

# Thomaston Historical Society

Spring Newsletter No. 48 – May 2018



## Farmhouse Restoration & Renovation Time Again Learn More Here

The picture above shows the condition of the Knox Farmhouse after abandoned as a train station, circa 1970 – before the conversion to our museum. Past newsletters addressed the much needed moisture abatement. The list of problems has grown, but our efforts to raise the money to cover the costs has almost kept pace. We are ready to begin in May. In addition, we have approval to convert one storage room into a Thomaston Archival Library and Gallery.

You can learn more about these projects in this newsletter and the many other exciting new activities and events that are in the works.

Susan Devlin

President, Thomaston Historical Society

## Join Us for our 5<sup>th</sup> Summer House Tour in June

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The Thomaston Historical Society will host its 5th annual Summer House Tour on Saturday, June 17 (rain date Sunday, June 18) from 1-4 P.M. at the home of Pam and Dave Allemeier and Penelope Baker, 14 Elliott Street.

This year's home, known as the Capt. Alfred Watts homestead, is a beautiful early Greek Revival style house. Master Mariner Alfred Watts purchased the land in 1847 and contracted with James Overlock to build the house in 1848. The Thomaston Historical Society has the signed agreement between Captain Watts and James Overlock in its archives. The house features a wide frieze and simple corner columns or pilasters supporting the roof and includes a piazza on the west façade. The front façade has a small enclosed single-height porch. The attached barn to the rear of the property has been turned into a delightful entertainment area with a lovely view of the Georges River. Lovely gardens outline the property as well.

Tickets will be available at the door and include light refreshments. A variety of raffle baskets will also be available. Detailed information for this event will be available on [www.ThomastonHistoricalSociety.com](http://www.ThomastonHistoricalSociety.com).

Mimi Zwick, Chair of House Tours



## Saluting Thomaston Veterans

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The project continues; we are contacting and gathering personal stories from the Korean and Vietnam Wars to add to our profiles of Thomaston veterans. This effort has been heartfelt and rewarding. The men and women who served have been so generous in relating their experiences. We are still adding stories. If you are a Thomaston veteran or know one, please let the Thomaston Historical Society know so we can add this profile.

The museum has on display a notebook of Thomaston WWII veterans with their stories and pictures already. Come visit us and see the veterans you know!

Plans for a Veteran Reception are starting to firm up. We want your input, too. What would you like to see at this event? The plan is to pick a day, on or near Veterans Day, to honor all veterans and their families, friends and anyone who would like to join us. As the plans get finalized we will announce the date, time and location.

Sandy Moore, New Veteran Project Chair



Cliff Blastow - Vietnam

## ***Bradley Beckett Local History Fund Launched***

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Bradley Beckett published *A History of Thomaston, Maine for Young Readers* in 1974. This book grew out of his avid interest in local history from an early age and a love of teaching. This very popular educator taught 4th and 5th grade for 26 years, first at the Thomaston Academy building and later at the Thomaston Grammar School. Tragically his life was cut short by cancer in 2002, shortly before his 50th birthday.



Recently the Beckett family donated a case of the second printing of his book to the Thomaston Historical Society. It is being used to help kick off the Bradley Beckett Local History Fund, which will seed school projects in local history. Currently Oceanside Middle School teachers, Rachel Burns, Bruce Gamage, and Lynnette McLaughlin, are planning future projects with the Thomaston Historical Society. Under discussion are a possible “Then and Now” book, a cemetery cleaning and profiling project, and a Thomaston time line to be displayed in the former Lura Libby School if preliminary plans to convert the former school into a municipal building come to fruition. You can support this project in two ways:

Helping implement the projects with the schools

Making a donation to the fund.

The first donors of more than \$20 to the fund will receive one of the books. We already have received over \$300. Donors are encouraged to write a memory note about Brad to include in a booklet being prepared for the family and school. All funds will be held by the Historical Society for future school history projects. Donations can be made out to Thomaston Historical Society, PO Box 384, Thomaston, ME 04861. Please note that the donation is for the Bradley Beckett Local History Fund. Contact [info@thomastonhistoricalsociety.com](mailto:info@thomastonhistoricalsociety.com) for more information. Donors will be kept apprised of the progress of the projects if an email is included with their donation.

Susan Devlin, Fund Chair (until someone volunteers to take the lead)

## ***Anatomy of Thomaston’s Main Street Business Section, North Side***

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Thomaston is fortunate to have its original 19th century business block district still intact with but few exterior changes. By today’s standards, a block is an area surrounded by streets, usually subdivided into several smaller land lots. A business block of the 19th century, however, refers to an individual building, oftentimes connected to others. Thomaston had several such blocks, usually named after the individuals who built them.



Standing at the present Watts Block, looking across Main Street toward the north side of the business district and starting from the west (on the left) to the east (Beechwood Street on the right) are five business blocks built between 1848 and 1891.

The Stimpson Block (sometimes referred to as the bank block), now housing Thomaston Grocery and Indigo consignment store, was built in 1874 by Charles W. Stimpson. Late 19th century urban renewal was responsible for the removal of the first Thomaston Bank, built on this site in 1825, but some of the granite was reused for a vault within the east side of the new Stimpson Block, and incorporated into the new “Bank Block”.

The next block to the east is known as Union Block. This three-story brick block was built in 1857 by a number of local businessmen as an early “condominium” business block and consists of 22 second-floor windows in a horizontal row with a floor above and several storefronts below. Unit One, adjacent to Stimpson Block, was built by Starrett and Starr as cabinetmakers’ shops and subsequently housed a stove, plumbing and tin store. In the early 20th century it was a dry goods store and for many years a hardware store (now Ross Levett Antiques). The next two units were built by Flint & Creighton and housed Union Hall above and dry goods, drug store and variety store below (today houses Yoga and half of Athens Pizza); the next two units were built by Barnabus Webb (Athens and Creative Images); and the last unit was built by Oliver Jordan, who, within ten years, sold to Sanford Delano. Maj. Delano opened a saloon with lodging on the upper floors (formerly Bowdish 5 & 10, Heritage Bank and will soon be opened as the Block Saloon.)

The Jordan Block was built by Capt. Oliver Jordan and Capt. Barnabus Webb in 1848. A few owners/tenants have been T.A. Carr Ins; C.C. Morton and Winchenbach Dry Goods; J.W. Harrington Hats & Furs; Hodgkin Dry Goods, Thomaston Café and Davis Funeral Parlor (more recently a dental practice and today a coffee shop).

The Vinal Block was built by Oliver Vinal on the site of the Keith Block, which burned in 1891. It was built immediately after the fire and William Vinal opened his store (formerly housed John Stetson; Red and White Groceries; 1st National; and an antiques store and today is a gym.) For a time, the public library was on the second floor.

Captain William Singer built the Singer Block on the NW corner of Beechwood and Main in 1869. His son, Thomas, sold candy, soda and light groceries. Walker, Linekin and Gray had stores, followed by a laundry, a restaurant and now Sandra L. Hoekstra, Bookseller.

Peggy McCrea, Historian

## ***Cushing Merchant’s Coin: History from the Archives!***

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Recently while sorting through some files, we came across the “trade token or merchant’s token” attached to this letterhead. Many would call this a coin, however the proper connotation is as a trade token issued by a merchant to be used solely in his store. This token is made out of a white metal with a plain edge. The obverse has J. O. Cushing Co. Thomaston, ME, surrounding a fleur-de-lis in the center. The reverse has at the top GOOD FOR and at the



bottom AT THE OFFICE surrounding a large 5C in the center. The letterhead shows the company was established in 1824 as manufactures of lime and dealers in coal, cement and hair. I assume the hair was probably horse hair for use in plastering.

Who was J.O. Cushing? The 1860 census listed his occupation as shipbuilder, the 1870 census lists his occupation as lime burner, and his 1894 death certificate lists his occupation as lime manufacturer. Morse's Thomaston Scrapbook provided the following information. During the Civil War years he was a shipbuilder who after the War acquired the Brown Kilns and shore property along with the store. At that time three Thomaston firms did most of the lime business in town. J.O. Cushing Co. was one of the three. J.O. Cushing bought the Cushing house on Elliot Street in 1857. It stayed in the family until 1945.

So from an afternoon updating the archive files we get a brief look into an outstanding Thomaston citizen. Perhaps more short stories will come out of future browsing in the files.

Bill Gay, Vice President

## ***Farmhouse Restoration Challenges***

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In May Joseph Construction will start our major moisture abatement project. Moisture was identified as the greatest risk for our building during the CAP evaluation in 2016 so this project has been long in the works. While Steve Joseph and his crew will be digging around the building to waterproof the foundation and put in drainage pipes on all sides except the track side, the farmhouse will still be open.

WE WILL CLOSE THE MUSEUM FOR SAFETY DURING THIS PERIOD STARTING ABOUT May 24<sup>th</sup>  
AND OPENING WHEN THIS PHASE IS DONE, LIKELY MID JUNE.

Because we have to remove the wheel chair ramp to complete the drainage work, we received permission from the MDOT to replace the ramp out towards the drive – making it more accessible. Come check out how the work is progressing and come in to see the museum collection changes.

Unfortunately, careful inspection of the building has brought other problems to light, some related to the moisture problem and some not. We are planning to address all of the problems we have discovered:

- Pulling up the carpeting, cleaning and then sealing the cement slab in the archive room. Moisture has been penetrating this floor, an issue exacerbated by the humidity control unit which was pulling moisture up through the floor.
- Replacing gutters/down spouts and repair rot in backing boards.
- Fixing leakage around windows, repairing/painting window frames, and replacing missing mortar in the brick.
- Replacing the furnace.
- Replacing the inefficient, malfunctioning temperature and humidity control unit in the archive room and expanding temperature and humidity control to both floors of the el.
- Bringing the alarm system up to code – thanks to advice from our fire chief, Mike Mazzeo.
- Replacing the water meter, which is now sitting in water on the floor of the basement, and adding a new water cutoff valve.

We have waited to begin this work until nearly all the approximately \$100,000 needed to pay for the work has been acquired. We are nearly there and, though any donations will be helpful to put us over the top.

Bill Eberle and Susan Devlin – Restoration Overseers

## ***New Archival Library and Gallery***

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With the upgrade of the temperature/humidity control unit, we now have permission from the Fire Chief to open the first floor room to the public. As the second floor can never have public access due to fire safety regulations, we will move most of archival storage upstairs. Our large selection of publications, photographs and framed art pieces will be accessible to the public the first time. We hope our new archival library and gallery will open by fall if all goes well – next spring at the latest. Look for news of the grand opening.

Susan Devlin - Curator

## ***Tour Brooks Trap Next August***

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Trapping and eating lobsters have been a Maine way of life almost since it was first settled. But how are modern lobster traps made and how do they work? In August, you will have the opportunity to tour Brooks Trap and learn answers to these questions. We are still finalizing the date and times – watch for this information on our Website, [www.thomastonhistorical.com](http://www.thomastonhistorical.com)

The cost is \$25, discounted to \$20 for members of the Thomaston Historical Society. You can make reservations by sending a check to Thomaston Historical Society, PO Box 384, Thomaston, ME 04861. Please note that the payment is for the Brooks Trap Tour. Space is limited – reserve your tickets early. Our tour last year of Dragon Cement sold out very quickly. For more information, contact [info@ThomastonHistoricalSociety.com](mailto:info@ThomastonHistoricalSociety.com).

Ursula Kruse-Vaucienne and Susan Devlin, Tour Coordinators

## ***Cemetery Cleaning/Repair Workshop This Summer***

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We have received a lot of praise for the result of the restoration of Gen. Henry Knox's grave site – but also some concerns about the conditions of the surrounding areas of the cemetery, with stones broken or in desperate need for cleaning. Sexton Pete Lammert has made progress over the years, but the significant effort needed requires more than one person.

With the Thomaston Cemetery Committee's blessing, we have scheduled a four day workshop next summer to jump start more cemetery restoration. The workshop will be led by Joe Ferrannini, a professional gravestone conservator and owner of Grave Stone Matters in Hoosick Falls, N.Y. He has taught many workshops for the Maine Old Cemetery Association (MOCA) and has done major restoration projects around the country. Up to 30 students are possible – so space will be limited.

Similar to the Maine Old Cemetery Association, we are not setting a fixed fee for the workshop, hoping each participant will give what they can to cover expenses. Consider registering for 1 to all 4 days, making a donation to cover the cost and/or sponsoring the restoration/*maintenance* of a gravesite. For more information, email [info@ThomastonHistoricalSociety.com](mailto:info@ThomastonHistoricalSociety.com)



## ***More New Project Ideas – But We Can't Move Forward Without You***

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Here are some other ways you can help us expand our reach:

- ***Editing The Olson House by Brad Beckett for Publication*** - We have another opportunity to honor Brad's contributions to area history. Not long before he died he was working on a book on the Olson House and the descendants of the Samuel Hathorn who lived there. Brad had given a draft to Shirley Stenberg who recently donated it to us. Our long term goal is to find a volunteer or student intern who is interested in polishing this draft for possible publication.
- ***Stories Behind the Cemetery Monuments*** –Wouldn't it be fun to collect the stories of families buried in our cemetery, using remembrances and photographs? A Rockland Cemetery did this and self-published a wonderful book. Do you have a family that we could preserve in this way and help jump start another then-and-now project?
- ***Sunday Trivia*** – Sally Ploski's new Facebook question each Sunday is gaining followers. Join the fun by seeing if you can be the first to answer the question and win a prize. We also need a supply of questions to challenge our followers.
- ***Museum Hosts*** - We have had to cut back on the hours we are open in the summer for lack of volunteers for regular or just occasional duty. We try to have two people there during open hours. This is a great opportunity to learn about our collection from a seasoned volunteer. During down times, you can help us uncover hidden gems in storage.
- ***Moving Our Archives Upstairs*** – Before the floor of the first floor can be repaired the room has to be emptied and most of the content moved upstairs. We need helpers to do this. Can you donate a ½ day or more?
- ***Implementing New Library/Gallery*** – We are looking for someone to help build the bookcases for us. In addition, once the room is ready, the books, maps, newspapers, etc. need to be sorted and placed in the new bookcases and framed items arranged and hung. We need help in planning and implementing this. Again, just a few hours would help.
- ***Design/ Tech Support for Smartphone Walking Tours*** - We need the technical know-how to transform Peggy McCrea's history of different streets into walking tours, cemetery tours, or waterfront tours. We need someone who has the technical know-how to help us jump start this project.
- ***Expanding Through Electronic Displays*** – Several of our projects tell stories through pictures, such as 20<sup>th</sup> century boat builders, veteran profiles, and stories of growing up in Thomaston. These would be best presented electronically and would allow us to further expand our museum within the space we have. We need computer savvy individuals to help design this computer application or point us in the direction of free tools to use. We also need help in converting some of the display material we have to this approach and plan for new content.
- ***Cataloging Our Collection***–While organizing our collection and entering the items into PastPerfect, a museum database, we are discovering gems we did not know we had! This is work that can be done at the museum or at home. Let us know if you would like to help. Our longer term goal is to take digital pictures of key items for electronic back up or to provide access through the Maine State Museum public access system.

## ***New Donations Expand Our Knowledge***

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Other recent additions to our collection:

- Thomaston Baptist Church Bicentennial (1816 - 2016) Records -- from the bicentennial committee

- Color printer & the book, Montpelier: The Spot So xxx and a Name So Great by Ellen Dyer – from Carolyn Whitaker
- Olson House, draft book by Brad Beckett – from Shirley Stenberg (given to her by Brad)
- Iron toy fireman and house, found in a house restoration – from Pamela Skinner
- Display Case – from Shirley Barlow
- Framed Poster of Wharfage Rates (1856) – from Kaja Verlleux
- Dunn & Elliot Nautical Papers/Receipts – purchased at online auction
- Thomaston Tax Collection Books (1882-1883) - purchased at online auction

Susan Devlin, President and Curator

## ***Meet Our Membership Chair and Facebook Editor – Sally Ploski***

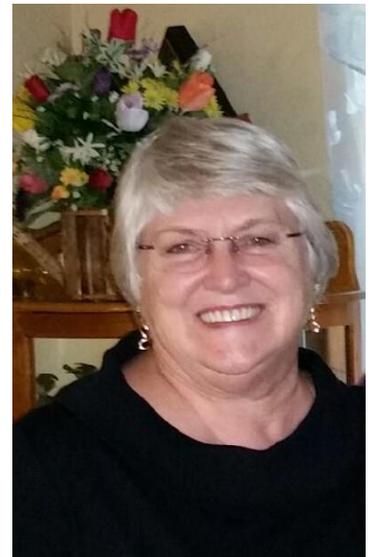
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Sally grew up on the Thomaston waterfront and is a 1968 graduate of Georges Valley High School. After high school she worked in various office positions from reception to bookkeeping. She moved to Conway, NH in 1973 and in 1978 she met her future husband, Robert Ploski, a local General Contractor. They were married in 1981 and moved to Naples, Florida in 1984. In 1985 she started her own wallpaper and painting business and the business grew into full scale remodeling with her husband and several employees. Sally retired from that business in 2008 and took on property management until they moved to Maine in 2017.

Prior to their move to Maine, Sally, along with her Mom, Pauline Thomas, and sister, Betty Lou Richards, provided THS with pictures and information about the boats built by Sally & Betty's father, Russell Tabbutt. His boat shop is now the Slipway Restaurant. And the home she grew up in was moved to the top of the hill and is now Strong's Law Office.

Over the years Sally's personal interest have included boating, water skiing and scuba diving with her husband, many crafts including stained glass, sewing, embroidery, quilting, and much more. She also writes poetry, organizes family reunions, weddings, and works on her family genealogy. She's always eager to take on something new. Sally is currently working as a part time bookkeeper for Jimmy's Rentals in Rockland.

Sally took over as Membership Chair after joining the Board in June of 2017. She has recently become Editor of our Facebook Page and has brought forth many great ideas to help with both positions.



## ***2018 Schedule of Events***

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Our talks have been increasingly popular with three last summer packing the museum. To better accommodate all who are interested, we are moving our talks to Watts Hall. This will also allow us to expand our exhibit space on the first floor of the museum. Thus, all programs will be at Watts Hall unless otherwise indicated. Refreshments and socializing starts at 7:00 PM and the programs begin promptly at 7:30 PM.

**Tues. May 8th – Green Street Touchstones.** Historian Peggy McCrea will guide us on a virtual tour of Green Street and talk about the houses and people who lived in them.

**Sat. June 16th – Summer House Tour 1-4 PM.** The tour is of 14 Elliot Street, a beautiful Federal home build in 1845 that overlooks the harbor and has lovely gardens. An outdoor tea and raffle baskets will be available.

**Tues. June 19th – In Defense of Henry Knox.** Dr. Bill McCarriston seeks to exonerate Major General Henry Knox's indictments by several authors through his research from the Archives of the Commonwealth of Mass. and elsewhere. He will discuss this research which is based on his monograph. Just prior to the talk is the Thomaston Historical Society's annual membership meeting and election.

**Tues. July 10th – Alfred D. Snow: A Great Ship Revisited.** Betsy White, descendant of Capt. Willey during the last voyage of the Alfred D. Snow, describes her journey to Ballyhack, Ireland, the town closest to where the ship and the crew were lost. Learn how the town supports its memory.

**Sat. July 21st - General Henry Knox Memorial Service.** This 10:30 A.M. service honors Revolutionary War General Henry Knox, who was also the first Secretary of War. It takes place at the gravesite in the Thomaston Town Cemetery off Erin Street. A reception follows on the Knox Museum grounds.

**July 27th-30th – Thomaston Cemetery Cleaning/Repair Workshop.** We are offering, with the blessing of the Cemetery Committee a four day workshop next summer. Let's keep the momentum going started by the restoration of Knox's grave and the solo work our sexton, Pete Lammert has been doing. There is so much more work to be done. We have expert, Joe Ferannini, who led the restoration of the Tolman Cemetery and is a frequent instructor of MOCA (Maine Old Cemetery Assoc.) workshops. Consider signing up as a student, making a donation to cover the cost, or sponsoring the restoration/maintenance of a gravesite.

**Tues. Aug. 14th – Stonewalling in Maine.** Kevin Curtin, Ph.D. will talk about his research on stone walls in New England and the famous impoundment structures in Maine and who built them.

**Aug. Date TBD – Brooks Trap Mill Tour.** We are still finalizing the arrangements with Julie Brooks. Reserve your space early – space will be limited.

**Tues. Sept. 11th – Thatcher Street Archaeological Dig Update.** Harbour Mitchell, Archaeologist, will talk about the process and the findings from the June 2017 dig we sponsored. Hear what our next steps will be.

**Tues. Oct. 9th – Heirloom Apples.** Our speaker will be John Bunker, the author of "Not Far From the Tree", a brief history of the apples and orchards of Palermo, Maine. He also established the Maine Heritage Orchard in Unity, home to 300 historic pears and apples.

**Fri. /Sat. Dec. 7-8th – Home for the Holidays House Tour.** The house featured will have a Friday reception from 5 to 7 PM with wine and hors d'oeuvres, live music, and a small live auction. The tour and silent auction continue on Saturday between 10 AM and 3 PM. Reservations are needed for the Friday night event and tickets may be purchased at the door on Saturday.

**Nov. Date TBD – Saluting our Veterans.** Reception and potluck buffet for all veterans and their families.

Aleta Kilborn, Program Chair

## ***New Membership Categories***

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We have some new and exciting membership opportunities for the coming year (June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 through May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019). We added two tiers of business membership in hopes to giving businesses ore recognition and getting them more involved in our programs and the history of Thomaston. We have also added a special lifetime membership for seniors.

Sandra L. Hoekstra Bookseller is our first Gold Business member. This is new Thomason, Maine Street business owned by Sandra Hoekstra which specializing in antiquarian, collectible, out-of-print and rare books, maps prints and interesting ephemera in a variety of topics. When Sandra was asked for advice on how to unroll and preserve our fragile collection of maps, she volunteered take on the significant project of preserving and cataloging all our maps. As a kick start to this new membership and as a thank you to Sandra, we honor her with this first Gold Business membership.

The idea of reintroducing this version of a lifetime membership – the Legacy Membership came from an older individual that wished to join but would prefer to pay a one-time fee. This option simplified the need for being sent renewal applications and writing checks every year.

The following is a complete list of Membership offers:

**Single Membership:** Annual Fee of \$20

**Family Membership:** Annual Fee of \$30

**Legacy Senior Lifetime Membership:** Lifetime membership offer for 1 or 2 Seniors 75+ for \$250

**Silver Business Members:** Annual Fee of \$50

**Gold Business Members:** Annual Fee of \$100

All of the above include discounts on items in our Museum Store as well as discounts on fee events. The Business Memberships have some new advertising options that are well worth every dollar! Check them out on our Website or Facebook page.

Sally Tabbutt Ploski, Membership Chair

## ***Don't Miss Our Annual Membership Meeting***

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There will be a brief membership meeting prior to the talk on June 19<sup>th</sup> at Watts Hall. This is the time for electing our 2018-2019 officers and board. The Nominations Committee has prepared the following slate of candidates, also showing the roles they serve:

### Officers:

Susan Devlin – President  
William Gay - Vice President  
Aleta Kilborn – Secretary  
Ron Gamage – Treasurer

### Board Members:

Brooks Stevens - Financial Chair  
Mimi Zwick - Summer and Winter House Tour Chair  
Sally Ploski- Membership Chair and Facebook Editor  
William Eberle - Website Editor and Farm House Restoration  
Kathleen Daley - Nomination Chair  
Sandy Moore - Veterans Projects  
Rod Grindell - IT  
Marquita Chambers - Member at large

Kathleen Daley, Nominations Chair



Sandra at the store's opening with her husband and grandchild.