



# The FERRYMAN

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VOLUME XIX No. 3

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November, 2005

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

## Annual Clara Mead Egg Nog Party and Zion's Washington Irving Celebration To Be Held Sunday, December 11th



It has become an annual holiday tradition here in Dobbs Ferry to usher in the season with the Holiday Egg Nog Party, this year to be held on Sunday, December 11th from 2:30 to 4:30pm at the Mead House (12 Elm Street). 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. It is one of the pleasures of the party to hear Clara Mead's house filled with laughter and toasts as we observe the tradition beloved by many in our village.

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. If enough egg nog is shared by all, we may even be persuaded to part with the recipe!

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 has chosen the theme of "Washington Irving, Early Historian of New York". Readings from Irving's works interspersed with familiar holiday carols will entertain one and all. The church will be decorated in traditional 19th century holiday fashion. Rumor has it that the final dramatic presentation for this year's celebration may well be especially appropriate to the theme, involving members of the historical society themselves. A reception follows the program in the parish hall. Admission is free and open to the public. The church is located at 55 Cedar Street.

### Our Own History?

How did the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society come into being? A search of our archives has produced this information. We would love to hear from others who were involved at the beginning. Probably as a response to thinking about our nation's coming Bicentennial Year, Jess Pearce, on July 9, 1975, brought up the need for a local historical society at a meeting of the mayor's historical committee. Others agreed and Mrs. Pat McIlvain and Colonel Lester Lichter were asked to begin organizing. They invited "all interested

residents of Dobbs Ferry" to a meeting held on March 6, 1976. Ten residents attended that meeting, most of whom were not members of the village historical committee. Meeting again on June 5, 1976, Colonel Lichter distinguished between the existing historical committee and a historical society, "A historical society is an independent corporation, over which the Village would have no control, and would operate under the laws of the State of New York. It would have the authority to open bank accounts and receive gifts and bequests (which would qualify for

tax deductions)." To incorporate a historical society:

- A simple constitution and by-laws must be written.
- A statement of purpose must be formulated.
- Classes of membership and membership fees must be determined.

At a July 24<sup>th</sup> meeting, Pat McIlvain distributed some fundraising pamphlets from historical societies in other communities. By October 16, 1976, the fall gathering invited people interested in oral history, archives, and "History Society planners" to join in the effort. Rita Gross, Lichter and McIlvain chaired the group. Thanks to Oceana Press, autographed copies of Sister Mary Agnes Parrell's book, *Profiles of Dobbs Ferry*, were sold to benefit the new Society. The meeting adopted unanimously a statement of purpose that Lester Lichter composed from samples that many people had contributed.

Early in 1977, Lichter drew up the necessary legal papers and submitted them to the New York Attorney General. By March, he received approval of the initial incorporation papers which he then submitted to the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York. That board suggested that the incorporation be acquired by means of a charter.

Work to fulfill the legal requirements continued. Meanwhile, committee members began to set up membership classes and fees, being guided by the experience of other nearby societies.

On July 3, 1977, at the Village Picnic-in-the-Park, the drive for charter members of the new Historical Society began and was continued at the Dobbs Ferry Festa the following September.

The University Board of Regents granted a provisional charter on June 23, 1978. Listed as incorporators were: Margarita Gallo Muller, Mary Agnes Parrell, Laurel W. Frees, Robert B. Dreaper, William J. Maguire, Lincoln Rothschild, Martha Schwartz, Frances Neill, Cathleen Polgreen Filomena Ricciardi, Patricia Baldwin Evans and Virginia W. Barton. Those persons, along with Albert J. Baviello, William Blanck and Florence Husband Parker were named as the first board of trustees with the power to adopt by-laws and set provisions for electing trustees. The charter would be made absolute if, within three years, the corporation could acquire the resources and support necessary for fulfilling its stated purposes.

The trustees were able to do so and on March 25, 1988 the provisional charter became absolute. On March 19, 1981, the Society's 501 C 3 tax exempt status was affirmed by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

*By Mary Sudman Donovan*

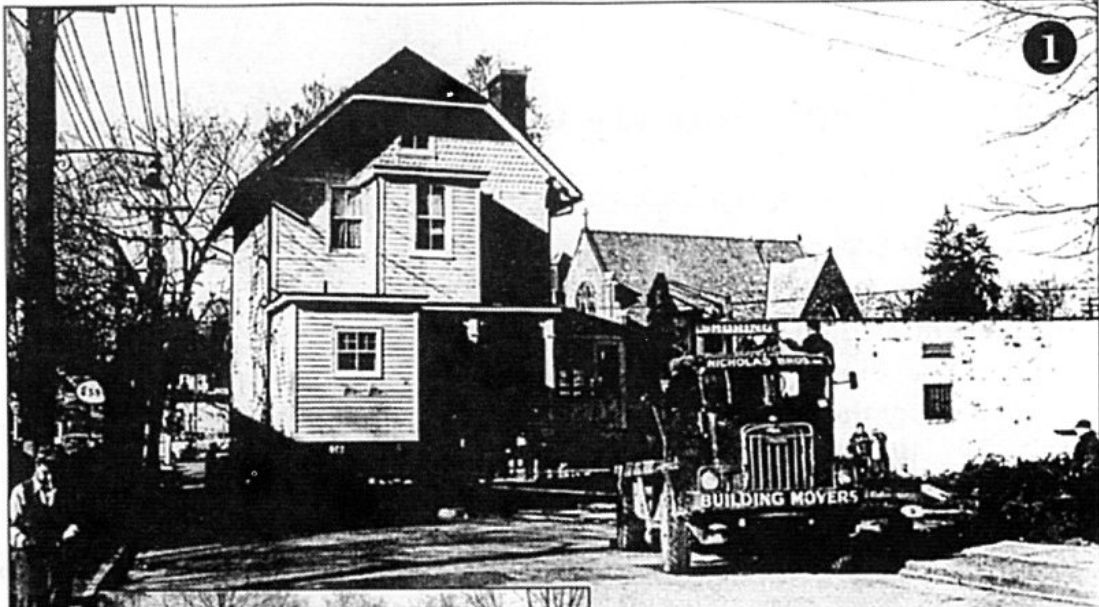
## **Please consider a gift to the legacy of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society.**

The Board of Trustees of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society invite you to consider a gift to the Historical Society, as part of your estate planning. It is only through such gifts, that we can be assured that the mission of the Historical Society to preserve the history of our village, will be carried out in generations to come. It is common for many institutions to make an appeal to the endowment fund that will help in the maintenance of the institution in the present and for years to come. We invite you to consider the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society when you are meeting with your estate planner or lawyer, and we would be happy to answer any questions you might have as a possible donor. Please keep the Historical Society in your thoughts as you plan for the future and consider how a gift might provide an important living legacy to you and help a community we value and cherish. Without a strong and well supported historical society, how will the traditions, the stories and the history of our community be preserved? We invite you to be a part of that challenge and vision through a gift for our future.



# On the Move

There is one sure way to eliminate all the hassles of packing when you move. Take the house with you! Sound a little unusual? It was once more conventional than you'd imagine. The common practice of moving a house was considered an economical solution to building. Things were built to last in the good old days!  
*by Dennis Wilson*

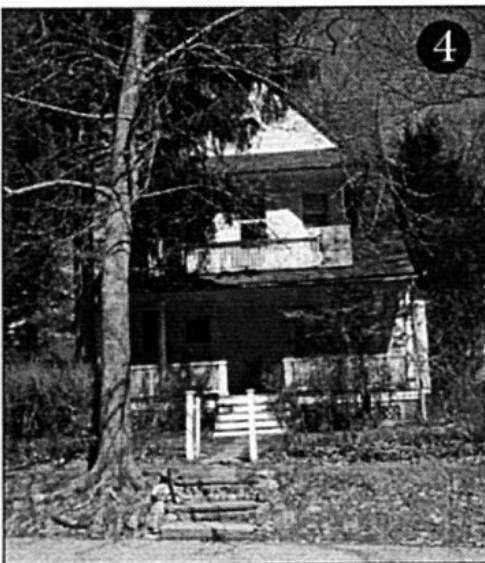


**1** The Ravekes were relatives of the Storm family. Their house once sat on Ashford Avenue's parking lot for Off Broadway. It was moved across the street, this time by truck, and onto Bellwood Avenue. A previous owner and mayor, Charlie Lester was an architect who doubled its size before selling it to the current owners. Legend tells it that when that house was moved, not a single teacup rattled in its cupboard.

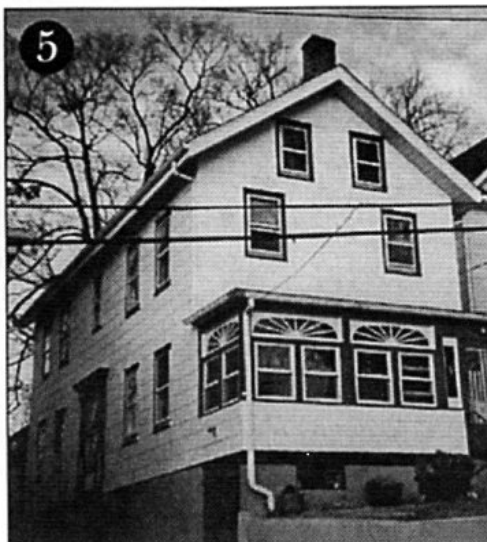


**2** There's an abandoned gas cap on the sidewalk on Rochambeau Avenue and no home to lead it to. That's because the Kelly's home was there. You can find it today near the corner of Storm and Ashford Avenue.

**3** Johnston's Florist and its greenhouses once flourished on a large corner of Lefurgy and Ashford Avenue, where they just put up all those homes. There was a house there too. It relocated up the hill to Highland Avenue. The attractive stained glass front door enticed the Gogarty's inside, leading to the purchase of their home.



**4** The Bliss house moved across the street on Belden Avenue in 1909. They were relatives of Henry Bliss. He was the first person killed by an Automobile in the North American Continent. The Sachs suspect that the previous owners enjoyed the view better from its current side of the street, and are inclined to agree



**5** Plans were once underway to build a Rectory onto the back of Sacred Heart Church. The Storm Farmhouse on the corner of the church's lot was sold and moved down to its present location on Rochambeau Avenue. The home was relocated in the early 1900's, rolled on logs pulled by a team of horses. Its current owners, the Wilsons, can still see the remaining three logs incorporated into basement beams



# The Odell Farmers and their Farmhouse

*Georgette Hedberg, the Historical Society's Vice President, has been researching the history of her home at 50 Temple Road. The following article is an excerpt of the more complete history that she has written and illustrates the nineteenth century development of Dobbs Ferry.*

## Niram T. Odell (1810-1898)

The creaking wagon wheels and clopping horse's hooves along Highland Turnpike (Broadway) must have carried beautiful thoughts to Niram T. Odell and his wife, Maria (Acker). On May 1, 1845, they had paid Anthony Storm \$1,300 dollars for 31 acres of fertile farmland in Greenburgh (Dobbs Ferry). They moved along the Wilsea Brook to the summit of a rocky hill facing the Hudson River where they would establish their new home. Today all that remains of the lane they traveled are two connecting driveways from the end of Temple Road to the base of Cricket Lane and Lefurgy. Though their address was variously listed as Belden Avenue, French's Hill, Ashford Avenue or Lefurgy Avenue, their farmhouse always stood at what is known today as 50 Temple Road.

Family connections probably eased the purchase of this lovely piece of land. An Odell genealogy reveals that Margaret Odell (daughter of Abraham and Ann Odell) married Andrew Storm in 1800. She and Niram (son of Tompkins and Rachel Odell) were cousins who had both descended from William Odell, who came to this country in the early 1600s. An 1836 bequest from William Lawrence to Niram's wife, Maria, possibly contributed towards the purchase price.

Niram's 1840s farmhouse resembles other houses of this era. The 2 1/2 story, cedar clapboard house has a wrapping porch along two sides. A central chimney shares its flue with the front kitchen. The floors are made from 6" wide pine planks. Most windows are double

hung with four large panes of glass. Cast-iron door hinges, carved window and door moldings add a decorative touch as do the parlor's plaster designed ceiling and wooden chair railings. Most unusual, however, are the carved shamrocks in the four corner brackets, indicative of Odell's Irish heritage.



*1984 Farmhouse view from Private Lane*

Fresh water was available to the land from the Wilsea Brook; and the nearby quarry could provide rocks for the house's foundation and rock walls. The Odells planted fruit trees and raised grazing animals along with their vegetable garden. Through the years, Niram Odell would maintain an orchard, operate a carting (trucking) business in Manhattan, invest in local real estate and accumulate enough wealth to purchase a second farm that would put him closer to the train station and the village.

### Odells Foster Family Relationships

Family ties were very important to the Odells. In 1850 Maria's parents, William and Abigail Acker, lived with the family which then included three children: Janette Odell (b.1844), John J. Odell (b.1846), and George W. Odell (b.1848). Harvey Odell was born in 1852. Like all children they worked and played on the hills, in the orchards, the fields and along the Wilsea Brook. Summer and fall there were apples, cherries, and pears to harvest. Along with the field and garden work in July, they could

*(Con't on page 5)*

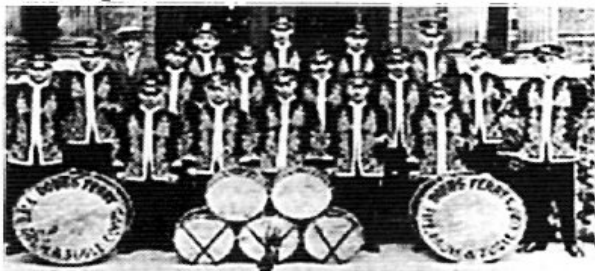


(Con't. from page 4)

always find lush, wild raspberries in and around the woods. Chickens and other farm animals were also tended daily along with the water that needed to be drawn for the kitchen. In time a hand-pump for well water was located within 20 feet of the front door and two cisterns were made on either side of the house for catching rainwater.

On January 12, 1858, Niram sold ten acres to his brother, Moses T. and Hannah (Barton) Odell. Around that same time, Maria, Moses T. and Hannah joined the Summerfield Methodist Church. Occasionally Sunday School picnics were held in the orchard. Even today a few local families tell stories about the Church picnics at the Odell Orchard.

After the children married, they continued to live on the farm into the 1870's. The 1870 Census clearly lists residents as: Niram and Maria, their oldest daughter, Janette (28 years), her husband Henry Gilbert (carpenter), their two children Louis (3 years) and Frank (2 years), John Odell, 25 years (carpenter), George Odell, 22 years, (farmer) and Harvey Odell, 15 years--nine people living in the three bedroom (plus attic space) farmhouse.



*Niram Odell (Niram T.'s grandson) pictured here in the Drum and Bugle Corps*

As the Hudson River Railroad brought better transportation to local villages, Dobbs Ferry and Irvington became quite attractive to wealthy New York City families. How did local farmers feel about these new, powerful neighbors? With mixed feelings, perhaps, as a conflict between the Odells and their new neighbors, Cyrus W. Field, the investor responsible for laying the first Transatlantic telegraph cable and his nephew, Frederick J. Stone, illustrates.

In 1879, Field and Stone filed a lawsuit against Moses T. Odell, Richard S. Palmer and

John A. Palmer over an artificial pond meadow that Mr. Field claimed had made him ill with the chills and fever of malaria. The Palmer brothers owned the property and Moses Odell had dammed Wilsea Brook to create the pond. Freezing winter temperatures created a thick sheet of ice that Moses harvested to sell. In the spring he opened the gate and allowed the meadow to drain so that it would be dry enough to serve as a grazing pasture. In the suit, Ward Carpenter, a civil engineer, testified that the meadow should be drained. Apparently he also produced a map, the same map that was copied and distributed during the 1973 Dobbs Ferry Centennial.

Though the ice harvesting business was destined to end with the invention of electricity and refrigeration, Moses Odell's business ended much earlier with the December, 1879 agreement that the ice-pond meadow would be drained at the expense of Mr. Cyrus Field.

#### **Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary**

In January 16, 1891, the *Dobbs Ferry Register* noted:

*Mr. & Mrs. Niram Odell celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on New Years Day. Mr. Odell is 83 years of age and has lived on his farm here for 45 years. He is hale and hearty, and but for a lameness, which was caused by being kicked by a horse several years ago, he would be as active as many men are at 50 years. We hope the old couple will live with unbroken happiness to celebrate their diamond wedding.*

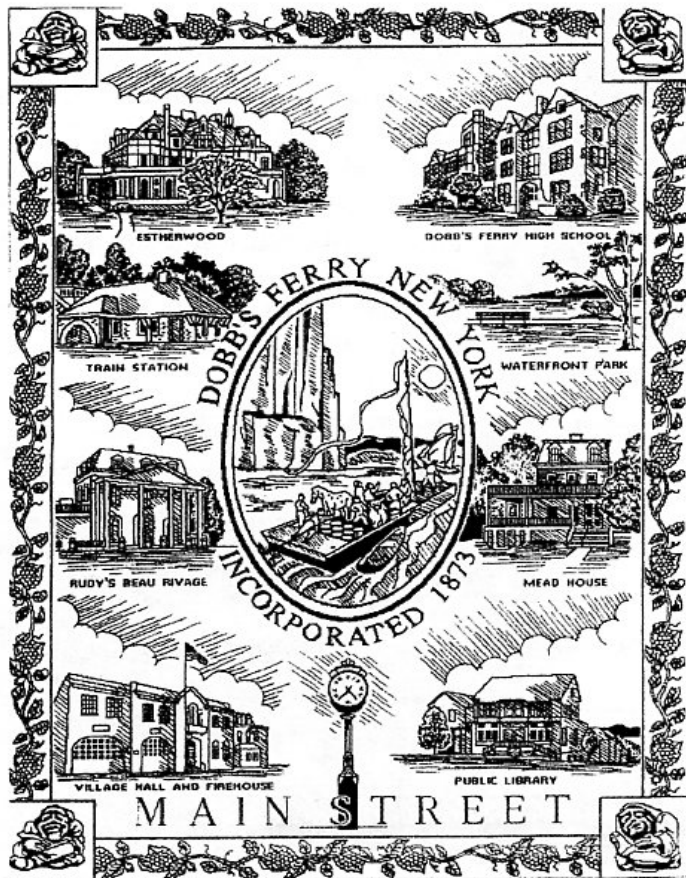
Within three months of this celebration, Niram sold the hilltop farmhouse to his son and daughter-in-law, George W. and Esther E. Odell. Like his father, George W. had a second trade to go along with his farming. He worked as a mason, then a contractor. Just seven years after the sale, on September 29, 1898, Niram T. Odell died after living for 88 years. According to the *Dobbs Ferry Register*,

*Mr. Odell was a life long resident of Greenburgh and for years conducted a successful trucking business in New York City for Howland Aspinwall & Company. He retired with a modest fortune and bought the farm where he died, about thirty years ago.*

# Great Holiday Gift!

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.

We have replenished our supply of blue afghans and are once again making available both colors, holding the price at \$45.



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

# Society Happenings

◆The October program, *The Legends of Dobbs Ferry* was a great success! Trustee Denis Wilson again entertained us with a fine presentation of ghostly tales involving Estherwood, Zion Church and other historical properties in the village. The program was jointly sponsored by the Society and the Public Library and was held in the Library Community Room. Additional informative and entertaining programs will be presented during 2006.

◆Mary Donovan, former President of the Society is spending this winter in Boston with her husband, Bishop Herbert Donovan who is serving as Interim Rector of Trinity Church, Copley Square. Rev. Richard McKeon is taking her place as President. We await Mary's return in the late spring. (Perhaps we can persuade Mary to deliver a talk on the architecture of Trinity Church which is designed in the same style as the railroad station here in Dobbs Ferry.)

◆Elected as trustees at the September annual meeting were: Madeline Byrne, Dolores Calafati, Mark Cassella, Nancy Delmerico, Jean Fritz, Georgette Hedberg and Ellen Klein. Pam Strachan, whose name was inadvertently left off the list of those running for re-election, has been reappointed trustee to fill an existing vacancy.

◆12 Elm Street is home to the Society and its collection of archival material about our village. The house is open on Wednesday mornings from 10 a.m. until 12 Noon for those who wish to research local history. Trustee Georgette Hedberg and other volunteers have worked hard to organize the archives and are available on Wednesday mornings to help visitors.

◆The Society welcomes donations and bequests to help us maintain the Mead House and to continue the work of preserving village history.

◆Thanks to Barbara Costello who donated 12 Masters School yearbooks to our collection.