

# White Plains Historical Society

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

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## Heatherbloom – White Plains' own Equestrian Champion

By Robert Hoch

As we drive through White Plains, many of us do not pause to think of the significance of the names of our local streets, let alone the people, places, or things they are named for. In fact very few White Plains residents realize that at least one leafy lane, Heatherbloom Road, is named for a horse; perhaps the greatest show jumper ever. Heatherbloom, White Plains' greatest forgotten equestrian athlete, held an official jump record of 7'10½." However, he famously made two unofficial jumps; one at 8'2 for *Harper's Weekly*, and a second one at Gedney Farm in White Plains, at 8'3! These unofficial jumps exceed the greatest recorded official jumps to this very day.

Born in 1895, Heatherbloom was a Canadian half-thoroughbred, sired by the race horse Philosophy. A brown bay gelding, he stood 16.1 hands (5'4") high, not particularly tall for a champion jumper. Heatherbloom's owner was Howard Willet, a merchant and gentleman farmer, who had purchased the 250 acre Gedney Farm in White Plains from the Gedney Family in 1898. Willet raised Dalmatians, prized cattle, and several horses, including a racing champion Hathaway (hence the name of Hathaway Lane). Willet purchased Heatherbloom in Canada in 1900 for \$1,000.

Early in his career, Heatherbloom was considered a competent horse but nothing special. He was expected to show in the hunting field, but Willet groomed Heatherbloom to be a jumping champion. Under the training and ridership of Richard Donnelly at Willet's Gedney Farm, Heatherbloom began a meteoric rise in show jumping. The die was already cast in 1902, when Donnelly rode the horse for a spread in *Harper's Weekly*, and Heatherbloom jumped a remarkable 8'2." The jump was not official; however, the picture was available for the entire world to see in *Harper's* September 13<sup>th</sup> edition. Soon after, on September 19<sup>th</sup> at the Bryn Mawr Horse Show, Heatherbloom set a more modest world's record jump of 7'5" with Donnelly at the reins.

Heatherbloom would not stop there. Before the end of 1902, he would set the new record of 7'8" at the Chicago Horse Show. The following year at Bryn Mawr on September 25, 1903, the horse again broke its own record under Donnelly's hand, by jumping over fifteen rails set at 7'9" before a crowd of 10,000 spectators. The New York Times reported that "Howard Willet of White Plains, N.Y. was present at the trial."

Heatherbloom would make one more remarkable unofficial jump, at Gedney Farm, where he cleared 8'3" and standing back, was a remarkable 27' in the air. If properly certified, this jump would surpass the existing official world record jump.

**Continued on next page**

## Heatherbloom Continued...

However, the horse and his rider would have to settle again for a more modest official achievement. On October 20, 1905, at the closing event of the Norfolk, VA horse show, Heatherbloom again broke his own official record with a 7'10" jump. Speculation continued that Heatherbloom would hit the 8' mark by the next show in Chicago but this was never achieved. The Show-Jumping Hall of Fame lists Heatherbloom's highest official record at 7'10½" for an undated jump at Richmond, VA. In the years to follow, Willet and Donnelly would seek to make Heatherbloom a more temperamental horse, and he would continue to be a great attraction at any horse show he attended.

Heatherbloom's life came to a tragic end on July 19, 1909 when he jumped over his enclosure at Willet's farm in New Marlboro, MA, injuring a shoulder so badly that he needed to be put down. In the end, Willet had refused an offer of \$20,000 for Heatherbloom from Barnum's circus. Heatherbloom's loss was one of several tragedies to befall Mr. Willet (who lived on Oxford Road at his death in 1938), along with the loss by fire of both his first White Plains home and his Gedney Farm Hotel. But in the final plan for the Gedney Farm neighborhood, he immortalized those things that he loved, including an animal who, for a brief time, captivate the imagination of American horse fans.

Sources: *Harpers Weekly*, September 13, 1902; *The New York Times*—9/20 & 10/5/1902, 9/26/1903, 10/21/1905, 7/20/1909, 4/11/1938; *The Show Jumping Hall of Fame*- [www.showjumpinghalloffame.net/inductees/r\\_donnelly.shtml](http://www.showjumpinghalloffame.net/inductees/r_donnelly.shtml); *Yesterday in White Plains*, Hoffman, R., 1981.

## Come Celebrate Washington's Birthday with the White Plains Historical Society

Sunday, February 20, 2011

1:00 PM—3:00 PM

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In honor of Washington's Birthday and Black History Month, we are pleased to welcome author and scholar Arthur S. Lefkowitz to present a multi-media talk on the African Americans in Washington's Army, including some of Washington's most trusted men. This should not be missed!

# Historic Burke Hospital Captured in Pictures

By Daniel Haines

*(This article is Part II of a series)*

Burke Rehabilitation Hospital has much to offer the White Plains community. It was founded in 1915 by the trust of John Masterson Burke as "a free Convalescent home for the people of New York. Such a home to be for the temporary use of those who were sick and feeble and who, while willing to work for their own support were disqualified by their condition for doing so ... ." Today, Burke is a free-standing not-for-profit hospital, providing inpatient and outpatient care to persons with a broad range of neurological, musculoskeletal, cardiac, and pulmonary disabilities. The beautiful grounds and neo-classical buildings, designed by the renowned firm of McKim, Mead and White, are well worth a visit.



The twelve buildings are connected by a series of graceful, arched colonnades and underground tunnels to help minimize patient exposure while walking and exercising during bad weather. The clock tower (believed to have come from the original Madison Square Garden), terra cotta moldings, and Greek revival columns all add to the architectural splendor. The buildings were named for Mr. Burke's influential friends: Stanford White, the architect, Abram R. Hewitt, iron magnate and Mayor of New York City, Frank K. Sturgis, president of the Burke Foundation; and Edward M. Shepard, Esq., the foundation's vice president. In the central building (known as the "Billings Building") is a gallery of 25 photographs dating back to the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The photographs mostly cover the period between 1915 and 1930. To visit Burke and see these photographs, one can enter the campus by car on Mamaroneck Avenue at Heatherbloom Road and park in the lots in front of the Billings Building. Climb the steps past the six great columns, enter the building and walk to the stairs ahead of you. The first is the portrait is of Winifred Masterson Burke; mother of John Masterson Burke, founder of the hospital, wearing a 19<sup>th</sup> century bonnet. Climb the stairs

and pass a photo of a man with a cane walking on grass next to a sign saying "Please walk on the grass." Further along you will see a group of men and women enjoying a toboggan in the snow. At the top of the stairs is a photo of Sunny Brae, the Bronxville home of John Masterson Burke. The home no longer exists.

There are many more photographs on the second floor. You will find two photographs of wounded sailors and marines from World War I who convalesced at Burke when Burke served as a Naval Hospital. More than 2,000 sailors were treated and they were known as "The Burke Navy."

In 1915 "a receiving department was provided for in New York City, by the purchase of a suitable brick residence at No. 325 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street ... for the use of patients who might be here detained before proceeding to White Plains." Photographs show this building and an early bus in front with people lined up to enter. This building no longer exists, having been replaced by a large apartment house near one of the entrances to the Queensboro Bridge. Around the corner is another photo of people exiting the bus at Burke. Other photographs depict an early baseball team representing Burke, girls on a see-saw and men and women doing exercise, playing croquet, demonstrating golf swings, gardening, enjoying the library and having tea. These photographs not only represent life at Burke, but also life in White Plains in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The author thanks Toni Boelson, Director of Community Relations of the Burke Rehabilitation Hospital, and Julian Moore, also of Burke, for their contributions to this article.



Several photographs in the Main Building (Billings) at Burke document life there between 1915 and 1930

# White Plains City Hall: An Icon for the Citizens of Bridgeton, New Jersey

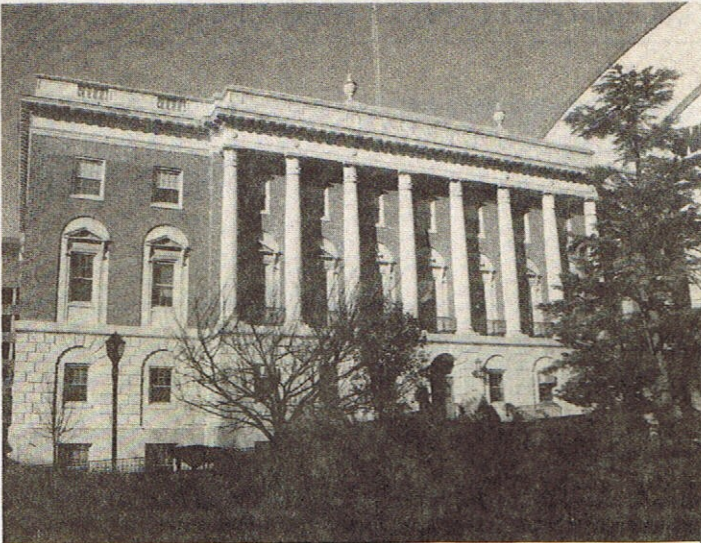
By Robert Hoch

If you're walking down East Commerce Street in Bridgeton, NJ, you might be forgiven for thinking, for a brief moment, that you are on Main Street in White Plains- because the former Bridgeton City Hall, finished in 1932, is a replica of the White Plains Municipal Building. This fact was brought to our attention by Penelope S. Watson, a restoration architect who is doing research on this building in southern New Jersey near Delaware Bay. It turns out that citizens of Bridgeton visited other municipalities to get ideas for their seat of city government. After visiting White Plains, they instructed their architect, Clarence Wunder, to use the White Plains Municipal Building as his model.

The White Plains Municipal Building was designed by Manhattan architect Joseph H. Freedlander, who won the building competition in 1924. The building, designed to house all municipal departments, was dedicated on February 22, 1926 and was completed at a cost of \$600,000. Among Freedlander's other works are the Museum of the City of New York, the Bronx County Court House (the Merola Building), and the new buildings at the Saratoga Spa. As President of the Allied Arts Federation, Freedlander was a vocal advocate for the establishment of a Secretary for the Arts during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt (a cause recently renewed by musician/producer Quincy Jones).

One should compliment the citizens of Bridgeton on their taste, and their frugality. Their replica of White Plains City Hall only cost \$90,000.

Sources: Penelope S. Watson, AIA. Yesterday in White Plains by Renoda Hoffman c. 1981. The New York Times, March 9, 1924 and November 24, 1943; [www.quincyjones.com](http://www.quincyjones.com).



The White Plains Municipal Building at 255 Main Street, designed by architect Joseph Freedlander and completed in 1926 at a cost of \$600,000.



Bridgeton City Hall, on East Commerce Street, was completed in 1932. Clarence Wunder was asked by a committee of Bridgeton residents to copy White Plains City Hall.

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*"Historic Treasures of White Plains"*

*[www.whiteplainshistory.org/treasures.html](http://www.whiteplainshistory.org/treasures.html)*

# Heritage Trail Enters the Digital Age Thanks to White Plains Eagle Scout

By Miriam Varian

You may have heard of the White Plains Heritage Trail - the White Plains Historical Society's historic walking tour through the city and its environs. But do you know how to follow it?

In 2010, Boy Scout Liam Carroll of White Plains Troop X placed new markers at many sites on the trail and prepared a Google Map with site locations, descriptions, distances and estimated walking times. He also created a patch available for Scouts (or anyone else) who complete the walk.

The inspiration for this work, which was Liam's Eagle Scout project, came from Troop X's scoutmaster, Kevin O'Donnell, after Troop X walked the Heritage Trail in Boston. Scouts who complete the trail there and take a quiz based on information gleaned at its sites can earn a patch.

O'Donnell thought that historical sites in White Plains were just as important as those in Boston, and lamented the fact that so few residents of this area were aware of them and their historical importance. Thus the project was born.

The White Plains Heritage Trail includes colonial homes, monuments, a Native American footpath, and several sites that were part of the Battle of White Plains.



White Plains' own Heritage Trail is now viewable on a Google Maps thanks to Eagle Scout Liam Carroll of Troop X White Plains.

Anyone can see Liam's Google Map by going to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and searching for "Heritage Trail sponsored by the White Plains Historical Society;" or through the link on our website, [www.whiteplainshistory.org](http://www.whiteplainshistory.org).

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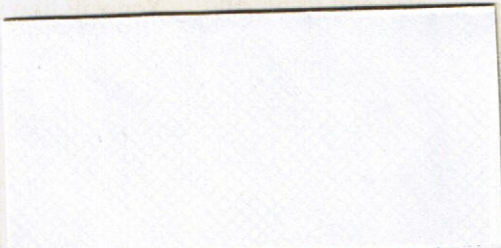
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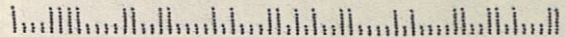
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