



Kent Historical Society Newsletter

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The King of South Kent - Barnabus Hatch

by Marge Smith and Jeffrey Morgan



The magnificent kitchen at the Barnabus Hatch house - at over 9' it was the center of life in the house.

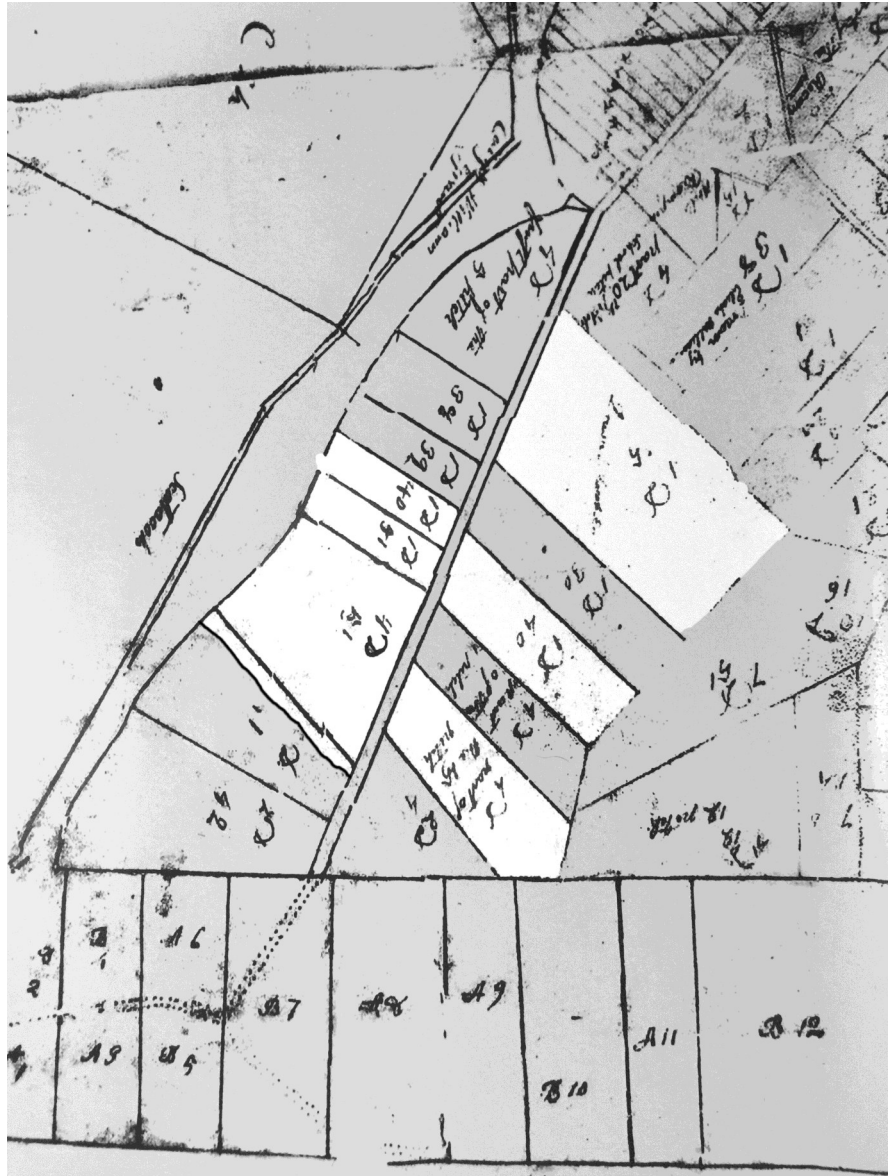
The need to straighten out the mysteries of early Kent land ownership has become somewhat of an addiction for the two of us. We have a large copy of the original division lots map hanging in the office, and it's way too easy to lose track of time as we ponder and puzzle what we're seeing. In mid-August, Jeff was drawn to two unusually large lots in the southern end of Division 1 in South Kent. We knew they'd been bought in 1740 by Barnabus Hatch, along with two other lots in the eastern part of town. But they seemed way out of proportion in size compared to most of the other lots in town. So we headed to our other hangout – the vault at the Town Hall where we could look at the deed descriptions of the lots to see if they provided any clues. They did!

The King ... con't

The lots were actually two parts of Lot 51 in the First Division. They were on either side of today's South Kent Road, though not right opposite each other. In checking the boundaries of both parts (always a good place to find clues), we discovered that Barnabus had also bought Lot 40, which was also in two pieces; one on either side of the road, this time opposite each other. The western section of Lot 40 abutted the section of lot 51 on that same side of South Kent Road. And, he had bought a 37' wide sliver of land on the other side of that section of Lot 51. There had to be a story here. Our heads were spinning!

But we were in luck this time – we didn't have to start from scratch. Several years ago, after South Kent School bought the old Arno farm at the north end of Hatch Pond, they hired Melanie Marks of Connecticut House Histories to research the ancient farmhouse, which we all knew had been Barnabus's large home. Melanie and her partner Morley Boyd spent months researching the Hatch family origins in America and tracing their migration from Dorchester, MA, to various other towns, finally arriving in Kent from Tolland, CT. While most of her research focused on all the families who had lived in the house up until the sale to the school, her time in the Kent Land Records has been invaluable to us. We could see all the land around the new town that Barnabus had bought and sold, and picking up where she left off, we began to see the empire he was building in South Kent. Still, why would he need SO much land?

He had the two big parts of Lot 51, maybe over 500 acres – that should have been plenty to start his new life with. But when we went



Map of Barnabus Hatch's holdings highlighted in white

back to staring at the map again, Jeff had an epiphany. When he explained it, a check of the Google satellite map seemed to confirm it. We zoomed in and out over the areas of Lot 51, and quickly decided that they were mostly water. They were Leonard Pond and

Hatch Pond – no wonder he needed more (dry) land! With that, the full story of Barnabus and his “mansion” became clear.



The Hatch House as it stands today, the largest first generation house surviving in Kent.

Melanie had proved that Barnabus first built a small log cabin farther down South Kent Road, and we actually had found the foundation in the woods, on what we now think was the eastern part of Lot 40. The 1798 CT Direct Tax form showed that the Hatches had two houses, one small and one large (with exactly the dimensions of the existing farmhouse). Melanie’s theory quite rationally is that Barnabus lived in the small house while he cut and prepared the timbers for the big house, which he would need since his family was rapidly growing. He probably lived here alone in the log cabin at first, while his second wife and his young children from his first marriage stayed behind in Tolland in 1740. But eventually they came to Kent and soon the family welcomed more babies to fill the big house that he had created.

Barnabus was wealthy. As a young man in Tolland, he had already amassed quite a for-

tune which he used to buy the various pieces of land in Kent before moving here. His property stretched for close to two miles

along South Kent Road. In fact, he had quite an empire in that part of town! By the time he began to build the big house, the King of South Kent was worth £1,225, which is about \$254,000 today. At one point he was the sixth wealthiest man in Kent, with the large farm on Hatch Pond as well as real estate investments elsewhere. His cousin Timothy was the wealthiest and most powerful, being a selectman, justice, town moderator and agent to the General Assembly.

Barnabus also was involved in town activities, being elected to the important post of Surveyor of Highways, and being appointed to negotiate issues that needed settling.

He died in 1781 and his will reveals an estate of a successful farmer and a good provider. He spelled out in great detail what he wanted his wife Phebe to have, which gives a very clear picture of what was going on at the farm. It included cows, sheep, flax, wool, wheat, Indian corn, bees, pork, beef, cider, and “all the apples she wants from the orchard.” He also left her a side saddle and bridal, and instructed his son Nathaniel, the executor of his estate, to maintain the best riding horse for her use. He described the areas of the house to which she was to have legal access: “the use and improvement of the south room in my house, and the chamber and garret over said room, and the cellar under said room, and one half of the kitchen and one half of the buttery for her use and improvement during her natural life.” He also left her the use of a small chamber that they had added to the south end of the main house. This description paints a clear picture



At left, the original wooden latch on the attic door in the Hatch house. Right, the reproduction latch made by Mark Peterson, for the attic door at Seven Heaths.

of the layout of her part of the house as it was then and still exists today.

The remainder of his estate went to Nathaniel, and it is Nathaniel's probate inventory that really shows what wealth and good taste the Hatches had. The house was furnished with six bedsteads and over 30 chairs, which is extraordinary. They had 30 sets of sheets and many other linens; lots of cups, plates and other cutlery, including silver spoons; 3 looking glasses; 7 brass kettles; a clock in case; 2 pairs of spectacles and many books – mostly church related; a chess set and much more. The inventory also included beehives, a case of gin bottles and 20 barrels of metheglin, which is a form of mead – an alcoholic drink made from fermented honey and spices, and in many cases, hops. There are still hops vines growing along the road just south of the driveway into the farmyard, and they probably are Hatch Hops!

If Barnabus could come back to his old home today, he might be pleased, though a bit puzzled by what is going on there. South Kent School is farming the property again, growing crops, raising goats and chickens for their milk and eggs. Many of the students are involved in the farm operation, but not in the way that Barnabus's children and grandchildren probably were, by necessity. Today's kids in general probably never think about where their food comes from, but at the Hatch farm, the SKS students learn the process from start to finish, so that when they sit down for a meal in the dining hall, they can proudly say that they raised the peas and carrots on the plates in front of them.



What a Sense of Community!



The lemonade stand and the community-minded children!

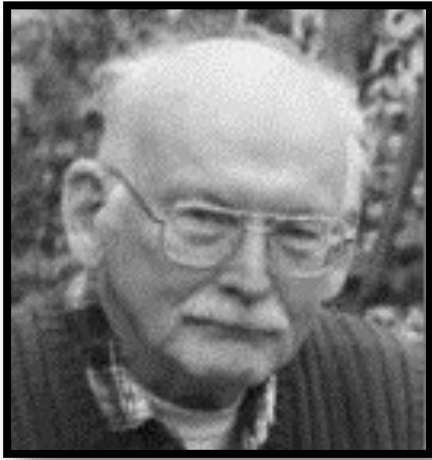
Herb Tully, his wife, Nancy and family (relatives of long time KHS president, Emily Hopson) were in town for a visit and came for a tour of Seven Hearths and the latest Portrait Exhibit. While giving the tour the children heard Jeffrey Morgan say that “there is a project we need to raise money for.” This gave the kids an idea and on the ride back to the house they suggested doing a lemonade stand and that this could be the first donation for the project! Then everyone jumped into action! Paul Neuman, who leases the Tully home, made the stand for them, a great surprise. All the grandkids painted it and did the lettering. Ellen at the *Heron Gallery* offered the use of her truck to bring the stand to town and to set it up by her shop. Frank, owner at *frank.food company* sent many customers their way! They all liked the thirst quenching lemonade and homemade chocolate chip cookies!

Best part, everyone commented that they liked supporting these two organizations; the money raised was split and donated to us here at the Kent Historical Society and the Kent Memorial Library! **Thank you Lucas, Martín, Isabel, Sophie, and Kayla for thinking of us and your support!**

We think they have started something because Ellen has offered that the stand can stay at the store and to be used by other nonprofits.

Remembering Kent Historical Society's President Michael Everett

by Marge Smith



Our president, Michael Everett, passed away on August 8th at his beloved and quirky home in Kent Hollow. He had been ill for many months, but continued his devotion to the KHS throughout his illness, even to the point of hosting board meetings at his house after it became too difficult for him to travel. Before those final months, however, Mike was a regular presence at our office on Studio Hill. He came to meet regularly with the staff, leading discussions ranging from what we needed to focus on that week, to long term planning and also to whatever else happened to be rolling around in his wide-ranging brain. I'd like to share with you a few of my own thoughts about this remarkable man.

I first became aware of Mike and his brain when I joined the Planning & Zoning Commission about 30 years ago. The Commission was reviewing the recently completed Town Plan created by the team of Michael Everett and Linda Cardini. I still have my copy, and it's very impressive! I hadn't given much thought to town planning before, and had no idea what a complex subject it is. Mike knew it inside out.

Our personal paths did not actually cross in

any significant way until Mike joined the Historical Society board in 2013. We were going through some staff and board changes at the time, and when Mike became president, he figured out that I had much of the long-term institutional history in my head, having been part of the KHS since the mid 90s. He wanted to learn about our past so that he could help plot the path forward. Little did I know how integral that thought process was to just about everything he tackled! It became clear as we began to meet at his house after work on a fairly regular basis, a routine that he suggested so that we could focus on his education away from the busyness of Tallman House.

Mike learned as much as he could about the KHS – our origins, our visions, our ups and our downs. What I learned is that the breadth and depth of Mike's interests knew no bounds. After talking about historical stuff for a while, our meetings inevitably veered off course to address some other event, issue or concept that had caught his attention over the years. There clearly were many! Plus – not only was he an architect, a teacher and a town planner – he also was a talented, passionate artist and much more. These surprises continued as our discussions evolved into the basis of a good friendship.

Planning to me implied focusing on the future, by definition. But – and here is the basis of that friendship, at least from my perspective Mike was an avid student of humanity, as am I. He understood the continuum of past, present and future. His passion was land use and the effect of the past and the present on the future of space and structure. Mine is people – why we do and feel what we do, how the past can inform our future, and what we as humans need in order to live fulfilling lives. I felt that Mike saw successful planning as the product of

knowledge of basic human needs and behavior. The historian and the planner were in sync. In an email to me after Mike passed, our former KHS director Brian Thomas summed up his planning process by saying “much of Mike’s efforts as a very active member of the Kent Street Scape Committee was devoted to the future of Kent as a community, as a physical space and as a living system.” I agree. He carefully considered each component on its own merit, but also understood instinctively how it might or might not be beneficial to the overall health of his beloved town and the individuals who live here. Or as P&Z Chair John Johnson put it, he always saw the big picture. He carried that over into his job as president of the Kent



Michael’s artwork for his essay, about the Howling Wilderness

Historical Society, constantly pondering the best way for the KHS to accomplish its mission and goals in a nuts and bolts way.

At the same time Mike was deeply involved in the Street Scape project, his polymathic brain was also working on a fascinating description about why the Founders of Kent in 1738 laid out the roads and home lots here the way they did, as opposed to the time-honored tradition used in earlier eastern Connecticut and Rhode Island towns. And he produced a series of dramatic prints in his studio to illustrate his concepts, with spooky owls and wild-eyed wolves peering out from the trees in the “hideous howling wilderness” as our northwest corner was described in the mid 18th century!

Mike was an active artist even during his busy academic career. What he says about his

prints, “my subject matter is largely based on local and visited landscapes and cityscapes.” One beautiful print that he gave to John Johnson shows the roofscape of ancient Prague. Others often show the rocks, ferns and streams that he saw on his own property in The Hollow. Still others are purely abstract – gently colored lines and angular shapes, clearly inspired by his architectural training. Similarly abstract wooden sculptures decorate the land around his house.

Mike’s contributions to the KHS were long range and short. He was an engaged president who interacted with staff and board members individually and together on a regular basis. He listened carefully and thought about what

he was hearing. He could see that we are in dire need of more space, so he spent a great deal of time designing an addition to Tallman House that includes exhibit and collections storage space as well as room for board and staff meetings. He told Jeff Morgan at one of his last visits that his regret was that he had never done a floor plan to go with the elevation sketches that we have here in the office. I’m sure we can figure it out. Mike also was busy writing a sequel to his original description about early Kent land use, hoping to bring the whole story forward to today. I have his draft, and promised him that I’d finish it for him.

Another project which we need to revive is a critically important survey of the historic houses in town. Mike put together a group a few years ago that met regularly in his overflowing studio to start the process of inventorying all the ancient houses in East Kent and Kent Hollow. Alice Hicks, Susi Williams, Jeff Morgan, Mike and I worked for many months and made some progress, but had to put the project on the shelf a few years ago due to time constraints. So I’d like to wrap up my thoughts about Mike to take this chance to ask for volunteers to get that project going again. If you would like to help, please let me know. Mike would be so happy!



Kent Historical Society

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**Please remember the Kent Historical Society
in your will or estate plan.
We are incredibly grateful for the visionary
donors who have remembered us.**



Our Mission:

We are a donor-supported nonprofit organization.
Our mission is to collect, preserve, interpret and present
the rich history of Kent as well as to provide educational
and research material to enrich the public understanding
of Kent's artistic and cultural heritage.

Kent Historical Society

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Hours at Tallman House at 10 Studio Hill Road
Tuesdays 9am - noon, Fridays 1 - 4pm
or by appointment

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