

HENNIKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY - THEN & NOW, 1971-2014

BY MARTHA TAYLOR

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Two events created a favorable atmosphere for the formation of the Henniker Historical Society in 1971. The town had celebrated its 200th anniversary three years earlier and the Nation was preparing to celebrate the American Revolution Bicentennial beginning in 1975.

On Sunday, November 7, 1971 an organizational meeting was held. Thirty-two charter members were present. Dr. William Mandrey was elected President; Dr. Chester Sillars, Vice-President; Mary Kjellman, Secretary; Willa Brigham, Treasurer and Chairmen of several committees. Dues were set at \$3.00. And 43 years later they are only \$5.00.

The next meeting was held in January 1972 and 11 more persons chose to become charter members.

From the beginning the Society presented programs to the public. They were mostly prepared and presented by the members themselves. The Society's purpose was and still is to educate and encourage original research about the history of Henniker.

The first large project was planning Henniker Old Home Day in 1973. The next and bigger project was the preservation and renovation of the Town Hall. Dr. Mandrey was successful in convincing the town, in spite of opposition, to support the completion of the project. It was dedicated in 1976.

The Society's most significant contribution to the town during the Bicentennial celebration was the beginning of the process of writing a one-hundred history of the town to be called "*The Only Henniker On Earth.*" It covers the time period from the ending of Cogswell's History of Henniker in 1880 to 1980. Society members researched, planned and wrote the book with help from more than 20 other members of the community who submitted articles and did editing.

After the book was published the Society members catalogued and filed all the materials collected during the book project. We continue to this day to add material to those files.

Some of the projects completed in the 1980 and 90's are supported and used by the Society to this day. The historical markers were rejuvenated and a history of each made into a brochure. Recognizing and promoting the Paul Revere bell in the steeple of the Congregational Church. Creating a system of cleaning, marking, cataloguing and storing period clothing in acid-free boxes. We now have 44 large boxes of textiles ranging from t-shirts with business logos to wedding dresses. Storing original historical documents in acid-free boxes. Every piece of paper in 190 boxes is catalogued. We are using the photograph filing system designed after finishing the book. We continue to present programs to school children as scheduled by the school.

In the early nineties the Tucker Free Library Trustees indicated that they wanted more space for books and asked if the Society could find a new home. Having only 22 members it seemed a daunting task. After looking and finding nothing suitable we were excited to learn that the college was giving Alumni Hall back to the town. We finally convinced the Selectmen to propose to the 1996 Town Meeting that it approve a long term lease until 2068 with the Society. We did not want any shorter term because we knew it would be expensive to upgrade the building for our use and then have to leave. One of those Selectmen recently told me that he was originally unsure if it was the right move but now he is sure that it was. We have been great stewards of the building. The lease was approved so the Society renamed the building Academy Hall in honor of the original use as the Henniker Academy in 1836.

The Library Trustees placed most of the historical artifacts from the library on permanent loan to the Society. More than 325 persons and businesses supported us to get to the momentous occasion of opening the research room in January 1997. We continued to work on the rest of the building. Late one Sunday morning which happened to be Mother's Day I was working alone sanding some repaired wall holes and the fire alarm went off. I found out something about burglary and fire alarms that day. When we set off the burglary alarm by mistake we can tell the alarm company a password and they won't call the Police but there is no such plan in place to stop the Fire Dept from coming. After the men and trucks arrived I had to confess what I'd done and apologize for them having to leave their Mother's Day dinner for a false alarm. And I've often wondered what they thought about me not being at a Mother's Day dinner.

There was another incident while Joyce Meyer and I were painting the museum room. I'm glad two of us were there that day. I had climbed up to the top of the staging to paint the top of one of the posts in the center of the room. Forgetting that the ceiling fan was on I turned to go back down and nearly made myself bald. With blood gushing out of the head wound I managed to get back down to the floor. Thank goodness Joyce was there to drive me to the emergency room for stitches. That's why I wear bangs!!

In August of that year we officially opened with 250 people touring our building. They saw our environmentally stable storage room where artifacts are kept. It is insulated against daily fluctuations of temperature and humidity to better preserve the historic artifacts stored there. We also lined the furnace room with fire rated sheetrock to help save the building in case of fire.

Another important thing we did was to secure a 501(C)(3) designation from IRS so that all donations to the Society are tax-deductible. We designed gift agreements, By-Laws, collections and donation policies. We set up a Governing Board to guide us into the future. We voted on 5 official goals of: 1) Collection and care of Henniker History 2) Maintenance & care of the building to house that history 3) Educate the public about Henniker history 4) Continuing research about our history 5) Financial support of these projects.

All of this work is to support the generous donations of artifacts, photographs and historic papers that have been given to the Society. After we moved into Academy Hall the donations have been pouring in to this very day.

We began our Annual Giving Campaign in 1996 and through your generous support we have been able meet our first 4 goals for the past 18 years. In 2005 the Board decided to start a Memorial Endowment Fund. We have raised \$17,660 to date for future use. We plan only to use the interest from this fund. ** This Memorial Gift Book is a permanent record of each person who has been memorialized in this fund. You may browse through it later. 102 different names are entered here.

We also have a Lillian M. Ayer Fund that was set up by her family upon her death. Only the interest is being spent on research items like surrounding town's history books. The principal is now at \$10,780.

Our first cookie sale was held in 1993. Our yard sale was in business from 1995 to 2013. The fundraising of Henniker related items has been on-going since 2000. We've held two Victorian Tea Parties, a Wedding Gown show, hosted a Gove

family and a Cogswell family reunion here. We sell history books, games, booklets on historic Henniker topics, ornaments, puzzles, pottery and photo items. We have published 2 cemetery gravestone books, 2 postcards books and an architectural detail book.

We have straightened the cupola and historically reproduced its railings and finials. We painted the building 3 times, installed the brick walkway and railing and will replace the roof shingles on the south side this year. We also maintain the 23 (and soon to be 24) historic markers.

The Henniker Historian is a usually-quarterly newsletter that has been sent to all members since August 1995. In 1997 we revived the official presentation of the Boston Post Cane to the oldest citizen of Henniker.

Now that we have 273 members we are going into the next decade with a presence on Facebook, a new video presentation showing the beauty of our museum and promoting that museum as a destination place.

As always we ask that you consider volunteering. We'll teach you everything you need to know to be of help. I guarantee you'll have a good time with our other volunteers and learn something you didn't know about Henniker. Would all of our volunteers and Board members please stand?

Thank you.

The title of this program is Henniker Historical Society Then & Now. There are 8 persons still alive who were here Then in 1971 and are here Now in 2014. Tonight there is one here. Alice Norton would you please stand? Please give her a hand of appreciation.

Other surviving Charter members out of the original 44 are: Miss Lorriane Aucoin, who was Treasurer for 35 years, Dolores Aucoin. Albert Aucoin, Mrs. Lorraine Aucoin, Virginia Carter, John Schule, and Lyle Wimmergren

Again Thank You for supporting the Society in any way that you do. It is important because as David McCullough said:

"History is who we are, and why we are the way we are."

Thank you.