



# *Stony Brook* **CURRENTS**

Vol. IX, No. 3

*A Newsletter of the Suffield Historical Society*

July 2014

**Alexander King House turns 250**

**Happy Birthday!**

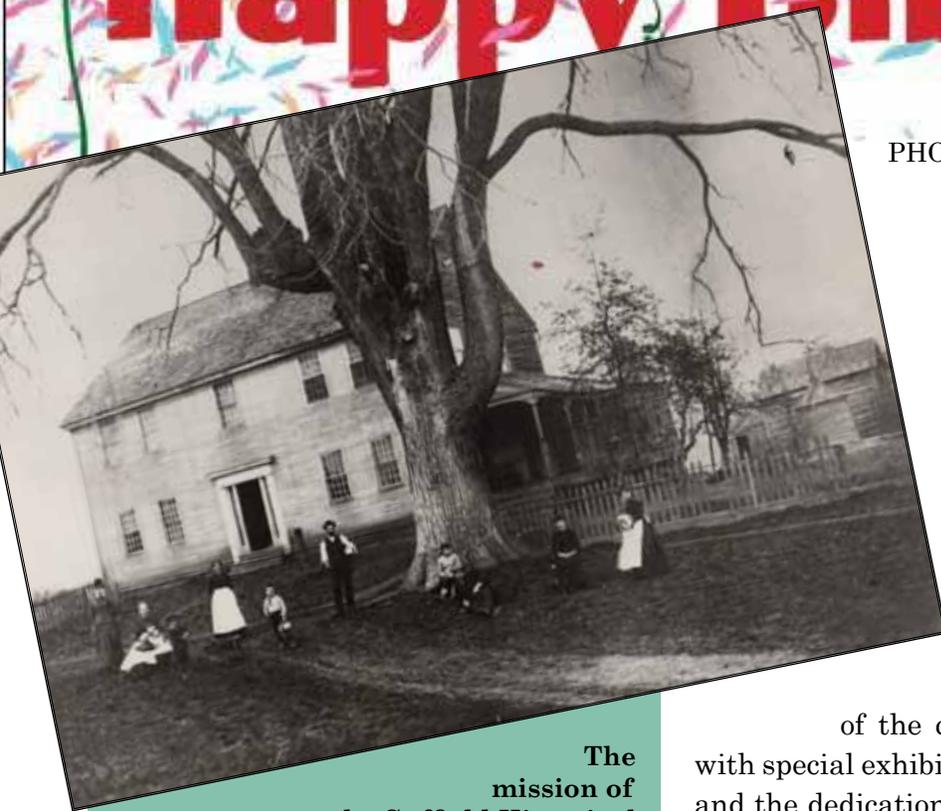


PHOTO TO LEFT:

*Probably soon after the Civil War, the West family and their neighbors the Wallaces are pictured in the King House front yard. The doorway had been “modernized,” but the windows are still the original 12-over-12. Many years later, the individual pictured as a baby in her Grandmother West’s lap at the left wrote Mr. Spencer and identified everyone in the old photo.*

**1764 – 2014**

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.

This summer the Suffield Historical Society celebrates the 250th Anniversary of the construction of the Alexander King House with special exhibits and activities to highlight both its history and the dedication of many individuals who made this legacy a reality for our community. Today the building stands at the corner of Kent Avenue and South Main Street to welcome the public as a museum house and serve as the headquarters of the Suffield Historical Society. Open your newsletter to the story of the Alexander King House’s beginning as well as the tales of its restorations and inhabitants compiled by Anne Borg.

## <sup>2</sup> THE BEGINNING

James King, the great-grandfather of Alexander, came to Suffield in 1678 and received a land grant on the east side of High Street (now Main Street) north of the village green.

In 1698 he purchased an additional 60 acres at what is now the corner of South Main Street and Kent Avenue. James King, Jr. built a house for himself on that newly acquired acreage. Later this dwelling became the home of his son Joseph King (Alexander's father).

In 1764 Alexander built his own home just south of his father's house. The following year, Joseph King deeded Alexander "part of the home lot where said Alexander's house now stands" for 40 pounds. In 1771 Joseph deeded to Alexander the "farm where I live ... reserving the use of the house and one half of the barn for me and my wife, Eunice, for our lifetime use." Joseph died in 1772.

Joseph's house burned July 30, 1776. Alexander wrote in his diary, "The wind being south saved my dwelling house from being consumed." In 1793 Alexander sold the house to his cousin Horace King. Alexander bought his father-in-law's home. He and his wife moved there and agreed to provide for his in-laws.

## THE SPENCER LEGACY

After several sales of the King House over the intervening years, Samuel R. Spencer, who lived in the Kent mansion across the street, bought the property in 1910.

The house had been long neglected, and after 1915, Mr. Spencer gradually began restoration. In 1915 the building had no modern utilities. Mr. Spencer installed electricity and a central furnace. He also installed twelve-over-twelve windows, replacing the two-over-two windows that had "modernized" the house many years before. Fortunately the original interior had endured little alteration.

With guidance from Professor J. Frederick Kelly of Yale, the principal expert on Connecticut architecture at that time, Mr. Spencer returned the front doorway to its original double-door style. (The mid-nineteenth century single door and side-lights are now exhibited in the woodshed.) His wife, Helena Bailey Spencer, took over the interior refinishing and decorating. She hunted out many pieces of fine old Suffield furniture, some of which belonged to Mr. Spencer's parents.

### ALEXANDER KING HOUSE OWNERSHIP

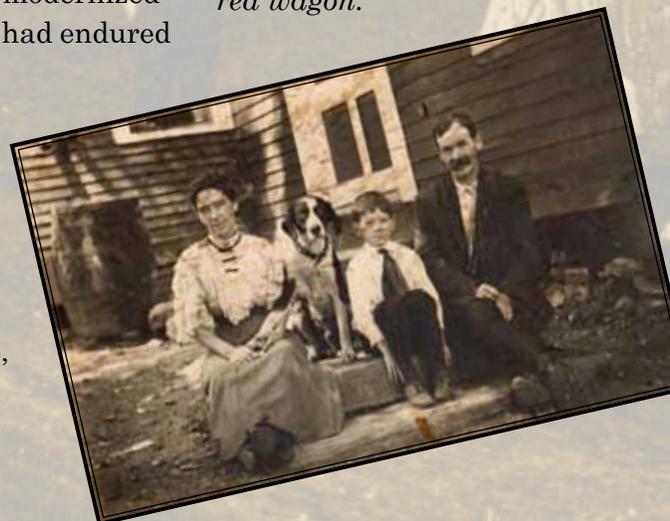
1764 – 1793	Alexander King
1793 – 1855	Horace King, Alexander's cousin
1855 – 1869	Horace King's widow and daughter
1869 – 1871	Henry Endress
1871 – 1876	William West
1876 – 1910	Emma Louise Shaw
1910	Joseph Patterson
1910 – 1960	Samuel R. Spencer
1960 – 2014	Suffield Historical Society

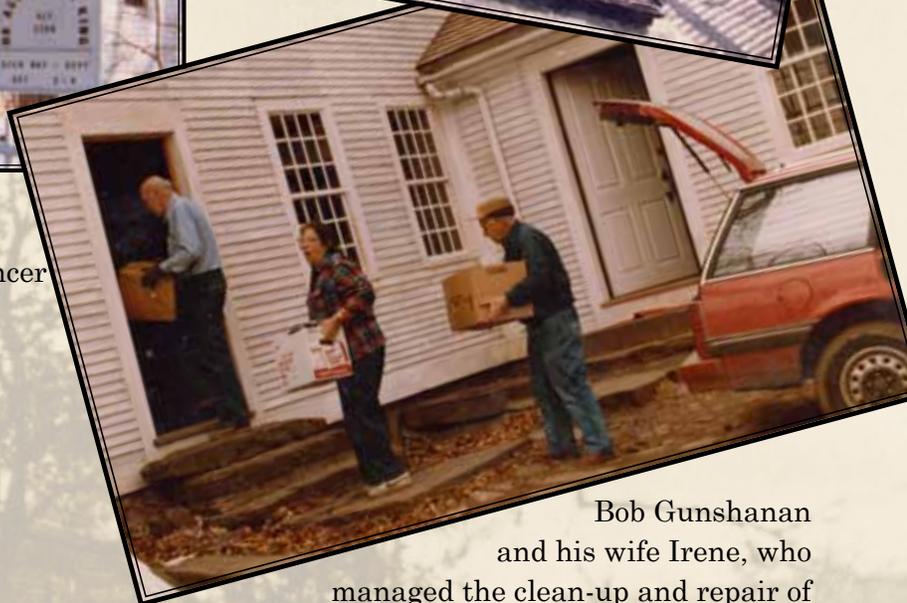
*Below: We're not sure who this family is, sitting by the back door early in the 1900s. Note the rain barrel and the dark exterior. Current paint samples indicate that the color then was deep red.*

*Right: On December 31, 1983, the morning after a major fire, the view was most discouraging.*

*Center right: Seen from the East Room upstairs is the furniture that was carried out onto the snow when it was thought there was a chance the house would be consumed by fire. Within a few days, everything was moved for safe-keeping and convenient review in nearby barns at the Hatheway House and Doug and Priscilla Viets's house.*

*Far right: Curator Bob Gunshanan, his wife Irene, and Society President Roger Loomis are shown in the spring of 1985, moving small furnishings back into the house from Lester Smith's red wagon.*





Bob Gunshanan and his wife Irene, who managed the clean-up and repair of most of the contents of the house.

The Spencers gave the furnished house to the Society on September 26, 1960. Mr. Spencer wrote that it was dedicated

*“to the memory of the Spencer family who helped settle Suffield in 1674 and who have lived in Suffield ever since, each generation playing a part in the town’s development. It especially commemorates my father and mother, Alfred and Caroline Frances Spencer who lived in the Spencer homestead (built in 1768 at the corner of Hale and Spencer Streets).”*

Since Mr. Spencer’s generous gift, the house has been open to the public. The Society continues to collect appropriate furnishings, as well as items that help to illustrate Suffield history.

## THE FIRE

On December 30, 1983, a major fire, thought to have been caused by a faulty furnace, seriously damaged a portion of the house.

With a reconstruction committee chaired by Donald Rollet, a fund-raising effort led by Astrid Hanzalek and funds from insurance, the house was repaired under the leadership of Society President Roger Loomis. The museum reopened in May 1985.

Though a number of important items were destroyed in the fire, special credit goes to Curator

## THE STORM

On July 9, 2011, a large tree limb fell on the chimney and roof during a microburst storm. The roof was soon repaired. The chimney was rebuilt above the ridge line.

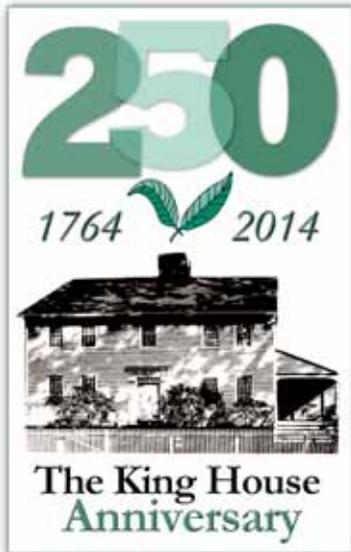
The house today remains a typical and well-executed example of an 18th-century Connecticut center chimney house. With the relatively new addition of an antique barn and the growing assemblage of items related to Suffield history, the King House Museum steps confidently into its next quarter century.

*Information for this article was taken, sometimes word for word, from two booklets published by the Society: “Alexander King House 1764” (c 1960) and “The King House Museum 1764” (1986).*

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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

#### Suffield Historical Society

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Arthur Sikes, Jr., *Vice President*  
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Nancy Noble, *Secretary*  
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#### Newsletter

Maggie Philippon, *Editor*  
Anne Borg, *Compiler*

Inside this special edition of the *Stony Brook Currents*  
is a history and photo array of the  
**250-year-old Alexander King House.**

Summer Exhibits at the King House  
**The Suffield Pharmacy 1871 - 1993**  
&

**A Mini Exhibit of the 1983 Fire and Restoration**  
on display through September

Watch for our Fall lineup of programs, workshops & events.  
Mailed to all members  
and available at

**Suffield on the Green**      September 6 & 7

**Tobacco Valley Artists Association**  
**Fine Arts Festival**

King House Grounds      Saturday, September 6

#### Car Show

King House Grounds      Sunday, September 7

#### Appraisal Day

King House      Saturday, September 20

*Join us for these and many other coming events!*