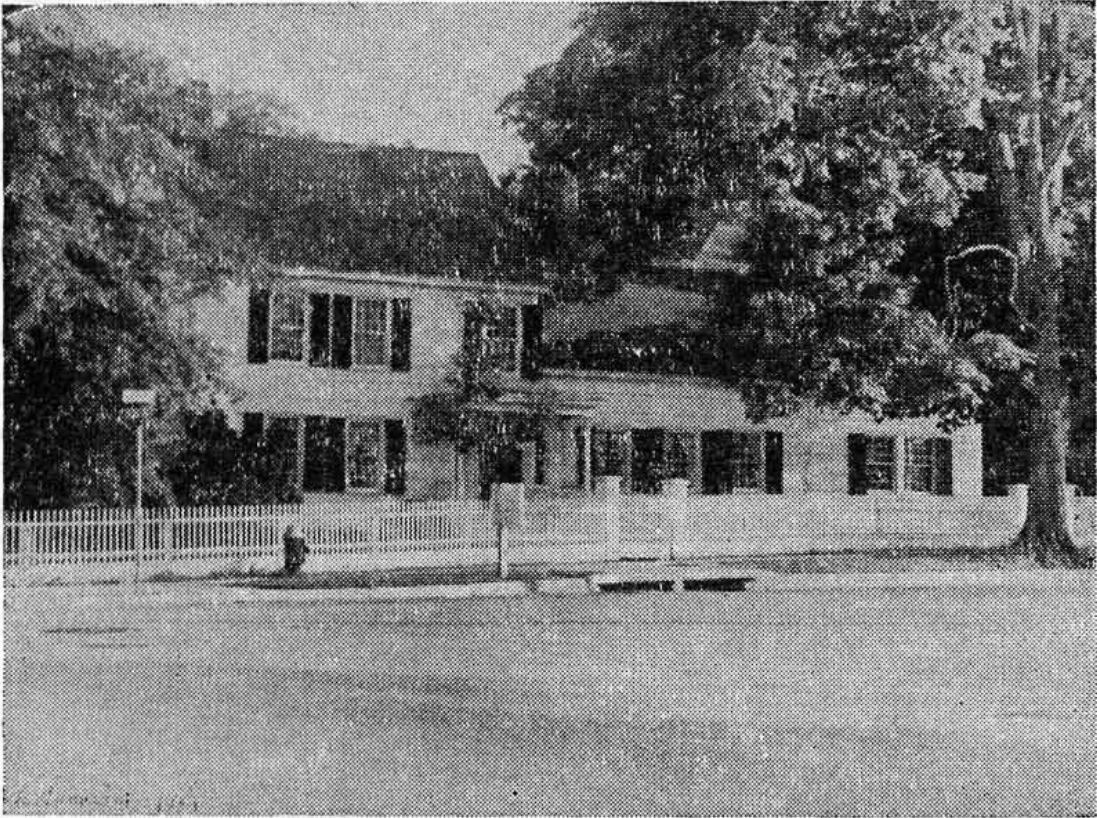


**1903 - 1953**



**THE HUNTINGTON  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

## FOREWORD

This story of the Huntington Historical Society is being presented to commemorate the 50th anniversary of its founding. It is dedicated to the Founders, whose vision and work created it, and to all those who in any way contributed to its growth and progress, and have made possible a continuous service since its inception in 1903.

In the preservation of the old Conklin farm homestead; the household furnishings and implements, and in the establishment and maintenance of a reference library, this society has assembled an historical collection of which any community may be proud.

As an instrument for historical education, these collections have been well applied, to the advantage of youth and adult, and have provided a source of interest and pleasure to the thousands of visitors from far and near, who have come to enjoy them.

Credit for certain information contained in these pages must be given to Mrs. Romanah Sammis, who faithfully recorded her transactions with Mrs. Ella Conklin Hurd in the acquisition of the house, and for the description of its physical features in its earlier years. This story was published in a pamphlet "The Home of Huntington Historical Society" now out of print. The revolutionary incident is contained in a story written by Miss Nettie Pearsall, and the other facts may be verified by the society's documents.

In assembling these highlights in the history of the Historical Society and its home, the writer has tried to present a picture of continual growth and patient endeavor through half a century, which has laid a foundation for greater achievements in future years.

Martha K. Hall.

# A STORY OF THE HUNTINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY (1903 - 1953)

*"I know that the past was great and the future will be great,  
And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time."*

Walt Whitman.

After half a century of continuous activity of the Huntington Historical Society, it is natural to review past years and examine its many aspects — its inception, home, growth and functions — and to explore further the possibility for a more effective use of this instrument which has a definite purpose — the promotion of historical education.

When Huntington celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1903, a group of women was officially appointed to prepare an historical exhibition of local Americana. Colonial items were collected and displayed in the old Stuart home, which faces the Town Hall on Stewart Avenue. This house was a symbol itself of the trend of time, for it once stood in spacious grounds extending from near New York Avenue to beyond the Town Hall, and was removed to give way for the present business block. It was probably built by Zophar Oakley, a noted merchant during the middle 1800s, and fourth postmaster of Huntington. His daughter married Carlos D. Stuart, poet and journalist, a contemporary of Walt Whitman, and the property came to be known as the Stuart homestead. When the road was cut through at the turn of the century, it was given the name of Stewart Avenue.

After the celebrations were completed, many who had contributed to the exhibition decided they no longer wished to own the exhibits, and at the inspiration of Mrs. Frederick B. Sammis, who had played a great part in the event, a society was formed to care for them. It was known as "The Colonial Society of Huntington" and a State Charter was acquired, dated December 3, 1903. Mrs. Sammis became its first president and worked faithfully for many years. On April 19, 1911, a new Charter was obtained for "The Huntington Historical Society", thus broadening the scope and meaning of its activities.

Meetings for several years were held in vacant rooms, and items pertaining to local history collected. Money was raised in many ways to build a house for this accumulating material. Because of the nature of these collections, it was decided that an old home would be more appropriate, and the home of Mrs. Ella Conklin Hurd at High Street and New York Avenue was suggested. As Mrs. Hurd was not then occupying the house, she was contacted, and the idea of her ancestral home being used for such a purpose strongly appealed to her. After some thought, she offered certain terms for the society's consideration, remarking "I wish I could give you the place, but I am obliged to have some income to meet my expenses." The society accepted her offer, and Lawyer Henry W. Gaines generously gave his services in preparing a conditional deed, which provided that the society pay a monthly payment during her remaining years, and those of her brothers Moreland's widow. Mrs. Hurd lived until April 21, 1917, and Mrs. Moreland Conklin until November 20, 1918, at which time the deed became absolute. When her will was published it was learned that the income from her estate was to be paid to a cousin during his lifetime, and that at the time of his death the society would receive the principal. This amount exceeded the society's payments 1911-1918, and Mrs. Hurd's wish that she might give the property was fulfilled.

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The date of the erection of the house is unknown but it was built and occupied by David Conklin, who was born August 24, 1744. He was the son of Thomas and Abiah Conklin, and a descendant of John Conklin who settled in Southampton 1640, who with his son Timothy settled in West Neck, Huntington before 1660. David married Sybel Wheeler and had nine children, one of whom, Almeda married Abel Brush. Her grandson was Morris R. Brush the horse trainer, who lived on Rogues Path. To him she related a story of Revolutionary days, when her father was absent from home, employed in patriotic duties. Being thirteen years of age, she well remembered the day the British came to Huntington. It was wash day, and the family wash was scalding over the fire when the alarm sounded. Seizing the kettle, and setting it in the back yard, she escaped to her relatives in Half Hollow Hills, where Jacob Conklin had settled in 1714. From David, the house

passed to his nephew Abel Conklin (1763-1827), from whom there was an unbroken record. Abel married Ruth Sammis June 21, 1790, 2nd Mindwell Johnson (1796-1855), and on his death willed the house to his son Abel K. a son of the second marriage. He was the father of Ella J. Conklin Hurd, and Moreland Conklin who conducted a drug store on Main Street. It may be of interest to note that Ella Conklin was one of the first six graduates from Huntington Union school in 1862, and was active in all things educational throughout her life. In recognition of her final benefaction to her native town, a tablet which was set in the hall of her birthplace on the eighth of November 1918 is inscribed:

**In Grateful Memory of**  
**ELLA J. CONKLIN HURD**  
**through her generosity**  
**this place which was**  
**her ancestral home**  
**became the home of the**  
**Huntington**  
**Historical Society**  
**June 7 1911**

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The original farm extended as far east as Nassau Avenue; west to Oakwood Avenue; north as far as Carver Place and south beyond the Huntington Rural Cemetery. New York Avenue ("The Lane" of those days) ran through the property, where flourished extensive peach and apple orchards, also two English walnut trees planted in 1840. Farm buildings stood west of the house, and on the east was a never-failing well, with a cattle trough for the watering of stock on the farm, also used by those who passed by. The present well house, removed from Waterside Inn, Vernon Valley, Northport in 1952, formerly owned by Wheeler and Call families, marks the approximate position of an earlier structure, which

was demolished in 1920. A high fence enclosed the kitchen garden.

When much of the land was sold in 1863, the farm buildings were torn down and a new fence constructed to enclose the whole house lot, including the irregular triangle reaching beyond the well. This resulted in protests from the public, that the owner had no right to remove a "public necessity", when access to the well was denied them.

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A common practice among early settlers of Long Island, was to build a story and half house to meet the immediate needs of the family. It usually consisted of a large living room with fireplace extending along one wall, and a bedroom. The half story was reached by a narrow steep stairway, and provided additional sleeping quarters. Later additions were made as the need arose, assuming architectural features of the period. This method seems to have been followed by the Conklin family, for the western section of the building has definite colonial features, while the eastern portion is of later date.

A picture taken about 1890, clearly shows these sections, and the appearance of the house before changes took place. The first major changes took place about 1896, when the earlier portion received treatment which removed many of its interesting features. The roof of the lean-to kitchen was raised to the present level, giving an ugly box-like appearance, and windows were inserted in the new west wall. The brick oven which projected into the yard from the north wall, protected by a shed, was removed, also the small door corresponding with that in the south wall. Here again two windows were built in the new wall, and a new door to lead into the yard on the west. Both of these old doors were of heavy verticle boards with strap hinges; latches for opening, and hooks instead of locks, and shaped to fit the roof.

The open fireplace, which may have been built to take the place of an earlier one in the colonial living room, along with the chimney and shelving, still remains, all built of hand made brick with lime mortar. The original crane still swings to position. Brick furnace pots once stood each side of the fireplace, built square, and hollowed at the top to accommo-

date iron kettles. Underneath each was a fire box, the flues connecting with the main chimney. Wooden covers provided additional table space, when the furnaces were not in use. The one at the north was about 30 inches square and held a five gallon pot. The other much larger, was used for heating water for washing, and trying out lard after the fall "hog killing", and would hold three bushels of escallops. These also were removed. While relating these changes, Mrs. Hurd observed "I have always regretted that a new kitchen was imperative", a sentiment in which we heartily concur. The large glass cupboard in the southwest corner, was formerly in the home of Zophar Platt, who was born 1734, and lived at the east end of town.

At this time the twenty-four panes of old glass were replaced by four in the old window frames, and the two half story windows were covered outside, but are still visible inside. Above these, dormers were built into the roof to provide light for two bedrooms, which were built in the garret of the middle section.

Again in 1907 further changes took place. The door in the middle section was replaced by a window; the roof of the south portion of the garret was raised and windows inserted in the new wall; existing partitions were removed, and a bathroom built. A large glass fronted linen closet was installed on the east wall. The south portion now holds a large loom, and in the linen closet are stored many fine examples of linen and woolen handwoven pieces. The floor was covered with new flooring, including the old stairway which may still be seen in the small back hall near the kitchen.

Until this time the later stairway reached only to the second floor, and the room immediately east was a long narrow bedroom. This room was opened up for the present hall; the handrail continued, and a new stairway built to reach the third floor. In the roof of this large garret a double dormer was built to give light, and for many years this room was used as exhibition space for miscellaneous articles.

Because of an unexpired lease, the society did not occupy the house until June 21, 1912, when it became necessary to employ a caretaker. For his accommodation two rooms were built in the rear of the early portion of the house. This necessitated the removal of a long narrow shed, called "the pump

shed" for obvious reasons. In 1922 a large fireproof vault was built at the rear of the western end, and the two rooms were opened up to form the present meeting room. At this time the present apartment was built for the caretaker, leaving the whole house for exhibition purposes.

In 1948-49 an effort was made to restore earlier architectural lines as shown in the 1890 picture which was used as a guide. Small panes of glass replaced the four panes, and all dormers were removed, along with several ugly features which had been introduced through the years in the interior. Metal ceilings, and wainscoating which covered the old kitchen were hidden with more appropriate material. An earlier fireplace in the old living room was uncovered, and while work was in progress the old fieldstone hearth was discovered. Stripped of its covering, it gives the impression that an early fireplace could have extended to its limits, and evidence of the early floor level. Carefully chosen paint and paper were applied to the walls and woodwork, so that now each room has assumed an atmosphere of its particular period.

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With few exceptions all furnishings and museum items have been gifts to the society. When the house was occupied in 1912, it was realized that the small group of items so far gathered, was inadequate to furnish it, and a policy was adopted whereby a family, undertaking to provide furnishings valued at a certain sum of money, would be honored by having a room dedicated to the memory of its ancestor. Three such dedications resulted: The west room to Thomas Brush who settled in Huntington in 1656; the east room to William Rogers, who partook in the Second or Eastern Purchase from the Indians in 1656, and the upper east or front bedroom, to Lucinda Beers Conklin, not only for her gifts, but her many years of faithful service to the society.

To attempt to enumerate the items which have accumulated since that time is impossible in this short story, but it might be well to mention a few of particular interest. When George Washington journeyed through Long Island in 1790, he dined at the house of Zebulon Ketcham, in Amityville. The table used on this occasion, along with the chair used by him at Widow Platt's Tavern at Huntington Town Green, on



April 23rd of the same year, is preserved, the latter a gift of Herbert F. Clock, who was grandson of Mr. William Woodend, Huntington's family doctor during the late 1800s' a wooden sewing machine built in 1840 by a boy of fourteen years of age is one of the most valuable pieces in the house; the bedroom furnishings including a "field bed" and "trundle bed" are always items of great interest, and along with pottery, china, silverware, costumes, needlework, war relics, paintings, and domestic utensils and implements, constitute a collection of local Americana illustrative of past living, such as no written word could describe.

During the 1949 renovation, it was decided wherever possible to place these furnishings in settings of certain periods, so that the "Brush" room became colonial in character; the "Rogers" room, Empire, and the "Conklin" room, Victorian. In this way an intelligent picture of each period was presented.

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As in the case of the museum, the library collections have grown to great proportions — mainly by gifts, often in appreciation for some service received. Its archives contain manuscripts of local interest both historical and genealogical. Among the latter is a unique collection of family records in six large volumes, known as the Nellie Ritch Scudder Mss., the source referred to in many published works; also "The Genealogy of Long Island Families" being compiled by Herbert F. Seversmith, Ph.D., President of the National Genealogical Society, Washington, D. C., along with many individual genealogies, which augment these. These, as well as a good assortment of printed records, constitute a genealogical library, which has come to be known in many parts of the States and beyond the seas. Requests by mail are taken care of for a moderate fee, by the librarian, who is a member of the National Genealogical Society.

The extensive collections of historical material pertains chiefly to New York, Long Island and Huntington, and includes an excellent file of newspapers, among which is a copy of the first newspaper published in Huntington in 1821; also a file of The Long Islander, beginning with the issue of July 21, 1839. This was presented to the society by deed of gift of

The Long Islander Publishing Company 1838, in memory of Walt Whitman, who began to publish this newspaper in his native town of Huntington, 1838. No copy of this Whitman publication has come to light. A first and second edition of "Leaves of Grass" by Whitman 1855 and 1856, as well as first editions of the works of Silas Wood, Long Island's first historian, are among a most valuable group of rare books.

All this material has been made available to the researcher, and every assistance given in the use of it. During the past few years there has been a marked increase in its use, and a recent survey made for the State Education Department, showed that sixteen persons were doing serious research from which it is expected published works will result.

As a part of the State Education System, this society has at all times tried to fulfill its duties conscientiously, and the annual reports to Albany, as well as year books which are filed in Washington, Albany, and important libraries, show the steady and effectual growth of its collections, activities, and memberships which at the present time number over 600. Perhaps the most important service provided, is the cooperation with the schools. Special appointments are made by teachers for their classes to be conducted through the house, so that their studies in local history, now mandatory, may be illustrated by actual contacts with past Americana. As many as twenty-five groups from Huntington and surrounding districts have attended in a single season, and all have been conducted by competent persons of the school committee.

Talks on special subjects have been given in the library by request, and during the Whitman exhibition in 1950-51, over 600 persons in small groups attended for this purpose. Throughout the years special exhibitions have been presented, and in recent years a rotation of small presentations have brought to the attention of visitors, material which cannot continually be on display, for lack of space.

Pilgrimages to historic places in Huntington are organized regularly, usually attended by from sixty to ninety people. Each person is equipped with a specially prepared map

and notes, which become available for source material, along with publications listed in the year book.

For some years craft classes were conducted, one important result being the hooked rug on display in the "Brush" room.

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Until 1947, the society was self maintaining, depending for its financial resources on memberships mainly. This became utterly inadequate to even meet obligations, and an appeal was made to the Town Board. As a result, a small grant was annually voted to ease immediate difficulties, and an intensive membership drive was made and annual dues raised. A special appeal provided money for greatly needed repairs and a certain amount of restoration in 1949, but much needs still to be done. The tremendous growth in the collections of the library and museum, necessitate storage space for their proper care; increased attendance at meetings shows the inadequacy of our meeting room; the demand for more and more publications in library material; the care and preservation of collections because of continual usage, &c., as well as current expenses, all call for better financial support, preferably from private sources. A new membership gives both moral and financial support, and any interested person may become a member by giving his or her name to a member. Gifts of money may be earmarked for definite purposes, or may be used to establish an endowment fund.

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No society stands still, and in this the 50th year, there is every reason to believe that with the help of each and every member, greater things may be achieved in future years by The Huntington Historical Society.