

The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

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Hedge Lawn

Submitted by Kevin M. Franklin



Hedge Lawn

This will be a two part newsletter dealing with the estate known as Hedge Lawn situated on Rt. 32 Broadway across from the Schuyler Flatts Park between the Village of Menands and City of Watervliet. It will include information on U.S. Army General William Jenkins Worth, the purported builder of this fine home, and James Barclay Jermain and the Jermain family who occupied the home for many years afterward. The property is still known locally as “The Jermain Estate” and is currently owned by Mr. Peter Hess, President of Albany Steel & Iron. Information for this newsletter has been compiled from research and sources gathered by the Colonie Historian’s Office and the personal collection and research of Mr. Peter Hess.

William J. Worth - Part I

This year is the 200th Anniversary of the War of 1812 and an important event in the life of William J. Worth. The first known mention that Hedge Lawn was owned and built by General Worth comes from the publication “New York State Men – Individual Library Edition – with Biographic Studies and Character Portraits” written by Frederick S. Hills, Albany Argus Press, 1930. In a chapter titled “Hedge Lawn” it describes the home occupied for nearly 100 years by the Jermain family, as a handsome Colonial suburban residence located on the west side of the Hudson River between Troy and Albany. The bottom of the page reads: *“Sylvanus P.*

Jermain purchased the home from General Worth, the original owner and builder.”

This statement identifies Worth as a General (which he became in later years), but the home attributed to him was built shortly after Worth left as the 3rd commander of the Watervliet Arsenal when he still held the rank of Lt. Colonel. According to records of the Watervliet Arsenal, Worth commanded the Arsenal between January 26th 1835 and April 30th 1838. A very short time later on July 24, 1838 Worth purchased (for the sum of \$3,173.00) slightly less than ten acres of land from five different members of the nearby Schuyler family to create his new home.

This brings to question of how could a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army of the late 1830’s afford to construct such a grand and impressive structure, which certainly must have taken many months to build because of its size, not including the many outbuildings associated with the property. It also brings up the question, who was the architect? Dozens of stone masons, framers, finish carpenters, plasterers, roofers and more had to be involved. The cost must have been tremendous.

The answer to that question may stem from the genealogical background of both the Worth and Jenkins families. Both families have roots linking them to the Island of Nantucket which was the center of 18th and 19th Century whaling industry in America.

The book “History of Hudson” by Anna R. Bradbury

(1908), records that two brothers, Seth and Thomas Jenkins, being natives of Nantucket but residing at Providence, Rhode Island, were engaged in the mercantile business. The Jenkins brothers left Providence to explore the Hudson River Valley in 1783 seeking to buy land there. By April 1783, the War of Independence between America and Great Britain was finally coming to a close, but during the Revolution, Great Britain's Navy nearly decimated Nantucket's whaling and merchant shipping and the economy and living conditions of people on Nantucket suffered greatly.

When the Jenkins brothers left Providence they took with them the princely sum of \$100,000 (some reports say as much as \$250,000) with the intent of securing a tract of land along the Hudson River, not only to continue and protect their livelihood as merchant shippers, but to establish a new community there. The brothers decided that the land in the area of Claverack met their requirements and that the river there was of sufficient depth allowing for navigation of large ships of the day.

The brothers purchased properties there in July 1783 and returned to Nantucket to bring their families to their new location, arriving back in autumn the same year. Several vessels arrived, some even carrying on their decks and in their holds the frames necessary for the quick erection of new buildings and dwellings. The Jenkins and other early settlers including Shubael (Squire) Worth and Thomas Worth decided to establish a Proprietors Association consisting of no more than thirty members, **"and all of them shall be merchants or; concerned in navigating the deep."** Articles of agreement were drawn up and a committee of six selected to govern their new community which they decided to name "Hudson" in honor of the great navigator Henry Hudson. Thus, the community known as Hudson was born. Most members of the Proprietors Association at Hudson were practicing Quakers.

Thomas Worth married Abigail Jenkins, daughter of one of the founding families of Hudson. Thomas and Abigail were the parents of William Jenkins Worth who was born at Hudson, N.Y. on March 1, 1794. Abigail's father, Thomas Jenkins, died in New York in 1808. His remains were brought to Hudson on a sloop and buried in the ground belonging to the Quaker Society. His son, Elisha Jenkins, was a leading partner in the well known house of "Thomas Jenkins and Sons". He retired from business **"with an ample fortune"** and removed to Albany circa 1801.

Elisha Jenkins tenure at Albany included serving on the staff of Governor Clinton with the rank of Colonel. He was a member of the Assembly, State Senator, and then Secretary of State, State Comptroller, and Quartermaster General for the Northern Department of the Army during the War of 1812. He became Mayor of Albany from July 1816 to 1819. He was twice married, but had no children. It would appear then that the Jenkins family line were not only wealthy merchants when they originally established the community of Hudson,

but their offspring continued to be wealthy and certainly very politically connected.

When the Napoleonic war between Great Britain and France (1803-1815) erupted in Europe, America attempted to remain neutral, but British harassment of American shipping escalated during this conflict disrupting American commerce and trade along the Atlantic coast of America and worldwide. Great Britain still had the largest and most powerful navy in the world, but conditions on British Naval ships were notoriously bad and sailors made little pay. Many British sailors deserted their ships the first chance they got and took jobs aboard American vessels where the pay and conditions were better. The number of British sailors deserting swelled to the point where the British Government enacted what was known as the Impression Issue, which allowed the Government to induct men into military service. This act also allowed their Navy to stop and search American ships on the high seas in order to recapture suspect deserted sailors. British presence on the Great Lakes area also threatened settlement of what was then considered north-west territories of America. These issues, and others, caused great concern in America and pro-war factions within Congress outnumbered those who did not want another war with England and America declared war against England on June 18, 1812.

Once again the events of the War of 1812 had a severe impact on the lives and commerce of people on the Island of Nantucket. The British continued to rule the seas and Nantucket was beyond the protection of any American forces on the mainland. In 1812 the population on the island of Nantucket was a little less than seven thousand persons, all of whom were mostly dependent on sea routes to provide them with food and fuel. The British were well aware of that, and tightly controlled merchant shipping in and out of Nantucket. In August 1814, British Officers met with Nantucket officials who were basically coerced into signing a peace treaty with England, whose intent was to use this treaty as a means of embarrassing the United States Government, cause discord and to hopefully induce Nantucket ship owners to locate their valuable whaling industry within the protection of British dominions.

Worth Joins Regular Army of 1812

William Jenkins Worth's mother, Abigail, died in 1800 when Worth was just a child. His father married for a second time on August 8, 1802 to a woman named Susanna Swasey of Martha's Vineyard. William's father, Thomas, died on May 29, 1812 at Martha's Vineyard. Shortly after his father's death, William returned to Hudson where he found employment as a clerk in a wholesale establishment. Although William Jenkins Worth was raised in a Quaker family whose religious values taught non-violence, when the War of 1812 broke out Worth rejected those teachings. Perhaps he was compelled by the bitter family memories of British activities against Nantucket during the Revolution, and again during this present conflict, or perhaps because he had become

dissatisfied with his employment as a clerk, or both. For whatever reason, at eighteen years of age he joined the military family of the well respected and prominent Brigadier General Morgan Lewis (1754-1844). Lewis had an illustrious military career having served as deputy Quartermaster General for the New York Department of the Continental Army under General Gates at Ticonderoga and Saratoga. Lewis was also Attorney General for the State of New York from November 1791 to December 1792, and afterward became 3rd Justice of the State of New York. He was ultimately promoted to Chief Justice in October 1801.

By 1804 Lewis rose to become the third Governor of New York State. In 1813, Lewis was promoted to Major General of the Niagara Frontier and by 1814 assumed command of military activities north of New York City. Worth accompanied Lewis to the Niagara Frontier in 1813 and took part in the attack on Fort George on May 27, 1813 where he distinguished himself with such bravery and gallantry that Lewis appointed him as his aid-de-camp. William Jenkins Worth was becoming a respected and experienced soldier besides having important political connections with the Jenkins side of his family.



Col. William J. Worth

At the battle of Chrystler's Farm, November 11, 1813, on the St. Lawrence, General Lewis became sick and was confined to his vessel. Rather than become a spectator, Worth asked to join the field army then commanded by General Boyd, where he served as his aid-de-camp and again won fresh honors where his courage and bravery were recognized. When General Lewis finally recovered from his illness after the battle of Chrystler's Farm, he was then assigned to New York City. By that time General Lewis thought of Worth as a member of his own family. Lewis wrote to Worth asking him to come to New York City, but Worth wrote back to Lewis stating that he was engaged in *"three months fatigues of the Camp of Instructions; the enemy being within striking distance, separated only by the Niagara, which we cross on the morrow, and the battle field in view, will, I trust, excuse my choice."*

By 1814, and now only in his twentieth year, Worth's duties were as an aide to the esteemed General Winfield Scott

during the battle of Chippewa Plains, July 5, 1814, in which Scott's forces defeated the British. It was during this event that once again Worth's excellent conduct and demeanor throughout this dangerous conflict was noted by General Scott and General Brown. A letter written by a soldier describing the Battle of Chippewa found on the *Stamp Auction Network* on the Internet describes the savagery of the action and is not edited here for errors:

Buffalo, July 10th 1814: *"I just drop a few words to you relating to our arms, our Army under command of Major Gen. Brown, Brig. Gen. Scott & Ripley.... Crossed the Niagara on the eve of the 2nd and on the third Fort Erie was surrendered without opposition in which were about 150 men - On the next day our Army passed down the Niagara met with some little opposition at Black Creek about 12 miles down river but the British retired to Chippeway where they had a strong and well fortified position. On the 5th Inst. they marched out of Chippeway and met our Army about two miles and a half above, where Gen. Scott's Brigade, the Seneca Indians, and Pennsylvania Volunteers engaged them and after a severe engagement of near two hours the British were obliged to retire leaving as report says three hundred dead and wounded on the field. Our loss in killed is stated at 71, wounded 150, many severely. All the wounded capable of being removed have been conveyed to this place and it is a shocking sight to behold. Some with one leg, some with one arm, many shot through the body. Arms, legs and in fact every part of body mangled---One was tomahawked in five places through the skull was brought here alive. Likewise three that were scalped, all save one of which have since died. The British have since evacuated Chippeway, our Army in pursuit &c. The groans of the wounded and dying are constantly sounding in our ears. We have an Officer in our house which was shot through the body which we expect will not survive many days....I write this in great haste knowing you would be anxious to hear from this frontier....H. Callender."*

Worth's bravery again at Chippewa was so noted by General Scott who wrote: *"I cannot close this account of meritorious conduct without mentioning the great services rendered me by those two gallant young soldiers, Lieutenants Worth and Watts, my aids."* Worth's star continued to rise. However, during the Battle of Lundy's Lane on July 25, 1814, Worth received what was thought to be a mortal wound while passing through blazing enemy fire to communicate an order when he was struck by a round of cannon grapeshot which passed through his thigh. All assumed this injury would be fatal, but after about a year of confinement to his bed and room, Worth regained his health but the injury left him with a permanent lameness in his leg. By the time Worth recovered, peace had finally been restored and Worth was promoted to the rank of Brevet Major in recognition of his bravery and sacrifice at the Battle of Lundy's Lane.

From 1815 on, Worth continued being promoted through military ranks. In 1818 Worth married Margaret Stafford of Albany whose family were merchants. They had four children: three daughters, Ellen, Mary and Margaret; and a son named Winfield Scott Worth after General Winfield Scott, whom Worth served under during the War of 1812. A later falling out between the two men caused Worth to change his son's name to William Scott Worth.

Worth continued his career with the 2nd U.S. Infantry, fulfilling a number of important and wide-ranging assignments including the Commandant of cadets at the Military Academy at West Point from 1820 to 1828 where he rose to the rank of Brevet Lt. Colonel. By 1824 he also functioned on the staff of the Coast Artillery School at Fort Monroe, Virginia until 1829-30 when he advanced to the rank of Major in the Ordinance Corps in 1832. The book "Watervliet Arsenal" by John Swantek shows that Worth commanded that facility as a Lt. Colonel between January 26, 1835 and April 30, 1838. By July 1838, he was also recognized for performing valuable services by patrolling the U.S. border during the Patriot War in Canada and enforcing American neutrality during this short event.

During the period of William J. Worth's increasing work assignments and rank advancements several life altering events happened in his immediate family. On October 3, 1833, William and Margaret's infant daughter, Ellen, died, and years later their second daughter, Margaret, died on November 6, 1839.

By the time of his second daughter's death in 1839, Worth had already served in the U.S. Army for a period of 27 years. Could he have decided then to just retire to his new home at Watervliet, or was it the Country that needed Worth's service, or was it perhaps Worth's own pride and ego that fueled his continued service?

Regardless of what kept Worth in the Army, one has to wonder, when William Jenkins Worth purchased properties from the nearby Schuyler family on July 24, 1838, and began to build his home there, did he actually have time to live in it? If we recall, Worth purchased the property from the Schuyler's toward the end of July 1838. If construction on his new home began immediately afterward, completion of this large home must have taken months to accomplish, not including halting some or all construction activities during the winter season, which would bring things into the year 1839.

By 1840 Worth reported to Florida to address the Second Seminole Indian War which had already been raging for five years. His window of opportunity to complete and furnish his new and large home had to be very narrow. On September 7, 1841 a notice of sale appeared in the Albany Argus newspaper advertising the "*Beautiful Country Residence of Col. W. J. Worth, situate in Watervliet on the McAdam Road between Albany and Troy is offered for sale.*"

The advertisement describes all the buildings as being nearly new. This statement is important as it clearly indicates that besides the house itself, there were other struc-

tures necessary to make the property a working gentleman's farm. How long did it take for barns, carriage houses, ice houses, wagon sheds and more to be built between summer 1838 and 1840 when Worth was ordered to Florida? Perhaps Worth knew he would be engaged at Florida for some period of time and would never return, or perhaps a financial deal involving Worth and others, including the Bank of Watervliet, went sour which ended up in court forcing the sale of the home. Unfortunately we will never know the answer to this.

Seminole Indian War

Worth's tactic's while commanding U.S. Army forces at Florida included denying Indian natives food by burning their crops and villages which forced Indian Chiefs Wild Cat and Halleck Fartinugge into battle at Pilicklickiha Hammock. After a fierce battle nearly 3000 Indians were forced out of Florida and relocated west. Only about 300 defiant and elusive Indians continued hide in the swamps and Worth advised the government to eventually make peace with them rather than continue wasting resources chasing them through the swamp lands. Worth remained in Florida for the next four years when hostilities commenced with Mexico and Worth was ordered to report to Texas and join the occupying Texas Army under Zachary Taylor.

War with Mexico

Worth's leadership in the Mexican War included victories at Palo Alto and Reseca-de-la-Palma in May, 1846. In September, 1846 Zachary Taylor mishandled the storming of Monterey during a three day battle but Worth's attack on the seemingly impregnable bishop's palace forced its surrender. Worth participated in several battles in Mexico including Cerro Gordo, Cherubusco, Molino del Rey, and Chapultepec. Worth received the surrender of Monterey and would later accept the surrender of Mexico City itself. William Jenkins Worth had become a national hero.

Worth's Death & Final Resting Place

After hostilities with Mexico ended, Worth was ordered to the Department of Texas where on May 7, 1849 he died of cholera. Worth's wife probably remained in the safety of Florida after hostilities broke out with Mexico. But when Worth died in Texas, his body remained apparently in a vault there for two years. Worth had already been recognized by the State of New York in 1838 when it presented him with a ceremonial sword for his services during the War of 1812. He was also officially recognized by the Florida State Legislature for his ending the bloody Seminole Indian Wars there. He was also presented with another ceremonial sword by the citizens of Hudson, N.Y. for his gallantry at Monterey, and the State of Louisiana did the same, recognizing his brave conduct throughout the Mexican War. In 1848 the U.S. Congress ordered a sword for him as well.

When it was learned that Worth had died, by 1850 Officials of the City of New York sent a committee of people to meet with Worth's widow and offered to bring his body back to New York City with the promise of erecting a suitable monument for him. Mrs. Worth ordered the General's remains released to the committee and Worth's remains were removed from Texas to a vault in Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, where they would remain for the next several years as no action had been taken by New York City to begin finding a final resting place for the General besides a temporary holding vault.

By January 9, 1854, Major John Titcomb Sprague, General Worth's son in law, wrote to Jacob A. Westervelt, the Mayor of New York City requesting that General Worth be permanently buried. The letter reads:

"Sir, I would again most respectfully and urgently ask your attention to the final disposition of the remains of General Worth. The fact that they were taken from the possession of the family and entrusted to a Committee of the Common Council of the City of New York at San Antonio, Texas, is well known from the proceedings of that body, and from the subsequent ceremonies, when the remains were deposited in Greenwood Cemetery four years ago, where they now are, unburied. The widow and the children have a deep and anxious feeling upon this subject; they ask a grave for the husband and parent, a spot to be identified as such, however humble or obscure. The proprietors of the Greenwood Cemetery are prepared at any moment to give the necessary ground to erect a monument worthy of the fame of the deceased, as contemplated and expressed by the Common Council, and guaranteed by the most reliable assurances when the remains were confided to the City of New York; or if the alternative be necessary, a piece of ground will be designated where the family can have the remains interred and a suitable stone erected. I have the honor to be, with the highest consideration and respect,..... Your Humble Servant, J.T. Sprague, Major, U.S. Army."

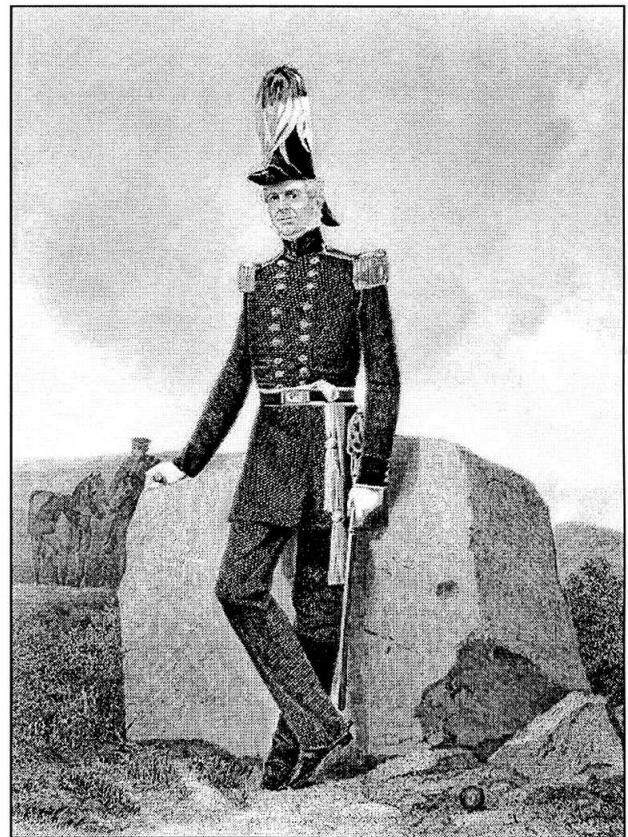
The mayor forwarded Major Sprague's letter to the Common Council, requesting that they act upon it. The Common Council passed a resolution that the remains of General Worth should be interred and that a suitable monument be erected as early as possible and paid for entirely by the City.

Finally, by 1856 the City of New York began erecting a fine monument at the intersection of Broadway and 5th Avenue in New York City. At about the same time that the monument was being constructed, General Worth's widow purchased a lot in the Albany Rural Cemetery, Town of Colonie, on May 16, 1856 where several family members were moved from other cemeteries locally or from Hudson, N.Y. and reinterred.

On November 25, 1857 a large funeral ceremony was held by the people of New York City with numerous digni-

taries in attendance. A sixty-five page document describing the life and accomplishments of General Worth was printed in 1857 titled: "Reports of the Erection of a Monument to the Memory of William Jenkins Worth, late Major General of the United States Army by the Special Committees appointed by the Common Council of the City of New York." Another fifteen page document records a copy of the official speech or address of the Hon. Fernando Wood, Mayor of the City of New York, which he gave to the throngs of people who attended the funeral event and dedication of the monument which still proudly stands at what is now called Worth Square in New York City.

General John T. Sprague died September 6, 1878. His daughter, Margaret Worth Sprague, died on November 3, 1883. Both are buried in the Worth family plot at Albany Rural Cemetery. General Worth's widow, Margaret Stafford Worth, and her daughter, Margaret Worth Sprague, are buried in the St. Augustine National Cemetery in Florida where they lived since the end of the Seminole Indian Wars .



Portrait of Worth by Elonzo Chapel
during the Mexican War

Part II of this newsletter will be Hedge Lawn
during the ownership of the Jermain family

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$ _____ is enclosed.

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Please accept my additional donation of \$ _____ as a gift to the Historical Society. *The Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation.*

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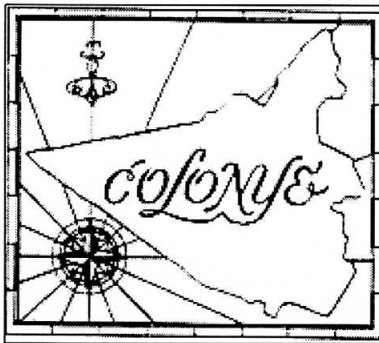
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**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE TOWN OF COLONIE**



Historical Society Founded 1971

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Support the Society's efforts to stimulate an appreciation of the historical heritage of your community. Join Now!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of our newsletter. Our Town Historian, Kevin Franklin, spent a great deal of time researching and writing this edition, an education of one of the prominent families and their property, still located in the Town. Like most historical societies our mission, in a nutshell, is to preserve and promote the rich history of our town. This includes educating all who are interested in the various aspects of the Town's record of events, people and places. We reach out to our membership frequently, sharing local history through a variety of means, such as this newsletter and regularly scheduled speaker's programs. Also, we are a presence at many local historical events in an effort to perform our mission. We have open arms for potential members, which often results in new members that bring to us their own personal knowledge and experiences of our town, which expands our ability to perform our mission. If you know of someone who may be interested in the HSTC, or someone who may bring a talent that we can benefit from, please don't hesitate to recommend them as a member of our historical society. We're confident that the experience will be mutually rewarding. Hope to see you at the next membership meeting!

Mark Bodnar, President