



Needless to say, since last August's Annual Meeting many challenges faced the Castine Historical Society as we pivoted to the new realities of running the Historical Society during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

We closed out the 2019 season in October with record attendance of 4,518 people who visited our exhibits and attended our programs. Our exhibit, *Risky Business: Square-Rigged Ships and Salted Fish* was immensely popular with our visitors, both local and from afar. Guest curator Richard M. Ames's book, *Risky Business: A Main Village Goes Global*, which accompanied the exhibit, was equally popular. Huge thanks to Richard; our exhibit designer, Cipperly Good; Curator Paige Lilley; and the Exhibits Committee for their hard work on this exhibit.

The cost and time of mounting an exhibit of this caliber meant that we intended the exhibit to be on view for 2020. However, after much deliberation this spring, we decided not to open the exhibits in 2020. However, we are in negotiations with art and object lenders to extend the exhibit for 2021 so more people can view this ground-breaking exhibit. In the meantime, Richard Ames created an excellent virtual tour of the exhibit you can see on our website at <https://www.castinehistoricalsociety.org/risky-business-square-rigged-ships-and-salted-fish/>.

I am not very good with remembering dates, but I think March 17th will stick in my mind for a long time. On this day the Historical Society staff began working remotely from our homes. Like all institutions and businesses, we were now confronted with a completely new workscape, one fraught with extremely difficult decisions.

I am very proud of how the Castine Historical Society handled the situation, including immediate communication with our membership about our most difficult decision, which was to postpone the 2020 House and Garden Tour until July 22, 2021. We formed a COVID-19 Response Committee that met remotely with me weekly to help guide us in decision making. In May, the committee moved into a more formal role as the Executive Committee of the board, and now meets bi-monthly.

The staff worked mostly from home until they returned to their offices in June. Our Office Manager, Angela Bonacasa went in twice a week to keep the membership program going, including sending requests and thank yous and updating the membership database.

She also kept the bill payment system going. On the days she worked from home, she worked on a new scanning and bar code system for our gift shop that we were poised to launch this year. Despite not being able to use it this year, she did the behind-the-scenes work so that next year we will be able to more efficiently process gift shop sales. In addition, Angela kept the website up to date with information on changes to our programs and exhibits for the 2020 season. Most importantly, she researched and created the online voting system we are using so our members can vote on the new slate for the Board of Directors.

Our Curator, Paige Lilly, also went in one to two days per week to work on collection's projects. (Staff came in on alternate days to maintain safety protocols). After it was decided to not open exhibits, Paige dived into creating two exciting new scripts for our expanded walking tour program that uncover the layers of Castine's history. We launched the tours on June 8th. Page was not only instrumental in creating the scripts but also helped train new and veteran walking tour guides. In addition, Paige launched a COVID-19 Collection project. Its goal is to document Castine during this time so that future researchers will be able to see how the town coped during the pandemic. Currently, she is back working on the photography collection project with our new intern, Darcy Stevens.

My work, especially in the early days of the pandemic, was learning how other museums are dealing with both the closures and the pandemic. I helped Paige develop the walking tours and also trained as a guide to fill in where needed or to conduct special tours. I have been working hard to keep the Historical Society in people's minds, especially by increasing our posts on social media.

In late May, like all people, we were horrified to learn of George Floyd's needless death. In case you did not see our response, I provide a copy here:

Our hearts have been heavy as we watched the events these last few weeks, which have again put front and center the long-standing issues of racial injustice and inequality in our country. Historical societies, like the Castine Historical Society, study and tell stories about the past to help people learn and apply the lessons to the present and future. However, we acknowledge that much of the history of oppression and marginalized communities has been left untold.

The Castine Historical Society needs to do better to bring out the stories of all marginalized people in our community, region, and state. To understand race-relevant history in Maine and the United States we encourage you to learn from these websites and publications.

- [Portland Freedom Trail](#)
- [Maine's Visible Black History](#)
- [Malaga Island, Fragmented Lives, an online exhibit from Maine State Museum](#)
- [Black History in Maine, a podcast from Maine Public Radio](#)
- [University of Southern Maine African American Collections](#)

- [The Atlantic Black Box Project: New England's Role in the Slave Trade](#)
- [The 1619 Project: A History of American Slavery](#)

As we move forward, the Historical Society is committed to finding ways it can preserve and teach the history of all people of color who lived and continue to live on Castine's peninsula through our exhibits, programs, research, and collecting practices. There is no quick solution to improving our representation of people of color, but as we move forward as an organization, we will look for meaningful ways to provide solutions.

I can say I'm proud how the Historical Society pivoted to safely provide historical content for our public through the walking tours. While we miss seeing everyone at our programs and events, we have much to look forward to in 2021 when, hopefully, we can again see our members in person. Until then, thank you for your continued support – now more than ever!