

# THE OSSINING HISTORICAL REGISTER

*Preserving, Protecting & Publishing Ossining's History*

WINTER 2014-15

## **A Message from Our President:**

*I hope this letter finds all our members well and enjoying the holiday season. We had a busy fall here at the museum. To prepare for winter, we repaired our roof and repaved the parking area and driveway. We still have some roof repairs that need to be done; the Yankee gutters on the backside of our building have rotted away and need serious work. Hopefully, this will be done by spring. These old buildings are so wonderful in their design and architecture, but they require a lot of maintenance lest they get too far gone. Many of you send extra donations at dues time to help with the care of our building and archives, and it is always appreciated.*

*One local landmark that was recently saved is the Kane mansion on Rte. 9. This gorgeous stone building on 22 acres is on the village's list of historic structures, but it had fallen into serious disrepair. Avalon Bay Communities purchased the property for the purpose of a residential development. Avalon did a real service to the community by re-purposing this mansion as a clubhouse for the apartment complex. Most developers would have found a way to demolish it, but Avalon spared no expense, painstakingly restoring the interior and exterior from top to bottom. We were invited to the new clubhouse's grand opening in October, and it was quite a shindig. If you get a chance, stop by and take a look at this masterpiece of adaptive reuse. And check out the before and after photos of the project in this issue.*

*Preserving legacies is what OHSM is all about. For example, we recently had a visit from staff and history teachers at Anne M. Dorner Middle School, who wanted to know more about the rich history of the village once known as Sing Sing. We gave them a brief overview of this wonderful area and the river that made our village so economically viable, from transporting goods to market to the fishing industry to manufacturing. My great-great grandfather Benjamin Brandreth, who made his world renowned patent medicines on our shores, was just one of the notable entrepreneurs who brought jobs and people here. The teachers spent 90 minutes with us, and they left very excited about sharing our history with their students. It was great to see their enthusiasm.*

*If you could not attend our annual Gala Dinner and Silent Auction at Sleepy Hollow Country Club on October 17, you missed a great time. This year, the raffle item was a matted and framed reproduction of "Village of Sing Sing, 1830," an oil painting by 19th century landscape painter Hugh Reinagle. We had reproduced it for Ossining's 2013 bicentennial, and it is available for purchase (see page 7 for details). I have a real connection with this work: My grandmother, Margaret Wunderlich, donated the original oil painting to the museum. It is a magnificent piece. If you are not familiar with it, please stop by to view this piece of our collective history.*

*And if we don't see you before the New Year, have a great holiday season!*

*John C. Wunderlich  
President, Ossining Historical Society Museum*

*We send our condolences to the families of the following members and friends who have passed away recently: James Shearman, Jean Walker, Charles O'Connor and Fred Bange.*

*We are pleased to welcome the following new members:*

*Kirk & Robin Carlson, Keith McKenna, Michael O'Neil, Duane Tiemann & Irene Herz, Eric Goldberg, Jeffrey Burdian, David Mallen & Nicole Mone', Kevin Sylvester and Peter & Christine Gallagher.*



## OH, WHAT A GALA IT WAS!

*Our annual dinner and silent auction makes a bid for history*

BY JOHN C. WUNDERLICH

The annual Gala Dinner and Silent Auction has become our largest fundraiser of the year, and the event we put the most energy into planning. This past year was our 83rd event! (Yes, do the math: The first one was held in 1941.) As usual, the party was quite successful, but it takes more than a little work and forethought to pull off. Here's a brief look, with photos, at how it comes together.

We moved the dinner to Sleepy Hollow Country Club three years ago and never looked back. With its history, architecture and grand view of the Hudson, this venue is one of the finest in our region. It not only gives us the room we need for our dinner patrons, who number between 150 to 175, but its roomy Cedar Room, next to the foyer entrance, showcases our silent auction items in a grand manner.

Rounding up auction items is a yearlong effort. We have a small inventory built up, and we also ask for donations. Some of our Trustees attend estate sales and tag sales; while quite time consuming, it can also be a lot of fun. Spring-cleaning brings many items to us. Countless times we get to the



Museum to find items sitting on the back stoop with not a clue as to who or where they came from. As October approaches, we start the trading game with antiques dealers. In addition to bric-a-brac and artwork, we try to have items that interest the guys, such as fishing gear, and wall hangers (i.e., old guns, swords, bayonets, etc.). These items bring a lot of interest and often result in hefty bidding wars. When it comes to quality we have set the bar high, and we want to maintain that level of quality. Not as easy as it sounds. The hunt is always on.

After the invitations go out and responses start pouring in, we start to get the “table groupings” together. This would be a whole lot easier if folks would pay attention to the cutoff date and we said “No!” when the date has passed. But our members don’t care about deadlines, and neither do we. On the Tuesday before the event, we get the seating arrangements all put together, then the phone starts to ring off the hook with questions like, “Can I bring a couple of friends--would that be a problem?” Of course not! We will simply re-arrange the tables that we have been arranging for the last week. This goes on pretty much up to the day of the dinner. The important thing when setting up the tables is to be sure who gets along with who, or, more importantly, who does not get along with whomever. It goes something like this: If we are not sure if two people are getting along lately, we make a call to someone who knows them and ask, “Do you think it would be all right if we seat Person X next to Person Y?” Many times the answer will be, “Oh no dearie, that will not do!” Fine, we’ll re-arrange the tables...again. By Friday, we are pretty sure of the seating--with room for some slight tweaking.

Around high noon on Friday, we truck all the items to Sleepy Hollow Country Club. We take

everything out of the boxes and put the items--approximately 95 of them--onto the tables. Then arrange them for eye appeal and number everything before heading out to get some rest for the big event. Of course, during this time we are all nervous: How it will come off? What did we forget? What might go wrong? At 6 pm, folks start showing up, the piano player is knocking out some tunes, the bars are busy and everyone is smiling, enjoying good conversation with old friends and writing down their bids. The bidding wars continue until 9 pm. We pull the sheets, and the lucky winners pay up and take their prizes home.

In the end, all the work is well worth it. The management and staff at Sleepy Hollow Country Club deserve a lot of credit for being so professional and helpful to pull this thing off. And without you, our membership, this event could not work. Thank you for your continued support.

Mark your calendars: The 84th Annual OHSM Gala Dinner and Silent Auction will be on Friday October 23, 2015. And remember, we start our collecting for our silent auction now, so scour your attics, basements, and garages for antiques you wouldn't mind parting with. It's also a great way to find a new home for that thing you have hanging over your living room mantel that you've been wondering what to do with!



**ABOVE:** Robert and Patti Sacchi, this year's lucky grand prize raffle winners, took home the Reinagle print. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from upper left): Virginia Brandreth fishes for a winning ticket; Eric Gustin and Cat Sales score some Chinese pottery; Eileen O'Connor and her son Tim O'Connor with Art and his wife Theresa Wolpinsky; OHSM president John Wunderlich emcees the evening's festivities; Bobby Decrenza shows off his silent-auction catch.



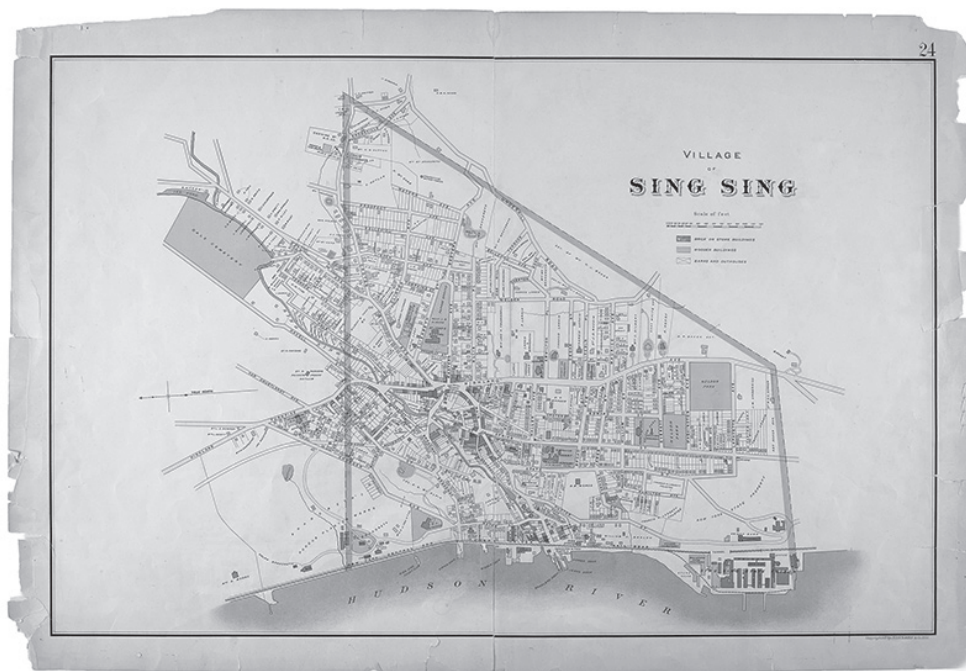
## YOU ARE HERE - OSSINING, NY

*Forget Google maps--we've got the real thing!*

BY MARTHA MESITI

Maps not only tell you where you are, but they have a lot to say about where you've been. Whether you are interested in cartography as an art form or historic document, the Ossining Historical Society Museum has treasures to offer map lovers and researchers.

The Museum's extensive map collection includes a variety of maps that range from before the incorporation of the Village in 1813 to the present day. It includes the standard Beers and Bromley ownership atlases of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and a variety of maps by the Georges Cartwright (father and son), surveyors and civil engineers who mapped much of early Sing Sing. In recent years the Museum received maps and plans from William A. Slater, Surveyor, to enrich its resources. Also included are aerial photographs and documents related to land ownership.



Maps are a rich resource for local history research and discovery. Tax maps give color-coded clues to the type of building construction, and kernels of family history can be gleaned through perusing land ownership atlases up to the 1950s. There are blueprints of property surveys as well as road construction, subdivision plans, and road maps.

Maps are also a source of random discovery that can send the researcher down different unknown paths. They can take you

back to a time of grand homes, vast estates and local landmarks. Homes were known as Torbank, Haymount, Careswell, and Lindwolden--some of which only exist on maps today. While such village landmarks as Fourth of July Hill (home of today's Independence Place), the "Five Corners," the Croton Aqueduct, and Pleasant Square are constant markers, street names changed over time. High Street became Main Street and Dynamite Road became the gentler Morningside Drive. Claremont and Brookside were names of neighborhoods long before the schools were built, when you could stay at the Brookside Hotel and visit Brookside Trotting Park.

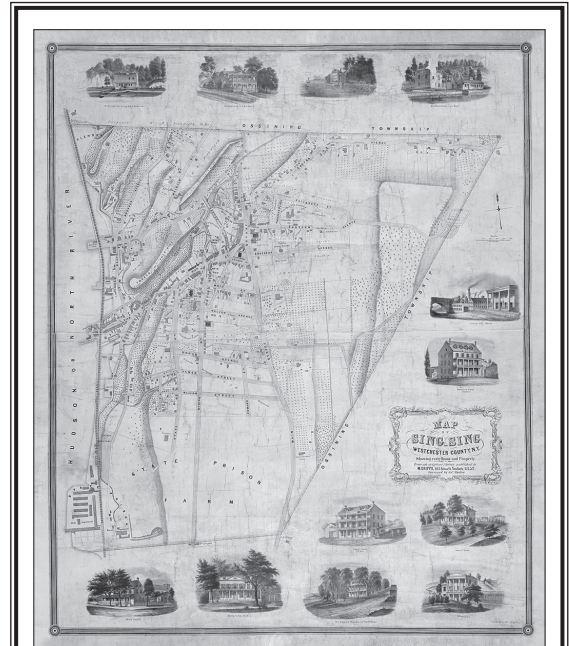
I've been in love with maps since I was a child, traveling through world maps on the classroom wall (perhaps printed by Rand McNally right here in Ossining). Maps draw you in with their seductive pastel hues and subtleties of the cartographer's hand. Engravings of significant structures and

insets of neighborhoods are tucked into the corners. Family names, orchards, farmland, and named hills fill out the open spaces.

In my work as a reference librarian and Ossining town historian, maps have provided the evidence to answering a variety of questions. A stream or pond that one surveyor included on a map, where others did not, pinpoints the probable site of a homestead. Footprints of houses past and directories of businesses and owners long gone speak to a picture of village life at a specific moment in time. If you ever thought that upper Eastern Avenue in the Village would be a great toboggan track if it weren't for the stairs that separate it from lower Eastern Avenue, it's fun to notice that in earlier years it may have been a straight shot from Bellevue Avenue into the parade grounds of St. John's School (today the site of St. Ann's School). If you own an older home, look for it on a historic map and learn its story, or learn how your neighborhood streets got their names. Hudson Street was renamed for landowner Charles Snowden; Malcolm and Matilda were his son and daughter, the family tree memorialized on a street grid.

I am currently working on a project at the Museum to organize and index upwards of 400 maps in the Museum's Map Room. Taking an existing index as a starting point, I am updating it with detailed information on each map. One of the challenges of this project is to reconcile the current index with the maps at hand. Many have been moved from one location to another over the years, since they were first indexed. Due to the amount of detail, the beginning stage is a bit of a jigsaw puzzle. But for me, sifting through the mounds of paper and uncovering hidden pathways and historic connections is a great joy. And, I'm learning a lot.

The index will be searchable on a computer dedicated for that purpose and will include title of map, year, author, and a short description. Each map will also be tagged with map type and keywords for searching a specific geographical area. After all the maps on the index are accounted for, materials not indexed will be added, and the organization of the maps will be reviewed for ease of use. The project is on track to be completed by the Fall of 2015.



**For the village's bicentennial year, the Ossining Historical Society Museum undertook restoration and reproduction of two historical maps, which are now available for sale as full-color art prints.**

**The 1852 Driggs Map of Sing Sing, Westchester County, Showing Every House and Property (above), is available in two sizes. The original full size, 43.5" x 36", is \$290 unframed; the three-quarter size, 32.5" x 27", is \$170 unframed.**

**The 1891 Jules Bien Map of the Village of Sing Sing (opposite page) measures 22" x 32" and is available unframed for \$140.**

*To place an order for one of our museum-quality historic maps, as well as a print of the Hugh Reinagle landscape that was raffled off at the Gala Dinner, please email [jcwunder@verizon.net](mailto:jcwunder@verizon.net), or call 914-941-9423. And don't forget to ask about framing!*



## TO THE MANOR RE-BORN

*A classy old lady gets a new lease on life*

BY ROBERT STAVA

Recently, members of the OHSM were invited to the Grand Opening of the Avalon Ossining apartment complex. The centerpiece, of course, is the restored Kane Mansion. For decades the mansion, once home to one of Ossining's more active and colorful citizens--Fanny Kane--had fallen into disrepair and was on the verge of becoming derelict after being vacant for decades.

I discovered this classic "Hudson River cottage" by accident shortly after moving here in 2010. I was aghast that such a beautiful structure could be left to decay. Having worked on many historic New York City landmark buildings during my last career, I was quite excited when I heard that the building was going to be restored as a clubhouse and offices for Avalon Ossining. I was even happier to hear it would be accessible to the public.

Avalon Bay Communities has done a commendable job in what amounts to a case study in adaptive reuse of an iconic building. I'm sure many of us would like to see similar properties in our community be given a new lease on life and repurposed for our future.

Documenting the restoration became a personal passion project. Here are some amazing before and after photos of the Kane Mansion. An OHSM reception there in is the works, so stay tuned!

**ABOVE:** *The Kane Mansion looks pristine at the Avalon Ossining grand opening. OPPOSITE:* *An historic photo of the mansion from the 1880s, with Fanny Kane seated out front; below, the same view of the property in its derelict state in 2010.*

All photos by Robert Stava, except opposite page top: Historic Kane Mansion Photo





*ABOVE: OHSM president John Wunderlich in the restored back room while hanging several prints purchased from the OHSM by Avalon Bay. BELOW: During and after shots of the billiard room restoration. OPPOSITE: The interior staircase before and after restoration. Note the plaster finials that were saved. PHOTOS: Robert Stava*







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**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

*From the Officers & Trustees  
of the Ossining Historical Society Museum*

Please visit us at:  
[www.ossininghistorical.org](http://www.ossininghistorical.org)

