

Egbert Benson HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF RED HOOK
P.O. Box 397 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571-0397

SPRING 2004

President's Message

It is possible that many of you may wonder just exactly what it is that we do. Very simply, our mission is to preserve the past and present for the future. We do this by collecting and preserving the documents and artifacts of historic interest relating to the Township of Red Hook. We try to promote and encourage historical research. We promote public knowledge, awareness, and interest in this history through the publication of our newsletter, old reprints from the Red Hook Journal, and the monthly programs that we present at the Elmendorph Inn. In addition to the history, we encourage the preservation of historic sites, buildings and markers.

Another vehicle that we use to encourage and reward the promotion of historic knowledge and the preservation of historic sites and artifacts is our Heritage Award Program. Each year at our annual meeting, we bestow awards to various individuals for their contributions to our cause. We have an award titled Written/Recorded for the production of any significant written or recorded document. Our Architectural award usually goes to those parties responsible for the preservation or renovation of an old building. The Artistic award has gone to those who have produced paintings, quilts, models or store displays or other visual items of historical significance. An Environmental award is given to those responsible for the preservation of any open land or historically significant structures such as the old stone walls so prevalent in this area. The Junior Leadership award usually goes to a high school student who makes some notable contribution to the promotion or preservation of local history. These are usually research papers on notable historic structures but also include model making and the organization of clubs promoting history. We also have a Senior Leadership award that has been given to those who have made major efforts in the acquisition and preservation of historic structures.

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ANNUAL MEETING & DINNER

The ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EGBERT BENSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY will take place Tuesday, **June 15, 2004**, at the Elmendorph Inn, North Broadway, Red Hook, NY. The evening will start with hors d'oeuvres at 6 p.m., dinner from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. meeting at 7:30 p.m. and the speakers at 8 p.m. Christopher Morton and Sarah C. Stevens will present CONSERVING NEW YORK'S HISTORY: THE NEW YORK STATE BATTLE FLAG PRESERVATION PROJECT. Mr. Morton and Ms. Stevens are Assistant Curator and Assistant Textile Conservator for the New York State Battle Flag Preservation Project.

Reservations are required for the buffet dinner. The menu and reservation form can be found on page 5.

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In addition to all of this, we offer an Annual Award – of -Merit to a graduating Red Hook High School Senior. This award is presently in the amount of \$100.00. It is given to encourage student interest in local history and to broaden existing data on the evolution of the Northern Dutchess County area. A selection committee will select a recipient who they believe has done the most to expand information on or appreciation for past times and life in this area. If you know of someone who may be interested in receiving this award, please write or call us for more details for qualification and application.

Our Annual Banquet is coming up this June 15th at the Elmendorph Inn to culminate another year of events from our society. We have two great speakers and a great menu from one of our local caterers. I hope to see as many of you there that can find the time to indulge in this affair.

If any of you have any ideas as to what else our society should be doing or perhaps what we should be doing differently, please let us know.

Finally, the rest of the Board of Trustees and I would like to thank all of you for showing your interest in local history and a special thanks for all of those volunteers and contributors that make our society possible.

*Best regards,
Nick Annas, President*

THIS MAY BE YOUR LAST.....

You know how you get those catalogs that say "This may be your last catalog!", and you hope it is? Well, this could be your last newsletter and we hope it isn't! We are in the process of reviewing our mailing list. Please check your mailing label. If the line above your name says "12/31/04" or "Life", you are current, and we thank you for your support. (The response to our fall membership letter was great.) If your label has an earlier date and you think you should be current, please let us know by dropping us a note (Egbert Benson Historical Society, PO Box 397, Red Hook, NY 12571) or giving us a call at the Historical Society office (845-758-1920). If your dues are not up to date, you can still send us your dues for this year and remain on our mailing list. If we don't hear from you, we will regretfully drop your name from our list. You know all about the high cost of postage!

One other note: Many people are still confused about the relationship between the Egbert Benson Historical Society and The Friends of Elmendorph. While we work together, and the Historical Society has its office at the Elmendorph Inn, we are two separate organizations with separate (but often overlapping) memberships. The Friends of Elmendorph are the folks who are responsible for restoring and maintaining the beautiful Elmendorph Inn. The mission of the Historical Society is to collect and preserve records relating to our town, and to encourage public awareness of and appreciation for the history of our area. We hope you will support both organizations.

LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

Winthrop Aldrich
Nick and Carol Annas
Lyle and Virginia Bacon
Steve & Eva Camille Beer
Bob and Barbara Bielenberg
Shirley Brown
Peter and Alice Bulkeley
David Case
John and Mary Cioffi
Arnold and Alice Colburn
Faith Compo
Richard Coons
Thomas and Lydia Cordier
Terence and Kate Dewsnap
Dr. and Mrs. Dillman
Margaret Doty
John Douglas
Barbara Field
Gary and Nancy Finkle
Paul Fredericks and Lottie Kittner
Edwin Geissler

Herman Gorgens
James Hardin
Albert and Marlene Hejnal
Nancy Hetzler
Louis and Mildred Hubach
Shirley Kane
Joe Kavacky
Vance and Linda Keeling
John and Elizabeth Kennedy
Evelyn Krueger
Roger and Bernice Leonard
Mrs. Jack McEnroe
Marie Milbrant
Walter and Jean Moore
Carl and Lorraine Pack
Dr. Nydia Perez
Samuel and Ellen Phlen
Rock City Grange
Thomas and Evelyn Seils
Elizabeth Seitz
Katherine Selznick
Alvin Sheffer

Barbara Thompson
Augusta Townsend
Gloria Trezza
Glen Waggoner and Sharon McIntosh
Monica Wieboldt
Mr. and Mrs. Donald Wise

Revised 4/9/04



Horticulture in Northern Dutchess

A Talk by Fred Battenfeld

At one time there were 150 violet growers between Red Hook and Violet Avenue in Poughkeepsie according to Fred Battenfeld, who spoke to the Historical Society on October 21st. One year the Lord & Burnham Company in Irvington built 350 greenhouses in the Hudson Valley. Here in the Village of Red Hook there are still a number of small frame buildings, which once supplied heat and workspace for long gone greenhouses. Violet growing became a cottage industry supplementing the income of many local households during the first half of the 20th century. Today the violets are gone but two growers in Red Hook and Rhinebeck supply most of the world's finest anemones to the floral trade.

Battenfeld, whose father started the floral and Christmas tree business, which now flourishes on Route 199 east of the village, recounted the history of the horticultural industry in Northern Dutchess County. According to Battenfeld it all began in the late 1800's when wealthy estate owners in the Hudson Valley imported talented gardeners from to Europe to beautify their grounds and manage greenhouses providing fresh flowers and exotic plants for their mansions. Some of the more enterprising horticulturalists went into business for themselves, many growing fragrant violets for corsages, which were the height of fashion at the time.

The violet corsages were shipped to New York City by train or steamboat. Growing, picking and arranging the individual blossoms into flat "nosegays" framed by violet or galyx leaves and paper doilies was very labor intensive. Women and children were employed and local schools scheduled their spring vacations before Easter so that the students could join the labor force to meet the holiday demand. The economic depression in the 1930's weeded out some of the less efficient growers. During World War II labor became increasing scarce as men were



Fred Battenfeld in one of his anemone green houses

into called into service and women found better paying employment. After the war, violets fell out of vogue, replaced by camellias, gardenias and finally orchids in the 1950's.

Roswell Cole, the Rhinebeck postmaster began to grow anemone's in his Rhinecliff greenhouse in 1948. Fred Battenfeld's great uncle who worked in the Troy family's greenhouse began to experiment with the plant and discovered it was an ideal cool weather crop. His brother, Frederick W. and F.W.'s son Richard founded the business that continues today on Route 199, east of the Village of Red Hook. Using artist brushes to transfer pollen from one plant to another, they began to hybridize new varieties to improve the color and form of the flowers. In Rhinebeck, Ralph Pitcher and his sons got involved and the three local growers cooperated to improve the crop, exchanging seed and ideas. Together they developed a unique long-lasting flower, which was well received in the New York market. The demand increased greatly when it became known that Jackie Kennedy loved anemones and insisted on having them in the White House.

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Today, the Battenfelds and Pitchers ship a million blooms a year to a worldwide market. The Cole brothers closed their greenhouses in 1982. Although anemones are field grown in France and in Israel where they are the national flower their blooms can't compete with the hybrid varieties developed locally. The local anemones are characterized by long, straight stems supporting large blossoms enhanced by leafy collars. Through hybridizing the red, blue, violet and white colors have been variegated and new shades added. The Battenfelds grow 16 different shades, many unique to their greenhouses. The seeds, which remain viable for as long as 20 years, are closely guarded and never sold, preserving their unique product.

Each plant produces 15 to 18 blossoms in a 9-month period. At the end of the season the plants are removed, the soil sterilized and enriched and new seed planted to start the cycle over again. Labor is the biggest expense followed by fuel, chemicals and fertilizer. During the winter the greenhouses consume 40 gallons of fuel per hour, 60,000 gallons per season!

Workers begin harvesting the stems at 5:00 am when the blossoms are still closed. The long stems are bunched and shipped without water in upright boxes to keep them erect. Most are trucked to New York but about 30% leave the greenhouse at 1:00 pm by Federal Express and will be in California by noon the next day. Other boxes go to Texas, Tennessee and other states and individual orders are received and shipped anywhere in the world. Once exposed to light and warmth, the blossoms open and often last a week or more if kept cool at night.



The Battenfelds also grow Asiatic lilies, alstromerias and the pick your own Christmas trees for which they have become famous! Each year their workers make 2,000 Christmas wreathes and decorations for sale. For largely sentimental reasons they also grow a small quantity of violets, continuing the local tradition, although now the violets are largely used for culinary decorations!

Barbara W. Bielenberg

DONATIONS RECEIVED

IN MEMORY OF

CLARE O'NEILL CARR

Nick and Carol Annas

The Brodsky-Longobardi Family

Joanne Clarke and Charles Schroedel

Annatje and Thomas Gilbert

Maynard Ham

Marilyn and John Hatch

Nancy Hetzler

Martin and Katherine Gould-Martin

Bobbie Thompson

Steve and Victoria Young

A big thank you to all of you who sent us donations in memory of our late President. The names listed here are in addition to the people whose names appeared in our last newsletter. Altogether, we have received \$1830, a fitting memorial, we think, to someone who was so interested in the history of Red Hook and the Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook. We are still discussing the best way to use these special funds, and would be glad to hear your suggestions.

DON'T MISS THE ANNUAL EBHS DINNER MEETING AND VOTE

Tuesday, June 15, 2004, Elmendorph Inn, Red Hook

6 p.m. Hors d'oeuvres ~ 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Dinner ~ 7:30 p.m. Meeting, ~ 8 p.m. Speakers

Dinner Menu

Braised Chuck Steak w/ Fennel & Onion
Salmon Quenelles w/ Sorrel Butter Sauce
White & Wild Rice w/ Cranberries , apples, oranges
Green Beans w/ Portabella Mushrooms

Ricotta Lemon Cake w/ Lemon Curd & Berry Filling

DINNER RESERVATIONS MUST BE MADE BY JUNE 8, 2004

PROXY for June 15, 2004

I will **NOT** attend the ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EGBERT BENSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY. In my absence, I hereby appoint the President or his/her deputy or _____

to act as my proxy to vote on all matters that come before the membership on June 15, 2004.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Mary Cioffi has once again graciously volunteered to accept proxies and dinner reservations. Please send your proxy or dinner reservation to: Mary Cioffi, 10 Old Post Road North, Red Hook, NY 12571 (845-758-6204). **Please make your check payable to RENNERS.**

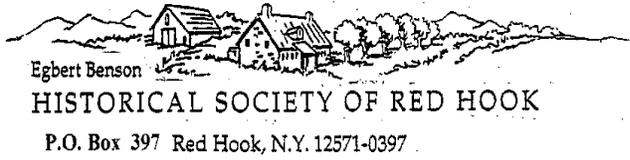
Dinner Reservation Form

Name[s] [please print] _____

Phone _____

_____ Number of Persons @\$16

Amount enclosed _____



MEMBERSHIP FORM 2004
The Egbert Benson Historical Society of Red Hook
 P.O. Box 397 Red Hook, New York, 12571

 Name(s) (please print):

 Mailing Address:

 Telephone Number (with area code):

 Dues: Please check: Individual \$10

 Family \$15

 Student (under 18) \$5

 Life \$100 (individual)

 Sustaining \$50

 Contributing \$ 25

 Donation (indicate any company matches please)

Benefits of membership : Advance notice of monthly programs ~ The knowledge that you support the collection, preservation, and dissemination of the history of the Town of Red Hook .



John Ham and Ed Decker Working in Ham's violet house on Garden Street c. 1924. Workers sat or lay on boards raised above the violets they are picking.

Maynard Ham Collection

INTRODUCTION

To paraphrase Russell Baker who wrote about growing up in Baltimore, Barrytown was a great place in which to grow up, but it really did not prepare us to live in the 20th Century.

PREFACE

With the coming of the railroad around 1850, Barrytown, New York, a small hamlet in the Town of Red Hook, located on the Hudson River about 100 miles north of New York City, sprang to life and began to prosper. For the next several decades, its economic and social life revolved around the railroad, ice making on the Hudson, shipping, agriculture, maintenance of the river estates and, later, the local institutions of Bard College (1860) and St. Joseph's Normal Institute (1930). St. Joe's-as it was commonly called by the locals-prepared students mostly from New York and New England to become Brothers to propagate the Catholic faith.

Most of what is written in this story was experienced by me. On occasion, I make reference to some stories that my siblings shared. Some details are somewhat vague, but I have tried to accurately recollect what took place while growing up in Barrytown. We sometimes have different perceptions of a particular incident. However, I'm sure if I have failed to portray a particular experience or historic fact accurately, my sisters, brothers or friends will inform me.

I recently read a column by Bard Lindeman, who offers advice to the elderly, which dealt with the idea of encouraging our "old folks" to write about

their life experiences. Since I believe everyone should do this, I have encouraged others to get involved.

My friend Warren Shaw, formerly of Red Hook, sent a quote which I feel is most appropriate in reference to recording local history. The quote is from a book written by Sharyn McCrumb entitled The Songcatcher. Warren, who now lives in Maryville, Tennessee, is interested in history and folk lore. We shared some ideas, and he encouraged me to finish my story after reading the chapter on the local characters. Having known some of them, he was able to appreciate the humor.

