



NEWSLETTER *of the* *Tefft Family Association*

uncovering the past

the descendants of John and William Tefft

Vol. 2, No. 1
January 2001

This issue looks at what Samuel Tefft, born 357 years ago, left behind...the record of his life and times and the home, built in 1720, that survived so long, only to be tragically destroyed on Dec. 21, 2000.



SAMUEL TEFFT HOUSE BURNS

by Darlene Tefft Cobb



Candles, their warm glow welcoming 25 guests to a celebration of the Winter Solstice, crackled into flame to destroy the ancient Samuel Tefft home and cause the family living there to escape homeless, but unharmed, into the night just four days before Christmas.

History is certainly strange. Its quirks of timing, the odd coincidences of people and other events can sometimes leave us shaking our heads wondering what it is we really know and can learn from it.

The Tefft family might well wonder why, now that we are coming together to save our heritage and succeeding in saving part of it, we should lose the earliest Tefft home to have survived intact since 1720. Perhaps there is a lesson here. But what?

News reports

A newspaper in South Kingstown, R.I. reported the fire that gutted the Samuel Tefft house on Dec. 21, 2000 started from a single unattended candle burning in the upstairs window.

A later local source said the house and walkway leading to it were filled with candles.

About 25 guests of the owners, Denis Durand and Cynthia Burke-Durand, had arrived earlier at the home to celebrate the longest and darkest night of the year. Their coats and boots were taken to the home's upstairs bedroom.

As the family of five and their guests, mostly members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County, sang Christmas songs

accompanied by a piano and guitars, a fire broke out. Early reports claimed it started in the upstairs bedroom. Wherever it started, the fire was not noticed until it sent the group of 30 scampering for an escape, too late to save anything but their lives.

Damage

According to the Providence Journal, the fire broke out at 8:30 p.m. and "pretty much destroyed" the residence at 70 Chestnut Hill Rd. None of the occupants was injured, but one fireman among the 45 who battled the blaze until 1 p.m. the next morning suffered from smoke inhalation.

The Durands lost not only their home but all their furnishings and possessions including their three sons' Christmas gifts. By Dec. 23, however, the South Kingstown community had rallied to their support raising about \$1,000. The family was given shelter by a local inn-keeper and plans for benefits by a merchant and others were also underway.

Oldest

The house was occupied by Samuel Tefft and was one of the oldest homes in the town, said

See *Burns* page 3

Welcome Family, Associates and Friends . . .

Comedian Groucho Marx had a line I love, "I would never be part of an organization that would have me as a member." I'd like to turn that around a bit to say, I'd never want to be part of starting an organization I wouldn't care to join.

What kind of organization the Tefft Family Association (TFA) is and becomes and how it will attract and keep members continues to be on our minds. It's not about numbers or increasing membership so much as constantly asking the question, What can this organization offer so people want to be part of it?

Mostly these concerns can be answered by two words: benefits and service. Benefits of TFA membership currently include receiving our quarterly newsletter. Everything else we've kept free or at least open to anyone who cares to join us at the TFA Website, on the Tefft-L and Tefft-D (genealogy) email lists and even at our annual reunions. Service comes in many forms, answers to questions about Tefft lineage, delivering a timely newsletter, keeping the Website current and functioning and other organizational follow through.

We hope you remain pleased to be a member. You can keep us happy by letting us know whenever you see room for improvement.

Darlene Tefft Cobb
Interim President, Tefft Family Association

Errata

The genealogy chart for the Descendants of John: First Three Generations, published November 2000, contained the following errors:

1. George Gardiner, b. 1647 (not 1674)
2. Not shown among the children of Samuel Tefft and Elizabeth Jenckes was Joseph, b. unknown, d. Abt. 1735.

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Family Album

Hello to all of my relatives. My name is Patricia Tefft Ward. I was born in Parkersburg, W.Va. I am the daughter of Gordon R. "Bob" Tefft and Doris Maxine Tefft. My siblings are Frank R. Tefft, David B. Tefft and Barbara S. Tefft Oldaker. My husband is Card D. "Danny" Ward and we live in Ashland, Ky. My sister and two brothers still live in Parkersburg, which is about two hours from here.

I am a rural mail carrier in Ironton, Ohio. My husband is an operator at an oil refinery. We have four children, all of which are on their own now.

Dad passed away Sept. 4, 2000. Since he was cherished by all of us, we are still trying to adjust to not having him around. He always took so much time with each and every one of us, including 25 grandchildren.

Danny and I work a lot, but enjoy traveling and riding a Harley Davidson when the weather allows. I love traveling, music, reading and gardening. We are both Christians and try hard to live our faith each and every day. I hope to get to the Tefft homestead one of these days. We have wanted to explore the New England states anyway, so maybe we'll see you one day. I'm excited to learn more about all of you. Take care and God bless you.

—Patty Tefft Ward



Danny and Patty (Tefft) Ward

Burns

From page 1

historian A. Craig Anthony. “Almost all of the houses from that era were burned in King Philip’s War,” he added. (See sidebar right.)

The house at 70 Chestnut Hill Rd. was at least Samuel’s second and almost certainly his last home, built nearly 50 years after King Philip’s War. Samuel died in 1725, just five years after it was completed. The house, which the Durands had carefully restored, stood in its present location for 280 years.

Homestead

News of the fire came on the heels of an announcement by the South Kingstown Land Trust that enough money had been raised through public and private means to successfully close the purchase of the nearby Tefft Homestead property. The ruins of Samuel’s earlier home, built about 1685, lies on the homestead land so that it too will be preserved with the purchase. Saving one thing, Teffts may have lost another.

At this writing, little is known about the disposition of the house, whether the Durands plan to rebuild on the property or if it is possible to save and restore any of the remaining structure. Without wishing to disturb the Durands at what certainly must be a difficult time, we have made some initial inquiries and expressed interest on behalf of the descendants of Samuel in what happens to the property and remains of the structure.

Maybe a lesson

Of all the candles that must have burned inside Samuel Tefft’s house, surely these last were not meant to cause so much damage.

If there is a lesson history is trying to teach us, it may be this: We remind ourselves that while we treasure the material evidence of our past, more...perhaps much more...remains for us in connecting to those living today who are Tefft descendants. The most enduring and vital spirit and bond of our kinship is embodied in each of us, the people we are today and are becoming, the knowledge and abilities we have to share, our willingness to tend our heritage, and the joy we feel whenever we come together as a family to honor our ancestors and our past.



Samuel, Joshua and King Philip’s War

King Philip’s War, 1675-76, ravaged most of settled colonial New England and has been called the bloodiest, most devastating Indian War in New England’s history. At its conclusion, out of 90 settlements in New England, 52 were attacked and 12 completely destroyed.¹ One of the most fascinating and largely forgotten facts of that war involves Joshua Tefft, Samuel’s older brother. Accused of taking the Indians’ side and killing a number of Puritan soldiers, Joshua was charged with high treason and executed by being drawn and quartered on Jan. 18, 1676, four days after his capture by Capt. Arthur Fenner.

No doubt Joshua suffered the fate of all those unfortunates who men of power chose to make an example of. That Samuel should have prospered as he did and that his house should have survived intact for so long must give us pause to wonder at history’s—or at least the neighbors’—judgement of Joshua’s actions and the horrible death that befell him as a result. What does it say that Samuel and the Teffts of Rhode Island not only continued to survive, but thrived in many ways in a place where one of their own got so sideways of events?

1. Taylor, Dale. *Everyday Life in Colonial America*. Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 1997.



Children of Samuel Tefft and their spouses *

Samuel Tefft

b: 1644 in
Portsmouth,
Rhode Island
d: 1725 in
Kingstown,
Rhode Island

Elizabeth Jenckes

b: 1652 in Lynn,
Massachusetts
d: April 1740 in
South Kingstown,
Rhode Island

John Tefft

b: Abt. 1675 in
Rhode Island
d: 1762 in South
Kingstown,
Rhode Island

Joseph Tefft

b: Unknown
d: Abt. 1735

Sarah Tefft

b: Abt. 1679 in
Newport, Rhode
Island
d: Abt. 1720

Joanna Sprague

b: 1676
d: Bef. Dec. 25,
1757
m. Abt. 1699

Virtue Wightman

b: Abt. 1768
d: Unknown
m: Dec. 25, 1757
in South
Kingstown, R.I.

Deliverance Reynolds

b: Unknown
d: Unknown
m: July, 06, 1718
in South
Kingstown, Rhode
Island

John Witter

b: March 11, 1678
d: Aug. 1757
m: Abt. 1703

Esther Tefft

b: Abt. 1681 in
Rhode Island
d: After July 4,
1739

Samuel Tefft

b: Abt. 1683 in
Rhode Island
d: 1760 in South
Kingstown,
Rhode Island

Mary Tefft

b: Abt. 1684 in
Rhode Island
d: Bef. 1739

Susannah Tefft

b: Abt. 1686 in
Rhode Island
d: unknown

Thomas Mumford

b: Bef. July 13,
1681
d: Abt. April 1726
m: Nov. 25, 1708

Abigail Tennant

b: Abt. 1690
d: 1758
m: Unknown

Peter Crandall

b: Abt. 1685
d: 1734
m: 1708 in South
Kingstown, Rhode
Island

Elizabeth Tefft

b: Sept. 29, 1687 in
Kingstown, Rhode
Island
d: 1750 in South
Kingstown, Rhode
Island

Tabitha Tefft

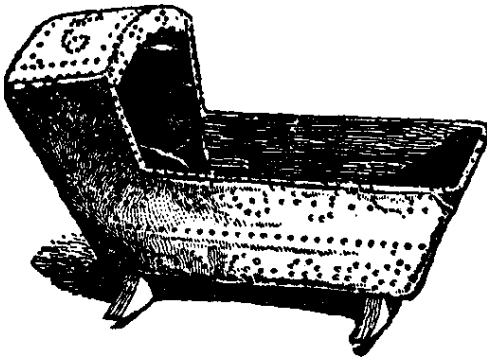
b: Abt. 1688 in
Kingstown, Rhode
Island
d: Unknown

Solomon Carpenter

b: Dec. 23, 1667
d: 1750
m: Abt. 1703

Mercy Tefft

b: Aug. 09, 1696 in
Kingstown, Rhode
Island
d: Unknown



*Samuel Tefft genealogy courtesy Timothy Nathan Tefft.



A Sketch of Samuel

Who was Samuel Tefft? His history is intriguing. The son of John and younger brother of Joshua, who was accused of high treason and executed by being drawn and quartered on Jan. 18, 1676, Samuel lived to be a wealthy man with many children and descendants. How he survived and overcame the stain of his brother's involvement in King Philip's War and horrible death, we can only guess. The following list of events in his life was assembled by Timothy Nathan Tefft and we are indebted to him and all those who contributed to his research for sharing their knowledge with us.

- Samuel Tefft was born in 1644, probably in Portsmouth, Rhode Island.
- ca 1684 — Daughter Mary is born.
- Samuel married Elizabeth Jenckes (Jenks), daughter of Joseph Jenckes and Elizabeth Ballard, probably in the early to mid-1670's.
- ca 1686 — Daughter Susannah is born.
- 1676 — Year traditionally given for the birth of eldest son John Tefft. The birth of another son, Joseph, has not been determined. Joseph was married in 1718.
- 1687 — Samuel is first taxed in Kingstown. Daughter Elizabeth is born.
- 1679 — Daughter Sarah was born. She was baptized at the First Sabbatarian Church in Newport.
- ca 1688 — Daughter Tabitha is born.
- April 28, 1679 — Samuel was chosen for the jury at the General Court of Tryalls in Newport. When he failed to appear he was fined 20 shillings. Samuel appealed and in March 1680 the General Assembly accepted his appeal.
- 1696 — Daughter Mercy is born.
- June 2, 1679 — Samuel was chosen as constable in Providence.
- 1709 — Samuel increases his land holdings by taking part in the Shannock Purchase.
- August 20, 1680 — Samuel is chosen for the Grand Jury.
- March 16, 1725 — Samuel makes his Last Will and Testament. Samuel Tefft is deceased by December 20, 1725, when probate begins. Samuel left his land holdings to his wife and sons. His daughter Tabitha was left in the care of John and Samuel, Jr. for the remainder of her days. He left £20 to each of his daughters, save Tabitha. He also left £20 to his daughter-in-law Mary Newton. He left an additional £30 to his daughter Mary Tefft. He left £20 to the children of deceased daughter Sarah Witter, to be divided equally among them. He left £10 to granddaughter Sarah Witter, to be paid upon her 18th birthday. He left £20 to his nephew, Daniel Tefft, son of Peter, provided he lived in the family until he attained the age of 21. Wife Elizabeth was the executrix of his will. Samuel Tefft's personal inventory exceeded £1000.
- ca 1681 — Daughter Esther is born.
- 1739 — Elizabeth Jenckes Tefft makes her Last Will and Testament.
- April 1682 — Samuel demonstrates his knowledge of the Algonquian language by acting as an interpreter at a hearing concerning the drowning of an Indian woman as she attempted to cross the river to Seekonk in a bark canoe.
- Spring 1740 — Elizabeth Jenckes Tefft passes on. An inventory of her estate was taken by Isaac Shelden and Samuel Tefft, Jr. on April 22, 1740. Her will is proved May 12, 1740, son John Tefft is named executor.
- ca 1683 — Son Samuel is born.

Rhode Island*

● 1663 — A new royal charter, obtained after the restoration of England's monarchy, replaces the Patent for Providence Plantations. It contains much from the original, with the notable exception of "a lively experiment" in Soul Liberty.

● 1703 — The colonies of Connecticut and Rhode Island agree on a mutually designated common boundary line. This boundary is affirmed by the English Crown in 1726. Deputy Governor Joseph Jenckes, brother of Elizabeth Jenckes Tefft, petitioned the Crown. Upon his success, he is elected Governor of Rhode Island, 1727-32.

*Rhode Island history courtesy A. Craig Anthony.

News Briefs

FROM THE TEFFT FAMILY ASSOCIATION

Want to know more?

Visit the Tefft Family Association Web site at www.geocities.com/tefft_family

Email
Darlene Tefft Cobb at dcobb@hughes.net

Write us at
3535 West Ave. J-13,
Lancaster, CA
93536-6320

Tefft Homestead land purchased — After months of public and private fund raising, the Tefft Homestead was officially transferred into the hands of the South Kingstown Land Trust on Nov. 28, 2000. Attention now is being turned to developing a management plan that will truly preserve the property.

Are you a member? — Membership has its privileges. At this time, only those enrolled as a member of the TFA and current with their dues for 2001 will continue to receive the quarterly newsletter.

If you have a question about your membership, please email, call or write Membership Chairperson Lori Horton at LHorton@LHorton.com; 401-782-2078; 99 Stonehenge Rd., Kingston, RI 02881.

Those with access to the Internet can check membership status on the TFA Website starting Feb. 1. A list of current members by name and state of residence will be posted on the site. Follow the link listed under the Main Menu on the homepage. The address for the TFA Website is www.geocities.com/tefft_family.

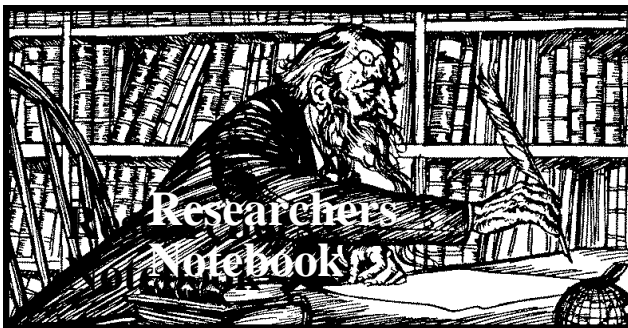
Time to Re-Up for TFA — If you joined the Tefft Family Association before Nov. 1, 2000, you need to renew your membership with a

payment of \$10 as your annual dues. Payments should be mailed to: The Tefft Family Association, P.O. Box 686, Green Mountain Falls, CO 80819.

TFA Elections — An election of officers and adoption of a permanent set of bylaws is set for March 2001. Only members whose annual dues have been paid will be eligible to vote. All those interested in running for office or serving on a committee should contact the nominating committee — Timothy Tefft (New England) and Barbara Tefft (middle states). Contact Tim at troutfly@ghi.net or 207-353-6408. Contact Barbara at bjt5@cornell.edu.

Reunion 2001 — A third annual reunion will be held in South Kingstown, R.I., on Columbus Day weekend, Oct. 6-8, 2001. On the planning committee are Otis Wyatt (RI) and Lori Horton (RI). Those interested in assisting the planning committee should contact Lori Horton at LHorton@LHorton.com or 401-782-2078. Details of Reunion 2001 will be announced on the TFA Website, by email and by mail to those requesting information.

Newsletter — Do you have articles, suggestions, photos or information to contribute? Please contact dcobb@hughes.net.



Finding Richmond, R.I.

One of the peskier problems in doing genealogical research is figuring out where some places are. Generally such problems stem from counties, towns and villages that have changed their name over time. For Tefft researchers, Richmond, R.I., seems to be a particular problem. Here are some facts and hints to help those researchers in search of Richmond.

Richmond is a town in Washington County. It is located south of Exeter. — *Timothy Tefft, ME*

If you follow route 138 on the map, going west, past the University of Rhode Island, into the village of West Kingston, you will have arrived at Richmond. Richmond was split off from Westerly. — *Donna Rice, R.I.*

There are several small villages in Richmond. When asked where they live, residents of the area are likely to say Alton, Carolina, Shannock and Wyoming rather than Richmond. But each of these places is part of Richmond. — *Donna Rice, R.I.*

Go to <http://www.rootsweb.com/~rigenweb/maps/index.html>. Near the top of the page you will see Rhode Island in 1902. Click IMAGE 1 to view Richmond. It's sandwiched in between Exeter, Charlestown and Hopkinton. If you go back to the top of the page and click WASHINGTON, it will take you to the Washington County maps. If you scroll down, you will see Richmond in six parts. — *Bob Tefft, N.Y.*

A CEMETERY SAGA: *The plots thicken*

by A. Craig Anthony, Cemeteries Preservation Chairperson

It was the first Tefft Family Reunion, 1999, and many of us visited the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society library. In the stacks, I came across a reference to South Kingstown Historical Cemetery #19 as the final resting place of “*the first John Tefft who settled this tract of land*” in George Harris’ 1880 unpublished manuscript, “Ancient Cemeteries of Kingstown.”

If John Tefft was buried at Cemetery #19, it is quite likely that his wife, Mary, as well as other members of the family are also buried there. We set out to locate the cemetery that afternoon.

At the end of Heritage Drive, at what turns out to be the historical home of Mercy Tefft, we were greeted by two friendly German shepherds. The owner soon appeared and directed us to the adjacent property on the corner of Enterprise and Ventura streets.

We found the site sandwiched between two yards, one littered with playground equipment and a shed almost on top of the cemetery. After groping around the thick underbrush, we located the rusty old cemetery sign and then spotted several fieldstone grave markers.

Part of the cemetery was being used to dump yard waste. We agreed that we would return the following year and clean it up. While there are several Tefft cemeteries in South Kingstown that could use some attention, Cemetery #19 seemed like the logical place to start.

At the TFA reunion in October 2000, nine of us geared up to attack the rampant overgrowth at #19. Rhode Island is infamous for its dreaded greenbriar, which no matter how well you protect yourself always seems to find a way to inflict a few wounds. The invasive bittersweet is ever an noxious obstacle and, no doubt, will be our continued adversary. After close to three hours we really made an impact. Even one of the neighbors came out to lend a hand. The cemetery is much larger than it first appeared. Harris recorded 56 burials in 1880.

Unfortunately, there was no specific evidence to indicate

which grave might be that of John Tefft. Perhaps closer study may provide a clue. Just to see the difference we made was satisfying. For a moment there I felt a certain peace with the Universe. Particularly touching were the large number of children’s graves in the center of the cemetery, very likely the result of an epidemic of some sort.

Thanks to the volunteers for their hard work: The Tefft brothers from Idaho, James, Perry, Jerry and Jerry’s intrepid wife Edna; and the rest of the gang, Timothy Nathan Tefft, Kathleen Tift Cooper, Darlene Tefft Cobb and Rick Norwood. You were all terrific!



Cemetery #19 sign before cleanup

Research



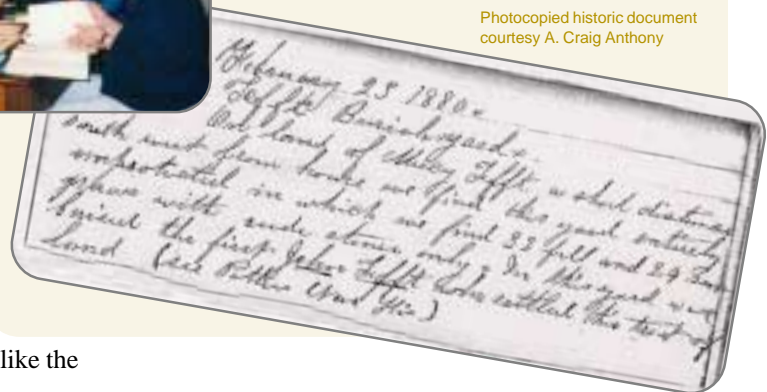
Tefft researchers dig into the books at the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society during the 1999 reunion.

February 25 1880
Tefft Burial yard.

On the land of Mercy Tefft a short distance southwest from house we find this yard entirely unprotected in which we find 32 full and 24 small graves with rude stones only. In this yard was buried the first John Tefft who settled this tract of land (see Potters Nar His)

Harris, George. Ancient Cemeteries of Kingstown. (Unpublished manuscript. RIHS, 1880)

Photocopied historic document courtesy A. Craig Anthony



Parting Notes

In Rhode Island, all historic cemeteries belong to us, the public. It is not the landowner’s responsibility to take care of a cemetery, although it would be nice. State law allows individuals to cross private property to access historic cemeteries for the purpose of maintenance and research. However, the landowner cannot be held liable if an accident occurs and it is a good idea to let them know what you are doing on their property. If you do visit any historic cemeteries, be sure to prepare yourself with the appropriate clothing. Deer ticks that carry Lyme Disease are common, so watch out. A good pair of garden shears works on most vegetation. And please always leave a cemetery in better shape than it was when you arrived.



Graphic by Pat Tift Crawford (Murray, KY)

If this newsletter **found you**, then our search is over!

The Tefft Family Association welcomes new members. Benefits include the TFA quarterly newsletter and information of interest to genealogists, historians and others who are curious about Teffts, Tifts, and other spellings of the surname. For more information, visit our Web site at www.geocities.com/tefft_family.

Come out of hiding to join us.

Just complete the enrollment form below and mail to:

The Tefft Family Association
P.O. Box 686
Green Mountain Falls, CO 80819

About the Tefft Family Association

Who can join?

Descendants of John Tefft (Tift) of Rhode Island and his brother, William of Massachusetts, including all variant spellings of the Tefft name.

Others who wish to join as associate members are also welcome.

What are the annual dues?

Dues are \$10 per year/per member.

Contributions to cover mailing costs and other start-up costs for the TFA would also be greatly appreciated.

The TFA has not yet filed for nonprofit status.

Join us for Tefft Family Reunion 2001, Oct. 6-8, South Kingstown, RI

Tefft Family Association Board of Directors Interim Officers

President
Darlene Tefft Cobb

Treasurer
Marilyn Tefft

Genealogist/Archivist
Timothy Nathan Tefft

Membership
Lori Horton

Historian/Cemeteries
A. Craig Anthony

Communications
Kathleen Tift Cooper

Homestead Preservation
Rick Norwood

Reunion 2001
Otis Wyatt and Lori Horton

Tefft Family Association Individual Membership Enrollment - 2001

- Your name _____
- Mailing address _____
Street _____
City/State/Zip _____
- Home phone _____ 4. Business phone _____
- Email address _____
- Are you a Tefft descendant? Yes No Don't know
- Are you applying for membership as a family (Tefft descendant) or associate member?
 Tefft descendant Associate member
- I am not a computer user and would like a printed copy of your quarterly newsletter mailed to the address above.
 Yes. Send my newsletter by mail.
- My primary interest in joining the TFA is: (please check one ONLY)
 Preserving Tefft Homestead Attending Reunions Researching genealogy Preserving Tefft Cemeteries Other _____
- I first learned about the TFA from: (please check one ONLY)
 A TFA mailing Internet A member of my family Another Family Association Other _____
- In addition to my annual membership dues of \$10, I wish to make a contribution to the TFA in support of the following:
 Purchase the Tefft Homestead Additional mailings to "lost Teffts" Unspecified Dues ONLY at this time

Thank you! Please mail to: TFA Enrollment, P.O. Box 686, Green Mountain Falls, CO 80819

Tefft Family Association
3535 West Avenue J-13
Lancaster, CA 93536-6320

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**Have you remembered to
renew your TFA membership
for 2001? You might miss the
next issue if you didn't renew.**