

# White Plains Historical Society

FOUNDED IN 1983 • SUCCESSOR TO THE BATTLE OF WHITE PLAINS MONUMENT COMMITTEE

Jacob Purdy House • 60 Park Avenue • White Plains, NY 10603 • [www.whiteplainshistory.org](http://www.whiteplainshistory.org) • Spring 2010

## 2010 DUES ARE DUE!

2010 Membership Dues for all except "Lifetime Members" are now due (if you did not receive an acknowledgement for 2009 then your membership has lapsed). Please help us continue our mission by sending in your payment with the newsletter form on the back page, or pay on-line at: [www.whiteplainshistory.org](http://www.whiteplainshistory.org)

**Please note new membership rates on the renewal form for 2010.**

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## *WPHS Annual Meeting to Honor Riena Kaplow and the late Walter Handleman Revolutionary War Author and Scholar Arthur Lefkowitz to give Key Note*

With the coming of Spring, the White Plains Historical Society's Annual Meeting is never far behind. This year's dinner event will be held Thursday, May 6th at the White Plains Crowne Plaza Hotel (invitations forthcoming). Our gathering will honor this year's Citizen Extraordinaire Riena Kaplow. A long-time volunteer and community activist, Ms. Kaplow has been involved in many organizations including the Council of Neighborhood Associations, the Westchester Council for the Arts, the Westchester League of Women Voters and the White Plains Beautification Foundation. She was active in the creation of the White Plains Greenway, and has been instrumental in saving open space in White Plains.

WPHS will also have a special memorial tribute to our long-time benefactor, Walter J. Handleman, who passed away unexpectedly in February, 2009. Through his management of the James A. Macdonald Foundation, Mr. Handleman, a prominent White Plains attorney and former Scarsdale Village Mayor, was a generous benefactor to various projects undertaken throughout the years by WPHS, including the restoration of the Jacob Purdy House and the publishing (and republishing) of Renoda Hoffman's several books. Walter's generous spirit lives on through his family, especially his sister Alice Model, whom we will honor along with the memory of Mr. Handleman.

Last, but certainly not least, our dinner key-note address will be given by Revolutionary War scholar Arthur Lefkowitz, a member of the board of the Revolutionary War Roundtable, and author of several books including The Long Retreat (Rutgers University Press); George Washington's Indispensable Men (Stackpole Books); Bushnell's Submarine, The Best Kept Secret of the American Revolution (Scholastic, Inc.) and Benedict Arnold's Army, The 1775 American Invasion of Canada. Lefkowitz's books have received numerous awards and Bushnell's Submarine was favorably reviewed in The New York Times Book Section. His lecture credits include numerous talks for The New Jersey Council for the Humanities, The National Park Service, and the Fraunces Tavern Museum. Mr. Lefkowitz's speech, *When Artwork Speaks: Eyewitness Images From the American Revolution*, is a multi-media presentation, analyzing the imagery and meaning of artwork from the American Revolution. For advance information on the dinner please contact (914) 328-1776 or [info@whiteplainshistory.org](mailto:info@whiteplainshistory.org)

## WPHS Launches On-line Archive of Historic Treasures— Seeks Residents' Support

Have you ever seen a Revolutionary War bayonet that was dug right out of the ground here in White Plains? What about pictures of a U.S. Army Air Corp biplane landing on a field in Gedney Farm?

You can see these unique items, and many more, online at the White Plains Historical Society's digital archive:

"Historic Treasures of White Plains" (<http://www.whiteplainshistory.org/treasures.html>).

Since 2008, WPHS has made an effort to collect images of historic memorabilia that do not appear in any previously published books. We started with a small selection of items donated to our own collection. These include rare photos of people and places in old White Plains, a slave's pass from the Revolutionary War, the old bayonet, commemorative pottery, and more; all accompanied by informative descriptions, and important facts about the History of White Plains.

The goal of this digital archive is to build on the great foundation of well-known White Plains history documented by Renoda Hoffman, and others; to expand this collection and share it with the public. But this is a journey we cannot accomplish alone. WPHS needs you to scour your attic, toss open those old musty trunks, and gently blow the dust off dog-eared photo albums to find the great hidden artifacts of White Plains' past.

All you need to do is send us a digital scan or photo of your historic treasure. You get to keep your actual artifact, while sharing its virtual twin on our website. If you don't have the ability to digitize these objects yourself, then we can do it for you. PLEASE donate images to our digital archive today by calling (914) 328-1776, or email at [info@whiteplainshistory.org](mailto:info@whiteplainshistory.org).



Digitized Treasures on the WPHS website include a revolutionary war bayonet, a commemorative plate designed by the DAR in 1910 in honor of the first White Plains Court House, and an Abraham Lincoln writing contest certificate signed in 1909 by New York Times publisher Adolph Ochs, whose one-time home "Hillandale" is now the offices of the White Plains Board of Education.



# THE BURKE REHABILITATION HOSPITAL

Founded by John Masterson Burke and rescued by Judge James A. O'Gorman

by Daniel and Laurel Haines

The Burke Rehabilitation Hospital on Mamaroneck Avenue is a treasure of green lawns and twelve beautiful neoclassical buildings. It has served the community and the entire New York metropolitan area since its founding in April 1915. John Masterson Burke created it and that creation is an intriguing tale.

John Masterson Burke was born in New York City in 1812 after his parents had arrived from Ireland. He left school at age 12 and began to work for an importer of woolen goods. He was recognized as a promising young man and was sent to Yucatan, Mexico to manage a cotton factory. He broadened his business experience in Mexico and Cuba and made most of his fortune in South American trade and real estate investments. He never married and lived modestly in his house on west 47<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City.

In 1902 at age 90 he announced in his will "The Burke Deed"—his intention to establish an "institution that was founded and endowed as a tribute to the memory of his mother Winifred Masterson Burke and for the relief of worthy men and women who not withstanding their willingness to support themselves have become wholly or partly unable to do so by reason of sickness or misfortune or have been discharged from hospitals before they have regained sufficient strength to resume their employment."

He stipulated that \$4,500,000 of his fortune be devoted to create a rest home for convalescents "in the country within easy distance of New York." Shortly after he made this announcement, about a score of distant relatives emerged from the woodwork to have the old man declared insane. They had no idea he had such a fortune. A suit was brought by the relatives to show that he was not capable of handling his money, but the suit was decided in favor of Mr. Burke by New York Supreme Court Justice James A. O'Gorman.

To that decision by Judge O'Gorman, many people owe enduring gratitude. Mr. Burke's action led after his death to the purchase of 61 acres in White Plains and the hiring of the renowned architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White in 1911 to design the facility. The building opened its doors on April 7, 1915. Today, the Burke Rehabilitation Hospital is fully accredited, providing inpatient and outpatient care to persons with a broad range of neurological, musculoskeletal, cardiac and pulmonary disabilities.

Sources:

"John M. Burke Left \$4,500,000 For Home," *New York Times*, December 4, 1909

Toni Boelsen and Julian Moore of the Burke Rehabilitation Hospital

## *Volunteers Wanted*

*Do you have an interest in history, writing, research, music, art, cooking, craft making, gardening, historic restoration, carpentry, collecting, event organizing, etc? We want you as a volunteer! Contact the White Plains Historical Society at (914) 328-1776 or email at [info@whiteplainshistory.org](mailto:info@whiteplainshistory.org)*

# WHITE PLAINS AND THE U.S. CONGRESS

By: John Vorpzrian, WPHS 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President

Ohio, the Cradle of Presidents, produced eight chief executives. William Henry Harrison, Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, James A. Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, William Howard Taft, and Warren Harding all hail from the Buckeye State. Someday a White Plains son or daughter may occupy the White House. Yet the U.S. Congress beckoned three White Plains natives. The following are brief bios for each Federal office-seeker born in White Plains.

**Thomas Cornell**, born January 27, 1814, attended public school and worked in the steamboat transportation, railroad, and banking businesses. A commissioned major in the New York Militia during the Civil War, Cornell, a Republican, took office with the 40<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1867. He was not re-elected, but was returned to serve in the 47<sup>th</sup> Congress (1881). He was a delegate to the 1884 Republican National Convention held in Chicago, IL where noted General William Tecumseh Sherman was considered a possible Presidential candidate. Sherman ruled himself out with the famed statement, "If drafted, I will not run; if nominated, I will not accept; if elected, I will not serve." Cornell died in Kingston, NY, March 30, 1890.

**Ralph Waite**, was born on June 22, 1928, to Esther (nee Mitchell) and Ralph H. Waite. Waite obtained his undergraduate degree from Bucknell University and a master's degree from Yale University Divinity School. Waite was a Congregational minister but then pursued an acting career. His most famous role was as John Walton, Sr. on the hit 1972-1981 Television program *The Waltons*. In 1990, Waite ran unsuccessfully against California GOP incumbent Al McCandless. Eight years later, in a special and a general election, Waite vied against Mary Bono. He did not win the Palm Beach CA congressional seat.

**Christopher S. Murphy** was born August 3, 1973. He grew up in Connecticut and graduated with honors from Williams College with a double major history and political science. Murphy obtained his JD from UConn Law School. Elected to the Nutmeg State's 5<sup>th</sup> District in 2006, the Democrat ousted long-time incumbent Nancy Johnson. The two-term representative currently sits on the House Energy and the House Oversight & Government Reform Committees.

*WPHS thanks our sponsor- Amodios's Garden Center, Nursery and Flower Shop 1160 Mamaroneck Avenue White Plains, NY 10605 - (914) 949-3922 or (800) 688-2612*

*(If you own a business and want to help WPHS, please contact us at (914) 328-1776*

# What's New at the Jacob Purdy House

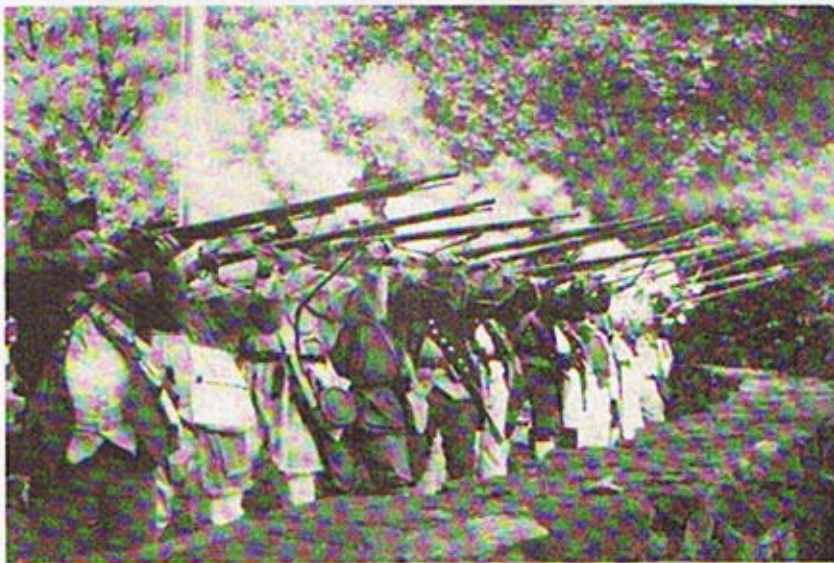
By Patti Indelicato

The White Plains Historical Society has the responsibility of maintaining the Purdy House, which was the site of the Headquarters of George Washington during the American Revolution's Battle of White Plains. The Society's mission is to preserve White Plains History and to educate our youth and the public of said history. The Purdy House was positioned at the foot of hill below where it now stands until the late 1970's. Major efforts were made by the Battle of White Plains Monument Committee to move and secure the building at its present site.

Today, the Purdy House is the site of two major events: The Birthday Celebration for George Washington in February, and the Remembrance of the Battle of White Plains in October. Minor activities include the use of the building for school field trips and occasional tours. The building also houses a gift shop and a collection of artifacts that are pertinent to either the Battle of White or White Plains History.

Presently, we are planning an update to the building. Our re-design devotes one room for The Battle of White Plains, one room for large gatherings and a "White Plains Through the Years" rotating exhibit. The gift shop will be pared down and a historical re-creation of George Washington at his desk is planned. Our design goal is twofold: first, to create a space using modern media resources to make the history of White Plains come alive, and second, to open the house to the public on a monthly basis.

A project like this cannot occur without the support of the community and individual people-power. We are looking for folks who can serve on a subcommittee for the re-design and a subcommittee for fundraising. If you are interested please contact us at [info@whiteplainshistory.org](mailto:info@whiteplainshistory.org)



*The 233rd Anniversary commemoration of the Battle of White Plains was held under sunny skies on October 25th, 2009. Over two dozen Revolutionary re-enactors from three regiments camped, drilled, and burned-off plenty of powder for the assembled crowd. In the words of one long-time trustee, "It was the most troops gathered on Purdy Hill since the battle." Special thanks to all those who helped make it possible.*

***WPHS thanks our sponsor – The Care of Trees - Certified Arborists - 57 Valley Avenue, Elmsford, NY 10523, (914) 345-8733. (If you own a business and want to help WPHS, please contact us at (914) 328-1776***

White Plains Historical Society

Jacob Purdy House  
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**RENEW YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP TO THE WHITE PLAINS HISTORICAL SOCIETY TODAY (PLEASE NOTE NEW RATES FOR 2010)**

(Please check appropriate box and remit dues payable to the "White Plains Historical Society," 60 Park Avenue, White Plains, NY 10603, or sign-up on line at [www.whiteplainshistory.org](http://www.whiteplainshistory.org).

**Individual**.....\$30       **Family** (household).....\$40  
 **Junior** (persons under age 18) *Free*       **Senior** (over age 62).....\$20  
**Additional Contribution** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(If your employer has a matching gift program, please make your contribution known to them).

**Lifetime Member** (persons 18 years of age or older with no further dues thereafter):

**Single**.....\$250  
 **Joint**.....\$400

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**MEMBER BENEFITS**

Your tax deductible membership to the White Plains Historical Society entitles you to receive all newsletters and mailings, free inquiries and access to research material and archives, advance invitation to public and members-only events, tours and programs, and discounts on books and gift items. Commercial/business sponsors are eligible for recognition in our newsletter and other printed material.