

The

# Orangetown Crier

News from the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives

FALL 2021

## KNOW THE PAST – FIND THE FUTURE

This issue of *The Orangetown Crier* sheds light on some of the varied collections of our museum – written by three authors close to our hearts. *Anne Pinzow* and *Paul Clark* are Board Members of *The Friends of the Orangetown Museum* and professional journalists. *Sarah Konyak* is our Research Assistant and currently a graduate student in Seton Hall’s Museum Studies Department. Their assistance in interpreting our local history substantiates the relevance of our collections and helps to reinforce the claim – that history matters. **EKS**



## From War Preparation to a Child’s Wonderland of Nature and Play

# BEING A CHILD IN SHANKS VILLAGE

by Mary Ellen Marshall as told to Anne Phyllis Pinzow

“More than 3,000 children and their parents of many different nationalities and races lived together in cramped apartments in Shanks Village with the bare bones of conveniences and yet it was fun,” said Mary Ellen Marshall, 75, who now lives in Teaneck, NJ.

He fondest memory, she said, was the closeness of all the children, “There was no perception of race or difference. One of our friends was from England, her mother was an English war bride. There were a lot of African Americans. There were people from all over the world and everybody got along, solving problems together.”

“It was very different, it was very fun,” was how Mary spoke of growing up in Shanks Village, on the site of Camp Shanks.

Her father worked at the Camp during the war and when he heard that the barracks were to be converted to small (very small, no bathtubs, no cooling in the summer, no insulation, a kerosene stove in the living room the only heat) apartments and rented to G.I.s some were being made available to men who were not going to college.

Mary said that her family moved from an apartment in Pearl River, when she was one-year-old in 1947 to a sectioned off Camp Shanks barracks on 5 East 301st Street, on what is now Lester Drive.

As she grew up, she felt that Shanks Village “sort of really belonged to the kids. There were so many children in such a small area. I think Shanks was all of Orangeburg, a little bit of Blauvelt and some of Tappan. But there were 3,000 kids and 3,000 adults.

“You never had to go very far to find a playmate. We very much lived in nature. It was rural, it wasn’t even suburban,” at the time.”

But there was a lot of fun and a lot of time to play as Mary explained, the apartments were so small that too much childish

*continues on page 2*



ABOVE: Mary Ellen & Eileen Marshall as Shanks was about to close, 1957

RIGHT: Mary Ellen & Eileen Marshall (center) playing with friends at Shanks Village

THE **Bob Knight**  
COLLECTION

## A Soldier Found

Some mysteries will never be solved. How and why Bob Knight was in possession of a collection of letters and photographs relating to the war time activities of a retired postal worker from Yonkers is a mystery – but there it is. Found among the documents in Bob’s archive are a collection of rare letters written in the trenches of the European arena by a young army private far from home.

His name was Harry Hochstadt and the conflicts that he endured would go on to earn him the European-African-Middle Eastern



Harry Hochstedt back home in Yonkers, Ca. 1948

Campaign Ribbon, the Bronze Battle Star and the Purple Heart. Born in 1921 he enlisted in the US Army in 1942 and served until 1945. In a letter written from a hospital in France to his sister Mae on June 30th, 1944 he writes, ...”I can understand why everyone was surprised when they got word that the invasion had begun. Everyone knew that it was due to pop off but they didn’t know exactly when it would happen. We’ve been quite

successful so far. If we continue that way, the war with Germany will end very soon. There isn’t any doubt about me coming back when this war ends. I have a long life ahead of me and I am looking forward to it. In fact, I am looking forward to a lot of things. Right now I’ve got Coney Island on my mind.”

This letter was written just four days after Hochstadt was injured at Cherbourg, France. In a citation honoring the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, of which Hochstadt was part, Col. William C. Westmoreland, Chief of Staff conferred honor on their “extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in action from 21 June 1944 to 26 June 1944 in France.” The fierce battle which assaulted one of the strongest of the fortified German positions in the defensive belt around Cherbourg was finally resolved by violent hand to hand combat.

If it had not been for Bob Knight the recollections, letters and photographs of Harry Hochstedt would have been lost. Harry went on to a quiet 37 years as a postal worker in Manhattan – his WWII legacy lives on at the Orangetown Museum. ■ *Sarah Konyak with EKS*

## BEING A CHILD IN SHANKS VILLAGE

*continued from page 1*

exuberance would more often than not earn a child a trip outside to play rather than discipline.

“There were dozens of activities that the children found to engage in, many because of the pre-identity of the area as farm land prior to the construction of Camp Shanks. I remember the hill (now plowed down by a developer) that went up to a reservoir. Half way up that hill on the right-hand side there were raspberry bushes in the summer time,” the picking of them as well as strawberries and blackberries from bushes growing between the barracks. constituted a very small and conservative, form of play that the children found, generally unsupervised, and not always very safe, by today’s standards.

“Right off Lester Drive down to the right there was a swamp. We used to call it Muddy Sock, because you got mud on your socks. We’d be down there trapping frogs, catching turtles. I remember one day a massive turtle came out of the swamp and he was strolling along Lester Drive on the other side of the street from our barracks. My mother saw it and we were headed right towards it. We got across the street and heard my mother screaming, ‘Get away from that. It’s a snapping turtle.’” Mary said she thought it was just a big turtle until it opened its mouth, “and we fled.”

Another activity “that everybody who lived in my part of Shanks,” had to do with the woods crowning the hill and a huge oak tree that stood on the top of the hill. “It had a vine that hung down.” She said the children would line up to run backwards with the vine and then swing out over the hill. “Then one day we came and the vine was cut down.”

It was a better time in many ways, she said. “We lived in nature, and we all had fun together.” ■

# A Life Well Lived. A Revolutionary Quest Fulfilled.

Our work on the Bob Knight Collection is progressing. Sorting out boxes of the Shanks Villager, the newsy biweekly newspaper written from 1949 to 1956 for the residents of Shanks Village, is complete. Bob's colorful and seemingly endless collections of vintage postcards are organized. Poring over boxes of photos from his prolific work as a journalist and photographer is done.

The last few weeks have been busy with one of the most enlightening pieces of the collection—a well-filled ring-binder of Bob Knight's personal history. It has been a true trove of family photos of Bob as a child, his parents and grandparents, newspaper clippings of his and his families' marriages and achievements, diplomas and certificates. Plus, his honorable discharge from eight years of service as a Sergeant in the New York Army National Guard from 1957 to 1965 that included one year of active duty for the "Berlin Crisis."

But one of the most interesting chapters in his history thus far has been reading the forms, genealogical charts and correspondence involved in his quest to become a Son of



the American Revolution (SAR), and follow the family legacy of his grandmother, Mary Theresa Olin Carter, who became a Daughter of the American Revolution (DAR) in 1919.

Bob's first and easier requirement for membership was showing that he was "a citizen of good repute in his community." His resume at the time listed membership in five historical societies, a post card collectors club, the Jaycees, NAACP and secretary of the Citizen's Radio Association of Rockland.

The second and harder part was being a lineal descendant of an ancestor who was "unfailing in loyalty to and rendered acceptable service in the cause of an American who assisted in establishing American Independence." And proving it.

But after months of correspondence with others in the US named Knight, and gathering the names and lineage of parents, grand and great-grandparents, Bob found his Revolutionary ancestor and wow did he ever qualify.

His name was Samuel Stowell, born in Millington, Connecticut on July 28, 1762, and died in Orwell, New York on January 27, 1850. He enlisted at the age of 16 and served in the Connecticut Corps under George Washington. He was twice promoted for bravery in action and was the first Continental soldier on the first redoubt taken from the British at the battle of Yorktown. Stowell also fought in the battles of White Plains, Stony Point, Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine and Monmouth. In all, he served for five years until the Continental Army was disbanded.

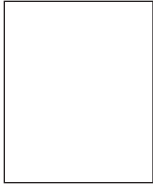
And with that, Bob Knight became a Son of the American Revolution on March 31, 1970. I can only think how proud he must have been. ■ *Paul Clark*



< A young Bob Knight in the early 1940s with his grandparents, Milton and Mary Theresa Olin Carter



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PLEASE VISIT US WITH A FACE MASK.

# ORANGETOWN MEMORY PROJECT

Opening April 2022

*With this exhibit  
 we celebrate the  
 preservationists and  
 encourage the uninitiated  
 to fall in love with the past.  
 Let's consider what is old  
 in a new way.*

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 At Home  
 in Orangetown**  
*by Appointment*

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Here at the Orangetown Museum we wish all of our friends and volunteers a wonderful holiday. Our annual holiday show is cancelled this year, but we invite you to stop by the historic Salyer House and take a selfie in front of our beautiful homestead – send it to our Instagram account at #otownmuseum. We look forward to seeing them – and you in the new year!

THE ORANGETOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES  
 Mary Cardenas, MUSEUM DIRECTOR • Stefanie D'Erasmus, 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.  
 STUDENT/SENIOR \$10 SINGLE \$15 FAMILY \$20  
 LIFE MEMBER \$100 CORPORATE \$250