

The Jamestown Historical Society has been around for a long time. We were incorporated in September 1912 "for the purpose of preserving old land marks and collection of historical relics." Our purpose hasn't changed much in 95 years – though we have broadened our mission to include "share with others" what we collect and preserve. This new monthly column is part of that sharing. We want you to know who we are and what we're doing.

To begin, appropriately, with a little history: At its founding the society could have been called "Save the Windmill." The Jamestown windmill, built in 1787, was abandoned in 1896. After 109 years of service, it was no longer an economic necessity for the islanders who could get flour and meal much more cheaply from off-island. For eight years, the mill stood empty and uncared for. In 1904, a group of concerned islanders bought the mill and fixed it up. Along with other islanders, they formed the Jamestown Historical Society and gave the mill to the new organization. We've maintained it ever since and love to show it off. It's open to the public on weekend afternoons in the summer. Any group that wants a private tour is happily accommodated.

In 1995 the society also accepted the stewardship of the Friends Meetinghouse on Windmill Hill. And in 2002 we joined the town to rebuild the 1776 battery and, through the Friends of Conanicut Battery, continue to support the Battery Park maintenance.

Our latest project is to upgrade our museum and the collections it



Jamestown Historical Society News

By Rosemary Enright

houses. The museum is the small white building at 92 Narragansett Avenue, directly across from the Town Hall. Since 1971, the society has rented the building, which was built on Southwest Avenue in 1886 as a one-room schoolhouse. After being moved to its present site, it housed the town library from 1898 to 1971. Last year, we entered into a more permanent lease agreement with the town. With our lease in hand, we've been soliciting individual gifts and foundation grants to allow us to upgrade the building and build additional storage space.

Of first importance are environmental controls to protect our collections. The objects and papers we store in the museum are currently subject to substantial humidity and to extremes of temperature. The windows no longer shut properly. Insulation, heating/cooling, and humidity control are important for preservation. They will also make the museum a more attractive and comfortable place to visit and work in.

Making the museum more accessible comes next. We plan to redesign the steps so that they're not as steep and to add a ramp. Our architect, Bill Burgin, has come up with a practical and attractive new approach that fits these needs and

keeps the museum's historic facade unchanged.

As an additional safety measure, we're also putting in an emergency exit. In the past, our only emergency exit was through a window with an uncomfortably long drop to the ground. We're replacing that window with a door and steps.

Beautification is also on our mind. A new garden in a colonial or English style has been suggested. Because our building schedule is designed to fit around the summer exhibit, which opens on June 30, landscaping will begin in the fall. We're looking for ideas and proposals.

The changes to the building will make the material in the museum safer but won't help with the overcrowded conditions. We need more space for storage. As you've been reading occasionally in the Press, our collections committee is continuously acquiring new material. Now that we'll be able to store our collection to proper museum standards, we hope that more of you will think about giving us family papers, photographs, memorabilia, and other items that may be of historic interest to future generations.

Our need for storage space will obviously continue to grow. To alleviate this problem, we're entering into another agreement with the town. We're building a vault in the basement of the new Town Hall. We'll pay for the vault in exchange for its use for a number of years – sort of a prepaid lease. At the end of the period, the vault will revert to the town. If the town doesn't need the space, a further lease to the society is a possibility.

The writer is president of the historical society.



Chamber donation

The Jamestown Chamber of Commerce this week presented the Jamestown Historical Society with a check for \$6,000. The money was raised by the chamber at its Night at the Windmill last summer and will go to the JHS capital campaign now underway. From left are John McCauley, chairman of the chamber event, chamber treasurer Eric Eunis, chamber president Charlie Petit, and John Murphy, co-chairman of the JHS capital campaign.

Photo by Jeff McDonough



At the library

The Jamestown Historical Society has unveiled an exhibit about Fort Wetherill in the display case in the lobby of the Jamestown library. A variety of photographs and artifacts detail the history of the fort from the early 1900s through World War II.

Photo by Joe Logan

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