

NEWSLETTER

LANSINGBURGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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December 2013

ACTING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We are grateful to everyone who supported our 2013 GALA Fund Raiser on October 17. This year we honored the memory of Gordon Brown, a well known figure in Lansingburgh schools and a dedicated trustee of the Lansingburgh Historical Society. Gordon's wife Suzann Brown, their daughter Lori and son Geoffry attended. A Certificate of Appreciation from the Rensselaer County Legislature was brought by County Executive Kathy Jimino, and was presented to Suzann Brown by Troy City Councilman Jim Gordon. A eulogy emphasizing Gordon's service to the historical society and the Lansingburgh community was given by David Marsh. Michael Barrett gave a fascinating talk about an incident from Troy's Nineteenth Century history. Warren Broderick portrayed Charles Hasbrouck, a figure from Lansingburgh's history. Our auction was very successful. Everyone enjoyed a very good time! Net proceeds from this event amounted to more than \$6400. We have Kay DeRosa and Liz VanBuren and the entire GALA Committee to thank for the success of this event.

Our year has gone very well from the standpoint of fund raising. Besides the GALA we have brought in money from a bake sale, a holiday auction, events by the Paranormal Society, a book sale, a porch sale, a holiday ornament sale, donations in memory of Gordon Brown, a donation from the Burgher Kids and other donations. Melville House contains two rental apartments which also help. We balance that against the expenses we continue to face with the maintenance and rehabilitation of the Melville House, its grounds and the Melville Park. The north side porch has some moisture damage and rotted wood which is being repaired. Railings will be installed. Regrading of the garden areas adjacent to the porch will be done by spring. The entry way of Melville House is being refinished. A damaged front window frame has been fixed along with damaged floor around a radiator beneath the window. New interior storm sash has been installed in the front windows. The trustees have approved hiring a landscaper to manage the grounds. All of these improvements have been done or are in progress right now.

In early November we discovered some damage to the east foundation caused by rain water which accumulated from improperly placed roof gutters and down spouts. We are in the process of having the roof gutters and down spouts replaced so as to carry more of the water away from the building. We are getting estimates for repair and replacement of a damaged beam and sills and the rebuilding of the foundation wall. All of this will be very expensive as we go in to 2014.

For several years we have been concerned about our lack of safe handicapped access and use in Melville House. We are also attempting to get advice on how to retrofit an historic house to meet minimum standards for handicap access. There will also be a need to find a contractor who can do this kind of work.

So while we have been successful in raising money in an era when the New York State government is not supporting member items as was its practice a few years ago, our needs continue to be very great. Melville House continues to be an expensive asset to maintain. At the same time we must keep in mind the purpose for which the New York State Education Department chartered the Lansingburgh Historical Society in 1965. The reason for our existence is to promote the history and people of the Lansingburgh community through research, teaching, writing and communication. If one was to audit the time we spend on various activities, our chartered purpose would seem to get lost in the effort to raise money to keep our property safe, secure and in repair. 2015 will be the 50th Anniversary of our NYS Ed Dept. Charter.

As 2013 comes to a close the Board of Trustees, our officers and I want to thank all of our members and friends for the many ways that you support the Lansingburgh Historical Society. We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS FOR 2014

December and January are the months when the Events and Programs Committee put together the offerings for the year to come. They are interested in finding speakers on local historical events in Rensselaer and Albany Co., happenings in the Hudson or Mohawk Valley, institutions in the region, etc. All we need is a name, a phone number or an email address to follow-up. If you have ideas for the Committee to consider for these evening presentations, please send them to our email address in the letterhead at the top of the first page or call and leave a message on the LHS phone 518-235-3501.

The following article by Warren Broderick which begins here will continue in future editions. Warren portrayed Charles Hasbrouck as he roved about and greeted guests at our GALA in October.

The Tragic Life and Death of Charles W. Hasbrouck

Warren F. Broderick
Lansingburgh, N.Y.
February 2012

Charles William Hasbrouck seemed to have a promising future when he was born to Peter Hasbrouck and Ann Montgomery in Albany on March 23, 1815. His father, descended from an early Huguenot family from New Paltz, was a highly-regarded Albany accountant. Charles moved to Lansingburgh in 1822 to apprentice under his uncle, William Montgomery, owner of a successful apothecary store on State Street (Second Avenue). He entered the Lansingburgh Academy in 1826 where he excelled in chemistry and pharmacopoeia, graduating in 1832. He entered Union College in Schenectady, graduating in 1835. At Union he was said to possess “no small share of brilliant talents” including oratory, wit, and poetics, but at the same time was described as “one of the ‘hard cases.’” He was admitted to the bar but never pursued a career as a practicing attorney. Charles remained in the apothecary business with his uncle until the death of William Montgomery on April 11, 1850.

William Montgomery’s estate totaled more than \$42,000 and Charles Hasbrouck, as Executor and principal heir, received circa \$30,000, including the apothecary store on the corner of State and Elizabeth Streets (Second Avenue and 116th Street) and its contents. A detailed listing of the medicines and other contents of the apothecary store was conducted as needed for probate for the Rensselaer

County Surrogate's Court---the original has been preserved by the Rensselaer County Historical Society. Tall and handsome, Charles was surely one of Lansingburgh's most eligible bachelors. On the first of June, 1852, he was married by Rev. C.W. Hewes of the Baptist Church to Lucinda J. Hannings, at 27 years of age considered by many to be the most beautiful woman in Lansingburgh. Lucinda appears to have come from rural northern Saratoga County to work as a seamstress in the tailoring business of Charles Clark as she was rooming with them in the 1850 census.

On July 22nd of the previous year Charles Hasbrouck purchased lots 235 and 236 on the west side of John Street (Fourth Avenue) in the Third Division of the Village of Lansingburgh from Miriam, the widow of Alexander Walsh, for \$2,500. He constructed an impressive late Greek revival temple-form house with Italianate details as a present for his bride, and it was numbered 170 John Street (street numbering was updated in Lansingburgh to the present system in the late 1860s); their house was assessed at \$1,700. In March of 1857 their only child, a daughter named Jane Ann, nicknamed Jennie, was born there. That year Charles served as Lansingburgh Town Clerk. A prosperous businessman, a loving couple, a lovely young daughter, and a handsome new home would seem to be the ingredients for happiness. No one in Lansingburgh could have imagined the series of tragic events that would soon follow over the succeeding thirty years.

The Hasbrouck world was shattered when their lovely little daughter, Jennie, passed away on the first of February, 1859. Two days later she was interred in the Trinity Episcopal Churchyard cemetery located on the same street where the family resided. Her grave was marked with a small marble marker with a tiny lamb on top. The exact cause of Jennie's death was not recorded and did not have to be determined at that date. The state of medicine at the time remained very primitive and child mortality was high by today's standards. For some reason or reasons Jennie's death devastated her parents more so than most. She was their only child and possibly her mother could not bear another. Or did the administration of some medicine from her father's apothecary store hasten her demise? Or did Charles feel responsible for failing to give his daughter medication?

The Hasbroucks never recovered from their little girl's death. They could no longer live in their beautiful new home. By 1860 they had moved to a modest apartment in the apothecary store. In 1862 they sold their former home to George Dauchy. Lucinda was said to never appear in public again except in her mourning dress and shrouded her face from view behind a black veil. She wandered the streets of Lansingburgh so attired and often visited the grave of her little girl. She wasted away and departed this world on May 9th, 1867, still only 41 years of age. "Humbly and lovingly" her husband committed "the faultless woman and faithful wife who lingered long at Marah's bitter well" to a place in Trinity churchyard alongside her daughter. Charles wrote in Lucinda's obituary in the Lansingburgh Gazette:

"Even when the opening rose was bursting into beauty in her cheerful home, the sunshine of that home departed and a shadow has fallen there which the light of long life will never prevail to overcome. . . . The remaining years allotted to her survivor will be alternately sad and rejoicing to know that there was one on earth of late, so gentle, so lovely, so beloved as she had gone to the company which is gathered of the beloved of all nations and at all times in that beautiful country, that far away country where there is no night . . . "

He concluded in praying that a reunion would be near "under a sky where trouble and temptation never come and where clouds of sorrow never roll."

The life of Charles Hasbrouck continued to spiral downward. The loss of his wonderful wife and child, whom he idolized, “seemed to strangely dishearten him,” recalled a local newspaper editor, “and intemperance, that rock on which many a fair barque has been stranded and wrecked proved to be his ruin.” After losing his property and his apothecary business and squandering what remained of his inheritance, Charles boarded at the tavern of his Uncle and Aunt, George and Sally McAuley at 630 State Street (Second Avenue). He was given a part-time job as a street inspector by the Village of Lansingburgh, likely out of sympathy for his many misfortunes. In 1876 or 1877 Charles admitted himself to the celebrated New York State Inebriate Asylum in Binghamton. He returned to Lansingburgh in the summer of 1878, “a reformed man and with a strong desire in his hearth to lead a Godly, upright life.” In spite of his life filled with tragedy, he had not given up all hope and composed this brief poem:

“Now deemed the irrevocable past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain.
If rising on its wrecks at last
To something nobler we attain.”

But the world of Charles Hasbrouck suddenly came to an end. On September 26th 1878 he traveled to Albany to visit his brother-in-law, James S. Wood. Shortly after breakfast he took a seat in Mr. Wood’s parlor and suddenly fell to the floor, expiring in a few minutes. Physicians pronounced it a case of apoplexy but there had been no obvious signs that a major stroke was about to strike him down.

The news of his death both saddened and stunned his friends in Lansingburgh as he had seemed to be in perfect health the previous day. The Editor of the *Lansingburgh Gazette* commented that Hasbrouck

‘Was a man of great ability, and with his endowments ought to have stood high in the estimation and respect of his fellow men. He was quite gifted as a poet, and some verses which he has written are very pathetic and beautiful. Now that he has gone, not a few will shed a tear over the grave of a man who had a tender heart for all mankind.’

The Editor of the *Lansingburgh Courier*, remarked that

‘Residents will recollect Mr. Hasbrouck as a genial, courteous gentleman who was always ready to lend a helping hand to a fellow creature in distress. His faults will be blotted out by the good deeds he has done, and none will remember him with aught but the kindest feelings.’

The funeral of Charles W. Hasbrouck took place at Trinity churchyard on Saturday morning, September 28th 1878 at 10 AM. Few attended the burial and his open casket was viewed in the churchyard. His appearance was strikingly lifelike, having every semblance of a person in calm repose. He had requested only that a poem of his be read at his funeral. The poem, “Trinity Cemetery---the Old Church and the New,” had been composed in 1875. The “old” church was a wooden structure constructed in 1804-1805 which had burned on December 23, 1868, and replaced the following year by the current Gothic Revival stone structure. The Hasbroucks belonged to the Trinity congregation and Charles had served on the Vestry between 1844 and 1846. The second half of the poem dealt with Charles Hasbrouck’s sorrow over the loss of his dear wife and daughter:

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TO BE CONTINUED

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