



The King House Museum

Stony Brook CURRENTS

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A Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society

July 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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THOMAS SPENCER, ORIGINAL PROPRIETOR

by Edward Chase

The Spencer family came to England as part of the nobility with William the Conqueror in 1066. By 1630, the Spencers located in the vicinity of Braintree, Essex County, England, had become Puritans and followers of the Reverend Thomas Hooker. That year, they emigrated to New England via the Winthrop Fleet and settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Sgt. Thomas Spencer, father of the Suffield proprietor, journeyed through the wilderness as part of the Hooker party which founded Hartford.

It was here in Hartford that the Suffield proprietor - also Thomas Spencer - was born in 1641. He married Esther Andrews of Hartford, who bore him three sons and four daughters.

At the age of 33, Thomas Spencer was granted 60 acres by John Pynchon's Committee for Suffield. Fifty of those acres were located on the east side of High Street (now South Main St). Those 50 acres now include the St. Joseph Church property and the colonial Norton House as well as Barry Place.

Thomas was listed as one of the 34 eligible voters at Suffield's first Town Meeting in 1682. He died in 1689 after only fifteen years in Suffield, but his descendants have had major impact on our history over the last three centuries.

His sons, William and Samuel, married the Mascraft sisters, Elizabeth and Mehitable, from Roxbury, Massachusetts. It is from these two families that all the Suffield Spencers draw their lineage. Their descendants include Samuel R. Spencer, a former Lt. Governor of Connecticut. He and his wife Helena Bailey Spencer purchased and restored the Alexander King House constructed on John Pynchon's lot, which was located just south of the original Spencer grant. The couple gifted the house to the Suffield Historical Society in 1960. The couple's own home is now *Spencer on Main*, a bed and breakfast owned by a descendant, Caroline d'Otreppe and her husband. Hezekiah Spencer Sheldon, a 19th-century town historian, was also a descendant.

Spencer Street was named after the family. At the terminus of Spencer, Prospect and Taintor Streets, a monument stands to commemorate the lives and efforts of generations of Spencers. The proprietor's son, Samuel, moved to this part of Suffield in 1726.

References: *The Spencer Genealogy*, Kent Memorial Library, Suffield, Connecticut and *The History of Suffield* by H. S. Sheldon

TRUSTEE EMERITUS HONORS CONFERRED

Long-time Society members **Hazel Phillips** and **Bill Connelly** were designated Trustees Emeritus by unanimous vote of the Board of Trustees.

Both have volunteered in a number of capacities. Hazel served as loyal King House docent and a great historical resource, and Bill as a member of the Investment Committee and an active volunteer. They also served as King House Trustees for many years. Their service has been much appreciated.

ICE CREAM SOCIAL

Bring your friends and family to an old-fashioned Ice Cream Social on the King House lawn on Tuesday, July 20 at 5:30 PM.

Pack your own picnic and bring your lawn chairs to enjoy an evening of neighborly visiting. The Society will provide ice cream and entertainment. Paul Kulas will join the social with his saxophone music.

A raindate of Thursday, July 22 has been scheduled in case of inclement weather.

ACCORDION CONCERT

The Polish Heritage Committee of the Suffield Historical Society is sponsoring an accordion concert on Sunday, October 3 at 2:00 P.M. at the Middle School on Mountain Road.

About 200 Polish families immigrated to Suffield in the early 1900's. They brought with them their love of music and dancing. This program will consist of music of that era. Selections will include favorites from the various regions of Poland and will be played on the same types of instruments used at that time in Poland.

The lead musician will be Gray Sredzienski, a native of Enfield. He has performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and represented New Hampshire at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1999.



The photos here were taken during the May 15th Suffield Historical Society trip through the Hudson River Valley in New York. Thirty-five people joined our trip, and the surrounding photos show many of them at various locations during the day.

Top above: Olana, a Persian-style mansion on the Hudson designed by Hartford-born artist Frederic Church.

Below: The Livingston Mansion, "Clermont," which overlooks the Hudson River.
To the right: The Hudson River Maritime Museum at Rondout Creek, also on the Hudson River.

CURATOR'S REPORT

Fourth Grade Visits – One of the highlights of our museum year comes in the spring, when all the fourth graders in McAlister Intermediate School visit the King House as part of a three-stop tour. (The other stops are the Hatheway House and the Old Center Cemetery.)

The children come one schoolroom at a time – three each day for three days. Along with their teachers and several parent chaperones, they tour the rooms as a group, looking and listening and learning. I encourage questions and often get some surprisingly perceptive queries. We always include the attic; the kids love that. But this year we shifted the time spent in certain rooms in order to include a short visit to our new barn.

The fourth grade (mostly ten years old) seems to me a very good year for such a visit. The kids have plenty of curiosity, and they're mature enough to understand a lot of the unfamiliar things they're being shown, but most have not yet acquired the "sophistication" to pretend a lack in interest.

The children seem to enjoy the visit as much as the docents and I do, and their subsequent letters often speak of their desire to return. Here are a few excerpts:

Thank you for showing us the King House. I loved the buttons, doll house, and samplers. I wish I could go every day. – OLIVIA GRIMARD

My favorite part was when you put me in the old hat bathtub to show the class how it worked. – ETHAN

You taught me that Suffield was the first town in the country to have a cigar business. – AMANDA

It was cool when you showed us how they used to tighten the bed ropes. – ASHLEY MEEHAN

Thank you for showing us the attic it was really cool because I liked both the washing machine and the tubs. – MEGAN CARTER

I thought you always had the perfect answer to each question we asked. . . . You really understood our questions. – KATELYN ANDRADE [Thanks, Katelyn!]

Julia scared me when I walked into the dining room because I did not expect her to be there. [Julia is a manikin in Julia Pease's gown, ca. 1900.] The barn was cool and exciting. . . . I wish I can come again but I probably won't because I live in Hartford. – BRENNA DUVERGER

NEW EXHIBIT

This spring we have been assembling a summer exhibit about Suffield's once-famous artist, Willis Seaver Adams, listed as No. 9 on the big blue historical sign on Main Street. Many of the paintings exhibited are from the collection of a generous Society member; most of the others are from the Kent Memorial Library. Motivation for the exhibit, plus considerable supporting material, was provided from what a Suffield Academy American Studies class achieved in a project this year.

The exhibit should be complete by the end of June; please come and enjoy!



MUSEUM WISH LIST

Does anyone have one of the original splint baskets used in the early days of shade tobacco picking?

We have both canvas and plastic baskets, but our exhibit in the Alexander King House barn should include one of the old, woven baskets.

Also, we still welcome small items to enhance the furnishings of our period rooms, such as a fireplace trammel, a candle-dipping frame, or a sugar cone cutter.

Please leave a message at the King House, 860-668-5256, if you have an item to donate. Thank you.

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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

PLEASE REMEMBER OUR ANNUAL FUND APPEAL

Members received letters recently, outlining some current projects and their expected costs, primarily the demolition of most of the old stables. Your gifts make it possible to accomplish projects at the King House without touching our principal, the income from which we use to pay all our ordinary operating costs.

Our yearly fund raising goal is modest, and each of your gifts is important and appreciated.

Many of you have already responded, and we thank you. If you have yet to send a donation, we look forward to your generous response.