

# 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 2017

## 2017 DUES ARE DUE!

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## SAVE THE DATE!

**W.P. Historical Society  
Annual Dinner**

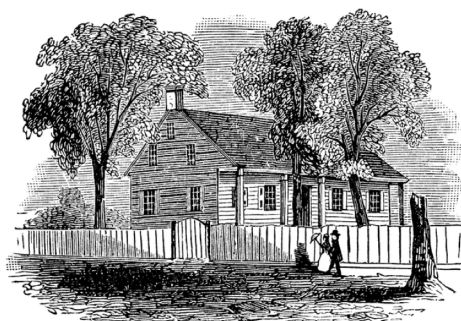
**Thursday, May 4, 2017  
6:00-9:00 p.m.**

at the

**Woman's Club of White Plains**

## JACOB PURDY HOUSE DECLARED LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK UNDER NEW LAW

by Robert Hoch



*Jacob Purdy House - Built in 1721*

Constructed by Samuel Horton in 1721, the home originally sat behind the current location of Pepe Cadillac (formerly Spring Street). It was later purchased by Samuel Purdy, whose grandsons vied for ownership in the years leading to Revolution. The oldest, Jacob, acquired the home, and as a Revolutionary soldier, helped guide the Continental Army to White Plains in the fall of 1776. The house served as Washington's headquarters from October 21-28, 1776 in the opening of the Battle of White Plains, and again in the summer of 1778. As the years went by, a village, and then a city grew up around the little house, and just as in the children's story book, it was moved in 1973 to a safer place - on Park Avenue atop Purdy Hill.

Add one more accolade to the many already bestowed upon the historic Jacob Purdy House. White Plains' most famous 18<sup>th</sup> Century farm house and former headquarters to General Washington is one of the first structures in White Plains to be designated a local Historic Landmark under the City's recently authorized Historic Preservation Law. The law is the strongest preservation tool now available to protect remaining historic properties in White Plains.

In 2015, Mayor Tom Roach and the White Plains Common Council authorized the City's Historic Preservation Law, which created a Commission to identify and recommend landmark properties and districts to the Common Council. Designation is based on local and national historical importance of the properties and the people who lived there, and significance of architectural or landscape design. Landmark designation provides an extra level of scrutiny to prevent the demolition or inappropriate alterations of a historic landmark, and may make a property owner eligible for restoration funding and certain tax benefits. Local landmark status adds to the prestige of a property, and brings intrinsic value to the site, its neighborhood and the entire community.

Due to its status as a rare example of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century farm house in White Plains, and the significant role it played in our local and national history during the Revolution, the Jacob Purdy House was recommended by the Historic Preservation Commission to the Common Council this past July; and in September, it officially became a local Historic Landmark. Joining the Purdy House on this list are the Percy Grainger House, Soundview Manor, and the Jack Harrington Greenway. Other candidates currently under consideration are the D.A.R. Monument at Armory Place, the Foster/Buckout Cemetery, and the Good Counsel Academy Campus. If you are the owner of a historic property or wish to learn more about the local law, you can find out more at: <http://www.cityofwhiteplains.com/index.aspx?NID=577>, or by contacting the White Plains Building Department at (914) 422-1269. Tours of the historic landmark Jacob Purdy House are available by appointment at (914) 328-1776 or [info@whiteplainshistory.org](mailto:info@whiteplainshistory.org).

## Battle of White Plains 240<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrated

White Plains Historical Society's annual commemoration of the Revolutionary War's *Battle of White Plains* was held at the Jacob Purdy House, now a National Historic site, October 23, 2016. On a beautiful, sunny, crisp autumn day, more than 200 people gathered to witness the scene, marking the 240<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic conflict where George Washington's troops held off the British and their Hessian mercenaries.

Dozens of Continental soldier re-enactors encamped on the Purdy House grounds performing drills and marches and firing their muskets to the delight of those in attendance. Several presenters gave demonstrations on the colonial art of candle-making as well as broom-making. Also, a kiosk displaying Native American artifacts was prominently featured. Students from Weston High School (CT) took advantage of these exhibits by interviewing each presenter and thereby earning scholastic credit with their Social Studies coursework.



White Plains Historical Society President John Vorperian welcomed all and personally acknowledged from the crowd two descendants of the colonial era families of Jacob Purdy & Capt. Jonathan Birge. He also noted that the White Plains Historic Preservation Commission had granted local landmark status to the Jacob Purdy House.

Rev. Siobhan Sargent, Memorial United Methodist Church, gave an ecumenical meditation. The White Plains High School Marching Band, conducted by Katherine Davis, played the Star-Spangled Banner as the American flag was raised. Girl Scout Troop 2254 (scout leader-Judy Pagnotta) and Troop 2266 (scout leader-Stephanie Bellantoni) recited the "Pledge of Allegiance". Abigail Purdy (portrayed by Society Trustee Cindy Kauffman) spoke about the events of the Battle and then invited everyone into her home for refreshments.

Inside the 18<sup>th</sup> century house, musicians donned period wardrobe and played the harpsichord and sang colonial tunes as attendees partook in enjoying apple cider and home-baked, artisanal, red, white & blue-iced cookies in the shapes of "1-7-7-6" that were provided by WP Historical Society friend, Kitty Stone.

## James Fenimore Cooper: First American Novelist

[Excerpted from an essay by Rod Carlson]

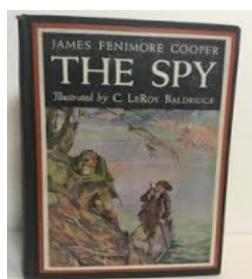


1789-1851

In 1821 James Fenimore Cooper, America's first novelist, lived just a mile from White Plains – at his Angevine Farm in Scarsdale – when he wrote “The Spy, a Tale of the Neutral Ground.” It was his second book and the first American novel. By then, he'd lived in Westchester County for almost a decade and absorbed the stories of veterans and civilians who'd endured the Revolutionary War. “The Spy” utters a painful story about the worst of a war fought between friends, families and empires. It's that war and the battleground of Westchester that produced a new country and the career and success of James Fenimore Cooper. The book quickly gained international popularity and established Cooper as the father of the American novel.

The idea for the book came from Cooper's visit to the home of Founding Father, John Jay up county in Bedford. Jay, who was then 75 years old, confided to Cooper about a time during the Revolutionary War when he hired a secret agent to spy on dangerous Tory loyalists and brigands who continually terrorized Westchester, then referred to as the “neutral ground.” One of the main characters in “The Spy” named Mr. Harper is actually George Washington; not surprising since by 1821 Washington had been idealized as the perfectly principled man.

With the *neutral ground* and the *spy*, Cooper has the ideal metaphor for communicating the two aspects of his moral conviction. First, like the characters Birch and Harper, in life nobody and nothing are really as they appear to be. Second, in all human affairs, principle must take precedent over all other loyalties including family, politics, romance, career, life, everything. Failure to adhere to principle is what drives many of the interrelated aspects of Cooper's plot.



Cooper went on to achieve other literary firsts. He was the first author to turn the American frontier into a literary setting. He created the first American hero: the quiet, independent loner. And, he expounded the culture and spirit of native Americans in his beloved “Leatherstocking Tales.” Cooper's characters dramatically prove that only those who live by principle are successful. He urges living by the principles on which America was founded.

A large bronze plaque outside the Scarsdale Public Library stands as a memorial to James Fenimore Cooper and “The Spy.” Another faded bronze sign, about a mile from the Library on Mamaroneck Road, marks the site of the Angevine Farm, Cooper's former home.

## An Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Classical Piano Virtuoso of White Plains

by Peter Stone

Augusta Cottlow of White Plains was at the height of her career as an internationally renowned classical pianist prior to, during and following World War II. Among her devoted fans was President Harry Truman. In 1951, near the end of his presidency, Mr. Truman gave praiseful remarks at the White House, stating:

"I have always been very, very fond of music. Since I was 12 or 13 years old, I have heard all the great pianists from that time until now....I have heard Paderewski....and I have heard the great Myra Hess, and **Augusta Cottlow**, and also these modern ones--Iturbi and Rubinstein... I have no objection to the noise they call music these days, any more than I have to the "daubs" they call art these days, but I would like to see you continue to get people interested in good music." \*

Augusta played in all the great concert halls of America and Europe. She became famous for her piano interpretations of music by Bach, Chopin, Liszt, Griffes, and especially American composer Edward McDowell.



Augusta Cottlow in 1921

*"If the Juilliard Foundation wishes to show its true patriotic inwardness, it cannot do so more effectively than by engaging Augusta Cottlow for a hundred or more MacDowell recitals throughout the country, particularly in educational institutions. No pianist has done so much as Miss Cottlow to reveal the poetic, entrancing side of MacDowell's music.*

*-- review by Henry Finck,  
NY Evening Post, 1921.*

Born in 1878 in Shelbyville, Illinois (suburban Chicago), Augusta Cottlow gave her first public performance at age 6; and her first full orchestra concert in 1888, at the age of 10. She studied in Berlin; and toured throughout Europe from 1896-1902. While in Berlin, in 1899, she met and married Edgar Gerst, an American classically trained singer (baritone). The couple returned to America in 1902 and Augusta toured the U.S. and Canada, playing with all the top orchestras of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They re-established a home in Berlin, Germany; but left again in 1916 after the outbreak of "The Great War," returning permanently to the U.S. and settling into a home in White Plains where they would spend the rest of their lives, until her death in 1954. The house, at 16 Blackthorn Lane, is still standing; and the neighborhood has changed very little.

Augusta performed frequently at Carnegie Hall, Aeolian Hall and Steinway Hall, and she and Edgar also attended many musical concerts there and at other venues around Manhattan, Brooklyn and Westchester. She also taught students in her White Plains home. For example, *The Bronxville Press*, May 17, 1932 issue notes a concert to be given by Italian pianist, Aurelio Giorni, "a student of Augusta Cottlow of White Plains."

\* Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, Archives: May 9, 1951 "Remarks at a Ceremony in Observance of National Music Week."



## Correspondence Between Augusta Cottlow and President Harry Truman\*

Dear President Truman: June 22, 1950

In the Magazine section of last Sunday's New York Times, I read a very interesting article regarding your music study ..... if some day in your over-busy life, you would care to spend a relaxed half-hour listening to some music, I should deeply appreciate, and it would give me great pleasure, to play for you and Mrs. Truman, quite informally.

In closing, may I add that my husband and I are your staunch admirers. We think you have had the heaviest load of any President and you have carried it with a smile.

With sincere appreciation,

--Augusta Cottlow, White Plains, New York

Dear Miss Cottlow: June 28, 1950

I can't tell you how very much I appreciated your good letter of the twenty-second...

Sometime after the White House (renovation) is finished I'd certainly be most happy to have you come down and play for the family as you suggest. I am highly pleased that you are still keeping up with your music. In my opinion, your mastery of the piano was most complete.

Sincerely yours,

--HARRY S. TRUMAN, THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

*\*From "Dear Harry: Truman's Mailroom, 1945-53" by D.M. Giangreco & Kathryn Moore, Stackpole Books, 1999.*

*You are invited to the  
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at the Woman's Club of White Plains*

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## WHITE PLAINS STREETS NAMED FOR REVOLUTIONARY WAR-ERA FIGURES

by Clifford Blau

**ALEXANDER AVENUE, HAMILTON AVENUE** - Named for future Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton.

**PAULDING STREET, VAN WART AVENUE** - Named for two of the three men who captured Major Andre after he had been given the plans to West Point by Benedict Arnold during the Revolutionary War.

**OAKLEY AVENUE, OAKLEY ROAD** - During George Washington's time here for the Battle of White Plains and when he returned a couple of years later, brothers Cornelius and Isaac Oakley served as guides to him.

**HALE AVENUE** - Named after another Revolutionary War hero, Nathan Hale.

**WASHINGTON AVENUE** - Called that in honor of George Washington, the “father of our country.”

**LAFAYETTE STREET** - Named for the Revolutionary War ally & active supporter, Marquis de Lafayette.

**WAYNE AVENUE** - Named in honor of “Mad” Anthony Wayne, another Revolutionary War figure,

**PUTNAM AVENUE** - Named for General Israel Putnam, commander of troops on Purdy Hill at the Battle of White Plains.

**LEE AVENUE** - Named in honor of General Charles Lee of the Continental Army; also at the Battle of White Plains.

**NEWCOMB PLACE** - Named for Colonel Silas Newcomb, who led a regiment from New Jersey in the Battle of White Plains.

**CLINTON STREET** - Named for the first governor of the state of New York, and fourth Vice President of the USA, George Clinton. He also was at the Battle of White Plains; and a New York delegate to the Second Continental Congress.

**JEFFERSON AVENUE** - Named for Thomas Jefferson, primary author of the Declaration of Independence.

**LIVINGSTON AVENUE** - Apparently named for Philip Livingston, who was a delegate to the Second Continental Congress and served on the committee that wrote the Declaration of Independence.

**STERLING AVENUE** - Named for William Alexander, Lord Sterling, a British aristocrat who fought on the American side.

**FRANKLIN AVENUE** - Named in honor of Benjamin Franklin, journalist, inventor, statesman and founding father.

**PRESCOTT AVENUE** - Possibly named for the colonial troops’ commander at the Battle of Bunker Hill, William Prescott.

**DEKALB AVENUE** – Bavarian/French Baron DeKalb was in White Plains when Washington was headquartered here during the war.

**MARION PLACE** – Named for General Francis Marion who was also known as the “Swamp Fox.”

**SCHUYLER PLACE** - Named for Gen. Philip Schuyler, commander of the American troops’ victory at the Battle of Saratoga.

**MONROE DRIVE** - Named for our country's fifth president, James Monroe.

## History of Westchester Hills Golf Club, White Plains

by Dave Donelson



Original Clubhouse at Westchester Hills Golf Club

When it was founded in 1913, Westchester Hills Golf Club was originally the golf course for guests of the Gedney Farm Hotel, also known as the “Saratoga of Westchester County” for its opulent 300-room hotel, tennis, polo, bowling alleys, winter sports, and sightseeing stagecoach. Members of what was then known as the Gedney Farm Country Club played the course and acquired it from the hotel in 1921, changing the name to Westchester

Hills and laying the foundation for one of the county’s most popular clubs.

The club’s first professional, Peter Clark, designed the golf course with assistance from noted architect Donald Ross. It was built in stages, with the first nine holes completed in 1913 and a residence converted to a clubhouse on the property. Five more holes were added during the next year, with the final four finished in 1915. Membership boomed, rising to 300 by 1918. Robert Farley, developer of the hotel and first president of the country club, remained a member until his death in 1933.

Westchester Hills accommodated hotel guests for a fee, but in 1923 a second course, which eventually became the now-defunct Ridgeway Country Club, was built across the street to cater to the hotel clientele. A year later, though, a nine-hour fire, the largest in White Plains’ history, destroyed the Gedney Farms Hotel.

Westchester Hills grew through the war years. War bonds were awarded as weekly golf prizes and servicemen were charged a greens fee of just \$1 to play the course. For three years, from 1985 to 1987, the LPGA staged the MasterCard International Pro-Am tournament at Westchester Hills (along with Ridgeway and Knollwood).

The club also has the distinction of having only four head pros during its first hundred years. The designer, Peter Clark, served until 1937, when he turned things over to his assistant, Jack Sobel, who was in turn replaced by Kevin Morris in 1977. Morris retired in 2006, and his assistant, Jason Cobleck, took over.

In 2011, members of the club financed the renovation of the clubhouse by prepaying dues and contributing construction services and materials, an unusual arrangement that paid off with a large influx of new members.

*Originally published in Westchester Magazine, May 2013. Reprinted with permission of the author.*

## Mal Graham — A Career On and In the Courts

by John Vorperian

Mal Graham won two NBA Championships as a member of the Boston Celtics. During his pro basketball career ('67-'69), the 6' 1", 185 lbs. point guard made 327 points, 118 rebounds and 75 assists. Robert Malcolm Graham (born February 23, 1945 in Parrott, GA to Bobbie and Elnora Graham) attended White Plains High School, where he played basketball and ran track & field. An all-Westchester high jumper and a hurdle relay team member, Graham, along with Skip Washington, Richard Berger and Earl Rainey set a County speed record.



In his junior year, Graham went undefeated in the high jump. But, he believed basketball would provide the best opportunities to him. With guidance from his basketball coach, Norm Fullerton, he narrowed his college search to NYU and Brown University. Brown offered an enticing scholarship and the promise Graham would be the program's star. Yet, he opted for NYU. Graham wanted to go to a business school, play in a major media market and land a position with a top company based in New York. He later noted, *"NYU played many of its 'home' games at Madison Square Garden so I felt that the publicity I received from playing in one of the great sports arenas would help me following graduation."*

At NYU, during the turbulent 1960s, Graham saw *"...the winds of social change were blowing in the U.S. and that constitutional lawyers were leading that change. I was excited about the possibility that I, a poor black kid from the projects could become an instrument of change enabling all Americans to enjoy the fruits of this great nation. So I decided to become a lawyer. I had no intention of playing professional basketball."*

However, the legendary Boston Celtics selected the All-American in the first round (11<sup>th</sup> overall) of the 1967 NBA Draft. The White Plains Tiger shared home court with Hall of Famers Bill Russell, John Havlicek, Bailey Howell, Sam Jones, Don Nelson and Tom Sanders. A health condition forced his retirement, but Coach Red Auerbach named Graham as the Celtics first-ever Chief Scout.

Graham, a recipient of the Earl Warren Legal Defense Fund Award, graduated from Boston College Law School in 1974. In 1982, Governor Edward King appointed him to the Roxbury District Court. Governor Mike Dukakis in 1986 named him to the Massachusetts Superior Court. In 1997 he co-founded the Massachusetts International Judicial Exchange Program where jurists from China, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria interfaced with their Bay State counterparts. In October, 2004, Governor Mitt Romney named Graham an Associate Justice on the Massachusetts Appeals Court. In February, 2015, Justice Graham retired from the state bench.

Nevertheless, Graham continues to be an arbiter with JAMS, an alternative dispute resolution group. He also enjoys being with his family: wife Joyce (an NYU alumnus); daughters Lynsey (Harvard & Yale Law) and Tracey (Columbia College; Bentley College, MBA; and U. of Chicago, Ph.D).

*John Vorperian hosts BEYOND THE GAME seen on Optimum 76, Fios 45, & [www.wpcommunitymedia.org](http://www.wpcommunitymedia.org). Many thanks to Justice Graham for setting aside time to be e-interviewed for this article.*



## White Plains Ice Cream Wars: Milk Maid vs. Daddy Michael's

If you were a kid growing up in White Plains in the 1950's you'll surely remember where you could go to get an ice cream sundae or ice cream soda. There was **Howard Johnson's** (with the orange tile roof) on Tarrytown Road near the County Center; but that was a well-known national chain. There was **Nielsen's**, but that was in Scarsdale Village or Port Chester. There was **Schrafft's** on Main Street, but that was where your old-maid aunt took you to lunch amid dozens of ladies all wearing hats atop their tinted hair-do's. But, the real fun, best treat, and most unique to White Plains, could be found at **Milk Maid** or **Daddy Michael's**.

**Milk Maid** was located at 1203 Mamaroneck Avenue, out near the Hutchinson River Parkway (currently the site of Lombardo's Pizza Bar & Restaurant). At **Milk Maid** you could get a hot dog or hamburger with fries, or a regular ice cream cone or soda, served on a paper plate or cup. The most fun, though, was to get a plastic bowl of soft ice cream and make your own sundae from a fixings bar with all manner of toppings. You could choose from hot fudge, marshmallow, strawberry, or pineapple sauces, crushed peanuts, coconut or sprinkles, sweet whipped cream; and of course, a maraschino cherry on top. You could even load up the toppings, eat your way through the top half, then step back to the fixings bar and re-load.



Milk Maid: Where you could make-your-own-sundae



Daddy Michael's: A step back into the 1890's

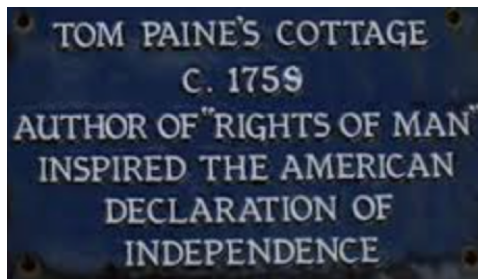
**Daddy Michael's** was downtown at 255 Mamaroneck Avenue, across the street from the YMCA. Upon entering you were immediately transported back into an 1890's ice cream parlor. It featured shiny marble floors and round marble-topped tables with bent metal chairs. There was a penny candy case, and a long bar with swivel stools. Waiters in red & white striped shirts wore arm band garters; and Daddy Michael, himself, sported a large handle-bar moustache. Ice cream sodas came in large Hofbrau-style glass mugs; and the sundaes were ample as well. In the corner was an upright player-piano pumping out old-fashioned tunes with a robust, tinny sound.

Mmmm!



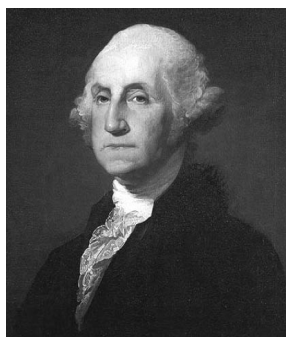
### Cast Your Vote for Your Favorite Ice Cream Venue

If you remember the long-gone places described above, cast your vote for your personal favorite 1950's-60's ice cream spot when you renew your membership in the White Plains Historical Society. Write your selection in the box at the bottom of the membership renewal form on the last page of this newsletter & mail it in. Include a note with comments if you wish.



Tom Paine's cottage, statue & marker on North Avenue and Sicard Avenue in New Rochelle.

## George Washington's Birthday Celebrated at Purdy House



George Washington 1732-1799



Thomas Paine 1737-1809

George Washington's 285<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated on a beautiful, sunny Sunday, February 26th at the Jacob Purdy House. Historical Society President John Vorperian welcomed the more than 100 attendees. The event commenced with General Washington (Michael Grillo) and his colonial troops (re-enactors) conducting a flag-raising ceremony. Local Girl Scout Troop 2254 led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance. Isabel Hoch sang a rousing rendition of the national anthem.

White Plains Mayor Tom Roach gave brief remarks about the significance of Washington and the importance of preservation. Guests then entered the historic landmarked building which was Washington's headquarters during the Battle of White Plains in 1776, greeted by White Plains patriots Abigail Purdy (Cindy Kauffman) and Ann Miller (Michelle Grieco-Varnit) for a historic presentation and refreshments.

"The Stormy Relationship Between Thomas Paine and George Washington" was presented by Gary Berton of the Thomas Paine International Historical Association; followed by a question period.

Mr. Berton explained that Paine and Washington had similar vision and fervor in the American Revolution against Great Britain. Washington used Paine's "Common Sense" to inspire the American troops. Their relationship soured, however, later, during the French Revolution, when Paine was imprisoned in France for treason in 1793. Paine felt that Washington could have used his influence as President of the new United States to gain a pardon and release from prison; but Washington at that time was interested in mending relations with Britain and did not intervene. This led Paine to write a scathing public letter to Washington, accusing him of being unworthy of his reputation.



General Washington led his troops into the ceremony; and delighted guests by sharing his birthday cake with all present.

## A Detailed Look at General Washington's Expense Account

Washington's refusal to accept a salary for his services (*during the Revolutionary War*) was emblematic of his somewhat ostentatious public virtue. He did open a public expense account, however, and some have claimed that he made money from it by overcharging Congress. In fact, the £150 per month that he requested for expenses was not just for him, but also for his entourage, which sometimes swelled to a crowd. His account books, which still exist, list charges for things like ferry fares, innkeepers' fees, candlesticks, saddle repair, meat, fruit, mounds of cabbages and beets, and (admittedly) oceans of grog, liquor, and wine. Washington even charged Congress for fifteen shillings cash paid to a beggar by the General's order. But although he was not averse to placing his headquarters in the occasional mansion, he otherwise made do with precious few luxuries.



Excerpted from — Edward G. Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life*, Random House, 2005.

### White Plains Word Search

Circle 10 words connected with historic or current White Plains

[Forward, Backward, Upward, Downward & Diagonal]

M	S	A	C	A	E	L	A	D	E	S	O	R
A	V	N	R	I	U	G	A	E	I	R	S	G
H	R	N	O	R	R	O	G	R	D	O	E	E
T	S	M	I	E	A	O	R	T	M	W	T	D
E	N	I	P	L	I	D	D	E	M	O	R	N
K	C	L	R	L	C	C	E	R	P	E	R	E
R	A	L	J	A	C	O	B	P	U	R	D	Y
U	F	E	U	G	M	U	N	S	I	O	G	H
B	I	R	S	A	E	N	D	O	N	N	C	C
T	I	B	B	I	T	S	P	A	R	K	O	R
R	U	R	A	L	C	E	M	E	T	E	R	Y
E	Y	U	S	P	R	L	I	D	W	T	E	Z

Published by

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8

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