

**“Sitting On A Million” – Mame Faye and Troy’s Red Light District**



Documentary film maker Annmarie Lanese holds a portrait of Mame Faye, legendary Madam of Troy’s red light district. In back are articles of clothing, possibly Faye’s, on loan from some of her descendants. (David Flint photo)

by David Flint

What happens in Troy stays in Troy! Or at least that’s what they used to say about Troy’s red light district. According to Annmarie Lanese who spoke at the Stephentown Historical Society Monday evening, the word on the street was that the girls in Troy could keep things to themselves; that’s why they were so popular in the area, exceeding the attraction of Albany’s Green Street girls. Lanese and collaborator Penny Lane, both RPI graduates, are in the process of producing a documentary on Troy’s legendary madam, Mame Faye. The documentary, “Sitting On A Million”, is expected to be completed in December and will have its debut shortly thereafter in Troy. The title comes from a line that Faye is said to have often used in recruiting young women for her “boarding house”. Women didn’t have a whole lot of choices about employment in the early part of the last century. Mame would approach a shop girl making \$20 a week and offer her five times that. “You’re sittin’ on a million dollars, honey,” she would say.

Lanese said she and Lane are not interested in the prurient aspects of bordello life, but were intrigued with the question of why we know so much about

other characters on the seamy side of life in the Capital District – Legs Diamond for example – but so little about people like Mame Faye and her ladies. So they have set out to find out all they can. They have put ads in the papers, called radio stations, completed some 30 taped interviews and talked to a lot more people. Lanese’s grandmother responded when asked, “Oh yes, we knew all about her, but we were told to stay away from that place.” They also have some information from fraternity songbooks at RPI, from the Rensselaer Model Railroad Society and from a biography of Faye started by the late Troy Councilwoman Norma Fatone, but never finished. But mostly they are gleaning stories from the people of Troy, seeking out people at lunch counters, barbershops and senior homes, and looking for long lost relatives.

Mame Faye, they found, was a highly respected lady in Troy and was “treated like royalty.” Lanese said that, with but one exception, all the comments she has heard so far have been positive, with many speaking of her generosity and love of children. She would take in children who were burned out of their homes and in turn, the boys of the Boys Club would run errands for the

girls. Her establishment on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, two doors down from the police station, was said to be a “high end brothel” that had an upper crust clientele, but also catered to the common folk. There is talk of a cordial relationship with their police neighbors, with the girls providing pots of hot coffee to the cops via some sort of clothesline pulley system between the buildings, and the cops providing security – and a steady supply of customers. Mame was said to have been very good to her girls and a devout Catholic who donated much to the church as well as to other worthy causes. Lanese said she was somewhat mystified at first by this sort of respect held for these ladies because it is quite different from current attitudes. But apparently it was in those days a lot more socially acceptable for a gentleman to traffic with a prostitute than it was to have sex with his girlfriend.

No one is quite sure what Faye looked like as so far no photographs have surfaced. Lanese does have a portrait from a relative who believes it is Mame. She is generally described as a heavy set woman with blond, black or maybe even red hair. Mame Faye died in 1943, leaving an estate of \$256,000, or about \$3 million in today’s money. She was buried in a family plot in St. Joseph’s Cemetery in South Troy. Only recently her unmarked gravestone was engraved with her name.

Lanese cautions that she can’t vouch for the truth of much of the documentary she’s putting together. “It’s complete hearsay,” she said, based on oral histories, memory and imagination, yet nonetheless she feels it sheds light on an interesting side of Troy’s life and some of its characters who have otherwise been erased from the official record. “We are not telling a history,” Lanese said, “We are animating a community to create it.”

The documentary at this point is a work in progress. Anyone who knows of any photos, newspaper articles, songs, artifacts or stories related to Mame Faye can contact Annmarie Lanese at 518-527-9521 or amlanese@gmail.com.

**Museum Passes At Stephentown Memorial Library**

The Stephentown Memorial Library has expanded its Museum Pass Program. You may now use your library card to check out a museum pass to the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, MA, the Hancock Shaker Village in Pittsfield, MA and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA. The Norman Rockwell Museum pass admits four people, the Shaker Village pass admits two adults and two youths (children 12 and under are always free) and the Clark pass admits two adults plus children, June through October.

To borrow a Museum Pass, simply stop by our circulation desk with your library card. Museum passes may be borrowed for two days. New borrowers need to present a photo i.d. and proof of residency when applying for a library card: a driver’s license and utility bill are typical choices. New borrowers may apply for a library card any time during our normal hours of operation: Tuesday – Thursday, 12:00 pm – 6:00 pm, Friday, 10:00 am – 8:00 pm and Saturday, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm.

**Individual/Business Vendors Wanted For Tag Sale**

Tag Sale will be on June 9, 2007 from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the Retreat at Pease Farm on NY Route 22, approx. one mile south of NY Route 22/Route 43 intersection in Stephentown, New York. To reserve a space please call: (518) 733-6236

**Jiminy Peak: “Name That Turbine”**

When Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort in Western Massachusetts makes ski industry history this summer with North America’s first ski area wind turbine, they’re hoping to have a new name for their new \$3.9 million GE wind turbine.

The 378-ft. tall turbine actually has a model number – 1.5sle – but the marketing folks at Jiminy felt a technical name full of numbers and letters didn’t quite convey a sense of excitement, nor promised to stimulate schoolchildren to learn more about the potential of wind energy.

The individual who comes up with the winning name (1-3 words) will receive a 2007-08 season’s ski/snowboard pass to Jiminy Peak, a pewter model of the wind turbine, and VIP treatment at the wind turbine dedication, tentatively set for “Windsday,” Aug. 15, 2007.

To enter, log onto [www.jiminypeak.com](http://www.jiminypeak.com) and submit your suggested name. Or fill out a paper entry ballot in the lobby of the resort’s Country Inn – look for the six-foot tall turbine replica. The winning name will be announced on June 13. Once in place, Jiminy’s wind turbine will generate 1.5 megawatts of energy – about 33 percent of the total electricity consumption of the resort, or enough to light up the TVs, DVDs, microwaves and refrigerators in 613 homes for a year.

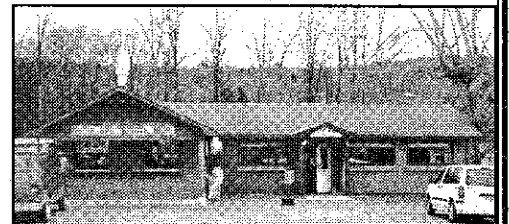
By using the wind turbine, and introducing other energy conservation efforts at the resort, Jiminy expects to reduce its energy dependence by almost 50 percent on the first day the turbine is turned on. The wind turbine is expected to pay for itself within seven years, according to Jiminy’s Brian Fairbank, president and CEO.

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