



# The FERRYMAN

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DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
12 Elm Street, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522

APRIL 1995

## VILLAGE THANKFUL FOR GERMAN SURRENDER MAY 7, 1945; ADDORISIO'S LETTER FROM BUCHENWALD SHOCKS RESIDENTS

Fifty years ago on May 7, 1945 the war in Europe ended with the unconditional surrender of Germany. While Dobbs Ferry residents were thankful for VE Day, a fierce and bloody war continued to be waged in the Pacific.

How the Village reacted is told in the columns of the weekly newspaper, the *Dobbs Ferry Register*. The headline read: "Village Marks VE Day Quietly As Prayers Are Said In All Churches."

The article continues: "In a sense it was just another day in Dobbs Ferry on Tuesday when President Truman officially notified the country of Germany's Unconditional Surrender. Dobbs Ferry did just about what the boys at the front would have them do.

"Rain fell most of the day but intermittent breezes kept Old Glory waving from the flagstuffs on the business curbs while the Stars and Stripes hung gracefully from hundreds of residences.

"Residents trudged through the downpour to the churches to offer prayers and worship services were held in the evening. At Dobbs Ferry High School the entire pupil body was assembled by Acting Superintendent William Z. Lindsey and the children saluted the flag, said prayers and then sang the National Anthem and other appropriate numbers.

"There was a little hilarity here and there, but nothing worth mentioning. On the whole Dobbs Ferry went about its way marking off another day on the calendar dedicated to complete victory . . .

"The observance of VE Day was touched off by the unified blowing of all the factory whistles and fire alarms at 9 A.M., and the air was filled with shrieking sirens for some 20 minutes or more.

"The pastors of all churches in the community have announced that church services on Sunday will be dedicated to VE Day."

With the collapse of Nazi Germany, the horrors of the concentration camps burst on to the front pages of the world press -- the *Dobbs Ferry Register* included. Corporal Joseph Addorisio, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Addorisio of 395 Ashford Avenue was part of the medical team that first entered infamous Buchenwald after its liberation by American troops,



**Corporal Joseph Addorisio**

### **A Letter from Buchenwald**

In a letter home, Corporal Joseph Addorisio recounted his experiences to a shocked Dobbs Ferry. Portions of his letter follow: "Our unit was assigned the job of helping to hospitalize the sick inmates, an almost impossible task since at least 50 percent of the prisoners left were so weak from hunger and disease that they never could fully recover. Everyone of us couldn't see how we could do it without more help, but the scenes we saw made us want to do everything in our power whether impossible or not to start a new life for those men who have been through hell. A number of inmates were doctors and professional men so that the organization of wards and treatment of patients was well under way in an unbelievably short time, so short a time that committees from the English Parliament and American official visitors, including a committee of Senators, were amazed at the progress we had made."

Corporal Addorisio's letter continues, "We made our way to the compound through a cultivated field where men were still working apparently from force of habit. The first thing that hit us was the smell. I don't know exactly what kind of odor it was, but it can best be described as a combination of unwashed bodies, gas and decomposition. It was then that we came upon the living quarters of the prisoners. Some of

-- continued on page 2

## MEMBERS ARE ENTHRALLED BY VALENTINE PROGAM PHOTOS

Over 40 members of the Historical Society gave a warm reception to the Valentine program of wedding photos on February 12th.

Coordinated by Historical Society trustees Muriel Br... and Virginia Gagliardi, the program included scores of wedding photographs loaned by Village residents. It would be an understatement to say that the exhibit was well received. Viewers were enraptured.

Family groups gathering before photographs taken decades ago of relatives or friends gave joyful exclamations of recognition.

The earliest photo was of an 1888 couple, portraying the husband standing as the bride signed a wedding certificate. Subsequent decades were well represented and included happy couples and wedding parties in the photos, smiling back at viewers.

As many Dobbs Ferry families are connected by marriage, the exhibit provided an opportunity to acquaint younger generations with family ties.

Sipping pink punch, and munching cookies -- many heart-shaped -- everyone attending said they had a wonderful afternoon and hoped similar exhibits would be presented in the future.

Happy though the exhibit was, it does have a serious purpose. The pictures themselves provide a treasure trove of the fashions of past decades. With the click of a camera shutter, the joy of "that memorable day," along with a record of how we lived, is preserved for future generations.

Most of these unions produced children, and future exhibits could feature young people, the "baby boomers" included.

... of the loaned photographs were copied, and are now part of the Historical Society's archives.

1888 - Jennie Ackerman and Sylvester Storms



1927 - Antoinette Leggiere and Dominick Vano



1933 - Helene and...



1905 - Mr. and Mrs. William Ward



them were lying motionless on the ground, their white unhealthy looking skin and shriveled bodies exposed to the sun, others hobbling and some crawling. With few exceptions, all were ragged, dirty and unkempt. Whenever we passed them, in groups or singly, they saluted, smiled and in every way tried to show how much they appreciated us.

"We could see that they were dazed and happy, yet so weak that they could not show their enthusiasm. Every one of them came up to us asking in a scared, shy manner for a cigarette or chocolate. Chocolate is as scarce to us as it is to them, but I never thought that I'd be getting rid of cigarettes I had accumulated this way.

"Some of them spoke English and whenever we stopped to talk to one, a crowd would gather around us, nodding assent to all the stories of horror he told us and every once in a while interjecting comments in their own language to us or to the one speaking to translate to us. So anxious were they to have some one know what happened to them. They showed us the prison number that was tattooed on their arms and other marks where they had been wounded or tortured.

#### A Day of Rebirth

"I shall remember the --- day of April, 1945, as the day of my rebirth,' another one of the inmates said to us. 'On that day I became a free man again.' I don't think there is a man in our outfit who was not happy to be doing the work he was doing and proud that he was an American soldier in Germany at that time. -- All the inmates seemed to agree on two points, (1) shortly before the Americans arrived, about half their number, some 25,000 were carried off by the SS and killed, and (2) if the Americans had arrived an hour later, all of them would have been dead."

"We wandered into one of the sleeping quarters. It was a barracks about 200 feet long. The stench of such a place becomes something to dread on a hot spring afternoon, the nauseating stench of vomit and foul breath and rotting bodies. Fifteen hundred men in a single room -- perhaps half again, or at most twice as long as our model barracks back home -- the ones where we doubtless are housing many German PW's today, lucky fellows.

"I shall never forget as long as I live what I saw. Piled on a car like sacks of grain were from 200 to 400 bodies, ready to be pushed into the furnaces. We then decided to go into the building and see the rest of it."

Corporal Addorisio stated that according to his information, some of the bodies were alive when placed in the crematorium. His letter continues: "There were four furnaces with a capacity of 21 each. The bodies were put on a steel platform and pushed into the furnaces. Chunks of bone fell through the grate and were piled below to a depth of some six feet. Each day the Nazis had a quota to fill. Estimates of this number vary, but it is generally believed

to have been 80 per day. If that many did not die of their own accord, they were shot, clubbed, hanged or killed mercifully with injections.

"This is a thing that is not to be fully believed but only accepted by the surface of the mind until it is seen. And even then . . . the scarred skulls and ribs and pelvic bones in the furnaces . . . the heap of white human ashes and bones . . .! It can't mean that they actually put human beings . . . into these furnaces and destroyed them in this manner -- but how true it is when one sees it all with his own eyes.

"When we told a French inmate that the civilians of Weimar claimed not to know of Buchenwald, you could have touched off a match with the fire in his eyes.

#### A Trip from France to Weimar

"'Not know,' he croaked fiercely. 'When we fell out of the boxcars into which they had herded us naked in the winter to travel from France to Weimar, the people of Weimar spit on us and called us dogs.' His indignation was so great that he could hardly talk.

"Today no German citizen of Weimar can claim 'not to know' of Buchenwald. By command of General Patton every civilian in Weimar capable of walking has been led through the camp and forcibly shown the things 'they had not seen.'

"Although Buchenwald was well guarded to keep the townspeople away, many of the prisoners worked in Weimar factories. They collapsed of hunger at their benches and no one asked why. They died along the road on the long walk back to camp and no one expressed surprise. They shut their eyes and their ears and their nostrils to the sights and sounds and smells that came from this.

"No one can say definitely that the men and women responsible for Buchenwald will ever be brought to justice. But if they ever should stand trial for all the things they have done in the name of the Third Reich, there will be witnesses against them, for we have seen the evidence ourselves at Buchenwald in Germany."

**Ed. Note:** Buchenwald, adjacent to the city of Weimar in East Germany, was the first of the infamous German concentration camps to be liberated by American Forces. While ostensibly a "labor" camp, it accounted for the deaths of 7,000 Gypsies, 50,000 Jews, German Communists, Slavs, resistance fighters, as well as handicapped and homosexuals. Starvation, and work to the point of exhaustion and death was the method of operation.

Ilse Koch, the wife of the Buchenwald commander, chose inmates with "interesting" tattoos, and after their execution had lampshades made from their skin. In 1947 she was sentenced to life imprisonment by an Allied Tribunal. Twenty years later, while still in prison, she committed suicide.

Corporal Joseph Addorisio, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Addorisio, died in 1961. His father fought in World War I and his son Peter served in Viet Nam.

-- Bill Blanck

## ALL VILLAGE RESIDENTS URGED TO ATTEND APRIL 30 GALA AT FELLOWSHIP HALL AND SHARE RECOLLECTIONS OF VE AND VJ DAYS

The end of World War II in Europe on VE Day will be commemorated by the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society at its annual Gala Buffet Dinner at Presbyterian Fellowship Hall on April 30.

Veterans and residents will recount their experiences both in and away from the village in a videotaped program that will be projected on a large screen.

Participants in the videotape presentation include Charlie Baiano, Bud Brown, Larry DaRosa, Joseph Gelsi, Fred Gottlieb, William McHenry, George Peretti, Fred Staats and William Warnock.

Those attending the Gala who have stories to tell are encouraged to share their experiences about both VE and VJ Days. All will be videotaped for the Society's archives.

All attending are also invited to bring photos, letters, home movies, newspaper clippings and other memorabilia that they might wish to donate to the archives of the Society.

The commemoration of VE and VJ Days is part of the living history of Dobbs Ferry. Many residents were yet to be born or were small children when World War II ended fifty years ago. The Gala's program will provide them with an opportunity to share the experience of their elders.

The Gala will be a friendly get-together of folks interested in Dobbs Ferry and its life and history. It will also be an opportunity to enjoy a

fine buffet dinner that will include salad, choices of three hot entrees, fabulous desserts, tea, coffee and soft drinks. Trustees Muriel Brown and Virginia Gagliardi are coordinating the event.

Fred Staats is hard at work obtaining raffle prizes from local merchants. Other prizes will include commemorative bottles, Ralph Fasanello notecards, Jon Neilson Centennial Posters, packets of post cards of early Dobbs Ferry, reproductions of an 1881 map of Dobbs Ferry, aerial color photos of Dobbs Ferry, and meals at local restaurants.

"It's always satisfying to put an event like this together," Historical Society Vice President Warren Gardner observed. "In the past everyone has always had a great time and was well pleased with the dinner. And it all helps to provide funding for the work of the Society."

Over the past three years the Society has repaired and renovated the home left to it by Clara Mead for the establishment of a History Center. Repairs were made on the roof, beams were reinforced, the brickwork foundation was repaired, and the electrical system made adequate for the needs of the Society.

Air conditioning and humidity controls have been installed in the second floor archival rooms. And within the past month, a fire and burglar alarm system has been added.

Recently the Society moved its archives from the cellar of the Library and from Village Hall to its new home at 12 Elm Street.

Costs for accomplishing these needed repairs and improvements have been kept within carefully budgeted amounts. The generosity of the membership has made everything possible. First, the gift by Clara Mead of her home and then a bequest by George Speyer. Other contributors have been generous as well. However, it has been the ongoing, steady membership support that has made the crucial difference.

*Please mark your calendars: The Historical Society's Gala will take place on Sunday, April 30, beginning at 7:00 pm in Fellowship Hall of South Presbyterian Church, 343 Broadway, (thanks to Joseph Gilmore and Susan DeGeorge, Ministers, who donated the use of the Hall to the Society.) Admission is \$15 for adults and \$8 for children under 12 years of age. Please send reservations and checks in early to the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society, 12 Elm Street, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522.*

### Mayor Marra Will Speak on Plans to Commemorate VJ Day

While VE Day marked the end of the war in Europe fifty years ago, it wasn't until August 15, 1945 that Japan surrendered. Mayor Donald Marra, featured speaker at the Gala, will tell of plans to commemorate this historic event in the village.

The next issue of *The Ferryman* will cover the total involvement of Dobbs Ferry in World War II, including the homefront, Dobbs Ferry residents who served, and the explosion of joy that broke over the village when the Japanese surrendered.

Those attending the Gala will have a preview of the next issue of *The Ferryman* that will include a description of the events of VJ Day in Dobbs Ferry.

# Dobbs Ferry Historical Society

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[ ] Junior (Students under 16)\*... No fee

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12 Elm Street  
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Membership contribution..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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\*Persons under 16 years of age must show parent's or legal guardian's consent for membership. Thus, if you have checked Junior membership above, please provide signature below.

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*Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian*



**IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, PLEASE JOIN NOW. YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO EXPAND ONGOING WORK.**

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