



The Roost

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1

IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING 2011

IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OFFICERS: 2010-2011

President: Andy Lyons
Vice President: Pat Ryan
Corresponding Secretary:
Barbara Carrozzi
Recording Secretary:
Brenda Livingston
Treasurer: John Ryan
Curator: Barbara Sciuilli

TRUSTEES:

Jane Berger
Frank Campbell
Barbara Carrozzi
Florence Costello
Barbe Crowley
Veronica Gedrich
Jack Hurson
Brenda Livingston
Andy Lyons
Sue Maley
Claire Mastroianni
Lenore Munigle
Ginny Read
Pat Ryan
Walter Schwartz
Barbara Sciuilli, Ex-officio
Amy Sherwood
Reina Sinni
Mary Toomy
Kevin Weber
Erik Weiselberg
Betsy Wilson, Ex-officio

Letter from the President



Dear Members:

After a long and harsh winter, the spring season is so welcome. While it was cold and snowy outside, we were busy presenting some great programs to the community; I hope you had a chance to attend them. The Society hosted Barnet Schecter's lecture on his book, *George Washington's America: A Biography Through His Maps*, a fascinating look at how maps influenced Washington's decision-making. Chris Jussel, the original host of the *Antiques Roadshow*, shared the ins and outs and behind-the-scenes stories of this popular PBS show. And we have opened our new spring exhibit: Things, Etc.

We also held our third annual Tomorrow's Historians program at the high school and enjoyed excellent presentations by students of their research papers. My favorite part of this program is how well the students handle the questions from the audience. They truly master their topics and it shows! I am proud to announce that, with the financial help of the Society, the Irvington High School Academic Challenge Team is participating in the National History Bee in Washington, D.C. They are off to compete as we go to press and we wish them well.

Next month we have scheduled a lecture by Irvington's own Kate Buford on her new biography, *Native American Son: The Life and Sporting Legend of Jim Thorpe*.

As always, our committees are busy with their projects. The Program

Committee is planning its fall offerings; the Exhibit Committee is working on the next exhibit (a comparison of the Brothers Grimm and Washington Irving); the Photo Committee is planning this September's photo contest—so start taking those pictures!; the Collection Committee is busy cataloguing (a never-ending job); the Roost Committee is already preparing the next issue; and the Technology Committee is developing a Historical Society blog so we can keep you up to date on what's going on. There is always plenty to do at the Historical Society! We have 17 committees that keep the wheels turning, so if you would like to lend a hand, let us know!

Most importantly, I would like to thank you all for your membership and support. You keep us going and we are very grateful. If you haven't yet renewed your membership for 2011, please do. We need your help.

Andy Lyons
President of the Board of Trustees

Contents:

- 1 Letter from the President
- 2 Mayor George Gillen by Barbara Carrozzi
- 3 Irvington Senior Center by Francis D Campbell
- 7 Things, Etc.
- 8 The Art of Collecting
- 10 Curator's Corner by Barbara Sciuilli
- 11 Tomorrow's Historians
- 12 Save the Date

Mayor George Gillen (1907–2001)

by Barbara Carrozzi

This is the first in a series of occasional columns profiling Irvington personalities — from prominent citizens of days gone by to contemporaries who help give our village its special character.

By the time George Gillen was elected mayor of the Village of Irvington in 1959, he was already involved in many community activities, including serving as Cub Master and as a Democratic committeeman. During his four-year tenure as mayor, many changes occurred in our village: The library grew within the Town Hall, the Irvington Boat Club found a home, Matthiessen Park underwent its first expansion, and the Irvington Senior Citizen Program began to take root, with the purchase of the former St. Paul's Methodist Church for use as a community center. This new Isabel K. Benjamin Center was conceived as a gathering place for all ages. The Senior Citizen Program continued to meet there until it was moved to the current Senior Center at Scenic Hudson Park in 2001.



Former St. Paul's Methodist Church, now the Recreation Center.

Mayor Gillen and his wife, Mary Frances Mullin Gillen (whose contributions to Irvington made her an important village citizen in her own right),

lived in Irvington 26 years, during which time he taught history at the DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx. After his retirement, the Gillens moved full time to New Lebanon, New York. Not surprisingly, Mayor Gillen became involved in local politics and other community affairs there. A man of many interests, throughout his life he pursued his love of history, reading, traveling, and music, singing in both Irvington and New Lebanon choirs. Along the way, he also found time to volunteer, continuing to deliver Meals on Wheels until he was 85 years old.

When George Gillen died on September 1, 2001, he left a legacy of service to his communities and a devoted family of six children and their spouses, 19 grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren. His beloved wife and one daughter pre-deceased him.



Photograph of Mayor George Gillen taken after his re-election in 1961.

Barbara Carrozzi

Irvington Senior Center

by Francis D. Campbell

Irvington residents, whether young or old, have never lacked motivation in finding recreational activities. However, the facilities and funding that would enable residents to pursue these activities as Village-sponsored programs were not really in place until the early 1960s. A privately funded Irvington Youth Center, Inc., fell under the direction of a full-time recreation supervisor who also held a salaried position as Irvington's superintendent of parks. The Youth Center was allowed use of Village parks but did not own any facilities. Seeking to remedy this situation, Richard C. Wells, president of the Youth Center board of directors, and Irvington mayor George F. Gillen sought to raise funds for the purchase of the recently vacated St. Paul's Methodist Church property (at the corner of Main and North Eckar streets). When renovated, the building would be renamed the Isabel K. Benjamin Community Center, in honor of Ms. Benjamin, "a first lady of Irvington," who led the village Girl Scouts in exemplary fashion for years. From the outset, Mr. Wells and Edward McDermott, director of the Youth Center's spring program, saw the new facility as providing recreation "for all age groups." Mayor Gillen, too, recognized that, in addition to youth recreation, "there are many additional ways in which the building can serve the Village of Irvington," noting several adult groups interested in the center as a meeting place.

The final phase of the fund-raising effort got

underway on April 15, 1961. Ted Mack, well-known host of *The Original Amateur Hour*, which aired on radio and TV, was an Irvington resident, living at the time on Meadowbrook Road. He offered to conduct an amateur contest at the elementary school, the proceeds of which would be added to the fund established for purchase and renovation of the Methodist Church. The Village would assume responsibility for the community recreation program, formerly conducted by the Youth Center, on June 1, 1961.



Ad for *The Original Amateur Hour*, a popular show hosted by Ted Mack from 1948 to 1970.

Accordingly, under the heading "Senior Citizens Meeting in Irvington," the October 28, 1965, issue of the *Irvington Gazette* notifies residents that the Recreation Department of Irvington invites those 60 [now 55] years of age and older, to attend a meeting at the Isabel K. Benjamin Community Center on November 4th. This "Organization Meeting" was called to establish, "for the first time in the history of the department, a program of activities for the senior members of the Village." Following introductory remarks by

Irvington Senior Center, *continued*

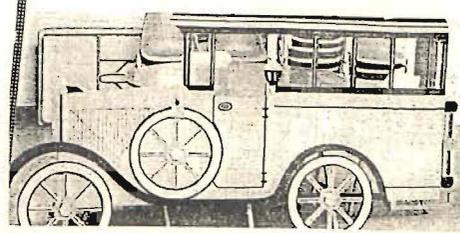
then-Mayor Peter A. Peyser, Ronald W. Chase, Superintendent of the Recreation Department, chaired the meeting and Wolfert Lockwood, Village Historian, gave a one-hour slide presentation on the historical development of Irvington.

Thus was created not only a meeting place, but what has become a recreation hall, learning/information center, community support group, charitable activities source, and home-away-from-home for so many of those who, over the years, have shared in making Irvington the community that it is. The group was to meet Tuesday afternoons. At a Christmas party held in the early 1970s, Deputy Mayor Adele Warnock, a club member, scanned the faces of the 90 attendees for those who had lived in the village for 40 to 70 years previously. She listed names such as Mondelli, Reale, Gilchrist, Tewey, Burke, Herlihy, and McHugh.

Not a group to sit back and let others take care of matters, the seniors pitched in during the 1976 Bicentennial celebrations by producing wooden Continental soldiers that lined the village streets for most of the year. These were later sold at auction to help raise funds for a mini-bus.

With additional money coming from bake sales, a food booth at the annual Fireman's Bazaar, private donations, and a mail campaign, more than \$12,000 was raised for the purchase of the mini-bus in 1977. The bus would convey seniors on shopping trips, visits to doctors, and recreation excursions. The Village would provide insurance, maintenance, and garaging

for the vehicle. "We hope to keep the mini-bus on the road for at least 35 hours a week," said Roy Flowers, Superintendent of the Recreation Department.



Mock-up used as the logo for the mini-bus fund-raising events.

By the mid-1980s, the seniors could look back on a wonderful succession of excursions to a variety of destinations. There was a boat ride on the Hudson River aboard the *Alexander Hamilton*, and trips to Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, Lake Mohonk, and Albany, where they visited state legislators for a tour and a chance to voice their concerns. Special events were held locally at Matthiessen Park, with some hosted by Irvington's religious institutions. Lorraine DePaoli, who had organized these outings for some ten years previous, offered the following observation in the *Enterprise* (September 13, 1984): "Members are expanding their friendships at a time when most seniors' family members and friendships are decreasing." Two such members were Stanley Zubas, then 67, and Helen Beswick, then 64. After returning from a March, 1984, senior outing to Lake Waramaug in Connecticut where they had enjoyed lunch with Helen's close friends, the Warnocks, they reconnected in Irvington for daily walks together along the Croton Aqueduct. As reported later in the *Enterprise*,

Irvington Senior Center, *continued*

the daily walks “led straight to Judge Chessari’s North Tarrytown offices, where the couple was married, with Adele and Bill Warnock as witnesses.” The marriage took place on July 26th and when the seniors held their annual picnic at Matthiessen Park in August, 80 members joined in the celebration for the newlyweds.

The last decade of the twentieth century saw continued growth of the Senior Center alongside steady expansion in the overall programs of the Recreation Center, which was becoming somewhat overcrowded. Fortunately, this situation was alleviated during Mayor Dennis P. Flood’s administration, when a building designated for use as the Senior Center was included in the plan for development of what has since become Scenic Hudson Park. The property at 29 Bridge Street had been previously occupied by a succession of lumber companies and the 4800-square-foot building to be occupied by the seniors was formerly the offices of the Advanced Transit Bus Company. A \$200,000 Community Development Block Grant funded 50 percent of the renovation. In the *Journal News*, Feb. 28, 1999, Irvington Recreation Director Joe Archino comments that “the new center will expand the village’s offerings to seniors even more.” In the same article, then Village Clerk/Treasurer Lawrence Schopfer remarks, “Most importantly, it’s a space of its own where seniors will have a building to themselves.”

And what a space! Following open houses at the center on March 3, 4, and 10th, 2001, some 200 seniors were given access to a beautiful building, adjoining a beautiful park, on the shore of a beautiful river.



The Irvington Senior Center.

As the *Journal News* reported in 2004, three years after the opening, the center “offers a warm and welcoming interior to its guests, as well as commanding views of the Hudson River. It has become a favored destination for the village’s elderly, who can find lectures, exercise, and travel opportunities.” In the same article, Donald Seus comments, “I enjoy just coming down, seeing people, being among friends. . . . There’s nothing not to like about it. It’s an excellent facility.” Pictured in the same article are seniors Helen Uszak and Barbara Kraus, assisting with the Midnight Run, a program that distributes food to the homeless.

Since assuming the position of Director of the Senior Center in June of 1987, Joan Armstrong has successfully continued its programs during the period of transition from Main Street to Bridge Street. Through cooperative endeavors she has also expanded senior benefits and center outreach. In 2002, at the request of Community Police Officer Peter Carelli, the Police Benevolent Association of Irvington purchased circular floor fans for distribution to seniors in need of summer heat relief. Carelli also helped the village join a metro-area program that collects cell phones, reprograms

Irvington Senior Center, *continued*

them with 911 access, and distributes them free-of-charge to seniors in need. With regard to Armstrong and Carelli's efforts, Recreation Superintendent Joe Archino commented that "they make life better for seniors." In 2004, the center joined forces with AT&T Telecom Pioneers, when 20 center members made Hug-a-Bears for distribution to children who had been through traumatic situations, such as car accidents and medical emergencies. Through an all-volunteer service known as FISH (Friends In Service Here), the center also provides escorts to medical appointments. In setting up for events and other daily matters, Joan receives great assistance from Herbert Mueller, Recreation Assistant, while Hank Samoyedny, mini-bus driver, assures the safe conveyance of seniors to and from programs.



Ivy DeLuca Morgan joins her parents, Irene and Raymond DeLuca, at the Senior Center.

When Ted Mack held that amateur contest in 1961, one of the contestants was a young girl named Irene (Ivy) DeLuca. Little did she realize that fifty years later her parents, Ray and Irene DeLuca, would be enjoying the weekly programs of the center for which the contest sought to raise funds. For almost half a century, the Irvington Senior Center has been a source of support for the village's elderly, while drawing upon the wisdom, experience, and altruism of that population to benefit the community at large.

Francis D. Campbell

The author would like to acknowledge the staff of the Irvington Public Library, especially Betsy Sadewbite, Local History Librarian, for providing access to the materials that made this article possible.



Society President Andy Lyons, left, with author Barnet Schecter.

On Sunday, March 27, the Irvington Historical Society welcomed author Barnet Schecter, who spoke about his most recent book, *George Washington's America: a Biography Through His Maps*. Washington's hobby was cartography and the maps were always central to his work as a military leader and statesman. Schecter's talk offered new insights into Washington's character and his transformation from private citizen to founding father.

Things, Etc.

On Saturday, March 19th, the Historical Society opened its newest exhibit, Things, Etc. Claire Mastroianni, with the help of Society curator Barbara Sciulli and a team of volunteers, has fashioned a varied and fascinating look at the “things” that people collect.

The art of collecting involves seeking out, locating, acquiring, organizing, cataloging, displaying, storing and caring for whatever items are of interest to the individual collector. These may be antique— at least 100 years old — or simply collectible. The word *vintage* may be used to describe some collectibles. Some people view their collections primarily as an investment; others make a point of using and enjoying their treasures.

Many people have shared their collections with us in Things, Etc. The items range from the very old to contemporary; some hold great monetary or sentimental value and some are just representative of their time and popularity.



Volunteers, from left, Ginny Read, Mary Scandura, Mary Elizabeth Hartnett, and Claire Mastroianni mounting the exhibit.



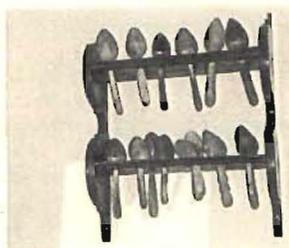
Exhibit curator Claire Mastroianni views the exhibit with visitor Trudy Rabb.



Marvel action figures.



A mysterious fisherman joins the exhibit.



A collection of wooden spoons.



Board members Sue Maley and Florence Costello serve refreshments.



Star Wars collector and high school teacher Dr. Erik Weiselberg crosses light sabers with life-size Darth Vader.



Whimsical fishing lures.



Jewelled tree made by Christopher Bergamini.

The Art of Collecting

Star Wars

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, I fell in love with *Star Wars*. As soon as I saw the film in 1977, I started collecting action figures, and they became a major item on my holiday wish lists. At some point in my teens, I thought I had outgrown them and I gave them away — those were the dark times. When the re-mastered movies came out in 1997, followed by the prequels, the toys and marketing followed. Like a scavenging Jawa, I scooped up whatever I could. Since then, the collection has been languishing in the outer rim of storage far from the bright center of the universe. But now, thanks to the Irvington Historical Society, I'm honored to present a good part of my collection. Shocked observers ask me how I could open the packages of what must surely be valuable toys, but to me they are more valuable out of the box, bringing back warm memories of childhood and exciting my imagination. I hope you enjoy seeing them as much as I did setting them up, and may the Force be with you!

Erik Weiselberg



White House Christmas Ornaments

The White House Historical Association started issuing official White House ornaments in the 1980s. I first became aware of them in 1990 when I received one as a Christmas gift from a family member who lives in Virginia. He is the reason I now have 21 of them. It's one of the gifts I look forward to receiving every year, not only to see who is being honored but also because each one is very special to look at. I also enjoy reading the story that comes with each ornament because it is a part of the history of our country and heritage.

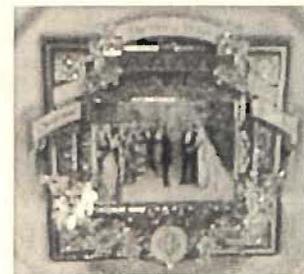
The 2003 ornament, below, depicts a boy on a rocking horse and was inspired by a Victorian illustration of a child's joy at a Christmas party during Ulysses Grant's administration (1868–1877).



Christmas 2007 honors the first White House wedding—Grover Cleveland's on June 2, 1886.

Come by the McVickar House and see the others on display.

Mary Elizabeth Hartnett



The Art of Collecting

Patricia Breen Ornaments

The Christmas ornaments on display in the Things, Etc. exhibit were designed by the noted artist and designer Patricia Breen. Breen and her husband, Eric Shaikewitz, started producing the ornaments in 1994 in Krakow, Poland, where they traveled after college to support local businesses there. Their own small cottage industry began in just two rooms and a bathtub. At that time, most ornaments were being made from century-old molds, but Breen's designs were new and exciting—inspired by nature, artifacts, buildings, and people. While the designs themselves were new, these beautiful handmade glass ornaments continued to be produced in the old Eastern European tradition.

Breen comes up with the ideas and Shaikewitz sculpts the models. Each mold is limited to 2000 pieces, with many ornaments even more exclusive. From the very fine glitter to the detail in the painting, the expressive eyes and embellishments, it is easy to see why these pieces are considered works of art.

In 1995, the Art Institute of Chicago commissioned Breen to design a Monet-themed ornament. She submitted three designs, each of which was accepted. Since that time, she has produced many more fine-art-inspired pieces.

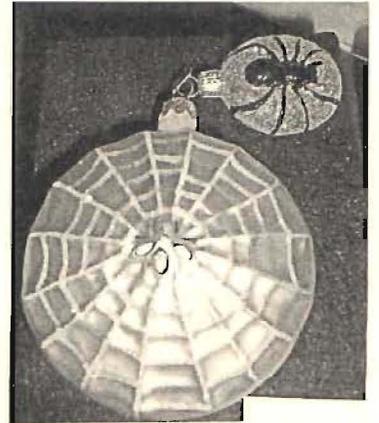
The ornaments on exhibit at the McVickar House include bees and beehives, spiders, museum commissions, and the more traditional Santas. I have

collected more than 200 ornaments, acquired over the last 20 years. In addition to Breen, I collect the works of Christopher Radko and Kurt Adler. My favorite ornaments are Breen's trees honoring individual artists, several of which are now on display.

Mary Scandura



Bee ornament.



Spider and web ornament.



Rene's Tree inspired by Magritte.

Curator's Corner

By Barbara Sciulli



The Irvington Historical Society Library Collection is a small and eclectic one that includes books, booklets, and other written materials that relate to Irvington and its residents. All of the books and materials are for research and reference. The books are organized by subject:

- Δ HISTORY: Colonial, General, Irvington, Local, Native American, Revolutionary and Westchester
- Δ ARCHITECTURE
- Δ ARTS AND ARTIFACTS: Collection Care, Organization Information
- Δ LOCAL AUTHORS: Carmer, Irving, others in alphabetical order
- Δ BIOGRAPHY
- Δ HUDSON RIVER
- Δ NATURAL HISTORY AND GARDENING
- Δ LITERATURE AND POETRY
- Δ RAILROADS
- Δ SCHOOLBOOKS AND YEARBOOKS.

Most of the books have been donated.

When houses are closed or people move, we receive

many collections. Not every volume becomes an addition to our library; at some time we plan on having a book sale for those that do not. Local authors and speakers at the Historical Society's programs also donate items.

The Washington Irving collection includes many editions of most of his published writings. Early editions, revised editions, children's editions, and even Classic Comics exist for several titles; e.g., "Rip Van Winkle." Of particular interest is an indexed set of 4 volumes of Irving's letters compiled and edited by his nephew Pierre M. Irving, published in 1862. The letters form a biography of Washington Irving's life from his youth in New York City, his travels in the United States and Europe, his term as Ambassador to Spain, to his final days nearby at Sunnyside.

The Library Collection—an interesting mix of material and information—is the first to be completely catalogued online. Our goal is to enter all our collections into Past Perfect, our cataloging software.

Volunteers are needed and welcome.

Irvington Historical Society Photo Contest

This year's theme:

The Doors and Doorways of Irvington

Deadline July 28, 2011

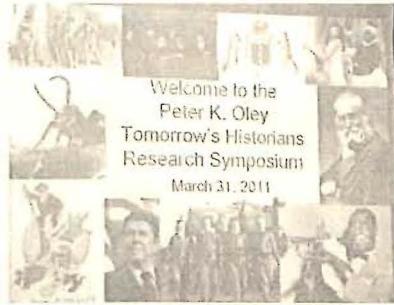
Get those cameras clicking!



Tomorrow's Historians



Society Board President Andy Lyons with Melissa Kuriloff (left) and Emily Greenspan.



Presenters (from left) Charlotte Follari, Nicole Swiecka, and Julia Decker.



President Andy Lyons congratulates presenter Toby Boff.



Society Board Member and moderator Dr. Erik Weiselberg addresses the audience.



Irvington High School Principal Scott Mosenthal and Society member Pat Bonomi.

On March 31, 2010, the Irvington Historical Society and the Social Studies Department of Irvington Schools hosted the third annual Peter K. Oley student research symposium, “Tomorrow’s Historians: Showcasing Exceptional Research by Irvington Students.” High School social studies teacher and Society board member Dr. Erik Weiselberg moderated the evening’s panel discussions, in which the students presented brief statements about their research topics and findings, and addressed audience and moderator questions.

The program was divided into four sessions focusing on different historical themes. Panelists in Session 1—Origins of Capitalism, Diversity, American Identity and Globalization—were Allyson Gambardella, Gus Passov, Helen Russell, Emma Harman, Jonah Scott, and Emily Greenspan. Addressing Session 2’s question—“Well-behaved Women Seldom Make History,” or Do They?—were Charlotte Follari, Nicole Swiecka, Julia Decker, Yeon Joo Park, Julia Canning, and Jane Richter.

Presenting during Session 3—Legacies of Communism—were James McLoughlin, Hyanghwa Kwak, Avery Nisbet, Toby Boff, and Reid Mitchell. The Session 4 panel on the topic Political Leadership and the Fates of Nations included Cleo Aukland, Megan Jones, Melissa Kuriloff, and Sam Donow.

Society President Andy Lyons presented each participant with a copy of *Irvington: Then and Now*. Copies of the papers will be kept on file by the Irvington Historical Society.

The Roost

Irvington Historical Society
P.O. Box 23
Irvington-on-Hudson, NY 10533
Phone: (914) 591-1020
www.irvingtonhistoricalsociety.org

Nonprofit
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 3304
White Plains, NY

Current Resident or:



Save the date!
Irvington's own Kate Buford
will speak on her latest book,
Native American Son:
The Life and Sporting Legend of
Jim Thorpe.

Sunday, May 15, 2011, at 4 p.m.
Parish Hall St. Barnabas Church
Book signing follows.