This year it is a pleasure for me to bring our friends and Pickering Foundation members up to date on the “behind the scenes” efforts of our Board of Trustees.

As many of you know, our main focus for some time has been on the general degradation of our buildings and property, and the need to focus on the most important of these problems quickly and effectively. Your Board has been working away on promotion, membership and fundraising to increase the awareness of the historical importance of the Pickering House and its wellbeing for the future.

While we didn’t receive any grant money this year to repair our chimney we are able to announce contributions from The Marine Society at Salem, The Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati, and several other individual donors. As valuable as these donations are, the fact that we must attack our largest project first makes our job of asking for donations that much more urgent and necessary.

I’m happy to announce that, as of our October meeting, the Board has taken decisive action to receive estimates for not only the chimney, but for roof and tree work as well. These are all critically needed operations that will help us avoid more costly repairs down the road.

The Trustees of the Pickering Foundation have become - more than ever - a focused, thoughtful and hardworking group. They have all contributed his or her time aside from their busy lives to become an integral part in the tasks we face in preserving this historic family home.

I urge you all – family, friends or Foundation members to refer to our list of Trustees and get in touch with any of us to rekindle YOUR interest in the house, and be an active part in this most active phase of its history.

I am proud of the progress in our quest to stabilize, and eventually improve the condition of this family treasure, and I thank you in advance for your continued support.

In closing, the Pickering family would like to thank the wonderful Goodhue family for being as caring and loving of the house as if it was their own.

Happy Holidays,
H.B. Pickering, President
A PAIR OF WORTHWHILE EVENINGS

In 2007, the greater Salem community and many Pickering House members have been treated to no less than two great events honoring the historic nature of the area.

First, last February many of you heard Carl Nold, the President and CEO of Historic New England, Inc., speak about the importance of preserving historic homes and the unique challenges that face those of us endeavoring in that work. Mr. Nold noted that although historic homes can be a fun and transformative experience, providing its visitors with a tactile connection to the past, visitation is down. There are a number of reasons for this, according to Mr. Nold. They include: (i) declining interest in American history and museums in general; (ii) too many competing demands on family time; (iii) museums’ failures to accommodate how visitors’ interests, expectations, and behaviors have changed; and (iv) an overabundance of historic homes, some of which are not particularly relevant or well-maintained.

But hope is not lost for those of us passionate about maintaining historic homes. Mr. Nold counseled all those in attendance to think about using historic homes in ways other than as strict museums with strict visiting hours. A renewed flexibility in use, such as for parties, meetings and special events, can still get the broader public into enjoy the homes, while adjusting the use to better suit the current culture. Special interest memberships and integration with school groups may also achieve this goal. The key to achieving relevance seems to be shifting the focus from the historic homes to the desires, interests and schedules of its potential customers.

None of this can be even attempted, let alone achieved, without a strong endowment. Mr. Nold emphasized that increasing the endowments of these homes must be the top priority.

In mid-October, the Bowditch Institute with sponsorship from the Pickering House, hosted a weekend of events honoring the philanthropic spirit of the late Caroline Plummer. The weekend began with an open house at the Pickering House. John Pickering VI (1777-1846), a lawyer and scholar, was a close friend and contemporary of Caroline Plummer in 19th-century Salem, and served on her Estate Committee. The highlight of the weekend was the Plummer Party, held on Saturday night in the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum. At the party, Pickering House President, Ben Pickering, introduced the keynote lecture given by Peter J. Gomes, the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in Memorial Church, Harvard University. A dessert reception followed and a good time was had by all during that festive Halloween environment of Salem in October. We look forward to more historic events in the coming year! Stay tuned!

- Nina Pickering with Becky Putnam

PIECES OF PICKERING HOUSE HISTORY DONATED:

More than 120 Letters and Documents Discovered

For a long time, there has been a collection of over 120 letters and documents mostly concerning Mary Elizabeth Pickering Dorsey, sitting like buried treasure in a closet. The trustees of the Pickering Foundation would like to thank Gerry W. Whitehead of Farmington, Connecticut, for uncovering the aforementioned items and graciously donating them to the Foundation. In his letter addressed to the Trustees of the Pickering Foundation, Mr. Whitehead wrote: “We are pleased to now offer these letters and documents to the Pickering Foundation, hoping that they might be safeguarded and that they might be of use and interest and benefit to the Foundation.” He continues: “Should the Trustees and the Museum deem it desirable, we have no objection to the collection being given to the Peabody Museum.”

Currently, the letters have been secured in protective sleeves, placed in a binder, and are available for viewing in the library of the Pickering House. They have also been color copied by trustee Racket Shreve.

The letters and documents are particularly interesting for a number of reasons. They are all very personal and unique. They document family and friends’ health and well-being, crops, births, and deaths. They are a step back in time as they provide real commentary on the hopes and concerns during the era in which they were written. Included in the collection are nine letters from Col. Timothy Pickering. In one of his letters, Col. Tim amusingly focuses on the drawbacks for women of wearing corsets.

Next time you are at the Pickering House, take some time to sit in the library and read the letters. They convey history in a unique and absorbing way; and at the same time, provide a sense of connection to the present through the common and everyday hopes and concerns unchanged by time.

- Rich Pickering
IN MEMORIAM: SALLY SULGER PICKERING

Sarah Sulger Pickering died peacefully on September 2, 2007. She was the beloved wife of Tim Pickering Sr. for 57 years, mother to Ann, John and Tim, Jr., and aunt to 16 Pickering nieces and nephews.

My mom grew up in Rochester and graduated from Smith in 1946. The Reverend George Cadigan, who was a strong childhood influence on my father at Grace Church in Salem, introduced my parents in the summer of 1948.

It was love at first site for them. In fact, things proceeded alarmingly fast, with Reverend Cadigan pushing my father to meet this beautiful and talented young woman, and then cautioning that they were too young to become so certain so quickly; after one date.

My mother was the woman behind Dad’s career success in Toledo, OH and Byn Mawr, PA. Through thick and thin she helped him lead large and vibrant congregations. She was a constant source of strength and perspective on every detail of church life.

In 1980, my mom was devastated by a stroke. She accepted her handicaps and aches with great courage. It is incredible to think how much she accomplished over the last 17 years: Several trips to see her beloved friends and museums in England; meals and housekeeping with Dad up until 2005; and, enjoying their wonderful house on the coast of Maine.

She enjoyed being a Pickering very much, and felt lucky be part of such a loving and generous family.

- Tim Pickering, Jr.