

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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Board of Directors

- President - Robert Kessler
- Vice President - Jim Vavrina
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- Corresponding Secretary - Marie Desch
- Librarian - Kitty Daniels
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- Historian Emeritus - Karen Mouzakes
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- 2-Yr. Trustee - MaryLaura Lamont & Robert Von Bernewitz
- 1-Yr. Trustee - Danielle Courtois & Dorothy Potts

YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Historic Yaphank - Where the Past Greet's the Present

JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH 2023

Society Receives Robert David Lion Gardiner Grant



The Society is pleased to announce that we have received a generous matching grant in the amount of **\$23,302** from the **Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation** for continued preservation work on the Homan-Gerard House. We received formal notice of this grant from Exec. Director, Kathryn Curran, on November 14, 2022. President Bob Kessler and Treasurer Audrey Kessler attended the official presentation ceremony held on December 9, 2022 at the Ketcham Inn where grant contracts were awarded and awards were made.

Kathryn Curran, Executive Dir., Gardiner Foundation, presents grant award to Robert Kessler, President, YHS

The Society extends sincere thanks to the Foundation for their continued support to preserve the history of Long Island.

Election Night Results

Voting for 2023 YHS Board Members took place at the November General Meeting on Thursday, November 17th at the Swezey-Avey House. The complete 2023 Board of Directors appears at left. We want to welcome new Board Members MaryLaura Lamont, Robert Von Bernewitz, Danielle Courtois, and Dorothy Potts. We look forward to working with our new Board Members this coming year. We also want to thank departing Board Members, Peggy Judd and Tom Skapinski. We thank them for their years of service and look forward to working with them as active members.

We take this opportunity to thank all of our continuing Board Members for their service and support these past few years as they continued in their positions throughout the COVID pandemic. The Society is hoping to make the coming year one that will be filled with interesting events and programs for our members and restoration efforts and improvements to the Yaphank Historic District.

Letter From The President

Best wishes to all for a Happy, Healthy, and Peaceful New Year. We look forward to a busy and productive 2023.

The Yaphank Historical Society had a very busy 2022. We finally were able to once again host our Summer Season Historic House Tours which were very successful. We also hosted our Christmas House Tours, also a great success. Thanks to all of our members for their help in doing all the work necessary to make our historic houses ready to welcome holiday visitors. For several weeks prior to the open-house weekend, members were busy cleaning, decorating, and baking cookies. And docents were on hand in each house on the big weekend. **Thank you all.**

The Society also hosted a very successful summer concert series featuring **Don and Susan** playing for us on the third Wednesday of each month at our Gazebo in the Park. A good time was had by all who attended, and we hope to continue the series again in 2023. Thanks to **Susan and Don Cerce** for their continued support.

Restoration Highlights:

Our reliance on grants continues to increase and we received several grants from the **Robert D. L. Gardiner Foundation** this past year.

The Society received **\$1500 Young Scholars Internship Award** for Abigail Horn who will be working with our Curator updating the inventory of items located at our historic houses and entering that data into the Collections Database.

We received a **non-matching \$10,000 grant** for the restoration of the Hawkins Family Cemetery. Work on the Cemetery was headed up by Zach Studenroth of the **Burying Ground Preservation Group**. Additional grounds help and installation of new fence was provided by the **Town of Brookhaven Parks Department** and the Inmates Training Program. The Society hosted a dedication and celebration of the Hawkins Family Cemetery at the Swezey-Avey House. Mr. Studenroth presented an overview of the restoration project and details of how the stones were restored. The event was well attended and refreshments followed the program.

Late in the year, the Society received a **\$23,302 matching grant** for the exterior preservation work on the front entrance of the Homan-Gerard House. This portico project has been on the "to-do list" for some time and this grant will now let us finish this important addition to the House.

Special end-of-year thanks go to the following:

Legislator Jim Mazzarella for facilitating the Hotel-Motel Grant that helped fund our on-going projects.

Legislator Rob Calarco for his assistance in facilitating additional Hotel-Motel grant funding.

Sheriff Earl Toulon, the Corrections Officers, and the Inmates Training Program who worked on a variety of projects.

Eddie Morris, Town of Brookhaven Parks Commissioner, and members of the Parks Department who continued to provide assistance when asked for help and who also do a great job in our Town.

Lastly, I thank the **Yaphank Historical Society Board of Directors** for all of their hard work and dedication to the Society. We will be losing some long-time Board Members this year, but gaining some new faces who I am sure will be an asset to our Society. I want to thank the retiring Board Members for their service and for helping us to be the Society that we are today.

Robert Kessler

Welcome New Members

- Dale Clancy, Mastic, NY
- Veronica DiFabio, Middle Island, NY
- Annetta & Ed Pol, Yaphank, NY

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

Message from the Editor

Dear Members and Readers,

After 12 years of sharing Yaphank Historical Society news with you, I am stepping down as Editor of the *Newsletter* and this will be my last issue. I have truly enjoyed keeping our members and readers informed of our preservation efforts and outreach activities. I especially enjoyed writing and publishing “historic-interest articles” gleaned from information that can be found in our extensive archive collections.

I look forward to working with a new Editor. As the Society continues to grow, the *Newsletter* will continue to serve its purpose of keeping our members informed. I also look forward to submitting an occasional article “from our archives”. Happy 2023! Best wishes for a year filled with peace, good health and happiness.

Peggy Judd
January 2023

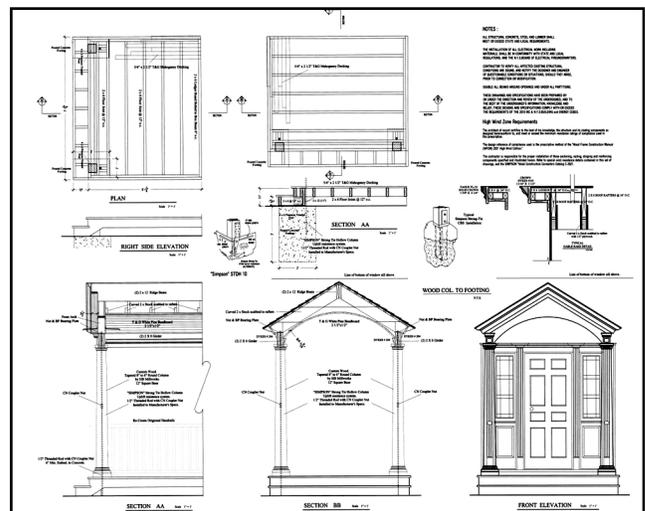
Note: Continuing with this issue, the Society will be distributing the *YHS Newsletter* online and via email. All members who have provided us with an active email address will receive a full-color PDF file of the *Newsletter* via email. As usual, the same full-color PDF version will be posted on the Society website, available to all.

The Homan House Portico Restoration Project

The Historical Society is looking forward to moving forward with completion of the remaining exterior work on the front entrance of the Homan-Gerard House. Early in the exterior restoration work on the House, a half-moon board was discovered buried behind the shingles above the front door. This board was clearly identified as the back board of the original portico. The board gave us the shape and the height of the portico. And on two of the trim boards at the front entry we found the oval shape of a handrail on each side of the front door. This discovery gave us the height and the shape of the handrail.

Looking to the future when we would hopefully obtain funds to pursue this project, we had an architect John Wallace Ross (Traditional Home Design, Northport, NY) draw up plans for us.

Over time, we received funds and support from our members, our Legislators, Jim Mazzarella and Rob Calarco, and Suffolk County Parks Division, and the funds were set aside. We recently received a matching grant from the Robert D. L. Gardiner Foundation (see page 1) which will provide the necessary extra funding to finish this project. The Society will begin preservation construction on this project this spring.



More About Mary L. Booth

WOMEN AT COLUMBIA.

ASKING THE COLLEGE TRUSTEES TO ESTABLISH AN ANNEX.

The petition in regard to the proposed women's annex to Columbia College was received by the Trustees of that institution yesterday. Mrs. Alfred Meyer was the originator of this scheme. The petition proposes that the Trustees shall officially sanction the establishment of a college for women that shall have a course parallel with that of the School of Arts, including the same studies, and under the same Board of Instruction. The Trustees are not asked to expend any money on the project, the necessary funds being raised by persons interested in the scheme.

The movers in the matter contemplate the erection or adaptation of suitable buildings in the vicinity of Columbia College. It is proposed that the government of the women's college shall be arranged between the petitioners and the college Trustees, and that it shall be either under the present board of Columbia College or under a separate corporate body that shall have charge of the internal affairs and pecuniary expenditures of the annex, and shall treat with the college board through a conference committee.

Among the persons signing the memorial are: Chauncey M. Depew, President Simmons of the Board of Education, William E. Dodge and Mrs. Dodge, Mayor Hewitt, Dr. Fordyce Barker, ex-Judge Noah Davis, Dr. William H. Draper, R. W. Gilder, Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, Miss Mary Booth, the Rev. Dr. W. R. Huntington, the Rev. Dr. Robert Collyer, the Rev. Dr. Arthur Brooks, the Rev. Dr. Gotthell, Mrs. Francis Fisher Wood, the President of the Vassar Alumnae Association, the Rev. Dr. R. S. Storrs, the Rev. Dr. C. H. Parkhurst, the Rev. Dr. Lyman Abbott, Frederic R. Coudert, Jesse Seligman, the Rev. Dr. T. Armitage, and President A. S. Webb of the College of the City of New-York.

The Trustees did not discuss the petition, but simply referred it to a special committee consisting of Trustees Nash, Dix, Harper, Mitchell, and Agnew. This committee is familiar with the subject, having gone over much the same ground about three years ago. Mrs. Meyer, then Miss Annie Foster Nathan, was a student in the collegiate course for women last year. Women are now given diplomas on passing the necessary examination, but cannot attend the lectures.

Information about Mary Louise Booth continues to be discovered by Tricia Foley, author of *Mary L Booth: The Story of an Extraordinary 19-Century Woman*. Tricia submitted this recently found newsworthy item.

A March 6, 1888, New York Times column titled "WOMEN AT COLUMBIA" notes ongoing activist efforts of our own Mary Louise Booth. Ms. Booth was one of the signers of a proposal to create a women's annex to Columbia College. Along with a long list of important religious and educational luminaries, Ms. Booth attended the meeting. Included in the list of attendees was Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, a close friend of Ms. Booth (and future executor of her will).

The Times article at left states "The petition proposes that the Trustees shall officially sanction the establishment of a college for women that shall have a course parallel with that of the School of Arts, including the same studies, and under the same Board of Instruction." The petition goes on to relate that funds would be provided for the establishment of this annex.



Barnard College beginnings.



Graduation Ceremonies , Barnard College—Columbia's Annex for Women

The Summer the Nazis Came to Yaphank

Editor's Comments: Recent increased attention to Nazism, due to our current political environment, news articles, both online and in paper, and even a New York City off-Broadway play, has resulted in several references (some complimentary, some not) to the fact that Yaphank played a small part 85 years ago. The Society offers the following overview of that old history to our readers. We have also made a PowerPoint presentation (by Karen Mouzakes, Society Historian Emeritus) available on YouTube. A link to that presentation on Camp Siegfried appears on our website, near the top of our homepage, immediately below the links to the *Newsletter* and the Hawkins House video.

In 1935, children of German heritage came out for summer camp to canoe, swim, and participate in sports and enjoy the forest/lakes setting, just as others came to the Girl Scout camps, Boy Scout camps, and Greek heritage camps along the lakes for years. Then more families started to arrive, and spend time here on weekends, originally enjoying German culture, music, and food, and they started building small summer bungalows along the lake. The crowds grew on Sundays, with trains full of people coming from the city to spend the day here and they supported the local farms and shops and restaurants on the lakes which had been hurting financially since the depression and the decline of the mills. The village economy was helped with their buying beer, ice cream, lunches and picnic food, and no one thought anything of it.

But soon the crowds coming had a political agenda. There was a faction promoting Hitler, and the tone of the summer retreat took on a secretive air and the numbers of visitors kept increasing. Extra train cars came out from the city (Jamaica and Yorkville) and they marched down Main Street to the other end of town to Camp Siegfried. People in Yaphank were now feeling uncomfortable with them and it was out of their control. Local residents were frightened and some couldn't get past them to drive out of their own homes.

Residents went to the local Town of Brookhaven, Suffolk County, and federal officials to see what they could do to stop this. They had no legal recourse as this group had the right to free assembly under the First Amendment. Local boys sneaked up to the camp and took down license plate numbers and submitted them to the police. Judge Neuss of Yaphank contacted the FBI, and they finally came to investigate and found nothing. As things were heating up on the world stage, and Hitler invaded Poland, it all ended. The Camp lost its liquor license, the U.S. government took over the property and Yaphank was quiet again. It all happened and was over in 2 – 3 summers. The property was bought up after the war and converted into residential communities.

As Ryan Shaffer, Stony Brook University History Professor, describes it: "While some were ardent Nazis, many were patriotic German-Americans whose families were in the country for decades. What needs to be understood by such groups is that for the rank and file, they were patriotic for both Germany and the United States. The Bund's activity on L.I. was a way to mesh patriotism of the two countries locally even if the ideology conflicted."

This Nazi activity was not generated by residents of the hamlet of Yaphank. When the Friends of New Germany evolved into the German American Bund, and bought property at the edge of town, they brought this faction here from the city, and tainted Yaphank's reputation for years. Yaphank residents who happen to be of German ancestry are still here and live in and around German Gardens and the German American Settlement properties and are part of the community along with residents of Irish, English, Italian, Jewish heritage and many other nationalities.

(continued)

The Summer the Nazis Came to Yaphank *(continued)*

Basic Timeline:

- 1935 Lakeview Farm on the outskirts of Yaphank was sold to Friends of New Germany and became Camp Siegfried. Children came from Jamaica, Brooklyn and Manhattan for summer camp for water sports, crafts, and German culture.
- 1936 Camp Siegfried was sold to the German American Settlement League. A separate political faction developed, part of the German American Bund. That faction began holding weekend rallies there.
- 1937 Huge crowds arrived from New York City in Yaphank for pro-Nazi rallies. Yaphank residents protested, and sent pleas to the Town of Brookhaven, Suffolk County and to the FBI to stop this invasion.
- 1938 The FBI, at Yaphank's request, investigated Camp Siegfried, and found no munitions, weapons, or sabotage as reported, and could not shut down the Camp, as they were protected by the First Amendment and they were allowed the right for free assembly. Camp Siegfried, however, lost its liquor license, and attendance diminished dramatically.
- 1939 Hitler invaded Poland and the parades and rallies stopped.
- 1941 The U.S. Government/Alien Property Custodian took over Camp Siegfried.
- 1957 The German American Settlement League purchased the land back from the U.S. Government, called it Siegfried Park, and received a charter in 1959 from New York State for German American people to purchase the old bungalows. Over the years it has been settled by a mix of German American and non-German American residents of all nationalities.



Ice Skating—A Victorian pastime

By Peggy Judd

During our recent cold snap with below-freezing temperatures for several days, our local lakes and ponds developed a nice layer of ice—ice thick enough for skating. Passing by a nearby pond, I saw young skaters out playing ice hockey and enjoying the winter day. I think most of us have fond memories of ice skating, gliding over the smooth surface, being proud of being able to skate backwards, trying out clever moves and even small jumps, and then gathering with friends around a small bonfire to warm up.

Ice skating has been popular since Victorian times. The last decade of the 1800s saw the nation embracing ice skating. In both the city and the country, skating on frozen ponds, lakes and rivers was “the thing to do”. In New York City as many as 20,000 skaters at a time were seen on the icy ponds in Central Park in the late 1860s and 70s.

Skating was a pastime for all ages. Young men and women would go on skating “dates” (a welcome escape from the obligatory chaperone), others began strapping on skates for exercise and to enjoy fresh air outside of their cramped city dwellings. In a January 1866 issue of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, skating was referred to as “Our National Winter Exercise”.

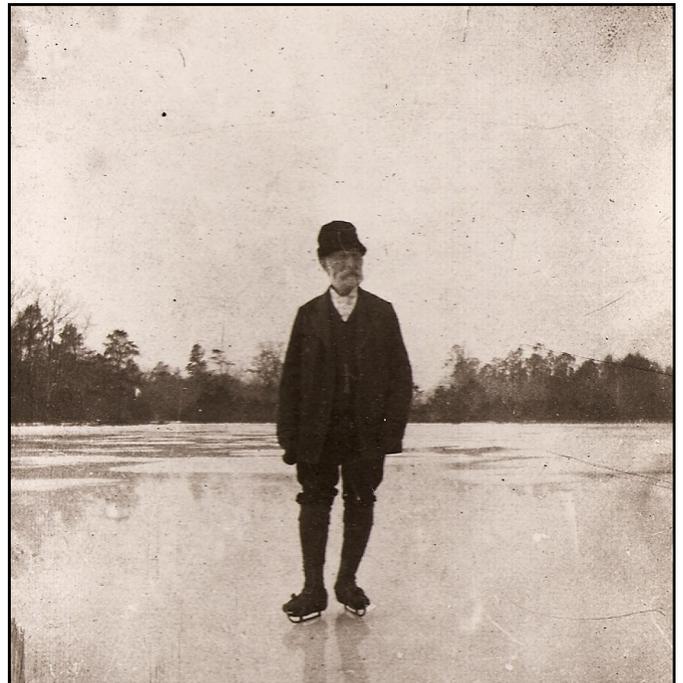
Skating was so much a part of the winter season's entertainment for every family, that soon skating scenes were a common subject for artists such as Winslow Homer and Currier & Ives. Sheet music was published for the piano and singers included skating numbers in their shows.

Modern Figure Skating. In a small Finnish town in 1879, a tombstone was erected for the passing of the man who influenced skating more than any other person. The inscription on the stone reads: *Jackson Haines, The American Skating King*. Haines almost single-handedly invented figure skating and he was revered worldwide for his skill and style. He is often referred to as the father of modern figure skating.

Yaphank's Own Figure Skating Legend. William James Weeks, a Yaphank resident, was an outstanding athlete who favored ice skating. He would frequently skate on his pond, practicing working out intricate patterns and words on the ice.

Mr. Weeks claimed to be able to skate the Ten Commandments (1200 letters in all) or any words or sentences in the English language. In a September, 1975 issue of the *Long Island Advance*, it was noted that “Dr. George Starr of Danbury, Mass. watched Mr. Weeks, then 93, skate the whole Lord's Prayer on the ice on Yaphank Pond in 1907.” Many other Yaphank residents enjoyed skating on the mill ponds, but none ever reached the level of skating performed by William Weeks.

Unfortunately for leisure skaters on Long Island, our winters usually remain too warm to keep our lakes and ponds frozen for long. Serious hockey players rely on indoor rinks and others can sometimes schedule skate time when the rinks offer open times. Still, when the weather turns cold enough, and ice forms, we will see skaters, young and old, out on the ice enjoying a Victorian pastime.



Yaphank's Own Figure Skating Legend. William James Weeks, was an outstanding athlete who favored ice skating.

YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
JANUARY— MAY 2023 UPCOMING EVENTS

Mid Winter Indoor Tag Sale

Saturday & Sunday, **February 11 & 12**,
9:00am—3:00pm, Swezey-Avey House
 Featuring items from Historical Society storage.
 Call 631-924-4803 with questions.

March General Meeting

Thursday, **March 16th**, **7:30pm**, Swezey-Avey House
 Guest speaker will be **Gary Lawrance**, architect & author
Program: “Long Island’s Lost Architecture
 of the Gilded Age”
 Refreshments will follow the program.

Early Spring Indoor Tag Sale

Saturday & Sunday, **April 1 & 2**
9:00am – 3:00pm, Swezey-Avey House
 Featuring items from Historical Society storage.
 Call 631-924-4803 with questions.

April General Meeting

Thursday, **April 20th**, **7:30pm**, Swezey-Avey House
 Guest speakers: **Jamie Reason**, historian & author, and
Joe Janssen, historian & author
Program: “C. S. Bunn (1865-1952)-- America’s greatest
 shorebirds decoy carver”
 Refreshments will follow the program

May General Meeting

Thursday, **May 18th**, **7:30pm**, Swezey-Avey House
 Guest speaker will be **Rob Von Bernewitz**, author &
 YHS Board Member
Program: “Long Island Cemeteries & Graveyards”
 Refreshments will follow the program

Spring Community Yard Sale

Saturday , May 20th, **9:00-4:00**, Hawkins House
(Rain date, Sunday, May 21st)
Donation: \$10 per vendor.
 Set up on the Hawkins House lawns.
 No reservations necessary.
 Call 631-924-4803 with questions.

Bank of the River Gift Shop at the Hawkins House

Open during the winter, weather permitting.
Hours: Thursday Afternoons, noon—4:00pm
Phone: 631-924-3401

Membership Dues: Your membership is important to us. Dues are currently payable for the Yaphank Historical Society 2023 membership year. Please see member types and current dues rates below. Please include your current email address when you send in your dues. Your support is essential and we sincerely appreciate your support.
If you have already submitted your 2023 membership dues, thank you.

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.

Please complete and mail form & check to : Yaphank Historical Society, P.O. Box 111, Yaphank, NY 11980

Name _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____ Email: _____

Town: _____ State: _____ Zipcode: _____

Yaphank Historical Society is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax-deductible as allowable by law.