



# Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

Volume 4

Issue 2

October 2006

## Houses of Worship in the Nyacks

**First Presbyterian Church - the Nyack Center Since 1990**

**Second in an Ongoing Series**

by Jean Pardo

From 1812 Presbyterian families in Nyack had to cross over Clausland Mountain to the newly built Greenbush Presbyterian Church in Blauvelt. Probably due to the misery of such winter travel, Tunis DePew in 1816 donated the land on which the congregation built a small sandstone church.

By 1839 it was replaced by a large frame building which is



She, as first director, and some local Presbyterian ministers together with local people, developed programs to the satisfaction of the Presbytery which then gave them the building. The Center pays \$100 a year to the Presbytery.

Because of the devoted work of many people over these 15 years, it now offers programs for chil-

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### Early Houses of Worship Exhibit in October

During October in the Nyack Library, the Society will be presenting an exhibit on the early houses of worship that flourished in the Nyacks during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Numerous original photographs, detailed historical information, celebratory commemorative pamphlets and artifacts will be displayed in the library's display cases.

The exhibit, curated by Patricia Condello and Karen Kennell, may be viewed during regular library hours. There is no admission charge for the exhibit.

We are looking for a permanent home to display our artifacts and share local history year-round. If you can help, please contact us.

*This photograph of the First Presbyterian church is from "Nyack and Vicinity in Pictures", published by the Nyack Evening Journal in 1925. You will find this book and many others in the Isabelle K. Savell Local History Room of the Nyack Library.*

still part of the structure. The north and south wings were added in 1899.

After flourishing for decades, the congregation began to decline after World War II. An attempt in 1948 to unite with the First Reformed Church failed. Urban Renewal's plan to buy the church in 1968 to widen DePew Avenue fell through. A further loss of members due to aging out, older people moving south, younger people priced out of expensive Nyack and a general decline in attendance at traditional churches led to closing the church in 1990.

Ownership reverted to the Presbytery. Jane Sherman, an elder at Palisades Presbyterian Church, suggested creating a neighborhood center in the Nyack church.

### Memories of St. Paul's

The article "Historic South Nyack Church for Sale" by Ron X. Gumucio in the Journal News on July 29, 2006, evoked the following memories for Dotty Larson. The article may be found via [www.nyackhistory.org/news.htm](http://www.nyackhistory.org/news.htm)

Sorry to see such a beautiful church run into hard times. In my memory I recall Easter Sunday services (circa 1940's) being held there when the weather was inclement and the Hook Mountain sunrise service had to be held indoors. My girlhood friend, Joan Kear, had a beautiful voice and always sang at that service. I went along to keep her company. Neither of us attended that church at the time, but we always took part in that community church service. I remember the

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### Nyack in Black & White to be Honored

*Nyack in Black & White, Race Relations Over Three Centuries* will be receiving two prestigious awards.

The Lower Hudson Conference of Historical Agencies and Museums has selected the book for one of its Annual Awards Towards Excellence for presentation during the organization's annual meeting in October.

In addition, The American Library Association will be honoring *Nyack in Black & White* with its David Cohen/EMIERT Multicultural Award for contributing to the understanding of multicultural issues.

The book was written by Carl Nordstrom and published by the Historical Society of the Nyacks and the Nyack Library.

## The History Detectives - Do You Know Mary?

by Daniel Estep

I've never been to Nyack or Piermont, New York. Until recently I had never heard of Nyack and I didn't know anyone from there either.

I was introduced to Nyack through a woman named Mary. I don't know her last name. She may have lived in Nyack or perhaps visited Nyack or Piermont sometime in the 19th century.

Mary was an artist, and one day while looking out over the Hudson towards Hook Mountain she decided to paint a picture. She was very careful to include great detail. She painted the trees and the water, the sailboats and the fisherman, the houses and the churches. Mary even included a picket fence next to a dusty dirt wagon trail and there in the background Mary reproduced the magnificent Hook Mountain.

I think Mary wanted to remember Nyack, Hook Mountain and the Hudson, more importantly she wanted to be able to have others see it as she did that summer day in the 70th year of her life.

My wife and I have been collecting art for the past few years. We bought this little picture from an art dealer about a year ago. I get excited when I find a new, old painting. I want to know all I can about it, where was it painted, who painted it and when did they paint it. I have always had a great interest in geography, history and people. As they say, every picture tells a story.

With many of the paintings I have found I've been able to immediately recognize the location while others take a little research. Slowly I piece together the puzzle.

Although I had never seen Hook Mountain this painting came with a clue. On the back, tucked in a window was a card. On the card was a short description and an attribution, perhaps it was written by Mary's daughter, or a friend. They must have thought Mary should receive some credit for her unsigned picture.

Later it seems the painting was reframed. Fortunately someone had the forethought to save that small inscription on the back and to tuck it into a little window. The card on the back read, "Palisades on the Hudson. Sketched and painted by Mary A. (Something) at the age of 70 - an original." Sadly Mary's last name was rubbed and has faded with time.

I began my search with the obvious, "The Palisades on the Hudson." From time to time I would submit an image search on the Internet. Most often my search results would yield pictures of some cliffs over the Hudson but never the exact scene.

One day a few weeks back I searched again and I came across someone's picture gallery. Their gallery had pictures of the usual Palisades but this time one of the pictures was of Hook Mountain.

After looking at a map that included Hook Mountain I discovered that the town in the foreground was Nyack. On computer earth imaging software I was able to zoom in and view Nyack and Hook Mountain in 3-D. From my office in Wisconsin I was visiting the location where Mary sat and



Hook Mountain viewed from Piermont, from top: Mary's painting, aerial image, today

painted her picture over 100 years ago.

None of those old wooden buildings remained, and the forest landscape has been altered with progress, roads and a bridge, but the Hook, as I'm told it's referred to by locals, remains unchanged. I never met Mary but through her eyes she did introduce me to Nyack, Piermont and Hook Mountain.

*Daniel Estep lives in Black River Falls, Wisconsin. He hopes to visit Nyack some day.*

## The Nyacks A Great Place to Grow Up

by Tom Hackett

Growing up in the Nyacks during the '30's, '40's and '50's was one of the best experiences of my life. We kids had it all.

We had the Hudson River in the summer, where we could go swimming at Hook Mountain in Upper Nyack or "the Tap" as we called it in South Nyack, fishing and crabbing all along the shore at Graney's, and Main Street docks, and the Piermont pier. We ate what we caught, and we're still alive.

Some of our friends' parents had boats at the Nyack Boat Club and we sometimes went boating. Winter was another great time. We had the mountains to go hiking, great hills to go sleigh riding, and oh yes, a skating pond on Route 59.

Most of us saw our first movies, and many others at the Rockland Theater on North Broadway.

A lot of girls and boys learned to swim at the YMCA, and before we had television at home we would watch our favorite shows at the Y.

I joined the Boy Scouts at age 12. Our scout master was A. W. Rittershausen; he was also Principal of Nyack High School. He loved the outdoors and taught us many things about nature, hiking and camping.

At the age of 15, I joined the Sea Scouts, another great boyhood experience. Our meeting place was a small building near the water at the bottom of DePew Avenue. We spent many hours cruising the Hudson on our old World War II boat.

We had three bowling alleys in Nyack where a guy could make a couple of bucks setting up pins.

After graduation from Nyack High, I joined the Orangetown Fire



Company. I was a member until I moved away from Nyack.

My family home and Willow Avenue in South Nyack are gone now due to Thruway and Tappan Zee Bridge construction. But they haven't taken away the memories of my old neighborhood.

Although I have not lived in Nyack for over 50 years I still go there at least once a week and am an active member of The Historical Society of the Nyacks.

## Oak Hill Cemetery Boris Aronson (1900-1980)



by Gini Stollendorf

Boris Aronson, born in the Ukrainian city of Kiev in 1900, would go on to win many Tony Awards for set design on the Broadway stage.

Due to political unrest, Aronson left Russia in 1922, moved to New York and quickly established himself as a designer in the Yiddish musical world. A highly talented designer, by the 1960's he was well established and formed a collaborative relationship with Hal Prince. Tony awards were forthcoming for such productions as *Cabaret*, *Company*, *Follies*, *Pacific Overtures* and *Zorba*.

Aronson demonstrated his versatility in 1977 when he designed the set of *the Nutcracker Suite*, produced by CBS and starring Mikhail Baryshnikov.

Boris Aronson died in November of 1980.

*The Friends of the Nyacks provide periodic tours of Oak Hill Cemetery. If you have an interesting story of someone at Oak Hill, please contact Gini Stollendorf, 845-358-7910.*

## From the President House Tour Returns

by Win Perry

As we approach the busy seasons of autumn and winter, let me invite you into the interesting world of local history. More than a dozen active committees of the Historical Society of the Nyacks offer ways for you to participate, from researching, recording, writing, planning, and displaying to simply reading, seeing and attending. Contact and program information appears elsewhere in this newsletter and is always up-to-date on our Web site at [www.nyackhistory.org](http://www.nyackhistory.org) and through our e-mail news group.

Among the highlights of the coming seasons is an exhibit on the history of local houses of worship researched and planned by a committee under Pat Condello and Karen Kennell.

The always popular John Scott Armchair Walking Tours, co-sponsored with the Friends of the Nyacks and featuring the outstanding knowledge, style and visual aids of Bob Goldberg, will be back again this winter.

And perhaps the best news, our favorite House Tour will be back after a two-year hiatus, under the guidance of Terry Hekker and Joan Moffett.

The three books we have published are available at the Nyack Library, local bookshops and by mail; and the Publications Committee is considering what to do next.

The Collections Committee works weekly, cataloguing and preserving our acquisitions for future exhibits and research, using a secure storage room generously provided by the Village of Nyack.

Our Cemetery Committee is working on a way to make information on burials at the Old Palmer Burying Ground more accessible to visitors.

And our volunteers continue to help the Nyack Library staff in its

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## How We Got Started

Florence Katzenstein, who would become our first president, got the ball rolling during a meeting in her home in early 1994 to discuss the need for a local historical society. The result was the following call to meeting in the *Journal News*.

*The rest, as they say, is history.*

March 1, 1994

**F**orming: Society of the Nyacks  
To the Editor:

A group of residents of the Nyacks is forming a Historical Society of the Nyacks to collect and conserve historical documents, individual oral and written accounts and historical memorabilia specifically related to Nyack, Central Nyack, South Nyack and Upper Nyack.

The new society will coordinate its work with that of the Historical Society of Rockland, which deals with the history of the entire county, and with the historical division of the Nyack Library, which has great expertise in oral history.

The three villages and the Hamlet of Central Nyack have constituted a single community, originally because of their focus on Hudson River commerce, and until recent decades because limited cross-county transportation facilities isolated them from the rest of the county.

In the 1930's and especially with the opening of the Tappan Zee Bridge (in 1955), the Nyacks were faced with rapid suburbanization, but they refused to become a mere bedroom community of New York City. Economic prosperity was stimulated by commerce in antiques: and from the end of World War II onward there has been remarkable growth in the practice and appreciation of the arts.

The Nyacks are home to artists, writers, musicians, actors, architects, movie directors and TV personnel. Much of the cultural life is focused on the Hopper House Art Center.

Important changes in the Nyacks have also taken place as minority groups have played an increasingly significant role in the community. Stimulating change is also evident in the churches temples and schools. These changes, all tending toward a most vibrant and intricate community along with the fascinating early history of the Nyacks, will be the focus of the new historical society.

An organizational meeting open to the public will be held Monday, March 14, at 8 p.m. at the Upper Nyack Elementary School, North Broadway. All interested are welcome. Florence Katzenstein

## Presidents's Letter

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Local History Room, filled with great resource material.

Still, lots of people say "Why should I care about history?" or "It's just an amusing hobby for a few people" or "I'm not going to let the past affect my future." We each have our own answer, based on our personal philosophy and beliefs. What is yours? I would like to publish some of the best answers in future issues. Please send us your answers.

## Houses of Worship

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dren all day and into the evening, all week long. The Center is also a hosting location for various groups of adults as well as children.

In the new basement ladies' room, one wall is of old sandstone. Win Perry, whose architectural firm did the recent renovation, says: "I have wondered about the old sandstone foundation that is visible in the ladies' room. It does not correspond with the present exterior wall of the building and is actually somewhat askew relative to it. I suspect that it is from an older building that was taken down when the church was enlarged. We found it when we had the space for the ladies' room dug out under the building."

## St. Paul's Fondly Recalled

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beautiful blues in the magnificent stained glass window. In later years I attended classical music events there with the Morning Music Club and the Saturday night recitals. Times change things and some call it progress, but still it is sad to see.

I wish the members well and I hope St. Paul's new life will be fulfilling, too.

## Coming Up

**F**uture newsletters will include articles on the Nyack Ice Company, The Pilgrim Baptist Church and the "glass box on stilts." To subscribe, join the Society today.

## Historical Society of the Nyacks

**A not for profit organization**  
[www.nyackhistory.org](http://www.nyackhistory.org)  
**P. O. Box 850, Nyack, NY 10960**  
**E-mail: [questions@nyackhistory.org](mailto:questions@nyackhistory.org)**

## Membership

Join us in preserving the rich history of the Nyacks. Members receive our mailings and enjoy discounts on our publications and special events.

- Family/joint (\$25)
- Individual (\$15)
- Student/retired (\$10)
- Business/professional (\$50)
- Sustaining (\$100)
- Enduring (\$100)
- President's Club (\$500)
- Fellow (\$1,000)
- Senior Fellow (\$2,500)
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ donation
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ corporate gift
- I am interested in mentioning the Society in my will.

If your company has a matching gift program, please include forms.

## Order Society Publications

- Award winning *Nyack in Black & White, Race Relations Over Three Centuries* for \$20.28 (Price \$16.00, tax \$1.28, s&h \$3.00)
  - The Nyacks* for \$24.59 (Price \$19.99, tax \$1.60, s&h \$3.00)
  - Nyack in the 20th Century: a Centennial Journal* for \$32.70 (Price \$27.50, tax \$2.20, s&h \$3.00)
  - \$68.57 for all three books (Price \$63.49, tax \$5.08, s&h waived)
- Members, apply 10% discount to Price, then add appropriate tax and s&h. For more information on our books, visit [www.nyackhistory.org](http://www.nyackhistory.org)

## Society Officers and Committee Chairs

President: Win Perry • Vice President: John Elliot • Secretary: Myra Starr • Treasurer: Tom Hackett • Corresponding Secretary: Rosemary McPhillips • Collections: Evelyn Fitzgerald • Events and Fund-raising: Florence Katzenstein • Exhibitions: Pat Condello and Karen Kennell • Finance: Tom Hackett • Graphic Design: John Elliot • Headquarters and Museum: John Elliot • Historian: Ruth Fee • Historical Markers: Gini Stolldorf • Membership, Web Site: Jim Hershberger • Newsletter: Jim Hershberger, Jean Pardo • Oral Histories: Jean Pardo • Programs: Bob Goldberg • Publications: Leontine Temsky • Publicity: Stephanie Taylor • Upper Nyack Cemetery: Florence Katzenstein • Yard Sale: Open