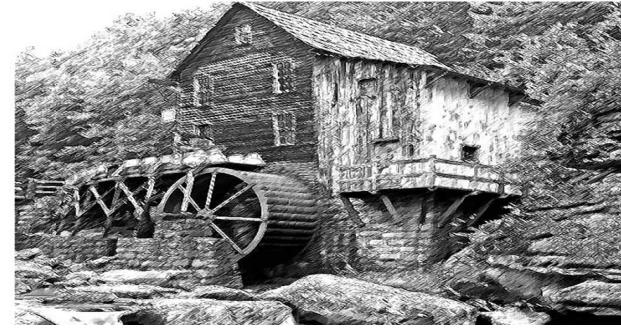


# The Gristmill

## Saratoga County History Journal



Preserving the History of Saratoga County

Spring 2019

## Lincoln's Guard

Ambrose Clothier Hickok was born in Corinth February 18, 1841 to Edmund and Alamothe Clothier Hickok.

**By Rachael Clothier**

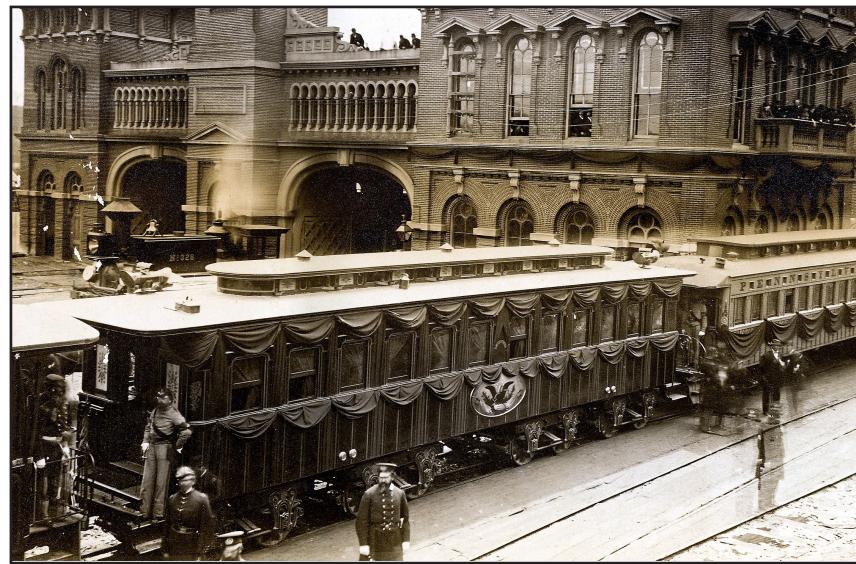
At the age of 21 he enlisted in the 115th New York Infantry as a private. In September of 1862 he was taken prisoner at Harper's Ferry with his regiment and later paroled on the field. He was promoted to the rank of sergeant in 1864 and participated in the Battle of Olustee, Florida. Later he was transferred to the Veteran Reserve Corps and discharged June 26, 1865 at Washington, D.C. Ambrose had an older brother, Salmon Heman, who enlisted a year before him and was a prisoner at Libby Prison and Belle Island until he was exchanged. He was discharged from Point Look Out Hospital and died in 1865 of disease. This is the basic story of Ambrose, what follows is an even more interesting story.

A. Leroy Hickok had in his procession a letter written by his father, Ambrose Clothier Hickok, from Capitol Hill Barracks in Washington, D.C. on May 9, 1865. This was shortly after the assassination of President Lincoln and Ambrose was to be part of that history.

"Yesterday at 3 p.m. I was detailed to go with a guard of 20 men to guard the cars used in removing the remains of President Lincoln to Springfield, Ill. The cars returned to this city on the morning of the 7th inst. A strong guard was necessary to prevent people from removing the trimming which consisted of heavy black crepe and black velvet and silver tassels and fringe on both inside and out. Everyone who saw it was anxious to claim something from the car as a relic or memento to preserve through time."

"The builder of the funeral car told me that if they have not a guard from Springfield to this place that he would not be able to bring back the running gear, and notwithstanding the guard much of the outside trimming was taken off (while going west) by relic seekers, causing the party to retrim some of it three or four times. The desire to obtain relics of our great men is fast gaining ground; in fact it is almost a mania."

"Enclosed you will find two or three threads of the fringe from the car and please reserve them. I saw men offering five and ten dollars for one like this, and could



Lincoln's funeral car, under guard, on April 22, 1865, in Harrisburgh, PA.

not get it - but how I procured it - it's No Matter. I likewise have some pieces of the inside trimming and one piece of velvet, all of which I will send home when convenient, or keep it and bring it when I come."

"Last evening we went on the cars to Alexandria and remained guarding the car until today at 3 p.m. when we returned to the "Hill".

"The funeral car cost \$30,000. It was a magnificent one. I cannot describe it. It was built especially for the president's use, but he never rode in it until his remains were put in it for removal."

"The car used for the General Officers accompanying the remains was a splendid one built for the use of

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**Dr. Paul Loatman  
1943-2019**

Dr. Paul Loatman, city of Mechanicville historian for many years and a dedicated and respected educator passed away on February 4. A prodigious author, Paul wrote an article for the introductory issue of this journal and was always willing to share his extensive knowledge of Saratoga County.

# Lincoln's Guard

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the officers of the railroad and in which the guard slept last night when not on duty. In the car was a splendid state-room and in one of the beds Yours Respectfully ensconced himself comfortably for the night."

Arise this morning much refreshed after occupying such a place in such strong contrast with my usual sleeping place, and then on our return here we came in cattle cars. So you see soldiers are subject to "ups and downs" once as guards of honor, and then as passengers of "Hog Pens on Wheel."

"Since my return I have been thinking how much really

unnecessary to expend so much in observing funeral services on any one. Would it not have been better to expend that money for some of the many families of soldiers who are so needy:

"Now my dear friends at home I have sketched to you my short trip on the funeral train and a partial description of the cars. It may not be interesting to you, but if not, the cost is not from your purse. I will close with my best love to you all."

"Devotedly your son and brother.

Ambrose"

Unfortunately the whereabouts of this letter is no longer known, but fortunately it was printed in the paper and clipped and put in a scrapbook.

(Source: February 8, 1940 Saratogian)

## The Country Printers of Ballston

By James Richmond

Historians have long emphasized the role of mineral springs and water-powered industries in the life of nineteenth century Ballston Spa, but there is another industry that distinguished the county-seat village. Ballston Spa was the epicenter of early printing in Saratoga County, far outstripping all other communities in the number and circulation of newspapers in the first decades of the 19th century. As the county seat, Ballston attracted lawyers, local politicians, tavern keepers and related public and commercial enterprises. In addition, Ballston Springs aggressively promoted by Nicholas Low, a developer from New York City, was fast becoming known as a resort community. These two growth factors – the year-round business of government, and the seasonal influx of tourists – encouraged several journeymen printers to set up shop in the village during this period. This article will focus on the lives of several of these printers, in some cases extending their story beyond their short stays in Ballston.

In 1784, Increase Child moved to the town of Ballston from his most recent abode in Stillwater where he settled after serving at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777. At the age of

44, Increase had already experienced much, serving in both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution, while supporting his family as a farmer and school teacher in Connecticut and Dutchess County, New York. His son William, was born in 1777. Twenty years later Increase purchased a small printing press in Albany and set up shop with his son on the second floor above the store of Robert Leonard across the road from the newly-built courthouse atop Court House Hill on Middleline Road. The next year they began publication of The Saratoga Register, or Farmer's Journal whose editorial content reflected their Federalist leanings.<sup>1</sup>

As the first printers in Ballston the Childs were at the forefront of the country printer phenomena in New York State. The development of newspapers in the remote frontier towns of New York occurred in spite of many hurdles to success. Printers relied on subscriptions, many of which remained unpaid, but even more so on advertisements and legal notices, which shared column space with articles reprinted from other newspapers. They also supplemented their income by printing political handbills, advertising flyers, and both new books and reprints. Often starved for cash to meet expenses, many newspapers quickly failed during this period.<sup>2</sup>

To supplement their income, the Childs published books that reinforced their political and religious preferences. In 1798 they reprinted "A Plain Account of the Ordinance of Baptism," and two years later resurrected "A Plea for the Non-Conformists," a century-old account of a Baptist martyr that sparked a fresh dispute between the local Episcopal and Baptist congregations.<sup>3</sup> The father-son enterprise also took on Ballston Town Supervisor Beriah Palmer, a Jeffersonian Republican who opposed the Adams administration, by printing "The First Book of Chronicles," a satirical piece written in biblical style by Nuel Bostwick.

In 1800 Increase withdrew from the partnership with his son William, who continued on as sole publisher until 1810. However, he was soon faced with competition, both for the sale of newspapers and the political preferences of the community. In 1804 David Cady Miller arrived in Ballston. Born in Richmond, Berkshire Co, Massachusetts in 1781, son of Revolutionary War veteran Stephen Miller, he



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# County Printers

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launched The Saratoga Advertiser in November 1804. This inaugural edition outlined the editor's political beliefs: "It will be a supporter of government implicitly republican" that believes "The intellectual, as well as the physical strength of the country is to be found in the mass of the people."<sup>4</sup>

This proclamation began the long and convoluted relationship between Miller and William Child. Against type, Child partnered with Miller in January 1805 to publish Miller's newspaper, but there was soon a falling out. In 1808, Child reintroduced his newspaper as The Independent American. As Miller had done four years earlier, this first issue of Child's new entry into the newspaper wars set the tone. Child took on the reigning Jeffersonian Republican establishment of Saratoga County. After graciously printing the opposition's call to "support the Republican Press at Ballston Spa and to guard against any intrigue that may be made use of to circulate a Federal paper," he excoriated the opposition: "Look at the head of this paper and that of Mr. Miller's – this reads Independent American — the other reads Saratoga Advertiser. There! Who is there that can read that cannot distinguish our papers one from the other!"<sup>5</sup>

However, there was another side to the story. They shared an affinity of beliefs that would become evident in later years. In 1810 both men left Ballston for opportunities further west. William Child moved to Waterloo in Seneca County and turned in his printing press for farming implements. He was not to reemerge in the newspaper world until 1823 when he launched the Waterloo Seneca Farmer.

In December 1809 David Miller sold his small lot in Ballston village to physician Samuel Pitkin for \$1,000, a tidy profit of \$700 within a year.<sup>6</sup> He with his wife Lucy (Gilbert) and their three small daughters, moved further west to Batavia in Genesee County. There he took over the Republican Advocate from Benjamin Blodgett and remained publisher of that paper for almost twenty years. Showing the same contrariness earlier displayed in Ballston, his editorials opposed Governor Dewitt Clinton and generally took on the establishment. For this he was chastised by his fellow newspapermen. Responding to a Miller editorial, another newspaper charged that "the whole is utterly false, and David C. Miller a worthless and detestable liar." While this may be hyperbole characteristic of the times, others claimed that Miller was known as a man of "irreligious character, great laxity of moral principles and of intemperate habits."<sup>7</sup>

All this would be lost to history if it were not for what happened next. It seems that while in Ballston Miller had flirted with Masonry, but soon became disenchanted with their beliefs and practices.<sup>8</sup> Twenty years later in 1826 he collaborated with another disgruntled ex-Mason, William Morgan, to publish an exposé on Masonic principles and rituals. This enraged Masons throughout western New York, who kidnapped Morgan and made several attempts to silence Miller's printing press by setting fire to his business and carting him off to face charges, which were dis-

missed.<sup>9</sup>

Much worse happened to Morgan who was never seen again and was widely thought to have been murdered. This enraged many non-Masons, who saw in the Order a secret society inconsistent with American values. The Anti-Masonic Party was born, the first populist third party in the nation's history. David Cady Miller, former Ballston printer, was in many ways responsible. He attempted to leverage his new-found notoriety by running for Congress in 1832, but was defeated.

Across the state in Waterloo, William Child joined the Anti-Masonic movement, using his Seneca Farmer to attack local Masons, one of which entered his office and assaulted him with a club.<sup>10</sup> Back in Ballston, Williams' extended family took up the cause. Ardent Baptists, the denomination most opposed to Masonry, his brother Judge Salmon Child and Salmon's son, Dr. Increase W. Child, were leaders of a convention of the Saratoga Baptist Association held at the Old Stone Church in Milton on September 12, 1827, one year to the day after Morgan's abduction. The Association listed fifteen reasons for denouncing the "wretched Institution."<sup>11</sup>

William Child remained in Seneca Falls until 1838 when he moved to Michigan where he died soon after being elected county judge in 1840. David Miller lived twenty years longer, but at the end he was a broken man. Moving to Bristolville, Ohio, "He died a drunkard, and now fills a drunkard's grave in our town, with not a single relative or friend to shed a tear for his departure."<sup>12</sup>

When Child moved to Waterloo in 1810, he turned the Independent American over to James Comstock. Comstock had arrived in Ballston in 1803 at the age of 16, probably to work as an apprentice in Child's shop. Born in Adams, Massachusetts, his family had moved to Lansingburgh in 1790 after his father served in the Revolutionary War from Rhode Island.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike many of the other early printers of Ballston who quickly moved on, James Comstock spent 40 years as a newspaper publisher in the village. Comstock embraced the Federalist perspective of his mentor, and took steps to solidify his position in the community, both financially and socially. After moving the business from Court House Hill into the village, he established a circulating library available to subscribers for \$5 annually or \$2 for summer visitors. In 1813 he married Mary Sears, daughter of Sunderland Sears, a prominent early settler. The marriage also led to a close relationship with Mary's brother, Rev. Reuben Sears. The Presbyterian minister and graduate of Union College partnered with Comstock to run the reading room and in 1818 Comstock published a book written by Reuben, *A Poem on the Mineral Waters of Ballston and Saratoga*, which included an early description of the springs and surrounding village.

His support of the weakening Federalist party often resulted in Comstock becoming crosswise with the dominant Democrat/Republican leaders of the village and county. Several times he was forced to recant his editorial statements. In 1828 the Saratoga Sentinel published one of these apologies under the headline "Comstock's Confessions": "I, editor of the People's Watch Tower, printed in

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