

NEWSLETTER

LANSINGBURGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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August 2013

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO OUR MEMBERS

The Lansingburgh Historical Society has lost some of its key people from leadership positions through death, illness, resignation and expired terms of office. More are anticipated. At present we have vacancies on the Board of Trustees. We need someone to take on the newsletter and website. We need help on the committee which advises on the maintenance of Melville House and the grounds including Melville Park. We occasionally need the advice of a lawyer and an accountant. We need one or more people to take responsibility for membership (keeping records, reporting data, soliciting new and continuing membership, etc). We also need people with an interest in genealogy, history and writing. There is a need for people to help with our collections. Some of these positions require some computer knowledge and a willingness to use a computer for email, writing and record keeping. Most of all we need people willing to learn, to cooperate, to communicate and to be available at least by email and phone during the year. If you have an interest and want to join us, please send an email telling us what you would like to help with and how to contact you. Send to davidm2444@hotmail.com.

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

SATURDAY AUGUST 3~ INAUGURAL HERMAN MELVILLE BIRTHDAY FEST WILL BE HELD AT THE MELVILLE HOUSE 10 A. M. Our Inaugural Herman Melville Birthday Fest will be held at the Melville House, located on the corner of 114th Street and First Avenue in Lansingburgh. Dennis C. Marnon Administrative Officer of Harvard's Houghton Library will deliver a slide presentation on Herman Melville and Lansingburgh at 10 AM, concentrating on Melville's Lansingburgh Academy years and the ironic portrait of the young author and adventurer. The Melville House will be open to visitors all day. At 1 PM we will take a brief walk to places in Lansingburgh important in Melville's life. Books authored by or related to Melville will be on sale. The festival is free & open to the public. A sandwich platter, along with a birthday cake for Herman Melville, will be served. Bring a birthday card for Herman, if you like, & we'll display it! Attendees are encouraged to dress in period clothing. There will be a coloring contest for children & door prizes for best Victorian outfit. Donations are welcome.

SATURDAY AUGUST 10~CLAMSTEAM 1:00PM AT THE VETERANS OF LANSINGBURGH PAVILLION will be jointly sponsored by "We Were Once Burghers Young & Old" and the Lansingburgh Historical Society. All proceeds benefit the Lansingburgh Historical Society. Raw clams, hamburgers, hotdogs, sausage and peppers, clam chowder, beer and soda available through the day. Dinner consisting of steamed clams, ½ barbequed chicken, baked potato, corn-on-cob, watermelon, tossed salad, rolls. You may bring munchies, salads, or desserts

to share. There will be a 50/50 raffle. The cost is \$35.00 (in advance) for each reservation. Make checks payable to Kathleen DeRosa. Contact Maria Chalifoux mchalifony@aol.com or Kay DeRosa kathleen.derosa@yahoo.com for more details. Send your check for \$35.00 for each reservation to Kathleen DeRosa P.O. Box 8, Troy, New York 12182

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 14~ LANSINGBURGH ARTISTS PROGRAM 9:00 AM. Our Lansingburgh artists program will coincide with a walking tour of artists' graves at Oakwood Cemetery. In the morning, at 9 AM, archivist and art historian Warren Broderick will lead a 2-hour walking tour to visit the grave sites in the Oakwood of 12 important artists of the 19th and 20th centuries from the Troy area. At each site we will learn why the artist is significant and will receive a handout with a brief biographical sketch and examples of each person's work. This tour involves a modest fee and one must register with Oakwood Cemetery at oakwood_cemetery@yahoo.com or by calling 272-7520. Following lunch (from 11:30 to 1:00) (we recommend the Lansingburgh Café at 112th Street and Fifth Avenue) meet at 1:30 PM at the Melville House, where the work of Lansingburgh artists will be on display. One of these artists, John Connors, will speak about and display his work and provide a live demonstration of his techniques.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19~ WORLD WAR II VETERAN TO SPEAK AT 7:30 PM AT THE MELVILLE HOUSE. Robert Jackson of Slingerlands, a World War II Veteran, wrote about his battles from Italy and in a prisoner of war camp in Germany in a log that he kept hidden from the enemy. Nearly 60 years later, he turned the notes into a book, "A Wartime Prison Camp Log," which will be the subject of his riveting presentation. Signed copies of his book on the subject will be available for purchase at the meeting.

SATURDAY/SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 28-29 In conjunction with the 2013 Hudson River Valley Ramble, lead by LHS Trustee, Russell Ziemba ~Details to follow.

THE FOLLOWING STORY BY WARREN BRODERICK BEGINS WITH THIS EDITION OF THE NEWSLETTER AND WILL CONTINUE AS A SERIES THROUGH FUTURE EDITIONS

Truth Stranger Than Fiction: The Tragedy and Triumph of Lany Wager Rose (Part 1)

WARREN F. BRODERICK

The vast majority of sex crimes that occurred in 19th Century America probably went unrecorded, with the exception of a few high-profile murders of prostitutes and deaths that resulted from botched abortions. Domestic abuse and incest were never documented because of the shame involved and divorces (mostly kept from the public by confidentiality restrictions) were generally granted only on the grounds of adultery and abandonment. Sex crimes that occurred in isolated rural areas were rarely made known to the residents of urban communities where newspapers were published. In this context it is truly remarkable that the abuse of Lany Catherine Wager, a young woman living on a dead-end road in rural Pittstown, achieved such notoriety in the Lansingburgh area in 1851.

Magdalena Catherine Wager, known as “Lany” or “Laney,” of Palatine German descent, was a daughter of William Coonradt Wager and Catherine (Bailey) Wager, and was born on December 17, 1831 on their farm on Piser Hill Road in western Pittstown. The family belonged to the Lutheran Church in Melrose and moved to Johnnycake Hollow Road, near the current Tomhannock Reservoir, in 1836. William purchased 22.8 acres of land there which included a modest wooden farmhouse; this dirt surfaced road, which now runs between Ford Road and LeLoup Road, dead-ended at that time. Lany’s mother, Catherine died on February 20, 1847 and her father remarried Sarah, the widow of Silas Stark, in August of 1848. William Wager, who could neither, read nor write, lived on his farm until his death on February 8, 1877; Sarah died there on October 5, 1878. Both are interred in Elmwood Cemetery, Schaghticoke.

In June of 1851 a pair of self-styled “Indian doctors” named William Avery (alias William May) and Lewis Livingston, who claimed to hail from Arkansas, visited the area professing to treat any malady for a price. The so-called doctors were well dressed and traveled in a fine carriage. Avery was very well spoken and Livingston was or pretended to be a deaf mute, communicating by sign language, cards and a chalk board. They boasted to have learned many secret remedies from living with western Indian tribes, a common claim in an era when medicine in America remained largely unscientific and often practiced by traveling confidence men who duped poorly educated residents with various forms of quackery. Sarah Wager sought advice from the doctors for a minor undisclosed ailment and brought along Lany who had been sickly for some time. The doctors had visited the households of John G. Clickner and “Squire” Charles Fake in the same general neighborhood.

Lany Wager supposedly suffered from small lesions or ulcers on her womb, clearly not malignant nor as large as the Indian doctors pretended, if any existed at all. As one might imagine gynecological problems were treated poorly, if at all, in America at this time, and the subject of much folklore and superstition. The supposed doctors diagnosed the serious nature of her illness merely by feeling her pulse. Avery and Livingston told the Wagers that Lany’s ulcers could be removed using metal instruments they possessed and that they had performed this operation before; Dr. Alson Hull later testified that such a procedure was medically impossible at that time “consistent with the life of the patient.” But these “wolves in sheep’s clothing” had other plans for Lany. Because they claimed Lany’s situation was too serious to use the metal instruments the doctors determined a “natural insertive method” was preferable, and both men raped her a number of times on June 25th and 26th, 1851, under the pretence of administering her medical treatment. They even demanded another dollar from her parents for an additional vial of oil needed to massage and lubricate Lany in preparation. The “treatments” took place on a bed and chair in a locked and shrouded bedroom. Sarah Wager listened from outside the room for fear Lany might be in pain but rather than crying heard “strange noises” from the bed which she did not like. Following the treatments Lany could scarcely rise or walk from her chair. Her suspicion now aroused, Sarah sent Lany’s younger sister (probably Mary, aged 17 and unmarried) into the room to inquire as to what had transpired.

Lany later testified that following a couple of these “natural treatments” she became

aware that the doctors had intentions beyond merely “applying” their medicines to her womb. She stated that she had never before had “connection” with any man and once the doctors forbade her to tell anyone about how they had cured her of the ulcers she realized their nefarious intentions and informed her parents. Lany Wager was no simpleton. She was merely a naïve, trusting country girl who had never dated a man. She could read and write and clearly attended the local one-room school for a number of grades. Her testimony at the “trial” of the so-called doctors was very forceful and articulate.

A warrant was secured for their arrest but they had already left Montgomery Hall in Saratoga Springs where they were staying and (Avery in the company of a “young lady” he claimed to be his wife) but they were apprehended soon thereafter in Troy and brought before Justice Isaac Ransom in Lansingburgh for a “criminal examination,” the equivalent of a modern grand jury. Marcus L. Filley conducted the examination for the court and both Sarah and Lany Wager gave detailed and consistent testimony. The defendants made no statements before the Justice’s Court. They were committed to Rensselaer County Jail for trial on charges of rape and conspiracy. But no such trial would ever take place.

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End of Part 1. To be continued

MEMBERSHIP

Our membership year begins in April. People who join 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 your friends to join.

Regular Membership is \$5.00/ year
Sustaining Membership is 25.00/year
Life Membership is \$100

Donations are welcome at any time!

Mail to: Lansingburgh Historical Society
P.O. Box 219
Troy, NY 12182-0219

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