President’s Corner

Hello Historical Society Members,

Summer is upon us, when I share the last 12 months at the Society.

Further work on Jason Russell House restoration, supported by both the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund as well as Community Preservation Act funds from the Town of Arlington has focused on the rear section of the house, especially the foundation sill and the windows.

Funds from the Commonwealth’s Office of Travel and Tourism paid for a new HVAC system in the Smith Museum, refurbished rest rooms, and general repairs and maintenance of the grounds.

We started to put portions of our collection onto the web. You can browse arlingtonhistorical.org to see many of the interesting items we have cataloged.

Here’s our by-the-numbers story from July 2018 through June 2019:

• Total memberships: 254
• Membership income: $13,075 (2018: $12,605, 2017: $10,295)
• Number of 3rd graders who visited the Jason Russell House: 221 (2018: 309)
• Schools sending students to the Jason Russell House as part of our third-graders program: Dallin, Peirce, St. Agnes, Stratton, and Thompson.
• Visitors to the Jason Russell house (excluding the third-grade program): 642—including 70 from outside of Massachusetts. Seven different foreign countries, including places as distant as Chile and Japan, are represented. Finally, four of our 2018-2019 visitors are descendants of Jason Russell.
• Number of collection items cataloged in the database: 17,064 (2018: 16,151, 2017: 15,285)
• Number of collection items now available online: 4,561.

I wish you the best of health as you enjoy the summer season,
Stuart Brorson, President
Because it was an agricultural town well into the 1900s, Arlington had many businesses supporting agriculture. One of them was the Frost Insecticide Company, which flourished during the first half of the 20th century. It produced several varieties of insecticide (including something called “Arlington Oil”) as well as many different spraying machines used on fields and trees.

In 1909 the company built the large brick building currently numbered 22 Mill St., which today serves as medical offices. Compare the photograph of the building in the vintage promotional literature to a contemporary photo below. The structures shown in the old photo have been heavily modified – including addition of windows to the brick building. But the majestic London plane tree in front of the building still stands today.

We have many interesting artifacts from the Frost Insecticide Company thanks to Society life-member Bill Mahoney. Bill spent a long time acquiring items related to Arlington’s history at antique stores, eBay and other sources. He donated his wonderful collection to the Society a couple of years ago. The volume of materials he donated is so large that we are still working to organize and catalog it all. Society
Harold L. Frost, president of Frost Insecticide, owned extensive fruit orchards in Littleton, Mass., which frequently served as another of the “catalogue models” for his own line of products. Harold L. Frost received his B.S. degree in 1895 from Massachusetts Agricultural College, the predecessor of today’s flagship state university, UMass Amherst. He founded Frost Insecticide Co. in 1906.

volunteer Colleen Cunningham recently cataloged the materials in Bill’s collection from Frost Insecticide, and brought them to my attention.

The Frost Insecticide collection includes two catalogs (1915 and 1922) sporting photos of interesting spraying machines, as well as photos of workers spraying clouds of toxic insecticides on plants. Some examples are shown on these pages. I normally cringe when I see unprotected workers spraying poisonous chemicals (including lead and arsenic) into the air, but the one photo shown below extolling the “beautiful mist” of deadly insecticide makes me chuckle and shudder at the same time. I can’t imagine modern insecticide manufacturers advertising their products in such an innocent and carefree way. We’ve come a long way since an airborne toxic mist could be considered “beautiful”!

In 1909, the Frost Co. won first prize at the New England Fruit Show in Massachusetts Horticultural Hall, for its exhibit of spraying equipment. After it exited the equipment business, the Frost Co. continued as a distributor of insecticides and fertilizers into the early 1960s.
2019-2020 AHS Election

On May 28, the Society held its annual election.

Sincere thanks are offered for the service of former board members Doris Birmingham, Angela Olszewski, and Christine Bird (Clerk of the Society); as well as to Bob Fredieu of the Nominating Committee.

This season’s listing of Society officers, directors and trustees is at right. George Parsons returns to the board after three years as a trustee, to serve as director in charge of membership. Rosemarie Smurzynski, previously first vice president, was elected a trustee. Christine Cronin-Tocci, Elaine Ropi, and Bob Tosi are first-time board members. Doreen Stevens was elected a new member of the Nominating Committee.

The Society is fortunate to have a great mix of talents and tenures to devote their volunteer energies to keep it such a dynamic organization.

OFFICERS
President – Stuart Brorson
Vice President – Pamela Meister
Vice President – Patsy Kraemer
Treasurer – Alan Jones
Clerk – Christine Cronin-Tocci
Membership Director – George Parsons

DIRECTORS
Linda Cohn • Paul Fennelly
William Lyons • Elaine Ropi • Bob Tosi

TRUSTEES
Peter Howard • Rosemarie Smurzynski
Al Stevens

The Arlington Historical Society is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. Contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.