

THE OSSINING HISTORICAL REGISTER

Preserving, Protecting & Publishing Ossining's History

WINTER 2013-2014

President John Wunderlich's Message:

Spring is on its way, and not soon enough! It has been a tough winter at the Museum; pipes froze, radiators blew apart, mountains of snow in the driveway and parking lot. Winter is holding on with a death grip, but spring will eventually win out. Once spring does show up we plan on cleaning out and reorganizing the map room, which is the old thrift shop, and make it more amenable for research. We will also set up displays from our Archeological collection and we will display some of the historic maps and photos that we reproduced last year for the Bicentennial that are for sale. The bicentennial was a great opportunity to show off our wares and we feel that the Museum should continue with these assets as a good source of revenue.

The Annual Dinner at Sleepy Hollow Country Club this past October was a huge success thanks to our members, the venue, the many donations for the silent auction and the raffle of the framed reproduction of the Robert Havell, jr. painting "Looking North to Croton". This painting was done in 1841 and was donated to the OHSM by Nelson Rockefeller in 1941 and is known to be one of his finest of the Hudson Valley. The Annual dinner this year will be on Friday October 17. If you like great architecture, great food and great company mark your calendars.

We will continue with our popular Historic Tours of our area starting with St. Augustine's Cemetery in April. There is more information on this in this Newsletter. Last year our tours were the Ellis Place Historic House Walking Tour, Dale Cemetery, Holy Ossining Historic Church's and the Sing Sing Prison and Madmen tour. We are working on house tours and lecture tours for the coming season. These are To Be Announced.

Think of us while amidst your spring cleaning, whether it be a basement, an attic, the garage or if you know of an Estate Sale that we might be interested in. Whether it is fishing and sporting equipment, old tools, vases, pottery, crystal, framed pieces, plate sets, mission furniture, artifacts from Borneo, or Egyptian Wall hangings. We hunt all year for items for our Silent Auction at the Annual Dinner and are often surprised as to what comes through our doors and even more so what our members will buy.

We have many new members due to all our activity last year and I would like to welcome each and every one of them. Hope to see you at one of our events and, of course, a big Thank You to all our members for their continued support and to all the volunteers that help make our museum a success.

*John C. Wunderlich
President, Ossining Historical Society*

Luigino (Lou) Galletto passed away on February 17 at the age of 88. Lou was a long time active member of the Society and one of our very enthusiastic supporters. He grew up in Ossining and graduated from OHS. Lou was very proud of his Ossining background and although he lived most of his adult years in Pawling NY, he was a frequent visitor at the Museum and attended many of our programs. We will miss him very much.

Our condolences go to the families of the following members and friends who have passed away recently: **Dorothy Fields Tompkins**, age 101, **Mafalda (Miffie) Fasciani**, age 82, **Grace Messiah**, age 103, **Jean Thompson Purdy**, age 90, **Betty Sclocco**, age 80.

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

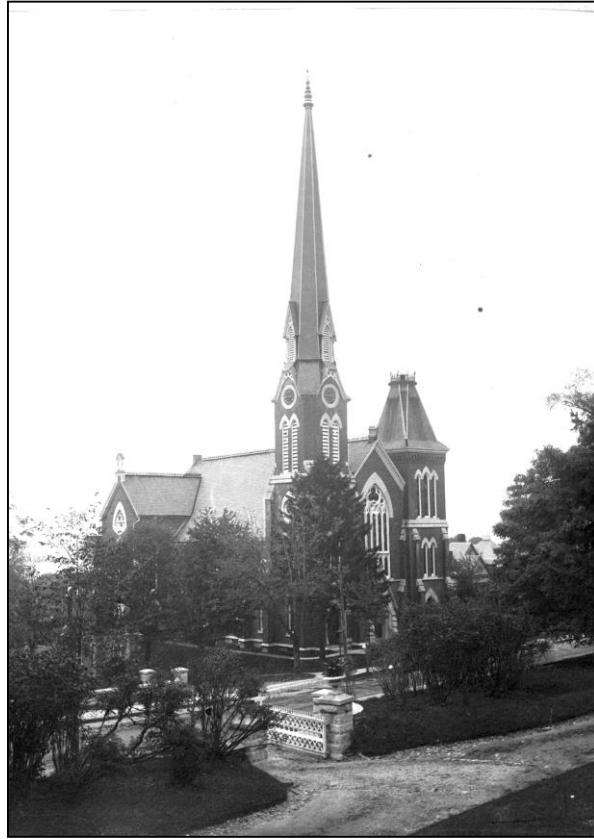
Janice Parker, Elizabeth Feldman, Stephen P. Long, Mary Lou Paletta, Laura Montgomery, Susan F. Irving, Gloria J. Seymour, Randy Hans, Harry Breheny, Veronica Gagliardi, Marianne Solak, W. Jean Horkans, Barbara Woller, Mr. & Mrs. Michael McMorrow.



OHSM President John Wunderlich addressing members at the 2013 Ossining Historical Society Annual Dinner at the Sleepy Hollow Country Club last October.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

On Saturday, April 26, 2014 starting at 2:00 p.m. the OSHM will conduct a tour of St. Augustine's Cemetery. The tour will include several different speakers and take approximately 1 - 1/2 hours. The cemetery dates back to 1862 and includes the interments of the area's Irish Catholic residents, construction workers for the Croton Aqueduct, railroad workers and Sing Sing Prison inmates as well as war veterans. In case of extreme weather the tour will be held on Sunday April 27, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. Contact Patricia Sacchi **914-552-5054** or **phsacchi@gmail.com** for any questions or additional information. Tour is free but a suggested donation of \$10 would be appreciated.



Original steeple & higher location

ONCE UPON A TIME IN OSSINING...
THE STORY OF
THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CLOCK
AND OTHER HOROLOGICAL MINUTIAE

By Patricia Sacchi

On Saturday, October 5, 2013 the Ossining Historical Society Museum hosted an informative lecture by Mr. Mel Smith, who related the story of the clock at the First Presbyterian Church, 34 South Highland Ave. He was accompanied by Jim Storrow and Bob O'Connor, all of whom had a part in restoring the clock some years ago. We first met Mr. Smith as an attendee of our Holy Ossining Tour held on the day of the Village Fair this past June. He spoke up about this particular clock as we approached the church. We decided then and there that it was an interesting enough story to warrant its own program so that more could learn about this treasure that is seemingly so



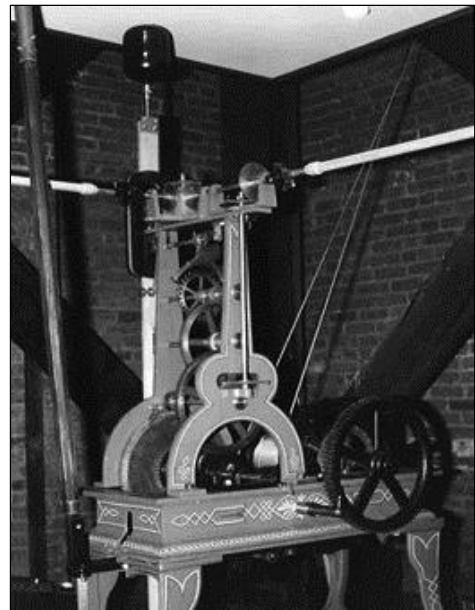
1. Mel Smith

well hidden in front of our eyes. Side note: Mr. Smith has an Ossining connection. His grandparents, the Van Attens lived on Spring Street and are buried in Sparta Cemetery.

The clock was manufactured by the George M. Stevens Company, Boston MA in 1869. A large and heavy bell 56" in diameter and 42" high hangs over the clock cast in 1872 by Meneely & Kimberly Founders, Troy NY. This is the second bell as the first was deemed unsatisfactory. In any case, when the church was built in 1869 the clock was located in a much higher position than its present location. The very tall steeple was deemed unsafe and it was removed in 1955. The clock was relocated two levels down to a convenient spot housing two windows. The bell was not moved. During this move, it was electrified and some of the original parts lost. It was the task of the men to restore the clock to its original glory and make it run without electricity.

Mel began his talk with a brief history of timekeeping in general, such as when time zones first came into existence (during the building of the railroad) and the basic physics and math that goes into the gears, bobs, pendulum, cables, wheels and multitude of miscellaneous parts that make clocks run. Some of us, me included, were a bit glazed over during this mechanical physics and math dissertation. By the time he was finished, somehow it all made perfect sense! He put together a sample clock which was a smaller version of the clock upstairs. Mel is a master machinist, horologist and member of the NAWCC (National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors).

Many of us cannot remember when we didn't have a cell phone, digital watch, cable TV box or computer to tell us what time it is. But in the late 1800's, all of the residents of Sing Sing relied on the accuracy of the First Presbyterian Church Clock. Documents prove that the village paid one man \$50 a year to maintain the clock.



2. Actual clock workings



3. Current location of faces

After watching a presentation that gave an overview of the restoration of the clock, it was time to head up and see the real thing for ourselves. Most everyone was brave enough to try. First, we went up one flight to the clock works through a trap door, where there awaited us another narrower steep flight to see the bell. Still another flight, more like a ladder really, was all that remained. But as the clock was moved from its original location above the bell to below it, most of us saw no reasonably sane need to climb any further. The floors beneath the clock and bell are surrounded by a “break away” wood box filled with small metal parts. This would limit the damage if by some slim chance the clock and bell were to fall. These smaller parts would absorb the impact by simply breaking away.

Every 7 days Mel winds the clock. The hypnotic tick-tock-tick-tock is very reassuring to all who stood next to the timepiece restored to its original glory. This clock has two sets of hands all running off the one clock. Next time you are in the area stop by and look at it in detail. If you are there on Wednesday mornings, about 10 am, please drop in to visit Mel as he winds the clock.

Our program has led us to the question: What about all the other clocks and bells of Ossining’s historic churches? According to Peter Cassidy of the Methodist Church, the bell located outside on the southern side of the building never did hang in the tower due to lack of funding at the time. Further research is being done. Stay tuned for upcoming programs and articles on these and all of our local treasures.



Interior view of the First Presbyterian



CITIZEN KANE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FANNY RANDALL KANE,
OSSINING'S FIRST LADY OF CIVIC AFFAIRS.

By Dana White

On the evening of April 13, 1936, more than 150 local residents paid \$2.25 apiece to attend a testimonial dinner at the Briar Hills Country Club (now Trump International). While such soirees were not uncommon, usually they were held for someone who'd recently died. That evening's honoree, Mrs. John Innes Kane—known to all as Fanny--was very much alive, the first person with a pulse--and a woman to boot--to be honored "for her unselfish service" to Ossining.

In an era before the social safety net, when citizens of wealth and privilege considered it their duty to assist those less fortunate, Frances Randall Kane was a tiny ball of energy in a size-one shoe, a Mayflower descendant and DAR member who made it her mission to help the poor, the sick, the lonely.

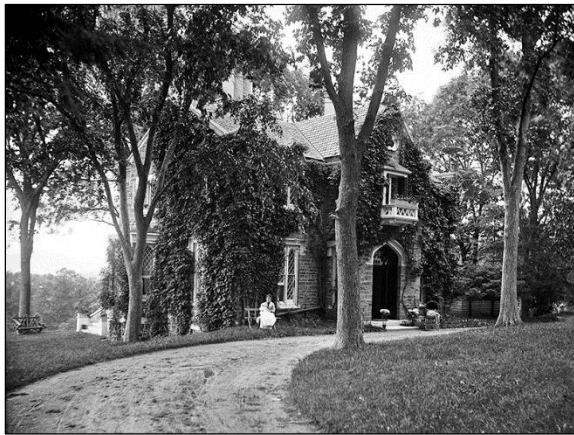
After the diners had finished the fresh fruit cocktail with mint, cream of tomato soup, filet mignon with pan roast potatoes and new peas, and ice cream in fancy moulds, the speeches began. One after another, Mrs. Kane's friends and admirers stood to toast her achievements as a Neighbor and Friend, an Organizer, a Citizen and a Humanitarian. Clara Fuller, owner of the Ossining School

for Girls and co-founder with Kane of the Civic League the Ossining Woman's Club, attested to her friend's astonishing can-do spirit: "She can't help it, she was born that way. What she wills to be done, will be done."

Fanny entered the world in the fall of 1858, one of four girls born to George and Virginia Brandreth. George, a lawyer and village president, was the oldest of thirteen children born to Benjamin Brandreth, the wealthy Englishman who manufactured his patent medicines and porous plasters on the Sing Sing waterfront. George ran the company after his father's death in 1880. Fanny's mother Virginia was a daughter of another leading citizen, General Aaron Ward, who lived in Careswell, a grand Greek Revival mansion built of convict-quarried Sing Sing marble. Fanny and her family lived at No. 10 Ellis Place, a large house they called Vine Cottage, only steps from Trinity Episcopal, the church the Brandreths were instrumental in building. Fanny showed an early propensity for order and neatness; as one admirer testified that night, Fanny "began her activities in public welfare at the early age of six, when she made her father remove a blot on the beauty of the neighborhood in the form of a little black pig and his sty."

Fanny's high-society upbringing was full of trips to New York City for Christmas presents, charity balls and dances at West Point, yet tragedy blotted this idyllic life. There was a childhood accident that stole the sight in her left eye, a handicap she did her best to ignore. When Fanny was 12 her mother passed away, and Mary, the oldest daughter, assumed the maternal role. When Fanny was 20, her fiancé, Alexander Gibson, son of the principal of St. John's School (where St. Ann's School now stands), died suddenly, and a heartbroken Fanny took a year-long trip to Europe and Egypt with Mary and her husband, Henry D. Borup.

In 1884, in her mid-20s, Fanny finally married, the last daughter to do so. Like her, John Innes Kane II was a Sing Sing native whose wealthy father, John Kane Sr., hailed from Albany.



4 Woodlawn in the late 1800s, with Fanny Kane out front

In the early 1840s, the Kane family had bought 46 acres on the river side of Albany Post Road--saving it from being cut up into home lots--and built the fine granite mansion called Woodlawn. It had 20 rooms and numerous outbuildings and was stuffed with fine antiques. But John Sr. had tuberculosis, and by the time their son was one year of age, both he and his wife had passed away. The little orphan inherited Woodlawn but was raised by relatives. He did not live there again until he married Fanny, having returned to Ossining after a career in the Army Calvary on the Texas frontier. According to a New York Times account of the wedding, Fanny's father George "presented her with a share in the

Brandreth Company, valued at \$50,000, a silver tea set, a check for \$500, an elegant piano, and a handsome Victoria [a type of carriage]."

The first half of Fanny's adult life was occupied with raising three children and caring for her husband, who, like his father, battled tuberculosis. John held positions at the Sing Sing Gas Co. and as Ossining postmaster, but his ill health forced him to warmer climes. Woodlawn was often vacant, the furniture sheeted, as Fanny accompanied John to Texas, California, and Arizona.

In 1898, John volunteered to serve in the Spanish American war as a captain, and after the invasion of Cuba returned home with ruined health. He passed away at Saranac Lake in 1904, leaving Fanny, at 46, a wealthy widow with three children and a philanthropic heart.

Over the next thirty years, Fanny made her mark on the village of Ossining. Again, tragedy was the motivation: Her younger sister Helen, called Nellie, was dying. Nellie, a kind soul who was married to Frederick Potter, scion of a wealthy local family, had the best medical care money could provide, yet she worried about those less fortunate. One day, she wondered aloud, "What do poor people do when they are sick?" Her dying wish was that Fanny and Frederick help the poor receive medical care.

After Nellie's death in 1905, Fanny and Frederick embarked on a partnership that would change the face of Ossining's health care. Frederick hired a nurse to care for the village poor, and Fanny directed her duties, jotting down reports with a pad and pencil she kept by her hand, at all hours of the day and night. (In 1914, this service became the District Nursing Association; Fanny served as its president until her death.) In 1906, the Potter family funded the construction of a new hospital on Spring Street, with Fanny a charter member. She also started clinics for women on Pre-Natal care, Maternal Health and Social Hygiene.

Community service filled a void in Fanny's life. Deciding the village was untidy, she and her childhood friend Clara Fuller, principal of the Ossining School for Girls, decided to do something about it. They started the Civic League, comprised of women dedicated to improving quality of life in the village. Whereas Ossining politics had been purely a man's game, Fanny insisted female voices be heard. In addition to cleaning up the streets, Fanny and her volunteer force tackled the cleanup of the Kill Brook, fought to preserve trees from developers, and took on the illegal saloons that distracted so many husbands from their domestic obligations. The story goes that one Sunday, motivated by one wife's tears, Fanny marched into a saloon and led the drunken husband out by the hand. When her efforts to regulate the saloons came up short, she opened a coffee shop and reading room on North Malcolm Street where "idlers" could spend time. She even hired the village's first policewoman to patrol the local "disorderly houses" at night and report any problems.

During World War I, Fanny characteristically turned hardship into opportunity. Her youngest child, Edward Winslow (named for a Mayflower ancestor), went off to Europe and became an aviator on the front lines. Fanny and the rest of the country's women stayed behind and did their part, knitting socks and making bandages for the troops. After Winslow returned unscathed, much to her delight, she transformed this community spirit into the Ossining Woman's Club. She raised the \$10,000 needed to buy the large house on South Highland Avenue. It was not



5 The Kane gravesite in Dale Cemetery

only a gathering place and hub of activity, but also a home for single women of modest means, who could rent rooms at a low price.

In 1931, convinced Ossining needed to preserve its past, Fanny hosted the first meeting of the Ossining Historical Society at Woodlawn. The society's first president, she presided over the collection of artifacts and documents that were stored in the Washington School on Croton Ave. before landing in their current home at 196 Croton Ave. While Fanny's other organizations have waned over the time, the Ossining Historical Society Museum remains her most visible and active legacy.

Elsewhere, Fanny's legacy is in transition. The Woman's Club is looking for a new home, now that its headquarters is on the market, but an oil portrait of Fanny still hangs above the fireplace in the main room. The Woodlawn estate, which was sold after her death in 1938 and served as corporate headquarters for decades, is now home to the new Avalon Bay luxury apartments. The majestic mansion has been impeccably restored to its former glory for a resident's clubhouse.

Fanny was the last of her sisters to pass away. Her generous heart gave out on June 1, 1938, at the age of 79. Her funeral was held at Trinity Episcopal Church and she was buried in Dale Cemetery. Flags on all the public buildings were lowered to half-mast. Her tiny coffin and legions of mourners brought to mind the words of one doctor at the testimonial dinner: "Fanny, you are a little bit of a woman, but you have a big heart and a big capacity for work that is worthwhile."



The Kane Mansion in its current state of restoration, March 2014, as part of the Avalon Ossining development. –Photo: Robert Stava



NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 6257
Ossining, NY

Ossining Historical Society Museum
196 Croton Avenue Ossining, NY 10562
(914) 941 - 0001 OHSM@bestweb.net

Forwarding Service Requested

Board of Trustees

John Wunderlich, President
Deborah Van Steen, 1st V.P.
Patricia Sacchi, 2nd V.P.
Joseph Burton, Secretary
Greg Fratianni, Treasurer
Norman MacDonald, Curator
Miguel J. Hernandez, Executive Director
David Bamonte
Yvonne Beldotti
Gabrielle Burton
Peter Cassidy
Jane Clark
Martha Mesiti
Gregory Kane
George Pires
Fred Roberts
Gregg Schatz
Robert Stava
Peter J. Tripodi IV
Dana White
Adam A. Wolpinsky, Photo Editor

