

HOMES OF HISTORIC DISTINCTION

# John C. Hart Memorial Library/Hyatt House

It would be extremely difficult to find anyone in Yorktown who does not treasure the John C. Hart Memorial Library in Shrub Oak. Generations of children have enjoyed story hours there; the reading room is constantly in use; and the local history section is a trove of information for curious Yorktown residents. But, for years before John Coleridge Hart's daughter, Catherine Dresser, bequeathed the building to the town in 1919 for use as a library, it was a stately 15-room home surrounded by lush specimen plantings and more than 50 varieties of trees. Today, even though it is an extremely active, functioning library, it is one of Yorktown's Homes of Historic Distinction.

Its history, however, begins much earlier. Almost 300 years ago, the 48-acre property, like almost everything in Westchester and Putnam counties, was owned by the Van Cortlandts. The site was first rented as a tenant farm by the Hyatt family, and eventually purchased by Revolutionary War Col. John Hyatt. The Hyatt family was so illustrious at the time that the town—now Shrub Oak—was called Hyatt's Plain. An old Van Cortlandt-era house, where Hyatt may have entertained Washington and Lafayette, originally sat near the spring on the property. Around the turn of the 18th century, Col. Hyatt and his family built a new house where the Hyatt family lived for generations.

In 1854, John Hart, who was born in Shrub Oak in 1822, but became wealthy as a pharmacist in New York City, purchased the house from his brother-in-law, John Hyatt. Hart used the place as a summer residence for years, and remodeled it in the Italianate style popular in the 1850s and 1860s. Hart and his family moved to Shrub Oak full time in 1864. He became an active citizen of the community, contributing generously to the building of the Shrub Oak Methodist Church and maintaining



The John C. Hart Memorial Library

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NANCY MILANESE



an avid interest in local schools. "Uncle Coleridge", as he was called by nephews and nieces, (He was related to the British poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge,) died in 1871 at 49 years of age. His wife and daughters lived on in the home, but at Catherine Dresser's death in 1916, family fortunes had greatly depleted and she was living in only a few rooms of the house.

By the time of Dresser's bequest to the town, all that was left of the estate were the buildings and acreage, along with an \$8,000 mortgage, back taxes and other debts. The prospect of creating a library was a daunting one, but in 1919, the town of Yorktown passed a resolution and the John C. Hart Memorial Library became a reality. In the early years, the librarian (and family) lived in the house and served as caretaker. During the 1930s, the Shrub Oak School District rented the first floor rooms for a kin-

dergarten, providing much-needed funds to maintain the property.

In 1969, the library was closed so that an addition could be built onto the original homestead, and further renovations were completed in 1988-89, removing a 19th century addition but leaving the original façade and carefully recreating facsimiles of the original windows and walls.

Today, although much of the John C.

hamlet of Shrub Oak.

The Yorktown Landmarks Preservation Commission is always seeking applicants for the Homes of Historic Distinction Program. To qualify, homes must have historical significance based on age, architectural style, past ownership or association with a person or event important to Yorktown's history. Through the program, plaques designating the basic facts about each house's history are fabricated and installed on or near the home. The commission will work with each homeowner on appropriate wording for the plaque and will assist in research. The cost for the application and the plaque is \$100. Applications are available online at [yorktownny.org/planning](http://yorktownny.org/planning) or by emailing [nmilanese@yorktownny.org](mailto:nmilanese@yorktownny.org).

*This article was submitted by the Yorktown Landmarks Preservation Commission as part of a series highlighting Yorktown Homes of Historic Distinction.*

State of New York Mortgage Agency

## LOAN TODAY. HOME TOMORROW.

Mortgages with down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers

Call (800) 382-4663 or visit [sonyma.org](http://sonyma.org)

## COLDWELL BANKER RESIDENTIAL BROKERAGE

*Congratulations to our 2016 Top Award Winner*

Annette Cicinelli has been recognized with the Coldwell Banker® International President's Elite award. This distinguished honor is awarded to the top 2 percent of approximately 88,000 Coldwell Banker®-affiliated sales associates worldwide.

**Annette Cicinelli**  
 Licensed Real Estate Salesperson  
 "Serving My Neighbors In and Around Yorktown Heights"  
 Cell: 914.755.5900  
 Annette.Cicinelli@CBmoves.com

398 Main Street  
 Ridgefield, CT 06877

© 2017 Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage. All Rights Reserved. Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage fully supports the principles of the Fair Housing Act and the Equal Opportunity Act. Operated by a subsidiary of NRT LLC. Coldwell Banker® and the Coldwell Banker logo are registered service marks owned by Coldwell Banker Real Estate LLC.