



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

Volume 6

Issue 2

Spring 2011

DePew House and the Historical Society of the Nyacks

by Gini Stollendorf, Editor

In March, the Historical Society began renting space in the DePew House, located behind the Nyack Library, on the corner of DePew and Piermont Avenues, across from Memorial Park. Volunteers moved the archives, memorabilia, and book collection, which had been stored in private homes and at the Nyack Village Hall, into the new space. With its materials centralized, the Society will now be able to stage displays and be open to the public.

The historic DePew House, built between 1850 and 1851, is in the Italianate style, which came into favor in the United States starting in the 1840s (more on this style of architecture in Nyack in a later newsletter). This architectural style was promoted by one of our country's preeminent architects, Alexander Jackson Davis, and popularized by the noted landscape architect, Andrew Jackson Downing. Lyndhurst, in Irvington, N.Y., a property of The National Trust for Historic Preservation (www.PreservationNation.org) was also designed by A. J. Davis.

The DePew family presence in this area dates back to before the American Revolution. Peter (Petrus) DePew I, descended from a Huguenot family, purchased land in what would become Tappan. In 1791, he moved to the Nyack area, buying an 80-acre

farm for five shillings. The Nyack Library sits on the site that was the barn of this farm.

Another member of the family, John DePew, served under "Mad" Anthony Wayne during the American Revolution.

In 1816, the DePews donated some of their land (corner of DePew and Broadway) for the construction of the church that now houses The Nyack Center. Along with farming, the family had interests in shipping. They built the first dock in Nyack and owned schooners that traveled up and down the Hudson River and into the Atlantic as far south as Richmond, Virginia.

Peter DePew II (1807-70) started a nursery on part of the farmland and sold varieties of grapevines, which were shipped all over the country. He was president of the Rockland Agricultural Society, a health official, a road commissioner, and was instrumental in bringing the railroad to Rockland County. He served as a trustee on the School Board and, in 1852, deeded 2.5 acres of land to be used for educational purposes—the Liberty Street School was built and remained there until 1968.

Twin sons, Peter III and Tunis, were born on the day of the Lincoln assassination. They later owned a floral business with greenhouses located on the upper level of Memorial Park.



OPEN HOUSE

**OUR NEW HEADQUARTERS
SATURDAY, MAY 7, 2011
1-4 P.M.**

**SAME DAY AS THE
NYACK LIBRARY REDEDICATION**

FEATURING:

**HOPPERESQUE EXHIBIT
SIGNATURE QUILT FROM 1862
TALLMAN FACTORY PIANO
WILCOX & GIBBS SEWING MACHINE
ST. GEORGE HOTEL RECEPTION DESK**

**ACROSS THE LIBRARY PARKING LOT
SUITE L-2
50 PIERMONT AVENUE**

Refreshments

(See the Historical Marker, placed by the American Legion, on the corner of DePew and Piermont Avenues.)

The DePew family is indelibly entwined in the history of Nyack and the Historical Society is delighted to be sharing their home. Please check our website: www.nyackhistory.org for updates. And stayed tuned!

Visit our Local History Calendar: www.nyackhistory.org

Edward Hopper and Nyack

by Arthur H. Gunther, III

When in May 1967 the famed American Realist painter, Edward Hopper, was buried at the top of the rise in Nyack's Oak Hill Cemetery as sunlight was rising from the east, there were just a handful of people to see this native villager's remains placed for eternity against the backdrop of the Hudson River. How fitting all this was, for solitude, light, and water were his lifelong mentors, and they were now his pallbearers.

Nyack in 1967 was not the community Hopper knew as a boy from 1882, the year of his birth, through 1899, when he graduated from Nyack High School on Liberty Street. Then a village of much industry and progress, Nyack would continue to grow up around the family home at 53 North Broadway, built in 1858 by Hopper's grandfather, John DeWint Smith, and the dry goods store operated by his father, Garrett, on South Broadway. After three trips to Paris to study art, Hopper left Nyack in 1910 for New York City, where he remained until his death. On occasion, he would visit his parents and sister, Marion, but spent little time in the formative community of his youth.

As Hopper matured as a painter and achieved fame producing iconic masterpieces, Nyack weathered World War I, the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the suburban changes that hastened and were forever forged in Rockland County by construction of the Tappan Zee Bridge and two interstate highways. By 1967, urban renewal was altering the face of the downtown. Suburban development was bustling outside Nyack and long-established small-town businesses, pushed into closing by shopping strips and malls, were giving way to antiques shops. Hopper's old homestead was rundown and it looked as if it would be demolished, perhaps to be replaced by the apartment buildings then gaining favor in tax-needy Nyack.

A group of quick-thinking, hardworking volunteers soon came forward to rescue the house at what is now 82 North Broadway. The non-profit Edward Hopper Landmark Preservation Foundation was formed and established the Edward Hopper House Art Center as a memorial to the great painter and, for the past 40 years, as a home for art and cultural activities.

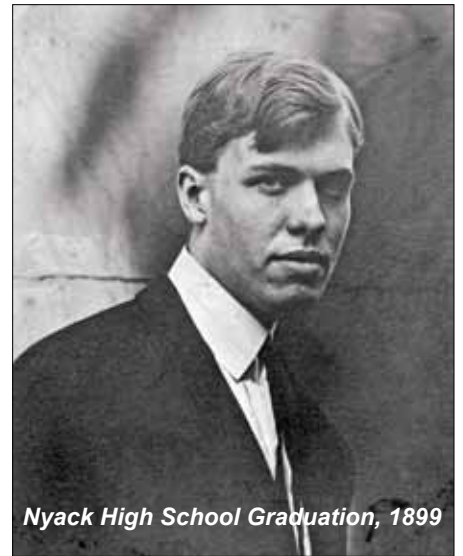
Today, the Edward Hopper House is increasingly recognized as the touchstone of a young boy, then a young man, then a young adult, whose mother Elizabeth, father Garrett, and sister Marion strongly encouraged his artistic development. (The family's ancestors included artists and would-be ones like his mother.)

Arthayer R. Sanborn, former pastor of the First Baptist Church in Nyack and a late-in-life good and loyal friend to Hopper, wrote in 1982 for the Historical Society of Rockland, "As Edward . . . walked through the boat yards, wandered along the Hudson or rode his bicycle throughout the county, his eyes were gazing on scenes which would be imprinted indelibly on his mind. Through the years, these scenes found their way into some of his paintings."

Such famous works as *House by the Railroad* and *Railroad Sunset* have a direct connection to Rockland, and *Seven A.M.* is a look at the old storefront at School Street and North Broadway still standing in Upper Nyack. Bits and pieces of Nyack architecture appear in many of Hopper's works and, some say, so does his father.

The painter's fame has greatly increased in the years since his death. And even as his hometown of Nyack also experienced a rebirth as a river village, Hopper has been sought out worldwide as "the painter of silence." He was an artist who captured moments that have a before and an after in their setting, a very American genius who put his finger on a

Continued on back page.



Nyack High School Graduation, 1899

Edward Hopper's Nyack Mercantile

Six tailor shops • three clothing stores • five coal dealers • 18 grocery stores • four book and stationery stores • nine meat markets • two sewing machine stores • five boot and shoe stores • six blacksmith shops • three music stores

Manufacturing

Three shipyards • one church organ factory • six shoe factories (turning out 500,000 pairs per year) • one paper box factory • one rowboat factory • two sleigh factories • one hat factory

Services

Eight hotels • two railroads • one rr headquarters • 31 passenger trains daily • one ferryboat • four weekly newspapers • one gas company • extensive telephone system • eight doctors • three laundries

Other

Two opera houses • one choral society • a free library • three public schools • one rowing association • ten churches • the Salvation Army

Sources: *Friends of the Nyacks and Nyack Evening Journal*, January 1888.

Saving the Hopper House

by Win Perry, Society President

Edward Hopper, who was to become one of the most admired American painters, spent his boyhood in the family home on North Broadway, from his birth in 1882 until shortly after he graduated from Nyack High School in 1899. After studying art in New York City and Paris, his life centered on his apartment on Washington Square, and a summer cottage in Truro, Cape Cod, as well as trips to Maine. His sister Marion continued to live in the Nyack house and Edward visited her regularly. Marion died in 1965, Edward in 1967, and his wife Jo soon after. By the time the estates were settled, the house was in bad condition. It was bought by an investor from Westchester County (N.Y.) who said she would tear it down and build a store building with apartments above. Meanwhile, Jeffrey Arnold and his wife Barbara had purchased the two houses behind the Hopper House that were also owned by the Hoppers.

Arnold, a chemistry instructor at Lehman College, recognized the potential of the Hopper House as a cultural resource and began a campaign to elicit interest in saving it. He consulted with the Hudson River Valley Commission and the New York State Historic Trust, which eventually named the house a historic landmark, but provided no money. After a year of writing letters to the editor of the local paper and appealing unsuccessfully to wealthy people and business groups, he issued a call to Rockland County artists to form a committee to try to buy the house. Gertrude Dahlberg, wife of watercolorist Edwin Dahlberg, was the first to respond, followed by Joseph McDowell, Susan Reed, Alan

Edward Hopper House Art Center

The Center will present a groundbreaking exhibit of paintings on loan from the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. *Edward Hopper, Prelude: The Nyack Years*, on view from May 21 to July 17, 2011, will also include artwork and memorabilia from the Arthayer S. Sanborn Hopper Collection Trust.

82 N. Broadway, Nyack
845.358.0774

www.yearofedwardhopper.com.

Gussow, and Ralph Braden. Tyna Mansfield of Tappan provided many useful connections. Robert Kassell, whose law office was next door, wrote them a letter offering pro bono legal services. Robert Minichiello, a publisher of art textbooks, also volunteered early. With Jeffrey Arnold as President and Barbara Arnold as Secretary, the committee succeeded in obtaining an interest-free loan from Stephen Leeman of Upper Nyack for \$15,000, and a loan of \$1,800 from Mr. and Mrs. J. William Clark of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. This funding, along with personal contributions by the Arnolds and other committee members, enabled the committee to sign a contract on February 23, 1971, to purchase the Hopper House for \$18,000, probably its fair market value at the time.

With Robert Kassell handling the legal work, the group adopted a constitution and bylaws. The Edward Hopper Landmark Preservation Foundation became official a few months later and soon achieved IRS approval as a recipient of deductible contributions. A big boost to the effort came when the Whitney Museum of American Art agreed to lend 30 to 40 original Hopper paintings for a fundraising exhibit, held in the Presidential Life Insurance



Building the following January. Alan Gussow was successful in negotiating with the Whitney and architect Fritz Krieger helped hang the show. The evening before the opening, a benefit dinner was held for 60 at the Norman Rose home in Upper Nyack.

Gradually, a rift developed between Jeffrey Arnold and the other trustees. Arnold was rather conservative, socially and politically, and the others were generally more liberal. They often found themselves disagreeing, sometimes about things that had nothing to do with the Hopper House. The final break reportedly came when Arnold was not included in the closing of a new bank mortgage to replace the earlier loans. Whether he was snubbed or whether he had already resigned is not clear. In any case, he left the Board and Robert Minichiello became the second President. During the next year and a half the Board completed its reorganization and focused on fundraising to meet its new mortgage payments.

In the Nyack Library
May 17 - July 31:
Edward Hopper:
Growing up in Nyack
Through May 31:
The History of the
Nyack Library

Historical Society of the Nyacks

A not for profit organization

Officers and Committee Chairs

President: Win Perry • **Vice President:** Leontine Temsky • **Secretary:** Myra Starr • **Treasurer:** Tom Hackett • **Corresponding Secretary:** Virginia Smith • **Collections:** Evelyn Fitzgerald • **Events/Fund-raising:** Florence Katzenstein • **Fund-raising/Grants/Volunteers:** Linda Greene • **Exhibitions:** Pat Condello, Karen Kennell • **Finance:** Tom Hackett • **Headquarters and Museum:** Tom Hackett • **Historian:** Ruth Fee • **Historical Markers:** Leontine Temsky • **Historic Preservation:** Jean Pardo • **Membership:** Judy Martin • **Graphic Design:** Jim Hershberger • **Publicity:** Tom Morrison • **Newsletter:** Gini Stoll Dorf • **Oral Histories:** Linda Greene • **Programs/Publications:** Bob Goldberg • **Upper Nyack Cemetery:** Florence Katzenstein • **Yard Sale:** Win Perry • **Year of Hopper:** Linda Greene

Hopper and Nyack, continued from page 2

nation's individuality, its quiet, independence, strength, spirit, and endurance in images of its landscape, architecture, and its people.

Edward Hopper, who wrote prophetically as a child on a small paint box, "would-be artist," walked through a Nyack and bicycled through a Rockland where Victorian homes stood, where there were boats on the water, trains on the rails, shops on the corner. Above all, he bathed every morning in the sunlight that chased dawn up Second Avenue into his second-floor bedroom. He could not and would not escape the realism of the American scene. He took that as gospel and was its eloquent stage narrator. Hopper left Nyack at age 28 to achieve lasting brilliance, but the village, the source of his "inner life," did not leave him.

Arthur H. Gunther, III is a retired newspaper photographer/writer/editor who lives in Blauvelt. He is a trustee of the Edward Hopper House Art Center and was co-curator of the recent exhibit Hopperesque: Realism and Light in Photography.

To join, renew or donate, mail a check to the return address below, or go to: www.nyackhistory.org, Membership Tab.



Return Service Requested

Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Nyacks

P.O. Box 850
Nyack, N.Y. 10960
845.418.4430
www.nyackhistory.org
newsletter@nyackhistory.org

~

Gini Stoll Dorf, Editor
James Hershberger, Designer
John Elliot, Logo Artist
Patricia H. Jarden, Copy Editor
Myra Starr, Copy Editor

~

Photographs courtesy of Nyack High School, Nyack Library, Hopper House, and Bob Goldberg, all rights reserved.

Return Service Requested

Renewal Notice: Please renew if your membership is nearing expiration, per the mailing label below. Thank you for supporting local history!
\$1/mo: \$12 per year individual
\$2/mo: \$24 per year family

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #6006
Monsey, NY
10952

