

MAY

MamaroneckHistoricalSociety.org

| MamaroneckHistory@gmail.com

Members Monthly Get-togethers!

Third Tuesday of every month (except January, July & August)
7:00 pm - 9:00 pm at
Woman's Club of
Mamaroneck, 504 Cortlandt Avenue.

7:00 - 8:00 (approx) group discussion of current research projects and local mysteries in Mamaroneck.

8:00 We grab some refreshments & stretch.

Then we take our seats for the "feature" presentation, usually with a PowerPoint, leaving lots of time for Q & A.

Next Get-together on Tuesday, June 20th.

Presentation: **Myths and Mystakes About Early Mamaroneck.**

A PowerPoint presentation from **Peter M Fellows** based upon the research he is engaged in for a future book, **Merchant Trader**, about the beginning of Mamaroneck



May 16, 2023, Members Get-together

You never know what you'll learn about your home town's history!

Michael N Tripicco is the Historical Society's Archivist and an enthusiastic private collector of old postcards.

The Village of Mamaroneck was officially incorporated in 1895. It has grown over the years, and Michael's selection of postcards gave us a picture of how Mamaroneck looked back in its early growing days.

Mamaroneck has changed since the early days. Schools, churches, the old grand estates, the Post Road and the Village itself, were all depicted in this well appreciated PowerPoint presentation.



Next Year's Presentations:

I'm already thinking about presentations for next year's Get-togethers.

If you have any ideas about what you'd like to learn about Mamaroneck History, or if you have an idea about something you'd like to share with other Members, let me know.

This September will be about John Richbell, October about the battle of Heathcote Hill.

1816 School House:

Just a reminder that (thanks to John Pritts) the School House is open for visits on the last Sunday of each month, from 1:00 - 4:00pm.

Jarvis Rockwell:

Thanks to Vivian Bonnist Cord for finding and sharing a signed sketch by Jarvis Waring Rockwell Jr., older brother of famed illustrator Norman Rockwell.

You can see it here: [Jarvis Rockwell Sketch](#)

Join us! Member Dues

Individual.....\$25

Family.....\$40

Senior/Student.....\$20

Checks payable to "The Mamaroneck Historical Society"

Mailing Address: **The Mamaroneck Historical Society, PO Box 776, Mamaroneck, NY 10543**

Mass at Most Holy Trinity (c 1889) - June 04 11:00 am a rare opportunity to celebrate Mass in the Roman Catholic Church Most Holy Trinity on the Post Road opposite the Mamaroneck Diner. There are only two masses a year performed in this Church right now. Join celebrants after the mass across the street at Elks Lodge 1457 for some light refreshment. Hear about the efforts to save the Church. Contact **James Maver** at jmaver@law.pace.edu

Historical Site Markers - Perhaps you have seen the blue Historical Site Markers around the Village. Some are missing, some need corrections.

Dennis Cucinella has taken on the project of inventorying the signs with an aim to have all historical sites in the village represented.

These are just a few of the areas of Mamaroneck History that we are interested and active in. How about you? What one aspect of Mamaroneck history excites or mystifies you?

Why not join us and see what you can uncover?

peter

TUESDAY, JUNE 20 PRESENTATION

*Myths and Mistakes
About*

Early Mamaroneck



MEMBER PHOTOS FROM MAY 16 PRESENTATION

Pictures from Postcards - A Visual Tour of

Old Mamaroneck



Body Snatchers in Mamaroneck

Much of what I learn about Mamaroneck History comes from a combination of serendipity, puzzle solving, and collaboration.

Ever since we received a digital copy of a sketch by Jarvis Rockwell, I've been casually looking around for sources of more information on Norman Rockwell's life in Mamaroneck, thinking it might make a good topic for a Members Get-together.

Last week I was browsing through Rockwell's 1960 autobiography, when I came across an account of an exciting adventure he had had while living in Mamaroneck.

Jarvis, Bob, Titus, Hurlbut, McAndrew, and I watched a disinterment.

Around the corner and down one block from our house in Mamaroneck there was a small back lot. The remnants of a picket fence – a toppled post or two, some rotting pales – were scattered about the edges of the lot.

From the weeds and refuse protruded, five or six old grave stones, crusted with moss and gray lichen. The top of one lay broken in the weeds; another had been uprooted by the gnarled tree which many years before had sprouted up in the center of the lot; the others sagged, pulled to the ground by vines.

One rainy night about nine o'clock two black, covered carriages, and an open wagon, drove up to the old

graveyard. A new pine coffin glimmered whitely on the wagon.

Several men in business suits got out of the carriages and two men in overalls unloaded some picks and shovels from the wagon.

After the men in business suits examined the gravestones by the light of a kerosene lantern, they set the lantern on the ground beside a grave, and the two men in overalls began to dig.

As they worked, their shovels now and then screeching on a rock, the earth piling up to one side, a wind blew up from the Sound and sighed through the scraggly branches of the old tree.

A dog barked over on Prospect Street; the lantern hissed; one of the horses snorted and stamped. Jarvis, Bob, Hurlbert, and I edged closer together.

Then there came a dull thud from the grave and the two men tossed their shovels onto the pile of dirt and climbed out. One of the men in business suits pulled a trowel from his pocket and lowered himself gingerly into the grave, while another spread out a white sheet on the weeds.



Rockwell 1954

After banging and stamping about for a minute the man in the grave swore softly and, sucking his thumb, handed up some rotted boards, splintered and broken. Then he passed up a leg bone and after that some arm bones, a pelvis, fingers, fragments of a backbone, while his companions assembled the skeleton on the sheet, pausing now and then to argue in hushed tones about the placement of one of the bones. A few tatters of cloth hung to the ribs; angleworms and beetles, dropped from the bones as they appeared over the edge of the grave. Finally up came a dark, moldy brown skull, caked with mud, long wisps of hair ruffling in the wind.

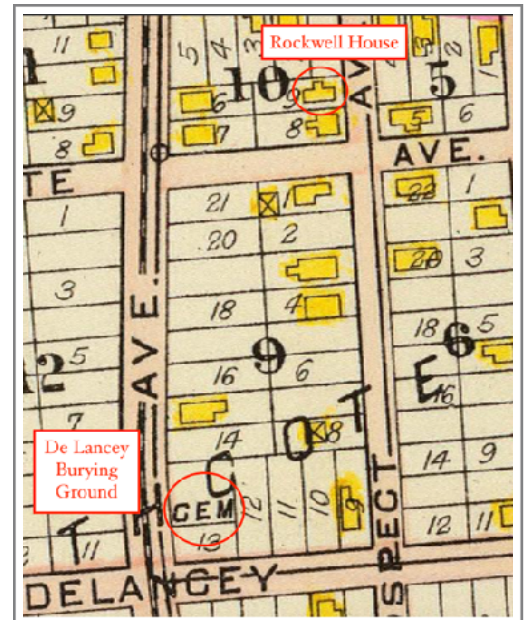
After each one of the men in business suits had taken the lantern into the grave and scuffled and scraped about, they loaded the sheet of bones into the coffin, snuffed out the lantern, and drove off. With the last clatter of the wagon rounding the corner into Prospect Street, the spell dissolved, and we realized to our horror that the night was black, and we were alone beside an open grave. Even the company of body snatchers was better than none at all.

So we ran home, only to learn that our great disappointment that the affair was legitimate. A party of historians and professional gravediggers had been sent to disinter the remains of a colonial figure and remove them to a more decent graveyard.

Body snatchers in Mamaroneck? Who did they snatch? To what purpose?



Rockwell House



Well, this is how I approached uncovering this little mystery and where it led.

My first thought was, “Could this cemetery be the De Lancey Family Burying Ground at Palmer and Delancey?”

I sourced a 1910 map and certainly De Lancey was “around the corner and down one block” from Rockwell’s house.

But it had *thirteen* graves rather than just the six mentioned by Rockwell. And I knew that *three* bodies had been disinterred from De Lancey and reinterred together rather than one. And I also knew that back in the day there were other small family burying grounds all around Mamaroneck.

Then too, Rockwell had suggested that the person disinterred was a “colonial figure” and only John Peter De Lancey was such a person, having fought in the Revolutionary War. Everyone else buried in the family burying ground was from the 19th century. J.P. was still a resident of De Lancey Burying Ground.

So I contacted my friend Michael Tripicco, Archivist at the Mamaroneck Historical Society and homegrown Mamaronecker. I told him what I had found and asked him if he knew of any historic cemeteries about a block from Rockwell's house on Prospect.

Michael and I had spearheaded the restoration of the De Lancey Burying Ground so he too was aware that Bishop William Heathcote De Lancey and his wife and son had been disinterred from that site.

"Check the date of the disinterment," he said, "And see if it works for when Rockwell lived in Mamaroneck?"

So I did.

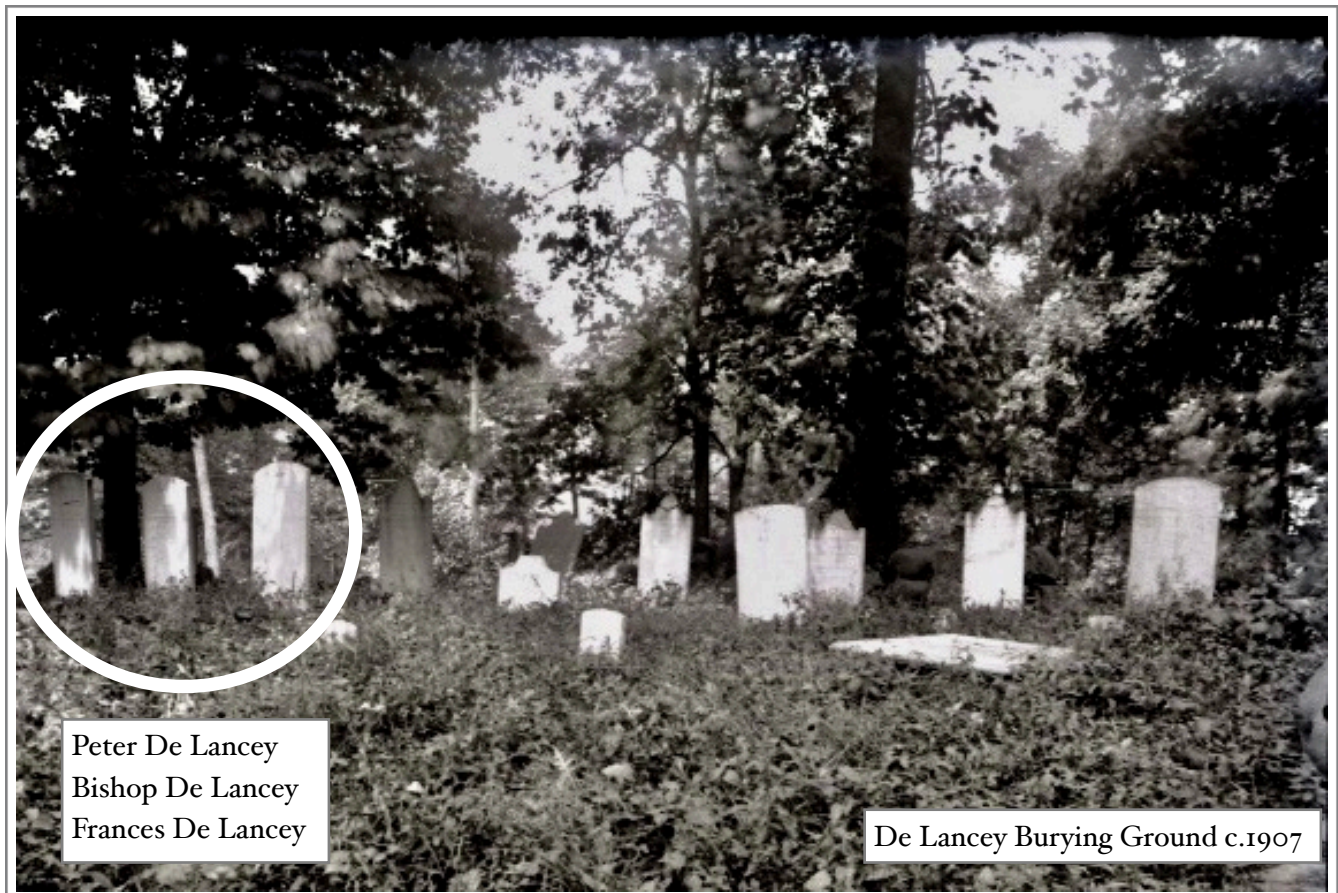
The Rockwells moved to Mamaroneck in September of 1906 according to Deborah Solomon, author of the 2013 book *American Mirror: The Life and Work of Norman Rockwell*, when he was twelve.

At some point in 1907, the Westchester Historian Otto Hufeland came to Mamaroneck. He entered the De Lancey Family Burying Ground from the southern end and took the photograph below.

It includes the three headstones for the Bishop, his wife, and his son.

On November 02, 1907, the remains of those three people were reinterred in St. Peter's Church in Geneva, New York.

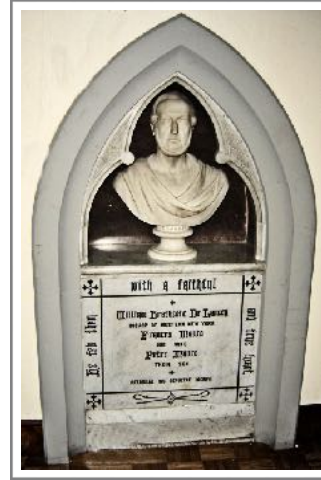
Norman would have been thirteen years old and living on Prospect, so yes, he *could* have witnessed the disinterment of Bishop De Lancey.



While we know that the remains of *three* bodies were reinterred on November 2nd, we don't know when they were disinterred other than it was at some time in 1907 after Hufeland's photo.

Rockwell recalls it was 9:00 pm and dark out. Even as early as August it would be dark by 9:00 (sunset being around 8:00 pm by August).

And Rockwell was quite clear that only one grave was opened and the remains removed. Also, his description



of the “business men” checking out the inscriptions suggests to me that this was the first disinterment and therefore probably the Bishop.

I suspect that at some point it was decided for some reason to go back for his wife and son. Only a guess. Since the bodies were now only bones, there was no need to rush to reinter them.

But why was this disinterment done, and why done in the dark of night?

Here's one explanation from the Geneva N.Y. Advertiser-Gazette, Thursday, November 7, 1907:

It was not because of the decay of that burial plot that the Bishop's remains were brought here [Geneva], but this was the center of his many years of church work, his home from 1839 till 1865, and St. Peter's church being the Memorial Church of Bishop DeLancey, that being its name, aside from the removal being a work of love on the part of the old diocese, it was also perfectly and entirely proper.

The explanation ends with this comment:

This is quite enough to say in explanation of the removal.

Which sounds to me like the author is tired of having to explain the removal.

Well, that's the story so far. Curious to find out more? Go for it! Get on the internet. Throw combinations of words in your browser's search window. Think tangentially.

Just begin researching and we'll be happy to answer any questions, offer any support we can!

Until next month, my best to you,

peter