



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

Volume 5

Issue 4

Winter 2010

President's Musings: It's Time to Shift Gears

by Win Perry, Society president

In 2009, we presented our big quadricentennial exhibit *Fish & Ships—the Hudson River in the History of the Nyacks*, featuring Henry Hudson, Native Americans, Robert Fulton, and the rock-quarrying, shipbuilding, steamboat-riding, fishing, fun-loving, and artistic people that followed them on our shores. What a high that was! We mustered almost 200 volunteers to serve as historians, curators, picture hangers, contributors, organizers, docents, hostesses, receptionists, publicists, shoppers, as well as a bookkeeper, videographer, and photographic recorder. Undoubtedly, there are other roles I've forgotten or wasn't aware of. We recorded 1,135 guests and there were probably more we didn't mark down. We spent some \$8,300 and took in about \$5,700 in contributions, sales, and special donations. I feel really good about our net cost of \$2,600, a gift to the community to promote interest in local history. The guest book is full of generous compliments and thoughtful reactions. But what really warmed my heart were the unedited letters from fourth-grade students who visited the exhibit and wrote to thank us.

Now we're planning for 2010. We will of course have our usual offerings of *John Scott Armchair Walking Tours*, historical exhibits at the Nyack Library, and other programs, probably a bus trip or two, and likely a yard sale. We will continue to augment and maintain our collection of items from Nyack's history, and our members will volunteer to help staff the library's Local History Room.

The big event this year will be our fourth House Tour, which will feature, among others, some of the homes owned by Dr. Pierre Bernard's Clarkstown Country Club, and by related people and organizations. The tour will be preceded a few weeks earlier by an illustrated talk by Grace Gordon, who curated the collection of papers and memorabilia in the Bernard estate. Her talks fill every seat in the house and bring rave reviews.

Dr. Bernard and the institution he and his wife developed constitute an incredibly strange, unique, and exciting episode in Nyack history. A promoter, who did not have the academic credentials he claimed, Bernard was largely responsible for introducing yoga to this country. He and his wife attracted wealthy socialites to the club and produced a staggering variety of activities, leaving a lasting mark on the community. We will also be reprinting *Life at the Clarkstown Country Club, Nyack, N.Y., a place where the philosopher may dance and the fool be provided with a thinking cap*, originally published in 1935.

Fourth Spring House Tour Approaches

Saturday, May 15
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Nyack's Original House Tour

Featuring homes and buildings of impresario Dr. Pierre Bernard and the intriguing Clarkstown Country Club of the 1930s, as well as other homes with distinctive styles and features.

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Purchase Early Bird
Reservations:
Members: \$30
Non-members: \$35
After May 1: \$40
~


If you have questions or wish to volunteer, contact chairperson Betty Gaeta, 845.358.2765, abgaeta@verizon.net

~
www.nyackhistory.org
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Information line:
845.418.4430

You will find details of all our 2010 activities in this and future issues of our Newsletter and on our website at www.nyackhistory.org.

Do You Miss us Between Newsletters? Visit our Website.

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The Hopper Spoon

by Arthur H. Gunther, III

Old houses do not give up their secrets willingly, with entire generations sometimes skipped before a stranger gets a peek into history. I was such a stranger in such a house, and I am thankful.

In early January 2009, at the Edward Hopper House Art Center in Nyack, the birthplace and boyhood home of the American realist painter (1882-1967), fellow trustee and volunteer Lynn Saaby and I were installing a utility sink. One final connection had to be made to an old drain pipe, which required that I crawl into the wall recess of what was once a linen/cutlery storage room on the second floor of the Queen Anne Federal-style house.

The pipe was stubborn, but so was I, and as I wrestled with it the cast-iron behemoth resisted. After giving up a few more drops of water, the pipe finally agreed to surrender and Lynn and I pronounced the installation a success.

When I was gathering up my tools, by now numbering about 14 pieces (you know how plumbing goes), I also threw a crusted, most awful looking piece of metal into my kit, which I had found in the wall recess. I was too tired to give it a look then, and with the savory thought in the back of my mind that perhaps we had found something really old in a really old house (1858), I let the metal sit with my tools for a week or so in my basement. (As it is with savory thoughts, the anticipation and suspense grow if you let them stew a bit.)

Finally, I took to the toolbox, pulled out my wrenches, pliers, and

what not, cleaned them and put them back in storage. Again, finally, there in the bottom of the box, along with worksite debris that I still had to throw out, was the crusted, most awful looking piece of metal. I took it in my hands and carefully chipped away at the greenish gook. I washed it in vinegar and polished it, and washed it again in vinegar and salt to etch out the crevices. It was eventually revealed that we had found a silver-plated spoon, most likely from the Hopper family service, marked "1847 Rogers Bros.," in the *Assyrian Head* pattern first produced in 1886.

This was a find, I thought, since the painter himself, a four-year-old in 1886, may have used it at Sunday dinner, as might his mother Elizabeth, father Garret, sister Marion, and his Grandmother Smith.

The story is even more interesting if you conjure up that the boy who would become the man who painted from inner life such iconic pieces as *Nighthawks*, *Early Sunday Morning*, and *Seven A.M.* may have deliberately hidden the spoon in the wall recess during his youth some 120 years ago.

Edward Hopper left his boyhood home for good in 1910, though his sister lived there until she died in 1965. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a great effort was made by the Edward Hopper Landmark Preservation Foundation to rescue the Hopper birthplace from demolition.

The building, located at 82 North Broadway, is now part of the Edward Hopper House Art Center, which offers exhibitions and other arts-

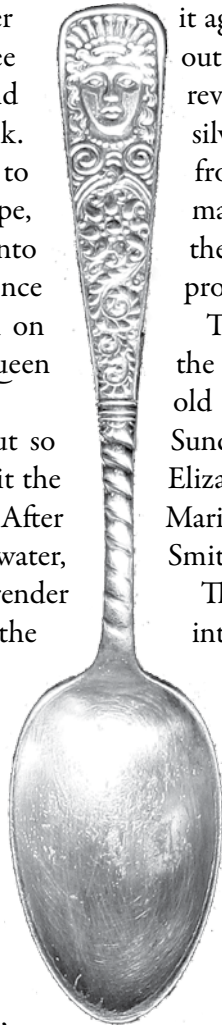
related activities. A Hopper Room is being planned to showcase the artist's life and work and that of his family.

The *Assyrian Head* spoon that Lynn and I found may well become a permanent part of that special room, which was added to the original house in the year of Edward's birth. Hidden from view, carved in the original fireplace mantle there, are the initials "E.H.," perhaps another secret young Edward left behind in his boyhood home.

Hopper once said, "The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm." It could be that the long-lost spoon and the initials, too, are part of his story and of his art.

Art Gunther penned *The Column Rule*, a newspaper opinion piece, for 25 years, 1981-2006, at *The Journal News* in Rockland County, New York.

Photo by AHG



Hopper House

The Edward Hopper House Art Center is a dynamic multi-arts center situated in the birthplace and childhood home of renowned American realist painter Edward Hopper (1882-1967). The Art Center presents art exhibitions featuring the work of emerging and established artists and juried theme shows in all styles and media. There are also programs and events for children and adults throughout the year, including an outdoor summer jazz concert series, Artists in the Park event, a December book fair, a monthly poetry workshop, drawing, painting, and photography classes, and much more. This historic house, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was an important influence on Hopper's art throughout his life.

www.hopperhouse.org



Main Street looking northeast, aftermath of the Blizzard of 1888.



Ayers Boat Yard, Upper Nyack, circa 1900.

Photos courtesy of Lewis F. Stockmeyer Collection, all rights reserved.

Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Nyacks

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~

\$1 per month for individuals,
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prorated monthly to May 31

~

More details on next page

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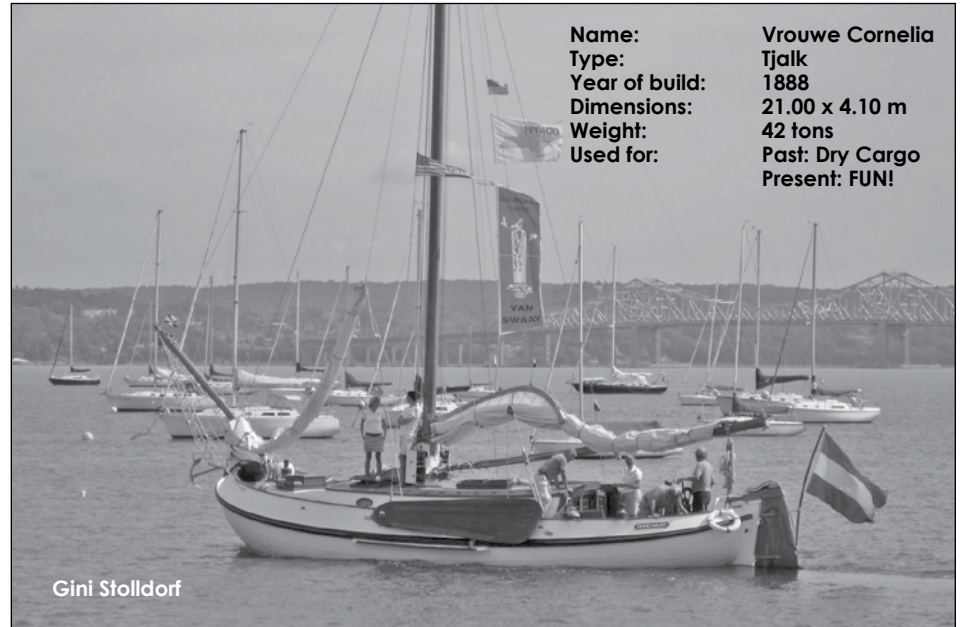
“Oh, what a time it was . . .”

(“Och, wat een mooie dag het was!”)

by Gini Stollendorf

Last September, the Nyack Boat Club hosted some 140 guests from the Netherlands, who had come with their flat-bottomed boats, or *tjalks*, to celebrate the quadricentennial of the discovery of the Hudson River.

This type of boat was used in the Netherlands as far back as Henry Hudson's time for its design, which enabled the Dutch to navigate their shallow waterways. Originally used to carry cargoes of peat, building materials, agricultural produce, oysters, etc., the *tjalk* today is used primarily for pleasure; of the visiting *tjalks*, several were owned by descendants of the families who built them.



Kieran Quinn, Rear Commodore in charge of programs at the Boat Club, thought the boats would be of interest to Nyack residents and contacted the Consul General of the Netherlands to make arrangements for their visit. The *tjalks* arrived by freighter in New York City, where they were met by their owners, who had arrived by plane to embark on their trek up the Hudson River to Albany with stops along the way. (Among the seventeen *tjalks* in September, the *Sterre*, was one of four that had previously visited Nyack twenty-three years ago.)

As the Nyacks are rich in Dutch history, Quinn asked the Friends of the Nyacks and the Historical Society of the Nyacks to treat our guests to walking tours. Kay Levinson, Bob Goldberg, and I were delighted to lead these tours. Our guests were pleased to hear about our Dutch heritage, which is reflected in the names of many of our streets and some of our local businesses. The Lydecker family can claim an ancestor, Melchior Leydekker, who was a professor of theology at the University of Utrecht, and another, Jan Claesz Leideckers, who is pictured in the Rembrandt painting known as *The Night Watch* (actual title: *The Militia Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq*).

Our guests were jovial, hearty, and most friendly and were delighted at the warm welcome they received from the residents of the Nyacks.

Nyack Boat Club: The First Hundred Years

by Gini Stollendorf
(from information provided by Lee Luce, editor of The Telltale, NBC newsletter)

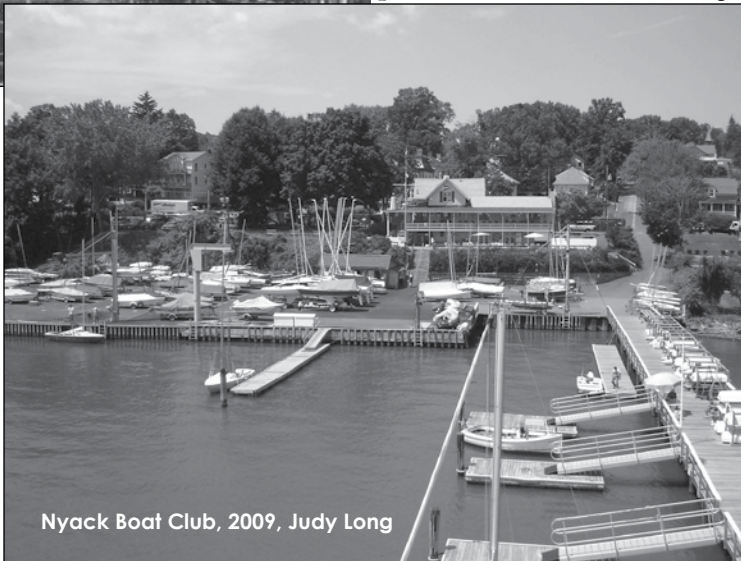


The Nyack Boat Club (NBC), located on Gedney Street, was established on September 10, 1909, and is one of the oldest boat clubs on the Hudson River. In the beginning, its original forty members owned canoes, small power boats, and sail boats. By the 1960s, the club was still a mixture of sail and power, but in the last few decades sailing has become the



First club house, circa 1910

passion. The clubhouse, which dates from an earlier time, occupies a two-and-a-half-acre site. Over the years, new docks and boat hoists were installed and a major bulkhead was constructed to provide dry storage, but also protection from the ravages



Nyack Boat Club, 2009, July Long

of the river. The Hudson, a tidal estuary at Nyack, experiences current changes four times daily, running to or from the Atlantic Ocean at up to 4.1 knots. The difference between high and low tide is generally three to four feet.

Nyack Boat Club is a do-it-yourself organization. All members are required to contribute at least four days of work per year. The practice not only helps keep membership dues low, but also helps establish a sense of ownership among members. Throughout the year, work parties maintain the clubhouse and waterfront.

The heart and soul of the club are its sailing and racing programs. Among them, the well-known Junior Sailing Program established forty years ago, which promotes the education and development of young sailors and has proven to be a springboard for a life-time love of sailing.

Congratulations to the Nyack Boat Club as it enters its second century. And many thanks for your continuing love and respect of the Hudson River.

To learn more about the Nyack Boat Club, visit www.nyackboatclub.org.

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Blauvelt Drug Store interior, circa 1900.



Dentist's office, circa 1900.

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Gentleman with horse and carriage, circa 1900.



Nyack Hospital, 1900.

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Watch for the Daffodils this Spring!

Remember the 2,000 daffodil bulbs that were donated to the Society by Jan and Annelien Doornbosch of the International Bulb Company of Montvale, NJ, which were given to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage and discovery of the river that bears his name (see HSN Newsletter, Fall 2009)? You can look for them popping up this spring at the following locations: South Nyack Village Hall, Nyack Library, First Reformed Church, Nyack Senior Center, Memorial Park, Nyack Hospital, Travis Monuments Inc., Congregation Sons of Israel, Old Stone Meeting House, Palmer Burial Ground (Upper Nyack), Temple Beth Torah, Upper Nyack Elementary School, Nyack High School, Nyack Beach State Park (Hook Mountain), and around the *Welcome to Nyack* road sign in Central Nyack. —Ed.



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Saturday, May 15, 2010
Nyack's Original House Tour
Details inside

