

History Project Meeting – Meeting Notes

Monday, June. 8, 2009, 5:30 p.m.

at Chelmsford Public Library

In attendance:

Brian Herzog, Library

Jill Hayes, Library

Fred Merriam, Historical Commission

Charlie Zisch

Madeline Needles, Friends of the Library

Bill Gerber, Middlesex Canal Association

Marsha Brown, West Chelmsford Methodist Church

Paul Windt, Unitarian Church

Villu Tari, Chelmsford Telemedia

Deb Taverna, Garrison House

Regenia Jackson, Veterans Agency

Overview of Project

The goal of the project is to make available as much information relating to the history of Chelmsford as possible, in a format that is easy to use and protects the original documents from overuse. In the long-term, this will (hopefully) mean digitizing these documents and artifacts to make them available online. However, since this will take a great deal of time, money and expertise, we will plan to do this later and apply for grants to accomplish it.

In the meantime, and to prepare for grant applications, we'll create an index of the historical records in town. Library staff and volunteers will visit the smaller groups in town to survey their materials, and larger groups like the Historical Society and Historical Commission have already begun their own inventories. By getting a searchable records index online, at least researchers will know which groups to contact for different types of documents and artifacts.

Searchable Index

We decided to use the PastPerfect software (<http://www.museumsoftware.com>) to manage the records index. This is because the Historical Society and Historical Commission are already using this software, and because it has an online component that will provide the searchable index we're looking for (the Maine Historical Society is a good example: <http://mainehistory.pastperfect-online.com/>). The library will purchase a copy of the software, and the records from the groups in town can be entered directly into its database.

Fred called their tech support line and found that it will not run on a Mac operating system, but will if a Windows OS is installed.

Until this gets going, Brian created a temporary website to be the focus of the project, which is at <http://www.chelmsfordhistory.org>. There is a Google Custom Search Engine to search the websites and online resources of town historical groups, a listing of the groups in town, and additional resources that may be of interest to historical researchers. This website is a work in progress, so please contact Brian (bherzog@mvlc.org or 978-256-5521 x211) if you have any suggestions or comments.

Collections of Groups

Next, each group present gave an overview of their historical resources:

Middlesex Canal Association

Most records are at the Morgan (?) Center. There are a few resources also stored at the museum. The collection contains newsletters (most are online), photo collections (not online), and glass slides dating back to the 1920's and 1930's. It is suggested that we scan or photograph these slides.

Chelmsford Telemedia

Archives (which were previously scattered around Chelmsford High School) have been collected and are stored at Parker Middle School. Much of this dates back to the 1970's (3 quarter inch cassettes). Also, a donated private collection contains footage of Chelmsford and neighboring communities (Lowell, Billerica, Concord) from the 1920s and 30's taken on a 60 milliliter camcorder. Example: Fourth of July Parade from the 1920s.

West Chelmsford Methodist

Archives, which were gathered for the 350th anniversary of Chelmsford, are scattered, stored in closets at the church and people's homes. The collection contains photos, scrapbooks, artifacts, newsletters, baptisms, funerals, finance records, women's society records, etc.

Unitarian Universalist Church

Archives are stored in the church in 2 four-drawer filing cabinets, 1 closet, 1 armoire and 1 safe and include few artifacts (pews and broadcasting equipment.) The collection is "quasi- organized," and has no index or finding aid. Contains some documents dating back to the mid-1700s.

Garrison House

Archives are scattered, and the collection is made up mostly of artifacts.

Veterans Agency

The boxes stored in Regina Jackson's office are still too current to be of use. There are also 20-30 boxes stored in the Old Town Offices dating back from the Civil War. The Veterans Office is look up legalities and trying to determine what information is safe to share and what information may impact veterans who are still living.

Scheduling Site Visits

In order to start building the records index, we talked about scheduling site visits. During a site visit, library staff and volunteers will visit and organizations and begin to record their historical items. Brian showed the Collection Inventory Survey form we expect to use (attached), which will hopefully identify records to the point that researchers and organizations will be able to understand and locate them.

The library will be the first organization surveyed, which will start in July. After that, Telemedia might be the next site, and the West Chelmsford Methodist Church said it might be ready by October. Also, the library will contact the school department, as much of their historical collection has been organized and indexed.

Speaker: Peter Parker

Following the meeting, Peter Parker of the Inlook Group delivered a presentation called "Collecting Local History: A Collaborative Venture." There was a lot of good information from his program, and his handouts are available at the library (contact Brian). Here're just a few notes I took during his talk:

- create a Chelmsford Timeline: document the history of the area and town with significant dates and changes, as an overview and framework of town history

- to establish a local history project as a legitimate entity with itself, researchers and town government, there should be a mission statement to clarify the intent and scope of the project. There should also be an elected Board or Chairpersons, to act as primary contact and liaisons.
- formal policies should also be created, such as a donation policy (especially concerning ownership and copyrights), a collections policy (so that organizations are cooperating instead of competing), a use policy (so there are limits on how historical records can and should be used), etc.

Next Meeting

We'll tentatively schedule the next History Project meeting for the fall. By then, we should have a few of the site surveys completed, and will have a report on how they are progressing. Also at that meeting, perhaps we could establish a mission statement for the project.

I'll be keeping in touch with everyone by email over the summer, to keep you posted on how things are going. If you have any questions or suggestions at any time, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thanks as always for your interest and participation in the project.

Brian Herzog
Head of Reference
Chelmsford Public Library