



# The Roost

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 3

IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2010

## IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Letter from the President



Dear Members:

How the year flies by, and what a busy year it was for our Historical Society. We presented three major exhibits at the McVickar House: **Things, Etc.**, which showcased what we collect; **200 Years of Wedding Dresses and Wedding Photographs**, and our current exhibit, **Irvington's Public Service Departments**, a tribute to the many Irvington families that have served in them. We also held seven wonderful programs: lectures on John Adams and Ulysses S. Grant; **I Do – I Do**, a fashion show featuring wedding gowns from generations of Irvington brides; **Songs of the Historic Hudson**, and **Tomorrow's Historians**, where Irvington High School students presented oral synopses of their historical research papers. We also enjoyed our first **History Cab** quiz show, at which local teams showed off their knowledge of U.S. and village history. And finally, at our annual meeting, our guest speaker, Joseph Pell Lombardi, gave a slide presentation about the restoration of the Octagon House. We have you, our members, to thank for all these great programs and exhibits. Your support made them possible.

Our program committee is hard at work planning next year's offerings. One very special event will be **MADAM**, a musical based on the life of Irvington's own Madam C. J. Walker. This award-winning production will

be performed at the Town Hall Theater on Saturday, February 5<sup>th</sup> by the TheatreSouth Atlanta company. We are also planning a second **Things, Etc.** exhibit so get out the duster and be ready to show your own collection at McVickar House. Be sure to watch the mail for information about all our 2011 programs.

The Society's Board of Trustees would like to thank two retiring trustees for their years of service on the board: Laurie McGuire and Frank Gilligan. We would also like to welcome two newly elected trustees: Amy Sherwood and Kevin Weber.

The Irvington Historical Society has so much to be thankful for this year, most importantly the support of our community. We thank you all and wish you and your families a warm and joyous holiday season.

*Andy Lyons  
President of the Board of Trustees*

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# Half Moon Apartments: Villager's Estate

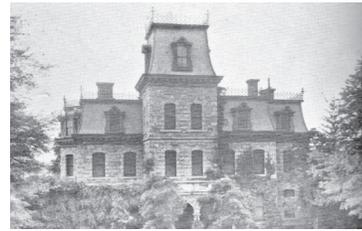
## by Francis D. Campbell

In July of 1952, readers of the *Irvington Gazette* were given the chance to view preliminary sketches of the Half Moon garden apartments and were invited by developers Morris and David Bogdanoff to view the proposed site. The public advertisement read, "In keeping with our established practice, first opportunity is being offered our neighbors and friends, one week in advance of metropolitan advertising, to purchase these two-story garden apartments, each with a separate entrance and an unparalleled river view in a 19-acre park." It was also noted that, "In accordance with provisions of the Federal Housing Administration, preference will be given to veterans..." Initial payments for the available 4- 5- and 6-room apartments ranged from \$950 to \$1,800.

The first unit of Half Moon was built adjacent to West Clinton Avenue on what was later to become the west side of the present South Buckhout Street. Not until 1954 was the portion of South Buckhout from Station Road to the southern boundary of Spiro Park extended to West Clinton Avenue. Both South Buckhout and Half Moon Lane, as we now know them, were accepted as village streets at a Town Hall meeting in December, 1954.

The apartments were built on property that was formerly part of the Mairs, Calvert and Luke estates. These estates were not only contiguous but the resident families were related either through blood ties or shared business interests. In 1869, John Dows Mairs purchased some nine acres of property just

south of the Village with frontage on the Hudson River. This property he called Lynwood. Not long after, John's uncle and business partner, David Dows, purchased a larger tract just south of Lynwood. David Dows, a produce broker, banker and railroad director, named his property Charlton Hall (shown below).



The land to the north of Lynwood was bought by Edwin Hays Mairs, eldest son of John D. and Mary E. Mairs, who, as a youth, spent summers at Lynwood with his siblings. Mairs eventually built a house on the property following his marriage to Katharine La Tourette Evans of Staten Island. Edwin, who held a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, carried on a private banking business under the name Thompson and Mairs. After his death on November 30, 1926, an obituary appearing in the *Irvington Gazette* recorded that, "In local affairs, he was one of the pillars of his neighborhood. He was Chairman of the Library Board of Irvington from its beginning until the time of his death and for many years a trustee and treasurer of the Irvington Presbyterian Church." Mary Mairs, one of Edwin's sisters, who married the Rev. Dr. John B. Calvert, assumed ownership of Lynwood by 1914, and it became the Calvert's country home. It was later razed in 1940. The David Dows estate

## Half Moon Apartments: Villager's Estate, *continued*

(i.e., Charlton Hall) was eventually acquired in 1913 by Adam K. Luke, a bank director. He renamed the estate Devon Hall and in 1940, following an unsuccessful attempt to sell the mansion, he had it destroyed. The carriage house of this estate still survives as a Dows Lane residence.

In the decades following the death of Edwin H. Mairs, the Mairs and Calvert properties came to be represented by Edwin H. Mairs, III, co-executor of the estates. In 1929, the J. C. Turner Lumber Company had purchased the entire riparian (water frontage) rights from the Mairs estate. During the 1930s and 40s, Edwin H. Mairs, III, urged the Village Planning Board to amend the zoning ordinance so as to allow the construction of garden-type buildings not more than two and one-half stories in height on the Mairs and Calvert properties. Planning Board approval was eventually granted.

In 1946, David Swope, president of County Homes, Inc., purchased 58 acres of land lying between the Albany Post Road (i.e., US9/Broadway) and the Hudson River, and between the Ardsley-on-Hudson station and Irvington. This purchase comprised the former Fraser, Victor, Luke, Mairs and Calvert estates. Swope later sold the Luke, Mairs and Calvert properties, which were located north of Clinton Avenue, to the above-mentioned Morris and David Bogdanoff. The cost was approximately \$1,250,000.00.

And so, in 1952, the 217-unit Half Moon Apartments saw initial construction, the F.H.A. having already approved a mortgage commitment. How-

ever, the transition from estates to apartments was not entirely popular. The community was not enamored of the idea and editorials in the *Irvington Gazette* reflected their concern. "Another Apartment" was the header for one of these, which went on to mention that "it is high time for Irvington to give serious consideration to the problems that will come with a 217-family apartment house in that section of the village." Yet another headline read "Dust Bowl or Mud Bath?," noting that "trucking concerns hauling dirt away from the site of the new Half Moon apartments on the former Luke estate have permitted parts of their many loads to drop over the tailboards of their trucks...."

Apparently, these complaints were not very persuasive because before long (i.e., November, 1953) the following headline appeared in the *Gazette*: "Proposed Elementary School Building and new Gymnasium." This, of course, refers to the Dows Lane Elementary School that would be built just south of Spiro Park on parts of the Mairs, Calvert, and Luke estates, and the school gymnasium slated for North Ferris Street. Taken together, the school-related construction and the completion of the north section of the Half Moon apartments in 1954, assured that the area south of Spiro Park would remain a construction zone for awhile.

However, it was not long after that those who governed the Village recognized the importance of the Half Moon complex. In the March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1955 issue of the *Irvington Gazette* we read, "Candidates of both

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## Half Moon Apartments: Villager's Estate, *continued*

parties will address a meeting of the residents of the Half Moon apartments in the assembly room of the apartment group on Friday evening, March 11. Both organizations feel that the balance of power in the village may rest in the four hundred voters who make their homes in the Half Moon development....” More than a year later, in 1956, Carl Carmer comments, in a letter to the *Gazette*, that “On October 21<sup>st</sup>, Irvington is to have an exceptional political opportunity in that our Republican and Democratic candidates for the United States Congress are to appear jointly at the Meeting Hall of the Half Moon Apartments North on South Buckhout Street....”

As for the residents of the Half Moon apartments, past and present, one could compile a substantial list of those who had accomplished much in their areas of expertise. One such was Dr. Leon M. Lederman, who, in 1958, was president of Columbia University's Nevis Laboratories, located in Irvington. In 1961-62 he conducted what is now one of the most famous experiments in scientific history, the "two neutrino experiment," which identified the muon neutrino. After leaving Irvington, Dr. Lederman, in 1988, went on to win a Nobel Prize for Physics with Melvin Schwartz and Jack Steinberger. Irvington's own art-

ist, illustrator, and cartoonist, Eytan Wronker, will undoubtedly be known to all who have seen his works exhibited at the Martucci Gallery or were amused by his cartoons in the former *Irvington Viewpoint*.



Wronker's illustration showing view from Half Moon apartment.

Wronker, whose work has appeared in numerous magazines, is presently creating imaginative and extremely detailed illustrations for *Robocosm*, a children's book about a boy who lives inside a robot body.

While much can be said about the history of the Half Moon apartments, they have, above all, as Myra Fisher Saturnen recalls in the article that follows, provided Irvington families with a wonderful living space in close proximity to schools, parks, public transportation, and Village resources, along with extraordinary views of the Hudson River.

Don't miss our 3rd annual student research symposium —  
**Tomorrow's Historians**  
 Thursday March 31st at 7pm  
 Irvington High School

# Growing Up in Half Moon in the 1950s

by Myra Fisher Saturen

I grew up in Irvington between 1953, when I was 4 years old, and 1961, when I was 12 and my family moved to Elmsford, New York. Even as a child, I was aware of and loved Irvington's unusual beauty.

My first memory of the village is stepping over wooden foundations that would become the Half Moon Apartments, where we would move into a two-bedroom unit at 134 S. Buckhout Street. We had the upstairs left apartment, whose small, square porch came off the living room and was separated from that of our neighbors, the Wenigs. From the porch you could see the sweeping Hudson River in all its ice-capped or bluish-gray moods.



**View of the Hudson River from the Half Moon Apartments.**

Like many of Half Moon's residents, we had moved from an outer borough of New York City—in our case, Queens. My mother, Ellen Fisher; my father, Seymour Fisher; my brother, Evan; and I moved in soon after the apartments were built. The year my sister, Alice, was born, 1958, we moved to a three-bedroom apartment at 212 S. Buckhout Street.

The apartments were grouped in a "U" shape around a grassy area, 4 units of 4 apartments each. It was the Baby Boom era and from sunrise to sunset, the area was filled with children, from toddlers to teens. We played kickball and hopscotch, jumped rope, and threw balls against the red brick walls of the apartment buildings. Some of the families I remember (in addition to the Wenigs) include: the Bensons, the Marksés, the Silvermans, the Camerons, the Boyles, the Bonds, and the McGranes.

We children made full use of Half Moon's facilities. We put on makeshift plays in storage rooms. We played ballgames and rode bicycles in the parking lots behind the apartments.

Half Moon not only teemed with youngsters but also with mothers, who socialized with each other, sitting on the small aluminum boxes that received the glass bottles delivered every morning by the milkman. The women would drag their milk boxes in front of someone's doorstep in early afternoon, after the household chores were done.



**Residents Annette Lewinter (with baby carriage), Evan Fisher (foreground), and Linda and Joan Pleshko standing in front of their apartment.**

## Growing Up in Half Moon in the 1950s, *continued*

Many of the men rode the Hudson-Harlem line into Manhattan to work, returning home in the twilight, briefcase in hand, from the Irvington Railroad Station.

In the summer, the village ran recreational programs for youth, based at Memorial Park. A little green cottage formed the nucleus of activities, which ranged from arts and crafts to dramatics, athletics, archery, and costume contests. We knew which activities were planned by consulting pastel, mimeographed sheets distributed at the Town Hall on Main Street. These programs were the highlight of our summer.

Also during the summer, the village showed outdoor movies at Matthiessen Park. I remember seeing *Some Like It Hot* there, starring Marilyn Monroe, Jack Lemon, and Tony Curtis. Families would bring blankets and sit on them while the sky gradually and then suddenly darkened and the screen lights came on.

During the winter, the tennis courts of Memorial Park were transformed into an ice skating rink and we'd go as families or as groups of children to skate, accompanied by music.



Myra Fisher Saturen, right, with her brother Evan, center, and her sister, Alice.

Any time of year, we found adventure in walking along Main Street. The most popular destination was Beckers, a stationary store where you could buy candy and small toys. Behind the counter, standing over Hershey's bars, Baby Janes, Tootsie Rolls, and baseball card bubble gum, you would find Marvin Becker and his mother, whom we knew just as "Mrs. Becker," serving customers. On Main Street, too, was the old, venerable Irvington Pharmacy and a beauty shop, Clip and Curl.

To me, the most important building on Main Street was the Irvington Public Library, located in the Town Hall. A square room on the second floor housed the children's collection, presided over by Mrs. Robertson, a lovely white-haired lady who adored children and books. Knowing that I relished medieval historical novels, she often had one or two on hand for me when I came in.

We went to the wonderful Dows Lane School, whose large rectangular windows overlooked the Hudson River and a Victorian castle-like house. I remember many of the teachers, but a few stand out most. Miss Alice E. Tewey, with her round face and round glasses, taught second grade in a gentle, encouraging way. After she died, in the late 50s, the Irvington Elementary School choir sang the Lord's Prayer at a school-wide memorial to her.

Mr. Peter Oley taught fourth grade and advised the newspaper club with great zest. Miss Emilie N. Petrie was a tall, handsome, robust-looking woman

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## Growing Up in Half Moon in the 1950s, *continued*

with plump red cheeks. I will never forget her. She loved drama, travel and literature and made Friday mornings special with her readings from *The Black Stallion* and *Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain. When she announced the time for social studies, my mind would gear up for excitement, for she brought to class her souvenirs and stories from exotic places like the Catacombs. She taught sixth grade.

Outside of school, I spent time in the Girl Scouts, led by Miss Isabel Benjamin, a stern but caring woman. We met in the drafty basement of St. Barnabas Church on Broadway.

I learned to swim in Irvington, with my father letting me float, draped over his arm, in the Hudson River at Matthiessen Park.

I have been 49 years away from Irvington, but like to come back for occasional visits, strolling around a place that has changed in some ways and remained remarkably the same in others.



**Myra and her grandmother, Olga Hyman, in front of 334 S. Buckhout Street.**

My memories of childhood in Irvington are magical, a time I think back on with great affection. I'd love to hear other people's memories, and I can be reached at: [myra125@hotmail.com](mailto:myra125@hotmail.com).



On Thursday, November 18th, the Irvington Historical Society said farewell to long-time residents Laura and Maurice Lohman at the History Center. The Lohmans, residents of Irvington since 1962, recently moved to an assisted living complex in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Morry, born in Denver, Colorado, was a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and Queens College. Laura, born in Peekskill and a life-long resident of the Hudson Valley, was a school psychologist in Eastchester. The couple raised their three children — Steve, Jonathan and Deborah— in Irvington.

The Lohmans have been generous contributors to the Irvington community. Morry was a Historical Society trustee and both were faithful docents at the History Center. They will surely be missed.



**Morry Lohman, L., with Society board members Mary Toomy and Barbe Crowley, and his wife, Laura, in foreground.**

## Curator's Corner

By Barbara Sciulli



Because I have been asked over the years to explain exactly what it is that a curator does, I thought I would devote this issue's column to the role of curator at the Irvington Historical Society.

The curator, with the help of many volunteers, manages the Society's collection, which is divided into several parts: clipping file, photo file, library, archive of ephemera, media collection, including recordings of sound and images.

Ninety-five percent of the collection has come from the public. We appreciate the memorabilia and preserve it for the future. More than 300 items were added in 2010. The largest and heaviest was Amzi Barber's massive mahogany desk. The oldest addition was a copy of *The Heiress of Bruges: A Tale of the Sixteen Hundreds* by Thomas Colley, an 1830 edition inscribed with the initials of a member of Alexander Hamilton's family (research is underway). A collection of hats and hatboxes, lovingly gathered for many years, was an appreciated donation. Many photographs of Irvington scenes, citizens and events were given to the Society. One of these, a 1909 photograph of Town Hall wired for illumination during the Hudson-Fulton Tricentennial, was not previously known to exist. We also received two pictures of the Town Hall illuminated for the Hudson-Fulton Quadracentennial in 2009. Some other additions include uniforms, early-20<sup>th</sup>-century baby clothes and shoes, and wedding gowns.

The curator and volunteers sort, clean, catalog, and store the collection materials following guidelines, standards and practices prescribed by the New York State Board of Regents through whom the Society is chartered. Every item has an accession number, and a box and shelf number. These numbers allow the stored items to be located.

The exception to this numbering system is the clipping file. The written or printed material in this collection is arranged alphabetically by subject from Abbotsford to Zoo, Hopkins. Entries within the folders of Biography, Houses & Buildings, Churches, Irvington Business, Irvington Government, Irvington Events, Irvington Schools, and Obituaries are also arranged in alphabetical order. Besides articles clipped from newspapers and magazines, there is "original source material" such as wills, deeds, letters, and written recollections.

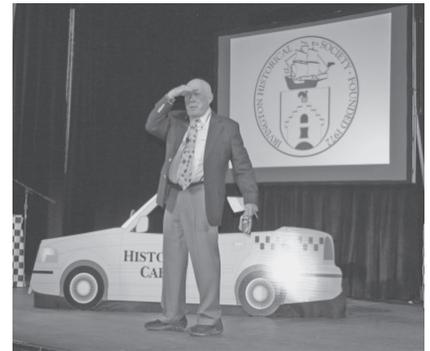
Our clipping file is about to triple in size. Peter Oley's own research material and clipping file have been sorted and arranged and are about to be integrated into the Society's file. Peter's passion for research and endless curiosity about the past have left us with thousands of facts and sources for reference. There is no better legacy from Peter to the Society and the people of Irvington than the notes and information he left us from his countless hours of research and discovery. His enthusiasm, curiosity, persistence and tenacity continue to serve us well.

Don't let your collections collect dust!  
Share your treasures by joining in the second annual  
**"Things, Etc."** exhibit  
coming in March.

For more information contact Claire Mastroianni at  
914 591-7568

# History Cab

On Friday night, October 22nd, the Irvington Historical Society presented its first History Cab, a program based on the quiz show *Cash Cab*. The evening provided a fun-filled competition in which teams of village residents answered questions about local, state and national history. Our taxi driver, Irvington native and star of stage and screen, Maddie Corman, quizzed team members against a backdrop “video tour” of Irvington. Competition was tight and laughs frequent as the evening unfolded. The night’s winners, the Village Squares Connie Kehoe, Chris Mitchell and Kevin Weber, were awarded taxi-shaped cookie jars filled with taxi-shaped cookies. Many thanks to those who participated in the event and to all those who attended.



Doug Wilson warms up the crowd and introduces the participants.



Eleven teams participated in the evening’s fun. Here they are being prepped by Committee members.



Taxi driver Maddie Corman searches for her first fare.



First up, the Washington Irving Hysterical Society: Peter Coddington, Maryon Noble and Erin Molloy.



The Overdue Historians team of Josef Sinko, Amy Fitch and Pamela Strachan hop in the cab.



Scorekeeper, historical society treasurer John Ryan, and Timekeeper, high school girl’s basketball coach Gina Maher, pay close attention.



Clever team names were a highlight of the night. Here are the iCABod Cranes: L to R, Michael Rosenberg, Jake Eisland and Daniel Siever.



The Historical Markers— Brian Smith, Reuben Garcia and Heather Bancroft —make a strong showing and take the early lead.

# History Cab



Our panel of experts, from left, Irvington High School Latin teacher Jonathan Silverman, Principal Scott Mosenthal, and long-time Irvington resident Pat Gilmartin.



The Irvington English— Reid Mitchell, Raphael Saphra and Sam Donow— consider an audience shout out.



Irvington resident John Farrell entertains the crowd with his lively piano playing.



The Main Street Mums (and a son) Peter Wilson, Harriet Kelly and Anne Myers enjoy a laugh as they ponder a question.



Traffic Controller Lydia Otivich gets ready to call a Red Light Challenge.



Slime Mold members Amy Sherwood, Barry Seaman and Alice Picon reach out to our panel of experts.



The Aries Historians Art Zuckerman, Susan Zuckerman and Tony Russo offer an answer.



But will the judge, high school social studies teacher Erik Weiselberg, accept it?



The Spiro Park Cab Company's Dale Russell, Jack Boyle and Don Isler risk everything on a Double or Nothing question.

## History Cab



The Norwhallian Fantasy, Alec Vulfson and Aidan Walsh ponder a question.



And the winners are—the Village Squares—Connie Kehoe, Kevin Weber and Chris Mitchell!!!



Irvington Historical Society Board President Andy Lyons thanks our evenings emcee, Maddie Corman, and all who were part of the event.

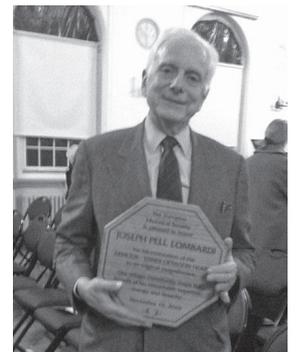


## Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Irvington Historical Society was held at the Main Street School on November 19th. President Andy Lyons summarized the past year's exhibits and programs and those planned for the future, and Treasurer John Ryan reported on the Society's financial state. Curator Barbara Sciulli then explained exactly what it is that a curator does and shared some of the newer acquisitions her volunteer team has been busy cataloguing. A surprise addition to our ever-growing collection was presented to Barbara by former Irvington resident Marjorie Clark who donated a nineteenth-century book inscribed by a descendant of Alexander Hamilton.

The Society thanked outgoing trustees Frank Gilligan and Laurie McGuire for their many contributions and approved the slate of three returning trustees and two new ones: Welcome, Amy Sherwood and Kevin Weber!

After introducing the evening's special guest speaker and honoree, architect Joseph Pell Lombardi, Andy Lyons awarded him an 8-sided plaque for his contributions to Irvington's architectural legacy. Mr. Lombardi then treated the audience to a slideshow, beginning with his international preservation efforts and highlighting the acquisition and restoration of his own magnificent village property, the Octagon House — efforts that continue to this day with new discoveries and directions, such as the planned neo-Egyptian scheme for the Music Room. Our thanks to Mr. Lombardi for this unique look inside a village treasure.



# The Roost

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## Save The Date

The Irvington Historical Society and  
Herman LeVern Jones's  
TheatreSouth Atlanta, Inc. present

### ***Madam***

*A musical of the life of Madam CJ Walker*

Irvington Town Hall Theater  
**Saturday February 5, 2011**

For tickets visit: [www.irvingtontheater.com](http://www.irvingtontheater.com)