

Settling In

JUNE 5th 1858

In the summer of 1858 the fastest and most comfortable way to travel is by rail. With an economy built on tourism, the railroad station in Saratoga Springs is conveniently placed in the middle of the village. Less than a block from the States Hotel and two short blocks from the Union and Congress hotels, the station is surrounded by boarding houses, warehouses, and a multitude of retail ventures.

Those fortunate enough to be able to afford an excursion to the village disembark to the sounds of trunks slamming from the baggage car to the deck, hack drivers screaming for riders, people pushing to find their belongings, and a general turmoil that puts even the busiest of airports today to shame. Into this mayhem each day, four trains arrive from the south and three more from the north. Hundreds of visitors disembark seeking primarily one thing, to **See and be Seen**. As the season evolves, hundreds more will leave daily because they have spent their allotted funds or stayed for as long as their family's business will allow. There is even a group, however small, that have left because they have accomplished one of the most significant objectives of a visit to Saratoga – they have become engaged and have to return home to plan their upcoming nuptials.

Visitors to the village are separated by wealth. The railroads have three levels for paid riders, first through third class, with the most expensive cars in the back away from the smoke of the engine. There are even the occasional guests who can afford their own car, which is at the extreme back of the train. Once in the city, guests continue to segregate themselves economically by the selection of the hotels where they stay.

The most affluent visitors stay at the States. The rising middle class take rooms at the Union or Congress and those who are struggling stay at lesser or older hotels. There is even a group who elect to stay in boarding houses. People who arrive without reservations might find themselves sleeping in private homes or even the livery.

On this day, James Marvin, the owner of the States, goes to the station to meet the first train of the summer. Stately in appearance, Marvin has the air of an executive. As the noon train pulls in, Marvin is approached from behind by his light hearted nephew, nineteen year old Jacob. Both are fashionably dressed in gray frock coats, white shirts, and ties. Jacob begins the conversation, "So another season begins."

Somewhat surprised, Marvin turns to his nephew. "What brings you here?"

"George and his family are supposed to arrive on this train," Jacob answers, referring to his friend and former classmate, George Batcheller.

"From Cambridge? I am surprised they are able to arrive so early."

"Uncle, you know Mr. Batcheller; he inevitably feels that the day is already wasted." They both smile. Sherman Batcheller is the owner of a woodworking factory near the waterfalls north of the village. His company started out manufacturing wooden spoons and bowls. A decade before, the senior Batcheller had established a burgeoning source of sales, wooden washboards. His company now employs twenty men. Jacob inquires, "So what will the season bring?"

At that moment the whistle of the northbound noon train signals it has come to a complete stop. There is the sound of people's voices as they begin unloading. Marvin speaks over the commotion. "As the summer social capital of the country, I have the feeling that this will be a season loaded with political tension, rumors, romance, the occasional robbery, and, in general, intrigue."

"How will that make it different than last season?"

"I did not say it would be different." Marvin pauses, looking over the crowd. "I believe that in these times, being what they are, there will be a greater intensity this season."

There is no platform, so the passengers are forced to climb down the steps between the cars. The narrow steps of the train are a problem for the women passengers, who are all wearing hoop skirts wider than the steps. The more sophisticated women place one hand on the front of their skirts, holding them in place. No lady would want a stranger to catch a glimpse of her stockings.

The station bustles with people. There are porters moving trunks, hack drivers trying to grab bags and trunks, and arriving guests trying to

find their trunks among the pile near the baggage cars.

Marvin looks toward the back, the first class section, where he recognizes the Stiles family. The Stiles' only son, ten year old Todd, jumps from the second step. Thomas, the father, has continued to lose his battle with weight, and is the second member of the family to disembark. At least in his own mind, Thomas, a true southern gentleman, turns and offers his hand to his wife, Cora, a perfectly proportioned lady with a natural presence, and a full decade younger than her husband. The final members of the family are the two daughters, Sarah, eighteen, and Sadie, seventeen. Both the girls are attractive. Fortunately for the Stiles, their daughters are the same height and weight. This permits them to wear each other's dresses at the hops and balls. The fashion of the day requires that Cora, Sarah, and Sadie wear dresses with hoop skirts. Sadie, the last to disembark, does not hold down the front of her skirt as she goes down the steps. Her ankles show. Sarah frowns at her sister's gaffe.

Once on the platform, the Stiles are joined by three well-dressed African Americans who traveled third class near the front of the train, immediately behind the baggage cars. The male servant, forty-five year old Benjamin, is wearing a red livery jacket that shows off his strong build. Seeing Mr. Stiles, Benjamin waves acknowledgement, then moves to collect the family's baggage.

The women servants, forty-five year old Josey and twenty year old Missy, are wearing plain black dresses. Josey is attractive; however, Missy's striking looks cause most of the men in the station to turn. Both women servants carry their simple carpet satchels as they join the Stiles women. Missy and Josey put their bags down at the feet of the Stiles women then go to help Benjamin.

Among those in the first class section is one tall, powerfully built man, John Morrissey, whose rugged face covered by a short beard and immense size make him stand out from the crowd. Although well dressed in a frock coat and tie, he fidgets as if the clothes make him uncomfortable. Morrissey is scrutinizing each building and each person in the horde.

A thin, demur young woman, extremely well dressed in a hoop skirt, Catherine Cook carries a parasol and a small purse. Catharine is accompanied by her stern looking father. Having no luggage, a sure sign they are from the village, father and daughter depart quickly. Automatically Catharine opens her parasol as soon as she gets in the sunlight, and then takes her father's arm as they walk away. Her actions are so smooth they appear to flow.

Near the end of those in the second class cars is the Batcheller family. Jacob's friend George Batcheller recently graduated from Harvard Law School at the ripe old age of twenty. He is thin and intelligent looking. He offers his hand to his older sister, Helen. Helen's fashionable dress and bonnet does little to hide the fact that she is tired from the trip. Sherman Batcheller, who worked hard his entire life, is rough around the edges. George and his father each wear frock coats that are a little worn.

Also in the second class area are the first members of the gaggle of dowagers to arrive. This pack plans to spend their summer criticizing everyone and complaining about everything. Dowager in Europe is a title used to show rank; in countries used to nobility this is considered an honorable title. In the democratic Saratoga it has taken on the derogatory meaning of someone who is aloof and constantly negative and condescending. To each of Saratoga's dowagers, the only persons who act virtuously or look refined are their fellow members. They are immune to the fact that no one outside the group wants to speak to them.

The widow, Mrs. Brewster, is the unofficial leader of the pack. Mrs. Jackson is her pathetic sidekick. Both are dressed in clothes that are a couple of years old. They appear unhappy; they always do, as they mill about the station looking for their trunks. Naturally, it is one of Mrs. Brewster's trunks that is found overturned with the contents spilled onto the ground.

As Marvin turns away from Jacob to greet the Stiles family, he murmurs, "Now the season begins." Capable of writing a book on etiquette, Marvin automatically starts by shaking Thomas' hand. "A pleasure to see you Thomas; I hope your trip was pleasant." He turns to each member in the family as he speaks. "Miss Sarah and Miss Sadie, you are even more beautiful than you were last year, if that is possible." Although vain by nature, the girls blush over the attention of such a sophisticated and handsome man.

Marvin rubs Todd's hair. "Did you get sick on the boat this year?"

Todd tries to duck under Marvin's hand. "No, I am too old to get sick." There is a fresh, disrespectful tone of a child who assumes status is inherited.

Marvin ignores Todd, and takes Cora's hand. "You look as charming as ever." Marvin holds Cora's hand a moment longer than necessary.

Benjamin is busy piling up the family's numerous trunks as the women servants pick up the ladies' suitcases and hat boxes and place them in the pile with the trunks.

A group of eight colorfully dressed women rush from around a

corner onto the station floor. Their dresses are shorter and more brightly colored than everyone else's. The women, all between the ages of 18 and 25, collide with the arriving passengers. Occasionally one of the women actually touches one of the men new to the village, a forbidden deed in the Victorian era. It is obvious that the women are desperately trying to board the train before it departs. No one in this group is concerned about anyone seeing their legs as they shamelessly climb the steps to the train. Knowing the women are prostitutes, the arriving women turn away, acting like those in the group do not exist. Many of the men take the opportunity to catch a glimpse of leg.

The last of the prostitutes flirtatiously squeezes Benjamin's strong arms as she passes him. "Where have you been all winter?"

A second prostitute grabs the flirt's arm, pulling her toward the train. "Hurry up. The judge said fifteen minutes."

"We still got five minutes," the flirt calls out so all can hear. "That's time 'nough to earn a dollar." She yells to Benjamin as her friend desperately pulls on her arm. "You's as big as they say?"

Finally, the two prostitutes board the train. As the train starts to pull out of the station the flirt takes out a hanky and begins a mocking wave to those at the station. Everyone does their best to ignore her.

Jacob approaches the Batchellers, who are near the area where luggage is being unloaded. Out of excitement at seeing his best friend, Jacob breaks tradition and shakes George's hand first. "George, my dearest companion, how was the year at Harvard?" Before George can answer, Jacob realizes his mistake and turns to Sherman Batcheller, offering his hand. "Mr. Batcheller, how was the graduation?"

The stoic Sherman talks as if giving a political speech, "If it were not for George's speech, it would have been singularly unimpressive."

George automatically defends his alma mater, "Harvard is a collection of America's best, both those of proven intellect and those who are our future leaders."

Jacob cannot help but be sarcastic. "I think Yale and Dartmouth would question that claim."

"And they would be wrong!"

"Helen, you deserve credit for tolerating these two on such a long journey."

"Their constant banter was a challenge." She picks up her lone bag. "I am not sure that even the opportunity to shop in Boston made it worthwhile."

"I do not question that they were constantly endeavoring one-

upmanship,” Jacob concluded.

Sadie watches a poorly dressed white man in working clothes deliberately bump into Benjamin, then stare, defying Benjamin to act. Benjamin continues pulling the family’s trunks to the side. The man smiles and jolts Benjamin a second time. Benjamin remains calm and signals for a wagon to be brought to transport the Stiles’ numerous trunks. The man is about to elbow Benjamin a third time when he notices Morrissey’s glare. Instinctively the man slinks away.

George gives Helen a brotherly hug then shakes his father’s hand. Sherman holds Helen’s hand as she steps into an older worn carriage that has been sent to pick them up.

Jacob and George begin walking toward George’s boarding house. Each has a suitcase in his outside hand and they hold George’s trunk suspended between them.

“Have you confirmed where you will board?” Jacob inquires. A true friend, he was helping with the trunk, not knowing how far he would have to carry it.

“I will be staying at Mrs. Webb’s boarding house,” George clarifies. A look of dread comes over Jacob’s face. He realizes it will be two long blocks before he can put down his burden.

The lobby of the States is alive with people who have just arrived on the train, all trying to check in. Upon signing in, one of the numerous porters grabs the guests’ bags to carry up the grand staircase. A few guests, mostly women, are sitting in the overstuffed chairs waiting for a nod from their husbands that they are registered. The women, sitting or standing, are all waving their fans. In the case of the younger women, the fans are not for the heat but rather a way to send messages to one another.

The lobby has tall windows to allow as much natural light as possible. Between the windows are twelve foot tall elaborately framed mirrors. Sarah and Sadie are examining themselves in one of the mirrors while Marvin talks to Cora. Dutifully Thomas looks on. Morrissey is waiting anxiously in the background for an opportunity to talk to Marvin. To the careful onlooker, Cora is more familiar with Marvin than is appropriate for a married woman.

“May I prevail upon you to volunteer to be on the entertainment committee again this year?” Marvin asks. It is the practice of the large hotels to ask the long-term guests to serve on committees. One of the most important is the one that organizes the season’s entertainment.

“Mr. Marvin, volunteer is hardly the correct word. I will consider

the committee; however, you should be mindful there was rarely accord last year.” Cora avoids looking directly into his blue eyes.

“I must insist,” Marvin pleaded. “I want this year’s grand ball to be the most magnificent ever, one so special that the children will be talking of that evening to their grandchildren.”

Cora waves her fan over dramatically and smiles at Marvin. “Thank you for your confidence. Do you have a theme in mind?”

“That would be the committee’s decision.”

“It would be presumptuous of me to believe I could speak on behalf of the committee but I think a masked ball could be interesting.”

“And I agree.” Marvin smiles at Cora, then hands the cottage key to Thomas who has been leering at the various ladies in the lobby. Marvin closes the conversation, saying to Thomas, “I have arranged for a bottle of bourbon to be sent to your cottage.” Led by Todd, the Stiles family starts toward the door to the hotel’s private park.

Like many of the guests who are spending the entire season in Saratoga, the Stiles have rented their own cottage. The cottage they will occupy consists of a foyer with two parlors and a small servants’ kitchen/workroom on the first floor. There are four bedrooms on the second floor; one for Todd, one for the sisters, and one each for Thomas and Cora – wealthy husbands and wives do not share a bed. The third floor, which is merely a finished attic, has four rooms for servants. The family will take their meals with the guests staying in the hotel.

Back in the lobby, Marvin walks toward the desk when Morrissey cuts off his path. “Mr. Marvin, allow me to introduce myself; I am John Morrissey.” There is a slight Irish accent. Morrissey extends his hand. Marvin accepts it with some reluctance.

“The same John Morrissey who was in the village last summer, I presume?”

Despite knowing that his reputation precedes him, Morrissey continues his self-introduction, “Yes sir. Finances required that I stayed at the Congress last year. However, this has been an excellent year and I have engaged rooms in your fine establishment for the season.”

“I assume the rooms will not be used for business,” Marvin cautions.

“Absolutely not; they are for my family. I was wondering, however, if you might know of a building I could rent for my business.”

“I am sorry but I do not.” Marvin lingers before asking a question to which he already knows the answer. “Why do you seek a place in Saratoga?”

“Because it is Saratoga; everyone who is anyone will be here during

the season.” Marvin and Morrissey continue taking the measure of one another. “Surely Mr. Marvin, you will admit the rich deserve the best and Saratoga is the summer habitat of the rich.”

Marvin changes the topic, “All of my properties are already leased and I believe most of the others suitable to your needs are also gone.”

“I am confident you will find something,” Marvin says insincerely before he turns to his post near the front desk.

Morrissey watches Marvin, then turns and walks out the front door.

Before they have officially checked in, four of the dowagers have commandeered rocking chairs on the front piazza. These are the same chairs in the same place as they occupied the previous season. The chairs are arranged in a crescent shape so that each of the coven can see the front steps and sidewalk. As self-appointed queen of the cluster, Mrs. Brewster occupies the center seat. Mrs. Jackson, who is knitting, sits to her right. Mrs. Brown has the seat to Mrs. Brewster’s left. Only in her late thirties, Mrs. Brown is sent to Saratoga each summer by her husband, who would rather be alone than share the ‘pleasure’ of her company. Mrs. Brown busies herself darning a glove. The three old guard are joined by the newest and youngest member of the group, Miss Strong. Only in her mid-twenties, Miss Strong has the misfortune of inheriting her position among the dowagers from an aunt who is ill and stayed home. Although quiet to the point of appearing meek, there is something intriguing about Miss Strong. All four women are wearing simple dresses with little flounce. Probably their most noteworthy characteristic is how unhappy they all look.

Morrissey walks out the door across the piazza and down the front steps.

Mrs. Brewster serves the first of the season’s rebukes, “He may be dressed in the best clothes but he does not appear to be a true gentleman.”

“I have heard he is a sporting man,” adds Miss Strong, trying to fit in.

“I have heard the same,” scowls Mrs. Brewster. “If that is the case, why does Mr. Marvin keep his company? The senior Mr. Marvin never would have allowed such a man to stay at the States.”

“Mr. Marvin may be an innkeeper, but he is also a man. What man does not want the company of others who enjoy the sporting life?” Mrs. Jackson pauses to be sure that all are listening. “I understand that Mr. Marvin was once quite the rider.” The implication is that he raced horses.

The other women nod assurances.

George unloads his trunk, placing the clothes in the lone dresser. Jacob is sitting in the only chair, running his hand up and down the curtain, examining the material. Both men have hung their frock coats on a stand.

Jacob sarcastically swings his free hand. "This room will definitely impress the girls you smuggle in. Of course, getting past Mrs. Webb will be a challenge."

"There will be no sneaking in of anyone. I intend to be accepted at the bar by autumn and will need all my time to prepare." George continues to unpack. "I anticipate being in the office every day by 9:00; I will allow myself an hour for dinner at 1:00, then back to the office until 5:00. I know that will be much more time than anyone else, but I plan to prove my worth."

Jacob's expression shows disbelief. "George, George, George, whatever am I going to do with you? This is the place and this is the season. Mornings at the springs, afternoon strolls on Broadway, evening walks beneath the stars, and a hop or a ball every night. George, this is the time to flirt, the time to live a life that makes poets jealous."

"Jacob, Jacob, Jacob, whatever am I going to do with you? This is the time of America's needs, a time of action, a time for doing. Despite the Dred Scott decision, or maybe because of it, slavery has to end. It is our time to make our marks." He stresses 'our.'

Jacob shakes his head, stands and looks out the window. "What has Harvard done to you?" Before George can answer, he continues, "George, did you ever think that you are too political? There is nothing wrong with a summer's attraction and a winter of action."

Knowing his friend has seen something out the window, George joins Jacob. The two gaze down on Catharine Cook. Dressed as she was at the station, Catharine is on the porch of a grand house across the street. She is sitting on the swing reading. They watch as her father comes out of the house onto the porch. As Jacob is about to speak, Reverend Beecher walks up the steps of the Cook's porch.

Catherine holds a book whose title is in French while she gently pushes herself in the swing. Her father, dressed in a frock coat, comes out carrying a thin stick with a flame from which he lights his pipe. He takes a drag. "Lovely afternoon." Looking directly at his daughter, he adds, "Are you going for an after dinner stroll?"

"Broadway will be there tomorrow. Today is for the pleasure of this gentle breeze."

“Catherine, you constantly confuse verse with life. Life is not what one reads about; it is what one experiences.”

“Is that why you are going to the Sheehan’s this evening? Because you know that the widow, Mrs. Putnam, will be there?” Catherine does not stop her all wise daughter persona, “Should I consider her one of your experiences?”

“Although its better days may be over, my life is still going. Yours has yet to start.”

Catherine doesn’t answer. She gazes up at the window where she sees George and Jacob looking at her. Neither moves to get out of her gaze.

The Reverend Beecher, thin and academic looking, walks up the steps. “How good it is to see you both out enjoying this fine afternoon.”

“To what do we owe the honor of this visit?” Cook asks.

“I was walking by and merely wanted to say hello and ask one more time if Miss Catharine would be willing to sing in the choir.”

“Reverend Beecher, I have told you many times that my voice was meant to be heard when I was reading, not singing.”

Reverend Beecher bows slightly, “I think your voice charming under any circumstances.”

“George, that is out of your league. Last season she was the hostess at her father’s dinner for President Buchanan. Her father would not let her consider a lowly college graduate who only owns three jackets.” Jacob points at one of the coats. “One of those has a hole in the elbow.” Tricked, George looks at the elbows of the coat - it is worn but there is no hole.

“Don Quixote had his windmills; maybe it is time for me to have mine. You are the one who implied I am too stoic.”

“That is as it may be, but do not expect me to be your Sancho Panza.”

George does not answer and returns to unpacking his trunk. Eventually he adds, “I must finish unpacking. Tomorrow I begin work at Mr. Beach’s office.”

“Tomorrow you become a mole; today we have time for a stroll.” Jacob tosses George his hat and coat to put on.

Despite the family’s wealth, the Stiles daughters’ room is simple. There are two single beds, two dressers, two wooden chairs and a washstand. Two trunks are standing on their ends, serving as makeshift dressers. Dresses are hanging from a rope that has been hung across the