

**Minutes of the
Eliot Historical Society Meeting
McPherson Hall, First Congregational Church
November 11, 2024**

President Tracey Graffam-Dickson opened the meeting at 7PM, welcoming those present.

Present were 17, in person and 2 on ZOOM.

PROGRAM

Eric Christian presented the history of Wood Island and the September meeting of area historical societies there. Eric represented Eliot Historical Society at the “Wood Island Summit, 2024”. The group hopes that by gathering together historical societies on the seacoast (Maine and New Hampshire) that they will be able to not only share ideas, and concerns, but to support one another with collaborations such as with fundraising, which might allow for obtaining grants by utilizing a larger geographic and population base. Nine Seacoast historical societies were represented at the meeting. They plan to issue a survey and to meet quarterly with the next meeting in January 2025, hosted by the Hampton Historical Society. Two representatives, from each historical society, are invited to the meetings.

Sam Reed presided over the gathering and shared his extensive knowledge of the history of the island and the restoration project, which he is intimately involved in. In 1827 the Federal Government obtained the island and in 1889 a military hospital was built. Here Spanish War prisoners were quarantined to prevent the spread of Yellow Fever. In 1908 the current Live Saving Station was built and, in 1915, the US Life Saving Service became part of the US Coast Guard. The US Life Saving Service had many such stations along the East Coast. In 1941 the US Navy took control of the island and buildings as an observation post, during the War and then after, returned it to the US Coast Guard. The tie-ups across the waters where nets and mines were placed to keep enemy submarines out of the harbor, can be seen today. In 1952 the US Coast Guard moved its operations to New Castle and the Wood Island Station was abandoned. Three years later, in 1955, the Department of the Interior took ownership until the 1970’s when Kittery was offered and accepted ownership, with the understanding that it would be used by the public and restricted to use for recreation purposes.

There was little done to the property until 2009, when the town of Kittery formed the Wood Island Advisory Committee to come up with plans for the restoration and future use of the property. The Committee determined that it would be too costly to demolish the buildings and the Wood Island Life Saving Station Association was formed (WILSSA) to spearhead the effort and engage in discussions with the town of Kittery.

In 2012, Kittery and WILSSA came to an agreement that Kittery would pay for the asbestos abatement needed, as they were able to obtain Federal Grants for this. Four phases, each taking about a year, were identified. One of the largest was the restoration of the seawall, with work being done by the Maine National Guard Corps of Engineers. Granite blocks had to be brought by barges from the Shipyard. The group also acquired and restored an actual Life Saving Boat and restored the rail line on the island, which brought those boats up into the boat house, and was the launching point.

Today the group is in the final phase of the restoration. Because there is no electricity to the island, it has to be generated by diesel generators and solar power. Wastewater is also recycled. Boats are allowed to come to the dock and people to come to the island, with restrictions.

Discussion followed. It was noted that the Atlantic Grill Restaurant in Rye has a good collection of Life Saving Station related pictures.

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NEXT MEETING December 9, 2024 . Our Annual Holiday Gathering with Potluck desserts and Business Meeting. There are several position openings to be voted upon

Meeting closed at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosanne M. Adams, Secretary