



# Kent Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 9, Number 2

Kent, Connecticut

August 2008

## Have YOU been to Seven Hearths yet???

This summer's exhibit, *Pulling Kent out of the Closet: Discovering Our Hidden Treasures*, may be one of the best we've ever done. But, to be honest, we are a bit puzzled about the attendance. Admittedly, the weather has been pretty unpleasant on many weekends – with 14 extra inches of rain so far, and a few sticky heat waves, leaving the house to go see an exhibit of clothing just doesn't sound worth the effort. We can assure you – it is!

Everyone who has been there has complimented us highly on the quality and content of the exhibit. Most have promised to come back with friends.

It is far from a routine clothing exhibit, so quit yawning and read on. We don't get involved in what the garments are made of or when they were made. Instead, we look at why the designs were created, the customs and rules that grew out of the designs, why people saved the clothing they saved and what those clothes can tell us about society in days gone by. For instance, did you know that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century The Rational Dress Society was formed to persuade women that they really should not have to wear



**The vignette called "Meatloaf Again????", which takes a look at the emphasis on family following World War II. It's a trip down memory lane for many of our visitors.**

more than seven pounds of underwear? One hundred years later, it is doubtful that a modern teenager's undergarments weigh more than seven ounces.... Or were you aware that the bustle was created because some reigning lady many years had a large derriere, so she had a dress designed with an even larger flounce of cloth to hide her unfortunate physique. Royal rules being what they were, her ladies-in-waiting all had to

adopt the same style. Voila – the bustle was born.....

We have asked a random selection of visitors to give us their thoughts on the exhibit. Comments range from "love to see old clothing," "always go to any exhibits at Seven Hearths," "interested in rituals of grief" to "my aunt made me come." One visitor even suggested that we nominate the exhibit for a Connecticut League of History Organizations Award of Merit!! That is very high praise, and we are going to look into it.

Unlike previous years, we are keeping the

Cont on Page 7

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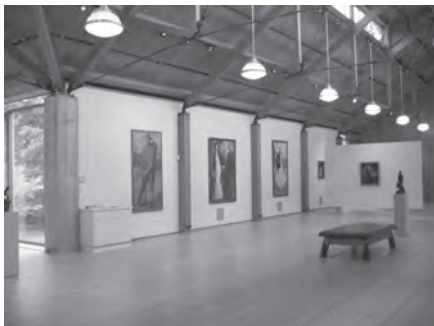
## A Gala Event at the Morrison Gallery

On Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup>, the Morrison Gallery hosted an exhibit the likes of which has probably not been seen for over half a century. Close to two dozen works of art by George Laurence Nelson were displayed in the large, airy gallery for an audience which, for the most part, was unacquainted with his talent.

George Laurence Nelson, as most readers of this newsletter know, was a famous portraitist and landscape painter for much of the twentieth century. But as “modern art” took over the art world towards the end of Nelson’s life, his work fell into oblivion. As part of our recently completed long-range strategic plan, the KHS is determined to resurrect the reputation of this incredibly talented man. The exhibit at the Morrison Gallery was the first major step towards achieving our goal.

KHS Trustee Bonnie Fremgen orchestrated the exhibit, which drew at least 150 people through the gallery doors. Our visitors were amazed to see the brilliance of Nelson’s work, and the words of praise from practically everyone there warmed our hearts to the core! *We* know that Nelson was a gifted artist. *We* know that we have a hidden treasure trove of paintings. *We* know that Nelson should be universally recognized again. But to hear it from the mouths of so many newcomers was incredibly exciting! Held as a private event, with an admission fee to attend, and with a silent auction of one Nelson watercolor, the exhibit raised some much needed funds. The money will be used for the continuing restoration of Nelson’s beloved Seven Hearths. The rooms which have already been finished are proving to be good backdrops for his stunning art work. The dining room and the upstairs bedroom are the next projects in line, along with putting the finishing touches on the kitchen.

For those of you who missed the exhibit at the Morrison Gallery, all of the paintings are now back on display in their permanent home – Seven Hearths. The museum is currently open on Saturdays and Sundays from 1-5pm, from now through Columbus Day, or by appointment. This summer, Nelson’s work is augmented by our fabulous costume exhibit “Pulling Kent Out of the Closet: Discovering Our Hidden Treasures.” (See related story.)



Above:

The large portraits were shown to their best advantage in the bright airy exhibit space at The Morrison Gallery

Below:

Bob Lenz and Gallery owner Billy Morrison admire the artwork of Laurence Nelson



Above:

Bonnie Fremgen and Hugh Hill put the finishing touches on the refreshments provided by Doc's and Kent Wine & Spirit



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## Housatonic Heritage Weekend of Walks

For the last four years, on the first weekend in October, folks in the northwest corner of Connecticut and the southwest corner of Massachusetts have been walking all over the place. Sponsored by the newly created Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, the Housatonic Weekend of Walks is an increasingly popular event. This year there are so many walks planned that the schedule has been split into two weekends – September 27 & 28 and October 4 & 5. Once again, Kent will be the southernmost destination. In past years, we have led walks through the Bulls Bridge area, up and down Main Street, and to the Veterans' graves in the St. Andrews and Congregational cemeteries.

On October 4<sup>th</sup> this year we return to the Congregational cemetery with a more lighthearted mission, entitled *Kent Underground*. Many of Kent's unusual and noteworthy people are buried there, and our guides will give you a unique perspective on the town's history. We'll visit the graves of a Russian nobleman and his wife, a world renowned artist, a revered State senator, a wealthy iron master, a poor collier, a reclusive Civil War veteran, and other local notables. We'll learn about scandals, politics, patriotism, real estate mysteries, medical epidemics, and many other facets of this small town's fascinating history.

This is a flat walk with easy access. The Congregational Church is the large white church on the west side of Route 7 at the north end of Main Street. Drive in on the right side of the church and continue on down a small slope to the parking lot next to the railroad tracks. The tour begins at 10AM.

For more information about the many other walks planned for these two weekends, go to [www.heritage-hikes.org](http://www.heritage-hikes.org). It's a great way to get to know your wider backyard.

## How Well Do You Know Your Way Around Your Town?

The Kent Historical Society and Kent Conservation Commission have recently collaborated to create a fun program called *The Treasures of Kent*. It is a treasure hunt in which participants are given cryptic clues to 10 locations in town. Participants will have to figure out the location of the sites and have their clue sheet stamped at each site to qualify for a prize.

The Treasure Hunt was originally held on July 19<sup>th</sup>, but it was a sweltering, hot, humid day, and – not surprisingly – few people showed up. So we are going to do it again in October. We have not confirmed the date yet, but it may be the Saturday of Columbus Day weekend. We'd love to know if you think that is a good idea, or is that weekend too busy?

The 10 sites are split between the KHS and KCC. 5 are historical and 5 are conservation-oriented.

We'll give you one of the clues here to pique your interest – and hope that you will join us in October to complete the hunt. Maybe by that time gas prices will have decreased enough that driving around our hilly terrain won't break your bank account.

Clue #10 – “A place with altitude – find the highest point on a public road in Kent. A swamp, a ring and many crosses will lead you right to this spot.”



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## The Annual Meeting of the KHS .....

will be held on Sunday, October 19<sup>th</sup> at 2:30PM at the Town Hall in Kent. Our speaker this year will be Marty Podskoch, who has presented his program, "The History, Lore and Legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps Camps in Connecticut," across the state and beyond.

Marty has probably the most extensive collection of photographs and information about the CT CCC camps known to exist, including a rare photograph of "Camp Macedonia Park," which was actually located near Kent Falls.

Many of you are probably familiar with the massive stone wall that parallels the dirt road through Macedonia Park, but how many of you know that the wall was built by the CCC? There is also a road to the top of Kent Falls, built by the CCC just north of the falls that contains small stretches of similarly constructed stone walls. These walls are monuments to one of the most remarkable projects to come out of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

### **Here is what Mr. Podskoch says about the CCC in his Press Release:**

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began on March 31, 1933 under President Roosevelt's "New Deal" to relieve the poverty and unemployment of the Depression. The US Army supervised the camps which had from 200-250 men each. The first year 13 camps were set up in these Connecticut towns & state parks & forests: In West Cornwall *Housatonic Meadows*, in Niantic *Military Reservation*, in Hampton *Natchaug*, in Haddam *Cockaponset*, in Stafford Springs *Nipmuck*, in Danbury *Squantz Pond*, in Cobalt *Meshomasic*, in Voluntown *Pachaug*, in Thomaston *Black Rock*, in East Hartland *Tunxis*, in Clinton *Cockaponset*, in West Goshen *Mohawk*, and in Torrington *Paugnut*. The Army Government Dock in New London was the supply depot for all the CT camps.

In the following years these eight camps were added: Riverton *American Legion State Forest*, East Hampton *Salmon River*, Danbury *Wooster Mountain*, Somers *Shenipsit*, Portland *Meshomasic*, Poquonock *Experiment Station Land*, Kent *Macedonia Brook* and Madison *Cockaponset*.

Men 18 - 25 (with fathers on relief) enrolled for 6 months, worked a 40-hour week for \$30 per month. They had to send \$25 a month home. They got good food, uniforms, and medical care. At first they lived in tents; later they built wooden buildings.

Workers built trails, roads, campsites, & dams, stocked fish, built & maintained fire tower observer's cabins & telephone lines, fought fires, & planted millions of trees. The CCC disbanded in 1942 due to the need for men in WW II."

In 2005, Bill Bachrach and Marge McAvoy trekked across the state to the Museum of the Northeast States Civilian Conservation Corps in Stafford Springs, CT. Housed in a former CCC Camp barracks, and struggling to keep its doors open, the little museum is a treasure trove of information and memorabilia.

The Corpsmen were mostly teenagers whose families were desperate for money. The boys were paid \$30 a month, of which \$25 was sent home. The federal government provided the staff (mostly reservists needing something to do after WWI) and the money, which the states were supposed to pay back (CT was one of the few that actually did). Uniforms, cots, mess kits and other supplies were initially US Army surplus, and the daily routine followed the discipline of the army as well. CT was in the forefront of FDR's efforts to create a program to help the unemployed and to do conservation work. The Forest Ser-

vice ran the overall operation, creating projects such as building 125,000 miles of forest roadways, planting billions of trees, establishing erosion control for 40 million acres of farmland, and building stone walls across the U.S.



**Building the road in Macedonia**  
Photo courtesy of Marty Podskoch

The CCC ended in 1940, as the young men were needed in the military ranks of WWII. Used to the Spartan living and strict discipline, the CCC grads excelled in the service, many of them calling the CCC years the best of their lives.



**West Cornwall Barracks. Photo courtesy of Marty Podskoch and Black Bass Antiques**

Kent's own Elmer Trombly came to this town as a member of the CCC. He remembers the large trucks delivering ton after ton of fill and stone for the magnificent road in Macedonia. It was as a CCC Corpsman that Elmer met his wife Beatrice, and it was because of the CCC that he stayed in Kent, enlisting in the army, suffering imprisonment in a German POW camp, and returning to Kent, where he

was known by all as the genial mail carrier for many years. Mention of the CCC brings a bright smile to Elmer's face, and his recollections illustrate the significance of this important New Deal program.



**The men of Camp Macedonia Brook**  
Photo courtesy of Marty Podskoch



**Camp Macedonia Brook, actually located near Kent Falls, but we are not sure of the exact spot. Do you know?**  
  
Photo courtesy of Marty Podskoch

**Please mark your calendars and plan to come see Marty's presentation!**

Remember - the location of the Annual Meeting will be the *Town Hall instead of the Swift House!*

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## OUR VALUABLE VOLUNTEERS



**Fran Johnson** is the President of the Kent Historical Society. Though Fran hails from Vermont, she could easily be mistaken for a native of Kent because of her extensive knowledge of the town and its history. Fran recently retired from her job as the Assistant Building Inspector, a position through which she gained an in-depth familiarity with many of the houses in town, and their occupants as well. She also has a passion for genealogy and has spent over three decades prowling around the town cemeteries, becoming equally familiar with another group of Kent residents. In fact, that passion led to an indispensable

book, *A Register of Some of the Families That Have Lived in Kent 1739 - 1999*. Using the information she gleaned from the local tombstones as well as the Vital Records in the Town Hall, Fran was spurred on in this project by the late Emily Hopson, the former President of the KHS. Emily was determined that the book be published before she died, and Fran was determined to grant her that wish. The book was published in the spring of 2000, and Emily passed away less than two years later at age 99! Because of the slight rush in preparation of the book, Fran recognizes that there are some omissions and an occasional error. She welcomes additions and corrections.

No sooner had she finished her Register than she took on another massive research project - the town's WWII veterans. Along with KHS Trustee Charlotte Lindsey, Fran has spent an incredible amount of time tracking down and verifying the names, dates and service records of almost all of Kent's WWII vets. The result is another fabulous book, *One Small Town in WWII*. The two have now embarked on a related project described in the box below.

When Fran is not busy researching and writing, we keep her out of trouble by forwarding on to her all the genealogy and history inquiries that frequently come to the KHS. Admitting that just maybe she has a few too many stuffed file cabinets in her house, Fran is rarely stumped by these inquiries. She provides all of these services for free, a real labor of love. She also rides herd over the finances of the KHS and volunteers her time for a myriad of other small tasks that would normally be overwhelming the Executive Director, for which we are eternally grateful.

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### Kent Veterans' Memorial

A new memorial to the veterans of WWII, the Korean and the Vietnam wars is in the planning stages. The memorial will be placed on the lawn at the Swift House to honor those men from Kent who served in those wars. The memorial plans to have the name of each veteran engraved on bronze plaques attached to the granite monument. A flagpole will be at the center of the memorial.

Anyone who has a relative from Kent who served during the Korean or Vietnam era is asked to contact the committee with the name and dates of service so their name can be included. The information should be sent to the Kent Historical Society, P.O. Box 651, Kent, CT 06757 or [kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com](mailto:kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com).

A fund drive is currently underway to make this project possible. Tax deductible contributions should be mailed to: **Kent Historical Society, P.O. Box 651, Kent, CT 06757**

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exhibit open through Columbus Day weekend, and perhaps beyond. We have a group of art historians coming up at the end of October from Ridgewood, NJ, to see both the exhibit and the Nelson artwork, and we are hoping to get the Kent Center School students up to see it. In addition, we have been getting attention from unusual sources. Two people from Historic Deerfield are planning to come down. *Antiques Magazine* asked if they could list it in their calendar. The Costume Institute has expressed an interest. So, even though you have almost two more months to come see the exhibit, don't put it off for too long.

*Pulling Kent out of the Closet: Discovering Our Hidden Treasures* is open on Saturdays and Sundays from 1 to 5PM from now through Columbus Day, or by appointment. Seven Hearths is located two miles north of the center of Kent on Route 7. For more information, call 860-927-4587 or email [kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com](mailto:kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com).



**Left:**  
**Margaret Tobin's**  
**burgundy silk**  
**wedding dress**  
**from the 1880s.**



**Right:**  
**Faye Preston's**  
**patchwork an-**  
**tique lace wed-**  
**ding dress from**  
**the 1980s.**



**19th century dress**  
**with a bustle, and**  
**underarm stains from**  
**being worn with 20th**  
**century deodorant!**



**Is there a teenager in your**  
**house with a horizontal clos-**  
**et like this one?**



**Period costumes for the**  
**kids to play dress up**  
**with. Bring your camera!**

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# KHS NEWS

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Macedonia Park is home to one of the major CCC efforts in our area. Starting just before the Ranger Station, there is a long flat road that parallels the public road which runs through the park. The eastern side of the road is supported in many places by a massive stone wall. Both the road and the wall were built by the CCC in the 1930s (see story on page 4) and both are in dire need of repair in some spots. For many years the culverts under the road had not been cleaned out and were clogged with leaves and debris. In late 2007 there were one or two intense downpours which caused torrents of water to overwhelm the culverts and wash huge gullies in the old road. The massive wall has collapsed in a few places after being undermined by the rushing water.

This past summer Park Ranger Jim Baeschle and KHS member Bill Bachrach organized a volunteer work party to do some simple maintenance projects. Starting at the south end of the road, the volunteers cut back all the brush that was growing over the wall and in the drainage ditches. They cleaned out the culverts and filled in some of the gullies. Walking along the road, it is easy to see how far up the road they worked. But there is much more to be done, and we are hoping to put together another work party in late October. If you are interested in helping out, please contact the Kent Historical Society at 860-927-4587 or [kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com](mailto:kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com).

The state has cut the maintenance budget for all of our lovely parks, so if we don't help maintain the venerable old CCC Road, it will be lost over time. Many of you have probably walked at least part of this road without being aware of its history. If you enjoyed that walk, please consider giving a few hours of your time to take care of it.



**The wall (above) and a culvert (below) after the July 12 crew worked their magic.**



**More sections of the wall and another culvert in need of attention. Won't you please help?**





# The Kent Historical Society GIFT SHOP

- One Small Town In World War II . . . . . \$25  
 Kent Tales . . . . . \$10 each  
     Iron Fever  
     Barzillai Slosson's History of Kent & Other Bits of History  
     Sherm Chase Remembers: A Kent Life 1900 to 1982  
     Rufus Fuller and the South Kent Ore Bed  
     The Pratts of Macedonia  
 Kent Tales (John Adam Journal) . . . . . \$40 each (By special order only)  
 New Life For Old Timber\* . . . . . \$6 each  
 Artists of the Litchfield Hills. . . . . \$32 each  
 A Register of Some Kent Families. . . . . \$30 each  
 Farm Life series, by Phil Camp . . . . . \$12 each  
 Ornament/medallion . . . . . \$10 each  
 Mini Bird Barn Ornament . . . . . \$5 each  
 G.L. Nelson Note Cards\*. . . . . \$6 for a packet of 8, or \$1 apiece  
     \*These note cards and "New Life" are done by George Laurence Nelson,  
     noted Kent artist, and previous owner of Seven Hearths  
 Photo cards of Seven Hearths . . . . . \$1 each  
 Color Copy of 1874 Map of Kent . . . . . \$10 each  
 DVD – Photographic history of Kent. . . . . \$10 each

To Order from the Gift Shop:  
 Write to: Bookstore  
     Kent Historical Society  
     PO Box 651  
     Kent, CT 06757 or Call: 860-927-4587



*For mail orders, please include \$5 S&H for One Small Town and \$3 S&H for all others*

## Welcome New Members!

**Jamie Bernardin and Julie Chang**

**Marc and Jan Bornn**

**Patricia Howland Lang**

**David Quay**

**We are happy to have you with us!**

## KHS Calendar of Events

**Summer exhibit - Through Columbus Day  
 Saturdays and Sundays 1 to 5PM**

**Cemetery Walk - October 4, 10AM**

**Treasures of Kent - tentatively October 11**

**Annual Meeting - October 19, 2:30 PM**

**KHS Christmas Open House - December 13**

## Kent Historical Society

10 Maple Street, PO Box 651, Kent, CT 06757  
860-927-4587 kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com

### Officers

Fran Johnson, President, Stan Jennings, Vice President  
Sandy Jennings, Treasurer Maggie Wells, Secretary

### Trustees

Fr. Tom Berberich, Beth Dooley, Bonnie Fremgen,  
Mary Grusauski, Charlotte Lindsey,  
Jeffrey Morgan, Susi Williams  
**Executive Director** ~ Marge McAvoy

**Hours** at the Swift House  
Tuesdays 9 AM to Noon, Fridays 1 to 4 PM,  
Saturdays by appointment

This newsletter was designed by Lynne Hicks,  
and is compiled by Marge McAvoy.  
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## Kent Quiz

Who gave Macedonia Brook State Park  
to the State of Connecticut?

### Answer to the last quiz:

Besides being known for his artwork,  
Laurence Nelson had a reputation for  
outspoken involvement in local issues. He  
loved to write letters to the papers and to  
speak up at town meetings. His active  
mind saw solutions to problems easily,  
and he delighted in sharing those ideas  
with the citizens of the town he loved so  
much.

## Kent Historical Society

PO Box 651  
Kent, CT 06757

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Individual \$10  Family & Sustaining \$25  Patron \$100  
 Sponsor \$250  Proprietor \$500 and up

*Please circle:* New Member      Renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Make Checks payable to: **The Kent Historical Society**, PO Box 651, Kent, CT 06757

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIETY ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Volunteer interest (please circle): Archives    Host/Hostess    Programs    Other \_\_\_\_\_