



The Roost

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IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2002

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The McVickar House

Dear Members:

As, I'm sure, most of you know, the Irvington Historical Society has begun the extensive process involved in establishing the McVickar House as its future home.

The house, 131 Main Street, is a 2 1/2 story, wood frame, single family structure with a basement and field-stone foundation. Built in 1853, it is one of the oldest homes on Main Street.

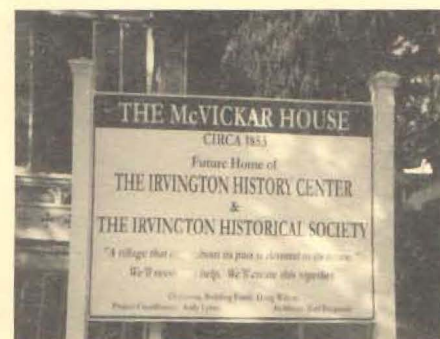
It's original owner, the Rev. John McVickar, was a dynamic leader in the Episcopal Diocese of New York. He was the first professor of Political Economy at Columbia College, twice serving as its acting president and from 1844 to 1862, he was chaplain to the United States forces at Fort Columbus, Governor's Island, New York. He was a good friend of Washington Irving and corresponded with literary figures in England and Scotland.

In 1809, McVickar married Elizabeth (Eliza) Bard, daughter of Samuel Bard, M.D., physician to George Washington and founder of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the University of the State of New York (later Columbia Physicians and Surgeons). John and Eliza had 9 children, only 3 of whom survived him.

For a brief period, the McVickar house served as the rectory for John McVickar's son, the Rev. William Augustus McVickar, during the construction of St. Barnabas Church and the stone Rectory.

The Society is in the process of applying for landmark status for the McVickar House.

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The McVickar House, built in 1853, is believed to be the second oldest house on Main Street.

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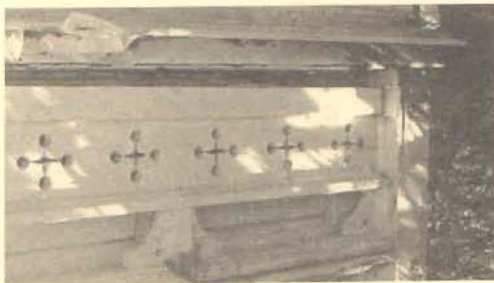
The McVickar House, continued

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The sketch above shows the McVickar house as it appeared in the early 20th century. The house is illustrative of early development in the Hudson Valley. The house is an intact representation of transitional Romantic styles of Greek Revival and Gothic Revival popular during the 19th century. It is the hope of the society to restore a number of the house's original features.

The original wood clapboard siding has been covered with asphalt shingles. The clapboard is in good condition and can be restored. The gabled roof is currently covered with deteriorated asphalt shingles. The rear porch is supported by original vernacular Greek Revival square columns with simplified pedestal and capital molding detail.



Quatrefoil motifs embellish the front porch

There is a single story full-width porch on the front façade. This porch has a hip roof and decorative carved wood columns with flat-cut brackets. The saw cut baluster details with their quatrefoil motifs are an early example of an "American" or Folk Victorian style that carried into the twentieth century.


The windows are original double-hung, six-over-six pane wood sashes, shuttered with hinged wood louver "screens."

Decorative carved verge boards along the gable ends and trim along the eaves are simplified Gothic Revival features.

The interior of the structure is in deteriorated condition and will undergo extensive renovation. Any damaged structural framing will be repaired, and insulation, air vents and moisture barriers will be installed. New mechanical systems, sheet rock and flooring will be installed.



Village historian, Peter Oley, and local Architect, Earl Ferguson, at an early inspection of the McVickar House.

There is much work to be done but the first steps have been taken. The initial responses have been generous and positive. Village residents have been anxious to help in many different ways from historical research, to architectural plans and restoration advice to the hands-on expertise of skilled craftsmen. We look forward to the venture ahead. 

*Betsy Griggs Wilson
President of the Board of Trustees,
Irvington Historical Society*

From Attics To Archives

By Pat Ryan

On Sunday, October 20th, the Irvington Historical Society presented an exciting program highlighting the Society's extensive fashion collection. On display were a wide array of men's, women's and children's attire from the 1700's through the 1900's. Artfully chosen and arranged by the Society's curator, Barbara Sciulli, the exhibit afforded a glimpse into the way styles and life-styles have changed over the last hundred years.

Some of the highlights of the show included a stunning array of over 30 dresses from the 19th and 20th century. Those below were donated by Barbara Denyer.



Dress of aqua silk decorated with embroidered designs and white beads, circa 1920. Originally owned by Charity Griggs.

Two piece, blue striped, silk taffeta gown, with an elaborately tucked & ruffled skirt made for a large bustle, circa 1870.



Dress of gold satin with laced bodice and chiffon ruffles on the bustled skirt, circa 1890.



Barbara Denyer has a wonderful collection of vintage clothing which she frequently shares with the Society for special programs and events.

Ms. Denyer, pictured above enjoying the event, was one of the founding trustees of the Irvington Historical Society. She has a great interest in textiles and clothing and is an avid and knowledgeable collector.

The 1920's "Flapper" gown below, the object of many "oh's" and "ah's", was donated by Sue Prior, who many remember as the Director of Irvington's Children's Theater.



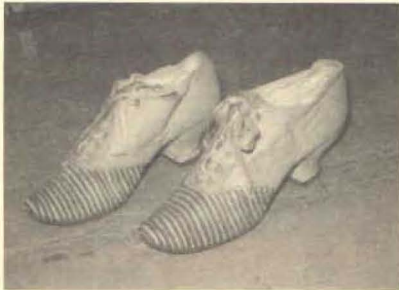
Elaborately beaded, iridescent sequined "Flapper" gown.

Continued on page 4

From Attics to Archives, continued

Continued from page 3

In all over 75 items were on display at this popular event. Among the ladies accessories were an assortment of purses, and parasols, undergarments and shoes. A collection of elaborate lace shawls adorned the high walls of the Archive Room.



Early 19th century wedding shoes from the Havemeyer family, donated by Charles and Ann Elliott.

There were also a number of men's items on view including a tuxedo, an Ardsley Country Club jacket, and a selection of hats and canes. Of particular interest was a shirt belonging to Washington Irving. The shirt, which the Historical Society recently had preserved by the Textile Conservation Workshop, was donated by the Warnock family.

Another popular collection, the wide array of baby clothes, long white dresses of cotton and silk, embroidered bibs and bonnets and soft shoes drew a great deal of interest. These items were particularly enhanced by the display of family photographs provided by Board member Joan Lobdell, who assisted curator, Barbara Sciulli, in mounting the show. ❧



Members enjoyed exploring the many treasures in the Archive Room.

Pat Ryan is Vice President of the Board of Trustees, Irvington Historical Society.



An Exciting Coincidence



In May, the Irvington Historical Society received a wonderful collection of photographs of "Rochroane", better known today as Beltzhoover or Halsey Castle. Among these, was the striking photograph of Arabella Beltzhoover, circa 1915, shown at left. As fate, or chance, would have it, the dress which Arabella Beltzhoover is wearing in the photo was donated to the Society shortly before the exhibit by Marianne Marra. The dress can be seen adorning the restored mannequin which appears on page 7. ❧

What's In A Name?

By Peter Oley

In previous issues of the Roost, I listed the derivation of the street names in the village proper. The names are familiar, Buckhout, Cottenet, Dutcher and Grinnell and yet few of us are aware of the remarkable histories that these names represent. This series will take an in depth look at some of the "Irvingtonians" these streets are named after.

Moses Hicks Grinnell was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1803, the sixth son of Cornelius and Sylvia Howland. In 1818, he went to New York and joined his brother Joseph's shipping firm Fish & Grinnell. When Joseph retired in 1828, his place was taken by Robert Minturn and the firm became known as Grinnell, Minturn & Co. One of their ships, the famous clipper "Flying Cloud" performed an amazing feat of sailing on a voyage from New York to San Francisco, running over 433 miles in a single day.

In 1836, Grinnell married Julia Irving, daughter of William and Julia (Paulding) Irving. William was Washington Irving's brother. Moses and Julia had three children, Irving, Julia and Fannie. Although we are unsure of exactly when Grinnell moved to Irvington, we do know that his villa "Wolfert's Dell" which was just north of Sunnyside, was built prior to 1849.



Detail of Grinnell's villa "Wolfert's Dell", as it appeared in Edwin Whitefield's book "Hudson River Houses".

Grinnell was elected as a Whig to the Twenty-seventh Congress (March 4, 1839 to March 3, 1841) and was a presidential elector on the Fremont ticket in 1856.

Grinnell played an active role in the political life of New York City. He became president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1843 and on November 27, 1850, while serving in that capacity, he wrote a letter to his friend Secretary of State Daniel Webster requesting government employment for Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi. He was also a member of the original Central Park Commission, President of the Merchant's Savings Bank and from 1860 to 1865 he was a Commissioner of Charities and Correction. He was president of the Union Club from 1867 to 1873 and was appointed naval officer of customs in 1870-1871.

Grinnell was also involved in the social issues of his day. He gave liberally toward Dr. Elisha Kent Kane's Arctic expedition of 1853 in search of the lost Sir John Franklin Party. He contributed generously toward the National cause during the Civil War and served on the Union Defense Committee. One interesting anecdote tells of the time when Fort Sumter was attacked in Charleston Harbor. Grinnell offered to pay one-third of the cost of 400 men to reinforce the garrisons. The offer went to the President, but it was refused. Abraham Lincoln empowered Grinnell in 1861 to act for the Navy Department in matters pertaining to "the forwarding of troops and supplies for the public defense."

Grinnell was recognized as a public-spirited citizen who gave generously of his time and money. He was one of the merchant princes of New York and enjoyed the friendship of Daniel Webster and William H. Seward. Grinnell died in New York City on November 24, 1877. He is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Sleepy Hollow, New York. ☞

Peter Oley is the Irvington Village Historian.

Oral History Project

By Gail Weiler

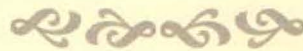
The Irvington Historical Society is forming an Oral History Committee to preserve the memories, stories and personal histories which characterize Irvington. Through video-taped, digitized interviews, we can archive this information to serve generations now and in the future.

We are compiling a list of residents, past and present, who might share their remembrances of people, places and things that should not be forgotten. If you know anyone who should be included on this list, please let us know their name,

telephone number or address, and if possible a short biographical sketch to aid the interviewer.

Committee volunteers are needed as well for various facets of the project. If you are interested in helping, or if you have information or names to share, please contact Pat Bonomi, 591-8052, e-mail, patbon@aol.com, or Gail Weiler, 693-2023, e-mail, drrichw@aol.com, or information can be dropped off in person at 12 Main Street. ☞

Gail Weiler is a trustee of the Irvington Historical Society.



Annual Meeting

The Irvington Historical Society's Annual Meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 6th at 8 P.M., in the Knox Auditorium, Irvington Presbyterian Church. An exciting and informative evening is planned. Betsy Griggs Wilson, President of the Board of Trustees, will open the meeting with the Society's Annual Report. This will be followed by nominations and elections of Officers.

The highlight of the evening will be a talk by historian and author, John Steele Gordon. Mr. Gordon's recent work "A Thread Across the Ocean" tells the story of a unique chapter in American history, the laying of the first trans-Atlantic telegraph cable. Released by Walker & Company in July 2002, this work has been well received. "Mr. Gordon's book is a masterly retelling of the cable adventure, filled with illuminating detail about the times and the people who made it happen." (*New York Times*, July 14, 2002). The principal force behind this massive undertaking was Irvington resident Cyrus Field, and Gordon gives us a detailed account of the 12 years and four failed attempts that Field endured to bring this project to realization.

John Steele Gordon is the author of several books on American economic history. He writes a regular column "The Business of America" for *American Heritage* magazine and can be heard regularly on Public Radio International's *Marketplace*.

The talk will be followed by a book signing. In addition, the plans for the McVickar House will be on display. This should be an exciting evening. We hope that many of our members will be able to attend. ☞



Curator's Corner

By Barbara Sciulli

The Challenge of Restoration

The curator manages the Irvington Historical Society's archival collection utilizing accepted museum and library standards and practices. The Board of Directors established these standards in The Guidelines For Collection Management Policy. The purpose of these guidelines was to establish specific and consistent policies for acquiring, accessioning, and deaccessioning items and collections. The process of cataloging, labeling, filing, and preparing objects for storage may seem exacting and dull, but each item brings its own challenge.

The most recent addition to the archive did just that. Barbara Denyer, a generous contributor to the Historical Society, offered us a petite, size 4, dress-maker's form. She had rescued it many years ago from the attic of Caroline Dutcher. The form stood in the damp, dusty Dutcher attic for unknown years and in Barbara's attic since the rescue. It was soiled, ragged, rusty and dusty. Would it meet the collection objectives, the acquisition guidelines, and could it be saved?



Mannequin rescued from the attic of Caroline Dutcher

The evaluation process began: Was the form pertinent to the history of Irvington? Yes. It had been in the possession of one of Irvington's founding families, the Dutchers. It was the first object belonging to a founding family to be offered to the society. It is an object common in many households in a bygone era and finally, it could be very useful.

Could the form be rehabilitated for our use? This was a more difficult question. It deserved careful

(outdoor) inspection. It was vacuumed. The nuts and bolts unscrewed despite the rust. My sister Diane and I carefully removed the ragged, torn, dirty, peeling fabric cover. Because we didn't want to make the embedded grit fly, we used embroidery scissors and needle nosed pliers to gently cut the fabric from nail and screw heads.

Under the "skin" was a firm pressed cardboard body, undamaged. The form has a sophisticated mechanism that would allow her measurements to be adjusted from neck to hip in all directions. Because the thin metal straps and screws of the mechanism or skeleton were rusted and for the most part unmovable, it will remain as it is, size 4.

The rust was removed from its stand. Its base and neck were primed and painted. The screw and nail heads were sanded with steel wool on a cotton swab to keep cleaning products from soaking into the cardboard body. A new fabric covering was applied and it will have several suits of "skin" in various hues, so it can compliment whatever outfit it is modeling.

The mannequin was restored and added to the collection because her history, provenance, and purpose met the requirements for accessioning items. She now proudly stands in the Archive Room modeling a gown from the collection.

What will the next challenge be? *CS*



A dress worn by Arabella Belzhooover, circa 1915, adorns the mannequin restored by the Society's Curator, Barbara Sciulli.


The Roost

Irvington Historical Society
PO Box 23
Irvington-on-Hudson, NY 10533
Phone: (914) 591-0703

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Submissions

The Irvington Historical Society is always looking for suitable material, whether historical essay or personal reminiscence, for *The Roost*. We believe that many of our members have information or stories that would be of interest to our readers. If you have a suggestion or idea for an article, please contact Pat Ryan, 591-7809, e-mail jppjryan@aol.com.

In addition, while every effort is made to insure accuracy, the Society cannot assume responsibility for statements made by contributors. 

Wish List

The Irvington Historical Society would like to obtain the names and addresses of former residents in order to share with them the news and plans for the McVickar House.

If you know of any former residents who might be interested in hearing about the Historical Society's new home, would you jot down their names and addresses and mail them to:

Irvington Historical Society
PO Box 23
Irvington-on-Hudson, NY,
10533