

# The Bowdoin Park Collection

## Repository

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## Access Number

2003.0005

## Processed by

Finding Aid Author: Gregory Wiedeman, 2013  
Arranged by: unknown  
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Encoded by: n/a

## Date Completed

2013 April 17

## Creators

Bowdoin Park Historical & Archaeological Association (BPHAA)

## Extent

8 linear feet, or 8 records boxes

## Dates

Inclusive: 1974 – 2001

Bulk: 1980s

## Conditions Governing Access

No Restrictions

## Languages

English

## Scope and Content

The collection primarily consists of the administrative records of the Bowdoin Park Historical & Archaeological Association (BPHAA). This includes administrative correspondence, meeting minutes, clippings, newsletters, mailing lists, invoices, archaeological reports, and overall a large

amount of semi-arranged administrative manuscript material. Some file listings and scope and content information is handwritten and located inside each corresponding box.

## Historical Note

The area that is now Bowdoin Park was first settled by Dutch traders around 1609. After the English takeover of the colony in 1664, Indian interpreter Arnout C. Viele bought a large parcel along the river in the area with the permission of Albany. This was the first recorded land deed in Dutchess County. Due to poor surveying and mapmaking, the crown also granted the same land to both Francis Rombouts and either Philip Pieterse or Pieter Schuyler.

In 1688 Pieter Pietersen Lassen sold half his stake in his father's brewery and settled on the land with his wife. His son William Lassen was the first ethnic European born in Dutchess County. In 1696 the elder Lassen and Arnout C. Viele petitioned the governor of New York and New Jersey to recognize the purchase of Viele's deed by Lassen – recognition was granted eight years later in 1704. Pieter Lassen died soon after in 1709, and when his wife passed in 1735, the estate was split into seven equal value portions among his children. Just to the south, the village of New Hamburg grew along the mouth of Wappinger Creek which powered the settler's mills.

Pieter Larsson's grandson sold his parcel in 1751 to Francis Jaycocks and Samuel Drake who built a ferry to Marlborough. The area was relatively quiet during the revolution, although it did witness the lower Hudson campaign of 1777, the only British movement that far north was General John Vaughn's march up the west bank of the river to burn Kingston and a British flotilla on the river which sacked the Livingston Estate in Columbia County.

The land passed to Aries Medlar and Peter Leroy before being divided up and sold to the Tallmadges and the Van Rensaleers before being reclaimed by John Leroy whose heirs held the plot until 1865. Another Larsson son, Johannes, built a homestead near where the park's duck pond is now. His grandson Peter Larsson sold the plot to a Fishkill farmer named Aries Vanderbilt.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the area became a prime location for seasonal retreats for wealthy New Yorkers. James Lenox bought Vanderbilt's land in 1837 and built Netherwood. Lenox's mother-in-law moved to the area and built The Cedars and her son John constructed High Cliff. Another brother-in-law, James Donaldson, followed and built an estate on Chestnut Hill where Mt. Alvernia will someday stand. The Presbyterian family funded several churches and schools in the area. James Lenox bought nearby parcels and reconsolidated much of the old Pieter Larsson estate. The coming of railroad tracks cut the estate off from the mainland and devalued much of the land.

The completion of the rail line in 1849 led to Lenox selling the land to Gardiner Green Howland, Sr., a shipbuilder and railroad investor. Howland lived at Netherwood with his second wife, Louisa Meredith until 1863 when the estate passed to his son Meredith who then sold the land to his sister Johanna, the wife of Irving Grinnell, the son of Congressman Moses Hicks Grinnell and grandnephew of Washington Irving. Meredith purchases part of the Leroy estate, most of which is added to Netherwood and the rest passed to neighbor John Banks.

Irving Grinnell built a large boat house on the property and held sailing and iceboat races. His sister and her husband, George S. Bowdoin purchased part of the estate on the other side of Sheafe Road in 1872. Grinnell sold the entirety of the estate to the Bowdoins shortly before his death in 1921. The family became involved with the Children's Aid Society of New York City and used part of the estate as a summer camp and "farmschool" for the society. The John Fisher

Sheafe estate was added to Netherwood around this time. The family passed the estate on to the society over seven transactions from 1928 to 1946. The Civilian Conservation Corps and local boy scouts also used the facilities. In 1975 the Children's Aid Society sold the land to Dutchess County for use as a public park.

After the purchase, the county had no available funding to develop the land. Volunteer support was sought and Glenn Dochtermann was hired as volunteer coordinator to manage the efforts. Donated materials and volunteer effort enabled the construction of nature trails, camping sites, a playground, picnic areas and the renovation of playing fields. The Bowdoin Park Historical & Archeological Association (BPHAA) was formed in 1978 and has cultivated the land's history and excavated the remains of human activity on the site over several thousand years.

The BPHAA cultivated and celebrated the park's unique position as "a complete cross-section of area history represented in one place..." The association focused on the microhistory of Bowdoin Park, presenting the land as a preeminent case study of local history from the first human habitation until the present day.

The BPHAA began while the future of the land was still very much in doubt. Dutchess County had little funding when it began administering the old estate. Dochtermann began encouraging local history "buffs" to meet regularly and help develop the park. During the late 1970s a Tri-Municipal sewer plant was planned for the neighboring land and the local history advocates were dissatisfied with an investigation that found that the land had no historic value. Thus, the BPHAA was established, with Seton Grundy as President and Gretchen Leak as Vice President, as both historical society and advocacy group. Their research identified the Tri-Municipal site as the location of the home and burial of Pieter Lassen. In the spring of 1979 a constitution was written and objectives were codified. Over the past four years, substantial work had been done on the Nature Center where the BPHAA resided and the building now had doors and windows. Yet, exhibits were still ravaged by marauding animals and in 1980 the BPHAA moved into the building next door to establish a permanent home. B Buchanan acted as unofficial volunteer historian while Jack and Donna Vargo conducted several state-registered archaeological digs on the grounds. Unfortunately, in the 1980s some poorly-planned renovations resulted in the damaging of some exhibits. Dochtermann left in 1999, but the BPHAA benefited when Gillian Flynn joined the park staff as curator of the heritage centers. As of 1992, the association had 56 members.

## **Provenance**

The Collection was donated to the Dutchess County Historical Society by Beatrice Buchanan in 2003.

## **Subject Headings**

Archaeology; Civic organizations; Clubs and societies; Genealogy; Land titles; Landmarks; Netherwood; North American Indians; Urban renewal

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