

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

I've collected a lot of things over the years. My youthful venture into stamp collecting hides in a drawer in our den. As an adult I saved the long-playing records which have now been superseded by compact discs. And now I have a collection of cookbooks! Well, not just any old cook book. These are profusely illustrated. I look at the pictures and read their captions, but that's about as far as it goes. My wife never ever looks at them. She has her own well-worn, 1949 edition of *The Good Housekeeping Cook Book* which flaunts its 15 colored illustrations. (Ruth never noticed them.)

My attraction to books in general started when I was a pre-teen. My mother was a seamstress who at that time worked at home. She, my sister and I (by default) would go downtown shopping and to a movie every Saturday. Mother and Sis would go to the fabric department and notions counter of Erie's biggest department store while I killed time in the book department.

If you're "just browsing" in a book store, the thing that catches you eye first is the jacket artwork. And if you want to pursue the matter any further, at least in my case, you open the book up and look at the illustrations. Some sixty years later and this is still my mode of operation except now, occasionally, I'll buy a book.

About 20 years ago our daughter introduced us to her Chinese wok. Whatever meat and vegetables were available were thrown in, and it always came out great. So add in a Chinese cooking class at the high school and we

were cooking. Ruth made up the sauce and I did the cutting and stir frying. This all led to collecting Chinese cookbooks, most of which were attractively illustrated.

The timing seems to have coincided with the advancements in the art of color illustrations in coffee table books. Lee Bailey's *Country Weekends: Recipes for Good Food and Easy Living* won the R. T. French Company's Best Cookbook Tastemaker Award. The word "tastemaker" seems to imply that the book won for its illustrations rather than its recipes. The photographer must have enjoyed a pleasant summer out on Long Island helping to eat the meal displays after photographing them. And since the first book sold so well, there were several annual sequels.

We used to eat almost weekly at a local Italian restaurant, so along with buying Chinese cookbooks came some Italian productions. And then since we both had some Alsace-Lorraine heritage, I expanded into French regional cookbooks. Included in my Christmas list for this past year was *Van Gogh's Table at the Auberge Ravoux* by Alexandra Leaf and Fred Leeman. This book contains copies of Van Gogh's paintings in and around the tiny peasant restaurant where he lived (and died) in one of their attic rooms.

This all leads up to a recent find: *Painters & Food, the Dutch Table: Gastronomy of the Golden Age of the Netherlands*, by Gillian Riley. The "Golden Age" was the 17th century, the period when both Albany and Schenectady were founded. After winning their freedom from the Spanish Hapsburgs, the Dutch Netherlands developed into the world trading post for northwest Europe.

It was a time of peace and prosperity in which all of the population seemed to have shared. The burgeoning middle class thrived in the good life, and the arts flourished. Many people of the upper and middle classes decorated their homes with oil paintings. Some of these paintings were depictions of the food and drink which graced their tables and kitchens. The paintings along with recipes from that period document what was available and hence what was being raised on their farms and in their gardens.

The garden produce are potential candidates for our Mabee Farm kitchen and herb gardens this summer. The basic staple foods were herring, cheese and bread which washed down by a hearty beer. The cheese and grain needed for this basic meal imply a farming operation which we'll leave to someone in the future to contemplate. We have had some hop vines at the Mabee Farm this past couple of years.

Depicted or included in recipes are the following: Vegetable: artichokes; asparagus; broad beans; cabbage; carrots; cauliflower; celery; cucumbers; lettuce (you name it-they had it); mallow; onions; parsnips (no potatoes). Fruit: apples; grapes; lemons (imported); medlars (look like quince); oranges (greenhouse?); pears; strawberries (New World variety); walnuts; (no tomatoes). Herbs: marjoram; parsley; rosemary; sage.

Let's end this discourse with a recipe *from The Dutch Table* for stewed eels. The Dutch of our area named a local stream and adjacent hamlet "Al Plaats," or "place of the eel." We now know it as Alplaus. The eels are skinned, cleaned and cut into 1" pieces. They are stewed with onion, ginger and salt. When tender, flavor with parsley and lovage. Continue to cook with a lump of butter until the herbs have softened. Salt and pepper to taste and serve with rice. Then feed it to the cat and phone for some Chinese takeout.

The only Dutch restaurant I've ever eaten at is in Greenville, SC. I don't remember eel being on the menu but if I ever get there again, I'll ask for it.

(Ed. Note: We were flying KLM when they served eel which we took for herring and enjoyed. When the woman in an adjacent seat said "That's eel, you know. ", our ten-year-old grandson said, "I'm so glad you didn't tell me until I had eaten it. ") —Bill Dimpelfeld

CALENDAR

Saturday, May 4, 2002 Mabee Farm Work Day

Saturday, May 11, 2002 1:30: Refreshments 2:00: Program: *Featherstonehaugh, Mariaville farmer and Man for all Seasons* Presenter: Bill Massoth

May 17, 18, & 19, 2002 (Friday - Sunday) Revolutionary War Reenactment 2nd Albany Militia at the Mabee Farm

Tuesday, May 21, 2002 7:30 PM Board of Trustees

Saturday, May 24, 2002 and Monday, May 25, 2002 Society is closed

Wednesday, May 29th Mabee Farm Summer Schedule of regular tours begins. Wed-Sat 10:00 to 4:00

June 14-15 Garden Tour in Stockade

Sunday, June 16, 2002 Forefathers' Day at the Mabee Farm (See details below)

Tuesday, June 18, 2002 7:30 PM Board of Trustees

JULY: Mabee Farm Open for Tours

MAY PROGRAM

(This program was erroneously listed for presentation in March. Sorry for the inconvenience.)

Aren't we lucky to have Bill Massoth, creator of so many fascinating historical slide shows? This time it's George Featherstonehaugh, a Mariaville farmer. That's like saying George W. Bush has a cattle farm. Featherstonehaugh was also the first United States geologist, he was an explorer in the Midwest, and even an ambassador to England. And according to my informant, his grandson founded the Historical Society. What more could we ask? Incidentally there are 17 letters in Featherstonehaugh which makes it the longest surname I believe I have encountered. *(Ed. Note: Our ever-alert nomenclature Maven, George Franchere of Dunedin FL., sent us the following phonetic amplification from the Dictionary of British Names.)*

MARCH PROGRAM

We were intrigued and amused as Bob Sager began the program with some family anecdotes of Warren Liddle, the creator of the slide show on 19th Century farming in Schenectady County. Who can forget the story of the elegant wedding that wound up in a cellar when the parlor floor collapsed, or the tale of the catatonic aunt who came to one day with total recall of all the insults heaped upon her in her helpless state? Then there were the slides, collected and prepared by a team that included our own Irma Mastrean.

APRIL PROGRAM

Cal Welch rounded out the annual meeting, sharing his knowledge of old maps with us. We want to thank Cal for filling in at the last minute with a really interesting program.

[A New History of Schenectady](#)

The most definitive history of Schenectady, surpassing the Nineteenth Century efforts of Jonathan Pearson, is nearing completion. This book promises to be the ultimate work on Schenectady for the foreseeable future. **BUT** the final stages of completion take time and money.

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 As a Patron of the Arts. 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.

[MUSEUM NEWS](#)

-Jo Mordecai Coordinator of Exhibits

FACELIFT

Thanks to ever busy Paul Gonsowski the Glen Sanders room has been rewired and repainted and is a thing of rare beauty. Thank you, Paul!

And those who have attended recent meeting have noticed our new, attractive chairs with (really!) padded seats. The price was right, the purchase was made, and the old chairs can be retired — put out to pasture as it were at the Mabee Farm.

PAINTING CONSERVATION REPORT

By now you should have received an invitation to "adopt a portrait." You also know that the society has established an endowed fund dedicated to addressing the conservation needs of our fine art collection. You know how endowments work: there is an income producing property, often cheerfully called "the corpus," which is never touched but which year after year produces income. In the case of the endowment established with the bequest from the Charles W. Carl, Jr., estate the interest will be enough to restore one painting a year. At this rate it will take twelve years to restore the most needy of our portraits. However, you can help move this project along by adopting one or more of the paintings listed in the brochure you have received.

Please review the literature sent to you about this plan and let us hear from you. Perhaps you should take a trip down to the Society if you haven't been here lately, and see the portraits for yourself.

MABEE FARM

Save these dates! May 18th and May 19th, 2002

On those days The Mabee Farm Historic Site will host a Revolutionary War reenactment. The program will be presented by the 2nd Albany Militia and by their invitation will include other militia and groups from throughout eastern New York. There are expected to be about 100 participants in period dress. Settlers, militiamen and Indians will be represented. The theme will be the conditions, attitudes and personal conflicts just prior to the Revolutionary War. The day reenacted will be May 17th, 1775.

The enactors will assemble Friday and camp overnight. We will be open to the public Saturday at 9 o'clock. During the morning there will be various activities: political debates, camp-fire cooking, household chores, musters, all reflective of the time. An Indian party may canoe down the river to trade with the settlers. Special emphasis will be on children's programs and involvement. By 3 o'clock events will progress to an actual skirmish between factions. This will be followed by a field surgery demonstration. After dinner a liberty pole and flag will be raised, followed by a committee of safety meeting. You are invited to a dance in the Dutch barn to end the day. Sunday starts with a church service at 9 o'clock. Activities similar to Saturday's will lead to another skirmish about 3 o'clock. Breakdown is scheduled for 4:30. Food will be available.

Mornings Coffee, tea and snack buns, etc. Lunch Sandwiches and soups, Dinner Hearty stew and bread

Admission will be charged while parking

And a hearty welcome to our new county manager, Kevin DeFebbo, who will be our grand marshal at the reenactment. Turns out he's a reenactor himself!

Meanwhile...

Mark your calendar for June 16!

Be sure and mark your calendar for Forefathers' Day. Easy to do as it takes place on traditional Fathers' Day.

Remember our first Forefathers' Day? We're going back to that format: lots of good food, lots of old fashioned games; a regular Dutch Colonial Festival.

Our theme this year is Colonial Arts. We'll have people here to demonstrate the various skills of Colonial craftsmen: blacksmithing, forging and the like. There'll be displays in our 250-year-old barn. There will be our usual assortment of Mabee Farm Project docents to explain things. The setting will be perfect with our completed barn and (we hope) our completed carriage shed.

Be prepared to enjoy a wonderful country day. Further details will be forthcoming in a letter to the membership about this fund-raiser.

Bellevue -Bob Sager

In the 1880s, George Westinghouse, Jr. built a beautiful mansion for his widowed mother at the top of Broadway Hill; it later became the Bond Funeral Home. Mrs. Westinghouse turned the gift down, saying she preferred her town house in the triangle which is now a park opposite the YMCA. The story goes that her son said he didn't mind since the house had only cost him "a day's pay." (*More next issue!*)

Scotia-Glenville -Elsie Maddaus

On April 27, 1902 (a hundred years ago!), Rev. Benjamin B. Loomis preached his first sermon to a newly organized Methodist congregation in Scotia. He served the church from 1902 to 1906. During that period, a small church building was constructed at the corner of North ten Broeck and Catherine Streets. In 2002 the Scotia United Methodist Church is observing its Centennial Year with a visit of Bishop Susan M. Morrison on April 7, a congregational dinner on April 27, a float in the Memorial Day Parade and other events.

Duanesburgh -Richard Lewis

Tired of *Linda* and *Michelle* for women's names? Richard Lewis has collected a bouquet of women's names from tombstones in Duanesburgh cemeteries. We'll print out a few at a time for the edification of those who may be seeking names for soon-to-arrive children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Here's the list for May-June: Adelia, Bietta, Clarinda, Darcas, Effie Orphelia, Emalina, Folica, and Mr. Lewis's favorites: Grizzley, Ladimma, Marinda, Parthena, Tryphemia, and Zorada.

Princetown -Irma Mastrean

Rural families seldom had time for recreation. There was always the Sunday School picnic and the Farmers' Picnic, but their favorite holiday was the Fourth of July. Everybody celebrated the Fourth. Former Princetown Supervisor Kenneth McKee remembered celebrating the Fourth in the town: "They always had a lot of fireworks, and they had a kind of dangerous thing. It was a balloon, saturated with alcohol and you would light that dam thing and it would take off — go forever — as long as it lasted. One night a hay barn burned down and they thought it came from one of those things."

(Your editor remembers one of those; a big paper balloon with a holder of cotton waste underneath, saturated with alcohol. The one we had floated over the place where my grandmother was sitting and dumped the burning waste in her lap. It was removed quickly — very, very quickly.)

MEMORABLE SCHENECTADIANS -by Neil Yetwin

Major Isaac Ledyard

Throughout May of 1862 Schenectady newspapers were filled with news of the Civil War. McClellan's advance toward Williamsburg, Stonewall Jackson's campaign in the Shenendoah Valley, and the epic five-hour battle between the ironclads "Monitor" and "Merrimac" were reported alongside telegrams and letters from soldiers at the front. But on the 29th of that month the local press also noted the passing of one of Schenectady's oldest citizens, Major Isaac Ledyard, a War of 1812 veteran who died at his Front Street home at age 85.

Ledyard was born at New London, Connecticut in 1777, one of nine children born to Youngs and Mary Ledyard. Youngs Ledyard was then serving as an artillery captain at Fort Griswold, a key American naval site located just across the Thames River from New London. On September 6, 1781 Benedict Arnold led a 2000-man force against New London causing most of the town's 5900 people (including the Ledyard family) to flee for safety in the surrounding woods and hills. Arnold had the town set on fire and killed any of its citizens who remained to try to save their property. Isaac Ledyard was just four years old and the time, but as an old man he stated that he could still hear "the cries of the sufferers above the crackling of the burning town" and the shaking of the countryside caused by its stores of exploding gunpowder.

Arnold then sent 600 men to take Fort Griswold. Aside from Youngs Ledyard and 156 poorly armed farmers and artisans, the fort was commanded by Lt. Col. William Ledyard, Isaac's uncle. After 40 minutes of intense fighting, Lt. Col. Ledyard was forced to hoist the white flag of surrender and open the gates. A Major Broomfield entered and asked who commanded. "I did command, Sir," answered Ledyard, "but you do now." As he presented Broomfield the hilt of His sword, Broomfield seized it and ran Ledyard through. At that the British began slaughtering the garrison and went so far as to push a baggage wagon full of wounded Americans down an embankment, drowning them in the Thames River. Only 26 men survived the Fort Griswold Massacre. Youngs Ledyard, Isaac's father, was not among them.

With her husband and brother-in-law now dead, Mary Ledyard left New London and moved with her children to New York. When Isaac was 23 he left New York and settled on a small farm in Rotterdam. He never forgave the British for the deaths of his father and uncle, so when the United States declared war against Great Britain on June 18, 1812, he accepted a commission as Captain of the New York State Militia and sent to Sacket's Harbor.

Sacket's Harbor, situated on the eastern shore of Lake Ontario, was the main U. S. naval base and site of most of the naval construction during the War of 1/812. By May, 1813, the British lake flotilla had been enlarged and reinforced by experienced seamen under Commodore Sir James Yeo. General Sir George Prevost, Commander-in-Chief of the Canadas, saw an opportunity to take the base, so on May 26th Yeo embarked with 900 regulars and sailed the 35 miles to Sacket's Harbor

At this point, Sacket's Harbor still had about 1500 troops manning its blockhouses and artillery, all under the command of Brig. Gen. Jacob Brown of the New York State Militia. Four hundred regulars formed the second line of defense closer to the fort. Before dawn of May 29th, British trips began landing under a barrage of American cannon and musketry fire. Brown assembled 500 of the militia, including Isaac Ledyard, behind a gravel heap on the shoreline where the British were landing. They were supposed to fire one or two volleys, but when they saw seasoned British regulars deploy into line with fixed bayonets, the raw militiamen broke ranks, firing sporadically while retreating. Brown ran desperately among his troops and finally rallied them to form an orderly column. When Prevost saw the column through his telescope, he thought the situation more desperate than it actually was, and ordered a withdrawal and return to the boats. In the end, British casualties numbered 259; the Americans lost 131. Isaac Ledyard had survived a second war.

At the conclusion of the war Ledyard was promoted to the rank of Major. According to the *Schenectady Democrat and Reflector*, he performed the duties of that office "with credit and ability, winning the respect of his superiors and the approval of those under his command." In addition, the paper noted, Ledyard was "not given to that ostentation and vainglorious action which so often characterizes those in prominent positions." He soon

after moved to 53 Front Street where he lived for the rest of his life.

Ledyard was a lifelong Democrat who was proud of having voted along party lines for every Presidential candidate from Thomas Jefferson to Stephen A. Douglas. As a merchant he enjoyed a reputation "for integrity of character and uprightness worthy of imitation and emulation." *The Schenectady Republican Weekly* of May 30, 1862 stated that even though Ledyard "was not a native but only an emigrant to this city," he "was looked up to as one of our genuine old burghers . . . One of the most quiet and sedate among men, he could when occasion required, evidence the possession of an energy of character and a strength of will that recalled the memory of his soldier days."

Ledyard left a sizable estate at his death, and although he had no family himself and only one surviving sibling (Mary De Clerk of Cazenovia, NY), he left generous sums ranging from \$50 to \$300 to distant friends. He even left the then-large sum of \$50 to his devoted housekeeper. The bulk of his estate went to his nephew and namesake, Isaac Ledyard De Clerk.

Major Isaac Ledyard, who was born during one American war, fought in a second, and died during a third, was quietly interred one week after his death in the De Clerk family plot in Cazenovia.

Contributors During February and March 2002

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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

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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

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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 decent 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.

Fall Festival

The date for the Fall Festival has been changed from September 15 to September 22.

THANK YOU!! Bob Riles of Palm Harbor, FL has presented us with an old fashioned hat stretcher and a mysterious tool call a "traveler."

