



The Denison Homestead Newsletter

No. 138



Spring | Summer 2010

Living in a Museum By Gayle Pallesen

It was author Thomas Wolfe who once wrote, “You can never go home.” I am the exception to the oft-quoted adage. For not only can I go home after more than half a century, nothing much will have changed.

Not the butter churn by the massive stone fireplace, the hitching post out front or the spinning wheels and looms that so finely wove together the threads of childhood memory. For the first nine years of my life, the Denison Homestead in Mystic Connecticut, also known as Pequotsepos Manor, was the only home I knew.

And now I am coming home, bringing my son Adam and daughter-in-law Christine this July to the house with a birthing room that predates the birth of George Washington. For nearly 300 years, the two-story, cedar-shake house that grips the rocky hillside has withstood uprisings and hurricanes. During its youth, it watched silently as the soil around it turned from British to American.

There will be a welcome sign out front that lists the times we are welcome to wander around inside. It will even list the price of admission. Unlike anyone I know, I grew up in a museum.



It’s been 11 years since I last made the sojourn to the Denison Homestead, that time bringing my 83-year-old mother to relive the experience. In 1946, my parents, Hannah and Tom McElroy, came on board amid the home’s restoration by Denison descendants who had formed the Denison Society. My mother was the museum’s first curator and my father developed the wildlife sanctuary across the road. They stayed 11 years. We lived in the “new” wing of the house added about 200 years ago and my older brother and I grew up thinking it perfectly normal to find a mortar and pestle beside of the six fireplaces.



Let me say up front, it’s not easy being a little kid growing up in a museum. Not easy, yet it all but guarantees the ability to return decades later and find that not that much has changed. Or has it? Sure some things aren’t quite what I remembered when I left there in 1957 and returned in 1999. The outcropping of rock along the sloping side lawn didn’t seem as “mountainous” as it did when my brother Tom and I crouched upon it playing cowboys and Indians. And sometime in the ‘70’s Dutch elm disease took the last of the two giant elms that once shaded the front lawn. The formal garden out back is no longer there.

continued on page 2

Living in a Museum continued

Childhood memories are for sharing and our July visit provides the perfect opportunity. In the birthing room off the colonial kitchen, I look forward to showing my son and daughter-in-law the wooden doll with hinged limbs believed carved by a Pequot Indian. Because of its age and origin, I never was allowed to play with it, of course. It's a good thing, or I might have been blamed for the missing tuft of fur that served as hair and was probably gnawed off by a rodent a century or two earlier.

That was the tough side of being a museum kid. My mother recalls a dour member of the Denison Society's Board of Trustees accusing me of tearing fringe from a fancy doily in the East Parlor, which reflects the gracious lifestyle of the 1920's and '30's. Mortified, my mother immediately began a search and discovered the missing fringe in a drawer where a mamma mouse had turned it into a nest for her babies.

Of course, they will want to see the 160-year-old hoop skirt whose rungs served as a ladder for my parakeet Buddy and the cast iron pots hung from a crane within the colonial kitchen's mammoth stone fireplace. The musket once over the mantle was propped in the kitchen corner during my last visit. Where will it be this trip?

I look forward to our slipping across the road to the wildlife sanctuary my dad developed and exploring the woods where I once played with my black and white hound Poochie. These are woods of oak, hickory, sassafras and maple where I climbed ice-age boulders and dreamed the dreams of little girls. It is in a small pond along one of the winding trails where, one day, a large snapping turtle almost took off a finger I twirled in tea-colored water. Ah, the memories...

These are things I want share with my offspring – life in a museum and the carefully-preserved woods that served as my playground. Thomas Wolfe may never be able to go home, but I can. And I plan to.

Thank you to Gayle for sharing her wonderful memories with us. We'd like to hear from more of you. If you have a special story or memories to share, please send them to membership@denisonsociety.org



We need your help this summer! If you live close enough to the Homestead, and are looking for a very rewarding way to spend some time this summer, why not spend it with us? We have some fun opportunities at the Denison Farm Market, events, and projects around the manor house such as gardening. Do as much or as little that works into your schedule. Every little bit helps! If your interested, call the Homestead at 860-536-9248. Hope to see you around the Homestead soon!



Welcome New Members!

Denison Society Members

Evelyn Hoover Steyer (*Life Member*) – California

Larry Allen McClellan - Illinois

Mary Churchill Moroney - Virgin Islands

Katia Debartolo - Connecticut

Alexio Denison Gonzalez - New Jersey

Katherine Dimancescu - Massachusetts

Carlita Beltz - IA

Bonnie Lee Everling - TN

John Hale Almy - CO

Vickie Jo Swanstrom - TX

Mary Ann Decker Craig - CO

Stephen White - CT

Glenn Carver Flodstrom - VA

Friends of the Denisons Members

Gayle Pallesen - FL

Strategic Planning Meeting Overview

Contributed by Board Member Jennifer Cody

I've heard it all my life, and on March 20, 2010, I saw just how true the statement is, Denisons like to talk! This was the day of the Denison Homestead Strategic Planning Meeting. Museum consultant Jennifer Eifrig led us on a journey of self discovery. Who and what are we? Who and what do we want to be? How do others see us? And, what is it we need to do to move forward in today's world and to obtain sustainability for the Denison Homestead?

Along with our talkative Denisons, which included the Board of Trustees and a past president, we were joined by representatives from the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center, Friends of the Denisons, the Mystic River Historical Society, the Stonington Historical Society, the New London Maritime Society and Custom House Museum, the Mystic Chamber of Commerce, and our farm market masters. On behalf of the Denison Board of Trustees, I would like to emphasize how appreciative we were to all our attending guests who provided us with invaluable insight.

It was an absolutely gorgeous, warm and sunny, early spring day - the kind of day that, after a long winter, you want to be outside working in the garden. But this dedicated group focused on the task at hand and stayed inside working on the base for our strategic plan.

The first half of the day was spent identifying who and what the Denison Homestead is today. This included determining both the geographic area and customers we currently serve, what programs and services we offer to both Denison members and the community, and our funding sources. Next we were challenged to determine our current market position, meaning where does the Homestead stand compared to competitors when it comes to who we serve, what we offer, and funding sources.

Unfortunately, but to no great surprise, the Denison Homestead comparatively fell short in most areas. We did however identify some outstanding strengths, which

included our large amount of property, location near a major tourist district, easy access to major highways, and a nationwide audience of Denison descendents. These are all competitive advantages that certainly require our focus.

After a lunch break, and yes, we did manage to enjoy a few minutes outside in the sunshine, we moved forward to: "Now that we know who we are currently, who do we want to be going forward?" Here we were encouraged to use our imagination and were also able to incorporate many of the suggestions recently obtained from members in the Strategic Plan Survey. (*Survey results can be found on pages 4 & 5 of this newsletter.*) So, once we had our 'who do we want to be wish list' in place, it was time to evaluate the list to make sure the items fit with our mission statement.

Finally, strategies begin to form! As the day came to an end, all of this discussion led to some "big questions." These questions relate to factors that will affect future strategies of the Homestead. First and foremost is: "How should the three entities located on the Denison Homestead, the nature center, farm market, and manor house, be interacting and supporting each other?" The other top questions were concerned with finding human resources (paid and volunteers) to support our programs, funding the operations of the Homestead and the preservation of our infrastructure, and defining our marketing message within the community. As we move forward with our planning, answering these questions will be a priority along with developing the appropriate strategies.

Overall, the day was considered a great success and helped to layout the road we have before us. Next steps are in place and we are preparing to take on the challenges presented. Based on the survey results, the Denison Board of Trustees feels it is working in the right direction for both the membership and community. We hope to see exciting changes in the near future - watch for more updates!



Early Spring Day at the Homestead

Strategic Plan Member Survey Results

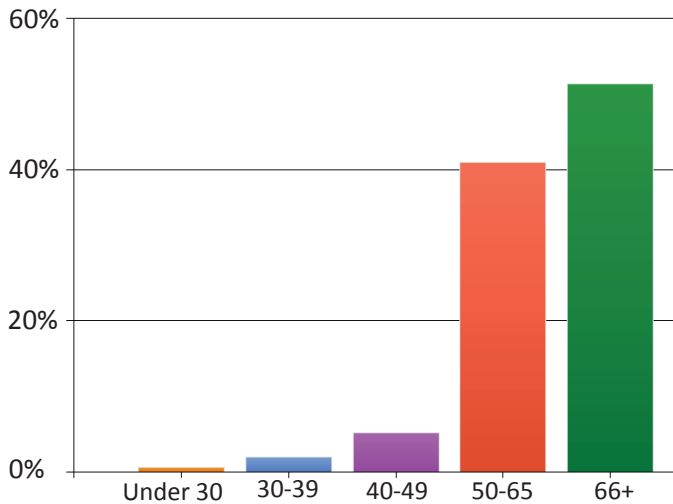
In February, in order to prepare for the Strategic Planning Meeting, a survey was sent to the membership. The following are the survey results from 156 responses.

Question 1

How long have you been a member of the Denison Society?
141 people answered - average was 18 ½ years

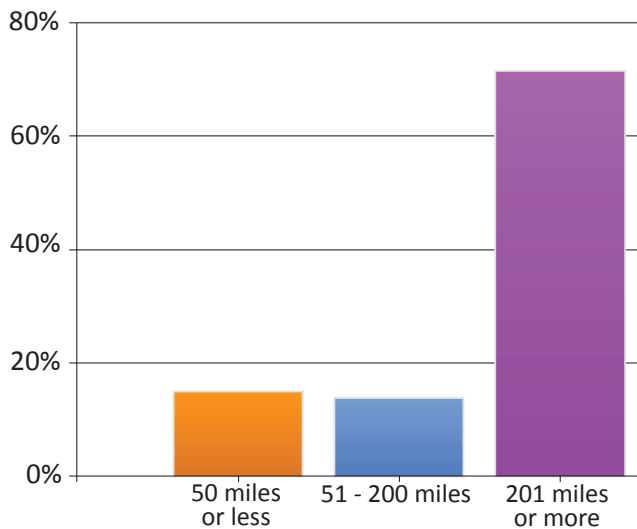
Question 2

How old are you?



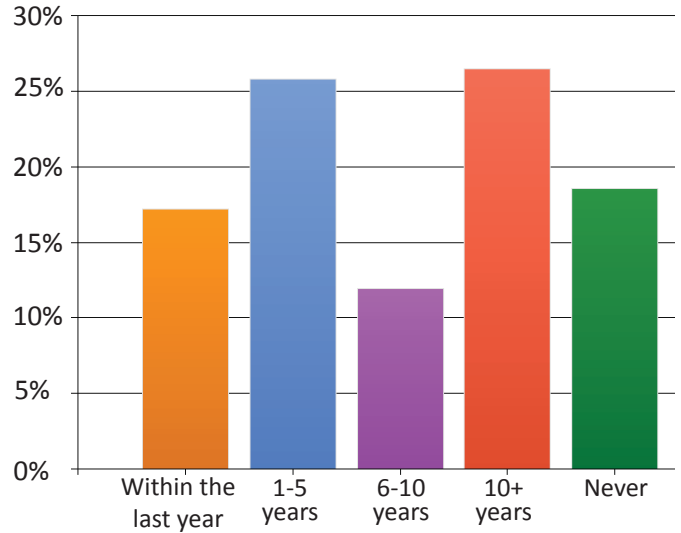
Question 3

How far from the Homestead do you live?



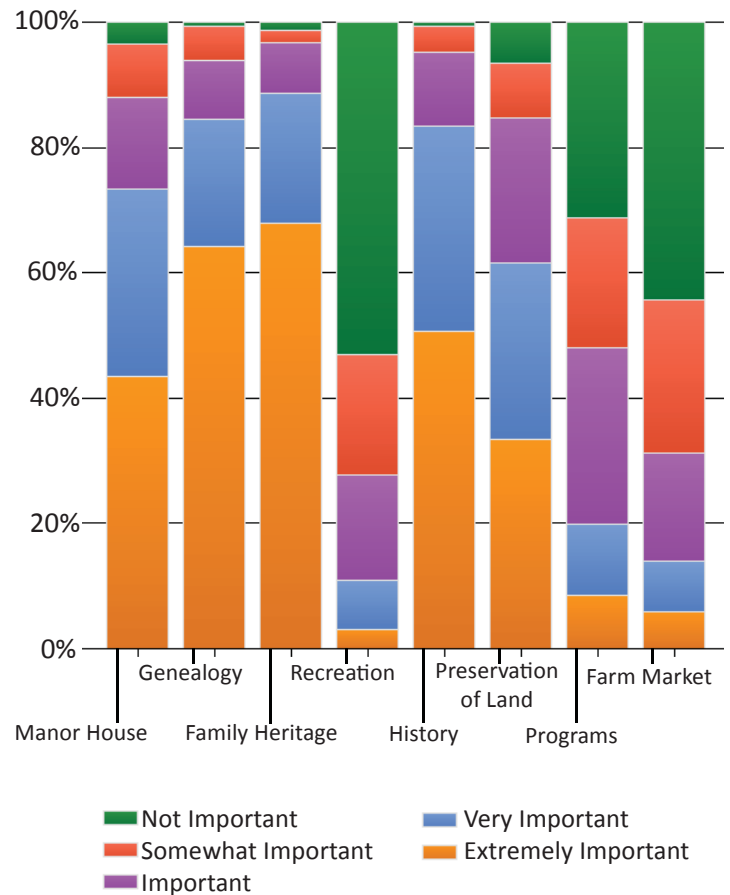
Question 4

When was your last visit to the Homestead?



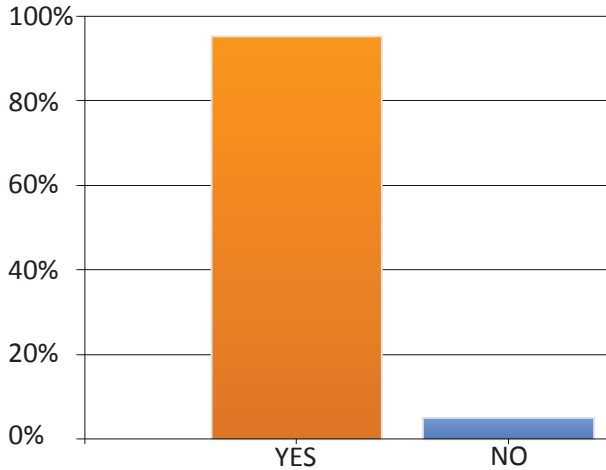
Question 5

What are your reasons for being a member?



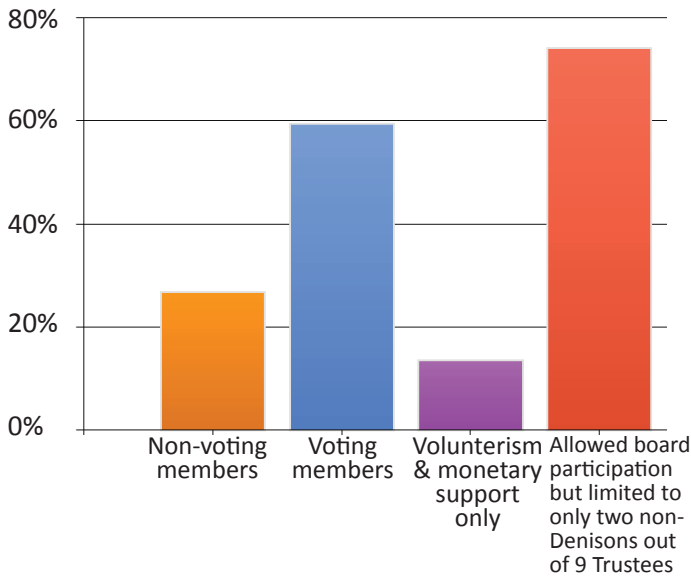
Question 6

“Friends”, non-Denisons, pay dues and have been around since 1946 but have never been an official class in our By-Laws. Should they be included as an official class category in our By-laws?



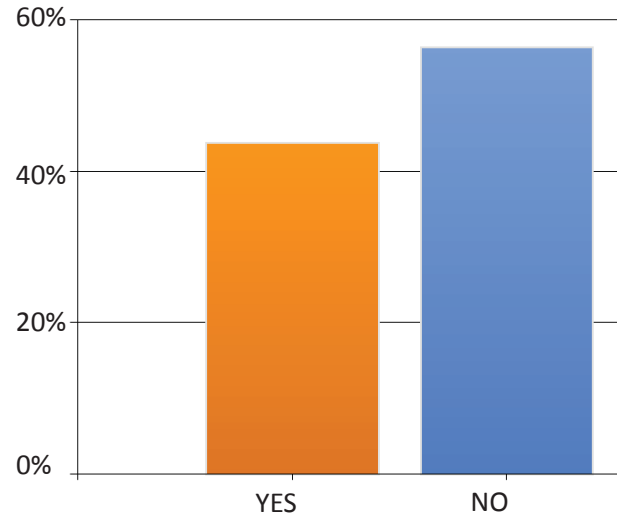
Question 6b

If you answered yes to the previous question, should “Friends” be:



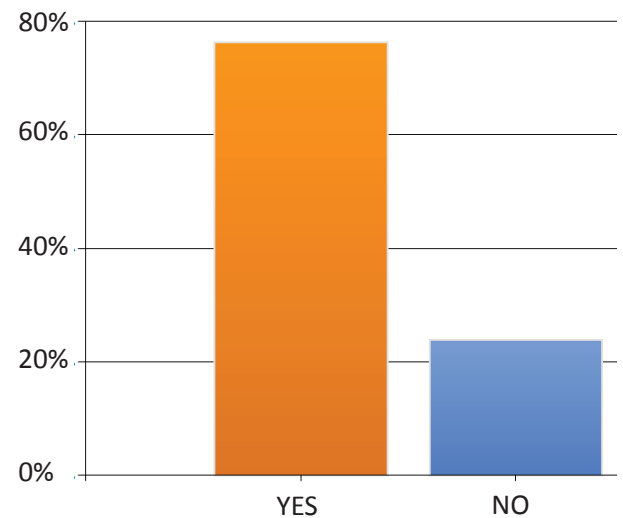
Question 8

Would you be interested in participating in a regional membership group?



Question 9

Would you be interested in being listed in a directory?



Question 7

We face substantial expenditures to maintain the manor house and possibly the barn. What do you suggest as the best way to finance such projects? **1 being the most important.**

	1	2	3	4	5
Fundraising from members	49%	31%	12%	8%	0%
Fundraising from non-members	17%	37%	32%	8%	6%
Bank loan	2%	6%	13%	39%	40%
Selling the Mistuxet-Cove 28 acre parcel	30%	16%	12%	15%	28%
Grants	34%	23%	24%	13%	6%

The Denison Homestead Website is Getting a Makeover



The Denison Homestead website is currently receiving a long needed update. The new site will have an updated look, be more user-friendly, and most importantly better service our members, community and visitors.

The website will be introduced in stages. First you will see a temporary page, which will give visitors to the site vital information such as contact info, hours of the manor house, directions, and events. Soon after the new site will be launched. We will be looking for your feedback, and ideas.

It is our goal to keep the site fresh while always looking to add new features. Keep checking back at www.denisonhomestead.org or www.denisonsociety.org to follow the changes!

Thank You!

We would like to thank all our donars for their generosity and support.

Elizabeth Acimovic
 Marilyn Alexander
 Diana Alheid
 Judith Allan
 Sally & Willam Alsobrook
 Elouise Andrews
 Sharon Arndt
 Ellen Baker
 Janet Barnum
 Doug & Barbara Butler
 Delilah Blount
 Carol Bonta
 Joan & John Butler
 Debra Butner
 Cynthia Chandler
 Archie Chester, Jr.
 Anne Collier
 Martha Conner
 Christopher Cooper

Alma Denison
 Carol Denison
 Charles Denison (FL)
 Charles Denison (NY)
 Charles & Cheryl Denison (MA)
 Dwight Denison
 Philip J. Denison
 James Denison
 Sherman Denison
 Harvey Denison, Jr.
 Katherine Dimancescu
 Deborah Downie
 Ernestine Elliott
 Jeanne Felker
 Lynda Fisher
 Sally Graf
 Joesph Greene II
 Joanne Griffin
 Alden Hatch

Jack Hillard
 John Hislop
 Carl Hyde
 Robert & Susan Johnson
 Christina Krashan
 Bourke Lodewyk
 Eileen Lombardo
 Scott Macdonough
 Susan Mann
 Ruth Miller
 Joy & Peter Molloy
 Mark Montgomery
 Peg Morris
 Mary Moses
 Susan Motycka
 Mary Nelson
 Gayle Pallesen
 Merrill Palmer
 L. Vail Palomino

Susan Petrivelli
 Joanne Pierce
 Zelma Potter
 Charles Powell
 Wallace Pursell
 Connie Purvis
 Barbara Reed
 Richard Rowe
 Carolyn Sparrow
 Elizabeth Taylor
 Carolyn Thompson
 Travis Kathleen
 Katherine D. Tripp
 Howard Van Valzah
 Scott Ward
 Charles Wardwell
 John Wheaton
 Douglas & Heather Wheeler

Joanne & Frank Collins in memory of Andrew Campbell Miller

Denison Lady Celebrates with a Bang!

Move over Gloria Steinem and Susan B. Anthony, first came Ann Borodell Denison Holmes, a true defender of women's rights! Ann Borodell Denison, widow of John Gallop, married sea captain Jeremiah Holmes. During the War of 1812, Holmes won the title of "Hero of Stonington" for his courageous participation in the Battle of Stonington against the British. So, several months later, when peace was declared, Captain Holmes and the other men of Mystic decided to throw a big celebration, except, only men were invited.



Well, Ann, who was as patriotic as her husband, felt very strongly that the women of Mystic had done all they could during the war efforts, and therefore were entitled to also participate in the celebrations. Ann decided to take matters into her own hands, and with the help of other Mystic women, put together a celebration of their own. They procured gunpowder, proceeded to load an old cannon located on a nearby wharf, and fired their own victorious salute. It is said, the shot was heard far and wide, and the men of Mystic paused in their celebration and doffed their hats to the patriotic women of Mystic that they had so rudely slighted.

Board of Trustees

Jean Evans - *President*

Anne Scheibner - *Vice President and Farm Market Liaison*

Archie Chester - *Treasurer*

Anne Collier - *Corresponding Secretary and Membership Chairman*

Jennifer Cody - *Marketing*

Debbie Downie - *DPNC Representative*

Joseph Greene - *Strategic Plan Grant*

Denison Hatch - *Investments*

Steve Solley - *Buildings and Grounds*



Jean Evans, Anne Scheibner and State Representative Diana Urban at the DPNC Earth Day Celebration

Genealogists:

Joanne Langdon

Midge Frazel

Staff:

Julie Soto - *Office Coordinator*

Aiden - *Docent*



With Our Sincerest Condolences

Louise Mae Whitney of Pasadena, Maryland, died December 2, 2009

Andrew Campbell Miller, brother of Ruth Miller, died March 8, 2010

Judith Alger, mother of Louisa Alger Watrous, died December 7, 2009

The Denison Society, Inc.
120 Pequotsepos Road
P.O. Box 42
Mystic, CT 06355

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 4
Mystic, CT
06355

Thanks to our Newsletter Patrons

Carol Bonta
Mary Cooper Nelson
John Fucik
Eileen Lombardo
Gerald P. Starr
Edwin David Taylor
Linda Dennison Wahl
Katherine Denison Tripp
Nadene Denison Hunter, MD

If you would like to be a
Newsletter Patron, contact us at
membership@denisonsociety.org
or call (860)-536-9248

Save the Dates!

Opening Day for the Denison Farm Market
Sunday, June 6

Connecticut Open House Day at
Pequotsepos Manor
Saturday, June 12

Denison Day / Gallup Wedding
Saturday, August 21

Send Us Your Email

Do you want to receive updates, event
announcements, and current news about the
Homestead? Then send your email address to
membership@denisonsociety.org