**The Colonial Society of Massachusetts**

Minutes of the 127th Annual Meeting of the Membership

Held at

87 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston

21 November 2019

President Donald R. Friary called the meeting to order at 6.00 P.M.

The reading of the minutes of the 2018 Annual Meeting was waived.

**1. Report of the Transition Committee.** Susan Lively, chair of the committee, summarized the charge of the committee: to create a job description for the position of president and to review the governance and operations of the Society to ensure they are in order before the Society begins its search for a new president. She thanked the other members of the committee: Leslie Morris, Christopher Jedrey, Thomas Paine, and John Tyler. Chris Jedrey and his firm provided valuable legal expertise in the process.

The committee believed it was unlikely to find a candidate for president who would be willing to shoulder as many duties as Don Friary has done, so examined how those duties might be assumed by members of the Council or its committees. This entailed an examination of the Bylaws, and it became clear that there was a need for substantial revision. The revised Bylaws and Conflict of Interest policy, brought to members’ attention in the Annual Meeting invitation and subsequent e-mail, and posted on the Society’s website, were the result. These revisions:

* remove outdated language about membership categories that no longer exist;
* make clearer and, in some cases, reorganize the duties of the officers of the Society;
* make clearer the processes to be followed to call meetings and set agendas;
* simplify the descriptions of the committees, allowing the Council to review and change as necessary their duties and organization;
* bring into alignment with current best practices the indemnification, amendment, and conflict of interest sections of the By-Laws; and
* merge the roles of Recording and Corresponding Secretary.

Additionally, the committee suggested that the Council pursue off-site storage options for the Society’s records in the interest of protecting our historical records, and that the Council appoint a Strategic Planning Committee within the first two years of the new president’s tenure to develop a five- to ten-year plan for the Society.

The vote was then called, Susan noting that only Resident Members should vote.

**Voted:** To approve the revised Bylaws and the Conflict of Interest policy. Approved unanimously.

Susan concluded her report by noting the Committee found that, thanks to the thoughtful and steadfast stewardship of Don Friary and the dedicated efforts of the members of the Society’s Council and committees, the Society is in excellent shape.

**2 . Report of the Membership Committee.** Celeste Walker, chair of the committee, said the membership of the Society stands at 327 members: 179 resident members, 133 non-resident members, and 15 honorary members. She reported the deaths of the following members:

David Johnson, in July

Amalie Kass, in May

Anthony Connors, in September

Members stood for a moment of silence.

The following Members have resigned:

Todd Andrlik

Benjamin Irvin

John W. Reps

The following new members were welcomed over the course of the past year:

***Resident Members***:

Scott Bartley, of Boston

Cynthia Cadwalader, of Boston

Dennis Carr, of Boston

Karina Corrigan, of Salem

Rose Doherty, of Needham

Daniel Finamore, of Salem

Samuel Forman, of Brookline

Timothy Kistner, of Boston

Danielle Legros Georges, of Boston

Rashaun Martin, of Boston

Meredith Neuman, of Worcester

***Non-Resident members:***

Antonio Bly, of California

Douglas Winiarski, of Virginia

**3. Report of the Treasurer.** [Redacted]

President Friary then yielded the chair to Georgia Barnhill for the election of officers. Gigi invited Barbara Lambert of the Nominating Committee, to take the podium.

**4. Report of the Nominating Committee.** Barbara Lambert thanked the other members of the committee, Thomas Michie, chair, and Emerson Baker.

The committee is pleased to report that all current officers have agreed to continue serving in their present capacities. They are:

President Donald R. Friary

Vice Presidents Robert Allison, Dan Coquillette, Susan Lively, Celeste Walker

Secretary Leslie A. Morris

Treasurer Thomas R. Appleton

Member of Council,

3-year term Martha J. McNamara (2022)

Continuing members of

Council Robert A. Gross (2020), Nonie Gadsden (2021)

Barbara expressed the Society’s thanks to Martha McNamara for her years as Corresponding Secretary and thanked her for accepting nomination as a member of the Council; and to Nathaniel Shiedley, ending his 3-year term on the Council.

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

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

President Friary resumed the chair and thanked the membership. He also thanked Nathaniel Shiedley, citing his valuable work as chair of the committee to devise guidelines for the Society for funding K-12 projects.

**5. Report of the Curator.**  Elton Hall’s report is appended.

**6. Report of the Editor of Publications.** John Tyler’s report is appended.

**7. Report of the President.** Don Friary’s report is appended.

Following his report, the members rose and gave Don a long standing ovation. After some time, Don commented that this was perhaps premature, as he still had a year to go, and urged members to adjourn for cocktails and conversation.

The meeting adjourned at 7.05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie A. Morris

Secretary

**Report of the Curator, Elton W. Hall**

The years go by with increasing rapidity, and in some ways the miles we have travelled seem to be coming around again and overtaking us. The Carriage House is the example currently on my mind because it is quite vivid for several reasons. At the beginning of my membership, the Carriage House was in essentially the same condition as it had been since it was built. Although it does not appear on a plot plan of February 1806, that conveyed our property to Stephen Higginson, Jr., it has much in common structurally with the main house, including the timber framing of the roof. The back of it was divided into three stalls, which were equipped with mangers and troughs for water. There was space in front for carriages, and a hayloft above. There were two large doors in front in the space now occupied by the new windows and glass paned doors.

The Society had no particular use for the Carriage House in those days, but it always seemed to be full of stuff about which nobody seemed to know. The stuff would change from time to time. We finally found out that our then live-in caretaker was not only using it for his own personal storage but inviting various friends of his to store their surplus possessions in it. Then two things happened. The caretaker left, emptying the Carriage House on his way out, and we subsequently found that there were leaks in the roof and a considerable amount of maintenance was required. We were reluctant to spend a lot of money on a building for which we had no use, but we also felt an obligation to maintain our historic property. Up spoke Dan Coquillette with the suggestion that as long as we had to spend some money on the building, why don’t we spend a little more and turn it into something useful, a residential rental unit that would generate a stream of income to support the maintenance of both our buildings. After careful investigation and discussion, we did it. The result was so successful that we soon did the same thing with the ell, and that’s how we got into the real estate business. While it seems to me that we just recently did that, it was in fact over a quarter of a century ago, and we now find that the pine available in 1990 was not like the eastern white pine heart wood that was readily available 200 years ago. What first looked like a little peeling paint and some minor leaks turned out to be extensive rot pretty much throughout that installation of doors and windows. That will occupy a good deal of our attention in the coming year.

The other sign of passage of time is the demise of the last of three gas-fired boilers installed back about the same time as the Carriage House renovation. They were a great improvement over the old oil fired boiler, which with only one zone heated the entire building so that while the fourth floor rooms where no one went were uncomfortably hot, those at work on the ground floor shivered away on a cold winter day. The three efficient boilers supplying eight zones throughout the building gave us a very quick payback on the investment, all the more as the price of oil increased ten-fold. But two years ago, the boilers began to fail. They very considerately died at one-year intervals, so we never had a crisis of being without heat. The last one went a month ago, and with improvements in technology, two are now doing the work of three. These and other smaller issues bring to mind one of Fred Ballou’s sayings that when you are trying to maintain a big old house, you are fighting the law of gravity.

In addition to the fabric of the house, we are of course maintaining an ongoing program of conservation of the contents of the house. Such is the nature of the conglomeration of miscellaneous artificial curiosities with which we are surrounded that a variety of expertise is required as we progress from one thing to another. Since many of us have had some experience with painting conservation and our paintings are among the most visible of our collections, we began with those and have made good progress, greatly enhanced through the interest of Robert Severy.

Purely by chance we have a significant collection of mirrors, some of Boston origin. Through the enthusiasm and expertise of Richard Nylander, eagerly supported by Robert Mussey, we have had a number of them conserved. Next to go out will be the large mirror on your left, which is of particular interest to us because it was here when the Paine family occupied the house.

Many of the works of art on paper have been conserved at several levels according to their particular needs. We were advised that many of them are stable and don’t really need the full treatment of deacidification, cleaning and remounting. Some may be secured and made more presentable simply by dismantling and remounting them with archival quality materials at a considerable saving of money. We have tended to several of them in that way, and another batch is scheduled to go out in the near future.

The most complex, and indeed most expensive, part of our conservation program is our furniture. For many years we did little about it, principally because most of what we have has been in suitable condition for our immediate needs. When a piece fell off, we glued it back in place or put it in a drawer and forgot about it. If a chair collapsed, we moved it upstairs and used another one in its place. Some years ago, however, a variety of forces began coming into alignment. We completed a major renovation of the house. Within the newly repaired and painted rooms, the shabbiness of our furnishings was more noticeable. More importantly, we became aware that many pieces were of more importance than we had generally supposed them to be. Scholarship in American furniture, which had generally petered out after the federal period, had been advancing towards the end of the nineteenth century. We began to think about priorities for work on the furniture, principally the importance of the piece and its importance to the house. But we were slow to take action, partly because there was no compelling reason to do something at once instead of a little later. We didn’t think we had a deadline. The situation brings to mind a conversation I had a few years ago with our late fellow member Rocky Stinehour. I had been working on a book about the Stinehour Press, which seemed to be dragging on forever. I apologetically mentioned to him that I work best to a deadline. He replied, “We have a deadline. We just don’t know what it is.” He was right, but a knowable deadline is more compelling than a theoretical one.

One of my strong feelings about the house and its contents, and for that matter the Society itself is that we should seize every opportunity to make these things of service to the field whenever we have a good opportunity. What really got us going on the furniture was Maury Heckscher’s request to borrow the two Pembroke tables in the library for his John Townsend exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Some time long before the tables had come to us, some idiot went to work with a cross cut saw and within a few minutes reduced their value by about a quarter of a million dollars by sawing off the elaborate cross stretchers of both tables. We had occasionally discussed having them restored but had no deadline. We approved Maury’s request, and suddenly had an occasion and a specific deadline to accomplish the restoration. The work had to be completed so they could be photographed for the catalog of the exhibition. We did it, and that got us going on our important furniture.

Some time passed before the next big event: 400 Years of Massachusetts Furniture. You have heard more than once how the scholarship for that led to discovery of the inscription on the Vose sofa (which you may sit on tonight), its loan to the Massachusetts Historical Society for their exhibition, *The Cabinetmaker & the Carver*, and inclusion in Robert Mussey’s and Clark Pearce’s essay in *Boston Furniture, 1700-1900*, Volume LXXXVI of our publications. The momentum continued, with Robert and the Historical Society kindly providing us with another deadline by requesting the loan of the Vose bookcase in the dining room and the French bed, now on the third floor, for the exhibition and publication *Rather Elegant than Showy*, which took place last year. Three other pieces from this house also appeared as illustrations in the book. These cooperative projects illustrate how through helping others we help ourselves.

We continue on with furniture in this room. The two cabinets on either side of the fireplace, given by Stewart Mitchell, went out for conservation this past summer, and next month the cabinet and mirror between the windows will also go out. While your eyes are aimed in that direction, consider the figure of Faith by Hiram Powers perched on the cabinet. A couple of weeks ago I was in another local museum where I saw a marble bust of Psyche, I think she was, also by Powers. She was immaculately clean and exuded a beauty that makes poor Faith Powers look like a street urchin. If any of you would be interested in providing the means to give her a bath, it would make a world of difference. Don or I would be happy to discuss it with you.

I renew my thanks to the members of the House Committee for their individual and collective hard work and sound advice and to the Council for providing the support necessary to accomplish these things.

**Report of the Editor of Publications, John W. Tyler**

The Colonial Society is an organization with comfortable traditions that fit us like a well worn slipper. There is no arcane ritual. Nothing complicated about the calendar. For instance: pre-Iphone Chrisitans who wanted to know the date of Easter, needed to figure out which was the first Sunday after the first full moon occurring on or before the vernal equinox, but to know the date of the next Colonial Society annual dinner, you simply need to remember that it always falls on the third Thursday in November. (In all my years as a member, there have been only two exceptions during special anniversary years.) But do you know why the annual meeting occurs on the third Thursday of November? Would it help, if I prefaced this year's date with the words, "In witness whereof we have subscribed our names at Cape Cod…" and then added in the stain-glass tones of the late Peter Gomes, "in the reign of our Sovereign Lord King James of England, France and Ireland the eighteenth and of Scotland the fifty-fourth"? Now some of you may object that the date of the document you will soon hear read says the "11th of November," but you need to make allowance for those ten " lost days" in September 1752 when Parliament decreed a change from the Gregorian to the Julian calendar. And voila! You have November 21. So once every seven years, we celebrate the signing of the Mayflower Compact on the exact anniversary. It's a pity we will be off by a day next fall on the 400th anniversary. But you can make up for it by throwing out your black tie and getting out your Pilgrim costume instead.

The Colonial Society's way of celebrating the 400th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims was to join with our friends at the New England Historic and Genealogical Society in commissioning a new transcription of William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation." Not only is this a more exact version than Samuel Eliot Morison's rendition of nearly 70 years ago, but our Fellow Members Frank Bremer and Kenneth Minkema have enriched the text with annotations reviewing all the most recent scholarship about Pilgrims and their Native neighbors.. It would not have been appropriate in 2020 to publish a new edition of Bradford and omit recognition that long before the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth, there was at the same site the Wampanoag community of Patuxent, the bones of which were literally pushed aside by the new settlers. Thus, Native American scholar and activist Paula Peters has added her own personal reflections to our new volume. And there is one more new twist to the CSM edition in Bradford: late in life, Bradford decided to teach himself Hebrew so that he could better understand "divine oracles" in what he called the "language of Canaan." He compiled a vocabulary list, which he entitled "Some Hebrew Words Englished," which he wrote in the margins and back pages of the manuscript of "Of Plimoth Plantation." Eric Reymond, a Hebrew scholar at Yale, has provided a translation and an analysis of Bradford's rudimentary skills as a Hebraist.

Bradford's handwriting is remarkably clear and easy to read for the early 17th century. I accompanied the editors to the State Library one day last spring to see the manuscript itself. For historians used to handling materials that are both rare and fragile, examining such a volume was all in a day's work. But the state librarians processed out with the volume as it was a fragment of the True Cross. Such special treatment may be just as well, given the propensity for the manuscript to wander. Of Plimoth Plantation first remained in Bradford family hands for almost a century, although it was consulted by several early New England historians, including the Rev. Thomas Prince, who then placed it in his "New England Library" in the tower of Old South Church. Presumably, it was taken from Old South to England by a fleeing British soldier in March 1776 and ended up in the library of the Bishop of London. There it remained barely noticed until 1856, when Thomas Thornton, an American historian tracked it down and transcribed it for publication by the Massachusetts Historical Society. After forty years of wrangling, a later Bishop of London allowed the manuscript to return to Massachusetts in 1898. Although the Massachusetts Historical Society would have dearly liked to own the manuscript, it was placed on display in the basement of the State House until 1984 when an unidentified thief ran off with the first page and seal of Massachusetts Charter. After that incident, most of the state's archival treasures moved to the recently constructed Commonwealth Archives on Columbia Point, but for whatever reason, Bradford remained behind though it is now kept under lock and key. Its keepers proudly showed us the new box they had made for it. The Colonial Society is doing what we can to keep Bradford safe for future generations, by "multiplying the copies." The new edition should be available by late spring, both in print and on our website, as well as that of the NEHGS.

One of the hazards of being a historian is that well-meaning friends often ask what you are working on. When I answer, "STILL the correspondence of Thomas Hutchinson," I receive a pitying look and some say, "But weren't you working on that 20 years ago?" A little defensively, I point out that there are actually 2,200 letters, and we will eventually publish 1200 of them in five volumes. At which point, they say, "But you've only published one volume so far?" To bring the conversation to a quick close, I sometimes answer, "YES, it's a race with death!" But this year I'm pleased to announce that volume two is actually with the indexer, and I hope will appear by late spring. The second volume covers the years 1767 through 1769. Highlights include the arrival of the news of the Townshend Acts, the landing of British troops (long-wished for by his predecessor Sir Francis Bernard), and the tumult surrounding Patriot efforts to enforce the non-importation agreements after Bernard's departure in the summer of 1769. Hutchinson always presumed that local knowledge and a strong political base throughout the colony would enable him to become a more successful governor than Bernard, and occasionally he manages to delude himself into thinking that this is true, but by late in the volume, the tide of violence is rising that will culminate with Boston Massacre on 5 March 1770. That event will produce so much correspondence that it is almost the exclusive focus of volume three, a book of almost equal size with the first two volumes, but devoted to only the first eight months of 1770.

So there should be two printed books (Bradford and Hutchinson) appearing in the winter and spring of 2020, but there should also be some exciting additions to the website as well. Since the inception two years ago of the not-so-longer-new website, both the Publications and the Website Committees have been imagining expanded possibilities for communication and outreach. One of the most intriguing ideas was that since the Colonial Society ceased publishing its proceedings in 1954, there has no longer been a place for publishing less-than-book-length documents. Could the website fulfill this need? Fellow Member Neil York obliged by publishing the first such short document, but we soon realized that web publication provided a tantalizing opportunity to publish facsimiles of documents together with their transcriptions side-by-side on the same screen. Before we could do that, however, we needed to develop a new viewer. Scribe, Inc. our primary vendor for all things web-based, is now working on the viewer and hoping to unveil it in January. Most of the projects queued up and waiting for the new viewer are in some way or another collaborative endeavors with New England's Hidden Histories, an arm of our Beacon Hill neighbors, the Congregational Library. Foremost among these is the Samuel Phillips Diary, part of the records of the First Church in Rowley. Like the first page of the Charter, the Phillips Diary had gone missing for a while, from 1966 to 2007 to be exact. But in this instance it was not found in an art thief's apartment, but stored securely inside a forgotten safety deposit box in a branch of a bank that was closing. It was even carefully wrapped in a bag marked "dimes." The Phillips Diary fills an important gap in Congregational church history since it focuses on the second generation of Puritan New Englanders and is replete with sometimes salacious details about disciplining wayward church members. Tightly written on 620 pages, the Rowley church records were transcribed by community-sourcing the task. The nearly 30 volunteers needed first to transcribe a test sample successfully before they were assigned a larger portion of the manuscript. Then the chief editors, Fellow Members Ken Minkema and Jeff Cooper, carefully checked and rechecked the results against the original. Once posted on the website, we hope that readers from around the world will help develop the annotations by posting their suggestions.

Two other church records should also appear in the revamped "documents" section of the website this winter. They include the Westborough Church Records kept by its minister Ebenezer Parkman (1703-1782) and a draft of the Cambridge Platform made by Richard Mather (1596-1669). The Cambridge Platform laid down in 1648 a religious constitution for Congregational churches in Massachusetts when their practices were under severe attack by Presbyterians, both here and in England. I wrote extensively about Ebenezer Parkman Project and the Westborough Center for History and Culture in the fall newsletter, so I will not repeat myself here, but needless to say, we are proud to be part of the innovative approach to local history.

Douglas Winiarski tells me he is still "plugging away" at The Memoirs of Josiah Cotton and Other Allied Documents, one of the things that has slowed him down is his decision to include among the "allied documents" four sermons delivered by Cotton in Wampanoag. This effort should mesh nicely with the publication of Cotton's Wampanoag word list, which is being prepared for the Massachusetts Historical Society by Kathleen Bragdon of William and Mary College.

Colin Nicolson is also at work on a sixth and final volume of The Papers of Francis Bernard, which will cover the years after the governor's return to Britain until his death in 1779. This was a period when Bernard was a much-consulted advisor to British administrators seeking to deal with the deteriorating political situation in the colonies.

If we can twist Fellow Member Tom Knoles's arm sufficiently, a third possible book might be volume one of the multi-volume new diary of the Rev. William Bentley of Salem. The Bentley projects joins Chuck di Giacomantonio's: The Insurgent Delegate: Selected Letters and other Writings of George Thatcher, as yet another addition to the Colonial Society's publications concerning the Federal period.

I'm very pleased to announce this evening a new project on The Collected Writings of Daniel Gookin (1612-1687) edited by David Hall and Adrian Weimer. Gookin settled in Roxbury in 1644 where he was a near neighbor of the Rev. John Eliot. In 1648, he moved to Cambridge where, a year later, he was chosen deputy to the General Court. In time, he became speaker of the House and eventually a member of the Council of Assistants. Although Gookin travelled back and forth to England during the Commonwealth and was dangerously close to the regicides Edmund Whalley and William Goffe, it is his appointment in 1656 as the first superintendent of the Praying Indians, where he worked closely with his friends John Eliot, that is our main interest. Shortly before the outbreak of King Philip's War, Gookin wrote Historical Collections of the Indians in New England, which is rich in cultural and anthropological information, as well as providing a detailed record of the progress of Christian missions among the Indians. During the war, he was a stout opponent to the policy of the rounding up Christian Indians and confining them in crowded, disease-ridden conditions on the Boston Harbor Islands, an experience that prompted the writing of his second major work: The Doings and Sufferings of the Christian Indians, which attempted to set right the record of Massachusetts Indian allies during the war and record the hardships they endured. Historical Collections was first published by the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1792 in the first volume of its collections, and Doings and Sufferings was printed in 1836. Despite all the historical interest in Native American history in recent decades, little attention has been paid to Gookin, and neither of his two books has ever been reprinted. So you see there is no shortage of good projects out there waiting to be uncovered! We will need to be busy for a long time to come.

**Report of the President, Donald F. Friary**

Thank you, John, Toby, and Thomas for your thorough and encouraging reports. As Thomas has told us, the Colonial Society is in very sound financial shape. Our endowment is well managed by Loring, Wolcott & Coolidge. Rental income is steady and substantial. And the commitment of our members is strong. A remarkable 38% of you give to the Annual Fund, over and above dues. Gifts to the Society in the fiscal year just past totaled $38,870.16--$11,565.16 from our leadership donors in the Samuel Eliot Morison and Frederick Jackson Turner Circles, another $14,705.00 in our Sustaining Circle. The Walter Muir Whitehill Fund and the William M. Fowler, Jr. Fund had additions of $2,600.00. The Joan Pearson Watkins Revocable Trust, on the recommendation of our Honorary Member Jonathan Fairbanks, made a grant of $10,000.00 that has been added to our endowment. Six of our members have indicated that the Colonial Society has been included in their estate plans and are enrolled in our planned giving group, the 1892 Associates.

Such generous support gives the Council the means and the confidence to maintain longstanding programs and to consider new initiatives. Among our well-established endeavors is the annual Graduate Student Forum that brings a select group of Ph. D. candidates in early American studies from across the nation to 87 Mount Vernon Street to discuss their research with fellow students and with Colonial Society members. Graduate students in early American history often live and work in isolation and welcome the opportunity to meet, converse with, and keep in touch with colleagues from the Graduate Student Forum. At this year’s event on June 7 Marla Miller, Director of the Public History Program and Professor of History, University of Massachusetts/Amherst, was the senior scholar commenting on the six student presentations and concluding the day with thoughtful remarks on the state of the field and its future.

Other ways that the Society encourages fresh research in early American history and culture are the Colonial Society Fellowship of the New England Regional Fellowship Consortium and the Walter Muir Whitehill Prize. The Colonial Society of Massachusetts Fellow this year is Jared Lucky, a graduate student at Yale, for "Cattle, Empire, and ‘Cowboys’ in Colonial New England,” a comparative study of cattle frontiers in the Spanish and British empires. He will conduct research at the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Connecticut Historical Society, and Historic Deerfield.

The Whitehill Prize of two thousand five hundred dollars, established in memory of Walter Muir Whitehill, for many years Editor of Publications for the Society and the moving force in this organization, is awarded for a distinguished essay on early American history (up to 1825), with preference being given to New England subjects. This year the Whitehill Prize Committee—Fred Anderson, David Hall, and Mary Beth Norton—selected David Como’s “City on the Other Hill: The Plough Patent, the Company of Husbandmen, and a Radical Puritan Colonization Project.” Dr. Como is Professor of Early Modern British History at Stanford.

I remind you that if you are preparing an article on early American history, not previously published, please consider submitting it for the Whitehill Prize. And tell your colleagues, students, and friends who are researching in this area about the prize. It is a generous award and guarantees publication in the New England Quarterly. The Society has been a steady supporter of the NEQ since shortly after it was founded in 1928. That annual subvention continues, as the NEQ confronts the challenges of the internet and declining enrollments in history and literature.

We reach a broader audience via Revolution 250, a consortium chaired by our Vice President Bob Allison that grew out of discussions by a small group of Boston historical organizations convened by the Colonial Society. It now has more than 60 partner organizations. This past summer Revolution 250 had a teacher institute, in which educators engaged with Gary Nash, Carol Berkin, Ray Raphael, Chernoh Sesay, and other scholars via Skype, and then had a week-long series of sessions with Serena Zabin, Jane Kamensky, and Bob Allison, including visits to the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Museum of African-American History, and the Royall House and Slave Quarters in Medford.

Plans are now underway for a more substantial conference to bring fresh research into the K-12 curriculum, with scholars whose path-breaking work on African Americans, Native Americans, women, Loyalists, and others has changed the way scholars understand the Revolution. Much of the discovery of these hidden stories--often hidden in plain sight--has happened since the American Revolution Bicentennial, which inspired a generation of scholars to ask new questions. The 250th gives us an opportunity to inspire newer scholars to ask newer questions. The conference is being discussed by Revolution 250 and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and is tentatively planned for the summer of 2021.

An initiative approved by the Council in September commits the Society to providing supplemental funding to programs in early American history for students and teachers in the K-12 grades. Proposals from school districts, historical organizations, and other non-profit entities with the co-sponsorship of a Colonial Society member will be considered. A committee to promote and manage this initiative will be appointed at the December Council Meeting. Committees will assume greater responsibility for the management of Colonial Society programs under the By-Law amendments adopted this evening.

The Society’s principal mission and activity remains the publication of documents in early Massachusetts history. This includes Maine, as demonstrated last spring in The Insurgent Delegate: Selected Letters and other Writings of George Thatcher, who represented the District of Maine in the first Federal congress and continued to 1801. A bibliophile, an early Unitarian, an observer of the beginnings of American government, and a devoted husband and father, Thatcher is a most interesting figure who will now be better known. More recently we have seen two volumes of the records of King’s Chapel, one of which presents, fully indexed, the parish register of baptisms, marriages, and burials from 1703 to 1777. In addition to our printed volumes we are now publishing documents online that make significant documents in Massachusetts history accessible to aid the research of students, scholars, and enthusiasts in American history. Several will be added in the coming months.

The house in which we have gathered this evening is a major asset and a significant responsibility of the Society. We are very fortunate to have an able and dedicated House Committee to plan and implement the care and maintenance of this 1806 Charles Bulfinch structure and its remarkable furnishings. The members of the House Committee—Richard Nylander, Chair, Tom Michie, Robert Mussey, Tom Paine, Lynne Spencer, Charles Sullivan, Barbara Ward—work closely with Curator Toby Hall to preserve the fabric of the building, its operating systems, and the fine and decorative arts within. The security system has been brought up to date and to standard this year, including the addition of gas and water detectors. When the east slope of the slate roof and the east chimney were replaced and repointed early in the year, we completed the restoration of the building necessitated by the ice damage of the winter of 2014-15. A 213-year-old building will always be in need of maintenance and repair, but we can rest a bit easier, now that years of deferred maintenance have been corrected.

87 Mount Vernon Street serves as the Society’s headquarters and meeting place, welcoming members to this Annual Meeting, and members and guests to our three Stated Meetings and to special events—an event on May 2 introducing member Mark Peterson’s The City-State of Boston: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Power, 1630-1865; the launch on July 18 of our own publication, The Insurgent Delegate: Selected Letters and other Writings of George Thatcher, edited by member Chuck diGiacomantonio; and a celebration of member David Hall’s The Puritans on October 23.

We made the house available to kindred groups on several occasions. It was shown last December 9 in the annual Beacon Hill Christmas tour that benefits our neighbor, the Nichols House Museum. In May and September we hosted Suffolk University History Department events and in August the annual faculty retreat of the University of Massachusetts/Boston History Department. The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Planning Committee met here on August 29. When SHEAR, the Society of Historians of the Early American Republic, convened its annual conference in Boston and Cambridge in July, several workshops were held in this house.

Our Curator, Toby Hall, who has served the Society for 40 years, will retire next year. Toby has seen this house through the renovations that created three rental units, the restoration and redecoration of the front section that houses the Society’s programs and activities, and the recent conservation of works of fine and decorative art given to the Society over the years. We are grateful for Toby’s energy and expertise and devotion to the Colonial Society and 87 Mount Vernon Street. Now we face the real challenge of finding a new curator to continue Toby’s careful stewardship of the house and its furnishings. A search committee will be appointed in the coming weeks.

As most of you know, I will also retire at next year’s Annual Meeting after fourteen years as President. I have enjoyed my role tremendously and will miss it, but, as I said to the Council in January, I would rather step aside than be carried out or escorted out. I recommended to the Council that an Ad Hoc Committee on Transition be appointed to commit to writing a job description for the President, an organizational chart, and operating procedures of the Society. The Transition Committee, chaired by Susan Lively and including Chris Jedrey, Leslie Morris, Tom Paine, and John Tyler, submitted a thorough and comprehensive report at the September Council Meeting that responded to its charge and also proposed a conflict-of-interest policy and by-law amendments on which you voted this evening. Among the amendments is provision for voting on committee nominations at flexible times of year, thus enabling appointment of the Nominating Committee at the December Council Meeting. We are now well positioned to look to and plan for the future of the Society.

We are also well positioned, here in the double parlor designed by Charles Bulfinch in 1806 for Stephen and Louisa Storrow Higginson’s family, to adjourn to the East Parlor and the Dining Room below for stimulating conversation and other stimulants for those who wish.