



NEWSLETTER *of the* *Tefft Family Association*

uncovering the past

the descendants of John and William Tefft

Vol. 2, No. 3
July/Aug. 2001

In this issue:

Just a little over one year ago, the ancient Tefft Homestead was on the verge of being destroyed. But today the property is in the hands of conservationists who have been working to protect the rich historical record it contains. Who are these people and what did it take to save this all but forgotten national treasure?



Next issue . . .

Meet Samuel Harlow Tefft. The ferry boat house he built in 1850 is being restored in Lewis, Iowa. It's the only known surviving site on the Mormon Trail in Iowa and was a route on the Underground Railroad before the Civil War.

The **TEFFT HOMESTEAD,** *saved in the nick of time*

by Darlene Tefft Cobb

What family could ignore a chance to save an original family homestead that dates from the earliest colonial days of America and has survived in almost pristine condition with a collection of artifacts nearly untouched by the centuries?

In South Kingstown, R.I., there remains such a place. It offers patient testimony to John Tefft's dream as an immigrant arriving on America's shores only a few paces behind the Pilgrims, a young man from somewhere in England, yearning, no doubt, for a great new chance. From Boston,* to Portsmouth, R.I., and thence to South Kingstown where 500 acres of land was purchased, he pursued opportunity's call, planting, building

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Photos courtesy Kathleen Tiftt Cooper

An educated eye is needed to see the hidden treasures of the past remaining on the Tefft Homestead property. Top, Tefft descendants peer through a dense covering of meadow grass to find moss covered fieldstones, left, marking the graves of their earliest American ancestors at Cemetery 100. Center, sunlight traces the all but obscured course of an ancient sluceway, its walls lined with stones. Lower right, ferns thrive within a centuries-old hollow created by a crumbled house foundation. Bottom, the ubiquitous bittersweet vine threatens to engulf an early gravestone (name unknown) marking the final resting place of a 1-year child.

Welcome Family, Associates and Friends . . .

As this issue on the Tefft Homestead was coming together, it occurred to me that documenting your own history can be as difficult as putting together a job resume. Not only do you know too much about your subject so that you feel overwhelmed with material, but you tend to lose sight of what others may want or need to know. More than once in this writing, I've felt totally lost in detail and have had to battle the way back to provide you with the best outline I could of a much more tangled and, perhaps, more engaging history. There's so much more to say.

In fact, the history of the Tefft Homestead is unfinished and still largely left to tell. Those reading this today may choose to take part in writing more of that history as there is, in truth, still everything left to do. Significant as it certainly was, purchasing the Tefft land was only the first step. To preserve and protect the Tefft Homestead, interpret and keep it, must be the task of this and generations to come. The only thing we can say for certain is saving the homestead made everything that may follow possible.

There were surprises for me in documenting this history. First, I was not aware of how strangely and strongly Joshua Tefft's story figured in saving the homestead. It's as if his story cries out to be told. Second, and best of all, I rediscovered my faith in the strength of a nation where individuals dedicated to a cause can make a difference.

The small words *thank you* to those mentioned or regretfully neglected by this brief history must serve as a token of enormous feelings of goodwill, gratitude and love.



Darlene Tefft Cobb
Interim President, Tefft Family Association

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Family Album



Harvetta and Evans Graham

Hi Tefft Family. My name is Harvetta (Kliwer) Graham and I live in the Green Country area of Oklahoma, south of Tulsa about 40 miles. I am part Tefft from my mother's side and her mother. They were from the Rhode Island and New York folks. I remember very vaguely my grandmother mentioning things regarding Rhode Island and her ancestry. The Tefft background is so interesting and I am so happy to have some of that blood in me to claim.

My hubby, Evans, and I got married young. We were still in college and working full time jobs. Both of us. I met my husband in a college math class, of all places. I hate math! It's been 44 wonderful years. We have had a good life, really! I would contribute our life to hard work, determination and having the six kids, which were great, and also loving to be busy and enjoy what we were doing. But, I think our love of the Lord and attending church has been a really big thing for us.

Our 13th grandchild, Giavona R. Graham, was born Jan. 17, 2001. She's a beauty and has lots of nearly black hair — and I mean a lot of hair! — dimples, and our son says she smiles all the time. At this count, we have eight granddaughters, ages 4 months to 19 years old. The five grandsons ages are 4 years to 22 years old.

I love doing many things: quilting, sewing, music (piano and harmonica), flowers, photography, crafts, decorating, and church work. You name it, and I pretty much enjoy it.



You are invited to introduce yourself. Send a photo and brief introductory message to Darlene Tefft Cobb, 3535 West Avenue J-13, Lancaster, CA 93536 or direct your email to dcobb@hughes.net. We'd love to meet you!



Angels, bulldogs, modern-day crusaders — no matter how you look at them, here are the two most all would agree were key in saving the Tefft Homestead. Giving credit to all, they tell why they got involved ...

In their own words

A. Craig Anthony



I wasn't about to just stand by and watch as they destroyed the site I had put so much time and energy into researching.

// I first began to research the Tefft Homestead in 1992, when there was very little documentation of the site. I spent the next few years researching the site and its former inhabitants for my grad school program in heritage studies, which culminated in my work, 'The Tefft Family and the Narragansett Controversy — A Window to the Creation of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation.' Shortly after I received the copyright for my work in 1998, the whole Blueberry Hill development affair arose. I wasn't about to just stand by and watch as they destroyed the site I had put so much time and energy into researching. Fortunately, there was considerable opposition to the development and we were able to save the core site for its historical value.

// Craig is presently the registrar/executive assistant for the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society in South Kingstown, R.I. He formerly was employed by the National Park Service, North Carolina Museum of Natural History and Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. He received an undergraduate degree in environmental science from Unity College in Maine. He also attended Plymouth State College in New Hampshire where he obtained a Master of Education in heritage studies.

Lori Horton



It's just that I love history and the more I learned about the history and archaeological artifacts on the property, the more determined I became to preserve it.

// I was born in South County, moved away and back again when I was 19. Shortly after I returned, I got married, and soon after that my husband and I bought the house on Stonehenge Road where we still live. My husband has lived in South Kingstown all his life. We've lived in this house for over 22 years. When we first moved in, we could walk out in our backyard and follow trails that joined the old cart path and other trails crisscrossing all the land between Biscuit City and the Great Swamp, because there were no houses there. I've always loved walking the trails (and picking blueberries!). Over the years some of land has been developed, most notably the Tefft Hill development and the White Horn Drive extension — the 19 houses that have been built directly behind us. **//**

Lori is a Certified Public Accountant and Certified Fraud Examiner who works out of an office next to her house doing forensic/investigative accounting — white collar crime, litigation support, embezzlement, etc. She also teaches an accounting computer systems class at the University of Rhode Island. The Hortons have three children, ages 18, 17 and 12. Lori is an officer of the Kingstown Fire District and an active volunteer in the local school system and other organizations. She is a direct descendant of Roger Williams with most of her ancestors being English settlers from the 17th century (with a few 19th century Irish immigrants mixed in.)



Homestead

From page 1

and founding a family to carry on his name and inherit all that could be realized from his labor and hope. There are today, and yet may be, many other places across this land that bear the stamp of John Tefft's descendants. But none can rival in significance or speak more directly to a family's heart and spirit than this starting place for the descendants of John Tefft.

Truly, there was no way not to try to save the Tefft Homestead property. But the road to success was far from assured. Even today, as we look back to celebrate the one-year anniversary of a remarkable and victorious effort to purchase and preserve the last remaining 28 acres of the Tefft Homestead land, we must marvel at the extraordinary good fortune that was involved.

There's danger

It started for us with an email alert. There's a housing development in the planning stages that might destroy the Tefft Homestead and two cemeteries, warned Dick Tefft of Pennsylvania in December 1998. There were only a few of us then, all strangers who had found each other on the Internet. We did our best to spread the message from inbox to inbox until perhaps 30 were aware, concerned, communicating by email . . . What to do? What can we do?

We had the barest understanding of the situation: A piece of land containing an ancient Tefft homesite and burial grounds as well as other significant prehistoric and historic features was about to be destroyed. The proposed development encompassing these ancient features included 22 homesites on 45 acres of land in a project known as the Blueberry Hill subdivision. Approval to begin construction by the Town of South Kingstown's Planning Board was less than a month away, we were told.

After centuries, the clock was suddenly ticking. The first thing to do was get on record as a Tefft descendant and interested party with rights to comment in a meaningful way before further decisions were made. Within days of Dick's message, I sent a letter to the planning board. In it, I requested *interested party* status along with

an opportunity to review and comment on all environmental clearance documents. In addition, a request was made for the presence of a qualified cultural resource specialist during any ground disturbance activity near the cemeteries.

The request for *interested party* status was never granted in what turned out to be a 10-month long process during which the Blueberry Hill subdivision remained in front of town planners. However, information and documents began arriving periodically in thick packets that had made their way through the U.S. mail from Rhode Island to California. Often their arrival left only days, in some cases mere hours, to respond before another irrevocable step toward the destruction of the Tefft Homestead would be taken.

These were anxious times. It wasn't just time that was a problem. From the outset, Teffts were disadvantaged for a fight to preserve the homestead. Not yet an organized body, we had no idea of the resources we could marshal. Planning laws in Rhode Island were mysterious to us. Information was hard to come by and difficult to interpret from so far away. Only two of our group, Timothy Nathan Tefft of Maine and Peter Tefft of Connecticut, had ever visited the Tefft Homestead and had any idea of what it looked like or contained. The rest were just becoming familiar with its history. Few of us knew the terrain, the people or anything about the political landscape of South Kingstown. And although the state of Rhode Island recognized Native

American peoples as *interested parties* and gave them rights to review and comment when their "sacred sites" were threatened, the same status had never been accorded to others. Lacking special legal rights, all the Tefft family could hope to be was another voice in a clamoring crowd.

What if?

Remarkable things were happening, though at the time it was hard to see. In retrospect, it's possible to credit saving the Tefft Homestead to a convergence of people, causes and tools, none of which, initially, had had much to do with the other. Things were about to come together at exactly the right moment. There was indeed a crowd so the family was not alone in wanting to save the Tefft Homestead. And while it's true the clock was ticking, the problem of time and distance was

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being overcome in significant ways by the incredible power of the Internet.

To begin to understand how remarkable this was, we might ask What if? What if the Internet had not existed at just this time, or been developed to the point that Tefft family members could surf the Net with any hope of finding one another? Yet technology was there to do just that, provided at just the right stage of development at almost precisely the moment it was needed.

Ahh, but then what if that right someone had not been online? Dick Tefft was just pursuing some genealogical research on the Net when he met South Kingstown and Tefft historian A. Craig Anthony and received the news about the Tefft Homestead. What if he had put off his search for a few more days, weeks, another month? The What ifs never end. But change the question to Without whom? and the answer to how the Tefft Homestead eventually was saved becomes clearer.

Without whom

The short list of answers to Without whom? includes A. Craig Anthony, Lori Horton, Paul Robinson and Joanne Ricceteli, all Rhode Islanders, all tremendously dedicated professional people — though from different career fields — and to a person, the kind that get hold of an issue and never let go. Yes, there were others who contributed much. But none were as absolutely indispensable or more deeply involved and critical to the success of preserving the Tefft Homestead as these four.

How so? Let's start with Craig and the What if? in Craig's case. What if A. Craig Anthony had not taken a historical interest in New England's oldest gravestone? For it is there that Craig's involvement with Tefft history began. An 11th generation Rhode Islander and scholar of history, Craig thought the stone was worth looking into. As it happened, this stone belonged to Sara Tefft. It was inscribed:

HERE LIETH
THE BoDYE of SARA
Tefft IN thE MARCH 16
1642

This Sara was the wife of John Tefft's eldest son, Joshua, arguably the Tefft's most intriguing, if not infamous, ancestor for having taken

the side of Indians during King Philips War (1675-76). (See the Tefft Family Association newsletter's April 2001 issue.) It took six years of research for Craig to sort out the history of Joshua, Sara and Peter Tefft, proving along the way that Sara actually died in 1672. The inscription had been misread and her gravestone was not the oldest in New England. But by that time Craig was hooked on learning more about Sara, Joshua and the family named Tefft.

What if Craig had never studied the Tefft Homestead so that he was not familiar with its historic value? What if the Biscuit City Homeowners Association, neighbors to the Tefft Homestead property, and activists among their group, like Lori Horton, had not valued the open space, had found no reason to become involved in

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preserving it?

Back a step

Let's back up to the beginning again, for the cast of characters enlisted to the cause grew and grew. As Lori tells it:

"In the Fall of 1998, there were a number of public meetings regarding the developer's proposed 22-lot subdivision of the land. A few neighbors got involved in protesting the development on various grounds — traffic, water quality and erosion and the historic cemeteries. Because I have a long-standing interest in history, I volunteered to research the cemetery laws and historic aspects of the property. I called a number of people, among them John Sterling, Rhode Island's preeminent cemetery historian, who told me the story about Joshua Tefft.

"In early November, 1998, I called Paul Robinson, Rhode Island's state historic preservation officer and principal archaeologist, to ask if the State would or could take a position against the development. He was very interested in the Joshua Tefft history of the property and the fact that the land around the cemeteries was untouched.

"On Nov. 10, 1998, he and another archeologist from his office drove down to look at the site with me. I didn't know the value of the foundations, and although I had seen two of them many years ago, I couldn't remember where they were anyway, so all we looked at on that first

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Homestead

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walk were cemeteries 100 and 17 (both on the Tefft land).

“At the public Planning Board meeting in South Kingstown that evening, Nov. 10, 1998, I spoke about preserving our heritage and the beauty of the cemeteries and stonewalls on the property. I related the story of Joshua Tefft in an attempt to convince the planning board that the property was important and there should not be houses built all around the cemeteries. In Rhode Island, cemeteries are never moved, but the original developer’s plan called for houses to be built around Cemetery 100.

“My Joshua Tefft tale got picked up by the press and Craig saw the article in the local newspaper. He looked me up in the phone book and called to tell me he had lots more information about the Teffts and the property.

“I called Paul Robinson again and told him that Craig could lead him to the foundations. He was very interested and came down that same day, Nov. 23, 1998, to review the property for the second time. Craig led us to the oldest foundation and the one on the property adjoining the Tefft land, and he told us what he knew about the history of the property.

“Several months later, a teenage neighbor, Alan Durbin, who lives next to the property and had roamed the land for years, mentioned to me that there were two other foundations on the property. Alan took Craig down to the land that afternoon to show him where they were.”

Into the fray

Thanks to this kind of activism, the state of Rhode Island’s Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) stepped into the fray to voice concerns about the destruction of the cultural resources represented at the site. A RIHPHC letter to the South Kingstown Planning Department dated Nov. 21, 1998, detailed mitigation measures the state was seeking. As indicated in the letter, Robinson had become personally involved in

the issue, calling the town’s planning director, Vincent Murray, prior to issuing an opinion. Robinson continued to keep a close eye on the project and the eventual archaeological work.

State Representative Leona Kelley, who we are sad to report passed away late last year, also got involved. Lori credits Kelley with helping her learn the laws about cemeteries and nearby developments.

“In the very beginning, before we knew about the value of the foundations, we thought the cemeteries were our only hope for changing the developer’s plans,” Lori explained. “Leona came to at least one, possibly two, of the public meetings and her presence was a big psychological boost to our cause because she was so well known and respected. In addition, she walked

the property with us and the press on Dec. 10, 1998, to draw attention to the property and our efforts to preserve it. Her presence always added credibility and weight to our position.”

Faced with this kind of opposition to development, the planning board had to decide if, as a condition of development, the builder would be required to perform a Phase I Archaeological Survey on the property.

This was unprecedented in Rhode Island and no one at the time cared to guess how the board might vote.

The answer came on Feb. 9, 1999, when the South Kingstown Planning Board approved the first phase of the Blueberry Hill subdivision. Only seven of the 22-lots were approved on condition of compliance with a number of requirements including performance of an archaeological survey. (Later three more houses were approved for construction.)

It was a mixed blessing for those working to preserve the property’s history. Part of the land was lost. Still, the part with the greatest archaeological value looked like it might be saved. But in the tumultuous months that followed, concern about the accuracy and completeness of the archaeological survey became an issue, particularly whether the survey had been successful in determining the boundaries of the Tefft cemeteries. And at this point, the Blueberry Hill developer was pressing

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for final approval of the first seven lots so construction work could begin.

Meanwhile, the case for Tefft descendants to do anything but watch events from afar was not promising. On June 22, 1999, I sent a letter on behalf of Tefft descendants to the town council objecting to approval of the start of construction without completion of an adequate archaeological survey. A letter from the town's legal staff, dated that same day, informed me the town was "under no legal obligation" to recognize me (and the descendants I claimed to represent) as an *interested party*.

Homestead saved

While ten homes will eventually be built at Blueberry Hill, over the next months, support for preserving the remaining homestead land finally tipped the scales in favor of a sale. By the Tefft's first reunion in South Kingstown, Oct. 16-19, 1999, the battle to save the remaining 28 acres of Tefft land from development was nearly won. The owner and developer, Michael Netro, indicated he would be willing to consider an offer to purchase and the South Kingstown Land Trust (SKLT), a nonprofit organization that works to protect open space in the area, stepped forward to negotiate a deal.

A purchase option for the land was signed on March 7, 2000. The sale price was \$260,000. SKLT's Director of Land Protection Joanne Ricciteli, who had negotiated the purchase option, now shifted into high gear to begin raising money to close the deal. Looking to the public and private sectors, she started a fundraising campaign, having about six months before the clock wound out on the purchase option.

The campaign found immediate support with Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management committing \$50,000 toward the purchase. By April 4, South Kingstown's Biscuit City Association led by Peter Maynard, president, was developing fundraising strategies. Helped by neighbors to the property like Holly and Mike Foley, this group spent a great deal of time attending meetings, writing and delivering neighborhood notices, making telephone calls, and hosting fundraisers.

By May 22, the Town of South Kingstown had

joined the fundraising effort, agreeing to spend up to \$80,000 to match funds raised by private donors. At the same time, the Kingston Water District announced its pledge of \$53,813 to help protect this open space abutting their new wellfield. The water district installed an underground water line through the property using their right of way.

By July 2000, the Biscuit City campaign was well underway and SKLT had launched a letter writing campaign to reach Tefft descendants. The private fundraising effort to date has raised \$53,807. Other private contributors include the Field Pond Foundation, a private foundation based in Massachusetts, which contributed \$4,000, and the New England Grassroots

Environmental Fund, which contributed \$2,500 to support fundraising costs.

On Nov. 28, 2000, SKLT completed the purchase, still shy of the goal. Beyond the purchase price for the land, SKLT, the Biscuit City Association and others spent another \$9,000 on acquisition-related costs. The Nature Conservancy agreed to loan SKLT \$25,000 to close the

deal, and later agreed to forgive the loan and consider the contribution a grant. At this writing, donations to build a stewardship fund for the property continue to be welcomed by the Land Trust.

Since the purchase, a management committee has been formed which has spent the past several months hammering out the details of a long-term management plan for what is today known as the Tefft Historic Park.

Recently, a subcommittee was formed to prepare the documents that would nominate the park for the National Registry of Historic Places (NRHP). Assisting in preparation of the NRHP application are Robinson, Anthony, Tefft descendant Kathie Kelleher and archaeologist Rick Norwood. The group also has received a pledge of support from U.S. Sen. Lincoln D. Chafee's (R-R.I.) office.

And thus the Tefft Historic Park came into being, one time capsule of America's colonial past saved in the nick of time. Amazing!



ENDNOTE: *John Tefft is believed to have lived in Boston, Mass., where his brother William resided. However, this is not known with certainty.

Tefft Historic Park Major Contributors	
Town of South Kingstown	\$80,000 (matching funds)
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management	\$50,000
Nature Conservancy	\$25,000
Kingston Water District	\$53,813
Private Donations	\$53,807
Field Ponds Foundation	\$ 4,000
New England Grassroots Environment Fund	\$ 2,500



Graphic by Pat Tifft 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, Tiffits, 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 (Tifft) 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
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Kathleen Tifft Cooper

Homestead Preservation
Rick Norwood

Reunion 2001
Otis Wyatt and Lori Horton

Tefft Family Association Individual Membership Enrollment - 2001

1. Your name _____

2. Mailing address _____
Street _____
City/State/Zip _____

3. Home phone _____ 4. Business phone _____

5. Email address _____

6. Are you a Tefft descendant? Yes No Don't know

7. Are you applying for membership as a family (Tefft descendant) or associate member?
 Tefft descendant Associate member

8. 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.

9. My primary interest in joining the TFA is: (please check one ONLY)
 Preserving Tefft Homestead Attending Reunions Researching Genealogy Preserving Tefft Cemeteries Other _____

10. I first learned about the TFA from: (please check one ONLY)
 A TFA mailing Internet A member of my family Another Family Association Other _____

11. In addition to my annual membership dues of \$10, I wish to make a contribution to the TFA in support of the following:
 Maintenance/Improvements to the Tefft Homestead 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

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