

Documenting the Pandemic for the Future

The Portland Historical Society, in an effort to continue our mission to document and share the history of “everything” Portland, invites you to share how COVID 19 has impacted your life. We will be collecting your stories, personal reflections, photos, poems, artwork and other items so that future generations will know how our community coped with the pandemic.

All submissions will be preserved in the historical society’s archives, as a type of community journal and time capsule of this historic event. All items should be emailed to the Society (PortlandCThistory@gmail.com). If you prefer, you can mail your submissions of stories, reflections or photos to the Portland Historical Society, PO Box 98, Portland, CT 06480. Please note, however, that we are unable to return any items. Please only send items that you would like us to keep for our archives.

The following are suggested prompts for your submission. You need not reply to all, they are intended to help you get started. Children are especially invited, with adult help, to submit their reflections in the form of paintings, drawings, or recorded voice/recorded singing. Questions are used with permission from the Middlesex County Historical Society’s director, Jesse Nasta.

Question 1: What were your first thoughts and feelings when you heard about the pandemic? How have those initial thoughts and feelings changed?

Question 2: If you were working before the pandemic, how did your work life change? (Possible topics to discuss: if you are working from home, if you are working in public, technology you are using, challenges, surprises, etc). Please include where you work, specifically, if you are willing.

Question 3: If you run a business or a non-profit organization, please describe how the pandemic has affected your business or non-profit, and how you have responded.

Question 4: If you are a student, please describe your remote learning experience . (Possible topics to discuss: technology, challenges, fears, surprises, etc.)

Question 5: How else has the pandemic affected your day to day life? Please give specific examples, if the previous questions have not covered this.

Question 6: How have you been keeping in touch with family and friends outside your home? Is this different from how you usually keep in touch and, if so, how?

Question 7: Who have you been sheltering in place with — if anyone — and what has your experience of life under sheltering in place been like?

Question 8: How are you or others staying involved with your community during this pandemic (examples: making masks or doing other volunteer activities, showing appreciation for medical professionals, etc). Try to mention specific places and activities.

Question 9: What activities are you doing to stay busy, if work and/or family responsibilities leave you any free time? Have you started any hobbies or picked any hobbies back up?

Question 10: Would you say that your experience during COVID-19 has been more difficult than most people's, less difficult than most people's, or about the same? Why?

Question 11: Do you think the pandemic will have a lasting impact on your community? If so, how?

Question 12: What are your greatest fears, and your greatest hopes, for the coming months? The coming years?

Question 13: How does this pandemic compare with other difficult times you might have lived through (examples: the Great Depression, wars, recessions, etc)?

Question 14: Do you think Portland's experience of the pandemic has been unique in any ways and, if so, how?

Question 15: What images, experiences, or stories from this pandemic do you believe will most stand out in your memory, in the years to come? These can be things that you saw/heard in the news, that you witnessed yourself, or that others told you.

Question 16: What would you want future generations to know about this time in history, including how Portland responded?

Question 17 (Past pandemics): Do you know any stories about Portland during the 1918 influenza pandemic (the largest past pandemic)? For instance, have any stories of your ancestors' experiences during that time been passed down to you? Did any of your family members die in the 1918 influenza pandemic and, if so, who?

If you know of anyone in particular whom the Historical Society should interview about their COVID-19 experience, such as someone doing essential work or volunteering, please consider sharing this list with them. Perhaps you can actually record a relative, neighbor or friend talking about their experiences — creating an oral history.

Thank You.