



The FERRYMAN

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PAID
Permit No. 2215
White Plains, NY
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Resident
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

VOLUME XVII No. 6

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

DECEMBER 2002

12 Elm Street, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522 (914) 674-1007



11th ANNUAL "CLARA'S PARTY" SET FOR DECEMBER 15

The eleventh annual Clara Mead Holiday Eggnog Party will be held on Sunday, December 15, at the Mead House, 12 Elm Street, from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. As usual, it will feature eggnog made according to Miss Mead's "secret" recipe, fruit punch and goodies baked or bought by the Trustees. It will also feature sparkling conversation by you, the members.

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, and Trustee.

Clara died in September, 1991 and bequeathed her 14-room home to the Society. It is now the Society's headquarters, home of its archival collections and Dobbs Ferry's History Center.

The eggnog fling is a member event. But non-members and buffs of local history who want to join in the fun and conversation may come and be cordially invited at the door to become members.

After the party ends at 4:30 p.m., the Zion Episcopal Church's annual Washington Irving Holiday Celebration, co-sponsored with the Church by the Society, will begin at 5:00 pm. Many of the Society's members will walk a short distance up the aqueduct from the Mead House to the Church to join that celebration.

Washington Irving Holiday Celebration at Zion Church

On Sunday, December 15th, Zion Episcopal Church and The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society will co-sponsor the annual Washington Irving Holiday Celebration at Zion Church at 5:00 p.m.

This year's theme is "Washington Irving: The Man Behind the Legend," with focus on more personal characteristics that can be known through his writings. One of Irving's most distinctive character traits was his love of the holiday season. Indeed, he was instrumental in creating many of the holiday traditions still celebrated in America almost 200 years later. Washington Irving was one of the founding members of Zion Episcopal Church in 1833. He served on the vestry, which is the governing committee of the church.

Selections pertaining to this year's theme will be read by members of the community. There will be special music, and the church will be decorated in keeping with the ecclesiastical fashion of the early 19th century. Following the candlelight program, a reception will be held in the Parish Hall. As always, a faintly historical sketch produced by Fr. Richard McKeon will be included in the evening's revels. Admission is free.

Growing Up in Dobbs Ferry

By Andrea Fritz

I haven't lived in Dobbs Ferry for over 30 years, but my mother still lives in the house on Bellewood Avenue where I grew up, so I have continued to have a strong connection to my childhood home. I was four years old in 1951 when our family moved from Manhattan to Dobbs Ferry. What was it like, growing up in Dobbs Ferry in the 1950's and early 1960's? Looking back, it seems idyllic: a quintessential slice of an American dream.

One summer night not long ago, while visiting in Dobbs Ferry, I went for a walk. As I walked up and down Bellewood Avenue, Transvaal, Walgrove, Esterwood, Grandview and Mohican, I found myself surrounded by the ghosts of my childhood. There I was alone in the darkness, sharing the quiet streets with my past self and all the neighborhood kids. We were playing hide and seek: "Tap, tap, Bobby, one two three, hiding behind the maple tree!" I heard us calling, "All-y, all-y in come free!" We were roller-skating and we were riding our bikes. We played stickball, hit-the-bat, and freeze tag in the middle of Bellewood Avenue with only minor interruptions for passing cars. "Car, car, C-A-R, look out wherever you are!" we called out to each other in warning. There were a lot fewer cars in those days. No one parked on the street as they do now; there was only one car per household, so our driveways were enough. There were fewer houses and people too, of course. What were once empty lots and woods gradually filled in with new homes.

For a short while, a great place to play was "the canyon", the excavation of the hillside that took place in building the Grand Union, now the Stop 'n Shop. We climbed the dirt canyon walls and slid down again and again. Before that, the A&P was the only supermarket in town, occupying the building that currently houses Brother's Market, the G&L Deli, and the Off Broadway restaurant. On cold days, walking home from school I would often cut through the A&P to warm myself up. The place smelled of freshly ground coffee and the people who worked there wore white aprons and white paper hats.

Living on Bellewood Avenue allowed me to walk everywhere – and I did. I walked to school, to modern dance lessons at the Episcopal Church, to Sunday School and Youth Fellowship at the South

Presbyterian Church, and to the stores on Cedar and Main Streets. Before the traffic light at the intersection of Broadway and Ashford went automatic complete with "Walk" signs, there was a tiny booth in the middle of Walgrove at Ashford from which a policeman manually operated the lights. Most prominent among my destinations on Cedar Street were the Liggett Rexall's Drug Store and the Broadway Arms Pharmacy. Both featured soda fountains at which numerous hot fudge sundaes, malted milks and cherry cokes were consumed. These were our hangouts after school and after ballgames on Saturday afternoons. During junior high school I had crushes on several of the high school boys who worked there as "soda jerks" and I spent many an early evening when my homework was done, treating myself to a coke and wishful thinking.

While I was in elementary school, my mother was children's librarian at the Dobbs Ferry Library. This was long before Springhurst School was built and the elementary school was next to the high school. At noontime I would walk from school down the aqueduct to join her for lunch. We ate tuna fish sandwiches in the upstairs back room of the library and looked out over the river to the Palisades.

I walked to Gould Park for football games in the fall and in summer for the movies that were shown there on an outdoor screen every Wednesday night. I walked to the tennis courts at the Masters School where my father taught me to play tennis, and I played with my friends at what we called the Castle Tree on the school's ground near Esterwood. How special I felt one day when I was eleven or twelve years old, sitting at the top of that huge copper beech tree, in the "king's seat", looking out over the top of the world as a convertible full of teenage boys drove down the hill. "Look!" One of the boys shouted, "There's a girl at the top of that big tree!" I was the only girl I knew who had braved the climb all the way to the top and I was proud to add my carved initials to those of my older brother and his friends.

Television was new in the early 50's and we were not among the first families to own one. My brother and I had to go to a neighbor's house up the street to watch Howdy Doody and Superman on her

TV. Television soon became a household staple, however, and I joined my generation in watching *The Lone Ranger*, *My Little Margie*, *Sky King* and *Davey Crockett* (in my very own coonskin hat). I was nine years old and amazed to see Elvis swivel his hips as he sang on the Tommy Dorsey show. I remember asking my brother, "Why are all the teenage girls in the audience screaming?"

The Hudson River in Dobbs Ferry was not as accessible during my childhood as it is today. There was no Chart House and no condos squeezed onto the riverbank. Where today the riverside park provides a scenic spot for recreation and contemplation, when I was growing up there were just jagged rocks jumbled on the shoreline, a small industrial zone with a haphazard marina, and a smelly garbage dump. Today's grassy park was constructed from years of well-planned landfill operations and is a most welcome addition to the village. The train station and trains were there, of



The Author and Lassie 1952

course, and by the time I was in junior high, my friends and I would take the train for a Saturday afternoon in the City, walking around Times Square and going to a movie.

In 1954, I went to my first movie at the Embassy Theatre in Dobbs Ferry, *The Long Long Trailer* starring Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez. In 1960, part of the ceiling fell down during a showing of

North to Alaska and the theatre was closed for years. My friends and I walked down Broadway to Hastings for the movies.

I watched the Tappan Zee Bridge being built in 1952 and 1953 and once rode the ferry from Yonkers to New Jersey for a picnic lunch with my family on the Palisades. Our family would often go to New York City on a weekend afternoon to a Broadway musical matinee or the Museum of Natural History. We'd eat lunch at the Horn & Hardart Automat. I was thrilled to exchange a handful of nickels for my choice of the foods that lay behind the rows of glass doors filling the restaurant's wall.

The baseball Giants were still in New York in those days and in the summers several of the ballplayers rented houses on Bellewood Avenue. I played with the sons and daughters of Whitey Lockman, Davey Williams and Alvin Darke, and rooted enthusiastically for "our" team. We all felt gyped in 1958 when the Giants abandoned us for San Francisco.

Every winter the 9th hole of the golf course was flooded over for ice-skating. Our favorite times were when our father would take us moonlight skating – the magic of the cold night and the ice illuminated by a full moon.

I marched in the annual Memorial Day Parade as a Brownie and a Girl Scout, and before that rode my bike alongside the marchers; red, white and blue crepe paper painstakingly woven into my bike's spokes and streaming off the handlebars. For many years, my bicycle was my "horse" and I would only get on and off from the left like any good horsewoman. I was Annie Oakley and my friend was Dale Evans.

It was a time of jumping rope in the schoolyard, and later, of sock hops after basketball games and school dances in the gym where we twisted, strolled, ponied, mash-potatoed, and Bristol Stomped. At the same time we were learning all the new teen-age dance crazes, my friends and I were being sent to Cotillion at the Women's Club on Clinton Avenue, to learn the dances of our parent's generation: the waltz, the foxtrot, the cha-cha and the lindy-hop.

I was in social studies class my junior year at Dobbs Ferry High School when our teacher shocked us with the news that the president had been shot. I was glued to the television with the rest of the country that whole November weekend, watching the fated motorcade in Dallas over and over again,

seeing Ruby shoot Oswald, and Caroline and John-John, brave and bewildered at their father's funeral. A year and a half later, in 1965, I graduated from high school and was only home again for vacations, holidays, and family visits.

I don't know if the 1950's and early 60's were really the simpler, idyllic time that I remember today or if I was just lucky enough to have spent this time in a great little village just up the river from the greatest city in the world. Regardless, I am thankful to have had such a special place in which to spend my growing-up years. ♦

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

ANNUAL MEETING ELECTS 6 TRUSTEES

At the annual membership meeting of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society, held on September 27, 2002 at Our Lady of Pompeii Parish Hall, the members who attended elected the following candidates as Trustees for three-year terms that will expire on September 30, 2005: Judith Bassin, Dolores Calafati, Mark Cassella, Jean Fritz, Helen Kirkpatrick and Pam Strachan.

The history program that took place after the business meeting consisted of an exhibit of selected photographs from the Society's archives. The exhibit was mounted by Trustees Mavis Cain, Chair, and Helen Fitzpatrick. A few of the people in the photos who had been unknown were identified by some of the members in attendance.

At a previous Board meeting, the Board of Trustees appointed Mary Scioscia as a Trustee to fill a vacant position whose term expires September 30, 2004. Ms. Scioscia will have to run for election to that term at the 2003 annual membership meeting.

TRUSTEES ELECT THEIR OFFICERS

At its annual reorganization meeting on October 1st, the 18-member Board of Trustees elected new officers for one-year terms. They are: Professor Mary Donovan, President; The Rev. Richard McKeon, First Vice President; Mark Cassella, Second Vice President; Pam Strachan, Third Vice President; Bill Blanck, Treasurer pro tem; and Helen Kirkpatrick, Secretary. Maz Hogan was appointed Corresponding Secretary.

Dr. Donovan is Adjunct Assistant Professor at Hunter College, teaching world history. Her other specialties are women's history and 19th century American history. She has also taught courses in African-American history, the British Colonies in

America and the American Revolution. Dozens of her articles have appeared in history journals and she is the author of several books.

She succeeds Bill Blanck who served as President for 10 years, from October 1, 1992 to September 30, 2002. Mr. Blanck was President during the critical years after Clara Mead bequeathed her home to the Society to house its collections and to become the History Center of Dobbs Ferry. He will remain on the Board.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS!

Would you like to help the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society preserve the history of the "sleepy little village" on the River? Become a volunteer. We need all kinds of help. Have a green thumb? You could serve on the Grounds Committee. How about the Membership Committee? Sends us a note at 12 Elm Street and tell us how you would like to help. Include your phone number and we'll get back to you. The Society will be deeply grateful.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY CALENDAR

DECEMBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				



HOW OLD SANTA WILL COME IN THE NEW CENTURY.

This cartoon of Santa was first printed in the Dobbs Ferry Register on December 20, 1901, proving that Dobbs Ferry has always been ahead of its time. Imagine Santa flying down from the North Pole when Lindbergh hadn't even made it across the Atlantic!

FOUNDERS OF DOBBS FERRY

People like to know when and how their village started. This story was included in several issues of The Ferryman in 1993 and 1994, but members of the present fourth grade in Dobbs Ferry were too young to read it then, so we are re-telling the story now, especially for fourth graders (and anyone else interested.)

Who were the first people in Dobbs Ferry before it became Dobbs Ferry? Indians, of course. They probably didn't live here all year long but they returned each year when the food they particularly liked became plentiful. One of their favorite foods was oysters. We know this because the river bank of Dobbs Ferry still has large piles of oyster shells discarded by the Indians. It is easy to picture those Indians, squatting around fires, licking their fingers, and watching the peach-colored sunsets over the Hudson River. They also left behind them a well-trodden path leading away from the river. It is now called Ashford Avenue.

It was 1662 before the first group of white people came to Dobbs Ferry. They were not scattered volunteers; they were an extended family led by William Merritt who had \$5000 when he started out – not enough to build their first settlement at the place they landed. But who would want to stay there for long? It was called Barren Island in Jamaica Bay, not far from what was then called New Amsterdam (now New York). The island was well named; it certainly looked barren. (It is no longer there, having been covered with land fill and turned into Floyd Bennett Field, one of the earliest air strips in the area).

William Merritt, founder of Dobbs Ferry, came from a close family. His grandfather was Walter Dobbs married to Mary Merritt; Mary's brother was our William Merritt married to Margery Lawrence in London in 1662 shortly before leaving for the New World. William had big ideas for himself but what chance did his ideas have on a miserable little out-of-the-way island? In 1671 he moved to New York City where he was soon recognized as a responsible citizen. In time he was elected an alderman, a collector of excises, a justice, and a vestryman of Trinity Church to which he gave five shillings and sixpence toward the purchase of a new steeple. In spite of spending twenty-one days in jail for some unknown reason, he was elected mayor three times in a row. What, if anything did he accomplish as mayor? Perhaps he made it safer at night; at least he made it a little brighter by requiring householders to keep a lighted candle in every window that faced the street.

But those three terms as major were enough for William. So when he had a chance to buy land up

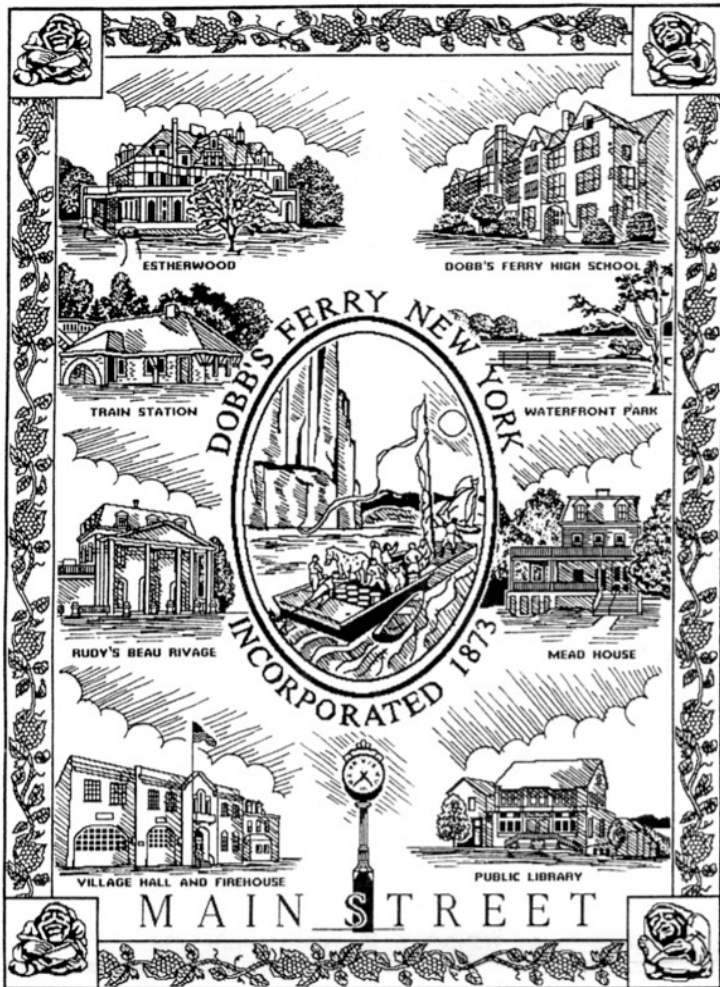
the river, he took it. George Lockhart, father of his daughter-in-law Jane (or Jennet), offered him 3,410 acres on the west bank of the Hudson. William bought it for 363 pounds and 17 shillings. Now he would have enough room to move his family.

And they came: Sarah Crabbe (a widowed sister) and five little Crabbes, Edward Meek (Sarah's grown son by a previous marriage), and John Dobbs, the twenty-three year old son of Walter Dobbs who had died in 1689. The only ones who did not join the Merritt pilgrimage up the Hudson was Mary, widow of Walter, now married to Nathaniel Pittman. She probably didn't say she was too old to travel. She was used to being old; she didn't die until she was 104. Sarah Crabbe lived to be 102. And Mary (or Mollie, the real heroine of our story) lived to be 101.

But Mollie hadn't arrived yet and when she did, it was on the other side of the river. Her father, John Dobbs, liked the east side of the river better than the west side so he leased 252 acres from Fredereick Phillipse, largest landowner in the area, and he built a farm where the present railroad station is located. The Dobbs' weren't the only ones who preferred the east side. A family named Hyatt (with a daughter, Elizabeth) lived just south of John Dobbs and before long Elizabeth and John married. They had two sons, William and John, and then Elizabeth died.

Fortunately for the town of Dobbs Ferry, John Sr. married again, a woman who is known to us only as Abigail. The two sons of Elizabeth Hyatt (William and John) had found a way to make extra money on the east side of the Hudson. There were always people who wanted to cross the river and since this was the first place above New York City where the roads came down on both sides to the water, the boys figured they would start a ferry service. They built a periauger which may in the beginning have been no more than a hollowed-out tree trunk but developed into a large flat-bottomed boat managed by sails and oars and capable of carrying heavy loads. The ferry service was probably well established when Mary (or Mollie, the traditional nickname for Mary) arrived, the first child of John and Abigail. Later on, trailing her brothers about, she would take an active part in the ferry business. *(To be continued in a later issue)*

-Jean Fritz



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 _____

Phone (day) _____ (eve) _____

Please make check payable to, and mail to:
DOBB'S FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
12 Elm Street
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522
telephone (914) 674-1007

MEMBERSHIP 2002-2003

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

Membership contribution.....\$ _____

Mead House contribution.....\$ _____

Newspaper Microfilming Project.....\$ _____

Total enclosed (TAX DEDUCTIBLE).....\$ _____

[] My employer's matching contribution 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 ___