



# The FERRYMAN

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DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

December, 2003

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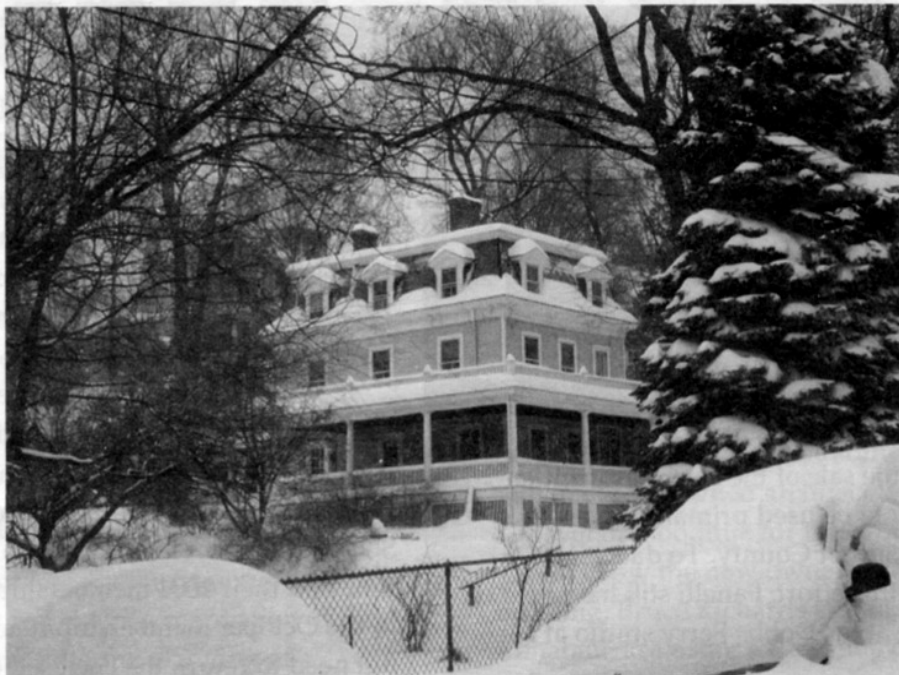
## Annual Clara Mead Egg Nog Party and Zion's Washington Irving Celebration To Be Held Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>

With a new sidewalk providing easy accessibility to the Mead House (12 Elm Street), even snow should not keep anyone from attending the Holiday Egg Nog Party on Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup> from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. This event is held each year in tribute to our benefactor, Clara Mead, who bequeathed her house to be used as the Historical Society headquarters.

Since the early 1950s, Clara Mead had invited family and friends to celebrate with her famous egg nog, made according to her closely-guarded, secret recipe. Historical Society members (and if you haven't joined, you are welcome to join at the door) look forward to ushering in the holiday

season with this afternoon of old-fashioned hospitality and conversation. Do join us this year.

After this event it is but a short walk to Zion Episcopal Church for the annual Washington Irving Holiday Celebration that begins at 5:00 p.m. The Reverend Richard McKeon assures us that a delightful program of readings from Irving's works interspersed with familiar holiday carols will entertain one and all. Rumor has it that the final dramatic presentation for this year's celebration may well be scouted by the Emmy Awards committee. A reception follows the program in the parish hall. Admission is free and open to the public.



*The Mead House in all its winter glory*

*Photo courtesy of Pam Strachan*

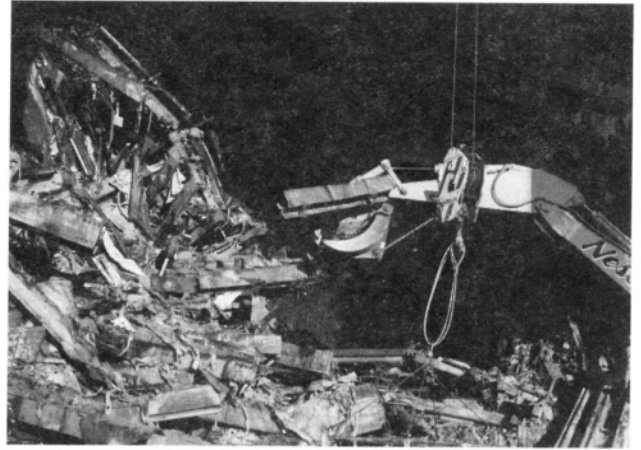
## Photos from Ground Zero Featured at Annual Meeting

Members at the September 19<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society were fascinated by Dobbs Ferry resident Nick Fanelli's account of his photography at Ground Zero. The day after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Fanelli, with his cameras and lots of film, made his way to the destruction site where he spent most of the next seven days making a photographic record of the rescue operation. His experience at the site impelled him to further action.

Fanelli's response was to use his photographs to create a calendar that might be sold to benefit the victims of the attack. Describing the complex process of assembling others to assist him, Fanelli noted that he eventually worked with a widespread series of associates. Manuel Lugo from Yonkers and Dan Goldfein from Dobbs Ferry for computer graphics and design, printer Ike Thaler from Boynton Beach, Florida; Denise Gagliardi who donated the paper; Bill Kingston from Springfield, Massachusetts who transported paper to the printer and calendars back to Dobbs Ferry; and James McCue who provided storage.



All proceeds from the sale of the calendar went to the Salvation Army to be used primarily to assist victims from Westchester County. To date, \$11,676 has been raised by this effort. Fanelli still has some calendars available at his Dobbs Ferry studio at 63 Main Street.



*Nick Fanelli's photographs such as these are a valuable historical record of the extent of the destruction of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> and the massive work accomplished by the recovery crews in the ensuing days.*

In other business, the annual meeting attendees heard a report of the year's activities from President Mary Donovan and a financial report from Treasurer William Blanck who stressed the need to raise additional funds for the recently completed sidewalk that makes the Mead House more accessible to the disabled. Six trustees were elected: William Blanck, Lawrence Dengler, David Koenigsberg, Brian Maddox, Jane Morgenstern and Denise Wilson. Retiring trustee Hank Walter was honored with a special round of applause for his many years' service to the Society.

### **Board of Trustees Meeting**

At the subsequent meeting of the Trustees, the following officers were elected for the coming year: Mary Donovan, President; Richard McKeon, Vice President; Helen Kirkpatrick, Secretary; and Pamela Strachan, Treasurer.

The Trustees also decided to embark upon a membership drive. Enclosed in this issue of *The Ferryman* is an envelope that Dobbs Ferry residents can use to join the Society. Current members who have already renewed their 2004 memberships in response to the October membership renewal letter do not need to return the enclosed envelopes.

## The Oldest House in Dobbs Ferry

*The house at 28 Rochambeau Avenue doesn't look like an old house. Certainly not the oldest in Dobbs Ferry. It just appears to be an ordinary house which could have been built between the 1920's and the 1950's. But the house has a story to tell. Denise Wilson, who lives there now, searched until she found the bones of the story and put them together. Here it is:*

At first only the Wysequaqua Indians lived here but on April 3, 1682, Frederick Philipse purchased the Dobbs Ferry area, along with most of Westchester County. At least he thought he purchased it! Indians did not believe that people could own land so they may not have realized that the deal that they were making was "for keeps". People moved on to the Philipse land, divided now into tenant farms, temporarily loaned, rent-free, to new settlers.

The house was built on Philipse land which would today be considered the corner of Broadway and Rochambeau Avenue in Dobbs Ferry. It came to be known as the Old Storm Farmhouse, named for the Storm family, members of which lived in it until 1891. It may have been built in the early 1700s and started out as a typical Dutch salt box, no larger than half its



*The farmhouse in the 1800s when it sat on the corner of Broadway and Rochambeau*

present size. The tin roof was still under several layers of roofing until March, 1999, when a leak called for changes and the old tin roof was removed. Other major changes were gradually made. Brick chimneys were added and removed as the house conformed to each update. An addition was built on to the right side of the

house with a slanted roof, and a second door in the front. Later still, the windows were aligned and the second door removed so that the house would conform to the colonial style. The peaked roof was extended to the full length of the house while the shingles on the sides of the house were removed and replaced with clapboard, still visible on the front porch. The house was painted white with a pale green trim.

Usually a farmhouse stays a farmhouse for all its life. Not this one. For a while it became Ye Old Inn Club, but by 1891, new owners had sold the farm off bit by bit. Still, the street on which the house sat remained unpaved, unnamed, and practically unchanged. The new owners tried to give it their own names but that didn't catch on. Instead, in 1891, the official address for the old farmhouse became Rochambeau Avenue, named for the French general, Comte de Rochambeau, who camped in this area before he and Washington began their long march to Yorktown for the final battle of the Revolutionary War.

### **And what of the old house?**

It remained on its original site but now there was too little land left for farming. The village was growing and the people of Dobbs Ferry had other uses for the farmhouse. They were building a new church, the Church of the Sacred Heart, which needed a rectory. Where would their priest sleep? They decided to use that old house. And that's what they did.

The farmhouse was used as a rectory from 1895 to 1901. After the church was completed, plans for the rectory changed several times. Eventually, a new site at 468 Broadway was purchased for the rectory. The old farmhouse was to be sold and moved.

Unfortunately for the house, it was to be moved to 28 Rochambeau's 25 x 100 ft. lot. The



*(The Oldest House in Dobbs Ferry con't.)*

back portion of the house had to be removed. In the kitchen a beam still indicates where three feet remains. The long porch across the front of the house was stripped off and the chimneys replaced. Of the four original chimneys, only one remains. But at least the pride and joy of the house - the white marble fireplace - remains intact. It was rolled onto logs, pulled by a team of horses. In the end, the house was spun around until it sat sideways on its lot.

The original front of the house became the side, facing west. The molding of the old front door remains today but the doorway was replaced with a large window. A front door and porch was added onto what now became the front of the house. You can see on what is now the back of the house two slightly different framed windows.

The current house on Rochambeau Avenue has undergone more changes, the kind to suit the taste of the inhabitants. It is now trimmed in red, perhaps to testify to the history



*The house as it sits today on Rochambeau Avenue*

of the house. No one knows the exact date the house was constructed. The house isn't telling. Nor are the people who lived in the house over the years. You'll meet them in another edition of *The Ferryman*.

*-Denise Wilson*



## The Story of the Dobbs Ferry Library

*(continued from the April 2003 issue)*

By the 1970's, the inadequacies of the library housed in the charming English Tudor building donated by Col. Brown were painfully apparent. The expanding population, including the ever-increasing baby boomers, had outgrown the building. Librarian Bettie Diver stressed the need for a new library then being proposed after eight years of study. In a letter to the editor of a local newspaper she wrote "borrowers aren't able to see all the books, charge-out patrons trip over the youngsters who are flipping through records, and you have to squint to read the card catalog numbers. A picturesque relic is one thing - frustration in not being able to do a good job is another." An addition to the existing building was considered and finally rejected by the Village on the grounds of its being neither safe nor fireproof.

"In the winter," Librarian Diver continued, "the bathroom in the present library registered 29 degrees. In the summer, patrons back out of the door as a blast of 96 degree heat from the main room hits them."

### **New Library Proposed**

Obviously, change was needed. After eight years of intensive work, the Village and the Library Board decided that Col. Brown's old Library should be razed and a new library of contemporary design constructed on its site.

The new structure would cost \$540,000, and would provide more space for new furniture and equipment. This figure would also cover the cost of reducing Col. Brown's building to rubble. The advantage was that Dobbs Ferry residents

*(continued on next page)*

*(The Story of the Dobbs Ferry Library con't.)*

would also get a reading room seating seventy-five people and a breathtaking view of the Hudson River.

Opposition to destroying the old building was voiced by Margarite G. Muller, who wrote in a letter to the local newspaper, "For many in the village of Dobbs Ferry, this old and small building is considered a historical landmark that should be kept in its present form. Many went to the kindergarten on its second floor. It's full of souvenirs and good memories and they would like to preserve the present structure. One can but hope that the good senses and feelings of the villagers of Dobbs Ferry will keep this old building that belongs to the Village as a landmark for the future generations to come."

Voting on the proposal was set for May 18, 1971. Villagers were able to approve or reject a twenty-year bond issue that would raise taxes only \$1.10 per thousand of assessed valuation. When the votes were counted, the proposal was defeated by a two-to-one margin, 700 to 1,411 votes. Only the Beacon Hill and Villard Hill areas



*This is the architect's rendering for a new library, made in 1971. Voters vetoed the proposal, which called for razing the old library building*

strongly favored the resolution. The local newspaper reported that, while there was strong sentiment for historical preservation of the library building, stronger still was the desire of the residents to hold down taxes. Just ten years before, the badly needed elementary school at Springhurst was constructed, only after several hotly contested and defeated bond issues.

### **Interior Renovation**

All was not lost. By the beginning of 1973 a \$45,000 interior and exterior renovation of the library was begun under the planning of architect Russ Dagrosa. For a few months a

miniscule temporary library operated at 34 Main Street. The library re-opened with new and better lighting, new shelving, new front steps and a ramp, and refurbished restroom facilities.

Still, many residents felt the library was inadequate, and for the last quarter of the century, there was a steady drumbeat for a new structure. Library Director Jeff Ault was convinced there was little choice other than new construction. A further renovation completed in 1997 had added columns in the basement to support the first floor stacks he said, but because the building would not meet current code requirements for a public building, the library would have to be shut down within a two-year period.

Finally, after years of discussion and planning, the Library Board and the Village decided to construct a new library at 55 Main Street, just a door away from where the original library had been founded in 1899. With village bonds augmented by a generous gift from the estate of Doris Volland, the construction began.

Opened on December 12, 2002, the new library had more space – 16,000 square feet compared to 5,200 square feet in the old building – and included some of the features proposed in the defeated 1971 referendum – the large community room and a magnificent view of the Hudson. For their work on this library, Peter Gisolfi Associates received the 2003 American Institute of Architects' Westchester Mid-Hudson Chapter design award.

### **Restoration of the Original Building**

There are no dark clouds, but only silver linings. Not only is there a new library, but the old Brown building still stands and is being renovated in a way that would warm the hearts of Colonel and Mrs. Brown. Shortly after they made space for the library in 1909, the Browns decided to renovate the building and hired nationally renowned architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue for the project.

Now the new owners of the old library building, Bruce Richards and his wife Kim Kanatani, are using a Goodhue drawing as a model for the exterior renovation. This includes

## A Great Holiday Gift!

(The Story of the Dobbs Ferry Library con't.)

the addition of two dormers shown on the Goodhue drawing that the Browns did not build when they finally got around to construction in 1923. The new owners are gutting and rebuilding the interior of the structure. The second floor will be used as their living quarters, while two-thirds of the first floor will be used for a studio workplace for Artist Bruce Richards, and one-third will be used for gallery space. In an interview, Bruce Richards revealed that the interior renovation will include new plumbing, electrical wiring, a heating system, and central air-conditioning.



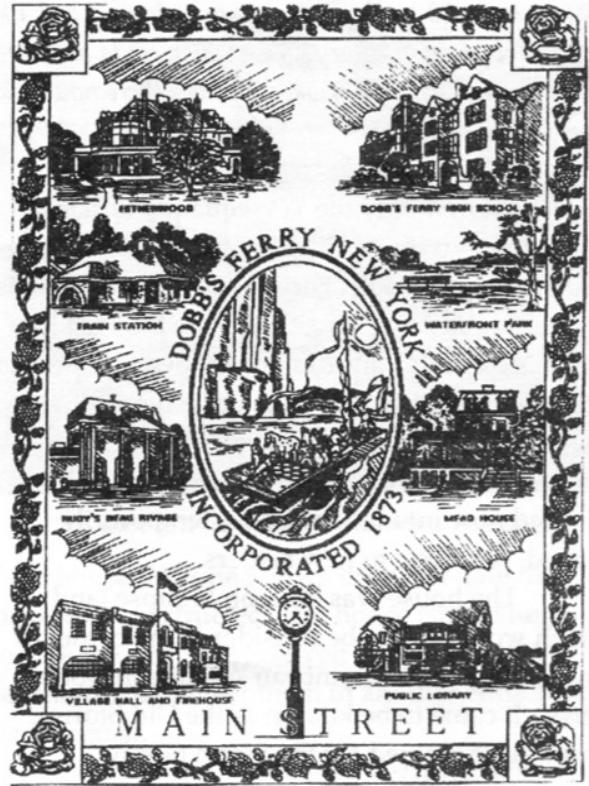
*Attention is invited to the drawing  
of W. Franklyn Brown  
in the Dobbs Ferry Library  
to be built on the corner of  
Main Street and the  
Waterfront Park*

*This is how the old library will look within the next year when the new owners complete restoration. They are following the design of architect Benjamin Grosvenor Goodhue*

Were they still alive, Col. Franklin Q. Brown and his wife would be happy to see the Goodhue design become a reality. And Librarian Bettie Diver, if she were still with us, would be impressed with the new library down the street with its long-needed central air conditioning as well as so many of the other necessities she so badly wanted.

*Material for this article from "Herald Statesman", "Reminder Weekly News", "American Architecture", "Westchester County, New York, Dictionary of American Biography", and interviews with Library Director Jeff Ault and the new owner of the library property, Bruce Richards.*

- Bill Blanck



Once again we are making available our history throw, holding the price at \$45.

Each afghan depicts scenes of Dobbs Ferry and evokes pleasant sentiments and fond memories for the lucky recipients of such a thoughtful gift. Use the order form below or call the Mead House at 674-1007 to order your throw in time for the holidays.

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