



# Kent Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 6, Number 3

Kent, Connecticut

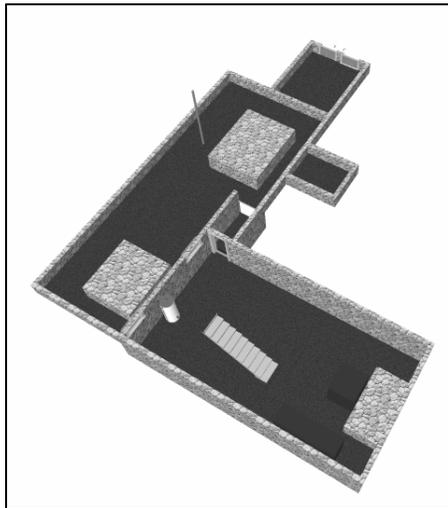
December 2005

## What's Wrong With the Swift House? Will an X-Ray Tell Us?

The venerable old Swift House, next to the Patco station, is ailing. The house is one of the oldest in downtown Kent, and is in desperate need of much repair. In an effort to assess the situation, the Board of Selectmen's Kent Building Preservation Committee has engaged the help of Hudson Valley Preservation Corp. HVP is in the process of doing what they call "An Old House X-Ray" to see

just what the condition of the structure really is. They are crawling through the house, inch by inch, taking note of every little detail. When they are done, they will present the results of the X-Ray to the public. This special program will be at the Swift House on Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, at 3PM (snow date February 12<sup>th</sup>). Admission is free, and you should be here! If you own an old house, your *really* should be here!!

Why is this important? For two reasons. First - the Swift House is owned by the Town of Kent, and is a real treasure. It has a long history, some of which just came to light during the X-Ray process, and is a good illustration of the history of the town itself. There is some money in the town coffers for the Swift House upkeep, but it is not enough. We all need to get together to see what we can do to save this



very special building. Emily Hopson rescued it once from the wrecking ball, and we must honor her commitment to it! Secondly - HVP will explain how the X-ray process can help you make the correct decisions with *your* old house. So often, the historic integrity of an antique house is destroyed in the process of updating and remodeling. HVP will

show you how you can make your old gem more comfortable without ruining the history of the house in the process. Kent is full of ancient old buildings, but unfortunately many of them are being destroyed. Often this destruction is not intentional, but rather is simply done through ignorance of proper alternatives. The Town of Kent, the Kent Historical Society and HVP would like to help put a stop to this trend. We can't do it without you! So, please mark your calendars for January 29<sup>th</sup>, and plan to meet us here!

What follows is an explanation of the X-ray process, written by Mason Lord, of Hudson Valley Preservation. If you have any questions, please feel free to call the Historical Society at 927-4587.

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# The Purpose of an Old House X-Ray

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You just bought an old home and want to make some improvements such as a new family room addition or renovated kitchen. You love the design, settled on the financial investment and signed an agreement with the building contractor. You and your family are raring to go. Everybody is excited because demolition is about to begin. Wait. Your excitement is tempered by the voices in the back of your head. These voices are your friends and neighbors telling their renovation stories/nightmares. The unexpected problems that nobody knew about, not even your trusted architect or builder. The honeymoon phase quickly ends and the finger pointing begins. Project is delayed, and who pays for the surprises? You of course!

Who likes surprises when dealing with their old home? Occasionally there are fun revelations; like the time capsule we once found that was left by the original builder in a column of an old home. Usually the "bolt from the blue" that people experience with old homes cost them money. And the money spent on these surprises is not for fun things like a new soaking bathtub or beautiful stone countertop. The items that catch you unaware on old houses usually have to do with rotten structure, mold issues, and mechanical failures. Why are these issues surprises? Why can't an experienced architect or builder discover these problems before they become a bombshell? It's because the problems are hidden. Hidden from even the most discerning eye. Just like a doctor can not get to the bottom of your aching back without some tests and probes, an old house requires deeper investigation than a cursory look to determine what is really going on.

The purpose of an old house "X-Ray" is to discover the problems at the earliest stage of a project, even before the project design begins. If the design team understands the home and its

problems, they can consider the impact of their design decisions on what the project will look like and how much it will cost. The homeowner can plan, and adjust their spending on the entire project. Maybe the addition becomes slightly smaller because \$ 5,000.00 must be spent to repair the rotten gable end framing. Remember, it is not a surprise if you can plan for it. This will keep the project on schedule, and the necessary resources available.

## Goals of an old House X-Ray

- **Finding Problems before construction.** Architects and builders experienced with old homes will have a sense if something is wrong. Stained exterior woodwork could point to a leaking roof. Spreading floor boards and cracking plaster could indicate structural movement. The idea of an old house X-ray is to go beyond the cursory look, and understand the problem completely. By making some inconspicuous probe holes in the interior and exterior finishes (repaired after the look see, of course), greater knowledge of the building can be gained. The objective is to know clearly what the problem is, how far it goes, what mechanical systems will be affected by its repair, and what will it cost. Additionally there may be an A, B and C way of making the repair with compromises and cost differentials for each option. The goal is to gain enough knowledge of the problem so that the whole team; homeowner, designer and builder are comfortable with the approach.
- **Good surprises.** The initial ideas for a project are altered when a fireplace and beehive oven is discovered in an area full of built-ins and closets.

Continued on Page 3

- Original molding from the eighteenth century is saved and incorporated into the design of a renovation because the person performing the X-Ray understood the value of this historic find.
- Windows and doors are reused and relocated because their historic value is now understood by the homeowner.

### More than I need or want to know

Not all discoveries found during an x-ray will need to be addressed. Not all areas of a home will need to be investigated during an X-ray. Maybe you only x-ray the areas of the home in critical condition or where new work will be constructed. The doctor does not x-ray your elbow when it is your knee that hurts, but he may look further into the large misshapen mole on your back even if you don't bring it up. If an addition is planned on the west side of your house, maybe you don't dig as deeply into the East side.

### Where the professional should look and, if needed, probe

- Areas the homeowner is worried about.
- Where the spiders, bats and rats live! Basements, crawlspaces and attics.
- Bouncing floors and shaking walls.
- Cracking plaster.
- Mechanical systems, electric, heating and cooling and plumbing.
- Wood framing that bends, bows or twists
- Discoloration on the interior or exterior of the house
- Roofs and Chimneys.

### Computer modeling of the existing conditions

A homeowner with experience in renovations appreciates the value a simple floor plan will provide to help understand the layout of rooms

in a house. Two dimensional room layout sheets will help some people begin to comprehend their home. Three dimensional computer aided design drawings will bring the comprehension to a new level. Today's software has been designed for better communication between designers, builders and homeowners can see a home from any perspective. Dollhouse view, with the roof off, glasshouse view looking through the walls, overlay view of the second floor on the first floor showing where walls from one floor are in relation to the next are only a few perspectives. Taken even further, computer modeling can locate the "bones" of a house in relationship to the mechanical systems.

## Summary

### Picture this

A homeowner lives in an old house and knows that there are problems. These problems may be design driven, or function driven. The homeowner will have ideas on correcting the problems, but not the expertise to design or implement the solutions. What should the homeowner do? One option would be to follow this 6 step process

- 1) The Homeowner, Designer and Design Builder **look** at the existing conditions.
- 2) The Design builder **Probes, Investigates** and **Measures**
- 3) The Designer **creates** a 3 dimensional computer model of the house.
- 4) Designer and Design Builder **present** the existing conditions to the homeowner.
- 5) The entire team **understands** the existing conditions and can now work together designing solutions.
- 6) Once the entire team is comfortable with the solutions, and the financial investment, the solutions can be **built**.

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# A Story Teller of Kent

Among the many interesting books we have for sale in our Gift Shop "Bookstore" is one entitled "Sherm Chase Remembers, a Kent Life 1900 to 1982". Published by the Kent Historical Society and the Chase Family in 1991, it is a wealth of memories from one of Kent's

most fascinating citizens. In the introduction to the book, Emily Hopson wrote *"Through his life at lumbering he knew every road, every nook and cranny of Kent and the surrounding area. He had interesting contacts with "grass roots" people everywhere. His inventive mind brought him interesting experiences. In his late years Sherm was confined to a wheel chair at his home in Flanders. Alert and widely concerned with many things, he taped sixteen roles of recollections of life in the Kent area. The record of those tapes presents a vivid picture of the life of a self-made man in the town in the 1900s with many glimpses of people and happenings. Sherm Chase died in 1982 - one of the last of a special breed of grass roots elf-reliant citizens."* We would like to share with you here a few excerpts from this delightful book:

"Macedonia. The start of this story is 1900 when we moved from Becket, Massachusetts to Kent. Father rented a freight car, put the cow in one end, the furniture in the other, and Joe and I rode in the car with them. We were about seven and nine years old. My oldest sister lived in Cornwall Hollow, or Cornwall Center, and Father and Mother with the three smaller children drove down with the horse and wagon and stayed there until the next day...My father had bought (rented) a house in Macedonia. Wheat, Ed and Al (the older



Sherm Chase's First Ford Truck

boys) were supposed to have the house open - and when the train came in, they were supposed to take the furniture over to it.

The train was due to be in Kent at five or six that night. We got to Kent about two o'clock in the morning. It was very cold. Joe and I walked

over to the house in Macedonia where we were going to live and there was nobody there. We went out to the barn and there was a lot of hay there. So we crawled into the hay and stayed there until morning. Along a little after daylight we went up to Grandpa Chase's where he lived up in the Kirk place in Bog Hollow. They all went down to the station and got the furniture out of the car and got everything going about the time Father and Mother came. We lived in Macedonia for many years....I got all my schooling at the Macedonia Schoolhouse. Miss Ramsey, who taught school, was an elderly maiden lady. In the morning, when the children first went into school, they used to sing some religious songs. The old lady was very enthused when she was doing that. She was up front one morning, singing - well, waving her hands. All at once her petticoat came down, and her underclothes with it. She was singing away and pretty soon she had to step back. She looked down and she couldn't step. She had an awful time gathering up those clothes and getting them up so she could get out into the other part of the school and hook them up....

"We didn't have much supervision when we were kids. We had chores to do and we did a lot of work around home all the time, but we could go about as we might the rest of the time. We

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had guns and fish poles and one thing and another. We were about nine, ten, maybe eleven. I remember one time we went up to a place where there was a fellow quite a little older than I was. He had an old muzzle-loading shot gun. I thought it would be a nice thing for me to have to shoot woodchucks and things like that. I finally worked it out to get the gun. The man showed me all about how to work it and shot it once for me. He would pour out a handful of powder and put it in the gun. Then he had a ramrod that fitted on the underside and you pulled it out and hammered down the powder and put it in the gun. Then you hammered in some wet or wadded paper and put in so many shot, hammered that in, put some paper over it and packed it tight. I took the gun and went home pretty proud that night. A couple of days later I went up the side hill, crept along the side wall and there was a woodchuck over the wall a ways. I had the old gun all loaded. I figured I needed about two handfuls of powder because the other fellow's hand was so much bigger than mine. I stuck the old gun over the wall and waited until the woodchuck sat up in his hole. I fired. Well, I don't know where the woodchuck went, but I went right over backwards and I guess the kick I got in my shoulder is why I have rheumatism there today....

"[Up in Bog Hollow] was the Schermerhorn place. Three old people lived there - two old ladies and their brother Egbert. The house was one of the nicest houses in town. They kept the neatest place. The women used to work outdoors and they'd cover themselves with flour sacks. They used to wash them nice and clean and use them as aprons. Egbert Schermerhorn was a tin peddler. He went all over the country as far as the Mississippi River. Then he'd come home and make up more tin. He had a long white beard and he had lost one arm. They kept a horse and an old fashioned buckboard with wooden wheels and axle. Egbert was quite a story teller. Boy, you could listen to him all day..."

*Sherm goes on to describe many more of his Macedonia neighbors, all of whom he regarded with great affection and humor. In 1908, the family moved up to Skiff Mountain, where his mother had bought her brother*

*Millard Soule's farm (now the home of Don and Leslie Connery). The adventures of the Chase family continued on the mountain, with Sherm becoming acquainted with the Pecks, Panes, Skiffs, Kinneys, Tobins and Pratts. He remembered the old North Kent Road, down which the Skiff Mountain dairy farmers took their milk to the creamery on the other side of the river (the road that the townspeople of Kent just voted not to abandon). There was also a mill and a store by the creamery.*

"When the North Kent Bridge went out, they [the Tobins] put a manure spreader on a cable and put their cans in that. It would be taken up to the creamery and they'd get their groceries and cans back across the river. If you had to go around by Kent, it was a long way by horse and wagon....

"There was a man named Hen Sterry used to work for different ones up on the mountain. This man Sterry lived down across from the Kent Furnace in Alder City. There were a number of houses and families lived there. Smallpox broke out and everyone became sick. I don't know whether Sterry had relatives there but it seems that he went down and took care of the people. In the end they all died of the disease. After that, I was told no one would live in those houses. Sterry was the only one who lived there....

"During the summer months we used to go down about twice a week to get the paper at the Flanders Store. Joe and I would go down the Choggam Road [Skiff Mountain Road] and cross the river at the "Riding Way". This crossed at the foot of the mountain to the tip of the island and up the bank by the Furnace. There was one place where the water was up to our shoulders. We'd take off our clothes and hold them across. Then we'd put them on and walk up to Gilbert's store and get groceries and papers. Then we'd do the same thing going back, carrying groceries too."

*This is only a small portion of the stories in the book. Sherm's memories continue, as he recounts a life full of activity. He eventually got married and had his own sawmill.*

Continued on Page 6

## Holiday Shopping at KHS

Have you ever thought of doing your Holiday shopping at the Kent Historical Society? No? Well, think again! We have a wonderful selection of small books about the history of Kent. The series is called "*Kent Tales*", and includes "*Barzillai Slosson's History of Kent & Other Bits of History*", "*Sherm Chase Remembers*", "*Iron Fever*", "*Rufus Fuller and the South Kent Ore Bed*" and "*The Pratts of Macedonia*". We also feature a memoir by George Laurence Nelson about his life at Seven Hearths, called "*New Life for Old Timber*". Another very special book, for the artist on your list, is Robert Austin's "*Artists of the Litchfield Hills*". This is a superbly written and richly illustrated history of the Art Colony that made Kent famous in the early days of the last century. In addition, we also offer Phil Camp's delightful series on farm life in Kent. For anyone who wants to get a real feel for Kent's rural flavor, these books are a must!

If books are not your thing, how about a pewter



medallion commemorating the beautiful old barns we have in Kent? The medallion can be used as a Christmas ornament, or hung in a window, or made into a necklace. This medallion is the first in what will be a series of annual pewter ornaments offered

by the Kent Historical Society. Each year we will feature a Kent scene or building. This year, since it is The Year of the Barn, we are portraying John Lindberg's barn on Bulls Bridge Road. The medallions are also for sale at the Town Clerk's office.

We have turned many of our old photos into magnets that would make great stocking stuffers or refrigerator magnets. For just a few pennies, you can give someone a piece of old Kent.

Finally, as a souvenir of our *Barn Again!* year, we still have the mini-bird house ornaments that sold like hot-cakes all summer. Come get one while supplies last.

### A Story Teller of Kent Continued from Page 5

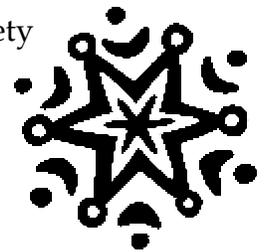
*In a freak accident, he cut his leg off, but it barely slowed him down. He made himself a peg leg, and kept on going. His rich imagination led him to invent many fascinating things which kept him occupied throughout his long, productive life. He built trademark log cabins, many of which may still be seen around town. His recollections truly illustrate the way it was in Kent for the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His talent as a story teller brings the 'good old days' of Kent back to life.*

**"Sherm Chase Remembers" is for sale, along with the rest of the Kent Tales and many other items, at the Swift House. As you plan your Christmas shopping, please stop by here. We have many gifts for the historians on your list!**

*We also are very concerned about the condition of these 16 roles of tape. If you have any advice about their preservation, or would like to make a donation towards the effort, please let us know!!!*

## The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Colonial Christmas Celebration

The Kent Historical Society invites you to join us for our Open House. Wine, cheese and savory goodies. Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the Swift House. No admission fee, but donations are welcome. All proceeds benefit the Kent Historical Society preservation efforts.



RSVP 860-927-4587 or  
kenthistoricalsociety@juno.com

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# Thank you to ALL our 2005 donors\*

Many non-profit organizations annually list the names of people who have supported the organizations during the year. We have decided to follow suit, because we are so grateful to each and every one of you. You deserve to be thanked publicly. We will not differentiate between the large and small donations. Every single penny is important to the Society. This has been the most successful year we have ever had, thanks to all of you. We have resumed our curatorial work on our clothing collection. We have properly sorted and sleeved our photograph and postcard collections. We are embarking on an in depth restoration project at Seven Hearths. We are filling the 2006 calendar with a number of interesting new programs and workshops. And last, but not least, we are adding new items to our Gift Shop. None of this would be possible without member donations. You are the foundation of our Society, and we thank you!

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*(If we have omitted your name,  
please let us know!)*

*\*Dues paid after October 2005  
will appear on next year's list.*

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## Help? We goofed!

Several years ago, the state of Connecticut published a "Historical and Architectural Survey of Kent, CT". The KHS received a copy, which Emily Hopson immediately began to critique. Sometime in 2002, I loaned our copy to someone, without making note of who it was. We would like to get it back. It is a thick, plastic spiral bound book with a yellow cover. Many of the pages have notes by Emily paper-clipped to them. Although the book is full of errors, it is still a valuable resource for us. I am hoping that the person to whom I lent it will remember that they have it and return it to us.

Thank you!

PS The Town also had a copy, which they lent out and would like to recover.....

# The Kent Historical Society BOOKSTORE

- 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 card of Seven Hearths . . . . . \$1 each
- Color Copy of 1874 Map of Kent . . . . . \$10 each



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



This medallion is the first in what will be an annual series of pewter ornaments offered for sale by the Kent Historical Society. Each year we will feature a Kent scene or building. This

year, since it is The Year of the Barn, we are portraying John Lindberg's barn on Bulls Bridge Road. These are beautiful creations, made by Woodbury Pewter, that can be used as pendants, necklaces, ornaments, window decorations, or any other decorative use you can think of. Available from the Kent Historical Society and the Town Clerk's office at the Kent Town Hall.

## Welcome New Members!

Anne H. Bass, Marcia Bosserman, Tom & Maureen Brady, Darlene Brady, Fran deVillafranca, George DeVilbiss, Francois & Dorli DeGregorio, George-Ann & Don Gowan, Mark & Jane Hanley, Edward & Meg Hoffman, Helen Nichols Jacobs, David & Carol Jalbert, Linda Kaplan, Charles Katzenstein, Bob & Carol Lenz, Ralph & Fran Matson, Denise Morocco, Betty Pacocha, John Polhemus, Walter & Ann Raynor, Elmer Trombly. We are happy to have you all on board!

# Kent Historical Society

PO Box 651, Kent, CT 06757

Est. 1954

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

This newsletter is compiled by Marge McAvoy,  
designed by Lynne Hicks, South Kent,  
and sponsored by Moore & More Printing, Millerton, NY

## Answers to 2 previous Kent Quizzes

**Vol 6, #2: Alder City.** Marcia Bosserman correctly identified the location of Alder City as being about ¼ mile from where River Road leaves Skiff Mountain Rd. Civil War vet John Rogers lived there, and is thought to be buried there. A new stone in his memory has recently been erected by anonymous donors. At one point, Alder City was home to 5 or 6 families, many of whom were colliers or who worked for the Kent Iron Furnace across the river. A smallpox epidemic helped to end the life of the little hamlet. The foundation holes of the hoses may be seen in the woods on the other side of the road.

**Vol 5, #4: The stone chimney.** Stan Jennings correctly identified the chimney standing in the field just north of Kent falls. It is all that is left of a roadside restaurant called "The Refectory". An old post card published by the State Park and Forest Commission shows a substantial one-storey rustic building, with a wide porch and several clusters of tables and chairs for outdoor dining. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rte 7 became known as a tourist road, and The Refectory was a popular wayside rest stop for weary travelers.

Next Quiz: Where, why and what is "Pigtail"?

# Kent Historical Society

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