

The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Volume 18, No. 1

By Kevin Franklin, Historian, Town of Colonie

Jan-March 2023

Jefferson Mayell--Who Was He?

In witness whereof I have hereunto
set my hand and seal this 14th day of
February 1887.

Jefferson Mayell



Who was Jefferson Mayell? No image of Jefferson has yet been found although he lived during the many advances of photography throughout the 19th Century. Census data reveals that Jefferson was born in about 1805 in either New Jersey or New York and died at Greenbush, N.Y. on July 5, 1892. His signature appears in testimony of his last will as seen above.

Jefferson Mayell's name appeared as the owner of a plot of land on an old map of the several parcels of land that formed sections of the original Albany Rural Cemetery. [See map on page 5] The Mayell land consisted of 33 acres and was on the western end of what is now part of the far western end of the Middle Ridge of the Albany Rural Cemetery, as well as part of the Beth Emeth Jewish Ceme-

tery at the eastern end of Turner Lane in the Loudonville area of Colonie. Present day Turner Lane was once known as Western Avenue and served as the western entrance into the Albany Rural Cemetery from the Loudon Road. A quaint structure known as the "Squirrel Cottage" once stood at the eastern end of Western Avenue near what is now the



The Squirrel Cottage

Albany Rural Cemetery's Corporation Plot on Middle Ridge. The structure no longer stands.

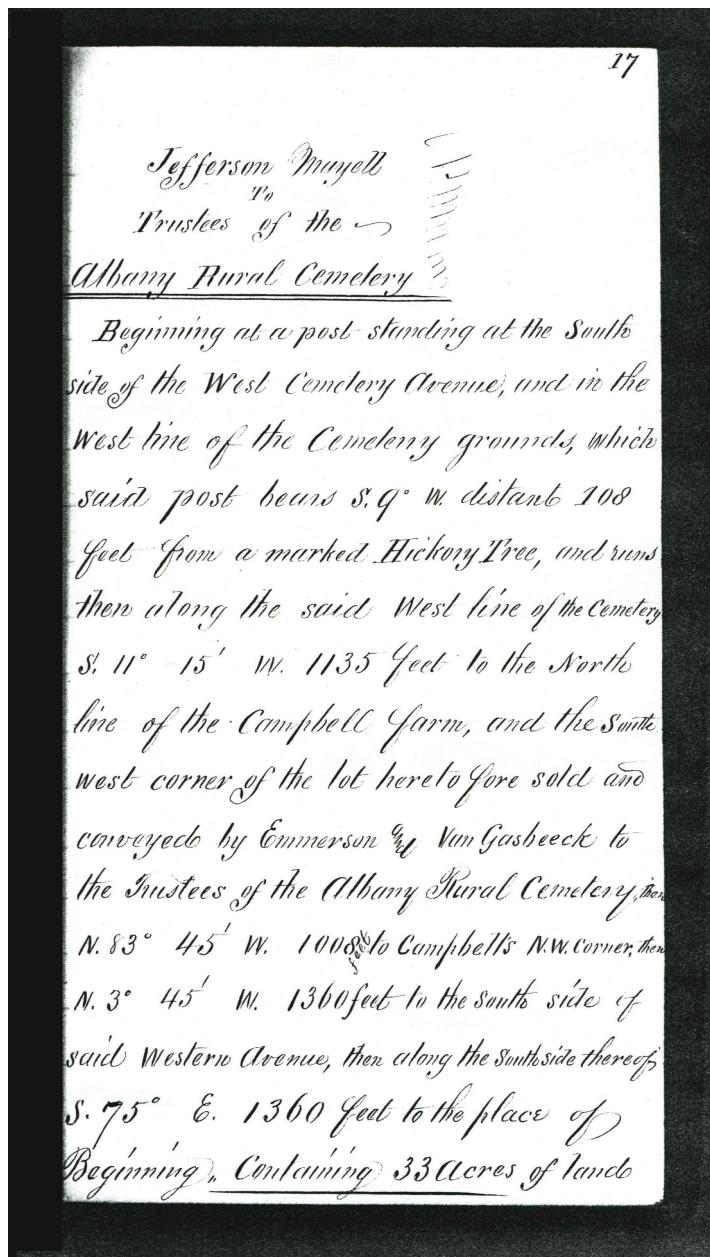
The old Turner farmhouse rests on the northeast corner of Turner Lane and New Loudon Road. It has recently been accepted to both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The book of grantee deeds and land transactions in the Albany County Hall of Records reveals no less than two dozen land transactions between Jefferson Mayell (grantee) and different grantors beginning in 1835 and ending in 1862. On

March 3, 1856, it is recorded that Jefferson Mayell purchased 33 acres of land from William T. Williams and his wife Nancy in the vicinity of the old Campbell farm close to the western end of the Albany Rural Cemetery for two thousand two hundred dollars. Jefferson made a quick turn-around of this same 33-acre plot when he sold it to the "Trustees of the Albany Rural Cemetery" on April 14, 1856, for the sum of two thousand five hundred dollars, or three hundred dollars' profit in about a month's time for the same parcel of land. Not a bad investment back in the 1850's! Jefferson's ability to speculate in property may have come as a result of his father, William Mayell, who was a hatter. His father owned a store on Court St. (now Market St.) in Albany that appears in 1813 records.

Besides Jefferson being involved in what appears to be real estate dealings in Albany County and elsewhere, he is recorded as once being the President of Albany's Christian Anti-Slavery Society and a member of the city's Vigilance Committee, or "Underground Railroad." Both organizations were very active in the anti-slavery movement in and around Albany in the early-to mid-19th Century.

Aside from properties that Mayell owned in Albany County, he is also recorded as owning property in the Sand Lake area of Rensselaer County and in the Ballston area of Saratoga County. Jefferson Mayell's last known home was situated in a part of Greenbush that was annexed into the southern end of the City of Rensselaer, just south of the historic Fort Crailo site. Mayell's home no longer stands.

Some of the properties that Jefferson Mayell owned in Albany County were at or very near the established and heavily traveled turnpikes coming in and out of Albany, including the Schenectady Turnpike (Central Avenue) and the Western Turnpike, or today's Rt. 20. Were these ownerships all part of Jefferson Mayell's profitable buy-and-sell



land transfers like the 33 acres he picked up and quickly sold to the Albany Rural Cemetery. Or in some cases, was there more than what met the eye, especially given his affiliation with the Sand Lake area of Rensselaer County and in the Ballston Spa area of Saratoga County? The Sand Lake area in Rensselaer County is documented in history as a hotbed of activists involved with the Albany area anti-slavery movement. Several homes in the Ballston area, some of which still stand, were suspected as being involved with the movement of enslaved persons traveling northward through Saratoga County.

In Ballston, Saratoga County, Jefferson Mayell's name appears as a farmer in various agricultural and horticultural publications of the mid-19th Century, alongside those of Erastus Corning Jr. and noted horticulturist, Louis Menard. The 1842 "Transactions of the N.Y. State Agricultural Society" publication listed Jefferson Mayell as residing at "Ballston" in Saratoga County. The 1853 "Horticulturist Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste" shows Jefferson Mayell being recognized for the growing of flowers. He is also listed as winning awards for the best cherries and raspberries in the Agricultural Fair of 1852.

In 1836, Jefferson's name appears in a publication about Albany's Young Men's Temperance Society where he is elected as one of several Vice Presidents of that Society. The 1849-50 Annals of Albany lists Jefferson Mayell as an appointed officer of The "Organization of the Society for the Relief of the Poor," along with other noted Albanians including Marcus T. Reynolds, Thurlow Weed and others. The 1851 Annals of Albany records Jefferson Mayell as living in the 10th Ward of Albany and lists him as a member of the city's Vigilance Committee.

An interesting document was drawn up by members of Albany's Anti-Slavery Society in 1838 supporting William H. Seward for Gov-

ernor of N.Y. against William Marcy. The issues of pro- and anti-slavery and past abolitionist political proposals were hotly contested. Anti-slavery stances supported Seward for Governor. Their document listed five main reasons for their backing of Seward, including: Seward's support of the right of petitioning, freedom of debate, and his refusal to support bringing the territory of Texas as a slave state into the Union. Seward also believed in granting trial by jury of persons claimed as "fugitive slaves" instead of the government threatening abolitionists with "penal enactments" (arrests) for helping fugitive slaves. Although the State of N.Y. had abolished slavery in 1827, it still recognized the rights of bounty hunters seeking to collect rewards for capturing escaped slaves suspected to be in the state. In addition; Mr. Seward opposed the re-election of a President who would veto the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia."

Their fifth and last sentiment was against the re-election of Governor Marcy "as it would go far toward (support of) the re-election of Martin Van Buren --- whose measures and policy are so hostile to the cause of Human Liberty." The document ends with a paragraph further explaining their reasons to support Mr. Seward's election as it would "best promote the great cause of Universal Emancipation" and recommends that fellow abolitionists do the same. This document is signed by Jefferson Mayell, President of Albany's Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society; Calvin Pepper Jr., Vice President of Albany's Anti-Slavery Society; and many others.

The 1860 U.S. Census Index for Sand Lake in Rensselaer County listed Jefferson Mayell and his entire family, including Betsy his wife and their eight children, as residents. The Sand Lake area was known to host what have been described as "radical" anti-slavery groups. Sand Lake also contained the church

of noted Pastor Abel Brown, a fervent abolitionist and founder of the Eastern New York Anti-Slavery Society. Abel Brown is recorded as helping at least 1,000 escaped slaves to find freedom. Southern slave holders even advertised rewards in local newspapers for the capture and arrest of Abel Brown.

Also in 1860, a slavery-related event occurred in Troy, NY involving the capture of Charles Nalle who had escaped enslavement from a farmer named Blucher W. Hansbrough of Culpepper County, VA. Hansbrough had issued Nalle a travel pass to the District of Columbia where he then made his escape with the help from the Underground R.R., eventually making his way to the Albany, NY office of the Vigilance Committee and soon to an abolitionist farm family in Sand Lake where he found shelter and employment as a wagon driver hauling wood and other materials. Of course, there were others living in the Sand Lake area who were not abolitionists and one resident named Horatio Averill found that a reward had been advertised by the farmer in Virginia for the capture and return of Nalle. Seeking to profit from the reward, Mr. Averill notified a local slave hunter of Nalle's whereabouts and Nalle was arrested in neighboring Troy.

The City of Troy also held many people who were sympathetic to the anti-slavery movement and, as coincidence, would have it, noted black female abolitionist Harriet Tubman was visiting Troy when she heard of Nalle's arrest and the location where he was being held—the Custom House in Troy. At that same time, large crowds of both anti-slavery and pro-slavery supporters had amassed there.

Ms. Tubman hurried to the scene and helped Nalle to escape with several supporters who rowed Nalle across the river to West Troy where the West Troy Police

promptly arrested Nalle once more and rushed him into an upper floor of a building along Broadway. A crowd of people still intent on seeking Nalle's release commandeered the ferry and other small boats and crossed over to West Troy, and according to some stories, promptly stormed the building where the police were holding Nalle.

The crowd was said to make their way up the stairs toward the police who fired several pistol shots, injuring two people. However, that didn't dissuade the group and they overpowered the police and swept Nalle down to an armed group of men on horses who rode off with Nalle south on Broadway and then west, likely up Watervliet-Shaker Road into the town of what is now Colonie. They rode unchallenged to Niskayuna where his shackles were cut away and Nalle was hidden after receiving medical care for his scrapes and bruises caused by his ordeal of rough handling in both Troy and West Troy.

Although speculation, it is likely that by 1860, Jefferson Mayell was well aware that Charles Nalle was being harbored in Sand Lake, as shortly before 1860, Nalle had already made his way to the offices of Albany's Vigilance Committee and he had been moved to Sand Lake by the Committee. We can also question whether the Watervliet Shaker Society, also referred to at times as the Niskayuna Shakers, might have assisted Nalle.

Several authors have written about the story of Charles Nalle. A plaque on a former bank building in Troy and a NY State Historic Marker in Watervliet commemorate the locations where Charles Nalle made his final escape to freedom.

The family plot of the Mayell family, including Jefferson Mayell, now rests at the base of North Ridge Road in Albany Rural Cemetery—Section 65. No recent burials are evident there. The name of Jefferson Mayell and his long affiliation with the Al-

bany, N.Y. area anti-slavery movement may well have been forgotten were it not for his name appearing on the early map of the lands of the Albany Rural Cemetery. Perhaps someday a small plaque commemorating Jefferson Mayell's dedication to helping hundreds or perhaps even thousands of enslaved persons to find freedom can be erected there.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to thank Addie Mayell Nesbitt and the late Patty Mayell, whose late husband Albert Jefferson Mayell was a direct descendant of Jefferson Mayell, for their many emails and help with research, photographs, and more. Perhaps one day an image of Jefferson Mayell will be found as well!

Kevin Franklin, Historian

We Want New Members!

Join The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie and support our efforts to increase awareness and appreciation of our important history.

We Need You!

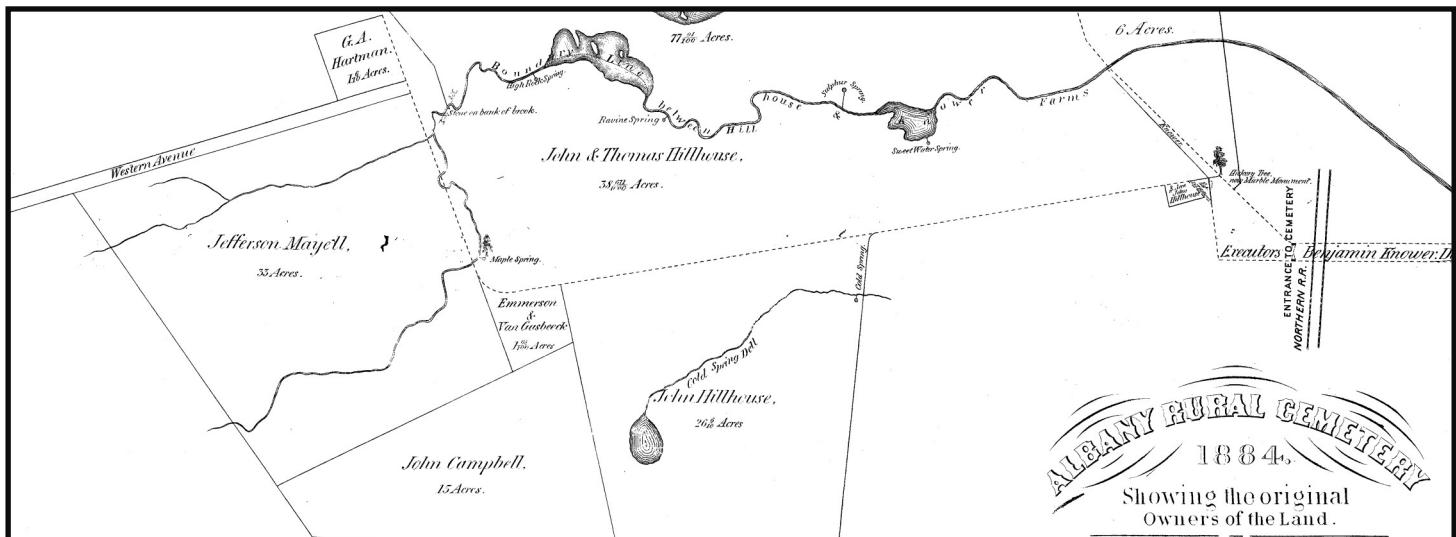
You can contact us via email at:
historical.society.town.colonie@gmail.com

HOLD THE DATE--

Our Next HSTC Presentation on:

Sunday, January 29, 2023
2:00 PM to 3:30 PM
Colonie Town Library

Below: 1884 Map of Albany Rural Cemetery showing the original 33 acres of Jefferson Mayell near Western Avenue



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[https://www.colonie.org/departments/
historian/historicalsociety/](https://www.colonie.org/departments/historian/historicalsociety/)

Welcome New Members!

The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie would like to welcome our newest members:

- Mary Ellen Bolton -Hilda Galster
- Arnold Cogswell -Sheila & Peter Molinaro

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$_____ is enclosed.

Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues
<input type="checkbox"/> Students and Senior Citizens..	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting.....	\$100—\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Business	\$50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor.....	\$250 & up

Please accept my additional donation of \$_____ as a gift to the Historical Society. *The Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation.*

Name _____

Address _____

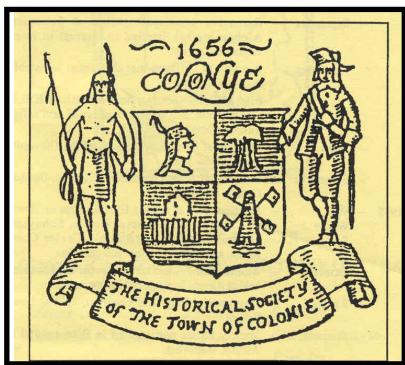
Post Office _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone Number _____ E-Mail _____

Please mail to Membership Chairperson c/o Historical Society, Memorial Town Hall, Newtonville, N. Y. 12128-0508

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE TOWN OF COLONIE



Historical Society Founded 1971

MEMORIAL TOWN HALL
NEWTONVILLE, NY 12128-0508
518-782-2601

Kevin Franklin, Town Historian

Current Officers of the Society

President:	<i>Dr. Michael Radlick</i>
Vice Pres.:	<i>Dr. David (Yizhen) Lin</i>
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Recording Sec.:	<i>Barbara McCarthy</i>
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Past President:	<i>Francia McCashion</i>
Trustees:	<i>Peter Cooke, Al Lansing, Bebe Morehead, Diane Morgan, Michele Sgambelluri, Kristie Schimpf</i>

Please support the Colonie Historical Society's efforts to stimulate an appreciation of the historic heritage of our community! Join Now!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We already have had two fantastic history-related presentations at the Town Library this fall--Kathy Sheehan's on the Gilded Age and then Lois Miner Huey's on Archeology and Children's Books. I'm sure that if you were able to attend, you agree they were very engaging. If you weren't there, then perhaps you will be motivated to attend in this new year.

I look forward to other presentations this upcoming new year, culminating—we all hope—in a return of our annual dinner meeting and presentation. We have had to defer the dinner for the last few years due to COVID-19. Hopefully this year we will be able to get together for a meal and to hear an interesting speaker. Happy New Year 2023 everyone! Looking forward to Spring for sure.

Michael S. Radlick, Ph.D. President