

**Minutes of the
Eliot Historical Society Meeting
McPherson Hall, First Congregational Church
January 8, 2024**

President Tracey Graffam-Dickson opened the meeting at 7PM

Present were 15 and 11 on ZOOM

The President opened the meeting, thanking Marge and Skip Brown for the evening's refreshments; reminding yearly dues paying members that their dues for the year are now due. Next month's program will have a Valentine theme and all are welcomed to bring valentine cards, memories and stories and people will have the opportunity to make their own valentines. Eric Christian will also give an overview of our Website. Our March program will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the district's Pre-Kindergarten Program with Jan Cerabona who developed and was one of the first teachers in the program.

REPORTS: Jan Cerabona reported that we have been given permission to set up a display and sell some of our books in the William Fogg Library and tonight she has set out the pictures that will be used at the Elementary School, followed by the Great Works School, showing places for people to try and figure out where they are. Sylvia Moynihan said that we have another lifetime member from an old friend who re-joined us and a contribution from the family of Florence Moulton, in her memory. Tracey said that we received an old letter that will be put in the archives.

PROGRAM: Kelly Vaughn joined us to share with us the story of Virginia Woods Bellamy (1890-1976) who invented a new method of knitting "Number Knitting". Bellamy and her daughter Jane, lived in Eliot in the late 1940's and Jane graduated from Eliot High School in 1949. While here she made many friends in the area. They lived on River Road and several residents either helped her with promoting her method and/or were models of the clothing items that were made. Virginia was 62 when she first published. Her father was a pastor, she came from a well-educated family on both sides, was classically trained and married (1) Alexander Lauter and lived in New York City and was part of the social elite. Virginia had her first child, Robert (who died at the age of 17 from polio) when she was 25 and sometime after that she contracted tuberculosis. It was while she was in a sanitarium, in her boredom, that she took up knitting. Her first marriage ended and, in 1927, she married Francis Rufus Bellamy. They had a son, Rufus in 1929 and daughter Jane in 1931. (Jane is still living in North Carolina and is in her 90s) With two small children, and in the midst of the depression she needed to make money to care for her family and turned to knitting. She wasn't one to go by the norms; was practical and independently minded. Virginia found the directions for knitting complicated and tedious, so she developed her own way of knitting, using seven basic shapes, the garter stitch and graft paper to chart the design, doing away with complicated knitting directions. Her way of knitting allows for all way stretch so that even if you gain and lose weight it will bounce back into shape. In 1948 she received a patent for her method.

From 1933- 1935 she published knitting pamphlets and her creations and patterns were featured in Women's Home Companion and other publications. Virginia was an interesting woman and had a number of interests beyond knitting. She produced children's operettas (1919). She did the poetry and a friend the music. She also wrote for newspapers. Francis Bellamy was a writer also and they collaborated on a writing project.

Divorcing her husband around 1942-3 she moved with her children from New York to Eliot and remained here into the early 1950s, publishing for McCall's magazine, developing a correspondence course and giving talks and classes in this area.

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In 1952, Virginia compiled all her correspondence course material and put it into a book “Number Knitting”. Today, there are only 17-20 copies of this book extant, with most being in libraries or private collections and worth anywhere from \$280 - \$395. The original run was 5000 copies. Just before it was printed, she went to New York City and had a fashion show, with her knitting creations featured, she was also listed in the “Who’s Who” of fashion.

In her book “Number Knitting” she talks about some of the people in her life – Mildred Obrey, her daughter’s teacher; Maynard Douglass her mail carrier, who delivered her patent notification and brought her mail from all over the world. She received so much mail that she had to hire a correspondence secretary, neighbor Bernice Clark, who also drew all the knitting charts for publications. Photographer Douglas Armsden of Kittery did the photography locally and it would be interesting to know whose house they were in. She gave a talk at the Brickstore Museum, and classes.

Daughter, Jane Bellamy, graduated Eliot High School in 1949 and went on to school at UMaine, Orono. Virginia moved to Blue Hill Falls and then to Castine, Maine, in 1956. Before she passed, Virginia gathered together her poetry and had it published. 1000 books were printed and 75 were numbered.

Kelly would be very pleased to connect with anyone having information about Virginia and Jane, while they were in this area. Her address in PO Box 14, Kipling, NC 27543 or you can email her at kelly@knitswag.com She also has a Facebook group and instructional videos have been posted on YouTube.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/7157299430993217/>

<https://linktr.ee/Knitswag>

Before breaking for refreshments a few UPDATES: were given –

- George Gefrich is looking to have a representative from the Historical Society on a Board or Committee to oversee and protect the Chapel property. It is a non-profit enterprise with an endowment for non-denominational public space. He is holding a meeting on January 21 at 2pm for anyone interested to serve.
- Tracey will be meeting with Aging in Place representative, Jenny Isler. A concept paper for the “Memory Walk” will be developed, geared to the aging population and people with memory challenges. Possibility for use of our snow roller or silent policeman?

NEXT MEETING: February 12, 2024

Meeting closed at 8:20pm

Respectfully submitted,

Rosanne M. Adams, Secretary