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# Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society

Website www.briarcliffhistory.org

Summer Newsletter 2014

## 2014 Summer Newsletter

Dear Members and Friends -

We're going to try something new. This is the first newsletter that we are sending via email. The plan has several advantages: it will cost less money, can be delivered quicker, will be of higher visual quality and is GREENER. We hope you'll enjoy reading Bill Sharman's recollection of early days in Briarcliff and the pictures we have selected from the BMSHS archives to illustrate it. Have a great summer and drop by if you're in the neighborhood.

Karen and Jan , Po-Bresidents

## **Eileen O'Connor Weber Scholarship Recipient**



Heather Schneck EOCW Scholarship Recipient & Jan Wagner

Heather Schneck, Briarcliff High School graduate, is the recipient of the Eileen O'Connor Weber Scholarship for 2014. She plans to pursue her interest in biomedical engineering at Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio. "I discovered my passion for engineering [with the help of] a very special teacher, Mr. Michael Diamente," in her freshman year.

Jan Wagner, BMSHS Co-President, presented a BMSHS check to her from the Scholarship Fund, at the Senior Awards Night, May 19, 2014.

#### **Recent Gifts to BMSHS**

#### **Eileen O'Connor Weber Bequest**



We have just received wonderful news from the attorney handling Eileen's estate that she made two bequests the to **BMSHS** in her will. She has given \$10,000 to the Scholarship Fund. Briarcliff High School seniors are invited to apply for this scholarship each year.

In addition she has bequeathed \$2,000 for our general

operating expenses. At our last board meeting we agreed to hold this aside in an Acquisition Fund for Special Purchases.

#### Robert F. Whitson Gift

In May Tom Vincent, Trustee, received a phone call from Mr. Robert Whitson of Louisville, Kentucky – formerly of Briarcliff Manor – to tell Tom that he wanted to give BMSHS a \$2,000 check for "special events and historical purchases." Mr. Whitson is a descendent of the old Whitson family. "Whitson's Corners" was the name of this area before W. W. Law renamed it Briarcliff Manor. He remembers his "Ol' Whitson's Corner Home" fondly and we are delighted to receive his gift and add it to Eileen's. Thank you so very much, Mr. & Mrs. Whitson.

## "Then & Now" High School Intern Projects



Michael Feist and Myles Ellis — Authors of "Then & Now"

This spring the Historical Society sponsored the internship projects of three high school seniors, Michael Feist, Myles Ellis and Ali Arminio, by sharing our photograph archives with them. Myles and Michael created a "Then and Now" book of photographs and text. It is beautiful and it will be possible to order. We will have three copies shortly.

Ali created a short film about Briarcliff Manor entitled "The Story of Us" as her senior internship project. It is as charming and moving as it can be and you can find it on the Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society website www.briarcliffhistory.org . Please check it out. It is on the front page.

#### HELP WANTED

Volunteer to help maintain our photo archives
No experience necessary!

We collect historic and contemporary photos of Briarcliff Manor. We document their contents, determine keywords for their retrieval and archive them for posterity.

This is how we make our collection available to inquiries, both from within our community and beyond.

Can you volunteer some time to help with this project?

Do You Have Any Pictures for Our Collection?

## Collection Acquisitions Received Recently

• Mr. Charles Van de Visse of Denver, Colorado, sent us his grandfather's 1914 yearbook of The Holbrook School: *The Holbrook Lion*. His grandfather, Martin Van de Visse ("Dutch" or "Vannie"), was born in 1890 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It is leather-bound and a real treasure. We also received an aerial photo of the Holbrook School, founded 1866, which is about 12" x 36". It is now framed. Please come and see it. You can see "forever."



Aerial picture of Holbrook School — Photo BMSHS Collection

• Mr. Arthur T. Thompson of Newton, Massachusetts gave us two copies of the personal hymnal of Walter W. Law. "These hymns have been selected for family use with an Aeolian\* Organ in our own home. WWL" is written on the introductory page. Mr. Thompson surmises that there "was a connection between Mr. Law and his godmother, Miss Ida Z. Thompson, who nursed Mr. Law."

\*The Aeolian Company was a manufacturer of player organs and pianos. According to Wikipedia, these organs were made "to provide entertainment in the mansions of millionaires." They had an extremely high mark-up "freeing them from the tight competition of church organ building with its *narrow* profit margins."

• Mr. Fred Becker of New Canaan, Connecticut, came for a visit Friday, June 6. Fred's great grandfather was Christleib Emil Becker, who emigrated from Germany with his wife, resided at "Altheim," (Old Home in German) at 450 Scarborough Road starting in 1854. Fred's grandfather (one of the twelve children of C. E. Becker) grew up, married in 1913 and lived on Long Island as did Fred's father and Fred. But the family visited the Scarborough residence about twice a year. Fred has clear memories of visits here. We drove to his "Altheim" and were generously shown about the property by a caretaker.



There were orchards on 71 acres across Scarborough to play in and many outbuildings to hide in. Fred gave BMSHS two books full of photographs of his

family, which picture their activities locally as well as on foreign trips. Several photos show an outing in 1908 to see the building of the Croton Dam. We are very grateful and honored to receive this bounty as part of the history of Briarcliff Manor.

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William A. Sharman, Born 1926

#### "Old Time Briarcliff"

#### Bill Sharman

Remarks given December 13th, 2013 to Briarcliff Rotary Club members at The Briars Restaurant, North State Road

When Sy [Yuter] asked me to speak to your group about old time Briarcliff, I decided that the way to approach the topic would be to mix some important dates and

events with some of my recollections of growing up here in the 1930's and 40's – so here goes!

In 1890, "The Law" came to Whitson's Corners. Walter William Law, a retired carpet maker, bought the 236 acre Stillman Farm between Pleasantville and Briarcliff Roads for \$35,000 and moved his family north from Yonkers. Whitson's Corners, as our town was first called, was named for the Whitson family. Three Whitson homes still stand: one on Pleasantville Road opposite Ash Road, and two on Washburn Road. A fourth, named "The Crossways," was at the corner of Pleasantville and South State Roads where the Congregational Church Parish House now stands. It later housed a tearoom and the post office



The Crossways Tea House, Pleasantville and South State Roads.

Originally the Joseph Whitson house. The Crossways, among other things, was the site of the village fairs held in September 1943 and 1944.

Mr. Law continued buying neighboring farms and by 1901 had acquired over 5,000 acres. His dairy cows provided milk which was shipped by rail daily to New York City. Butter from his farms won a gold medal at the 1901 Paris Exposition. The "Briarcliff Rose" from his greenhouses was famous across the country; unfortunately its variety is now lost. Mr. Law built houses for many of his workers. Some still stand on Dalmeny and Old Briarcliff Roads and Route 9A. In 1902 he decided to have Briarcliff incorporated. And when 25 of the 100 residents voted favorably, he now owned a village.

Moving ahead to 1930, my mother, father and I arrived in town to stay with friends until we "got back on our feet," my father having lost his job when the banks closed during the



1927 Briarcliff Pool and Pond with Public School in left background behind the fountain and two trees.

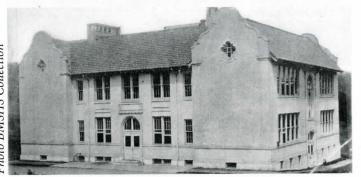
Great Depression. The Village population at that time was about 1,400. It is over 8,600 today. We stayed with friends for a year or so, rented an apartment in a four-family dwelling near the Pocantico River off Pleasantville Road, and finally bought a house, which stood where the current post office is.

In 1901 there were five ways to reach Briarcliff from New York City – four by road and one by rail: Albany Post Road (now Route 9), South State Road (still the same), the Briarcliff-Peekskill Parkway (now Route 9A), the Bronx River Parkway Extension (now the Taconic State Parkway) and the Putnam Division of the New York Central Railroad. The trip from Grand Central Terminal took about an hour. The tracks ran through town on what is now the North County Trailway Bike Trail. The passengers had to change at Highbridge in the Bronx to get a Hudson Division train into Grand Central. Steam locomotives were not allowed in the tunnel under Park Avenue.

The original station was moved to Millwood when Mr. Law built a fancy new station in 1906, which is now the original part of the expanded public library. Passenger service ended in 1958 when more people commuted by car and fewer by rail. Freight service stopped in 1962. As kids we used to peer down the locomotive smokestacks as the trains passed under the Pleasantville Road bridge getting a face-full of smoke. And you thought cigarette smoke was hazardous to your health! There were far fewer automobiles in those days and the only traffic jams occurred on Sunday nights when city-bound traffic was backed up on the Taconic from the Hawthorne Circle to Briarcliff.

Two notable sightings on the Parkway: One was in 1939 when the King and Queen of England were driving up to visit President Roosevelt at Hyde Park. They were supposed to stop to be greeted by some of their loyal subjects from the Victoria Home in Ossining. The motorcade barely slowed down leaving the disappointed Brits and the Boy Scout Troop very disappointed. In 1959 another famous person was spotted heading north -- Nikita Khrushchev -- who didn't wave. In the 1940's, Briarcliff was a notorious

speed trap. Our cops gave out more than their share of speeding tickets. On one occasion, Chief Johnson and Lieutenant Addis were chasing a car up 9A when they were passed by an even faster car. When they pulled this driver over to everyone's embarrassment, it turned out to be our Mayor, Fritz Kossow. I don't know if they gave him a ticket or not. A quick trivia question: Where was the first traffic light in the Village? (At the exit from Sleepy Hollow Country Club.) And another trick question: How many streets are there in our Village? (Only one – Stafford Street and the rest are "roads," "lanes," etc. as per W. W. Law!)



Public School, 1025 Pleasantville Road (where the Atria is today)

My earliest memories are of my school days. I spent all of my school years from kindergarten through high school in one building located where the Atria now stands. When an early school became too small for the 108 students, a new building was constructed. By 1923 the student body numbered 273 and an addition was built. The front building housed K through 6th grade and the rear building, 7th through 12th – and also the auditorium, gym, cafeteria and offices. In 1952 Todd School was built and in 1971 the new high school opened.

Some grade school memories: my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Duncomb, taught long enough to have had both of my daughters in her class. My stage debut was in first grade when I sang, "I'm a Jack-in-the-Box" and popped out of said box in a show we put on for some of the older classes. In fourth grade, my parents arranged for me to take violin lessons. (I would rather have played trumpet.) I played through high school — even played "Pomp and Circumstance" in the orchestra for my graduation. Sixth grade brought my first dancing class. We boys had to dance with girls, which I only appreciated later.

In high school, along with the usual English, history, math, languages, science, etc., there were many extracurricular activities available. Sports for the boys only included football, basketball and baseball; and for the girls, field hockey, basketball and softball. Bill Bowers was the only coach for the boys' teams from 1928 until the 1970's. (He did have assistants in his later years.) He let anyone join a team and have some playing time so that even those of us with limited ability got to come off the bench and into the game. At 123 pounds I was a little light for football when players played both sides of the ball but I did make two tackles in one game when the outcome of the score was no longer in doubt.



8th Grade Football ca 1938

Back Row: Birge Kinne, Warren Byrne, Charlie Ogg, Bevan Jones, Jackie Collins, Martin Fitzgerald, **Bill Sharman**, Jim Todd, Peter Heller. Front Row: John Booth, Tom Cunningham, Joe McHenry, Bud Bowman, Sayward Allen, Austin Brown, Jim Stafford. View is eastward toward the "Putnam Freight Building"

Stage productions were far less ambitious than the Broadway musicals staged in today's high school. The play, "Our Town," was one memorable show. The leads were married after high school and raised their family here. The high school newspaper "The BHS Bulletin" was "published" weekly. It was run by students with a faculty advisor. It reported on sports events, activities, events, "Here's Moron" was the name of a column of humor? by yours truly with jokes from all over (and some original). The papers were typed on stencils (remember typewriters?!) and printed on a mimeograph machine.

When school was over for the summer we left home in the morning and made our own activities. Much time was spent at the pool. The Briarcliff pool was the first municipal pool in Westchester (courtesy of Mr. Law) built in 1926. We all learned to swim there. The tennis courts were in their present location. There were pick-up neighborhood baseball games and basketball and football on the high school field (still there). On most Sundays a baseball game between local men and teams of neighboring towns was played on this field. We watched from the park on the hill above the field. The kids chased the foul balls and received ten cents for each one they returned. In the evenings after supper there were games of kick-the-can, redlight, hideand-seek until dark. There was an abandoned quarry off Carlton Avenue with a dilapidated building where we played at times. For a couple of years there was a donkey baseball game on a farm where Hemlock and Spruce Roads are today. It was fun to see the local guys try to control the donkeys.

A soap-box derby was run down Todd Lane. One year the wheels of my little red wagon went missing and turned up on a car built by one of the older boys in the neighborhood. My father made sure they were returned.

The sale of fireworks was not permitted in Briarcliff so I got on my bike, rode to Millwood and bought some at a roadside stand. The police informed me that throwing cherry bombs against the wall of the post office or blowing up tin cans on Horsechestnut Road was frowned on. One

object. The numbering became necessary as the village had grown and was to identify location in case of fire and ease of mail delivery.



Municipal Building/Fire House ca 1913

The Briarcliff Manor Fire Department was organized in 1901, a year before the Village was incorporated. It began with horse-drawn wagons and now has some very fine equipment. It has always been totally volunteer. Even the chiefs are unpaid. Our trucks have always been white. Mr. Law believed that white was more visible at night than the standard red. The department is comprised of the Fire Company, the Hook & Ladder & Rescue, the Scarborough Company and the Ambulance Corps. Many communities have a separate corps – not so Briarcliff. In 1943 during World War II when most able-bodied young men were away in the military service, the Village Board decided to lower the age for membership to 16 (with parental consent). In February of that year, eight Briarcliff High School students, including yours truly, were sworn in to the Department and given on-the-job training, unlike the many courses required today. I am still a proud member after 70 years. My first fire was a porch roof at a house on Maple and Valentine Roads. I was sent up a ladder to see if I could spot more flames. With no breathing apparatus, I saw only smoke and the fire was contained.

My first large fire was on the second floor of a house on Old Briarcliff Road. The way the firemen covered furniture on the first floor and moved a lot outside impressed me with the care the firemen showed for their neighbor's property.

Mr. Law built the famous Briarcliff Lodge on the highest point of his estate. It became the summer residence of wealthy New York City dwellers. It later became the Edgewood Park School for Girls and then the King's College. It burned to the ground September 30, 2003 and is now being built as The Club, a continuing care retirement community.

Two of my memories of the Lodge are a birthday party given by Henry Law's son for all the children in the Village. Some Party! Henry Law, Walter's son, was Mayor of the Village from 1918 to 1936. In 1977 the servicemen were asked to speak about the U.S.O. at the Edgewood Park

School in order to raise money for that organization. I was one of the two and all I can remember was the low whistle and catcalls from the refined young ladies as we walked up to the podium. Some reception!



Thalle Industries (fka Thalle Construction) 51 Route 100

The Briarcliff Library has moved to many locations – from the Briarcliff Realty Company building to the Thalle Building on Old Route 100, to the high school and the converted railroad station, where it is now located in its recently enlarged quarters. Many roads were unpaved when I first moved here: Jackson Road and Washburn Road east of the Parkway, for example. I rode my bike to Camp Edith Macy one summer on the dirt roads to my job as the salad boy at the camp. Other local jobs I had were mowing lawns, cleaning houses. At one house I split wood in the cellar for the fireplace as the owner was giving singing lessons. Sounded like someone was beating his wife.



Great Hall Edith Macy Training Center for Girl Scout Leaders "Singing Steps"

The aforementioned Thalle building was once the site of a riding stable where I first learned to ride. During my high school years there being little to do in the evening, we went to the movies at the Rome Theatre in Pleasantville (now the Burns Center), or to the Victoria and Strand theatres on Church Street in Ossining. Since very few students had cars then, we took the bus or walked. I was dating a girl in Ossining and walked or rode my bike to her house. We walked down and back to the movies and back to Briarcliff. She found a guy with a car, dumped me and later married him.

My friend and I took the bus to White Plains on many Friday and Saturday nights to go roller skating at the rink there. It was a good place to meet girls.

A lot more places in the Village fill my memories – the churches, the schools and colleges and many friends. It was a great place for kids to grow up in and still is.

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year my father was shooting sky rockets when a hot spark landed on my head. His quick hands prevented all but a little scorching.



Toboggan Sledding on Central Drive

In the winter there was ice skating and hockey on the pond in Law Park (it was much larger then) and on Gooseneck Pond at the corner of Birch and Pine Roads on the Briar Hills Golf course. We went sledding wherever there was a good hill. One took us from the top of the hill on Valentine Road, across the road, behind the houses on Simpson Road, across Larch Road and into the field next to the Taconic. No one ever got hit by a car there. But some years later we had a sleighing fatality in the village.

There was also skiing in the Village. The best run down the hill from the Briarcliff Lodge to Dalmeny Road. There was even a small jump built there.

We traveled everywhere on foot or by bike. There was so much open land that places to play were everywhere.

Tuttle Road had only two houses – one at each end. On the west side was Titlar's Farm, with large hay stacks near the road. They were great to climb in, relax and slide down until Mr. Titlar objected. There were apple orchards and grape arbors for a quick snack and a well with pump on Long Hill Road for an ice cold drink.

The Boy Scouts and Girl Scout troops were active. The boy's troop predated 1919 and the girl's organized in 1929. Weekly meetings, hikes, early morning bird watching and overnight campouts kept us busy. Horseshoe pitching was also a popular sport. I had a court in the empty field beside our house and we played next to the railroad tracks on South State Road behind a friend's house. When our horse shoes bounced on rocks we threw the rocks across the tracks. One day a train was coming and I tried to throw one over the train and it was short hitting the train. I finally convinced the police who came to investigate that it was my weak arm not my intent to hit the train that caused the cracked window.

Some early businesses included the Briarcliff Laundry on Woodside Avenue. Its fleet of trucks picked up the dirty laundry and delivered the clean throughout Westchester, Connecticut and New York City. Whitson's Garage, built by two of the brothers, became Creighton's and, most recently, Birritella's. Davies Drug Store was at the end



Town ca 1940

of the stores on Pleasantville Road. It became Kennard's - then Cadman's and Jules. The Christopher Brothers Deli became Weldon's. The Manor Valet has been in the same location for many years. One of my first jobs was to drive their delivery truck and to remove fancy buttons and sew them back when the clothes were cleaned. Weldon's Stationary Store was Wittenberg's. Mrs. Black's Variety Store became the Briar Rose and now it is Wondrous Schuman's Pyrofax Gas and Kitchen Ranges and Oil Burners was next to the municipal building with a driveway between and with open lots on the other side. Another of my summer jobs was to deliver bottled gas throughout Westchester and nearby Connecticut and I got quite familiar with the country roads. At one time there were both an A & P and a Gristede's in the row of stores. On the west side of Pleasantville Road were two gas stations and the rest was open space. The Fire Department held an annual bazaar for many years there.



This building served many purposes, Office of Briarcliff Farm, Briarcliff Assn., Briarcliff Realty Co. & Operating Engineers Hdqtrs, at Pleasantville Road & Central Drive.

The Village offices were originally located in the Briarcliff Realty Office Building (now the Operating Engineers next to St. Theresa's). In 1913 a new municipal building was built where the Patio Restaurant is now. The fire department occupied the first and third floors and the Village office, building department and police department occupied the second. In 1964 the present municipal building at 1111 Pleasantville Road was built.

Prior to 1952 there were no street numbers in the Village. Village Engineer Max Vogel (and later the first Village Manager) and I drove around and gave address numbers -- one number for each 25 feet of frontage. He would not assign the number 13 unless the owner at that time didn't

Photo BMSHS Collection

**Current 2014 BMSHS Memberships** 

If your name is on this list, you're a current member. If your name isn't on this list, please renew your membership. We need your support. If you need a membership envelope, please call or email us.

Aisenbrey, Stuart & Bev Hager, Bobby & Terry Pitman Haimowitz, Raphaelle Alenstein, Mary Hales, Thomas & Alice Altman, Cynthia Amicucci, Phyllis Halper, Stuart & Stacy Hegarty, Michael & Anita Austin, Sandra Herbek, Richard Basset, Michael & Linda Bauer, Wilhelma Hershberger, James Hiller, Sidney & Lana Beebe, Tyler & Brooke Behling, George & Elaine Horkans, Wilma Jean Hugue, Germaine Beicke, Robert & Joan Bergman, Ruth Isaac, Helene Jusko, Edward & Delores Bernstein, Barbara Kail, Ken & Ivy Hwang Blockley, Kaye Kane, David & Siegrun Boe, Carl & Mimi Kostman, Stan & Barbara Cochran Ross, Shirley Bogart, Christopher & Eliz. O'Connell Braun, Norman & Janet Kwiat, Lawrence LaBruzzo, Carmelo & Joann Ruffner, Nancy Brenneman, Florence Buerger, Theodore & Helen Lebenson, Eric Caramanica, John & Lisa Czachor Leihbacher, Thomas & Rachel Leitzes, Martin & Pauline Satlin, Doris Carpentier, Marie Carr, John & Patricia Lewis, Barbara Anna Limongelli, William Cartenuto, David & Christina Little, Bob& Mary-SaveScarborough Carter, Phoebe Malech, Kenneth & Betty Caspar, David & Jelane Maloney, Michael & Cynthia Chapman, Katharine Chervokas, Roseanna Manganello, Louise Manuele, John & Lisa Sharman, Bill Citron, Gerald & Millicent Mayas, Albert & Francine Code, Howard & Susan McGarrity, Thomas & Meg Cohen, Steven Smith, Karen McGinnis, Eva Marie Comiskey, Thomas Corfield, Peter & Gillian McGinty, Gregory & Joan Springer, Todd Crowley, John & Caroline McGrath, Jr., Thomas & Barbara McGuire, Carol Strauss, Lore Cryan, John Curran, John & Connie McVeigh, Brian & Heather Taub, Sue Daly, Trudy Mendelsohn, Jim Teitelbaum, Michael Davis, Stephan Messer, Eric & Hillary Davis, Tom & Kathy Mezzatesta, Diane Tobin, Beverly Michel, Peter DeRose Cesare & Beatrice DiMase, Frances Mickel, John & Carol Dumitrescu, Dumitru & Otilia-Liana Midgley, Edward & Margaret Eschweiler, Peter & Micki Mirsky, Sandra Feher, David & Gwen Molinelli, Michael & Regina Fetonti, Robert Molino, Daniel & Josie Fludgate, Simon & Susan Morrison, George & Mirla Franco, Anthony & Edith Myers, Louisa Walsh, John Myers, Tom & Shannan Freeman, Ellen Warnier, Daniel Naclerio, Richard Garrison, Bruce & Didi Gartner, Gary & Deirdre Neubauer, George Nolan, Ed & Elaine Gioscia, Michael & Clorissa Obermeyer, Werner & Izel Glassman, Jay & Jean Goldstein, Stanley Olson, Maxine Paddock, JoAn Graham, Audrey Zegarelli, Philip & Barbara Grant, Alan & Michelle Parker, Caroline

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Siebert, Robert & Norvell Smalley, Stephen Stoianoff, Carroll Stroobants, Henry

Towbin, Carl & Twilia Varvaro, Steve & Mattie Vastola, Eugene, Alex & Anna Vescio, William & Sara

Vincent, Tom & Barbara Wachtel, Louis Wagner, Chip & Jan

Wasiczko, Dennis & Bernadine Wayne-Paulmeno, Larisa Whitson, Robert & Yvonne Williams, Morton & Grazia Wilson, Mark & Denise Rempe Wolf, Morton & Penny

Zirman, Bryan & Rori Pastore, Jr., Joseph & Pattie

Graves, Bruce



#### Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough Historical Society

P.O. Box 11, Briarcliff Manor, New York 10510

#### Officers

Karen Smith - Co-President Jan Wagner - Co-President Vice President - Open Secretary - Open Treasurer - Open

#### Trustees

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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

Mark Your Calendars!

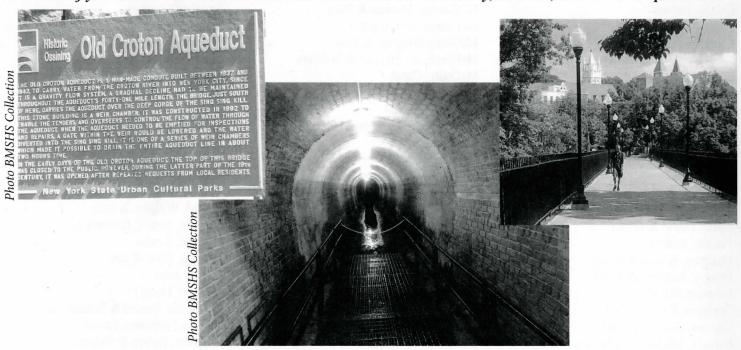
Date to be Announced — "Historical Stained Glass Windows" Tour and Talk

Possibly — Tour of Lyndhurst with the Director, and Jazz Concert &

Picnic on the Lawn

Sunday, October 5, 2014 — Third Annual Fall Harvest Dinner, Sleepy Hollow Country Club

And if you missed the Walk and Talk with Carl Oechsner on Sunday, June 22, here are some pictures.



Pictures of the Aqueduct Weir Chamber and the beautiful walk and bike-way over the Double Arches in Ossining.

Look for BMSHS information in your emails, on the Village Community Events Banner, our newsletters, *The Gazette*, the bulletin board outside the EOCW Historical Center, like us on Facebook, our website <a href="www.briarcliffhistory.org">www.briarcliffhistory.org</a> and the Briarcliff Library announcements bulletin board. And we welcome your phone calls to us at 941-4393 and email at Mail@briarcliffhistory.org