

Lewiston
History
Mysteries

Treasure Trove of Tryon Family Papers Recently Discovered in London

Lewiston Library Beneficiary of First Known Handwritten Letter from Josiah Tryon

Dear Brother have no confidence in the unstable things of this world.

Excerpt: Josiah writes from Lewiston to his brother, Francis in New York City, "Dear Brother, have no confidence in the unstable things of this world."

Written 117 years ago by Lewiston historian Joshua Cooke, praising Josiah

To the readers of these words of the past, there is another record book to be opened up when this and all earthly volumes have passed away. When the page of Lewiston is turned, it will not be the names of the leading men in the worldly sense who will stand highest in the record.

At the head of all will be the name of one of the lowliest as to place; one of the poorest as to men; and one of the feeblest as to the strength of the band of pioneers. While others lived for this world, he made this world a stepping stone to another and higher world for others, as well as for himself.

Whole generations of the young call him blessed in their age, for he led them in and shielded them with counsel and prayer.

Poor in this world's goods, for he shared with the poor to his loss. He made his treasure that hope whose fulfillment is heaven. In the heavenly reminiscences of Lewiston, the first name will be that of Josiah Tryon.

-- Joshua Cooke
Souvenir History of Niagara County, 1902



Josiah Tryon (1798-1886) was immortalized in the bronze Freedom Crossing Monument on Lewiston's riverfront in 2009.

Acclaimed as Lewiston's greatest citizen of all time, Josiah Tryon, known for his faith, reminds his brother what's important in life

Written at the height of the Underground Railroad Movement

Josiah Tryon was the volunteer station master and "conductor" for the local Underground Railroad network that secretly assisted fugitive slaves in their journey across the Niagara River to Canada and freedom. He broke the federal law to follow a higher law.

The papers were discovered in the inventory of a London, England, manuscript dealer, Richard M. Ford. A Connecticut historian purchased the lot for \$485 to obtain one letter he was interested in, and then donated the remaining documents and letters to the Lewiston Library as a "worthy repository." The donated papers include family letters, property deeds and other documents. No one knows how the papers ended up in London, but local history buffs are grateful they were found.

Michelle Kratts at the Lewiston Library received the collection on July 22, 2019. Since then, the papers have been examined and transcribed. "An amazing find," Michelle said. Tom Collister, curator at the Lewiston Museum, said, "One of the greatest discoveries of the past Century." Tim Henderson, who has portrayed Josiah Tryon for the past 30 years, said, "I have not had a greater honor than seeing and touching the papers Josiah had in his hands."

Quotation from Josiah Tryon, in a letter to his brother Francis, dated May 7, 1845, with a Lewiston postmark:

"Let me say to you, dear Brother, have no confidence in the unstable things of this world. They dazzle, bewilder and terminate in disappointment. According to the wise old man, they will be found in the end to be 'vanity of vanities and vexations of spirit.' Take a look at John Jacob Astor, with his millions. He has no more of this world from which he can draw any substantial enjoyment than I have."

Josiah Tryon

Despite his tremendous impact on local history, no personal effects of Josiah were known to exist until now. This signature on a deed is the first known autograph.

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