



Kent Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 10, Number 2

Kent, Connecticut

August 2009

The *Real* Studio on Studio Hill Road

As most of you know, Seven Hearths, the former home of George Laurence Nelson, sits at the bottom of Studio Hill Road, facing Rte 7 in the Flanders section of Kent. But did you know that his big, bright studio was not the inspiration for the name of the road? That honor belongs to a little house farther up the hill at 38 Studio Hill Road, once the home of Nelson's colleague, Spencer Baird Nichols. Mr. Nichols' daughter, Helen Nichols Jacobs, told me that her parents gave the name to their road when they moved to Kent from Bronxville, NY, in 1922. That two widely acclaimed artists should live on the same short dead-end road is not surprising when you consider the cultural climate of Kent at the time – a time when palettes and paintbrushes could be found all over town (as indeed they still can).

Spencer Nichols and Laurence Nelson were among a talented group of artists who were migrating north from New York in the very early twentieth century, forming The Litchfield Hills Art Colony. Robert Nisbet was the first to land in Kent, arriving in 1910. He was followed by Willard Paddock in 1912, and then Laurence Nelson and his father, Carl Hirschberg, rented a house in Macedonia in 1915, following the death of Laurence's mother, Alice Kerr-Nelson Hirschberg the year before. The next decade saw the arrival in Kent of several more distinguished artists, including the uniquely talented Spencer



An illustration from
"The Happy Prince"

Baird Nichols.

The members of this Kent art colony soon realized that they should organize into a formal group, and thus the Kent Art Association was born. There were nine founders: Rex Brasher, Eliot Clark, Floyd Clymer, F. Luis Mora, George Laurence Nelson, Spencer Baird Nichols, Robert Nisbet, Willard Paddock and Frederick Waugh. They held their first Annual Show in October of 1923. The Kent Art Association continues to flourish, and Helen Nichols Jacobs, a very talented artist in her own right, is an active exhibiting member – a second generation member of the KAA!

According to Robert Michael Austin, author of *The Artists of the Litchfield Hills*, Spencer Nichols was one of the most original members of the Kent Art Colony, primarily in his use of color and design. Most of the members had gravitated to Kent because of their love of the natural beauty of the area, and Nichols was no exception. His luminescent landscapes and floral paintings are exquisite. But his preferred venue was as an illustrator of such classic children's books as *The Happy Prince* and *The Christmas Stories of Charles Dickens*. (See photo on page 5)

Spencer Nichols' 1950 obituary reveals a rich and varied life, with jobs including Head of Design at the Tiffany Studios, Instructor of Illustration at the Art Students League (at age 17!), work for the Geological Survey

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KHS NEWS

Another New Face at the Kent Historical Society



The Kent Historical Society is pleased to welcome **Nancy Hamilton** to our Board of Trustees. Nancy is a newcomer to the society, having joined last spring when she was asked to participate with other KHS members in a Non-profit Learning Program sponsored by the Northwest Corner Fund (see story below). Nancy, her husband Mark, with their two children, Benjamin and Nicole, moved to the area over 5 years ago from Wilton, CT, and rapidly became involved in Kent town activities (although they live a few feet over the Cornwall town line). Mark is the President of the Kent Lions Club, and Nancy is on the board of the Brasher/Northrop Museum. She has a degree in psychology, and spent her early professional years working in a clinic with drug addicted adolescents. She then returned to school for a degree in Fashion Merchandising and Marketing, acquiring skills which made her an attractive candidate for our board! Upon graduation, she worked at Hanover House catalogs, and managed the Ann Taylor store in Stamford. Nancy also taught swimming and was co-director of the YWCA Aquatic Department in Greenwich. All this before her children were born!

After raising Benjamin and Nicole, Nancy worked as the Administrator for the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and had a business called Nancy's Nest, in which she sewed soft furnishings for the trade. Just a few weeks ago, she took a leap of faith and opened a new store on the Green in Kent, called "Chanticleer", which offers yarn, craft kits, hand hooked rugs, home accessories and beautiful fabrics. She's on the right as you exit the Green. Stop in to say hello and ask her about upcoming events and classes.

Our Education Continues

In early 2009, the Kent Historical Society was invited to take part in the 5th year of The Nonprofit Learning Program of the Berkshire Taconic Foundation, sponsored by the Northwest Corner Fund. This was a big honor, and a great opportunity to learn how to become an even better nonprofit organization. We needed to put together a team of four people who would commit to six intensive learning sessions, which would then be followed by a day of learning for the whole board. Board members Beth Dooley and Jeff Morgan signed up, and we recruited new KHS member Nancy Hamilton to join Director Marge McAvoy to round out the team.

The classes were taught by Simone Joyaux, ACFRE, who is recognized internationally as one of the nonprofit sector's most inspirational and thoughtful leaders, and has a lifetime of experience in all aspects of the nonprofit world. We were honored to participate in the program with her. Simone's sense of humor got us through the rigorous training. She had warned us in the beginning that we would progress from being excited but suspicious, through feeling overwhelmed, panicked, whiny and resistant to change but would end up saying "Yes! We can do this." She was right. We have learned so much - things that we didn't know we didn't know, as one of the earlier participants put it. Details about governance and management, board responsibilities, fund development and fundraising, etc. There were three other northwest corner nonprofit groups attending our sessions, and we networked with them. We now join quite a large group of graduates from the area, including the Kent Children's Center. And, as graduates, we are eligible to apply for a \$2000 grant to hire a consultant to help us further our mission. This is a tremendous gift, and we are very grateful to the Northwest Corner Fund and the Berkshire Taconic Foundation. If you are involved with a local nonprofit organization, and would like more information, please contact Marge McAvoy.

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE BOSTON TEA PARTY AND AMENIA UNION?

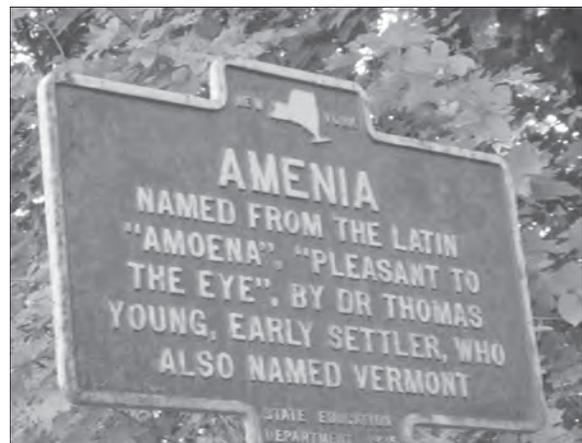
Come to our Annual Meeting in October to find out!

On October 18, at the Kent Town Hall, David Parker will illuminate the life of Ethan Allen's unsung sidekick and partner-in-rebellion - Dr. Thomas Young. Mr. Parker, who has been researching the life of Thomas Young for many years, will explain how the United States very well might not be the great free country we know today had it not been for the radical thoughts of Dr. Young.

As a very youthful physician, Thomas Young, aged 19, left his home on the western shores of the Hudson River and headed east to the little settlement on the northwest border of Kent. There he found lodging at the home of Captain Garret Winegar, a prominent German Palatine immigrant. Winegar was one of the leaders of a group of Palatines who settled in this area; his descendants moved to the Macedonia section of Kent where they were involved in the iron industry. Dr. Young learned to speak the Old Dutch language, and became physician to the Palatine community. In 1762, the erudite young doctor was asked to name the growing village in the Oblong on the New York side of the state line. He came up with the word Amenia, which he said meant "pleasing" in Latin. He lived in Amenia Union, just inside the Connecticut border, for 12 years, practicing medicine, reading voraciously and developing a rather radical and rebellious way of looking at the world.

1762 was a fateful year not only for the hamlet of Amenia but for the American colonies as well. 1762 was the year in which Thomas Young met Ethan Allen, and found in him a kindred spirit with a well developed sense of rebellion against all powers that be. This friendship would set Young on the trajectory that eventually took him from the Oblong Valley all the way to Boston and Philadelphia - the hot beds of the brewing American Revolution. Working with radicals such as Thomas Paine and supported by Samuel Adams and Benjamin Franklin, Dr. Young set about to ensure that the colonies could not only break away from England but also establish an entirely new order of governance in the fledgling new country.

To find out just how Thomas Young became such an integral part of the American revolutionary movement, and what his important role was in the Boston Tea Party, come to our annual meeting. The meeting will be held at **The Kent Town Hall** on Sunday, October 18, at 2:30 PM. After a short business meeting, in which we need your vote on a few issues, we will take a short break and settle in to hear about this fascinating man who, perhaps due to his wild nature, never received the historical credit that he surely deserved.



The House on Studio Hill, continued...

and the National Museum, as well as the achievement of numerous prestigious art awards. During the Great Depression he painted 33 murals for the WPA's Federal Art Project, including one in the lobby of Kent Center School (which unfortunately was lost when the school burned in 1956). Like many of his colleagues here, Nichols became a part of the fabric of the town. But his tie to Kent became unique and emotional in 1932. On November 28th of that year, the little house at the top of Studio Hill Road burned to the ground. The Nichols family lost *everything*, including a treasure trove of Spencer's artwork.

The paintings were irreplaceable, but the house was not! The town of Kent quickly rallied around the devastated family and worked a miracle. On December 1st the following letter was mailed out. *To all the friends of Mr. and Mrs. Spencer Nichols: The evening of November 28th, the studio dwelling of Spencer Nichols, A.N.A., was totally destroyed by fire, together with furniture, clothing and every household and personal belonging except the clothes they were wearing. All studio fixtures, tools and materials and a large accumulation of Mr. Nichols' paintings are completely lost and uninsured; nothing is left except the land which is free and clear. Mr. and Mrs. Nichols and their three children must start life afresh in the midst of this unprecedented depression. All of us who have been blessed and have not suffered dire calamity can each give something to help and it would be a happy Christmas spirit if enough money can be raised to repair this tragic loss. If everyone who receives this message will contribute as much as he or she can, this will be accomplished. An informal committee has appointed Mr. T. Dixon Walker, of the Kent School, Treasurer. Please send your gift of money to him as soon as possible. To all who may not be personal friends of the family but appreciate Mr. Nichol's outstanding work as a painter, or who may be touched by human sympathy, this letter is also addressed.* The letter was signed by the members of the committee: Jessie Rittenhouse Scollard, Mary Bacon, Marion E.

Britton, Frederick H. Sill, Howard Giddings, William Templeton, William C. Woods, Randolph P. Titus, Edward Casey, Peter Gawel, Otto Leonhardt, Len Howard, Henry H. Bartlett, H. Philip Staats, William D. Paddock, T. Dixon Walker and Allan McDowell.

The result of this impassioned plea was the building of a small cottage on the site of the old house. Carpenters, electricians, plumbers and painters all donated their time and what materials they had and quickly constructed a new home for the family. In the midst of The Great Depression, our little town pulled together to help one of their own. The house has its quirks, and is a curious mishmash of materials, but it is a very special house nonetheless. I ought to know – I live in that priceless little cottage. My father bought it from Mrs. Nichols not long after Spencer's death. Dad became friends with the Nichols' son and daughters, and loved the house even more as he learned the story of its creation from them. Helen Nichols Jacobs has visited what is now my home, given me photos of the original house and told me stories about watching her father paint in the original studio. Robert Austin recently gave me an original Spencer Baird Nichols water color, saying that the house needed to have a Nichols work in it. My mother, Maggie Smith, who also was a graduate of the Art Students League and an active member of the Kent Art Association, painted her own lovely watercolors in Mr. Nichol's studio. My home is filled with her work, as was his home filled with his – so in a sense, the real studio of Studio Hill is still alive!

Written by Marge Smith McAvoy, with thanks and appreciation to Helen Nichols Jacobs

Post Script: Although the mural at Kent Center School was part of the Federal Art Project, it was done as a grateful thanks to the town of Kent, which makes its own loss in the 1956 fire even more tragic. We do not have a photo of the mural in our archives, except for a small glimpse of it in a very ironic photo of a KCS

The House on Studio Hill, continued...

fire drill in the 1940s! If you know of anyone who has a picture of this very special work of art, please let us know.



The bottom of the mural is just barely visible in the original of this photo.



"GOD BLESS US EVERY ONE!" SAID TINY TIM"—Page 47

Illustration from Dicken's
A Christmas Carol

We Need YOU! **for a look back at** **The Great Depression**

Next summer, our exhibit at Seven Hearths will feature *Kent in the 1930s*. As we have done so many times before, we need your help to make it a very special presentation. Though we had the idea for this exhibit before our own economy sank to its present depths, we realize that now is the right time for such a retrospective. Maybe we can all pick up a few tips on how to cope today.

We know that the townspeople could rise to the occasion in the midst of economic disaster when needed, as they did when the Nichols family house burned down in 1932, but what we don't know enough about are the daily challenges, fears and rewards from those difficult years. Many of you survived that awful time, and you are the ones we'd love to hear from. Also those of you whose parents passed on their stories.

What did people in Kent do to make ends meet?

There weren't many street corners on which to sell apples, but there must have been other creative ways to make a few extra pennies.

What did people in Kent do for entertainment?

It was the era of the over-the-top musical motion pictures, and of course the zany Marx Brothers kept Americans laughing, but what was going on here? The Grange no doubt kept people busy. There must have been good radio shows to listen to, songs to sing, games to play...What else?

In addition to your memories, we'd love to borrow any keepsakes, photos, homemade clothes, games, etc. We hope to have a few programs to go along with the exhibit. Frank & Patrice Galterio of The Kent Film Festival have offered to screen some Marx Brothers movies. Do you have any other ideas?? Call us or stop by!!!! We'd love to chat about it with you.

KHS NEWS, continued...



The Veterans Memorial Committee thanks YOU!



In our last issue, we dedicated an entire page to a plea for donations for the veterans memorial. You responded well, and the fundraising goal has been met. Construction of the memorial has started on the east lawn of the Swift House. The dedication is scheduled for Veterans Day 2009. Our sincere thanks to those individuals, businesses, organizations and volunteers who helped to make this all possible.

Without your donations and support we never would have succeeded.

Fran Johnson, Chairman; Andy Ocif; Jack Osborne; Charlotte Lindsey; Jerry White and Fr. Thomas Berberich.

OUR BEHIND-THE-SCENES SUPPORTERS

There are a number of businesses and professional people in this town who give quietly and generously of their time and materials when the KHS reaches out to them for help. We thought you ought to know who they are.....

Bill Gawel - backhoe work at Seven Hearths
Gleason Electric - electrical work at 7H
Kent Greenhouse - topsoil for 7H gardens
Hudson Valley Preservation - 7H restoration
Joey Ramirez - 7H grounds work, and more
Clive Lodge and Skeeter - tree pruning at 7H
Bill Case - Skiff Mountain schoolhouse care
Billy Morrison - art framing
Bill & Marion Whynott - land records research
Town Clerk's Office - publicity & sales

**Thank you, each and everyone of you!
Without you, we would never have been able
to accomplish what we did this year.
You are true friends of the Kent Historical Society!**

A Significant Gift

The Kent Historical Society has *just* received a treasure trove of pictures and information about the Straight family of South Kent. Included in the gift are two stunning portraits of Henry Straight and his wife Roccelania Peet. They are the ancestors of our new friend and benefactor, Fran Beardsley of Hawaii. She also donated *labeled* photographs, daguerreotypes, engraved silverware and other items from the Straight/Peet families. We are so excited about this gift, and will tell you more about it in the next newsletter!!!

Can You Sew Well?

If so, we'd love to have your help. We've decided that we'd like to have a number of period costumes in which to dress up for occasions such as cemetery tours, the Sidewalk Festival Days, school-house programs, etc. Borrowing an idea from our sister society in Sharon, we'd like to gather a group of experienced sewers who could help us create a collection of 18th, 19th and 20th century outfits. We would meet perhaps once a month at Nancy Hamilton's shop, Chanticleer (see page 2), where we could spread out, sew and chat. This might be a good mid-winter project. It's strictly BYOSM, so if you have a machine and would like to help, please call us at 927-4587, or send us an email.

OUR VALUABLE VOLUNTEERS



Ky Anderson and her pet sheep Romeo at the Kent Hollow School House

On the third Friday of every month, precisely at 1PM, Ky Anderson cheerfully reports for duty at the Swift House. How she finds the time in her busy life at the Anderson Acres horse farm in Kent Hollow to come help us out is beyond comprehension, but she does it! And we love her! She's willing to do anything from vacuuming and dusting to poring carefully over old letters and documents in the archives. She's even apt to bring us some of her famous home baked goodies (Ky may have a few equals in the kitchen, but no superiors).

Born and raised in Kent Hollow along with her sisters Delight and Claire, Ky still lives in her childhood home, surrounded by her horses, carefully tended fields, old friends and the tranquility of The Hollow. Ky is a registered nurse, a skilled horsewoman, an enthusiastic friend and a wealth of knowledge about the history of Kent - especially Kent Hollow. She attended the last one room

schoolhouse in Kent, just down the road from her home, and delights in passing on her school day stories to the Kent Center School 2nd and 3rd graders when they come to us to learn about the old days in school. Her favorite story (and theirs) is about the time her lamb, Romeo, followed her to school on the same day that the District Supervisor came to inspect the school. Ky was terrified that the supervisor would be furious about the lamb's presence, but the inspector not only was enchanted, she also took this photo of Ky giving Romeo his lunch time bottle.

Ky gets quite absorbed by the material in our archives and often apologizes for not getting enough done because she gets sidetracked by one item after another. We hear her in the back room, chuckling or exclaiming, and she soon comes out, eyes twinkling, with another story to tell us! My response to her is always the same: "Volunteers are just that - *volunteers*. You're not getting paid by the hour, no one is cracking the whip on you. We want you to have fun here, and if that means getting lost in a story about a parade, an old teacher or a property boundary dispute, then go for it!!!!" Notwithstanding her protestations to the contrary, Ky gets a great deal done for the KHS, and we are very grateful! ***Thank you, Miss Anderson.***

STRONG BACKS NEEDED FOR A PROJECT AT SEVEN HEARTHS!

This summer we have taken advantage of the fact that the museum is not open to catch up on some big projects on the grounds around the house. Jeff Morgan can be found almost any week day hard at work inside the house, removing the paint from the walls and doors. But on Mondays he joins Marge McAvoy outside, where they are tackling years worth of overgrowth encroaching on the lawn and gardens. Not as much has been accomplished this summer as we would have liked, so we are looking for strong volunteers for just a few days to help us dig out large clumps of ferns, daylilies, phlox and other sturdy plants. One benefit for our garden helpers is that you can take home what you dig out if you would like to! Please call 927-4587 or stop by 7H on a Monday morning. We're usually (but not always) there....

JUST FOR FUN



Myra Hopson at Pond Mountain

JANUARY TIDBITS

- 1 - NEW YEAR'S DAY
- 18 - MARTIN LUTHER KING HOLIDAY

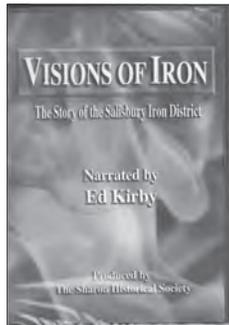
FROM THE 1/17/52 GTD

DID YOU KNOW? BETWEEN THE AGES OF 15 AND 30 IN KENT THERE ARE 231 PEOPLE. 16.7% OF THE POPULATION.

Lisby Ritchie has designed the first annual Kent Historical Society calendar which will be available for sale in December 2009 (or maybe before). Each month shows an appropriate photograph from our archives and lists current important dates, as well as major dates from the past. Make sure to include a calendar in your holiday gift planning. The cost will be \$10 and the calendar will be for sale at the KHS office, and possibly other locations around town. Stay tuned. All proceeds benefit the Kent Historical Society.

Programs! Programs! Get Your Programs Here!

The Kent Historical Society Program Committee has been reactivated and has a fantastic list of ideas for new programs to entertain you. Years ago, the KHS held monthly lecture or slide show programs, usually at the Swift House or Seven Hearths, but most of the older members of the community who supported the programs are sadly no longer with us, and the practice fell by the wayside. The Program Committee continued in fits and starts, most notably staging the great Civil War Encampment a few years ago, but the momentum waned. Recently, Assistant Director Lisby Ritchie began dreaming about possible new programs - in order to entice a few more of you through our doors. She called on the co-chairs of the slumbering Program Committee, Charlotte Lindsey and Bill Bachrach, and invited KHS President Fran Johnson to join them for an initial meeting. The ideas flew thick and fast, and they have booked their first speaker! Ed Kirby, renowned author and expert on the iron industry, will offer a screening of his recently released DVD docu-



mentary, *Visions of Iron*, to be followed by a question and answer period. *Visions of Iron*, which was produced last year by the Sharon Historical Society, gives an insightful look at the complexities of the iron industry which permeated the very fabric of life in Kent and a host of towns north of here. Some scenes in the movie were shot at Seven Hearths, the Sloane

Stanley Museum and the Casey barns behind the Fife 'n Drum. Local actors brought to life the daily routines and risks of the iron workers who populated so many of the towns in this area. Mr. Kirby has recently been given a prestigious Award of Merit by the CT League of History Organizations, recognizing his individual comprehensive life work in his study of the history and geology of the Salisbury Iron District. *Visions of Iron* was also given Awards of Merit on both the state and national levels! Stay tuned for details about where and when Ed Kirby's presentation will be.

Don't miss this presentation!!!!

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 (genealogy of Kent)
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!

Lloyd Albin
Susan Forbes & Bob Markowitz
Francoise Kelz
Charlotte Whitcomb Ramuten

We are happy to have you with us!

Fran Johnson, president of the Kent Historical Society and author of *A Register of Some of the Families That Have Lived in Kent, CT 1739-1999*, has been named **Kent Town Historian**. Fran's knowledge of Kent people, Kent houses and Kent history is extensive, with much of it stored right in her head. The rest is threatening to consume all available storage space in her house!

Fran answers most of the genealogical queries that come to the KHS, quite often establishing length correspondence with the researchers, and she rarely charges a penny for her work! The town is lucky to have her.

Congratulations, Fran!

Kent Historical Society

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Officers

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

Trustees

Fr. Tom Berberich, Beth Dooley, Charlotte Lindsey,
Jeffrey Morgan, Nancy Hamilton, Bruce Whipple, Susi Williams
Executive Director ~ Marge McAvoy
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 McAvoy.
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Kent Quiz

In what ancient Flanders building was an early exhibit of the Kent Art Association held?

Answer to the last quiz (about theft):

Well, it looks like few of you will come clean, despite the promise of anonymity! We know there are stories out there, like the child who snatched some gum from Winchester's and, after being caught blowing bubbles while in her bath, was forced by her mother to go back and pay for it. We also heard that the theft went both ways - you had to carefully count your change. But we heard good stories about the store as well, and want to hear more.....

Kent Historical Society

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

Please circle: New Member Renewal

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIETY ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

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