



Kent Historical Society

Newsletter



Volume 3, Number 2

2002

Two Great Exhibits at Seven Hearths

If this newsletter reaches you before the end of August and you haven't been to see the exhibits at Seven Hearths, please plan to do so. We have mounted two of the most ambitious shows in recent years. Upstairs, the sparkling Gallery shows off the cream of the crop of the newly restored Nelson paintings, featuring primarily portraits of Mr. Nelson and his family. They are simply beautiful. Downstairs, the front rooms are jammed packed with wartime memorabilia loaned to us by a remarkable number of Kent's proud veterans. In addition, there is a room dedicated solely to the history of Civil Defense in

Kent during and after WWII. This little known Herculean effort on the part of Kent citizens to be fully prepared for the worst consequences of war is something that every single one of you should learn about. Kent's Civil Defense team was the model for Civil

Defense teams all over the country, and yet it's something that is rarely mentioned today. Please make time to go see the show. It will also be open on Wednesday, September 11, as part of a nationwide effort of American museums to pay tribute to the concept of freedom and on Monday, November 11th, Veteran's Day.

Annual Meeting Time Again

The time for our annual meeting is fast approaching! The fiscal year of the Kent Historical Society begins on October 1st, and your annual dues are due at that point. We will be sending out notices shortly. If all goes as planned, we will have a fascinating guest speaker - Ann Linden, Director of the Amenia Historical Society. Ann will present her hugely popular slide show and lecture about the history of cookies and crackers. While this may sound like a dry subject, we can promise you it is not! Ann developed the show after becoming curious about the history of what she was eating one day. She called the manufacturers of the crackers and chastised them for not putting the history of their crackers on the box. Ann is one of those people who refuses to believe that not everyone is as interested in history as she. The company actually had some printed material, which they sent to her. She culled out what information she wanted, added in some of her great sense of humor, and produced a show that has been presented as far away as Poughkeepsie and Fishkill NY. She had so many requests for the show that she has stopped doing it, but has consented to pull it out again just for us! This is a lecture not to be missed! Please join us for cookies and crackers, both real and historical!

Joel and Orinda, Part II

A few issues back, we shared a picture of Joel and Orinda Pratt, two of Kent's characters from the last century. Along with the photo, we printed an excerpt from Sherm Chase's memoirs in which he recounted Joel's habit of wearing a heavy overcoat year round, tied closed with a piece of rope. If

the heavy coat kept the cold out, he reasoned, it should keep out the heat as well. With the summer weather we've been having lately, I can't imagine spending the day in a heavy woolen coat! There are so many stories about the Pratts, some of them collected in a booklet in our *Kent Tales* series. Here are a few snippets about Orinda, who was just as much of a character as her brother. Joel and Orinda lived in separate parts of the house in Macedonia, reportedly because they did not get along with each other. But they watched out for each other in spite of their differences. Edith Gilbert, who as a little girl was fond of the Pratts, later wrote the following accounts:

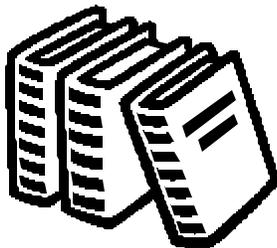
My childhood memories of helping Miss Pratt when she had company are quite thrilling to me. At one time Miss Pratt wanted to take her guest for a ride. Mr. Pratt harnessed the very old horse that had probably not had any oats for a long time. After the ladies started, Mr. Pratt came into the house and watched them from a window. The guest was a very stylish lady from California. Miss Pratt's head was even higher than usual, as if she were driving the grandest outfit in town. They moved at a snail's pace. Mr. Pratt watched them out of sight. Then he broke into a laugh and said "I guess they'll have chance to see the scenery!"

Miss Pratt was afraid to come home from prayer meeting alone in the dark and used to prevail upon her brother to come after her. He did, on horseback, and would precede her all the way home, she walking of course....

When out in company, Miss Orinda dressed well and in good taste, but she scared a new hired man nearly to death with the outlandish things she wore at home. For all her savoir faire, she could forget herself sometimes. The Tallmans had been invited to tea (tea as a function was coming into Kent, but one had to specify "5 o'clock" or guests would come expecting to spend the evening). Miss Pratt took down her best china, blew the dust off, and wiped it on the back of her skirt. The Tallmans were amused.

To make a grammatical error to her was unpardonable. After church service she would tell the minister of his grammatical errors or of any words he mispronounced.

She thought her brother's horse an ox-team a novelty and bought many postcard pictures of him to send to relatives.



Did you Borrow Something?

Someone has borrowed one of our two original copies of Atwood's "**H**istory of Kent." Please return it to the archives. The book is out of print and we do not usually lend out either copy. Thank you!

Welcome New Members

Ginny Goodsell, Bob & Sabine Gibson, John Fullerton, Lester Hoysradt, Robin Dill-Herde.

At some point in the near future, we will begin sending the newsletter only to paid members. So if you would like to continue to receive our publication, but have not yet joined the Society, please join today! Annual dues are only \$10, which buys you a subscription to our newsletter, access to our archives, and invitations to various historical programs. Stay with us! Fill out the membership application in this newsletter.

Our Volunteers Are the Best!

The first half of 2002 has been a busy and difficult time for us at the Kent Historical Society, as we adjust to life without Emily. As the only paid employee of the Society, I was overwhelmed with the amount of work that needed to be done, and gratified by the tremendous response of our volunteers. To begin with, I'd like to thank our Board of Directors (the Officers and Trustees) who rolled up their sleeves to help sort through Emily's papers and belongings before the house could be sold in June. Many other stalwart volunteers were part of that effort as well: Sue Edgerly, Mary Grusauski, Charlotte Lindsey, and Dawn Stone.

We emptied the house by June 1st, but no one had a chance to breathe! We were already behind schedule on our next big project - the summer exhibits at Seven Hearths. When we conceived of the idea last summer of the military exhibit, we thought we would have all spring to put it together. But because of the necessary focus on Emily's estate, we had little over three weeks to co-ordinate two ambitious exhibits. While Robert Austin and Carly Morrison worked upstairs preparing the newly restored Nelson paintings for exhibit, a large group of people pitched in downstairs to create the memorable "Tribute to Our Veterans". Susi Williams, Mary Grusauski, Dawn Stone, Beth Dooley, Gail Tobin, Julia Mankin, Dick & Charlotte Lindsey and I dusted and scrubbed the house, sorted and mounted the heaps of papers, photographs, uniforms and

other mementos donated for the exhibit by generous townspeople. KHS Secretary Lynne Hicks virtually turned over her color copy machine at Thistle Graphics to us. Last but not least are the many people who are generously donating time on Saturdays and Sundays to greet the visitors at Seven Hearths: Marj Anderson, Catherine Bachrach, Joan Crews, Beth Dooley, Sue Edgerly, Mary Grusauski, arol Hall, Elsie Heimbuecher, Lynne Hicks, Fran Johnson, Charlotte & Dick Lindsey, Bob & Cheryl McDowell, Don & Mary Peters, Dave Parker, Bill & Tammy Potter, Barb Scott, Dawn & Scott Stone, and Susi Williams. Without them, we could not even have the museum open. Meanwhile, the Kent Girl Scouts again trekked up Skiff Mountain to clean the little schoolhouse in preparation for the summer season. After an enthusiastic attack with Windex and mops, the one room school positively sparkled! So, thanks to each and every one of you! *You* are what makes the Kent Historical Society so terrific!



Artists of the Litchfield Hills

In the Spring 2001 newsletter, we told you about the tremendous effort by KHS Trustee Robert Austin to have many of the paintings by George Laurence Nelson restored. We mentioned that Robert has written a book about the landscape artists of Litchfield County. The publication of the book, *Artists of the Litchfield Hills*, was to have happened last fall and to have coincided with an exhibit at the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury of artwork by the various Litchfield County artists. Due to complications arising from 9/11, both the publication and the exhibit were postponed. But now they're back on track. The book is due to be out in the spring of 2003, and the Mattatuck exhibit will open in June 2003. In September 2003 the exhibit will travel to the Newington Cropsey Foundation Gallery in New York State. Next summer we hope to fill Seven Hearths with our own exhibit devoted entirely to Mr. Nelson's wonderful paintings. Keep your eye on the papers for more details.

Flanders School ~ Miss Templeton, teacher. Who are the students?

We're Moving Soon!

We will be relocating the archives of the Kent Historical Society from our upstairs room at the Library to our downstairs room at the Swift House. We hope to make the move sometime this fall. This is an exciting step forward for the Kent Historical Society, which began its existence in the basement of the Kent Art Association. Finally, almost 70 years later, we will have our own home. Watch the local papers for announcement of the move!

Calling All Gardeners!

The gardens at Seven Hearths desperately need major help! If you have time on Wednesday mornings to give us a hand with big projects and little tasks, please join us! We're there from 8:30 till about noon, and anyone is welcome to show up for any part of that time. Thank you!

For Sale in Our Gift Shop

Kent Tales - \$10 each

Barzillai Slosson's History of Kent and Other Bits of History

The Pratts of Macedonia

Iron Fever

Rufus Fuller and the South Kent Ore Bed

Sherm Chase Remembers: A Kent life 1900 to 1982

Kent Tales - \$40 each

The Journal of John Adam of Canaan Concerning the Operation of The South Kent Ore Bed 1792-1802

New Life For Old Timber, by George Laurence Nelson (an account of his restoration of Seven Hearths, \$6 each)

A Register of Some of the Families that have lived in Kent 1739-1999, By Francelia Johnson, \$30 each

Greeting cards - \$6 per packet of 8 lithographs by George Laurence Nelson

“What has happened to Emily’s house?”

The question is being asked over and over again. We’re delighted to tell you that the house has been purchased by one of Emily’s cousins. Herb Tully and his wife, Nancy, have bought the house and are in the process of “fixing it up”.. Herb is the grandson of Elinor Hopson Tully, who was the first cousin of Emily’s father William. That makes Herb Emily’s first cousin twice removed, for those of you who are into cousin lingo. For the rest of you, he’s simply a cousin. Herb grew up visiting Emily, and attended Kent School, so he feels very at home here. Though he and Nancy live in California, they plan to spend as much vacation time here as possible. We’re delighted that there will still be a Hopson in Kent.

Kent Center School Programs

Once again, the children at Kent Center School were able to spend some time soaking up Kent history this spring. On April 2nd, the second grade students walked from the school to the Swift House to learn about life in a one room school house. As they approached the house, they heard the sound of former one-room-school teacher Laura B. Newton’s school bell ringing them into class. They learned about what lessons they might have had and what games they might have played if they had gone to a small local school 100 years ago. Many of the students were curious about which District they would have been in, and several of them later asked their parents to drive them past “their” school. The second grade common room at Kent Center School was decorated for the remainder of the school year with photos and drawings of the one room school houses. On April 30th, KHS Director Marge McAvoy went to Kent Center to present a program to the 5th grade about the history of the Housatonic River and its impact on the town. There was a lively question and answer session about bridges, the iron industry, Indians and all the other subjects that inquisitive fifth grade minds need to know about. Indians

again became the topic of discussion when the 3rd grade students walked to the Swift House to view the Indian artifacts owned by the KHS. They were most fascinated by the arrowheads, but also learned to appreciate the skill and craftsmanship evident in the beautifully woven splint baskets, one of which was reportedly made by Princess Mauwee herself. Several of the children admitted to having some Indian blood, and were encouraged to learn more about their proud heritage. The final session was held on May 28th at Seven Hearths with the 4th graders, who learned about artist George Laurence Nelson. Half the group went inside to look at Mr. Nelson’s sketches and paintings, while the other half stayed outside sketching the flowers in his garden. Then the two groups switched and the lesson was repeated.

This is a terrific program, which we all thoroughly enjoy. Many, many thanks to KCS art Teacher, Al Coffill, who has organized the series of sessions as part of a grant called “A Village Through the Eyes of its Artists”. We look forward to next year’s crop of students.



Calling All Birdsey Northrop Fans!

Dr. Birdsey Northrop, who is widely recognized as the founder of Arbor Day, was born in Kent in 1817. A man of remarkable energy, civic spirit, and patriotic zeal, Northrop decided that there was no more fitting way for children to honor the approaching Centennial of the Declaration of Independence than through planting commemorative trees. He spent the next two decades traveling the country lecturing on the benefits of trees to the peace and prosperity of town life. In honor of Dr. Northrop, the Kent Conservation Commission and the Kent Garden Club are sponsoring a tree seminar on Saturday, September 14, at the Kent Community House. Representatives of the CT DEP will be on hand to lead workshops on tree selection, tree care, pruning and a host of other tree related topics. Refreshments and music will follow. Sign up sheets may be found at the Library and the Kent Greenhouse.

Update on the Sloane-Stanley Museum and Kent Furnace

The Sloane-Stanley Museum and the nearby Kent Furnace have both been in the news this summer. The Kent Historical Society has played a role in both stories.

An unexpected July 1 cut of 42 percent in the Connecticut Historical Commission budget forced the CHC to draw up plans for closing all four of its museums, including Sloane Stanley, and for laying off staff, including those in Kent.

At this writing (Aug. 8), however, a firestorm of protest from historical societies, legislators, editorial writers and others seems to have saved the museums. Legislative leaders and Gov. Rowland's office now say they never intended the museums to close and that somehow funds will be found, even in the face of the state's deficits, to keep them open.

Not yet clear is whether the Historical Commission itself or perhaps its museum division may be merged with some other state department in the name of administrative cost savings. Sen. Andrew Roraback of Goshen and Rep. Roberta Willis of Salisbury are among those publicly opposed to this. Both these lawmakers say they received a ton of mail, email and phone calls from history-minded residents of the Northwest Corner protesting plans to close the museums.

Among those registering opposition to the CHC funding slash and proposed Sloane-Stanley shutdown was President Susi Williams of the Kent Historical Society. She pointed out that the move, coming just before the fall tourist season, would be harmful to the community. On the furnace front, news is hopeful. Karin Peterson of the CHC confirms that the Kronenberger restoration firm from Middletown is under contract to resume stabilization of the 176-year-old stone furnace stack this fall. And there's hope funds may be found to extend the relatively modest work now proposed.

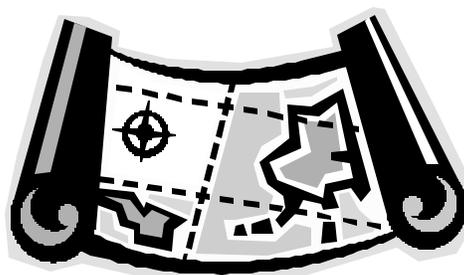
Susi Williams and Marge McAvoy of KHS met last month with Peterson and Kent First Selectman Lorry Schiesel to assist the Board of Selectmen's plan to seek a \$100,000 state grant for work at the furnace site. If the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant is secured, it would be used for several purposes: to provide a secure grating that would let visitors see the furnace's unique interior brickwork without damaging it; to cover the furnace top more effectively against the element and to create signage that would explain the furnace's workings, history and role in the region's 19th century iron industry.

The first selectman and Peterson both said the Society's input and support could help both in securing the grant and in helping implement its use.

-- David Parker

Land Records need to be Researched

Do you know your way around the Land Records in the Town Hall? If so, would you be interested in helping us with various research projects? We need to straighten out the history of many of Kent's old houses. The Land Records may seem intimidating at first, but it's like riding a bicycle – once you learn how, you don't really forget. We're willing to train rookies. All you need is dedication and perseverance. Come give us a hand!



Bulls Bridge Inn 1909

A Fun Fall Weekend

The Tri-Corners History Council and Housatonic Heritage are planning a weekend of walks on Saturday and Sunday, October 5th & 6th, as part of the focus on the pending National Heritage Area here. The National Park Service is showing increasing interest in the creation of the Heritage Area, and the weekend's activities will highlight some of the rich heritage the corridor has to offer. Beginning on the southern end in Kent and heading up as far north as Dalton, Mass, a variety of educational walks will take place.

On Saturday, October 5th, Kent Historical Society Director Marge McAvoy will lead a walk through the site of a long gone Kent village called Alder City. Located on the west bank of the Housatonic River, the Alder City area is now known as a favorite stopping point for hundreds of migrating fall warblers, so birdwatchers are encouraged to attend.

On Sunday, October 6th, Sharon Historical Society President Ed Kirby will conduct a tour of the Bulls Bridge area of South Kent and the remnants of the old Bulls Bridge Iron Furnace. The crumbled stack and stone work on the river bank offer clues easily read by this noted expert on the iron industry.

Also in Kent on both Saturday and Sunday, mining expert John Pawloski of the Connecticut Antique Machinery Association will offer a lecture titled "Touring Our Industrial Past". He, like Mr. Kirby, is an expert whose talk should not be missed.

Heading north, Russ Cohen will lead a hunt at Housatonic Meadows State Park for edible wild plants and mushrooms. In Salisbury, George Massey will take interested hikers into Salisbury Dark Hollow, while farther up the Corridor, Monument Mountain will be scaled by Bernard Drew, and Jim Parrish will follow the trail of Shay's Rebellion.

One of the most intriguing walks promises to be a tour of downtown Pittsfield by Norma Lynn Powers. Pittsfield's reputation has been badly tarnished by the controversial pollution problems of General Electric. But the city has a rich and fascinating history – this walk should not be missed.

The hardest part of the weekend will be choosing the event to attend. This is only a partial list of the walks and tours to be held. Save the dates and watch the papers for more information as the time approaches. You may also call the Kent Historical Society at 927-4587 or the Sharon Historical Society at 364-5688.

Kent Historical Society

PO Box 651, Kent, CT 06757

Est. 1954

Executive Director ~ Marge McAvoy

Officers

Susi Williams, President

Tamara Potter, Treasurer Lynne Hicks, Secretary

Trustees

Robert Austin, Beth Dooley, Fran Johnson, Bill Leo,
Dick Lindsey, David Parker, Gail Tobin

Hours Tuesday mornings 10 to Noon

Upstairs in the Kent Memorial Library

This newsletter is compiled by Marge McAvoy,
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Kent Quiz

In iron lingo, "pigs" and "sows" were named for the sand-lined troughs into which melted iron was run out from the bottom of the furnace stack. The long central strip from the furnace to the casting house was called the "sow". Smaller 3 ft. troughs led off in perpendicular rows from the side of the sow, and for obvious reasons were then called "pigs". When the iron was cooled, the pigs and sows were broken apart and pulled out by teams of oxen to the railroad tracks for shipping.

Next Question: Where was the part of Kent known in 1780 as "East Greenwich"?

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