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DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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ARNOLD'S TREACHERY, THE MARCH TO YORKTOWN, REVOLUTION ENDS, TORIES LEAVE, FERRY CONTINUES TILL 1944

--by Jean Fritz

The American Revolution is tied closely to place names: Valley Forge, Saratoga, West Point, but not often to Dobbs Ferry. Of course, it was not a battle site, unless you count the Battle of Edgars Lane, which happened over the line in Hastings in 1778. That, however, was more of a skirmish than a battle between foraging Hessian mercenaries and Americans. Still, during the last stages of the war, if it was not where the war was happening, Dobbs Ferry, often was at the edge of what was happening, whether Dobbs Ferry residents were aware of this or not.

Certainly, on the night of September 22, 1780, no one on shore would have noticed the activity on the British warship, the Vulture, which, along with the Phoenix, stood like a guard dog on the river. Tonight the Vulture was up-river near Croton, too far away to be seen in Dobbs Ferry. Besides, this was a moonless night, too dark for anyone on land to make out what, if anything, was going on. And who would have given a second thought to the small boat being lowered from the Vulture to make its way to the western shore? No one could have recognized the man in the boat, wrapped in a huge blue cape, going under the name of John Anderson. Yet this was not John Anderson; this was John Andre, a high ranking British officer on his way to a secret rendezvous with General Benedict Arnold, American commander of West Point.

The purpose of the meeting was to arrange for Arnold not only to defect to the British, but to turn West Point over to them. Their planning went well. Arnold returned to West Point.



Benedict Arnold

Andre, with six drawings of West Point hidden in his boots between his socks and his feet, began an overland trek down the east side of the Hudson River to the British lines. Andre, who had thought he'd be returning by ship as he'd come, was uneasy, venturing into the dangerous territory of what was called No Man's Land. At Tarrytown he was stopped by three young men. At first Andre tried to bluff, then to bribe, but those Tarrytown men were suspicious and told him to strip. Off with his coat, his vest, his pants, until he stood before them naked except for his boots. Then he was ordered to take off not only his boots, but his socks. And there, of course, were the West Point plans. Andre was caught!

The war might have ended differently if those Tarrytown men had been less thorough, but as it was, Arnold had enough warning to escape to New York City. Andre was put on trial and condemned as a spy. The people along the river, always looking for news, had plenty to talk about now, and on the day that Andre was to be hanged in nearby Tappan, they streamed from all directions to see the sight.

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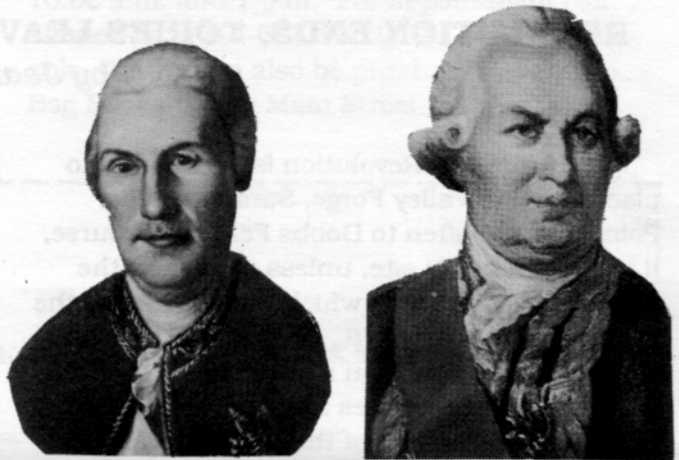
*The day before he was hanged,
Andre drew this sketch of himself.*

The noose should have been for Arnold, they muttered, not Andre, who had endeared himself to the American public by his gallantry. Across the way, George Washington silently agreed, but rather than be another spectator, he pulled down the shades in the DeWindt house where he was staying and tried to ignore the noise outside.

West Point was safe for now, and by the summer of 1781 most of the battles were taking place in the South. The British General, Lord Cornwallis, and his troops were holed up on the coast of Virginia, where, if the need arose, they could quickly take to the sea and sail back to New York and the rest of their army. In the area of Dobbs Ferry, 10,000 American and French men were in camp, awaiting orders from General Washington whose headquarters was about three miles behind them on the hill where the present radio station WFAS is located. They all took for granted that eventually they would be marching to New York City, while the British forces were divided and vulnerable. On the other hand, the British in New York could just as easily sail south to help Cornwallis.

How to attack one branch of the British army without bringing both branches together must have been uppermost in Washington's mind, but to read his correspondence during this time, no one would have known it. Indeed, he wrote so many letters, one wonders how he had time for anything else. He was concerned about the army's supply of nails, of horses, especially of rum. The men would never get far

without their rum, he said. He fussed about Governor Hancock of Massachusetts. Why didn't he answer letters? He wrote to Captain William Dobbs, asking him to gather pilots, presumably for the attack on New York. At the same time he was keeping in touch with Count de Rochambeau, in charge of French forces, and with Count de Grasse, who was presumably bringing the French fleet to help. Washington wrote Count de Grasse that he should bring his fleet directly to Sandy Hook, New Jersey for a concerted move on the British in New York.



Count Rochambeau

Admiral DeGrasse

But on August 17, 1781, General Washington amended his orders to Count de Grasse. It has been judged "expedient", he wrote, "to give up for the present the enterprise against New York and to turn our attention towards the South." To Count de Rochambeau he wrote, "We have not a moment to lose".

And they didn't lose a moment. Count de Grasse raced his fleet up to Chesapeake Bay to block Cornwallis' retreat. The American and French units streamed south to "Little York", as they called York, Pennsylvania, by boat, on foot, on horseback, in wagons. Among them were Joseph Martin, the one who had left a girl in Dobbs Ferry, and Sarah Osborn, wife of Aaron Osborn, a commissary sergeant with the Third New York Regiment. Arriving and seeing that Cornwallis' retreat by sea was cut off by the French fleet, Washington ordered the army to bottle up the British on land. Joseph Martin's corps was ordered to storm the redoubts, the watchword being "Rochambeau". It was a hard name to pronounce, but when said quickly, it sounded like "Rush on, boys," so in full cry the Yanks did rush on.

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Sarah Osborn, who carried food to the men in the trenches, was surprised one morning by the sudden continuous beating of drums in the enemy camp. When she saw the Americans hurrahing and swinging their caps, she asked, "What is the matter now?"

"The British have surrendered!" she was told.

When, on October 19, the British marched out of town in their formal surrender, Sarah was there to watch. And there were those drums that she had heard before, only now they were covered with black handkerchiefs. The fifes were tied with black ribbons. Leading the British was an officer whom Sarah didn't recognize. It was not Cornwallis, she said, (General Corn Wallace as many Americans called him) because this man was too small and did not have cross eyes.

Washington's Watch Chain

Although the British army was beaten, the American soldiers were not discharged, nor did they know if there was to be more action or not. In the spring of 1783, soldiers on the Hudson River kept a close watch on West Point. Would the great chain that barred the river to the enemy be laid down as it had been every spring? "George Washington's watch chain", they called it -- weight, 136 tons; length, 500 yards. If that chain went into the water again, the general consensus was that the war was not over. Regardless of the chain, however, on April 19, 1783, the army was informed that a provisional peace treaty had been signed.

But after the long, hard years of the war, peace deserved a little fanfare. Perhaps there were local celebrations, but the face-to-face meeting between the two commanders in chief was the dramatic finale. It took place on board the British frigate, the *Perseverance*, on May 6, 1783, right in the middle of the Hudson River, between Dobbs Ferry East and Dobbs Ferry West (known now as Sneden's Landing). Although residents on both sides of the river could not see the ceremony between George Washington and Sir Guy Carleton, commander of the British forces, they could hear it and that was the important part. For, as George Washington stepped on board the *Perseverance*, seventeen guns were fired, one after another, in his honor, a salute reserved for heads of state. As the booming echoed through the Hudson Valley, people rejoiced not only that they were

at peace, but that Great Britain had at last recognized the United States as a sovereign nation in its own right.

Dobbs Ferry tried to settle down to new conditions. The Storm family was still on hand, buying and selling pieces of their land as they always had, and farming their vast acreage that extended from the Hudson River to the Saw Mill River. Still, there was a huge turnover in the population as a result of political affiliations. The Tories had for the most part already quit the country, leaving behind property that had formerly been leased. In Dobbs Ferry there were five leaseholds, the largest belonging to the Phillipse family, which in 1750 had accommodated 1100 people. The Dobbs family had given up their leasehold in 1769 when they moved to Hastings, all eight of them.

Philip Livingstone, who was suspected of half-hearted patriotism ("Money talks," a commentator remarked) bought up three southern leaseholds which, along with his son Van Brugh, he maintained as a "manor" for fifty years. He called his property "Calendar near Yonkers" and at the same time took it upon himself to rename Dobbs Ferry too. Claiming that a "ferry" had bad connotations, he had his mail addressed to "Livingston's Landing". This did not sit well with the other inhabitants, so at a later date they named the village officially "Dobbs Ferry". After all, the ferry was still running and over the years it was making its own history.

Snedens Sell Ferry Rights

In 1902 the Snedens sold the ferry rights to Captain Dobbs Wine Hill who had his own sloop named for his wife, Eliza Ann Dobbs. The only trouble was that his sloop had an unreliable gas-run motor and Captain Hill had an unreliable temper. Once when the motor was acting up, Captain Hill was seen beating the motor with a hammer. A later skipper, Captain Armstrong, did not go in for physical abuse, but when things weren't going well, he could deliver a string of colorful epithets that continued across the river without interruption or repetition.

The various ferries withstood war and mistreatment: they survived to see the river crowded with steamboats, but when a hurricane struck the Hudson Valley in 1944 during World War II, that was too much. The ferry tilted to its side, then slipped soundlessly under water.

Report of the Ongoing Projects of the Historical Society

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society is engaged in a series of long-term and short-term historical projects. President Bill Blanck reported to the Board of Trustees at the Board's first regular meeting of the 1995-96 membership year on October 25. Projects include the following:

- Researching the formal reasons for Dobbs Ferry's desire to be less dependent on the Town of Greenburgh for governmental services and for its separate incorporation as a village within the town in 1873.

- Collecting the photographs of all Dobbs Ferry mayors (the early ones were called "presidents"). Residents who have photos of mayors serving before 1965 are urged to lend them to the Society for copying.

- Researching Dobbs Ferry's history in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War.

- Researching our village's history in the aftermath of World War II.

- Expanding the Society's archives on World War II's impact on the village and its residents. Members are invited to submit photos, letters and other documents for possible inclusion in the archives. (But not all material can be included.)

- Continuing videotape interviews of veterans and village residents.

- Expanding the Society's collection of wedding photos of Dobbs Ferry residents for an exhibit at its second annual Valentine's Day party in 1996 (the first party earlier this year was a smashing success).

- Follow-ups on prior research on Community Hospital, Sacred Heart Church and the woman's suffrage movement in Dobbs Ferry.

- Continuing research on the other houses of worship in Dobbs Ferry.

- Indexing the *Dobbs Ferry Register* (the Society has microfilmed almost all of the issues published between 1890 and 1974 from the only extant bound collection, belonging to the Graham family, the last publisher). It is a

priceless resource. The first indexing cut will be of residents' names, a project which will make genealogical research much easier.

- Researching early issues of the *Herald*, the *Statesman* and other area newspapers and noting for the Society's purposes what early coverage of Dobbs Ferry events is available.

- Investigating and keeping up-to-date on CD-ROM technology. Eventually, "writing," that is, recording, on so-called "Read Only Memory" disks will become commonplace and relatively inexpensive, as well as much more lasting than paper, tapes, film and prints. When that happens, the Society will want to commit all its oral and video history tapes, photographs, films, letters, maps and other documents, as well as its treasured microfilmed record of the Dobbs Ferry Register, to compact disks. Other historical societies are also waiting for this development and plan to take this step. Originals will, of course, be kept in the archives, but the CD-ROMS will make genealogical and other historical research much easier and more accessible.

- Writing a new history of Dobbs Ferry. This book, to be published in time for the new millenium, will be an update and, in light of recent research, a revision and expansion of previous histories of the village. It will be produced by a team of researchers, writers and editors.

Members and non-members alike who are interested in any of the above projects are invited to volunteer any time and effort they are willing to give to the Society. Call 674-1007 and leave a message on the Society's answering machine, or get in touch with Bill Blanck or any of the trustees.

"Speaking of volunteers," Mr. Blanck said in an invitation to the membership, "folk history gives us the adage that many hands make light work. We need many helping hands for such projects as our Valentine's Day party, our spring gala, and several housekeeping and grounds chores to keep the Mead House, our headquarters and the home of our collections, well maintained. We also need help in fund-raising projects."

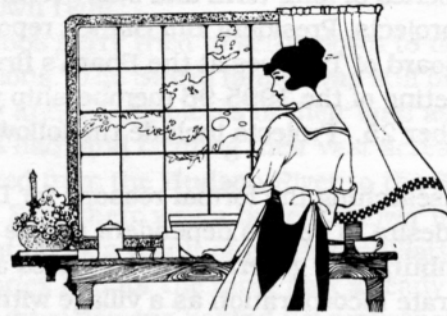
MEAD HOUSE DEDICATION AT FOURTH ANNUAL EGGNOG PARTY

The Fourth Annual Clara Mead Egnog Holiday Party will be held at the Mead House, 12 Elm Street, Sunday, December 17, from 3 to 5 p.m. for members of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society.

A dedication of the house and second-floor archival rooms will also take place. The Society will pay homage to Miss Clara Mead for her bequest of her family home and \$10,000, and to long-time village resident George A. Speyer for his generous bequest of \$12,000.

For years Clara Mead held holiday eggnog parties for her friends. Her eggnog recipe reportedly is a variation of one published by *The New York Times* in December 1954. It was used by Miss Mead that year at a holiday party--one that would be held for the next 36 years until the time of her death.

Miss Mead, who died in 1991 at the age of 81, was a contributing member of the Society. She bequeathed \$10,000 and the 14-room three-story, yellow clapboard house that sits on approximately one acre of land and to the Society.



The Board of Trustees designated the three second-floor rooms as George Speyer Archival Rooms. Mr. Speyer left his money to the Society to be used as it wished. The rooms are temperature and humidity-controlled to protect the Society's collections.

Speyer was a decorative plasterer who specialized in ornamental frieze work. A skilled artisan, he was frequently called on to produce elaborate plaster work.

The party is open only to Society members. Anyone wishing to join may do so on the day of the event.

--Teresa Walsh

FIFTH WASHINGTON IRVING HOLIDAY CELEBRATION AT ZION



For the 5th year Zion Episcopal Church and the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society will co-sponsor a Washington Irving Holiday Celebration at Zion Church, 55 Cedar Street in Dobbs Ferry. This year the celebration will be on Sunday, December 3rd at 4:00 p.m.

The theme of the program will be "At Home for the Holidays." Using Irving's own writings

and dramatic interpretations of history, the program will celebrate the importance of the home for Irving, remembering the proximity of "Sunnyside," his own home, and Zion Church, his spiritual home for many years, where he served as a vestryperson of the parish from 1837-1843. Zion Church is the oldest standing house of worship in Dobbs Ferry.

The program will feature a candlelit church decorated in the 19th century style, with traditional holiday carols and music. A variety of local community members will participate in the program. A festive holiday reception will follow in the parish hall. Members of the Historical Society are encouraged to bring baked goods which can be dropped off at the parish hall on Saturday, December 2nd, or Sunday afternoon, December 3rd. As always, children are welcome and admission is free.

In Irving's own words, we look forward to celebrating the season with you, for as he stated, "It is, indeed, the season of regenerated feeling, the season for kindling, not merely the fire of hospitality in the hall, the genial flame . . . in the heart."

SOCIETY'S AFGHAN WILL MAKE IDEAL HOLIDAY GIFT

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society will soon unveil a brand new Dobbs Ferry afghan or "throw" for holiday sale. The all-cotton woven and fringed throw will depict scenes and structures familiar to all residents, including the high school, the river view from Waterfront Park, the train station, the public library and Estherwood, among others.

The two-color throw, measuring 50 by 65 inches, can be ordered in either Williamsburg blue and natural or cranberry red and natural. It is machine washable.

The manufacturer's sample is expected to be received in December and will be on display in the window of the Brown Bag Bookstore at

127 Man Street. The first bulk shipment is due shortly before Christmas.

In the meantime, throws can be ordered by using the order blank below. The price is \$45 prepaid, and includes a sturdy box convenient for shipping.

After the arrival of the bulk shipment, orders can be picked up by appointment at the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society at 12 Elm Street on Tuesdays and Fridays between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 1 p.m. For appointment call Tahnee Neil (914-693-9462). As soon as available, throws can also be purchased at Brown Bag Bookstore on Main Street.

Dobbs Ferry Historical Society
12 Elm Street
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

I would like to order _____ throw(s) @ \$45 each. Enclosed is my check for \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Check here if you wish a gift certificate mailed to you.

Colors: First Choice _____ Second Choice _____

SACRED HEART PARISH CELEBRATES 100 YEARS OF CHURCH BUILDING

Sacred Heart parishioners celebrated the centennial of their church building at Broadway and Ashford Avenue on November 12. The celebration included a "Mass of Thanksgiving," a sharing of food and reminiscences, a "Wall of Memories" and distribution of a photo directory of parishioners.

Mayor Donald P. Marra presented to Father Terry Attridge, Pastor, a Village proclamation declaring November 12 as Sacred Heart Centennial Day in Dobbs Ferry.

A new history of the Roman Catholic parish was written for the occasion by Hank Walter, Dobbs Ferry Historical Society Trustee. It was included in the photo directory. A condensed version of this history will be published in a

future issue of The Ferryman. It is part of the Society's ongoing project to write and publish histories of the Village's eight houses of worship over the next several years.

Three histories of Sacred Heart have been written, each a centennial milestone in the development of the parish. The first was written in 1933, marking the 100th anniversary of the arrival in Dobbs Ferry of the first Catholic family, the Lawlors. The second was written in 1962 to celebrate the centennial of the founding of Sacred Heart as a New York Archdiocesan parish on November 26, 1862. The third and current history marks a century of spiritual progress from the time the present church building was constructed.