

## Houses, but no elephants, on parade in Nyack

There's always something thrilling about being able to peek into other people's houses and see the way they live. That's why house tours are always so popular. Add that you can be inspired by (OK, steal) great ideas for decorating your dining room or planting your perennial bed, and there's more than enough reason to take a tour.

You get two thrills for the price of one, then, at the Great Nyack House Tour, a fundraiser Saturday for the Historical Society of the Nyacks. It features 10 homes, all with admirable architectural details; impressive, name-droppable owners (present and former); and, yes, inspirational ideas that anyone can steal.

But five of these homes also allow tour-goers a peek into another way of life: that of Pierre Bernard, who popularized yoga in the United States. The tour includes his Clarkstown Country Club, a collection of buildings and homes throughout the Nyacks.

During the Gilded Age, Bernard, known as "Oom the Omnipotent," attracted famous followers with names like Vanderbilt and Kellogg, who came to the countryside for recreation and to practice yoga. But Bernard also had an eccentric side. He kept elephants and monkeys which, along with acrobats, performed circus acts at the Country Club. And at one of the homes on the tour, the upper floor was used for tantric dances, chanting and theatrical exhibits.

According to material provided for the tour, "During Bernard's first year in Nyack, the townspeople summoned the state police because they saw yoga exercises being practiced on the lawn and thought that Bernard was establishing a love cult. Upon arrival, the police found nothing suspicious and the matter was dropped."

The club operated successfully throughout the 1920s and '30s and began to decline at the beginning of World War II. Oom the Omnipotent died in 1955.

Here are brief descriptions of the homes, edited and condensed from the tour's brochure.

The properties include:

**North Cottage, The Moorings**, a Tudor-style house with original leaded-glass windows, built by James Hilton for one of his daughters in the early 1900s and sold to Bernard for his Clarkstown Country Club in 1925. The upstairs rooms of the main house were used for those tantric dances, chanting and theatrical exhibits. On the grounds are a spring-fed pond at the base of a 30-foot palisade and plantings by the current owners that include more than 50 Japanese maples, new flower beds and shrubs.

**South Cottage, The Moorings**, which, from 1751 to 1905, housed six generations of the Williamson family. Originally a large farm, it stretched from the land now occupied by the Fellowship of Reconciliation to the top of the mountain above Camp Ramah, and grew fruit, flowers and vegetables. In 1905, James and Ida Hilton bought the estate and named it The Moorings, and built this half-timbered house for another of their daughters.

**Anne R. Adams House**, a 1905-tudor that was built for actress Mary A. Nicholl. Large stone piers and a wide gable welcome guests to the front porch. There are leaded-glass sidelights, a handcrafted staircase and a built-in bench facing one of the six fireplaces. Among the furnishings are a tall clock, books, artwork and treasures from Enoch Bell, grandfather of Anne R. Adams and an early Nyack resident.

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**Sarvent/Diebold House**, a 70-acre farm with 900 feet of frontage on the Hudson that Phillip Sarvent acquired in 1748. During the Revolutionary War, the Americans fired on a British landing party from a quarry pit on the property. The sandstone portion of the house was built in 1813, and, prior to 1905, the Victorian-style front addition was built by owner Garret Sarvent, who was the first president of Upper Nyack. In 1940, William Diebold, an economist who worked at the Council on Foreign Relations, bought the home. He and his family lived there until 2002. The present owners renovated the house, and there are lovely details inside, including a circular foyer upstairs, a 19th-century heating grate and a eyebrow window near the ceiling of one of the eight bedrooms.

**Bennet/Deyrup House**, a Queen Anne-style house built in 1887. Attorney J.A. Bennet who had been U. S. consul in Bogotá, Colombia, was the first resident. In 1918, the house was purchased by Dr. Alvin Johnson, the founder of the New School in Manhattan, and his wife, Edith, as a summer home for their family. The children, who were given the old family name of Deyrup, were home-schooled by Edith Johnson, and in the home, they explored art, music, literature, foreign languages, economics, the sciences and nature. The paintings of Dorothy Deyrup were recently shown at an exhibition at Hopper House. An extraordinary variety of windows was installed on the first and second floors, an unusual touch for a late-19th-century house. Of the original 10 fireplaces, the current owners rescued eight intact, with original tiles surrounding most of them.

**On the Road Over the Mountain**, a charming cottage in a wooded setting next to an ancient burial ground. The house was built in the early 1900s on property that was once part of Wynddown Farm, on the Bradley Estate, which was later subdivided. The north section of the house might have been used for the storage of tools and farm equipment, as rusty tools have been found in the surrounding garden areas. The subflooring reveals 2-inch planks similar to those found in farm buildings. The house has been renovated. The original fireplace on the east wall was moved to its present location, and interior walls were moved to achieve a more open effect. Many windows have been added, providing a lovely view of the natural environment of the property.

**Highmount Cottage** originally faced the river with large columns across the porch. Pierre Bernard

purchased the house and the one to the west as accommodations for his guests under the name "Biophile Club." In 1996, the porch was removed and the front door was moved to the north side of the home.

**Rossiter House/Nyack Field Club**, a three-story, 18-room, stone-and-stucco house is part of the original 73-acre Hugh Maxwell Estate. Bernard's wife, Blance DeVries, taught dance here, and when the school went out of business, she suggested that Bernard buy the house to start their Clarkstown County Club. They and the staff of the club lived in the home. In 1954, Bernard sold the 12 1/2-acre Rossiter portion of the estate to the Nyack Field Club, which has preserved the building.

**The Towt House**, just north of the South Nyack campus of Bernard's Clarkstown Country Club, was the refuge of his monkeys, which often escaped from their cages and were once found in the bedroom of the owner's young daughter. The house has been called "Lawyer's House," for the many owners of that profession, and "Daffodil House" and "Daylily House," for the 1,200 bulbs and 1,500 plants that bloom on its sloping front yard each April and June.

**Wertheim Residence-Shuman Hall**, a Tudor-style stone and timber mansion that was the last of the grand homes built before the Great Depression. In 1945, Viola Bernard, who was married to a nephew of Pierre Bernard's, arranged for the mansion to be a hostel for refugees from Nazi persecution. In 1954, Nyack College (then known as the Missionary Training Institute) bought the building and used it

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as a library. Today, it is the college's administrative offices.

— **Liz Johnson**



A watercolor painted by Beverley Bozarth of the North Cottage of The Moorings, which is on the Great Nyack House Tour. It is a Tudor-style house with original leaded-glass windows, built by James Hilton for one of his daughters in the early 1900s, and sold to Pierre Bernard for his Clarkstown Country Club in 1925.

#### If you go

The Great Nyack House Tour, sponsored by the Historical Society of the Nyacks, is from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Reservations are \$40. Tour-goers can pick up guide books and maps from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Living Christ Church, 151 S. Broadway. For more information, [www.nyackhistory.org](http://www.nyackhistory.org), [housetour@nyackhistory.org](mailto:housetour@nyackhistory.org) and 845-418-4430.

#### Yoga in America

Robert Love, a South Nyack resident, has written, "The Great Oom: The Improbable Birth of Yoga in America," a nonfiction account of how Pierre Bernard popularized yoga and how its history is intertwined with the story of the nation. He will speak about the book at 7 p.m. May 22 at the Nyack Library, 59 S. Broadway, Nyack. 845-358-3370.

#### About the artist

Beverley Bozarth, a professional artist for more than 25 years, specializes in watercolor paintings with subjects that include landscapes, floral and botanical still lifes and commissioned house portraits. Her paintings are in the permanent collections of Scudder Investments, Exxon Corp., Bristol-Myers Squibb, Fidelity Investments and Colgate Palmolive, among others. She created watercolors of each of the homes on the tour and is presenting them to the homeowners. Her website is [bbozarthwatercolors.com](http://bbozarthwatercolors.com).

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An advertisement for the USA TODAY AutoPilot app. The top part features the USA TODAY logo in blue and the word "AutoPilot" in large black letters with a blue airplane icon to the right. Below this, a smartphone is shown displaying the app's interface with flight information for a BNA to IAD flight on Sep 21, 2009. To the right of the phone, text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". At the bottom right, it says "Presented by: Hampton" with the Hampton logo. A blue button at the bottom right says "SEE HOW IT WORKS »".