



Newsletter

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Gansevoort Melville



Herman Melville

The Melville Brothers in Schenectady

*By
Neil B. Yetwin*

The name of Herman Melville has always evoked images of New England whalers plying the South Seas, of desperate mutinies aboard British naval vessels, and of the epic pursuit of an elusive white whale. Yet Melville's life prior to his attaining an honored place in American letters was anything but adventurous, marked as it was more by personal loss and financial instability than by any literary success. It was during those uncertain early years that the future author of Moby Dick and his lesser-known elder brother Gansevoort both had brief associations with the city of Schenectady.

Herman Melville was born in New York City in 1819 to Allan and Maria Melville, both of whom came from prominent families. When Allan Melville's import concern failed, the family was forced to move to a rented house in Albany, where he tried to establish a cap and fur business. In 1831 Herman and Gansevoort were enrolled at Albany Academy until their father died a year later. Forced to leave school, the brothers tried to maintain the family business until their uncle Peter Gansevoort intervened and secured Herman a position as a clerk at Albany's New York State Bank. The 13-year-old worked six days a week filing, copying, and running errands for \$150 a year.

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President's Letter

Fall: the change of seasons is here! With it comes cool temperatures and crisp, dry air, a welcome relief from the sweltering humidity and extreme temperatures of the summer. At summer's end we sadly said our goodbyes to our wonderful summer interns, Hannah Miller and Nick Tarricone, and wished them well!

Before summer departed we welcomed a new employee, Audrey Humphrey. Audrey received her Bachelor of Arts degree in History this past year from Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA. She is our new Visitor's Services Assistant at Mabee Farm, working on Saturdays with the collections and providing tours. Welcome Audrey, and welcome to three fabulous fall events here at the Schenectady County Historical Society!

The Candlelight Tours of the Stockade District are offered on the Friday evenings of the 14th, 21st, and 28th of October. Get your tickets soon as last year's tours were a sell-out! Sunday, October 16th, is the free Fall Foliage Festival, always a crowd pleaser with families, brought to you in partnership with Schenectady County. So much to see and do! Don't miss the highlight of the weekend: the opening of a new exhibit at the George E. Franchere Center at the Mabee Farm. This new exhibit features the Mohawk River. Come and learn about the powers that formed the river, how the river has shaped the lives of the people who have lived along it, and the impact people have had on the river.

Finally, the grand finale of our three fabulous fall events: the Festival of Trees, which starts on December 3rd. Come celebrate the season of light with us at 32 Washington Avenue. Feel the serenity that these beautifully decorated trees bring, as you wander through both the Schenectady Museum and the YWCA. Created and decorated by families, community organizations, and businesses of Schenectady County, they are a source of pleasure and joy for us all. In fact, sponsor a tree yourself, easily done by contacting us at exhibits@schenectadyhistorical.org or by calling 374-0263.

Marianne



Moving? Snowbird? Don't Miss An Issue Of Our Newsletter!

Please contact Mary Treanor at 518-374-0263 Ext 5 or office@schenectadyhistorical.org to update your address.

Donations to the Historical Society & Mabee Farm June 2016 – August 2016

Edgar Alderson	Diane Fisher	Stockade Book Group
David & Marianne Blanchard	L. Arlene Frederick	(in memory of Kathryn Johnson)
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Thank you for your continued support of the Society

Your generous gifts enable the Schenectady County Historical Society to tell the story of Schenectady through Preservation and development of our historic sites and to educate the next generation about our history and its place in the growth of America.

As a member and supporter, you can now take advantage of a convenient and meaningful way to make a monthly contribution. Automatic donations by credit card or PayPal provide the Society with a regular stream of income and the flexibility to adjust to sudden economic changes without the loss of programs. And for some of us, it is easier to make small, monthly gifts rather than larger, one time gifts. Will you consider joining our monthly giving program at whatever level you are comfortable with?

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**Mail to: Schenectady County Historical Society, 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305
OR call 518-374-0263 Ext 5.**

Change



Fall seems to be a season all about change. The temperature begins to drop, as do the leaves, and students head back to school. I still itch to buy new notebooks, even though it has been a few years since I had to report to a classroom.

This year, we are thinking a lot about change here at SCHS. As you read in our last issue, we are meeting with our interpretive committee to discuss the Mabee Farm. We look forward to the changes those conversations will bring about as we grow as an organization.

Are you wondering how to change iron into any shape you want using only air and heat? Sign up for our blacksmithing workshops and find out! How about changing reeds into a basket using water and your bare hands? We have workshops for that too! Do you want to see how your family has changed over generations? Our research library is a great place to dig into your history, and be sure you check out the Genealogy Day at the end of October. At our Fall Foliage Festival, we'll gather at the Mabee Farm to celebrate the changing of the season with fun and activities for the entire family.

That day, October 16, we will also open our new exhibit, "Changing Waters: The Story of the Mohawk River." The exhibit centers on how the river impacts our lives, and at the same time how we make changes to the river.

At the Historical Society, we often joke that the changes we make happen at a glacial pace but compared to the actual glaciers that helped shape the valley, we are moving at lightning speed. Hop on board and don't miss out!

See you soon,

Jenna Peterson Riley, Educator



Candlelight Walking Tours: Oct. 14, 21, 28

Genealogy Day

Saturday, October 22, 2016

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.



At the
Schenectady County Historical Society
32 Washington Avenue
Schenectady, NY 12305

Admission - \$5.00; Free for SCHS members

New Materials in the Library

DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS:

Stockade Art Show Collection. **Gift of Charles Gelarden.**

Whitmyer Broom Company Records. **Gift of Patricia Haffner**

Frank Sharpe Collection. **Gift of Paul Moore.**

BOOKS:

American Women in the Revolutionary Era 1760-1790: A History Through Bibliography, Volumes 1, 2, and 3. **Gift of the Schenectada Chapter of the New York State Daughters of the American Revolution.**

BLOG POSTS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED:

The Grems-Doolittle Library Collections Blog (<http://www.gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com/>) is a great resource for learning more about Schenectady County's rich history. Here are a few of the posts from the past couple months that you might have missed.

- ***Louis Kortmann in the Wild and Woolly Country of Cuba*, by librarian Mike Maloney – June 30, 2016**
This blog post follows the story of Louis Kortmann from Sackets Harbor to Santiago, Cuba during the Spanish-American War. Kortmann's son, Louis Kortmann Jr., would go on to become the president of the Schenectady Trust Company.
- ***Lewi Tonks: Physics with a Side of Social Justice*, by librarian Mike Maloney – July 29, 2016**
Lewi Tonks was a brilliant physicist at General Electric, but he was also involved with the Schenectady Commission on Human Rights during the height of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This post gives a glimpse of some of the struggles African-Americans faced in Schenectady during this time period.
- ***Elizabeth V. Glen, The Little Woman*, by library volunteer Gail Denisoff – August 16, 2016**
While transcribing letters from the Glen Family Letter Collection, library volunteer Gail Denisoff found a humorous letter to Henry Glen from his wife Elizabeth. The letter shows off Elizabeth's quick wit and her understanding of Henry's often unfavorable relationship with politics.

Grems-Doolittle Library and Archives celebrate its 25th Anniversary!



Over the years, our library collections have grown and grown and grown and they keep growing. By the early 1980s our original library, located in one of the rooms of our current museum, was packed to the brim. Eventually, our Library and Archives Committee came to the decision that something needed to be done about the lack of space in the library and the idea for a completely new facility began to gain some traction by late 1982.

By 1985, the fund drive for the library was in full swing and by mid-1987 the fundraising campaign was complete! With the fundraising finished, the historical society approved the building of the library. The planning and fundraising was tough and time-consuming work and could not have been done without trustees Frank Taormina, Mandalay Grems, Jim Pontius, John Hancock, Ruth Anne Evans, and the many others who worked on getting our library up and running.

With the very hard work of various trustees, staff, and volunteers, the Grems-Doolittle Library and Archives officially opened on October 12, 1991. Over the years, the library has hosted many programs and has seen volunteers, trustees, and staff members come and go.

We will be appreciating all those who contributed to the library's ongoing success on November 19, 2016 with a reception at 32 Washington from 2-4pm.

EXHIBITS and PROGRAMS

For more information or to learn more about other upcoming exhibits and programs, please check our website, schenectadyhistorical.org.

On Exhibit at 32 Washington Avenue

Opening December 3, 2016:
10th Annual Festival of Trees

Opening January 14, 2017
The First World War in Schenectady

Through November 2016:
Vote Here! Vote Now!

Ongoing:
Boomtown: Immigration, Technology, and Urban Schenectady

Hops & Hogsheads: Beer from Colonial to Craft Brew

On Exhibit at Franchere Education Center

Opening October 16, 2016:
Changing Waters: The Story of the Mohawk River
How has the river that stretches from one end of our county to the other changed our lives, and how have we influenced the river over the centuries? You might be surprised to find out just how big of an impact it has on your life!

Program Calendar

Saturday, October 1 – 2 PM
Schenectady Socialism and Mayor George Lunn with Bill Buell

@ 32 Washington Ave; \$5, free for SCHS Members
Did you know Schenectady has a legacy of socialism? Buell will discuss how Mayor George Lunn's socialist politics affected his career, and the growing city of Schenectady in the early 1900s.

Thursday, October 6 – 7 PM
Politics & Patriots
a concert with Lost Radio Rounders

@ Mabee Farm; \$5, free for SCHS Members
A musical journey from George Washington to F.D.R. that still reminds us that the more things change, the more they stay the same. After all, before there were attack ads, there were attack songs!

Friday, October 14 – 7 PM
Howlin' at the Moon Concert with 13 Feet of Bluegrass & Dog House Carpenters
@ Mabee Farm; \$5
October's full moon is the only night in the month when the moon is in the sky all night! Celebrate with us as we sing along to bluegrass and folk favorites and originals!

Fridays, October 14, 21, & 28 – 7 & 7:30 PM

Candlelight Tours
@ 32 Washington Ave; \$12, pre-registration required
Explore the historic Stockade after dark and discover the neighborhood's haunting past!

Sunday, October 16 – 11 AM - 4 PM

Fall Foliage Festival
@ Mabee Farm; FREE!
Presented with Schenectady County: A celebration of all things fall! Activities for kids, farmers' market, hayrides, pony rides, live birds of prey, petting zoo, scarecrow stuffing, pumpkin painting, historic exhibitions, live music all day, food, drinks, and much more!

Wednesday, October 19 – 11 AM

Mangia! Tour & Tastings of Italian Schenectady
@ N Jay St, Sch'dy; \$12, pre-registration requested
We're exploring all things Italian on our new heritage tour and tasting! Join us for a guided walk through Schenectady's Little Italy as we discover how Italian immigrants have left cultural and culinary marks on our community. Included in the tour are tastings at local eateries.

Saturday, October 22 – 9 AM - 4 PM

Genealogy Day
@ 32 Washington Ave; \$5, free for SCHS members
Discover where and how to find information on family history, share stories with other researchers, and learn how to access the resources in our Grems-Doolittle Library.

Sunday, October 23 – 9 AM - 5 PM

Workshop: Beginner Blacksmithing
@ Mabee Farm; \$150, pre-registration required
Explore a variety of forging techniques and build your blacksmithing skills.

Wednesday, October 26 - 1:30-3:00

Homeschool Day: Election 1823
@ 32 Washington; \$5, pre-registration required
Explore the exhibit "Vote Here, Vote Now!" & learn about how our democracy happens. Try your hand at creating your own campaign, including your platform, slogan, and logo!

Saturday, October 29 – 2 PM

Election Madness with Mark Mahoney, editor, Daily Gazette
@ 32 Washington; \$5, free for SCHS members
We'll dig into election madness with Mark Mahoney, and discuss the impact of our opinions on local and national elections.

Saturday, October 29 – 8:30 AM - 5:30 PM

Basketweaving Workshop: Wine Carrier

@ Mabee Farm; \$85 + \$25 materials fee, pre-registration required

Weave your own double wine bottle carrier, perfect for trips to the store, or as a gift.

Sunday, October 30 – 9 AM - 5 PM

Workshop: Intermediate Blacksmithing

@ Mabee Farm; \$150, pre-registration required

Learn beginning welding and decorative techniques. Take home your own project.

Saturday, November 5 – 2 PM

Schenectady's Struggle for Democracy: 1684 – 1798 with John Gearing

@ Mabee Farm; \$5, free for SCHS members

Decades of political intrigue. Drawn-out lawsuits. Citizens' voices going unheard. Lawyer and historian John Gearing will take us through the tumultuous road to Schenectady's democracy.

Monday, November 7 – 6 PM - 8 PM

Presidential Trivia Night

@ 32 Washington; \$5, free for SCHS members

Think you know Lincoln? Mad about Madison? Grab your team, BYOB, and join us for refreshments as we compete in presidential trivia!

Saturday, November 12 – 8 AM - 8:30 PM

SCHS Bus Trip to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

\$95, pre-registration required

Get lost in the MFA's extensive galleries, and explore everything from Impressionist paintings and Egyptian mummies to contemporary masterpieces and the best of American art and artifacts. The MFA has it all!

Saturday, November 12 – 8:30 AM - 5:30 PM

Basketweaving Workshop: Two Pie Basket

@ Mabee Farm; \$85 + \$35 materials fee, pre-registration required

It may be called a Two Pie Basket, but this large market basket is also great for holding craft projects or magazines!

Wednesday, November 16 – 1:30-3:00

Homeschool Day: Climbing Your Family Tree

@ 32 Washington; \$5, pre-registration required

Jumpstart your family genealogy and learn the basics of preserving your family history.

Saturday, November 19 – 2 PM

Grems-Doolittle Library's 25th Anniversary!

@ 32 Washington; Free!

Join us to celebrate the library's 25th anniversary with a reception and talk by Frank Taormina along with an exhibit of items from our archives. Refreshments will be served!

Saturday, November 19 – 8:30 AM - 5:30 PM

Basketweaving Workshop: Penobscot Tote

@ Mabee Farm; \$85 + \$35 materials fee, pre-registration required

Perfect for trips to the farmers' market, overnight stays, or family picnics!

Saturday, December 3 to Sunday, December 18 – Times TBD

@ 32 Washington; cost TBD

Get into the holiday spirit with the Festival of Trees! We're lighting out galleries with dozens of glittering Christmas trees, decorated by friends, local businesses, and the community!

Wednesday, December 14 - 1:30-3:00

Homeschool Day: Historic Holidays

@ Mabee Farm; \$5, pre-registration required

Take a look back at how Schenectady's residents have celebrated the many December holidays throughout the year, including some of the delicious treats families use to celebrate!



Continued from page 1

Over the next 3 years, Herman proved to be such a reliable employee that he and 15-year-old fellow-clerk Frederick Leake were entrusted to go to Schenectady and conduct business with the newly-chartered Schenectady Savings Bank at 29 State Street. Unfortunately, Herman neglected to inform his family about the trip; 18-year-old Gansevoort, always protective of his younger brother, learned about the odyssey after the fact and became so concerned that he borrowed a horse and rode to Schenectady to locate him. Gansevoort had good reason to worry. The teenagers had taken the “De Witt Clinton,” the first train to run in New York State. Its 6 open cars were simply refitted stagecoaches in which 3 riders sat inside and 2 sat in “rumble seats” on the roof. Each passenger was given an umbrella which afforded little protection from the locomotive’s black smoke and burning embers; sometimes the metal strips fastened to the crude wooden rails separated and broke through the cars’ floors, maiming or even killing passengers. On March 7, 1834, Gansevoort made this entry in his diary:

“This afternoon at ½ after 3 o’clock started for Schenectady (to see Hiram Haight) on horseback, accompanied by Aly Bradford...I was very much surprised to meet brother Herman in the bar-room at Davis’ in company with Frederick Leake, and at first could not imagine the reason of his being there, but on reflection saw that the bank must have sent them over, on enquiry I found my opinion confirmed – They came over in the afternoon car and were unable to return that eve’g there being no cars.”

Scholars believe that this was Herman Melville’s very first railroad trip.

The “De Witt Clinton” made three daily trips from Albany to Schenectady at 6:00 AM, 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM, and five runs from Schenectady to Albany, the last one departing at 4:00 PM. The two teenagers had taken the 4:00 PM run to Schenectady, apparently unaware that there would be no return until the next day. Hiram Haight operated a hatting business at 105 State Street, and Gansevoort’s diary indicates that he and Haight were acquainted professionally. The “bar-room at Davis” was attached to “Crane & Davis” at 154 State Street, which specialized in “grocery, provisions, liquors & wine.” Harvey Davis, the co-owner, was one of the Schenectady Savings Bank’s trustees, and it is likely he put up the Melville brothers and Leake that night in his home just a few doors down at 166 State Street.

Herman was able to return to Albany Academy in 1835 until the Panic of 1837, forcing the family into final bankruptcy and into another rented house, this time in Lansingburgh. Gansevoort read law while Herman studied surveying at Lansingburgh Academy and taught school near Lenox, Massachusetts until 1841. Gansevoort secured him a position on the whaler “Acushnet,” over the next 3 years Herman deserted 2 whalers, participated in a mutiny, lived among cannibals in French Polynesia, farmed in Tahiti and made his way to Honolulu. There he joined the American Navy until he was discharged, returned to Lansingburgh, and completed the manuscript for his first book, Typee.



Melville house in Lansingburgh, NY

Gansevoort had since become a popular orator, speaking throughout Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio and New York State in support of the expansionist policies of Presidential candidate James K. Polk. He had already appeared at eight rallies in as many days from Buffalo to Utica until finally arriving at Schenectady. On Friday, October 11, 1844, the Schenectady Reflector announced in bold print that “**GANSEVOORT MELVILLE**” who had already “won laurels as an eloquent and powerful speaker” would be addressing a Democratic rally at the Court House on October 17th.

The October 25th Reflector reported that despite the inclement weather, the rally “quite exceeded our expectations.” Judge Alonzo Paige, chairman of the Schenectady County Democratic Committee, introduced Melville, who was “greeted with an enthusiastic and hearty welcome” from the large crowd.

Melville “held captive the minds of his audience” for more than two hours on the political and military necessity of annexing and occupying Texas and Oregon, and warned against England “insidiously attempting to check our territorial expansion.” New York Lt. Governor Daniel Dickinson followed Melville with similar remarks until Judge Platt Potter thanked the speakers “amid tremendous cheers” and adjourned the meeting “with high hopes and in excellent spirits.” When Polk was elected President, Gansevoort was named Secretary of the American Legation in London. It was there that he secured the publication rights for Herman’s Typee, which had been rejected by every American publishing house. Tragically, Gansevoort died in London of cerebral anemia on May 12, 1846, just two months after Typee was published in America. His body was shipped home and interred at Albany Rural Cemetery in Menands.

coming from the ranks of Christian clergymen who were offended by Melville’s respect for indigenous religions and his biting criticisms of missionary activities in the Pacific Islands. Despite the controversy, the Young Men’s Association of Schenectady invited its young author to speak here in the fall of 1846. Melville was reluctant to go on the lecture circuit, though, and declined the invitation.



Herman Melville 1861

Typee was an immediate sensation, with positive reviews and excerpts published in the United States, Europe and Honolulu, as well as local coverage in the Albany Evening Journal and Albany Argus. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman and Margaret Fuller all praised the book in glowing terms, its only detractors



Arrowhead homestead in Pittsfield, MA

By 1850 the Melville family had settled at “Arrowhead” a homestead in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and it was there he completed Moby Dick, which was published in 1851 to mixed reviews. In debt and behind in his mortgage payments, Melville failed to support his family by his writing and left “Arrowhead” to work as a deputy customs inspector in New York City until his death on September 28, 1891. It would take another 30 years before the academics, critics, and reading public came to recognize Moby Dick as a masterpiece in the same league as Homer’s Odyssey and Dante’s Inferno.

It is almost certain that Herman Melville would not have had the literary impact he had without the devotion of his eloquent and unsung brother Gansevoort, who once located the young bank clerk who sought shelter at Crane & Davis’ Schenectady bar-room, and 10 years later so captivated his listeners at the Schenectady County Court House.

Our apologies!



Photograph by Mary Zawacki

Last issue's feature article, "The Mabees, Revisited," by Hannah Miller, Jenna Peterson Riley, Nick Tarricone, and Mary Zawacki was mistakenly cut off before it concluded. Here, please enjoy the last half of the article. Again, we apologize for the editorial error.

Stories like Cato's define this site, and there are many more to tell. There are overlooked pieces in Mabee Farm's history, including the vital Native American influence in Schenectady, the Mohawk Valley's unique environmental history, what life was like on the frontier, the realities of slavery in New York, and the influence of transportation, technology and industry in this region.

Fresh interpretation of the site will also tie in ways that the Mabee family adapted to change in this region. Consider this: the Mabee house and its inhabitants saw the birth of our nation in the American Revolution; the emancipation of millions of American slaves; the electric pulse of the industrial revolution; waves of immigrants streaming in from across the world; and finally, two world wars and a century of political change. This house, on the banks of the Mohawk, is an expert witness to the birth of our modern culture and world, and serves as the tangible link across times. So, bearing that in mind, the Interpretation Committee is looking at ways that the Mabee Farm can engagingly represent the varied events, time periods, and ideas that have shaped us today. For example: can the architecture of the brick and stone houses be used to tell the story of Dutch building patterns in early American history, and relate back to the various cultural identities that have left their mark on our landscape? Can butter-churning, blacksmithing, or flailing and scything demonstrations at Mabee Farm provide a tangible link with the evolving nature of household tasks through Mohawk Valley history? These concepts are touched upon now, but new interpretation will shed light on the deeper truths of changing lifestyles and ideals in our region.

The Interpretation Committee will also look at maximizing use of the spaces inside the historic structures. Based on surveys of our audiences, a mixture of authentic Mohawk Valley artifacts, hands-on reproductions, and images will offer visitors an optimal experience. As they stand now, the Brick House and the Stone House are mostly empty. While both structures are still valuable teaching tools, the careful addition of new artifacts, images and signage will give the buildings the potential to take on deeper meanings. Hands-on activities, for example, will enrich the experience, and help visitors make connections between the farm historically and today. Additionally, with a total of four distinct rooms, we have the opportunity to tell four unique stories, thereby creating a broader narrative about life in the Mohawk Valley and Schenectady County.

Mabee Farm is poised perfectly, both along the Mohawk and in time, as we usher in a new era of historical interpretation. We are just beginning to harness the site's full potential and to tell the stories of Cato and the countless others who have crossed the farm's fields. We're digging into the "maybe, Mabee nots" of the site's lore, figuring out what's real, what isn't, and what could be. We don't have all the answers, and we never will. That's part of the fun of history, and part of the fun for visitors. Thinking critically, analyzing the evidence, and making educated guesses about the realities of life in time periods we will never truly know. Thus, the Interpretation Committee has a great task ahead of them: make the Mabee Farm educational experience as meaningful, engaging, and vibrant as it can be. And, by identifying a central, unifying message, and weaving together a variety of vital themes with individual stories and poignant questions, we will succeed. Beginning now and ending only when our community is satisfied, the Interpretation Committee will work hard to give Mabee Farm a sharpened focus and provide the public with the best possible view into our regional history.

Around the Society



Arts and Crafts Festival - Mabee Farm



Everest Rising with Mark Baptiste - Howlin at the Moon



In Whom We Trust: At the Crossroads of Faith and Community art exhibit - Michael Diana



New fence thanks to Jin Eignor, Kyle Ostrander, Dale Wade-Keszey and John Ackner(not pictured)



Finally - corn crib on its posts!

Photos - Ann Aronson, John Ackner



Schenectady County Historical Society
32 Washington Avenue
Schenectady, NY 12305

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Schenectady County Historical Society

2016 Festival of Trees

December 3-18

Saturday & Sunday 10-4

Monday – Friday 12-5

Adults \$5 Children \$2

Children under 5 free

32 & 44 Washington Ave. Schenectady NY



schenectadyhistorical.org
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eliminating racism
empowering women
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