



Kent Historical Society

Newsletter



Volume 3, Number 3

2002

Bull's Bridge Furnace

Heritage Weekend

On Saturday and Sunday, October 5th & 6th, as part of a local 18 town effort to have North-western CT and southwestern Massachusetts designated a National Heritage Area, 4 walk-ing lectures were held in Kent. On Saturday, noted mining expert John Pawloski conducted a tour of the CT Antique Machinery Associa-

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Mysteries from Kent's Past

On the west bank of the Housatonic River in Kent, a small 12 acre community arose in the mid to late 1800s. Called Alder City, probably because of the thickets of swamp alder still growing there, it was subject to rampant speculation during its brief existence. In preparing for our Heri-

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Heritage Weekend (Continued from page 1)

tion next to the Sloane Stanley Museum. John led visitors through the CT Museum of Mining and Mineral Science, the Industrial Hall of Steam Engines, Diebold Agricultural Hall and the Cream Hill School. It was a rare opportunity for visitors to get “up close and personal” with many of the treasures exhibited by CAMA, including several dioramas built by John himself, which depict various aspects of the mining and iron industries.

I was unable to attend this fascinating tour because I was across the river leading another group of history buffs on a walk through a long-vanished hamlet of Kent called Alder City. All that remains of Alder City now are 5 or 6 partially buried cellar holes, but in the late 1800s it was a busy little community. Fran Johnson, who did most of the research for the tour, accompanied the visitors as we tromped through the woods and poked through the leaves looking for clues. We found a surprising amount – a door knob, the top to a teapot, the bottom of a heavy cut crystal glass, a door lock, adz heads, barrel hoops, a small sheet of lead and some other interesting bits of iron. From these artifacts, from further research and hopefully from you, we will continue to piece together the picture of Alder City (see related story, page one).

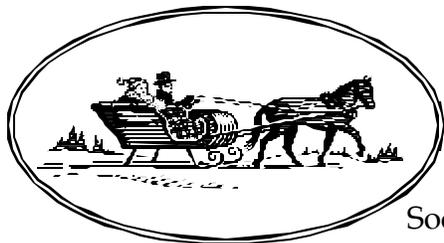
On Sunday, October 6th, the Heritage Weekend featured a tour of Bulls Bridge Gorge and the remains of the old iron furnace there. We were very lucky to have Ed Kirby, a highly regarded geologist and iron historian, conducted the tour! As President of the Sharon Historical Society, Ed has spearheaded the effort to restore the unique old lime kiln in Sharon. That project is winding to a close, and Ed’s voracious appetite for new projects just might be taking him in Kent’s direction. With several broken down furnaces and forges in our area, maybe he

will find something here to sink his teeth into. He certainly enjoyed leading a large group of people along the banks of the river just below the power plant, where he explained the various geologic formations visible in the water starved river bed. Our tour encompassed millions of years in a matter of minutes, but it all made perfect sense thanks to Ed’s clear explanations. We then walked across the old covered bridge and into the woods to the ruins of the old Bulls Bridge Furnace. Again, Ed’s eloquence and knowledge brought the furnace back to life for us, and we left with the mysterious iron industry terms tripping lightly off our tongues – flumes, boshes, tuyere nozzles (pronounced “tweer”, we now know), pigs and sows.....!

The final Kent walk that weekend followed close on the heels of the Bulls Bridge tour, so some of us jumped in our cars and raced up to the Sloane Stanley Museum, where John Pawloski gave yet another informative tour, this time of the recently uncovered stack of the Kent Iron Manufacturing Company. Owned by the State and currently undergoing a major renovation, the stack is in surprisingly good shape. John showed many old photographs of the furnace and explained how it all worked. We bandied about our newly acquired knowledge, and had a rousing layman’s conversation about salamanders (the iron kind), and charging walls.

So, the Heritage Weekend was a great success! It should be held on an annual basis, and with luck and perseverance, our valley should achieve its National Heritage Area designation. Please write to your congressmen and express your support for this wonderful idea.





Please Join Us for Our 3rd Annual Christmas Party & Wine Tasting

As we have for the past two years, the Kent Historical Society is holding its annual fundraiser on the first weekend in December. On Saturday, December 7th, from 4 to 7PM at the Swift House, we will be joining forces with Ira Smith of Kent Wine and Spirit to offer you samples of wine from France, Spain and America. The wines will be accompanied by tasty hors d'oeuvres from Stroble Baking and Catering.

This event is our only major fundraiser, and has become a popular social event as well. An added attraction this year will be the official opening of our new headquarters in the western rooms of the Swift House. We are very excited about both events and we do hope that you will come support the Society and enjoy the festivities!

Louise Hansen ~ School Nurse

Kent Center School Scholarship Fund is raising funds by selling commemorative bricks that will be installed in the new courtyard at the school. The Matson family in Kent has suggested that a memorial brick be purchased in honor of Louise Hansen, who was the school nurse and local assistant to Dr. Josephine Evarts in the 1930s and '40s. Paddy Matson called me to find out what information we had about Louise in the Historical Society's files. We have nothing! Since that call, I have spoken to many people about Louise. She sounds like a remarkable person. She was from Sharon, and took care of many people there, but she was equally involved in Kent. There were many children in the Matson family, and their mother died when they were all very young. Louise became a central figure in their lives - caring for them physically and emotionally. They were not the only ones who benefited from her very large heart. It is fitting that she be remembered at Kent Center School. The Matsons are hoping that people will contribute money towards the purchase of a brick in her memory. It's a wonderful idea! For more information, please call Paddy Matson at 927-3260 for more details.

Now that our interest in Louise has been aroused, we are hoping that you will be able to help us gather information about her. Do you have any stories about her? Any photos? Please help us fill this gap in our files. We will gladly copy and return any original material.

We also would like to suggest that the courtyard bricks be used to commemorate many of Kent's bygone legendary figures, and to benefit today's children at the same time. If there is someone in your family lore who looms as large as Louise does in the Matsons', perhaps the courtyard would be a way to remember that person forever! For more information call Ed Epstein at 927-4057 or Hedy Kinney at 927-1040.

Mysteries from Kent's Past *(Continued from page 1)*

tage Weekend tour of Alder City, Fran Johnson and I chose 1874 as the point in time to focus on, because Alder City appeared, with the names of the inhabitants, on the Beer's Atlas map of that date. In 1874, Alder City was populated by the Elwyn, Rogers, Ingraham, Erckman (or Ackerman), and Morey families. However, in searching the land records, Fran discovered that there was a great deal of land trading and speculation going on in Alder City during its brief existence. The Rogers family continually traded part of a 78' strip of land among family members. Hannah Rogers and James Brazee also at one point owned the Elwyn lot next door. The Rogers lot itself was owned (between 1866 and 1893) by Noah Bennett, Hannah Rogers, Sarah Whalen, John Rogers, Luman Gale and finally Catherine Rogers. Catherine Rogers was married to David, and their daughter married a man named Robert Waldron. The Morey property was owned briefly at one point by Artemesia Waldron - a relative? In one year alone - 1866- the Ingraham lot was transferred from John Rogers to Wiston Ingraham to Robert Elwyn and back to John Rogers! The Erckman lot belonged at various times to a John Chamberlain, Henry Erckman, Hannah Marshall and possibly Mary & Ira Dean. The Morey property, described in 1864 as one half acre, was sold that year by Joel Pratt to Ezra Marshall, who turned around and sold it the same day to Artemesia Waldron. In 1874 it was listed as 3 acres and was sold to Hannah Marshall! It makes your head spin! But why all the transfers? To pay off debts? To help each other out? We may never know? Do you?

Another mystery about Alder City concerns the local legend that it was wiped out by smallpox. We found no direct evidence of that. Only one resident, Revolutionary War Veteran John Rogers, has smallpox named as

the cause of death on his death certificate. There is marker in his memory on the river bank by his house site. No one knows for sure that he is actually buried there, but it would make sense that they had wanted to bury him quickly. Other Alder City residents may have had smallpox but survived it. A story in a 1981 issue of the Danbury News Times stated that in 1893 patrols were established along the river to make sure that no one got in or out of Alder City because of smallpox. Perhaps those who survived the disease decided to move far away. We do know that many of them left town and by 1906 the entire area had been bought by a speculator from New Milford named Young, who sold it to Noah Rogers, who sold it to Stanley Works, and *the rest is history!*

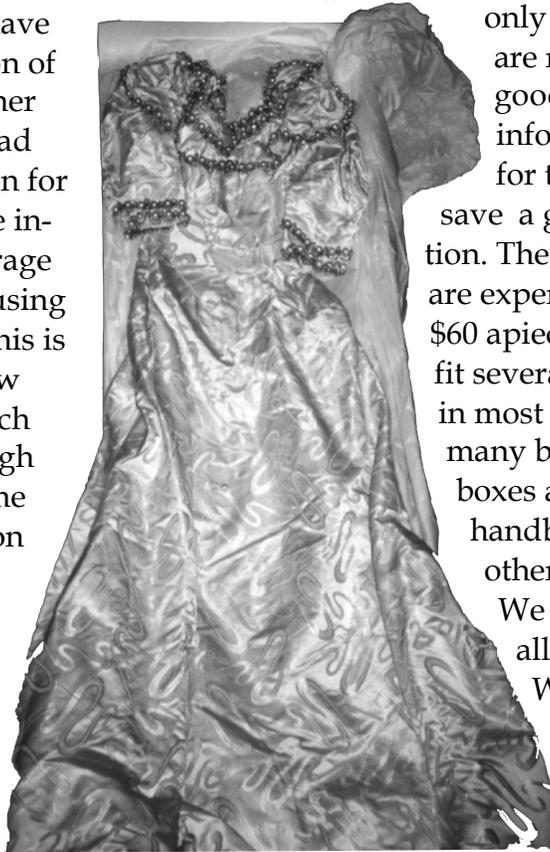
On the riverbank near John Roger's stone, I found a very large heavy iron chain link. That discovery led me to start investigating again a curious object in the river just north of the iron furnace and the old Pratt's Dam (the remains of which are still visible on the river bottom during dry season). The object is an enormous long rock with an iron ring imbedded in the northern end of it. This rock with the ring is known to many of our old locals as "The Boom Rock", but there is differing opinion as to why. A "boom" is a term in the logging industry which refers to a chain of iron links or else of logs connected end to end, used to secure a raft of logs that had been floated down the river. But the mystery here is that such logs were not normally used in the iron industry, so there is no logical connection between the Boom Rock and the furnace. Was there a lumber mill nearby on the riverbank? Was it even truly a boom rock? It has also been suggested that the ring in the rock was used to anchor a cable that spanned the river enabling people to cross the river there. We have no proof of that either, though we do have pictures of a cable across the river up in North Kent.

If you have any information about either Alder City or the Boom Rock, please let us know!

Collection in Crisis

We need your help! We have discovered that our collection of antique dresses, hats and other items of apparel is in very sad shape. Part of the preparation for our move to the Swift House involved reorganizing the storage space we had already been using in an upstairs room there. This is a part of the KHS that too few people know about and which obviously does not get enough attention. Emily had taken me quickly through the collection several years ago, but I have never had a chance to go back through it thoroughly. A few volunteers and I recently did go through each box, and we were shocked at what we found! There are gorgeous gowns, linens, hats and other items of primarily Victorian clothing stored in cardboard boxes. Unfortunately, cardboard is both flimsy and highly acidic. The boxes are collapsing and crushing the contents, and the acid is permanently staining the fabrics.

We need new storage boxes NOW! Not all the items have been damaged and others



only slightly, though some are ruined. If we can get the good pieces into acid free, reinforced boxes that are made for textile storage, we can save a good part of the collection. The problem is that the boxes are expensive, averaging about \$60 apiece. We should be able to fit several garments into each box in most cases, but we still need many boxes. We also need hat boxes and smaller boxes for the handbags, handkerchiefs and other treasures that we own.

We don't have money to buy all the boxes we need now.

We could buy a few boxes each year, but it would take too long to safely protect all the items in our collection. So, will

you help us? If you can make an extra donation designated specifically for collections care it would be a wonderful holiday gift for the Society. If any of you would like a "tour" of the collection to see what we're up against, I'd be happy to arrange that. We will be grateful for every penny given to this project. Thank you!!

Dues are due!

A gentle reminder that your annual dues were due on October 1, 2002 - the beginning of our fiscal year. We hope that you have not decided to drop your membership, and that you will be sending a check to us soon. Your membership is important to us!

Thank you

Welcome New Members!

The ranks of the KHS continue to grow! Since August we have been joined by Barbara McCarthy, Pam Kempe, Dr. Jeanette Marlow, Bob & Betty Carlson, Ed Goodsell, Jerry & Judy White, Charles Emerich, Mary & Don Peters, Denis Curtis and Gary & Bobbie Davis. We are delighted to have you with us.

Do you know what is happening here? (Hint: they are using saws.)

Annual Meeting was Crackers

The Annual Meeting of the KHS was a great success. Those members who let their curiosity override their skepticism were thoroughly entertained by guest speaker Ann Linden and her slide show about the history of cookies and crackers. Ann is one of those inquisitive historians who look for subjects out of the ordinary. She enjoyed talking with KHS members, and was intrigued by a few reports of old cracker delivery wagons. That little known business could easily become a new passion for her – maybe she'll come back and tell us all about them in a few years.



Skiff Mountain & Schoolhouse Remain Untouched

Thanks to months of hard work by many Skiff Mountain residents, some of whom are members of the KHS, the historic and picturesque setting of the little one room schoolhouse has been saved from further development. The proposed subdivision, the entrance to which would have been within feet of the schoolhouse, is no longer being considered. The view from the east window of the schoolhouse, overlooking the fields towards the ancestral Skiff home, will remain as it has appeared for over 200 years. Our heartfelt thanks go to the wonderful Skiff Mountain community!

Our Fabulous Volunteers!

As always, one of my top priorities in this newsletter is to thank the amazing volunteers who pitch in to keep the KHS humming along. Interest in the Society is growing again, rapidly, and there is no way that everything can be done by just a few people. So it is gratifying to see the number of volunteers growing too!

Our move into the Swift House is progressing slowly but steadily. Dawn and Scott Stone donated and installed a new carpet in the little room where the files will be kept. Beth Dooley, Sue Edgerly, Mary Grusauski, Fran Johnson, Dick & Charlotte Lindsey, Julia Mankin, Henry Mellen, Gail Tobin and Susi Williams have been busy packing, painting, sorting, lugging and otherwise making the move happen. Our goal is to be in (or almost!) by the Christmas Party on December 7th. We hope to see you there.

Mary Grusauski and Hilary Durno faithfully attend to the gardens at 7 Hearths each week. They were joined for one big project by Lori Carlson, Tom Pochia and Heidi Wilson, who wielded grubbing forks and shovels as part of our efforts to tame the overgrowth around the house. Bill Tobin brought one of his machines down from Skiff Mountain to cut much of the outer area. Bill told us that, when he was a kid, George Laurence Nelson hired him to mow the lawns. Mr. Nelson would drive his old station wagon down to the garage to pick up Bill and his lawnmower, and take him back to 7H. We appreciate Bill's return to his old job.

While I'm thanking people, I'd like to thank all of you who took the time to return the survey we sent out. Your comments and responses have been very helpful, and we hope to be able to act on your suggestions soon!



Greeting Cards Available

Did you know that we sell greeting cards? 8 of George Laurence Nelson's lithographs were made into cards several years ago. A set of 8 costs \$6.00 and includes rural scenes and floral arrangements such as this one. The cards, along with our historical "Kent Tales" booklets will be available for sale in our new rooms at the Swift House as of December 7th. A good idea for Christmas gifts.....

Kent Historical Society

PO Box 651, Kent, CT 06757

Est. 1954

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Tarmara Potter, Vice President

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Buildings Supervisor ~ William Potter

Hours Tuesday mornings 10 to Noon

Upstairs in the Kent Memorial Library

This newsletter is compiled by Marge McAvoy,
designed by Thistle Graphics, Kent,
and sponsored by Moore & More Printing, Millerton, NY

Kent Quiz: "East Greenwich" was the original name of a section of Warren, once a part of the town of Kent. East Greenwich severed its connection with Kent in 1787, as did present day New Preston, thus vastly reducing the square mileage and population of the Town of Kent.

Next question: Where was the 12 Rod Highway? (Note: This is not 10 Rod Road!)

Kent Historical Society

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Volunteer interest (all members, please circle): Archives Host/Hostess

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