



Kent Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 21, Number 1

Kent, Connecticut

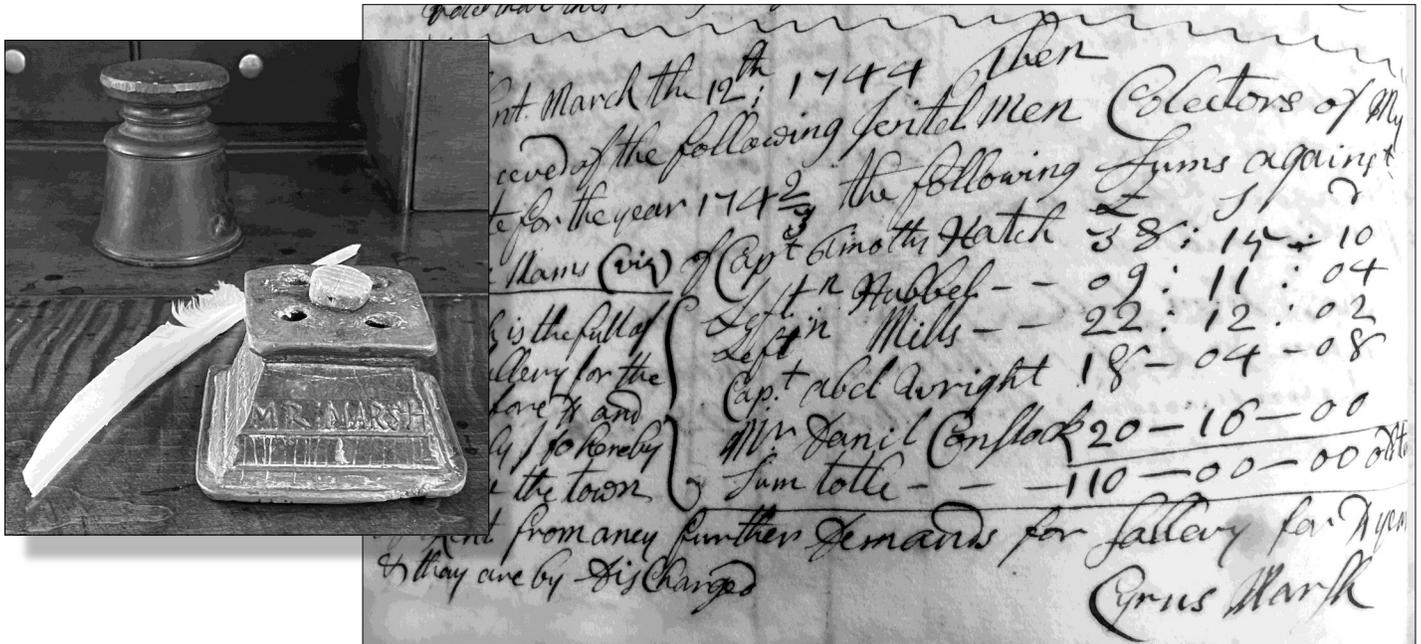
February 2020

Scandal, Outrage, Removal, Return

by Marge Smith, Jeffrey Morgan and Susan Shepard

What may have started as talk in the taverns wound up with a prominent leader of the early Kent community being dismissed and suspended for “immoral behavior.” On December 3, 1755, the Rev. Cyrus Marsh faced his flock at the First Ecclesiastical Society (Congregational Church) and listened to several accusations of adultery. Four months earlier, he had married his second wife Abigail Marvin, who was already carrying his child. The new year did not improve Rev. Marsh’s lot in life. His wife and baby died on March 15, and at some point that same year, he was dismissed from his position as Pastor of the church where he had served since 1741. He took his four surviving children from his first marriage - Sarah, Rebecca, Ann and William - and left town.

Marsh’s fall from grace was a sad chapter in the life of a promising young preacher who had come to Kent fresh out of Yale. Every fledgling town on the Connecticut frontier needed a minister as one of its town leaders. The early meeting minutes of Kent reflect a struggle to find someone willing to move out into the “howling wilderness” of the largely unsettled northwest corner. Their first attempt failed, in spite of several offers of an increasingly high salary to a Rev. Robert Silliman, a family man who felt that it would be better to raise his brood elsewhere. So the search committee consisting of town leaders John Mills, Timothy Hatch and “Ensine” Berry, turned to the 23 year old Marsh who had just married Margaret Kinsman of Plainfield. Rev. Marsh at first also refused



Cyrus Marsh's Inkwell and the receipt confirming his salary for the year 1742

Scandal, Outrage, Removal, Return (con't)

their offer in January, 1741. In February, they sent a new committee – Ebenezer Barnum, Samuel Lewis and Abel Wright – to ask him to reconsider. He finally did accept in April.

With an agreed-upon salary of £260 for the first year, as well as about 500 acres of land, Margaret and Cyrus came to Kent. It was the time of the “Great Awakening” when the Church was in the throes of a deep divide between the conservative, strict “Old Lights” and the

more open-minded “New Lights.” Timothy Hatch was a staunch Old Light and quickly took the malleable young man under his wing. Marsh began to rise in the ranks of the conservative church, and by 1742, he had caught the eye of the notable Rev. Daniel Wadsworth, pastor of the First Church of Hartford. Wadsworth kept a diary about his work, and Marsh appears in it on several occasions. On February 5, 1745, Wadsworth recorded that he and Marsh were signers of a strong testimony against the fiery Great Awakening preacher from England, the Rev George Whitefield. The document condemned his views, his preaching, and planned to keep him out of Connecticut churches.

On the local level, Marsh, Hatch, Mills and the other elder conservative Proprietors were alarmed by the arrival in Kent of Moravian Missionaries who were working to convert the Scaghticokes to Christianity on the other side of the river. The New Light preachers had the same open-minded attitude towards worship as the Moravians did, so the Old Lights had their hands full. Marsh kept tight control over his congregation. One of his prime targets was the same Abel Wright who had been on the



A dejected Cyrus Marsh in the “Howling Wilderness”

committee that hired him. On April 4, 1743, Wright and his New Light neighbors were called in front of the Church Meeting and accused of “unchristian disrespect” to Christ, and had their gospel privileges suspended. Wright left town in 1745.

At some point, Cyrus and Margaret chose a site on which to build a house and raise their growing family. The earlier portion of the house at the bottom of Muller

Road is part of the Marshes’ original home, long thought to have been built by the Comstock family. Their choice of this location gives credence to our growing theory that the Proprietors had originally planned to establish the town up on Good Hill. But that’s a story for another newsletter! Their eldest daughter Sarah Marsh Wheeler eventually inherited the house. She sold it to Eliphalet Comstock who gave it to his son Peter, who probably built the large Federal section on the north side. Margaret gave birth to nine children there before dying in childbirth on April 4, 1755. They had already lost five other children either at birth or as young children. A year later, his second wife Abigail died giving birth to a stillborn child. A year after that, he married Susannah Dow in Plainfield, CT, where he was living.

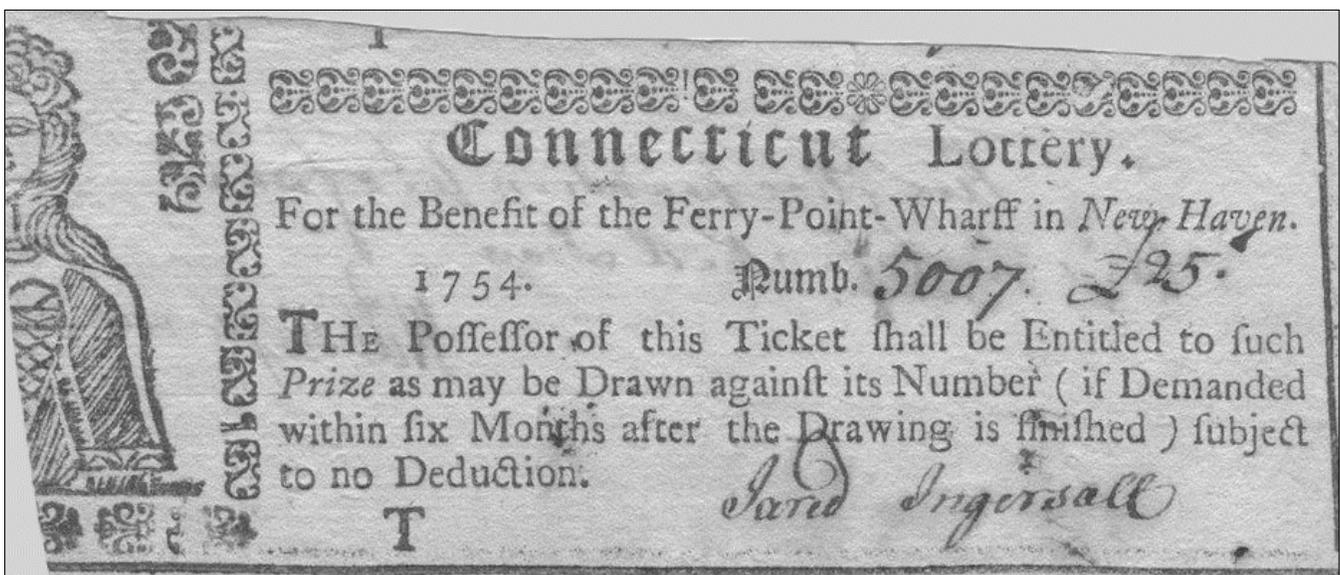
In the KHS archives is a curious deed showing the 1758 transfer of land by Cyrus Marsh of Plainfield to the Rev. Mr. Joel Bordwell of Kent. Bordwell was Marsh’s successor as pastor of the church. The deed has a very lengthy declaration of “the Love and Good Will which I do bear unto the people of the First Society in Kent and in con-

sideration of the Desire I have and do always exercise that the Gospel may be maintained and supported amongst them and in consideration of the Love and Good Will which I have an maintain for the Revd. Mr. Joel Bordwell especially..." It goes on and on and on as he transfers to Bordwell for his "quiet and peaceable Injoyment & Possession the aforementioned Parcel of land." To us, this rather smarmy document smacks of an apology to the church and town. It must have worked, because he was back in Kent by 1761. In 1766 he confessed to his sins of adultery and was restored to full ministerial standing, though he chose not to return to the pulpit. Instead, he became a Justice of the Peace, married for a fourth time on August 31, 1767 to Hannah Ransom Clark, and had his 13th child, Margaret Kinsman Marsh, a year later. His 14th and final child, Cyrus, was born in 1770. We don't know what happened to third wife Susannah, but their son William is buried in Good Hill cemetery alongside Rev. Marsh, 1st wife Margaret, 2nd wife Abigail and five more of his children by these various marriages. Hannah is buried nearby with her Ransom family.

Although no longer a minister, Marsh was active in Kent and Litchfield County affairs as a Justice of the Peace. In 1761 a lottery was proposed to raise £300 to fund clearing the "Ousatunnick River, so called, of the present obstructions." Such lotteries for the public good

were common in colonial Connecticut and the colony assembly appointed Cyrus Marsh and several others as lottery managers. While ticket sales were apparently brisk, settling with the winners was a nightmare – the ticket sale proceeds held by three of the managers had somehow gone missing or never even existed because tickets were sold on credit.... This would be akin to taking a Powerball ticket and telling the storekeeper that you'll pay for it another day!

In May of 1764, Marsh and John Williams of Sharon petitioned the Colony for formal direction as to their further proceeding in the unresolved matter. So, in good government fashion, the assembly appointed a committee of three Litchfield County men to inquire into the accounts of Marsh and the other managers to see what had gone on with tickets and money. The investigation wasn't completed until 1767. Though three of the managers were found to have absconded with money, Marsh and Williams were cleared of wrong doing and empowered by the colony to track down and collect the missing cash - the winners had to be paid and the river cleared! The Treasurer of Connecticut was ordered to pay Marsh and Williams £100 for discharging the matter. In 1768 Marsh told the assembly that there was no prospect of recovering all the money due from tickets because poor securities had been taken for some ticket sales and the three managers were insolvent. But



The 1761 lottery ticket

it didn't end there. In 1769, Marsh and Williams petitioned the assembly for still more help because holders of the winning lottery tickets had begun suing *them* and other managers for the winnings. Another committee was appointed to investigate. October of 1770 saw the lottery turmoil worsening and Cyrus Marsh had done long and hard duty, so the assembly appointed two agents to receive all the accounts and money from all the managers. £500 from the colony treasury was given to redeem any prize tickets "yet unpaid" with a public accounting. That the whole mess was ever fully resolved to the satisfaction of winning ticket holders is not clear.

Cyrus died in 1771 leaving a very large estate inventory and land in several towns. His will generously dispersed possessions to his fourth and last wife, Hannah Ransom Clark Marsh, his living children, and his four Clark step-children brought to their marriage by Hannah in 1767. Hannah and his son by a previous marriage, William Marsh, were named executors. The extensive probate inventory reveals a man with a love of fine things. For example: a waistcoat with silver buttons, silver shoe buckles (but steel knee buckles), an expensive beaver hat, two banyans (elegant costly dressing gowns), one of which was lined, 5 beds, 8 chairs, 3 tables, 2 desks, 15 Delft plates, 1 glass mustard pot, 2 dozen large horn buttons, £60 of pewter, lots of clothes baskets (instead of clothes chests), skeins of silk, 2 sticks of silk and hair, 3 dozen and 7 sticks of crewel plus part of a set of valances – suggesting that Hannah was an embroiderer who hadn't quite finished the bed

furnishings, and finally, "Cuff's bed" and 1 negro man valued at £75. Yes, there were slaves in Kent.

One thing Cyrus did not consider when distributing his lavish estate was the means with which to address the amount of debt that he owed. His will, dated a few months before he died, said that he was "of sound mind and disposing memory but under great weakness of body," so he might not have had the strength to deal with the debt. By 1773, Hannah petitioned the colonial assembly for permission to sell real estate left in the will because the debts surmounted the personal estate by about £200 – a substantial amount in the day. The assembly granted the petition and appointed Heman Swift, Esq. of Cornwall, acting for the probate court, to sell as much of the real estate as needed to raise £200 plus charges to settle the estate.

Not far from Marsh's grave in Good Hill is that of his old nemesis, Abel Wright, who had also returned to Kent around the same time as Marsh. The Old Light and the New Light, each accused and expelled from the town that was at the time very strict in its attitudes toward worship and personal behavior, came home. Was the town relaxing as the elderly Old Light leaders were passing on? John Mills had died on June 7, 1760. Had the New Light preachers like Whitefield been able to open the minds of the younger generation that was beginning to assume the leadership roles? We may never know. Whatever it was, both Marsh and Wright came back to live out their lives in Kent, and rest for eternity in peaceful Good Hill cemetery.

*** * * Membership Renewal * * ***

In order to save some money this year we have included the Membership Renewal remittance envelope in the newsletter, we hope you will continue to support us!

You sustain us. You enhance us.

Thank You!

Yet Another Sad Goodbye...

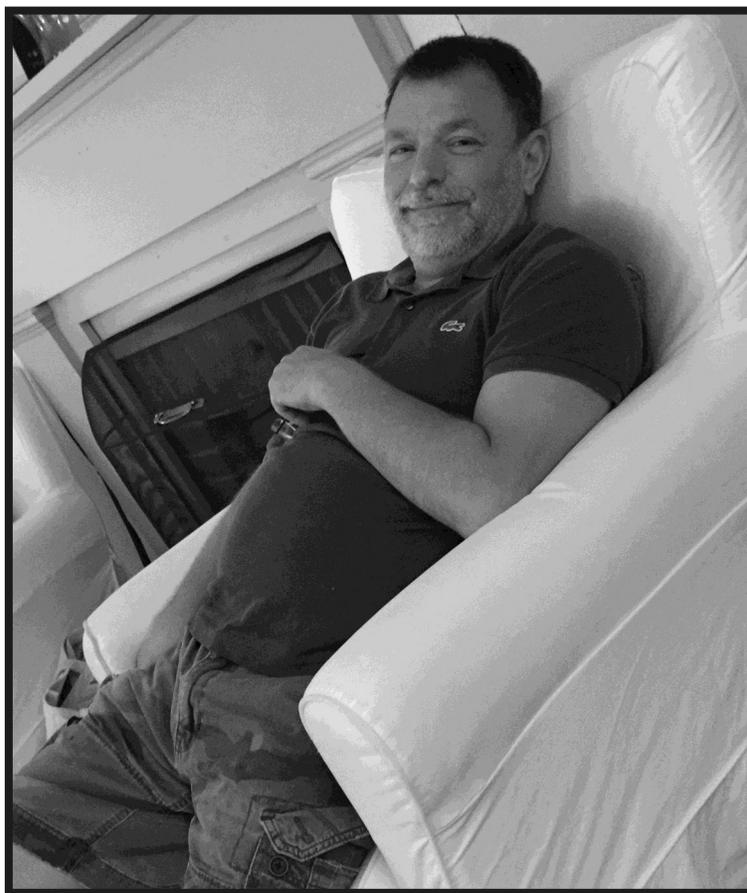
We have a wonderful variety of people who volunteer for the KHS in varying capacities. One of the more colorful characters was Bruce Whipple, who passed away unexpectedly last September. Bruce wore many hats. He was on the board of Trustees for several years, served as Treasurer and was head of the Buildings and Grounds committee. He created the Historic House Tour for the KHS and co-chaired the first one with Deb Chabrian, establishing a tradition that we are committed to continue.

Bruce loved to garden and had all sorts of ideas for the yards around Seven Hearths and Tallman House. He waged a one-man whirling dervish war on the Japanese Knotweed that was invading Laurence Nelson's flower beds. He was generous to a fault, and assumed that everyone else would be too. So it didn't bother his conscience when he took flowers from other peoples' gardens for his famous exuberantly large arrangements on the St. Andrews altar. How could you be cross with him for that?

Coming from historic Winston-Salem, North

Carolina, Bruce had an intense interest in colonial America, especially the decorative arts aspect. Though Seven Hearths, built on the western Connecticut colonial frontier, had little in common with the grand houses in North Carolina, he worked to ensure that we had an accurate atmosphere to greet our visitors. But we had to keep an eye on him! In preparation for an event to raise money for the new roof, Bruce decided that we needed a rip-roaring welcoming fire in the small, shallow Rumford fireplace in the south parlor. He stuffed it with an abundance of dry wood and lit it. Smoke filled the house in no time, but luckily we got it under control and the rest of the evening went off without a hitch. We hid the box of matches after that!! He never mentioned it again.

Bruce was too full of ideas to let himself sit still very often, which is why we love this photo of him actually relaxing! But, don't you think he looks like he's about to slide off the chair to go find more mischief to get into?



Bruce in a rare moment of relaxation!

The Kent Historical Society's 2019 Annual Members and Donors

We are grateful for your support

\$5,000. and above

Ben and Donna Rosen
Jeffrey Morgan and Robert Couturier

\$1,000. up to \$4,999.

Susan Babbitt
Anne Bass
David and Allison Blitzer
Anne Everett
Nina Henderson
Frank and Carol McCann
Guy Peterson
Herb and Nancy Tully
Michael Ward

\$500. up to \$999.

Mark Amsterdam
Donald and Leslie Connery
Kent and Adrianna Freeman
Ted and Megg Hoffman
Jane Klein
Martin Levin and Israel Cruz
Mason and Hope Lord
Carol Matzke
John and Pat Noneman
Lynn Perry and Michael Hallows
Todd Porterfield and Benoit Bolduc
Leslie and Robert Powell
Allan and Jackie Prialux
Ed Sadtler and Jordan Jacobs
Jerry and Gail Tobin
Wes and Nancy Wyrick

\$250. up to \$499.

Dan Alitowski and Paula Caceci
Christine Armstrong and Ben Nickoll
Ely and Carla Britton
Austi Brown
Bill and Patti Case
Stacy Danielson
Nancy Hass and Bill Roe
Jim and Alice Hicks
Charles Hirschler
Stan and Sandy Jennings
Jane Klein
Charlotte and Richard Lindsey
Ann Lozman
Melanie and Eugene Marks
Dave and Angelina Melton
Anne Todd

\$100. up to \$249.

Celeste and Steven Abbate
Larry Appel and Ellen Dunn
Catherine and Bill Bachrach
John and Liddy Baker
Georganne Bensch
Monty and Fran Besmer
Jim and Gini Blackketter
Mark and Jan Bornn
Woody and Pixie Brown
Jim and Anne Burnham
Karen Butler and John Thompson
Dorothy Casey
Sarah Chase and William Watts
Priscilla Coons
Darlene Cromer
Deborah Devaux
Carolyn and Don DeVita
Dorli and Francois DiGregorio
Robin Dill
Randy and Tony DiPentima
Beth Dooley
Maureen and Patrick Dore
Susan Fink
George Flynn
Karren and Chris Garrity
Wayne and Kim Giles
Jeri and John A. Gleason
Roger Gonzales
Peter Grossman
Howard and Lisa Hart
Jonathan and Deborah Hart
Bronson and Marcia Hawley
Alina Hernandez and Dan Murray
Richard Herrington
George and Jill Hetson
The Horgan Family
Robert and Kollen Indorf Jr.
Claire Irving
Russel and Sun Ae Jennings
Lydia Jones
Tom Knotek and Paul Hilepo
Joan Larned
Gail Lettick
Leslie and Rick Levy
Lisa Lippman and Ben Finkelstein

Cathy Mazza
Susan Menconi and Bruce Hoheb
Hugh Mitchell
Denise and Stephen Morocco
Wendy Murphy
James and Gail Neill
Jack and Janet Nelson
Paul Neuman and
Karen Binder-Brynes
John and Nancy Novogrod
Linda and Dan Palmer
Andrew Parlen and Daniel Pereira
John Pawloski
Don and Mary Peters
Chris and Jennie Rehnberg
Eric and Alice Roper
Peter and Laura Rothschild
James and Julia Samartini
Dan and Lorry Schiesel
Ken and Gwynne Seufert
Dana and James Slaughter
W. Becket Soule
Patsy and Jon Stroble
James and Molly Talbot
Chris and Toby Utsogn
James and Kate Vick
Edward and Carolyn Wagner
Stephanie Wargo and Bill Arnold
Lisa and Alan Weinblatt
Karen and John Wheat
Susi Williams and Dick Wyman
Richard and Lauri Zarin
Gabe and Jane Zatlín

\$35. up to \$99.

Lloyd Albin
Marjorie Anderson
Richard Barber
Bob and Jo Bauer
Fran Beardsley and Dave White
Darlene and Kevin Brady
Maureen and Tom Brady
Tom and Maureen Britton
Nancy Bushnell and Victor Reiling
Bill and Brenda Camp
Bennett Capers and Seth Forman
Betty Carlson
David and Lauri Carey
Marjorie Carmody
Janice Carmody-Tanner
John and Carolyn Casey
Robert E. Casey
Nancy and Bill Cipolla
Ellen Corsell
Al and Terri Coffill
Margaret Britton Crecco
Denis and Barbara Curtiss
Bobbi and Gary Davis
William Dillon and Jeff West
Joseph Dwyer and Cynthia Steele
Susanne Edgerly
Ed and Ruth Epstein
Kathleen and Peter Esche
Susan Forbes
Phyllis Foster
Tom and Carol Franken
Susan Gawel
Deborah Giuffre
GeorgeAnn Gowan
Cynthia Gustafson
Mark and Jane Hanley
Gale and Tom Hartch
Kathryn and Harvey Hayden
Patti and Donald Hicks
Melinda Keck
The Olga Kennedy Family
Georgianne Kent
Pam Kempe
Ed and Mary Kirby
Jay Kriegel and Kathryn McAuliffe
Louisa LaFontan
Ward and Judith Landrigan
Dianne and Phil Lang

Ron and Xiang MacFarlane
Carol MacRitchie
Paddy Matson
Jay Kriegel and Kathy McAuliffe
Peter and Judy Messer
Roz and Rudy Molho
Michael Monsarrat
Owen and Jane Moore
Linda Nacinovich and Elaine Debet-Fricke
Charles and Heather Nierling
Laurie Nussdorfer
Marilyn Ober
Andrew Ocif and Elaine Carlson
Millie and Andrew Olson
Doris Palmer
Jacqueline Pfliger
Jessica Pleasants and Okan Oncel
JoAnne Pappano and Robert Norton
Leigh Peet
Bertha Petith
Pat Purdy
Alison Ratliff
Elizabeth Ritchie
Janet and Lawrence Rivkin
Robert Rothenberg
Elyse Sadtler and Jean-Daniel Cloutier
Faline Schneiderman
Lorna G. Schofield and Stephan Landsman
Catherine and Kenneth Schwanfelder
Deborah Shiflett-Fitton
Janet Skinner
Judi and Butch Soule
Toni and Dan Soule
Maggie Stearns
Ron J Suresha
Virginia Suttman
Laurel Swartz Neugeboren and
Harlan Neugeboren
Marian and Bob Torre
Frank Tosto
Cliff Waldow
Julia White
Kenneth and JoAnn Whitmore
Bruce and Donna Wilkins
Lynn and John Worthington
Stuart Wurtzel and Patrizia Von Brandenstein



Kent Historical Society

PO Box 651
Kent, CT 06757

* * *

Become a member!
kenthistoricalsociety.org/memberships/

* * *

**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

10 Studio Hill Road, PO Box 651, Kent, Connecticut 06757
860-927-4587
info@kenthistoricalsociety.org
www.kenthistoricalsociety.org

Officers

Jeffrey Morgan, Acting President
Sharon Cipolla, Treasurer
Catherine Sweet, Secretary

Trustees

Deborah Chabrian, Kent Freeman, Allan Priaulx,
Roger Gonzales, Chris Naples

Director ~ Patrice Galterio
Curator/Archivist ~ Marge Smith

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

This newsletter is printed and sponsored by Moore & More Printing, Millerton, NY