



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

Volume 52 Number 1-2

Jan - Feb 2009

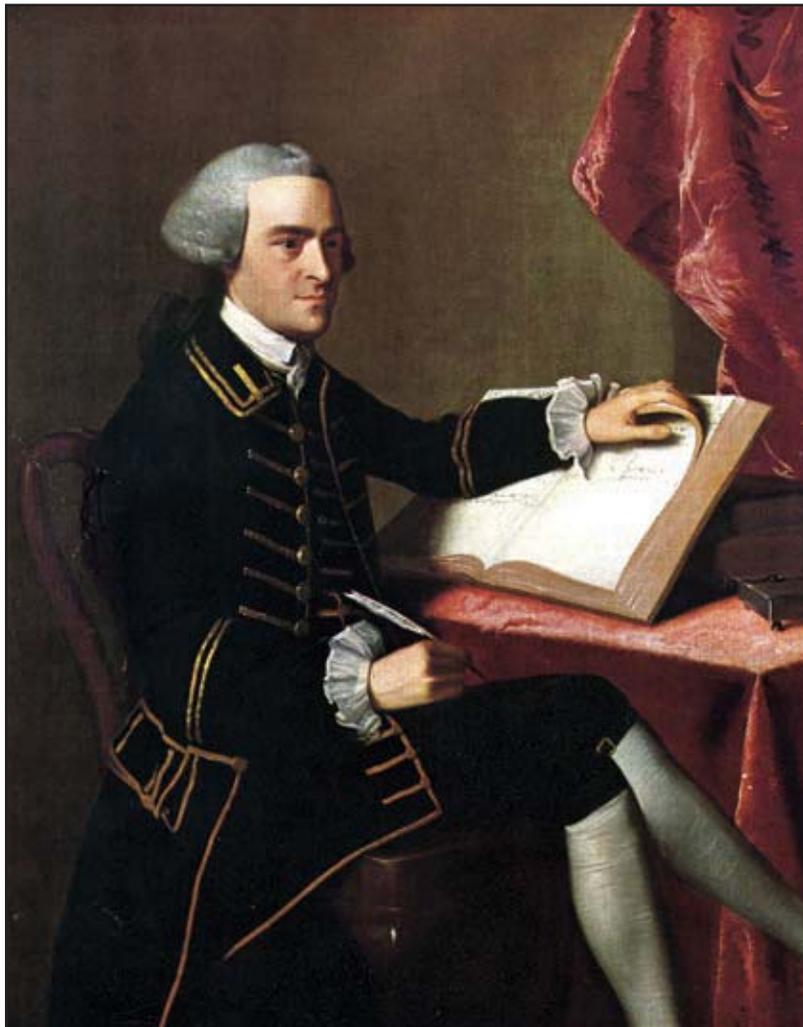
32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, New York 12305

Web site: <http://www.schist.org> • Editor email: rbergero@nycap.rr.com

Librarian email: librarian@schist.org • Curator email: curator@schist.org

(518) 374-0263

FAX: (518) 688-2825



John Hancock

John Hancock was a prominent patriot of the American Revolution. He served as President of the Second Continental Congress from 1775 to 1777 and as the first Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1780 to 1785. Hancock was a Federalist whose career inspired the Schenectady Federalists whose philosophy is described in the centerfold article by Professor Harvey Strum on pages 4 and 5.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

EDWIN D. REILLY, JR.
PRESIDENT

MERRITT GLENNON
VICE PRESIDENT

MARY TREANOR
TREASURER

WILLIAM DIMPELFELD
ASSISTANT TREASURER

CYNTHIA SEACORD
SECRETARY

STEPHANIE ALBERS
ANN ARONSON
RUTH BERGERON
MARIANNE BLANCHARD
EARL BRINKMAN
JIM EIGNOR
PHILLIP FALCONER
FRANK GILMORE
CAROLINA LAZZARI
CAROL LEWIS
MARY LIEBERS
KIM MABEE
ELSIE MADDAUS
VAUGHN LOUISE NEVIN
HARRY STEVEN
ROBERT SULLIVAN
FRANK TAORMINA
SALLY VAN SCHAICK

STAFF

KATHERINE CHANSKY
LIBRARIAN

KATHRYN WELLER
CURATOR

PAT BARROT
MABEE FARM SITE MANAGER

JENNIFER HANSON
OFFICE MANAGER

NEWSLETTER EDITORS:

ANN ARONSON
RUTH BERGERON

HOURS

MUSEUM & LIBRARY
MONDAY-FRIDAY 9-5
SATURDAY 10-2

MABEE FARM
CLOSED
FOR THE SEASON

President's Letter -

This grand new year of 2009 marks both the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's 1609 voyage up the river that now bears his name and, halfway between then and now, the 200th anniversary of Schenectady County. Our county was formed, like Eve from Adam's rib, through excision of a small slice of Albany County on March 7, 1809, just three days after the inaugural of Thomas Jefferson's vice-president, James Madison, as the fourth president of the United States.

Until I read Professor Harvey Strum's centerfold article on the early years of the Schenectady branch of the Federalist political party, it had not occurred to me that international issues that led to the War of 1812 had arisen at almost precisely the time that our county was born. Photography was a few decades into the future then, so what could our valiant editors do for a colorful cover for this issue? To the best of our knowledge, none of the Schenectady Federalists had ever sat for an oil portrait, so we'd have to go national.

One possibility was a color portrait of John Adams, our second and only Federalist president. But last year was a great one for him, so I went Googling in search of some other founding father who was an ardent Federalist. Certainly Alexander Hamilton was, but his features gracing our cover might too much remind you of the current financial meltdown. So who better than the namesake of a former SCHS Trustee, John Hancock. Hope you like it.

According to the 100-year history of the Society posted on our website, our own John Hancock, born in 1907, was a driving force behind the creation of our Gremms-Doolittle Library. Assuming the mantle of the time-honored profession of "clerk of the works," he brought the project to a highly successful conclusion and lived to see dedication of the library on Columbus Day, 1991. Sadly, John died just three years later. A wooden sign bearing his name sits proudly beside a tree not far back from the side entrance to 32 Washington Ave.

-Ed Reilly

IN MEMORIAM The Society notes with great sadness the passing on October 21, 2008 of Anne B. Coggeshall, a long-time resident and community activist who is survived by her husband Almy. Anne gave generously of her time and talents to organizations that reflected her interests in nature, music, and art. She served on the Board of Directors of the Environmental Clearinghouse of Schenectady (ECOS) and was a Trustee of the Schenectady County Historical Society where she served for many years on its Museum Committee and Accessions Committee.

Anne always went straight to the heart of an issue. She would lay out the reasoning for her response with intelligence and a wonderful wit. She was known and loved for the twinkle in her eye, her ready smile, and her complete commitment to whatever task she undertook. Ann was intrepid. When the Accessions Committee made a survey of the objects at the Mabee Farm a few years ago, it meant climbing narrow stairs to barn and house lofts, scattering critters along the way.

Anne led the way. She was a major contributor to the fund drive to build the George E. Franchere Educational Center at the Mabee Farm. That seems to have been the way she lived her life - forging ahead and always eager to learn more and do more. She deserves to be, and will be, remembered and honored for the exemplary service she gave so unselfishly to us and to her community.

-Ruth E. Bergeron

IN MEMORIAM We also note with great sadness that Virginia Bolen, former SCHS Librarian / Archivist, died on November 19, 2008 at age 60. She is survived by a large family that includes her parents, twelve siblings, three daughters, a son, and nine grandchildren. For several years after the retirement of Elsie Maddaus, Ginny combined half-time work at our Gremms-Doolittle Library with half time at the Clifton-Park Halfmoon Library. She loved books, genealogy, and history, and used those passions in her work at both locations. She resigned from SCHS in early spring of 2007 to accept a full-time position at the public library but was stricken with pancreatic cancer shortly thereafter.

Volunteerism at the Gremms-Doolittle Library grew significantly under Ginny's leadership. It was upon her initiative that the City of Schenectady was able to re-open its Efner History Center at City Hall. It was she who invited me to manage the Center after Mayor Brian Stratton accepted our offer to staff the Center with a Society volunteer.

Ginny was her family's Scrabble champion and a proud member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Professionally, she was a member of the Middle Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC) and the Capital District Library Council (CDLC). As an active member of the Historical Society and my friend, she will be sorely missed.

- Cynthia Seacord

MUSEUM – lectures, exhibits and activities

Italian-American Genealogy Research

by Peter Sisario

Saturday – January 10

1:30 pm Refreshments 2:00 pm Program

Peter will speak on researching Italian-American family history. A retired English teacher, Peter lives in Scotia and travels frequently to the Region 9 National Archives office in Pittsfield, MA where he volunteers and gives talks on Italian-American genealogy. Peter will provide tips and research strategies to help beginning genealogists and those who have “hit the brick wall” in their family research.

Electric City Immigrants: The Polish and Italian Experience in Schenectady

by Frank Taormina

Saturday – January 17

1:30 pm Refreshments 2:00 pm Program

Schenectady’s Italian and Polish immigrant populations over the past 100 years brought visible change to the City of Schenectady as it became the destination for employment in the booming industries of the American Locomotive Company and General Electric. Initially snubbed by “native” Schenectadians because of the differences in language, religion and culture, they created their own enclaves as they contributed to the city that “Lights and Hauls the World.”

“In Goode Olde Colonie Days” narrative and traditional folk music from native, Dutch and English settlers in the Mohawk Valley

by Rich Bala

Saturday – February 7

1:30 pm Refreshments 2:00 pm Program

Like the troubadours of old, Rich performs authentic, traditional folk music that weaves a tale of living history about our nation’s people and heritage. He has performed at coffeehouses, festivals, concert series, schools, museums, libraries, Elderhostels and historic sites from Boston to North Carolina.

Traveling the New York City African–American Experience, 1623 – 1830

by Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson

Saturday – February 14

1:30 pm Refreshments 2:00 pm Program

This slide presentation will focus on people, places and events that illustrate the history of the African presence in New York City during the 17th and 18th century. Enslaved Africans in 18th century New York City were the second largest such group, second only to that in Charleston, SC. Both cities were major ports. This trade in human beings took place under Dutch and British occupation and continued after independence. Dr. Wilson earned a Ph. D. in Urban Anthropology from the New School for Social Research.

LIBRARY NEWS

The Library Documents Collection is Re-housed and Described

Completed this fall is a three-year project by Ann Eignor and Mary Liebers to sort, protect, and describe unique, fragile pamphlets, letters, and programs. The SCHS documents collection is now organized into thirteen subject areas comprising over 30 boxes. The documents in this collection were pulled from the research files housed in the library. They cover a wide-range of subjects all pertaining to Schenectady history. The job of selecting materials for special care from the files in the library, transferring them to acid-free folders, re-boxing in archival, stable boxes and then cataloging them into the PastPerfect database took many hours of labor. Thanks to this work the library can locate, to the folder, documents on topics key to the study of Schenectady.

Examples include newsletters, programs for graduation exercises, and student publications for public and private schools with a majority of documents about secondary schools. There are documents about a wide-variety of Schenectady groups, including ethnic, youth, social, civic, religious, and fraternal organizations. The documents in the ethnic organizations help us to recall immigrant communities in Schenectady. The document collection describes diverse businesses: from department stores, Barney’s and Carl’s, to family-run laundries and bakeries.

Continued on page 6

Schenectady Federalists and the Second Anglo-American Conflict

by Harvey Strum

The first president of the United States, George Washington, supported the Federalist Party but never actually joined it or any other political party. The second, John Adams, was a Federalist, the only member of that party ever elected president. Adams' vice-president and successor, Thomas Jefferson, and the three presidents who followed him were, formally, Democratic-Republicans, but in the newspapers of the time, just "Republicans" for short.

Between 1807 and 1815 a national debate over American foreign policy and Anglo-American relations found expression in the New York State Capital District with members of the Federalist Party taking a very active part. The outbreak of conflict between Great Britain and France in the early 19th Century in the Napoleonic Wars dragged in the United States, which had wanted to remain neutral with regard to European conflicts.

When, under President Jefferson, the United States imposed an embargo on all European trade from December 1807 to March 1809, his Republican supporters endorsed the embargo. His successor, James Madison, requested a declaration of war against the British and Congress obliged, leading to the War of 1812. From 1808 to 1815 Republicans portrayed the struggle with the British as a conflict between "good republican government" and "royalty and corruption."

Reverend Joseph Ellis, a Republican-leaning minister, used his pulpit in Duanesburgh to remind his listeners that "no King, no Pope, no Emperor" ruled the American people. Ellis called upon his parishioners to rally around the government and show to European despots, including the British monarchy, "the same spirit which was displayed by their ancestors in '76." For Republicans, the United States was engaged in a righteous struggle, "for God...the rights of man and... America." Republicans like Ellis and others viewed the Anglo-American conflict as a struggle between republicanism and monarchy and as a second war of independence against British arrogance. They portrayed Federalists as Tories, more loyal to England than the United States.

Schenectady's Federalists, in turn, saw the foreign policies of Jefferson and Madison as pro-French and aiding the French "tyrant" Napoleon Bonaparte, at the expense of common sense and good commercial relations with the British. From the embargo to the War of 1812 they portrayed the Republican foreign policies as self-destruction resulting in economic ruin and eventually in

an unnecessary war. Federalists denounced the embargo as an ineffective measure to force the French and British to respect American neutrality, and the decision to go to war in 1812 as subservience to Napoleon.

From 1808 to 1812 Federalists warned that first Jefferson and then Madison planned to "draw us into a French alliance" and "to Frenchify our morals, our religion, and our feelings." On the other hand, Great Britain's "navy alone stands betwixt us and the iron grasp of Bonaparte," especially since the Republicans sold the warships built under the Federalist presidencies of Washington and Adams, replacing them with the "miserable gunboats" as the primary coastal defense. While Republicans argued that the foreign policies of Jefferson and Madison maintained American independence against British tyranny, Federalists saw the Republicans as selling out American independence to the French and asked: "Who among us believes that if Britain falls we shall maintain our independence." Foreign policy issues dominated the political discourse from 1807 to 1815, not only at the national level, but also in state and local party meetings, like that of the New York State Federalists in Albany in March 1808 and in the election appeals of Schenectady's Federalists.

For the Federalists, the dominance of foreign policy issues worked to their partisan advantage in some counties and cities in New York. Americans expressed deep anger in the summer of 1807 when a British warship opened fire on the American warship Chesapeake, but President Jefferson did not ask Congress for war. Instead, he hoped economic coercion, an embargo, would force both the British and French into negotiations. But it created an economic downturn in New York, and led to widespread smuggling from Lake Champlain to Buffalo.

The President declared the Lake Champlain region of New York and Vermont in a state of insurrection because the embargo produced smuggling. Federalists in Schenectady emphasized the economic hardships produced by the law, and considered it an "evil" that destroyed commerce and agriculture. Upstate commercial centers like Albany, Schenectady, and Troy faced "a great stagnation in every kind of business." In neighboring Schoharie County, farmers lost their farms in sheriff's auctions because they could not raise the funds to pay their taxes. The attacks by Schenectady's Federalists emphasized that it was "a strong measure against ourselves, a measure that breathes destruction."

In 1808 Federalists gained seats in the spring state elections and won seats in Schoharie and Montgomery counties for the first time since 1799.

In 1809, the newly minted Schenectady County, formed that very year from what had been part of Albany County, narrowly leaned towards the Republicans but, with the embargo as the principal issue, activities of local Federalists paid off with victory in the Assembly elections. Schenectady and Albany voted Federalist, while neighboring Saratoga voted Republican.

Removal of the embargo put Schenectady back into the Republican column in 1810, but the outbreak of the War of 1812 changed things once again. Initially, the war proved unpopular in New York and the Federalists did well in the Congressional elections of December 1812 and the Assembly elections in both 1812 and 1813. But the British attack on the Niagara Frontier in December 1813 led to a Republican landslide in the spring 1814 elections, bringing Schenectady back into Republican ranks despite the best efforts of a valiant group of younger Federalists in Schenectady County.

In Schenectady County, Federalists tended to do best in Niskayuna and in the second of the city of Schenectady's four wards. Nationally and locally Federalists denounced the decision to go to war and attacked the wisdom of the conflict from 1812 to 1815.

Underlying the bitter antagonism between Federalists and Republicans lay one shared belief that the American government derived its powers from the people. Both parties believed that the people in exercising their responsibilities as citizens should periodically meet in public to express their sentiments upon the conduct of their rulers. Schenectady's Federalists articulated in far greater detail the rights of citizens to dissent from government policy and to throw out of office men who violated the public trust. To these Schenectady Federalists, the American government "was formed for the public, not the people for the government." When a government ceased to maintain "the safety, honor, and welfare of the people," it loses its mandate to rule, and the people have the right to elect men who will fulfill these obligations since "all power emanates from the people."

Schenectady Federalists articulated a vision of the people's role in government remarkably similar to their Republican opponents. While many of the older Federalists clung to the concept of a speaking aristocracy and a silent democracy—deferential politics—the resolutions of Schenectady's Federalists expressed a commitment to popular will and a veneration of popular sovereignty. Older Federalists in New York, like John Jay, who served as diplomat, governor, and Supreme

Court Justice, complained of the Republican tendency to court public opinion and flatter the multitude. However, Schenectady's Federalists appeared just as willing to court public opinion. They encouraged the public to criticize the government, especially the embargo and later the War of 1812, and they stimulated the public to vote. By encouraging citizen participation, Federalists speeded the democratization of New York's political structure.

Federalist appeals contained a moralistic streak missing from Republican pronouncements. Schenectady's Federalists urged voters to support Federalist candidates:

"Able men, men of truth who fear God and hate covetousness." Their concept of the right to vote emphasized that God entrusted each citizen with the right to determine their rulers. This obligated the voter to choose wisely for he would eventually "account...to Heaven" for how he utilized his right. Turning Republican rhetoric on its head, Schenectady's Federalists warned that the odium of the embargo "would discredit the republican form of government" and drive the people into supporting "the first desperate adventurer to establish despotism."

Schenectady's Federalists acted as political Jeremiahs warning the people of the sins of the Jefferson and Madison administrations and urging the people to dissent against foreign policies that would lead the nation into ruin, undermine the public will, lead to despotism, and an unnecessary war. They sought to return the United States to the path of political righteousness. For Schenectady Federalists the Constitution remained the bulwark of American liberties. Federalists stood as the "Sentinels at their posts" protecting the values enshrined in the Constitution.

In the forefront of the Schenectady Federalist appeal were many veterans of the Revolution with the English and Dutch names that characterize the early history of Schenectady County. The chairman of their strongest effort was Henry Glen and the Secretary of the group was Daniel Martin. Additional signers of the appeal were Francis Denning, Jacob Groesbeck, Daniel Johnson, John Joyce, William Lyman, Samuel McKinney, Jonathan Price, Asa Ried, Henry Sergeant, John van Gasbeek, and John van Vorst.

Harvey Strum is professor of history and political science and Chair of the Social Science Division of the Sage Colleges of Albany and Troy.

One of the larger series in the documents collection is the Italian-American documents from the Mancuso family. Ettore Mancuso (1896-1979) was a prominent lawyer and political leader in Schenectady. Born in Italy, he came to the United States at the age of 12. He served in the U.S. Army from 1918-1920 and became a naturalized citizen in 1919 while still in the military. After the World War I he graduated from Albany Law School and opened a law office at 158 Jay St. He served as the City of Schenectady corporation counsel to Mayor J. Ward White from 1932-1933 and was subsequently employed by NY State in the field of municipal finance from 1944-1966. Throughout his career Mr. Mancuso was an active leader of the Republican Party.

The documents in the Mancuso series primarily relate to his interest in politics and government in the 1940's, '50's and '60's. A large number of articles follow the career of Sam Stratton, Schenectady Mayor, and later Congressman. These documents have become fragile over time. Thanks to the dedicated work of the library volunteers these unique materials will be available to future generations.

New Materials

Books

- *Books on General Electric, gift of James and Gayle Caufield
- *Books on interior decoration and art history, gift of Kathryn Kindl
- *Schenectady History books donated by Mark D'Attilio
- **Broadcasting by the Seat of Their Pants* by Charles William Everson
- **Flashbacks 1946-2008: 62 Years in Upstate New York* by Alan Hart
- **ALCO's DL-640 Locomotive* by Christopher MacDermot and Richard Steinbrenner

Archival Materials

- *ALCO company records donated by John Sylvester
- *Schenectady Concert Association records collected and donated by Helen George
- *Soroptimist International organizational records, 1955-1990
- *USS Schenectady memorabilia from the Caufields and from Chet Watkins

Mabee Farm news

Grants Received

The Mabee Farm will be the recipient of a Dickinson Sponsorship Grant in the amount of \$4,000 from the New York State French and Indian War 250th Anniversary Commemoration Commission. It will be used for an exhibit on site that will focus on the original documentation owned by Mabee Farm Historic site and will portray the significance of the Schenectady area during the French and Indian War. Re-enactor Cliff Mealy will be part of this educational program as well as the production of a brochure.

The Mabee Farm is also the recipient of a grant for \$4,233 from the Lower Hudson Conference Award in Museum Conservation for the conservation of the painted folk art tavern sign for the Jacob Mabee Inn. Kate Weller, the Society curator, wrote the grant and the work will be done by Sandra Weber of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center.

Volunteers Needed

The Mabee Farm Historic site needs volunteers to be tour guides for school programs and events for the 2009 season. Training will be available during the winter months. Please call Pat Barrot at (518) 887-5073, or e-mail mabee@nycap.rr.com.

The Mabee Farm Historic site is in need of a volunteer to care for and maintain its *Colonial Herb Garden* from early spring into the fall. Call or contact Pat Barrot (see above) if interested.

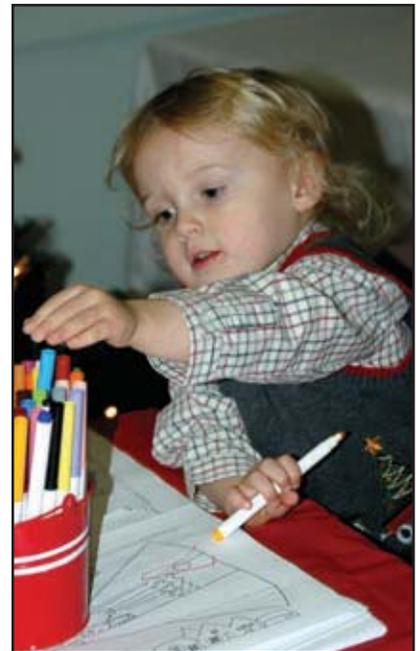
Underground Railroad Seminar

The 8th Annual Underground Railroad Public History Conference will be held February 27 – March 1, 2009 at Union College. This year's program is "*The Underground Railroad: Its Legacies and Our Communities.*" The event features workshops, exhibits, concerts, vendors and displays. The Society and the Mabee Farm will participate with an exhibit during workshops on Saturday, February 28. The Mabee Farm will be a scheduled stop on the tour Sunday, March 1. The event is open to the public. For more information call (518) 432-4432 or visit the Underground Railroad website: www.ugrworkshop.com.

A Visit from Saint Nicholas...



Photos: Ann Aronson



2008 Festival of Trees at the Schenectady
County Historical Society.

Photos: Ann Aronson



Non-Profit Org.
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 942
Schenectady, NY

Historical Society Newsletter
32 Washington Avenue
Schenectady, New York 12305

