**The Colonial Society of Massachusetts**

Minutes of the 132nd Annual Meeting of the Membership

Held at

87 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston

 21 November 2024

President Robert Allison called the meeting to order at 6.00 P.M. He welcomed members present, and apologized to members tuning into the live stream that the audio was not working.

The reading of the minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting was waived.

**1. Report of the Membership Committee**. Susan Lively, Chair, on behalf of the Membership Committee, Nonie Gadsden, Sally Hadden, and JonPaul McBride, extended a particularly warm welcome to members attending the annual meeting for the first time.

 She requested that members stand and observe a moment of silence to remember the members of the Colonial Society whom we lost this year:

Peter Haack (April 19, 2024)

Henry Lee (August 12, 2024)

Patrick Leehey (June 15, 2024)

Harvey Steinberg (July 23, 2024)

Louis Leonard Tucker (March 18, 2024)

Alden Vaughan (March 19, 2024)

She then recognized those members who have been part of the Colonial Society for fifty years or more, some of whom were in attendance:

James Bell (1973)

Richard Bushman (1969)

Cary Carson (1968)

Lawrence Coolidge (1968)

Jonathan Fairbanks (1971)

David Hall (1971)

Elton Hall (1973)

Barbara Lambert (1974)

Nathaniel Shipton (1974)

Roger Stoddard (1966)

Bryant F. Tolles (1972)

Norman Tucker (1970)

Gordon Wood (1966)

L. Kinvin Wroth (1963)

Hiller Zobel (1970)

**2. Report of the Treasurer.** Thomas Appleton reported for Amory Loring Logan, Treasurer.

**Voted:** To accept the Treasurer’s report. Approved unanimously.

**3. Report of the Curator.** Meghan Gelardi Holmes’s report is appended.

**4. Report of the Editor of Publications**. Sally Hadden’s report is appended.

**5. Presentation of the John Winthrop Prize.** The prize was presented to Adrian Chastain Weimer for her book, *A Constitutional Culture: New England and the Struggle Against Arbitrary Rule in the Restoration Empire*. John Winthrop, the Prize sponsor, was on hand for the presentation, which the President made on behalf of the Winthrop Prize committee, chaired by Francis Bremer, with Cornelia Dayton, David Hall, Meredith Neumann,  and Alden Vaughan. Professor Weimer, a Member of the Society, had spoken at our February Stated meeting, so limited her remarks to a heartfelt “Thank you.”

**6. Report of the President.** Robert J. Allison’s report is appended.

**7. Report of the Nominating Committee**. Rose Doherty, Chair, presented the slate on behalf of the committee. She thanked fellow committee members Robert Bellinger and Christopher Parsons.

President Robert Allison

Vice Presidents Dan Coquillette, Susan Lively, Rashaun Martin, Celeste Walker

Secretary Leslie A. Morris

Treasurer Amory Loring Logan

Member of Council,

 3-year term Kenneth Turino (2027)

Continuing members of

 Council Jessica Parr (2025), Gorman Lee (2026)

There were no nominations from the floor. Rose moved the slate of officers and councilor.

**Voted:** To approve the slate as read. Approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 6.40 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie A. Morris

Secretary

**Report of the Curator.** Meghan Gelardi Holmes

Good evening, everyone. It’s my pleasure to report to you on the house and the collections. I have three projects I’d like to highlight tonight, all of which have taken some time to come to fruition. Many times, my predecessor, Toby Hall has quoted Walter Whitehill to me, who often commented about a project that it would happen “in the fullness of time.” A useful mantra, for sure. Institutions set their own pace, after all, and what a good reminder that deliberation and patience can pay off.

When you entered the building tonight, you may have noticed some in-progress work in the front vestibule. Back in 2015, the house experienced some ice dams during that extremely snowy winter which caused a whole bunch of interior and exterior damage. The exterior damage was a priority and was dealt with in short order. The interior damage – mainly water damage to the paint around the front door – required more thinking, and was part of a cascade of necessary repairs –refinishing the front door, stripping and repainting, and new flooring. The House Committee has been working on elements of this project since 2020 – wanting to get it just right - and we’re nearing completion now. On your way out, you might take a peek at the newly painted black baseboards, which according to our historic paint analysis, were originally painted black in 1806, when the house was built – not unusual to pick the baseboards out in a separate and darker color which showed less dirt and wear. Quite striking to look at.

The second project I’d like to highlight is the new rug here at our feet in the Meeting Room. Several years ago, we invited Michael Grogan, an expert in oriental rugs, to evaluate the collection here at the house. While he thought that the previous rug in this space was quite nice, he agreed that it was too large for the room – palace-sized – and also in increasingly poor condition. He suggested a few folks who might help us source an appropriate replacement, and the House Committee and I reviewed many different options over a period of about two years, before settling on this Turkish rug – a modern reproduction, woven with high-quality wools and natural dyes. Just the right amount of change.

And, finally, I’ll encourage you to admire the newest addition to our collection – a square piano made by Boston piano manufacturer, Alpheus Babcock, in 1825. This acquisition is due in part to member Darcy Kuronen, who put us in touch with the collector who previously owned the instrument. It makes a lot of sense to have a Boston-made piano in the collection, and possibly in the space where the former residents of the house – Hannah Farnham Lee or Charles Jackson Paine – might have had a similar instrument. Babcock’s significance in the Boston piano industry is outlined in Darcy’s essay in the Boston Furniture volume, and I especially appreciate that link between our collections and publications.

These projects were all made possible thanks to the dedication and expertise of our House Committee, with whom I feel so lucky to work. For the last five years, the chair of the House Committee has been Robert Mussey, who stepped down earlier this fall. I came on board only about a year after Robert began his tenure, and I couldn’t have asked for better leadership, especially as I learned the house and the collection. On my first day, he was here returning the Vose sofa and that was an indication of how he worked – hands-on, getting things done, and applying his expert eye to conservation of the collection. Robert, I wonder if you might come up, we have a token of our gratitude here for you.

**Report of the Editor of Publications**. Sally E. Hadden

One of the joys I have working as the Society’s Editor is seeing projects germinate and progress to the point of publication, a process that requires years. Whether a planned publication yields the hoped-for result is not automatic. It takes dedication and the leadership of committed scholars who serve as project editors—not knowing what roadblocks may hinder them along the way—to start and complete a new addition to the Colonial Society’s distinguished volume list.

I’m happy to report that another team of editors has reached the publication milestone this year. Members Ross W. Beales, Jr. (Professor Emeritus, College of the Holy Cross) and James F. Cooper (Director, New England’s Hidden Histories), working with Dr. Anthony T. Vaver (Local History Librarian, Westborough Public Library), the American Antiquarian Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Colonial Society, have published Ebenezer Parkman’s World (https://www.colonialsociety.org/index.php/documents/ebenezer-parkman-world). For over five years, Beales, Cooper, Vaver, and a number of dedicated volunteers have transcribed voluminous materials, created or collected by Rev. Ebenezer Parkman (1703-1782), connected to Westborough’s early religious and local history, including his diaries that span multiple decades, and in 2025, we will see several important additions to the World including select sermons and the diary of Ebenezer’s son Breck.

Our next printed volume will most likely be one of these two: the Collected Writings of Daniel Gookin (1612-1687), edited by CSM members David Hall and Adrian Weimer, or the first volume of the Papers of John Hancock, edited by CSM member Jeffrey Griffith. Both are nearing the finish line. One or the other of these volumes (and hopefully both!) should reach the printing house in 2025. The project that will definitely be our next online-only publication shall be the Massachusetts Superior Court of Judicature volume for 1760-1762, for which I serve as editor. I’m writing the introduction to the volume now, but exactly when it will go up onto our website is something of an open question, for the following reason.

Our website is going to be rebuilt in 2025 by a new company, Agile Technologies, who will take over creation in addition to management of the site while giving it several important upgrades. One of the upgrades will be to make it fully compliant for ADA users of all types. We are in the midst of negotiations with Agile about exactly what kinds of changes they will make, so the uploading of new materials to the current site is on hold, but I expect by this time next year to be able to discuss how the new website is performing. When I say “we” I should be clear that Bob Mack, CSM member and chair of the website committee, has been leading the way and I’ve been tagging along—if you see Bob, please give him your thanks for all his hard work on this project. Ken Minkema has been a great help on this too, so give him your thanks as well.

Google Analytics tells us that over 105K users came to our site in the past year. At any given time, ten or more users are on our site. Those users come from all over the world: more than 80% are from the US, but we have had more than 100 individual users from 30 different countries (that is, 3000 users scattered in 30 countries), and we have had website views from more than 190 discrete countries. We’ve had people on our website from war zones like the Ukraine, Myanmar, Ethiopia, and virtually every country in the Middle East. In the US, Analytics lets us know that the majority of our American users are in Boston and New York, with Chicago and Los Angeles coming in third and fourth. Outside the US, the biggest user groups come from countries where English is often used: the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and India. Our biggest cluster of city users outside of America live in London.

Our usage statistics went up at the start of this school year with the arrival of Ebenezer Parkman’s Word and the vast materials available in that new set of documents, with its front page receiving over 700 visits in only a few short months of availability. Aside from our general Society welcome pages and overview section headings, the most visited part of our site this year was Karen Kupperman’s essay on climate in Massachusetts, from volume 63 on seventeenth-century New England, followed by William Baker’s essay on vessel types in volume 52 on seafaring. I suspect that our summer teacher’s institute may have shaped some of these usage figures, since the Puritan portraits essay by Lillian Miller (also volume 63) and the looting of Thomas Hutchinson’s house essay by John Tyler, that appeared in the Boston Furniture volume (number 88), ran third and fourth. These four essays were accessed anywhere from 2400 times to over 5000 times, which suggests just how important the research our Society publishes has become.

The Society will be doing a little more to make people aware of the work we do through some strategically placed ads in 2025. We’ve commissioned a graphic designer to create ads to go into a number of publications next year, for the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), the National Council for Public History, American Spirit (DAR), and American Ancestor (NEHGS)). The goal is to reach a slightly wider public, targeting the folks who are most likely to be interested in the publications we create. This campaign is in line with two other initiatives we’ve got underway, to create a rack card about the house and our publications, to sit in the hall downstairs for visitors to 87 Mount Vernon, and to make a bookmark that will also highlight our newest publications. When you next visit the house, I urge you to take several of these away with you to give to friends and enjoy.

I would be remiss not to thank members of the Publications Committee for their assistance over the past two years. I’m grateful for the generous counsel offered by Members Ken Minkema (chair), Bob Anderson, Catherine Brekus, David Hall, Chris Jedrey, and Celeste Walker in our discussions. Like me, the committee enjoys seeing projects take root, thrive, and come to fruition.

If you have considered publishing primary sources with the Society, I urge you to submit a proposal. Details about how to do so are on our website, or you can catch me this evening or send an email. Thank you.

**Report of the President**. Robert Allison

On a rainy Friday in June of 1968, our editor of publications Walter Muir Whitehill met Boston artist Alan Crite at the Athenaeum. Crite spent his working days as a draftsman at the Boston Navy Yard, but in his spare time created vibrant paintings of Boston’s 20th-century street life. Whitehill met Crite to plan the Athenaeum’s third exhibit of the artist’s work, and promised a ride home to the South End afterward. But car trouble delayed them. Whitehill suggested a tour of 87 Mount Vernon Street. In a note a few days later, Crite thanked Whitehill for this “unscheduled visit” to this “interesting building,” where he “had a strange sense” that “the past and the present were all one, and that if I looked out the windows on that rainy late afternoon and saw ladies and gentlemen in the attire of 1812 or so it would not have surprised me in the least, but would have seemed perfectly normal.”

Few visitors put it so eloquently. But all who come to 87 Mount Vernon--for a stated meeting, a teacher workshop, the Graduate Forum, the Friary Symposium, an open house, or this Annual Meeting--have that feeling that here past and present become one.

This was explicitly the aim of this year’s first stated meeting. Members Danielle Legros Georges and Artress Bethany White presented their new edited collection, *Wheatley at 250,* poems of Phillis Wheatley reimagined by contemporary African-American women poets. Hearing the voice of Phillis Wheatley Peters, and contemporary voices engaged with her poetry, was another moment when past and present came together, and we look forward to more voices of past and present being heard at 87 Mount Vernon in the future. Speakers have been presenting their research to the Society since 1892, and many of their papers can be found in our *Proceedings.* Now the presentations live on through You-tube, where more than a thousand viewers have found this year’s events. Thank you to Anne Cecere and the events committee for keeping this room alive with voices past and present.

Our open houses continue to draw visitors from around the neighborhood, the city, and the world, coming through to hear about the Society, the House, and the history it contains. April’s Open House coincided with the birthday of William Ellery Channing, whose library is upstairs, and whose grandmother, uncle, and brother watch over us in the parlor. We brought out Channing’s family Bible, his copy of Joseph Story’s *Commentaries on the Constitution,* and the day included a living historian portraying Channing. Guests received not only a lesson on this notable Boston minister, who once performed a wedding in this room, but also cookies decorated with Channing’s visage.

Thank you to Ann Little for overseeing the Graduate Forum Committee again this year, and to Chris Parsons for volunteering to chair it next. Our twenty-first Graduate Forum, brought to 180 the number of younger scholars encouraged by the Colonial Society. Joyce Chaplin offered commentary, at the day’s end, following in the footsteps of other moderators beginning with John Murrin in 1999.

As an additional way of encouraging younger scholars, Mary Beth Norton suggested organizing panels with Graduate Forum alums, now junior faculty around the country, to present at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting. Our two panels, on Loyalists in the Revolution, and Environmental History, were accepted for the January meeting in New York, with Mary Beth moderating the discussion of loyalists, and Joyce the Environmental panel. It will be worth traveling to New York in January to reconnect with our Graduate Forum alumni, and we look forward to these panels and to next year’s Graduate Forum which Peter Mancall will moderate.

Nonie Gadsden organized this year’s Donald Friary Forum, which focused fittingly on material culture and the changing ways of museum interpretation, two areas in which Don had long experience in his role as director at Historic Deerfield, engaging scholars in thinking of how to preserve and present the past. Karin Wulf has organized next year’s Friary Forum, on May 8, focusing appropriately for 2025 on what is new in the archives for the American Revolution, a discussion featuring Karin Wulf, Scott Casper from the American Antiquarian Society, and Paul Erickson from the William L. Clements Library.

In August fourteen Massachusetts teachers, ranging from elementary to high school, from public, parochial, charter, and private schools gathered here to dive into our publications and find material to use in the classroom. Gorman Lee and Charlie Newhall organized this teacher institute, introducing educators to our publications, and members came to offer expertise on particular topics—Daniel Mandell on Native Americans, John Tyler on Thomas Hutchinson, and Bob Gross on the Provincial Congress. The teachers began by exploring the digitized publications, but once they found the troves of books in the basement, they put aside their computers to use our handsome published volumes. “Why have we not heard of Josiah Quincy before?” one asked. The Institute was only phase one. Some of the teachers ventured to Concord in October to join the commemoration of the first Provincial Congress, and others were here the next day for Mary Beth Norton’s discussion of the year the Revolution began. That was phase two. Phase Three has the organizers of the Institute traveling to the schools to see the students using our documents to learn history from these primary sources, including my own visit to Arlington Catholic to see the students put Governor Hutchinson on trial for failure to avert the Revolution. Our editor emeritus John Tyler was relieved to hear that the Governor was found “not guilty.”

Publishing primary documents, encouraging younger scholars—junior faculty, graduate students, k-12 teachers, or k-12 students—and preserving this elegant house as a place where past and present come together, are the Society’s mission. Even as we find new ways to do these things, we are not straying from this mission. We have changed the way we do things—digitizing our publications, streaming our meetings, and sometimes rearranging or even swapping out furniture—but not what we do or why we do it. This balance was expressed best by Henry Lee, then president of another esteemed history organization, in his instructions to Bill Fowler on becoming that society’s director. “We want you to make changes,” Henry said, “but we don’t want to notice them.”

Changes we don’t notice allow past and present to continue as one, and allow us and all who come through 87 Mount Vernon to connect with the past. Looking out our windows we would not be the least surprised to see Walter Muir Whitehill or Alan Crite, Henry Lee or Hannah Farnum Lee, Ebenezer Parkman or Thomas Hutchinson coming up the drive.