



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

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Sartell Prentice

by Gini Stollendorf, Editor

Sartell Prentice (1867-1937) served as the tenth minister of the First Reformed Church of Nyack, on South Broadway, between Burd and Church Streets. Born in Albany, N.Y., the son of Major and Mrs. Sartell Prentice, Prentice was a descendent of a family that was among the original settlers of Cambridge, Mass., and the founders of Harvard University.

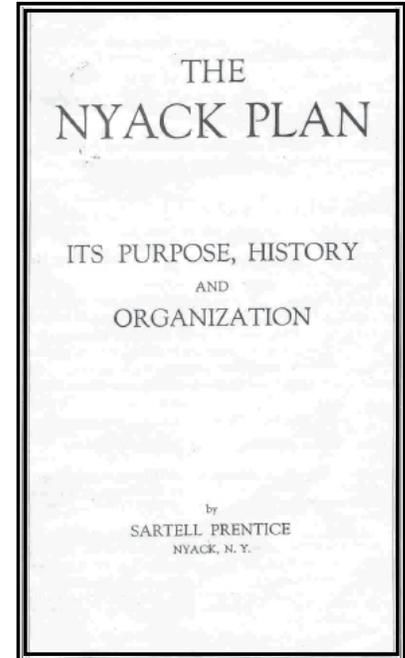
The First Reformed Church's current brick structure was built in 1901 (the earlier structure had become too small for the congregation). Under Prentice's long tenure (1904-1923) the congregation was able to pay off its entire mortgage.

In September 1917, during the First World War, Prentice was granted a four-month leave of absence to work abroad on behalf of the YMCA and mingle with soldiers at the YMCA camps. A second leave from the church was granted in June 1918 to serve as chaplain for the Red Cross in France, first at Base Hospital 101 at St. Nazaire and, later, at Evacuation Hospital 13, behind the Allied lines during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. He wrote about his experience in a book titled, *Padre: A Red Cross Chaplain in France*, in which he takes the reader through his day-to-day work with the soldiers helping them with simple menial tasks and servicing their souls.



NY Times

DR. SARTELL PRENTICE



Prentice's congregation at home showed their desire to share in the noble work that their pastor had undertaken by providing him with a small collapsible organ, which he carried around from ward to ward, and with two communion sets, one with 136 cups and the other, a small pocket set that was also easy to carry. He recalled a boy in Ward 19A asking, "I don't suppose it would be possible for me to have communion would it, Padre?" to which Prentice responded, "Why not?"

During his time of serving the soldiers in World War I, Prentice contracted certain influenza germs, diagnosed at the time as NYD (not yet determined), and in January 1919 he was "invalided" home. The influenza germs affected him throughout the rest of his life and caused him to resign his position from the First Reformed Church in 1923. But, before his resignation, Prentice started a nationwide movement called "The Nyack Plan," a nonsectarian back-to-church program based on the idea that the church was "a social and economic asset to

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Prentice, continued

the community and as such deserving of the same community support that lay organizations command." The plan was copied by hundreds of communities throughout the United States. On its national Board were representatives from all over the country, such as Victor James Dowling, N.Y. State Supreme Court; Jacob Klinck, V.P. and Trust Officer of Metropolitan Trust Co.; Julius Rosenwald, President of Sears Roebuck & Co.; E. T. George, V.P. Seaboard Refining Co., New Orleans, La.; Harry Chandler, Owner/Publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*; Ray Lyman Wilbur, President of Stanford University. As a result of this "movement," the Nyack church alone grew its membership by 171 people.

Within the next decade, the idea of sharing the religious experience would take another turn with the construction of Riverside Church in New York City. Riverside was conceived as an interdenominational church admitting people of all faiths and allowing them the forms and customs of their heritage, accepting the principles of religious tolerance and freedom that permit the fullest cooperation with all groups.

Prentice was a student of world events and often gave talks on the world situation and "the responsibilities" that he felt "were laid upon the American people." Besides writing about his experiences with YMCA and the Red Cross, Prentice authored a book titled, *Cloud*, in which he wrote of the world situation before the war and all the moral issues involved with the war. He believed that America had a supreme responsibility in this world crisis.



Wedding of Alta Rockefeller and Parmelee Prentice (Sartell's brother), January 17, 1901, Rockefeller home, 4 West 54th Street, NYC. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., first left, back row; Laura Spellman Rockefeller, John D. Rockefeller, fourth and fifth from left, back row; Sartell Prentice, fourth from right, back row.

Sartell Prentice traveled extensively and was fluent in a number of languages. He was a student of medieval history and the origins of Christianity. He wrote extensively on cathedrals in such books as *The Heritage of the Cathedral* and *Voices of the Cathedral*. He attributed his interest in the subject to an experience he had near the towers of Amiens Cathedral, when a tourist asked him, "What is this church? Why are you going in? Is there anything to see?"

The Heritage of the Cathedral is a study of the influence of history and thought on cathedral architecture. Prentice believed that these great European buildings—St. Chapelle, the Madeleine, and Notre Dame in Paris; St. Ambrogio in Milan; and St. Maria Maggiore in Rome embodied in their magnificent structures the history of the times and also the

fascinating stories of man's beliefs, hopes, fears, work, and pleasures.

A brother of Prentice's, Parmelee Prentice, married Alta Rockefeller, a daughter of John D. and Laura Spellman Rockefeller. A son, Pierrepont Isham Prentice, became the circulating manager of *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life* magazines.

Due to Prentice's service in World War I, one can find his name in Nyack's Memorial Park on the Soldier's and Sailor's Memorial designed by Nyack architect Marshall Emery. The tablet on the memorial bears "the names of men and women of this community who served in the active and auxiliary of our country and her allies during the World War 1914-1918."

Some of the books mentioned in this article are available through the inter-library loan system of the Nyack Library

For a letter from John D. Rockefeller to Prentice, see page 8.

Support Local History: Join the Society: www.nyackhistory.org

First Reformed Church

by Jean Pardo, HSN Trustee



In 1798, Rockland County split from Orange County to become the smallest county in New York State, with the exception of the New York City boroughs. At that time, descendants of the early Dutch settlers still farmed the land between Hook Mountain on the north and the Bight on the south. And they still spoke Dutch.

These families had long attended the Tappan Dutch Reformed Church, founded in 1698 and still in existence today, where services were held in Dutch. Some of the families preferred the Clarkstown Dutch Reformed Church, because of the shorter distance, which also held services in Dutch. By 1811, these Nyack families sought permission to build their own church, but were rejected by the Dutch Reformed hierarchy and the Presbyterians. In 1812, the Old Stone Church in Upper Nyack (now known as Old Stone Meeting House) was built by the Methodists. By 1816, the Greenbush Presbyterian Church had been built in Blauvelt, with the expectation that Nyackers would attend as services were held in Dutch. After 15 years, it became obvious that

Nyack residents preferred to meet in each others' homes or other facilities rather than travel over the mountain to Blauvelt. They wanted their own Dutch Reformed Church in Nyack.

Spurred by parishioners Peter Smith, John Lydecker, Abram Tallman, and Cornelius F. Smith, permission was obtained in 1836 from the Dutch Reformed hierarchy to build a 32-foot by 50-foot wood frame building with a corner tower. Land was donated on South Broadway by Peter Smith next to his cow pasture. The new home was incorporated as the First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of Nyack. With a few additions over time it served its community for 65 years. The Wayside Chapel in Grandview-on-Hudson, near the Bight, was also owned and used by the congregation. Eventually, age and the growing number of congregants led to the Nyack church being razed and replaced in 1901 by the present brick building.

The new building, made possible through a generous donation by Mrs. Garret Van Nostrand, was designed by the Emery Brothers Architects, well known in Nyack for their many other buildings around the village. The clock tower with its illuminated dials soon became a landmark for boats on the Hudson. In 1910, taxpayers voted to have the village assume responsibility for maintaining the clock. A new organ, built in 1901 by Michael Clark of South Nyack, was installed. Around 1913, the front lawn was enclosed by an iron fence as the grassy plot had become too popular a spot for picnicking, and even for pasturing animals! And what seems odd to modern ears is that, for many years, a common method of fundraising was to rent out pews.

In 1923, the church purchased Eendracht House next to it, which had been used as a community center since 1837. In 1937, Eendracht Hall was built for the use of all community groups for parties, entertainments, performances, and a well-baby clinic. In 1964, both were razed and Pitkin Hall and Voorhees Hall (used for the church school) were built in their place.

Reading about the church's 100th anniversary celebration in 1938, I came across an account of a part of the entertainment featuring a future friend of mine, Myrtis "Bunny" Cairoli, which read, "Myrtis Cairoli played as harmonica solos *Home on the Range* and *Coming Round the Mountain*, followed by *I've Been Working on the Railroad*. After she had played the numbers once, she led the audience in singing them."

In 1983, during its restoration, the 1901 organ was destroyed by fire. Within a year, however, enough funds were raised to build a new one, which included the three remaining pipes that were not destroyed in the fire.

In addition to serving as a spiritual home for all people seeking it, the First Reformed Church of Nyack is still helping the wider community. The Soup Angels provide free weekly meals for those in need; space is offered to the Rockland Psychiatric Center for an outpatient clinic and 12-step programs; and the sanctuary is shared with a Hispanic ministry, all through the generosity of volunteer parishioners.

Request for Information

Gini Stollendorf is looking for information for an article on Civil War Col. Willson Wyett, infantry. His headstone reads "Co. 1, 10th Regiment, died February 24, 1889." If you have information, please contact Gini at ginstollendorf@nyackhistory.org.



John Scott Armchair Walking Tours

by Win Perry, AIA, HSN President

The John Scott Armchair Walking Tours are back! But who was John Scott anyway?

I'm thrilled to welcome this year's series of the John Scott Armchair Walking Tours, so thrilled that I volunteered to lead the first tour, which by now is history. In its 17th year, the series is now under the direction of our trustee, Brian Jennings, who, in his day job, is Librarian Supervisor at the Nyack Library

John Scott (1916-2005) was a school textbook salesman, retired when I first met him as a friend and neighbor of my parents in West Nyack. Raised, schooled, and married in Nyack, Scott served in the Navy in the Philippines during World War II and played jazz clarinet with the Sauter-Finnegan Band. A founding member of the Historical Society of Rockland County, he served in many roles: vice president, librarian, publications, historic markers, house tours, and, finally, senior historian. He visited over 200 old local houses to examine the details of their historic design and construction, often in the company of Claire Tholl, another expert in historic architecture. I was privileged to join them on several such visits to buildings in the Nyacks.

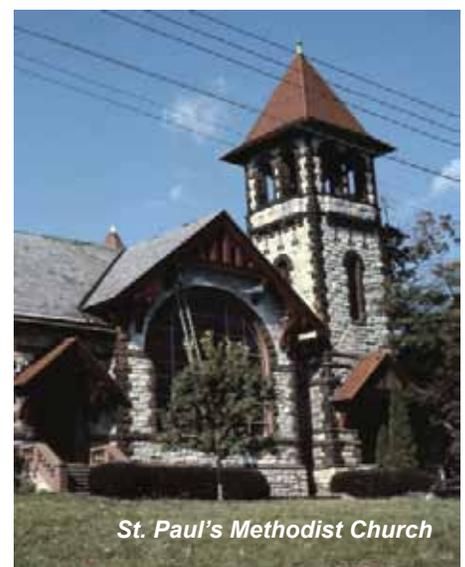
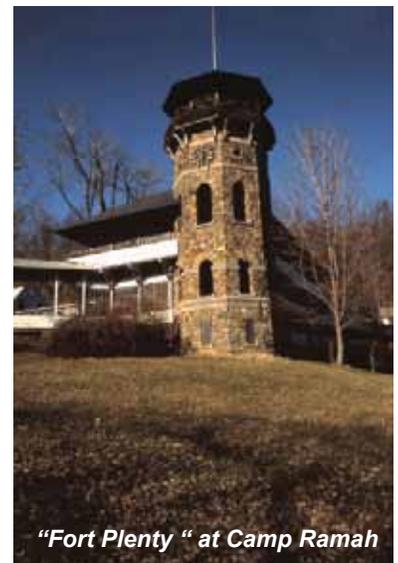
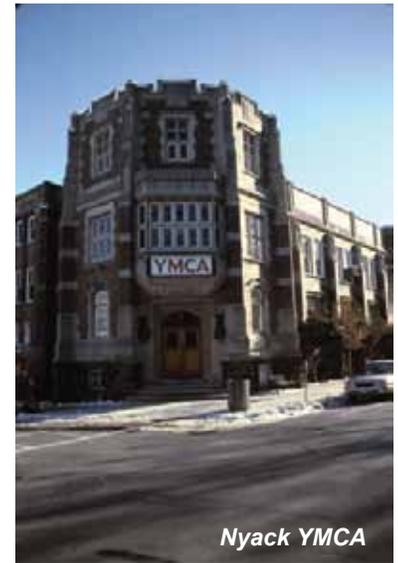
John would meticulously research an aspect of local history, then document it with slide photographs that he presented in public programs with learned and entertaining commentary. One that I especially remember was his reconstruction of the route of the King's Highway of



the pre-Revolutionary period. Partly renamed Greenbush Road by patriots, he traced it from Tappan through Piermont, Orangeburg, Blauvelt, West Nyack, Valley Cottage, Congers, and Haverstraw to Stony Point and beyond. The program was beautifully illustrated by photographs of the current appearance of the road and of buildings remaining from the Colonial and Federal periods.

It was that tradition of illustrated historical talks that our trustee Bob Goldberg picked up when John Scott stopped doing them and presented, first under the sponsorship of the Friends of the Nyacks and then, more recently, under the joint auspices of the Friends and the Historical Society of the Nyacks. Bob's time as producer spanned the transition from film to digital photography and he often took the photographs needed to illustrate the talks of the many fascinating presenters he recruited. In November, we welcome him back in the role of presenter himself, in the program "History Happened Here," in which he will expand on the historical events signaled by some of the historical markers seen in Rockland County, many of which, incidentally, were erected by John Scott.

And that cute sketch of people touring with their armchairs? It was contributed several years ago by our trustee, John Elliot, a renowned artist now residing in Florida. Another talented local sketch artist, Bill Batson, is our presenter in October.



These buildings and others were featured by Win in his Armchair Walking Tour, the Architecture of Marshall and Henry Emery.

John Scott Armchair Walking Tours

*Wed., Oct. 10, 7:00 p.m.,
Nyack Library, call 358-3370 x 214
to register
and Thurs., Oct. 11, 2:00 pm., Valley
Cottage Library*

Nyack History *One Sketch at a Time*



Artist and Author of the Nyack Sketch Log, Producer of Nyack's Flash Sketch Mob, and Artist-in-Residence at Nyack's Farmer's Market

Bill Batson

will take us through his drawings of Nyack and the stories behind them, covering a fascinating artistic journey, blending both social and personal history.

*Wed., Nov. 14, 7:00 p.m.,
Nyack Library, call 358-3370 x 214
to register
and Thur., Nov.15, 2:00 pm.,
Valley Cottage Library*

History Happened Here



Historian and Long-Time Producer of Armchair Walking Tours

Bob Goldberg

will begin in historic Tappan and continue with stops at sites of historical significance, including the Revolutionary War, the building of the Nyack Turnpike and Erie Railroad, early industry, and the first struggles to integrate Rockland's schools.

TAPPAN ZEE PERSPECTIVES



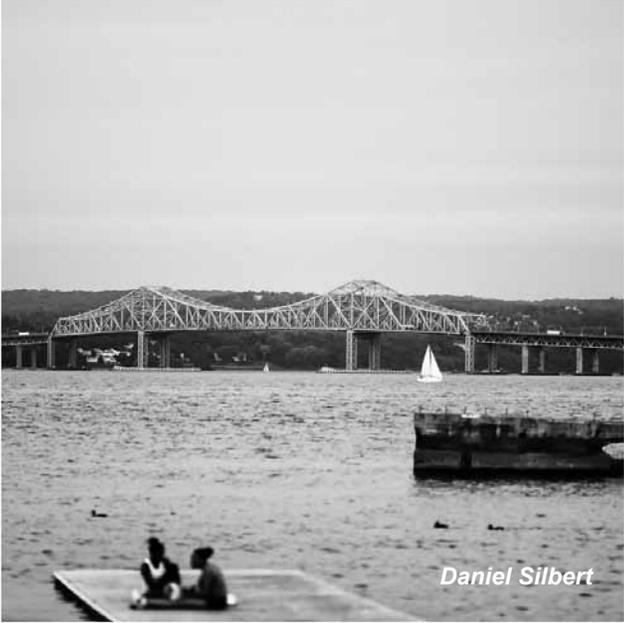
Alison Perry



Ray Wright



Arnold Roufa



Daniel Silbert



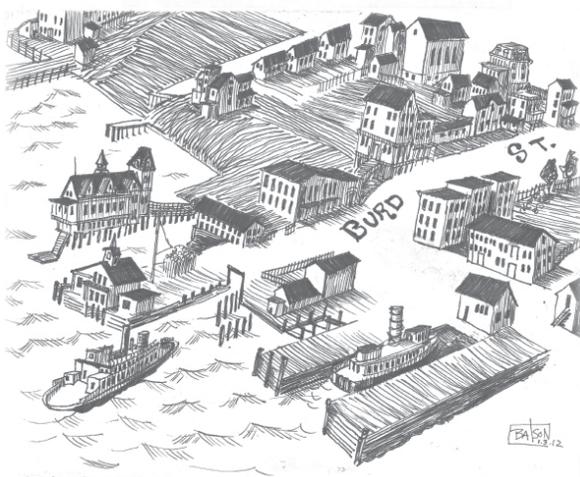
Bill Batson



Ray Wright

Nyack History

One Sketch at a Time



An Exhibit of Drawings by Bill Batson

**Artist and Author of the Nyack Sketch Log,
Producer of Nyack's Flash Sketch Mob, and
Artist-in-Residence at Nyack's Farmer's
Market**

**Historical Society of the Nyacks
Exhibit Opening:
Refreshments
Sat., Oct. 6, 1 - 4 pm**

**DePew House, just behind
the Nyack Library
Enter through the lower level facing
Memorial Park
Saturdays during
Oct., Nov. & Dec.
1 - 4 pm**

Historical Society of the Nyacks

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Please take a few moments to benefit local history. Your support helps us to maintain and enhance our new museum in the DePew House and enables us to continue popular activities such as our acclaimed House Tour, our John Scott Armchair Walking Tours, and other special lectures and programs.

Please mail your payment to Historical Society of the Nyacks, P.O. Box 850, Nyack, NY 10960

- Family/Joint \$28
- Individual \$15
- Business/Professional \$50
- Donation \$ _____

Save the John Green House



John Gromada

Some Nyack residents have formed an independent group "Save the John Green House." While the group secures its tax-exempt status, anyone interested in making a tax-deductible donation now may send a check, made out to The Historical Society of the Nyacks (with "Save the John Green House" in memo line), to the Society at P.O. Box 850, Nyack, NY 10960.

For more information:

Email John Gromada: john.gromada@verizon.net
Visit: www.facebook.com/savethejohngreenhouse

Letter from John D. Rockefeller to Sartell Prentice (Article on p. 1)

August 19, 1919.

Dear Dr. Prentice:

Answering yours of the 15th,
I thank you for the book entitled "Padre."
It has not yet come to hand, but when
it does it will give me great pleasure
to read it.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Sartell Prentice,
Lake Mohonk Mountain House,
Mohonk Lake, N. Y.

Newsletter



Historical Society of the Nyacks

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