

The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Volume 14, No. 2

April — June 2018

“The Grand Old Man”: Louis Menand (1807-1900)

Submitted by Kevin Franklin, Historian, Town of Colonie



Last known photograph of Louis Menand

Louis Menand (he pronounced his first name: Lou-e’) was born in the area of Burgundy, France in 1807. We know a bit about Mr. Menand through both his auto-biography written in 1892 and from his grandson Howard Menand, who authored a booklet about the history of Menands and Louis Menand in 1974 for the 50th Anniversary of the incorporation of the area of the Town of Colonie known as

“Menands”. Howard Menand was the first ever appointed Historian for the Village of Menands and I had the pleasure to have known him as a young Police Officer in Menands, having joined that department in 1973 as the Village was gearing up for its 50th Anniversary in 1974.

In his autobiography Louis gave credit to his father, who was a gardener, for sparking his interest in

growing various plants and flowers. Beginning at about ten years of age, Louis began experimenting with trying to grow various plants from the cuttings of other plants. "I have always been fond of cutting! Properly and figuratively speaking, except my fingers!" said Menand in his autobiography, which he authored eight years before his death in 1900. It becomes apparent in reading his book: "Autobiography and Recollections of Incidents Connected to Horticultural Affairs, Etc., From 1807 to This Day 1892" that the "Grand Old Man" of Menands (as he was often referred to) was quite witty and certainly had a sense of humor. He claims to have been unable to master the art of mathematics, or arithmetic as he called it, but was always able to "count the money that has passed through my hands!"

Louis recalls losing his father at about the age of 15 or 16 years old while the family lived at the city of Chalons-sur-Saone, Dept. de Saone-et-Loire, France. He remained with his mother and sister for a short period of time after his father's death before deciding to strike out on his own and eventually made his way to Paris in the spring of 1827 where he was befriended by a fellow stage coach passenger who took him to what Louis described as a very seedy hotel in "old Paris" where he stayed but a few nights after having seen sights "during those three evenings and nights I learned more than I did thereafter in ten years."

Louis goes on to tell of his experiences working for various people in the gardening trade and even learned "Cryptogamy" which was the study of plants that reproduce by spores like ferns and various fungi which actually helped him to understand the reproduction process of flowering plants like Orchids, a species that Louis Menand became a recognized expert in the development of different kinds of orchids and how to properly take care of them. In fact, the very last known photograph of Louis Menand is shown on the cover of this newsletter. He is seated beside several plants including what appears to be a fern and in a basket, some type of orchid. I was allowed to re-photograph this old photo by an elderly woman named Jane Glen, a resident of Dutch Village Apartments shortly after being appointed historian for the Village of Menands in 1986.

Louis decided to leave France and come to America, arriving in New York City in 1837 with a letter of introduction from the curator of the Botanical

Gardens of Paris which enabled young Louis to secure a job with the J.M. Thornburn Nursery in Hallett's Cove, Long Island. (The name of this cove was later changed to Astoria, Long Island.) It was here that he met Adelaide Jackson of Albany, NY, who was a piano teacher and in 1840, the two married at Albany but resided for the following two years at Hallett's Cove before eventually returning to Albany.

According to Howard Menand; in 1842 Louis rented a small house on a small plot of land on the grounds of what later became the Home for Aged Men. No railroad came through Menands at the time, but certainly there was much talk of constructing one northward out of Albany. The land which Louis Menand leased or rented could have been as far west as the present day Villa Road area in the heart of Menands. Land records at the Albany County Hall of Records indicate that Louis Menand first actual purchase of land was in January 1846 for "part of lot 8, 4 acres" in the old town of Watervliet from David & Lydia Moore for a portion of one of several lots on the old farm of Abraham Ten Eyck.

The book "A Century of Progress, The D & H 1823-1923" states that it wasn't until March 1853 that the line was completed north out of Albany all the way to Cohoes and that regular service on this line began on April 11 of the same year. Louis Menand appears to be maneuvering with his land acquisitions to be close to this new rail line. His next acquisition was in March, 1856 of: "lot 7, 2.5 acres, Watervliet" on the west side of the Albany and Northern Railroad from Eugene & Catharine Clifford (for whom Clifford Road in Menands is named). In 1860 Menand sells what appears to be about 8/10th of an acre of land to the Albany & Vermont Railroad Company (Howard Menand identifies the railroad as the Albany & Northern.) The language in the Clifford deed to Menand also describes land west of the Albany & Northern Railroad, so it would appear that the railroad changed its incorporation name from the Albany & Northern in 1856 to the Albany & Vermont Railroad by 1860.



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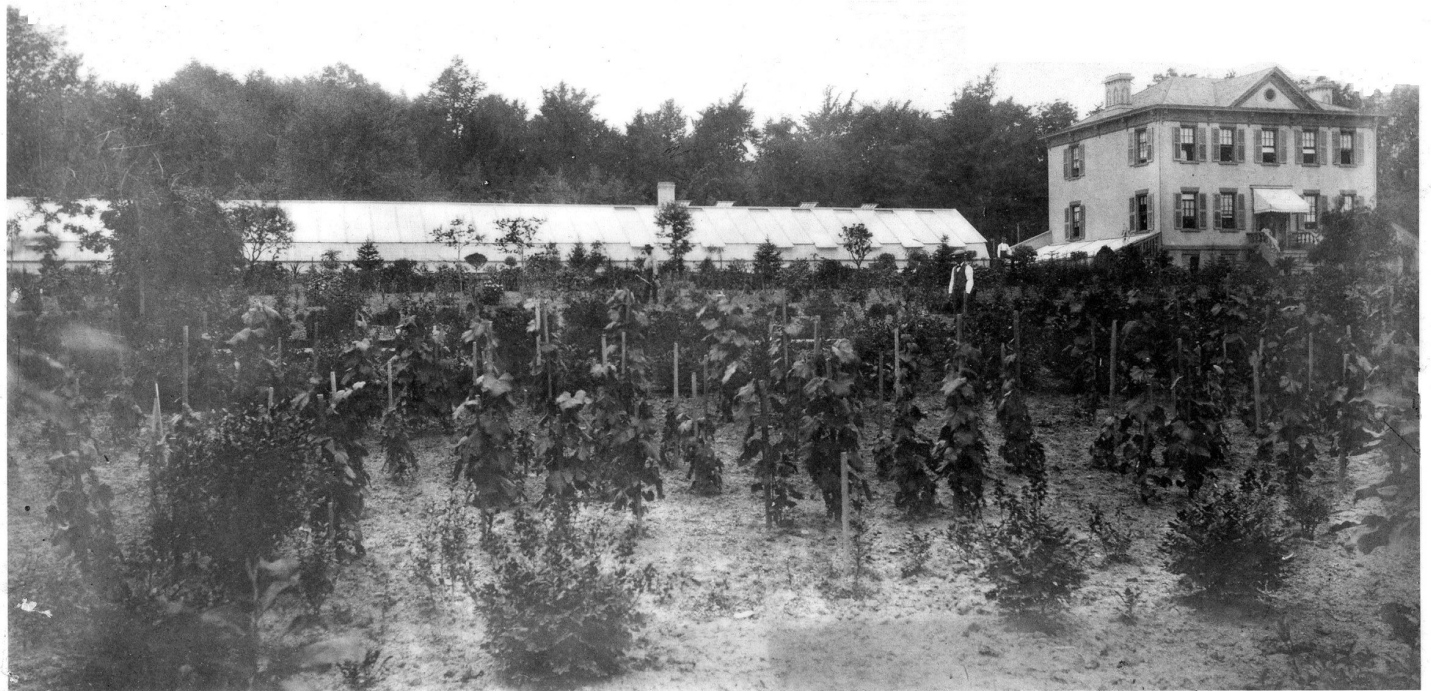
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Historical Society Town of Colonie

Apparently Mr. Menand's florist business was becoming more and more profitable and the land records show that in 1870, Louis Menand purchases 30 acres of land from John Hillhouse, the executor of his father Thomas's large estate, which included lands that became part of the original Albany Rural Cemetery in 1841. This 30 acre plot of land was situated on the north side of what later became known as the Menand Road, built in the 19th Century between what was then called Ireland's Corners (Loudonville) to the Watervliet Turnpike or today's Broadway in Menands. The railroad right-of-way was the eastern boundary of this property, much of which, including the site of the old Menand home itself is beneath the earthen berm of the State Rt. 378 which was built to the north of the old Menand Road. The popular Ganser-Smith Park now occupies the land wedged between Menand Road, the railroad and the earthen berm of State Rt. 378.

The gardens of Louis Menand became a popular stop along the railroad and in the later part of the

19th Century, the D&H Railroad constructed a fine railroad station at the site of the present day concession stand in the Ganser-Smith Park and named it the "Menands Stop". The name took hold and the entire area surrounding the station became known locally as "Menands". Louis Menand has been listed as both a horticulturist and/or florist. In the book "The Bicentennial History of Albany and Schenectady Counties, 1609-1886", under Horticulture, Floriculture and Agricultural Literature in Albany County it reads of Louis Menand as follows: "Louis Menand, located, in 1842, upon the Troy Road, and established his present green houses and nursery. He has about ten acres of land, upon which are twelve greenhouses containing many rare and valuable plants, with a large stock of flowering and ornamental shrubbery and fruit trees. The whole plot and surrounding are attractive and beautiful for situation. L. Menand & Sons also conduct greenhouses near the rural cemetery."



Menand Florist and Garden on the Menand Road



Menands Stop Railroad Station

However, it is in Parker's "Landmarks of Albany County" (1897) that lavishes Louis Menand with kind words and recognizes his autobiography as well: "Menand, Louis, has been a commanding figure in the horticultural circles for a number of years. He has been named 'The Grand Old Man' of the gardeners craft in this county. He is now in his 89th Year. He came to America in 1837 and enjoys a retrospective view of American horticulture, extending over a period of sixty years. Mr. Menand continued to reside among his beloved flowers at Albany. He is mentally alert and active as ever. His personal recollections as originally published in the American Florist, from which we quote, are overflowing with a personality with is both charming and unique. Mr. Phelps says well of Mr. Menand's autobiography that contains 'the natural philosophy of one who was

always a lover of liberty, and a student alike of books and nature.' His life has shed fragrance and beauty that will endure as long as flowers grow and gardens bloom.

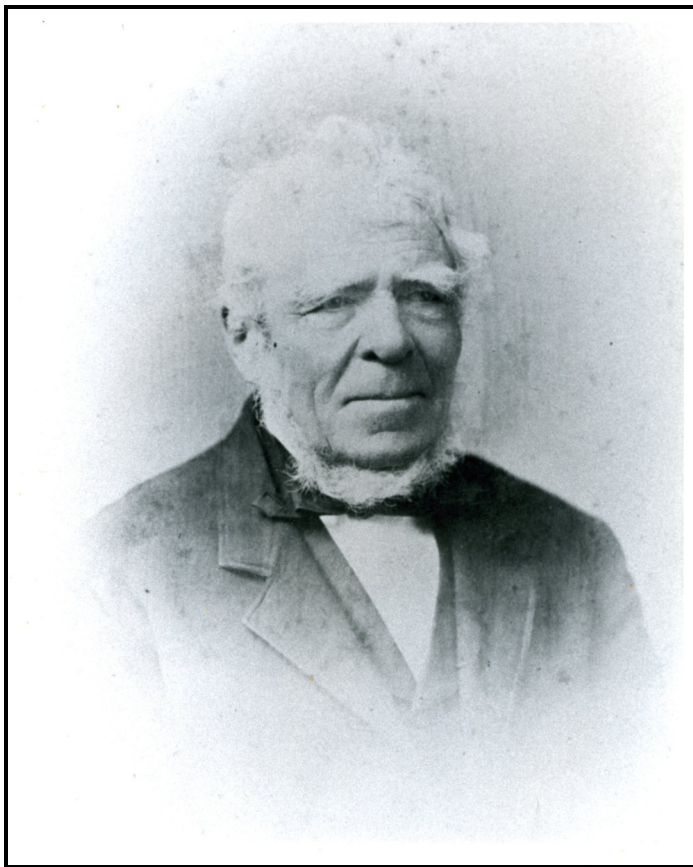
Author's Note: Henry P. Phelps was a resident of Brookside Avenue in Menands. In 1893 he was the author of a comprehensive history of the Albany Rural Cemetery.

Welcome New Members!

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

Kori Graves, Mary Ellen Bolton, Robert Bullock and John Pipkin.

Welcome Aboard!



Louis Menand



Adelaide Jackson Menand



**PASSENGER STATION
BUILT IN 1891-1892**

Original Combination Station was built in 1853 ; burned in 1873 ; rebuilt in 1874.
Located about 200 feet north of present station.

Cemetery Avenue Railroad Station, Menands

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"/> Student and Senior	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100—\$250
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Please accept my additional donation of \$ _____ as a gift to the Historical Society. *The Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation.*

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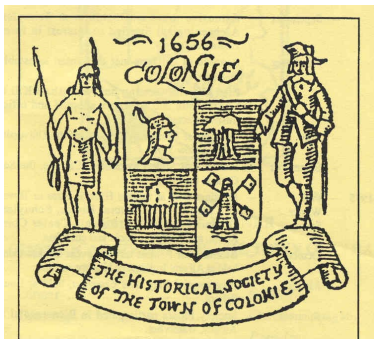
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Kevin Franklin: Town Historian

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope you are enjoying this edition of the Colonie Historical Oracle. Kevin Franklin, our historian, has put together another wonderful edition featuring the founder of the Village of Menands.

A very special Thank You to Mark Bodnar, a Past President, who has spent the last few years typing and formatting the Oracle. His expertise has been greatly appreciated and will be missed. Mark is stepping down from the Board and we will be looking for someone to type and format future newsletters.

And a Thank You to the following Board Members whose terms are up: Bob Reilly, Karen Senecal, Ursula MacAffer and Bebe Morehead. To Bebe, a very appreciative thanks for helping to keep everything in order as Recording Secretary. Her knowledge of the Historical Society and record keeping has been invaluable. Two other Board Members, Don Morton and Kristie Schimpf, will be taking on new positions on the Executive Committee.

A huge Thank You to all.

Fran McCashion, President