

The

Orangetown Crier

News from the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives

WINTER 2021

From Saving Lives to Saving History

The Story of Kayla Bellomo, Kyle Weiss & the Verbryk-Clarke House

by Elizabeth Skrabonja



Kayla Bellomo & Kyle Weiss in front of their new old house

A certain house in Sparkill with a particularly historic legacy has been waiting for the right owners. The wrap around porch, distinctive floor plan and ominous basement might not appeal to all young couples, but Kayla Bellomo and Kyle Weiss knew when they saw the Verbryk-Clarke house that it was home.

Kayla, 24, has always loved old houses – especially those of the Victorian or Arts & Crafts movement style. She enjoys finding treasures in local antique shops, (especially vintage photographs) and is well on her way to becoming a collector of merit. She relates to the past in such a refreshing way, with an open curiosity

and unabashed love for the patina of time. When she and Kyle found us through the help of local historian Larry Vale, the paper trail to the Verbryk-Clarke family had already been established. Finding out – and caring about who those people were is not foreign to how Kayla conducts her daily life; she is a caring person. Kayla is a first responder; she works as a 911 Dispatcher. During the pandemic and lockdown hers was the first voice that many in distress heard after dialing 911. The joys of discovery, (and countless renovation projects) helped relieve some of the stress of her job – and was, in a way,

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The Verbryk-Clarke House Ca. 1920



Living in an older home is more than just hearing creaks and patching up cracks from settling plaster. It is restoring love and life back into history. When we first saw the home, we knew this was “it”. Growing up in an older home myself, it was set in stone that living in an older house is where I felt I belonged. Finding out the history and some hidden gems within our new home has been quite the adventure, we know there is more to uncover and we are so excited to see what awaits.

~Kayla Bellomo

Above: Original Daguerreotype of Cornelius Verbryk-Clarke, (1836-1927) and Helen Elizabeth Verbryk-Clarke, (1840-1925). Their son James built the house.

THE LEGACY OF James Verbryk Clarke



James Verbryk Clarke, age 43

When James Verbryk-Clarke, (1861-1946) married Elizabeth *Lizzie* Haring (1861-1937) in 1887 it was a love match that joined some of the most influential families of Dutch ancestry in Orangetown. Through the diaries written in 1876 and 1877 by James's mother, Helen Verbryk Clarke, (1840-1925) housed at the New York State Historical Association at Cooperstown, NY we know of the industrious nature of this family. Helen wrote about her well run household and her husband's efforts as a small farmer, their social and cultural pursuits and the beauties of nature. The camaraderie of friends and neighbors and the seemingly endless whirl of activity during this Victorian period is particularly striking noting the

church socials, fairs, festivals, concerts, lectures and holiday excursions. With the coming of the railroads the little towns and hamlets became highly mobile; taking a train and then ferry to New York City to purchase bonnets and gloves was not out of the question. In the fall of 1863 the Tappan Congregants of the Dutch Church were divided over the teachings of Rev. Isaac Cole and 'church hopping' became the norm; Helen made pies for AME Zion Church in Sparkill and attended services at various houses of worship. In 1876 with her family she attended our nation's Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia and noted that the July 4th Independence Day celebrations were 'more universally observed than usual'.

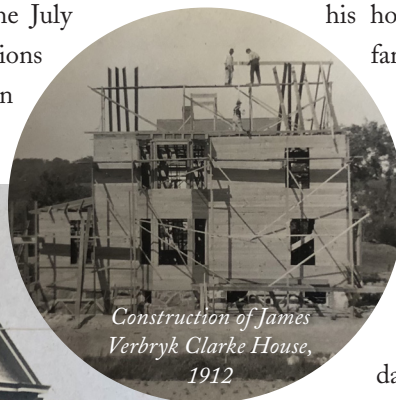


Lizzie & James, courting, 1886

Her prodigious efforts as a diarist were passed on to her son James. Our museum is in possession of one of his diaries, dated 1925-1934, donated to us courtesy of the Rockland County Archives. Comparing this diary to two photo albums compiled by the

family, (the first donated by Firth Haring Fabend and the second donated by the Rockland County Archive) there are several themes indigenous to the Dutch families of our area that become immediately apparent. ***Love of Hearth and Home***; in his almost daily postings, James writes about

his house. When the family homestead burned down in 1915 work was already completed on the home he, his wife Lizzie and daughter Bessie



Construction of James Verbryk Clarke House, 1912

would share. He annotates with care the paint color choices, (cloud white, pearl grey and sky blue) as well as all plumbing, heating and decorating additions; there is an obvious and emphatic pride of place. Top of the line, efficient and modern is what interested him. The family owned a 'Maxwell' and



Completed James Verbryk Clarke House, 1914

later a ‘Cadillac’ automobile in the teens and James set up a photographic studio in the house in 1929 developing and printing his own photographs.

With *Entrepreneurial Spirit* James approached farming. He worked hard. He developed his several acres of land into profitable seasonal produce, expanding development even as he approached 70. His pragmatic entries chronicle purchases, plantings, chickens and expansions. Of the vegetables, fruits and flowers noted from the diary are: **tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, early cabbage, lettuce, cauliflower, celery, beets, onion, asparagus, string beans, peas, carrots, cucumbers, potatoes, pumpkins, corn, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, apple, pear & peach trees, currants, rhubarb, roses, pansies, geraniums, mums, nasturtiums, lilies, Japanese iris and marguerite carnations!** He noted seed purchases and planting dates, weather changes and barn improvements. Despite the fact that the diary runs from 1925-1934 there is no mention of the great depression.

Looking at the photographs that James took as well as reading his diary it is obvious that *Family is Central*. He was a loving husband and a doting father. There were family trips to the shore at Ashbury Park or to Boston or Albany and frequent shopping excursions in New York City. He notes Lizzie attending ‘picnics of the Blauvelt tribe’ and the birth of his only daughter, Elizabeth, *Bessie’s* daughter Anna Elizabeth in 1926. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter are noted with mention of what was served and who attended.

James Verbryk Clarke’s line ended with him in name only. Here at the Orangetown Museum we honor his legacy and delight to see interest in the life he lived and home he cherished. *EKS*

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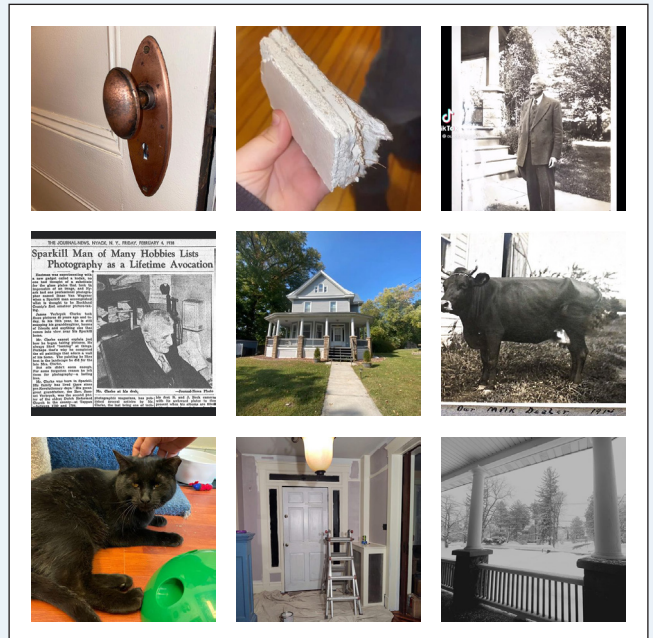


Kayla & Kyle at the Orangetown Museum, researching their house

like the Verbryk-Clarke family giving back to her.

Kyle, 26, is taking on some of the major renovation work. An Electrical Engineer employed as a Buildings Engineer, he has lived in Orangetown his whole life. Equally fascinated by the history of the Verbryk-Clarke house, he has embraced a whole panoply of projects, from discovering horse hair lathe in the walls to a photography lab in the basement. While getting an old house was not at first a priority for him, this experience helped him to appreciate local history in a more intimate way. Reading through the diary of James Verbryk-Clarke and even visiting that family’s gravesite in Tappan before closing on the house is testament to his regard. Kyle is interested in restoring the house to its former glory thus restoring to the town one of its architectural gems. This is not the only way that Kyle gives back to his community; he is also a first responder. As a volunteer with both the South Orangetown Emergency Medical Services (SOAC) and Fire Department, (where he serves as Lieutenant) Kyle, (whose Dad also served the EMS) embodies the motto ‘preserve and protect’.

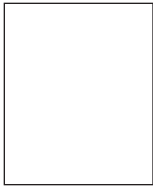
The couple now has two black cats (Benjamin and Salem) in residence that serve as observers of further remodeling work. Research on wallpapers and fainting sofas, (Kayla) paint colors and furnace issues, (Kyle) is ongoing. When asked what advice they would give to other young people interested in buying an old house the couple made a point to warn about hidden costs like heating. Kayla has been documenting their journey on social media; you can follow her on Instagram **ouoldhouse1910** and on tiktok **@ouoldhouse2020**. Various facebook old house groups were also helpful to them at the beginning of this journey to connect with other like-minded individuals and get ideas. This spring will bring some gardening projects back to the house that was once surrounded by climbing *Miss Lolita Armour* roses and *Antique Hydrangea Blue*. There is already a beautiful story blooming within.



Highlights from ouoldhouse1910, Kayla's Instagram



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 We can accommodate no more than 6 visitors at a time

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MARCH IS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Grace
 Sayres
 1872-
 1970



SHE DID IT ALL

An early and ardent supporter of women's suffrage, she ran and won as a candidate of the women's party getting 380 votes for the office of Trustee of the Village of South Nyack taking the oath on March 24th, 1919. She was appointed on March 3rd, 1920 as the first South Nyack Municipal historian and was the first female member of the Nyack School Board of Education, serving from 1920 – 1928 as well as Senior Account Clerk, Orangetown Tax Collector's Office from 1934-1947. She was a descendant of Adrien Lambertson, patentee who in 1686 settled in Orangetown and a granddaughter of Commodore William Voorhis of whom Voorhis Point in the Village of Nyack is named.

THE ORANGETOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES
 Mary Cardenas, MUSEUM DIRECTOR • Emily Hingle, CURATOR OF COLLECTIONS
 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.

 TOWN OF ORANGETOWN

Teresa Kenny, 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.

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