



THE ROOST

VOLUME 20 ISSUE 1

WINTER 2019

OUR TOWN AND SLAVERY

by Cathy Sears and Sarah Cox

Irvington, New York, is pretty much a one-stoptlight town, whose Main Street begins with a sweeping view of the Hudson River from atop Broadway. Roll down the hill and you pass familiar streets named for some of our original families who began their lives here as farmers by the early eighteenth century: Ferris, Eckar, Dutcher, and Buckhout. Patriots of the Revolutionary War. These families and others—Bont, Jewel, Odell, Requa, and Van Tassel—now join their fellow honorees in hammered granite on the brick walk of our Veterans Memorial Plaza.

The founding families did not break ground by their labor alone. Hannah, Betty, Dick, David, Teem, Brebay, David, Bill, Jack, Bette, Bet, Caesar, Hannah, and Dinah are but 14 among the many unrecognized original inhabitants of our community: African men, women, and children identified by first names only, who were enslaved by most of our founding families.

The focus of this article is twofold: First, to reintroduce New York's history of slavery, including in the lands that would become Irvington. Next, to highlight these enslaved people's names and their lives—and the many more who remain mere numbers in records—based on original documents about two local slave-holding families. (Note that historical spelling of places and names vary.)

CONTENTS:

1. *Our Town and Slavery*
by Cathy Sears and Sarah Cox
- 8 *IHS/Main Street School Partnership*
by Scott Mosenthal
9. *Holiday Model Train Exhibit*
by Ginny Read
10. *The Legacy Project*
by Scott Mosenthal
11. *Stars of the Harlem Renaissance*
by Ginny Read

The Roost is a publication of the Irvington Historical Society. We welcome your story ideas, photos, and suggestions. Contact us by e-mail: Roost@irvingtonhistoricalsociety.org or by phone: (914) 591-1020.

Roost Committee: Ginny Read, editor. Barbara Carrozzi, Scott Mosenthal, Pat Ryan, and Barrett Seaman.

THE ROOST

OUR TOWN AND SLAVERY *continued*

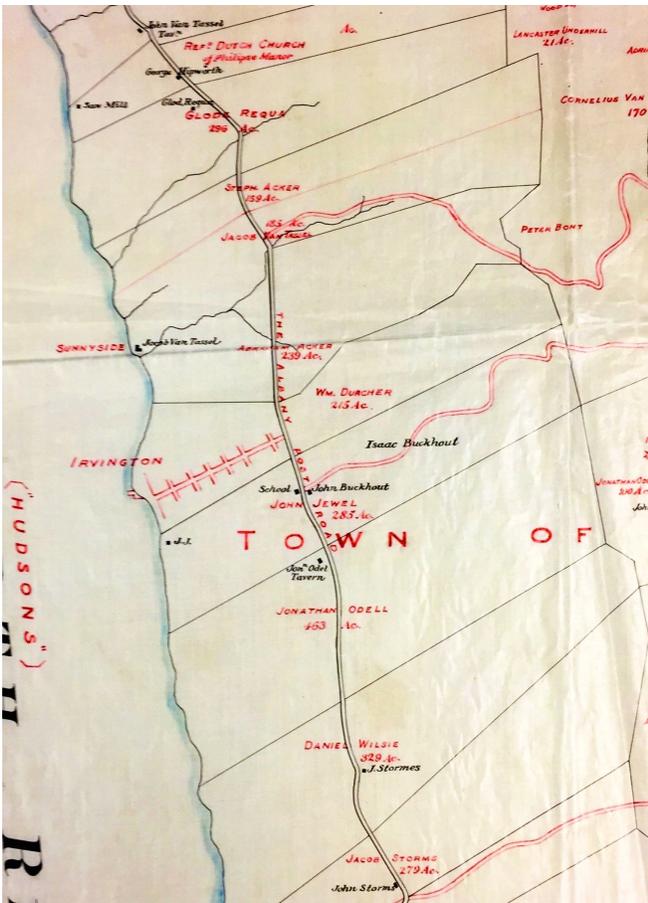
Our founding families lived as tenant farmers on Philipse Manor, which from 1693 to 1785 encompassed about 57,000 acres of land extending from the Croton River to Spuyten Duyvil, and sweeping east from the Hudson to the Bronx River. These holdings were a patent bestowed by the English Crown upon the politically savvy and wealthy Dutch merchant,

Frederick Philipse. He was also a slave trader. Both his Upper and Lower Mills sites relied on the labor of enslaved men, women, and children; twenty-three individuals lived and toiled at the Sleepy Hollow commercial hub of the estate. Most Hudson Valley families did not own enslaved people, states Albert James William-Myers in his book of essays, *Long Hammering*. But, he adds, those who did owned an average of one or two people. Several of our founding families owned more—four to ten. Research continues to determine the full magnitude of the enslaved population of historical Irvington.

New York State was the capital of American slavery for more than two centuries, according to the New-York Historical Society, and one of the last northern states to abolish slavery. Although the commonly accepted timeline in our state is identified as the mid-1620s to the late 1820s, John

In 1723, Westchester's enslaved population was 448. By 1771, the number had jumped to 3,430 – outnumbering those enslaved (and some free) in Manhattan. 1756 was the relative height of slavery in Westchester, with black people representing 15.7% of the population.

Reprinted with permission of the Westchester County Historical Society.



This 1785 Commissioner of Forfeiture map of Philipsburgh Manor, redrawn with 1880 additions, shows the tenant farms.

Following are the known names of enslaved African men, women, and children, listed after the names of the families who owned them. *Requa*: Brebay, David, Bill, Jack, Hannah, Bette. *Van Tassel*: Dinah. *Buckhout*: Betty, Hannah, Dick, Teem, and David. *Odell*: Caesar. *Dutcher*: Bet. Other slave-owning families: *Acker (Ecker)*, *Jewel*, and *Wilsie*. The majority of these names come from primary sources such as wills, estate inventories, and court records. Secondary sources—in this case, published historical narratives—provide the names of Brebay, Dinah, Betty, and Caesar.

OUR TOWN AND SLAVERY, *continued*

Jay College's (CUNY) New York Slavery Record Index sets the beginning of slavery about a hundred years earlier—and extends it later, prior to the Civil War, when Southern fugitives were caught and re-enslaved due to then-current state and federal law. Social historian Vivienne L. Kruger's deep analysis of state data sets the end date decades later. (Read our brief summary, "New York's Complex History of Slavery," at the end of this article.)

The 1991 discovery and subsequent dedication of the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan put an immediate spotlight on the history of slavery in the colonial North. How could New Yorkers account for the estimated 15,000 "free" and enslaved Africans buried there and then forgotten? A reckoning began. Major exhibits on slavery ensued, as well as a reframing of familiar New York historical sites, primary among them Historic Hudson Valley's living history museum, Philipsburg Manor in Sleepy Hollow. Last year, artists unveiled separate memorials to name and remember the people enslaved by the Philipse family at both the Upper and Lower Mills sites: Paul Growald's Stopping Stones installation at Philipsburg Manor, and two of Vinnie Bagwell's five planned sculptures for the Enslaved Africans' Rain Garden, which will formally open in November at the Yonkers waterfront.

Throughout both the Dutch and English periods, the colony found few prospective European immigrants willing to take on indentured service, especially when it came to settling the wild lands beyond Manhattan. The

prospects for owning land were bleak: the manors dispersed throughout the region were monopolized by the very wealthy (such as Philipse). Slave labor was a compelling alternative for both manor lord and tenant farmer: An article in *The Westchester Historian* notes that in the 1760s, one could pay a free man 60 pound sterling annually to work, or one could pay £60-100 to purchase a captive African—for life. Even after the Revolutionary War, "slaves were easily the most valuable possession of farmers, especially when free white laborers were becoming increasingly scarce," writes noted historian Graham Russell Hodges in his book *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East New Jersey, 1613–1863*.

Enslaved Africans who lived on Irvington's tenant farms labored mostly in small groups or individually; their families were dispersed among separate owners. They worked alongside their owners to meet the high price the Philipse family exacted in rent, mostly in wheat, from their tenants. In Historic Hudson Valley literature, Margaret Vetare reports that the Philipsburg Manor tenants had to "clear the land of trees and stones, cultivate crops, plant orchards, tend livestock, fence fields and build necessary structures."

Documenting the Lives of Enslaved Africans on the Buckhout and Requa Farms

The Buckhout and Requa families were well off and their farms large. Buckhout lands included two houses and a school. Buckhout's late-eighteenth-century will and estate inventory

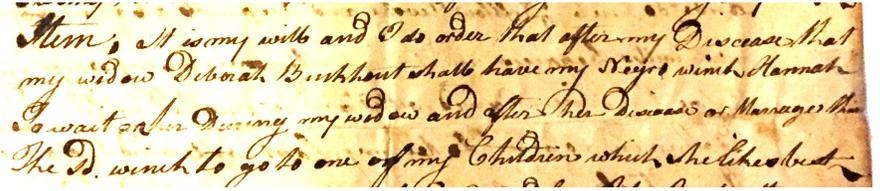
OUR TOWN AND SLAVERY, *continued*

echo what historians report: that much of the work enslaved people did was skilled labor. These documents list many woodworking tools; a wide variety of animals to care for, milk, and butcher; heavy iron yokes; an ox-driven wagon; a plow; and fishing net. Sold household items reveal the skills of enslaved women: spinning, sewing, and weaving. These women also whitened clothes and cleaned the brass kettles, dishes, and glassware; made butter using ladles, churns, and tubs; and cooked with iron pots. Another document reports a peach orchard whose fruit would have required harvesting and preserving.

Glode Requa, Jr.'s farm estate inventory of 1807, though considerably shorter than Buckhout's, shows that the enslaved Africans likewise mastered animal husbandry (given the many cattle, horses, sheep, pigs, and oxen listed) and used axes and other iron tools to clear the land and build a house, an ox cart, and furniture. Stored wheat and a half grinding stone indicate the individuals planted, harvested, and ground wheat. Barrels of cider suggest they also maintained an apple orchard.

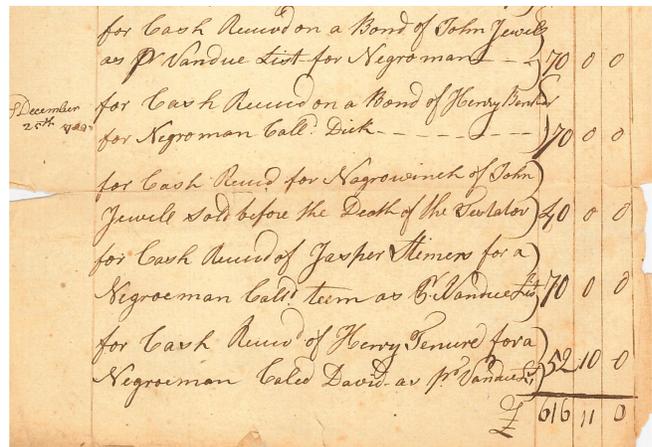
Documenting the Names of Enslaved Africans

Captain Jan (Johannis) Buckhout's 1774 will detailed how his estate was to be divided up among his extensive family members. He bequeathed Hannah to his second wife, Deborah. Buckhout added another clause in his



"Item, It is my will and I do order that after my Decease that my widow Deborah Buchhout shall have my Negro winch Hannah To wait on her during my widow[']s life] and after her Decease or Marriage then The D. winch to go to one of my Children which she likes best." Reprinted with permission of the Irvington Public Library, Guiteau Foundation.

will: upon the death or remarriage of his widow, Hannah's bondage would continue through ownership by his children.



In 1785, Jan Buckhout died at the age of 103. Within his will, he had ordered an estate inventory—a complete list of all his “movable property,” including people. In his 1790 Estate Inventory, Buckhout's heirs detail the public auction or “Vendue” of Dick, Teem, and David, as well as an unnamed woman and man. Reprinted with permission of the Westchester County Archives.

The death of Jan Buckhout was clearly a seismic event in the lives of those enslaved by his family. “The single most common reason for the sale of a slave was the division of a testator's estate; it was at this point that slaves would be separated

OUR TOWN AND SLAVERY, *continued*

from friends and family members,” writes Vivienne L. Kruger in her Columbia University PhD dissertation, *Born to Run: The Slave Family in Early New York, 1626–1827*. She continues, “the completed bills of sale emphasized the property nature of slaves—they were used as currency and collateral. Slaves were traded along with lands and farms, put forward as security for mortgages, and used to raise cash or repay debts.”

And so it was for these five enslaved people of unknown age; four of whom were sold on Christmas Day in 1789. This inventory and other documents indicate Dick, Teem, and David’s new owners were local people known to the Buckhout family.

To date, we know that Jan Buckhout owned seven people, five of whose names survive. In addition, his extended family within Greenburgh and the county did as well, including his grandson John Jewel, who purchased Buckhout’s farm after the Revolutionary War. Other members of the Jewel family also owned individuals.

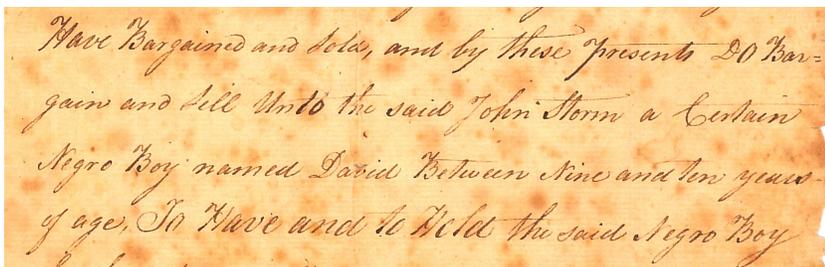
Five years later, the heirs of Glode Requa, Jr., inventoried his estate and sold four more children: Bill, Jack, Bette, and Hannah. Bill’s price of \$200 was the same paid for eight cows. The \$75 received for Hannah was equivalent to one mare and 20 sheep and lambs. The estate inventory does not reveal the new owners of these children. But Requa’s will identifies David’s new owner, John Storm, as local—“of the same place”—and a “Farmer.”

The local 1790 census and other historical records note that Glode Requa, Jr., owned 10 enslaved Africans, six named. Additional Township of Greenburgh records through 1820 show that the extended Requa family continued to be a large slave-holding family.

Enslaved people’s identities emerging from anonymity enrich our understanding of the great labor sacrifice and suffering that went into building our community. Meanwhile, we continue researching the full extent of Irvington’s history of slavery. One of the identified names, in fact, opened up another

avenue of inquiry. J. Thomas Scharf’s mid-nineteenth-century two-volume tome, *History of Westchester County*, recounts a Revolutionary War-era tale about an “Aunt Betty” that revealed a burial ground for enslaved Africans on the property of Jan

Buckhout, on which he and his Jewel descendants lived from 1708 to the 1850s. Our analysis of both old and new research strongly suggests that this burial ground was located



In 1802, Glode Requa, Jr. sold “a Certain Negro Boy named David Between Nine and Ten years of age” for \$125 to John Storm. Bill of sale reprinted with permission of the Westchester County Historical Society.

THE ROOST

OUR TOWN AND SLAVERY, *continued*

across South Buckhout Street from the Cosmopolitan/Trent Building alongside Barney Brook. In 1939, the now-defunct *Irvington Gazette* reported that, “human skulls and bones were dug up” from this “almost entirely forgotten” burial ground in 1895 when excavation of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine building site was underway. But construction continued,

including development of the surrounding area and alongside the brook, and the site was destroyed. Tours of this former burial ground were given during the 2018 Celebrate Irvington Festival. Check the Irvington Historical Society’s website for future information about this important topic.

—Cathy Sears and Sarah Cox

NEW YORK’S COMPLEX HISTORY OF SLAVERY

From New York’s beginning as a Dutch colony, enslaved people were considered chattel, property to be traded and sold like cattle and wheat. Just before the English took over in 1664, the Dutch West India Company granted conditional or half-freedom to select enslaved men and their wives, stipulating dues and labor obligations. Their children (even the unborn) remained enslaved. The British then replaced the Dutch system with harsher slave laws. After independence, in 1799, New York passed a Gradual Emancipation Act, followed by a second one in 1817 (with myriad modifications in between). Historian Vivienne L. Kruger explains its impact: “In contrast to sudden, total emancipation in the South, New York slaves were freed voluntarily and gradually between 1785 and 1848. Separate ownership guaranteed separate manumission of relatives and severe family disruption as husbands, wives, and children were freed individually, often many years apart.” As such, children born into slavery after July 4, 1799, would be freed, but only after long service: 25 years for women and 28 for men. People born before this date were renamed “indentured servants,” but essentially remained enslaved since owners could be reasonably confident these newly “free” people would stay by their enslaved children. Slavery officially ended in New York in 1827, but the children remained in bondage until their period of servitude expired. Kruger concludes, “it was not until the mid-1870s . . . that an entire generation began to be born . . . whose parents had not been enslaved or ‘bound youth’ in New York State.”

***Our Town and Slavery* copyright © 2019 by Cathy Sears and Sarah Cox. All rights reserved. This article, *Our Town and Slavery*, or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any format (including digital) whatsoever without the express written permission of the coauthors, Cathy Sears and Sarah Cox. The three historical images and one illustration were used with permission of the Irvington Public Library, Guiteau Foundation; the Westchester County Archives; and the Westchester County Historical Society. Reproduction of these copyrighted images or their use in any other format is strictly prohibited without written permission of these archives.**

THE ROOST

NOTES AND SELECT RESEARCH SOURCES

Onsite research was conducted at a variety of archives, including: the Irvington Public Library, Guiteau Foundation; Tarrytown Historical Society; the Historic Hudson Valley Library and Collections; the Westchester County Archives; and the New-York Historical Society. Online land deed research was conducted by Charles L. Kerr.

NOTE: Page references for material directly cited in our article are given in boldface after the sources from which they are taken.

Websites, Books* and Publications

(*Certain historical books can be viewed online at Google books):

Benton, Ned. "Dating the Start and End of Slavery in New York," *New York Slavery Records Index*. nyslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/dating-the-start-and-end-of-slavery-in-new-york/.

For "commonly accepted dates" and extended dates of slavery, see p. 1.

Bolton, Robert, Jr. *A History of the County of Westchester, from its First Settlement to the Present Time*, New York, Alexander S. Gould, 1848. See vol. 1, p. 196 about Dinah.

City University of New York (CUNY)'s John Jay College of Criminal Justice. New York Slavery Records Index: Records of Enslaved Persons and Slave Holders in New York from 1525 through the Civil War. 2017. nyslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/search/ Information on slave owners and enslaved individuals in New York.

Davis, Thomas J. "Westchester's Early African Roots," *The Westchester Historian: Quarterly of the Westchester County Historical Society*, Winter 1987, vol. 63, no. 1. See p. 8 for the 1760 value of a free man and buying a captive African.

Greenburgh, Town of, West Chester County, New York, Federal Census, 1790. Ancestry.com

For information on local tenant farmers and numbers of enslaved individuals they owned.

Hodges, Graham Russell. *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York & East New Jersey, 1613-1863*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1999. **For quote on post-Revolutionary war value of slaves, see p. 165.**

Kruger, Vivienne L. *Born to Run: The Slave Family in Early New York, 1626 to 1827*, 1985. Columbia University, PhD dissertation. *ProQuest* no. 8523186. **See ch. 5 for quotes re the "division of a testator's estate." See Abstract for quote, "In contrast to sudden, total emancipation" and ch. 13 for quote, "mid-1870s for entire generations."**

Raymond, Marcius D., ed. *Souvenir of the Revolutionary Soldiers' Monument Dedication, at Tarrytown, N.Y.* New York, Rogers & Sherwood, 1894. See p. 141 about Brebay.

Scharf, J. Thomas. *History of Westchester County, New York including Morrisania, Kings Bridge and West Farms which have been annexed to New York City*, Philadelphia, L.E. Preston & Co., 1886. See vol. 1, part 2, ch. 2, pp. 189-190 about Caesar and Aunt Betty.

"Slavery in New Netherland," New Netherland Institute. <https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/digital-exhibitions/slavery-exhibit/half-freedom/> For information about half-freedom.

Vetare, Margaret L. *Philipsburgh Manor Upper Mills*, Tarrytown, NY, Historic Hudson Valley Press, 2004. The Philipse family history of slavery at the Upper Mills site. For size and history, see p. 21 and 60. **For Vetare quote, see p. 22.**

See online information about same: <https://hudsonvalley.org/historic-sites/philipsburg-manor/>

William-Myers, Albert James. *Long Hammering: Essays on the Forging of an African American Presence in the Hudson River Valley to the Early Twentieth Century*, Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, 1994.

For Westchester County statistics on enslaved and free people, see p. 22.

For Hudson Valley average ownership of one or two slaves, see p. 23.

<http://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/historyculture/index.htm> For information about the African Burial Ground in NYC.

Irvington Historical Society / Main Street School Partnership



Hudson River Day, Matthiessen Park.

The students from Irvington’s Main Street School have been part of an ongoing collaboration with the Historical Society to learn about their local history.

On October 5th, local historian (and IHS member) Bob Connick and former Irvington High School principal (and IHS trustee) Scott Mosenthal shared a history of the Irvington riverfront with the Main Street School fifth-graders on the annual field trip to study all things related to the Hudson. Students were provided with a chronological outline—complete with photos, maps and anecdotes—of how over the past three hundred years Irvington has been transformed from a Native American fishing and farming encampment to a popular suburban village with a variety of commercial enterprises and residences.

In December, the fifth-graders visited McVickar House and the Great Estates exhibit, which had been previewed by their teachers in order to frame engaging questions. Students then arrived class by class and were greeted by docent volunteers, who explained different aspects of the three Irvington estates (and families) on exhibit. The fifth-graders then headed downstairs where they were treated to the holiday train display and a short presentation by Train Master Bill Schwartz, who was fully decked out in engineer regalia.



John Ryan talks about Cyrus Field and the Ardsley estate with visiting fifth-graders.

The visit ended with a Jeopardy-style quiz based on information the students had learned earlier in the year (“What company changed from making greenhouses in the 1880s to making landing craft in WWII?”) as well as knowledge of current Irvington history (“Which legendary high school coach just notched her 700th win?”). As one teacher commented, “It’s always a pleasure to connect our students to Irvington’s history; whether it’s discovering how the Hudson River has impacted the village to studying the great estates in the area, the learning is so important to their understanding and appreciation of their community. We can’t wait to do this again.”

Upcoming on June 6th, Bob and Scott will join the Main Street School’s annual Immigration Day event and present the story of how immigration has impacted Irvington during its history. We look forward to many more opportunities to connect Irvington students with the history of their village.

—Scott Mosenthal

Holiday Model Train Exhibit

We very much hope you made it to McVickar House over the holidays to see the fabulous model train exhibit. The brainchild of our own Bill Schwartz, the HO holiday village and Lionel “Main Street” layouts delighted visitors of all ages and brought many new faces to the History Center.



The model of Village Hall.

The holiday train layout.



Bill, Andy Api, IHS trustee Earl Ferguson, and Alex Powell fashioned the wonderful models of Main Street buildings and designed the layouts of both train runs. Vintage model trains, a film about the Old Put, and authentic railroad memorabilia were also on display.

Railroad memorabilia on display included the Irvington station sign.



Bill Schwartz shows visiting Irvington fifth-graders the Main Street train layout.



The exhibit opened on December 1st and ran through Saturday, January 12th. Fifth-grade classes from the Main Street School stopped by to see the trains and the Great Estate exhibit. We hope to make the Holiday Model Train Exhibit an annual treat. So if you missed it this year, make sure to stop by next December—and bring the family!

—Ginny Read

NEW AT THE IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY:

THE LEGACY PROJECT

Last summer, a friend of Irvington Historical Society Trustee Veronica Gedrich shared with her a town history that had been published by the Truro Historical Society. The book was based on a series of interviews conducted by a member of that society with a number of older, lifelong Truro residents, in which they were asked to describe what it had been like to grow up there during the 1940s and 50s. A black-and-white photo of each interviewee accompanied their recollections.

When Veronica shared this idea with the IHS board to see whether or not we might be interested in undertaking something similar, the response was universally positive. Consequently, a committee was formed that selected about a dozen older residents who had either grown up in Irvington or had moved here as young adults, and who had been active in village life. Legacy Committee members then interviewed these residents about their life in Irvington during the 1940s and 50s. They were also photographed by IHS Trustee Edna Kornberg.

The Legacy Project will culminate in June at a public reception for the interviewees at the Irvington Public Library, where enlarged photographs and summations of their interviews will be exhibited in the Martucci Gallery. There will also be a panel discussion featuring the interviewees, who will reminisce about their childhoods or what it was like to be an Irvington parent sixty or seventy years ago.

This process will repeat next year when the Society invites another dozen or so residents to share their memories. Once that round has been completed, we will publish and sell a book featuring all the interviews and photographs.

Our plan is to make this a bi-annual event.

—Scott Mosenthal

STARS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

On Sunday, February 10th, Charlese Randolph’s **Stars of the Harlem Renaissance** program at the Irvington Public Library brought us back to a time when Harlem was “the” place to be



Charlese Randolph takes a question from the audience.

and a nexus for African American artists, writers, and civil rights activists. Their names read like a Who’s Who of American culture: musicians Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie; writers Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston; scholars and political figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, and many others who found in Harlem a place where economic self-reliance, cultural pride, and community were possible.

After setting the stage with a video showcasing the amazing flowering of African American culture during this era, Ms. Randolph recounted her lifelong fascination with the Harlem Renaissance, sparked by one of her high school teachers in New York City and kept alive by her own study and love of dance—and there was plenty of unbelievable dancing on display in the film.

Ms. Randolph’s program explored the many factors that contributed to the Harlem Renaissance—World War I, which created a need for factory help in Northern cities; the Great Migration of black families from the Caribbean and Southern United States in search of these jobs and

new lives; Philip Payton, the savvy African American realtor who convinced white property owners to rent Harlem brownstones and apartments to black tenants once the housing boom went bust; the arrival of the IRT subway in Harlem; and Prohibition, which sent young white New Yorkers “up there” to Harlem clubs for excitement and illegal booze.

Also helping to shape the Harlem Renaissance were Irvington’s own Madame C.J. Walker and her daughter, A’Lelia Walker, whose lavish parties at her grand townhouse on West 136th Street, the “Dark Tower,” brought together artists, poets, writers, activists, and musicians. Although Madame Walker died in 1919, in the early days of the movement, her philanthropy supported important new civic organizations like the NAACP and she hosted conferences and artistic gatherings at her Irvington mansion, Villa Lewaro. —Ginny Read

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 DATES

☞ **Sunday, March 17th / 2 PM • Irvington Public Library**

Celebrate Women's History Month by coming to see
Michele LaRue perform the anti-suffrage satire,
"SOMEONE MUST WASH THE DISHES"
(written by pro-suffragist Marie Jenney Howe in 1912)

☞ **Sunday, April 7th / 3 PM • Irvington Public Library**

Author and Food Historian, **Peter G. Rose**, will speak on
everyone's favorite subject: **Chocolate!**