



# The Ferryman

Fostering an awareness and appreciation for the history of Dobbs Ferry and all the people, noted and humble, who transmitted the good things of the past to the present and the future.

## The Dobbs Way of Death

A meditation on village cemeteries and the evolution of our burial practices.  
Page 4

## A Talk With a Founder of NOW

Muriel Fox, living up the river at Kendal, reminisces about feminism's early days.  
Page 6

## Uncovering History at Masters

Preserving a bounty of material in the school's basement archives.  
Page 7

## A History of Village Libraries

The various incarnations along Main Street over the years.  
Page 8

Volume XXIX Issue No. 6 Fall 2019

## John Dobbs Makes It to Dobbs Ferry

By Jim Lockett

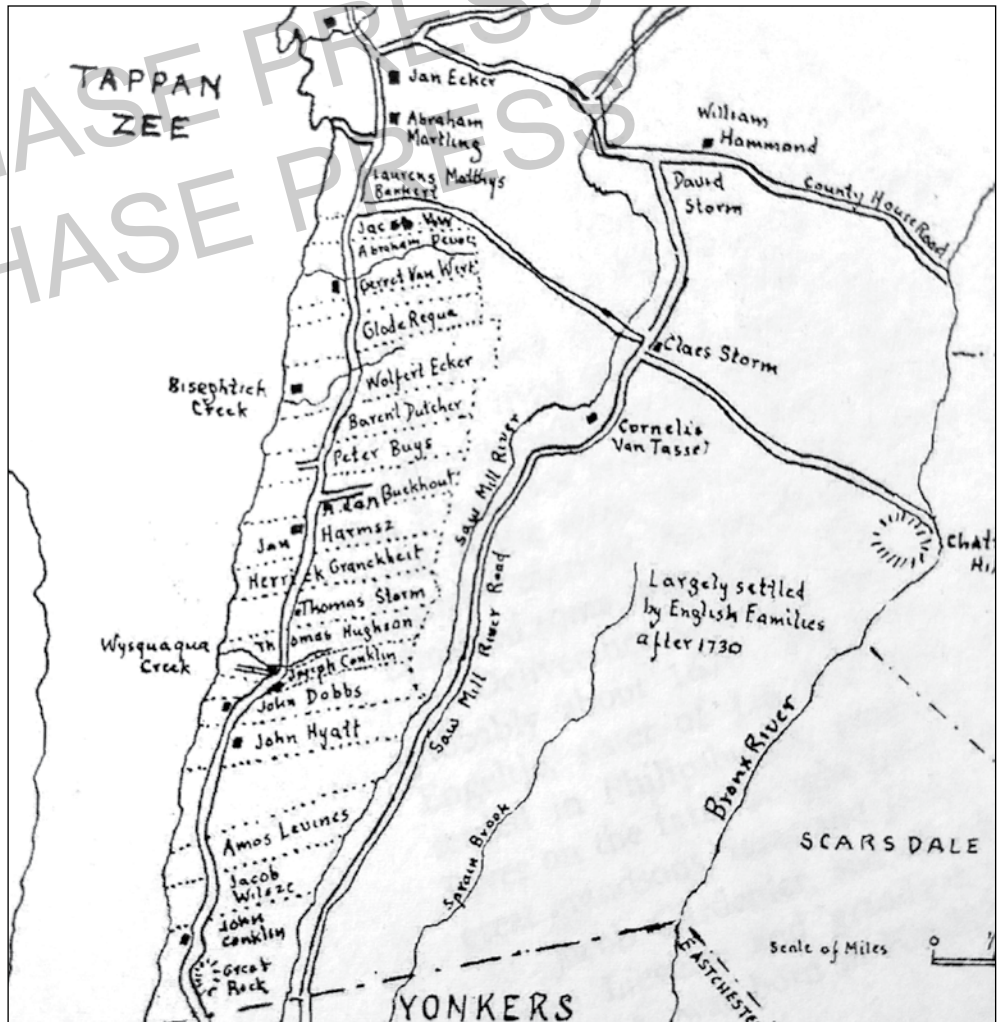
Finally, our Dobbs family saga brings us to Dobbs Ferry. Young John Dobbs moves up from Manhattan and settles on the east bank of the Hudson, and his uncle, the wealthy and prominent William Merritt, settles on the west bank opposite him. The ferry begins, but soon passes into the hands of the Sneden family, operating from the west bank. Myths and mysteries cloud our view of this period, but we'll set the record straight to the extent possible.

## My Life in Dobbs Ferry

Part 4 of an Imagined Autobiography of John Dobbs

Around 1698, I leased 282 acres, in a narrow strip running from the Hudson almost to the Saw Mill River. Frederick Philipse did not sell any land. To be here, you had to be his tenant. As tenants, my neighbors and I could not vote for a representative in the provincial assembly and could not serve on juries. Yet we had public responsibilities as assessors, fence viewers (responsible for ensuring new fences respect property lines and for settling disputes arising from trespass by livestock), tax collectors, and road overseers, for example.

Continued on page 2



A 20th-century map, based on old records, shows the leaseholds of John Dobbs and others along the Hudson's eastern shore, with the road now known as Route 9 running through them. The Wysquaqua Creek, in northern Dobbs Ferry, was an earlier name of Wickers Creek.

Continued from page 1

It was quite a change, moving from bustling Manhattan, with 5,000 people and 544 houses, to the almost virgin land of Westchester. In my early years here, there were just 100 to 200 people on the entire Philipsburg manor, which stretched from Spuyten Duyvil Creek (between Manhattan and the Bronx) to the Croton River and from the Hudson to the Bronx River.

**The Family Spreads Out**

**A**nother big change was having my family so spread out. We had all been in Manhattan. Now look where we were:

My sister Mary Hughson and I were on separate leaseholds in Dobbs Ferry, hers near the future Broadway and Cedar Street, mine near the future train station.

Across the river, my Uncle William Merritt, cousin John Merritt, and their wives, Margery and Jannet, were in Orange County (a later subdivision made it Rockland County), along with my Aunt Sarah Merritt (Meeks) Crabbe, a widow once more, and some of her adult children.

My brother William was in lower Manhattan making shoes, serving as sexton of Trinity

Church and as a scavenger (street cleaner) and bellman (watchman) for the city. His famous son, Captain William H. Dobbs, the future Patriot spy and ship's pilot praised by George Washington, was born in 1716.

My brother Walter Jr. was on Barn Island (also known as Great Barent Island in my time but as Wards Island in yours) in the East River off Harlem.

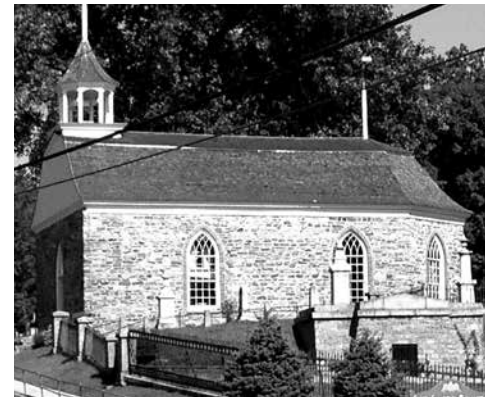
My sister Margery Reyerson was in Fordham, in the Bronx. She came to the baptism of my sons William, Walter, and Michael in 1706, 1716, and 1721.

My mother, Mary Merritt (Dobbs) Pittman, widowed again, had her house in the Bowery on Manhattan. She eventually gave that up and joined Walter Jr. on Barn Island, where she died in 1737, at age 104. On March 22, 1737, the New York Gazette reported her death and also mentioned Aunt Sarah:

*"About three Weeks ago, dyed at Barn-Island (about 7 miles from this City) one Mary Dobbs at the Age of 104 year and 9 Months; and she has a Sister now living in the City of New-York that is One hundred and two years old, who has all her senses, only is a little thick of Hearing; she is a lusty hearty Woman, can knit, spin and do other Work about the house; she often goes to Market, she can walk from one end of the Town to the other without a stick in her hand. These two Women were the Sister of the late Coll. William Merritt, who was Mayor of this City several years, about 40 years ago, now deceased."*

Both of my brothers married girls from the Parcell family, which owned Barn Island. The girls' father, Thomas Parcell, bought the island in 1690 from none other than Jacob Milbourne, Jacob Leisler's son-in-law and collaborator in rebellion, who died with him on the gallows in 1691. Parcell developed the island into a productive farm and then moved to Hart Island (also known as Spectacle Island) in Long Island Sound, leaving Barn Island in the hands of the next generation of Parcells. References to "Barn Island" and variations thereof in my brothers' marriage records, and in my mom's death notice, were misread by historians, leading them to hallucinate multiple connections to Barren Island in Brooklyn, also sometimes called Barn Island.

There were Parsells (likely the same surname with a change in spelling) at Snedens Landing in the 19th century. It would be



The Old Dutch Church in Sleepy Hollow was the site of many family baptisms and weddings.

interesting if someone could connect these folks to the Parcels of Barn Island.

All previous histories have identified my brother William's wife as "Catherine Slot." But old deeds on microfilm at the property records office on John Street in Manhattan show land transactions between Thomas Parcell and Mr. and Mrs. William Dobbs, identifying William's wife as a daughter of Thomas Parcell. One of these also gives William's occupation as shoemaker.

**So Who Started the Ferry?**

**N**o one can say who the first ferryman at Dobbs Ferry was. Candidates put forth by historians have been myself, my eldest son, William, or one of his sons, Jeremiah or Abraham. The argument for me being the first ferryman would be "Why not me?" I was there first. My uncle, two aunts, and a cousin were on the other side of the river until 1705. Certainly we were going back and forth. Why wouldn't we take paying passengers? Why did we choose this particular spot, perfect for a ferry, if not to start a ferry business?

My son William stepped into my shoes as leaseholder, and he was there on my leasehold through at least 1760. He is mentioned in the Town Book of the Manor of Philipsburg as a road overseer, assessor, and tavern keeper. So perhaps he ran the ferry, and perhaps he was the first to do so. My descendant Margaret Lane wrote in the 1970s, without citing a source, that William is identified as a ferryman in 1729.

Why some historians have landed on William's son Jeremiah as the first ferryman — or even as a ferryman at all — is a complete mystery. Jeremiah moved to New York City as a young man.

Continued on page 3

Thank you for helping to make the 14th annual Road to Freedom Day a terrific success

Photo courtesy of Frederick Charles ©Frederick Charles, fdcharles.com

We thank our principal sponsors, Tensor Foundation & the Grant family

THE TENSOR FOUNDATION

THE GRANT FAMILY

& all our business contributors for their generous support.

- Community Nursery School
- Dobbs Diner
- Emily Rose Wood Studio
- Half Moon Restaurant
- John Salamone, D.D.S.
- MadeByRK Catering & Bakery
- NcC Studio Architecture P.C.
- Nicholas Donas, M.D., Ophthalmology
- Stephen Tilly, Architect
- Performance Parts, Service & Auto Body
- ArchForKids - architecture for children
- Battaglia Brothers Meateria & Deli
- Scaperrotta's Deli



Continued from page 2

William's eldest son Abraham, who married a daughter of Amos Leviness and settled on his father-in-law's leasehold at the Hastings waterfront, makes more sense than Jeremiah as a candidate for first ferryman — or perhaps second or third.

**Was the First Ferry a Dugout Canoe?**

This is a popular traditional story, but let me plant some doubts: I grew up in Manhattan, surrounded by sailboats. My uncle was a wealthy businessman, politician, and sailboat captain. The river is 1.1 miles wide. Would we have paddled a dugout canoe that distance rather than buying a sailboat?

It is possible the canoe story got started out of confusion over the word “periauger.” That word can mean a dugout canoe, or a two-masted, shallow-draft, flat-bottomed sailboat. My descendants definitely used periaugers of the second definition for the ferry. An invoice survives from around 1800 to prove this. It would be quite a coincidence if, out of all the many kinds of boats in the world, we happened to use both of the boat types with the name “periauger.” But people looking back on our history who were ignorant of the second definition might have encountered that word and imagined us in dugout canoes.

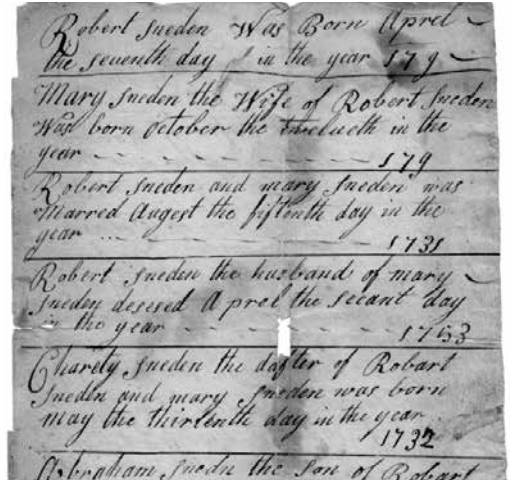
A 1951 Dobbs Ferry Register article spun a Darwinian tale to fit both meanings of “periauger” into our history. We started out making dugout canoes, the article said, and “gradually ... learned how to make the periauger larger,” eventually arriving at 55-foot flat-bottomed sailboats. In fact, periauger sailboats (also called “pettiaugers”) were in common use in the 18th and 19th centuries. We did not make them. We bought them.

**Call Me Jan? or John?**

We conducted many family weddings and baptisms at the Tarrytown Dutch Reformed



A recently discovered document lists Mary (Molly) Sneden's birthdate as Oct. 12, 1709. This information is incompatible with the theory that she was born Maria Dobbs, because Maria was baptized on Aug. 2, 1709. On the other hand, information on her tombstone in Palisades, N.Y., indicates she was instead born on Jan 13, 1709, a date that is compatible with the theory.



Church, although, being English, we were not members. (It is now known as the Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow.) Dirk Storm, the Dutchman who wrote the church records, rendered names the way he said them. Thus, Dirk wrote my name as “Jan Dob” or “Jannie Dops.” Many historians have adopted Dirk's Dutchification, calling me Jan.

But my name was John. Need proof? Look at the Road Commissioners Report of 1723, at the Westchester County Clerk's Office. It identifies who lived where. Or look at the Town Book of the Manor of Philipsburg, a transcription of which was published in 1928 in The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record. (Read it online at QuickReference.info.) It refers to places by the names of the persons who leased them. On page 204 it refers to “John Dobbs” as a place.

**Was Mollie Sneden My Daughter?**

I married my neighbor's daughter Elizabeth Hyatt and we had two children, William, in 1706, and John Jr., in 1708. Elizabeth died young. With my second wife, Abigail, I had six more children, the first being Maria, born 1709.

Maria is important to this story. Most historians believe she married Robert Sneden of Eastchester and became Mary (“Mollie”) Sneden. Robert and Mary married on April 2, 1731 (according to a Sneden family document). They had 12 children, and some time before 1745 took over the ferry and moved to the west bank. Robert died in 1753, but Mollie and her sons kept the ferry going.

I can't prove Maria Dobbs is the Mary who married Robert Sneden. The evidence is circumstantial:

- History offers no alternate adulthood for my Maria, and no alternate childhood nor maiden name for Mary Sneden.
- Both were born in 1709.
- Mary Sneden lived more than 100 years, which would be right in line with the longevity of my mother and Aunt Sarah.
- Later generations of Dobbses had various connections with the Snedens and their ferry, suggesting a family linkage.
- And the most obvious thing: The Snedens took over our ferry.

Maria Dobbs was baptized on August 2, 1709, in Tarrytown. Mary Sneden's birth year is implied by information on her tombstone in Palisades, N.Y. It states that Mary died on January 31, 1810, age 101 years and 18 days. That makes her birthdate January 13, 1709. Might we have waited eight months from birth to baptism? Yes. June 1 was the only other day in 1709 when baptisms were performed in Tarrytown. Eight were done in August, versus only four in June and none from November 1708 to June 1709. Farmers had more time for such things in August.

Now the plot thickens: Recently a tattered old three-page document was discovered in Palisades, N.Y., listing important Sneden family dates. It gives Mary Sneden's birthdate as “October the twelue 179 [sic].” One cannot be baptized two months before one is born. This implies Mary Sneden was not Mary Dobbs.

Continued on page 4

**FERRYMAN STAFF**

- Larry Blizard
- Peggie Blizard
- Maria Harris
- Hubert B. Herring
- Ellen Klein
- Judith Doolin Spikes

# R.I.P. In Dobbs Ferry

(Advice to the deceased: Don't get too comfortable!)

By Larry Blizard

I find myself confused about cemeteries. As a child, I believed they were sacred places, where time stood still and monuments stood in perpetuity. In school, I was taught they were our link to the past, a conduit for myth and memory.

On the other hand, heading out of the Costco parking lot, I come face to face with a granite plaque proclaiming the lot as the site of a former Jewish cemetery.

Back in Dobbs Ferry, when I walk down to the river through the Landing development, I am overcome with memories of the time when a portion of the site was a cemetery for nuns from the Convent of Mercy, now part of the Mercy College campus. I remember the tranquility, the almost unearthly stillness

of the place, the air disturbed only by the rustle of leaves and the calls of birds.

These experiences, plus the news of a possible, previously undetected African-American cemetery in Irvington — not to mention a century-old news item about human bones uncovered on Oliphant Avenue — got me to thinking: how have burial practices in Dobbs Ferry evolved or deteriorated over time, and how do our current attitudes compare with those of our ancestors?

Early Dobbs Ferry was part of a huge tract of land acquired over a period of time by one Vredryk Vlypse (later known as Frederick Philipse), an enterprising ship's carpenter who became a successful merchant and who married an equally astute and even wealthier woman, Margaret Hardenbroeck.

Sickness and death were constant presences. Nutritional deficiencies and exposure to the elements meant that people were continually gripped by one malady or another. Some ailments were so prevalent they were barely considered illnesses. (George Washington had recurrent bouts of malaria.)

Medical practice was rudimentary, sometimes lapsing into quackery. Work accidents and



A likely "death portrait" of Deborah Lawrence Dobbs, who died in 1847. It is labeled "Mother Dobbs of the Ferry," but that is erroneous: The Dobbs Family had long been out of the ferry business.

the long-drawn-out Indian wars didn't help. Communication regarding medical breakthroughs was lacking. (In 1809, when a doctor in Danville, Kentucky, successfully removed an ovarian tumor, medical journals did not take note for eight years.)

Under these circumstances, early burials were intimate affairs. Shrouds with drawstrings at the top, lumber for caskets, and pressed burial clothes were kept at the ready. Since embalming was not yet standard, burial had to take place quickly. A place on the farm was set aside for burials but had to be kept hidden, as native Americans kept tabs on the decimation of the white population. If the ground was frozen, the corpse might be kept in a barn until spring.

*Continued on page 5*

## A Word From the Presidents

Members and Friends:

Welcome to the fall Ferryman newsletter! We hoped you joined us for the Society's Annual Meeting this year with World War II fighter pilot Lt. Bill Lyons. Our next program was a wonderful chat with Muriel Fox, co-founder of NOW.

This fall our program committee outdid themselves. We also have a lecture on November 17 at the Dobbs Ferry Public Library, "Hudson Rising, an Environmental Odyssey," presented by the staff at the New York Historical Society. All our programs are free and open to all.

We also welcome our two new trustees: Carolyn White and Teresa Walsh.

Please look out for announcements on the annual Clara Mead Egg Nog party in January.

*Frank and Madeline*

## John Dobbs...

*Continued from page 3*

But why believe this document over her tombstone? The document appears authentic and very old, but it is not a contemporaneous record. Those are strictly chronological; this document has Robert Sneden's death in 1753 entered before the births of his children, from 1732 to '52. Contemporaneous documents spanning decades have differences in ink and handwriting among the entries. This document is all in the same hand, in the same ink. It is someone's recollection, and therefore subject to error.

I'm going to treat Mollie Sneden as my daughter and her descendants as my own in future articles. The evidence points in that

direction, and it makes a better story that way. So let's make that leap of faith together.

## What's Next?

In the next installment, the Merritts and Lockharts sell their vast tract on the west bank and, decades later, the Snedens buy Cheer Hall as their base for the ferry and a tavern. Three famous patriots take rides on the ferry in 1775 — Martha Washington going east to join George at the siege of Boston and John and Sam Adams going west, to the second Continental Congress. Soon after, Mollie and most of her sons are banned from the ferry business for political reasons. I'll provide details on this and much else.

All sources for these articles can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/DobbsLuckettNotes>

*Continued from page 4*

By and by, churches were established, and funerals became more elaborate. In 1823, the Little White Church, the original South Presbyterian Church, was built on Ashford Avenue, followed by Zion Episcopal in 1833. Prior to that, in 1685, Philipse built the Dutch Reformed Church in what is now Sleepy Hollow.

Since churches were so central to people's lives, there arose a desire to be buried within their walls. (Philipse and his wife lie beneath the floor of the Sleepy Hollow church.) But a problem developed where sub-floor burials were permitted. As time passed and bodies accumulated, the air inside the church became unpleasant, and finally unwholesome. The custom was finally prohibited. Cemeteries were established on the outskirts of towns. In Dobbs Ferry, all burials were on a plot beside the Little White Church beginning in 1810, and continuing until 1894.

**B**y this time, cabinet makers began to supply caskets; livery stable owners could supply a hearse and carriages, and a church sexton was on hand to ring the church bell and dig the grave. (The ringing of the bell was an old custom, thought to frighten away evil spirits.) Another custom carried over from ancient times was wearing black. The idea was to make oneself as inconspicuous as possible so as not to be noticed by those evil spirits.

On Broadway in Hastings is a house relatively unchanged from the year of its construction, 1834. It was the home of George P. Baker, a cabinet maker trained in France, who supplied coffins as well as furniture. In later years, the first floor of the house became a funeral parlor.

During the Civil War and beyond, mourning customs reached a new height of elaborateness. Embalming was required so that slain soldiers, particularly officers, could be returned home for burial. "Mourning shops" appeared in places like Fifth Avenue in New York City, where black clothing was available.

Rules of dress were established. Margaret Coffin, in her book "Death in Early America," provides a list: A widow was to mourn for two years. During the first year, solid black wool garments were to be worn. Collars and cuffs could be of folded, untrimmed crepe



*The 1823 Little White Church cemetery on Ashford Avenue.*

and black lace. She could shorten her veil and make it of tulle or net. After a year and a half, she might vary her wardrobe with garments or trim of gray, violet, or white. In the last months of mourning, her bonnet might be of lace with white or violet flowers.

The rules were more lenient for mourning other relatives.

A "death portrait," made before burial, was an important tradition. Painters or photographers were called in to execute a portrait either as the subject was dying or had just died. In photos, the deceased was sometimes shown propped up in a chair.

At the Mead House, there is a photograph of what seems to be a watercolor of an elderly woman wearing an old-fashioned bonnet. The picture is entitled "Mother Dobbs of the Ferry," but this is a mistake. The Dobbs family had long been out of the ferry business at the time of the painting/drawing. This may well be a "death portrait." There is a curious vacancy in the facial expression, common to such paintings.

The woman's name was Deborah Lawrence Dobbs, the wife of a John Dobbs who was the great-great-grandson of the ferryman. This portrait is in the downstairs powder room, while a more youthful portrait of her hangs over the fireplace in the parlor. She died in 1847 and is buried beside her husband in the Little White Church cemetery.

Fast forward to the summer of 1927: Bertils D. Edwards moved to the village, bought a property on Ashford Avenue, and

opened a funeral home. By year's end, he had conducted eight funerals and was off to a long and successful enterprise, which continues to this day.

Bert, his son Orville, daughter-in-law Joyce, nephew Jan, and now James Dowdle have made more bearable the shock of transition for the bereaved.

**W**hat happens next may be another matter. With developers eyeing formerly "sacred" sites, with rumors of hidden buried cemeteries, the dead may not necessarily continue to "rest in peace" here.

(For a fuller treatment of early funeral practices, read "Death in Early America," by Margaret M. Coffin. And for a look at early gravestones, visit the Little White Church cemetery on Ashford Avenue, which, by the way, was threatened with upheaval in the early 1960's. But that's a story for a later article.)

*Resources:*

"*Death in Early America*," by Margaret M. Coffin  
 "*Tales of the Old Dutch Graveyard*," *The Heritage Committee of the Junior League of Westchester*  
 "*Honoring the Rich History of the Little White Church Cemetery in Dobbs Ferry, New York*," Altaira Calen  
 "*Westchester County, a Pictorial History*," by Susan Swanson and Elizabeth Fuller  
 "*Profiles of Dobbs Ferry*," by Sr. Mary Agnes Parrell, R.S.M.  
 Interview with James Dowdle, owner and manager, Edwards-Dowdle Funeral Home



# A Chat With a Feminist Pioneer

## Interview with Muriel Fox Co-Founder, National Organization for Women

On Sept. 13, 2019, Maria Harris, a trustee of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society, interviewed Muriel Fox at Kendal-on-Hudson. With Maria was fellow trustee Richard Borkow. Muriel Fox spoke at a historical society program on Nov. 3 at the Dobbs Ferry Public Library. (A bit of background: One night at Kendal, Maria had asked the six women dining with her, “Do any of you know a woman who might be living at Kendal and is a source of information about the 19th Amendment and women’s suffrage?” In unison, they responded, “Muriel Fox!”) Below are excerpts from their conversation.

**Maria:** A hundred years ago, in 1920, the 19th Amendment, guaranteeing women’s right to vote, was ratified. Tell us about your experience with the women’s movement.

**Muriel:** It goes back to 1966, when we founded NOW.

**Maria:** Who is the one person who influenced you the most and why?

**Muriel:** My mother. She was very unhappy. She was a housewife, and she very much resented that this was the only job available to her. I said to myself, “I’m not going to live the life that my mother lives.” And when we began to experience discrimination and I was active in the civil rights movement, I said, “Well, I’m going to work for women’s rights also.”

**Maria:** Were you aware of the suffrage movement?

**Muriel:** Very, very vaguely. I was aware of

the civil rights movement. That was my inspiration.

**Maria:** Your achievements are lengthy. What are you most proud of?

**Muriel:** I’m most proud of having been a co-founder of NOW. For thousands of years, women were the property of men. How lucky we are that we’ve been able to change that and work for equality. We haven’t gotten completely there but we’ve made a difference.

**Maria:** What other events molded your life?

**Muriel:** Like every woman, I encountered discrimination, and we used to take it for granted. When I applied for a job in 1950, I called Carl Byoir and Associates, the world’s largest public relations firm. The executive vice-president interviewed me and said, “I’m sorry, we don’t hire women.” So I went away and accepted the rejection. A few months later, when I had another job, someone said, “There’s an opening in the radio and television department with Carl Byoir.” And I said, “They don’t hire women.” He said, “Well, go see Bob Davis, who’s head of this department.” And I got the job. Thirty-four years later, I ended up as executive vice-president, the same job the man who’d rejected me had held. I’d hit what we used to call the women’s plateau, where you could make it very fast all the way to the middle. I became Byoir’s youngest vice-president, but the president said, “Well, Muriel, you’ve come very far but we think that’s as far as you’re going to go because CEOs can’t relate to women.”

**Maria:** How did you take that?

**Muriel:** I said to myself, “Well, we’ll see. We’ll show you.”

**Maria:** Yes, I can’t see you giving up. To go back to your childhood, what was your favorite activity?

**Muriel:** Reading. I’m sure it was reading.



Muriel Fox at a 1980 rally in Chicago to ratify the E.R.A.

**Maria:** And what world events had the most impact on you?

**Muriel:** The founding of the women’s movement. Professor Eli Ginsburg of Columbia University in 1996 said, “The most important event of the 20th century was the founding of the women’s movement. This was a bigger event than the rise of Communism or the atom bomb.” I’m very proud that I was there.

**Maria:** What do you do to stay so young?

**Muriel:** I had a happy marriage. I really think that explains why I’m in good health and a good state of mind. My husband, Shepard Aronson, and I were married 48 years. He was a doctor, he was a feminist, he was the first chair of the board of New York NOW. We were at a cocktail party when someone said to him, “Shep, what are you doing in the women’s movement?” I said, “He believes in justice.” Shep said with a laugh, “I want my wife to make more money.”

**Richard:** Very practical man.

**Maria:** What would be your advice to your younger self?

**Muriel:** Don’t accept discrimination. There were men in my firm who were making more money than I on the same job. If I asked for a raise — I always felt bad because I knew my husband could support me. So I couldn’t say, “Well, I need the money.” Today, young women don’t even think about saying that; they’d say, “I deserve it.”

**Maria:** One graduate of your alma mater, Barnard, in the late 70s, a lawyer, not hired

Continued on page 7



PLEASE COME JOIN US FOR OUR

## Annual Eggnog Party

HOSTED BY THE

Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12TH, 2-4 PM

THE MEAD HOUSE

12 ELM STREET, DOBBS FERRY

COME TOAST OUR PLANS FOR 2020  
AND ENJOY SIPPING OUR SIGNATURE EGGNOG  
WITH FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS

## Reinventing History at the Masters School

By Rachel O'Connell, archival intern

The Masters School has remained an active part of the Dobbs Ferry community since its founding in 1877. With its sprawling campus, local community engagement, and, of course, the notable Estherwood mansion on its estate, the school holds a rich and profound history that lives on within its students, faculty, and alumni.

Until recently, however, most of the school's storied history has remained hidden in an archival room in the basement of Masters Hall. Unbeknownst to many, this room houses a wealth of knowledge and artifacts, although many have suffered damage due to years of neglect, flooding, and an immense fire in the building in 1971. Many faculty and community members have expressed concern about the state of the school's archives, and local projects were established in order to stabilize the items before further damage occurred.

This past January, The Masters School initiated a large-scale preservation project for its history, which, as the advancement



Students of the Dobbs Athletic Association take part in the Maypole dance, a tradition dating to about 1900 that still takes place annually on alumni weekend.

team's intern, I headed. My experience in drafting historical data through archival and research methods is now being implemented to create a better repository of the school's history. This project has included preservation and stabilization of the items, and digital conversion and cataloguing of all material. To date, over 2,000 photos have been converted and stored digitally in an online archival database. This will allow for the school community to have access to the photos and thus explore the rich history of this well-regarded and impressive institution.

The archives also contain historical data such as letters written by past students,

building information, old uniforms, school ephemera, jewelry, yearbooks, and newsletters that highlight all 142 years of Masters history. An unexpected but pleasant result of this project has been an influx of research queries coming in from the student population, who are excited to learn about the old "Dobbs" days, and how, although the campus has changed tremendously over the years, the great sense of community has stayed strong throughout. Many of these photos and historical materials will be showcased at the upcoming school Reunion, where alumni and other members of the school community can relive their fondest days at The Masters School.

### Muriel Fox...

*Continued from page 6*

*by private firms because she's a woman, became an F.B.I. agent. For 34 years, as an agent, she had frustrations because she felt women were discriminated against in the circles of F.B.I. agents.*

**Muriel:** I got a letter from J. Edgar Hoover. I had written to him and said, "Why don't you accept women as agents?" And he said, "Well, because we never do, we never have, and that's the way it is." In fact, he had undercover agents in all the civil rights organizations, including the women's movement.

**Maria:** *I may know how you are going to answer the next question, but I'll ask it anyway. Is there anything you wanted to do that you never got around to?*

**Muriel:** I wanted to be an author of a great book. I did write a book about the women's movement; it's sitting in a drawer.

**Maria:** *Have you thought about writing a memoir?*

**Muriel:** A number of people would like me to, but I never have.

**Maria:** *What would you consider the best years of your life?*

**Muriel:** After retirement. We would get up later and read The New York Times and enjoy life. In the early years, I was working so hard. With two children to raise, a family, a job, and the women's movement, I didn't get much sleep. So, the happy years were when we could get enough sleep.

**Maria:** *And your children?*

**Muriel:** I'm proud that my son and my daughter are both feminists and activists. My daughter has published four books about abuse of women and girls. My son is a psychologist. And my grandchildren are activists. They're to the left of me — where I think one's progeny should be.

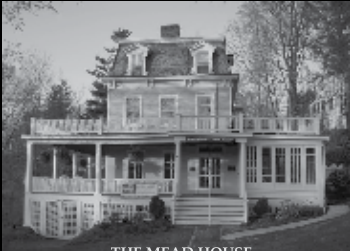
**Maria:** *Which new technology have you found most helpful?*

**Muriel:** I still think it's a miracle we have email.

**Maria:** *Finally, please share reminiscences about the founding of NOW.*

**Muriel:** I met Betty Friedan in 1963 when her book "The Feminine Mystique" had just come out. I invited her to speak to American Women in Radio and Television about how women were treated badly by TV. Beforehand, I said, "You really need an organization to work for women's rights." And she said, "You mean an NAACP for women?" So that was it. After she spoke I said, "If you ever found an organization that will work for women's rights, I'll help with the public relations." In the summer of 1966, Betty Friedan and a small group of women had started the organization. She chose the name National Organization for Women — not of women, because many men were involved. Betty thought it would be just a small group of professionals. Of course, no one dreamed it would explode to tens of thousands of women and men throughout the country.

**Maria:** *This has been inspiring and a pleasure. Thank you, Muriel Fox.*



THE MEAD HOUSE  
12 ELM STREET DOBBS FERRY, NY 10522

POSTAL CUSTOMER

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

CONTACT US BY PHONE : (914)-674-1007 EMAIL : DFHISTORY@ICLOUD.COM ON THE WEB: WWW.DOBBSFERRYHISTORY.ORG

## The Libraries of Dobbs Ferry

By Judith Doolin Spikes

The first library in Dobbs Ferry was founded in 1899 under the auspices of the Women's Christian Temperance Union at 59 Main Street (at that time a home owned by J. Scott McComb, and originally with the address 63 Main Street), which was then at the center of the village. Among the founders were Mrs. Thornton M. Niven, wife of the Presbyterian minister and grandmother of the playwright Thornton Niven Wilder; Eliza and Sarah Masters of the Masters School; and Mrs. Nathaniel Lawrence, whose husband operated a grocery and feed store on lower Main Street.

Books for the library were provided by these and other prominent citizens and, it is recorded, "reflected the good taste and wide interests of the founders, ranging from sermons by Phillips Brooks and Henry Ward Beecher, through the classics, to 'Three Vassar Girls in Rome' and Horatio Alger's 'Tattered Tom.'"

Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Pearce of Brooklyn and their three small children occupied the



The old library on lower Main Street (left), and the way the site looks now.



house rent-free in exchange for operating the "Dobbs Ferry Free Library and Reading Room" in the front parlor every day and every evening except Friday, with Mrs. Pearce serving as librarian. Library patrons could peruse a book of their choice from the comfort of an armchair beside a fire blazing on the hearth or take it home with them for two weeks without charge. Overdue fines were a hefty 5 cents a week.

By 1909 — the year the library was chartered — the collection had grown to 1,510 volumes for adults and 340 for children, and larger quarters were needed. Franklin Q. Brown, president of the Village of Dobbs Ferry for 10 years and of the Dobbs Ferry Bank for 50, offered the use of the ground floor of a house he owned at 153 Main, where his wife was running a kindergarten.

The library opened on the corner of Main and Cedar on December 15, 1909, in the middle of a snow storm, and remained in this charming old building (now a home again) until 2002. That year it moved into its newly built building right next door to its original site in the Pearces' rented home.

That home, which was the original library at 32 Main Street, was long ago remodeled

almost beyond recognition. The pitched roof was replaced with a flat-roofed second story, the chimneys are gone, a large addition has been added at the rear, and the shaped shingles and hand-cut moldings have been reduced to a thick coat of stucco — yet the central front door, its now simplified portico, first-story windows, and the four broad front stairs remain. The original remodeler and the names of the earliest commercial tenants of the repurposed building are not known. The tenant in 2004 was Tarricone Fuel Service, and the occupant and owner since 2014 has been the Plitnick Home Fuel and Service Company.

*The major source for this article is an unidentified c. 1955 news article in the possession of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society, which also holds a c. 1954 typeset photocopy of the same information in a different format (presumed to be a tear sheet from the Library's 1954 Annual Report). Lisa Fitzsimmons of Plitnick Home Fuel and Service Co. shared some of the building's recent history.*

*Most information as printed here was first published as an installment of the "Then and Now" column by Judith Doolin Spikes and Anne Marie Leone in the Rivertowns Enterprise, November 5, 2004.*

## From the Archives

### Our newest acquisition:

We have received the personal papers of Bradley Bolke, a prominent Dobbs Ferry resident, who died in January. Mr. Bolke was a voice actor in the 1960's and 1970's. He added his voice to "The First Family" back in 1962, 70 episodes of "Tennessee Tuxedo," Chumley the Walrus, and the TV movie "The Year Without a Santa Claus."