



## More Than A Rented Pineapple

By Marguerite Neary

**Webster's Dictionary** tells us that the root word in **hospitality** comes from the Latin **hospitum**, which means "lodging." But we all know that to be hospitable means more than providing overnight accommodations for a visitor or a guest. It can refer to offering food and drink to friends or strangers, to opening our homes to visitors, and, through an even lesser known definition, to keeping an open mind.

On all counts, the Yorkville Historical Society acknowledges and adheres to the many layers of meaning in the word **hospitality**, and YHS's determination to remain open minded is observable in the attitudes of non members, too. Each year historic home owners, ministers, and history enthusiasts graciously open their doors to hundreds of tour takers, trusting in the good will of those to whom they extend hospitality and, very likely, hoping and praying that their unknown guests will be gentle on their belongings.

This very same selflessness can be observed in our Society members, who volunteer their time, their service, and even their own personal space when the good of the organization is involved. There was not even a need for the slightest nudge when Grace Ulbricht started up a committee to plan for the forthcoming Doheny lecture on York's native son, David Finley (see the article in this issue), and the generous offering of the Cumbie residence for our guest's housing and dinner. This is a perfect example of spontaneous hospitality. Likewise, the Christmas Tour Committee materialized when Jan Ramsey and Anne Allison called for assistance: new members Jessica Dunlap and Cynthia Macri, joined the force, and "the usual suspects" (Pam Schronce, the Propsts, and Scott Hollis)) signed up for Christmas duty, knowing full well that the committee service would involve everything from cutting greenery, to lighting luminaria, to assisting with last minute touches on home décor.

## Neary ... **More Than A Rented Pineapple**

Whether the tradition of generosity and graciousness comes from the practices of the early settlers of York, who brought with them the Celtic imperative of sharing their bounty (even when times were not so bountiful), or from colonial traditions of providing food and lodgings for travelers passing through, we can affirm that an open, hosting spirit has not faded away. And the cost, whether of money, time, or energy, has occasionally been high. Reserving special rooms or towels or foods for “company” is embedded in our collective psyches. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, hostesses were proud to display a pineapple for their guests, as they looked for a distinctive centerpiece for the dining table. This relatively newly discovered and quite exotic fruit, one that Columbus brought to Europe in 1493 (after his second voyage to the New World), was so prized that it was often rented. When circumstances allowed, astonished guests were even allowed to consume the pineapple!

Because the tropical pineapple became a symbol of hospitality in American culture, one that appears on flags and stencil designs, we are reminded of the openness of the newcomers to America, who were eager to learn about something new, to take a chance on the unknown, and to go to great lengths to impress their visitors. Their enthusiasm for knowledge of new things prevails today, although, at times, the willingness to be exposed to new concepts takes us to historic periods that can be disturbing or painful. Our interest in all aspects of history compels us to hear stories about an era when hospitality was not extended to all people. **At our January 25, 2007 meeting, Dr. Litasha Dennis, who teaches in the English Department at Winthrop University, will present a talk on slave narratives, derived from a course she designed for Winthrop students. Engaging in and being receptive to conversations about the experiences of slavery, which are still in living memory in this part of the country, can only advance future hospitality. As we educate ourselves about the past, we continue to unlock our minds. We may not have to rent the pineapple anymore, but we can remember how a precious article symbolized our commitment to hospitality.**

