



# Newsletter

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

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## THE PRISON WITHOUT WALLS by Libby Ross

Drivers along Route 208 between Ireland Corners and the Hamlet of Wallkill often take note of several dignified, almost campus-like stone buildings – New York State’s most progressive adult prison - nestled in a hollow against the backdrop of an unsurpassed view of the Shawangunk Ridge. The Wallkill Correctional Facility, designed by architect Alfred Hopkins, was constructed in 1932 on 850 acres of good land with the purpose of setting up a medium security prison with an open atmosphere – a prison without walls. This prison was founded to prepare “good risk” prisoners (about 500 at a time) for their reentry into society through vocational training and education. Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor were present at the opening ceremony. Leo J. Palmer served as the first Superintendent. The earliest group of 29 inmates arrived before the prison was completed; they were housed in temporary wooden houses, and helped to construct the facility and set up the farm. By the late 1940s, 424 acres were under cultivation and an additional 198 acres were used for pasturing livestock. Wallkill residents were

predictable results. In contrast, men assigned to this prison were carefully selected with a minimum of years further to serve, and therefore with a strong incentive to make the most of their time under confinement to prepare for reentry into society. As a result, disciplinary problems were at a minimum.

What made this facility unique was its emphasis on restoring dignity and hope for the future to the inmates by means of programming for rehabilitation. An amazing number of courses were offered, ranging from carpentry, plumbing, automotive, and welding on the industrial side, and crop management and animal husbandry on the agricultural side. To give you an idea of the scope, in the 1930s the farm yielded 2000 bushels of corn annually. Many of us still remember driving past fields of corn in the summer - a pretty sight on the undulating hills near the highway. Today the farm is no more because of budget cuts, and the number of vocational programs are reduced, but there remains a significant program concerning optics which produces eyeglasses for NYS agencies, Pennsylvania correction facilities, and New York City underprivileged youths; and NYU offers a path towards a college degree, among other vocational paths. Programs are increasing because the authorities recognize their importance to the inmate, the benefit to society, and therefore they are attentive to education and mental health issues.

At this time, the Wallkill Correctional Facility is undergoing changes, as other upstate facilities close. After over 80 years of operation as a prison without walls, the facility will be accepting longer-term inmates, increasing the security risk. In response to these realities, for the first time in its history, authorities are raising the first fences around the facility. However, the commitment to prepare men to reenter society constructively remains.

*Based on interview with Gene Niles  
Dept. Supt. of Security (ret.)*



enthusiastic because of the promise of work for locals.

The prison was an enlightened response to a traditional system in which all kinds of men, young and old, dangerous and first-timers, were thrown together, often in overcrowded situations, with

Website: <a href="http://WallkillHistory.com">http://WallkillHistory.com</a>	Page 1	Email: <a href="mailto:ShawangunkHistoricalSociety@gmail.com">ShawangunkHistoricalSociety@gmail.com</a>
Address: 75 Wallkill Avenue, Wallkill, NY 12589		PO Box 570, Wallkill NY 12589

## EVENTS

On Saturday morning, **October 10**, at the Shawangunk Town Hall a group of enthusiasts met in a workshop to build **Fairie Houses**, charming constructs of natural materials (bark, mosses, leaves, ferns, etc.), the technique based on an article that appeared in County Garden Magazine.



**November 2** marked the Inaugural Meeting held at the Knights' House, future home and museum of the Historical Society. Fittingly, the event was titled **An Evening with the Bordens**, the first family of the Hamlet of Wallkill. We took a close look at the Borden Home Farm that showcased the astute decisions of Gayle Borden and the incredible generosity of his daughter Marion, after her father's death. Richard Hoyt, the son of Claire Hoyt, narrated a presentation of home movies from the 1930s and 1940s of the Hoyt family, culminating in footage of the disastrous fire that destroyed the farm in 1966. *The complete movie is on the Historical Society Website.*



**GAIL BORDEN JOHN G BORDEN ELLEN BORDEN MARION BORDEN**

On Saturday afternoon, **November 12**, a sell-out crowd enjoyed the annual **Benefit Tea** at the Shawangunk Town Hall. Volunteer hostesses decorated tables for 4-8 guests who enjoyed tea served with sandwiches, slices of a massive splendid cake, and entertainment by local singer, guitarist, and composer **Meghan Tobias**.

The successful event which netted over \$2000 to benefit the restoration of the Historical Society's historic houses was chaired by **Carolyn Crowell** and other hard-working volunteers.



In the last event of 2016, members and trustees of the Historical Society met at the **Andries DuBois House** for the **Annual Holiday Party** on Wednesday night, December 7. The annual vote was held to elect three trustees to new 3-year terms: **A. J. Schenkman, Hal Van Aken and Donna Myer** (replacing **Adam Seelig** who left because of time constraints – and we will miss him!)



**RESTORATION** Taking advantage of a relatively mild season, volunteers put in hours of sweat equity at the **DuBois House**. **Karen Wohlforth Dale** and **Libby Ross** spent countless hours steaming off damaged wallpaper in the dining room (first floor rear) and removing layers of paint from moldings and doors to reveal a soft original milk paint green. Other work by **Bob Mooney, Hal Van Aken, Al White, and Adam Seelig** included the repair of roof supports in the attic and efforts to improve storage for collections materials in the upstairs rooms.

A special thanks to **Adam Seelig** for his craftsmanship on building our new **Little Library** book sharing unit that can be found on the grounds in front of the DuBois house. It is now ready for contributions of books that are available to anyone willing to replace each taken book with a replacement book.



At the **Knights' House**, we celebrated the turning on of water and electricity. A bathroom is available and meetings can be held in the building.

### *Officers*

**President** Debra Wolff  
**Vice President** Libby Ross  
**Recording Secretary**  
Doris Callan  
**Corresponding Secretary**  
Donna Myer  
**Treasurer** Bob Mooney

### *Trustees*

Doris Callan  
Freda Fenn  
Jim Malloy  
Bob Mooney  
Donna Myer  
Libby Ross  
Adam Jay Schenkman  
Harold Van Aken  
Alan White  
Karen Wohlforth Dale  
Debra Wolff

### *Publications*

Libby Ross, Doris Callan, Freda Fenn, Bob Mooney, Hal Van Aken

### *Standing Committees*

**Programs and Education:**  
*Freda Fenn, Donna Myer*

**Fund Raising:** *Trustees*

**Membership:** *Bob Mooney*

**Publicity:** *Hal Van Aken*

**Restoration/Bldg Maintenance:**  
*Bob Mooney*

**Finance:** *Bob Mooney*

**Archives and Collections:**  
*Hal Van Aken*

**Publications:** *Libby Ross*

**Webmaster:** *Hal Van Aken*

## **Letter from the President**

Dear Members and Friends,

The fall came and went quickly and now winter is upon us. Thankfully, both the Andres DuBois house and Knights of Pythias house are buttoned up for the winter! Many activities happened this past fall. **Freda Fenn** organized a workshop on building a “faerie house.” Participants had fun creating their own version using material collected in woods and fields. In fact, Freda was asked to repeat this workshop several more times, which has helped raise money for the historical society! Check out the HSSG website to see the finished faerie houses. Our October presentation on the “History of NYS Covered Bridges” was cancelled, but we hope to reschedule that in the spring. In November, we had our first general meeting at the Knights of Pythias house, with a record attendance. The theme of the evening: “A Night with the Borden.” We saw a video with **Rodney Thompson** discussing the Borden farm and movie clips from **Richard Hoyt**’s collection, edited by **Harold Van Aken**. Also in November, we had our 2016 Annual Holiday Tea. Many thanks to **Carolyn Crowell** and her committee for their hard work. Also thanks to all the businesses and individuals who contributed gifts for the raffles. This event raised more than \$2,500 for the Historical Society! Our last event for the year was our annual Holiday Party at the Andres DuBois House. Good food and good company were in abundance.

On October 14<sup>th</sup>, the fourth-grade class in Wallkill visited the Knights of Pythias house as part of a walking tour of Wallkill. Over 60 children and approximately 25 adult chaperones attended this event. The children learned the history of the Knights of Pythias organization and its motto Friendship, Charity, Benevolence. In fact, many artifacts in the room upstairs have the initials FCB inscribed on them.

If you drive by the Andres DuBois house, be sure to check out the Little Free Library in front. Many thanks to **Adam Selig** for coming up with this idea and building us a beautiful structure. **Bob Mooney** has stocked the LFL with both adult and children’s books, so please stop by and pick up something to read.

Finally, a big thank you to **Karen Dale** for her diligence in applying for an historical marker for the Andres DuBois House. We have received the marker, but will wait until the spring to place it on the outside of the building.

In closing, we welcome you as a member to participate in whatever capacity – through volunteer work, attendance at events, advising in areas in which you have expertise, donations of artifacts or photos, recruiting new members, or making a financial donation. Remember, HSSG is your organization and is committed to preserving the rich local history of the Shawangunk and Gardiner area

**Debra Wolff – President**

### ***Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner Mission Statement***

*In one of the oldest settled townships in the U.S., The Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner preserves historic buildings, stories, records, and artifacts. We share them with the community through absorbing and inspiring programs, strengthening a shared understanding of local history.*

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner  
PO Box 570  
Wallkill, NY 12589-0570

Stamp

*Please join the Historical Society to continue receiving the Newsletter. You can join the Historical Society at <http://WallkillHistory.com>*

Adrian M. Dewitt  
169 Hardenburg Rd.  
Pine Bush, NY 12566



NY PRISON 1933



Marion Borden



MARION BORDEN IN A TREEHOUSE

**DUES. Have you paid your 2017 dues?**  
Check your mailing label to find out.  
**Mail dues to:**  
The Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner  
P.O. Box 570,  
Wallkill, NY 12589-0570.  
**DUES AND DONATIONS CAN NOW BE PAID ON THE WEBSITE AT**  
[HTTP://WallkillHistory.com](http://WallkillHistory.com)  
(credit card or PayPal)  
**Individual: \$20, Family: \$30, Supporting: \$50.  
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