



The Roost

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IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Letter from the President

Dear Members,

It's wonderful to see spring in all its finery. Is there any sight more beautiful than our Main Street with the trees flowering and the river sparkling?

It has been a busy winter and spring for the Historical Society. Our Annual Meeting featured a fascinating lecture and book signing by Gerard Koeppel on the New York City grid. Thom Johnson, former art teacher at Irvington High School, presented an in-depth look at Bannerman's Island Arsenal. Many thanks to Thom for sharing an article on Bannerman's for this edition of *The Roost*. Following that program, he and his former student, Rob Yasinsac, gave us a glimpse of "out of the box" teaching that led to Rob's extensive interest in Hudson Valley ruins. Our most recent program, to a standing-room-only crowd, celebrated Riverkeeper's first half century as New York's clean water advocate. Riverkeeper boat captain John Lipscomb shared his deep knowledge of the Hudson River with television meteorologist Storm Field as we honored a fifty-year history of protecting the river and restoring its health.

Added to that were frequent visits to our McVickar House exhibit, *Let's Celebrate*, and the setting up of our new archive space, a work in progress.

Don't miss our upcoming programs – Tomorrow's Historians in May, Celebrate Irvington Day in June, and the Photo Contest in July. The McVickar House will close on July 15, for interior and exterior painting and the mounting of our new exhibit. And watch for news of our Fall Benefit scheduled for Saturday, September 10th!

—Pat Ryan



Meteorologist Storm Field (l) and Captain John Lipscomb discuss protecting the Hudson River.

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Don't Miss Out!



*Coming in July:
The 2016 Photo Contest
This year's theme
"Life by the River"*



Share that special spot, hidden gem,
or unique scene of people and places
along our beautiful riverfront.

Be one of the lucky prize winners!

Adult and Under Eighteen categories.

Entry deadline: July 31, 2016

For more information visit:
www.irvingtonhistoricalsociety.org

A Profile of Monica Silfverskiöld Getz

by Barbara Kerr Carrozzi

Monica Silfverskiöld Getz was born in Sweden in the idyllic pre-war days to a legendary orthopedic surgeon and Renaissance Man, Nils Silfverskiöld (he won a gold medal in the gymnastics team event in the 1912 Summer Olympics), and the young Countess Mary von Rosen Silfverskiöld, later a translator and pioneer in the Montessori Method, both descendants of longtime, well-known, philanthropic Swedish families. Monica's ancestry includes generations of courageous men and women who devoted their lives to science and medicine and who possessed a deep sense of spirituality and concern for others.

Monica's gentle paternal grandfather, a physician until his death in 1939, treated two of the most prevalent and stigmatized conditions in Sweden at that time: tuberculosis and alcoholism. He founded and built a large hospital on the Swedish coast for children diagnosed and struggling with tuberculosis. Her father built a hospital for the victims of fascism in the midst of the Spanish Civil War.

During World War II, her parents and their now-legendary childhood friends Raoul Wallenberg, former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, and former Prime Minister Olof Palme, along with other outspoken, courageous few, were at the forefront in opposing Nazism, devoting themselves to obtaining safe haven for Sweden's Jewish population. Monica's mother entered Germany while war was raging to extract prisoners from the concentration camps. Jews from all over Europe were channeled through their home in Sweden in their quest for eventual settlement in England and the United States.

Monica enjoyed an unusual, multilingual, aristocratic childhood and youth growing up in a country castle, with winters spent in the family's Stockholm townhouse and halcyon summer days on their west coast island. She attended private schools from kindergarten through baccalaureate, followed by enrollment in the University of Lund law school in Sweden.

Monica was inspired by a generation of young adults on fire with ideas of democracy and anxious for their country to actualize them.



Monica's childhood home.

While a student of law, Monica was offered a scholarship to come to the U.S. Interested in international affairs, she was happy to pursue her dreams here. Arriving first in New Mexico, she grew fascinated with the old Native American culture and astonished that their rituals still were being observed. After a short stay there, during which she studied anthropology and international affairs, Monica continued her education as a diplomatic student at the School of International Studies at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Taking a break from these studies one evening, Monica joined a group of students at a concert featuring the Birdland All-Stars, with Count Basie and Dinah Washington. The young and stunning blonde Swedish beauty did not go unnoticed by the handsome young saxophone player, Stan Getz. He had recently returned from a triumphant engagement in Sweden where, unbeknownst to him and to her, he was hugely popular.

After a whirlwind courtship and on the heels of the success of the film *The Benny Goodman Story*, which starred Steve Allen and featured Stan and his music, Stan and Monica married in Las Vegas, Nevada, on November 3, 1956. Academy Award-winning ac-

A Profile of Monica Silfverskiöld Getz, *continued*

tress Donna Reed was her matron of honor and Reed's husband, producer Tony Owen, served as best man. Yet, amidst the happiness and joy of their new marriage was the old demon of addiction that Stan had been dealing with since his teenage years. The young couple determined to face the problem that so threatened their lives together, but unfortunately, no expert at the time seemed to know how. The prevailing view in medicine was that addiction was a psychiatric problem, which it is not.



Monica and Stan's November 3, 1956, wedding, Las Vegas. (l to r) Donna Reed, unknown, Monica, Stan, and Tony Owen.

In 1958, in an effort to escape the temptations found in Stan's U.S. surroundings, the young family moved to idyllic Denmark, which at that time was drug- (but not alcohol-) free. The following year, Monica, always interested in science and medicine, and actively dealing with the consuming addiction of her husband, enrolled in medical school with hopes of helping the love of her life, her family, and others with similar problems. Although there was no addiction in her family of origin, she was fascinated by the miraculous recovery process, and continued throughout her adult life to study, learn, and participate in various programs and institutes dedicated to helping those battling alcoholism and other abusive substances. Her eventual insight and awareness of Minnesota's Hazelden Foundation's revolutionary methods of treating addiction so inspired her that she became a part of the program, desiring to understand the dynamics and miracle of recovery, and

eventually was invited to pioneer efforts in the Soviet Union and other countries.

The treatment offered at Hazelden was a multidisciplinary approach based on the Twelve-Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous, which to the present day continues to be overwhelmingly successful. Aware that her native country also faced tremendous problems of alcoholism and drug addiction, Monica, like her grandfather before her, understood that stigma, shame, and silence blocked the truth that addiction is a treatable disease. (Years later, in 1984, Monica would gather the world's experts in the field of recovery, among them Dr. Daniel Anderson, Hazelden's president, Monica's mentor, and a pioneer in the treatment of addiction; former First Lady Betty Ford; and Queen Silvia of Sweden for a weeklong conference in Sweden's Grand Hotel, which ultimately resulted in many effective treatment programs where there had been none, and AA and Al-Anon being made available in every town and village in the country.)

In 1962, Stan and Monica returned to the New York area, renting for a time the former Guiteau mansion on Broadway here in Irvington. In 1966, Monica purchased Shadowbrook, a historic mansion, which, she says with a smile, "was then considered a 'white elephant,' but could accommodate the seven kids we really were."



Getz Children Steven, Beverly, David, Pamela and Nicolaus.

A Profile of Monica Silfverskiöld Getz, *continued*

Situated on 10 acres high above the Hudson River at the corner of West Sunnyside Lane and Broadway, Shadowbrook is an extraordinary property. Among its many amazing architectural features—arches, paneled walls, high ceilings with ornately carved moldings, and many more exquisite details—the pièce de résistance in this home is clearly the rotunda, or music room, with its domed ceiling, Corinthian columns, built-in velvet-cushioned seating spanning its perimeter, and windows crafted by neighbor Louis Comfort Tiffany. The room's perfect acoustics were an amazing gift for Stan, the man known as "The Sound." If these walls could talk, what a tale they would tell! This spectacular room has hosted a veritable who's who in the world of music, a music Hall of Fame. Enrico Caruso, Vladimir Horowitz, Count Basie, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Segovia, and Duke Ellington are but a few of music industry giants who have played in this unique space.

Shadowbrook was designed by architect Robert Henderson Robertson in the Tudor Revival style and built between the years 1880 and 1910 for banker Henry Graves. It was later home to, among others, Katherine Duer MacKay Blake, the wife of silver magnate Clarence MacKay who disinherited his daughter Ellin when she eloped with American composer and lyricist Irving Berlin (who, like Stan, also happened to be a musician of Russian Jewish descent). Dismayed by his father-in-law's actions, Irving presented Ellin with the wedding gift of the song "Always" (in the Shadowbrook music room), which generated millions of dollars in royalties. (Irving Berlin's fortune and forgiving heart later rescued Clarence MacKay from financial ruin after the '29 crash.) As fate would have it, many years later, "Always" would be the first tune recorded by Stan Getz.

Monica was a loving, loyal, and knowledgeable partner to Stan. Her successful promotion in the mid-1960s of the revolutionary Brazilian bossa nova sound of "Desafinado" and "The Girl from Ipanema" (a part of the album *Getz/Gilberto*) fea-

turing vocalist Astrud Gilberto, was just one of many pivotal contributions she made to her husband's career and life. When in 1965, "The Girl from Ipanema," competing against recordings by the Beatles at their peak and Barbra Streisand's "Hello Dolly," won most of the top Grammys of that year, including the top prize, Record of the Year, Stan, who could not care less about awards, sent Monica (who was largely responsible for the tract's worldwide success beyond his limited, but adoring jazz audience) to accept the coveted award from their friend, presenter Sammy Davis, Jr.



Monica accepting the Grammy for Record of the Year from Sammy Davis, Jr.

Alongside many happy and exciting periods in their young lives when Stan led an alcohol- and drug-free lifestyle for increasingly long periods, there were also relapses, which took a tremendous toll on their marriage. Monica tried through interventions and the courts to get Stan into treatment, but, as she recalls, "In customary addictive denial, he fled to enabler heaven—California." (Sadly, in 1991, Stan died from a result of his addictions: liver cancer.)

Her husband's move to the West Coast left Monica with ongoing family and financial obligations. Seeing how poorly the legal system functioned for families led her to become actively involved in im-

A Profile of Monica Silfverskiöld Getz, *continued*

proving it. In 1988, she founded the Coalition for Family Justice, a 501c 3 not-for-profit foundation that helps empower and protect children and parents involved in abusive situations, divorce, and other domestic relations affairs, as well as providing crisis intervention. Many accolades have deservedly been bestowed on Monica and the Coalition as she continues to champion family and legal matters in Westchester and beyond. Her advocacy has also benefitted the National Council on Alcoholism, which she chaired for many years along with the Rivertowns League of Women Voters, the UN Earth Day Foundation, and many other organizations dedicated to helping people and improving society's ills. Through the Coalition for Family Justice and many other causes, she has translated her wish to help others by opening the doors of Shadowbrook in support of causes close to her heart. Once a month persons facing stressful situations involving relationship problems, courts, spouses, lawyers, etc., can find solace in this magnificent home where professional people in the fields of finance, law, and other essential life-needs reach out with practical solutions to those in crisis. This vital service offered to the surrounding communities has been available to everyone in need for close to 30 years with an 80 percent success rate at turning around seemingly hopeless, despairing life situations.

Monica is a true pioneer in so many aspects of recovery and reform, this profile could not adequately enumerate them. A vibrant, warm, compassionate, genuine, honest, loving, and caring woman, Monica remains matriarch of her beloved family and spectacular home that sits on land once part of Washington Irving's homestead. (In fact, the noted American author of "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is said to have drunk his last glass of wine while visiting Edward Jaffray at his Willowbrook estate on the evening before he died. Willowbrook encompassed land that later became Shadowbrook.) Monica recalls sitting in her grandfather's library

as a girl listening to him read aloud from *The Alhambra* by his favorite author, Washington Irving. Now, years later, her heart warms to the thought of Irving enjoying neighborly visits on the same land where she raised five children: Steven, David, Beverly, Pamela and Nicolaus.

Monica, with sparkling blue eyes and a radiant smile, declares, "Life has been good much because of my awareness and faith in a loving God. I believe in an intrinsic goodness in most of us; that we all search for a higher order of things and aspire to the ultimate meaning of life: love." Without the loving and secure childhood she was blessed with, Monica is not sure she could have weathered the more challenging periods of her never boring life. She is grateful for her remarkable parents and grandparents, who instilled in her the values of compassion and meaningful work, and who were equipped with a gigantic, grounding, and infectious sense of humor—a core quality she found and treasured in Stan, her five children, and her friends.



Recent photo of Monica, son Nicolaus, and a "friend."

How fitting that Monica, who so values authenticity, would find her way to Shadowbrook. The motto of the Graves family who built the estate was *Esse Quam Videri*—"To BE, rather than to seem"—which pretty much sums up her life philosophy.

—Barbara Kerr Carrozzi

Bannerman's Island Arsenal and Irvington High School

by Thom Johnson

On March 18th of this year, Thom Johnson and Rob Yasinsac presented a Historical Society program, Teaching from Ruins, at the Irvington Public Library on introducing students to vulnerable architectural treasures—and documenting them before they disappear—in Irvington and beyond. Here, Thom Johnson recounts how his own passion for the abandoned arsenal and castle residence on Bannerman's Island led to using them as a teaching tool in his work with Irvington High School art and theater tech students.



Rob Yasinsac (l) and Thom Johnson.

I first learned about the Bannerman's Island arsenal when I was a high school student living in Dobbs Ferry, with an interest in the Hudson and in railroads. I was shown a photo of the *20th Century Limited* train passing what looked like an abandoned castle and soon was asking why such a magnificent structure sat on one of the few islands in the Hudson and how it had fallen to ruin. One of the first publications that answered my questions was produced by the Bannerman Co. and on file at the midtown branch of the New York Public Library, by Bryant Park. My search to learn the Bannerman story had begun.

From the beginning, I knew that Francis (Frank) Bannerman VI was a successful businessman dealing in surplus military goods. He built his island arsenal to

store his stock, which included everything from black powder to uniforms. He also built a residence at the top of the island for himself and his wife, Helen. But I also knew that he, at his own expense, brought city kids to the island, providing them with a day of adventure with games, races, and a meal at his castle residence. At the end of the day Mr. Bannerman would muster his troops to the north entrance of the castle where a photo would be taken. Over the years I have acquired a number of images that show different groups on the island with Mr. Bannerman. In a way, Frank Bannerman was a scout leader at just about the time the Boy Scouts were being organized. He and his wife also sponsored a camp called Goodwill that provided children of his era with similar outdoor experiences.



Goodwill Camp was sponsored by Frank Bannerman and his wife.

I started my teaching career at the Irvington High School in 1978. At about this time, I also began to make trips to Bannerman's Island to photograph the ruins. Soon, the images that I shot there started to appear in the slide presentations that I created to illustrate the elements and principles of design—

Bannerman's Island Arsenal and Irvington High School, *continued*

the foundation of my art teaching. At first I could convince students that I had visited Tibet because of the eclectic architecture of the Bannerman structures and the angle of the shots. I did this to start a dialogue with the class, pressing them to question what I was showing them. This would end with me informing them that the building photographed was in fact on an island about 30 miles up river from Irvington.

One student, who had access to a canoe, became so motivated that he made his own trip to the island, which made me realize that the island and the ruins of Mr. Bannerman's castle could be a great teaching tool. At that time the property was part of the Hudson Highland State Park under the jurisdiction of the Taconic Park and closed to the public. So while I continued to create and show photographs, I could not take students there.

This started to change when I met Neil Caplan and we, with others, started the Bannerman Castle Trust. One of the goals in setting up the trust was to safely open the island to the public; one of my goals was to bring my students there. With the approval of the State we began to clear and reopen trails on the island and created a landing on the south side for small vessels. Soon we were ready to bring small groups for adventures that, I am sure, Mr. Bannerman would have enjoyed.



The first group of Irvington students at Bannerman's.

In 2000, the first group of Irvington students to visit the island took a bus to a little-known Hudson Line railroad station called Breakneck Ridge, just north of Cold Spring. Here we crossed the tracks and boarded a rowboat and canoes for the short ride to Bannerman's Island. Once there, each student had their own goal for what to do: drawing, painting, photography—one student was writing an article for the school paper.

Rather quickly the few hours that we had passed and the students returned to shore for the ride home. The reaction from all involved was very positive; one student wrote me a note saying it was the best field trip that she had ever been on.

The next year we tried to return but the weather made it unsafe. Still, the seeds had been planted as to how Bannerman's could be used as a teaching site. It would be a few years later, with students from the Irvington high school tech theater program, that we would create history together again at the site.

From the start of my years at Irvington High School, in addition to teaching art, I also worked as the Technical Director for the theater productions. Many of the students involved in the tech program were also in classes that I taught. Two, Adam Farber and



Deke Hazirjian working with students on the design process.

Bannerman's Island Arsenal and Irvington High School, *continued*

Matt Marks, had seen photographs that I had taken of the arsenal and residence illuminated under the direction of my friend, lighting designer Deke Hazirjian. They asked if they could design something like that, too. In 2007 I wrote an Irvington Education Foundation grant to fund the project, the IEF said yes, and we were off on a great educational experience.

Now that we had funding, the real work started. Adam, Matt, and I met with Deke on the island to begin the design process. Deke suggested that we do something different from what had been done before and that it involve a performance of music and dance. So I went to my good friend Larry Corio (legendary band instructor at Irvington High School) to see if one of his bands would play. Next I met with student dancer Talia Sperandio to talk about her doing the choreography; a team was coming together.



The first Bannerman's lighting project.

Soon after we finished the school musical, we started working. Mr. Corio selected proper music and began rehearsing his band. He also made a recording that Talia could use with the dancers who had to perform in a 16' x 16' area — the size of the stage to be built

on the island. As all this was going on, the set crew made trips to Bannerman's to clear the area called the garden brae on the north side. They also transported lumber and equipment, and then built the stage.



Another view of the Bannerman's lighting project.

The week before a production opens is often called Hell Week, and given the logistical problems of getting everyone and everything to an island in the Hudson, this one sure lived up to the name. When there were problems with floating the equipment, members of the Cornwall Yacht Club and a local crane company stepped in, turning a pile driver into a barge and getting the last load to the island at sundown. The next two days the crew set lights, pulled cables, located the control board, and built a campsite on the south side of the island. By Thursday night we were ready and had rehearsed the light cues while the dancers and musicians made ready for Friday night's performance.

On Friday afternoon, the performers left for Bannerman's, the dancers heading to the Cornwall Yacht Club to be transported to the island, and the musicians going to the Beacon dock. After all were on the island, we had a quick run-through before the tour boat arrived with the audience. The perfor-

Bannerman's Island Arsenal and Irvington High School, *continued*

mance went well and soon the audience, dancers, and musicians returned home, and the crew headed to our campsite.

On Saturday, art teachers Diana Schmertz and Kathleen Tetro, and the accelerated art students from the middle school were brought to the island to draw and paint. Shortly after they left, we started preparation for the second night's lighting. For this, we had a bagpiper who performed on top of a scaffold that we built on the stage. Again, all went well and both nights we not only had the island audience but many more watching from boats.

Sunday the crew was up early to "strike" the cables and equipment. By late morning, everything was down and we were making the last trips and, with help again from the yacht club, we sent the rental equipment back. By 2 p.m. all involved headed home for some well-earned rest.

But the project was not done. Matt Marks had filmed the event and was now in the process of editing. Over the next few weeks he created a fine production, highlighting what young people can do with support and guidance. Of all of the educational productions that I have worked on, this is the one that makes me most proud and I am sure that Mr. Bannerman would have been pleased.

In 2009, after 31 great years at the Irvington High School, I retired. But I did not retire from projects on the island with young people. I have worked with both Girl and Boy Scouts, including two Eagle Scout projects. I have also joined with local gardeners of all ages on trail work so the public can better enjoy what the Bannermans created.

This past September, Drama Club Director Diana Selenow called me, requesting that I return to the High School as Tech Director for her last two shows. The second production was the musical *Shrek*.



Shrek set based on Bannerman's Castle.

Given that part of the action takes place in a castle, I provided the design students with reference photos of Bannerman's. The Gates of Duloc onstage were based on the island's North Gate and the two crow's nests were modeled on one from Bannerman's arsenal. The project took a lot of work by more than 20 students but was also a lot of fun. And the best part was seeing the crew roll the set around and turn it into other scenery. Again, I know that Mr. Bannerman would have been very happy.



Local gardeners doing trail work at Bannerman's Island.

I have talked with some of the students that I worked with this year to perhaps make a trip to Bannerman's before the school year ends. If I am able to do this, I will be continuing what I started when I showed the first group of students the images of the ruins. Sharing my knowledge of the island arsenal and helping young people to learn and be creative has been a major part of my career at Irvington and beyond.

—Thom Johnson

Celebrate Irvington Day

Sunday, June 19, 2016

Enjoy a day of family-friendly activities



*Free old-fashioned, jump-on, jump-off **trolley tours** of Irvington's historic sites including Main Street Historic District, great estates and more.

*Visit the **1853 McVickar House**, home to the Irvington Historical Society, take photo ops in **period costumes**, visit the **current exhibit** and find treasures at a **tag sale**.

*Experience **guided walks** in town, on the waterfront and on the Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park. Local docents will describe the past and present life in this small rivertown community known for its **magnificent Main Street views** of the Hudson.

*Tour the (Louis Comfort) **Tiffany Reading Room** and the historic Irvington **Town Hall Theater** in the landmark 1902 Village Hall.

*Enjoy fresh & prepared foods at the **Irvington Farmers Market**.

*Enjoy the open **shops** and **sidewalk activities** on Main Street and visit our local restaurants.

For more information, visit: www.irvingtonhistoricalsociety.org

The Roost

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Save the date!

The Irvington Historical Society in conjunction with
Irvington High School presents

The Peter K. Oley Tomorrow's Historians

Student Research Symposium

Wednesday, June 1, 2016

7-9 p.m.

Campus Presentation Room

Irvington High School