

# The Somers Historical Society, Inc. Fall 2011 Newsletter

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SEPTEMBER 27, 2011

Somers Historical Society Meeting ❖ 7:00 PM  
Somers Senior Center

Speaker: Wayne Cooley

*How to Research Family Genealogy*

OCTOBER 25, 2011

Somers Historical Society Meeting ❖ 7:00 PM  
Somers Senior Center

Speaker: Jim Klopfer

*The American Hearth and Fireplace Design*

SOMERS HISTORICAL MUSEUM OPEN 10 AM to 12:30 PM

11 BATTLE STREET, SOMERS, CT

**September 24, October 15, November 12, December 3, 2011**

❖ Private Tours can be arranged - Call 860.749.6437

## NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: Military memorabilia, Somersville Mfg. Co. lead plates used to print lithograph ads for their wool fabrics.

## Future Events - Celebrating 50 Years in 2012

How would you like to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2012? Take a trip to Bermuda or dinner with society members? Please let Barry Moynihan know if you have ideas and are available to help. 860.763.5222.

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From THE HARTFORD TIMES, Thursday, March 23, 1961 Somers was originally part of Springfield, MA, granted by the Court of Massachusetts to Major William Pyncheon and his Company. The town later became a part of Enfield, then called East Enfield Society in 1723.

The original price for this territory of Enfield and Somers was 25 pounds sterling paid to the Indians.

In 1734, Somers received its name from Lord John Somers of England. The first town meeting was held on October 14, 1734. The following items were voted upon:

- The first tithing men were appointed \*
- Swine were at liberty to run at large this year
- Samuel Billings was elected constable
- A school was to be constructed
- A team of horses was to be allowed equal wages as a man



**Kibbe Hotel 1880**

At all meetings and gatherings, rum and liquor was voted upon for the occasion usually by the gallon or barrel full and always recorded in the town records. Cider brandy was \$.25 per gallon and American gin \$.40 per gallon.

In 1749, Somers became part of Connecticut, and the town sent its first representative, Capt. Samuel Dwight, to the capitol in New Haven. The first recorded birth was Benjamin Thomas in 1725 who was said to have made the first apple cider in Somers. From 1785 to 1818, everyone residing in Somers had to pay taxes for the support of the Congregational Church unless they filed a certificate signed by the minister stating they belonged to another church and supported it. They were freed of this by the Constitution in 1818.

**THRIVING TOWN** The following industries were in Somers: the only hat factory in the state of Connecticut in a home on Main Street where Shaker bonnets were made, a gristmill, an ax factory, the first Satinet factory (later shut down) and another started where the Somersville Mfg. Company now stands, a select school for girls, and a carding shop. There was also a bonnet factory in Somersville on Maple Street.

The story is told that in the Revolutionary War, Hessian soldiers hired by Britain were imprisoned in the hotel known as The Kibbe Hotel (later renamed The Olde Homestead Inn and then The Somers Inn) built in 1769.



**Four Town Fair 1884**

A Toll road was built and run from 1808 to 1832 which ran over the mountains to Stafford and Woodstock. The price for a man and his horse was four cents. Exempted were public worshippers, those traveling to public meetings and funerals, neighbors, gristmill patrons, and soldiers.

**FAMOUS NAMES** Somers can boast the ancestry of some famous people and inventions: George Abbe, born in Somers in 1911, was an American poet and novelist. Graduating from the University of New Hampshire in 1933, he taught at Mount Holyoke College, Yale University, and other prestigious schools. Seth Chapin, medical professor, invented the hemmer attachment for sewing machines; his brother, Joseph, invented the circular saw. The mother of William Collins Whitney, Secretary of the Navy during the Cleveland administration, came from Somers. Our first Public Library was given to the town by the children of Mr. Whitney in 1896. The Honorable Leverett Erwin Pease, Secretary of the State of Connecticut from 1866-69, was a delegate to the Republican National Convention from Connecticut in 1860. He also held the office of postmaster in 1860. On his beautiful monument with a carefully carved anchor in the West Cemetery it says "Diligent in business, fervent in spirit serving the Lord".



\* The office of Tithing man has never been satisfactorily explained. New England traditions describe this institution only in its later ecclesiastical form. People in New England remember the Tithing man as a kind of Sunday Constable, whose special duty it was in the old parish meeting-house to quiet the restlessness of youth and to disturb the slumbers of age. He saw to it that all persons were attentive except himself, and who occasionally broke the peace by sharply rapping with his tune-book and pointing at some whispering boy, or else by patrolling the aisles to arouse sleeping saints by means of his black pole tipped at one end with brass. It is said that one or two of them sometimes sat under the very shadow of the pulpit, facing the congregation. But more usually one Tithing man sat at each door of the meeting-house to keep out dogs, and one often sat in the gallery to keep order.

◆ Full text of "Saxon tithing-men in America"; read before the American Antiquarian Society, October 21, 1881.

THE SOMERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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