

# THE FERRYMAN

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*Since 1991, thanks to a generous bequest by Clara Mead, the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society has been at home in the Mead House. Here the Society has gathered, preserved and indexed the archives and photographs that chart the story of our village's 400 year history.*



## HELP SAVE The Mead House

Now we need your help to save this valuable asset. We have just completed major repairs to the roof and the second floor railing is in the process of being reconstructed. Each repair reveals a new need. Now the exterior walls are desperately in need of a fresh coat of paint.

Unfortunately, Clara Mead's bequest did not include all the funds needed to maintain the house and, as you know, the costs of maintaining an old house are soaring. Even increased membership dues and many hours of volunteer work have not been enough to manage current upkeep and create a reserve fund for predictable future needs.

**We need your help.  
Join now.  
Contribute now.**

The preservation of the archives and easy access to them is an obligation we owe to present and future residents, students and historians. To maintain this storehouse of fascinating history we must ask you and all residents to

help us save our Home. It would be dreadful to lose this village asset and source of village pride.

If you are not a member of the Historical Society, we urge you to join and to contribute to our Preservation Fund. If you are a member, chances are you have already done much to help the Society. But we need you to do more. We urge you to make a special tax-deductible contribution to our Preservation Fund. Our need is urgent so please respond as soon as possible. It would be a huge loss not to have the unique history of Dobbs Ferry accessible to today's residents and future generations.

**Respond today  
The need is urgent.**

Please fill out and mail your tax-deductible contribution to the Preservation Fund today. The total financial reserve of the Historical Society is currently less than ten thousand dollars, a fraction of the total cost for the rehabilitation work detailed above—to say nothing of the predictable costs of future needs.

Send your contributions to :  
The Mead House  
12 Elm Street  
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

Yes, I would like to join the effort to save the Mead House. Add my name to those who are contributing to the Preservation Fund.

I enclose a check made out to the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society  
 \$500     \$250     \$100     \$50     Other

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

# DOBBS FERRY'S SEA PLANE BASE



PHOTO COURTESY JACK GAREY

BY HERBERT A. DONOVAN, JR.

An airport in Dobbs Ferry? Not exactly! But how about a seaplane base located along the Hudson shore near the railroad? Indeed, the base existed there complete with a hangar and ramp for about 20 years, from 1939 until at least 1955.

Origins of the airbase go back to 1937 with the formation of the Westchester Private Fliers, Inc. Their only plane was a land based Piper Cub (J-3, 65 hp., top speed 70 mph, 2 seats). They used flying strips at Valhalla and Armonk.

The seaplane base at Dobbs was established in 1939 on land leased from the New York Central, "north of the Beeson Grainery Docks", where a "hangar and float with ramp and dolly were constructed" using "empty beer barrels obtained by Gus (Sonny) Rabe from his employer, the Jacob Ruppert Breweries of New York City." The first floatplane used there for both sightseeing and instruction was a Luscombe 8A Silvaire (90 hp, top speed of 90 mph, no electrical system, no exterior or interior lights). Other Luscombes followed as well as a Piper Cub with floats. Chief pilot was former Navy officer Robert Tinay, along with instructors Mackay Holmes and William Kinser. The next year, with World War II drawing closer, the Club was considering a contract with the Civilian Aeronautic Authority to train future pilots.

The seaplane base received its first real notoriety in June 1940 with the presence of actors Vivian Leigh and Laurence Olivier. They were living in seclusion on an estate in Sneed's Landing, across the Hudson from Dobbs. Seeing a plane flying overhead, they were both inspired to take flying lessons. The *Herald-Standard* of July 22, 1940

shows Olivier and Instructor Tiney, both wearing parachutes, beside a floatplane which appears to be a Piper Cub, about ready for what was said to be Olivier's final test flight before soloing. Rumors had it that he was preparing to leave for England to fly with the Royal Air Force. He later hosted, in absentia, along with four other recent soloists, a party for some two hundred persons at the Village Tavern on Main Street in Dobbs Ferry. Co-hosts and speakers at the event were Alex Weston and James Martin of Yonkers, David Wadleigh of Hastings, Glen Acheson of Dobbs Ferry, Bob Tinay of Stamford, Leo Donaldson and Vincent Cronin (residences unnamed) and Greenburgh patrolman, Ross Weaver.

Most airports inevitable generate complaints because of noise from low flying aircraft, and Dobbs Ferry was no exception. One month after all the excitement generated by Olivier and Leigh's presence, Private Fliers asked for a zoning exemption in order to enlarge its present hangar, a request denied by Village Trustees after a lengthy and heated discussion. Opponents, notably Fred Rassmusen representing Sussex Hall Apartments and J. Eugene Baker, representing Rosalind Garden Apartments, Hudson House, Riverview Manor and the Villard Hill association, cited the noise factor. Proponents accused the opposition of lack of patriotism because of the potential for training pilots for the military. Baker responded that "the local project is as important to the National Defense as was the Home Guard to the A.E. F. during the World War." In the end, the flying club lost by a four to two vote. However, they later received a permit to build a new hangar, 100 X 100 feet of corrugated steel, fire-proof construction, capable of storing 15 seaplanes at an estimated cost of \$3500.

There is no record that the C.A.A. contract was ever awarded to the Dobbs Ferry operation. However, training went on and the same month of the controversy before the Village Trustees, produced the first woman soloist, Kay Stafford of White Plains, followed shortly by Julia Chapman of Tarrytown.

The Dobbs Ferry area was not without its close calls and aviation fatalities. Pilot Jack Garey described his night landing at age 16 in January 1955. He was fulfilling a standard requirement, a solo cross-country flight from Dobbs Ferry, passing over Matamoras and Newburgh before returning to Dobbs. He reported that Claude Dilworth, then owner and operator of the base "was a little put-off by my 'know it all' attitude." Encountering freezing temperatures, turbulence and fading light, he almost aborted the flight over the Kitatinny Mountains, but continued on course, only to return to Dobbs Ferry and make a "textbook landing," with the help of shore lights at Hastings to guide him.

Garey was using a Luscombe 8-A, referred to as a "hybrid" because of various parts such as wings and struts used from other planes. It was this plane, N2200K, which in 1957 crashed into the Tappan Zee Bridge (built in 1955), killing both instructor and student, the only known fatalities in planes based at Dobbs Ferry. Ten years earlier, Diane Haucke, daughter a Dobbs Ferry Trustee, crash-landed her land based Fleet Trainer on the athletic field at Children's Village when it ran out of gas. Quick response by two Village staffers got her out of the wreck and to the hospital where she proved to have only minor injuries. She had learned to fly the previous summer at the Dobbs Seaplane Base.

Exactly when did the base go out of existence? We can find no firm date. The chance encounter by Charlotte Frankenthaler (DFHS Trustee) with Roy Federoff of Yonkers produced a phone conversation between this author and Mr. Federoff, who learned to fly at the base around 1947 and continued to fly in this area until 1955. He notes that seaplane bases then existed at City Island, Croton and Yonkers as well as Dobbs. He also confirms that Claude Dilworth was the owner of the Dobbs base.

"The seaplane base received its first real notoriety in June 1940 with the presence of actors Vivian Leigh and Laurence Olivier.

They were living in seclusion on an estate in Sneed's Landing, across the Hudson from Dobbs.

Seeing a plane flying overhead, They were both inspired to take flying lessons."



*The Ferryman* invites readers who have memories of Dobbs Ferry's aviation days to share their stories for future editions.

Sources: Clippings from *The Herald Statesman*, June 28, July 18 & 22, 1940 and Jan. 20, 1947; *Dobbs Ferry Register*, August 9, 1940; and websites: [http://william-rabe.tripod.com/Early\\_Years/story.html](http://william-rabe.tripod.com/Early_Years/story.html); Jack Garey at <http://1000aircraftphotos.com/Contributions/Garey/2153.htm>.

*Author's Note: Writing this article brought back many memories. In 1960, I soloed in a land based Luscombe and also flew a Piper Cub. Later as a Navy Reserve Chaplain, I had my hands briefly on the controls of the Navy's last flying boat—the Martin P5M.*

# THE MOVE TO SPRINGHURST



THE SPRINGHURST ESTATE

The new school was the culmination of a six-year effort to provide for Dobbs Ferry's growing school population. The Board of Education first submitted a proposition to fund a new school in 1955. The existing school buildings on Broadway were filled to capacity and the prospect of real estate developments on several of the large estates in Dobbs Ferry predicted a rapid rise in the school population. When put to a vote, the board proposal to build a new school away from the present site was rejected.

By MARY S. DONOVAN

Imagine a wintery day in March, 1961, a light snow still on the ground, when down Broadway came a parade of elementary school children led by the Dobbs Ferry High School marching band. Proud parents, school administrators, Board of Education members and even uniformed Police and Fire Department members and the Ogden Fire Engine accompanied the young people on their long march up the hill to a brand new Springhurst Elementary School.

The parade stopped in front of the school, saluted the United States flag and sang the National Anthem. Then a second grader, Scott Creedy, cut the ribbon and Scott's father, Board of Education President John A. Creedy, declared the school open for education.

At each classroom door, another ribbon was cut and the young students assigned to that room entered and began to move their school supplies from the small satchels they had carried from the old school into their new desks. The first, second and third-graders were about to

embark on their first experience of regular full-day classes. Limited programs and double sessions had marked their school experience thus far.

Built on a 23 acre tract that had been the site of Springhurst Estate, the home of Colonel and Mrs. Franklin Q. Brown, the new school contained sixteen classrooms, accessory facilities and an all-purpose room. Pastel—painted rooms with abundant window light and a setting within a small forest of trees enhanced the welcome the children felt.

By 1958, the predicted increase was a reality. The schools were holding double sessions to accommodate the increase. The Marguery Apartments, then under construction, would add 144 additional families to the Village. The Board of Education submitted a plan to acquire 12 acres from the Gould estate behind the High School and across the Croton Aqueduct. By moving recreational facilities there, a ten-room addition could be added to the present elementary school. Citing the urgency of the situation, the Board of Education scheduled a new referendum on June 24<sup>th</sup>.



Again, the voters rejected the proposed construction, partly because of the inaccessibility of the Gould property.

As double sessions continued and more and more children entered the school system, the Board of Education returned to the possibility of building on a separate site. Dr. Henry J. Risetto of the Columbia University Institute of Field Studies was hired to examine the issues facing the village and recommended the construction of two buildings—one for K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and one for 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade, on an alternative site.

Springhurst, the estate of the late Mr. & Mrs. Franklin Q. Brown, was available and eventually the Board negotiated a satisfactory purchase price. There were still some questions—"Should the present buildings on the site remain?" (Later they were torn down) "Will this decision increase the number of students bused to school?" (It did; the district purchased a new school bus). However, the final decision was that the site offered the best location in Dobbs Ferry for the new school. Finally, on April 21,

1959, the voters agreed to build an elementary school on the Springhurst site. Even then, the vote was close: 1,333 in favor and 1,199 against the measure.

The new school was intended to house the K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. With those students transferred to Springhurst, the 4<sup>th</sup> through 6 graders filled the previous elementary school, some of them returning to classes there from alternative sites in the community. Eventually, the Springhurst School would be expanded. But on March 13, 1961, parents and students were simply glad to view this proud addition to the Dobbs Ferry School System.



Can you help us identify the Springhurst students in these pictures?

Please send your info to us at the DF Historical Society  
12 Elm St  
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522



# Need a Place to Party?



The Mead House is now offering its unique space as a meeting place for local community groups. The historic charm of the Historical Society's home is conveniently located on Elm St. Take advantage of a glimpse into one of Dobbs Ferry's most beautiful homes while supporting the Society.

We welcome organizations such as the Girl and Boy Scouts, schools, PTSA and similar non-profit groups.

Does your book group need a quiet place away from the family to meet?

Rates are set to defray our expenses and are as follows:

- One time use of space for meetings \$30
- One time use of lawn and bathroom \$150
- One 3-4 hour use of house (first floor only) \$250

Weekly/biweekly/monthly use of house (first floor only) for Dobbs Ferry non profit groups \$125 per annum

Contact us at 674-1007 or DFHistory@verizon.net.



## *Lecture on Plossopel Island*

On October 4th members and friends were treated to an illustrated lecture by Thom Johnson, a graduate of Dobbs Ferry High School who now teaches in Irvington. He became interested in the Island because of his love Hudson River history.

Frank Bannerman, a native of Scotland, acquired the island in 1900 for his castle, a large storage warehouse for munitions he sold from his NYC Army/Navy store. He later built a summer home on the island for his family.

Thom Johnson was part of the original group that recognized this island as an important part of the history of the area. Repair work on the buildings continues and the island is now open to the public. Johnson's excellent slides made for an exciting evening.

## STEP IT UP 2— WHO'S A LEADER?

Step it up had a fine celebration of "Step it Up 2—who's a Leader? A National Day of Climate Action" on Saturday November 10, 2007.

Despite the cold and blustery wind, about 25 of us gathered on the front lawn of the Historical Society and discussed climate change and the leadership development needed to deal with it. We were invited to send postcards on the subject of climate change to our elected officials. We also ate snacks, drank hot cider and heard contemporary music.

On behalf of the Historical Society, I was asked to give the "welcome". Trustee David Konigsberg represented the Village of Dobbs Ferry and Supervisor Paul Feiner represented the town of Greenvale. Members of the clergy addressed the group, and candidates for village office and town office were there for the leadership discussion.

Reporters from *The Enterprise* and *The Journal News* were there also. I was privileged to make a few closing remarks on behalf of the Historical Society. Everyone enjoyed the event and learned about developing leadership to deal with climate change.

By LARRY DENGLER

# Historical Happenings: Archives Visitor



TOGLIA WITH DF RESIDENT ROCCO DIPAOLO (ON THE LEFT), WHOSE ANCESTOR MARIA SCOCA CAME HERE IN 1916 FROM CALITRI.

Mario Toglia of Long Island recently visited the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. A member of the Calitri American Cultural Group, he is researching the DFHS Archives for information on the original Calitri immigrants who settled in this area in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He and his organization have recently written a book, *They Came By Ship: The Stories of the Calitri Immigrants in America*. (Xlibris publishers).

**Local residents of Calitriani immigrants who would like to share information with Mr. Toglia can send copies of photos or documents to the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society at 12 Elm Street.**

Mr. Toglia was delighted with the amount of information he was able to obtain from the Historical Society Archives. He wrote, "Many thanks for helping me yesterday at the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. As I mentioned several times, I have been to other archival libraries and I am quite impressed with the cataloguing your staff has done. My compliments to them. I look forward to receiving the transcriptions of the interviews of Filomena Ricciardi and Matilde Abate's."



I would like to order \_\_\_ afghan(s) @ \$45 each.  
Enclosed is my check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ please send it to:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

phone \_\_\_\_\_

Williamsburg blue   
Cranberry red

DF Historical Society  
12 Elm St  
DF, NY 10522 or  
phone (914)-674-1007



Oooh...I hope Martha buys me one of those afghans for the holiday! It's the only thing on my list!

# *You are cordially invited to our New Year's Clara Mead Egg Nog Party*



Sunday, January 6th, 2008 from 2-4pm  
At the Mead House  
12 Elm Street  
Dobbs Ferry



Each year the Historical Society hosts a holiday party for its members both old and new—in honor of our benefactor Clara Mead, who bequeathed her house to be used as the Historical Society Headquarters.

This year we will gather in January to welcome in the new year. Please join us at the Mead house on January 6th from 2-4pm for an afternoon of hospitality and conversation.

Come meet some new friends, see our beautiful Mead house; enjoy a cup of Clara's Mead's famous eggnog—a closely guarded secret recipe!) and nibble on some delightful edibles made from old-fashioned recipes made especially for the occasion

Back by popular demand, we will present our program of selections and quotations from Revolutionary war soldier diaries.

We welcome and encourage all our members to attend and non-members too! Everyone is invited... Please bring your friends!

It's a Dobbs Ferry village tradition – We'll see you there!

**The Historical Society is  
now open on TUESDAYS  
from 10am-12pm and by  
appointment  
Please come see us!**



The Mead House  
12 Elm Street  
Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522  
Phone: 914-674-1007  
Email : [dfhistory@verizon.net](mailto:dfhistory@verizon.net)

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**DOBBS FERRY  
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