



## Friends of John Jay Homestead Inc.

### Newsletter

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## Friends Celebrate Move to Coachman's House

By Nancy Dexter

To celebrate the official transformation of the Coachman's House into the Friends' offices, a reception was held at the site on Wednesday, June 18. Just below the wooden steps from the porch, a festive tent was set up with a delicious array of hors d'oeuvres and champagne to toast the Friends' latest move. Event organizers were Board Secretary Pam Hubbard and Friends' staffer Claire Crasto.

Special guests at the reception included Bedford Town Supervisor Lee V.A. Roberts; Kelly Montagnino, a representative from State Senator Vincent Leibell's office; Lynn Ryan, Executive Director of the Bedford Historical Society; new board member Compton Spain and other Friends trustees and local luminaries.

Everyone toured the new offices, which looked pristine for the occasion with fresh flowers and a mix of old prints and more recent photographs on the walls. Despite a sudden downpour, the reception was well-attended and guests left knowing that the Friends are making great strides toward their next major project, the renovation of the Carriage Barn into an Education and Visitors Center.

In a toast to the new office space, Friends' President Laurie Lewis said, "The setting is perfect, since work on the Carriage Barn can be viewed from the offices. Most significantly, this move underscores the strong partnership the Friends have with the state. Working together, we're preserving history and bringing more and more people to the site." Visitors drank a toast to this new incarnation of the Coachman's House and to the Friends' future.



Senator Vincent Leibell's assistant Kelly Montagnino; Friends' president Laurie Lewis; and Bedford Town Supervisor Lee Roberts.

Photo by Nancy Dexter

## The Coachman's House at John Jay Homestead

By Allan Weinreb

*"My dear Sally...The additions to the House (the Piazza excepted) were raised last Week; and Yesterday the foundations for the Stable were begun..." - John Jay to Sarah Livingston Jay, June 16, 1801*

The Coachman's House is one of a number of buildings erected by John Jay in preparation for his political retirement and move to Bedford. First built by local contractor Hizikiah Tracy, it is one of the oldest buildings at the Homestead.

The Coachman's House was constructed as part of a stable complex with the Carriage Barn, with a cobblestone courtyard between them. Visitors to the Jay estate entered the property on what is now Lyon Ridge Road, wended their way through the landscape and were dropped off on the front porch of the main house. Their carriages and coaches continued to the Carriage Barn, entering through the south doors. If their horses were to be stabled, they were walked across the courtyard and put up in stalls on the lower level of the Coachman's House. On the upper level of the building were living quarters for the Jays' coachman on the east, and a hayloft on the west.

The building has been altered repeatedly during its long history. The stables, originally open on the ground level, were fully enclosed around 1903. The hayloft was sacrificed around 1911 in order to expand the coachman's apartment, which was also equipped at that time with a modern bathroom and kitchen. For a long time, the Coachman's House was home to Thomas Ryan, Arthur and Eleanor Iselin's valued stablekeeper. Their daughter, Eleonor Iselin Wade, recalled "The keeper of the stables, Thomas, was like a king. Thomas was very important to me, like a second father."

The Coachman's House was part of the purchase of the Jay house and grounds made by Westchester County in the late 1950s. By 1980, the building was in deteriorated condition, and was given an extensive restoration by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. From the 1980s to 2006, it was used as an employee's residence by five successive site staffers. Last year, the State of New York decided that the building would house the offices of Friends of John Jay Homestead, and after upgrades to the heating system, the Friends moved in on March 31, 2008.



Coachman's House South Facade in 1897.

Photo from *Homestead* Archives