



# *Stony Brook* **CURRENTS**

Vol. X, No. 1

*A Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society*

January 2015

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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## **JOSEPH AND JONATHAN SHELDON, TWO EARLY SUFFIELD SETTLERS**

*by Ed Chase*

*NOTE: The term "Original Proprietors" denotes early settlers who were awarded or purchased land grants from the Suffield Committee. The last of these grants was documented in 1682. Your author uses the term "early settlers" to connote the settlers who followed and purchased their own property.*

By 1651, Issac Sheldon had emigrated from England and purchased a house and 3-acre woodlot in Windsor, Connecticut. Three years later he married Mary Woodford<sup>1</sup> of Windsor. Their stay in Connecticut was short, as by 1656, they were in Northampton, Massachusetts, with their daughter Mary. She was the first of their thirteen children. Joseph Sheldon, their eighth child, was an early Suffield settler.

Issac was widowed in 1684 and married Mehitabel (Gunn) Ensign<sup>2</sup>. Their union brought another son, Jonathan Sheldon, the second Suffield settler in this story.

Joseph was the first brother to arrive in Suffield, bringing his wife Mary Whiting<sup>3</sup>. Mary was the granddaughter of Suffield's founder John Pynchon, the most important person in the Connecticut River Valley at that time. She also enjoyed privileges and wealth as a direct descendant of one of the founding families of Hartford. Thus we can safely assume that early on this young Sheldon man was impressive and well respected. It is obvious from records that he earned those modifiers as a leader in Suffield affairs quickly after his arrival.

In 1699, he purchased a mansion with a 21-acre house lot for 55 pounds from Victory Sikes. (This lot was originally granted to the Reverend Peletiah Glover. Today the Gay Manse, just north of the Baptist Church, stands on this site.) Three years later, he was chosen as a Selectman, and his name features prominently in our Town Meeting minutes.

Town Meeting records show Joseph was appointed to “run and renew” Suffield’s boundary lines that from almost the very beginning “occasioned many uncomfortable debates.”<sup>4</sup> Some acreage along the then southern boundary overlapped land deeded to Simsbury. His passion was great enough that he was imprisoned in Hartford for his assertion that certain of these lands were granted to Suffield. Joseph often traveled to Boston as the Town’s representative to the Massachusetts General Court. It was on one of these journeys that he died in 1708 leaving Mary with five young children<sup>5</sup>. The southern boundary dispute continued for another five years after Joseph’s death.

Captain Jonathan Sheldon (Joseph’s half-brother) purchased 1,100 acres in the western part of Suffield in 1723. The home he built still stands today – the oldest documented house in Suffield. He arrived in Suffield with his wife Mary Southwell<sup>6</sup> and seven children. Three more would bless the household in the years to come. From this large tract of land, Jonathan provided a house and farm for six of his seven sons. The street that runs just north of the dwelling came to bear his name as Sheldon Street.

He – like his half-brother – soon became an integral part of Suffield affairs. Town records show that he built pews for the newly covered Meeting House soon after his move. Within a few years he, too, was elected a Selectman, and a 1739 Town Meeting record has him given the use of two bulls in lieu of payment for “Instructing children in Reading.” And by this date, the names of his sons are also appearing in offices of

leadership throughout the community. In fact, a son is given a charge by the Selectmen in 1740 to make important decisions about school properties with the caveat to do what he “shall think best”<sup>7</sup> in the interest of the Town.

A large monument in the West Suffield Cemetery describes Jonathan and Mary as “The Happy Couple.” It was erected by their great-great-grandsons, Martin and Hezekiah Sheldon<sup>8</sup>. The latter grandson wrote *The Documentary History of Suffield* in 1879, one of the foremost referenced texts of early Suffield history.

- 1 Mary Woodford, b. circa 1636, d. April 17, 1684.
- 2 Born Mehitable Gunn, she was divorced from David Ensign, an adulterer according to records.
- 3 Mary Whiting of Westfield, Massachusetts, was the daughter of Mary (Pynchon) Whiting, who in turn was the daughter of John Pynchon. Her father was Joseph Whiting, who was a scion of the original founders of Hartford.
4. 1702 Suffield Town Meeting minutes.
5. In 1709, Mary Whiting Sheldon married the widower John Ashley of Westfield. They lived in Westfield until her death on Mar. 13, 1735. Her link with Suffield continued through her inheritance of Pynchon’s Island in the Connecticut River and the Pynchon saw mill with acreage at the mouth of the Stony Brook.
6. Jonathan b. 1687, d. April 11, 1769, married Mary Southwell, Dec. 30, 1708. Mary b. Feb. 25, 1688, d. Jan. 11, 1768. They had ten children, seven born in Northampton and three in Suffield. Five of his six sons settled on Sheldon Street farms. One son, Asa, moved to Marlboro, Massachusetts.
7. 1740 Suffield Town Meeting minutes.
8. Jonathan and Mary’s 4th son, Elijah b. 1719 was the great grandfather of the brothers, Martin and Hezekiah Sheldon. Their father was Julius, son of another Martin who was Elijah’s son.

#### REFERENCES:

*The Documentary History of Suffield, Conn*, Hezekiah Sheldon, 1879. Various Sheldon genealogies including *Descendants of Jonathan Sheldon* by Charles C. Sheldon, 1908, and owned by Eleanor Rose Chase; Internet genealogy information from *Joseph Sheldon, 1668-1708, Massachusetts*, and from *Roots Web Genealogy of Issac Sheldon of England, Windsor, Ct. and Northampton, Mass.*

## DO YOU HAVE AN OUTHOUSE?

by Anne Borg

We are curious. How many outhouses still survive in Suffield? Of course, the King House Museum has one which always intrigues the fourth graders when they visit. And my house (earlier the Nelson home) has one, though we removed the three seats. If you have one or know of one, we would like to hear about it. Please call me at 668-7841 or Lester at 668-7256. We’ll report back!

## GROWING UP IN SUFFIELD

Coming up on March 18 is our annual Show & Tell. This year we have a theme. We would love to hear from any of you who grew up in Suffield. Tell us about school, about working tobacco, about leisure time before TV, what antics did you get up to? Don’t be shy; we’d love to hear your stories. Call Ed Chase at 668-2962 to sign up for a 10-minute slot.



*Jamie Turner Drenzek and Laurie Tavino  
view items in the extensive display  
assembled for Versatile Wood,  
this year's Holidayfest exhibit in early December.*

## ANNUAL FIELD TRIP

This year's SHS annual field trip explores the Charles River Museum of Industry and Innovation as well as two historic homes in Lincoln and Waltham, Massachusetts.

The 18th-century Codman Estate includes portraits, memorabilia and art works collected in Europe in settings that span 200 years of decorative schemes ... including rooms by noted 20th-century interior designer Ogden Codman, Jr.

The Walter Gropius House was the residence of one of the most influential 20th-century architects and founder of the German design school Bauhaus.

Watch for final details in our April newsletter for this May 16th adventure.

**WELCOME** to new members Robert Williamson, Joanne Horacek, Jackie and David He-  
mond, Tami Zawistowski and William Gallagher.

## CURATOR'S REPORT

*by Lester Smith*

Holidayfest went well! About 120 visitors came on December 6 & 7 to enjoy the sociability, the goodies, the fire, and over 250 items in our two-day exhibit: Versatile Wood. With African carvings, ship models, Colonial treenware, an 1838 jigsaw puzzle, artistic marquetry, ingenious toys, some notable canes, Sam Spencer's gavel, and much more, this exhibit was a happy surprise. We appreciate all the generous folks who made it happen.

Our collections continue to grow. In addition to occasional interesting objects, like a six-foot bellows from the Merrill Farm blacksmith shop donated by Ray Deedy, Anne Borg is carefully shelving old documents, photos and other local memorabilia in our archives room (which is about five years old now). Please think of the Society when you come across old material that might better be preserved in our climate-controlled room. If you can't bear to part with such items, please consider letting us copy them, especially local photographs.

## BOOKS MOVED TO EAST GRANBY

With the recent closure of the Kent Memorial Library for renovations, some of us began to worry about leaving so many of the older research books in a construction zone with no access for a year or more. Lisa Salazar, East Granby Library Director, generously offered space in their archives room to us.

As a result almost all of the genealogies and local history books have been moved there for the duration. They can be used on Tuesday afternoons from 2-4 or by calling Anne Borg, who is a part-time staff member. The most often used books, e.g. vital records, the Clark notebooks and a few others are at the King House archives, also available by calling Anne.

## GUIDES NEEDED

We always need guides! If you would like to greet visitors to the King House and learn its history to guide them around, call Nancy Noble at 668-2538. Tours are Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and we are especially desperate for Saturday guides; even one day per month would be terrific.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### ANNUAL ICE HARVEST

Saturday, February 7

Noble & Cooley Mill Pond, Granville, Massachusetts

NOON – 3:00 p. m.

*Co-sponsored with the Suffield Land Conservancy and the Noble & Cooley Museum, this demonstration allows you to learn the techniques that were used to cut ice in our area a century ago. Dress warmly and wear grips on your boots if you want to cut ice! Dependent on weather conditions.*

*Storm date for the harvest is February 8.*

### SHOW & TELL NIGHT

#### *Growing Up in Suffield*

Wednesday, March 18

Senior Center 7:30 p.m.

*Anyone can sign up for a five-to-ten minute presentation about growing up in Suffield. Bring stories of places, people or events alive with your first-person accounts and perceptions. Artifacts that complement your reminiscences are welcome.*

*Contact Ed Chase by March 1 to sign up.*

### NOTE CHANGE IN DAY IN APRIL AND MAY

### THE 29<sup>th</sup> INFANTRY

Tuesday, April 14

Senior Center 7:30 p.m.

*Bill Sullivan brings his Suffield Academy American Studies students and their research into the 35 African-Americans from Suffield who enlisted in the Civil War – men whom Frederick Douglass called “pioneers of the liberty of your race.”*

### 150 YEARS OF SIGNATURE QUILTS

Tuesday, May 12

Senior Center 7:30 p.m.

*These quilts were used by churches, organizations and families to raise funds for towns, veterans, orphans, worldwide organizations and benevolent causes close to home. Sue Reich, an AQS Certified Appraiser, NQA Judge and author of several books on signature quilts, will share her knowledge and some of her treasures with you.*

### SPRING TRIP

Saturday, May 16

Lincoln & Waltham, Massachusetts

7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Departing from the King House

*See article inside for more complete details.*

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 Phillippon, Editor  
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