

Dr. Sarah Swezey Avey
By Karen Mouzakes

Sarah Ellis Swezey was the daughter of Dr. Gilbert H. and Susan Swezey. She graduated high school in Jamaica, Queens with a "Scientific Degree." She attended Oneonta Normal School and Cornell University Medical School. Sarah was graduated from Denver and Gross College of Medicine in 1909. After receiving her license to practice medicine in New York, she took her internship at the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Roxbury, Mass. Dr. Sarah E. Swezey was appointed by the Board of Foreign Missions to take charge of the Sara Seward Hospital at Allahabad, India. She specialized in pediatrics and obstetrics.

Her father, Dr. Gilbert H. Swezey had not wanted her to pursue a career in medicine. Sarah credited the prayers she listened to during her childhood at the family altar as a factor in deciding her life's work. She sailed for India in 1910, a year after her father's death. While in India, she met Harry Thompson Avey, a mechanical engineer, who was also active in missionary work. They married in 1913 at Allahabad, India.

In 1920, the Aveys returned to the United States with their children H. Thompson Avey and adopted son, Charles Avey. Harry T. Avey, took a position at the University of Wisconsin, teaching mechanical engineering.

Professor Avey and Dr. Sarah Avey occasionally visited Yaphank, staying for a few weeks at a time. They always stayed at the Swezey Homestead. The house had been closed since 1920 when Sarah's mother, Susan E. Swezey, and Sarah's sister, Charlotte, moved to Bayside, Queens. Swezey family members vacationed at the Swezey Homestead for extended periods of time. Sarah's sister, Lillian Swezey Webber, lived nearby on Patchogue Road.

In 1944, Professor Avey retired from teaching and the Aveys took up permanent residence at the Swezey Homestead. They continued to live in Yaphank, where they became active in community life. The *Advance*, employed Dr. Avey as a reporter for the village of Yaphank. Sarah continued to be active at the Yaphank Presbyterian Church where she had attended as a child. She was also active in the Yaphank Cemetery Association. Professor Avey made a cemetery plot map to hang on the pump house at the edge of the cemetery. Dr. Avey started a lending library at her home. Adults and children could borrow books on any day except Sunday from 2 until 5 pm.

Dr. Sarah Avey passed in 1963 while she and Professor Avey were visiting their son, Dr. H. Thompson Avey, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She was buried in Norman, Oklahoma. She was 82 years old. Professor Avey remained with his son in Oklahoma. Professor Avey passed in 1966, at the age of 87. In 1963 the Swezey Homestead was sold to Brookhaven Town. The Town intended to burn down the house. The Yaphank Chamber of Commerce was successful in saving the house from demolition. The Swezey-Avey House was used as a recreation center and Willow Lake was used as a Town Beach.

Editor's Note: The Swezey-Avey House officially became the headquarters of the Yaphank Historical Society in August 2014; that date coincided with the celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Society. The Swezey-Avey House is one of the oldest structures in Yaphank (the original Swezey Homestead started out in the early 1700s). As noted above, the House remained in the family from when it was built until 1963, when it was sold to the Town of Brookhaven. The Society negotiated a special contract with the Town: The Society would renovate the house and in return, the Town would lease the building to the Society to serve as its headquarters. The very first meeting of the Yaphank Historical Society was held at the Swezey-Avey House in 1974. The Yaphank Historical Society is happy to return to their home forty years after that first meeting in the house. The Swezey-Avey House is now Society headquarters, home to our administrative offices, several exhibit rooms, a library, reading room, and is also now home to our extensive historic archives.