



The King House Museum

Stony Brook CURRENTS

Vol. IV, No. 1

A Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

January 2009

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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Committeeman John Pynchon *by Ed Chase*

For the first dozen years of Suffield's existence, a committee of six men selected all the proprietors and issued all land grants.¹ Each committee member was given a land grant for himself. None of the six settled here, but their decisions would impact the formation of the fledgling settlement for centuries to come. This story focuses on the committee leader, John Pynchon, who had purchased Suffield's acreage from sachems who controlled this wilderness area prior to Suffield's 1670 charter.

John's story must begin with his father, William, and their roots as English gentry in Springfield, Essex, parish of Chelmsford, England. William immigrated to the new world in 1630 with the Winthrop fleet. First as an assistant in the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and later as the colony's Treasurer, William settled in Dorchester. He became involved in the founding of Roxbury. Young John, born in 1626, soon joined his father in Roxbury.

John's wealthy and influential father obtained the rights to settle "Agawam" in the Connecticut River Valley. The Algonkian word meaning "meadowland" described what we today know as Springfield, Massachusetts. William secured the exclusive rights to fur trade over this vast area, and Springfield soon became an agricultural and fur trading center. William's education included business and law, but his talents included leadership, judgment and Puritan piety. Under his control, the town flourished. With its distance from Boston, William and the settlement enjoyed much freedom.

However, this freedom allowed him to publish a treatise on religion that greatly disturbed the magistrates in Boston. In 1652, they banished William from the colony, and young John Pynchon took over his father's properties in the new world.

John had learned well from his father and possessed similar leadership and business talents. He was commonly known as the "Greatest Man in the West" back when Springfield was indeed the western frontier! Over the next half century, John outfitted ships for the sugar trade with Barbados and Antigua. He spoke fluent Algonkian, was involved with Indian affairs and expanded his holdings through purchases of land such as Suffield. He had bricks made in Northampton and built the first brick mansion in

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PROGRESS AT MUSEUM

We are slowly making progress on getting an archives room and a heated bathroom at the museum.

SHS has hired Dave St. Martin to do the necessary work, which will begin in February. We hope to move in by May.

Money raised in our annual appeal was used to repair our lovely sideboard and to purchase materials necessary to regrade in front of the house. Anne and Bob Borg created a slope away from the foundation, built a small retaining wall next to the steps to prevent rot, and laid a three-foot wide strip of loose stone along the front to aid drainage and prevent dirt splashing on the house. We hope this helps keep the basement drier.



Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Bill Clinton, "Foxy," Pooh, a cat and a masked mystery woman, a.k.a. Nancy, Kathy and Norm Noble, Anne Borg, Nancy Hess and Joan Baker at the King House on Halloween.

EVELYN PHELPS BEQUEST

We recently learned that Evelyn Phelps, a long-time docent devoted to the King House, left the Society a very generous bequest, amounting to close to \$150,000.

The Suffield native left equal gifts to several other organizations and town departments, handsome reminders of her love for Suffield. Her gift will benefit the Society and the King House in many ways.

THANK YOU

Thank you to the members who showed up on a rainy morning for our fall work day! Charles Simons, John Quenneville, Peg Shaughnessy, Lester Smith and Anne Borg cleaned house and hauled brush.

ICE HARVEST

The Noble & Cooley Center for Historic Preservation will re-create a 19th-century, small scale ice harvest on Sunday, February 8 between noon and 3:00 p.m. The Suffield Land Conservancy and the Suffield Historical Society have teamed up with the Center to make this event possible.

The Noble & Cooley Center is located at 42 Water Street in Granville, Massachusetts. Water Street is located off Route 189, 1/2 mile south of Route 57. Granville Center is the junction of Routes 189 and 57.

Here's your chance to use an ice saw, handle a pike pole and slam a breaker bar!

The event is free of charge, but donations are gratefully accepted. Refreshments will be served.

The Noble & Cooley Drum Factory Museum will be open for tours.

Please check www.suffieldhistoricalsociety.org for day of event changes, in case of weather-related issues.

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes new members:

Brian and Deb Edgerton
John and Diane Scannell
Robin Zatony

Please contact any officer of the Society listed on the front of this newsletter if you would like to join us.

BARN NEWS

The SHS Executive Committee has intensified its search for an old barn to erect behind the King House in which to display our larger tobacco and agricultural items and our carriages. They have been in touch with owners in Suffield, Westfield, Southwick, Palmer, Mystic and even Maine.

Annalee Christmas tree decorated by Helen Kope for Holidayfest at the King House Museum.



Pynchon *continued from page 1*

Springfield². As a military leader he helped European settlers prevail in the Indian Wars, King Philip's War (1675/6) and in the early French and Indian Wars until his death in 1703. John was also one of the commissioners to receive the capitulation of the Dutch when the English seized New Amsterdam (1664). Among his major accomplishments was the establishment of many towns along the Connecticut River Valley, including Suffield.

His life was not just a series of successful adventures. John Pynchon faced some tumultuous times. During King Philip's War, most of Springfield was destroyed by fire. He lost his mills and the food stores for the settlement. His settlements of Suffield, Brookfield, Northfield and Deerfield had to be abandoned. Pynchon asked to be relieved of his military command to attend to his other duties.³

In his personal life, John was the husband of Amy Wyllys, daughter of the Connecticut Governor George Wyllys. They had a daughter Mary and two sons, Joseph and John, Jr.⁴ Although the family never lived in Suffield, Pynchon owned a sawmill, cornmill, his 80-acre grant which included the land on which the King House Museum now stands, King's Island⁵ and a warehouse below the island at what is now Warehouse Point.

The Reverend Solomon Stoddard of Northampton preached John's funeral sermon in 1703. Titled "Gods Frown in the Death of Useful Men," he described Pynchon as the "most revered man in the valley".

- 1 John Pynchon, Thomas Cooper, Benjamin Cooley, Elizir Holyoke, George Colton and Roland Thomas.
 - 2 Remembered today as "The Fort," Pynchon's brick house was one of the few Springfield buildings to survive the Native American burnings during King Philip's War.
 - 3 Major John Appleton replaced Pynchon and garrisoned the remaining valley towns. Pynchon would later resume his command and serve in this capacity until 1703.
 - 4 John Pynchon's son, Joseph, graduated from Harvard. The young physician was to have a Suffield land grant, but he died unmarried in 1682. His son, John Jr., married the daughter of the reverend and historian, William Hubbard of Ipswich. The couple settled on the Ingorsol lot which is now near the Sutton and Deupree family homes on North Main Street, Suffield.
 - 5 Known as "Pynchon's Island" at that time.
- References: "Letters of John Pynchon", compiled and edited by Carl Bridenbaugh and Juliette Tomlinson, 1982.
H. S. Sheldon's "Documentary History of Suffield".

UPCOMING EVENTS

ICE HARVEST

Sunday, February 8 12 noon - 3 p.m..
Cooley Mill Pond
Granville, Massachusetts

*PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE
AND TIME CHANGE*

The new Noble & Cooley Drum Factory Museum
will also be open for tours.

*See story inside for directions to Cooley Pond
and details about the event.*

THE ROLE OF DNA TESTING IN GENEALOGY

Wednesday, February 18 7:00 p.m
Kent Memorial Library

*PLEASE NOTE CHANGE FROM USUAL
MEETING TIME*

SHS Vice President Art Sikes will present
this program, which discusses a whole new
dimension in genealogical reseach.

SHOW AND TELL

Wednesday, March 18 7:30 p.m.
Kent Memorial Library

Bring an artifact, a collection or a story to
tell. Presentations are limited to 10 minutes.

Presentation open to one and all.

Call Bob Stewart 668-2928 to sign up.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF WILLIAM WEBB

Wednesday, April 8 7:30 p.m.
Kent Memorial Library

Kevin Johnson depicts the life of William
Webb, an African-American Civil War soldier
from Connecticut. Webb's story is told from an
emotional, first person prespective illustrating
the unique struggle in the Colored Infantry.

ROSELAND COTTAGE & CRANSTON PRINTWORKS FIELD TRIP

Thursday, May 7 Details available in April.

Suffield Historical Society

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www.SuffieldHistoricalSociety.org

King House Museum
232 South Main Street

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