

# NEWSLETTER

**LANSINGBURGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**P.O. BOX 219, TROY, NEW YORK 12182-0219**  
[www.lansingburghhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.lansingburghhistoricalsociety.org) our web address  
[lhssecretary@gmail.com](mailto:lhssecretary@gmail.com) our email address

AUGUST 2011

## EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

**September 22, Thursday, 7:30PM, Melville House-** Joe Ferrannini of Gravestone Matters will speak about historic cemeteries, their restoration and preservation. Joe has done a number of cemetery restoration projects in the area.

**September 24, Saturday, meet at 12:30PM at 107<sup>th</sup> St. between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue** for a program in conjunction with the Hudson River Valley Ramble. The three oldest of Lansingburgh's cemeteries will be visited. Joe Ferrannini, Gordon Brown and David Marsh will lead ramblers through the Lansingburgh Village Burying Ground and the Old Catholic Cemetery discussing the history of these cemeteries, plans for their restoration, and notable's families and veterans interred in them. We will then go to Trinity Episcopal Church Yard at 115<sup>th</sup> St. and Fourth Ave. where Fr. John Kelly will talk to ramblers about this cemetery's history and some of the people buried there. Refreshments will follow in the Trinity Church Hall. The program is expected to end at about 4:30PM.

**September 27, Tuesday, 4:30PM, Lansingburgh Academy** (the Lansingburgh Branch of the Troy Public Library), 114<sup>th</sup> St. at 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. a program sponsored by the Rensselaer County Historical Society. Details to follow.

**October 13, Thursday, 7:30PM, Melville House.** Troy resident, retired librarian and published author, Mike Esposito present a program on Troy's Little Italy.

**Oct. 20, 2011** we will have our annual **GALA Fund Raiser Dinner** and Auction at the Veterans of Lansingburgh Hall. Save the Date!!!

**November 10, Thursday, 7:30PM, Melville House.** Journalist, author and historian, John Warren will speak about the Poestenkill, a stream that flows through Berlin, Poestenkill and Brunswick to Troy. Mr. Warren's talk will emphasize how it's waters have served agricultural, industrial and recreational activities in Rensselaer County and the history of the lands it drains.

**November 17, Thursday, 7:00PM, Melville House. The Annual LHS Holiday Party and Auction.** Small antiques and collectible items, holiday books, ornaments, and LHS notepapers will be offered. Come share the fun!

# **KEATING RAWSON AND HIS LEGACY FOR LANSINGBURGH**

**By David Marsh**

In 1829, Keating Rawson, an accomplished Lansingburgh business man, purchased a plot of land on the southeast corner of what is now Third Avenue at 107<sup>th</sup> Street. The sellers were Philander and Elizabeth Wells. Rawson's wife, Annie Eustace Rawson, a Roman Catholic, had died. Since there was not yet a Catholic church or burying ground in the village, Rawson chose to ask that the land be consecrated and to serve as a final resting place for his beloved Annie. She was buried there on Christmas Eve 1829. The land became what we call today the Lansingburgh Old Catholic Burying Ground. Keating Rawson intended to have the cemetery receive burials of Catholics from Troy, Lansingburgh and Waterford.

Keating Rawson was born in Glassealy, County Kildare, Ireland in 1767, the son of James Rawson and his German wife (name unknown). The elder Rawson was a wealthy farmer, loyal to King George III and therefore a devout member of the Church of England. Keating was given the kind of education a young man from an affluent family of his time would receive. He was educated at home by private tutors. Just before 1785 he met and later married Annie Eustace b. 1764. She was from a less affluent Roman Catholic Irish family which had fallen on hard time after being involved in one of several rebellions against English rule. Marriage to Rawson probably seemed an opportunity for young Annie to improve her life despite the family religious differences.

Keating and Annie's first child, Sara, was born in Ireland in 1790. Their second child Robert Eustace was born in Ireland in 1792, shortly before they emigrated to New York City. Initially only Robert accompanied them on the voyage. Sara who had been living with family members in Ireland was brought over after the rest of the Keating Rawson family had established a home in New York. By 1795 the Keating Rawson family had settled in Lansingburgh where Keating was a member of Trinity Episcopal Church. From 1810 to about 1816 Keating served as a vestryman in that congregation.

Lansingburgh had become a marketing center and shipping point for locally produced agricultural commodities. Its location on the Hudson made it possible to easily move products in and out. The nearest major port was Albany and as the Erie Canal came into use around 1820, Lansingburgh's reach extended to destinations further west. Rawson also did business in New York from his base in Lansingburgh, evidenced by advertising in New York for his leather and tanning products.

Rawson began two malt houses in Lansingburgh, the oldest of them (Malt House #1) at the end of Canal St. (the present 120<sup>th</sup> St.) near the river. Malting was a major industry connected to brewing beer, distilling spirits and producing yeast. Grains harvested locally were marketed in Lansingburgh and either processed there or shipped elsewhere. At that time barley was the grain of choice for malting (others could be used). Grain was spread on floors or in shallow pits, wet down and allowed to sprout for about three days. During the sprouting, the grain released enzymes which converted the starch in the grain to sugars. The sprouted grain was then ground, mixed with water and inoculated with yeast to begin the fermentation which produced beer or ale. Rawson was not known to do any more than produce the malt. He was not a brewer, distiller or yeast manufacturer.

When Keating Rawson had his Malt House #1 built at Canal Street he had a large room built, separate from the malting rooms. The room was set up for group meetings and he made this available to traveling Roman Catholic priests who visited Lansingburgh periodically from established churches in Albany and Sandy Hill (present Hudson Falls, NY). The priests would be hosted by Rawson and others in the area and celebrate Mass for Catholics from Lansingburgh and Waterford. Annie Rawson continued her Catholic faith and participated in these rites at her husband's malt house. Keating remained an Episcopalian until about 1820 when he converted to his wife's religion. Where, when and with whom this conversion occurred is not clear.

John Tracy joined the Keating Rawson malting venture as a business partner. They took the name Rawson and Tracy. John Tracy was born in Ireland of Roman Catholic parents in 1785. He married Keating and Annie Rawson's daughter Sara in Lansingburgh in 1820. For a short time after the marriage they lived in New York

City but returned to Lansingburgh in 1822. John and Sara had a son Edward who acquired ownership of the malt house business when John died. Edward Tracy built two more malt houses in Lansingburgh, #3 and #4, so that by 1860 the Tracy business ran four malt houses in all.

Tanning was another business venture begun by Keating Rawson in Lansingburgh. He purchased hides from local farmers and slaughterers, processed them and then selling the leather locally and elsewhere. Tannin was produced locally from hemlock and oak bark. The river provided the water source for soaking. Advertising from the time indicates that he also sold tools and materials for cleaning hides and tanning.

Much of Keating Rawson's income and time was devoted to charitable endeavors. As noted earlier he purchased the land for the Catholic cemetery in Lansingburgh in 1829 to serve Catholics in the region. In 1827 he was elected to the Board of Trustees who planned and sought subscriptions for the building of St Peter's Church on the corner of the present Fifth Avenue and Hutton Street. Other Trustees were Patrick Irwin, Edward Lawler, Patrick Mooney, Patrick Cole, George Donlevy, Phillip Quinn, Michael Egan, and James Cantwell. Note from the names that this was largely an Irish community.

Several of these surnames and others who were prominent in the growth of St. Peter's parish appear in the Old Catholic Burying Ground. It comes as no surprise that at some point this burial ground had been known as Roscommon Cemetery, named for the city and county of the same name in Ireland. None of the visible stones mention Roscommon as an origin of the deceased but several other counties appear on the monuments. By 1851 the Irish population in Lansingburgh had peaked. Burials ceased in the Old Catholic Burying Ground in about 1858. In that same year 13 acres of land on Oakwood Avenue was purchased by Bishop McClosky from Thomas and Anna Sausse, congregants at St. Peter's Church, Troy. Thomas Sausse was a well known businessman (butcher) in Troy. In 1858 the Augustinian Order of Catholic priests arrived in Lansingburgh. Two years after the arrival of the Augustinians they had purchased land in Lansingburgh from Philip O'Neil which included the O'Neil home. That land on the present Gurley Avenue became St. John On the Hill Cemetery. The Old Catholic Burying Ground begun by Keating Rawson was therefore replaced as parishes became established.

St John the Baptist Church, began in 1844 in a former Baptist/Universalist church building near the corner of 114<sup>th</sup> St and Fourth Avenue. It had been a church since 1803. Keating Rawson was a prime mover for acquiring this frame building. In addition to Rawson the committee consisted of John Higgins, James B. Smyth, James Halligan, George T. Gillespie, Barnet Evers, John Doorley, John Driscoll, and Daniel Murrey. The money to purchase the land and the building was donated by Keating Rawson. St John the Baptist was located approximately at the location of the former Sisters of St Joseph convent, next to the present St Augustine's School. St John's was the Catholic church in Lansingburgh until the first Mass was celebrated in the present St Augustine's Church building in 1865. The St John's building was moved after St Augustine's was built and was known for many years as Rawson Hall.

Keating Rawson is mentioned in many historical works about Lansingburgh, Troy, the Roman Catholic church in America and certainly in the Diocese of Albany, NY. Sara Rawson Tracy died in 1839 and was buried beside her mother in the Old Catholic Burying Ground. John Tracy died in November 1842 and is interred beside his wife. Keating Rawson died the same year and was also buried in the plot with his wife and daughter. The family monument is no longer visible in the cemetery. Stones of many other Irish Catholics are still visible and many list the origin of the person in Ireland. The only existing plot map of the graves is a simple one produced in the 1960's by Loretta Nial. Mrs. Nial's plot map and other information about Troy Irish families can be found in the Troy Irish Genealogical Society website

A project by the Lansingburgh Historical Society to catalog visible grave stones in this cemetery and the Lansingburgh Village Burying Ground is in progress.

Much of the information for this article came from:

Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, Vol. 7, published

by the Society. 1896 It contains and extensive biographical sketch of Keating Rawson and John Tracy, written by Rev. Thomas Middleton, D.D., OSA The article is available on the internet by "Googling" the names of the two men. Guerin, T. M. A History of St. Augustine's Parish Lansingburgh (Troy), New York, Custombook Inc., Hackensack, N.J. 1964. There is a copy in the Melville House library.

Founding of St. Peter's Parish, an article in the St. Peter's Church website <http://www.the-latinmass.com/id59.html>

The Troy Irish Genealogical Society website. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nytigs/>

Other materials in the possession of the author.

**IT'S MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME**

Our membership year begins in April. People who join 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 your friends to join.

- Regular Membership is \$5.00/ year
- Sustaining Membership is 25.00/year
- Life Membership is \$100

Donations are welcome at any time!

**Mail to: Lansingburgh Historical Society  
P.O. Box 219  
Troy, NY 12180-0219**

----- cut off here-----

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAILING ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **ZIP** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMAIL ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Regular(\$5) \_\_\_\_ Sustaining(\$25) \_\_\_\_ Life (\$100) Donation\$\_\_\_\_\_

Donations welcome! You may include it with your membership.