

Belmont needs help to preserve town's history for future generations

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DATE: November 13, 2007

PUBLICATION: New Hampshire Union Leader (Manchester, NH)

EDITION: State

SECTION: Local

PAGE: B1

BELMONT -- THE VICE PRESIDENT of the **Belmont** Historical Society says she is worried that declining membership and a lack of volunteers is making it increasingly difficult to complete projects to help preserve the town's history.

Diane Marden, who last year put together a postcard history of the town that was published by Arcadia Press, said, "The town's history is an important piece of what **Belmont** is today and a huge piece of what **Belmont** will be for future generations. Without a historical society there is not much hope for the future of town's exceptional historical qualities," she says.

Her own roots in the town run deep. Her grandfather, Harold Reed, was road agent from 1957 through 1983 and her great-grandfather, Howard Reed, was the town's first fire chief, serving 38 years with the department, 25 as chief, until he retired in 1962.

And Marden, a 1985 graduate of **Belmont** High School, has served the town in a variety of capacities, as secretary to selectmen and to a variety of town boards and commissions, as well as administrative assistant at the town fire department.

She left that post in 2001 after her son's confinement to a wheelchair but kept involved in the community by starting her own Web site, belmontnh.org, and writing for the **Belmont** Better Times, a free community newspaper.

She said the town has a lot of residential growth in the last 25 years and that it is the goal of the historical society, as well as many other volunteer committees in town, to educate and involve new residents in the process of town government, including its history.

Currently, the historical society's main project is the restoration and preservation of the Province Road Meeting House on Route 107. In 1979 the society voted to accept the structure from the Third Free Will Baptist Meeting House Society to be preserved and used for the purposes of the **Belmont** Historical society.

She said the 215-year old building is one of the oldest in the area and that plans are under way to place it on a foundation, which will stabilize the structure and provide additional room for safe storage of museum items, records and activities.

She said it is important to the town's historical heritage that the meeting house's continuing presence as a gathering place and community landmark be maintained.

The project last week received a \$5,000 grant from the state's Land and Community Heritage Investment Program.

Marden said the society has raised more than \$5,000 over the past five years with its historical trolley tours during the town's annual Old Home Day, another community event that is run by volunteers whose ranks need replenishing.

"Many citizens step up to the plate to complain about town happenings, but very few step up to volunteer and try to make a difference. A lot can be learned from volunteering on these boards. Making a difference in the community is extremely rewarding, but it all can't be done solely by a few dedicated individuals currently serving," says Marden.

She said the groups in need of volunteers and new membership are the **Belmont** Historical Society, Old Home Day committee, planning board, zoning board, and budget committee. She urges people to call her at 267-1108 to become a member of the historical society and to call **Belmont** Town Offices at 267-8300 to become active with the other boards and committees.