

**The**  
*Courier*  
**Bi-Monthly Newsletter**  
**of the**  
**Lansingburgh Historical Society**  
**April, 2016**

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**From the Acting Presidents Desk**

The 2016 season of the Lansingburgh Historical Society is about to begin. This year we are asking three things of the membership. First – If you have thought about or would like to become a trustee or if you know of someone who might be interested, please let us know. Second – Those of you who could possibly volunteer a few hours of your time for any of our events, we sincerely ask that you do so. The trustees cannot do it all so even a few hours during the course of the year would be a tremendous help to the society and a lot of fun for the volunteer. Thirdly we ask all of you to renew your membership and note any changes to address, phone or email.

On a personal note. If you are afraid to help because you feel you wouldn't know anyone, let me relate a story. Three years ago I walked through the doors of Melville House not knowing a blessed soul. I had been doing some genealogical work upon my retirement and thought I might find some information there. I soon volunteered to help with the cemetery committee. After that I became a trustee and ultimately acting president. I have met many interesting, knowledgeable and warm individuals and I am hoping that you might reach out and meet them also. I no longer live in the Burgh but I care for it deeply and hope to help

return it to the wonderful place we remember from younger days. We can make the Burgh a better place, together!

*John Ward*

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On Feb. 7, Warren Broderick, Emeritus Archivist at the NYS Archives as well as local historian and Melville scholar, gave a talk on Herman Melville and the influences on his work from his time living in Lansingburgh. He provided interesting insights into the type of research he is doing on Melville.

The lecture was presented to Professor Brian Sweeney's graduate English class from St. Rose College. Afterwards there were refreshments and the class toured the Melville House where there was a large selection of books, by or about Hreman Melville, for sale.

# Historic Peebles Island

Warren Broderick

The following article by Warren Broderick, prominent local historian, depicting the people and history of Peebles Island is reprinted from a special history edition in *Saratoga Living*. It will be reproduced here in three installments.



Anthony A. Peebles and his wife, Mary Louisa Peebles, from a brother's collection. Courtesy of the Lansingburgh Historical Society.



## Peebles Island and the Family Who Owned It Saratoga County's Southernmost Place

by WARREN BRODERICK

Peebles Island, a popular hiking destination, forms the principal land mass of Peebles Island State Park in the Town of Waterford, Saratoga County. With nearly three miles of trails and scenic vistas overlooking the Mohawk River and smaller rocky islands, the park is an easily accessible oasis between Waterford, Cohoes and Lansingburgh. Lost to most visitors is the island's fascinating history dating back hundreds of years when the Mohican Indians resided in a palisaded village, "Monemin's Castle," named after their sachem.<sup>1</sup>

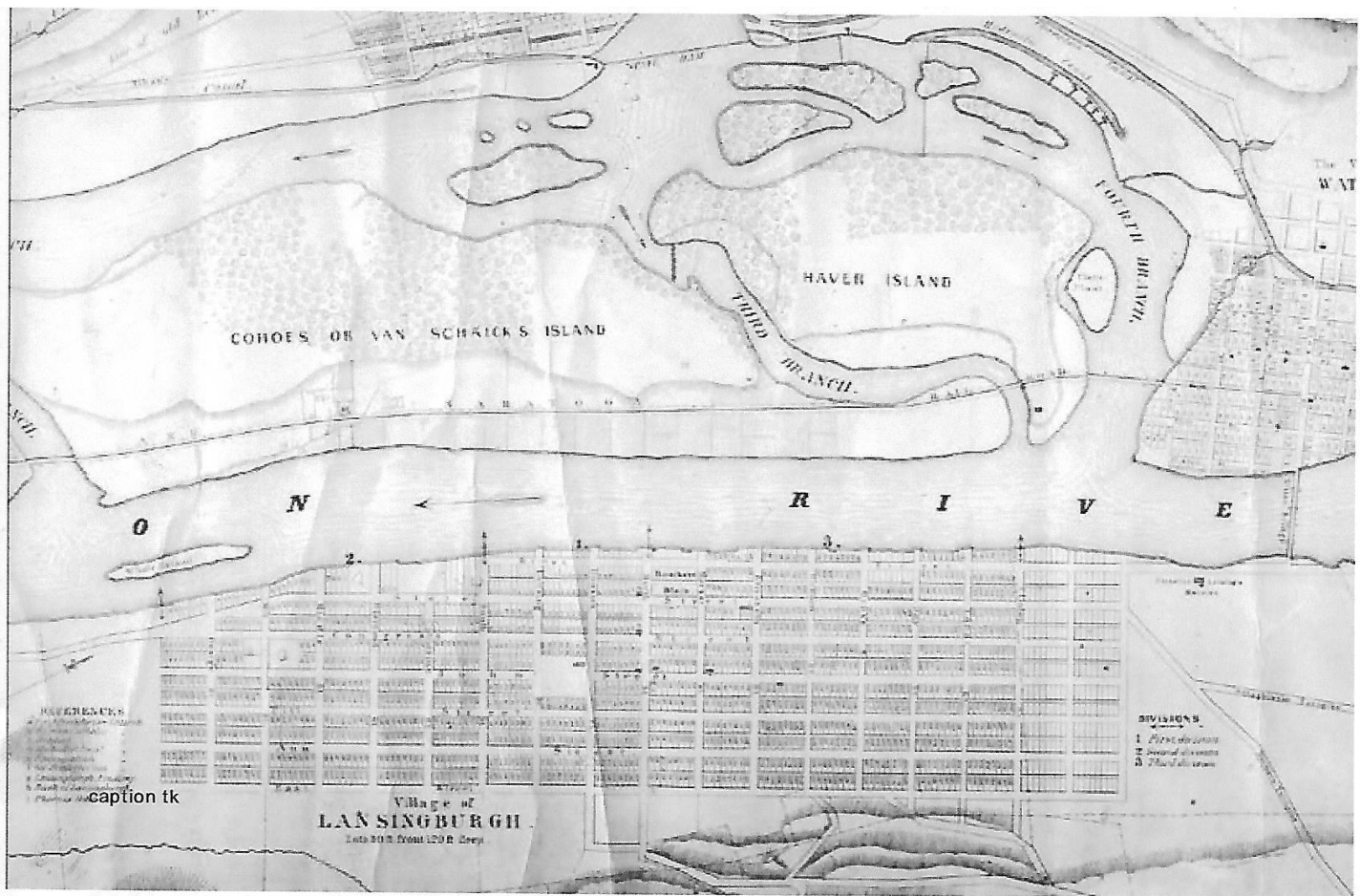
Native Americans continued to visit the island into the nineteenth century. In 1823 or 1824 a large party of them erected bark wigwams and many nearby residents visited their encampment where they "did a profitable trade" in bows, arrows, bead-work and baskets." Their chief, John Shilol-o-quish, died during their visit. A party of Penobscots visited in 1825 after traveling south on the Champlain Canal and still others paid Peebles Island a visit as late as 1848 and 1857.<sup>2</sup>

The progenitors of the Peebles family in the Capital District region appear to have been Hugh and Gertrude Peebles, eighteenth century Albany residents of Scottish descent. Their son, Thomas, settled at "Brookwood," along River Road in the Town of Halfmoon about 1762. A prominent trader and merchant, he died in, 1774, but his widow, Elizabeth (Bradt) Peebles, survived until 1809. Following her husband's premature death she operated a tavern at her home and George Washington stayed there in July of 1783 on his trip to northern and western New York State.<sup>3</sup> So far eleven published accounts have been identified for travelers stopping here between 1775 and 1788. The well-preserved Georgian mansion with its later Greek Revival portico on Routes 4 and 32 about four miles north of Waterford is now owned by the Hotaling-Palmer family and includes a family cemetery on high ground overlooking the Hudson River.

Of Thomas and Elizabeth's three children, Hugh Peebles (1763-1840), served in the American Revolution and later became a bank officer in Troy. Their

daughter, Gertrude Peebles (1771-1841), married Benjamin Tibbitts, a Rensselaer County merchant, and Eliphalet Nott, the long-time prominent president of Union College. Young Gertrude, only 13 years of age, impressed traveler Francisco de Miranda with her charm and maturity when he visited on June 3, 1784.<sup>4</sup>

Their other son, Gerrit Peebles (1769-1841), removed to Lansingburgh prior to 1800. Gerrit, a highly successful merchant, first married Elizabeth Survatt who died in 1811. He remarried Maria Van Schaick (1782-1865) in 1818. Maria's parents, cousins John G. Van Schaick and Anna (Van Schaick) Van Schaick, were residents of Van Schaick Island in the present City of Cohoes where their eighteenth-century mansion still stands. The Van Schaicks were a prominent early Albany Dutch family. In a portrait executed by Ezra Ames about 1808 Maria (Van Schaick) Peebles is shown to be a very attractive woman.<sup>5</sup> By virtue of this second marriage of the affluent Gerrit Peebles his family joined the social circle of the Dutch patrician families.



Detail from the Map of the Confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers, showing the Village and Islands. Courtesy of the Lansingburgh Historical Society.

Herman Melville's second cousin, Anthony Augustus Peebles (1822–1905) is seen in a negative light by scholars based on his portrayal by members of the Melville family during the 1840s when he was engaged to Herman's sister, Augusta, for a few months. In fact, over a far longer period of time beginning in 1838 when Maria Melville's family removed to Lansingburgh, Anthony served as a most helpful cousin and close family confidant. His mother, Maria (Van Schaick) Peebles, was a good friend to her cousin, Maria (Gansevoort) Melville, as well.

Gerrit Peebles died on January 23, 1841. The value and contents of his estate give some indication of his lifestyle and education. His estate totaled more than \$12,000 and included not only land and investments but also valuable furniture, fine art and decorative accessories, as well as maps, globes, and a wide assortment of books.<sup>6</sup> Maria Melville's family, living only two blocks away in Lansingburgh between 1838 and 1847, surely had access to this library.

The Melville family in Albany was facing a financial crisis due in part to business failures and the so-called Panic of 1837. Maria (Gansevoort) Melville (1791–1872) removed from Albany to Lansingburgh in the spring of 1838 to reduce living expenses and remain in close proximity to trusted relatives such as the Van Schaicks. The Melvilles rented a house on the corner of River and North Streets (the present First Avenue and 114th Street and now owned by the Lansingburgh Historical Society). Maria Melville was close to her cousin, Maria Peebles, and relied on her for financial and other assistance. Gerrit and Maria Peebles had purchased a substantial two-story wood-frame house on the southeast corner of Congress Street (the present Third Avenue) in 1821.<sup>7</sup> Given the above-mentioned contents, the Peebles house must have appeared to Maria Melville as elegant and any patrician Dutch home in Albany.

Maria Peebles also inherited substantial assets from her affluent parents and from her unmarried uncle,

Gerrit W. Van Schaick, who died in 1816. Maria Peebles inherited an interest in a 138-acre island at the junction of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, known as Haver<sup>8</sup> (or sometimes Oat or Stone) Island, from her brother, Anthony Van Schaick, in 1822 and proceeded to acquire the interests of her siblings soon thereafter. The island was one of a series of colonial patents including the larger island we now call Van Schaick Island granted to her great-great-grandfather, Goosen Gerritse Van Schaick, beginning in 1665.<sup>9</sup>

Gerrit Peebles's seven children included Anthony Augustus, who was born in Lansingburgh on January 19, 1822. Anthony attended the juvenile department of the Lansingburgh Academy but his secondary school years were spent in at a private school in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Anthony Augustus was home in Lansingburgh for the school vacation months. The first indication of how the Melvilles viewed Augustus is found in a February 16, 1842 letter to Maria from Herman's 25-year-

Cont. Next Issue

# Then & Now

## NE Corner 112<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>



**Park Hotel**

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the northeast corner of 112<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue was home to the Park Hotel, owned by W. F. Armstrong. Looking at the above photo, it is hard to believe the changes in 100+ years. The open spaces, lack of sidewalks or street paving and an abundance of horses speak of a different era. The view above was probably taken from the vicinity of the current Lansingburgh Café and on the right it is looking towards the east. The house to the far left may still be in existence on 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.



**Original Bijou**

It appears that the original Bijou (small but attractive trinket, jewel or building), seating 400, was erected in the shell of the hotel, in 1912.

According to a November 1912, Troy Times article, things did not go well on opening night. A row was caused in front of the new Bijou Theater on Twelfth Street Saturday by the fresh paint near the box office. Patrons clothing came in contact with it. The proprietor offered to settle for all damages, and the damaged clothing was taken to a nearby cleaners.



**Second Bijou**

Around 1930 or 1931, the wooden building was demolished and a new brick, art deco theater seating 800 was erected. Many reading this will remember the Saturday matinees. The theaters name changed around 1970 to the Oxford and closed for good a few years later.



The theater was razed and a new bank was built. It occupied the site for a number of years. Since consolidation caused the bank to close, a number of restaurants and bars have occupied the space, none with any continuing success. The last business utilizing the building was DiBello's, a sports bar.

*Kathleen DeRosa*

# 2016

## Schedule of Events

**April 7** – Michael Barrett will be speaking about Mr. Russell Sage at the Van Schaick Country Club in Cohoes, NY. A buffet will be provided starting a 6:00PM. Admission, prepaid by March 24<sup>th</sup>, will be \$35 (\$40 at the door). Please send your check for your reservation to the:  
Lansingburgh Historical Society  
PO Box 219  
Lansingburgh Station  
Troy, NY 12182

**April 9** – Open House at the Melville House, 2-114<sup>th</sup> Street on First Avenue. 10:00AM to noon. Personnel will be on hand to conduct a tour and answer questions.

**April 30** – From 9:00AM until noon, an Earth Day cleanup will be held at the Village Cemetery at 109<sup>th</sup> Street and Third Avenue. Volunteers are needed!!!

**May 18** – At 7:00PM a trustees and membership meeting will be held at Melville House for the purpose of voting to name new trustees to the LHS board.

**May 21** – The Second Annual Lansingburgh House Tour will kick off starting with an open house at Melville House. This was an extremely popular event last year and more information will be forthcoming.

**June 9** – A “Burgher Bash” will be held at the Veterans of Lansingburgh Club to

include a dinner and a special speaker. A silent auction and raffle will also be featured. Further information will be announced.



St. Rose Grad English Students at Melville House on 2/7



Liz VanBuren showing some of Society's collection



The above Hard Times tokens were issued by Walsh General Store of Lansingburgh in 1834 and 1835. From around 1828 through 1843 many merchants issued these tokens as a substitute for bank backed specie as uncertainty gripped the Country and financial institutions.

We will look at the Walsh store and the Walsh family in the next issue of the Courier.

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. Student/Senior Membership \$5/year. Corporate/Professional Membership \$200/year.

Donations are always welcome! . **Rates currently in effect since 1 July 2014.**

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

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_ City & State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Regular \_\_\_\_\_ Sustaining \_\_\_\_\_ Life \_\_\_\_\_ Student/Senior \_\_\_\_\_ Prof./Corporate \_\_\_\_\_ Donation \_\_\_\_\_

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