

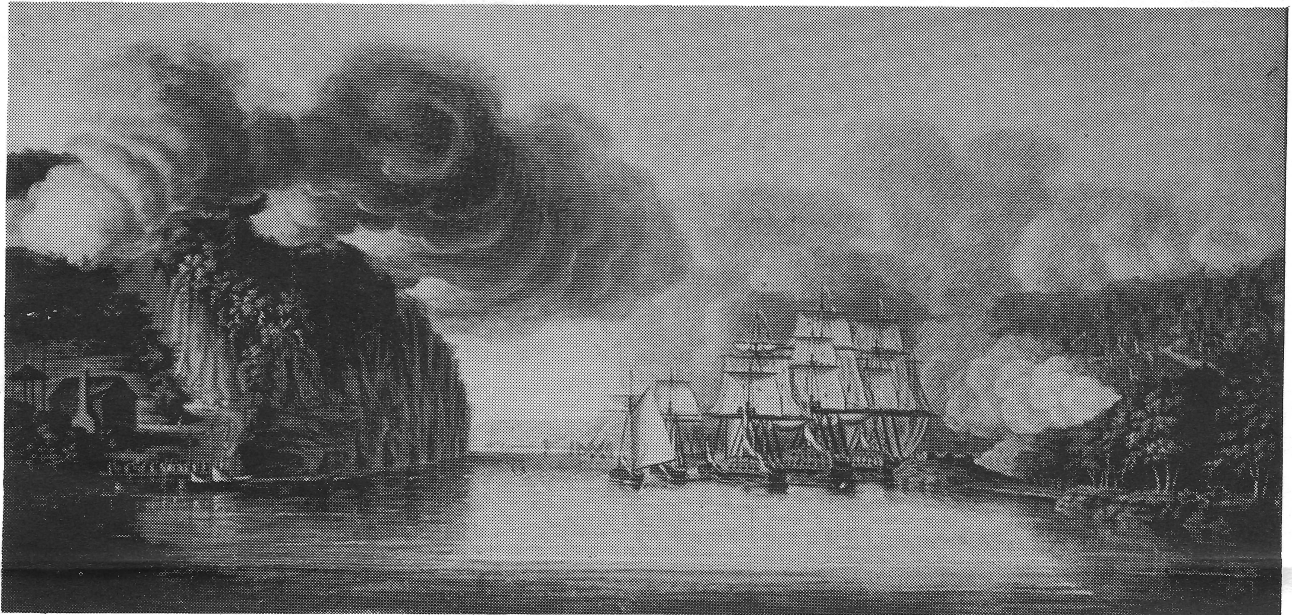
The FERRYMAN

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VOLUME XIII, No. 3

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
153 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522

JULY 1994



Dominic Serres' painting depicts British frigates under fire from Forts Washington and Lee.

The Story of Dobbs Ferry - Part Four

THE HUDSON RIVER IN '76 --by Jean Fritz

When the British evacuated from Boston in the spring of 1776, the war moved to New York. General Washington arrived in New York City on April 3, 1776, almost three months before the British, and began immediately to see to the fortification of the Hudson River. Later he would build redoubts at both Dobbs Ferry East and Dobbs Ferry West, but for the moment he ordered eight forts to be constructed along the river from University Heights to Yonkers. Between Fort Washington on the east side of the river and Fort Lee directly across on the west side, ships loaded with stone were sunk to prevent the enemy from proceeding up the river.

The sunken ships didn't work. On August 3, two British men of war, the *Phoenix* and the *Rose*, together with three tenders, sailed right through the barricade up to Tarrytown where they anchored fairly close to the shore, prepared to harass the countryside. Anyone familiar with these waters would have known that those ships would be aground as soon as the tide went out. So it is safe to say that Robert Sneden, one of the Tory Snedens from Dobbs Ferry West, who often acted as a pilot for the British, was not along this time.

Seeing that the British ships were sitting ducks, Americans rushed five galleys and a whale boat to

the scene, but they weren't fast enough. By the time they arrived, the tide had changed and the British ships were safely afloat again. Still, the Americans, mismatched though they were, could not bear to leave without an exchange of shot. There was a two-hour battle in which an American reported repeated "hullings" on both sides. Two Americans were killed, fourteen wounded, but the rest were not disheartened. "We hope to have another touch at these pirates," the American concluded.

Indeed, over the next months Americans saw a great deal of those "pirates" on their river. On October 9, 1776, while the British were attacking Fort Lee, an American schooner and a sloop tried to slip away, but were chased up river until they were overtaken by the British in front of Dobbs Ferry, in full view of residents on both banks. The British captured the schooner and sank the sloop, but probably neither the British nor the Dobbs Ferry spectators realized what was actually going to the bottom of the Hudson. On board the sloop was the *Turtle*, the first submarine, a one-man underwater-machine invented by David Bushnell of Connecticut and designed to blow up enemy ships. Tested in Long Island Sound against the British flagship, *Eagle*, it had not succeeded in its mission, but, ac-

(continued on page 2)

THE HUDSON IN '76 (continued from page 1)

ording to Mr. Bushnell, this was the fault of the operator. In any case, the idea of underwater warfare against the British came to an end in Dobbs Ferry. In the meantime, the British, having routed the American army from Long Island, were in full control of New York City. At the last minute before the British took over, Americans removed the New York City Post Office to temporary safety in Dobbs Ferry, where it remained from August 30 to September 10. At the same time, Loyalists streamed into the city for protection; Patriots streamed out of the city into the countryside.

Among those Patriots leaving New York City was the family of Captain William Henry Dobbs, cousin to William Dobbs, the ferryman. Fire was another reason that they fled New York. On September 29, 1776, fire swept through New York, destroying the lower end of Manhattan and up the river as far as Kings College (Columbia University). A total of 493 houses went up in flames, including that of Captain William Henry Dobbs, who lived directly behind Trinity Church. Like many evacuees, the Dobbs Family moved to Fishkill, New York, where Americans would soon be establishing a cantonment.

A Dobbs War Hero

If the Dobbs family were to pick a war hero from their members, they would certainly choose Captain William Henry Dobbs. Before the war he was a channel pilot for the City of New York, a spy for the Committee of Safety in New York and the New York Provincial Congress. In February, 1776, he enlisted in the regiment of Colonel (later General) Alexander McDougall, whom he served throughout the war. Most important, however, he carried out a number of secret service missions for General Washington, who referred to him as "Capt. Dobbs, one of our most experienced pilots."

Captain Dobbs had three sons who also participated in the war. Joseph was captured by the British after the Battle of White Plains, but was later attached to the Quartermaster General's Department at the Fishkill Cantonment. William and Jarvis, twins, fought in the Battle of Long Island and, like Joseph, ended up at the Fishkill Cantonment.

In 1776, however, much of the population was in motion and who knew where anyone would end up? The opposing armies crowded into Westchester County, marching down roads that crisscrossed the area and ran north -- the Boston Post Road, the Albany Post Road, Old York Road (White Plains Road), Mamaroneck Road. Although not sure how to get there, General Washington headed for White Plains and arranged his troops in the hills east of the city. The British arrived on October 28: a "magnificent" spectacle, according to one American officer -- arms shining, uniforms bright, formations orderly, in marked contrast to Washington's undisciplined, rag-tag men.

(Editor's note: Someone probably fancied the Patriot flag and uniform, took them home after the 1917 Dobbs Ferry School exhibit and kept them as historic memorabilia. Maybe they belonged to Joseph Dobbs, who was captured by the British during the Battle of White Plains, or to some other colonial resident of Dobbs Ferry. If you have any documented information about the flag, the uniform or the building at Chestnut and Main Streets in which they were found in 1917, please show it to The Ferryman or to Jean Fritz and we'll print the documentation. Better yet, check your attic. If you find the flag and/or uniform, donate it to the Historical Society for preservation. And we'll throw a little party in your honor!)

General Howe, on the British side, fought his war in a leisurely fashion. Washington counted on surprise. Nine days later, neither side could claim victory; neither side admitted defeat. But the Battle of White Plains was over.

And the British moved to Dobbs Ferry. They pitched their tents all the way from the Saw Mill River to the Hudson, but they didn't stay in their camp. Roaming the area, they cut down trees for firewood, broke up fences, stole animals, looted houses and, in general, terrorized the populace. When they left, they took with them as prisoners Jonathan Odell, John Storms and Joseph Dobbs, son of Captain William Henry Dobbs. Jonathan Odell and John Storms died in prison.

When American soldiers came to Dobbs Ferry, they were not much better. Indeed, soldiers on both sides disobeyed their officers who issued orders against vandalism. This was a war, the soldiers figured, and they were entitled to get what they could out of it.

But if the people of Dobbs Ferry thought that the worst was over when the soldiers left, they would find that the worst was yet to come. Westchester County became a "no-man's-land," a battleground for bands of guerrillas -- Tory highwaymen, or "cowboys," against "skinnners," their American counterparts. And both terrorized civilians.

At one point, three Dobbs Ferry boys were walking near the Dobbs Ferry-Ardsley line when they were approached by a group of Tory "cowboys" on horseback. Apparently, the Dobbs Ferry boys couldn't resist a bit of name-calling, which the "cowboys" didn't let pass. They beat up the boys so badly that two of them (a Smith and a Lawrence) died, and the third (a Vincent boy) was crippled for life. He received the first pension that the Continental Congress ever granted.

Some Fled

Some people fled the county. No one dared go out at night. They hid their food, buried or secreted their valuables and, when danger seemed imminent, they brought their horses into the house. Apparently, at least one person hid a treasure which he never retrieved.

In 1917, when a building at the corner of Chestnut and Main Streets was being remodeled, a workman discovered in the wall a buff colored uniform wrapped around a flag. The words "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death," were painted across the top of the flag and beneath it was the picture of two daggers with a red hat on the tip of one. The uniform was of the type worn by Patriot soldiers in the Battle of White Plains. The flag was believed to have been carried at the battle.

On their discovery, they were displayed at the Dobbs Ferry School and, although there were no longer any Tory "cowboys" around, the long-hidden souvenirs of the Battle of White Plains disappeared once again.

[To be continued]

DOBBS FERRY HOSPITAL: THE BEGINNING



The first Dobbs Ferry Hospital

It is a given fact that the Community Hospital at Dobbs Ferry has enjoyed the financial and moral support of the area's residents for nearly all of its 100 years of existence.

But in its very early days, the institution met with strong opposition. The December 23, 1892 issue of *The Greenburgh Register*, edited and published at the time by F. Bradley, contained the following editorial:

"The location of the shanty hospital on Ashford Avenue is in every respect an unfortunate affair. The hospital itself is likely to be a nuisance. It is an injury to the neighborhood, and an offense to many of our best citizens. It should, for the rest and repose which its patients will require, have been placed on some side street, and not on one of our main business [sic] thoroughfares. There is something gruesome at best in placing such an institution on an abandoned portion of a grave yard. The enterprise is an entire miscarry and had better be abandoned."

Site Next to Graveyard

The site had originally been owned by Martin and Rebecca Lefurgy. In 1823 they sold or gave the land to the "Presbyterian Church in Greenburgh" for use as a burial ground and church. By 1892, nearly 70 years later, "the lot adjoining the old grave yard" was owned by Dr. Champion H. Judson who proposed to build a hospital on part of the lot. His proposal, outlined in a letter by Anne L. Langdon, of Irvington, to some of the area's residents, was to raise \$600 for part of Dr. Judson's lot and then build a hospital "with capacity for four patients, a nurse and servant" under the following conditions:

"During two years Dr. Judson gives his services free of charge, the nurse's salary is given; a small charge will be made to such patients as can pay and the balance of the necessary expenses must be met by subscription." Management of the hospital would be under Dr. Judson and Miss Langdon for the two years, after which it and the deed to the land would be turned over to a Board of Managers.

If, after that trial," Miss Langdon's letter continues, "the hospital is considered a failure, the sum of \$600 which we now ask for shall be returned to the donors, but we want a guarantee now that if the hospital is a success the sum of \$2,000 will be raised at the expiration of two years. That will enable us to purchase the remainder of the lot, and a pavilion for

contagious diseases which is promised can then be put up."

Well, in a decade when cholera and typhoid epidemics in New York City were a good enough reason for never going there, proposing to build "a pavilion for contagious diseases" on Ashford Avenue in Dobbs Ferry produced a general call to arms.

The Pest House

Letters were written, speeches made, petitions circulated and *The Dobbs Ferry Register* began to refer to the proposed hospital as "The Pest House." In 1893 the weekly printed sarcastic editorial comments, such as: "Wouldn't a 'pavilion for contagious diseases,' filled with small pox and cholera patients, in the most densely (sic) settled part of the village, and on one of our busiest and best streets, be a fine thing?"

And, "Why didn't the persons, who are getting up the hospital, with a pavilion for contagious diseases, place it nearer thier (sic) own homes? It would be so much more convenient for them to get at it." And, "If it cannot be removed to Irvington, where it belongs, why not transfer it to the corner lot on Broadway, in front of the Presbyterian Church and directly west of Dr. Judson's residence. It certainly would not be deemed offensive there."

One petition to the Village Trustees and the Board of Health of Dobbs Ferry and Greenburgh was signed by many of the property owners on Ashford Avenue, including "the President and Clerk of our Village." The signatories were: Frederick J. Stone, Alonzo Ackerman, J. L. Taylor, Walter S. Warman, Walston H. Brown, W. H. C. Ewen, Chas. G. Storms, Clarence Travis, P. E. Osborne, Laura B. Field, Joseph Stiner, O. S. Bradley and D. O. Bradley -- a mini Historical Who's Who of Dobbs Ferry.

Not in My Back Yard

The petition, printed by the *Register* on January 6, 1893 was a classic, nineteenth century version of NIMBY -- "not in my back yard." In addition to arguments that the proposed hospital would "endanger every family" and hurt property values, the petition declared:

"It will be noticed, that the lady [Anne L. Langdon], who fosters the concern, lives in Irvington. Her family residence has several beautiful sites for a hospital, adjacent to it, on the premises, yet she kindly favors another village, and selects a location at a considerable and probably a safe distance from her own home. The spot selected does however adjoin other homes. When thier (sic) owners protested, and expressed to her thier (sic) fears and timidities, she replied:

Dear Sir:-- Yours at hand. It is too late to stop anything now; I am sorry there is so much opposition, but we must now defend the hospital if need be. Yours truly, A. L. Langdon. (continued on page 4)

DOBBS FERRY HOSPITAL

(continued from page 3)

"Mr. Tweed asked on a similar occasion, with less words: "What are you going to do about it?"

But between January and October of 1893, attitudes toward the proposed hospital changed dramatically. The money was raised and the tiny hospital was built. In its issue of November 10, 1893, *The Dobbs Ferry Register*, which, incidentally, is in the archives of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society, notes that the hospital "is now open and free to all for inspection . . . A most cordial invitation is extended to all. The hospital is open to any case not contagious regardless of creed or nationality. The patients will receive the best of care from Dr. Judson and his associate physicians, assisted by a trained nurse from Bellevue Hospital, New York."

Yearly Expenses \$1,500

The article continues: "The Dobbs Ferry Hospital is largely dependent on the generosity of the public as the yearly expenses are entertained at about \$1500. All contributions both large and small will be gratefully received; little doubt can be entertained as to the need of a hospital and a visit there will assure anyone of its order and fitness."

A remarkable turnaround from hostility to friendliness in a matter of months! And from that time on, the community gave the hospital its wholehearted support and made possible the institution's growth and development.

The following summer, for example, the *Register*, noting the need for a verandah or awning around the building, announced that "collections will be taken up in all the churches on Sunday for the benefit of the hospital. Do not fail to turn in your mite."

In an editorial headed, "Hospital Sunday," the *Register* of July 6, 1894 made the following pitch for the hospital: "It is not the most attractive institution outwardly, but most excellent work has been accomplished within its walls since its establishment. It was opened for patients October 18, 1893. On that very day a man with a broken leg was brought in. During the eight months of its existence 20 patients have been treated.

Charge \$5 a Day

"Two, admitted with incurable diseases have died; one afflicted with cancer and one with insanity were removed from the hospital; all the others were cured. There is a trained nurse and a housekeeper connected with the hospital, and their salaries are guaranteed for two years. If patients are able to pay for their maintenance they are charged only \$5 a week. The majority thus far treated have not been able to pay this small sum, so that those who have the institution under their care are obliged to ask the residents of the place for aid to carry on their work.

"This is a most useful and interesting charity. It is

wholly non-sectarian, and it appeals to all for support. Let each one take an interest in this work and make some contribution on the second Sabbath of July."

--Hank Walter

[to be continued]

LAWN AND PORCH SALE RAISES \$634 FOR SOCIETY

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society realized \$634 from its porch and lawn sale on May 21. Literally thousands of items -- pots and pans, blankets, books, fabrics, lamps, curtains, knickknacks, etc., donated by members and friends of the Society -- were offered for sale to the public on a beautiful, sunny spring day.

The proceeds will go toward the costs of creating archival rooms on the second floor of the Mead House History Center.

Mary Walter, chair of the Housekeeping Committee, thanked those who collected the items, sorted them, priced them, set them out on tables on the Mead House porch and lawn and otherwise helped make the sale a success. They included: Bill and Gloria Blanck, Larry and Peggy Blizard, Evelyn Fitzgerald, Hugh and Charlotte Frankenthaler, Jean Fritz, Tahnee Neill, Barbara Pearce, Betty Romaine and Hank Walter.

BOARD OKAYS SELLING 16 ITEMS TO OTHER HISTORY GROUPS

At its May 25th meeting, the Board of Trustees approved the Collections Committee's recommendation to offer 16 items of furniture from the Mead House for sale to historical societies, museums and landmark houses in Westchester. The offer of sale will be made to the county groups during the summer. The action follows a requirement by the executors of Clara Mead's estate regarding 39 items of historical interest in the Mead House. In 1991 the late Clara Mead bequeathed to the Society her 14-room residence at 12 Elm Street, which will become the home for the Society's collections of documents, films, oral and video histories, microfilm, photographs and other memorabilia of the history of Dobbs Ferry.

The 16 items, according to Collections Committee Chair Tahnee Neill, include a banjo clock, two separate mirrors, a Shaker rocker, a rebuilt candlestand, a French piano, a mid-Victorian sideboard, a black-painted rocker, a tavern table, a four-poster canopy or field bed, an American Chippendale dropleaf table, a washstand, a Hitchcock settee, a set of six Hitchcock chairs, a small armchair with "bamboo" turnings and an American Empire bureau.

SPRING GALA RAISES \$1,500 FOR ARCHIVAL STORAGE ROOMS

Some 85 guests attended the Spring Gala of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society on Saturday, May 7, in Fellowship Hall of the South Presbyterian Church. The Society grossed \$1,973 from admissions to the event, which was a 50-year commemoration of World War II, and from donations, raffle tickets and membership renewals.

President Bill Blanck reported that, with expenses of approximately \$450, the net proceeds came to \$1,523. For their \$12 admission charge, members and friends of the Society enjoyed a buffet dinner, video history interviews of Bill Maguire and Charlie Baiano, two Dobbs Ferry residents who served in the war, a variety of desserts made by members and recorded music of Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman.

Twenty-five prizes were raffled off, including gift certificates at local stores, dinners, lunches, breakfasts, flowers, jewelry, a hand-made afghan, wine, champagne, concert tickets and a manicure.

"The Society wishes to thank the business community for its support," said Mr. Blanck. "The merchants and residents of Dobbs Ferry who contributed the prizes for the raffle helped make the Gala a success."

Prize Donors

The prize donors included Flowers by Carole, Sisters Flowers, Rochambeau Wines and Liquors, Scheri Shop, Susan's Specialty Shop, House of Charm, Jake's Hair Salon, Dan's Sports Center, Yodice Jewelry, Elegant Poster, Brown Bag, Dobbs Ferry Photo, Readers Hardware, Cary's Pharmacy, Dobbs Ferry Pharmacy, Zion Episcopal Hilltop Thrift Shop, Dobbs Ferry Woman's Club, the Staats Family, the Blanck Family, and the following restaurants: Louisiana Cajun, John Richards, Off Broadway, Doubleday's, Sam's and Charcoal Corners.

Winners of the prizes included (last names only): Bolke, Charny, Etharnton, Frankenthaler, Gardner, Goldfarb, Kissi, Lofstedt, Manzel, Migliore, Monahan, Mottola, Staats, Thornton, Trapani, Walsh and Warnock.

Both Bill Maguire, a PT Boat radioman, and Charlie Baiano, a ball turret gunner on a bomber, expanded their video history interviews, Bill telling of his speaking with Lt. John F. Kennedy, skipper of his brother, John's, boat (the PT 109), and Charlie answering questions about his life in Stalag 17, the infamous prisoner of war camp in Austria. Charlie noted that the date of the Gala, May 7, was 49 years to the day that he was liberated.

"From the floor" reminiscences included those of Bess Pobiner and Marian Fitzpatrick, who served together as WAVES; Betty Thompson, who was an air raid warden for Palisade and Magnolia Avenues; and George McDermott, who displayed his submarine's flag.

Among the dessert donors were: Gloria Blanck, Peggy Blizard, Charlotte Frankenthaler, Sharon Fredericks, Virginia Gagliardi, Carol Lofstedt, Barbara Pearce, Julia Rokicki, Barbara Staats, Betty Thompson, Mary Wall, Patty Walsh, Mary Walter. Unfortunately, some donors' names are missing

because those donors left desserts without leaving their names.

Helping in the kitchen were Barbara Pearce, Sharon Fredericks, Sharon Menzel, Patty Walsh and Virginia Gagliardi. Decorating Fellowship Hall were Mary Walter, Barbara Pearce and Virginia Gagliardi. Charlotte Frankenthaler and Bess Pobiner were at the door taking admissions. Tahnee Neill sold raffle chances. Bill Blanck brought the food from Rudy's Beau Rivage and the television/VCR equipment. Gloria Blanck made salad for 100 people.

Fred Staats, Andrew Graham, Bill Blanck and Hank Walter set up and took down the dinner tables. Fred Staats also brought the ice and took care of the raffle, along with his wife, Barbara. Mae Pepper tagged the World War II memorabilia that were lent by members for the event, set up the exhibit and also crafted and produced the invitation that went out to all members of the Society. Tahnee Neill, Mary Walter and Mary Wall provided flowers for the festivities.

CARPENTRY WORK COMPLETED

Carpentry work has been completed on the second floor of the Mead House to convert the floor into archival storage rooms for the Society's collections.

Fred Staats, chair of the House Committee, reported to the Board of Trustees that the next step would be installing a separate electrical line to the second floor to power the air-conditioning and humidity controls required for creating state-of-the-art archival rooms.

Bill Blanck, President, said, "We hope to have the second floor ready by the end of the summer to receive the Society's collections." Those collections are now housed in the cellar of the public library and in Village Hall.

ANDREW GRAHAM NEW TREASURER

Andrew Graham was appointed a Trustee of the Society by the Board of Trustees at its April 27th meeting to succeed Bess Pobiner, who resigned. The Board then elected him Treasurer to succeed Phil Elbert, who stepped down as an officer, but remains a Trustee.

Mr. Graham, a Dobbs Ferry resident since January, 1987, owns African Wildlife and Travel, a tour operation located in Ardsley and specializing in safaris in Africa. He was born in Capetown, South Africa, and grew up in Salisbury, Rhodesia. He received a master's degree in mathematics and economics from Cambridge University, England, and a master of business administration degree from Harvard. Before beginning his safari business in 1989, he worked in various financial and consulting positions in New York City and Philadelphia.

Under the Society's By-Laws, Mr. Graham will stand for election to the Board of Trustees by the general membership at the Society's annual meeting in September. He will run for a two-year term to fill out the unexpired portion of Mrs. Pobiner's term.

Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

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