

The

Orangetown Crier

News from the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives

SUMMER 2019

A Reminiscent Celebration of **ORANGEBURG & CAMP SHANKS**



By Stephanie Linek Johnson

On August 8th of 1942, on my 19th birthday, we came home from New York City, where we had bid my brother farewell at Grand Central Station. He was leaving for the service and boot camp. We were shocked when we arrived to find a barrage of construction workers, pick-up trucks and bulldozers roaring through the fields across the street. They were plowing up people's gardens, throwing vegetables and flowers everywhere. My dad stood in the street watching and weeping as his garden was torn apart, and we realized the reality of the 'rumors' and saw the beginning of Camp Shanks. It was a very chaotic time in our lives. Everyone was distraught, trying to pack up their belongings and furniture and struggling with hundreds of other families to try to find a place to live. The roar of the earth moving equipment and the rudeness of the construction workers was frightening. The men would walk into our house unannounced and without knocking to get a drink of water or to use the bathroom. This went on for several days and the neighbors began to complain to the

foreman, and finally it stopped until the homes were vacated. It was a traumatic experience for us and we were uneasy and troubled by the never ending roar of the machinery as we desperately searched for a home to relocate to. *~continues on page 2*



Shanks for the Memories

The Children of Shanks Village

When Camp Shanks became Shanks Village Orangetown was changed forever. Were you a kid in Shanks Village? Did your parents or grandparents live in the barracks or are you just interested in the 1950's in Orangetown? Learn about this fabulous social experiment through first person reminiscences here at the DePew House, Sunday October 27th. Our program starts at 1 pm; admission is free.

LIFE WITHOUT George



Our museum community was stricken to learn of the passing of our friend, collector George Way. Described by curator, Patrick Grenier as, "A genius cultural detective who modestly shared his deep and exquisite knowledge of material culture with everyone". George's generosity of spirit bestowed two remarkable exhibitions on the Orangetown community. The first, *From Holland to Here* stunned visitors with an opulent display of 17th century Dutch art and artifacts that heralded our earliest settlers. The second, *Loyal to the Crown; British Art from the George Way Collection* presented the grandeur of empire that appealed to many colonial loyalists who embraced the crown. With each exhibition, the planning, scholarship and placement involved months of preparation; George was available at every juncture with encyclopedic knowledge and amusing anecdotes. Our two *Sunday in the Museum with George* programs provided a salon style experience with George holding court surrounded by his beloved antiques. In 2017 I presented George with the *Catherine Dodge Humanitarian Award* at the museum's annual dinner. Embodying the spirit of a true connoisseur – George Way lived for art; collecting was his creative outlet. My last conversation with him was on the day that Notre Dame Cathedral was burning. Despondent and pained into disbelief, he asked –'what will we do now?' The Cathedral will be rebuilt, but life without George will be decidedly less grand.

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ORANGEBURG & CAMP SHANKS

~continued from page 1

Our family relocated to Blauvelt for a short time, then moved back to Orangeburg, just outside of Camp Shanks on Mountainview Avenue. By late fall, early winter of 1942 construction was well under way. Roads and sewers were completed, barracks were going up all over what once was farmland, and in January of 1943 we saw the first troops arrive to Camp Shanks. There were loud speakers playing the music of our era and PX's around the camp where soldiers bought cigarettes, candy, toiletries and gifts.

We had heard there were jobs available at the camp, and that they were looking for civilian drivers for the motor pool. In late January or early February of 1943 some friends and I applied for a driving job and we were hired. We were photographed, fingers printed and investigated by the FBI. We then took a driver's test, and later a six week course in driving large trucks, then another road test, and then we finally got through it all and so began my truck driving career at Camp Shanks!

The motor pool was made up of civilians, mostly women and a few older men. In addition there was our Army Captain, a couple of soldiers in the office and five civilian dispatchers and a female office secretary. Help was scarce as all of the younger men and women were drafted or volunteered for the service. We wore navy blue jackets, skirts and overseas type caps when we drove the sedans to transport officers on Army business to New York City and surrounding areas.

Many of us younger women were qualified to drive the heavier army equipment, the 6X6 trucks as they were called. We transported troops in convoys to the piers in New York City where the men boarded ocean liners that had been converted into troop carriers during the war. We made laundry runs into the city, trips to the Quartermaster Corps on the post, driving various officers of Army companies and their Sergeants, gathering up their clothing and supplies before being shipped overseas.

The men were always gentlemen, well-mannered and courteous. Many times they were surprised to see a young female driving a large truck and would joke with their buddies “asking if their insurance was paid” since they had a woman driver. Though we were all fairly young in those days, many a tear rolled down our faces as we watched these soldiers walk up the gang plank with their duffle bags, onto the troop ships that took them to the European Theatre of war. We spent several days with each unit until they shipped out. We became close friends or like family as they talked about home, their parents, their wives or sweethearts, and their fears and wondering if they would make it back home from the war, and what they planned to do when the war was over. We were the last civilians they talked to on their final stop in the USA and we soon became good listeners. We all grew up and matured quickly. We would hear the evening news on the radio before going home each night about the heavy fighting and casualties, and the next day we would sit silently in the cab of our trucks praying and hoping they would return safely.

We experienced many sad times and some happy times. We were fortunate to see some of the same men return that we had put on the troop ships, and it was good to talk with them again. I lost my dear brother at sea in 1944. We saw many come back on crutches, limping, some with arms bandaged and limbs missing. We drove ambulances to transport the wounded.

Camp Shanks housed many prisoners of war and they were treated well. If only other countries could have treated our prisoners of war as well.

As a young woman I experienced a lot during the war at Camp Shanks. It made me very humble and aware of what life was really all about. It was an experience I will never forget. War is hell no matter how you look at it.

Written April 8th, 1994 by Stephanie Linek Johnson: preserved in the Orangetown Museum archive

GOOD LUCK, COLLEEN



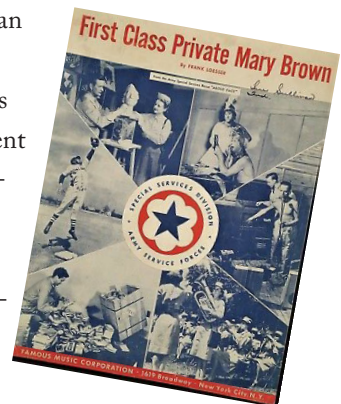
Curator Colleen Moriarty has moved on to take a position at the Surrogates Court at the Rockland County Courts System. Her formidable talents will long be remembered by visitors and friends of the museum. Besides excelling at collections management, Colleen masterminded several very successful programs that bridged generations and generated joy for all. Her intelligence and grace moved the museum forward in many ways. We wish her the best of luck in her new endeavor.

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS



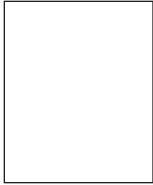
Left to right:
Sara Nugent, Director,
 Tappan Free Library
Barry Koch,
 Blauvelt Free Library
Anya Berg,
 Adult Services Librarian,
 Palisades Free Library
Lynn Warshavsky,
 Events Coordinator,
 Orangeburg Library

On Saturday, May 18th the spirit of generosity that was the home front was alive again at the Manse Barn – a former WWII USO - in Tappan. Together with the Tappan, Blauvelt, Palisades and Orangeburg libraries and under the kind stewardship of Pastor Don Hoover of the Tappan Reformed Church *Swingin’ at Shanks with Big Band Sound* took to the stage with the 18 piece ‘Reflections Jazz & Swing Orchestra’. A special feature of the event was a rendition of ‘First Class Private Mary Brown’ – written by Pvt. Frank Loesser (of ‘Guys & Dolls’ and ‘How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying’ fame) for the Special Services army musical – ‘About Face’. The last time it was performed in Orangetown was in May of 1944.





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at The DePew House
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 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. At the DePew House; exhibit runs through November. Admission is free; donations accepted.



SHANKS FOR THE MEMORIES – THE CHILDREN OF SHANKS VILLAGE In 2013 we had our first Shanks Village reunion – it's time to do it again! When the largest embarkation camp in the United States became post-war housing for veterans and their families – Shanks Village was born. If your parents or grandparents lived at Camp Shanks, we invite you to come and share your memories. In conjunction with the Orangeburg Library. Sunday, October 27th at the DePew House: Our program starts at 1 pm and will end at 3 pm. Admission is free; please call the museum for further information.



FRIENDS OF THE ORANGETOWN MUSEUM ANNUAL DINNER Join us as we celebrate the closing of SHANKS LEGACY at the place our WWII servicemen raised a glass to freedom. Our USO SHOW dinner will feature *Francine & Joel* singing songs of the 1940's. This year's *Catherine Dodge Humanitarian Award* will honor the historical powerhouse, Claire Sheridan. At the Tappan '76 House, Sunday, November 10th @ 5 pm. Please call the museum for further information



HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE It's a SHANKS LEGACY holiday as the historic Salyer House is dolled up in its best 1950's finery remembering how Shanks Villagers would have celebrated. Bubble lights on a beautiful tree and holiday music made famous by Bing Crosby and Judy Garland (performed live by *Francine & Joel*) will take us back . Our program starts at 2 pm at the Historic Salyer House, 213 Blue Hill Rd., Pearl River, NY Admission is free; donations accepted.

THE ORANGETOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES
 Mary Cardenas, MUSEUM DIRECTOR • Elizabeth Skrabonja, CURATOR FOR EXHIBITIONS
 Steve Schwinn, 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.



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