



*Highlighting Dobbs Ferry  
and its history*

# The Ferryman

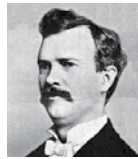
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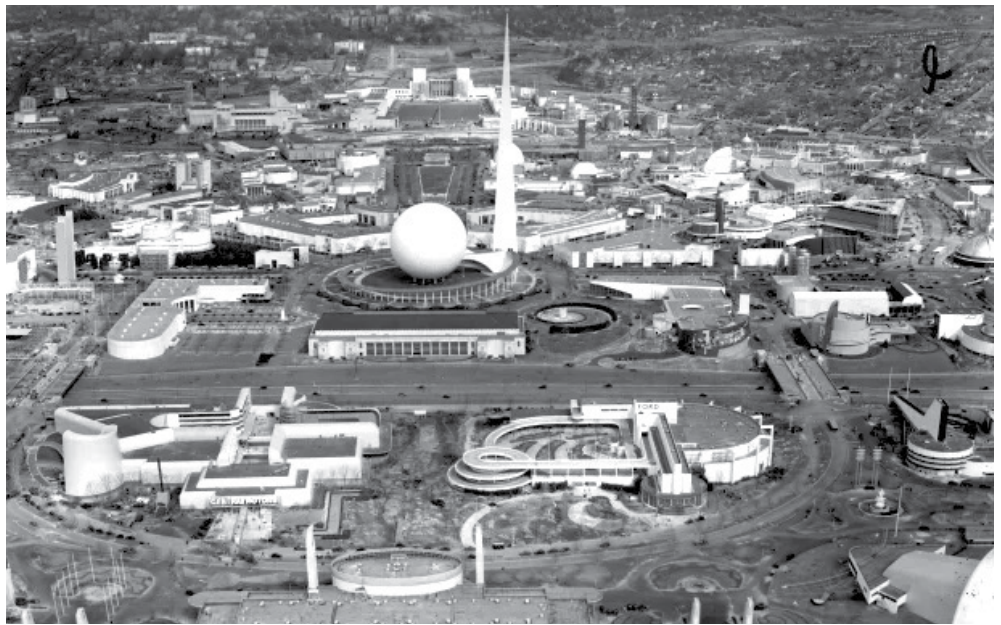
## Locals have ties to '39 World's Fair

*Contribute archives,  
innovation, art*

By Seamus Breathnach

In 1935, the world was in the throes of the Great Depression and economic relief was on everyone's mind. In New York City, a group of business and civic leaders decided to create an international exposition to help pull the city out of its financial straits. The group would become the New York World's Fair Corporation, and by 1939, under the leadership of its president, Grover Whalen, would launch the New York World's Fair. By the fair's end in October 1940, five individuals with connections to Dobbs Ferry, Whalen, Vera Andrus, Mesmore Kendall, Louis Levy, and Patricia Murray McIlvain would contribute to it.

The fair opened in Flushing Queens on April 30, a date selected to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the Inauguration of George Washington as the country's first president in 1789



1939 World's Fair at a glance.

in New York City. President Franklin Roosevelt's opening remarks were broadcast live on TV, the first ever by a United States commander in chief. Promoted as the "World of Tomorrow," the fair was dedicated to the future and showcased science and cutting-edge technology. It hosted exhibits by 60 countries, 33 US states and territories, the

League of Nations, federal agencies, and New York City. The outbreak of World War II, four months after the opening, would lead to the closing of exhibits from the Axis countries. And the fair looked like nothing else before it with the distinctive, futuristic appearance of many of its pavilions. New consumer products

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General Motors Pavilion



Grover Whalen (left) receives contribution

### Locals have ties...

*Continued from page 2*

such air conditioning, television, nylon stockings and color film were introduced to the public.

Divided into different zones, each sector of the expo presented a different perspective. The Communications and Business Systems Zone displayed the latest technology. The Government Zone housed the pavilions of the represented countries and the Transportation Zone had exhibits from General Motors and Ford. The Food Zone contained an exhibit from Bordon's featuring "Elsie" the Cow and the Amusement Zone included the latest rides and attractions.

Large sculptures, including a 65-foot statue of George Washington, and Work Projects Administration murals were spread throughout the fairgrounds.

One of the most popular locations was the RCA building, which introduced television to the American public.

### The Designer

Grover Whalen, the fair's creator, was born to Irish immigrant parents on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1886. An outgoing character, Whalen interspersed

bureaucratic positions in the city with a successful career as the general manager of Wannamaker's Department store.

In 1928 Whalen was appointed Police Commissioner by Mayor Jimmy Walker. In an era of strong enforcement of Prohibition laws, Whalen said "There is plenty of law at the end of a nightstick." His tenure ended after a disastrous confrontation at an International Unemployment Day rally in 1930, in which the police used excessive force against demonstrators. In 1935, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia appointed Whalen the "Official Greeter" of New York City. He is credited with creating the tickertape parade.

For several summers in the 1930s, Whalen rented the Castle on what is today Beacon Hill in Dobbs Ferry, from Louis and Irma Levy. The Castle, once known as Stone Cliff and part of the original Stone Estate still stands. The property was sold in 1889 to Walston Brown and his wife suffragist Eva who was the daughter of the orator Robert Ingersoll. The Levy's purchased the estate in 1926.

In 1935 Whalen's 14-year-old son Grover Jr. disappeared while waiting to be taken back to school in Rhode

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Louis Levy at Yale, 1881



Mesmore Kendall, 1920



Vera Andrus



Patricia McIlvain, 1973

Island and was thought kidnapped. The teen had wandered off and fell down an embankment in the woods near the Saw Mill River Parkway. After an extensive search he was found bruised but safe. The incident was front page news in the New York Times. Whalen died in 1962 at the age of 75.

**The Aesthete**

Whalen’s landlord Louis Levy was the Chairman of the Board of Art Associates Inc. The group curated a major exhibition of paintings, sculpture, and graphic arts displayed at the fair. The exhibition included works by the old masters, Rembrandt, Gainsborough, and Van Dyke, and of modernists Francis Criss and Max Weber.

Levy was born in Forkland, Alabama in 1877. While a student at Yale, he helped form the first all-inclusive fraternity, Pi Lambda Phi, which allowed students of all faiths to join. A successful New York lawyer who dealt mainly with the art world, Levy was disbarred in New York State in 1940 for making a \$250,000 payment to an associate of a judge presiding on one of his cases.

The Levys lived in a 30-room mansion on their estate in Dobbs Ferry. The couple raised champion German Shepherds in their kennels on Forkland Lane. Levy died in 1952.

The property was sold in the mid 1950s and became the Beacon Hill Co-Op Apartments. The mansion, which had become the Beacon Hill Country Club, burned to the ground in 1973. The Villas on the Ridge townhouses now sit where the mansion was located.

**The Artist**

Vera Andrus, was born in Plymouth, Wisconsin in 1896 and moved to Dobbs Ferry in 1931 where she commuted by train to her job at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She studied at the Minnesota Institute of Architecture and won a scholarship to the Arts Students’



*Art at night*

League in New York City. She worked on the WPA Federal Arts Project.

Her works include watercolors, oil paintings, book illustrations and her longtime passion, lithographs. Andrus’ lithograph, *Memory Stairs* was displayed at the fair and would win the 1941 medal from the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors.

Today, her works are in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC, the Library of Congress, National Gallery of Art, the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Andrus lived at her home at 8 Hudson Terrace, which was designed in the 1800s by George Palliser, one of the best-known architects of the period, until moving to Rockport, MA in 1957. She died there in 1979.

**The Historian**

Mesmore Kendall, one of the foremost collectors of George Washington



*“Memory Stairs” by Vera Andrus.*  
Photo: National Gallery of Art

memorabilia approached Whalen about erecting a building that he would pay for to display the first president’s relics. Washington Hall would cost Kendall almost \$50,000.

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## Locals have ties...

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Kendall was born in Grand Rapids Michigan in 1872. He was a lawyer and real estate investor, as well as a Broadway producer, book publisher and book collector. He built and owned the Capitol in New York City, the first movie theater on Broadway. A member of the Sons of the American Revolution, Kendall was deeply committed to keeping alive the memory of our first president as well as the country's history.

In 1916 while driving through Dobbs Ferry to New York City, he noticed a rundown farmhouse on Broadway that was for sale. In front of the house was monument stating that it had been one of Washington's headquarters during the Revolutionary War. Kendall bought the structure known as the Hyatt Livingston house and restored it. The information on the monument would prove to be inaccurate and would remain uncorrected until 2000, long after Kendall's death in 1959. The house was destroyed by fire in 1974 and is now the site of the Washington Headquarters townhouses.

### The Pioneer

Patricia Murray, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's school of journalism, was an RCA employee. While working on television demonstrations, Murray would become the first human to interact with puppeteer Burt Tillstrom's Kuklapolitan Players. Murray bantered along with puppets Kukla, Oliver J. Dragon, Beulah Witch, and friends in shows at the RCA pavilion. Years later, Kukla, Fran and Ollie became a hit children's television show.

Murray would marry William McIlvain in Nyack, NY in 1949. The couple moved to Dobbs Ferry around 1960 and raised their family in their home at 130 Washington Ave. Their home was built in 1899 as a guesthouse for the



*RCA Television demonstration*

Ardley Country Club. She was active in the village's centennial celebration in 1973, curating, along with future Mayor Gisela Knight, a memorabilia exhibit. She died in the early 2000s.

For a small village Dobbs Ferry was well represented in both the planning and execution phases of one of the major events of 1939.

### Photo Credits:

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# Hyatt- Livingston is setting of early 20th century novel

By Teresa Walsh

*“When Spring comes laughing o’er vale and hill, she never wears a brighter or more contagious smile than when she dances along the valley of the Hudson. And always she casts an especially tender glance at a certain loved spot in the town of Dobbs Ferry.”*



Carolyn Wells.  
Photo: Poetry For Kids

Wells and Kendall both shared a love of books and were avid collectors. Wells visited Kendall at his Hyatt-Livingston home on Broadway to discuss books. Somewhere along the line she decided to use it as the setting for her 1917 book.

A native of Rahway, New Jersey, Wells, born in 1862, was a prolific writer producing 170 books, more than half of them mysteries, during her lifetime. Her Walt Whitman collection is housed at the Library of Congress.

*The Vanishing of Carolyn Wells*, a recent biography by Rebecca Rego Barry, has created some interest in Wells, whose works fell out of fashion after her death in 1942.

*Doris of Dobbs Ferry* the eBook is available online. It can also be found at [dobbsferryalumni.com](http://dobbsferryalumni.com).

And so, begins *Doris of Dobbs Ferry* by Carolyn Wells, a well-known author of her time. The book was dedicated to Mesmore Kendall.



“Doris of Dobbs Ferry” Illustration

## Are you a Dobbs?

A recent inquiry sent to the Historical Society asked if there were any direct descendants of the Dobbs family, for whom the village is named and who still carry the Dobbs name, living in the town or surrounding area. A provocative question and one we could not answer.

While the Historical Society has an extensive tree of the Dobbs family which begins with Walter Dobbs (born about 1630), it only extends forward in time to the mid-1970s. People born after that time can be difficult to trace because of privacy issues limiting access to their information. Additionally, the last male descendant who bore the Dobbs surname of which we are aware was Charles Holt Dobbs. Mr. Dobbs was born in 1915 in Hawaii and died in 1985 in Texas.

So, this request goes out to everyone who thinks that they are a descendant of the Dobbs family of ferry fame. Please contact the Historical Society and make yourself known. We’ll put you in touch with our genealogist who will verify your connection to the family. We are especially interested in anyone who still carries the Dobbs name and can be traced to the famous family. As a gift to all who contact us, and are family members, you’ll be sent a full family tree going back to 1630!

Contact us:

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Office: 914-674-1007  
Email: [dfhistory@icloud.com](mailto:dfhistory@icloud.com)  
Website: [dobbsferryhistory.org](http://dobbsferryhistory.org)

# The great debate over “Why Johnny Still Can’t Read”

By Seamus Breathnach

As the reading proficiency rate in the United States decreases, the debate on how to teach the subject increases. Since 2013, 37 states have passed laws or implemented new policies related to the science of reading instruction method. The science of reading method is an alternative to the balanced literacy method.

The push for teaching the science of reading method, which combines teaching phonics along with vocabulary and comprehension, is nothing new. Horace Mann, the father of American public education, criticized teaching phonics and the alphabet in the 1800s. He believed children should learn to recognize whole words, which in turn would enhance their love of literacy and reading habits. For years, the balanced literacy method, which concentrates on whole language instruction and word memorization, was widely incorporated into many curriculums, as opposed to basic phonics. Phonics teaches the relationship between sounds of the letters and words of the written language.

Recent research has shown that the human brain does not learn the written word as easily as spoken language. The absence of teaching children phonics, at an early age, has proven detrimental to the development of good reading skills.

According to The National Assessment of Educational Progress, the program mandated by Congress to evaluate the educational achievement of U.S. students, the 2022 nationwide tests showed that 37 percent of fourth graders performed below basic reading levels.

37 percent of fourth graders performed below basic reading levels



Rudolph Flesch. Photo: Research Gate

During the 1950s, one of the most prominent advocates of teaching phonics was Dobbs Ferry resident Dr. Rudolph Flesch.

Born in Vienna, Austria on May 8, 1911, Flesch received a law degree from the University of Vienna in 1933. In 1938, to escape the pending Nazi invasion of his country and antisemitism, he immigrated to the United States, becoming a citizen in 1944. Flesch earned his Ph.D. in library science from Columbia University.

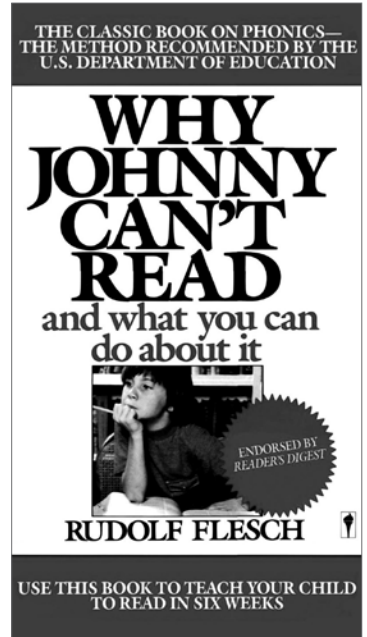
An authority on literacy and concise writing methods, Flesch's 1955 bestselling research work *Why Johnny Can't Read: And What You Can Do About It*, stated the only way to develop early reading skills was through phonics instruction at early ages, coupled with concisely written material. He believed that the current system being taught had no theory

behind it and that simple memorization did not prepare students to read more complex materials as they progressed through school.

One of his earlier books, *The Art of Readable Writing*, introduced his theory on keeping writing simple that will allow more readers the ability to comprehend material and increase literacy. His Flesch Reading Ease Formula suggested that short and simple words and sentences increased readability. His work was disputed and discounted throughout much of the academic community, but his style for writing was largely utilized by the journalistic and newsprint industries.

Flesch wrote a follow up book in 1981, *Why Johnny Still Can't Read*, for which he was criticized by academia. The work was virtually ignored by the teaching community. In a letter to the New York Times in 1985, Flesch stated “Around 1930 our schools switched from teaching reading to teaching word-guessing, using the so-called look-and-say method rather than systematic

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# Civil War surgeon, eloquent speaker, is first president

By Madeline Byrne and Alan Steinfeld

**D**obbs Ferry came into being as the incorporated village of Greenburgh on July 5th, 1873, as a result of an election held on that day. The minutes of the first meeting of the Village Board, held on August 16th of that year record the event as follows:

*"...an Election was held for such purpose at the Feed Store of Lester and Odell in said village of Dobbs Ferry on the Fifth day of July A.D. 1873 at which it appears by the certificate of the result of such election... that the whole number of ballots cast was one hundred and forty-four of which one hundred and thirty-seven were for incorporation and seven against..."*

At that same meeting, the first set of village officers were elected. James H. Pooley was elected as president.

Pooley, born in England around 1813, came to the United States in 1844. He lived in various locations in Greenburgh but by the time of the 1870 census, he resided in Dobbs Ferry. Of note on that census is that he was a neighbor to James Bremner, the first gatekeeper of the



Civil War battlefield hospital.  
Photo: National Park Service

Old Croton Aqueduct. He trained as a physician in England and was a general practitioner and obstetrician, caring for many well-known families in the river towns. His son, James Jr, would follow in his father's footsteps, graduating from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in March of 1860. A second son, Thomas, also became a physician.

During the Civil War, Pooley was an assistant surgeon serving initially in Washington and later in southeast Virginia during the Peninsula



Rudy's, former Pooley home.

Campaign (spring/summer 1862) under the command of General George B. McClellan. The battle was a defeat for the Union forces and when the army left the peninsula, Pooley was assigned to a

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## The great debate...

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phonics." Flesch thought that the look-and-say method had greatly contributed to increased rates of illiteracy.

Flesch had a successful career as a teacher, consultant, and author of 13

books written from the 1940s through the 1980s. He and wife Elizabeth lived on Belden Avenue where they raised their six children (five daughters and one son). Elizabeth passed away in 1975. Dr. Flesch died in 1986.

**Fun Fact:** Flesch's work had a positive effect on Theodore Geisel (Dr. Seuss) who after reading *Why Johnny Can't Read* was inspired to write his 1957 children's book, *The Cat In The Hat*.

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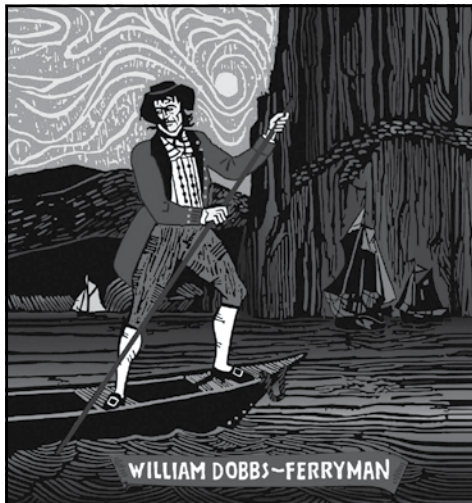
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# Every donation has a story

By Madeline Byrne

Recently we received a donation from the family of William Z. Lindsey, Dobbs Ferry High School principal from 1943-1965. Included were a student desk with 'Miss Parsons' etched on the back of the seat and a Burroughs calculator. Both can be seen at the Mead House.

William Seward Burroughs was an American inventor born in Rochester, New York. He started as a bank clerk



and found the job tedious. As a child he worked with his father who was a mechanic. William grew to love inventing. He applied his efforts to creating an adding machine as an aid to bank clerks who were responsible for adding numbers all day!

After working at the bank for a few years, he took a job at a mechanic shop where he now had the tools to work on his adding machine. He built the adding machine, applied for a patent in 1884 and received US Patent #388,116 in 1888.

Before the patent was granted, he founded the American Arithmometer Company with three other men. At the time of its introduction, it was the company's only product and selling for \$475 each. He continued to improve the design. Unfortunately, he suffered from poor health and died at the age of 43. The company continued to produce adding machines and there were about 60 variations on the original.



Mr. Lindsey. Photo: 1965 DF High School Periauger



Arithmometer. Photo: DFHS

Our Burroughs machine is Class 5. It was sold as the Burroughs Class 5 from 1918 into the 1960's.

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## Civil War surgeon...

*Continued from page 7*

hospital in Alexandria. He resigned his commission in April of 1863, returning to New York and his medical practice.

One can imagine the appeal of James Pooley as the first president of the Board of the newly formed incorporated village. His education and English accent lent him an air of refinement. He was also a "man of engaging manners and a fluent

and eloquent public speaker" according to his obituary. Pooley returned to England after the death of his wife, Anna, in 1885 and died there in 1890.

The Pooley home on Livingston Ave. was demolished in 2012, but its history was rich. It remained a private home for several decades. Later it became the Dixie Inn, Villa Arturo, and then Rudy's Beau Rivage, still remembered by many in the village today.