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Fall 2024

Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church Marks its 85th Anniversary

Eighty-five years ago, Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church began in a rental hall with less than two dozen congregants and a visiting pastor.

Before 1939, if one wanted to attend a Lutheran service, Scarsdale, Yonkers and New York City were your options. Some Dobbs Ferry residents thought it was about time that something was done about it. Eloise Witt, tired of traveling to attend church services, asked Pastor Dr. F. H. Meyer of Fordham Lutheran Church in NYC if a survey could be conducted to determine the possibility of starting a congregation in the village. Witt along with Meyer and other pastors conducted a survey that revealed that 17 people wanted a church here.

Since there was no building to house the congregation, the group rented the Masonic Temple at 18 Ashford Ave. On Sunday, December 10, in front of a packed house of Lutherans from visiting churches that included a robed choir from Kingsbridge, Meyer led the congregants in the first service.



Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church c 1942

Henry Witt, Sr. would pay the rent that Sunday and many Sundays thereafter. A meeting at Witt's house to select officers for a church vestry was held soon after the

December service. Witt became president, Emory Roraback, vice-president, Edwin Schiffer, treasurer and Herman Strohmman,

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Dobbs Ferry Lutheran...

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secretary. The Witt's home at 14 Seneca St. would serve as the parsonage.

A Sunday School led by Mrs. Henry Witt, Jr., Mrs. George Elder and Mrs. Wahl was launched and by 1940, the congregation was now meeting, rent free, in the chapel at St. Christopher's School on Broadway. That spring, Waldemar Langholz became the first regular pastor of the church. A missionary student with one year to go to complete his studies, Langholz left that fall but vowed that he would return. Pastor Laverne Meinecke came to DF Lutheran and remained until Langholz's return in 1941.

Getting a church

The need for a church building to call its own was always on the congregation's mind.

As chance would have it, one day Walter Irmer met up with Emma Losee, who owned a house on Ashford Avenue on a triangular piece of property next to the Little White Church Cemetery, just up from Storm Street. Losee proposed that the church buy the house and property. The building had been the original Dobbs



Chapel, 1942

Ferry Hospital. However, the now nearly 50 members of the congregation weren't all in favor of purchasing the house. Some didn't like the shape of the property or its location. Eventually the house and property were purchased, with Witt advancing the down payment.

The men of the congregation worked diligently at converting the house into a church. "Hammers flew, plaster fell, and a transformation took place," Emory Roraback wrote in the church's 30th anniversary pamphlet. "From newly

studded floors to the handmade altar, not one penny was spent on labor, all the work of loving hands," Roraback wrote.

On June 14, 1942, the congregation moved into its new church. The dedication service theme that day was "Work of Our Hands," delivered by Pastor Gerbich of St. Peter's Church in New York City. Originally, there was no heating system, making it uncomfortable for the Sunday School students. Irmer would later install an oil burner. By 1944, the mortgage was paid

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First hospital, soon to be the home of Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church

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off on the building and the congregation celebrated at a dinner at Pardee's Restaurant on Saw Mill River Road.

When Pastor Langholz returned with his wife Vera and their daughter, the need for a parsonage was moved to the forefront. With the help of Henry Witt, Jr., a home on Seneca St. was made available to the congregation.

In 1947 Langholz left, and the congregation had no pastor until June of that year, when Dr. Arthur Kuhlman and his wife and family arrived.

Kuhlman proposed that the congregation build a new church and to apply for a building loan from the Home Mission Board of the American Lutheran Church. Kuhlman explained that time was of the essence and the loan had to be proposed by 1949, as these loans were only good for 10 years from the founding of the mission. Both the building of a new church, and its funding was widely debated. A green light for both was eventually given.

In June 1951, the church was dedicated, but again there was no permanent pastor. Pastor Clemens arrived in 1952 and remained until the spring of 1960. A short transitional period without a pastor then ensued until the arrival of Pastor William Behrans in June, who would remain until 1965.

Behrans noted that more room was needed for the church's burgeoning Sunday School. Under his leadership, nearby property was acquired, and an addition was completed for the congregation's education program.

Changes

1965 saw the arrival of Pastor Norman V. Braatz, and in 1971, the Seneca St. parsonage was sold. A building to serve as the parsonage located at 30 Henry Court was purchased. Braatz would stay until 1972. The congregation again went through a period with no permanent pastor. Pastor William Larson and his family would arrive in July of 1974, and he would remain until 1997.

In 1975, the Church Council approved of the implementation of a community

Christian Pre- School conceived by Larson. The pre-school would be the first in the area to offer Christian teachings to its students. The pre-School opened with Dottie Fergus as its director, teacher Frances Bockhorn and 14 students.

In 1982, the congregation began a year- long celebration of the birth of Martin Luther in 1483, with a 16th century street fair sponsored by the Luther League.

Also in 1982, three major Lutheran Churches voted to merge into one to create the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church voted in favor of the merger in 1983.

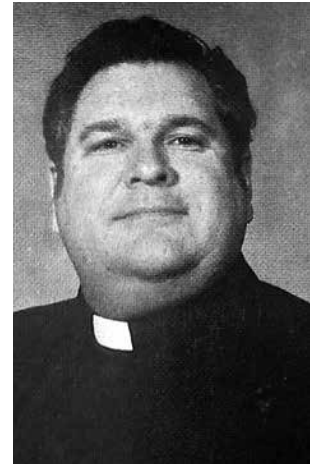
Pastor Larson would leave in 1997, and the congregation would be without a pastor once again. Pastor Chris Mietlowski arrived in 1998 and would stay for nine years. In 1999, a handicapped accessible ramp was added to the exterior of the building, along with new front doors and new classrooms. A new lead copper steeple and re-glided cross was also added atop the building.

Under Mietlowski's supervision, Dobbs Ferry Lutheran saw a flurry of new activities and ministries, expanding its pastoral care and interaction with the community outside the church. Interfaith programs, ministries for young people, and community outreach were just a few of the activities the church engaged in. At the same time, prayer groups, Bible studies and the music ministry flourished. The first "Worship by the Water" took place in the summer of 2001. Conducted at the Dobbs Ferry Waterfront Park, the public was invited. Through prayer breakfasts and worship services, beginning in 2000, Dobbs Ferry Lutheran recognized the contributions made to the community by uniformed volunteers and village staff members.

In 2000 Kathy Rock would become the church's first deacon. The following year 10 more parishioners would also become deacons.



Pastor W. C. Langholz



Pastor William Larson

Moving Forward

Upon the departure of Mietlowski in 2007, Pastor William Egger served as interim pastor until 2009. During his tenure the sanctuary underwent a renovation, a new organ was purchased, and the church once again undertook the task of finding full time pastor. In 2009 Pastor Scott Paradise came to DF Lutheran.

Pastor Marie Meeks arrived soon after Paradise's departure and would remain until her departure in March of 2024.

Currently, DF Lutheran is without a pastor. It is going through the transition process that is needed to get a new one.

On September 8th, the congregation marked its anniversary with a celebratory worship service and birthday luncheon in Fellowship Hall. The event, which is first of several dedicated to the anniversary, drew government officials. NYS Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, NYS Assembly member MaryJane Shimsky and Westchester County Executive George Latimer were all in attendance. Another worship service and congregational celebration gathering will take place in December.

Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church has maintained a presence in the village since its early days. The spirit of generosity, selfless volunteerism and unflagging belief has made Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church what it is today and will continue to do so moving forward.

*Thank you to Deacon Sharon Brennen and Sue Fernandez for all their help in making this article possible.
Bibliography/Photos: Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church Archives*

A School for Everyone: Public, Private, Parochial

Since its early days as a village, Dobbs Ferry has been the site of many different schools. Some have endured the test of time and others have long shut their doors.

For the ones that have retained a lasting presence there has been much change. The public school system has grown from a small two-room schoolhouse with less than 50 students to one comprised of three individual buildings with more than 1,500 students.

The Catholic women's college has now morphed into a research university and that all-girls' "finishing school" is a top college prep school.

Gone from the village are the boarding schools that only catered to the sons and daughters of the wealthy, moving on long ago. The Catholic schools that have succumbed to lack of religious laity no longer dominate the west end of the village on Broadway.

Here is an overview of those schools, past and present.

Dobbs Ferry Public Schools

Prior to 1855, children from both Dobbs Ferry and Ardsley attended school at Abraham Storm's Ashford Ave property on the corner of today's King St. The small, two-story schoolhouse had two classrooms, one for younger children on the first floor and a second on the upper floor for the older children.

On March 15, 1855, residents voted to establish the Union Free School District of Dobbs Ferry and elected a Board of Education. By fall it became apparent



Main Street School

a new school building was necessary to accommodate its growing student population. There were 80 students registered with 49 in daily attendance.

In 1857, residents voted to build a new schoolhouse and by August of that year a new two-story school was constructed on High St. (now Main St.) just below where Reader's Hardware is today. The new building contained 10-14 classrooms.

This school would also eventually prove to be too crowded and in 1896 it became necessary to build another one. The D. Appleton Estate on Broadway was purchased and a brick building with tile roof was completed on Dec. 23, 1896. The school opened in January 1897.

A kindergarten was established in the school in 1897. In 1922 another wing was added to the building. In 1923 there were 660 students.

In 1931 the Cromwell estate, next door to the existing property, was purchased so

that a high school could be built. A federal loan and a grant from the Federal Works Project under the supervision of the Public Works Administration was secured for the construction. The junior and senior high school building was dedicated on February 11, 1936.

During the 1950s double sessions in both the high school and elementary school were held to accommodate the burgeoning school population. Classes were also held in nearby buildings such as the Greenburgh Hebrew Center.

As the former Edwin Gould estate on Broadway came up for sale, it was seen as a possible site to build a new school. However, this became a bone of contention in the community. Some residents wanted a new school while other residents lobbied to add classrooms at the back of the existing high school building. The Board of Education proposed two referendums to build a new school, both were defeated by voters.

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Original Broadway School



Mackenzie School

A School...

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When the estate of F. Q. Brown on Walgrove Ave, became available, residents finally passed a referendum to build a new school. Springhurst, named after the Brown estate, opened in 1960. The building was added to some years later and more grades were added. Today, the school houses children in kindergarten through fifth grade.

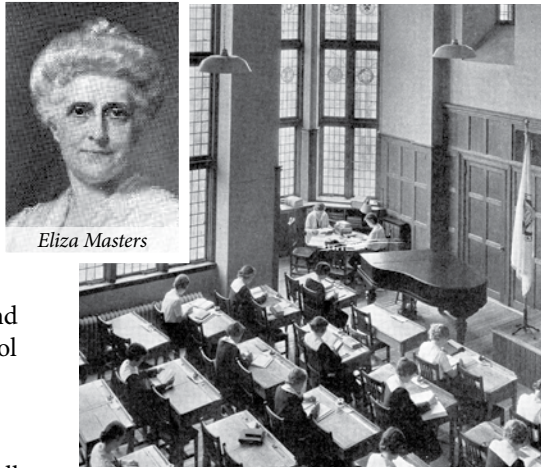
The 1896 building became solely the Middle School for grades six through eight. In the 1970s, that building was razed, and a new middle school was built adjacent to the high school, where it currently stands.

English and Latin Boarding School

One of the earliest schools in Dobbs Ferry was an English and Latin boarding school for girls that opened in 1871 at the Wilde House, 343 Broadway. Miss Elizabeth Dana was the school's principal. Born in Michigan, Dana moved to New England where her father, Robert Henry Dana, Jr., was a reverend in the Congregational Church. She was educated at Ipswich Academy in Massachusetts. In 1875 there were 42 girls attending the school with female teachers exclusively. Tuition was \$300. Dana remained for six years as principal. In 1877 she moved her school to Morristown, New Jersey, where she established the Dana Seminary for Girls. She remained there until her death in 1908. Coincidentally, when she moved her school out of the building Eliza Masters moved in!

Masters School

Masters School was founded in 1877, by Eliza Bailey Masters as the Misses Masters Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies and Children. The inspiration for the school



Eliza Masters

Masters school students, unknown date

came from Eliza's brother, Jeremiah, a teacher who died of typhoid fever.

Eliza envisioned a school whose students came from all over the country. She sent out the original school curriculums to prominent men in Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago and Rochester in hopes that they would enroll their daughters there.

Located at the Wilde House, (now Days of Wonder Child Care Program on Broadway), the private school opened with nine students and a tuition of \$400 for boarders.

As the student population increased Eliza considered moving the school to the estate of Cyrus W. Field in Irvington.

However, cotton financier and philanthropist James Jennings McComb, who had moved to the village in 1881 to be near his children, convinced Eliza not to relocate her school out of the village. McComb had purchased the Ryder property on Clinton Ave and built a mansion, Estherwood, named after his second wife, there. He purchased land south of his mansion and in 1883 built First and Second houses on the property, leasing them to the school for a nominal fee.

In 1888 a third house that contained a gym, classrooms and an assembly room was added. In 1891 a fourth house was completed. McComb died in 1901 and Eliza purchased the estate for \$12 million dollars. Eliza died in 1921 and her sister Sarah became the headmistress. The school was incorporated in 1911 and Masters Hall was completed in 1921.

Eliza's Masters' school was not a typical finishing school. Although most of the earliest students didn't go to college, the liberal arts curriculum included Latin, mathematics and astronomy.

In 1996 the school went coed, and now has a student body that encompasses Grades 5 thru 12.

Westminster School

The Westminster School was founded in 1888 by William Lee Cushing as a school for boys. In 1894 a meeting was held at the school to arrange for the dedication of the monument on Broadway in front of what is today Washington's Headquarters condominiums, by the Sons of the American Revolution. In 1900 Cushing moved to the school to Simsbury, Connecticut.

Mackenzie School for Boys

In 1901 Reverend James C. MacKenzie opened the Mackenzie School for Boys on the Broadway property that once was owned by the Westminster School. The school provided a home-like atmosphere with family seating at meals. The curriculum was based on practices of Dr. Eliot, president emeritus of Harvard University. In 1913 the Mackenzie School sold its site to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart for \$92,500. The school moved to Monroe, N.Y.

Academy of St. Francis

The Academy of St. Francis was located on the south side of Grove Street on the estate

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St. Francis School



Mercy College graduation in the chapel c. 1970

A School...

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once the country home of Francis W. Lasak who made his fortune in the fur trade with his partner John Jacob Astor.

During the first two decades of the 1900s, the Catholic school was run by Franciscan Sisters.

The 1918 Catholic Directory listed 38 boys and 35 girls who were taught by six nuns.

William McKinley Free Kindergarten

In 1901 Mrs. Franklin Q. Brown (Ida) had the idea of founding a free kindergarten for all village children. That same year the William McKinley Free Kindergarten was opened. Named in honor of President William McKinley, who had recently been assassinated, its classes were initially held in several locations on Main Street. By 1906 Colonel Franklin Q. Brown (Ida's husband) purchased the building on the corner of Main and Cedar streets (now Bruce Richards Studio and site of the former library). The Mothers Club organized a house warming to celebrate the new school's lodgings. The kindergarten moved to the second floor in the fall of 1906. Children from ages three to six attended the school and classes were held from 9 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. The school closed in May 1933.

Sacred Heart Villa

The Sacred Heart Villa was opened in 1913 on the site of the Mackenzie School by Mother Cabrini, as an orphanage run by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Later it became a boarding and day school for girls. In 1970 the school buildings were demolished to make way for the Cabrini Health Care Center.

Hudson River Country Day School

The Hudson River Country School was established as a private elementary school in 1924 by a group of citizens of Hastings-on-Hudson. The school was initially run out of the home of photographer Lewis Wickes Hine on the corner of Villard and Broadway. The first principal was H. H. Murphy. Tuition rates were \$150 for kindergarten and first grade, \$175 for second and third, and \$200 for fourth and fifth grades. The school opened with 58 students in attendance.



McKinley school kindergarten. Inset: Ida Brown

In 1929, the school property was sold to the Catholic Church and leased back to the school for three years. In September 1934 a new principal, Miss Anne Warnock, opened the school in the home of Cyrus Field at 23 Clinton Avenue, Dobbs Ferry on the grounds of Masters School. In 1959 the school moved to Irvington, New York.

Mercy University

Mercy University was established in the 1950s as Mercy College by the Sisters of Mercy in Tarrytown, NY for the education of members of their order.

The Sisters purchased the property of the former estate of Edwin Gould, son of financier Jay Gould, on Broadway in Dobbs Ferry following the Rockefellers purchase of their Tarrytown property. The Rockefellers also donated \$1.6 million to the nuns to construct the complex called Mt. Mercy.

The property would contain a chapel, administrative offices, living quarters for the nuns, and a building to house the college.

In 1968 the college received Middle States accreditation and in 1969 became independent, co-educational, and nonsectarian.

In the 1970s and 1980s the college established extension centers and branch campuses with the main campus in Dobbs Ferry. In 1981, the college offered its first graduate degree (nursing). Today, Mercy offers more than 100 graduate and undergraduate degrees and introduced a PhD program in physical therapy in 2006.

The now independent school went on to purchase the sisters' living quarters and

created its first student housing. In 2011, the college moved into Our Lady of Victory Academy, following its closing, on its campus and also constructed a new student center and residence.

In 2019 Mercy absorbed the closing College of New Rochelle.

In 2023, Mercy College became Mercy University.

Our Lady of Victory Academy

Our Lady of Victory Academy was a private, all-girls Catholic High School located at 555 Broadway. Established in 1961 by the Sisters of Mercy as a part of the Mount Mercy complex, the school closed in 2011. Mercy University took over the building and it now houses the school's Victory Hall Sports Center.

Sacred Heart School

Sacred Heart School, located at 535 Broadway (today, Alcott School) was a Catholic coed elementary school established in 1960 by the Sisters of Mercy. Originally the school was for grades 1- 8 but was expanded to include kindergarten in the mid 1970s. The school closed in 1993. The school was owned and operated by Sacred Heart Church parish.

**-Madeline Byrne
Teresa Walsh**

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Rex Beach: Prospector, Novelist, Olympian

The Olympic Games have always been a source of national pride as athletes from all over the world compete to win medals for themselves as well as their countries.

One such athlete who both competed and medaled was Rex Beach, who summered in Dobbs Ferry for many years.

Beach was a member of the silver-medal winning USA men's water polo team at the 1904 Summer Games held in St. Louis, Missouri. The team's win would prove controversial as water polo at that time was considered a demonstration rather than a competitive sport. It wouldn't be until 2021 that the International Olympic Committee recognized water polo as an official sport of the 1904 Olympics and the medals were recognized.

Rex Ellingwood Beach was born on a farm in Atwood Michigan on September 1, 1877. When he was seven, his family moved to Tampa, Florida. He attended Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida for several years before moving to Chicago to study law. While in Chicago, Beach became intrigued with the Alaskan Gold Rush and in 1897, he left school to become a prospector. Beach made several trips to the Klondike and Nome, Alaska to pan for gold. While he never succeeded in striking gold,



Beach home at 85 Myrtle Ave.



Rex Beach

he did find a talent in writing that would sustain him throughout his life.

Like thousands of others, Beach was captivated by the prospector life in Alaska. As he became knowledgeable of the people, politics, corruption and rough lifestyle, he began to write short stories and articles about them. His writings were published in the prominent newspapers of the time.

The *San Francisco Chronicle*, known for its coverage of westward expansion published works by Beach as well as Mark Twain, Bret Harte and Jack London, often without benefit of a byline.

In 1903, Beach published his first short story *The Mule Driver and the Garrulous Mute* in *McClure Magazine*. In 1906, Beach published what was to become his most famous work, *The Spoilers*, about a failed attempt by a politician to steal gold from the prospectors in Nome, in 1900. Originally, serialized as *The Looting of Alaska*, for *Everybody's Magazine*, *The Spoilers* was one of the bestselling novels in 1906 with 700,000 copies bought. Later that year he transformed the novel into a play.

The Spoilers captured the excitement of gold-rush Alaska, with all its claim-jumping, corruption, deception, villains, heroes and romance. The age-old story



of good vs. evil made it perfect for an adaptation for the new medium, movies. The book inspired five different movie versions, including a silent one in 1914 which was one of the first feature-length films to be made. Gary Cooper starred in the 1930 version, and in a 1942 film, Marlene Dietrich, Randolph Scott and John Wayne were the headliners.

During the course of his career, Beach would write more than 30 novels, hundreds of articles and several successful plays. He never could get over his success at writing

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Rex Beach...

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which apparently came easy to him. He often commented that he could not believe he got paid for his works.

Although his writing proved successful, some found his novels formulaic and predictable, and critics often panned his books. However, his writing remained popular, and his books often appeared on the bestseller lists.

In 1907, Beach married Edith Greta Crater of Denver, Colorado, who he met in Nome, and the couple moved to New York City. Though married for 40 years, the couple would have no children.

During his time in New York, Beach maintained a penthouse in Manhattan, and a summer home in Dobbs Ferry. Rex and Edith purchased an estate at 85 Myrtle Avenue for their getaway. The Tudor-style mansion on the estate was built in 1902 by Mary A. Archbold van Beuren. Mary was the daughter of John Archbold, the successor to John Rockefeller as CEO of Standard Oil. Mary's husband Michael van Beuren's family founded the Campbell Soup Company.

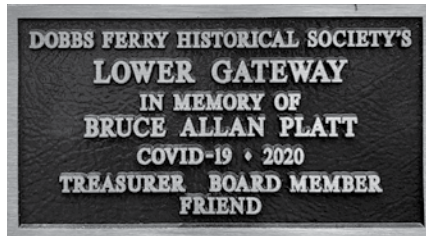
Beach continued to write, produce plays, and became involved in movie production. Besides being a prolific writer, Beach was an astute businessman and was one of the first

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Remembering Bruce...

The Dobbs Ferry Historical Society recently dedicated the lower gateway in memory of its treasurer, Bruce Platt, who passed away in 2020 due to complications from Covid 19.

Bruce was an avid history buff, often taking part in the annual Road to Freedom Day march. He was active in the community, volunteering to coach sports, helping at South Church and keeping the historical society's books in order.

The plaque on the gate says it all: Bruce Platt: Treasurer, Board Member, Friend.

We miss you, Bruce.

- Photos: Carolyn White

authors who maintained the movie rights to his works. This foresight into an emerging industry made him a wealthy man.

The Beach's were part of the New York social and literary scenes attending plays and fashionable events. Beach was one of the speakers at a 70th birthday celebration held for Mark Twain.

In the early 1920s, Beach purchased 7,000 acres of land in Sebring Florida and returned to his farming roots growing celery and cultivating Easter Lily bulbs, leaving Dobbs Ferry and Manhattan behind.

On December 7, 1949, debilitated by cancer and in great pain, Rex Beach died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Edith predeceased him in 1947. Both Rex and Edith are buried on the campus of Rollings College.

Although Beach was once one of the most popular authors of his time, he has little name recognition today.

The Village of Dobbs Ferry remembered Beach however, when it named a walking path alongside the Ardsley Country Club golf course, not far from his former home, *Spoilers Run*, in honor of his most famous work.

-Seamus Breathnach

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