

The

Orangetown Crier

News from the Orangetown Historical Museum and Archives

FALL 2014

This past August, we became acquainted with Mr. George Way, an enthusiast and collector of Seventeenth Century Dutch collectibles. Mr. Way was gracious enough to invite us to visit him at his home where we were immediately transported back to the land of the progenitors of New Netherlands - and Orangetown. If we agree that objects have the power to convey the spirit of the past, then George Way's life is informed with the richness of the craft and culture of the Dutch. In the following article, reprinted from 'DUTCH, the magazine' he reveals some insights into a small - but important part of his collection; miniatures.

When I was fifteen years old, one might have frequently seen me roaming the art gallery floors at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. I found refuge there studying the old masters that formed the collection of this great institution.

I soon acquired a taste and an eye for period Dutch painting, which I admired above all other art. Famous names such as Rembrandt, Frans Hals and Adriaen van Ostade were always on view for me to study at close range. I never left home without my large magnifying glass, a small flashlight and a jeweler's loupe. Tools that helped me study and magnify each painting, and see what the naked eye could not see.

The Old Masters produced an abundance of interesting subjects. From their palettes came wonderful landscapes, frozen canals, tavern scenes, still lifes, marvelous portraits and numerous other appealing subjects that give us a glimpse into the world and minds of these gifted artists. I soon learned how to recognize the many styles and subjects associated with these Dutch masters.

One time, while visiting the Met, I noticed a glass case exhibiting several miniature portraits. I was fascinated by how the artists, with such skill and minute detail, had managed to capture the likeness of their sitters. These oval-shaped miniatures, some measuring barely more than three inches in height and width, were all painted on small copper sheets. Copper was favored by many artists at one time. I soon learned that portraiture in The Netherlands during the 16th and 17th centuries was highly regarded by wealthy patrons, and the sitters were not only immortalized on large canvases, but were also represented as remembrance tokens on a much smaller scale. These miniature



portraits could easily be carried around by family members, making it easy to always view a loved one.

These small gems originally developed from 15th and 16th century illuminated manuscripts (books adorned with designs or miniature pictures in gold, silver or brilliant colors). Two of the earliest portrait manuscript painters, who became widely known,

were the Frenchman Jean Fouquet (1420 -ca.1480) and the Flemish Simon Bening (1483-1561). Unfortunately most Dutch miniatures are not signed, making it difficult to assign them to a specific artist or to give an accurate date of production. We can usually guess the date of some of these miniatures by the style of the clothing pictured. On rare occasions, dated specimens have been found. Sometimes one might find an inscription on the reverse side, identifying the sitter, place and approximate year of execution.

A miniature portrait painting can be executed in gouache (a method of painting with opaque watercolors mixed with a preparation of gum watercolors and enamel). Portrait miniatures flourished throughout Europe during the 16th century and many, if not most, were painted on stretched vellum, usually of fine parchment made from calf, lamb or kid skin.

When visiting the Oneonta area of Oswego County, New York, with a friend, I came upon an antiques store in Mount Vision that specialized in military antiques. The shop did not look very appealing to me, and I was not too eager to go in until my friend reminded me of one of my favorite sayings: "You never know what you might find". We went in, and within seconds my friend called me over to a large glass case. In it was a small miniature of a man. I asked the proprietor if I could have a look

THE

DePew House PORCH PROJECT

..... ongoing!



Our museum's headquarters at 196 Chief Bill Harris Way in Orangeburg, NY is getting a new 'stoep' (Dutch, '*stoep*'), which in the olden days meant a small porch with seats or benches. The Dutch built stoeps in front of their houses on which they could sit outside in the evening. The custom was pleasant and well adapted to our climate, and soon spread all over the country; and with it the *stoep* became the common name for any open porch with seats in front of a house.

Probably constructed around the time of the Revolutionary War by Isaac DePew, the house is a sandstone and frame homestead that was maintained by the original family until 1881. Dutch style buildings were made of a variety of building materials – stone, shingle, clapboard, brick and iron were often used in one house to form a beautiful composition. The DePew House is built of native sandstone which was quarried on or near its property. After 1881 the house was owned by the Blauvelt and Morrell families and by 1929 the homestead and farm was purchased by the State of New York as staff housing for the RPH. A modern addition was added in the 1930's that serves currently as the museum's formal exhibition space. Two dormers were added to the original section of the house at that time. The house was acquired by the Town of Orangetown and by 2004 the museum began renovation, officially opening on October 13th 2007 with the exhibit, '*Who Was Here*'. The historic Salyer House at 213 Blue Hill Road in Pearl River is the Orangetown Historical Museum & Archives first home and has since 2003 been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Small but Charming continued from page 1

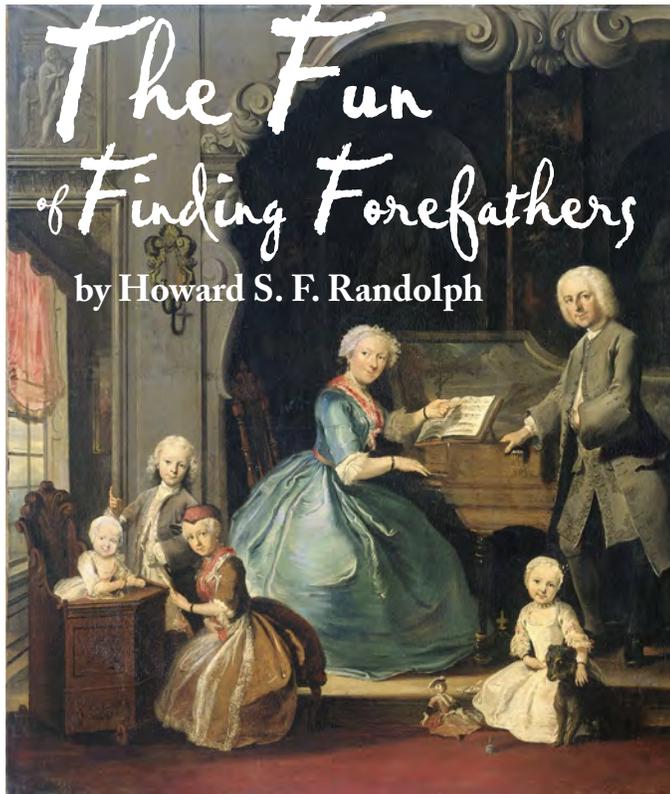
and soon realized that it was Dutch and dated back to the 17th century. The sitter was wearing a flat white, fallen collar typical of the 1650's. Unable to identify him, I decided to call him 'Lord George'. This particular miniature would no doubt have been housed in a period frame possibly made of brass or copper. During the 18th century the use of copper dwindled – oddly enough at a time when the demand for portrait miniatures was on the rise. Many artists made their fame painting portraits of loved ones, and thin sheets of ivory began taking the place of copper and canvas as the chosen material.

Something else to be noted about small portraits painted on copper (as well as other metals), is that at close range one can see

fine cracks known as craquelure. This is the result of aging, mainly in paints, and it can detect forgeries. Since it is difficult to see these small cracks with the naked eye, one needs to use magnification. Although disturbing to some collectors, one must understand that these cracks are the result of the normal aging process and should be left as they are. By magnifying the cracks, one can also detect signs of previous restoration, which, of course, would decrease the value considerably.

Learning about these century-old techniques gives us a better glimpse into the lives of the artists. It is wonderful to appreciate these paintings and to have a better understanding of what happened in the workshops of those early, skilled painters.

Editor's note: In anticipation of our upcoming spring exhibit, 'FROM HOLLAND TO HERE' we reproduce part of an address given by Howard S.F. Randolph, a noted historian and genealogist from New England at the 4th Annual Reunion of the Association of Blauvelt Descendants. Delivered on September 20th, 1930 at the Tappan Dutch Reformed Church, many of the points raised here are still relevant today. In the spirit of bringing the past to the future, we invite the community to take a look back with us as we begin our investigation of the Dutch in Orangetown.



Cornelis Troost, *Family Group near a Harpsichord*, 1739
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation of Mr. Blauvelt to tell the Association of Blauvelt Descendants of some of the fun I've had in trying to find forefathers. Many people seem to regard ancestor hunting as a dry-as-dust pastime, but if approached in the right spirit it yields unsuspected amusement and humor.

To most of us there is nothing as boring as other people's ancestors – unless it be other people's diseases; so today, I am not going to speak of my ancestors, or other people's ancestors, but of your ancestors; your grandmother and grandfather, and their grandmothers and grandfathers.

In the first place, why does a person try to find their ancestors? What possible use is genealogy in this work-a-day world? Of all the silly, impractical, useless and foolish employments, genealogy is regarded by many as the worst. Is it? It is, of course, undeniable that to the modern American typified by the 'go-getter' sort of person, nothing could be more useless. But is it of use to the rest of us? Probably not.. It might help somebody's inferiority complex to know that some of

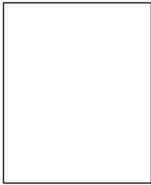
their forebears were worse off than he is; it might – and often has – spurred a person on to greater efforts and achievements not only to uphold the honor of the family name – but also to excel those who have gone before. But the study of genealogy itself is seldom responsible for such results. Why, then, do we attempt it?

Another reason that induces us to study genealogy is for our personal gratification. As soon as a person begins to brag of his ancestors he is on his way to becoming a snob. I am not speaking now of that delightful old aunt of yours, whom Oliver Wendell Holmes called the 'one sad, ungathered rose on my ancestral tree', who might be persuaded, if you showed real interest, to bring out the family Bible, and the family album and other family papers, and tell you stories about the almost forgotten past. Snobs are quite different creatures. They brag about one line of their ancestors, and ignore all the others. They speak of their ancestors social prominence, their great wealth, their crest and coat of arms, their marvelous estates and so on.

The best type of searcher is one whose motive is pure curiosity. He has no preconceived notions regarding the importance of his family. He has no urge to be descended from Charlemagne or William the Conqueror. He knows he was rather fond of his mother and father, and grandparents, and suspects that they in their turn were rather fond of their parents and grandparents; and he wants to know about them. When and where did they live, what did they do, and what were their motives, their controlling interests, their ambitions? Of course, when they leave the field of genealogy proper, they then enter that of bibliography, but the two are so closely related that it is hard to distinguish them. He wants the actual facts. It does not matter if an ancestor was as poor as a church mouse, famous or infamous, deacon or rowdy – he wants the facts. They are part of him, bone of his bone, marrow of his marrow, blood of his blood. He may find in them an excuse for his own shortcomings; he may find in them inspiration to overcome his own difficulties, he may not find anything that will influence his life, but he will know who his forebears were, and what they did and tried to do. This is the searcher who gets the fun. All is grist that comes to his mill. There is but one criterion – is it true? If it is, he accepts it, with thanks and rejoicing.



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☛ The DePew House
196 Chief Bill Harris Way
Orangeburg, New York
Office, Archives by Appointment (845) 398-1302

Closing November 16th

AN ORANGETOWN SCRAPBOOK

Featuring photographs, collectibles and ephemera spanning several centuries, various industries and individuals where 'rich in history' comes to life.

☛ at The Salyer House
213 Blue Hill Road
Pearl River, New York
*A Spy in Our Midst, Our Dutch Sandstone Houses
& At Home in Orangetown*

Permanent Exhibit: Hours by appointment
(845) 398-1302

Dutch Holiday Party' Saturday December 6

THIS FALL AND WINTER:



AN ORANGETOWN SCRAPBOOK at the DePew House

Showcasing how we remember our past, with scrapbooks, photographs and fascinating memorabilia, this exhibit is a collector's delight. Find out why 'what's in your attic' may be more important than you think. Exhibit open through November 16th.



Antiques & Collectibles Sale: Saturday, October 11, 2014, 10 am – 4 pm

The museum will be open free of charge! Enjoy a beautiful Fall day with some fabulous Antiques, Fine Collectibles, Jewelry, Toys, Decorative Arts, Furniture, Fine Arts & Ephemera. Table Rental for Dealers is \$25. At the **DePew House** 196 Chief Bill Harris Way, Orangeburg NY. Please call (845) 398-1302 for further information.



Dutch Holiday Party: Join us at the historic Salyer House, 213 Blue Hill Road, Pearl River, for a Dutch Holiday Party as we celebrate with **Sinterklass** and our friends from the Tappan Dutch Reformed Church on Saturday, December 6th from 1 – 4 pm. Enjoy spice cookies, handmade holiday decorations and local history - right in your own backyard! Admission your donation.



Get the book – ORANGETOWN. Discover 300 years of local history!

Pick it up at the DePew House, price: \$23.83 or let us mail it to you, price: \$25.00 (price includes shipping & handling) Make your check payable to *Friends of the Orangetown Museum* and mail to the museum at 196 Chief Bill Harris Way, Orangeburg NY 10962.

THE ORANGETOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES
Mary Cardenas, MUSEUM DIRECTOR • Elizabeth Skrabonja, MUSEUM CURATOR
The Orangetown Historical Museum & Archives was founded in 1992 to acquire, preserve and exhibit objects which reflect primarily the history of the Town of Orangetown. The Museum's additional, but not lesser mission is to document, research, promote and publicize the town's rich, historical heritage of the town for the people of Orangetown.



Andrew Stewart, SUPERVISOR
Thomas Diviny, Tom Morr, Dennis Troy and Paul Valentine, COUNCILMEN

FRIENDS OF THE ORANGETOWN MUSEUM
Your membership in the Friends of the Orangetown Museum helps to collect and preserve the history of Orangetown. Members will receive notices of programs and events as well as free admission to the Museum's special exhibits and events. The Museum is a 501 (C) (3) organization and all donations are tax deductible.

STUDENT/SENIOR \$10 SINGLE \$15 FAMILY \$20
LIFE MEMBER \$100 CORPORATE \$250