



# The FERRYMAN

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Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

VOLUME XVII No. 3

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

DECEMBER 2001

## 10th Annual Clara Mead Eggnog Fling on December 16th

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society is about to pass another milestone on Sunday, December 16: the TENTH Annual Clara Mead Holiday Eggnog Party. It starts at 2:00 p.m. and will run to 4:00 p.m. at the Mead House, 12 Elm Street.

The eggnog spree carries on Miss Mead's personal tradition of hosting a holiday get-together for her circle of friends. She began this practice in 1954 and continued it for 36 years.

In September, the Historical Society marked the tenth anniversary of Clara Mead's death. While she had not been very active in the Society, she had been a long-time member of it and gave it her support. After she died in 1991, the Trustees were surprised and then delighted to learn that Miss Mead had bequeathed her 14-room house to the Society as a home for its collections of documents, letters, other written records, maps, drawings, photographs and oral and video history tapes.

It took some years to raise funds, make needed house repairs, strengthen floors of the building (now about 150 years old), reconstruct the second floor into

climate-controlled archival rooms and move the collections in from their previous location, the basement of the old library at Cedar and Main Streets as well as Village Hall.

Grateful for Miss Mead's generosity and to commemorate it, the Society resumed her personal eggnog party tradition a year after her death in the holiday season of 1992. She had her own "secret" recipe for eggnog. It was her version of one printed in *The New York Times* in December 1954.

Though the eggnog fling is a members-only event, non-members and local history buffs who want to join in the fun and conversation are welcome. They will be cordially invited at the door to join the Society. Members who have not yet paid their 2000-2001 dues also may do so at the door.

The eggnog party ends at 4:00 p.m., and Zion Episcopal Church's annual Washington Irving Holiday Celebration, co-sponsored by the Society with the Church, begins at 5:00. The church is a very short walk up the aqueduct from the Mead House.

## Washington Irving and the Spirit of Old New York To Be Celebrated at Zion Episcopal Church, December 16th 5:00 p.m.

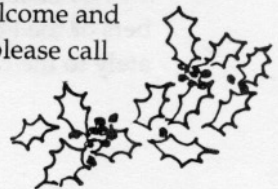
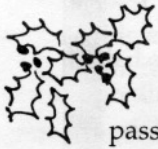
Zion Episcopal Church and the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society will co-sponsor their annual holiday celebration of Washington Irving (1783-1859), famed 19th century author. The program is a community event celebrating aspects of Washington Irving's life and holiday traditions.

This year's program is entitled "A New Yorker's Christmas: Washington Irving and the Spirit of Old New York." In light of the events of September 11th, a theme reflecting the spirit and resilience of New York has been chosen, while celebrating one of New York's and Dobbs Ferry's great authors. Washington Irving was one of the founders of Zion Church in 1833. It is the oldest house of worship in Dobbs Ferry, overlooking the Hudson River so loved by Irving.

In 1809 Washington Irving wrote his fictional "History of New York", supposedly narrated by

Diedrich Knickerbocker. In many ways Irving popularized the image we carry to this day of "Olde New York" under the Dutch. Among the customs described are the story of St. Nicholas and the celebrations of Christmas, which quickly became a part of the American holiday tradition.

This is the twelfth annual Washington Irving celebration, which has become a popular part of the holidays in the lower Hudson Valley. Local actors and members of the community will read selections from Irving's writings and traditional holiday carols will be sung by candlelight. The church will be decorated in the 19th century style and a reception in the parish hall will follow the program. Children are welcome and admission is free. For more information please call Fr. Richard McKeon at 914-693-9320.



## War Comes to Dobbs Ferry -- 1776 -- 1941 -- 2001

Since September 11, 2001, fighter planes have protected our skies and Coast Guard patrols on the Hudson have defended Indian Point Nuclear Power Facility against attack. Dobbs Ferry is in a war zone.

Like Pearl Harbor, the attacks on September 11th came unexpectedly from the air. But unlike Pearl Harbor, one terrorist target was only twenty miles downriver -- not a continent and an ocean away. The horror on the New York City skyline could be witnessed from our waterfront. Unlike Pearl Harbor, the attacks were on the continental United States, striking both the military at the Pentagon and civilians at the World Trade Center.

After World War II began, on December 7, 1941, the first Dobbs Ferry casualty occurred months afterwards on July 10, 1942 when Private William Gamerota died tragically in an accident. On September 11th Dobbs Ferry resident Timothy Stout was killed, as was Michael Lepore, a communicant of Zion Episcopal Church. New York City firefighter Douglas Miller, a former resident of Dobbs Ferry and member of the Ogden Fire Company, died heroically at ground zero. The numerous deaths of friends and neighbors in surrounding communities brought the realization that war had come to our doorsteps and entered our homes.

Village residents watched with horror as the terrible events unfolded on television. Unlike Pearl Harbor, the havoc at the Twin Towers and the Pentagon was broadcast live in startling color. In 1941 there was no commercial television coverage. Only newsreels in black and white were shown in theatres much later.

### **New York City Asks For Help**

On September 11, 2001 the Dobbs Ferry Police and Fire Departments responded immediately to requests from New York City for help. Two fire trucks and fifteen firefighters went to the Bronx to free City firefighters for emergency duty.

Six Dobbs Ferry residents are employed as New York City professional firefighters -- Lt. Frank Farrington was at ground zero in the midst of the havoc when both towers were still standing. Lt. Dan Crowe and Paramedic Neil Sweeting arrived just before the collapse of the first tower; Captain Brian Johnson, Captain Gary Sanger and Captain James Walsh arrived after both towers had collapsed. Five of the New York City professional firefighters are members of the volunteer Dobbs Ferry Fire Department, of which Neil Sweeting is Chief.

Police Chief George Longworth and ten members of the Police Department also responded immediately to the call for help from the beleaguered City.

Some officers were assigned to the morgue, while Chief Longworth, Police Officer Brian Hennessey, and Sgt. Thomas Leahy worked at ground zero.

In the aftermath, our Police have new duties and responsibilities. When a suspicious letter or package is reported, they respond. This has happened sixteen times within past weeks. No anthrax was found.

On September 11, 2001, Larry Dengler spent hours on a crawling subway that finally came to a halt shortly before reaching the disaster area. After walking through other stalled subway cars on trains ahead, he exited by means of a trackside catwalk to a station platform. Above ground, he walked north to Grand Central with hundreds of others, followed by billowing clouds of smoke and dust. Numerous people, he recalled, were making calls on cell phones. Some of the walkers, he said, appeared to be in a state of shock.

### **Response After Pearl Harbor**

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the Village responded quickly. Acting on Federal directives to the police, German and Italian aliens were required to register, turn in cameras and radio equipment, and obtain permission to travel. This included trips to New York City. On instructions from the FBI, a lone Japanese resident was also required to register.

And after Pearl Harbor, the possibility of bombing by enemy aircraft caused great concern. Volunteers were appointed as air raid wardens and at the blast of a siren, blackout drills were rehearsed. The Dobbs Ferry Hospital was readied for casualties. Two buckets of sand were issued by the village to each householder to fight fires that might be caused by incendiary bombs.

Fortunately, World War II enemy bombers lacked the capacity to fly over the ocean and back. Inter-continental missiles were weapons of the future. Consequently, there wasn't a single casualty due to enemy aircraft or missile action in Dobbs Ferry or the continental United States.

During World War II, enemy submarines off shore were a constant menace to shipping and convoys. Because night lighting silhouetted vessels, making them easier targets, a dim-out was imposed. Illumination from street lights was reduced by one half by painting the tops of the bulbs black. Residents were required to shade lamps, porches remained unlighted, and store windows dark.

As it was during the American Revolution, the Village is again in a war zone. In 1776 British General Howe landed troops at Dobbs Ferry in pursuit of Washington's retreating army after the Battle of Long

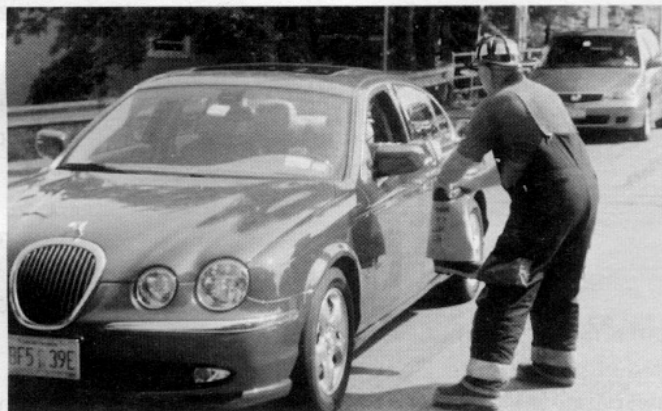
Island. And during that conflict the Battle of Edgars Lane -- a skirmish between local farmers and Hessian mercenaries hired by the British -- was fought just south of the present Dobbs Ferry Village line.

During the entire Revolution the British fleet controlled the Hudson up to West Point. When the Dobbs Ferry area became the staging ground for Washington's and Rochambeau's armies before the decisive battle of Yorktown, Virginia in 1781, fortifications with gun emplacements were built on both sides of the river to prevent the incursion of British forces. It was then that a Dobbs Ferry shore battery scored a direct hit on the British ship "Savage". But times have changed. Two hundred and twenty years later the British are our staunch allies.

This year, three days after the savage attacks of September 11th, residents alerted by the internet and telephone calls, gathered at the waterfront to join in a national candlelight memorial service. Organized by PTA President Saralyn Myers and Mayor Brian Monahan, hundreds participated. Looking down river at sunset, one could still observe clouds of smoke from ground zero.

During the past weeks, saddened residents gathered together in houses of worship to mourn the loss of relatives and friends and to strengthen their spirit and resolve. Throughout the Village, flags appeared on residences, storefronts and vehicles. There emerged a strong feeling of affectionate respect for the police and firefighters who gave their lives to save others, as well as for the living still engaged in those dangerous professions. There was also the firm resolve that we as a people would unite on this new battleground to preserve and defend our values and country.

-- Bill Blanck



*Dobbs Ferry firefighter passes the boot to collect funds for the Fire and Police Relief Fund. All money in the Fund will go to families of the heroic firefighters and police who died at ground zero. Over \$37,000 has been collected locally. To contribute, make your check payable to the Fire and Police Relief Fund, Attention: Chief Neil Sweeting, Dobbs Ferry Fire Department, 112 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522.*

## Society Establishes September 11 Archive

Your Historical Society has begun a special archive to illustrate for coming generations how Dobbs Ferry residents were impacted by the World Trade Center tragedy on September 11 and by its aftermath.

The Trustees have been interviewing Village officials (see accompanying article) and residents willing to discuss their experiences and feelings about the awful attack on our nation and how it affected their lives.

This archive will include documents (official Village reports when available, letters, personal journal entries, essays and poems by residents), photographs, home videos and video/oral history tapes (mainly interviews). Excerpts will be taken from time to time from this expanding archive and used in the Society's public programs and exhibits.

Residents who have something to say or show about September 11th, which has changed all our lives, are urged to contact the Society. Either write to the Society, The Mead House, 12 Elm Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522, or leave a message on the Society's answering machine, 674-1007.

## In Memoriam -- Cecil Jack, Trustee

Cecil Jack, Trustee of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society for a number of years and Chairman of the Society's Membership Committee, died after a long illness on September 10 at the age of 81.

Dr. Jack had been a long-time biochemistry professor at St. John's University in Queens before his retirement. Born in the West Indies, he earned his bachelor's degree at McGill University, Montreal, and his Ph.D. at Columbia University in 1964. He lived in Dobbs Ferry for many years with his wife, Yvonne, and daughters Valerie and Marcy, before moving to Texas.

Cecil loved music and was a talented pianist. He also loved local history. A genial man, he nonetheless took his responsibilities as Trustee and the Society's Membership Chairman very seriously. He computerized the membership list on updated software and kept meticulous track of dues payments and contributions. His kind and pleasing personality was a welcome grace note at meetings of the Board of Trustees.

In addition to the Historical Society, Dr. Jack was active in the Community Hospital at Dobbs Ferry, the Village's Community Concerts and the Democratic Party of Dobbs Ferry. His daughter Marcy attended Masters School.

## What Rochambeau's Officers Thought About Us



As soon as Americans heard that France was joining them in their war for independence, they were, of course, overjoyed. But what would the French think of America, they wondered. At least three French officers kept diaries. Here are excerpts, with comments on their first impressions, which the diarists recorded from their arrival in Rhode Island through their stay in Greenburg, NY (Dobbs Ferry area) and their departure for the South. Although the Marquis de Lafayette, who had been fighting with the Americans for two years, wanted very much to be in charge of the French, he was rejected for being too young. Instead, the command was given to General Rochambeau (often called Papa behind his back).

The first diarist, **Louis de Clermont-Crevecoeur**, was in the artillery. "There is nothing pretty about Newport," he wrote. For one thing, there were no trees; the British had chopped them all down before they left. The houses were, for the most part, wooden, built outside of town and trundled in on rollers to their specific plots. As for the people, they were not friendly at first because the Tories (and there were many in Newport) had spread bad stories about the French. Indeed, the people were not very impressive. They were tall and well-built, but looked as if they had grown while convalescing from an illness. Once off the dance floor, the women seemed frigid.

Clermont-Crevecoeur would change his mind. Before long we find him eating at the homes of Americans -- coffee, chocolate, toast for breakfast and perhaps cheese, jam, pickles, fried meat. Dinner was more lavish. They piled everything on their plates ("enough to frighten a man") and poured gravy over it. The Royalists were cowardly and cruel, he said, and he didn't blame the Whig ladies for refusing to dance in the same room where Tory ladies were dancing. He felt sorry for Quaker ladies who had to live so simply that they professed to hate their religion and only when they were middle-aged did they seem to accept it.

Washington and Rochambeau did not meet at first in Newport. Washington sent Lafayette to conduct the business in his place, but Rochambeau objected, insisting on a personal meeting with Washington himself. He felt he couldn't be frank with a man young enough to be his grandson, so in the end the two men conferred in Hartford, Connecticut. In the spring of 1781, however, Washington did go to Newport and the French had a good look at him. He was 5 feet 10 or 11, well built, with a good figure. He had a modest expression, if a bit cold, but still he looked kind and affable.

The French went all-out in welcoming him, illuminating their windows in many cases, giving balls

in his honor -- most likely in the recreation hall that Rochambeau built on the property where he was living -- without permission of the owner. (One man from Newport observed that this was not very "polite" of him.) Nevertheless, it was a successful affair, with Washington dancing with everybody "indiscriminately". The entertainment was further enhanced by the arrival of 13 Indians who performed a sword dance for the company and demonstrated the proper way to scalp a man.

About the first of June the men were told to pack only the bare essentials, which still left them heavily burdened when they began their march on June 10. Clermont-Crevecoeur described every day of their march -- the bad roads, heat, lack of food and water. He admired Connecticut as they passed through it, but criticized the fact that they didn't develop their grapes. He supposed they were too lazy. They arrived at camp in Phillipsburg late at night, July 23rd. Washington and his army set up their quarters three miles from Rochambeau.

### Beautiful American Women

There was one subject with which all three diarists were in full agreement: American women were beautiful. What was more, they were easy to court. Showing no concern, parents would leave a daughter alone with a young man, knowing that the two would get under the covers of the bundling bed. Bundling, however, had rules. A girl could be free with her kisses, but she and her suitor knew that their love-making must not venture into what was reserved for the marriage bed. Still, bundling could arouse strong feelings, and it did in Newport. Ten Frenchmen deserted the army while they were on their march so they could go back to Newport to their lady friends.

**Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger** was the youngest of the three diarists, only seventeen when he came to America. He didn't start keeping his diary until he reached Williamsburg, December 1, 1781 -- just before the battle of Yorktown, so most of the material prior to this is recollection. In Newport he was particularly impressed with the visit of the Indians and since he was a good artist, he painted them as they were before they performed their sword dance. He gave them all faces that resembled his own self portrait -- round and babyish. The Indians said they regretted the fact that some of their people fought with the English, but this was because the English gave them such good rum and plenty of gunpowder. Rochambeau told them his king would supply them with good rum; then he began handing out presents: swords, shirts, blankets, and rouge. The Indians went off a little way to try on their new clothes and they used the rouge generously -- combing it through their hair, applying it on their faces



## Rochambeau's Officers --continued from page 4

and bodies. They came back to the French, took off their animal skins, and performed the sword dance, beating two little sticks together and singing in a monotonous way.

October 10-13. Rochambeau entered winter quarters. Most houses in Newport were made of wood, but he admired the Town Hall, built of brick and converted into a hospital. Also the meat market. The best thing about Newport, however, was its harbor -- big enough so that one hundred ships could winter there with no problem.

Although America was excessively hot in the summer, Newport escaped the worst of it. And you could always count on having delicious fish to eat -- blackfish, bluefish, cod, lobster, eel, oysters.

### "Why Are We Never Ready?"

Vergier spent much of the time while the French were in Newport on various expeditions -- to Virginia to help Lafayette, who was trying to capture Arnold, who was laying waste to the countryside. The expeditions were not successful and Vergier seemed to think the French were at fault. "Why are we never ready?" he asked. He also went on a sortie to Long Island which was equally unsuccessful.

Later in his diary he had kind things to say about the American army. "The American Continental Army," he wrote, "is very war-wise and quite well disciplined. They are thoroughly inured to hardship, which they endure with little complaint so long as their officers set them an example, but it is imperative that the officers equal their troops in firmness and resolution. They have supreme confidence in General Washington and march with courage and enthusiasm behind the Marquis de Lafayette. The militia seem a bit worse here than elsewhere. (Yet) we have seen parties of militia in this country perform feats that veteran units would have gloried in accomplishing. They only do so, however, after the persuasive eloquence of their commander has aroused in them an enthusiastic ardor."

"Some American officers were heard to say that when Cornwallis saw the militia and the French arrive, he wasn't much worried, but when he saw the Continental troops---!"

Like most of the French officers, Vergier could not contain his admiration for the women of Newport. He even called them by name: Mr. Champlin's daughter "had beautiful eyes, an agreeable mouth, a lively complexion, a fine figure, a pretty foot, and dressed with taste -- that is to say, in the French fashion." Polly Lawton, a Quaker, was described as a "nymph" rather than a woman.

**Louis-Alexandre Berthier** came from a family of humble origin, yet his military career lasted longer and was the most dramatic of the three diarists. Although

his father was a wheelwright, he managed to send this son and a brother to a military school for cadets in Paris. Berthier was in America for three years with Rochambeau and later became chief of staff to Napoleon during his many campaigns, including the one in Egypt and his infamous winter campaign against Russia. In the end, depressed over Napoleon's high-handed treatment of him, Berthier threw himself out a window of his father-in-law's home and died, just a few days before the Battle of Waterloo.

Many of Berthier's engagements with the enemy were at sea. Indeed, he did not accompany Rochambeau on his first trip to Newport. Instead he was sent to Martinique where he got his first taste of colonial life as lived by the French. He didn't think much of it. In the first place, it was hot. Every woman had a hammock swinging in her parlor, where she would lie while two black maids rocked her back and forth. The main occupation of the men was at the gambling table, where they played for high stakes. Many of the men kept mulatto women as their mistresses. Another diversion was theater-going, though they didn't applaud fine acting, being impressed merely if the actors remembered their lines.

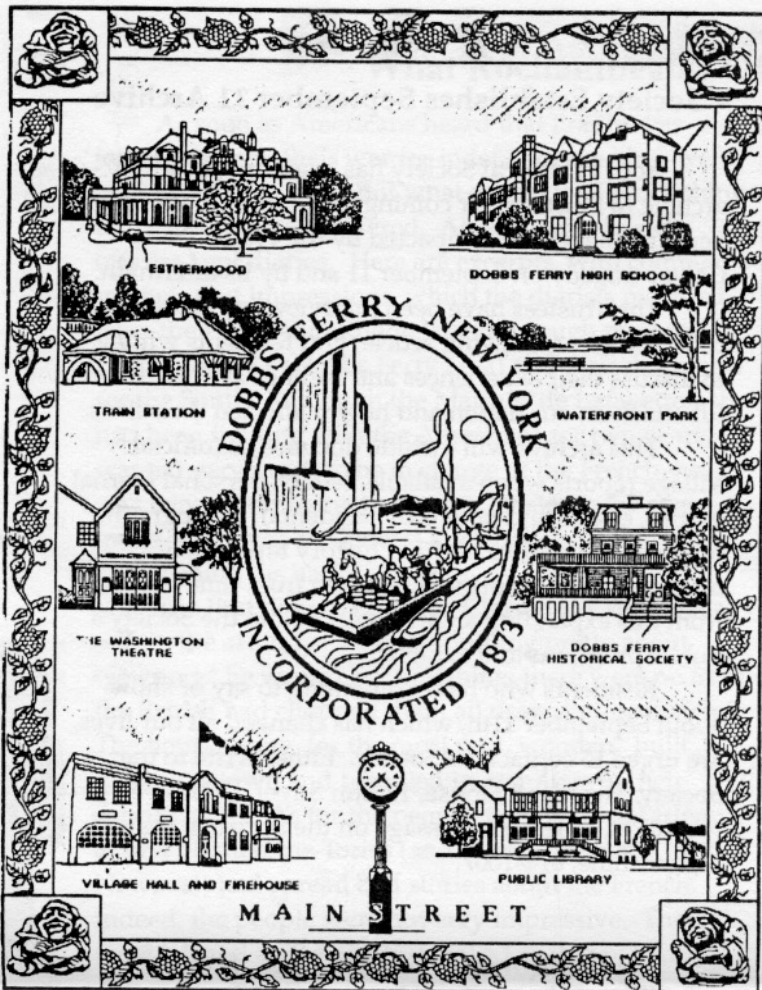
### Shocked at Treatment of Slaves

Most of Berthier's sympathies were with the black population -- both slaves and free blacks. If he saw a black person in an iron collar and in chains, he knew that person had been a runaway and was being punished. He was continually shocked at the way slaves were treated.

When he finally got to Newport, he was ready for a good time. And he had it. Rochambeau used the meeting place he had built for dances. "Our General gave charming balls for us," Berthier wrote, "and presided over them like the head of a family." Berthier was appointed assistant quartermaster general, which gave him enough money to buy a horse to use in campaigns. Still, he believed in living carefully and did not complain about eating stew every day. He made himself so at home in Newport that, like the rest of the army, he regretted leaving when it came time for their march. And he said not only the soldiers regretted leaving, but the inhabitants, "particularly the ladies."

--Jean Fritz

*Editor's Note: Mavis Cain's article in the February 1997 issue of "The Ferryman" describes how Berthier and his fellow officers provided for their creature comforts while in the Dobbs Ferry area. A map showing the disposition of the French and American armies, as well as Washington's and Rochambeau's headquarters, is attributed to Berthier.*



## Throws: 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: Williamsburg 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:  
DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
12 Elm Street  
Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522  
Telephone (914) 674-1007 (24-hour answering)

MEMBERSHIP 2001-2002

[ ] 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 Roof/Boiler 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