



The Bristol Historical & Preservation Society
83rd Annual Meeting
April 25, 2022
Executive Director's Report
Prepared by Catherine W. Zipf, Executive Director

I write every year that things are busy—and they are!—but I think the pandemic has really brought busy to a new level. We accomplished a lot of large projects that we wouldn't have been able to ordinarily. It's been gratifying to see our collections and exhibit space become better organized and accessible. If you haven't been by HQ lately, please come down soon!

Programs:

The main programming news was our move to the Zoom platform. Going virtual was a necessity, of course, but it allowed us to reach new audiences and, more importantly, new speakers! Two years ago, we offered a series of virtual lectures by scholars who study the history of enslavement, including Cynthia Johnson, Nancy Kougeas, Rafael Ocasio, Christy Clark-Pujara, and Joanne Pope Melish. We also inaugurated three new named annual lectures, one in honor of Derry Riding, one for Helene Tessler, and one for Lombard Pozzi. Each speaker—Elizabeth Stevens, Eleanor Langham, and Arnold Robinson respectively—were the perfect way to begin these speaker series. This spring, we follow with Charlotte Carrington-Farmer, Keith Stavely and Kathleen Fitzgerald, and Jessica Rogers-Cerrato.

We have also begun an effort to carry forward Lombard's legacy with a robust set of programming for May is National Preservation Month. We will be offering six workshops geared towards helping historic homeowners be better stewards of their homes. We are also offering four community demonstrations days to show off not-frequently seen arts like metalwork, bookmaking and printing, textile production, and gravestone art. If you missed our newsletter announcement, please check our website—we don't want our members to miss out!

Collections:

Lisa continues to bring her extensive experience in collections management to our organization and we are thrilled with her exhibits—the current one is on the history of Bristol's schools from 1680 to 1900. Over the past year, Lisa has worked hard to bring order to our collections, to get like with like, and to put all the collections in spaces that are suited to their long-term care. Please read more about her accomplishments in her report.

Grants:

We've been very fortunate over the last few years to receive a number of significant grants. The most important were the two Paycheck Protection Loans (which were really grants, as the loans were forgiven), which helped us weather the pandemic. But we also received smaller, project-directed loans from Historic New England (to create a new finding aid for the DeWolf Collection), RI Council for the Humanities (to fund a free booklet of our popular Bristol Businesses exhibit), and the RI Foundation (to create a set of mobile exhibits). We're looking forward to more such grants, as they go a long way in helping us get our collections in order, interpret what we have, and bring it to the public.

Research:

Interestingly, we've had a burst of interest in our plaque program, so Rei has been very (very!) busy researching plaques—five so far this year with another five (or so) in the queue. We've also had a burst in research requests, we think because people have had more time to spend on research projects, due to the pandemic. While Rei remains our lead man on research, Lisa and I both help make sure our researchers have what they need. We also wish to mark the passing of Bob Leonard, our longtime sign maker, with whom we've worked since the beginning of the program more than forty years ago. Bob's hand painted signs were works of art in themselves and we will miss his calligraphied invoices and correspondence. It has taken some time, but we've managed to find another sign maker, Shawn Gilheeny, to take over the work and look forward to working with him on this project.

Annual Appeal:

I'm pleased to report that our Annual Appeal went very well this year. With a 50% participation rate and an average donation of \$100, we raised about \$9,000—and many gifts were from first time donors. Thanks very much to all who contributed—we cannot do what we do without you!

Final Words:

Not to be cliché, but the state of the Society is strong. The staff continues to make progress in managing collections, no small task with donations coming in strong. Our financial picture is in good shape and we continue to work on imaginative ways to bring history to the Bristol community. And, we are delighted to welcome many new members to the Society's stalwart ranks. We thank you for joining us on this important journey.