



Port Chester Historical Society Newsletter

January 2020



GARDEN NEWS



Our garden grew beautifully this summer; the Jerusalem artichoke was well over 10 feet tall! The Coreopsis [tickseed] produced many lovely yellow flowers, prompting us to think that next year we should use them as colonists would have - to create a dye! It was gratifying to see so many bees and butterflies visiting our garden. We know this is something that Native Americans and colonists would not have worried about, but today we need to think about our pollinator friends.



The garden is resting for the winter, but we expect it to come back better than ever in the spring. We will harvest some of the Jerusalem artichoke for a project with the Middle School as part of our outreach to the schools.

ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION STUDIO UPDATE

All this summer and fall, APS was busy doing research on many aspects of the Bush Lyon Homestead. They visited the site multiple times and did extensive document research in various New York archives. They pried up a few floor tiles for a better look at the original floors, drilled a few wood samples to test the dates of the wood used in the beams, and took extensive scans of the walls. We can't wait to read the final report, which we understand has been given to the Village (we are just waiting for the Village to give it final approval for public release).

ONGOING HOMESTEAD WORK

Many people have been working on going through the spaces of the Homestead, the big and small, the dark and dusty, and even the downright scary. We've found some trash (creepy child mannequins that are perhaps part of the local legend that the house is haunted) and some treasure, including old Port Chester High School yearbooks, beautiful photos, World War II ration books, and antique clothing. We've been especially excited to have some Port Chester High School students helping us with our archiving mission; we hope that seeing history "discovered" in front of their eyes will inspire them to pursue it in the future!



PORT CHESTER DAY



County Legislator Nancy Barr



State Senator Shelley Mayer

In August we set up and ran a booth to meet and greet our neighbors! Port Chester is a fun day to celebrate all things Port Chester. We brought some items with us for a “Be a History Detective” display. Two of the items we brought were known to us - a toasting rack for the fireplace and a solid metal hand iron. The third item is a mystery to us, and we wanted visitors to see that we are constantly making new discoveries and understanding new ideas. Guesses as to what this third item was ranged from cherry-pitter to wine-cork re mover, but we are pretty sure it is neither of those.



We had some fun costumes to dress up in and some selfie placards for people to try out. The paintings used in the placards were painted by Robert Feake, a well known American 18th century painter. He and Ruth Lyon Bush were first cousins twice removed; Feake's grandmother was also Ruth Bush's great-great-grandmother, Elizabeth Fones. Her full name is Elizabeth Fones Winthrop Feake Hallett, which gives you a clue to her fascinating life (three husbands!!).



An important discovery: everyone looks good in a tricorn hat. Literally everyone.



Visitors to our booth enjoyed dressing up and posing with placards

BEAUTIFYING THE HOMESTEAD, ENGAGING OUR SCHOOLS



As part of our work to make the plants more historically accurate and also beautiful, we got permission from the Parks Commission to plant 250 spring-blooming crocus bulbs in front of the Homestead. Happily, we got assistance from over 25 students from Port Chester High School. Students broke up into groups so everyone got a chance to plant some. We are very grateful for their cheerful engagement and were excited to give them a brief tour after their hard work.

While many people think that colonists would not have “had time” for pretty plants, it is clear that human beings have always wanted to have beautiful things in their lives. Crocuses are originally from the Middle East, but the Dutch - better known for their great love of

tulips at this time - loved flowers of many kinds. According to the University of California Center for Landscape and Urban Horticulture, “The first crocus in the Netherlands came from corms brought back from the Roman Empire in the 1560s ... By 1620, new garden varieties had been developed, such as the cream-colored crocus similar to varieties still on the market today.” We have discovered that colonists in Pennsylvania started growing crocus bulbs for saffron in the early 1700s. Saffron, the world’s most expensive spice, comes from the flower stamens in fall blooming crocus bulbs - if you have crocuses, they are probably spring-blooming, so don’t go out and eat yours! Used in many dishes from cultures all over the world, growing saffron might be an interesting community project. We will keep you updated on all our research and planting efforts.



Due to a shipping error, we ended up with some extra crocus bulbs. We were happy to share them with the Port Chester Beautification Commission, who planted them at the Port Chester-Rye Brook Library and other places. We also got to do a planting project with about 100 Port Chester Middle School students, including some special education students. Students planted bulbs on the hill facing the main entrance of the school so when the bulbs come up in the spring, they can feel a deep sense of satisfaction for making a difference in everyone’s school experience. Everyone needs flowers in the dark days of early March!

WINTERFEST 2019



Mayor Fritz Falanka

Our annual WinterFest included tasty treats from around the world (Mexico, Poland, Peru, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and even some Native American treats), music from around the world, and kid-friendly crafts. For our own historical interest, we asked people to share holiday traditions and the responses were fascinating. We heard about so many food traditions, including chocolate pie, bagels, and tamales and punch. People told us about their family traditions as well, such as attending the children’s Christmas service, having a family



Historical Society President Jordan Shoor
and husband John

member dress up as Santa, plain old “relaxing,” and waiting until noon to hug each other. It was wonderful to learn about the diversity within our small community! A special thank you to La Flor de Jalisco bakery for donating absolutely delicious holiday breads [WOW]!

The mistletoe/dress up area was popular both for those ready to smooch and those who just like to rock a velvet coat with lacy sleeves or a satin bodice over a silk skirt and sleeves. This is yet more proof that the Hamilton musical has made much of the 18th century cool.



Party-goers got to eat chocolates off the Christmas tree, make their own paper chains or lacy snowflake art, read various holiday stories, tour the Homestead, learn about Westchester's very own Christmas legend creator - Washington Irving - and, of course, gorge themselves. A special thank you to the Port Chester

High School students who generously contributed their time and efforts (before, during, and after the event) to make this a success.

If you didn't attend this year, we hope you do next year!



UPCOMING EVENTS

Our WEBSITE is coming!

You will be able to read all about the fascinating history of Port Chester (with sources), keep up to date with our events, and even join or donate to our Society. Check www.PCNYhistory.org soon!

Do you live on Putnam Avenue or Putnam Drive? Have you heard of the Port Chester Putnam and Mellor Fire Company? Ever wondered why there is a Putnam pretty much everything, from towns (Putnam and Putnam Valley) to Putnam County? Ever wondered who the man on horseback on the official seal on Greenwich police cars is?

This is all in honor of a man who was almost burned alive, was shipwrecked off the coast of Cuba, and was reportedly the Bunker Hill commander who said, "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes!"



Come learn about General Israel Putnam, the Revolutionary War commander whom we have largely forgotten about. We are about to change that!

On April 13th, at 7:00 p.m. in the Davidson Community Room of the Port Chester-Rye Brook Public Library, we will host Professor Robert Hubbard for a presentation on this fascinating - and influential! - historical figure, covering both his military career and his personal life.

Professor Hubbard has written the first biography of General Israel Putnam in over a century: *Major General Israel Putnam: Hero of the American Revolution*, which "re-examines the life of a general whose seniority in the Continental Army was second only to that of George Washington."

Don't miss this opportunity to find out about the man behind all things Putnam!

ANNUAL PORT CHESTER HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIP

Hear ye, hear ye, high school students - put on your thinking caps! The Port Chester Historical Society will once again be offering a \$500.00 scholarship to a graduating senior who demonstrates a keen interest in Port Chester local history. We will be sending our scholarship essay theme to the Port Chester High School guidance department in February for inclusion in its scholarship information booklet. Follow the directions spelled out by the high school guidance department and have your essay ready in the spring.

JOIN US! MEETING SCHEDULE:

All meetings are Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m. at the Bush Lyon Homestead, 479 King Street. Email us at portchesterhistoricalsociety@gmail.com with any questions.

January 14th

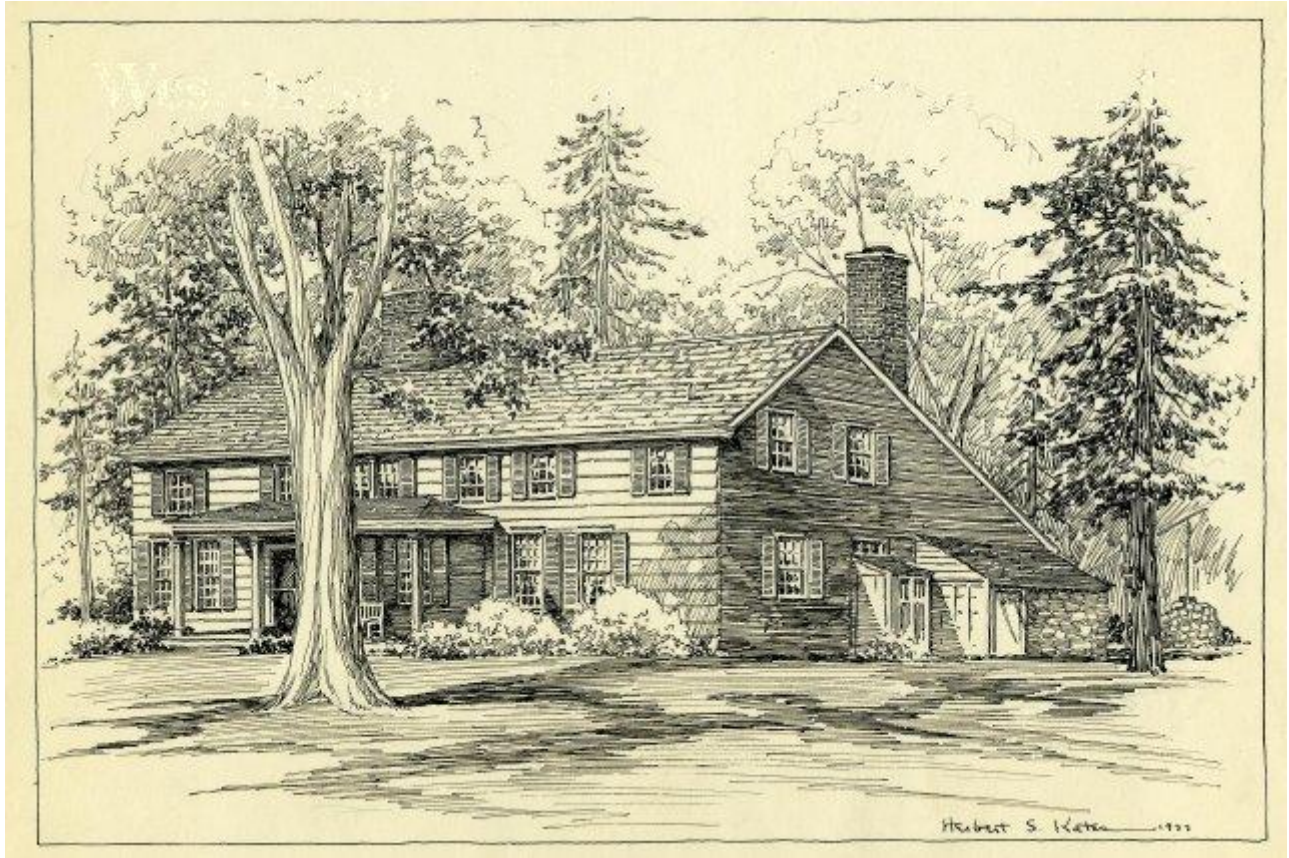
February 10th

March 10th

April 14th

May 12th

June 9th



Drawing from the Westchester County Historical Society