



Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK

P.O. Box 1813 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0397

LOCAL HISTORY FUND DRIVE A SUCCESS

WINTER 1998

"Community response to our fund drive has been wonderful," observed Friends of Elmendorph President **Joan Lewis** as the organization's Directors voted to sign the final contracts for the restoration of the Library/Archive Center and Gallery for use by the Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook. **Hudson Valley Preservation** will perform the skilled restoration carpentry and **Charles Hapeman** will do the plaster repairs and replacements. **Robert McCarthy and Sons** is the electrical contractor for the job.

Work is scheduled to begin on February 16th and will be completed by April 1st, according to project supervisor **Herman Gorgens**. "I'm confident that we have a good team. All of them have worked on the Inn previously and we've been very pleased with the results."

Barbara Bielenberg, President of the Historical Society and Chairman of the Elmendorph Restoration Committee, expressed heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to the drive. "**Rosemary Coons**, who was for so many years our Village Historian, always dreamed of the day when Red Hook's historical records would be housed on the second floor of the Elmendorph Inn which she worked so tirelessly to save from destruction. Now the Historical Society is challenged to furnish and equip the Library and Gallery so that Rosemary's dream will be fulfilled. Donations will continue to be welcome."



RED HOOK VILLAGE: Founded on spec and the drawing of a straw

Clare O'Neill Carr

The history of Red Hook is often overshadowed by the history of Rhinebeck, whose official name this northern settlement bore until 1812. But on closer examination, the creation of the small "hardscrabble" of Red Hook has all the makings of a good story in itself.

The northern crossroads in the Rhinebeck precinct of 1750, which later became the town of Red Hook, was won by a local landowner in a family lottery--a literal drawing of straws. And what would later become the Village of Red Hook was first created in a time-honored fashion--as a promising subdivision and development investment made by a smart businessman.

The story is found in the papers and oral tradition of **J. Winthrop Aldrich**, the local town historian and descendant of the principal players in this little eighteenth-century drama--the Beekman-Livingston-Armstrong family that owned most of Red Hook.

General John Armstrong, whose wife, Alida Livingston, had inherited the Red Hook lands through her grandfather, Henry Beekman, subdivided in 1795 what amounted to nearly the entire village of Red Hook. Thirty-four lots of between one-half and three-quarters acre each, comprising what is now Cherry Street (then simply referred to as the road to Pine Plains, or Connecticut), North Broadway (the Old Post Road) from the Elmendorph Inn to the Red Hook Public Library and East Market Street, were surveyed by John Cox for Armstrong in 1795. They were carved from twenty-four acres of a leasehold farm held by Aaron Whiteman, who lived opposite what is now the Elmendorph Inn at the site of the present Stewart's Store. The original map, fragile and in pieces, is in Aldrich's possession, part of a set of several dozen maps and deeds contained in family papers in the attic of the family estate Rokeby. (Copies of the subdivision map are displayed on the wall in the south room at the Elmendorph.)

"It seems apparent that the Village of Red Hook first evolved because of the real estate decision," said Aldrich recently. "I suppose Armstrong felt 1795 was a good time to invest," said the historian. "The [Revolutionary] war was over. A bad period of postwar inflation was down, the English question was settled.

People began to feel that the country was really going to make it."

The subdivision map shows the Elmendorph Inn, owned by George Sharp at that time. A few houses and inns are shown on the west side of the Post Road. Graves Street is not yet shown and a new road, later to be named East Market Street, is simply drawn in and created access to the new subdivision on the east. A second map in Aldrich's possession, drawn some years later, contains the names of some new subdivision owners, or just as likely, renters of the plats: David Martin, Moore, Lown, Van Benthuyssen, Mathias Row, Seimon, among them. The margins are scribbled with columns of figures, in pounds, indicating rents or leases.

An Eighteenth-Century Twist

Alida Livingston Armstrong, into whose possession the Red Hook lands came, was the youngest daughter of Margaret Beekman Livingston and sister to the famous Chancellor Livingston of Clermont. Altogether there were ten Livingston children. Alida's grandfather, Henry Beekman, had bought a large chunk of what was to become the Town of Red Hook from Peter Schuyler, the original patent holder. His was the largest holding of four purchasers of Schuyler's patent, which essentially contained the Town of Red Hook. The others were the Staats family, Barent Benthuyssen and, in the Tivoli area, the Knickerbockers. Knickerbockers later sold to Hoffmans, whose name was prominent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Red Hook. Combined with his holdings in Ulster, southern Dutchess and Rhinebeck, it made Beekman one of the richest men in the region.

Ordinarily in those days, Beekman's vast estate would have been inherited by his son, his daughter's husband or his first grandson. But in an unusual eighteenth-century twist, the vast holdings came to be owned by a woman--daughter Margaret Beekman Livingston, Beekman's only living heir. her husband, Judge Robert Livingston, had died just days before her father, leaving her the sole heir. Because her first son, Chancellor Robert Livingston, had just inherited his father's vast fortune, he declined the Beekman lands. So, through a literal drawing of straws, the property was passed down to the remaining nine of her ten children.

"Alida drew the straw that gave her what is now Red Hook. And when she married three years later, Armstrong became the owner," said Aldrich.

Old Family Story

The story was passed down in the Aldrich family, and was one Aldrich remembers well from his grandmother, Margaret Aldrich. The lottery was arranged by Margaret Beekman Livingston to divide the estate among the remaining nine grandchildren. Twelve thousand acres of Dutchess County land were to be given to each of the brothers and 8,000 acres each to the sisters. The brothers were also given 30,000 acres each of Catskill land from the old Hardenburgh patent held by Beekman, and the sisters, 20,000 acres each. Margaret, an astute businesswoman and manager, first precisely surveyed and divided the lands, adding to each Dutchess County parcel, a parcel of Ulster holdings. Then she arranged for two lotteries, one for the brothers and one for the sisters. Paper strips containing the divisions were attached to the bottom of straws. And the children took turns drawing for their inheritance.

Alida drew the straw containing the lower Red Hook settlement just three miles south of Upper Red Hook, then the primary village. The 8,000-acre parcel ran approximately from the area of Montgomery Place on the Hudson River to the present town line on the north, then out to Rock City on the east.

The end of the eighteenth century began a period of development throughout Dutchess. "It was a whole new world. By the end of the century, New York and Ohio had opened up. The Post Road was a key artery in the Hudson Valley and people were interested in the area," said Aldrich.

Still, it would be another fifty years before things began to take off for Red Hook village, when tobacco manufacture and the railroad came to town, transforming the small crossroads further.

But that is another story.



Remembering the Village of Red Hook, with stories and comments from long-time residents will be the subject of the Historical Society meeting to be held at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 17th at the Elmendorph Inn.



CLARA W. LOSEE

September 30, 1917 - September 27, 1997

Dutchess County history lost a dedicated friend this fall, shortly after our last Newsletter was published. But it is never too late to remember this remarkable woman. Clara and her husband John were founders of this Historical Society and many an early meeting was held in their living room. A year before her passing, Clara turned over to us six full cartons of historical records and John's slides, negatives and prints as well as a complete run of Dutchess County Historical Society Annuals. So that you can better know Clara, we've asked her longtime friend and collaborator, Barbara Thompson, to share her memories. (Barbara continues to collaborate with Clara as she meticulously prepares a detailed index of Clara's files.)

I can't remember meeting Clara, it seems like I've always known her. Friendship is like that. We both lived in Milan and probably met at one of the first meetings of the Milan Community Organization about 1968.

Our first collaborative effort was collecting names for a mailing list for the new association and the accompanying Newsletter. Our last was when Barbara and Bob Bielenberg and I went over to Millerton in the autumn of 1996 as recipients of Red Hook and Milan records that Clara had collected in those 28 years.

After the first joint venture for the Association, we worked together on the Milan Community Newsletter. The first page was formatted with a pen-and-ink drawing of a building or structure in the town, followed by a short blurb about the picture. As Town Historian I had only been a resident for three years, I asked Clara if she would be interested in helping.

Clara always felt a special connection with the Losee Farm and Upper Red Hook. John's family had lived in the area for generations and she and John spent their early married life together there. I think that feeling probably sparked her interest in historical research. Whereas John was a collector of "things"--rocks and minerals, Indian artifacts, stuffed birds and photographs, Clara was a gatherer of information. She had a wonderful intellectual curiosity that was tenacious, thorough and untiring. These were qualities that served her well when she became involved in historical research.

Neither of us knew anything about deed research nor where records were located. Clara knew Clifford Buck of Salt Point through his association with John. Clifford became our mentor. We met him down at the County Office Building in Poughkeepsie and he kept us going all day through the intricacies of title search, liens, mortgages, how to map parcels of land, wills, etc.

We were off and running.

The Newsletter lasted for about five years with sixty articles about the land and people of the town. The name "snoop sisters" got coined in one issue and so we were. We interviewed residents of Milan, old and young; we found and picked our way over the ruins of stone houses; climbed ladders of old houses and barns and walked over the old abandoned roads. One time we drove on the closed part of Knob Hill with Clara hanging her head out the window to make sure there was enough of the road for the right-side tires so that we didn't go careening down the hill. In our travels we found old household dumps and started digging and collecting bottles. The last time Clara got a severe case of poison oak; we never did it again. We did genealogy of the nineteenth-century families and mapped their farms. By the time we got through, we had mapped almost three quarters of Milan in that period.

On weekly trips to Poughkeepsie we shared the joys and cares of raising our families. Clara loved children and they in turn loved her. It's a gift, the return of love from a child. At that time some of our children were in a 4-H Sheep club. When number three son got his first ewe at nine years old, he named her Clara. Lambing and dandelion wine will always be linked together in our family memories. After we spent frigid midnight hours in the barn waiting for a ewe to lamb and making sure the new lambs were nursing, we

would go back in the house and have a small glass of Clara and John's wine to warm our innards and celebrate a new life.

When Clara moved to Millerton and me to Saugerties, we didn't get together as often. When we did, it was as if we had met yesterday. I trust it will be again. Friendship is like that.

Barbara Thompson
October 13, 1997

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO CELEBRATE LIBRARY'S 100TH BIRTHDAY

The Society has plans under way for a creative writing and an art contest for young people in celebration of the Red Hook Library's 100th Birthday, according to Society Trustee **Kate Dewsnap**, Chairman of the project. The contests will be open to all students from grades 1 to 12 who wish to participate.

"In an effort to celebrate the upcoming centennial year of the Red Hook Public Library--1898-1998--and to honor the many citizens of our town who made it possible for us to have our own fine public library in the historic Octagon House, we will request that both the setting for the original story and the artwork feature that building in some way," stated Dewsnap.

Details of the contests will be announced in mid-February and entries will be due on April 3rd. Contest information and background material will be available at the Red Hook Schools, the Library and from the Historical Society. A special presentation of the winning entries will be a featured part of the May-19th Historical Society Meeting and Birthday Celebration for the Library.

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ARCHIVAL PROGRESS

Linda Keeling, Archivist Pro Tem

The Archives Committee has been working with great enthusiasm, patience and dedication on most Tuesdays in our temporary quarters on the second floor of the Elmendorph Inn. **Bobby Thompson**, former Milan resident and historian, has graciously focused on the Losee Collection, box by box and file by file, creating a typed index. Along the way, specific archival recommendations are noted to serve as a guide for future purchases. **Marlene Hejnal**, archivist to the Methodist Church, former Town of Red Hook records-management clerk and great computer list-maker, has been upgrading the Historical Society's filing cabinet and minute books and also copying obituary lists. **Shirley Brown** and **Barbara Bielenberg** are sorting through boxes of the Rosemary Coons Collection donated by our good friend, **Richard Coons**, Village of Red Hook historian. We cannot forget **Bob Bielenberg**, the infamous "Keeper of the Inn" who does all the little things that make the building a most hospitable place to work, learn and entertain, even though the second floor is unfinished.

Along the way, other volunteers have emerged. **Clare O'Neill Carr**, a longtime member, local journalist and real estate salesperson, has been identifying real estate properties pictured in our collections. Local surveyor **Marie Welch** has offered her expertise on the future organization of the extensive Frank Teal Survey Collection.

My job has been to organize the working space, advise on accepted archival practices, suggest and purchase materials, oversee and recommend tasks to be accomplished and analyze and problem solve. As noted, I view this as a temporary position. If you have a background with archive material and an interest in organizing our varied collections, please apply within.

Our volunteers are a wonderful assortment of members with a keen interest in local history. We are so lucky to have them. Money could never adequately compensate them for their individual and collective involvement.

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EGBERT BENSON'S FIRST HANUKKAH PARTY

Our December Holiday Party was a great success. Thanks go to Carol Brener for making initial arrangements, to Rabbi Joanna Katz and Professor Lauren Rose from Bard College for their leadership and to Nancy Hetzler who rounded up traditional dreidels (a four-sided toy like a top) and "Hanukkah Gelt" and made delicious latkes (potato pancakes). And, as always, many thanks to Mary Cioffi who assisted Nancy and filled in any gaps. The following appreciation, clipped from the *Poughkeepsie Journal* tells it all!

POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1, 1998

Thanks for Hanukkah party

The Hanukkah party held at the

Elmendorph Inn on Dec. 16 was so well attended, it was standing room only! On behalf of the small Jewish community in Red Hook, a hearty thank you to the Egbert Historical Society for sponsoring this event.

My children and I thoroughly enjoyed the presentation by Rabbi Joanna Katz, Jewish chaplain at Bard College. Lauren Rose, a professor at Bard, deserves a huge round of applause for not only leading the audience in singing traditional Hanukkah songs, but for encouraging and succeeding in teaching a diverse audience to sing in Hebrew — and in round, no less! And the refreshments were delicious.

It was heartwarming to enjoy this evening with other residents of Red Hook and the surrounding area. During this holiday season, when so much emphasis appears to be placed on the commercial impact, it was a wonderful way to share the traditions of Hanukkah with our neighbors, who may not be familiar with this historical event.

My sincere thanks to the Egbert Historical Society for a lovely evening. And, to all the new friends we made, Shalom Chaverim!

Barbara Sanchez
Rhinebeck



Above: Rabbi Joanna Katz

Right: Prof. Lauren Rose

Below: Young partygoers

Photos by John Cioffi



REMEMBERING BARRYTOWN AND LIFE ON THE FRONT PORCH

Sandy Bloomer Lydon

Recently I had the opportunity to sit down with others to speak about growing up in Barrytown. I still live in the hamlet with my family. One thing most of us had in common was the daily ritual of sitting on the porch. My next-door neighbor would come out around 3 o'clock with a colander of green beans ready for snapping and cutting. Often, I'd snap the ends while she did the cutting. Afterward, we would rock for awhile in those wonderful creaky rockers. I loved the crunchy sound of the wicker--a familiar sound I'd often hear coming through the darkness on a quiet evening.

Much can be said about times spent sitting on a porch and all of us had special moments. My favorite time came at the end of the day. After all the farm work was finished and supper was cleaned up, the garden weeded and the clothes brought in from the line, Mom and Dad headed out to the porch with newspapers, tall glasses of ice coffee, and a couple of fly swatters. My older brother and I would rush out to see who would get to the hammock first. I never won the race, but I didn't care. Usually I sat at the top of the steps with my back resting against the post. From there I got a better view of the sky with the everchanging colors that linger long after sunset. The smell of fresh cut hay was in the air. It was peaceful.

The porch was a wonderful place to do nothing at all and mostly, I sat there listening and watching. Dad would get out his tobacco and roll a cigarette while Mom got out her reading glasses and piled the papers on her lap. I'd watch my brother swing back and forth, his sagging body brushing against the dog lying almost under the hammock. One of the cats was sleeping in the chair with its head dropping off the edge of the cushion.

Soon there were other screen doors slamming here and there and I could hear faint voices and little bits of laughter coming from across the way. Once in awhile a car would go by giving us a toot and of course there were the early evening walkers always calling out a greeting and occasionally they would find their way to our porch steps and sit awhile. One visitor was **Allen Porter** who would stop briefly to chat about the weather and the "glorious" evening and he'd remark how "grand" it was. Then he'd be on his way, taking long strides and calling over his shoulder, "Well, be brave!"

Another Barrytown "character" who frequently stopped by was **Nina Russel**. At one time she told me she was caring for thirty-eight cats. Some she claimed were her own, others she wasn't sure, but it didn't seem to matter. The funny thing about a visit from Nina was that she would no sooner reach the porch then say, "Well, I must be going." She would say it often during the next hour or two. Then she would proceed to my neighbor's porch and in that short distance we could hear her say again, "Well, I must be going." It was just her way and we loved it!

People came and went. Conversation was easy. Refreshments were simple. Mom would make us all ice-cream cones or ice-cream sodas and there was always coffee or tea, hot or cold. It was part of the ritual, and to me, always a celebration.

Along with darkness came lightning bugs, the sound of crickets and pesty mosquitoes. I continued to sit on the top step watching for falling stars. Through the stillness of the night came the distant whistle of a train. Sometimes we could hear the purring motor of a barge going up the river. Once again, here and there, screen doors opened and closed. Finally, Mom and Dad would get up from their chairs giving us the signal that the day was done and it was time for bed.

I'm glad I stayed in Barrytown and moved to another house with a front porch. I've given my children the rich experience of enjoying simple pleasures. In early spring when the temperature reaches the "heavy sweater" stage, out come the rockers and extra chairs and tables. Our "porch life" season will last for as long as our bones can tolerate sitting in the crisp fall air. We still have "characters" around and they manage to end up on my porch. Sometimes the overflow has to sit on the sidewalk. No one seems to mind. The tradition is carried on and we all are content while we are busy building more memories.



Sandy Lydon, Wint Aldrich and other longtime residents will gather in the Parish Hall of St. John's Church in Barrytown, on Tuesday evening, April 21st for another session of Remembering Barrytown. Don't miss it!



RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE SOCIETY'S COLLECTIONS

Our recent acquisitions are as richly varied as the history of our Town and we are deeply grateful to the donors who so thoughtfully added to our collection. (Listed in approximate order of receipt.)

John Watts DePeyster, by Frank Allaben (NY: 1908). **Donated by Louise Schwed.**

A Civil War Soldier's Diary, transcribed and printed by Margaret E. Herrick.

Thaddeus K. Smith and Bertha Heyne, Their Ancestors & Descendants Including the Families of Bard, Downing and Veach by Margaret E. Herrick

Original sketchbook of Cornelia Cruger, dated October 11, 1867

Three items donated by Margaret Herrick.

Original photos of a theatrical production staged at the Academy in Upper Red Hook in the 1930s and copies of a photo of boxer Joe Louis taken at his Red Hook training camp. **Donated by Howard (Sid) Delanoy,**

Copies of c.1950s farm records and family photographs of Alfred Rockefeller's Tivoli farm. **Donated by his grandson Donald Avery of Morrisville, Vermont.**

Original photograph of the John Watts DePeyster family. **Donated by Katharine D. Chalmers of Chevy Chase, Maryland and Agnes Losee Clark of Montecito, California.**

Original photograph of Maple Hill (Upper Red Hook) with village school children.

Copy of an 1867 map of Upper Red Hook.

Two items donated by Agnes Losee Clark, Montecito, California.

Collection of original and photocopied documents including: Original Program, Dedication of Oakleigh T. Cookingham Sr. Baseball Field, dated 1976; Original advertising flyer for the V-T Soap-Master, Voorhis-Tiebout Co., Inc.; Original Poster for the Bard College Residential Unit of Columbia University; Tribute to F. Palmer Hart upon his passing by John J. Lewis; Photocopy of *Ice Harvesting on the Hudson* by Harry Arnold, Poughkeepsie, c.1930s; newspaper clippings related to Red Hook history. **Donated by John J. (Jack) Lewis**

The Selected Writings of John Jay Chapman, edited and with introduction by Jacques Barzun (NY: 1957). **Donated by Carol Brener.**

Annual Reports of the Red Hook Farmer's Cooperative Association for the years 1921, 1929, 1939, 1949, 1959.

Original magazine, *The Farmer's Wife*, September 1905.

Six items donated by Peter and Alice Bulkeley.

Three framed maps of Red Hook (NY: F. W. Beers, 1867), Red Hook/Annandale/Cedar Hill and Rhinebeck. **Donated in memory of Paul Van Eyre by his sister Sheila Mayer of Saugerties.**

Collection of clippings, notes and research materials. **Donated by Claire O'Neill Carr.**

Bar of Borax Soap, Voorhis-Tiebout Co., Inc., Red Hook, N.Y. U.S. PAT. 201129. **Donated by Howard Bliss of Schenectady.**



Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK

P.O. Box 1813 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0397

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WINTER/SPRING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Jan. 20 **19th-Century Industries in the Hudson Valley**
Allyne H. Lange, Curator, Hudson River Maritime Center
- Feb. 17 **Remembering the Village of Red Hook**
Richard Coons, Village Historian and longtime residents
- Mar. 17 **St. Patrick's Day Memories**
Patrick Higgins, Town of Milan Historian
- Apr. 21 **Remembering Barrytown, Part II**
J. Winthrop Aldrich, Town Historian and longtime residents
Note: This program will be held in the parish hall of St. John's Church, Barrytown.
- May 19 **Red Hook Library's 100th Birthday Celebration**
Winners of Children's Creative Writing and Art Contests, and more, to be announced.
- June 23 **Annual Dinner Meeting**
Victor Cornelius, Guest Speaker

All meetings are held on Tuesday evenings at the Elmendorph Inn, North Broadway, Village of Red Hook unless otherwise noted.