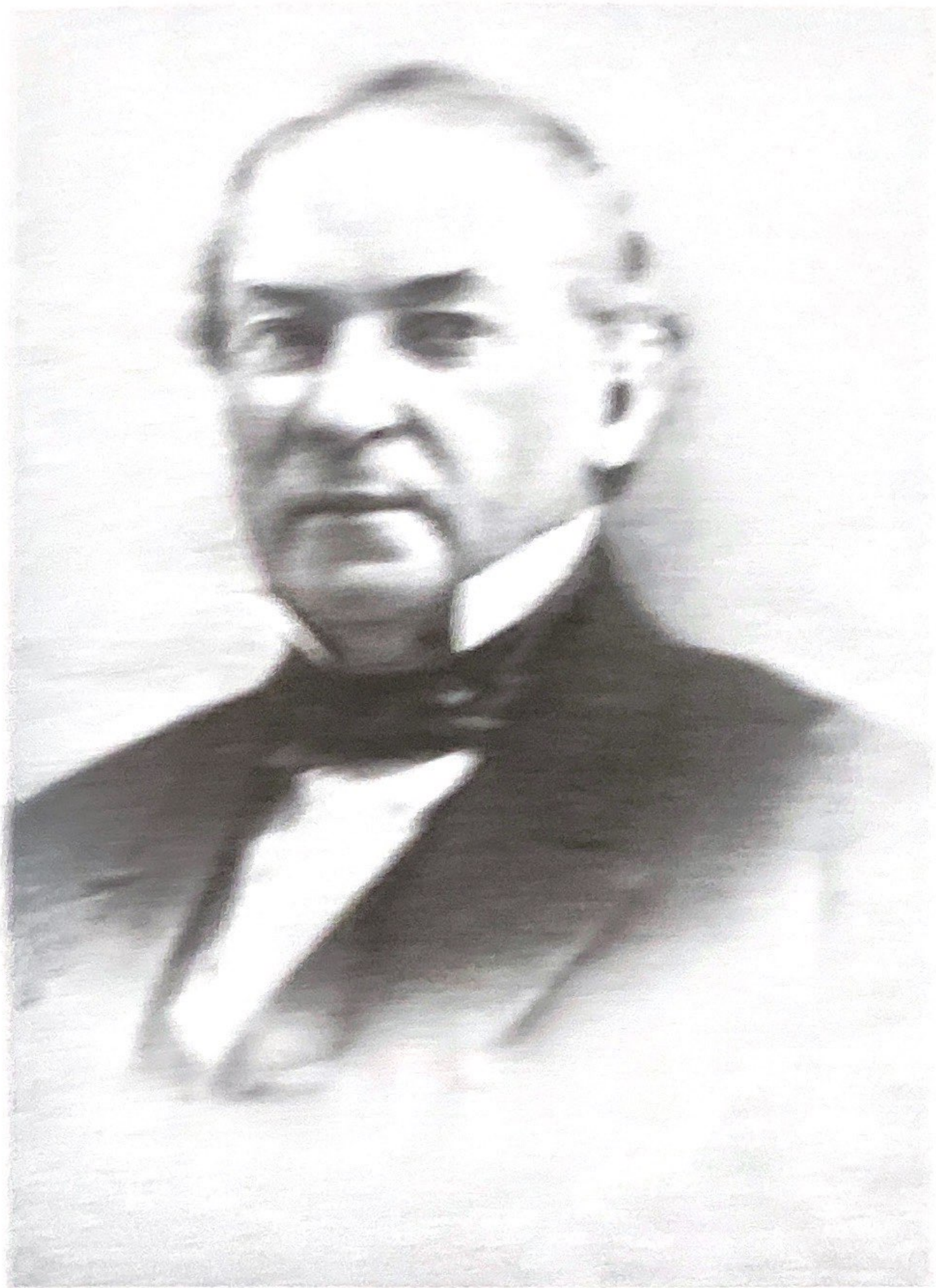


The Chamberlains
of Red Hook & New York City
1800 - 1950



Bronson W. Chanler



THIS MEMOIR is written for the descendants of
Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler and Robert Winthrop Chanler,
some of whom are prone to boast
of their Livingston, Winthrop and Stuyvesant blood
but think little or nothing of their connection to the
Chamberlains. Yet, because two Chanler brothers
married two Chamberlain sisters in the 1890s,
all of us are more closely related to the Chamberlains
than we are to those grander names.
Who were these people who came and went
over just three generations?

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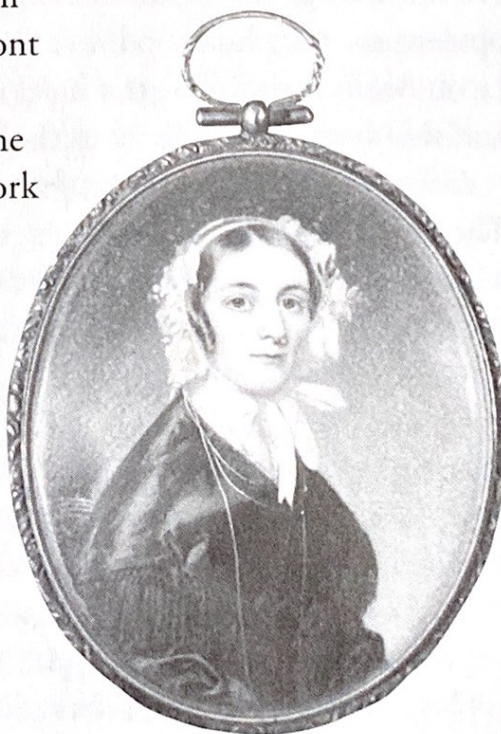


WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

THE FIRST William Chamberlain known to us was married in 1795 to Lydia Jones. After two daughters, Lydia and Nancy, a son, William, was born in 1800 and, in that same year, their father died. The family lived in Vermont (where there was a well-known General William Chamberlain in Revolutionary War times), but we have no record of young William's childhood or education. No doubt as the only son of a young widow with two daughters to support, much responsibility was placed

on his shoulders at an early age. This William Chamberlain moved to New York on attaining his majority and became our ancestor.

Embarked on a business career, his name first appears in the New York directories of 1826 as William Chamberlain, Merchant, at 90 Front Street. Two years later he married Amelia Ann Lawrence, then 26, the daughter of an established New York family, who had been educated at the Adelphi School, from which she received a testimonial in 1818. Her handsomely tooled prayer book, with her name engraved in gold and dated 1828, contains many blond curls. The couple lived at 35 Mercer Street and the business moved to 103 Front Street, where its name changed to Chamberlain and Lawrence,



AMELIA ANN LAWRENCE

Importers. Alexander M. Lawrence was probably Chamberlain's brother-in-law.

Our great-grandfather, William Lawrence Chamberlain, was born in 1831, and a daughter, Mary, in 1833. A second boy, Warren W., arrived in 1835 and a third son, Henry, in 1837. This last boy lived to be only 13, when he died of dysentery. Unfortunately, in 1837, Amelia Lawrence Chamberlain also died, probably while giving birth to Henry. She was buried in New York's Marble Cemetery, at Second Avenue and 2nd Street, until her remains were removed to the large Chamberlain plot at the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, a dozen years later. Aged only 35, with her eldest child just 6, Amelia's death must have been a devastating blow to the family. Her husband never remarried.

In spite of finding himself a widower at 37, William Chamberlain persevered and prospered in the mercantile life of New York. In 1841, he bought a country seat in Red Hook, comprised of a large red brick house in the Federal style, with 364 acres of farmland, known as "Maizeland." It had been built in 1797 for General David Van Ness, of Revolutionary War fame. By 1850, Chamberlain's firm had changed its name to Chamberlain and Phelps, Importers, still at 103 Front Street. His home address is listed that year as Astor House, the opulent six-story hotel on lower Broadway, that was built by John Jacob Astor to rival the great hotels of Europe. It boasted 300 rooms and was described as the "marvel of the age" for its lavish furnishings.

George A. Phelps remained Chamberlain's partner and lifelong friend. Their principal business was the importation of fruit from the Mediterranean. They owned a number of orange ships, in one of which Chamberlain invited Sarah Armstrong, granddaughter of General Armstrong who built Rokeby, to accompany his daughter Mary on a trip to Genoa. They were evidently chased by Barbary pirates but returned safely from England by the steamer "Asia" in the spring of 1858.

Caught up in the excitement of the California Gold Rush and the great surge in trade between New York and San Francisco, Chamberlain and Phelps built three clipper ships in the 1850s. Most important was the extreme clipper "Hornet," launched in 1851, of 1,426 tons and 207 feet on deck. She made ten trips to San Francisco, averaging 121 days, the shortest of which was in 1853,



"MAIZELAND"

when she sailed in company with the 89-day record holder "Flying Cloud," beating her into port by 45 minutes after 106 days. In 1866 the "Hornet" was lost by fire near the equator in the Pacific and only one of her three boats, carrying the captain and 14 men, survived a 2,500-mile, 43-day ordeal to Hawaii. She and her cargo were insured for \$400,000. Other Chamberlain and Phelps ships were the medium clipper "Aramingo," also launched in 1851. She was of 716 tons and 152 feet and after an undistinguished run to San Francisco, sailed to Shanghai in 47 days and thence to New York in 118. She later traded mainly between New York, Calcutta and Liverpool and was sold in 1862 for \$25,000. Last and smallest was the 534-ton 156-foot clipper barque "Zephyr," launched in 1855, about which no details are available.

By mid-century Chamberlain was spending more and more time at Red Hook, where he is listed as a resident in the 1850 census. He was a prime mover in the planning and construction of the Hudson River Railroad and, in 1846, became its first president. His free pass for life is dated ten years later and, in 1865, the road was acquired by Cornelius Vanderbilt, who merged it with the New York Central (Albany to Buffalo) and so established the New York Central and

Hudson River Railroad. William Chamberlain had been an Alderman of the 6th Ward in New York City in the 1840s, and in 1856 ran for Congress (unsuccessfully) from Dutchess and Columbia counties. He was a free trade Democrat and his campaign inspired a local diarist to write: "Mr. Chamberlain's money flows like water with the usual exercises of drunkenness, brawling, bargaining for votes; it was pretty well understood that the "Know Nothings" were bought booze by Chamberlain."

In 1865, William Chamberlain founded the First National Bank of Red Hook and remained its president until his death in 1875.

Another venture in which he was a heavy investor was the Rhinebeck and Connecticut Railroad, a line that served the local dairy industry and wandered inland from Rhinecliff, via Red Hook and Silvernail, to a connection with the Connecticut Western R. R. Familiarly known as the Hucklebush Line, because the engineer would stop the train at a good patch so everyone could get off and pick berries, and sometimes called Chamberlain's Folly, it ran one round trip a day until falling victim to the Depression in 1938. In addition to his varied business interests, William Chamberlain was a keen scientific farmer, specializing in the breeding of Merino sheep of imported Austrian and Spanish stock at his Maizeland farm. An active member of the State Agricultural Society, he regularly won prizes at the State Fair in Syracuse.

We unfortunately have very little insight into the personality of William Chamberlain, as there is no surviving correspondence. He must have been a serious man, a solid provider for his family, and a respected figure in the community. Although probably lonely, having lost his wife at such a young age, his children apparently held him in high esteem and no doubt he was much loved by his daughter Mary, who devoted her early life to his well-being. Mary was a keen churchgoer and doubtless very prim and proper. She kept house for her "dear father," as she regularly referred to him, until his death in the spring of 1875, when she would have been 42. Later that same year an elderly widower from the outskirts of Syracuse proposed marriage to her and, being unable to make up her mind, she wrote two letters, one accepting and one declining, then shuffled them up



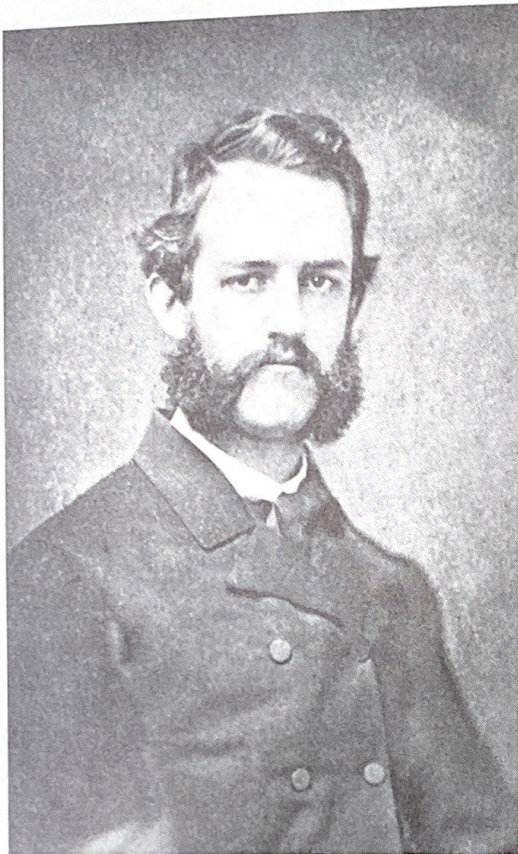
MARY CHAMBERLAIN

and dropped one in the mailbox. When she got home she found she had mailed the refusal and, filled with remorse, rushed back to the Red Hook Post Office to switch them. But the postmaster claimed it was against the law to give the letter back, so she mailed the other one also, which her suitor graciously accepted as her reply.

Mary and George Geddes were married at Maizeland in October 1875, and subsequently moved to Fairmount, New York, a suburb

of Syracuse on Lake Onondaga, where Mary spent the rest of her life. Mr. Geddes was prominent in both engineering and agricultural circles. His father had been chief engineer in the laying out and construction of the Erie Canal, which opened in 1825, and had built a grand house on his 500 acre farm. George Geddes was also an engineer and surveyor and among other large jobs had been consulting engineer for the construction of the Oswego and Syracuse Railroad. He served four years in the State Senate in mid-century, but was particularly well known for his extensive writings on scientific farming methods. He twice entered his farm for competition at the State Fair and twice received the first prize. No doubt it was through that organization that he came to know the Chamberlains, who regularly exhibited their sheep at Syracuse. George Geddes was already 66 when he married Mary Chamberlain and he died eight years later. His widow continued another quarter-century at Fairmount, expiring in the first days of 1909 in her 76th year. By then the matriarch of the Chamberlain family, she was also buried in Brooklyn with her parents and brothers.

Her younger brother, Warren W. Chamberlain, embarked on a military career at an early age. The first picture we have of him was one painted when he was a boy, already in uniform at some military school. He was appointed to West Point in 1855 and became a



WARREN W. CHAMBERLAIN

member of the Class of 1860, with which he would have graduated at age 25, had he not been dismissed from the Academy after two years for "deficiency in mathematics." His class eventually commissioned only 41 officers, while 42 others were dropped. By the start of the Civil War in 1861, Warren had a commission as 1st Lieutenant in the 12th New York Infantry, a regiment of the New York State Militia, that sailed for Washington just a week after the fall of Fort Sumter. His brother writes to Mary, 22nd

April 1861, "Warren left in the 'Baltic' last evening in excellent health and spirits, the coolest man in the regiment...." The 12th was mustered into federal service for only three months, and had the honor of leading the van of the Union Army into enemy territory when it crossed the "Long Bridge" into Virginia in the night of May 21st. When the 12th's term of service expired and it was sent back to New York, Warren transferred his commission to the 14th Infantry, a regular Army regiment with which he spent the rest of his days. On August 30th, 1862, he was on staff duty as an A.D.C. to General George Sykes, commanding the 2nd Division in General Porter's Army Corps at the Second Battle of Manassas or Bull Run. Lt. Chamberlain was sent late in the day with orders for Colonel Warren, one of the brigade commanders in the thick of the fight. He was mortally wounded and died that night, behind enemy lines.

Warren's affectionate letters home touch on the bittersweet life of a soldier on campaign in wartime. A life of rumor and uncertainty, of hardship and boredom, of anticipation and nostalgia. Letter dated 2nd July 1862: "...we left Alexandria yesterday bound for Fortress Monroe.

We are about 1,000 regulars... I think it quite possible we are sent to take the place of older troops, but there is no telling anything about it and possibly we will find orders awaiting us to join the Army before Richmond".... And on 13th July..."My Battalion is with McLellan's Army...the general impression is that we shall not move for four or five weeks.... Army life in the field is a hard one and completely divested of the alluring poetry of West Point... both officers and men are dirty and careless of their dress. We eat just what kind Providence may put in our way, and we do a great deal of work of one kind or another...." From camp on the James River, 26th July 1862, he wrote "...beyond many rumors there does not appear to be much ground for expecting a change in the position of the Army...but there is no knowing what an hour may develop...and I should receive orders to go to Washington or Richmond with no surprise...."

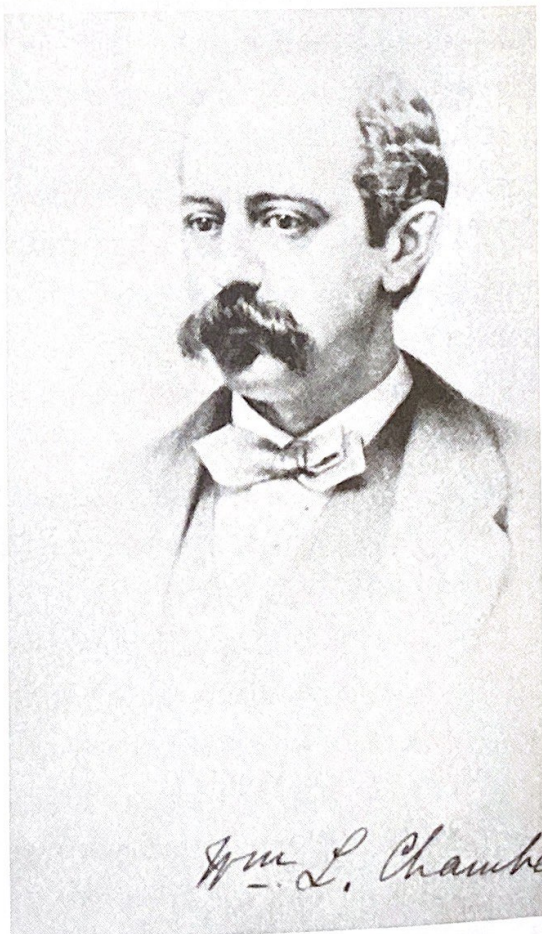
Later in the same letter Warren writes "...I think that officers generally, both regular and volunteer, are heartily sick of the war and would be very glad to get out of it...but God only knows when the war will end, we seem about as far from it now as ever..." and still in the same letter, "...I know I may be shot and if I should be killed, my dear brother, I want you always to recollect that you have been to me the best brother and kindest friend that ever a man was blessed with. When dear Henry died, I had much in my conduct toward him to reproach myself for, but you will have no such bitter thoughts in your recollection of our intercourse to make you unhappy"...and finally in a lighter vein..."I feel sure that I shall live to have some good times yet with you—Oh dear how delightful the pleasures of New York will be after the toils of this war are over. What grand dinners we will have at Delmonico's, then what delightful drives we will have to the Central Park..."

On December 8th, 1862, William L. Chamberlain received word from one of Warren's West Point classmates, a Confederate officer and Virginian named Frank Huger, who wrote on November 25th from camp near Fredericksburg, "...I hope that mine is not the painful task to inform you that Warren was certainly killed in the engagement of 30th August. I was not present at the time, being absent sick, and did not rejoin until the early part of September, but I heard of him

through a gentleman who met him on the field.... Major Taylor, of General Lee's staff, told me that while riding over the field he saw Warren mortally wounded. He endeavored to make him as comfortable as possible and before leaving placed him in charge of one of your surgeons. At a later hour passing the same spot he saw him dead.

A short time before he died he gave to a Texas Ranger a letter he had written to you the day previously and requested him to write a few lines, which he dictated, simply saying he was severely wounded and sending a farewell to you all. The old Texan promised him to send the letter to you, which I've no doubt he has done.... I beg to offer to your father, sister and self my warmest sympathy in your distress. Not all the horrors of this sanguinary conflict could alienate the personal affection and esteem I entertained for your brother, and I mourn with you all that it is out of my power ever to be of any service to him...." William L. Chamberlain did receive the letter from the Texan, whose added words (written in pencil) were "My Darling Brother I am Dieing 30 Aug God Bless You." William later succeeded in crossing the lines to recover his brother's body. Warren is now buried with the rest of his family at Green-Wood.

William Lawrence Chamberlain, our great-grandfather, followed in his father's footsteps by joining the firm at 103 Front Street in 1852, when he would have been 21. There is no record of his schooling, but no doubt he was well educated either by tutors or private academies. His business must have prospered because,



WILLIAM LAWRENCE CHAMBERLAIN

still in his early twenties, he bought for \$18,000 in 1854 the 230-acre farm that became the northern half of present day Orlot. As he lived with his father at Maizeland, when not in the city, the purchase must have been for investment. He married in 1863, a year after Warren's death, a handsome blonde of 22 (ten years his junior) named Mary Bradhurst Remington. Her father, Clement Remington, was a Philadelphian who became a prosperous New York silk importer. Her mother, Julia Schieffelin, belonged to the prominent New York mercantile



MARY BRADHURST REMINGTON

family whose company continues to this day. Julia's father is said to have asked Dr. Bradhurst for his younger daughter's hand, but the old gentleman refused because her older sister was not yet betrothed and had no immediate prospects. Frustrated, Schieffelin promptly married the older sister instead.

The William Lawrence Chamberlains lived on lower Madison Avenue, their last house being number 99. They also spent a good deal of time at Maizeland, which William L. inherited from his father in 1875. One has the impression that William was more fond of the country than his wife, who preferred the excitement of cosmopolitan life. He also took a keen interest in farming and writes to his sister Mary "...Tell Mr. Geddes that John Lewis threshed 380 bushels of wheat from 12 acres of land and 20 bushels of seed this fall, not bad for Dutchess Co...." The couple had four children, William Remington Chamberlain born in 1864, Alice in 1868, Julia in 1872, and Howard in 1877. Another son, born in 1874, died at birth. While there is little anecdotal evidence of William's personality, letters

to his sister leave the impression that he was a plodder, probably less imaginative than his father and a careful conservator of wealth, rather than creator of it.

When William Chamberlain senior died in 1875, only William L. and Mary survived of his four children. The custom of male primogeniture still being widely accepted, he left his daughter a trust fund of \$75,000 and the rest of his estate to his son. William L. was trustee for his sister and invested her capital in 6% mortgages on local farms in Dutchess County, earning her \$4,500 a year, which her brother remitted to her as he collected the interest. The relatively modest size of her income may well have been a contributing factor in her decision to accept Mr. Geddes' proposal of marriage. When William L. himself died in 1880, only five years after his father and only 49 years old, apparently of a heart attack, he left his widow a trust fund subsequently valued at \$790,000. Being governed by the restrictive Trust Laws of the State of New York, the U. S. Trust Company kept the principal almost entirely in railroad bonds, at least until the widow's death in 1927.

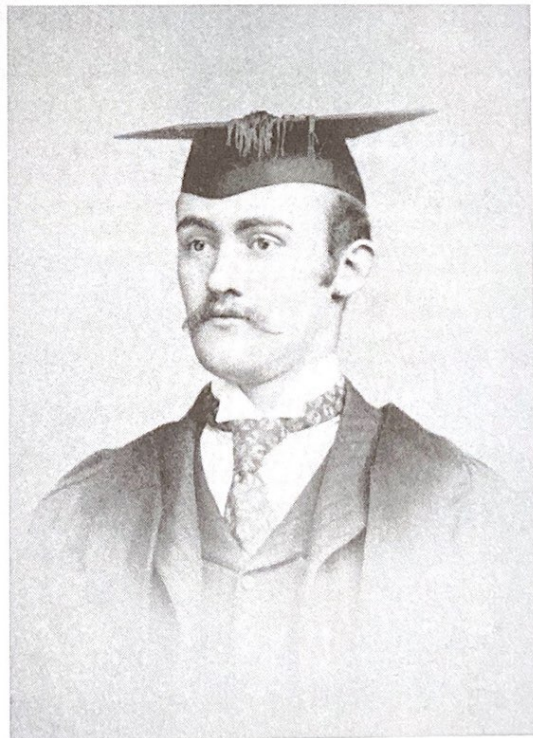
William Lawrence Chamberlain named his best friend, Theodore Timpson, and his father's old partner, George Phelps' son Frank, to be executors of his estate. He directed them to sell within two years all his real estate in both Dutchess County and New York City. Maizeland was sold at auction and bought by Timpson himself for his own use, which may have raised some eyebrows, as self-dealing by executors is generally frowned upon. The fine house at 99 Madison Avenue was also sold and Mary Chamberlain subsequently departed for Paris with her four children, who ranged in age from 3 to 16 at the time of their father's death. Ten years younger than her husband and only 39 when widowed, she must have been a live wire.

Mary Bradhurst Chamberlain eventually buried three husbands, not dying herself until 1927, when she was 86. Her second husband, Octavius E. Winslow, we know nothing about except that he had already expired when she wrote her will in 1897. Her last husband, Alphonse Hasselmans, was, I believe, a musician, perhaps a conductor, who had come to Paris from some middle-European city like Budapest. Mary was said to have taken her children to Europe for

their education and no doubt she was an urbane society woman who appreciated the sophistication of Paris life. She is said to have run a smooth household and entertained lavishly, always anxious to see her daughters marry well. Paris in those days was home to many Americans, including at one time or another Uncle Archie, Uncle Bob, Uncle Willie, and my own Grandpa Lewis Chanler, each with their various wives. My father spoke fondly of staying with his grandmother when on leave in Paris during the First World War, and when my parents were married she gave them barrels of fine Chinese Export china for a wedding present.

Eldest of the four children was William Remington Chamberlain (known as Willie) who grew up to be a scholar and intellectual. Avoiding the business careers of his father and grandfather, he spent three years at King's College, Cambridge, in his mid-twenties and took a degree with honors in philology, the study of the science of language. He writes to his sister Alice of his enjoyment in learning Sanskrit and Early Anglo Saxon. In 1890, his mother rented the Schieffelin house on Fifth Avenue at 53rd Street and Willie and the other children came back briefly to New York. They visited the Timpsons at Maizeland with much nostalgia. Later, Willie won a post on the Cornell faculty, to start as an instructor the next fall. He joined the Union Club, to which his father had also belonged, and in the summer of 1891 went to stay with friends at Oakdale, on the south shore of Long Island. There he contracted typhoid fever and, after five weeks of struggle, died at the end of August. He was only 27.

His younger sister, Alice, had been secretly engaged to Lewis Chanler for a year when he



WILLIAM REMINGTON CHAMBERLAIN



LEWIS CHANLER



ALICE CHAMBERLAIN

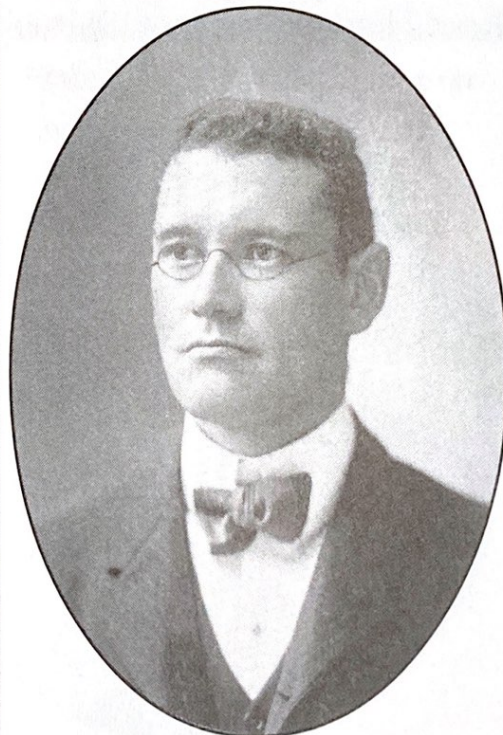
announced their intention to marry, shortly after his 21st birthday, in the fall of 1890. They were married in London and returned to New York, where Lewis had completed his legal studies at Columbia the previous spring. Embarked on a career as defense attorney in the criminal court system, Lewis soon gained a high reputation among judges and defendants alike. In 1895, Alice persuaded her husband to take her to England for her health, and the couple moved to Cambridge, where Lewis enrolled in the university to study international law. Back in New York in the first years of the new century, Alice encouraged Lewis to go into politics, with the results we are all familiar with. After winning the lieutenant-governorship on a split ticket, he was asked to run for Governor in 1908 against his boss, the popular Charles Evans Hughes. Alice urged him to wait two years, when Hughes was expected to run for President, but Lewis ignored her and was narrowly defeated, which led to repeated "I told you so's." By 1910, living in a fine house in Tuxedo, Alice's constant nagging drove her husband to the arms of neighbor Julie Olin Benkard, and their marriage was on the rocks. Alice refused to give her husband a divorce until 1920, when her eldest son, Stuyve,

married. Claiming that, since her son had come under the influence of another woman and there was nobody she could trust, she sent the telegram "I have taken your suits to the cleaner and you can have your divorce." She hired attorney Arthur Train, who negotiated such good alimony through Morris and McVeigh that she could spend the rest of her life in considerable splendor in an apartment at 133 East 80th Street and a large country house on Lloyd's Neck, in Long Island, where she indulged her passion for gardening. She died in 1955, aged 87, a lonely and bitter woman, divorced for 35 years and befriended only by pansy men, who came to sponge off her and listen to tales of Society from a bygone era.

Alice's younger sister Julia shared her mother's love of fine clothes, fashionable friends, and an orderly life. Her marriage to artist Bob Chanler in 1893, when she was 20 and he 21, had been promoted by her mother, but proved a mistake from the start. He was loud and boisterous and she shrank from his advances in the marriage bed, driving her husband to bohemian excesses in the night spots of Paris. After marriage in London, they tried to settle in New York, but were both unhappy there and moved back to Paris. A daughter Dorothy



JULIA CHAMBERLAIN



BOB CHANLER

was born after five years and brought some solace to the marriage, and seven years later a second daughter was named after her mother. By 1907, Julia was divorced and settled permanently in Paris, with \$20,000 "off the top" of Bob's substantial income. She quietly created for herself an elegant life, painting very well, writing three novels in German, and numbering among her friends distinguished musicians and artists. After Bob's death in 1930, she retired to the National Hotel on Lake Lucerne, in Switzerland, and cut off all association with her friends and relatives, including her daughters, for the rest of her life. She died there in 1936 without answering any of the letters her daughters wrote.

The last of the Chamberlains, Howard, was only three when his father died and was brought up by his mother and stepfather, almost entirely in Paris. He writes to his Aunt Mary Geddes in 1907, when he would have been 30, that his mother is giving up the harp to play bridge. He also speaks of his interest in oriental religions and of his own spiritual life, perhaps to impress Mary. They lived at 34 Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. Sometime later in his life he married an English woman, Esther Grant, whose son Gerald took the Chamberlain name. When he wrote his will in 1930, he and his family lived at the Royal Hotel, in Lausanne, Switzerland. He had no children of his

own and, after his wife died in the mid-thirties, he returned briefly to New York before emigrating to Buenos Aires, where he died in 1945 at age 68.



HOWARD CHAMBERLAIN

When William Lawrence Chamberlain died in 1880, leaving a large trust fund for the benefit of his widow, he granted her power of appointment over the eventual distribution of the capital among his surviving children. In her own will,

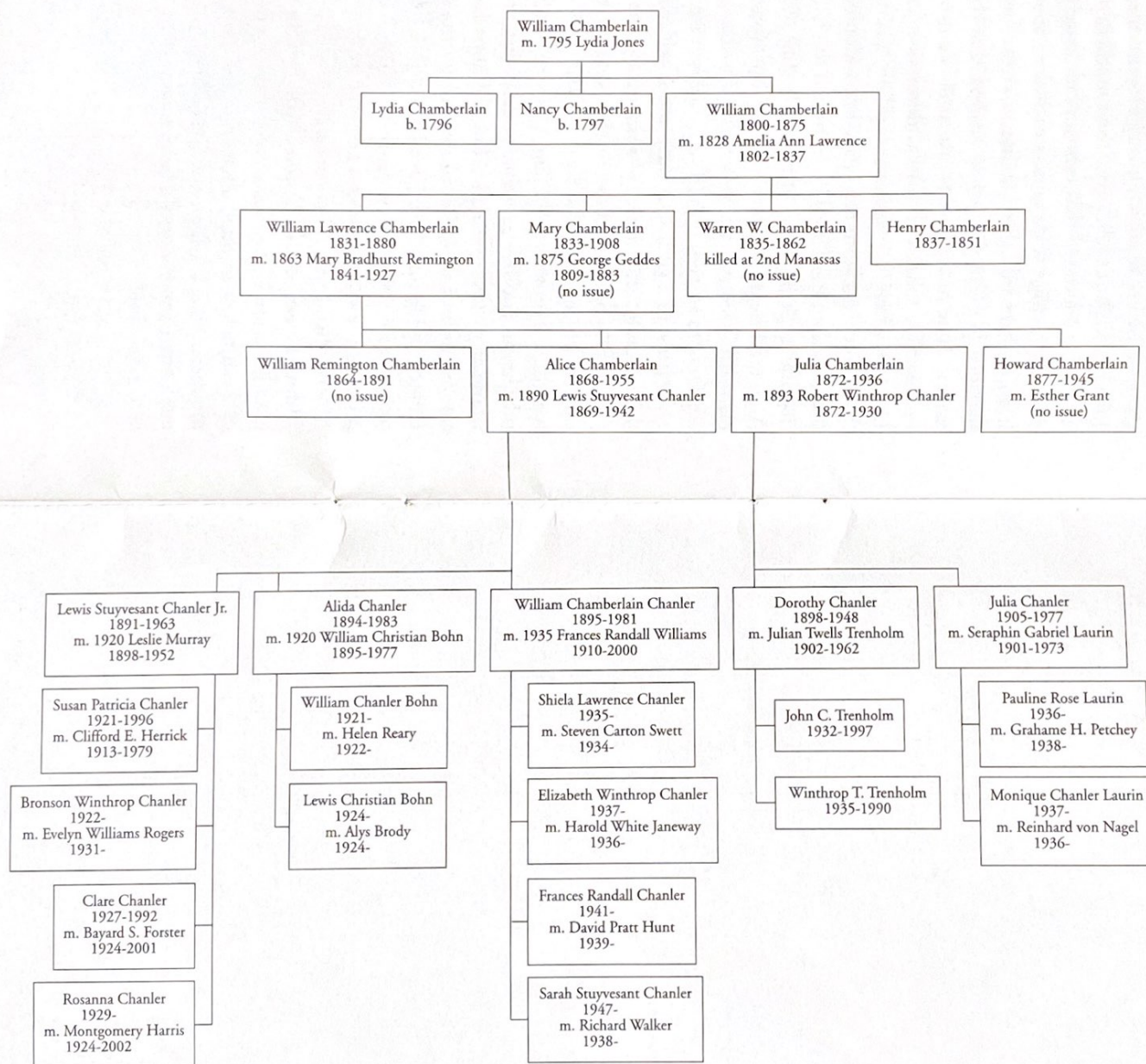
she exercised that power, giving Howard three-quarters and Alice and Julia one-eighth each. After their mother's death in 1927, the daughters contested that ratio and ultimately a compromise was reached, giving the daughters each their one eighth outright, but keeping Howard's three-quarters in trust for the rest of his life. If he had a child of his own when he died, that child would inherit all the capital. If he did not, the trust would continue one-half for Alice and one-half for Julia, with their children ultimately receiving the capital. In 1945, when Howard died childless, a certain Ilya Laskoff appeared from nowhere claiming to have been adopted in Brooklyn by Howard Chamberlain in 1935. He petitioned the U.S. Trust Company to distribute the principal of Howard's trust to him, as his legal heir. After a blizzard of paperwork, the court found no merit in Laskoff's claim and the trust was eventually distributed to Alice and Julia's children, as agreed in the 1927 compromise.

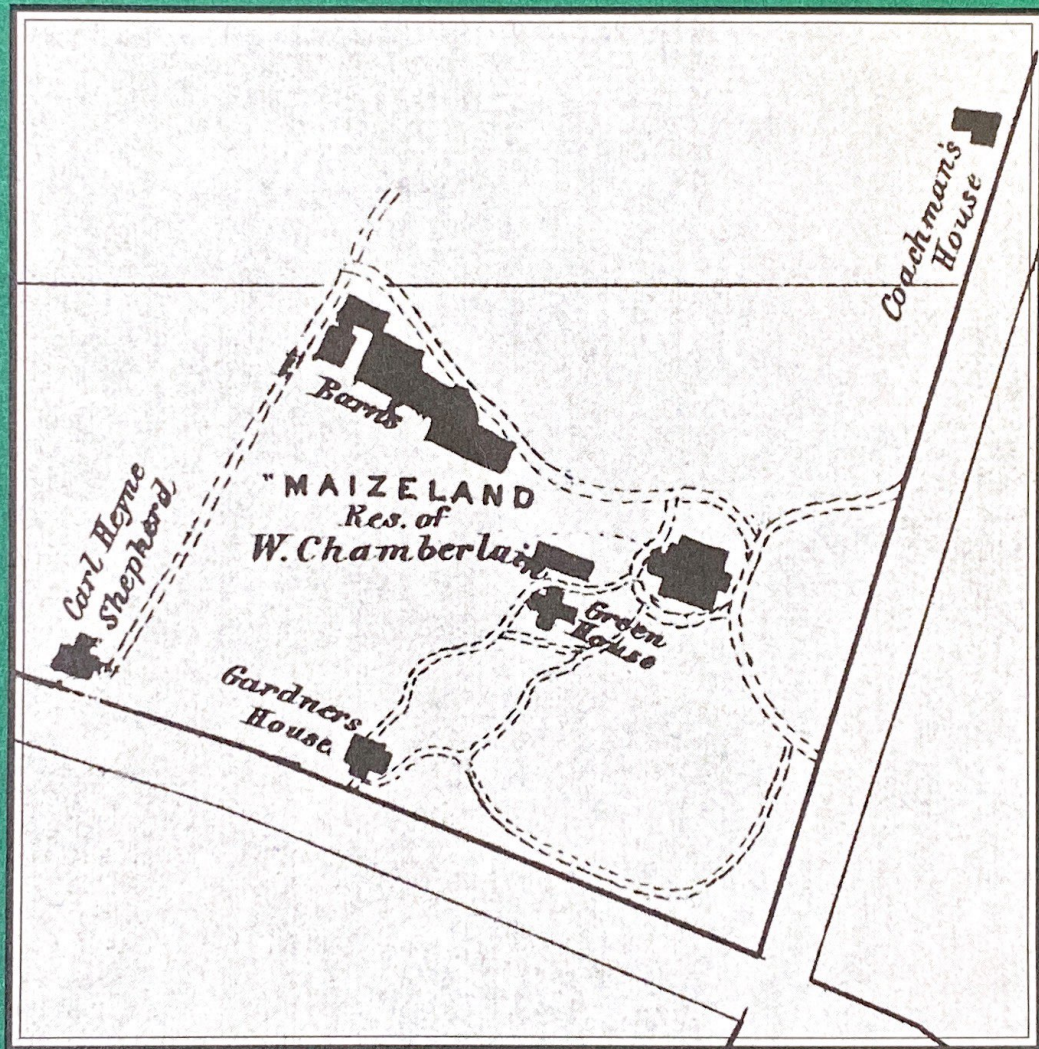
So drew to a close a century and a half of Chamberlain history. It is not a story of shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves, but it does reflect the progression of upward social and economic mobility prevalent in nineteenth century New York. Transatlantic trade, railroads and banking all propelled William Chamberlain to his position of prosperous country gentleman and paterfamilias. No doubt he arrived in the city with some education and capital, or he could not have set himself up as a merchant in his mid-twenties and married Amelia Lawrence. He must also have been driven by ambition and the urge to better himself. Nor is it surprising that his son was content to preserve the status quo and keep the pot simmering. Post Civil War America had lost its innocence and settled into smug satisfaction within the established families. And by century's end the grandchildren had come to look down on money and seek cultivation of the intellect through a return to the sophistication of European manners. Had Warren or Willie or Howard had sons, no doubt their descendants today would be much as we all turned out to be. Which is to say—fine!



B.W.C.

DESCENDANTS OF WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN





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