

The

Orangetown Crier

News from the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives

SPRING 2019



Virginia Parkhurst, (1903-1990) as a U.S. Army Photo lab technician in New Guinea, 1945. She was a WAC from 1943-1945 and associated with the Journal News from 1928-1971

“I’d rather be with him than waiting,”

wrote Virginia Parkhurst, recalling a poster she and her friends use to kid about. She later states “it was surprising how true that poster was.” Pte. Virginia Parkhurst was a journalist at the Nyack Journal News, before she decided to enlist in the Women’s Army Corps. After serving as a WAC for three years in World War II, Parkhurst was discharged and returned to her home in Nyack. Thereupon, she wrote a 26-page typewritten article, recollecting her experience as a WAC serving overseas.

Virginia Parkhurst’s (unpublished and untitled) article, part of the museum’s “Camp Shanks” collection, is like a parcel with a bow on top! It exhibits admirable details and a well-organized flow that effortlessly immerses readers. Parkhurst provides insight not only into her WAC-life, but also to those that she befriended and acquainted. Through her lucid writing, readers are given a vivid image of life as a WAC – whether it be going to the jungle to pick flowers, attending a wedding on base, making a dress out of a parachute, or washing your clothes in your helmet – readers are captivated page-by-page, making it hard to put down before finishing all 26 pages. Parkhurst’s voice is evident in her

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The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was established in 1942. A year later, its name was shortened to the Women’s Army Corps, and women that enlisted became known as WACs. The first WACs arrived at Camp Shanks in early 1943. They lived at the bottom of Avenue A just off Western Highway, in one of the seven staging areas in Camp Shanks – the only area they were allowed to be in (men were not allowed, unless registered).

THE HOME FRONT

The Home Front was a major part of the war effort during the Second World War. It gave every-day Americans, whether young or old, a chance to contribute to the war effort. Some of these efforts were small and others like volunteering fully involved civilians in the war. Americans could do this in many ways: planting a victory garden, giving up nylon and silk stockings (wearing instead rayon or cotton substitutes or even using makeup to give the appearance of stocking), buying war bonds, or avoiding certain metals that would be used by the military.

Talk to anyone alive in the 1940s and one thing they will probably remember is rationing. Rationing was the one home front activity every American participated in. Rationing began in America January 1942 and lasted until June 1947. Booklets issued by the government provided rations for everything from sugar to gasoline (even coffee was rationed). Americans were expected to recycle items like cooking fat (which could be used to make explosives), rubber, clothing, and paper. With food goods being rationed, victory gardens became a popular way to get around the rationing system by growing vegetables and fruit yourself. Victory gardens had the added bonus of opening up more food to be sent overseas to the troops.

For women that wanted to contribute more to the war effort, many women chose to knit for victory during the war. Though it would have been much faster to have machines make sweaters and vests for soldiers, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt pushed for women to pick up their knitting needles and knit sweaters, vests, fingerless mitts, and socks in olive drab or navy blue to clothe the military. The movement was full of catchy propaganda posters like "Remember Pearl Harbor, Purl Harder!" While some argued for the more efficient machine-made uniform pieces, many American women felt that knitting these items by hand gave them a chance to provide succor for the men overseas (not



to mention the donated items cost the government nothing). However, as the clothes were all handmade and by various people there are some slight variations between like items. Knitting was largely overseen by the Red Cross which provided patterns for volunteer knitters. The Red Cross ingeniously overcame one major obstacle in its drive for knitting, the shortage on wool. As wool

production was disrupted during the war, the Red Cross trained volunteers in historic methods of producing wool, teaching volunteers to spin yarn into wool. There was no shortage of ingenuity among Americans during the war.

For those Americans that wanted to be fully-involved in volunteering for the war, there was the option of Civil Defense. The Office of Civil Defense was created in 1941 by President Roosevelt, New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia was chosen to be the head of the department. The office supervised black-outs, protected against fires, and established air-raid procedures. Eleanor Roosevelt wanted the OCD to take on public health and welfare and increase civilian participation, so LaGuardia tasked the first lady with doing just that on behalf of the OCD. It was the first lady that founded the Civilian Participation Branch. With only 75 paid staff members, the OCD was largely reliant on volunteers. Some of these volunteers were right here in Orangetown. There was a Civil Defense tower on Tweed Boulevard in Upper Grandview. From the tower, spotters would watch out for fires and for enemy activity.

This widespread feeling of obligation to support the war effort is completely foreign to us today. In the wars since, the public has been less involved in the war effort. However, we can all admire the people that remained on the Home Front during World War Two for their efforts in contributing to the war effort.

~ Colleen Moriarty



On display in **SHANKS LEGACY** are several of the items mentioned in the above article: a handmade army sweater, a handmade army vest, a Civil Defense helmet, and rations.

VIRGINIA PARKHURST *continued from page 1*



opens
April 13

article, as well as the voices of those that would originally be seen as background characters; she remarkably bestows voices to all – even those she has not met. In honor of women's history, here's HERstory in *history*.

On July 10th, 1943 Virginia Parkhurst traveled all by herself, from her home in Nyack, all the way to downtown Manhattan, to enlist in (what was then) the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. A long journey for her at the time, but not the longest she'll have within the next three years! Parkhurst did basic and physical training in Florida, then learned how to process photos for the lab in the Army Air Force Photographic School in Denver. She later traveled to areas such as Georgia, California, New Caledonia, Australia, New Guinea, and the Philippines. In these areas Parkhurst had experiences one can only image; from making a tent out of a parachute to watching a python be killed to retrieve a chicken it had swallowed. Her transparent writing allows us to experience those strict rules, homemade washing machines, hot tropical weather, and barter system within the camps she lived in. On-base funerals, frequent interactions with native villagers, visiting wounded soldiers, eating dehydrated food, going to nightclubs constructed by soldiers, and changing your uniform twice a day, became the custom on these bases. For three years, Parkhurst and thousands of other women, experienced all these ingredients that later came together to form the essence of life of a WAC serving overseas during World War II.

Mary Virginia "Ginny" Parkhurst was born in Hammonton, New Jersey in 1903. She graduated from Swarthmore College and attempted to teach – later realizing she "hated it." She then became a journalist for her hometown newspaper for three years then moved to Nyack in January 1929. She joined the Nyack Daily News, left, then came back to the Nyack Journal-News, becoming society page editor. After spending nine years at Nyack Journal-News, Parkhurst became bored of her job and decided to join the Women's Army Corps in 1943. Once she came back from serving, Parkhurst went back to work for the paper, becoming a reporter for 37 years until she retired in 1974. She was village historian for two months before she passed away on June 12th, 1990 at the age of 86.

Virginia Parkhurst received many honors and firsts over the course of her life. She was honored by the Nyack Board of Trustees and was the first female member of the Nyack Fire Department. She was described as a woman who had a fearless attitude as a reporter (Arthur Hunther, newspaper editor), "the perfect description of a lady" (Jean Gardner, Nyack Village Clerk), honest, law-obeying, accurate, and respectful, "the perfect model of a human" (Robert A. Jewett, Reverend), strong yet gentle, and a journalist legend that wrote in shorthand.

~ Lauren Wilkins, OHMA intern,
Dominican College senior



DON'T MISS THESE UPCOMING EVENTS:

Friday, April 26 • 6 – 7:30 pm

And what be this poet's plea

But to honor our Veterans from sea to sea

~ Rose Marie Raccioppi

Wine & Cheese & Poetry in Celebration of National Poetry Month. Enjoy a glass of wine and a special look into the poetry and music of the 1940's while touring **SHANKS LEGACY**. Orangetown's Poet Laureate Rose Marie Raccioppi will read some of her poetry reflective of the period. Suggested donation is \$5. Presented in conjunction with the Orangeburg Library

Saturday, April 27

The History Program at Dominican College will host a Phi Alpha Theta (PAT) regional undergraduate research conference. The concluding panel discussion, open to the public, will explore Public and Digital histories and how these two subjects are transforming the History discipline. Contact social.sciences@dc.edu for more information.

Saturday, May 18 • 7:30 pm

Swingin' at Shanks with Big Band Jazz.

At the **MANSE BARN** in Tappan. The greatest names in Big Band Music performed at Camp Shanks



during WWII when the Manse Barn was a USO Club.

The museum, in collaboration with the **Orangeburg, Tappan, Blauvelt and Palisades Libraries** will present **Reflections Jazz & Swing Orchestra** in this historic site – reprising the big band tradition made famous by Count Basie, Benny Goodman and Woody Herman. Manse Barn, 32 Old Tappan Rd., Tappan, NY. Donations accepted

Wednesday, May 29th • 6 pm

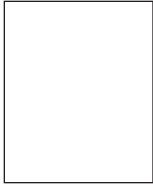
The Aftermath of Shanks. The Tappan Library will host a special lecture with Orangetown Historian, **Mary Cardenas**. Find out the history and significance of Camp Shanks on the Town of Orangetown at this illustrated lecture. Tappan Library, 93 Main Street, Tappan, NY Admission is free

Saturday June 1st • 10 am – 4 pm

Spring Fling Flea Market on the beautiful grounds of the DePew House! Shop as independent vendors sell their wares from curiosities to treasures; take a free tour of **SHANKS LEGACY** while you are here. At the DePew House, 196 Chief Bill Harris Way, Orangeburg, NY



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



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

*A Spy in Our Midst,
Our Dutch Sandstone
Houses & At Home
in Orangetown*

Permanent Exhibit:
Hours by appointment
(845) 398-1302

UPCOMING :



SHANKS LEGACY. The U.S. Army's largest port of embarkation on the East Coast in World War II, Camp Shanks saw some 1.3 million troops pass through on their way to England and North Africa. Learn about how the camp looked and operated and what its transition into the residential 'Shanks Village' meant to the development of the Town of Orangetown. Opening April 13th 2019 at the DePew House; exhibit runs through November. Admission is free; donations accepted.



WINE & CHEESE & POETRY. Celebrate national poetry month! The Orangetown Museum opens its doors for a tour of **SHANKS LEGACY** with a wine & cheese event of note. From music that moves you to words that will inspire you, the 1940's returns with Poet Laureate Rose Marie Raccioppi leading the way. Suggested donation is \$5. At the DePew House. Friday April 26, 6 – 7:30 pm.



SWINGIN' AT SHANKS WITH BIG BAND SOUND. Travel back in time to the USO at the Manse Barn! Servicemen from Camp Shanks were entertained at dinner dances and swanky socials here. The 18-piece **REFLECTIONS JAZZ & SWING ORCHESTRA** brings it all back for one night only! Together with the Orangeburg, Tappan, Blauvelt and Palisades Libraries – it's a big band night to remember. Saturday May 18th, 7:30 pm. At the Manse Barn, 32 Old Tappan Rd., Tappan, NY donations accepted



THE AFTERMATH OF SHANKS. How did Camp Shanks change Orangetown? What happened to the barracks and what is the legacy left by the greatest generation? Find out the answers to these and other questions as Orangetown Historian and Museum Director Mary Cardenas presents an illustrated lecture at the Tappan Library, 93 Main Street, Tappan NY, Wednesday May 29th at 6 pm. Admission is free



SPRING FLING FLEA MARKET. The museum will be open free of charge! Stroll the grounds of the DePew House on a beautiful spring day and pick up a few treasures from local vendors. Collectibles and memorabilia abound – only limited by your imagination. Tables rental for vendors only \$25. What's in your attic? Saturday June 1st, 10 – 4 pm at the DePew House. Please call (845) 398-1302 for information.

THE ORANGETOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES
Mary Cardenas, MUSEUM DIRECTOR • Colleen Moriarty, MUSEUM CURATOR
Elizabeth Skrabonja, CURATOR FOR EXHIBITIONS • Giuliano Premus, BUILDINGS MANAGER
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