



Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK

P.O. Box 397 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0397

WINTER 2003

RH Loses Two Good Friends

Two of Red Hook's most devoted "historians" died last November within 10 days of each other. **Mary Elizabeth Briggs**, who passed away on November 19th came to Red Hook in 1940 as the bride of Fred Briggs who was employed as a butcher. Mary and Fred took up housekeeping in an apartment in the Massonneau building and returned to Red Hook after World War II and Fred's discharge from the Army Air Corp. Mary was an active member and officer of the American Legion Auxiliary and carefully maintained the records of the organization, presenting them to this Historical Society after the Auxiliary disbanded. They were both devoted collectors of local historical materials. Mary's specialty was buttons. She regularly accompanied Fred to Historical Society meetings where they displayed items from their collections. Her quiet presence at our meetings is deeply missed.

Jane Knobloch passed away on November 29th. Jane had a Masters Degree as a teacher of home economics, but after moving to Red Hook began to work in the real estate business, eventually starting her own agency 14 years ago. She was very active in community organizations including the Red Hook Rotary, the local Chambers of Commerce, the boards the Red Hook Library and Town Economic Development Committees and the Society for the Detection and Apprehension of Horse Thieves. Jane's love of Red Hook history lead her to EBHS where she served on our Board of Trustees and wrote for the Society's newsletter. She had a deep interest in genealogy and was a tireless researcher. We are most grateful for the many memorial contributions given to the Historical Society in her honor.



Fortieth Anniversary Party of the Historical Club of Upper Red Hook, Oct. 30, 1941: First row, left to right, Charter members Mrs. Harry Arnold, Miss Mary E. Kerley; Mrs. Edwin K. Losee, Miss Jennie Fulton; second row, Officers Mrs. O.T. Cookingham, Treasurer; Mrs. F. Palmer Hart, Social Committee; Mrs. George C. Hubbard, Vice President; third row, Mrs. William H. Boice, Social Committee; Mrs. RH Brenzel, Social Committee; Mrs. G. Gordon Mead, President; Mrs. Charles Gallager, Secretary. EBHS Photo, Harriet Norton Collection

The Historical Society of Upper Red Hook -

Red Hook's first history society

[Author's note: When I first heard of the Upper Red Hook historical society years ago, it was with raised eyebrows: "My, you were invited! Quite an honor!" You had to BE somebody or know somebody to be asked into what was considered in
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the first half of the twentieth century to be a closed club. All ladies, they were usually the wives of well-off farmers and professional men, civic-minded, politically and socially conservative and overwhelmingly Dutch Reformed. You knew a member by her husband's name alone, unless she was unmarried. Times may have changed, but these were impressive ladies who meant to be progressive and promote education and enlightenment in this still rural place, and they did so with élan, along with white gloves and perfect teas.

This is a reprint of an article I wrote Dec. 8, 1983 for the Gazette Advertiser, when the URHHS was still going strong. When the club was discontinued a few years ago, Charlotte Bathrick, last secretary at the Club, gave the Historical Society a wonderful box of memorabilia (thus the reminiscence).]

When Mrs. E.K. Losee wrote a history of the Historical Club of Upper Red Hook in 1921, she praised her fellow members for managing to keep it going for 20 years.

"The men have often wished for a club like ours," wrote the witty wife of Dr. E.K. Losee of Upper Red Hook, "but there has never been one brave enough to attempt it – they seem quite satisfied with the Annual Horse Thief Club!"

"It just shows what women can do," she concluded.

Six decades later, the women's Historical Club is still going strong.

The world may have changed since Mrs. E.C. Perrine founded the club in 1901, but Mrs. Losee, herself a charter member, would probably find little fault with the women who carry on the organization's original mandate – "the study of world-wide subjects."

The Upper Red Hook Historical Society still meets about twice a month to present papers on subjects that have ranged from local history to French music of the 16th century.

In order not to overcrowd the private homes in which it meets, the club allows no more than 30 members, the number which was set down in the original bylaws.

It rotates the responsibilities of its active members, half serving as hostesses to the meetings, the other half presenting written papers at each meeting.

Despite at least one attempt to storm the female bastion, it remains a women's club and membership still by invitation only.

During the club's long history, being invited has often been an indication of local social status.

"Oh, it used to be quite the thing," said member Bernice Gallagher at a recent meeting.

A member for about 40 years, she considers herself one of the "newcomers," she said with a laugh.

Originally from Brooklyn, she married into the Gallagher family of Upper Red Hook (long-time farmers and founders of the Red Hook Grange), so there was no problem being invited as a member.

Until the 50's, the club was restricted to Upper Red Hook residents only.

Years ago, you came dressed in hat and white gloves, never smoked, and the papers could run over an hour, said Mrs. Gallagher. At that time, two papers were presented at the meetings, which were held every week on Friday afternoons. Substantial refreshments, such as creamed chicken and biscuits, were served. And the Committee on Pronunciation, whose job it was to correct improper diction, was only abolished in the late 40's.

"It has changed a lot since then, she said.

Elegance and manners are not a thing of the past however. A recent meeting featured a lace-covered table replete with candles flickering above homemade finger sandwiches and cake. Tea was served in silver teapots. Tradition remains important to this historical club where at least two members represent their family's third generation of membership. A number of others are second generation. Some younger members bought farms in Upper Red Hook, which were the homes of past long-time club members and so in a way "inherited" their place in the historical society.

The honored elders

The eldest is honorary member Mrs. O.T. Cookingham, who joined the club in 1911 as Miss Clara Ham. Her mother, Mrs. Arvine Ham, who joined in 1903, was one of the first members.

The second eldest is honorary member Mrs. Clinton Gallagher of Upper Red Hook, who joined in 1913. Her aunt, Miss Jenny Fulton, was a charter member of the club, as was current member Mrs. Mary

Leake & Watts Orphanage -

A part of Tivoli's past

J. Loren Russell spoke about the Leake & Watts Children's Home and Orphanage at the Historical Society meeting on March 18, 2003. Leake & Watts operated a summer camp in Tivoli for many years. The following article is reprinted in part from The Yonkers Historian, the quarterly journal of the Yonkers Historical Society.

"John George Leake, the son of a commissary of stores for the English during the French and Indian War, inherited a large estate from his parents. John, being the last of his family, bequeathed his fortune to Robert Watts, the third son of his intimate friend and brother-in-law John Watts. The will stipulated that young Watts had to change his name to Leake to preserve the family name. If not, he was to use the estate to create a haven for homeless orphans.

Unfortunately, young Watts died before he reached the age of 21. Moved by sentiment, Robert's father joined the effort to establish the orphanage that would bear the names of both families. Leake & Watts Orphan House was founded in New York City in 1831, eventually moving to the site of The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 1843 where they remained for almost fifty years. In 1888 construction began on a new location, and in 1890 the staff and children moved into its present location at 463 Hawthorne Avenue in the city of Yonkers.

In the course of the agency's history, a third major contributor helped to expand the ability of the orphanage to provide recreation to the children served. On July 16, 1905, for the sum of \$1.00, Major General John Watts DePeyster contributed building additions and his 100-acre estate in Tivoli, NY to the Leake and Watts Children's Home and Orphanage."

The estate was originally called Rose Hill by the DePeysters'. It became Camp Tivoli, then was sold to the Catholic Workers in the 1940's and is now privately owned.



The old Leake & Watts pool, later Camp Tivoli-EBHS Photo

PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS

Curt and Lorraine Birnbaum
Ian and Randy Buckingham
Robert and Susan Davis
Nancy DeAngeles
Laurel Zadorozny Fay
Gary Finkle
Dave and Sandy Foti
Gale Knull
Donna Matthews
Ingeborg Pedersen
Carrie and Harold Ramsey
Rock City Grange (Life Member)
Rosalie Rossi
Doug and Terry Schaff
Bill Videnovic
Jan Volpe
Denise Barton and Michael Taylor

JANE KNOBLOCH MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTORS

Nick and Carol Annas
Maureen L.S. Ashley
Carlene and Dick Baright
Clare and Geoffrey Carr
John and Mary Cioffi
Paul Golden
Maynard Ham
Evelyn Krueger
Floyd and Marilyn Mathews
Lois Rachels
Peter and Beverly Riley
Tom and Evie Seils
Marie D. Sturges
Steve and Victoria Young

Hardin's grandmother, Mrs. Peter Potts.

Long-time secretary Mrs. Arvine Bathrick first attended the historical club as a child, when her mother, Mrs. George Hubbard, used to dress her and her sister up and bring them along.

"You had to behave," said Mrs. Bathrick, who will be a 50-year member in two years.

In those days, in the hamlet of upper Red Hook, social affairs centered around the grange and the church, recalled Mrs. Bathrick. But the big event of the week for ladies like her mother was the Historical Club on Friday afternoons, she said.

Monday Club

It was no different in 1901, when the club began as "The Monday Club," with what our historian Mrs. Losee calls, "a call from the pulpit!" of St. John's Church in Upper Red Hook. The connection is still maintained with a large number of the club members still belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church. In giving the impetus to the organization, the church minister, the Rev. Charles Maar, invited all the ladies of the congregation to meet at Mrs. Perrine's house on the following Monday, Nov. 11, 1901. What his motive was is not documented in the history or minutes of the club. But 13 women showed up, including Mrs. Maar. The first meeting was called the following week, with a decision to study Holland that year, and they have not stopped since.

In the ensuing 20 years, the club studied Italy, America, Germany, England, the Near East, Spain, Travels in Europe, Dutchess County and English literature. As the years progressed, they had guest speakers from Bard College, ministers and world travelers. Sometimes they gave musicales.

It was at the historical Club that brides were given showers and anniversaries were celebrated. The minutes document carefully when a Miss turned into a Mrs. To this day, with few exceptions, married women are referred to by their husbands' names on printed programs, and sometimes in introductions at meetings.

Laundry and Literary Pursuits

Mrs. Losee tells of the decision to change the name to the Monday Club a few years after its inception. "As Monday seemed to Wash Day the world over, so it was here, and Laundry and Literary Pursuits being a bad combination, we changed our name to the more dignified one of Historical Club, and we meet now on Friday, which seems to suit every one better."

The club established a library, borrowed yearly from the New York State Education Department. Members were often given reading assignments in connection with papers to be presented that year. With easier access to local libraries, members take care of their own research now.

After over 80 years, the Historical Club may appear a holdover from a world of quiet, isolated rural communities. Many women now hold down jobs and do considerable traveling. A Friday afternoon literary society seems almost a luxury. But the words of Mrs. Losee written in 1921 may still apply:

"We have yet to hear of as small a village as ours that can boast of as successful a club, one so well attended or so full of live interest in intellectual affairs, and so well represented."

On the other hand, change does not come too easily, which may be one of the reasons for the tenacity of this unusual club.

In 1945, a question came before the group, on whether or not to invite a well-known lady to speak.

Among the traditions that the club represented both officially and unofficially – those of rural life, the farm, the church, community, the pursuit of knowledge – was the tradition of political conservatism. Northern Dutchess County was then, as now, a Republican stronghold, and most of the ladies of the Upper Red Hook Historical Society were no exception, recalls Mrs. Bathrick.

The lady in question was a Democrat, and a number of the women were not sure they were interested in having her as a guest at their club. As always, the women arrived at a consensus before deciding finally to invite the noted lady – non other than the wife of the President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt and first lady of the nation, Eleanor Roosevelt.

"There was quite a to-do," recalled Mrs. Bathrick, but she was invited and came, "and they loved her." She was invited back and even made an Honorary Member.

As one of the ladies at the club put it, "If you were invited to become a member of the Upper Red Hook Historical Club, that was no small thing."

By Clare O'Neill Carr

From the Presidents desk.....

March 15, 2003

We were very shaken this year by the unexpected death of our board member Jane Knobloch. Jane was a new board member last year, but left a very positive impression on our society. She will be missed.

We have a tribute to Jane and to long-timer member Mary Briggs, who also passed away this winter in the newsletter. We thank all who contributed to Jane's memorial fund, and we hope to have a nice new "Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook" sign soon, to be placed at the front door of the Elmendorph, directing people upstairs to our archives room and office. This was Jane's great idea and wish, and the sign will be in her memory.

We are happy to announce that the Fall membership up-date drive has been successful, and we have listed the new and re-newed members in this newsletter. Please note your mailing label to see if you are up-to-date. If not correct, let us know. We always welcome new members to help support our work.

One important project that we will undertake this spring is the nomination to the National Historic Register of St. Margaret's Home. You remember we have been documenting this lovely brick house on the south of the village, which was built as a home for abandoned girls and was one of the first orphanages of its kind in Dutchess County. Hannaford Supermarkets is the owner of the house, and has agreed to support the nomination of the building. The historical society will complete the application and work with the state Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

The future of the building is not decided. However, a group of village and town trustees and several not-for-profit organizations have met to discuss its future. It is hoped, with community support, that one day we can see it returned to some kind of shared community use.

In the meantime, the board welcomes John Vincent, who has been appointed to fill the seat of Jane Knobloch. John, whose expertise is in filming and recording, has long been a volunteer with EBHS. There have been a few more changes. Clare Carr has stepped down from the presidency because of ill health this winter. Although she remains a director, I have taken her place as Acting President, while Nick Annas has replaced me as Vice-President. Elections will be held at the annual dinner in June, where we hope to fill three seats. Details will follow in the May newsletter.

Despite changes, our archives room remains productive, with several new additions to our collections. Among them are: Fred Briggs has given us a box of interesting bottles from early Red Hook businesses, along with some memorabilia and a pound of sweet-smelling Red Hook tobacco from Hoffman & Company in its original container. Maynard Ham has added more to his already extensive collection. And Bim Chanler has given us a privately published history on the Chamberlain family.

Tom Cordier, Acting President

**SPRING 2003
PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

April 22nd "Radio 31", the Klose family radio show broadcast from Red Hook 1947-1949. Old recordings. Klose remembrance. Tivoli

May 20th Emmett Donohue on the unsolved murder of Frank Teal and other D.C. mysteries

June 17 Annual Meeting - Speaker Wint Aldrich, Town Historian, recently retired Deputy Commissioner NYS Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Board Members, 2003

Tom Cordier, Acting President

Nick Annas, Vice President

Evelyn Seils, Treasurer

Victoria Young, Corresponding Secretary

Mary Cioffi

Clare O'Neill Carr

Katherine Dewsnap

Maynard Ham

John Vincent

Barbara Thompson, Archivist

Barbara Beilenberg, Trustee Emerita

The Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook

P.O. Box 397 Red Hook New York 12571

MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2003

Name(s) (please print): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone Number (with area code): _____

Dues:

Please check: Individual \$10 _____

Contributing \$25 _____

Family \$15 _____

Sustaining \$50 _____

Student (under 18) \$5 _____

Life \$100 (individual) _____

Donation (indicate any company matches please)

Would you like to help us with the work of the Society? Please check: _____

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP: + Advance notice of monthly programs + Three newsletters yearly +The knowledge that you support the collection, preservation and dissemination of the history of the Town of Red Hook

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