



Stony Brook **CURRENTS**

Vol. XIX, No. 1

The Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

January 2024

HOLIDAYFEST

Cuddly Teddy bears – collected by members and friends – were lent to the Historical Society for the 2023 Holidayfest at the King House. The scent of evergreens filled the air as the rooms filled with guests to view the exhibits, sample holiday treats and mingle with friends and neighbors on December 9 and 10.

A VERY BIG THANK YOU to all who contributed to the success of Holidayfest, from Teddy bear lenders and volunteer docents to decorators and bakers. Many thanks, too, to Marjorie Begin who has faithfully gifted us her beautiful wreaths, which have adorned the house each holiday season, for many years now.

Thanks also to our docents, many newly trained this year by Art Sikes and Barry Sisk, who also serve as docents. They are: Holly Banak, Christine Chapman, Jackie Hemond, Rose MacNeely, Nancy Noble, Jan Peake, Bev Sikes, Dorian Taylor, Wendy Taylor, Sara Zak.

PHOTOS

Top to bottom: 1. Christine Chapman (left) with Curator Christine Ritok (right) and the treats shared with holiday guests.

2. Volunteers Bev Sikes, Christine Chapman and Rose MacNeely share a moment by the fireplace, while 3. Todd and Lynn Mervosh enjoyed the beautiful display of Teddy bears. 4. Wendy Taylor greets guests by the Christmas tree. 5. Tabletop Teddy bears.



WEAVING

by Sara Zak

In his book *Republic*, Plato wrote, “Our need will be the real creator.” The modern-day equivalent is “Necessity is the mother of invention.” Beyond food, two of the most basic needs are shelter and clothing. Hence, the craft of weaving has existed for as many as 20,000 years.

It began when Neolithic humans interlaced plants and branches to make crude structures, among other items such as baskets. In time, raw wool was spun into thread and woven into cloth.



Many centuries later, simple looms were improved, other resources such as flax, cotton, and silk were used to produce threads, and textiles became more sophisticated. Fast forward to New England in the years before the Revolutionary War. England controlled the flow of products in and out of the colonies at that time. One of the largest imports was textiles. Boycotting and substitution were forms of protest and ways to decrease the dependence on Britain. Imported textiles and clothing were boycotted, and the need for cloth became the mother of homespun. American women began spinning threads and weaving them into cloth that was more coarse than that which came from Europe.

However, domestically-produced material became an expression of patriotism in the colonies.

In the 1700s, many American homes would have had a place in the cottage industry of producing textiles. They would have been similar to the barn frame loom pictured below left.

They were constructed with posts, mortices, tenons, and pegs to facilitate easy assembly and disassembly. These looms might have measured as much as 8 feet per side, so they were not always inside the house.

One such loom was stored in the King House attic when the property was donated to the Society in 1960. It was



never formally part of the Society’s collection but remained in the attic. It was charred by the 1983 fire, and some parts were destroyed.

During the clean-up, it was disassembled, and the remaining parts have been stored in the stable for the past 40 years. As the Historical Society started to prepare for the eventual demolition of the stable, the question became, “What do we do with the loom parts?”



Coincidentally, the Salmon Brook Historical Society in Granby staged a weaving demonstration at their Wilcox House this past summer. I attended, explained our situation, and asked the docents and weavers if they

had any ideas to answer our question. I learned of the Marshfield School of Weaving in VT and the Barn Frame Loom Discussion Group on Facebook. Hand weaving may no longer be necessary, but it appears to be a craft that is widely enjoyed.

The fire damage rendered the loom unusable, and it had no monetary value, so the Historical Society decided to look for a new home for the loom parts. I posted it on Facebook and found a woman who lovingly restores looms like this one and passes them on to other artisans. Maybe someday, the pieces of loom will look like the working one pictured above.

WOMEN'S WORK

From *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home 1760-1860* by Jane C. Nylander

“Any of the financial records of ... work were kept by men in complex double-entry account books. In a nearly cashless society, the financial value of goods and services was carefully calculated and accounted for in order to make certain that people were treated fairly. Accounts sometimes ran for months or years before being settled, although they were usually balanced at least once a year, often on January 1. The exchanges of goods and services between women were less frequently accounted for in such formal ways, but they were no less valuable. A few women kept records in diaries or account books; for many the entire system was based on memory and trust. Because very little of the women's work is documented in traditional written sources, it has remained invisible to historians; this has contributed to the concept of household self-sufficiency and the idealization of the productive housewife.

“Some women left their own homes to provide important services to others – nursing, delivering babies, washing and ironing clothes, and cleaning houses. At home, most women's productive “earning work” was related to dairying, textile production, dressmaking, or millinery but even in the eighteenth century, some women made money by stitching shoe uppers or covering buttons. In the early nineteenth century, New England women and girls made straw braid, bonnets, or palm-leaf hats; wove carpets; and stitched shoes.”

THE VALUE OF MONEY

by Jackie Hemon

How people in America were paid before and after the Revolutionary War was complicated. Before the war, Great Britain forbade the colonies to mint their own coins and exported few of their own. The colonists resorted to bartering, using wampum or commodities such as corn, hay or tobacco, and also paper money. With the shortage of money, the colonies established their own currencies, printing paper money based on the British pound. Since the colonies were separate entities, there was little consistency in the value of paper money between them. The price of the same article differed as one traveled through the colonies, frustrating trade between the colonies and with Great Britain. Depending on how much was printed, the value of the money fluctuated, even within a colony. To achieve more consistency in the value of the printed money, Parliament passed the Currency Act of 1764 which restricted the printing of money in the colonies and which became another point of contention between the colonies and Great Britain.

When the Revolutionary War began, the colonies began to print money with abandon to pay soldiers and supplies. The result was wildly fluctuating values which ultimately made the paper money worthless. The Continental Congress began issuing paper money called “Continental” which used dollars as its basis. The dollar system was familiar to the colonists as the “piece of

eight” coins minted from silver in Mexico and South America were also called dollars. The Continentals also proved to be useless due to inflation, so people, when they could, used foreign coins from Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark; but the most favored was the Spanish coin. Unfortunately, there was still confusion depending upon the coin and how it was minted. Some coins had more silver than others. Coins that were in frequent use lost some of their silver. And worse, some people began to shave, file and cut the silver coins. Instead of using them for their face value, people had to weigh them.

The U.S. dollar was officially established after the end of the war. But in the 1820s, John Quincy Adams reported that the dime was “utterly unknown,” whereas the Spanish coin was accepted as a shilling in New York, nine pence in Boston and eleven pennies in Philadelphia. It is not surprising that the Spanish coin was considered legal tender until 1857.

Note: *The change in the currency system used in the USA is demonstrated well in William Pease's account book (next page). He used pounds, shillings, pence, dollars and cents in the transition after the American Revolutionary War.*



PHOTO: *The image to the left is a typical shilling with King George I's image, from the 18th century.*

4 WILLIAM PEASE'S ACCOUNT BOOK

by Barry Sisk

The symbols for the English system come from Roman times—"£" for the pound comes from the Latin "libra," the basic Roman unit of weight; "s" for shilling comes not from "shilling" but from a Roman coin called "solidus;" and "d" for pence comes from "denarius," a smaller Roman coin. (allthingsliberty.com/2016/09/dollar-revolutionary-america)

William Pease (1772-1846), part of a civic-minded family, was primarily a furniture maker and carpenter. However, his account book (right), which he kept from 1796 to 1844, lists a great variety of tasks and services for 140 individuals and the town. The diversity of his activities facilitates an understanding of Suffield's economy and daily life of its inhabitants.

The design and construction of buildings was a significant part of Pease's work. For Apollos Norton, he designed a barn in 1819 for \$.50 and a house in 1824 for \$1. In 1820, he charged Harvey Bissell \$1 for "drawing a plan for barn." For designing plans for a "storehouse" and an addition to a paper mill, Pease charged Butler & Ward \$2. He worked 6 1/4 days framing a structure, probably a barn, for Apollos Norton in 1819, earning \$9.37. In 1834, Pease charged Seth King \$4.96 for 4 1/4 days' work "framing a bridge."

Pease frequently constructed windows, making frames and sashes, installing "lights" and puttying. He charged William King 2s for "setting" glass in 1802. In 1808, King was charged 7s,60d for 30 lights, sashes and 4s,40d for "setting glass" and puttying. In 1796, Pease charged Gideon Granger 3s for "setting glass and putty."

Pease performed other work associated with buildings. He made a cistern for 1£,1s for Captain Joseph Fuller in 1810 and a cistern at his "still house" in 1812 for 1£,6s. Pease charged Apollos Norton \$1.41 for "hanging" (installing) a grindstone in 1821. "Hanging grindstone and making frame" cost Thaddeus Leavitt 3s,6d in 1817. Nathaniel Remington was charged 5s for "hanging a grindstone."

For "mending a great wheel" in 1811, Pease earned 5s,6d from Ezra Hanchett. In 1801, Gideon Granger, Jr., William's

brother-in-law, paid 15s for "putting up partitions and bords." Joseph Pease, William's brother, paid \$.89 for a cornice for a kitchen fireplace in 1828.

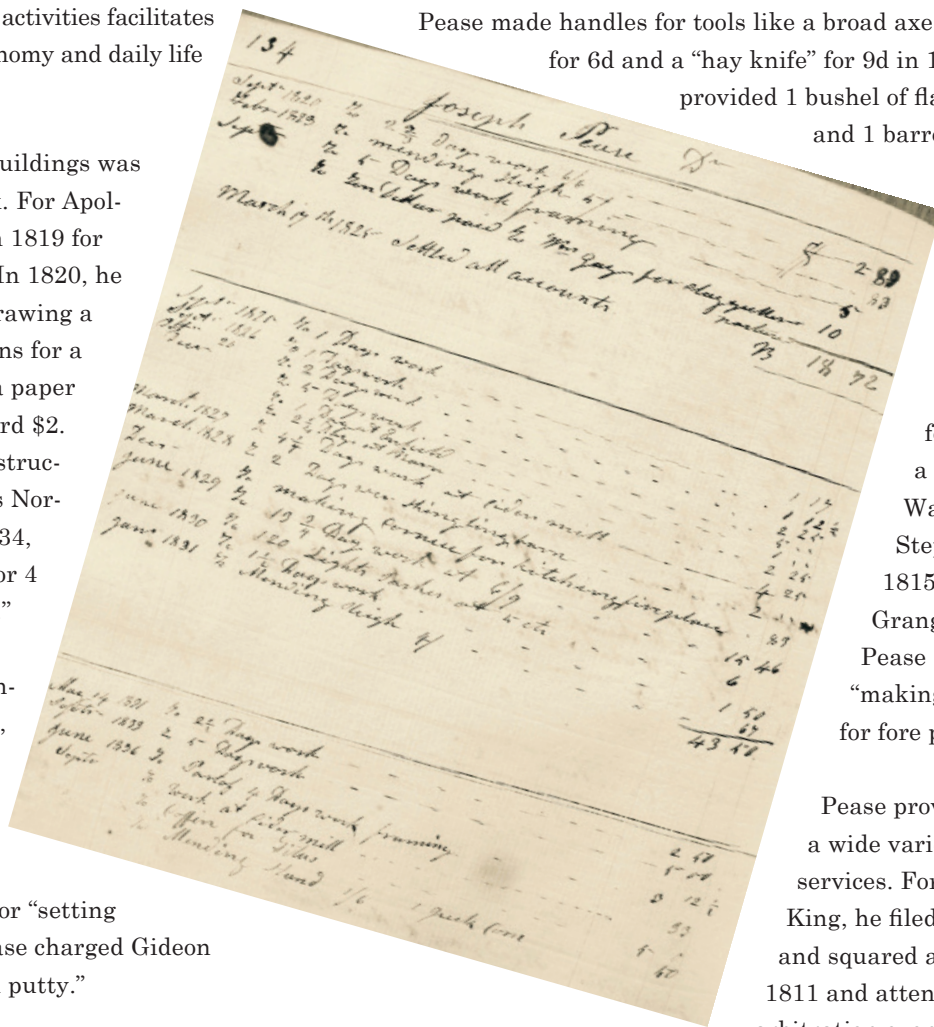
A wide variety of products were made by Pease. Coffins were in frequent demand. Eliphalet King paid 7s for his daughter Harriet's coffin in 1803. In 1836, Joseph Pease paid \$5 for the coffin of Titus, who was formerly a slave. The coffin was probably expensive because of the type of wood used. A "roler" for a washing machine cost Eliphalet King 1s in 1803 and a door for an oven cost 6s in 1805.

Pease made handles for tools like a broad axe in 1810 for 6d and a "hay knife" for 9d in 1808. He provided 1 bushel of flax seed and 1 barrel of cider, for 6s each, to Ezra Hanchett in 1811. Pease was paid \$5 for making a loom for Warren Stephens in 1815. John Granger paid Pease 9d for "making a wedge for fore plain."

Pease provided a wide variety of services. For William King, he filed a saw and squared a loom in 1811 and attended an arbitration event in 1813.

He worked at a cider mill for 4 1/4 days in 1827 for \$4.25. Repairing and making parts for sleighs was a significant activity for Pease. He made and installed sleigh parts for Ezra Hanchett in 1810, 1814 and 1818.

Pease grafted apple trees for Captain Joseph Fuller in 1811 for 6d, and for Jabez Heth he charged \$.33 in 1817 for the same work. For the Town of Suffield, he evaluated the soundness of a town bridge.



THE SIKES BURIAL PLACE

by Jackie Hemond

When George Hendee, who later built Hilltop Farm, bought land in Suffield, he found an old Sikes family cemetery on the property. In May 2022, this newsletter published a photo taken at the cemetery. As a sequel to that photo, here is the story of the cemetery's origins which John R. Henshaw recorded in January 1944.



John Robert Henshaw was born October 2, 1865 and died September 9, 1953, at the age of 90. John was the son of Andrew Augustus and Mary Sikes Henshaw and great grandson of David Sikes, a Revolutionary War soldier who is buried in the Sikes cemetery. John is remembered today because he collected and wrote many stories of Suffield families who lived in the Northeast section of the town, including stories of his Sikes relatives.

Here is a summary of Henshaw's record about the cemetery, which was transcribed by Art Sikes.

The cemetery was started when Zenas Sikes was killed on February 25, 1827 during the turning of the Lovejoy ferry boat which ran between Suffield and Thompsonville. His brother Elam Sikes, Henshaw's grandfather, owned and operated the boat. Elam lived with his family in the large tavern/hotel, since taken down, which stood south of the road which led to the ferry.

When Zenas was killed, the ferry boat was being turned over to caulk the seams between the planks which had dried out. The men dropped the boat. Henshaw's uncle hinted that there was too much liquor, or it might have been too few men. At any rate they lost control of the boat and it crashed, crushing Zenas Sikes.

Zenas was survived by his wife Alma Adams and three sons. Zenas' family chose to bury him on a hillside near his house because they feared that medical students who, at that time, were reportedly robbing graves, might dig him up, as he had died without disease. Or, perhaps, they didn't want to bury him in the old cemetery by the church

because the graves situated there filled with water during rainy times.

Gradually, twelve graves were added to the Sikes cemetery.

Hendee removed the original gravestones, along with a white picket fence and brush. However, within the last 20 years, two of the original gravestones have been added back to the cemetery.

In May 1916, Hendee unveiled a boulder with a bronze tablet commemorating the family members buried there (shown on the left). Two

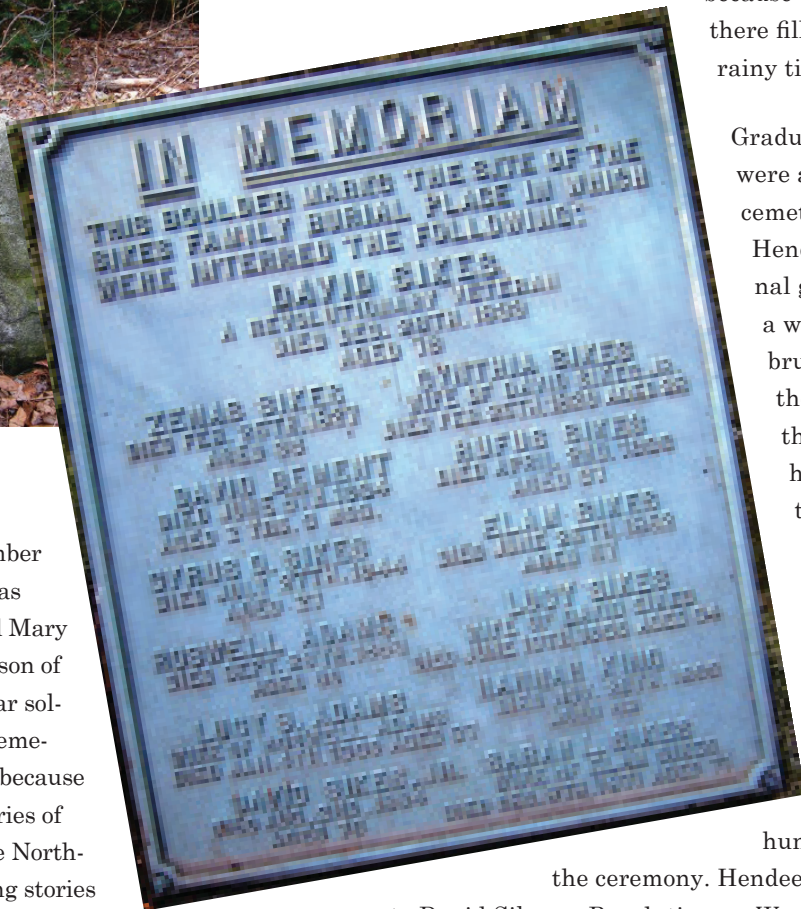
hundred people attended

the ceremony. Hendee gave special honor to David Sikes, a Revolutionary War soldier, who was the father or father-in-law of most of those residing in the cemetery. Art Sikes says that the cemetery holds two generations of his direct Sikes lines.

David Sikes, the Revolutionary War soldier, was born in Suffield in 1756. His house stood across the street from what is now Hilltop Farm. David fought in either the Battle of Bunker Hill or the siege of Boston. He returned to Suffield in 1776, where he lived as a farmer until his death in 1833, six years after Zenas.

Henshaw said that, "David was a man of small stature, short, and his family used to speak of him as only three feet high. We have a pair of buckskin trousers he wore and they would not fit my [young] son. But we know that David Sikes had all the determination, grit and vigor of the early New England men."

PHOTOS: *Sikes Cemetery memorial marker.*



6 CEMETERY TOUR

by Jackie Hemond



It was a beautiful hot day on October 28 when the Historical Society cemetery tour took place in the Old Center Cemetery behind the First Congregational Church. Twelve presenters, some in period dress, spoke as or about Suffield residents who are buried there: Alexander King, Anthony Austin, Reverend Benjamin Ruggles and his wife Mercy, Hannah Leavitt, Sibbil Dwight Kent and Major Elihu Kent, Peter Uzell, Irish canal workers, Mary and Timothy Swan, Ebenezer Gay, Henry Sykes, Leslie Adams (known as the Hermit), and Civil War soldiers: George Washington Allen, Henry Barnett, Horace Warner, Edson DeWolf Bemis and Joseph Underwood.



Thank you to the presenters: Bill Sullivan, Art Sikes, Nancy Leiper, Deirdre Ducharme, Judith Hanmer, Rose MacNeely, Jan Peake, Barry Sisk, Kaitlyn Webster and Jackie Hemond. A special thanks to Sarah Donahue and members of the DAR and her sister Susan Tyler for cleaning the gravestones and to Sarah again and Laurie Tavino for help with the tour.

We hope to do another cemetery tour in 2024. If anyone is interested in being a presenter, please contact Jackie Hemond, jives98@hotmail.com.

PHOTOS: *Left: Alexander King AKA Randall Nelson; Kaitlyn Webster presenting Civil War stones.*

Right: Judith Hanmer presents the story of Sibbil Dwight Kent, for whom the local DAR chapter is named; Hannah Leavitt, AKA Deirdre Ducharme, presents her place in Suffield's history by her gravestone; Mercy Ruggles AKA Nancy Leiper.



MARY GAY SWAN SCRIPT

by Jackie Hemond

Note: *This is one of the stories told at last October's Old Center Cemetery tour. Included in this issue is an article on the new owners of the Mather House. The original owner of the house was Timothy Swan (1758-1842). Mary Gay Swan (1764-1841) was Timothy Swan's wife. This is her story.*

My death is noted on two different stones in two different graveyards. The one in Suffield is only a memorial. My brother added my name to his gravestone because I loved Suffield but I am buried with my husband Timothy Swan in Northfield, Massachusetts.

I was born on September 23, 1764. Although I was named Mary, I was always known as Polly. I was the eldest daughter of the distinguished Reverend Ebenezer Gay and Mary Cotton Cushing, his second wife.

My father was a learned man, graduating from Harvard with the Hopkins Prize and a speaker at his commencement.

I would have liked to have been learned too, but unfortunately as a girl I only had an elementary education. I tried to make up for this deficit in my adult years by reading, reading, reading. I read history, biography, literature, morals and divinity. My children can account for the fact that I always had my nose in a book which was difficult to do with so many children in the house.

My father was called to Suffield to be the third minister of the First Congregational Church. He was ordained in 1742. His uncle, also the Reverend Mr. Ebenezer Gay, officiated the ceremony on a very snowy day. Uncle Ebenezer was the minister of Old Ships Church in Hingham, Massachusetts and is considered the father of Universalism, which held a more tolerant version of Christianity than Calvinism. One of its tenets is that all souls are saved, not just the Elect.

The next year, in 1743, my father moved into the Main Street house he had built. It is still standing and is called the Gay Manse, one of the earliest gambrel-roofed houses in New England.

In those days, it was customary for ministers and wealthy landowners to own slaves, they were a sign of high status and authority. In 1790, my father owned five slaves. After my father's death, my brothers freed the slaves from bondage. Later in life, I became an ardent supporter of the antislavery movement which was an uncommon group at

the time. We were considered fanatics and disturbers of the peace. 7

My brother, also Ebenezer Gay, became an associate minister in my father's church and assumed the full ministry upon the death of my father. Together, my father and brother served as ministers in Suffield for nearly 100 years.

Timothy, my husband, was a musical man. He learned to play the fife as a Continental soldier. I met him when he joined the choir in my father's church. We married when I was twenty on May 5, 1784.

Much later, my sister Lucy married Timothy's brother, Benjamin. So many families were interconnected! Over the years, I bore fourteen children, of whom ten survived into adulthood. We lived on High Street. The house is still standing next to the First Congregational Church. For many years now, it has been referred to as the Mather House, but it was a home built for us on the top of the hill with a spectacular view to the West Suffield Mountain.



Mary Gay Swan at age 26

Timothy was a hatmaker. He loved hats, wore them everywhere, even to bed! He was also a poet, singing master and a composer of hymns and secular music. He published two tune books, *The Songster's Assistant* in 1786 and *New England Harmony* in 1801. His tunes were played throughout New England, New York, Maryland and Virginia. He was famous in my time.

In October 1807, after 23 years of married life in Suffield, we moved to Northfield, Massachusetts where Timothy's mother lived and whose health was failing. Timothy became a milliner but he also continued with his music, writing and teaching.

I died before my beloved Timothy on September 19, 1841 when I was 77 years old. He died in his sleep, probably wearing his hat, on July 23, 1842, at the age of 84. His death was published in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*.

8 THE MATHER HOUSE

AKA The Timothy Swan House

by Jackie Hemond

The Mather House, an historic house on High Street, situated between the First Congregational Church and Suffield Academy's LeGare Library, has new owners. With their careful renovation, the 1794 house will be rejuvenated to last another 200 years. The new owners are Karen and Ted Markham who came to town four years ago. Ted had previously lived in Suffield for 25 years, then moved away, but he always wanted to return. The Markhams recently bought the Mather house from the First Congregational Church. When the church received the house as a donation by the Mathers, it was converted into a multi-family house. The Markhams will keep it as an apartment house but they are updating it while keeping as many historical features as they can, such as wainscoting, paneling, hardware and wood floors.

The house has revealed some of its past. Hidden in the walls, the Markhams have found newspapers from 1893, a candle and a bonnet. The bonnet is probably from the same time as the newspaper but harkens back to Timothy Swan, the house's original owner, who was a hatter. The Markham's donated the bonnet to the King House Museum's collection.

A beautiful fan-shaped window with matching sidelights at the front door interests Karen. She hopes that Christine Ritok, the King House Museum Curator, can tell her more about the design. Other fan-shaped windows appear in the gables on the north and south sides of the house. In one of the rooms, the fireplace has such an ornate surround that Karen is convinced it was a family's best parlor. A china cupboard, probably installed in the house years after the house was built, is another beautiful feature.

Ted believes that the addition located behind the house was once an open-air blacksmith workshop. The room's huge hearth features a metal door to a recessed area which may have served as a kiln. Blackened circles decorating the floor may indicate that hot pots were set down. Are the circles more proof that the room was once used by a blacksmith? It's an educated guess. There is also evidence that



a fire damaged the walls. At some point, perhaps after a fire, the smithy was encased and attached to the house. If only the walls could talk!

Karen and Ted own several multi-family properties but this one is their favorite and the oldest. Some old houses are said to have a resident ghost. The Markhams say a ghost is a feature this house doesn't have.

To view the house's renovation journey, visit [thematherhousesuffield](#) on Instagram.

PHOTOS: *Above and to the right is the Mather House as it appears today and original details within the house that have been restored and maintained by the Markhams in the multi-family house as it stands now. Insert on the left is a bonnet found within the walls.*



PERFECTION

by Wendy Taylor

Nancy really knew how to make a fine strawberry shortcake. So fine, it made its way into her husband's obituary.

Nancy (Doyle) Collins was born in Suffield on August 1, 1829. Her father was Martin Doyle, one of the many Irish Catholic laborers whose hard work built the Windsor Locks Canal. It is thought most of the workers left when the canal was finished in 1829, as the area was unwelcoming to Irish and to Catholics at the time. Martin however was still collecting a paycheck in December 1830. He was living in Suffield per the 1830 Census, and though there are no birth records in Suffield to prove this, all of his daughters' death and marriage records indicate they were all born in Suffield. Martin died from tuberculosis sometime between 1836 and 1838 when his youngest child was born, and wife Eleanor "Ellen" Belcher, remarried to fellow Irishman, John Mead (making Nancy a half-sister to John C. Mead, Jr., the architect.)

Young Nancy was "reared in the home of Reverend Dr. Gay." Ebenezer Gay Sr. died before Nancy was born so this reference would be to his son, Ebenezer Gay Jr., who himself died in 1836. Jr.'s wife, Bathshua (Pynchon) Gay, passes in 1845. What happens between "being reared" and the year 1851 when Nancy marries her husband William Smith Collins in Springfield, MA, is a mystery. But Martin left behind seven daughters when he died. Perhaps Nancy went to live with the Gay family when her father became sick, or after he died.

Nancy's husband William had a very popular livery stable in Springfield, and they lived on Dwight Street. Nancy and William had three sons, Francis, known as Frank, Samuel and Harry. "Mrs. Collins was a kindly, warmhearted woman, who rarely went out into the world, but was ever active in administering to the comfort of her family at home. She was generous to a fault and no one in need was ever turned away from her door without assistance. Whatever her table afforded, she was ready to share with the wayfarer who asked for food. September 18, 1895, marks the date of her passing to stomach cancer. And just nine months before this sad day, "the nomination of William S. Collins, as surveyor of the Springfield port of delivery, was made to the Senate by President Cleveland... The qualities Mr. Collins has to such a rare degree of making friends and keeping them have given him a warm place in the affections of the community, and wishes for his success in the new office will be general."

William would live another twelve years before passing in 1907. In his obituary, it was said that "Collins was a connoisseur of eating; he was indeed a gastronome, a gourmet – not a gourmand, for everything on his table must be the finest: not mere gross feeding was his, but fine cooking, right flavors. His little dinners at his home in Dwight Street, with Mrs. Collins to prepare them, were charming, and Mrs. Collins's strawberry shortcake was perfection."

TWO NEW TRUSTEES FOR THE SUFFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Robin Zatony

Robin has resided in Suffield for over 60 years, where she grew up and raised her children. She was married in the First Baptist Church on Hill Street. She started her career in the corporate world with an MBA and later joined Roland Dowd, her father, in real estate. As a local real estate broker/owner, with an office on North Main Street, she enjoys exploring and learning the history of older homes and barns and their owners. She loves the town and its sense of community.

Jason Cromack

Jason has been a member of the Suffield Historical Society since 2015. He enjoys finding, identifying, and educating people about the various types of Native American artifacts that can be found in the area. Jason is also a wildlife enthusiast and enjoys filming and sharing videos of our local wildlife. He has presented programs to the Society on King Philip's War and Native American Artifacts. A graduate of Providence College, Jason enjoys cheering on Manchester City, the New England Patriots, and spending time with his family. He is currently the Senior Director of Empower located in Windsor. He brings 21 years of experience leading relationship management, production, compliance, quality, training, and business analyst teams.



10 SHS AWARDED GRANT FROM THE TOWN

by Christine Ritok, Curator

The Historical Society is thrilled to have been awarded an \$11,500 Suffield ARPA Grant for Historical Buildings and Assets to fund an assessment of its King House Museum by an architectural preservationist. The goal of this project is to determine the feasibility of adding an HVAC system and surveying the overall condition and potential needs of the house.

Adding an HVAC system will improve the environment in the museum for visitors, volunteers, and staff. Furthermore, being able to better regulate the temperature and humidity level inside the museum will contribute to the long-term preservation of the house and its valuable collections. As the museum is itself an important historical artifact built in 1764, any changes for air conditioning/HVAC system must be done with care to minimize compromising the building's historical integrity. A feasibility study would be the first step of such a project. An architectural preservationist will be selected with the guidance of the State Historic Preservation Office. Any funds remaining after the completion of the feasibility study will be put towards the implementation of the recommended plan.

The Society's most important asset is the King House, which it acquired in 1960, since which time it has operated as a museum. The King House was enrolled in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. It is a well-constructed example of an eighteenth-century Connecticut house with a central chimney and high-quality interior woodwork made by the house builder, Eliphallet King (1743-1821), of Suffield. Its porch, original to the structure, is unusual for the time period, but served an important function: it led to the office of its original resident, Dr. Alexander King (1737-1802) for his medical practice. King also served as Justice of the Peace, Town Clerk, and other leadership positions in Suffield. The interior configuration of the house has changed very little since its construction, providing visitors with a sense of how a prominent family in the area lived three centuries ago. The Museum contains an important collection of furnishings, textiles, fine art, locally-available ephemera and products, items related to Suffield's tobacco industry, and in an adjacent facility, maintains a rich collection of archival material including manuscripts, photographs, and publications.

The Society is grateful to First Selectman Colin Moll and other town officials for their support in preserving the town's historic buildings.



SHS Curator Christine Ritok (right) accepting ARPA check from First Selectman Colin Moll.

NEW ACQUISITION FOR THE KING HOUSE MUSEUM

by Christine Ritok, Curator



The Historical Society recently acquired a late 18th-century dressing table, which is now on display in the south bedroom of the King House Museum. Probably made in Glastonbury, it exemplifies the high-style furniture wealthy residents of Suffield purchased from cabinetmakers throughout Hartford County. Made of cherry with pine used as a secondary wood, it retains its original brass hardware. Its molded-edge top generously overhangs the lower case on all four sides, a feature associated with Glastonbury furniture made during this period. Its most remarkable feature is the beautifully-carved shell on its central drawer.

In June, Gary R. Sullivan, a well-known antique dealer and scholar of American decorative arts based in the Boston area, visited Suffield at my invitation to visit the King House Museum and examine a tall case clock at the Phelps-Hatheway House. During our tour of the King House Museum, I mentioned to Gary that I sought a locally-made period example to replace the 20th-century reproduction dressing table that previously stood in the south bedroom. As luck would have it, Gary had recently come across just such an item, which the Museum was able to acquire using its acquisition fund as a partial gift of Gary R. Sullivan Antiques, Inc.

THIRTY-NINE YEARS AGO

by Jackie Hemond

On December 30, 1983, on a cold, wintry night, a fire attributed to a faulty furnace switch, erupted at the King House Museum. Fortunately, despite irreparable losses, such as a Hadley chest; a painting attributed to Carlos King (1769-1843), Alexander King's son; a tall case clock; and various other artifacts, the building was still structurally sound.

Thanks to the quick thinking of the Suffield firemen, many pieces of furniture were carried outdoors and deposited briefly on the snowy lawn. It created an odd sight to passers-by, but the furniture was preserved. However, the gallons of water that were used to douse the flames caused further damage to some furniture and paintings.

Roger Loomis (1916-1999), the president of the Historical Society at the time, led the restoration of the museum after the fire. He had to apply to the Town Zoning Board of Appeals to rebuild the house, which the Board approved.

A fund-raising drive chaired by Astrid Hanzalak raised \$100,000 and a \$360,000 insurance settlement covered the cost of the \$275,000 restoration. The rest of the money was added to the Historical Society's endowment fund.

The restoration was quickly completed, and when the museum opened in May 1984, just four months after the fire, it looked much the same as it did before. It has been open to the public from May to September as well as for special events like Holidayfest ever since.

HALLOWEEN UPDATE

This year 98 Trick-or-Treaters received treats from Society members at the King House Museum.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Usually the Society does not do an evening program in January because of the possibility of inclement New England winter weather. But this year we've planned a special surprise.

Stay in the warmth of your own home, curl up with a blanket and make some buttered popcorn. Our January 24th program will be via Zoom only. Wadsworth Atheneum docent Jan Beatty will guide us through Hartford's Austin House. Once the home of A. Everett "Chick" Austin, Director of the Wadsworth from 1927 to 1944, the structure is now the largest object in the Atheneum's collection.

It is modeled after a 16th-century villa near Venice, Italy, that Chick and his wife Helen Goodwin Austin had seen on their honeymoon in 1929. During the 1930s, it was a gathering spot for leaders of the international art world, and its decor is as breath-taking as the names on their guest lists! On Wednesday night, January 24th, you are invited to be on the guest list.

Zoom link is <https://tinyurl.com/4efnpptx>.

Suffield Historical Society, Inc.
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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
Jackie Hemond, Compiler

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Upcoming Events

The Unique House of Chick Austin

Wednesday, January 24, 2024 7 p.m.
Zoom only: <https://tinyurl.com/4efnptx>

Jan Beatty, a Wadsworth Atheneum docent, will be our guide to the Austin House. It is a National Historic Landmark and was the Hartford residence of the legendary and innovative A. Everett "Chick" Austin, Jr., the Atheneum's Director from 1927 to 1944.

In-person Suffield Trivia Night

Wednesday, February 21, 2024 7 p.m.
Community Room, Second Baptist Church

Can you correctly answer 30 questions about Suffield? Compete for prizes. Individuals and teams are welcome.

In-Person Show and Tell

Wednesday, March 13, 2024 7 p.m.
Community Room, Second Baptist Church

Sign up for a five-to-ten-minute presentation on any aspect of local history. Anecdotes about local characters, folklore, artifacts or photographs are most welcome. Contact Jackie Hemond (jives98@hotmail.com, 860 539-7367) by March 1 to sign up.

*Regular meetings are held
at the Community Room of the
Second Baptist Church
100 North Main Street
Zoom links also available on
suffieldhistoricalsociety.org*

SHS Officers: Arthur Sikes, Jr., *President*; Jackie Hemond, *Vice President*; Joe Artioli, *Treasurer*; Vacant, *Secretary*; Lester Smith, *Historian & Curator Emeritus*; Christine Ritok, *Curator*. **Trustees:** Anne Borg, Christopher Childs, Jason Cromack, Nancy Noble, Norman Noble, James Reeves, Robert Stewart, William Sullivan, Wendy Taylor, Jennifer Yergeau, Sara Zak and Robin Zatony. Ed Chase, *Trustee Emeritus*