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 , Co-Presidents

Eileen O’Connor Weber Scholarship Recipient

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 to the 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

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.

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.”

- 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 Christoleib 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.
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.

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 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!)

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

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 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 Things. 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.

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

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!

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.

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.
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
Alenstein, Mary
Altman, Cynthia
Amicucci, Phyllis
Austin, Sandra
Basset, Michael & Linda
Bauer, Wilhelma
Beebe, Tyler & Brooke
Behling, George & Elaine
Beicke, Robert & Joan
Bergman, Ruth
Bernstein, Barbara
Blockley, Kaye
Boe, Carl & Mimi
Bogart, Christopher & Eliz. O’Connell
Braun, Norman & Janet
Brenneman, Florence
Buerger, Theodore & Helen
Caramanica, John & Lisa Czachor
Carpentier, Marie
Carr, John & Patricia
Cartenuto, David & Christina
Carter, Phoebe
Caspar, David & Jelane
Chapman, Katharine
Chervokas, Roseanna
Citron, Gerald & Millicent
Code, Howard & Susan
Cohen, Steven
Comiskey, Thomas
Corfield, Peter & Gillian
Crowley, John & Caroline
Cryan, John
Curran, John & Connie
Daly, Trudy
Davis, Stephan
Davis, Tom & Kathy
DeRose Cesare & Beatrice
DiMase, Frances
Dumitrescu, Dumitru & Otilia-Liana
Eschweiler, Peter & Micki
Feher, David & Gwen
Fetonti, Robert
Fludgate, Simon & Susan
Franco, Anthony & Edith
Freeman, Ellen
Garrison, Bruce & Didi
Gartner, Gary & Deirdre
Gioscia, Michael & Clorissa
Glassman, Jay & Jean
Goldstein, Stanley
Graham, Audrey
Grant, Alan & Michelle
Graves, Bruce
Hager, Bobby & Terry Pitman
Haimowitz, Raphaelle
Hales, Thomas & Alice
Halper, Stuart & Stacy
Hegarty, Michael & Anita
Herbek, Richard
Hershberger, James
Hiller, Sidney & Lana
Horkans, Wilma Jean
Hugue, Germaine
Isaac, Helene
Jusko, Edward & Delores
Kail, Ken & Ivy Hwang
Kane, David & Siegrun
Kostman, Stan & Barbara Cochran
Kwiat, Lawrence
LaBruzio, Carmelo & Joann
Lebenson, Eric
Leibacher, Thomas & Rachel
Leitzes, Martin & Pauline
Lewis, Barbara Anna
Limongelli, William
Little, Bob & Mary-Save Scarborough
Malech, Kenneth & Betty
Maloney, Michael & Cynthia
Manganello, Louise
Manuele, John & Lisa
Mayas, Albert & Francine
McGarry, Thomas & Meg
McGinnis, Eva Marie
McInty, Gregory & Joan
McGrath, Jr., Thomas & Barbara
McGuire, Carol
McVeigh, Brian & Heather
Mendelsohn, Jim
Messer, Eric & Hillary
Mezzatesta, Diane
Michel, Peter
Mickel, John & Carol
Midgley, Edward & Margaret
Mirskey, Sandra
Molinelli, Michael & Regina
Molino, Daniel & Josie
Morrison, George & Mirla
Myers, Louisa
Myers, Tom & Shannan
Naclerio, Richard
Neubauer, George
Nolan, Ed & Elaine
Obermeyer, Werner & Izel
Olson, Maxine
Paddock, JoAn
Parker, Caroline
Pastore, Jr., Joseph & Pattie
Patella, Paul & Annemarie
Payne, Ed & Claire
Pedowitz, Larry & Kathleen
Peterson, Rhoda
Peterson, Robert
Porter, Henrietta
Poulton, Ed & Shelley
Prager, Gerald & Patricia
Quigley, Matthew & Nina
Ravosa, Carmino & Claire
Reilly, Patrick & Sally Scudo
Reynolds, Calvin
Rittinger, James & Kathleen
Robson, Phil & Yvonne
Ross, Shirley
Rotondo, Guy & Marisa
Ruffner, Nancy
Rush, Warner & Nancy
Santiago, Mark & Adeline Olmer
Satlin, Doris
Schultz, Stephen & Marilyn
Schwartz, Esther
Schwartz, Margaret
Seideman, Betty
Semisa, Aurelia
Shanahan, John & Monica
Sharman, Bill
Siebert, Robert & Norvell
Smalley, Stephen
Smith, Karen
Springer, Todd
Stoianoff, Carroll
Strauss, Lore
Stroobants, Henry
Taub, Sue
Teitelbaum, Michael
Tobin, Beverly
Towbin, Carl & Twilia
Varvaro, Chip & Jan
Walsh, John
Warnier, Daniel
Wasiczko, Dennis & Bernadine
Wayne-Paulmeno, Larisa
Whitson, Robert & Yvonne
Williams, Morton & Grazia
Wilson, Mark & Denise Rempe
Wolf, Morton & Penny
Zegarelli, Philip & Barbara
Zirman, Bryan & Rori
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 www.briarcliffhistory.org and the Briarcliff Library announcements bulletin board. And we welcome your phone calls to us at 941-4393 and email at Mail@briarcliffhistory.org