

Bringing Mr. Parmelee Home

by Lynne Belluscio

I drove over to Skaneateles last week to pick up Mr. Parmelee. He sure does look a lot better than the last time I saw him! His shirt is clean and all the dirt on his face has been removed. I think he looks a lot happier.

The portrait of Mr. Parmelee has been in the land office for many years, and last year we received a grant from the Lower Hudson Consortium to have Mr. Parmelee cleaned and restored. The problem was, that when I first proposed having him cleaned, I discovered that he was really on loan. So I had to search through our old files to find out who he belonged to.

The dates on the paperwork were twenty-five years old. So with trepidation I called the phone number. When I asked to speak to the person listed, I was told that she had passed away several years ago, but luckily I was talking with her daughter. And when I said that we wanted to restore the portrait, but could not ask for a grant unless we had title to the painting, I was told: "Oh, my mom wanted the Historical Society to have Mr. Parmelee. He's yours."

So I mailed out the paperwork and sure enough, Mr. Parmelee became ours, and we applied for the grant. I took him over to Westlake Conservators and they estimated that it would cost about \$2,000 to clean him up. That was last spring. In August we were notified that our grant request



was accepted and so the work began. It takes a little while for restoration work.

Two weeks ago, I had an e-mail that Mr. Parmelee was ready to come home. He is now back in the land office with his friends, Herman LeRoy, Dr. Sheldon and Daniel Webster.

He has always been called Mr. Parmelee. Which Mr. Parmelee? I'm not sure, but I've taken an educated guess. He is holding a music book, so I suspect that is a clue. Looking at his coat and tie, he probably dates to the late 1820s to early 1830s. There is an account of Heman Parmelee, who

builder. Afterward my uncle Heman became organist for some of the large churches in Utica and Little Falls, NY. Uncle was now living in LeRoy with his daughter and her husband, William D. Olmsted on Church St. Evenings after my father's store closed ... I would take my uncle by the arm and we would walk up to the church, where all was dark and quiet ... I would go to the bellows' handle and uncle would "just feel of the organ" was the way he expressed it. Soft and low he would improvise. What solemn and religious thoughts would steal over me at such times. Thus many impressive hours did we spend in the dark and quiet church. And I would walk home with him, arm in arm, neither of us uttering a word, each busy with his thoughts, he doubtless of the past, I of the future ..."

was born in 1806 (died 1879), written by his nephew, H.A. Parmelee in 1912.

He wrote about the organ in the Presbyterian Church. "How I loved that organ! I was permitted to have a key to the church. My uncle, Heman Parmelee, was an organ builder by trade, having served a time with Erbin of New York, a once famous organ

I have looked at the dates of other Parmelee men and Heman seems to fit. His clothes are right for a man in his 20s and his love of music is displayed in the music book. If the portrait is not Heman Parmelee, then I hope whoever he is, he isn't offended. At least his face is clean and his shirt is pressed.



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