



## Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK

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

### VICTOR CORNELIUS TO ADDRESS ANNUAL MEETING, June 23rd

## SPRING 1998

Although **Endeavor Inc.**, the media-services consultancy headed by Victor Cornelius serves a nationwide roster of clients, he is best known here in the Hudson Valley as the producer of films interpreting many of the historic sites in the region, including Clermont, Mills Mansion, the John Jay home and Historic Hudson Valley sites Sunnyside, Van Cortlandt Manor, Kykuit and Montgomery Place. Less well known is the assistance given communities like Tivoli and Saugerties in finding funding for major projects such as the restoration of the Watts dePeyster Firemen's Hall, parks and waterfront restoration.

Mr. Cornelius will recount some of his experiences and address the importance of historic preservation in community planning. His talk will be preceded by the Historical Society's annual meeting and presentation of the Heritage Awards. Reservations are required for the buffet dinner which precedes the annual meeting; a reservation form appears elsewhere in this newsletter.

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### RED HOOK PUBLIC LIBRARY CELEBRATES 100TH BIRTHDAY

Clare O'Neill Carr

*[In celebration of the library's Centennial Birthday, a history of the library prepared by Clare O'Neill Carr and Linda Keeling will be published by the library. This article is excerpted from Clare's research paper.]*

#### The Village of Red Hook in 1898

In 1898, the year the Red Hook Public Library was founded, the village of Red Hook, though officially only four years old, had been well established for over 100 years. Surrounded by outlying farms, the mile-square village had a population of about 935 people.

That spring, merchants such as B. F. Gedney, whose family had built the large brick building at the corner of North Broadway and West Market, and George Aucock, who operated out of his commercial building across the way at the corner of East Market, advertised their goods in the *Red Hook Journal*.

Just south of the corners formed by the Old Post Road (Rt. 9) and Broadway stood one of the largest businesses in town, employing 43 workers in 1899--Hoffman & Co., makers of cigars and chewing tobacco for over 75 years. W. H. Baker operated a chocolate factory in nearby Annandale. The operation, listed in the New York State Factory Inspectors report as employing 40 people in 1899, would move to the village within the next two years. There were several livery stables, a millinery shop, two blacksmiths, a drugstore, and a music store.

Just outside the village limits, the Red Hook Mill operated on the Saw Kill, just as it had done for over 100 years. G. W. Wilbur had a large coal and lumber yard. And that spring Curtis and Benner Hardware advertised a special sale on Deering mowers and reapers. A few miles west went the busy commercial railroad and shipping lines which stopped daily at Barrytown, Tivoli, Rhinecliff and Staatsburg on the run between New York and Albany. Both merchants and farmers benefited. In the May 27 issue of the *Red Hook Journal* that year the names and transactions of attorneys William Massonneau, Leonard Mattice and Jacob Elseffer appeared, along with references to Drs. Harris Cookingham and R. J. Carol.

It was nearly the turn of the century and Red Hook shared with the rest of the country some of the stability and prosperity brought about by the industrial movement.

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### The Progressive Library Movement Sweeps New York State

Along with prosperity came a newfound interest in culture, social awareness and education that came to be known as the Progressive Movement. And the merchants and businessmen of Red Hook, and especially their wives, were caught up in the idea of individual (and civic) improvement.

A small notice in the May 27 *Red Hook Journal* announced a meeting of the Roundtable Literary Society to be held in the Lutheran Chapel on June 3rd, 1898 for those interested in discussing a public library. It was the forerunner of the Red Hook Free Library.

In the 1890s New York State led the public library movement. Based on the ideal of individual improvement and civic responsibility, the cause was taken up by politicians who linked it with education and public service. Though nationally connected with philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie, in New York State the library movement was spearheaded by Melvil Dewey, the director in 1888 of the New York State Library in Albany and founder and president of the New York Library Assoc. Dewey successfully lobbied the state legislature for funding and tax-exempt status to establish libraries throughout the state, and for subsidies to keep them going. The local public library became the symbol for the enlightened community.

Between 1893 when the public library law was passed, and 1912 the number of public libraries doubled in New York, the number of books tripled and the circulation increased sevenfold. Free libraries in New York, including school libraries with open circulation, rose from 238 in 1893 to 529 in 1902.

### The Red Hook Library is Born

Following the initial meeting of the Literary Society in Red Hook that spring of 1898, a representative from the State Board of Regents told the organizers that if the people of Red Hook wanted a library the state would match funds raised up to \$200. By June 22, the Village Board had appointed the first library board of trustees and the Literary Society had raised the \$200 by subscription. Their provisional charter was issued June 27, 1898.

The first directors, appointed by the Village Board, were Luther L. Stillman, Dr. Harris L. Cookingham, Leonard Mattice, Mary G. (Mrs. D. W.) Wilbur and Emma L. Ryder. On April 26, 1904, the permanent charter was issued to library trustees Luther L. Stillman, Harriet E. Elseffer, Dr. Robert J. Carroll, Leonard Mattice and Emma L. Ryder.

From the start, the state reimbursed the fledgling library 50% for book purchases and some physical improvements. The book of minutes from 1898 showed the trustees met two or three times a year. Rooms were found for the library upstairs in the Massonneau building on the southeast corner of Broadway and Old Post Road for \$24 a year.

And the trustees were asked to make a list of 100 books each to consider for purchase. The lists were first considered by the board, then sent to the Regents in Albany for their approval. It was a practice that continued for many years.

Eli Collins was appointed librarian for an annual salary of \$40 in 1898 (which was also to cover oil and fuel to heat and light the rooms.) The

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Library's first home was on second floor of frame annex to Massonneau building

library opened in the fall of that year for four hours a week. In January of 1899 the secretary recorded 360 volumes on the shelves; by August of that year the number had increased to 850.



*The Hendricks family in front of their ivy-covered home*  
Collection of Fred Briggs



*Library in 1939; note original columns and in cupola,  
clock donated by Margaret Chanler Aldrich*

Except for a brief period during World War I, the Red Hook Public Library has served the community continuously since 1898, first in rented rooms in the Massonneau building and later, across the street in the Aucock building. In 1935, the landmark octagon house, built on South Broadway in 1865 by Allan Barringer Hendricks, a partner in the Red Hook Tobacco Factory, was purchased from his heirs with \$5,000 left to the library by Libbie Benner Perrine, a former trustee and Red Hook native. William Massonneau, a trustee and lawyer, who represented the estate of Mrs. Perrine, gave \$6,000 for an endowment fund in her memory to maintain the library.

The purchase of a fifteen-foot strip on the south side of the property by a neighbor, Dr. L. W. Stoller brought the purchase price down to \$3,850. Frank Coon was paid \$900 to turn the upstairs into a caretaker's apartment. Another \$1,289.40 was recorded to buy furniture, with the remainder donated as memorials.

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## ORSON FOWLER AND THE OCTAGON HOUSE

Katherine Dewsnap

The Red Hook Public Library is a fine example of an Octagon House. It was built in 1864/65 by Allan Barringer Hendricks, a partner in the Red Hook Tobacco Factory, with variations on a design created by Orson Fowler and promoted by his book, *A Home for All*.

Fowler was an interesting American character. When he was a young theology student at Amherst College in the early nineteenth century he traveled to Boston to attend a lecture on phrenology. Phrenology was a new "science" that allowed a practitioner to analyze a client's personality by examining the bumps and valleys of the client's skull. Shortly after returning to Amherst, Fowler and a friend who had accompanied him to Boston announced themselves as phrenology practitioners and started charging 2¢ per head among their classmates. They also began lecturing to the public. After graduation, Fowler abandoned theology and moved on with his new business. During the next four decades he became wealthy and successful, practicing phrenology and lecturing and publishing about it and other self-improvement plans. At the height of his success he published *A Home for All*. In it he suggested that people would be happier,

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healthier, and easier to get along with if they moved out of their old houses with right angles and into Octagon Houses. He built a huge, five-story Octagon for his own family in Fishkill, New York that was completed in 1858.

Fowler's own house no longer stands, but happily for us in Red Hook, New York, our lovely Octagon does, and we can still visit it. The house has three stories, but only two are visible from the street. The ground-floor entrance at the back of the house leads in from a broad rear lawn. The original kitchen and dining rooms faced toward that lawn; storage and service rooms were behind them, built into the hillside. On the top floor there were four bedrooms and a bathroom. It's interesting to note that some of the windows are false, done that way to keep a balanced look to the facade. The wooden pillars supporting the porch roof replace original iron ones.

A. B. Hendricks lived in the building for over sixty years until he died at 93 years of age. So perhaps Orson Fowler was right about Octagon Houses being healthy homes!

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## STUDENTS' CREATIVE-WRITING CONTEST RESULTS

Twenty-four imaginative young writers submitted stories to the contest held in celebration of the 100th birthday of the Red Hook Public Library, coordinated by Trustee and retired teacher **Catherine Dewsnap**. Professional writers **Margaret Creal Shafer** and **Paul deAngelis** accepted the challenge of selecting the winners who were announced at our May 19th meeting. Rewarding the efforts of the young writers, all received certificates, medals or ribbons, and gift certificates from **Holy Cow** ice-cream parlor. First-prize winners also received Gift Certificates donated by the Historical Society and the **Book Center** in Red Hook and Rhinebeck. The Historical Society is deeply grateful to Kate and her committee, to our brave judges and to all who contributed to the success of the project. The winners are:

Grades 1-3 (Guest)	1st Prize	<b>Heidi Bielenberg</b>
Grades 4-5	1st Prize	<b>Andy Van Ness</b>
	2nd Prize	<b>Nicole Montgomery</b>
Grades 6-8	1st Prize	<b>Tyler Mastri</b>
	2nd Prize	<b>Tessa LeGare</b>
		<b>Peter Rossi</b>
		<b>Kaitly Zitz</b>
Grades 9-12	1st Prize	<b>Joanne Fivelsdal</b>
		<b>Jen Spano</b>
	2nd Prize	<b>Lee Zimmerman</b>

Honorable Mention, Grades 6-8:

**Robert Bruno**  
**Christopher Byrne**

**Matthew Reis**  
**Erica Skov**

**Krystle Skinner**  
**Thomas Terranova**

Honorable Mention, Grades 9-12:

**Brenda Bloomer**  
**Jim De Sario**

**Emily Fisher**  
**Nadine Hilbrandt**

**Christopher Kavanagh**  
**Joseph Osterhoudt**

**Tracey Norton**  
**Christopher Slater**

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A capacity crowd at our February 17th meeting REMEMBERING THE VILLAGE OF RED HOOK moderated by Richard Coons.

*Photos by John Cioffi*

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S KEYBOARD

**Barbara Bielenberg**

As our Annual Meeting approaches we can celebrate a year of great accomplishment. We're finally moving into a home of our own--the beautiful archive center dedicated to the memory of former Village Historian and prime mover behind the saving of the Elmendorph Inn, Rosemary Coons. Our local-history gallery needs only some volunteer hours putting a final coat of paint on the trim and plaster walls before it's ready for its first exhibit on "Farming in Red Hook," opening in September in time for the 20th anniversary of the founding of this Historical Society.

Our membership has tripled since this time last year, due largely to you many generous new members who contributed to our "Local History" fundraising campaign. We hope you will continue your valuable support by renewing your memberships next fall.

Our collections of documents, books, photographs and artifacts preserving the history of our community continues to grow. The six transfer files of historic records from Clara Losee have been inspected and each of the hundreds of items individually catalogued by volunteer **Barbara Thompson**, a former Milan historian now living in Saugerties. Bobbie has also been responding to the frequent requests for genealogical information and improving our genealogical records in the process.

We envision a new year full of opportunities as we take up the challenge of providing a safe, yet accessible home for Red Hook's historic records in the oldest building in the Village open to public use. We've listed some of our *material* needs elsewhere in this newsletter. In our September issue we'll talk about some opportunities to learn and have fun while helping enrich our community's knowledge of its past. In the meantime we hope to see many of you at our Annual Meeting on June 23rd before we take our summer break, interrupted this year by the return of the **150th New York State Volunteer Infantry Regiment** of Civil War reenactors on July 25th and 26th--a not-to-be-missed historic experience at the Elmendorph Inn. We hope to see you there. Have a great summer.

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## GIVE A GIFT TO OUR NEW ARCHIVE CENTER!

Community donations to our "Local History" campaign made the transformation of two spacious rooms on the second floor of the Elmendorph Inn into an historical-archive center and gallery possible. **Now we need your help to make our new center a truly useful and safe home for Red Hook's historical papers and artifacts.** Your donations will help us purchase--

<b>Archival Storage Boxes</b> (we need 30) .....	@\$8
<b>Track Lights for the Gallery</b> (we need 7) .....	@\$25
<b>Oversize Map Boxes</b> (we need 8) .....	@\$50
<b>Wire Shelves to hold storage boxes</b> (we need 12) .....	@\$50
<b>File Drawers</b> (we need 8) .....	@\$100

The care and safekeeping of Red Hook's history is an ongoing challenge we hope you will join us in accepting. Please make checks payable to the **Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook** and mail to P. O. Box 1813, Red Hook NY 12571. Memorial donations and corporate matches are always welcome.



## RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE SOCIETY'S COLLECTIONS

In this newsletter we feature gifts from two very generous and frequent donors and one very special gift to our new home in the Elmendorph Inn.

### From Maynard Ham:

- Collection of papers retrieved from **Mapleton**, the Elseffer/Adams home destroyed to make room for the A & P; these await inspection and cataloguing.
- Three mounted photographs as follows:
  - Robert Chanler Hook & Ladder Co. in full dress for Poughkeepsie? Firemen's Parade
  - Twilight Bus Line Inc. bus
  - Old photograph of unidentified family standing in front of their home
- Wooden roller skate used at rink on second floor of Pink's Hotel at 61 E. Market St. (now Luna 61)
- 15 sheets of laser photocopies of historic photographs and maps in Maynard Ham's collection

### From J. Winthrop Aldrich:

- *Documentary History of Rhinebeck in Dutchess County, N.Y.* by Edward M. Smith, Rhinebeck, Dutchess County, N.Y., 1881. Numerous newspaper clippings are glued onto, or slipped between, its pages, many referring to members of the Elseffer family of Red Hook and augmenting genealogical information about Red Hook and Rhinebeck families in the text.

### From Gunnar Sleigh:

We are exceedingly grateful to this Staatsburg resident for constructing and donating a new mantel to replace the one missing from our new archive room. The plans were prepared by **Herman Gorgens**, based on ghost lines on the existing brickwork and inspection of a similar original mantel in the upstairs

South Room. Gunnar visited the Elmendorph in response to a request for bids for the new mantel and was so captivated by the restoration that he donated the materials and labor to make the mantel and completed the job in two days in order not to delay our plasterers!



*Second-floor gallery during restoration; note the Gunnar Sleigh mantel visible through open door at left*



### THREE TRUSTEES TO BE ELECTED AT ANNUAL MEETING

Nominated to serve for second three-year terms are: (vote for three)

**Barbara Bielenberg** graduated from Michigan State University and began her museum career at Boscobel Restoration in Garrison, NY, later becoming the first site manager at Philipsburg Manor, a Historic Hudson Valley property in Sleepy Hollow and later at Montgomery Place. As Director of Tourism for the Hudson River Valley Association she coordinated the regional promotions of the eight participating counties. Since retirement she serves as Restoration Chairman of the Friends of Elmendorph and recently, President of the Egbert Benson Historical Society.

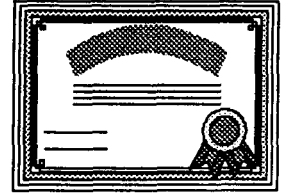
**Nancy Hetzler** is retired from more than 30 years teaching 2nd- 3rd- and 4th-grade Red Hook children. She has a Masters in Education from the State University at New Paltz and served on the Dutchess County Social Studies Council for five years. Born in Queens, NY she summered in Rock City for 20 years before making her own home in Red Hook. She has been a member of St. John's Reformed Church in Upper Red Hook for more than 30 years and is a member of the Friends of Elmendorph and co-secretary and Hospitality Chairman of the Historical Society.

**Larry Thetford** has been a research scientist with Novartis Corp. for 31 years and a resident of Red Hook for 27. He occupies an historic farm with a house built in 1746. He is a past President of the Historical Society and currently serves as Vice President. He is a past Board member of the Friends of Elmendorph and past President of the Board of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia County and of the Northeastern Society of Agricultural Research Managers. He is known for his knowledge of Native American culture.



## NOMINATIONS REQUESTED FOR HERITAGE AWARDS

Each year the Historical Society solicits nominations of individuals or projects which have made significant contributions to the historic heritage of the Town of Red Hook. Nominations may be made in one or more of the following categories:



**Written or Recorded:** typed or published texts; taped, photographic or audiovisual material; documents or research work.

**Architectural:** historic restorations, preservation or design applications that reflect or enhance the vintage character of the Town.

**Artistic:** artwork, artifacts or replicas, in any media or material, which depict, typify or enlarge comprehension of the past.

**Environmental:** site works that conserve, restore or beautify settings reminiscent of the area's past.

Nominations may be made in each of these two categories:

**Senior:** an individual or group over the age of 21;

**Junior:** an individual or group under the age of 21.

Nominations must be received by June 13th. Mail to the Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook, Box 1813, Red Hook NY 12571. Please include the following information:

- a. Award category;
- b. Identification of the nominee by name, title or location;
- c. Brief description of the project or activity, including why you feel it worthy of recognition;
- d. Your name, address and telephone number in case we need more information.

Nominations received by the due date will be evaluated by an objective Heritage Awards Committee. Winners will be notified and a formal presentation will be made at the Society's Annual Dinner Meeting on June 23rd. Awards include a certificate, complimentary membership and complimentary dinner. For more information, please call 758-2923.



## BOARD REQUESTS CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP YEAR

At the June-23rd Annual Meeting, the Board of Trustees will request the members to approve a change in the By-Laws to bring our membership year in concert with the calendar year. At present our membership year runs from July 1, 1997 to June 30, 1998.

Under the new system, if 1998 appears on your address label, you will be considered paid up through December 31st. We will launch our 1999 membership drive in the fall and hope you will all renew at that time.

Accordingly, the Board of Trustees recommends the By-Laws be changed to read:

### Article I. Membership

Section 4. Annual dues shall be paid on or before January 1st of each new 12-month membership/fiscal year. Said year shall run from January 1st through December 31st.





**DON'T MISS THE  
ANNUAL DINNER MEETING  
OF THE  
EGBERT BENSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK**

Tuesday, June 23, 1998  
at the Elmendorph Inn  
North Broadway, Red Hook

6:00 p.m.	Punch and Hors d'oeuvres	7:30 p.m.	Meeting and Awards
6:30 p.m.	Buffet Dinner	8:00 p.m.	Speaker, Victor Cornelius

**Dinner Menu**

Rolls and Butter	Garden Salad
Chicken Orcutt	
Rice Pilaf	
Finger Desserts	Coffee Service

**Cost: \$11.00 per person**

**DINNER RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE BY JUNE 15TH**  
Please make checks payable to **RENNERS**  
and mail to: Mary Cioffi  
RD#3 Box 72  
Red Hook NY 12571

**RESERVATION FORM**

Name(s) (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Persons @\$11.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

**PROXY**

I/We will **not** attend the Annual Meeting of the Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook on June 23, 1998. In my absence, I hereby appoint the President or her/his deputy or \_\_\_\_\_ as my proxy to vote on all matters that may come before the membership at the meeting.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

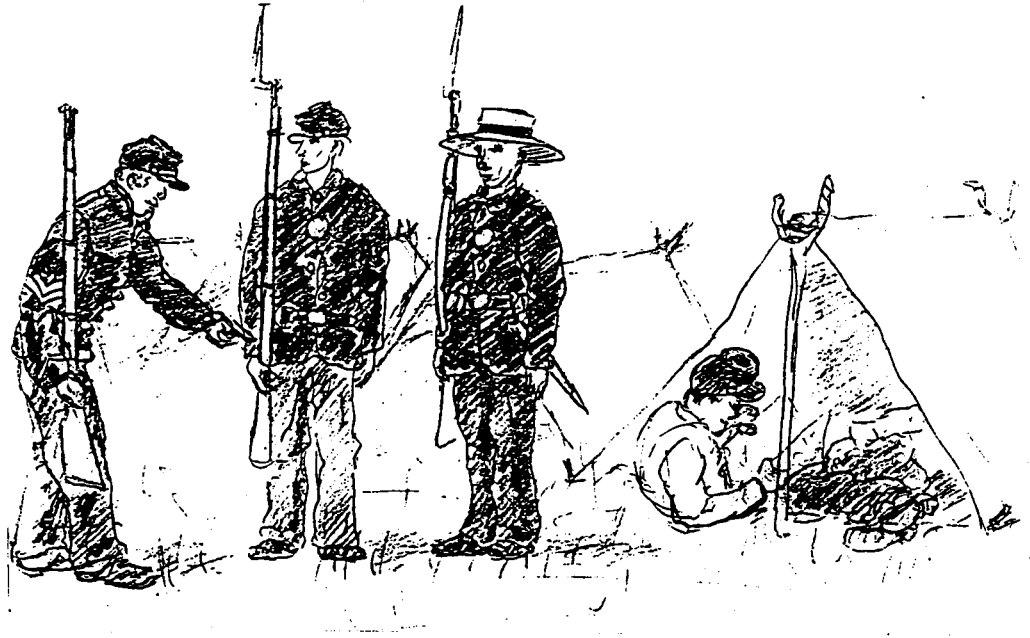
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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SAVE THESE DATES!**  
**Saturday and Sunday, July 25th & 26th, 1998**

The 150th New York State Volunteer Infantry Regiment will once again encamp at the Elmendorph Inn as they did last September. Their **Hudson Valley Ladies Aid Society** is planning special activities for the Inn to augment the Civil War military action which will take place on the grounds. Don't miss this very colorful and informative event recalling Dutchess County's own Civil War Volunteers. Sponsored by the Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook and the Friends of Elmendorph.

*Sharpening up the "fishes" from the sketchbook of Civil War Reenactor Gus Truin. Gus tells us that new recruits were often referred to as "fresh fish." A resident of Tivoli, Gus is interested in re-establishing Company K of the 128th New York Regiment which was recruited in the Red Hook-Hudson area. For information call Gus at (914) 757-3603.*



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