



MANSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 52, No. 2

September 2016

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Summer is transitioning into another New England autumn as the days get shorter once again. Our museum season is also drawing to a close. Due to the Condition Assessment Survey work that was in process this summer, our display space was limited to the front room of the main building and the showcases outside of the library/office area. The museum opened on June 4 with two new exhibits – one that highlighted the life and career of builder Edwin Fitch of Mansfield and another that featured photographs of the McDaniels farm on Wormwood Hill Road. The exhibits will be open through Sunday September 25.

I am happy to let our members know that the Mansfield Historical Society and the Town of Mansfield have now signed a new twenty year lease for both museum buildings. Attorney Stephen Bacon did an outstanding job assisting the Mansfield Historical Society in this process and thanks go out to Town Manager Matthew Hart, Director of Facilities Allen Corson, the Mansfield Town Council and the Mansfield Historical Society Board for their efforts in resolving this long standing issue. You may also have noted the improved curb appeal due to the new asphalt driveway that was installed this summer.

Two free workshops were also offered this summer. On Saturday, July 16th, Dick Roberts and I presented a program on the genealogical information available on free and pay websites. Most attendees brought their own laptops and were able to access some of the website resources. Bruce Clouette also hosted an informative program on how to research an old house on Saturday, August 20th. He provided valuable tips on utilizing historic maps, deed records, probate records, and other sources of information. The audience was largely comprised of historic house owners who shared their own research journeys.

(Continued on the next page)

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Friday, September 30, 6:00 p.m.: ANNUAL MEETING - DINNER AND PROGRAM

Storyteller Gwendolyn Quezaire-Presutti will portray Harriet Tubman in a one-woman living history performance entitled "I Can't Die But Once." This event will be held at the First Church in Christ (Congregational) in Mansfield Center. Reservation forms for the dinner are included in this newsletter.

Thursday, October 6, 7:00 p.m.: SPECIAL PROGRAM, co-sponsored with the Coventry Historical Society and the Windham Historical Society

The East Haddam Stage Company will present a live-action 'radio' drama, "Sherlock Holmes and the Adventures of the Speckled Band." It features William Gillette's actual 1930 radio script. The program will be held in the Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library (54 Warrentown Road).

Friday, November 18, 7:00 p.m.: NOVEMBER MEETING AND PROGRAM

Historian William Hosley will speak on "Why Local History Matters." Details will follow in the next newsletter.

(President's Corner continued)

I would like to recognize Anne Bennett and John Meyers who have left the Mansfield Historical Society Board. Anne served two terms as Secretary and then served as Vice President; her efforts to modernize the office environment and upgrade computer equipment and software helped move us into the future. John was President of MHS for two terms and has served in the Past President position for four years; I benefitted from his experience when I became President.

This past year our volunteers really stepped forward as much of our collections in the attics of both buildings had to be packed and then moved to the Old Town Hall to facilitate the Condition Assessment Survey. The basements also required a lot of labor to move items away from walls and to sort materials destined for the town transfer station.

In June, the team of specialists from Nelson Edwards Architects, Inc. and GNCB Consulting Engineers, Inc. thoroughly examined the museum buildings. A number of structural issues, areas of water infiltration and other problems were identified. The draft document of the Condition Assessment Survey has been recently received by both the Mansfield Historical Society and the Town of Mansfield. Although the Mansfield Historical Society Board has done a preliminary review of the document, it is quite comprehensive and the report is almost two hundred pages. A Building Committee has been established to do an in depth review and there will be further discussions with the Town of Mansfield to determine priorities and available sources of funding.

Please join us for our upcoming fall programs, beginning with our annual meeting and dinner on Friday, September 30. The full details follow.

Should you have any suggestions for the Historical Society and its museum, please contact Ann Galonska or me via mail, phone (860-429-6575) or e-mail (mansfield.historical@snet.net).

Keith Wilson, President

ANNUAL MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 30

Our annual dinner meeting will be held on Friday, September 30, at the First Church of Christ, Congregational in Mansfield Center (intersection of Rtes. 89 and 195).

Following dinner and a brief business meeting, storyteller Gwendolyn Quezaire-Presutti will bring to life Harriet Tubman, a former slave and abolitionist who helped many other slaves escape to freedom. Ms. Quezaire-Presutti's performance, "I Can't Die

But Once," will focus on Tubman's service during the Civil War. In fact, one of the most daring and effective spies during the Civil War was none other than Harriet Tubman.



*Harriet Tubman, c. 1885
Artist: H. Seymour Squyer
National Portrait Gallery*

During the presentation, Harriet Tubman weaves a tale of truth, pain, courage and determination that take the audience into her life – born enslaved, her eventual escape, and then her service as an armed scout and spy for the Union cause.

Tubman had a unique talent for blending in that enabled her to repeatedly evade capture behind enemy lines. She was the first woman to lead an armed expedition during the war. She

guided the raid at Combahee Ferry, which liberated more than 700 slaves.

In her later years Harriet Tubman became an active promoter of the cause of women's suffrage. Her courage and leadership throughout her life has inspired generations of African Americans struggling for equality and civil rights.

Last April, Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew announced that Harriet Tubman's portrait would replace that of President Andrew Jackson on the redesigned twenty dollar bill. Following Ms. Quezaire-Presutti's performance you will have a better understanding of why Harriet Tubman was chosen for this honor. The first of the new \$20 bills will appear in 2020, the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment that gave women the right to vote.

About our presenter: Since tutelage under Attorney and Professor Lloyd Barbee at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Gwendolyn Quezaire-Presutti has been a committed scholar of African American Studies, in particular Women of Color. Embracing her passion, she began Historical Performing in 1997 at The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures as an Educational Interpreter.

Moving to Connecticut in the fall of 2001, Gwendolyn brought her love of storytelling and passion for history with her. She has performed throughout New England as well as across the United

States. Her programs introduce an array of untapped accessible history that celebrate the rich diversity, ambitions, and heroism of African-American women in the face of racism and violence.

In recognition of the quality and range of her work, she has received a number of awards and distinctions, including The Institute of Texan Cultures Director's Award for Excellence, The Greater Hartford Arts Council & the Boston Fund Individual Artist Fellowship and the 1st place International Toastmaster (Interpretive Reading) Award. She was also crowned Ms. Senior Connecticut America in 2010.

We hope you will join us on September 30 for this inspiring educational program.

RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR THE DINNER. Please send in the enclosed reservation form or call the museum (860-429-6575) by **September 24** to reserve your spot.

Those who wish to attend the program only should arrive by 7:30 p.m. There will be an admission fee at the door of \$5.00 for MHS members and students or \$7.00/non-members for those who are not attending the dinner.

SHERLOCK HOLMES COMES TO MANSFIELD

On Thursday, October 6, we are joining with the Coventry Historical Society and the Windham Historical Society to bring you a unique theatrical experience. The East Haddam Stage Company will recreate the 1930 radio drama, "Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Speckled Band," utilizing William Gillette's original script. The performance will include sound effects, audience participation and four actors portraying seven characters.

Producing Artistic Director Kandie Carle will introduce the show with a retrospective on Connecticut's own Victorian superstar actor William Gillette (1853-1937) and his creation of the quintessential Sherlock Holmes. Gillette portrayed the detective on stage more than 1,300 times over thirty years. He also starred in the silent motion picture based on his Holmes play and voiced the character twice on radio. Today his home in East Haddam, Gillette Castle, is a major tourist attraction.

The radio drama, "Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Speckled Band," debuted on October 20, 1930, with William Gillette voicing the title role. It became the pilot of a new radio series.

After Gillette, Richard Gordon took over the role for the remaining 34 programs.

Please join us on October 6, 7:00 p.m. when the East Haddam Stage Company will recreate the popular radio drama. It will be a fun event, giving the audience a behind the scenes view of how a radio show was produced in the 1930s. The program will be held at the Buchanan Auditorium at the Mansfield Public Library. Admission is \$8/person.



The East Haddam Stage Company performing William Gillette's Sherlock Holmes radio drama

THERE'S STILL TIME! THE MUSEUM IS OPEN THROUGH SEPTEMBER 25

If you have not already done so, we urge you to visit the museum before it closes for the season on Sunday, September 25. The museum and library are open on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, 1:30 – 4:30 p.m. There are two interesting new exhibits to see.

One exhibit provides an overview of the career of Edwin S. Fitch, a master builder-architect active in the 1830s through the 1860s. The Society is fortunate to have seven of Fitch's business ledgers in its collection. The best known example of Fitch's work is the grand home that he built for his bride in 1836. The landmark house in Mansfield Center introduced the Greek Revival style to the area. Fitch also built several churches, mills, commercial buildings and numerous dwellings throughout northeastern Connecticut. Student interns, Helen Stec and Madison Savage, located many of the surviving structures built by Fitch and photographed them for this exhibit. The interns also researched, designed and assembled the display.

The second exhibit features a series of silver images, entitled "Claude's Place," made by noted photographer James S. Klar. These photographs were taken in 1978-1980 at the Wormwood Hill farm then owned by Claude McDaniels. An adjunct to this display shows the ongoing restoration of the McDaniels house by its current owner Greg Cichowski. David Landry photographed the restoration work in progress and Greg provided some of his own photographs to document his work.

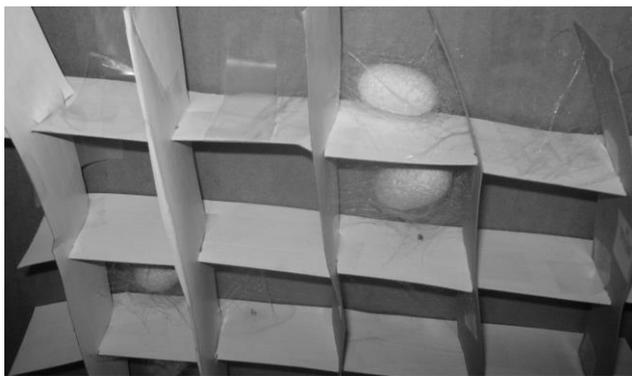
Live silkworms also returned to the museum this summer. Ann Galonska raised a crop of them for a presentation at the Windham Textile and History Museum in late June. The silkworms and later silk moths were then on view at our museum through the end of July.

In other news, we continued to benefit from volunteer help over the summer. Daniel Allie has now been working in our archives for a full year. He is currently sorting through a large collection of Merrow family materials recently received from George and Libby Merrow.

Local students Simone and Ruby Landry and Madison and Ryan Dunstan also volunteered during the summer. They helped with outside maintenance work in the gardens and yard. They also built a cocoonery for the silkworms out of egg cartons, paper towel rolls and strips of cardboard. The silkworms happily made their cocoons in the compartments they provided for them.



*Above: Silkworms feasting on mulberry leaves
Below: Some of the cocoons spun by the silkworms*



The student volunteers also helped carry some of the lighter boxes of artifacts back to the attic of the stone building. Unfortunately that project is now on hold.

The condition assessment report has advised that certain repairs need to be made before artifacts can be safely returned to storage. We had hoped to move

the collections back into the attic storage areas this fall. Now it appears likely that those plans may be delayed for some time.

In the interim we will investigate the possible use of other display spaces within the community and perhaps the creation of online exhibits. We will refocus our energies on public outreach and find new ways to bring our resources to the community.

Ann Galonska, Museum Director

OUR MEMBERSHIP BASE: VITAL TO MHS'S HEALTH AND SUCCESS

For a full year now, I have been orienting myself to the membership files, entering data and generating useful reports. I have been getting to know our members better, and setting in motion a consistent schedule of membership communication to:

1. Improve the percentage of dues paying members who renew in a timely way.
2. Provide a volunteer system where members' interests, gifts and talents are known, staff and Board members can access workgroups in timely ways, and tasks important to the vitality of MHS can be completed in fun and rewarding ways.
3. Implement a systematic new-member recruitment plan focused specifically on our diverse and fluid town profile, using new and traditional media in effective ways and drawing from the non-profit literature on strategies for success.

I invite your input on these goals, ways we can meet them in general, and the ways YOU wish to contribute personally. Together we can strengthen the membership base at MHS.

Renewal notices for the MHS 2017 year starting in January will be mailed out by the end of October 2016 and will include information on a new 2017 Member-Get-A-Member campaign as a part of our new member recruitment initiative.

We encourage you to pay your dues promptly and no later than January 1st, so membership data for budget planning, grant proposals and town collaboration in 2017 will be based on an accurate and robust membership profile. Please participate in our interest survey AND commit to at least one action related to our new member recruitment plan.

Renewal notices sent will include person specific data about your current status. A second notice will be mailed by the end of March giving another opportunity to pay dues for the 2017 year.

YOU can help us meet these goals. Feel free to contact Pam Roberts and share in the challenge.

Respond promptly to your renewal notice and interest survey, and participate in the Member-Get-A-Member campaign. Call 860-428-2406 or Email: drpampt@gmail.com with any questions. **A strong, supportive membership is vital to MHS.**

Pamela Roberts, Membership Chair

LOOKING BACK: THE HISTORY OF OUR MUSEUM BUILDINGS

In conjunction with the condition assessment study of the old Town Hall and the former Town Office Building that the Mansfield Historical Society now occupies, we have also reviewed their history.

In her book, *Listen to the Echoes: The Early History of Spring Hill, Mansfield, Connecticut*, Roberta Smith details the origin of the old Town Hall. "During Mansfield's formative years, town meetings were held in the homes of various prominent settlers. Later on, the meeting houses were used. The early Ecclesiastical Societies controlled not only the religious life of the people but also much of the educational and political life of the rural communities." On November 10, 1800, it was voted to hold 'the Freemans and Town Meetings' alternately in the meeting houses of the First Society (now Mansfield Center) and the Second Society (North Mansfield, now Storrs).

As the town grew, so did its need for a town house – a dedicated building for town meetings and for conducting town business. Construction of a town house was first proposed at a town meeting on December 3, 1838. Then followed several years of controversy over where to locate the proposed town house and how to pay for its construction.

Finally, in October 1841, a site on Spring Hill was selected for the new Town House, presumably because of its centralized location. The following August, a tax of four cents on the dollar was levied on the Grand List to defray the cost of its construction. Elijah C. Moulton of Chaplin was engaged as the builder and he received \$800 for his services.

The new Town House, later known as the Town Hall, was completed in the summer of 1843. Mansfield voters met there for the first time on September 4, 1843 and for the next 128 years the Town's annual meetings and special meetings were held there. The building also served the community as a venue for social events such as dances, concerts and other entertainments.

Early in the 20th century, a section to the left of the Town Hall's front entry was partitioned off to create an office for the Town Clerk. The town's vital records and land records were stored there in a safe

that was purchased for this purpose in 1918. Most other town business, however, was still conducted from the homes of various officers. This arrangement became progressively less satisfactory over time.



The Town Hall as it appeared prior to the construction of the Town Office Building

By 1930, the nearly century-old Town Hall was showing its age. The old wooden structure, described as "ramshackle," had become a fire hazard and a risky depository for the Town's valuable records. Mansfield had a pressing need for new town office building that would provide both a central place for offices and a safer location for its important records. However the nation was in the midst of the Great Depression and undertaking such an expensive project seemed impossible.

Hope for a town office building was rekindled with the establishment of federal aid programs under the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Known collectively as "The New Deal," these new programs were designed to improve the economy and put the unemployed back to work.

Shortly after Roosevelt took office in 1933, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was created. This agency provided loans and grants to states for the operation of relief programs and for works programs to hire the unemployed.

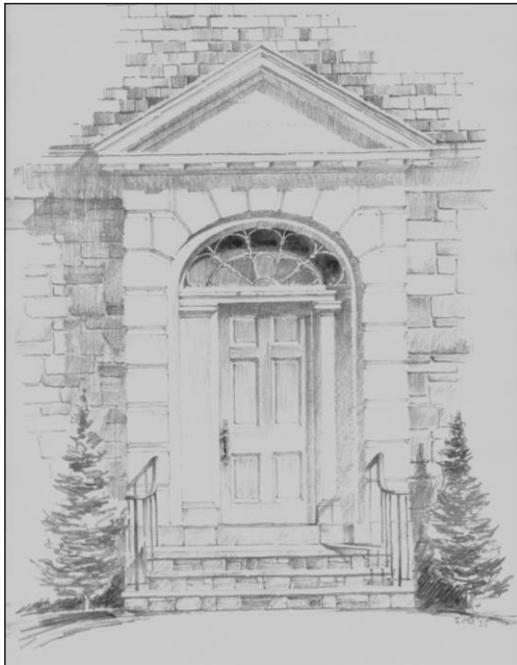
In 1935, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration was dissolved and its work was then taken over by two new federal agencies, the Works Progress Administration and the Social Security Administration.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) funded national, state and local public works projects. It hired the unemployed directly and became the largest of all public works programs. Its goal was to employ most of the unemployed people on relief until the economy recovered. This massive public works program improved the nation's infrastructure through the construction of highways, roads and bridges and funded countless public buildings. Almost every community has a town hall, library, school or park that was funded by the WPA. Renamed the Work

Projects Administration in 1939, its public works program continued until 1943 when pre-war production essentially ended unemployment.

In the fall of 1934, the Town of Mansfield applied to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration for a grant to build a new town office building. At a meeting of Mansfield's Board of Finance on October 16, 1934, first selectman Daniel C. Flaherty reported that "it appeared likely federal funds would be available for the payment of all labor costs and a large part of the cost of material for a Town Office Building. He pointed out that this project would furnish work for residents of the town who would soon be in need of town aid and that the project, if undertaken, would relieve the town budget to a considerable extent" (Town Meeting Records).

The project was approved on October 31, 1934 and the architectural firm Perry & Bishop of New Britain was engaged to design the Town Office Building. They designed an attractive one-story colonial revival edifice with a fieldstone exterior. The interior featured office spaces for the town officials and a fireproof vault for the town records.



Design of the front entrance to the Town Office Building by Delbert I. Perry and Earle K. Bishop

Work commenced on November 22, 1934. The Annual Report of the Officers of the Town of Mansfield, for the year ending September 17, 1935, lists 42 men on the payroll for the construction project. The workers' pay ranged from \$2.75 to \$63.00 depending on the length of their service; the total payroll was \$889.65.

The report also shows that the architects were paid \$255 for their design work. Surprisingly, one of the most expensive features of the new building was the heavy vault door which came from a bank in Danielson. It cost \$182.40, including installation.

The Town subsequently applied for FERA funds to renovate the Town Hall building as well. This project was approved on January 3, 1935. Work began almost immediately on the excavation and building of a new foundation directly behind the old building. When it was completed, the Town Hall was moved from its original location and placed atop the new foundation. The interior was then renovated and new lighting and heating systems were installed. The Town Hall project was completed in November 1935. The total project cost was \$3,261.18, with \$3,108.45 from FERA funds. The cost to the Town was just \$152.73!

Meanwhile, construction of the new Town Office Building continued on. When the project was transferred to the Works Progress Administration on November 4, 1935, it was 60% complete. A report filed with the WPA on September 15, 1936 states that the project was completed in May at a cost of \$7,070, of which \$5,430 was granted from federal funds.

However the Project Register, now held in the Society's collection, shows different figures. It records project expenses through November 27, 1935 totaling \$8,251.92, with \$3,791.15 covered by FERA funds. Penciled notes indicate a final grand total of \$9,709.19 in expenses and an additional grant of \$1,455.27 from the WPA. Thus the correct project cost remains unclear. Nevertheless, an inventory of Town Property in the Annual Report for 1936 shows the new Town Office Building valued at \$10,000 and the renovated Town Hall at \$3,000.

The 1936 project report filed with the WPA states that the new Town Office Building "is very pleasing to the eye and has the unanimous approval of every citizen in the community." In fact, the Town was so proud of its new municipal building that its image was incorporated in the Town's official seal, still used today. The report concludes, "There is no doubt but that without the aid of the federal government the town of Mansfield would never have been able to build [this] new edifice."

Do you have any photographs showing the construction of the Town Office Building or the moving of the old Town Hall? We would be very interested in scanning them and adding them to our collection. Please contact the museum at 860-429-6575 or email mansfield.historical@snet.net.

Following the completion of the Town Office Building and the renovation of the Town Hall, further alterations were made to the two buildings. Sometime during World War II or during the subsequent Cold War years, a plane spotting tower was constructed on top of the Town Hall building. The Town Office Building served as the town's Civil Defense Headquarters during these years.

Mansfield's population grew rapidly with the post-World War II baby boom. The growth of the University of Connecticut and the Mansfield Training School also brought many new residents to town. By the 1950s the Town Hall could no longer accommodate the crowds that gathered to discuss important town issues. Meetings about the construction of new schools were especially contentious and crowded. Town meetings often had to be adjourned and moved to a larger venue, usually the Hawley Armory on campus. At the town meeting on March 15, 1971, it was voted: "that town meetings may be held in locations other than the Town Hall, which is 127 years old."

Likewise, the 1935 Town Office Building was quickly outgrown. By the 1950s there was already a need for more office space and the narrow 8' deep vault was no longer adequate for housing the town records. A large addition was added to the rear of the building in 1957. The new addition provided a much larger vault (now our office and library) and more office space. However the addition only temporarily relieved the space issues.

By the 1970s it was clear that larger quarters were needed for conducting town business. In 1977, voters approved plans to renovate the old Storrs

Grammar School and transform it into a new municipal building. The town offices moved into the new municipal building at the end of the 1970s. It was named after the late Senator Audrey Beck in 1984.

In 1980 the Mansfield Historical Society moved its headquarters and museum from the old Eagleville schoolhouse to the vacant Town Office Building. The Old Town Hall was added to its museum complex in 1986. The buildings are still owned by the Town and are leased to the Society under a long-term lease arrangement.

Today the Old Town Hall and the former Town Office Building are 173 and 81 years old respectively. Age and Mother Nature have taken their toll. Water infiltration from the roof systems and poor site drainage conditions have caused the most damage.

The condition assessment study, made possible by a grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and matching funds from the Town of Mansfield, has identified the many issues that threaten the buildings. It has also provided a prioritized list of needed repairs and their estimated costs. As we study the draft of the condition assessment report, one thing is immediately clear. It will cost much, much more to repair the buildings than it did to construct them!

RESERVATION FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING & DINNER
Friday, September 30, 2016

Please reserve _____ places for dinner. Enclosed is a check made out to "Mansfield Historical Society" in the amount of \$_____ at \$18.00 per person. (The amount includes the \$5.00 admission fee to the program.)

Entrée Choice: Salmon_____ or Vegetarian_____
The meal also includes appetizers, side dishes, bread and dessert.

Name(s): _____

Phone #: _____ **Email:** _____

RESERVATION DEADLINE is September 24, 2016

Please send your reservation form and check to Mansfield Historical Society, PO Box 145, Storrs Mansfield, CT 06268.

Mansfield Historical Society
P. O. Box 145
Storrs Mansfield, CT 06268-0145

Web site: www.mansfieldct-history.org
E-mail: mansfield.historical@snet.net

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**UPCOMING EVENTS: Sept. 30 – Annual Meeting Oct. 6 – Re-enactment of Sherlock Holmes radio drama
Nov. 18 – November Meeting & Program**

We especially want to recognize the following people who helped make this year’s museum season a success. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

- Helen Stec, Madison Savage, David Landry, Greg Cichowski and Ann Galonska who prepared the exhibits.
- Richard Roberts and Keith Wilson who presented the Online Genealogy Workshop; and Bruce Clouette who presented the Old House Research Workshop. Thank you also to Pam Roberts and Donna Clouette for providing the refreshments at these events.
- Rudy Favretti and Richard Schimmelpfeng who hosted at the museum when Ann Galonska was not available.
- Our volunteers, Daniel Allie, Simone and Ruby Landry, and Madison and Ryan Dunstan who assisted with various projects over the summer.
- Members of the Garden Gate Club for their work in maintaining our garden and landscape plantings.

HELP NEEDED: Do we have any members with background or interest in:

- **Investment Management** to serve on our Finance Committee?
- **Organizing hospitality volunteers** for program and meeting refreshments?
- **Participating in specific leadership tasks necessary for our vitality?**
- **Researching, writing or proof reading** to assist leadership in creating grant applications necessary for collaborative town efforts to repair and maintain our leased historic buildings?

Simply chat with Membership Committee Chair, Pam Roberts about opportunities to contribute and we will get you “linked into participation.” Call 860-428-2406 or Email: drpampt@gmail.com. With a pool of volunteers, we can meet time sensitive tasks identifying participation based on your time and talents. A full list of interests and talents will be in the survey distributed with dues notices in October 2016.