The Brentwood Historical Society board met on January 19, 2021. At this first meeting since October, the board discussed old and new business and plans for the future, while thoughtfully practicing social distancing.

Outgoing president Rebecca Dunham was recognized for her three years of service in that position. During her tenure, Becky helped the Society improve its ability to care for, manage and share the collection that tells the story of our town. The board also expressed its appreciation to Suzanne Austin who served as the organization’s recording secretary for three years. We are pleased both Becky and Suzanne will remain on the board as directors.

Board member and research correspondent Albert “Skip” Belanger has completed an incredible Civil War project. Skip meticulously gathered the names of every person from Brentwood who participated in the Civil War and put that information, and so much more, on a CD, which will be accessible to all. Please look forward to an in-depth article about this project in an upcoming newsletter.

The Society was thrilled to have the long-awaited stairlift installed at the museum on December 30 thanks to the efforts of board members Frank Northrup and Becky Dunham. This generous gift will make it possible for everyone to visit the upstairs and see the wonderful things it holds! Donors Joseph Falzone and Gove Realty will be formally thanked and recognized with a plaque in the coming weeks.

Frank, pictured to the right, reported the maiden voyage was efficient and comfortable!
One thing we’ll be focusing on in 2021 is the ongoing accessioning project. At this time, more than 700 objects have been accessioned into the Society’s new collection management database thanks to the efforts of Rebecca Davis, curator, and Karen Ellis, registrar.

As the work heads towards “putting things back on the shelves,” the museum space will be assessed and a plan created to utilize the space to safely, logically and attractively store and exhibit the town’s many precious objects.

Other items on the Society’s priority list for 2021 are: 1) the completion of the transcription of the Mary Abbie Sanborn diaries; 2) an exhibit celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Swasey Central School; and 3) cleaning and returning the upstairs Grange Hall to its original state.

With its commitment to using professional collection management software, the Society decided it was time to invest in a new computer and printer. We knew we needed something dependable and powerful to allow us to maximize the benefits of the program. So, in October, with the help of Nick Wrighton, we purchased a Dell Inspiron 3880 mini desktop computer and a Xerox Work Centre printer, which can also be used as a scanner and fax. Nick set up the system for us in November, and the transition has been perfect. The Society does not have Internet service at the museum at this time, and the cost and value of that is being deliberated.

The Historical Society participated in the first annual Holiday Stroll held at the Recreation Center on December 11 and 12, 2020. This event was organized by the Peach Project, and 100% of the proceeds benefited the NH Food Bank. Pictured are Karen Ellis and Dexter Swasey amidst the pieces used to create a tableau of a vintage Christmas.

Did you notice the black and red checked wool pants on the chair? Those belonged to John Swasey, Dexter’s father. He wore them in the 1950s while hunting in Brentwood.

Thanks to Nate Ellis for his usual helpfulness!
It won’t be long before this pretty winter picture is replaced with one of colorful summer flowers!
Board Member Profile:  
Rebecca J. Davis, Curator

The Society is privileged to have board member and BHS Curator Rebecca J. Davis on the job!

During her career, Rebecca has been a decorative arts and furniture specialist with the firms Leslie Hindman Auctioneers, Sotheby’s, and, from 2001 to 2019, the Senior Specialist at Northeast Auctions in Portsmouth. She was responsible for the research, cataloging and appraisal of 18th, 19th and 20th century American, English and Continental decorative arts, with specialization in ceramics, silver and glass. When the auction house closed, she formed her own cataloging and appraisal company.

So it was a logical fit when Rebecca was asked to be the Curator at the Brentwood Historical Society. In that position, she is responsible for identifying, describing, assessing the value of, and then photographing the numerous pieces in the collection. The cataloging is then entered into the PastPerfect museum collections management database. It has been quite a jump from researching formal antiques to studying the primitive, handmade, and utilitarian objects she deals with now. For example, the small collection of pie plate lifters, donated by Barbara Northrup in 1996, appeared to her to be one of a kind, handmade items. But she found nearly identical examples, manufactured from around 1870 to 1900, in a kitchenware book. A small collection of hand tools donated by Frank Northrup, board member and treasurer, were used by Sydney Northrup, Frank’s father and Barbara’s husband, at the Rockingham County Almshouse and Farm during the late 1930s into part of the 1940s. Rebecca tells us “it has been rewarding and fascinating to not only research each object, but to also learn the family connection to each piece, knowing that many have come directly from the Brentwood community.”

Rebecca and her husband Randall have lived in the Flanders, Robinson and DeButts house (along with several other owners) on Middle Road for 13 years. Many of you have undoubtedly seen the chimney restorations on the house and the lifting of the attached barn back onto its stone foundation. They are now re-painting the barn in a historic yellow color. Rebecca and Randall have a sassy and sweet horse going by the name of Beams.

If anyone is interested in joining our active board, please contact Dexter Swasey.