



The FERRYMAN

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DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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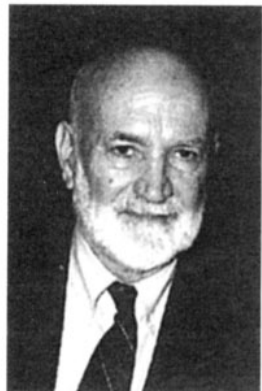
12 Elm Street, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522 (914) 674-1007

Historical Society Gala Honors Unsung Heroes

“**U**nsung Heroes” is the theme for the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society’s Annual Gala Dinner on Friday, June 3rd, at 7:00 p.m. at the Dobbs Ferry Woman’s Club (54 Clinton Avenue). This year the Society celebrates people whose contributions to our village have been made up of many small deeds of kindness and generosity—actions that too often go unnoticed in the rush of everyday life. It is evident, however, that the many relationships these honorees have forged among the citizens of Dobbs Ferry have enriched the fabric of village life.

The “Unsung Heroes” who will be honored are: **William “Bill” Cassella, Anthony “Goldie” Gernivivo and Gail Malara.**

Longtime associations with Dobbs Ferry’s young people characterize all three nominees. Bill Cassella served for years as troop committee chairman for Boy Scout Troop 24, Goldie



Bill Cassella

Gernivivo reached more than one generation of the students of Springhurst Elementary School, and Gail Malara has worked with both the Springhurst students and a youth group sponsored by the Dobbs Ferry Police Department.

Dobbs Ferry residents will have many memories of these three honorees: Goldie Gernivivo entertaining the Springhurst

students by climbing to the top of the Fire



Goldie Gernivivo

Department’s ladder during a demonstration on fire safety, Gail Malara joking with patrons at Sam’s Restaurant, Bill Cassella working with other board members on a Croton Aqueduct project. Come and hear more about the lives of these three neighbors as we celebrate their contributions to Dobbs Ferry.

Department’s ladder during a demonstration on fire safety, Gail Malara joking with patrons at Sam’s Restaurant, Bill Cassella working with other board members on a Croton Aqueduct project. Come and hear more about the lives of these three neighbors



Gail Malara

Call and make your reservations now. The tickets are \$30 per person or \$50 for a couple. Advance reservations are necessary. Please call 674-1007 for reservations and send a check to the Historical Society at 12 Elm Street by May 29th. Our ever-popular raffle will be held and those who purchase tickets ahead of time receive bonus tickets for a \$10 purchase. The proceeds from the Gala will assist the Historical Society in the important work of preserving and publicizing the history of this river village. Your generosity is much appreciated.

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Our Collection Grows . . .

Last fall, Mr. Frederic C. Hof of Silver Spring, Maryland wrote the Society to ask if we still had the photograph of "Mother Dobbs" which had been donated to the Dobbs Ferry Library many years ago. We did find it—an 8 X 10" black and white photo of what looks like a painting, in a wooden oval frame. Mr. Hof then sent us an article by Margaret T. Lane, a descendant of the Dobbs family that identifies the photo as a portrait of Deborah Lawrence Dobbs (1778-1857), the wife of John Dobbs (1775-1847). John Dobbs was the grandson of Abraham Dobbs who was the last ferryman named Dobbs. John was born in Dobbs Ferry, just a few days before Martha Washington crossed the Hudson on the ferry on her way to join General Washington at Concord, Massachusetts.

In the period after the Revolutionary War, John left Dobbs Ferry but returned before his marriage to Deborah Lawrence in July, 1799 to work for Philip Livingston who had purchased the Dobbs and Hyatt leaseholds. John and Deborah were the parents of ten children; hence the name "Mother Dobbs" is quite appropriate. The couple remained in the village and eventually both were buried in the Little White Church Burying Ground on Ashford Avenue.

Following the correspondence about the photo, Mr. Hof sent the society a copy of the Dobbs Genealogy that was prepared by Margaret T. Lane in 1979. It is a fascinating document, rich with details about the Dobbs



Mother Dobbs

family such as the indication that the family divided its loyalty during the American Revolution. Captain William Henry Dobbs joined the patriots and, at age 65, was sent on a secret mission for General George Washington. At the same time, a different John Dobbs and his son, Thomas upheld the Loyalist cause, moving to Nova Scotia with other British subjects at the end of the war.

Such genealogies are the building blocks of history. If you have gathered your family's genealogy, do consider giving a copy to the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society.



Volunteers Needed

Would you like to help the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society preserve the history of our rivertown? Become a volunteer. This year we have two volunteers who come regularly to work in the archives on Wednesday mornings and we need more such workers. Now with the

warm weather, we could also use volunteers to spruce up our garden. Please call us at 674-1007 or send a note to 12 Elm Street and tell us how you would like to help. Include your telephone number and we'll get back to you. The society will be deeply grateful!

The Building of Village Hall

In 1925 there was no question that Dobbs Ferry needed a municipal building. Village business was conducted from cramped rented quarters in a dilapidated Main Street building not far from the present library. The bugle call for action came when the landlord raised the rent.

The local weekly newspaper, the *Dobbs Ferry Register*, described the situation. "Dobbs Ferry needs an up to date municipal building. The present board room is so small that Village residents cannot attend board meetings. The Village records are presently stored over a feed store where they are in constant danger of fire. The police chief has to do most of his business at home, as he has no office. The patrolmen have no locker room in which to change and store their clothes. The present courtroom is a second-hand book case. (editor's note: apparently for law books and Village statutes).

Only a few miles to the north things were very different. In 1902 Irvington built a costly, much admired municipal building variously described as Revival, Colonial, Neo-classical or Georgian. Constructed of brick and sandstone, its tower rivaled those of local churches. Besides rooms for village offices, it had a beautiful theatre and a Tiffany designed library-reading room. Without question, in 1925 Dobbs Ferry had some catching-up to do.

In January of 1925, the Chamber of Commerce formed a committee to plan for the needed municipal building. Soon the Ogden Resolute Hook and Ladder Company became interested and, according to the *Register*, "wound up fathering the project." In October three invited trustees represented the village.

Where were the Women?

There was an unfortunate oversight. The newly enfranchised women of the village had been overlooked.

"When the first newspaper accounts appeared advocating the lower Main Street location," the *Register* reported, "the Woman's Club elected themselves on the General

Committee, interested Col. and Mrs. Franklin Q. Brown in the movement and arranged through the efforts of Mrs. Franklin A. Wagner, a public mass meeting."

But why had the women and the public spirited Browns not been included in the planning? While the *Dobbs Ferry Register* doesn't provide answers, it does report a dispute about



Surrounded by officials from the village, firefighters and police, Mrs. Franklin Q. Brown breaks ground for the new Village Hall

the building site. The first proposed location was at the corner of Broadway and Ashford Avenue. This site was strongly opposed by firemen who contended, according to the *Register*, that "the efficiency of the fire companies would be seriously lowered if the apparatus was moved away from where the majority of the members worked and lived. . . As Ogden Engine company is located in the north east end of the village, the other two companies should be continued at the southern end."

With this in mind, the Committee agreed on a lower Main Street site and favored the property presently occupied by the Dobbs Ferry Library. The other desirable lot across the street, used for showing outdoor movies, was owned by Col. and Mrs. Brown. The Committee believed the Browns didn't want to sell.

In February of 1926, architect Henry C. Pelton presented a plan that had everything. The *Register* headline asked, "Has Anything Been Left Out of the New Municipal Building?" Nothing had been except consideration of cost.

But these were the boom days of the roaring 20s so why not? Besides, look what was in Irvington.

According to the plan, the new two story building would have rooms for village offices, a board room also used as a courtroom, two bays for the fire engines, room for police headquarters with an office for the chief, as well as a lockup for criminals, the unruly and those consuming too much prohibition bootleg booze. Locker facilities and showers for the Police and Fire Departments were included. Street cleaners were assigned the basement while the attic would accommodate the Chamber of Commerce and Veterans of Foreign Wars. There would also be clubrooms with a kitchen and toilet facilities.

And best of all, the plan called for a large hall on the south side complete with a projection booth, a stage and dressing rooms for men and women. The hall would accommodate 500 people for entertainment and culture. An organ, essential for tear-provoking background music for silent movies, was not included. It was hoped some kind soul would provide one as a memorial.

The Public Meeting

The time had arrived for the citizens of the village to be informed and persuaded to approve the project. On February 9, 1926, the previously overlooked women arranged a public meeting. Feelings ran high with the bond issue ballot only a few weeks away.

The meeting was a public hearing chaired by Judge Albee. The most vigorously contested issue was where the new municipal building would be located. Colonel Brown recommended a Main Street location which would best provide fire protection for the business district. His wife, Ida Brown, now very much part of the discussion, said she and the Colonel would be happy to cooperate if the decision was in favor of the lot on Main Street that she and her husband owned.

Village President Lyman French was loudly applauded when he proposed a location in the area of Ashford Avenue and Broadway. He was echoed by Dobbs Ferry Bank President

Wilde. Both men supported that space because the Village was growing east toward Saw Mill River Road.

Two other alternatives were presented, buying one building for \$110,000 or the other decrepit building now rented by the Village for \$42,000.

The *Register* reported that sentiment was swinging strongly in favor of the Ashford Avenue location but the price of \$63,000 was considered excessive.

When John Gower of the Zoning Commission concluded that the Village simply couldn't afford the new building, everything seemed to be coming apart, Mr. Myers of the Building Committee passionately pleaded that the entire project, to quote the *Register*, should not "go to smash".

Colonel Brown to the Rescue

At this strategic moment Colonel Brown, a senior partner of the firm later to become Merrill Lynch, came to the rescue. He "electrified the meeting by offering 40 feet of the old open air motion picture lot to the Village for the erection of a separate fire house," the *Register* reported. There was no price tag. The property was offered as a free gift.

When the question about space for the other Village departments was raised, Colonel and Mrs. Brown offered another 80 feet of their property, again at no charge. But Colonel Brown suggested that the ballot proposition offered to the voters should be limited to the construction of a new fire house and village offices to keep costs within reasonable bounds. The 500 seat community center could be constructed at a future date – a dream later foiled by the Great Depression. The Brown's offer was passed joyously on a second vote. The committee's proposal was then sent to the Village Board and accepted.

Financially this made good sense. The Brown's generous offer reduced the cost of the project by \$20,000 to \$30,000. The money that the Village paid for rent would, in effect, pay off the bond issue. And when the bond issue was paid off, the Village would save money. It was a win-win proposition.

(The Building of Village Hall con't.)

Now it was up to the voters, who at that time had to be taxpayers, to vote on a bond issue. The proposition calling for an \$80,000 village hall was approved by a 10-1 majority on election day, March 16, 1926. The uninvited, recently enfranchised women who helped to bring this about had reason to rejoice.

The New Hall

Just a year later, on July 29, 1927, the *Register* reported, "Village clerk Charles E. Storms is now located in the new Town Hall, and will transact all Village business and serve as Collector of Taxes in this new location." The article went on to indicate that the Board of Trustees were occupying the room on the second floor where new office equipment was being installed. The two fire companies had moved in to their quarters, having successfully



The New Village Hall

transferred the fire siren and alarm system to the building. The police moved into the south end of the first floor of the building and setup a switchboard for emergency calls. Police Justice John T. McCormick would hold court on the main floor. Village Hall had become a reality.

The Brown's legacy is still very present on Main Street. Bruce Richards, working from architect Goodhue's sketch made for Ida Brown, has restored the exterior of the old Library building to what the Browns had envisioned for a Village Hall earlier in the century. Farther down the street the Post Office and Village Hall sit on former Brown property. And Mrs.

Brown's early project, the Playhouse, remains with its interior space converted by Steve Tilly into architectural offices.

In the decades to come, Dobbs Ferry women would play an increasingly important role in the Village as elected officials, administrators, and members of the police and fire departments. In political parties they would become chairpersons and district leaders. The League of Women Voters would have an important part in elections by helping to define issues and providing a public forum for candidates. The women who invited themselves to plan and campaign for the new Village Hall, were pioneers. To commemorate their victory, the cornerstone is there for all to read.

Town Hall Site
Donated by
Colonel & Mrs. Franklin Q. Brown
1926

(It's almost correctly written in stone. The inscription should read "Village Hall Site" but it's the spirit that counts.)

Bill Blanck

Call for Contributions

Your support is needed to help maintain and enlarge the work of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. That support can come in many forms:

- You can join the Society if you are not already a member. Send your check for \$15 for an individual membership to the Society at 12 Elm Street today.
- You can donate historical materials. Last month **Sean Bucci and family** donated several High School yearbooks and the Society is grateful for this addition to our collection.
- You can send an extra financial donation in honor of a friend or loved one. Such gifts are always welcome and we will notify the person you are honoring.
- You can include a gift to the Historical Society in your will. Several people have made such bequests in the past—bequests that have been crucial to supporting our present work.

Your Raffle Donation will help the Historical Society maintain its home at the Mead House and provide expanded programs for the membership

Return completed tickets to the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. Mail to 12 Elm Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522 by May 29th or bring them to the registration table at the Gala on June 3rd at the Dobbs Ferry Woman's Club, 54 Clinton Avenue.

Prizes will include gift certificates to our local restaurants, the Society's popular Afghan and other great gifts donated by local merchants and Society members.

<p>\$1 each, 6 tickets for \$5 Free Lucky Bonus – 13 for \$10</p> <p>Free Lucky 13th Ticket with \$10 donation for page of 12!</p> <p>FREE EARLY BIRD 14TH TICKET WITH \$10 FOR 12 THROUGH May 29th</p>	<p>Early Bird Bonus With \$10 for 12 by May 29th</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____</p> <p>Zip _____ Phone _____</p>	<p>RAFFLE</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____</p> <p>Zip _____ Phone _____</p>
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