



# Stony Brook CURRENTS

Vol. XVIII, No. 3

The Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

September 2023

## SUFFIELD HISTORY TRIVIA

### BACK-TO-SCHOOL EDITION

1. In 1869, how many school buildings did the Town of Suffield maintain for public education?
  - a. Two
  - b. Seven
  - c. Eleven



2. In 1909, the Town Report enumerated 753 possible school children. What was the average attendance?
  - a. 490
  - b. 523
  - c. 621



3. Before 1939, Suffield had no high school. In 1897, the Town signed an agreement with Connecticut Literary Institute (known as CLI, now Suffield Academy) to send qualified students at an annual tuition payment of
  - a. \$21 each
  - b. \$39 each
  - c. \$43 each



4. In what year did CLI change its name to Suffield School?
  - a. 1916
  - b. 1939
  - b. 1946



Answers on page 3

## LAST CHANCES

by Christine Ritok

*My Sunday afternoon visit with Lester Smith is a highlight of my week. He always shares an interesting story or an answer to one of my many questions. Two weeks ago, our conversation led to the extraordinary story of West Suffield natives Ralph Granger (1850-1938) and Jessie Freemont Hastings (1856-1922).*

Jessie was a teacher at the Hastings Hill School. According to former Town Historian Hawley Rising,\* one day a letter arrived for her from Colorado. After reading it, she crumpled it up, threw it into the wastebasket, and left.

Her mother and sister took the letter out and read it: it was a proposal of marriage from Ralph Granger, who grew up across the street from Jessie.

Granger was born in West Suffield, and like many men of his generation, traveled west in search of opportunity. He settled in Del Norte, Colorado, where he opened a grocery store. In 1890, one of his customers, Theodore Renniger, a German immigrant, asked Granger to fund a prospecting expedition. By this time, the area's rich silver deposits had largely been depleted, and at first the expedition was unsuccessful. Renniger soon discovered a rich ore deposit, staked a claim, which he named the Last Chance Mine. Renniger lost interest in the endeavor and sold his share to Granger.

Within a year, the mine yielded silver that was worth many millions of dollars, and Jessie Hastings changed her mind and went west to marry Granger.

Ralph and Jessie built a mansion in Paradise Valley, California. In the late 1890s, Granger, an accomplished violinist, constructed the Granger Music Hall in San Diego, which became a well-known venue, and a financial success. Ralph and Jessie had two children: Paul Hastings Granger (1896-1967), and Rachel Hastings Granger (1893-1986) who inherited the family's fortune. Rachel and her husband, Dr. Harry Wegeforth (1882-1941) used this inheritance to found the San Diego Zoo.

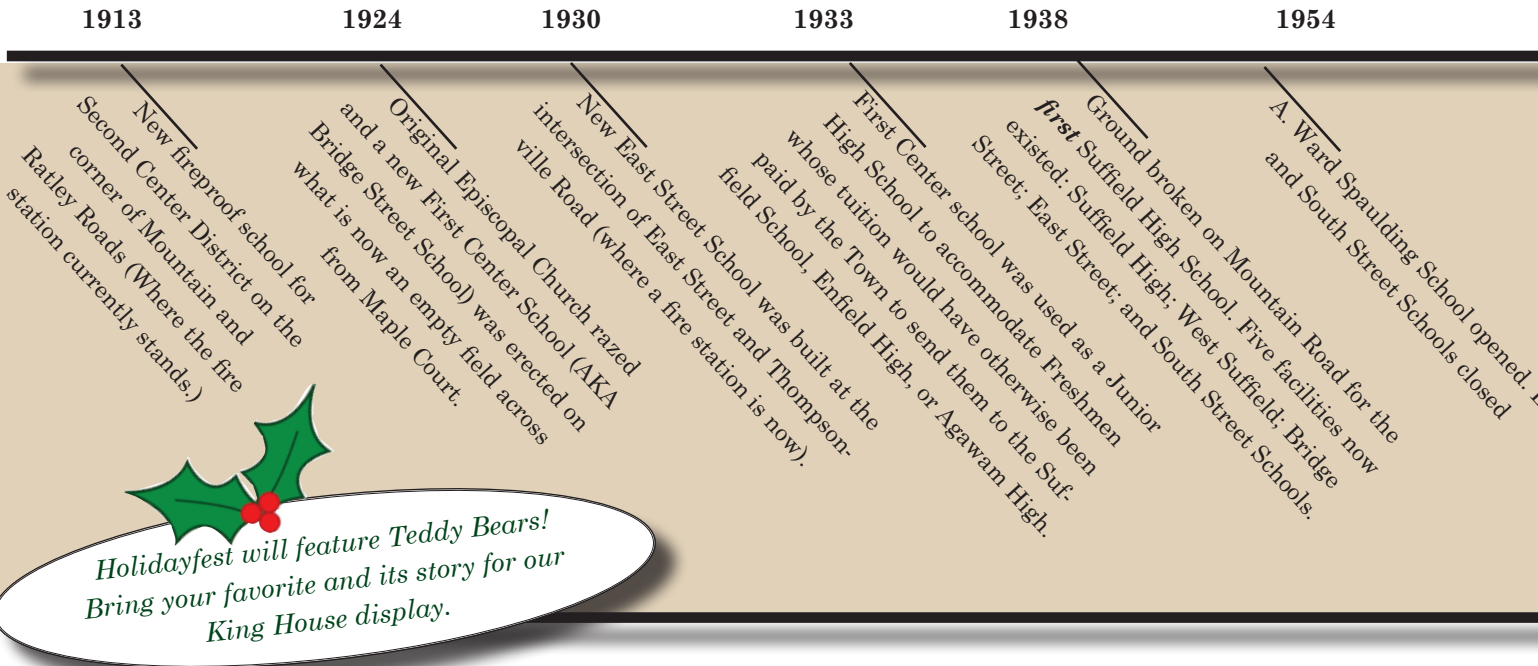
\* Hawley Rising's paternal aunt, Maria Louise Hastings Rising, was the sister of Jessie Freemont Hastings. Part of the SHS photograph collection was donated by Mr. Rising.

Membership renewal envelope is enclosed. Your membership status is on the mailing label.

## SUFFIELD SCHOOL HOUSES

by Sara Zak

At the turn of the 20th century, Suffield had 11 elementary schoolhouses scattered around Suffield's First and Second School Districts. They accommodated children in grades 1 through 8. Most were the traditional one-room building (as shown center page 3), although the First Center (shown left on page 3, razed in 1965) and Second Center (shown right on page 3) schools were larger. The Town of Suffield paid tuition for older students to attend the Connecticut Literary Institute (CLI, now Suffield Academy). Today, the Suffield School system consists of only four buildings. Below is a timeline showing the evolution of the school houses and our students' class divisions throughout the 20th century.



## PRESERVATION

by Art Sikes

Items that define Suffield's present, history, culture, families, farms, industries and government need protection. Preservation enables future generations to understand Suffield and its history better. It facilitates genealogy research and allows exhibitions of objects so that their use and cultural significance are not lost.

Some historic items need to be transformed or stabilized. For example, newsprint contains a lot of acid. Unfortunately, there is not a good way to preserve a newspaper article. Making a digital scan of it preserves the text. Additionally, replacing acidic paper with acid-free paper in the backing and matting of picture frames stabilizes and extends the life of a picture.

Harmful environmental agents such as weather, extremes in temperature, humidity, light, insects and rodents will cause damage unless there is an overall preservation program incorporating maintenance and well-designed storage and display areas. Luckily, with proper foresight and preparation, most damage is preventable or at least contained.

## LESTER SMITH JOINS LUNCHEON AT KING HOUSE



Curator Christine Ritok invited the Summer Historic Deerfield Fellows and Historic Deerfield staff for lunch and a tour at the King House Museum on a hot July Sunday. Trustees Sara Zak and Barry Sisk assisted. Former Curator Lester Smith was able to attend as well.

The Fellows are college juniors and seniors interested in historical preservation who are selected each year to participate in a fully-funded 9-week fellowship.



1962



1970



2002

After much controversy over whether to expand Spaulding School or build a new school on East Street, residents voted for the expansion.

The original SHS became McAlister Middle School and a new high school was built on an adjacent Mountain Road lot.

At Suffield's 300th Anniversary celebration, the Superintendent of Schools announced the five school buildings in Suffield accommodated 2350 students and 140 teachers.

The Suffield Board of Education announced the field Middle and Spaulding Schools.

Our current Suffield High School opened for students. The old high school became the Suffield Middle School for students in grades 6-8. The original High School became McAlister Intermediate School, which was initially for grades 3-5. Spaulding School, which was initially for grades 3-5, is now the school for PreK-2.

## BACK TO SCHOOL TRIVIA ANSWERS

by Sara Zak

1.c. 11 school buildings. In 1869, Suffield was divided into the East and West Societies then sub-divided into 11 school districts. The East Society, with a more significant population, was divided into seven sections. The largest of the buildings was the First Center School on Bridge Street for Grades 1 to 8. The other six schoolhouses, for Grades 1 to 4, were near the intersections of: North St. and Halladay Avenue; East St. and Canal Rd; and South St. and Austin St., as well as on Mapleton Ave. and Boston Neck Rd. The West Society had its Center School, for Grades 1 to 8, on Mountain Rd. directly opposite Ratley Rd. The smaller schoolhouses, for Grades 1 to 4, were on Copper Hill Rd., Sheldon St., and Spruce St.

By 1913, the population of West Suffield had grown to the point that a new Second Center School became necessary. According to the *Hartford Courant*, "a new \$30,000 fireproof school building . . . is one of the best in the state and will fully house 300 pupils." This brick West Suffield School



was closed in 1982 and razed in 2000. Construction of the West Suffield Fire Station on its location began in 2004. The original wooden Second Center School still stands as West Suffield Academy Hall.

2.a. 490. Translating into 65% of the eligible students. Many never registered, others attended sporadically. In Suffield – as in many rural areas of the United States – children comprised a large part of the family workforce.

3.c. \$43. All candidates for high school were required to pass an entrance exam and be approved by the Board of School Visitors before the Town paid this exorbitant amount to CLI!

4.a. 1916. In January of 1916, State's Attorney, Suffield resident, CLI graduate, and a member of the CLI Board of Trustees, Hugh H. Alcorn presented a case to the State Superior Court to change the name of the Connecticut Literary Institute. The Town continued to pay tuition for qualified residents to the newly named Suffield School (now Suffield Academy), Agawam High or Enfield High until the Suffield High School was built and opened in 1939.

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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

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*Left three photos show members and friends enjoying our July 11th Ice Cream Social on the King House Museum Grounds. The bottom photo shows three smiling people: First Selectman Colin Moll, Bev Sikes, 61st District State Representative Tami Zawistowski.*

*Sarah Donahue and team members from the DAR Sibil Dwight Kent Chapter gather on Tuesday afternoons to clean gravestones in the Old Center Cemetery. Shown above are Sarah (right) with her twin sister Susan Tyler, who also volunteers in the cemetery.*

**SHS Officers:** Arthur Sikes, Jr., *President*; Jackie Hemond, *Vice President*; Joe Artioli, *Treasurer*; Vacant, *Secretary*; Lester Smith, *Historian & Curator Emeritus*; Christine Ritok, *Curator*. **Trustees:** Anne Borg, Christopher Childs, Jason Cromack, Nancy Noble, Norman Noble, James Reeves, Robert Stewart, William Sullivan, Wendy Taylor, Jennifer Yergeau, Sara Zak and Robin Zatony. Ed Chase, *Trustee Emeritus*