



## **Minutes of the Historical Commission Deerfield, MA.**

Town Offices  
July 21, 2009

Members present: Henrietta Kocot, Chair; Edie Lipp, Clerk; Helen Petrovic; Pat Potter

Absent: Pat Karkut, Vice Chair

Guest: Carolyn Ness, Select Board Member

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:35 P.M. by Chair, Henrietta Kocut. New member Pat Potter was introduced. Clerk, Edie Lipp, read minutes of the Historical Commission meetings of June 16 and June 29. Both documents were approved by consensus.

2. Old business was briefly addressed:

- Henrietta reported that neither Bette Schmitt nor Paul Olszewski was available to be project coordinator for the DCR Historical Landscape Preservation grant. Therefore the Historical Commission cannot pursue DCR assistance this year, and the grants will most likely not be available in our region next year. The Commission will keep in mind the at-risk sites we brainstormed as we look toward other preservation projects.
- Edie reported her research on Town of Deerfield cemeteries. The oldest town cemetery on Albany Road has been well documented, so no inventory work is necessary there. Jane Trigere has done preliminary research at the PVMA (Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association) library and has worked on inventory, gravestone cleaning, and restoration work at the Sugarloaf Street cemetery. Jane kindly allowed Edie to photocopy her materials for Historical Commission use. Jane reported that the Deerfield Women's Club took part in a one-day effort at cleaning some of the Sugarloaf Street gravestones, but there were no follow-up volunteers to continue the work. Hap Eaton of the Highway Department helps when he can with gravestone restoration.

3. The rest of this meeting was devoted to conversation with Select Board Member, Carolyn Ness about the work of the Historical Commission. These were the main talking points:

- On the issue of volunteers to help with projects, Carolyn recommended that each project have a leader designated to keep the project going. Volunteers can then be asked for a limited time commitment, working on a finite task.
- Another source of volunteer help might be veterans. Doug Tierney is head of the Memorial Day Committee. He might be able to enlist the help of the Sunset Hoopers to clean vet graves.

- Students could be another source of help. Edie already contacted Principal Marti Barrett at **Frontier Regional School** about high school students and teachers joining with the Historical Commission in an oral history project that would involve interviewing senior citizens about their experiences living in Deerfield. Marti Barrett was delighted with the idea and copied the preliminary idea to several of her teachers.

The Frontier Regional School Honor Students service group might be able to work with Doug Tierney and the Sunset Hoopers.

Bernie Sadowski volunteers with Frontier students who might also be a source of help. We should investigate whether his woodworking students could make historic house signs if the Town could supply the wood.

**Deerfield Academy's** Heritage Day service volunteers might also be able to help, especially with cleaning the Old Albany Road Cemetery graves. Bernie Baker is the contact person at D.A.. Carolyn said she would be happy to arrange contact with Bernie Baker on our behalf.

**NOTE:** Permits to work on gravestones should be procured from the Town of Deerfield through Mary Stokarski, Town Clerk. Students would need to be supervised by an adult and be taught proper grave cleaning procedures and materials. Jane Trigere might be a good resource for teaching cleaning techniques.

All of these service opportunities would be valuable learning experiences for the students, teaching them everything from writing skills to how to use spreadsheets. Participation in these activities could appear on students' college applications.

- Pat noted that the cemetery on Upper Road was most likely connected to a church that was once there. She has a picture of that church and an historic map of Deerfield. Pat will investigate the cost of getting the map copied and laminated for the Town.
- Edie asked Carolyn if there is any reason why the Historical Commission should at this time work to prepare for the Massachusetts Historical Commission a formal inventory with photographs of all Deerfield cemeteries. Carolyn explained that a formal inventory might some day be useful for applying for grants. Right now, however, an informal inventory for the Town records would be useful.
- Carolyn explained her own experience 10 years ago when working on the Deerfield Master Plan. She realized then that South Deerfield has many buildings that could be on an historical registry, but the first step would have to be a formal inventory that could be used in applying for grants. At that time, the Town Meeting did not approve the proposal to fund a preliminary inventory. More planning work needed to be done. The lesson learned: If the Historical Commission starts with its own informal inventories for the Town only, the data gathered can be used to make a real plan to apply for CPA funds.
- One possible use for CPA funds would be to fund an intern from UMass to research grants for historic preservation and determine what steps must be taken to apply.
- Pat Potter noted that most towns have buildings devoted to Historical Commission or Historical Society displays, document storage, and presentations. Deerfield's need for a Historical Commission building has been discussed in previous Historical Commission meetings. Places of interest currently available include the upstairs of the Senior Center (it would have to be made handicap accessible with an elevator), the Bloody Brook

Tavern site, and the house for sale across from the Town Hall. Consensus was that the St. James Church – formerly the Monument Church – would be a uniquely wonderful site and a great community use for a building valuable in the town's history. Carolyn pointed out that zoning issues require the church and parish house to be sold together as one property. If the parish house could be made into senior apartments, perhaps the Historical Commission and the Senior Housing Committee (Leelee Dwight, Chair 665-3197) might work together to recommend Town purchase of the property. Carolyn said that it's possible to borrow against future CPA funding. We could also petition the Community Preservation Committee to take an application to a special town meeting. Funding through grants could also be explored.

- We discussed the process in general of looking for grants. Carolyn suggested calling the Massachusetts Historical Commission to explain that Deerfield is trying to reactivate its Historical Commission. We need two things from them: (1) We need contact information on the 3 to 5 most successful town Historical Commissions in Massachusetts. Contact with these towns can give us ideas on how they funded their preservation programs. They can also help us understand more about budget needs. (2) We need information on grants available to help our Historical Commission centralize its work, bringing together in one place materials now stored at the PVMA, the Senior Center, and other sites. Les Thomas has some materials; the estate of Edna Stahelek may also have Historical Commission materials. Currently we have no records depository, no place either to showcase the history of the entire town of Deerfield, not just Historic Deerfield. Such a site is crucial for spreading knowledge and generating interest in the community.
- Pat Potter told us that Bette Schmitt in the Deerfield Elementary School has a book of old photos of Deerfield. Perhaps that book should be a part of the Historical Commission collection. At a minimum, we should look at it to help us see buildings in town as they used to look.
- Considerable discussion centered on recognizing South Deerfield Center Village as an area of historic importance. The Historical Commission could identify historically important buildings and sites on North and South Main Street, Sugarloaf Street and Elm Street, with an ultimate goal of providing homeowners with date plates for their homes and of creating a pamphlet for a walking tour of the Center Village area. Other goals might be to improve the appearance of the town center, around the Common, by having overhead wires placed underground (collaborating with the Streetscape Committee) and ultimately perhaps working for an historic overlay district with some standards set by the Historical Commission. Carolyn suggested we contact the Greenfield Historical Commission to find out the cost of publishing their Walking Tour pamphlet.
- Edie asked Carolyn about the accuracy of property dating on the Patriot Properties section of the Town website. Both Carolyn and Edie said they know of errors in their own house entries, so the data is not completely reliable. It can be used, however, as a starting point in determining the age of houses in the town. The next step would be to go to the Franklin County Registry of Deeds online. Homeowners can also check their own assessor's card. Getting homeowners interested in their own properties is another way to generate interest in historical preservation.
- Carolyn stressed the importance of the Historical Commission setting clear priorities for itself, priorities that reflect our enjoyment of the work we do. That pleasure, she said, can generate excitement in others, leading to more community involvement in preservation work. Pick your goals, she said, and work toward them. Pull in students and other committees to gain momentum. To manage several projects, use each Historic Commission member as a project leader. Those leaders can seek volunteers – each with

limited tasks - to help with their chosen projects. They would then report their progress back to the full Historic Commission.

- We discussed ways to publicize the work of the Historical Commission to get people excited and involved. We can use the Community Access TV station, and we can leave fliers with information on the table in the Town Hall, but these sources reach a limited audience. We can also prepare materials to hand out at Town Meetings. It is sometimes hard to get articles in the Recorder, but collaborations between the Historical Commission and students might be something newsworthy. Irmari Jones column might be another way to get information into print.
- Charlie Bohonowitz was mentioned as a possible Historical Commission member. It is good to seek members willing to pitch in and work. Carolyn clarified that we have seven members but can also have alternates who can add ideas and labor.
- Carolyn clarified as Tom Scanlon had done the process for seeking operating funds from the Finance Committee. She said it's best to submit line item figures, to justify request amounts. Expenses from other towns' active Historical Commissions can guide us. She also said requests can be modified or amended in December. She mentioned Locust Press as well as Staples for printing jobs. She also said the Greenfield jail does printing cheaply or free. Henrietta has a contact there.
- Carolyn clarified that applications for CPA funds are due in November. That's a goal to work for also.
- Carolyn also said we could also request a special town meeting for money for a specific crucial task such as getting a UMass intern in the fall to help us realize our goals. Such funds would be "project money." She suggested we contact the UMass History Department and others like Community Planning or even Landscape Design to find out if Interns are available.
- Carolyn mentioned her concerns about the H1N1 virus hitting the town in the fall. She wants the message to get out to people to wash hands frequently and practice social distancing for the sake of safety. She mentioned the Town nurse as an important resource for the town. As part of the oral history project, students might interview town citizens who have some personal or family memories of the 1918 flu epidemic.

3. The final meeting discussion centered around putting up maps and pictures of Deerfield historical interest in the Town Office Conference Room, now a very bare space. Pat Potter will see about getting her old Deerfield map copied for the room. Edie mentioned the wonderful Howe Brothers photos of Deerfield at the Ashfield Historical Society. Helen Petrovic offered a watercolor of the building that now houses the Berkshire Brewing Company. The building used to be used as a two-floor tobacco shop.

4. At 8:40 P.M. Edie made a motion and Henrietta seconded it that the meeting be adjourned. The motion carried by consensus. The next meeting of the Historical Commission will be August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in Room 130 of the Town Offices.

Respectfully submitted,

Edie Lipp, Clerk  
Deerfield Historical Commission