

The

Orangetown Crier

News from the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives

SUMMER 2018

ORANGETOWN'S TREASURE:

THE Sleepy Hollow Murals

The Legends of Sleepy Hollow are important to Orangetown not only because of their thematic use for the WPA era murals that were removed from the Children's Pavilion of the Rockland Psychiatric Center. Their value to the history of New York is, in a word, legendary.

First published serially by the American author, Washington Irving between 1819 and 1820 in an anthology commonly referred to as 'The Sketch Book' it contains two of Irving's best known stories, attributed to the fictional Dutch historian Diedrich Knickerbocker: *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle*. It is these two stories that were chosen to be depicted in the murals. The impact of 'The Sketchbook' on the development of American literature is immeasurable. Beloved by Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott and the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Irving created a place on the world stage for American fiction that frankly shocked his British readership; it was simply considered unbelievable that an American could be responsible for such good writing. Even Charles Dickens was influenced by his stories of Christmas traditions



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ICHABOD CRANE (mural fragment), by Victor Pedrotti Trent, 1941

DIGGING into Our Past

by Emily Hingle



You might be familiar with the 2016 save of the Perry-Blauvelt-Seth House (also known just as the "Seth House"), now restored as a recreational community center at the Club at Pearl River, a residential over-55 rental complex that overlooks Lake Tappan. This save was critical in preserving the historical integrity that the house carries, as it displays three architectural styles ranging from the mid-18th to the early 19th century. However, what most people are unfamiliar with is the processes that went into the historical preservation of the land that the Seth House sits on. In 2009, after the development proposal of the Club at Pearl River (then named the Pointe at Lake Tappan), the Pearl River Veterans LLC requested an archaeological investigation of the project site to uncover any significant historical artifacts that could potentially include the site on the National Register of Historic Places. Over the summer of 2009, an archaeological excavation spanning over 25½ acres produced countless artifacts that allowed an even deeper insight on the area surrounding the cherished Dutch farmhouse. As an anthropology and archaeology student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, my internship project this summer is to examine and catalogue the plethora of data collected and thus make a conclusion of its historical relevance in relation to the Seth House and the role it played in Orangetown history.

Pre-excavation soil testing revealed the site's potential to be used at one point by 18th century Native Americans (the specific tribe could not be determined at that time), particularly as a hunting ground. The excavation yielded almost two thousand artifacts, including hundreds of rudimentary flakes, shells, and glass fragments at several levels of soil, which indicates the site was used at different periods in time. A handful of unique artifacts have already been on display at the Orangetown Museum's 2016 exhibition "past/forward," which included an intricate ashtray imprinted with a hamsa and a fully intact glass bottle. The site was concluded to most likely be a temporary hunting and tool sharpening station used by Native Americans, with no signs of typical Native household habitation. Excavation around the closer perimeter of the Seth House uncovered typical yard scatter, which can give us a better understanding of the owner's diet and income. It's the wide variety of artifacts like this that allows us to catch a glimpse of life in the earliest years of Orangetown.



The South Orangetown Middle School's annual trip to the historic Salyer House was a huge success. For 10 years the museum has educated over 1000 7th grade students during these tours, in no small part due to the efforts of teachers James Amandola, (left) Sarah Kukla, (right) and re-enactor Fred Schofer (center). An historic time was had by all.



On Sunday, June 10th George Way addressed a standing room only crowd for a tell-all afternoon entitled, 'Sunday in the Museum with George'. After revealing many of his secrets of collecting, a lively conversation ensued under the watchful eyes of Charles I's Queen, Henrietta Maria.



The recent royal wedding made us realize that there are still local residents that have remained loyal to the crown. During our war for independence there were many unions between loyal British subjects and American patriots; in that spirit we wish the best to Meghan and Harry!

ROBERT P. KNIGHT



Bob Knight grew up in Pearl River where he became a journalist for the *Our Town* and later the *Rockland County Times*. Bob's main interest in life was local history and he wrote two books – one on Pearl River and the other on Congers, the hamlet where he lived. Another interest was in preservation particularly of 18th and 19th century houses and he chose to live in an early 19th century sandstone house that he rescued from demolition.

His love for history made him an ardent supporter to a number of historical societies including the Orangetown Historical

Museum & Archives. It was in this group that he offered his help especially with obtaining objects for exhibitions. Bob died on April 1, 2018. He is greatly missed by the staff and volunteers of this museum.

Bob's postcard collection is legendary. Comprised of thousands of unique images of mostly local sites, it serves to document our collective history. A project is currently underway to scan the collection, spearheaded by Brian Jennings and Joe Barbieri of the New City Library. Once complete, it will serve as a virtual memorial to a motto that Bob Knight lived by – history matters.

Sleepy Hollow Murals continued from page 1

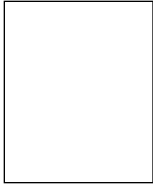
and celebrations that were first published in 1820, (the Dickens classic, *A Christmas Carol* was published in 1843).

In a classic interpretation of the true American diaspora, Washington Irving blended the influences of German fairy tales with stories of our earliest Dutch settlers. In this way, he created an American voice that came directly from New York State. Recounted countless times on stage and screen, the 1922 silent film version of *The Legends of Sleepy Hollow* starring Will Rogers was filmed partly at the Van Houten farm in the current Pearl River.

The murals that Victor Pedrotti Trent created for the WPA at the Children's Pavilion illustrate a continued fascination with the stories. Currently in desperate need of conservation, these oil on canvas fragments exist in a holding pattern at the moment. To find out more about the murals and Washington Irving's role as an arbiter of America's cultural heritage please come to our program on October 28th at the Pearl River Library at 3 pm, *The Sleepy Hollow Murals: Orangetown's Treasure*. EKS



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

Closing October 14th
LOYAL TO THE CROWN:
British Art from the
George Way Collection

Open Tuesdays
and Fridays 10 – 2,
Sundays 1 – 4
or by appointment
Admission free:
donations accepted

at The Salyer House
213 Blue Hill Road
Pearl River, New York

At Home in
Orangetown,
The Tappan Patent

Permanent Exhibit:
Hours by appointment

UPCOMING :



Loyal to the Crown: British Art from the George Way Collection. Closing October 14th. Open Tuesdays and Fridays 10-2, Sundays 1-4, at the DePew House. Loyalist or Patriot? This pressing question vexed our earliest residents. The might and glory of England presented a formidable draw – as is presented through the magnificent collection of art and artifacts from the collector George Way. With paintings, objects and furniture from the 17th century, this impressive exhibit proclaims ‘God save the King!’.



Early American Tea Party. Join us for early American and colonial crafts – feel free to bring your favorite doll. Make a mob cap, learn to weave and enjoy some iced tea, lemonade and cookies. Admission is free, donations accepted. *Recommended for Ages 5 – 9.* Saturday, August 11th, 11 am at the Historic Salyer House, 213 Blue Hill Road, Pearl River, NY



Antiques & Collectibles Sale. The museum will be open free of charge! Enjoy a day on the beautiful grounds of the museum with some fabulous, fine collectibles, jewelry, toys, decorative arts, furniture and ephemera. Table rental for antiques dealers is only \$25! At the DePew House, 196 Chief Bill Harris Way, Orangeburg, NY. Please call (845) 398-1302 for further information. Saturday, October 6th, 10 am – 4 pm



The Sleepy Hollow Murals: Orangetown’s Treasure. Why did Victor Pedrotti Trent choose to depict scenes from *The Legends of Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winkle* in 1941 for his WPA murals and why is Washington Irving an American Icon? Find out on Sunday October 28th at 3 pm at the Pearl River Library during an illustrated lecture with Colleen Moriarty. Admission is free.

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.



TOWN OF ORANGETOWN

Christopher Day, SUPERVISOR
Jerry Bottari, Thomas Diviny, Denis 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