



Stony Brook **CURRENTS**

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The Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

September 2018

The mission of the Suffield Historical Society is to collect, preserve and stimulate interest in the history of Suffield and the region and to actively share it. The Society hopes to inspire a sense of community, as well as to provide an understanding and appreciation of Suffield's past.

Suffield Historical Society

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THOMAS HUXLEY, ORIGINAL PROPRIETOR

by Ed Chase

Our own SHS website describes Thomas Huxley in these words: "... while seemingly of lowly origin, did nothing to tarnish his name. Rather, he added to it as he advanced steadily in the communities in which he lived." This good character probably was very important as the home he built on North Main (then High Street) would soon be next door to the house of the Reverend Younglove. But let's explore how he arrived here.

My genealogical research and that of many others recognize that he was born probably circa 1640 and was one of the first settlers of the Hartford colony. However, whether he was born in England or in the colonies remains a mystery. The first record of Thomas is in the will of John Wakeman from the records of New Haven, Connecticut. Wakeman leaves his "Shot gun"¹ to his servant Thomas providing that he "carried himself honestly and faithfully." This will was probated in Hartford on September 16, 1661.

In the following decade, Thomas went from a lowly servant to a landowner, a husband, a freeman and a sergeant in the militia. He married Sarah Spencer, a Hartford native and daughter of Thomas and Sarah (Bearding) Spencer, on April 11, 1666. While living in Hartford, the couple was blessed with the birth of two sons and three daughters.

Sarah's brother, Sergeant Thomas Spencer, moved to Suffield at the end of King Philip's War. One can only surmise that his life in Suffield gave the Huxley family a desire to join him here in John Pynchon's fledgling community.

On June 12, 1678, Thomas Huxley was granted 60 acres in Suffield by the Committee for Suffield. Twenty of those acres were a home lot on the east side of North Main Street (then High Street). The young family soon built their home on this lot. The family grew to include three more sons and another daughter here in Suffield. Four years later, his son, Thomas Jr., received his own land grant of eight acres² – he was only 14 years old! "Idle teenager" would probably not describe this young lad in 1682!

Sergeant Huxley was one of those 34 voters in Suffield's first Town Meeting. Fellow citizens called on his leadership talents

many times in the following years. Thomas held almost every office in town government and was elected Selectman three times. In 1686, in addition to his farming and civic roles, Thomas was granted permission to keep a public house of entertainment (a tavern).

His children all married other early Suffield settlers, and most lived their entire lives in Suffield. Strangely, however, the surname disappears from Town records by the early 1800s.

1 In 1661, a shotgun as we know it did not exist. The "Shot gun" referred to in Wakeman's will was most likely a "short gun" which was used for birding during this time in history.

2 The six-acre lot granted to Thomas Jr. was across the street from his father's, much of which is now within the old cemetery.

References:

Documentary History of Suffield, Hezekiah S. Sheldon, 1879.

Biography of a Town, Robert H. Alcorn, 1970.

<suffieldhistoricalsociety.org/families_huxley>, Suffield Historical Society website.

The Pynchon Papers, Vols I and II, Bridenbaugh & Tomlinson, 1982.

Huxley Family History/Genealogy, Jared Huxley, Jr., Date 1901

WOMAN'S CLUB CLOTHING PROJECT

The assessment of the Society's collection of vintage clothing, funded by a grant from the Suffield Woman's Club, began this spring. Our consultant, Stacey Danielson, is making good progress.

Items are being assessed for condition, described more accurately and in depth in our catalog, hung on newly-made padded hangers and are being labeled with catalog numbers sewn into each garment.

Lisa Pepe, Renée Woods and Diane O'Grady along with Anne Borg have been making the padded hangers. They have been amazed and impressed by the sewing skills of previous generations. Most of the dresses are hand-sewn. Many are quite elaborate, with tucks and flounces and ruffled skirts, lace inserts, tiny buttonholes and embroidered details. Our collection also contains some military uniforms, one jacket from the Revolutionary War and one complete uniform from World War II, as well as some World War II Red Cross uniforms.

We've discovered at least one costume from the 1920 250th anniversary pageant and a gorgeous beaded flapper's dress also from the '20s. Much of the collection dates from the late 1800's and the early 1900's. If the project is finished by next spring, we hope to mount an exhibit selected from these lovely outfits.

NEW SUMMER VOLUNTEERS

We have some new and very welcome summer volunteers. Kaitlyn Nigro, a Suffield Academy graduate and history major at George Washington University, is busy entering descriptive information for the photos in the Hawley Rising Collection. She heads for a semester in Chile at the end of July.

Myra Edmonds, who will begin a Master's program in Costume Studies at NYU in September, is thrilled to be helping out with the clothing project. We are delighted to have some willing and able young people who are interested enough in history to give of their time and talents.

Insets show sights and sounds enjoyed on July 10 at the SHS Annual Ice Cream Social.

HOLIDAYFEST

Our 2018 holiday festivities will take place on December 1st and 2nd. This year's theme is

"Snowmen." We hope members will be generous – as usual – in lending items to display in our exhibit. Figures large and small, including tree ornaments, will be welcomed. They may be dropped off at the King House Wednesday mornings throughout November, preferably before Thanksgiving.

Our curator, Lester Smith, in the spirit of easing up a bit, is handing over the organization of the exhibit to Anne Borg and Jan Peake.

ZAK GRANT AWARDED

We have been very fortunate to receive a grant from the Zak Foundation in the amount of \$800 to scan photos from the Delphina Clark albums, thanks to Art Sikes and Jackie Hemond.

Delphina put together six albums of photos back in the 1940's and '50's, most of the pictures dating from the 40's or earlier, documenting many of the older houses in town. Her added commentary is most helpful. These albums are meant to be used in conjunction with her eleven volumes of information taken primarily from early town land records.

Once the photos have been scanned, they will be made available online by the Kent Memorial Library.



LEARNING ABOUT AN OLD HOUSE

by Lester Smith

There's a spot down on East St. South near the Windsor Locks line that was for many years called Wood's Station. It showed up on maps as a small circle along the Suffield branch line railroad from Windsor Locks, along with station stops at Mather St., South St., and the depot on what became known as Depot St. (now Mountain Rd.). The branch line to Suffield opened in 1870 and closed to scheduled passenger traffic some 40 years later. Its last freight delivery to town was about 1998; but a branch to Bradley Airport, added soon after the airfield was opened, still provides freight service to customers on Turnpike Rd. (Route 75).

Wood's Station got its name from Benjamin Wood, whose tobacco fields and impressive home were there, along with his cigar manufacturing shop. The house has survived, across from The Shamrock Café. The old brick building, reportedly built in 1817 by John Moran (or perhaps McMoran or even Moron – the name shows up variously), was expanded about 1870 by Wood, after he married John's daughter. Most of this information was known by local folks interested in history, and a grand pastel portrait of Benjamin Wood has hung in the King House Museum at least since before 1987, when this writer came on the scene as curator. A small cigar box for "Little Crown Jewels" sits on the display case in the museum's cigar collection, with a small copy of Ben's portrait inside the lid. (We would certainly like to have a "Crown Jewels" box, if that brand existed!)

Over ten years ago, we discovered an old rotogravure photo from the Springfield Republican showing just how grand Ben's mansion home was. There were porches on two sides, spires on the ornate dormers and tower, a large ell in the rear, and considerable landscaping. Most notably, a long, ornate, balustrade fence extended along the unpaved highway. A copy of that rotogravure hangs next to Ben's portrait along with a photo depicting the current poor condition of the old mansion, which now lacks its rear wing as well as the porches, and, of course, the fence is long gone. (This summer, we also purchased an old stereo view card of the Wood mansion.)

Recently some information was published that added a bit to the historical record. The Benjamin Wood house



LEFT: Left-eye portion of a stereo view of the Wood house, taken by Windsor Locks commercial photographer S. Parmelee, ca. 1880. ABOVE: What's left of the Benjamin Wood house is located at 1082 East Street South, with now only a sorry hint of its former grandeur.

was included in the Historic Resources Inventory completed by consultant Lucas A. Karmazinas in 2016 for the Town of Suffield, supported by a State Historic Preservation Grant. This document, along with a description of the house itself, mentioned that Benjamin Wood was at one point the Suffield representative to the Connecticut General Assembly and was one of the founders of the late Suffield Savings Bank. The Inventory adds that Suffield assessed Ben's personal property and real estate in Suffield at \$20,000 in 1870, a considerable sum for the period.

A brief summary of the 2016 HRI may be found on line by searching for Historic Resources Inventory Town of Suffield Connecticut. About 200 selected buildings are included, all but one of them east of Route 75. The full document, which includes a general summary of Suffield history, is available at the Town Clerk's office. It comprises over 800 unbound, one-sided pages.

A second grant-supported Inventory, covering about the same number of buildings was completed this May by consultant Rachel Carley. This survey focused on West Suffield. The report is available in the Planning & Zoning office in two loose-leaf binders holding a total of about 400 one-sided pages. Neither of the hard-copy embodiments of the two Inventories is fully paginated and neither can be regarded as user-friendly, but the Town intends to make digital copies of both available on line at some point.

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King House Museum
232 South Main Street

Open to the Public, Free
Wednesdays and Saturdays
1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
May through September

Newsletter
Maggie Philippon, Editor
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UPCOMING EVENTS

SUFFIELD ON THE GREEN

Sat., September 8 and Sun., September 9
COLLECTIBLE CAR SHOW

Sunday, September 9 (*weather permitting*)

King House Museum Grounds 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

AN EVENING WITH EDGAR ALLEN POE

Wednesday, September 19

Suffield Senior Center 7:00 p.m.

Campbell Harmon stays in character as he performs Poe's work as well as discusses Poe's life, his death, and the profound influences his work made on American literature.

Be enthralled!

SUFFIELD'S POLISH HISTORY

Wednesday, October 17

Suffield Senior Center 7:00 p.m.

Steamships brought hundreds of courageous Polish immigrants to America in the late 1800s. Sara Zak's grandfather – like all the others – came with hope of economic prosperity. Using census records, personal genealogical research and stories from Polish Heritage Society members, she will describe how this ethnic landscape shaped the area.

HALLOWEEN CANDY DISTRIBUTION

Wednesday, October 31

King House Porch 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Join in the fun.

Bring the children for treats and laughter.

A SUBSTITUTE IN THE CIVIL WAR Suffield's Civil War Militia

Wednesday, November 14

Suffield Senior Center 7:00 p.m.

Seventy-three Suffield men marched off to war in May 1861 wearing red flannel shirts made by the women of the Second Baptist Church. Some were drafted. Others were paid to serve in place of wealthier conscriptees. Pam Baldini brings faces, personal stories and tales of sacrifice from the lives of these men.

HOLIDAYFEST "Snowmen"

Saturday & Sunday, December 1 & 2

King House 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. both days

Enjoy the Christmas decorations and tree, plus this year's exhibit: "Snowmen" Come see the myriad depictions for this Christmas icon. Join us by the great kitchen fireplace for cookies and punch!