

V. EVERIT MACY, A Man for All Good Reasons

By Walter Schwartz

Introduction

More than 80 years after his death, the impact of V. Everit Macy's great work remains firmly fastened and widely spread throughout Westchester County, although few alive can recall his name or the reasons for his fame. Over a span of more than a decade, he overhauled and revolutionized the county's treatment and physical facilities for its abandoned children as well as its poor, sick, aged and needy, removing the old almshouse from patronage and politics, from unsanitary and antiquated ways. He did much the same to the old jail and the county's corrections system.

Later, he oversaw the development or completion of some of the most scenic and widely emulated parkways in the entire country, the Bronx River, Hutchinson River, Saw Mill and Taconic. Many of his efforts are forever embedded upon the lovely parklands alongside these roadways. From Glen Island Park in New Rochelle across to Yonkers' Tibbett's Brook Park, stretching north to Blue Mountain Reservation in Peekskill, and in between at Playland and the County Center, he reinforced those good deeds with beautiful parks, recreation and entertainment facilities.

The magnificent mansion he built in Briarcliff Manor shortly before the turn of the 20th century still stands atop a steep mountain majestically overlooking the Hudson River not far from the property he donated for the Girl Scout camp which occupies that site and bears his beloved wife's name. Nearby, streets and neighborhood give recognition to him or to his ancestral home, Chilmark. For the past 80 years, a sign at the Ardsley entrance to a 172-acre county park and woodland has revealed his name: V. E. Macy. Yet, hardly any longtime local resident knows how or why this came to pass.

For sixteen years until his untimely death on March 21, 1930, while at the height of his accomplishments, Macy served Westchester County government and its residents, first as Superintendent of the Poor, then as Commissioner of Charities and Corrections, and later as President of the County Park Commission, leaving his office for two years only because the President of the United States called upon him during World War I to head a major labor department during a period of threatened strikes in a critical wartime industry.

Upon his death, an editorial in The New York Times summed up his exemplary life and legacy:

“Mr. Macy was no knight on some fantastic crusade. All manner of civic causes won his allegiance and support, but the problems he liked best to tackle were those with which he came in contact on his own doorstep. That others more vaulting in their ambitions for reform had overlooked them served but as a spur to his energies. They were devoted primarily to the betterment of Westchester, with whose extraordinary metamorphosis his name will ever be linked.

“Having spent ten years of his life cleaning up the county’s back yard—its poorhouse and prison and welfare institutions generally—he brought his broom into the front yard and swept it clean, helping to give the county the beautiful parks and parkways that have benefited its residents and made it famous far beyond its boundaries. He will be missed, sadly missed, from the life of that community, for he was one of those “rich men furnished with ability, living peacefully in their habitations,” of whom it is recorded that they “were honored in their generations and were a glory in their days.”¹

It is generations removed from the time when these and other equally laudatory words were written about V. Everit Macy. The most impressive tributes now can be found only inside dusty scrapbooks on archive shelves or inscribed on a tablet mounted to a boulder deep inside the woods where only experienced hikers are likely to trek.

There are many places where we could begin to tell the story of such a multifaceted and dedicated public servant as V. Everit Macy. To tell his whole story would warrant a book of many chapters. We could

begin on March 23, 1871, the date of his birth in New York City. We could start with the development of Quakerism in this country in the 17th century or with Teddy Roosevelt and the National Progressive movement of the early 20th century. Surely, both events had a major impact upon the generous and wondrous life he lived and the lasting legacy he left. By reading on, you will learn that the early whaling industry of Nantucket and the Standard Oil Company also played essential roles in the development of this visionary man. Yet, the major influence in the life of V. Everit Macy was undoubtedly that of the woman he married, Edith Carpenter Macy.

The Macys, Nantucket and Oil

V. Everit Macy descended from a long line of Macy ancestors.² The first to sail to America was Thomas Macy and his wife, Sarah, who arrived in 1635 from a place in Yorkshire, England, called Chilmark, to the colony of the Massachusetts Bay Company during the mass Pilgrim migration. Thomas was one of nine original purchasers of an island, soon to be named Nantucket ("faraway land" in Wampanoag). In 1711, his grandson, John Macy, became the first of the family to join the Religious Society of Friends, which by the next century became the island's major denomination and extremely influential in its business and governmental affairs. The Quakers were known for their simplicity, honesty, kindness and humanitarian activities, attributes that they passed along to future generations.

Jonathan Macy of the fifth generation successfully took to the sea, engaging in commercial shipping, whaling ships and the manufacturer of products from whales, such as oil for lamps, lubrication and candle making. His son, Captain Josiah Macy owned and operated 32 whaleboats off Nantucket, the world's greatest whaling port through the 1830's when the industry began its decline as the result of the discovery of kerosene, a less costly fuel, as well as electricity and the eventual scarcity of whales. After the decline, Captain Macy transferred into banking and other mercantile interests in New York and retired in 1853, purchasing a farm in Rye, Westchester County, where he died at age 88, one year after the birth of his great grandson.

Captain Josiah's eldest son, William Henry Macy, became president of the Seamen's Bank for Savings, Vice President of US Trust Company and a director of the Union Pacific Railroad Company. He had a reputation for integrity and ability and was appointed fiduciary of many large trusts and estates. One of William's sons was Josiah Macy, Jr., who was born in 1838. He became president of an oil refinery company, which owned two refineries in New Bedford, MA and three in greater New York City, including Hunter's Point. In 1872, the company joined John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company and the Macy investment in oil refineries turned into black gold, making millionaires of the family. This also began a close friendship between the Rockefellers and Macys, which carried on well into the next generation with mutual respect and admiration.

Josiah, Jr., died in 1876 at age 38 of typhoid fever that he contracted while the family was attending the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. He left a young widow, Caroline Everett Macy, two daughters, Mary and Kate, and a five-year old son, Valentine Everit Macy, whose first and middle names had been family surnames. He always chose to be known as Everit, and in later years signed his name, "V. Everit Macy". John D. Rockefeller and William Rockefeller offered to assume the educational upbringing of Everit, however Caroline declined the offer. She was a loving mother and a decisive and remarkable woman who was also left with a vast fortune. In 1887, when Everit was 16, she purchased ~~200~~¹⁰⁵ acres in Tarrytown, south of where the Tappan Zee Bridge now meets Westchester County, for \$200,000.00.³

It is unlikely that Everit ever met Rowland Hussey Macy, his sixth cousin twice removed. Both V.E. and R.H. descended from common ancestors, Thomas and John, born two centuries earlier.⁴ The cousins took different directions to their fortunes and to their fame. R.H., born on Nantucket Island in 1822, died in 1877, less than twenty years after he opened a small dry goods store on Sixth Avenue and 14th Street in Manhattan. R.H. would forever be famous as a businessman. V.E., although he attained greater wealth in his day, would come to be known as a humanitarian.

The Progressives and the Poor House

To retell the story of V. Everit Macy and his everlasting contribution to Westchester County, perhaps we should begin with an unexpected telephone call in the summer of 1913 when Macy was a 42-year old multimillionaire businessman and philanthropist, serving on the boards of more than 23 organizations ranging from banking to education to the control of milk contamination in New York City.⁵ To Macy's surprise, the caller cajoled him to run for the position of head of the county almshouse, Westchester's poorhouse for the pitifully elderly, mentally deficient, vagrant, sick, insane and destitute of all ages, located in miserable conditions at East View.

But why would a man of his means be interested in the almshouse and its politics? It was, quite simply, because he was the man who he was. He stood out and apart because he did what he did because it was the right thing to do. His unique nature and character is the key to understanding the great life of V. Everit Macy.

It was a time when there was a rising progressive spirit in the nation, fostered in large part by Teddy Roosevelt's campaign to regain the presidency the previous autumn, and now the movement had reached out into the states and municipalities. This new political activity attracted intelligent and highly motivated socially and politically minded individuals who recognized that the industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century had created poverty, over crowdedness, poor and unhealthy living conditions, unsafe working conditions, pollution, defoliation of our natural resources and abuse of political power.⁶

Macy fit well into the category of socially conscious enlightened individuals. He was not aligned with any political party, although a Democrat by heritage. By virtue of his intelligence, business acumen and experience, independent financial resources, Quaker upbringing, strong family traditions, humanitarian principles, practical nature, and, above all, his rectitude, Macy possessed the attributes necessary to commit himself to such a formidable task as heading the poor house.

From his early adult life, he had been actively engaged in many humanitarian causes for the betterment of society. His sensitivity to

political reform had taken him into the City Club of New York and the Citizens Union as well as two terms as a Village Trustee in his home village of Briarcliff Manor.⁷ His concern for social reform had taken him into the first settlement house movement, child labor movement, educational innovations at Teachers College, summer camps for youth, boys clubs, the fight against contaminated milk, and a dozen other welfare causes and organizations, not only in New York City, but also in impoverished rural districts of Georgia and Alabama, benefitting numerous persons of all shades.

The job would require that he relinquish leadership roles in a wide variety of banking, oil and other business interests, philanthropic and social welfare endeavors in order to devote himself, first to campaign for office in what would certainly be a hostile uphill contest against the well established party in power, and then, if elected, to subject himself to criticism while seeking to reform the horrendous longstanding conditions in the county poorhouse.

Encouraged by his wife, Edith, he accepted the invitation from both the Democratic and Progressive tickets, thrusting himself into an intense and bitter campaign in which he implored his constituents to vote for him, "To take the Poor House out of Politics."⁸

The attacks were personal and vehemently partisan, particularly from the Republican-controlled local press, which refused to print his response, but Macy emerged victorious by a comfortable margin of 4,587 votes on election night. Now, the responsibility for the problems of the poorhouse rested upon his shoulders.

The almshouse was established in 1828 at East View, where Con Edison's service plant is situated today. It provided a roof and the bare necessities "for recent mothers, abandoned children, the elderly, tramps, vagabonds and knights of the road.... Vagrants were committed to the almshouse for the winter."⁹ The conditions were deplorable, the buildings inadequate and unsafe, food was scarce, many of its wards belonged elsewhere, such as in hospitals, jails, asylums or in their return to society. Only waste, corruption and lack of concern were abundant.

Macy urged the building of a new almshouse, a uniform method of admitting inmates instead of letting local officials make the decisions, elimination of political control over administration of the budget, appointment of the best institutional department heads to lead the children's division, humane treatment of patients, the need to put to useful labor those who were capable of working, and studies to get at the root causes of the patients' problems.

The many improvements under the departments directed by Macy during the period from January 1, 1914, when he assumed office, to June 2, 1924, when a testimonial dinner was held in his honor, "in revolutionizing both the physical plant of the county institutions and administrative procedure and methods," were summarized in a booklet, "Milestones of 10 Years of the Westchester Way--A Decade of Progress. It detailed, "The results accomplished under Direction of the Office of Commissioner of Public Welfare, Westchester County, New York," including "Public Health, Child Welfare, Penitentiary and County Home."¹⁰

They included, in his first three years alone, purchase of the first new kitchen equipment and properly balanced meals which ended a "diet limited to soups and stew"; development of what eventually became the Department of Child Welfare, beginning with the employment of social workers and the appointment of Ruth Taylor as its director, paid from private funds; census of dependent children scattered in many institutions; accurate accounting practices to record and track patients; purchase of an adjoining farm as a site for new buildings; transfer of children into family boarding homes and defectives into suitable state institutions; issuance of a county bond for a County Penitentiary and Workhouse; appropriation by the County of monies toward a hospital building and a central heating plant; and a state law creating the office of Commissioner of Charities and Corrections to take over the powers of the Superintendent of the Poor as well as administration of the proposed County Penitentiary.

In 1916, Macy not only succeeded in getting the Republicans to cross-endorse him, but he was re-elected to the new office and expanded responsibilities by a majority of 27,876 votes.

On January 1, 1917, the hospital was separated from the poor house and people who were destitute due to sickness were no longer committed to the almshouse whose name was changed to the Westchester County Home. Public hearings were conducted on proposals for a new hospital. The new County Penitentiary opened in April 1917, a few days after the US declared war on Germany. However, in October 1918, on the eve of the opening of the new County Home, the Penitentiary and Power House were leased to the Government for war use. The war effort created a heavy burden upon both monetary and human resources of the department and it also interrupted Macy's services in Westchester.

In 1919, after an absence from his position due to the war, Macy returned to Westchester and, despite Democratic Party opposition, was re-elected by 23,662 votes. Under his reins, mothers' allowances which provided relief for dependent families were increased significantly; the facility built for the County Home was converted into a general county hospital and the name, Grasslands Hospital, was selected; Almshouse inmates, except infirmary patients, were returned to the old plant; in 1921, the title of Macy's office was changed to Commissioner of Public Welfare, a more befitting title, and many long term younger patients were discharged to the care of relatives.

In 1922, soon after Macy was re-elected by 11,604 votes, a psychiatric program was established at Grasslands; thereafter, a County Juvenile Court, advocated by the Department and others, was set up to take delinquency cases; Grasslands Hospital, having admitted over 4,000 patients, was found to be overcrowded and the Board of Supervisors appropriated funds for accessory buildings, including a nursing school, employees dwelling and farm buildings; a new chapel was opened with a motion picture stage, connecting passageways and ample space for wheel chair patients.

Macy continued to serve through 1925. His years in office were a record of enormous accomplishment to the people and the County of Westchester.

World War I and the Shipbuilding Industry

With the U.S. entry into World War I in April 1917 during Macy's second term in office, President Wilson was keenly aware of the devastating impact major strikes would have upon production in the vital shipbuilding industry. He knew that a delicate balance had to be maintained between the interests of labor and management.

To chair the newly formed Shipbuilding Labor Adjustment Bureau, the President needed to select someone with a diverse background who was independent and skilled enough to be respected by both sides. Macy was an experienced businessman, fair minded and sympathetic to labor issues. He had served on a strike arbitration committee, had been named to the Labor Committee of the National Defense Council and undertaken a leading role in patriotic defense drives. Despite their general pacificism, Quakers viewed the War "as a religious and necessary crusade." Macy "was regarded as a man whose interest was in doing what was fair and right," and the President chose him for this demanding task.¹¹

While Washington, D.C., became his headquarters, the Bureau's duties sent him to Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, New York and the Gulf Coast to conduct extensive hearings and make decisions, which set wage scales to resolve or prevent strikes that threatened to imperil national defense production. Inasmuch as the five-member board was composed of two employers and two union employees, Macy was given the decisive vote on all issues. Hundreds of thousands of workers and their families were affected by decisions critical to the entire nation.

Away from Westchester for nearly two years, Macy was concerned about resigning his county office for fear of seeing a return to the politics he had sought to eliminate. In his place, he appointed and personally paid an assistant to run the Department. After the armistice, he continued his labor duties for a time, before returning to the office to which the public had elected him.

Years later, at a memorial service shortly after his death, Dean Emeritus James E. Russell of Teachers College, Columbia University, who knew Macy very well, recalled that "Mr. Macy wore himself out in

war work. The conflicts in labor circles, which he was called to settle, bore heavily upon his sensitive nature. The strain was the beginning of the end, making him a war casualty as truly as if he had fallen on the fields of France. But even in these later years when strength was waning, he still did yeoman service in his home county. The parks and parkways of Westchester are one of his many monuments."¹²

The Macy and Gannett Newspaper Chains

As early as 1921, Macy discussed with his friend, Arthur Lawrence of Bronxville, the possible acquisition of local newspapers in Westchester. The idea was put on the back burner while Macy continued his welfare activities.

On January 6, 1925, as he began his last year of elective office, Macy sent a Western Union telegram to Frank E. Gannett, Editor and Publisher of the Gannett Empire State Group in Rochester, asking to have lunch together at Macy's office, 24 Broad Street, New York City.¹³ Discussions ensued with Gannett sending Macy a copy of the Rochester Times-Union so he might see the type of paper they had been putting out.

Thereafter, Macy prepared and forwarded to both Gannett and Lawrence a draft memorandum for the purpose of forming a holding company to acquire control or ownership of the Yonkers Statesman, which was losing money at the time, the Mount Vernon Argus, the New Rochelle Standard Star, and perhaps others. After a series of starts and stops, Gannett amicably withdrew from the project, focusing his designs toward acquiring papers in the Midwest.

Ultimately, Macy acquired the Statesman and turned over the editorial operations to his two sons, particularly Noel, a Harvard graduate who had worked as a young reporter. In a handwritten letter addressed to "Dear Father," written in March 1926, Noel wrote, "I am spending 90% of my wakeful hours in Yonkers," at the Statesman. He mentioned that Gannett was "still interested in hooking up with you, provided you were willing to go beyond Yonkers.... We had a frank talk. I said I knew you would always like to connect up with Gannett provided the details were O.K."¹⁴

On May 29, 1926, Gannett sent a letter congratulating Macy on his efforts and results. He wrote, "You have a very nice little group started and I hope it will all work out successfully. Let me assure you again of my desire to help in any way. With every good wish."¹⁵

Within the next four years, Macy purchased the major interests in several other independent newspapers throughout Westchester County, including the Daily Argus, Standard Star, Tarrytown Daily News, Ossining Citizen-Sentinel and the Port Chester Daily Item.

After Macy's death, the sons, "with the avowed intention of perpetuating the social and civic programs their parents had helped to establish," became the longtime owners and operators of what came to be known as the Macy chain of newspapers, expanding to other parts of Westchester before purchasing a Rockland newspaper chain.¹⁶ Finally, in 1964, after making huge profits, they sold their enterprise, with a combined circulation of about 175,000, to the Gannett multimedia conglomerate, by then one of the largest newspaper companies in the nation.

Edith Macy

Even before they were married in 1896, Edith Carpenter Macy and Everit were soul mates, sharing the same values and goals, philosophically and practically, in words as well as deeds. There were many similarities in the nature and background of the couple, although she was the more outgoing. Both were well educated and came from wealthy Quaker families who lived near one another in midtown Manhattan and had childhood summer homes in or near Irvington-on-Hudson in Westchester County.

When they met while both were attending college in the City, they were involved in similar work, teaching those "lacking the money to attend college." "Both possessed a rare desire to do something about the deprivations they saw all around them."¹⁷ Like her husband, Edith had a genuine and abiding interest in helping others, whether her equal or less fortunate, and in connecting one individual's needs to another's capabilities. Dean Russell, who knew them as well as anyone, best

described Edith and Everit: "When I think of Mr. Macy, I cannot disassociate him from Mrs. Macy. They were, indeed, one—one in ideals and one in good works."¹⁸

Edith was a suffragist who believed women should be granted full rights of citizenship and was active in the League of Women Voters. She was particularly involved in Teachers College and the Manhattan Trade School for girls, and she was a founder and strong supporter of the Westchester Children's Committee that was aimed at helping poor children, among numerous other endeavors.

Almost from its founding in 1912, Edith was deeply interested in the Girl Scout movement. In 1919, she became chairman of its National Executive Board and thereafter spent many hours hiking through the woods near Chilmark, dreaming of creating a Girl Scout leadership training school. Sadly, her aspirations were abruptly ended by a sudden heart attack on February 1, 1925 at the age of 54 while visiting friends in Florida and away from her husband.

Soon afterwards, as a fitting memorial to his beloved wife, Everit proposed to build the Girl Scout training school she had dreamed of. He purchased nearly 300 acres of woods off Chappaqua Road in Briarcliff Manor and established a trust fund to maintain the program. Within a year, Camp Edith Macy opened.

Dr. Russell delivered the dedication address in her honor, describing the devotion Edith had to scouting, education, and philanthropy: "Certainly, no one has a keener sympathy for those in need of help.... This dedication is in honor of one of the noblest women that I have ever known, and it is an honor for you, and something for which you may be thankful, if you are an American citizen, that she was a member, an active member, of your organization."¹⁹

Today, Edith Macy Conference Center, occupying 405 wooded acres, continues to function as a nationally recognized learning center for Girl Scout volunteers and staff, offering workshops, meeting rooms and lodging, as well as providing facilities for other non-profit and corporate organizations. Its rustic Great Hall, opened in 1926, and used for very special events, contains a handsome relief of Edith above the

fireplace in the main hall. Its inscription reads, "Her ways were the ways of joyousness and her paths were the paths of love and understanding."²⁰

She would be missed terribly by all who knew and loved her, but of course, especially by her husband, whose own joyousness was largely taken away by her death.

Chilmark

"Chilmark" had been the name of a village in England, about 100 miles west of London, which was the ancestral home of Thomas Macy, born in 1608 and the first of the family to arrive on our shores. As was often the custom when descendants acquired large estates in America, Macy gave the name, Chilmark, to the property he and Edith purchased in 1896, and thereafter to the magnificent 44-room mansion they completed in 1898, soon after the birth of the first of their three children. Chilmark was situated atop the highest ridge in the vicinity.²¹

Although Everit graduated as an architect from the Columbia University School of Mines, he never practiced that profession. However, in a figurative sense, he was a master "architect" of everything he touched. The couple hired one of his classmates to design and oversee the construction of their home. Edith was the force behind the decorating and maintenance of the interior and she was the gracious entertainer of their innumerable guests.

She was also a caring mother for their three children, Valentine Everit Macy, Jr. ("Valentine"), born in 1898 shortly before Chilmark was completed, Josiah Noel Macy ("J. Noel" or "Noel"), born in 1900, and Edytha Macy Gross Mickles Lewis, born in 1903.

Other than campaign photos in thick scrapbooks located in the Westchester County Records Center in Elmsford, there are few available pictures of Macy, which attests to his modesty. One of the best is now exhibited as part of a collage in the lobby of a local bank. It shows him on a horse in front of the mansion with a backdrop of forty employees sitting or standing in front of the residence or looking out its windows.

At the time the Macys lived there, there were many servants engaged in the house or tending to its grounds, horses and other animals. A person whose father managed the estate and felt he “knew Macy as few did,” described the man after his wife’s death: “His bedroom expressed him exactly. A small room, three pieces of furniture and a good picture. Simple, honest and natural.”²²

According to Mary Cheever, “The mansion was surrounded by gently slopping lawns planted with shade trees and shrubbery, meadows and woodlands. Great stone barns housed Guernsey cows, givers of prize-winning milk, and Hampshire Down sheep. There was a greenhouse for the gardens, a carriage house with apartments over it for the help, a chicken house, a stable of spirited ponies, a polo field, squash courts, a swimming pool, two tennis courts, and a small but challenging nine-hole golf course.”²³ For years, Edith and Everit regularly sent milk produced on the premises by their forty cows to hundreds of poor children living in Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

It is, of course, impossible to capture the spirit of the place during the quarter century that Edith and Everit so happily lived there together. It is also difficult to find words to justly describe the awesome beauty of the exterior of the magnificent Tudor-style stone and stucco edifice as it still stands, more than a century after it was erected, with a breathtaking view of the Hudson River in the distance below.

Chilmark had been Edith’s handiwork. After her death in 1925, Everit realized he could not live there without her. He decided to gradually close down Chilmark and spend more time in the homes they had also maintained in Manhattan and the Catskills. He suffered from depression and melancholy, as well as physical ailments, needing to take time away, to escape to Europe and elsewhere to regain clarity of mind and body.

Although not robust in physical strength or stamina, when he returned he somehow managed to find the will to continue his mission by assuming the enormous task of an entirely new project, heading the Westchester County Park Commission for more than four years beginning January 1, 1926. He took on this responsibility because it

provided him with yet another opportunity to serve the welfare interests of the public, albeit in a very different venue.

Today, Chilmark is the name of a residential neighborhood in Briarcliff Manor just south of Pleasantville Road near the attractive Ossining Reservoir. The community was developed in the early 1960's and is laid out along winding roads dotted with handsome colonials, ranches and split-levels on comfortable plots. Macy Road, its longest street, runs past 8-acre Chilmark Village Park. When the Macy family lived there, the reservoir was part of their 300-acre estate and was called Macy Pond.²⁴ Ask any of the neighbors today how Macy Road came to be named. Hopefully, none will respond by suggesting it had something to do with the department store.

Parks and Parkways

During his four years as President of the Westchester Park Commission, Macy made significant contributions to the county's arteries, parks, parklands and recreation facilities. Although the work of the Commission began in 1922, and much had already begun or been completed, he inherited a great deal of challenges when he assumed his new office on January 1, 1926.

The parks and parkway system in Westchester developed out of the need for convenient and pleasant motor vehicle transportation as well as for opportunities to enjoy more leisure time during the decade beginning in 1922. It was funded entirely by county money and caused a rapid growth in auto travel, population and county property values. The Saw Mill Parkway and Bronx River Parkway were the first to be opened, in 1926. Thereafter, the Hutchinson River Parkway opened in 1928 and the Bronx River Parkway Extension, renamed the Taconic State Parkway followed.

Between 1925 and 1932, the Park Commission acquired land for 15 public parks and six parkways, some of which never came to fruition, partly because of the great depression. The acquisition of public land, diversion of rivers and streams, construction of bridges and overpasses, placement of restaurants and service stations were all needs that had to be carefully addressed.

Macy chaired his final meeting of the Commission, on January 23, 1930, at his apartment at 4 East 66 Street, Manhattan. Among actions taken were the following: Appropriated funds for work on the proposed Pelham-Port Chester Parkway, the proposed Briarcliff-Peekskill Parkway and the proposed Sprain Brook Parkway; Enacted a resolution for settlement of condemnation proceedings on the Bronx River Parkway extension; Approved a new concession at Glen Island Park and a sightseeing bus at Playland; Received proposals for a comfort station on the Saw Mill River Parkway between Tuckahoe Road and Ardsley, as well as for a restaurant shelter, gas station and police station at Woodlands Lake park.²⁵

At the meeting of March 27, 1930, John Agar, a member of the Commission, sadly and formally announced Macy's death. A tribute entered in the official minutes acknowledged that, "endowed with an unusual intellect, a generous heart and a courage to do what he thought was right to do, he has left an example in many fields of endeavor and elevated every sphere of enterprise in which he worked."²⁶

On June 27, 1930, there was published posthumously a lengthy article entitled, Parks In the Modern Manner, which Macy had written months earlier. In it, he traced the history of public recreation grounds, dating back to London's celebrated Hyde Park, and wrote of "the imperative need for setting land aside for park purposes before the opportunity might be lost forever," "the attempt to provide the widest possible range of recreational facilities for the greatest numbers," and "the governing principle of free access."

The article concluded, "The intense modern life of our cities, the pressure of population, the relentless speeding of mass production make wholesome relaxation and recreation even more important to our age than in any preceding age.... Thus the need for recreation and the leisure in which to use it have coincided.... The confidence shown by the people [of Westchester] in supporting this largest public improvement and general welfare [park] program ever undertaken by the county rests on an unbroken record...of honest and efficient government."²⁷

Final Resting Place

V. Everit Macy died March 21, 1930, just two days before he would have turned 59, suddenly and quietly, of bronchial pneumonia in Phoenix, Arizona. On his physician's advice, he had traveled to Phoenix, Arizona earlier in the year, seeking relief from a sinus infection that for years had affected him, requiring him to take refuge in Switzerland and other mountainous European countries. All three of his children were at their homes on the East Coast at the time his condition became serious and none was able to reach him before he succumbed.²⁸

Immediately, tributes poured in from public officials and the news media, eulogizing and describing him as respected, admired and loved. Typical were the words of the Director of Playland, Frank Darling:

"Westchester County citizens may never realize the loss they have suffered in the passing of President Macy. His quiet, unassuming manner never attracted attention. He was glad to let others have the glory for his faithful public service but we who worked with him and under him know something of the great energy he expended, often sacrificing himself in accomplishing the things he did for Westchester County. Serving the public seemed to be his happiness."²⁹

Everit's funeral was held at Chilmark on March 26, officiated by Rev. Henry Emerson Fosdick, one of the most prominent Protestant preachers of the day. His final resting place was beside his wife, Edith, in a large, but hardly ostentatious family plot, halfway up the hillside in historic Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, not far from Chilmark. In front of a 50-foot dark grey stone wall and terrace, rhododendrons are planted.³⁰

His footstone reads, simply:

Valentine
Everit
Macy

March 23, 1871
March 21, 1930

In later years, all three children would be buried alongside their parents, first Edytha in 1967, then Valentine in 1970 and, finally, Noel in 1977. A half dozen other Macy family members would follow. Apart from their names, dates of birth and dates of death, only one footstone would have any additional inscription, recalling the time more than three centuries earlier when Thomas Macy first arrived on the island later known as Nantucket: "I must go down to the sea again."

Monument and Legacy

Within a few days after his death, Macy's close friend and contemporary, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., set about to form a committee of prominent citizens to establish a suitable monument and memorial to honor him. In a series of conversations and correspondence, reflected in Rockefeller's private papers, he elicited opinions from many persons, including the three Macy children. It was the committee's intention of "keeping alive in the minds of the people of the county the type of citizenship which Mr. Macy himself so well personified."³¹

The committee's first proposal was for a statute, to be placed prominently in a public park. Their sights turned toward the 172-acre Woodlands Lake Park, which had been owned earlier by Cyrus Field of Trans Atlantic Cable fame, and later by the J.P. Morgan Syndicate, and which was situated in the woods where young Everit may have roamed after his widowed mother purchased a summer home in Tarrytown, just north of the Irvington border.

In a revealing letter, dated May 31, 1930, from J. Noel to J.D., Jr., it was apparent that neither the idea of a statute nor the particular site on either side of the Saw Mill Parkway in Irvington, Dobbs Ferry and Ardsley appealed to the family. He wrote: "While the parks and parkways were the last interest in which Father was actively engaged, his real interest was in social welfare work and he went into the Park program solely as a means of expressing along a new line, his welfare interest. Therefore, while a park as a tangible memorial would be entirely appropriate, it should be a park which should stand particularly for welfare opportunities rather than just an open breathing space. For this reason, we do not feel that Woodland Lake Park is particularly fitted as a memorial except it is ground over which Father rode as a boy.

On the other hand, his life in Irvington had little or no relation to the rest of his activities. It was in no way a background for his subsequent development."³²

The letter strongly favored a tablet as opposed to a statute, because "Father" was too self-effacing to have wanted any statute. It recommended that "some park such as Pound Ridge, which has the possibilities of a development such as Bear Mountain park and its welfare connections, would be more suitable as a memorial since the social welfare aspect of a county park which was used by people rather than just visited by them more nearly parallels his interest."

At that time, President Franklin Roosevelt was developing depression-era public works programs aimed at preserving the environment in Bear Mountain State Park and other parks. After further reflection, the committee decided against a statute, but firmly believed the recognition of V. Everit Macy to be compelling and the Woodlands Lake site to be appropriate.

On May 2, 1932, the Westchester County Board of Supervisors unanimously accepted the Committee's recommendation to rename Woodlands Lake Park as the V. Everit Macy Park, and for the placement of a suitable monument as well as four stone piers on either side of the Parkway, with Macy's name on each post. Work then began on an impressive tablet and its inscription. One year later, a handsome monument was imbedded onto a huge granite rock, surrounded by rhododendron plantings atop a stone stairway and walkway not far from a turnout off the south side of the Parkway, just north of Cyrus Field Road. No public funds were solicited or expended for the project, which was financed by Macy's friends.

Considerable care was taken in the wording of the tablet, which reads:

"V. Everit Macy was a great citizen of Westchester County. He gave generously not only of his wealth but of himself. His countless benefactions and deeds of kindness were never heralded but his constructive achievements as Superintendent of the poor, Commissioner of Public Welfare and President of the Westchester

County Park Commission were widely known. In recognition of these services this park has been named for him and this tablet erected by his friends. MDCCCLXXI – MCMXXX”³³

On September 7, 1934, Noel sent a note to a member of the Committee: “I have noticed the bronze plaque on the Saw Mill River Parkway and stopped the other day to go up as far as the big stone on which the plaque is mounted. It certainly is a very beautiful piece of work, and I am sure that with the possible exception of his name on the gate post along the road, the whole layout would have appealed to father.”³⁴

Nearly eighty years now have passed since the name, V. Everit Macy, first appeared on the Park entrance and the tablet was installed. Over that span, traffic on the Saw Mill Parkway has increased tremendously both in numbers and in speed. The turnout from the Parkway has been covered over and no longer is accessible to visitors. The New York Thruway, which first cut through in the late 1950’s, has taken over many of the park’s original acreage.

Today, only an experienced hiker can find the trail to the beautifully descriptive monument, which honors this great public servant. V. Everit Macy probably would have preferred it that way. Through all his lasting accomplishments, he was an innately modest man.

Last Will and Testament

Generous with his wealth throughout his lifetime, Macy bequeathed his fortune to his family, charitable and non-profit institutions and longtime employees. His Last Will and Testament, covering 23 pages and executed nine months before his sudden death, left the bulk of his estate in equal shares to his three children as Edith had predeceased him by five years.³⁵

Macy’s generosity to the institutions he especially cherished was reflected by these bequests: To Teachers College of Columbia University, founded to prepare teachers for children of the New York City poor, \$500,000; To the Henry Street Settlement, famous for its

pioneering efforts in social service and health care delivery, \$100,000; To the Berry School, an industrial school in rural Georgia set up to serve impoverished mountain children, \$50,000; and To the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia, devoted to the education of Native American and Negro students, \$25,000.

To his employees, Macy left varying amounts based upon the number of years they had been in his service. In addition, he bequeathed \$100,000.00 to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which he had long supported.

The gross assets of Macy's estate were listed at \$36,937,316.68, consisting primarily of securities in Chilmark Company, which was a holding company for various entities belonging to the Standard Oil group and other oil company stocks. His real property was appraised at \$518,270.³⁶

Other assets demonstrated his diverse interests and investments:

1. 72.22% ownership in Westchester County Publishers, Inc. and its nine subsidiaries and affiliates;
2. Millwood Corp. and its 30 subsidiaries in the textile business, owning wool and cotton mills in New England and southern states;
3. Hathaway Holding Corp., which held real estate in Westchester and Nassau Counties;
4. Chilton Pen Company, manufacturer and seller of patented fountain pens;
5. American Kerament Corp., manufacturer and seller of building materials;
6. Blue Diamond Service Corp., manufacturer and seller of plaster and brick mortar for building contractors; and
7. Rocky River Coal and Lumber Company, owner of lumber mills, mines and 50,000 acres of timber land in Tennessee.

As the estate was finally wrapping up, years later, daughter Edytha was living in Massachusetts, Valentine in East Hampton and Noel in Washington, D.C. Each had led successful lives, carrying on the Macy tradition first brought forth on the Island of Nantucket three hundred years earlier.

Postscript

To use the term advisedly, Macy was a “politician,” however not in any pejorative sense. In a secondary meaning of the term, Macy was indeed a student of “the art of politics,” skilled in statecraft. He knew how and when best to deal with public officials, such as the county Board of Supervisors when he asked for appropriations for Grasslands. He requested \$1.2 million and was pleased when the Board of Supervisors appropriated \$950,000. A major accomplishment was in convincing and enlisting Boss William Ward, the head of the party that opposed him so strongly in his initial election campaign, that Macy was not a political rival and that his only interest was in doing public good.

Unlike other important men of his and other era, Macy apparently had no ambition to rise to higher office, although there were suggestions he run for governor. Had he so chosen, even by today’s more transparent standards, it is unlikely anyone would have uncovered any scandal in his personal or professional life, for his was one of moral rectitude. Macy’s higher calling was altruism, unselfish devotion to the interests of others.

It would be altogether wrong to think of him in the same mold as Robert Moses. True, both men were adept as innovators, planners, developers and builders. But, unlike his counterpart, he was not a power broker. The bridges which Macy built were bridges to connect people to other people: the progressives to the poor, hungry and dispirited; management and labor to common ground; parkways leading to parks and playgrounds for recreation and general welfare, with minimal intrusion to neighborhoods and communities.

Although, surprisingly, there appear to be no published biographies or magazine articles written about Macy, the Westchester County archives house two very well researched and extensive typewritten works, which were apparently commissioned by the family years after Macy’s death. One, titled “V. Everit Macy (1871-1930), New York Philanthropist and Social Reformer”, was written by Paul F. Erwin of the University of Cincinnati; the other, “The Life of V. Everit Macy,” was written by William C. Wright, an author of historical non-fiction.

Both authors agree that Macy was an extra-ordinary human being. Prof. Erwin opines that Macy “perpetuated throughout his life the fine Quaker traits of his Macy forefathers and devoted his career to social betterment through his business and social service work.”³⁷ Wright believes that “it was the humanitarian interest that formed the dominant theme of his life and which led him to the most impressive contributions.”³⁸

For this, we in Westchester County should be forever grateful.

¹ New York Times, March 22, 1930.

² Paul F. Erwin, “V. Everit Macy (1871-1930), New York Philanthropist and Social Reformer,” Chapters I, II and III, as taken from *Genealogy of the Macy Family from 1635-1868* by Silvanus J. Macy, compiled in 1868, Westchester County Historical Society (WCHS) archives.

³ Deed, Walter and Mary Gurnee to Caroline L. Macy, April 12, 1887, Westchester County Land Records, Liber 1107, Page 203.

⁴ Ancestry.com.

⁵ Erwin, Ch. IX, p. 1.

⁶ Barbara R. Troetel, “The Bronx River Parkway,” *The Westchester Historian*, Fall 1999, p. 102.

⁷ Alvah P. French, “History of Westchester County, New York” (NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1925), Vol. III, p. 51.

⁸ *Westchester County Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 1, October 1913, p. 14.

⁹ Canning & Buxton, “History of the Tarrytowns” (Harrison, NY: Harbor Hill Books, 1975), p. 316.

¹⁰ “Milestones of 10 Years of The Westchester Way—A Decade of Progress,” Office of the Commissioner of Public Health, Westchester County, June 2, 1924.

¹¹ William C. Wright, “The Life of V. Everit Macy,” undated, Ch. I, p. 4, WCHS archives.

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- ¹² James E. Russell, "A Personal Tribute to Mr. and Mrs. V. Everit Macy," abstract of address, April 3, 1930.
- ¹³ Macy to Frank E. Gannett, January 6, 1925, Westchester County archives.
- ¹⁴ J. Noel Macy to Macy, March 1926, Westchester County archives.
- ¹⁵ Gannett to Macy, May 29, 1926, Westchester County archives.
- ¹⁶ Mary Cheever, "The Changing Landscape of Briarcliff Manor-Scarborough," 1990, p. 56.
- ¹⁷ Wright, Ch. 3, pp. 54.
- ¹⁸ Russell, "A Personal Tribute to Mr. and Mrs. V. Everit Macy," abstract of address, April 3, 1930.
- ¹⁹ Russell, "Dedication of Camp Edith Macy," abstract of address, May 12, 1926.
- ²⁰ Onsite visit and conversation with David A. Vogt, General Manager, July 14, 2011.
- ²¹ Erwin, Ch. IV, p. 1.
- ²² Vincent Phelps to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., April 15, 1932, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY (RAC).
- ²³ Cheever, p. 55.
- ²⁴ Richard M. Lederer, Jr., "The Place Names of Westchester County" (Harrison, NY: Harbor Hill Books, 1978), p. 86.
- ²⁵ Minutes of Meeting of Westchester County Park Commission, January 23, 1930, Westchester County archives.
- ²⁶ Minutes of Meeting of Westchester County Park Commission, March 27, 1930, Westchester County archives.
- ²⁷ V. Everit Macy, "Parks In the Modern Manner," Irvington Gazette, June 27, 1930.
- ²⁸ Ossining Citizen-Sentinel, March 21, 1930, p. 1.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, March 22, 1930, p. 2.
- ³⁰ Onsite visit to Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, April 26, 2011.
- ³¹ Westchester County Park Commission to Westchester County Board of Supervisors, March 21, 1932, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
- ³² J. Noel Macy to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., May 31, 1930, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
- ³³ Field trip to Macy Monument, with Lucas Buresch and Patrick Raftery.
- ³⁴ J. Noel Macy to H.W. Robertson, September 7, 1934, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
- ³⁵ Last Will and Testament of Valentine Everit Macy, June 18, 1929, Westchester County Surrogate's Court file no. 650/1930.
- ³⁶ Inventory of Assets of Estate, Westchester County Surrogate's Court file no. 650/1930.
- ³⁷ Erwin, Ch. I, p. 1.
- ³⁸ Wright, Preface, p. 6.