DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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.

FOLLOW US @ Dobbs Ferry Historical Society
@ dobbsferryhistoricalsociety

The Dawn of the Electric Age
Starting in the 1890s, service arrived in the Rivertowns slowly, sporadically, and with varying degrees of coverage.
Page 4

A Home-Grown Celebrity
Peggy Conklin, born in Dobbs Ferry, was a star of stage and screen in the 1930s. She had a lead role in "The Petrified Forest" in 1935.
Page 5

A Local Treasure
Zion Episcopal, built in the 1830s with later additions, is the oldest surviving Gothic Revival house of worship in Westchester.
Page 6

Vol. XXX Issue No. 12 Winter 2021

The 20th-Century Ferry: Quirky Amenity for an Artists' Colony

By Jim Luckett

The author gratefully acknowledges help from historian Alice Gerard of Palisades, N.Y., in the form of questions answered and resources shared, including notes on interviews with older residents of Palisades by her late mother, historian Alice Munro Haagensen. Much of this article is also based on books about Mary Tonetti by Barry Faulkner and Isabelle Savell.

This is the tenth and final installment in our saga of the Dobbs family and their ferry. We have imagined this as a first-person narrative by John Dobbs himself (born c. 1675). John leased the land now comprising the Dobbs Ferry Waterfront Park and much more starting about 1698. He continues his narrative:

Did you ever cross over to Sneden's?
Do you think that you ever will?
Is the past like a dream in remembrance?
Can you see now the frock you wore
On the day that you started for Sneden's
From the strangely still, faraway shore?
(From the song by Alex Wilder,
recorded 1953 by Mabel Mercer)

That "strangely still, faraway shore" is of course Dobbs Ferry. Imagine we are there, about to make a 20th-century crossing to Snedens Landing (Palisades, N.Y.).

The Katy Did, which was the ferry for a decade starting in 1918. With a notoriously unreliable motor, it might more aptly have been called the "Katy Didn't."

Set our time machine for when? If we go before 1918, then our trip will be powered by muscle or wind, as in the centuries before. After that, it will be gasoline-powered.

Let's choose July 21, 1924, because we happen to know of a particular crossing on that day.

Where exactly was the ferry dock? I don't know; but let's guess it was Besson's dock, south of the train station. Besson's was a coal and lumber yard, with a deepwater dock. It allowed the ferry to dock there for at least part of the 20th century. A 1933 article in The New Yorker said the ferryman paid Besson's in shad roe, shad fishing being a favorite local activity.

We arrive at Besson's dock to find that a woman and her young daughter have already signaled for the ferry. We strike up a conversation with a remark about something in the news. You say, "I just read that Clarence Darrow moved for a 30-day delay. What do you suppose he's up to?" Darrow is the lead defense attorney in the sensational Leopold and Loeb case. Two privileged teenagers murdered a small boy just to prove they could perpetrate a perfect crime. They fell short of perfection, were caught, and confessed. It is Darrow's challenge to get them life in prison instead of the hangman's noose.

In our imagined conversation, the woman ducks the question, saying she has just seen her husband off on a journey toward the Arctic, in search of the explorer Donald MacMillan. She thinks only of him at the moment. This last statement would be a

Continued on page 2

The 20th-Century Ferry...

Continued from page 1

lie. She is a journalist who is following the Leopold and Loeb case closely and writing about it. Moreover, she and Darrow are ex-lovers, and still very close.

How do we know this? She is Mary Field Parton. Her diaries and letters will be made available decades later, and will be drawn upon by Donald McRae, the author of "The Last Trials of Clarence Darrow."

You ask her, "What brings you to Snedens?" But before she can answer we hear the putt-putt-putt of an approaching motorboat. It's the Katy Did, an open boat, about 30 feet long. An unsmiling man in his sixties pilots it. This is the ferry.

The ferryman is Lavinus D. "Wine" Hill. Is "Wine" word play on the middle syllable of his first name? Or just his favorite beverage? We don't know. Wine is a "loud, tough man," according to the reminiscences of Anna Gilman Hill (no relation), his contemporary in Snedens Landing.

Lavinus and my four-greats-grandson Henry Dobbs Jr. took over the ferry from William Coates in 1903, according to Mrs. Hill, but Henry's involvement was brief.

I suspect some family connection between Lavinus and me. I had a grandson with a wife from the Leviness family. Their grandson Amos (1781-1856) moved across the river to Snedens or thereabouts and named a son Lavinus (1825-1867). Is it just coincidence that a few years before Lavinus's death, Lavinus D. Hill is born and he grows up to run the ferry? Does that "D" stand for Dobbs, connoting a familial link?

Back to our imagined story: Mr. Hill gruffly tells us where to sit, collects the fares, and off we go. Mary now answers your question, explaining that she and her husband divide their time between Manhattan and an 18th-century farmhouse owned by Mary Lawrence Tonetti on the ridge above Snedens Landing.

"Mrs. Tonetti owns much of the property in Palisades and Snedens Landing," we imagine Mary Parton explaining. "We've been lucky enough to be her tenants and hope to buy the place."

A Besson & Co. building on the Dobbs Ferry waterfront. Laurence Olivier on his sailing dinghy, Fiddle Dee Dee, off Snedens Landing. He and Vivien Leigh were among Mary Tonetti's famous tenants in the 1940s.

"Why 'lucky'?" you ask.

"It's not a normal business transaction when you move into a Tonetti house. You are chosen based on personal qualities, not money. If you are quirky, creative, energetic, and fun-loving — but poor — $25 a month will be fine with her."

In the book's account of this trip it says that the "fiery" ferryman "cursed the summer folk." (Insert said curses here.)

Approaching the western shore, we'll bend time some more, using Mary Parton's diary for October 10, 1924, to paint the scene:

"Crossing the Hudson at twilight is an event. Great purple sashes of shadows, great green bar of light, black perpendicular palisades looming against the horizon. We [something missing] down in a little boat with night and the night lights about us. The dear little house all quiet waiting us, like some gentle old lady, wise with waiting…"

We dock at a tiny, rickety pier, maybe three planks wide, with spindly sapling trunks for legs. It is removed each autumn and rebuilt each spring. Stepping off the shaky dock, we plant our feet on Snedens Landing (population about 350).

We stroll south, soon coming to an old, boxy black house by the water's edge, one of about 16 picturesque houses owned by Mary Tonetti. This is the Pirate's Lair, reachable only by a footbridge grandiosely named the Pulaski Skyway. All the houses have fanciful names — Ding Dong House, Chateau Hash (a house formed by grafting half of one house onto another), Laundry, Spite House, Log Cabin. "Are we in Oz?" we wonder.

In 1924, Mary still divides her time between her Manhattan properties and her Snedens properties, developing both as magnets for creative people. She will lose her main Manhattan property to foreclosure in the 1930s and move full-time to the Pirate's Lair. But now, the Lair is occupied by a woman named Susan Smith. John Dos Passos supplies detail in his book "The Best Times":

"After crossing the Hudson on an ancient motorboat that plied back and forth from Dobbs Ferry, it was like stepping ashore in a foreign country. Another pleasant way to reach Snedens was to cross on the regular ferry from Yonkers and to walk up five miles by a path along the edge of the water. The riverside copses were full of birds. You occasionally caught a glimpse of a Baltimore oriole or a scarlet tanager. Herons flew up from reedy coves… When you arrived there were always good things to eat and drink, things to look at, things to talk about. An evening at Susan's black house was an oasis after the strident dusty racket of New York."

The Yonkers ferry? Competition! Modern earth-moving machinery has made it possible to carve a decent road down the Palisades at Alpine, N.J., resulting in large-scale car-ferry service from Yonkers (1923). Soon (1931) there will be a George Washington Bridge and a modernized Route 9W. More competition.

Exploring south from Pirate's Lair, suddenly we are in ancient Greece or Rome. Behold: A masonry pergola, classic fluted columns, a waterfall, a pool, fruit trees, flowers, lion-head

Continued on page 3

The 20th-Century Ferry...

Continued from page 2

fountains, flights of stone steps. Mary Tonetti and her late sculptor husband have created this, helped by her architect friends, Stanford White and Charles McKim. Whose derriere molded the anatomy-friendly contours of this concrete bench before it hardened? Mary's, of course.

In the Tonetti era, one might bump into Carl Sandburg, Noel Coward, John Steinbeck, Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, Burl Ives, or the actresses Katharine Hepburn or Katharine Cornell here. Call Snedens "Hollywood-on-Hudson" if you like, but not "Tinsel Town." Amenities were rudimentary. Entertainments tended toward picnics, gardening, wine making, and zany homespun productions on makeshift stages.

Now it is 1933 and we are about to take another ferry ride, this time eastbound. Lavinus Hill has retired six years earlier. An association made up largely of Tonetti tenants now runs the ferry. The New York Times recorded this transition in a 1927 article, remarkable for the density of its errors. Headline: "Dobbs Ferry Residents Run Their Own Ferry." Contradicting, erroneous text: "Stevens Landing" "landowners" make up the ferry association. And Hill's 1942 obituary in The Times will say he retired "six years ago" (should say "16") after "more than 30 years" as captain (it was 24).

Back to 1933: The June 13 New Yorker narrates our embarkation. The authors are E.B. White (famous for "Charlotte's Web," "Elements of Style," and so much else) and J.D. Ratcliff (author of the "I Am Joe's Body" series). Both are intimately connected to Snedens.

They describe "a gallant little company [of commuters] who come trailing down the hill sleepy-eyed in the morning, shoes unlaced, neckties in hand, yelling for the captain to wait…"

"There is no swank about it; when the tide is out, you are rowed out to the ferryboat in a dinghy. On rainy days, those that can crowd into the tiny cabin crowd in; others are handed oilskins."

FERRYMAN STAFF

Larry Blizard
Peggie Blizard
Gerard Coffey
Maria Harris
Hubert B. Herring
Ellen Klein
Teresa Walsh

Anita Gilman Hill (who is quoted in the article for her remembrance of Lavinus Hill) and Mary Lawrence Tonetti, probably in the 1880s.

A book by the muralist Barry Faulkner paints an even more madcap picture:

"When Mrs. Tonetti decided to go to town, [her departure] was a time of nervous suspense. She was often late, and the anxious commuters, fearful of losing their trains, presently would hear shrieks from the hillside and upper-story windows, 'Wait for Mrs. Tonetti! She is on her way!' Then the majestic woman would climb aboard, settle her flopping hat, and imperturbably finish buttoning up her dress."

Mary Tonetti died in 1945. So did the ferry. The hurricane of 1944 sank the ferry, but it was raised, rehabilitated, and run again in 1945. It was Mary's leukemia that sank it for good. Her silent subsidies had kept it afloat.

I love that the brief involvement of Henry Dobbs Jr. gives me bragging rights even for the last chapter of the ferry. There actually was another of my descendants at the helm in the 20th century: Rudd Sneden was captain in 1932. I don't know exactly where Rudd fits in the family tree, but here's Hank's line: Me, William, Jeremiah, Jeremiah, Frederick, Henry, Henry.

(In the previous installment I debunked the myth that a Jeremiah Dobbs was the first ferryman. I said, "The only Jeremiah in the family was of a later generation." I should have used the plural – "The only Jeremiahs were of later generations.")

Our long saga ends. We began in 1662, with Uncle William Merritt signing the oath of allegiance to England upon the surrender of New Netherlands to British forces. We debunked the myth of the family living on Barren Island, Brooklyn. We traced the rich record of their lives on Manhattan and Wards Island.

We saw Uncle William Merritt tangle with the rebel leader Jacob Leisler, who jailed him. After Leisler was hanged, we saw Uncle William rise to Mayor, then leave abruptly in 1698 when the Leislerites regained power. We left Manhattan, me leasing land on the east bank and Uncle William co-owning land opposite me at the future Snedens Landing. Soon the ferry began, with me or my son William probably at the helm.

By the mid-1700s ferry headquarters had moved across the river, in the hands of Mary ("Molly') and Robert Sneden. (I assert, without proof, that Molly was my daughter.) We saw John and Sam Adams ride the ferry westbound and Martha Washington ride it eastbound during Revolutionary times. We watched the ferry grow in its early 19th-century boom times and then shrink as railroads and steamships transformed the economy in ways unfavorable to ferry revenues.

Twentieth-century technology made the ferry obsolete, but a band of west-bank Bohemians resisted the modernizing tides to keep it afloat through the century's 45th year.

We end as we began:

"Did you ever cross over to Sneden's?"

Yes we did. And back. Countless times.
"Do you think that you ever will?"

Perhaps you will, but probably sealed in a rubber-tired luxury capsule, not riding the wind and the waves and smelling the salt air.

"Is the past like a dream in remembrance?"

Exactly like a dream: Something unusual and good, rooted deep in the soul, but difficult to recall in some of its details, making us wistful about the parts that are forgotten.

Wires, Wires Everywhere

By Gerard Coffey

There is no reliable record of the first home or business to have electric service on premises when power lines made their appearance in Dobbs Ferry in 1893.

Likely it was the Village offices, with possibly the police and fire houses thrown in by the service providers, eager to ingratiate themselves with Village decision makers. (Wealthy residents already had private power via small generators in the basements of their mansions.)

What is known is that electric service arrived and developed in Dobbs Ferry and neighboring villages largely in the same way natural gas did: slowly, sporadically, and with varying degrees of coverage.

As related in the previous edition of the Ferryman, natural-gas distribution began in New York City in 1823 with the New York Gas Light Company, focusing initially on street lighting. Dobbs Ferry didn't see a developed gas lighting system until 1881, and then only west of Broadway.

The region's emerging electric power grid — small independent generators that were ultimately swallowed up by what today is Con Ed — developed in less time than the development of gas networks took, but Westchester was still at the back of the electric infrastructure bus. Not until 1920 was the local grid more or less complete.

The electric power revolution in the U.S. is generally regarded as having started on Sept. 4, 1882, the day Thomas Edison, who had already invented the incandescent light bulb, turned on the electric generation station he'd built on Pearl Street in lower Manhattan to begin serving 69 wealthy residential customers and the financial district.

New York City residents had more or less full access to electric service by 1899, according to electric power historian Joseph J. Cunningham, "although some of the more semirural areas in outer Queens and especially lower Westchester may have required the customer to finance an extension of the lines." Not an appealing proposition for homeowners who only a decade before had gas pipes installed throughout the house for lighting.

The electric power industry positioned itself as the safe and efficient alternative to natural gas. But electricity solved other safety and "quality of life" issues.

Having converted to an electric track signal system in 1892, Grand Central helped clear the air and its riders' lungs by inventing the electrified third rail to power trains on New York Central's Harlem and Hudson Lines.

Fewer Christmas trees illuminated by candles burned down houses, ushering in the annual ceremony of untangling, testing, and cursing safer electric lights.

Electric streetcars (trolleys) replaced horse-drawn coaches in New York (and, more slowly, Westchester), sharply reducing the 2.5 million pounds of manure the horses produced on the streets every day. Later, the automobile eliminated the rest of the daily manure pile from horse-drawn cabs and delivery wagons. A related problem was disposition of the dozens of horses who died on the streets every day.

At first many small but expensive independent power suppliers popped up, just as happened with natural gas. Electricity for street lighting in the Rivertowns was supplied by the Excelsior Electric Light Company from a generator that the natural gas supplier, Tarrytown & Irvington Union Gaslight Company, quickly built next to its gas-generation facility. The generator was bought in 1889 by another company that expanded electric service to homes and businesses.

By 1893, Dobbs Ferry was plugged in for anyone who wanted "the juice." Seeing the writing on the wall, the natural gas companies began merging, first with other gas companies and then with electric companies. Demand for electricity took off after the First World War.

The 1920s roared as electricity-enabled inventions like record players (previously hand-cranked), the home radio and

A view of Main St, circa 1910.

the radio broadcast stations, and home appliances like washing machines and toasters came to market. With the Great Depression, most of the remaining independent gas and electric companies that dotted New York City and Westchester villages and towns disappeared into Consolidated Edison.

Dobbs Ferry and the rest of Westchester now found a second forest inside it: utility poles. Some had been there since 1846 to carry the first telegraph line through Westchester County, and Dobbs Ferry's first telephone exchange opened in 1883 in Herbeck's Drugstore with 15 subscribers. But it takes a great many poles to send electricity to today's 925,000 users within Westchester's 450 square miles.

The state is studying the feasibility of burying wires underground to reduce weather-related outages. Dobbs Ferry wants to eliminate utility poles entirely along Main and Cedar streets, partly for cosmetic reasons. Recent public meetings in Dobbs Ferry with Con Ed disclosed wide differences in the estimated cost of eliminating the poles and the magnitude of disruption to local businesses. Con Ed is currently running a test in Yorktown by burying 2,200 feet of wires to test the technical feasibility and cost structure.

But electric service continually hunts for cost reduction. Con Ed's Indian Point nuclear facility upriver, which once provided a quarter of Con Ed's electric power, was shuttered for good in April. Today power is supplied by Con Ed and by energy service companies that focus on sustainable sources of power, such as wind and solar.

Our Own Star of Stage and Screen

By Teresa Walsh

When I was growing up in Dobbs Ferry, the kitchen was the hub and heart of our home – the room where my mother, three of her sisters, and their Aunt Caty shared coffee and chitchat about village comings and goings. Often these conversations turned to the past, when women were always referred to by their maiden names, and businesses and real estate remained in the hands of their former owners. I paid little attention to these discussions, wondering what, if any, purpose they served.

Not too long ago, while watching Turner Classic Movies, I spied the name Peggy Conklin in the credits. The name somehow jogged my memory. The more I thought about it, the more I was sure her name had come up in one of those long-ago kaffeeklatches. Intrigued, I Googled her name and discovered that Peggy had indeed come from my hometown. I wanted to know more. I read her New York Times obituary. I looked up the plays she appeared in, read the corresponding Playbills and newspaper reviews, checked out the TCM website and the IMDB database, hunted on YouTube, and perused The Dobbs Ferry Register. Still I wanted more.

Her obituary listed two children, Antonia West of Britain and Michael Thompson of Redwood City, Calif. I searched for them online but always came up short – until last March, when a Michael Thompson showed up in an article about the controversy surrounding Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel) and books no longer published due to perceived racial stereotyping. Seuss had dedicated his 1950 "If I Ran the Zoo" to three-year-old Michael, his godson. According to the article, Seuss and his first wife had been friends with Michael's parents. Although the article didn't name the parents, I hoped this was the Michael I had been looking for. I immediately emailed the journalist who wrote it, seeking her help in reaching Michael.

Several days later I received a phone call from Michael. He seemed pleased about my interest in his mother but confessed he knew little about her time in Dobbs Ferry, as that was a period she seldom spoke about. But he knew plenty about her career and personal life. His deep love and admiration for his mother could be heard in his voice throughout our conversation.

Margaret Eleanor Conklin was born in 1906 in Dobbs Ferry. Her early life was impoverished and harsh. Her mother died when she was 12, and her father abandoned Peggy and her brother, Chester. Michael believes these events led to the shame and embarrassment she seemed to harbor throughout her life. "I don't know why she felt this way," he added. "People said when she was acting, she was a different person, positive and bright."

Michael visited Dobbs Ferry as a child but had no memory of where his mother lived. The 1920 census has Peggy living at 207 Ashford Avenue (where the townhouses next to Ogden firehouse stand, the former site of Scappy's Harmony Inn). After the death of her mother, Peggy lived with her aunts, Olive Pfeil and Ethel (Pfeil) Stinson, and Ethel's husband, Ralph, at 33 Ogden Place, according to the 1930 census, where she remained until she graduated high school. "Aunt Ollie was like a mother to her, and mom dearly loved her," Michael said.

Left: Leslie Howard, Peggy Conklin, and Charles Dow Clark in "The Petrified Forest" (1935). Right: Peggy Conklin

Ginger Rogers, Peggy Conklin, and Lucille Ball in "Having Wonderful Time" (1938).

Peggy moved to New York City and "worked in a typing pool," Michael told me. "During her lunch hour she took dance lessons and auditioned for the theater. She always wanted to be involved in some type of performance art."

In 1928 Peggy made her Broadway debut in the chorus line in the Gershwin musical "Treasure Girl." In 1929 a small speaking part in "The Little Show" proved to be her breakout role, according to her son. From the 1930s to the 1950s Peggy appeared in 22 plays, five films, and on TV and radio. She acted in both comedies and dramas, often in the lead. She appeared in the 1934 Broadway period piece "The Pursuit of Happiness" and reprised that role on the London stage.

The year 1935 proved to be good to Peggy. She snagged a juicy Broadway lead in "The Petrified Forest," portraying Gabby Maples (the part played by Bette Davis in the film version) alongside Leslie Howard, who also directed, and Humphrey Bogart. "My mom adored Howard," Michael said. That same year Peggy met and married James Thompson, a Wall Street executive. "My mother met my dad at a Sunday luncheon in 1935 on a huge estate on the Hudson," Michael remembered. "They had a quick

Continued on page 6

Zion Episcopal, A Local Treasure

By Emily Kahn

During high school at the Masters School, I often walked by Zion Episcopal Church, admiring its architectural beauty. Yet even as an aspiring historic preservationist, I never ventured up the hill to explore this church. Years later, while completing a Master's in Historic Preservation at Columbia University, I stumbled upon Zion again in a course on the National Register of Historic Places. The assignment required each student to nominate a historic property to the National Register, the "official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation." With Zion presented as an option, I felt compelled to return to Dobbs Ferry and finally give Zion the attention it deserved.

Nominating a property to the National Register involves researching and photographing the site, writing an architectural description and statement of significance, and, ideally, meeting with community members. I scoured historical documents in Zion's archives, the Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, and the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. Reverend Mary Grambsch gave me a tour of the church campus, and vestry members welcomed me to a religious service. It quickly became apparent that Zion was a strong candidate for the National Register, and my professor was surprised it had not been listed already.

Top: Zion Episcopal Church. Right: The church's rectory

Zion Episcopal Church, including the rectory, sanctuary, parish hall, stone wall, and grounds, was listed on the National Register in December 2020 for architectural significance. Zion is representative of a highly intact nineteenth-century religious complex that embodies distinguished features of early and late Gothic Revival, Federal, and Second Empire architecture. The church building, erected 1833-34 with later additions, is the oldest surviving Gothic Revival house of worship in Westchester County. The development of the church campus, largely completed with the construction of the parish hall in 1888, represented the growth of the Episcopal Church, with Zion helping establish additional Episcopal churches along the Hudson River.

Notably, National Register listing cannot protect Zion from demolition or insensitive alterations. However, with this designation, Zion is eligible for additional grants to support the ongoing maintenance of its campus. The listing could help Zion garner increased support from preservation organizations against neighboring development threats. Hopefully, this designation (coupled with the parish's impressive stewardship) will help ensure that Zion remains a fixture of Dobbs Ferry that supports its community and maybe even catches the attention of other aspiring preservationists walking down the street.

Our Own Star...

Continued from page 5

courtship, and they were married on August 7th."

A short stint in Hollywood in the 1930s had Peggy sharing the screen with Ginger Rogers, Eve Arden, Lucille Ball, and Douglas Fairbanks Jr., along with Mickey Rooney, Jackie Cooper, Lloyd Nolan, and Edward Everett Horton, to name a few. In 1940 she become the original Mrs. (Pam) North of the "Mr. and Mrs. North" sleuthing team; Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times gave her favorable reviews. Pam would be recreated many times over for the silver screen, radio, and TV. In 1950, Peggy performed with Helen Hayes in "The Wisteria Trees" based on "The Cherry Orchard" by Anton Chekhov. In 1953 she was the original Flo Owens in William Inge's "Picnic," alongside Paul Newman. "My mother really liked Paul Newman and his wife, Joanne Woodward," said Michael.

Michael shared that early on in his parents' marriage it was his mother's salary that paid for a car and rent on the Upper East Side.

It was in New York City that Michael's parents became friends with Seuss, remaining so after his move to California. The friendship was so binding that Seuss was godfather to both Thompson children. Michael is proud that he knew him.

After the 1950s, Peggy's career waned, and Michael offered some reasons. "According to my father, my mom never played the casting-couch game," he said. "Her family was very important to her, and taking care of us was why her acting career suffered." In 1960 Richard Rodgers approached Michael's sister Toni at a Broadway gathering to figure out what could be done to get Peggy back on the stage. It was not to be.

Peggy and Jim retired to Naples, Fla., Jim dying in 1998 and Peggy in 2003.

References:
Peggy Conklin, Actress on Broadway, Is Dead at 96 – New York Times, March 25, 2003.
Telephone interview with Michael Thompson, March 26, 2021.
1920 & 1930 U.S. Federal Population Census.

From the President's Desk

By Madeline Byrne

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society welcomes artifacts, records, letters, etc… any type of mementos pertaining to the village and its history. All donations will be carefully cataloged and preserved.

Part of the history of Dobbs Ferry are the families that have lived in the village for generations.

The Warmans and Their Dairy

The White Clover Dairy was started in October 1902 with a horse-drawn cart delivery of 56 quarts of milk by Irving G. Warman. His company grew over 30 years to distribute more than 2,000 quarts of milk daily to the residents of Dobbs Ferry, Hastings, Irvington and Ardsley.

Originally, the milk came from dairy farms owned by Norman Secor, whose cows grazed in a pasture now known as Macy Park in Ardsley. As the local villages grew, and more and more milk was needed, the supply came from Yorktown Heights. As the years went by the distribution was picked up by the Crowley Milk Company in Newburgh and the Dairymen's League in Poughkeepsie.

The Dairy was located at 135 Ashford Avenue, at the northeast corner of Ashford and Washington.

Irving Warman retired from the dairy business in 1941 and his son Walter G. Warman took it over. Irving was also an active member of the Dobbs Ferry Volunteer Fire Department for 50 years until his death in 1951.

Q: How did Lyman Place get its name?
A: It was named for Lyman C. French, the original owner of the property, who settled in this village, circa 1870 when it was known as Greenburgh. Two of his maternal ancestors were signers of the Mayflower Compact. He served as village president for eight terms and also as a village trustee. He purchased a farm just north of Highland Avenue where he lived for 40 years. In 1925, he sold the property which was later developed as a residential area known as Oradell Manor.

Q: When was Genehurst built?
A: Genehurst, located at 38 Oliphant Ave., was built in 1894 as a private residence by Andrew C. Fields, an insurance executive. Currently, the building houses condominium units. One of the current owners purchased a Historic House Plaque. For more information on our plaque program please see our website, http://dobbsferryhistory.org/wordpress/ongoing-projects/plaque-program/

New Volunteers

Welcome Barbe and Ruth, the Society's newest volunteers. The women will both work on our archive collection. Barbe will be working on improving the metadata for our 250 maps. Ruth

Continued on page 8

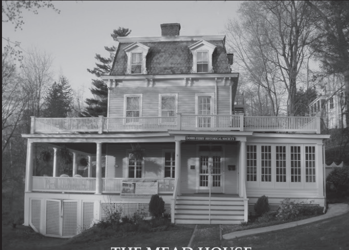
Comments From Readers

We welcome feedback from our readers. Here are two comments we received about the last issue.

On page 2 of the Summer issue of The Ferryman, in the article "The Ferry Shrinks, but Survives, in the Late 1800s," there is an error with regard to the number of people in the Dobbs family who bore the name Jeremiah. The first was the son of William ("The Ferryman") Dobbs. He was probably born in the 1730s or 40s. He married a woman named Elizabeth and they had a son named Jeremiah, born about 1781. (In her book "Profiles of Dobbs Ferry," Sister Mary Agnes Parrell said that Jeremiah was an error and his name was Abraham.) The third Jeremiah Dobbs was born in Dobbs Ferry in 1757 and was the son of Abraham Dobbs. He died on April 22, 1812, and is buried in Saint Paul's Church Cemetery, Mount Vernon, N.Y. All of this information comes from the Dobbs tree available in the Grenville Mackenzie manuscript, a copy of which is, I believe, in the Historical Society archives. The information on the third Jeremiah Dobbs has supplemental information from Find A Grave.
— *Alan Steinfeld*

The article "Yes, Dig They Must," in the Summer issue of the Ferryman, speaks of "natural gas," but that term refers only to the gas that comes out of the ground. Natural gas became widely available only in the mid-20th century. Before that, in the gas wave of the 19th century, it was "coal gas," a product of several chemical reactions of hot coal with steam (coal gas, Mond gas, synth gas). Every city had large gasworks that produced the gas. The coal gas contained a significant amount of carbon monoxide, so it was poisonous when not burned. Accidents where some light was switched on, but not burning, were fairly frequent, and caused many deaths by carbon monoxide poisoning. Suicide by intentionally breathing the gas was also frequent. In some novels of the 19th and early 20th century, a person commits suicide by switching on the oven (but not lighting it), and putting the head in the oven and breathing. With today's technology that makes no sense, for natural gas is mostly methane, which is only slightly poisonous but is explosive. The old coal gas was less explosive, but its carbon monoxide content made it seriously poisonous. The transition from coal gas to natural gas happened sometime in the 1950s and 60s — same pipes, usually the same appliances. But gas for lighting was on the way out, displaced by electricity, which was both cheaper and less dangerous. Gas for heating and cooking stays with us; indeed, today's natural gas has a higher energy density than the old coal gas had.
— *Peter Brass*

DOBBS FERRY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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

H. DeWitt Dobbs and His Hats

By Madeline Byrne and Alan Steinfeld

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society not only appreciates new additions to its collections but always welcomes any pertinent ephemera that come its way. So it came as a pleasant surprise when a resident recently donated a "Dobbs Park Avenue Hats" bandbox to the Society. Members of the Dobbs family have certainly branched out from the days of running the ferry from which our village gets its name. But a Dobbs in the hat business? This required some research. And as often happens with such work, a fascinating story unfolds.

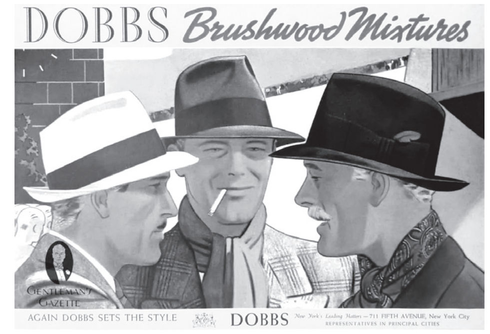
The manufacture and sale of hats had, for hundreds of years, been the domain of small manufacturers selling their wares locally. The Industrial Revolution changed that, and by the early 1800s, large hat factories grew in regional centers such as Orange, N.J., and Danbury, Conn. In 1858, two small hat manufacturers, Andrew Crofut and James Knapp, joined forces, becoming Crofut & Knapp (C&K). With Crofut's death, in 1893, the partnership ended, and a public corporation was founded by Knapp, his son, and other businessmen. The company became a manufacturing leader, notably in the production of men's soft felt and straw hats.

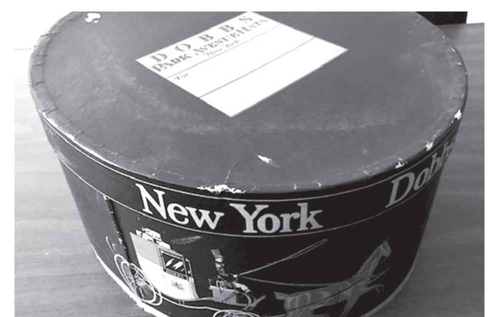
Until the early 1900s, hat manufacturers sold their wares to jobbers (wholesalers), who in turn sold them to retail establishments. Most hats were purchased in department stores, often when a man bought a new suit, or later in the new specialty hat stores, where a man might also buy umbrellas, gloves, and the like.

Jobbers could control the sale of goods and often pushed lower-quality products, something C&K opposed. It was against this backdrop that C&K decided to open its own line of stores. Thus, Dobbs & Co. was born. (Other factors led to this decision, but room does not allow us to consider them.) It is not clear why C&K did not use its own name for the stores.

Henry DeWitt Dobbs (1858-1926), a distant cousin of William "The Ferryman" Dobbs, was well known in the hat business. His uncle, Howell Dobbs, worked for the hat manufacturer Dunlap & Co., which is how Henry probably got into the business. Henry had been working for Dunlap as well, but was snatched up by C&K to run its Fifth Avenue outlet store, which was then renamed Dobbs & Co. (The hire of Henry may have also been influenced by the fact that his father, William H. Dobbs, was an influential leader in Tammany Hall, the Democratic political machine.)

Creating Dobbs & Co. was a marketing scheme for C&K. It gave the company a retail outlet without the political baggage a store with the Crofut & Knapp name would have brought. C&K had also had clashes with the United Hatters of North America and the jobbers it had sidestepped. Additionally, if Dobbs & Co. failed it would not hurt the parent company.





Dobbs & Co. advertised extensively, targeting not only high-end customers but also shops around the country that would carry both its C&K and the Dobbs Fifth Avenue lines of hats. The hatbox, now part of the Historical Society's collection, is part of this advertising campaign. Of note is that our box was for the Park Avenue location of Dobbs & Co, not the flagship Fifth Avenue store.

Bibliography:
Dobbs and Co., The Hatted Professor. https://www.thehattedprofessor.com/dobbsco.html
Assorted articles in the Society Archives

From the desk...

Continued from page 7

has taken on the clippings project (articles about Dobbs Ferry 'clipped' from newspapers) and will be putting them in chronological order.

We welcome anyone in the community who might have an hour or two to devote to helping with any of our collections.

A Special Thanks to:

General Foreman Steve Trezza, Sean Bucci and the rest of the DPW crew for the cleaning of the municipal parking lot that abuts the Historical Society's property.

Tom Bucci Excavating for preparing the yard for the planting of the Pollinator Garden by removing all the metal poles and the cement footings from an old fence.

The Village of Dobbs Ferry for funding our Ferryman newsletter that is mailed to the more than 4,000 households in our community. Please consider being a member of the Society to support our work.