

Dutchess Historian

A Publication of the Dutchess County Historical Society

Preservation in Dutchess County

Update on the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge

The Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge was the first bridge to be built over the Hudson River below Albany. It was considered an engineering marvel when it opened in 1888 and it operated for almost 100 years, closing in 1974 after a fire damaged the Dutchess County end of the bridge. Now, Walkway Over the Hudson, a non-profit corporation which owns the bridge, is dedicated to preserving it and turning it into a public park, complete with a walkway across its 6700 foot span, bicycle paths and places to sit and enjoy the spectacular view. They have received funds from the federal government, the Governor's office and removal of a tax lien by the City of Poughkeepsie. Walkway's president, Fred Schaeffer, gave us this update: Walkway recently received a report on the underwater inspections of the piers that support the bridge structure. The report was satisfactory and stated the piers are in good shape and will allow us to safely put on a solid deck and railings in place of the existing deck of railroad ties.

Thus it can be opened to pedestrians without any work on the piers prior to its opening. Some shoring up will be necessary as the years go on after it is open but no major problems exist. With regard to the million dollar federal grant we secured last year, we are waiting for the state and federal departments of transportation to sign off on our preliminary plans to do the design work to examine the steel superstructure to make the same determination as was done for the piers. We hope this will be soon. Meanwhile, we continue to pick up support from all segments of society and are approaching the new governor to obtain funding for construction, so we can have the walkway and bike path over the Hudson open by September 2009 to properly honor Henry Hudson's daring voyage 400 years before to discover the river that bears his name. We are working with the Hudson Quadricentennial Committee to this end. On June 23, 2007, Walkway will sponsor a bicycling tour in order to publicize our project and to raise funds toward future costs. These will serve

as our 25% match of the federal grant. The bike tour is a challenging 90-mile ride from Poughkeepsie to Battery Park in New York City. Interested cyclists can visit our website (www.walkway.org) for more information and registration forms. We also need volunteers for the event. Anyone interested in cycling or volunteering can email me at FredinHV@aol.com.

Fred Schaeffer

Director's Desk

For the past sixteen years, from my chair behind the Director's desk, I have seen all of the wonderful work being done by staff, board members, volunteers and student interns. This is what keeps DCHS going, in addition to the generosity of members. Such generosity of time, talent and funds is crucial for the survival of any not-for-profit and certainly for our ven-

erable organization. For the past 93 years, DCHS has worked to preserve Dutchess County's extraordinary and virtually unsurpassed history, keep it alive for the benefit of today's audience through programs and publications and transmit it as a legacy for future generations. As members, your generous support of programs and lectures, Silver Ribbon Tour, Dutchess

Award, and the general operation of the society, will insure continuation of our ongoing task to "tell it like it was."

Eileen M. Hayden
Executive Director

Committee News

Black History

“New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War,” the final exhibition of the New York Historical Society’s two-part series on slavery, was the second motor coach trip to NYHS on Saturday, April 21. The committee sponsored the first trip in February 2006 to view the first exhibit: “Slavery in New York.” The New York Divided exhibit was smaller than the first exhibit; however, the second exhibit featured an abundance of documented records which shed light on the role New York played in being labeled the “Capital of the South.” Because of New York’s mercantile community’s complex ties to the South as the major distribution center for cotton, these ties fed a pro-slavery mentality and divided its citizens against those who actively supported the abolitionist movement to end slavery in America. There were three major themes in the five galleries: New York and the Cotton Trade; Abolitionists and the Fight for Freedom; and New

York and the Civil War. The exhibit concluded with the reconstruction of New York following the Civil War and previewed the movement from freedom to equality, the preamble to the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement. At Vassar College, Villard Room on Thursday, April 26, an audience of over 150 people attended a lecture by the legendary psychiatrist Dr. Hugh F. Butts. His topic was “Opposite Sides of the Same Crazy Coin.” This lecture was sponsored by the Vassar College Program in Africana Studies and the DCHS Black History Committee as a part of the Fourth Biennial Norman E. Hodges Lecture on Race and American Law. Dr. Joyce Bickerstaff, long-term faculty member in the Africana Studies Program, introduced the speaker. Dr. Butts’ lecture was highlights of his professional experiences in dealing with multifarious racial issues.

Lorraine M. Roberts

Director’s Note: As always at NYHS, there were additional exhibits on Civil War diaries and letters, John J. Audubon, Asher Durand, and the Hudson River School to fascinate and absorb the viewer. The slavery exhibit will be on view until September 3rd and is well worth a trip to N.Y.C.

Membership

Dues Notices have been sent out to remind members that it is time (or past time) to pay dues. Many members of the community think that funds come from the County. They don’t. Your dues are an important part of the DCHS operation and a sound investment in local history.

Book Review: **The Hudson** by Tom Lewis,

Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005

Lewis provides nine fascinating chapters on the Hudson River, from its geological formation in the distant past to environmental battles in the 21st century. In between is its long history of human habitation: Native Americans, early Dutch settlement, transition to English hegemony, and

the river’s role in the Revolution. Of course the sloops are there, “Hudson River School” artists, writers and architects, the growth in population and industry, robber barons and great estates, Con Edison and G.E., and always the beauty of the river and its capacity to inspire us.

This and a wealth of books concerned with Dutchess County and New York State history are available in the Franklin A. Butts Library at DCHS. Members may use the library free of charge

Nan Fogel

Dutchess County Towns

History of the Town of Wappinger

In 1875, the Town of Wappinger was created from lands of the 1682 Rombout Patent. By 1880, although the smallest town in Dutchess County, it was one of the most industrious, with a population of 4,966 and property valued at \$1,642,518. Within the borders of the Town of Wappinger were Hughsonville, Low Point, New Hackensack, Myers Corners, Swartoutville, Middlebush and the Village of Wappingers Falls. **Hughsonville** is named for the William Hughson family, who settled the area before the Revolution. A post office was established in 1847. The hamlet contained a church, district school, one hotel, two stores, blacksmith shop, carpenter shop, two shoe stores, and a harness shop. **Low Point**, once known as Carthage Landing, now Chelsea, was part of one of the largest Indian encampments recorded in Dutchess County. In the colonial period, Chelsea provided an ideal location for commercial activities such as fur trading and lumbering. Many supply routes of Dutchess County led to Chelsea for its easy access to river travel. In the 1820's, a shipyard was built by Cornelius Carman. Carman's shipyard built barges and sloops and the first steam ferry boat, called "The Plow Boy," used on the Hudson River to connect Fishkill Landing and Newburgh. In the 1850's the New York Central Railroad was completed from New York City to Poughkeepsie and a small station was

constructed at Chelsea. The Chelsea Station remained a railstop until 1973. **New Hackensack** was founded in the northwest section of the Town of Wappinger and derived its name from Hackensack, New Jersey, from which its settlers had come. By the mid-nineteenth century, New Hackensack had a church, a school, one store, a gristmill and a sawmill, one hotel, a blacksmith shop, a wagon shop, shoe shop and post office. **Myers Corners**, south of New Hackensack, was named for a farmer from Holland who owned a farm of about 150 acres. It once had a store, a tavern, and a resident physician, Dr. Anthony Underhill. **Swartoutville** was established in the southeast corner of the Town. During the American Revolution, it was home to Colonel John Brinckerhoff, where General George Washington is said to have made his area headquarters. Swartoutville had a school and a general store, and was the center for army activities during the Revolutionary period. **Middlebush** was established about a mile southeast of Wappingers Falls. It was an early business center, home to a post office and the first Baptist Church in the town. There was a wagon maker, blacksmith and shoemaker, but most residents were farmers. As the Village of Wappingers Falls grew, many people chose to work in the factories and mills of the village rather than

remain on the farms of Middlebush. A small cemetery is all that remains as a reminder of Middlebush. The **Village of Wappingers Falls** was the most important and enterprising of all villages in the town. Its location at the falls of the Wappingers Creek, its several mills and industrial plants, its churches, post office, schools, hotels and residences made the village one of the most prosperous in Dutchess County. Although most industry has long since gone from the village, it remains today a prosperous and flourishing village.

Janice A. Hilderbrand,
Historian, Town of Wappinger

Silver Ribbon '07

The annual Silver Ribbon Tour is now behind us and historic Fishkill was the place to be on June 9, 2007. Included on the tour were homes new and old, churches, and barns. The Reformed Dutch Church, Trinity Church, Stony Kill Environmental and Education Center, the Col. John Brinckerhoff House, Toll Bros. House, Erts House and Van Wyck Homestead were all

included on the drive-yourself tour. A week prior to the tour, a lecture by Revolutionary War re-enactor Cpl. John Cronin enthralled the young winners of the 4th Grade art and essay contest organized by the Fishkill Historical Society. The adults present at the event were just as fascinated by the portrayal of life of a Revolutionary War soldier stationed in Fishkill

Our thanks is extended to the major sponsors of the event, the Town and Village of Fishkill, Brinckerhoff and Neuville, Central Hudson, M & T Bank, RPA Associates and Toll Brothers.

Plan now to join us next June in the Town of Washington and Millbrook.

