



The fire engine on Montserrat in 1992

Historical society prepares for milestone

By Kris DiLorenzo

The coming year, 2021, is the Village of Ardsley's 125th anniversary, and in preparation for the occasion the Ardsley Historical Society is "going global," as a recent press release termed its new burst of activity.

Though not as old as the village, the historical society, founded in 1982, has archives that go back at least as far as World War I, and is continually collecting photos, papers, books, maps, publications, audio recordings, films, and other memorabilia.

With a stash of historical, amusing, and occasionally startling material (available for viewing by appointment only) crowding its home on the second floor of the public library, the society began digitizing and uploading photos and documents to its website repository with the aid of high school summer interns in 2017 and 2018, but that effort proved insufficient.

The historical society has now decided to upload content to the Internet Archive. Since 1996, Internet Archive, a nonprofit organization, has been building a digital library and providing free access to the public.

In light of next year's relevance, the historical society's first choice for digitization is the late Arthur Silliman's three-volume

"A Short Informal History of Ardsley, NY." Silliman was the first superintendent of the Ardsley School District when it had one building, now the Ashford Court condominiums, at 520 Ashford Ave.

"The three volumes, totaling 100 pages, including photos, were published by the Office of the Ardsley Methodist Church in 1968," historical society president Peter Marcus said, adding that it was bound into one book to mark the U.S. Bicentennial in 1976.

Silliman's work starts by describing the Ice Age and ends in 1976. In one section he mentions the 1643 Dutch war against the Wickquasgeck (Weckquaesgeek) of the Lenape Nation, original inhabitants of this area. The entire work should be archived by the end of January but will not be immediately available on the Society's website.

"We've got a lot of things we want to do with the website," Marcus noted.

The historical society is sprucing itself up in other ways as well. Its biannual newsletter, founded in 1984, has been rebranded as "The Beacon," and printed partially in color. The new name references the bonfires of Revolutionary encampments, the 1930s-era Beacon Hill Company subdivision's colonial-era street names

such as Flintlock and Powder Horn; and its logo featuring the sun's rays refers to the Ardsley Sun (the village's first newspaper), and Cyrus Field, instrumental in the naming of Ardsley ("Cyrus," of Persian origin, means "Sun").

The newsletter is bigger, and the fall 2020 issue contains stories about an Ardsley fire truck that ended up on the Caribbean island of Montserrat, and a quartet of Ardsley High School students who sued school officials over their First Amendment right to distribute fliers on campus supporting the Chicago 7.

Currently, newsletters from 2007 to the present are posted on the website, with more on the way.

What Marcus calls "Our *pièce de résistance*" also will be rolled out for display next year: a 4-pound cannonball certified by former West Point Military Academy curator and conservator Paul Ackermann as Continental Army ammunition.

The Revolutionary-era cannonball was donated to the historical society in 1988 by Ludmila and Brian Yamrone, who live near where Gen. George Washington's troops had camped; Ludmila Yamrone found it while planting a garden.

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In 2002, Historical Society president Arline Weston watches Paul Ackermann measure the Revolutionary War cannonball donated by the Yamrones.

Anniversary

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“We speculated that when the troops were stationed on the grounds of the current high school and Concord Road School, they used that area for target practice,” Marcus said, somewhat tongue-in-cheek.

A Village committee headed by Trustee Joann D’Emilio will plan 125th anniversary events. The committee is made up of historical society board members Mary Keehan, Pierre Fontaine, and Rob

Pellegrino (village historian, and past president of the historical society), and representatives from the fire department, the Ardsley Garden Club, the Ardsley Recreation Commission, the Multicultural, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee, the Ardsley Public Library, and the school district (including students), among others.

Anticipating the continuing need for social distancing, the society is working out details of eight-person weekend walking tours that will take participants through a different type of history: viewing the before and after of the village’s appearance. They’ll be given binders of old photos to

contrast with what they see now. Those who don’t tour in person can take the walk virtually through a narrated slide show.

Marcus’s comment that “Some of the pictures are pretty old,” is an understatement. Every year the Ardsley schools provide a yearbook for the historical society’s archives; the first one dates back to the high school’s first graduating class, 1916 — three boys and three girls.

Along with the ongoing process of unearthing, categorizing, and digitizing Ardsley’s history, the historical society performs a service that would be daunting for most people: locating information

about relatives who once lived in Ardsley. The internet isn’t necessarily reliable, but the historical society is.

“Most often we find the information in the yearbooks,” Marcus said. “Otherwise, we have access to old newspapers that were around then. Sometimes people are looking out of general curiosity.”

Asked if he’s ever found an unusual or shocking revelation, he replied, “Nothing newsworthy.”

For information on membership, newsletter, and calendar, go to ardsleyhistoricalsociety.org or contact Peter Marcus at pmarcus@optonline.net or (914) 393-3222.