

Don't Let History in Orangetown Get Bulldozed

By Robert Brum

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PHOTO: MASAKO BIRMINGHAM

In a place like Orangetown, whose motto is "rich in history", you don't go knocking down a 263-year-old Dutch colonial without setting off a panic in the preservation community.

This is, after all, a town where you can grab a burger at a 300 year old inn. So when the Abram Lent House was unexpectedly demolished a year ago to make way for a shopping center, a townwide examination began to make sure no other hidden gems would be bulldozed into the past.

Part of that re-examination can be seen in "past/forward", an exhibit at the Orangetown Historical Museum & Archives that urges viewers to consider what preserving the past means to their future.

And it's not just about that house where George Washington slept.

It's also that dress and beaver fur top hat your grandparents wore on their wedding day in 1928. Or the ice sled, made in Nyack sometime near the end of the 19th century, used to push a child along back when winters were far worse. Those items are all part of the exhibit. "Preservation begins at home," museum curator Elizabeth Skrabonja said. "It may sound dizzying but

you've got to be able to look backward and forward at the same time. Saving the Clausland Mountain, which in the mid 1960's was this close to being lost to a warren of dormitories and buildings for Columbia University, until a group of local individuals got together and said, "This is not how we want our community to look. We want to preserve this green space,".

I asked museum director Mary Cardenas whether she wanted people to hold onto everything, lest they accidentally dump something that may carry historical significance. "No, not at all," she laughed. "What we are asking them to do is not dismiss their past but keep what is really important. You can't keep everything, but to keep the important elements from your past."

And although every building is not worth saving, she lauded the preservation of the Perry-Blauvelt-Seth House by a developer who's putting up senior housing near Lake Tappan. "If you destroy everything from your past, then you've destroyed an integral part of your history," Cardenas said. "You've got nothing to take with you from the people that came before you, whether or not it's for writing a history book, saving an historical area, or saving the Sparkill Creek."



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at The DePew House
196 Chief Bill Harris Way
Orangeburg, New York
Office, Archives by Appointment
(845) 398-1302

considering preservation
past/forward
open Tuesdays 10 – 2
Sundays 1 – 4,
or by appointment
admission free
donations accepted



at The Salyer House
213 Blue Hill Road
Pearl River, New York
*A Spy in Our Midst,
Our Dutch Sandstone
Houses & At Home
in Orangetown*
Permanent Exhibit:
Hours by appointment
(845) 398-1302

THIS SUMMER/FALL



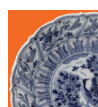
past/forward At the DePew House. In considering preservation, the Town of Orangetown can look back on a history of achievement as well as some significant losses. Featuring local history superstars, with a nod to some spectacular saves. Featuring a screening of Tina Traster's documentary film: *This Place Matters* and the evocative sculpture of Dutch artist Nynke Koster from her *Elements of Time* series. We invite the viewer to consider what is old in a new way. Exhibit open through November 13th, 2016. At the DePew House, 196 Chief Bill Harris Way, Orangeburg, NY



Antiques & Collectibles Sale: Saturday, October 1, 2016, 10 am – 4 pm
The museum will be open free of charge! Enjoy a beautiful Fall day with some fabulous Antiques, Fine Collectibles, Jewelry, Toys, Decorative Arts, Furniture, Music & Historians, Fine Arts & Ephemera. Table Rental for Dealers is \$25.
At the **DePew House** 196 Chief Bill Harris Way, Orangeburg NY. Please call (845) 398-1302 for further information.



Friends of the Orangetown Museum Annual Dinner:
Save the date! Sunday June 26th at the historic '76 House in Tappan. 5 pm: social hour; hor d'oeuvres, cash bar. 6 pm: dinner. Tickets: \$55 per person, \$65 at the door. In the spirit of celebrating the museum and all things preservation, join us for a lively repast honoring a woman who keeps history alive – Marilyn Schauder.



VIDEO: In case you missed the museum's groundbreaking exhibition 'From Holland to Here' we are able to provide you with another chance to see it. By visiting the museum's website www.orangetownmuseum.com and clicking on the VIDEO tab in the upper header, you can access our YouTube video. Collector George Way with Curator Elizabeth Skrabonja and Museum Director Mary Cardenas recollect this important show.

THE ORANGETOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

Mary Cardenas, MUSEUM DIRECTOR • Elizabeth Skrabonja, MUSEUM CURATOR
The Orangetown Historical Museum & Archives was founded in 1992 to acquire, preserve and exhibit objects which reflect primarily the history of the Town of Orangetown. The Museum's additional, but not lesser mission is to document, research, promote and publicize the town's rich, historical heritage of the town for the people of Orangetown.



TOWN OF ORANGETOWN

Andrew Stewart, SUPERVISOR
Jerry Bottari, Thomas Diviny, Denis Troy and Paul Valentine, COUNCILMEN

FRIENDS OF THE ORANGETOWN MUSEUM

Your membership in the Friends of the Orangetown Museum helps to collect and preserve the history of Orangetown. Members will receive notices of programs and events as well as free admission to the Museum's special exhibits and events. The Museum is a 501 (C) (3) organization and all donations are tax deductible.

STUDENT/SENIOR \$10 SINGLE \$15 FAMILY \$20
LIFE MEMBER \$100 CORPORATE \$250

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EDITOR: Elizabeth Skrabonja

The

Orangetown Crier

News from the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives

SUMMER 2016

past/forward

If we consider that Old = Opportunity, the Town of Orangetown can look back on a history of achievement as well as some significant losses.

Interpreting the past requires a kind of literary imagination. A beautiful vintage object can contain a magical presence all its own. The architecture and attributes of the past can serve as inspiration for contemporary artists. Living with the past enriches our lives immeasurably.

The notion of caring is embodied in the definition of preservation. What is built, what is demolished, what is preserved – all determines the character and future of the town. As an area identified as 'Rich in History' – efforts made to preserve that history here have been history making on their own. When the Tappan Historic Area was adopted by the Orangetown Town Board in 1965, it was the first such designation in the State of New York. The Palisades Historic Area soon followed. Many buildings in the town have achieved the status of being included in the National Register of Historic Places. This work was championed by a cadre of local history superstars who worked tirelessly to preserve the unique character of the town for future generations. Sustaining the Palisades, the Sparkill Creek and our Hudson River greenspaces has also helped to maintain the unique balance we enjoy today. Vigilance, however, is required as we consider what we have lost. The majestic Salisbury Manor and graceful Lent House are just two examples of major losses suffered by our historic infrastructure.

With *past/forward* we invite the viewer to consider what is old in a new way. Imaginative interpretive sculpture that takes inspiration from classical architectural detail by the young Dutch artist Nynke Koster. Bits and pieces of the past, preserved, protected, reimagined. Stories of treasures saved (the Seth House), lost (the Lent House) and re-emerging (the John Greene House) just begin the conversation. Preserving the past never gets old; it allows for a continuity of place. It opens the door to the future.

Elizabeth Koszarski-Skrabonja
Curator

SAVED! Seth House

The Perry-Blauvelt-Seth House was saved due to the intervention of the Town of Orangetown collaborating with the Rockland County and Orangetown Highway Departments. Millennium Homes, a Division of BNE Associates, rose to the challenge and chose to preserve and protect this architectural gem for future generations.



Students at the Salyer House

From May 16th through May 18th the historic Salyer House in Pearl River went back to the past. The infamous re-enactor Fred Schofer, (aka Mountain Man) regaled 7th graders from the South Orangetown Middle School with tall tales and terrifying demos. It was all a part of our annual education program, that includes a tour of the museum's permanent exhibits, 'A Spy in Our Midst – Major John Andre', 'At Home In Orangetown' and, as a special treat this year, courtesy of the Tappantown Historical Society, 'The Tappan Patent'. Social Studies teachers, James Amandola and Sarah Kukla spearheaded this program with us over 7 years ago, and it has become a rite of passage for the students at the middle school.



- 1 **Scott Webber.** Scott Webber was a journalist for the Journal News, whose unparalleled research produced a book on the history of Camp Shanks, a WW II army installation which later became Shanks Village, housing for former GIs. Under the GI Bill, many of those veterans attended local colleges and universities while working at full time jobs. By 1956, Shanks Village was demolished and tract housing replaced it. Webber was a reporter, feature writer, news editor, columnist and freelance journalist during his career as a writer. He wrote another book – *D-Day to Y2K* and was a contributing writer to the book *Rockland County Century of History 1900-2000*.
- 2 **Maria Mackay.** Maria Mackay is a former Orangetown Historian who in 1992 was able to secure the Salyer House from the United Water Company and convert the house into a museum known as the "Orangetown Historical Museum & Archives." This building is our museum's first home and houses three permanent exhibits which are used for school children in their study of local history.
- 3 **Historical Society of the Nyacks.** The Historical Society of the Nyacks promotes the histories of Nyack, Upper Nyack and South Nyack and the surrounding areas via exhibitions at the newly renovated DePew House. The HSN puts on a variety of programs including lectures and walking tours.
- 4 **Dorothy Mellett.** Dorothy Mellett was a long time Blauvelt resident whose curiosity with gravestone art produced a book, *Gravestone Art in Rockland County*. An artist herself, Mrs. Mellett taught classes in gravestone art rubbings as well as water color painting.
- 5 **Hopper House.** Over 100 years ago the world famous artist Edward Hopper was born and raised in this Nyack house. Today, with changing exhibits and programs, the Edward Hopper Landmark Preservation Foundation maintains his home.
- 6 **Carl Nordstrom.** Carl Nordstrom moved here in 1943 and became deeply interested in Nyack's history. He wrote two books *Frontier Elements in a Hudson River Village* and *Of Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax*, tracing Nyack's economic development. A third book *Nyack in Black & White*, tackled race relations in Nyack.
- 7 **Jerry Donnellan.** Jerry Donnellan, head of the Veterans Administration in Rockland, was able to secure funds to develop a museum honoring Camp Shanks, the largest port of embarkation on the east coast, which had 1.2 million soldiers come through during WW II. This museum, which opened in June 1995, gives an accurate picture of what WW II barracks were like.
- 8 **Rosalie Fellows Bailey.** Rosalie Fellows Bailey's 1936 book *Pre-Revolutionary Dutch Houses* was a massive undertaking in which she focused on sandstone houses – their architectural details and the genealogical research on the families that inhabited them. With some of the homes no longer standing, Bailey's work is still highly regarded and referred to by researchers.
- 9 **Rails To Trails.** Rails To Trails is a passive walking and bike path through Orangetown, which formerly was the rail bed for the Erie Railroad for one of the longest rail lines in the country. The first portion of this trail was dedicated in 2005. The trail begins on Oak Tree Road in Tappan and extends into Blauvelt connecting several historic communities.
- 10 **Claire Tholl.** Claire Tholl's interest in sandstone houses ultimately saved many of them through her exhaustive study of them in 1979-80. Thanks to her study, many were saved from demolition and are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. She collaborated with former county historian John Scott to create the *Landmarks Map of Rockland County* published in 1975.

what they did matters



- 11 **Isabell Savell.** Isabell Savell was a senior historian at the Historical Society of Rockland County. She was a retired journalist who wrote for the Brooklyn Eagle and later for the NY Herald Tribune. She authored several books including *Wine and Bitters*, a book on the end of the Revolutionary War. Her other two books were *Ladies Lib* on women's suffrage and *The Tonetti Years at Snedens Landing*.
- 12 **The Sparkill Creek Watershed Alliance (SCWA).** Coursing over ten miles through Orangetown, the Sparkill Creek (Dutch for spruce creek) has its beginnings on top of Clausland Mountain. The course takes it through Blauvelt, Orangeburg, and Tappan into Northvale, New Jersey and back into Palisades and Sparkill, emptying into the Piermont marsh. Its water power was once vital to the number of lumber and grist mills along its path. In earlier times, it was navigable as far up as Piermont. In current times, it has become a source of pleasure meandering through parks and suburban communities, but it is also a source of concern with the amount of development encroaching as well as contamination from sewage and dumping. The SCWA is a watchdog group keeping an eye on preserving the environment and health of the creek.
- 13 **Sally Dewey.** Sally Dewey moved to Tappan in 1965 where she quickly got involved with the Tappantown Historical Society. She was president of the THS 1980-84. She worked as a genealogist dealing with local families. In 1996, Dewey was a member of a committee, which worked on updating local laws for the historic areas in Tappan as well as Palisades. Today much of her research can be found in the Orangetown Museum's Archive.
- 14 **Alice Haagensen & Alice Gerard.** Alice Haagensen spent 40 years researching material that produced a comprehensive history, *Palisades & Snedens Landing*, beginning with the early history of Palisades to the 19th century. She was a resident of Snedens Landing for 59 years until her death at the age of 105. Her daughter Alice Gerard transcribed the *Diaries of Nicholas Gesner, 1829-1880* which was published in 2015.
- 15 **Friends Of The Orangetown Museum. Catherine M. Dodge • Jeffrey Keahon** Spearheaded by community leader Catherine M. Dodge and education advocate Jeffrey Keahon, the Friends promote The Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives outreach programs. Their support has increased awareness of preservation issues and local history.
- 16 **Win Perry.** Win Perry is an architect and the Upper Nyack Historian with a keen interest in preservation. Often sought after for help with old houses, particularly sandstone houses, he is a member of the Rockland County Preservation Board and serves as a member on several committees at the Hopper House and the John Green Preservation Coalition. His family has lived in Nyack for many generations.
- 17 **George Budke.** George Budke was born in 1868 and died in 1948. During the course of his lifetime, Budke used primary sources beginning with the early patents in the 17th century, through part of the 19th century to compile *The History of Rockland County*. These sources included government records and personal correspondence all of which helped piece together life in the past. His collection was sold to the New York Public Library in 1933. Many of the compilations are available to us thanks to the Library

Association of Rockland County's efforts to publish his collection in the 1975.

- 18 **Paul Melone.** Paul Melone was a former resident of Shanks Village and past president of the Tappantown Historical Society. Along with a number of Shanks Villagers he bought property in Tappan and developed what is today Hickory Hill. He was instrumental in obtaining the property behind the Tappan Library for a small town park and also helped gather information and design the layout for the book, *Tappan: 300 Years*. Melone has donated many photos, postcards and memorabilia to the Orangetown Museum. Today, he is still referred to as "the unofficial Tappan Historian."
- 19 **The Rockland County Journal News William Haeselbarth • Virginia Parkhurst Saxby Penfold • Art Gunter III Nancy Cacioppo** The Rockland County Journal News has long been associated with the publication of local historical articles educating the public which began with William Haeselbarth, the newspaper's founder in 1850. Virginia Parkhurst wrote for this newspaper from 1934-1971 with time off while she served in the WACS during WW II. Saxby Penfold, a Rockland County Historian, contributed articles throughout the 1950's. Art Gunter III enlivened the conversation for 42 years with historical tidbits from 1964-2006. In 2004, Nancy Cacioppo retired from the Journal News after 38 years as a feature writer and history columnist.
- 20 **Dewint House NYS Free & Accepted Masons.** In 1932 the Masons bought and rescued one of the oldest houses in Rockland County which was built in 1700 in honor of their fellow Mason, George



- Washington. The house was used as Washington's headquarters three times during the Revolutionary War and later as a stop-over for Washington during a severe snow storm. It is now a museum and still supported by the NYS Masons.
- 21 **Cornelia Bedell & Wilfred Talman.** Cornelia Bedell & Wilfred Talman are both writers from the 20th century. Bedell, whose family goes back to the time of Dutch settlers, wrote a book, *Now and Then and Long Ago in Rockland County*, which was designed to serve as a reference for Rockland's school children, but in the years since has delighted readers of all ages. Talman, who was a newspaper reporter for many years writing historically themed vignettes, eventually compiled them and turned them into a book, *How Things Began...In Rockland County*.
- 22 **Marydell Sisters.** Marydell Sisters of Upper Nyack wisely sold 30 acres of their property to the Trust For Public Land, an organization that will keep this property as open space. The parcel of land is on a gentle sloping hill with a view of the Hudson River. The Trust, a non-profit conservation group, will convey the land to the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites.
- 23 **Danforth Toan.** Danforth Toan was a former Shanks Village resident known for his work in designing Hickory Hill, one of this country's first community cooperatives of 32 houses. He is also internationally known for his architectural building designs. He taught at the Columbia School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation for 12 years and served on the Historical Areas Board of Review from 1966 to 1994.
- 24 **Mary Lawrence Tonetti.** Mary Lawrence Tonetti married a well-known Italian-French sculptor, Francois Tonetti in 1900. She owned 16 houses near the Hudson River in a section of Palisades known as Snedens Landing. She rebuilt them and created an artistic enclave by renting them out to artist friends in the summer. She kept the Snedens Landing Ferry going by creating "the Snedens Landing Association." The ferry service ran until 1944.
- 25 **Genealogical Society of Rockland County.** Dedicated members of this organization have worked tirelessly to document who has lived and died in Rockland County. They have spent countless hours locating, transcribing and publishing information on burials, funeral records, marriages and naturalization records.
- 26 **Isaac Cole, Frank Green, Arthur Tompkins.** Isaac Cole, Frank Green, and Arthur Tompkins all wrote about Rockland County history. Cole and Green published in 1884 and 1886 respectively and Tompkins in 1902. Each author began with the early history of the county, the occupation of the Dutch, the American Revolutionary War and a section on the five towns of Rockland and a section on the small communities within each town.
- 27 **Robert Knight.** Robert Knight, a native Rocklander, serves as the Clarkstown historian. During his tenure as historian, he has helped save two important houses in Clarkstown – the Vanderbilt-Budke house and the Traphagen house. Unfortunately, he lost the battle to save the Teaberry Port House in Congers. Knight is also a City Editor and a contributing writer for the Rockland County Times.
- 28 **Frances & Ralph Blauvelt.** Louis Blauvelt, Ralph's ancestor, dedicated his life to cataloging all the descendants of the family's progenitor, Gerrit Hendricksen, who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1638. Eleven of Gerrit's twelve children would settle in Orangetown. Frances and Ralph worked tirelessly updating the *Blauvelt Genealogy*.



Join Us for Our Annual Dinner!

There is still time to sign up for the celebratory repast at the '76 House. Honoring the museum, the achievements of local historians who made a difference in our community and in particular, Marilyn Schauder, this year's dinner will take place on Sunday, June 26th starting at 5 pm. There is a lot to be thankful for – promoting local history in our schools, safeguarding the past in our archives and presenting thought provoking exhibits that continue the historical dialog. Let's mingle, munch and make plans for the coming year. The Orangetown Historical Museum & Archives success is predicated on the amazing support we receive from the community. We look forward to seeing you on the 26th in the spirit of 'past/forward'.

