



The FERRYMAN

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VOLUME XX No. 1

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May, 2006

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

Historical Society Gala Will Present a Special Program on June 9th

ON Friday, June 9th at 7 pm the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society will hold its annual gala at the Dobbs Ferry Woman's Club at 54 Clinton Avenue. The evening will include dinner, a program and the ever popular raffle.

The program for this year's gala focuses on a teacher from Dobbs Ferry, **Miss L. Doris Wood**, who taught generations of young people in our town, including the Word War II era. During that time Miss Wood wrote letters to the young men she had in her classes as they served in the armed forces, and the responses to her letters have become part of the permanent collection of the Historical Society. A special dramatic presentation of the letters has been written by Jo Ann Skousen especially for the gala.

As a continuation of our unsung heroes tribute, begun last year, we will honor another retired teacher from Dobbs Ferry, **Barbara Pearce**. Barbara grew up in Dobbs Ferry and attended the public schools here before attending the State College at New Paltz, where she earned her bachelor's degree and then

received her masters degree from NYU. Barbara taught for 43 years, mainly 3rd and 4th grades.

Barbara's contribution to the community is not confined to her many years of teaching. She has been active in both girl and boy scouting programs and she is a founding member of the Ambulance Corp. She served on the boards of the Community Hospital and the Historical Society.

Her ties to the community go far back. The first Dobbs Ferry Library was founded in the home of her grandmother. Barbara exemplifies what it means to live a life dedicated to making a difference in the lives of the people of this village, and it is an honor to be able to thank her for all that she has accomplished.



Please make your reservations for the gala by calling 674-1007. Tickets are \$30 per person or \$50 per couple. Send your check to the Society at 12 Elm St. and take advantage of the raffle's early bird special by sending in the tickets you will find enclosed in this newsletter and your check by June 1st.

AN URGENT PLEA FROM THE DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A recent leak at Mead House left us with fallen plaster, a gaping hole in the second-floor ceiling, and water damage even down to the first-floor parlor. The good news: our archives—which are irreplaceable—were spared. The bad news: there's an urgent need for expensive repairs to prevent future leaks and restore the second-floor offices and archives to a functional state. To date, we have spent over \$1,000 to address the immediate problem, replacement plumbing. But we estimate that it will cost another \$3,000 to replace additional ancient pipe, patch the ceiling, and dry and clean the water-soaked rugs. All this has come as we've struggled to meet steeply rising costs for property insurance and utility bills.

To meet these challenges and those to come, given the age of the Meade House, the Society is making a special appeal to defray the costs incurred this year. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution of \$50, \$100, \$250, \$500 or more over and above your annual membership dues. All contributions will be recognized in the Ferryman and at the annual meeting in September. Please make your check payable to Dobbs Ferry Historical Society and mail it to 12 Elm Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. We need and very much appreciate your help!

The Browns--The President and First Lady of Dobbs Ferry

Colonel Franklin Quimby Brown and his wife Ida contributed greatly to Dobbs Ferry and their gifts are still very much with us. Springhurst Elementary School is built on the site of the former Brown Springhurst Estate. The monument topped by a carved eagle about to fly marked the entrance to Brown's property and has been moved to the school's incoming driveway, The eagle, in the Brown tradition, symbolically greets students every morning on their arrival to classes.

The Browns are also with us in the heart of the Village. On Main Street architect Steve Tilly, in planning his offices, preserved the exterior of the English Tutor Playhouse that Mrs. Brown established, and Bruce Richards recently renovated the former Library building for his home and studio using an architect's drawing ordered by Mrs. Brown in the 1920's. Decades before the Village acquired the property, the Browns provided this building for library use.

The ground on which the Village Hall was built was donated by the Browns a cornerstone attests. Next door to Village Hall the property on which the Post Office was built was also a Brown property.

The marble altar and the alter rail at the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii was given by the Browns. At the entry to Zion Episcopal Church a bronze plaque donated by their five children commemorates the dedication of the Browns to their church over the years. This is just part of the Brown legacy they contributed much, much more.

Col. Franklin Quimby Brown was born in Chicago in 1862 at the beginning of the Civil War. His wife Ida Eldridge was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts two years afterwards. They met when the Colonel's business interests took him to Boston. After their marriage in 1893, they decided to make Dobbs Ferry their home.

When the newly-weds arrived in the Village in 1895, Ida Brown was thirty one years old and Franklin thirty three. They would reside in the Village for the rest of their lives raising two sons and three daughters. They would name their great estate Springhurst. On the estate there would be a Tutor style mansion, several outbuildings and acreage for livestock including horses, cows and sheep. And they would play an important role in the social, political and religious life of the Village.

Both Franklin and Ida had records of accomplishment before coming to Dobbs Ferry. Ida had been active in social work in Boston while Franklin was a railroad president at the age of 29.

Ida was the daughter of a distinguished New England Family. According to the *Dobbs Ferry Register* she "— was born on the family estate, Elm Hill in Roxbury, Mass. — on her father's side she was directly descended from Elder William Brewster who arrived on the Mayflower. Her paternal great grandfather and grandfather respectively served as captains in the U.S. militia in the Revolution and the war of 1812. "

While we don't have any background information about Franklin Brown's family, his obituary in the *New York Times* reported that Brown went to Florida when he was 29, and



The photo of the Brown mansion was borrowed from Springhurst Elementary School with the following information: "Residence of Colonel and Mrs. Franklin Q. Brown (1895-1955) donated to Springhurst School by Leigh Hill French III, grandson of Colonel and Mrs. Brown (October, 1997)"

Copy made by Bill Blanck, November, 2005

became president of the Florida Southern Railroad. After the railroad merged with the plant system (which included steamship and hotel operations), he became vice president in the new venture. For thirty years he was employed by the banking firm of Redmond and Company in New York, much of the time as a senior partner reorganizing railroads utilities and banks. During this period he became either an officer or director of many of these companies.



Col. Brown

In Dobbs Ferry Colonel Brown was President of the Village from 1912 through 1919. The chief executive of the Village was the President until the mayoral system was inaugurated in 1929.

For fifty years he was President of the Dobbs Ferry Bank and also served for long terms as President of the Dobbs Ferry Free Library and the Dobbs Ferry Hospital. He was a Senior Warden of Zion Episcopal Church.

Colonel Brown was proud of his military service. When the Spanish American War erupted in 1898, he was a Colonel in the Florida State Militia which was then incorporated into the United States Army. During World War I he was Chairman of the Finance Advisory Committee of the United States Railroad Administration.

During World War 1 as chairman of Liberty Loan drives in Westchester, Rockland and Fairfield Counties he raised \$200,000,000. After the War, he became a Colonel in the Quartermaster Reserves.

While the Colonel was busy with his duties in Dobbs Ferry (which he sometimes called his night work), his wife Ida wasn't idle. Besides caring for her children the *Dobbs Ferry Register* reported "Mrs. Brown's activities in Dobbs Ferry resumed the pattern of her earlier activities in Boston. She became interested in immigrant families, many of whom were coming from Southern Italy to Westchester.

She also founded the William McKinley Free Kindergarten for children and the Mother's

Club which met regularly in the Main Street Library building. She established one of the first playgrounds in Dobbs Ferry. During the first World War she was Chairman of the Dobbs Ferry Red Cross in charge of surgical dressings."

During the holiday season she distributed baskets of food to the poor.

Retired teacher Barbara Pearce remembers Girl Scout rallies hosted by Mrs. Brown on the estate for 1,200 to 1,400 scouts. She also recalls sewing merit badges on the sleeve of her Girl Scout uniform.

The carved eagle monument, now at the entrance of Springhurst Elementary School, is all that is left of the former Brown estate. And now



Photo made of monument at entrance to Springhurst Elementary School by Bill Blanck, November, 2005. The dark, rectangular stone at the bottom of the monument is carved "Springhurst"

happy shouts of children on the playground and the newly constructed softball field would be welcome sounds to the Browns could they hear them. For decades Dobbs school athletic teams have adopted the eagle as their symbolic mascot and often students at Springhurst are referred to as eagles learning to fly. The Colonel and Mrs. Brown would have liked that.

Editor's note: Further research on the Browns and Springhurst will continue and will be published in future issues of the Ferryman.

Sources: *The Dobbs Ferry Register*, the *New York Times* and interviews with Barbara Pearce and the Rev. Canon Charles E. Karsten

-- Bill Blanck

L. Doris Wood – Educator, Correspondent and Friend

"I'm grateful for your splendid teachings." "I should have paid more attention in class." "You were one of my favorite teachers, you seem to understand." "You've been good to us and someday it will all come back to you." "You really are a grand person."

What teacher wouldn't love to hear those sorts of compliments? L. Doris Wood, a social studies teacher at Dobbs Ferry High School, read those and many more in correspondence from students who were far away from home fighting in World War II. This cache of letters was donated to the Historical Society by her niece, Joan W. Coulter of Phoenix, NY.

L Doris Wood was born in Phoenix, NY, on May 3, 1892. She attended local schools and was active in the community. Her father owned and operated a meat business and her mother was a dressmaker. She studied at Oberlin College and graduated from Syracuse University with a BA in History. Her first teaching position was in a one-room schoolhouse near Phoenix in September 1910. She came to Dobbs Ferry in January 1923 and taught at the high school until her retirement in 1951. The classes she taught included civics, ancient history, American history, and economics.

Miss Woods Set High Standards

According to her niece, Miss Wood was always interested in history and politics, anything that affected the freedom of the United States. She was determined that her students would learn and use their heads. She set high standards in the classroom and demanded respect from her students. Several of the soldiers mentioned the political discussions they'd had in class, almost teasing her when President Roosevelt won another election.

A popular teacher, Miss Wood wanted to keep in touch with her students while they were off fighting in Europe and the Pacific. She asked every former student and soldier for a photo of himself in uniform and had the collection mounted on the wall of her classroom, centered by an American flag. By November 1943 she wrote to a friend she had 166 pictures of the boys including 26 in large frames. Some of the soldiers weren't able to send a photo right away. Cameras weren't allowed on some military bases, and other soldiers sent any photos

they had to their families. Several soldiers apologized for not including a photo with their letters to Miss Wood, but continued to write to their old teacher and pleaded with her to keep up the correspondence.

Her students knew Miss Wood had a good sense of humor, and they put it to the test in November 1943. There was an assembly planned that day in the school, and the students set it up in the form of a radio program with students doing imitations of various well known personalities. Three girls sang songs like the Andrews Sisters and another student impersonated Frank Sinatra. Then a



L. Doris Wood

Courtesy of Joan W. Coulter

news bulletin was announced that for the first time in the history of the country, a woman had been elected vice-president. The new ticket was Franklin D. Roosevelt and Miss L. Doris Wood. The students clapped and laughed, many asking Miss Wood when she had turned Democrat. Other students were grateful they had her signature on a report card since the President and Vice-President's signatures were valuable. Miss Wood described the day to a friend, writing that it was "a grand slam at me for criticizing the New Deal." Others saw it as a compliment; Miss Wood knew she'd gotten her point across to the students.

Soldiers Express Their Homesickness

Many of the soldiers expressed a definite homesickness for "good old Dobbs" while they were gone. One even wrote he'd take Dobbs Ferry in place of all of Italy. They saw Miss Wood as quite the main source of information to all the fellows abroad who missed their hometown. Inquiries were made as to the weather, other teachers at the high school and

Con't. on page 5

other local events. One soldier wondered if it was quiet in the classroom now that all the trouble-makers were in the service. Letters from several former students were signed with "old pain in the neck boy" or "your worst student" or another, "your problem child." One simply wrote "How I wish I was home. Please write more letters to me."

Soldiers asked Miss Wood how long she thought the war would last. Another wrote "the things you taught me I'm seeing for myself." Former students still remember Miss Wood fondly, recalling her as a firm but fair teacher who was always encouraging and offering words of advice.

In the mid 1930s, she recognized Japan's growth and emergence as a world power. She predicted that her students would be the ones to fight a war against the Japanese. This was met with laughter, but she pressed on and told the girls they wouldn't be wearing nylon stockings for much longer. Other soldiers seemed concerned that the world was changing, knowing that history had changed overnight. "You teach, we'll change history." Another wondered how Miss Wood was teaching history when the world was changing every minute. Still another wrote he felt sorry that "in ten years or so" teachers would have to teach about the war. One soldier wrote "When I was in your history classes, I wondered if I'd see history made. I've stopped wondering now."

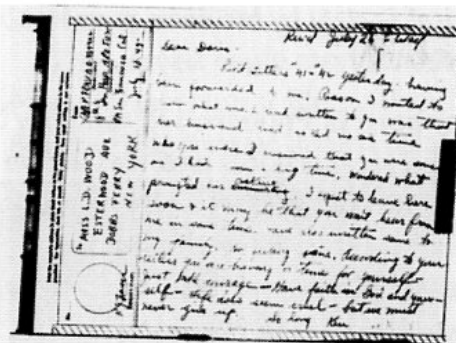
Miss Woods Wrote Often to the Soldiers

Some of Miss Wood's letters to the soldiers are part of the collection, they must have been returned to her due to incorrect addresses. She wrote of events in the high school, news of other Dobbs Ferry boys, and proudly described her victory garden. As part of a national defense strategy, she took classes in first aid as well as auto mechanics. To one soldier, she wrote, "you should see me change a tire." In May 1945 she wrote about attending a memorial Mass at Our Lady of Pompeii for several Dobbs Ferry boys who had been killed. She knew all of them from her classroom. She listed their names and where they were killed. She apologized for the lack of cheerfulness in the letter but said that's the way things are at the present. The Germans had surrendered by then, but Miss Wood wrote that it was hard to be jubilant with all the news coming in about the concentration camps.

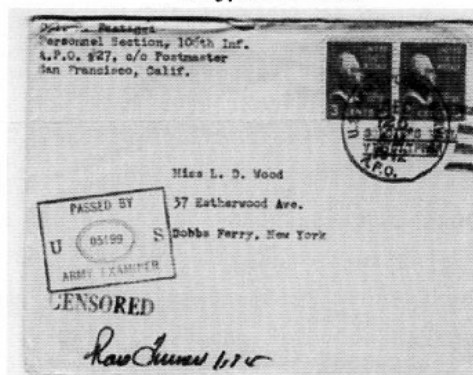
She wanted returning servicemen to visit her "at their earliest convenience" and was anxious for them to see her picture gallery. She said the photos would be left on the wall "as long as the school building stands."

The letters in our collection take many forms. Many soldiers sent holiday greetings, several with artwork specific to the South Pacific or Europe. Many letters are handwritten, some two or three pages long. There are postcards from military training camps all over the U.S. Some letters are typewritten and one soldier mentioned he was using a Typomatic machine and had to feed it dimes every

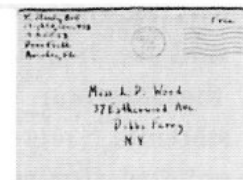
30 minutes to keep typing. Miss Wood also received V-Mail letters. These were written by the GIs then a photographic negative was made and shipped to the US on large rolls of paper. Once in the US the roll would be cut and the letters folded into small envelopes and delivered. Most



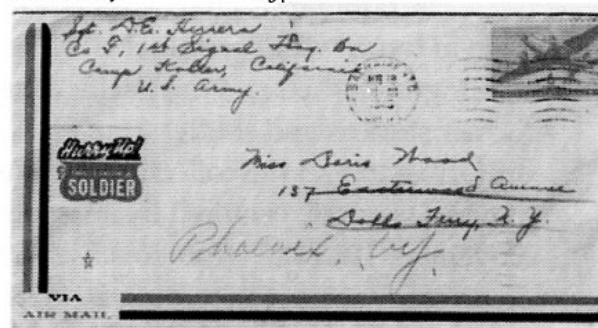
A typical V-Mail



of the letters were read by censors and their approval stamps were clearly marked. In June 1943, a soldier wrote that things were pretty quiet around him now but "it will begin to hum shortly (censors), you know)." *Typical Postmarks*



The postmarks of the letters were unique as well. One read



"Hurry Up! This is from a soldier" A postcard was imprinted "Avenge Pearl Harbor, We'll Set the

Rising Sun." A letter mailed from the southwest Pacific in early 1943 bore a postmark that read "The Marines have Landed."

Often the soldiers described their journeys across the country and even across an ocean. One soldier left Dobbs Ferry and saw the entire country before shipping out from California. He describes his journey across the Pacific as "day after day of water, sun and sky and no land," saying it is a great strain on his nervous system. He compared his reaction to the voyage with early explorers after many days at sea in their frail crafts.

Miss Wood received letters from female students who joined the service as well. One former student left her job at an insurance office to work in Washington, DC. She seemed disappointed in the similarity of the work, telling Miss Wood to remind the other girls that there was nothing glamorous about the service. Another had a different reaction, she said that some people laugh at the girls in uniform and needed to know to what length the girls

went to join up. This soldier was teaching a class on shooting to new recruits. Another former student worked as a fingerprint classifier in Washington DC. One male soldier wondered

more fully but understood that the coastline needed to be protected as well.

Miss Wood Takes a Leave of Absence

Miss Wood spent summers with her family in Phoenix, NY and in several letters the soldiers said they hoped she had a relaxing summer upstate with inquiries about the success of her victory garden. Miss Wood's mother moved in with her in Dobbs Ferry at some point, and suffered some health problems. She had a stroke in March 1944 and was paralyzed on the right side. She was unable to walk but had been gradually improving until a second stroke that June that left her helpless. Miss Wood took a leave of absence from the school to be a full time caretaker. She went back to teaching in October after locating a nurse to come in during the day to care for her mother. She shared this with the boys, and many of them inquired as to her mother's health in their letters to Miss Wood.

In the materials donated to the Historical Society by Miss Wood's niece is included a small pad of paper that was labeled "addresses of boys in the service." She kept track of each address of so many former students and they were all noted in her crisp penmanship.

The high school newspaper contained an article about the picture collection in Miss Wood's classroom and included a 'word to the wise' that quoted from a letter to her from a student in case anyone should doubt the value of Miss Wood's teaching. The letter said, "If I knew five months ago what I know now, I am pretty sure that I would have been one of your best students. I am not sorry I am in the service but I am very sorry I quit school due to the fact that I had one more year of high school to complete my education. The Marine Corps showed me what I really wanted and that was a sound education."

Miss Wood retired from Dobbs Ferry High School in 1951. The gift of these letters is a testament to the role she played in a generation's hearts. One soldier pleaded for her to keep writing letters to him. And she did.

- Meg Lauer



A WAC Recruiting Poster

if the women who had gone to work during the war would give up their positions in offices when the men came back.

Even soldiers who weren't in Europe or the Pacific knew their efforts were important. One said he was classified 4-F due to a hole in his eardrum and reminded Miss Wood that Frank Sinatra had the same condition. Another soldier, stationed in Connecticut, said he felt guilty he wasn't in the fight

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The Historical Society will be open for research on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to Noon. Call 674-1007 for more information or to make an appointment.