

November - December 1998

32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, New York 12305 (518) 374-0263

And now our web site: <http://www.schist.org>

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

We have had an active fall season with the annual Walkabout being the largest event. With the cooperation of the weather nearly 900 people participated. Thank you to the many society members who volunteered that day as docents and to those who provided the delicious refreshments at our facility. It was a fun occasion and one that helps our organization financially. Thanks also to those who arranged the affair, members of our Society as well as the Stockade Association.

The trading card display in our museum was well received, and was shown in a segment on Channel 13 by Steve Scoville. Mrs. Mordecai deserves much credit for her great exhibits which take organizational skills as well as creative ability. She currently has a display in one of the glass cases in the Proctor Theater arcade that shows a few of our artifacts as well as giving our location and the times we are open.

In our museum right now there is an attractive and instructive exhibit of commemorative plates, large and small. This will be up until Thanksgiving.

The library remains busy after an unusually active summer season. We now have records of over 2000 families in our files. Also we are now "on line." See our home page on the Internet: www.schist.org .

At our first society meeting this fall we were treated to a talk on introductory Genealogy by Society member Jack Maybee, who also happens to be the historian for the Mabee family organization. While on the subject of the Mabees, note the name is spelled various ways with the original French spelling something like Mebille.

The big news from our Mabee Farm Project is that the Schenectady Foundation, which gave the Society \$50,000 unconditionally in June to use in moving the Nilson Dutch barn to the Farm from its location in the town of Johnstown, has notified us that we're approved for additional grants totaling \$100,000 conditioned on our raising funds totaling \$300,000. That's generous of the Foundation for which we're grateful, but it's quite a challenge. Of course, we did it before when we built our present library, and this current effort will be as much a contribution to the historical promotion of the county as the former was, and, tied in with the County's Native American Cultural Center next door to the west, it will have even more impact on building tourism in the Mohawk Valley.

In October of last year Kathy Johnson, who led the Mabee Farm Project for several years, took on new employment duties and had to withdraw abruptly. At that time John van Schaick, although his work on assessments and the New Netherland Project were quite time-consuming, agreed to lead the Project for six months until a permanent chair could be named. Now, after twelve months, he finds site development at the Farm about all he can continue with on the Project, so I'll take the Project lead for now. My personal thanks to John for his work this last year and for his continuing help.

In closing I wish to express my fatherly pride in my daughter Susan who has just had a book published entitled *Selling your Crafts.* Good luck, Sue.

We look forward to another successful season for the Society and cordially invite you to participate in it.

- Bob Sager -

We continue with our series of recollections of Mandy Grems. This month's contribution comes from former SCHS Board Member and longtime supporter, James Pontius. We have taken the liberty of inserting some ancillary material provided by other old friends of Mandy.

Concerning Mandalay Grems at her funeral service, July 11, 1998

Everyone who knew Mandalay Grems will find it difficult to forget her enduring warm personality. For me, that warmth started with the delightful name given to her by her parents . . . Mandalay . It almost sounds like a poem. Some years ago I read that a linguistic society had chosen the ten most beautiful words in the English language. If I had been on the committee, one of those ten words would have been the name Mandalay.

Mandy and I first met each other in New York City in 1954, she as a mathematician from Boeing Aircraft in the state of Washington and I as a financial person from General Electric in Schenectady. Mandy and I were in a month-long class at Remington Rand learning how to program the UNIVAC, the first large scale electronic computer to be used in business.

After intermittent contacts during the 1960s and 1970s, common interests of a different kind surfaced quite apart from our vocations, and I would like to spend just a few moments in some personal comments on a series of events which I deem to be important aspects of Mandy's life in retirement.

The new common ground was the genealogical collection at the Schenectady County Historical Society. When Mandy formed a judgment, she was usually politely outspoken and right. It didn't take Mandy long to recognize the value of the historical and genealogical collection — later described by the New York State Historian as one of the five best of its kind in the state, and Mandy soon concluded that the quarters were extremely cramped, making use of the collection difficult.

(Ed. note: Will those of us who labored in the cramped library-office in those days ever forget leaping over piles of books and boxes to get to the particular file we were working on!)

A committee formed at Mandy's prodding concluded that a new wing on the Historical Society's building—exactly one block west of the First Reformed Church—was needed at an estimated cost of \$200,000, a sum heretofore beyond the comprehensions of the Society's trustees. Nevertheless the project was approved, and I was prevailed upon to raise the money. Almost immediately Mandy came to me and said she would match funds raised up to \$100,000, thus achieving the goal—with one proviso: that the building be named for her mother and father, a request which was promptly agreed to.

Mandy was at her very best when she appeared in a stunning bright blue suit at a dinner held at the Mohawk Golf Club to honor her, to recognize her gift, and to announce that the project would proceed. The state historian, Edward Winslow, came over from Albany to be present.

A humorous event occurred when the first \$50,00 had been raised and Mandy wrote out a check for a matching \$50,000. Since gifts of \$50,000 for any purpose are not frequent, the *Schenectady Gazette* sent a photographer to record the event which took place in the office of John Morris, then president of Union College, who, with his wife Enid, was honorary co-chairman of the fund-raising effort. The picture in the *Gazette* the next morning showed the check being held by Mandy and John Morris but with a caption that it was John Morris who was handing the gift to Mandy. Needless to say, this created quite a stir amid the colleagues of John Morris at the college that day. A short correction appeared in the *Gazette* the next day.

When the cost of the new library building soared past \$200,000 to an estimated \$300,000, Mandy again came to the rescue. Mandy pledged a third \$50,000 if the same amount could be pledged by another donor. This was accomplished in the course of just an hour, and if you enter the society's driveway on the north side of the building you will see in large gold letters spread across the side of the new library wing . . . Grems-Doolittle Library . . . for everyone to see as they approach the main entrance to the society's building in years to come.

(The above was given by James W. Pontius as a memorial statement at the First Reformed Church on July 11, 1998, in honor of Mandalay Grems.)

(Frank Maginnis has the honor of being the person who knew Mandy the longest; his first encounter took place in 1941 when he and Mandy were working on analog computers in the same office. Frank reported that she was a very bright engineering assistant at that time, and continued to show her ability as they moved into digital computers. She was sent to New York City to learn how to use IBM machines; Frank reports that IBM learned more from her! After career experiences in Hanford and at Boeing, she returned to GE in the '60s when she worked with Gordon Carter on OMIBAC.)

(Harold Wusterbarth added the information that since Mandy was articulate as well as intelligent, GE sent her to Europe and India at various times to enlighten people about computers. This journeying apparently scandalized some members of her family who wanted to know what she was really doing on those jaunts. It was not customary for well-brought-up young women to travel alone all over the world!)

PROGRAMS FOR NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

Remember what fun we had a couple of years ago when Bill and Jean Massoth prepared a genuine Colonial meal for us? Well, with some arm-twisting they have been persuaded to do it again. For Colonial gourmets: There will be a whole new menu this year except for Salmagundi which is being recreated by popular demand. If you missed this event last time, be sure to sign up early as space is necessarily limited. Tickets are \$10. Time: Our usual second Saturday: November 14 at 12:30. Note earlier-than-usual hour.

Our annual Christmas party will take place on December 12 at 1:30. Remember the delicious buffet prepared for us by the young people at Schenectady High School? Well we have their services again to add to our festivities. And of course our Christmas singing around the piano for those who like to bathe in seasonal nostalgia -- like your editor!

As a special treat we will hear from Professor William Murphy, the renowned Yeats scholar on "Reminiscences of Jeanne Foster." Jeanne Foster was a remarkable woman whom Professor Murphy met not long after he had been defeated in a run for Congress. He had been asked to take a place on the Municipal Housing Board of Schenectady, and met Jeanne who worked for the agency. What a treasure she turned out to be! Living quietly in Schenectady she had spent much of her life among well-known literary and artistic figures. She had actually known William Butler Yeats and Ezra Pound; She had met James Joyce and Pablo Picasso. And here she was working for the MHA! But we won't give any more of it away. Come to the Christmas party and all will be revealed.

MABEE FARM PROJECT NEWS

The big news, already mentioned from the President's Desk, is the receipt of a conditional grant from the Schenectady Foundation of \$100,000 for which a fund drive is in the planning stages. Our first task is to find a donor (or donors) who will raise the ante on the matching funds to a dollar for dollar ratio. More later from Mary Kuykendall who heads that Project Committee.

The dismantling of the Nilson barn by Steve Swift of Middleburg was almost complete at Newsletter press time. We had assumed since most Dutch barns in the Mohawk Valley had been torched by Brant and his Indians during the Revolutionary War, that this barn dated from ca. 1790, but Steve says details like the kinds of nails used in its construction show it's a generation older, built perhaps around 1760. Steve has moved several Dutch barns including the Granville and Altamont Fairgrounds barns and is enough of a specialist that he had to break off from our project on October 5th and 6th to install an exact replica he built of Jackson Pollack's barn studio in a room in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City where it will be a feature of a major Pollack retrospective in the offing for the whole third floor.

A number of timbers in the Nilson barn have suffered from water damage and these Steve will take to his workshop near Middleburg for repair. The remainder will stack in the barnyard of the farm while Larned Construction does the site preparation and John DeRussio puts in the foundations according to specifications prepared by Architect Keith Cramer of Albany who is overseeing the work. Our thanks to the Town of Rotterdam who have given major help in a number of ways

to be acknowledged in detail later.

A photo in the files of the Society shows a small frame barn in the Mabee Farm barnyard in the 1880's. To the uneducated eye it looks much like the small 20' x 26' English barn built ca. 1730 which stands on the Bratt-Mabee property next door not far from our Mabee cemetery. When Scott Haefner, our Site Manager, learned that the County planned to demolish all the outbuildings in developing the Native American Cultural Center, we found the County Manager willing to move it for us and save hauling away the debris. We'll have to get somebody like Steve Swift to put new sills under it, brace it, and prepare it for moving, but it will fit into the site plan and will be a great addition to the farm along with an antique privy from the Cobblestone Church.

Bill Dimplefeld has been working closely with Rob Petito of Waite Associates, the preservation architects of Albany, on the Historic Structure Report to be ready for publication in November and on projected contracting to stabilize the Brick House under the State preservation contract. Bill has also prepared a contract for repair of the chimney in the Inn, which work will be performed the spring of 1999. This preservation work is really the most important activity of the Project because without the ancient buildings, the Farm is just a farm. And also of course, an archaeological site, which Project member Ron Kingsley plans to explore in part this fall with his archaeology students from the Community College. For some reason, nobody but George Franchere and the van Schaicks seem to want to call the Brick House the Slave Quarters. Are we ashamed that English and Dutch in New York kept slaves into the 19th Century? Or is it because family members may have lived in it some of the time? But then, why call it the Brick House, since two sides are of wood frame and only the two sides that show from the parking lot are of brick and those are the sides that need the preservation work?

THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

This time it's the Walkabout.

I would like to thank all the Society members, Auxiliary members and volunteers who donated their time to make this years Walkabout such a success. This special people worked at the following stations: Door, Bob Sager, John van Schaick; Study, Bill Dimplefeld, Scott Haefner; Parlor, Louise Waterman, Elsa Church, Stephanie Albers; Music Room; Dorothy Sefcovic, Irma Mastrean, Steve Never; Glen Sanders Room; Neela Heany, Ann Ross, Sally van Schaick; Children's Room; Ed Cozine, Carol Harvey, Beryl Grant; Doll House; Margaret Cozine, Neela Heaney, Rita Fitten; Shaker Room; Olive Bernet, Larry Rainey, Bill Massoth; Third Floor; Chris Hunter, Wayne Harvey; Library; Elsie Maddaus; Reception; Johanna Woldring, Ruth Ann Evans; Pourers: Mildred Taormina, Virginia Murphy, Dorothy White, Rose Dixon; Kitchen Helpers; Carol Kochis, Carolyn Veeder.

The supervision of the busy kitchen from 10 AM to 4 PM was the responsibility of Anastasia Berdy and Ann Karl. These ladies worked tirelessly making sure the table was filled with things to eat and drink, and afterwards putting everything back together spic and span.

Thank you all for a job well done.

- Jo Mordecai

AROUND THE COUNTY by Elsie M. Maddaus

DELANSON: "Because of the nature of the employment, the population of the village was largely the transient type, with employees coming here to work for terms of different duration, and leaving through advancement, promotion or the desire to seek other employment due to the proximity of Schenectady with its extensive enterprises. This being the case, there is considerable lack of accurate records, and this makes it difficult to record in true order the events that contributed to the growth of the village." - Wanda Patterson, 1938

DUANESBURG: "Some twenty miles west of Albany, on the old road known as 'The Great Western Turnpike', there is a place called the Center Square. It is located about a mile west of the village of Duanesburg. In the center of this ten acre square stands the building known for more than a hundred years as Christ Church." - Rev.

David B. Patterson

GLENVILLE: A collection of genealogical notes relating to 19th century families of the Town of Glenville was compiled in the 1870's by Edwin Zachariah Carpenter (1835-1917). Neil B. Reynolds gave the original notes to Donald A. Keefer in 1956. A xerox copy was made by Peter H. Graham and presented by him to our library.

NISKAYUNA: "The name Niskayuna, spelled in over sixty-five different ways, is handed down from the Mohawk Iroquois, and a literal translation is 'great corn fields'. . . in 1765 the Mohawks were selling land at Niskayuna and living on the islands before their sale."

- Town Historian, 1952

PRINCETOWN: "The Princetown Academy and Female Academy, located on scenic 'Academy Hill' in Princetown from 1853 until 1856, could have been described as having existed 105 years too soon. The coeducational institution which lasted only three years might be considered a forerunner of central district schools." - Helen Barber

ROTTERDAM: A telemarketer called the Jan Mabee House and asked to speak to Jan Mabee. The reply was that he was dead. Then how about Mrs. Mabee? She's dead. "Oh," said the voice, "They've been such generous contributors to our organization the past few years." "Not likely," was the reply. "They've been dead since the 1720's." Silence.

- Scott Haefner, Town Historian

SCHENECTADY: "When the Dutch people laid out their village, naturally they built it near the river. It was just a little village with a stockade all around it made of pointed logs placed close together. The sides that touched were hewn flat. They were pinned together at the top with wooden pins. French accounts say there were two main gates; the English accounts say there were three." - Millicent Winton Veeder, 1947

SCOTIA: "Broom corn was introduced into Glenille by Isaac Toll shortly after 1830 Mr. George Canfield who came to Scotia in 1840 is known to have made several inventions that improved the process of broom-making."

- Gweneira Williams & George Palermo, 1943

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Education Committee is moving forward with plans for the traveling kit of items relating to 17th and 18th Century America. We participated in the Mohawk Pathways Riverwalk on October 4. Our booth was busy almost continually for five hours as we explained our Native American kit to scores of youngsters and adults.

BEYOND BELIEF by Bill Massoth

It happened during the Revolutionary War at a time known as "the burning of the valley." As you remember, the British had failed to trisect the area in order to bring a quick end to the war. They then resorted to "border raids."

During this period British Tories and their Indian allies would come down out of Canada and burn crops in the fields. The Tories would also burn barns and houses as well as killing livestock and settlers including women and children.

The place it happened was Scotch Church, the Scotch church located about halfway between Pattersonville and Mariaville - the Scotch church where the houses on the south side of the road are in Schenectady County, Town of Duanesburg, and the houses on the north side of the road are in Montgomery County, Town of Florida. The place was called Van Vechtenburg

back then.

The men of Van Vechtenburg were off with the militia, ready to fight wherever needed. The women and children were left home alone.

The signal went up! Tories and Indians had been sighted in the area! Like a well-rehearsed fire drill, the livestock were driven off into the wilderness forest, and the children were taken to a safe hiding place in the forest.

Suddenly a wisp of smoke appeared where one of the houses was located. It turned black and burned for a long time. Another plume of smoke appeared, and another and another until a plume of smoke ascended from each of the dwellings in this wilderness settlement. The children, although safe in the forest, were saddened; their homes were gone, and they worried about the safety of their mothers.

As dusk fell, someone from the settlement came to pick up the children. They went back to their homes to find their mothers in the kitchens preparing the evening meal.

It seems that the women had built huge piles of brush, set fire to them, and poured animal grease that was being saved for soapmaking on the burning brush. This made huge plumes of smoke that made the Tories and Indians think that another band of Tories and Indians had already gotten to Van Vechtenburg and destroyed it. Did the ruse work? Well, Van Vechtenburg was never burned.

This story was told to me by Mrs. Margaret Leackfeld who had heard the story from her grandmother Van Vechten who heard the story from *her* grandmother. That grandmother's grandmother's mother had been one of the women who participated in the great deception. The question of how the settlers in Van Vechtenburg knew of the Tories' proximity remained a mystery for some time.

In the Montgomery County archives the Robert Hartley papers provided the answer. There were four lookout posts in the Town of Florida. One on the west end of town had a view up the Mohawk Valley as far as the Noses: Big Nose and Little Nose. Another lookout above Young's Ponds had a view up the Schoharie Creek. The third lookout was atop Bean Hill between the Young's Pond lookout and Yankee Street or "the Street" as Minaville was then called. The fourth lookout was atop McKinney Hill which had "a view in all directions for twenty miles except to the south. McKinney Hill is about a mile west of Scotch Church.

WE GET LETTERS . . .

George Franchere writes:

In my list of downtown Schenectady stores I forgot the Imperial, Bond Clothes, Masonic Temple, the cigar store at State and Erie (*ed.note: Vottis?*)... Wasn't there a jewelry store (*ed. note: Jay Jewelers?*), the *Schenectady Gazette*, or was it the *Union Star*? A cafeteria downstairs near Wallace's, a pet shop and Singer Sewing Machine on Jay Street, Thom McAn shoes with the X-Ray machine you saw your feet in the shoes. . . (*More next time!*)

IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO ALL TELEPHONE USERS

Sorry to intrude with a non-society item, but . . . We received a message that there is a telephone scam floating around in which the caller identifies himself as an AT&T technician, working on your line. He asks you to touch 9 then 0 then # (pound). What happens is that pushing 90# gives the individual that called you access to your telephone line and allows him to place a telephone call, with the charge appearing on your telephone bill.

We telephoned Bell Atlantic to verify this, since it could be a hoax. B-A informed us that they had had word of this and recommend that no one touch 90#. They asked us to spread the word, so we felt obligated to pass the information on to you. Ed. note.

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Without you we would be nothing!

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AMONG OURSELVES

The staff and volunteers present on October 6 honored Rose Fetter, our stalwart volunteer with a small tea party on the occasion of her 90th birthday. Rose says of her career with us: "Initially my work at the Society involved Genealogy, the old Schenectady records, the master card file, the obits, etc., but my duties have filtered into riding herd on the thousand-plus Family Folders and a burgeoning Miscellaneous file. I live by the alphabet and the copying machine. In any capacity it is a pleasure to be associated with a gracious and efficient staff dedicated to serving the public and preserving our city's rich heritage." And we are lucky to have Rose with us!

* * * * *

Many of us were treated to a splendid celebration this past summer when John and Anastasia Berdy celebrated their 50th Anniversary at the Russian Orthodox Community Center. The theme was carried out in grand Russian style with ample Russian delicacies, and an opportunity to meet members of the Berdy family who had gathered for the occasion.

The Berdys are the parents of John Victor, a therapist and supervisor with Northeast Parent and child society, and Michelle Ann who resides in Moscow, Russian where she is a TV producer, a Russian translator and an author. She represents the Johns Hopkins Center of Communications for Eastern Europe.

John, Senior, is retired from GE where he was an electrical engineer. Now he is occupied with photography, gardening and woodworking. Stasia is a graduate of the St. Luke's School of Nursing in NYC. She has nursed in Veterans' Hospitals, St. Clare's and Ellis. She is a tireless volunteer, an energetic past president of the Auxiliary and now a trustee of our Society. If something needs to be done Stasia will see that it is accomplished. The reason you have this newsletter in your hands right now is that Stasia put the mailing label on it when it came back from the printer.

- Jo Mordecai -

HANDICAPPED ACCESS

There is an elevator between the entrance vestibule at the back entrance, and the main floor. If you are on wheels, walker, or cane, enter through the parking space entrance and our staff will be happy to help you with the elevator

Mission Statement: Gremms-Doolittle Library

The Gremms-Doolittle library is a historical, biographical, and genealogical reference library whose purpose is "To gather, preserve, display and make available for study, books, manuscripts, papers, photographs and other records and materials relating to the early and current history of Schenectady County and of the surrounding area." The collection includes many histories and genealogies. Because it is a reference library, none of the material is permitted to leave the building so that it will be accessible to researchers at all times.

