



# *Stony Brook* **CURRENTS**

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*The Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society*

April 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.**

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## **WORLD WAR II LETTERS**

### **PART THREE**

*by Barry Sisk*

*Lt. Richard E. Wolff is the third WW II pilot to write from England to John and Sally Washburn of Suffield, Connecticut. Further research about Wolff does not support his being stationed at Bradley Field. However, research has revealed that Richard's mother, Florence Bowker Wolff of Westfield, Massachusetts, and Alice Bowker Washburn of Suffield were sisters. Therefore, Richard was a first cousin of John Washburn and Lois Washburn Anderson of Suffield, and he probably had pre-WW II contact with John, Sally and his aunt.*

Richard Wolff was about six years younger than his cousins. Prior to his military service, Richard was enrolled in 1938 as a freshman at the University of Texas in Austin, and in 1940 he was living in San Antonio.

He had returned home and was employed as a telegraph operator when he enlisted on January 22, 1942, as an Aviation Cadet. If they exist, records of his military assignments are not known.

Flying training began in Texas and, when completed, he was commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps. Lt. Wolff's letter of June 23, 1943, from England to "John and Sal" suggests that he had been there for some time.

"Gosh - I've been seeing quite a bit of the world and believe me - there's no place like home ... the natives can have the place."

Instead of transport by ship, he had flown to England: "I had a nice time on my flight over here and my work isn't too hard."

Like the other pilots, Wolff said

"... I can't tell you much about our activities prepare yourself for a good session when I get home."

The other letter which the Washburns received was sent from the 181st "Gen Hosp" without any explanation concerning his situation. The letter, dated August 23, 1943, began "John, Sal, Ruthie & ?" The question mark was used because a Washburn baby (Howard) had been born on July 31.

*continued on page 2*

## WORLD WAR TWO LETTERS

### *continued*

Wolff said that

“I’m sure congratulations are in order now - really hope to have some children of my own someday. I guess you know I’m engaged to a very great girl in Louisiana. Wait til I get home and bring her up to see you folks.”

Wolff knew that John Washburn worked at Pratt & Whitney during the war. In this August letter, Wolff said

“Tell all the boys there to keep up the good work because P & W are best in my estimation.. I’ve flown in ships when one of them has kept us in the air with a full load when the other engine was out.”

**To the right: Jim Kent checks to see what may have been stashed in the document box he made for the King House Museum. It’s a careful copy of the original, which was badly burned in the King House’s 1983 fire.**

Shown below are photographs recently donated to the Society. The large complex known as the Travelers Rest House once stood on North Grand Street in West Suffield. Behind the complex was the Restland Farm barn.

## TRAVELERS REST HOUSE AND RESTLAND FARM

*by Anne Borg*

*The Society recently received a gift of photos taken at the Travelers Rest House located on North Grand Street. The following bits of its history come from John O’Malley, great-grandson of the owners, and Joanne Sullivan, widow of Dan Sullivan, another great-grandson.*

The Travelers Rest House was begun in the early 1930’s by John O’Malley and his wife Catherine Barron. An astute business woman, Catherine ran the Rest House, and John ran the associated Restland Farm. The farm comprised 100 acres, 80 on the east side of North Grand and 20 on the west side. The Rest House itself was two houses connected by men’s and women’s dormitories. The name reflects a long-term agreement with the Travelers Insurance Company for care of its recuperating employees.



This quote indicates that Wolff was flying a two engine aircraft and suggests that it was a bomber.

Lt. Wolff was discharged on October 8, 1945. He married and had at least two daughters. He lived in San Antonio, Texas, working as a high school teacher, and died there of a heart attack on October 8, 1972, at age 53. He may not have been married at the time of death; information on his death certificate was supplied via telephone from a daughter in Dallas, Texas.

*Barry Sisk is the widower of Ruth Washburn Sisk (“Ruthie”). He was assisted by James Reeves, Trustee of Suffield Historical Society, and Pamela Washburn Berry, sister of Ruth Washburn Sisk, in the research for this article.*



## DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE

by Bill Sullivan

On Tuesday, May 11, Kevin Johnson will perform a dramatic interpretation of the life of Jordan Freeman. Johnson has worked for many years in the Connecticut State Library's History and Genealogy Unit. His presentation is based on extensive research in the library's collections and those of the Museum of Connecticut History.

Kevin Freeman, an African-American servant of John Ledyard, served as the body servant of Col. William Ledyard in the Revolutionary War. He was a native of Old Lyme and played a role in the Battle of Groton Heights, the largest Revolutionary War battle fought in Connecticut.

Historians estimate 5,000 black soldiers and sailors served in the Revolutionary War in militias, seagoing services, and support activities. Join us to hear Johnson's dramatic interpretation of one man's story of that pivotal battle in Groton and the role of a black man at that time.

Access the following tinyurl-link that will connect you to the Zoom platform at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, May 11 at <https://tinyurl.com/8475ya8s> Email Bill Sullivan with any questions: [bsullivan@suffieldacademy.org](mailto:bsullivan@suffieldacademy.org)



by Anne Borg

Early on, there was the O'Malleys had a business agreement with the Travelers Insurance Company. Many, if not most, of the patients were Travelers employees or pensioners. Travelers Rest was not a nursing home for the elderly, but rather a convalescent home for patients who had been sick or had broken bones and needed care. It was run more like a resort than today's continuing care places. Baseball games were hosted on the grounds for the patients' amusement. There was a shuffleboard court and a pool house where residents could play billiards.

Restland Farm played an important part of the venture. Vegetables were grown for the kitchens. The big barn housed cows that provided fresh dairy products and horses to help with the farm labor. Walter Link and Dryden Phelps helped run the farm. Florence Noble remembers the head nurse, Margaret Edgerton, who came to board at Florence's childhood home when the Travelers Rest closed. She also remembers playing on the grounds as a child with friend Shirley Sullivan. The last of the original family to own the place were Dan Sullivan and his wife Marion O'Malley, who sold to Ring Nursing Home around 1960. Only one of the original houses and a garage remain today as part of a private residence.

## SHS NOTES

The three trees closest to the King House on the south lawn were taken down in February. Two were not in good health, but all were creating deep shadows on the museum house roof. Now the wooden shingles will get more sunlight, which will help inhibit the growth of moss and algae. It is our hope that this will extend the roof's life expectancy.

We will be opening as usual in May with a new exhibit on previous town celebrations. This is in honor of Suffield's 350th anniversary and was postponed – as were many other events – from last summer. We plan to enter our cigar wagon in the October parade and are looking for someone who might like to head up this project. Equine experience, while not necessary, would be helpful. Call Art Sikes at 860-668-0414 if you are interested.

The Ice Cream Social is back! Our first in-person event is scheduled in August instead of July, hoping that the great majority of attendees will have been vaccinated by then and everyone will be willing and able to get back to normal activities.

Volunteers are still needed to verify street addresses for photos of old houses in Delphina Clark's albums and also to do data entry. Contact Art Sikes at 860-668-0414, if you would like to help.

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Like Us on Facebook:  
www.facebook.com/SuffieldConnecticutHistory/

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.  
However, as of this publication date, the August  
program is planned to be an in-person event.

### **Dramatic Interpretation of Historic Figure Jordan Freeman** Tuesday, May 11

**Zoom 7:00 p.m.**

*Kevin Johnson, Historian and Actor*  
Join us via Zoom for a dramatic presentation of the life  
of African-American slave Jordan Freeman during  
the time of the American Revolution.

See story on page 3 for further details.  
Connect via <https://tinyurl.com/8475ya8s>

## Suffield's Past in Photographs

Wednesday, June 16

**Zoom 7:00 p.m.**

*Our annual glimpse into Suffield history chronicled  
by our extensive photograph collections is a perennial  
favorite. This year's selection will be chosen from the  
albums of Delphina Clark.*

*Watch your email for linking details  
for this Zoom 350th Anniversary Year event!*

## Ice Cream Social

Tuesday, August 17

**King Museum House Grounds 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.**

*Time to gather again and enjoy each other's company  
after more than a year of virtual gatherings!*

*Bring your dinner and your lawn chair ...  
and bring your appetite for ice cream  
and entertainment with Paul Kulas  
provided by SHS.*

*Raindate: Thursday, August 19*