



The King House Museum

Stony Brook CURRENTS

Vol. V, No. 2

A Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

April 2010

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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WILLIAM PRITCHARD, PROPRIETOR

Our story begins with his father, William¹ of Lynn, who emigrated from England to eastern Massachusetts. William¹ became one of the founders of Brookfield.* At the beginning of King Philip's War, William¹ was a sergeant in the Brookfield militia and served under Captain Wheeler.

In 1675, the local Nipmuck Indians were numerous and allied with King Philip. Captain Wheeler's and a Captain Hutchinson's companies were sent to parley with the Nipmucks in August. The militias were ambushed at Quabaug Swamp. The battle resulted in the death of both captains, Sergeant Pritchard and many others. The surviving troops fled back to Brookfield, a distance of ten miles. Their survival was credited to three Indians loyal to the English, who used a shortcut to outrun the pursuing Nipmucks.

In a subsequent siege, the Nipmucks filled wagons with hay and candlewood, lashed the wagons together and pushed them against the garrison. Then they ignited the mass. Smoke covered the scene of the approaching warriors. Only a providential downpour and the arrival of forces from Marlboro saved the settlers. However, in this battle William's¹ son, Samuel, was beheaded in front of his brother, William². William² soon left the area and came to Suffield.

In 1679, he received a 50-acre grant, approximately where the Nicholson & Carmon Funeral Home presently stands. But tragedies for this 27-year-old man had not yet ended. In 1683, he married Elizabeth Allen. They had a son who lived only three days. Elizabeth died in 1685. William² married again in 1688. His second wife, Elizabeth Palmer, bore him two children: a son who died at birth and a daughter who died at four months. Elizabeth herself died in 1694. His third wife, Rebecca Taylor**, bore his only surviving child, but William² died shortly after she was born. He was in his mid-forties. This life – so filled with heartache – was also filled with service to our fledgling community. William² served as tythingman, constable, surveyor and selectman for Suffield.

* Many Brookfield founders later became Suffield men: John Pynchon, Judah Trumble, Samuel Kent, Daniel Hovey and the minister, John Younglove.

** With her second husband (Ebenezer Burbank), Rebecca bore eight more children. References: *The Pritchard Genealogy* on <suffieldhistoricalsociety.org>, *Soldiers in King Philip's War* by George M. Bodge, and *The History of Suffield* by H. S. Sheldon

WILLIS SEAVER ADAMS PROJECT

by Bill Sullivan

Suffield Academy's American Studies Senior Seminar students pored over the Kent Memorial Library's collection of Adams' letters with Historical Society members Anne Borg, Bob White and Lester Smith twice a week during the better part of February and early March. Anne, Bob and Lester lent their time, talents and enthusiasm for this history project as the students hoped to understand Adams's life better from the letters that Adams wrote to his kin, Mrs. Artie Lyman of Mapleton Avenue.

Using the relatively unknown life of native artist Willis Seaver Adams has been a perfect 21st-century exercise in researching and writing history. Even though Adams is etched on the Bicentennial sign in front of the library as one of ten famous residents of Suffield, Adams as a subject evades the typical Google search, and the students have only been able to find a few informative documents, all of them in the library.

With these research challenges naturally creating a rigorous academic context, there was an urgency to extract as much information as possible from these letters. As a result, our class time in the Historical Room transformed into an excellent laboratory for experiencing the true work of writing history as well as witnessing first hand the rapture, reverie and sense of otherness in examining hundred-year-old materials.

The experience encouraged the students to allow the documents to illuminate the Willis Seaver Adams story.

Anne, Bob and Lester were naturals at prompting students to find context clues when frustrated with the difficulties of transcribing, and this positive dynamic created a productive work flow. Everyone was transformed by the rewards of deciphering Adams' eccentric cursive to learn more details about his personal life and general living conditions of early 20th century life:



visiting calls, water wells, trolley traffic and accidents. One letter painted an evening's memory of attending an extravagant party that featured fantastical electric lights and lamps.

Students wrote about their amazement of witnessing archival materials in complex ways. Their journals exhibited an appreciation of the experience and how it will positively inform our writings on Adams as well as how to best contextualize his life and work for our upcoming exhibit in the William Pinney Gallery in April, our presentation to the Society on

April 7th, and a later installation and program at the King House this summer. Come see for yourself.

Most importantly, the journal work confirmed the academic pleasure of discovering a story from the past; this zeal that charged the room will hopefully pay future dividends, as most students responded thoroughly to the last prompt in their

Shown above:

Top photo is a picture of Adams's father and stepmother in front of his home on East Street.

Below is a photo of Adams himself with his dog, Collie.

Adjacent page:

Adams's work entitled "Epizootic" shown in the center. Below is his painting entitled "Looking Across the River from My Garden in Suffield".

weekly journals which challenged them to reflect on why they care about what they learned. Students reported in a variety of ways that they would look at their hometowns differently, and some have already reported visiting local historical places since being home on vacation.

In this day and age when adolescents are bombarded by an electronic wave of culture pressures to be wired and online, the days in the historical room proved that they can be awakened to a sense of place by an ageless and important task, the work of history and the preservation of historical documents for future generations.

POSSIBLE SUMMER INTERN

The Society will be advertising for a summer intern to begin entering our collections into a computer format. This will eventually involve photographing every item and beginning an inventory, depending on time available and progress made. We hope to find a graduate student who plans to make a career of museum work. If you know of a qualifying candidate, please contact Art Sikes at 668-0414. This is an exciting project, and we may, at some point, be looking for members who might like to continue what we begin this summer.

DOES ANYONE KNOW PASTPERFECT?

In conjunction with our search for an intern, we hope to find a member who knows PastPerfect well enough to mentor and/or supervise him or her. If you are that person, contact Art.

POLISH HERITAGE NEWS

Members of the Polish Heritage Committee have been busy learning PastPerfect and entering photos and information they have collected about

the Polish in Suffield. Using the remainder of last year's grant from the Zak Foundation with a generous matching gift to the Society from Della Zera Winans and husband Roger, the Society purchased the necessary computer equipment and software to enable the project to move forward. The equipment will eventually be installed at the new Senior Center for ease of use by the members involved. Lorraine Rapacki has created two notebooks of Polish family genealogies, which are in the reference area at the



Kent Memorial Library. Local residents are encouraged to make use of this information and to give any family data they may have to Lorraine to be added to what she has already compiled. Members of the Polish Heritage Committee have been working diligently to preserve family histories and memories, to locate areas of settlement and early Polish farms and homes, and to make copies of family photos, memorabilia, etc. They are to be commended for their very productive efforts. The story of Polish immigrants to Suffield is a vital part of the town's history.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WILLIS SEAVER ADAMS, ARTIST

Wednesday, April 7 7:30 p.m.

Kent Memorial Library

*Bill Sullivan and Suffield Academy students
present the life and work of
Suffield-born artist Willis Seaver Adams.
See article inside.*

KING HOUSE SPRING CLEANUP

Saturday, April 17 9 a.m. - Noon

Raindate: Saturday, April 24

FIELD TRIP

Saturday, May 15 *See enclosed flyer.*

WINDSOR LOCKS CANAL

Wednesday, May 19 7:30 PM

Kent Memorial Library

*Steve Sorrow, who adopted the canal as
his retirement project, will show a video
about the Windsor Locks Canal.*

*He will discuss both the progress made
and the plans for the future.*

PHOTOGRAPHS OF OLD SUFFIELD

Wednesday, June 16 7:30 PM

Kent Memorial Library

*Anne Borg and Lester Smith collaborate again
to develop a program based on
the library's collection of over 2,000 photos originally
assembled by SHS Historian Hawley Rising.*

ICE CREAM SOCIAL

Tuesday, July 20 5:30 PM

King House Museum lawn

NOTE: THIS IS A DATE CHANGE

*Bring friends and family to an old-fashioned ice cream
social. Pack a picnic, bring lawn chairs, and enjoy an
evening of neighborly visiting. The Society will provide
the ice cream and entertainment.*

Raindate: Thursday, July 22.

CORRECTION: Stony Brook Currents
January 2010, Vol. V, No. 1. Footnote #2 on page 1
indicated that Robert Rose helped to found
Wethersfield, Connecticut, in 1734. It should read 1634.

Suffield Historical Society

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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

Newsletter Editor
Maggie Philippon