



**Robert Hawkins House**  
 P.O. Box 111  
 Yaphank, NY 11980-0111  
[www.yaphankhistorical.org](http://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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# YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 2020

## Society Receives Pomeroy Grant of \$2,000

We are very happy to report that the Yaphank Historical Society was recently awarded a grant from the William G, Pomeroy Foundation.

In April, the Pomeroy Foundation, in conjunction with the Museum Association of New York State created a \$50,000 fund, *Pomeroy Fund for NYS History*, to help non-profit history-related organizations in New York State that were closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Fund-raising opportunities became very limited or impossible during the first several months of the pandemic, and grants from this fund, if awarded, would help such organizations continue to move forward and/or offset expenses.

The grant money from the Pomeroy Fund will be used to purchase new hardware and software, enabling the Society to continue work on updating our technology. As part of this work we are creating databases of our collections, archives and library collections, as well as working toward a website-accessible virtual tour of the Homan - Gerard House.



**New Interactive Touch-Screen Video Display at Homan-Gerard House.**

**Special thanks to Suzanne Johnson**, Society Historian, for applying for and successfully obtaining this grant. Her hard work is much appreciated.

**Special Notice:** In order to protect the health and well-being of our members and visitors, and to help mitigate the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Society will be postponing and rescheduling upcoming events as necessary. Each event will be evaluated as we move further into the calendar. At the time of this publication, the Society is waiting for official reopening dates and regulations from both Brookhaven Town and Suffolk County. Please check our website, [www.yaphankhistorical.org](http://www.yaphankhistorical.org), for ongoing current information. Thank you for your support. Stay safe and be well.

## Letter from the President

**I hope everyone is well. Please take precautions to stay safe.**

Although we have been closed for the last few months because of the virus we still have been terribly busy. Our two major projects have been upgrading our technology and getting our district on the National Register

We were able to upgrade our technology thanks to a very generous grant from the **Robert Lion Gardiner Foundation**. In our meeting room at the Swezey House we now have a large screen TV monitor. We also have speakers and a microphone for our guest lecturers so we can all hear what they are saying. The Town of Brookhaven Parks Department recently installed an in-wall air conditioner for us; our old one was very noisy and could not be run when we had a lecturer. I want to thank **Eddie Morris** (Town of Brookhaven Parks Commissioner) for getting this done.

At the Homan House we now have a touch-screen technology unit which we put into an antique desk. The desk was modified to accept the touch-screen monitor. This tells viewers the story from the formation of the Carmans River to the end of Milling in Yaphank. We were also able to buy two new computers thanks to a generous grant of \$2,000 from the **Pomeroy Foundation**. One of the computers, a laptop, will be used for our presentations and another one, a desktop, will be used for our Library, Archives and for research.

Our project to have the Yaphank Historic District listed on the State and National Register is also moving forward. Our consultants, Zachary Studenroth and Kurt Kahofer, have completed an intensive survey of all the properties. They have photographed them and uploaded the images onto the State Historic Preservation Office website. The areas and the properties to be included in the filing have also been mapped. We have included Willow and Lily Lakes in the filing. The next steps will be to do National Register narratives, description and significance of the properties.

Normally at this point we would do a public hearing, but due to the coronavirus this is not possible. The State Historic Preservation Office will be sending letters out to all the property owners that are in the listing area. That mailing will include their letter and a letter from the Yaphank Historical Society describing the listing and what it entails. This project was funded by a grant from the **Preservation League of New York** along with money from the Yaphank Historical Society.

**Reopening Update:** Once we receive official reopening notification from the Town and County, the Society will take steps to sanitize and disinfect all historic houses. The Society recently received a generous donation from the **Bellport Home Depot**. Thanks to **John Gobel, Store Manager, and Lisa Marie Halliday, Assistant Store Manager**, we now have plenty of PPE (personal protection equipment) supplies on hand. The Society will take all safety precautions to protect our members and guests.

**Please stay safe—we will open again when it is safe for all of our members and guests.**

*Robert Kessler*

### Welcome New Members

- **Andy Kaufman , Yaphank, NY**

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

## Newsletter Going Paperless

In this time of increasing costs and decreasing revenue (especially with limited fund-raising opportunities) the Society is moving toward distributing the *YHS Newsletter* via online and/or email instead of the costly mailing process. A full-color PDF version of the *Newsletter* will be posted on the Society website and the same full-color PDF version could also be emailed to our members with active email addresses. **Please email your name and your current email address to [webmaster@yaphankhistorical.org](mailto:webmaster@yaphankhistorical.org)** or fill out **the enclosed green email address request form** and mail it to Yaphank Historical Society, P.O. Box 111, Yaphank, NY 11980. We will update your member record in our files. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

## Hawkins House Docent Questions Answered

**From the Editor:** Unfortunately, we will be unable to host summer house tours this year due to the Corona virus pandemic. We have always had a number of interested visitors to each of our historic houses. We have noticed an increased interest in history over the past few years. I usually do docent duty at the Hawkins House and last summer several visitors asked questions about who lived in the Hawkins House once the Hawkins family no longer resided there. The Hawkins family built the house in 1850 and members of the family were in residence, either as summer visitors or full-time residents from 1850 to 1877. 1877 was the last year that any member of the Hawkins family owned the house. From that date until 1966 when the property was condemned by Suffolk County, the Hawkins House had a variety of different owners and/or renters and served a variety of purposes including a boarding house, single-family residence, and rental property.

A number of early owners used the house as a rental, first as a single-family residence and later owners divided the house into a multiple-family residence. Several dates stand out: from 1911-1919, then owner Roswell Davis rented the house to the Louis and Rozilla Kammerer family. The family took care of the house and the Society has pictures from a Kammerer photo album containing exterior pictures of the Hawkins House and its outbuildings along with family pictures. As our Historian Emeritus, Karen Mouzakes, states *these were happy years for the Hawkins House*. After the Kammerer family moved, the Hawkins House mostly had a long run of many short-term renters; some respectful of the house, some not so respectful.

In the early 1930s, the Davis family sold part of the property north of the house, where the Yaphank Garage now stands, and they also sold property west of the house where once the barns and coops had been located. In 1948, Alan and Irene Burke purchased the house and remaining property, living there with their three children. They also rented out room to cover some expenses.

From 1955-1966, the house was repeatedly sold to speculators who partitioned the rooms and rented them out. The house slowly deteriorated under these conditions and in 1966, the house was condemned and scheduled for demolition for a planned Yaphank Avenue road-widening project. The property was left vacant and it was vandalized; many of the wonderful architectural features were lost forever. In 1974, the Yaphank Historical Society was founded and was successfully involved in restoration efforts to save this important part of Yaphank history. So began a promise of many more happy years for the Hawkins House.

Our Historian Emeritus writes: *1855-1877, when the Hawkins family resided there, were the best years for the Robert H. Hawkins House. Except for the years between 1911-1919, when Rozilla and Louis Kammerer rented the house, the house was for so many years at the mercy of realtors.* The following article, by Karen Mouzakes, is a story about the Hawkins House and the Kammerer family.



An artist's rendition of the Hawkins House.

## The Robert H. Hawkins House—A Story From Its Past

By Karen Mouzakes

Rozilla Kammerer lived with her husband Louis at the Hawkins House from 1911-1919. Their son Louis Jr. was born there. We know what life was like then by the pictures that Rozilla took. The long-gone barn was alive with ducks. There were pens of pigs and chickens. An old arbor, covered by vines, stood just outside the kitchen door. One view of the Hawkins House from the corner shows the square picket fence that rimmed the perimeter of the property and to the left in the photo we can see the Old Red Mill that no longer stands. The recorded experiences of this little family bring our Hawkins House alive.



Rozilla, Louis and Louis, Jr. (The Kammerer Family)



Corner View of Hawkins House and Old Mill

We have thanked Rozilla's granddaughter Christie so many times for scanning the pictures from that old family album and I have used many of the pictures in my power point presentations. I knew that the little family moved from Yaphank to the far west in 1919, but I didn't know why. Then one day as I stood in front of the very beautiful Brewster Monument at the Yaphank Cemetery, I noticed this inscription on the north side of the stone "Rozilla Kammerer 1888-1919." Rozilla, only thirty-one at her passing, had died just a year after many of those pictures in the album were taken! Rozilla, who was a Brewster before marrying Louis Kammerer, was buried in the Yaphank Cemetery family plot in 1919 and only her husband and son had moved on.

Shortly before I wrote this article, Rozilla's granddaughter wrote to the Society through our web site. She had been going through some of her father's papers and found this handwritten note:

1944

*I received the remains of your father from Yaphank Station and buried it in the Brewster Plot in Yaphank Cemetery. Charge will be \$5.*

*I have taken care of the plot since you were here. I think it was 4 years ago at the time you gave me \$10.00. I am wondering if you want me to continue caring for it.*

*I remain*

*Yours truly*

*John C. Hoeffner*

*Yaphank, LI*

*Continued on next page*

## The Robert H. Hawkins House (continued)

So young Louis, Jr. had made a trip back to his birthplace in 1940 and had visited his mother's grave. His father Louis Kammerer Sr. was remarried by then, but in 1944 when his father passed of tuberculosis in San Francisco, the son had the remains shipped by rail to Yaphank Station. Yaphank had stuck in the hearts of that little family. Rozilla and Louis Kammerer were together here once more.



Hawkins Barn & Ducks



Brewster Monument at Yaphank Cemetery

As is often the case, pieces of history come from very different places and arrive at various times, but they slowly fit together telling us a story of a time long ago. An Historian's job is to keep looking for those pieces.

### Society Notes:

Although our historic houses are still closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, we see that several of our Historical Society outdoor locations have been busy with people enjoying the summer weather. The canoe and kayak launch at the Homan-Gerard park is always busy, especially on weekends. The Nature Trail leading off from the Homan House parking lot has had at least 50 hikers this past couple of months. We keep the trail maps stocked and they need replenishing regularly. The mini library kiosks at the Swezey-Avey Park are well used by people visiting Willow Lake or walking on the new path along the Lake. The Friends of the Library keep these mini libraries stocked and the Society also adds books as needed. The picnic area at the Park sees families enjoying time together. And canoes are launched from the sandy beach several times each week. No doubt swimming will be on the agenda as our weather continues to warm up.

### Renewal Dues Reminder

Your membership is important to us. Dues are currently payable for the Yaphank Historical Society 2020 membership year. Your membership will be active from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020. Please see member types and dues rates below. **Please include your current email address when you send in your dues.** We look forward to hearing from you soon. If you have already submitted your 2020 membership dues, your support is much appreciated. Thank you.

**YAPHANK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**JULY through OCTOBER 2020**  
**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Special Notice:** In order to protect the health and well-being of our members, guests and visitors, and to help mitigate the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Society will be postponing and rescheduling upcoming events as necessary. All of our historic houses are closed to the public. At the time of this publication, the Society is waiting for official reopening dates and regulations from both Brookhaven Town and Suffolk County. Please check our website, [www.yaphankhistorical.org](http://www.yaphankhistorical.org), for ongoing current information. Thank you for your support. Stay safe and be well.

**Yaphank Historic House Tours**  
**(Summer Season CANCELLED)**

**July and August, Sunday afternoons, 1:00—4:00pm.**  
 Hawkins House, Homan-Gerard House, Booth House  
 Museum and Swezey-Avey House.

**Fall Community Yard Sale (tentatively scheduled)**

Saturday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 9:00am—4:00pm

**(Rain date: Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup>)**

**Donation: \$10 per vendor.**

Set up on the **Hawkins House** lawns.

No reservations necessary.

Call 631-924-4803 with questions.

**October General Meeting (tentatively scheduled)**

Thursday, **October 15<sup>th</sup>**, 7:30pm, Swezey-Avey House  
 Guest Speaker will be **Antonia Petrash**, President of the  
 Long Island Woman Suffrage Association.

**Program:** "Woman Suffrage Movement on Long Island  
 and throughout the United States".

Refreshments will follow the meeting.

**Bank of the River Gift Shop at the Hawkins House—**  
**CLOSED.**

**Reopening will be based on official reopening date from**  
**Suffolk County**

**Hours: Thursday Afternoons, noon—4:00pm (on hold)**

**Phone: 631-924-3401**

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:

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Active Member</b>	<b>\$20.00/person - \$17.50/Senior Citizen (62+)</b>
	<b>\$25.00/couple - \$22.50/Senior Couple (62+)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Contributing Member</b>	<b>\$50.00</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Life Member</b>	<b>\$100.00/person - \$75.00/Senior (62+)</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Patron Member</b>	<b>\$300.00</b>
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