



## *Ellington Historical Society*

*P.O. Box 73*

*Ellington, Conn. 06029*

### **October 2014 Newsletter**

(This newsletter is being published early because the editor will be away in early October.)



The Ellington Historical Society will meet on **Thursday, October 23, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.** at the Hall Memorial Library at 93 Main Street. After a brief business meeting, Kevin Johnson of the Connecticut State Library will reenact the life and times of Jordan Freeman, an African-American servant who served John Ledyard and fought alongside Col. William Ledyard at the Battle of Groton Heights at Fort Griswold during the Revolutionary War.

The program is free, and the public is invited. New members are always welcome.

#### **News from the Curator-Nancy Long**

The museum will be open for Winterfest on Saturday, December 6, from 2:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. We will be contacting our members for volunteers in the museum that day. Our exhibit will feature memorabilia from the life of Nellie McKnight. In addition to the items already on display, we will have yearbooks, letters and diaries. Nellie dabbled in a number of crafts and even made a scrapbook of holiday wrapping paper spanning almost twenty years. We hope this exhibit will show the more personal side of Nellie and who she was when she wasn't filling the roles of town librarian or historian.

## **News from the President-Tim Fahy**

At our September Executive Board Meeting, we devoted the entire time to identifying problems we encounter in trying to carry out the stated mission of the Ellington Historical Society. The problems are not unique to our organization. Most volunteer groups are experiencing the same problems.

- Declining enrollment, and an inability to attract new, younger, active, members.
- Disbursements greater than receipts
- Too few visitors to the museums – Too little community support
- Too much work, for too few staff, over too many years

Let's take a closer look at these problems. Each year we have more members pass away than we gain new members. Coupled with lapsed memberships, we have decreasing revenues. Our fiscal year ends in August. For last year, total receipts were \$3,342, which included three large donations totaling over \$700. Total disbursements were \$4,568, which do not include a donated tank of oil, and some \$1,000 in expenses which some members declined to submit for reimbursement. The major expense is the Nellie McKnight Museum. Utilities were \$928 and insurance was \$2,509. Revenues from dues were \$777, but it cost \$742 to send out newsletters. You can't run a museum on flea markets and bake sales.

Over the last few years we have employed some new strategies to attract patrons. In addition to being open on Thursday afternoons May through September, we opened on a weekday evening to celebrate Nellie McKnight's 120<sup>th</sup> birthday, with free admission, plus lemonade and cookies. We opened on a weekend to take advantage of the nearby Farmers Market. We held an all-day event to correspond with Open Museum Day in June. We brought in volunteer archaeologists to supervise a dig on museum grounds so kids could participate, and learn to dig correctly. Despite good publicity in the newspapers, and a visit to three schools to show 3<sup>rd</sup> graders objects found in a previous dig, we had more archaeologists (7), than diggers (5). We had very few visitors at any of our events. Many Thursday afternoons we had no visitors at all.

For the last three years we have set up a display and participated at the Ellington Farmers Market. We usually do this twice a year. We meet people, answer questions, hand out applications, and try to attract new members. Our two biggest events of the year are the flea market, at which we also have an open house and bake sale, and Winterfest. Both events are a lot of work and are weather-dependent.

When the Ellington Historical Society decided to accept Nellie McKnight's house in 1982, subcommittees were formed to study and/or process various aspects of the acquisition. There were 13 subcommittees, each with its own chairperson. How things have changed.

In 2005, society by-laws called for 7 standing committees. We have no one willing to serve on any of these committees, and that has been true for the last ten years. All of the functions of these committees, by necessity, have been picked up by the president, the curator, and the archivist, the only ones who would do it.

Our youngest member agreed to be vice president two years ago. All other officers have been serving from 10 to 14 years. I have been president as long as FDR was! That is not healthy for the society, or for me. Nancy Long our curator, and Lynn Fahy our archivist, have served about 15 years each, and have almost single handedly kept us afloat. They put in hundreds of hours each year, and hundreds of dollars to go with it. Their work is every bit as good as paid staff in bigger museums. More about their accomplishments in next month's newsletter.

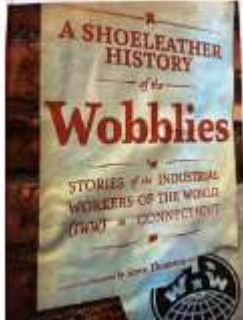
The world is changing rapidly. Society is very different than even ten years ago. Young people don't need organizations to get together. They use their electronic devices for instant communication and to find information. We have a web site, a Facebook page, and an online catalog of objects in the museum to try to reach this demographic, but they are widely ignored. Many people of retirement age are still working, or helping their kids with babysitting, and maybe caring for aging parents at the same time. They should be good candidates for EHS but don't have the time. Once sports programs start, we never see any kids.

Much of what we do has brought its own reward. We enjoy putting on a first class event and the feedback we get. Teaching people something about their town is something we always enjoy. We just wish we could do more of it.

The executive board will examine options and try to find workable solutions for our problems. We welcome your input. If you have some good ideas, and think you can do something to help, contact me. I'll be away for a couple of weeks, but you can call me after 10/20/14. Tim Fahy 860-875-5804.

**Upcoming meeting**

**Thursday, January 22, 2015 7:00 p.m. at the Hall Memorial Library**



Steve Thornton will discuss his book:

*A Shoelather History of the Wobblies: Stories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Connecticut*

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**If you did not renew your membership in September, we have enclosed a form to fill out and include with your dues payment.**

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Ellington Historical Society Membership Dues

Class of Membership	_____	Individual \$10.00
	_____	Senior Individual \$8.00 (Over 62)
	_____	Family \$20.00
	_____	Senior Family \$15.00 (Over 62)
(Check one)	_____	Patron \$25.00
	_____	Business \$50.00

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

\*E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: Ellington Historical Society

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