

CASTINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Collections Committee

2020 Annual Report



Committee Members:	Howard Lowell, Chair; Rodney Flora; Jack McDonald; Lynne Dearborn; and Paige Lilly
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The Committee met four times in 2020: February 3; April 6; June 1; and August 3. Major items dominating the Committee's 2020 agenda were: inventorying the Collections; digitizing the Collections; documenting Castine's experience with the COVID-19 pandemic; and disaster preparedness.

Inventory of Collections. The staff and Collections Committee are committed to making steady and measurable progress toward full intellectual and physical control of the historic materials held by the Castine Historical Society in public trust. In fall 2019, Paige Lilly presented the Committee with an outline of the projects, tasks, and time commitments necessary to do this work. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, which reduced staff time at work onsite and shifted the focus of staff efforts for the spring and summer, progress has been much slower than planned. However, Paige and the 2020 CHS graduate student intern, Darcy Stevens, are now devoting a couple of days a week to the photograph cataloging project. This effort consists of digitizing historic images, researching the acquisition files, entering data, and placing thousands of individual photographs into archivally safe preservation storage sleeves and boxes.

Digitization of the Collections. Discussion at the February meeting focused on why we digitize and should we do more systematic digitization. Currently CHS scans documents or photographs so they can be enlarged and used for exhibits or in a publication. The Curator also scans material for research requests, marketing, and outreach projects. Digitization as a preservation tool is also considered, but digitization is not currently in the Society's processing workflow as a standard step, except for photographs, as the Curator estimates it adds 8-15 minutes per scan to the processing activity.

Disaster Preparedness. In 2014, CHS developed its first plan for recovery of damaged items following a flood, fire, or similar natural or human-caused disaster. At its March meeting, the Board tasked the Collections Committee to update the 2014 plan. Target date for Board approval of the revised plan is November 2020, at which time the Board is scheduled to use the plan for a "tabletop" exercise. Activities through July include revising and updating all contact information for essential first responders and disaster recovery supplies providers; updating the list of recovery priority items in the collection; and developing a new response protocol based in large part of the Society's response to COVID-19 decision-making. Still to be done are a "walk-thru" of the Grindle House and Abbott School to identify potential risks to the collections that

need to be mitigated, and inventory and replacement of disaster supplies on-hand. The COVID-19 pandemic has put these activities behind schedule, but we are hopeful they will take place by the Board's November meeting.

As part of this project, the Committee also considered adequate protection of the Society's administrative digital records. It found a material weakness in the age of equipment used to backup existing, active CHS records. The Committee will recommend remedial action in the next Society budget.

Castine and COVID-19 Project. CHS is actively collecting materials from people in the community who are creating a record – diaries, art, poems, photos, whatever – during the current pandemic. The Curator's idea for this initiative came about in part because of a dearth of historical information on Castine during the 1918-1919 flu pandemic. Our current thoughts and actions will become "history" so we need to document them for those who will follow and who will want to learn about the impact of the 2020 pandemic on Castine and the people who live here.