

RHS: Summer 2012

SAVE THESE DATES

Saturday, May 19th, 2-4 pm at the Rhinebeck Cemetery

Steven Mann will take us on a tour of the Rhinebeck Cemetery. Meet at the chapel which is at the corner of Route 9 and Mill Road across from Hobson's

President's Message Summer 2012

I am delighted to report that we had three very informative programs this spring. Our first, *The History of a House*, was based on the trials and tribulations I endured as I sought information about my circa 1820 home's past. Prof. Brian McAdoo of Vassar College piqued our interest with a lecture on the history of African Americans in Rhinebeck, while Cynthia Owen Philip told us about the Delano Family's involvement in the China Trade. All three events were well attended and videotaped for preservation in the RHS archives.

It most definitely has been quite educational for me working in partnership with filmmaker and RHS member Leigh Anne Bishop to record all RHS programs for future generations. Some of our programs appear on PANDA, so be sure to check out Channel 23 if you did not get to attend the program in person. I arranged with Steve Cook, Director of the Starr Library, to add the DVD's of RHS programs to the Library's video collection so that library members can check them out.

Much has gone on behind the scenes at RHS as well. RHS board members and volunteers worked for several weeks on a project to expand and reorganize the archive room. We added map cases donated by the Clinton Historical Society and purchased new shelving to greatly increase our capacity to store archival material. We are now in the process of reorganizing the collection and adding recently acquired material to the online database.

In addition, we have scanned part of our postcard collection as a pilot project to make the archives more accessible via the web. Shortly, you will be able to not only look up items in the database but also view the actual items with a single click of your mouse. In the coming years, we will be working on adding photographs, maps and more postcards available on the website.

Finally, on June 16th Red Hook Historical Society and RHS will co-sponsor a program to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the separation of Red Hook from Rhinebeck called "A Peaceable Secession: Red Hook Splits from Rhinebeck". J. Winthrop Aldrich, Red Hook Town Historian, will use his considerable knowledge and engaging humor to bring the early days of Red Hook's founding to life at Rokeby, his

family's historic Hudson River estate. This talk will feature rare period maps and images. Light refreshments will be served. Admission is \$5 and space is limited, so reserve your spot by calling 845-758-1920, e-mailing rhcibicentennial@earthlink.net or mailing in the reservation form at www.redhook200.org. 2 p.m. – Rokeby, 845 River Road, Annandale (see flyer in this newsletter)

This year we have joined with the Museum of Rhinebeck History as a co-sponsor of their Progressive Dinner. It will take place on July 29th and I hope that you will be able to join us. The flyer for this event is also in this newsletter.

Have a safe summer full of sun, fun and relaxation!

David Miller, President

The Delanos in the Hudson River Valley and in the China Trade

by Cynthia Owen Philip

Warren and Franklin Delano did not settle in the mid-Hudson valley until 1851. What made it possible for each of them to build their handsome Italianate mansions there – Warren's in Newburgh and his younger brother Franklin's in Barrytown - was their involvement in the China trade, Warren directly and Franklin peripherally.

Warren, born in 1809, was the first Delano to leave the Fairhaven section of New Bedford, where the Delano family had lived for seven generations, to make his fortune in New York City. He was a ripe twenty-three years old. Franklin his next younger brother, then 19, followed soon afterwards. (Yes, it was after his uncle that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was named.)

Franklin was the first to get a job. It was with Grinnell, Minturn, New York City's foremost worldwide trading company. Moses Grinnell, the managing partner, who shared their heritage as old New Bedford stock, treated him like a son which placed him in high social as well as commercial circles. He specialized in trade on the west coast of South America. Many of its exports went to Canton.

Warren, however, was slow to make a career for himself; he even thought of going into the linseed oil business. Then suddenly he was offered a position in Canton by Russell Sturgis, a Bostonian whose family and their connections had long been South East Asian traders. A polymath graduate of Harvard and a successful lawyer, he had decided to change course and had put together a small company with a main office in Manila which he would oversee and a second office at Canton, Warren's lot. Warren rushed off on the first available ship sailing for China. However, the thought of being half way around the world from his three younger brothers, his four sisters and his father made him homesick in advance. Moreover, rightly worried about the dangers inherent in a voyage of four or more months - mast snapping gales, unchartered waters, rampant piracy – he must add his cure-defiant seasickness, a humiliating affliction for a man from a seafaring family.

One can only imagine his joy when the ship moored at the island of at Macau to collect a pilot to navigate the Pearl River up to Canton, almost fifty miles inland. If Warren was shocked by the number of foreign opium storage vessels permanently anchored around Lintin Island at the mouth of the river to accommodate the illegal drug that flowed in from British plantation in northern India and from Syria, he did not comment on it at this time. However, they were a warning. Such a casual presence clearly indicated collusion by Chinese officials, for imperial edicts against importing any opium whatsoever into the Celestial Kingdom had been issued repeatedly for more than a century.

Five miles inland he witnessed his first ceremony of bribe taking. There was nothing clandestine about that either. The presiding official stated how much was expected, the Macau pilot cheerfully paid, whereupon the two shared a few courtly words over a glass of wine and the ship was released to continue up stream. Called "cumsha, Chinese for "golden sand," the ritual was repeated again and again. As the bribe was shared with officials from the top down, the Chinese believed it to be fair and just. Because it was seldom excessive and always reliable, most foreigners thought so too. It was simply the oil that made commerce run smoothly.

The ship's last halt was at the port of Whampoa where all foreign ships together with their officers and crews were required to anchor until return cargo was loaded and they received the "grand chop" that permitted them to leave China. The last twelve miles were covered in "fast boats," skiffs propelled by oars. As the tea season had been gearing up for over a month, Chinese vessels – salt junks, coasting junks and flocks of sampans offering everything from clothes, tools and edibles to fortune telling, earwax removal and sex – formed a floating city, for the 800 or so Chinese men who had been hired to handle the foreigners imports and exports as well as be their cooks and housekeepers be

must be provisioned. They were, however, out of bounds for foreigners.



At first sight, the Factory complex was spectacular. A line of handsome white three-story buildings with the national flags of each flapping on high poles above, it seemed worthy of a high class English seaside resort, except that it vibrated with hustle and bustle. At second sight it was so compressed that it might have been a toy. A mere thousand feet along the riverfront and 700 deep, it was the only space foreigners were allowed to move freely in and most of that was covered with buildings. In essence, it was a gilded money-making machine in which the parts moved smoothly, because everyone in the system wanted them to and the profits were so great. It required great self-discipline on the part of the foreigners and enforced discipline on the Chinese.

Each country occupied a separate factory within which it lived and worked. That of the Honorable East India Company was by far the most luxurious. Its columned entrance was embellished with the motto *Regis et Senatus Angliae*. Its magnificent dining room easily seated a hundred. Its library and gaming rooms were lavish, and its verandah overlooking the river was both charming and grand.

Americans occupied the former Swedish factory, which was decidedly more informal. As with the other factories, business was conducted on the first floor, with the public rooms on the second and sleeping accommodations, including a few bathing rooms so vital in hot weather, on the third. Its dinners were like a family gathering. All members of the community, from company chiefs to the youngest clerks, dined together, and along with the usual jokes and long involved stories, shared business experiences and solved problems. It was one of the ways in which novices learned the trade.

The rules under which all foreigners lived and worked were strict. Quite simply, all trades were managed by the hong merchant assigned to them; all they could do was accept or reject them. All communication with the Chinese outside the compound was through him. They rented their quarters from him. For 24 hours a day he was responsible for their

following the rules and their general good behavior. Fortunately, they often formed strong friendships with each other based on trust and that it was through each other that they both made fortunes. The final rule confined them to the compound except for occasional closely supervised visits to the nearby temple gardens and their departure for Macau or home after the tea buying season was over. The understanding that underlay these rules was that foreigners were permitted to trade in China only by virtue of His Celestial Majesty's grace and had been made only for their protection from wayward Chinese.

The major import Warren depended on was rice, which although grown north of Canton, was so much easier and safer to get from the Philippines that low rates were set on its import. Other Americans brought in beaver and sea otter skins, manufactured cotton goods, iron, copper, tin plates, sandalwood and whatever the sender thought would sell. But often the major import was specie, packed in barrels and reaching hundreds of thousands of dollars in value, to pay for the teas, silks and varying amounts of opium that were the principle exports. Spare room in the ship was filled out with items such as lacquer boxes, feathered fans, fine porcelain, again whatever home merchants had specified.

Few letters from this early period survive, but it is evident from those that did, that Warren sorely missed his tightknit family and their circle of friends, especially the pleasant occasions when women joined in.

Moreover his work life was also strained. The American community was experiencing a period of subdued turmoil, caused by the retirement of seasoned chiefs. Too often it seemed their replacements were running through a revolving door set spinning by illness, death and dissatisfaction. In addition, Russell and Company was so huge and Russell, Sturgis so small, Warren must have worried he would get lost in the shuffle. Even more grave was the British East India Company's decision in 1833 to abandon its monopoly for free trading. Many viewed the transformation as Britain's first deliberate step towards a war that would open more Chinese ports to foreign trade and ensure they would be governed on British terms. Others hoped it would not. From his subsequent actions, it was highly probable Warren fell in the latter group. Still, it provided a chance for Americans, now the EIC's chief competitors, to pick up more business and they did.

A highly intelligent, persistent person by nature, Warren gradually settled down. He learned Pidgin English, the language especially devised for talk between the Chinese and the foreigners. And he became accustomed to Americans being called a "flowery flag devil." As the years sped by he steadily gained expertise and command. When Russell, Sturgis was absorbed into Russell and Company, he rose high in its ranks. His Hong merchant became the

famous head of the Co-Hong, Houqua. They worked well together and became loyal, trusting friends.

In 1839 the war that had been seething beneath the surface broke out. Provoked by increasing their illegal sales of opium into interior of the country by the foreign community, Chinese authorities realized they had to act decisively. They commandeered 20,000 chests of opium, worth untold millions of dollars from the foreign community and burned it up in what might be called a ritual sacrifice against evil.

Warren, who had been made a partner of Russell and Company and was about to become its chief, was forced by the action to think more deeply about the opium question. That opium was not illegal in the United States at this time must have shaped his thought. Opium poppies had long been grown in home herbariums to be used as a tonic in small dosages and in larger ones to alleviate intense pain, for instance, victims of tuberculosis in the throes of their last days. Moreover, a strong cadre of highly reputable American doctors regarded it as a miracle cure; the word for its derivative, laudanum, comes from the Latin meaning to praise. There still was no safe general anesthesia, although mankind had been looking for one from prehistoric times. Ether would not be publically administered until 1846, when a Boston doctor pulled a tooth with its aid. Even then it was found to risk serious side effects. And chloroform was still a long way off. In the end Warren took the position that, if the Chinese government forbade the importation of opium into their country, foreigners should obey. It was a bold, isolated stance, but to the end he would hold to it.

When the Chinese, who had many centuries of herbal medicine behind them and feared opium's addictive power, realized that the British were using the drug as a weapon of war against China, they fought back. It was not an even match. The British brought in far advanced warships and artillery. They sank antiquated Chinese war junks and threatened to fire Canton. Finally there was nothing the Chinese could do but give in. The Treaty of Nanking gave the British what they wanted, more ports opened to free trade along the whole coast of China, an ambassadorial presence in Peking and the pleasure of accusing the Chinese of provoking the war. But that was not enough. Other Opium Wars followed, further subjugating the Chinese, who looking back on their proud history, called the nineteenth century the time of humiliation.

Most of the other foreigners fled Canton while the war was going on, but Warren continued business as well as he could. It was not the Americans war, it was a British war. In 1843 he went home. There he captured the heart of Catherine Robbins Lyman, the daughter of a prominent Massachusetts judge. The family, who warmly embraced the courtship, was closely connected Boston China traders who undoubtedly verified his virtues. After their marriage,

Catherine gaily returned to China with him, glad that one of the immediate positive outcomes of the Opium War was that husbands and wives need no longer be separated for half the year. As Hong Kong was one of the ports newly opened, it was to that island they went.

Two years later, they returned to the house he had bought in New York City's fashionable Lafayette Square. Franklin owned the one next door, it having been given to him by John Jacob Astor the grandfather of his prospective bride, Laura Astor. For a wedding present, they received from her father, William B. Astor, a large section of Rokeby in Barrytown that John Jacob had originally bought from John Armstrong, William's father-in-law. Warren followed in his footsteps by renting a house John Armstrong owned across the river just north of Newburgh. By 1851 he had bought it and was replacing it with a handsome Italianate villa, named Algonac. His family would live there for almost a hundred years. Franklin was in the process of building a similar

mansion named Stein Valetje in Barrytown. Although he and Laura lived abroad most of the time, when they spent time at Stein Valetje, they visited back and forth with Warren's growing family. Although childless, their marriage was long and happy. Franklin's will passed Stein Valetje on to Warren's eldest son, Warren III. That property was not sold out of the family until the mid-1970s.

At the same time, the Delanos never relinquished their love for their ancestral Fairhaven. They maintained the house built by Warren Delano I in 1832 and used it for family reunions. As children proliferated they simply enlarged it. That house was not sold until 1942. By then it was 110 years old. The house still stands and the family still flourishes. To me this is proof certain that the great strength to be gained from uniting two, albeit differing, heritages.

RESERVATION FORM
A Peaceable Secession: Red Hook Splits from Rhinebeck
Illustrated Talk by J. Winthrop Aldrich
Saturday, June 16, 2012

2:00 p.m. Rokeby, 845 River Road, Barrytown

I would like to reserve ___ tickets at \$5.00 each

Name (s) _____

Mailing Address _____

E-Mail Address _____

Telephone (with area code) _____

Please make your check payable to 'EBHS – Bicentennial' and mail with this Reservation form to EBHS, P.O. 397, Red Hook, NY 12571.

I would like to receive confirmation by
___ e-mail ___ postcard

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