In June, the SCHS hosted a special welcome luncheon for Peter F. Cohalan, the newly appointed Suffolk County Historian. Many members of the Suffolk County Legislature, which had appointed Mr. Cohalan to the position in May, joined us for the event.

Upon Mr. Cohalan’s appointment, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone stated, “Now, more than ever, in this age of constantly changing technology, it is critical that we preserve what has come before so that we can continue to honor and learn from the past. Peter Cohalan has deep roots in Suffolk County, a long record of public service and a passionate interest in local and American history.”

The SCHS has provided Mr. Cohalan with an office at the Society, where he will be engaged in researching historic County events and promoting the preservation of historic materials and documents.

A former Suffolk County Executive who served in that position from 1979 to 1986, Mr. Cohalan also served as a New York State Supreme Court Justice for 25 years, and as the Islip Town Supervisor from 1971-1979. We are honored and thrilled to welcome him to the SCHS!

Currier & Ives: Printmakers to the American People will be on display through the end of January. See box below on special events to be presented in connection with the exhibit – and read more about the exhibit and the history of Currier & Ives inside!

Save-the-Date for these Currier & Ives Events

The SCHS is seeking sponsors for this exciting new educational program! Sponsors are asked to contact Kathryn Curran, at (631) 727-2881 x101.
Celebrating our 126th year, the Suffolk County Historical Society is embarking on a new and exciting path. As our stewardship of art, artifacts and archives continues and our collections grow, we are mounting fresh and innovative offerings. In the past few months we have looked for SCHS children’s programs, educational outreach to schools, collaborative events and off-site exhibitions where our collections will be shared.

Moving forward into this exhilarating phase we are honored that the office of the newly appointed Suffolk County Historian can be found at the Suffolk County Historical Society. The SCHS is a capital campaign to add a new ADA compliant wing and a handicap parking area to our historic structure. We are very lucky to have our vision and goals supported by Riverhead Town and the Suffolk County legislature.

We continue preserving history while bringing it to the present. Come to the Suffolk County Historical Society: discover yourself, uncover the past, and learn something new!

SUFFOLK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

300 West Main Street
Riverhead, NY 11901
(631)727-2881
www.suffolkcountyhistoricalsociety.org

HOURS: MUSEUM Tues. through Sat., 12:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. 
LIBRARY Wed. through Sat., 12:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Membership is open to everyone. Individual yearly dues are $35, family dues are $40.

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The Suffolk County Historical Society is a private, not-for-profit organization, and is an Authorized Agent of Suffolk County, that receives partial funding from Suffolk County, Steve Bellone, County Executive.

The Long Island Connection: Collector Harry Twoford Peters Popularized Currier & Ives

Harry Twoford Peters (1881-1948) is largely responsible for making the American public aware of the historical and artistic importance of Currier & Ives prints. Born into wealth from the coal business, Peter’s family owned Windholme on 250 acres, the largest estate of waterfront property on the South Shore of Long Island. This gentlemen working farm in Islip Hamlet consisted of a dairy, horse and cow stables, wagon rooms, chicken coop, kennels and a pig sty. The stables housed Peter’s polo ponies and the kennels for his foxhounds.

A lifelong student and collector of Americana, Peters began acquiring inexpensive Currier & Ives prints as a child. Living in New York he would go to the printmakers shop on Spruce Street, where he made friends with some of the artists. When in Ithaca Peters met the Currier & Ives artist Thomas Worth. Worth had married Louise Stellwrustwer whose father owned the Stellworth Lake House (now the site of Brookwood Hall in East Islip). This became a particularly close friend to Worth and attributed his enthusiasm as a collector of Currier & Ives to “Uncle Tommy” as he called Worth. Peters was to become an expert on Currier & Ives.

In 1929 Harry T. Peters completed and published his first volume of the works of the lithographers, Currier & Ives: Printmakers to the American People. In 1932 he completed the second volume. Peters then published America on Stone, the Other Printmakers to the American People. During the travails of the Great Depression, Americans had a renewed interest in the halcyon days of the past. 1932 a group of twelve prominent collectors gathered in New York City to judge what they considered would represent the best large folios produced by Currier & Ives. The late Harry Shaw Newman, who along with fellow collector and dentist Michael Keilty became an expert on Currier & Ives.

Part of the exhibit in the main gallery

Harry T. Peters was the “pioneer rediscovered” of Currier & Ives prints. Born into wealth from the coal business, Peter’s family owned Windholme on 250 acres, the largest estate of waterfront property on the South Shore of Long Island. This gentlemen working farm in Islip Hamlet consisted of a dairy, horse and cow stables, wagon rooms, chicken coop, kennels and a pig sty. The stables housed Peter’s polo ponies and the kennels for his foxhounds.

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The firm Currier & Ives billed itself as selling “Works of art to brighten the home,” “Pine Colored Prints” and as “The Grand Central Depot for Cheap Popular Prints.” Little did they know these images would play an important role in shaping the identity of the Nation.

Currier & Ives celebrated the activities, events and everyday life of 19th century Americans. Images included domestic life, historical events, city and country views, religious scenes, scenic wonders, city maps, westward expansion, trains, ships, winter scenes and hunting and fishing. Each print was titled and most were hand-colored by women who worked for the firm. The prints were sold in the New York City shop, distributed through mail-order and were offered by peddlers and by agents.

Working at a time when newspapers did not have pictures, the public was interested in depictions of noteworthy events. In 1840 Nathaniel Currier (1813-1880) produced the lithograph “A Federal Conflagration of the Steamboat Lexington in Long Island Sound on Monday Evening, January 13th, 1840, By Which Melancholy Occurrence One Hundred Persons Perished.” The print was a resounding success and Currier’s print became a sensation.

Partnering with James Merritt Ives (1824-1895) in 1834 the firm sought to sell lithographs to ordinary people, and its works hung on the walls of America’s homes stores, barbershops, firehouses barrooms, out houses and barns. The firm was the most prolific and successful company of lithographers working at that time. It is estimated that the company created more than 7,400 different images and produced more than a million prints before it closed in 1907.

Below - detail from the prints: Dystonia and Fashion, 1845, Central Park Winter, 1862, Preparing for Market, 1856.