

SCOTT HOUSE JOURNAL



President's Message

It's been a busy, busy summer and we are looking forward to an exciting fall!

We are pleased to announce the Historical Society was awarded a \$30,000 grant from the Anne S. Richardson Fund. Miss Richardson, who donated Richardson Park to the town and whose foundation still bestows grants on non-profits in the area, has done so much for Ridgefield. We deeply appreciate the grant. Most of the money will be spent on a new wooden roof for our beloved Scott House.

Since the Ridgefield Historical Society was selected to develop the pilot program for the State of Connecticut's town walking tours, ConnTours, we have been busy researching Ridgefield's history and pulling photos from our archives. It's been interesting photographing the buildings in town now and reflecting on photos and descriptions of what was once in their place.

We have also been gearing up for the 100th Anniversary of the ratification of



Miss Susie Scott, a New York debutante whose descendants later lived in Ridgefield. Her 1871 diary is in the Ridgefield Historical Society archives.

New York to Norwalk to Ridgefield:

Making connections

In a small town, connections abound and historians often tease out links among people and places from documents and texts donated by unrelated parties.

Recently archivists at the Ridgefield Historical Society transcribed the journal of Miss Susie Scott, written in 1871 when she was a 15-year-old living in Manhattan.

How did her very candid thoughts end up in the Scott House vault? Not, as one might guess, because she was a descendant of the early owners of what is now the Ridgefield Historical Society headquarters.

the 19th Amendment. This amendment gave women the right to vote by declaring that the “right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

As a kickoff to the Votes for Women program, the Ridgefield Historical Society is sponsoring a field trip to the Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum in Norwalk. The museum has an excellent exhibit, “From Corsets to Suffrage: Victorian Women Trailblazers,” that through the lens of fashion, looks at the suffrage movement. Think of how women’s lives changed — from the high-collared, tight-waisted, floor-length dresses of the late 19th Century to the swinging flapper dresses of the Roaring Twenties. An interesting additional feature of the tour is the first floor of the mansion, which has been completely restored. In an unusual move guides will take our tour group up to the unrestored second floor! Come join us Sept. 21. Visit our website for details.

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion about how Ridgefield can maintain its historic charm. Phil Esser will do a PowerPoint presentation on “Ridgefield’s Rich Architectural History — What’s Here and How to Protect It.” He’ll highlight some of Ridgefield’s most architecturally important structures. After his talk, representatives of Connecticut preservation agencies and the Ridgefield Historic District Commission will discuss what they are doing and what you can do to help preserve this historic town. If you love Ridgefield, please attend and join this discussion! Check out our website for more details.

Back by popular demand, is historian Ed Hynes. Did you know that during the Revolution Long Island Sound was a hot-bed of activity? Lots of nefarious runs were taken in little whale boats. Learn about the spies of yesteryear. Join us at the Library for “Activity

Susie Scott Hall was the mother of Mrs. Gerardus P. Herrick, whose family had a summer “cottage” on High Ridge beginning in the early part of the 20th Century. (The family’s main residence, as was typical of Ridgefield “cottage” owners, was in New York.)

When the Herrick descendants wanted to find a place for their historical collection a few years ago, they chose the Ridgefield Historical Society. The materials included plans for Gerardus Herrick’s “Vertaplane” (an invention to which he devoted his career) and the actual prototype of the plane’s convertible wing/rotor. Another treasure is Susie Scott’s diary, which had been passed to her daughter, Lois Scott Hall Herrick. (Lois Herrick is the subject of a large formal portrait that hangs in Town Hall, on loan from the Historical Society.)

One of the subjects to which the young Miss Scott devoted space in her journal was a visit to the “Le Grand Lockwood place” (as she called it) in Norwalk, which is now a National Historic Landmark.

“We arrived at Norwalk about six o’clock and the Lockwoods’ carriage was there to meet us. We drove up to the house and they all came out to meet us. The house opens onto an elegant hall with the most magnificent picture that I have ever seen. We went up stairs and were shown into the guest chambers. I cannot describe the house but it is a paradise on earth and will spoil me for any other house. We got dressed and then dinner was ready so we went down and the table

on the Sound During the American Revolution” on Nov. 23.

This is just a taste of the many exciting things happening at the Ridgefield Historical Society. We are always looking for interested volunteers to help us with our mission. Do you have some time? Love history? A skill you'd like to share? Stop by. We are open to the public Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 1-5 pm. We'd love to meet you!

— Sharon Dunphy, President,
Ridgefield Historical Society

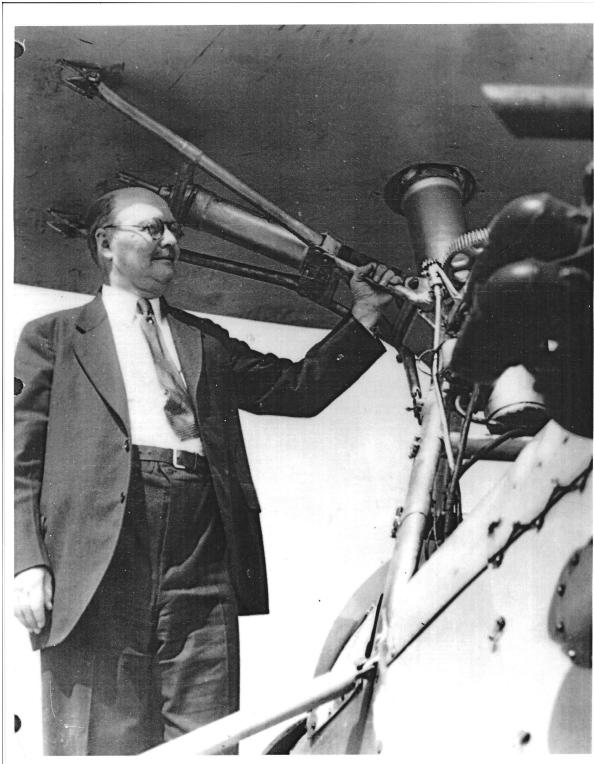
was perfectly covered with flowers and silver. There was a bouquet at every place and it seemed to me that it was a perfect Fairy Land.”

Before leaving the next day, Susie and her parents took “another look around this superb house. I will not attempt to describe the house for words could not tell how magnificent it is. Every bedroom has its Boudoir, dressing room, and Bath room,” she wrote in her diary. “We all said good bye and in a few minutes we were leaving the place where the handsomest house in the United States stands.”

Coincidentally, the Ridgefield Historical Society has planned its fall trip to that very same home, now known as the Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum, where guests will see From Corsets to Suffrage: Victorian Women Trailblazers. Curated by Kathleen Motes Bennewitz, the exhibit celebrates the centennial of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution and is the first in a year-long schedule of events, Votes for Women, planned by the Ridgefield Historical Society, the Ridgefield Library, the League of Women Voters, the Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center, and the Drum Hill Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution.

LeGrand Lockwood’s personal connection to Ridgefield went beyond having hosted the mother of a future Ridgefielder; he and his uncle, Edwin Lockwood, were substantial investors in the Danbury & Norwalk Railroad and he helped create the branch line to Ridgefield in 1870. (According to author L. Peter Cornwall, in his book *In the Shore Line’s Shadow: The Six Lives of the Danbury & Norwalk Railroad*, Ridgefield has LeGrand Lockwood to thank for the elegant design of its station, now beautifully restored and repurposed by the Ridgefield Supply Company.)

The Lockwood mansion, a National Historic Landmark since 1971, is regarded as one of the earliest and most significant Second Empire Style country houses in the United States. Owned by the City of Norwalk, it was rescued and restored by dedicated volunteers, who were able to turn what had become a derelict storage building for the city’s heavy equipment back into the magnificent mansion that so thrilled young Susie Scott.



Gerardus Herrick with his HV-2a Vertaplane in 1936.

A Wing: A Propeller

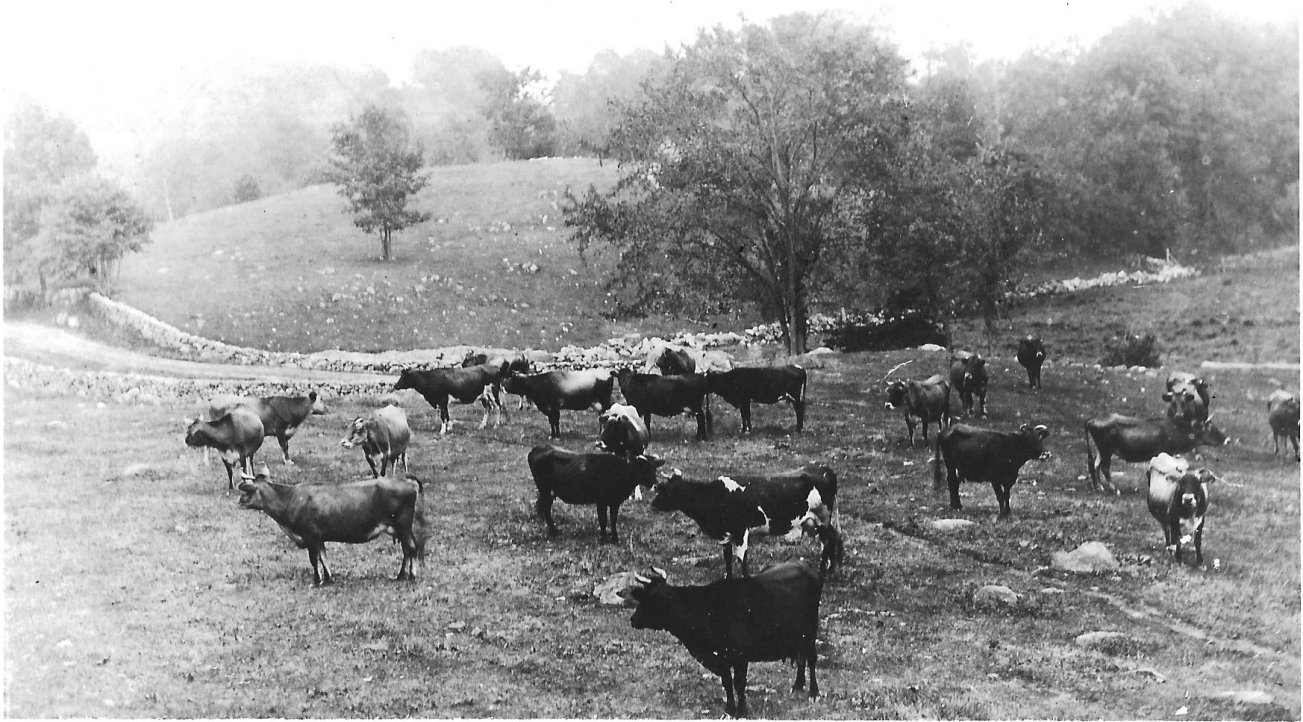
As mentioned, Gerardus Herrick devoted his life to the development of a plane that could take off conventionally but had the capability of landing vertically, as a helicopter would. The Vertaplane underwent several iterations as Mr. Herrick refined his design. Having served with the Army Air Corps in World War I and having seen the many crashes as the new “flying machines” were used by the military, he was determined to create a safer plane.

The plane he designed was a fixed-wing monoplane with a large overhead propeller, shaped somewhat like a smaller wing. The aircraft could take off as a monoplane and once in the air, convert to a hovering aircraft

using the large overhead propeller. It could then land in a very small area. The aircraft could also take off vertically, but could not convert to horizontal flight in mid-air, and had to remain a “helicopter” until it landed.

A new version, the HV-2a, began flying successfully in 1936, cruising at 100 mph as a fixed-wing plane and 65 mph in autogyro mode. The 2,300-pound aircraft needed only 60 feet of runway to take off. The design proved commercially undesirable, however, because of the weight of the plane, but Mr. Herrick continued to refine his Vertaplane and tried to obtain investor and government investment until his death in 1955.

The HV-2a is owned by the Smithsonian Institution’s Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. (although not currently on display there), but a prototype of the all-important rotor wing is in the collection of the Ridgefield Historical Society and will be on permanent display at Ridgefield Town Hall, beginning this fall. It will be accompanied by a selection of documents and other materials from the Herrick collection at the Ridgefield Historical Society.



Scenes of beauty

Marie Kendall, a pioneering photographer who briefly lived in Ridgefield after marrying a Ridgefield native in 1878, was nationally renowned for her work, which was displayed at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 and at the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904. She spent most of her married life in Norfolk, Conn., where the family relocated in 1884, but she did photograph Ridgefield scenes during and after her residence here. This picture, in the Ridgefield Historical Society collection, is of Walnut Grove Farm in Ridgefield, owned by David Jones. The Ridgefield Historical Society has preserved thousands of photographs in its archives, and they are searchable on the website, ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org. For information on obtaining high resolution scans, call 203-438-5821 or email info@ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org.

The Ridgefield Historical Society

4 Sunset Lane

Open Tuesday-Thursday, 1 to 5 p.m.

203-438-5821

info@ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org

Ridgefield Historical Society Events

Field Trip to the Lockwood–Mathews Mansion Museum, Norwalk, Saturday, Sept. 21, 1:30 p.m.; exhibit **From Corsets to Suffrage — Victorian Women Trailblazers**, plus special tour of unrestored second floor of the mansion; \$18 for members; \$20 for non-members. ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org.

Sundays at the Schoolhouse, open house at the Peter Parley Schoolhouse, West Lane at South Salem Road, Sunday, Sept. 29, 1–4 p.m.

“Ridgefield’s Rich Architectural History — What’s Here and How to Protect It,” program by architectural historian Phil Esser, with representatives of the Ridgefield Historic District Commission, the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and the Connecticut Department of Community and Economic Development, Saturday, Oct. 5, 10 a.m., Ridgefield Library; free; reservations, ridgefieldlibrary.org.

Sundays at the Schoolhouse, Halloween surprises, open house at the Peter Parley Schoolhouse, West Lane at South Salem Road, Sunday, Oct. 27, 1–4 p.m.

“War on Long Island Sound during the American Revolution,” lecture by Ed Hynes, co-sponsored by the Ridgefield Library, Saturday, Nov. 23, at 11 a.m. at the Ridgefield Library; free; reservations, ridgefieldlibrary.org.

Silhouettes by Deborah O’Connor, Sunday, Dec. 8, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.; information, ridgefieldhistoricalsociety.org; reservations, 203–438–5821.