

The  
*Courier*

Monthly Newsletter

of the

Lansingburgh Historical Society

August, 2014

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### From the President

The work on the east wall foundation and the drainage plan for moving roof water from Melville House and the neighboring Eldridge home was completed in mid-July. The foundation has been reinforced underground so that it no longer bows out. Water from roof gutters has been directed into a subsurface leach pit several feet from the building so as to prevent further damage to the foundation. The work was done by Duncan and Cahill of Troy.

Beginning on August 1<sup>st</sup> we will have a new policy on genealogic research inquiries. The first two hours of research will be free. If further work is required to answer the inquiry the person making the inquiry will be informed. If agreed, the research will continue at the rate of \$25 per hour. All proceeds to the Lansingburgh Historical Society.

We are about to develop an MS Power Point program for relating the history of Melville House, some of Lansingburgh's history, some of the people who played a part in Lansingburgh's history including Herman Melville and several others, and how Lansingburgh served an important role in the growth of this region. The program will be similar to those produced by the National Park Service to acquaint visitors with specific national parks and monuments. We plan to use materials already in

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### The Lansingburgh Courier

The *Lansingburgh Courier* was one of the last weekly newspapers devoted to the Town and Village of Lansingburgh. It existed from Christmas Eve 1875 until 1909 when the Burgh had already become part of the City of Troy. It was the work of two Lansingburgh men, Isaac Lansing VanVoast and William H. Engel. Our Lansingburgh Historical newsletter is named after that paper.

Isaac was born in about 1836 in Schenectady County. His mother was Eliza Truax, a descendant of early Dutch in Staten Island. His father was of Dutch heritage in Schenectady. Within a year of his discharge from Civil War service in the US Navy, Isaac married Mary Elizabeth Whiting. She was from an early Vermont family which settled in Brooklyn. Her father was a minister and teacher of languages. She had a brother who was a printer and typesetter. At various times the VanVoasts and their children lived at 522 Fourth Ave, 439 Sixth Ave, 673 Sixth Ave. and 8 119<sup>th</sup> Street.

They had five children. Lansing VanVoast, born in 1866 in Schenectady, became a brass worker in a foundry in Troy but lived in the Burgh. He died in 1933. Alexander, born in 1868 in Schenectady, lived only six years. He died in Lansingburgh but was buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Brooklyn where the Whiting family had a burial plot. Miriam

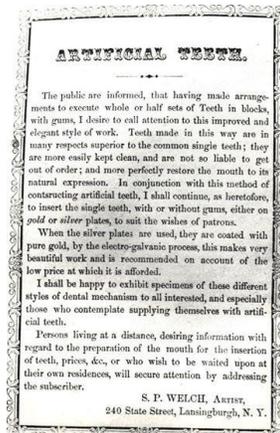
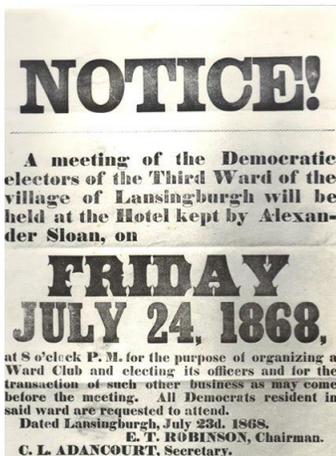
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files in Melville House and add to what we have so as to make the program as accurate as possible. If there is anyone who has experience making Power Point programs who has interest in photography and history or who would just like to get involved, send an email to [lhssecretary@gmail.com](mailto:lhssecretary@gmail.com) stating how you might like to work with a team on this project.

The Acting President and the Board of Trustees have been studying alternative fund raising ideas. We already have some exciting new fund raising projects in progress. You can see some of them in our events list. In a recent visit with a very accomplished fund raiser from Boston who works with one of the oldest historic and genealogic institutions in New England we learned that for historic societies of our size, the most effective method to raise the primary income for the society is through an annual appeal which focuses mainly on successful businesses and professionals who are in the community or who have done business with the society. You will be hearing more about this as time goes on. If you have experience and an interest in fund raising and would like to help in setting up or working on the program, send a note to [lhssecretary@gmail.com](mailto:lhssecretary@gmail.com) advising what you can do.

Hope to see some of you at Herman’s Birthday Party, the Clamsteam, the Champlain Canal Cruise or any evening program at the Melville House.

*David Marsh*



Leland VanVoast was named for Mary Elizabeth’s grandmother. Miriam died in 1871 in the first year of her life. Edward Alfred VanVoast born in 1873 was a printer and worked for a shop in Waterford on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Until his marriage in 1920 he lived with his mother and one sister (Ina) in the family home at 439 Sixth Ave. in the Burgh. He married Ellen Evangeline Bigger from Schenectady and moved there to continue as a printer. Ina Mary VanVoast, born in 1882, married Patrick Canary. They lived for a time in the Burgh with Ina’s mother but later settled in the town of Brookhaven in Suffolk County, New York. Charles Christopher VanVoast born in 1883, died at age 17 in Lansingburgh.

William H. Engel was the son of John Engel, a Prussian immigrant maker of shoe and boot lasts. John and Isabella Engel operated a shoemaking shop at 542 Fifth Ave. (1886) and later (1891) had a shop at 571 Second Ave. He made a home at 658 Third Ave. In the 1875 NY State Census, William H. Engel is listed as a printer. By 1880 he and his wife Julia (first wife and mother of his children) made their home on North Street (114<sup>th</sup> Street). In 1900 William was working as a newspaper reporter and editor.

During the US Civil War Isaac VanVoast served in the US Navy under the name of Nelson Oliver. The use of aliases was not uncommon among Civil War soldiers. He enlisted in June 1861 and held the rank of ordinary seaman on the *USS Sabine*, a sailing frigate enforcing the blockade of Confederate ports along the Atlantic Coast. In particular this ship was interrupting commerce at the Port of Savannah, Georgia for much of the war. He was discharged in June 1864. He and William Engel began working together in the early 1870’s. Both had printing experience but Engel also did news gathering, reporting, writing, and editing. By 1875 they had started the *Lansingburgh Courier*. In 1877 Engel started the Evening Standard Publishing Co. and they both published the *Troy Evening Standard*

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## The Tracys

### Wealth, Philanthropy & Scandal

(continuing from June 2014 *Courier*)

He would find reasons to keep her around his office to extend the visits. At some point the relationship became intimate and Hortense prevailed upon Edward to marry her.

Edward Tracy claimed that the only way he could marry her was if she agreed to keep the marriage a secret from his sisters and the community. The reason he gave was that much of the property that was bequeathed to him carried the provision that he could only keep it so long as any marriage he had was to a Roman Catholic. Furthermore, his sisters opposed his marriage to a young woman and especially one who was not a catholic. Hortense was not Catholic and would not become a Catholic. However she was pregnant and needed care for her baby and herself.

On September 22, 1872 Hortense Pine and Edward Tracy are said to exchange matrimonial vows before a Rev. Stoughton. The couple took a wedding trip to New York City. Hortense told her parents that she was visiting relatives there for a few days. She returned to Lansingburgh to live in her family's home. Edward continued to live in the Tracy family home on Second Ave. with Eustace and Sara, both spinsters. Anna at this point was married to William Cagger and living in Brooklyn. Hortense gave birth to a baby boy in 1873 which she raised for ten years in her mother's home. Edward provided for Hortense and the child during that time.

Edward then told Hortense that their marriage was a hoax. He convinced her to leave Troy and move west to Boise, Idaho. She settled there and in a couple of years got a marriage proposal from George Washington Adams, a miner in Boise. Hortense believed she could legally marry Adams because her marriage to Tracy was not valid or so she was told by Edward. She then receives a letter from Edward in which he retracts the story about

their 1872 marriage being a hoax. Thinking that Edward is now willing to share his life and fortune with her, Hortense attempts to divorce Adams. She is granted a divorce on grounds of desertion. Adams remarries thinking that his marriage to Hortense had to be invalid since she claimed she was married to Edward Tracy.

Edward and Sara Tracy for twenty-five years prior to his death had not spoken to one another. The reason has not been documented but judging from the date at which their feud began (1872), it had to do with his marriage or desire to be married to someone very young or not of Roman Catholic faith. His health had been deteriorating so Edward took an extended vacation to Bermuda in 1897. During his time there he attempted to make peace with Sara but died there before things were settled. When he died on April 17, 1898 the bulk of his estate, which included the family fortune, went to Eustace with a small portion to Sara.

Eustace left the family home in Lansingburgh to live in Saratoga Springs. She died there on Christmas Eve 1898. She had drawn up a will which she destroyed, intending to draft and sign another but died in the meantime. Having died intestate and with Anna and Edward deceased, her entire estate went to Sara.

And what about Sara? For many years she lived with Edward and Eustace in the family home at 669 Second Avenue. She taught at Lansingburgh Academy and tutored students at home in French language and culture. Sometime after 1880 she moved to New York City and lived in one of the early residential hotels in Manhattan, the Windsor, at Fifth Ave. and East 47<sup>th</sup> Street. Sara was away in Europe at the time but on St. Patrick's Day in 1899 the Windsor burned to the ground causing many deaths and great loss of residents' personal property. From Europe Sara wired large donations to charities in NYC, thankful that she was not among those that perished. When she returned to New York in about 1902 she took residence in the St. Andrew Hotel at 72<sup>nd</sup> Street and Broadway. For

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## Events Calendar

**Saturday, Aug. 2 9am-2pm** – We will be hosting our **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Inaugural Herman Melville Birthday Party** to be held at the Melville House at the corner of 114<sup>th</sup> St. and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. in Lansingburgh. John Bryant, Professor of English at Hofstra University & member of the Melville Society will speak on Herman Melville. He has published many books including: “Melville and Repose” (Oxford), “The Fluid Text” (Michigan), “Melville Unfolding (Michigan), and the “Longman Critical Edition of Moby Dick”. He is former editor of “Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies and of the Melville Electronic Library.” The Melville House and attic museum will be open to visitors all day. Books on or related to Melville will be on sale. Festival is free & open to the public. A sandwich platter along with birthday cake will be served. Bring a birthday card for Herman and we will display. 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, Aug. 16 1pm** – **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Clam Steam, Steak and Chicken Roast** at the Veterans of Lansingburgh Pavilion. Jointly sponsored by We Were Veterans and LHS. All proceeds benefit LHS. Raw & steamed clams, hot dogs, hamburgers, sausage & peppers, chowder, beer and soda all day. Complete steak or BBQ chicken dinner. 50/50 raffle. Cost is \$45 per person. Reservations with payment to: Marcia Chalifoux at 1108 O Street, Troy, NY 12182. State meal preference and only reservations with payment are accepted.

**Saturday, Sept 20 at 1:00pm** – **Champlain Canal Cruise** on the Caldwell Belle (paddle wheeler). Narrated cruise on the historic Hudson /Champlain Canal waterway. This peaceful and scenic area was central to the Battle of Saratoga, “Turning Point” of the Revolutionary War. Rain or Shine our journey begins at 1:00pm, lock C5, Rtes. 4 & 32N, Schuylerville, NY. The cruise will head south, pass the Saratoga Battle Field and return at 4:00pm. Those wishing to carpool can meet at Melville House at 11:45am. Light refreshments available on

board and you may bring a bag lunch. Cost is \$35 for adults, \$30 for seniors and \$20 for children. Send your check for a reservation to Lansingburgh Historical Society, P.O. Box 219, Troy, NY 12182 by September 15.

**Thursday, Sept. 25 7:00pm** – **Steve Miller**, local historian and author, will speak on his book “Troy, New York and the building of the USS Monitor.” It was the first ironclad warship commissioned by the US Navy during the American Civil War. Mr. Muller was a Foreign Service Officer for 26 yrs. specializing in int’l economic issues. After retirement he worked for 12 years as a reporter for a group of electronic newsletters covering the electric utility industry. He lives in Troy and is interested in its industrial heritage. Steve grew up in Chicago and holds a BA in Economics from Dartmouth.

**Thursday, Oct. 2 @ 7:00pm.** – **Don Rittner** will speak about famous inventors of the area. He is a historian, archeologist, environmental activist, educator and author residing in Schenectady. In 2004 he was named official Schenectady County Historian, responsible for providing guidance and support to municipal historians. He has since been named Schenectady County Historian. He has published 30 books in history, science and technology, including on Lansingburgh which is available for purchase at the Melville House.

**Saturday, Oct. 4** – Kay DeRosa and colleagues will be leading the **Burghs First House Tour** highlighting some of the beautiful and historic buildings in our Lansingburgh neighborhood. More details forthcoming!

**Thursday, Oct. 16 at 6:00pm** – **Tom Martin**, author and blogger, will read his fiction novel “Murder in the Burgh”. Nov. 22 was a sad day for many Americans but there was another November in 1886 and it takes the combined efforts of Chester A. Arthur, Herman Melville and Theodore Roosevelt to solve a 50 year old murder mystery. Melville is a 16 year old who wants to go to sea but is stuck in Lansingburgh. Tom Martin was born and raised in the Burgh in the house where many of the books scenes take place.

## Then & Now

The banner image on the front page of this newsletter shows 126<sup>th</sup> Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. The old Waterford

Bridge is in evidence. Also seen in that



picture and the one on the right is the United



Traction Co. trolley barns. The trolleys ran until 1933 but evidence of their

existence can still be

Found throughout the Burgh. Company switched to buses in 1933 and they are still in evidence on our streets today. Most of us remember JM Fields/Central Market of the 50's, 60's and 70's. I loved those stores! The site today hosts a Hannaford Market and many frequent the location.



*Kathleen DeRosa*

**Tracy**

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the time she lived in New York she was a communicant of St. Francis Xavier Church, a few doors west of 16<sup>th</sup> Street. There is more reference to that church in her will.

Sara made frequent trips to Europe and lived for lengthy periods in Paris and Rome. She was living in Paris at the time her nephew William Cagger (Anna's only child) died. Her attorney, John Foley, of Saratoga Springs arranged for her to serve as administrator of Cagger's will while she was still living overseas. She made frequent trips to Rome, probably to enhance her knowledge and interest in Roman Catholicism. It was on the return from one of these trips that Sara met Rev. Patrick James Donahue, then Bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling and Charleston, West Virginia.

More on Sara Catherine Tracy in future editions.

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*David Marsh*

**Courier**

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Newspaper which ran until 1911. It was succeeded the next year by the *Troy Standard Press* until 1915.

Isaac VanVoast died in 1891. His wife Mary became destitute and continued to receive his invalid pension after his death. She made further application for a widow's pension which she received until her 1923 death. She lived her last days with her daughter Ina Canary in Brookhaven, Suffolk County, New York.

William H. Engel went on to become the City Editor of the *Troy Record*. He worked in the present Record Newspapers Building on Fifth Ave. & Broadway in Troy after it was built in 1909. In his last days he lived at 489 Third Ave. He died in 1922 in Lansingburgh.

*David Marsh*

## Join the Lansingburgh Historical Society

Our membership year begins on April 1<sup>st</sup>. 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-----**

**Mailing Address----- City----- Zip-----**

**Email-----**

**Regular----- Sustaining----- Life----- Senior/Student----- Prof./Corp.----- Donation-----**

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

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