

The Piermont Newsletter

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FALL 2006

Village Board Weighs Historic District Preservation

John McAvoy, who owns an older Piermont home and the Turning Point restaurant, was worried. If the Village Board adopts the historic district preservation law it is considering, would it force him to get color approval before he painted his buildings, he wanted to know.

The answer from the state's leading historic preservation expert, Julian W. Adams, was an empathetic no. The local Historical Review Commission, which would have the job of enforcing the law, wouldn't concern itself with changes as temporary as paint color, he explained.

Adams is a certified local government coordinator at the Historic Sites Bureau of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. He had come to Piermont from Albany to answer questions about the law at the third in a series of public hearings the Village Board has held on the pending legislation.

The proposed law, based on state guidelines, aims at stopping anyone from tearing down or altering buildings of historical or architectural significance. Advocates say updating the Village code would give the Board more muscle and a clear set of guidelines for preserving properties. It would also make the Village eligible for various grants.

If the Village Board adopts the law, its next step would be to appoint an Historic Preservation Commission. That won't be easy because the proposed Piermont law is very specific about the qualifications of the five-member (plus two alternates) Commission:

- = "At least one shall be an architect experienced in working with historic buildings;
- = "At least one shall be an historian;
- = "At least one shall be a resident of an historic district;
- = "At least one shall have demonstrated significant interest in and commitment to the field of historic preservation evidence either by involvement in the local historic preservation group, employment or volunteer activity in the field of historic preservation, or other serious interest in the field; and all members shall have a known interest in historic preservation and architectural development within the Village."

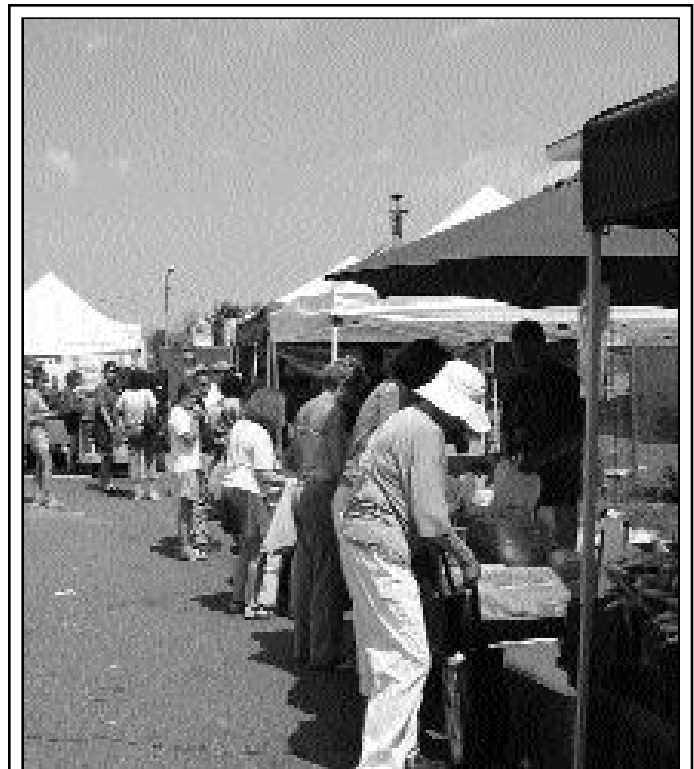
Although an early draft didn't call for it, Mayor Ed Traynor promised that all Commission members will be Piermont residents. That would seemingly make it even more difficult to find qualified people willing to serve.

The mayor has acknowledged the problem and said it troubles him.

The Commission's first job would be to develop criteria for labeling buildings and neighborhoods historic. Once that's decided, it will have the tough task of inventorying all Piermont buildings 50 years old and older and all village neighborhoods. (It may be able to get State grants to hire an historian to help with that survey.) It would then recommend to the Village Board which deserve landmark. The entire process could take several years.

The thorny problem of which body would have ultimate authority over all these decisions—the Village Board or the Commission—is still up in the air. Former Mayor John Zahn urged the elected Board to retain the power not the appointed Commission. Some critics disagree, arguing that

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Piermont Farmer's Market is a hit—page 4



Goings-on In Piermont

SAW YA RECENTLY!

Memorial Day saw the dedication of the statue of GI Joe attended by veterans of all stripes, and most Piermonters. The statue commemorates those GI's of World War II who left for Europe from the Pier in Piermont. The last to be seen was often a friendly wave as their boat pushed off for parts unknown.



Photo by Sally Savage

Piermont Community Garden members and friends gathered again in Parelli Park next to the garden for their annual Summer Solstice celebration, sharing food and friendship and the traditional maypole. This year's honoree for service to the group was given to Joan Gussow, one of the group's founders and a member of the village board.

A fund-raiser for the Piermont Historical Society enjoyed balmy summer weather and Xavier appetiz-



Merrymakers at the Summer Solstice.
Photo by Colleen Leidy

ers at the Castle, the imposing house built by Eleazor Lord of the Erie RR that has been lovingly maintained for many years by owners Dick and Charlene Stern (below). The first order of business for the Society will be finishing the restoration of the railroad station on Ash Street. The Sterns are also co-advertising managers for the Newsletter.



SEE YA AGAIN SOON!

The going-away party for Ken McNichol of the Piermont post office, who chose early retirement, was great fun but a slightly sad occasion, as many residents will miss his presence keenly. Musician, sculptor, bibliophile, humorist, Ken has worked at the Piermont facility since 1977, sharing his talents for life with everybody in the village. The party at the Pavilion was organized by Gayle Elson.



Musician and audience—Ken McNichol and Merrill Toan

A large party at the Pavilion said goodbye to Mimi (Mary) and George Bryan, residents of the village for 45 years and their family, the Reeses. Mimi was a mayor of Piermont for 7 years, a founder and treasurer of Friends of the Library, and an active member of Empire Hose Company.

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George was a researcher at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

The Bryans plan to move upstate with their son Paul and daughter Martha Rees, both with years of service to the Empire Hose Company and Ambulance Corps, and their children.



Mimi Bryan receives one of a number of awards for years of service to the Village and surrounding community. She is joined by (from left), husband George Bryan, son-in-law Larry Rees, 11 month-old granddaughter Angelina, and daughter Martha Rees.

Photo by Trevor Traynor

I am sad to see Fred and Candace Berardi fold up shop at E & F Florists on the creek. It has been an institution in our lives, and those of friends in Palisades, Tappan and throughout nearby Rockland, and will be missed. Fred will continue his local landscape business (359-5604).

"I first met him when he was a teenager delivering groceries for Community Market, then owned by his parents. He points out that, as with

so many "mom and pop" shops these days, it hasn't helped that the conglomerate department and grocery stores carry everything - from pumpkins at Hallowe'en to plants and flowers. We wish them the best of luck. I for one already miss our pretty little flower shop on the creek."

~Sally Savage



Crab Fest Coming!

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~Joe Van De Mark

Voting Switched From Spring to Fall

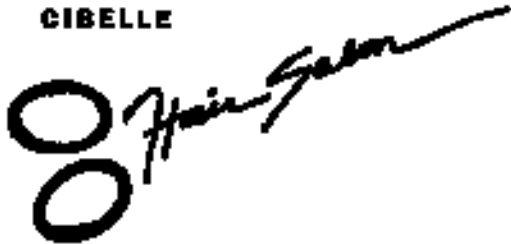
Piermonters who are used to voting for local officials in March, will soon visit the polls along with the most of the voting public in November, beginning next year.

The Village Board voted to move the date to coincide with state and national elections, when voter turnout is historically better. The Board approved the change Tuesday night by a 4-0 vote. Officials said the move would save the village about \$2,000 because the county would run the election instead of the village and would absorb the cost of running the elections.

Trustee Joan Gussow abstained, voicing the opinion that with the new date, voters may be more likely to vote along party lines than for the candidate of their choice. Former mayor Dennis Hardy was opposed. "November elections are very partisan on the town, county and state level," he said. "We have always tried and thought in Piermont that we'd like to keep politics, particularly partisan politics, out of the election."

Howard Brawner, who lives on Piermont Avenue, said he didn't see how changing village elections from the spring to the fall would make a difference either way. "I think it depends on the candidates and if they have opposition," said Brawner. "We need a little bit of competition in Piermont."

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Getting To No You

Fans of the Piermont farmers' market who stopped in on its early June opening day to get their spring veggie fix were stunned to find that the lavishly abundant vegetable stand that filled the north side of the market last year was missing. The good news was that the absence was only temporary, caused, as it turned out, by the 6th birthday party of the youngest of the farmers' daughters. On the market's second week Nevia No and her husband Kwang were back in their usual places, smilingly weighing and handing out packages of some of the most beautiful produce lots of us have ever seen.

All of these stunning vegetables-and on the second market day they included carrots, two kinds of beets (including the red and white striped one called chioggia) 3 kinds of young bulbing onions, green garlic, 2 kinds of baby zucchini, avocado squash, arugula, fresh basil, shiso, and baby greens of all kinds including bok choy, calaloo, chard and chicory-come to Piermont from a 105 acre farm in Bordentown, N. J. just south of Princeton which the Nevia and Kwang bought in 2002.

Kwang comes from five generations of farmers most of them based in Korea which is their home country and when he came to the U.S. with his father in 1980, the family lived in the Bronx. Every morning Kwang drove his father out to his farm at the end of Long Island in Riverhead and in the evening he drove him back. Trying to keep busy during the intervening hours, he found himself drawn into farming. Then he met Nevia whom he married in 1999. "He didn't tell me I would be farming," she says. "He said I could just stay home."

So she stayed home and he farmed, until her practical head told her they were not making much money selling their produce to Asian grocery stores. At which point a neighbor mentioned Greenmarkets. They started slow, but their first a few crates of Oriental vegetables at the Sunset Park Greenmarket were so extraordinary that they were invited into other markets and found that by directly selling to consumers they could often make ten times what they made in the wholesale produce business. They now sell at 6 greenmarkets in the city, as well as in Piermont and Larchmont

Their 80 farmed acres are supplied with plants of 120 to

150 different varieties of vegetables started from seed in 2 big glass greenhouses that capture the light to give the plants a fast start, and moved to 6 poly greenhouses as they grow. Then Nevia on a small planter, sets them out in the fields. "I have a better sense of what will sell," she says. "He used to plant five acres of radishes. And finally, I said 'Let me do the planting.' And I plant what we can sell."

What they can sell, plus, enough for the critters. What do they do about varmints? I asked Nevia. They have all kinds, deer, groundhogs, and rabbits who like their greens and foxes who like their chickens. "Nothing," says Nevia. "I tell him plant enough for us all and let them enjoy."

Although the Nos are technically not organic-they use a small amount of fungicide on some of the young tomato and pepper plants in the greenhouses, but nothing when the plants are bearing-and the fertility of their soil is maintained with a neighbor's cow manure and with a drip tape in the winter greenhouses that uses a liquefied organic fertilizer. So though they can't be certified, they are close enough to organic for most of us. and being able to know just what farmers do to keep their produce coming is one of the best arguments for buying locally--something you can do every Sunday from now until the end of November at the Piermont Farmers Market.

The Piermont market will run from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Sunday, rain or shine, through Nov. 19.

~Joan Gussow

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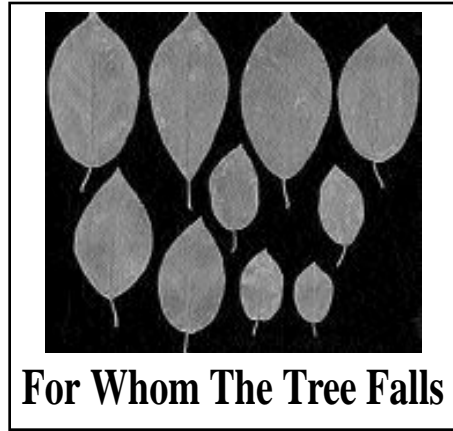
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If we look at online satellite pictures of Piermont, we see a wooded hillside. This is in keeping with the Piermont Code, that seeks to “promote the preservation, protection, restoration and reforestation of trees and forested areas” and to prevent soil erosion and pollution, to improve air quality, save energy, protect wildlife and enhance the value of property. Worthy goals no one could dispute. And in a final stipulation “protect, enhance or restore the unique visual and aesthetic character of the steep slope and mountainside areas as viewed from the downhill portions of the Village.”

There are 8 pages of regulations for a developer to adhere to or face penalties. However, there is no guideline for the home owner who may want to take out some trees to make a larger open space in his yard for a play area or to extend the terrace. One thing, for almost sure: he’s not thinking about erosion or the way his land looks from the Pier.

When trees are removed from the front yard for a better view of the river, which is commonly done in Piermont,



the hillside loses an important ally, says John Angelis, the Piermont Building Inspector. When a small house becomes a bigger house for a new owner, trees are often of small consequence to the owner or his builder.

What can be done to protect and preserve? Although it is not in the Code itself as yet, Angelis says the present rule is that you cannot take down a tree having a girth of 8 inches that is three feet above the natural grade without permission of the Vil-

lage Board. “Most people just don’t know about this rule,” Angelis said. The rule is flexible, so if there seems to be a danger of a tree falling on a house, this will be the deciding factor in allowing the tree to be cut.

In the event that a new room or wing is to be added to the house, requiring a tree or trees to be cut, the property owner may be required to plant new ones elsewhere on the property. Trees to be protected are alders, ash, beech, dogwood, elm, birch, locust, maple, mulberry, oaks, poplars, sassafras, sycamores, and all conifer/evergreen and fruit trees.

Angelis also said that if he finds tree-cutting going on in the Village, he stops by to check on it and may ask the police to be brought in on it to call off the cutting. He will suggest to the trustees that the Code be modified to include new standards.

He feels most Piermonters will be happy to conform to this change to save some trees on the hillside, and, possibly, the hillside itself.

~Rosemary Cone

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What's Historic and What's Not?

Piermont is presently concerned with historic preservation-- protecting for the future what we value from the past. With 400 or so years of buildings lying around, some do represent significant periods in our village's history. A few examples from my own private register of historic places:

The Onderdonck House, built as a simple family house in the early 1700's, was made worthy as the Revolution ended. I'm sure George Washington would want it preserved.

Then there was the railroad era. It saw the creation of Piermont's downtown. In the 1850's, the Erie RR chewed up Mount Nebo and spit it out in the marsh to create Piermont's flat land. The railroad then built most of the buildings that still stand near it., including the the whole west side of Main Street (Piermont Avenue.)

Victorian era furbelos and fretwork convey a sense of humor to this day. They're in no danger of being lost; most Victorian home owners have a definite taste for Hudson River Gothic gingerbread.

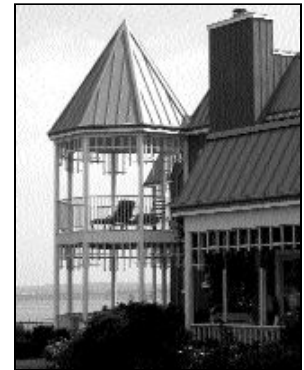


The paperboard factory defined an important historical period for Piermont. In the early 1900's a strip of attached houses was built along the south side of Ferdon Avenue. They have been spruced up and individualized, but at heart they're still factory row houses.



With a sense of humor similar to the Hudson River Gothic, the blue towers on the Pier expand a feeling of fantasy. Since Piermont in itself may be a fantasy, they fit right in.

The final category of architecture in my private register of historic places is the Modern Big Foot Mega House.



Designed in the current "tear down and build bigger" architectural ethos, this style carries the seeds of its own destruction. For that reason, I feel that at least one existing Big Foot Mega House should be protected from being devoured by another Big Foot Mega House.

~Fred Burrell



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President's Corner



Like most people who live here, I love the look of Piermont's older homes and buildings and I don't want to see them changed. The proposed Historic District Preservation Law, its backers say, will preserve those buildings and neighborhoods.

I had an open mind about the plan in the beginning but after attending every hearing about it so far, I have joined its many opponents. I now believe the solution the law proposes will create another level of bureaucracy without accomplishing much. Although it wouldn't be binding, we should demand that the Village Board measure public sentiment about the legislation by putting it on the November ballot.

There's been a torrent of informed criticism at the public hearings but the Village Board seems deaf to it. Three members of our Planning Board have spoken against the law, as have a num-

ber of former village officials. They favor historic preservation but don't want to create a powerful new Commission to implement it. They say there are ways to accomplish the same goals by strengthening and enforcing existing laws.

That's also what many owners of older homes and the Turning Point Restaurant have told the Village Board. These Piermonters, without any legal whip to drive them, have spent tens of thousands of dollars and countless hours restoring and preserving their buildings. They don't want to deal with another body when they want to make changes to their property.

Piermont has always resisted attempts to dictate taste. Successive Village Boards have refused to give our Architectural Review Committee a board with real power. Nyack went the other way and created an Architectural Review Board. Only architects were to serve on it, but it couldn't find

any who were willing to devote the time. Instead, its members are, "people who have an interest in design," whatever that means.

I asked a Nyack official, who requested not to be identified, how it is working out. "It's a disaster," he told me. "The Planning Board grants an approval, then the applicant goes to the Architectural Review Board and it wants to make changes to what the Planning Board approved. It is a mess." Many on our Planning Board believe the new law will produce the same bureaucratic nightmares here.

Piermont's proposed law specifies that professionals, including an architect and an historian, serve on the Historic Preservation Commission the law will create. The Commission will have the time-consuming job of deciding what buildings and neighborhoods are historic. It also will write the rules to protect them. Mayor Traynor has doubts about finding qualified people in our small village who are willing to

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Women Working On The Railroad

Somehow the idea of women working on the railroad in the early years just doesn't occur to us. So a journalist writing recently about the Piermont railroad station could say of our legendary station agent Belle Kelly that she "was the first and probably only woman to serve as telegrapher and station master for the Erie." The Erie was a fairly large enterprise, and Belle could have had a good laugh at that idea – possibly sending the story out to sister telegraphers to help brighten their working hours.

Belle Kelly started at the Piermont station in 1908. In the 1860's, well before her time, women with code names like



"Lightning," "134," and "Magnetta" were working the telegraph wire, most frequently from small rural railroad stations. And while they were not always also the station agents, articles from the Erie Railroad Magazine show that by Belle's time at least, lady agents were not unusual.

The magazine published articles specifically about "female agents" employed by the railroad, including one in October, 1915. "Two Young Women Employees of the 'Old Reliable'" profiled Miss Marie Thelma Riley and Miss Mary M. Blake. Miss Riley, described as "an energetic young woman," who held the position of Station Agent at Nutley,

NJ, was "the youngest of her sex to hold such a position on the Erie." Her age was not revealed, but the description of her as "a little bright-eyed girl of the brunette type" who "would hardly be taken for one filling the office of agent at so important a station as Nutley," suggests that she was quite young.

She was intelligent, did a great job and supported her widowed mother. She had earlier worked as an Assistant at the Avondale station and had made such an impression that she was invited to become the Agent at Nutley when the position came up. "Her hours on duty are from 7 a.m. until the same hour p.m. and she thinks that division of time is all right, for she manages to keep busy with the 34 trains going and coming, and making out reports," the article says. Miss Riley was cheerful and philosophical about her work, and was also described as "ambitious." One wonders what happened to her.

Miss Mary Blake, Agent at Prospect Street, Passaic, NJ, on the other hand, was modest and retiring, saying to the reporter that her remarks "would not be of any aid in writing an interesting story." She had only been employed there for a year and three-quarters, coming from Bloomingburg, NY, when she secured the job at Passaic in 1913.

In November of the same year, the stories continued with those of Miss B.F. Noyes and Miss G.E. Merritt. Miss Noyes was Station Agent at Park Street, Montclair, NJ at that time, but "was not a newcomer on the Erie," having been "agent at Park Street since September 13th, 1900, when she was attending school at Englewood, NJ, and, at the same time, learning Telegraphy at Piermont, during leisure hours." She performed all of the Agent's duties at this station, which included selling tickets, checking baggage and assisting the traveling public in many ways during a twelve hour day.

It could not have been Belle Kelly instructing her in telegraphy at Piermont in 1900, since she didn't arrive until 1908. But Florence Ripley Mastin, a Piermont poet, was 14 years old in 1900 and she later wrote a poem about a station agent at Piermont named Rosie Callahan whom she recalled fondly from her youth. Obviously another female agent, perhaps she was the telegraphy instructor in Miss Noyes' time. It was common for telegraphers to learn from a mentor in the craft, rather than through formal schooling.

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And finally, Miss G.E. Merritt had been working at the Williams Avenue, Hackensack, NJ, station for about three years at the time of the article. She started immediately after "the time she left school." This doesn't say "graduated", and we don't know what level of school she attained, but the accompanying photograph is of a smiling and very young woman. She reported that during her tenure there "the receipts have increased materially." At that time, Hackensack was "one of the largest cities on the New Jersey & New York Railroad, with a very large passenger and freight business. As to Williams Avenue, Miss Merritt says she gets a share of the passenger business and commuter business, as well. She says she finds railroad life very interesting."

Belle Kelly was about 20 years old when she took up her position at the Piermont station, and it sounds as if some of these women were even younger when they assumed full responsibility for the operations of

their respective stations. They handled sometimes complex questions, worked long hours, kept the books, and found a way to learn telegraphy. Belle also married and raised a son -- in the upstairs rooms of the station with no indoor plumbing. The family had to carry water in daily and heat it on a coal burning stove for the, probably not daily, bath.

By the end of the first World War, partly because more women entered the work force during the war, the Erie Railroad Magazine reported in the August 1919 issue that "101,785 women were working at railroad occupations at the high point of female employment, October 1, 1918. The Erie accounted for 11 percent of that total, employing 10,274 women in various job categories." Most of the jobs, such as telegraphy, were in the clerical category, but also included were blacksmiths, boilermakers, pipe fitters, electricians, machinists, crew callers, engine wipers, crossing watchwomen and switch tenders.

Railroad employment declined after the war, and eventually the automobile and the telephone made these jobs obsolete. By 1966 the trains here had stopped running altogether. Belle Kelly came back to Piermont in her retirement and lived in the old station until her death in 1976. Imagine the memories that she must have had!

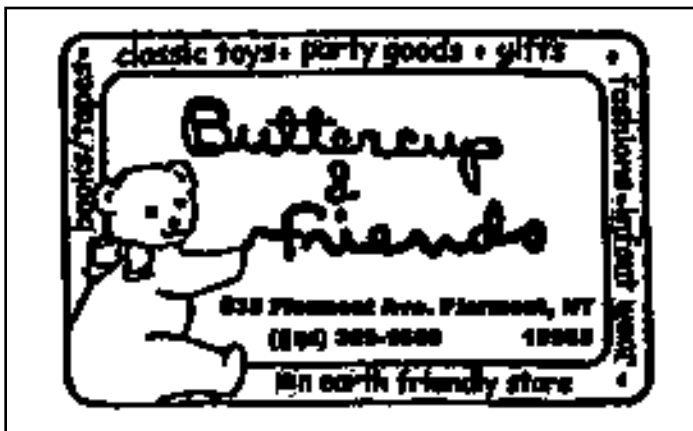
~Grace Mitchell



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From The Library, Music Too

It's been fun this summer watching the new Dennis P. McHugh Piermont Memorial Library take shape. It was good to see it high and dry even during torrential rains and flooding. Now everyone is wondering what the interior will be like. And although there is no firm date for com-



pletion, the library should be ready to open in late fall, so we won't have to wait much longer to find out!

The new building will allow us to do many more things than we have been able to do in the present building for some time. One very special project will begin soon after we open. "Sonic Hudson," an original sound art installation by composer and former Piermonter John Morton, will be installed the new library in January 2007. In this work, Morton will use sounds of life on the Hudson River including maritime sounds, those of river industries, and fragments of recorded oral history in the creation of a unique and contemporary musical piece that will be

played periodically in the Hudson River room during the spring of next year.

This exciting project is made possible through a \$16,000 grant from The New York State Music Fund, which was created when the New York State Attorney General's Office resolved investigations against major record companies engaged in the practice of "payola." The settlement agreement stipulated that funds paid by music businesses would be used to support music education and appreciation for the benefit of New York State residents, and the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors was chosen to develop and manage the grant program which aims to make contemporary and experimental music more available to diverse audiences and communities within New York State.

John Morton was chosen as a recipient in the first cycle of grants. He grew up in Los Angeles, the son of a composer of music for film and television who was surrounded by music most of his life. He attended Cal Arts, and then headed for New York to pursue his career in music. He has been described as a postmodern composer, and achieved distinction in a new use of the music box in his CD "Outlier." Last summer, Morton's sound installation, "The Diaries of Emily Trevor," was featured at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers. As a part of the "Sonic Hudson" project, the composer will also present conversations with the community about his work, describing his process and thoughts about contemporary music. We are delighted to be able to bring a new composition and the discussion of new ideas in music into our new library!

The premier exhibit in our new gallery space will feature the stunning black and white portrait photographs of Piermont residents by Trevor Traynor. Trevor, at twenty-

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something, has been published in magazines such as Rime, Mugshot, Chronogram and Tablist and his work was exhibited in a group show at the L Street Gallery in San Diego in April. There are sure to be more gallery shows in the future. Trevor has been working for some time on his "My Piermont" series, a documentation of his home town in which he says "I'm photographing people who've meant something in my life, from the neighborhood bully to the people I rode the bus with as a kid." Don't miss this opportunity to see a real emerging talent!

To help in the building effort and in the future of the library, there is still time to have your friends and family members honored in our outdoor "Path of Friends." With a gift of \$250. or more, you may have a name or a phrase engraved on a brick for this walkway. If you would like more information on naming opportunities, please contact Sara Tucker at 845.365.2631.

And don't forget the Friends of the Library's famous annual CRABFEST! Come enjoy Hudson River blue claw crabs, hot dogs, corn on the cob, cole slaw, beverages and dessert at the Goswick Pavilion on Saturday, September 30th from 2-6 p.m.; Adults: \$20; Seniors: \$18; Children under 10: \$12. Wine and beer will be available for purchase. This year the feast is accompanied by a fabulous flea market on the ball field, and vendors are invited to apply. For further information, please call Joe at 845.359.7073 or Doreen at 845.365.1700, x236.


In the meantime, the present building is open for business from 1-8 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 1-5 p.m. on Friday. After Labor Day, we will resume weekend hours of 1-5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Things will probably become somewhat interesting as the move approaches, so stay tuned for more information on that. We are located at 153 Hudson Terrace. Please call 845.359.4595 for more information.

~Grace Mitchell

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Onderdonk House Put On Historical Register

The Onderdonk House, a Dutch colonial sandstone Piermont Avenue home built in 1737 by Garret and Abraham Onderdonk that is believed to be second oldest house



in the Village, was placed on the New York State Register of Historic Places on June 28. The placement virtually ensures that a listing on the National Register of Historic Places will follow in mid-September.

The house is located upon the site where General George Washington

and New York Governor George Clinton met Sir Guy Carleton, Commander of the British Army, at the close of the Revolution in May 1783. The group then continued by carriage to the DeWint House in Tappan to discuss the particulars of the British evacuation of New York. The following day, upon Carleton's return to his ship the HMS Perseverance anchored in the Hudson River off Piermont, he ordered his crew to fire a 17-gun salute, the first time America was recognized as a new nation.

In August of last year, the now dilapidated house, which is still privately owned by a direct descendant of the Onderdonks, was condemned as an unsafe structure and is currently uninhabited. Fearing that the house might succumb to the wrecker's ball like other lost Rockland historical treasures like the Salisbury House in Nyack, the Piermont Historical Society has been engaged in ongoing negotiations with the current owners in an attempt to purchase the property for

possible use as a museum. With the State Register listing granted, a not-for-profit owner of the property is eligible to apply for matching state historic preservation grants.

More recently, the Onderdonk House has served as the principal catalyst in the ongoing discussions by the Village Board regarding the Village possibly adopting a local historic preservation law, and/or establishing a historic district. Proponents of such a law note that the protections gained by a property becoming listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places are minimal at best. Registered properties are protected from the effects of federal and/or state agency sponsored, licensed or assisted projects through a notice, review, and consultation process, but achieving a listing places no restrictions on private owners of registered properties. Private property owners are free to sell, alter or dispose of their property as they wish.

~Mark Blomquist

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Fire Department To Benefit From Long Distance Run

Emergency volunteers from Piermont will benefit from the upcoming 18th South Nyack 10-mile run next month.

The annual race, scheduled for Sept. 10, is being sponsored by the village of South Nyack and organized by the Rockland Road Runners. This year, it will benefit the Piermont and Nyack fire departments, and the Nyack Ambulance Corps.

The 10-mile race will begin and end near the Franklin Street Park in Nyack, and go through the villages of South Nyack, Grand View and Piermont, via River Road. From there, the runners will wrap around the Piermont Pier and head back up River Road to the walking trail and linear park in South Nyack that was created from an abandoned railroad line, Rockland Road Runners spokesman Jamie Kempton said yesterday.

For more information, contact www.rocklandroadrunners.org.

Village Weighs Historic District Preservation continued from page 1

it would be better for the Commission to make the decisions because it is not subject to political pressure.

At the hearing the questions for Adams continued. Would the law have prevented her from replacing some wooden siding with new concrete siding? asked Peggy Sennish, who owns an old house in Bogertown. The Historic Preservation law has nothing against new materials as long as they resemble what they are replacing, Adams answered.

Richard Esnard, another village resident, said the law had not been a burden when he had made changes to a building in a New York City historical zone. He'd replaced windows with modern, energy-efficient ones that looked similar to the original. He had no trouble getting the change approved, he told the hearing.

Ed Nelson, the owner of a large Victorian house on Piermont Avenue, worried that the law would bring down property values. He argued that it would discourage potential buyers who wanted to buy a historic house to rip it down to replace it with more modern house. That would limit the number of potential buyers, he said.

Property values have only gone up in every one of the more than 50 New York State communities with historic preservation laws, Adams told him. Rich Ellis, a Nyack real estate broker and Piermont resident, promised that historic preservation laws will enhance real estate values here. Ellis is a member of the Piermont Historical Society which has lobbied for the legislation.

Nelson, still skeptical, wanted the Board to promise to put the proposed legislation on the ballot as a referendum. The Board was noncommittal but observers doubt if that the legislation will ever be put to a public vote. A number of people, including Richie Stark, the owner of an old house on Franklin Street, and Nat Wasserstein, the owner of property on Ferdon Avenue, object to the law because it would add another layer of government. Stark said that he didn't want to have to hire lawyers and experts just to get approval to make some changes in this house. Adams said that wouldn't be necessary.

Bill Herguth, a third-generation Piermonter, asked how the proposed law would affect "indigenous people." Adams looked startled, perhaps wondering if Piermont still had a population of Native Americans, but it soon became clear that Herguth meant residents who have grown up here. Adams assured him that the law would not force anyone to change an existing building.

Public hearings will continue in the Village Hall regarding the proposed law-- a workshop meeting Wednesday, August 23, at 7 p.m., which the public may attend but not participate in, and a public meeting open open to all on Tuesday, September 19, at 8 p.m.



Going, Going – The Effort To Preserve The Unique Character Of Piermont.

Piermont's unique character comes from the combined effect of its architecture, scale, use, density, and citizens. For a village not much more than a mile long, most would agree – character is something that Piermont has lots of.

While the Piermont Village Board grapples with creation of a Historic District Preservation Law, the village may do itself a favor by looking at some of the aspects of our current zoning law and see where tightening it up may achieve at least some of the same goals of preservation of Piermont's character, throughout the village.

This timely interest in preservation was triggered by two particular events in Piermont. The first was boarding-up of the historic Onderdonk house on Piermont Ave., which brought fears of an ultimate knock-down. While its value and uniqueness was recognized this year with a place on New York State's Register of Historic Places, its future is not protected by that distinction. A second loud cry arose with the application by a homeowner on the end of Paradise Avenue to tear down an existing 150-year-old house and replace it with a much larger structure.

Most folks that follow land use issues in the village agree that Piermont's zoning does a pretty good job of regulating the use of property. The commercial areas are clear, and its intensity is limited by among other things, strict parking guidelines.

It is the scale and density of construction that seems to be the tipping points in maintaining village character. Conversations with present and past planning board chairmen point to some specific aspects in our current zoning laws that deserve some real scrutiny. "The philosophy of property ownership has changed over time. 30 years ago the language

of our zoning code was strong enough. That has changed", says former PB chair Vince O'Brien.

People now have a tendency to "max-out" everything about their property. "This has to do with a homeowner's income, availability to engineer solutions for difficult construction sites, and very often the very high purchase price of the property," notes Karl Knocklein, current planning board chairman. You won't find many new homeowners with a 800 thousand dollar house expecting to live in it at its original 1600 square ft. size.

Charlie Berger, a Planning Board chairman in the 1990's reminded the Village Board at a recent meeting that in Piermont's past there were few really big houses. "People started with a small or moderately sized dwelling and gradually expanded them as their families grew." Because growth was organic, there was a stabilizing effect on the overall scale of the village neighborhoods. The dilemma of maintaining the character through neighborhood scale is now compounded when people use the expanded house as a launching point for the next expansion.

So what we do to the current zoning code to protect the existing character of the entire village, not just historic buildings and neighborhoods? Four areas of our zoning and building codes need review, say the experts. These are: how our code describes building height, identification of "grade level" on a site, criteria for demolition permits, and the current zoning rights that accompany existing non-conforming uses.

Building height.

Piermont zoning code identifies height as height of stories built. The height of a story is the measure of

average heights of the roofline. This measurement has little relation to the actual finished height of a building. A number of new homes along north Piermont Avenue that technically met zoning height requirements because their design had extremely low architectural roof features combined with high peaks, equaling out at a height that is conforming, but looms in front of backyard neighbors. As a consequence, the views of existing houses are blocked and neighborhood scale is bumped up. Suggestion? Zoning should describe the maximum finished heights allowed.

Grade Level.

From where are you measuring that height? In Kansas, this is easy – from the sidewalk.

In Piermont, it is not unusual to have a lot that has 10, 20 and more feet of grade height variation across the property. Grade is not clearly defined in our code, so we defer to state guidelines, with the building inspector determining grade, using a number of criteria. These can include grade measured from street level, or grade interpreted by averaging of site heights to determine "at grade" measurement from which to measure construction height. As zoning stands now, if your new construction backs up on a hillside, it may have conforming height if street grade is the measure, but four stories downhill, in back. (In a hillside village like Piermont the back of the property is often the front to downhill neighbors, affecting adjoining streetscapes.) "The outcome you want from measuring grade from existing topography is that a house would be designed to be set into a hillside rather than imposing a large structure on a hillside" says planning board member Rod Johnson. Suggestion? Grade should be measured from existing topography of a property, measured from numerous property locations,

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President's Corner
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serve. If Nyack's experience is any guide, his concern is well founded.

So who is for it? Its main backer is the Piermont Historical Society, the same people who have done such a wonderful job preserving our old train station. It sincerely believes that we need the new law to preserve the Piermont we all treasure. Trustee Vince O'Brien, the Board's most effective advocate, is solidly behind them.

Let them continue to make their case. Then let the people vote this November on what they want.

~Bob Samuels

FROM MY MOUTH TO YOURS

by Chef Phyllis Segura of Cooking on the River

Beets, Beans and Berries

Now that the vegetables and fruits are fresh, eat 'em while you can. Sashay over to the Sunday Farmers Market (lucky us!) and get some beets - wash them well, trim the ends and plopp them into some boiling water until fork tender. Drain and cool by running cold water over them, then peel. The peel slips right off. Slice into rounds. Slice up some onion rings, chopped parsley, add some olives, sugar, oil and vinegar, salt and pepper then whisk together. Pour over the

beets and let them stand a couple of hours, refrigerated.

Fresh cranberry beans are in season. They're the ones with the red and white mottled shells. Pop them out and boil in slightly salted water until soft. Drain, add chopped red onion, parsley, garlic, balsamic vinegar, a good olive oil, salt and pepper, toss well. Eat warm or cold.

Get some mixed berries. You can freeze them for eating in the winter. In fact freeze almost everything, except tomatoes. Blanch briefly in water. Cool in ice water and put into freezer bags. You will be going to the Farmer's Market in your freezer all winter long! Slow cook in the winter.

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Join Us! The Piermont Civic Association is a nonprofit group dedicated to the betterment of Piermont. Thanks to membership dues, numerous fundraising events and countless hours of volunteer work, Piermont has its *Newsletter*, Main Street has its trees, bike rack and flower pots, Kane Park has its gazebo and the Community Playgroup, Empire Hose and PAL have received generous donations, to name a few PCA accomplishments. Please mail this application to: Piermont Civic Association, Box 454, Piermont, NY 10968 I have enclosed: \$_____ 2007 PCA Family Membership (\$25 includes the *Newsletter*)

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## Going, Going—The Effort. . .continued from page 14

and not assigned an averaged height that is then applied to the entire site.

### Demolition:

When its gone, its gone. With so many potential knock-downs in the age of super-size-me, Piermont risks losing its handle on neighborhood character and scale. Demolition is usually accompanied by a re-sculpting of the site prior to construction, often with not enough consideration given to how it will affect the neighbors' drainage and views. Suggestion? For demolition of more than 50 percent of a structure, require a visual and technical inventory of the site, including pre-existing grade documentation, footprint and height, and relation to surrounding structures.

### Reconstruction of Non-Conforming houses:

Probably more than half of the homes in the Piermont have front, side or back yards, and accessory buildings that do not conform to our current zoning. At this time, if a homeowner chooses to tear down a non-conforming house, the right to build on its footprint stays with the property for a year. That decades old footprint often is almost on top of the property line, right-of-way, etc., and affords a window to a much larger structure than would be allowed with new zone compliant construction. By allowing reconstruction of a non-conforming footprint, we may be encouraging teardowns. Suggestion? When an owner demolishes a structure, insist that new construction must be to village standards.

"The first thing I remember about Piermont," says planning board chairman Karl Knocklein, "is the scale and the narrowness of the streets are all of a certain scale, all blend together to give you the feeling of a village.

Everything looks like it has been here for generations. Piermont's character occurs in clumps". And it does. Piermont is a village that is truly the sum of its parts. It is through its many neighborhoods that Piermont maintains its special character, its serendipity, and its overall visual modesty. With ever more imposing facades appearing on our streetscapes, the village should inventory our neighborhoods, try and understand their scale, and update our zoning to protect them.

~Margaret Grace

Writer's note: *Do you think of yourself as living in a particular neighborhood? What streets or borders define it? Does your neighborhood have a name? What are the characteristics that make it distinctive? The newsletter will be looking at our neighborhoods in the next issue.*

## Some Condo Owners Cry Foul At New Tax Valuation

A group of condominium owners unhappy with Village taxes is suing the Village for improper taxation and lack of services. Earlier this year, the Village Board had changed the way the condos on the Pier are taxed, from the basis of estimated value as rental income to the "homestead" method applied to house-owners, based on a property's actual assessed value.

As a result of the change, the Village is obliged to offer trash pickup and street cleaning to the condos, services that are presently paid for by the condo owners. But there's a rub: the condo streets are private and for the Village to provide services, they have to be made public. To shift from private to public access legally requires the assent of all the condo owners without exception, a step that the condos have not been able to take.

The Village says it is open to further negotiations on the issue.

### From the Police

WARNING: Many child car seats are designed or installed improperly. That can be more dangerous to your child than no seat at all, according to police sergeant Mike O'Shea. Detective Brian Holihan has been certified by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to advise on the installation of child car seats and should be consulted on this important matter. he can be reached at 359-1258, ext. 333, for an appointment.

### From the Highway Department

Road resurfacing for 2006 has been completed, according to Highway Superintendent Al Bartley. The total cost was slightly more than \$100,000, of which all but \$15,000 was covered by grants from New York State, aided by Sen. Thomas Morahan. Upcoming projects include sidewalk and curb replacements, drainage improvements and road resurfacing. For detailed information, contact Superintendent Bartley.



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