



# The Haverhill Gazette

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## Haverhill's past revealed

### By historic signs introduced by Team Haverhill

By Jean MacDougall-Tattan  
Correspondent

When Dr. Robert L. Kemper bought his 86 Mill St. home seven years ago, he had no idea he was living in the home of the founder of Haverhill. He discovered that fact when a historic sign was mounted on his home just a few months ago.

Kemper owns The William White House, built in 1680. White was one of the first settlers of Haverhill, the financial backer of the settlement, and author of the original deed between the settlers and the Indians in 1642.

"I was astounded when I read the words 'Founder of Haverhill,'" said Kemper. "I was not aware of that. I was impressed."

Kemper said the home had been on the market for some time, and was in a state of disrepair when he purchased it. A prior offer was from a developer who planned to level the home, which sits on one and a half acres in the heart of the city, and build five new homes. When Kemper discovered the historic significance of his home, he was grateful that did not happen.

Kemper, an education consultant, and the fourth owner of the home which was built 327 years ago, said his visitors comment on the sign, and one visitor, a Realtor from Boston, was quite impressed.

The historic signs were the idea of Shaw Rosen and Constantine Valhouli



Jean MacDougall-Tattan photo

The historic sign on this home reveals that it was built by William White, the founder of Haverhill. Standing proudly beside the sign is Dr. Robert L. Kemper, the current owner of the home who considers himself its caretaker.

of Team Haverhill, a group of business leaders, city officials and community members with a vision to move Haver-

hill forward. Valhouli and Rosen decided to start the program over the summer, and it has been quite a success.

"We're breaking records," said Valhouli. "In the past six months we've put up 70 signs."

"Haverhill is the only town I have worked with where residents aren't only buying signs for their own houses, but making donations to mark other historic houses," said Bob Leonard of Old Colony Artisans, the signmaker behind the hand-painted historic signs for Haverhill and other towns such as Salem, Ipswich, and Providence.

Rosen, chair of Team Haverhill, said the program was designed to make Haverhill's history accessible to residents and visitors. "There's an incredible pride in the town's history," said Rosen.

Haverhill, founded in 1640, is one of the oldest cities in the United States.

Many residents, like Kemper, ordered signs without knowing the history or significance of their homes.

Research for the signs has turned up stories spanning almost four centuries — from the oldest standing house in Haverhill, the 1697 Henry Kimball House, whose owner was killed in the Abenaki raid where colonial heroine Hannah Dustin was abducted, to some twentieth century homes whose residents later achieved fame, like Rob Zombie and Hollywood Squares host Tom Bergeron.

Some — like the 1710 Peaslee House — combine both. Early Haver-

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# Research for signs spanned four centuries

## RESEARCH

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hill resident Robert Peaslee was a member of the first Masonic lodge in America and owned a share in the merchant vessel *The Adventurer*. His descendent, Nathaniel Peaslee, was later featured in a story by early horror writer H. P. Lovecraft, who visited the town on several occasions, and who set a number of his stories in Haverhill.

"We've received private donations for historic signs to mark the residences of Haverhill's literary stars including John Belairs and Andre Dubus," said Rosen.

Haverhill's leading author, John Greenleaf Whittier, and many of his contemporaries supported abolition, and a number of Haverhill houses were stops on the Underground Railroad.

Signs will soon mark the houses where entrepreneurs R. H. Macy and Louis B. Mayer boarded while launching their careers. Macy's first store and parade, and Mayer's first theaters, were all in downtown Haverhill.

### How to get signs

To order signs, information is available at [teamhaverhill.com](http://teamhaverhill.com). Signs are \$110 — \$100 plus \$10 for taxes and shipping. Needed is the address of the home, the owner's name, and any other information that you might know.

For more information, Shaw Rosen, Team Haverhill, 978-289-2639; Constantine A. Valhouli, The Hammersmith Group, 917-447-8800; and Bob Leonard Ould, Colony Artisans, 207-779-0707.

"Haverhill's history is America's history," said Valhouli, principal of The Hammersmith Group, a firm which revitalizes historic downtowns. "Haverhill is rebuilding its identity around its historic and literary heritage. These signs enable people to connect with the stories behind the buildings. Now, visitors to Haverhill know they're walking the same streets as Whittier, Macy, Lovecraft, and George Washington."



Jean MacDougall-Tattan photo

Dr. Robert L. Kemper in front of his historic 86 Mill St. home.