



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

Volume 5

Issue 3

Fall 2009

Fish & Ships is back with a splash

by Win Perry, Society president



Detail from *Half Moon* by John Beerman

Our exhibit on the Hudson River in the History of the Nyacks has reopened with a fresh look and a major new addition. John Beerman, the internationally known contemporary Hudson River painter from South Nyack, has loaned us his major new painting *Half*

Moon. The painting has a place of honor in the entrance gallery. It shows Henry Hudson's ship on the Tappan Zee on a typical calm and hazy day, with Hook Mountain in the background. The ship and sky glow with filtered yellow sunlight.

John Beerman is a direct descendant of Henry Hudson and has done this large oil painting to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Hudson's sail past Nyack. After *Fish & Ships* closes the painting will be presented to the White House by the American Heritage Rivers Alliance.



Lee Hoffman

The life-size photographed paintings of Hudson River fish, created circa 1930 for the New York State Department of Conservation, have been regrouped to make room for the *Half Moon* and to improve their visibility. The shad and the striped bass have found an appropriate place as part of the memorial to Bob Gabrielson, Nyack's favorite commercial fisherman. Other fish have moved to surprising places in the midst of other parts of the exhibit.



Lee Hoffman



Fish & Ships

Saturdays and Sundays

1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

through September 13
and by appointment.

Former Pavion Building
60 Cedar Hill Avenue, Nyack

The exhibit will remain in
place for the rest of September
for the benefit of school groups
who may wish to visit.

For an appointment, call
845.704.7343

www.nyackhistory.org
exhibit2009@nyackhistory.org

And our live Hudson River fish, which returned to their natural habitat when we closed in July, have been replaced by fresh representatives caught the day before the reopening. A few passes of the seine through knee-deep water along the beach yielded about two dozen young individuals of eight different species including striped bass, shad, silversides, yellow perch, mummichaug, and a tiny pipefish.

The John Scott Armchair Walking Tours - Fall 2009

The Historical Society of The Nyacks and The Friends Of The Nyacks Announce the Schedule for the 2009 Fall Season of the John Scott Armchair Walking Tours.

This popular program, now in its fourteenth year, features slide presentations on local history, architecture and related cultural subjects. The Armchair Walking Tours are dedicated to the memory of John Scott, Rockland County's great historian. The programs are produced by Bob Goldberg.

The Ex-Slave's Fortune: The Story of Cynthia Hesdra will be presented by Dr. Lori L. Martin. Dr. Martin was born and raised in Nyack, and is Assistant Professor at John Jay College of Criminal



Justice in the department of African-American Studies. Dr. Martin is the author of a book and forthcoming article about Cynthia Hesdra.

Cynthia Moore was born a slave in Tappan. During her fascinating life, she married Edward Hesdra, a Jewish man from Virginia, purchased her freedom, and went on to own and operate several successful businesses in Nyack and New York City and acquired significant real estate in this area. At the time of her death in 1879, she was one of the wealthiest people in all of Rockland County.

The program will be presented first at the Nyack Center on Wednesday evening, September 23 at 7:30 p.m. and will be repeated the following afternoon, Thursday, September 24 at 2 p.m. at the Valley Cottage Library.

Nyack College, High on A Nyack Hill will be presented by a former president of Nyack College and Seminary, Dr. Rexford Boda. Founded in New York City in 1882 as the Missionary Training Institute, the school relocated to South Nyack in 1897. Dr. Boda will describe



the growth of Nyack College from its founding 127 years ago by Dr. Albert Simpson, as a strictly religious institution that offered one year certificate programs, to its present stature in the academic world, where it now offers programs leading to careers in education, business, ministry, community development and more. Dr. Boda's presentation will also include many interesting notes on the historic buildings located on the hilltop campus and on the changing campus life itself.

The program will be presented first at the Nyack Center on Wednesday evening October 7 at 7:30 p.m. and will be repeated the next afternoon, Thursday, October 8 at 2 p.m. at the Valley Cottage Library.

www.nyackhistory.org

The Towers Of Nyack will be a delightful virtual walk along Nyack's streets to spot the many towers which crown its homes, churches and public buildings. This tour will be presented by Bob Goldberg, the producer of the Armchair Walking Tours and a frequent presenter of programs. For



many years Bob conducted the walking tours for the Friends of the Nyacks.

Nyack likes to celebrate its Victorian architecture and the most visible and distinguished elements of that architecture are the towers which adorn these buildings.

This program is a virtual walking tour through the Nyack villages and will show over 100 slides of the fanciful, unique, and occasionally functional towers which grace the homes, churches and public buildings of Victorian Nyack.

The program will be presented first at the Nyack Center on Wednesday evening, December 2 at 7:30 p.m., and will be repeated the next afternoon, Thursday, December 3 at 2 p.m. at the Valley Cottage Library.

Seating is open at the Nyack Center but is limited at the Valley Cottage Library. Please call the Library (845.268.7700) 10 days prior to the program for free seating reservations

Julius Petersen's Shipyards

by Gini Stollendorf



From a full-page ad taken out by Julius Petersen for the 1944 Nyack High School yearbook, The Tower. Nyack Library, Local History Collection.

A name long associated with the Nyacks, its boatyards, and boat building, is that of Julius Petersen, who was born in 1867 in the coastal town of Koge, Denmark, about 27 miles south of Copenhagen. At the age of 23, he immigrated to the United States and was employed in boatyards on Staten Island.

During the Spanish-American War, he established his own shipbuilding business in Tarrytown, New York. Around 1907, he came to Nyack and purchased the clubhouse of the Nyack Rowing Association, which was located at the foot of Burd Street.

This site would become known



World War II Rescue Boats in Nyack, February 1945. Ten aircraft rescue boats in the Hudson River, Upper Nyack, that were built at Julius Petersen Boatyard. Nyack Library, Local History Collection, no. 0051.

as the "lower yard" after Petersen purchased the Upper Nyack site in the late 1920s (possibly from the International Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Corporation).

Julius Petersen was known by the boats he built. His boat and ship designs were very innovative. The Julius Petersen name was to become as famous among boat lovers as Bond Street was to men's clothing and Schiaparelli was to women's clothing.

For over 45 years, Petersen's boats were Nyack's claim to fame. His boatyards undertook the construction of ten-foot dinghies to eighty-foot cruisers and were equipped with every facility for the building, repair, and storage of boats. He advertised the building of yachts, and two of his clients were Cyrus McCormick and Adolph Zukor.

The local Rockland newspaper reported that prices "were often the equivalent of two years' salary for the President of the United States."

Petersen's shipyards built submarine chasers for the U. S. government during World War I that were 65 feet long. During World War II, most probably the busiest period at the yards, they built chasers that were 110 feet long, as well as aircraft rescue boats for the U. S. Army that were 85 to 104 feet in length.



Petersen's Shipyard in the 1930s with recreational boats tied to docks. Nyack Library, Local History Collection, no. 925.

Between 1942 and 1945, there were more than 300 workers employed in the yards. Upper Nyack residents could hear the shouts of the workers, the pounding of hammers, and the boatyard whistle that sounded four times a day, seven days a week.

The New York Times reported on April 18, 1942, that two submarine chasers had been launched at Petersen's Shipyard, the first since World War I. On August 17, 1942, the newspaper again reported that a seventh sub chaser had been launched, on August 27, the launching of an eighth, and that work on a ninth chaser had already begun.

Petersen's shipyards also built airplane tenders for Pan-American Airways that were used for bases in the South Pacific. One of these was used in a major defense against a Japanese attack at Wake Island.

Usually smoking a cigar, Julius Petersen was known as "the Boss" by his employees. He served as one of Nyack's fire commissioners for seventeen years.

Petersen died at the age of 81. His funeral was held at White Funeral Home, then located on South Broadway, and he is interred at Oak Hill Cemetery.



Student exhibits at Fish & Ships

Bob Goldberg

Students' feelings, memories and reflections on living in a river town

As we began to celebrate the Quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's exploration of the Hudson, I thought about our students and what feelings they might have on living near the Hudson River, and whether they might want to express them in writing. Many thanks to the students for these pieces and to Rudy Arietta, assistant principal and former chair of social studies at Nyack High School, for supporting the project. Now, sit back and enjoy the following original essays by Nyack High School students.

Gini Stollendorf, editor

Kenny Richards, Grade 12

The Hudson River is one of America's most treasured areas. Explorer Henry Hudson sailed up the river in 1609 for the Dutch East India Company. The Hudson River extends about 315 miles, from the Adirondack Mountains at Lake Tear in the Clouds to its meeting with the Atlantic Ocean at New York City. The Hudson River is a very big tourist attraction. Tourists come from all parts of the United States to see this amazing river. It has been a very important part of trips to Saratoga Springs, the Adirondacks, Niagara Falls, and Canada. The Hudson River has been part of a lot of history, from the great chain of the American Revolution in 1778, to Fulton's steamboat in 1807.

Living in a river town like the Nyack-Valley Cottage area is filled with excitement and surprises. Living in Nyack became a lot more popular when the Tappan Zee Bridge was built in 1955, because it gave a direct route to the New York City metropolitan area. Nyack is west of the Hudson and about 19 miles from the Manhattan border. The river town of Nyack is a great place to hang out because of the different things to do. While in Nyack, you have your choice of many places to eat with many different foods. If you choose to, the night life can be very entertaining

with the amount of bars, music, dance clubs, and two community theaters. Riverspace Arts is located at 119 Main Street and is home of the Rockland Symphony Orchestra. If you go closer to the river, you have a lot of different amazing restaurants and activities to keep you busy. Nyack is a great place to meet people and have fun without spending money. The one-day September Fest, on the 18th this year, and the three antiques fairs each year, are among the many things that happen in Nyack that bring out large crowds and create a fun atmosphere. You could also visit the Hopper House at 82 North Broadway, which is a New York historic landmark and a very big tourist attraction. Many notable people have lived in Nyack, like the drummer of U2, Larry Mullen Jr., and Rosie O'Donnell. After all that has been said about living in Nyack, the one thing that is true is that you have to be here and experience it all for yourself.

Dylan Sansone, Grade 11

Living in a river town has proved to be a unique life experience. Besides the scenic beauty of it, it offers countless recreational possibilities that other towns simply can't compete with. For example, on any given day of any season I can walk

down to Memorial Park, or any of the other numerous access points, and relax next to the Hudson. When I was a little kid, my friends and I used to spend a good chunk of our summers swimming and floating around near the boat launch at the park. My Dad has always been an avid kayaker, and when I turned eleven he introduced me to the sport. Where was the logical place to take our boats? The Hudson of course! Many towns are not quite as fortunate, and people have to travel pretty far to get to a place where they can launch a boat (if they don't in fact come to the Hudson).

There is also a lot of historical significance associated with living on the Hudson, because it is essentially a flowing part of history. To contemplate all the ships that have sailed up and down and the significance of many of them, such as that of Henry Hudson, it makes you feel unique. Sitting in Jimmy's (Skylark) Restaurant, as it is known by most people in town, you can gaze around at the walls and see things from the Nyack of past and present. You see newspaper headlines from the early 1900s and pictures of buildings from the 1920s that are still here today.

Jonathan Breland, Grade 11

It really is a privilege and a pleasure living in a river town. Nyack in

particular is one of the most unique and interesting river towns of all along the Hudson River. A thriving business district, boat club, rowing team, marina, scenic view, and easy access to the Tappan Zee Bridge are all prime examples of the convenience created by living in a river town.

One thing that's nice about living in a river town is the density of the town. Despite its size, most people seem to know everyone and, for the most part, everyone is friendly towards one another (maybe the main exception being the parking enforcement people). Its size/population is just about perfect. It is dense enough that most people know or recognize each other, but large enough that people are able to have their own yards, houses, and privacy when needed/wanted. Another advantage to Nyack over the typical New York town is that while there is a large array of businesses, there is also access to the river. Being able to go over to your friend's house and being able to get on a boat and go swimming or boating is a luxury that many are unable to even fathom. Not very many kids across the state are able to say that they are on a rowing team, or that they have a boating license. The river draws the drastically diverse community together, in a way. One can hardly begin to imagine the convenience of living in a river town such as Nyack. I have to feel sorry for my friends who live in central to western Rockland County, because they can do nothing but envy those who live in towns like Nyack, Haverstraw, or Piermont.

Courtney Cordero, Grade 9

Living in a river town is different from living in any other town for multiple reasons. A river town is very special and unique. I have had many great experiences and memories in my town. My life

would be very different if I didn't live where I do. The Hudson River is a joy to everyone that encounters it.

Every morning I wake up to see the Hudson River and the Tappan Zee Bridge from my living room window. The view is beautiful and the mountains add to the picturesque scenery. Not only is the river a beautiful sight, but it's a pleasure to have around due to its many advantages. Many people own boats and use the Hudson as their trip from reality. In the spring or summer, a nice boat trip is just what some people need and the Hudson River offers this. The Hudson also offers the feeling of freedom and relaxation to those who need it. From my memory of boating on the Hudson, I can honestly say that it is a great and pleasing experience.

The Hudson also acts as a chilling source. The days when it gets unbearably hot out are the days when the river comes in handy. If a pool or sprinkler is not nearby, you can dip your feet in the water and cool down. Many people also go fishing in the river. I myself have not done this, but I have had a Hudson fish experience. On most days there are people fishing on the pier near where I live, and one particular night I had to save a fish from its death. I was with my friends and there was a catfish alone on the pier. Of course, I was the one who had to pick it up and throw it in the river, but at least I could say that I saved a catfish.

I would not give up where I live for any little reason. The river makes the town, and without it the lives of many people would be incredibly different. I live in a town that I can be proud of and be happy with for a very long time. Not only am I proud of where I live, but everyone in the whole town realizes how lucky they are to be

living where they do. Due to this, the town is better and stronger.

Jonathan Cohen, Grade 9

There's a very good reason why more than eight-and-a-half million Web sites are listed on Google with the word "riverview" in them. The experience of being on or simply near a river, especially one as majestic as the Hudson, elicits an almost entrancing, soothing calmness. It is said that when Henry Hudson sailed up the river for the first time, this well-traveled explorer thought it was the most beautiful scene he had ever experienced in his life. Indeed, traveling along the Lower Hudson Valley is, to this day, considered one of the most picturesque vistas in America.

Growing up here in Rockland County has afforded me the opportunity to see the Hudson regularly, and it certainly does have an innate strength about it, instilling a sense of tranquility and peace. The Nyack Middle School sits atop a hill with an unobstructed view of the Hudson. Seeing the view also seems to incite a certain creative spirit in those whose eyes engage the river. That's why there are a significant number of fine artists living in the area, looking for that creative spark within each of them. Gazing on the Hudson generates an almost divine experience, being moved by the beauty inherently designed in the flow of this bounteous source of life's water.

While early eras generated an appreciation of the river for its commercial advantage, today we are certainly privileged to live close to this alluring Hudson for its beauty and strength. There are few things on earth that can provide a superior easel for aesthetic appreciation than the awesome Hudson River.



Fish & Ships: In memoriam, Bob Gabrielson



Fish & Ships: River characters

Jan Doornbosch donates bulbs

Interested in helping to plant them?

To commemorate the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage for the Dutch East India Company and the discovery of the river that now bears his name, Jan Doornbosch, president of the International Bulb Company of Montvale, N.J., is donating 2,500 daffodil bulbs to the Historical Society of the Nyacks and the Nyack Garden Club. Historical Society and Garden Club members will be planting the bulbs throughout the Nyack villages as a living tribute to this historic event. Mr. and Mrs. Doornbosch were born in the Netherlands and now live in Valley Cottage.

For information on how you can help with the planting, please call Florence Katzenstein at 845.353.0131 before 8 p.m. any day of the week.

Newsletter of the Historical Society

of the Nyacks

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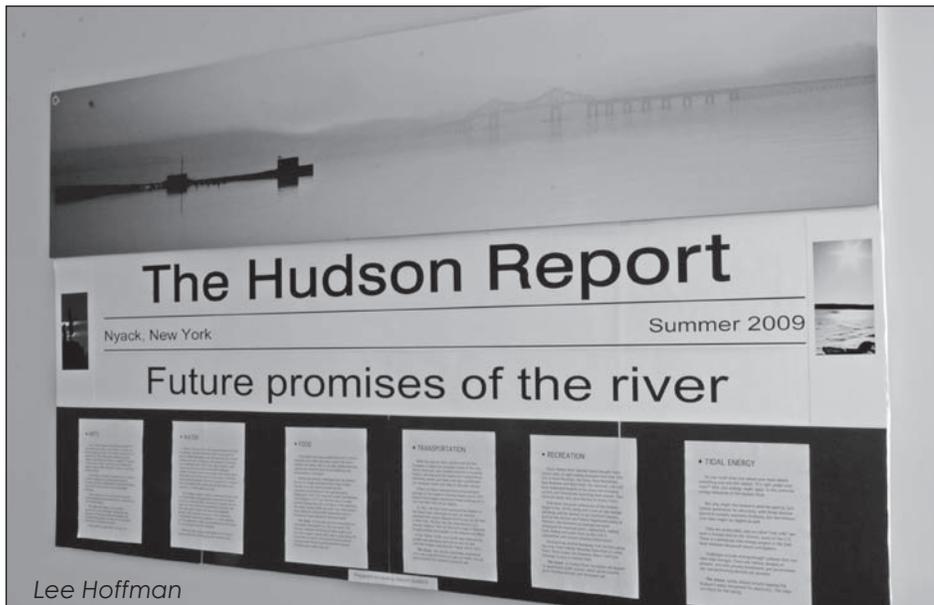
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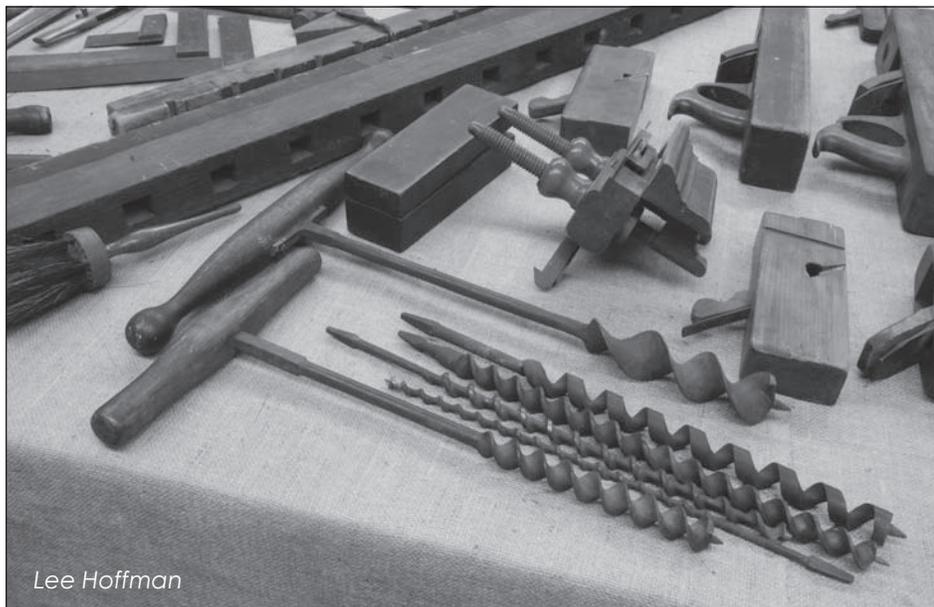
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Lee Hoffman

Fish & Ships: Art Gunther's photos and essays on the river



Lee Hoffman

Fish & Ships: A wide array of tools

The Nyack Library takes images online

Approximately 1,300 images from our Local History Image Collection can now be seen online at Hudson River Valley Heritage: www.hrvh.org/nyacklibrary. We anticipate that the entire collection of ca. 5,000 images should be available online sometime this fall. We are aware that many of our Nyack residents know details about the people and places in these photographs and this database allows the viewer to submit comments. Please take a look and let us know what you think!

—Brian Clay Jennings, Local History Librarian, The Nyack Library

The Society issues a “new” book

Old Nyack, our facsimile reproduction of this 1928 classic, is just back from the printer and costs \$10. It's still the best summary of early Nyack history and a bargain. Order it on the right.

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A not for profit organization
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- \$79.64 for all four books (Price \$73.49, tax \$6.15, s&h waived)

Members, apply 10% discount to price, then add appropriate tax and s&h. For more information on our books, visit www.nyackhistory.org
 *Also available at The Nyack Library, discounts by mail only

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Tandem bicycle, circa 1900
 Courtesy of Lewis F. Stockmeyer Collection, all rights reserved



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