



The King House Museum

Stony Brook CURRENTS

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A Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

March 2006

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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Here We Go!

In an effort to fulfill our mission, we are mailing this inaugural issue of *Stony Brook Currents* townwide. It is our hope this will expand your knowledge of Suffield history and our membership in the Suffield Historical Society.

We are most fortunate to have acquired the services of member and former resident Maggie Philippon as our editor. Many may recall her *Suffield Accounts*, historical articles published by the First National Bank of Suffield in their community calendar.

We plan to publish our newsletter on a quarterly basis. I hope you find it interesting, informative, and inspiring. And I welcome you to join our membership to learn more about your town's past and our efforts to preserve its history.

— Ed Chase, President

New Building Planned by Barry Sisk

The Board of Trustees created the Long Range Planning Committee to explore the way in which the Suffield Historical Society was fulfilling its purpose. Committee members Anne Borg, Ed Chase, James Reeves, Lester Smith and Barry Sisk identified numerous needs both immediate and longer range at its first meeting in October, 2001: a larger and more active membership, space for exhibitions and activities which would attract more people, space for proper storage of our collections, space for archives, annual fund raising activities, a professional director/ curator, and improved communication with our members and with the entire community of Suffield.

Within a year, they realized that a number of its needs related to the lack of space and the very poor condition of the 1927 stable building behind the King House. As a result, sketches for a new building to replace the stable were developed. Maintenance of the King House was improved, and a membership drive was developed. A report to the Society's membership in June 2003 included drawings of the proposed new building. ...continued on page 2

Who was Dr. Alexander King?

by Anne W. Borg

Alexander King, whose home is now the King House Museum, was born in Suffield in 1737, the second of five children and the great grandson of an original proprietor, James King, who settled in the town in 1678. Alexander graduated from Yale in 1759, having studied "Physick," and apprenticed with his uncle, Lt. William King, who practiced the art of healing in town.

In 1764 Dr. King built his house on family land; he married Experience Hitchcock the following year. He was Suffield's "prudent and beloved physician," according to Rev. Ebenezer Gay, Jr. in his Records of the Parish Deaths, but, like his ancestors, also served as a noted political leader. He was Justice of the Peace, Town Clerk, and Selectman for about thirty years. He was also elected to the General Assembly in the years 1768-1784 and was a delegate to the State Convention for the Ratification of the United States Constitution in 1788. In 1774 King was part of a committee, along with Gideon Granger and Joseph Pease, appointed at a Liberty meeting to write resolutions "to Secure our Liberties which we consider as greatly threatened." This was two years before the Declaration of Independence was drafted and illustrates how up-to-date and forward thinking Suffield's citizens were.

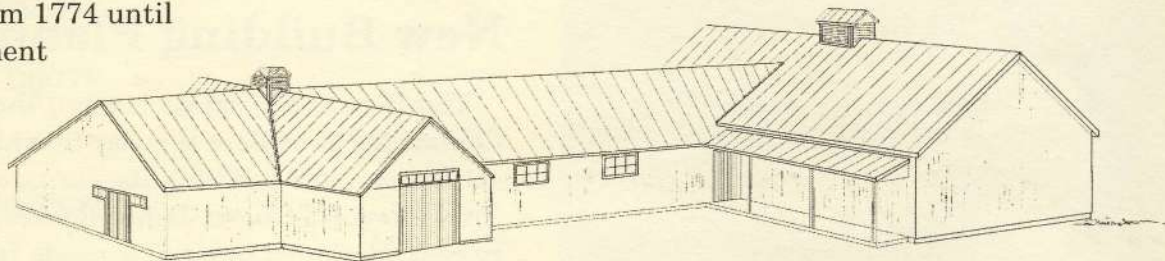
King kept a diary from 1774 until about 1791. This document and the diary of his contemporary, Joseph

Pease, are important witnesses to the history surrounding the Revolution and how it affected Suffield.

In addition to his many civic responsibilities, Alexander maintained a large farm, and mentions of his farm work—sowing, mowing, reaping wheat and rye, slaughtering pork and beef—are found throughout his diary. Some of his cases as a doctor are also recounted.

His personal life contained tragedy. He had five sons, the oldest of whom was killed by lightning at age 12. Another died just before his second birthday. Two other sons committed suicide, after their father's death, by drinking laudanum.

King and his family lived in the house on the corner of Kent Avenue for nearly thirty years. In 1793 he and his wife moved to his inlaws' home in order to care for and provide for her parents. The King house had a succession of owners until it was purchased in 1910 by Samuel Reid Spencer. He and his wife slowly restored the long neglected house, refurnished it, largely with family antiques, and in 1960 gave it to the Suffield Historical Society. For many years the house has been open to the public as the King House Museum and documents domestic life in Suffield.



Our proposed new building. Drawing by Robert Borg

New Building

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Architect Roger Clarke met with the committee numerous times and completed schematic drawings and artistic renderings by the fall of 2004.

During this time the committee realized that professional help was needed to improve the operation of the entire Society. After receiving permission from the Trustees, the committee applied for and successfully secured a strategic planning grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council. This grant financed the services of museum consultant Elizabeth Pratt Fox and fundraising consultant Kate Busch. Ms Fox helped develop a Strategic Plan. Ms Busch conducted a workshop

for the Board of Trustees. The Trustees approved the Strategic Plan in January 2006. This detailed plan of purpose and action includes a new mission statement, a vision statement, goals, objectives, and tasks. Three general goals will guide the Society's actions:

- Develop a more prominent position in the community.
- Improve the Society's advocacy for collecting, preserving and interpreting Suffield's rich history.
- Expand its facilities with a new building.

Curator's Report

With the excellent help of Terry Mandirola, Anne Borg and others, plus generous cooperation from lenders, the King House Museum's Holidayfest exhibit in December went very well. *In Search of Convenience: Household Appliances and Tools* comprised over 130 items, many shown in thematic groups. "Laundry" included the Spencer family's big 1912 electric washing machine, and the "Cleaning Up" group even had three hand-powered vacuum cleaners.

With Christmas decorations, good refreshments, and a blazing fireplace, Holidayfest added good sociability to an interesting museum exhibition.

A major acquisition to the museum in the past year was a great old wooden cigar store Indian, bought at auction and now installed in the tobacco exhibit loft. I've named him Pampunckshat, after the Agawam chief from whom John Pynchon bought most of Suffield.

This winter, Anne Borg and Ruth Sisk have been assisting at the King House, improving our curatorial records and storage. Now we're preparing for another summer season. With the much-appreciated regular help of docents Rosalie Lappen, Nancy Noble, Natalie Mahoney, and Peggy Shaughnessy, last year went well. We look forward to more visitors and a cooler summer.

— Lester Smith, Curator

HELP!

by Ruth Sisk

We realize that success of our Strategic Plan will require involvement of more members, who will commit time and resources, both large and small.

To improve our Society, we'll need to expand some existing committees and add some new ones. In other words: *We need your help!*

We are an open, friendly group, and we welcome all who are interested in working to preserve and interpret Suffield's unique history. If you aren't

already a member, please use the form below to join our membership. Take a moment to choose areas of interest in which you would like to be involved.

If you are already a member and would like to be more involved, we would love to hear from you too! Use the same form, mark areas of interest. Please note that you are a current member.

We'd love feedback about our newsletter and the kinds of articles and information that you'd like to see in future editions.



Ruth Sisk tries the latest appliance at Holidayfest.

Application for Membership

Miss/Ms/Mr./Mrs. _____

Address _____

Telephone (optional) _____

E-mail (optional) _____

Dues: Individuals \$10 Family \$15

 Youth (under 18) \$2 Patron \$25

Donation _____

The Internal Revenue Service has granted tax exempt status to the Suffield Historical Society.

Please complete this form and mail it with your check to
Suffield Historical Society, c/o Gary Mandirola, 1600 North Street, Suffield, CT 06078.

Please check any committee or committees that are of interest to you.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collections | <input type="checkbox"/> Development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Docents | <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibitions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Property | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Program | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity and Marketing | |

Upcoming Events

Genealogy Workshop

Wednesday, March 15 7:30 p.m.

at the Kent Memorial Library

Arthur Sikes, Jr. will conduct a workshop to show members how to research their family history.

Mr. Sikes will cover the resources available on the Internet for genealogical research.

Show and Tell Night

Wednesday, March 22 7:30 p.m.

at the Kent Memorial Library

Members and town residents are invited to participate in an evening of Show and Tell.

Share your knowledge of a historical event, memories of your childhood, travel tales to a site of historic interest, memories of Suffield in years gone by, artifacts, photos, folklore or what-have-you. Presentations will be strictly limited to 10 minutes.

Call Bob Stewart at 668-2928 if you have a topic to share.

Old Newgate Prison

Wednesday, April 19 7:30 p.m.

at the Kent Memorial Library

An early copper mine, a jail for Loyalists, and Connecticut's first state prison, Newgate Prison offers abundant opportunities to get a first-hand look at local technology and culture in the Colonial and post-Colonial periods. Karin Peterson from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism will elucidate the site's history and discuss plans for preservation of this historic site.

Plimoth Plantation

Wednesday, May 17 7:30 p.m.

at the Kent Memorial Library

Through the magic of time travel, the Society will be honored with the presence of Miles Standish at the May meeting. Standish, most noted for his inability to propose marriage to his beloved, was responsible for the defense and safety of the colony.

Suffield Historical Society

P.O. Box 893

Suffield, Connecticut 06078

(860) 668-5256

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