

Publication: The East Hampton Press

## Designer helps boost attendance at Mulford Farm

By Katy Gurley



The number of visitors to the 1680 Mulford Farm in East Hampton, long-known as one of the best preserved of historic farms here, has surged this summer, thanks to a well-advertised association between its owner, the East Hampton Historical Society, and Ralph Lauren stores.

Polo Ralph Lauren, which has four stores in town, is underwriting the restoration of Mulford Farm's landscaping and seven outbuildings and structures.

The company has taken out full-page ads in local newspapers and has produced a line of Mulford Farm T-shirts and hats, with all proceeds going directly to the historical society and Mulford Farms.

The number of visitors to the farm, located across Town Pond from Route 27 on James Lane, has doubled over this time last year, according to Richard Barons, executive director of the historical society. He declined to give exact paid attendance figures. It is difficult to give accurate attendance figures because of the group visits by schools and camps, which are not counted, he said.

As with any historical site, renovations come in stages. The last stage of renovation was to the front of the main house in 2004.

"What we are working on now is the landscaping and the out-buildings so they are historically accurate to the interpretive time of 1775, during the seven years that East Hampton was occupied by the British during the American Revolution," Mr. Barons said. "The out-buildings include the mid-18th century barn, a tool barn, a chicken coop, and a finger-shaped barn, along with a smokehouse, outhouse and corncrib. These buildings need to be restored and moved back to where they were in 1775."

The Polo Ralph Lauren-East Hampton Historical Society partnership came about after the historical society praised the company for last year's renovation of what is believed to be one of East Hampton's most historic houses on Main Street. It is now the Ralph Lauren Children's Store. The two-story building maintains the same timber frame and corner posts that were erected when it was constructed in the mid-1600s; these elements, discovered during renovations, were incorporated into the present day design.

"It has been a pleasure for us to have been a member of the East Hampton community for nearly 20 years and we are proud to be partnering with East Hampton Historical Society to further their efforts to preserve and maintain the heritage of this unique town," said Charles Fagan, executive vice president of the company's global retail brand development.

"I think that Ralph Lauren began to see the role they were playing on Main Street," said Mr. Barons, "and was looking for an East Hampton organization that would support their aesthetic—the elegance of their clothes, the nature of their designs all fit into a 1921 organization." The historical society was organized in 1921.

In addition to its colonial architectural significance, the Mulford Farm remained in Mulford hands for most of its existence, giving scholars the opportunity to trace the family, their use of the land and the structures on the site. The lives and spirit of the family echo throughout the house, which was restored using period appropriate

furnishings and authentic decorative arts.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the farm was originally the site of three successive blacksmiths' shops. In 1680, the Mulford Farm was built as a family farmstead of about 14 acres, and was the home of more than 10 generations of families, most of them Mulfords, until 1949. In 1790, the U.S. census found that there were eight people living in the house, David and Rachel (Gardiner) Mulford, three sons, one daughter, and two apprentices.

The Mulford Barn, constructed in 1721, is one of the most wholly intact early 18th-century English-plan barn forms in New York State and is recognized as an outstanding example of construction methods and materials of that time.

Though it probably isn't related to the partnership with Polo Ralph Lauren, attendance is up 18 percent at the society's Marine Museum in Amagansett, while attendance at the Clinton Academy is the same as last year, Mr. Barons said. Again, he declined to give exact attendance numbers.

## OTHER HISTORIC SITES

Other sites owned and managed by the historical society include the Osborne-Jackson House on Main Street in East Hampton and the house next door to it, called the Town House. Attendance at those two houses is not counted because admission is free.

A beneficiary of the Mulford Farm ad blitz is that farm's next-door neighbor, the 18th-century Home Sweet Home museum, owned by East Hampton Village. Hugh King, town historian and director of Home Sweet Home, said attendance is up at the historic house that has connections to actor and poet John Howard Payne, who wrote the famous "Home Sweet Home" song.

"I usually wait until the end of the year to tabulate attendance figures, but my gut feeling is that attendance is up. And any time there's an event at Mulford Farm, it usually helps Home Sweet Home," he said. Attendance is also up at the village-owned Hook Mill in East Hampton, he said.

Home Sweet Home mostly attracts adults and young adults because the house is filled with antiques from the time the last owner, Gustav Buek, lived there from 1907 to 1927. Mr. Buek was a collector and the antiques found in Home Sweet Home are from his collection, the kind of artifacts that are not of as much interest to children, according to Mr. King.

But families are the usual crowd at other historic sites in the area, and attendance this summer is also up for some, though slightly down for others.

At the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, once the home of artist Jackson Pollock and his wife, Lee Krasner, on Springs-Fireplace Road in Springs, attendance is up about 10 percent, said Helen Harrison, director of the house. As of Sunday, August 3, attendance was 3,437, compared with 3,113 in the same time last year.

Ms. Harrison said she did know the reason for the upswing in attendance, but that the crowds visiting the house this summer are mostly made up of families, "lots of children," and European visitors.

The trend has been different in Amagansett, where Miss Amelia's Cottage, the Roy Lester Carriage Museum and the Phoebe Edwards Mulford House all stand on the same grounds on Main Street. Attendance each weekend this summer has been between 50 and 60 people, down 15 to 20 percent from last year, said Peter Garnham, president of the board of trustees at the Amagansett Historical Association, which manages the buildings.

"We're not too worried about it—attendance at house museums across the country is down," he said, citing a study by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Also, he said, attendance at Miss Amelia's Cottage and the other buildings was double the current attendance when the association offered pony rides on the grounds until 2005.

"We may do that again," Mr. Garnham said with a smile.

A new building to see on the Miss Amelia grounds is the 1805 Phoebe Edwards Mulford House, which once stood on the east side of Atlantic Avenue in Amagansett, and was most recently owned by Adelaide de Menil and Edmund Carpenter of East Hampton. The couple donated the historic house to the Amagansett Historical Association and had it moved to its present site in 2007, when they also donated a set of historic buildings to be renovated for a new Town Hall complex.

At the Montauk Lighthouse, the oldest lighthouse in the state—it still flashes its light every five seconds and can be seen a distance of 19 nautical miles—attendance is down slightly from last year, according to Brian Pope, assistant site manager. In June 2007, he said, attendance was 7,924, compared with this past June, 2008, when the number was 7,144. But the famous 1796 lighthouse is still visited by roughly 70,000 people a year. The crowds that come are mostly tourists and families, he said. The lighthouse is operated by the Montauk Historical Society, which also runs the Second House museum in Montauk.

“It’s a fantastic place with great exhibits—we have a room dedicated to origins of the lighthouse and we have two rooms dedicated to the history of Montauk,” Mr. Pope said. “Another reason a lot of people come is for the view. Even without climbing the lighthouse you can see Connecticut, Block Island and the shoreline of Rhode Island.”

The Second House Museum in Montauk, which underwent a restoration last year, had 131 visitors in July and has had 113 so far in August. FloraBell Mulvaney, curator, said there were no comparative figures from last year because the museum was closed for the renovation. The 1797 building, at Main Street and Second House Road, is the oldest and most historic building still standing on Montauk. It was purchased in 1968 by the Town of East Hampton and the New York State Historical Trust and is operated as a museum by the historical society.

Last Updated Aug 26, 08 5:58 PM



[mailbag @ 27east.com](mailto:mailbag@27east.com)

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Ph: 631-287-1500