



The FERRYMAN

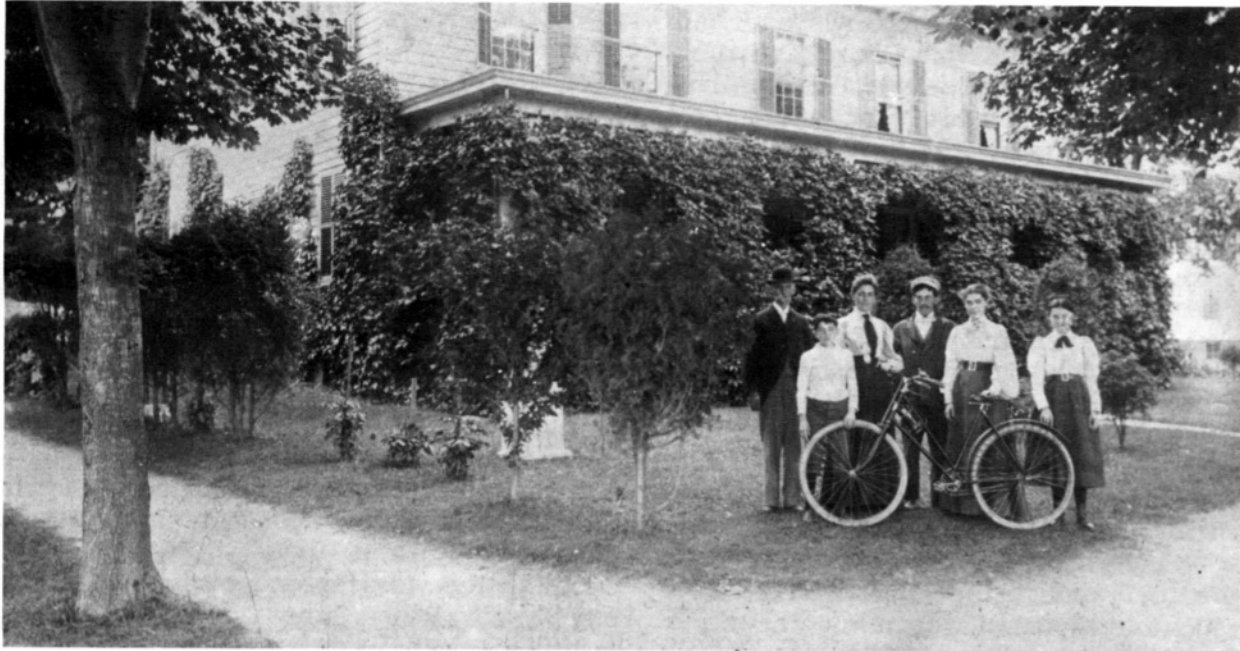
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VOLUME X, No. 2

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
153 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry, New York, New York 10522

MARCH 1991

Your Memorabilia Will Help Tell The Ashford Avenue Story



At the turn of the Century, the Storms family is shown in front of their home on the corner of Ashford Avenue and Broadway. The building was demolished in 1933 and the property is now occupied by the Mobil Station.

You can help us put together a planned exhibit ABOUT ASHFORD AVENUE which is being developed jointly by the Ardsley and Dobbs Ferry Historical Societies. The exhibit, when completed, will be shown in both Ardsley and Dobbs Ferry Libraries and the Bank of New York, whose contribution seeded the project in 1990-91.

We are seeking more material, and would be happy if you would look through your family collections of memorabilia and share with us any photographic or filmed materials showing changes in the landscape and streetscape of the Avenue. We are also looking for photos or movies reflecting the lives and times of the Ashford Avenue residents and businesses. If you can help, call Barbara Novich of Ardsley at 693-5438, or the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society at 693-7766.

Students at Ardsley and Dobbs Ferry High Schools have seen presentations about the Ashford Avenue project, and some have come forward,

through Mr. Haffner at DFHS and Mrs. Tina at AHS, to work with Barbara Novich, who is President of the Ardsley Historical Society, and Tema Harnik, Director of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society, as researchers and photographers. Volunteer internships are available through the schools, during the summer as well as regular school terms.

Many Dobbs Ferry and Ardsley residents live on Ashford Avenue and have saved valuable written and visual records of life on the avenue. Some historical society members and local residents have lent, shared or donated deeds, letters, diaries, and oral reminiscences, photographs and drawings of Ashford Avenue. These items form the archival basis for our research, along with the fascinating documentation of 60 years of village life (now on microfilm) in the newspaper the *Dobbs Ferry Register*.

It Started As an Indian Trail

As you may know, Ashford Avenue was first an Indian trail connecting the Hudson River and Wick-

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Ashford Avenue Story

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er's Creek to the Saw Mill (Nepperhan) River, and over to the hunting grounds of "Thirty Deer Ridge", where Ashford Avenue ends at Sprain Road (today an Ardsley village boundary).

After the American Revolution and into the early 1800's, lands were bought by the tenant farmers of Philipsburg Manor, along the "road to Ashford", as the Ardsley vicinity was then known. The farming families included such names as Odell, Storms, Lefurgy, Meyer, Travis and others.

During the 19th century Ashford Avenue was known by such landmarks as the Anthony Inn (an early Postal stop on the Post Road to Albany), South Presbyterian Church and Little White Church Cemetery, Dobbs Ferry Hospital, Hotel Bellvue, Putnam Railroad Station, Ardsley Methodist Church, Ardsley Lyceum, early school houses, and fire companies.

By the 1890's new families had arrived to live in new "cottages" going up along the avenue in Dobbs Ferry: Lester, Stalb, Devoe, James English, Thomas Creighton, Alonzo Ackerman, J. C. Horn, Chris Doolan, James Dowling, M. D. Polhamus and A. C. Siess -- all these Dobbs Ferryans worked locally, some as builders, painters, plumbers. Ashford Avenue residents included florist Alexander McClelland, Joseph Stiner, Frederick Stone, Walston H. Brown, Harry and O. S. Bradley and Laura B. Field.

Suburban Development

The period of suburban development, after the World Wars, brought enormous changes to both villages, and eventually brought the New York State Thruway, which interrupted village continuity between Dobbs Ferry and Ardsley--continuity which had always been best expressed by Ashford Avenue, itself.

Pictorial documentation of the avenue between the 1920's and 50's will be an important part of the exhibit. Ashford Avenue has certainly not been the same since 1953 when the New York State Thruway opened. The earlier Saw Mill Parkway, which opened here in 1928-29, intersected Ashford Avenue, but it did not create the barrier and physical changes brought about by the Thruway. An elevated bridge and re-aligned streets replaced the easy, strollable continuity between Ardsley and Dobbs Ferry. Life in Ardsley's Addyman Square changed as Ashford Avenue was redrawn for suburban development.

Our thesis is that over time, although Ashford Avenue's dimensions may have changed, the street remained a vital connecting link between farming, municipal, immigrant and eventually suburban communities. The history of the street and its inhabitants, its buildings and its crossroads is an important part of the history of the development of our community.

--Tema Harnik

Historical Society Now Video Taping Dobbs Ferry World War II Veterans; Korea, Vietnam, Gulf Tapes Planned

During the next few months the Historical Society will complete the video documentation of Dobbs Ferry veterans of World War II. Future tapings of Korea and Vietnam veterans are also planned. The project is now in progress and the Historical Society welcomes community suggestions concerning veterans to be interviewed.

Four tapes have already been made.

Bill Maguire has been videotaped recounting his experiences aboard a PT boat in the South Pacific during World War II. Bill was in the same squadron as President John F. Kennedy. His brother was a member of Kennedy's crew on PT 109 that was sunk by a Japanese destroyer. Bill tells of the dramatic rescue.

Met with Kennedy

During the taping Bill reminisces about meetings and conversations with Kennedy both during the war and during Kennedy's campaign for the presidency. This tape is currently being edited.

Two other tapes report the World War II experiences of Larry DeRosa and Seymour Rosenwasser in the South Pacific. Rosenwasser purchased Reich's Jewelry Store after his return from the service and operated the business until his retirement last year. Larry DeRosa is the proprietor of the barber shop his father established in 1919.

Still another video tape was made, of Dobbs Ferry Detective Robert Cunningham, who served in the Army of Occupation in Japan.

Dobbs Veterans in Europe

Production of tapes documenting experiences of World War II veterans in Europe is now in the planning stage. Taping will begin in the next two months and showings of the finished tapes will be scheduled in the near future.

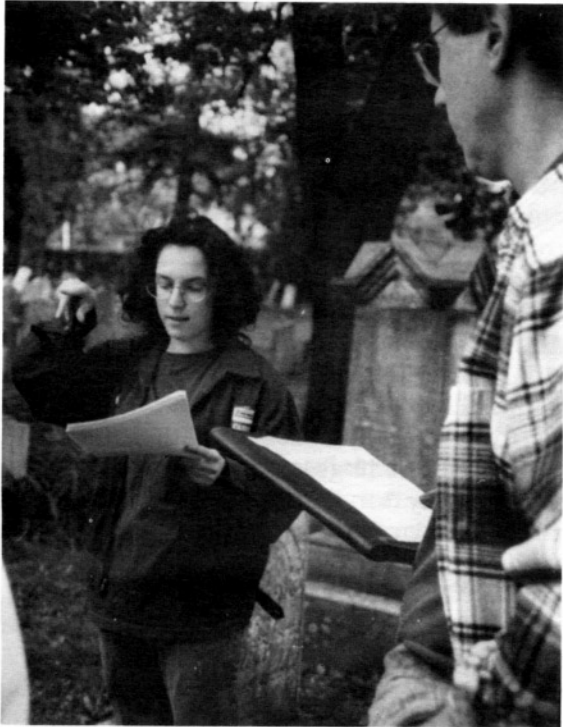
The last video production presented by the Historical Society was "Dobbs Ferry 1933" documenting life in the Village during that depression year. It included filmed footage of the era and the Dobbs Ferry National Recovery Act (NRA) parade. Future showings of this tape will be scheduled.

--Bill Blanck

ISSUE EDITOR
Bill Blanck

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Cemetery Preservation Report Ordered As Volunteers Take Emergency Action; Research Reveals Some Harsh Realities in the Lives of Early Residents



Caroline Kravath directs volunteer crew, including Trustee Brian Monahan (right) in documentation of cemetery.

Last summer the Village, with the help of the Historical Society, hired graveyard preservation expert Lynette Strangstad of Stone Faces, a gravestone preservation firm in Charleston, South Carolina, to survey the Little White Cemetery and report on its condition and potential remedies. The report will be in soon and will help us to formulate our master plan for the continued care and preservation of the old graveyard.

The cemetery was in use as a free burial ground through the 19th century. Residents from Dobbs Ferry, Hastings and Ardsley are buried there. Unfortunately, like many old cemeteries, it has fallen into disrepair over the years.

On the advice of Ms. Strangstad, the cemetery has been carefully documented, thanks to a volunteer crew including Patty Forshaw, Barbara Dannenbring, Eileen Fried, Evelyn Fitzgerald, Martha Schwartz, Brian Monahan, Mary Jane and Adrienne Ricci, and Rosemary Fleming. Each stone has been numbered, transcribed and measured, and the condition of each noted. Most of the stones have been photographed. The cemetery has also been "winterized" -- the fragments of broken and fallen gravestones have been raised above ground to protect them from the freezing and thawing that wreak havoc on delicate marble stones. Approximately two hundred fragments, many very heavy, were lifted from the ground and placed on wooden palettes. These fragments also

had to be documented and photographed. With the help of Bill and Candace Shuluk, Peter Lillard, Pauline and Robert Kravath, the paletting was completed before the arrival of the cold season.

Part of the preservation project is an effort to learn more about the cemetery and the lives of those buried there. For example, the casual observer in the graveyard can't help but notice the large number of children's graves. Of 214 stones standing in the cemetery, 53 stand in memory of children under ten years of age. Twenty-four commemorate infants younger than one year. High infant mortality was a fact of life then. The death register of the South Presbyterian Church (the church, now on Broadway, once stood next to the cemetery) records as the major causes of these infant and childhood deaths such scourges of the 1800's as cholera, diphtheria, "congestion of the lungs", whooping cough, "dropsy", tuberculosis, typhoid, and scarlet fever. Charles Horn, a six-day old infant, is noted as having died of "lockjaw". Six-year old Freddie Nockenworth drowned in Schmidt's Pond in 1878.

Died at 38 of consumption

According to the church records, older people tended to die of heart disease, tuberculosis, cancer, kidney disease, typhoid, "paralysis", and pneumonia. The gravestone of Mary Ann Bishop tells us that she died at the age of 38, of consumption or tuberculosis. This inscription is unique as the only known stone in the cemetery noting the cause of death.

There are other interesting stories behind the stones. The stones of the Schmidt children, Clara and Charlie, stand together on the east side of the cemetery. Their father invented the spinning piano stools which were produced in the piano stool factory here. Their tiny, intricately carved stones are among the finest in the cemetery, but the graves are empty. The bodies were removed long ago and placed in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.

Sacrilege in the Graveyard?

Mystery surrounds the stone of John and Elizabeth Kyte. She died in 1828, at the age of 65; he was 75 when he died fourteen years later. At the very bottom of their large marble stone it says "The graveyard where they were first interred being sacrilegiously used for other purposes, their remains . . .". The rest of the inscription has sunk below ground over the years, leaving only a tantalizing clue to surreptitious goings-on in old graveyards.

Another mystery is the blank stone of William Matthews. His name is carved in relief on his large stone. Beneath, the inscription leaves spaces under the words "Died" and "Aged", but the dates and age were never inscribed. He apparently had the stone made during his lifetime and never got around to

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Cemetery Preservation

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using it! His wife, Martha, however, was buried in the adjacent grave with their two-week old son William E. She was forty years old when she died, January 30, 1877. Her child died only days later, on February 8. "... in their death they are not divided," says their inscription. Childbirth was indeed a major hazard for women of the time.

Some gravestones and fragments had been lying face down in haphazard piles for years. Their inscriptions were seen again and noted for documentation purposes during the process of paletting this fall. The complete stone of Charles O'Brien, a Civil War veteran, was found under other stone fragments, leaning against a tree. Beneath his name, the inscription has no dates, but says simply, "67th Regt."



The gravestone of James Bremner, the Aqueduct Overseer, was also discovered. A large, particularly heavy stone, it had broken in two. The base was still standing, but the fragment containing the inscription lay face down and couldn't be read until it was pried from the ground. Bremner lived in the Overseer's House on the Aqueduct at Chestnut Street, and died in the village in 1872 at the age of 73.

While paletting the fragments, it was often possible to "reunite" fragments from the same stone and read the complete inscription. Two large fragments of the stone of a young man named Johannes B-, his last name mostly illegible, were found. The inscription is in German.

Two other fragments were found, which read like this:

JOH-----N
DOB-----BS
Died July 2--- -----5, 1845
Aged 71----- -----9 Ms

This is the third Dobbs stone, with Deborah and Amos Dobbs, to be found in the cemetery. With modern preservation techniques, it is possible for these stones to be repaired and appear as though they had never been broken.

The cemetery is full of local history. Anybody with information on the cemetery or an interest in the project should contact the Historical Society.

-- Caroline Kravath
Photos -- Evelyn Fitzgerald

State Denies Overseer's House Funding; Decision on Reapplication Due in April

For over two years the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society has sought to become the operator of the Aqueduct Overseer's House and in the process find a much needed new home. To bring this about, the State Parks Department's Taconic Region applied for funding of \$524,000 with the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society named as the future operator of the building and its programs.

The proposal was denied last August by the Commissioner of the State Parks Department.

The State Parks Department's Taconic Region re-submitted a request for the lesser amount of \$350,000 in October 1990. We will get the word, yes or no, from State Authorities next month.

Funding for projects such as restoration of historically significant buildings is obtained under the Environmental Quality Bond Act passed by the State Legislature in 1986. Unfortunately, funds are limited and other projects in other areas are also seeking money.

In the interim, Dobbs Ferry Historical Director Tema Harnik has been researching the Overseer's House, as well as the construction of the Aqueduct through Westchester lands, under a grant from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation of New York City and the Natural Heritage Trust of New York State.

A video introduction to the history of the Aqueduct and the Overseer's House is being produced by consultant Judy Brewton, Rusty Russell and Evelyn Fitzgerald.

Welcome New Members

A special welcome is extended to the following new members who have joined the Society during the 1990-91 membership year:

From Dobbs Ferry: Eileen and Salvatore J. Basso, Gail L. Benson, William and Frederica Capshaw, Sarah Carnahan, Philip & Shirley Elbert, John & Ginger Griffin, Celeste Meneses, Cindy & Leslie Spodek, Rick & Doranne Telberg, Laurie Thomashow, Constance & Carlos S. Vegega, Teresa & Jimmy Walsh, and William & Evelyn-Joan Warnock.

From nearby towns: Mary Geraghy, now of Hastings; Barbara Block, Ardsley; Constance C. Porter, Ardsley-on-Hudson; Stanley W. Rabadan, the Bronx; and Eleanor Lohn, Yorktown Heights.

From out-of-state: Mayzette Edholm Stover, State College, PA; Dr. Christopher C. Barton, Boulder, CO; and Mike Dobbs of Vancouver, WA (the latest in our string of "Dobbs" contacts across the country).

We welcome as a new professional membership The Children's Village Historical Society at Children's Village, Dobbs Ferry, with Frank Hartsoe as Coordinator.

--Virginia Barton

NYU Archeologist Suggests Preservation Techniques for Wickers Creek Site

Eugene Boesch, an archeologist specializing in Eastern North American sites and in the cultural remains of the Middle Woodlands period in the Midwest, was guest speaker at a program sponsored jointly by the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society and the Friends of Wickers' Creek Archeological Site on February 15 at Mercy College. He described the nature of archeological preservation in the coming decade and his comments included observations about the Wickers' Creek site.

Boesch has directed numerous excavations throughout New York and New Jersey. As a member of the Westchester County Archeological Review Board, he is also familiar with historical and prehistoric sites located on county property.

Hoped to Study Wickers Creek Site

While Boesch had not excavated the Wickers Creek site, he said he was familiar with the final report prepared by Greenhouse Associates, the archeological consultants who did the Phase II study for the developer, Mount Mercy Associates of Castleton, N.Y. Boesch and the late Dr. Bert Salwen had discussed the conclusions of this study and had hoped to work with a New York University field study team on the remaining portion of the site; this included the shell midden or shell deposits left by the native Americans preparing shell fish for later use. Permission for further exploration was not granted by the developer and consequently additional studies have not been made. Presently all construction activities have ceased at the development.

Site in Peril

Boesch feels that the Wickers Creek site is indeed in peril on several counts. First of all, there is evidence that pothunters now ravaging the site are stripping the area of artifacts. This adds to the difficulty of piecing together any concrete description of what actually occurred on this land during prehistoric times. Secondly, erosion from partially constructed roads and hillsides as well as previously excavated areas that had not been back-filled, is contributing greatly to the destruction of the site.

How Site Might be Protected

"Immediate measures should be taken to ensure the physical protection of the Wickers Creek site," suggested Boesch. These would include: shoring up the eroding walls and putting in a breakfront to contain further erosion from run-off, covering the critical archeological site with sterile fill at a depth of one and one-half to two feet. Capping the site in this way would protect the exposed areas and work as a deterrent to pothunters. The filled area could be planted with "non-friendly" vegetation such as thorny plants, etc. In addition, one of the best remedies against destruction of this nature would be to consecrate the area as a riverview park. "This would make

it very difficult for anyone to get into the site and loot the artifacts without being noticed," Boesch observed.

The artifacts that had been uncovered during the Greenhouse excavation of the Wickers Creek Site are presently in the hands of the developer. At a December 1987 Dobbs Ferry Board of Trustees Meeting, it was stipulated, and the property owner agreed, to turn over the artifacts to the Village as a condition for issuing the building permit.

Put Something Back

"Developers are taking something from a town, from a society. They are changing something, taking away that resource forever. It is appropriate that they should be required to put something back . . . Something has to remain that will let the people know that people existed on this land a thousand years ago and that their relationship to the land was very different from ours today," he observed.

In describing the nature of archeological preservation in the coming decade, Boesch continued, "Archeological sites are definitely a finite resource. Once the cultural remains have been taken away or disturbed beyond a point where excavation will be of any use, nothing can replace these sources of pre-history."

Few Sites Will be Left

At the current rate of site destruction through public and private land development, there will be few existing sites in the northeast and along the Hudson River by the end of this century, he said. And sadly, he observed, the majority of the people are not aware of the prehistoric aspect of American history.

In the northeast, he said, the Native American population had been quite thoroughly and rapidly eliminated after first contact with the Europeans.

The restoration of Ellis Island is indicative of where emphasis is placed in current historic restoration. When working on several of the Ellis Island buildings, Boesch recalled, "We found some wonderful stuff in the basement. There were shell midden remains from the late archaic period and even artifacts that dated from the contact period," However, the permanent exhibit now open to the public reveals nothing of the prehistory of Ellis Island, even though all evidence shows intense and long-lasting activity.

--Kathleen Modrowski



TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

... if you haven't already

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All other memberships expired. Please take a moment to renew NOW.

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For two recent gifts, the Historical Society expresses its great gratitude:

* to long-time Society members Reuben and Sheila Fisher for a gift of \$2,000 from the Louis R. & Nettie Fisher Foundation, named for Ruby's late parents.

* to Molly Hazen for a gift of \$1,000 in memory of her father, Richard Hazen, who had been a Historical Society trustee. Richard died on February 12, 1990.



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