



# The FERRYMAN

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

Resident  
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

ECRWSS

VOLUME XIX No. 2

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

September, 2005

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## Plan to Attend the Annual Meeting of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

As a young boy growing up in Dobbs Ferry, William Pisani would often camp in the wooded hills overlooking the Hudson River, the same area once occupied by the Weckquasgeek Indians. His camping experiences began his lifelong fascination with native American tribes. At this year's annual meeting, Mr. Pisani will speak about his newly published novel, *The Call*



William Pisani

*of Distant Drums*. Featuring a Weckquasgeek warrior, Pisani weaves the warrior's personal story into the larger plight of native Americans whose territory was increasingly invaded by the European

newcomers. Copies of the book will be available for sale at the meeting.

Though he now lives in Ardsley, Bill Pisani grew up in Dobbs Ferry where his father worked at the Post Office. Like many others from Dobbs Ferry, Pisani served in the Army during the Vietnam War. A civil engineer by training, he has worked for the city of White Plains since 1968, most recently serving as the city's building commissioner. He retired this year in order to devote more time to his research and writing.

The annual meeting will be held on September 30<sup>th</sup> in the parish hall of Our Lady of Pompeii Church, 95 Palisade St. at 7:30 p.m. The agenda includes the annual report of the Society's activities and future plans, the treasurer's report

and the election of seven trustees. The Nominating committee has nominated the following candidates: for re-election—Dolores Calafati, Mark Cassella, Jean Fritz and Ellen Klein—and as new nominees—**Madeline Byrne** and **Georgette Hedberg** for three-year terms and **Nancy Delmerico** to fill the unexpired term of Mary Scioscia who resigned.

Madeline Byrne and her husband David moved to Dobbs Ferry in 1986 from Manhattan. Their sons, Kevin and Joseph are in Dobbs Ferry High School. Madeline has been active in the Girl Scouts, having served as a leader and as a member of the local Girl Scout Committee. Throughout this hot summer, she has been an energetic volunteer working in the garden at the Mead House.

Nancy Delmerico grew up in Dobbs Ferry and attended Dobbs Ferry High School and the School of Visual Arts. She and her husband Don Vitagliano have one son who is now at the high school. She is a graphic designer. She served as a Village Trustee from 2002-2004.

Georgette Hedberg and her husband Richard have been in Dobbs Ferry since 1973, raising six children; their youngest is now at Dobbs Ferry High School. The family moved into the Niram T. Odell homestead which was built about 1840. A visit from the house's former resident spurred Georgette's interest in history and she researched the activities of the Odell family. She volunteers both at the Family History Center in Scarsdale and at the Mead House where she has already begun to show others how to research local history.

## PRIVATE FLOHR'S TIME IN ROCHAMBEAU'S ARMY (Part Two)

The first installment in a previous issue of *The Ferryman* saw Georg Flohr, a German mercenary in Rochambeau's 5,800-man army, leave France in the French armada, take two months to cross the Atlantic and arrive at Newport, RI, on July 15, 1780. Flohr's diary tells us that after those men with scarlet fever were taken from the ships, the army set up camp just outside the town. The second installment of selected excerpts from that diary follows:

We felt very good in our camp, because in our neighborhood two attractive women lived in a windmill. One was called Hannah, the other Martha. They spoke a little broken German and the word got out that they also had liquor. Most of the Germans in our regiment soon were chatting regularly with them, not only because of the liquor, but also because the two pretty women gave them a good time.



Later windmill similar to that viewed by Pvt. Flohr

Our rations were now very good. They consisted of one and a half pounds of bread each day, some rice,

white corn flour and half a pound of salted horse meat or beef. In this country, white corn flour is used instead of wheat flour.

We got along fairly well with the inhabitants, but could not talk much with them.

We did try to speak with them to learn some English that way. In general, American women were suspicious of us. But we were well liked by the girls, because we were Germans and the German Volk are well regarded.

### Religious sects are plentiful

Reformed Protestantism is the main religion, especially Reformed Lutheranism. There are also a few Catholics here. The sects include newly reformed Lutherans, and Quakers, Baptists, Anabaptists, Buddhists, Jews, Presbyterians, Marian Brothers and Seventh Day Adventists. Freemasons hold their ceremonies publicly. I saw them many times going to funerals, all in white leather aprons, with their tools held in their hands.

The women here have great freedom. No man may harass them under threat of "severe punishment." The young girls also have such freedom. When they are 16 years old, father and mother cannot prohibit them anything, and they cannot give their daughters any kind of orders. If a 16-year-old girl has a boyfriend, she can walk with him openly, and the parents cannot say anything.

On the 20th of August, (that is, a month after we disembarked at Newport and some seven weeks before we moved into winter quarters in town), 20 aborigines ("wilde") arrived at our camp (just outside the town). They were chiefs from the Albany area, a king among them. These aborigines had been sent by four of their tribes from Albany to learn about our arrival and to offer their allegiance. Our General let them come

and a pound of beef. We had to pay the inhabitants for them and they were expensive. For example, for a three-pound loaf of bread, you had to pay 40 to 42 sous (French coins) and add polite, flattering words to get it. As for the local money, it was a piece of paper, the size of a playing card, with the imprint of the province signed by the governor.

On the 11th of October, we moved into winter quarters in town where houses had been made ready for the land troops to lodge in. The sailors stayed on their ships. As soon as we were in winter quarters, our daily rations changed to one pound of bread, half a pound of

before him through the intervention of two interpreters, one who had been born in Canada and spoke French well, the other a German who had been born in the Palatinate.

Those two interpreters knew the language of the aborigines as well as their own mother tongues. What follows is their address to our General :

"Els Lagacio," - which means, "Oh my fat father," - "In this present war, what can we do for you out of our good will towards you? We promise you all our help. We do not like to see that some of our tribes are on the side of the English. They do give us gunpowder and buckshot for hunting, but the English do not like to be real friends with us. That is why we have come here."

Our General answered that for this, our King would thank them and there would also be no shortage of liquor. Our General then gave them some medallions with the King's image and the French coat of arms. They kissed the medallions and hung them around their necks. He also gave them some ointments, white rugs, red dye to paint their faces and bodies, and a house for their stay.

### **The aborigines were a happy people**

These aborigines went about all naked, except for a covering woven from tree bark, which they threw on themselves and which was painted with different colors. On their feet, they had deer skins instead of shoes. Their language, when they talked with each other, sounded like the cackling of geese. Every soldier saw them daily in town and outside of it, parading around at noontime.

They also entertained us with music and comedies and it was wonderful to see them. I myself was astounded, especially when I saw them for the first time in a theater which they had built from posts, dancing to their wild music. One of them had a small drum poorly made from wood. He beat it with a drumstick in a strange tempo, while the others danced on a spot in a marvelous way, totally naked except

for skins they wore on their legs up to their knees. Above the knees, their legs were bare as well as their upper bodies. They had girded their "shame" with braided tree bark. Their whole bodies were painted in different colors, their hair colored red and decorated with all kinds of feathers.

After they had danced for about an hour, some of them painted themselves again with other colors and put rings in their noses and ears. At the end of their noses they had two or three holes from which to hang these rings. They also had slit their ears in three places for the rings. They never use chairs, but always sit on the ground.



*Though in this later drawing of an Iroquois warrior, a cloth skirt and sash have replaced those of tree bark, the native described by Pvt. Flohr is quite recognizable.'*

**Source: Carrie Lyford,  
Iroquois Crafts, 1945**

They also have strange customs. When they get too old for looting and pillaging, they are buried alive, standing upright in the ground. A fire is started on their heads and then the whole tribe dances around them and makes their music with a small drum. When they marry, the man hands the wife the foot of a deer. The wife gives the man a handful of wild plants.

This means that the husband has to provide the meat, the woman the bread.

I walked a few times with the German interpreter. By chance we came into a house where liquor was being distilled. Because he heard me speak German with a comrade, he came to talk to us and told us how he had come here from the Palatinate with his father when he was a boy. When his father died, he came to live with the aborigines and has been living with them for 23 years.

### **Sacrificial religious services**

These wild ones move every Friday to another place. They also have their religious services. They say God is a good man to them, but they have to make sacrifices to the devil, so that he would remain friendly to them. Every year they have a feast of sacrifice. They collect a heap of wood and congregate there with their priest; They light the fire and dance around it with deplorable screaming. Then their priest hits one of them on the head with his battle ax and as soon as the others see that, they approach and help to throw him into the fire. That, they say, is their sacrifice.

At their departure, the Americans accompanied them to their country.

*By Gabriele H. Grunebaum with Hank Walter  
(to be continued)*



### **Your Help is Needed**

The Historical Society seeks active participation from its members. Committees such as Program, Events, Finance, Development and others would benefit from the expertise and the fresh ideas of many of its members. Please feel free to chat with any of the Board members at the annual meeting about ways in which you can help. Or you can call the Mead House at 674-1007, leave your name, number and a word about your interest and we'll get back to you.

## **It's that time again . . .**

To renew your membership in the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. Each year in the September edition of the Ferryman, we enclose a membership envelope. We depend on you, our readers, to support the work of collection, research and writing that makes this publication possible. Rising costs make it more and more difficult for us to do this work without public support. So, please take a moment

- to renew your membership in the Society.
- to think about increasing your contribution – even a simple increase of \$10 would make a great difference if multiplied many times.
- if you've read this newsletter for many years and never joined, do sign up now.
- tell us on the flap of the envelope how you would like to volunteer.

"Those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it." Help facilitate our collective memory.



### **Historical Society Gets New Fence**

This past spring a new white picket fence was installed in front of the Mead House, the Historical Society's headquarters. Over the years, the fence had fallen into disrepair: in addition to needing a new coat of paint, one section appeared to have been struck by a car that jumped the curb, splintering many of the white pickets. The Historical Society, though obviously in need of a new fence, did not have the funds to pay anyone to do the job.

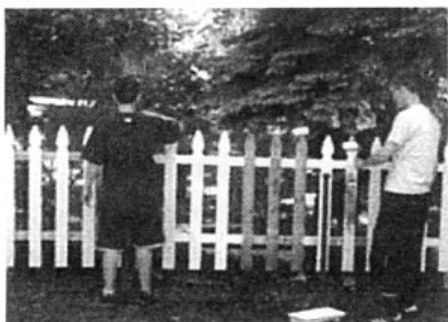
Fortunately, however, Eric Koenigsberg, a student in the Eleventh Grade at Dobbs Ferry High School and a member of Dobbs Ferry's Boy Scout Troop 24, made the replacement of the

*(con't. on page 5)*

## New Fence *con't. from page 4*

fence the focus of his Eagle Scout project. The troop members, with a large assist from Clifford Harris, the son of Historical Society Board Member Maria Harris, came together in May to tear down the old fence and construct and install the new fence. In a scene reminiscent of Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, the Scouts stained the fence a bright white color. In fact, the entire project for the Scouts had that Tom Sawyer flavor because one of the purposes of the Eagle Scout project is to encourage the scout to organize the efforts of his fellow scouts and

others to complete the project. Thus, while Eric Koenigsberg may use the completion of the fence project to satisfy one of



*Scouts tackle the pickets*

the many requirements to become an Eagle Scout, he had to spearhead the effort, not just do all the work himself. This required him to plan the project and how it would be executed, including obtaining materials and people to help him complete the project. Cliff Harris was a key contributor, helping to select the fence design and install the new fencing.

Construction began on May 14 when Eric and scouts Raymond Vincent, Robert Chebetar, Kyle Trenholm, R.J. Martin and Blake Anderson dismantled the fence and loaded the remnants



*A group effort*

into a Dept. of Public Works dump truck that was graciously provided by the Village and conveniently parked in the lot behind Village Hall. The Scouts relied upon the very experienced and able Assistant Scout-master John Trenholm who showed them how to

dismantle the old fence and install the new. Other helpers that first Saturday were Assistant Scoutmaster Brian McCauley, Troop leader, Scout Master Edmund Dalio, and Tony Ceraolo, a father of one of the troop members.

On May 19, Clifford Harris, Eric, Tony and Rob began to install the new fence, digging holes for the fence posts and connecting the new fence sections to the posts. The installation work continued the next day as Clifford, Eric and Tony completed the Elm Street portion of the fence. On May 21, Scouts R.J. Martin, Blake Anderson, Mike Pawlick and Carter Smith, supervised by Eric's father, David Koenigsberg and assisted by Eric's sister Sarah and his mother Ada Huang, sanded down the rough edges on the new fence pickets and stained them. While the painting was going on at one end of the front yard, Eric and John Trenholm assisted by R.J. and Carter, completed the installation of the fence that bordered the Village parking lot. Finally, on May 28, Eric, Blake and his brother Nick Anderson, Joel Shuart, Rob Chebetar, Mark Sudak, along with Eric's father and Edmund Dalio, completed the staining of the new fence. As anyone who has

driven by the Mead House can see, the collaborative efforts of Eric and the Troop 24 Scouts



*View from Elm St.*

were a success. The Society thanks Eric Koenigsberg, Clifford Harris and John Trenholm for their leading roles in this project and all the Scouts who assisted. In addition, our thanks go to the members of the Dept. of Public Works who made the trucks available to haul away the debris. But, the project is not yet complete as the Society needs to raise funds to help defray the expense incurred in purchasing the materials for this project and is asking for donations to cover this expense. All contributions are welcome.

## "Unsung Heroes" Applauded at Gala

This year's Gala on June 3<sup>rd</sup> was a wonderful event. The Dobbs Ferry Woman's Club was festive with pastel tablecloths and ivy centerpieces, later awarded to lucky recipients at each table. The Chicken Marsala, Sausage and Peppers and Penne Martini, provided by the Celtic Corner on Main Street, was delicious and ample beverages added to the festivity.

Patrons were delighted to honor three "Unsung Heroes" – William "Bill" Cassella, Anthony "Goldie" Gernivivo and Gail Malara. Bill Cassella's longtime work with Village planning and with the Boy Scouts of America; and Goldie Gernivivo's and Gail Malara's constant care for generations of Springhurst students were highlighted with a slide show outlining some of their contributions to this community. In spontaneous individual testimonies, many friends and family members shared both tears and smiles. One unexpected coincidence was revealed; Gail Malara told us that Eric Koenigsberg, who was also honored at the dinner, had been one of her Springhurst students years ago. Eric, with the assistance of Clifford Harris and members of his Boy Scout Troop, replaced the picket fence in front of the Mead House this spring and received a vigorous round of applause for that work. The only cloud on the festivities was the fact that Goldie could not attend because he was recuperating from a fall. However, Bill Blanck filmed the program so Goldie could enjoy the video later.

The Society is especially grateful to Gail Malara's son, Joe Rooney of Rooney Tunes Entertainment, for the sound system

and commentary and to the following merchants who provided gifts for the raffle:

**Boutique Wines and Liquors,  
Breezly's Bar & Grill,  
Cary's Pharmacy,  
Dobbs Diner,  
Dobbs Ferry Café,  
Fiamor Boutique,  
Flowers by Carole,  
Jean-Denis Marzi Custom Framing,  
Life Cleaners,  
Marshall's Cheeses,  
Mimosa Restaurant,  
Off Broadway Restaurant,  
Readers Hardware,  
Rose Gift Shop,  
Sam's Italian Restaurant,  
Scaramella's Restaurant,  
Sushi Mike's Japanese Restaurant,  
The Relaxation Oasis,  
Tomatillo Restaurant.**

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### Return of The Legends of Dobbs Ferry



The Dobbs Ferry



Historical Society and the Public Library are joining forces this Fall to bring you updated classic tales of true local ghost lore. Please join us on Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. in the Library Community Room. Mark your calendars! While the program is free (to all who dare to attend) any optional donation to help fund future programs will be greatly appreciated.

