

HISTORICAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Native American artifacts in the Kent region have been radiocarbon-dated to as early as 10,600 years ago when the first Paleo-Indian people encamped here. Judging by the design and materials used to make their knapped flint and jasper spear points, the earliest people came from the areas of Pennsylvania and the Hudson Valley. Their arrival followed a gradual warming of New England's climate and the establishment of woodlands and grasslands on the once sterile soil.

The Northwest Corner continued to enjoy seasonal occupation during the so-called Archaic (9,000 to 3,000 years ago) and Woodland periods (3,000 to 400 years ago). The native peoples gradually learned to domesticate and cultivate plants, create pottery, and develop the bow and arrow as an advance over earlier hunting spears and throwing sticks. When the first Europeans in Connecticut in the 17th Century made contact with these people, at least two distinct Algonkian tribes were discernible in the southern parts of the state and the Connecticut Valley—the Pequots and the Mohegans.

The Schaghticokes

Relatively weak, the Pequots and Mohegans were defeated by the white men and their tribal allies in the Pequot War of 1637. Remnants of these two tribes moved north from their coastal homelands to settle in scattered villages throughout the areas now constituted as New Milford, Kent and Dover, NY. Though primarily hunter-gatherers, they created clearings in the woods and practiced rudimentary farming in flood plains and along wetland areas.

By the time the first white settlers arrived in Kent a remnant band had a permanent village at the confluence of the Housatonic and Ten Mile Rivers under the leadership of Chief Gideon Mauwehu. They called themselves the Schaghticokes, an Algonkian name that translates as “place where two rivers meet.”

Some archaeological sites from this era are known but are purposely indicated on the Scenic and Cultural Resources Map # 12 only in a generalized way to prevent the disturbance of fragile sites or the irreversible depletion of historical resources by treasure hunters. Individuals wishing to see the restricted data will have to apply to the Office of Connecticut State Archaeology and the University of Connecticut, Storrs.

In 1752 the European settlers forced the Schaghticokes onto a reservation of roughly 2,200 acres on the western shore of the Housatonic River and placed them under the supervision of the State. The Schaghticoke Reservation still exists, though now greatly reduced in size to some 400 acres of mostly mountainous terrain. It is year-round home to several families claiming direct descent from the earlier Schaghticokes under the name of the Schaghticoke Indian Tribe.

A second group, the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation, based in Waterbury, CT, has made competing claims both as to its rights to the current reservation and to formal federal recognition by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). In 2006 the BIA turned down the latter group's claim on the grounds that its organization did not meet two of seven required standards for recognition. The STN continues to make all available appeals for review.

Permanent Settlement

Kent was incorporated as a town in 1739, but early white settlers arrived in the area much earlier in pursuit of the iron ore that fueled the local growth and economy for almost 150 years. Benjamin Fairweather, described in history books as “the cornet of the troop in Fairfield,” began exploring the area in the early 1700s and in 1716 acquired a strip of land from Chief Waramaug, sachem of an alliance that included the Schaghticokes, the Weantinokes of New Milford, the Pomperaug of Woodbury, the Bantams of Litchfield and several other tribes.

“Fairweather’s Purchase” stretched from Lake Waramaug on the east to the New York border on the west, and represents one of the first European-style land transactions in Kent. It proved profitable to the iron mongers, being full of ore, water power and marble, from which lime, used as flux, could be extracted.

Not long after Fairweather’s arrival, other European settlers began to appear in the Northwest Corner, primarily Englishmen from central Connecticut. The “Western Lands,” were surveyed in 1736 and 1737 by men appointed by the Colonial General Assembly. In 1738 Kent and its sister towns of Cornwall, Goshen, Norfolk, Canaan, Sharon and Salisbury were sold at auction in various established cities, Kent going on the block in the town of Windham.

The first division was laid out in 1738, with purchasers arriving from as far away as New London, Windham and Colchester and as close as Danbury. Many of these original investors were land speculators, who quickly turned around and sold their lots for profit. Partners Noah Rockwell and John Knapp, for instance, appear briefly in early land transaction records, never to be seen again in Kent; others such as Ebenezer Barnum and John Mills became permanent residents, the Proprietors of the Town of Kent. They quickly laid out roads, established a church and held town meetings. A few of their descendants still live in town today.



The original settlement in Kent was about two miles north of the current town center, in what is today the Flanders Historic District. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places but the origin of its name has never been determined with certainty. Some believe it refers to the industrial activity in the neighborhood in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, comparable in the minds of some locals to the iron-mining region of Belgium known as Flanders. Many of the houses of this early settlement still line Rte. 7 and Cobble Rd. today.

Other small hamlets developed within the town, often associated with iron manufacture, as in Bull’s Bridge and Macedonia. By the time F.W. Beers published his *Litchfield County Atlas* in 1874, the town had grown well beyond Flanders with the center of Kent shifted south to its present location as a result of the arrival of the Housatonic Railroad in 1844.

The Iron Industry

From the time of its founding to the late 1800s the primary industry of Kent was iron mining and manufacture. Nearly every family in Kent had at least one member working in the iron industry and by 1812 Kent had at least six forges, each producing 30 to 40 tons of iron per year. The number of forges eventually swelled to 14. One of the earliest was that of Ebenezer Barnum of Danbury, who built a bloomery forge at the outlet of North Spectacle Pond in 1744. Later known as Morgan’s Forge, this operation continued to produce iron until 1867. Bates Forge (1791) was established in the area of Dugan Rd., where its remnants can still be seen.

Within Kent’s borders was virtually everything needed to keep a forge going. An abundance of readily excavated iron ore was found in the vast open pit near the intersection of Ore Hill and Geer Mountain Rd., discovered by New Milford adventurers as early as 1732. Kent had plentiful timber for charcoal, marble from whence limestone flux was derived for the iron smelting process, and an abundance of small ponds and streams, critical to washing the ore and

powering the forge operations.

Often these same streams were used to power small mills that served other needs of the local economy. Kent Falls State Park contains the remains of a few stone dams that once helped to provide power for Morgan's saw mill (1738), Benton's Grist Mill (1769), and Stuart's Grist Mill (1793). Still another saw mill, partially restored by its current owners, can be seen on private property along Macedonia Brook Rd.

The first furnace in Kent was built in the Macedonia area in 1823 and soon employed more than 100 workers. This was followed a year later by the Kent Furnace in the Flanders area. The first stack, 28 feet high, produced three to four tons of pig (or cast) iron daily. A third furnace at Bull's Falls opened in 1826 and at its height employed more than 200 men. Several forges and puddling works were associated with the iron furnaces. The works produced wrought iron tools such as crow bars, farm hitches and wagon rims.

Iron-related operations ran with varying degrees of success for several decades, but by the late 1800s competition elsewhere sounded the death knell of the iron industry all over the Northwest Corner. The discovery of cheap anthracite coal in Pennsylvania and radical new technological developments for mining, producing and transporting iron and steel made Kent's production obsolete. The Kent Furnace, which shut down in 1892, lasted longest because of the high quality of its ore. Employment opportunities for woodcutters, colliers, ore miners, blacksmiths, teamsters, furnace workers and other industry-related jobs vanished. Associated mills, stores, taverns and other commercial enterprises also suffered and Kent's population sank from a peak of 2,001 in 1830 to 1,622 in 1880, and 1,220 in 1900. In 1930, at the start of the Great Depression, Kent had a population of 1,054.

The remains of all three furnaces can still be found. The Macedonia furnace lies in complete ruins just inside the Macedonia Brook State Park boundary on the stream bank. The Bull's Falls stack, crumbling but still upright, sits on the east bank of the Housatonic River, just below the Bull's Bridge covered bridge. The stack of the Kent furnace, restored in 2006, is on the grounds of the Sloane Stanley Museum on Rte. 7.

Other remnants of the iron industry are easily recognizable, particularly along the Appalachian Trail, but in many other sections of town as well. Dotted the hillsides are large circles of barely mounded earth. In some instances, several of these mounds may be found together, in other places they are considerably spread apart. Their locations are, no doubt, due to the relative abundance of suitable trees. These are all that remain of the charcoal mounds, which averaged about 20 feet in diameter and might contain as many as 25 cords of cut wood.

Teams of woodcutters and charcoal-makers were employed to construct conical stacks of hardwood. These mounds were covered over with earth to control the burning and set afire to convert the wood—chiefly oak and chestnut—to chunks of charcoal. Annually it took about 600 acres of woodland to provide the 350,000 bushels of charcoal needed to run a typical furnace. Consequently, the hillsides of Kent were soon denuded of their forests.

Kent's own ghost town, known as Alder City, was once populated by colliers employed by the Kent Furnace. The demise of the iron industry, along with a threat of smallpox, caused the residents of Alder City to seek their fortunes elsewhere. What remains—half-a-dozen cellar holes with a single stone monument to one Alder City resident, John Roberts—can be seen on the west bank of the Housatonic River, across from the present day Sloane Stanley property.

New Town Center, New Purposes

With the coming of the railroad in 1844 and the construction of the first railroad station south of Flanders, a new, more modern village began to form on Kent Plain. Entrepreneurs such as John Hopson, Jabez Swift and John L. Stuart built substantial houses within walking distance of the station. Hotels and inns went up, including the Kent Hotel (library site), the Golden Falcon (the open lot owned by the Casey Family on the east side of Main Street), and the Kent Inn (where the PATCO gas station now operates). These hotels, the last of which was torn down in the 1950s, capitalized on Kent's scenic beauty and its convenient transportation. They laid the foundation of a tourist industry that has waxed and waned ever since. The Village was planted end to end with roadside elm trees which, by the end of the century, made Main Street a sylvan showplace.

As passenger and freight traffic increased, a new and larger station was constructed in 1872. Though passenger service ended in the 1960s, it remains a major structure on Main Street, housing local businesses. Freight service, discontinued for decades, has been resurrected by the Housatonic Railroad Company, making daily runs from Canaan to

Danbury where it links up with major interstate lines.

The combination of good transportation and pastoral landscape not only brought travelers to Kent, it attracted the attention of early artists, and painters, musicians, actors and writers have followed, many choosing to stay and become colorful parts of the fabric of the town. George Laurence Nelson, whose large house and studio, Seven Hearths, now belongs to the Kent Historical Society, was an early New York City convert to the artistic benefits of country life.

Internationally known as a portraitist and lithographer in the first decades of the 1900s, Nelson brought other accomplished artists with him to establish an art colony in Kent. Among them were Nelson's father, Carl Hirschberg, Robert Nisbet, F. Luis Mora, Willard Paddock, Frederick Waugh, Spencer Nichols and brother Hobart Nichols, Eliot Clark and naturalist Rex Brasher. In 1923, the colony organized a formal group, the Kent Art Association.

Arts and Culture

The Kent Art Association still exists and attracts high quality art for its exhibits. The legacy of these artists is also seen in the extraordinary number of creative people and enterprises that are a part of Kent today, especially the cluster of commercial art galleries, a phenomenon that dates from the opening of Jacques Kaplan's Paris-New York-Kent Gallery in Railroad Square in 1984.

Kent has five museums, which is surely unusual for the town's size. The Sloane Stanley Museum on Rte. 7 is open seasonally. The museum stands on property donated in 1969 to the State of Connecticut by the Stanley Works, a New Britain-based manufacturer of craftsmen's tools that then owned a large swath of Kent property along both sides of the Housatonic north of the village. The Sloane Stanley Museum displays an extensive collection of hand tools from the collection of Eric Sloane, a local artist, illustrator and author, Eric Sloane's recreated studio, and a diorama explaining the local iron industry. On the grounds are a reconstructed pioneer cabin and the remains of the blast furnace that was once the centerpiece of the Kent Iron Works.

Adjoining Sloane Stanley are the grounds of the Connecticut Antique Machinery Association or CAMA, also on former Stanley land. The CAMA museum is dedicated to the preservation, restoration and demonstration of antique machinery from New England's industrial and agricultural past. CAMA displays include the Industrial Hall of Steam Power, a three-foot gauge railroad display, the Diebold Agricultural Hall showing farm contrivances dating back to the late 1800s, displays of large and small internal combustion engines, and a collection of early road construction and earth-moving equipment.

Also on the grounds of CAMA, but operated independently, is the restored Cream Hill Agricultural School (1845-1869). The school, which formerly stood on Cream Hill in Cornwall, was a boarding school that trained boys in scientific agriculture on the family farm of Theodore Sedgwick Gold, remembered today as the father of modern agriculture in Connecticut. Cream Hill School was the forerunner of Storrs Agricultural School (later University of Connecticut.)

The Connecticut Museum of Mining & Mineral Science, another independent enterprise located on CAMA grounds, opened in 2000, with displays drawn largely from the private collection of John Pawloski. It combines extensive displays of Connecticut minerals with exhibits devoted to the history of mining in Connecticut.

Lastly, the Kent Historical Society maintains a seasonal museum of local history at Seven Hearths, the 1751 homestead that once belonged to artist George Laurence Nelson.

In 2008 the birth of yet another facility, The Brasher-Northrop Museum, was announced with the formation of a group

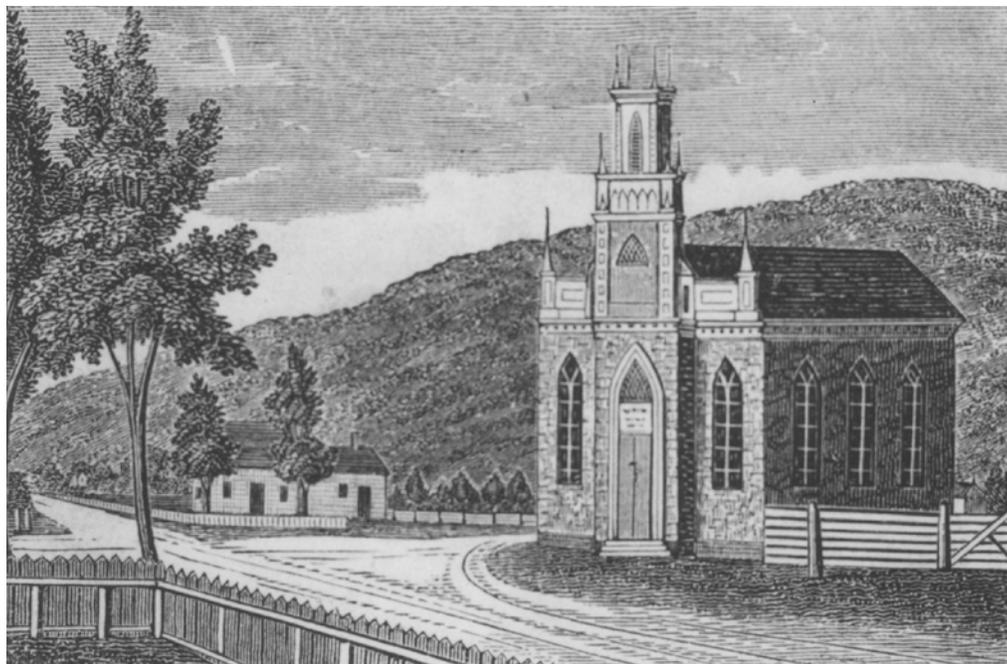


dedicated to celebrating the lives and works of two Kent notables, artist Rex Brasher (1869-1960), and educator Birdsey Grant Northrop (1817-1889). Brasher's unique work, "The Birds and Trees of North America," comprising 874 detailed watercolors depicting the 1,200 species and subspecies of birds on ornithological lists in the late 19th century, was purchased by the State of Connecticut in 1941. It remains in storage at the University of Connecticut, awaiting a suitable exhibition space for which the Brasher-Northrop Museum founders are now seeking public and private funding.

The museum would also present the life story and writings of Dr. Northrop, a Kent farm boy who, after earning degrees at Yale College and Yale Divinity School, became Connecticut's Secretary of Education for 16 years, a founder of Arbor Day, and an international conservationist.

No site for the building has been selected beyond the fact that a Kent location is being sought.

Spiritual Life



Kent's spiritual life is also vibrant. As was the case with its sister towns in the Northwest Corner of colonial Connecticut, the first church incorporated was the First Congregational Church, formally organized in 1741. Members held meetings in a private house on Good Hill until a proper house of worship was erected in the Flanders District in 1742. A second and third building followed at this location but, in the 1840s, with the heart of town shifting south, the Congregationalists moved with it. In 1849 they completed the current sanctuary, a tall-spired white wooden building

in the Gothic Revival style, designed by one of Connecticut's most distinguished 19th century architects, Henry Austin of New Haven.

The Episcopal Church had a presence in town as early as 1760, with its first church building erected sometime prior to 1772. Though its location is unrecorded, it is thought to have been south of the current St. Andrew's Church, built in 1826. The Episcopal parish today also includes two chapels, St. Joseph's at Kent School and St. Michael's at South Kent School.

The third Church to gather in Kent was Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, which built the present house of worship in 1854. The three churches hold a joint service annually, and their many individual activities—a thrift shop, a nursery school and a day care center, various community outreach programs, holiday fairs—are supported by a majority of the townspeople.

The Kent Cemetery Association cares for seven cemeteries in town. Both the Congregational and Episcopal churches have cemeteries adjacent to their buildings. However, in both cases, half of the cemetery was established privately rather than by the town, the Gibbs family having provided the southern portion of the Congregational cemetery, and St. Andrew's Church Parish the eastern half of St. Andrew's. The Catholic Church for many years had no cemetery of its own, but now owns a portion of the town's newest burying ground on Flanders Lane.

Two other early cemeteries (Good Hill and Bull's Bridge) are not near any current church, although the Good Hill cemetery sits on the west side of Rte. 7 near the site of the original Congregational Church. Up on Skiff Mountain, the Peck family owns half of the small cemetery there, while the town owns the other half. The Cemetery Association also maintains two small family plots—the Morehouse and Parcels

cemeteries off Richards and Gorham roads, respectively. Five other independently managed burying grounds exist in Kent: the Kent Hollow Cemetery, the Schaghticoke Indian Burying Ground and three private cemeteries belonging to Kent and South Kent Schools.

The oldest gravestones are in Good Hill with several dating from the 1740s and 1750s. The cemeteries are shown on the Scenic and Cultural Resources Map #12. Yet another cemetery belonging to the Peet family of Kent lies in a thickly wooded area between Peet Hill and West Meetinghouse Rd., just over the Kent/New Milford town line. The towering “altar rocks,” where old Sam Peet prayed daily, are celebrated in many old histories of Kent.

Other groups maintain memorials to Kent’s war veterans. The older is the Civil War Monument, a granite obelisk at the intersection of Rtes. 7 and 341, erected in 1885. In 2009 a second memorial stone is to be erected on the lawn at Swift House to honor the veterans of World War II, the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Civic Life

Kent has had a large number of social and civic organizations, past and present. The Kent Grange was the social nexus of the town when farming was a major industry. It disbanded in 2004, but other civic groups continue to thrive and their volunteers form the backbone of many services and activities in town. Most notable is the Kent Volunteer Fire Department, the membership of which constitutes a good cross section of Kent’s population. The Kent Chamber of Commerce was organized in 1957 and in recent years has had averaged 120 members. The Kent Garden Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, the Masonic Lodge, the Informal Club, the American Legion, the Parent-Teacher Organization and a half dozen or more town commissions that rely on elected or appointed volunteers to manage town business, also exemplify the residents’ strong sense of civic responsibility.

The Kent Historical Society, with headquarters at Swift House, 10 Maple Street, as well as a museum at Seven Hearths, has an active program of exhibitions and lectures as well as an ongoing project to catalog and preserve a wealth of local artifacts. The Society, founded in the 1950s, is able to keep a part-time paid director to oversee its work thanks to donations, members’ dues and occasional state grants.

The Kent Memorial Library also has a paid director and staff, but is supported to a significant degree by voluntary donations from townspeople as well as by a number of fund-raising activities carried out by its all volunteer board. The library’s activities go well beyond loaning books to include lectures, craft exhibitions, language courses, chess and bridge groups and a sidewalk book sale that involves scores of members and draws hundreds of browsers each year.



The town has a 24-unit elderly housing complex called Templeton Farm Apartments on Swift Lane, built in 1976, and an affordable housing complex on South Commons, opened in 2004 with 24 rental units. Both were brought into being and supported by boards of local volunteers. Kent employs an advocate for its elderly residents and operates a free food bank for those in need, stocked with donations of food from generous townspeople.

The Kent Community House on Main Street, built in 1925 as the parish house for the neighboring First Congregational Church, was deeded to the town in the 1960s. Since that time it has variously been used by a local theater group, a number of gymnastics and exercise groups and by townspeople as a party location. Starting in 2006 it also became the main venue for the Kent Film Festival, held over a long weekend in March and attracting large numbers of visitors to the town in an otherwise quiet time of the year.

Political Life

Kent is organized around the Town Meeting system of government, a political structure found throughout much of Connecticut. Routine business is conducted by the First Selectman and two part-time selectmen, a town clerk, and a tax collector, all of whom are elected every two years. In 2008 the job of Town Treasurer was changed from an elected to an appointed position with a professional accountant hired to perform this increasingly complex function.

Nomination of individuals to serve on Kent commissions—Planning and Zoning, Board of Finance, Boards of Appeals and others—is handled in caucuses held by the Democratic Town Committee and the Republican Town Committee, although many persons declared as Independents also participate and are put on the ballot. Still other town officials are selected and appointed by the Selectmen with an eye to maintaining a balance between party affiliations.

Kent has historically favored Republican candidates though in recent years the greater share of registered voters identify themselves as Democrats and Independents.

Schools and Summer Camps

An element of the town that sets Kent apart from many of its neighbors is the diversity of academic opportunity. For almost 200 years, the mandatory education of Kent's school-aged children was provided in 14 separate one-room school houses scattered throughout the town. As transportation improved in the first quarter of the 20th century, the feasibility of centralized schooling became possible. Gradually the small schoolhouses began to close and in 1929 a new consolidated grammar and high school opened on Elizabeth Street in the center of town.

It served 40 high school students and 111 grammar school students. The Flanders district students were included in the following year, leaving only the relatively distant Bromica, Ore Hill and Kent Hollow schools to function on their own. By 1950, all the one-room schools had closed. A few were subsequently torn down, but most exist as private homes today. Two have been preserved as they were on Skiff Mountain and in Kent Hollow. Today, Kent Center School is a kindergarten through 8th grade institution with student enrollment averaging 280 in recent years.

In the late 1930s, Kent joined with five other Northwest Corner towns to form Regional High School District #1, the first such district in New England, and erected Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village. Kent's share of the annual high school budget is prorated based on its portion of the HVRHS population.

Meanwhile, there has long been a tradition of private high school education in Kent. Often these schools were started in the homes of women with higher levels of education themselves. Many gained reputations as worthy institutions of further education. Mary Hatch, Olive Fuller, Annie Gibbs, and Kate and Amy Hopson all ran small private schools of fine repute.

There were also larger schools, most notably the Flanders Academy, located in what later became the George Laurence Nelson house (now the Seven Hearths Museum). Another was the Kent Cottage Seminary at the intersection of Rtes. 7 and 341 in the center of town. The seminary, established as a stock company in 1871 by 21 prominent citizens, flourished for many years, educating both local students and those from far away. Upon the demise of the school, the building was converted into the imposing



Kent Inn, later razed to erect the PATCO Station.

These small private schools were part of a growing national trend toward private secondary education. By the turn of the 20th century, college preparatory schools attracted students from all over the country, and Kent was no exception. In 1906, Kent School for Boys was founded on the west bank of the Housatonic, followed by South Kent School five miles to the south in 1923. The first was the creation of Fr. Frederick H. Sill, a monk of the Order of the Holy Cross, who dreamed of a network of small Christian schools for boys of parents who could not afford the high tuition charged by the existing upper class boarding schools. South Kent School was started by two of Father Sill's former students, Samuel Bartlett and Richard Cuyler, with Sill's encouragement and support.

In 1959 the Girls' Division of Kent School was built on top of Skiff Mountain, where it sat for several decades before being consolidated with the boys' school in the valley. In 1995 Kent School's mountain top campus was purchased by the Marvelwood School. Founded in 1956 in neighboring Cornwall, Marvelwood had outgrown its facilities and needed more space.

All three private schools welcome townspeople to musical, theatrical and sporting events, and many faculty members serve as volunteers on the town's commissions and civic organizations. The natural beauty surrounding all three schools is an added attraction to prospective students, some of whom return to settle in the area after graduation from college.

Kent has also been home to numerous sleep-away summer camps, starting as early as 1914 when Camp Po-ne-mah opened on North Spectacle Lake. Gone now are Po-ne-mah, as well as Camp Leonard-Lenore, Camp Kenico, and several others, but Camps KenMont and KenWood—one for boys, the other for girls, and dating back to 1924—continue to be active on North Spectacle Lake. Leonard-Lenore, on Leonard Pond, has been transformed into a weekend and day camp facility known as Club Getaway, attracting adults, families and children alike. The Girl Scout Council of Southwestern Connecticut owns camp grounds near Beaman Pond, though it no longer operates a formal camping program.

The Architectural Record

In a curious twist of fate, the demise of the agricultural industry, with its bucolic atmosphere so treasured by artists and tourists, has meant a second chance for the increasingly run-down farmhouses and fields that marked Kent in the early 20th Century. George Laurence Nelson wrote a small book, *New Life for Old Timber*, about his decades-long love affair with the shabby 1751 house that he bought and slowly restored as Seven Hearths. Other artists and newcomers purchased and restored old farmhouses to bring them back to life, some simply, some on a grand scale. In 1976, a group of residents successfully advocated for the original settlement of Kent to be listed as the Flanders Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.

The stately old homes that line the Flanders District portion of Rte. 7 exemplify the endurance of the early structures. The Captain Philo house, c. 1750 on Beardsley Rd. in Kent Hollow, was also awarded National Registry status. Other fine examples of both simple and grand Colonial architecture, as well as several large houses associated with the wealth of the 19th century iron industry, line Main Street. The old Hopson place became home to the New Milford Savings Bank after local citizens persuaded the buyer to preserve rather than tear it down. Rustic farmhouses and barns dot the landscape throughout Kent, although several of the barns have been converted into dwellings. Taken in their entirety, the houses of Kent give a clear picture of local history and architectural taste over the past 270 years.

A recent development in shaping Kent's architectural record is the 2007 passage of the Kent Village District Regulations (VDRs). Developed over two years of discussion by a committee of concerned citizens, the VDRs were incorporated as Section 5A in the town's zoning regulations. The intent of the VDRs is to preserve the mixed use, predominantly Victorian character of the commercial and residential center of Kent by requiring a volunteer Architectural Review Board (ARB) to review major renovations and new construction plans in the district. Using criteria related to building height, construction materials, setbacks, signage, window treatments and other features, the ARB's stated purpose is to work with applicants to achieve visual results in keeping with the "unique character and scale ... of a small New England village."

Kent continues to change and evolve as does every living town. In Kent's case we have lost many of the

wide vistas common in the countryside during the decades of active farming and even before that when many of the woodlands were harvested for charcoal. Today the woods and forests have returned. One notable exception to this natural reforestation is the “Southern Gateway” of Kent, which, thanks to the preservation efforts of the Kent Land Trust, continues to welcome visitors and citizens with long views of open fields and pasture land on both sides of Rte. 7 as one approaches Kent from the south.

Also different in appearance are the stone walls that farmers once threw up in the process of clearing land for pasturage. Now, many of these rambling old walls are disappearing, some naturally, swallowed up by second growth forest; others dismantled because they interfere with owners’ landscaping and building plans. In some instances new stone walls, straighter and more orderly in appearance and built by stone masons rather than farmers, are taking their place, but at a visual cost many would say endanger the integrity of Kent’s historical landscape.

Today, the tourist industry is once again thriving as the houses on Main Street are converted into boutique shops, real estate offices and restaurants. Houses in outlying areas of town are opened as bed and breakfast establishments, allowing owners to live in their homes while renting rooms to visiting tourists. Ironically, the popularity of Kent as a tourist destination has proven its salvation. Prized as a quaint New England village, its charm lies in its quiet Main Street, attractive old houses and the absence of large commercial chain stores.

Maintaining the delicate balance between preserving Kent’s rural character and respecting property owners’ individual rights is a constant struggle. But with a moderator known personally by a majority of residents, and a show-of-hands vote—the accepted form of settling most issues—the close-knit community of Kent has adopted standards that promise to retain a good bit of its identity in the face of 21st-century pressures.

The three churches, the social clubs, the volunteer organizations, the schools, the government institutions, and the individuals who participate with such zeal, continue to give Kent a fabric that is probably not that different from its early days so long ago.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Give the Historic District Commission the support needed to carry out its regulations and decisions.
2. Check for historical accuracy the Kent entries in the 2000 Statewide Historic Resource Inventory (SHRI) and correct the inaccuracies. This potentially valuable resource contains many errors in its present form.
3. Provide more adequate funding for the long-term maintenance of community-owned historic structures and for village tree maintenance and replacement as needed.
4. Make residents and contractors more aware of the historical and aesthetic values of old stone walls and consider regulating against roadside destruction of stone walls.

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