

# ***NORTH CASTLE HISTORY***



[Collection of Mary Milo]

**HENKER'S FARM, 1989**

**THE NORTH CASTLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Volume 30 -- 2003**

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Smith's Tavern  
Society Headquarters  
Listed in The New York State  
and National Register of Historic Places

# The North Castle Historical Society

440 BEDFORD ROAD ARMONK, NEW YORK 10504

Dear Friends,

## President's Message

As I approach the end of my first year as President, I continue to be amazed at the amount of time and effort expended by our committed volunteers. You are the lifeblood of our Society! While our volunteers provide the manpower, the financial contributions provide the fuel for us to operate. Our membership continues to grow and special donations are always welcome. This year's two fundraising events were outstanding. Both the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual North Castle Wine & Food Festival (initiated by Armonk Rotary) and the Society's 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Armonk Antiques Show were terrific community events. (The 2004 Antiques Show will be April 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>.)

Our docents, off for the winter, will be back to work the beginning of April, when we will be open to the public Wednesdays from 2:00pm-4:00pm and Sundays from 2:00pm-5:00pm. In addition, group tours are provided by appointment. The Colonial Crafts Days for hundreds of area 4<sup>th</sup> grade students are outstanding events and because of their success, we are adding a special program for pre-school age children this March. Maintenance of the four historic buildings is ongoing. Several permanent exhibits are on display at the Educational Complex. Temporary exhibits change seasonally. Annual publications continue. A 'lost' cemetery was discovered in Middle Patent. In short, there is a lot going on at the historic complex on Route 22. Volunteer to help and encourage others to come by and see what we are all about.

A very special 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting is planned – a professional presentation about the spy Major Andre, who was held in North Castle before his execution. Plan to join us April 4<sup>th</sup> at Smith's Tavern.

"Thank You!" for your help and guidance and for continuing the work of preservation and education – the mission of our Society.

Sincerely,

  
Robby Morris, President

WORDS FROM THE CIVIL WAR  
From David C. Banks

by Doris Finch Watson,  
North Castle Town Historian

A Civil War Soldier's timeworn letter reads:

*Harewood Hospital<sup>1</sup>, Washington, D.C.  
May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1864*

*Dear Wife,*

*I have received no letter from you yet, but expect one today. I thought to have a letter yesterday, but was disappointed. As I remarked in my last, I have had but one letter from you in one month, but I am to blame for that, for I have been moving from place to place so much that I at first thought it better for you not to write until I had got settled down, but I cannot go without hearing from home and will risk your writing at least twice a week until you hear of my removal from here.*

*I feel about the same – my head feels as large as a bushel; I have no appetite and am quite thin. I have no idea how long I may stop here – it may be twenty-four hours, and I may stop here three months. Every day or two we are visited by a different Surgeon and each will have some remark to make on each patient's case according to his own judgment, and in nine cases out of ten differing with the Surgeon who made the previous visit. For instance, we have one young man in the ward that I am in who is ruptured – a perfect case of hernia, and the Surgeon who has had charge of him for a number of days past has had him on light duty, telling him it amounted to nothing – and this morning we were visited by another Surgeon who examined this young man's case and asked him how long he had been in this condition. He answered three months. The Surgeon told him to keep very quiet and he would have his papers made out for his discharge -- this is the way we get along in an institution of this magnitude.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Located on the farm of W.W. Corcoran, 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW near the Soldiers Home, Harewood Hospital was supervised by Surgeon Reed Bontecou. The Hospital held nearly 2,000 beds. At one time an additional 1,872 beds were provided on the grounds in 312 hospital tents. [nmhm.washingtondc.museum/exhibits]

*Active operations in front appear to be at a standstill – at present it is believed here that ere many hours roll around the most deadly and hardest fought battle of the war will be opened. May God grant us victory and cover our brave soldiers with glory, vanquish the enemy, and bring this war to a speedy termination. From all that I can learn, I fear that Gen'l. Grant has paid dear for all he's gained thus far in this Campaign, and even now Gen'l. Lee claims the Victory. The fact is this, Gen'l. Grant has failed to march steadily along to Richmond as he expected, and Gen'l. Lee has thus far been successful in keeping him out of Richmond.*

*There is no lack of sympathy with our cause now in the loyal states, and I doubt not but Grant will take Richmond this campaign, but the cost will be great in life and the best blood of our country.*

*I think I have written you a long letter if not an interesting one, but you know I am where I cannot hear or see much, so you must excuse my letters being dry and without interest, and I'll atone by telling you how very much I love my dear wife and Pets,<sup>2</sup> and how very anxious I am to get home with them once more. Home! How that word sounds to me now. It appears to me I never realized the meaning of that word until I lost my health. How many poor soldiers never will see home again. God grant that I may be spared to go home to my wife and be a Citizen again. Write soon.*

*Your affectionate husband.*

*David C. Banks*

*P.S. Give my love to our parents and kiss our Pets for me. I have no tobacco nor money to buy with.*

- - - - -

One may wonder about that sentence, "God grant that I may be spared to go home to my wife and be a Citizen again." Did his prayer come true? YES, thankfully he did come home.

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<sup>2</sup> "Pets" was a term of endearment David used to refer to his daughters. He lovingly called Sarah Ann "Wife".

## BACKGROUND

**DAVID CLAUSON BANKS** was a member of one of North Castle's oldest and founding families. He was a great-great grandson of Samuel Banks, who came to Middle Patent circa 1698, and whose family name is still carried on today in the hamlet of BANKSVILLE.

David C. Banks was born in Bedford, New York on October 20, 1827, the son of Walter Banks and his wife, Mary Dayton. Walter Banks was the Superintendent of the large Jay Farm, which had been inherited by the son of John Jay, the great statesman and first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.<sup>3</sup> Thus, David and his sister, Lavinia, grew up in this fine atmosphere and attended Bedford Schools. He must have played on the old village green where in Revolutionary days Lt. Col. Tarleton<sup>4</sup> had led his British troops to burn and ransack the town. Young David probably enjoyed sitting around the country store and listening to the talk of those who had lived through the war. Like many young boys, he may have dreamed of being a soldier. Little did he know that the day would not be too far off when he would enlist to fight for his country.

## THE YOUNG MAN

After completing his education, young David began a career as a carpenter, and as his success grew he decided to move to Rye, New York. There he built up his trade until he was an expert building contractor. In 1852, at age twenty-five, he married Sarah Ann Field, the daughter of Stephen Field and his wife Mary Cromwell.<sup>5</sup> The Fields were prominent in the Quaker Church and affairs of Purchase. Sarah was the eldest of eight, having seven younger brothers who welcomed and teased David, their new "brother".

The new couple made their home in Rye, and their three daughters were born there. Sadness came into their lives in 1856 when

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<sup>3</sup> The land was purchased in 1703 by Mr. Jay's grandfather. By 1801, John had acquired 750 acres. The home is on Route 22 between Bedford Village and Katonah. [nysparks.state.ny.us]

<sup>4</sup> Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton and his troops burned and ransacked private homes as they moved from Pound Ridge to Bedford and down Route 22 to North Castle. The burning of Bedford occurred July 1779 and has been well documented by several sources.

<sup>5</sup> Family genealogy taken from the private collection of Doris Finch Watson.

Mary, their first little girl, died at age three, just a few months after her little sister was born. In 1861 a third little girl was born, and they named her Carrie.

When the war between the North and South erupted, David was one of the first to give his service to his country. He enlisted and was assigned to Capt. David F. Wright's Company B, 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment of New York Volunteers<sup>6</sup> on September 7, 1861 at age 34. He was assigned to medical duty and put in charge of a hospital wagon and tents. He had full charge of ordering medicines and medical supplies and transporting them to hospital tents.



[civilwarphotos.net]

### SUPPLY WAGONS AT THE LANDING BELLE PLAIN, VIRGINIA (1864)

The world in which he lived during the Civil War is best understood in writings from his diary. Here are entries from a few pages:

*Sunday, Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1862. The weather clear and pleasant. This morning I went out on a hill in front of our quarters to take a view of the Rebel encampments. They are in strong force on the other*

---

<sup>6</sup> The 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment, New York Volunteers contained six Companies of Shepard Rifles, two of Scott Rifles and two of Union Rifles. The Regiment fought at New Berne, Manassas, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Vicksburg, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg and Appomattox. Recruited at New York City and assigned to General Burnside, the Regiment left Annapolis January 6, 1862 for Roanoke Island. [51stnewyorkinfantry.tripod.com]



*side of the river and I could plainly see seven siege guns mounted and entrenchments thrown up last night. I understand that our trains have gone to Belle Plain today after Pontoon bridges to throw across the river at this place.*

*Monday, Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1862. The weather clear and pleasant. The Rebs on the other side of the river are drilling in plain open sight of us. We expected to have an artillery duel with them this morning, but for some reason it has been deferred. A number of the Rebs have forded the river and come over to us. They say that they will fight at this place until there is not a man left – this is just what we want.*

*Thursday, Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> (1862). A beautiful clear morning and mild as May. We are all happy that we have so fine a day for Thanksgiving – although we have no means of raising anything extra in the way of eatables. Our dinner today is Pork and Beans with hard bread and coffee, and I think we are lucky to get that. At any rate we will not grumble.*

*Saturday, Nov. 29<sup>th</sup> (1862). The weather clear and cool. Our forces are building up the depot at Falmouth Station<sup>7</sup> and the road is now in good running order. Our greatest trouble here at present is the want of tobacco, which sells for two and three dollars per pound and scarce at that.*

*Monday, Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> (1862). The weather very cold, and six of our pickets froze to death in the posts last night. I went to Aquia Creek again today after more medical supplies. The Potomac is frozen nearly across and the ice in the Creek will bear a horse. There are now eight engines on the tracks and supplies are being rapidly moved up to Falmouth and intermediate stations.*

*Sunday, Dec. 14<sup>th</sup> (1862). The weather clear and pleasant. The ball opened this morning early and the most terrific fighting I ever witnessed was the battle of today.<sup>8</sup> The battle of Antietam news is completely*

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<sup>7</sup> Falmouth Station, near Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>8</sup> The Battle of Fredericksburg, December 11-15, 1862. Union casualties were estimated at 13,353. [americancivilwar.com]

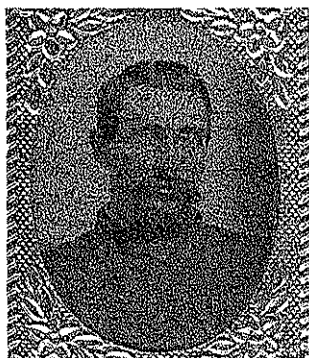
thrown in the shade. Our loss up to this time cannot be less than seven or eight thousand.

*Thursday, Dec. 18<sup>th</sup> (1862).* The weather clear and cool. No more fighting. We think we are nicely whipped. Sent a few hundred more wounded to Washington. Dr. Leonard<sup>9</sup> is constantly amputating and is covered with blood from head to foot.

*Friday, Dec. 19<sup>th</sup> (1862).* The weather cool and freezing hard nights. We again sent a number of our wounded to Washington and continue to amputate limbs of the wounded. We buried thirty-four men today who died from the effects of their wounds.

*Thursday, Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> (1862).* The weather warm and pleasant. Today we sent the remainder of our wounded to Washington. Except four who were thought to be dying. Two died this evening. I sent a letter to father today.

*Saturday, Dec. 27<sup>th</sup> (1862).* The weather clear and pleasant. We have struck all of our hospital tents and are packing up for a move. I had my daguerreotype<sup>10</sup> taken today and sent it to wife.



(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**DAVID CLAUSON BANKS FROM THE DAGUERREOTYPE  
WHICH HE SENT TO "WIFE" (1862)**

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<sup>9</sup> William H. Leonard was made Assistant Surgeon, 51<sup>st</sup> New York March 1862 and Surgeon October 1863. [collectorsnet.com]

<sup>10</sup> See December 27, 1862 diary entry. He sent "wife" a small, locket-size daguerreotype.

*Thursday, Jan. 1<sup>st</sup> (1863). The weather clear and cold. This is a holiday and I never wish to see another celebrated as this has been. Almost everyone is intoxicated and a great many beastly. Truly our army is demoralized when our generals and their Staff are as drunk as brutes in front of their soldiers. I have been very busy writing all day and this has been no holiday for me. I received a letter from wife today.*

## WOUNDED AND HOSPITALIZED

After David was both wounded and sick he spent weeks in the Harewood Hospital in Washington, DC. His military service had exposed him to much horror, pain and death, including the Battle of Fredericksburg and the Battle of Antietam. After three years of service he was discharged on September 21, 1864.

Know ye, That David C. Banks  
 Private of Captain George F. Vaughn's  
 Company, (16<sup>th</sup>) 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Mass.  
 VOLUNTEERS who was enrolled on the fourteenth day of September  
 one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two to serve three years or  
 during the war, is hereby Discharged from the service of the United States  
 this twenty-first day of September, 1864, at Washington  
Discharged by reason of Expiration of term of enlistment  
 (No objection to his being re-enlisted is known to exist.)  
 Said David C. Banks was born in Andover  
 in the State of Massachusetts, is thirty-five years of age,  
five feet seven inches high, fair complexion, gray eyes,  
dark hair and by occupation, when enrolled, a carpenter  
 Given in Washington D.C. this twenty-first day of  
September 1864  
W. B. Bontecou  
Surgeon U. S. A.  
In charge

NOTE - The signature will be correct should there be anything  
 in the margin or a marginal question of the matter  
 rendering this void for the above.

(L. O. O. No. 94)

(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

DAVID C. BANKS ... "DISCHARGED FROM THE SERVICE" (1864)

## HOME

David came back ... leaving behind the bloodshed and death scenes that had been part of his everyday life. He was home at last with his family. He began to regain his health and then began work again in his contracting business.

The years passed. David's contracting business continued to be successful, and the two daughters, Ella and Carrie, attended Miss Life's School for Girls, which later became Rye Country Day School.<sup>11</sup> David and Sarah Ann decided it was time to move back to North Castle to the farm of his father, Walter Banks, a gentleman who was known as "Uncle Walter" to all who knew him in his later years.

## THE FARM YEARS

David continued his building business, and he and Sarah Ann hired workers to run the large farm. In addition to the animals and crops raised on the farm, they owned property and a mill across the street from the house. Those were busy times. The farmhouse<sup>12</sup>, which still stands today, is located on the west side of Bedford-Banksville Road a short distance north of Brookwood Road.



(Both Photographs Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**WALTER BANKS (1798 - 1882)**

**BANKS FAMILY FARMHOUSE**

The home was a gathering place for family and friends. Among young Ella's guests was a youth named William S. Finch; their friendship turned to romance, followed by their wedding in 1874. William was the son of Marvin N. Finch, whose family dates to 1720 in

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<sup>11</sup> Rev. William Life and his wife, Susan, established The Rye Female Seminary in 1869. In 1896 the Misses Harriet and Mary Stowe purchased The Seminary. In 1921 The Seminary merged with a local boys' school and became The Rye Country Day Schools. [rcds.rye.ny.us]

<sup>12</sup> The house has been extensively remodeled over the years. Richard and Diana Zeltner lately owned the house.

the Banksville area. Marvin Finch was the owner of Finch's Store, the only store in the area, and was also the U.S. Postmaster of Banksville.<sup>13</sup>

David's father, Walter, died in 1882. David and Sarah Ann's younger daughter, Carrie, married William Close in 1883. With both girls gone, David decided to sell the farm. He purchased land from Marvin N. Finch, his daughter Ella's father-in-law, and built a home just north of the Finch Store. They moved to their new home complete with trellises, picket fences, and lovely old shade trees. It was a picturesque little village with a country store, white country church and tree-lined dirt roads.



(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**DAVID CLAUSON BANKS' HOME, BANKSVILLE, NEW YORK (1922)**  
**Bedford-Banksville Road was unpaved and had towering trees.**



(Both Photographs Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**WILLIAM SUTHERLAND FINCH**  
**(1852-1934)**



**ELLA BANKS FINCH**  
**(1856-1893)**

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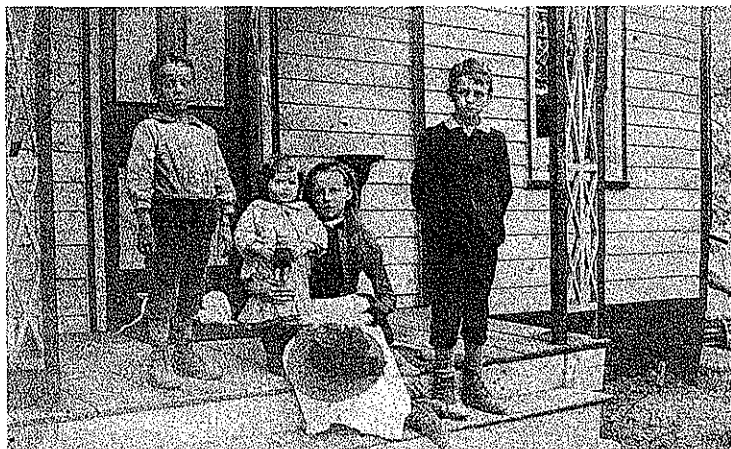
<sup>13</sup> Later, Banksville mail was transferred to the Greenwich Post Office and then to the Bedford Post Office.

## SOCIAL LIFE

As Sarah Ann had been raised in the Quaker faith, she and David often attended meetings at Purchase, and other times they attended the Middle Patent Methodist-Episcopal Church where their daughter, Mrs. William Finch, was a devoted and active member. The whole family attended the popular Strawberry Festivals, they enjoyed visits to the local store where news of the hamlet was learned, and they both visited neighbors and welcomed friends to their home.

## JOY AND TRAGEDY

Daughter Ella and William Finch brought great joy to David and Sarah Ann when they made them grandparents, not once but four times over the next several years. The children were: Gertrude, Walter, William and Mary Helen. When little Mary Helen was six months old, great sorrow befell the family. Ella died of pneumonia in 1893. She was only thirty-seven years old. David and Sarah Ann took the grandchildren to live with them.

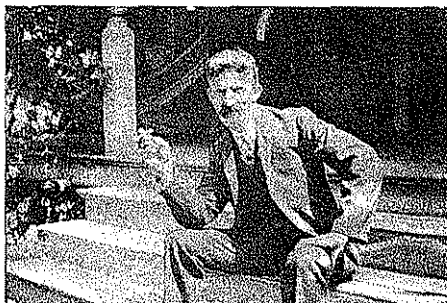


(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**WILLIAM, MARY HELEN, GERTRUDE, WALTER (c. 1894)  
CHILDREN OF WILLIAM AND ELLA BANKS FINCH**

David's beloved Sarah Ann died in their Banksville home in 1908 in her eighty-third year. David's grandson, Walter, had married a few years before, and he and his wife Emma Miller came back to live with David and care for him. Missing his dear wife, David began taking long walks, often walking to Greenwich some nine miles away. He

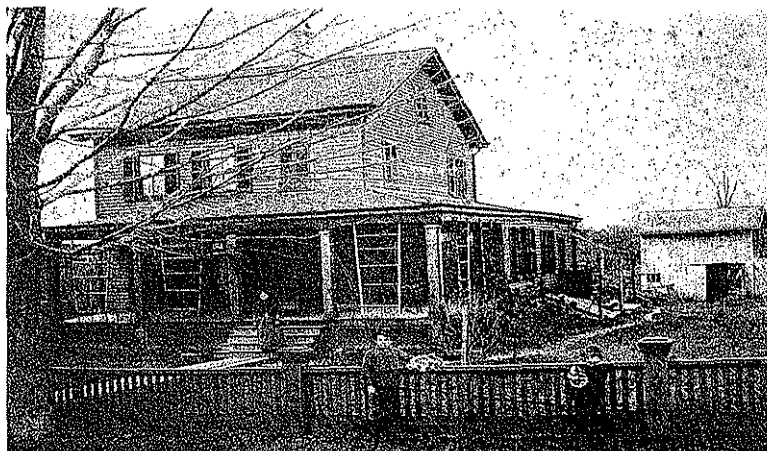
claimed he needed the exercise. He loved his grandchildren and took great pleasure in being with them and his great-grandchildren.



(Both Photographs Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**WALTER SUTHERLAND FINCH**  
(1876-1961)

**EMMA MILLER FINCH**  
(1876-1967)



(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**DAVID C. BANKS HOME, BANKSVILLE, NEW YORK (c. 1889)**

**Mrs. David Clauson Banks (Sarah Ann) is coming down the steps.  
Grandsons Walter S. and William E. Finch are by the front  
fence petting the kittens. The house burned in 1937.**



(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**DAVID C. BANKS, GRANDSON AND GREAT GRANDSON**  
 [l-r] William E. Finch, Walter D. Finch, David C. Banks  
 and William E. Finch, Jr. (1918)

### THE FINAL TRIP

After a very full life, in 1921 David Clauson Banks was laid to rest beside his dear Sarah Ann in The Middle Patent Rural Cemetery. His ninety-four years of life had been witness to so much – to happiness, to heartbreak, to the ugliness and pain of war, to the coming of steam engines, wireless, automobiles, telephones, electricity, trains and much more. But now he was surrounded by seven generations of his family who all lie in Banksville's old country cemetery near the white church, the Mianus stream and the every-changing hillsides. Peace is theirs.



(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

**SARAH ANN FIELD AND HUSBAND, DAVID C. BANKS (1898)**



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## SOME SLAVES IN NORTH CASTLE

by Sharon Tomback

Early in 1755 a Slave Census was conducted in North Castle. The following two records survive.<sup>1</sup>

### **"North Castle, May 4, 1755**

This Comes to let you know that Aron Forman has one Negro man Named franses and George Knifin has two Negro men one named pomp and the other Cuffe and Thomas Golding has one wench named Elizabeth and Antoni Trip has one Negro fellow Named Ned and a wench Named francis and Roger Lyon has one wench Named Mereum and Samuel Banks has one wench Named Marget and Timothy Carpenter has one wench Named Susanah

**This from your friend to serve, AARON FORMAN Capt"**

### **"NORTH CASTLE A list of ye Nagros in Captine Dusenbery's<sup>2</sup> Company for ye year 1755**

Robert Dikensen<sup>3</sup>, 1 man, Dick

Nathaniel Carpenter, 1 wench, Dinah

Able Weeks, 1 man, Lewis

Joseph Sutton, 2, a man and woman, Roger and Dorrity<sup>4</sup>

Peter Toten, 1 man, prins

Elias Clap, 1 man, Narow<sup>5</sup>

Caleb Fowler, 1 wench, peg

Elizabeth Fowler, 1 wench, Teen"

The Slave Census of 1755 appears on pages 855 and 856 Volume III of The Documentary History of the State of New York by E. B. O'Callaghan, M.D. published in 1850 and on page 634 of J. Thomas Scharf's History of Westchester County, Volume II published in 1886.

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<sup>1</sup> Misspellings and capitalization errors are intentional. Copied from NYGenWeb's Westchester County website rootsweb.com.

<sup>2</sup> J. Thomas Scharf, History of Westchester County, Volume II, 1886, New York, page 634 reported as Dusenbury's.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, reported as Dickenson.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, reported as Dorothy.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, reported as Narow (Nero).

## **Anti-Slavery Measures**

Between 1777 and 1804 the territory of Vermont and the states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey passed laws to abolish slavery. Slavery was not abolished Federally until 1865. Interestingly, in 1641 the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Colonies had been the first to authorize slavery ([loc.gov/exhibits/African](http://loc.gov/exhibits/African)).

### **1790 Federal Census, Slaves**

The First Census of the United States (1790) reported that 7,796 families in New York were holding slaves. Eighteen of those families, holding twenty-nine (29) slaves, were in North Castle. Because New Castle was divided from North Castle in 1791, some of the households may have been in the New Castle portion. Those reported as owning slaves in North Castle in 1790 were:

Hannah Smith, 2	Thomas Green, 1
Abraham Waring, 1	Samuel Dickenson, 1
Jonathan Hobby, 1	John Wright, 1
Ann Banks, 1	Charles Haight, Senior, 2
Jonathan Platt, Junior, 1	William Hunt, 2
Jonathan Platt, Senior, 1	Gabriel Archer, 1
Roger Lyon, 5	William Wright, 1
Miles Forman, 1	Abraham Miller, 1
John Martin, Senior, 5	Thomas Ferris, 1

### **1790 Federal Census, All Other Free Persons**

The 1790 Census allocated five (5) categories: Free White Males 16 years and upward, Free White Males under 16 years, Free White Females, All Other Free Persons, and Slaves. The following eleven (11) households reported a total of forty-three (43) persons in the "All Other Free persons" category:

Ann Banks, 2	James Underhill, 1
James Platt, 1	Francis (Free), 10
Miles Forman, 3	Cuff, 6
Andrew Sniffin, 1	Lazarus, 10
Anthony Tripp, 1	Amos, 7
Thomas Ferris, 1	

### 1800 Federal Census, Slaves

The Second Census of the United States (1800) reported 20,613 slaves in New York. Twelve (12) of those slaves were reported in the Town of North Castle by the following nine (9) slave owners:

Joseph Lyon, 3	Jeremiah Green, 1
Abraham Miller, 1	David Hobby, 1
Nathaniel Purdy, 1	James Banks, 1
Thomas Ferris, 1	Joshua Knap(p), 2
John Smith, 1	

### 1800 Federal Census, Others Free, except Indians, not Taxed

The 1800 Census reported twelve (12) households with thirteen (13) persons in the "Others Free, except Indians, not Taxed" category:

Anthony Trip(p), 1	John Smith, 2
Peter Lyon, 1	Thomas Hopkins, 1
Solomon Rundel (Rundle), 1	David Hobby, Junior, 1
John Ferris, Junior, 1	Joshua Smith, 1
Harrison Palmer, 1	John May, 1
Thomas Ferris, 1	James Banks, 1

### "Every Child Born of a Slave to be Free as the Law Directs"<sup>6</sup>

John and Sarah Smith reported on September 14, 1800 that Harry "a male child belonging" to them was born in the Town of Harrison on November 17, 1799. A male child named Robert belonging to John Smith was born October 15, 1813. His birth was entered on the record February 14, 1814.

Widow Hannah Smith of Middle Patent reported November 12, 1802 that a female named Tamer was born February 14, 1801. A female child named Gin belonging to Solomon Rundle was born August 20, 1805. The information was recorded March 20, 1806. Samuel Lyon reported that his slave Peg, otherwise called Margaret, gave birth to a female child named Jerusha on May 7, 1804.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Historical Records North Castle, Volume 2, page 264, Armonk, Town of North Castle, 1986.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, page 261.

## **Slaves Bequeathed by Capt. Roger Lyon**

The Will of Capt. Roger Lyon, probated June 3, 1797, gave slaves "Pate" and "Roser" to his two daughters Sarah, wife of William Wright, and Glorianna, wife of Andrew Sniffin. Capt. Roger Lyon was the son of John and Hannah (Banks) Lyon. His North Castle home stood near Chestnut Ridge Road and the Danbury Post Road (Route 22).<sup>8</sup>

## **Society of Friends on the Issue of Slavery<sup>9</sup>**

As early as 1767 the question of slavery was debated within the Society of Friends. The Purchase Quarterly Meeting of May 2, 1767 proposed to forward to the Flushing Yearly Meeting the following: "If it is not consistent with Christianity to buy and sell our fellow-men for slaves during their lives, and their posterity after them, then whether it is consistent with a Christian spirit to keep in slavery those we have already in possession by purchase, gift, or any other way..."<sup>10</sup> should be resolved.

Ten years later the Purchase Monthly Meeting received a report that a committee had "visited nearly all of those within the verge of this monthly meeting that hold slaves and hereby inform that a considerable number have been declared free under hand and seal since last year."<sup>11</sup>

In 1785 a group based in the Quakers of Long Island organized as the New York Manumission Society. The group had strong economic support and became socially and politically effective. Members wrote newspaper editors asking them to cease advertising slave sales. The group provided free legal help to slaves.

## **Political Debate on the Issue of Slavery**

Rev. Dr. Richard Price, a well-know theologian, reported that in a September 27, 1785 conversation with John Jay, Mr. Jay felt "that men should pray and fight for their own freedom and yet keep others in

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<sup>8</sup>Richard N. Lander, "The Lyon Family of North Castle", North Castle History, Volume 13, 1986, Armonk, The North Castle Historical Society.

<sup>9</sup> Other religious groups were opposed to slavery. In 1784 "The Christmas Conference" of the Methodist Church passed a resolution against holding slaves. However, the Quakers were more organized, outspoken and active.

<sup>10</sup> Historical Records North Castle/New Castle, Volume 1, page 61, Town of New Castle, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

slavery is certainly acting a very inconsistent, as well as unjust and perhaps impious, part.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1799 the New York State Legislature passed “An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery.” Slave owners were allowed to keep their younger slaves for most of their productive lives. All children born to slave women after July 4, 1799 were freed – but not until the males reached 28 years and the females reached 25 years. Slaves owned before July 4, 1799 remained slaves for life and were reclassified as ‘Indentured Servants’. In 1817 a statute was passed – to become effective ten years later on July 4, 1827 -- giving freedom to New York slaves born before July 4, 1799 ([www.yorktownhistory.org](http://www.yorktownhistory.org), December 2003). In 1801 the New York State Legislature passed an Act that a person could be bound by Indenture by his, or her, own free will, with the consent of a parent or guardian or by Justices or Overseers of the Poor. There were specific conditions and later amendments to the Act.<sup>13</sup>

The North Castle Town Minutes reflect that the trend towards manumission continued.

### **Some Records of Manumissions**

On April 23, 1804 Isaac Webbers purchased a Negro man named Lew from James Barker and Stephen Barker of White Plains.<sup>14</sup> Webbers promised that if after seven months Lew were dissatisfied staying with him, then Lew could find someone else to buy him. Further, after three years, “I will manumate him and he shall be free.”

On February 6, 1808 Peter Lyon, Esq. set free a Negro woman slave named Comfort. Daniel Tripp and David Dayton, Overseers of the Poor for the Town, certified that Comfort appeared “to be about twenty-one years of age and of sufficient ability to get her own living.”<sup>15</sup>

John May emancipated Rachel, a Mulatto girl, on October 10, 1808.<sup>16</sup>

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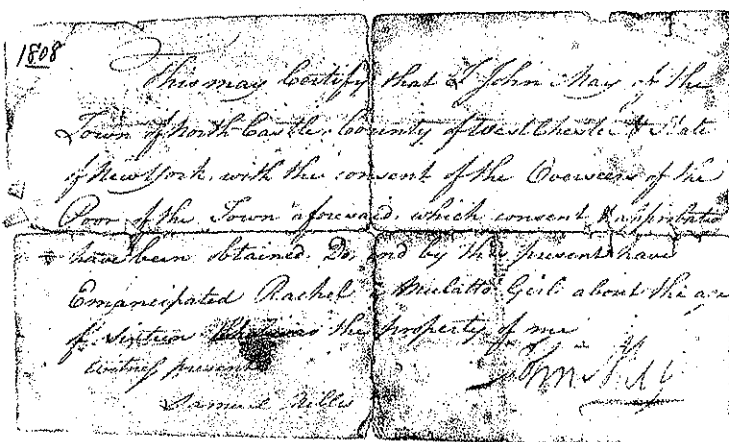
<sup>12</sup> William Jay, Editor, The Life and Times of John Jay, Volume II, page 174, New York, J.&S. Harper, 1833.

<sup>13</sup> Laws of the State of New York 1801, page 254.

<sup>14</sup> Historical Records North Castle, Volume 2, page 255, Armonk, Town of North Castle, 1986.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

# **EMANCIPATION OF RACHEL, A MULATTO GIRL (1808)**

*"This may certify that I, John May, of the Town of North Castle, County of West Chester, State of New York, with the consent of the Overseers of the Poor of the Town aforesaid, which consent and approbation have been obtained, Do and by these presents have Emancipated Rachel, a Mulatto Girl about the age of Sixteen, who was the property of me. Witness present Samuel Miller."*

On May 23, 1811 Thomas Ferris, "agreeable to the second section of the act of the Legislature of State of New York concerning Slaves and Servants passed the eighth of April 1801," freed a Negro man slave named Cobe, apparently under the age of 50 years.<sup>17</sup> Nathaniel Purdy freed a Negro man slave named Ickabade, age about 24 years, on March 7, 1815. James Banks freed a Mulatto man slave named Pomp, age about 28 years, on February 15, 1819.

John Smith, Innkeeper, freed a Negro woman slave named Peg, age about 34 years, on February 21, 1818. Samuel Dibble freed a Mulatto man slave named Thomas Dibble, age about 26 years, on October 3, 1822.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, page 262.

On page 80 of Historical Records North Castle appears an undated side note. Other entries on this page are for the year 1793. "Voted by voice of the people that black Harry Danford so called, supposed to be the property of Samuel Lyon of Bedford, but now an Inhabitant of the Town of North Castle if his said supposed Master should relinquish his right and title to the above said Negro and sett him att his Liberty, he the said Harry Danford was by a vote of the Town Meeting considered as a Lawfull Inhabitant thereof and should in case of old age or misfortune be rendered incapable of maintaining himself, be provided for by the Overseers of the Poor for the time being, the same as any other poor person belonging to the Town of North Castle."<sup>19</sup>

On April 7, 1789 Anthony Tripp, Senior, manumitted one Negro slave named Tone, who appeared to be under fifty years old and "of sufficient Abilities to git his own Living."<sup>20</sup>

Peter Lyon, Esquire received certification on April 2, 1789 that two Negro slaves, Isaac and Hannah, both appearing to be less than fifty years of age, had been set free as he requested.<sup>21</sup>

## War

Indeed, the social trend toward manumission continued, and conflicting opinions clashed in heated debate. The social premise of 'who' decided 'what' for 'whom' grew into a political debate concerning the rights of States vs. those of the Federal government. The debate continued to divide the nation and later erupted into armed conflict – the Civil War.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, page 80.

<sup>20</sup> Historical Records North Castle/New Castle, page B128.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

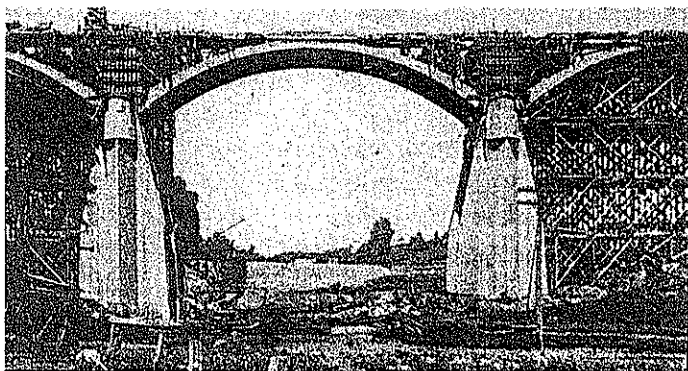
<sup>22</sup> North Castle History, Volumes 15 and 16, 1988 and 1989, contain a two-part series, "The North Castle Hills" by Edythe Quinn Caro. Many local Negro families sent men to fight in the Civil War. Also refer to North Castle History, Volume 6, 1979, page 30 for a photograph taken in White Plains about twenty years after the Civil War ended. North Castle Veterans Willet Ackerman, Thomas J. Ackerman, William Mathers, William B. Williams, John Palmer, Samuel W. Palmer, Charles Raymond and Samuel Tucker are pictured.



## RYE LAKE BRIDGE, STATE ROAD ROUTE 22

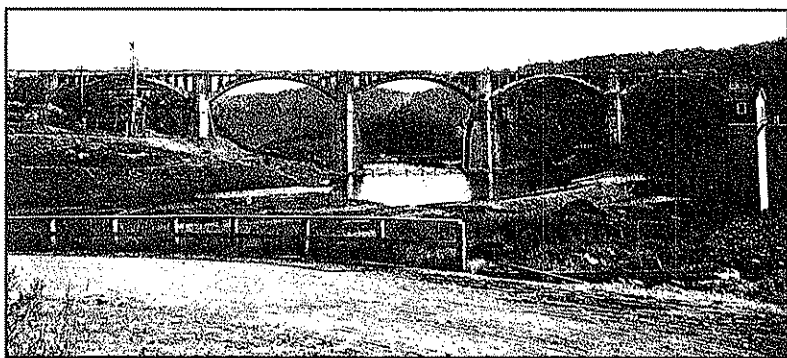
During 2003 work to rebuild the Bridge has been underway. Your editors could not resist a look back nearly one hundred years.

The Bridge was initially constructed during 1910-1911 as a two-lane bridge, 924 feet long with five spandrel arches.<sup>1</sup> Adding a lane to each side in a cantilevered fashion widened the Bridge to four-lanes in 1938.<sup>2</sup> Some residents have long preferred to “cross using the inside lanes” because the “wings” were added after the Bridge was built.



(Gannett Westchester Newspapers, Section G, August 12, 1979)

### CONSTRUCTION DURING 1910-1911



(Collections of The Society, donated by Oliver Knapp, 1983)

### ANOTHER VIEW OF CONSTRUCTION, 1910-1911

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<sup>1</sup> Kristine Edwards, P.E., Structures Group, Region 8, New York State Department of Transportation, January 23, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The North Castle Sun, August 18, 1938, publisher John N. Coffey.

## HENKER'S FARM

by Leonard Pouder

June 20, 1985<sup>1</sup>

Located on Bedford-Banksville Road near the Bedford line are almost twenty-four acres that have been farmed for two hundred years or more.<sup>2</sup> At one time the land was cultivated for growing food for the French Hospital, a makeshift hospital located across the street.<sup>3</sup>

The present owners of the farm, Frank and Ernie Henker, are both now in their early seventies and the years are starting to show, although their Dutch blood seems to keep them going. Together, these two men have cultivated these acres for more than forty-five years. For many years they also cultivated another thirty acres in Armonk, which was used for growing corn.<sup>4</sup> The Henker's farm opens in early June and runs to late October, when the last butternut squash are packed in wooden crates and stored in the cold cellar for winter.

These men have such feeling for the land that it could not help but rub off on me. They know every inch of soil on the farm – where the tractor gets stuck and where the raccoons come in at night to feed on the sweet corn.

Frank and Ernie hired me as soon as I received my first working papers at age fifteen. I started after school and began with thinning out the lettuce seedlings. The work was monotonous and my back ached. I hated it. At first, I kept working only because I lived across the street. If I quit, facing Frank and Ernie would be hard. But, slowly I began to enjoy the work. There was so much satisfaction from going to work at

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<sup>1</sup> The author, a son of Aurelia ("Ray") and George Pouder, wrote on this topic in 1985 for a course at the New York Botanical Garden. He is the proprietor of the family greenhouse and plant nursery, Lieb's Greenhouses, Inc. in New Rochelle.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Erskin-DeWitt 1777 map the land was part of the John Banks farm. Banks, Guion and Smith families held the land until 1919 when Elroy Smith and wife, Mary Bush Hobby, sold to Lucien Jouvaud.

<sup>3</sup> The North Castle Sun newspaper, December 10, 1920, reported that the Sisters of Charity of the French Hospital, New York were expected to move to the former Elroy Smith farmhouse by the first week of 1921. Lucien Jouvaud owned the property.

<sup>4</sup> These acres were part of the Wenga Farm purchased by IBM Corporation.

five thirty in the morning and persevering until six o'clock at night. Being offered that symbolic gallon of warm, but sacred, water they kept under the front seat of the Ford 600 was rewarding. Surprisingly, unloading the afternoon delivery of manure from Frank's 1956 Chevy flatbed was gratifying. The chore broke up the day and provided a good excuse to go inside for a drink (and an opportunity to flirt with the girls).

During summer months these men worked eighty or more hours per week, growing and picking their crops. They employed seven or eight young men who helped pick and weed the vegetables. In the barn were seven or eight young women who cleaned the vegetables and then weighed them for the affluent clientele who patronized this farm. Yes, the girls were the main topic of the boys' conversation while working in the hot dusty fields.



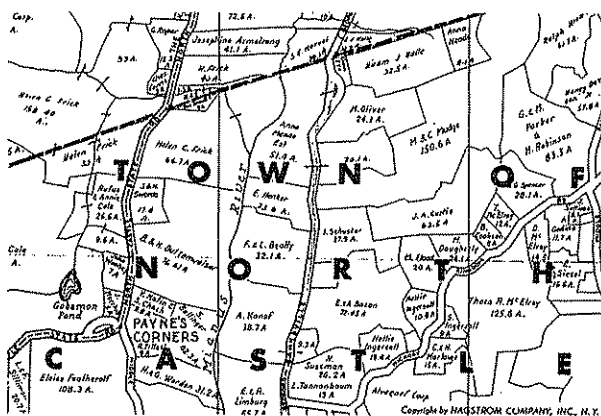
(Collection of Doris Finch Watson)

### **GIRLS WASHING VEGETABLES, 1980s**

When you walk down the long sloping driveway, on the left is the farmhouse and off to the right are two barns, one for tractors and machinery and the other for the sales area.

In the background past the barns and along the driveway stands a row of Norway spruce that must have reached one hundred feet tall and the row two hundred feet long. These massive trees, a haven for the crows, spread their drooping branches bowing over the driveway. Beyond the spruce row, and to both sides, are fields of at least ten acres each.

I was raised across the street from the Henker's Farm and have watched the farming seasons come and go for many years.



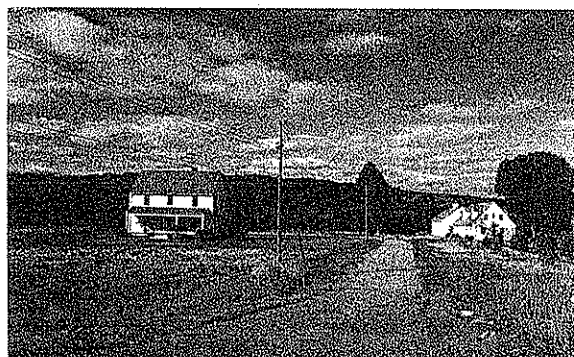
(Hagstrom's Atlas of Westchester County, published c. 1950)

## MAP SHOWING THE HENKER FARMLAND



(Collection of Helen and Ernie Henker)

## THE HENKER FARM – 1992



(Collection of Mary Milo)

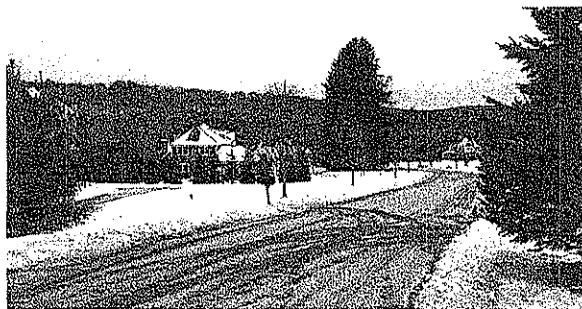
## THE HENKER FARM – 1993

The summer mornings have been especially beautiful on the farm. I picture the morning sun breaking through the midsummer haze and reflecting off the wet corn leaves.

Often I recall the image of the mist hanging over the cornfield on an early August morning. I see the cool autumn frost steam off the cut corn stalks as the first sunlight warms them. And, I hear the Canada geese breaking the quiet fall morning air with their calling as they come to fatten up on the corn.

From my bedroom window each winter I could see the snow blowing across the barren fields exposing four-inch corn stalks standing in perfect rows that had been cut the fall before. There were snowdrifts of three or four feet deep in other spots. After a snowstorm I could see Frank ambling across the yard in his yellow raingear towards his Ford tractor. Trailing behind him was a cloud of smoke from his White Owl cigar, which he rolled across his mouth. In my memories, I can still hear the muffled sound of his tractor as he began his morning task of plowing out first himself and then a few neighbors. He charged a modest ten or fifteen dollar fee for the service. As spring approached, the farm came to life. The manure that was piled the previous summer was spread and the first fields plowed. And, the farming cycle was reborn each year.

This last-of-a-kind lifestyle is disappearing. These men are the last of the old time farmers. Talk is, they have sold the Farm. I don't really know . . .



(Collections of The Society, donated by Steve Tomback, 2003)

### **“HENKERS FARM”, 2003**

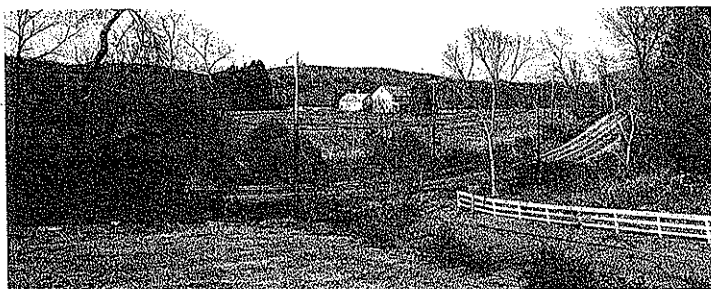
**Ten families are now making their homes where once the farmhouse and barns stood and where once the corn and vegetables grew.**



(Collections of The Society, donated by Helen and Ernie Henker 2003)

### **INSIDE THE SALES BUILDING, 1991**

**[l-r] Victor Mead, Frank Henker and Ernie Henker**



(Collection of Mary Milo)

### **A VIEW OF THE FARM FROM BANKS FARM ROAD, 1989**



(Collections of The Society, donated by Helen and Ernie Henker 2003)

### **IN FRONT OF THE SHOP BARN, 1991**

**[l-r] Frank Henker, Gertrude Henker Rohrbach and Ernie Henker**  
See "Henker's Farm & the Banksville Fire Emblem" article herein.

## HENKER'S FARM & THE BANKSVILLE FIRE EMBLEM

by Doris Finch Watson  
North Castle Town Historian

Henker's Farm is no more. Today large homes dot the area, and a busy lifestyle fills the place where once the Henker corn and other vegetables grew in lush fields. There is one reminder of the Farm that remains very much in evidence in a most unusual and active way.

The story goes back to 1949, the founding year of the Banksville Independent Fire Company. The newly formed Company had purchased their first fire truck, an old second-hand 1926 American LaFrance for \$318. It was housed in George Zygmunt's garage on Banksville Avenue, for it was before the first firehouse was built.

That first fire call for the Banksville Fire Company was at the Henker Farm, where a bolt of lightning struck the barn. The new Company responded and saved the barn. That call was not to be forgotten, so years ago the Department adopted a meaningful seal. The Fire Company emblem depicts a fire helmet with a bolt of lightning emblazoned across it ... a tribute to and a reminder of that first response to Henker's Farm.

Today the emblem holds a very special place in the hearts of the Banksville Firemen, and indeed, many Banksville residents. It appears on the doors of all the various fire apparatus; it is on the Fire Department stationery; the emblem appears on the fire shirts and uniforms; and the emblem patches have been exchanged with other fire companies. Perhaps the most interesting and unusual reminder of that Henker fire is that several Banksville firemen have that emblem tattooed on their shoulders! Thus, the story of that first fire call and Henker's Farm will not be forgotten.

Today, a new, larger Banksville Firehouse is reaching completion, and appeals are going out to the community for financial support. But one thing will not change: the emblem of the lightning bolt at Henker's Farm will always remain...



## A SALUTE TO JOHN SCHNOOR

by Sharon Tomback

John was born in Brooklyn, New York on January 30, 1917. His family moved to Armonk in 1917 when his father, Harry, became superintendent on an estate known as "Red Brook Farm", owned by States Tompkins.<sup>1</sup>

From an early age John was active in his community. As a boy he was a member of the Boy Scouts and then later the Lions Club, Armonk Fire Company, American Legion Post 1097, Whippoorwill Country Club and, of course, The North Castle Historical Society.

John attended the one-room Coman Hill School, the Whippoorwill School and Pleasantville High School.<sup>2</sup> Following school he worked at various jobs, including construction and milk delivery for R.B. Henry, Valhalla.

In 1940 he and Eleanor Farrington were married. John referred to Eleanor as "a local girl" because the Farringtons were long-time Armonk residents. John and Eleanor celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on September 7, 2000.

During World War II John served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and the Air Corp. After discharge in December 1945, he opened a small appliance and service store on Main Street in Armonk where the Shell Service Station is located today. Later he built and moved into a building on Main Street, and with C. Nash Reid, owned and operated a hardware and appliance store. In the early 1950s John sold his share of the business and buildings to C. Nash Reid and began his construction business.

He built many homes and commercial buildings in Armonk and the surrounding area. John developed the Remsen Farm on Banksville Road and some of the Walter S. Gifford property on Round Hill Road.

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<sup>1</sup> Located on Route 22 near present-day Red Brook Place.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to North Castle History, Volume 5, 1978, and Volume 24, 1997 for articles concerning the schools.



Over the years he did volunteer services for St. Stephen's Church and Rectory, St. Patrick's Church, the American Legion, the Town of North Castle Bi-Centennial Celebration of 1976, and The North Castle Historical Society. The Armonk Eagle was a "pet project" for John. He served on the committee to build and then erect the Eagle; he donated the lumber and steel for the Eagle. And, twice he helped lower, repair and re-paint the Eagle.<sup>3</sup>

John served as Chairman of the Architectural Board of Review for the Town of North Castle. He was a tireless worker. He advocated a building set back of 10 feet along Main Street as well as a 25-foot right-of-way for rear deliveries to buildings along Main Street.

As chairman of restoration and maintenance for The North Castle Historical Society,<sup>4</sup> John directed the restoration of the interior of Smith's Tavern; the moving and rebuilding of the Brundage Blacksmith Shop; the moving and restoration of the East Middle Patent One-Room Schoolhouse and the moving and restoration of The 1798 Quaker Meeting House. He loved the ancient buildings of The Society, and the buildings flourished under his care.<sup>5</sup>

Society members Ed and Ilse Ruckert<sup>6</sup> wrote in memory of John that he was "a man whose dedication and hard work represented the spirit and vision of The Society. His sparkling eyes revealed his loving inner nature. His integrity, intensity, sincerity, courage, and dedication will always be remembered. John was the salt of the earth."

In 1993 the Armonk Lions Club recognized John's community service. He received the Pat J. Bresha Distinguished Service Award. In October 2003 The Society hosted a memorial tribute honoring John and fellow Trustee Marguerite Hopkins Lewis.

Becky Kittredge<sup>7</sup>, who grew up in Armonk, knew John well. John built her home. She reports that whenever she has work done in the house the

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to North Castle History, Volume 23, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> John served as a Trustee of The Society for twenty years and as Vice President for seven years from 1984 through 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to North Castle History, Volumes 4, 1977; 8, 1981; 10, 1983; 13, 1986; and 22, 1995 for articles describing these ancient buildings.

<sup>6</sup> Friends of John and Eleanor for many years.

<sup>7</sup> Becky is a Trustee of The Society and serves on the North Castle Town Board.

contractors compliment her on the quality of the material and workmanship in the construction, and say that the house is as solid as a rock.

Bumpy Taylor<sup>8</sup>, a friend of John and Eleanor before “dating days,” remembers that John, Frank Nellis<sup>9</sup> and he were the three musketeers. Their adventures were legendary. In the 1930s the rage was to see who could sit in a tree longer. John and Bumpy tried tree sitting – before it became an environmental protest movement.<sup>10</sup> The three friends and their dates frequented a dance club at Mt. Beacon, which featured cable car access. Bumpy remembers that Eleanor was a good dancing partner and that she taught him to dance when they were in high school in Pleasantville. In 1936 John, Frank and Bumpy went off in John’s new Ford to survey the damage caused by the Great Flood in Hartford. John usually drove fast, but this time he flew -- 75 miles in 74 minutes – on Route 22! (... or so they claimed!)

We have many happy memories of John. He was a good friend.



(Collections of The Society)

**JOHN SCHNOOR, 1986**

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<sup>8</sup> Erling J. “Bumpy” Taylor is a past Trustee of The Society as well as a past recipient of the Pat J. Bresha Distinguished Service Award.

<sup>9</sup> Sadly, Frank Nellis was killed in WWII.

<sup>10</sup> They strategically built their platform in a tree in front of the Old Waterbury house, across from a restaurant owned by John’s father, Harry, who kept them well fed. (The restaurant was across from the present-day Sheep Shack.)

THE HENKER FARM  
Bedford-Banksville Road

Going to the Henker Farm for early corn and summer tomatoes was a 'rite of passage' every year from the late 1930s until the mid 1980s. Patrons came from all over Westchester as well as Connecticut. Neighbors came not only to buy, but also to visit.

In 1937 the Henker family purchased their property from Mutual Trust Bank of Port Chester, New York. They built the farmhouse and out buildings and moved into the new farmhouse in 1939. That same year Mr. Henker, Senior (Adolf) passed away. Mrs. Henker, Senior (Emilie) died in 1976 at the age of 95.

Mr. and Mrs. Erwin B. (Ernie) Henker, who are living in Bedford, have graciously shared information with The Society. Ernie and Helen (Progreske) Henker have been married forty-nine years and have two sons, Jim and Tom, and two granddaughters, Dominique Lynn and Tiffany Lynn. Mr. Henker's sister, Gertrude Rohrbach, lives in Port Angelis, Washington and is still in the farming business – at the age of 88 years. Sadly, their brother Frank (Franz G.) died in May 2003. He is buried in Middle Patent Rural Cemetery, Banksville – near the family farm.

Ernie remembers the day the shop barn was struck by lightning. The lightning traveled through cans of nails that were on a workbench and melted the nails together; it melted teeth from saws; and it finally traveled to a can of paint, which exploded and started the fire. He telephoned the new Banksville Fire Company. The barn was saved.

*Please forward any corrections or additions to the information presented herein and/or your constructive suggestions for improving this publication to your editorial board at The North Castle Historical Society, Smith's Tavern, 440 Bedford Road, Armonk, New York 10504. If you would be willing to research and/or author an article, please let us know. Different writers and diverse perspectives are vital.*

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