



# YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER 2024

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**Robert von Bernewitz**

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Vice President - Jim Vavrina  
Treasurer - Audrey Kessler  
Recording Secretary -  
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Corresponding Secretary -  
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Librarian - Kitty Daniels  
Historian - Judi Bird  
Historian Emeritus - Karen Mouzakes  
Curator - Helen Kalbach  
Honorary Lifetime Board Member -  
Kathy Schmidt  
Booth House Curator - Trish Foley  
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3-Yr. Trustee - Gary Scherpich  
2-Yr. Trustee - Robert von Bernewitz  
1-Yr. Trustee - Dale Clancy &  
Lynne Scofield

## YHS's 50th Anniversary Celebration a Well-Attended Success

On Saturday August 10<sup>th</sup> the Yaphank Historical Society hosted its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. It was a well-attended event on a beautiful summer day. On hand were members of the community, local elected officials, long time Society members, community leaders, volunteers and more. The attendees were treated to exhibits, tours and refreshments and this set the stage for a fine day to experience Yaphank's rich history. This event took months to prepare for and the result was a wonderful time was had by all.



## Letter From The President

Our 50th Anniversary Celebration was a tremendous success. Many thanks go out to our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary committee members; they worked for months organizing and scheduling the many items, projects and work assignments necessary to meet our scheduled celebration date. Their work, and the work of Board Members and Society member volunteers, resulted in the great and happy celebration enjoyed by all on August 10, 2025. Special thanks go to committee chairperson Danielle Courtois and to our event coordinator Ellen Kushner. Without them we could never have put this together.

The Society received many well-deserved thanks and Proclamations from the attending dignitaries. County Executive Ed Romaine was also on hand for the unveiling of our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Monument, marking the burial of a Society time capsule. Mr. Romaine expressed heartfelt interest in history and thanked the Society for its work in preserving the history of Yaphank.

Our Swezey-Avey House exhibit rooms, containing Society historical information and displays, were open for our visitors and Board Members were on hand to answer questions. Outside, our master gardeners were on hand to showcase our Butterfly Garden and our resident arborist MaryLaura Lamont was on hand to showcase the largest Sugar Maple Tree in Suffolk County. **THANK YOU ALL.**

As we look forward to our 51<sup>st</sup> year, we are awaiting our new contract from Suffolk County. The contract is a 20-year contract; it includes the Hawkins House and property, as well as the Homan and Booth Houses and the property behind both houses. The contract also includes provision for the Society to assume responsibility for the Prosser Pines Barn and surrounding property. The Society will be installing period-appropriate exhibits in the Barn and we hope to have the Barn open for our summer house tours.

We also plan to restore the shed structure that is located behind the Homan House. This is a shed that has been dated to 1800. Our good friend Stan Kazel of Dawn House Movers lifted the shed/barn up for us free of charge so that we can work on the stone foundation and restore the sills and the bottom part of the structure that is in bad shape. We can then lower the building down on the new stone foundation and restore the rest of the structure.

We are in the process of putting QR codes throughout our Historic District. Look for them; they will be on wooden posts, the top part of which will be painted yellow. The posts will be located at all of our historic houses, our gardens, our Nature Trail, and places of interest throughout the Yaphank Historic District. Just scan the code with your phone and get a description of the site you are at.

Several of us attended the Longwood Fair again this year. We had a great time, and we met so many people that we had not seen in years. We offered many Society handouts to the people who stopped by our table. We made new friends and signed up some new members.

Special thanks go to all our neighbors, supporters and volunteers, without whose help and generosity we could not have accomplished all that we have.

And I take this opportunity to sadly announce the passing of two good friends of the Society, Eric Crater and Kurt Kahofer—*rest in peace.*

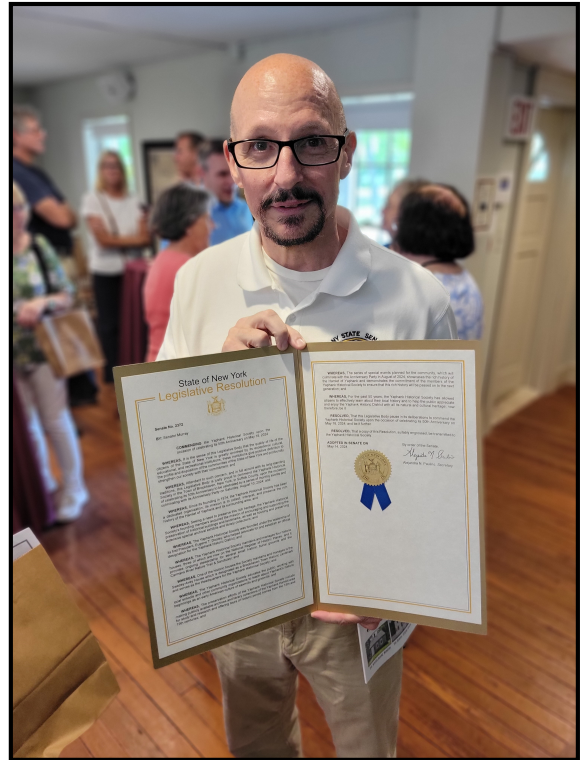
*Robert Kessler*

## Editor's Note

I would like to thank the following for their contributions to this Newsletter: Bob Kessler, Helen Kalbach, Gary Scherpich, Peggy Judd, Judi Bird and Danielle Courtoir. 50th Anniversary photos by Robert von Bernewitz. **Funds for this newsletter were provided by Suffolk County Legislator James Mazzarella, 3rd Legislative District. Thank you!**

# YHS 50th Anniversary Celebration

## Photo Essay





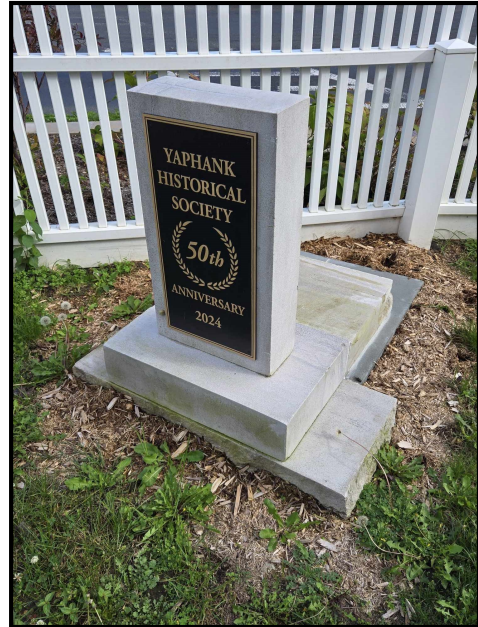






## Time Capsule Buried at Swezey-Avey House

Just prior to our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, the Yaphank Historical Society buried a time capsule near the front gate of the Swezey-Avey House. Inside this container is a variety of items that shows the charming village of Yaphank as it is in 2024. A sampling of photographs of the village, newspapers, notes from people in the society, items of historic importance and more, were environmentally sealed and buried under concrete and stone. This time capsule is to be opened 25 years from now in 2049. We can only imagine what Yaphank will be like in 25 years.



## Explore Our Nature Trail and Historic Houses with QR Codes!

As you wander through our nature trail this fall, keep an eye out for QR codes placed along the path. These codes provide instant access to information about the plants, animals, and ecosystems, as well as the structures and former residents, on the trail. Simply scan the QR code with your smartphone camera to see interesting details. Look for additional QR codes on the grounds of our historic houses this fall as well.





## YHS Hosts Scavenger Hunt

As part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, the Yaphank Historical Society held a scavenger hunt throughout the historic district. Participants had to answer questions on Yaphank's history at various locations. The event was well attended and there were many nice prizes given away. One of the prizes was a handmade quilt made by Olive Archer. Thanks to everyone who helped staff the locations and thanks to Sarah O'Donnell and Lauren Hoffman who helped at the Swezey-Avey House. The event was a great success.



## Swezey-Avey House Presentation

On Thursday July 18<sup>th</sup> YHS President Bob Kessler gave a presentation on the history of the Swezey-Avey House. The house has a rich history and was home to early settlers of the area. The first saw mill in Yaphank was built next to the house, operated by Christopher Swezey. Many generations of Swezey's lived here afterwards. Sarah Swezey married Harry T. Avey, who she met in India and they both lived in the house for many years. The Town of Brookhaven purchased the house in 1963. In a joint effort with the Yaphank Historical Society the house was renovated and now houses the headquarters of the Yaphank Historical Society.



## YHS Holds Fall Yard and Craft Sale

Long Island can have spectacular weather in September. When YHS held our annual fall Yard and Craft sale on September 14<sup>th</sup> at the Robert and Isabella Hawkins House, we had just that. Folks were out shopping, antiquing and looking for treasures in full force. There was plenty of fine merchandise available from our 27 vendors. Visitors also had the opportunity to visit the historic Shell Gas Station Museum, which was open to the public on the corner of Yaphank Avenue and Main Street right next door. It was a wonderful event in rural Yaphank.



## Revolutionary Connection to Yaphank

Benjamin Tallmadge was a Setauket, Long Island-born Revolutionary hero. He was a child prodigy and attended Yale College at a young age. Upon graduating from Yale, he became a school teacher in Connecticut. When tensions reached a boiling point in Boston between the British homeland and the colonists, the battles of Lexington and Concord signaled the start of the Revolution. Sympathetic to the patriots, Tallmadge enlisted in the Continental Army. Rising up through the ranks, he eventually became the first director of intelligence for George Washington. Tallmadge led a daring raid on the British-controlled fort at the Manor of St. George in Mastic. In June, YHS Trustee Robert von Bernewitz gave a pictorial presentation on the path Tallmadge and his forces took during this raid, now known as the Tallmadge Trail.



### In Memorium. . . . . .

It is with sadness that we note the passing of Eric Crater, a friend and Yaphank Historical Society preservation partner. As Assistant Director of Historic Services at the Suffolk County Parks Department, Eric worked closely with the Society to preserve and restore historic buildings within the Yaphank Historic District, including the Robert & Isabella Hawkins House, the Booth House Museum, and most recently the Homan-Gerard House.

Many of us at the Society worked closely with Eric during these restoration projects and we remember his sense of humor, his knowledge, and his dedication to the work. We shared fun times along with the hard work that comes with any preservation project. We have a wealth of memories and Eric will be dearly missed. Each of our historic houses that are enjoyed by many visitors during our summer house tours are part of Eric's legacy and his commitment to preserving local history.



A quote posted by the Suffolk AME, so nicely says what we all feel at this sad time---*Eric Crater leaves behind a legacy of friendship, dedication, and kindness. His absence will be keenly felt by his co-workers, friends, and the entire community he served with such distinction. Eric will be sorely missed and his spirit will continue to inspire us always.*

Peggy Judd  
Helen Kalbach

## Homan House Barn Restoration is Underway

Behind the Homan-Gerard House is a barn-like structure that has been dated back to 1800. The structure was used as a shed. Through time and exposure to the elements, it has become in need of restoration. The Yaphank Historical Society has now started the process of the restoration of this treasure. Recently the barn was raised by Dawn House Movers as a gift to the Society. The next step is to give it a solid foundation so it can be lowered back into place. We are keeping Yaphank's history alive one structure at a time.



## YHS to Host Holiday House Tours

Coming this winter holiday season, the Yaphank Historical Society will showcase our four historic houses with guided tours. The Swezey-Avey House, Mary Louise Booth Birthplace Museum, Robert and Izabella Hawkins House, and Homan-Gerard House will be decorated for the holiday season. There will be live music and refreshments at the Swezey-Avey House



## Amendments made to YHS By-laws

The following Amendments were added to the By-laws:

1. The term of our Executive Board members (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Curator, Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, and Librarian) was increased from one year to two years.
2. An additional 1-year Trustee position was added to the Board of Directors

Nominations, elections and voting processes remain the same. Elections for all open 2025 board positions will be held at the November General Meeting, Thursday November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024, at the Swezey-Avey House.

**YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**October 2024 through April 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS**

**October General Meeting**

Thursday, **October 17th 7:30pm**, Swezey Avey House  
 Guest Speaker: **Karen Mouzakes, Historian Emeritus and Founding Member YHS**  
**Program:** Hawkins Family of Yaphank and Brooklyn Heights Connections  
 Refreshments will follow the program.

- **No December 2024 General Meeting**
- **No January 2024 General Meeting**
- **No February 2024 General Meeting**

**November General Meeting**

Thursday, **November 21st, 7:30pm** Swezey-Avey House  
**Program:** Yaphank Historical Society Elections  
 Refreshments with follow the program.

**March General Meeting**

Thursday, **March 20th 7:30pm**, Swezey Avey House  
 Guest Speaker: **Art Billadello, Historian**  
**Program:** The Roe Tavern  
 Refreshments will follow the program.

**December Holiday House Tours**

**December 14th and 15th, 1:00 to 4:00pm,**  
**Donation \$20 Adults; Children under 12, free. Pick up tickets at Swezey-Avey House**  
 Homan-Gerard House, Booth House Museum, Hawkins House, Swezey-Avey House will have guided Tours  
 Swezey-Avey Exhibit Rooms Open.  
 Holiday Music and Refreshments.

**April General Meeting**

Thursday, **April 17th 7:30pm**, Swezey Avey House  
 Guest Speaker: **Jim Ward, Historian**  
**Program:** The Hunt for John Wilkes Booth (following the 1865 assassination of Abraham Lincoln.)  
 Refreshments will follow the program.

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

Open all year long, weather permitting  
 Hours: Thursday Afternoons, noon - 4:00pm  
 Phone: 631 924-3401

**Welcome New Members**

**Ulrike Gawor - Yaphank, New York**  
**Carol Wendell - Miller Place, New York**

**Volunteers needed**

Do you enjoy local history or like driving through a picturesque town and looking at old historic houses? Why not become a volunteer for the Yaphank Historical Society? We showcase wonderfully restored homes that are rich in history! The Society is looking for volunteers to help us with our tours of our properties. If you are interested in helping out, visit our website volunteer page ([yaphankhistorical.org/volunteer/](http://yaphankhistorical.org/volunteer/)) or call (631) 924-4803 and leave a message.