



# Kent Historical Society Newsletter

*Prepared with love for our wonderful donors*

Volume 19, Number 1

Kent, Connecticut

February 2018

## Kent, Our Town, Back Then

*by Brian Thomas*

We try to create exhibits and programs that strike a chord. Sometimes the audience is smaller than we had hoped. But other times we choose well and a numerous and enthusiastic public responds warmly. That's why we were so pleased by the turnout for our first Sunday Series event on January 21 – over 70 came. Curator Marge Smith spoke about “Kent, Our Town, Back Then” to kick off our theme for 2018.

That theme is “**A Sense of Community: Our Town in the Mid-20th Century.**” As Marge explained in her talk, we wanted to place a special focus on the generations that were around in the 1950s in Kent. After the “**Founders of Kent**” exhibit in 2017, as a contrast we are bringing our attention to the more recent past.

The local newspaper gave Marge the tools to create a window into the past. Marge explained how the Boy Scout's paper, *The Good Turn Daily*, morphed into the *Kent Good Times Dispatch*, preserving the same initials. The reason, according to one member of the audience, is that the Scouts objected to one of their publications advertising the local liquor store.

Using a selection of articles and ads from the GTD, Marge led the audience on a nostalgic trip through Kent in 1952. The articles were a medley of local events and gossip: who visited, who went into the hospital, who attended various social events, as well as marriages, births, and fallings



*John Casey describes his early days as a six-year-old reporter for the GTD. Photo by Lynn Mellis Worthington.*

out. The editor at that time, John Greene, was an ardent controversialist who “loved to stir things up,” according to Catherine Bachrach. Catherine also noted how vibrant the town’s political life was back then. Meetings of the Board of Finance are often sparsely attended today -- in the 1950s they drew a packed house and vigorous debate.

The audience responded with waves of memory and emotion. John Casey recalled his mortification as a six-year-old reporter dogged by his clumsiness handling a pencil, coming up with the ingenious method of asking his subjects to write the article for him – fake news at its most wily.

Marge zeroed in on specific ads and articles, including one gossipy piece announcing that Ky Anderson had turned down a role in the upcoming MGM film, *The Flaming Redhead*. Ky herself was in the office when we turned up that nugget, and when Marge asked if this was true, Ky gave us a pitying look and said, “Look at the date.” It was April 1.

The next Sunday Series event in “**A Sense of Community: Life in Kent’s Farms**” will take place March 18 at 2:00 in Town Hall. It will focus on Farming in Kent, and feature a roundtable with farmers from today and yesterday. Local agriculture in the 1950s was still going strong, but in the 1960s and ‘70s it fell into a decline. More recently it is experiencing a comeback, led by the Kent Land



*Bill and Catherine Bacharach in the audience at “Kent, Our Town, Back Then.” Photo by Brian Thomas.*

Trust Farm under the stewardship of Megan Haney. If you have farming memories and would like to participate, please get in touch with us as soon as you can -- we’d love to have you join us. Future topics will include the Village, and Newcomers, in which residents who weren’t born here will reflect on what brought them to Kent. We hope we can continue the emotional high of



*Photo by Lynn Mellis Worthington.*

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# In Love and War: The Stockdales in Kent

*By Brian Thomas*



*Left, a formal portrait of James Stockdale. Right: the A-4 Skyhawk aircraft, one of which Stockdale flew when he was shot down. US Navy file photos.*

Some historically significant lives pass through Kent at unexpected angles. You can see one sign of this truth at the South Kent School's hockey rink, the Admiral James & Sybil Stockdale Arena. The Stockdale's sons, Sidney, Stanford and Taylor, attended the school in the 1970s. The connection with the family has endured since Sid is now on the school's Board of Trustees. But who were the Stockdales?

James Stockdale entered the public eye under harrowing circumstances. In 1965, anti-aircraft fire brought down his plane, and he became the highest-ranking prisoner of war held by the Viet Cong.

Sybil Stockdale in many ways matched her husband's achievements. In 1966, she co-founded the National League of Families of POWs and MIAs. This organization pioneered a model that has been copied many times since, in which a group of stakeholders bands together to pressure leaders and legislators. At a time when many in the government and the public just wanted the war to go away, she publicized the horrible

treatment of the POWs and demanded that the President and Congress to take action.

His imprisonment lasted from 1965 to 1973. His jailers tortured him and denied medical treatment for the leg he broke in his crash landing. They rebroke that leg repeatedly. He spent four of those years in solitary confinement in the Hanoi Hilton. Sybil worked hard for his release on the outside. On the inside, how did he withstand this nightmare? Through philosophy.

In addition to his bravery, James Stockdale studied the Stoic philosophers, especially Epictetus, a former slave who lived in Greece and Rome in the first century of the common era. Of his philosophical model, Stockdale said, "He's been in combat with me, leg irons with me, spent month-long stretches in blindfolds with me, has been in the ropes with me, has taught me that my true business is maintaining control over my moral purpose, in fact that my moral purpose is who I am. He taught me that I am

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totally responsible for everything I do and say; and that it is I who decides on and controls my own destruction and own deliverance. Not even God will intercede if He sees me throwing my life away. He wants me to be autonomous. He put me in charge of me."

The British philosopher Richard Sorabji, in a recent article about his own encounter with Stockdale and his similarities to Mohandas K. Gandhi, said of Stockdale, "... during the Vietnam War, he welcomed and withstood 19 occasions of physical torture. ... Stockdale was conducting what Gandhi would have called an experiment. The deliberate provoking of punishment by small infractions of the rules in captivity restored his self-esteem, and that of other captives, whom he similarly persuaded, which left them all free to refuse the captors' limited objective of securing televised denunciations of the war."

The torture lasted for years. In the summer of 1969, he was locked in leg irons in a bath stall and routinely tormented and beaten. To disrupt plans to parade him in public for propaganda, Stockdale cut his scalp with a razor, so that his disfigurement thwarted his captors. They stuck a hat on him to cover the wound. He countered by beating himself with a stool until his face wounds made him still more untelevisable.

Crippled by his injuries, Stockdale could not stand upright or walk unassisted upon his return to the United States. He could no longer pilot a plane. As a gesture of respect, the Navy kept him on active duty, promoting him eventually to vice admiral. He



capped his career by serving as the President of the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island from 1977 until his retirement in 1979. He taught a course titled "Foundations of Moral Obligations" about stoicism and his lessons of survival and strength. After his retirement he became a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institute at Stanford,



*Above, a portrait of Sybil Stockdale by Mindabond, from Wikimedia Commons, under the under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license. Left: Admiral Stockdale's Medal of Honor on Display at his funeral, from a US Navy photo. He was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1976. A collection of Sttockdale's essays, *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*, is still in print.*

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where he continued writing and lecturing about stoicism and his life's experiences.

James and Sybil co-authored book, *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice During the Vietnam War*, penning alternating chapters. The combination of their two voices is sweet and moving, and they tell their story with humor and verve. You glimpse Sybil's steely side as she uncorks her wrath on Alexander Haig after Haig's boss, Kent resident Henry Kissinger, missed another meeting with her (Kissinger missed the meetings in part because he was negotiating extensively with the North Vietnamese to end the war--and he did meet with Sybil's group a few days later). It's easier to act with detachment worthy of the Stoics with a formidable warrior on your side.

Stockdale's views often aren't what one expects from a seasoned soldier: He said, "To take a nation to war on the basis of any provocation that bears the smell

of fraud is to risk losing national leadership's commitment ....a guilty conscience in a top leader can become the Achilles heel of a whole country..."

After such a distinguished career, Stockdale's final chapter took an unhappy turn. Ross Perot asked him to serve as his Vice-Presidential running mate in the 1992 campaign. Stockdale felt obligated to help Perot since the billionaire had worked hard for his release. The vice presidential debates resulted in mortification. Comedians mocked Stockdale's speaking style and delivery, and unfortunately this hardened into a lasting public impression. The ticket lost, and Stockdale's reputation suffered, obscuring just how impressive the man was.

One imagines that he took this adverse turn stoically. After all, he'd seen far worse.

## Fixing the Roof, Fixing a Legacy

Maintaining old houses is a labor of love, but it is costly. The roof, the furnace, the windows.... something always needs attention. .

We know this first-hand from our work in caring for our own house museum, Seven Hearths.

In fact, it is all too easy to outstrip our operating budget. Yet at the Kent Historical Society, caring for our house museum and collection is just one part of what we do. We have programs, we provide services to genealogists and other researchers.... The list goes on.

We also have offices, which are more prosaic and lack the romance of a Colonial-era building, but we need to keep the physical plant maintained so that we can carry on our mission of celebrating Kent's past.

Bequests from donors like you are a great way of helping us fill in the financial gaps, so that we can continue to play a vital role in paying proper attention to Kent's past. By including us in your will or living trust, you are ensuring that we can continue to celebrate and preserve Kent for years to come.

Your gift also entitles your estate to an unlimited federal estate tax charitable deduction. You can use a wide variety of assets to fund a bequest, including cash, appreciated securities, real estate, tangible personal property, securities, and even closely held stock.

Please give us a call at 860-927-4587 to discuss it with us.

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With great appreciation, we list the following businesses, organizations, foundations, and individuals that provided funding for the Kent Historical Society's programs and events, or awarded grants to KHS toward the restoration of Seven Hearths in 2017.

*Gold Benefactors* (designated gifts of \$1,000 and above)

Ky Anderson  
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**Our heartfelt thanks to the following donors, including all those who gave to the Kent Historical Society's Annual Fund, to our Spring gala Seven Hearths in Bloom, and to our Holiday House Tour. These donors gave in the calendar year 2017, so if you gave in 2016 or 2018, your name will not be here.**

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We received so much more than just donations in 2017. Many businesses, individuals, and organizations stepped forward to give us something or lend us a hand, volunteering time, effort, and creativity. We list them here, with warm thanks...

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# Kent Historical Society

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## Cost Increases

It's with some sadness that, in our upcoming membership mailing, we are raising the cost of our Individual membership from \$20 to \$35, and our Family membership from \$35 to \$50.

Our fiscal situation has forced us to tighten our belts, and to raise money wherever we can. Our membership have been at the same price for some time.

It's not a step we take lightly. We know that for many of you an increase like that might be a hardship. If so, let us know — we want to keep you with us, and we'll come to an accommodation.

### **Kent Historical Society**

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