

## **An Exhibition and Play Honoring our Lady of the Museum...**

**Catharine Ladd: Nineteenth Century Voice of Fairfield.** Our new exhibit, curated by Michaela Pilar Brown with contributions from Ladd scholar Patricia Veasey, will open to the public on October 18.

The exhibition will showcase the life of this legendary Fairfield county educator, artist, and ancestor. This exhibition includes documents, personal items, and artwork from the permanent collection, The York County Culture and Heritage Museums, as well as from private donors including Ladd descendants. The exhibition will focus on Catharine's life in the context of Fairfield County history and will examine some of her written works. "New Improvement," an essay attributed to Catharine Ladd, addressed the 1868 Presidential and state elections, the politics surrounding them, their impact on Fairfield County citizenry, and a forecast on their impact today. The exhibition will look at Catharine's position on the responsibilities of registered voters in context with current themes prominent in the 2008 Presidential election.

**A Grande Event:** The exhibit, which will open at 1 PM on Oct. 18, will be preceded at 12 noon by a staged reading of Catharine Ladd's original 1853 play, **The Grande Scheme** in the backyard of the Museum. The curious theme of matchmaking between cousins by Chester, a "frothy old bachelor," will be introduced to our modern audience by director Dr. Martha Macdonald, professor of English literature at USC (Lancaster campus).

Bill Wedding will enact the part of "frothy" Old Chester, while Rolf De Swardt will be his manservant Tom. Dr. Macdonald will play the part of Chester's servant Old Martha. Chester's nephews Henry and Charles will be portrayed by Chris Darner and John McCants, while the nieces Mary and Anna will be played by Ester De Swardt and Corinne Reed. The roles of William and Patrick, Irish servants of the nephews, will be enacted by David Brandenburg and Kay Boulware. Susan and Ellen, waiting maids of Anna and Mary, will be played by Marcie Wedding and Elfi Hacker. Old Michael, a fiddler will be enacted by Roy Gugel.

**The Grande Scheme** will be performed on Saturday at noon and again on Sunday at the sametime. The play is presented in cooperation with the Pine Tree Players annual Shakefest event which will begin each afternoon at 1 PM across the street in the PTP playhouse.

### **Biography**

A native of Virginia, Catherine Stratton and her artist husband George Williamson Livermore Ladd followed demands for his work as an itinerant portrait painter across several southern states. Wherever George found portrait work, Catharine taught in or established schools for local girls. After establishing Brattonville Female Seminary in York County, S.C. on the Bratton plantation, working in York County, S.C. for the Brattons and other families, the reputation of the couple brought them to Winnsboro.

After several assignments in Winnsboro and nearby Feasterville, the Ladds purchased the Richard Cathcart home on Congress Street of Winnsboro and opened a boarding school for the education of young ladies called the **Winnsboro Female Institute**.

Catharine's school would become a counterpart to the nearby well-known **Mt. Zion College** for males. Girls from Fairfield and many other places came to learn both the cultural and academic masteries necessary to develop ladies of intelligence and social standing. After South Carolina's secession from the Union in January of 1861, Mrs. Ladd focused her efforts to the formation of the Soldiers' Aid Association to support the southern cause. She "put aside her pen and took up a needle," and organized the women and girls of the town into production crews for soldiers' clothing and foodstuffs. She is known to have contributed to the design of the first Confederate flag. She is also accredited with collecting the village's pots and pans for conversion to Confederate munitions.

The Ladds sold the Ketchin house in 1862 where Winnsboro Female Institute was located, and moved the school to another location in town. In 1865 when Winnsboro was occupied by Union troops, her daughter later described in a newspaper article how Catharine diverted the soldiers from burning the school. After the War in 1866 the Winnsboro Female Institute resumed in the Bank Range building under Mrs. Ladd and Rev. Josiah Obear.

Catharine Ladd was a leader in bringing arts to the community, writing and publishing her poetry and plays in national magazines, and conducting theatrical and musical productions to help the townsfolk survive difficult times. Her theatrical group, The Thespian Corps, became the second acting troupe established in the state. When the burned building housing the railway passenger depot behind the Town Clock was reopened in 1873, it became known as Thespian Hall. She was a well-known writer and published many literary works, particularly on art and education under several different pen names--Minnie Mayflower, Arcturus, Morna, and Alida--in various southern journals. She attributed much inspiration to her childhood friendship with Edgar Allen Poe.

In her late years, Mrs. Ladd lived and took in students at Buena Vista in present-day Blair, eventually losing her sight. She died in 1899. In 1976, the 146 year-old building would be restored and reopened as the Fairfield County Museum.