



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

Volume 4

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Houses of Worship in the Nyacks

Third Article in a Series

Pilgrim Baptist Church

by Jean Pardo



On the first Sunday in May 1960, the congregation, led by Reverend Taylor, marched from its old church over to the new home. The old Main Street property was sold to Hollingsworth Temple. This money helped buy a parsonage just north of the church where Rever-

end and Mrs. Taylor lived with their adopted and foster children.

After 42 years of spiritual leadership of the church, the Reverend Taylor, in failing health, retired in 1980. He left the church free of debt and with savings of \$50,000.

Expansion and renovation of the church were completed in 1984 under the direction of a new young pastor, Reverend O. T. Moore. The event was celebrated that year on the 109th anniversary of the church's founding. While the renovation meant razing the parish house, it provided much needed additional space for worship and church-sponsored activities serving the growing numbers of young people using the facilities.

The current pastor, Reverend Willie Hairston, was appointed in 1990. Under his leadership strong ties to the whole community have been developed through such activities as a runner's rally for racial equality and a cook-out festival featuring Nyack's ethnic diversity. Emphasis on youth programs has continued.

Pilgrim Baptist Church was organized in 1875 above a blacksmith shop on the northwest corner of Main and Bridge Streets with only four parishioners, including Mr. and Mrs. Travis Armstead. She had been a slave before being brought to Nyack.

Services were held in the Armstead home until being moved to a private room over the Spector store on Main Street. This was the same place St. Ann's Church met in its early days.

In 1903 the growing parish purchased a property on Main Street near Washington Street with a small white frame church. A mortgage burning ceremony was celebrated in 1938, the year that Reverend William H. Taylor began his long tenure as pastor. He immediately began raising funds to buy a larger church.

By 1960 membership had increased to such an extent that Pilgrim Baptist, funds in hand, took over the old German Evangelical Lutheran Church on High Avenue and North Franklin.

Third Spring House Tour Approaches



The Society's much-anticipated Third Spring House Tour will take place on Saturday, May 12, the day before Mother's Day.

Why not think of the Tour as a gift for her and combine it with a delicious meal at one of Nyack's sensational restaurants?

About ten houses will be featured covering an eclectic mix of historical periods and architectural styles.

Unusual riverfront houses are on the Tour including the storied "Houseboat." The School Street row house above will also be shown.

In appreciation for graciously opening their homes, homeowners will receive an original line drawing of their house by the well-known Upper Nyack artist John Elliot.

More details will be mailed soon. Join the Society and receive a House Tour discount.

If you have questions or wish to volunteer, contact co-chairs Terry Hekker (358-2349) or Joan Moffett (358-1194).

Visit: www.nyackhistory.org

E-mail: housetour@nyackhistory.org

Information line: (845) 267-1413

Retired Marine Recalls Service in Nyack

by Gerald F. Merna

Nyack played an important part in my life. From 1950 to 1952, I proudly recruited for the U.S. Marine Corps in Nyack and was promoted there.

We met many wonderful people in Nyack and I was fortunate to enlist some of Nyack's finest citizens to serve our Corps and country.

Before we married, Dot took the daily Rockland bus from Piermont to Main Street to her job as a long distance operator for the Nyack Phone Company. I was living in Piermont then too. We often took the bus to Nyack for the theater, ice cream at Eagle's store, and to Charley's bar and restaurant for his famous turkey and roast beef sandwiches, and of course, an occasional cold beer.

In 1951, Dot Sedlack and I were married at St. John's Church in Piermont. St. John's was later destroyed by fire but rebuilt on the same site in 1964.

Following our honeymoon, we moved into the old Graycourt Apartments in Nyack at 127 South Broadway. As fate would have it, that building also burned down. Friends jokingly blamed us for this fire because we were newlyweds.

One day while walking down Main Street in my Marine dress blues, I encountered an attractive woman walking two fairly large dogs. Perhaps my uniform caught her attention. We chatted briefly. This gracious lady turned out to be Helen Hayes, "The First Lady of the American Theatre," on her way to the five and ten cent store as we used to call both Newberry's and Woolworth's on Main Street.

Years later Dot and I saw a play in Washington, D.C. that Ms. Hayes also attended, drawing a large crowd of course. We were privileged to meet her after the show. She indicated she remembered our meeting in Nyack, but whether or not she did or was just being kind, it didn't matter. It was great to see her again.



Mernas' wedding reception at the St. George Hotel. The recently well-restored complex of office suites at 48 Burd Street represents the last vestige of Nyack's great hotel industry. The St. George Hotel was built in 1885 by George Bardin, a very successful hotelier and restaurateur. It was the overnight stop for visitors arriving by steamer from the City, destined for Suffern, Tuxedo and other interior locations. The hotel was famous for its dining room and grand breakfasts of flaming rum omelettes which were served to guests before boarding stagecoaches to continue their journeys.

My recruiting tour was very successful, enlisting many Rockland youths, including several from the Nyacks. I enjoyed talking to high school seniors throughout the county, including my own Tappan Zee High School. (There were no protests against military recruiters in those days.) Here I was, a TZHS dropout, telling students to finish school, attend college, and then join the Marines!

Several youths from my alma mater, St. Agnes Home and School for Boys in Sparkill, were among my recruits. St. Agnes's legendary Coach Jim Faulk, a World War II Marine, often referred young men who he thought were beyond even his strict discipline and could greatly "improve" by undertaking boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. As an article in *The Journal News* attested, Coach Faulk was "Mr. Everything" to the boys.

Calling on prospects' parents to obtain their written consent for their son to join the Marine Corps was a very daunting challenge, considering the war in Korea was in full force at the time. I don't recall enlisting any women in Rockland

County, but did so years later on a second recruiting tour in Owensboro, Kentucky. The real proof of my success was being promoted to staff sergeant in May of 1951.

I also attended and occasionally spoke about the Marine Corps during civic meetings, luncheons and other events. One such occasion was a Cub Scout ceremony at St. Paul's Methodist Church where Tech Sergeant Gross and I carried in two large candle-lit cakes.



Sergeants Gross and Merna at the Rockland Theatre for the 1951 showing of "Flying Leathernecks." The theater was one of the great movie palaces of the era from about the 1920's to the 1950's, ending in the late 1960's. Many Broadway tryouts were staged there. During its early years, African-Americans were restricted to the balcony. Torn down in 1978 after being closed for 11 years, the theatre was on the west side of North Broadway where Victoria Mews, an apartment building with offices, now stands.

Upon my return from Korea in 1953, I decided to make a career of the Marine Corps, and ended up serving for 22 years. And, on my way to Vietnam in 1966, I was commissioned as a second lieutenant after having served in every enlisted grade from private to master gunnery sergeant.

My memories of Nyack are deep and warm. Recruiting in Nyack affected not only our memories, but greatly influenced our lives, including my future assignments.

The author is a retired first lieutenant, United States Marine Corps. He holds B.S. and M.S. degrees from George Washington University. For more of his memories, visit the Web site of his Alma Mater, St. Agnes School, www.stagnesalumni.org

Photo captions by Bob Goldberg, producer of "When Nyack Meant Business" and many other John Scott Armchair Walking Tours.

Nyack During the War Years

by Tom Hackett



Those of us 70 and over probably remember where we were on December 7, 1941. I was 9 years old, it was late Sunday afternoon and my mother sent me down to the grocery store on the corner of Willow Avenue and Franklin Street in South Nyack.

The proprietor, Mr. O'Donoghue, was listening to the radio. He was very upset, and told me Pearl Harbor had been bombed. I ran home to tell my mother and father. I'm sure none of us knew where Pearl Harbor was.

For the next year or so, Nyack was like the rest of the towns in America. We had men being drafted or just joining the various services. There was rationing, air raid drills, scrap drives and many other things people volunteered for.

In 1943 things sure changed in Nyack. Just over the mountain in Orangeburg, a large army camp was being built. It was to become Camp Shanks, the port of embarkation for those soldiers being shipped overseas.

Once the soldiers started to arrive, Nyack had to prepare, and little did we know what to expect.

Nyack, being the closest large town, drew as many as 1,600 soldiers on its streets each night. They came by bus and taxi, just looking for something to do. For many, it

was their last night in the U.S.

In July of 1943, the USO was opened at 37 North Broadway, right across the street from The Rockland Theater. Many young women volunteered to dance and serve at the snack bar. There were three other USO's near the camp, but Nyack was the favorite.

The problem was that many soldiers were looking for more exciting things to do, and the bars took on new meaning. The bars up and down Main, Franklin and Cedar Streets were jammed to capacity and beyond. There were two in South Nyack, Eddie Nolan's being one of the most popular. The local police could not handle all the problems so they stationed Military Police in the Nyack and South Nyack Police Headquarters.

One bar on Main Street had so many fights it was named the bucket of blood and the one on Cedar Street was called The Cotton Club.

All in all, the soldiers were a great bunch of guys who did not know if they would come home alive.

Nyack residents were also great. They invited men to their homes for holiday meals and volunteered to help in any way they could. Many telephone operators, like my sister, gave their free time to work the

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From the President

Printed below is a response to my question in our October newsletter "Why is local history important to you?"

Miriam Wexler was one of the founding members of the Society and has been active in it ever since. She also translated two deeds in the Dutch language that supplied missing links in the very early history of Grand View and Piermont.

Win Perry

Why Local History is Important to Me

by Miriam Haagens Wexler

As an immigrant from Holland, transplanted in 1939 to Nyack with its Netherlandish origins, my interest in local history was piqued early.

At first, my family rented a cottage on the Pierre Bernard estate, but after a few months moved to a house in South Nyack on Voorhees Point, attracted by its riverfront and its Dutch name.

Learning that a Dutch family had moved to Nyack, the pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church on South Broadway, William Neely Ross, visited and accompanied me to a musical soiree in New City at the home of Hedi Katz, the then music director at the Henry Street Settlement in New York City. There I met my future husband Jacob K. Wexler, a lawyer with a deep interest in and knowledge of both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War.

Our honeymoon in 1942 was spent on the battlefield at Gettysburg, where I became acquainted with our local General Sickles, whose home was on Sickletown Road, not far from Townline Road, where we made our first home. Here, especially when I saw the brownstone houses with their double Dutch doors and roof styles, I was reminded of home.

After living in Nanuet for the first 16 years of my marriage I was happy to move back to the Nyack area with its Dutch street names (Van Houten, Kuyper Drive, Tallman Avenue, Lydecker Street, Tappan

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Oak Hill Cemetery

J. DuPratt White

(1869-1937)

by Gini Stollendorf

The Tudor-style house at 339 North Broadway, currently the home of the Summit School, was built in 1927 by Justin DuPratt White, who left an indelible mark on Nyack



Palisades Interstate Park Commission

and Rockland County.

White graduated from Nyack High School in 1885 and was part of Cornell University's class of 1890.

His estate, upon its completion, would be known as Miramare (Mira is Spanish for "Look at" and mare is Italian for the "sea") to reflect its lovely landscape on the banks of the Hudson River and perhaps the Italian background of his wife Anita Lombard Bradley.

A lawyer, White was a founding partner, in 1901, of the New York City law firm, White and Case. DuPratt White served on the village board of Upper Nyack for many years. He and his wife Anita were instrumental in the founding of Nyack Hospital. Anita was a member of the Morning Music Club and both were very active members of Grace Episcopal Church.

White was a founding member of the Rockland County Society (now the Historical Society of Rockland County). Due to his efforts, historical status was obtained for the Old Stone Church in Upper Nyack in 1928.

The preservation of land for public use was a passion of White's.

He was one of the original commissioners of the Palisades Interstate Park which helped to "Save the Palisades." During his long tenure, White helped to secure Tallman Mountain, Hook Mountain, Storm King Mountain, Harriman Park and Bear Mountain Park for the Palisades Interstate Park system.

Former Nyack police chief (1958-1970) Justin DuPratt Kaney was named for White.

DuPratt and Anita White are buried in Oak Hill Cemetery along with their daughter, his parents and sister.

Local History

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Zee, Ackerman Lane).

Digging in my garden has turned up a few historical artifacts, e.g. a playing marble of real Vermont marble, ancient apothecary vials, an old quarter from 1875 (?).

Living in a historic environment and becoming acquainted with one's predecessors is a connecting experience. Although those who came before me were here so much longer than I, my younger roots are beginning to intertwine with theirs.

Now that the neighborhood where I have lived for 48 years is registered as the Van Houten's Landing Historic District, I seem to have really come full circle.

War Years Remembered

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switchboards at Camp Shanks.

The camp put out a weekly newspaper called *The Palisades* which was printed under the direction of Lou Stockmeyer a pressman and photographer for *The Journal News* on Hudson Avenue in Nyack.

Many more stories can be told about those years in Nyack, but the war finally ended in 1945 and many men returned from Europe back to Camp Shanks. The USO in Nyack closed November 15, 1945 and things slowly got back to normal.

Those thousands of men and women who passed through our towns certainly were part of the Greatest Generation.

Historical Society of the Nyacks

A not for profit organization

www.nyackhistory.org

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*Also available at The Nyack Library, discounts by mail only

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