



The FERRYMAN

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DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
12 Elm Street, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522 (914)-674-1007

SEPTEMBER 1999

Memories of John Nanna at September 24 Annual Meeting



At a 1973 dinner honoring former Mayor Nanna are (l. to r.) Mrs. Jean Zemnick, Mrs. Peggy Moynihan, Congressman Peter Peyser, Dobbs Ferry Mayor William Zemnick, John Nanna and Anna Nanna.

Remembrances of former Mayor John F. Nanna will be featured at the annual meeting of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society at Our Lady of Pompeii Parish Hall on Friday, September 24th at 8:00 p.m. Speakers will include family members, village officials, and friends.

In our letter to the membership it was announced that the program would be Washington in Westchester. However, due to the recent death of Mayor Nanna this program has been postponed and will be presented in the near future.

Besides speakers, a short videotape presentation will be made including his accomplishments spanning the years from 1959 to 1979. The Mayor first served as a Village Trustee, then as Mayor and Town of Greenburgh Councilman.

John Nanna, like hundreds of former World War II veterans, came to the Village to buy a home and raise his family. During the war he served in the Army Corps of Engineers, advancing through France, Belgium, and Germany.

As President of the 17th District Home Owners' Association, he came to the attention of local Republican leaders, who persuaded him to run for office.

During his tenure, he was instrumental in acquiring the Juhring Estate for open space, the purchase of the railroad station, and taking title to the cemetery on Ashford Avenue.

Another accomplishment, of which he was especially proud, was the establishment of Memorial Park; and he was also instrumental in closing the dump at the waterfront, which had been a polluting garbage dump for decades. This was followed by the transformation of a polluting eyesore to the Waterfront Park we all enjoy today.

The Juhring property, containing the source of Wickers Creek, was considered by Mayor Nanna to be a high mark of his administration. The property was purchased by the village as open space with funding from the State and Federal Governments. Lady Bird Johnson wrote to Mayor Nanna congratulating him on the Village's foresight.

Annual Meeting, September 24th

In addition to Remembrances of Mayor Nanna, the meeting will include the election of Trustees of the Society. To be eligible to vote, an attendee must be a member in good standing; that is, the attendee must have paid his or her dues for this membership year, ending September 30. Non-members may attend the business part of the meeting, if they wish, as well as the program on Mayor Nanna.

Six Trustee candidates have been nominated by the Society's Nominating Committee for three-year terms ending September 30, 2002. They are: Jean Fritz, Virginia Gagliardi, Gabriele Grunebaum, Helen Kirkpatrick, former Dobbs Ferry Mayor Donald Marra, and Dr. James McCarthy.

Henry Villard, German Immigrant, Civil War Newsman, Financier, Railroad Builder, and Dobbs Ferry Resident

-- by Hank Walter

Henry Villard, of Speyer, Zweibrucken, Manhattan, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, Denver, Boston, Washington, Munich, Heidelberg and Dobbs Ferry, among other places, was a man who all too often failed to meet the expectations of his father, business associates, enemies and the press. What he did was often unexpected.

To begin with, despite the name we know him by, Henry Villard was not French. The man who left his name on Villard Hill in Dobbs Ferry and on Villard House (the former mansion on Madison Avenue across the street from the grounds of St. Patrick's Cathedral) was born on April 10, 1835 in Speyer. That was a town



Henry Villard

in what was known as Rhenish Bavaria, one of the German kingdoms in those days.

Then, Villard was not his real name. The man who owned one of the largest estates ever in Dobbs Ferry -- 100 acres, or 8% of the whole Village -- was baptized Ferdinand Heinrich Gustav Hilgard.

Though he came from a well-to-do family of landowners, lawyers, bankers and German government officials, life was not easy for young Villard when he ran away from Bavaria. At the age of 18, he boarded a ship for New York and arrived here almost destitute, with few clothes and no money, and not knowing a word of English.

His father, Gustav Hilgard, was a stern authoritarian as a parent, an aristocrat in his relations with others, a monarchist and conservative in politics, and a justice on the Bavarian supreme court. He expected his son to study law. But Heinrich Hilgard rebelled.

Heinrich found the law books boring and learned that his true bent was toward literature and writing. Having enraged his father earlier by crossing him politically, Heinrich realized that his decision not to study law would further strain, perhaps even break, his bond with his father.

So, to avoid the inevitable confrontation, he simply left his country and family behind, determined to be his own man making his own decisions. It wasn't easy. In America, fearing that his father would send people to find him and bring him back to his law studies, he changed his surname to Villard, after a French friend, and anglicized his given name to Henry.

Villard's sense of independence and his democratic ideals drove him to America, but the German upper-class values that had formed him did not let him enjoy huddling with the huddled masses in a filthy, raucous, booming, multi-ethnic city like New York. But he refused to settle in Manhattan's German communities, not wanting to isolate himself from the English-speaking American mainstream.

Slammed by the culture shock of coming to an expansionist United States, Villard's uprooted German compatriots, just like members of other ethnic groups, banded together in little enclaves to preserve their old-world languages, cultures and life styles. But Villard wanted to assimilate American customs, eager to learn new ways of acting and new possibilities for his talents. Most important, he was determined to become

an expert in reading, writing and speaking English, a *sine qua non*, in his own mind, for upward mobility in the United States.

After living in New York for about a year in dreadful surroundings, Henry Villard, the future Dobbs Ferry resident, knocked about the East Coast and mid-West, with a variety of odd jobs to sustain him. They included legal apprentice, secretary to a county recorder in Illinois, Chicago real estate salesman, teacher in Pennsylvania. But then he rose from rags (well, not *quite* rags) to riches (eventually, very *real* riches) in true Horatio Alger fashion.

So persistent was Villard in his desire and efforts to master the English language, that within five years he was hired at the age of 23 by the *Cincinnati Commercial* as a legislative correspondent. What got him this job was his coverage of the Lincoln-Douglas debates (in German) for the *New York Staats-Zeitung* in 1858. That was the beginning of Villard's friendship with Abraham Lincoln that ended abruptly in 1865 when the President was assassinated.

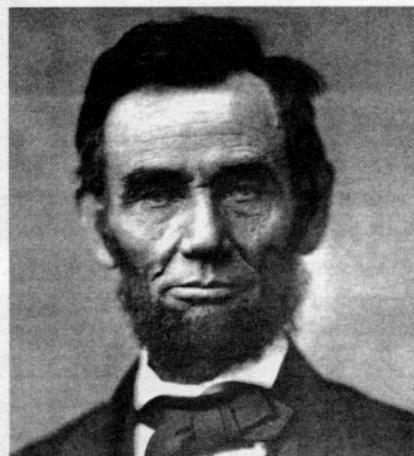
In 1859, he went to Denver for the *Commercial* to confirm or deny rumors of a gold strike in the Pike's Peak region. There he met Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune* and a reporter for the *Boston Journal*. The three men confirmed the gold strike for their papers. Villard stayed for six months, collecting material for a book which was published in June 1860, when he was just 25.

That year, he covered the Republican Convention that nominated Lincoln and the subsequent Presidential campaign in the mid-West for the *Commercial*, the *St. Louis Missouri-Democrat* and Greeley's *Tribune*. After the election, he covered the daily actions of the Presi-



Horace Greeley, one-time employer

dent-elect for the *New York Herald* and the *New York Associated Press*, from December through March and followed Lincoln to Washington for his March inauguration.



Abraham Lincoln, close friend

He became quite close to Lincoln during this time. One of the things Villard reported was that Lincoln enjoyed telling and hearing off-color tales, a report that subjected Villard to considerable criticism in later years after Lincoln was virtually deified in public opinion.

But his closeness to Lincoln was undisputed. His old editor, Murat Halstead, of the *Cincinnati Commercial*, wrote after Villard's death in November 1900: "He knew Mr. Lincoln rarely well. There are only seven men alive, other than Robert Lincoln, his son, who knew Mr. Lincoln as intimately as Mr. Villard knew him: John Hay, John C. Nicolay, "Bob" Hitt, Horace White, Carl Schurz, Edward Rosewater of the *Omaha Bee*, and Col. Alexander K. McClure."

A few weeks before Villard arrived in Washington with Lincoln, the Confederate States of America had been formed and Jefferson Davis elected as its president. War was on its way. Two months after Lincoln's inauguration, the CSA numbered 11 Southern states, with a population of 5 million. They were aligned against 23 Northern states, with a population of almost 23 million. Both sides were preparing for war. The issue was slavery and its economics. Villard and other anti-slavery advocates expected the war to last a few months. History proved them wrong.

The *Tribune* sent Villard to cover the first big battle at Bull Run. He was one of very few war correspondents who then observed, sometimes participated in, and reported on most of the big battles of the Civil War after Bull Run: Shiloh, Perryville, Fredericksburg, Charleston, Murfreesboro, Chattanooga, Missionary Ridge, Petersburg, the Wilderness, among others.

His witness to the carnage of war made him a

pacifist, a cause shared by his wife and children. It was during a much-needed two-week leave from the war front in April 1863, that, on the advice of his editor, he visited Boston. There he met his future wife, Helen "Fanny" Garrison, daughter of the famed abolitionist, and fell in love with her, and she with him.

THE ROMANCE OF HENRY AND FANNY

The time: April 24, 1863
The place: Boston
The plot: Boy meets Girl

It was love at first sight for both of them. She was 19; he was 28. She was beautiful; he was handsome. They shared many beliefs, values and ideals. They married each other on January 3, 1866.

Thirteen years later, they bought a house in Dobbs Ferry, plus about 80 acres behind the house consisting of woodlands that stretched to the top of a high hill, the highest in the Village. A few years after that, they bought their neighbor's house and land, increasing their Dobbs Ferry holding to 100 acres. They were the Villards -- "Fanny" and Henry.

"Fanny" was Helen Garrison, born and raised in Boston, the daughter of an implacable foe of slavery, William Lloyd Garrison, the nationally known abolitionist, writer and orator, considered later by some as the main inciter, if not the cause, of the Civil War.

Henry was Henry Villard, born in Germany, an emigre to the United States, always on the move, living in several different cities, now nationally known and admired as one of the best of the Civil War correspondents.

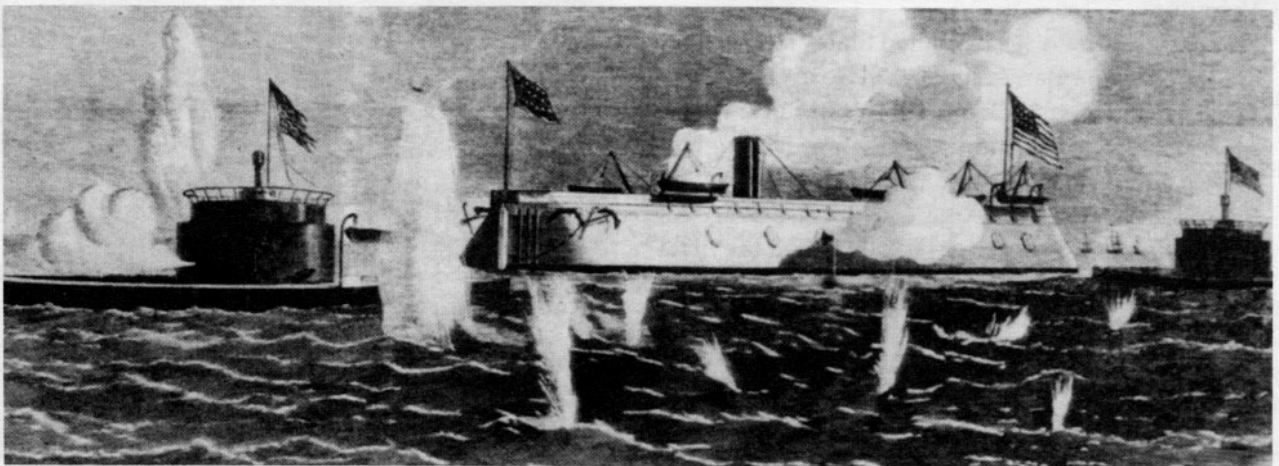
Working for the *New York Tribune*, Henry found himself on April 7, 1863, on the Federal flagship, the *New Ironsides*, outside Charleston, South Carolina. The Union's nine ironclads attempted to capture the strongly fortified defenses of Charleston. But the "fighting rafts" were able to fire only 139 shots against the rebels' 2,020, fired from Ft. Sumter and Ft. Moultrie. The fleet retired with one vessel sunk and others damaged or disabled. Henry's article about the battle was spectacular and the *Trib's* managing editor rewarded him with a \$100 bonus and a two-week leave of absence, his first in almost two years of war. The editor recommended that he visit Boston.

In Boston, among other "sights," he visited the gymnasium of Dr. Dioctetian Lewis "to witness the exercises of a class of young men and women," according to Villard's *Memoirs*. There he was introduced to a young man, William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., who, astonished at meeting the famous war correspondent in the gym, promptly invited him to hear an anti-slavery preacher the next morning, a Sunday, ". . . and afterwards to dine with his family." Villard writes, "I gladly accepted."

Villard recalls how "young William Lloyd and his younger brother Frank, a boy fifteen years of age, called for me, as agreed, and took me to hear Mr. Johnson [the preacher] . . . Their sister [Fanny] was also present and joined us after the sermon, and we all walked together to their house. I was heartily welcomed by the parents and at once felt entirely at home with them."

To say nothing of the fact that Villard was completely and hopelessly smitten by Fanny. Henry visited Fanny and her family and their many liberal friends several times, but then, "with deep regret,"

-- continued on page 5



As a war correspondent, Villard was aboard the *New Ironsides*, shown above bombarding Charleston's fortifications.

Henry and Fanny Villard -- continued from page 4

shortened his leave after receiving a letter from his editor. He left in order to cover an impending campaign in Tennessee by Gen. William Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland.

"I returned to New York by the night train," Henry writes in his *Memoirs*, noting that "it was to this chance visit to Boston that I owe the greatest happiness of my life -- my marriage to Miss Fanny Garrison . . . to whose charms of mind and person I surrendered on first acquaintance."

With the exception of some time out for serious illness (in those days, most illnesses were "serious"), Villard then covered two more years of the war from the front, some of the war's bloodiest battles, as it turned out. He kept in touch with the Garrisons by talking young Frank into corresponding with him.

A few months after the war ended and Lincoln was assassinated, Villard asked Garrison for permission to marry his daughter. Garrison wrote back reminding Villard that he was a foreigner. He said he did not know Villard's family and background; but he added that he knew that Villard had an "affectionate, generous and noble nature."

In his reply, Villard said he appreciated being accepted solely on the basis of his character. Four months later, Henry and Fanny were married.

Henry, who, since the assassination, had been covering Congress for his friend, Horace White, now editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, took his bride to Washington and its post-war concerns. Six months later, at White's request, he went to Europe to cover the Prussia-Austria war, taking Fanny with him.

After that war, he and Fanny stayed in Munich for half a year, then went to Paris where Henry covered the World Exhibition of 1867. He interviewed John Stuart Mill in Italy and covered a violent eruption of Mt. Vesuvius.

They returned to the United States in May, 1868, and lived at the Garrison home in Roxbury, a suburb of Boston, for two years, during which time he wrote for several newspapers and where their only daughter, Helen, and their eldest son, Harold, were born. While he was secretary of the American Social Science Association there for two years, he established the first societies for civil service reform in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

Suffering from catarrh and generally failing health, Villard took his family to Germany in the fall of 1871, hoping to obtain effective medical treatment there and find renewed strength from well-known German spas. While in Germany, Fanny presented him with a second son, Oswald, who was to follow his father into journal-

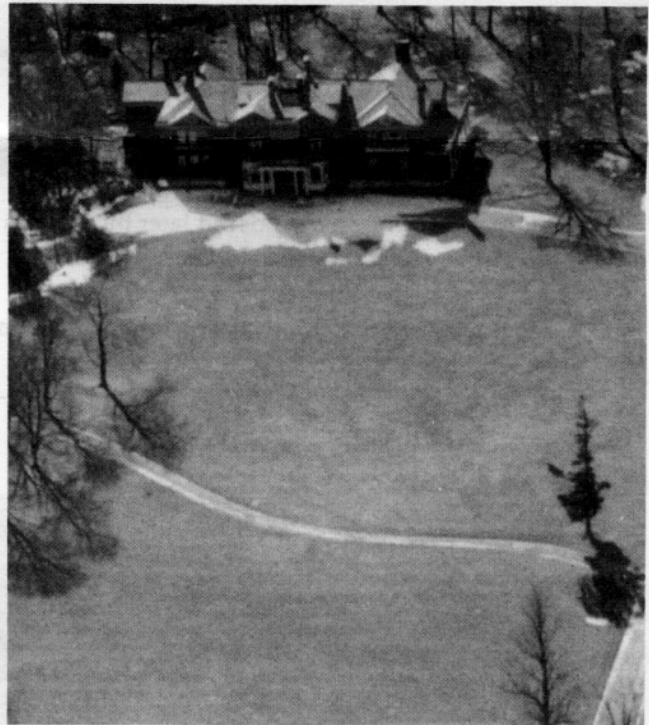
ism and later take over as owner and publisher of the *New York Evening Post* and the weekly liberal magazine, *The Nation*.

The family moved around Germany for two and a half years, staying at various times at, among other places, Wiesbaden, Frankfurt, Berlin and finally, Heidelberg, where in January 1873, he suffered a serious stroke. His physicians said he could not recover from such a blow unless he gave up all mentally stressful activity -- meaning, of course, newspapering.

But that year, while he was recuperating, he became involved in the problems of German investors who were holding American railroad bonds. His new career as international financier and railroad builder began.

He continued to bounce around between the East and West Coasts and across the Atlantic to Germany, sometimes taking his family with him. In 1876, he settled his family in Manhattan and three years later bought Thorwood in Dobbs Ferry. His fourth child, Hilgard, a boy, was born there in 1883.

-- Researched by Hugh Frankenthaler



Thorwood was the Villard family home where guests marvelled at its views of the river. While not a castle on the Rhine, it was a gracious home that Villard loved, and where he died in 1900. This 1933 photo shows Thorwood before it was demolished to make room for development.

Next: Villard, railroad builder, developer of the American Northwest and first CEO of General Electric.

Help Wanted!! Donations Needed to Defray Maintenance Expenditures

The Society needs your help! This past year your Board of Trustees has had to spend some \$8,000 of the Society's reserves on the Mead House, which serves as our Society's headquarters and Dobbs Ferry's History Center. House expenses will consume several more thousand in the coming year.

We ask non-members who receive this Village-wide mailing of *The Ferryman* to become members. Additional donations from both current members and village residents will help us meet these expenses.

This past year we repainted the outside of the Mead House and made additional repairs. That cost was a total of \$5,000.

Then we reconstructed the long picket fence -- installing new posts in concrete, replacing some of the pickets, and putting a new coat of paint on the whole fence. That came to \$1,500. We also spent around \$1,000 on lawn and tree maintenance over and above the \$500 which the Dobbs Ferry Garden Club so generously donated to the Society, along with its time, effort and expertise.

We have repaired and redone Herbert Mead's workshop on the side of the house facing Broadway. We have remade it into an exhibit area where we will maintain periodic exhibits of Dobbs Ferry history beginning this coming year. That cost about \$500.

Finally we will be contracting for work on the two small outbuildings behind the Mead House, with no estimates yet for the cost of the work.

In the past, we have called on you for help to make emergency repairs to the roof and replace a broken boiler. You came through for us magnificently, for which the Board has been deeply grateful. For other house projects, we have been blessed in the past by a number of bequests, notably from Clara Mead who bequeathed her home to us in the first place, and from George Speyer and John Ricciardi.

Whatever tax-deductible gift you make to the Society will greatly assist it in its stated mission -- to preserve the history of Dobbs Ferry for future generations of its inhabitants.



Members of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society help continue the exciting trip to the Village's past.

Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER, PLEASE JOIN US NOW.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City/State _____ Zip _____
 Phone (day) _____ (eve.) _____

MEMBERSHIP 1999-2000 [] New [] Renew

- [] Patron..... \$100.00
- [] Friend..... \$ 50.00
- [] Contributing..... \$ 25.00
- [] Family..... \$ 15.00
- [] Individual Adult..... \$ 10.00
- [] Student/Senior (over 60)..... \$ 3.00
- [] Junior (Students under 16)*... No fee

Please make check payable to, and mail to:
 DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 12 Elm Street
 Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522
 Telephone (914) 674-1007 (24-hour answering)

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

*Persons under 16 years of age must show parent's or legal guardian's consent for membership. Thus, if you have checked Junior membership above, please provide signature below.

_____ Date _____ Please check one: Parent _____ Guardian _____
Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian