



The FERRYMAN

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

MARCH 1994

SOCIETY AUTHORIZES FUNDS FOR ARCHIVAL STORAGE AND OFFICE SPACE IN ITS NEW HOME AT THE MEAD HOUSE

At its meeting of March 6 (postponed twice because of heavy snows), the Board of Trustees authorized spending up to \$11,000 for creating archival storage and office space on the second floor of the Mead House.

The renovation, involving carpentry, air-conditioning and humidifying installation, plumbing and electrical work, will implement most of the recommendations of the Sue Smith Report, as they pertain to the four bedrooms on the second floor.

Estimates Received

Fred Staats, House Committee Chair, told the Board that he had received two estimates for the air-conditioning and humidifying work and that he would get estimates for the other elements of the job. The Board authorized Mr. Staats to select the contractors and begin the work in consultation with Stephen Tilly, Dobbs Ferry architect, and Sue Smith, restoration and construction consultant.

The Sue Smith Report is a comprehensive study of how the Society can best use the space in the 14-room residence at 12 Elm Street left to the Society by the late Clara Mead. Miss Mead, a member of the Historical Society who died in September, 1991, intended her house to become the new home of the Society's collections.

Costs Manageable

The Smith study contains detailed recommendations to help the Society carry out its mission of preserving Dobbs Ferry history and making it accessible to its members and the public. Mrs. Smith concluded that the Society can modify the Mead House "for a reasonable, one-time cost" and that operating expenses of the House as a history center "can be kept within manageable bounds."

Her report recommends that the front three bedrooms "be closed off . . . to be a self-contained space with its own climate control sys-

tem separate from the rest of the house." She views the bedrooms "as an archival cluster, a building within the main building. This area should be reconfigured with one entry, an internal traffic pattern and a climate controlled environment." She recommended "a constant temperature of 68 degrees and relative humidity of 40% to 45%; this is adequate for both people and paper."

Archives to be Moved

When the work is done, the collections of correspondence, microfilm of the *Dobbs Ferry Register*, other records, books, photos, oral histories and videos will be moved to the new archival storage rooms from the cellar of the library and Village Hall where they are now housed.

Bill Blanck, Society President, said that a corporate donation of a copier was being sought, as well as funds for a reader-printer for the public to use in researching the weekly *Register*. If members have leads for the Society to acquire these items of equipment, they are invited to pass them along.

Smith Will Advise

Mrs. Smith, who, with Mr. Tilly, will be advising the Society during construction, is a graduate of Vassar College and the New York School of Interior Design. She was construction coordinator and supervisor for the renovation of the old Dobbs Ferry Playhouse on Main Street into the architectural offices of Mr. Tilly. Among her projects as an independent general contractor was conversion of "The Cottage" on Washington Avenue in Hastings-on-Hudson into office, archival and exhibit space for the Hastings Historical Society, of which she is a Board member and Past President.

For more details on her report, please refer to the April, 1993, issue of *The Ferryman*.

-- Hank Walter

The Story of Dobbs Ferry -- Part Two

THE TWO DOBBS FERRYS: TO 1765

-- by Jean Fritz

By the time the Dobbs family and their neighbors -- the Hyatts, the Hughsons and the Storms -- had settled in, most of the native peoples were gone. The land looked occupied. Orchards had been planted, farms were flourishing, children were growing. In the spring the families welcomed the fresh run of shad; in June they picked wild strawberries which were so abundant on the hillsides that they could not only feast to their hearts' content, they could also sell the extras. So they filled pint baskets -- hundreds and hundreds of them -- loaded them onto boats, and sent them to New York to be sold for five cents a basket.

In the winter (but only in the winter), they gathered oysters, the delicacy which eighteenth century Americans prized above all else. Eastchester residents were warned against taking oysters from their creek between May 1 and October 1, "excepting for a sick person or a longing woman."

The river was the life line for settlements along its banks. It was the source of news from the outside world, the link to stores, markets and services in New York City, and the connecting bond between the two Dobbs Ferrys, making them almost a single community with shared interests, particularly for the extended Dobbs Family with members on both sides.

Surveyors Arrive

Certainly in 1719 people on both sides of the river must have taken a lively interest in the arrival of New York and New Jersey surveyors at "Chear Hall" [the large house built in Dobbs Ferry West by William Merritt, former Mayor of New York City, uncle of John Dobbs, Sr., and granduncle of William Dobbs, the ferryman after whom this newsletter and the present Village of Dobbs Ferry (East) are named.]

Again the surveyors were trying to settle their long-standing argument about the boundary between the two colonies. Again they gave up. Their quadrant wasn't large enough, they said. (Not until 1773 was the boundary line, as it came down to the river, firmly established just south of "Chear Hall.")

The most spectacular visitor to "Chear Hall" in the early days, however, was the Crown's governor of New York, Lord Cornbury. In 1702, he was coming down the river from Albany when he heard, perhaps from a passing sloop, that there was an epidemic of yellow fever in New York. And there he was in his official barge with eight oarsmen and a coxswain. What to do? Luckily (for him) he remembered that William Merritt, the ex-Mayor, lived on the west bank of the river. He would just stop off and visit for three weeks or so, at least until it was safe to go on.

For William Merritt, this was a sorry day. Lord Cornbury was not a welcome guest. Despised throughout the colony, the governor was known for being dishonest, arrogant, coarse, vain and a show-off who liked to dress in women's clothes to prove how much he looked like his cousin, Queen Anne. Surely some of the people from the east bank found excuses to cross over and catch a glimpse of this outrageous man who was so universally hated.

Houseguest Lord Cornbury



Collection, New York Historical Society

William Merritt did not stay on the west bank long enough to entertain many more celebrities. A restless man, he seems to have built "Chear Hall" as an investment. In any case, in 1705 he sold his patent to Captain John Corbett, a merchant of New York City, for 1,800 pounds. Having bought it seven years earlier for 353 pounds and 17 shillings, he made a substantial profit, but he had also improved his holdings in the meantime. In addition to the 3,410 acres, the deed included ownership of three Negro slaves ("Stephen," "Dirck" and "Toby"), three yoke of oxen, eleven cows, seven yearlings, seventeen sheep, eleven lambs, five horses and one set of "Smiths Tooless." The next year, William Merritt, now in his mid-sixties, returned to sea. Two years later, he died.

The family on the east side of the river also lost members. Maria Dobbs, John Sr.'s sister (who may have come from England with the original group) died in 1716. She had become Maria Hughson, wife of Thomas, who right from the first raises questions.

In one source, Thomas Hughson is listed as "Thomas Hughson, Earl of Warwick;" in another, he is "Earl of Warwick, alias Thomas Hughson." Since the family name of the famous Warwicks in England is Neville, Thomas seems to have no legitimate claim to his title. Obviously, he had delusions of grandeur

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The Two Dobbs Ferrys

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which, to judge by future events, rubbed off on his sons.

In 1741, his son, John, and John's wife, Sarah, were running an alehouse in New York City when he (Thomas), John and three of his other sons became involved in what was known as the "Great Negro Plot" to subvert the established government. During three weeks in March, about 50 conspirators (both slaves and white) set fires around the city, destroying the governor's house, many government buildings and the home of the chief justice's brother-in-law.

The plot was apparently hatched in the alehouse of John Hughson who bragged that, when the destruction was complete, he would become King of New York. Instead, thirteen of the slaves were burned at the stake and four of the guilty white people, including John and Sarah Hughson, were hanged. As for Thomas Hughson, he and his other three sons were ordered to leave the province.

But to return to Thomas' quieter days in Dobbs Ferry, he lived with his wife, Maria Dobbs, and his growing family on 279 acres in the neighborhood of the current intersection of Broadway and Ashford Avenue. Perhaps it was lucky that Maria died in 1716 before her children got into trouble. Maria Dobbs Hughson had eight children in all and about the time that the last was born, her brother, John Dobbs, Sr., (the first John to settle in the area) and his second wife, Abigail, gave birth to a daughter. Surely it was for his sister that John named this daughter Maria, or "Mollie." And Mollie was the one who left stories in her wake.

100 Pigeons with 1 Shot

Mollie was the kind of person whom people liked to brag about. She could run the ferry and shoot a gun as well as any man in her family. Once she reportedly brought down 100 passenger pigeons with a single shot. If the number has grown over the years, the story is still testimony to her marksmanship and to the fact that she was a natural candidate for tall tales. One must remember, however, that in those days passenger pigeons flew in flocks of several million, so it is not as outlandish a story as it might seem. At the very least, Mollie must have established a local record.

As for the ferry, Mollie would have learned early to take into account the wind and tides, to hoist the sails and row if she had to. Since she would eventually take over the ferry, one must suppose that she occasionally spelled her brother, William, on the run across the river. Possibly it was on the ferry that she became acquainted (or better acquainted) with the young man from Eastchester who had come to the area to seek his fortune.

Robert Sneden was a carpenter who left his Eastchester home soon after his father died around 1727. Perhaps he had connections of some sort in the Dobbs Ferry area. In any case, that is where he wound up, met Mollie and married her. If they did not settle immediately on the west wide of the river, they were there before 1745 when their name appears on an early map.

Initially, Robert may have leased part of the old William Merritt property, but in 1752 he definitely bought the house ("Chear Hall") and 120 acres at the bottom of the hill. Meanwhile, Mollie was busy pro-

ducing children -- nine in all, seven boys and two girls. Unfortunately, Robert did not live to see all his children grow up. He died prior to 1756, leaving no will, so his property went to his oldest son, Abraham.

Life was also bringing changes in Dobbs Ferry East. John Dobbs, Sr., died in 1759 in the large house he had built on the corner of what is now Walnut Street and Broadway. William inherited the house, turned it into a tavern and gave the ferry to Mollie. And Mollie ran it, not entirely alone. Her oldest son, Abraham, could not help her, since he married and moved to New York City the same year, but 18- or 20-year-old Dennis, the second son, surely did. Dennis was his mother's right-hand man, living with her his entire life, never marrying.

And then what?

Tracking down history is like groping through patches of fog and for the following years, the patches are thick. The next news of Mollie comes in 1765, when a mystery man by the name of George Calhoun suddenly made his appearance.

(To be continued)

SOCIETY OPPOSES INDECK GAS LINE FOR BOTH AQUEDUCT AND BROADWAY

The Board of Trustees of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society voted unanimously at its meeting of January 31, 1994 to oppose the Indeck Energy Services natural gas line project originally planned for the Aqueduct.

Bill Blanck, President, said the Society was troubled by the risk of explosions and fires that the high-pressure gas line posed to the Society's archives and collections and to various historic places.

Mr. Blanck expressed the Trustees' concerns at an environmental impact hearing held February 3 by the State Department of Environmental Conservation at the Museum Junior High School, Yonkers. At the hearing it was announced that the gas line project would not be built under the Aqueduct Trail, but that the Illinois-based Indeck gas line company now plans to build the project in Broadway.

Mr. Blanck also relayed the Society's concerns for the safety of its archives to Governor Mario Cuomo. Copies of his letter to the Governor, dated February 1, were sent to Joan Davidson, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation at her Albany office; John H. Kennedy, of the same department, at his Staatsburg, N.Y. office; State Senator Nicholas A. Spano; Assemblyman Richard Brodsky; Save the Aqueduct Committee; Donald Marra, Mayor of Dobbs Ferry; William Lee Kinnally, Jr., Mayor of Hastings-on-Hudson; the Dobbs Ferry Village Board of Trustees; and Suzanne K. Smith, Trustee of the Village of Hastings-on-Hudson.

In his letter to the Governor, sent before the February 3 announcement that the pipeline route would be changed from the Aqueduct to Broadway, Mr. Blanck stated that the Society's objections still applied "if the pipeline route were moved from the Aqueduct a few hundred feet east to Broadway or less than 100 feet west to Main Street."

COMMUNITY HOSPITAL: THE PAST 40 YEARS, THE FUTURE



Even while wreckers demolish the old hospital building, an ambulance transports a patient to the emergency room of the new hospital, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The historical retrospective currently on display in the Community Hospital at Dobbs Ferry provides the visitor with a sense of the hospital's rich past. Artifacts and news articles trace the origins of the hospital and its stages of development; they highlight important events in the hospital's history and describe periods of both growth and threats of extinction throughout the years. The display refers to several interesting developments since the Korean War.

In 1952, for example, the hospital grew, as a new wing with 18 more beds was added. The construction at that time increased the availability of both general in-patient and maternity beds, and made improvements to several laboratories, the emergency room, the X-ray department and the waiting room. It was also during 1952 that Dr. J. Beattie was commended by the Village he faithfully served as he celebrated his golden jubilee in the medical field.

In 1963, the hospital opened a new kitchen. From that time the dietary department has provided increasingly healthful and appetizing meals to its patients. Today a patient is given a daily menu with ample selections for all meals. The patient, with doctor's approval, may also have wine with the main meal.

In 1964, a benefit raised funds that enabled the hospital to work with BOCES, the Board of Cooperative Education Services, to train nurses' aides. In 1968, the maternity department closed and its beds were converted to general medical and surgical care. At that time there was also a noticeable increase in the number of patients.

In 1972, the Hospital Board petitioned the State for a \$2 million loan to finance the construction of a brand new 50-bed patient area. The hospital was on the verge of closing, despite a significant need in the area for an acute care facility to serve Dobbs Ferry,

Hastings, Ardsley, Irvington and other communities of Greenburgh.

A merger with St. Agnes Hospital in White Plains was discussed and declined. The hospital had had a long history of successfully struggling to maintain its existence during adverse times as both a local landmark and as the basic health care facility in the area.

There was also talk at that time of a State recommended plan to convert the hospital into an ambulatory center. That plan, too, was not viewed as viable for the community. Once again, the residents of the area were a key factor in keeping the hospital open by continuing their history of generous financial support.

Expectations were raised in 1978 when Governor Hugh Carey made a campaign pledge in a visit to the Hospital to support construction of a new Dobbs Ferry facility. Still, it took until 1984 to finalize financing for the project, and begin construction on the present site of the hospital. The new hospital was dedicated and opened to the public in 1987. Dobbs Ferry Hospital then became the Community Hospital at Dobbs Ferry, a name that more suitably described its mission since its beginning in 1893 -- providing medical care for ill people in all the surrounding communities as a hospital that happened to be located at Dobbs Ferry.

The new hospital was built in such a way as to enable the construction at a later time of two additional floors, if the need should arise, and with an eye to expansion of ambulatory surgery services, if the future demanded such a facility. These provisions were designed to make hospital practices as cost effective as possible, since skyrocketing medical costs, government intervention and restrictions by insurance companies were seen as inevitable. Today, many procedures that even just 10 years ago re-

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COMMUNITY HOSPITAL - continued from page 4

quired an overnight stay in the hospital are being performed on an out-patient basis.

In 1990 and 1991, the hospital began plans to form an alliance with a larger health care facility in order to support its present level of excellent care and ensure its continued existence in the future.

It was hardly the first time that a merger or alliance with another institution was considered. As far back as 1938, a year in which costs exceeded income, the first study in the hospital's modern history was made to determine the feasibility of a merger. In 1946 and 1948, proposals to form medical centers with Tarrytown and Ossining were investigated. Talks were seriously begun in 1972 to form a merger with St. Agnes Hospital in White Plains.

Even as continuing local resistance to any merger made a new hospital in Dobbs Ferry an actuality in 1987, little by little an awareness grew among people that some sort of affiliation with another institution was needed to generate a cost effectiveness that might stem to some extent the tidal wave of higher medical bills engulfing all of us.

Alliance with Phelps

So, when an alliance was once again discussed in 1991 -- this time with Phelps Memorial Hospital in Tarrytown -- local acceptance became a probability. While some autonomy may be sacrificed in a merger, it was generally acknowledged that a reduction in autonomy is preferable to no existence at all.

Extended talks produced a proposal that did not compromise the Community Hospital's mission as people saw it, namely, to continue serving Dobbs Ferry and the surrounding villages as a hospital. When this was guaranteed, the proposed Phelps/-Dobbs Ferry collaboration became a fact.

Will the new alliance be a success? Yes, according to Thomas Green, the Community Hospital's Executive Director, who said that even in its early stages, the affiliation has produced savings in several areas and has engendered a promise of continued excellence in the future.

As the hospital begins its second century on Ashford Avenue, it has 50 beds to meet the medical and surgical needs of the community, including intensive care, coronary care and step down units; 250 medical staff specialists, of whom 35 are active core physicians; 85 members of a highly trained and dedicated nursing staff; and 200 others who work daily to keep the hospital going.

Laparoscopic Surgery Center

The hospital has now opened a special laparoscopic surgery center headed by two of the nation's leaders in this field, Drs. Avram Cooperman and Harry Reich. New services, such as the Respite Care Program and the Early Cardiac Care Intervention Program, have been introduced. And the hospital's three great traditions remain: a family atmosphere, the highest quality of medical care and community support.

From the beginning, the hospital has always looked to the community for financial and moral support and the community has responded in a multitude of ways. People have been most generous in donating their time, talents, efforts, material goods and financial support to the hospital, and their continued generosity will ensure its future.



SOCIETY ACCESSIONS FIVE ITEMS

On the recommendation of the Collections Committee, the Board of Trustees accessioned five items for its collections at its March 6 meeting.

Collections Committee Chair Tahnee Neill proposed the following list for accessioning as illustrative of Dobbs Ferry history:

1) A survey map, dated 12/26/70, of the Bernard Zincke property on Oak Street behind the Mead House. Mr. Zincke was the father of the present owner, Anne Zincke. The house and land had been bequeathed to Mr. Zincke by Theodora Mead Regan, younger sister of the late Clara Mead, who left her house and land at 12 Elm Street to the Historical Society.

At one time the Mead property stretched between Oak and Elm Streets. It contained the Mead House looking out on Elm, two small outbuildings behind the house and a carriage house on Oak. When Theodora married Joseph Regan, Herbert Mead divided the property and reportedly gave the carriage house to the newlyweds as a wedding present.

2) The genealogy papers of Joseph Regan whose roots trace back to Princess Pocahontas, a few members of the Virginia House of Burgesses and other historical figures.

3) Two undated, but old paper and wood fans advertising the Greenburgh Savings Bank. Among the inscriptions is a list of ways on "how to save for old age."

4) A book of blank checks from the Dobbs Ferry Bank.

5) A yellowed and fragile mimeographed paper issued by the "Office of Civilian Protection" presenting a "three point Home Defense check list." The Committee's initial tentative conclusion is that it was printed during World War II.

Items (1) and (2) are from the Mead family papers and the last three items were given by Dobbs Ferry Historical Society Trustee Barbara Pearce.

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