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DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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WICKERS CREEK ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE PLACED ON COUNTY INVENTORY OF HISTORICAL PLACES



*Millie Lynt, Rachel Losee King, and Lilly Storms Ravekes seated near stream, circa 1912.
In the background is seen a bridge over a ravine on the Gould Estate.*

The Wickers Creek Archeological Site was officially placed on the Westchester County Inventory of Historic Places on September 27, 1989, by a decision of the Westchester County Historic Preservation Advisory Committee.

The site itself, which was nominated for this distinction by the Friends of Wickers Creek Archeological site (FOWCAS) is six tenths of an acre and occupies a corner of a bluff overlooking the Hudson River to the West and Wickers Creek to the South. Archeological evidence found on this traditional encampment of the Weckquasgeek Indians (circa 17th century) shows that Native Americans have been visiting the site since 4,000 B.C.

The land was part of the Mercy Convent property

until it was sold to its current owners, C. M. Realty Developers. While mention of the palisaded villages of the Weckquasgeek goes back to Henry Hudson's voyage up the Hudson River, it has only been since 1987 that the historical value of the site has attracted wide attention. At that time plans to build condominiums on the site were approved and many local residents, environmentalists, archeologists and educators began speaking out for its preservation.

Wickers Creek is a unique part of the collective memory of the Dobbs Ferry community. The nomination of the Wickers Creek site by the County marks a major step towards recognition of the value of the cultures that dwell on this land for so many centuries before European contact.

-- Kathleen Modrowski

DOBBS FERRY IN THE ERA OF THE OLD CROTON AQUEDUCT: 1835-1850

Built in 1845, at mid-century the new brick Overseer's House on the Aqueduct at Walnut (then "Water") Street in Dobbs Ferry, stood witness to an era of swift change enveloping the people, landscape and the economy of the Hudson Valley. The village was not yet incorporated (that would come in 1873). Yet Dobbs Ferry was well-situated and well-known in the Town of Greenburgh, where it had been referred to as Van Brugh "Livingston's Landing": a community of farmers and nouveau country-gentlemen from New York City. The future of the residents and of the village itself would be seeded during the years between the building of the old Croton Aqueduct and the opening of the New York & Hudson Railroad in 1851.

Between 1837-1842 the tunnels of the Old Croton Aqueduct were furrowed and laid through Westchester's backyards from the Croton Dam south into New York in order to provide the City with quantities of pure water.

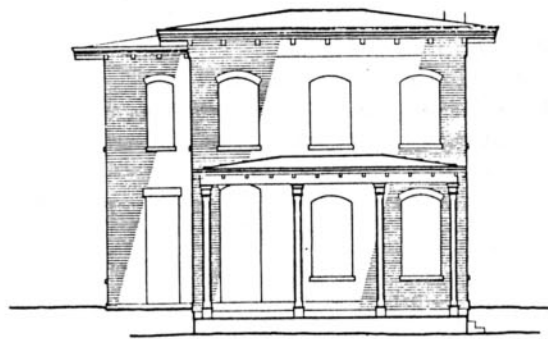
Surveys Made

According to the Water Commissioner's Report to the NYC Board of Aldermen, as early as 1833 engineering "surveys embraced nearly the whole county of Westchester; every stream of any magnitude was gauged, levelled and traversed, and though the corps consisted of only one party, the extent of its levellings and surveys--mostly through a wooded country, was about 200 miles in 10 weeks. The result of the whole was, for the first time, a clear demonstration of the practicability of conveying the Croton Water to the city in great abundance, and at a commanding elevation . . ." The Croton Aqueduct's first chief engineer, David Bates Douglass's original survey corps included "5 engineers (with himself), 5 rodmen and 7 laborers and chainmen . . . The party, consisting of 17 persons, proceeded to the field of operation, and commenced work on or about the 6th day of July, 1835. George W. Cartwright, Esq. was engaged to survey the land . . . and to furnish the Commissioners with maps . . ."

A November 24, 1835 letter, written from Yonkers by Chief Douglass to Commissioner Allen, explained the surveyors' relationship with the property owners through whose lands they moved: "I am happy in being able to say that our location generally in the vicinity above this appears to give very general satisfaction. Mr. Oscar Irving, whose house we pass very near, expresses himself entirely satisfied (sic). Mr. Hamilton (at Nevis) likewise. Mr. Livingston I did not see, but as I have endeavored to meet the (interest?) of his property to the utmost that the case permitted, I trust he will be satisfied. Mr. Constant (at Hastings) is much pleased with the present arrangement. (J.?) W. Wells of this place (Yonkers), whom I met today, expresses the greatest cordiality and good feeling."

Washington Irving at Sunnyside

After some disputes with the city Water Commissioners, Douglass was replaced as Chief Engineer of the Croton Aqueduct water supply project by John B.



Jervis, in October 1836. That same month, Washington Irving moved into his remodelled "Sunnyside".

What was Dobbs Ferry like at this time? In 1835 you could identify the village by Shadrack Taylor's (later Besson's) coal company at the river dock, by the neighboring Hudson River Hotel (later Peterman's), and in the village proper by Anthony Storms' Inn, which had been built in 1820 at the corner of Broadway and Ashford Avenue. Anthony Inn was the overnight stop for New York-to-Albany stage coaches on the Post Road. The inn was also Dobbs Ferry's Post Office; its resident, Anthony Storms, had been appointed Post Master in 1828, by President Andrew Jackson. On Broadway, down near Walnut Street, the George Knox Tavern is said to have served a previous generation of road travellers from as early as 1785.

Zion Established

In 1834, after earlier aiding in the establishment of Dobbs Ferry's first South Presbyterian Church, Van Brugh Livingston helped to form Zion Episcopal Church (today adjacent to the Aqueduct Trailway, at the corner of Cedar and Main Streets). Washington Irving, now resident at Sunnyside, was to serve as a Vestryman at Zion Church in Dobbs Ferry between 1837-43, although he was abroad during part of that time.

Coincident with Chief Engineer Douglass's 1833 plan for a complete survey of the line the Aqueduct would follow through Westchester County, the Lawlor family had arrived in Dobbs Ferry. Joseph Lawlor and his father, the village's first Catholic family, were most likely present in 1837-38 when the first Mass was read here in a lime shed on Gould's pier (today near the dock at Mt. Mercy). "Most of those present were the (predominantly Irish) men working on the Aqueduct), according to the 1933 *History of the Parish of the Sacred Heart*, Dobbs Ferry. Over the following years, in fact, through 1847, Irish Catholics from Verplanck's Point (Croton) to Yonkers regularly held their services in Yonkers or Sing Sing (Ossining). In 1847 Mass was read "once every two months, in Mr. Lawlor's house in Dobbs Ferry."

Wages \$12.00 to \$14.00 Monthly

In other ways, too, the construction of the Croton Dam and the Aqueduct were related to the labors and laborers from Verplanck, whose brickyards produced hand-thrown, molded clay bricks through the second quarter of the century. "Notwithstanding the hand labor, the yard was able to produce about 9,000 bricks a day (which) sold for \$3.25 per thousand", according to the *History of the Town of Cortlandt*. Predominantly Irish brickmakers at those yards received wages of \$12-\$14 per month, plus board.

The Croton Aqueduct was officially opened with fountains spouting wild, in New York City on October 14, 1842. A citizen of the city wrote: "Nothing is talked about or thought about in New York but Croton Water; fountains, aqueducts, hydrants, and hose attract our attention and impede our progress through the streets. Political spouting has given place to water spouts . . . All parties hail the advent of pure and wholesome water after its journey on the earth, and under the earth, and across the water-courses of miles . . ."

In 1845, as the bricks of the Overseer's House were being mortared in Dobbs Ferry, there were at least 30 brick yards in the Verplanck area. Although the industry began there before 1820, the New York state Gazetteer's 1858 vantage point could report that it "was most thriving" in the late 1840's. "Large quantities of these bricks were used in the Croton Aqueduct; the pressed brick made here are known in market as "Croton Fronts", and sell at from \$8 - \$9 per thousand." "The quantity of brick used along the lines may be estimated from the fact that about 2,000,000 (were) required to form a mile of the Aqueduct, making a total of about . . . 85,000,000 to 90,000,000 of brick for the entire work."

In 1845 Eliza B. (Lillie) Masters was born at Matteawan. It would be 32 years before the Masters School was established in the Wilde House on the corner of Clinton Avenue and Broadway in 1877.

Deborah Louise King was also born in 1845, in neighboring Ardsley (then Ashford). She was one of the 10 children of Eliza Dobbs and Capt. John King, who commanded the Sloop *Eliza Ann*, full of pickles, farm produce and occasional passengers, from Dobbs Ferry landing to New York City between 1825-1840. The King family is said to have had a cucumber farm at Willow Point.

Hope Cut Off?

"How soon is hope cut off?" rhetorically asks the 1840's tombstone marking the grave of baby Andrew Storms, aged one year, in Little White Church Cemetery.

There was a great deal of hope for some in Dobbs Ferry, however, as the records show 1845 to be the year that NYC ex-Mayor William V. Brady purchased four Dobbs Ferry acres, and probably built the house at 63 Livingston Avenue, once known as "Terrace Villa". At the same time a more modest residence was being completed on the Aqueduct for the overall supervisor or "Keeper" of the Croton Aqueduct. The Overseer's House may be the building referred to in the January 1846 "Semi-Annual Report of the Water Commissioners", who cited a disbursement in the previous six months of \$650 . . . for building station house at Dobbs Ferry, section 50 . . ."

By June 1847, plans for "erecting walls and embankments on several of the sections of the Croton Aqueduct" were reported to the NYC Water Commissioners, and lowest bids selected, including work on section 45, somewhat north of Dobbs Ferry, by Taylor & Peck. That year Westchester County was first divided into Assembly Districts.

The Railroad Arrives

The 1850's were to be a time of invention, village industry and "summer immigration". Chartered in

1846, the Hudson River Railroad was constructed going north from New York during the same period that the Aqueduct had been constructed through Westchester, going south to New York. The Railroad began carrying passengers as far as Peekskill by 1849; the New York & Hudson Railroad opened its line to Albany in 1851. Dobbs Ferry was at the threshold of its development; you could see it happening from ex-mayor Brady's back porch on Livingston Avenue, and witness progress from the veranda of the Croton Aqueduct Overseer's House.

-- Tema Harnik

"Outbuildings", such as the Overseer's House,-- surviving architecture from an estate or larger property-- can be found all over the village of Dobbs Ferry. Carriage Houses, stables, barns, Gate and Keepers' Houses: these outbuildings are part of a new self-guided, printed tour of Dobbs Ferry architecture and history which will debut this spring. Thanks to the generosity of the Chase Manhattan Bank Neighborhood Grant Program, "Outbuildings: Architectural Survivors of Another Era" will join the Historical Society's series of tours, which already includes "Stucco & Stones: The Look of Italy in Dobbs Ferry" and "Victorian Variety: An Architectural Walking Tour on Clinton Avenue". Self-guided walking or driving tour brochures are available at the Historical Society Office. \$1 ea.

GRANTS NEWS:

FOUNDATIONS SUPPORT SOCIETY PROGRAMS

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society is pleased to announce the enthusiastic receipt of three new grants made at the start of 1990. Our thanks go to:

- ~ *The Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, Inc.* for \$3000 in support of research and reproduction of archival materials, maps, photos and drawings relating specifically to the Overseer's House;
- ~ *The Hudson Valley National Foundation, Inc.* for \$250 towards visual collections cataloguing;
- ~ *The Bank of New York* for \$500 towards planning an exhibition documenting the history of Ashford Avenue.

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VILLAGE DEPRESSION YEAR 1933 IS DOCUMENTED ON VIDEO TAPE



As a survivor of the great Depression, I was especially intrigued when Barbara Pearce suggested that we screen 16mm film of the Dobbs Ferry NRA parade that had been shot by her uncle, John Forsythe, in 1933. Previously, another donor knocked at my door with a somewhat different version of the parade, made by an unknown photographer. In 1933, the letters NRA represented the National Recovery Administration -- not the National Rifle Association.

The two films were a find that begged for exploration of local history. More than that, they could also be part of a video tape documentary that would bring to life the depression year of 1933. The Board of Trustees of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society agreed and production was begun.

The films were copied on video tape and the *Dobbs Ferry Register*, the local weekly newspaper, researched for background material. Village residents who were witness to the times were interviewed and their reminiscences recorded. Another intriguing source was the scrapbook of the daughter of the NRA Parade Chairman, Peter Carpenter. My search would also take me to libraries, including the Roosevelt Library and Museum at Hyde Park, NY.

Tapes Being Edited

Tapes incorporating this material are now being edited and the documentary video will be presented by the Historical Society in the near future.

The centerpiece of the production, the Dobbs Ferry NRA parade held on Saturday afternoon of September 30, 1933, had over 2,000 participants. Its purpose was to celebrate the 100% adoption of the National Recovery Administration Act by local corporations, merchants and businesses. At the time, Dobbs Ferry, with the rest of the nation, was in the depths of the depression, and the purpose of the NRA was to put people back to work and revive the moribund economy.

On June 16, 1933, the United States Congress passed the legislation authorizing the National Recovery Administration, the NRA. Nationally, fifteen million individuals were without jobs and local relief agencies were strained to the breaking point. Many were literally starving and there was fear of riots and civil upheaval. There was also the assuring voice of Franklin Roosevelt calming the nation with his inaugural message that "**The only thing we have to fear is fear itself**". Clearly, action was necessary, and the NRA was designed to provide both the mechanism and impetus for economic recovery.

Basically, the NRA suspended the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and urged business and industry to establish codes setting prices in terms of voluntary "fair competition". The purpose was to curb the downward price spiral. Labor was also protected. "If all employers in each competitive group agree to pay their workers the same wages--reasonable wages--and require the same hours--reasonable hours--then higher wages and shorter hours will hurt no employer."

President Roosevelt told the nation in his third Fireside Chat on July 24, 1933. The NRA was a bold attempt at voluntary economic planning.

Public relations were important and the resultant hoopla, including massive parades, such as the one in Dobbs Ferry, was to gain support for the program and instill confidence that would get the industrial gears turning. The method: check falling prices, cut the work week, put more people to work at decent wages and increase mass purchasing power. This, hopefully, would speed recovery. The fact that the Supreme Court later found the NRA unconstitutional and that the NRA did not end the depression is another story.

But for the suffering people of Dobbs Ferry, the NRA offered hope. How bad were conditions in 1933? The local paper, the *Dobbs Ferry Register*, tells the story:

- 500 families were dependent on whatever jobs of fiscal and private agencies could provide. 42% of the families were in deep trouble -- 4 out of every 10.
- The president of the Chamber of Commerce estimated that 75% of the residents were "hard up".
- 20% of the Village taxes went unpaid and the Village had to collect on the installment plan.
- A starving man collapsed in the street in Irvington and was taken to the hospital.
- Street lights were dimmed to save money.
- There were food and clothing drives for the Village needy.
- The police launched a war on aggressive panhandlers who came to the door and demanded money.
- Editorially the *Dobbs Ferry Register* expressed fear that the problem of jobless youth "--eventually, might result in organized rebellion."
- The home of the mayor was burglarized.

In 1933, relief was of vital local concern--the Federal Government was just beginning programs that would eventually provide money and jobs for local communities. With Town, County and State Assistance unable to meet catastrophic need fully, local churches organized to feed the hungry, and the mayor encouraged local groups to do the same.

Faced with economic collapse and the fear of what might yet come, industry and labor, the rich and the poor, joined to fight an economic war. There was fear and suffering in the land, and it is not surprising that the NRA was warmly embraced as salvation. Dobbs Ferry, with the rest of the nation, was in need of deliverance.

When I screened the parade films with Barbara Pearce, a window opened into the past. There were the streets of Dobbs Ferry, the old storefronts, and the automobiles now considered classic. And there were the people--the village officials, representatives of every business and profession, religious organizations, fraternal groups, the American Legion, political leaders, scouts--all vibrantly alive, marching for survival.

-- Bill Blanck





HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPONSORS LITTLE WHITE CHURCH CEMETERY RESTORATION PROJECT STUDY

If you peek between the branches of the shrubbery that hides the Little White Church Cemetery from Ashford Avenue, you might notice signs of the decay that plagues this otherwise charming acre of our village. Many of the gravestones are broken or leaning over, others are piled up in heaps under trees.

This is the burial place of some of Dobbs Ferry's most prominent early citizens. The Lefurgys, the Losees, Charity Storms, Daniel Willsea, James and Elizabeth Odell, Deborah and John Dobbs . . . these are just a few of the 300 or so of those folks interred here between 1810 and 1894. Ten Civil War Veterans are also buried here, most notably Brigadier General James S. Bowen. The gravestones in the cemetery serve as both a unique example of early symbolic art and as a record of births, deaths, and sentiment in the early life of Dobbs Ferry. Unfortunately, the stones are deteriorating rapidly.

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society has now turned its attention to the plight of the cemetery. Details for a spring/summer cemetery conservation project are being worked out now. As the only cemetery in Dobbs Ferry, its importance as repository of early village history is equal only to its urgent need for care. While different community groups have begun the task of improving the burial ground over the past thirty years, the Little White Church Cemetery has never received the careful, professional conservation work needed to preserve such an irreplaceable site.

What can be done for a cemetery that has not received necessary attention for almost a century? Plenty! With professional guidance, leaning gravestones can be reset. Broken stones can be repaired. The stones can be cleaned and protected from further deterioration. Overgrown trees and bushes, which can damage stones, can be cut back. Careful documentation of the cemetery will preserve the historical data engraved on the stones for future researchers.

With proper upkeep the cemetery can be maintained as a place of beauty. As models for our project we have the example of other communities which have done excellent jobs of restoring their historic cemeteries, such as North Tarrytown's Old Dutch Graveyard.

We are currently looking for professional consultants and applying for grants to fund the project. Of

course, while professional leadership is necessary to insure that the gravestones receive the best care that recent preservation technology can give them, the most crucial part of this project will be the input of interested members of the community. There will be lots of things to do--such as recording gravestone inscriptions, fundraising, and cooperating with professionals doing the actual preservation work. Students are especially welcome--perhaps school credit could be granted for doing a cemetery related project.

If you would like to help preserve a piece of Dobbs Ferry history; or if you have any information about the cemetery that you could share with us (such as maps, photos, memories or anecdotes about the cemetery or the people buried in it, etc.); or if you are a descendent of any of the families buried in the Little White Church Cemetery, or if you know of any descendants, please contact the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. We would also like to hear from photographers who could help record the appearance of the gravestones.

If you visit the graveyard:

- Please do not touch or lean on the gravestones. The stones are in a delicate condition, and pieces of stone are liable to break off.
- Please, no rubbings. While interested and well-meaning citizens may wish to take rubbings, this practice may damage gravestones.
- Do feel free to photograph, sketch, or transcribe the stones. Please share the results with the Historical Society!
- Until the conservation process is completed, the cemetery will not be mowed in order to avoid damaging the stones. Be careful when visiting the graveyard not to trip over gravestone fragments, rocks, or overgrowth.
- Do not move or remove any parts of any gravestone in the cemetery. It will be important to have the fragments in their original places during the conservation process.
- Please do not attempt upkeep or repair of the cemetery yourself. Without professional instruction, more harm than good may be done.
- Report acts of vandalism in the cemetery to the police.
- Most of all, enjoy the graveyard and imagine how pleasant a spot it will be in the future.

--Caroline Kravath

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