

HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The purpose of the Historical Commission is to plan and implement programs for identifying, evaluating and protecting our town's historic resources. We work with other Town boards and commissions to achieve our goals. We are responsible for commenting on environmental review issues at the local level and are mandated to alert state and federal agencies to local preservation issues.

This year we have been working on a no match grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) to identify the Town's historic resources. Christopher Skelly, Director of Local Government Programs at MHC has made 3 field visits to Hampden. To date we have identified and photographed over 450 properties of historic value. The photos, along with a brief description and history, will be available both on CD and hard copy in the Hampden Free Public Library and local schools for use by residents and scholars. The MHC - based on our local commission's findings - will prepare a preservation plan for the Town.

The ADOPT-A-PLOT program continued this year with several activities in Old Cemetery listed below.

- A shallow archeological dig at Old Cemetery to search for fallen tombstones was conducted under the leadership of John Pretola, retired archaeologist at the Springfield Science Museum. MRHS advanced placement students from Mary Lou Brewer's history classes participated in the dig.
- Jon Appell conserved and/or restored over 25 gravestones using CPA monies.
- Joe Grant repaired a small part of the holding tomb also with CPA monies.
- Mark Ogoley volunteered both his time and equipment to regrade the area around the holding tomb.
- A Halloween walking tour of Old Cemetery, spearheaded by Chrissy Cesan, with costumed interpreters portraying deceased Hampdenites proved to be a popular attraction and another tour is being planned. Bill Meuse wrote an informative booklet for the tour. Ed and Trish Loiko collected monetary donations at their annual Pumpkin Party for the ADOPT-A-PLOT program.
- With our exhibit entitled "Crime, Controversy and Comedy in Hampden's Cemeteries" we "bury" a two-year series of exhibits on our cemeteries. We would like to thank Ellen Bump for letting us use the Library's display case.
- The ADOPT-A-PLOT program won the coveted Oakley Award given by the Association for Gravestone Studies, an international organization, for our efforts in Old Cemetery.

Two members of our commission attended a workshop on preparing building inventory forms. MHC and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission sponsored the daylong event.

We would like to thank the many Town boards, departments and their employees and volunteers who assist and encourage us in our work.

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Historical Commission member Noreen Couture resigned this year after accepting the position of Postmaster of South Dennis, MA. We will miss her dedication to the commission, her thought provoking questions and her wonderful sense of humor.

We are increasingly troubled by the number of serviceable older homes that are being demolished in order to build new ones. Over a two-year period, 4 houses on Allen Street alone have met this fate.

Our concerns are not just old buildings and archaeological sites. We are also concerned with preserving what little remains of our rural heritage through preservation of farmlands, scenic roads, conservation and smart growth.

Respectfully submitted,

Connie Chapin Witt, Chairman
Melissa Lail – Trecker, Publicity
Chrissy Cesan, Archaeology Coordinator