



ANNUAL REPORT

(year ending October 2019)

It has been an exciting year at the Ridgefield Historical Society as we implement our new strategic plan. The continued focus on community outreach has broadened and deepened our impact on local and regional audiences. The direct result of this heightened visibility has brought us new members, partnerships, volunteers, and donors. This in turn has improved our ability to fulfill our mission to “serve the public by preserving, interpreting, and fostering knowledge of Ridgefield’s historical, cultural, and architectural heritage.”

Increased engagement with the community has dramatically affected the day-to-day workload of the Historical Society. We are experiencing growing pains and restructuring to accommodate our new, more active status in the community. Additional needs have been identified and we are striving to meet them thanks to an increased number of volunteers and board participation.



The Scott House

Marketing/Publicity

Perhaps the strongest facilitator of this increased engagement with the community has been our dynamic marketing/publicity department. During the past year, development and marketing consultant Kathryn Tufano, administrator Betsy Reid, and marketing and publicity chair Sally Sanders have created monthly schedules of press releases, email blasts (using the Constant Contact program), and Facebook posts to promote the organization. The website has also been regularly updated in a timely manner by webmaster Rick Pereira.

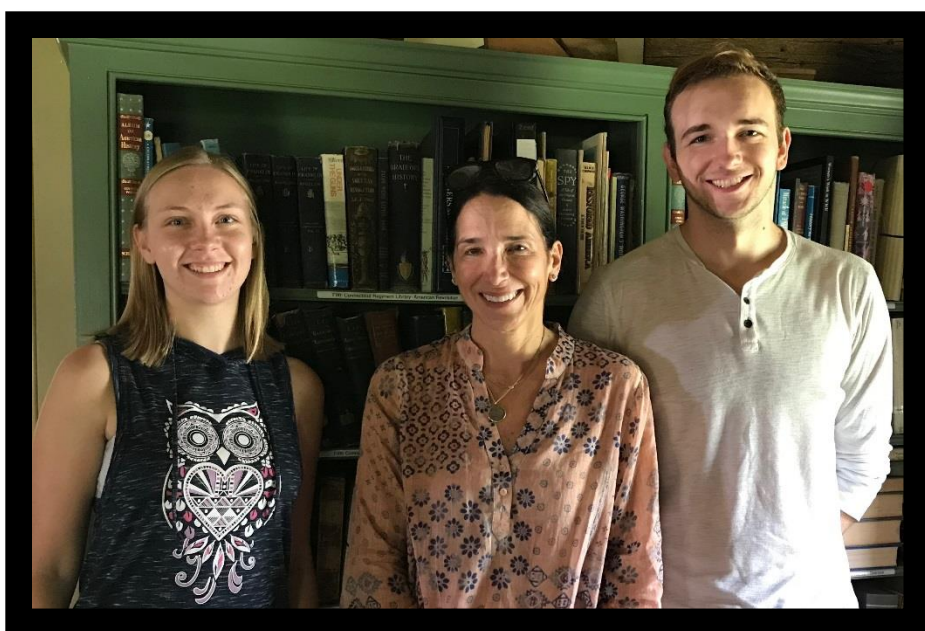
Our Constant Contact Year in Review (September to September) showed 48 campaigns with 23,101 emails sent. The average open rate was 39% (which is very high for a non-profit - 49% mobile, 54% desktop) and the average click-through rate was 9%. Our

Constant Contact list grew by 33% over the past year. We are continuing to increase our reach by accumulating email addresses from program participants and visitors to the Scott House and the Peter Parley Schoolhouse.

The social media roll-out of twice-weekly Facebook posts has brought increased engagement as well as allowed us to share all posts on the Old Ridgefield group with its 5,500-plus members. In addition, over 20 press releases have been sent year-to-date to a variety of outlets including The Ridgefield Press, Hamlet Hub, and the Ridgefield Patch, among others. Our quarterly Scott House Journal, which features the President's Message and upcoming events, adds some historical research to our publications, with topics based on materials in our collection. Portions of the Scott House Journal are republished as features in the Ridgefield Press.

Membership

Membership has grown over 33% from the previous year due to an increase in yearly membership campaigns with targeted follow-up. In FY19, two membership drives were implemented – one in the fall of 2018 and a second in the spring of 2019. While both were successful, the spring initiative included a letter campaign with email follow-up, which proved to be very effective.



Volunteers Savannah Kiss and Jake Seem flank Board member Tracy Seem

In September of 2019, the membership drive became more refined with four targeted solicitations sent by bulk mail to lapsed, current, not-yet members, and donors to the Annual Fund. Personalized letters were also sent to board contacts. In addition, a press release, a series of e-blasts, and personal email reminders were sent to promote the fall Membership Drive.

Member benefits have been enhanced for this year and now include priority registration and early access to ticket sales, an invitation to exclusive members-only events (the first to be held on November 2nd), and a Historical Society coaster as a token of our thanks.

General Contributions

In FY19, the Historical Society almost tripled its budgeted goal in general donations. Funds were received from a small pool of individual donors as well as through the

Society's first Annual Fund Campaign, which had a tremendous response. Many donations came from first-time contributors.



Ed Hynes lecture

Programming

This year we ran a wide array of interesting programming. In December 2018, the silhouette event attracted more than 50 people and pets. Debbie O'Connor magically created silhouettes of children, dogs and one stylish couple dressed in 1930's garb. The Program Committee recommended that it be a signature event. In January and February, we co-sponsored two events with the Ridgefield Library and Keeler Tavern as part of the Revisiting the Founding Era series - a panel

discussion and a lecture by Yale professor Akhil Amar. Each event attracted over 200 people.

A March tour to the John Jay homestead was attended by over 50 people. In April, the Casagrandes ran their famous "Battle of Ridgefield" walking tours. Ed Hynes did a well-received lecture on "The 1777 Danbury Raid and the Battle of Ridgefield" and we co-sponsored a silent film night at the Cannondale Grange. We joined the Ridgefield Arts Council and in April became a location on their Otocast application. In May, we hosted a neighbor's open house at the Peter Parley Schoolhouse.

This year, Connecticut Humanities selected the Ridgefield Historical Society to develop a pilot program for its new ConnTours application, which it funded as an in-kind donation. This GPS smartphone tour, "Revolutionary War Walking Tour" is now used by Connecticut Humanities to market the application to other communities throughout the state.

Over the summer, we also held a successful "Hands On History" Scott House open house, and arranged for author, Marty Podskoch, to do a lecture at the Library on "The 169 Club," and we had a table at the 87th Annual Cannon Grange Agricultural Fair & Exposition.

In September, we submitted our second walking tour, "The Baker, the Butcher, and the Candlestick Maker," a tour about the history of commerce in Ridgefield, to Connecticut Humanities and coordinated a special tour of the Lockwood-Mathews Museum and Suffrage Exhibit.

In October, Phil Esser ran a historic preservation program at the Library.

For the first time we have been able to get a head start on program planning for the coming year, most of which has already been contracted! It will be a big year with the 100th Anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment. We are working in collaboration with the Ridgefield Library, League of Women Voters of Ridgefield, Keeler Tavern and DAR and have scheduled over 14 programs. An 11-panel suffrage exhibit, “Votes for Women” is being created by the Ridgefield Historical Society and League of Women Voters of Ridgefield. This exhibit will be on view for month-long runs at the Library in March, Founders Hall in April, and Keeler Tavern in August. For the first time, we initiated writing a grant with the Ridgefield Library to the CT Humanities. We also developed a marketing plan for the series.



Peter Parley Schoolhouse

West Lane Schoolhouse

The schoolhouse is open to visitors on the last Sunday of the month between May and October. Those who attended were keenly interested in the history of the schoolhouse and of the town, the wall placards, the antique books, and the 1853 map. The children were entertained by playing with the antique toys, writing with chalk on the slate tablets, and ringing the bell. Many enjoyed viewing the video “Peter Parley Pays a Visit.” Cindi Emmert, a reenactor who demonstrated quill pen writing, and a local ice cream truck appeared at a few open houses. Most visitors stayed at least 45 minutes and many returned for a second visit bringing out-of-town visitors or members of their families.

Special programming at the schoolhouse included a “Halloween Party” where children decorated pumpkins and Martha Bishop told Halloween stories; a lecture, “The Schoolhouses of Ridgefield” by Jack Sanders; and “Peter Parley Meets Maurice Sendak” by Darla Shaw and Samantha Kulish.

The Ridgefield Garden Club did an outstanding job caring for the ornamental plantings and even weeded and planted new annuals on the island in front of the schoolhouse.

Field Trips

The Historical Society arranged two field trips this year – one to the John Jay Homestead in Katonah, NY, and the second to the Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum in Norwalk. We decided to take advantage of local history and have participants drive a short distance rather than provide a bus for transportation.

Exhibits

During the past year, Ridgefield Historical Society exhibits in Town Hall have included a display of “Books by Ridgefield Authors” and “Books About Ridgefield,” which together filled four cases on the upper and lower levels of the building. The books were from the collection of Jack and Sally Sanders and were accompanied by explanatory text and signs indicating Ridgefield Historical Society’s sponsorship. While the “Books by Ridgefield Authors” remained on exhibit in the lower level, in April, the main floor cases were cleared for a new exhibit, “Postal Ridgefield.” This presentation featured items from Jack Sanders’ collection including stamps, special cancellations, pieces of mail, and other material related to the history of mail delivery in Ridgefield as well as biographical information about many stamp designers and people featured on stamps who have called Ridgefield home.

In mid-August, the display cases were emptied again to provide space for the annual “Remembering September 11” exhibit, which Kay Ables of the Historical Society and the Town of Ridgefield coordinate. This will be on view through fall in the main floor display cases. On the lower level of Town Hall, an exhibit featuring the Vertaplane invented by Gerardus P. Herrick of High Ridge is awaiting installation. Kay Ables and Sally Sanders have prepared materials to give context to the installation of the Vertaplane wing-propeller prototype to be on permanent loan from the Historical Society at Town Hall.



Halloween at the Schoolhouse

Collections

The Collections Committee completed writing their Policies and Procedures. Now donations are received on a temporary basis until the Collections Committee decides what will be accepted into our permanent collection, and a log is kept of all transactions. This log can then be used by the archiving teams.

The Tuesday archiving team meets weekly to archive photographs. Each item is given a number. Then a cataloging sheet is filled out with information about the photo. In turn the photo and information is entered into our PastPerfect database. The Tuesday team has been working on three large projects for the last few months. There are over 500 digital photos that Jack Sanders has enhanced and donated. A second large collection of photos and postcards was donated by Francis Martin’s grandson. This was a mixed collection and items that are not photos are cataloged by the Thursday group. The third fairly large collection are photographs of the Beers family.

The Thursday archiving team worked on many projects including two main collections - the Francis Martin Collection which was completed and the Beers Collection which is being organized and cataloged.

It should also be noted that the Ridgefield Press closed its Ridgefield office and donated a substantial amount of material to the Ridgefield Historical Society. We received all the old hard copies of the Ridgefield Press dating back to the 1930's, nine file cabinets filled with press clippings, and a set of microfilm containing copies of old Ridgefield Press editions.

Historic Preservation

This year three major initiatives were taken in historic preservation:

We are pleased to announce the creation of The Arthur Warren Architectural Collection. The Society will house the architectural plans of significant Ridgefield structures. Special storage units have been purchased to house the collection.

In October, Phil Esser presented a lecture and led a discussion on “Ridgefield’s Rich Architectural History – What’s Here and How to Protect It.” The architectural PowerPoint presentation, at the Ridgefield Public Library, was well received and afterwards many civic leaders and residents participated in a lively discussion on how to maintain Ridgefield’s rich architectural heritage. At our request, representatives of the Ridgefield Historic District Commission, State Historic Preservation Office, and Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation were present. As a result of this program, discussions have taken place in town to promote Historic Preservation.

Representatives of the Ridgefield Historical Society have met with representatives of the Historic District Commission to explore how we can work together to promote historic preservation in Ridgefield. Dan O’Brien, head of the Historic District Commission, wrote a demolition delay ordinance which the Historical Society will support. The Society and Commission both wrote letters and appeared at the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting on September 24th asking them to stop the demolition of a home in the Titicus Historic District or at least modify the builders plans to be in keeping with the character of the historic district.



Debutante Susie Scott from the Society's archive

Technology

A number of improvements have been made. The latest PastPerfect 4.0 updates are implemented; the PP4 support license extended; new upload program to the online database installed; PP4 database was made available on a second local/license approved Scott House computer with user training. The latest Norton Security 360 anti-malware was installed on all Scott House computers. Auto backup storage was initiated both locally and remotely. Required hard file replacement with all application software was updated on the main workstation.

Genealogy

Genealogy services continue to investigate queries put forth by interested folks. Most requests come via the internet or telephone but occasionally a visitor will drop by in person.

Services include searching the Society's library holdings which include the vital records



Kay Ables and Dave Scott talk about the *Mysteries of the Scott House* at the first members-only event

indexes, early state census reports, and local family histories and genealogies. Often Town Hall records are looked at to verify vital records, burial reports, and occasionally land records. The Ridgefield Library has digitized newspapers that are referenced, if needed.

This meaningful service is valued and can provide interesting as well as elusive information recorded from many, many years ago.

Real Estate Liaison

Provided real estate MLS listing information and brochures for antique/historic houses with details from either the selling agents or the homeowners.

Buildings and Grounds

On-going maintenance at the Scott House included installing a remote spotlight to illuminate the rear entry doorway, repairing a section of the roof, and installing a "no parking" sign and the painting of parking-space lines in the parking lot. The roof has been evaluated and will be replaced. New organizational signage has been ordered.

At the Peter Parley Schoolhouse, an evaluation of the electrical service panel indicated it needs to be replaced. An electrical box was installed as well as a remote spotlight to illuminate the front entryway. An alarm system was installed by the town.

Grants

In the last year, the Historical Society has made wonderful progress by increasing the number of grants received for capital and programmatic initiatives. By the end of FY19, we had doubled our budgeted goal with grants from Fairfield County Bank, Wadsworth Lewis Trust, and the Ridgefield Thrift Shop. In addition, we received an in-kind donation from the CT Humanities to develop and pilot the first town-based walking tour in the State. To date in FY20, the Society is the proud recipient of a capital grant from the Anne S. Richardson Fund.

Plaque Program

The Historical Society has sold a number of plaques this year. Three of the orders included a membership to the Society.

Gift Shop

Our newly expanded gift shop includes prints, books, postcards, and now a \$2 sale bin which has been quite popular. An increasing number of people stop by for a tour and browse our gift shop which has resulted in an increase in sales over the past year.

Financial Report

The organizational budget increased by 38% this year with an increase in both revenue and expenses. The Historical Society ended the year with a small surplus.

Growth in assets remain stable.

We've changed some of our investments from Certificates of

Deposit to an Infinex investment of five different funds. This should provide the necessary growth required for future activities.

Conclusion

In summary, it has been an extraordinary year for the Ridgefield Historical Society. Our budget is reflective of our vast expansion into the community. Over the last year the budget increased 38%, both in revenue and expenses. The Ridgefield Historical Society dramatically expanded its outreach into the community and forged new partnerships with statewide organizations such as CT Humanities and the CT Preservation Trust. It offered outstanding programs and increased membership. A record number of donations and grants were received. With this increased momentum, we are more capable than ever to meet the community's needs and preserve "Ridgefield's historical, cultural, and architectural heritage."



Votes for Women team (Historical Society, Ridgefield Library, Keeler Tavern Museum & History Center, League of Women Voters of Ridgefield, and DAR)