



# The FERRYMAN

NEW GALA DATE!  
SUNDAY, APRIL 17

INFORMATIONAL  
MEETING  
MARCH 31 - 7pm  
LIBRARY

VOLUME VIII

No. 1

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MARCH 1988

## *Pre-History At 'The Landing':*

For many years local historians and archaeologists have examined the 26 acre area behind Mercy College bordered by the river and bisected by Wicker's Creek.

Ed Kaeser, an amateur archaeologist and maintenance supervisor at the Sisters of Mercy Convent, spent eight years making test trenches in the area and uncovering artifacts that would place occupation of the site during the Early Woodland Period, hundreds and even thousands of years before European contact with Hudson River shores.

In fact, evidence exists of site occupation as far back as 4,000 BC. At least one artifact may be as old as 6,000 BC! The variety, quality and quantity of artifacts found at this site are amazing: 14,000 lithics or modified stone pieces such as arrow heads, 340 ceramic pieces, 6 hearths, 17 post holes with linear alignments and more than three dozen features or areas with cultural debris. This data suggests that large numbers of people may have lived here over time.

A summer 1987 survey made by William I. Roberts, an archaeologist contracted by Geygl Associates, developers, substantiated Mr. Kaeser's findings. Development of 'The Landing' would mean erecting 140 condominium units over this site of Dobbs Ferry pre-history.

To appreciate fully the importance of these discoveries, it should be understood that, as of 1966, along the entire length of the Hudson River there were only ten pre-historic sites which were recognized as worthy of preservation because of the information they have yielded or may yield. The Dobbs Ferry site equals or possibly surpasses the informational value of each of the other sites. In addition, not one of these ten is of the Early Woodland Period, making our site unique in its location, time period and information. New site discoveries are being subjected to on-going evaluations.

The Woodland Period (1000 BC - AD 1600) dates to the earliest use of pottery and other cultural advancements. By the early 17th century, when Europeans arrived in the area, the site was occupied by Indians known as the Wecqueskeeks. Within Woodland tribes groups of family units as large as 25-30 people lived together. Their activities were survival oriented and seasonally defined. Due to their location and resources, summer fishing and winter hunting spots were returned to year after year and used for centuries. The Dobbs Ferry site is one of these spots.

## *An Important Archaeological Site*

Archaeological sites are finite, non-renewable and are disappearing more rapidly in the Hudson River Basin than in any other area in the state. This site and the data it contains are priceless to us, to Native Americans, and to those who are documenting our links to the past.

We would like to assume that the state or the federal government would provide the means to protect the site. This is not the case. Since state money is not involved, responsibility rests with the Village. In this instance, the Village, in compliance with SEQRA (State Environmental Quality Review Act), has insisted that Phase I, determining the existence of the archaeological site, and Phase II, defining the boundaries of the site, be carried out by the developer.

At the final stage of the environmental study (mitigation), the Village could have stopped any further excavation to save the site from destruction and applied for designation as a National Historic Register site. The other option, and that which was taken, was to conduct a full-fledged archaeological excavation by a group contracted by the developer. Greenhouse Associates was hired, and prepared a final report revealing several disturbing factors. First, mechanical stripping of the land was used during site excavation. This method allows for a large area to be uncovered while at the same time destroying considerable information contained in the ground. Secondly, while the final report will give much information concerning the site, can we assume that nothing else is to be gleaned? Both the archaeologist and Mr. Arcuri, the developer, admit that once 'The Landing' is built there will be no way of ever going back into the ground to discover the pre-history of the area.

In granting final approval, the Village Board prudently stipulated that "Archaeological Survey, Stage III, shall be submitted to the Village prior to the issuance of a Building Permit and to the State Department of Parks, Recreation and Preservation and shall receive independent review...".

The people of Dobbs Ferry still have one last chance to assess what it would mean to lose this site forever and for all generations to come.

-Catherine Walter

-Kathleen Modrowski

# YESTERDAY'S NEWS: a chronicle of 1888

as recounted in the pages of the historic Greenburgh Register newspaper, published on Main Street, Dobbs Ferry.

This resource for village history is preserved on microfilm by the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society, where it is available to researchers and the public. For research appointments, call (914) 693-7766.



## ***The Storm: Dobbs Ferry In The Blizzard of '88***

[Greenburgh Register, vol.VIII, Mar.16, 1888]:

"A snow storm set in on Sunday last, which by Monday morning had become a very respectable imitation of a Western blizzard. We are assured that John J. Storm, who is probably our oldest inhabitant, says that nothing like it has ever happened within his memory. The snow fell probably nearly or quite three feet deep on the level, and as it drifted badly, snow banks ten feet deep were no rarity. Such a one blocked Broadway, near Mrs. DeWint's, and several such obstructed all travel on Ashford Ave. Main Street, on its west side, had an average of six feet to contend with. No one ventured out after nine o'clock on Monday and Tuesday. No passenger or freight train passed the Hudson River railroad station in either direction after Monday at 9 o'clock a.m. till Wednesday evening. The Northern Railroad was as badly blocked. The mailservice was entirely suspended for two entire days. All daily papers were cut off, and the village was as completely shut up within itself as it would have been had it been located in Laborador.

"The laborers on the new aqueduct at Ardsley rely on Dobbs Ferry for their bread. It was impossible to send it to them on Monday, and they were suffering. They organized a cavalry brigade on Tuesday, came over ten or fifteen strong, and carried large loads back in bags thrown over the horses' backs. Several of our citizens who started out on the early morning trains of Monday in the ordinary course of their business, got nowhere, and only succeeded in returning home on Wednesday, entirely worn out with the three days spent uselessly and idly on the cars. ...

"The express train of the Hudson River Railroad, which was due in New York City on Monday morning at 7 o'clock, was running in two sections. The first train stopped at our station to water at half-past six o'clock. The storm was blinding, and the track was obstructed by the drifting snow. The engineer could not start his train, and it was run into by the second section. One

engine, one baggage and several sleeping cars were pretty badly smashed. Six or seven passengers were injured; two somewhat severely. It was a striking illustration of the severity of the storm, that the smashed cars lay on the main down track untouched for sixty hours.

"A Poughkeepsie local was stalled on Monday morning half a mile below our station. It reached Hastings, one mile below, on Wednesday morning, forty-eight hours after leaving here. It had nearly a hundred passengers. The railroad company sent down tea and coffee and sandwiches in abundance from Mrs. Peterman's; still the passengers were greatly wearied by their cramped positions, the foul air of the cars, and their natural anxiety. We met a stranger plodding through the deep snow and the storm, in our empty streets on Tuesday evening. He was intensely anxious to learn where he could buy a warm meal. He had left Newburgh on Monday morning, expecting to return home that night. He reached New York on Thursday. Three thousand passengers were on the tracks at an entire stand still for nearly three days between here and Mott Haven.

"The coming of the snow is not the only bother. We have got more than we want, and the getting rid of it may work harm. Snow shovels are at a premium; not one can be bought in the village. Ordinary iron shovels even are in great demand."

[Greenburgh Register, vol.VIII, April 6, 1888]

"Adam Stalb had not spent a night out of his own house in 27 years. The blizzard however, was too much for him. He was kept in Yonkers nearly three days, and finally walked home. In such emergencies the old-fashion [sic] methods of getting about come into good play."



**Adam Stalb,**  
CUSTOM AND HAND MADE  
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Repairing Neatly, Cheaply and Promptly Done.  
All kinds of Boots and Shoes, Rubbers &c., always on hand and sold at the Cheapest Prices.  
**I Guarantee First-Class Goods and Work.**

## ***How The Railroad Station Came To Be At Its Present Location...***

[Greenburgh Register, vol.VIII, Jan.13, 1888]:

"The managers of the Hudson River railroad long since determined to give this village a new station house in place of the rickety old barracks which is now being used .... This was followed by a very earnest protest from several citizens who know that, earlier or later, the station must be put on the east side of the tracks. There is an earnest desire to give to the village a beautiful and tasteful brick station .... They are thwarted by the miserable delays in the opening of the extension of Palisade Street."



### ***...Because Shadrack Taylor Served Dinner To The Surveyors!***

[Greenburgh Register, vol.VIII, Jan.27, 1888]:

"It is curious how trivial things some times determine great and lasting results. The talk about changing the Hudson River railroad station to the east side of the tracks... has revived all the neighborhood traditions, as to how the present amazingly inconvenient and very dangerous site ever came to be selected."



"When the railroad was surveyed nearly fifty years ago [c. 1840], the neighborhood doubted the success of the enterprise. Our citizens had been accustomed to the stage coach and to river navigation, and they doubted if they would use any other methods of getting to the city. Therefore, no one cared particularly where the station was to be placed...."

"The surveyors selected a location on the Willsea farm, near the old mill, on the property... lately transferred by James Wilde Jr.'s estate to General Thomas. [Note: that would be the present, archaeologically important Mt. Mercy site!]

"That is unquestionably the easiest of approach and the best natural site. The surveyors talked the matter over one day as they were dining at Shadrack Taylor's hotel, which was then where Mrs. Peterman's is now [in 1888]. Mr. Taylor was a wide-awake businessman. He overheard the talk, and he supplemented Willsea's proposition to give the necessary land, if the station be placed adjacent to his hotel; but he would also give the dinners, with his thanks, to the surveying party. The latter part of the proposition settled the question. That free dinner sent our predecessors, and has sent us... over a dangerous bridge, around an exceedingly bad turn, to an out-of-the-way place for a station."

DOBBS FERRY: "A Gilded Colony"

[Greenburgh Register, vol.VIII, Feb.3, 1888]:

"The London Times says of Dobbs Ferry, that it is the center of a "gilded colony". A thousand magnificent estates look out from the eastern bank upon these noble Palisades. They are of all kinds and styles. Fortunes have been expended upon their elaborate decoration, and their ornamental grounds upon the hillsides and terraces surround costly dwellings, built to represent palaces, churches, castles, old manor houses, and every conceivable structure that can be made into a dwelling, some being of great size. They show out among the trees, and some are thrust out so that they almost overhang the water, while others are far back and high up on the slopes."

"...YET POMPEY IS MELODY ITSELF  
IN CONTRAST WITH DOBBS FERRY "

[Greenburgh Register, vol.VIII, April 6, 1888]:

"Dudley Field, in pleading before a congressional committee for euphonious names for places and localities, said: 'We have shown in the naming of our States, Cities and Towns the utmost poverty of invention. The State to which I belong has names which will forever make it next to impossible for anybody to write or think poetry about them. Some time ago I was travelling in western New York, and came across a sorry old horse dragging through the mud a wagonload of empty barrels."

"I asked the driver where he was going and he answered, "To Pompey!"

"Good Heavens, I thought, can anybody live there? I thought that before entering such a place to dwell in, one must have abandoned all hope of feeling any sense of fitness or beauty, in fact, have become ashamed of himself. Why the people of New York, people that have schools, academies and universities, do not get rid of these abominations I cannot understand. And yet Pompey is melody itself, in contrast with Dobbs Ferry."



Editor this issue: Tema Harnik

PHOTO ARCHIVES PROJECT

Enabled by Conservation/Preservation Grant From the New York State Library for 87-88

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society has received a grant of \$8,196 from the New York State Library's Conservation/Preservation of Library Research Materials Grant Program. These funds are being used to make copy negatives of 350 of our most fragile and valuable photographs and to improve storage facilities for the more than 4,000 photographs, transparencies and graphic materials that make up the Society's photo archives. Two collections stand out because of the richness of the subject matter: the Ravekes Collection and the School District Archives.



The Ravekes Collection, donated in 1984, chronicles the lives and labors of members of the Ravekes and Storms families for several generations in Dobbs Ferry. Going back to the turn of the century, and continuing through the 1950's, the more than 600 photographs offer unique insight into a picture of the civic, business and family life of Dobbs Ferry in the first half of the 20th century.

The School Archives consist of some 200 pictures of the students and faculty at the village public school. Subjects range from class photos and team portraits to athletic events, science labs and some informal activities. Because it is easy to locate a picture of someone who attended Dobbs Ferry High School between 1903-1933, the School Archive is the most frequently consulted series in the collection.

Unfortunately, frequent handling damages and ultimately destroys the prints. Therefore the largest portion of the NYS Library grant (\$6000) is being spent to make archival quality copy negatives of the 350 most significant photos, and place the originals in acid-free sleeves and negative envelopes, thus assuring their access to future generations.

Dust, dampness, ultra-violet light rays and air pollution also contribute to the deterioration of photographs. The grant is helping to remedy these problems by enabling the Historical Society to purchase acid-free storage boxes, mylar envelopes, a dehumidifier and a hygrometer.

In addition to concerns of preserving the collections, the Historical Society is trying to increase public access to the pictures and their future interpretive use as documentation of village life. Kathleen Brennan, an archivist, has been called in to create a coherent system of referencing and classification by individual, street and architecture, as well as subject matter.

Once the cataloguing project has been completed it should be possible for you to locate a picture of grandpa's football team a view of Main Street in 1908, or a picture of little girls in high button shoes playing on the aqueduct.

The work of identifying the people, places and events in the photographs is a real labor of love. Those who have participated in the archival project have discovered that beyond providing a historical record, photographs have the unique ability to project the emotions and the mood of a certain time and place.

The Historical Society invites anyone who would like to volunteer a few hours for working with this fascinating material to call 693-7766 and arrange a visit.

-Kathleen Modrowski



Storefront History Theatre

TWO NEW SHOWS: Drawn From Dobbs Ferry and Through Stained Glass

Storefront History Theatre is adding a new dimension, SOUND! Many of you saw a select preview of our new slide show, "Drawn From Dobbs Ferry" at our Annual Meeting in October '87.

Visually it is an exciting collection of art work in many forms and media done by local artists. The new sound version will include taped interviews of the artists themselves, commenting on the community and their work.

The show was begun by Lynn Margileth and is being coordinated by Judy Brewton, who is currently finishing the soundtrack with a big assist from Sleepy Hollow Sound Studios on Cedar Street.

Rusty Russell, always a strong supporter, has contributed a fine outdoor speaker. So now you will be able to see us, and hear us, from the local storefronts in the near future.

-Cathy Polgreen

Stained Glass

When I was asked by the Historical Society to take photographs of the stained glass in Dobbs Ferry for a Storefront History Theatre exhibit, I didn't think it would take very long; not much stained glass in Dobbs Ferry. WRONG!



I spent an exciting winter climbing long unused staircases in the towers at Ingleside (St. Christopher's) and the old choir loft in South Presbyterian Church. And then there was the "ghost" at Estherwood, the National Register-listed 1896 mansion at the Masters' School, which was built by J.J. McComb and named for his wife, Esther Wood. They say the ghost of Esther herself walks there. I'm sure it was the ghost who prevented me from getting a clear picture of the stained glass skylight in the great hall near the main staircase.

In the Library at Estherwood the only way I could get a shot of the painted octagonal skylight there was to lie down on the floor!

Though most of the windows were in public buildings, much of the stained glass proved to be in Dobbs Ferry's private homes. It was the fashion to incorporate mass-produced designs of stained glass as a matter of course into the decoration of most homes from the 1890's until the 1930's.

-Evelyn Fitzgerald

## HISTORIC MAIN STREET

Paint Shop \* Blacksmith \* Wheelwright \*  
 Movie House \* Washington Theatre \* Civic Theatre  
 Caldara Movers \* soon to be Dobbs Ferry Playhouse

Stephen Tilly, local architect, has contracted to purchase the picturesque, historic building at the corner of Main and Elm Streets, known for many years as the Caldara Building, because since 1959 it housed the moving and storage business of the late Frank J. Caldara. Tilly calls it "The Dobbs Ferry Playhouse".

"I was interested in it (as) an odd assemblage of buildings. The interior wasn't divided into the standard small spaces."

In fact, the original part of the present complex of structures had been a paint shop for Henry Whittle and Charles F. Eichhorn as early as 1860, became a blacksmith shop where horses were shod in 1916, and was converted by Mrs. F.Q. Brown in 1917 into a movie house called "The Washington Theatre".

Col. F.Q. Brown was Village President that year. Coincidentally, another new business venture was advertised in the March 23 Dobbs Ferry Register newspaper of 1917: "Caldara & Raff... under the name of the Dobbs Ferry Express Co., has formed a co-partnership and will commence business.... Griffin's Garage has turned out for them a brand new Ford ton truck, with which they hope to be able to give the public prompt transportation service. Both members of the new firm are well known here..."

On June 29, 1917 the Register announced the "Opening of the Washington Theatre" (Arthur Young, general builder; Lofgren & Eckstrom, painting; Jos. V. Langenburg, plumbing and heating; Elliot Bray, tinsmith; Frank Hill, electrical equipment; J. Gordon Guthrie, artist [later designer of the Village Seal and creator of the beautiful stained glass windows of South Presbyterian Church on Broadway]; W. Thornton, curtains and draperies. James C. Mackenzie, who has just joined the artillery, was the architect."

By July 6 of that year, the Dobbs Ferry Register reported that architect Mackenzie's interior renovations produced "unquestionably the finest, coolest and most sanitary theatre in Westchester County. All the pictures fit to be shown to an intelligent public."

In the early 1930's, an addition up the hill to the east was built by Mrs. Brown to provide an ample stage for a legitimate theatre. The Register of June 1, 1934 declares: "Broadway stars will open Main Street Theatre for Preview Plays", and on June 8: the "idea is to have the biggest names on Broadway for the quaint, gabled showcase on Main Street."

Indeed, Ethel Barrymore and her two children performed there on July 16, 1917. The local paper promised "Miss Barrymore will autograph the souvenir programs for the opening performance and the proceeds will go to the Dobbs Ferry Hospital."

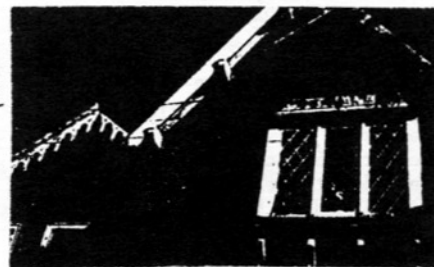
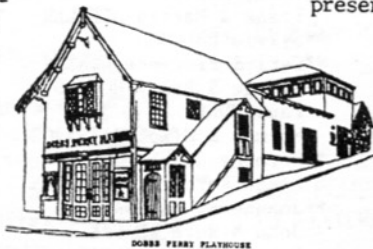
When Stephen Tilly first saw the building "...it was dark, dingy and mouldy. But we architects are used to seeing things in the 'before' stage and envisioning them through to an 'after' stage."

Having lived for many years within 600 yards of the aqueduct, Tilly liked the building's location adjacent to it. The changes Tilly plans for the structure are termed "adaptive re-use". While the Main Street facade will be restored to an elegance it has not shown in many years, the

architect is proposing some changes to the exterior, chiefly the addition of a cupola atop the part of the building on Elm St. that was once the stage of the legitimate theatre. From Tilly's present office at the corner of Main and Chestnut, he looks out and sees the many-windowed cupola of the Oceana Building. The Playhouse cupola which will serve as a conference room, is designed to relate to the Oceana roof.

The Elm Street facade will also be restored and the charming exterior stairway to the theatre balcony, a village landmark, preserved. Inside Tilly plans to open up the old proscenium by removing the mezzanines built by Caldara. New, smaller mezzanines will be built, but the old wooden ceiling, the theatre balcony railings, some of the old arched doors and the diamond shaped window panes will be preserved.

-Frances (Tahnee) Neill



### COMMUNITY HERITAGE YEAR 88

Begins on March 7, 1988, when the Town of Greenburgh is among many in the State to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the creation of Towns and Counties in New York.

A new book, The Town of Greenburgh - A Glimpse of the Past - 1788-1988, will be published by the Greenburgh Bicentennial Commission. The book, which will go on sale this April and will be largely pictorial, will cover both the incorporated and unincorporated sections of Greenburgh. The anticipated price will be \$10.

The text includes new research material and many previously unpublished pictures and illustrations.

The Dobbs Ferry section, for example, will contain a British 1776 military map of the area as well as a 1781 French map drawn by one of Rochambeau's officers. The latter map specifically shows the locations of both Washington's and Rochambeau's headquarters, as well as the redoubt on the Dobbs Ferry riverfront.

-Bill Blanck

### Contributors to this issue:

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| - Bill Blanck        | - Cathy Polgreen         |
| - Evelyn Fitzgerald  | - Martha Schwartz        |
| - Kathleen Modrowski |                          |

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# Time to Renew Membership

★★ A double star next to your name indicates that you have already paid your membership dues for 1988- Thank You!  
All others are due to renew membership for the 1988 year.  
Please make checks payable to: DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
153 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. 10522

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## 10th ANNIVERSARY GALA

Come celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society at the Anniversary Gala on Sunday, April 24, from 4 to 7 pm at celebrated Estherwood mansion, a National Historic Register site.

The Anniversary Gala will feature live music, a continuous slide showing of "Dobbs Ferry Through Stained Glass", a buffet of gourmet and international specialties, a continuous silent auction and a raffle drawing.

The Society, provisionally chartered by the New York State Board of Regents in 1978, anticipates receiving its permanent charter as an educational institution during this anniversary year.

Mark your calendar now for Sunday, April 24 and watch for your invitation and ticket order forms in the mail.



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