



# MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 52, No. 2

November 2016

## **PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

Early last week we had some snow with a background of fall foliage and that was followed by temperatures in the 70's on Sunday. Although the weather seesaws back and forth between seasons, soon the cold weather will settle in as the year wanes.

Our Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grant (HPTAG) project has been progressing. The condition assessment report was received in August and Building Committee members, Bruce Clouette, Rudy Favretti, Ann Galonska and I have reviewed it in detail. The report is a comprehensive review of the repairs needed in the Old Town Hall and the former Town Office Building. The committee's comments and corrections to the report are being sent to Bruce, who is compiling them into one document. These will be forwarded to the consulting firm, Nelson Edwards Company Architects, so that the report can be finalized.

On October 26, we met with Mansfield Town Manager Matthew Hart and his staff to discuss the HPTAG project. We agreed that the most critical priorities are to stop water infiltration into the buildings and to make structural repairs that will stabilize the buildings' envelopes. The report identifies many issues in both buildings and the costs are significant, so the repairs will not be accomplished overnight. The Town of Mansfield will include both buildings in Capital planning with all the other properties that are owned by the Town of Mansfield, and will assign priorities to each item as is done for all Town buildings. Grant opportunities will also be explored to assist in funding the needed work.

One significant cause of water infiltration is the failed water drainage system in the basement of each building. The Building Committee and the Town of Mansfield concurred that the remaining funds for the HPTAG project will be utilized to engage a Civil Engineering firm to design plans for a replacement drainage system that will tie into the State of Connecticut owned water drainage system on Route 195.

Collection storage has long been an issue at the Mansfield Historical Society Museum. The storage areas are filled to capacity and are far from ideal for storing artifacts. The attics are subject to temperature fluctuations and the basements are damp and prone to flooding.

To provide access for the condition assessment study, much of the collection was moved from the attics to the main floor of the Old Town Hall last spring. This has greatly reduced our exhibit space. Unfortunately the artifacts cannot be returned to their storage areas until certain repairs are made. That will take some time. In addition, the condition assessment report states that the attic of the Old Town Hall can no longer be used for storage due to load restrictions. A new storage option is urgently needed.

*(Continued next page)*

## **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

### **Friday, November 18, 7:00 p.m.: NOVEMBER MEETING & PROGRAM**

Historian William Hosley will present an illustrated talk, "Making History / Making Place: A Celebration of Connecticut's Local Museums." This event will be held at the Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library (Route 89 in Mansfield Center).

*(President's column continued):*

We also discussed our storage needs at our meeting with Mansfield Town Manager Matt Hart. He indicated that the Town of Mansfield would be amenable to a cost sharing approach for the installation of a storage building on the grounds behind the Museum buildings. A pre-fabricated type of building may be a good solution. Its size would be determined by an evaluation of our artifact storage requirements. This exciting initiative to preserve our collections will require a fund raising effort. More details will be forthcoming over the next several months.

David Landry has been appointed Vice President to fill out the remaining term left following Anne Bennett's departure from the Mansfield Historical Society Board. The Nomination committee is still working on filling other Board vacancies. Please contact us if you are interested in serving on the MHS Board.

In the near future, you will receive a membership renewal mailing from Membership Chair, Pam Roberts. It will also include information about a new Member-Get-A-Member initiative and an expanded check list of volunteer opportunities at the Mansfield Historical Society. Please return your membership renewals promptly and consider volunteering to help in one or more areas.

Should you have any suggestions for the Historical Society and its museum, please contact Ann Galonska or me via mail, phone (860-429-6575) or e-mail ([mansfield.historical@snet.net](mailto:mansfield.historical@snet.net)).

*Keith Wilson, President*

## **CELEBRATE CONNECTICUT'S LOCAL HISTORY MUSEUMS ON NOV. 18**

Connecticut has 169 towns and as many community-based historical museums. Most are small. Many are run by volunteers. No two are alike. They preserve and present great local history stuff and stories. They collect. They offer public programs. They advocate for preservation. They serve schools and greet tourists. They are a civic miracle. At our meeting on Friday, November 18, William Hosley will tell their story and discuss their importance. His talk will also address the question of "Why Civics and Local History Matter." It's sure to be a compelling talk.

William Hosley, the principal of Terra Firma Northeast, is a cultural resource development and marketing consultant, new media expert, historian, museologist, and preservationist whose body of work has always been primarily about place – especially

the Connecticut River Valley and Vermont where his career began at the VT Division for Historic Preservation in 1977. He was formerly Director of Connecticut Landmarks, where he cared for a chain of historic attractions throughout Connecticut. Prior to that, as a curator and exhibition developer at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Bill organized major exhibitions, including *The Great River: Art & Society of the Connecticut Valley* (1985), *Sense of Place: Furniture from New England Towns* (1993) and *Sam & Elizabeth: Legend and Legacy of Colt's Empire* (1996). Community-based historical organizations and house museums are a pet passion. They function as outposts of local learning and have substantial untapped potential for advancing the goal of place-based education.

We hope you will join us on November 18, 7:00 p.m. for this special program. It will be held at the Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library. **Admission is free to members and children under 16; \$3.00 for non-members.**

## **NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM**

We have just concluded another successful season at the museum. The museum opened on June 4 and closed for the season on September 25.

As you know, we faced some challenges last year. Due to the ongoing condition assessment of our buildings, our exhibit space was minimized. Only the front room of the main building and the glass display cases outside the office/library were available.

Our two spring interns, Helen Stec and Madison Savage, prepared an exhibit about the life and work of builder-architect, Edwin Fitch. We also assembled an exhibit of James Klar's photographs of the Claude McDaniels farm on Wormwood Hill Road. An adjunct display showed the restoration of the McDaniels house by its new owner, Greg Cichowski.

With the museum only partially open, it was a quiet summer. Visitation was down compared to other years, but the exhibits were well received by all who visited. Several researchers also came to use our archives.

We are fortunate to have a new student intern working with us for the fall semester. Craig Nakatsuka is a senior at the University of Connecticut, majoring in history and political science. He has been cataloging photographs and entering data into our accessions database. He is also assisting Daniel Allie in organizing a large collection of Merrow family papers.



*Intern Craig Nakatsuka and Volunteer Daniel Allie*

It may be some time before we can safely return the collections to the attic of the main building. Repairs will first have to be made to the roof and cupola. For the time being, the artifacts will continue to be stored in the Old Town Hall, making it unusable for exhibits.

Fortunately, now that the condition assessment team has completed their work, we can reclaim the exhibit space in the main building. The furniture pieces can now be returned to their original position and the store exhibit can be reassembled. Volunteer help will be needed to accomplish this. A work day will be scheduled soon.

We are also investigating new ways to bring our resources out into the community. Online exhibits and blogs are among the ideas we're considering. Craig and I are also going through all the old boxed exhibits to see what materials are still usable. We are exploring the possibility of mounting small exhibits elsewhere in the community.

We would appreciate any other suggestions you may have. Please contact us with your ideas at [mansfield.historical@snet.net](mailto:mansfield.historical@snet.net) or 860-429-6575.

*Ann Galonska, Museum Director*

## **THE RISE AND FALL OF WILLIAM EATON: HERO OF THE BARBARY WAR**

*A search on eBay for Mansfield items uncovered a colorful but largely forgotten military figure with ties to Mansfield. Up for auction was a biography, The Life of the Late Gen. William Eaton, published in 1813. A further internet search revealed a digitized copy of this biography as well as lengthy articles on Wikipedia and several military history websites. A condensed account of William Eaton's life follows, drawing from these resources. Where there was conflicting information, the 1813 biography was used*

*as the definitive source. The 448-page volume contains transcriptions of Eaton's journal entries and many of his papers.*

William Eaton was born on February 23, 1764 in Woodstock, Connecticut. He was the second-born son of Nathaniel and Sarah (Johnson) Eaton, one of thirteen children. His father was a farmer, who also taught school during the winter months.

When William was ten years old, his family moved to Mansfield. There he excelled in his studies, but found rural farm life dull. Even at a young age, he had an adventurous spirit and often engaged in reckless behavior. His biographer relates one Mansfield incident in which he climbed a tall cherry tree and fell out, resulting in a concussion and dislocated shoulder.

Seeking adventure, William Eaton ran away from home at the age of sixteen and enlisted in the army. To his disappointment, he saw little action and spent most of his time serving as a waiter/clerk to Major Dennie of the Connecticut troops. A year later, he fell ill and was allowed to return home. His stay, however, was brief. As soon as he recovered his health, he rejoined the army and served until April 1783, attaining the rank of sergeant.

After he was discharged William returned home to the family farm, but soon grew restless. He then set his sights on higher education. To prepare for college, he studied Latin and Greek with the Rev. Samuel Nott of Franklin.

In October 1785, William was admitted to Dartmouth College from which he graduated in August of 1790. During his college years, he took several leaves during which he taught school in order to finance his education. He taught in Scotland, Connecticut and later in Windsor, Vermont. During the summers he returned home to help out on the family farm. He continued his studies under the direction of the Rev. Moses Cook Welch of the congregational church in North Mansfield.

Rev. Welch saw great promise in the young man and urged him to enter the ministry. William briefly considered this career path, but his quest for adventure would soon lead him in a different direction. Among his surviving papers, there is a letter written to Rev. Welch dated August 22, 1799. Included in it is a sermon that William had written during his college years. Rev. Welch was likely surprised to find the letter addressed from the ruins of Utica in Tunis (now Tunisia).

Following his graduation, William resumed teaching in Windsor and then served a term as Clerk to the House of Delegates in Vermont. But the

clarion call of the military remained strong. Thanks to the influence of Senator Stephen R. Bradley of Vermont, William was appointed a captain in the U.S. Army in March 1792. He was placed in charge of troops in Bennington, Vermont.

On August 22, 1792, he married Elizabeth Sykes Danielson, the young widow of General Timothy Danielson. He had previously met the general and his wife during visits with his brother Calvin in Brimfield, Massachusetts. Upon his marriage, William acquired an instant family of three step-children to which he later added four more children of his own.



**William Eaton**  
**1764 - 1811**

In September, Capt. Eaton received his marching orders. He left his new wife and proceeded with his company to Albany and thence to Pittsburg. There Eaton and his company were assigned to the American Legion, a combined-arms unit consisting of infantry, artillery and light dragoons. Serving under Maj. Gen. Anthony Wayne, Eaton received his first taste of combat during the Ohio Valley campaign.

In late 1794, Eaton was reassigned to Georgia where his troops protected settlers from attacks by Creek Indians and also guarded the Georgia border from Spanish incursion from Florida. During this time, Eaton became a wealthy man through his speculative investments in western lands.

Eaton had a fiery temperament and often clashed with his commanding officer, Colonel Henry Gaither. Their relationship worsened when Gaither became jealous of Eaton's newfound wealth. It reached a breaking point when the colonel suffered a financial loss from his own land deals.

In the fall of 1795, Col Gaither brought court-martial charges against Capt. Eaton for allegedly selling government supplies to the Creek Indians and for improperly using his time in the military to further his private land deals. Eaton was sentenced to two months suspended commission. A review board later overturned the conviction and chastised Gaither for bringing the charges. Nevertheless, Eaton's reputation was now tarnished in the military. Not wanting to remain under Gaither's command, he resigned his commission in December 1796 and returned home to his family in Brimfield.

The following July Secretary of State William Pickering recruited the disgraced officer for a confidential mission. A Congressional committee was investigating Senator William Blount who was suspected of conspiring with the British to seize the Spanish-controlled territory in Louisiana. Dr. Nicholas Romaine of New York was a suspected co-conspirator. Eaton's mission was to arrest Romaine and seize his papers. With the conspiracy uncovered, Blount was expelled from the Senate and became the first public official to face impeachment.

After the successful completion of this covert mission, William Eaton was offered a diplomatic position as American Consul to Tunis. He eagerly accepted. He embarked on December 22, 1798 to assume his new position.

Tunis, along with Tripoli, Morocco and Algiers, comprised the four Barbary states on the northern coast of Africa. For centuries privateers from this area had preyed on merchant vessels. They took the ships and their cargo and often ransomed the crew or sold them into slavery. Tunis, like the other Barbary states, extorted annual "tribute" payments from other nations in exchange for protection from their pirates.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, such tribute payments had become exorbitantly high. A treaty that America had signed with Tunis in 1797 provided little protection from piracy and imposed heavy taxation on American goods. Eaton was tasked with negotiating a more favorable trade agreement with the bey (ruler) of Tunis. It took two years of negotiation to reach agreeable terms.

Eaton's success, however, was soon overshadowed by a humiliating incident in Algiers. In September 1800, the American frigate *George Washington* arrived in port to deliver America's annual tribute to the Algerian bey. The bey had recently offended the Ottoman sultan by signing a treaty with France. To avoid retribution, a shipment of gold and other goods was to be sent to placate the sultan. Under orders from the bey, the *George Washington* was seized and its captain was forced to deliver the shipment to Constantinople. The American government was outraged to learn that one of its naval vessels had been commandeered and forced to sail under a foreign flag. War clouds began to gather.

During this tense time, James Cathcart, the American consul to Tripoli, requested Eaton's aid in negotiating with the Tripolitan bashaw, Yusef Karamanli (alternatively spelled Caramelli). Yusef had seized power in 1795 after assassinating his older brother and driving his other brother, Hamet, into

exile. As bashaw (ruler), Yusef had increased Tripolitan attacks on American shipping and demanded ever-larger tribute payments from the American government.

Eaton arrived in Tripoli in January 1801 and met repeatedly with Yusef to no avail. Eaton and Cathcart agreed that military intervention was the only answer. Eaton voiced this opinion in an impassioned letter to the Secretary of State dated April 10, 1801. It concluded: "But if our government yield these terms to the Bashaw of Tripoli it will be absolutely necessary to make provisions for a requisition of double the amount for the Bey of Tunis. Algiers also will be to be respected according to rank. If the United States will have a free commerce in this sea they must defend it. There is no alternative. The restless spirit of these marauders cannot be restrained."

The tribute was not paid and on May 11, 1801, the small nation of Tripoli declared war on the United States. Before this news even reached Washington, President Jefferson authorized sending naval forces to the Barbary coast. A squadron of three frigates and one sloop departed on June 2. But this small squadron was not enough to quell the continuing attacks on American vessels. In April 1802, a second squadron was sent, increasing the American naval force in the Mediterranean to eight warships.

Meanwhile Eaton hatched his own plan to end the conflict. He befriended Hamet Karamanli, the deposed brother of Yusef. He saw in Hamet a chance to depose Yusef and install a bashaw in Tripoli who would be friendlier to American interests. He proposed his plan to the Jefferson administration but there was little interest.

Undeterred, Eaton proceeded with his plans without government backing. To fund the operation, he purchased a small merchant vessel, *Gloria*, and proceeded to sell goods at inflated prices throughout the Mediterranean region. Due to his consular position, his ship sailed under the protection of the American Navy.

Eaton's plans went awry in March 1803 when Commodore Richard Morris paid a visit to Tunis. He came to negotiate the status of a Tunisian merchant vessel seized by the American warships. Morris was arrested and ordered held until a debt that Eaton had incurred was repaid to the bey. Government funds were delivered from the American squadron to pay the debt. Morris was released and then the bey ordered Eaton to leave Tunis. Eaton's diplomatic career was over.

Eaton returned to Washington and reported on the dire state of affairs in the Mediterranean. That May two more frigates, the powerful *Philadelphia* and *Constitution*, were sent to join the squadron. It was the fate of the *Philadelphia* that would later set Eaton's grand plan into motion.

On October 31, 1803, the *Philadelphia* ran aground on a reef near the entrance to Tripoli harbor. It was quickly surrounded by Tripolitan gunboats and forced to surrender. Some 307 crew members, including Captain William Bainbridge, were taken prisoner. When the ship later floated off the reef, Yusef's navy had a 44-gun frigate available for its use. News of the *Philadelphia*'s loss sparked outrage throughout America.

On the night of February 16, 1804, the frigate *Intrepid* slipped into Tripoli harbor with 70 commandos led by Lieutenant Stephen Decatur. The boarding party quickly overcame the unsuspecting Tripolitans aboard the *Philadelphia*. Under a hail of cannon fire, the commandos set fire to the ship and then escaped back to the *Intrepid*. They sailed away past the burning wreckage into the night.

Against the backdrop of the unfolding *Philadelphia* drama, Eaton again pitched his plan to depose Yusef. This time Jefferson was interested. In May 1804, Eaton was given the title of "Navy Agent of the United States" and was dispatched back to the Barbary coast, under the supervision of Commodore James Barron. His mission was to locate Hamet Karamanli and enlist his cooperation in deposing Yusef. To achieve this end, Eaton was provided with \$40,000 and 1,000 rifles.

Hamet was rumored to be in Egypt. Eaton, with a company of eight marines led by Lt. Presley O'Bannon, set off to track him down, finally locating him in Alexandria. On February 23, 1805, Eaton signed a convention (agreement) with Hamet on behalf of the United States. It specified that the United States would provide cash, arms and provisions for re-installing Hamet Karamanli as the bashaw of Tripoli. It also designated William Eaton as "General and Commander in Chief" of the land forces that would carry out the operation. The final article stated: "This convention shall be submitted to the President of the United States for his ratification: in the meantime there shall be no suspence in its operations." The agreement was forwarded to the Secretary of State but it was never ratified.

Without waiting for clearance, the self-proclaimed General Eaton proceeded posthaste to raise an army. He requested 100 marines from Commodore Barron but his request was denied. That left him with just the eight marines led by Lt.

O'Bannon. Hammet arrived with about 100 of his followers. It was a small beginning.

Eaton and O'Bannon began immediately to recruit mercenaries in Alexandria. They quickly assembled a diverse group of mercenaries of Turkish, Greek, French, English, Spanish, Indian, and Eastern European backgrounds. Hamet also succeeded in rallying some disaffected Tripolitans, Egyptians, and other Arabs to their cause. Together, Eaton and Hamet managed to assemble a force of some 400 men. It would be a difficult challenge to manage this army comprised of so many diverse cultures and nationalities.

On March 8, 1805, Eaton's expedition set off across the desert, accompanied by 200 camels. It was an arduous journey across nearly 600 miles of desert to their first target – Derna, the second largest city in Tripoli. As the march wore on, supplies began to dwindle and tensions rose among the troops. Fights broke out among the different factions and many of the recruits threatened to leave. Fortunately the army reached Bomba before there was a total mutiny. There American ships waited with more supplies.

After resting for a week, Eaton and his army pressed on to Derna. They arrived on April 26, surrounded the city, and prepared for battle. However capturing Derna would be no easy task. The city was defended by a garrison of 800 troops and was heavily fortified.

Eaton planned a two-pronged attack. O'Bannon would lead a strike force of 60 marines and mercenaries to attack the city's barricades while Hamet and 200 Arab horsemen would attack the city

from the south. The three naval vessels stationed offshore would provide covering fire for the assault. Meanwhile Eaton and the reserve cavalry would stay south of the city to prevent relief forces from reaching Derna.

At first everything went as planned. The American warships silenced the shore batteries and Hamet's cavalry captured a castle outside the city. However O'Bannon's men were pinned down by heavy fire from the city's defenders. Although his force was heavily outnumbered, Eaton decided to charge. He led the reserve Arab cavalry in the assault and surprisingly, the defenders withdrew. O'Bannon's strike force then stormed the barricades and took control of the shore batteries. With the taking of the governor's palace, all resistance ended. For the first time in history, the American flag was raised in victory on foreign soil.

With victory in hand, Eaton wanted to march on to Tripoli to reinstate Hamet. However the battle to hold Derna had just begun. Within days, Yusef's forces arrived to re-take the city. Eaton's men held them off for over a month.

Meanwhile, Yusef realized he was in a difficult position. American ships were blockading his harbor and Eaton's forces would soon be approaching from the east. He realized it would be in his best interests to resume peace negotiations with the Americans. On June 3, while the battle still raged in Derna, Yusef signed a peace treaty. For the first time, the treaty did not require a tribute payment. However the U.S. had to pay \$60,000 in ransom for release of the *Philadelphia's* crew.



**Map of the Barbary Coast of North Africa, showing General Eaton's route to Derna.** Reproduced from the article, "General William Eaton: To the Shores of Tripoli..." at <http://warefarehistorynetwork.com>

With the war over, Eaton was ordered to evacuate Derna but he stubbornly refused to go. He feared that Hamet and his followers would be slaughtered once the Americans withdrew. The *Constellation* was sent to retrieve him. When the ship arrived, Eaton realized that he had no choice but to abandon Derna. His dream of further conquest was over. The evacuation was done secretly, under the cover of darkness. Eaton, the marines, the Christian mercenaries, Hamet, and a few of his followers piled onto the *Constellation's* life boats and escaped to the waiting ship.

Eaton returned home to a hero's welcome. For awhile, he was the toast of Washington and his victory at Derna was lauded in the press. But Eaton had become an embittered man. He felt he had been robbed of a victory in Tripoli and was highly critical of the treaty that had ended his military campaign. He was outraged that ransom had been paid for the hostages and he accused the government of not honoring the agreement made with Hamet Karamanli.

Eaton began to drink heavily and ranted about the government in public. His opinions were widely published, offending the Jefferson administration. His criticisms also provided ammunition for Jefferson's enemies in the Federalist Party. Eaton's drunken behavior and outspokenness soon cost him many friends in Washington.

At this low point in his life, Aaron Burr approached Eaton. Vice-President during Jefferson's first term (1801-1805), Burr had fallen from grace following his infamous duel with Alexander Hamilton in 1804. In the succeeding years, he traveled through the west to avoid murder charges stemming from the death of Hamilton. During this time, he met with several disgruntled military men, including Eaton and General James Wilkinson. He floated a plan to invade Spanish territory in the southwest and to establish an independent state.

Eager to get back in the president's good graces, Eaton personally warned Jefferson of Burr's plot. However his claims at first were given little credence.

In 1807, Burr was arrested for treason. Eaton provided a deposition on January 26, 1807 in which he described his conversations with Burr. He reported that, on one occasion, Burr "laid open his project of revolutionising the western country, separating it from the Union, establishing a monarchy there, of which he was to be the sovereign, New Orleans to be his capital ; organizing a force on the Mississippi and extending conquest to Mexico." Eaton claimed that Burr had offered him the position of second command in his army, with General Wilkinson as chief command.

When Burr's trial for treason began on August 3, Eaton was one of the key witnesses. He reiterated the information in his deposition. To discredit him, the defense questioned Eaton about a payment of \$10,000 he had received from the government, implying that his testimony had been bought. Eaton countered that the payment was reimbursement for his expenses during the Barbary War. The judge and jury were unconvinced. In fact, there was no substantial evidence to support his or Wilkinson's claims against Burr. Ultimately Burr was acquitted. Historians still debate the validity of the charges.

Following the trial, the discredited Eaton slunk back to Brimfield. He continued to drink heavily and fell into debt at the gambling table. His drinking led to health problems to which he succumbed on June 11, 1811 at the age of 47. It was his old tutor, Rev. Welch of Mansfield who presided at his funeral, giving a "pertinent and pathetic discourse." The death of William Eaton, once hailed as a conquering hero, was barely noted by the press.

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**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**



**REMEMBER: November 18 – MHS Meeting & Program by Historian William Hosey**  
**PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!**

**MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**  
**2016-2017**

**ELECTED OFFICERS:**

**President:** Keith Wilson  
**Vice President:** David Landry \*  
**Secretary:** Mary Feathers  
**Treasurer:** Anne Greineder  
**Assistant Treasurer:** *Vacant*

**Member-at-Large:** Jamie Lang-Rodean  
**Member-at-Large:** *Vacant*  
**Member-at-Large:** *Vacant*  
**Member-at-Large:** *Vacant*  
*\*Appointed to fill the remaining 1 year term*

**COMMITTEE CHAIRS:**

**Programs:** Bruce Clouette  
**Membership:** Pam Roberts  
**Hospitality:** *Vacant*  
**Research & Publications:** Rudy Favretti  
**Newsletter:** *Vacant*  
**Publicity:** *Vacant*

**Education:** Carolyn Stearns  
**Old Houses:** Donna Clouette  
**Museum:** *Vacant*  
**Collection Management:** Lisa Ferriere  
**Library:** Richard Schimmelpfeng  
**Genealogy:** Richard Roberts

**EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS:**

Ann Galonska (Museum Director)  
Roberta Smith (Town Historian)