

# The New York Times

## With a Bit of Bon Ami and a Lot of Care, the Half Moon Sails Back Into View

The Half Moon Sails Again



By David W. Dunlap  
November 10, 2011  
© The New York Times

Time and the elements had seriously diminished “The Arrival of the Halve Maen, 1609,” a lovely, century-old stained-glass window that depicts Henry Hudson’s sailing vessel, the Half Moon, on the river that would bear his name.

How seriously? It was possible to work in the library of the New-York Historical Society for weeks at a time — as I have — without being aware that there was a lovely, century-old stained-glass window in the room. In fact, there are two 13-foot-tall stained-glass

windows. The other, depicting the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV, is known as the Huguenot Memorial.



David W. Dunlap/The New York Times The Huguenot Memorial window being reinstalled on Oct. 31.

Hiding in plain sight, they were dulled by decades of exposure in the early 20th century, when they were exterior windows. They were darkened further after the society's building was expanded in the late 1930s, leaving them in the interior. Dust accumulated. The artificial illumination behind them dimmed. After the frames were painted white, the once-luminous glass stood out even less. The windows looked more like muddy murals.

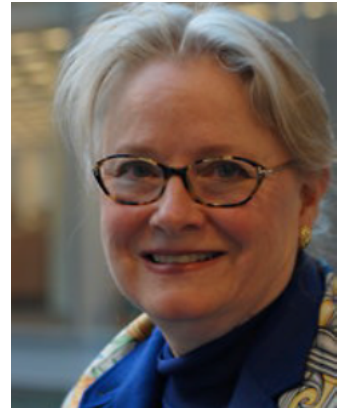
Even those who worked around the windows could not take them in fully. "We had no idea you could see the faces of the Indians," said Jean Ashton, executive vice president of the historical society and director of its library. (*Real* native New Yorkers are shown in the foreground of the Half Moon window.)

Their faces can be seen clearly now. So can every line in the Half Moon's rigging; delicate strips of lead that had become caked with soot. So can the separate layers of lavender and blue in the sky. Best of all for Ms. Ashton, the reflection of the mast on the water can now be discerned. "It's a great revelation," she said.

The freshly restored window will be formally unveiled Friday as part of the grand reopening of the New-York Historical Society, at Central Park West and West 77th Street, after a three-year, \$65 million renovation, designed by Platt Byard Dovell White Architects.

Much of the credit for rescuing the Half Moon window goes to the very organization that donated it in the first place: the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames, Descendants of the Ancient and Honorable Families of New Netherland. (I wrote this post just so I could drop that name.)

Mary Woodfill Park, a great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter of Abraham Riker (the Riker of Rikers Island), was the directress general of the Holland Dames in 2008 when the plight of the Half Moon window was brought to the group's attention. "I don't know a lot about stained glass, but I knew it would be very labor intensive," Mrs. Park said.



Mary Woodfill Park

Thomas Venturella, a glass restorer and conservator, told her in 2009 that she could expect the project to cost around \$60,000. Most of the expense was eventually met by the Anna Glen Butler Vietor Memorial Fund. Mrs. Vietor, who died in 2005, was a "very beloved" member of the Holland Dames, said Mrs. Park, whose daughters and granddaughters also belong. William Hudson — no relation to Henry — was the other major donor. Restoration of the Huguenot window was underwritten by Robert G. Goelet.

Examining the Half Moon window on Oct. 31, a few days after it had been reinstalled, Mr. Venturella recalled: "It was dead. Absolutely dead. It was almost uncomfortable to look at." The cross-hatched ship's rigging, he said, resembled the lint filter of a drying machine. Dust was trapped between the three layers of glass that compose the sky: opalescent, blue and lavender. The structural supports were giving way.

The windows were taken to the Venturella Studio on Union Square East. They were disassembled and gently cleaned with water and Bon Ami. Extensive new leading was installed but no new glass was needed. Mr. Venturella came to know the Half Moon window intimately enough that he began referring to Henry Hudson, who is barely visible on the poop deck, as Hank.

The Half Moon window, designed by Frank J. Ready of the Gorham Manufacturing Company, and the Huguenot Memorial, by Mary Tillinghast, were always treated by the society simply as architectural features of the building, said Margaret K. Hofer, the curator of decorative arts. But now that they can be fully appreciated, they have been formally accessioned into the society's collection, 103 years after their arrival.



David W. Dunlap/The New York Times Because the windows are no longer on exterior walls, they must be artificially illuminated from behind.

***Correction: November 16, 2011***

*The City Room* column in some editions on Friday, about the restoration of two stained-glass windows at the New-York Historical Society, misstated the given name of one of the donors to the project. He is William Hudson, not Thomas.