



Kent Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 20, Number 1

Kent, Connecticut

February 2019

There goes the neighborhood, the three Jonathans...

by Marge Smith and Jeffrey Morgan

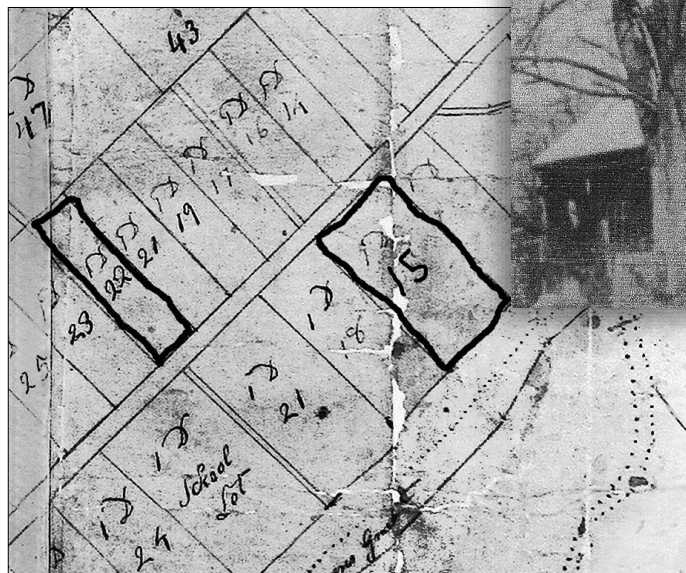
In the last installment of rewriting the history of the Flanders neighborhood, we proved that Jonathan Morgan, Jr., never lived in the house that has long been known as “Morgan’s Tavern” at 115 Kent Cornwall Road. There was no dwelling house there when he sold the property (Lot 15 in Division 1) to Gershom Comstock in 1751, nor did a Morgan ever hold a tavern license. There was a sawmill as well as a tannery and a grist mill, which contributed to the higher sale price of £1200.

While trying to figure out where he did live, we decided that we were seeing evidence of three Jonathan Morgans in Kent, rather than the two (“Senior” and “Junior”) that had previously been noted in written histories of Kent. There are many, many deeds in the land records involving a Jonathan Morgan, Jr. Jeff quickly realized that the man who has been traditionally referred to as “Junior” would have been a very young child when he first showed up in the records in the 1740s. His birth date was a very recent May 20, 1737! Once we decided that the use of Sr. and Jr. was what was throwing us off, and that we really were dealing with three generations of Jonathans, we decided to designate them as J1, J2 and J3 instead.

The original Jonathan Morgan Sr. (1680-1766) became J1; his son, the original Jonathan Morgan Jr. (1710-1762) became J2; and the grandson also known later as Jonathan Morgan



*Photo above:
The house at 115 Kent Cornwall Rd in the early 1900s,*



*Map left:
The map of first divisions, with Lots 15 and 22 outlined.
For reference, Seven Hearths sits on what was Lot 16.*

There goes the neighborhood...

Jr. (1737 - ?) became J3. J1 apparently decided that the frontier town of Kent wasn't suitable for an elderly couple, and he moved with his wife Judah to New Fairfield in 1742. Jeff found evidence of that in the well-known diary of New London's Joshua Hempstead, who handled the sale of New Fairfield

property to Jonathan Morgan that year. In 1744, J1 sold everything he owned in Kent to J2 (noted as "Jr.") for £800.

At some point, with Grandpa removing to New Fairfield and the youngest Jonathan reaching his majority, "Jr." became "Sr.", and the grandchild became the new "Jr." But we're sticking with calling them J1, J2 and J3. We still have questions about the three Morgans, and so are avoiding the suffixes altogether. The story is complicated enough without having to stop and figure out which Jonathan Morgan Jr. was which.

J1 had been born in New London, and was one of the original Proprietors of Kent, buying Lot 19 in the 2nd Division up between the Spectacle Lakes. The descriptions of the first highways in Kent note that one went "through Jonathan Morgan's Homelot," and is probably today's Davis Road. The use of the term Homelot implied that the property owner lived there. Jeff says that the house has at least two features that are very typical of New London houses of the time. The framing scheme and the early use of the oven beside the fireplace, rather than in its rear

wall, make Jeff confident that New Londoner J1 built the house. He should know - he owns that same house today! J2, also an original Proprietor, had purchased Lot 22 in the 1st Division, between Halls Lane and Muller Road, and by 1740 was living at what's now the north side of Muller

Road at Rte 7. When he sold it in 1751 to Nathaniel Berry, it was a substantial home worth £1300! He and his wife Zipporah Strickland had at least 12 children, born between 1733 and 1755, so the size is not surprising. Sadly, it's no longer there. We wish we knew what happened to it!

Having sold his two lots in Flanders in 1751, J2 moved up Seger Mountain to East Kent, where he amassed a 200 acre holding. This included 2nd Division Lots 19 (originally drawn by his father, J1) and 23 (for which he had traded with Gershom Comstock). The move was likely precipitated by J2's desire to join in the rush of people investing in the town's first iron industry at what's now Beeman Pond at the East Kent Hamlet Nature Preserve. He bought his first share of the business in 1754. Tracing the various owners and investors of the forge is horrendously complicated, but suffice it to say that by the time J2 died in 1762/63, the Morgan family were major shareholders in the forge that has retained their name down to the present. Our very recent

surprising discovery of a deed that mentions the existence of two earlier forges will have to wait for a future article!

Just to complicate the forge narrative, the name "Morgan's Forge" was also given to a forge on the outlet of *South* Spectacle Lake that had been run by J2's son Samuel. Samuel by that time was living in his grandfather's house on Lot 19. He was

Diary of Joshua Hempstead 1742

March Friday 5: Rain & Some Snow & hail all Day. I was at home writing ye Bolles & Deeds to Jonathan Morgan of Sam Bolles House & Land at New Fairfield. Night I was at Lecture at Mistress Pickets. Mr Adams Repeated a Sermon. Saturday 6: Fair & windy. I was up to Thomas Turners to finish & Deeds for Joseph Bolles his Brothers & Sisters for 1100 pounds. Sell their Brother Samuel's house & Land at New Fairfield to Jonathan Morgan & I. Reed. My pay for my Service was 39 shillings.

Above: Transcription of the entry in Joshua Hempstead's diary.

the three Jonathans... continued



Above: The house of Jonathan 1, on Lot 19 in 2nd division, now owned by Jeff Morgan

probably the one who built the leanto (atypically on the front of the house, seen in photo). Jeff found an early clapboard with Samuel Morgan's initials on the back. Does it help to tell you that we are still having trouble keeping this all straight? The house on 2nd Division, Lot 23 was built after 1751, so J2 didn't move his large family of nine children there right away. Where did they go? His father's house on Lot 19 was tiny, so where did all those kids sleep, if he even did move his family into it? Three or four to a bed? Stuffed in the garret? Farmed out to neighbors? By 1755 three more babes had arrived! We're going to investigate another house that appears on Kenico Road on the 1874 map as belonging to Thomas Mansfield Morgan, great grandson of J2. We don't know

when that house was built, and it no longer exists, so we can't inspect it for clues. Even Kenico Road has been considerably changed, so the site may even be hard to find. A search for J2's probate has been unsuccessful. We just hope the deeds themselves will give us some answers.

But it's fun to imagine the maturing of this important Kent family. The children and grandchildren married into many other Kent families, some with still familiar names: Rowley, Comstock, Campbell, Gorham, Bissell and more. Meanwhile, our attention has turned to yet another Flanders challenge – untangling the whereabouts of various Pratts and Mills, the misattribution of the “Inn at Kent Falls” to Samuel Lewis and the tangled web of Lots 11 and 12! Stay tuned!

Curator's Corner

by Marge Smith

As this newsletter was being assembled, we learned that the great team from Belfor is finally going to begin the repairs to our basement storage area. Very exciting, and just in the nick of time! Our Collections Committee (Patti Case, Beth Dooley, Charlotte Lindsey and Nancy Schaefer) has been valiantly meeting almost every week in the workspace which is jampacked with boxes and piles of papers that are very much in our way. As Curator of Collections, I've been near the end of my rope with the cramped and cluttered space, and want to thank them for their patience and unflagging sense of humor!



Above: Sketches for a larger mural, one of many Nelson did for the WPA Arts Project.

The good news is that this event has given us a chance to assess the KHS collection, and poke into boxes that haven't seen daylight in decades. One discovery is a set of large portfolios full of beautiful watercolors and sketches by George Laurence Nelson. We'd seen a few before, but others are stunning surprises. It has been a while since we've had any focus on Nelson and his work, so our plan is to display many of the rediscovered pieces in an exhibit this summer to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the purchase of his beloved Seven Hearths. We hope you all will make time to come and see his fantastic work and re-visit his lovely home.

The other "exhibit" at the museum will be the ongoing restoration of the house itself. People have been donating pelts for the fur trading post, which is definitely beginning to look like a busy enterprise. The general store on the first floor that we created for the Founders exhibit is still in place, so we'll be able to really bring to life the early American commercial north end of our beloved Beebe house. Meanwhile, conservator Jeff Morgan has been hard at work removing more and more of the 20th century latex paint from the kitchen and south parlor, exposing the lovely soft original woodwork. He'll eventually choose an appropriate paint color, based on his discovery of the many layers that have been used over the centuries, but right now it's a chance to

see the place as it might have looked in its very early days.

By the way, we will once again be needing docent help in keeping the museum open for visitors on the weekends. Many of you have been steadfast volunteers in that capacity in the past, and we hope to see you again. For those of you who haven't tried it yet, please give it some thought! We can't share Seven Hearths without your help! It's too special a treasure to keep it closed for two summers in a row, so let us know if you can take a shift or two in July and August. Thank you.

Thank you in so many ways

For Our Collections

In addition to the donation of the Slosson family letters that began the toppling of the dominoes in Flanders, we received many other great donations to our historical collection in 2018. They ranged from a small WWII Office of Price Administration pin from Jerry Tobin (easily stored) to several pieces of furniture (not so easily stored) and every size and shape in between. In chronological order, our donors are Sue North, John Barton, Elizabeth Roberts, Andy Olson, Christine Utsogn, Betty Lawrence, Lydia Jones, Ed Travis, Barbie Howland, Bill Tobin's estate, Helen L. Burger, Sabine Gibson, Kent Memorial Library, Mimi Huntley, Sandy Marchetti, Jerry Tobin, Mike Everett and Jackie Markham. Thank you SO much! While we can't accept absolutely everything, because of tight storage space, we really appreciate being asked. The old mantra "when in doubt, don't throw it out - call us" still holds. Something that you may not think is valuable can actually be a great history resource for us.

To Our Volunteers

As we've said many times before, we are nothing without our volunteers! 2018 was a quieter year than others, but we still have many loyal people to thank. Austi Brown, our Buildings Steward; Christina Purcell, who has spent several years entering collections items into our museum database; Kevin Capobianco and Joey Ramirez, who come at the drop of a hat to move things for us; Mark Peterson, who donates much of his regular fee as he works his magic on Seven Hearths; Paul Tines, who guides our Fund Development Committee; our Collections Committee, mentioned in a separate article; our Board of Trustees, and the one-and-only Ky Anderson, who comes faithfully twice a week to work with our newspaper archives. You keep us going!

Some of the collections at the Kent Historical Society office.



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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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