

The

# Orangetown Crier

News from the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives

WINTER 2013

## STORMY WEATHER

Orangetown suffered an unprecedented amount of damage from Hurricane Sandy's unwelcome arrival last October. Between the downed trees, the power failures, and the massive storm surge from the Hudson River, it is unlikely that any resident of Orangetown will soon forget the destructive power of this storm. While Sandy is certainly the worst storm to hit Orangetown in many years, readers may be interested in learning about some of the other major storms that have impacted this town over its history.

The Great Hurricane of September 1938 was one of the most powerful hurricanes to hit Orangetown during the last century. According to *The Journal News*, tree damage from this hurricane was substantial. Water damage was also significant, as "the Nyack ice pond overflowed into Main Street west of Highland Avenue, running several inches deep over the Turnpike." Jack Geist, a longtime Orangetown resident and volunteer at this museum, remembers that he was traveling home with his mother from the movie theater when the hurricane hit: "It blew down a lot of trees... We tried to get to Grand View by Piermont Avenue... and it was flooded. It always flooded with storms for years."

Two hurricanes in the mid-twentieth century demonstrated the damage that a major storm could inflict on a river community. Hurricane Carol, in August

### Orangetown Storms: Now and Then



Blizzard of 1888, Piermont Avenue in Nyack, photo courtesy of the Nyack Library

1954, created havoc for boats anchored along the Hudson River. Indeed, *The Journal News* recounted that, on the morning of the Hurricane, "three vessels used in the construction of the new Tappan Zee Bridge had torn loose from their moorings and were being washed downstream." Hurricane Donna, in September 1960, also caused substantial damage along Orangetown's coast, as "boats broke loose, smashed against rocks, were beached, or drifted... Docks and other structures all along the Rockland shore received extensive damage." While they may not have been as damaging as Sandy, both Carol and Donna created a mess for Orangetown residents who lived alongside the Hudson River.

The most significant hurricanes over the last two decades have been Floyd in September 1999, Irene in August 2011, and Sandy in October 2012. While Sandy will likely be remembered for its high winds and massive storm surge, Floyd's legacy is its heavy rainfall. Although Floyd and Irene were both significant storms, neither matched the destruction wrought by Sandy on Nyack, Piermont, and the rest of Orangetown.<sup>7</sup>

Two major blizzards have impacted Orangetown's history. The Blizzard of March 1888 is one of the earliest and most devastating storms on record to have hit this area. Nyack's *City and Country* newspaper described this storm: "Rockland County was fairly snowed

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Our Dutch sandstone houses are the local treasures that give historical dimension to our community. These 18<sup>th</sup> century structures remind us of our first residents and provide a window onto the early years of life here in Orangetown. In light of the recent destruction of the Teaberry-Port House (built 1777)

in Clarkstown, we are pleased to announce that the Seth House of Pearl River has been saved. Future generations will be able to enjoy this local treasure due to the efforts of the Town of Orangetown and various department agencies.

The Perry-Seth House is an outstanding example of Dutch Colonial and Federal Period Dutch style architecture. The west wing of the house was probably built in 1752, the east wing in 1776 and the main center portion in 1830, replacing the 1776 center portion that was demolished at that time. Isaac Perry built his house on his father's homestead shortly before the Revolution when it sat on a property of several hundred acres. Isaac left the house to his daughter, Catherine Perry Blauvelt and it survived several generations of Blauvelts before being passed on to David D. Blauvelt's granddaughter, the wife of Edward Lydecker. She sold the house to Montgomery Maze, a well known philanthropist and businessman about 1906 – 1909. The house will stand as a brilliant reminder of Orangetown's motto – a town truly 'Rich in History'.

## Stormy Weather

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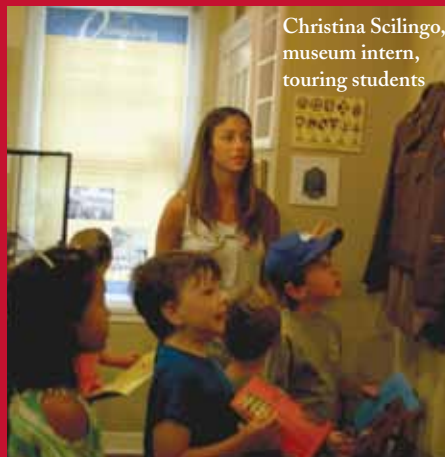
under...travel was suspended and business came to a stand still." Despite this hardship, Orangetown residents showed a tremendous amount of resiliency and generosity. The newspaper especially credits "the grocerymen, the butchers, and particularly the wood and coat dealers, of Nyack," as they delivered the necessities to their patrons on foot when the snow was too deep for horses to travel. This example of Orangetown residents looking out for one another during times of hardship is an inspiring one that has been echoed by the numerous acts of altruism in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

The Blizzard of December 1947 was another major storm that affected Orangetown, as it blanketed 25.8 inches of snow across Rockland County. After this massive storm concluded, however, Orangetown residents were determined to bring life back to normal. Indeed, as *The Journal News* recounted in the aftermath of the storm, "they shoveled and they shoveled and they shoveled and this morning they were still shoveling."<sup>9</sup> This activity is undoubtedly familiar to Orangetown residents who have suffered through frequent snowstorms over the last several years.

It is clear that Orangetown has persevered through several major storms throughout its history. On each occasion, residents were able to pull together during the period of recovery and repair the damage that these storms had wrought. Jack Geist notes that "the community reaction to Sandy was wonderful," as neighbors went out of their way to help each other out. While there will likely be more major storms in Orangetown's future, this town's residents will undoubtedly make it through those as well with the same courage and perseverance that they have so often demonstrated in the past.

—Jason Schachter

On December 7th Mary Cardenas, Museum Director, Elizabeth Skrabonja, Curator and Anna Berent, Intern attended a history conference sponsored by IHARE, ( Institute for Historical and Archeological Research). The thrust of the event was to expose local history teachers to resources available for further study. We believe that it is important to establish good working relationships with local schools and to work with them in implementing substantive programs where the take away is a curiosity about our past. We reach out in specific ways to the elementary, middle, high school and college students in our area. This, combined with our core force of senior volunteers creates a homogeneous blend of inquiry and research that is never old. Being in the history game for the long run. – we are always looking for the newest – old thing, keeping in mind that if you know the past, you will find the future.



Christina Scilingo, museum intern, touring students

EKS

# THE Railroads of Orangetown 1876

At the time of our nation's centennial the New York Lake Erie & Western Railway (known as the Erie Railroad,) the New Jersey & New York, the Nyack and Northern, the Northern Railroad of New Jersey and the Jersey City & Albany railroads served the residents of Orangetown. These rail lines connected the residents of Nyack, South Nyack, Grandview, Piermont, Sparkill, Tappan, Orangeburg, Blauvelt and Pearl River to each other, but also to New York City, and an expanding nation.



Passengers could reliably and safely journey to New Jersey and the City of New York using the Erie Railroad's vast network of railroads. These lines brought thousands of commuters daily to Jersey City, Weehawken, or Hoboken, where ferries were taken to various docks in New York City. It was also on these lines that the agricultural wealth of Orangetown and the Hudson Valley was transported. Freight trains transported hard goods and perishable produce, most notably tomatoes and berries

Moving locally could be accomplished by taking the Erie, the Nyack and Northern, the New Jersey and New York or the Northern Railroad of New Jersey lines. These railroads in all would eventually be operated by the Erie. In 1876 the Piermont Branch of the Erie was a passenger and freight line providing local and long distance scheduled service between Piermont and Suffern and points west. From Piermont certain trains would travel west stopping at Orangeburg and Blauvelt to the Junction with the New Jersey and New York at Nanuet. From Nanuet travelers would continue south through Pearl River and onward to Hoboken, NJ. From Nyack, the Nyack and Northern/Northern Railroad of New Jersey trains would continue through Sparkill and Tappan onward south through to Jersey City, NJ. The Erie railroad system was quickly becoming the major transportation link for commuter service from Orangetown and all of Rockland County to New York City.

to New York's markets. Express trains provided fresh dairy products to New York City's consumers.

The Jersey City & Albany, still under construction in the 1870s, provided service to Tappan in 1874. Locomotive power for the JC&A trains was provided by the New Jersey Midland Railroad and the passenger cars were owned by the JC&A. While plagued with financial problems the railroad would eventually reach Haverstraw by 1879.

Railroads connected Orangetown with the rapidly developing nation: by 1876 it had become possible to traverse the nation coast to coast via a system of connected railroads, the major hubs being New York, Buffalo, Chicago, and San Francisco. The railroads profoundly changed Orangetown, linking its hamlets to the nation's explosive development in the nineteenth century.

—Joseph Barbieri

Back page advertisements from the *Illustrated Christian Weekly*, 1873, NY, Lyman Abbott, Editor. OHMA

Train Photograph. Passengers from the NY Ferry boarding the train at the Piermont Pier. OHMA, gift of John Scott



196 Chief Bill Harris Way  
Orangeburg, New York 10962

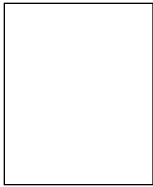
Tel. (845) 398-1302  
www.orangetownmuseum.com

☛ at The DePew House  
196 Chief Bill Harris Way  
Orangeburg, New York  
*Office, Archives by Appointment*  
(845) 398-1302

Opening April 20<sup>th</sup>  
**Orangetown/1950s: A Place To Build The Future**

A building, baby and business boom exploded in Orangetown. See how life changed – the optimism, idealism and hula-hoops; Ike and Margaret Mead concurred; it was the place to build the future.

☛ at The Salyer House  
213 Blue Hill Road  
Pearl River, New York  
*A Spy in Our Midst, Our Dutch Sandstone Houses*  
*& At Home in Orangetown*  
Permanent Exhibit: Hours by appointment  
(845) 398-1302



THIS WINTER AND SPRING:



**Antiques & Collectibles Sale:** Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 10 am – 4 pm.  
The museum will be open free of charge! Enjoy a beautiful spring day with some fabulous Antiques, Fine Collectibles, Jewelry, Toys, Decorative Arts, Furniture, Fine Arts & Ephemera. Table rental for dealers and collectors is \$25.  
At the **DePew House**, 196 Chief Bill Harris Way, Orangeburg, NY. Please call (845) 398-1302 for further info.



**Orangetown /1950s: A Place to Build the Future.** Opening Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, this exhibit will recall a decade of great change in Orangetown. From Shanks Village, to the construction of the Tappan Zee Bridge and the Palisades Interstate Parkway – life was never quite the same again. From pop culture to politics, come and remember these milestones with us, be it in Mom's kitchen or in the labs that helped to wipe out polio, it was all happening in Orangetown. Exhibit open through November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013.



**Friends of the Orangetown Museum Annual Dinner.**  
This year our annual dinner will conjure up images of the 1950's in celebration of our newest exhibit and highlight milestones from this period that changed Orangetown forever. Musical entertainment and awards will enhance this anticipated event. More information forthcoming.



**Get the book – ORANGETOWN.** Discover 300 years of local history!  
Pick it up at the DePew House, price: \$23.83 or let us mail it to you, price: \$25.00 (price includes shipping & handling)  
Make your check payable to *Friends of the Orangetown Museum* and mail to the museum at  
196 Chief Bill Harris Way, Orangeburg NY 10962.

THE ORANGETOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES  
Mary Cardenas, MUSEUM DIRECTOR • Elizabeth Skrabonja, MUSEUM CURATOR  
The Orangetown Historical Museum & Archives was founded in 1992 to acquire, preserve and exhibit objects which reflect primarily the history of the Town of Orangetown. The Museum's additional, but not lesser mission is to document, research, promote and publicize the town's rich, historical heritage of the town for the people of Orangetown.



Andrew Stewart, SUPERVISOR  
Thomas Diviny, Tom Morr, Dennis Troy and Paul Valentine, COUNCILMEN

FRIENDS OF THE ORANGETOWN MUSEUM  
Your membership in the Friends of the Orangetown Museum helps to collect and preserve the history of Orangetown. Members will receive notices of programs and events as well as free admission to the Museum's special exhibits and events. The Museum is a 501 (C) (3) organization and all donations are tax deductible.

STUDENT/SENIOR \$10 SINGLE \$15 FAMILY \$20  
LIFE MEMBER \$100 CORPORATE \$250