



Schenectady County Historical Society
32 Washington Ave., Schenectady, NY 12305
(518) 374-0263
www.schenectadyhistorical.org

Our First Hundred Years, 1905-2005: A History of the Schenectady County Historical Society

Part 1: 1905-1960

The following first fifty-five years of SCHS history was written by John J. Birch. It was printed in The Markers Speak, published by the Society in 1962. Birch was president of the Society from 1954-56 and from 1963-65. He was a teacher and an author, a member of the Board of Directors of the Vale Cemetery Association, and active at the Schenectady First Reformed Church. The history of the next forty-five years follows the Birch narrative.

Founded in 1905, the Schenectady County Historical Society fulfilled the dream of the city's distinguished historian, Professor Jonathan Pearson of Union College. Sixty years earlier he had noted in his journal that:

It is a thing much to be desired that some Schenectadian would 'endeavor' the history of this old town which has now been inhabited these more than two hundred years. Our antients (sic) are passing away fast, family records and traditions are also becoming scarce, and if the materials... are not soon gathered, the beginnings of 'Dorp' will be forgotten and unsung."

Others shared his views, but no one took action. In 1862 Pearson wrote: "I still get encouraging answers from all with whom I speak about starting a historical society for Schenectady. Yet few, I presume, will be real working members. Besides, even those who would be glad to do something have but a crude notion of what is needed to constitute real historical facts of value—most men are satisfied with mere gossip and floating traditions."

So Pearson, himself, decided to "attempt the collection of some... old records and other relics that would illustrate the habits of our lazy old Dutchmen in former years and rescue from oblivion the origin of the city." This collection later became the nucleus of the present Society's library of documents, now numbering over 100,000 items.

In July 1875, there appeared locally a modest pamphlet entitled "The American Historian and Quarterly Genealogical Record." Its title page stated that it was edited by the "Historical Society" and published by E.Z. Carpenter. Apparently it ceased to exist after a few years. Whether this "Historical Society" was more than E.Z. Carpenter himself is not now known, but his voluminous papers have become part of the collection of documents belonging to the present Society.

In 1899 The Netherlands Society of Schenectady was established "to collect and preserve information respecting the early history and settlement of Schenectady and the Mohawk Valley

by the Dutch, and to discover, collect, and preserve all still existing documents, etc., relating to their genealogy and history.” This organization had a membership requirement of direct male lineage to settlers of Dutch national and linguistic stock, and was not, therefore, a general historical society. Nevertheless, it appears to have made the first organized effort to collect and preserve historical documents of this area. Most of these documents were later given to the Schenectady County Historical Society.

Six years later a number of Schenectady citizens planned a loan exhibition of articles of historic and artistic interest to be held at the Public Library in the month of May. A committee consisting of De Lancey Watkins, Lee W. Chase, Judge Alonzo P. Strong, Miss Mary Backus, Mrs. Judson S. Landon, and others arranged the exhibition. It was extremely interesting and instructive. The exhibition lasted 10 days. After its closing the exhibits remained at the library, but were not, so far as can be learned, on public display. Those who had contributed to the success of this project then began to discuss the advisability of establishing a permanent historical society. The organization of such a society was strongly urged by the Schenectady Gazette...Public meetings were held and committees were appointed. Articles of incorporation were prepared by Judge Strong and filed on June 30. As a result, the Schenectady County Historical Society was established on July 14, 1905, under the Membership Corporation Laws of the State of New York.

A program of monthly meetings during the fall, winter and spring was set up soon after the Society's organization. As the Society had no quarters of its own, these meetings were held in various downtown public buildings. The Society took over responsibility for the exhibits at the Library but allowed them to remain there. The situation continued for several years. In 1908 a committee was appointed for the purpose of finding a permanent home for the Society, but did not immediately accomplish any tangible result. Action was taken in 1910 to have the exhibits at the Library open to the public on Saturday afternoons and evenings. An attendant was hired by the Society at a modest salary to be in charge of the exhibits at those times.

In December 1912, the committee responsible for finding a home for the Society succeeded in negotiating a three-year lease for the building at 13 Union Street that had been erected a half-century earlier to accommodate the offices of the County Clerk and the Surrogate and was no longer needed for that purpose. The exhibits were moved from the Library to the new home, and this became the location for monthly meetings.

At this time the membership dues were one dollar per year. As these dues were the main source of income, the Society was not in a particularly affluent condition. It soon became apparent that the rent of \$100 per year called for in the lease was beyond the Society's slender resources. It was, therefore, reduced by the County Board of Supervisors to the nominal amount of one dollar a year. Some revenue was derived from time to time by renting parts of the building for meetings of outside groups. In 1918 a curator was engaged, Katharine V. Steers, and the exhibits were opened to the public on weekday afternoons. In 1925 the dues were increased to two dollars per year, but this added only a small amount to SCHS income. The Board of Supervisors had, for some time, arranged to give the Society a subsidy to promote activities which were considered to be of public interest.

In 1941, Miss Anna B. Case bequeathed her home at 720 Union Street, together with an endowment fund, to be used as the headquarters of the Society. Because the conditions of the bequest required the construction of a large extension to house the Society's collections and imposed other restrictions which were not considered to be economically feasible, the bequest could not be accepted.

In April 1958, the General Electric Company deeded to the Society the former G.E. Women's Club building at 32 Washington Avenue "as tangible evidence of its interest and desire to associate itself with those who are working to advance the city's cultural and educational activities." This generous action provided the Society for the first time with adequate and attractive facilities for its collections and activities.

A sufficient number of artifacts had been assembled as early as 1914 for the establishment of a "Colonial Room." Actually this was a collection of furniture and furnishings containing some colonial antiques with various later pieces, which gave the effect of a bedroom in a pre-Revolutionary home, some of the furnishings of which had been replaced in later eras: Federal, Empire, and Victorian. This collection, supplemented by many later acquisitions, now occupies three rooms in the Society's present quarters. The greater amount of space available has also permitted the establishment of a "Gun Room" to accommodate the Society's notable collection of firearms, an "Indian Room" for relics of the early inhabitants of this area, and a "Map Room" for a display of historic cartography. At the same time, the Society's library facilities have been greatly improved, and a concrete vault has been provided to protect the valuable collection of original documents, some dating back to the 1600s.

Late in 1935, the Society's president, Judge James W. Liddle, approached the president of the Museum Auxiliary (Children's School and Schenectady Civic Museum, located in Brandywine Avenue School) to interest this group in serving as an auxiliary to the Historical Society. This arrangement was made, but it was not until 1941 that the group became officially the Women's Auxiliary of the Schenectady County Historical Society.

In 1940 several active members of the Historical Society formed the Schenectady Genealogical Society, with headquarters at the Historical Society building. For a number of years this group held regular meetings and embarked on record-collecting projects. As its interests were rather closely allied with those of the Historical Society, it was absorbed in 1949. With this merger the Society acquired a large collection of copied records of churches, cemeteries, censuses, etc.

Publications have always played a significant part in the Society's activities. During its first 10 years, annual yearbooks were published. In 1936 a periodical called *The Milestone* was published for a few issues and was revived for a few issues in 1949. Starting in 1957, a quarterly *Bulletin* began publication. This has now entered its fifth year [that is, into 1962]. A leaflet entitled "Guide to Historic Schenectady" was brought out at an early date and has been reprinted several times. A booklet for the first "Walkabout of Old Schenectady" was published under Society auspices in 1954. This booklet was expanded in 1959 to serve as a guide for those who wished to tour the Stockade Area of the city and observe its historic buildings.

One of the Society's early activities was to participate, along with the Netherlands Society, in the erection of a memorial tablet to Arent Van Curler, who founded Schenectady in 1662. It was placed at the northwest corner of Church and Union Streets where his original town lot was located. At this time the Society also contributed to the erection of a Van Curler tablet at the church at Nijkerk, Holland, where he was born in 1619.

More recently this type of activity was revived with the appointment of a Committee on Historic Markers. This came about through a request in 1955 that the Society verify the construction dates of a number of historic buildings in Schenectady and permit the use of its seal on appropriate date markers. Since the original request, the owners of numerous other buildings have made

similar requests. Today nearly 50 buildings in Schenectady County display date markers approved by the Society, indicating construction prior to 1825. In connection with this activity the Society has become affiliated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, an organization interested in the preservation of historic buildings throughout the United States.

Part 2: 1961-2005

The following additional history was written by members of the Education Committee of the Historical Society in 2005: Elsie Maddaus, Elliess Riemer, Sally van Schaick, and Frank Taormina. The document was then edited and prepared for publication by Sylvie Briber and Ed Reilly.

The last edition of the quarterly Bulletin mentioned by Birch was published in March 1969, but a Society Newsletter mailed to all members began publication in November 1965. The Newsletter was originally a monthly publication of one or two pages, but now multi-page issues appear six times per year. The year 2004 marked the 40th year of continuous publication.

In the 1960s, some important decisions included an addition to the Dora Jackson home at 32 Washington Avenue, the position of a curator, the involvement with Union College in its 300th year observance, and the possible purchase of the Glen Sanders Mansion.

In 1960, the Historical Society was positioned favorably in Schenectady's Stockade section, which had not yet been formally designated a historic zone. The Stockade Association invited representatives of the city government to investigate the possibilities of creating a historic district. The city's 300th year celebration committee was interested in establishing a semi permanent Union College exhibit in our museum. Interviews were held with college professors, editors, and authors. John J. Birch was the author of *The Markers Speak*, a successful historical book designating 46 homes by the Historic Markers Committee. Birch also recommended in 1964 that the Society have closer ties to the five town historians.

GROWING PAINS

In June of 1965, the trustees began to explore other buildings for housing the Society. The first discussions and views of purchase of the Glen Sanders Mansion took place. Larry Hart, president of the Board of Trustees, arranged a tour of the house and grounds, with Mr. Palmatier, the owner. But the asking price was considered too high by the Board. Then, in October 1965, an architect was consulted about expanding and enlarging the vault and other parts of 32 Washington Avenue. The committee formed to consider this and the possibility of building or using space elsewhere included Howard Van Voast, Jonathan Pearson, Harold F. Lewis, Larry Hart, Mrs. Charles G. Patton, Dr. Louis Navias, Lansing Christman, and Richard McKeeby. Many views were expressed, from using the YWCA, First Reformed Church, uniting with the Schenectady Museum, or not expanding at all because "it would spoil the residential character of the Stockade."

In 1966, the Schenectady architectural firm of Feibes and Schmitt was asked to draw up plans to expand the current building. The original design was for a one-story brick-faced-concrete-block exhibition/meeting room with seating for 250, restrooms, and a small kitchen. The rear porch of the house would be removed. A foyer would connect the old and the new addition. The cost would be \$45,000-\$50,000. Our subsidy from the county was \$6,000 in 1965 and increased to

\$8,900 in December 1966. The plan of Feibes and Schmitt now had real dollar figures and the Board of Trustees began discussing a membership drive and a fair increase in dues. (But it was not until 1971 that the individual membership donation was increased from \$2 to \$3 and additional categories were established: \$7 for families, \$10 for patrons, and \$50 for a life membership.)

In 1967, the city zoning committee expressed concern that such a large addition to the present building would spoil the appearance of the neighborhood. Judge Raymond Quinn felt that the addition would detract from its future use as a home again. Other objections were raised, but its members very much wanted the Society to remain in the Stockade, saying that it was an ideal place for it. Comments included: Stay in the First Ward; the Society must grow to serve the community; consolidate with the Schenectady Museum; and just the plaintive expression "We need more space."

In April 1967, the application for the addition was denied. The opinion was that the plans submitted were not consistent with the historical style in the Historic District. So an alternative plan was developed to extend the rear 40'x18' and provide an L-shaped room seating 150. The existing small library would be fireproofed and given additional vault space. The plans were now approved by the Society's architects, and then by the City. The rear and side elevations of the building were modified to allow addition of a new room, extending 20' beyond the original rear wall, with space for 80-100 people. Additional modifications provided double the vault space, two restrooms, and a kitchen. The total cost was \$50,000. Parking would be considered later. The first step in building the new addition was taken in November 1967. The new room was named the Vrooman room, for the local author, John Vrooman. In December 1969, the Stockade requested state and federal approval to become a National Historic Site, and it was so declared on April 3, 1973.

The question of retaining a professional curator had been ongoing for years, and came to a head in the late 1960s. Trustee Ona Curran, through her knowledge and interest, had been making sure that valuable paintings had been repaired and cleaned by a noted restorer, Caroline Keck. In June 1968, Mrs. Curran was appointed curator and served in that capacity until September 1969. Money needed for restoration of paintings came from the National Council of Arts in the amount of \$3,000. Ona urged the Society to give any modern art and most scientific apparatus to the Schenectady Museum and to keep anything historical for the Society, and this was done.

THE GLEN SANDERS COLLECTION

The story of how the Historical Society obtained the items of the Glen Sanders Collection evolved over a five-year period and is summarized from the minutes of the Society's meetings. These items of furniture and other furnishings had been sold to Colonial Williamsburg, VA in 1963. The house itself was on the market several times. In August of 1970, the price for 2½ acres of land was \$150,000. The trustees even considered buying it for a site for the Society. In April 1971, the house was on the market again for \$200,000. After much discussion, the Board of Trustees decided against the purchase of the Glen Sanders house.

The arrangements with Colonial Williamsburg to purchase the Glen Sanders collection began in 1972. Wayne Harvey, who was president for much of this time, and his wife, Carol, worked tirelessly to obtain these items. In 1973 a fund drive was initiated to raise \$30,000 to purchase the pieces. Various fund drives were held to pay off the balance owed. (The Women's Auxiliary paid \$985 for the Glen Sanders silver.) The entire collection arrived in October 1973. The

Society couldn't pay the price in full so Colonial Williamsburg granted a one year extension for the balance due. In May 1974 the trustees voted to borrow money from a local bank for the money owed. A check for the debt was sent to Colonial Williamsburg on June 12, 1974. The Historical Society finally owned the collection. Work was begun on cataloging it and improving the rooms on the second floor to provide space for them. For the list of the Glen Sanders collection of furniture and other furnishings, see the addendum.

SECURITY

The minutes for this time period also revealed thefts from the Society's collection. These included guns, paintings, antique cameos, the lock plate from a Revolutionary War firearm, a Civil War sheath, and some petty cash. The need for tighter security was discussed. There was only one mention of a retrieval—"Stolen guns returned"—but no details about these or whether other items were found or returned. In addition, some items were disposed of by sales from time to time. The minutes refer to the cleaning out of the attic and setting aside things to sell. Our HQ is now protected by an extensive alarm system that is monitored by a professional service.

YOUTH GROUP

From time to time, there was interest in having a youth group in the Society. In February 1971 it was proposed that the Society sponsor a Yorker Group, a junior historical society with connection to Cooperstown. By September 1972, there were 28 in the Yorker Group (leader unknown). In November 1973, the group was still meeting and in 1974, they had a craft show. But then it was mentioned that they were looking for a new leader. They must have disbanded after that as there is no further reference to the group.

FINANCES

The financial status of the Historical Society was a constant worry and will be treated at the end of this history in some detail. This concern was mentioned in the minutes over the years many times. Efforts were tried to increase the membership dues, to charge for genealogical research, and to apply for grants. Dues began at \$3 for regular members and rose to \$5 in six years with the addition of other categories such as family, sustaining, benefactor, and corporation during this time period. The charge for research began at \$1 for "easy" answers and \$3 for "hard" answers. This was later changed to an hourly rate of \$5. Gifts were received from the Stockade Association (\$500) and Schenectady County (\$8,000, \$4,000, and \$3,000 at different times). Insurance on paintings and buildings increased almost yearly.

STAFF CHANGES

Changes in the staff were made from time to time. Howard McConville did the genealogical work for many years until he was hospitalized. Then the work was done by Elsa Church, who also taught courses in genealogy. For a brief period in the 1970s, the Society employed a part-time paid Director, Mary Antoinette De Giulio. Building repairs continued to be needed and there was always a frantic search for money to cover them. In addition to the Glen Sanders mansion as a more suitable site for the historical society, the Board also considered the Mabee House and 108 Union Street, but these were voted down. A need for a library wing was a major concern and discussed several times.

GREMS-DOOLITTLE LIBRARY

In the 1980s the changes which occurred to the Schenectady County Historical Society had a lasting effect on the Society's way of life. This was the decade during which the Grems-Doolittle Library was conceived, discussed, planned, and eventually built. It was during this decade that the Yates Doll House, certainly one of the outstanding artifacts owned by the Society, was added to the collection. It was also during this decade that we began the custom of having members' meetings and programs on the second Saturday afternoon of each month. Under the leadership of Stacia Berdy, we began the custom of serving refreshments at these get-togethers. Roy Giebel, during his term as president, provided the leadership to establish the security system that we still use.

The issues considered by the trustees during the decade have a familiar sound: How can we induce people to give us more money? How can we develop programs which have more appeal for teachers so we can share our historical resources with them? Are we properly insured? In what condition is our building and what must we do to maintain it properly?

And then there were other issues which the trustees had to resolve that were different than any we have considered recently: Should we sell the Society's headquarters at 32 Washington Avenue and use the proceeds of the sale plus the money raised to build a new library and buy the Glen Sanders Mansion? (No.) Should we accept the million dollar gift that William Broughton was offering us? (That offer was respectfully rejected because it would have entailed building the library elsewhere and because alternative fund raising had progressed to the point where adding a library addition to Society HQ was now feasible. But after the death of its founder, the William Gundry Broughton foundation established a dedicated endowment whose annual interest helps support library acquisitions.)

Another issue that came in for considerable discussion and concern was the Society's practice of authorizing plaques and historic markers for building sites in Schenectady County. (The Society no longer does so.)

While issues may be alike or unlike over a period of time, one thing that never changes is any organization's dependence for its life and its accomplishments on people. Human vision, energy, talent, and intellect are the materials out of which community is created and sustained. There were literally hundreds of individuals who contributed their time and energy to the Schenectady County Historical Society in this decade. To list them all would create a small phone book. Not to list them all runs the risk of leaving out individuals who did make considerable contributions which will go unrecorded in this history. Let us apologize in advance to anyone we may overlook.

The construction of the library, no doubt the biggest accomplishment in the decade, occurred because of the initial efforts of James Pontius. In identifying the need and organizing a committee to do the fund raising. Jim's efforts were undoubtedly furthered immeasurably by the generosity of Mandalay Grems who offered a matching gift of \$100,000 to help bring about the change. Elsa Church played a vital role on this committee. John Hancock acted as the "Clerk of the Works" throughout the process of construction, playing a vital role in bringing the project to a successful conclusion in May of 1990. Bette Bradway did the bookkeeping throughout the campaign for funds.

The Yates Doll House, undoubtedly one of our major attractions, was donated by Mrs. de Lancey Walton Watkins, a descendant of Joseph C. Yates who served as Governor of New York from 1823 to 1824. The dollhouse was designed and built by J. R. Wendell in 1834 and painted by Victor D.A. Browere. According to family tradition, the house was built for the governor's granddaughter and is the only known documented doll house of its era in New York State. Its acquisition was a project brought to fruition largely as a result of the efforts of Trustee Katherine (Katy) Kindl, and Marilyn Freitas, who was the Society's curator for much of the decade. Katy arranged to have the house refurbished in Cooperstown, and Marilyn did much to publicize its existence and value to the community. Later, Miriam Lewis, a trustee, contributed the stand on which the house is now mounted. The doll house is much larger than those typically sold today and has 14 rooms full of period style furniture.

In little over a decade, Schenectady County Historical Society grew from a modest house museum with one room jammed with local history and genealogy, to a twelve room museum, now called the Dora Jackson House; the adjoining Grems-Doolittle historical and genealogical library housing over 2,000 local family files; and the Mabee Farm—three 17th century farm buildings on 9½ acres in Rotterdam Junction, seven miles west of the City of Schenectady.

Ground was broken for the Grems-Doolittle Library on June 3, 1989. Scott Haefner was hired to become acting librarian at \$5 an hour until a professional librarian could be found. On February 20, 1990, Ruth Anne Evans agreed to try to recruit Elsie Maddaus as librarian. She was successful, and Elsie served from January 10, 1992 until June 30, 1999. She became a trustee on July 21, 1999.

Much of the business of the early part of the decade revolved around the completion of the library. Raising money was a real cliff-hanger—or maybe a roller coaster: a gift in 1989 from Mandy Grems of \$115,000, a “bridge loan” in 1990 of \$100,000 to cover current expenses, \$10,000 from the Schaffer Foundation, \$2,000 from the Women's Auxiliary, and \$25,000 in matching funds from GE in 1990 and 1991.

Those in the Society at the time will not forget John Hancock playing out his role as guardian of the library, providing a liaison with the architect and the contractor. Ultimately the Society recognized his efforts by declaring him an honorary life member. And there was Mandy, making sure that things were done right, supplying extra funds on at least one occasion, and always keeping us focused on the need to reach out to young people. Toward the end of the activity, Ruth Anne Evans was president and had the joy of shepherding the project through to completion. If, indeed, a library is ever complete. In the late fall of 1991, the library was opened as the Grems-Doolittle library in memory of Mandy and her parents, Edward George Grems and Charlotte May Doolittle. Local historian Larry Hart, a former president of the Society, spoke at the dedication on October 12, 1991.

By early 1992, the Society was out of debt; a gift of \$10,000 from Trustco Bank and one of \$15,000 from the Schenectady Foundation provided these funds. And we had a New York State certified librarian, Elsie Maddaus.

With the library nearing completion, members began redecorating the Dora Jackson house. The first item of business was the Victorian study, the southeast parlor which had housed the historical and genealogical library for so many years. As we look at the study and admire the peaceful 19th century decor, we marvel that the contents of the Grems-Doolittle Library had once been crammed into that little space.

At the same time, the former Society office was gradually transformed into a stately dining room. Gone were the five office-style desks around which volunteers had steered cautious paths. Now there was rose-colored wall paper, a dignified Hepplewhite dining room table (gift of the auxiliary), and the beautiful Stauring family gazing upon us from their golden frames. All that was needed now was an up-to-date kitchen. Thanks to a gift from Mandy Grems—\$15,000—we had it.

On May 19, 1990, near the outdoor fireplace behind Society HQ, we planted the “Tree of Friendship” with the Indians and Friends from LaChine, Quebec celebrating the end of hostilities resulting from the 1690 Schenectady Massacre.

In 1998, James Pontius helped us once again by arranging a grant from the Broughton Foundation sufficient for the purchase of our first computer and payment of Internet service for three years. Volunteer Ed Reilly, a later trustee and Vice President, implemented our first website.

MABEE FARM

On December 7, 1992, the Jan Mabee ad hoc committee met with George Franchere to receive a gift of the furnishings at the Mabee property and a check for \$17,500 to maintain the property over the next three years. Chris Harter and Derek Sayers were named as co-chairs for the Mabee Farm Committee.

George Franchere also gave the Society 583 family papers including the deed passed by Daniel Van Antwerpen to Jan Mabee on January 29, 1705/06. The Mabee homestead was passed from generation to generation for 287 years before being deeded to the Society on January 29, 1993. Soon the Dutch Barn Society began to show interest in helping the Society locate a Dutch barn for relocation to the Mabee farm site. Vince Schaeffer and Everett Rau began the search.

Meanwhile on April 27, 1993, the members of the Society created a new membership category of Honorary Life Member, “and in demonstration of our gratitude. . . bestow(ed) the title of Honorary Life Member upon George E. Franchere. . .”

Another milestone was reached in the summer of 1993 when the Jan Mabee Farm was open for tours by appointment. In October of that year, curator Ona Curran created a display of Mabee Farm Artifacts in the Vrooman Room.

By January 1995 Chris Harter and Derek Sayers presided over a Mabee Farm symposium and at the end of 1995, Kathy Johnson, who replaced Chris Harter, reported that we had been offered the Nilsen Barn in Johnstown for one dollar, and we had three years during which to move it to Rotterdam Junction.

Suddenly the Society was faced with the need for vast infusions of money. The price of the barn might be only one dollar, but the cost of disassembling it and then transporting it to Rotterdam Junction, building a foundation (after having the barn site explored by archeologists) and reassembling it was daunting. All the fund raising talent of the Society was needed to raise the necessary \$100,000, an effort successfully led by John van Schaick and Mary Kukendahl.

By 1997 the Society began to hit its stride, moving beyond “retail” to “wholesale”: fund raising. The Society applied for and received a \$50K matching grant from New York State through its Environmental Protection Fund. At that time the need was to stabilize and repair the three existing ancient buildings; the brick house, the stone house and the Inn. The Society also had to do a Historic Structure Report and an archaeological survey to put in a barn and do extensive repairs to the house.

None of the activities that brought the Mabee Farm to the status of a public museum would have been possible without the tremendous energy supplied by the members of the Mabee Farm Committee and by the generosity of many members of the community.

TURN OF THE CENTURY

The early years of the new millennium saw many changes in the Society, both at 32 Washington Avenue and at the Mabee Farm Historic Site. At the Society’s headquarters, the library saw a general increase in genealogical research while the house museum saw an emphasis on restoring the art collection. and displaying it to best advantage. At the Mabee Farm, the emphasis was on preserving the ancient buildings and restoring the barnyard for reception of visitors and school student groups.

Following the opening of the Grems-Doolittle Library in 1991, attention shifted to the house museum which had been sorely neglected. Painting of the walls and ceilings made the rooms presentable while the kitchen was remodeled in a major project. Redoing of the floors extended into the year 2000. Then a gift of two paintings by Edouard Cortes from the estate of Charles Carl drew attention to the coherence, or lack thereof, of the Society’s collection. Because the Cortes paintings did not fit the theme of our collection, these painting were sold in July 2001 for \$50,000, with the proceeds dedicated to the care and improvement of the overall collection.

ART RESTORATION

Ona Curran, art historian, rejoined the Board in April as conservator of the paintings. She soon reported that a large number, perhaps three-quarters needed help and she arranged with Caroline Keck of Cooperstown to do the required work. To raise the necessary funds, an “Adopt-a-Painting” project was undertaken among potential donors.

Ona inventoried and appraised the major paintings within her first few months. In so doing, she discovered that several were portraits of unknown persons. In hopes that readers might recognize the subjects, the SCHS Newsletter began showing photos of the paintings, but no one ever did. An article in the November 2003 issue of the magazine Antiques with photos of the collection attracted a number of visitors. By then the restored paintings had been re-hung, numbered, and listed and the museum had taken on the ambience of an art gallery.

STAFF CHANGES, AGAIN

Elsie Maddaus, librarian, archivist, and genealogical researcher, retired in the summer of 1999 and the Society hired librarian Virginia Bolen. Then in 2004, Jo Mordecai, who had brought much newspaper and TV attention to the Society, retired after 16 years as Coordinator of Exhibits. Kate Weller was hired as the museum’s curator. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program (SUNY). The 2005 staff also includes

Johanna Woldring, who was hired as Office Manager in June 1992, and custodian Paul Gonsowski, hired in 1996.

CHANGES AT THE MABEE FARM

In 1998 George Franchere, donor of the Farm, added a small piece of the property that had been left out of his original gift in 1992. It was the corner of the farm that had been sold to the Methodists in 1890. Then with about \$375,000 in donations and State grants came the restoration of the brick house foundations; replacement of the inn's deteriorated foundations, sills, joists and flooring; and buildings added to the barnyard to replace those destroyed by fire over the years.

In 1998, a contractor took down the Nilsen Dutch barn in Johnstown and moved it to the Mabee site where a foundation had been prepared for it. Starting in 1999, the barn was re-erected and extensively restored under the direction of Albany architect Keith Cramer, a leader of the Dutch Barn Society. The effort took the time and energies of a legion of people over three years until the barn was ready for use in 2002.

The volunteers rehabilitated a small two-story English barn standing on lands to the west and skidded it onto the property. The contractors attached a shed to this barn containing visitors' restrooms and a kitchen for use by caterers for functions in the Dutch barn. Volunteers acquired a trolley-stop shed from along the Troy Road and rehabilitated it for use as a kiosk for ticketing and tourist information.

In 1999 John van Schaick and Stan Lee were appointed co-chairs of the Mabee Farm Committee. In 2001, a carriage shed went up east of the Dutch barn for storing donated 19th century farm machinery. The next year saw a small shop for a resident blacksmith, and the next, the erection of a colonial woodworking shop. A 4-hole outhouse was donated by the Cobblestone Church.

Each of these changes made feasible an addition to the program. The Dutch barn eliminated the need for tents to shelter activities and provided space for children's displays designed by Ned Pratt. The restrooms made possible the opening of the site for visitors on scheduled hours. The added facilities allowed the scheduling of school groups beginning the fall of 2002. By 2004, the school program had expanded to accommodate more than 4,000 students from area schools.

An ongoing activity has been the essential archaeological investigations at the farm to determine aspects of the unwritten history of its occupation. Led by Ron Kingsley and Louise Basa, these investigations have become class--study programs for the students at the Schenectady County Community College. Another activity surrounds a 23-foot replica bateau acquired in 2003 which was the start of the riverfront program, a program enhanced in 2004 by the gift of a second bateau from Siena College. The first bateau was named DeSager in honor of the late Bob Sager, a former Society president, and the second is called Bobbie G. in honor of the mother of a boat builder.

Also in 2004, the site concluded an agreement with the County for the use of a dock on the riverfront next door. Besides its annual Forefathers Day celebration (on Father's Day), Fall Festival, and Open Houses, the site hosts an annual Spring re-enactment, a Flint Knapping Day and "Sundae on the Farm." The latter event in 2004 attracted between seven and eight thousand participants. Special crafts and collectors' events, blacksmith workshops, weddings, showers, receptions, dances, and family reunions keep the largely volunteer staff heavily involved. A gift shop, started in 2004, has begun to satisfy an evident demand for souvenirs and gifts.

Scott Haefner, former librarian at 32 Washington Avenue and later, in 1996, the resident caretaker of the farm, became the site manager in 2000. After completing work on his bachelor's degree, he resigned in December 2002 to become site manager of the Fort Johnson historic site. With his departure, the Mabee farmhouse became a non-residential structure for the first time in some 322 years and now serves as a museum with offices on the second floor. In 2003, Patricia Barrot became the full-time site administrator.

The growing program and various activities dictated the need for a year-round education center at the farm to be named for George E. Franchere. The center will provide suitable car and bus parking; space for reception, presentation, and archaeological specimens, refreshment facilities, classrooms, a colonial kitchen, a local history library, a gift shop, and offices.

THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY

The original 25 Society trustees of 1905 were all men, but by 1912 a third of Society members were women. Nonetheless, an informal Women's Auxiliary of the Schenectady County Historical Society was formed in 1934 with an initial membership of five, which soon grew to twenty. Over the years, membership grew to more than two hundred. Its first meetings were held at 13 Union Street, then later at 32 Washington Avenue. In 1941, the group was officially recognized as the Women's Auxiliary of the Schenectady County Historical Society. In March 1946, the Auxiliary adopted a constitution and bylaws which were revised in 1959, 1970, and 1984.

The aims of the auxiliary were to assist in furthering the purposes of the Society and to make a study of local history and antiquities. They also donated funds for many specific artifacts for the museum as well as specific projects and maintenance. (See a partial list in the addendum.) In order to do this, the auxiliary was active in fund raising. These activities included an evening garden party, White Elephant sales, concerts, and card parties.

The members served many volunteer hours as docents and hostesses and were in charge of many receptions. For many years, Ann Karl and Anastasia Berdy, who were members both of the auxiliary and the Board of Trustees, served refreshments for monthly meetings and other social events.

In the summer of 2000, however, declining membership, the inability to secure officers, and the fact that women had long since been eligible for Society membership led to a proposal that the Women's Auxiliary be dissolved. The vote was taken at the last meeting on September 20, 2000. Two activities had to be completed. First, a number of the auxiliary members spent hours polishing silver, making an inventory, cleaning the kitchen curtains, and washing the kitchen windows. By October, the process for dissolution of the organization had begun. Assets were transferred and presented to the Society with the intention that they would be used for purchases of artifacts for the museum, for specific maintenance projects, and for the cost of receptions held there. The auxiliary reflected the times and attitudes of the previous 65 years.

A FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

As the committee began its work of reporting the history of the first 100 years of the Schenectady County Historical Society, we wondered how the group was financed in the past. We knew that it was never formally associated with the city or the County even though it did

receive contributions from them for many years. What about dues or fees? Where did the money come from to keep this venture going?

We assumed that the details would be contained in the trustees' minutes, but the first thing we discovered was that the minutes were incomplete. Occasionally a page would be missing, and treasurer's reports were not recorded at every meeting. When they were, there might only be a mention of the current balance. Currently, the treasurer prepares very detailed monthly reports for the Finance Committee and distributed to the Board quarterly, with shorter summaries distributed in the intervening months.

The early group met several times to organize the Society but it was officially established at an organizational meeting of July 14, 1905, with a membership of 160, annual dues of \$1, and the adoption of a constitution. The dues structure changed through the years. In 1926, annual dues became \$2. In 1971, they were \$3 for regular members, \$10 for patrons, and \$50 for a life membership. In 1978, it changed to \$5 for regular members with raises also in other categories, such as \$10 family, \$25 sustaining, \$100 benefactor, and \$25 Corporation. Currently the membership dues are \$25 individual, \$40 family, \$50 donor, \$100 sponsor, \$500 patron, and \$1000 lifetime.

The beginning of the relationship between the Historical Society and the County seems to have started in 1913. In January of that year, there was an arrangement to lease the old county clerk's building on Union Street. In June of that year, the deal was closed with the county for rental and additional amounts for necessary repairs. This building then became our meeting place.

In 1921, a new lease with the County for 15 years at \$1 per year was arranged. The County also contributed cash donations from time to time beginning with \$750 in 1922. The amount changed to \$1,000, \$1,250, \$8,000, \$4,000, \$3,000 at different times. The Society also derived money by renting the second floor of the building to various community organizations for differing amounts.

The first mention of a Ways and Means Committee of the Society was in 1914. In addition to seeking funds from the County, the Society derived funds from members, the Stockade Association, and later, from the city council. In 1925, an endowment fund was created when memorials were given by the Case family. But even so, the records of the Society show a constant struggle between receipts and expenditures that continued until fortunes improved significantly in 2004, our 100th year.

Since the start of the annual Stockade Walkabout in 1959, the Society has received a modest but steady source of income. The Walkabout quickly became a fixture and, as of this writing, has been an annual event for 46 years. For the first two years the Society's Walkabout partner was the Schenectady Museum, with each making an equal contribution in effort and expenses. In 1961, our partner became the newly formed Stockade Association in place of the Museum. By the 1980s, when the weather was good, the Society's share of the proceeds could be as much as \$3,000. In 2001, the two organizations were joined by a third partner, the Downtown Schenectady Improvement Corporation (DSIC), and programming was enhanced through addition of a Waterfront Faire that is very popular with children.

Twenty years ago the Society's major asset was the house at 32 Washington Avenue. It began as a residence and then was a women's club for General Electric employees. When the Society obtained the building, it became its headquarters and a museum for the display of furnishings,

paintings, and artifacts relevant to Schenectady's history. A part—the gentleman's study, dining room, and kitchen areas—housed a genealogical and local history library. After the addition of the Vrooman Room at the rear of the house, this was used for meetings and as a work area for genealogical and historical researchers.

Volunteers performed much of the work of the Society, aided by two part--time employees. Annual budget making by the trustees usually required an optimistic overestimation of dues and gift incomes. By year-end, the special gifts usually made up for revenue deficits.

Recognizing the inadequacy of the facilities, trustee Mandalay (Mandy) Grems challenged the trustees with an offer of \$100,000 to start the funding of the library addition. She added another \$50,000 later and by the time the library had been built and paid for at a total cost of some \$432,000, other money had been received from a broad segment of the community. Mandy demonstrated that the Society no longer needed to think of itself as a shoe-string operation suffering from the loss of local government subsidies. During the later phases of library construction one trustee, John van Schaick, facilitated a bridging loan to pay the contractors. He then laid out the library, locating placement of the stacks, files, desks, and equipment. A contract with an Albany firm was made to refurbish cast-off furnishings and put them in position, saving moving costs. Mandy and President Ruth Anne Evans were impressed and delighted.

In 1992, John van Schaick succeeded Ruth Anne Evans as President. At this time there were serious problems regarding staffing. Our volunteer administrator, Miriam Lewis, was replaced with part-time paid staff. Renovating the vacated spaces in the house and paving the parking area required funds. Since most of the Society's general reserves had been spent, budgeting was very difficult. Meetings of the trustees had often bogged down in lengthy discussions of new projects brought forth by the various members and occasional budget-breaking approvals for new spending. Soon after taking office, van Schaick reactivated the executive committee to which he added the chairs of the house and library committees. Because he required that budgetary plans and all proposals involving new spending be submitted to this committee by other committees for review, it became known as the Finance committee. This committee cut down on ad hoc financial planning by the trustees and facilitated meetings.

The new president was both fortunate and astute. He soon learned that Esther Glen, the widow of Henry Glen, a founder of our Society and director of the Schenectady public library in the 1890s, had died recently and that the Society would benefit substantially from her will. He asked the trustees to restate their invested funds policy. When the Esther Glen bequest turned out to be some \$265,000, the trustees, after further discussions over several months, directed that the bequest go into the invested funds account so that interest income could provide the funds needed for new staff positions.

To administer the invested funds account, an investments committee was formed comprising President van Schaick, Treasurer Frank Taormina, and William H. Milton III, a trustee at the time and a retired Trustco trust department banker.

The committee decided to invest primarily in dividend-paying common stocks, each issue limited in amount to no more than ten percent of the portfolio for diversification. The dividend income would go directly into the budget and increases in the value of the portfolio would provide inflation protection. Several smaller bequests during the next year brought the portfolio to over half a million dollars and provided half the funds for the operational budget

During Ruth Anne Evans' presidency, Van Schaick had met with and discussed the Mabee farm with its owner, George E. Franchere of Dunedin, Florida, a former resident of this area. He wanted to donate it to a worthy 501(c)3 organization and had offered it unsuccessfully to the Society, which was then busy with the library project. Evans regretted that the Society had not obtained the Glen Sanders mansion twenty years before and wanted to accept the Mabee farm. But she doubted that the trustees would accept it without guarantees that it would not become a burden on the Society. She dispatched John Van Schaick to discuss matters with the owner in Florida. When he returned in February of 1992 with assurances that Franchere would grant much of his tax savings from the gift to support the farm during its first three years as a Society property, the trustees voted to accept the gift of the Mabee farm. Franchere turned over the deed to the Society in January 1993.

These post-library arrangements continued largely unchanged through the next decade under the presidencies of Mason Harter, who died in office, Robert Sager, his successor, and William Dimpelfeld. The invested funds swelled by accretion and internal growth to well over a million dollars and still supplies about half of the operational budget. Special gifts by the membership and the community have funded special projects like the renovation of the kitchen and the restoration of the Society's paintings.

For nine years Mabee farm accounting was kept separate from that of the Society as a whole, but in 2002, its budget became a part of the overall Society budget. In 1998, the farm had nm a capital campaign to pay for preservation work of the old buildings and to restore the barnyard and moving in the Nilsen Dutch barn from Johnstown. That fund raising, subsequent donations, plus in-kind contributions from volunteers has enabled over \$375,000 in improvements and establishment of schools and tourist programs that lend luster to the Society.

The Society's 2004-2005 budget was just over \$158,000, including the Mabee Farm. Staff at the 32 Washington Avenue complex were upgraded and the Mabee Farm had a full-time administrator and two excellent summer interns.

The Mabee Farm portion of the budget is \$52,000 of which \$20,000 to \$30,000 was funded annually by the farm's donor, George Franchere, until he died in late 2004. But he provided generously for the Society in his will, so that the long term financial outlook of the Society in general and the farm in particular is very bright.

As of 2005, the farm was engaged in a capital campaign to raise funds for the first phase of the badly-needed George E. Franchere Education Center, a drive being conducted by the Mabee Farm Committee co-chairmen under the leadership of President Kim Mabee, who succeeded William Dimpelfeld in 2004. Bill continues to serve the Society as Assistant Treasurer.

EFNER HISTORY CENTER

In 2004, Society officials met with Schenectady Mayor Brian Stratton and offered volunteer staffing to manage the then dormant Efner History Center under Society auspices, an offer that was enthusiastically accepted. The Center is essentially a city historical library that was founded by former SCHS President William B. Efner, Sr. and contains numerous maps, documents, books, photos, and papers that were collected by him over a period of fifty years. This library was opened to the public on November 19, 1952. This collection once occupied the upper floor of Mr. Efner's home and was brought to the top floor of City Hall after he died. After several years during which the Center was only sporadically staffed and seldom open, volunteer and

current trustee and Society secretary Cynthia Seacord now opens it to the public three days per week and helps visitors with their historical research.

EPILOG

The Society had to operate close to the vest for its first 85 years, and its survival for that long is due to the perspicacity and frugality of the Trustees who carried us that far. Over the last fifteen, however, financial fortunes changed to the point where SCHS was able to expand its hours and services to the community in general and our members in particular. The significant “recent” advances were the construction of the Grems-Doolittle Library and the acquisition and improvement of the Mabee Farm. We look forward to the next 100.

Appendix: List of Presidents of SCHS

1905-1906:	Myron F. Westover	1954-1956:	John J. Birch
1907-1910:	Dr. Charles C. Duryea	1956-1957:	John J. Vrooman
1910-1912:	Henry G. Reist	1957-1959:	J. Warren Joyce
1913-1914:	Gen. Charles L. Davis	1959-1963:	John W. Harper
1914-1915:	Langdon Gibson	1963-1965:	John J. Birch
1915-1916:	Alonzo P. Walton	1965-1968:	Larry Hart
1916-1918:	Allen W. Johnston	1968-1970:	Lansing Christman
1918-1919:	Henry G. Reist	1970-1971:	Neal W. Allen
1919-1920:	John I. Bennett	1971-1973:	Gene F. Seehafer
1920-1921:	Hanford Robison	1973-1975:	Wayne H. Harvey
1921-1922:	Henry B. Boardman	1975-1977:	William E. Fasake
1922-1924:	Robert Judson Landon	1977-1979:	Stephanie Albers
1924-1926:	Delancy W. Watkins	1979-1980:	Larry Hart
1926-1930:	Peter Schuyler Miller	1981-1985:	Wayne H. Harvey
1930-1934:	Clarence E. Bennett	1985-1987:	Roy Giebel
1934-1935:	Edwin G. Conde	1987-1989:	Francis R. Taormina
1935-1938:	Jason W. Liddle	1989-1990:	Arthur Glover
1938-1941:	Frank C. Zapf	1990-1992:	Ruth Anne Evans
1941-1942:	William B. Efner	1992-1994:	John H. Van Schaick
1942-1943:	Dr. Frederick L. Bronner	1994-1995:	L. Mason Harter
1943-1945:	Duane Featherstonhaugh	1995-1999:	Robert W. Sager
1945-1947:	Clyde D. Wagoner	1999-2004:	William A. Dimpelfeld
1947-1949:	William C. Yates	2004-2006:	Kim A. Mabee
1949-1950:	Duane Featherstonhaugh	2006-2012:	Edwin D. Reilly, Jr.
1951-1952:	Howard McConville	2012-2014:	Merritt Glennon
1952-1954:	William H. Bloodworth	2014-Present:	Marianne Blanchard