



YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Historic Yaphank - Where the Past Greet's the Present

APRIL, MAY, JUNE 2022

Robert Hawkins House
P.O. Box 111
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www.yaphankhistorical.org

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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Historic House Tours—Summer Season

We are happy to be able to once again offer in-person tours of our restored historic homes in the Yaphank Historic District. All four of our historic houses are scheduled to be open Sunday afternoons in July and August from 1:00—4:00pm. Docents will be on hand to guide tours and answer questions.

The circa 1850 **Robert and Isabella Hawkins House**, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is a well-furnished Victorian country home. Both floors of this home are open for the tour.

The circa 1829 **Booth House Museum**, also listed on the National Register, is the birthplace of Mary Louise Booth and features information about her interesting life and displays of artifacts and documentation illustrating her lifestyle. Among the artifacts is a letter to Ms. Booth signed by President Abraham Lincoln, thanking her for her translation services.

Restoration of the circa 1790 **Homan-Gerard House**, listed on the National Register, was recently completed in 2019. The original house was part of a large sawmill complex located on the banks of the Carmans River. The restored house is being interpreted as the mill owner's home in 1825. Both floors of the home are part of the tour. Access to the *Carmans River Nature Trail* is located behind the house.

The circa 1843 **Swezey-Avey House**, is designated as a Brookhaven Town Historic Landmark. In addition to housing our extensive archives and library, the second floor also features several exhibit rooms—the *Weeks Legacy: A Yaphank Story*, the *Kovarik Collection* and the *History of Prosser Pines*, new this year.



Letter From The President

The Society is so glad to welcome spring and hopefully a new beginning for all of us. The Yaphank Historical Society is going back to having our in-person Board meetings and in-person General Membership meetings. We hope you can all join us for our General Meetings; the meetings feature a guest speaker, an interesting program and are always a nice time. Light refreshments and time for socializing follow the program. Please see the Upcoming Events section on page 6 for meeting details and also check our website for ongoing information on these meetings and all our events.

We will once again be hosting our summer historic house tours Sunday afternoons during July and August. We were unable to welcome visitors for the past two summers and we look forward to welcoming people to the buildings in the Yaphank Historic District. Please check our website for information on our historic houses and the summer tours.

The Society has several projects on the agenda for this year. We want to repair and paint the fences in the Yaphank Historic District. We are also going to restore the Hawkins Family Cemetery. Efforts will include cleaning up the brush, installing a new sign, and installing new fencing around this long-neglected historic burial ground. The article on page 3 presents some details on how the stones will be repaired. At the Hawkins House, restoration carpentry will continue on the front porch, finishing the project that we started last year. Work includes repairing the trim and replacing all the pine balustrades with mahogany.

Our major project scheduled for this year will be to finish the portico on the Homan House. This is a major project that has been in the works for quite some time. We have a rendering of the proposed porch, drawn by our architect. We will be working with Suffolk County Historical Services and our carpenter to come up with a final draft before we do the working drawings. All of this work needs to be completed prior to any construction. Hopefully, we will have the money to get this project completed this year. Another Homan House project scheduled for the near future is the restoration of the storage shed that is behind the House. The shed dates back to 1800 and would be an important addition to the historic buildings in the district.

Now that spring is here you should take a walk on the *Carmans River Nature Trail*. The trail head starts at the rear of the parking area on the south side of the Homan House.

I want to thank **Sherriff Toulon** and his Inmate Vocational Work Release program for all their help in our district. And I also want to thank Brookhaven Town Parks Commissioner **Eddie Morris** and his crews for always keeping the Swezey Park clean and neat.

Robert Kessler

Welcome New Members

- Joan Milner, Yaphank, NY
- Dorothy & Fred Potts, Medford, NY

Funds for this Newsletter were provided by the
Suffolk County Legislator Jim Mazzarella,
3rd Legislative District. Thank You !

&

Thank You to our corporate sponsor,
Andy Kaufman, Brookhaven Rail Terminal.

Volunteers Needed for the Busy Summer Season

If you can donate a few hours on one or two of the Sunday afternoons in July and/or August, you can welcome visitors to one of our Historic Houses. We have decent information for each house which you can refer to during the tour. If you are interested in learning more or want to volunteer, visit our website Volunteer page (yaphankhistorical.org/volunteer/), or call **Tom Skapinski at 631-732-1825**. Thank you in advance for your support.

Society to Preserve the Historic Hawkins Cemetery

Thanks to a recent grant from the **Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation**, the Yaphank Historical Society has retained Burying Ground Preservation Group (BGPG) to clean, repair, and restore the 15 markers in the Hawkins Family Cemetery, located on Middle Island-Yaphank Road in the Yaphank Historic District. The Society assists the Town of Brookhaven in maintaining the grounds. The stones date from 1770 (Joseph Homan) to 1861 (Robert Hawkins). Several of the stones have fallen over, are broken, and some may be missing. BGPG will study previous cemetery surveys to determine the condition of all stones. The cemetery is the burying place of many of Yaphank's earliest families: Homan, Hawkins, and Gerard. The historical society maintains homes that were owned by these families and which now belong to Suffolk County.

This spring all monuments will be cleaned with a mild detergent and water. Missing pieces and broken tablets will be identified and relocated if possible. Any buried stones will be excavated and brought up so that they can be further stabilized and repaired. Volunteers will be needed to assist BGPG's Zachary Studenroth and Kurt Kahofer in straightening tilted stones and reassembling broken pieces. If you are interested in helping with this project, please visit our website Volunteer page (yaphankhistorical.org/volunteer/), or send an email to Bob Kessler, president@yaphankhistorical.org.

A public tour and rededication is planned for July. Thanks to **Suzanne Johnson** for all her work on this project.



Example of marble monuments broken into multiple pieces.



Bio-growth obscures inscriptions, and threatens integrity of stones.



Tilting endangers monuments and leads to falling/breaking and further stone loss.

In Remembrance. . .



We are sad to announce the passing of Helga Wubker. Helga was a Life Member of the Yaphank Historical Society and will be remembered for her varied activities in support of the Society's events over many years. She enjoyed decorating the Hawkins House in preparation for the Christmas House tours and Victorian dinners. She was a faithful "porch person" on Sunday afternoons in July and August when the Hawkins House tours were presented. Another porch person was Edythe Davis who recently passed and was a longtime friend of Helga. In their early years they seemed inseparable! Helga usually had a table at our annual yard sales, and often Edythe did too. Helga enjoyed travel; she had relatives in Germany and visited them frequently. While participating in all these Society activities, Helga worked at the Longwood School District for many years and only retired a few years ago. The Society members will miss her and remember her fondly.

Helen Kalbach
March, 2022

Postmaster Fannie Raymond

by Karen Mouzakes

Fannie Szuster Raymond was born on April 27, 1923, at her family home in Middle Island. Her parents Kazamier and Teofia Haleski Szuster raised five girls and five boys on the Szuster farm. All of the children helped with the farm work and Fannie enjoyed growing up on the farm. There were milking cows, horses, a bull and chickens. In spring the spinach that had been planted in fall, came in. There were also strawberries and peas. In summer there were carrots, beets and cabbage to harvest. Since there was neither gas nor coal, wood was used for cooking and to heat the house. The wood was cut, split and stacked to create three large woodpiles. Fannie remembers an outhouse and sponge baths. It was a big event when sometime around 1916, a Delco gas powered generator was purchased to generate electricity for some portions of the house and farm; though there were still some times when Fannie did her homework by kerosene light.

Each morning Fannie was expected to do chores before walking to school. The school still stands on Middle Island Yaphank Road and is now an administrative office. Fannie remembers two classrooms upstairs with four classes in each room. In her first grade class there were only three students. Some of the teachers that she remembers are Mrs. Jones, Mr. Thomas and Mr. Tillinghast. After grade school, Fannie attended Port Jefferson High School.

In 1942 and it being wartime, Fannie was a U.S. Army Air Force Volunteer. She was selected to travel to New York City to learn to spot enemy aircraft. She became a Chief Observer. After a week in the city, she returned home and taught observation classes at both the Middle Island School and the Suffolk County Farm. The volunteers stood on platforms with binoculars and searched the sky for enemy planes. One such platform was atop the hill in Middle Island where the Bayles House stood. Fannie says that thankfully, they never spotted an enemy plane, but that they were always on the alert! Fannie was also an Air Raid Warden and she helped to distribute ration coupons

for gas. There were priorities given for the amount of gas coupons received. Class A, the largest amount, went to workers.

In 1944, she took the Civil Service Test to gain employment in the U.S. Postal Service. Fannie passed the test. Since no one else took the test it was not considered competitive. They asked her to take it again! Again, she took the test and this time was hired as a clerk. To be a postmaster, she had to be twenty-one years old. Fannie would not be twenty-one for another month. On March 1, 1946 a telegram arrived from the U.S. Senate telling her of her appointment as Postmaster of the Yaphank Post Office. On March 6, she received a letter from President Harry Truman confirming it.

In those days the government classified U.S. Post Offices as First Class, Second Class, and Third Class by the amount of revenue they brought in. Of course, the little Yaphank Post Office was a Class Three. The Yaphank Post Office was in a wooden building that had once been a crab shack and had been moved from Selden to Yaphank. Soon after that old office was moved, a new building made of cement blocks was built. That building still stands today on the south side of Main Street just west of the Police Garage. Because it was such a small office, Fannie had to purchase the metal Post Office Boxes out of her own pocket. The U.S. Government would not pay for them. Along with the Post Office Boxes, Fannie also purchased the framed 3'x 3' picture of George Washington that hung on the wall for one dollar. Fannie saved that picture and it hangs in her home today. When Fannie first started working, stamps were ½ cent. In 1946, she made twenty-five dollars a week and there was no sick leave. In those early years the mail came to the Yaphank Train Station where Ada Norcross would transport it to the Post Office. In later years the mail came directly to the Post Office by truck. Fannie's day would begin at 5:45am when she waited to accept the delivery of the first batch of mail at 6:00am.



Fannie Raymond was Yaphank Postmaster from 1944 until 1980.



Fannie's first office was in a crab shack that had been moved to Yaphank from Selden.

Postmaster Fannie Raymond (continued)

She would have the mail sorted by 8:00am. Other mail deliveries came at eleven, two and five o'clock. Fannie was always a working postmaster sorting mail and working the counter. She enjoyed being Postmaster. Each year she would know it was spring, when young chicks would arrive by mail to be delivered to local farmers.

During the war years, mail for Camp Upton was processed through the Yaphank Post Office and then was sent on to Camp Upton. She remembers that dances were held at the Grange Hall (today's Chase Bank) where the young girls would dance with the soldiers.

In 1945, Fannie married Charlie Raymond. Charlie came from Richmond Hill. He attended Farmingdale College where he studied farming, specifically poultry where his plan was to sell eggs. His West Yaphank property had (2) 200' long chicken coops. Charlie soon realized that selling broiler chickens, which weighed five or six pounds at 7 cents a pound, was more profitable than selling eggs. Charlie sold crates of live chickens to west-end restaurants. Through the years Charlie had a feed business and an oil business. For twenty years he was a Town of Brookhaven Code Enforcement Officer. Fannie was a founding member and the first president of the Yaphank Fire Department's Ladies Auxiliary and Charlie was Fire Chief.

Charlie and Fannie raised five children John, Mary, Cathy, James and Charlie. During these busy years, Fannie always found time, to plant a large garden behind her house on Lincoln Road. She purchased a 1940 Ford Ferguson tractor from her brothers. Each evening after dinner, Fannie would work in her garden where she raised beets, carrots, spinach, peas, peppers and squash. There were also pumpkins and a row of sweet corn. With an

abundance of vegetables, she often shared some with her neighbors. Fannie continued planting until 2019, when she broke her hip. This once again proves that you can take the farm girl off the farm, but you cannot keep the love of farming out of the girl.

The years passed and with the coming of the Suffolk County Center, the Highway Department and the Board of Elections, the volume of mail that arrived made Yaphank a First Class Post Office. Fannie now had three girls working the counter and the Star Route Rural Delivery. John Mize now delivered the mail, but some people chose to pick up their mail at the post office. It was a chance to meet neighbors, have a chat and keep up on local news.

Through the years, Yaphank's Post Office was housed in many buildings with many different Postmasters. Fannie's career began in that crab shack on Main Street and then in that small cement block building where she spent many long hours. In 1977, the Federal Government built a new federally owned government building to house the Yaphank Post Office. Fannie was there when they moved the big old safe across the street to the new building on East Main Street. The new building was beautiful and for the first time, Fannie had an office of her own. She continued on as Yaphank Postmaster until her retirement on May 2, 1980.

Fannie Szuster Raymond was interviewed by Karen Mouzakes, Society Historian Emeritus. The Yaphank Historical Society wishes to thank James Raymond for persuading his mother to be interviewed, thereby sharing the history of the Yaphank Post Office.



The old crab shack was replaced by a cement block building, c. 1950.



By 1952 mail no longer had to be picked up at the train station. Mail was delivered to the Yaphank Post Office by truck.



Fannie at her retirement luncheon where all agreed that "Her retirement would leave a big gap to fill."

YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY - APRIL, MAY, JUNE, 2022
UPCOMING EVENTS

April General Meeting

In-person meeting *
Thursday, April 21st, 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House
 Guest Speaker will be **Richard Welch**, author & historian
Program: "L.I. Gold Coast Elite and The Great War"
 Refreshments will follow the program.

Concerts in the Park

Swezey Park at the Gazebo
Music by Don and Susan
3rd Wednesday of the month, 5:00—8:00pm
 May through September (weather permitting)
 Bring a chair, spend some time with friends,
 and enjoy the music.
 All are welcome.

May General Meeting

In-person meeting *
Thursday, May 19th, 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House
 Guest speaker will be **Bill Bleyer**, author and retired
 prize-winning Newsday reporter.
Program: "George Washington's Long Island Spy Ring"
 Refreshments will follow the program.

Spring Community Yard Sale

Saturday, May 21st, 9:00—4:00, Hawkins House
(Rain date, Sunday, May 22nd)
Donation: \$10 per vendor
 Set up on the Hawkins Houses lawns
 No reservations required.
 Call 631-924-4803 with questions.

June General Meeting

In-person meeting *
Thursday, June 16th, 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House
 Guest speaker will be **Max Rowland**, entertainer.
Program: "Historic Music and Stories"
 Musical performance at the Park Gazebo, weather
 permitting . Refreshments will follow the program.

Yaphank Historic House Tours

July and August, Sunday afternoons, 1:00—4:00pm
 Robert & Isabella Hawkins House, Homan-Gerard House,
 Booth House Museum, and Swezey-Avey House.
 Docents will be on hand for tours.

July General Meeting

In-person meeting. *
Thursday, July 21st, 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House
 Guest speaker will be **Don Fisher**, President of the
 Railroad Museum of Long Island.
Program: "History of the LIRR"
 Refreshments will follow the program.

August General Meeting

In-person meeting. *
Thursday, August 18th, 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House
 Guest speaker will be **Barbara Russell**,
 Brookhaven Town Historian
Program: "Born in Brookhaven"
 Refreshments will follow the program.

Bank of the River Gift Shop at the Hawkins House

Hours: Thursday Afternoons, noon—4:00pm
Phone: 631-924-3401

***If COVID-19 conditions require that we host a meeting via Zoom, we will post instructions & meeting data on our website yaphankhistorical.org, and send email messages to our members.**

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please enroll me as:

_____ \$25 Individual _____ \$150 Business \$_____ Additional Support
 _____ \$40 Family _____ \$300 Life Member TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

Thank you for your Support !

Make check payable to Yaphank Historical Society.

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