

societies

Canaan Historical Society reborn

The renaissance of the historical society was in response to residents in the town. Under a new director, ambitious fundraising plans are in the works.

By Jesse DeGroot

It's alive!

After a couple of years spent in hibernation, the Canaan Historical Society is experiencing an energized resurrection under the hands of a new administration.

Stunned by the death two years ago of Tammy Flaherty, the driving force behind the Society for years, things fell dormant until this past October 10, when an organizational meeting attended by 36 members was held at the 1829 Canaan Historical Society Meeting House on Warner Crossing Road. Lauree Hickok was elected president, Brenda Adams was chosen as treasurer, and Dodie Gearing selected secretary and museum curator. In addition, Gearing, who also serves as Town of Canaan historian, gave a presentation on the King's District 17th Militia and the Battles of Saratoga in 1777.

"Tammy was involved in the Historical Society since she was a kid," said her husband, Gary. "She put her whole life into it. It's really fantastic to see Lauree, Brenda, and Dodie step up and get things running again."

"This renaissance is largely a response to residents in town," said Brenda Adams, who, in addition to serving as Society treasurer, is currently Canaan town supervisor. "When I was going door-to-door running for supervisor, I heard from many town residents who said they loved the historical society, but that it seemed dormant." With the help of Gearing, the pair got the Society rolling again, subsequently enlisting Hickok as president.

Chartered in 1971

Provisionally chartered in 1963, the Society received its permanent charter in 1971. In its first year under the provisional charter, in a quirk of history, The Echo newspaper noted that the Society's board of directors was planning to meet on Friday, November 22. Let's go out on a limb and surmise that meeting didn't happen, for that was the day President John F. Kennedy was slain in Dallas.

It was also in 1963 that the Society received the deed to the former Presbyterian Church for use as its home. At the same time, a gift of \$125 was made for the repair of the window in the church loft. Officers that year were Mrs. Lawrence Dunton, president; Robert Wilson, first vice president; Archibald Ruether, second vice president; Mrs. John B. Mulligan, recording secretary; Mrs. William Stelling, corresponding secretary; and Franklin Gearing, treasurer.

Enthusiasm and experience

Hickok brings some serious enthusiasm and a wealth of experience following a career in not-for-profit work, as well as an attachment to Canaan, to her new post. Until the age of 13, she spent every summer on Queechy Lake, and now lives in the town. Until jumping in to assume the Society's reigns in early fall, she had been a life member. Several years ago, she and Anne Pearce managed the Canaan 250 House Tour – "I just love old houses," Hickok said.



New director
Lauree Hickok.

Canaan Boston
and Albany
train station.

The old kettle
spring along the
lake shore road.

Until two years ago, the Society had presented programs and operated its museum, when disaster struck. "Tammy's death shocked everyone. Nothing happened for a while, then came COVID-19," said Hickok, who plans to capitalize on the tremendous interest the Society, with its 200 life members, has generated in the past. "I think that membership speaks to real interest and caring. I am so thrilled to have such enthusiastic and great people to work with," she said.

Two months after the organizational meeting, Hickok reported that more than 20 people had signed up to work on a committee. "The membership committee has met several times and they're really digging in. They have oodles of work to do. The program committee is scheduled to meet. The building committee is working like mad because there is a hole in the roof. We have water pouring in – it's not good. We're in contact with a roofer and hope to get a temporary fix before winter," she said.

The cost of a full repair is estimated at around \$16,000, which does not include the cost of any plywood that may be needed, "so I'm thinking more like \$20-25,000," Hickok said. A community capital campaign kicks off in January to fix the roof and thus protect the Society's home and collection of artifacts and archives. "That's going to be real lift," she added.

Digitizing project

A long-term goal is to inventory and digitize the Society's rather extensive collection.

Always an organization big on presenting historical programs, the Society plans a return to that way of doing business next summer. A speaker on the career of Samuel Tilden, a demonstration of woodworking skill, and a talk with a B-29 pilot are among the presentations of the recent past.

"The reason I enjoy this work is because of the opportunity to reach out, meet new people and introduce them to the work of the Historical Society," Hickok said.

Membership information

"We are actively seeking new members and new volunteers. We have a new email account at CanaanHistoricalSociety@gmail.com and a new website at CanaanHistoricalSociety.org. People are banding together and eager. They're coming out of the woodwork. Please join us." ❧