





*Highlighting Dobbs Ferry
and its history*

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Dobbs Ferry Celebrating 150 Years (1873-2023)

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Women in 1873 dress on parade.

Remembering the Centennial - 50 Years Later

It has been a half a century since Dobbs Ferry celebrated the Centennial of its incorporation as a village.

As we celebrate our 150th anniversary it seems like a good time to look back on 1973 and see how the village acknowledged this benchmark.

And what better way to return to that special time than by the reminiscences of those who were there.

Two such recollections appear in this issue of The Ferryman: one by longtime Historical Society Trustee Robin Costello and the other by author Christine Potter.

Mummers, and Twirlers and Floats...

By Robin Costello

The year was 1973. Richard Nixon was president and the Vietnam War ended. You could buy a gallon of gas for 40 cents, a first-class stamp was 8 cents, a gallon of milk was \$1.40 and eggs cost 45 cents a dozen. The average cost of a home was \$32,500 and you could buy a car for \$3,200 - all of which could be covered by the average family income which was \$12,000 a year.

The popular TV shows were All in the Family, The Waltons,

Sanford & Son, Mash and Hawaii 5-0. Secretariat won the Triple Crown of horse racing. Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs competed in the "Battle of the Sexes" tennis exhibition match. We all "Tied a yellow ribbon 'round the Ole Oak Tree" boogied to "Crocodile Rock" and were made "an offer we couldn't refuse" by the Godfather.

As a child growing up in this village in that era, our whole world was the path between our house, our

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Mummers, and Twirlers..

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church, the park and school. That world was filled with Little League, hopscotch, and the Boy and Girl Scouts. (Our beloved Pop Warner Football would not be established until 1974). We had only seven TV channels to choose from. The internet would not be invented for another decade - the only screen we stared into was our Etch-a-Sketch!

The prospect of a year-long celebration to commemorate the village Centennial - filled with activities for all ages - was warmly welcomed by the whole community. Under the auspices of Mayor John Nanna, a "Centennial Committee" of more than 50 people was set up a few years before, led by Jess Pearce and Patrick Ricci. There was so much planning to do! The community calendar boasted more than 20 events that year and there was something for everyone.

A copy of the original village Charter was drawn up on a large scroll of parchment paper. School children and citizens were able to sign their name on the scroll - which was eventually sent to the state archives in Albany.

In June, they organized a "Father's Day Picnic in the Park" to celebrate the town's Founding Fathers and the dads of Dobbs Ferry. Held at Waterfront Park, they served fried chicken (for \$1) 15 cent beers on tap and slices of apple pie for a nickel.

That year the Kiwanis Club held an Easter Egg hunt at Gould Park for the children - complete with a "best costume with an 1873 motif." There was a "Centennial Tea and Open house" sponsored by the Women's Club, a Centennial dance and buffet held at the Embassy Club. The fire department and the American Legion held their conventions, parades and dances. Residents also enjoyed a book fair at the library and a village -wide track meet.

A Memorabilia Committee curated an exhibit of historically significant pieces that were held in private collections. People loaned their treasures for a special three-day exhibit in Town Hall. Some pieces were so valuable the exhibit was guarded by the police!



Pipers and girl scouts march by local dignitaries on reviewing stand in front of village hall.

School children held a mock Revolutionary War skirmish at Springhurst followed by the dedication of the real Revolutionary War monument in a pocket park at Broadway & Livingston.

A highlight for the boys in town was the "Soap Box Derby" which raced down the length of Main Street.

At the end of May, a village wide religious observance was held at the Waterfront Park for all faiths.

A replica of Dobbs' ferry, called the "Tappan Packet" was constructed by volunteers. This boat was actually floated in the river in a demonstration - complete with costumed re-enactors.

Special musical events that year featured the American Wind Symphony Orchestra - a 45-piece band that played on a barge at Waterfront Park and a visit from famed folk singer and activist Pete Seeger.



Mummers on Main Street

There also was a charming "Italian Fiesta" with Italian folk dancing, singing and food held on a single block of Main Street between Oak & Elm. I know that some of us here today would give a king's ransom for some of the sausage & peppers, and "pizza frittes" served by the Sons and Daughters of Italy back then.

All the events culminated in a Centennial celebration parade which took place on the weekend of the 4th of July. The parade

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Sailing, Singing, and Sunburn: Tales from an Ex-Hippie

By Christine Potter

I grew up in Dobbs Ferry, the elder daughter of Bill Blanck, past President of the Dobbs Ferry Historical Society. I was almost 21 in 1973, old enough to report on the voyage of the Tappan Packet, Dobbs' original ferry, reimaged and rebuilt to celebrate one hundred years of the village's incorporation. The Tappan Packet was a half-sized reproduction, built with great love by local carpenters who did a very thorough job.

My old pal Larry Ricci (who'd studied engineering at Rensselaer) had designed the boat and was captain. After just one trial run up and downriver—not across—we were ready for showtime. On the day of the Centennial picnic, The Tappan Packet's crew suited up in tricornered hats and knee pants and attempted to sail and row the thing across the Hudson, with villagers gathered on shore making bets on how long it would take.

I'm pretty sure nobody won: the boat's crew was a dog, me, Larry, and some very young boy scouts—plus Barbara Pearce, a local elementary school teacher and Ambulance Corps member. There was an in-costume George and Martha Washington, played by local residents, but my dad doubted the historical accuracy of that touch.

So of course, we got caught in a powerful outgoing tide we hadn't expected. A motorboat picked us up somewhere around Yonkers and dragged us back to Dobbs.

It was probably the worst sunburn I ever got in my life. I was supposed to meet my friends from college, who thought the village was “very cool,” for dinner in the



The Tappan Packet

city. We were all pretty big hippies then. Somehow, I think we wound up listening to music my dad said reminded him of being anesthetized with ether before an operation in my attic bedroom. He wrote in *Life of a River Village* that psychedelic music and long hair were well on their way out of fashion in 1973. They weren't.

That first Fiesta? That was our San Gennaro. You wanted the zeppole, and you wanted the sausage and peppers.

I played five-string tenor banjo as part of the Fiesta's entertainment with Larry Ricci's mom. The stage was in front of Town Hall. Helen Ricci was classically trained in opera but had reinvented herself as a country singer specializing in tunes by Bill Monroe and Hank Williams. She called herself Aunt Effie. Larry's kid brother Jim and I were an item for a while, so I played in their family band. I remember the dress I wore for Aunt Effie and Her Young'uns shows: long, vaguely Victorian. Effie's costume was usually full-metal parasol and petticoats, with a Minnie-Pearl-style straw hat.

Mummers, and Twirlers..

Continued from page 2

featured representatives from every club in town. Firemen, policemen, veterans, army troops, marching bands, pipers, twirlers, little leaguers, boy and girl scouts, antique cars, beauty queens, costumed ladies wearing fashions from the 1870s and even a dog pulling a miniature fire engine - all proudly paraded through the center of town.

As a little girl – the most memorable sight was the “Mummers” a marching band out of Long Island which wore these huge elaborate headpieces and costumes. We had never seen such pomp and pageantry in our little village – and the memories of it are still so sweet and clear in our minds. It was a gentler, innocent time – and a beautiful celebration of life.

If there's one thing I have learned from my work at the Historical Society it's this: The

I also remember a group of older Italian gentlemen putting out some fine traditional music on mandolins.

My father worked hard on the *Life of A River Village* book. I believe he took all the 1973 photos in it, which means he processed them in our home darkroom, too. He did layout, wrote, and researched also.

There was merch! As I write these words, I'm looking across my office to the window with the blue glass souvenir Dobbs Ferry Centennial bottle catching the light. And of course, there were glass beer mugs. I finally wore the paint off mine, but for a long time it was my favorite iced-coffee container, permanently next to my computer. It had lived in my parents' house for decades barely used—until I found it again and grabbed it. It fit in your hand just right, the way a favorite mug should.

I think my father's proudest moment was finally getting the history corrected on the Washington's Headquarters monument at the site of the 18th century Hyatt-Livingston House. That was decades after the Centennial, but Dad got his picture in *The New York Times*, and was referred to as Mr. Blanck, the historian. The title was fitting. He had a passion for local history, especially the Revolutionary war.

Almost exactly one year after the first Fiesta, that lovely old Hyatt-Livingston House burned - another Dobbs Ferry story, more history. The village is full of it, and it's worth remembering. Dobbs Ferry is, as my hippie friends said, a “very cool place”. Here's to another hundred and fifty years!

history of our village is not one story – it's a million stories of all the hardworking, brave and wonderful people that have called it home. Like an exquisite mosaic - each story tile alone is interesting but when viewed together as part of a larger whole - is so breathtakingly beautiful.

**The author presented this speech as part of this year's Sesquicentennial celebration at Waterfront Park on July 4.*

From the Desk of the President

By Madeline Byrne

At one of the Society's May Café Sunday music mornings this spring a guest presented us with a deck of playing cards bearing the Blasberg Motors logo. This welcomed gift presented a new subject to explore and yielded much to share about the auto dealership that was in business for more than 60 years.

Blasberg Motors was founded in 1926 by William Blasberg and was originally located at 27 Cedar Street. The business would move to 40 Cedar St. in 1938 and to the corner of Broadway and Estherwood Avenue in 1952 where it remained until it was sold in 1990 to Scott Chevrolet.

William was the son of Jacques who was born in Paris, France in 1871, and emigrated to the United States in 1888 and then to Dobbs Ferry in 1905. Jacques and his wife Rebecca had two other sons, Arthur and Theodore, and a daughter Jules. The family lived at 31 Rochambeau Ave.

Jacques owned a liquor store and then a realty business both located on Cedar St. Prior to owning the car dealership, William opened a candy store on Cedar St.

During WWII the dealership was shuttered for four years while William was in the service.

William retired from Blasberg's in 1954, after turning the business over to his son, William, Jr. who would be president of the company for more than 40 years.

Happenings in the Archives

Thank you to all our volunteers:

Jen Kupershlak, who clips articles from the Rivertowns Enterprise, makes copies and files them. Evelyn DiGuglielmo who is reading all the Italian oral history interviews and compiling the information. Our Society Trustee, Dean Leggiero, who is scanning, saving and tagging our photos and to Barbe Crowley who works on our Garden Club papers.



Officer poses in front of new police car purchased from Blasberg Motors on Cedar St.



Blasberg Motors at corner of Broadway and Estherwood Ave. Note the police stand in left of photo and sloping lawn, on right where Stop and Shop is today.



Playing cards celebrating Blasberg Motors at 60.

As always, if anyone is interested in volunteering on Fridays when our archives are open we would love to have you. Contact us at dfhistory.org, 674-1007, or just drop by.

Big shout out to Marie and Arch McKellar for their generous gift to the Society. It was both needed and appreciated.



Jacques' J Blasberg and Son Realty and other businesses on Cedar St. on right.

Edwin Gould: Village Benefactor, Champion of Many...

By Seamus Breathnach

For nearly 100 years, residents and friends of Dobbs Ferry have enjoyed outdoor recreational activities at Gould Park. Located on Ashford Avenue, this two-level, six- and one-half acre tract of land has provided numerous hours of enjoyment, from baseball and football games, summer camps, softball and basketball leagues, summertime outdoor family movies and just regular impromptu playing. At one time there were tennis courts, which during the winter doubled as an ice-skating rink. Over the years a pool in various shapes and sizes have been located there as well.

I wonder how many people ever stop and think how the park got its name. Who was its namesake?

Edwin Gould, the man responsible for the park, lived in the village for several decades. Born on February 26, 1866, Gould was one of five children of the railroad tycoon and notorious robber baron Jay Gould, who owned Lyndhurst in Tarrytown. Raised in the family mansion in Manhattan, Gould attended Columbia University.

After school, Gould proved himself a successful businessman on Wall Street, and was hired by his father to run one of his railroads, eventually becoming vice president of the St. Louis Southwestern. Unlike his siblings, who married actresses and European nobles, Gould shied away from the limelight and modestly amassed a fortune with several successful business ventures, including one small business, Continental Matches which he acquired in 1894. He merged this company with the Diamond Match Company in 1899, and today, it remains the largest producers of matches in America. Also, unlike his siblings, Edwin was generous with his good fortune, and he gave away millions to worthy causes.

A tireless benefactor for the village, and surrounding communities, Gould was often seen strolling through the streets of downtown Dobbs Ferry, giving away books to children that he met. Gould donated the funds to construct a cottage on the grounds of St. Christopher's School.

His most enduring donation to the village,



Gould at Leake and Watts

however, was for the construction of Gould Park. The property was owned by the Ardsley Estates Co. and leased to the Ardsley Country Club, of which Gould was a former member. In 1924, Gould provided \$20,000 for the purchase of the property and \$10,000 for construction costs.

This endeavor was not met with complete enthusiasm by some residents. In 1929, the Ardsley Estates, which included several homes, and the Ardsley Country Club sued the village for reportedly dumping refuse on the grounds of the park and hosting raucous semi-pro baseball games on the weekends. The village countered with a request for an injunction to prevent golfers from using the several village streets one needed to cross to complete a round. Litigation went on until 1931 when both sides settled. The village had to install fencing around the park and parking on Washington Ave. was restricted. The village also agreed to not dump refuse at the park, and golfers are still seen crossing several village streets.

Gould's time in Dobbs Ferry began years before his donations to the park. In 1892, he married Sarah Cantine Shradly, stepdaughter of the prominent Manhattan physician Dr. George Shradly and his wife Hester, whose summer residence Upaway, was located on what is now the Juhring Estate Woodland Preserve. It burned in 1931 and was demolished in 1941.

The Goulds were the parents of two sons, Edwin Jr., and Frank. Tragically, their elder



Edwin Gould

son Edwin Jr. died in a hunting accident on Jekyll Island, Georgia, in 1917 when he was only 21 years old. Gould was a member of the Jekyll Island "Millionaires Club", a collection of successful northern businessmen, bankers, and politicians who had winter vacation homes on the barrier island off the coast of Georgia.

In 1902, Gould bought 88 acres on what is now Mercy College. He renovated the existing house turning it into a forty-room mansion built in the style of Spanish architecture with a large patio out front. He called his home Agawam. The property contained 13 additional outbuildings. The bluestone gate house and entrance were located on Broadway where the Alcott Pre-School stands. A dock and a boathouse

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Fond Memories Drive This Family Narrative

By Annie Zaranski Brown

My mother Marie was born in Dobbs Ferry Hospital. She recently recounted her family history to me.

Her great-grandfather Johann Ochs and his family emigrated from what is today Germany to America in the mid-1800s. Their last name was Ochs, which is the German word for ox, but on the immigration papers it was incorrectly spelled Oths. That is the way it would remain.

My mother's grandfather, Joseph Anthony, was born around 1869, one of eight children. He married Marie Heller in New Haven and had three sons, her father, Joseph William (b. 1904), and her uncles Edward (b. 1911) and Paul (b. 1913).

The family moved to Dobbs Ferry in 1913 where they rented a house on English Lane before purchasing a three-story home at 15 Ogden Place.

That house had a bar and a piano in the basement which was likely a speakeasy during the Depression.

Her grandfather was a horse-drawn carriage painter, and the large two-story barn behind the house was his workshop. As carriages went out of fashion, he started painting automobiles.

Her grandparents were parishioners of Sacred Heart Church. Her grandfather was a volunteer firefighter at Ogden Engine Company and also served as a village trustee.

Since he had a good singing voice, mom's grandfather became involved in the Washington Theater on Main Street (today's Steve Tilly, Architect) and would assist in putting on shows there. He and his friends would often rehearse in the basement of Ogden Place. He learned how to play the ukulele and he and his brothers would participate in vaudeville-type shows.

My grandfather joined Ogden Engine as had mom's grandfather and would go on to become chief of the department. My



The Oths family at 15 Ogden Place.



Uncle Ed, left, and Marie's dad at Oths' Place

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Fond Memories...

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mother remembers him telling stories about how the three fire companies would race to see who got to the call first, and if the Hook and Ladder truck was ahead of Ogden on the way to an alarm, the rear driver would steer the back of the truck to block the road making it impossible to pass. During Prohibition, her father and his friends buried full bottles of homemade liquor in the dirt floor in the basement of the firehouse that could be dug up as “needed”.

In 1930, my mother’s grandmother passed away. Her father and his bride Martha Walker, from White Plains, moved into Ogden Place. Her father had become a plumber and worked in the village. My mom was born in Dobbs Ferry Hospital in 1932. Her family moved to Valhalla when she was two and then to White Plains when she was nine, where her father would open his plumbing business.

My mom and her family would visit her grandfather every Sunday. She and her five siblings would play in the basement, in the barn and on the carriages. She especially remembers one enclosed carriage that had plush velvet seats with windows shades that could be pulled down for privacy. There was a gramophone with a horn-shaped speaker in the barn and they used to play old records on it. Sometimes, she and her siblings would get a special treat, homemade ice cream from Bartel’s on Main Street.

My great grandfather died in 1941 when my mom was nine years old. After that, her family didn’t make too many trips to Dobbs



Marie & Hank

until she was older. Uncle Paul married and moved to Hastings and Uncle Ed, a postman in the village, remained at Ogden Place which he converted into a three-family house. Ed married Mildred Munroe from Hastings and they lived on Ogden Place until around 1957 when it was sold.

In the 1950s Ed and Mildred opened Oths’ Place, a bar/restaurant that was the former Chestnut Grove (today The Cookery) located on Chestnut Street. My grandfather would often bartend there, and my mom would waitress for special events. It was through her father that my mom met her future husband, my dad, Hank Zaranski, who had moved to the village from Buffalo to work at Children’s Village. My dad would become the Dobbs Ferry recreation director and go onto coach at the high school where he would later work in the physical education department.

My grandfather convinced Hank to buy a couple of tickets to a Knights of Columbus dance and he suggested that he invite my mom....

My parents married in 1957 and they moved to Dobbs Ferry into an apartment on Maple Street where they lived for a year. As our family grew, they would move several more times, from Maple Street to Hudson Terrace and then Broadway next to the then Summerfield Methodist Church (Rivertowns Chabad).

In 1964, my parents bought a house at 21 Ogden Place that was right next door to her grandparent’s old home.

My parents would raise their six children there. My mother often worked to supplement the family income by doing childcare in our home. When I went to college my mother worked for two years as a secretary at the village court and later, she would do eldercare.

My mother met her soon- to- be best friend Pat Piacentino while they were both pushing strollers on the way to the park. Between the two of them they had 11 children and as we all became older, they would take us on day trips during the summer, to places like the New York Botanical Gardens and Palisade Park. My mother belonged to the Sacred Heart Choir and was an active member of the Dobbs Ferry Volunteer Ambulance Corps. Always an avid sewer and knitter, she continues to do both today.

My parents were married for 42 years, my dad died in 2000.

Today my mom lives in North Carolina where she just returned from attending my son Matt’s wedding in California. She is the proud grandmother of 12 grandchildren and two-great grandchildren. And she often thinks about Dobbs Ferry.

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Teresa Walsh

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Zaranski, Blanck and Blasberg family archives



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Edwin Gould: Village...

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were constructed on the Hudson River near the railroad line.

The dock figured prominently in a piece of Dobbs Ferry history when on April 5, 1907, the steamboat City of Troy, bound for Saratoga Springs with 90 passengers and 13 racehorses onboard caught fire in mid-river. The captain steered the doomed vessel towards Gould's dock. The passengers were rescued, but the ship and the dock were destroyed by the fire and the horses perished.

Inspired by his mother-in-law's volunteer work, Gould and his wife Sarah dedicated much of their time and resources to those less fortunate than themselves. They contributed money, food, and clothing to numerous charitable organizations.

In 1926, through a special act of the New York Legislature, Gould established the Edwin Gould Foundation for Children. He wished to ensure that his charitable works would continue after his death. One of the organizations that benefited from the Foundation was Leake and Watts, a charity that provided food and shelter for orphans. Began in New York City, Leake and Watts purchased a thirty-three-acre tract of land in Yonkers and started the cottage system of housing for orphans. Gould donated the funds to construct the cottages, one of which was named for him, and another for his mother-in-law. Gould also donated the money to build a swimming pool. He was often seen visiting the facility during the summer, providing circus tickets, ice cream, and other gifts to the staff and children. Now known as Rising Ground, in 2018 the group assumed all administrative responsibility for the Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families.

In 1927, Gould moved to in Oyster Bay, on Long Island. He died there on July 15, 1933, but his legacy lives on. Today, his numerous



Remains of the steamboat City of Troy



Gould Park today

charities continue to help children and others in need.

His enduring local gift, which was recently renovated and upgraded, continues to bring joy to many. So, the next time you take a dip, watch a game, slide down a snow-covered hill on a tube, or simply enjoy some fresh air, remember, it was the generosity

of Edwin Gould, who decided to share his wealth and good fortune with others, that you can thank.

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