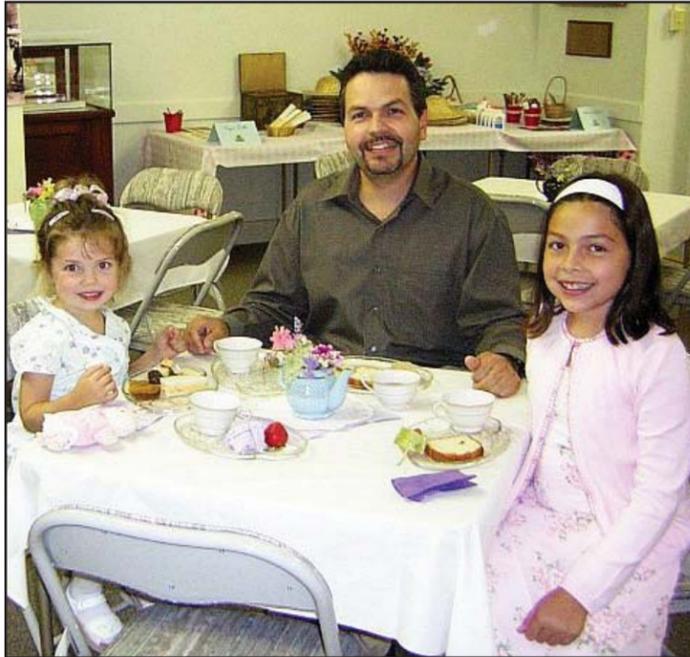


Victorian Tea of August 27



Jim Schermerhorn and his daughters, Alexandra and Sophia enjoy their cake and tea.



Anneke Bull and Sylvie Briber peek at Samantha Percy, 5, and the hat she made.



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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November-December 2006

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A Preservation Reunion

Do places retain the memory of their occupants? Could floors and walls and ceilings indeed tell us
What they had heard and seen and felt about the people who once
Trode them, leaned on them for support, stared up at them in joy or dismay?

Could we resurrect them all? The inhabitants of this place?
Ignoring the strictures of time, the melancholy restraints of death,
Could we just invite them to join us for a party here,
Where, over the span of two centuries or more, they all once lived?
Glen and Bradt, Duncan, Schuyler, Vrooman, Stanford. What would we talk about?

Ah, Mr. John Duncan, you knew both Amherst and Johnson?
Did they get along? And Richard Duncan—How do you feel, now that the Revolution is over?
Did you and Lawrence Vrooman know each other as boys?
What a time you both went through, you on the King's side, he on the American.
Mr. Harmanus Schuyler—What a beautiful house you built here. How were you related to Philip Schuyler?
I'm sure you remember the duel. Is Elizabeth Hamilton your relative? How did she get along?
How painful. Both her husband and her son killed in duels.

John I. Vrooman—Is it true? Your daughters were married here?
Why did you decide to sell to Stanford? Don't tell me – I think I know.
And Senator Charles Stanford. My goodness. Do you recognize the place? Can you tell us about the changes you made in it?
You came so close to making this the Governor's mansion! Imagine, Leland on the West Coast and you here in the east.
That would have been something!

Does everyone know everyone else here? Let me introduce you. Thank you for coming.
Can you tell us who we were? Can you help us to remember?
Teach us to cherish what is beautiful and good,
And to avoid the pitfalls of misusing what you left us.

— Frank Taormina, January 2, 2005



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32 Washington Avenue
Schenectady, New York 12305

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MONDAY-FRIDAY 1-5
SATURDAY 10-4

LIBRARY
MONDAY-FRIDAY 1-5
SATURDAY 9-12

MABEE FARM
CLOSED UNTIL SPRING

Letter from the President



A Cloud Over the Ingersoll

Dissemination of historical information and sponsoring events with a historical overtone is the relatively easier part of the Society's mission. The really hard part is that of historic preservation. Schenectady's record in this regard is a mixed one. Two notable successes are Proctor's, all of which and more has been saved except for its apostrophe, and the Van Curler Hotel, which is now Schenectady County Community College. Two miserable failures are the Steinmetz mansion, reduced to a passive park with a modest monument, and our majestic Union Station, replaced by a black box of absolutely no architectural merit.

The Society played no financial role in any of these four examples because saving or even attempting to save large structures is inordinately expensive for a not-for-profit cultural institution. A fifth example of success that I could have given is the Mabee Farm, but it is ours only through the extraordinary good fortune of it having been given to us. Even the restorations that followed stemmed primarily from the Franchere donations that came with it.

Now we are facing the possible, if not probable, loss of the historic Stanford-Ingersoll home at the apex of Balltown Road and State Street in Niskayuna. The sadness of the prospect is poignantly captured in Frank Taormina's prose poem on the cover. See also the excellent profile of the home's most distinguished owner, Charles Stanford—brother of Leland—in the centerfold. This was researched and written by SCHS Trustee Garrett Hermanson. My name is on that piece too only because Gary asked that it be; my only role was a Procuetean abridgement of his longer essay and the addition of a tidbit here and there.



Future Site of Walgreens?



Will the Colors Fade Forever?

So, what can be done? One remaining impediment to replacement of the Stanford home and its more than ten acres of green space with, among other things, a Walgreens on State Street right next to a CVS in Schenectady, is Ingersoll's application for a Special Use Permit that will allow more than one structure on the property. Ingersoll, on behalf of Highbridge Development, which wants to buy the site for \$3.5 million, has the legal right to ask for that Permit. But, they do not have a legal right to demand that it be granted. So, members, especially the third of you from Niskayuna, please watch for the announcement of the November public hearing and pack the meeting room. Remind your Board members that to vote is to choose. Which do they think their constituents would rather have, preservation of the historic Stanford Home and its 12 beautifully landscaped acres, or a new 3-lane cut through to State Street and yet another humungous drug store?

Ed Reilly

The 47th Annual Stockade Walkabout and Waterfront Faire



Frank Taormina as Governor Yates

Over 1,000 visitors attended this event that took place on a sunny day, Saturday, September 30th in crisp autumn weather. People lined up early in front of the Schenectady County Historical Society to buy tickets and get their Stockade maps showing the location of homes and buildings open for visits. There is something very appealing about the once a year opportunity to see inside some of the distinctive homes and public places in this historic area of the city. Historical Society's Trustee Frank Taormina was in costume as Governor Yates and circulated throughout the area. Another Trustee, Mary Liebers, was in costume as Dora Jackson as she welcomed people at the Society's open house where light refreshment was offered as well as tours of the Society's building. The Mabee Farm had one of its bateau plying the Mohawk in full view of the Waterfront Faire visitors.



THE BUILDING OF THE ONRUST



Photo: Ann Aronson Photography

Major progress has been made on the *Onrust*. The pole barn to house the replica 1614 ship was quickly erected with the help of a wonderful group of volunteers. The keel has been laid, the stem and stern have been raised, the floor timbers will be laid, and planks will be attached.



l-r: Gerald de Weerdt, Master Shipwright and Architect of the *Onrust* and Howard Mittleman, Shipwright.

SAMUEL FULLER

architect and Mohawk Valley legend

November 11th 1:30 pm refreshments; 2:00 pm program

Samuel Fuller, a descendant from the Mayflower settlers, arrived in Schenectady during the French and Indian War in 1758. He was employed in the King's service in Schenectady and in surrounding areas. In 1761 he settled in Schenectady until his death just prior to the American Revolution. During the period of 1761-1766 Samuel Fuller designed and built a mansion that was located on 28 acres of land conveyed by the Dutch Church of Schenectady to the local merchant, John Duncan, and was referred to as the "Hermitage." The Hermitage eventually burned down and was replaced by a mansion commissioned by Harmanus Schuyler around 1818. Schuyler was an Albany surveyor and he called his property "Locust Grove." This property is now known as the Ingersoll Memorial Home at the corner of Balltown Road and State Street. Samuel Fuller's impact is still visible today in the homes, buildings, and churches that have survived including St. George's Episcopal Church in the Stockade section of Schenectady.

Join us at the Schenectady County Historical Society on November 11th to hear architectural historian Walter Richard Wheeler discuss the legacy of Samuel Fuller and to learn more about Fuller's architectural achievements, the world he lived in, and the man himself.

Celebrate the Holidays with the Schenectady County Historical Society!

"Thomas Nast: Creating Christmas" December 1st through January 31st

Thomas Nast's portrayal of Santa Claus has become our universal image of the symbol of Christmas. Almost single-handedly, Thomas Nast created the modern image of how we visualize Santa Claus. Nast created illustrations for Harper's Weekly throughout the 1860s and 1870s. His drawings documented everything from the Civil War to the infamous "Boss" Tweed. His images of Christmas had the greater effect on the American public. Celebrate this artist's vision with the Schenectady County Historical Society's holiday exhibit, which will focus on both his holiday images as well as his political drawings.



***The Forgotten Holidays* with Peter G. Rose
December 9th 1:30 pm; refreshments 2:00 pm program**

Back by popular demand! Ms. Peter Rose will present a second program at SCHS thanks to a grant from the New York Council for the Humanities. Please make reservations early because space is limited and this program will sell out. This lecture explains the practices brought here in the 17th century by Dutch settlers - the celebration of Christmas and Pinkster. Slides illustrating the celebration of these festive occasions are part of the lecture. Along with this informative lecture, participants will be invited to enjoy some of the bakery items associated with the holidays discussed. A free will donation would be appreciated.

***Dora's Home by Candlelight*
December 13th 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm**

Enjoy an evening of holiday fun as the Schenectady County Historical Society is transformed by the Hugh Platt Garden Club into a Victorian holiday wonderland. View the home of Mrs. Dora Mumford Jackson in its holiday finery with fresh greens, Christmas trees, and period toys. The building will be open for evening tours with guides stationed throughout the building to answer questions. Make a Victorian ornament to bring home. Mrs. Jackson herself may attend and holiday treats will be available in the dining room!

Efner Center – what's new

For November and December our request is simple: The Efner History Center is looking for the volunteers. We need volunteers to work on projects such as identification of photos, photo collection processing, photo-copying, filing, boxing documents, and setting up folders for documents, etc. Adult volunteers can come in any time between 9:00am -1:00pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday to learn more about the projects we have. We also welcome interested History Club and National Honor Society history buffs, and other high school students recommended by their teachers. We can work out an afternoon for volunteer archive work that suits your schedule. Contact Mrs. Seacord at 382-5088 or HsCenter@nycap.rr.com.

Mabee Farm news notes:

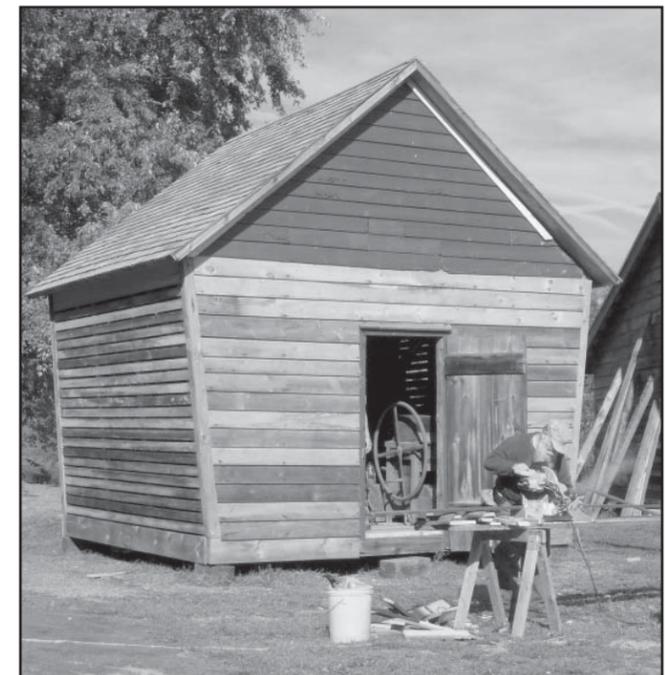
RESEARCH ON ENSLAVED PEOPLE

We recently received a copy of a "30 dollar reward" dated June 6th, 1798 for a runaway slave named Cato from Mary Liz and Paul Stewart from the Underground Railroad Project in Albany. This document was remarkable because it described Cato so well. It even said "he has a curious way of showing the whites of his eyes, especially when things do not suit him." It described him as 25 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, remarkably stout built, very thick lips." It goes on to say that he "speaks English and low Dutch ...had on when he ran away a cotton check shirt, cotton vest nearly white, jean overalls, blue cloth short coat, black castor hat..." Cato belonged to Simon and Peter Mabee who lived in Montgomery County in 1798. We were able to match it up with one of our own Mabee Farm documents. Apparently, Cato was found and sold by Simon and Peter Mabee to Jacob Mabee who lived at the Mabee Farm in 1800.

We are presently doing research to expand our program on enslaved peoples. If anyone has documentation on particular enslaved people or slavery in general in Schenectady County, particularly in Rotterdam Junction or at the Mabee Farm Historic Site please call Pat Barrot at (518) 887-5073.

CORN CRIB

The corn crib is almost completed. Volunteers have been feverishly working on reconstructing the corn crib as winter approaches. Thanks to all who helped.



Charlie Long works on siding for the corn crib in October.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The Farm's acclaimed school program attracted 45 schools from far and wide. The visiting children, many of whom had never been outside a city, were able to learn about broom making, blacksmithing, how wool comes from a sheep and how it is spun, how to churn butter, about colonial life in New York State, and other programs. The Gift Shop, whose sales were the highest to date, was a popular place with old-time toys complete with instructions and history. The school schedule is already filling up for Spring 2007.



Richard Lewis talks to students about colonial farm life.

THANKS

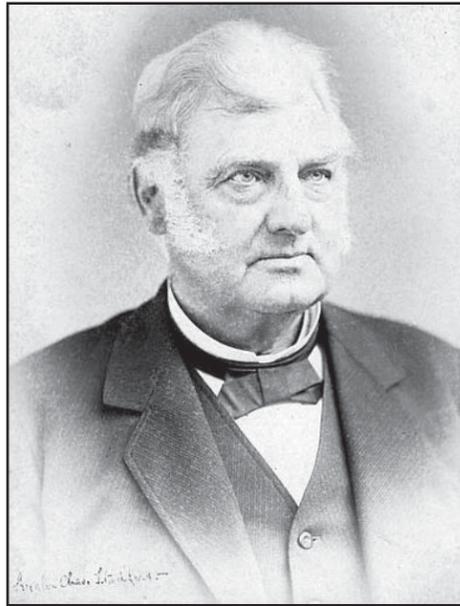
A big "thank you" to the Mabee Farm Committee members and volunteers for a fantastic 2006. You are all wonderful to work with and I feel privileged to be a part of such a great group of people. Now, on to 2007! See you next year!

Pat Barrot

See page 7 for more photos depicting the building of the *Onrust*.

Charles Stanford (1819 - 1885) by Garrett Hermanson and Ed Reilly

Charles Stanford died quietly at the age of 66 at his Locust Grove home in Niskayuna, New York, on the afternoon of August 24, 1885. The funeral was held at his home, now part of the Ingersoll Memorial Home across from Mohawk Commons in Niskayuna (see cover). At the time of his death, Schenectady city historians



wrote: "much of the enterprise in Schenectady owes its existence to him." During his lifetime, he was a local Assemblyman and State Senator, a successful businessman, a newspaper publisher, an excavating contractor, a railroad builder, a thoroughbred horse breeder, and a California merchant.

Charles's older brother Leland is certainly the better known Stanford brother nationally, but it is Charles who lived here among us and whose saga was such an integral part of Schenectady's 19th century history.

Charles's grandparents, Lyman and Elizabeth Roberts, came from Massachusetts in 1799 and settled in the hamlet of Lishakill, NY. The Stanfords leased a 179-acre farm from Lt. Governor Stephen Van Rensselaer III on the old Albany-Schenectady turnpike. Lyman Stanford helped build the new turnpike as it crossed through the family farm. The Historical Society owns two of the turnpike's original markers. Lyman also operated an inn on the new turnpike soon after it was built in 1802.

Charles was born on April 26, 1819, on his grandparents' farm in Lishakill, just three miles down the turnpike from his later home at Locust Grove in Niskayuna. Charles was the second oldest son born to Josiah and Elizabeth Phillips Stanford. His brothers with their years of birth were Josiah, Jr. (1817), Asa Phillips (1821), Leland (1824), DeWitt Clinton (1826), Jerome Bonaparte (1829), and Thomas Welton (1832).

Charles's grandfather, Lyman, died on December 16, 1828, at the age of fifty-five. Records indicate that some time after his grandfather's death, Charles's father leased a 171-acre farm on Consaul Road near present Sunflower Lane in the Lishakill area. Josiah sold the Consaul Road farm in 1833 and the Stanfords may have moved back to the grandmother's farm, which she sold in 1837.

In 1836, when Charles was 17, his parents leased a 322-acre farm about four miles east of his grandmother's Lishakill farm on the Albany-Schenectady turnpike (now Central Avenue), from Stephen Van Rensselaer III. His parents' new farm in what is now Colonie was called "Elm Grove" and was located in the present area of Rössleville in the Town of Colonie along Central Avenue between North Elmhurst Street and Vatrano Road.

After the death of Stephen Van Rensselaer III in 1839, most of his property on the west side of the Hudson was inherited by his son, Stephen Van Rensselaer IV, and his wife Harriet. In 1840, Charles's parents purchased Elm Grove from the Van Rensselaers and the Stanfords converted the main house into the Elm Grove Hotel.

Between 1844 and 1847, Charles worked as an excavation contractor in Albany. One of his biggest contracts was to fill the Rutten Kill, a creek which flowed from present Washington Park in Albany to the Hudson River. At one time, he employed 250 men and 60 teams of oxen to fill its ravine.

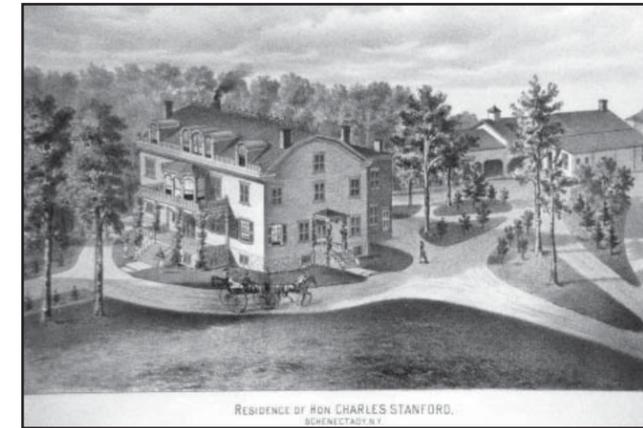
Charles married Jane Eliza Page on April 25, 1847. They had eight children, Winfield Scott (1847), Welton (1849), Nora (1855), Charles E. (1857), Josiah (1858), Jennie (1860), and twins Maude and Victor (1863). In 1850 he went to California with his brother, DeWitt, to work with their brother Josiah at his store on Mormon Island, now at the bottom of Folsom Lake. Not long after arriving at Mormon Island, Charles and Josiah opened a second store in Sacramento. In October of 1851, Charles returned home with his substantial earnings.

In March of 1852, Charles returned to California and worked with his brothers at Mormon Island. A few months later, he joined Josiah and Phil as proprietors of the new *Stanford Brothers* store in Sacramento. As operations continued to grow, Charles again returned to Albany County where he became the purchasing agent for *Stanford Brothers* and bought locally manufactured goods and shipped them to his brothers to sell.

After Charles's father died in 1862, Charles and Jane moved from their home in Schenectady to the Locust Grove estate in Niskayuna that his parents had bought three years earlier from Town Supervisor John I. Vrooman. In 1865, Charles's mother Elizabeth transferred the estate to her children. Charles and Jane eventually bought out his siblings' interests in the property and obtained sole ownership.

The stately brick home known as Locust Grove was built in 1814 by Harmanus P. Schuyler, the great grandson of Pieter Schuyler, the first mayor of Albany. Harmanus Schuyler was also a former Albany County sheriff (1800) and a Niskayuna Town Supervisor (1817-1821). The Schuyler home was the second built on what was already a very historic site. A farmhouse called the *Hermitage* was built there in 1760 by John Duncan, the first non-Native American owner of the property, but it burned down some thirty years later. After Schuyler and up to 1859, the home had several owners, including Lemuel Hand and Lawrence Vrooman, who had been Niskayuna's first Supervisor in 1809. Fifty years later, in March of 1859, Charles and Leland Stanford's parents purchased the three-story federal-style farm house with

over 200 acres of land from another Vrooman, John, the Town's 31st Supervisor, and called it *Locust Grove*. The house and its remaining 12 acres of property in Niskayuna is located at the intersection of State Street and Balltown Road.



After Charles's father died in April of 1862, his widow, Elizabeth, went to live with Leland and Jane in Sacramento. In December of 1879, Charles's brother Leland and his 12-year-old son Leland, Jr., visited Charles and Jane at Locust Grove. Leland Jr. died from yellow fever in March 1884, only a few weeks short of his 16th birthday, and in 1887 his parents established the Leland Stanford Junior University, now just Stanford University, in his honor.

While living at Locust Grove, Charles made many improvements to the magnificent estate. He built stables for his trotting horses and a racetrack on the east side of Balltown Road, now the site of Mohawk Commons. At one time, he had as many as 175 thoroughbred trotting horses quartered there. Locust Grove was also known as "Stanford Heights" by locals because of its prominent location at the crest of a small hill, and that name is still used to describe the area and the fire department that serves it.

In the ensuing years, Charles accumulated a great deal of wealth from business and real estate investments in Schenectady and Albany. In 1864 he was elected to the New York State Assembly and between 1866 and 1869 he served two terms in the New York State Senate. In 1865 he founded the *Schenectady Union* newspaper and was its publisher for many years. Later Charles bought the *Schenectady Evening Star* and merged the two newspapers into one, the *Schenectady Union-Star*. He remained the publisher of the *Union-Star* until he sold it in 1883.

In 1869 Charles reorganized the Schenectady Water Company and became its president. He was also president of the Schenectady Knitting Mill and the local gas company. Charles was also a railroad builder in western Massachusetts around Pittsfield and North Adams. He also worked on a railroad on the western side of the Hudson River.

In 1882 Walter McQueen, a locomotive designer who had left the Schenectady Locomotive Works, joined Charles and several other Schenectadians to form a rival locomotive company. They acquired eight acres of land and built two large buildings in Schenectady to be used for the newly formed McQueen Locomotive Works. When Charles died in 1885, McQueen

decided to return to the Schenectady Locomotive Works and the new buildings were never equipped for production. The buildings were sold to the Edison Electric Company in 1886, which later became the General Electric Company.

In 1861, Leland became governor of California and served one two-year term. Also in the same year, he became president of the Central Pacific Railroad and became a co-builder of the first transcontinental railroad. The Golden Spike Ceremony at Promontory Summit, Utah Territory, on May 10, 1869, celebrated the union of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads. Leland and others symbolically drove the final spike on that historic occasion.

In the late 1800s, Leland owned the largest winery in the world at Vina, California. Leland also was the world's foremost trotting horse breeder and owned over 900 thoroughbred horses at one time, some of them establishing world records in racing. In 1878 Leland set up a series of cameras designed by Central Pacific Railroad engineers and noted photographer Eadweard Muybridge to take a sequence of photographs to prove to doubters that a horse in a fast trotting gate really does have all four feet off the ground at one time. Leland lived until 1893, serving the last eight years of his life as a U.S. senator from California.

Sometime after Charles's death in 1885, his son, Welton, inherited the Locust Grove estate. Welton, and his wife Cathrine, continued to live in the Schenectady area for many years. The Welton Stanfords maintained Locust Grove until Welton's death in 1922. Cathrine, sold the remainder of the Locust Grove estate in 1923 to the Ingersoll Memorial trustees.

Welton and Cathrine had three children, Welton (1878-1947), Grant Lansing (1883-1956), and Lorraine (1888-1981, married to Glen Huntsberger). Welton and Cathrine's son, Grant, was a graduate of Albany Law School (1907) and practiced law in Schenectady. Grant and his wife, Ethel (1886-Sept. 12, 1950), resided in the Schenectady area for most of their lives and also had homes at Pacific Grove, California and at Caroga Lake in the Adirondacks.

Charles Stanford was interred in the Stanford Mausoleum at Albany Rural Cemetery with his wife, Jane Page Stanford, and four of their children, Winfield, Charles E., Josiah and Victor. Leland's parents, Josiah and Elizabeth, were also interred at the Stanford mausoleum at Albany Rural Cemetery. Welton and Cathrine, who died in 1926, were interred at the Stanford Mausoleum at Vale Cemetery in Schenectady with their son, Grant, and his wife Ethel.

In all of Schenectady County, only the Society's Mabee Farm can match the rich centuries-old history of Locust Grove and the Duncans, Vroomans, Yates, Schuylers, Lansings, and Stanfords who lived there.

References: *The Governor — The Life and Legacy of Leland Stanford* by Norman E. Tutorow, Spokane, Washington: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2004