

New Fiction

Here Lies a Most Beautiful Lady

RICHARD BLAKER

Hester Billiter's faculty for keeping up appearances and saying little helps her weather many a crisis as she follows her husband into whatever queer place his devotion to "big business" takes them in his search for oil, gold or furs.

The Hill

ELEANOR GREEN

A brief first novel of unusual charm in which Vinnie, a daughter, views with detachment her family—their joys, sorrows and weaknesses—while they are gathered on the hill to watch a sunset.

Beyond Sing the Woods

TRYGVE GULBRANSEN

Against the background of modern Norway, with its sagas and feuds, Dag Bjorndal, proud and vindictive, learns humility and compassion, through the influence of a foreign wife.

South Riding

WINIFRED HOLTVY

The workings of English county government, local as they may seem, represent a cross-section of life, contrasting Robert Carne, conservative gentleman farmer, and Sarah Burton, modern, fighting school teacher.

Best in the Greenwood

FREDERICK LAMBECK, psued.

A refreshing story of Mrs. Beaufort, wealthy widow of sixty-three, so happy in her quiet Connecticut home with her garden, music and books, that she always rebels against the annual birthday visit to her sister's New York apartment, with its endless rush.

Sparkenbroke

CHARLES MORGAN

A long, philosophical novel laid in England and Italy, dealing with Mary, a delightful combination of the romantic and the practical, her conventional, level-headed husband and Lord Sparkenbroke, self-centered, erratic poet, who believes that love, art and death are the only realities.

Christina

C. H. OLDFIELD

A rather morbid, yet fascinating, picture of the ravages of insane jealousy is shown in Peter Brent's search for his dead wife's un-named lover.

The Roofs of Elm Street

W. J. McNALLY

Elm Street grew out of the profits of a Minnesota lumber concern started after the Civil War. The story glorifies the West and contrasts the three generations who lived there from 1870 to 1914.

Gaudy Night

D. L. SAYERS

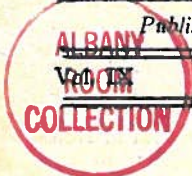
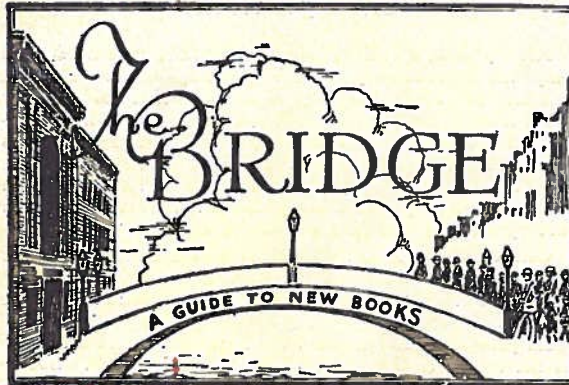
Harriet Vane, returning for a reunion at Shrewsbury College, Oxford, becomes involved in a poison pen mystery which only Lord Peter Wimsey can solve. Because of the English university atmosphere, its keen analysis and its romance, this mystery without a murder is outstanding.

The Baroness

ERNST WIECHERT

A quiet, unusual story of a German baroness, alone in the world, who restores faith and a purpose to a post-war derelict by making him gamekeeper on her estate.

Albany, N. Y. 12202



Published by the Albany Public Library

MAY-JUNE, 1936

No. 4

ALBANY

Its Literary and Cultural Past



ST. PETER'S CHURCH, 1715
(Fort Frederick in the Background)

Notes inspired by the
Dongan Charter Celebration
1686—1936

Albany Public Library

Albany Libraries

Albany is celebrating, with appropriate ceremonies, in July the tercentenary of the granting of the Dongan charter in 1686, marking the transition of Albany from a mere trading post and village to a city with self-governing powers rather unique in that age. It is therefore fitting that some account be given of some of the cultural and educational advances which have been made in Albany since early times: libraries and the history of libraries are our chief concern.

One of the first collections of books is said to have been in Rensselaerwyck in 1642 and consisted of 17 books in theology, philosophy, mathematics and the classics, and during the early Dutch period many theological pamphlets and tracts were sent on from Amsterdam to the ministers and schoolmasters in the colony. Sometime after 1700 the first English library was begun when 10 volumes were sent, by the Bishop of London and Thomas Bray and his Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, to the church in Albany for the use of the ministers and their parishioners and to aid in the suppression of heresy.

The famous Society Library had been founded in New York City in 1754 and probably gave impetus to the establishment of a similar library in Albany in 1758. Each subscriber purchased a "right" or share for five pounds and agreed to pay an annual fee of ten shillings. The Revolutionary War intervened, and evidently the library ceased to function during those troublesome times, for, in 1791, some of the old subscribers founded the second Albany Society Library. The library grew. In 1793 there were 650 titles, and by 1828 there were 2,000 volumes and over 240 active shareholders. In 1833 the Society's 5,000 volumes were moved to the Albany Female Academy, and today many of the books are in the State Library.

Even in those early days circulating libraries were run by booksellers. Barber and Southwick reported 400 volumes in 1799, and Daniel Steele advertised a similar number in 1803, patronized chiefly by clerks and apprentices. John Cook had a reading room and library and also sold Saratoga mineral water. Mr. Cook was probably the first professional librarian in Albany, being state librarian in 1818 and librarian of the Apprentices Library organized in 1820.

The founding of libraries for the exclusive use of apprentices was the work of William Wood who had established the Mechanics and Mercantile libraries in Boston, New York, and other towns. Under the spell of Mr. Wood's eloquence, many of the prominent citizens donated several volumes toward the new Apprentices Library which flourished until the 1850's and had 3,000 books. Another library of similar educational purpose was the reading room of the Young Men's Association for Mutual Improvement begun under the inspiration of Amos Dean. Over 600 members were enrolled when the library opened on January 4, 1834 with 800 volumes and more than 100 newspapers and periodicals. Out of this reading room grew the present Albany Public Library.

In 1818 the State Library was established for the benefit of all the people of the state. It has grown to be a great reference library and a book reservoir to which all the libraries of the State, including in particular that in Albany, are indebted. The State Library suffered a great loss in the historic Capitol fire of 1911. Most of its collection has been replaced and housed in the State Education Building, but much valuable and historical material, including historical records, was irretrievably lost.

The Albany Public Library as it exists today is governed by the Board of Trustees of the Young Men's Association for Mutual Improvement which has already been mentioned. In the first years of its growth lecture series and debates were of as much importance as the library, but gradually interest in those activities waned while the library grew in size and importance, although it was, until 1899, a subscription library charging two dollars as an annual fee. The first free library was started in the South End district in 1893 through the efforts of John A. Howe, principal of School 1. Later a branch was established in Pine Hills. In 1901 the John V. L. Pruyn Library* was built and presented to the Young Men's Association, in memory of John V. L. Pruyn by his widow, his son and daughters.

Harmanus Bleecker, an Albanian who had been minister to the Netherlands and who had died in 1849, left his estate for the permanent benefit of Albany. It was decided in 1888 that the Young Men's Association was a worthy recipient of the gift and as a consequence Harmanus Bleecker Hall was erected as an auditorium with a room devoted to the library. Its sale in 1920 provided funds for the erection of the present central library building, Harmanus Bleecker Library. Finally in 1922 the Young Men's Association and Albany Free libraries united and in 1924 were taken over by the city to become the present Albany Public Library system. Today the Albany Public Library consists of a headquarters, four branches, a number of deposit stations in schools, hospitals and other institutions, nearly 140,000 volumes and some 44,000 active borrowers—a far cry from the tiny library in Rensselaerwyck three hundred years ago.

Some Authors of the Past Whom Albany Claims

For a city which cannot call itself a literary center, Albany has accumulated a notable number of literary associations. The highest claim it can make is possibly that it gave Herman Melville all the schooling that he had—the years 1830 to '32 at the Albany Academy for Boys. His restiveness, as a clerk in the New York State Bank, where his uncle Peter Gansevoort was trustee, and as a salesman in his brother's hat store on Maiden Lane, led to his first sea voyage and the beginning of the travels which produced his masterpieces. A brilliant future was not prophesied for him by either his relatives or his school. His father, when he first sent him to Albany in 1826 at the age of seven to visit his Uncle Peter, said of him: "He is very backward in speech and somewhat slow in comprehension, but you will find him as far as he understands men and things both solid and profound and of a docile and amiable disposition".

Another romanticist and wanderer with slighter Albany associations was Bret Harte, who was born in Albany in 1836 at about the time that Melville left it. The

*The John V. L. Pruyn Branch building in its Dutch architecture and its memorials recalls old Albany. Among the small stained-glass panel inserts in the windows, themselves Dutch in atmosphere, are the city seal adopted in 1686 with the Dongan Charter, and the beaver seal adopted in 1752, as well as the Albany Coat of Arms. The most lively episode in the city's early history, the clash of the patroon's representative with Pieter Stuyvesant, is pictured in two large oil paintings by Vincent Adirenti in the children's room. This civil war of words which raged from 1648 to 1653, to the accompaniment of violent acts and arrests, grew from the attempt of the Dutch West India Company to force the manor of Rensselaerwyck to keep its houses out of cannon-shot of Fort Orange, the Company's fortification, and lost its bitterness only when in 1653 the threat of English occupation brought both Dutch antagonists to a more reasonable attitude.

city's influence upon him can only have been indirect because his father, who had been conducting a private school here, moved his family away when Bret was less than a year old. Harte returned only once to Albany, in 1872 when he lectured before the Young Men's Association on "The Argonauts of '49, California's Golden Age".

Harold Frederic lived in Albany from 1882 to 1884 while editor-in-chief of the Albany Evening Journal. Although Albany appears in his *In the Valley*, now the most popular of his works, it was the Mohawk Valley, where he lived as a child and where his family went as pioneers, which gave him the inspiration for his historical tales and his most famous book, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*.

Two Albany poets who had a nation-wide fame in their day were Alred B. Street and John G. Saxe. Street was a lawyer, turned poet and librarian, who came to Albany in 1839 when he was 28 years old, and served as director of the New York State Library from 1848 to 1862. He was a sort of unofficial poet laureate for New York State, who celebrated its scenery and great events, and wrote poems at the death of its prominent citizens. He was rated in his day as one of the foremost of the minor poets. Some of his poems were translated into German. He had praise from Disraeli and Poe. Although he wrote for the most part of the Adirondacks and the southwestern part of the State, Albany too is the scene of some of his nature poetry: *A Walk to Tivoli*, *The Falls of the Normanskill*, *Albany Rural Cemetery*. He used such subjects as, *The Albany Cathedral in its Building* and *The Return of the War Banners*, and wrote narrative poems on the burning of Schenectady by the Indians, on Burgoyne and Frontenac.

John G. Saxe, who lived in Albany during his middle life, from 1860 to 1872, and who died here in 1887, was the Tom Hood of his day, a writer of humorous society verse who, until his fame was somewhat overshadowed by that of Artemas Ward, was probably the most popular humorous writer of America. Albany itself does not appear in his works, though Saratoga Springs and New York City do; but we may suppose that Albany social life, of which he had a great deal, since he was personally popular, gave him the inspiration for many of his social satires. The State Legislature also figures in his *Ode to the Legislature on the Expiration of the Hundred Days*. Saxe first came to Albany to edit the Albany Evening Journal. Houghton published a selection from his works as late as 1905.

Michael Monahan, a journalist who became a literary artist, began his career in 1887 at the age of 19 as reporter for the Albany Press. The activities of the Holland Society in preserving a reverential memory of the early Dutch Settlers provoked the young Irishman to write in his early 20's a group of satirical poems, *A Fantasy of the Fuyck and other Conceits of the Colonial Low Dutch*. He served as secretary for two mayors, the first John Boyd Thacher and Thomas J. Van Alstyne, before he turned to the literary career which he carried through with honor. He founded and edited two literary periodicals, *The Papyrus* and *The Phoenix*, and published a number of works noted for the distinction of their style, among them his translation of the poems of Heine, *My Jeanne d'Arc*, *Road to Paris*, and *Palms of Papyrus*.

Though neither William James the philosopher nor Henry James the novelist lived in Albany, they and their work can be said literally to have had their roots here, because it was here that their grandfather William James made the fortune which made possible what Henry James referred to as that "habit of ease" and that consciousness "disfurnished of the actualities of busi-

ness" which in turn produced the philosopher and the writer. William the grandfather was credited by the New York Evening Post at his death in 1832 with having done more to build up the city of Albany than any other individual. Henry's father was for a few months in his early days, editor of the Albany Daily Craftsman, a sheet issued in 1831 and 1832 in opposition to the Albany Regency and in active support of President Jackson. Henry the novelist acknowledged more of a gift from Albany than his grandfather's money. He often visited his grandmother at her home in North Pearl Street and even attended at one time a little dame school kept by a "Miss Bayou or Bayhoo", an episode which he describes in his *Small Boy and Others*. Albany gave him a "most majestic and ineffaceable image of government" in the Capitol (the capitol building designed by Philip Hooker) which "loomed, familiar yet impressive, at the end of almost any Albany vista of reference". The "sweet taste of Albany" lingered in his regard through his life. Readers of the *Portrait of a Lady* will remember that Isabel Archer, the charming young heroine who had a "general air of being someone in particular", came from Albany.

Another author, who made his name known beyond Albany, was Amos Dean, founder in 1833 of the Young Men's Association for Mutual Improvement, a model for several similar organizations through the country. His most extensive work, published after his death, was a seven volume *History of Civilization* which was a result of his life-long study of history and of his dissatisfaction with then prevailing methods of studying it. His efforts to make of history a connected whole, studied in its philosophy, with events linked to causes connecting age to age and nation to nation, suggest the motive actuating H. G. Wells to write his *Outline of History*.

Edmund B. O'Callaghan was another scholar of note who started the writing of history as an avocation. He was a physician whose interest in history began with the Anti-Rent agitation in 1839 which led him to a study of Dutch land grants and thence to early New York history. He published in 1846-48 a history of New Netherlands, based on the study of the State's Dutch records, which rescued the early Dutch settlers from some of the odium cast upon them by Irving's burlesque *Knickerbocker History of New York*. The success of this publication led the State to urge him to give up his profession and devote the next twenty years to editing, translating and publishing manuscript records, which he did, fortunately, because many of the records which appeared in his several volumes of documentary history were burned in the Capitol fire of 1911. He left Albany ten years before his death to edit the Common Council minutes of New York City.

Some Albany Printers

Probably because Albany is the State Capital its major industry has been and still is printing. When in 1771 the Robertson brothers, Alexander and James, set up their printing press here three years after James began printing in New York, theirs was the only place in the Colony outside New York City where printing could be done. They were patronized by Sir William Johnson and also by the City of Albany for whom they printed a compilation of its ordinances in 1773. During the Revolution they were found to be circulating loyalist handbills and were forced to flee. Their type which was buried by a friend was resurrected in 1782 and sold to the second Albany printer, Solomon Balantine. It was Balantine who began publication in 1784 of *Poor Ned's Albany Almanack*, later *Webster's Calendar*, or the *Albany Almanac*, which had a continuous existence under Charles R. Webster, Joel Munsell, his

sons Frank and Charles, and granddaughters, Harriet E. and Grace H., until it ceased publication in 1918 in its 135th year. The last number was issued by the Albany Knickerbocker Press.

The man who gave Albany its claim to importance in the history of American printing is Joel Munsell who opened his own shop here in 1836. He earned a national reputation for fine printing. "For many years his was one of the chief offices in which fine editions of biographical and historical works were printed, his reputation for skill being as high as that of any man in America", according to the *American Dictionary of Printing and Bookmaking* published in 1894.

By Albany's good fortune he was a historian also. The Dongan Charter Celebration would have had hard sledding without the valuable source material on the city's history gathered by Munsell in his ten volumes of *Annals* and his four volumes of *Collections*. The *Dictionary of American Biography* accords him a "secure place among the pioneer workers who by their labors in source material have opened to others more inviting fields of historic production".

Albany in Literature

The Conqueror MRS. G. F. H. ATHERTON

Alexander Hamilton, on a military mission to Albany, is entertained by the Schuylers. Interesting sidelights on this Dutch pioneer family and an excellent description of the Mansion are furnished in the account of his courtship and marriage to Betsey Schuyler, in 1780.

All Ye People MERLE COLBY

In 1810, John Bray, riding into Albany from Vermont, is impressed by the neat Dutch houses with checker-board brick patterns, the hospital, armory and City Hall, where maps of land grants in the west are displayed to tempt the fortune-seekers. He describes the new wharves, piled with goods being loaded into sloops for New York, and a novel note is the reference to itinerant blacksmiths, medicine peddlers and sign painters.

Satanstoe J. F. COOPER

Most of the early families of Albany figure in this romance of Cornelius Littlepage and Anneke Mordaunt, daughter of a Dutch merchant. Of special interest is the account of the ten-day trip in 1758 by sleigh from New York and the description of the Van Rensselaer and Schuyler family pews in St. Peter's with their canopies and coats of arms.

Colonial Days in Old New York MRS. A. M. EARLE

A storehouse of information on Dutch customs, housewives' duties, amusements, education, wardrobes, punishments and funeral ceremonies. Collections for the poor were taken at all fashionable weddings and the transfer of church pews to the heirs or their sale for thirty shillings, if unclaimed, was customary.

Erie Water W. D. EDMUNDS

From the Greenbush ferry, in 1817, the Capitol stands out as a brown building with marble pillars, and the glass dome of the Albany Bank, at the foot

of State street, is another landmark, while South Pearl street was the center of "Cheap store" signs. Martin Van Buren is a Senator, and the Senate is struggling with the new Canal Bill which has already passed the Assembly.

Rome Haul W. D. EDMUNDS

By 1850 the dream of the Canal is a fact, and Albany is the great reloading center for goods being transferred from barges to canal boats. There are huge stables at the end of State street for the canal horses, and Delaware and Hudson coal barges are plying the Hudson to New York.

In the Valley HAROLD FREDERIC

The hero, sent as a fur trading agent to Albany in 1772, finds the Dutch city a "quiet, delightful place where he first learned to laugh". From the State House, birds in the nearby woods could be heard and, on quiet nights, a panther's howl from the Helderbergs. There is an interesting description of a ball held at the Van Rensselaer Mansion in honor of Lieutenant-Governor Colden.

Memoirs of an American Lady MRS. A. M. GRANT

As a child, Mrs. Grant spent several years in the home of Mrs. Philip Schuyler, aunt of General Schuyler. This volume, recalling her Albany experience, is a tribute to Madame Schuyler, the "American lady", and an invaluable record of family life among the social leaders of Albany during the Colonial period. Of particular interest is the detailed description of The Flatts, the Schuyler estate just north of Albany.

The Black Gown RUTH HALL

A tale of the French and Indian wars, emphasizing the Dutch-English conflict in the story of an Albany girl who marries an English officer, though she really loves a Dutch boy of her own "company".

Quiet Cities JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

The romance here included, of Claes Mey's daughter with one of Lord Howe's soldiers typifies the English influence encroaching on the peaceful Albany of the 1700's, when the Dutch frowned on the English customs of dancing and acting, and no girl was expected to marry outside of her own particular "company".

Catherine Schuyler M. G. HUMPHREYS

Catherine Van Rensselaer was married to Philip Schuyler in 1755 when this section was deep in the French and Indian War. With General Abercrombie's headquarters at Albany, the British "red-coats" introduced the theatre to the town, causing a great furor in the church and among the old Dutch burghers.

Recollections of the Revolution and Empire

H. L. LA TOUR DE PIN DE GOUVERNET, MARQUISE DE

In 1794, while the De Gouvernets were getting established in Albany, they were guests of the Schuylers. They had sailed to Boston from France and had made the overland journey to Albany in fifteen days. The Schuyler mansion and the old Van Buren farm are described.