



The FERRYMAN

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

DECEMBER 2000

Ninth Annual Clara Mead Eggnog Party Set for Sunday, December 10 from 2 to 4 pm

*In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo
Over their cups of eggnog. Then, the men,
Also drinking eggnog, join them.
Conversation
Shifts to what is happening in the nation,*

With apologies to T.S. Eliot, one can imagine the members of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society discussing current politics (gently, of course), rather than Renaissance art, a few days before the members of the Electoral College cast their pro forma votes for the President-Elect of the United States.

For the members of the Historical Society will meet on Sunday, December 10, at the Mead House, 12 Elm Street, from 2 pm to 4 pm. The meeting will have no formal agenda and both current politics and Renaissance art will take second place to the *real* purpose of the meeting: PARTY TIME! That is, the ninth annual Clara Mead Holiday Party, featuring eggnog made according to Miss Mead's "secret" recipe, fruit punch made by first Vice President Warren Gardner, and goodies baked or brought by the Trustees.

While this is a membership only party, anyone may

enjoy the festivities by joining the Society at the door. As members know, this now traditional Dobbs Ferry holiday event began in December 1992, as a memorial to the generosity of Clara Mead, a member of the Society. It actually commemorates Miss Mead's 36-year-long practice of serving eggnog to her circle of friends at Christmastide. Her "secret" recipe was her own version of one printed in *The New York Times* in December, 1954. Custodian of that recipe was the late Mae Pepper, Clara's next-door neighbor and long-time friend, Trustee, Membership Chair and Secretary of the Society.

Clara died in September 1991 and bequeathed her 14-room home to the Society, now the Society's headquarters.

After the party ends at 4 pm, many of the Society's members will walk over to Zion Episcopal Church to join in its annual Washington Irving Holiday Celebration, co-sponsored with the Church by the Society.

Followed by

"Washington Irving: The Romance of Nature and the Romance of Christmas" at Zion Episcopal Church at 5 pm

The second is Zion Episcopal Church's annual Washington Irving Holiday Celebration, at 5 pm at the Church, 55 Cedar Street, an event which is co-sponsored by the Church and the Society, and is open to all. The theme this year is "Washington Irving: The Romance of Nature and the Romance of Christmas".

The Church, founded by Washington Irving in 1833, and the oldest house of worship in Dobbs Ferry, will be decorated in the nineteenth century style. Washington Irving worshipped regularly at Zion where he served as a member of the vestry.

Local actors will read selections from Irving's writings and traditional holiday carols will be sung by candlelight. A reception will follow in the parish hall. Children are welcome and admission is free.

According to The Rev. Richard Richard McKeon, Washington Irving believed that all that was good in the

human spirit; beauty, generosity, and kindness, was mirrored in the romantic landscape of the Hudson Valley, especially in the gentle gardens of Irving's beloved home, *Sunnyside*. Irving, in his writings, celebrates Christmas as the great holiday of both the human spirit and creation, and this year the holiday celebration at Zion will draw on both sources from Washington Irving's own words.

Washington Irving at Zion is becoming a cherished tradition in the Village and celebrates not only Irving's presence here during the nineteenth century, but also the spirit of cooperation between the Church, the community, and the Historical Society.

Volunteers are needed to bring baked goods for the reception. Such donations can be brought to the church earlier on 10th, or to the reception itself. For more information, please call Fr. McKeon at 693-9320, or Bill Blanck at 693-4964.

VILLARD FAMILY AT "THORWOOD" --- 48 YEARS IN DOBBS FERRY

Henry Villard - German immigrant, journalist, author, friend of Abraham Lincoln, and railroad tycoon - bought a house in Dobbs Ferry in December 1879.

This Dobbs Ferry resident had been a nationally known Civil War correspondent for the *New York Tribune*. At the time of his house purchase, he was an international financier who, through his dealings in railroad stock, ended up running the Northern Pacific Railroad and expanding it to open up the entire Pacific Northwest to commercial and real estate development. Subsequently, he became an investor in, and then the president and CEO of, General Electric.

Villard liked what he saw in Dobbs Ferry and decided to settle there with his family. The house, known as "Thorwood," was a three-story structure. It was one of the only two houses on a very steep hill, at 465 feet above sea level the highest elevation in Dobbs Ferry.

He bought it from the survivors of the recently deceased Samuel Cochran. The other house, known as "Dunedin," was virtually an identical twin and not too far away. It belonged to Samuel's brother, Thomas.

Villard also bought the top of the hill that rose behind the two houses and consisted of 80 acres of woods. The land right around the two houses was

farmland. When Thomas Cochran died in 1899, Villard bought his house, too. The area around Villard's house, Thomas' house and land, and the 80 acres of woods on the upper part of the hill totaled 100 acres, or about 6% of the entire acreage within the Village's boundaries. It was the largest estate in Dobbs Ferry since colonial times and it became known as "Villard Hill."

Soon after Henry bought Thorwood and the 80 acres of chestnut, oak, hickory and dogwood trees and a few meadows, he built winding paths through it. According to one of his sons, he kept "the whole simple, natural and dignified, giving us young people and our playfellows plenty of room to roam and ride and still be at home."

McKim, Mead and White Hired

Indeed, the son writes with enthusiasm: "We looked 40 miles to the north across the Tappan Zee to the Highlands around West Point; from a summerhouse in the rear we looked 25 miles down the river and saw the Statue of Liberty until the skyscrapers hid it; from the top of our water tower we saw many miles of the Sound and ships on it. In a lifetime of travel at home and abroad, I have never seen a situation to surpass it."

Villard hired the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to design and supervise the reconstruction and enlargement of the house into a



Photolithograph of "Dunedin," Thomas Cochran's house, twin of "Thorwood," his brother Samuel's house, bought by Henry Villard in 1879. Both houses were designed by Jeremiah Burke around 1855. "Dunedin" was one of those featured in A.A. Turner's *Villas on the Hudson*, 1860.

mansion with two new wings. It had bedrooms, bathrooms, "six beautiful living rooms, some of superb proportions . . . a beautifully paneled library . . . a white and gold music room . . . a fine California redwood hall . . . and a half-paneled dining room with full-length windows and grand views." The stable that was built for the family had stalls for 12 horses, room for a number of "shining carriages" and enough grooms and a stable master to care for that building and its horses.

The Thorwood mansion, the stable, other outbuildings and Dunedin are long gone. There are scores of homes on the hill now. The oldest of these are almost 70 years old. The current owners are sitting on a rich legacy of local history. Here is a sampling of that history:

Henry Villard bought the property as a "country summer home" for his wife, Fanny Garrison, and their three children, Helen, Harold and Oswald. A fourth child, Hilgard, was born in the house in 1883 and tragically died of a ruptured appendix at the age of 7 in 1890.

Villard Houses on Madison Avenue

The Villards moved around a lot, because of Henry's business dealings, staying at various places in Europe and the United States. When Hilgard was three, Henry built a mansion in New York City, later known as "Villard Houses," on Madison Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets, across Madison from the Cardinal's residence and rectory of St. Patrick's Cathedral. But the family always considered Thorwood as their real home, no matter what city they happened to be living or staying in.

Henry had to sell his Madison Avenue residence shortly after he built it in 1886 because of business reverses. He sold that property to Whitelaw Reid, publisher of the *Tribune*. "Villard Houses," considered a landmark, is now the base floor of the Helmsley Corporation's Palace Hotel.

Helen "Fanny" Villard was the daughter of William Lloyd Garrison, of Boston, the famed abolitionist who, because of his fiery anti-slavery articles and speeches, was considered by some to be the main inciter, if not the cause, of the Civil War. Before her marriage, Fanny was deeply involved in the anti-slavery movement, along side her father.

During her marriage, Fanny and her husband, who shared her egalitarian views - even as he was making and losing fortunes and rebuilding them - continued to espouse liberal causes. Henry went so

far as to buy the *New York Post* and the weekly magazine, *The Nation*, as a way of editorially promoting the liberal views that he and Fanny shared. Their son, Oswald, took over the running of their publications in the 1900s.

Fanny Carries On Liberal Tradition

After Henry died in 1900 at the age of 65, Fanny, then 56, threw herself fully into her causes. She founded and was president of the Hudson River Equal Franchise Society, which campaigned for women's right to vote. She founded the Women's Peace Society, which protested World War I. After the war, in her late seventies, she and her Society marched in Fifth Avenue parades calling for total disarmament and complete abolition of war.

She was president for 25 years of the New York Diet Kitchen Association, which fought for a clean milk supply for New York. She was an active member of the Boards of Directors of the Dobbs Ferry Hospital, the Tarrytown Hospital, the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, Columbus Hill Day Nursery and the Hudson River Music Settlement.

She campaigned for higher education for women, pressed for the establishment of Barnard College and was a trustee of the American College for Women in Constantinople. She was an advisory committee member of the NAACP. And she was an ardent advocate of free trade.

Thorwood Estate Sold To Patterson

Fanny died on July 5, 1928, at the age of 83. Her two surviving children, Harold and Oswald, found they could not maintain the vast property, along with the hired help, left to them. After living there for more than 48 years, they sold it in 1929 to Captain Joseph Medill Patterson, owner of the *New York Daily News*. Thorwood and Dunedin were town down in 1930 and the construction of new homes on the hill began soon after.

The brothers were saddened by having to let their servants go. Oswald, in his autobiography, *Fighting Years: Memoirs of a Liberal Editor*, writes that the egalitarian Villard family considered their house employees as loyal friends. One had been with the family for 50 years, three for 25 years or more, one for 15 years, one for 10, and the others for fewer than 10. The 50-year family retainer, who acted as superintendent of the estate, had worked for the Cochran and had come with the Cochran property when Henry bought it.

Oswald in his book recalled his feelings about Thorwood, as his mother grew older and finally died in the mansion with her two sons in attendance:

"So the years rolled on. It seemed to me that Thorwood and its one hundred beautiful acres grew lovelier every year, the views finer, the sunsets - to see which my mother led us all, especially our guests, every evening to the summerhouse above the river - more glorious. My father hoped an impossible hope for the America of today - that Thorwood would be like an old English manor and stay in the family for generations. It was a farm when we first went to it, for we had cows and chickens and ducks . . . and the annual haying was a serious business.

"When the end came, it was a highly taxed piece of suburban property, quite beyond our means to maintain. I am glad that when Joseph Patterson purchased it (to build upon it the many homes that my mother hoped might rise there in all that beauty), he tore down both Thorwood and Dunedin and every other building. It was fitting. The home in which we had had such happiness, in which my parents and Hilgard died, ought never to have passed into other hands and other uses. The chapter was full and rounded; the new one rightly started upon a blank page."

--- Hank Walter.

1852 MAP OF VILLAGE GIVEN TO SOCIETY BY THE SAR; CORRECTION OF MONUMENT DESCRIBED

An 1852 map of Dobbs Ferry and an 1854 document describing plans to establish a village library were presented to the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society by Robert Stackpole, President of the New York Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). The presentation was made at the annual membership meeting of the Society on September 22.

Mr. Stackpole was the featured speaker at the annual meeting. He explained plans to correct the inaccuracies chiseled in 1894 into the SAR's Washington-Rochambeau Monument on Broadway at Livingston Street. A large metal plaque, paid for by the SAR, will cover the mistakes. The accurate account of Dobbs Ferry's vital role in the Revolution will be engraved on the plaque. (See *The Ferryman*, April 1999 for an account of what that vital role was.)

He noted that many errors of one kind or another can be found on historical monuments. Indeed, he

quoted from *Lies Across America*, a recently published book that asserted at the end that the author had found only one monument in the United States that was completely accurate. It was a monument in Maine that stated on such-and-such a date, "nothing happened."

Mr. Stackpole also said that plans were afoot to declare as a Federal Historic Route the entire route that Rochambeau's army took from Newport, Rhode Island, through Connecticut and meeting Washington's army in Westchester (part of which was stationed in Dobbs Ferry). The Historic Route continues from there through several states to Yorktown, Virginia, where the French and American armies defeated Cornwallis' British army, effectively ending the war.

NO FIGHTS, NO RECOUNTS, NO CHADS IN TRUSTEE ELECTION BY MEMBERS

At their annual meeting on September 22, the members of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society unanimously elected six candidates for three-year terms, ending September 30, 2003, to the 18-member Board of Trustees. They are: incumbents Bill Blanck, Muriel Brown and Hank Walter; and new Trustees Larry Dengler, Cathleen Ha and Jane Morgenstern.

New Board Elects Society's Officers

At their reorganization meeting on October 4, the Trustees of the Historical Society elected the following officers: President, Bill Blanck; First Vice-President, Warren Gardner; Second Vice-President Fred Staats; Treasurer, Mavis Cain; Corresponding Secretary, Jean Fritz; and Recording Secretary, Cathleen Ha.

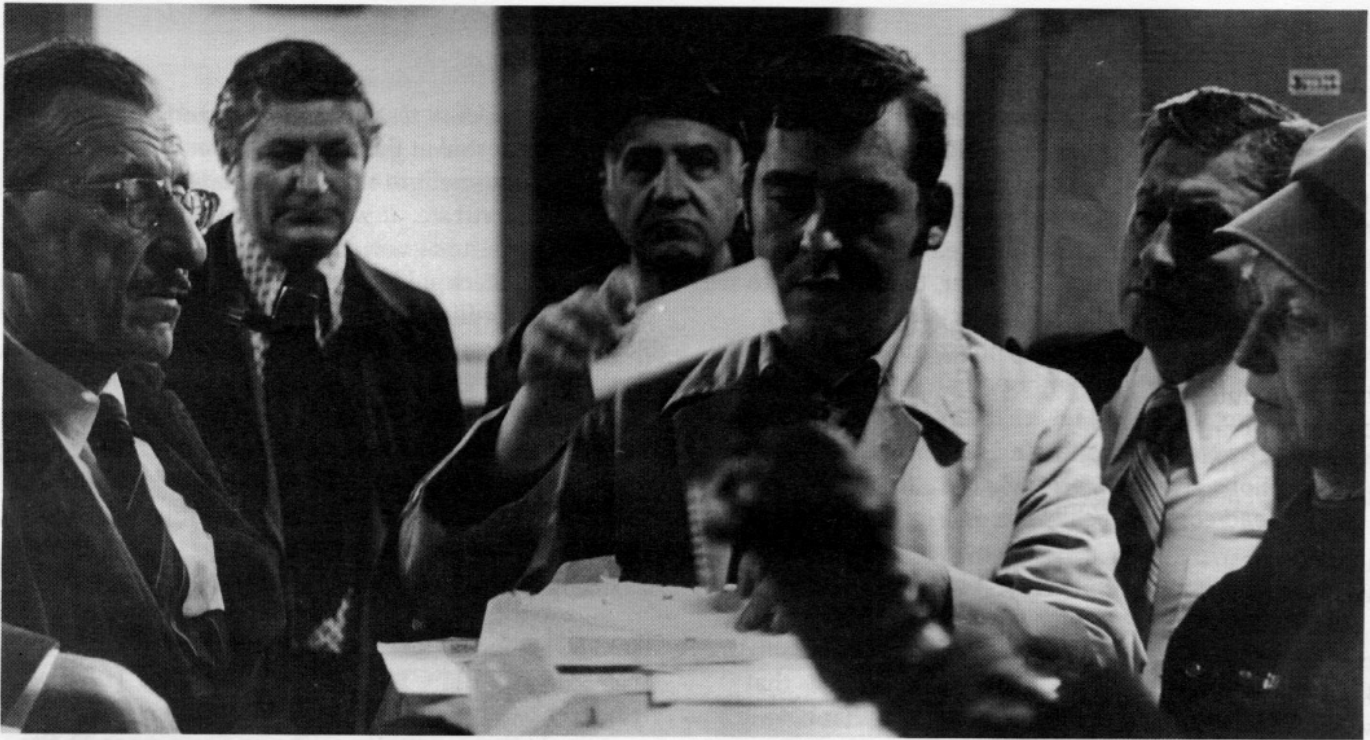
SOCIETY RESEARCHING HISTORY OF VILLARD DEVELOPMENT

The development of the acreage that the Villard family sold to publisher Patterson for development is presently being researched by the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society and an article will be published in a future edition of *The Ferryman*.

To do this we will need the assistance of the residents whose houses are situated on what was the old Villard Estate. Each of these households will be contacted by mail by the Historical Society requesting the history of their houses.

The Society is also in possession of a map showing development sites and the 1933 price of each parcel.

A Village Vote Recount and the Presidential Crisis



Pete Carey (center) recounts votes, watched by (l. to r.) Daniel Mack-Forlist, Phil Mellilo, John Malfai, Bill Zernick and Mary Wall.

When Democratic candidate for Mayor of Dobbs Ferry Phil Melillo lost the March 20, 1973 election to Republican Bill Zernick by only 24 votes, he decided on a recount. Besides the close vote in the Village election, residents were also confronted with a presidential constitutional crisis as the Watergate hearings came before Congress.

Rhetoric in the 1973 Village campaign was gentle compared to today's bombast. Democrat Phil Melillo proposed a series of debates at locations such as the Legion Hall, Embassy Club, and at restaurants on Main Street.

Republican Bill Zernick, who had been a trustee for the past year, claimed he never saw Melillo in Village Hall during his tenure. "Village government is conducted in the Municipal Building," Zernick charged, "and if Melillo has anything to say, that's the place to say it so everyone can hear it -- not in restaurants."

Democrat Phil Melillo and his running mates for Village Trustee, Ann Edwards, Daniel Mack-Forlist and Hillel Goodrich strongly supported a proposition that, if passed, would have provided for a village manager form of government. The Republicans Bill Zernick, Bill Hogan, Wally Slezia and John Palermo vigorously opposed the proposition that went on to defeat -- 992 for -- 1403 against. But there were also 875 residents who couldn't make up their minds and didn't vote on the proposition.

The defeated proposition was not an issue on the recount, nor were the winning Republican candidates for Trustee, Bill Hogan, Wally Slezia, and John Palermo.

It was only those 24 votes! Had there been an error somewhere along the line? Phil Melillo wanted to know.

The recount was done quickly. Dobbs Ferry residents were not kept in a torment of suspense as to who would lead the parade down the streets celebrating the Village's Centennial year of incorporation in 1973. Few people had to hold their breath for very long.

On the night of the election the voting machines for all the election districts of the Village had been sealed. When

they were opened one by one for recount, numbers on the counters were preserved exactly as they were when each machine was sealed on election night.

After an examination of the machines by both parties, the paper absentee ballots were recounted by Village Clerk Pete Carey. Besides the civilian absentee ballots, there were ballots from the Armed Forces.

After a careful recount of the machines and absentee ballots, the result remained exactly the same. Zernick had won by 24 votes. The final tally -- Republican Zernick 1647--Democrat Melillo 1623. While not all were happy, everyone was satisfied that everything was fair and square.

Mayor Bill Zernick would lead Centennial Celebration parade marking the Village's 100th Birththday of incorporation. The Village also sponsord a book, *Life of a River Village*, recounting its history.

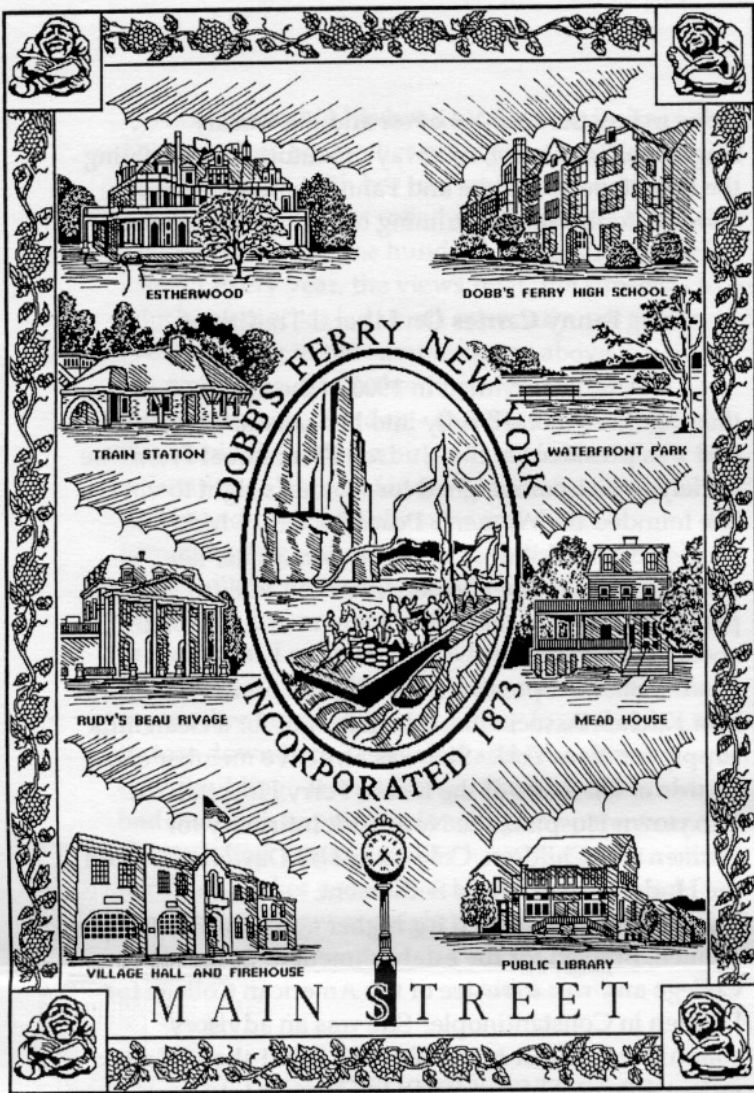
But in 1973, Village residents had many other things on their minds. Besides Vietnam, there was also the Yom Kippur War, when the Israelis defeated Syria and Egypt in 17 days, followed by OPEC's restriction of the oil flow to punish the allies of Israel. This resulted in fuel shortages and long lines of cars at Village gas stations.

But never say it's over till it's over.

While Phil Melillo did not discontinue patronizing local restaurants, he took Bill Zernick's advice and got closer to the scene at Village Hall by running for trustee -- and winning -- in 1974. In 1975 he again faced Zernick in the Village's Mayoral race and this time beat him decisively. Two years later, Melillo was defeated for mayor by John Nanna.

While the political battles were transpiring in Dobbs Ferry, Nixon resigned as President and was pardoned for his Watergate involvement by President Ford. Nelson Rockefeller became Vice-President, and United States troops were withdrawn from Vietnam. The cost in lives -- 58,000 Americans and 3 million Vietnamese.

-- Bill Blanck



Afghans: A Great Holiday and Graduation Gift

Because of the continuing popularity of our history throws, we are once again making them available at the holiday season. They can be ordered either in Cranberry Red or Williamsburg Blue.

Despite inflation, the Society is holding the price at \$45 dollars each.

The throws have been in constant demand every season of the year as they make ideal holiday, birthday and graduation presents. With high school graduation just months away, it's not too soon to order now.

Evoking pleasant sentiments and fond memories of living here, each afghan depicts the High School, the Railroad Station, Waterfront Park, the Mead House, Village Hall and the Firehouse, the Public Library, Washington Theatre, national landmark Estherwood, and the Main Street sidewalk clock. These scenes surround Jon Neilsen's well known woodcut of William Dobbs and his Ferryboat sailing towards the Palisades.

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 color: Williamsburgh Blue Cranberry Red

IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER, PLEASE JOIN US NOW

Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

Phone (day) _____ (eve.) _____

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

MEMBERSHIP 2000-20001

- 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

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.

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

Date _____

Please check one: Parent _____ Guardian _____