



# Kent Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 12, Number 1

Kent, Connecticut

May 2011

## Seven Hearths Grounds Are Looking *GOOD!*



Left to right: Marge Smith, Dick Lindsey, Nancy Shaeffer, Gage Hall, Charles Tomlinson, Mason Lord, John and Carolyn Casey, Michael Ward, Bruce Whipple, Kevin Capobianco, Charlotte Lindsey, Linda Nacinovitch, Bruce Adams, Jeff Morgan. Missing from photo, but equally hard working, are Holly Adams, Elaine Debet-Fricke, Beth Dooley and Margaret Wiener.



Saturday, April 16, dawned blustery and cold, but a group of dedicated volunteers gathered at Seven Hearths determined to clean up the winter detritus from the yard. And clean up they did! Armed with rakes, loppers, clippers and tarps as well as a chain saw and a tractor, these wonderful people spent several hours pulling vines, yanking weeds, trimming bushes, raking leaves, patching holes in the lawn, cutting down overgrown shrubs, hauling brush and happily socializing. Coffee breaks in the cozy 7H kitchen, where a fire burned cheerfully on the hearth under the watchful eye of Jeff Morgan, fortified our intrepid friends until the work was done. Never has the yard looked so great!

**Our sincere thanks to each and every one of you. What a difference you make!**

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## **Programs! Programs! Get Your Programs Here!**

Our highly successful “SUNDAY SERIES” continues into 2011. We’ve drawn good crowds so far, most recently to hear Emery Roth present his fabulous photographs of local rural scenery, and Ernie Barker who touchingly brought Civil War veteran Frederick Lucas to life through a reading of his wartime correspondence with his future wife.

We will take a summer break and then be back in September, when Andy Vadnais, Headmaster of South Kent School, will talk about the school’s plans for an impressive and innovative use of the former Arno farm on Hatch Pond. His program will be held on Sunday, September 18, at 2PM at the Kent Town Hall. Most of us are very curious about what’s going on there, so this is your chance to find out from the source! Andy’s talk is open to the public, with free admission, but donations to the Kent Historical Society are welcome.

In the meantime, the KHS Programs Committee has created a wonderful addition to our line up. We are offering a four session **Kids’ Art Program at Seven Hearths** in July for children aged 6-9. The dates are July 12, 14, 19 and 21 from 10a.m.-11a.m. The classes are limited to 8 children per session. Sign up for one or more sessions at \$5 each. Projects include making a birdhouse, a picture frame, painting a landscape and decorating a flowerpot. All materials will be supplied. Talented art instructor Linda Cohen will be leading the children. The program will be held at Seven Hearths, corner of Rte 7 and Studio Hill Road. To sign up or for more information, call the Kent Historical Society at 860-927-4587, or email [kenthistorical@att.net](mailto:kenthistorical@att.net). Registration is required by June 15.

***HURRY—the classes are almost sold out!***

We’re very excited about this new art program as we move ahead with promotion of GL Nelson at 7H.



The Programs Committee is bubbling over with ideas for new programs—some historical, some art related. To bring them all into being, we will need help. Many of you have given generously of your time in the past. You’ve helped by gathering the oral histories of local residents, cleaning up the 7H grounds and greeting visitors who come to exhibits. Because we have not had an exhibit every summer at 7H in recent years, some of our volunteers have moved on to other projects. We understand! But we’d like to get things going again, and are asking you to let us know if you’re still available. We’ll be sending out a letter soon with details of what we’re up to. And if you know of anyone else in the area whom you think would enjoy working with our great group, please let us know! (See related plea on page 6) Most of all -

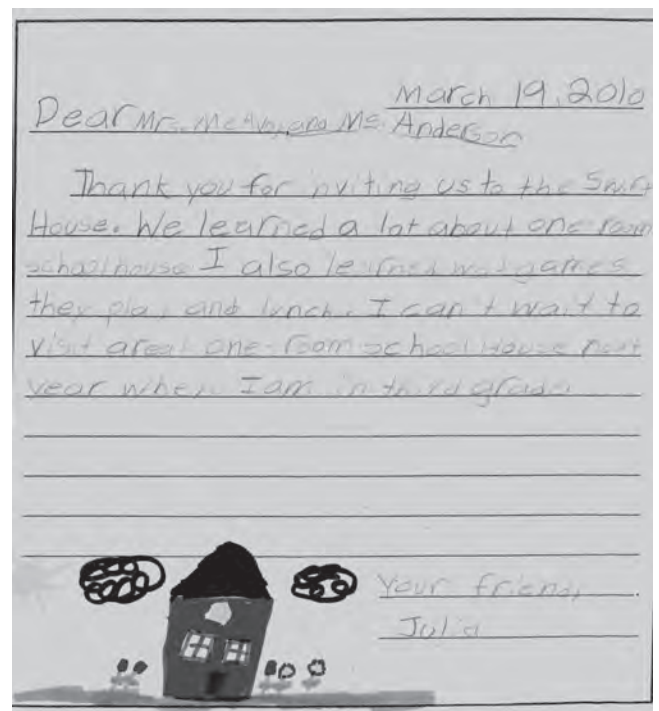
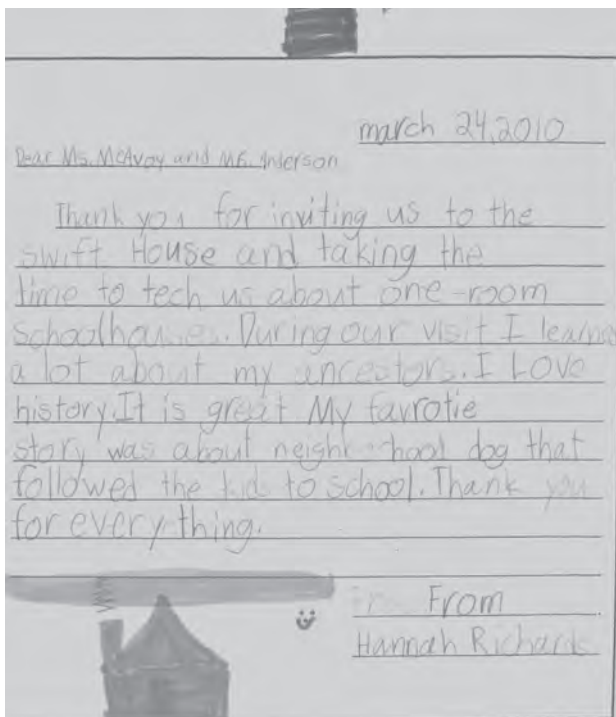
***thank you for your past support!!!! We can’t be who we are without you!***

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## OPEN HOUSE AT SEVEN HEARTHS SATURDAY, JUNE 11—10AM to 3PM

Kent Center School and the KHS have a very special relationship that goes back decades. Not long after the society inherited the Skiff Mountain schoolhouse from the Skiff family in 1973, then president Miss Emily Hopson put together a program at the schoolhouse for the lower KCS grades. She taught them about education in the bygone days of one room schoolhouses, showing them old composition books from the Tobin family, practicing spelling and arithmetic bees and explaining the workings of a typical day in a classroom full of children from many grades. As a thank you, those KCS kids drew pictures about what they had learned that day and donated them to the society. We have saved each and every picture over the years, and would like to share this amazing treasure with you. It's been going on long enough that we think we have some second generation drawings in our collection! So, this summer at 7H we will have them all out on display in an informal exhibit, which will open on June 11, as part of the statewide Connecticut Open House Day. From that day on throughout the summer, the exhibit will be open whenever one of us is working at the house on the continuing restoration. We hope it will be most weekends. If you see the OPEN flag flying, please stop in. **On June 11th only**, each visitor will be given a copy of *New Life for Old Timber*, Laurence Nelson's book about his life in Seven Hearths. Also on display will be some of the more significant recent donations to the society, including additions to the Barton collection, a Len Howard stained glass window, a baby crib and an antique trunk. We hope you will stop by. Please call or email us with any questions.

**Next year, we are thinking about doing an exhibit of dollhouses, and would love to borrow yours if you still have one. We love doing community-based exhibits that feature your treasures along side ours! We'd also welcome suggestions from you gents about whatever your childhood equivalent of the dollhouse might have been. Any ideas?**





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# The Conklin/Tallman House is Finally Ours!

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**Dick Lindsey, Bill Manasse, Lorry Schiesel, Fran Johnson and Paul Dooley at the closing for the Conklin house purchase by the KHS.**

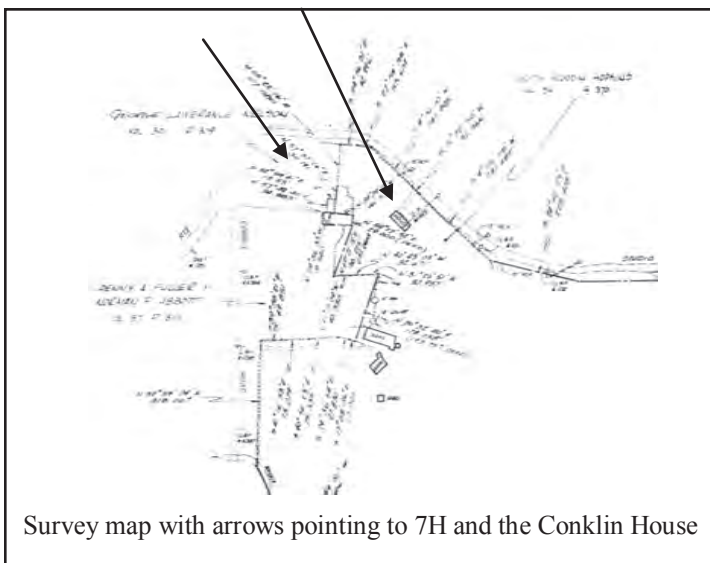
A long-term goal of our 2006 Strategic Plan has been realized. On Tuesday, May 10, KHS president Fran Johnson signed papers that finalized our purchase of Carol Conklin's house on Studio Hill Rd, next door to Seven Hearths (7H). Five years ago, we decided that we needed to find safer housing for the archives and collections currently stored at the Swift House. We also realized that having 7H open on such a limited basis (only on Saturday and Sunday afternoons the summer) was a very bad idea. So our long term goal was to build a new climate-controlled structure on the 7H grounds that would house our office, archives and collections, creating a "campus" that would allow us to keep 7H open all year round. But – the prospect of raising that kind of money was daunting, and then the economy tanked! What had been a long-term goal began to look like an unattainable dream. We put the project on the back burner and focused on other goals.

Things happen for a reason. When our neighbor Carol Conklin passed away last year and the family began to put her house on the market, we thought about asking them if we could buy a narrow strip of land between the two houses to use as a parking lot. After brief discussion at a board meeting, it was decided that it might be worth making an offer on the whole property! While it wouldn't have everything we wanted in our dream building, it would provide solutions to the most pressing needs – keeping 7H open all year round, providing a safer, though not actually climate controlled, environment for our collections...*and* the cost would clearly be substantially less! As stewards of your hard earned money, we had to try.

Carol had been a good neighbor to the KHS, and her family was delighted to reach an agreement with us that would benefit the KHS in such a significant way. We are very grateful to them, to say the least!

Piecing together the story of the little house has been a challenge. But we have found that history has come full circle with the joining of these two properties. In the backyard of 7H, there are several old stone foundations. During the archaeological reconnaissance conducted as part of our historic structures survey, it was determined that they all had agricultural purposes. One of those foundations is about the same dimension as Carol's house. The "bones" of the house appear to be old chestnut beams. Hmmm... We wondered if at one point those beams had been part of the small barn that sat on the foundation. Time to investigate.

We suspected that Carol's house had been built in the 1950s by Gladys Tallman, who owned the



Survey map with arrows pointing to 7H and the Conklin House

Pratt/Northrop house to the south of 7H. Investigation into the land records and conversations with local folk provided some fascinating details. We knew that the stone barn foundations were not on 7H property, but rather that of the Conklin and the Pratt/Northrop properties. It turns out that Miss Tallman, who owned all of that land at one point, decided that her ancient old house was too big and too much trouble to take care of. So she carved off a smaller lot for herself, dismantled one of the little barns and moved the beams up the hill to become the innards of a little cottage. Much of this was confirmed by John, Sue, Tom and Bill Gawel, who were the small children of Joe Gawel and lived across the road at the time this move took place. They remember the events well, especially Bill, who says

he was about six years old then. When the cellar hole was being dug, the contractor left his backhoe running while he went on an errand. Young Bill approached the machine and pulled the lever that operated the bucket, imagining that HE actually was digging the foundation. The bucket moved! Bill ran home! But “the rest is history”, as anyone who is familiar with that boy today knows.

In tribute to Miss Tallman, who was a very early and devoted member of the KHS, the board has voted to officially call our new home “Tallman House.” In tribute to Carol’s passion for her gardens, we will place a plaque recognizing them as the Carol Conklin Gardens, and will endeavor to maintain them with as much love and care as she did.

We expect to begin the move soon, but plan to do it carefully. There’s not much more space available than what we have in the Swift House, though the configuration is better. We will be able to fit in whatever we want to take. But, like anyone else moving from one place to the next, this is a chance to do a little house cleaning. We’ve begun to pare down the files, discarding duplicates and unnecessary articles. Items not related to our mission can and will be discarded or passed on to more appropriate homes. Then the move will happen. Though we are very sad to leave our downtown location, the trade off of being able to open 7H year round is well worth the sacrifice. We hope you all will continue to drop by on Tuesday mornings and Friday afternoons!



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## **KHS Board News—Farewell and welcome**

There have been a few changes on the Kent Historical Society's board of directors. After serving for six years together on our board, Sandy and Stan Jennings have retired at the end of their terms—to play golf, visit light houses, putter in the garden and pursue whatever other whims might come to them. Our heartfelt thanks to both of them, especially to Sandy, who, as Treasurer, spent countless hours meticulously processing and tabulating the society's income and expenses. It is clearly the most time consuming of all the board jobs, and she took it seriously. Stan, as our affable Vice President, was a regular visitor to the KHS office and an enthusiastic representative of the KHS wherever he went. To succeed (not replace) them, long time board member Beth Dooley has stepped into the Vice President's spot, and we are welcoming our former Treasurer Dick Lindsey back into that position again. Maggie Wells has also stepped down after first offering to finish the term of the late Lynn Hicks and then serving for two of her own. The KHS would not be what it is without the generous donation of time and effort by many wonderful people, and these five folk are examples of the best! Thank you!

### **Speaking of Volunteers....**

The **Oral History Committee** is looking for help. They have so far completed about 20 fascinating interviews with many notable Kent citizens, and there are many more names on the list. All of these interviews need to be transcribed. There is a very small amount of money in the program budget to pay someone to do the transcribing, and we are looking for more sources of funding. But we would also welcome your volunteer time if you are interested in helping out with the transcription as a gift to the KHS. Interviewers are still needed as well. Those people who have conducted the interviews so far have had a lot of fun. If you can help us, please call Charlotte and Dick Lindsey at 860-927-3724 or email to [kenthistorical@att.net](mailto:kenthistorical@att.net).

We also will need help with the **Big Move to Tallman House** (see related story on page 2). If you have a truck, van or station wagon and can give us a hand, please let us know. No date has been set yet, since we are still planning and organizing the move. It won't be right away, but we'd love to have your names soon as we put the pieces of the moving puzzle together. Thank you!



### **HELP!**

Do you know who these boys are? Kent Center School, circa 1950. Assistant Director Lisby Ritchie has scanned over 3,500 photos, with descriptions, into our data base! But we have no names for these three. Some of YOU may know... we are curious.

# The Kent Historical Society GIFT SHOP

**2011 Kent Calendar . . . . . \$5 each (worth it for the pictures)**

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 (genealogy of Kent)

Farm Life series, by Phil Camp . . . . . \$12 each

Ornament/medallion . . . . . \$10 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!**

**Kevin Alger, Rich Hibbard & Jane Brown, Ken & Charmian Cooper,  
Mason Lord, Anne and Dick Martin, Linda Schofield,  
Matt and Ane Starr, Barbara Sussman**

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



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## **Civilian Defense in Kent, CT, during WWII, by Charlotte Lindsey, Part Two**

In our last issue, we printed the first part of Charlotte's essay about Kent's contribution to the defense effort. The essay is continued here. Her interest in the subject grew out of the research that she and KHS president Fran Johnson did for their book "One Small Town in World War II."

*We left off with Robert Nisbet's appointment by Jim Humphreys to be Kent Air Raid Warden....*

Nisbet believed that the chief problem confronting any community was how to fight many fires at once. He learned that one bomber could drop as many as 2,000 incendiary bombs at once and that German bombers, after bombing intended targets, would lighten their loads to return to their bases. Nisbet was concerned about even one bomber being chased away from our industrial towns and letting off their loads as they went, creating huge fires.

As I said, Ted Woodin was in charge of Constables and the head Constable at the time of World War II was J. Floyd Barton, known as "Buffie." Town Constable from 1930 to 1973, Buffie was also a long time member of the Connecticut Auxiliary State Police and, as Kent's Police Chief during the War, he worked hand in hand with Rob Nisbet, Chief Warden, and Albert Edwards, chief of the Kent Volunteer Fire Department. Buffie enlisted in the army in September of 1942 and served almost 5 months before he was discharged at age 44 for being "the oldest man in his platoon." He came home to pick up his civic duties proving to be more important in his hometown. His son, John, served in the Army during the Vietnam War from 1968 to 1970.

The Connecticut State Defense Council mandated a survey of goods and services in the Town of Kent. This survey was taken under the chairmanship of Paul J. Tobin, a Skiff Mountain farmer and a veteran of World War One. Paul and his brothers, Leo and Daniel Jr., all bachelors, ran the dairy farm started by their father, while their sisters, Al-

ice and Ella, kept house for them. Three other brothers left the family farm for their livelihoods, one of them Will Tobin who ran a garage on Main Street.

The survey questionnaire was to be answered by all citizens over the age of 16. Interviewing Kentians and collating the information, a big job, came under Tobin's chairmanship and all results were filed at the Defense Council Headquarters located in Kent Town Hall, now the location of RTFacts opposite the Kent Art Association. The survey required drafting and organizing many volunteers.

Reading the results of the survey gives a wonderful sense of the flavor of a small rural farming community. One man, answering Question #14 "How many refugees you might accommodate" answered he could put up any number as long as they weren't relatives. A list was made by family name of the number of children under 16, 206 of them. At that time the Matson, family with 8 little ones had the most. The Sterrys had six as did the Spooners. The Tobin and Austin families each had five.

The survey was so thorough that it counted every farmer, cow, horse, chicken, daily production of milk and eggs, tractors, busses, trucks and cars, gas storage tanks, bicycles, boats, motorcycles, binoculars, tents, stretchers, extra sheets, mattresses and cots. It listed people who were trained in police work, mechanics, carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, driving, riding a horse, first aid and nursing, photography, short wave radio, shorthand, typing, signaling, sewing and so forth. People were asked to give their names and ages, one woman responding "just



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very Old.” Another question asked for anyone who could speak another language. Only one person listed German although there were several German-speaking residents at that time.

Over 200 people signed up to donate blood. It appeared that any survey answers involving firearms and who owned them were removed from the records after the War. There was a count of 83 shot-guns, 91 rifles and 21 revolvers, the owners’ names being deleted.

Forty-four people listed previous military training. None of the names appeared in the list of those 208 men and women who would serve in the WWII services. Most respondents had served during WW I, one in the Spanish-American War and one trained at military school. One woman had served in the Mechanized Transport Corps in London during WW I.

Kent was home to several summer camps, four for children and two for adults, all seasonal, of course. A survey was done of their facilities and each was generous in what they could offer when in session including vehicles, first aid and housing.

One of the committees that relied on some of the results of Paul Tobin’s survey was the Evacuation and Housing Committee which was under the chairmanship of Mrs. Frederick Bauer.

Bertha Bauer graduated from Connecticut Agricultural College, now UConn, and became the first woman extension service agent. Known for her green thumb, she was a longtime member of the Kent Garden Club which played an active part in Kent’s commitment to Victory Gardens and keeping the HomeFront ahead of food needs. The Club encouraged canning vegetables and fruits and loaned canning equipment to those who needed it.

Bertha had three family members serving during the War. Her husband, Frederick, former principal of Kent High School, left his teaching post at Housatonic Regional High School to enter WW II,

reactivating his commission as a captain from his service during WW I. He served from May 1942 until May 1944.

Bertha’s oldest son Frederick, Jr., enlisted in the Navy and served in the Pacific Theater as a lieutenant from July 1944 to August 1946. Bertha’s youngest son, Robert, also enlisted in the Navy, serving in the Pacific Theater as a lieutenant j.g. on a cruiser, the USS Cleveland during the Bikini Atoll Atomic Bomb Tests. Bob served from 1943 until going on inactive duty in September 1946.

Bertha’s Evacuation and Housing Committee was formed on the concern that German bombers could target industrial cities such as Waterbury and Bridgeport, thus creating a large number of evacuees that would head toward our rural hills of food, clothing and shelter. Threats of sabotage of defense factories were also considered a reason for citizens to flee and head this way.

The plan of the evacuation and Housing Committee mandated all evacuees were to report to the Town Hall to obtain an identification card to be presented at the churches where they would be fed. The Community House would shelter women and children and the Sports Building at Kent School would shelter men and older boys. The Committee had access to 367 beds or cots, 366 mattresses, 268 blankets, 16 cribs, 359 sheets and 19 pillows “generously promised by the people of Kent.” If evacuees required shelter of a long period the Committee found that individual homes would take in a total of 258 people.

The Canteen Committee, an adjunct of the Evacuation and Housing Committee, was in charge of meals for evacuees. Three restaurants – the Kent Inn, Aunt Ellen’s and the Pewter Mug – would prepare foods such as oatmeal, soup, sandwiches and coffee which would be served by women from the churches, involving about 25-30 volunteers.

*The last installment will appear in your next regular newsletter*

## Kent Historical Society

10 Maple Street, PO Box 651, Kent, CT 06757  
860-927-4587 kenthistorical@att.net  
www.kenthistoricalsociety.org

### Officers

Fran Johnson, President, Beth Dooley, Vice President  
Dick Lindsey, Treasurer

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**Executive Director** ~ Marge Smith  
**Assistant Director** ~ Lisby Ritchie

**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 Smith  
Sponsored by Moore & More Printing, Millerton, NY

## Kent Quiz

**What geographic feature once formed  
the western boundary of Kent?**

**Answer to the last quiz** (About the number of school districts in 1874): There were 14 separate districts. Because travel was so slow (either on foot or by horse), schools needed to be located closer to students' homes. This led to the creation of many small local school-houses, mostly just one room, scattered around the town. When automobiles came along, the need for these small district schools evaporated. The districts were consolidated and the present site of KCS developed for all.

## Kent Historical Society

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\_\_\_ Sponsor \$250 \_\_\_ Proprietor \$500 \_\_\_ Leadership \$1000 and up \_\_\_ Other \$ \_\_\_

*Please circle:* New Member      Renewal

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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 \_\_\_\_\_