



Kent Historical Society Newsletter

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What's In a Name? The Story of Pigtail

by Marge Smith

Many residents of a certain part of South Kent are proud to say that they live in Pigtail. The center of this curiously named community is the four-corner crossroad of South Kent Road, Bulls Bridge Road and Geer Mountain Road. The area once contained a cider mill, a general store, a train station, a creamery, a blacksmith shop, two ice houses and a schoolhouse, as well as the post office which proudly still exists today. The rest are all gone.



At some unknown point in time, well over a 100 years ago, the nickname "Pigtail" was bestowed upon the community. The exact origin of the name is obscure, with several suggestions still being bandied about. The least plausible says that because South Kent is at the bottom of the town of Kent, it was called Pigtail. But what does that suggest about our lovely town? Let's toss that one out for good! Another dubious idea is that the area was called Pigtail because of the iron ore bed that operated up on Ore Hill Road. But that's a real stretch. High quality ore was mined out of the bed in large lumps, but then was taken away in wagons by teamsters who delivered it to the three blast furnaces in Kent and nearby towns where it was smelted and molded into long bars of pure iron that were called pigs. The reason behind that name for the bars is a story for another day perhaps, but please do let us know if you're curious. Suffice it to say there were no iron pigs coming out of Pigtail.

According to Charles L. Spooner (1845-1923), who lived on Spooner Hill, "One story is that a man let his pig run loose around the village. Some of his neighbors in order to get rid of the pig caught it and cut off its tail and hung it on the sign post on the corner for everyone to see. Another legend is that a man traveling through the place found so many pigs in the road that he said that all

he could see were pigtails." Lillie Darling Deeds, who was born in 1907 and lived at the north end of Hatch Pond, confirmed the story of just one farmer cutting off another farmer's pig's tail due to a quarrel between the two. I grew up in Pigtail as well, and remember hearing a longer version of Mrs. Deeds' story, one that explains the slogan on the side of the old creamery barn in the photo above.

It seems that there were indeed two farmers in town who didn't get along. One day Farmer A's pig got loose and tore up the crops of Farmer B. Farmer B retaliated by cutting off the offending pig's tail and hanging it up for all to see, some say on a sign post, others say on the door of the barn. People began to laugh at the two men, dubbing their domain "Pigtail." That didn't sit well with either of the antagonists, who mended their proverbial fences and stood together in the face of the laughter from the rest of their world. They took ownership of the formerly derisive name and declared "The World Against Pigtail / Pigtail Against the World." Ultimately the whole neighborhood rallied around them, to the point that the store owner, Fred Chase,

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Farewell to Four Treasured Former Board Members

by Marge Smith

It is with a heavy but grateful heart that I write this tribute to four former stalwart members of the Kent Historical Society's Board of Trustees who passed away in 2023. They were dear personal friends of mine as well as colleagues within the KHS for many years. They were all dedicated volunteers and fun to be with. Space does not permit a full recounting of all that they did for us and for our town, but here are some highlights.

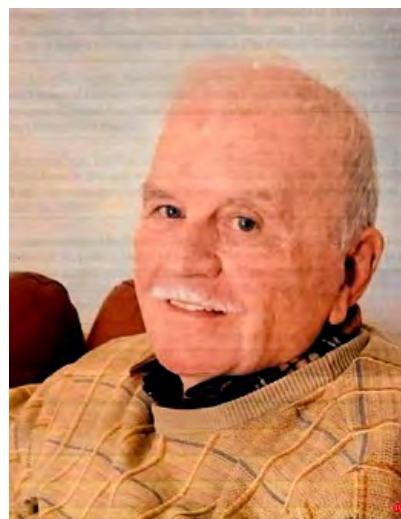


We lost Dick Lindsey in April and Charlotte, his beloved wife of 45 years, in December. Dick served as Treasurer from 2010 to 2016, and Charlotte as Secretary from 2007 to 2015. Their contribution to Kent history was huge. They both were involved in the Kent Veterans Committee, which established the war memorials on the lawn of the Swift House, among other things. Charlotte worked with the late Fran Johnson and Lynne Hicks on a remarkable book about Kent's WWII veterans

called *One Small Town in World War Two*. Here's a little known fact about Charlotte. A former 2nd Grade teacher at Kent Center School, she was the one who brought the famous Chocolate Fest to town to raise money for the KCS Scholarship Fund! She was also a hard-working member of the Kent Garden Club. Dick was usually found hidden between the heavily-stocked aisles and piles of books in his antiquarian bookstore on Main Street. He also kept a collection of musical instruments there, which he had taught himself to play "in the closet." A little known fact about Dick is that he transported and planted untold hundreds of the famous blueberry bushes in his massive Buick wagon from the Kissengers' land in Warren to the Marvelwood campus atop Skiff Mountain! He loved old cars and, together with Charlotte ran the Classic Car Show for years on the Kent Green. They volunteered at *all* KHS exhibits and events, including the Veteran's exhibit and the Square Dance/Husking Bees in the Community House. Charlotte was also a faithful worker bee on my Collections Committee, and I smile when I see her careful signature on the countless object work sheets she filled out!

Stan Jennings died in August in his home on ancestral family land on Segar Mt. Rd. He was passionate about his genealogy, and had direct connections to the earliest Kent settlers. His mother Jnet was a Seger (please note the correct spelling of that family name) who had been born in the old Seger house a bit farther up the road. His Seger ancestors had come to Kent in the late 1700s, investing heavily in the first iron forge. They married into the Root family, the earliest member of which – Gideon – had become a Proprietor of the fledgling town in 1745.

On Stan's father's side, he was descended from the Fairchilds, who apparently had settled in South Kent near the ore bed in the 1720s, before the town was even formally established! Through the Seger, Root, Jennings, Cass, Judd, Soule and other families, Stan was related to about just about all the early movers and shakers of Kent, and he was quietly but wholeheartedly proud of it. A Freemason for 32 years, Stan joined St. Luke's Lodge when he and his wife Sandy moved back to Kent in 2005 from Washington, CT, where he had served as Master. In Kent, he served as Chaplain and Historian, organizing the Lodge's records. When he wasn't at the Lodge, or playing golf, or working on his Mayflower application, or selling things on eBay, Stan was a regular volunteer for the KHS. He served as Vice President of the Board from 2006 to 2010, and spent a great deal of time in our office photographing the objects in our collections for the database. He was willing to help out wherever we needed him, and – like Charlotte – has left evidence of his dedication with us in the collections rooms.



Fr. Tom and his best pal, Art Seabury

made it a policy to join historical societies wherever he could. He filled out a membership application on the spot. He went on to say that he had been coming to Kent for years as an avid birdwatcher, walking often on River Road (a famous destination for birdwatchers during migration season) and Cobble Road. In 2002, when we did our exhibit "A Tribute to Our Veterans," Fr. Tom, by that a Brigadier General in the Army, was a big part of it, loaning us many of his precious items from his time as a priest on the front lines in Vietnam, and speaking compellingly to the KCS students who came to tour the exhibit. He joined the KHS board a few years later, and was an active part of carrying out our mission until he retired in 2012. Along with his fellow board members, the Lindseys, he was a founding member of the Kent Veterans Committee. In 2012, he was inducted into the CT State Firefighters Association Hall of Fame.

We also extend our deep sympathy to the families of the many wonderful regular members of the Kent Historical Society who also passed in 2023. It was a year of real loss, and we are grateful for their loyal support and friendship.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP IN 2023!

Our three successful exhibits last year covered a wide range of topics and required a great deal of time and effort to create. But it was all worth it. Thank you to all of you who came to see them and to support our programs!

“STICKS AND STANDS” at Seven Hearths was an amazing collection of candlesticks and candlestands that told the story of our earliest indoor lighting, and the craftsmen who made them. Thank you to Roger Gonzalez, Frank Tosto and Jeff Morgan for putting the exhibition together. Also to Gabriella Martinez for posing for the beautiful poster advertising the exhibit, and to Deb Chabrian for photos and publicity.

“A SENSE OF PLACE” at Seven Hearths was a wonderful show of drawings by the itinerant folk artist Fritz Vogt of structures and homesteads in central New York state between 1890 and 1900. A huge thank you to our volunteer extraordinaire, Frank Tosto, the collector of these works, who worked again with Roger Gonzalez and Jeff Morgan, and also Ron Marasco. Thanks as well to Deb Chabrian for photos and publicity.

“PLACES OF KENT” at the gallery above the House of Books was a collection of 50 paintings of Kent landscapes and structures by 20 local artists, present and past. Led by Deb Chabrian, many people chipped in to help with this first post-Covid fund raiser: Ed and Gabriella Martinez, Chris Adams, Susan Grisell, Kent Freeman, Roger Gonzales, Debbie Shiflett-Fitton, Logan Wheeler, Marge Smith, and our faithful docents Fran Goodsell, Karen Ianucci, and Catherine Bachrach. Special thanks to Amie Mckay from Kent Barns for the wonderful exhibit space and to everyone who loaned their paintings to display!

Our faithful collections volunteers, Beth Dooley, Louisa Lafontan, Karen Lamdin and Jennifer Petrone, work at Tallman House on a regular basis to help process donations, organize files and catalog document collections. They are indispensable worker bees and the Curator could not function without them.

Ten students from Kent School came to Seven Hearths again in the fall to help spruce up the grounds. It is an annual community service workday for them, and we are so grateful for their loyalty and their willingness to do whatever job we need done, no matter how dull it might be!



A New Partnership With the Senior Center

Our front page story about Pigtail was inspired by a new program we have with the Senior Center at Templeton Farm. Last August, in keeping with the KHS's 2023 theme of "Places of Kent," we were invited to give a presentation about some of the formerly iconic scenes around town. Catherine Bachrach suggested that we bring some photos and see who could identify where or what they were. It would be a challenge for long-time residents of Templeton Farm, and a chance for people who have more recently moved in to learn more about their "new" hometown. Copies of the photos below, along with several others, were passed around the room for seniors to see what they could identify. Some, not pictured here, were easy, such as the original part of the Kent Memorial Library, although not everyone knew that the building itself is our World War One memorial. These three stumped many people.



The one on the left is the Devil's Chair, or Chimney Rock, which still sits on Chimney Rock Road in North Kent, though its is worn down a bit and surrounded by houses. The one in the center is what is now known as Morningstar, on the corner of Elizabeth Street and Bridge Street. It, too, is now part of a dense neighborhood. The one on the right is the old Templeton Farm, with its fields now occupied by the Elderly Housing units and the Fire Department.

At the end of the meeting, we asked if there were any requests for future topics, and South Kent resident Barbara Psarakis asked about her South Kent neighborhood. So we investigated and prepared a presentation about Pigtail for the October meeting. At the time this newsletter is going to the printers, we are scheduled to do a talk about the old postcards of Kent, many of which were created by Dr. George Smith. He was the minister of St. Andrews Church from 1900 to 1910, and an avid photographer. We know the Devil's Chair photo was taken by him, and are pretty sure the other two were as well.

In March we are planning a show-and-tell with toys. We will bring some of the antiques from our collection, and the seniors are invited to bring some of their own, if they still have them. Or, they can tell stories of what their favorite toys were. July will be the same format, with tools and cooking utensils, being the focus.

Future ideas being tossed around are the history of the Civilian Conservation Corps in Kent, the history of our three private schools, stories about some of the longtime families of Kent, and more. Given the rich history our little town has, the possibilities are endless. We are honored to be a part of the activities offered to the elder citizens of Kent!

Continued from page 1

painted part of the slogan on the creamery barn, and began marketing his merchandise with it as well. Rob Boyd bought the store in 1923, and when the Independent Grocers Association was formed in 1926, he joined, thus bringing the IGA brand to Kent for the first time! Many years later, his wife Tillie described their store: “Robert J. Boyd started in business selling groceries, dry-goods, boots, shoes, etc – also some hardware: nails, bolts, gasoline, motor oil and kerosene. Molasses was pumped into jugs or glass jars in the cellar where the barrel was stored.” The Boyds’ store was in the large right-hand side of the building that we all now think of as just the Post Office. There was a small area in the left side that functioned as the Post Office, with shopkeeper Boyd also serving as Postmaster.



Mrs. Boyd described the rest of Pigtail in the 1920s as well. “Milk was pasteurized at the Creamery next to the store. There was an ice house in the east end of the creamery building that had double walls that were filled with sawdust as insulation to keep the ice. After the lease on the building was not renewed by Willow Brook Dairy, we went into the animal feed business. Barn dances were held in the loft of the creamery for a few years. The creamery building was sold to Gabe Smyrski and I understand he used the lumber to build a house near his father’s farm.” But before the building was actually torn down, some students from nearby South Kent School got permission to cut out the boards that said *Pigtail Against the World*. They took them up to the campus and hung them over the stage in their Playhouse (which had previously been the old Straight farm’s tobacco barn). It is still the school’s unofficial motto.



The creamery barn is to the right of the store. Its cement foundation is still visible there.

Ice cutting was a necessity before the days of electric refrigeration, and Hatch Pond provided plenty. She wrote, “Men were brought by train from Bridgeport when the ice was thick enough for cutting. There were two large icehouses by trackside. There was also a ‘bunk’ house for the men behind them. They usually came with little in the way of warm clothing and were allowed to buy what they needed, and the Sprague Co. of Bridgeport would guarantee payment if they did not. In the summer, freight cars would be loaded with ice at trackside to be sent to the city of Bridgeport.” When South Kent Road was straightened, the ice houses were torn down, but a portion of the bunk house still sits where it was.



Left: The ice houses with freight cars waiting to be loaded. Center: Circa 1930 train wreck with ice houses in background. Right: The remaining part of the bunk house at 249 South Kent Rd.



**Above: The little station building, now gone.
Below: The one room schoolhouse.**



The train also stopped at the small station that sat behind the store, but only if there were people waiting to be picked up, in which case the Station Master would put out a flag to alert the engineer to stop. At night, it would be a green and white lantern, and if he was not there, the waiting passengers could hang the lantern out themselves. Mrs. Boyd described the system by which the mail was picked up if there were no passengers which would require a full stop. “The mail was put on the ‘mail arm’ which was just across the track and the mail clerk on the train would put out the iron arm to catch it [as the train slowed down] and bring it into the mail cars. Incoming mail was put out on the station side from the mail car and the baggage car. The milk train left empty milk cans (30qt) in the morning and picked up milk that farmers had left on the platform on the afternoon run. In the morning school children who were going to New Milford High School went by the local train.” Up until 1928, the younger children in Pigtail walked to the little one room schoolhouse at 281 South Kent Road. Foster Richards, the rural mail carrier, then added on to it, making it into a home for his family. His grandson lives there today.

On the other side of Boyd’s Store from the station office



was Samuel B. Goodsell’s blacksmith shop. The sign above the sliding door says “S.B. Goodsell: Horse Shoeing & General Jobbing.” In addition to running this busy little shoe place, Mr. Goodsell was a farmer, and later the foreman for the State Highway Department. Today the blacksmith shop has been converted into a garage. The store is visible at the far right in this photo.

Another building in Pigtail that has an interesting train-related history is at 9 Bulls Bridge Road, just across the tracks from the station. Until fairly recently, it had the date 1824 in wrought-iron numbers above the front door, but it actually was built in 1842 as a “public house” or tavern for guests traveling through on the train. Our super-sleuth former Board member Melanie Marks discovered the error while researching the now-famous itinerant portrait painter Ammi Phillips. There was a local man named Richard Stevenson who, much like Sylvanus Merwin down in Gaylordsville, learned that the railroad was due to be built in the area in 1842, and decided to capitalize on that opportunity. He designed the structure and hired Phillips as his first tavern keeper in 1842, spelling out in great detail, in the agreement between the two men, just how many “good French bedsteads” would be provided, where the horse stables and well should be located, etc. Apparently, Stevenson was somewhat of a scoundrel, and Phillips decided to move on. We don’t know how many years the public house did stay in business, but it wasn’t long. Fortunately, Mr. Merwin’s hotel still stands today as an excellent little museum to the bygone days of train travel. If you haven’t been there yet, you must go! As for the wrong date, my personal scenario is that someone had the four numbers in his pocket as he climbed up a ladder to nail them above the door, and somehow attached them in the reverse order. Just a guess! I hope you have enjoyed this journey around Pigtail. Do let us know if you have any questions, or any stories to add!



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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

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Tuesdays and Fridays 9am - noon,
or by appointment.

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PO Box 651
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