

# Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 41 - Number 1-2

January - February 2004

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## CALENDAR

**Saturday, January 10, 2004**

**1:30 Refreshments**

**2:00 Program: The Erie Canal**

**Presenter: Frank Taormina**

**Wednesday,**

**January 21, 2004**

**11:30 AM**

**Board of Trustees Meeting**

**February 1-29**

**Various Activities of the Colonial Festival**

**Saturday, February 7, 2004**

**1:30 Refreshments**

**2:00 Program: Early Dutch Hardware**

**Presenter: John Ackner, Blacksmith**

**The public is welcome**

**Wednesday, February 18, 2004**

**11:30 AM**

**Board of Trustees Meeting**

**(New) Society Hours**

**Museum: Tuesday-Friday 1:00 to 5:00 PM Saturday: 10-4 Closed on Monday**

**Library: Monday-Friday 1:00 to 5:00 PM Saturday: 9-1**

**Group tours by appointment Phone (518) 374-0263**

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

**Bill Dimpelfeld**

Everyone likes good music, and the definition of good music is whatever music you happen to like. My exposure to music in the 1930s was limited. One aspect was listening to the radio and Kate Smith's weekly program. While Kate sang her version of popular music, she had the voice of a "fat lady" opera singer. She had resonance.

After Kate graduated from high school in Washington, DC, she moved to New York City, not to get into show business, but to attend nursing school. But her interest was in singing and somehow this inexperienced teenager landed a job in a Broadway "Follies." As the name of the revue implies there was a lot of joking around during the performance. If Kate was on stage her excessive girth became the butt of the comics' ad libs. This did not help Kate's ego. But she was "discovered" by a music promoter, Ted Collins, who volunteered himself to be her agent.

Ted arranged for a 15 minute local radio program for Kate, and she gladly quit the Follies. Within a couple

years, Kate was promoted to a weekly network program; this southern belle had it made.

One of Kate's earliest splurges with the money made from her success on radio was to buy an island at Lake Placid, New York, for a summer retreat from the City. Kate's theme song was "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain." I wonder if she picked this in reference to the mountains that surrounded her summer retreat at Lake Placid.

My grade school made a couple attempts to introduce us to classical music. There was one teacher who had two 78 rpm records which she played for us. The one record had two of Edward Macdowell's Woodland Sketches: "To a Wild Rose" and "To a Water-lily." The second record had an Edward Elgar "Pomp and Circumstance March" on the one side, and the flip was an abbreviated version of Sibelius's "Finlandia." That I remember these so vividly leads me to believe the teacher played these recordings more than once.

Our second introduction to the classics was a sixth grade graduation performance of Englebert Humperdinck's "Hansel and Gretel." I got to sing in the choir. (I still sing in a choir.) What I remember most about this production was that they put lipstick on the boys and not the girls (their color was already good). And classmate Margaret Funk lost the diamond out of her new graduation ring. (Margaret's father owned Erie's first "streamlined" grocery store. You got to pick out your own groceries and put them in a cart. There was a turnstile to keep you from leaving the store with their cart.) I think I'll add a recording of "Hansel and Gretel" to my Christmas list.

I'm going to end this wandering memoir by mentioning a live performance that I attended of Spike Jones and the City Slickers. Spike Jones was the Peter Schickele aka P.D.Q. Bach of popular music. It was fun. One of the bits both Jones and P.D.Q. Bach did was to have their orchestras play a piece on toy instruments. A local classical music radio station I was listening to recently played Spike Jones rendition of Leopold Mozart's "Toy Symphony."

Let's see, For my Christmas list, in addition to the "Hansel and Gretel" CD, add Kate Smith and Spike Jones. (I've already got the "Woodland Sketches," "Pomp and Circumstance," and the "Toy Symphony").

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## **AROUND THE COUNTY**

**Princetown Tidbit** Irma Mastrean -- Town Historian

Oldtimers in Princetown remembered their parents telling them about the "Blizzard of '88." The snow was piled right up over the windows and doors; people had to shovel to get out of the house. A couple visiting from New Jersey during the storm said they never wanted to come to New York State again in the wintertime.

In one big snowstorm, a family living in Princetown had a house full of company when the storm struck. . . . they were there for a week! Fortunately, there was enough food, since farm folks always had a good supply of canned goods and smoked meat.

The storm of 1931 left drifts up to 25 feet high. Many town roads running through the hills of Mariaville, Princetown and Duanesburg were completely closed. People were forced to go on skis and snowshoes for provisions to Peeke's store in the village of Mariaville. They dug tunnels from their homes to the main roads.

**Scotia-Glenville** by Elsie Maddaus

How many private cemeteries do you think there are in the Scotia-Glenville area? I you said 30, then you might have seen the list of Private Family Burial Grounds compiled by Donald A. Keefer and Roland R. Vosburgh in 1967. These include, by name, Brumaghim, DeGraaf, Fonda, Haverly Brooks, Lovett, Rector, Reese, Sanders,

Seaman, Swart, Swart and Van Patten, Toll(2), Mabee-Van Antwerp, Van Eps (2), Van Natten, Van Patten (4). Van Vorst (Van Voast), Vedder, Viele, Weatherwax, Yates, DeGraff, Haverly (Haverley), Puffer and one listed as Unknown. The list gives the location of each by street and road.

My thanks to the present Glenville historian, Joan Szablewski, for providing me with this information. There are also cemeteries near the First Reformed Dutch Church of Glenville at West Glenville and the Centre Glenville United Methodist Church (formerly the First Methodist Episcopal Church of the Town of Glenville), also the work of Donald A. Keefer and others.

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## **COLONIAL FESTIVAL**

The Community Archaeology Program of the Continuing Education Division at Schenectady County Community College and the Mabee Farm Historic Site of the Schenectady County Historical Society (SCHS) are sponsoring "Digging" -- Buried History at the Schenectady County Public Library from Feb. 1 through Feb. 29.

"Digging" is an exhibit prepared by the Community Archaeology program, illustrating the research of people's lives through gravestones, cemetery records, Genealogy, wills other historic documents and non-destructive archaeological methods, including radar surveys. The focus is on the Mabee family cemetery at the Mabee Farm Historic Site, a property of SCHS. Hours: M-Th 9-9; F & Sat. 99-5; Sun. 1 - 5; Schenectady County Public Library, Clinton and Liberty Streets.

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## **LIBRARY POTPOURRI** by Virginia Bolen

### **Books**

We are looking forward to the arrival of Susan Staffa's *Schenectady Genesis* which we understand should arrive in late January just in time for the Colonial Festival. The biography of Larry Hart, written by his son should be available too. And don't forget *Survival Against the Odds*, John van Schaick's memoir of his experiences in the South Pacific during WW II. A tale of love and war.

### **2004 Calendar Here**

The Society's 2004 calendar, with the theme "Industries of Schenectady," is now available. The calendar covers early mills of the Colonial period to Schenectady International of the 21st century. It is available to members for \$8; nonmembers for \$10; postage and handling if necessary \$2.

### **Dates**

Colonial Festival -- February 6-7 (at least!)

Library open Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, January 19

Library open President's Day, February 16

Take note: Museum and Library now open 10-4 on Saturdays, closed on Mondays.

Transcriptionist needed. The library needs someone to extract and transcribe obituaries and death notices from the newspapers of the 1930's. There is currently no index to the 1930's deaths, so this is very important work. If you are a meticulous, detail-oriented person, this job is for you! Work at your own pace and on your own schedule. Call our librarian at 374-0263

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## **The Bells are Ringing**

**This was the theme in the Vrooman Room throughout the holiday season and into the New Year. The bells, 110 of them, were loaned to the Society by Mr. and Mrs. Marty Colangelo of North Ferry St., Schenectady. Marty has collected bells for over 20 years and is a member of the American Bell Association. His first bell was a large school bell picked up at a flea market. Marty had always wanted to collect something and bells became an interesting subject.**

**Through the years, bells of all description became part of the decor of the Colangelo home. Marty now has over 300 bells in his collection. 110 of these have been on exhibit for the holidays in the Vrooman Room and hall. The attractive boudoir bells are made of mother of pearl, glass, gems; some with painted scenes of Lourdes, France, Paris, the Chicago Exhibition of 1893 and the Holy Land. Such bells were often collected by European ladies of society in the 1800's and were used to summon ladies maids or little slaves.**

**The school bells are from America and England. Large bells were rung to bring the children into school; the smaller version was rung at the end of the day to send the children home. The English school bells are smooth inside; the American bells are rough. My favorite bells are the sleigh bells placed over the doorway into the hall. These were used on the sleigh horses, not just for decoration, but to warn other sleighs in the vicinity. What a lovely sound that must have been! Another bell I love to touch is the ARP bell used during WW II by the Air Raid wardens during the Blitz of London. As my father was a warden, it brings back memories.**

**The rest of the exhibition consists of small dinner bells, town crier bells -- one from England dates back to 1750 - a bell given to Sir Winston Churchill in 1956, and a muffin bell that has a two tone ring. These bells were rung by the muffin men carrying their hot muffins on a large tray on their heads. I can hear their call now: "Muffins, hot, hot, muffins, Oh."**

**I hope you had a wonderful holiday, and may the bells ring in a good, happy and healthy New Year.**

**-Jo Mordecai -**

**More Portraits adopted . . .**

**Many thanks to the most recent "adoptive patrons." Five more portraits have been restored.**

**Mrs. Ruby Deagle**

**Mrs. Rose Dixon**

**Mrs. Joan Spicer**

**Mrs. Carol Harvey**

**Mrs. Ona Curran**

**Thank you all.**

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**WE GET LETTERS . . .**

**We received the following a few days ago:**

**"I have some additional information on the 'Did You Know' article by Elsie Maddaus concerning the writing of 'It Came Upon A Midnight Clear.' Edmund Sears wrote the words as a poem. The music was written by Richard Storrs Willis. Willis is my husband's great-grandfather.... I did enjoy the article as I didn't know Sears went to Union. I don't know if RS Willis knew Mr. Sears or just put his poem to music. In 1848 or shortly thereafter Willis lived in NY City.**

"For more information please visit these web sites

Lych-Gate 0102 or <http://www.littlechurch.org/lyych0102.html> and  
<http://www.thecemeteryproject.com/Graves/willis-richard-storrs.htm>

"Thank you."

-Nancy George McNabb"

We checked out the web sites and found them interesting about the "Little Church Around the Corner" in NYC.

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## **MABEE FARM**

### **WHAT IS THE MABEE FARM HISTORIC SITE?**

The Society's Mabee Farm Historic Site, operates as a separate educational facility. In 1993 George Franchere of Dunedin, Florida, donated his family's 9 1/2 acres of land in Rotterdam Junction containing three Dutch style buildings, dating from the late 17th and early 18th century. Remarkably, these buildings have had few alterations over the years and stand today as the oldest and best preserved examples of Dutch Colonial houses in the Mohawk Valley. It is the Society's mission to use these structures to interpret the rural history of the Mohawk Valley from pre-colonial times to the beginning of the 20th century, particularly those times when the Mabee family lived on and farmed this Mohawk River property. To help in this interpretation, the Society has added a relocated 1760 Old World Dutch barn, a mid 19th century English machinery barn, modern rest rooms and three smaller buildings housing farm equipment. The Mabee Farm also has a Broom Making shop, a working Blacksmith shop and a soon-to-be-operational small Woodworking shop.

The Mabee Farm Historic Site focuses on four operational areas:

- 1) The Historic Site Museum - The Mabee Farm objectives are to develop a first class museum to bring the interpretive message to the public and also to serve as a tourist site for the community.
- 2) Educational Programs - The Mabee Farm offers a "hands on" learning experience for visiting school classes, student workshops and classes teaching archaeology, rural crafts and industries.
- 3) Special Events - The Mabee Farm introduces and educates the public through family programs, thereby raising money to support the site. At least one event is held per month.
- 4) A Community Resource - The Mabee Farm is available to the community for special functions such as weddings, showers, company picnics, club events, reunions, seminars and other events. This promotes community involvement and awareness and is an additional source of income.

One of the cornerstones of the success of the Mabee Farm lies in its funding which has grown year after year. Beside grants and money raised by Farm events and programs, we have received continued support from George Franchere, the donor, and the community which supported a successful Mabee Farm Campaign. Up until this point the Farm has been run through efforts of our volunteers. However, as the farm continues to grow, professional staffing is required. The development of the Mabee Farm into a first class historic site and educational center depends on your continued donations and the development of other revenue sources.

### **MAJOR DONATIONS OF 2003**

Through State Senator Hugh Farley we received \$7,500 and through Assemblyman James Tedisco, \$1,500, toward the Inn Restoration Project.

The Lally Grant of \$1,000, designated to support school programs, was used for direct mailers to teachers, a

printing of the teacher's workbook and publicity in support of the children's programs.

The Bob Sager Memorial Fund has exceeded \$2,500 and has been used to purchase and equip the Bateau.

Bob's Trees donated over a thousand dollars worth of trees (pines, sugar maples, birch and crabapples). These were solicited and planted on the fall workday by Dale Wade-Keszey mostly for screening along the boundary with Schenectady International.

A raffle of a hooked rug of the Mabee Farm by Jennifer Parslow netted \$1,246. Proceeds went toward general operating costs.

A second Westinghouse Thresher dating from 1864 was given by Eugene Herold from Rexford and moved to the farm courtesy of J & P Builders. This is an earlier version of our 1881's thresher and was made for stationary operation on the barn floor.

A stationary flailing machine from the Altamont Fair Collection was donated via Earl Macintosh and Ev Rau. This is another example of early mechanization on the farm and a forerunner of both threshing machines.

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### **SCHS FEATURED IN ANTIQUES**

Actually it is our newly refurbished collection of 18th and 19th paintings that has been brought to new light in the September, 2003, issue of *Antiques* magazine. The excellent article by Ona Curran is richly illustrated with an eight-page spread, leading off with Helena Van Eps Pieterse and the customary view of the covered bridge. Thank you, Ona, for this splendid display. Copies of the magazine are available for viewing in the Gremis-Doolittle Library.

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### **FEBRUARY: BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

As most of us know, a strong thread of African-American history runs side by side with the threads of Dutch, English, French and other European groups from the 17th century on. Since February is Black history month, we are pleased to present another of Neil Yetwin's essays: "Bartlett Jackson of Schenectady." Bartlett Jackson's life is a study in sheer survival.

On Wednesday, September 18, 1901, the *Schenectady Evening Star* announced that General Electric, the Locomotive Works, and all city businesses and stores would be closed to observe the funeral of President William McKinley, who had been shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz on September 6th while attending the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo and died there on September 14th. That same edition of the *Evening Star* noted another death as well, this one in the city. The deceased was Bartlett Jackson, a former North Carolina plantation slave and refugee from the collapse of the Confederacy, who through the aid of a Schenectady soldier became a citizen here for nearly forty years.

When the Civil War ended in April, 1865, thousands of newly emancipated slaves left plantations and wandered throughout the South or headed North trying to build new lives. Many were murdered by hostile whites or died of exposure and starvation; it is estimated that in some areas during this period, one out of every four freed slaves perished. Bartlett Jackson was one of the fortunate ones who managed to survive.

Among the regiments stationed in North Carolina at the end of the war was the 134th New York Volunteers, which included in its ranks a Captain James T. Joslin. Joslin was the son of a local physician and a descendant

of several of Schenectady's old Dutch families. After attending Union College, Joslin joined the Union Army in 1862, attained the rank of 2nd Lieutenant, and before the war ended was serving as a captain in the quartermaster's department. It was in this capacity that he encountered Bartlett Jackson and hired him to tend his horses. The former slave continued to work for Joslin until they arrived back in Schenectady in the summer of 1865.

There had been an African-American presence in Schenectady since at least the February, 1690 massacre, during which nine blacks were killed and four others marched as prisoners to Canada. The city had established an African Free School in the 1830's for the education of poor black children, hosted several abolitionist speakers, and was a well-known station on the Underground Railroad. Several escaped slaves had been helped by Schenectadians on their way north to Canada or west on the Erie Canal, so it was not unusual for a man like Bartlett Jackson to end up here.

Jackson was immediately hired as custodian for the Wall Street police headquarters by City Police Justice Alexander J. Thomson and also worked as a day laborer, shoe shiner and assistant baggage man at the New York Central Railroad Station downtown. He was married for several years to the daughter of local contractor Dick Brown, but the couple had no children, and, after his wife's death, Jackson lived something of a transient life within the city limits. From 1867 to 1889 he lived at several locations, including rented rooms on Ferry, Albany, Smith and Irving Streets. His listing in the 1890 Schenectady City Directory reads: "Jackson, Bartlett, bootblack - rooms N. Y. C. R.R. Depot."

Despite his hard life, Jackson reportedly had an amiable nature and became a popular figure among downtown merchants as he shined shoes at the railroad station and the State Street Canal Bridge. The local papers noted that in his younger days he was "possessed of great strength" with the ability to crush wooden barrels with his bare hands; he once tested the strength of a cell door of the police lockup by knocking it down. Jackson never knew his exact age but when asked about it, he quipped to a local reporter, "I 'spec I's most a hundred and fifty."

By 1893 Bartlett Jackson was destitute and living in the Schenectady County Almshouse, which was located at the corner of Emmett and Craig Streets. It was there that he lived out his remaining years until his death in 1901. The Evening Star reported that Jackson "had failed steadily for several months past" and weighed only 90 pounds at the time of his death. The traditional confusion over his actual age persisted, as the local newspapers reported his age to be 71 or 72 while his death certificate listed it as an unlikely 96. When the autopsy was performed, attending physicians McEnroe, Schoolcraft, Wienecke and Mc Mullen determined that Jackson had died of starvation and exhaustion resulting from stomach cancer. Despite Jackson's lowly social station at death, the *Schenectady Daily Union* nevertheless invited "those who want to look again on the face of the old negro" to view the body until 10:00 AM on Friday, September 29th, at which time his funeral took place at Bale Cemetery's "colored plot."

No stone marks the final resting place of Bartlett Jackson, and though seen by contemporaries as simply a quaint or colorful character who frequented the streets, his long presence here provides yet another link in the ongoing history of Schenectady's African-American community.

### [Speaking of Black History . . .](#)

Governor Pataki has launched The Underground Railroad Heritage Trail program which will be implemented by Heritage New York. The program is to preserve and commemorate the important history of the UGRR in New York State and create high quality tourist destinations. Heritage New York understands that this is a long and complex process that will require extensive cooperation with other organizations.

## **Reflections on a Tour of the Historical Society -Frank Taormina**

As persons, we are either inventors or imitators. When we invent something, we are trying to solve a problem. When we imitate, we are also trying to represent ourselves as being a certain kind of person. It may be that that is the most important problem we are trying to solve: the problem of how we want to be seen. To be seen a certain way we imitate the people we want others in the community to think we are like. We build our houses a certain way. We buy certain types of furniture. We wear certain kinds of clothing. We are recognized by our style.

Style emerges in the way we deal with a variety of concerns we have in our everyday lives.

The collection of the Historical Society is a reflection of what engaged the attention of people over a period of time. Many of these concerns deal with common problems which people find it necessary to solve in their everyday lives. Issues like where we sit and what we sit on persist. Do we sit on the floor? On an orange crate? On a chair? What kind of chair? The need to sit is common to us all. There are other common concerns: the need to lie down to sleep (beds), the need to have a place to put things on (tables), the need to have a place to store things (chests and bureaus) to keep them safely or just to keep them out of the way.

Even though we can sit on an orange crate and we can store things in an orange crate, we, given the choice and the opportunity, more often prefer to sit on Hepplewhite chairs or Empire chairs and to store our linens or clothing in Hepplewhite bureaus or Empire bureaus. This says something about us as human beings. Our adoption of different styles to deal with the various concern common to our lives is one of the things that the collection of the Historical Society illustrates.

Other human concerns besides sitting, sleeping and storing our things are amply represented in the Society's collection. Keeping track of time is one of them. Again, the persistent human preference for variety is represented in our collection of clocks. A music box enjoyed by people who traveled on the canal boat Kitty Hawk, wax cylinders created by Edison which enabled people to play music almost anywhere, not to mention an eighteenth century pianoforte built in elegant Hepplewhite style by none other than the brother of John Jacob Astor remind us of the persistent human interest in and enjoyment of music. Everything in our collection speaks to us about the variety of concerns people have had down through the years and the ways they have dealt with those concerns.

Lest this little reflection be turned into a long and boring "list", I want to mention only one more element of the Society's collection, and that is our paintings. Portraits, likenesses of persons who once lived in Schenectady, are an important part of the artifacts we preserve. Each of these represents a person who was at one time a member of this community. The earliest, a limner's portrait of Helena Van Epps dates back to the 1740's. All have a "story" to tell us, not only about the individual represented in the portrait by the artist, but also about the time and place of that individual's life. Christopher Yates' portrait takes us back to the French and Indian War, to Fort Ticonderoga and Fort Niagara, to the Mohawk Valley Frontier, and to the American Revolution. From the harried days preceding the Battle of Saratoga, to the construction of two hundred bateaux to transport Clinton's Army to Canajoharie in 1779, Christopher Yates was deeply involved in the effort to win freedom from Great Britain. Like his portrait, each of the pictures of individuals or of places in our locality help to tell the story of our community. If only the people whose likenesses gaze out at us could speak!

Over and over again, here, in what was once the home of Dora Jackson, we are reminded of our common human

concerns and of the variety of ways in which we deal with these concerns. They remind us also of the experience of the members of our community who preceded us in earlier times, but who still shared with us the qualities which continue to make the interesting subjects of thought for us today. By the experience they share with us through their portraits and the things they have left us, they continue to help us to consider the persistent question of what it means to be a human being.

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## **AMONG OURSELVES**

We were sorry to hear of the passing of former Society President, William Fasake. He had renewed his acquaintance with us recently and we were looking forward to having him back. Our best wishes go to his relatives and dear friends.

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## **CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT**

**Wanted!**

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

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**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

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**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 Ann a time or two and you'll get the hang of it. Call Jo Mordecai at 374-926 for further information.

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## **LITERACY VOLUNTEERS IS LOOKING FOR YOU. . .**

Did you know that 27 million Americans don't know how to read? Did you know that more than 60,000 adults in Albany and Schenectady County counties cannot read this message? Help lower these numbers; call Literacy Volunteers at 372-9819.

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A word about GE matching. We really appreciate you who are employees or retirees of GE making sure that you let GE know of your contributions to this Society. Every dollar counts and the matching funds contribute substantially to our operating fund and our ability to continue to work for the improvement of our program.

## **CONTRIBUTORS DURING OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2003 WITHOUT YOU WE ARE NOTHING!**

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Allen County Public Library  
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## **MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Please enroll me as a member of the Schenectady County Historical Society in the following category:

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 Individual  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$40 Family  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$50 Donor  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 Sponsor  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$500 Patron  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$1000 Lifetime  
\_\_\_\_\_ Additional contribution for:  Library  Museum  Mabee Farm  Paintings  Unrestricted  
\_\_\_\_\_ Total enclosed

Please print out and mail this form with your check to: Schenectady County Historical Society  
32 Washington Ave., Schenectady, NY 12305

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note: Memberships are renewable upon the anniversary of your payment.  
If eligible, your tax-deductible membership can be matched by G. E. (800) 462-8244. Use option 3 to speak to a human.**

