**The Colonial Society of Massachusetts**

Minutes of the 131st Annual Meeting of the Membership

Held at

87 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston

16 November 2023

President Robert Allison called the meeting to order at 6.00 P.M. He welcomed members present, both in person and virtually.

The reading of the minutes of the 2022 Annual Meeting was waived.

**1 . Report of the Membership Committee.** Susan Lively, Chair of the committee, opened her report by asking members to stand for a moment of silence to mark the deaths of the following members:

Jerome Anderson - February 2023

Robert Brown - September 2022

Miriam Butts - August 2023

William Koelsch - November 2022

Lion Miles - December 2020

On behalf of the Membership Committee – Nonie Gadsden, Sally Hadden, and JonPaul McBride – Susan extended a particularly warm welcome to members attending the annual meeting for the first time. She asked new members to raise their hands. Members present applauded the new members.

Finally, Susan recognized members who have been part of the Colonial Society for fifty years or more:

Kinvin Wroth, member since 1963

Peter Haack 1965

Roger Stoddard 1966

Gordon Wood 1966

Cary Carson 1968

Laurence Coolidge 1968

Richard Bushman 1969

Hiller Zobel 1970

Norman Tucker 1970

Jonathan Fairbanks 1971

David Hall 1971

Bryant Tolles 1972

Toby Hall 1973

James Bell 1973

This was followed by applause from the members present.

**2. Report of the Treasurer.**

**Voted:** To accept the Treasurer’s Report. Approved unanimously.

**3. Report of the Curator.**  Meghan Gelardi Holmes began her report on the House and its collections by talking about the Society’s Open Houses, the second of the season having happened less than two weeks ago. Over 100 people visited, each one of them thrilled to be in the space and see the collections. She reflected on what makes the House so special to visitors and to members, saying that for many, it is the unmediated access to objects of the past. She quoted Brenda Cowan, a scholar and faculty member at FIT, who writes about the relationships between objects and people. Cowan argues that objects have therapeutic power, and there are real benefits to us as individuals to associate with objects and make our own meaning out of them.

Meghan also spoke of how much she learns from visitors, hearing the meanings they layer upon the objects they see in the House, which adds to their interpretive power.

She commented that while the House is not a museum, the Society invests in this collection because the objects have meaning, historical significance, and emotional resonance to our members and our visitors. She reported on several conservation projects undertaken during the past year: the reupholstery of nine pieces of furniture, the conservation of the mirror in the dining room, and conservation of the Channing family bible. Caring for the building’s exterior included repointing the rear chimney and refinishing the front door.

She concluded her report with thanks to the House Committee and, especially Robert Mussey, for support, assistance, and expertise.

**4. Report of the Editor of Publications.** Sally Hadden noted that two new Society publications appeared in the past year: the two-volume set of Dartmouth , Massachusetts Monthly Meeting of Friends minutes, and the final volume of the Thomas Hutchinson papers. New projects continue to enter the pipeline. She reported that the Dartmouth volumes will soon appear on the LDS/Mormon genealogical site Family Search, which will make the contents fully searchable. The Massachusetts Superior Court of Justice project will begin to put material online in the coming year. She encouraged members who had publication projects to contact her to discuss them.

Sally expressed warm thanks to John Tyler, for making her transition to the role of Editor pleasant and easy. She also expressed appreciation to Robert Mack, chair of the Society’s Website Committee, for his expert assistance and help with getting publications onto the website; and to Ken Minkema, chair of the Publications Committee, for his support and guidance.

**5. Report of the President.** Robert Allison’s report is appended.

**6. Report of the Nominating Committee.** Robert A. Bellinger, chair, presented the committees’ slate:

President Robert Allison

Vice Presidents Dan Coquillette, Susan Lively, Rashaun Martin, Celeste Walker

Secretary Leslie A. Morris

Treasurer Amory Loring Logan

Member of Council,

3-year term Gorman Lee (2026)

Continuing member of

Council Katheryn Viens (2024), Jessica Parr (2025)

There were no nominations from the floor. Robert moved the slate of officers and councilor.

**Voted:** To approve the slate as read. Approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 6.35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie A. Morris

Secretary

**Report of the President, Robert J. Allison**

One month from tonight, Boston will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Destruction of the Tea. In seven years, we will commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Boston. The Colonial Society, and its members, do not need round-numbered anniversaries to take notice of historic events. But anniversaries are opportunities to present the history we have been assiduously editing and publishing to a broader public.

Ebenezer Mackintosh, the South End shoemaker who organized the Sons of Liberty, lives on through George Anderson’s presentation to our March 1924 stated meeting, published in our 1926 Proceedings. The papers of Francis Bernard, Thomas Hutchinson, and Josiah Quincy, published in the past decade, let us understand the imperial changes in London and political crisis in Massachusetts that brought on the Revolution. Not long ago a researcher needed to find a library to consult our volumes. Now, thanks to our digitization of all our publications, more than ten thousand people consult them every month. We never know where their inquiries will lead, what questions they will raise or answer.

Our range of publications since the 1890s, through the anniversary publication of William Bradford’s Journal, the records of the Dartmouth Quaker Meeting, the writings of Daniel Gookin, a fundamental primary source to understanding the Native World of early New England, and our other publications past and future allow a fuller telling of the 17th, 18th, and early 19th-century than was available for the Revolution’s bicentennial or centennial, and for Boston’s 200th or 300th.

In addition to publications, the presentations in this room have expanded the scope of early American history. Thank you to Anne Cecere and the Events Committee for bringing us an astonishing range of speakers and topics. Our Donald Friary Symposium in May explored the global reach of colonial New England, with members Joyce Chaplin, Jane Hooper, and Asheesh Siddique connecting New England with the wider worlds of the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, and the British Empire. Other topics have included Member Robert Bellinger on the foodways of the African-Americans of Virginia and the Carolinas, Members Ken Turino and Nina Zannieri organized a symposium on changing practices in house museums, Jane Nylander spoke on New England parades, Member Ted Andrews introduced us to Occramer Marycoo, or Newport Gardner, African-American composer and political activist in Newport, Jerrad Pacatte on African-American women and the process of emancipation in New England, Graduate Forum alum Nicole Breault on the Night Watch of Boston, and Israeli scholar Dror Goldberg discussed his new book Easy Money, the Puritan invention of modern currency.

In October, in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the publication of Phillis Wheatley’s Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, we had a preview of Wheatley at 250, a book edited by Member Daneille Legros Georges and Artress Bethany White, both award-winning poets, with twenty contemporary African-American women poets reimaging the poems of Phillis Wheatley, a project Danielle Georges said began with a conversation here about how best to commemorate this important event.

Next month, five days after the anniversary of the tea’s destruction, James Fichter from the University of Hong Kong will talk on tea as a commodity. In February, we will present our second John Winthrop Prize to Kirsten Silva Gruesz for her new book, Cotton Mather’s Spanish Lessons, a story of language, race, and belonging in the early Americas. And on May 16, our fourth Donald Friary Symposium will feature Karin Wulf of the John Carter Brown Library, and other Members who oversee archives and libraries, discussing the challenges and opportunities for repositories of knowledge. Thanks to their accessibility on Youtube, our programs now have a longer life and a wider audience.

Under the leadership of Ann Little, our 20th Graduate Student Forum brought graduate students from nine Universities in the U.S. and the UK to 87 Mount Vernon Street, to present topics included fatherhood and children’s illnesses, the Pequot country in the 17th-century, college student clubs in early America, the 1650 Hartford treaty, racial violence in 18th-century New Hampshire, New York runaway ads, indignant subalterns, the 1795 Naturalization Act, and Agawam’s transition to Springfield in the 17th-century.

Moderator Annette Gordon-Reed’s comments during and at the end of the day, and the conversations among students and members, ranging as Chris Grasso said “from the first-years to the famous,” had these rooms echoing with the excitement of discovery and the sense that all are engaged in the same endeavor.

After Curator Meghan Holmes gave the students a tour of 87 Mount Vernon Street, Editor Sally Hadden offered a workshop on preparing an article for publication, complementing the on-line program the Graduate Forum committee hosted in January with NEQ Editor Holly Jackson on writing your first scholarly article; on December 7, we will host another on-line workshop on Research Opportunities in New England, introducing prospective researchers to the New England Research Fellowship Consortium. The only participating member of the NERFC without an archive, the Colonial Society sponsors a researcher every year to focus on early America. This year’s NERFC Colonial Society Fellow is Member and Graduate Forum alum Ted Andrews of Providence College, for the first book-length treatment of Newport Gardner, The first published African-American composer.

Beyond this room, last month we sponsored a workshop on “Teaching King Philip’s War: Indigenous Perspectives and Historical Empathy,” with Linda Coombs, historian from the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah, and Barbara Mathews, Historic Deerfield’s public historian, at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Council for Social Studies. Their presentation to k-12 teachers foregrounding the Native voice and perspective, offered maps and other materials to help understand the war and its consequences. Thank you to Council Members Gorman Lee, conference organizer and past president of the MCSS, and Kate Viens for organizing that workshop for K-12 teachers. We look forward to the National Council for Social Studies conference in Boston next December.

Over the past year we have opened the house on the first Sunday of the month to visitors, neighbors from Beacon Hill, other Boston neighborhoods, other parts of the country and from Australia, Japan, Chile, and points beyond and between. Showing the house, sharing the work of the Colonial Society and the stories of the Higginson, Sawyer, and Paine families has brought together volunteer members and local college students, and gave us all a new appreciation for the gift Georgina Howland gave the Society seventy years ago.

In his valedictory message to us last year, Editor of Publications emeritus John Tyler cautioned us not to try to be what we are not. We are busy enough being who we are that this seems an unlikely miss-step, but it always good to reflect on what we do and how we can do it better.

Our late Member Pauline Maier said “it all happens at the Colonial Society.” Our conversations here are more interesting and worthwhile because our Members come from so many different fields, and not the narrow confines of academic disciplines or even academia. It was in conversation around our dining room table that Revolution 250 was born, a consortium now of 70 organizations planning commemorations of the Revolution began a decade ago. With the 400th anniversary of the Massachusetts Bay approaching, the Colonial Society should prepare similar efforts to ensure the story is told well.

Conversation between past and present, and beyond narrow academic confines, draw many of us here to 87 Mount Vernon Street. Thanks to the generosity of our Members present and past, who have given time and attention to committees overseeing the House, the publications, the archives, the web-site, and our finances. Thank you for paying your dues, for your generous gifts to the Annual Fund, and long-in-the-future bequests as 1892 Associates. Your generous support preserves the house, produces our publications, outreach, and conversations between past and present, spurring us to imagine new ways of presenting the many voices and stories of early America. Thank you for sparking these conversations, and making them possible.