

Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 41 - Number 5-6 March-April 2004

CALENDAR

Saturday, March 13, 2004

1:30 Refreshments

2:00 Program: The Air Museum and
Related Topics

Presenter: Lt. Col. Al Hulstrunk, Civil Air Patrol

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

11:30 AM

Board of Trustees Meeting

Saturday, April 10, 2004

1:30 Refreshments

2:00 Program: Historic Canada

Presenter: Bill Massoth

Wednesday, April 21, 2004

11:30 AM

Board of Trustees Meeting

Society Hours

MUSEUM

Tuesday-Friday 1:00 to 5:00 PM

Saturday: 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

LIBRARY

Monday-Friday 1:00-5:00

Saturday 9:00-12:00

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK -Bill Dimpelfeld

I attended a talk recently where the speaker, a Schenectady resident for about a year, mentioned that the name "Schenectady" was derived from the Dutch. For some in the audience, including me, this came as surprising news. We had always thought the name was of American Indian derivation. Johanna Woldring, the Society's office manager and a native of the Netherlands, said that the name had no Dutch meaning that she knew of, although the "sche" part of the name was a typical Dutch spelling practice. It was the local Dutch settlers who put the oral Iroquoian language into writing. So it was reasonable that even if "Schenectady" were an American Indian word its spelling would reflect Dutch phonetics.

I next called Scott Haeffner, former site manager at the Society's Mabee Farm. Scott, while a walking information desk on local history, admitted to not knowing the meaning of Schenectady. He noted that the Dutch initially referred to the Schenectady area as "Groote Vlachte" (in English "Great Flat" and in the language of the Mohawks "Schonowe"). He pointed out there were several reference volumes on Schenectady history in the Society library that might be helpful. It was time to hit the stacks.

About the second reference I looked at was a 1969 thesis by Joseph C. Parisi (University of New Hampshire!) on The Early Years of the Schenectady Settlement. One section of the thesis is headed by "The Meaning of Schenectady." And the opening sentence of this section states: "The origin and meaning of Schenectady is very uncertain." This does provide a clue as to where all this is heading. There were both "from the Dutch" and "from Native American" derivation theories.

The Dutch derivation was based upon something written in a letter by Arent van Curler. Van Curler was the leader of the founding families of the Schenectady settlement. He was a cousin of Kiliaen van Rensselaer, one of the five directors of the West India Company. When the company decided to diversify their American colony into land development and set up a patroon system, van Rensselaer was first to apply for an estate. The patroon was required to obtain 50 adult settlers for his property within four years. 18-year-old van Curler was sent by van Rensselaer to be his assistant agent. Five years later in a letter reporting back to van Rensselaer van Curler described the Schenectady area as being: "dat Schoonste landt dat men oogen bezien mach" (the most beautiful land that the eye of man ever beheld). You may have missed it, but in theory the above sentence contracts to "Schoonechtendel". And with time this supposedly evolved into "Schenectady". Even van Curler missed acknowledging

the name. In 1661 his letter to the Governor sought permission for a settlement at the "Groote Vlacht".

There are two theories for attributing the derivation of "Schenectady" to Native American languages. The Mohegans, who were the American Indians living along the Hudson, said something that sounded like "S Gaun-hac-ta-tie". This translates into "without the door." This acknowledged that the Mohawk Valley was the opening through the Appalachians for travel to the west and Schenectady was the open doorway

The ice age left a large deposit of sand at what was the bottom of a lake located between Albany and Schenectady. This area is now referred to as "the Pine Bush" because of the extensive growth of pine trees. The Mohawks referred to "beyond the pine plains" as "schan-augh-stede," or similar spellings. It was not a place. It was like saying "the other side of the street". Albany is schen-sugh-stde from Schenectady, and vice versa.

Apparently the Dutch settlers of this area were too busy making a living to worry about spelling out the meaning of Schenectady for future generations. It's like many of the photographs donated to our library. At the time the photos were taken everyone concerned knew who was who being depicted and where. And a generation or two or more later everything is left to speculation.

PROGRAMS - MARCH AND APRIL

Ellisse Riemer, our peerless program chair, has come up with a great spring program: Al Hulstrunk in March and Bill Massoth in April. Al Hulstrunk, currently a lieutenant colonel in the Civil Air Patrol, many of us remember as an atmospheric scientist who warned us about global warming as far back as the 1960's. His insatiable interest in everything has led him into a number of fields: one of this writer's children remembers Al Hulstrunk as his own elementary school science teacher. And in April there's the tireless and always interesting Bill Massoth, who will fill in a lot of those holes in our knowledge of our northern sister, Canada.

NEW HOURS

The Schenectady County Historical Society will open the House Museum on Saturdays 10 AM to 4 PM, be closed Monday, and be open Tuesday through Friday 1-5 PM. The Grems-Doolittle Library hours remain the same: Monday through Friday, 1-5 PM and Saturdays, 9AM to 12 noon.

AROUND THE COUNTY

Princetown Tidbits -Irma Mastrean, Town Historian

Early Farming in Princetown

The county was still covered with virgin forests of pine and oak when people started to settle in Princetown in the late 1700's. Many trees in this virgin forest were five and six feet in diameter. Clearing the land of trees was the first task of farming. Robert Wingate wrote to a brother in Scotland describing farming in Princetown in 1815:

"Princetown is very hilly and knolly. The most of the country is so thick it cannot be laid out well. The soil is clay. It is hard work cutting wood. The stump will take eight or ten years. They put horses to them with a chain and pull them out. Pine stumps will stand in the ground a man's lifetime."

From this first settlement, until the 1940s, farming was the chief occupation of the Princetown families.

Scotia-Glenville -Elsie Maddaus

In contrast to the industrial city of Schenectady, the area comprising the village of Scotia and the town of Glenville was once a farming and rural area. A number of statements gleaned from local history books attest to this conclusion. For example:

"Centuries ago, the men and women of Glenville faced the challenge of settling in the wilderness, clearing the forests, and making a living from the thin Glenville soil."

"Farming was the major industry in Glenville through most of its history."

"Fields of broom corn surrounded the hamlets of Scotia and Reesville."

"Hundreds of acres on the river flats were used for the growing of broom corn to the almost complete neglect of the line of general farm produce."

"Most of Maalwyck and other farms along the river were planted with broom corn."

"As late as 1910, many Scotia residents had kept chickens, horses and cows. A flock of sheep grazed at the Glen-

Sanders Mansion. By 1940, the transition from farms to suburbia was nearly complete."

BELLEVUE

We need a new reporter for Bellevue. Let me know if you are interested. 372-7711.

Reprise: "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" -Elsie M. Maddaus

I accidentally came across more information on Edmund Hamilton Sears and Richard Storrs Willis, who wrote the words and music to "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," in the book, *Stories Behind the Best Loved Songs of Christmas* by Ace Collins, (Zondervan, 2001, pp.96-101). Perhaps Nancy George McNabb and others would be interested in what the author has to say about the two men. The Newsletter welcomes these little tidbits of historical information. Bring them on, as we say!

LIBRARY POTPOURRI -Virginia Bolen

Books

We are looking forward to the arrival of Susan Staffa's *Schenectady Genesis* which we understand should arrive soon. The full title is: *Schenectady Genesis: How a Dutch Colonial Village Became an American City, Volume I: The Colonial Crucible, 1661-1774*. A description of the book states: "The early citizens of Schenectady made vital contributions to the survival of the English colonies and the formation of a new nation. The author analyzes the connections between the village's social and political hierarchies and family factions. "\$29

And don't forget *Survival Against the Odds*, John van Schaick's memoir of his experiences in the South Pacific during WW II. A true tale of love and war. John is another past president of the Society and is currently co-chair with Stanley Lee of the Mabee Farm committee. \$20

2004 Calendar

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

MUSEUM NEWS -Jo Mordecai, Coordinator of Exhibits

Colonial and Revolutionary Display

To celebrate Colonial Week, the Vrooman Room displays a collection of Colonial memorabilia. From the Revolutionary War we are showing part of our collection of muskets:

- A. A Palmer Flintlock, made in England in the early 18th century.
- B. Also a Palmer Flintlock.. Made in London. Circa 1750.

Two swords and a saber from the Revolutionary War-- used only by officers, they were made to their personal design, often showing the family crest.

Three of our vintage uniforms are on display: an English officer's coat, the well-known bright red with brass buttons; a French officer's coat, the deep blue, nearly navy, with beige and brass buttons, the hat trimmed with beaver.

Lastly a little American drummer boy's jacket , deep gold trim on deep blue, with small brass buttons.

Shown also are cannon balls, one very large one that would have been shot from either a fort or boat; the smaller ones were all found in Schenectady gardens.

The decorative epaulets worn on the shoulders of high ranking officers in both army and navy; powderhorns and shot bags complete the exhibit.

To show colonial style, a mannequin displays a gown, fichu and cap worn by ladies of that period.

Some of our intricately carved Dutch cookie molds and a few iron candlesticks and pots round out the display--a small tribute to the people of that time who lived in our city but knew it as a village.

ETTORE MANCUSO'S WORLD WAR I EXPERIENCES

A year or so ago three cardboard boxes of papers left by Ettore Mancuso were donated to the Grems-Doolittle library. Ettore Mancuso was a Schenectady attorney who started practice of law here in 1922. Among the papers were a letter dated Jan. 15, 1924, addressed to "Dear Miss Root" and signed "Ettore" and a reply dated Aug. 24,

1924, from Mabel V. Root who was living in Catskill, NY, at the time. Their relationship seemed to be that of former teacher and pupil. Ettore's letter is on the letterhead of Ettore Mancuso and Hannibal Pardi, Attorneys-at-law, 428 State Street, Schenectady, NY, and the subject is his experiences in the 2nd Pioneers, an army service and construction battalion. We will publish this missive in three installments. In the light of today's events it has a certain relevance. Part I appeared in the Nov-Dec 2003 issue.

Part II

. . . My Colonel . . . asked me if I wanted to be transferred to Headquarters Company or proceed to Marseilles. . . . The lure of the Mediterranean, and the idea of being so near to Italy, with the hope of obtaining a short leave which might enable me to take a trip through Northern Italy at least, prompted me to choose . . . Marseilles. Being still convalescent, it was really a Godsend that my company was in Marseilles, because the climate is so delightful down there, and we spent the whole [of December there before] our company began the pilgrimage which caused me to write those "famous letters."

First they told us that as soon as Embarkation Camp at Marseilles, which we were building, was completed, we would sail for home. Later they sent us to Allerey -- a cold place which caused many of our boys to be taken sick soon after we reached it and . . . one of our boys died within a week . . . from pneumonia. With one of ours being buried, and many (35 or 40) in the hospital, and much of the rest of the company answering sick call every day, mutiny was being whispered all around; but while I was championing the cause of the men before the officers, among the men I was doing everything in my power to keep the peace. It certainly was the queerest, as well as the finest feeling for me to think that a majority of the men in my company looked up to me for guidance--and I only a buck private! -- rather than to the officers themselves.

After suffering at Allerey for several months, we were ordered to Is-dur-Tille, on the pretext that our regiment was assembling at that place previous to sailing for home We were again told that as soon as we could turn the camp over to the French, we would be sent home. Of course we were in for more disappointment, because when the French did come, instead of going home we were sent to Germany, and from there we would have gone to Silesia, if my letters and telegrams had not created a furor in the New York papers and in the Congress. . . . Some of the papers had some appropriate cartoons depicting the plight of the Second Pioneers. Delegations went to see the Governor and the Congressmen, until finally we were ordered home.

As in every tragedy, a victim was needed, and I was selected for the honor, merely because I had not been so cowardly as to request the publishers to withhold my name. I was asked if the letters appearing in the papers were mine I could have denied, and thus have postponed my arrest long enough perhaps to have been home and discharged before they could have secured the originals, but I admitted the authorship of the letters, whereupon I was placed under charges for a General courts-martial under a General Article of War, for lack of any article which exactly covered my offense, if any.

I was imprisoned awaiting trial. In the meantime, contrary to the practice that a prisoner cannot be placed to work until tried and found guilty, I was placed to work on the filthiest jobs that could be found or devised; I was made to work without a raincoat on rainy days until I was again taken sick and finally ordered to a hospital. While in this hospital, the orders for my company to go home came, and they sailed, leaving me behind as a patient-prisoner, with no definite information as to why I was held.

When I requested to be sent home, I was told that they could not do so until orders to that effect were received. When the orders did arrive, they did not state that I should be released so I was to sail as a prisoner. Being the only one on board having that distinction, I was guarded by three soldiers for eight hours each during the entire voyage which I made on the same boat which had taken me to France I landed at Hoboken after a rather stormy voyage on the 8th of January 1920,, and I was taken to a prison on one of the docks, where I did the same work as other prisoners there for about five days. I was the center of attention . . . because I was the only one who had been overseas, and everyone wanted to know what I had done, and what was the mystery around my case, the guards having confided to some of the prisoners that they had received instructions to keep special guard over me.

MABEE FARM HISTORIC SITE

NEW SITE MANAGER APPOINTED

The Board of Directors of the Schenectady County Historical Society has announced the appointment of Schenectady native Pat Barrot to the position of site manager. We welcome Pat who has been working part time at the Farm for the last six months and is also a volunteer in our archaeology digs. Pat is pursuing a certificate in community archaeology at SCCC.

Pat comes to us with a background in marketing and advertising, as Corporate Marketing Director of Miromar Development, an international developer of communities and factory outlet centers. Prior to that position, Pat was District Sales Manager for Style Magazine (the Women's Wear Daily of Canada). Briefly she was associated with the Schenectady Museum as Assistant Gift Shop Manager.

Pat looks forward to working with the Mabee Farm Committee and its incredible group of volunteers in preserving our local heritage and educating the public about this amazing historic site, right in our own backyard.

DUTCH BARN PRESERVATION SOCIETY

The Dutch Barn Preservation Society recently moved its headquarters to the Mabee Farm Historic Site. The Society is an incorporated non-profit organization. Their mission is to preserve the remaining Dutch barns in America. Founded in 1986, they cover an area from northern New Jersey and Long Island up through the Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys. Their 300 members help museums and historic sites (including the Mabee Farm) either restore or replace their Dutch barns. The Society has moved to the Mabee Farm to allow the public better access to their library and records on barns. We welcome the Society and look forward to working with them even more closely in the future.

SPECIAL MEMBER AND VOLUNTEER EVERETT RAU

Our committee members and volunteers are vital to us. This issue we highlight Everett Rau, veteran volunteer and tireless worker at the Mabee Farm. Today Ev lives on the farm in Altamont that was originally owned by his mother's family, the Ogsburys, in the late 1700s.

During World War II, Ev worked at General Electric, first as a blueprint clerk, then as an engineers assistant, working on many projects including the Manhattan Project. At GE in 1942 Ev met his future wife Peg, marrying her the following year. Ev and Peg have a real crew to help them out at the farm: three sons, one daughter, 13 grandchildren, eight great grand-children and three on the way.

An 85 year old former president of the Dutch Barn Society, Ev shows no signs of slowing down. Presently he is president of the Grange Tri-County Fair Society, a member of the museum committee of the Altamont Fair grounds and is presently growing rye for a straw roof for the Shakespeare Theater in Lenox, Mass. With a keen interest in old machinery and Dutch barns, Ev is also restoring the old barns on his farm (The Pleasantview), to bring the farm back to circa 1880.

At the Mabee Farm, Ev is one of our most beloved volunteers. He was the master builder for the carriage shed and carpenter's shop and conducted many workshops. You can hear his "hip,hip huzzah" echo through the fields during our school tours. You can catch him on the top of the carpenter's shed, nailing that last nail. Or you can see him flailing rye during our events. Ev is everywhere on the farm. Which is why he is our special member and volunteer this issue.

MABEE FARM PUBLIC EVENTS 2004

- April 17 Spring Work Day
- April 24 Volunteers Day
- April 25 Capital District Blacksmith Association
- May 5 Mabee Farm opens for the season on regular hours
- May 22-23 Revolutionary War Re-enactment
- June 20 Forefathers' Day - Fund-raiser
- June 22 Maritime Academy bateau ceremony
- July 17 Erie Canal Bike Tour Rest Stop
- July 18 Community Open House
- July 19-30 Hands on History Class (youth)
- July 26-30 Archaeology Class (youth)
- August 7 Archaeology and Flint Knapping
- August 14 A Day of Fife and Drum Drills
- September 18 Stockade Walkabout
- September 19 Sundae on the Farm 12 PM - 5 PM
- September 25 Close for regular hours for the season
- October 3 Hudson Mohawk Valley Antique Tool Swap
- October 9 Fall Arts and Crafts Festival

MEMORIALS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

- Memorials
- Joan Cady West Belden from Sandra Mable Caldeira
 - Oliver Edgar Mable from Sandra Mable Caldeira
 - Oliver Gerald Mable from Sandra Mable Caldeira
 - David Elwyn Mable from Sandra Mable Caldeira
 - Mrs. Cornelia Porath from Mrs. Vera McGovern,
 - Mr. & Mrs. Paul Ducharme, Mr. & Mrs. James
 - Nicholas, Mrs. Helen Loomis, Mr. & Mrs. Paul
 - Martinovich, Mr. & Mrs. Paul E. Hoodack and J. Gresham

CONTRIBUTIONS

- Clinton Sager
- Adirondack Trust
- Sandra Mable Caldeira

Mabee Farm Historic Site
1080 Main St. (Route 5S). Rotterdam Jct. N. Y. 12150
Tel: (518) 887-5073 Fax: (518) 877-5746
E-Mail: mabee@nycap.rr.com
Web: www.mabeefarm.org

AMONG OURSELVES

We are grateful to George Franchere for his continued support of the Mabee Farm Historic Site, this year in the form of a check for \$30,000 which will go far to enhance the Farm's program. We also thank Paul Tonko for his efforts in achieving a legislative grant of \$5,000 for the Mabee Farm. This will enable us to move forward with our plans for the use of the replica 18th century bateau.

We are sorry to report the passing of Beulah Hinkle, for many years one of our most generous supporters. Even in her later years, Ms. Hinkle maintained a strong and supportive interest in the activities of the Society.

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

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

Transcriptionist needed. The library needs someone to extract and transcribe obituaries and death notices from the newspapers of the 1930s. There is currently no index to the 1930s 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

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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