

THE HISTORY OF HOLY ROSARY  
from the memoirs of Elizabeth Burroughs-Kelly

transcribed by Bro James Sheldon circa July 16, 1992

In the Spring of 1913; my father was offered the position of superintendent at the Colonel Payne estate.

How did it happen? This is the story: In 1909 Colonel Oliver Hazard Payne, a Civil War veteran and a multi-millionaire from Ohio, bought two adjoining estates at West Park. The one on the North had been for over half a century the home of Colonel George W. Pratt's widow, who was now selling in order to live in France with her daughter, the Countess de Gasquet James. The one on the South was being sold because George Neidlinger, who had inherited his father's property, wanted to return to Germany to live. Both estates had been owned by other millionaires. One of the owners had been John Jacob Astor III, the richest man in the United States.

Colonel Payne, who had America's most beautiful yacht, chose West Park as the place for his summer home as it was on the Hudson so he could use his yacht to travel back and forth to New York where he had a town house.

Combining the two estates, he owned over six hundred acres and he commenced at once building a mansion for himself but also for employees and remodeling service building and making other improvements. Former owners and notably Adam Neidlinger, had spent thousands on the grounds and gardens. Payne did more.

He had as his superintendent Andrew Mason, a Scotchman who had been with him on the trip around the world on his yacht. Sometime in the early spring of 1913, Mr. Mason was in an automobile accident in which his leg was cut. The wound was not cared for properly and blood poisoning set in. Though the Colonel had his own doctor come up from New York, it was too late for the doctor to save him. As soon as the news of Mr. Mason's death was known, there were many applications for the position.

My father did not apply, but he got the job. This was due indirectly to my grandmother who, when she gave him the Victrola, gave him the means of making contacts with people he had no other chance to know. One was Emma C. Larson, who managed the Colonel's household and had been with him for years. When the vacancy occurred she thought of my father, whom she had come to know through buying a Victrola and records for the Colonel and she recommended him.

On April 24, my father went to New York to be interviewed by the Colonel himself at his house at 852 Fifth Avenue. Writing of this in his memoirs my father says, "I passed". On June 1, he began working for the Colonel and a few weeks later, we moved to the superintendent's residence, a big and beautifully furnished Federal Period house, which was our home for the next five years.

At Riverby, the year of 1913 began with the excitement of owning a car. I remember the first time my father drove it with Glen Buck, who had come from

Detroit to show him how to operate it, my brother and I. My sister, who could not go because she was sick at the time, remembers watching us start off. We went up the highway to where it crosses Black Creek. The turn here in the road is where, four years later, when my grandfather was showing Dr. Barrus how to run his car, my sister turned the wheel the wrong way and sent the car up the bank and it turned on top of them both. After that, she gave up trying to learn.

My father was now the manager of Colonel Payne's estate with employees under him in several different departments. In addition, he was the architect for the Colonel and had the job of planning new buildings; a new boathouse for the launch from the Colonel's yacht, the new poultry plant buildings, and the big barns. All these were built of stone from quarries on the estate. My father, in his memoirs, says that he was both busy and happy, for he loved to build and design and put up beautiful stone buildings and now he could do it without any thought about the cost.

The architect of the Colonel's mansion, Thomas Hastings of Carrere and Hastings of New York, had not supposed the Colonel would let anyone else be the architect for his buildings and had only scorn for my father, who had no professional training. The new buildings for which my father was the architect pleased the Colonel very much.

My father, in turn, had scorn for Hastings, who in planning the Colonel's house, had built it around an open court with a fountain in the center and walls with beautiful murals. He did not however make any provision for removing the snow that would accumulate in the winter. It all had to be carried out in wheelbarrows over the marble floor of the hall. He put on the mansion a roof of red tiles set in tar which in hot weather ran down the stone work of the walls and had to be scraped off. Also, Hastings showed poor judgment in choosing imported limestone for the house. It is not suited for this climate and has weathered badly.

My father now had a Packard car for himself and his family to use and his own chauffeur, and we had a beautiful home with many comforts and no financial worries. At Riverby, making ends meet had meant plenty of labor for my father. Now he had the leisure to enjoy his fine collection of records of classical music and, in season, go trout fishing with his chauffeur, Pete. He and my mother would take trips to New York to hear the grand opera at the Metropolitan Opera House where they were privileged to use the Colonel's box.

In buying two estates, the Colonel had acquired two mansions. The one built by the Astors in 1851 with twenty-three rooms he replaced with a larger one of his own. The other, the Pratt house, is where we lived and we loved it. I have not been able to learn when and by whom it was built. It was probably constructed in the early 1800's or before that. Colonel Pratt bought it from the Pells of Esopus in 1859 and the Pells bought it in 1827 - the earliest deed that I could find - from a Scotch man with the name of John Johnson Cameron.

I like to assume that the Scotchman with a middle name of one of my own Scottish ancestors was the builder for the entrance suggested a Scottish castle. It had a wooden door arched at the top and small side windows with iron lattice grilles as in a castle and an outside grille door, a heavy iron lattice

door, always left open for it was just ornamental.

Like Riverby and several other nineteenth century houses at West Park, it was built on the side of a bank so that the lowest floor had the bank on one side and only the three other sides had windows. The kitchen was placed here because with a wood-burning stove, it could become very hot. The dining room was placed above it away from the kitchen odors and the heat. A dumb-waiter carried the food upstairs. When we moved in, the house had been renovated so the kitchen was now upstairs and the basement had been made into a laundry. The main entrance was under a porte-cochere. My brother and I sometimes climbed out of a window and sat on top of it. I remember reading some of Treasure Island to him there.

This big house, over a hundred years old, had been built for a wealthy family that entertained house guests and had several servants look after them, but we made it our home. Our comfortable living room was the front room which was both the entrance hall and lounge with two rooms opening off it at the right. One of these was the drawing room and the other was now our dining room. The dining room may have been a library originally. To the rear was the room my father used as his office, in which he had placed the desk of John Jacob Astor brought over from the other house. Also, at the back of the house on this floor, was the former dining room. This was now the kitchen. It was large room and had a big bay window looking north over the fields to the woods along the river. Next to the kitchen, there was a sizeable pantry. Here, there were stairs going down to the laundry and up to the next floor which the servants used to go to their quarters.

On the third floor were three bedrooms and a bathroom, with storage space. Our maid, Lily, had one of these rooms and my sister and I took another for a playroom and kept our dolls and our doll houses there. The second floor had five bedrooms with baths and big closets.

Because of the period in which the house was built, it had special features such as fireplaces and with mantels typical of the Adam style of architecture. That in the dining room was decorated with a linen fold wood carving. All of the rooms on the first floor had hinged wooden shutters on the inside that could be closed to keep out the cold air, and the glass doors in the dining room that opened out on the lawn had inside wood shutters too.

Though there had been some changes when the house was wired for electricity and the walls and floors were refinished, the stairs had not been touched and the newel posts still had the original acorn-shaped tops. The stairs had a landing that made a balcony where my sister and I acted out scenes from plays that we made up. One could see the balcony from the living room.

Some of the furnishings in the house such as the Astor desk were from the other house. From that house also were the rather ornate bed and bureau in one of our guest rooms, the big comfortable leather covered chairs in our living room, mantel piece items such as the pair of marble busts in the dining room, and all of furnishings of the drawing room. This elegant room looked as it had at an earlier period with heavy silk drapes and rosewood chairs and a sofa covered in pan velvet (some gold and some blue), and a Steinway grand piano. It also had beautiful wine glasses, a punch bowl and other imported

glass in a glass case, and some exquisite Dresden China that may have been Neidlinger heirlooms.

The pieces marked "Waldorf" we knew to be Astor's, but we were not sure of the others. Some of it may have belonged to the Neidlingers. Adam Neidlinger was a very rich man, the recognized leader of the malting industry in this country, and his brother, the inventor of the flat-sided sewing machine needle, was a millionaire too. Between the Astor and the Neidlinger owners there had been another owner, Alexander Holland, president of the National Express company, and some of these furnishings may have been Holland's. The fact that among these items we found in the Pratt house was a book about the history of the National Express Company, which was obviously his, seems to confirm this.

My mother now had no chores such as cleaning and filling the kerosene lamps. The estate had two big diesel engines that supplied all the buildings with electricity. Before Colonel Payne, there had been at West Park some estate owners with gas-generating plants. The Neidlingers had one and so did Frank Seely, the West Parker who had the tally-ho. He was a millionaire who was known as the Soda Water King before he sold out to Canada Dry. Now, electricity was replacing gaslight.

As an artesian well supplied the estate buildings with water, there were no more water problems for us either for the time being. No more carrying a pail up from the spring with water for cooking and drinking. No more hand pump by the kitchen sink and no more out house.

We had various services: a man to look after our furnace, another man to come twice a week to polish the brass and the floors, and mail delivery, telephones both for the estate and for the outside, and bounty from the estate such as vegetables, milk, eggs, chickens, and ice from the estate pond for our refrigerator. We were kept supplied with fresh flowers too from the greenhouse and the big flower gardens. My mother now had a home where she could entertain her friends and my father had a life he enjoyed and we children on this big estate of a multimillionaire had more opportunities for outdoor play. There were driveways on the estate where my sister and my brother could ride their bicycles in safety. My brother's bicycle had been a gift from Colonel Payne, who had the same birth date as he. Another year, he gave him a magic lantern and slides that entertained us all. On these driveways, we coasted in winter with mother sometimes coasting with us. On the estate ice pond we went skating for we learned to skate there and it was only a short walk from our house.

There were gardens; a large formal flower garden and the rock garden and the greenhouse with tropical plants as well as flowers. My sister and I spent much time in the gardens. There were so many flowers always in bloom, and all had the best of care. The trees did too. There were several well-pruned trees near our house to climb. I remember that I was sitting up in my favorite tree the day in 1917 when war was declared and I heard the bells ringing across the river at Hyde Park.

There were several special treats for us such as riding on top of the hay wagon down to the big stone barn my father built for the Colonel, where we slide off into the hay. The farm buildings were on the part of the estate that was

west of the highway. Besides the cows, there were pigs and sheep. In the late winter, we would walk down to the barn to see the new lambs. There were teams of work horses, but there were also five carriage horses. Their stable was one of the buildings in a quadrangle on the Pratt side of the estate. The garage for the Colonel's Pierce Arrow and Crane Simplex as well as our Packard were also kept on this quadrangle. My sister loved to go to the stable to look at the horses and she would be privileged to ride beside the driver who went to the post office to get the mail for the estate.

Much of the estate east of the highway was a well cared-for park with lawns, shrubbery, flower beds, and paths. There was a lovely walk that one could take on a path that Mr. Neidlinger had made at the edge of the woods along the river shore. South of the estate at West Park, the river front was mostly a scramble over rocks.

Riverby has a beach but owns only one hundred and fifty feet of water front. The Colonel's estate had ten times that. Along the path here and there were stone beaches. At the south end was the Colonel's boathouse, a dock, and a summerhouse with a view down the river to Crum Elbow.

The Pratt dock at the north end was used for coal, and coal barges would be tied up there. A crane on the dock with a bucket would unload them, dumping the coal into a metal cart which was on a trolley to take it to a pit a few hundred feet away for storage. We would go down to the dock watch unloading and I have a picture of us riding on a cart.

Sometimes in summer when the tides were right, we children would take our bathing suits and bath towels and go down by the river to play in the water by the dock.

When my grandfather's friend Henry Ford sent my brother a fishing rod, he and my sister went to the dock to fish. The first time, my sister remembers, he caught an eel and they were unable to get it off the hook. They walked back to the house with the eel dangling from the rod.

Near the Pratt dock, there had once been a house but the Pratts, who would have known its history, were gone and we were not able to find out anything about it. The foundations showed that it had been a fairly large house. There was a mystery about it and mysteries make such places very interesting. My sister and I had played there. We would invent stories about the people who lived there. Lilac bushes grew around the foundations and in May were masses of fragrant lavender bloom. We used to pick some and take home with us though we did not pick the other flowers.

Every year, the Colonel had a Christmas party for his employees children. In the big carriage house (which was one of the buildings in the quadrangle) there would be a handsomely decorated tree. Under this tree, there was a present for each one of the children with his or her name on it. In the adjoining harness room, an ornamental room, there would be cake and lots of cookies for everyone.

Some of the children lived in the cottages the Colonel had built on the northernmost part of the estate. This was sometimes called the "English Village". Others lived in the Village of Esopus or in West Park. These were

good times for West Park and Esopus because the Colonel's estate gave employment to local people.

Our Christmas gifts from the Colonel were under our own tree. Miss Larson would pick them out for us. There would be beautiful dolls and other toys from the best known toy shops in New York and pretty clothes from Fifth Avenue shops too. It all seems like a dream now. When my sister and I were older, there would be platinum or gold pins from Tiffany. One of my gifts from the Colonel was a Tiffany bracelet of scarab-like stones.

One year the Colonel gave my mother a pin in the shape of a bowknot, all diamonds. He remembered that he had never seen her wearing any jewelry. My mother won his admiration and in his Will, he left her the same legacy as he did my father.

We children were somewhat shy and awed by older people especially in a setting of such grandeur as the Colonel's, a magnificent house with butlers and other servants, but the Colonel would draw us out and get us to talk to him. He knew that my sister loved her Yorkshire Terrier, Bunty, and he would ask her about her little dog. He gave my brother a pedigreed Sealyham from the kennels of his nephew Payne Whitney so Bunty would have another dog for company. He would find out what our interests were and talk to us about them.

We always enjoyed going over to the Mansion, "The Big House" as everyone called it. We would visit with him in the library and have a chance to look about for there might be some new art treasure from the Duveen Galleries in New York to see and there were all the other treasures to look at again. It was the most luxurious of all the millionaires' homes in the Hudson Valley and had a wealth of art surpassing all of the others combined.

The art collection is all scattered now. I know that one of his Turner paintings, "Juliet and Her Nurse" is now in Argentina, where it was taken by a woman who bought it in 1980 for \$6.4 Million. It was one of the Turners in the southeast room of the Mansion that had walls paneled in ebony with gold tracery. The Colonel willed to his nephew Harry Payne Whitney a painting called "Les Demoiselles de Village". This painting was by Courbet and hung in the long drawing room. It is now in the City Art Gallery in Leeds, England. The other big painting in that room, "Venus and Adonis" by Rubens, is in the Metropolitan in New York as are the tapestries. I wonder where one would now see the Hudon Bust, the other Turners, the Della Robbia Madonna and Child, and the Exquisite Ming porcelains which, when we lived at Colonel Payne's, we had become familiar with. Because I began going away to school our second year at the Colonel's, my sister was there more often than I but I remember all this well. It meant so much to me.

The Colonel's yacht, the Aphrodite, the largest steam yacht at the time and the most beautiful, became a familiar sight on the Hudson during those years. My family had many cruises on it. Some were short and others were longer. My family would usually take the short cruises while my sister and I were lucky enough to be invited for longer ones. The first time we were invited to accompany the Colonel on the yacht, the Poughkeepsie college boat races were being run. My father and mother were not sure whether or not the invitation included the children and did not take us. When the Colonel learned

that we were not on board, he dispatched his speed launch to come and get us. We were brought to the launch by the Colonel's limousine.

The yacht, with a clipper bow, three masts, and a fan stern, was 350 feet long and had a crew of fifty to sixty. It was a luxuriously comfortable boat. The Colonel had his own quarters and had privacy for himself when he wanted it. He always took some of his household staff with him and there were staterooms for them and guests. He also had a combined lounge and dining room for their use.

At Riverby, my grandfather must have often seen the Aphrodite pass by for he loved to watch the boats on the river. Once in a while, my grandfather would come and visit us but we lived our own lives now.

In the spring of 1914, when Henry Ford was visiting my grandfather at Slabsides, they had dinner with us. I can see Henry Ford sitting in our dining room but I cannot recall anything he said. Perhaps he did not say anything worth recalling. While at the table, he looked at his watch. I remember this because his watch was one that I had never encountered before. It was flat and rimmed with sapphires. (Twice the Colonel called on my grandfather at Riverby as my grandfather reports in his journal without comment.)

I was eleven years old when I was invited for the first time to go on a cruise on the Aphrodite to Newport. I had my own stateroom with a bed (not a bunk) and my own bathroom with salt water as well as hot and cold. I felt very grown up. I knew the date was early August in 1914 as I remember seeing in the ship's lounge a New York Times with headlines about the assassination which brought about the outbreak of World War I.

At New York, the yacht anchored off the Columbia Yacht club and we went ashore in the launch. Miss Larson took me to lunch at the then fashionable Claremont on Riverside Drive where, I remember, we had cream of corn soup which was a revelation to me as I had not known that anything so delicious could be made out of corn. While in New York, we stopped at the Colonel's house at 852 Fifth Avenue where all the furniture was covered with dust cloths in the summer. We also went to Duveen's at 726 Fifth Avenue as the Colonel, through Miss Larson, kept in touch with what Duveen's had for sale and we looked at some paintings.

On the decks there were comfortable chairs, and reclining in one was a pleasant way to spend time. In the lounge, there were magazines to read and there was a writing desk with Aphrodite note paper. I had not reached the age when I did much letter writing so I did not bother with these things much. It was much more fun to stay outside and watch all there was to see.

At Newport., there were other yachts in the harbor but the Aphrodite was the largest of them all. It was the "Queen of the Yachts" and when we were out in the launch we could see how she towered above them all. She had graceful lines with that clipper bow on which there was a figurehead of the goddess for whom she was named.

I went ashore with Miss Larson in the launch and we saw something of Newport and she took me shopping with her. At that age I was collecting Kewpie dolls and she bought me one for my collection. My sister and I enjoyed

being with her for she understood little girls.

As I did not keep a diary in those days, I cannot say long it was before we were sailing up the Hudson on our return and once more seeing the Highlands and the Poughkeepsie Bridge. The launch in which we came ashore on brought us into the boathouse my father built for the Colonel with the peacock gate that my father designed.

In winter, the yacht would be put up until Spring and the Colonel would return to his estate in Thomasville, Georgia, leaving my father in charge here, with money to run the place at West Park. He had complete confidence in my father's ability and judgment. My father did have to cope with petty jealousies and disagreements among the employees. It was not all smooth going, but my father had a personality which could handle such problems and he was highly respected.

In the summer of 1915, my sister (now 10) and I were both invited to go to Newport on a leisurely cruise on the Colonel's yacht and the youngest daughter of Andrew Mason was also invited. She was older than we were and we looked up to her in admiration. In New York, Miss Larson took my sister and I shopping on Fifth Avenue where she bought us pretty slippers at Alexander's, dresses at DeVinna, and dresses at Grande Maison de Blanc. For us, this was a big adventure.

We liked to go on the bridge of the yacht where the charts were. My sister remembers asking someone who came to read them, "Where are we now?" and being told, "Off Point Judith." She also remembers seeing the Colonel's own dining room, which had walls of carved teakwood. On the table were pink roses, linen, crystal, and the Aphrodite's own Minton China. Two stewards in white coats were standing ready to serve a meal. She asked one, "What is the Colonel going to have to eat?". The reply was, "Cream of wheat."

At Newport, we had a cruise about the harbor in the speed launch, with a sailor standing with folded arms in the stern. We also had a ride in a limousine along the shoreline to see the summer homes of the other millionaires.

The harbor had many other boats and other yachts anchored there so when the sunset gun rang out across the water, we saw all these vessels drop their flags simultaneously. This was an exciting moment that we would never see at West Park.

For my twelfth birthday, Miss Larson had a white birthday cake made for me at the Big House which was sent over to our house. It was beautifully decorated and made me very happy. She did other thoughtful things for us children such as giving us big chocolate candy eggs at Easter.

In 1916, I entered Kingston High School that fall even though in meant studying during the summer. I would shut myself up every morning in our east bedroom. This room, with the Japanese grass wallpaper and the ornate bedroom set, was the one we did not use except when having house guests.

My sister and I did have another cruise on the beautiful Aphrodite to Newport so my summer was not all study. When we were in Newport, Miss

Larson learned that there was to be musical entertainment at the summer theater so she arranged to have my sister and I go with the two Scandinavian girls from the Big House staff who were on the yacht with us. The little outdoor theater was bedecked with artificial flowers as a festive setting for the dancing and singing. I remember the words of one of the songs which reflected the mood of 1916. The first line was "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier."

One Saturday evening, there was to be a dance in the carriage house for some of the Colonel's household staff and some of the officers and stewards from the yacht. My mother let me go. It was my first dance.

The big carriage house was used as a hall for such occasions. Here was held the lovely wedding reception the Colonel had for one of his officers from the yacht and an English girl from the household staff. Her name was Annie Payne and we were all invited. The carriage house was also used for movie entertainment for his estate employees, and movies were shown on Saturday nights. There, we saw Westerns with Tom Mix and William S. Hart and other films with early female stars such as Dorothy Dalton and Marguerite Clark. It was all free.

The estate was in some ways a self-sufficient community, an exception being in the matter of church services. Some of the staff went to the nearby Episcopal Church. The Colonel had this church wired for electricity and a new house built for the sexton. He himself did not attend services there as did his predecessors Mr. and Mrs. John Jacob Astor and their son, the later Viscount and owner of Hever castle.

Several of the staff were Roman Catholics and went to the Church in Esopus so I am sometimes asked whether we ever saw Mother Cabrini, the first American citizen ever to be canonized as she was in West Park intermittently during those years. The answer is yes. She came to the estate to solicit funds both at the Big House and at our house. Mother gave her money and served her tea.

Both my sister, now eleven, and my brother, seven, were going to the West Park school, but my brother only went for the morning. Peterson brought them home for lunch. At the end of the school day, my sister would walk home from school. Minka, the Colonel's German Shepherd, would be watching for her inside the gate for which my father made the design to be cast in iron as he did for the big gate to the boathouse. He also designed the plaque for the fireplace in the cottage of the poultry plant manager, a building he planned. It was a scene from the Nibelungenlied, the Queen Brunhilde on her shield surrounded by flames.

We had one more Christmas with lovely gifts for us children from the Colonel. Mother got a big fancy box of Millard's chocolates and father got a case of champagne.

In Washington during these days, the Senate and the House passed a Declaration of War. We did not know what a war would mean to us. Our immediate concern was that in trying to learn how to drive. While learning, Dr. Barrus turned the Ford upside down on top of my sister and grandfather. She and my grandfather escaped serious injury but were anxious for a time.

There is this entry in my grandfather's Journal for June 28, 1917 : "Colonel Payne is buried today. Peace to his ashes." We stayed on the estate for nearly a year longer but there were some changes right away and employees commenced leaving. Harry Payne Bingham, a son of Colonel Payne's sister Mary, inherited the 645 acre estate at West Park along with two million dollars. This being war time now, he was in service with the rank of captain in the Field Artillery, and was at the estate only intermittently. His wife Harriette and their two children moved into the Big House to live. My sister remembers that they brought a children's brown pony and a pony cart and coachman.

Harriette, "nouveau riche" as she was, immediately wanted to show her importance by making changes. My father, who tried to please her, says in his memoirs that she even wanted to change the driveway with its old trees and cobblestone gutters. In the Big House, those of the Household staff who remained were distressed because, as they told my father, she did not know the value of anything. Some of her changes were having the silk curtains of the long drawing room, which had been made especially for it, dyed and having the gold tracery of the gold and ebony room removed with chemicals and the ebony painted a putty color.

The new year, 1918, began with very cold weather and bad news for us. Captain Bingham was making changes and cutting down expenditures and my father lost his job and would have to find something else to do. We had until April 1 to move. This bad news came at a time when my father was already faced with other problems since now, because of the death of his mother, he had to keep up the Riverby buildings. My grandfather had deeded Riverby to my grandmother in 1892. We said goodbye to the Pratt house and moved in to Riverby and began to make it our home.

#### Editor's Note

- 1) The "Grandfather" in these pages is the famous author John Burroughs. His summer house, Slabsides, is a National Historic Landmark.
- 2) Riverby is not far from this property. It is south on 9W at the spot where Park Lane meets 9W. There is a large house on the property but, at the time of this writing, it had not yet been determined if that house was the original Riverby. The house is now apparently owned by a doctor.
- 3) The "Doctor Barrus" was Clara Barrus, a doctor who came to treat John Burroughs and stayed with the Burroughs family for 30 years. She became Burroughs' Boswell and published many books about him.

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