

Schenectady County Historical Society

Newsletter Volume 39 - Number 1-2 January - February 2002

32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, New York 12305

(518) 374-0263

Web site: <http://www.schist.org>

Editor email: slbvs@earthlink.net

Librarian email: librarian@schist.org

CALENDAR

Saturday, January 12, 2002

1:30: Refreshments

2:00: Program: "Rotterdam Junction and its Trains"

Presenter: Scott Haefner, Rotterdam Town Historian

Tuesday, January 15, 2002

7:30 PM

Board of Trustees

Saturday, February 9, 2002

1:30: Refreshments

2:00 Program: Presidents' Month: Chester Arthur

Presenter: Frank Taormina

Tuesday, February 19, 2002

7:30 PM

Board of Trustees

Society Hours

Monday-Friday 1:00 to 5:00 PM

Saturday 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

Group tours by appointment

Phone (518) 374-0263

The Newsletter is published six times a year. Deadlines are the second Monday of June, August, October, December, February April. Please submit material as early as possible.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

My father's father was born in 1859 in the village of St. Avold, Lorraine. At that time Lorraine and neighboring Alsace were part of France with a German-speaking population. In 1870, when my grandfather was eleven years old, France attacked the newly formed German Confederation. In the process they lost Alsace and Lorraine to the Germans. Since the end of World War I, Alsace and Lorraine are once again part of France, but with a French-speaking population. The German influence lingers on in the architecture, municipality names and a unique cuisine.

Today Lorraine is known for its cemeteries. Large military cemeteries. St. Avold has the largest American military cemetery in Europe, 16,000 graves from World War II. Nearby Verdun has the graves of 14,000 American servicemen. Part of the 880,000 soldiers who died in that area during World War I. Lorraine has the terrain for easy military invasions. It is the gateway to Paris from the east.

My grandfather emigrated to this country in 1882 from Zweibrucken, the German province adjacent to Lorraine, after three years service in the German army. 170 years earlier the German-speaking people who immigrated to the American colonies from this general area were known as Palatine Germans.

The Palatines' homeland was the area along the mid-Rhine River and its tributaries, an area known as the Palatinate. Palatine was the title of the Roman officials who governed the area in the first century A.D. It is also the name of one of the Seven Hills of Rome.

In addition to the Franco-Prussian squabbling over territory, the Palatinate was the center of religious warfare. From the ninth through the eighteenth centuries, the German-speaking people of Europe were part of the Holy Roman empire. In 1517, Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic priest, protested against the fund-raising campaign to build St. Peter's in Rome. He was reprimanded by the Church at the Diet of Worms. (This had nothing to do with nutrition; Worms is the name of a Palatine City.) Within a hundred years the Protestant Reformation movement had spread throughout most of northern Europe. And as might be expected, since money and power were involved, the bickering escalated into conflicts.

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) was really a series of wars which initially were fought between German Protestants and Catholics. Later the fighting expanded with the invasion by foreign armies from France, Sweden and Denmark, and Austria. By the time the fighting was over, two-thirds of the population of the Palatinate had died.

In 1685 the French king, Louis XIV, decreed that since he was Catholic all his subjects also should be Catholic. (Some references suggest that his mistress made him do it.) At that time one-third of France were Calvinist

Protestants who were known as Huguenots. Many of these Huguenots fled France: some to the Netherlands and others to the Palatinate. In 1702 Louis decided to expand his empire. His armies invaded the Palatinate.

In addition to his "Catholics only" policy, Louis also disliked Germans. All Germans. Both the Protestant and Catholic Palatines alike plus the displaced Huguenots were in serious trouble.

But there was a way out! England under Queen Anne was looking for settlers from its colonies in the New World. It actively recruited the Palatines. William Penn even made two trips to the Palatinate, looking for settlers. (The Pennsylvania Dutch are remnants of Palatine Germans.) Over 13,000 Palatines responded to the call. England was overwhelmed with the logistics of housing and feeding this number of people while arranging for their resettlement. And even after resettlement there was still a need to support the settlers until they became self sufficient. You know who suffered the most during all this.

The Palatines selected to settle along the Schoharie Creek in "upstate" New York had an especially rough time. American Indians' representatives had been brought to London to present Queen Anne with title to their land along the Schoharie Creek. The Palatines were promised this fertile valley in return for supplying lumber, tar and pitch for the English navy. They were also to act as a buffer between the English/Dutch settlements of northern New York and raiding French and Indians.

Before they got to this "promised land" the Palatines were diverted by Robert Hunter, the Governor of New York Province, to work on the Livingston Estate along the Hudson River at Germantown. The Palatines were indentured which meant they had to pay off for their passage and keep by working for the Livingstons. The pine trees of New York did not yield tar and pitch like Carolina's southern yellow pine. So the cash crop which was to pay off their indebtedness was a fizzle. England, frustrated by their failure to perform, canceled their contract with the Livingstons. This put the Palatines out of work.

Many decided to move on to the Schoharie Valley. Now you have to realize that the American Indians didn't have a formal definition of land ownership. While the Palatines were with Livingston, Mohawk chiefs sold the same Schoharie land promised to the Palatines to Adam Vrooman of Schenectady. Governor Hunter was inclined to support the Dutch/English claims over those of the Palatine. Some of the Palatines stayed on in the valley, some moved to join their countrymen in Pennsylvania, and others moved further out along the Mohawk River valley to places like Stone Arabia, Palatine Bridge and Herkimer/German Flats some years later. In these locations they were raided, not by the French and Indians, but by Tory English and Indians.

The saga of the Schoharie Palatine's misadventure is documented in the novel, *The Promised Land*, written by John Vrooman of Schenectady in 1958.

After almost 300 years, many of the Pennsylvania Dutch Amish still maintain their unique culture. The suburban sprawl of Philadelphia has made their farmland very valuable. Some have sold and moved north to New York to places like Palatine Bridge and Stone Arabia, the farmland of their former compatriots. The last time I stopped at the McDonald's in Palatine Bridge, the place was half-full of Amish families, out on-the-town.

--Bill Dimpelfeld

JANUARY PROGRAM

On January 12, at our regular meeting, Scott Haefner, Rotterdam Town Historian, will present a talk and slide show about Rotterdam Junction in its heady days as an important railroad center in the Northeast. Learn about the roundhouse and the nearby Mabee Hotel. Recapture a day when the economic struggle was between the railroads and the canal system.

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

On February 9 we celebrate Presidents' Month with a talk by Frank Taormina about Chester Arthur, our 21st president, and a graduate of Union College at the age of 17. Born in Fairfield, VT, he was the first son of nine children. His father was a traveling rural minister. Consider the world of Chester Arthur:

1883 - The Brooklyn Bridge was completed - the longest in the world at that time.

1883 - Standard Time was adopted by the railroads and finally the public for time zones.

1884 - The world's first skyscraper, Home Insurance, was built in Chicago.

1884 - The Linotype was patented; it was used by the New York Tribune in 1886.

There were 38 stars on our national flag during Chester Arthur's term of office.

HOLIDAY PARTY

Elliese Reamer's "ethnic" Christmas party made everyone very happy as we shared goodies from foreign lands and traded stories about our various childhood customs.

WE GET LETTERS . . .

From: "mike engle" <speigletown@hotmail.com>

Hello,

I am doing research on Diners and Lunch Wagons. My general coverage area is upstate New York, but I would be interested in hearing about any stories relating to diners from anywhere. I am looking for any information concerning diners of the past or the present. This would include stories from former customers, former owners, pictures or any other recollections. It is always great to place a diner with a family and/or with some of its customers, as this is what a diner is really about. So if your family used to own a diner or lunch wagon, you know of people who did, or you went to a diner as a kid in your hometown, I would love to hear from you.

To People with family from Schenectady: I have a list of owners of lunch wagons and diners from the 1890s to about the 1940s. It is incomplete, but the majority of data is there. <http://www.nydiners.2ya.com/schd.html>

Best Regards,

Michael Engle

speigletown@hotmail.com

<http://www.geocities.com/cornwallace55/>

KINGSLEY HONORED FOR WORK ON MABEE FARM

The local Schenectady Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution presented Dr. Ronald Kingsley with the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution Conservation Medal during a recent luncheon meeting. Dr. Kingsley was recognized for this honor . . . for his archaeological undertaking at the Mabee Farm in Lower Rotterdam Junction. He accepted the award, recognizing fellow archaeologist Louise Basa, along with Kingsley, an Adjunct Faculty member at Schenectady County Community College.

LOCAL ARCHAEOLOGY COURSES OFFERED IN 2002

Interested in learning more about Local Archaeology? Then check out these two non-credit courses starting in

January 2002 at Schenectady County Community College. For registration materials and costs, contact Continuing Education at 381-1423.

"Pre-Colonial Archaeology and Field Study", a hands-on course that explores current ideas about Native American lifeways prior to European settlement in the Capital District through research, interpretation and artifact investigation. Offered by Louise Basa, Thursdays, 6 to 8 PM, January 24 through April 4.

"Researching and Interpreting Documents in Archaeology". This course examines primary and secondary documents used in archaeology. Sources, methods, locations, and interpretations of a variety of documents used for research, proposals, and publications in archaeology are addressed. Visits to repositories, discussions, lectures and hands-on activities are among the methods employed. Offered by Dr. Ronald Kingsley, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6 to 9 PM, January 23 through March 12.

MUSEUM NEWS by Jo Mordecai, Coordinator of Exhibits

The God Bless America Christmas 2001 exhibit in the Vrooman Room during December was very successful. The theme appealed to the school children who make their visit to the Schenectady Historical Society during the Christmas season a yearly treat. I would like to thank Mrs. Dorothy White for allowing me to use her Christmas miniature villages. Dorothy is always willing to share her many treasures with me for Society displays.

We were also lucky to be featured in the Gazette, on the front page of the life style section. Star reporter Jeff Wilkin always does a good job writing up our exhibits.

Thanks also to Beryl Grant and Wilma Corcoran, responsible for obtaining all the hats under the American Tree. Wilma's bother Fire Chief Jim Sherry was proud to have his white and red helmet and visor under our special tree. The hats of NYS, NYPD, NY State Police and Altamont Police were given by Beryl's grandson Michael Phelps who is a NYS trooper.

All the hats had been worn during the Twin Towers disaster, and put extra meaning to our God Bless America Christmas.

This year we were visited by the following schools: The Glencliff School, two groups; Brown School, two groups; St. John the Evangelist, two groups; and the Teckla Elementary School in Amsterdam, two groups. The latter is the first Amsterdam school to make the visit. Altogether we have had 215 school children and 84 adult visitors up until now.

Unfortunately the nursery schools were not visiting this year because of warnings being given out. As they are all privately owned they did not want to take the chance. But they were missed; I used to enjoy hearing them sing their Christmas songs and joining in.

Have a good, healthy New Year and may it bring forth peace.

-Jo Mordecai

LIBRARY DOINGS by Virginia LaGoy, Librarian

DONATIONS TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Donor	Book
Georgetta Dix	Something to believe in by Frances B. Grant with Georgetta Dix
Ann Ross	Samuel S. Stratton

**Jerry Lynn Ross (author) Ancestors and Descendants of Ellis Grant Dillabaugh and Loraine Edna Shay
William H. Seward's travels Around the World by Olive R. Seward, ed.**

BOOK ACQUISITIONS

**Starbuck, David R. The Great Warpath: British military sites from Albany to Crown Point
Images of America Series Albany; Clifton Park; Johnstown; Troy; New Scotland Town ship; Guilderland;
Around Burnt Hills; Around Ballston Lake; Saratoga Springs, an historical portrait**

Bunnell, Paul J. The New Loyalist Index

**Hughes, Marian I Refusing Ignorance: the struggle to educate black children in Albany, New York, 1816 -
1873**

Byron, Reginald Irish America

Hart, John P., ed. Nineteenth and early 20th century domestic site archaeology in New York State

Larkin, F. Daniel Pioneer American railroads: the Mohawk and Hudson & the Saratoga and Schenectady

**Scott, Kenneth, comp. Early New York Naturalizations: Abstract of Naturalization records from Federal, State,
and Local courts, 1792-1840**

McEneny, John J. Albany, capital city on the Hudson: an illustrated history

Larkin, F. Daniel New York State canals: a short history

Godfrey, Fred G. The Champlain canal: mules to tugboats

Roser, Susan E. Mayflower Increasing, 2nd ed.

CDs

1910 New York Upstate census index

Vital Records Index: British Isles

Vital Records Index: North America

The Erie Canal in Schenectady - Frank Taormina

Vital Records: Mayflower vital records, deeds, and wills, 1600s - 1900s

1880 U S Census

HELP NEEDED!

**The library is looking for someone to learn book and paper repair. Our newest volunteer, Samantha Couture, is
graciously donating her time and expertise to prepare some of our valuable old books and maps. She would like
to find someone else to train and to work with her. If you are interested, call the librarian, Virginia La Goy, any
afternoon. Many hands make light work!**

PAINTING CONSERVATION REPORT by Ona Curran

**Progress is being made, one painting at a time. Thanks to the Dimplefelds and a matching grant from General
Electric, a portrait by Schenectady artist John Wilkie has been restored by well known conservator Caroline
Keck of Cooperstown. John Wilkie reportedly was born in Charlton NY in 1793, the son of Thomas Wilkie, Jr.
and Mary Felthousen, both of Schenectady. He spent much of his life in Schenectady, but records indicate he
also painted portraits in Hamilton NY for a period of time About twelve portraits are known to have survived,
one of Governor De Witt Clinton is in the Union College collection, one is in the collection of the Philadelphia
Museum of Art, three are in the Schenectady County Historical Society. In addition to the known portraits in
private collections, there are probably others location unknown.**

**The sitter in the portrait recently restored is unidentified but is stylistically similar to the portrait of Marie
Dunham, sister of Professor Isaac Dunham which was painted by Wilkie in 1838 and given to the Schenectady
County Historical Society by Cora Eloise Campbell in 1905. The third portrait painted by Wilkie in the Society's
collection is that of the Sailor Boy painted in 1833. Wilkie died in Schenectady in 1840. The Wilkie portraits in**

the Society's collection are on exhibit in Society headquarters on Washington Avenue. Hours are Monday - Friday 1-5pm and Saturday morning 9 - 12 noon.

STROLLING THROUGH THE ARCHIVES ON A RAINY AFTERNOON . . .

[Cardiff Giant]

According to one of the senior members of the Society, the Cardiff Giant was a big draw in more innocent days. We encountered this advertisement while examining a large box of items that had been in someone's attic and which are being prepared for accession.

MABEE FARM PROJECT

The Mabee Farm Project is in a quiet mode these days, On the 17th of December the committee hosted a jovial holiday party where we could get together and see how plans were coming along. Ned Pratt is in the last stages of preparation of the displays for the barn which will provide ancillary experiences for fourth grade students. In concert with the Education Committee he has also prepared a workbook based on the requirements of the State Education Department and the rich discoveries of the New Netherland project which is translating thousands of documents that have been languishing in the State Library waiting for translation from Middle Dutch. We are grateful to the Lally Foundation for funding this project which is a pioneer in the area. Needless to say we are trying to get information about this activity out to as many teachers as possible. We hope to do this through the Teacher Center in this region now that they have been assured of funding.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

Wanted!

Someone to do filing in the library. Our librarian can never catch up.
Great opening for volunteer with unsatisfied clerical lust! Call librarian at 374-0263

Wanted!

Someone to do data entry on one of our wonderful computers. You do not have to be a computer geek; you just need enthusiasm for the work of the society plus the ability to follow directions. Call librarian at 374-0263

Wanted!

A real extrovert to organize boat and bus trips. There are wonderful places to go around here, but all the board members are maxed out and we need fresh blood, verve, muscle and know-how to plan trips. Call office at 374-0263

Wanted!

A grant writer. We know the grants are out there; we just need that certain person with the time to ferret out where the grants are hidden so we can continue to enhance the work of the Society. Call President or office manager at 374-0263

Wanted!

Docents. A docent is a tour guide. We're running out of docents and we want fresh troops. Come now: you know that you've always secretly wanted to show people around the Museum. Follow Jo or Sally or Wayne or Ann a time or two and you'll get the hang of it. Call Jo Mordecai at 374-926 for further information.

Moses Viney had several responsibilities outside of his driving Eliphalet Nott about the town and campus. He would also carry the president's messages around the college and city as well and was the designated driver for nearly every dignitary who visited Union. According to the Garnet, a Union College publication, he also "assisted the students in innocent escapades of the night and who on the following morning hurried through the dormitory to arouse the oversleepers in time to make their morning classes or to get them to chapel." Two of the students whom Moses used to pull out of bed were Frederick William Seward, son of Lincoln's secretary of state William H. Seward, and future president Chester A. Arthur. In addition, he was responsible for bringing students to Nott's office for reprimands, but all of the students came to refer to him affectionately as "the old man".

Moses continued as Nott's driver until the latter was stricken by a series of paralyzing strokes between 1859 and 1864. During this period he became more of a body servant, preparing Nott's meals and using massage to treat the president's severe rheumatism. In fact, Viney earned such a reputation for conducting successful "massage therapy" that he occasionally accompanied a local bonesetter named Dr. Sweet on particularly difficult cases. When Nott died on January 29, 1866, Moses followed the bier all the way to the burial site in Vale Cemetery. Of all the faculty, alumni, employees and dignitaries present, it was Moses who was the last mourner to leave Nott's grave.

The death of Eliphalet Nott proved to be the beginning of a true independence for Moses Viney. Nott had stipulated in his will that his coachman and servant receive \$1000 from his estate - an enormous sum for a person of Viney's station in those days. On February 14, 1867, Moses and his wife Anna used this money to purchase a small home on Lafayette Street from a Mrs. Ellen G. Latour, whose late husband Frank, an African-American barber, operated a shop out of Fuller's Hotel on State Street. Moses was then hired as a coachman, gardener and watchman by Urania Nott, the college president's widow. Within four years he had accumulated enough money to purchase three lots on Furman Street for \$450, which he sold a few years later for \$850.

With Federal troops still occupying the South under Reconstruction, Moses returned to Maryland for the first time since his escape over thirty years earlier. Richard Murphy, his old master and childhood friend, was still alive and "welcomed him cordially, notwithstanding the fact that Viney had impoverished him to the extent of sixteen hundred dollars." Moses discovered that two of his brothers had also escaped slavery but were killed while fighting in the Union Army. Yet three other brothers were still alive as well as a four-year-old half sister name Leila, who returned with him to Schenectady. By 1884, Moses and Anna Viney were keeping house for Sidney G. Ashmore, a professor of classics at Union College.

Moses' life was overshadowed a year later by personal loss. The Schenectady Daily Union of December 12, 1885, carried this obituary: "Mrs. Anna Viney, the wife of Mr. Moses Viney, died last evening at her residence in Lafayette Street. Like her husband, she was well known to all the older residents of this city and was respected. She was a person of much intelligence and had read a good deal for one of her opportunities. She was sensitive to the wrongs and disadvantages of her colored race, and took a practical interest in its improvement. She has done well her humble part through a long life. Within a few hours of her departure her husband received word of the death of his stepmother in Baltimore. Mr. Viney had been for many years employed by Mrs. Dr. Nott."

When Urania Nott died two years later, she left Moses a wash stand, table, "Her late husband's Extension chair" and \$1000 for "services as a watchman in her house". He then purchased Mrs. Nott's horse and carriage from the estate and went into business for himself as a coachman, providing rides for the citizens of Schenectady as well as the many statesmen, generals, bishops, financiers and authors who visited the Union College campus. The city's fashionable women also used his services, and throughout the 1890's the local press often noted that "the ladies consider it quite 'chic; to shop with Moses now."

The most definitive history of Schenectady, surpassing the Nineteenth Century efforts of Jonathan Pearson, is nearing completion. Much of the exhaustive research has been done, using the primary sources in the Grems Doolittle Library of the Schenectady County Historical Society. Replete with an authoritative narrative, maps, and charts, this book promises to be the ultimate work on Schenectady for the foreseeable future. BUT the final stages of completion take time and money. Grants have run low; much meticulous final work needs to be done, and this costs money- money for transportation; money for duplication of documents, money for preparing the index, and money to get the manuscript camera-ready for printing. Here's where you come in. For a Gift of \$1,000 you become a Patron of the Humanities. Your name will be included on a special page in the final volume, where you will be listed as a Patron. Checks should be made payable to the Colonial Schenectady Project (a 501 (c)(3) organization), 1127 Avon Road, Schenectady, NY 12308. Needless to say, gifts in any amount are more than welcome.

FUNDS NEEDED!

Renew your Status. Our extensive art collection is suffering from deferred maintenance! Our beautiful paintings need cleaning, restoring, and frame enhancing.

Want to help? Contributions to this fund are tax deductible and can be made in your name, or in memory of a deceased relative or friend, or even to celebrate and honor the accomplishment of someone you admire.

CONTRIBUTORS DURING OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, 2001 WITHOUT YOU WE ARE NOTHING!

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