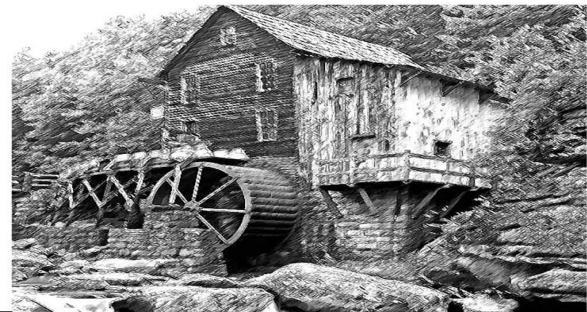


# The Gristmill

## Saratoga County History Journal



Preserving the History of Saratoga County



Summer 2019

## Emma We Hardly Knew Ye

By Sam McKenzie

On a balmy evening in the “season” of 1863, on South Broadway in Saratoga Springs, patrons in the parlor of a brand new hotel were entertained by the beautiful voice of a young girl.<sup>1</sup> She was singing ballads of the day, accompanied at the piano by her younger sister who also was responsible for “passing the hat” at the conclusion. We do not know the timing precisely, but it was in the midst of a terrible Civil War in which Saratoga Springs was enjoying a boom as a fashionable summer resort.

We do know the name of the hotel, the Clarendon, located on the lot which now contains the Saratoga Central Catholic High School. The songstress was Emma Lajeunesse and the pianist was her sister Cornelia (Nellie) Lajeunesse. The Clarendon was particularly convenient for the young women because they were heavily involved in the music of St. Peter’s Roman Catholic Church, just across William Street. Also, they were being educated in the church school run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.<sup>2</sup> Their father Joseph Lajeunesse was a part time organist at the church as well as doing business locally as a piano tuner.<sup>3</sup>

Imagine if this was a century later and you were told that the singer became as world-famous as Barbara Streisand or Céline Dion. This is what happened to the young singer in the story above. In her day, bereft of electronics, world-wide popularity was harder to come by for singers. Most people got to hear the latest “song” by attending a local performance or buying the sheet music to perform it themselves. In the 19th century, the famous singers tended to be those who were most written about in newspapers and whose performances were attended in the highest numbers by “the quality”. These were the singers in opera.

Emma grew up to become one of the handful of leading opera stars of the late 19th century. She took the stage name of Emma Albani. She was lauded and feted by Emperors and Presidents. She became a friend of the great Queen Victoria herself. According to one of Emma’s biographers, she narrowly avoided becoming an even more “intimate” friend of Alexander II, Tsar of All the Russias.<sup>4</sup>

Emma’s stellar career has been publicized in reams of newsprint and book pages. But the accounts of her early



**Emma Albani as Amina in La Sonnambula , Florence 1871** - Université de Montréal, Division des Archives

life tend to be garbled and frequently omit the two years when she lived, sang, played and studied in the vicinity of Saratoga Springs. What follows will emphasize what is known about that formative period.

Emma Lajeunesse was born, probably in 1847, in Chambly, Quebec a short distance southwest of Montreal.<sup>5</sup> Her father, Joseph Lajeunesse was a descendant of Etienne Charles dit Lajeunesse landed with the Régiment Carignan-Salières at Quebec City in 1665.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, Emma has this ancestor in common with a present day celebrity, namely Hillary Rodham Clinton.<sup>7</sup> Emma’s mother Melina Mignault was three quarters Quebecoise and one quarter Scottish.<sup>8</sup> Emma was very close with her maternal grandmother Rachel McCutcheon.

After age five Emma’s father took over her musical training. His approach was thorough and severe according to Emma herself.<sup>9</sup> Joseph’s attempts to earn a living by his musical talents led to a rather wandering and threadbare life for the Lajeunesse family. Late in 1851, they moved south to Plattsburgh, New York. In 1856

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# Emma

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tragedy struck when Emma's mother and her baby died after childbirth.<sup>10</sup> Lois A. Johnson (néé Webb) of Plattsburgh knew Emma when she was a "poor little motherless beggar girl".<sup>11</sup> Later in the same year, Joseph and his remaining three children (Emma, Cornelia and brother Adelard) moved back to Chambly.

Emma's first public performances were in 1856 at the Mechanic's Hall in Montreal and the "grand reception room of the Catholic Academy". The Montreal Gazette reported that it was "astonished that a young girl, of eight years of age, [was] singing and executing [on piano and harp] a program of 108 pages in 2½ hours, and also several pieces presented to her at first sight."<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Lajeunesse was anxious to present Emma in public at every opportunity. Following his wife's death he also seems to have drowned his sorrows with some frequency.<sup>13</sup> These stresses and the absence of a mother may be what caused the two sisters to be placed as boarders at the Convent School of the Sacred Heart, at Sault-au-Recollet near Montreal in September 1858.<sup>14</sup>

On August 24, 1860, a grand concert was held in Montreal for the visiting Prince of Wales, including a cantata sung by a 400 voice choir. The soprano soloist was Emma Lajeunesse, 12 years old. This was the first time that Emma shared billing with an opera star, who was later Emma's "friendly" rival, Adelina Patti<sup>15</sup>

By 1862, Joseph Lajeunesse decided that Emma should receive musical education beyond what he or the Convent could provide. He tried to raise money in Montreal by arranging a "musical evening to assist the Lajeunesse sisters in financing a trip to Paris where they will study at the Conservatoire".<sup>16</sup> Once again Emma sang, played the harp and piano, including some pieces of her own composition. It was a critical success but not a financial one. Disappointed, Joseph and his daughters determined for a second time to seek financial success in

the United States.

This time the family's first US port of call was Whitehall, NY. They lived "in Blount Street in the old Merritt homestead", the home of widow Abigail Hanks Merritt. Joseph "tuned pianos and gave vocal and piano lessons".<sup>17</sup> Their stay at Whitehall seems to have been only a few months at most. Probably in early 1863, the family took the two hour ride on the Rensselaer and Saratoga Railroad to Saratoga Springs, where they appear to have stayed for at least a year. A relatively new Catholic Church, St. Peter's, had been built and its priest Reverend Daniel Cull was busily expanding its infrastructure. The church school could further the sisters' education. The church also could give Joseph work as organist.

The girls enrolled in St. Peter's School and became the responsibility of the Sisters of St. Joseph.<sup>18</sup> Emma and Cornelia may have been boarders at the school; no other residence for them in Saratoga Springs has been discovered. Joseph, meanwhile, befriended the Durkee family, well-known in the village. We know this from the testimony of their son and long-time chronicler of Saratoga Springs, Cornelius E. Durkee.<sup>19:20</sup> Also Joseph's November 1863 advertisements for his piano tuning services said that he could be contacted through the Durkee bookshop on Broadway. The same advertisements gave another contact point care of "Mr. Adams' Continental Hotel", which might be where Joseph resided.<sup>21:22</sup>

As well as performing at the Clarendon and some other Saratoga Springs Hotels, Emma sang at St. Peter's, including at a summer fair in 1863 to raise money for the church.<sup>23</sup> She was then asked to sing at a fair in Ballston Spa to benefit St. Mary's Catholic Church in that Village. Apparently, Joseph also was employed as organist at St. Mary's and Emma played and sang at the church fair for eight days.<sup>24</sup> During their time in Ballston, Emma and Cornelia were befriended by the family of Mary Ann Brady of Bath Street whose obituary states that the sisters were "inmates" of the Brady family.<sup>25</sup>

Emma's success at these fairs generated interest in concerts where Emma sang operatic arias such as the "Shadow Song" from Meyerbeer's opera "Dinorah", as well as playing her own compositions at the piano. One of her works was a Fantasia, or adaptation of "When this Cruel War is Over" a hit song of the day.<sup>26</sup> It was reported to have interested a Philadelphia publisher of sheet music.<sup>27</sup> Several concerts took place at Saratoga Springs and were said to have "attracted general attention". This "attention" had brought Emma the nick-name the "French Canary" by "those uncultivated people for whom she used to sing".<sup>13</sup> Her concert in Ballston Spa on November 19, 1863 took place at Waverly Hall on Bath Street, a building later referred to as the Cold Storage building. The local press thought Emma showed much promise and a great career was prophesied for her.<sup>28</sup> They also found it remarkable that only 12 of the 147 in the audience were Catholics, though it is quite as remarkable that anyone could establish this merely by looking at the crowd.<sup>24</sup> Further concerts were given, including one at Rand's Hall in Troy on January 27, 1864

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# Emma

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which was forecast to be “a brilliant and popular” program.<sup>29</sup>

These performances came to the attention of influential Albany residents. There are several versions of the story, each with a different patron who lubricated the skids upon which Emma glided on her journey to fame. One is an unnamed (but wealthy) lady benefactor. Others are Fathers, later Bishops, Conroy and Burke who were key to her becoming a fixture at St. Joseph’s Church in Albany. Then there was the well-known Albany surgeon Dr. James H. Armsby, of whom Emma stated “I owe all my fame to him and to the inspiring encouragement he gave me when I was friendless and alone”.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, there is Oliver Houle (or Houll) an Albany businessman of Quebecois origin. Mr. Houle is credited with getting Emma a soloist assignment at a concert for the Albany Bazaar in February 1864 to raise funds for the soldiers of the Union Army.<sup>31</sup> It is unclear whether Emma commuted from Saratoga Springs to perform at the Bazaar, or had already relocated to Albany at that time, but sources suggest that Emma moved to Albany at some point in 1864. Perhaps Cornelia moved to Albany with Emma but it seems that Joseph did not. He is reported to have been living still at Saratoga Springs in May 1872.<sup>32</sup> Joseph acquired properties on Van Dam Street near the corner of Clinton Street in Saratoga Springs in 1872 and 1875 and held on to them until 1885. Cornelia bought a large lot on Clinton Street at the corner of Walton Street in 1875 and sold it in 1887. No doubt Emma’s earnings were used to fund these purchases.<sup>33</sup>

In Albany, Emma boarded in 1865 at 160 Clinton Street, quite near St. Joseph’s Church in the Arbor Hill district.<sup>34</sup> The owner was Ann White, born in Canada, and recently widowed. Emma is listed in the 1865 Albany Directory as a music teacher. By 1866 Emma had moved to 677 Broadway, where her neighbor was Dr. Armsby.

Those familiar with Albany may recognize the address, now the location of an upscale restaurant, 677 Prime. In 1867 Emma boarded with the family of James O. Haight at 100 Grand Street. The fifteen year old daughter of the family, Annie Haight, was a particular friend.<sup>35</sup>

Later in her stay at Albany, Emma acquired a paid position at St. Joseph’s Church as organist and choir director, as well as lead soloist.<sup>27</sup> She also continued her education at the nearby Convent of the Sacred Heart at Kenwood.<sup>36</sup> Regular concerts were arranged at which she and her sister performed. These included events at Johnstown, Canajoharie, Oswego and Troy. Finally, in 1868 two benefit concerts were arranged for her at Albany to raise funds for her further musical studies in Paris, to which she departed later that year.<sup>10; 37</sup>

Emma achieved success after only a year of study in Europe and she did return to perform in Albany at least four times during her career. There was an attempt by Sa-

ratogians to arrange a concert here during her first return visit to Albany in 1874.<sup>38</sup> This could not be accomplished, but Emma’s management offered Saratogians a discount on tickets for her one Albany performance to offset the cost of the rail fare. In truth, there is no record of Emma having even visited Saratoga County again after her departure in 1864, despite her father’s residence here until possibly 1874. It was claimed that “Albani has very dear friends in Saratoga with whom she has corresponded at various times while in Europe”.<sup>39</sup> The claim is supported by Cornelius E. Durkee who said he received such a letter from Emma while she was living in Europe.<sup>40</sup>

Emma found immense fame after leaving these parts. The regard in which she was held, particularly in Britain, can be illustrated by one example. At Queen Victoria’s private funeral in 1901, not only did a single singer perform but only one person was present who was not a member of the Royal Family. Emma was both that singer and that person.<sup>41</sup> She was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1925 and died in 1930 at her home in London. Her obituary appeared in virtually all the New York State and New York City newspapers and ties to our area were prominently mentioned. However, in the last few decades, few local publications have remembered Emma and her connection to this region in historical articles. The reader may feel that the recognition given her in this article is a tad overdue yet richly deserved.

Continued on next page

## History Roundtable Re-Formed

We are pleased to announce the formation of the Saratoga County History Roundtable. The SCHR was initially created in April, 2018 as the Ballston Area History Roundtable (BAHR). The new name is in recognition of the expansion of the membership, programs, and community history-related projects of the group.

The mission of the organization is to deepen the understanding of local history through presentations, discussion groups and research by history buffs throughout Saratoga County.

The Roundtable is an independent group that functions in close collaboration with the Saratoga County Historical Society and considers Brookside Museum, 6 Charlton Street, Ballston Spa as our home base. Monthly programs are held there or at other locations throughout the county.

The Roundtable is the publisher of *The Gristmill - Saratoga County History Journal*. The Journal is published quarterly and is available both on-line at the SCHR website and at local libraries, museums and community venues.

For further information on the SCHR and our upcoming programs, please visit our new website <https://saratogacountyhistoryroundtable.com>

# Emma

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# William H. Manning

By Paul Perreault

One of the most prominent and versatile men to have played a role in Malta affairs was William H. Manning for whom Manning Cove is named. In what must have been a very busy life, Manning gained fame as a manufacturer, sportsman, politician, statesman and agriculturist.

Born in Troy in 1867, he was the grandson of the founder of Manning Paper, an early manufacturer of rope manila paper: a cheap, coarse paper made from used ship's rope. Both of his parents were descendants of socially prominent Troy manufacturing families and were listed in the "Social Blue Book", which included only the crème de la crème of society. William attended R.P.I. but left prior to graduation in order to enter the family's successful business.

Like many socially up and coming families, then and now, the Mannings were attracted to Saratoga Springs and purchased a summer home on Franklin Square. William became a part of the "sporting set" as a founder of the Saratoga Golf Club (predecessor of the Saratoga Golf and Polo Club) where he rubbed elbows with the sons of Jay Gould and Pierre Lorillard. He also was a director of the Saratoga Gun Club, (predecessor of the Saratoga Lake Association). He joined the Riding and Hunt Club of Washington, D. C., the St. Bernard's Fish and Game Club of Quebec and the Gunston Cove Country Club of Fairfax County, Virginia where he met and mingled with the socially well known people of his generation.

Rarer than a hen's tooth, Manning was a member of the Democratic Party in Malta, serving as a member of

both the Saratoga County Committee and the State Committee. In 1912 and 1913, he was elected Malta Town Supervisor and did so well that he was nominated by his party to run for the New York State Assembly but lost a close race in the heavily Republican district. Four governors of the State ( John Dix, Martin Glynn, Al Smith and Franklin Roosevelt) saw fit to appoint him to various commissions where he served with distinction. He was a delegate to the 1916 Democratic Party Convention that nominated Woodrow Wilson and was offered an appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury but declined the appointment to return to Malta and pursue his real interest: chicken farming.

As early as 1903, Manning began purchasing land on the western shore of Saratoga Lake and continued to expand his holdings until the area then known as Turtle Point was renamed Manning Cove. One could safely assume that this renowned sportsman's interest in this beautiful area was exclusively in hunting and fishing but that was not the case. He was interested in chickens.

For years Manning had bred, raised and shown prized poultry and by 1914 he was devoting over one hundred and fifty acres of his estate to this business. His catalogue from that year promised "All of our birds are raised on unlimited free range under the most modern and approved methods and grow up full of vigor and stamina." It further boasted that "Nearly all our males used in breeding pens have won at America's best shows." That point was backed up by their performance at the presti-

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# Manning

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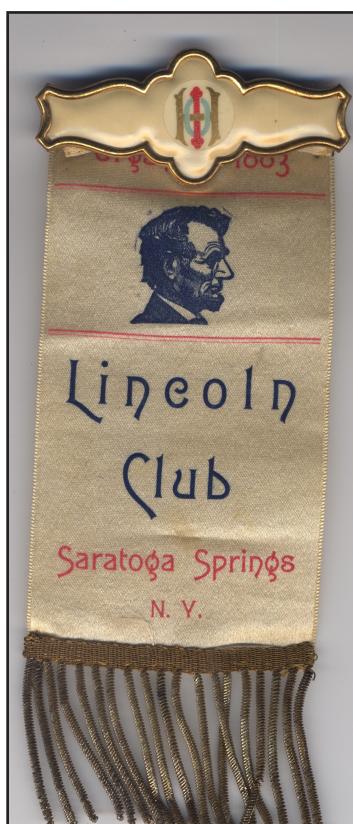
gious Boston Poultry Show in 1914 when Turtle Point Farm won fourteen first and numerous other prizes. Their birds were widely desired and they shipped as far away as Wisconsin.

Manning was very active in a wide variety of agricultural organizations. For many years he served as the President of the Saratoga County Agricultural Society and was particularly proud of the work done with children by the Society under his leadership. He also was a member of the Grange, the Dairyman's League, the Farm Bureau and the Sheep Breeders and Poultry Association. Both Governor Smith and Governor Roosevelt appointed him to the commission that oversaw the State Fair. Someone who could dine with the governor one night and attend a Grange meeting the next, he was truly a renaissance man.

William H. Manning died on November 13, 1931. His funeral service was held at Turtle Point and was well attended by a large number of friends from Washington, New York City, Syracuse, Troy, Albany and Malta. At his request "the services were of a simple nature". Neither his wife nor his two sons shared his interest and the business was closed. In the mid 1940's, the property and the Manning home were purchased by the Melander family who lived there for many years. The well persevered

## Politican memorabilia

- Courtesy of William MacPherson



It's not every day that a sitting president visits Saratoga Springs. However, such was the case in August 1891 when President Benjamin Harrison visited the Queen of Spas. The president spent some time at Mount McGregor and traveled to Saratoga by rail on August 21st. He was greeted by a large contingent of politician's dignitaries and citizens who escorted him to the Grand Union Hotel. Harrison spent a day in the city and left for a four day tour of Vermont. Members of the Lincoln Club were among those welcoming the President. The ribbon pictured here was made especially for the occasion.

# Turtle Point Farm

"The Home of Leghorns"

"The Faultless Strains"

of



R. C. Brown Leghorns  
S. C. Brown Leghorns  
Silver Leghorns



R. C. White Leghorns  
S. C. White Leghorns  
Black Leghorns

Saratoga Springs, New York

For years Manning had bred, raised and shown prized poultry.

Manning home is now the club house of The Saratoga Lake Sailing Club. In 2007, John Witt donated 159 acres of the former estate to Saratoga PLAN (Preserving Land and Nature) which are currently raising funds in order to conserve the area. William H. Manning would be pleased.

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# Con men cause 'oil rush' in 1865

By CHARLES HOGAN

For a few months in the spring of 1865, the Village of Ballston Spa was the Next Big Thing in the world of petroleum exploration.

In the closing days of the Civil War, businessmen and average citizens were thinking about their future. For

# ‘oil rush’

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many, the future seemed to be in oil.

America’s first energy crisis took place in the 1840’s and 1850’s. By then, candles, the primary source of light during the Colonial years, had been replaced by whale oil lamps. The problem was that there were not enough whales in the ocean to supply the demand for whale oil. By the 1850’s, the lag between supply and demand was driving up the price of whale oil.

Enterprising businessmen looked around for substitutes. One of those substitutes was kerosene, a product that is produced when petroleum is distilled.

Petroleum was a well-known, if comparatively rare substance. It naturally oozed out of the ground in small quantities in some places, and was generally considered a nuisance.

One of those places where people seemed to run into petroleum on a fairly consistent basis was around Titusville, Pennsylvania. In that region people were drilling for salty water, which they allowed to evaporate in order to gather salt. Unfortunately for the Pennsylvania salt driller, their efforts were often spoiled by petroleum contamination. When the salt drillers hit oil, they stopped drilling, and tried a different place.

In 1859, Edwin L. Drake went purposely drilling for oil in Titusville salt region. When he found oil, he kept drilling and the well soon became an oil gusher. This well marked the beginning of the commercial oil industry. In the early years, over two thirds of the oil produced was used in kerosene lamps.

During the Civil War, Titusville and soon other areas, produced about two to three million barrels of oil. The industry was dominated by small operators. Drilling rigs were homemade contraptions, hammered together from wood beams. Distilling took place in open kettles fired by wood or coal. The kerosene was then shipped in barrels by railroads, or even horse-drawn wagons.

The oil industry was a free-for-all, similar to the gold mining towns of the West. As with gold prospecting, there was money not only for the producers, but also people who bought and sold rights to the land bearing the resource. Oil, or even rumors of oil, created boom towns, quick-buck artists and con men.

People in Ballston Spa were well aware of the opportunities in the booming oil industry. The *Ballston Journal* in early April, 1865, contained two items about the oil industry. One was a list of tips for safely using the new kerosene from the H.R. Kemp Co., who identified themselves as “Dealers in Oil Territory” from Titusville, PA. They offered to sell oil-bearing property to investors in Ballston Spa.

In this atmosphere, in the closing days of the Civil

War, when the public’s thoughts were turning to peace-time opportunities, some wheels started turning in the heads of a couple of soon-to-be con men in the Village.

On the last Thursday in April, an exciting “discovery” was made public.

The story that was told was that a ditch was being dug in the rear of a tannery on Saratoga Avenue, owned by the Parent brothers. Workmen, it was said, discovered an oily substance in the bottom of the excavation. This substance was taken to a reputable assayer and identified as “crude oil.” Even more exciting, so the story went, the owners of the property said that scientific analysis proved that the Ballston crude oil was superior to that found in the Pennsylvania oil region.

The *Ballston Journal* was initially skeptical about the so-called oil discovery, observing that oily substances could be expected to be found near a tannery. However, after looking at the product, the editor admitted that “It has every appearance of being petroleum.”

Other local newspapers flocked to the scene. The editor of the *Schenectady Star*, viewed the oil, pronounced it genuine, and even offered the opinion that the tannery property was worth \$100,000, an astronomical amount in 1865.

The news was quickly spread, by telegraph, around the country. The Great Ballston Oil Rush was on.

According to an article in the *Journal*, dated April 29, under the headline OIL STRUCK, “Our Village was thrown into great turmoil Thursday evening by an announcement that oil had been struck.” The *Journal* editorialized that “We hope a stream of oil will begin to flow from some seam in our slate rock formation.”

Oil men from Titusville caught the next train north and were soon prowling the streets of Ballston Spa looking for drilling rights. Joining them were what the *Journal* called “serious businessmen” from Albany and Troy. Lots all over the north end of the Village were leased, drill rigs constructed, and Ballston Spa took on the look of an oil boom town. The *Journal* observed that “every one around here feels as if made suddenly rich.”

At least one Ballston family did get rich; the Parents sold their tannery for \$60,000.

The oil boom faded, after an exciting three weeks, when the con was unmasked. As the *Journal* tells the story in its May 20th edition, a group of would-be investors were examining the flow of oil near the center of activity when they noticed a strange coincidence.

“The flow of oil seemed to coincide with the coming and going of a shadowy individual. He would disappear and the oil began to flow. He would re-appear, look in the ditch and the oil would stop.”

A hue and cry went up in the crowd, the man disappeared, and so did Ballston’s short history as an oil town. As a headline in the *Journal* put it: “BALLSTON OIL EXCITEMENT - A FIZZLE.”