

# The *Courier*

Bi-monthly newsletter

of the

**Lansingburgh Historical Society**

**June, 2014**

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## **The winds of change are blowing**

Beginning with this issue our newsletter will take on a new look, upgrade the scope of the reporting and attempt to include everyone's ideas. This will only be accomplished with input and direction from the entire membership. Therefore, I am asking everyone for suggestions relative to the content and format of this communication.

For this issue I am using "The Courier" as the name of the newsletter only because three different Lansingburgh newspapers were published under that name. I am soliciting your thoughts on a permanent name. That and all your suggestions can be sent to me at [jjjo1944@comcast.net](mailto:jjjo1944@comcast.net).

I am using a two column format for this issue. Do you like this or the traditional single column? A new feature will be "**Then and now**" where images of historic Burgh buildings are shown side by side as they were and how they are. Each issue will also feature Burgh trivia, reports from LHS officers, photos and upcoming events.

One additional feature I would like to incorporate is a mailbag. Members could write in and ask questions, offer suggestions, discuss the Burgh of their youth and offer constructive ideas for the future

More next issue



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## **From the President**

Our newsletter has a new look! We now call it **The Courier**, following the name of an early Lansingburgh newspaper. The *Lansingburgh Courier* began publishing on Christmas Eve in 1875. Isaac Lansing VanVoast and William H. Engel published it. Look for a story about these men in a future edition of **The Courier**.

It is not too late to buy your tickets for the **Clam Steam, Steak and Chicken Roast on August 16**. See details in Events & Programs below. Look forward to seeing many of you.

The Audit Committee consisting of Peg Parnell, Byron Moak and Michael Barrett is in the process of selecting an accounting firm to do the first audit of the Historical Society in many years. Rules of the NYS Board of Regents require periodic audit of historical societies that it charters. LHS was first chartered in 1965.

We are in the process of repairing and upgrading the porch at Melville House.

Last August Keith Austin and Erv Stevens called me about volunteering to do a landscape design for the yard/garden area behind Melville House. They are Master Gardeners here in Troy and have been working on three designs which will vary in cost to build and maintain. This is a real benefit and cost

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saving for LHS. These services can be very expensive. Keith will present his work to the trustees at their June meeting and make recommendations on how to preserve the perennial material already in the yard. We may be able to get some volunteers from Lansingburgh Rotary to help with our garden plans.

The annual Earth Day cleanup took place recently at the Lansingburgh Village Burying Ground. Leslie Tash began with cleanup of the sidewalk along Third Avenue. We have surveyed the slate flags along both 107<sup>th</sup> Street cemeteries. Some require resetting while others are broken and require replacement. We may be able to acquire recycled slate flagstones for the replacements. On May 20 John Ward and David Marsh will meet with Chris Connell from the Troy Irish Genealogical Society to discuss their assistance with our cemetery work. We are planning to obtain signs for both cemeteries. The old sign at LVBG is no longer readable and the sign at the Old Catholic Burying Ground has been missing for several years. John Ward heads up the Committee on Cemeteries.

On May 14 four people were elected to the Lansingburgh Historical Society Board of Trustees. Gail Beckett and Liz VanBuren are returning to the board and Mary Ellen Kelleher and Leslie Tash are newly elected. They begin serving July 1<sup>st</sup> for 3 yrs.

LHS recently became a member of the Museum Association of New York. MANY is an organization that brings together museums, historical societies and related organizations of all kinds and sizes to help preserve our heritage. It provides training and guidance to those who either work or volunteer their time to their organizations.

*David Marsh*



## Then & Now



### Lansingburgh Academy

The Lansingburgh Academy was incorporated in 1795 and the charter signed by John Jay and DeWitt Clinton. A wooden building was constructed in 1796 on two lots on the west side of the Village Green between 112<sup>th</sup> and 113<sup>th</sup> Street.

The Academy bought two lots in 1820 on the NW corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 114<sup>th</sup> Street from the Baptist Society for \$100, the same amount the Society had paid when it purchased the land from Levinus and Catherine Lansing. Here they built the 194 year old brick building that still stands today. It was a private school and two well-known attendees were Chester Arthur and Herman Melville. In 1901 the building was leased to the Lansingburgh Free School District No. 1 to be used as a high school until a new one could be built. Building was sold to the School District in 1911, nine years after the addition was added to the north side of the building.

The building has continually housed education functions over the years. It was an elementary school while two new ones were being built and has also served as the Lansingburgh Branch of the Troy Public Library for many years.



*Kay DeRosa*

## **The Tracy's: Wealth, Philanthropy & Scandal**

**David Marsh**

(Continuing from April Newsletter)

In January 1901, William Cagger sets off from New York with his friend Steven Golding to Ashville, North Carolina. The purpose of the trip was to be rest and recuperation from William's cirrhosis. The two get as far as Richmond, VA when Cagger suddenly has an acute attack and decides he must stop for a few days at the famous Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, VA. Cagger's condition worsens and he asks Golding to summon his attorney and bookkeeper so he can make a will. Attorney John Foley is called to come from Saratoga Springs and Charles E. Dusenberry from Troy. The two arrive in Richmond, but too late for William Cagger to sign his will. No earlier will having been made, Cagger is intestate.

Fortunately or unfortunately Foley and Dusenberry have been serving the Tracy family for many years and it does not take long for the news of Caggers death to get to the legal heirs. They include the four living children of William Cagger's brother Peter. They are Mary C. Cagger who resides at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Albany; Peter Cagger II, William C. Cagger and Susanna Cagger, all of whom were in Europe. Each of the four was entitled to one-eighth of the estate. The other legal heir, who had asked the court to appoint her administratrix along with Dusenberry (who knew what assets there were and what debts were owed) was Sara C Tracy, aunt of the deceased, whose share would be half of the estate. Sara had been living in Paris for a year when the death occurred. It's important to point out here that Sara C. Tracy received little or nothing when Edward died, but Edward left to William Cagger \$50,000 cash. Sara and Edward had not spoken to one another for twenty-five years before his death. Sara felt she had not gotten her share of the family fortune when

Edward died. She wanted to recover what she felt she was owed by the Tracy family.

Edward appears to have learned the skills of entrepreneurship on the job from his father's malting business. He was eighteen years old when his father died. Lansingburgh was close to grain production sources and was a river terminal for shipping. Edward eventually expanded from one malt house to four by 1860. Tracy malt was supplying brewers not just locally but along the Hudson River.

By 1870, because of its location on the Hudson River, Lansingburgh had become a grain marketing center. Grain arriving in Lansingburgh that was not processed there was shipped downstream to Albany. The 1870 Census of Industry showed that in that year alone Tracy was processing 200,000 bushels of barley (valued at \$180,000) and 10,000 bushels of rye (valued at \$12,000) giving a total production of 210,000 bushels of malt worth \$315,000. That amounts to about \$5.6 MILLION in current US dollars. Tracy had a capital investment of \$300,000 (\$5.3 million today) in 1870. He employed 60 people whose average income was \$233/year/person. This serves to illustrate the significance of the Tracy malt business in Lansingburgh in 1870.

Tracy was also involved in several other businesses, some related to malting, others not. Samuel Bolton, an immigrant from England, got into brewing at home in Lansingburgh. After 1865 he had turned it into a business, Samuel Bolton and Sons. They sold their product under the Eagle Brewery label and it was one of the largest ale and porter brands north of New York City. Edwin Tracy's malt was used in the brewing and Tracy owned a share of Samuel Bolton and Sons.

The New York City Directory for 1859 lists Edward Tracy as a brewer doing business at 130 Cedar Street (west side of Lower Manhattan just north of Wall Street). He also partnered with James Russell in his brewing business in New York City. Tracy was the senior partner in two breweries, 95 Greenwich Ave. and 3-5 Bank Street in Manhattan.

1873 marked the beginning of the first worldwide economic recession and depression. In the US this lasted until 1879 but went on until 1896 in much of Europe. The second industrial revolution had brought North American and European economies closer together than they had ever been. The crash began with the collapse of stock markets in Vienna and Paris. It was fueled in the US by the post-Civil War restructuring of the US economy and tight money policy. After the Civil War, the US was trying to return to the gold based currency that it had gotten away from when the war was being financed. In practical terms, the value of many types of assets decreased. Most important in New York was the value of real property. This was a time for anyone with cash to buy up real property and hold on to it until the economy recovered.

Together Tracy and Russell invested some of their beer and ale profit speculating on Manhattan property in the 70's, 80's and 90's streets, close to Fifth and Madison Avenues. These blocks were later bought and developed with apartment buildings and single family mansions. Such notables as Andrew Carnegie, Henry Phipps and other American industrial giants owned homes on lots in these blocks. Tracy also invested in real estate on his own in NYC and elsewhere.

Banking became another venture of Edward Tracy. In 1859 he is listed in the NYS Business Directory as President of the Rensselaer County Bank in Lansingburgh. It had capital of \$200,000 (a little less than \$6 million by 2013 standard). In 1852 Edward Tracy was a member of the Board of Directors of the Rensselaer Insurance Co. in Lansingburgh. The company was said to hold capital of \$200,000 with several other prominent locals on the Board including J.E. Whipple, C.C. Parmalee, Wm. Bradshaw, Edwin Filley and others.

Bottom line of all this is that Edward Tracy did very well in business, much of which was held by Edward Tracy personally, not by the Tracy family. Other businesses he held jointly with partners locally and in New York City. He continued to live in the family home at 669 Second Avenue with his spinster sisters Eustace and Sara from 1850 until the

early 1890's when he and Eustace left to live in New York. For twenty-five years prior to his death he did not speak to his sister Sara Tracy. She remained in the family home on Second Avenue during this time, tutoring and teaching young men and women in French language.

While he still lived and worked in Lansingburgh, he had in his employ a carpenter named Edward Pine. Mr. Pine was best known as a mast carpenter (one who produces masts for sailing ships) but the actual work for Tracy involved general carpentry and building around the malt houses and brewery. Pine had his lunch brought to the job by his then teenage daughter Hortense. Hortense Pine was said to have visited Edward Tracy at his office in the worksite when she would deliver her father's lunch. Mr. Tracy and Miss Pine became friends. She was physically mature for fifteen and he found her fascinating. She in turn basked in the attention of this much older man.

(To be continued)

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*David Marsh*

**ATTENTION!**

**TAX-PAYERS, ATTENTION!**

*Ed* Turn out and Vote down the Sewer, on Friday March 27, 1868.

Another attempt is hereby made to saddle the village with another foolish Debt. The old game is started again. Turn out and Vote it down; or the trap will be sprung upon you.

The Sewer Commissioners not only ask you to vote the privilege to change the Route of the Sewer but also to allow them to make a new estimate of the expense, adding four or five hundred feet in length to said Sewer.

Every house in this village is now mortgaged, for what? one of the most foolish, unnecessary and extravagant expenditures ever put up.

Those who formerly Voted for the Sewers are now satisfied that they done wrong and no doubt will come out on Friday next and Vote down all attempts to saddle any more Debts on this village by a few interested individuals.

**MANY TAX-PAYERS.**

Lansingburgh Gazette Sept. 4, 1810. Poem sent to the Editor signed "Edgar"

*How few of all this hurrying crowd,  
Who press to reach the house of prayer;  
Who seek the temple of their God,  
Seek him, whose spirit hovers there!*

*See you demure and pious maid,  
She surely shows devotion true;  
In robes of party army'd,  
Her bonnet, not her heart is new!*

*To yonder heaving bosom turn,  
Which swells with pious rapture high,  
With sacred zeal her heart must burn—  
Oh! trace the coquette's glancing eye!*

*That grave and stately age-indeed,  
His thoughts must be on heaven intent,  
But, heaven, perhaps, in him may read,  
A pondering wish for ten per cent.*

*With nimble steps and eager haste,  
That pious youth with pleasure view,  
Who fears a single moment's waste—  
His footsteps yonder fair pursue!*

*Yet who shall dare presume to raise  
A din of censure, better grudge'd  
Take then the moral of my Lay,  
And Judge not, that ye be judge'd!*

**ASSIGNEE'S SALE  
OF  
DRY GOODS,  
AT AUCTION!**

The entire Stock of J. R. PARKER is CO. will be sold at Public Auction for the benefit of Creditors.

**COMMENCING ON MONDAY, MAY 26th, 1863,  
AT 10 O'CLOCK.**

**JOSEPH CALVERTER, AUCTIONEER, 201 N. 2nd St.**

At 10 A. M., 2 P. M. and 7 in the Evening until the whole is disposed of at the Store

**No. 291 State Street,  
LANSEINGBURGH.**

The above Stock consists, in part, of

**BLACK & FANCY SILKS,  
Irish and French Poplins,  
Ottoman Serges, Brocaded Poplins,  
Balmaine, Figured and Plain Valenciennes,  
Organdy and Jaconet Lawns,  
Gingham, Prints, &c.**

**SHAWLS!**

in great variety, such as Scotch, Long and Square, Talbot, Wool and Merino Beavers.

**LINEN GOODS,**

such as all kinds of Linens, Handkerchiefs and Shirts, Table Cloths, Napkins, Doilies and Towels.

**Woolen Yarns, &c.**

Headsteds, Caskets, Saddles, Trunks, Cases, Gun Barrel and Shotguns, Buckles, Knives and Hardware, in great variety.

**ESSENTIAL GOODS—Shawings, Shirts, Cotton and All Wool Thread.**

ES-LADIES are especially invited to attend, as the Goods are generally adapted to their use, and will be sold without any regard to cost.

**AGLEY & CO., Auctioneers.**

Lansingburgh Gazette Jan. 20, 1802

A notice warning the public to beware if they purchased any Hay from Thomas T. Francisco of Pitts-town, as he had been more than once caught trying to increase the weight of his hay by secreting in it a "Lubber of a fellow" named Peter Stalker.

Being suspicious of him, the village officials in Lansingburgh were watchful as they weighed a load of his hay coming into the Village and they saw this lubber sneaking out of the hay...

## Events & Programs

**Saturday, Aug. 2 9am-2pm**, we will be hosting our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Herman Melville Birthday Party at the Melville House, corner of 114<sup>th</sup> St. and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. in Lansingburgh. John Bryant, professor of English at Hofstra & secretary of the Melville Society will speak on Herman Melville. He has published many books including "Melville and Repose" (Oxford), "The Fluid Text" (Michigan) and "Melville Unfolding" (Michigan). Melville House and attic museum will be open all day and books on or related to the author will be on sale. Festival is free and open to the public. Sandwiches and birthday cake will be served. Bring a birthday card for Herman and we'll display it. Attendees are encouraged to dress in period clothing with prizes for best Victorian outfit. Coloring contest for children.

**Saturday, Aug. 16 1PM** 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual **Clam Steam, Steak and Chicken Roast** at the Lansingburgh Vets Club Pavilion. Jointly sponsored by We Were Burghers and LHS. All proceeds benefit LHS. Raw and steamed clams, hot dogs, hamburgers, sausage & peppers, chowder beer and soda all day. Complete steak or BBQ'd chicken dinner. There will be a 50/50 raffle. Cost is \$45 per person. Reservation with payment to: Marcia Chalifoux at 1108 O Street, Troy, NY 12182. State steak or chicken preference and only reservations with payment are accepted. This is a fantastic event. Hope to see a big turnout!

**Thursday, September 25<sup>th</sup> @ 7pm** Steve Muller, local historian and author, will speak on his book "Troy, New York and the building of the USS Monitor". The USS Monitor was the first ironclad warship commissioned by the US Navy during the American Civil War. Mr. Muller was a US Foreign Service Officer for 26 years 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 Troy's industrial heritage. Steve grew up in the Chicago area and holds a BA in Economics from Dartmouth College.

**Thursday, Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup> @ 7pm** Don Rittner will speak about famous inventors of the Capital District. Mr. Rittner is a historian, archeologist, environmental activist, educator and author residing in Schenectady. In December 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 a book on Lansingburgh which is available for purchase at the Melville House.

**Thursday, Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> @ 6pm** Tom Martin, author and blogger, will read his fiction novel "Murder in the Burgh". November 22 was a sad day for many Americans there was another November 22 in 1886 & it takes the combined efforts of Chester A. Arthur, Herman Melville & Theodore Roosevelt to solve a 50 year old murder mystery. Melville is a 196 year old boy who wants to go to sea and write about it but is stuck in Lansingburgh, NY. He must solve the mystery of stolen rifles and the murder of an abolitionist so his family can keep their home. Tom Martin was born and raised in Lansingburgh and lived in the house where many of the scenes in the book took place.

**Friday, Oct. 31<sup>st</sup> @ 6pm** Annual Halloween party. Warren Broderick will discuss some "Urban Legend" ghost stories of the Lansingburgh area. Door prize for best costume.

**Thursday, Nov. 13 @ 6pm** Melville House will host our annual Holiday party. We will auction a number of items suitable for holiday gift giving: small antiques, collectables, Christmas books and holiday ornaments. Proceeds to Melville House restoration fund.

**Thursday, Nov. 20<sup>th</sup> @ 7pm** at the Melville House. Gary Robusto, founder of Tri-City NY Paranormal Society will speak on paranormal research.

Additional info on all events can be obtained by calling the Society @ 986-2285 Jennifer Parnell or e-mail at [lhssecretary@gmail.com](mailto:lhssecretary@gmail.com)

## 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 is \$5/yr. [\$15/yr.], Sustaining Membership is \$25/yr. [\$40/yr.], Life Membership is \$100yr. [\$150/yr.], Senior/Student Membership is [\$5/yr]. after July 1 and Professional/Corporate Membership is [\$200/yr.] after 1 July. Donations always welcomed!

**Old rates good through the end of June 2014. New rates (in brackets) effective 1 July. Write in amount.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Regular \_\_\_\_\_ Sustaining \_\_\_\_\_ Life \_\_\_\_\_ Senior/Student \_\_\_\_\_ Professional/Corp. \_\_\_\_\_ Donation \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: **Lansingburgh Historical Society**

**P.O. Box 219**

**Troy, New York 12182-0219**

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**Lansingburgh Historical Society**

**PO Box 219**

**Troy, New York 12182-0219**