

The
Courier

Bi-Monthly Newsletter

of the

Lansingburgh Historical Society

February, 2015

From the desk of the Acting President

It is with great sadness that I and the Board of Trustees of the Lansingburgh Historical Society announce the resignation of David Marsh as our president. He has served the board and the membership of LHS with faithfulness, integrity, and a marvelous sense of humor, something sorely needed at times. We will be going forward with many of the plans Dave has helped implement and will always rely on his wisdom and guidance as he continues as a trustee.

Liz VanBuren

Acting President

Learning Opportunities

Hudson Valley Community College is offering a few noncredit “short courses” of interest to people who enjoy New York history and its people. See HVCC’s Winter/Spring 2015 Community and Professional Education Catalog. These are inexpensive “courses” which last for just a few hours. The enrollment is open until full or the course has begun. Contact the college for details and enrollment at (518) 629-7339 or www.hvcc.edu/community/register

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The Brush Industry in Lansingburgh

The manufacture of brushes in Lansingburgh began around 1810 when William McMurray started to make brushes from locally acquired pig bristle. The family farms in the area raised swine and there was ample hardwood for the brush backs. It was his brother John G. McMurray who came along a little later and expanded the business into a factory. As time went on into the 1860’s, other McMurray family members came into the business including Alfred, Amos, Andrew, David, Edward, James H., and Samuel.

Many others started brush factories. An 1899 New York State Factory Inspection report listed the following brush factories in Lansingburgh: Comesky Brothers, O. Denin & Sons, Diack Brothers, Flynn Brothers, Fredrick M. Hoyt & Brothers, James McQuide & Son, John G.O’Brien Jr., Powers Brothers, George Scott, A. L. Sonn, and E. and C. Wood. A 1915 brush industry report says that Lansingburgh brush factories produced \$1,000,000 worth of all kinds of brushes: hair and nail brushes, brushes for the skin and bath, dog brushes, horse (curry) brushes, bath tub brushes, toilet bowl brushes, barbers dusters, hat and clothes brushes, radiator brushes, tooth brushes, typewriter brushes, and many more for obscure applications. That would be worth \$23,250,000 in 2015 dollars.

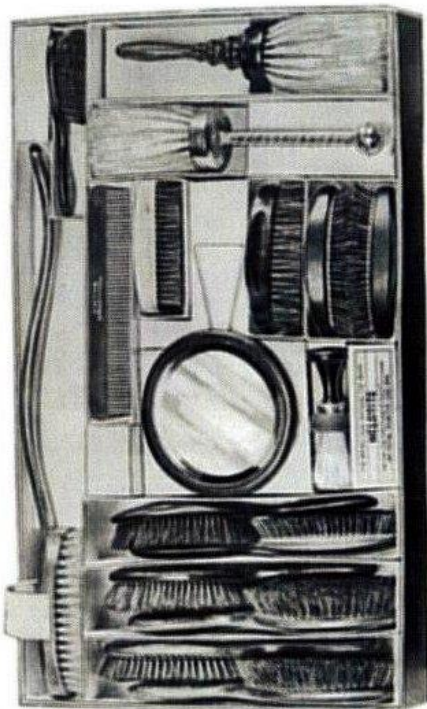
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Victory Turned into Mourning: Farewell to Lincoln and Grant at the New York State Capitol. Lincoln and Grant lay in state in the New York State Capitol after their deaths. President Lincoln in the old capitol building and Gen. Grant in the new capitol shortly after it was completed. One session April 9, 10:00AM til noon.

One Soldier's Account: The Battle of the Bulge and the Conquest of Germany. The story of a Syracuse, NY man who was there. One session March 26, 9:30 until 11:30AM.

Some Aspects of New York State in the War of 1812. Robert Mulligan, a retired NYS Museum curator will lead the program. He will also be presenting a program with LHS in June about a local Civil War hero, Rice Bull. One session April 16, 9:30 to 11:30AM.

A Visit to the Senate House: A Historic Site in Kingston. Kingston was New York's first Capitol and the location of the first NYS Senate meeting in 1777 before the British burned the city in the fall of that year. One session March 18, 11:00 to 12:30PM.



All the factories were located in the north end of Lansingburgh. Charles Wood's factory was at 649 Third Avenue, Flynn Brothers was at the SE corner of 111th at Fifth Ave., Hoyt's was at 27 120th Street, Dennin's on the SW corner of 120th Street at Sixth Ave. I remember the latter well. In the late 1940's and early 1950's we Burgher kids played in the ruins of the brick factory building, defending our fort from imaginary invaders. It was replaced by a small apartment building. Diack's brush factory was the furthest south at 108th St. and Third Ave.

The brush making material used included pig or hog bristle, horsehair, and tampico. Tampico is a fiber used for floor and other scrubbing brushes. It is extracted from various species of agave, a plant native to semi-desert environment. The agave leaf is dried and softened which produces a fiber that is strong, maintains its stiffness, and holds considerable amounts of water. Agave used in US brush manufacture usually came from the dry inland parts of northern Mexico but any semi-desert area can produce it.

Hog bristle is the hair of boar and some domestic swine. It is still used in the best quality artist's paint brushes for oil based paints. It was used in the past for many types of hair brushes. The very early brush manufacturers in the Burgh bought bristle from local farmers but as the size of the industry grew here, the need for large amounts of bristle of better quality caused manufacturers like John G. McMurray, James Flynn and others to travel to Europe and Japan to purchase bristle. In the late 1800's, the best pig bristle came from Germany, Austria, and Russia. When World War I and the Russian Revolution began there was a scarcity of bristle and the price soared, damaging brush production and making bristle brushes expensive.

Horsehair brushes were used as clothing brushes, barber/shaving brushes and shoe polishing brushes. Hair was collected locally but as the industry grew, it was imported from South American countries

Events and Programs

From Pg. 2 Col 2

March 14, Saturday, 10:00AM until 3:00PM, Melville House. Open House and Bake Sale.

This is the first of our open house programs for 2015 and is combined with a bake sale. The house and museum will be open to the public with guides to talk about the house, Herman Melville's life here and the history of Lansingburgh. Please have donations for the sale at Melville House by 9:45AM the morning of the sale. Kay DeRosa is the contact person for this event at (518) 237-3924.

April 9, Thursday, time and place to be announced. Michael Barrett, Executive Director of the Hudson Mohawk Hudson Gateway, will speak about Troy in the US Civil War.

April 11, Saturday, 10:00AM to Noon, Melville House. Open House Volunteers will be present in Melville House to give tours, discuss the history of the house and about Melville's life there, and talk about the history of Lansingburgh and its people.

May 9, Saturday, 10:00 to Noon, Herman Melville House. Open House Volunteers will be present in Melville House to give tours, discuss the history of the house and Melville's life there, and talk about the history of Lansingburgh and its people.

May 16, Saturday, Tour of Lansingburgh Houses. Information forthcoming.

June 4, Thursday, Time undetermined, Lansingburgh Veterans Club, An Evening with Sgt. Rice Bull, NY 123rd Volunteer Infantry. Robert Mulligan, a retired NYS Museum Curator, will impersonate Rice C. Bull, a Union soldier who fought at Chancellorsville and with Sherman's march through Georgia which devastated every railroad, bridge, town, village, and plantation from Atlanta to Savannah in the US Civil War. There will be a sit down dinner with choice of roast beef, chicken or haddock. A basket auction will follow at the end of the evening. You must make and pay for your reservation by May 27. The \$30 reservation

The earliest brushes were made by drilling holes in a wood backing. Bristle was then pushed into the holes and hot pine or spruce pitch was poured into the holes, fixing the bristle to the wooden back. A second piece of wood was glued over the top, then shaped and finished. Brushes of this type were easily damaged by water which tended to dissolve the pitch, loosening the bristle.

Most Lansingburgh made brushes were assembled by pulling bristle through the backing holes with a continuous wire, a practice called *brush drawing*. The wire loops were pushed through adjacent holes until the entire backing was filled with bristle. A wooden top piece was then glued in place, concealing the wire network. The top piece was then treated as described above. Brush drawing was a cottage industry and often employed young girls and women. The later factories had additions where brush drawers worked inside the factory building.

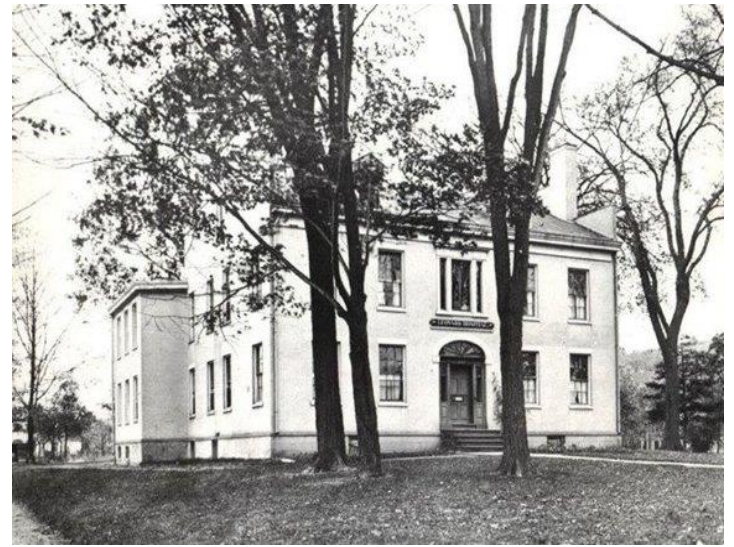
Brush backing included varieties of hardwood, bone, and ivory. Most of the brushes manufactured in Lansingburgh came from birch harvested in Grafton, NY. Very fine brushes were often backed with imported decorative wood like ebony, rosewood, satinwood, and olivewood. California redwood made a very attractive backing. Every factory had a woodworking shop to cut and drill the backing and then shape, glue and finish the top piece for the backing.

The energy for sawing, drilling, heating and wood bending came from a steam boiler plant in the factory building. The December 18, 1865 edition of the Albany Evening Journal reports a massive explosion in the four story John G. McMurray brush factory at the corner of John St. (Fourth Ave.) and Richard Street (118th St.). A Mr. Ward was the engineer operating the steam boiler. He was killed instantly as he lay asleep beside the boiler at 7:00AM, his limbs said to be torn from the torso when the excess pressure burst the boiler. He was the only fatality because other workers had not yet arrived for the start of the workday. Windows

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THEN & NOW



Original Leonard Hospital

Leonard Hospital at 114th Street, between 6th & 7th Avenues, was organized by Dr. Fredrick B. Leonard in 1893. The building was originally the home of his father, Timothy Leonard. A new hospital was built on New Turnpike Road in 1973 and all hospital operations were moved there. The building was remodeled into senior apartments and today is known as Lansingburgh Apartments.



Leonard with Additions



Lansingburgh Apartments

Our membership year begins on April 1st. Those joining in January, February or March extend their membership through the next membership year. Consider upgrading your regular membership to a sustaining membership or either of those to a life membership. Encourage friends to join. Regular Membership \$15/year, Sustaining Membership \$40/year, Life Membership \$150/year, Senior/Student Membership \$5/year, Professional/Corporate Membership \$200/year.

Donations are always welcome! **Rates effective 1 July, 2014.**

Name----- Phone-----

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Send to Lansingburgh Historical Society PO Box 219 Troy, New York 12182-0219

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PO Box 219
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