, who lived practically next door, saw what was going on and it wasn't long before he was brought on board and spearheaded the restoration with the great help and expertise of Lindy Leavitt. At the schoolhouse is an "Honor Roll" recognizing all those who volunteered and helped in any way with that restoration. In October 2006 the #8 Schoolhouse, with the restoration complete, was officially reopened and in 2007 the first group of students from Eliot Elementary School came for a visit and have come every year since (with the exception of the schools being closed during the Covid outbreak in 2019-2020). At the school is an autograph book that the children sign. In 2018 we put up our first display at the Elementary School. It had been the job of the art teacher to keep the display case filled but upon seeing how well the students reacted to our display, Jan suggested that perhaps we could continue to switch out displays that would highlight Eliot's history as well as work with the teachers and their curriculum. The school then asked us to continue the displays and working with Julie Johnson, our collections chair, displays are changed out 3-4 times during the school year. In 2019, it was decided to open up the school to families so that parents could experience the school with their children, from 10-2. It was opened one or 2 weekends a month (Saturday/Sunday), and by appointment. We've had a really good response and are now looking to expand the days it is open. We are hoping to have it open each Saturday from the end of May, up to Eliot Festival Day weekend by forming "teams" of at least two people. If we have enough teams then it spreads the number of times each would

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have to be at the Schoolhouse out. It would also be open “by appointment” as well. Another goal is to find a way to engage the 8th grade students in helping out at the #8 Schoolhouse, earning community service credits as well. Presently EHS has a changing display, at Eliot Elementary School, and have just begun displays at Marshwood Great Works School and working right now to create a partnership with Old Berwick Historical Society in creating joint displays focusing around history themes shared by both Eliot and South Berwick. With displays being produced and printed materials being saved, to be used over again, we see them being rotated among the locations that are available to us. We have also loaned some of the display board to Leslie Stevens to place in her barn at her Sturgeon Creek Farm, and thus make available to the wider public. Displays have also been placed at the town hall for various occasions. The committee is always looking for others to help with the displays. Jan expressed her appreciation to the late Jeannette Paul for her support when Jan got involved in the hosting of the children at the #8 Schoolhouse. At the March meeting Jan will be bringing a signup sheet for the summer Schoolhouse schedule.

The President thanked Jan for the overview and then we proceeded into the second part of our program “Books of our Childhood” which took a look at the display currently at Eliot Elementary School, followed by attendees sharing some of their favorite childhood books. Jan shared, through slides, pictures of the display and explained that teachers and staff were asked to contribute their favorite book. Jan worked with librarians at the Elementary School and William Fogg Library to obtain a copy (if they didn’t have one) for the display and made placards for each with the name of the teacher or staff member hidden on the other side. Children were to guess whose book each might be and then, toward the end period of the display, the cards would be turned over to reveal the contributor.

Attendees then shared their books. Tracey brought the iconic children’s classic, A.A. Milne’s “Winnie the Pooh”; Polly shared R.L. Stevenson’s “A Child’s Garden of Verses”, a 1929 edition (the year her sister was born), with lovely illustrations. Polly read “The Swing”. Jack brought one of the books in “The Boy Scouts Book of Campfire Stories” series. His father died when he was 5 months old and these books lay in the attic bookcase, where he loved to go and read them. He and his four brothers grew up on these books and later Jack would become a scout leader. Sally Hartford “Uncle Wiggley” by Howard R. Garis and a “Colorfun” coloring book that belongs to her husband Fran that he had as a child and as his children and grandchildren have come along would sit down with them, and together, color a picture in his childhood book. Jan brought a reprint of “The Little Princesses”, the story of Princess Margaret and her sister Elizabeth of Great Britain. It was written by their nanny, Marion Crawford, in 1950, having come in the early 1930s to care for the girls and leaving in 1948, when Charles was born. Its publication caused the Queen Mother to never speak to Ms. Crawford again. Julie shared a book that she remembers her mother reading to her each night, “Smiling Hill Farm”, by Miriam

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E. Mason. It was published in 1939 and contains short stories about the struggles and successes of a family traveling to settling in the west during the early part of the 1800s. Skip Devito shared his memories of "Mother Goose Tales" that would be read to him when he was very young, and then "Men of Iron", by Howard Pyle. This 1891 novel with great illustrations fascinated him, as an adolescent. Telling the story of a poor Knight, who overcomes obstacles to redeem his family name and fortunes and take the hand of a princess, it spurred his imagination with its tales of knighthood and chivalry. When he was 9 or 10 years old it really moved him, but he found not so much his grandson when he gifted him a copy or himself when he revisited the book as an adult. Rosanne brought a number of books from different periods of her childhood "One Fish Two Fish", "Robin Hood", old publication with colored pictures, "A Child's Garden of Verses", and "Home on Star Island" (one of many given each Christmas by her great-aunt). In the discussion that followed several members recalled the "Book of the Month Club" books and the joy they brought each month, opening up to see what would be there and mentioning that some came with a record, as well. Sally Sullivan recalled, as a teacher, in the 1960s, not having a big library, or budget for one, in the school, that the State had a program allowing teachers to order books for their classrooms, on loan for a month, for her children (1st grade). Several people remembered that in the 1960s you could order books in school - Scholastic Books, which became the precursor of the present Scholastic Book Fairs. Skip recalled, as a youngster, asking the librarian for a book on learning how to fish. The librarian took him out to her '59 Chevy, opened the trunk and there was her fishing gear. Right then and there she gave him a lesson in fishing!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Jack and Polly McDonough were thanked for the evening refreshments.
2. Refreshment sign ups needed for April and May - signup sheet passed around the room.

BUSINESS

3. Proposal to move the Monthly Meetings to the 2nd Monday of the Month. Following discussion it was AGREED to try it out for this coming year and see how it goes. It is hoped it will allow more people to attend and to subvert the necessity of having to move the meeting to the 2nd Monday because of a holiday on the 1st Monday of a given month. It was suggested that we may have to send out notices reminding people of the change.
4. Tracey reported that the Eliot Garden Club is interested in partnering with us to grow and sell wildflowers for a fundraiser. They have been given access to Hidden Meadows Gardens off Main Street (Route 103). The thought is to grow an historic/native garden with classic plants of the past. Perhaps there are gardeners in our group that might be interested and then could sell the plants on Eliot Festival Day? It was brought up that the

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Library has a "seed bank" where people can get and donate seeds. This might be something to donate to as well, as our own seeds are produced, as well as a place to get some seeds. Time was discussed with the possibility of maybe 2 days a month (weekly), for each group, tending to the gardens. Interested members can contact Tracey to explore with her further.

5. Tracey reported that she had met with the Town Planner (Jeff Brubaker) and discussed with him what EHS role would be in helping update the "Historical and Archaeological" section of Eliot's Comprehensive Plan. She talked about getting a small group together to help with the update. Jeff said he'd like to have the draft ready by March 10th, if possible. Tracey assured him that EHS will work on this. She directed the members to pages 134-140 and 209-211 of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan
6. Auditing of the Financial Books - Julie Johnson offered to do the audit, and Paul Johnson said he would be the backup.
7. Next Meeting, March 13th. Reminder that this will be our Quarterly Business Meeting with a short program.
8. March Refreshments - Rosanne and Bob Fisher

Meeting closed at 9:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosanne M. Adams-Fisher, Secretary