

Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter

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CALENDAR

Saturday, May 12, 2001 1:30 Refreshments 2:00 Program: The Shakers Presenter: Laurence Rainey

Tuesday, May 15, 2001 7:30 PM Board of Trustees

Tuesday, June 19, 2001 7:30 PM Board of Trustees

AROUND THE REGION

Van Schaick mansion to rise again

After nearly half a century in capable private hands, the Van Schaick Mansion on Van Schaick Island, Cohoes, is being taken over by the General Peter Gansevoort Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. They hope to turn it into a house museum and a depository for Albany archives.

Ten Broeck Mansion -- Living History Day

On May 6, 11AM-5PM, The Ten Broeck Mansion will host Living History Day in conjunction with the 2nd Annual History Fair. There will be reenactors, tours of the Mansion and a free trolley ride to sites throughout Albany. For further information phone 518-436-9826.

Conference Announcement

The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society is holding a conference for genealogists and historians entitled Nineteenth Century New York Genealogy and History: A Marriage Made in Heaven to be held at the Gideon Putnam Hotel, Saratoga Springs, NY, May 10, 11, 12, 2001. You may get further details from our librarian, Virginia LaGoy.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

I first heard about a Shaker village some forty years ago. At that time we lived in Manlius, a suburb of Syracuse (and burned Stickle furniture in our fireplace. The wood was kiln-dried cherry scrap from the local factory).

There was a newspaper article about a summer camp for underprivileged New York City teenagers. The teenagers lived like Shaker brothers and sisters at an actual Shaker village, the South Family buildings at Mount Lebanon, NY. Living like brothers and sisters seems to have been a more workable arrangement for teenagers than the Oneida Community's practice of having all the men married to all the women.

The South Family buildings at Mount Lebanon were open for tours on weekends. And of course we went. Twenty-five years later I got to visit the site again. the teenagers were long gone, and now the buildings were lived in by a religious order called Sufi. A close friend lived at this community at least part of the week. The Sufis, who are still there, work off site. This differs from the Shaker approach of setting up home industries. The side road at the South Family is appropriately named Chair Factory Road.

Mount Lebanon, located off Route 20, halfway up the hill between New Lebanon, NY, and the Hancock Shaker Village in Massachusetts, was the first Shaker settlement and was the ministry's headquarters. You may have seen the sign at the Watervliet Shaker settlement near the Albany airport saying they were the first Shaker site, and this is also true. Let me digress to examine who Mother Ann Lee and her followers were and how they got to Albany.

Ann Lee was born in Manchester, England in 1735. She had no formal education and instead was part of the child-labor force in the textile mills. She was married in the Manchester Anglican cathedral at age 25. Both husband and wife signed the registry with an "X". Even before her marriage Ann had belonged to a splinter group of Quakers. Ann and her husband had four children. Three died in infancy and one at the age of six. Probably because of these bad experiences she became more active in the leadership of her religious group and made celibacy one of its tenets. They were known at "Shaking Quakers" because of their energetic whirling dancing, and Ann Lee was their "mother." Ann and her small group of followers, which included her father, husband and brother, were very demonstrative in proclaiming their beliefs to others. This resulted in their frequent arrests for being disruptive of the peace. Perhaps to find a more tolerant environment they had to move to the New World.

Mother Ann Lee and her small group of followers moved from England to the colony of New York in 1774. Within a year they bought some marshy farm land seven miles northwest of Albany. At that time the area was called "Niskayuna," later renamed Watervliet, and now is in the town of Colonie. The farm is now the site of the Albany County Airport, a baseball stadium, the county home, etc. Mother Ann lived at the farm the last nine years of her life. She died there in 1794. The Shaker settlements of Mount Lebanon and Watervliet both opened in 1787.

There had been good news and bad news for the Shakers in the New World. The bad news was they were English and pacifist at the opening of the American Revolution. For this reason Mother Ann got to spend some time in the Albany jail charged as a traitor. The good news was the colonies were experiencing a revivalist movement, and new members flocked to join the Shakers, for Mother Ann was represented at the Second Coming. The settlements were built to house, feed and support the new members. The settlements consisted of a cluster of farm families around a church family. There were between 50 and 100 people in the family. One of the largest settlements was Mount Lebanon with eight families and 600 members. By comparison Watervliet had four families and 350 members. Buildings of Watervliet Shakers' West and South families are still lived in by tenants, and the church family buildings are used as the Albany County Nursing Home.

The next time you take visiting friends or family over to see the round stone barn at Hancock Shaker Village, why not take a detour down Mountain Road. Drive past the Darrow School, which occupies the Mount Lebanon Church Family buildings, and continue on to the buildings of the South Family, current home to a Sufi commune. The quiet surroundings of the back road will give you the feeling of what the settlement was like 200 years ago. (Except you won't experience the Sunday afternoon religious celebration. They could be heard for miles.)

March Program

Derek Sayers introduced us to the pioneers of anesthesia in a lively slide presentation. We came away feeling we were fortunate in being alive in the age when anesthesia is something we can take for granted.

April Program

Timed to coincide with the Schenectady Museum's display of Antique Cars, Bill Massoth provided us with a program on the same subject. Bill continues to add to his repertoire of slide shows, and we enjoyed his presentation.

MUSEUM NEWS

Docent Needed

This is the perfect position for the retired elementary teacher who would like to keep his or her hand in, once in a while, with younger children. It's more important that you have a rapport with youngsters than an encyclopedic knowledge of everything we have in the museum.

-Jo Mordecai

From Your House to Our House

<u>Donor</u>	<u>Gift</u>
Pamela Lehman	Six volumes of American Heritage: 1952-1962
Wayne Harvey 1690, Girl's	Bottle Collection; a full length Shaker style dress with large shawl and long apron lined in black; two snow glass ornaments; "Schaghnechtatie" Feb. 7th made in 1990; 300th anniversary of the Massacre; one Victorian calendar - portrait in a Rose. Circa 1900
Bill Dimpelfeld	One pair of binoculars made in France (Jockey Club marking on rim)
Barbara Weinheimer	Three unframed water colors; artist Elizabeth Rickey; scenes of gardens
Carl Christensen	Two Carl Company boxes; one small jewelry box; one Nusbaum box; one money bag, Schenectady Trust Co.; four framed sepia prints of Schenectady
Louise Waterman	One set: The Schenectady Game; three Christmas books; Two Thanksgiving books; one book on Van Gogh; Two books on Amish cooking; Three folders of Louise's news; paper clippings on Dutch culture and recipes

Thank you all for your generosity. Everything is useful and will add interest to our collection.

A Thank You Tribute

In June we lose a warm, talented generous lady--a member of our Society. She moves to Pittsburgh to live with her daughter Karen and her husband. I speak of Louise Waterman. I have known her mostly through my work as Coordinator of Exhibits at the Society, but I am always impressed with her warmth and enthusiasm. Louise was born in Manchester, NY, to a large happy family of seven brothers and three sisters. After high school Louise attended Albany State Teachers' College, graduating in 1940. In 1942 she became the bride of Edward Waterman who served in the Pacific during W.W.II. Meanwhile Louise started to teach school in Illinois, then became a librarian, first in North Carolina, and later at Seymour Air Force Base.

In 1951 Edward found a job with Gulf Oil in Schenectady and the Watermans came to our town and settled happily for 50 years, becoming caring citizens and friends to all. The first professional librarian in elementary schools in Schenectady, Louise was librarian at Elmer Avenue, then Zoller and finally Linton High School. She then became a Librarian Specialist. The Watermans had three children: William, Karen and Robert; after the last child was born in 1955, Louise attended college for six years on Saturdays to get her Master's in Library Science.

Outside of her professional life Louise has many interests. As a member of the AAUW she gave presentations on Old Schenectady. Her research was extensive--she definitely is a history buff. She was also an active member of the Business and Professional Women's Club. In fact, in 2000, she was named their Woman of the Year and given their award. In 1995 she had been named District Volunteer for her volunteer work at the Hallmark Nursing Home. She was also a tireless volunteer at the Ellis Hospital Psychiatric Unit, touching patients with her kindness and patience.

Louise is also a collector of -- guess what?-- camels! I asked why camels. "Why?" Louise responded, "because I am a first generation Syrian American and the camel is symbolic to that country." She has hundreds, all shapes and sizes. Louise has given the Society all her research clippings recipes and notes-- to use as I please. Looking through them I have found not only Dutch recipes and customs, but Shakers too--many things I can use in the future. Louise has always found time to be a docent for the Walkabout, and has baked endless cookies whenever I have asked. Now Louise is a widow-- Edward died in 1999--but she is surrounded by her family. Son William is retired from the Air Force and is now a computer specialist. Daughter Karen is a speech therapist, and Robert a graphic artist. Her five granddaughters all came through their colleges with honors, and now Louise has two great-grandsons.

Pittsburgh is lucky to get you, Louise. Good luck, be happy and always have fun. I know you will.

--Jo Mordecai

LIBRARY DOINGS -Virginia LaGoy, Librarian

A Modest Want List

A chair mat in good condition (for rolling from desk to computer)

A printer in good working order

Telephone books from the 1970s (We have some gaps)

Yearbooks and student photo albums from Schenectady County schools (any grade)

Your pedigree chart for our files.

AVAILABLE FOR SALE

Reproductions of old Schenectady postcards, singly or package of 20;

Notecards-scenes of Schenectady and Rexford, package of eight;

Book. Images of America series --Schenectady: Stop in and make a purchase!

GIFTS TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

DONOR	ITEM
Frank Pochabradsky	"Motorgram," Oct. 1938 and Nov. 1938; "GE Works News", 9 issues.
Bette Geci	Packet of letters with envelopes to Fannie Fisk, Schenectady resident
Norman S. Collins	Book. Union College: an Unfinished History
Edith Adams (friend)	Photos and material about Corinne Conde
Ruth Hand	Family, Bible, cemetery and church records
Martin J. Kehoe, Jr.	Schenectady County Voter Enrollment Lists 1910,1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1922
Gardner,	George R. Lunn (author) The Schenectadians: the Story of Schenectady's 20th century and two men who helped shape it

ACQUISITIONS

CDs: 1900 Federal Census Index - New York State

Microfilm: 1890 Veterans' and Widows of Veterans' census - New York

Six rolls - Vosburgh Collection of Church Records

Books:

Sacred Heart Church: Marriages, November 1903 to December, 1998

St. Joseph's Church : Marriages, August, 1862 to December, 2000

St. Columba Church Marriages, April, 1908 to October, 1974

STROLLING THROUGH THE ARCHIVES ON A RAINY DAY . .

We've spent a year's worth of volunteer time reviewing the "Legal Matters" file with the purpose of eventually creating an index. Much of it is mundane and repetitious: debt, promissory notes; defamation of character, and theft. But once in a while something pops up that reveals circumstances which no longer come to light in our current judicial system.

Schenectady Com. Pleas. of December Term in the year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twelve

Schenectady fs. Sybrant Van Schaick plaintiff in this suit complains of Henry Barhydt defendant in this suit in custody etc. for that the said Henry Barhydt on the twentieth of October in the year aforesaid with force and arms in the city and in the county of Schenectady and within the jurisdiction of this court with force and arms attacked a certain Bull of the said Plaintiff to the value of two hundred dollars there found in the said Henry with clubs, hoisuspenders axes knives swords dirks pistols guns stiletoes bayonetts [unreadable] swivels hatchets tomahawks skalling knives ploughshares pruninghooks and spears did kill and destroy the said Bull by means of cuts bruises and wounds by means whereof the said Bull died, whereupon the said Plaintiff saith that he is injured and hath sustained damage to the value of two hundred dollars and therefore he brings his suit.

Pledges to xxxxx John Doe Van Antwerp

Richard Roe For Plaintiff

Schenectady ss. Sybrant Van Schaick puts in his place Daniel Van Antwerp as his Attorney in this cause against Henry Barhydt in a plea of Trespass.

Ed. Note: We find ourself wondering: did Barhydt use all those weapons at once? Did he stand at a fence and throw them at the Bull one at a time? Did anyone try to stop him? And what are hoisuspenders?

MABEE FARM PROJECT

The Nilsen Dutch Barn. Roof boards went on in February, and the contractor for the red cedar shake roof will finish by April 21. The lightning rod system is in and the weather vane for the west gable is on order. Pressure wash of the timbers is complete and floors will be done by May 21. Work at the Farm falls into several categories. Most important, of course, is care and restoration of the ancient buildings that make the Farm so unique. Next is reconstruction of out-buildings necessary to any farm, and in this case to provide space for displays and activities. Third is plantings -- kitchen, herb and flower gardens - for display and pathways for access to them. And finally, carrying out all those activities which make the Mabee Farm accessible to the public.

The Stone Farmhouse. Leaks had developed in the farmhouse roof and these have been fixed by reflashng the chimneys and dormers. The fresh new copper, shining in the sun, gives us new reason to call it "flashing." Scott Haefner rebuilt the farmhouse bathroom, replacing the subfloor which had deteriorated badly, and installing a water-saver toilet to help out the septic tank.

Slave Quarters (Brick House). In this stage restoration proceeds next by breaking into the roof to install stainless steel tie rods to stabilize and hold the east brick wall in place. Concomitantly, the contractor will replace the decayed brick at the southeast corner. This work is scheduled for completion by the first of June.

Scheduled Opening. For some time the Project has been planning to open on scheduled hours which are now set for 10:am to 4:pm, Wednesdays through Saturdays, during the warm weather starting on Opening Day, Saturday, May 26th. Scott Haefner will be the Site Manager in charge of operations; phone him at (518) 887-5073. The Farm will continue open other times by appointment.

Keith Cramer has scheduled the Dutch Barn Preservation Society to meet at the Farm, Saturday, June 9th. Sundays are reserved for special events, the first to be Forefathers' Day, Sunday, June 17th, while the Fall Festival will be Sunday, September 9th. The Farm is on the Stockade Walkabout on Saturday, September 22nd. A brochure on the Farm will be paid in part by I Love NY funds.

Activities. Water has been turned on in the restrooms for use by contractors and occasional visitors. Cleanup day has been scheduled for Saturday, May 5 (or the next day in case of rain); drop-in volunteers will be welcomed.

Mabee Farm committee members are at work on the gardens and plantings, led by Sue McLane, Kim Mabee, and Scott. The plan the displays, Ned Pratt, a professional, is at work (he did the displays at the Albany airport) and is developing the children's exhibits funded by a gift from Ken and Thelma Lally. Stanley Lee, the new co-chair of the Farm Project (replacing Bob Sager, now the Society's assistant treasurer) is leading the charge to ready the farm for the scheduled opening.

Thanks are due all those who helped with the funding that makes all this possible, especially to the Schenectady Foundation which led the way with a \$50,000 grant to move the Nilsen barn, and then a challenge grant that raised their ante to a total of \$142,396, and to George Franchere who continues his benefactions at an annual rate of \$20,000. There will be a complete update in the next issue.

Motion Picture History Notes Schenectady was ahead of Hollywood by John Duncan

John Duncan is back with another of his Schenectady-Motion Picture revelations! David L. Lewis, writing in the June 1971 issue of *The Public Relations Journal*, pays tribute to the pioneering work of Henry Ford, in setting up the "first corporate film department." According to Lewis, then professor of Business History at the University of Michigan, Ford was introduced to motion picture production in mid-1913, when a commercial organization filmed operations in the Ford Highland Park, Michigan plant. Ford bought a motion picture camera in September 1913, and four months later discussed films with Judge Ben Lindsay and another man who had more than a casual interest and knowledge of the exciting new medium: Thomas A. Edison. According to the Lewis report, Ford, encouraged by Edison, in April of 1914, ordered Ambrose Jewett and his advertising department to start a moving picture department. By mid-summer, the new organization had produced its first film, entitled *How Henry Ford Makes One Thousand Cars a Day*, and as Professor Lewis tells it, "it remained the only department of its kind until 1916, when General Electric set up a similar operation."

The tremendous pioneering impact of Ford's film work is beyond question whether measured by such innovations as newsreels, educational films, or the sheer size of the Ford film operation. All the same, the old game of "who did what first" is frequently fraught with claims which may stand only until another voice is heard. For example, the late John Schwem of Schenectady (the last of the old film makers, who retired shortly after I joined GE, in 1945), in his essay, "My 45 Years of Business Filmmaking" in March 1954 *Business Screen Magazine*, relates that General Electric commissioned a film to promote the sale of electrical appliances way back in 1909. Acknowledging that some of the first movies from Edison's laboratories were produced for advertising purposes in 1888, Mr. Schwem nonetheless suggests that the 1909 appliance film, made by Essanay Motion Picture Company of Chicago, and entitled "Every Husband's Opportunity," was a pioneering effort, if not the first industrial-sponsored film. John Schwem also confirms that 1916 was the year when GE established a distinct motion picture organization some two years after Ford. Yet, as Schwem tells it, GE's still photograph section, as early as 1912, owned an old hand-crank Williamson movie camera, and Schwem and Ed Jones, who ran the old still-photo operation, started experimenting with shots of "every animate object in the area, including each other."

In 1914, when the Ford film organization was established, GE motion pictures were gradually evolving from their still photography section. That same year, no less than three motion pictures were completed by the in-house GE organization. The first showed how GE Motors were made in the Lynn, Massachusetts plant; the second was entitled *Si Smith's Conviction*, a subtle title concealing the story of making Mazda lamps in the Harrison New Jersey plant; the third, somewhat more pretentious, was titled simply *The Panama Canal*. Just as many Ford films espoused the cause of the great American motor car, through the eyes of the Model T, General Electric films frequently, and with equal subtlety, reported of the growing advances in the electrification of industry, home railroads, and agriculture. *The Back to the Farm* was a minor 1915 epic which pictured the joys of electric pumps, wringer washes, fans, and, yes, even electric automobiles. During that same year, the GE filmmakers produced

Home Electrical, King of the Rails, and a documentary about their fast-growing Schenectady Works. In 1917, the year after a separate motion picture operation was formed, the flow of GE films across the broad area of electrification was interrupted long enough to pay fitting film tribute to a man whose identification with General Electric and the motion picture is aptly described by the film title: *The Benefactor*. The part of Edison was played by an actor in this case, but small shreds of Edison film still remain among the GE archives.

The full story of motion pictures at General Electric, complete with the joys and heartache, is too long to relate here, but even this capsule report would be incomplete, were we to overlook two further examples of pioneering. In the first case, it was a young engineer named Charles A. Hoxie who, as early as 1919, developed the first of a series of patented equipment leading to a system of sound-on-film motion pictures; and thanks in great part to Mr. Hoxie's "Palophotophone," General Electric produced limited sound motion pictures more than a year before Al Jolson's *Jazz Singer* greeted the American Public.

In the second example, the pioneering appears in the subject matter of the film. For than thirty years ago, before most of us were truly conscious of environmental concerns, General Electric sponsored a moving, informative film entitled *Clean Waters*, calling attention to the urgent need for adequate waste filtration controls, following this with *Pipeline to the Clouds*, which underscored the need for care of our natural water supplies.

If the old question of who pioneered most and firstmost is one which must always be ready for amendment, it is at least secure to say that Tom Edison really started something.

P.S. John D. included the following charming anecdote.

My older brother George once told me after a date with Gertrude Alexanderson that her father, E. F. W. Alexanderson, had shown him an interesting contraption in which he had rigged up a photo picture on a screen, and when he cranked this thing by hand the photopicture actually moved; I gathered it was a crude example of television.

Ed. Note: One should point out that filming rivalry did not affect the friendship between Edison and Ford, whose winter homes are nestled side-by-side on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River in Fort Myers, Florida, where your editor's little sister was a docent in the 1940's.

Arent Van Curler - His Role in the Colonial Community of New Netherland by Frank Taormina

[Here is the last half of Frank's essay which appeared in the March-April issue.]

Both the gifts he brought and his broad proposals conformed to Iroquois definitions of peace. The Mohawks received Van Curler as the respected headman he appeared to them to be, with all due ceremony as embellished with the fruits of intercultural trade. "We were obliged to halt fully a quarter of an hour before each castle, in order that the Indians might salute us by the firing of muskets," Van Curler recalled. "There was also great joy among them because I had come. Indians were immediately sent out to hunt, who brought us in some excellent turkeys." Van Curler hoped that his embassy would gain the release of Jesuit missionary Isaac Jogues and two other French prisoners recently seized by the Mohawks. Though he promised (but apparently didn't bring with him) a ransom of six hundred florins worth of trade goods, the Mohawks refused to yield their captives. In all other respects, however, the mission was a rousing success.

Both sides later recalled the 1642 visit as a major turning point that laid the groundwork for an expanded relationship (Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Long House*, pp. 93-95). Richter goes on to offer the opinion that this visit, taken at Van Curler's initiative, played a role in the negotiation of the "earliest surviving written treaty between the government of New Netherland and the Mohawks." (Richter, p. 95.) Van Curler ended his

service as commies in 1645. However he retained his influence with the Mohawks, and "During the 1650's and 1660's the court repeatedly called upon him to handle difficult intercultural negotiations." (Richter, p. 95.) It was under Van Curler's leadership that "the first recorded major transfer of land from Iroquois to Europeans ..." took place, "on which a new village called Schenectady was established." (Richter, p. 97.) This real estate transaction, according to Richter, came about because of the abusive practices of a number of Dutch fur traders at Fort Orange who "on horseback go up and down in the woods, and not only take away their beavers by force and carry them, leaving the Indians to run after them, but also knock and throw them around. . ." Apparently, the founders of Schenectady, led by Van Curler, thought they could establish trade in Schenectady away from the over-aggressive Dutch traders of Fort Orange.

The circumstances surrounding the end of Van Curler's life were related, according to Richter, to the turmoil the Mohawks were going through with the French. In an effort to overpower the Mohawks and end the continuing raids by them on Canadian fur routes, the French invaded Mohawk country in 1666, destroying all the Mohawk's major towns. Van Curler had a hand bringing about peace after this invasion and, according to Richter, played his role in a way which favored the French, in the hope that they might occupy the country eventually and drive out the British who, by 1666, had transformed "New Netherland" into "New York." Thus, in the summer of 1667, "...Van Curler set out with a group of Mohawks for Canada to receive the personal thanks of French leaders for his role in making peace. On Lake George (Here, I believe Richter is mistaken. Every other source I have read about this tragedy indicates it happened on Lake Champlain. F.T.) his canoe capsized and he drowned. Contemporary accounts fail to mention the later recorded Indian tradition that the accident followed an insult to spirit beings who lived under the waters. His Mohawk traveling companions' stories at the time were sufficiently contradictory to lead one to suspect that they assassinated him (Richter, p. 104).

My interest in this story was piqued by the fact that Arent Van Curler was once a neighbor of ours since he once owned the lot on which the Mohawk Club is now located, just a block away from the present headquarters of the Historical Society.

THE ODYSSEY OF MOSES VINEY PART 1: BORN INTO BONDAGE by Neil B. Yetwin

(Ed. Note: Neil Yetwin, who brought us Mordecai Myer and the Masons of Schenectady, has done it again. This time it is the story of a Black man who led an extraordinary life, much of it in Schenectady. We'll be running the full story in a number of issues; we hope to find a way to call it to the attention of the Schenectady Black community, whose local history goes back as far as our Dutch and other northern European accounts -- they were here right along, toting barges and lifting bales and occasionally being mentioned in a deed or a will or a bill of sale.

While we're on the subject, the Schenectady County Historical Society would be even more valuable than it is already if it were to represent more of the diversity in this richly diverse community. So we're calling all of you with Irish, Scottish, German, Italian, Jewish, or Polish heritage to share with us: tell us stories of how your family got here; maybe you have pictures we could show; and don't forget to start a family file with Ginnie LaGoy, our librarian.)

Schenectady's Vale Cemetery has become better known in recent years as a place where local vandals have been more active than the Mohawk warriors, hardy voyageurs and "wood rangers" who made portage here more than three centuries ago. Yet even a brief tour of this "lost world" can provide a vivid portrait of Schenectady's long history and the Dutch and English merchants, traders and industrialists who developed the city during the first two centuries since its founding. But there is a section of Vale Cemetery that has escaped attention and the stories of those buried there long neglected. Several decades ago the remains of about eighty African-Americans were removed from various sites around the city and interred in a donated section of land which over time came

to be known as the "Colored Plot". There are no outward signs to distinguish the Colored Plot from its surroundings. The 60-by-80 -foot area contains the familiar slate or granite markers that date back to the early nineteenth century, but many of them have been worn or broken by time, nature or the occasional delinquent. According to local records, however, at least one of the people buried in the Plot was well known. Moses Viney (1817-1909) was a former slave who came to Schenectady in search of freedom, and his life was to have an important impact on the city's social life.

Moses Viney was born on March 10, 1817 in a slave cabin near Easton, Talbot County, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Just eleven months later (February, 1818) and fifteen miles away at Tuckahoe Creek, Talbot County, Frederick Douglass was also born in a rude slave shack. Moses' father, Horace Thomas Viney, had been purchased on a Baltimore auction block by plantation owner William Murphy. Horace would eventually father twenty-one children, of whom Moses was the eldest. Murphy's son, Richard, was born on March 10, 1816 and the two boys played and celebrated their birthdays together. Moses would recall later in life that the Murphys were not unkind, but the harsh realities of plantation life dictated that slave children be sent to work in the fields at about age seven, and the two boys were discouraged from associating with one another from that point on. The slave's work day began at dawn, and, except for the house slaves, everyone worked in the fields, sowing, cultivating and reaping tobacco, corn and wheat. Slaves received a weekly ration of one peck of corn, twenty-four herring and four pounds of meat, and in some areas they were permitted church services and even some schooling. Women were allowed four to six weeks of rest following childbirth, but after that they were expected to return to the fields to work, usually with their newborn infants nearby. It is likely that Moses himself became acclimated to slave life in this way.

Moses was separated from his parents at age fourteen and spent the next three or four years working in the fields until he was considered trustworthy enough to be a butler in the Murphy household. After William Murphy died just before 1840, Moses heard Richard Murphy's tentative plan to sell him and several other slaves to pay off some of his father's debts. Maryland's slaves had a tremendous fear of being sold "down the river" to the Deep South where plantation life was considerably more brutal. Edward Lloyd, the wealthy Talbot County planter who once owned Frederick Douglass, had already sent some of his several hundred slaves to a cotton plantation in Mississippi, and others were doing the same to pay debts of to offset the decline of tobacco as Maryland's staple crop. A common saying among the slaves, "The wild geese come from Canada, where all are free," gave Moses an idea to gain his freedom.

While working in the wheat fields, the bosses often gave pennies to the boy who could stack the most sheaves. Moses knew he would need money for a successful escape, so by stacking as many sheaves of wheat as he could, he accumulated what he called a "liberty fund" of \$20. Now 23, he devised a plan to escape with two companions. As a trusted house slave, Moses had been allowed limited traveling privileges from Murphy's plantation and knew the woods, roads and towns in the surrounding area. Richard Murphy granted the three men permission to visit a neighboring town for the upcoming Easter festival. On Easter morning, 1840, the trip prepared to leave the Murphy plantation; Sunday and Monday being holidays, the escapees would have two full days head start. Tying their few belongings in bundles, the men "resolved to kill themselves rather than be taken back alive" and set out to the North where they heard that "all are free."

Moses' neighbor, Frederick Douglass, expressed in his Autobiography what may have been on the fugitives' minds, when he wrote about his own view of the Chesapeake Bay: "This very bay shall yet bear me into freedom. The steamboats steer in the northeast course for North Point; I will do the same, and when I get to the head of the bay, I will turn my canoe adrift, and walk straight through Delaware and into Pennsylvania. When I get there I shall now be required to have a pass; I will travel there without being disturbed. Let but the first opportunity offer, and come what will, I am off."

[To be continued](#)

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

VALE FEST THIS SPRING

The Vale Cemetery Association, working with the Vale/State Street Corridor Association (VSSCA), in an effort to improve the central State Street area, has proposed a week-long festival--"Vale Fest." They have invited Sally van Schaick and Frank Taormina to accompany Superintendent Jack Sheffer to "highlight certain individuals interred" there and to deal with questions that might be asked.

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Checks should be made payable to the Colonial Schenectady Project (a 501 (c) (3) organization), 1127 Avon Road, Schenectady, NY 12308.

WORK PARTY

Longing to get involved with the Mabee Farm Project? Wanting to play an active role? Here is your chance! May 5 is the day. Workers will gather under the leadership of committee co-chair Stanley Lee (377-7948) and Scott Haefner (887-5073) to WORK. All kinds of opportunities in yard work are available. Phone one of our leaders and let him know that you'll be there, rarin' to go.

THE ODYSSEY OF MOSES VINEY PART TWO: EXODUS ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD by Neil Yetwin

By nightfall the trio had covered 17 miles and had arrived at the village of Denton, which they entered and quickly left under cover of darkness. Bloodhounds had been put on the escapees' trail when their absence was noticed, but Moses had anticipated this and had spent months feeding Murphy's dogs and treating them kindly. He recalled, in old age, that when the dogs caught up with them, they rushed up to him and at his command ran back in the direction of the plantation. Continuing northward, they came upon the banks of the Choptank River, stole a canoe and, finding that it had no paddles, dismantled a fence and used the rails to row their way across.

On Monday they reached Smyrna, Delaware, the most important port between Wilmington and Lewes, from which hundreds of vessels carried grain, hides, lumber, peaches and other produce to northern markets. Moses and his two friends took a stagecoach to the steamboat landing, watching carefully for the slave catchers who frequented these points. As Frederick Douglass recalled in his own memoirs, "these human hounds were most vigilant and active." Once aboard

the vessel they looked forward to their next destination, Philadelphia. It was natural for the men to head for Philadelphia; besides being the first major port on the Delaware after Smyrna, it was the seat of American Quakerism, with a long history of tolerance toward African-Americans.

As early as 1721 there were about 3600 African-Americans in the city, and over the next sixty years Quakers and independent philanthropists had established all-black schools. By the time the importation of blacks into Pennsylvania was halted in 1780, their number had risen to 6000 when the entire population of the state was just 11,000. Within ten years only 210 blacks in Philadelphia were still enslaved. The Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of slavery helped freed slaves financially, so that within thirty years freed blacks owned 100 houses and lots in the city limits. The freedmen also established a Masonic Lodge, St. Thomas' Church (The first African Protestant Episcopal Church in America), the African Methodist Episcopal Church (which had 4000 members and its own publishing company), and were secure and vocal enough to petition Congress to stop the slave trade and reconsider the fugitive slave laws.

But Philadelphia had seen more than its share of racial tension. In 1819 three white women stoned a black woman to death, there existed an un-spoken, unwritten tradition of driving Blacks from Independence Square each July 4th as a way of denying them their right to celebrate a freedom that whites believed they hadn't earned. And on August 12, 1834, a mob of whites marched into the city's black section, beating up residents, burning homes, and wrecking the African Presbyterian Church. The destruction continued unabated for three days until the police were finally ordered to put a stop to it. When Moses Viney and his friends arrived in Philadelphia they made their way to Reverend Alexander Weyman of the Mother Bethel AME Church, which served as a station on the Underground Railroad. Weyman gave the men food and shelter and the names of some New York abolitionists who could help them get to Canada. When the trio arrived in New York, their contacts informed them about a man in Troy who owned a Canadian line of canal boats and who could get them across the border.

Troy, New York, had already experienced some abolitionist activity. Black minister Henry Highland Garnet once served an integrated church there, and the city hosted a convention of blacks and prominent white abolitionists who called for the integration of white schools. Harriet Tubman once personally escorted a manacled fugitive slave named Charles Nalle from the office of Troy's police commissioner. Amidst a shower of police clubs and objects thrown by an angry mob, Tubman ferried Nalle across the Hudson to Albany and put him on a wagon to Schenectady, where he escaped west via the Erie Canal. But Viney's group failed to locate their contact in Troy and decided to cross the Hudson and head for Schenectady. Moses found work as a farmhand for a Glenville physician named Fonda, who also found work for Moses' companions. Viney worked on Fonda's farm until 1842 when he was hired by Union College President Eliphalet Nott and moved into a small frame structure that once stood at the rear of Nott's house on the campus. Here he began a new life as President Nott's coachman and messenger for the next quarter of a century.

