



The FERRYMAN

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 2215
White Plains, NY
ECRWSS

Resident
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

VOLUME XVIII No. 2

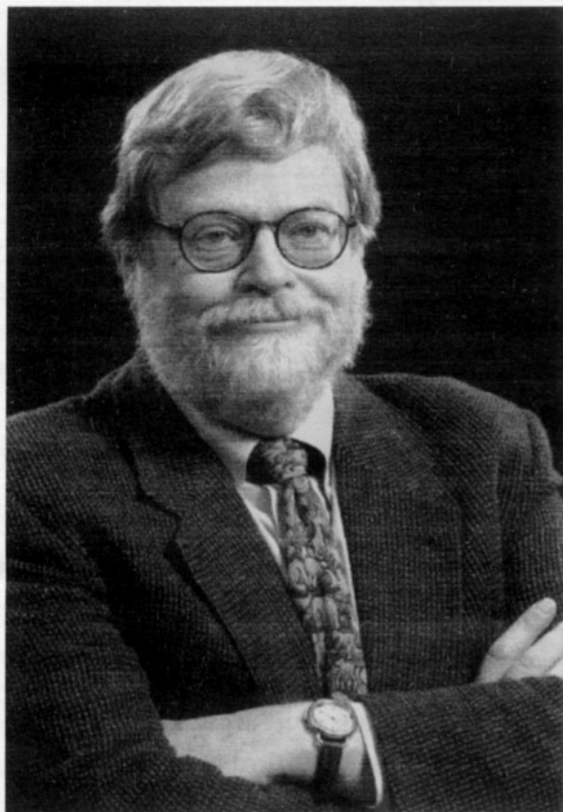
DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

September, 2004

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

Annual Meeting of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

Members and non-members are urged to attend this year's annual meeting to hear historian David McCullough speak on "What is Local History?". McCullough is the author of several books and anthologies, including *Wars of the Irish Kings*, *Chronicles of the Barbarians*, and *American Childhoods*. The latter book includes a piece from our board member, Jean Fritz, on her childhood in China. His most recent book, *The Unending Mystery: A Journey Through Labyrinths and Mazes*, will be published in October by Pantheon Books.



David McCullough

McCullough is a trustee of the Hastings-on-Hudson Historical Society. He and his wife, Frances, have lived in Hastings since 1978.

The annual meeting this year will be held on September 17th at the Dobbs Ferry Woman's Club, 54 Clinton Avenue at 7:30 p.m. Also on the agenda are the annual report of the Society's activities and future plans, the treasurer's report and the election of six members of the Board of Trustees. The Nominating committee has nominated the following candidates: for re-election—Mavis Cain, Mary Donovan, Richard McKeon, and Mary Scioscia; for new terms—Maria Harris and Teresa Walsh.

Maria Harris teaches children with learning disabilities at the Windward School in White Plains. Born in Iran, she came to this country at age nine and settled in California where she attended San Francisco State University. She has lived in Dobbs Ferry since 1972 when she married local resident Bernard Harris. Together they have raised nine children who went to the Dobbs Ferry Public Schools. She remembers fondly conversations she had with Clara Mead at South Presbyterian Church where they were both members.

Teresa Walsh is a life-long resident of Dobbs Ferry. She has a degree in History from Mercy College and currently serves also as the Village Historian. She has been a reporter for *The Enterprise* for several years and also works part-time as a library clerk in Irvington. She and her husband Jimmie are the proud parents of a seven-year-old adopted daughter from China.

History of the Storm House – part three

In a recent response to Denise Wilson's article some valuable information was received regarding the mysterious Mr. James Boyle of 28 Rochambeau Avenue's old farmhouse. A portion of the letter follows:

Dear Denise,

Eileen (Sheridan) Basso, my classmate from Dobbs Ferry High School (Class of 1949), recently sent to me the May, 2004 edition of THE FERRYMAN . . .

My mother was Lucy Boyle, one of the twelve children of William and Margaret Boyle. William was Dobbs Ferry's first policeman. He was killed in the line of duty in 1898. (The D.F. Police dept. commemorated the 100th anniversary of his death in 1998 - I believe a plaque is located in the Police Station.) Officer Boyle left a pregnant widow (she was carrying their 12th child). The family lived on the "back street", now Palisade St. At the time of her father's death, my mother was six years old. To ease the burden (an understatement?) of caring for the large family, my mother's uncle Jim (the James Boyle of your article) and his wife, Elizabeth Lightholder Boyle informally 'adopted' the two youngest children – my mother Lucy and her brother Jim. Jim was not happy with the arrangement and did not remain very long, but returned to the larger family unit. My mother was brought up by her Uncle Jim and Aunt Liza. They were unable to have children themselves.

I believe Uncle Jim was the sexton of Sacred Heart Church which would explain why he was the purchaser of the former Rectory.

My mother lived with Uncle Jim and Aunt Liza until her marriage to my father, John T. McCormick, in April, 1920. While my parents were on their honeymoon, Aunt Liza fell down the stairs in the house and died from injuries received in the fall. You can

imagine the shock my parents experienced when they returned from their honeymoon to find Uncle Jim mourning his wife's sudden tragic death.

I'm not sure what the original plans were, but, given the situation, my parents moved in with Uncle Jim at 28 Rochambeau Avenue. They remained there for several years. Two children were born--one stillborn, the other my older brother John, born in July 1923. At some point after my brother's birth, they moved into a newly-constructed home at 83 Mohican Park Ave. Uncle Jim lived with my family at 83 Mohican until his death in November, 1935.

The Thorntons and Boyle/McCormicks had a long history of friendship. Besides being the church sexton, Uncle Jim also worked on the Gould estate. I'm not sure in what capacity, but I think today we'd call him a handyman.

. . . I well remember Bridgie and Charlie McLaughlin. Charlie was a great educator of Boy Scouts from both Troop 24 and the now defunct Troop 39 and the training sessions were held at their home at 28 Rochambeau. Mrs. McLaughlin was often in frail health, but she never failed to have great refreshments for the scouts who were earning merit badges . .

*Best Regards,
Pat McCormick*



Our Thanks.....

To the Department of Sanitation for their help in hauling away trash during our **Spring Clean-up Day** and to all the Historical Society Members who volunteered their time and energy to maintain and improve the Mead House and the Historical Society property!

When Broadway Sent its Stars to Main Street

In the 1930's, during the Great Depression, Broadway stars like Ethel Barrymore, Ilka Chase and Franchot Tone performed on the stage of Dobbs Ferry's Washington Theatre at Main and Elm Streets. On July 16, 1934, Ethel Barrymore appeared with two of her children in *Laura Garnett*. It was the gala opening of the Mayfair Players' first season at the Washington Theatre. The announcement of Miss Barrymore's appearance was greeted with incredulity, producing a rush for tickets for the six consecutive nights of her performance.

The Dobbs Ferry

Register reported that on opening night there were to be speeches by Noel Coward, Dobbs Ferry Mayor Walker, and Messmore Kendall, the theater magnate who lived in the Hyatt-Livingston house at 152 Broadway.

Ethel Barrymore Opens Mayfair Players' Season In Dobbs Ferry July 16

Stage Star Will Act With Children in Same Play For First Time

GALA OPENING NIGHT

Souvenir Programs of "Laura Garnett" Will Assist Hospital

Ethel Barrymore, glamorous, dynamic and world famous, will usher in a new era in Dobbs Ferry community entertainment on Monday, July 16, in the



storm of local resident Mrs. James Watson. You've heard the phrase "it bombed in New Haven." Well, Dobbs Ferry was the New Haven of the 30's. Much earlier, around 1917, this little theater had been a cinema, showing such films as *The Eagle* with Rudolph Valentino. And even earlier, it had been the shop of Hill Henry, who advertised himself as a "Horseshoer, Blacksmith and Wheelwright." Possibly watching a horse being shod was as entertaining as

viewing a silent film. The transition from movie to legitimate theater in the 1930s filled the need for good entertainment during the difficult depression years. A trip to New York City to see a Broadway play would have been a major extravagance for most local residents. During World War II the need was just as great.

The Washington Theatre thrived during those years. Mildred Persinger, a longtime Dobbs Ferry resident, recalls a memorable evening at the theater in the late 1940's, sitting in the balcony with a group of friends that included Martin Lowenfish (the architect who designed Jacques Lipschitz's studio in Hastings) and Edith Serrell (fondly



The idea of Broadway plays having a tryout period in Dobbs Ferry was the brain -

known as "The Puppet Lady" because of her work with marionettes.).



Dobbs Ferry friends watching a performance

Front Row: Edith Serrell, Mildred Persinger,
Wilma Wiggers, Louise Trueblood

Second Row: Martin Lowenfish, Dick Persinger (hidden),
Unknown, Bert Wiggers

The theater at that time was under the direction of John Timen who was trained in the Russian style of theater. Jane McGuinness, one of the actresses of the group, known then as the Civic Theatre Players, wrote of her time with the troupe, "What a wonderful time I had. And how I loved it!" McGuinness continued, "The theater was built with an Elizabethan air about it and attached to a house which provided space for a resident director and his wife. . . . The spaces were not large but big enough for the actors to read for plays, . . . and to do makeup and to dress. At production time it was a beehive of activity. The stage was small and the sets were built by the members. An alley ran from a back door of the house with access to backstage."

Jane McGuinness's account of her performance in *The Pigeon* by John Galsworthy is delightful. "The back alley came in handy during *The Pigeon* in which I played the part of a poor cockney girl rescued from a suicide attempt in the Thames River. Since I was supposed to be carried in dripping wet, before my entrance I stood in the alley while water was poured over me--and in winter, too! That was an experience hard to

forget. It was the best of times for someone devoted to acting."

By the early 50's, the theater began to decline. For a brief period, two young actresses who were twins, Dran and Tani Seitz tried unsuccessfully to run it. Then to the rescue came James McKenzie, a young World War II veteran without a job. One day in 1952, he happened to pass through Dobbs Ferry and spotted the theater. He was a devotee of theater and had managed a small theater in Pennsylvania. McKenzie corralled three of his wartime buddies who had also been involved with theater or broadcasting. Ted Bird, a former airman, had managed a theater in Japan before leaving the service. Two other friends, Scott Warden and Charles Lamb had worked briefly in TV and radio. All four young men, still in their twenties, were out of work and full of enthusiasm for revitalizing the Dobbs Ferry theater. McKenzie bought the theater and together they did the physical work of restoration. The set designer for the movie *An American in Paris* was persuaded to design the interior. Though there were seats



Hi jinx at the Washington Theatre

for only 200 people, every seat had good visibility of the stage.

The restored theater, however, never became profitable. In the late fifties, with television becoming more common and prosperity returning, the need for a legitimate

Broadway, con't. from page 4
theater in Dobbs Ferry faded. The doors closed in 1958. The next year Frank Caldara opened a moving and storage business on the premises. Caldara constructed massive mezzanines in the space and boarded up the windows. Even so, the space proved too small for moving and storage.

Finally, in the 80's, architect Stephen Tilly bought the building. Interviewed by Frances Neill in 1988, Steve told of his first impressions there. "It was the kind of space that architects can live in but some other professionals can't. When I first saw the building it was dark, dingy and moldy . . . [but] I thought the old theater space was quite wonderful. I could see that once you brought light back into the building, you would breathe life into it."

Those of us who are familiar with the beautiful design of Steve Tilly's offices are convinced there couldn't be a better fifth life for our dear old Washington Theatre.

Mavis Cain

Hidden History

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society received an interesting gift this spring. When Dawn Castellano was remodeling her home at 21 Rochambeau Ave., she found several items that had slipped behind the mantelpiece, including a letter from "Lillian" dated August 24, 1911, a photograph of an unidentified building and a ticket to the Holy Name Society Annual Picnic held on August 10, 1910. All these items have been contributed to the Historical Society so that they can be part of the ongoing record of this village. Dawn's young son, Christopher, was very excited about the discovery and was glad to know the items had a new home. So our thanks go especially to Christopher in hopes that his interest will be the start of a continuing historical career!

Other items donated this year include 24 antique punch cups from Elizabeth Grell Johnson on behalf of her mother who had happy memories of the annual Clara Mead Eggnog Party, and the *Hi Neighbor Cookbook* published by Sacred Heart Parish and contributed by John Reilly. Since the cookbook is not dated, we would love to hear from any members who remember when it was produced. Call the Society at 914-674-1007.



The Legends of Dobbs Ferry

Since History needs to be preserved and not buried in the past, the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society has unearthed "The Legends of Dobbs Ferry."

Prepare yourself. This fall, whispers about the village's true ghostlore will be exposed! Through careful research, fact has been separated from fiction to bring you accurate details of local phantoms and haunted places.

With this program, our popular Friday Evenings with History will resume on Friday, October 22nd at 7:30 p.m. at the Mead House, 12 Elm Street. Board member Denise Wilson has assembled a fascinating collection of stories and photos to delight and terrify old and young alike. Everyone is invited to attend.

The Historical Society is a non-profit organization. While the program is free to all (who dare to attend), an optional donation to help fund further programs would be greatly appreciated. All donors will be eligible for the door prize--a gift certificate to The Earth Light Center located at 12 Cedar Street. This alternative healing center offers numerous workshops, and unique gifts.

Please join us for a delightful program on October 22nd!



Report on our Spring Gala

Our annual gala dinner this year on May 21st honoring Dobbs Ferry writer Jean Fritz was a delightful occasion. President Mary Donovan surprised our guest with a slide show aptly entitled, "Where Are You Going, Jean Fritz?" — a takeoff on the titles that Jean has used for so many of her books. Responding to the presentation, Jean Fritz shared



Jean at six years

many stories of her own process of historical research, a process that even took her back to China where she was born. Questions from the assembled guests brought more interesting details about Jean's historical writing and stimulated such interest that it was hard to cut short the conversation.



Jean with Chinese children

Our thanks go particularly to the following local merchants whose gifts added excitement and anticipation to the raffle: **Brick Oven Pizza, Cary's Pharmacy, Dobbs Ferry Café, Flowers by Carole, Off Broadway Restaurant, Reader's Hardware, Rituals Makeup and Manifestations, Rochambeau Wines, Sam's Restaurant, Stop and Shop, Sushi Mike's Japanese Restaurant,** and to authors **Jean Fritz, Mary S. Donovan and Mary Scioscia** who donated copies of their books.



Why should I join the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society?

The U. S. presidential campaign this fall provides an interesting background for considering this question. With politicians on all sides of the fence saluting "the American way of life" or "the principles of our founding fathers," one might well ask, "What is the American way of life?" "What are the principles of our founding fathers?" Though we at the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society do not claim to have definitive answers to those questions, we do have some broad guidelines for formulating such answers.

- The American way of life was created by a wide variety of women and men who were willing to work together to address common problems.
- These Americans were guided by some specific ideals proclaimed, but not necessarily invented, by our founding fathers and mothers.
- Those ideals included a devotion to the intrinsic worth of every individual, and a claim to liberty, equality and justice for each of those individuals.

It is our conviction that as we study the past and learn how communities are shaped, we are better able to answer these questions and to formulate ways to continue to improve "this American way of life". But we also know that such study needs certain tools. The records from past days must be preserved. The photographs and letters and newspapers of bygone days must be collected and organized. They must be made accessible to today's searchers.

To maintain this historical record for the Village of Dobbs Ferry is the central purpose of the Historical Society. We desperately need the help of the entire community in this endeavor. This issue of *The Ferryman* includes a membership envelope for the coming year.

- Do take the time to join immediately.
- Send an added donation if you possibly can.
- Let us know that you will donate some time to work with the Society.

Mary Donovan, President of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society