



Stony Brook CURRENTS

Vol. XVI, No. 3

The Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

September 2021

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.

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DIARISTS: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

by Anne Borg

Suffield is fortunate to have a fair collection of diaries dating from the late 1700's to the mid 1900's. These diarists, from prominent men to modest men and women, give us snapshots of life in a different time. While their experiences differ, common themes connect them to each other and to us. Commentary on the weather seems to be universal, be it detailed or a one-word description. Gardening is another common denominator. Though gardening is optional in the 21st century, it was crucial to survival for previous generations and a connection we still relate to. Keeping chickens, currently enjoying a surge of interest, is a third link. As you read the following excerpts, note both the differences in their lives from ours but also the commonalities.

Women diarists are not as easily found as men, primarily I suspect because, especially in the early days, they had very little free time. They were too busy rearing children, cooking, sewing, growing and preserving food, etc. The women quoted here made very short daily entries. The men, on the other hand, wrote more extensively and more often related events outside their own sphere.

Our first diarist is Dr. Alexander King, whose home is now the King House Museum. From the introduction to its transcription, probably written by Suffield historian Delphina Clark: *Alexander had a college*

education, was a pretty noted Physician & much employed in public business. Was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1767 & held that office until 1793 when he resigned.

He was a representative to the General Assembly for many years & probably might have been many more, had he not declined serving. He was chosen one of the selectmen in 1767 & filled that place about 30 years without being omitted more than 2 or 3 years. He was chosen Town Clerk in 1774 & held that office until his decease in 1802.

continued on page 4

This publication was scheduled for last year to celebrate Suffield's 350th Anniversary. Like much in our lives, it was postponed! It shows a cross section of what the Suffield Historical Society is all about. We invite you to join us in discovering where we came from and preserving clues to where Suffield's future might lie.

THE HERMIT OF RIVER ROAD – AN EAST SUFFIELD STORY

by Laurie Tavino

Leslie C. Adams was an “old Yankee genius,” an inventor who could fix just about anything. He built a little house on River Road (currently River Blvd.), furnished it with a hand-made lathe and some tools and earned a living by doing mechanical repairs. Mr. Adams serviced the clock tower in Springfield, Massachusetts, every year. Reportedly he was not recognized or compensated for contributing valuable mechanical innovations for one of his employers. For this reason he became a recluse, and was referred to by locals as “the Hermit.”

Though he lived alone, Leslie was known and appreciated in the community. For two weeks after the Hurricane of 1938, Theodore Papafil, owner of Theodore’s General Store on Thompsonville Road, had no power to work his gasoline pumps. Leslie Adams came by and after hearing what was wrong, said “We can fix that.” Turning a bicycle upside down, he devised an arm-powered pump that dispensed gasoline when the pedals were turned.

Credits: Springfield Republican, Pat Rippish, Elaine Alexopoulos Ford, the Rookey Family, the Alexopoulos Family and interviews with neighbors. Ed note: Laurie is working on a “booklet” to fill us in with more “Hermit” stories and pictures. Follow the SHS Facebook page for more information about the booklet.



THANK YOU!

A big thank-you is due to two people who have volunteered their time and talent recently. Jim Kent spent several hot days painting windows, porch trim and the hatchway at the King House. Jim Reeves did the same, cleaning out the old stables, a truly dirty job. Thanks to both of you! Hands-on volunteers are truly appreciated. And while we are at it, thanks, too, to Bill O’Brien, who spends every Wednesday morning helping out.

POLISH HERITAGE SOCIETY

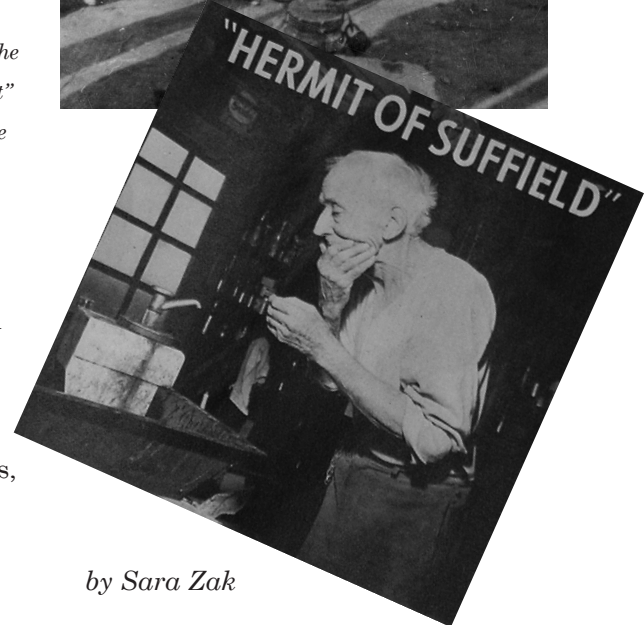
by Sara Zak

The Polish Heritage Society (PHS) is a subcommittee of the Suffield Historical Society, founded 15 years ago to procure, preserve and perpetuate the history and culture of the Polish immigrants who came to Suffield nearly 125 years ago. Today, 4th- and 5th-generation Polish-Americans live in our diverse town. As the surnames ending in -ski or -wicz transitioned to Egan, O’Brien, or Wood, the strength of the Polish connection began to fade. The PHS strives to keep it alive.

Visit the PHS tent at *Suffield on the Green* on Sept. 11 and 12. Members will be there to help dig up or deepen your roots to your pioneering Polish ancestors. Our display will include local ethnic history, examples of traditional culture, custom-based crafts, family histories as shared by PHS members, the Suffield Polish Families tree and a DNA matching project.

IN MEMORIAM

We have recently lost two long time members. Gary Mandirola, Trustee and past Treasurer, and Eleanor Chase, who gifted several items to the museum. Eleanor was also the wife of Ed Chase, our past President. They will both be missed by the society and their many friends. We mourn their loss, thankful for what they meant to the Society over many years.

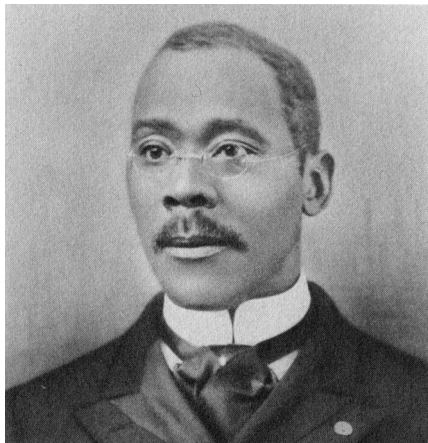


THIRD BAPTIST CHURCH

by Maggie Philippon

Excerpts from *The Biography of a Town* by Robert Alcorn

“In 1903, the Reverend David Drew of Springfield was instrumental in the organization of the Third Baptist Church Society. The Reverend Drew was the father of the well-known Howard Drew, who at one time held the world’s record for the 100-yard dash. Howard later became a successful lawyer in Hartford.”



The Reverend David Drew

The aim of the Society was to provide an independent church for the growing Black population of Suffield. The Congregational and Baptist churches had included this population in the Suffield church community. However, “their pride, their improving economic condition and the desire to have their own means of religious expression gave impetus to the movement.”

According to the church’s website, the Society focused around twelve Suffield families: Chamberlain, Dunston, Gayles, Jubrey, Harris, Hayes, Johnson, Lockett, Morgan, Edmonds, Jones, and Brewster. These were solid Suffield families with farm properties and in a position to establish a church society and advance it.

“The first services of the Third Baptist Church were held in the Town Hall and there were occasional meetings in the Connecticut Literary Institution.” Numerous fund-raising efforts, which included handiwork sales and community suppers, made possible the purchase of land on the north side of Kent Ave in 1905. The building we see today at 188 Kent Avenue was dedicated on March 31, 1906. Their first pastor was the Rev. David Drew.

NOTE: To young athletes who have been focused on the Tokyo Olympics, the story of Rev. Drew’s son is inspiring.

Howard Porter Drew ran his first track meet in 1905 at *The Springfield City Games* in Forest Park. His dad’s salary from the pulpit did not allow for the extravagance of a pair of track shoes. So Howard hammered roofing nails through the soles of his tennis shoes. He won the 100-yard dash, but his feet were raw from the impact of the nails. He decided to run the 440 barefoot. He took first place again ... but the cinder track had taken its toll on this already bleeding feet. He described the event as feeling like he was “walking on a sea of glass with fire.” He went home with very sore feet, but proud of his two medals.

In 1912, he won the US Olympic Trials 100-meter dash handily. By this time, he had dropped out of high school and had a wife and child to support. He couldn’t afford to go. The mayor of Boston learned of his plight and wanted to start a fund with a \$25 donation. A Springfield Newspaper verified that the donation would not affect his amateur status with the Olympic Commissioner, and funds began pouring in for his journey to Stockholm.

He was so far ahead of the pack in the semifinals that, when he seriously injured himself by stepping into a soft depression in the track, he hobbled across the finish line STILL in first place. He broke a world record that stood for 15 years. He was unable to race in any finals. Thus he gained the title of “the world’s fastest human” and never received an Olympic medal. World War I side railed any 1916 Olympic hopes. Howard Drew went on to serve in the Army and finish high school on his own. His straight A-student status brought him scholarships for college and law school. He settled in Hartford.

This high-school drop-out, who played baseball with Jim Thorpe and coached Jesse Owens, went on to become a

role model for youth of any color. An injury in 1916 was diagnosed to leave him paralyzed. Although he walked with a limp for the rest of his life, he worked his way back to successful racing competitions and into combat readiness for World War I. Time and time again Howard Drew faced hardship, heartbreak and prejudice, but he continued to write, advocate for the underdog, and win great admiration

through his own perseverance. He

became one of the six first Black attorneys in Connecticut and Connecticut’s first Black judge.



Howard Porter Drew

4 WHAT'S HIDING IN YOUR OLD HOME?

by Laurie Travino

While restoring his early East Street home, Frank Ruggiero stumbled upon a “concealment shoe” – evidence of the ancient custom of hiding a shoe in a house in order to protect it from harmful spirits. Little is known about this tradition. Brought to America by early settlers from England and Western Europe, shoes have been discovered here in houses dating back to the 1600’s, and in Europe as long ago as the 14th century. In fact, the Northampton Museum in England has documented over 2,000 concealment shoes.

The shoes are usually found hidden around chimneys, walls and windows. Nearly all are well worn. Half of all concealment shoes belonged to children and are very rarely found in pairs. Though shoes are the most common objects found, many other personal possessions have been found hidden with them such as coins, spoons, food, knives, toys, sleigh bells, even chicken and cat bones. The brass-tipped child’s boot (top photo) that was found in the Ruggiero’s brick oven does not date as far back as the house as it was common to hide or “conceal” a shoe during later renovations. The other photograph shows two shoes that were found in the floorboards of a 1700s home along the Connecticut River.



If anyone has found a concealment shoe in their home, please contact us, as we would like to document it. The location will be added to a map of Suffield that is in progress and already has five addresses marked. And if so inclined, you could donate your concealment shoes to build a collection as other New England towns have done, so everyone can view them. Unless you think that would be bad luck?

continued from page 1

Dr. King reported extensively on the national political scene and the events of the Revolution. But in between the commentary and his many public duties we see glimpses of his personal life. Like all diary keepers, he often described the weather. He was attuned to nature, noting singular phenomena such as a tornado or whirlwind, the aurora borealis, a meteor, an eclipse as well as *the greatest plenty of Wild Cherries I ever remember to have seen or Tis Remarkable that the Robbin is a Rare Bird this Season more so than I ever Remember. They are as Seldom heard or Seen as the Cuccou.*

Dr. King’s personal family life was difficult, as were many of the time.

January 1, 1775—my child Alexander lies Dangerously Sick. The Weeks following, proved a Sorrowful and Distressed Time as we expected the Death of the Child from Day to Day.

January 11th about one Clocke the Child Died.

12th—Attended the Funeral of a Child Dearly Beloved and by its Parents very greatly lamented---a child very

forward Active and Sprightly, who bore the image of his natural Father in Countenance. (age not yet 2)

Dr. King and his wife suffered a stillborn son in 1786 and lost son Orestes, who was killed by lightening at age 12.

Like everyone else in colonial America, Dr. King was a farmer, raising his own grain and meat.

January 6th 1774 Killed about 36 Score of Pork and 480 wt of Beef.

June 27th 1774 began to mow.

July 14th began to reap.

22d [ditto] Finished harvest. I had 85 Shocks of rye and 22 of Wheat

July 13th 1782 this Day brought Home the Last Crop of Grain from the Plain [probably now Bradley airport], which I have improved for 17 Years past in which Time it has been the Scene of much Labour and Toil, Sorrow and Affliction (his son Orestes was killed by lightening while hoeing corn) and also of great Pleasure and Delight. I now leave it to the improvement of Others and wish a Blessing may attend the Succeeding Labourers.

Dr. King was obviously interested in the world beyond Suffield and was well informed. For example: *this year was invented by One Mr. Montglossier in France a flying Machine called the Air Baloon in which People may ascend in the air by the Assistance of a large globe made of Silk & Leather filled with Inflamable Air which destroys the Natural Air & renders the Globe specifically lighter than common air...*

We move ahead to the 1800's to the diary of Mary R. King in 1871 who lived on North Street with her husband, William, and three children. She kept a garden, hens and apparently sold the eggs to a local store. Her entries are strictly domestic.

Feb. 21 Pleasant. Washing my floors. Been up to school house to meeting. Mr. Ives spoke from Mat. 25

4-10 Visiting with Dorcas and sewing

4-13 Dorcas & children gone to Chicopee. Washing, Ironing and baking for Sarah

5-1 Doing chores this morn. & calling this afternoon.

School began today

Throughout the summer, her notes about her food preservation and deliveries continue: working butter, canning, churning, choring and killing a calf. Marginal notes in August show impressive amounts of what I guess to be her canning—39 qts, 42 qts. etc. We have to remember that the grocery stores of today stocked with everything imaginable didn't exist 150 years ago.

In contrast to Mrs. King, we sample the diary of Martin Smith in 1896. Mr. Smith was born in Suffield, graduated from Williams College, was head of Maysville Institute in Kentucky for 21 years and then returned to become headmaster at Suffield Academy. He was probate judge, treasurer of the Suffield Savings Bank, a frequent contributor to *Connecticut Magazine* and "one of the leading citizens of the town" according to his obituary. He speaks of probate business, trips to Hartford on bank business, news of his daughters and their families and of his neighbors. He is better than the newspaper if you want the local news! In 1896 he was living on South Main Street. He writes lengthy entries every day.

Jan 1 The year that has just past has been a very pleasant one in every essential particular. All our family have had good health, or at least no serious sickness. If our income has not been large, our wants have not been great. We enter upon this year under almost the exact conditions of the last except that we are a year older. We are sorry the last clause is true but it cannot be helped. Old age and Death are the results of being born, and there is as much of good in this world that is worthwhile to have lived.

Jan 4 It has been growing cold rapidly since morning, and promises to be the coldest night so far of the season.

Jan 8 ...now we have a revival of interest in Abraham Lincoln. Well, it is worth while. Circumstances, his good common sense, his intellect, his patriotism, made him the grandest man of the age

May 6 Cloudy but no rain. This morning I planted a row of corn – Country Gentleman [a variety of corn], and set the poles for lima beans. Have been fairly busy at the Bank and Office.

May 8 As Charlie Bissell was riding out, and Julia had little Charlie in her lap, the horse threw them by stopping too suddenly. Julia went between the wheel and the horse, Charlie went into the middle of the road. It happens that neither of them were hurt...

May 17 We had two hens come off with seventeen chickens this morning. We do not intend to set any more as we yet have nine sitting...

May 22 The safe for the Savings Bank came today. When it was brought up to the place to unship it from the wagon, it took tilt and unloaded itself.

Aug 14 It has been the longest hot season on record. The death list in the larger cities especially has been frightful.

Our last diarist is Elizabeth Clara (Pease) Goodrich Burke, who, twice widowed, owned a small house on South Grand Street. Her son Chauncey lived with her, and other family members were close by. In these excerpts from her diary of 1942 we see that life is still very rural. She keeps chickens, has a large garden, cans and bakes, hangs her clothes out to dry and comments daily on the weather. Family and neighbors come and go, cards and letters are sent and received. Only occasionally does the war intrude on this quiet, bucolic life.

Jan. 17: I canned 2 ¾ pts cranberry sauce. Made 2 mince and 1 ½ apple pies, 1 loaf layer cake & a pan ginger cookies

Feb. 11: 5 men in a plaine crashed between East Granby & Teriffville, Conn. All killed. Another man not accounted for

Mar. 3: Suffield had its first Black out 9 o'clock to 9:15. also many other towns.

Mar. 11: I dug last of Parsnips in garden some frost far down

Mar. 25: Frogs were peeping tonight

April 14: Chauncey picked a big meal of Dandy lions

May 17: Minnie was up at town farm watching for Enemy biplains [The WWII aircraft spotter tower was there.]

June 5: (Daughter Minnie bought her 50 chicks.) I put all 50 chicks under the hens.

June 17: Went to Suffield & got our Canning Sugar. Coupon.

July 7: ... 16 War plains flying in the sky at the same time.

July 11: Mr. B.J. Ahrens & Mr. Joe Burns gathered the selvage rubber & iron & Papers for the War help.

CURATOR'S REPORT

by Lester Smith, Curator

In connection with the Town's celebration of its 350th anniversary last year, I had intended to prepare a historical exhibition at the King House Museum describing previous anniversary celebrations in town, but, along with most other such facilities, our museum didn't open for the regular season, and preparations for the exhibition were suspended.

This year, work resumed for the planned exhibition, and as this report is being written, interesting material is on view from the Suffield celebration of the 1976 American Revolution Bicentennial, the 1970 Suffield Tercentenary, and the 1920 Suffield Quatermillennial. (In 1920, an estimated 5,000 spectators gathered on a hillside near Schwartz Pond in 1920 to watch a historical pageant for the Quatermillennial; the town's population was only 4,070.)

Work on the exhibition continues, and I hope the completed display will be extended through next year.

The Society has acquired recently, by gift and purchase, a number of large and small items. One batch was a group of great old family photos from William King of Windsor, whose family had lived on North Street and at the Indian Spring Farm at the end of Mapleton Avenue. See adjacent article for a Sikes sampler we bought in August.

Several of us have been moving questionably saved material out of the stable and clearing debris in order to evaluate that space for decisions on its future. (Several items unsuitable for our use were donated to the Friends of the Farm at Hilltop for use as exhibits in their large dairy barn.) Except for the "garage" part of our stable, which was added soon after 1960, the old (1920s) building is in very bad condition. Our decision may require approval by the Suffield Historic District Commission.



The newly acquired Sikes embroidery sampler and associated silhouettes arrived by Fed Ex in good condition, packed in an abundance of bubble wrap and crushed paper.

SIKES SAMPLER PURCHASED

by Lester Smith, Curator

Jim Ciaschini, a furniture restorer and friend in Agawam, emailed that a Suffield embroidery sampler was being offered by an auction house in New Jersey we weren't familiar with. With help and advice from Sandy Johnson, an SHS member who is quite knowledgeable about antiques and their market, we were able to buy the sampler, plus a pair of silhouettes in the same auction lot, all at what several of us feel was a good price.

The sampler, which includes some interesting, colorful, decorative work and two unexciting proverbs, was sewn in 1821 by Maryann Sikes of Suffield, age 11. The two silhouettes were cut in 1829. They represent Thaddeus Sikes and Diantha (or Dianthe) Rising Sikes, Maryann's parents. Both frames are vintage and in good condition.

Ralph Harsh wrote his name on the back of the silhouette frame, stating that Thaddeus Sikes was his great, great, grandfather. We haven't determined yet where the Thaddeus Sikes family lived, but Maryann's name (she never married) is noted in the 1869 atlas map for a house in the later location of Spaulding Gardens, between Mapleton Avenue and East Street North.

The sampler, together with the silhouettes, will make an excellent addition to the substantial number of local samplers already hung in the

East Room of the King House Museum.

P. S. Your curator's favorite sampler proverb in our collection was sewn by Sally King, age 10, in about 1790 (the date is uncertain). She wrote: "LOVE COMES BY CHANCE AND IS KEPT BY ART. Now that's profound!

EBAY VOLUNTEER WANTED

The Society has some items, both large and small, that need to be sold. Is there anyone who has Ebay experience who would like to take on this short term project? If so, call Anne Borg at 860-668-7841 or Lester Smith at 860-471-1915.

A TASTE OF HISTORY AT HOME

Why support the Suffield Historical Society?

To educate...

There were slaves in Suffield. The Congregational minister owned five, and the 1790 census showed 28 people were enslaved. However, before the end of the Revolutionary War, all of New England had passed laws to abolish slavery. (*New Hampshire and Massachusetts in 1783, Connecticut and Rhode Island in 1784, while Vermont and Maine entered the union as free states.*)

To uncover stories...

Ebenezer King III caught the water cure spa bug in 1807 when he built a three-story spa resort on Poole Road. His spa ultimately failed despite Suffield physician Alexander King (owner of King House, the jewel of the Suffield Historical Society) advertising the spring's health merits. Today there is hardly a puddle where the spa was located.

Two centuries later, people came again to our community for the restorative care of the Travelers Rest on North Grand Street.

To connect to other stories...

Oliver Phelps, who was the owner of what is now known as the Phelps-Hatheway House, was the wealthiest man (in land values) in America circa 1788 because of his

purchase of enormous tracts of land in the Western Reserve and other areas. This purchase was an investment to sell to settlers. His plan ultimately did not work out and he became bankrupt.

To show Suffield was (and is) part of a larger story...

Suffield natives have been part of the national scene in every century.

Stephen Fuller Austin, the great-great-grandson of our first school teacher, **Anthony Austin (1635-1708)**, went west to found the first Anglo colony in Texas.

Austin, Texas, bears his name.

Gideon Granger, Jr., (1767-1822) was United States Postmaster General under Thomas Jefferson.

Hugh Meade Alcorn (1902-1992) chaired the Republican National Committee during Dwight Eisenhower's presidency.

... and we're still going ...

In 2012, **Greg Butler** took home an Academy Award for visual effects in the film *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

We have a lot more stories to tell. Learn and discover more stories. Join us.



2021-2022 Membership Form

I/we subscribe to the mission of the Suffield Historical Society, which 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.

Miss/Ms/Mr./Mrs. _____

Address _____

Telephone (optional) _____ E-mail (optional) _____

Dues: Individuals \$10.00
 Family \$15.00
 Youth/Student \$2.50
 Patron \$25.00
 Supporter \$50.00
 Benefactor \$100.00
 Additional donation _____
 Amount enclosed _____

The Internal Revenue Service has granted tax exempt status to the Suffield Historical Society.

Please complete this form and mail it with your check to
Suffield Historical Society, c/o Rick Seaman, Treasurer, P.O. Box 893, Suffield, CT 06078.

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Like Us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/SuffieldConnecticutHistory/

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
Anne Borg, Compiler

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Because of COVID-19 protocols, programs and formats of upcoming events may be revised. State mask guidelines will be followed. If events need to be virtual experiences rather than in-person meetings, SHS members with email addresses on file will get a notice of any change (or check our website).

SHS programs are planned for the Suffield Senior Center.
PHS programs are planned for the Ambulance Center.

Suffield on the Green

Saturday, September 11 & Sunday, September 12
Join both the Suffield Historical Society and the Polish Heritage Society at their respective booths on the Green.

Gone a Whalin'

Tuesday, September 21 7:00 pm

Denis Picard will capture the lives and jobs on board the Connecticut and western Massachusetts whaling vessels.

PHS Tribute

Wednesday, October 6 10 am

A Tribute to Founder Harry Kozikowski

Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples

Wednesday, October 20 7 pm

*with Dr. Lucianne Lavin,
Institute for American Indian Studies*

Halloween at the King House

Sunday, October 31 Dusk until 7 pm

Come in costume to join with fun on the porch!

PHS How to Write Music

Wednesday, November 6 10 am

The Fight for Women's Suffrage in Connecticut

Wednesday, November 17 7 pm

with Natalie Belanger, Connecticut Historical Society

PHS Christmas Koledy

Wednesday, December 1 10 am

The 2021-2022 program brochure will be sent to all members. Others can get a hard copy by sending a request from the SHS website or printing the copy on our website.