



# NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 523 • Ardsley, New York 10502

[www.ardsleyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.ardsleyhistoricalsociety.org)

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## ALL THE NEWS (ARDSLEY'S) THAT'S FIT TO PRINT

By Robert M. Pellegrino

What do an Amelia Earhart sighting, a laundry bag full of chestnuts, and county-shaking dynamite explosions all have in common? Not even a guess? Each was a newsworthy event at Ardsley reported in the pages of the New York Times! And there's more.

Recently, the Times generously gave free access to its archive on its web site, including an ability to word search every issue. After this author searched to see if any of his Italian ancestors (or their tenement addresses) had made the news, it was time to go hunting for mentions of Ardsley, which soon included, to be sure, "Ashford," "Ardsley-on-the-Putnam," the "Saw Mill River Valley," and other possible back doors to our local history.

Those who would put down this newsletter and go searching the web site immediately for "Ardsley" are forewarned that before they finish they will have waded through dozens and dozens of stories relating to that "other Ardsley": Ardsley-on-Hudson, including the Ardsley Club and Ardsley Casino, both of which were reported on regularly at the turn of the twentieth century for their high society goings-on, not to mention tennis and golf tournaments.

What news from our area is newsworthy enough for the New York Times? Was it any different 100 years ago? Unsurprisingly, no. Then and now, it's the old standbys – murder, catastrophe, intrigue, and tragedy that most often make news – and, of course, famous people. Perhaps surprisingly, Ardsley's has had its share of these, along with much lighter news as we'll see.

## All the News (cont'd)

The first noteworthy mention found of our area was in a letter to the Times' editor in August, 1862. A local true son of the north was on the lookout for rebels during the Civil War, and believed he had located some that deserved closer attention:

### SECESSIONISTS IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY.

*To the Editor of the New-York Times:*

I wish to call your attention to the fact that there are about a dozen rabid Secessionists in this neighborhood (Saw-mill River Valley). They are very bold, and one of them said yesterday that he "wished the rebels would take Washington and burn everything and everybody in it," particularly the President and "Bill Seward"; and that "if Jeff Davis were a candidate he would vote for him." Now will you please inform me to whom I must make the charge, or will you send an officer up here. I will attend to them, and prove the charge by a dozen persons. They are all men of some little property, but ignorant, and it would hardly be worth noticing them if it were not that there are several young men, strong, hearty and just the material for soldiers, who are inclined to volunteer, and would do so with a little inducement.

Greenburg, Friday, Aug. 9, 1862  
ODELL HEART.

A specific mention of "Ashford," the place name by which our Village was previously known in its days as a hamlet before it was changed to Ardsley (a name selected when an application for an "Ashford" post office was declined because another already existed upstate), appeared on August 11, 1870. A land boom was underway because of news that the railroad was coming:

### WESTCHESTER COUNTY

The effect of locating the New-York and Boston Railroad along the line of the Saw-Mill or Nepperhan River, has been to create a wonderful demand for property in the vicinity of Ashford, about half way between Dobb's Ferry, on the Hudson River, and Hart's Corners, on the Harlem Railroad. The latest sales of real estate there have been as follows: 28 acres of Mr. Bassett's farm \$8,000; Mr. Brown's farm, 15 acres, \$9,000; Dr. Hammond's farm, 25 acres, \$20,000; Mrs. Hall's farm 85 acres, \$22,000; W. & C. Buckhout's farm, 100 acres, \$34,000; John Vincent's hotel and farm, 100 acres, \$50,000.

Prices go down as well as up. Unfortunately for the speculators, the New York and Boston Railway failed and it was another 10 years before railroad service would actually come to the Saw Mill River Valley and stay, at least until 1959, when passenger service on the "Old Put" was ended.

In July 1878, the "Village of Ashford" made the Times again when a Sunday storm "*spoken of as a tornado... a whirlwind*" overturned small outbuildings and moved a "*good sized barn from its foundation.*" The havoc caused by that storm was kind by comparison to the havoc complained of the next time Ashford was mentioned, in May 1885. New York City's increasing need for clean water had led to the beginning of the construction of the new Croton Aqueduct and the digging of one its shafts (Shaft 14) smack in the middle of Ashford. More than a hundred workers gathered in and around Ardsley for several years, as did saloons, to help with their pay-days and off-days. Unruliness was the rule, and drunkenness sometimes led to



Ashford Avenue showing Murden's Saloon in the foreground at right, c. 1905. Photo courtesy of "Pictures of the Past" by Patricia and Fred Arone

murder. One unhappy citizen begged Cyrus Field, whose estate was nearby, for help:

### AQUEDUCT LABORERS DRUNK

*To the Editor of the New-York Times:*

Cannot the Commissioner of the new aqueduct do something to diminish the frightful drunkenness among their laborers? They have a large number employed on the shafts and works near the pretty village of Ashford, east of Dobbs Ferry. On pay days these men lie around in the gutters and by the roads dead drunk, and are really a danger and nuisance to the community. The contractors or company have put up a huge liquor shop right by the public road. Has Mr. C. W. Field no control over the precincts of his Ardsley property? Or cannot the Commissioners of Greenburg do something to check this dreadful increase of drunkenness and disorder in these quiet villages? The excise law should control even the boarding houses and saloons of the contractors for this company.

CITIZEN. New York, Wednesday, May 27, 1885

## All The News (cont'd)

The first mention of our "Ardsley" comes on January 17, 1886, the direct result of a boom of another kind that had frightened thousands the day before. The headline screamed:

### ALARM IN WESTCHESTER

#### *The County Shaken by a Dynamite explosion.*

#### **A QUANTITY OF FORSYTHE POWDER AT A NEW AQUEDUCT SHAFT LEVELS BUILDINGS AND SCARES MANY PERSONS.**

There was a dynamite explosion at a little hamlet called Ardsley, on the New-York City and Northern Railroad, Friday night, which shook up Westchester County so that the inhabitants thereof thought they had been visited by an earthquake. Shaft No. 14 of the new Croton Aqueduct is at Ardsley, and the work there is being done by Flanagan & Co., subcontractors under O'Brien & Clark, the contractors for the lower portion of the aqueduct.

About 200 feet from that spot was the residence by John Vincent. It presented but a faint resemblance to a house after the explosion. The two ends had been blown completely out, and there was hardly a whole board in the building. Furniture was tossed about on the floors and out into the garden, and a person could stand at one end of the building and view the landscape in the distance through it. Mr. Vincent's family owes their lives to the fact that they were attending a party at Samson Lawrence's hotel, in the village, where most of the young folks of the village were assembled. Had any of the Vincents been at home they would in all probability have been killed or maimed for life. At the party mentioned the dancers had just completed a quadrille, and were about sitting down to supper when the explosion occurred. They were nearly all thrown off their feet by the rocking of the building. The windows of the hotel were smashed, dishes were broken, and lamps were thrown down from the chandelier.

A related report from Nyack stated: A heavy rumbling and jar were felt all through Rockland County. . . No information of the dynamite explosion in Westchester County reached here until very late. The commotion in Nyack was felt all the way from the river to the mountain top. . . There was not a place in Rockland County where the supposed earthquake was not felt, and many persons were so frightened that they sat up during the rest of the night.

A little more than two years later, March 28, 1888, Ardsley was at it again - blasting news:

### TWO MEN BLOWN TO ATOMS

#### **A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION IN A DYNAMITE FACTORY.**

An explosion occurred in the dynamite factory near Ardsley, Westchester County, at 8:15 o'clock yesterday morning with so much force that the people for miles around thought there had been an earthquake. It was L. D. Stickney's Aqueduct Powder Works, which were situated on Williams and Lander's farm, about a mile from Ardsley station on the New-York and Northern Railroad. Of the six buildings which were standing there at 8 o'clock in the morning not one was left. The nitroglycerin storage house, the one in which the explosion occurred, had disappeared as if by magic and where it had stood there was a hole in the ground about 12 feet deep. . . . Mr. Williams, who was sitting at a window at the time of the explosion, was thrown from his chair and the window sash was thrown violently against him, the broken glass cutting him severely about the head and hands. Just how the explosion was caused will never be positively known, for the only two men who were at work there at the time of the explosions were blown to atoms. Men and boys were all day yesterday scouring the fields about the neighborhood for pieces of the two men. By the middle of the afternoon they had picked up about much as would fill a derby hat. . . At Tarrytown, five miles away, windows were shaken and several plate glass windows badly cracked. In White Plains two plate glass windows in the grocery store of F. Rauscht & Co. were cracked. . . In Dobbs Ferry one or two loose chimneys tumbled down, and the same was the case in several instances in Elmsford and Ashford. The shock was even felt in Nyack.

The reporting may be colorful, but conditions for the workers, mostly immigrants, were pitiful. Nearly a hundred men died along the 30 mile tunnel route in just the first three years of construction, and fatal dynamite accidents were common. The reader may enter a search with the words "dynamite" and "Croton Aqueduct" for proof.

Though unreported, one can be sure that there was heroism shown by those men in their attempts to save injured co-workers. An example of heroism of a different kind—no less noble, or tragic—follows on the next page, as reported on June 12, 1898:

## All the News (cont'd)

### Killed Trying To Save Her Dog.

YONKERS, N.Y., June 11. —Coroner Miles of this city was notified this evening that a woman had been killed at Ardsley station, on the New York and Northern line, about 5 o'clock. She was struck by the Superintendent's motor, Hudson, a modern coach and engine combined, while she was endeavoring to save a pet dog from being killed. Her name was Mochstein, and her husband is a weaver in a tapestry factory at Ardsley. He was summoned from work, and upon seeing her, fainted.

Local intrigue also traveled well:

### A SACHEL SUGGESTS A MYSTERY.

DOBBS FERRY, N.Y., July 9, 1897. A valise was found yesterday on the Central Railroad's tracks between Ardsley and Dobbs Ferry. It contains two caps, a coat, a vest; and a sleeve torn from a shirt. There were a number of footprints which seemed to indicate a struggle near the satchel.

### ARDSLEY STATION AGENT GONE.

*His Wife, a 16 Year-Old Girl,  
And Another Man Also Leave Town.*

DOBBS FERRY, N.Y., Aug 16, 1899. Clarence Frick, twenty-four years of age, who was station agent at Ardsley, on the New York and Putnam Railroad, has been missing since Monday evening. A temporary agent is in charge of the station and an auditor is going over Frick's accounts. When Frick went away Robert Lefurgy, a teamster for Quimby and O'Dell also disappeared. This Morning Mrs. Frick and Emma Lent, sixteen years of age, a daughter of Mrs. Andrew Lent, left town. It is said they have gone to join Frick and Lefurgy. Lefurgy is credited with telling friends that he was going to marry Mrs. Frick as her husband was securing a divorce from her, and that Frick was to marry Miss Lent.

Just as interesting, but more humorous, is this article from March 25 1900, which reported the opening of a very special hotel nearby to treat gambling addiction; the opportunity for alcohol abuse was less obvious, or perhaps the draw:

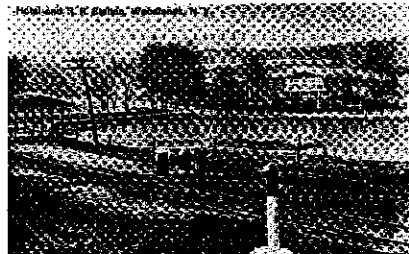
## WHERE BETTING MEN GO TO GET "CURED"

### Woodlands Lake Hotel, Irvington Borough, Transformed.

#### Private Hotel with a Bar

Sporting men in great number from this city are flocking daily to the Woodlands Lake Hotel, in Irvington Borough, sixteen miles from One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Street, on the Putnam Division of the New York Central Railroad. The establishment was a headquarters for greengoods swindlers until the place was raided by the United States Authorities about a month ago. A number of its old patrons are now awaiting trial in Ludlow

Street Jail. All is changed now at this rural hostelry. It's said by those in charge that the place is a private hospital for nervous disorders.



Woodlands Lake and Hotel, c. 1904.

Photo courtesy of "Pictures of the Past" by Patricia and Fred Arone

After the aqueduct building years, our area returned to its calmer, more

bucolic self. Here the reporter offers our mind's eye the Saw Mill River Valley—without the Parkway, the Thruway (or Ashford Avenue and 9A as seemingly the only way)—as he appears to guide us up Ridge Road and into Ardsley Heights:

### A GOOD PLACE FOR NUTTING PARTIES

Few of the nutting parties that travel to Bronx Park nowadays and come back happy in the possession of a few pocketfuls of chestnuts know of the hundreds of well-laden trees in the wooded hills that mark the eastern boundary of the Saw Mill River Valley, a few miles north of Van Cortlandt. In these woods chestnuts trees are so common that it is almost impossible in fifteen minutes' walk for even a novice to fail to locate one or two worth shaking. Black walnuts and butternuts are also plentiful, and the brisk winds of the last week have strewn the ground with them. There is no prettier bit of country in this vicinity than offers itself for exploration by a nutting party. The Saw Mill River flows between a high ridge on the westward and on the east a series of hills rise one above the other to a plateau, from the summit of which the Jersey side of the Hudson may be seen on clear days. A few little villages are scattered through the valley along the lines of the railroad, but for the most part the countryside consists of large farms.

## All The News (cont'd)

The reporter goes on to suggest an easier alternative to hiking up from the steep hills facing Chauncey, where he first directs the reader, and states that "chestnut trees [at Chauncey] are so common that it is impossible in a fifteen minutes' walk for even a novice to fail to locate one or two worth shaking."

Another way of reaching the same woods. . . will be to continue on the train until Ardsley Station is reached, crossing the stone bridge over the Nepperhan River, and turning down the Saw Mill River Road, where, just past the village a road goes over the hills from the left. This cuts through the heart of the woods, and is a quicker as well as easier way of reaching them. Nuts are so plentiful that it is advisable to take a laundry bag with one. This will not carry as much as an empty feed sack, but it is more calculated to suit the fastidious taste.



The old Ardsley railroad station. Photo courtesy of "Pictures of the Past" by Patricia and Fred Aronc

The implication of the last sentence (proper city folk vs. locals) is made clear by the last sentence: "Stout shoes, knickerbockers and bicycle skirts are almost a necessity...."

This was not the last report of Ardsley as a recreational destination. The next time, on January 10, 1916, it was the place to turn around:

### WALK THIRTY MILES.

#### Fifty-three men Make Trip to Ardsley and Return.

The members of the Manhattan and Bronx divisions of the American Walker's Associates took a thirty-mile tramp to Ardsley and returned yesterday, fifty-three men making the trip. The start was at the Dyckman Street Ferry, and from there the men went to Getty Square, Yonkers. Then by the Saw Mill river Road to Ardsley. In returning the squad come by way of Ashford Avenue, through Dobbs Ferry, Hastings and Yonkers, to the starting point.

With the turn of the century, automobiles became newsmakers, as did automobile accidents. Remarkably, in June 1909, a mother was able to save her child's life, even without a babyseat:

### TOURING CAR TURNS TURTLE

#### Father, Mother, and Six Children all Pitched Out, but Escape Unhurt.

ARDSLEY, N.Y. June 19-- William H. Sergeant, a contractor and builder, and his wife and six children had a narrow escape from death here this afternoon when the automobile they were riding in turned turtle. They were all tossed in a mud bank, which broke all their fall. Mr. Sergeant, who was driving his own car, was taking part in the endurance race of the Mount Vernon Automobile Club from Mount Vernon to Lake Mahopac. While turning a sharp curve in the Scarsdale Road leading into the Sawmill River Road at Ardsley, a tire on one of the rear wheels blew out. Mr.

Sergeant put on the brakes, which failed to work and the car, after skidding, suddenly veered to the left and turned over in a ditch. Mrs. Sergeant had a baby in her arms, and although she was thrown out of the machine and landed twenty feet away she clung to the infant and both mother and child were uninjured. Mr. Sergeant and the other five children also were thrown some distance, but they landed on a soft bank covered with thick grass and escaped injury. The car was wrecked.

For one other automobile accident, let us turn to a local paper, the Irvington Gazette, which deserves mention for the novel way it described an automobile accident in 1916 at a certain well known intersection:

On Sunday afternoon at the corner of Sprain Road and Ashford Avenue was again demonstrated the principle that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time; the experiment was made by two Ford cars, with the result that neither occupied the coveted middle of the Road.

There was more to autos than accidents, and in the teens the test of any machine was its ability to climb the "Heights"—presumably Larchmont and Euclid Avenues. Two more reports on the next page from the Gazette complete our side trip:

## All The News (cont'd)

November 5, 1915. Mr. W.C. Emerick is now the possessor of a 40-horse-power Cole car. It can go up Ardsley Heights backwards.

March 30, 1917. A notable feat in motoring was achieved by Mr. G. W. Davenport, when at a recent demonstration, he drove his celebrated Ford racing car "The Bull" up Ardsley Heights in high gear. Mr. W. C. Lawrence, who witnessed the achievement, said the car was traveling so fast that he had difficulty identifying the occupants.

It was more than 30 years after the completion of the aqueduct that this bit of "news" from a most peaceful Ardsley was reported:

### ARDSLEY JAIL EMPTY.

#### Fine Condition Falls to Attract Tenants, Commission Reports.

A report of the State Prison Commission on the condition of twenty jails made public today discloses that while Ardsley has the best prison it has not had any prisoners for many months. John S. Kennedy, President of the Commission, reported: "This is an excellent lock-up. Since the last inspection the place has been painted and is in excellent condition."

Even in those times, our traffic woes were not unforeseen. In November, 1930, the headline reported that officials were sure that many more traffic lanes would be needed to properly move traffic through Greenburgh; they weren't wrong. Why weren't they built? That's another story.

### FORTY TRAFFIC LANES CALLED TOWN'S NEED

#### Many Ten-Foot Roads Urged to Carry Albany Travel through Greenburgh in 1960.

TARRYTOWN, N.Y. NOV. 8 - The through traffic which now passes through Greenburgh over the Albany Post Road, the Bronx River Parkway, the Saw Mill River Road and Central Park Ave. will require forty ten-foot lanes of highway for its passage in 1960, according to a statement issued today by the Planning Board and zoning commission of the town of Greenburgh.

As the reader was promised news of famous people, we return first to the Irvington Gazette. The Gazette recapped President Howard Taft's passage through Ardsley in November, 1912, in a way that spoke to the times and the man (the reporter):

The Village of Ardsley was electrified with the news that the President would be traveling through Ardsley. The school children and a considerable portion of the populace lined the road. He was to have lunch with Lewisohn. A large banner floated over Ardsley Square, "Welcome to our President." Certainly Ardsley was no "foolish Virgin," but she did have her lamps trimmed and burning.

Our final stops - first, 1933. The Times' byline said Ardsley, N.Y., but to be fair to unincorporated Greenburgh, the location was just east of Sprain Road:

### MISS EARHART HONORED. Flier Is Guest at Annual Event in the Salvation Army Camp.

ARDSLEY, N.Y. May 23 - Amelia Earhart and commander Evangeline Booth were the guests of honor today at the annual luncheon held at the convalescent and fresh-air camp of the Salvation Army at Ashford Hill. The Salvation Army Band played at the luncheon, which took place on the lawn outside the main building. Over 200 representatives of women's organizations accompanied Miss Earhart on an inspection of the camp preceding the luncheon.



Amelia Earhart

One can imagine the extraordinary excitement that day brought to women and intelligent men throughout our area.

## All the News (cont'd)

Ms. Earhart was not the only famous flyer to appear in a Times' story about our area, and if this pilot and others had their way, traffic might not be our only travel nuisance. Consider, however, the significance to local residents of promised jobs during the Depression era, and the wealthy opposition's self-interest is not so praiseworthy.

### AIR FIELD OPPOSED IN WESTCHESTER

**Felix Warburg, Adolph Lewisohn and  
Others Fight Greenburgh Project.**

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### FRANK HAWKS APPROVES

**Captain Rickenbacker Also Is In  
Favor of Location as a  
Safety Measure**

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. Jan 2, 1934 -- Some of the leading figures in American aviation and a group of Westchester County's wealthiest estate owners debated this afternoon whether there should be an emergency landing field on the Simpson tract, Dobbs Ferry Road, Greenburgh. The Federal Government had agreed to put from 800 to 1,000 men to work to create a field in connection with a chain of fields to aid commercial aviation through the nation. . . . The proponents of the plan included Frank Hawks, speed pilot and Captain Eddie Rickenbacker . . . The property owners, both real estate developers and residents, opposed the project on the ground that it would depreciate real estate values, create a nuisance and endanger the safety of life in that vicinity.

Of course, any news reporting, even if true, is but a slice of a place, and the clippings we see cannot be said to be representative of the day-to-day character of our Village.

All our readers and especially our younger readers are encouraged to use the web as well as traditional resources to help us piece together as fair and complete a history as we can, and we welcome hearing from all of you. With our own web site now online, please email us with your thoughts, questions, and your own discoveries.

*Afterword:* Readers who know our local history well will note the absence of at least two tragic events in Ardsley's history that were widely reported - the great fire of 1914 that resulted in the deaths of William Johnson and his family and the destruction of much of our downtown, and the death in 1928 of Patrolman Joseph Bachman, the only police officer to have given his life in service to our Village. They are omitted only because they deserve the fuller telling and more respectful context which a future issue will allow.

### In Memoriam

We are saddened to report the passing on November 16, 2007 of our long-time member and trustee of 14 years Esther DeNardo. Esther was a life-long member of our community and an enthusiastic supporter and volunteer of the Society. Always available with information about names and events for our archives, Esther was an asset and a great friend. We will miss her.

### Volunteers Needed

Anyone interested in helping us catalog the archives, please call 693-1266. Just a few hours per week would be helpful. Thank you!

The Ardsley Historical Society Newsletter is published three times each year. The Society was established in 1982 and is chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, and disseminate the history of Ardsley to members and to the public.

Archives are open to the public on Tuesdays from 10 am to 12 noon, or by appointment, at 9 American Legion Drive. Our phone number is 693-6027. Subscription to the Newsletter is included in membership dues, which are:

Individual:	\$ 12.00
Family:	15.00
Senior Citizen:	10.00
Student	8.00
Sponsor:	35.00
Patron:	100.00

All articles, queries, and replies should be addressed to the editor, Mary Lichtenberg. Although every attempt is made to maintain historical accuracy in the Newsletter, the editor and the Society assume no responsibility for errors. The editor also reserves the right to edit where necessary.

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