



**July 1, 2010**

Well, folks, thanks for your interest in the Fall River Historical Society and in *Parallel Lives: A Social History of Lizzie A. Borden and Her Fall River* – it really has been an amazing adventure.

Over seven years ago, Dennis and I had an idea – why not write a little book with the intent to dispel a few myths about Lizzie and her family, place her in the context of the Fall River in which she lived, and present some new and, we thought, rather intriguing material about her life. An easy task, yes? Well, so we thought. The research, and the writing began – and then the detective work, and more detective work, and telephoning here, then telephoning there, and conversations such as “Oh, isn’t that interesting,” and “Well, who would have thought,” and “Fascinating,” and “I suppose we should follow up on this one,” and, “You’ll never guess who I just spoke with,” and so it went ... and, well, as we progressed, it did get rather intriguing.

Juxtaposed with all this was the day-to-day business of running the Historical Society – so we would write, and stop, and write, and stop, and then research, and attend to business, and more business, and then write, and order stock for the museum shop, and work with patrons, and write, then perhaps a bit more research. And always fund-raising and trying to make ends meet - the non-profit business is not an easy one, doubly so in tough economic times when contributions are fewer and fewer ... you’ve heard the expression “It ain’t easy” – well, believe me, in this business, “It ain’t!” Come every October, we reluctantly put all thoughts of a book aside and spent several weeks decorating the museum for the holidays, and getting the tearoom and shop ready for customers. And, of course, there is *McWhirr’s* candy – hundreds of pounds of it. In mid-November, the museum opens for the holiday season – the busiest time of the year at the Historical Society, so, no time for writing, or research, or much else for that matter. Just the holidays, and they go on, and on ... did I tell you I hate Christmas, well, I do ... bah humbug! I now have great empathy for good old Ebenezer!

And then, in January, glorious January, we close for the season, tie up loose ends and start writing again, conducting research, and making lots of telephone calls and visits to interesting people with very interesting things – some with fascinating stories to tell. What sort of stories? Well, things like:

“My grandmother was very close to Lizzie, and she was with her when....”

“Oh yes, and did you know that she often traveled to ... she wrote to my family from there. I still have the letters.”

“As a matter of fact, I know I have her ... around here somewhere, I will dig it out if it interests you.”

“This was not discussed in our family, but why don’t we meet and talk things over – you see, my great-aunt was a friend of Lizzie’s and often spent time with her. She often said that Miss Borden was the....”

“This may not be of interest, but I have a ... that belonged to Lizzie, she gave it to my ... and we also have a few ...”

And so it went, year after year, because so much of it, you see, was a matter of time – or, specifically, a lack of time. It would have been much easier to just research and write, but that was not the case, nor could it be, because there is a Historical Society to run. So, as the years went by, people called, and asked questions, and wanted to know – “When will the book be done?” And we thought, “Good question!” And, just when we thought we were done, presto, along came a significant collection of material and – “What to do?” Well, the only thing to do was to run with it, and so we did.

As more material was uncovered, the initial idea of “a little book” changed and the volume grew, and grew, and we thought, “Well, we have waited this long, and that bit is really too good not to use,” so we would pursue another thread, which led us to another, and another, and – Did I say that people have been really wonderful to work with and unbelievably forthcoming?

Now, some of you have asked why it is that we have been able to uncover such a great deal of new material about Lizzie, and Emma, for that matter, and other bits and pieces of interesting stuff about the family. Some detractors have opined, erroneously, that the Historical Society hoards material and does not make it public, which is simply not the case at all. Yes, if a particular collection is to be published, the papers of City Marshall Rufus B. Hilliard being one notable example, it is considered a “closed” collection, and remains so until its publication. Oftentimes, this is done at the request of the donor and, regardless, it is a rather sensible strategy. That book is coming – eventually! But the fact is that the materials used in *Parallel Lives* were sought out specifically for that purpose – we had to go looking for them. And what a task that has been.

So how did we do it? First off, we established some very close relationships, and that took years – and, yes folks, I mean years, and not just one or two, but several. That, in a nutshell is what it takes – very good relationships and years, a lot of them. Things don’t usually just materialize out of thin air - well, to be honest, on rather serendipitous occasions they sometimes have. What it takes is work, a lot of it, a great deal of trust, and, above all, absolute confidentiality ... and, of course, luck plays a huge part. You see, to the majority of

people August 4, 1892 was a very long time ago, and Lizzie is very much an historical character, elevated to legendary proportions by myth, innuendo and outright lies. But to a few individuals, just a few, she is much more than that, yes, very much more. It is due to the consent of those who hold her memory dear, who continue vigilantly to protect her eighty-three years after her death that much of her story can be told. In effect, they are the keepers of the flame, and that flame has been burning for a long time, a very long time. For some of them, the time has come to allow that flame to illuminate a life extinguished in 1927, to offer a glimpse of the other side of the story. Fascinating stuff, eh?

So, what have we learned? We now know a great deal more about the Borden sisters and their family – more about Lizzie as a girl, and a great deal about her life after the acquittal, who her friends and what her sorrows were, her collections (did you know she was a collector, and not just of books), some of her favorite places ... important, obscure, sometimes trivial stuff ... but interesting. And what of Emma – we know when she left *Maplecroft* and exactly where she went after she did, and who her friends were, her pastimes, her travels... so we can shed a bit of light on the life of that enigmatic woman. I could go on, and on, but ... well, you will all read the book soon enough.

It has been an amazing journey, really, in so many ways, a proverbial voyage of discovery. That may sound a bit like a cliché, but it is, nonetheless, quite true. Along the way we have met and enjoyed the company of some wonderful people in the U. S., Canada, and Europe – and some have become very good friends. There have been many interesting conversations, lots of lunches – some quite good and a few equally bad, miles and miles of driving here and there, lots of laughs, a great deal of frustration ... and, well, you get the picture. We have been privileged to have the opportunity to look at some of Lizzie's things, sit in chairs she used at *Maplecroft*, examine lots of her books, and I was even served tea from her silver service – very nice, lovely monogram.

I suppose many of you have seen the “Tantalizing Tidbits” on the Historical Society's website, so you have some idea of the type of materials we have been working with – amazing what has surfaced, and, sometimes, in the most unexpected places. Suffice it to say that there is more to come ... a lot more. We just hope you all will think it worth the wait, and yes, we know ... it has been a long one. But like I said, these things do take time.

And then there is the story of Fall River too, the story of life on “the Hill” in the days when Fall River was at its peak – tales of trials, tribulations, and social scandals ... of grand wedding, and balls, and cotillions ... great social triumphs ... and defalcations, lost wills, divorce, and even the occasional murder. It all blends together rather well – we hope!

So, here is where we stand at the moment. The writing is a *fait accompli* – finally! The book is in layout, which is completed through Chapter XIII – there are sixteen in total. The dust jacket is finished, excepting for a few minor tweaks – and it is a fine design, too. It will be posted in the very near future so you will all have a chance to see it. Prepare yourself for a lot of book - there are over 1,000 pages – yes, one thousand pages, over 500 photographs and illustrations, all sourced and fully indexed – Stefani Koorey is working on the index. The photographs are interspersed throughout the text - so much easier that way. Don't you

hate it when they are all lumped together in the middle of a book? Way too much flipping of pages.

Can't tell you the price yet – we won't know until the layout is complete. Publishing is an expensive business, especially at this level – but when we know, you will know.

There you have it – for now, anyway. Stay tuned for the occasional update on our progress and, perhaps, the sporadic special little “tidbit” for our friends on Facebook ... who knows what might be revealed in these pages?

Thanks much for reading this – and for your interest.

I can guarantee you one thing – in the pages of *Parallel Lives* you will see Lizzie as you have never seen her before, and I mean that quite literally.

You know, she had interesting taste in hats.

Is anyone curious?

Well ... anyone?

**Michael Martins**  
**Curator**  
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