

Kingston Historian

Newsletter of the Kingston Historical Society

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October 2012

KHS Annual Meeting

**Thursday, October 25, at 7:30 pm at the
Kingston Fire House.**

After a brief business meeting the KHS will host Clifford Zink, local historian, author and preservation consultant in Princeton, NJ. An expert on the Withington Estate - Heathcote Farm he will speak about

**“A Lovely Place to Live: Heathcote Farm
Gracefully Adapts to Changing Times.”**



Clifford Zink

From its early 19th Century origin as the Withington Farm through its House of Refuge period, and its many decades as an elegant estate, Heathcote Farm has always adapted gracefully to changing times and changing needs.

In 2011 Clifford Zink received the John A. Roebling Award for an outstanding contribution to documenting or preserving the industrial heritage of the area and is the author of five books including the Roebing Legacy and the Monmouth County Park System. He is currently compiling a history of preservation in New Jersey for the N.J. Historic Trust.

Kingston area residents know him for his work in the preservation of Heathcote Farm as a four-unit condominium in the 1980s, but most likely for the *Princeton Recollector* Special Edition, September 1982 that he authored on Kingston's Heathcote Farm. He described the building's history, as well as, its extensive landscape history.

The meeting is free and open to the public.
Refreshments will be served.



**Visit the Withington Estate -
Heathcote Farm:
House and Grounds**

KHS is grateful to owner David Scully and historian Clifford Zink to be able to offer tours of the current Withington-Heathcote Farm Estate House on **Sunday, November 4, 2012**. Up to three tours (of 15 persons each) will be available, on a reservation only basis to tour this historic home and grounds. **This is an opportunity not to be missed.** Tours will begin at **12:30 pm, 1:30 pm and at 2:30 pm** led by Clifford Zink.

Reservations can be made via the KHS email at KHSof NJ@gmail.com or by phone at 609-223-3877. Please give contact name, phone number and tour time.

Kingston Historical Society members will be given priority for reservations until October 26, after which places will be made available to the public.

**Save the Date: KHS Holiday Open
House, Sunday, December 2, 2012.**

Shann's Civil War Diary

The KHS has received a photocopy of Peter V. Shann's Civil War diary courtesy of Robert Stults, a family relative. Shann was a lifelong member of the Kingston community. In 1862 he volunteered for the 28th NJ Vol. Regiment, Co B. He was one of 65 South Brunswick men who received a \$60 bounty for volunteering that August.

His diary begins as he reports to Camp Vredenburg in Freehold, before leaving for Washington, D.C. Shann notes common soldier themes at his unit's endless drills and days of boring activities. Most of the 28th's duties (the 28th was a 9-month unit), were guard duty, horse duty, and other routine jobs. He especially prized letters from family and friends, noting letters he received and those he wrote.

Considering they were living outdoors, weather conditions are noted in nearly every entry. He also comments on marching in mud, tenting in mud and rain, and living in muddy conditions. This posed further problems for washing clothes.

Shann commented about participating in the Battle of Chancellorsville and after when "they told me that [Aaron] Colby (his Kingston friend) was wounded badly in the leg I went to find..." Colby lost part of a leg. Shann wrote that Thomas Jolly, another SB man, died from his injuries.

The diary's 53 pages describe a soldier's account of service in the Civil War and is a great source for learning about Shann's Civil War service and that of other Kingston residents. Shann returned in 1863, married, raised his family and resumed his Kingston life as wheelwright and carriage maker.

A Civil War exhibit at the South Brunswick Municipal Building this month has excerpts from a letter Peter Shann wrote to his family on the Chancellorsville battle and about Allan Colby.

Repairs and Restoration Continue on the Locktender's House

A year has passed and much has been done to repair the Locktender's House for public use after the devastation wrought by Hurricane Irene. The D&R State Park staff has overseen mold remediation that included removal of portions and in some places entire wallboard sections in the old kitchen, center

room and downstairs office. Photos, explanations of the Kingston Lock and other items were removed and stored on the second floor.

The D&R Canal Park maintenance staff has restored most of the Locktender's House after the flood damage from hurricane. All should be completed in time for the KHS Holiday Open House this coming December 2nd.



After a year and a painting party by KHS and Canal Watch members the downstairs renovations are nearly done.

Anne Krumier at the painting party.

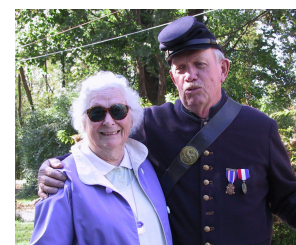
The center room in the Locktender's House is now open during weekends until the end of October. Look for announcements for the December Holiday Open House.

Keep it Green

This organization is dedicated to preserving New Jersey's parks, natural areas, clean water, farmland and historic areas. Its goals are to create a stable source of constitutionally-dedicated funds to ensure better stewardship of these places and to increase funding to improve the creation and care of these places. The Kingston Historical Society has become a "Keep it Green" Partner in support of all these goals, which would enable the much needed continuance of the NJ Historical Trust.

Last Year's Civil War Walk and Talk

The tour of Kingston and Civil War burials in the Kingston Presbyterian Cemetery was well attended. Attendees learned much about those buried here. George Luck and David Potts (here with Dorothy Koplinger) gave an excellent presentation.



The Withington Estate-Heathcote Farm and the House of Refuge.

It is hard to believe that a state institution like a House of Refuge could become Kingston and South Brunswick's only brownstone estate house.

Clifford Zink, in a Special Edition of the *Princeton Recollector* in September 1982 and other sources relate this story. This is a story of both the Phineas Withington family and the mid-19th century movement to house youthful offenders separately from adults and in a rural setting.

In 1850 the State of New Jersey purchased nearly a hundred acres of land on the south side of now Route 27, mostly from Isaac Chandler Withington, the current owner. This land extended as far as Ridge Road. However, the tract purchased for \$5,600 and planned for \$15,000 was soon dwarfed by an anticipated completion cost of over \$100,000 when the state budget was only \$165,000. However noble the planned 192 dormitories would be, the building was abandoned and the land later resold to Withington. The project cost the state \$35,567.

Phineas Withington came to Kingston from Massachusetts in 1810. He soon married into the Gulick family and purchased over a hundred acres in the Kingston area including the 5.93 acres where the Union Line Hotel stands today. Phineas was involved with the burgeoning stage coach transportation between New York and Philadelphia. He did well. After he died in 1834 his son Isaac Chandler Withington became owner of the land then about 80 acres.

I.C. Withington worked for a prosperous New York firm, married the boss's daughter and sold the farm in Kingston to the State in 1850. After the House of Refuge project ended Withington repurchased the land in 1852 and changed the House of Refuge into a brownstone mansion for his family. This elegant house had rooms heated with individual coal stoves and other amenities. It was named Heathcote Farm after the nearby brook.

When Isaac died in 1881 his son, Charles Summer Withington, inherited the farm. Charles left his New York law practice and returned to Kingston. He became heavily involved with growing violets and marketed as many as 750,000 violet blooms in one

season. He married Eva Van Duyn of Kingston, but they had no children.

In 1914 the property was purchased by Joseph Garneau, a wealthy wine importer in New York. Garneau renovated the house in the Colonial Revival style then popular, adding one-story wings, a porte-cochere and changed the windows to the colonial style. He died in 1917. The property was later purchased by the Cooks in 1926.

Thomas and Grace Cook of New York City brought their six children to Kingston. Again changes were made to the house including a 20 by 50 ft. music room and a swimming pool added in the 1930s. They held many musical and social events over the years. Thomas died in 1965 and Grace in 1981. Some Cook land, 52 acres, was donated to the State creating the Cook Natural Area. In the 1980s the house was turned into four condominiums. More recently, new plans are being considered for the future of Kingston's brownstone estate.

KHS helps FPNL with Flemer Collection

The Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands are caring for the Flemer Collection of books papers, and photographs related to Princeton Nursery and the Flemer family. The Kingston Historical Society is helping in this project by providing a storage place for some of this collection in the new Library on the second floor of the Locktender's House.

Kingston History for Sale!

Available at the KHS Annual Meeting will be your opportunity to spread Kingston history around with the purchase of KHS Calendars full of Kingston photos from past years --T-shirts with the KHS logo -- books by Ed Belding on *The Broken Bridge* and *Stryker's Gambit*. In each book a series of poems, describes an historical event, followed by annotations and foot notes of historical interest relating to the poems. *The Broken Bridge*, describes the destruction of Kingston's Millstone River bridge and "the Conference on Horseback" with Washington and his advisors on Church Street. *Stryker's Gambit* details a nighttime skirmish on Route 27 just north of Kingston on the night of January 3, 1777. *Think Christmas gifts!*

Kingston Notes and Historical Tidbits

The Kingston Bridge – Did you know that a bridge at Kingston has existed since the early 1700s. *Old Princeton's Neighbors*, a WPA area history published in 1939 says on page 91 that “In 1704 the tiny settlement was already known as Kingstown. A year later the first bridge was built over the Millstone River. This wooden structure was replaced by a stone one in 1738.”

From a *History of Princeton and its institutions* by John Frelinghuysen Hageman in 1879, Vol. 2. On page 22. "In 1738 a bill was introduced in the Assembly to authorize a stone bridge over the Millstone River, between the counties of Somerset and Middlesex in the high road; and one over the Stony Brook; and in 1740 a petition was presented to that body for repairing and rebuilding those two bridges on the post-road to New York. The bridges above referred to were undoubtedly the one at Kingston, over the Millstone, and the one at Worth's Mills over the Stony Brook.”

The construction of this stone bridge is not confirmed, but Continental troops did destroy the bridge that was here in order to delay the pursuing British after the Battle of Princeton, Jan. 3, 1777.



The bridge was again damaged, by high water in 1787. A joint commission from Somerset Co. and Middlesex Co. was responsible for reconstructing the bridge in 1798.

From that time until the present this great quadruple arch stone bridge still serves as the boundary point of Middlesex, Somerset and Mercer Counties and it still serves its original purpose, although a new wider bridge was constructed in 1969 carries most of the traffic.

Kingston Historical Society Officers

Robert von Zumbusch, President
George Luck, Jr., Vice-President
Nat Clymer, Treasurer
Ceil Leedom, Secretary

Kingston. *Gordon's Gazetteer* published in 1834 notes its location in both Somerset and Middlesex Counties and that it is halfway between New York and Philadelphia. It lists: a Presbyterian church, an academy, 3 taverns, 4 stores, a large grist mill, saw mill, and woolen factory. Also, the D&R Canal and 40 dwellings. It was noted for the many stages that passed through it and the many who dined at P. Withington's hotel. Before the Bordentown rail road (pre-1830) as many as 49 stages with passengers and “more than 400 harnessed horses were seen standing in front of the inn.” Withington had also made a very large fish pond on his lands to feed his guests.

Kingston Water Company was originally developed by William Flemer, Jr. to provide water for Princeton Nurseries. It began service in 1929 to 240 Kingston area customers. Its rates are the same as in 1940 of \$32 a year whereas Elizabethtown Water charges \$35 a quarter. Sold to Elizabethtown Water Company for \$100,000 in 1982/83. *Central Post.*

Help needed with KHS Archives

The KHS is beginning a project to identify, label, enumerate and record items that have been collected by KHS members in the past several years. This will include physically describing these items and recording them, both by written and computer records.

Daytime hours during the week and/or weekends available. Your time and interest are needed. Computer experience helpful, but not required. You will work with others interested in preserving Kingston's history.

You may contact any KHS officer, write to the address below, email to the address below or call Ceil Leedom at 609-223-3877.

Kingston Historical Society

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Interest in the past, present and future of Kingston is encouraged. Join us in these endeavors. Membership in and support of the Kingston Historical Society is welcomed.

