



# The FERRYMAN

VOLUME VIII No. 2

Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

JULY 1988

## UPDATE ON EARLY INDIAN SITE

by Kathleen Modrowski



The importance of the Wickers Creek archeological site in Dobbs Ferry as a key to understanding the early history of the Hudson River Valley has emerged as an issue of concern among residents of Dobbs Ferry and persons throughout the New York area.

To inform the public, the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society organized an educational information meeting in March. This led to the formation of an ad hoc committee of concerned citizens, the Friends of Wickers Creek Archeological Site (FOWCAS).



Mayor Gisela Knight and the Village Board insisted that an archeological review be carried out to the fullest extent required by the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

Evidence obtained through the phase 1 and 2 archeological studies indicated that the site is much more important than previously imagined. Bruce Fullem, N.Y. State archeologist, who presides over review of archeological surveys for the section of Historic Preservation, has recognized it to be "a significant archeological resource which meets the National Register criteria."

Phase 3, or final archeological report, is not expected to be released until July 25. However, confidence that no further on-site field work is necessary has been expressed by the Village Board, the developer and his lawyer, and the contracted archeological consultants.

Mayor Knight has stated that State Archeologist Fullem has assured the mayor that no further on-site work is necessary. But in conversations with Kathleen Modrowski and Catherine Walter of the historical society, Mr. Fullem has made the distinction that his opinion is based on the general requirements prescribed as a part of SEQRA guidelines and does not refer to any analysis of material that may be contained in the final report.



(continued on page 4)

## THE SEARCH IS ON! FIND OLD LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

Search your attics and comb your cellars to locate missing issues of Dobbs Ferry newspapers so that the microfilming of our village newspapers may be completed.

Do you have any single issues of the Dobbs Ferry Register from 1953 to 1970? Could you give or lend your copies to the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society to fill in the gaps for those years?

Work has come to a halt on this successful long-term project while the Historical Society broadcasts a search until Labor Day to find as many of these loose Register issues as possible. The New York Public Library stands ready and waiting to continue its professional microfilming of the Register but requires the issues in hand by early fall.

Microfilming of bound volumes of 1888-1952 of the Register has been completed over the past few years, and the microfilm is in regular use by researchers at the Historical Society's office in the Dobbs Ferry Library. Here again, there are gaps---nine missing bound volumes, most from the 1880's and 1890's, plus 1941. If you see one of these large bound volumes (at a flea market, in a garage sale, at a neighbor's), you've found the missing treasure, because only one bound volume exists for each year. Please notify the Society immediately (693-7766, 24 hours) of the location so that we may borrow, buy, or "rent" these important early papers to microfilm.

At the same time, look for the Dobbs Ferry Sentinel in loose issues from 1958 to 1970. This local weekly newspaper will also be microfilmed by the New York Public Library for public use here in our local archives, with the same September deadline for locating sufficient issues to fill in the Society's collection.

Meanwhile, the Reminder Weekly News, publishing Dobbs Ferry news from 1970 to April 1975, has been prepared for microfilming by the Society's work crew, headed by Evelyn Fitzgerald. Most of the five-year run was provided by the editor, William J. Blanck of Dobbs Ferry. It's not too late to add the few missing issues, if you call 693-7766 soon.

## NOW PLAYING ON YOUR VCR! AN ORAL HISTORY WORKSHOP

Review by Tema Harnik

An Oral Historian's Work is a thoughtful, practical 33-minute color VHS videotape demonstration of organizing, preparing for, conducting and transcribing oral history interviews, with Folklore Professor Edward D. (Sandy) Ives of the University of Maine.

For all Sandy Ives' 30 years of oral history experience, this folklorist takes nothing for granted when it comes to tape-recording interviews, and this attitude is a help to viewers of his half-hour video workshop. He stresses that there is nothing "instant" about an oral history project. In fact, "the more you know, the better interview you'll do."

After organizing the necessary specific audio equipment and choosing or locating the narrators to be interviewed (Prof. Ives calls them "informants," reflecting his strong research bent), you can spend your preparation time most usefully on background research of your project topic---checking historical records, facts, and documents, in addition to a physical checking of the area in which the subject of your oral history project took place.

For his project---gathering the taped recollections of woodsmen along a river in Maine ---Ives walked along the river logging sites and made notes on the condition of the river banks today, which aided him in designing questions which would elicit descriptive responses from the loggers and woodsmen about changes in the locale over time.

In this essential research phase of an oral history project, Professor Ives suggests that historical newspapers allow the oral historian a way of checking the events of the past with which the narrator may have been associated. Newspapers, he emphasizes, are a valued resource for "browsing through a time period."

The video takes us through the setting up of interview appointments by phone and the actual interview sessions at the narrator's kitchen table. It offers practical techniques for getting the most out of interviews, such as the advice that "frequently, silence is the best follow-up" question.

Indexing, transcribing, and editing of oral history tapes are briefly demonstrated and discussed. At the Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History they estimate that a one-hour taped interview will take 15-20 hours to transcribe.

Professor Ives then edits the typed transcript (one hour of tape equals three hours of editing) while listening to the tape. He claims that new questions often occur to him

during this checking process, and he will incorporate these into the on-going oral history project.

Duplicate tapes should be made for use by transcribers and the public.

A strong recommendation is made for depositing the original taped material (the safety copy) into an archive (such as a local historical society, a library, or other research repository): "You have everything to gain, and nothing to lose."

The latter might well be said, too, of a half-hour viewing of An Oral Historian's Work ---a precise, yet comfortable and very do-able look at how to collect oral history.

Available resources: "An Oral Historian's Work," a 33-minute color/sound videotape workshop in VHS format. 3-day loan \$3.50 (members \$2).

At no charge, numerous how-to-do-it books on all aspects of oral history: interviewing, indexing, transcribing, editing, etc. 2-week loan, free.

For background research, local historical newspapers on microfilm 1888-1952, to use at Historical Society office. (914) 693-7766

### ORAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS MARK COMMUNITY HERITAGE YEAR



Oral History Workshops, initiated for this area by the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society some 12 years ago, continue to flourish.

An active springtime during Community Heritage Year 1988 included workshops presented on behalf of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society by Tema Harnik, former director:

★★★for the entire 7th grade of Woodlands High School in Greenburgh Central 7 School District, six workshop sessions to train 125 students and 4 teachers in oral history techniques. For their study of local community (the physical community, the people, the "official" government community) in this 200th Anniversary Year of the Town of Greenburgh

★★★for the Lewisboro Historical Society, four evening workshop sessions at the South Salem Library to train society members and members of the community, including local teachers, to tape recollections of community life. For culmination in Town of Lewisboro celebration on Memorial Day

★★★for CIMS: teacher training and curriculum development for 4th grade social studies in New York State, two training/demonstration sessions at BOCES in Ardsley. For teachers of 4th grade who pilot curriculum materials

**SPRINGHURST 4TH GRADERS  
WALK THROUGH HISTORY**

by Frances Neill

Sketches by Carol Kyner's 4th grade

Some 4th grade students at Springhurst School declared their June walking tour of Clinton Avenue's Victorian houses and Estherwood mansion their favorite field trip of the year.

Using the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society's printed walking-tour guide *Victorian Variety*, Carol Kyner's class spent 2½ hours with pencils and clipboards sketching details of several of the buildings they observed. The trip was part of a unit of local history, a mandated curriculum topic for 4th graders. The venture proved so instructive and popular that Mrs. Kyner plans to make the tour an annual event.

Another of Mrs. Kyner's projects which made use of Dobbs Ferry Historical Society materials was a study of stained glass. It began with a class trip to see Lyndhurst and the Chagall windows in the Union Church in Pocantico Hills. To encourage an appreciation of Dobbs Ferry's own stained glass treasures, Patricia Magnani, a Springhurst mother, showed the Society's slide show, "Dobbs Ferry Through Stained Glass," to a gathering of all 4th grade classes. Mrs. Magnani was an enthusiastic presenter since it was she who had done the original research for the program.

Additional Historical Society resources were enjoyed by some of Barbara Pearce's 4th grade students studying local history. They used the Society's archives and library for research on such buildings as the High School and Our Lady of Pompeii Church. Their favorite resource was *Life of a River Village*, a book originally published for Dobbs Ferry's Centennial (1973) but now out of print. The Society hopes to republish the book soon.

Available resources mentioned in this article:  
*Walking tour guide illustrated pamphlet Victorian Variety*, and its companion tour, *Stucco & Stones: The Look of Italy in Dobbs Ferry*, @ \$1 each (\$1.35 each by mail). Quantity price available for classroom or group use.

Slide show, "Dobbs Ferry Through Stained Glass," with written narrative, available for club program, group or class. Call 693-7766.

**YOU CAN LIST A SITE  
ON NEW COUNTY INVENTORY**

by Kathleen Modrowski

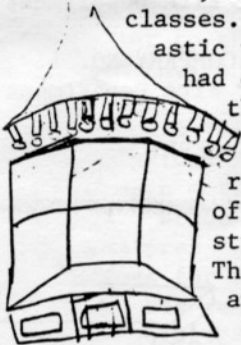
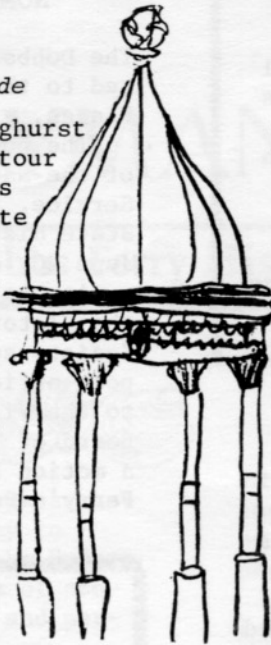
Dobbs Ferry has many buildings and places which might qualify for inclusion in the Westchester County Inventory of Historic Places, newly established by County Executive Andrew P. O'Rourke as an appropriate way of celebrating 1988 Architectural Heritage Year.

The purpose of the Inventory is to serve as a record of buildings, sites (including cemeteries), districts, structures and objects (such as monuments or fountains) which are significant in the design, location, setting, materials, or workmanship, or the associations that go along with them. Each must be at least 50 years old.

In Dobbs Ferry, for example, there are numerous houses and buildings on Main Street, Palisade Street, Clinton Avenue, etc., which, while ranging from "estate" status to that of modest wooden structures, provide fine architectural examples of certain periods of Village history. In addition to the buildings, there are other notable sites such as the fountain in Gould Park, the willow tree at Waterfront Park, the terraced gardens seen from along the Aqueduct Trail, and stucco and stone garden sanctuaries, just to name a few.

There is no obligation to property owners who participate.

Anyone interested in listing a home--- or any other structure or site---on the Inventory should contact the Historical Society to obtain the one-page application form. Members of the Society will be willing to help in the research and completion of this official application.





INDIAN SITE UPDATE (continued from page 1)

Dr. Lynn Ceci, Professor of Archeology at Queens College, states, "While there is a popular notion that 'all' is known about pre-historic and historic Indian lifeways in this region, the painful truth is that we still lack good scientific evidence to explain, for example, the beginnings of village life, the subsistence year-round for settled populations, and the impact of European contact on Native settlement patterns.

"If Wickers Creek contained such evidence, its loss would be incalculable if not indefensible."

There is special concern for the shell midden, those densely packed deposits of mollusk shell which over the centuries had been discarded by the Indians who processed the shells at the confluence of Wicker's Creek and the Hudson River.

The Indians steamed and scraped the oyster meat from the shells for immediate consumption as well as to preserve it by smoking and drying for food stores and perhaps for barter.

Besides the knowledge to be gained from the shells themselves, there are many other artifacts which had been thrown into or had sifted through these shell mounds. Due to the leaching of the components that make up the shells, these artifacts have been preserved where, in other instances, they would have deteriorated.

Dr. Thomas H. McGovern, Professor of Bio-archeology at Hunter College, writes of his concern over "the major shell mound on the Mt. Mercy property":

"Only large-scale and long-term investigation will provide the necessary data. Many important techniques (such as incremental analyses and oxygen isotope assays) have only been developed in the past five years, and the next five will certainly see still more previously unknown approaches emerge in this exciting and rapidly changing era of archeological research.

"This is a poor time in the history of archeological research to conclude that we know all we will ever need to about the shell mounds of the Hudson Valley.

"If this major shell mound (one of the last accessible in the New York region) is sealed or destroyed now, future generations will be denied an important window to the past."

Mayor Knight was able to ensure partial protection of the site in the 6-month permit issued May 26, by making the permit subject to the following conditions:

- 1) no excavation or site work can be done within the critical area without the presence of an archeologist [Mt. Mercy Associates has engaged Greenhouse Consultants to monitor the on-site excavation work], and
- 2) the area of the shell midden shall be fenced off and protected until the final report by Greenhouse Consultants has been evaluated.

The shell midden indicated on maps provided by Greenhouse, however, are much smaller areas than those which Hans Schaper and Barbara Baske, who have worked on the site with both contract archeologists (Cultural Resources and Greenhouse), believe to be the full extent of the mounds.

At the Village Board meeting last Dec. 15th, at which time final approval of The Landing cluster condominium project was granted to Mt. Mercy Associates, historical society members requested that no building permit be issued until the final report was submitted and had received state and independent review. Dr. Bert Salwen, Director of the Department of Anthropology at New York University, offered his services as an independent reviewer.

On May 26 the Village Board issued an "excavation permit" to Mt. Mercy Associates, though not a building permit. A majority of the historical society trustees signed a prepared statement, read at the Village Board meeting June 21st, that they recognized the efforts made by the Village and the developer but that they could not agree with their decision.

In an attempt to provide the Mt. Mercy Associates with a reasonable return on the costs so far incurred by the archeological study while at the same time avoiding damage to the site, members of FOWCAS and of the historical society have researched various federal and state acts which would provide financial benefit to the property owner were the site area preserved. These possibilities were sent in a letter to the developer in May.

Rana Greene, Director of the American Indian Center at the Smithsonian Institution, states, "We need more working models where there is cooperation between developers and community preservation groups. Let us hope that Dobbs Ferry will establish such a precedent."

All those interested in the issues surrounding the Wickers Creek archeological site have been trying to deal with complicated issues and have found no easy solution.

Christopher Letts, environmental educator, has expressed an idea which many local residents can appreciate:

"Were I a parent, a teacher, a youth leader in Dobbs Ferry, I would want preserved forever the opportunity to share with young people the experience of seeing first-hand the evidence that others had lived where they now live, and very different lives at that.

"Files and archives and shelves full of artifacts can not provide the full sense of wonder nor excite the imagination in the way that a visit to a dig, or to a shell mound can.

"An obligation exists to protect this common resource, this community treasure."

## "STUCCO & STONES" AT MUSEUM OF SONS OF ITALY ON STATEN ISLAND

by Tema Harnik

The latest organization to request the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society's popular slide program, "Stucco & Stones: The Look of Italy in Dobbs Ferry," is the Garibaldi Meucci Museum on Staten Island, operated by the Order of the Sons of Italy in America.

The program was presented there recently as the final segment of the museum's 3-part series on Italian immigrant heritage, sponsored by the New York Council on the Humanities. The presentation was made by Tema Harnik, former director of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society.

This slide-lecture program offers a view of how an immigrant population affected the look of a growing Hudson River village through the influence of visual memories, skills and materials reminiscent of the people's home towns in southern Italy.

The Stucco & Stones program grew out of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society's oral history project of the late 1970's, when the stories of many local residents of Italian descent were collected on tape.

The slide lecture was developed by the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society with Cathleen Polgreen as photography coordinator and Karen Morey Kennedy as architectural historian.

Available resources: "Stucco & Stones" is available in two formats: 1) a full-length slide lecture with three 80-slide carousels and an accompanying written narrative, and 2) a captioned, continuous-showing mini-slide-show through the Storefront History Theater project of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. Also available: a printed self-guided walking tour, *Stucco & Stones*, @ \$1 (\$1.35 by mail). Call (914) 693-7766 for more information.

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Contributors to this issue:

Tema Harnik, Kathleen Modrowski, Frances Neill

Sketches by Carol Kyner's 4th grade students  
at the Springhurst School

Architect's notebook sketches by Stephen Tilly

Editor this issue: Virginia W. Barton

## RESTORATION ON MAIN STREET

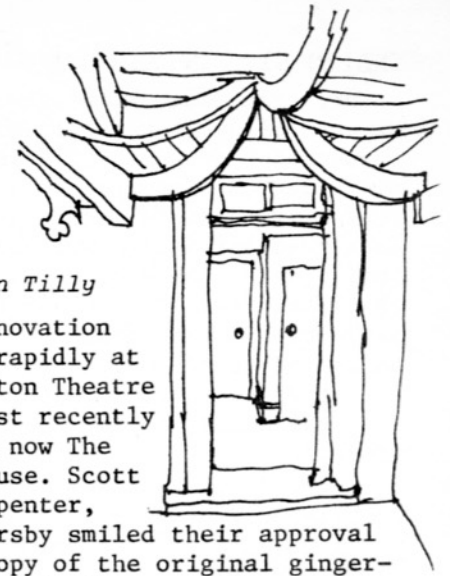
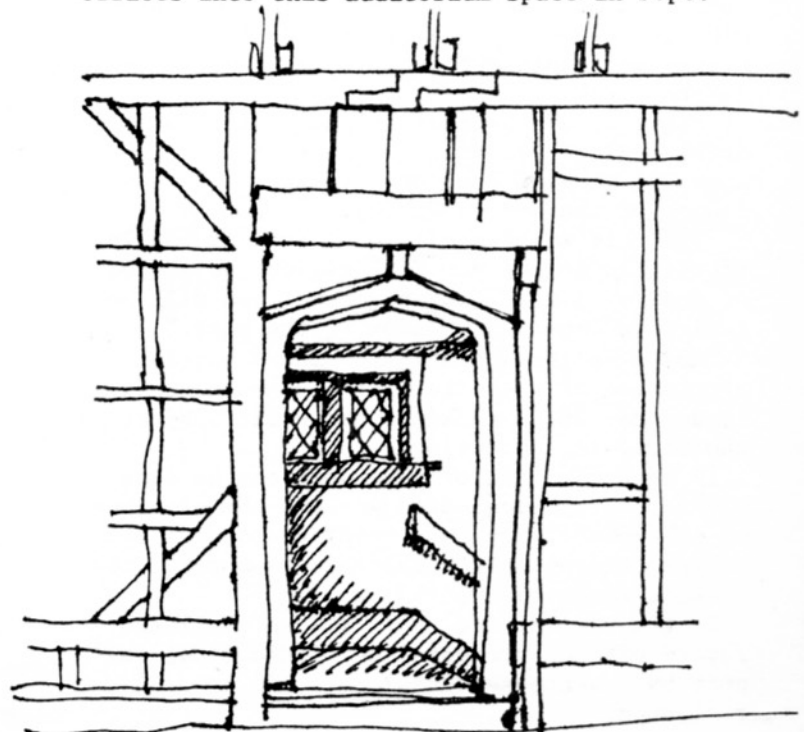
by Frances Neill

Sketches by Stephen Tilly

Restoration and renovation are going forward rapidly at the former Washington Theatre on Main Street, most recently Caldara Movers and now The Dobbs Ferry Playhouse. Scott McBride, chief carpenter, reports that passersby smiled their approval as he attached a copy of the original gingerbread trim to the roof of the small porch at the entrance to the adjoining apartments.

Uncovered during alterations were distinctively-patterned horizontal drop siding exposed along Elm Street, Y-shaped framing secured with stout wooden pegs in the original barn-like building fronting on Main Street, and even old windows below present ground level, indicating that at one or more times in the past the level of Elm Street was raised several feet to allow for an easier grade.

The interesting bones of the building will soon be covered by new interior walls. But one element which will remain almost exactly as it was is the 26-ft.-high yellow pine ceiling of the former theater auditorium, now a mellowed rich shade of brown. Also recalling the past elegance of the theater will be the carefully restored balcony railing. Co-owners Stephen Tilly and Elizabeth Martin expect to move Tilly's architectural offices into this auditorium space in Sept.





**CHARTER MADE PERMANENT**

The charter of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society, provisionally granted some years ago, was made absolute by the Board of Regents of the State of New York on March 25, 1988, just in time for the Society's observance of its 10th Anniversary Year.

The Board of Regents had granted the original provisional charter June 23, 1978.

**WELCOME ABOARD! TO 29 NEW MEMBERS**

Since the listing of current membership in the March 1988 issue of *The Ferryman* newsletter, 29 new members have joined the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society and many more have renewed their membership.

Here's gratitude to the many who continued their ongoing support, and a hearty welcome to our newest members:

Natalie BARNES, Robert and Ronna BLAU, Robert J. BRUTTING, Larry and Allegra DENGLER, Anna DENIKE, Eileen DONOVAN, Laura Lynn FLATLEY, Janet B. GRAY, Dr. and Mrs. John HOLZER, Douglas KEITH, Robert and Marilee LEE, R. Walker and Patricia S. LEWIS.

Also, Hiroshi and Harumi MATSUZAKI, Mary Louise MCHUGH, Toshiaki NAITO, Emmett and Anne O'REILLY, George PAGE, R. V. and Hema PENDIKATLA, Jane REED, Genevieve N. REZNIKOFF.

Also, Paul and Amy RIVERS, Manuel SANTAPAU, Ronald and Donna SCHEELER, Margaret M. SHIRK and D. MEHLMAN, Gerald and Constance SHULMAN, Raymond SIMON, Eric and Lynn SOBEL, Chikaharu URAKAWA, and Katherine WASHER.

**DOBBS FERRY POST OFFICE  
NOMINATED TO NATIONAL REGISTER**

The Dobbs Ferry Post Office has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The nomination was forwarded to the keeper of the National Register by the U.S. Postal Service, in consonance with the New York State Historic Preservation Officer, on June 20, 1988.

At the request of Mayor Gisela Knight, the Historical Committee and Historical Society sent background material on the post office building from the archive files to the Village for forwarding. The Society Board of Trustees at its June meeting passed a motion to endorse the nomination of Dobbs Ferry's Post Office on Main Street.

ANNIVERSARIES

- 10 Years - DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
- 40 Years - GREENBURGH HEBREW CENTER
- 50 Years - LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF DOBBS FERRY
- 90 Years - OGDEN ENGINE COMPANY  
Dobbs Ferry Volunteer Fire Department
- 100 Years - LIVINGSTON HOSE COMPANY NO. 1  
Dobbs Ferry Volunteer Fire Department
- 115 Years - VILLAGE OF DOBBS FERRY

**Dobbs Ferry Historical Society**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Town \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (eve.) \_\_\_\_\_

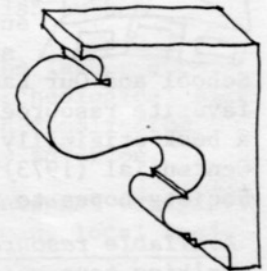
- MEMBERSHIP  New  Renew
- Supporting.....\$50 - \$100
  - Business/Professional....\$30 & \$50
  - Contributing.....\$25
  - Sustaining.....\$18
  - Family.....\$12
  - Individual Adult..... \$8
  - Student/Limited income... \$3
  - Residents over 80.....Honorary

Make check payable to and mail to:  
DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
153 Main Street (Library building)  
Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522

Tel. (914) 693-7766 (24-hr answering)

Membership contribution.....\$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Newspaper Microfilming project contribution...\$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 TOTAL enclosed (TAX-DEDUCTIBLE).....\$ \_\_\_\_\_

My employer's matching contributions form enclosed



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