

WHITE PLAINS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FOUNDED IN 1983 ★ SUCCESSOR TO BATTLE OF WHITE PLAINS MONUMENT COMMITTEE ★ SPRING 2007

Annual Dinner

Join us for the White Plains Historical Society's Annual Dinner Program.

The 19th Annual Dinner Program of the White Plains Historical Society will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, White Plains—Thursday, May 3, 2007 at 6:00 p.m.

Our guest speaker will be David Hackett Fischer, historian and university professor at Brandeis University. Dr. Fischer is the author of twelve major publications including *Paul Revere's Ride*, *Liberty and Freedom* and *Washington's Crossing*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 2005. His topic at the dinner will be "General Washington's Contribution to our National Legacy of Leadership" — and will include material pertaining to The Battle of White Plains. Autographed copies of *Washington's Crossing* will be on sale.

At the dinner, the title of *Citizen Extraordinaire* will be given to:

NANCY WALLACE — former member of the White Plains Common Council; Director of the Bronx River Restoration Project; organized and maintained many projects for the improvements of The Bronx River and its environs; helped to obtain and maintain a public-private consortium so that there is a river ringed with ribbons of county parkland, which is good for local people and is an inducement to draw tourists; helped obtain federal funding for redevelopment in the Fisher Hill Neighborhood; now a member of the Conservation Board.

ISABEL VILLAR — founder and director of Centro Hispano in White Plains; a bilingual teacher and guidance counselor at Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk, Connecticut; recipient of many awards and honors for services to Centro Hispano in White Plains and for her achievements as an educator — awards given by the City of White Plains, County of Westchester and by the New York State Legislature; worked on City's Comprehensive Review Committee.

For Reservations to the Dinner Call

914-682-8426 or 914-428-9441

or E-Mail Info@WhitePlainsHistory.org

MISSION OF THE WHITE PLAINS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The discovery, preservation and dissemination of knowledge about the history, past and present, of the City of White Plains, particularly the preservation of historical buildings, sites, monuments and cemeteries; and to promote public interest and awareness to generate pride in our historic heritage.

President's Report

Once again it is my pleasure to deliver our annual report.

With the commencement of the operation of our website (www.WhitePlainsHistory.org), we have been able to reach out. We have received comments and questions from many people who, in the past, thought that this was a dormant organization.

Our programs for "The Battle of White Plains" and "Washington's Birthday" were very successful and again there were many favorable comments. Credit must be given to those members of the Board of Trustees who chaired the various events and those many volunteers who assisted with the trappings to make the occasions very successful. On a cold winter's day what could be better than being in the Purdy House eating sweets and drinking warm beverages? All thanks to the volunteers.

Our publications, such as the present one, sparked a great deal of interest and generated many new members. The membership is now at an all-time high.

The continuing goals of this Society are to make sure that succeeding generations learn about those happenings which were so vital in helping to establish our great country. This educational process must include imparting the historical facts of the importance of White Plains and our leaders in founding this Republic. A great American educator, John Kilpatrick, stated "Democracy must be learned in every succeeding generation". We are dedicated to following that precept.

We hope to see you at our annual dinner to be held on May 3, 2007 at the Crowne Plaza in White Plains. The program will be of interest to all. **DON'T MISS IT!**

Robert James Friedman
President

Westchester's First Residents

By Barbara Carlson

The Indians, of course, were Westchester's first residents, living here long before the Europeans arrived with their diseases and guns. Approximately 60,000 Indians lived in the Westchester area, according to Beth Herr, former curator of the Trailside Museum at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation. Unfortunately, by 1825, there were only about 125 left. This figure derives from the number of Indians who "went to salt", the ancient custom of spending summers on Long Island Sound to harvest oysters and clams.

The Wappinger people lived in the Westchester area and they were hunter-gatherers and farmers who had domesticated dogs and raised corn, beans, squash, watermelons and pumpkins. Evan Pritchard, the director for Algonquin Culture in Woodstock,

New York, said Wappinger society was generally divided into patrilineal clans. The Lenape were part of the Algonquin which included 84 major nations across the continent. The Wappingers were part Lenape and part Mohican. They believed in "the one who thought us all into being" and their most important spiritual event was the Big House Ceremony; for twelve nights every fall tribal members would sing about their visions.

The Indians began to disappear very soon after the Dutch arrived. In one Indian account the European ships were described as "tall floating cloud-houses carrying hairy, ghostlike men". Disease killed about three-quarters of the native population, and unfriendly relations, carried out in attacks and counter-attacks, decimated the rest. Treaties were signed, without much success, but by the 1750s the Indians and Europeans had some common agreement, chiefly opposition to British rule.

The Wappingers left Westchester County around the time of the Revolution and moved to the area around Stockbridge, Mass. After further loss of leadership, they moved to Wisconsin.

What lives on today, besides the many artifacts which are still unearthed, are place names and old Indian trail routes. Early trails became roads for horse and wagon and eventually paved-over highways. Such routes include:

- Route 9: part of a trail system from Montreal to Manhattan
- Route 22: White Plains Road was originally a trail from Montreal to Louisville, Kentucky
- Route 100: known as the Succabonk Trail

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Thomas Paine and the Preservation of True Democracy

By Jeremy A. Fitzpatrick

In 1926, The Thomas Paine Museum opened its doors in New Rochelle, NY. Located on the property given to Paine by the United States government for his service and contribution in the American Revolution, The Museum is an American symbol of Equality and Human Rights to all people. Recently the museum has been renovated and houses priceless artifacts and documents of democracy. The Thomas Paine National Historical Society has been acquiring and preserving documents and artifacts relating to Thomas Paine since it was founded in 1882 in New York City. The Association offers educational programs, public speakers, presentations, and special events about Thomas Paine's work and the relevance and importance of his writings in modern times.

Thomas Paine can be considered the Father of Modern Democracy and a preeminent founder of The United States of America. Author of Revolutionary Pamphlets such as "Common Sense" and "The Rights of Man", Paine's writing inspired men to fight for equal rights against the oppressive English Monarchy. He marched next to George Washington in America, helped write the Preamble to the Pennsylvania Constitution, (which was the first state of challenge slavery in its Constitution) and stood up against tyranny in both America and France.

The Museum director, Brian McCarin, has written a wonderful book on the work and life of Thomas Paine entitled, "Thomas Paine — Common Sense and Revolutionary Pamphleteering." He has taken Thomas Paine's elaborate and sometimes difficult writing, and simplified it for a nice read. A historian and teacher by trade, Mr. McCarin has dedicated his life to the work of Thomas Paine and The Museum. As resident-director, he has even donated his own money to keep alive the spirit and words of Thomas Paine. Also Mr. McCarin works with inner city youths in New York City.

The museum is located on the Paine Farm on 983 North Avenue in New Rochelle, New York. On this property Paine lived and worked at his Cottage (which still stands today). Paine was also buried on this property before his remains were stolen. The search for his bones continues to this day. The Museum was built by The Thomas Paine National Historic Association under the direction of William Van der Weyede and Thomas Alva Edison.

On display at The Museum are some original documents written by Paine, his death mask, bust sculptures, the spade that Thomas Edison broke the ground for The Museum site, authentic political cartoons, — some that Paine was the punch line for: smear campaigns by the wealthy in an attempt disregard his work. They even have a set of his spectacles amongst lots of other relics. For information about The Museum go to thomaspaine.org.

Institutions such as these are of paramount importance in order to preserve democracy as it was intended by our forefathers. The rights OF THE PEOPLE as equals is the basis of true democracy that has been fought for hundreds of years. In the time where our civil rights are being phased out by The Patriot Act and The Military Commissions Act, the words of Thomas Paine are just as important today as they were over 200 years ago. In the words of Thomas Paine—"We have it in our power to begin the world again!" ☒

Westchester's First Residents from page 2

Place names include:

- Armonk: from Warramaug, good fishing place
- Chappaqua: "place where the brush makes a rustling sound when you walk through"
- Croton: named after a leader, Kenotin, whose name meant "wild wind"
- Katonah: named after a leader named Ketatonah, which meant "great mountain"
- Kisco: muddy place
- Mamaroneck: a chief's name, meaning "He has stripes on his arms" perhaps referring to tattoos
- Ossining: after Sint Sink, or "place of stone"
- Pound Ridge: named for the pound or enclosure made of saplings that the Indians used to trap and contain game until they needed to kill it for food
- Taconic: cold river
- Tuckahoe: a root that is good to eat, perhaps "mushroom"
- White Plains: the Weckquaesgeek tribe called the area Quarropas, meaning white marshes or white plains, for the fog that hung over the swampland for days.

Material from New York Times article entitled "In Their Footsteps: Tracing the Mark Left by Westchester's First Residents", 5-2-04. ☒

HISTORIC PLAQUEING PROGRAM

The Society has established and maintained a Historic Plaqueing Program, actively utilized, to publicly designate those historically significant buildings, sites and cemeteries in the City, and to help educate the public.

EXAMPLES:

- Peoples National Bank and Trust Company building (1928), now Westchester Arts Council Headquarters
- Meditation Garden and Monument, Good Counsel, Sisters of Divine Compassion
- Jacob Purdy House (1721)

The Goldbricker Who Changed The Course of History

By Raymond Indelicato

John F. Parker was born on May 19, 1830 in Winchester, Virginia. As a young man John moved to Washington D.C. and found work as a carpenter. He married his "sweetheart" named Mary on July 16, 1855 and eventually going on to sire three children, all girls. Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, John enlisted in the Union Army. From this point the saga gets interesting. In September 1861, Washington D.C. newly formed Metropolitan Police Force was looking to fill its ranks, Parker, heavy laden now with the demands of a family, managed to extricate himself from his military service to become one of the first patrolmen on the newly formed force. Specific details to how he was able to accomplish this in the midst of a national emergency are lost in the abyss of history. Parker's career as a Police Officer and a goldbricker were about to commence. About a year after joining the Force, he was charged with conduct unbecoming of an officer. Taking personal offense over an order given by a superior officer, Parker was charged with gross insubordination exacerbated by his use of violent, coarse and insolent language. The official report stated that Officer Parker's behavior was so out of line with official protocol and decorum it was recommended he be reprimanded and transferred to another precinct.

A change of venue was no magic bullet. In March of 1863 Parker was cited again. This time he was accused again of the use of inappropriate language. The unique aspect of this incident was that Parker's tirade occurred while he was visiting a house of prostitution in a drunken stupor. It was even reported he fired his pistol through a window there. Less than a week later Parker once again was found derelict of duty when he was discovered sleeping in a street car when he should have been walking his rounds. Scarcely three months passed before Parker had to appear again before a Police Board on suspicion of sexually groping a lady. Incredibly, in each case the charges were dropped. John F. Parker had become a poster boy for bad behavior.

Then, inexplicably, in November 1864, Parker was picked to be one of four Presidential guards. Back then as now,

White House guards had been picked from the ranks of the oldest, best behaved and the most respected member of the force. How then did a man like Parker find his way into this prestigious assignment? The answer: Goldbricker Parker was chosen by none other than the wife of the President, Mary Todd Lincoln. What possessed her to make this usual request on behalf of an unstable patrolman like Parker remains an intriguing mystery. Maybe the answers reside in the transcripts of a court petition filed by her elder son Robert. He was convinced his mother was insane. A Chicago court declared Mary insane and committed her to a mental institution on May 20, 1875.

On that fateful night of April 14, 1865, Goldbricker Parker reported to his White House post at 7:00 pm, three hours late!! Pressured by time constraints, the Sergeant of the Guard ordered Parker to go to Ford's Theater and wait for the President to arrive and occupy a sentry post just outside the State Box. Parker at first stayed at his assigned post. From his spot he could hear the play. It wasn't long before curiosity got the best of him and he wandered off to catch a glimpse of the play, *Our American Cousin*. At intermission, Officer Parker, feeling hail and hardy, invited Charles Forbes, Lincoln's Footman, and Francis Burke, Lincoln's Coachman, to join him for a drink at the saloon next to Ford's Theatre. There is every indication that Parker's entourage walked in to behold Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, at the bar filling himself with liquid courage in the form of rot gut whiskey in preparation for his dastardly deed. Booth left the bar and returned to Ford's Theatre, climbed up the stairwell, passed Parker's vacant post, crept up behind the President and fired the fatal shot.

The next time anyone saw Officer Parker was at 6:00 am the following morning arriving at the Police Station accompanied by a woman of ill repute. On May 1, 1865, Parker was formally charged with neglect of duty. The departmental trial took place on May 3 and the charges were dismissed on June 2, 1865. Transcripts from the trial have

never been located. Perhaps they wound up in that special repository where the JFK and Roswell UFO files may be found. Officer Parker remained on the Police Force until 1868 when he was finally fired for some infraction. He died in Washington on June 28, 1890.

As a modern comedian once said, "Folks, you can't make this stuff up!" ☒

Renoda Hoffman's YESTERDAY IN WHITE PLAINS (1981) NOW AVAILABLE!



The late White Plains City Historian Renoda Hoffman's most popular book, *Yesterday in White Plains*, had been out of print for quite a few years. After hundreds of requests for copies, the Historical Society reprinted the 3rd edition.

This 350-page book has over 550 photographs, maps and illustrations of White Plains' evolution and is a cherished archive of White Plains history.

If you would like to order a copy or make a donation to the book fund, please call 682-8426.

Amodio's Nursery

By Mary Ann Amodio

Amodio's Nursery has been growing with the Westchester Gardener since 1939, when Maria and Frank Amodio purchased farmland located on Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains and opened their nursery, landscaping and flower business. They were married in the Church of St. Anthony in New York City in May of 1923 and moved to White Plains where they lived on Rockledge Avenue.

In the beginning, Frank and Maria leased farmland from Mr. Haas on Saxonwoods Road to grow plants, vegetables and flowers. Early photos show Mamaroneck Avenue to be a two lane road with a trolley going to downtown White Plains. Then, in 1939, they purchased the land at 1160 Mamaroneck Avenue, the site of the present Amodio's Garden Center, Nursery, Flower Shop and Landscaping and presently owned by their grandchildren.

Frank was considered to be an excellent grower of nursery stock and landscaped many homes in White Plains and Scarsdale. One of his favorite customers was Al Jolsen. To this day, customers come to the store and tell stories of how he transformed their homes with his designs and plants. A favorite story recounts a young married couple with little money for landscaping, coming to the nursery to explore some planting ideas. The next day, when the couple

returned home from work, their house had been completely landscaped. They sheepishly came to the nursery and told Frank Amodio that they could not afford his services at this time. He told them to pay as they could, but to make sure his plants (which he watched over like they were his children) were maintained with care. You can imagine their relief!

Maria was a gentle woman who loved her flowers, vegetables, and her chickens! She grew for the local flower markets, her specialty Delphinium and Snapdragons which she grew in cold frames. Every morning at 5:00 a.m. she would climb down into the frames and cut her flowers, bunch them for sale, and be back in the kitchen to make breakfast for her two sons and three daughters and get them off to school. Then she would go to her chicken coop, where she raised chickens for eggs for the local markets, and to her vegetable garden. Her children would deliver tomatoes, corn and eggs for her to restaurants, like The Hunters Lodge, The Rosedale Corner House, and Ebersoles on Mamaroneck Avenue, and Rudolphs Market on Lexington Avenue. She also grew apple, pear and peach fruit trees. Frank built a wine cellar where he made his own wine.

Today, Maria and Frank's grandchildren continue to work the nursery. Although White Plains has changed since 1939, they feel very fortunate to be able to continue the nursery business started by their grandparents. They hope to be an ever present influence on the history of White Plains and they are proud of what they have contributed to this community for over 70 years. ☒

In 2001, the Society established two annual scholarships to help White Plains High School graduating seniors — The Renoda Hoffman Honorary Scholarship and the Stephen Holden, Jr. Memorial Scholarship. Both scholarships were established to honor their prodigious and ongoing efforts to preserve White Plains history. Holden, Jr. and Hoffman were founders of the White Plains Battle Monument Committee and the White Plains Historical Society. Renoda Hoffman was also the author of three books on the history of White Plains and Holden was a historical reenactor. He also served as legal counsel in the Monument Committee's effort to save the "old Courthouse." ☒

HERITAGE TRAIL

Since the early days of the White Plains Battle Monument Committee and its successor, the White Plains Historical Society, members have laid out and installed trail markers and maintained those portions of the trail located in White Plains, with support from the Harrison and North Castle Historical Societies.

**TO BECOME A
MEMBER OF
THE WHITE PLAINS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
SEE APPLICATION ON
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DATES TO REMEMBER

May 3, 2007 (Thursday)

Annual Dinner of White Plains Historical Society
682-8426

March 7 – June 5, 2007

Historical Society – Historical Costumes
967-7588

To June 30, 2007

Scarsdale Historical Society—Home, Hearth & History
723-1744

May 2007

White Plains Memorial Day Parade
(To Be Announced)

June 2007

Cherry Blossom Exposition—White Plains
(To Be Announced)

Miller House
Open During Daylight Hours



Return Service Requested

White Plains Historical Society
Jacob Purdy House
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White Plains, New York 10603

White Plains Historical Society

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MEMBERSHIP

Join us in preserving and promoting the rich history of White Plains. Become a member today. Invest in the future by helping preserve the past.

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

You will receive: Society Newsletters • Free inquiries and access to our archives • Advanced notice of all lectures, tours, programs and special events • 15% discount on books and gift items.

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