

# **The Mather Homestead**

## ***2022 Audience Assessment***

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## Executive Summary

***“The Mather Homestead offers the ability to experience generations of life in Darien. It has value in the beauty of the home and property and in the shared experiences it offers.” - visitor comment***

There is a *lot* of good news for the Mather Homestead revealed through this data collection study: the Homestead is a place that is well loved by and embedded within its community, generating significant repeat visitation. Visitors seem to not only understand the nature of the Homestead mission, but also appreciate the ways in which it has been creative at introducing new audiences through wide-ranging activities and resources. The holistic view of Mather Homestead is one of a beautiful site – inside and out – where people can go for education, enjoyment, and socializing.

The vast majority of respondents relay a *very* positive reaction to the vibrant mix of educational and entertaining options provided by the Mather Homestead. Visitors appreciate the rich history associated with this site, and wish to see even more programming around associated topics, such as the Revolutionary War and the origin of the National Parks. But they also love the more social, entertaining, or tangentially-related experiences, and asked for more culinary and gardening classes as well as a walking path on the site.

The audience is local, with 59% living in Darien, 26% living in New Canaan, 7% in Norwalk, and the remainder in Stamford or elsewhere in Fairfield County and Westchester Country. Of those surveyed, 40% are over the age of 65. 31% are between the ages 55-64. A further 25% are 45-54, while 2% are 35-44 and no one is under 35.

One area for more research and experimentation seems to be child-oriented activities, most of which did not generate wide interest. This lack of interest can be partially explained by the demographics of this sample, which was primarily older adults without children (69% do not have children under the age of 18), but some questions did speak directly to those with children, so that cannot account for all of the responses. Findings also show that existing family events and kid programming were not well attended compared to other events/activities. Adding and marketing new children’s activities certainly has the potential to increase the presence of younger adults/families. A case study to review might be that of the Florence Griswold Museum in Old Lyme; they have a similar base demographic profile to that of the Mather Homestead, and achieved great success with attracting a younger demographic through a special yearly event (in addition to smaller more frequent events; their annual Wee Faerie

Village is a well-designed, well-promoted children's event.

(<https://florencegriswoldmuseum.org/wfv/>)

In general, people are very pleased with the level and type of communication from the Homestead, though there is room for growth with encouraging social media use. Likewise, membership seems surprisingly low given the frequency of visits many people are making and with their general excitement about the Homestead; there is a lack of clarity on membership benefits which should be easy to address. Giving -- both annually and in other ways -- seems high, and visitors are expressing a desire to give even more, especially to tangible bricks and mortar projects.

In summary, the Mather Homestead is already perceived as a vital community resource, as a place to be social with neighbors and friends, and engage with historical programming; people seem eager to become even more engaged with both programming and giving, providing great scope for expansion in these areas.

**A note on the data:**

While graphs of close-ended questions are displayed embedded in the report, the open-ended questions and the full survey questions and all 54 responses can be found [here](#).

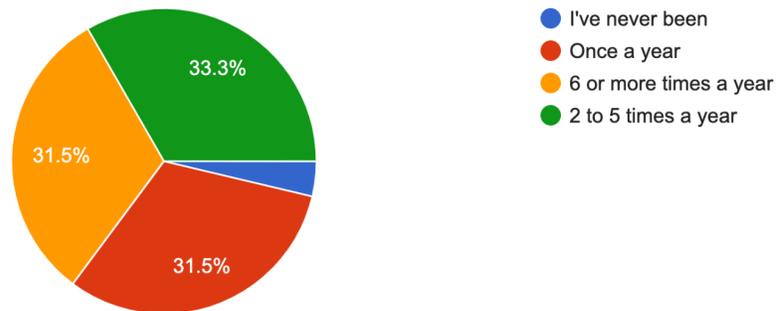
## Detailed Analysis

### Visiting the Mather Homestead

The responses to this survey indicate an active group of repeat visitors. Around a third visit more than six times a year, a further third 2 to 5 times a year, and all but two visit at least once a year.

How frequently do you visit the Mather Homestead?

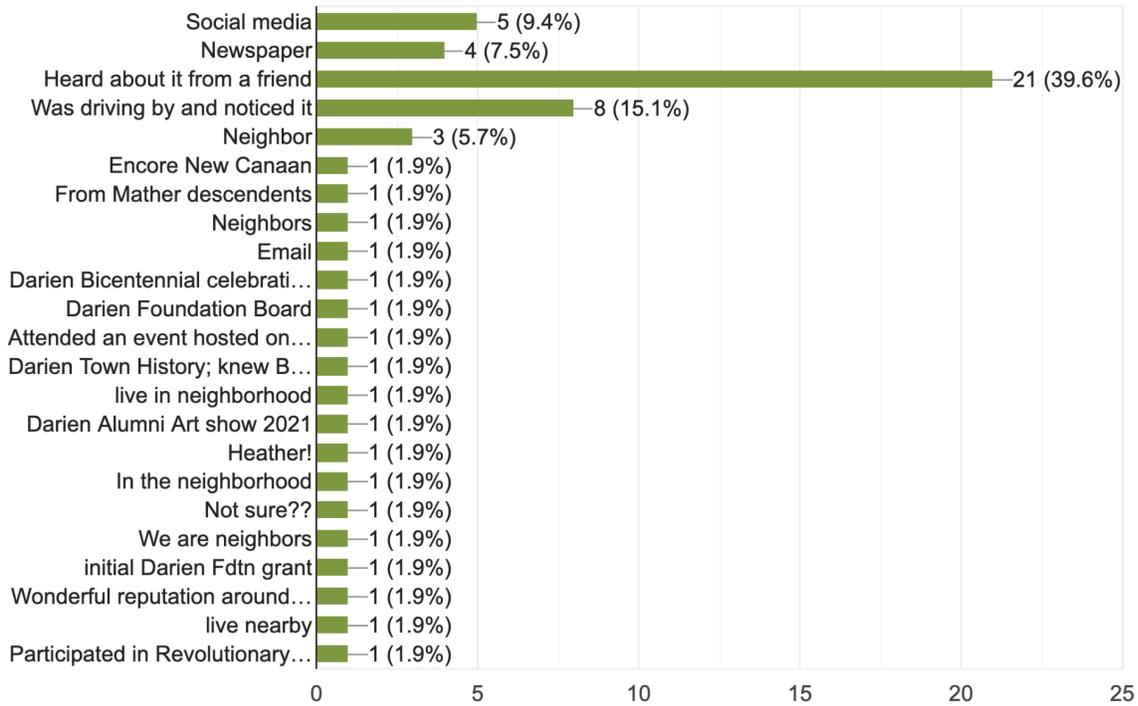
54 responses



The Homestead is truly a community-based resource. 45% of respondents first heard of the Mather Homestead from a friend or neighbor, while another 15% were driving by and noticed it. Many people offered write-in answers, with many indicating they live nearby or heard about it locally around town.

## How did you first hear about the Mather Homestead?

53 responses



## Impressions of the Mather Homestead

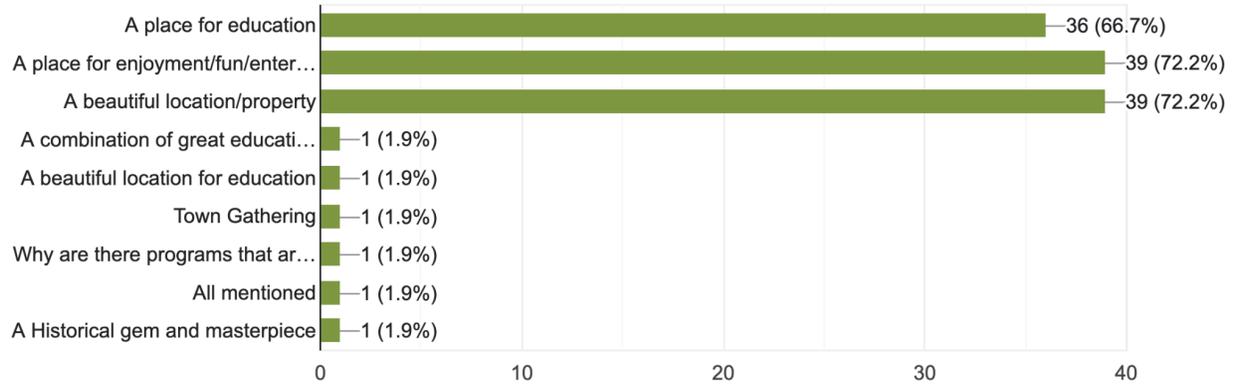
In the 44 responses to the open-ended question, “How would you describe the Mather Homestead to someone who's never been, and what would you say is its ‘value’ to the local community?” people were overwhelmingly positive, frequently using words such as “fascinating”, “wonderful” “beautiful” and “interesting.” The most common mentions include that it is a place that is of value to local history, is a vibrant community space as well as a well-preserved outdoor space. One comment wrote, *“It's a historic homestead with a wonderful community space providing interesting and varied programming to appeal to a widespread cross section of our community.”* and another said, *“It is a historical treasure with beautiful grounds and a wonderful Barn to hold events for all ages, e.g., historical, entertaining, interesting speakers, great musical concerts. In addition it has a FABULOUS Executive Director and her wonderful assistant to organize everything. The website is so well done. The local community should be so happy to have such a special place in Darien.”*

Additionally, these two comments exemplify many of the responses, which were factual responses about what the Mather Homestead “is” and encompassed the history and current offerings: *“The Mather Homestead is a historic property dating from the American Revolutionary period. It served as a family home to early American religious figures and in the 20th century to the founder of the National Park Service. It continues to be a community based staging area to keep the history of past events and current events relevant through education and enjoyment while undertaking the challenges of historic management and preservation.”* and *“A beautiful gift from the Mather family heirs that's a wealth of local history and one of the heirs was the first Director of Nat'l Parks. They have quite a bit of educational programming focussed on Mather family and local history and national parks/environmental concerns. In addition they have programs that are terrific community builders and provide rental space in their barn for small-medium size events.”*

The Homestead is used in many ways, with wide appeal in the community. Three-quarters of survey takers agreed that Mather Homestead is a place for enjoyment/fun/entertainment, as well as a beautiful location/property. Just slightly fewer respondents found it a place for education (two-thirds). One write-in answer called it a *“historical gem and masterpiece”* and another described it as a *“town gathering”* place.

Please think about your perceptions of the Mather Homestead. Which of these descriptions seem accurate to you?

54 responses

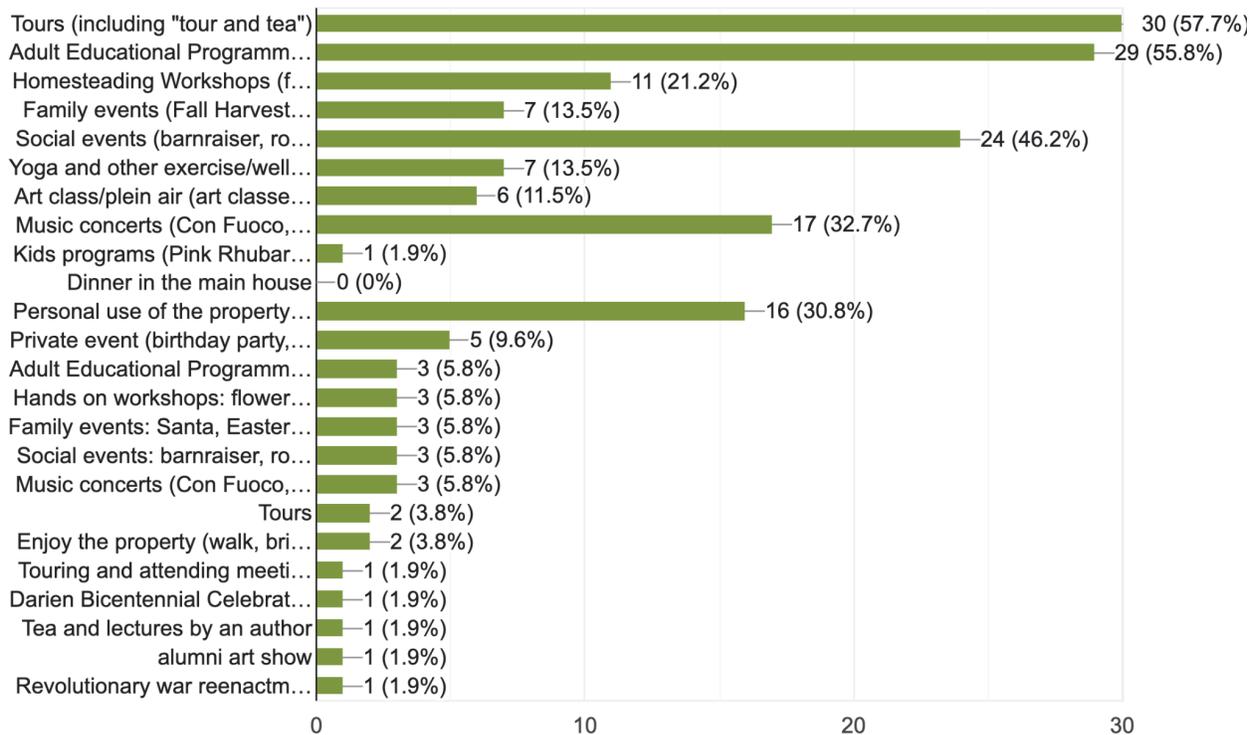


## Experiences at the Mather Homestead

People visit the Homestead for a wide variety of reasons, from tours to programs to concerts to personal recreational use of the property. The most popular, at 58%, is “tours (including ‘tour and tea’)”, with “Adult Educational Programming (lectures, book talks, poetry, etc.)” and “social events (barnraiser, rosé and roses, newcomers event, etc.)” coming in close behind at 56% and 46%, respectively. Other common reasons that people visit were indicated as “music concerts (Con Fuoco, On the Trail, David Higgins Band, Dan Zlotnick, Nick Depew, Acabella, Caryn Lin, etc.)” (33%) and “personal use of the property (walk, bring your dog, picnic, etc.)” (31%).

What of the following have you attended at the Mather Homestead? (Check all that apply)

52 responses



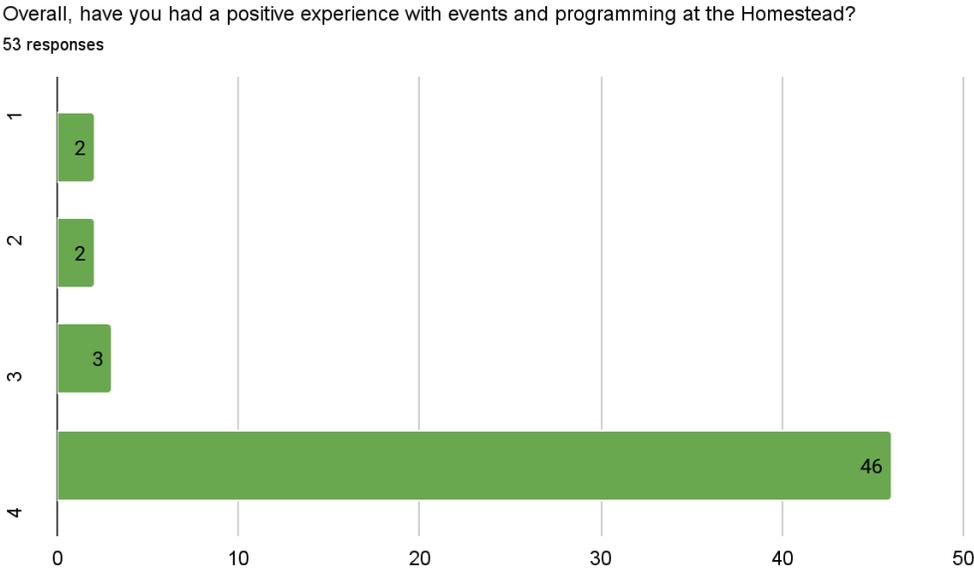
When asked about their favorite event or program that they attended at the Homestead, eight people mentioned tea in the garden as their favorite event, one person even wrote that it was attending a tour and tea that “Gave insight to a place that piqued my curiosity” about the Homestead. Another said, “Garden Party. So well done, wonderful speaker this year and last year. Delicious box lunches and table settings. Perfection!!!!!!”. Three people mentioned the barnraiser as a particular favorite.

Two people wrote about the Executive Director, Heather Raker, saying she is a “knowledgeable” tour guide, and she makes the tours “interesting and fun”.

There were varied comments about speakers, some very positive, while others were less happy about specific speakers, one mentioning in particular writing that the “scholar from UC Berkeley did not know about the California connection.” (It is worth noting that for a later question, someone also mentions that they “didn't love the Yale professor guy bc he didn't answer the questions”.) In our experience these individual negative comments tend to be outliers, and are not reflected elsewhere in the data.

Two people mentioned bread making, however, and this comment exemplifies many: “I enjoyed bread baking class. I attended with coworkers and a good friend. We had a blast!” People spoke to attending with friends, and family, and meeting people from the wider community. Visitors see Mather Homestead as a social place, which is encouraging as the Homestead seeks to develop more events and programming.

When asked if overall they have had a positive experience with events and programming at the Homestead, visitors were overwhelmingly in agreement: 87% gave it the highest possible score.



People were also extremely positive in their responses and comments about the events they have attended, including comments about both the content and logistics of these events. People specifically mentioned the Barn as a “game changer”, as well as noting how well the property is maintained. One commenter wrote, *“I am always super impressed by the quality of the programming. I like the intimate setting and feeling like it is a special and unique small scale community resource.”* and another specifically mentioned the Executive Director, Heather Raker, writing, *“Heather is always ready with a warm welcome, iced tea, and clean facilities for visiting artists. Thank you!”*

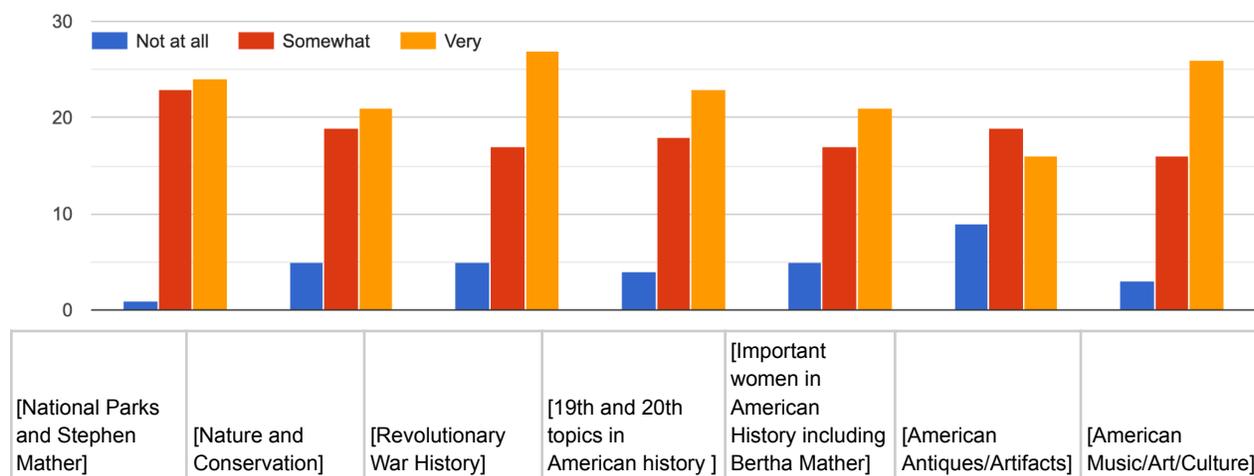
In terms of more constructive feedback for areas of improvement, two people asked for more events without alcohol or other drink options. One wrote, *“Less emphasis on events where alcohol is included, obviously displayed, and pushed onto participants. We do not consume do to health reasons and would appreciate more non-alcoholic options at events. There are many people in our community who struggle with addiction and are in recovery.”*

And since this was an open forum for all commentary about the Homestead programming, a couple of respondents used this as a chance to discuss issues personal to them, specifically as neighbors to the Homestead. There were two rather lengthy comments from those concerned about the quantity and type of events being held at the Homestead. The shorter one is quoted below, however, it is important to note this is *not* a typical visitor, this is from a neighbor who isn’t speaking to events they personally attended: *“As a neighbor who borders the Mather Farm homestead, we are very unhappy with the frequency of events, the size of the events (parking), the noise, and that often the events are not educational at all but private parties. The Mather Homestead has become very commercial and defeats the purpose of wanting to preserve history and protect the wildlife. And it is obviously exceeding the number of events that it can hold. As neighbors, we feel misled.”*

## Future Programming at the Mather Homestead

The Mather Homestead is rich in history related to a variety of topics. When asked how interested they were in educational programming or tours about these topics, there was a high level of overall interest across the seven options. Revolutionary War history had the highest percentage of very interested respondents (50%), American music/arts/culture (48%), and National Parks and Stephen Mather (44%). With respect to the National Parks and Stephen Mather, an additional 43% were somewhat interested, the highest of any topic by far. This shows great scope for promoting and gathering further interest with people open to the idea. With 17% saying they were not interested, American Antiques/Artifacts was the least popular.

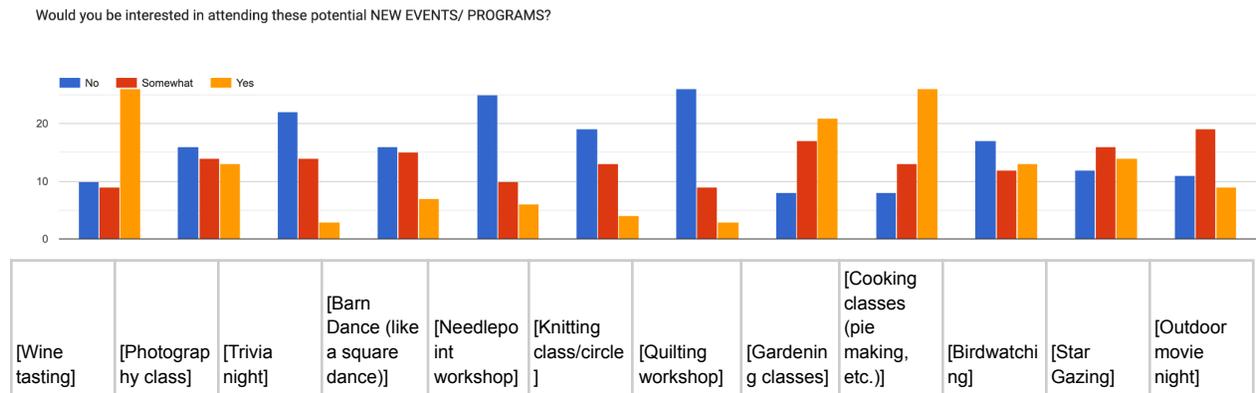
The Mather Homestead is rich in history about a variety of topics. Please tell me how interested you are in educational programming or tours about these topics:



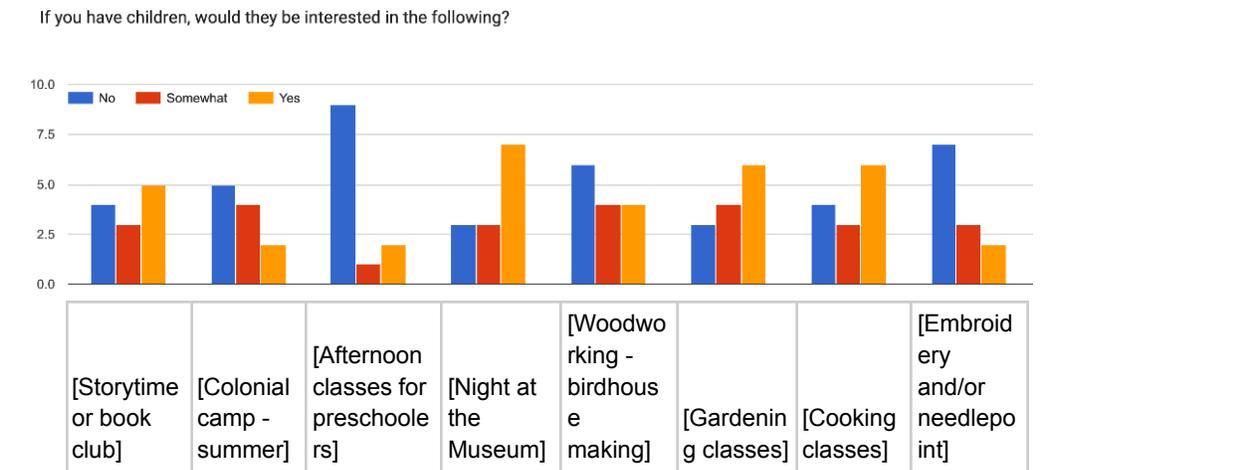
When asked if there are other topics for educational programming or tours that they think would be appropriate for the Homestead, there were 15 responses. Three thought the list provided by the Homestead was comprehensive as is; three were interested in learning more about the property, topics ranging from the environment to beekeeping; three people also wanted specific programming and tours about local Darien history; two people were interested in wider history or colonial reenactments and taverns, and two others suggested more promotion of local artists or having an artist in residence.

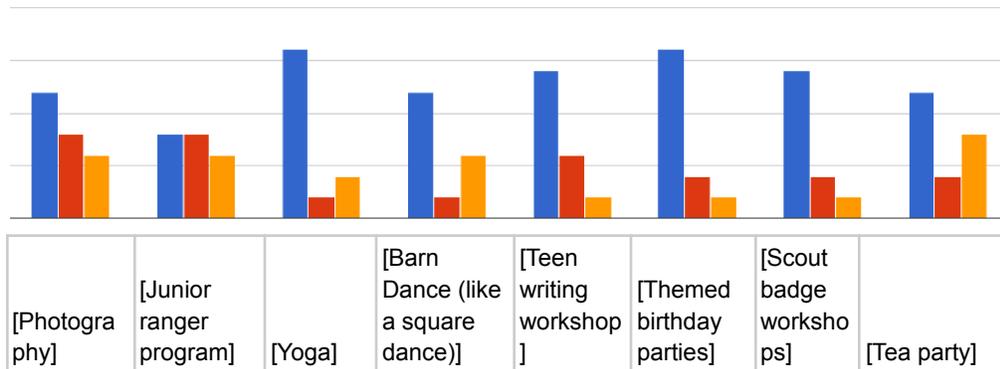
The Homestead offered respondents to this survey a variety of options for new events and programs they might be interested in attending. Of the twelve options, there was a range of

interests, some very high, while others were clearly less favorable to the audience. The most popular, with 48% indicating high interest, were both wine tastings, and cooking classes (pie making, etc.). Following those front runners, 38% were also interested in gardening classes. On the other side of the scale, 48% were *not* interested in quilting workshops, 46% were uninterested in needlepoint workshops, and 41% were uninterested in trivia night.



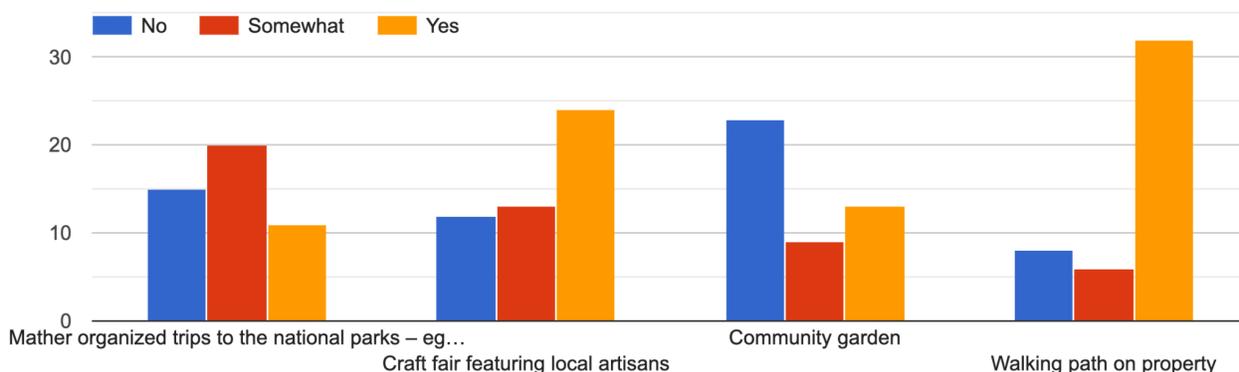
Respondents with children were asked about their children's interest in the 16 different options for events and programs. Overall in this subset population, there was higher disinterest across the board, especially when compared to the popularity of other topics and events/ programs suggested in the previous questions. Afternoon classes for preschoolers were extremely unpopular, with 75% of respondents indicating “no,” while yoga and themed birthday parties were also unfavorable, with 73% of respondents indicating “no.” However, the Night at the Museum gathered moderate interest at 54%, and gardening classes and cooking classes also had interest, both at 46% of respondents.





From the list of activities the Mather Homestead was considering developing, a walking path on the property was the most popular, with 96% of those responding indicating interest. Of the least interest, with 51% saying “no,” was the community garden. Respondents had moderate interest in Mather-organized trips to the national parks, with 41% saying somewhat and 24% saying yes, providing some incentive for the Homestead to develop and market these trips and gauge whether interest becomes stronger.

The Mather Homestead is also considering developing the following ACTIVITIES. Would you be interested in any of these?



When asked if there are other programs or events which they think would be appropriate for the Mather Homestead, there were several constructive responses. Two were interested in more history. One mentions historical reenactments that would be engaging for children, and the other is specifically interested in more about the American Revolution. One person

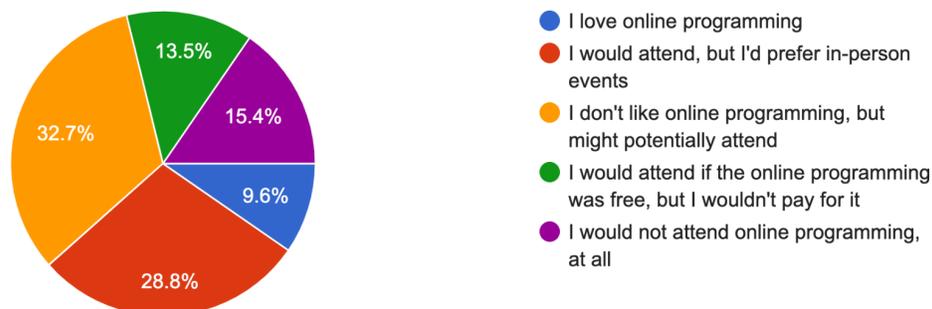
mentioned events, and first craft beer tastings from local breweries, and another wrote that an antiques show/fundraiser could be part of the craft fair. One person spent a lot of time writing out a comprehensive reply, which is included in its entirety below:

*"I love your idea of tours. You could also organize day trips -- e.g. tour and lunch at the Florence Griswold Museum, tours of Hudson Valley properties (the Met organized one a few years ago with the houses open to the public plus a few private ones -- I have the brochure if you want it), a tour of CT Revolutionary War houses (e.g. Wethersfield and lesser known ones), tours of houses by centuries (e.g. 19th century homes and art collections, 20th century mid-century architectures. You can also do a lecture on the engineer who built the Hoover Dam (and didn't Stephen Mather ask him to dam the pond near the Homestead on Dorchester Rd?), lectures from the state archaeologist (he did an excellent one on finding Revolutionary War soldiers in Ridgefield...and one on finding the unmarked grave of young man from Hawaii who went to Yale in the late 18th century and ultimately died near Cornwall, I think -- reconnected him to his tribe), CT Native American history in this area, how-to lectures (e.g. how to build stone walls, make maple syrup, etc). Honestly, there is SO much that you can do. I am also curious to see how you will link with the Darien Museum to share resources. Their history programming has felt "dusty" in the past but their recent art show was very interesting and together, you could do a progressive dinner with lecture -- or some other joint event. I know it all takes effort and I truly appreciate all that you do!"*

Respondents were very divided on the topic of online programming at Mather Homestead. While only 15% would not attend any online programming at all, the remaining 85% were divided on in what circumstances they would attend. A little over a third wrote that they "don't like online programming, but might potentially attend," and another 29% wrote, "I would attend, but I'd prefer in-person events," a clear indication that Mather Homestead's current efforts to develop more in-person programming is very welcome.

#### How do you feel about ONLINE programming at Mather Homestead?

52 responses

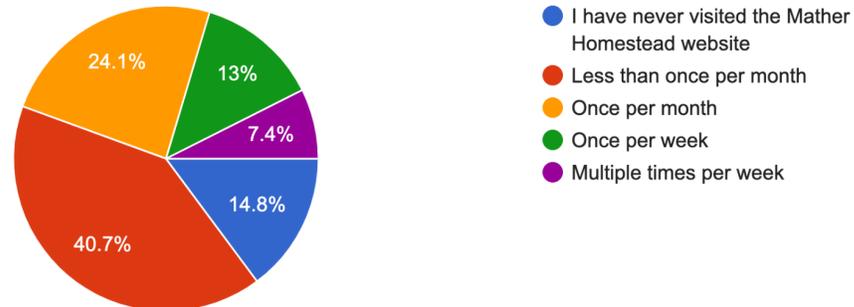


## Mather Homestead Communications

Most people surveyed visit the Homestead website less than once a month (41%), and a further quarter of responses say they visit about once a month.

How often do you visit the Mather Homestead website?

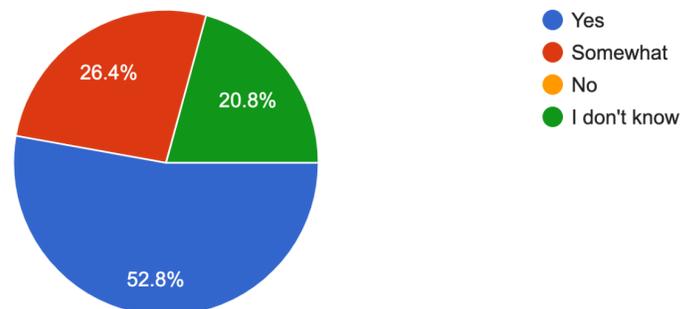
54 responses



These visitors have indicated that they find the website easy to use, with 53% agreeing, 27% saying “somewhat”, but crucially no one saying it was not easy to use.

Do you find the Mather Homestead website easy to use?

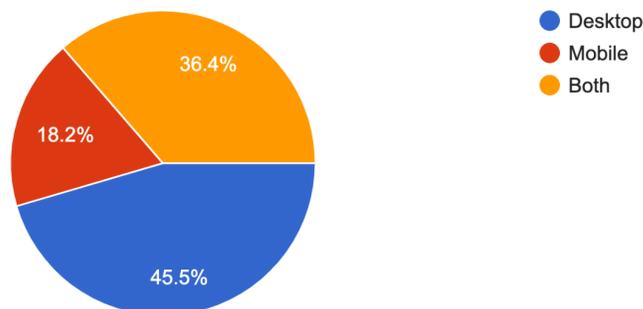
53 responses



The desktop version of the website is most popular, with 46% usually accessing the site that way, but 36% said they use both mobile and desktop.

Do you usually view the website via desktop or mobile device?

44 responses



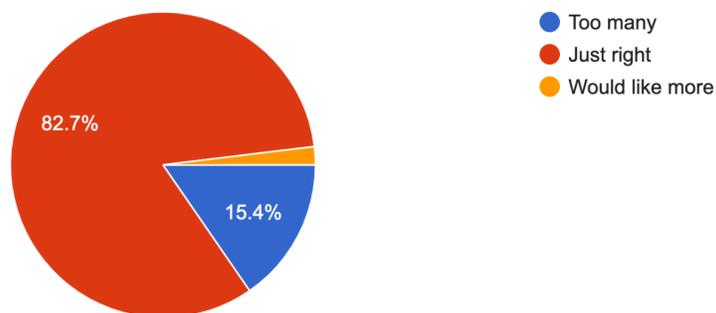
When asked how the Homestead could improve the site, there were three comments of substance, two of which mentioned the system used to get tickets or sign up for events:

- 1) *"remove large house image on home page and put more timely info there"*
- 2) *"Ticket purchase is clunky."*
- 3) *"There are too many things to fill in when you are signing up for something - a bit of a barrier to use, esp when trying to go fast. The sign up system / process is a bit clunky."*

The respondents are happy with the frequency of emails they receive, with 83% saying it is just right, and only 14% preferring less.

How do you feel about frequency of email communications from the Mather Homestead?

52 responses



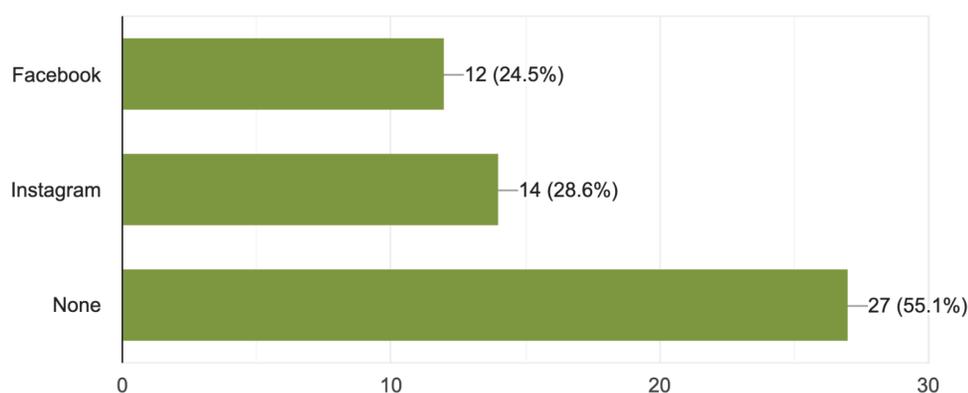
When asked how the Homestead could improve email communications, there were nine responses. Four responses said they liked the emails the way they currently are. One visitor

took the time to reread emails, and noted, *“In reviewing current emails I find the info short, easy to read and efficient.”* However, one person wrote *“One blast per week is plenty for a small organization.”* Two visitors mentioned a way to opt out of certain emails or be only on specific lists: *“perhaps have a way for people who want to opt in to certain emails (like at WB you can opt in for golf or tennis or paddle...)”* and *“Similar to Darien Library, it would be helpful to send out newsletters specific to only kids/family activities (noted in subject line) so they catch the attention of busy parents.”*

Slightly over half of respondents do not follow the Homestead on social media. For those who do, Instagram is slightly more popular (29%) than Facebook (25%).

#### Do you follow Mather Homestead social media?

49 responses



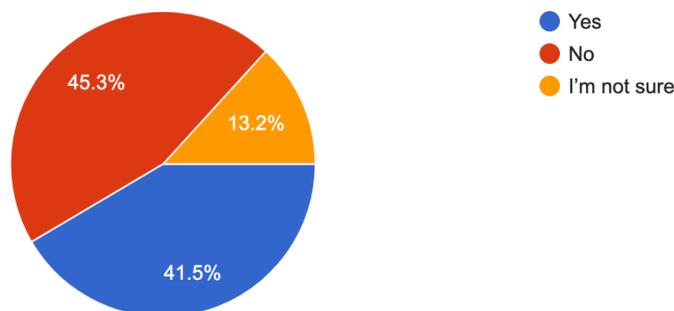
When asked to indicate ways the Homestead might improve social media communications, two comments were useful: one encouraged more of the same, *“I like the weekly reminders of events”* and another had advice for ease of use, *“are there links on the website? Include a link to fun tiktok videos or IG photos in the emails - then it's easier to click on Follow”*.

## Membership and Giving

Among this sample, 45% were not members. This is an engaged audience already on the Homestead's email lists, so there is great scope for encouraging more membership. Concerningly, 13% were not sure whether or not they were members, which may require some proactive communication by the Homestead to reinforce their status and benefits.

Are you a member of the Mather Homestead?

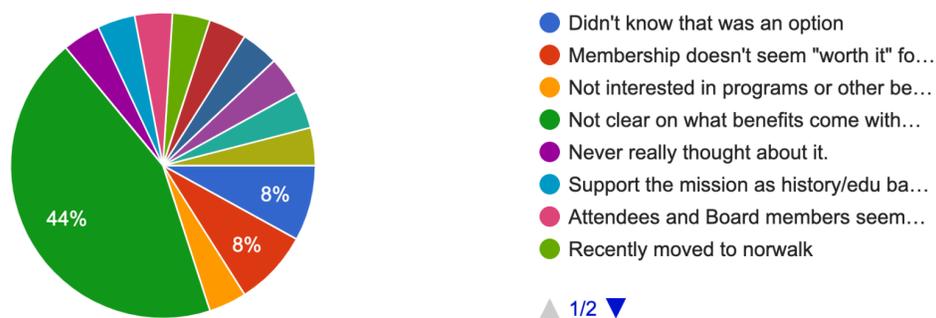
53 responses



The most common reason given for non-membership (44%) was lack of clarity on what benefits come with being a member. The next most popular choice, at just 9%, was "membership doesn't seem "worth it" for my/my family -- not a good value for the price." This led naturally to the next question, which asked what could be added to encourage them to be a member, and what could make it a good value.

If you are NOT a member of the Mather Homestead, which of these best describes why not?

25 responses

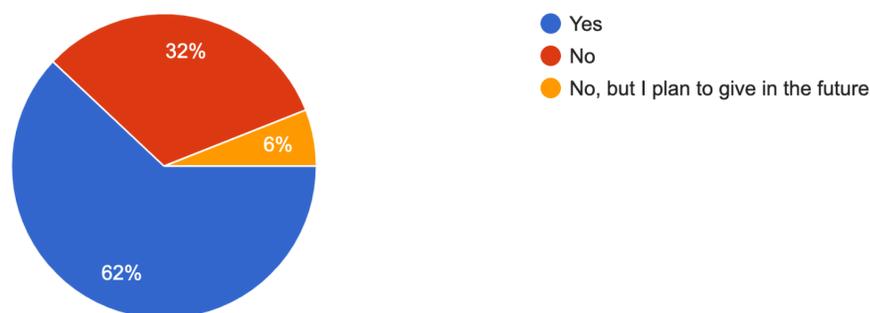


There were six suggestions on how to encourage them specifically, or other visitors, to become members. One person spoke to it not being “worth it”, suggesting that the Homestead add something special for members. *“Maybe a free members only event. I have given to the annual fund and a capital campaign gift, but when it comes to membership, I typically weigh the cost vs. the likely number of events I will attend vs. the member pricing savings. Generally, it is cheaper to pay the full price for the event vs. becoming a member. I think you need something that will tip the scale.”* Other responses agreed with the issue of price. Two respondents suggested senior or couples pricing, and two suggested “members only” perks, discounts or events.

The survey respondents are very engaged with giving. 62% have given to the Mather Homestead Annual Fund, and another 6% have not yet but plan to in the future.

Have you ever given to the Mather Homestead's Annual Fund?

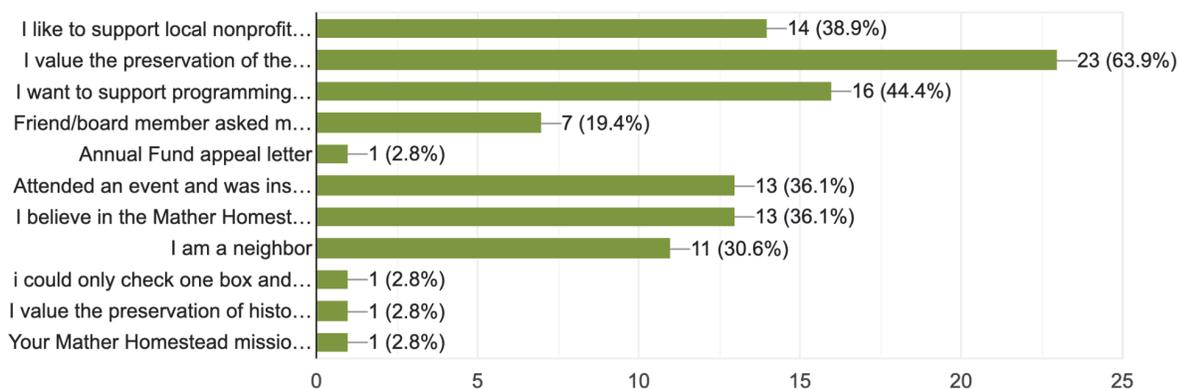
50 responses



The reasons that people gave to the Mather Homestead Annual Fund varied, but the most popular, with 64% choosing it as a reason, was because they value the preservation of the historic house and property. 44% said they want to support the programming at the Homestead, and 39% said that they like to support local nonprofit organizations.

### If yes, thank you! What are your reasons for giving to the Mather Homestead Annual Fund?

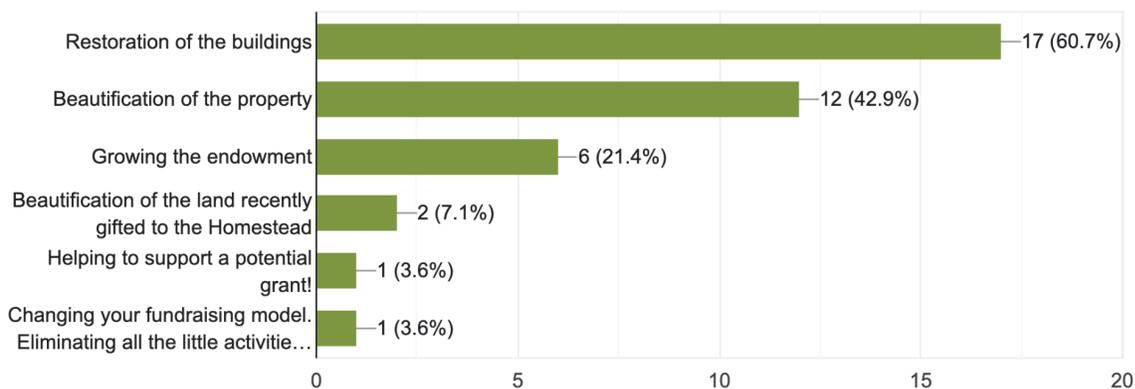
36 responses



In addition to the Annual Fund, respondents were also particularly interested in donating to support the restoration of the buildings (61%) and beautification of the property (43%).

### The Mather Homestead needs help to ensure the future of this historic home and property. In addition to the Annual Fund, would you consider donating to the following?

28 responses



*\*(Changing your fundraising model. Eliminating all the little activities, and groups using the property to raise funds through Rental Venue income. One large fete would get me to write a check and take a seat at the table. Note, please that you have others in your environs who feel similarly .)*

This array of reasons for donating and ways they want to contribute mirror the varied reasons people visit when they were asked earlier in this survey why and how they experience the Homestead.

**Karina Wizevich, *Ph.D.***

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*Bringing History to Life*

**CT**humanities