



Stony Brook **CURRENTS**

Vol. XVI, No. 1

The Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

January 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.

Suffield Historical Society

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WHY IS HISTORY IMPORTANT? *by Art Sikes*

History helps us to understand current events. It can also help us in making better decisions today about our future. Remember philosopher George Santayana's often quoted observation: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The SHS aims to teach/educate our members and our community about history, mainly our town's history, but also how local, state, national and world events affect us here in Suffield. Our Society belongs to The American Association for State and Local History, which has just completed the first part of a multi-year study "to identify the gaps between experts' and the public's understanding of what history is and why it's valuable to society." The following list is their conclusion:

1. The public thinks of history as a series of chronological events driven by the actions of key individuals.
2. The public believes that history is about recording and documenting "just the facts."
3. People can't tell the difference between rigorous analysis and personal opinion.
4. People think that learning about the past means absorbing facts and figures.
5. There is a belief among the public that mainstream (i.e., white male) historical narratives are the default that everyone has to learn, while narratives of historically oppressed peoples are "extras" that are, in principle or practice, unnecessary for everyone to learn.
6. Much of the public is reluctant to learn or talk about painful or troubling things that happened in the past, particularly to historically oppressed groups.
7. The public sees history as a nonessential hobby.
8. People are fatalistic about the possibility of improving how history is taught in schools.

There are many challenges here. Who has not heard opinions about what history is from family members, friends and co-workers. However, we can start to work on a couple of things as individuals and as a society. Support history-related curriculum and programs in our schools. Make sure that Suffield residents know who we are and what we are doing. Get our youth involved in history-related projects and activities. I would like to hear other ideas from you, our members, as to what else SHS can do.



Last summer we mounted a second large tobacco plantation sign in the barn, high inside the south gable under the “Bissell Farm” sign hung last year. This one was donated later last year by Chris Olson, who had bought the property just south of the Christian tobacco warehouse on North Grand Street and found the sign in the barn behind his house.

CURATOR’S UPDATE

by Lester Smith

It’s been a very different year at the King House Museum, closed for the summer season and no Ice Cream Social, because of the pandemic, considerable cleanup after a wind storm, and, for several Society trustees including me, the extra activity from being members of the Suffield 350th Anniversary committee (now planning a major parade in October 2021).

Realizing that there was no urgency to complete the planned summer exhibit about previous anniversary celebrations in Suffield, I devoted attention to improvements in the barn, with considerable help from Wednesday morning volunteer Bill O’Brien.

We restored and hung two large tobacco plantation signs and installed self-storing draft-stopping strips on the barn doors to prevent leaves from being blown in – a minor, but annoying, nuisance. We also began work on renovating an exhibit of tobacco-harvesting tools assembled many years ago by tobacco grower and early Society supporter “Herbie” Russell.

When Gov. Lamont eased Connecticut’s pandemic restrictions in September, we decided to open the museum for the month of October. Visitors were happy to be able to come, and it was satisfying not to lose the full year.

Our traditional fall volunteer work day was held on November 7, with general clean-up outside and dust-covering and the like inside. Thank you, loyal helpers.

As Connecticut’s current pandemic surge has brought restrictions, we did not plan to open for our usual Holidayfest weekend in December. Yes, a different year, indeed.

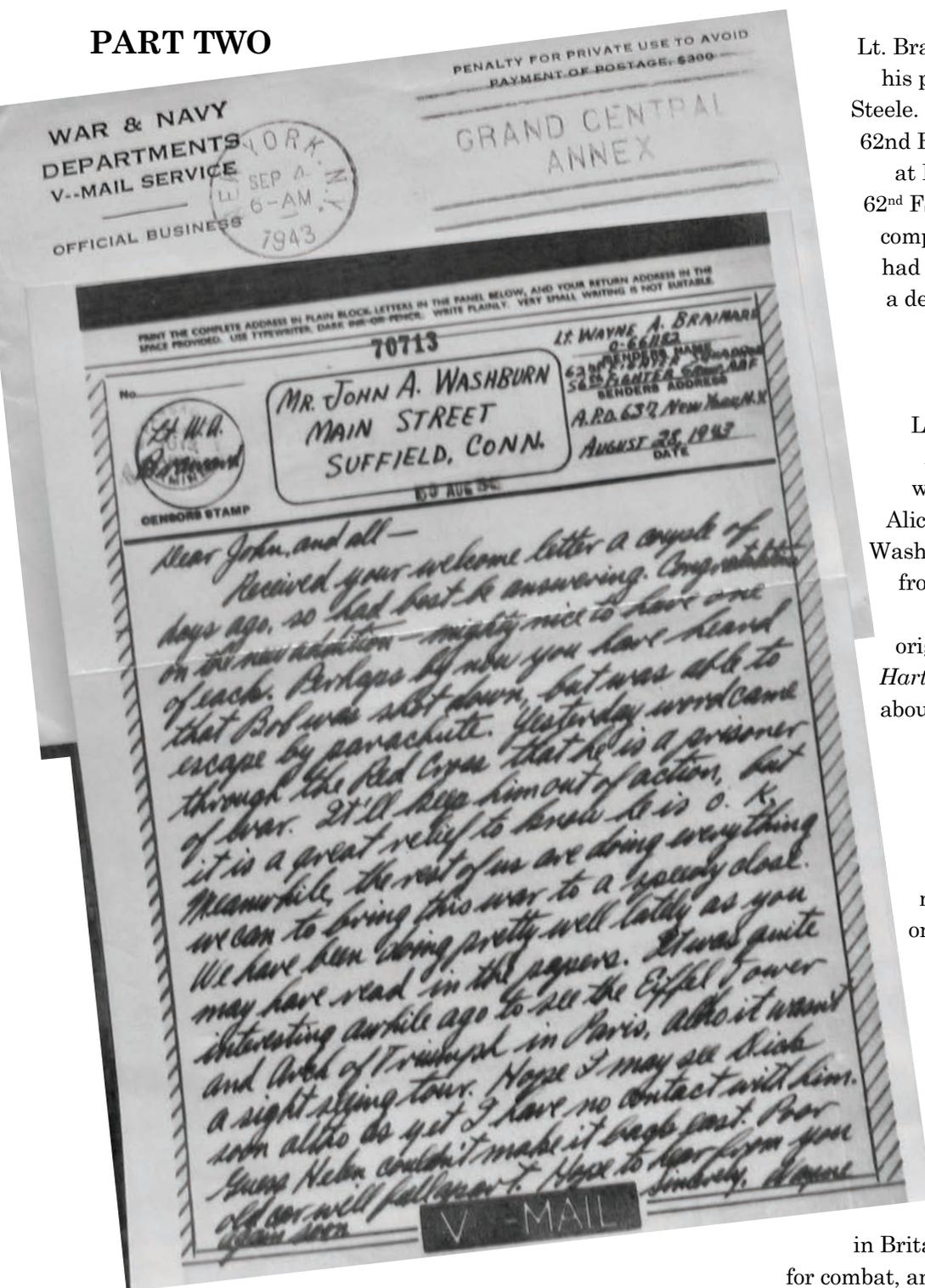
For the future, the society’s plan to seek an executive director and possibly a professional curator (increasingly necessary as the present volunteer curator’s abilities decline) have intensified our need for space for satisfactory office use and possible expanded Society programs, as well as for storage.

In a small response to that need, we spoke with Howie Orr, president of the Friends of the Farm at Hilltop, and found they would be happy to accept our gift of several bulky old objects they could use as exhibits in their giant barn. Orr and a crew of strong men came on December 19 and loaded into their trucks an old winnowing machine, two foot-powered grinding wheels, and the large blacksmith bellows, all stored in the stable but not part of our collecting goals.

WORLD WAR II LETTERS,

by Barry Sisk

PART TWO



The four articles in this series relate to WW II fighter pilots who lived in Suffield while stationed at Bradley Field. Lt. Wayne Brainard, a close friend of Lt. Steele, who was the subject of Part One, is the focus of Part Two. Five letters from Brainard, addressed to Mr. John Washburn and dated in 1943 and 1944, are among Washburn family papers. The letters suggest a fairly close relationship with John and Sally Washburn, who were about five years older.

Lt. Brainard, from Kellogg, Idaho, received his pilot training in Texas along with Lt. Steele. In July 1942, he was assigned to the 62nd Fighter Squadron, which was located at Bradley Field in Windsor Locks. The 62nd FS was one of three fighter squadrons comprising the 56th Fighter Group which had moved into the northeastern U.S. as a defensive measure in December, 1941.

The 56th FG was the first unit to fly P-47 Thunderbolts.

Lt. Brainard rented a room from Mrs. Alice Washburn at 24 Bridge Street, where Lt. Steele and his wife roomed. Alice Washburn was the mother of John Washburn. Lt. Brainard probably learned from his father, a newspaper publisher in Kellogg, that the Brainard family originated in Haddam, Connecticut. A *Hartford Courant* article (Sept. 18, 1942) about Lt. Brainard stated that he visited Haddam to view "...a marble slab erected to the memory of Daniel Brainard..." who settled in 1649.

The article referred to his upcoming marriage which occurred in Hartford on October 7, 1942. He married Helen Holcomb of Centuria, Wisconsin.

Lt. and Mrs. Brainard moved to New York City in early December as the 56th FG prepared to move to England (without dependents).

The 56th FG arrived in Britain in January, 1943, began training for combat, and the 62nd FS became operational in England in March. In a letter dated Feb. 8, 1943, addressed to John Washburn, Brainard stated that he had received "... your letter today..." and that Bob (Steele) had received one from your mother. Brainard stated "I'm sorry I had to leave my car like I did and I certainly appreciate all your efforts to dispose of it." Also, he mentioned that on his trip to England on the Queen Mary with more than 13,000 troops, "I cleaned up about \$30 playing blackjack on the boat... Certainly miss the good times we had playing it etc."

During the training period, there was time for sight-seeing. “Bob (Steele) and I have seen quite a bit of London, having been there twice, and have seen quite a bit of England and Scotland... Haven’t been doing much work but will be getting at it shortly.” He signed off with “My best to Sal, Ruthie and the rest...”

In a letter dated March 26, 1943, he dealt mainly with the disposition of his car – located in Alice Washburn’s driveway. He stated that “I owe your mother a letter.” He also wrote “Hello to Ralph, Lois and Judy.” (Lois was the sister of John Washburn, and Judy was the daughter of Lois and Ralph Anderson.)

A May 2, 1943, letter expressed concern about the unresolved issue of his car and he mentioned 2½-year-old Ruthie; “I’ll bet Ruthie is quite the gal now.”

In April, 1943, the 52nd FS had begun combat flying. “We are kept pretty busy here and we all know what Holland, Belgium, and France look like. Hope this mess can be cleaned up in the near future.”

An Aug. 28, 1943, letter to the Washburns refers to the birth of a baby boy (Howard Washburn - born July 29), who had been mentioned in a letter from the Washburns. The illustrated letter provides more information about Brainard’s activities.

The last letter in the Washburn papers from Lt. Brainard was dated Jan. 5, 1944. He thanked John Washburn for all the help with his car. Someone had returned it to Helen. Lt. Brainard had earned a number of medals, according to Lt Steele. Brianard stated in this letter “...not much flying combat... being held back to take over the squadron when the present leaders finish their required hours. I’ll get a promotion out of the deal anyway, but it will take me a couple of months longer to finish up. Hello to Sal and Ruthie and Howard. Sincerely, Wayne.”

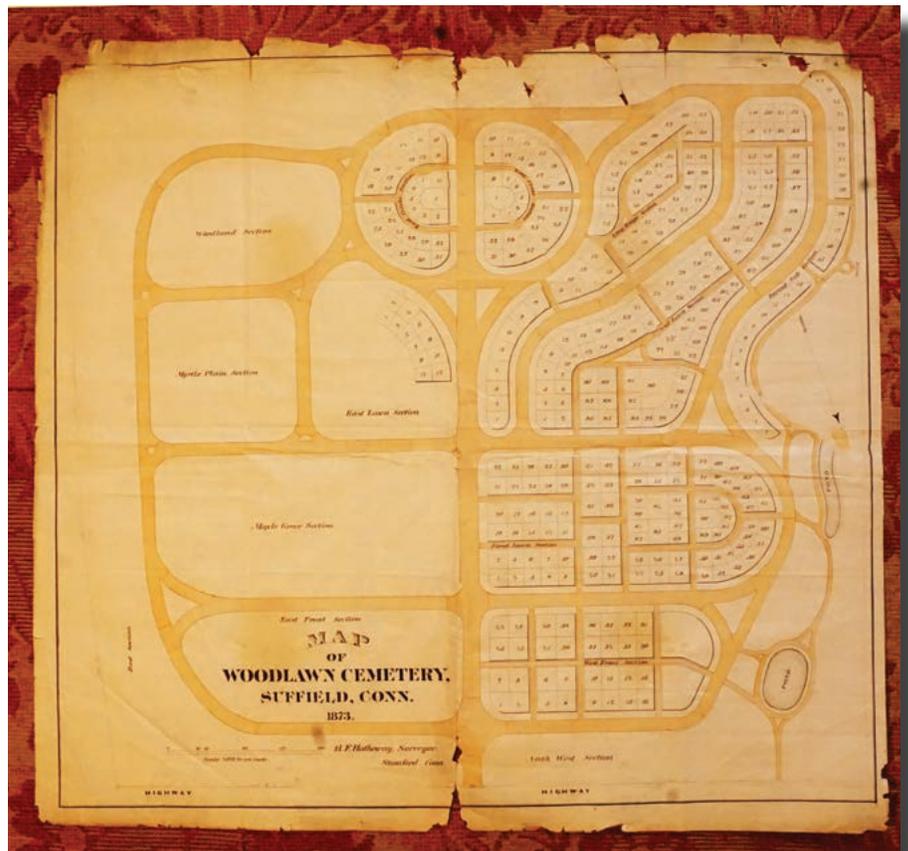
Brainard was transferred to the 56th FG HQ in April and promoted to Captain. In July, he transferred to the 72nd Fighter Wing in the U.S. and then to the Second Air Force as an instructor before being discharged. Wayne Brainard died on July 27, 1994, in Kellogg, Idaho, at the age of 75.

GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY *by Anne Borg*

Our thanks to Marjorie Rollet Begin for the lovely wreaths and over-the-door fruit board she made to decorate the King House during the holiday season. (These beautiful creations can be seen on the front of the museum in the photo on page 5.) She has willingly shared her time and creative talent with us for many years, as did her mother, Carol, before her.

Our thanks also to Joe Artioli, who donated a large original 1873 map of Woodlawn Cemetery he had purchased. It was drawn by Suffield’s Benjamin Hatheway, a professional cemetery designer.

Shown below: This 1873 map of Woodlawn Cemetery, on Bridge Street, is an original print, drawn by the cemetery’s designer, B. F. Hatheway, born in Suffield.



Lastly, we are most grateful for a large bequest from the estate of Astrid Hanzalek, totaling \$31,602. Many of you may remember Astrid as our State Representative, environmentalist, civic leader and friend. SHS will always remember her dedication to the fund raiser which allowed us to restore the King House after the fire in 1983. Astrid passed away on September 1, 2019.

A RARE BREED

The Polish Heritage Society mourns the loss of one of its co-founders, Harry Kozikowski, this past November. Harry and Mary Anne (Kelly) Zak organized the group to collect, preserve, and perpetuate the history and culture the Polish immigrants brought to Suffield beginning in the late 1800s. Many of those immigrants were in their late teens and single. It was not long before they were getting married and starting families.

About 200 pure-blooded Poles with undeniable American citizenship had been born in Suffield by 1910. The number of first-generation Polish Americans increased three-fold by ten years later. When Harry was born in 1932, he became one of the thousands of this pure Polish-blooded breed in Suffield.

By the time he helped create the Polish Heritage Society in 2006, the population of first-generation Polish Americans in town was probably very similar to what it had been one hundred years earlier. On November 5, 2020, the day Harry passed away, fewer than ten of this rare first-generation breed of Suffield residents were on the Polish Heritage Society roster. The Society would like to account for any others prior to the 350th Anniversary of the town.

Do you recall the photo of a four-by-four-foot quilt square panel we hung on our exhibit barn, reported in the September *Currents*? Many now appear around town as part of a Suffield 350th Anniversary program? We have now added a two-foot panel, hung on the King House next to the porch entrance. Based on the “Compass Rose” pattern of the King House south chamber’s bed quilt, it was carefully painted by Laurie Tavino.



SUFFIELD ALIGHT

by Lester Smith, Curator

The customary Christmas Party at the King House was cancelled by COVID-19 this year, much to our joint disappointment. But the Society did respond nicely to First Selectman Melissa Mack’s request that homes on the full length of Main Street be specially decorated this year. Calling the occasion *Suffield Alight*, she also arranged for a glorious lighting and special activities on and around the Green on the mid-December weekend to brighten the town’s spirits.



At the King House, Nancy Noble and Anne Borg set up lighted trees on the porch, a little tree on the front doorstep, and another in the upstairs front hall window. The picket fence in front was hung with swags of string lights. Along with Marjorie Begin’s customary wreaths and the big, traditional, pineapple arrangement over the front door, we made a good contribution to *Suffield Alight*, which was enjoyed by the many sidewalk strollers Selectman Mack had encouraged. Unfortunately, predictions of very high winds a few days later led us to take down the lighted trees and the fence lights, which we had planned to leave through New Year’s Eve.

The King House Museum was well lit for Christmas during *Suffield Alight*.

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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
Anne Borg, Compiler

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Watch your email for ZOOM connection details,
if we are unable to meet in person!

Because of the COVID-19 protocols, our regular museum
hours this spring and summer may be revised.

Native Ecosystems of Suffield

Wednesday, March 24

Kent Memorial Library 7:00 p.m. Todd
Mervosh, Ph.D, Plant Scientist and Land Conservationist

*Much of Suffield's diverse topography and ecosystems
remains undeveloped as agricultural lands, woodlands,
meadows, wetlands, and other open space.*

*Farm families, conservation-minded citizens and town
leaders have maintained these lands for our benefit, as
well as to preserve the native plants
and animals that live among us.*

*Todd will discuss the ecosystems of Suffield with a brief
history of Suffield's land conservation and ecological
threats caused by non-native invasive species.*

Titus Kent Witness Stone

Tuesday, April 13

Kent Memorial Library 7:00 p.m.
Suffield Academy American History Students

*Suffield Academy students will present an update
regarding their partnership with MacAlister fifth graders
and the planned Witness Stone memorial for Titus Kent.*

May Program

Details to be announced

Suffield's Past in Photographs

Wednesday, June 16

Kent Memorial Library 7:00 p.m.

*Our annual glimpses into Suffield history chronicled
by our extensive Hawley Rising Photograph Collection
is a perennial favorite. Each year our volunteers
collaborate to create a unique view of our own New
England town. Come join us for a delayed
350th Anniversary Year event!*