



**Fairfield County Historical Societies Convening 6
By Zoom
Wednesday February 10, 2021**

MEETING NOTES

This was the first discussion since COVID struck and most of the comments referred to the impact of the pandemic on operations over the year since COVID hit.

Norwalk Library History Room

- Had lost half of their staff since the pandemic
- Were collaborating with Westport (on Enslaved People Project) and with Weston Historical.
- Since pandemic, realizing the lack of online Norwalk history resources, they have doubled-down pulling together material from the Internet into one space online.
- Just finished digitizing local high school year books from 1950 to the present.

Jewish Historical Society

- Shut down in March 2020 and re-opened in July. Have used time to rewrite bylaws and governance documents
- Transition to Zoom has been very successful with 30-50 attendance (although now facing a glut of content)
- In midst of re-imagining their library. 4,000 volumes in archives and 2,000 other volumes-looking for a new space. Have been digitizing (starting with documentation of 3 synagogues of Stamford) and joined CLHO. Copyright issues
- Showed trailer of a film made with Margie Coasta on "Remembering the family store, 1940-1965.
- Introduced new President, Peter Lilienthal

Norwalk Historical Society

- Leapt into virtual meetings and lectures on Zoom and have been very successful. Biggest in-person event, Hallowe'en celebration was due its 10th anniversary but it too transferred successfully to virtual program. Has helped expand work with schoolchildren.
- Installing an elevator in the Lockwood House, giving ADA access to all floors.

Trumbull Historical

- Very little able to do with no staff, even with 4 educators on the board.
- Looking hard to get people in
- For Ramin, had material on Nero Hawley - enslaved person who became a businessman after serving in the Revolutionary War.
- Copyright - came up twice.

Wilton Historical

- Programs switched to online with much success. Book discussions on Zoom very popular and easier to get authors on Zoom than in person.
- Created 5-10 minute “History is Here” videos produced by Nick Foster and very well received.
- Did first totally online show on suffrage - and proved to be very popular.
- No school field trips - no luck getting into schools. Collaborate with library, Kiwanis, DAR
- Taking time to plan a big reinstallation of their Tools exhibition - adding more interpretation.
- Alissa complimented Wilton on its programs; Jewish Historical had copied many of their ideas to good effect. One of the best things about this group is that we can all learn from each other. “Your efforts sparked us to do things that we didn’t know could be done.”

Westport Historical

- Westport quickly ramped up content in its online newsletter and also developed a separate “virtualhistorywestport.org” website.
- Virtual has been a big learning experience - “who knows why people come to what they come to?”
- People go and look at YouTube and website events after the fact.
- A virtual “Oyster Festival” event proved as successful as the previous annual in-person events. This led to re-thinking the value of investing the amount of labor they put into events. Simplification was a message that was emerging.
- Spent a lot of time behind-the-scenes, getting the house in order: working on archives and collections, developing finding aids and research guides for the collection - made a real difference.

Rowayton Historical.

- Most everything went on hold - including the opening of new Maritime Museum. Canceled biggest fundraisers - but the gift shop remained open.
- Piggybacked on and marketed other societies’ programs.
- Membership dropped but a number gave more generously.

Weston Historical

- COVID coincided with Weston’s plans for revamping its website.
- In July kicked off many virtual events but also used their outdoor spaces to do 4 in-person events.
- so good time to rethink
- In response to influx of New Yorkers, membership coordinator pulled names and addresses for property transfers and offered free 1-year memberships to new residents. Generated positive interest and engagement.
- June 2020: unique engagement with a Weston Middle-School teacher who was doing a segment on journaling that coincided with HS program of seeking stories from the community about living through the pandemic. Samantha gave a program to the students quoting from diaries/journals in their collection about the importance of documenting events as they were happening. One result was a collection of journals about their experience of the pandemic in Weston.

Greenwich Historical

- Bush-Holley house closed for a period
- GHS miraculously came into possession of a Childe Hassam painting of the Bush-Holley site - and enabling them to do an exhibit both about the painting and the shipyard it portrayed.
- Developed many curated talks - narrating and walking through the exhibits.
- Found many ways to use outdoor space: lawn concerts; farmers market; spring landscape and gardening programs.

- The decades long tradition of a program with Greenwich Third-graders was cancelled in 2020 as schools were holding out for in-person tours. But then they later agreed to a virtual series and expanded the program.
- Memberships grew in Nov-Dec - including a sizable number of new residents.

Westport Historical

- Ramin spoke on the urgency of gathering resources for being able to tell the histories of those enslaved in our towns. She cited the [\\$4.9 million Mellon Foundation grant](#) to Brown University's Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice "to fund a partnership with Mystic Seaport Museum, and Williams College that will use maritime history as a basis for studying historical injustices and generating new insights on the relationship between European colonization in North America, the dispossession of Native American land, and racial slavery in New England."
- Ramin suggested that all societies had more material on enslaved people than they probably realized - it was often the smaller "sliver" pieces of evidence that together could speak volumes - but this material was often much harder to find than sales receipts or deeds.
- She proposed writing a planning grant to CTH and National Archives to discover how much manpower, training, technology is needed. The end goal would be digitization and finding aids and resource guides that are then made available through collective access through CLHO and state library.
- Ramin stressed the importance of letting her know about any material that societies knew that they had - to help build the case for the project.
- Debra Mecky suggested that perhaps seeking a grant for an archivist to conduct an initial survey of societies and other institutions might be a better way to proceed. Researchers could then go back to institutions with promising collections.
- Ramin agreed with Debra's viewpoint and would go back to CTH with a revised plan.
- Several members volunteered that they had useful resources, including Jewish Historical Society, Wilton Historical and the Norwalk History Room.
- Several made the point that libraries (several had "History Rooms") and town clerk offices could be as important as historical societies in being able to uncover material.