

Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK -Bill Dimpelfeld

My wife was having lower-back pains and one of the solutions was to get a heavy car. A "really" heavy car. So I went out and bought this old used Lincoln with maroon-colored leather seats.. It must have weighed twice as much as a normal car, and got under ten miles per gallon. Sort of an SUV of its day. And you know it must have been old because its cost was under \$600.

At that time I was working on the design of bearings for gas turbines. Several gas turbines were used to generate electrical power in New York City. Someone had this ingenious idea of assembling the turbines and generator on barges and floating them down to "the City...." The barges were tied up to docks along the lower Hudson River in Brooklyn, and the electrical output was plugged into the Consolidated Edison electrical grid. The customer thought that because the units were not on land they wouldn't have to pay taxes on them. The city thought otherwise.

The power from the turbines was turned on when the demand for electricity exceeded normal loads: e.g. on a hot summer day with a heavy use of air conditioners. At these times the barge units could carry up to one quarter of the electrical demand of the city.

After a few years of operation some of the gas turbines experienced bearing problems. Four of us were sent to run tests on a turbine on one of the barge units. There were three Rogers and me (always the oddball). We went to pick up our rental car--and it wasn't available. So we set off to the Brooklyn waterfront in my antiquated Lincoln.

Things went well until we started down the Saw Mill River Parkway into the city. There was a detour which sent us off into city traffic. Across the Bronx, past Fordham University and towards the Bronx Zoo. Not another detour sign was to be seen, and we had an appointment to meet with the customer.

We panicked. We turned south into the south Bronx. The south Bronx is not one of New York City's better known tourist destinations. I was driving and one of the Rogers was reading a city map. We were driving south, 180 degrees out of phase with the map's orientation. We turned right when we should have turned left, and left when right was called for. We saw quite a bit more of the Bronx than was necessary, but did eventually escape.

We ran our tests at the customer's "the Narrows" site located opposite the Statue of Liberty. The lower tip of Manhattan was off to the right and Staten Island to the left. The Staten Island ferries paraded back and forth. It was an especially glorious view at night. The New York City garbage barges were stationed at an adjoining wharf. When the full barges left for open water off the continental shelf, they were swarmed by a bevy of screaming sea gulls. There was always a breeze which was rather invigorating on a cold January evening.

The street leading to the site was lined with mostly abandoned tenement buildings or their debris-littered former sites. During the week we were at the site it was interesting to watch the demise of an abandoned car. Each new day revealed the disappearance of additional features: wheels, windows, the engine. One long evening we left the site at about 3:00 AM and got to see in passing an entrepreneur at work in his brightly illuminated garage

cum auto repair shop. Could this have been the destination of all the parts from the abandoned car?

The final block before the dock was lined with warehouses. The one was used to build and store the sets for the Metropolitan Opera Company. On the opposite side of the street, replete with a black Cadillac, was the reputed headquarters of a Mafia family. (The site's night watchman was mugged going home one night, but there probably was no connection.)

I had to get rid of the Lincoln. Couldn't afford to keep it in mufflers. The car had four mufflers which cost about \$200 each to replace. Because we didn't drive the car very much, the mufflers had a tendency to rust out frequently. I do miss those maroon-colored leather seats.

MAY 10 PROGRAM

Many of us have roots, or at least tendrils, in Schoharie county. If so, we know that the name Sagendorf is synonymous with Howe's Cave. We're fortunate to have John Sagendorf as our speaker on May 10 to give us a fuller picture of this famous landmark.

AROUND THE COUNTY

Princetown Tidbits -Irma Mastrean -- Town Historian

Miss Mae Liddle of Delanson began teaching in 1902 at Kelly's Station school in Princetown, where she was paid \$280 per year. She was also paid an extra 5 cents a day for custodial work. She lived in Delanson and used to take the train to Kelly's Station, a distance of eight miles. One day the passenger car was out of service for repairs. To get to work Miss Liddle sat on the cowcatcher of the steam locomotive along with the trainman and arrived at the school just in time for morning classes!

MUSEUM NEWS -Jo Mordecai, Coordinator of Exhibits

We're happy to be able to display our newly restored "Liberty Flag," a relic of Schenectady's participation in the American Revolution.

Owing to the absolutely ghastly weather our museum has not had too many visitors. In addition we were expecting to have the second story floors redone, including the Shaker Room and hallway which sadly need work. But the work has been delayed. However we have had a tasteful display in the showcases in the Vrooman room: some of our Limoges china, made in France for Barney's of the 1800's; at the end of the 19th Century, Barney's was an up-scale department store where socialites from Albany and New York City came to order their crystal and china ware. The china on display is part of a large dinnerware set. Also there is English Transfer ware from the 1880's, Luster ware, Liverpool ware and Apostle ware.

In late May we are booked for a wedding reception and a fifth anniversary party. The first wedding we had here was four years ago when my daughter Mallory married her David in the Vrooman room. Everybody loved it; this old house is a perfect setting for an intimate wedding.

Happy Spring!

FUNDS NEEDED -Ona Curran, Protector of the paintings

Attention Covered Bridge Enthusiasts, Physicians, Agriculturists, Friends One and All!
Funds are needed for the restoration of the following paintings in the Society's Collection:

Old Wooden Bridge Over the Mohawk, painted by Jerome Barhydt 1870 Cost \$450

**Thomas Dunlap M. D. (1781 - 1861), graduate of Union College 1803. This fellow is in bad shape. He has a hole
Cost \$1000**

**Aaron M. Schermerhorn, painted by Samuel Sexton 1852 Farmer who fought in the war of 1812. Cost \$800
Would you like to adopt one of these paintings? In whole or part? Your gift is tax deductible. Contact the
Society at 518 374-0263.**

EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

The Education committee of the Schenectady County Historical Society announces a new film program which is available for use. It is called "Colonial Life in the Mohawk Valley." The script was written by Sally van Schaick and the photos and tape were the work of William Massoth. For details regarding the program's availability, please contact committee chair, Elsie Maddaus, 346-8981

LIBRARY POTPOURRI THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE . . .

Contact Virginia Bolen at the Historical Society, 374-0263, or Frank Taormina at 374-9655. Tell us how your street got its name.

Research your own family! Would your group like to be introduced to the fun of Genealogy? The Gremms-Doolittle Library of the Schenectady County Historical Society invites you to make an appointment with the librarian to bring a group from your organization to find out how to get started on family history. You will be introduced to our fine collection of local and New York State resources as well as how to use other sources such as the Federal Census. If you are interested in finding out more about this opportunity, call the librarian, Virginia Bolen, at 374-0263.

The following copies of portraits and prints in our collection are now for sale:

**Helena Van Eps Pieterse 1743 Artist unknown 8x10 black & white photograph,
\$30 plus \$5 shipping & handling**

**Jonathan Walton and Margaret Thatcher Walton 1830-1835 Ezra Ames 8x10 black & white photograph
Each \$30 plus \$5 shipping & handling**

**Schenectady Harbor 1814 Tantillo 1992 signed, limited edition print, image size 8x10, sheet 12 3/8x14
\$65 plus \$10 shipping & handling**

**Lawrence the Maquase I. Joseph 1986 Depiction of the Lawrence statue in the Schenectady Stockade, signed,
limited edition, image size 19 1/2 x 25 1/4, sheet 22x28 \$75 plus \$12 shipping and handling**

LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS AND DONATIONS

Donations

Lori J. Dubois: Truax/Truex Genealogy Project, 5 volumes
WMHT: Remembering Downtown, video
Elizabeth Ehrcke Bradt family: Bible records
Thomas P. Turiel: The Harrans of Sligo

Acquisitions

Bethlehem Historical Society Bethlehem Cemetery Records, collected by Margaret Thayer
Sotheby's Caring for Antiques
Sleepy Hollow Restorations: Cross Section of the Collection
White Studio collections, microfilm, 2 reels
Heritage Hunters of Saratoga County - Index to Surrogate Court files, 1791-1900
Index to David W. Hoyt's A Genealogical History of the Hoyt, Haight, and Hight families
Nevin, Vaughn Lainhart Stephen's World: The diaries of Stephen H. Lainhart, 1859-1923

MY GENEALOGICAL TABARD -Elsa K. Church

I once knew a remarkable retired elementary school librarian, a Pied Piper kind of a person, who could lead children to books. Her name was Marion Ham. She enjoyed hiking, music, conservation, children, story telling, risqué jokes, knitting . . . though not necessarily in that order! I met her in the Schenectady County Historical Society where she was a volunteer and I was a paid librarian and genealogist.

We soon discovered that the Dewey Decimal system in order to be useful in our research library had to be modified, and, as the staff before us did, we improvised finding devices to make our collection, heavy with Dutch documents, easily accessible to scholars, both historical and genealogical.

Marion was a passionate knitter. Her family wore handsome sweaters. When she ran out of family bodies, she resorted to "outside knitting" to fund her favorite causes. I yearned to own one of her creations, so I paid \$25 for a custom-made tabard. What is a tabard? It used to be a piece of clothing a medieval soldier wore over his armor, bearing his own or his Lord's coat of arms. The one she designed for me was a sleeveless white wool affair, heavy with cable stitches on the loose hanging panels, front and back and tied at the sides.

When Marion delivered my tabard, she included her knitting directions as well as a catalog card which read: "all the patterns in this tabard are from Yorkshire fishing villages." In her droll way she named the four kinds of cable stitches: From Cradle to Grave; Family Tree; Lost Generations; and Family Reunion, even drawing little diagrams for identification!

I used to wear my tabard over my blouse on a cold day. We genealogists are a peculiar breed. Our family research takes us to new places and new people. We learn history in a novel kind of way without war dates to memorize. When I moved to South Carolina I took my tabard along. It still speaks to me . . . a real treasure. Perhaps the only one of its kind in the world.!

(We too remember Marion Ham with great affection. How about you? There must be scores of stories you could be telling us, stories of former members, stories of your own genealogical adventures. Let's have some more stories!)

WE GET LETTERS . . .

Dear Sally,

I just read with interest Bill Dimpelfeld's article on street vendors. As a native Schenectadian who moved away in the early '60s, one of my fondest memories is the horse-drawn Freihofer bakery wagons. We must have been one of the last cities in the USA to continue with horse-drawn service. My home was at the corner of Union Street and Gillespie, and our next-door neighbor was a single elderly woman named May Basley. One day, Maury Lynch (son of Veronica Lynch, who went on to found a successful real estate company) and I noticed that Miss Basley never had to pay for her baked goods. She simply told the Freihofer man to "put it on my account." Maury and I hatched a brilliant plan. The next day, as the wagon went along Gillespie Street, we stopped the driver and got two boxes of chocolate chip cookies and said that Miss Basley had said to put them on her account. We then ran down to the Lynch's home on Union Avenue, ran up to Maury's room, and consumed the cookies. It worked for three days. Miss Basley found it amusing, but our parents made us pay dearly for taking advantage of the sweet old lady.

Bob Mead, Senior Engineer/Analyst
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Huntsville, AL 35806
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MABEE FARM -Andrea Becker

Reenactment-Encampment May 3 and 4

The dates have been changed to avoid competing with other events. It will be bigger and better than last year's. No, it will not snow! This is our biggest and most fun event of the year. Who can forget all those brave little tents in the snow last year? Come, enjoy, participate.

The Inn

Work has started on the repair to the sills and floors in the Inn. We are doing most of this work ourselves with only the masonry work being contracted out. It is interesting to see how this building was constructed and later repaired. Anyone who wants to help or to see the building exposed call Stan Lee at 377-7948

Open for the Season - May 28

Our regular hours for the season until September 27th are Wednesday through Saturday 10 AM to 4 PM.

Forefathers' Day - June 15

Our annual fund raiser, celebrating our Dutch Colonial Heritage. There will be an afternoon dinner meal with special foods; colonial demonstrations, children's activities and entertainment from 1 PM to 5 PM. A chance to tour the farm and see our new river bateau replica. Donation: \$25 Individual; \$40 Couple; \$50 Family. Reservations suggested.

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.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

Wanted!

Someone to do filing in the library. Our librarian can never catch up.

Great opening for volunteer with unsatisfied clerical lust! Call librarian at 374-0263

Wanted!

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

Wanted!

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

Wanted!

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

Wanted!

Docents. A docent is a tour guide. We're running out of docents and we want fresh troops. Come now: you know that you've always secretly wanted to show people around the Museum. Follow Jo or Sally or 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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