



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

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BOB GABRIELSON: A LIFETIME OF WORKING AND RESPECTING THE HUDSON RIVER

by Gini Stollendorf, Editor

Nyack's own Bob Gabrielson loved the Hudson River. For over 60 years, he was a commercial fisherman and active member of such organizations as the Hudson River Commercial Fisheries Association and Riverkeeper. Robert Eric Gabrielson was born in 1929 of Norwegian descent. His grandfather had been a lobsterman in Brooklyn. The family moved to Nyack, where Bob graduated from Nyack High School. By the time he was 17, he owned a 12-foot boat with a five-horsepower engine and was fishing the Hudson. As his reputation as a fisherman grew, he would often, as he told it, "have people standing in line, like at the supermarket, to buy shad, catfish, and anything else to come off the river," as his boat would pull up to the dock in Nyack.

In the 1940s and 50s, there were about 250 commercial fishermen operating along the river, but by the 21st century the number had plummeted to closer to ten. By the 1970s, fishing on the Hudson River had become a hard way to make a living due to unchecked pollution from such sources as the Anaconda Wire & Cable Company in Hastings, which was dumping oils, metals, and solvents in the river. Exxon International tankers would leave the Lago Refinery in Aruba loaded with petroleum products, such as jet fuel. They would "off-load" in Bayonne, New Jersey, or elsewhere on the East coast, and, then, journey up the Hudson to Hyde Park, where they would rinse their oil tanks, load up with river water and head back to Aruba. When Exxon was accused of polluting the Hudson with toxic chemicals and stealing Hudson River water, they denied it. Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant was another source of pollution, withdrawing millions of gallons of water from the Hudson to cool its reactors. Tens of thousands of fish would die on screens created to keep debris from fouling the intake pipes. The Penn Central diesel yards in Croton had been disposing of oil waste from a three-foot pipe in the Croton River for years. This river flows into the Hudson. In August 1975, the New York State DEC found dangerous levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyl) in fish from the river. The following February, the state issued a ban on the commercial harvest of bass, eel, carp, catfish, perch, and striped bass.

Through all his years on the Hudson, Gabrielson regarded the river as public property and equated its protection with the protection of fundamental

"He knew the biology of the river, the rhythms of the river. . . better than all the scientists of the DEC put together. He was a great friend of mine, and I spent many hours out in the river." —Robert F. Kennedy Jr., on the death of Bob Gabrielson on May 13, 2009, in *The Journal News*, 5/14/09



democratic values. In fact, the Hudson River Commercial Fisheries Association, which he helped found in 1964, was an organization with a great reputation for pursuing polluters. In 1986, this organization merged with Riverkeeper and Bob served on its board for many years. Gabrielson was also a member of the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Commission and the Hudson River Advisory Committee. In a 1986 Rockland Journal-News article, he credited the environmentalists and New York State governor, Nelson A. Rockefeller, for helping to clean up the Hudson River. "They did a good job," Gabrielson is quoted as saying. He further stated that "now, when you pull up the nets, the bottom of the boat is just crawling with life, with crabs, and other marine life. Believe me it's probably the healthiest estuary on the East Coast."

continued on next page

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LOCAL HISTORY IS SO REAL AND SO CLOSE YOU CAN REACH OUT AND TOUCH IT
JOHN SCOTT ARMCHAIR WALKING TOURS
BY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND THE FRIENDS OF
THE NYACKS

We hope you caught our fantastic first program on the early iron industry. Don't miss our remaining programs.
CAMP SHANKS, FIRST STOP ON THE ROAD TO VICTORY IN EUROPE

The October program in the series will be presented by Jerry Donnellan, a native of Nyack and a wounded Vietnam War Veteran, currently Rockland County Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, and curator at the Camp Shanks Museum in Orangeburg.

In September of 1942, the U.S. Army took over 2,000 acres of Orangeburg farmland and New York State property to create a huge port of embarkation to support the war in Europe. Over 1.3 million GIs were processed at this "Last Stop USA," on their way to victory in Europe. After the war, Camp Shanks served to process the returning and victorious men on their way home. Many veterans chose to remain in the area at Shanks Village, with their wives and children, to study at near-by colleges and universities. Many of these veterans, with their new degrees and families, decided to remain in Rockland and built the Hickory Hill Cooperative in Tappan.

The program will be presented first at the Nyack Library, 59 S. Broadway, at 7:00 PM on Wednesday evening, October 16, and will be repeated the following afternoon, Thursday, October 17, at 2:00 PM at the Valley Cottage Library on Route 303.

TRAP ROCK QUARRIES IN ROCKLAND-DIGGING IN TO OUR EARLIEST HISTORY

The November program will be presented by Bert Dahm, a life-long resident of West Nyack, president of Heritage of West Nyack, and unofficial historian of that hamlet. Bert Dahm's family owned and operated three trap rock quarries that later merged to form the New York Trap Rock Corporation.

The program will describe Rockland's earliest industry, including the uses of trap rock and the hazardous explosives that were used to mine this valuable mineral. Bert will show the growth of this basic industry and include many events from his personal recollections of his family's role in the quarries of Rockland. The program will be presented first in the Nyack Library, 59 S. Broadway, at 7:00 PM on Wednesday evening, November 13, and will be repeated the following afternoon, Thursday, November 14, at 2:00 PM at the Valley Cottage Library on Route 303.

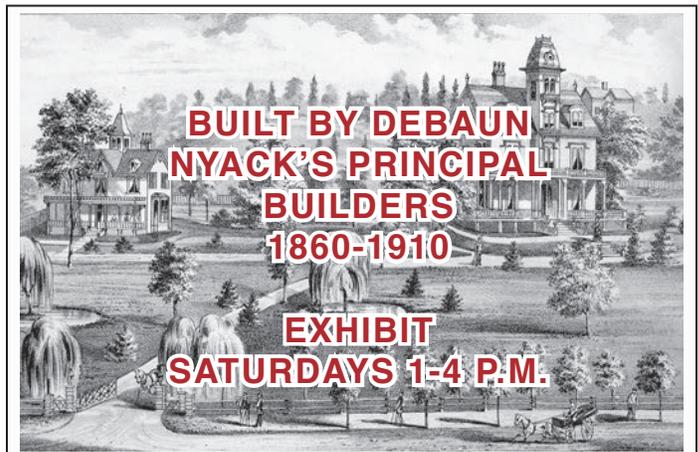
Seating is limited and attendees should pre-register by calling or going online. (Nyack Library, 845.358.3370, nyacklibrary.org or Valley Cottage Library, 845.268.7700, vclib.org). For more information, contact the producer, Bob Goldberg at 845.268.3838 or bobgoldberg@nyackhistory.org

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Gabrielson, continued

Robert F. Kennedy stated that he was grateful for the skills and culture of fishing that Bob had shared with him. As Bob Gabrielson fished the Hudson, he spoke for the Hudson.

(Ed. note—I am sure that Bob Gabrielson would have been delighted with a piece in the Rockland Express on July 18, 2013, which stated that fishing bans put in place in 1996 by New York State and, two years later, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission had helped sturgeon re-bound in the Hudson. Also see this YouTube video: <http://tinyurl.com/jw44klk>)



FALL MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Win Perry, AIA, Society President

If you like Nyack's old houses and commercial and public buildings, you will love the current photographic exhibit in our museum on the lower level of the Library's Depew House. When I casually suggested to the Exhibit Committee that we might organize an exhibit around buildings built by the DeBauns, I had only an inkling of the treasures we would uncover. First, we discovered that there were several DeBauns who worked in Nyack. Cornelius DeBaun built several delightful Victorian cottages, including his own at 45 Washington Street (1860), and later the classic Italianate block of stores with apartments above that line the east side of South Broadway in the block just south of Main Street, called the Moeller Block (1890).

Then, in 1867, Cornelius's young nephew, Matthew W. DeBaun, caught the public's eye with his delightful Carpenter Gothic Universalist (later First Church of Christ Scientist) Church on South Broadway. His career blossomed immediately as the next year he designed and built his masterpiece, a grand Gothic Revival home for one of Nyack's wealthiest citizens, David D. Smith, a steamboat mogul. The home sat in the middle of a landscaped block that extended from Fifth to Sixth Avenues and from Broadway to Franklin Street. We found an engraving of it in the 1876 *Atlas of Rockland County*, showing that it had a broad front porch and a very tall central tower, both decorated with carefully proportioned ornate carpentry details. It's still there. The block has been divided by Hart Place, the house has lost its porch and tower, and the upper portion has been rebuilt in a simpler design after a fire, but it still retains much of its commanding presence. You can compare "before" and "after" views in the exhibit. Matthew went on to build hundreds of houses in the Nyack area, including many of the grandest. He also built large homes in Tuxedo Park.

I won't give away all of the things you will see in the exhibit, except to say that it includes Carson McCullers's house and Nyack's First Reformed Church, among others of your favorite buildings, often in both historic and recent photographs.

Do you possibly live in a DeBaun house? If you know or suspect that you do, please send us your story at <info@nyackhistory.org>. Maybe we can add yours to the exhibit. In any case, we'll be expecting you, Saturdays between 1:00 and 4:00 pm.

GEM ON THE HUDSON

by Arthur H. Gunther, III

When Henry Hudson plied the river off Nyack's shores in 1609, he did not worry about a new Tappan Zee Bridge, or street parking, or politics, or even the great, continuing change his exploration would bring. But I bet he took in, albeit from the water, the same beauty so many of us soak up in this wonderful village.

In 42 years of varied newspaper activity, 18 of which were spent in downtown Nyack at the paper's 1930-1982 home at 53 Hudson Avenue, and with the rest spent intimately enough in the village as to call it a marriage, I could not—cannot—walk Nyack's streets, nor look upon the Hudson without numerous frames of reference.

This is the town where longtime Journal-News reporter, Virginia Parkhurst, thoroughly covered stories in such balanced fashion that no one would challenge her on the facts. Sitting upstairs, almost tucked away anonymously in the meeting room of the old Village Hall on Main Street, she would take notes in longhand, then transcribe them into typewritten pages so she would have her "who, what, where, when, how, and why," the bible questions of newspapering, answered before the story was eventually written. That meant extra hours never balanced by monetary compensation. But it gave Nyackers in-depth reporting of a community that has always been chock full of news.

The Nyack of my reference, essentially from the early 1960s on (but also the 1940s and '50s of my youth), was a newspaper town, with presses churning in the bowels at 53 Hudson, so that the brick, one-story building, then two-story, then two-story with a large addition in the back, shook with the birthing pains of the daily effort.

It was the village where copy boys secured coffee for grumbling editors in the wee hours of the A.M., passing in quick pace the newspaper's first home on South Broadway, or its second one on Burd Street (both buildings still stand). It was a village coming alive on the news



of the previous night and day, and that day's too, with the menu already being written for the following day's meal, all to quench the information appetite of Nyackers and other Rocklanders.

In the P.M., a toast could and would be made to the daily birth at the old Hi-Ho Bar off Main Street. It was the newspaperman's second home.

Nyack was also the longtime host of the New York Telephone Co., with specially made, olive-colored utility trucks lining both sides of Main Street all the way west to the Lydecker Building. The switching frames in the edifice at Cedar Avenue and Main Street had wire pairs dating back to the late 1800s.

It was once the village of a ferry to Tarrytown, a busy Main Street with some stores that had duplicates in Suffern, the other major shopping area in pre-mall, pre-bridge Rockland County.

This was Main Street, USA, with the requisite bakery, Five-and-Dime (two), sporting goods stores, dress shops, gin mills, diners, and, yes, bookie joints and, during Prohibition, speakeasies.

The Nyack of my moment had all the flavor—sweet, bitter, and in-between—of a typical downtown, and that served many tastes. It excelled overall.

As with other American communities, change came to Nyack and the village re-defined itself, beginning in the mid-1960s, as an antiques mecca, a cosmopolitan suburbia with charming shops, urban renewal, and all the politics, all the pull between old and new, that metamorphosis brings.

Today, the village again is changing, this time into a mecca of restaurants and strong cultural offerings, such as ArtsRock, the Edward Hopper House Art Center, and

Historical Society of the Nyacks

A not for profit organization

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the Historical Society of the Nyacks. Yet the essential community remains, as always, a continuing stirpot of mixed feelings about its present and its future, but "who would want to live anywhere else?" As such, it is typical of Rockland and its never-ending change.

Through it all, and actually as a result, Nyack has offered and continues to present such a wide range of delicious flavors, with a great diversity of peoples, beliefs, and sense of purpose and direction, that it is a truly wonderful place to live, to work, to visit—a gem on the Hudson.

I can no longer jump around the corner from 53 Hudson Avenue to Elliot's Broadway Luncheonette for a regular coffee at 15 cents per, but the same goose bumps that often came to me early on a day when Nyack was again rising to life still appear on a walk down Depew Avenue toward the magnificence of Henry's Hudson.

This updated piece originally appeared on August 18, 1988, as a Journal-News essay. The writer is a retired newspaperman who lives in Blauvelt, but years to reside in Nyack.

Newsletter



Historical Society of the Nyacks

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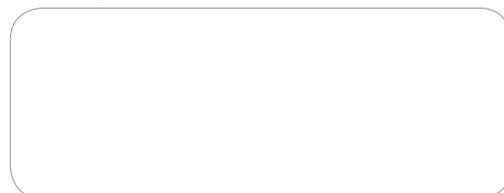
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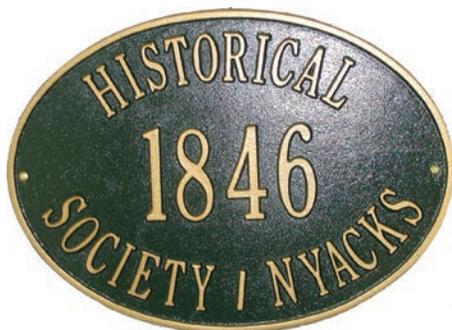
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