



# The FERRYMAN

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VOLUME XX No. 3

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

December, 2006

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

## You are cordially invited . . .

. . . to a reception honoring the Comte de Rochambeau, illustrious leader of the French forces that joined General Washington and the Continental Army at Dobbs Ferry in 1781. The combined forces marched to Yorktown where they were victorious over the British, thus ending the Revolutionary War.

Using *receipts* [recipes] from *The Thirteen Colonies Cookbook*, the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society will replicate a reception that might have been held in Dobbs Ferry after the conclusion of the American Revolution, had Comte de Rochambeau returned to be



Comte de Rochambeau

and after the fighting. [Historical note: After the battle of Yorktown, Rochambeau did travel back to the Hudson River area to celebrate the Yorktown victory with General Washington before his return to France in 1783. Though there is no evidence of a reception in

Dobbs Ferry, such an event is not beyond historical imagination.]

This event is an expansion of the annual **Clara Mead Egg Nog** party that the Historical Society holds each year for its members. We will gather on December 10<sup>th</sup> from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Mead House, 12 Elm Street. All members are invited—non-members will be able to join at the door. An eighteenth century collation of delightful edibles will adorn the table along with Clara Mead's traditional egg nog and other liquid refreshments courtesy of Rochambeau Wines and *Chateau*. Periodically during the festivities, quotations from the French soldiers who fought with the Continental forces will be read to the assembled guests. Do bring your best manner to greet our famous French visitor. An elegant soiree is promised!

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## August, 1781: The March to Freedom

*In mid-August, 1781, the seventh year of the Revolutionary War, Generals Washington and Rochambeau, decided to break the summer encampment of the allied American and French armies in Greenburgh (then called Philipsburg), abandon plans to attack the British in Manhattan, and instead risk a march of more than 400 miles to Virginia. Washington and Rochambeau were hoping to set a trap for British General Cornwallis, who was then fortifying the hamlet of Yorktown, Virginia. Success would depend on critical help from the French fleet of Admiral de Grasse.*

**THE VICTORY** at the Battle of Yorktown led to the end of the Revolutionary War. Yet the move towards Virginia was virtually unforeseen until mid-August, 1781, the final week of the Greenburgh encampment. Between August 14<sup>th</sup> to August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1781, Generals Washington and Rochambeau designed the winning strategy.

In August, 1781, political prospects for the United States were poor. There was a military stalemate, and the conviction was growing that the War for Independence was unwinnable. The French government hoped to end the war under terms of *uti possidetis*—that is with the belligerents retaining only those territories where they held military dominance. This arrangement would have left the British in control of Manhattan, Long Island, Georgia, South Carolina, the coast of North Carolina, the coast of Virginia, and most of the trans-Allegheny west and the United States confined to a narrow coastal strip. If the French army then left, the British armies would have been poised to resume hostilities. Yet Congress, discouraged by the long, inconclusive war, instructed its representatives in Paris (John Adams and Benjamin Franklin) to accede to French proposals to end the fighting.

All of this changed with a message from

## *March to Freedom Con't.*

French Admiral De Grasse in the West Indies which Washington and Rochambeau received at the Greenburgh encampment on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1781. Historian Robert Leckie has called De Grasse's communication "*possibly the most momentous message of the entire war.*"

Admiral De Grasse announced that he was bringing his large fleet to the Chesapeake Bay area, and would be ready to cooperate with the combined American-French forces against General Cornwallis's troops in Virginia

With this news Washington and Rochambeau knew they had a chance to trap Cornwallis's large army and win a major victory. Control of the Chesapeake by De Grasse's fleet would prevent Cornwallis's escape by sea.

Between August 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, Washington abandoned his plan to attack the British in New York, and decided to risk a secret march of more than 400 miles, from Greenburgh to Yorktown, Virginia.

The allied armies broke camp at Dobbs Ferry, Ardsley, Hartsdale and (for the French) the Edgemont/Greenville area on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1781 taking the first steps on the march to Yorktown. Two months later, after a fierce battle, on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1781, Cornwallis surrendered his army of 7500 men to General Washington. The victory at Yorktown, Virginia, led to favorable peace terms and to uncontested independence for the United States.

## Road to Freedom Day

To commemorate the remarkable events which took place in our village in mid-August, 1781, the Trustees of the Village of Dobbs Ferry declared August 19<sup>th</sup> as *Road to Freedom Day*, and the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society sponsored the *Road to Freedom Walk*, following the probable route through Dobbs Ferry of the Continental army on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1781.



*Photos Courtesy of Anne Marie Leone*



# 1840 Odell Farmhouse and Barn

## Part II: 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Generations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### George W. Odell & Esther Emma Burfield

At the turn of the century Maria Acker Odell had been a widow for two years. During those years she was listed in Railroad Directories and Census records along with either her son John at Field Street or George W. and his family at Belden Avenue (50 Temple Road). On December 18, 1900, Maria sold the last of her 31 acres of land for \$20,000 to Melchoir Beltzhoover of Irvington (now known as Halsey Pond). Six years later she died and was interned in the family plot at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.

Although John J. Odell was 5 years older than George W., it made sense for Niram T. to



George W.  
Odell  
(81 years old)  
holding  
great grandson  
Buddy

sell his first farmhouse to his younger son with a small family. After all, John J. was a carpenter and George W. was a mason. Also, George W.'s family had their share of challenges. The family story is that two children became handicapped after having dyptheria. During an era when women had few rights Esther Odell took charge of financially securing protection for her family. She wanted to guarantee that her children, Charles and Viola, would always have a home. By 1911 the Odell property was deeded in Esther's name. Later documents reveal that George W. had suffered a stroke and perhaps his poor health precipitated these actions.

More challenges came to the family in 1914 when John Allender, Edith Jane Odell's husband, died. This summer I interviewed Edith's youngest daughter, Pinky (Edith Allender Fisher, now 93 years old). She remembered hearing that relatives had suggested the four children be sent away for others to care for them. Her grandfather George W. wouldn't hear of it. He said, "That's not necessary; we can fix up the barn for them."



Odell Barn/Cottage 2006

When the U.S. entered World War I in 1917, George W.'s youngest son, Niram T. Odell, filled out his Draft Registration card and reported the situation of his needy family:

*Father partially disabled by stroke, sister, brother grown – but affected so that they are unable to support themselves – mother in poor health.*

Three years later on February 25, 1919, Esther Odell sold a piece of land to the Lorena Company (became Ardsley-on-Hudson Estate homes and Golf Course). The 1920 Census showed the Main House full with George W. (72), Esther (66), Charles (46), Viola (35), Niram (25) and his wife, Mary (22). The Barn/Cottage was listed separately as a rental for their daughter, Edith Allender (33) and her children

George (13), Esther (12), John (9), and Edith "Pinky" (6).

In her interview, Pinky explained that she was rarely called Edith. Her nickname evolved on her Christening day when her father saw her pink bow and referred to her by that name. She remembered being so embarrassed about where she lived that she told children at school that she lived in the Main House. Perhaps she felt safe saying that because her Uncle Lyman C. French and his family lived in the only other house on the hill. Pinky reminisced while standing and talking inside our small Barn/Cottage. She talked about the winds of winter blowing and rhythmically curling the linoleum floor as it blew, the two mattresses in the attic that came downstairs during the hot summer, and the chicken coop (still standing today).

In 1923 Niram T. Odell and Mary G. purchased property from John J. Hazelton, and by 1926 the south side of the hill was transformed as Lyman C. French's estate sold Moses T. Odell's Manor House, orchard, and out buildings to a developer. According to a *Dobbs Ferry Register* article (October 4, 1957):

*On the hill above to the north was the Harvey [George W.] Odell farm and the French farm which section in 1927 was taken over by the Methodist Book Concern as a residential development for its employees and named "Oradell Manor."*

The Methodist Book Concern would have 400 employees in their new Dobbs Ferry plant by the following year.

John E. Trenholm Jr. (25 Lyman Place) explained, "Temple Road was the last road to be built. It took some property away from my father's land (9 Highland Avenue), and it also required land fill to make it possible."

Within six months of the announcement for "Oradell Manor" Esther E. Odell died at the age of 75. She was truly a very thoughtful and caring woman. One only has to read her carefully planned will to recognize her concern for every member of her family. For her

children, she used the phrase "share and share alike." A few items she listed were: sheet music and a piano to Charles and Viola, furs to Edith, watch and chain to Irene, and a large portrait of grandfather Niram T. Odell to his namesake, her youngest son.

Little did Esther know that after all her planning, that son would end up with the full responsibility for the estate. Irene Alma Christian died by the end of 1926 and Edith Jane Allender Williams died 3 years later. Thus, Niram Odell, married and with two little ones, George W.



Edith Jane Odell Allender Williams (1925) and Bettie B. (1926) would care for older family members at the Main House for at least another 14 years.

On November 30, 1928, Niram bought Lot #7 from the "Oradell Manor." He built his home (47 Temple Road) next to the Barn/Cottage and Main house. Through the years Niram worked as a Tree Surgeon. In June, 1941 George W. Odell (93) died, and two years later his son, Charles (69) died. Viola was placed in the Wassaic State School where she lived until 1965. Niram sold the two acre Odell Estate to Walter and Leona Hardy in 1943. For the first time in over 100 years, an Odell would not own the Farmhouse, walk down its brick path to the Barn/Cottage, draw water from the well, prune the fruit trees, harvest grapes or tend the hilltop garden.

-- By Georgette Hedberg

**Sources:** Dobbs Ferry & Westchester County Archive Map Collections, Federal & State Census Records, Probate & Land Records, *Dobbs Ferry Register*, *Herald Statesman*, *New York Times*, World War I Draft Registration Records, & local history books.

**Interviews:** Leona Hardy, Pinky Allender Fisher, John E. Trenholm Jr.

**Odell Photos** courtesy of Pinky Allender Fisher

# Historical Society Happenings

► Our annual meeting was held on September 28<sup>th</sup> at the Mead House. Georgette Hedberg, Vice President, presided in Richard McKeon's absence. She reported on the last year's activities and thanked outgoing trustees Bill Blanck, Jean Fritz, Jane Morganstern and Denise Wilson for their service on the board. Laurence Dengler and David Koenigsberg were re-elected and new trustees elected were: Richard Borkow, Harriet Cheney, Robin Costello, Charlotte Frankenthaler and Stewart N. Storms, Jr. Elected to serve on the 2007 nominating committee were Peg Coffey, Bradley Bulkey and Denise Wilson.

► Treasurer Ellen Klein sounded a wake-up call, noting that increased postage, utilities and insurance rates had left the Society with a deficit at the end of the year. Though an emergency fund-raising effort had raised more than \$4,000 to repair the damage caused by a burst water pipe on the third floor, many structural and cosmetic repairs still need to be made.

► After the business meeting, Richard Borkow presented a fascinating review of the events in and around Dobbs Ferry in July and August, 1791 as General George Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau planned the secret march to Yorktown, Virginia.

► A brief meeting of the trustees elected Mary Donovan, President; Georgette Hedberg, Vice President; Dolores Calafati, Secretary and Ellen Klein, Treasurer.

On October 27, in conjunction with the Dobbs Ferry Public Library, Denise Wilson presented a newly revised edition of her popular *Legends of Dobbs Ferry*.

Accompanied by photographs of various village locations, Historical Society members and Library staff members read tales of ghosts and unexplained occurrences that centered on the places pictured.

Many thanks to **Stop and Shop** and **Pastry Chicks** for donating the delicious refreshments. They contributed greatly to the evening's enjoyment.

## Mead House Fund

Our thanks to Christina Hoff, Betsy Grell Johnson in memory of Ellen & Ellis Grell and Sara Cowless Walden for their generous contributions to the Mead House Fund.

## Volunteers needed

The Society can use help in various areas: Archives, Building and Grounds, Programs, Grant Writing, Fund Raising, Graphic Arts.....and more. If you have any interest and/or skills in any of these areas please call 674-1007. Leave your name, number and area of interest and you will be contacted.

## Historical Society Website.....

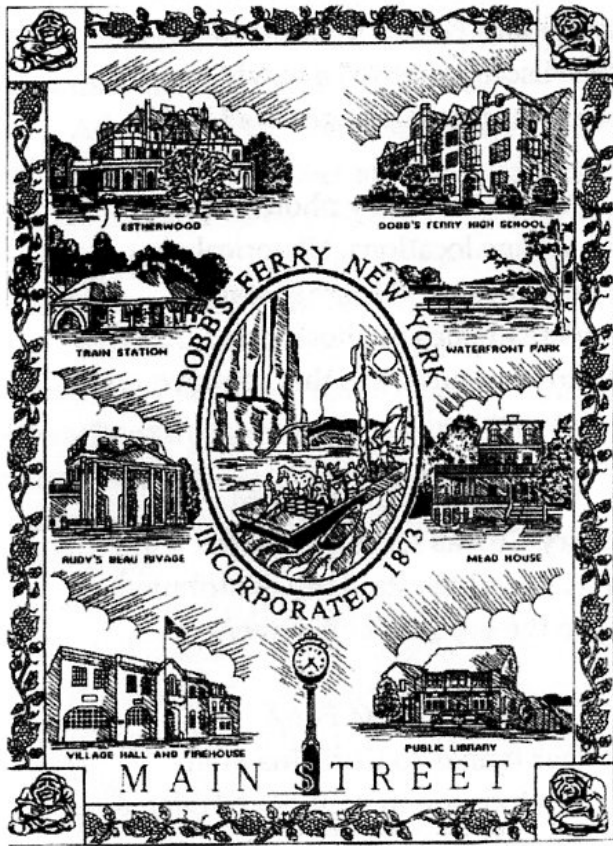
Dobbs Ferry Historical Society's very own website is now in development. You can access the alpha version using the following address:

<http://web.mac.com/msdonovan/iWeb/DobbsFerryHistoricalSociety/Home.html>

Please email your comments to:  
[msdonovan@msn.com](mailto:msdonovan@msn.com)



# A Great Holiday Gift!



## "These Are The Times That Try Men's Souls"

Dobbs Ferry has a rich and varied history that we must preserve, promote and celebrate. This is where the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society comes in...

Now, with a new board in place, we are "reinventing" ourselves by making our history an integral part of our village life and identity, by making our archives more accessible and by reaching out to you with our new website.

We want to fire your imaginations with stories about: the Weckquaesgeek Indians who made their home at Wickers Creek; the Patriots who began their march to Yorktown near Broadway and Ashford Avenue; the farmers, immigrants and millionaires who built the town, and the brawls, bigwigs and breweries that gave Dobbs its identity!

We've already started new initiatives that include petitioning the National Park Service to name Dobbs Ferry as a key site on the National Washington-Rochambeau Historic Trail and a video history project combining the talents of our students with the sagas of our seniors.

But, as Thomas Paine said, "These are the times that try men's souls." We can't do any of this without your help. We're struggling to stay afloat... while trying to maintain our home, the Mead House (which needs major repairs), continue existing programs and plan new events.

If you enjoy reading "The Ferryman," love Dobbs Ferry and appreciate our history, please help us by joining – if you are not already a member – or by making a tax-deductible contribution today.



Winter View of the Mead House  
Photo Courtesy of Pam Strachan

Once again we are making available our history throw, holding the price at \$45. The throw is available in Cranberry Red and Williamsburg Blue.

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.

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