



**Fairfield County Historical Societies Convening 8  
Fairfield Museum & History Center  
Wednesday August 16, 2023**

**MEETING NOTES**

In Attendance: Amy Allen, Michelle Cheng, Samantha Fargione, Nick Foster  
Diane Jellerette, Stephanie Kadam, Dianne Niklaus, and Amrys Williams

Eight members from 8 historical societies met in person at the Fairfield Museum & History Center, hosted by Michelle Cheng.

After a welcome from Michael and David we had brief reports from members.

- Amrys Williams (CT League of History Organizations) noted they were shortly to change their name to CT League of Museums
- Stephanie Kadam (Stratford) planning a Native American program on September 24 and an all-day celebration of William Samuel Johnson (drafter and signer of the US Constitution) in October. Also planning to engage the Stratford Public Schools for another successful year of local history field trips. Working on internal documents (debt policy, incoming collection loan policy, board duties, etc.)
- Samantha (Weston): recently opened “Weston Illustrated” on Weston painters from first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Successful Music at the Barn series (with parallel kids activities). Planning “Weston at Work” permanent exhibit in the barn.
- Nick Foster (Wilton) On-boarding new development associate and working out a local sponsorship program with local businesses. Big project: looking for a lost African-American burial ground (last burial noted was 1890). Believe they’ve found it and have state archaeologist working on it. Working with local and state stakeholders for interpretation and education. SHPO very helpful. Local black church whose congregation might well have descendants from the cemetery.
- Diane Jellerette (Norwalk) - new plaque installed marking the visit of Lafayette on his tour of the US in 1824; they’ll commemorate this next year with a website showing his 25 stops in CT. Planning lecture series on indigenous peoples in

Fall. Planning second part of Norwalk History exhibit 1835-Present to be at the Museum

- Amy Allen (Museum of Darien) has moved on from fixing the basement, repairing the elevator and cleaning up the archives to staff restructuring -still searching for a 15-hour assistant director. Starting strategic planning and working with the Darien Garden Club on restoring historic garden. Big problem currently finding insurance.
- Dianna Niklaus (Greenwich): Dianne has been marketing director at GHS for 18 months. Other staff have been hired and programming has really picked up. Just received Good to Great grant to update HVAC and other systems at the Bush-Holley House. Preparing for a joint exhibit with the Clay Art Center in Portchester celebrating its founder Katherine Po-Yu Choy, *Radical Pots and Cooperative Hands*.
- Michelle Cheng (Fairfield) spoke about the new Creating Community exhibit based on a lot of new research on the 1637 Pequot War and other subjects and have a 3-part lecture series on different aspects of the exhibit this fall. They are partnering with the Connecticut Museum on their \$2 million [Access to Civics Education](#) program providing civics education to some 100,000 students across the state

We then broke up into two sets of working groups. The first set focused on 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Funding

**A. 250<sup>th</sup>:** Michelle Cheng, Diane Jellerette, Stephanie Kadam, Dianne Niklaus and Amrys Williams,

1. How to calendar events across the region to avoid duplication. David volunteered that we could host a calendar on a private area of our website (or on our shared Google Drive). We might start on Google Drive and transfer to website when we have a private area established.

2. Coordination at the town level: Amrys serves on the Connecticut Semiquincentennial Commission (<https://ct250.org/>). One key interest is in finding a way for towns to put organizations that contact the Commission in touch with each other. Role of towns versus historical societies.

3. Organize different types of events that would attract different audiences and thus also introduce these new people to the local historical societies.

4. Lot of discussion around a “250<sup>th</sup> Trail” - maybe driving but also maybe with MetroNorth. Perhaps a 250<sup>th</sup> Excursion from NYC to CT. Great opportunity too to forge relationships with MTA for the future.

5. Connecting with Tourism - one example would be to leverage Open House Day (always the second Saturday of June) and dedicate to 250<sup>th</sup> celebrations.

6. Leveraging this interest in history and civics to go beyond just the 250<sup>th</sup> but to use this as an opportunity to discuss the importance of history. Connecting to questions about democracy and civic participation. Also to help public understand the needs of history organizations (many of which were founded in the run-up to the Bicentennial in 1976) <30>.

**Discussion:** In response to a question about whether the Commission was connecting with organizations in other sectors to discuss issues like the future of democracy, Amrys said it was. One example was connecting with Everyday Democracy. Commission is working hard to make sure it's not seen as a limited "historical thing" like a DNR Celebration etc. Amrys encouraged everyone to get on the mailing list <<https://ct250.org/learn-more/mailling-list/>>

**B. Funding:** Amy Allen; Samantha Fargione; Nick Foster

**1. Business Relationships.** Piggybacking off of Nick's presentation about Wilton's new Development Associate and plans to develop long-term relationships with local businesses, developing rapport and only asking for funding later on.

**2. Membership and Annual Appeal.** All do a bit of both but Amy and Nick were narrowing down their outreach (going for the 200 that have a record of giving rather than the 5,000 hopefuls). Questioning the value of traditional memberships (especially with younger people) - see report on EDN meeting on membership and subscriptions where Nancy Geary spoke about New Canaan's experiment with membership models: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kLD-MGsnp9HTL33x2zSM4\\_620NFjVH3wruG-BeravVE/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kLD-MGsnp9HTL33x2zSM4_620NFjVH3wruG-BeravVE/edit?usp=sharing)).

**3. Fundraisers:** Importance of structuring fundraising so figuring out with the board how much money needs to be raised and then figuring out the kind of fundraisers able to get to the goal and how to allocate budget to make it possible.

**Next Steps:** Finding ways of making fundraising more personal. Standing out from the crowd by making the approach more personal and individual. Samantha pointed out that one of their issues is that Weston has 0 businesses (just 4 in the small shopping center). So have to reach out beyond Weston. Challenge of reaching into Westport and Wilton.

David raised the issue from the previous meeting of cutting down expenses - and the realization that cutting corners could produce the same results as a full-blown fundraising event. Lorie stressed the importance of the board in building relationships (and not even mentioning fundraising)

**C. Marketing:** Amy Allen, Samantha Fargione; Nick Foster; Dianne Niklaus

### **1. Campaign for Non-Special-Events**

Issue of how to work together to campaign for visitors for non-special-events. Perhaps a campaign for each society to point to others (“If you liked this then why not try...”) and help each other market (a little like CT Tourism’s approach of pointing out what else was close to any attraction). Idea of coming to next meeting with data about visitation - when do they come, where do they come from? From that create a marketing handout or passport that we can use during the time when more people visit. Not just competing/ collaborating with each other but competing with other events and other kinds of organizations.

Also need to work on a collective agreed best way to collect visitation data. Nick has been using the CTH survey as a prompt.

Lorie suggested the value of having specific options for people with different interests: are you interested in colonial, or Victorian? Then here’s where to go.

Lorie suggested like we’ve done for the community theatres put the logos on the Historical Societies’ page <<https://culturalalliancefc.org/programs/historical-societies/>> with links to their websites. So send logos to Lorie.

**C. Inclusion Strategies:** Amrys Williams; Michelle Cheng; Diane Jellerette, Stephanie Kadam

Initially hearing from different groups about how they are trying to tell more diverse and inclusive stories. From there, discussed how to bring community members together to confront these issues. This shifted the conversation to how to foster more inclusive culture within the organization. Working with local community organizations and building stronger relationships. Moving on from training with external experts to having conversations about issues that come up and finding ways of dealing with them. Challenges of creating a space for organizations to have deep internal reflection as an organization in the midst of the day-to-day demands. Figuring how to overcome obstacles at organizations to making change.

David talked about successful Community Theatres meeting with Erika Wesley, the DEI Coordinator at the Westport Country Playhouse, and perhaps arrange a similar talk with someone who has worked with historical societies about their experiences

Perhaps consider a summit of arts councils and historical societies.

**Action Items:**

1. Review and correct/adjust text and correct identification of members of each workgroup.
2. Submit logos to Lorie for inclusion on our Historical Network page
3. If available, submit event dates planned for 250<sup>th</sup> which we will add to a Calendar (initially on Google Drive and then on private webpage).
4. Everyone join the 250<sup>th</sup> Mailing List
5. **250<sup>th</sup> Group:** Research possibilities for a 250<sup>th</sup> Trail.
6. **Funding Group:** Articulate Strategy for Next Steps
7. **Marketing Group:**
  - Agree on a common visitor data collection instrument system
  - Come to next meeting with visitor data to then hash out a common program (campaign; passport, etc)
8. **Inclusion Group:** define action item for next meeting. Consider a speaker who has worked with historical societies.