



Highlighting Dobbs Ferry
and its history

The Ferryman

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Dobbs Ferry Celebrating 150 Years (1873-2023)

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Spring 2023

Looking Back at 1873

By Teresa Walsh

The 150th anniversary of the village's incorporation is a good time to see what the world of 1873 was like nationally, internationally and in a small village located on the Hudson River.

In 1873 Ulysses S. Grant had begun his second term as President of the United States. There were 37 states in the union. Queen Victoria reigned in England, Tsar Alexander II ruled Russia and Otto von Bismarck's power could be felt in Prussia.

It was the era of Reconstruction in the American South, the beginning of the Gilded Age and the early stages of a worldwide depression that would last until 1879.

The Comstock Act, which made it illegal to send obscene materials through the mail, was enacted and the country embraced the gold standard.

Women crusaded for temperance in upstate New York and Ohio, and attacks against Native Americans occurred with consistency in the West.

Levi Straus began manufacturing jeans in New Hampshire, Remington made

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Map of the village in the early 1870s.

Looking Back..

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typewriters in upstate New York and in Iowa, barb wire was mass produced. Postcards made their debut in the United States and Coors began brewing beer in the Colorado territory.

The James- Younger gang had pulled off the first successful American train robbery, one of many to come.

The infamous Ma Barker, renowned operatic tenor Enrico Caruso, and author Willa Cather entered the world, as philanthropist Johns Hopkins and philosopher John Stuart Mill exited it.

And in July, closer to home, a group of men gathered to decide by vote to incorporate their village. The meeting, which took place on July 5th in Lester and Odell's Feed Store located on the corner of present-day Chestnut and Main streets, resulted in a vote of 137-7 in favor of incorporation. The village would become the Incorporated Village of Greenburgh and would remain so until 1882 when the name officially was changed back to Dobbs Ferry. In August, James H. Pooley, a physician and trustee of the Greenburgh Bank, was elected the village's first president.

In the beginning

The village of 2,000 was a rural enclave made up primarily of farmers, small business owners and tradesmen. The Greenburgh Savings Bank's first book for depositors list of occupations from that year included teamsters, carpenters, clerks,



The railroad made commuting into the city for work a commodity. Note the closeness of the river to the station before the advent of landfill.

harness maker, real estate agent and sloop captain. Irish and German immigrants had settled in the village joining the descendants of the Dutch and British who already called it home. It was a place where everyone worked, socialized, and worshipped mainly within the village environs.

The Hudson was a major means of transportation and sloops moved both goods from local farms and residents alike. The ferry service begun by the Dobbs family had been sold in 1759 and the headquarters for the service was located across the river. And the steamship was making inroads.

In 1849 the railroad came to town and a depot was built on the tracks along the river. Well to do business men began to move in, building estates and commuting to the city for work. The average commuting time in 1873 was one hour and five minutes and some evening passengers boarded with candles so they could read.

At the time of incorporation there were no sewers, street lights, or paved roads. It would be a year before the first police constable, Lawrence W. Boyle, was hired, three more before the first Street Commissioner Owen Hanlon was hired at \$2 a day, and a decade before Resolute Hook and Ladder Co. was formed in 1883.

Main Street was called High Street. Oak, Walnut and Palisade streets were Church, Water and First streets respectively. Broadway was the Old Albany Post Road and Ashford Ave. was referred to simply as the road to Ashford (now Ardsley). Today's Maple Street was then Main Street.

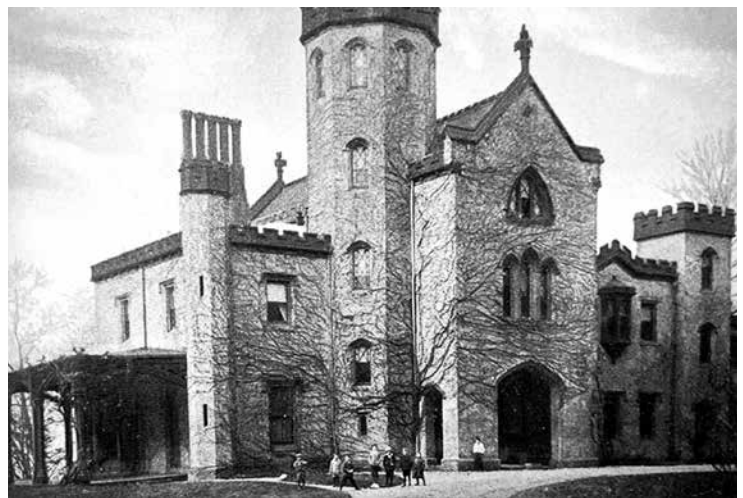
Life in the river village

Zion (1833) and South Presbyterian (1823) churches were located at their current locations. Summerfield Methodist Church (1855) was at 303 Broadway where the Chabad of the Rivertowns is located today. Sacred Heart was

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Levi Strauss ad



Ingleside was the home of New York City silk merchants Albert and Edward Bruton Strange who sold the property to St. Christophers School in 1890.



Hudson River Trip, the Day - Boat on the Hudson, 1873 Granger Collection.

Looking Back...

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located at the corner of Livingston Ave. and Water St. (present day Walnut St.) and would remain there until it moved to its current location on Broadway in 1895, constructed on land owned by John J. Storms, a descendent of a family who settled in the village in the 1700s.

A new school had been built on upper Main Street in 1857 to replace the little red schoolhouse (1829) that stood on the corner of King Street and Ashford Ave.

Bigen's Hudson River Brewing Company which opened in 1853 on the current day site of 145 Palisade Street (known as First St. then), employed many German immigrants who lived in boarding houses located on the same street. The Brewery had a park area that was a popular destination for both residents and out of towners.

Since the 1860s the Loan Brother Butchers on Main Street proved to be a successful business. Each week cows were brought from New York City and herded through the streets to a building where they were slaughtered.

A factory that produced revolving piano stools since 1851 was located along the river behind today's Village Green condominiums. George Smith, the inventor of the stools ran the factory that was located behind his home.

The village was also the home to 26 saloons, a source of consternation for some local religious leaders, making it a popular weekend destination for visitors who arrived by steamship.

Some original buildings located in the village during this period remain standing today.

The Keeper's House on the Old Croton Aqueduct on Walnut St. was built in 1857. The building was home to the overseers in charge of maintaining and patrolling a portion of the Aqueduct, and their families. Occupied until 1962, the structure is a National Historic Landmark and home to the Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. The Mead House, the home of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society at 12 Elm Street, was built in 1859. In 1873 the second owner, sloop Captain Abram O. Willsea, a third-generation village resident, and his family lived there. The Meads wouldn't arrive until 1917. Ingleside (1854-7) the Gothic Revival mansion designed by Alexander Jackson Davis, the designer of Lyndhurst, the Jay Gould home in Tarrytown, still stands on the property of what is today the St. Christopher's School on Broadway.

Today some village streets share their names with property owners that appear on the maps of this period including Cochran, Appleton, Walgrove, Oliphant (Olyphant) and Storms.

Throughout the village there are several streets named for David Ogden Bradley, an attorney and a village president including Ogden Place, Avenue and Park and Bradley Street as well as Ogden Engine Fire Co.

Life was good in the river village in 1873 and its commercial, social and religious activity would continue to thrive for the next 150 years. That vibrancy can still be felt today.

Sources

Life of a River Village, 1974; Morgan Press Profiles of Dobbs Ferry, Sr. Mary Agnes Parrell, 1976; Oceana Publications League of Women Voters, 1969, Dobbs Ferry The Internet

The Name Game...

By Madeline Byrne

On July 5, 1873, the men in Lester and Odell's feed store voted to incorporate the village. Because there had been controversy surrounding a name for the village the men reluctantly chose the name Greenburgh after the town in which it was located.

Originally known as Wysquaqua, it later became known as Dobbs Ferry for the man who ran the ferry.

Resident Peter van Brugh Livingston always called the village Livingston Landing and even went as far having maps made up with that name, but it never took hold.

In 1867 the discourse on the name spilled out into the newspapers when letters to the editor and editorial responses on the subject appeared in the New York Tribune.

Some writers thought that Dobbs Ferry lacked distinction as the village was named for a mere boatman. Others thought the name should be changed to Paulding in honor of one of the captors of British Revolutionary War spy Major John Andre (John Paulding).

According to one Tribune editorial, the name Dobbs' conjured up pleasant sensations while Paulding did not.

It took a clandestine train trip to Albany on the part of Village President Andrew C. Fields and federal judge and village resident Charles P. McClelland in 1882 to petition the state legislature to have the name changed back to Dobbs Ferry, a process that took all of 24 hours. Fortunately, the post office and railroad station had not changed the name as the Village Board of Trustees had requested.

From the Desk of the President

By Madeline Byrne

100 Years for Garden Club

The Garden Club of Dobbs Ferry is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year and the Historical Society is fortunate to be the repository of the Club's archives.

From the Club's earliest recorded, and most elegantly scripted, documentation in 1923 we learn the following:

Mrs. Hugh Baker invited ladies to her Bellair home on the afternoon of April eighteenth, 1923, to consider the possibility of organizing a Garden Club.

In attendance were:

Mrs. Baker, Mrs. Trueblood, Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Cornell, Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. Morgan, Mrs. Branson, Mrs. Locke, Mrs. Hall, Mrs. Morse, Mrs. Miner, Mrs. Porter, Mrs. Haynes, Mrs. Hazen, Mrs. Harper.

The Club's mission... Conservation, including bird, flower and forestry protection. Roadside planting, school gardens...

... The time of the meeting was considered, and Thursday was selected as the most convenient day for all.

Additional sleuthing found that Mrs. Baker's house was located on Bellair Drive. Mrs. Hazen, who held the second meeting, lived on Oliphant Avenue in one of the concrete houses there.

The Club, one of the first in New York state, was organized as a working gardening group to benefit its members through education and the community through beautification, conservation, and environmental initiatives.

In 1929 members supervised the planting of over 100 flowering Malus, or crabapple trees, some of which can still be seen on the Ardsley Country Club golf course and along the Saw Mill River Parkway. The planting was in honor of the Club's first president Mrs. Hugh



Members of the Garden Club pose with their greenhouse blooms.

Baker whose favorite tree was the Malus, and who died in 1928. Subsequently, the Malus became the Club's "flower."

Delving into more of the Club's records, we found that early on the group set up and maintained a Lord and Burnham greenhouse. A greenhouse logbook shows members were involved in propagating plants, the control of plant disease and experimenting with unusual plants. Every spring the members sold daisies and geraniums from cuttings grown in the greenhouse.

The Club has helped finance subsistence gardens during the Depression, provided fresh flowers to the Library, established a vest pocket garden at the intersection of Broadway and Livingston Avenue, decorated for high school graduations and contributed to landscaping at the hospital.

Additionally, the Club participated in the renowned International Flower Shows held at the Grand Central Palace in New York City. In 1994, it held its first annual flower sale in the Grand Union parking lot (Stop & Shop) which has since moved to the train station. Over the years It has actively supported legislation to preserve natural resources and to protect the environment.

Today the Garden Club of Dobbs Ferry continues the traditions started 100 years ago. The Club still meets on Thursdays, but now at the Mead house where it has



Poster from International Flower show.

been instrumental in helping with the landscape of the property there. The Club hosts lectures and takes field trips to other gardens and horticultural centers. The members have planted trees at Waterfront Park as part of the Freedom Trail program in remembrance of 9/11 and in honor of the Dobbs Ferry Ambulance Corps. During the Christmas holidays, Club members make wreaths for veterans at the Montrose VA Hospital and small, decorative boxes of homemade cookies are distributed to the Senior citizens in the Rivertowns. The Club also donates horticultural books to the Rivertown libraries each year.

For 200 years South Presbyterian Church, often affectionately referred to as South Church, has been an integral part of our community. Always a spiritual and moral compass, it has long been committed to social justice.

South Presbyterian Church Celebrates Bicentennial

By Jacque Jennet

In 1820 Dobbs Ferry consisted of a small number of farmhouses on one of two main roads: The Albany Post Road (now Broadway) and Ashford Avenue, the original path used by Native Americans leading east from the Hudson River. The most conspicuous landmark was the mansion of Peter van Brugh Livingston at the southern end of town. There were no churches in Dobbs Ferry, so for several years a small group of inhabitants met in the barn belonging to Livingston, led by a travelling preacher who was either Presbyterian or Methodist. In 1823, this little congregation wishing to register its permanence, incorporated as the South Presbyterian Church in Greenburgh to distinguish itself from the North Presbyterian Church in Halls Corners.

In August 1823, six members of this group bought a one-acre triangular piece of land next to the free burial ground on the corner of Storm Street and Ashford Road. They paid Martin Lefurgy and “Rebecca his Wife” thirty-five dollars for the lot. With that commitment, the first house of worship was erected in Dobbs Ferry. The building of the little church was done mostly by personal labor. Made from timbers hewn out of trees cut in the swampland by the Saw Mill River, with a roof and walls covered in hand-split shingles and painted white in the manner of New England churches, the church became known as the Little White Church Cemetery. Although the building no longer stands, the Little White Cemetery remains. The Lutheran Church now occupies that property beside the cemetery.



Looking across Broadway at South Church flanked by Wilde House to its left and the Manse on its right, before the addition of the connecting corridor.

For two years, the church was Presbyterian in name only, but in 1825 the church was received by the Presbytery of New York and was officially organized in April of that year. In 1831 a disagreement shook the church when van Brugh Livingston, who militantly opposed liquor, convinced some of the congregation to pass a resolution that anyone wishing to join the church must sign a pledge of total abstinence from distilled spirits. A difference of opinion developed over this issue, which was censured by the Presbytery, and eventually led to Livingston’s resignation as elder.

For nearly 40 years, the Little White Church served the needs of the congregation, which now had about 140 members. As Dobbs Ferry began to grow, a plan for a new building closer to the center of the village was proposed in 1864. James Wilde, Jr., a member of the congregation, negotiated the purchase of land on Broadway, and acquired the adjoining piece of property to the west for his own use. Plans for the church were drawn up by Julius Munckowitz, who later became Supervising Architect of the New York City Department of Public Parks. Building of this new church on the hill became a matter of tremendous



Old White Church (1823) occupied land where the Lutheran Church stands today on Ashford Ave. The Church was last used by the congregation in 1869.

local importance. The granite was cut at the quarry said to be on Ashford Avenue, belonging to congregation member George Schmidt. Calder and Banta of Irvington did the carpentry and James Gaisford, the masonry. Workmen from Dobbs Ferry and

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EDITOR

Teresa Walsh

FERRYMAN CONTRIBUTORS

Seamus Breathnach

Madeline Byrne

Lexy Higgins

Jacque Jennet

Emily Wood

South Presbyterian Church...

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all the surrounding villages were called to the job. Church members helped by contributing either money or their labor to the effort. The new church had all the modern conveniences of the day, including gaslights. The cornerstone for the new building was laid on June 8, 1868, in the presence of a large crowd including Rev. Thornton M. Niven, the new pastor. On the last Sunday of 1869 the present building was dedicated, and the congregation left the old white church never to return. Construction on the Manse to the east of the church, was started in 1869. When it was finished the following year, Rev. Niven and his wife moved in.

Playwright Thornton Wilder, the grandson of Niven often rode his tricycle around the Manse and church walkways when visiting there. Wilder's, mom, the Niven's daughter grew up in the village.

In 1871, a young Teddy Roosevelt and his family spent the summer in the village. They attended services at South Church where a plaque marks the pew where they worshipped on Sundays.

During the 1870's James Wilde, Jr. built himself a retirement home on the corner of Broadway and Oak Street next to the church. Upon its completion, he decided not to occupy it, but instead turned it over to the Misses Masters who had come to Dobbs Ferry to open a school. In 1916 the church acquired Wilde House, which now houses Days of Wonder Child Care / Community Nursery School.

In 1916 when John M. Trout was minister, electric fixtures replaced the gaslights, and new stained glass memorial windows were put in place. The windows were designed and made by J. Gordon Guthrie, a member of the church who for several years worked for Louis Comfort Tiffany. Mr. Guthrie used members of the congregation Emma Losee, Jean Judson and Ethel Wilde as models for the rose window.

In 1928, the original hand-pumped organ started wheezing. A committee headed by Sarah Masters and the organist, Frederick Carter, established a fundraising goal of \$10,000 for a new organ. In the first month, they raised \$16,000. With this money, the



Rev. Thornton M. Niven, the grandfather of playwright Thornton Wilder, with Sunday school class outside the Manse early 1890s.

balcony was rebuilt, and our beloved organ was installed. Originally built in 1898 and formerly installed in the Central Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, it is the organ which today contributes to the vitality of worship services here at South Church. The church bell is dated 1876, made by a major bell founder in this country, Maneely & Kimberly of Troy, New York.

Construction of the church building has been an on-going project. Stained glass windows were added in the nave and vestibule, as memorials to members of the congregation in 1964. They were designed by J.M. Baransky in Yonkers.

In 2000, South Presbyterian Church was listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, as an example of a well-preserved urban Gothic Revival church.

From the very beginning when a small group of people decided to begin this church, they never sidestepped controversy, hard work or social justice. From van Brugh Livingston's stance on no liquor (though medicinal use was accepted), to providing money to help Civil War reconstruction in the South and for the newly "freedmen," and today's homelessness, fair housing and commitment to sexual justice, our historical roots continue to guide us.



An early winter scene of Dobbs Ferry with South Church on the hill.

Lost Video Brings to Life the Meads and Their Home

By Seamus Breathnach

Did you ever pass by that charming yellow abode at 12 Elm Street, often referred to as the Mead House, and wonder what life was like inside there before the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society moved in? Well, you are probably not alone. Now, thanks to an unexpected discovery, one can get a glimpse of the house and of its namesake just prior to its occupation by the Society.

Village resident Steve Brosnahan discovered the DVD *Clara Mead - A Life in Dobbs Ferry* while “rooting through old DVDs of videos produced by Rusty Russell.” Brosnahan, who had collaborated with Russell, a writer, director and producer of numerous multimedia projects, for over a period of 15 years, shared a digitalized version of the video.

Clara Mead passed away in 1992. In her will, she left her family home to the Historical Society. Shortly after the acquisition, the Society’s video committee members, Bill Blanck, Barbara Pearce, and Russell, worked on a project to document the life of Clara and her home.

Originally from North Carolina, Rufus “Rusty” Russell was, according to his 1996 obituary in the Greensboro, NC News and Record, “prominent as a writer/designer/director of entertainment, museum and corporate productions in a wide range of media, Mr. Russell pioneered the development of the multi-image, sound-surround show in the 1960s.” He worked for many years out of his studio at his home on Broadway in Dobbs Ferry, writing and producing projects, both nationally and internationally, for municipalities, historical sites, and museums.

Brosnahan stated that Russell’s interest in history, combined with his appreciation of antiques, family heirlooms and curious objects that tell a story, are what led him, in what Brosnahan said was a “rare moment when his schedule was not overbooked,” to create the Mead video. Brosnahan went on to say that Russell’s appreciation of the finer things came from his exposure to his grandmother’s Victorian house in North Carolina and its contents.

While the quality of the video may seem dated, the production is extremely professional,

taking the viewer on a guided tour, aided by photographs, through Clara’s life, and the house as it was before the Historical Society took up residence there. Russell was even able to talk the renowned George Page, an award-winning PBS television host and voice actor, to be the narrator of the film.

In the 18-minute film, Russell uses his signature video techniques, with multiple pan and zoom shots interspaced with still photos, to personalize the tour. Soothing classical music and the lilt of Page’s voice make the viewer feel like an invited guest being graciously shown through a beloved home by a proud owner.

When completed, the video was shown in the Public Program category at the Lower Hudson Conference Historical Agencies and Museums, where it received an Honorable Mention award.

Located in Elmsford NY, the conference promotes research and public education through its museum collection.



Clara relaxing in her yard.

So, it is with thanks to the generosity of Clara Mead, the passion and talent of Rusty Russell, and the much-appreciated sharing by Steve Brosnahan, that everyone can now see what life was like when the house at 12 Elm St. was Clara’s home.

Just enter the link below and sit back and enjoy.
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LvXAB8tR-TliKyUrKOJwxFKRSUru1Uxl/view>



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We are currently seeking volunteers to:

- Review and accession new gifts
- Scan and tag new photographs
- Enhance the walking tour offered on our website
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- Become part of the weekend greeting team at the Mead House

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Ogden Engine Company Reaches Milestone – 125 Years of Service

Founded on March 30, 1898, to expand fire service coverage in the growing village, it was originally known as Ogden Hose Company #3. The Company named for David Ogden Bradley who owned most of the property in the area, is located at 201 Ashford Ave. The first piece of equipment the company owned was a hose jumper (in photo) made by the Combined Ladder Company of Providence, Rhode Island, that members refurbished and then pulled in the 1973 Village Centennial parade

(also Ogden's 75th anniversary).

The jumper along with photographs, and other Fire Department paraphernalia can be viewed at the Museum of Firefighting located on the second floor of Ashford Avenue firehouse.

For more Ogden Engine Co. history go to the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society's website: www.dobbsferryhistory.org, The Ferryman, issues September 2006 (Part 1) and Spring 2007 (Part 2)



Masters School students use archives for new course work

In late January, eight Masters School students accompanied by two of their teachers spent time in the archives at the Historical Society. History teacher Lexy Higgins, and Richard Simon who teaches foreign language, brought the students to the Society as part of the school's newly-launched WinterMission program.

WinterMission is a four-day schoolwide program, that allows students to take a break from regular classes and engage in immersive learning.

For two days the visitors used the archives to research local indigenous people and to learn what role the village played in the Underground Railroad.

Both teachers are eager for more opportunities that will allow Masters' students to use the Society in the future. "The Society is an important resource that is just steps away from the Masters campus," said Higgins.

Dobbs Ferry Historical Society
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