



# The FERRYMAN

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VOLUME XII, No. 1

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

APRIL 1993

## REASONABLE COST MODIFICATION OF MEAD HOUSE CAN PROVIDE FOR SOCIETY'S NEEDS -- *Smith Report*

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society can modify the Mead House "for a reasonable, one time cost" to meet its needs for archival storage, research access, office space, meeting areas, and social function space.

Furthermore, operating expenses of the house as a history center "can be kept within manageable bounds."

Those are key conclusions of a comprehensive report by Sue Smith, restoration and construction consultant, on how the Society can use the space in the Mead House to carry out its mission of preserving Dobbs Ferry history and making it accessible to its members and the public.

Mrs. Smith observed in her report, "The Society has a great deal to gain as an organization by moving ahead in a prompt, deliberate and unified manner to make the Mead House into its headquarters. This can become an hospitable gathering place and focal point for Society activities which will stimulate both greater volunteer participation and increased contributions to the collections. This project has the potential to invigorate the Society in many ways and as no other program can."

Mrs. Smith, a graduate of Vassar College and the New York School of Interior Design, was construction coordinator and supervisor for the renovation of the old Dobbs Ferry Playhouse on Main Street into the architectural offices of Stephen Tilly.

Among her projects as an independent general contractor was conversion of "The Cottage" on Washington Avenue in Hastings-on-Hudson into office, archival and exhibit space for the Hastings Historical Society, of which she is a Board member and Past President. She is also a Trustee of the Village of Hastings-on-Hudson.

### Board Considering Report

The Society's Board of Trustees is now considering Mrs. Smith's recommendations, said Bill Blanck, President. At its December 16 meeting, the Board had approved asking Mrs. Smith to do the study and submit a report. At the Board's March 24th meeting,

Mrs. Smith explained to the Trustees the issues involved and her recommendations and conclusions.

Underlying all of her recommendations are two acknowledged conditions. One is to reconcile opposing options--keeping the 14-room Mead House exactly the way it is and making it into a museum, or completely modernizing the entire interior into an efficient office and archival storage space. Neither of these options was expressly willed or even inferentially intended in Clara Mead's bequest to the Society.

The second condition is to require that "changes should respect the period details of the house," so that "nothing of historic value will be obliterated," and that whatever modifications are made for office and archival storage purposes will be "reversible," that is, it would not be "difficult or costly" to restore the structure to the single family residence it always was for more than 130 years.

### First floor uses

With these two conditions in mind, the compromise proposed by Mrs. Smith includes the following: "The first floor remains much as it is." The living room and dining room can "function comfortably for small scale social events and for Society activities like the preparation of a mailing, or conducting Board meetings." The walls of these two rooms offer 40 linear feet of exhibit space.

The kitchen can be used for lunch and coffee breaks for volunteers and staff and for preparing food for social events. The front parlor can serve as a sales area.

"Two small rooms are available for office space," says the report, "or to store sales items, bulky equipment, folding chairs and tables."

Mrs. Smith said the Board should consider removing the "deteriorated" workshop used by Herbert Mead, Clara's father, from the eastern side of the house.

In Mrs. Smith's view, the four bedrooms on the second floor should be modified. Her report says:

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## MEAD HOUSE MODIFICATION AT REASONABLE COST

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### Second floor uses

"The second floor becomes the work and storage area for Society archives and for business needs. The front three bedrooms can be regarded as an archival cluster, a building within the main building. This area is reconfigured with one entry, an internal traffic pattern and a climate controlled environment. The second floor hall can be used as a secondary exhibit space (35 linear feet). The back bedroom serves initially as an office for business functions and is available in the future as needed for extension of the archival space."

"The third floor," the report continues, "remains a rental apartment, with the benefit of income and the security of a person living in the building."

Mrs. Smith recommends that the basement not be used. She also says the two outbuildings behind the house could "provide some storage of bulky items . . . not sensitive to temperature fluctuations."

### Climate control for archives

Recognizing that the Society's two basic obligations are to preserve its collections and make them available to the interested public, Mrs. Smith recommends that the three front bedrooms on the second-floor "be closed off . . . to be a self-contained space with its own climate control system separate from the rest of the house."

She says there is enough space in the three bedrooms to satisfy current archival storage needs, as well as anticipated growth of the Society's collections for five or more years, after which the fourth bedroom in the back can be used for archival space expansion. In the meantime, the back bedroom can serve as an office.

For the Society's purpose of not only preserving and storing its collections, but also providing access to researchers, Mrs. Smith recommends these climate control standards: "a temperature of 68 degrees and relative humidity of 40% to 45%; this is adequate for both people and paper." The important requirement is that the standards are effective constantly, 24 hours a day, year round.

To achieve this unvarying climate control, Mrs. Smith says the Society should install three small ductless air-conditioning units called a "split system" within closets between the rooms. Cool air enters the bedrooms through wall-mounted grilles high on the walls. The three air-conditioning units, controlled by

a wall-mounted thermostat, are connected to a single condenser unit "placed outside and away from the building or in a hidden location, perhaps under the porch on the west side."

### Heating and other recommendations

Two humidifiers, one in the front bedroom and another in bedroom #3, can be located in the same closets which also hold the air-conditioning units, says the report. Each would be controlled by a separate humidistat and would require an electrical connection and a water line.

As for heating, the house is now served by a two-pipe steam system that does not lend itself to creating separate zones, one for the climate-controlled archive rooms, the other for the rest of the house. Nonetheless, a separate heating system for winter use is not as essential as a separate cooling system for summer use and a separate humidifying system for year-round use in order to preserve the archives.

The report suggests "trying to live with the existing (heating) system for a trial period." If it does not work next winter, that is, if there is too much fluctuation in heat and the 68 degree standard cannot be maintained fairly constantly, or if it is too costly to maintain a constant 68 degrees throughout the house, then a separate heating system can be installed for the archival area.

Other recommendations by Mrs. Smith deal with archival furniture, books owned by the Society, protection of the house, the archives and the other contents of the house from fire, water damage and theft, disaster planning, duplication of archival material and storage elsewhere of these backup copies, access for the handicapped, outside light and inside lighting, electrical outlets, climate control monitoring, weather-proofing, energy efficiency and tree removal.

### Costs

Projecting specific costs for each improvement was beyond the scope of the report and Mrs. Smith said, "comparison costs should be obtained from the appropriate contractors." However, she did provide round estimates for some items.

An air-conditioning split system for three rooms can be done for \$4,500. Two humidifiers would cost \$1,000. A new baseboard heating system, if needed next year for the archive rooms, would be about \$4,000. Additional costs would be incurred for a security system, carpentry, electrical work, new file cabinets, shelving, light fixtures, floor finishes, and exterior repairs and painting.

## You May be in the Picture in Film of Dobbs Ferry's 1973 Centennial Celebration at Society's Spring Gala Buffet Dinner May 2

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society's Spring fund-raising Gala, a buffet supper and film program of the 1973 Village Centennial, will be held on Sunday, May 2, beginning at 7:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall, South Presbyterian Church, 343 Broadway.

As practically the entire village was either a participant or a spectator in the Centennial Celebration, you or your friends could appear in the movie.

The film includes the crossing of the river by the Tappan Packet, a scaled-down recreation one of the early ferries plying the river between Dobbs Ferry and Sneden's Landing.

The 1973 Centennial Celebration marked 100 years of incorporation for the Village. Unincorporated Dobbs Ferry was on the map from colonial times.

The Society will hold a raffle, always popular at past fund-raisers, for distinctive prizes at the event.

A membership table will provide an opportunity for non-members to join the Society. Current members who have not yet renewed their membership may do so at the Gala.

Shirley Elbert, Membership Committee Chair, noted that a current membership card entitles the holder to attend special Society functions and receive a 10% discount on many sale items. The membership year runs from October 1 through September 30.

Donations will also be welcomed at the gala, especially for maintenance of, and improvement to, the Mead House.

Society President Bill Blanck said, "We need funds for exterior work on the steps, porches, and for painting. Hopefully, volunteers will accomplish much of this, but we still need materials, and importantly, money will be needed for whatever interior renovations the Board may decide to do."

## Dobbs Ferry's Italian-American Heritage Will be Celebrated at Society's Poetry Reading by Michael Palma on May 15

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society is sponsoring a poetry reading by award-winning poet, translator and educator Michael Palma on Saturday, May 15 at 3:00 p.m. in Village Hall, 112 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry.

Admission is free. The reading will be followed by refreshments at the Mead House, 12 Elm Street (behind Village Hall) for members and guests.

The program celebrates the Italian-American heritage shared by Palma and many Dobbs Ferry residents. An exhibit of photographs and memorabilia will also illustrate the significant Italian influence on Dobbs Ferry's history and architecture.

Michael Palma is Professor of English at Iona College. His poems and translations appear in Poetry, Grand Street, Paris Review, Northeast, Si scrivo (Italy), and other periodicals, as well as several anthologies. Prof. Palma's books include The Egg Shape, a 1972 collection of poems; The Man I Pretend to Be, a translation of Guido Gozzano; My Name on the Wind, a translation of Diego Valeri and winner of the 1989 Italo Calvino Award; and New Italian Poets, edited with Dana Gioia, and named in 1991 "Outstanding Translations of the Year" by the American Literary Translators Association.

## Mead House Springtime Clean-up and Repair Volunteers Will Enjoy Hot Dogs, Soda and Munchies on May 8

It's spring cleaning time for the Mead House. The first volunteer gathering will be at 9:00 am on May 8.

Yard work and gardening needs to be done outside the 14-room house at 12 Elm Street, the inside needs cleaning, and the house exterior needs touch-up scraping and painting. Members and non-members who want to participate are most welcome.

The quid pro quo, in addition to helping the Society and the Mead House? Hot dogs, soda, and

other munchies.

To volunteer for yard work and/or gardening, call Charlie Baiano at 693-4519.

To volunteer time for painting, or other exterior work on the house, call Fred Staats at 693-9167.

If you want to work inside this lovely 19th century building, call Shirley Elbert at 693-1438.

If May 8 doesn't fit your schedule, please let us know when you can give some time for future work weekends at the Mead House.

**YOUR RAFFLE DONATION WILL HELP THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
TO ESTABLISH A NEW HOME AT THE MEAD HOUSE**

**Raffle Prizes and gift certificates will be awarded at Gala on May 2.  
Winner need not be present.**

Return tickets & donation to DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
in door slot of Dobbs Ferry Public Library, 153 Main St., through April 30,  
OR to the registration table at the Gala on May 2.

*Prizes will include:*

**Commemorative Bottles ★ Gourmet Meals  
Aerial Color Photos of Dobbs Ferry ★ Books on Local History  
and Other Exciting Prizes**

<p>\$1 each, 6 tickets for \$5, FREE LUCKY BONUS 13 FOR \$10.</p> <p>FREE LUCKY 13th TICKET with \$10 donation for page of 12.</p> <p>FREE EARLY BIRD 14TH TICKET with \$10 for 12 through April 30.</p>	<p align="center"><b>FREE BONUS!</b> with \$10 for 12 by April 30</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____</p> <p>Zip _____ Phone _____</p>	<p align="center"><b>FREE BONUS!</b> with \$10 donation for page of 12</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____</p> <p>Zip _____ Phone _____</p>
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# Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

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Phone (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (eve.) \_\_\_\_\_

- MEMBERSHIP**     New  Renew
- Patron..... \$100.00
- Friend..... \$ 50.00
- Contributing..... \$ 25.00
- Family..... \$ 15.00
- Individual Adult..... \$ 10.00
- Student/Senior (over 60)..... \$ 3.00

Please make check payable to and mail to:  
**DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
 153 Main Street (Library Building)  
 Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522  
 Tel. (914) 693-7766 (24-hr. answering)

- Membership contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Mead House contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Newspaper Microfilming Project contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- TOTAL enclosed (TAX DEDUCTIBLE) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- My employer's matching contributions form is enclosed.

**Reserve your tickets for the Gala!**

\$24 per couple \$12 for singles  
 Tickets at the door \$26 and \$14  
 Checks payable to Dobbs Ferry Historical Society  
 Mail to 153 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

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IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY A MEMBER OF  
 THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND HAVE NOT  
 ALREADY RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP,  
 WON'T YOU PLEASE DO SO?

IF YOU HAVEN'T AS YET BECOME A MEMBER,  
 WON'T YOU JOIN US NOW?

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