

North

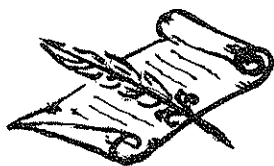
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Castle

History



Main St., Armonk, around 1910



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

To residents and members of The North Castle Historical Society,

We in North Castle are most fortunate to be living in an area so rich in American History. The very existence of North Castle was a factor in the shaping of the American Colonies, and, during the Revolutionary War the Battle of White Plains, Washington's Headquarters, the detainment of Major Andre, and many other important events during this period, contributed significantly to the cause of freedom. There have been many interesting people, places and events on the North Castle scene over the years and it is one aim of the North Castle Historical Society to research and publish some of this distinctive and fascinating past so that the knowledge collected can be made available to the residents and members of the Society.

The Board of Trustees of the North Castle Historical Society, in discussing ways of informing residents of this heritage, decided the best method would be a bulletin such as you are now reading, not only because it is an effective means of disseminating information, but also because of its permanent historical value to future generations.

The bulletin will eventually be published twice a year, but depending on several factors may be published only once a year for the first year or so. The Society is very young and shouldn't bite off more than it can chew too soon.

This FIRST EDITION is being sent to all North Castle residents gratis. Future editions should be available in some of the local stores for a nominal fee but members of the Society will automatically receive theirs as part of their membership in the Society. You can be assured of a complete set by joining the Society now. There is information elsewhere in this bulletin on where and how to join. I would like to point out however, that joining the Society does not obligate you to be active except as you desire, but the Society does have an urgent need for your financial support.

I feel sure you will enjoy this first edition of "North Castle History" as we tried to make it meaningful and interesting to all ages, as well as historically accurate. We will continue this endeavor in future editions. Your comments and suggestions are most welcome.

Sincerely,

Lindsay H. Welling, Jr.

Lindsay H. Welling, Jr.

The North Castle Historical Society

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TOWN HALL REACHES QUARTER CENTURY

by Jane Fehrs

Although there was no fanfare and no cake with candles, April 1, 1974 marked the twenty-fifth birthday of North Castle's Town Hall. Few of today's residents realize that North Castle was the first town in the State of New York to build a town hall with capital reserve funds frugally saved over the years, and that, prior to 1949, when the present "modern colonial" building was completed, North Castle's "make-do" public offices were located in private homes, taverns, stores, workshops, and a former horse stable.

There are no records of where the Town Board met in the earliest days of North Castle history. The town officers probably held infrequent meetings in their homes throughout the township (which until 1791 included the present town of New Castle).

From 1798 until approximately 1856, North Castle town meetings were held in Smith's Tavern (which was, until recently, the Datlowe property on Route 22 and is now owned by Hillside Church) the home of Captain John Smith, Innkeeper, and later, of his son, Samuel Purdy Smith. This building, in addition to providing spacious quarters for official town functions, had the extra attraction of a tap room which dispensed spirits. This might have had some bearing on the fact that town meetings of that era occasionally lasted for three days.



The Datlowe house, which now belongs to The Hillside Church, was once Smith's Tavern and a North Castle Town Hall

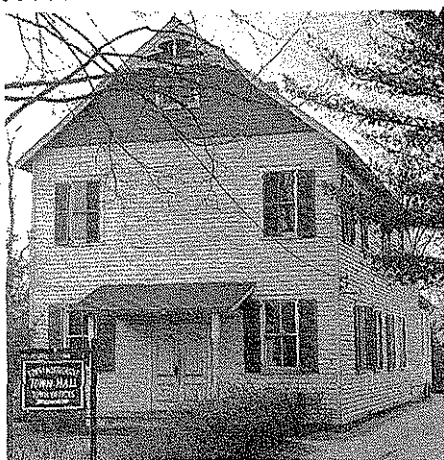
Later, town meetings were held in private homes in various parts of town. During the Civil War years the town officers met in the carpenter's shop of the Rev. Isaac Dyckman Vermilye, rector of St. Stephen's Church.

After 1875, for over thirty years, North Castle Town Meetings were held at a shop owned by the widow of Thomas R. Smith, shoemaker. (This building, later remodeled into a home, is located at the corner of Annadale St. and Main St.) The shop became officially known as "Town Hall" and subsequently as the "Town House". It was North Castle's principle meeting place until it was vacated by the town in 1909, although during the Gay Nineties, the town officials held additional meetings in offices located in local stores and homes.

In 1910, the Town Board rented a hall from Council No. 65 of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, a secret fraternal order. This hall, located in what is now a rear workshop to the Stromak Gallery on Maple Ave., was originally a horse stable that had been added to the rear of a private residence. It was converted for Town Hall use in 1910 (see sketch), and served North Castle as such for almost forty years.

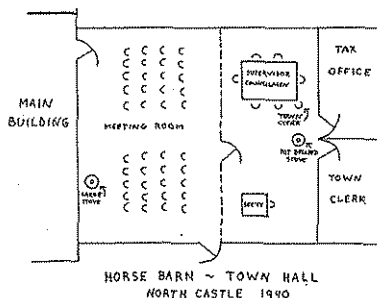
Fuel shortage nothing new

During the fuel oil shortage of the early 1940's, a period of bitter cold winters, additional heating was needed for the Maple Ave. Town Hall.



North Castle's last rented
Town Hall, 1948

Inside diagram

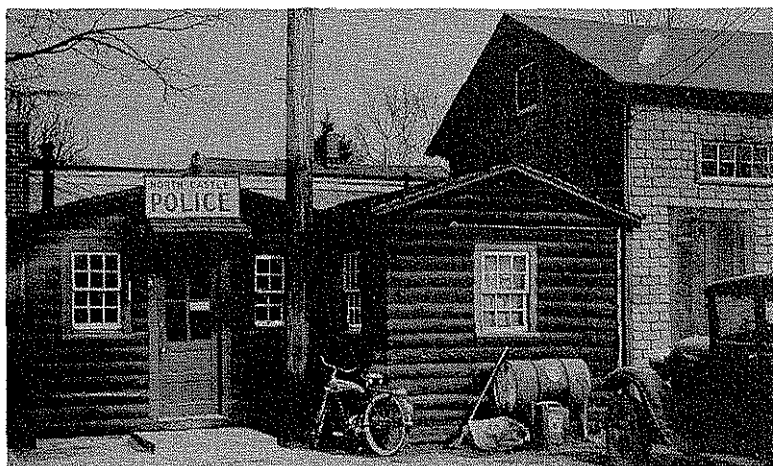


A small pot-bellied stove was installed at the entrance to the offices of the Tax Collector and Town Clerk, with a fan blowing the heat into each cubicle. Another larger antique pot-bellied stove, a railroad station type supplied by J. Frederick Acker, was set up in the rear of the meeting room. Joe Miller, then as now the Town Clerk, was pleased when the Town Supervisor preferred him to sit at the Supervisor's end of the Conference table at Town Meetings, as this meant Joe would occupy the "hot seat" next to the small stove on cold nights. Incidentally, the Town Secretary, who was seated in No-Man's-Land between the two stoves, was assigned to both the Town Clerk and the Tax Collector, and also answered police telephone calls!

Police aid cupid

The North Castle Police moved to their present location in a wing of the "new" Town Hall building when it was completed in 1949. They formerly had been situated in a small shed on Main Street, the property belonging to a tavern. Backed up against the south side of the building that now houses Ann Stephen's store, the police station was located on the present parking lot of GG's North.

A rough log structure, this station was a regular stop for eloping couples who considered North Castle a veritable Gretna Green in an era of quick legal weddings. The local police became most proficient at giving nuptial directions, calming nervous affianced lovers, and arousing Justices of the Peace in the wee small hours. (It is not recorded whether they ever caught the bride's bouquet!)



Town's first Police Station

Town pays cash

At the time of the completion of the present Town Hall in 1949, North Castle, under the leadership of Town Supervisor, James D. Hopkins,

held the unique position of being the first town in the state of New York to build a town hall with capital reserve funds saved over the years. The town paid \$87,000--\$7,500 for nine acres, \$70,000 for the building, \$10,000 for furnishings -- in "cold hard cash."

For many years previously, the officials of North Castle had been dissatisfied with their rented quarters. Finally in 1944, New York State amended the General Municipal Law, to permit towns to set aside monies each year for this type of municipal construction, instead of having to issue bonds or wait for lump sum windfalls as in the past.

North Castle immediately started allocating \$10,000 yearly to its Town Hall Capital Reserve Fund. All monies from the sale of town properties were also added to it. Finally, the necessary amount was realized and in 1949 the construction firm of Monda and Munoz of Brooklyn completed the red brick building designed by architect Lawrence M. Loeb of White Plains, and Henry H. Moger, Jr. of Armonk.

When commended for North Castle's financial achievement, Supervisor Hopkins stated, "The pay-as-you-go policy has taken root here to such an extent that the town debt has been cut from \$500,000 to \$54,000 and the last bond will be burned at the new Town Hall in 1952."



Town Hall, Spring 1974.

The "new" Town Hall is now the "old" Town Hall, and there are those who believe that it too should be replaced. But regardless of what changes may come, North Castle will rarely achieve a day of greater pride than twenty-five years ago when it moved its administrative and police facilities from two rented sheds to a modern new building--with CASH in hand!

(Information on the history of North Castle Town meeting places prior to 1910 was obtained from "North Castle's Town Meetings and Meeting Places" by Richard N. Lander, in the July 1949 issue of The Westchester County Historical Society Bulletin. The author is also indebted to the prodigious memory of Joe Miller, North Castle Town Clerk, and his extensive files on North Castle history).

TO MIDDLE PATENT SCHOOL.....with Love ♥

by Doris Finch Watson

Have you ever driven past Middle Patent School, the little building at the corner of Round Hill Road and Banksville-Bedford Road (sometimes called Greenwich Road) and wondered about it's past? It's closed and boarded up now, but for many families in this area it holds wonderful memories. I'd like to share some of them with you.

The early school

Back in 1812 this was an area of scattered farms, many with young children in the household, and plans were made to build a schoolhouse to serve these families. In 1813 the first Middle Patent School opened its doors. That first building stood close to the road, near the present exit drive, and was a little one room wooden school built on land which had been part of the Hobby farm.

My great-grandfather, Marvin Nash Finch, was one of the early students in that first school. The boys helped with the wood, piled high in the fall to keep the stove going all winter when students walked to school in ice and deep snow. Recess time and the noon lunch hour meant lunch out of a basket, then walks in the woods behind the school where several trails were marked out, or fishing in the Mianus Brook at the corner.

"The Big Rock"

Another noontime joy was sliding down "The Big Rock," and many a pair of pants suffered from those trips. Take a minute some day and stop for a look at "The Big Rock" - it was playground equipment provided by Nature, for the holes in the back made hand and foot spaces to reach the top, and then the slide down!

In addition to schoolwork during the week, the building was used on Sundays when the itinerant pastors of the Methodist Church came to preach in the schoolhouse prior to the building of the first Middle Patent Church in 1826. (The present church was built in 1847.)

The "readin', writin' and 'rithmetic" that great-grandfather Marvin Finch learned in Middle Patent School helped with all the planning and figuring when he opened Finch's Store in 1860. His son, my Grandfather, William S. Finch, and then his son, Walter S. Finch, my dad, all attended that first Middle Patent School.

Some of the early family names on the school records include: Mead, Banks, Finch, Hobby, Platt, Reynolds, Smith, Lyon, Miller and Palmer. When the teacher was hired by the Board, arrangements were made for her to live with one of the families in the area.

By the mid-eighteen hundreds there were seven school districts in the Town of North Castle, and Middle Patent School was District Two. (East

Middle Patent was District One, Coman Hill was District Three and so on, with Districts Six and Seven in Kensico and North White Plains area.)

That first little one-room Middle Patent School served for over one hundred years, all during the Civil War, the Spanish American War, and right up through 1915 when plans were made for the present building.

The second Middle Patent School

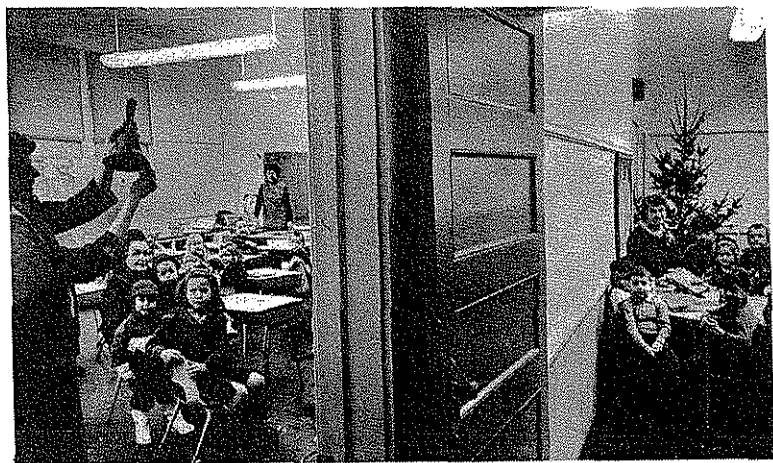
By 1915 the school population had increased, and the old school had seen over a hundred years of wear and tear. Plans were completed for a new two-room school. When built, it had two entrances: the boys' entrance on the left and the girls' on the right. A big stove near the front of the large room supplied the heat. Fresh water came from the outdoor pump...along



Middle Patent School

with wet feet! In the nineteen-thirties when the coal furnace was put in the cellar and indoor plumbing was provided, the taxpayers thought their taxes would "go out of sight." By 1935 a small kitchen with sink, stove and refrigerator was installed in the cellar, and some of the older girls enjoyed cooking classes. Later some of the mothers used the little kitchen to serve hot soup and food at lunch hour.

When I went to Middle Patent School we were allowed the freedom of the woods at lunch hour, and we walked and ran on the same trails as my great-grandfather Finch - out to Lookout Rock (above Round Hill Road) and back to the hut, which was made of branches and old logs leaning against the overhanging rock (where Gina Lane and Troy Lane are today).



Middle Patent School, inside

Some of us rode bicycles to school, and on cold or rainy days my dad would pack ten or twelve of us into his Ford for the trip to school or back. In earlier days there was no transportation to high school, but by the time I went, there was transportation to Mount Kisco High School.

Closed on election days

The children always looked forward to Election Day, for the voting took place in the school, meaning a day off. When I went to Middle Patent there were eight grades, just as in earlier times. Grades one through three were in the little room at the front, grades four through eight were in the big room. The teacher would call each class (sometimes only two, and usually not more than five students per class) up around his desk to hear the lesson, and the remaining classes worked at their seats.

School was called by the ring of an old handbell. When the school was closed, the bell was taken over to the new Coman Hill School, and it is still used there by the Principal, and kept in her office. That bell called us in from recess, from lunch, and it signaled the close of school each day. I've wondered about the old wall clock which the teacher used to wind by hand. If anyone knows about it, I'd like to know. Or if anyone has pictures of Middle Patent School, we would love to share them!

When it came time to take Regents Examinations, we had to be driven up to Bedford Hills High School, where we found strange faces, an unknown building and teachers we'd never seen before. It always seemed good to get back to Middle Patent again!

Larger population

As more children came into the district, a new room was added to the left side of the school then another at the rear. As the years passed the grade

level had to be reduced to students in the sixth, fifth, then fourth grade and so on, until in 1964 only kindergarten, first and second grades could fit into the building. When our daughter, Phoebe Finch Watson, went there (1961-64), she was the fifth generation of the Finch family to attend Middle Patent School.

The sad closing - after 151 years

When the present Coman Hill School was being built, we learned that our Middle Patent School would be closed. And so, on December 23, 1964, the fifty-two students had their last day in Middle Patent School. After 151 years, the closing was a sad one. The children gathered around their fresh-cut Christmas tree and tried to sing, but there were tears on many cheeks.

As I stood there that closing day, with my three children around me, I thought back to an Arbor Day when I was in Middle Patent School. We had all signed our names on a paper and put it in a sealed jar and buried it beneath the tree we planted. It's still there.... The new school would have so many advantages, but —

The New York Times sent a photographer to share that closing day, and those of us who had returned for that day had to say our goodbyes to a place filled with memories ... memories of tests worried about, friendships made, picnics with parents at the close of school each June, parties at holidays such as Christmas, St. Valentine's Day, studies under the trees on nice days, science lessons beside the brook, games on the lawn, those walks in the woods, and, of course, sliding down "The Big Rock."

Such happy memories — and a tear slid down.

THE LEGEND OF JIMMY-UNDER-THE-ROCK

by Joseph Miller as told to Jane Fehrs

The tale of Jimmy-Under-The-Rock, a 19th Century hermit, is one of the more unique and colorful legends in the annals of North Castle. Living over one hundred years ago, Jimmy was eccentric to an unusual degree. Shunning civilization, he lived a solitary existence, except for his animal friends, in the rocky hills of North White Plains.

As the result of a family disagreement, young Jimmy Johnson left his home in search of a secluded spot to build a refuge. Climbing over the wild rocky areas of North Castle, he stumbled into an overgrown ravine that had a large flat rock jutting out about twenty feet, horizontally, from the side of a hill. As this outcropping formed a natural roof about fifteen feet above the ravine floor, Jimmy immediately moved into the crude shelter thus formed by nature.

Over the years Jimmy Johnson became known as "Jimmy-Under-The-Rock." He added rough unfinished wood walls, complete with windows and a door, on the three open sides of his rock shelter. Searching out the flattest

field stones, and laying them with a little cement, he made a primitive but durable floor. A large wood burning stove for cooking and heating and the barest of necessities furnished Jimmy's retreat.

There was only one drawback to this "hermit's heaven" - the area abounded in Copperhead snakes. Jimmy wasn't bothered by them during the day, but he had a horror of their curling up with him during his sleep. To solve the problem, Jimmy drilled four holes in the rock ceiling of his shelter and cemented heavy eye bolts in them. Then for a snake-proof bed,



Jimmy under his rock

he hung a box wagon body to the stay bolts. To climb into this elevated bed Jimmy used a ten foot ladder. After getting into the wagon box, he drew up the ladder and hung it on props attached to his bed, thus making it readily available for his descent in the morning.

Jimmy, although gruff and unfriendly to visitors, was harmless and never bothered anyone. Even so, many of the more imaginative youngsters of North White Plains regarded him as the neighborhood "bogeyman" and delighted in making up tales about him. George Stevens, writing in the July, 1939 issue of the Quarterly Bulletin of the Westchester County Historical Society, says, "I am minded of the time over sixty years ago when, as a barefoot boy of ten years, I used to pass by it (Jimmy's shelter). I was so fearful he would come out and catch me that my hair stood on end and I ran so fast I surely made a speed record for a boy of that age."

Although Jimmy avoided human company, speaking to the rare visitor only in grunts or monosyllables, he was fond of the company of animals. He

kept goats, pigs, chickens, a cow and a horse, and built a crude lean-to of the same materials as his home to shelter them. Jimmy was most partial to goats, and was never without at least one or two. They were allowed the freedom of Jimmy's home and grounds and made his roof one of their favorite climbing spots.

Besides raising animals, Jimmy had a flourishing garden. His old white horse was used for plowing, carting or transportation when Jimmy needed to go into White Plains for groceries and supplies. (Tradition has it that Jimmy, after completing his errands, used to ride out of town backwards on his horse so he could wave good-bye to all his city friends.) Being practically self-sufficient, Jimmy was able to live in this manner for many years. Then one winter in the early 1880's, exact date unknown, Jimmy caught pneumonia and died. No town records have been found of his death or place of burial.

Today all that is left of the home of Jimmy-Under-The-Rock is a large flat stone and a small portion of the foundation wall. These may be seen approximately 2000 feet directly east of the eastern terminus of Hillandale Avenue, on the City of White Plains watershed property in North White Plains. Although the physical remains of the 19th century hermit's abode are nearly erased by time, the legend of Jimmy-Under-The-Rock lives on in local folklore.

*** FORGOTTEN ROLL OF HONOR ***

by Richard N. Lander

When a visitor reaches the heights of Middle Patent Cemetery where the forefathers of the community sleep, his attention is immediately drawn to the cluster of American flags which abound among the old stones. These are the graves of the men from that portion of colonial North Castle who rendered service in various American units in the war for independence.

The author has catalogued nineteen graves of Revolutionary War veterans within the present boundaries of the Town of North Castle and fifteen are located in the town's oldest burial ground at Middle Patent. To be sure there are probably others which time have erased or records do not trace, indeed a list of pensioners for the town compiled by the government in the eighteen twenties shows the names of two veterans, John Smith and Samuel Miller, who lived in the Middle Patent area residing respectively with Silas Sutherland and Joseph Feeks; whose graves cannot be found and are obviously unmarked. The names of several other Middle Patent men appear on the muster rolls of the Westchester County Militia whose graves must be unmarked, for a diligent search does not find them among their widows, children or descendants in the ancient grounds.

Great credit is due to two local organizations who have not forgotten the historic dead: the Middle Patent Rural Cemetery Association and North

Castle American Legion Post, No. 1097. The cemetery association has embarked on a program of restoring and recutting the ancient monuments that were fast being lost to the erosion of time. Over the past half a dozen years at a considerable cost, the association has pursued a systematic preservation program. Some years before the Town of North Castle hooded some of the old brown stones with copper. In this manner many of the stones of the veterans have been preserved. (The stone of Deacon Silas Sutherland was in such bad need of repair that the Cemetery submitted his war record and other necessary forms to the United States government who then furnished the grave with a beautiful new marker of Vermont marble citing his service in it's inscription.) The American Legion has furnished the appropriate flag markers for graves and faithfully places flags upon them each Memorial Day.

Some of these men played important rolls on the local scene in the struggle to achieve our independence, and some who were in the Militia probably saw action (if then) only twice: the Battle of White Plains, October 28, 1776, and the retreat of the British from the burning of Bedford, July 2, 1779. Because of the close proximity of the state line some served in Connecticut units, especially the Ninth Connecticut Militia. Spencer P. Mead, in his "History of Greenwich," tells us part of this regiment under Col. John Mead took part in the Battle of Long Island, August 27, 1776, and was one of the last regiments to leave New York on the retreat from the city. It was engaged in the Battle of White Plains where it suffered considerable loss.

David Hobby of Middle Patent rose through the ranks of the Westchester County Militia and at the close of the war (1781) was the Colonel commanding the Second Regiment. His son, Jonathan, was taken prisoner (the story now lost as to how) and spent some time in the "sugar house," the notorious British military prison in New York City. He predeceased his father dying a young man on October 3, 1796. His father, the Colonel, died February 7, 1812. We are told that when the British burned Bedford they attempted to go down to Middle Patent to arrest certain persons who had been very obnoxious to them. The rising of the Militia and the bridge over the Mianus River being destroyed, the British light horse turned back. The author has always suspected David Hobby was one of the persons they were after.

The last survivor of this glorious company of men was Enos Hobby who died January 1, 1857 age 95 years, 11 months, and 19 days. He was approximately thirteen when the war began, but served as a scout in a company of rangers from Stanwich, Connecticut whose last service was performed in the year 1780, when he was about eighteen years of age.

With the close of the war these men assumed places of religious, political, agricultural and business leadership in the Middle Patent and North Greenwich community of which they were a part, and we, the inheritors of their legacy may be proud of the record they made in establishing our independence.

The Roll of Honor is as follows:

Daniel Brown, Private
Samuel Ferris, Private
Thomas Ferris, Sergeant
Ezekiel Finch, Private
David Hobby, First Lieut., promoted
Capt., Major, Colonel
Enos Hobby, Private
Henry Hobby, Private

Jonathan Hobby, Sergeant
Joshua Lounsbury, Private
Benoni Platt, Captain
Aaron Peck, Private
Charles Rundle, Private
Benjamin Smith, Private
Roger Sutherland, Captain
Silas Sutherland, Sergeant

COVER PICTURE

Armonk Village looking south. First house on left: residence of Charles E. Brundage, now Hickory & Tweed. The next house on the left belonged to Woolsey Ackerman, now Armonk Cleaners (Note: part of the white picket fence still stands). Just beyond the trees is the corner of Rt. 22 and Main Street where the Armonk Methodist Church was and still is. The house on the right was the residence of David Brundage, and it stood where the Armonk Pharmacy is today.

MEMORABILIA NEEDED

The Society urgently needs books on the history of the surrounding areas, old and not so old maps of North Castle, letters (they need not be old but descriptions of town life, events, buildings, etc., are most wanted). We also need diaries and pictures (even recent) to mention a few of the more important items being sought.

If anyone knows the whereabouts of any memorabilia relating to any period of North Castle's history please let the Society know of their existence and location so that the Society can offer advice on their safe keeping and maintenance.

Of course the Society would be most grateful for the tax deductible donations of such priceless items - priceless because they are irreplaceable.

THE AUTHORS

(Richard N. Lander is Town Historian for North Castle. He is a resident of Armonk and recently retired from the North Castle Town Board after serving for 12 years.)

(Joseph T. Miller has been Town Clerk for the Town of North Castle for 32 years and is a resident of North White Plains.)

(Jane Fehrs is an Armonk resident. Her collection and knowledge of antiques is well known in this area.)

(Doris Finch Watson lives in Banksville, as have generations of her family. She is a Trustee of The Middle Patent Rural Cemetery Association)

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The North Castle Historical Society was founded in 1972. Several meetings are held throughout the year at which time speakers present various topics of historical significance relating to North Castle. Slides, antiques and other items are also part of most of these programs.

It is the aim of the North Castle Historical Society to search out and record as much information on the history of North Castle as possible, and then make this information available to the public.

Membership dues are as follows:

Family - \$7.50	Sustaining - \$25.00
Individual - \$5.00	Corporate - \$25.00
Junior - \$1.00	Life membership - \$150.00

Checks should be made out to The North Castle Historical Society, and mailed to 15 Bedford Rd., Armonk, N.Y. 10504. All dues, gifts and contributions are tax deductible.

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