

# The Yaphank Historical Society Continues to Preserve the History of Yaphank

## By Andrea Peponakis-Matzner

The Yaphank Historical Society's mission is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of the lovely town of Yaphank and the surrounding area. Currently led by President Robert Kessler, the society was founded in 1974 to save the Hawkins House from demolition.

Yaphank's Historic District is about a mile long and runs along Main Street parallel to Yaphank Lake. During the 19th century, Yaphank was known for its mills (saw, grist, fulling). With electric power arriving in the early 20th century, the mills were forced to shut down. Yaphank then became a popular summer destination for families who wanted to vacation in the homes that bordered the lake. Camp Upton, which was located where Brookhaven National Laboratory currently sits, was a point of embarkation for the United States Army during World War I. During World War II, Camp Upton was used as an Army induction center.

The Yaphank Historical Society has restored and taken over the stewardship for four historic 19th century houses in the Yaphank Historic District. These houses are:

1. The Hawkins House was built around 1850 and is currently owned by the Suffolk County Parks Department. The address is 4 Yaphank Avenue. Because of the incredible detail in the restoration and the historical significance locally and nationally, the Robert Hewlett Hawkins House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, our nation's highest historical citation.

2. The Mary L. Booth House was constructed in 1829 approximately and is currently owned by the Suffolk County Parks Department. It is located at 230 East Main Street. Mary Louise Booth was born here in 1831. She is the author of "History of New York", the founding editor of Harper's Bazaar Magazine, secretary of the first Women's Rights Convention and an active abolitionist.

3. The Homan-Gerard House is also owned by SC Parks Department and was erected around 1820. It can be found directly across from the Hawkins House. It is a unique example of Federal and Greek Revival architecture. Brookhaven Town records show that in 1762, a sawmill was built on the river adjacent to the house.

4. The Swezey-Avey House, owned by the Town of Brookhaven and built around 1840, is located at 19 Mill Road and is home to Yaphank Historical Society Headquarters. A Research Library, rooms for exhibits, meetings and community programs are all found here.

The restoration of these four houses was made possible with volunteers, grants and maintenance help from the municipal governments. In fact, a recent grant from the Robert David Gardiner Foundation in the amount of \$10,000.00 was awarded to YHS. The funds will be used to clean and restore the Hawkins Family Cemetery.

The society is very proud of its accomplishments as they should be. They thoughtfully plan out community and school activities which are all free. They have free



Photo Credit: Yaphank Historical Society

The Hawkins House located on Middle Island-Yaphank Road in the Yaphank Historic District.



The Mary L. Booth House is located on East Main Street in Yaphank.

Summer Sunday Tours from 1-4 PM every Sunday in July and August. The third Thursday of each month is the YHS's general meeting which takes place at 7:30 PM at the Swezey-Avey House. Each meeting features a guest speaker offering historical and educational information. The Spring Community Yard Sale is taking place on Saturday, May 21, 2022, from 9 AM to 4 PM on the lawns of the Hawkins House.

The current Board of Directors are:

**President** – Bob Kessler



The Homan-Gerard House is located across from the Hawkins House.



The Swezey-Avey House can be found on Yaphank-Middle Island Road and Main Street in Yaphank.

**Vice President** – Jim Vavrina

**Treasurer** – Audrey Kessler

**Recording Secretary** – Kayann Donaldson

**Corresponding Secretary** – Marie Desch

**Librarian** – Peggy Judd

**Historian** – Suzanne Johnson

**Historian Emeritus** – Karen Mouzakes

**Curator** – Helen Kalbach

**Honorary Lifetime Board Member** – Kathy Schmidt

**3-Yr. Trustee** – Judy Bird

**2-Yr. Trustee** – Kitty Daniels & Tricia Foley

**1-Yr. Trustee** – Tom Skapinski & Gary Scherpich

Thank you so much to the current and past directors who have preserved the rich history of Yaphank.

For further information, to become a member or to volunteer, please visit [www.yaphankhistorical.org](http://www.yaphankhistorical.org).