



# The Roost

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 3

IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2013

## IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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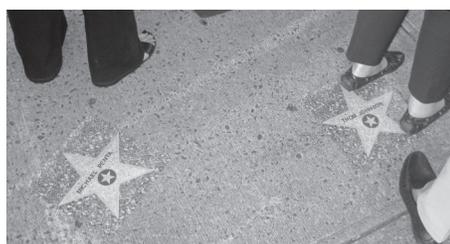
## *A View From Backstage* Opens to Rave Reviews at the McVickar House

The Irvington Historical Society's newest exhibit, *A View from Backstage*, opened to rave reviews on Saturday, September 21st. The exhibit presents an overview of forty-six years of Irvington High School theater. Through the use of props, costumes, scripts, scenery and photos, the exhibit shares with visitors an inside view of the time, hard work and talent that go into a high school production.

On the evening before the opening, guests enjoyed a preview party at the McVickar House.



Jack Hurson and Reina Sinni pass hors d'oeuvres enjoyed by guests.



Stars lined the street with the names of those who have given so much to the high school theater productions: Michael Penta, Thom Johnson, Larry Corio, Diana Selnow and Barbara Sciulli.



Don Costello, Richard Weiller and John Ryan pouring some bubbly!



Guests mingled under tents on Main Street.

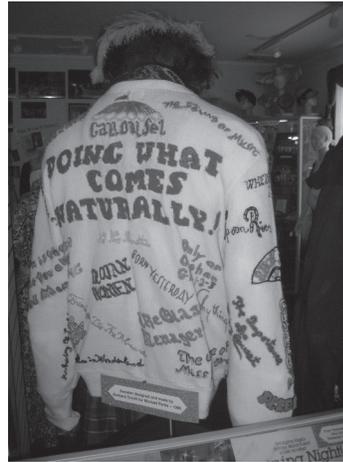
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# A View from Backstage, *continued*



Former musical director Lawrence Corio, current theater director Diana Selenow, former technical director Thom Johnson, costume designer Barbara Sciuili and former theater director Michael Penta on the McVickar House porch.



Jacket made for Michael Penta with names of shows he directed.



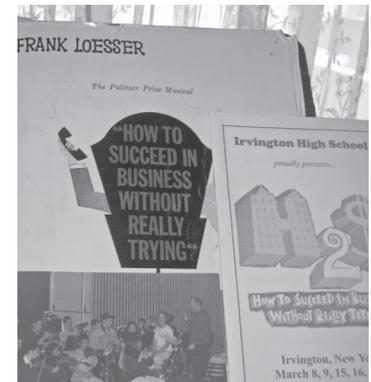
Props and costumes that made productions come alive.



From left, Thom Johnson, Barbara Sciuili and Arkady Selenow.



Enjoying photos of high school theater productions.



Scores, scripts and programs fill the exhibit.



Frank Sciuili (l) and Larry Corio.



Former students Nell Stifel (l) and Peter Wilson flank Michael Penta.



A video of clips from many high school productions was enjoyed by all.

# Recollections

PENTA, is the name, the only name, I use as the answer to the password security question, “What is the name of your favorite teacher?”

I was one of the lucky ones. I was fortunate to be a student of Michael C. Penta or “MCP.” Arriving to the Irvington school system in the 8th grade, I stumbled across his theater program because I loved to sing. In music class one day, the teacher, Mr Conlin, suggested I try out for a show and the rest is history. I was in every and any show I could possibly be cast in. I was like a sponge, yearning to soak up all I could learn from MCP, a theatrical genius in my mind.

The theater program at Irvington was well known for its high-quality Broadway-like productions. MCP's shows often received a plug in *The New York Times*. For those of us who were tucked in tightly under Michael's wings, it was an incredible ride. Michael was always fair, yet demanding. While it was theater he taught and plays he directed, Michael and the program prepared students for the rest of their lives. He required his students to show up ready to learn and perform. In turn, the respect level was so high for Michael that we yearned to deliver a solid performance to make him proud. If you were involved in the theater program, you were not just learning how to perform, Michael was a teacher through and through. I recall the field-trips, the movies, the plays he would insist we study to better appreciate the history of theater, playwriting, acting style, set design and overall technique.

Much to Michael's despair (and probably my own regrets as well), I did not pursue an acting/stage career. I did however use the skills I learned at Irvington High and incorporated them into my career where I'm required to do a great deal of public speaking and at times host a TV show. I think of Michael each time before I “go on stage.”

So yes... I was indeed one of the lucky ones. I feel blessed that I had the good sense and proper guidance to embrace the Irvington High theater program and I feel especially blessed to have crossed paths with my mentor and dear friend, MCP. Thankfully the program and MCP embraced me right back.

“Ditto” and cheers to my MCP.

KT Hill-Gallo

Mr. Penta (I've only recently been able to call him Michael) was my director, teacher, and mentor for six happy years in jr. high and high school. I performed in many of the shows he staged in his early years at IHS, among them *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Now's the Time for All Good Men*, *The Sound of Music*, and *The King and I*. And, inspired by his example, I went on to study theater at Smith College and to work for Joseph Papp at the Public Theater right after graduating. But, while doing plays and musicals were formative experiences for so many of us, Michael gave us much more.

Just take a simple thing like gym. Instead of putting on a uniform and running up and down the basketball court, we fortunate students of Michael donned leotards and dance shoes, learning ballet, modern, tap, and trying our hand at choreographing everything from Stravinsky to pop music. In theater class we tackled a wide range of material, from medieval morality plays to Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* to modern works with controversial content like Edward Albee's *The American Dream*.

Then there were the films Michael showed us in class, from the glorious *The Red Shoes* to Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, starring a heartbreaking Nureyev and Fonteyn, to the genius of Japanese master Kurosawa. And I haven't begun to describe the field trips we took to the city to see dance and theater or the visits by guest artists, some of whom led workshops with us.

Michael respected his students enough to demand their best, and we repaid him by working hard to please him – our most important critic. But, above all, Michael gave the students under his tutelage a precious gift: he opened up to us the great big beautiful world of the arts.

~ Kathy Bonomi (class of '73)

The Roost has received wonderful reflections from former students who were part of the high school theater program. Our next issue will feature more of these.

# A Profile of Donald William Seus

by Barbara Kerr Carrozzi

November 1, 1921, was a day of rejoicing for Edna Cowlin Seus and August Edward Seus: their first and, what was to be, only child, Donald William Seus, arrived into this world! Although Edna and August were residing at 29 North Eckar Street at the time, Edna chose to deliver her baby in Mount Vernon where her mother, grandparents and other close relatives lived, insuring upon discharge from the hospital that she would have loving family members to assist with the care of her newborn son. Within a short time, the happy little family returned to their Irvington home, one of five row houses built in the late 1800s by Irvington's Murphy Construction.



Donald Seus circa 1930.

Don enjoyed a carefree and innocent childhood playing with neighborhood children and his next-door neighbors, Jean and Phyllis Connor, and he clearly embraced the moments of happy reflection as he reminisced about those wonderful friends and times from days past. The relating of the following memory of his pre-high school days in the "clubhouse" on the Whitehouse Estate (now Cedar Hill Garden Apartments, 35 South Broadway) where he spent countless fun-filled hours with his buddies, Walter Schreiber, Steve Hart, Bob Chisholm, John Hickey, Irven Ostrander, Richard "Buddy" Irwin, and Ray Beckley, conjured up many laughs, with Don recalling how Ray had demonstrated a level of

mechanical skill that enabled them to install a SHOWER in the "clubhouse" for cooling off and cleaning up after a rousing game of baseball or football!

His school days, kindergarten through 12th grade, were spent at the Main Street School, culminating with graduation, IHS Class of 1939. Don's memories of those salad days are as cherished and vivid today as they were then. In the fall of 1939, he was a freshman in the College of Forestry at Syracuse University. Very quickly, he realized this curriculum was not for him and promptly changed his major to Business Administration. In his senior year at Syracuse, with America already engaged in World War II, Don was accepted into a U.S. Navy officers' training program at Columbia University. Halfway through the program, the students were given a choice of enlisting in either the army or navy, and although Don was actively involved in the naval program, he chose the U.S. Army (which, as you will see further along in this profile, was the BEST decision he ever made!). Awarded a Bachelor of Science degree in May 1943, by the following month Don was an enlisted man headed to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, for basic training. Upon its completion, Don was sent to Army Administration School at Sam Houston State Teachers College in Huntsville, Texas, for a ten-week course of study and then to Fort Slocum, New Rochelle, for further preparation prior to deployment overseas.

With Don's destination determined, his convoy of ships left New York harbor. Shortly after their departure, his ship, the *Mauretania*, was rammed by another, causing a two- to three-day delay. Since the remainder of the convoy had pressed on with its Atlantic crossing, the *Mauretania* (repairs completed) was left to continue its journey overseas without escort or protection, eventually arriving in Liverpool, England, in the dark of night. After a period of time, Don was assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Postal Regulating Station in Prestwick, Scotland, sited at an essentially "fog-free" airport to make landing as safe as possible for the large transport aircraft. As Don familiarized himself with his duties and began to settle into a routine, he (as well as many other ser-

## A Profile of Donald William Seus, *continued*

vicemen) began to take advantage of any downtime from the stressful days of war to explore the picturesque Scottish countryside of Ayr and Prestwick. A welcomed gesture by the military was the dispatch of trucks to these areas for the purpose of providing transportation back to base for the young GIs after a much-desired day off. Don laughingly recalled just how important it was to keep your eye on the passing time, because if you missed the truck ride back, you could count on a good five-mile walk!



**Don served in World War II from 1943 to 1946.**

Remember the earlier reference to the “BEST” decision Don ever made? Here’s its significance: On a day free from his duties, Don went to a beach area in Prestwick where there was a putting green. A lover of golf, Don started playing and soon noticed a stunning young woman with a beautiful smile playing ahead of him. Janet “Netta” Davies Barbour was enjoying a game of golf with her father as her mother looked on. The handsome American GI with the twinkle in his eye did not go unnoticed by Netta either! Very aware of each other, surprisingly, both left the beach that day without any contact. However, Don’s thoughts were not far from the young Scottish woman, and Netta had the young American GI on her mind as well, causing her to comment to her mother, “There was an American soldier playing golf behind us who looked lonely; do you think our Tom [Netta’s brother, also serving in the war] is lonely?”

Wondering if a special opportunity had been lost, wondering if they would ever see each other

again, Don walked on alone; Netta with her parents. In this moment of reverie, Netta looked up, and there was Don walking toward them. Hollywood could not have scripted this serendipitous moment any better!

Immediately, Mrs. Barbour approached Don and asked if he’d like to come back to their home for a visit and refreshments. Her offer of hospitality, although genuinely extended to Don, also was given in part with the hope that if someone came across her son, Tom, in a distant land, they would do likewise. Unsure of the exact time the Army truck was coming by for the return to base, Don reluctantly declined the offer but promised to return the next evening. Netta met him once again at the putting green on the beach and the love affair, now in its 70<sup>th</sup> year, had its beginning! Don remained stationed in Prestwick for six more months and the young couple’s romance grew stronger. However, eventually their time together was interrupted by Don’s transfer to Glasgow, where he continued with postal operations until a call went out for frontline replacements and Don and a buddy were selected to attend Army Replacement Training in Tidworth, England. Within days of the end of this training, the Victory in Europe Treaty was signed at General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s headquarters, the Little Red Schoolhouse, Reims, France, ending the war in Europe. Instead of the battlefield, Don was sent to France and the now famous Little Red Schoolhouse, where he was responsible for the deployment of soldiers either back to America or to the Pacific, depending on the length of military time they’d served.



**Netta and Donald Seus in Scotland, spring 1944.**

## A Profile of Donald William Seus, *continued*

Meanwhile, Don and Netta were talking marriage. Don wrote to Netta's parents seeking permission for them to marry before he returned to the United States. The answer came back, "No, Don. You go back home to America and make sure of your feelings." The young and in-love couple, though disappointed, accepted Netta's parents' advice. Mr. and Mrs. Barbour had heard too many stories of GIs marrying young women they had met during wartime, only to regret the decision upon their return to America, and they did not want this for their beautiful Netta.

Undeterred, shortly after Don's military service had ended and he returned to Irvington, Netta arranged to emigrate to America. On her arrival in Irvington, she and Don were thrilled to be reunited! Wedding plans were quickly finalized and the young couple was united in holy matrimony on April 26, 1947, at the Irvington Presbyterian Church, with the Rev. Philip W. Furst officiating. Following a honeymoon trip to Virginia Beach, the newlyweds established their home with Don's parents at 29 North Eckar Street, where they reside to this day. Adding to the happiness they were enjoying was the birth of their two children, Thomas in 1948 and Audrey in 1955.

Don's secular employment was in the field of insurance, with employment by Atlantic Companies (1946–1979) and Home Insurance Office (1979 until its closing in 1984). Not quite ready to retire, Don began work as a school crossing guard (Broadway at Immaculate Conception School) and parking enforcement officer for our village. When Netta retired in 1988 from her position at Sleepy Hollow Restorations, Don decided the time was right for him as well, affording them many hours to pursue their interests in travel, golf, and summers in the Catskill village of Windham, N.Y.

Don and Netta remain active, committed and loyal members of the Irvington Presbyterian Church, the Irvington Seniors, and the Irvington Historical Society, as well as enthusiastic supporters of village activities and events.

Seventy years have passed since their first

meeting. Netta's beautiful smile is as lovely, warm and welcoming as ever and Don's eyes still possess the beguiling twinkle! The marriage vows spoken between them so many years ago (67 in April 2014!) "to live together . . . to love . . . to comfort . . . to honor and keep . . . in sickness and health . . . forsaking all others . . . so long as you both shall live" remain strong and unbroken. Their union has been abundantly blessed and they continue to enjoy and share a beautiful life together. Spending a lazy, warm, sun-drenched summer morning in their company was a gift; pure joy! Netta and Don are a warm, loving, caring, kind, gentle, giving, long-time treasured Irvington couple (67 and 92 years in town respectively!)—a remarkable example of enduring love, devotion, commitment, and fidelity.



Donald (l.) and Netta (r.) in 2007 at his 65th class reunion.

Donald William Seus, in his tenth decade of life, remains a proud American patriot and Irvington native son! It is our privilege and honor to call him neighbor and friend!

—Barbara Kerr Carrozzi



# Growing Up in Barney Park

## by Douglas “Skipper” Carney

Picture this: You live in a small neighborhood consisting of 15 houses situated on 4 small streets with only one automobile entrance and exit, which means no thru traffic. This neighborhood is two short blocks from two banks, two supermarkets, a post office, pharmacy, delicatessen, stationery/candy store, cleaners, barbershop, liquor store, and a bar/restaurant. Just two short blocks further is a station for a train that goes south to New York City in 45 minutes or north to Albany and points west. This neighborhood is bounded on two sides by a babbling brook and one side by woods. Got it? “Location, location, location.”

Oh, and now add to this neighborhood approximately 35 active, competitive, playful boys and girls of various ages who can’t stand being indoors, give them unfettered access to most of the yards, and voilà, you’ve got Barney Park in the 40s and 50s!

I lived in Barney Park from 1943 through 1961, in the fourth house on the right past the gates. To me, it was an idyllic time and place to grow up. Back in the day, kids loved to be outdoors. Give them places to play and they will create all sorts of activities to engage in whatever the season. We were very fortunate to have generous and understanding neighbors within the park who allowed us to play in their yards. And each yard had particular aspects that were perfect for specific activities.

Most of the activities I describe were ones that occurred during my days in Barney Park, but they were certainly not unique to my time.

Because Barney Park has only one automobile entrance/exit, the streets became one of our playgrounds. We used them to ride bikes; roller skate; play hop-scotch, kickball, “steal the white flag,” and curb ball; hit fly balls with a tennis racket; and sled down the hill in winter. When sledding down the hill, you had two choices when you reached the bottom. You could either go straight into the woods and see how far you could travel towards the brook, or you could make a slight right turn and go flying over the two-foot curb and down into the Briggs/Jones’s yard. For obvious reasons,

going over the curb was the preferred choice. If the streets were plowed, not a problem. We would sled down the sidewalk, a more challenging feat. Your steering had to be pretty exact to avoid running into the trees along the way. And you still had those two choices at the bottom of the hill. Oh, the choices . . . and the fun! And when you added more kids to a sled than it could hold, it was even more fun!



**Sledding down the hill in Barney Park.**

Some years we decorated the front gates with Christmas lights and decorations. It was a joint venture among many of the residents. One time we had to climb up on the two pillars to raise the Christmas lights so a large truck could pass through the gates. Way cool!

On the Briggs/Jones and Gorrissen properties were hills we used to roll down and get a buzz (dizzy) doing it. The Briggs/Jones’s backyard had a wall that overlooked the brook. We used this wall when playing “war.” It was the high-ground advantage when shooting at the enemy below. Under their back porch, we used to smoke cigarettes when the Briggs family was away in the summers. We got caught once. Tawny, our dog, led Anna, our housekeeper, right to us. Boy, did we catch it!

When it snowed, we used to sled down the Gorrissens’ larger hill, bounce over the sidewalk and gully at the bottom, cross the street, bounce over the gully on the other side of the road and into the Briggs/Jones’s front yard. The Gorrissens also had a

# Growing Up in Barney Park

small tree in front of their front porch that wasn't big enough for climbing, but was great for just sitting in, lying under, and doing what kids normally do, "nothing."



"The Snap" in our side yard.

Our side yard and the McCormacks' side yard was where we played tackle football. When it rained, the McCormacks' yard was perfect for "mud football," because the rain pooled at the bottom of their yard, and that was the best place to get tackled. We also played "night football" there. We set up lights on the roof of their side porch and played "fumble." Someone picked up the football and ran around the yard until he got tackled. As soon as he was tackled, he fumbled the ball and another person would recover it and start running with it until he got tackled. Nonstop action! And if we made a great play, we used to make crowd-cheering noises with our mouths. On our side yard, if you made it past the small hill either way, it was a first down. Extra points were kicked between two bushes near the street.

Our property had a great climbing tree next to our house, a maple with the little helicopters that we used to stick on the ends of our noses. You could climb as high as the third floor of our house. One time we climbed the tree during a hurricane. That was great fun and somewhat scary swaying in the high branches. In ninth grade, I fell out of the tree and broke my arm. Graw Gehrman and I were

having a contest to see how fast we could climb down from the top of the tree to the ground. I won! I broke a branch and fell 19'2". I measured it after my arm healed.

The Gordon/Fitzgeralds had two basketball courts in their driveway. One was a low basket nailed to a sycamore tree that was great for small kids to start on. The big kids used to dunk basketballs there, but you always had to watch your feet, because the root of the tree extended above the ground right where you landed. The other basket was attached to their garage and slightly lower than regulation height. There was also a regulation basketball hoop in the Glenns' tennis court where the big kids played.

The Glenns' tennis court, regulation-size, was the focal point of many Barney Park activities. We played hardball, kickball, basketball, touch football (not tackle—the ground was too hard), and stickball; rode bikes; ice-skated when Mr. Glenn flooded the court in the wintertime; conducted races; and even held a circus there one year organized by Mr. Glenn. Ironically, the only sport I don't ever remember being played in the tennis court was tennis! When playing any ball sport there, I can't tell you how many times we had to retrieve balls that had gone over the bank and into the brook. Actually, the only complaint I remember Mr. Glenn making about our playing in his tennis court was that the bank at the end of the court was being eroded by us constantly climbing up and down retrieving balls.



More football at the Glenns' tennis court.

## Growing Up in Barney Park

Stickball was probably the most played sport in the tennis court. There was a cement wall approximately 5 feet high that bordered the Glenns' driveway on which we drew a box that represented the strike zone. We pitched tennis balls from the other side of the court. Wild pitches or fouled-back hits ended up in the Glenns' rock garden. It's a wonder we didn't ruin their garden because of all the times we traipsed through looking for tennis balls, and the balls weren't easy to find.

The Glenns' pool was a cement enclosure that was built into the brook. There was a sluice gate that, when dammed up, filled up this pool to about 5 feet at its deepest point. There were steps built into the wall at the deep end and a large step around the middle of the pool to climb in or out. The pool was approximately 40 feet long and about 12 feet at its widest. The brook water was cold! For kids, it was definitely deep enough to dive or cannonball into. Many of us learned how to swim in this pool. When the pool was dammed up, the brook water ran over the top of the wall, which created a waterfall—another place for us to play.

On more than one occasion, Mr. Glenn left the brook dammed up throughout the winter. Thus, it became an ice-skating rink. What could be better! I remember being able to skate up the brook well into the Almlofs' property; however, we first had to stop and climb over two wooden planks at the shallow end of the pool that crossed the brook. Well, that's no fun. So, what did we do? We skated real fast and then slid under the two planks. Now that was fun! I remember we had a skating party, complete with a bonfire next to the pool and hot chocolate served by Mrs. Glenn on the side porch that overlooked the pool.

The Waterburys lived right behind us on the other side of the brook in a beautiful and historic brick house. They had a stone patio on the side of the house with a very high wall that we used to climb up and down when "Robin Hood" was attacking the king's castle. One spring we built the coolest underground fort on their side yard. It had two rooms, two entrances, and a fireplace. One of the entrances was about 15 feet from the main entrance, so if we were

attacked, we could escape by crawling through the tunnel and out the "secret" entrance. The Waterburys also had an excellent climbing tree right next to Station Road. It was a tall pine tree, sticky sap included, that even had a toilet near the top of it. Don't ask. Remember, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

Right behind the Gehrmanns' house at the top of the hill were "the woods," now Jaffray Park. It was a great place to play cowboys and Indians, war, hide-and-seek, or anything else that came to mind. There was one fallen tree that was Flash Gordon's space ship, and on another was a vine that Tarzan would swing on. There was also a very steep dirt hill overlooking the Almlofs' house that we used to play on. When there was snow on the ground, we used to slide down the hill toward the brook.



**Some of the gang assembled at the brook.  
Everyone looks dry!**

The brook is central to Barney Park; it borders the park on the south and west. Chances are that anyone who lived in Spiro Park or the Half Moon Apartments and who walked to the high school on Main Street crossed the brook, and anyone who lived in Barney Park or the Main Street area and who walked to the Dows Lane Elementary School, crossed the brook, and they all have tales to tell. I can't tell you how many times we fell in. Below are three entries from my mother's diary:

9/28/43 – "Sandy went wading in the brook with his brand new shoes on!"

# Growing Up in Barney Park

10/4/43 – “Sandy fell in the brook with new shoes again.”

12/12/44 – “Sandy threw Margie Naughton’s hat in brook. Kevin fell in brook. Only thing dry was his diapers.”

The brook was our Playland. We tried to catch crayfish and penny bugs, all the while stepping on rocks and trying not to slip into the water. We would also try to go as far as we could from rock to rock without ever leaving the middle of the brook. It was especially difficult after a rainstorm, as the rocks we normally stepped on would be covered by the rushing water, but therein was the challenge! We also built dams along the brook out of whatever we could find, but that was when we were barefooted.

I remember one winter when the ice was frozen solid from behind the McCormacks’ house all the way to the waterfall on Buckhout Street. We piled snow on the ice at the bottom of the waterfall, and then went skating towards the waterfall, sitting down right before we went over the waterfall. That was fun! There was a wooded path along the brook pretty much out of view that went from the Glens’ tennis court to the tunnel that crossed below Buckhout Street behind the Lawrences’ house. I rode my imaginary white horse along this path chasing all the bad guys. I was good at riding horses!

None of us kids wore a watch, but we always knew what time it was by the hourly gonging of the bell emanating from the Town Hall. And after a rainstorm, I loved the sound of the swollen, babbling brook right outside my bedroom window. At night I would open my window and the sound would drift me off to sleep. If the brook wasn’t babbling, it was the clackety-clackety-clack of the “milk train” (freight train) heading into New York sometime after 10 p.m. that put me to sleep.

Back in 2000 after my mother died, per my parents’ wishes, we combined the ashes of both my mother and father in one urn and sprinkled some in the brook behind our former house in Barney Park. My brother Gary and I were standing together looking down at the brook and contemplating the moment, when Gary said, “That rock was always hard to get to,” and I knew exactly which rock he was talking

about! The large rocks were just as they were 50 years earlier. Amazing!

In July, 2012, we held a reunion of kids who grew up in Barney Park during the 40s through the 60s. It was attended by almost 40 people from as far away as California, Florida, and Canada. Four parents were among the attendees. Current Barney Parkers warmly opened their homes to welcome us as we swarmed the neighborhood. Some of the older attendees were initially concerned they wouldn’t know the younger ones, and some of the younger attendees were concerned they wouldn’t know the older ones. Not a problem. Some of the older attendees had babysat for some of the younger attendees, and the younger kids had participated in the same activities that the older kids had. As we reminisced, it was apparent that, despite the span of 30 years, we all shared many of the same memories of growing up in Barney Park. What a day!



**Sandy Carney trying to block Charley Gordon’s imaginary jump shot at the imaginary basketball hoop in the tennis court at the reunion. And they’re both in their seventies! Give it up, fellas! “You can never go back” . . . but you can imagine.**

–Douglas “Skipper” Carney



## Photo Contest Winners!

Once again, the Irvington Historical Society received a number of terrific entries for its annual photo contest. This year's theme was "This Old House." Congratulations to our winners!



First Place: Steve Beech



Second Place: Johanna McHugh



Third Place: Nick Furnarotto

Thanks to all those who entered! And in a nod to our new Historic District, next year's contest theme will be:

**“On and Off Main”**

# The Roost

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## Save the Date:

Irvington Historical Society's

Annual Meeting

**Friday November 15, 2013**

Main Street School 7 p.m.

**Kevin Avery**

**Metropolitan Museum of Art**

Lecture and Video Presentation on

the Hudson River Painters.

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