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THE JOSEPH STROUD MURDER STORY 1848

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From information found in Stroud family accounts, it appears that William Stroud and his new bride Zerviah Sturtevant were married on August 1, 1794 in Cheshire, Mass. Soon thereafter William purchased 160 acres of land on Willsborough Point from the State of New York for \$200. Their first child Hannah was born in Willsborough on April 9, 1796. This would make them one of the earliest families to live on Willsborough Point. Their third child, Joseph, who was born on February 4, 1802 is the subject of this story.

In the early 1840's, Joseph Stroud lived the life of a bachelor in the red brick house on the Essex Road near the present Post Office. There were barns and some stock as well as a little red store where he sold dry goods and meats from his farm. He lived a rather secluded life other than to attend Methodist church services held in the schoolhouse which stood in back of the present Champlain Valley Senior Community. Sometime around 1844 he went to a small town in Vermont and came home with a wife, a refined, quiet lady who, after a while adopted some of Joseph's recluseness and went only to

church with her husband.

During those church services, she would always sit in the front seat with one elbow on her knee, her dark eyes cast upon the floor in front of her. She was always dressed in black with with a very long fur boa (a long ornamental scarf of either fur or feathers) which would drag upon the floor. Her lips always moved as though she were talking to herself and her body would exhibit a rocking motion. Over time she became melancholy gradually becoming insane, at times her tall slender figure could be seen through the windows gliding about the house. The towns people sympathized with Joe and his wife Mary Ann, but the two became even more reclusive as time went on.

At the rear of the house was a combination wood shed and workshop with a long work bench along one wall. On the outer wall above the bench was a ladder which went up into the garret (attic) where Mary Ann would often go, sometimes spending a day or two there before coming back down.

On the morning of March 28, 1848, news rapidly spread around town that Mrs. Stroud was dead in the shop. The authorities and the coroner were immediately notified and of course Joe was questioned. Joe gave the opinion that she must have tried to climb the ladder, fell, and struck her head on a large spike that he had driven into the wall for his own use, for there was a hole in her head and a pool of blood on the floor. Some rumors spread around town of murder, fueled by testimony of a young boy, Ashel Lynde, who said that as he walked by the house on his way home the night before, had heard screams coming from the Stroud home. All of the local children were paralyzed with fear and

dared not be left alone after dark.

Upon questioning Stroud about his wife's death, he gave this account. "On Monday evening I sold a piece of meat from my cellar and my wife became offended. She then took a piece of bread and passed from the house across the piazza and into a shop that opens from it." Mr. Stroud then stated that during the evening he found the shop door fastened, so he retired for the night, leaving her to come in at her leisure as she had done before, since this night was only moderately cold. He said that if he had forced her to stay in the house that she would abscond at the first opportunity.

At six o'clock the next morning, March 28, 1848, Joe Stroud was seen raising a shop window with a lever. He soon notified a neighbor that his wife was dead, assuming that she had fallen in an attempt to climb the ladder into the shop chamber. When the investigation was commenced, two things were suspicious. One was the sleeve of her dress appeared to be torn as if the body had been dragged across the floor. The other evidence was blood which was too far from the body to have splashed that far. Joe explained that he had skinned an animal the day before and had not wiped up all of the blood found near the kitchen door.

Appearing in a local newspaper was this account of the autopsy. "The autopsia done by Drs. Mead, Shumway, Barton, Amor and Manley showed a contused wound of the scalp and pericranium and fracture of the occipital bone extending downward and outward to the mastoid portion of the temporal bone, where an effusion of blood gave the appearance of a second injury, but this was somewhat doubtful." The doctors also

found a considerable effusion of blood on the brain, a result of the injury. There were chronic changes of the brain, heart, etc., but they had no influence on the death.

After the inquest on the body, Joe Stroud was allowed to remain free. Very shortly, Sheriff Page discovered that Joe had left for parts unknown. The sheriff pursued Stroud immediately and finally found him in Jefferson County, New York and then brought him back to Essex County where he was examined and placed in the Essex County jail to await trial.

The trial of Joseph Stroud was postponed until the October term by Judge Daniel Cady. The local newspapers stated that this trial promised to be the most interesting as it is the most important criminal trial that has ever been held in the county.

Joseph Stroud's murder trial was held in Elizabethtown Court on October 3, 1848. The jury came back with their decision-- eight returned a verdict of murder, two of murder by hands unknown, and one of death from the fall. Even though Joe was not convicted, he was banished from his own State by the Judge of Advice. Joe left town with meager provisions finding his way to Ohio where he contracted cholera, died and was buried by strangers.

Mary Ann Stroud is buried in Memorial Cemetery next to Joe's brother Luther who had died at age twenty two. Mary Ann's age is unknown.