

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 • Spring 2018

Please take time right now to join or renew your membership in the

White Plains Historical Society.

Help us to continue our mission. Send in your dues payment with the form on the back page, or join on-line at:

www.whiteplainshistory.org

Thank you!

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SAVE THE DATE!

*White Plains Historical Society
Annual Dinner*

Thursday, May 3, 2018

6:00-9:00 p.m.

at the

Woman's Club of White Plains

100th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage in NY State

Most people nowadays believe that the 19th Amendment to our U.S. Constitution, which was passed in 1920, gave all women (who are U.S. citizens) the right to vote. But New York State had already passed legislation allowing women's voting rights three years before the federal Amendment. Preceded only by Wyoming, New York was a leader in women's rights and New York State legalized women's suffrage on November 6, 1917, slightly more than 100 years ago.



NY women led the fight for voting rights in 1848.

Seneca Falls, New York was the site of the first-ever Women's Rights Convention in 1848. That initiating event was organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The eventual outcome, legalizing women's suffrage, came 69 years later, in 1917, when New York State gave its women the right to vote.

Three years after that milestone, the 19th Amendment was ratified by three-fourths of the forty-eight States, granting all women throughout the United States the right to vote as protected by the federal Constitution. Tennessee was the last state to ratify, thus achieving the 36 state majority required to pass the federal Amendment. According to historical author and speaker Louise Berkinow, "When New York women won the right to vote in 1917, they changed the national political landscape. The victory was a critical tipping point on the road to a constitutional amendment."*

New Yorkers Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were among the staunch and active promoters for women's suffrage in the late 19th century; but sadly neither lived to see it become a reality, as they died in 1902 and 1906, respectively. On election day 2016, 110 years after her passing, hundreds of women visited the gravesite of Susan B. Anthony in Rochester NY and placed "I Voted!" stickers on her headstone. Nationwide in the 2016 presidential election 73.7 million women voted as compared to 63.8 million men.

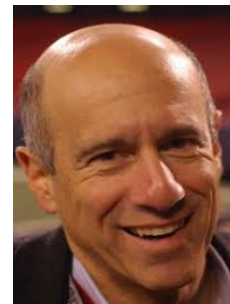
■ PVS

* Louise Berkinow, "Lady Liberty: A Counter-Narrative," *The Huffington Post*, 7/04/2013.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK:

To the Mountaintop via White Plains?

Our Society's three-fold mission is the discovery, dissemination, and preservation of White Plains History. Daily, a number of historical inquiries from all over the USA cross my desk pertaining to White Plains lore. Most queries can be answered with a swift reply. But every so often there is a unique and puzzling question whose response is clouded by the fog of time. **Maybe you can help the Society in solving a current mystery in history?** Recently an award-winning best-selling author phoned the Society with a research question for which we have yet to find the answer.



John Vorperian, President

A half century ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. journeyed to Memphis, TN in support of that city's Black sanitation workers strike for civil and economic justice. On April 3, 1968, at Mason Temple (Church of God in Christ Headquarters), Dr. King delivered his last speech. The address, considered by many as one of the greatest oratory performances in the American experience, is known as "I've Been to the Mountaintop." Prophetically, Rev. King stated, *"...I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land."* The next day he was felled by an assassin's bullet.

Earlier in that speech, he referenced the aftermath of his hospital recovery from a 1958 assassination attempt on his life. During a book signing at Blumstein's Department store on West 125th Street, New York City, a crazed individual stabbed him with a letter opener. The blade's edge rested on his aorta and a sneeze would have caused a fatal puncture. At Harlem Hospital the wound was successfully repaired.

Before closing his Mountaintop oratory Dr. King said, *"Well, they allowed me, after the operation, ... to read some of the mail that came in.... I had received one from the President and the Vice President; I've forgotten what those telegrams said. I'd received a visit and a letter from the Governor of New York, but I've forgotten what that letter said. But there was another letter that came from a little girl, a young girl who was a student at the White Plains High School. And I looked at that letter and I'll never forget it. It said simply,*

"Dear Dr. King: I am a ninth-grade student at the White Plains High School. While it should not matter, I would like to mention that I'm a white girl. I read in the paper of your misfortune and of your suffering. And I read that if you had sneezed, you would have died. And I'm simply writing you to say that I'm so happy that you didn't sneeze."

Thus far our search has yielded no answer. She may have been in the High School Class of 1961 or '62.

IF YOU KNOW WHO THIS PERSON IS, PLEASE CONTACT THE SOCIETY. Help us if you can.

Yours in History,
John Vorperian

(914) 328-1776
<whiteplainshistory.org>

Washington and the Essence of Leadership

by Rod Carlson – Member, White Plains Historical Society

For most of Americans, George Washington stands apart as our greatest leader, the epitome, an icon of true leadership. The Continental Congress unanimously elected him in 1775 to “command all the continental forces ... for the defense of American liberty.” With the same unanimity, he was chosen to lead the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and then in 1789 to be the President of the United States. In fulfilling these roles, he set the standard for American leadership, a standard that endures to this day with ever growing importance. But only by understanding Washington and his genesis as a leader can his followers gain from his example to go forth and do likewise. Of course, George Washington had significant advantages. He was tall, strong and a good rider. In every way he looked the part ... to others. But to himself? Here’s where his story gets interesting. Others saw grandeur, but he wasn’t so sure. Without land, riches or social status he was a mere commoner.



General Washington 1775-83

More than lacking confidence, he was an outsider to the lofty realm of his aspirations. Yet he possessed a rare streak of brilliance that was based neither on education nor any form of intellectualism. Perhaps instinctively, Washington knew that the only thing that would get him where he wanted to go couldn’t be faked. It couldn’t be just an act with such trappings and clothes, or even just land and money. It had to be real, genuine. He had to become a man of superior quality. He had to demonstrate his brand of excellence to others in all that he was and did and even thought.

This wasn’t a hit or miss proposition. He codified a slew of rules governing his thinking and behavior, eventually as a book: “The Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior In Company and Conversation.” The rules’ impact on his leadership are obvious. For example:

Rule #1: Every action done in company, ought to be with some sign of respect to those that are present.

Rule #67: Detract not from others neither be excessive in commanding.

#82: Undertake not what you cannot perform but be careful to keep your promise.

#88: Be not tedious in discourse, make not many digressions, nor repeat often the same manner of discourse.

#22: Show not yourself glad at the misfortune of another though he were your enemy.

#110: Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.



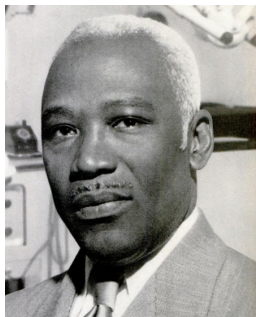
President Washington 1789-97

Washington’s passion for self-improvement and personal quality translates to real leadership greatness that wasn’t autocratic but instead participatory. He harnessed ideas from every conceivable source, even lowly soldiers. He drew others’ talents and in turn supported their successes. Washington was always in control, but he never bullied, bossed or pulled rank intellectually or personally. Everyone – friend and foe – knew he wasn’t out for his own gain or glory. He played to principle above all else, always a higher calling above politics and power. He did what was the right thing to do and everyone knew it. Moreover, he reflected and promoted the ideals of a new country.

Washington’s, we must admit, is our living legacy of leadership. Were we individually and collectively to follow his lead, as people and as a country, we’d be a lot farther down the road in our quest for “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Dr. Errold Collymore: Champion of Civil Rights in White Plains

by Ted Lee, Jr., Ben Himmelfarb & Peter Stone – Trustees, WP Historical Society



Dr. Errold D. Collymore, Sr.

Errold Collymore was a champion of racial justice and equality right here in White Plains beginning in the 1920's, a time when taking such a stand was very difficult and required real courage. Nevertheless, over the ensuing decades Dr. Collymore made a number of significant strides towards securing the rights of African-Americans and became known as "Westchester's Fighting Dentist."

Errold D. Collymore, Sr., was born in Barbados, B.W.I., in 1893. He worked his way to the U.S. via a job as radio operator on the construction of the Panama Canal. After saving enough money there he emigrated to the United States in

1912 at the age of nineteen. He served in the U.S. Army during World War I as a radio operator in France, and became a U.S. citizen via his military service. After returning from the war, he put himself through Howard University, and then dental school earning a degree as Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS). He opened his first dental practice in New York City; and moved his practice to White Plains in 1926. His struggle to rent an office in White Plains was a compelling force leading to his activism and quest for racial equality, a motivation he carried for the rest of his life. Following this move he bought a home for his family in the newly developed White Plains neighborhood known as "The Highlands." Regrettably, he faced continuing strong opposition due to racial prejudice aimed at his business, his home, himself and his family. In the Spring of 1930 members of the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on his front lawn. He was subjected to rock barrages. Some local employers, hoping to ruin his practice, threatened their African-American employees with firing if they utilized Dr. Collymore's dental services. He was quoted as saying "All sorts of pressure and threats were used to get me out, but I held on."

He and his family integrated the Community Unitarian Church of White Plains in 1927. Many of his fellow church members rallied behind him, leaving their former dentist and joining Dr. Collymore's clientele. He served as a board member and president of his church, although he was the only black family in the congregation for a long period of time.

He was the first and only African-American dentist in White Plains for many years. Dr. Collymore co-founded the Urban League of Westchester, organized the United Colored Republican Club, and started the White Plains/Greenburgh branch of the NAACP, where he served as president. Soon after coming to White Plains he found enormous challenges facing virtually all African-Americans. They were limited to the worst housing in town, but forced to pay exorbitant rents. Job opportunities were confined to low-paying manual labor. There were no black policemen nor firemen. Black children were banned from recreational facilities such as public swimming pools and playgrounds. Dr. Collymore actively sought to correct these issues. He led the movement that opened Westchester County Hospital in Valhalla to black nurses and nursing students. He was instrumental in forming the White Plains Housing Authority and ensuring the success of the Winbrook Housing Project. Among his other active efforts

Dr. Collymore (cont'd. from page 4)

to establish racial harmony, on multiple occasions he took to the streets when there was tension and the threat of racial conflict, bringing a calming and rational effect to avoid violence. Dr. Errold Collymore received a human relations award in 1956 inscribed as follows:

Indomitable champion of his race and pioneer in human relations who has advanced the well-being of our entire community by his vision, courage and faith in the brotherhood of man.

Sources: "Dr. Collymore: A Pioneer in Human Relations" The Reporter Dispatch, April 13, 1956;

"BW Black History: Errold D. Collymore - the Fighting Dentist" Black Westchester magazine, January 18, 2016;

Untitled essay by James Collymore; and notes from the late White Plains based journalist, Milton Hoffman.

The Lost Village of Kensico

Just beyond the northern tip of White Plains, in Valhalla, at the intersection of the Towns of Mount Pleasant and North Castle, stands the majestic Kensico Dam. It holds control over the Kensico Reservoir, part of the water supply of New York City. Until 125 years ago what is now the reservoir was the site of a rural village nestled between two small mountains, with the Bronx and Byram Rivers flowing through it. It was named after Siwanoy chief Koken-se-co, who was an original signer on the deed for the sale of White Plains. Kensico Village had its own train station, a hotel, a mill, an ice house a stone quarry and a Methodist-Episcopal church. About 200 people lived in the Village. As New York City's population grew rapidly in the 1880's, land was annexed to provide the reservoir, and the village of Kensico was burned and flooded.



Kensico Village was burned and flooded in 1893 to make way for the Kensico Dam & Reservoir
Photos courtesy of North Castle Historical Society & Mount Pleasant Historical Society.

Initial construction on the old, smaller Kensico Dam began in 1881; but plans expanded to include annexation of the entire town. In March-April of 1893 the residents were forced to complete the evacuation. The final Kensico Dam, as we see it today, was built from 1912-17 at a cost of \$15 million, with much of the work done by immigrant Italian stone masons. It stands 307 feet high and 1,843 feet long, and blocks 30 billion gallons of water. Currently, Kensico Dam Plaza is a popular host site for festivals, ceremonies, public events, picnicking or jogging and is home to Westchester County's 9/11 memorial, "The Rising." It was acquired as parkland in 1963 from the New York City Watershed Commission and remains the property of the NYC Department of Environmental Protection. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Bronx River Parkway Reservation. ■ PVS

Fact v Fable: When Was the Declaration of Independence Actually Signed?

Only two people actually signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776: John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress, and Charles Thomson, its Secretary. Most of the rest of the delegates to the Continental Congress signed on August 2nd, and some others in November, but the last signature wasn't added until 5 years later.

Although July 4th is the day the United States celebrates its independence, that was not the day the document was signed by most of the founding fathers. The Continental Congress voted for independence on July 2nd, deliberated and amended Thomas Jefferson's Declaration on July 3rd, and adopted the final version of the Declaration on the 4th. That prompted the effort to spread the word throughout the 13 colonies, but according to the National Archives most delegates did not sign the Declaration until August 2, 1776. The Liberty Bell was rung on July 8th.



John Turnbull's famous painting entitled "July 4, 1776"



"1776" musical play & film

New York delegates could not officially give their support until July 9. The founding fathers did not expect Independence Day to be remembered as July 4th. Rather, July 2nd, the day the Continental Congress voted for independence, was thought to be the day of celebration, which was noted by John Adams in two letters to his wife, Abigail, according to historian Joseph Ellis.

The well-known painting in the Capitol Rotunda by John Turnbull entitled "July 4, 1776" depicts the entire group of delegates preparing to sign on that date. The Broadway musical and film "1776" also perpetuate the myth that all 56 signers affixed their names on July 4th. Nevertheless, it is a fact that a copy of the momentous Declaration (perhaps without a full slate of signatures) was sent by courier and read on the courthouse steps in White Plains on July 11, 1776, marking that historic event as the birth of New York as no longer a *Colony*, but a *State*.

■ PVS

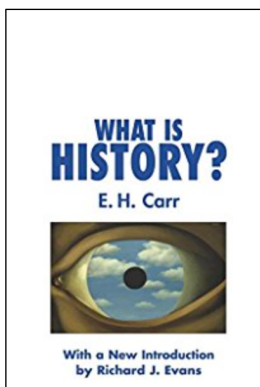
See also: <<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-ellis-real-date-of-american-independence-20170702-story.html>>
And/or: <http://www.history.com/news/9-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-declaration-of-independence>

BOOK REVIEW:**What Is History?**

by Edward H. Carr

[2nd edition with a new introduction by Richard J. Evans, 2001]

Reviewed by Stephen R. Rolandi – Member, White Plains Historical Society



I have long been fascinated by history, how historians do their jobs and the lessons they give us for the future. Of all the histories, one book stands out as an important guide for thinking about the study of history as well as viewing historical events. Edward H. Carr's "What Is History?" takes a radical view. Rather than looking back on cold facts, Carr presents history like someone who has actually lived through those events, many of them major events of the twentieth century, as a participant or a journalist or a diplomat.

Carr believes that history is alive and requires continuous interpretation in order to decipher and reveal its complex meaning and significance. "The facts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab," he states. "They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean. By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation." This and other similar passages reveal his perspective on history and historical literature.

Carr taught at Oxford and Cambridge and was active in British government during and after both world wars. His approach to history is controversial, particularly because he frequently takes issue with the historically correct claims of standard history: what happened and why. My personal feeling has always been that Edward H. Carr is a thinking person's historian and, like any other real teacher, he gives us the motivation and the insight to go and do likewise, to understand and cherish history the way he does.

As a member of the White Plains Historical Society, a former trustee and treasurer of the Larchmont Historical Society and as an adjunct professor at Pace University and John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, my love of history and my career have been greatly enriched by Edward H. Carr and his great book "What Is History?"

Battle of White Plains 241st Anniversary Celebrated

Chatterton's Hill: Battle of White Plains on 28th October 1776 in the American Revolutionary War

Photo Source: Britishbattles.com/2002-2017



Drew Shuplar-Rayvis portrayed a British-allied Mahican warrior

On October 22, 2017 more than 200 people gathered at the festive 241st commemoration of the Battle of White Plains where George Washington's troops fought the British and Hessians in 1776.

Local History Update from WP Public Library

by Ben Himmelfarb – Trustee, White Plains Historical Society

The past few months have been exciting at White Plains Public Library. As part of the Hub (the redesigned adult learning commons on the first floor), we opened a new local history room--albeit in an old location. Since we have our space back, the White Plains History Roundtable is back, too. The White Plains History Roundtable is an educational, participatory, and social event where attendees hear a presentation on a historical topic, examine materials from the White Plains Collection and engage in discussion with each other. If you want to not just hear about history, but actually examine historical records and discover stories with others, the White Plains History Roundtable is for you.



In February, we had a Black History Month event featuring history from residents whose families go back generations in White Plains. On April 18th, we will have author Stephen Paul DeVillo and environmentalist Erin Provenzano to speak about the Bronx River. In addition to their talks, we'll have historical reports and images from the library's collection out (and some copies for people to take with them). We're developing an event on LGBT history for June, so stay tuned! Please note that the local history room has open research assistance hours each week on Mondays from 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM and Fridays from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Check out <whiteplainslibrary.org/local-history> for the latest.

Washington's 286th Birthday Celebrated



Photo by Frances Jones

George Washington's 286th birthday celebration was held on Sunday, February 25, 2018 at Jacob Purdy House. The flag raising featured colonial military re-enactors with authentic period muskets.



Guest speaker, Richard Forlano
Photo by Rob Hoch

Guests entered Purdy House and dined on birthday cake and apple cider after hearing a presentation by Richard Forlano, Eastchester Town Historian, on "Geo. Washington in Westchester County."

WP Historical Society in St. Pat's Parade



Photos by Rod Carlson

Historical Society Trustees and re-enactors marched in the White Plains St. Patrick's Day Parade on Saturday, March 10th. Onlookers were thrilled by the firing of Revolutionary War era muskets and the Continental Army uniforms.



White Plains Historical Society

requests the pleasure of your company at our

Annual Meeting & Dinner

Thursday, May 3, 2018 • 6-9 p.m.

at the Woman's Club of White Plains

*featuring presentations on "The Genius of Percy Grainger"
and "I Remember Jack (Harrington)"*

Make your reservation now by sending your check for \$76 per person to:
White Plains Historical Society, 60 Park Avenue, White Plains NY 10603;
or reserve by PayPal or credit card at our website: www.whiteplainshistory.org

Joe Davis Broke the Color Line as White Plains Firefighter

by Ted Lee, Jr. – Trustee, White Plains Historical Society

Joe Davis was the first black fireman in the City of White Plains, appointed on April 13, 1949; almost exactly two years after Jackie Robinson broke the color line in major league baseball when he started for the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947. Joe Davis was born in 1921 into a family with five children in Sheldon, South Carolina; and moved to White Plains at the age of 8. He attended school in White Plains, including: Ferris Avenue, Battle Hill and White Plains High School. He served in World War II in the 477th Bomb Group – an outfit on record as one of the most outstanding military units in the Air Force (which then was part of the Army). He spent part of his military hitch working in a support group for the famous Tuskegee Airmen. Joe's brother, Bellinger Davis, Jr., was a casualty of the Korean War. After leaving the White Plains Fire Department, Joe was a corrections officer at the Westchester County Penitentiary until he retired in 1984.

Joe Davis passed away on November 5, 2017. White Plains Fire Chief Richard Lyman said that Davis "...had a fine way of living. He was part of the firefighters' family." And, he will remain part of White Plains history.



Joe Davis in 1949

A Historical Lookback at White Plains Mayors

Below is a list of those who served as Mayor of White Plains since it officially became a city in 1916.

Name of Mayor	Party Affiliation	Dates Served
Farrington M. Thomson	Democrat	1916-19
Frederick E. Weeks	Republican	1920-25
Frederick C. McLaughlin	Republican	1926-31
Chauncey B. Griffen	Republican	1932-33
Robert P. Smith	Republican	1934-35
Walter Rogers	Republican	1936-37
Chauncey T. S. Fish	Republican	1938-45
Silas S. Clark	Rep. & Dem.	1946-49
Edwin G. Michaelian	Republican	1950-57
Richard S. Hendey, Sr.	Republican	1958-73
Carl J. Delfino	Republican	1974
Harry Gordon*	Republican	1974
Michael Keating**	Democrat	1974-75
Richard Maas***	Democrat	1974
Alfred Del Vecchio	Republican	1976-93
Seymour J. Schulman	Democrat	1994-97
Joseph M. Delfino	Republican	1998-2009
Adam T. Bradley	Democrat	2010-11
Thomas M. Roach	Democrat	2011-present

*Served as Interim Mayor Jan.- May 1974 upon resignation of Carl Delfino (due to illness).

**Named Acting Mayor by fellow Council members May-Aug 1974. Elected Mayor by voters, Nov. 1974.

***Appointed Acting Mayor by Council Aug.-Dec. 1974 as NY State Attorney General ruled existing Council members could not hold interim Mayor position.

Many thanks to White Plains City Clerk, Anne McPherson for providing information.

Historical Trivia Quiz

What Happened in Old White Plains?

Identify each celebrity with a career and how he/she was connected to our City.

1. Band leader
2. Film actor
3. Heir of Sultan
4. "King of Pop"
5. NFL football player
6. Playwright

___ Cab Calloway ___
 ___ Dan Duryea ___
 ___ Rita Hayworth ___
 ___ Bob Hyland ___
 ___ Michael Jackson ___
 ___ Aly Khan ___
 ___ Arthur Miller ___
 ___ Art Monk ___
 ___ Marilyn Monroe ___
 ___ Jay Saldi ___
 ___ Ralph Waite ___
 ___ James Whitmore ___

B = Born in White Plains

M = Married in White Plains

D = Divorced in White Plains

V = Visited each other in White Plains Hospital

Answers on our website: <www.whiteplainshistory.org>



Percy Grainger in 1922, at the height of his popularity as an internationally famous and respected pianist / composer; one year after settling here in White Plains.

Be sure to attend the White Plains Historical Society's Annual Dinner on May 3rd where you will hear about "The Genius of Percy Grainger" from guest speaker Barry Ould of the U.K., President of the International Percy Grainger Society.

In May of 2017 the Percy Grainer House at 217 Cromwell Avenue was dedicated as a local landmark by the City of White Plains.

Learn more about White Plains history and the musical genius of Percy Grainger on May 3rd.

You may purchase tickets on our website:

<www.whiteplainshistory.org>

Published by

White Plains Historical Society

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Please check the appropriate line and remit dues payable to the *White Plains Historical Society*,
60 Park Avenue, White Plains, NY 10603; or sign up at www.whiteplainshistory.org; or call (914) 328-1776.

___ 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.)

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___ Joint.....\$400

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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, advance invitation to public and member-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, and acknowledgement at public events.