



The King House Museum

# Stony Brook CURRENTS

Vol. VI, No. 1

A Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

January 2011

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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## GEORGE NORTON, ORIGINAL PROPRIETOR

by Edward Chase

George Norton of Ipswich, Massachusetts, was a 33-year-old carpenter when he came to Suffield after buying a 60-acre parcel of land from John Pynchon in 1674. Fifteen acres of that land were on the west side of High Street (now South Main) diagonally across from the King House Museum. After fleeing the town during King Philip's War, he settled on this lot with his wife Sarah Hart and built a home for his family of five children. The rear portion of the house currently owned by Raymond and Anne Quenneville at 249 South Main probably contains part of that original dwelling.

Norton was the 4th of 10 children born to immigrants George and Mary Machais Norton. His father trained him well in the skills of carpentry and instilled in him a work ethic and a sense of civic responsibility. George Norton became one of the most accomplished and versatile citizens of Suffield. He was a farmer, innkeeper, cabinetmaker and furniture maker<sup>1</sup>. As a freeman, he appears on the 1682 list of original voters. He served our town as a fence viewer, surveyor, captain of the militia, hog reeve and selectman. In 1693, George Norton was selected as the first representative from Suffield at the General Court in Boston. According to records, he was excused from another session because of "the poverty of the town." Shortly thereafter, in 1696, George Norton died.

To lose such a useful man in the prime of his life was not unusual among Suffield's original proprietors. Life was physically demanding. Incurable diseases and accidents were common. Nevertheless, his death must have been a tragedy for the town and his family.<sup>2</sup> He was predeceased by his wife Sarah, with whom he had eight children. His second wife, Mercy Barber Gillett, bore him an additional four.

Likewise the hardships of life affected the children and not all twelve children survived to adulthood. The first child born to George and Mercy Norton was named Freegrace after his uncle. (George's oldest brother, Sgt. Freegrace Norton, had been killed at the side of Capt. Appleton during King Philip's War.)

...continued on page 2

## BITS AND PIECES

The October concert of Polish music by Gary Sredzienski, organized by the Polish Heritage Committee, was a big success.

Members' hard work was rewarded with a large crowd who were enthusiastic in their enjoyment of the music and whose attendance, along with a small grant from the New England Foundation for the Arts, more than paid for the cost of the concert. Thanks to Della Zera Winans, Mary Anne Zak, Gary Mandirola and others who made the concert happen.

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Did you notice the new look of our program brochure? Recent member Sandy Taylor volunteered her professional services (Sandy Taylor Graphic Design & Marketing) to give Bob Stewart's basic design a new twist. It complements the look of our newsletter and gives the Society a standardized and up-to-date look. We challenge you to identify each of the small photos, all of which were taken at the King House!

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Curator Lester Smith and Nancy Noble, head of our docent crew, wish to thank our house volunteers for their faithful service throughout the summer season. Natalie Mahoney, Peg Shaughnessy, Jan Peake, and Barry Sisk form the core, with help from Ann Cronan and John Quenneville.

Nancy, too, should be thanked for her tireless efforts to schedule the docent staff on open days and for special events. Please call her if you can help out on a regular or one-time basis.

## NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the following new members: Ron Birmingham, Beth Cutting, Barbara and Roland Dowd, Albert Taylor, Lawrence and Lauren Life, Jonathan Tautic.

## FIELD TRIP UPDATE

For those of you who are dying to know, we will be visiting the Quechee, Vermont, area in May, with stops at the Simon Pierce glassworks and pottery, a brewery, and at least one historic house. Details will be enclosed in the April newsletter.



### **NORTON** *continued from page 1*

The child grew up in Suffield. His gravestone and that of his wife are among the best preserved in the old section of the Mountain Road Cemetery in West Suffield.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** In *A Norton Family History* by James L. Norton, I discovered that the immigrant George Norton left Luton, England, in 1610 along with many other Puritans because of persecution by Archbishop Loud, Archbishop of Canterbury. He sailed to Salem, Massachusetts, in 1629. Through heraldry his ancestry was traced back to Charlemagne and Alfred the Great under the surname de Norville. The family came to England with William the Conqueror in 1066. I found this 1992 book a fascinating read. Unlike most genealogy books, it is written in a story format. It is available at the Kent Memorial Library as is Hezekiah Sheldon's *A Documentary History of Suffield*, also used for this article.

- 1 Some of his furniture was listed in the estate of his descendant John Pease Norton, who died in 1952.
- 2 Curiously, many of the original proprietors died in the 1690s although there is no description of the town being part of an epidemic of any kind.

## CURATOR'S REPORT

by Lester Smith

New items continue to arrive – some for immediate display, some for archival preservation or attic and barn loft storage, available for future reference and possible use. Major items include a lovely tall case clock received from Mrs.



Margaret King Widigren, now of Ashlar Village Masonic in Wallingford. The clock came from England in the early 1800's and spent almost a century on Mapleton Avenue in the King family before moving to Windsor in about 1900 with the donor's grandfather.

Jim Kent donated a very sweet bowback Windsor rocker with a Suffield provenance. And a considerable quantity of Grange material has been transferred from Academy Hall, where the West Suffield Grange met before the chapter closed last fall. Included are many items of regalia – symbolic pieces representing various Grange ideals – as well as sashes, badges, and aprons. Some of the material is from the Suffield Grange, which closed two decades ago.

We welcome donations such as these testaments to the history of Suffield.

### PHOTOS:

*Previous page: Charlie Holomb's Model T and a fire engine owned by Steve Sorrow were part of our September Car Show on the King Museum House grounds.*

*Above: An old King family clock now stands in the King House Museum dining room.*

*To the right: Art Sikes and Lorraine Rapacki examine a display of recording media in the Holidayfest exhibit.*

*Curator Lester Smith relaxes by the fireplace during Holidayfest.*

## HOLIDAYFEST

Our December weekend party and special exhibit attracted a great crowd – 168 visitors! – and many generous lenders had provided what turned out to be a very interesting display. Over 50 items were featured in “The Sounds of Yesterday: Phonographs, Music Boxes, and Radios,” including an Edison cylinder phonograph, several old Victrolas, impressive early radios, and dozens of music boxes. Stars of the show were the Edison phonograph and a glorious 1875 Swiss music box with six different, long selections on one rotating drum. Lender Gary Mandirola let us play the Edison, and Bob Stewart demonstrated the music box, which has always been in Sally Stewart's family. For background, we played recordings of old radio programs and a CD assembled by Ruth Zimmerman with notable excerpts from two dozen famous speeches. As always, visitors enjoyed the goodies our members provided and the friendly warmth by the kitchen fireplace.

Many thanks to all who helped, including the Vintage Radio and Communications Museum in Windsor.



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King House Museum  
232 South Main Street

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

Newsletter Editor  
Maggie Philippon

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### ICE HARVEST

Saturday, February 5  
11:00 a.m.  
with Dennis Picard  
and Crew  
Noble & Cooley Mill  
Pond  
Granville,  
Massachusetts  
*The Society, along*

*with the Suffield Land  
Conservancy and the  
Noble & Cooley Mill,  
will again be*

*holding an ice harvest demonstration.*

*Learn how to handle an ice saw and other antique  
tools to cut blocks of ice.*

*The Noble & Cooley Mill will be open.*

*In case of inclement weather, the event will  
take place on Sunday, February 6.*

*If there is no ice, please check our website at [www.SuffieldHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.SuffieldHistoricalSociety.org)  
for a new date.*



### CONNECTICUT GENEALOGY RESOURCES WORKSHOP

Wednesday, February 16 7:00 p.m.

with Arthur Sikes

Kent Memorial Library

*Art will review area archives and discuss their usefulness  
for genealogical research. Note: 7 p.m. not usual 7:30.*

### SHOW AND TELL NIGHT

Wednesday, March 16 7:30 p.m.

Historical Society Members and Guests

*Sign up for a ten-minute presentation on a subject of  
Suffield or American history. Contact Bob Stewart at 668-  
2928. He will prepare photos for projection ... preferred to  
passing valuable archival photos or artifacts.*

### OFF-BEAT CONNECTICUT MUSEUMS

Wednesday, April 20 7:30 p.m.

with Steve Wood

*With its rich colonial and industrial history, Connecticut  
has become home to over 500 museums! Wood will talk  
about some of the unusual places and the history buffs  
who staff them. He will discuss using the internet as a  
method to gain visibility for smaller museums.*