



The FERRYMAN

Become a member of
The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society.
Join the exciting exploration of local history.
A membership form is on the back page.

VOLUME XII, No. 3

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

SEPTEMBER 1993

NEW YORK LAGS IN GIVING WOMEN THE VOTE; WAR AIDS SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT; 1917 DOBBS VOTERS FAVOR SUFFRAGE BY 56 VOTES

On October 26, 1917, eleven days before an Election Day on which the men of New York State were to decide whether New York women should be allowed to vote, the following unsigned advertisement appeared in the *Dobbs Ferry Register*:

"Mr. Voter! Double the number of voters and you increase the expenses of the Government. Increase the expenses of the Government and you increase Taxation. Increase TAXATION and you raise the COST OF LIVING. Isn't TAXATION High Enough Now? Do you want to still further increase the COST OF LIVING? IF YOU DO NOT -- VOTE NO ON WOMAN SUFFRAGE!"

In other words, keep women silent and save money. The ad expressed a prevailing male attitude that women should not have a voice in how the country and state were to be governed and that politics was a male preserve.

Some women had never taken this attitude submissively. The first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 and the women's mission of consciousness raising never let up after that historic convention. Still, the state officially dragged its heels for nearly the next 70 years on the issue of the "woman vote."

Dobbs Votes for Suffrage

Finally, on November 6, 1917, the Village of Dobbs Ferry (males only) voted, "by a nice majority," according to the *Dobbs Ferry Register*, to amend the State Constitution to give women the right to vote. And a majority of the males in the rest of the state also voted for women's suffrage.

But it was a victory of New York women that was too long in coming. In the seven decades between 1848 and 1917, men first ridiculed, then ignored, then resisted the slowly growing drive of women for the right to vote.

New York was clearly behind the times, as several other states -- beginning with Wyoming in 1869 (as a territory) and 1889 (when Wyoming became a state) -- approved of women's suffrage.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, New York women developed ever more noticeable momentum in their struggle for the vote. A statewide suffrage association was established and local and regional chapters popped up in different parts of the state.

In November, 1909, the Hudson River Equal Franchise Society was founded in the home of Mrs. Walston H. Brown, of Dobbs Ferry. (See the June, 1993 issue of *The Ferryman* for details.)

By the start of World War I in 1914, 10 states had given women the right to vote. New York still resisted. But the tide was changing. In 1915, a proposed State Constitutional Amendment to give women the vote was defeated at the polls. Women noted, however, that had only one out of nine "no" votes shifted to "yes," the Amendment would have passed.

By 1917, the suffrage movement had built up to a fever pitch. In March, the Legislature again passed the Suffrage Amendment and placed it on the ballot for a statewide vote in November. Senator George H. Whitney of Saratoga County, the Amendment's sponsor, predicted that men in the state would approve it in November.

State Legislature Switches

Mrs. Helen Leavitt, the suffrage movement's lobbyist in Albany, noted the dramatic shift of sentiment on the issue since 1916, according to the March 30 issue of the *Register*. Not only had the new platforms of both the Republican and Democratic parties called for women's suffrage, but the Majority Leaders of both houses, as well as 14 Assemblymen and five State Senators, had switched from "no" in 1916 to "yes" in 1917. Furthermore, Mrs. Leavitt supplied figures to show that freshmen legislators, newly elected in November, 1916, were overwhelmingly in favor of women's suffrage.

The following week, the United States declared war on Germany. Women barely broke stride in their determined march toward winning the vote for themselves. They backed the war fully, yet never muted their clamor for the vote and the press was generally disposed to print virtually everything they said and did.

Locally, for instance, the June 8, 1917 issue of the *Dobbs Ferry Register* contained nine stories and two photos about the women's movement.

It was only two months after the United States entered World War I. The women who had formed the New York State Woman Suffrage Party enthusiastically joined the war effort. By combining their struggle for the right to vote with activist support for America's fighting men, women generated enough public attention to convince a majority of voting male New Yorkers to give suffrage rights to New York women after November 6, 1917.

One of the nine suffrage articles in the June 8 issue was headlined "Woman's Burden A Double One. Leader Shows Need Of War Service And

-- continued on page 2

1917 DOBBS VOTERS FAVOR SUFFRAGE BY 56 VOTES

-- continued from page 1

Suffrage." It ran excerpts of an address by Mrs. Norman DeR. Whitehouse, "chairman" of the New York State Woman's Suffrage Party, at a suffrage convention in Rochester.

Another, "Women In Liberty Loan," told of how the Suffrage Party mailed out "one-half million advertising cards and 50,000 application blanks" for Liberty bonds.

A third article, headlined "Suffrage Party to Aid Census," reported that women were "given entire responsibility for the taking of the state military census" in Westchester, Nassau and some Assembly districts in New York City.

Other items were: "Frank A. Vanderlip Speaks For Suffrage," "[Six] States For Federal Amendment," "Ministers For Suffrage," "Business Woman For Suffrage," "Six Million Women To Vote [in England]." The ninth article, "Smallest Republic Gives Women The Vote," reported that Tavolara, "the world's smallest nation," had granted suffrage rights to women before declaring war on Germany and Austria.

"The new adversary of the Teutonic powers is a small island situated northeast of Sardinia," the article says. "It is about five miles long by three wide and rises abruptly out of the sea to an altitude of half a mile. Tavolara was known to the Romans as Bucina and was famed for its pearl fisheries."

One of the photos was of the "1917 Campaign Poster Adopted By The Suffrage Party." The other was a head and shoulders side shot of Mrs. Flora McDonald Denison, honorary president of the Canada Woman Suffrage Association, who was campaigning for suffrage in New York State.

Nearly every issue of the Dobbs Ferry Register during the last half of 1917 carried several articles and items on the women's suffrage movement. On October 26, the paper also ran this ad: "Voters of Dobbs Ferry! A Majority of the Women of your Village want the Vote. Come to Suffrage Headquarters and see the Names. Women are sharing the burdens of the war with you. They ask you to vote for Woman Suffrage on Nov. 6th."

"The rest is history." The Village gave the Amendment "a nice majority." So did the state. A proposed Suffrage Amendment to the United States Constitution was defeated by Congress in October, 1918, but passed by Congress in June 1919 and ratified by enough states in August, 1920.

The results of Election Day in Dobbs Ferry on November 6, 1917 are wonderfully described in the November 9, 1917 issue of the Dobbs Ferry Register:

"At last it has come -- the men of New York state have seen the light and put an end to the position of women as political nonentities. There are better days ahead for all of us -- men and women. Westchester county responded nobly to the call and gave women suffrage a majority of nearly 5,000, while in the election two years ago the vote was 3,000 against. Even little Dobbs rose to the occasion and gave the women a majority of 56.

The Ninth district, sad to say, fell behind by 10, giving 102 against and 92 for, but the Tenth district came to the rescue with a majority of 20,

106 for and 86 against, and the Eleventh district did even better, with a majority of 46, 115 for and 69 against.

There were women watchers at all the voting places, in accordance with the law, arriving promptly at six in the morning and staying till five, then coming back to see the counting. They had a very quiet day and managed to do a lot of knitting between votes, giving a placid and domestic air to what the (former) antis used to call "those horrid polling places." Women from the suffrage headquarters brought coffee, cake and sandwiches to all the workers, men and women, and the relations on all sides were friendly and helpful.

So the long struggle of forty-eight years is over. The women are now able to take their share of civic duties and responsibilities and add their experience and point of view to the men's in making the laws all must live under, and choosing the officials who are to enforce them."

-- by Henry Walter

Mead House Progress

Society President Bill Blanck reported the following progress on the Mead House:

The front steps have been rebuilt. The pitch of the steps is now less steep. Wooden banisters have been built on both sides of the steps and a curved metal railing has been installed down the center of the steps.

The work was done under the supervision of First Vice President Fred Staats, with the *pro bono* advice of Stephen Tilly, architect.

Estimates have been received to repair existing electrical lines where repairs are needed and to install a separate electrical system on the second floor to service the proposed archive rooms and Society office, with their need for temperature and humidity controls.

This work would implement one of the many recommendations of Sue Smith, restoration and construction consultant. Ms. Smith wrote a comprehensive report for the Society on how it can use the space in the Mead House to carry out its mission of preserving Dobbs Ferry history and making it accessible to its members and the public. (See the April, 1993 issue of *The Ferryman* for details.)

State Gets Collections Policy

A formal Collections Management Policy statement, required by the State of New York, has been sent to the State Archives and Records Administration, meeting a September 15 deadline.

Up to now, the Society has operated under an informal Collections Policy articulated in general terms as Article II of its By-Laws. The State, which charters the Society as a nonprofit cultural organization, now requires a more detailed statement, specifying rules, guidelines and procedures for acquiring, caring for and preserving, de-accessioning and disposing of items in the Society's collections and for providing public access to the collections.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S ANNUAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 29th

Mead House progress reports will share the spotlight with Trustee elections at the annual meeting of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society on Wednesday, September 29.

The meeting will begin in Village Hall at 7:30 p.m., after which refreshments will be served at the Mead House, a short distance away at 12 Elm Street.

Members will also vote on a proposed slate of Trustee candidates and on proposed By-Law changes to eliminate minor inconsistencies among current By-Law articles.

The nominating Committee has proposed a slate

of six Trustee candidates for three-year terms expiring in 1996, one candidate for a two-year term expiring in 1995 (to fill a vacancy on the Board of Trustees) and three non-Trustee candidates for membership on the 1994 Nominating Committee.

Candidates for the three-year terms are: Jean Fritz, Virginia Gagliardi, Grace Reagan, Julia Rokicki, Tahnee Neill and Mary Walter. The candidate for the two-year term is Mary Jane Chase. The three non-Trustee candidates for the Nominating Committee are Fay Delmerico, Peg Quinn and Cecil Jack.

SOCIETY'S SPRING GALA: A SUCCESSFUL SOIREE

The balmy spring evening, splashed with the brilliant hues of the season's flowering trees and shrubs, was a happy omen of success for the Society's Spring Gala on Sunday, May 2, at South Presbyterian Church's Parish Hall. Inside, the scene, equally colorful, was set up for an evening of good food, nostalgia and camaraderie.

Colorful tablecloths and bud vases filled with flowers graced the dining tables. The buffet was laden with casseroles of baked chicken, ziti and cheese, sausage and peppers and green salad. Soft drinks flowed freely at a help-yourself counter.

The enchanting desserts challenged the calorie-conscious to defy temptation! The assorted cookies, tortes, loaf and layer cakes, all pretty and luscious, were baked and donated by the Society's culinary-oriented members. The more than 100 guests gaped in awe at the fabulous assortment as they swung back and forth among the many choices. Many commented, "Everything looks so good!"

More than \$1,200 was netted at the event to further the work of the Society.

A video tape of a filmed record made 20 years ago of the Village's Centennial celebration was shown, evoking nostalgia among long-time Villagers.

Gala guests recognized themselves, friends and relatives among both the marchers in the Centennial Parade and the viewers who lined the streets. In the

weeks following the parade, the Conservatory Musicians' Wind Symphony joined the celebration by periodically entertaining at the Woman's Club, the Sons of Italy and the railroad station. Here, too, Gala guests spotted themselves and people they knew dancing to and enjoying the musical entertainment.

Hank Walter, Publicity and Publications Chair, emceed the raffle drawings. Prizes were donated by: Dan's Sport Center; Cagney Unisex, House of Charm and Pin and Curl beauty salons; John Richards, Sam's and Chart House restaurants; Dobbs Ferry Pharmacy; Rochambeau Liquor Store; Hilltop Thrift Shop; Dobbs Ferry Woman's Club; Hudson River Museum; Florence Parker; Bill and Gloria Blanck; and the Historical Society.

Mr. Blanck expressed the Society's warmest thanks to the merchants who donated the raffle prizes and to the Trustees and members of the Society who worked so hard together to make the party a huge success.

The Sisters' Florists donated the flowers which Trustee Barbara Pearce arranged. Gloria Blanck, Chris Jones and Vikki Jones worked in the kitchen. The desserts were created by Charlotte Frankenthaler, Judy Holzer, Vikki Jones, Linda Moot, Tahnee Neill, Mae Pepper, Cathleen Polgreen, Barbara Staats and Mary Walter.

-- by Sylvia Brownshield

ITALIAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE CELEBRATED AT POETRY READING

A poetry reading by Michael Palma in celebration of Italian-American heritage was presented by the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society on Saturday afternoon, May 15.

Palma, an award-winning poet and translator of Italian poetry is also a Professor of English at Iona College.

After the poetry reading in Village Hall, the assemblage walked over a short distance to the Mead House, where there was a photo exhibit relating to the first Italian residents of Dobbs Ferry, and an antique wedding gown was displayed. Guests enjoyed delicious Italian confections after viewing the exhibit.

Authentic and delightful Italian music was provided by Joseph and Steve Gelsi and Frank Lopinto.

Tina Marziale sang beautifully -- and, yes, there was dancing on the porch.

The event was organized by Linda Moot, aided by Shirley Elbert.

Assisting volunteers included Mary Bova, Fay Delmerico, Angie Fastiggi, Kitty Firman, Evelyn Fitzgerald, Helen Gamera, Joe Gelsi, Teresa Gelsi, Frances Grande, Mary Grande, Andrew Levin, Frank Lopinto, Elvira Marconi, Tina Marziale, Josephine Pace, Mildred Persinger, Sadie Pollick, Joseph Trepani, Mimi Trepani, Marie Vano, and Teresa Walsh.

Dobbs Ferry businesses contributing to the program included The Creative End, The Elegant Poster, Flowers by Carole and Grand Union.

COMING EVENT:

QUILTING EXHIBIT AND DEMONSTRATION BY CLAUDIA WEINER ON THE PORCH OF THE MEAD HOUSE, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3rd, FROM 1:30 TO 5:00 P.M.

Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

Name _____
 Address _____
 Town _____ Zip _____
 Phone (day) _____ (eve.) _____

- MEMBERSHIP** New Renew
- Patron..... \$100.00
 - Friend..... \$ 50.00
 - Contributing..... \$ 25.00
 - Family..... \$ 15.00
 - Individual Adult..... \$ 10.00
 - Student/Senior (over 60)..... \$ 3.00

Please 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 \$ _____
 - Mead House contribution \$ _____
 - Newspaper Microfilming Project contribution \$ _____
 - TOTAL enclosed (TAX DEDUCTIBLE) \$ _____
- My employer's matching contributions form is enclosed.



A 56-VOTE PLURALITY FOR WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE WAS GOOD NEWS IN 1917. THE DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY HAS AN ONGOING PROGRAM OF RESEARCH ON IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF LOCAL HISTORY.

YOU CAN KEEP THE GOOD NEWS COMING BY JOINING THE SOCIETY. IF YOU HAVEN'T AS YET BECOME A MEMBER, WON'T YOU JOIN US NOW?

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

Non-Profit Org.
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Dobbs Ferry, NY
 Permit No. 15

Resident
 Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522