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631-924-4803 -Swezey-Avey House  
 Main Office

Meetings: Third Thursday of the  
 Month; 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House.

**Newsletter Editor: Peggy Judd**

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# YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

*Historic Yaphank - Where the Past Greet's the Present*

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER 2019

## HOMAN-GERARD HOUSE RESTORATION OPEN HOUSE CELEBRATION

**Saturday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2:00—4:00pm**

**All are welcome.**

**Tour the House and  
 Enjoy refreshments with us.**

The Yaphank Historical Society is pleased to announce the completion of the restoration of the Homan-Gerard House in the Yaphank Historic District. The Homan-Gerard House is a unique example of transitional Federal and Greek Revival architecture and the preservation of this early Long Island home is an integral part of the history and culture of Yaphank. The Homan-Gerard House and Mill Complex were first noted in Brookhaven Town Records in 1762 when the sawmill was built there on the river adjacent to the house. The house was rebuilt in the Federal style in 1790 and ownership was transferred over the years to the Homan, Hawkins and Gerard Families. The house is being interpreted as the mill owner's home as it was in 1825.

When the mills became obsolete, the house was used as a boarding house for summer visitors who came to Yaphank to enjoy swimming, fishing and boating on the millponds, and then as a sporting lodge until it was closed. Its site on Lily Lake and at the entrance to the Yaphank Historic District make the Homan-Gerard House a significant landmark in Yaphank.



**BEFORE**



**AFTER**

## Letter from the President

As we head into the fall season, the Yaphank Historical Society has a very busy schedule ahead of us. We have our Fall Harvest Tea, the grand opening of the Homan House and our Christmas Tour. We also have several private tours scheduled for our historic houses. The Society is hosting the quarterly board meeting of the Preservation Long Island group in October. And along with all of this, we also have three Board meetings and two General Membership meetings. As you can see, we have a very full slate this fall season.

We are continuing work on the Historic District Survey project in preparation for applying for State and National Register listings. Zachary Studenroth, who is doing the historic district survey for us will be coming to speak at our October general membership meeting. He will give us an overview of what the project entails and the benefits of being on the National Register.

The October 26<sup>th</sup> grand opening of the Homan House is coming up very quickly. We have some last-minute details to finish up inside the House before our grand opening celebration. On the exterior, we have just finished the grading of the property, setting the large stepping stones at each door, and setting the handicap walkway. Grass seed has also been put down. We have finished the front walkway. One of the last items we have to do inside the house is build the cellar steps. So, as you can see, we have completed a significant amount of work, but still have more to go to get the house ready for the grand opening.

Recently, we hosted a Girl Scout doing a project for her Gold Award (this is the equivalent of the Eagle Scout award for young men). She came to us with plans for an ambitious project; it was to build a Butterfly Garden at the Swezey-Avey House. Her project was large and beautifully done, she even bought caterpillars and kept them until they hatched into butterflies. The butterflies (about 100 of them) were released into her garden in early September. When you are at the Swezey-Avey House or at the Park, take a look at the garden she designed and built. She will continue to add finishing touches over the fall season. Overall, the project has been a success and the garden is a nice addition to the grounds of the Swezey-Avey House.

*Robert Kessler*

### Welcome New Members

- **Matt Donlan, Yaphank, NY**
- **Marjorie Niesen, Cleveland, OH**

**Funds for this newsletter were provided by  
the Suffolk County Legislature,  
Rudy A. Sunderman, 3rd Legislative District.  
Thank You !**

## Election Night Results

Voting for Board Members took place at the August General Meeting on Thursday, August 15<sup>th</sup> at the Swezey-Avey House. The complete Board of Directors for the remaining 2019 term and the calendar year of 2020 appears on page 1. **Jim Vavrina** was elected to serve as Vice-President, moving from his previous office of 3-year Trustee. **Judi Bird** was newly elected to serve out the remaining term vacated by Jim Vavrina. We want to welcome Judi Bird to the Board and we wish both Jim and Judi success in the coming year. We also want to thank departing Board Member, **Oliver Archer**, for her service and we look forward to working with her as an active member. We take this opportunity to thank all of our continuing Board Members for their service and support this past year. The Society looks forward to making the coming year one that will be filled with interesting events and programs for our members and continued restoration efforts and improvements to the Yaphank Historic District.

**SAVE THE DATE**  
*Yaphank Historic District*  
*Christmas House Tours*

On Sunday, **December 15<sup>th</sup> from 1:00—5:00pm**, the Yaphank Historical Society will host a Christmas Tour of several historic houses in the Yaphank Historic District. Guests will register at the Swezey-Avey House and receive a ticket and directions to the historic houses and buildings that are on the Tour. All of the houses will be decorated for the holiday season and all exhibit rooms will be open for our holiday visitors.

**Swezey-Avey House (c. 1843)**  
**Hawkins House (c. 1850)**  
**Booth House Museum (c. 1829)**  
**Homan-Gerard House (c. 1790)**

Greeters and docents will be on hand at each location to welcome you and guide you through the houses. There will be holiday music at the Swezey-Avey House provided by **Don and Susan Cerce** and you may even run into Santa. Holiday refreshments will also be available at the Swezey-Avey House. Donation for the Tour is **\$10 for adults**; free for those 12 years and younger. We hope to see you there.



**Volunteers Needed for Historic District Christmas Tour**

The Society needs volunteers to help with the Christmas Tour (**Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup> from 1:00—5:00pm**), both on the day of the Tour, but also in the few weeks prior to the Tour. If you enjoy decorating, we have plenty of opportunities for decorating. If you can spare an hour or two the day of the Tour, you could choose to help with refreshments or be one of the hosts or hostesses welcoming visitors. You do not need to be versed in historical facts to participate. You just need to have a special fondness for the holidays and enjoy helping others share in that holiday spirit. Thank you in advance for consideration of our request for help.

**If you are interested in participating, please call Tom Skapinski at 631-732-1825 or Jim Vavrina at 631-754-1730.**

**Please note: Change to Yaphank Historical Society Membership Year**

At the April 2019 Executive Board Meeting, it was unanimously voted to change from the current **Fiscal Year Membership** (based on the Society fiscal year of September 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>) to a **Calendar Year Membership** (from January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>). Calendar Year Memberships will start in 2020 and will be renewable on an annual basis. All members in good standing on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, will remain members in good standing through the remainder of this year, ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019. This change was in response to many member comments and we hope that the change will be beneficial to all.

## Yaphank Historic District---State and National Register Project

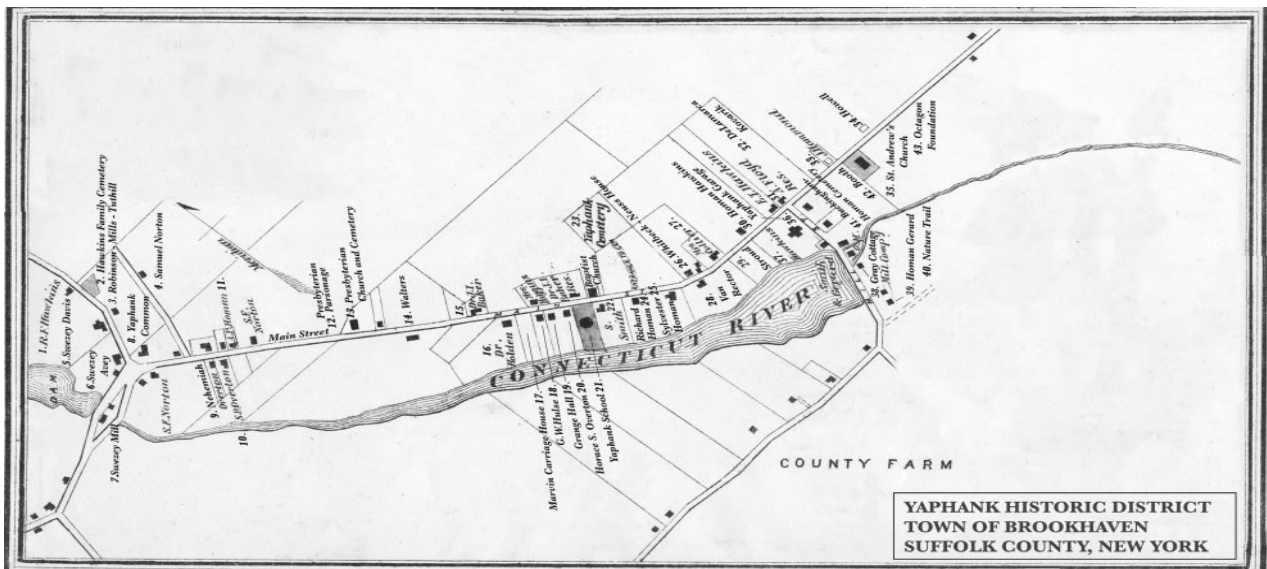
As we reported in the *Spring 2019 Newsletter*, the Yaphank Historical Society is committed to preserve Yaphank’s historic houses, properties, and historic documents and we feel that obtaining state and national recognition for the Historic District is a significant step forward in our preservation efforts. These registers are the official lists of buildings, structures, districts, objects, and sites significant to the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture of New York State and the nation. The Yaphank Historic District is home to over 30 historic houses and numerous other historic buildings, ruins, sites, cemeteries, and historic markers. Several of our historic homes are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Hawkins House, Booth House, Homan House and St. Andrews Episcopal Church.

The Yaphank Historical Society was recently awarded a grant in the amount of \$9200 from **Preserve New York\*** which will allow us to retain Studenroth Consulting Inc., to prepare the State and National Register applications for the Yaphank Historical District. It is important to note that Yaphank’s Main Street was the first town historic district designated by the Town of Brookhaven. It seems logical that State and National recognition should follow. At our upcoming October General Meeting (see pg. 6 for time and date) Zachary Studenroth, Historic Preservation Consultant, will present an overview and status of the project and discuss what is involved in the application process.

**\*Note:** Preserve New York is a signature grant program of the New York State Council on the Arts and the Preservation League of New York State. Preserve New York is made possible with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. Generous additional support has been provided by the Robert David Lion Gardner Foundation for the projects in Nassau and Suffolk County.



All of the above structures and sites would become part of the Yaphank Historic District National Register Listing, along with most structures noted on the map below.



Annotated Walking Tour Map showing historic structures along Main St.

## The Yaphank Garage

by Karen Mouzakes

The old Yaphank Garage stands on the corner of Main Street and Yaphank Avenue. It was built by Yaphank's Leslie R. Marchant for station owners Sheridan and Ehrenworth. The design was typical of the 1930's. It was made of cement blocks that were painted white. The trim was red. It first opened in 1937 as a Shell Gas Station/Garage and Machine Shop. The station hummed with activity as cars pulled in and out, filling up on gas that sold for fifteen cents a gallon. Customers received full service that included an oil check and a friendly chat, services not available at today's busy self-serves. Old timers remember the garage's old wooden swing-in doors, the big thermometer that hung outside, and a freestanding Shell sandwich sign. Out back, beside the burn barrel, stood a gray wooden box for old oilcans. When locals reminisce, it is the small garage office that is remembered most fondly. It had a brown swivel chair that stood opposite the window. Below the window was a long shelf stuffed with auto repair manuals. A big old safe stood in the corner and an ornate cash register rang each sale. A schoolhouse clock ticked away the hours next to the "cheesecake" calendar so familiar to the service stations of yesterday. The brown and gray kerosene heater warmed the room and invited one to stay awhile and perhaps share a story or two. A frequent visitor to the Yaphank Garage was the local Police Constable. In those days the constable worked out of his car as there was no formal Police Headquarters. It was at the garage that the Constable stopped in to use the phone, bathroom, and sometimes he was even allowed to use a drawer in the old rolled-top desktop to store his reports and the tools of his trade.

Years passed and the Suffolk County Police replaced local Brookhaven Town Constables. The old Yaphank Garage was condemned for a road widening project that never came to pass. But that's not the end to this story. The Suffolk County Police Historical Society has restored the Yaphank Garage. Mannequins and display boards tell the story of how a small community service station and its local Constable worked together to serve their citizens in the 1930's and 40's.



Period police car at the Yaphank Garage in 2004.



Yaphank Garage, 'back in the day'...

### A Successful Historic House Tour Season

All three of our restored historic houses, the Hawkins House, the Booth House Museum and the Swezey-Avey House were open for tours Sunday afternoons in July and August. St. Andrews Episcopal Church was also open on several Sundays. Docents were on hand to conduct tours and answer questions. Several exhibits were on display in each of the houses. We had a busy season with guided tours numbering just over 160. Thank you to all who helped make this a very successful summer historic house tour season. And special thanks to **Tom Skapinski** who arranged and scheduled docent coverage for all the houses. In addition to our Sunday summer tours, quite a few "tours by appointment" were also conducted during the summer season. It continues to be encouraging to see so much interest in our historic homes and in the history of the Yaphank area.

**YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER 2019  
UPCOMING EVENTS**

**October General Meeting**

Thursday, **October 17<sup>th</sup>**, 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House  
Guest Speakers will be **Zachary Studenroth** and **Kurt Kahofer**

Historic Preservation Consultants

**Program:** "Status and Update on the Yaphank Historic District National Register Project".  
Refreshments will follow the meeting.

**Victorian Harvest Tea**

Saturday, **October 19<sup>th</sup>**, 2:00—4:00pm, Hawkins House

**This event is SOLD OUT.**

Date and details about our Spring Victorian Tea will be published in the next *Newsletter* and on our website.

**Open House Celebration---Homan-Gerard House**

**Please join us!**

Saturday, **October 26<sup>th</sup>**, 2:00—4:00pm

Please join us to celebrate the successful restoration of this historic mill house which played an important role in Yaphank's early history.  
House tours will be conducted.  
Light refreshments will be offered.

**Dinner and Dusting**

Saturday, **November 16<sup>th</sup>**, 10:00am—4:00pm

Help get our houses ready for the Holidays.  
Spend a few hours during the day cleaning and earn a wonderful pasta dinner.

Dinner served at **5:00pm** at the Swezey-Avey House.  
Call 631-924-4803 and leave a message if you plan to participate, ensuring adequate food for all.

**November General Meeting**

Thursday, **November 21<sup>st</sup>**, 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House

Guest speaker : **Brian Smith**, Master Gardener.

**Program:** "Native Plants of Long Island"

Refreshments will follow the program.

**Yaphank Historic District Christmas House Tours**

Sunday, **December 15<sup>th</sup>**, 1:00—5:00pm

**Donation \$10 adults; 12 years and younger free.**

Several historic houses open for tours (see page 1).  
Tickets and map available at the Swezey-Avey House.  
Holiday music and refreshments.

**Bank of the River Gift Shop at the Hawkins House**

**Hours: Thursday Afternoons, 12:00-4:00pm**

**Phone: 631-924-3401**

- No December 2019 General Meeting
- No January 2020 General Meeting
- No February 2020 General Meeting

Keep current with all our events and projects. Visit our website—[www.yaphankhistorical.org](http://www.yaphankhistorical.org)

**Yaphank Historical Society  
P.O. Box 111  
Yaphank, New York 11980-0111**

Please enroll me as:

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>( ) Active Member</b>       | <b>\$20.00/person - \$17.50/Senior Citizen (62+)</b> |
|                                | <b>\$25.00/couple - \$22.50/Senior Couple (62+)</b>  |
| <b>( ) Contributing Member</b> | <b>\$50.00</b>                                       |
| <b>( ) Life Member</b>         | <b>\$100.00/person - \$75.00/Senior (62+)</b>        |
| <b>( ) Patron Member</b>       | <b>\$300.00</b>                                      |
| <b>( ) Benefactor Member</b>   | <b>\$500.00</b>                                      |

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

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Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_