



The Roost

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IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2012

IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Letter from the President



Dear Members:

Our 2012 membership drive is underway and by now you should have received my letter asking for your renewal. Sometimes it seems that all my letters to you ask for contributions, but the Irvington Historical Society is solely funded by your generosity. Please tell us you approve of what we do by renewing your membership!

I am always so proud of the Society's board and their commitment to presenting outstanding programs and exhibits. Last year we published spring and fall editions of *The Roost* and presented two excellent exhibits: Things, Etc., showcasing collections; and Once Upon a Time: The Stories of the Brothers Grimm and Washington Irving, curated by our own Erik Weiselberg, who also presented his research in a lecture. Authors Kate Buford (*Native American Son*) and Barnet Schecter (*George Washington's America*) discussed their most recent books. The one-woman play, *Rosie the Riveter*; a visit from *Antiques Road Show* host Chris Jussel; Tomorrow's Historians; the 2011 Photo Contest; and the always fun History Cab rounded out a very busy year.

The various committees are busy planning for 2012. The Program Committee has arranged for Irvington's Pulitzer Prize-winning author Robert K. Massie to speak to us about his best-selling new biography, *Catherine the Great*. So set aside Friday evening, March 2nd at 7:00 p.m. at the Main Street School for this excellent event.

The committee is also planning a Senior Center discussion forum on the social changes of the last 50 years and how they have impacted us.

The Photo Contest Committee was so pleased with last year's submissions. What a wealth of talented shutterbugs we have in Irvington! The 2012 photo contest theme will be *View from a Room*. Make a little history and get that camera clicking!

The Irvington House Tour is back this year. The Fundraising Committee is planning a fabulous April tour with a special reception afterwards featuring on-hand appraisers.

The Media and Technology Committee is working on transferring much of our audio and video collection from outdated formats to more permanent and accessible DVDs.

I hope you have a chance to visit the McVickar House and attend our lineup of great programs this year. In mid-March the Exhibit Committee will mount Hobbies, which opens in early April. As always, thank you for your involvement and support.

Andy Lyons

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IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING NOVEMBER 18, 2011

The Irvington Historical Society held its Annual Meeting on Friday, November 18, 2011. The meeting opened with President Andy Lyons giving his annual presentation highlighting the Society's mission and goals. He emphasized that we strive to be interesting and relevant, as well as entertaining, and we do this through our many exhibits and programs. Andy acknowledged the active involvement of the Board of Trustees, the dedication of our many volunteers and the generous support of the community.

Andy was followed by John Ryan, Treasurer, who gave an overview of the Society's financial situation. John also introduced Richard Livingston of the CPA firm of Resnick and Newman. Richard was presented with a plaque thanking him for the many years of pro bono accounting services he has provided to the Society.

Following this presentation, Andy thanked the Society's departing Trustees—Lenora Munigle, Mary Toomy, Frank Campbell and Jane Berger—for their many years of service. He also welcomed back for a second 3-year term, Barbara Carrozzi, Jack Hurson, Pat Ryan, and Florence Costello. In addition Doug Wilson has been asked to return as a Trustee. This slate was presented to the membership and unanimously accepted.

The highlight of the evening was a one-act, one-woman program "Rosie the Riveter" by playwright, lyricist and author, Adriana Rogers. The play the story of a young woman who goes to work in a defense department factory when her husband goes off to war. In telling Rosie's story, Rogers presents the story of all the women who went to work in the factories, shipyards and plants during World War II. The audience was delighted with the production and participated in a question and answer session with Ms. Rogers afterwards.



Cyrus Field Honors a President

by Charles T. Bates

In 1881, Cyrus Field was “on top of the world.” The successful completion in 1866 of the transatlantic telegraph cable, which he had envisioned and tirelessly promoted, had made him both famous and prosperous. Owning an elegant townhouse in New York City on Gramercy Park, and a country estate, Ardsley, in Irvington, Cyrus and his wife, Mary, enjoyed a prominent position in society, and the renown that had resulted from Cyrus’s accomplishments.



Portrait of entrepreneur and businessman Cyrus W. Field.

Cyrus became active in a wide range of business and public affairs, and sought out and enjoyed the company of other notable figures of his day. In this regard, the repute of the Field family name was well established. His brother David Dudley was one of New York’s most prominent and influential lawyers, and lived in a townhouse adjoining Cyrus’s in

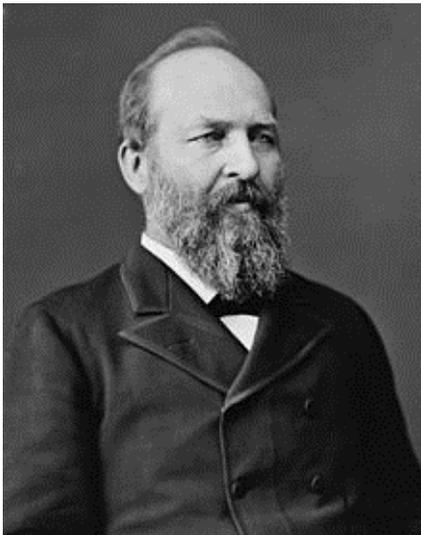
Manhattan. Another brother, Stephen, was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1863 by Abraham Lincoln, and would serve there until 1897.

Both David Dudley and Stephen had graduated from Williams College. Cyrus, impatient to become independent and gain financial success, had passed up a college education. Instead, in 1835, at age 15, he came to New York City; through hard work and daring, he soon made a modest fortune in the wholesale paper trade, enabling him to retire in 1853 at the age of 34. Although he had not matriculated at Williams, throughout his life Cyrus maintained strong links to that college, strengthened by his family’s experiences there, and the proximity of Williams to the Fields’s roots in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. These connections to Williams may account, in part, for Cyrus’s interest in the character and public life of James A. Garfield, who had graduated from the college in 1856 at the advanced age of 25.

Garfield in many ways is a classic example of the self-made man. Born in rural Ohio, fatherless at age 2, he had advanced from work on the tow path of an Ohio canal, and in odd jobs as a carpenter and farmhand, until he had saved enough money to go to college. After graduating from Williams, he returned to Ohio as an educator; later he was ordained as a minister. As a leader of Ohio volunteers, Garfield took part in the Civil War, and by 1862 had been appointed a major general. After the war, he entered

Cyrus Field Honors a President, *continued*

public life, and was elected a member of the House of Representatives. In 1880 the Ohio legislature appointed him to the United States Senate. In the eyes of his contemporaries, Garfield's personality was a blend of intellect and amiability, and he was appreciated for both his eloquence and his judicious temperament.¹



Portrait of President James Abram Garfield.

Garfield was a delegate to the Republican National Convention held in Chicago in June 1880. The contest for the presidential nomination was a heated one between supporters of former president Ulysses S. Grant and of Speaker of the House James G. Blaine. After 34 ballots, with neither candidate having gained the required majority, Blaine threw his support to Garfield who had not even been previously nominated. On the 36th ballot, Garfield won the majority of the votes, and became the Republican Party's presidential candidate. In that fall's election, Garfield de-

feated the Democratic nominee, General Winfield Scott Hancock, by 214 electoral votes to 155, yet with a popular majority of fewer than 10,000 votes of the nine million cast in a voter turnout of 78 percent. In the course of the year 1880, Garfield had sequentially been a member of the U.S. House, appointed to the U.S. Senate, and elected president of the nation, a trifecta impossible to replicate in later years.

Taking the presidential office in March of 1881, Garfield found little pleasure in life in the White House. He was troubled by the continuing bitter factional controversy in the Republican Party, and was pestered by the steady flow to his office of political job seekers. He no doubt contemplated with pleasure his plans for a summer vacation, to begin with a trip to Williams in July for the college's commencement exercises, which coincided with the 25th anniversary of the graduation of his Williams class of 1856.

Somehow aware of Garfield's vacation plans, Cyrus Field, early in June of 1881, sent an invitation to the White House. In it, he invited President and Mrs. Garfield, and also Secretary of State Blaine and his wife, to visit the Fields in Irvington, and to spend the night there before going on to the festivities in Williamstown. Field's diary entry for June 6, 1881, reads: "I have invited President Garfield to come to Irvington for a visit and then go on to Williams College for commencement on July 6th."²

Why might an invitation have been so casually made and so readily accepted? No doubt Field and

Cyrus Field Honors a President, *continued*

Garfield had often met socially and likely enjoyed each other's company. Field was almost certainly attracted by Garfield's rise from youthful obscurity to national prominence in ways parallel to Field's own advance. Field surely found appealing those aspects of Garfield's character that seemed similar to his own: energy, perseverance, and gregariousness.³ And they had that interest in Williams College in common.



Cyrus W. Field's home on his Irvington estate.

Moreover, by 1881, Field had acquired a substantial financial interest in the *New York Daily Mail*. Cyrus, and the newspaper's other principal owner, Major J.M. Bundy, were planning a biography of the new president, to be published in serial form in their newspaper. Field likely anticipated that a visit by the Garfields to his home would provide opportunities to know more closely the subject of the planned biography.

Arrangements were made for the presidential

visit to Irvington. In her biography of her father, Field's daughter Isabella provides this recollection: "Mr. and Mrs. Garfield, with several members of the cabinet and their wives, were to come to us at Irvington, pass Sunday with us, and on Monday leave for Williamstown."⁴ (Whether Mrs. Garfield was planning on visiting with the Fields is unclear. She had been in Long Branch, New Jersey, since late May, being treated for exhaustion and a malaria-like condition. In early July she was making preparations to join her husband for their anticipated vacation in New England. It is not clear from the records if her plan was to meet up with the President at Field's estate in Irvington, or later at the festivities at Williams, or thereafter.)

On the morning of July 2, the President, Secretary of State Blaine, and the two oldest Garfield boys, who had been tutored in the White House planning to enter Williams in the fall, arrived by carriage at the Washington depot of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad. Blaine would not be travelling with the President, but it appears that several other cabinet members (the record does not indicate which) were to accompany Garfield for at least the first portion of the trip north. In the station's waiting room, an unhinged religious fanatic and disappointed office-seeker, Charles J. Guiteau, twice fired his .44 caliber pistol at short range into the President's body. Garfield, seriously but not obviously mortally wounded, was carried to the White House and later removed to El-

Cyrus Field Honors a President, *continued*

beron, New Jersey, to escape Washington's summer heat. After prolonged suffering, caused in large part by medical malpractice, Garfield died at Elberon on September 18, almost certainly from septic poisoning.



Engraving of James A. Garfield's assassination, published in Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper*.

News of the assault gradually reached Irvington. Field's grandson, Cyrus Field Judson, later wrote: "I well remember July 2, 1881. We had prepared flags and bunting and fireworks for the reception of President Garfield and his cabinet who were to visit us and proceed from here to the Commencement at Williamstown. It is needless for me to tell you how horribly shocked we were when we received word that the President had been shot in the depot in Washington on his way here."⁵

Part of the plans for the visit had been that the Garfield party would be brought to Irvington from the rail terminal in Jersey City on Edward S. Jaffray's yacht. Jaffray was a successful New York merchant whose summer home, Willowbrook, in Irvington, adjoined Washington Irving's Sunnyside estate. He regularly commuted to his New York City

office on his steam yacht *Stranger*. In her biography of the early years of her life, Jaffray's then-9-year-old granddaughter, Florence "Daisy" Jaffray Hurst, later recollected that day: "Grandpa had gone off in his steam yacht to meet President Garfield and bring him up to M. Cyrus Field's. He came back alone. The President had been shot at the station in Washington on his way to Jersey City."⁶

When news of the shooting reached the Fields, the plans and expectations for a presidential visit abruptly ended. However, Field's evident deep respect and concern for Garfield were to continue. Shortly after the event, Field sent this telegraph message to a wide circle of his friends in America and Europe: "If President Garfield should die from the wounds received on the 2nd he would leave for his wife and children about \$20,000. I shall cheerfully subscribe \$5,000 toward the sum to be raised. If you or any of your friends would like to join, please telegraph me tomorrow for what amount I may put your name."⁷ The subscriptions totaled more than \$360,000, a very substantial amount at the time, which assured the future financial stability of Garfield's widow and children.

Field also decided to commemorate the President with an appropriate memorial at Williams College.

He commissioned John LaFarge, the preeminent designer of stained glass windows, to create a memorial window honoring Garfield. This window was completed at a cost of \$3,500, and installed in

Cyrus Field Honors a President, *continued*

1882 in the “old” chapel at Williams; it was re-set and installed in Thompson Chapel when that structure was completed in 1905.



The Garfield memorial window at Williams College

The window occupies a prominent position on the south wall of the chapel’s west transept, and is brilliantly illuminated as the sun lowers in the west. The inscription beneath the window reads:

JAMES ABRAM GARFIELD

Twentieth President of the United States

Born November 19, 1831 Died September 19, 1881

In honor of his services to his country as
Scholar, soldier, statesman, and in token of the

Universal love called forth by his protracted
Suffering and untimely death, this window is
Placed in this Chapel of his Alma Mater by his

Friend

CYRUS W. FIELD

And Afterwards . . .

α The Fields subsequently did receive a presidential visitor. Chester A. Arthur, Garfield’s vice president who represented a rival faction of the Republican Party, was invited to Ardsley, and arrived by yacht in July 1882. He was entertained by the Fields, and briefly greeted the public upon his departure from the rail station in Dobbs Ferry.⁸

α Garfield’s assassin, Charles J. Guiteau, was swiftly tried and convicted, and was executed by hanging in July 1882. He was the son of a cousin of Frederick W. Guiteau, a prominent Irvington resident and public-spirited citizen, and the donor of the funds and property on which the eventual Irvington Public Library was established.⁹

α Garfield’s two older sons entered Williams in the fall of 1881 and both graduated in 1885. The elder, Henry Augustus Garfield, trained in the law. Later he became a professor of government under Woodrow Wilson at Princeton, and served as the president of Williams from 1908 to 1934. His brother, James Randolph Garfield, also became a lawyer. He was appointed secretary of the interior by Theodore Roosevelt, and throughout his life was active in a range of educational, civic, and charitable causes.¹⁰

Cyrus Field Honors a President, *continued*

α During the 1880s, Cyrus's health and financial circumstances suffered declines. At a large gathering at Ardsley in 1890, the Fields celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Mary Field died in 1891. On July 12, 1893, Cyrus died at his Irvington home at the age of 72.

—Charles T. Bates

Charles T. Bates, a lifelong Irvington resident and former trustee of the Irvington Historical Society, is a collateral descendant of Cyrus W. Field.

Sources and Notes

α Many details of the assassination of President Garfield, and sketches of the various characters involved, are to be found in Candice Millard's *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President* (New York: Doubleday, 2011).

α Information on the Garfield window at Williams College is taken from the Winter 1983 issue of the Williams College *Alumni Review*, kindness of Thomas W. Bleazard, editor.

1. Allan Peskin, biographical sketch of President Garfield in American Council of Learned Societies, *American National Biography*, ed. John Arthur Garrity and Mark C. Carnes, vol. 8 (New York: Oxford Uni-

versity Press, 1999).

2. Arthur C. Lord, "Cyrus Field," *Westchester County Historical Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (January 1948), pp. 11–12.

3. See note 1 above.

4. Isabella Judson, *Cyrus W. Field, His Life and Work* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1896).

5. Cyrus Field Judson, "Reminiscences of 'Ardsley,'" in Westchester County Historical Society, *The Quarterly Bulletin* 6, no. 3 (July 1930), p. 75.

6. Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, *From Pinafores to Politics* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1923).

7. See note 2 above.

8. Reproduction of an item from the *Greenburgh Register* 1894 [probably 1882] published in the *Half Moon Press* (November 2004).

9. Irvington Historical Society, *The Roost* 3, no. 1 (March 1979), and Elizabeth Sadewhite, *Irvington Public Library Newsletter* 4, no. 2 (November 2005).

10. Robert D. Cuff, biographical sketches of Harry A. Garfield and of James R. Garfield in American Council of Learned Societies, *American National Biography*, vol. 8.

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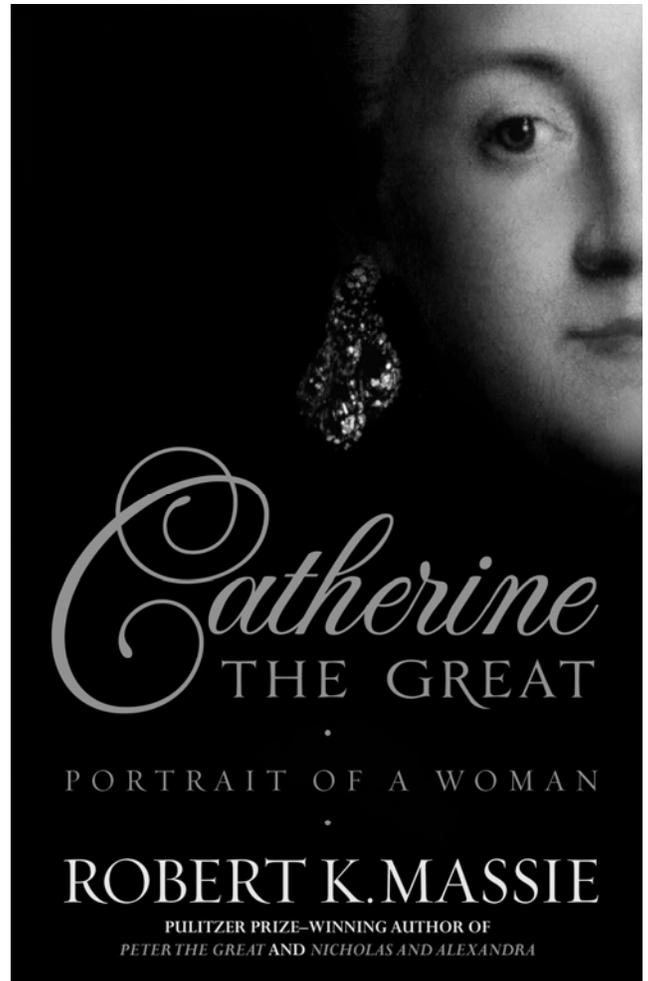
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History Cab

On Friday, October 21, 2011, the Irvington Historical Society held its second History Cab. This year's "taxi driver" was noted local author Kate Buford, whose most recent work, *Native American Son: The Life and Sporting Legend of Jim Thorpe* was published to critical acclaim in October 2010. Eleven teams of local history buffs participated in this fun and challenging competition answering questions on local, state and United States history. As last year, the competition was keen but friendly and the audience got into the spirit with their helpful (and vocal) "shout outs." **And the winners were: high school Latin teacher Michelle Cella, and students Emma Harman and Julia Canning!**



Doug Wilson once again warms up the crowd.

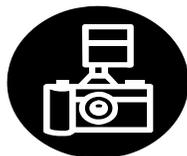


At left, our helpful panel of experts, from left, high school teacher Chris Barry, Irvington resident Pat Gilmartin and high school principal Scott Mosenthal.



Winning team, "All Cabs Lead to Rome." From left, students Emma Harman and Julia Canning and high school Latin teacher, Michelle Cella.

Get those cameras clicking!



The Irvington Historical Society
Annual Photo Contest
Coming this summer!
This year's theme-

"A View from a Room"

A Reminder...

The Historical Society membership drive is underway. Please keep in mind how important your membership and donations are to our community and your Historical Society. It is only your generosity that enables us to celebrate our distinguished history and share the Irvington of today with future generations. If you do not have your pledge card, please take a moment to fill out the following and return to: Irvington Historical Society, P.O. Box 23, Irvington, NY 10533. As always, thank you for your support.

Thank you for your continuing support to preserve & share our rich history.

Please make check payable to:
Irvington Historical Society

Please return check in enclosed envelope.



Enclosed, representing membership dues for one year is my tax deductible gift of: (check one)

- \$250 (or more) Benefactor
- \$125 Patron
- \$ 75 Friend
- \$ 40 Family
- \$ 25 Individual
- \$ 10 Student/Senior

Telephone: _____
E-Mail: _____

Plus a voluntary additional contribution to the Society's Endowment Fund of: \$ _____
Total amount enclosed: \$ _____

- Check here if you would like to be a volunteer.

***Membership year now runs
January 1st through December 31st.***

Watch for the Irvington Historical Society's upcoming exhibit "Hobbies" opening in April!

The Roost

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Save the Date
The Irvington Historical Society's
House Tour
“Off Main”
Saturday, April 28, 2012