

Preface to the letter:

Samuel Daly Langtree was the most illustrious of the Langtree brothers. As detailed in this letter, he was an early publisher of *The Knickerbocker*, one of the earliest of New York City's many literary magazines (later to publish the likes of Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Oliver Wendell Holmes). In 1834 he married Mary Juana O'Sullivan, with whose brother he was then to go into business publishing *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in Washington, DC.

O'Sullivan and Langtree intended to combine the newsiness of a monthly magazine with the intellectual snuff of a quarterly review. Hence the portentous name with which they baptized their creation: *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*. This wording instantly signaled ambitions of nationwide circulation and an unmistakable partisan affiliation. They wanted their magazine to be definitively "American" and "Democratic," and soon it was known across the land simply as the *Democratic Review*. The editors solemnly announced their goals in a prospectus released during the last week of Jackson's administration: "As the United States Magazine is founded on the broadest basis which the means and influence of the Democratic Party in the United States can present, it is intended to render it in every respect a thoroughly NATIONAL WORK, not merely designated for ephemeral interest and attraction, but to continue of permanent historical value."

Unlike most pronouncements of this sort, their braggadocio was more or less fulfilled. The first issue was released in October 1837 and arrived at an opportune moment. In the short term, the beleaguered new administration of Martin Van Buren, reeling from the financial panic of the spring, needed all the popular support it could get. And from a wider historical perspective, O'Sullivan picked a timely occasion to remedy an imbalance in American cultural politics.

Specifically, he noted that almost all of America's influential literary periodicals issued from the camps of the enemy: Whiggery. Van Buren could count on daily newspapers like Bryant's *New York Evening Post* or Francis Blair's *Washington Globe* to serve as party organs, but there was nothing in the way of a respectable national magazine with Jacksonian leanings. Unlike the newspaper, the magazine was still the domain of well-educated minds with a conservative bent and little interest in disrupting the status quo. The *Democratic Review* did not displace these magazines over its long tenure, but it brought a fresh voice and a measure of equilibrium to the publishing world of antebellum America.

Hence the exuberance shown by O'Sullivan and Langtree as they commenced their undertaking. As O'Sullivan reflected in 1842, they were "very young, very sanguine, and very democratic." Their goal was nothing less than "to strike the hitherto silent string of the democratic genius of the age and country as the proper principle of the literature of both." Democracy was the engine that drove both O'Sullivan and his magazine. It was an ill-defined concept, to be sure, but one that could be depended upon to excite American readers, whether embracing the specific doctrines of the partisan Democracy, or the larger set of meanings yoked

to the lower case “d.” Either way, the editor saw the American political experiment as the beginning of a worldwide revolution that would soon spread to other domains of the mind. With proper tending, an entire intellectual system of great art, literature, and philosophy ought to spring from the same impulse that had declared all men created equal. For O’Sullivan, politics and culture were indissolubly linked, and his advocacy of Democratic authors went hand-in-hand with his support of the Van Buren administration.

From a lengthy review of *The Politics of Culture: O’Sullivan and the Democratic Review*, by Edward L. Widmer. The review is worth reading in its entirety at <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/w/widmer-america.html?mcubz=0>.

Samuel also assembled a pamphlet collection, “American Pamphlets,” presently in the collection of the University of South Carolina:

Langtree's American Pamphlets constitute a uniquely valuable resource for students of nineteenth-century history, politics, and culture. Sometime after 1839, Samuel D. Langtree, a Washington, D.C., publisher, gathered an eclectic group of almost 900 speeches, annual reports, state and federal documents, sermons, travel accounts, single issues of periodicals, and essays on every subject imaginable and cased them in a serviceable half calf binding.

Unfortunately, Samuel did not live to fulfill the enormous promise of these auspicious beginnings – he died in 1842.

[From Samuel to his Father]

New York, Thursday, 10th May 1833

Dearest Father:

My heart is sick in this distant country in consequence of not hearing a syllable of or from a human being with whom I am, connected in the world for nearly eight months. I have just this day heard of a gentleman going to London and I am induced to send this to the Book room there in the hope that it may find you; and if you are in the same state as regards me, how uneasy you must all be, and this I am half inclined to believe from the fact that a large packet which I sent off three months since, in the ship “Bolivar” must have been lost, as that ship has not been heard of since. If this is the case, I will just mention hastily the principal occurrences that have happened to me since I left Liverpool, in anticipation of a large parcel which I will send by the Canada Packet ship to Liverpool, which leaves this port on the 16th.

You are well aware that I meant to have returned again immediately. That was prevented by a most unfortunate series of events which happened to me on my arrival, and way here. On the voyage, the Captain struck me for attempting to open a child that had died under suspicious

circumstances.¹ For this I brought the Captain to law when I arrived in New York, and though I had the satisfaction of obtaining a verdict against him, it involved me in such ruinous expenses, that in a short time after my arrival I had not a dollar left out of about 180 which I had scraped up by hard earnings in Liverpool, and from the passengers. (The expenses were 173, of which 80 were refunded by the Captain's counsel.)

Thus thrown upon my resources, the invariable good fortune which has attended me throughout life, did not desert me. It gives me much more pleasure to inform you of the means by which I attained independence, than the privations I endure when I had but little means. Suffice it is to say that I managed by vigorous and incessant application to get Caleb into a situation which paid for his board, for all the while, he lay more heavy upon my mind than did myself, and by different expedients contrived to make off life until the commencement of this year when a new magazine² was commenced in this City under very favorable auspices. I had seen some advertisements about it in the papers, and sent them a small piece of poetry which they published and which was so favorably received all over the United States, that it procured me an introduction to the publishers who immediately offered me a permanent though small salary to write for the magazine. But Fortune was still more propitious; I had not been in this situation long before Editor and publisher had a quarrel. When they gave the former a considerable sum to retire from the work, which he did without going further, they immediately offered it to me in the most handsome and gentlemanly manner, and thus I found myself put, with very little experience, at the head of one of the first publications in America. I can hardly expect this situation to be permanent for the Americans attach so much to a name and have such an abhorrence to everything in any way connected with England, that I expect, in order to quiet the clamor, they must at least put the name of some eminent American author on its cover. It is, however, secured to me for one year, and the very fact of my ever having become so connected at all is said by the Methodist preachers and other confidential friends to be as extraordinary and honorable a circumstance to me as they have heard of, and will form such an introduction to me in this country that I am told I will always be sure of a handsome livelihood in a literary way. My salary in consequence of the large sum paid to the former Editor will this year be but small, amounting to 500 Dollars, which next year will be increased to 1200, but such as I consider equal to 250 Pounds at home. Then I pay off the debts in which I became involved, and a suit of clothes, which in this country are enormously dear,³ I will be able to send you some money, a time I ardently long for.

In the discharge of the arduous duties which have devolved upon me, the family can assist me much. The small trunk which I unhappily left at Mrs. Thompson's Edinburgh tavern, High St., Belfast, about which I wrote to Josh, contained several papers which would be of great use, and John could send me many an article which would be of use and greatly oblige me – his "Midnight" and other poems or prose articles he may think fit, and I will publish them seriatim in the *Knickerbocker*, the name of my magazine, and send him afterward as many copies as he may choose. At present I am constantly oppressed for want of matter, and writing so much will, I fear, make some inferior.

¹ - Discussed at length in Caleb Langtree's letter of 19 Nov 1832, reproduced separately.

² - *The Knickerbocker*.

³ - Sic. "dear"?

Caleb has been in New York ever since he came. Those friends to whom Mr. Henry gave him letters proved good ones, in his adversity. He is now in a situation where he gets 5 Dollars a week, but otherwise not eligible. He has a strong desire to become a Methodist preacher, and I was speaking to Dr. Banse and the other preachers here who are my good and kind friends, and the result is that I am going to pay for one session at the Wesleyan University of Middletown, 150 miles from here, to qualify him in some degree better for the office. Poor fellow, I feel my very soul bound to his in this far country, but he is not at all calculated for America. Had you sent me anyone else but him, he would have done well, Jos. [Joshua] or George, for instance. Caleb, unless he gets to be a Methodist preacher, will never get on in this country.

Oh, how anxious I am to hear all about home. Dear, dear Mother, the other day I found in my box a lock of her hair which she sent by Caleb, but which I thought I had lost, and I burst into tears for joy at the sight. Oh Mother, dear Mother, write to me. Will I ever see you again? I will, I will. And Catharine and Martha and John and Eliza and Arabella and Wilson and Joshua. Noble Jos., I wish he were here, and my ever dear George. With respect to your writing I beg you to observe first after family affairs, send me "The Sun" by Matthew and whatever poems, tales, and essays John will give you. Next, the second volume of the *Ulster Magazine*, and the papers in that little trunk, if you can get it. These are all of the most vital importance to me.

This letter goes for nothing. I will give every particular at large in a packet I will send by the Canada. I also beg you may observe that since I came to this country, I have spelt my name with a "g", and if my family did otherwise it would be thought strange here. With the packet "Canada" ship I will send you a box containing all the *Knickerbockers* from the commencement, all the New York papers, all the magazines in America, with presents to Catharine, Martha, Jos., George, John and Mother. If I cannot get them ready in time for the "Canada," I will send them on the first of June by the "Pacific" packet, and will direct it in care of Mr. Furness, druggist, Liverpool; but if you get this first, write to me as I have requested and send me the manuscripts and magazines.

If possible, I will send you Five Pounds next month. I think you may rely on it. I would rather you would send by the packet ships which sail from Liverpool every week. Mr. Furness will attend to it. My address is, Care of Peabody & Co., 219 Broadway, New York. Don't by any means, neglect to write.

I have written this in an immense hurry at a moment's warning, so excuse. Along with it I send to London in hope of finding Henry, a parcel containing some magazines and a letter. If he is not there, tell Mr. Mason to send it to you in your next parcel.

I have never heard of James⁴ since I came to this country though I have used every exertion except advertising, which I will not do. If you can give me any information, do so.

Dearest Father and Mother, Farewell

Your affectionate son,

Samuel Daly Langtree

⁴ - James Hope Langtree, my 2x great grandfather, who wrote home separately on 1 May 1833.