

# NEWSLETTER

LANSINGBURGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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June 2013

## COPRESIDENTS' MESSAGE

David Marsh

On Tuesday night May 14<sup>th</sup> the Rensselaer County Legislature concluded its proceedings with a memorial statement honoring **Gordon Wayne Brown** for his many contributions to the Lansingburgh school community and our community in general. It states a condolence message to his immediate and extended family who will be invited to a presentation ceremony in June. This year's LHS GALA and silent auction will be a memorial to honor our friend and colleague **Gordie Brown**. The GALA will take place on October 17<sup>th</sup> at the Veterans of Lansingburgh Hall on First Avenue and 121<sup>st</sup> St. A team of fund raising volunteers will be canvassing members, businesses and friends of LHS in the near future for donations and reservations for the event. Auction donations this year are running somewhat higher in value than in the past. Make and pay for your reservations early because this year only prepaid guests may attend. *We Were Burghers Once*, a Facebook group for and about people who have roots in Lansingburgh have teamed with the LHS to sponsor a benefit clam steam on August 10<sup>th</sup>. The Burghers have generously offered to donate proceeds to the LHS. The clam steam was conceived and planned by **Jim Norton** and **Kay DeRosa**. *We Were Burghers Once* is a great way to reconnect with old friends, learn about interesting places in the Burgh, and even learn about the history of Lansingburgh through photos and stories of its past. It has more than 500 members. It is free to join by going to their Facebook page and you will enjoy the daily exchange of memories and info about the Burgh. See more about the clam steam below.

## EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

**SUNDAY JUNE 2nd OPEN HOUSE 1 PM to 4 PM, at Melville House.** In conjunction with the New York State Path through History Weekend, we are holding an open house. Historical society officers and trustees will answer questions on the restoration of our headquarters, the history of Lansingburgh, and especially on Herman Melville. The attic museum will be open. Light refreshments will be served.

**SATURDAY JUNE 8th PORCH SALE 9 AM to 2 PM rain or shine.**

Sale is held inside & under cover hundreds of antiques and collectible items priced from 25 cents to \$25! Kitchen and household items, local post cards, antique & collectible glass and china, antique tools, iron trivets, collectible soda, beer & m& other perennial plants. No junk! Proceeds benefit the restoration of the historic 1786 Herman Melville house. If you wish to donate items for the sale call 235-4041 medicine bottles, quality modern gift items, hostas, lilies.

**SATURDAY AUGUST 3~ INAUGURAL HERMAN MELVILLE BIRTHDAY FEST WILL BE HELD AT THE MELVILLE HOUSE 10 AM.**

Dennis C. Marnon, Administrative Officer, Houghton Library, Harvard University, will deliver a slide presentation on Herman Melville and Lansingburgh, concentrating on Melville Lansingburgh Academy years and the ironic portrait of the young author and adventurer. The festival is open to the public and a sandwich platter along with a birthday cake for Herman Melville will be served. A suggested donation is \$5 along with a birthday card for Herman. Everyone is encouraged to dress in period clothing! There will be a coloring contest for children & door prizes for best Victorian outfit!

**SATURDAY AUGUST 10- CLAMSTEAM 1:00PM at the Veterans of Lansingburgh Pavilion**

Jointly sponsored by We Were Burghers Once and the LHS. All proceeds benefit the LHS. Raw clams, hamburgers, hotdogs, sausage and peppers, clam chowder, beer and soda available through the day. Dinner consisting of steamed clams,  $\frac{1}{2}$  barbequed chicken, baked potato, corn-on-cob, watermelon, tossed salad, rolls. You may bring munchies, salads, or desserts to share. 50/50 raffle. \$35 (in advance) for each reservation to Kay DeRosa. Contact Maria Chalifoux [mchalifony@aol.com](mailto:mchalifony@aol.com) or Kay DeRosa [kathleen.derosa@yahoo.com](mailto:kathleen.derosa@yahoo.com) for more details. This promises to be a fun filled afternoon with opportunity to renew old acquaintances, catch up on what's new,

talk about the time you tried to fill the well at the old Lansingburgh High School, etc. Hope to see you there!

## PHILO SNYDER

David Marsh

In February we received an email inquiry from someone in the Rochester area regarding Philo Snyder, a US Civil War veteran whose death certificate indicated his burial in the Lansingburgh Village Burying Ground (Third Ave. at 107<sup>th</sup> St.). The inquiry was very useful to us because we have no burial records for the cemetery and neither the DAR lists from 1915 nor Frances Broderick's notes about burials there contain the name. This corroborated our belief that these lists are incomplete.

Even more interesting is the story of this man who enlisted July 27, 1864 in Co. K of the 169<sup>th</sup> NY Infantry, a Lansingburgh unit. He was born in Freehold, Greene County, New York in 1836, the son of Philip and Margaret Snyder. His muster roll entry indicates he was a molder by trade which may have been what brought him to Troy after the war. There were a number of foundries in South Troy before, during and after the Civil War. The entry further states the he was discharged from the US Army at Hart Island, NY May 9, 1865.

Hart Island is at the west end of Long Island Sound close to the Bronx. At various times Hart Island has been the location of a workhouse for delinquent boys, a reformatory, a prison, a cemetery and most recently a "potter's field" for remains of unidentified and unclaimed dead from the New York City Medical Examiner's Office. During the Civil War it was a Union prison camp for Confederate war prisoners. Both Confederate and Union soldiers who died on the island were buried there. Most likely Snyder's unit was charged with managing and guarding the prison camp. It was disbanded there at war's end.

Three brothers of Philo were also Civil War soldiers. Demerest died in a Union hospital in Falmouth, VA March 1863. Nelson Snyder died in service in New Orleans, LA in September 1863. Dean Snyder enlisted at Troy in September 1864, served one year and survived the war.

Philo reenlisted in the US Army in 1871. The early 1870s were a period of serious economic depression in the US and in the world. Because of a lack of jobs some veterans reenlisted thinking that it would provide an income for the time that the

recession lasted. In 1873 Philo Snyder was arrested as a deserter and confined at the US Army prison in Fort Columbus on Governor's Island. Desertion became a problem for the US Army because the military was broke and was unable to provide decent food and shelter for soldiers. An article dated April 28, 1873 in the Albany Argus said that he was arrested by Troy police for the second time for desertion from the US Army.

On 21 December 1866 he married Mary C McDonald in Chicopee, MA; the marriage was performed by a Justice of the Peace in Chicopee. The record of the marriage indicated it was the first marriage for both bride and groom. That was not true. Philo had married Catherine Mabee in about 1856. There was one child from the Catherine Mabee union.

The Springfield MA Republican newspaper reported May 25, 1866 that a Superior Court Grand Jury offered several indictments, among them Philo Snyder on a charge of polygamy. On May 30<sup>th</sup> of that year Philo entered a plea of guilty to the polygamy charge.

Also in May 1866 he was tried in Springfield MA for stealing a horse and wagon. He took it back to Greene County, New York where Massachusetts authorities arrested him and brought him back to stand trial. It appears that May of 1866 was a bad month for Philo Snyder.

Philo married once again in 1870 to Mary Hendricks Wheeler, the widow of Albert B Wheeler who died in Virginia in 1864 serving the Union. She had been receiving a pension for Albert's service at the time she met Philo. For whatever reason the marriage to Philo ended in divorce in 1872. The divorce reinstated Mary's pension.

He married Catherine Taylor in Troy. She was the widow of Alpheus David Lynch who died from combat injuries in July 1864 in Washington DC. Catherine was granted a pension as Alpheus' widow. She later married Philo Snyder which was grounds to have the pension benefit withdrawn. Philo did not continue to live with Catherine which seemed to be a pattern of his behavior with others of the six wives he accumulated over his lifetime. When the pension office learned of the remarriage they sent investigators to question Catherine, Philo, the minister who performed the marriage, neighbors, friends and just about anyone who knew the couple or the children born to Catherine. When questioned about the marriage Catherine stated in her deposition that she could not remember ever having been

married to Philo Snyder. Rev. Sheldon, who married them stated that he clearly remembered marrying them, stating the date and location of the ceremony. Friends could not remember the names of the witnesses but a few recalled that one of the witnesses was now dead and that the other had moved away.

There were four children of Alpheus David Lynch that would be beneficiaries of his pension provided there was no legal remarriage. The file goes on for 127 pages of depositions, court testimony, and decisions of the Pension Office. The end result was that the pension was reinstated to benefit the four children all under the age of sixteen, until each reached that age. Catherine's marriage was judged illegal because it was not consummated (or at least that's my interpretation of the legalese in the documents).

In 1880 he was tried for bigamy in New York and served time in the NYS Penitentiary at Dannemora in Clinton County. But that was not the end.

Philo went on to marry Alice Bennett in Troy in 1882 according to the NY Vital Records Index. That appears to be the last of the six marriages. He apparently was abusive to his wives and went to prison for that in September 1882.

He died on March 26, 1894 in Lansingburgh. He lived on Fifth Avenue near 108<sup>th</sup> Street at the time of his death. His death certificate indicated he's buried in the Village Burying Ground at 107<sup>th</sup> Street and Third Avenue.