

HISTORIC RED HOOK

2015 Annual Report

It was a terrific 2015 thanks to our enthusiastic and hard working Trustees and many volunteers – and the continuing generous support of the greater Red Hook community. Our second year’s highlights included offering history programs and community open houses at the Elmendorph Inn, conducting video histories, hosting our first Historic Preservation Exposition, and welcoming several wonderful donations to the archival collections.

Programs

We inaugurated our 2015 series on January 11 with a lively look by Robin Cherry through her newest book, “Garlic, An Edible Biography: The History, Politics and Mythology Behind the World’s Most Pungent Food), followed on February 15 by The Rev. Bruce Chilton’s “Building Bard,” a thorough (and thoroughly engaging) recounting of John Bard’s travails in establishing St. Stephen’s College, today’s Bard College. Coinciding with apple blossom season (timing is everything!), Dutchess Land Conservancy’s Julie Hart and Chuck Mead, Mead Orchards, joined us on April 19 for a fascinating review of changing land use patterns in Red Hook over the last 60 years. On May 1 we joined forces with the Red Hook Public Library to present local historian and author Vernon Benjamin on his newly published, eminently readable ‘History of the Hudson River Valley: From Wilderness to the Civil War.’ Saturday, June 20, saw more than 150 visitors from up and down the Hudson Valley converge on the Elmendorph for our first annual House & Barn Preservation Exposition. On Historic Red Hook’s behalf, more than twenty experts in the preservation arts, the building trades, zoning and land use, interior and landscape design, and adaptive reuse fielded questions from the curious. While local musicians strummed and sang, hot dogs and mustard abounded, and a good and informative time was had by all.

Community Open Houses

As part of its continuing community outreach, Historic Red Hook was much in evidence through Red Hook’s major seasonal events: Apple Blossom Day, Hardscrabble Day and the Chocolate Festival. We were particularly thrilled on Apple Blossom day to participate in the installation of a historic marker funded by a grant to Historic Red Hook from the Pomeroy Foundation, commemorating the Red Hook Public Library’s historic octagonal building.

The Elmendorph's doors were wide open as usual on Hardscrabble Day, with homemade apple pie and ice cream, and a "pop-up" display of Red Hook's one-room schoolhouses ready for close inspection. The "pop-up" later travelled to the Mill Road Elementary School lobby.

In November, when everyone's fancy turns to The Chocolate Festival, some 200 chocolate lovers young and old flocked to the Elmendorph for chocolate-dipped delights, marvelous musicians (including young Molly Jeanne on her guitar and mandolin), and a table-top exhibit of archival photos, correspondence and objects detailing the life and operation of Red Hook's own W.H. Baker Co., producers of "guaranteed as absolutely pure" cocoa butter and other chocolate products.

Dutch Christmas on December 6 saw the year end on literal high notes from the Hand Bell Ringers of St. John's Reformed Church, Red Hook school and other musicians, mulled cider and fresh-baked goods straight from the wood-fired beehive oven, courtesy of Tivoli Bakery's Mikee Gonnella.

Video Histories

In February, thanks to the expert team of board member Seth Kramer, videographer Ricardo Fernandez and interviewer Chris Klose, we captured hour-long in-depth discussions with six Red Hook 'legends' – Sue Crane, Bill O'Neill, Kevin Klose, Claude Potts, Margaret Doty and Barbara Bielenberg. The videos and written transcriptions have been added to the archives and we hope to do more in 2016. The first edited video, pared down to 10 minutes, was 'Saving the People's Building' featuring Barbara Bielenberg, and it was premiered to much acclaim at the Oct 3 Membership Annual Meeting. Sadly she passed away just after Thanksgiving and we are grateful to have her words recorded.

Fundraising

Our winter evening 'Tavern' nights resumed with Soup Night on March 7 (GrassFed) and Chili Night (Maggie Rothwell) on April 11 – both crowded with friends and neighbors enjoying good food and music. Our biggest fundraiser, the November 13 Gala Auction and Dinner, was a sold-out success. The combination of a live auction by 'Cornelius Elmendorph' with a silent auction and delicious dinner made for a lively, entertaining (and lucrative!) evening.

We also introduced Historic Red Hook branded merchandise that sold well at our events – t-shirts, caps and other items.

Community Outreach

Throughout the year, we continued to work with other key organizations –including Bard College and the Red Hook Central Schools. In January for Martin Luther King Day four Bard students helped us catalog historic maps as part of their Civic Day of Engagement. Also in January, 10 teachers from Red Hook High School visited the Archives Room to learn about how its resources might be helpful in their work with students. We hosted Bard College's History Intern meeting on Feb 12, and signed up an energetic junior, Frankie Witzenburg, to help us with historic survey work. On September 2, we hosted Red Hook's fourth-grade classes for their annual tour of the Elmendorph.

On March 25 a dozen Girl Scouts also had a chance to explore the inn. We spoke at the Rotary Club and offered historical material to Red Hook Community Arts Network (RH-CAN) for their St. Margaret's festival. We stay involved with Dutchess County Historian Will Tatum and hosted his final quarterly meeting of the year at the Inn. We're also very involved with regional organizations such as the Greater Hudson Heritage Network and remain a member of the Museum Association of New York (MANY), American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), and Hudson River Valley Heritage (HRVH).

Archival Collections

Meanwhile, our dedicated, hard working History Committee volunteers kept the second-floor Rosemary Coons Archive Room abuzz, cataloging, organizing, and fulfilling research requests by visitors from near and far. In 2015 we accepted several unique donation including a collection of Tivoli documents and photographs as well as a couple of antique chairs from Reverend Elliott and Mrs. Lindsley, family photographs from Margaret Doty, Mark McNally and Vincent Asher, and finally several boxes of Fraleigh family documents and photographs, donated by David and Karen Fraleigh before they moved out of their farmhouse at Rose Hill Farm. In addition to fascinating Fraleigh material, the boxes included valuable letters and business documents that belonged to neighboring Upper Red Hook apple farmer William S. Teator.

We made headway cataloguing, rehousing and digitizing existing collections to offer better access for researchers and the general public.

Administration

On the operations side, we maintained our database of collections and memberships – now at 225 members and boast 282 subscribers to our e-bulletin.

In 2015, our board membership remained at 11, as we welcomed new board members Thea Burgess and Susan Ezrati and thanked Adam Aronson and Patsy Vogel for their service. (Patsy Vogel remains as an 'ex officio' member of the board).

We benefited from a strategic planning session on May 16, 2015. With the support of a MANY "Get Set" grant, consultant Linda Norris spent a half-day with the board advising on developing a mission statement and short-term strategic plan. After that session, a board group developed the following mission and strategic goals for 2015/2016:

Mission:

Historic Red Hook engages the community in conversations about Red Hook's continuing story.

What we do:

- *collect, preserve and promote Red Hook's history*
- *maintain the historic Elmendorph Inn as a community center*
- *create dynamic public programs*
- *partner with community organizations*

What we value:

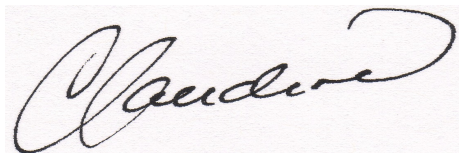
We value Red Hook's history, traditions, and community connections.

Strategic Goals for 2015-2016:

- *Build Historic Red Hook into **THE** "Go To" organization for exploring Red Hook's continuing story*
- *Engage with young people*
- *Attract dedicated volunteers*
- *Build long-term financial sustainability*

All in all, an exciting second year for Historic Red Hook and we look forward to an equally rewarding 2016!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claudine Klose", written in a cursive style.

Claudine Klose
President, Historic Red Hook

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