

Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 41 Number 11-12

November - December 2004

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FROM COOKIES TO TREES The Evolution of Christmas in Schenectady Exhibit November 26- December 30

How do we celebrate the holiday season today? The timeless traditions and honored customs that Americans use today to celebrate the whole holiday season draw from a diverse tapestry of nationalities and cultures. This year's exhibit will look at how Schenectady's inhabitants celebrated the holiday season from the earliest inhabitants in the seventeenth century through the English traditions of the eighteenth century to the mixing of cultures in the nineteenth century that still continues today creating a truly American way of celebrating.

Beginning with the Dutch in the seventeenth century, Schenectadians celebrated the New Year with special cookies made in hand carved wooden molds. The Dutch traditions the first settlers brought with them continued in their families into the eighteenth and even the nineteenth centuries but also began to mix with the traditions of the new English settlers that swarmed into the colony after the English gained control of New

Netherland in 1664. These Anglican traditions focused on the twelve-days of Christmas which began on Christmas day and continued until January 6th, the Epiphany. Finally, in the nineteenth century, Americans began to combine these



traditions starting with the acceptance of Santa Clause after the publication in a Troy newspaper of "The Night Before Christmas." German

Christmas ornaments and Queen Victoria's Christmas tree brought another indispensable tradition to Americans.

All of these traditions added to the fabric that makes American culture. Come celebrate the old and new holiday traditions of Schenectady with the exhibit "From Cookies to Trees: The evolution of Christmas in Schenectady." Two special programs add to the exhibit. Join local collector Robert Halley as he gives a lecture on the rise in popularity of the Christmas tree and Christmas ornaments in the nineteenth century and curator Kate Weller who will conduct a children's program on colonial Dutch holiday traditions, stories and cookies!

BOOK SIGNING

Susan Staffa's long awaited SCHENECTADY GENESIS: HOW A DUTCH COLONIAL VILLAGE BECAME AN AMERICAN CITY, Volume 1. The Colonial Crucible 1661-1774 Copies will be available at SCHS on November 13 at Noon and the author will be happy to sign your copy.

THE USS SCHENECTADY Honoring Schenectady's Vietnam Veterans Exhibit November 1- November 20

The Society is proud to honor the veterans of the Vietnam War and show its appreciation of their sacrifices with an exhibit telling the story of the USS Schenectady. Named in honor of the city that bears its name, the ship was commissioned on the 24th of May 1969. During her diverse 24 year history she came under fire in the Vietnam War. In 1983 she received the comphibron 3 Silver Sabre award for the most ESWS qualified personnel. She also gave support in the making of the motion picture "Raise the Titanic". After an illustrious career, the USS Schenectady was finally decommissioned on the 15th of December 1993.

CALENDAR

- November 13th at 12 Noon
Susan Staffa
- November 13th at 1:30 p.m.
Capt. James Caulfield and
Chet Watson, USS Schenectady
- December 11th at 1:30 p.m.
Robert Halley "The Birth of The
Christmas Tree Tradition," Guest
of Honor, Jo Mordecai
- December 18th at 1:30 p.m.
Kate Weller: Children's Program
"Colonial Dutch Holiday Stories
and Cookies"

**Society Closed November 25,
December 24, 25 & 31,
January 1-9**

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HOURS:

MUSEUM

Monday – Friday

1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Saturday

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

LIBRARY

Monday – Friday

1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Saturday

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

MABEE FARM

Closed for the season

Open by appointment.



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello fellow historical society members! Don't know about you but I sure am tired after the past two months!!

As I sit here at the Waterford Heritage Days, manning the brochure and book table, I'm trying to recall all that's happened.

I'm sad that lovely lady Jo Mordecai decided to retire early, but happy that we've acquired a super new curator in Kate Weller. So far she's done a great new exhibit on the Erie Canal for September/October and our theme for the walkabout. For November she will be working on the USS Schenectady Veteran's Day exhibit. In December there will be a traditional Christmas exhibit, holiday programs and an opportunity for all members of the society to wish our guest of honor Jo Mordecai farewell.

Did everyone see the wonderful exhibit at the Altamont Fair in August? Of the 4 there, we had the best! I'm only a little prejudiced.

The Farm's bateau has become one of our

best ambassadors. It has been traveling around the state performing in National Park service movies for other sites like Ft. Stanwix.

I'm happy that the Walkabout turned out fine and sad that it rained and probably scared a few folks away. Then we were ecstatic that the Mabee Farm blew the doors off with approximately 6,000 attending Sundae on the Farm the very next day.

We received the Rotterdam Images of America books and our 2005 calendars in time for sale at our big events. They show member Dot Karl's house and sister on the cover!

Ginny, Pat and Kate have been busy attending numerous conferences and workshops, for our benefit and job improvement.

So stop in to join us for all the activities coming up. It is always a fun and interesting time when everyone contributes so much of their knowledge and experience. Thanks to all!

Kim Mabee



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The Society is growing and as we move into our second century we are making plans for the future. The Society is no longer a simple operation. It is multifaceted with the Grem's Doolittle Library, the Museum and the Mabee Farm. We are very dedicated to our local community and happy that we are being recognized on the national level. We have made a start. Our art collection appeared in the November 2003 issue of *The Magazine Antiques*, a nationally known publication.

I would like to see more of our collections publicized in books and magazines. The Museum has a representative collection of ceramics including 18th century Dutch Delft and English Delftware, Chinese Export and English Staffordshire. We would like to make the Society's collections known not only in Schenectady but also in the state and the nation. Is there a researcher out there who would like to write an article or a book or two on the Society's collections?

Ona Curran

THE SOCIETY HAS LOST THREE GREAT FRIENDS

DEREK M.M. SAYERS, M.D. (1921-2004) Physician and active volunteer for almost half a century. Derek was born in England, came to New York in 1953 for advanced medical training in Ithaca and Buffalo. He was a founding member of Schenectady Anesthesia Associates in 1956. He also served on the faculty of the Albany Medical College. He retired from practice in 1987 and became an active member of Hospice and served on the Board of the Schenectady County Historical Society. He was chosen Schenectady Volunteer of the Year in 2000.

JOHN E. DUNCAN (1914-2004) Long time friend of SCHS was a graduate of Union College in 1936. He participated in the invasions of North Africa and Italy, receiving two purple hearts at Anzio. After the War he worked at GE in the Advertising and Sales Promotion Depts. He

was the author of several books including the popular: "Sea Chain" and was the founder of *Americana Review* which published books under the name Long Ago Books.

MARIE NITCHMAN (1911-2004) Marie, born in Boston was chief of the Physical Therapy Department of Robert Breck Brigham Hospital in the 1930's. She was married to the late Dr. Donald Nitchman well known Schenectady dentist and served as a trustee of the Schenectady County Historical Society for many years.

All of thier talents and creative spirit will be missed.

Be sure to visit the Society's Christmas Tree at Proctor's Theatre November 24-28, 2004. This year's theme is "Stars of Schenectady."

Mabee Farm Historic Site

1080 Main Street (Rt. 5S), Rotterdam Jct., NY • (518) 887-5073 • Email: mabee@nycap.rr.com • Web: www.mabeefarm.org

SPOTLIGHT ON MERRITT GLENNON

The Farm's tireless committee member and volunteer, Merritt Glennon grew up in Schenectady and always knew about the Mabee Farm as a child. Little did he know at that time how committed and involved he would later become on the Farm.



Merritt retired from the New York State Office of Mental Retardation where he worked for 33 years as the Supervisor of the Documentation and Training Unit in the Division of Revenue and Reimbursement. He has had extensive involvement in non-profits as President of the PTA, President of the Altamont Library Board and the President of the Guilderland Soccer Club, to name just a few. Merritt met his wife at work and has three daughters; Sarah works as a Historical Archaeologist for the State of South Carolina; Rachel is a grad student at University of Connecticut; and Erin is a junior in High School.

Merritt received his undergraduate degree in History. After retiring, he came to the Mabee Farm with a keen interest in New York State Colonial History and the history of the Mohawk Valley. Merritt's input is invaluable at the Farm. As a Farm Committee member he designed, printed and erected the signage for the bateau and the cemetery. Besides his signage efforts, Merritt contacted the Spectrum Theater in Albany and the Mabee Farm is now featured on screen 5 before each movie. He also has been the sole coordinator of all our exhibits at the Altamont Fair. Just last week he was helping put the finishing touches on the restoration of the Inn and on Sunday working the crowds at Sundae on the Farm. Merritt Glennon has come full circle.

OH, WHAT LOVELY GARDENS

The Mabee Farm now has a Master Gardner, Sharon Scheib from Amsterdam! She has done a fantastic job of weeding and fixing up our herb garden in the few weeks she has been on the project. Plans are in the works for Sharon to put together a colonial garden next year, which may possibly be suited for garden tours.

The Harlow Garden Club has probably produced its best flowers yet! Hoards of people comment about the beautiful garden. It may be the most photographed garden we ever had! Many thanks to the Harlow Garden Club and Evie Terwilliger's hard working group - what a terrific job!

DOCK

We now have all the permits and are ready to go with our dock. The dock, which will allow the Mabee Farm to accept historic boats will be started in the spring. The County has sent a letter accepting the grant for the Tourist Boat Dock which will be adjacent to the Mabee Farm dock. Hopefully they will also start building this dock in the spring.

SUNDAE ON THE FARM



WOW! What a fabulous day! As if it couldn't get any better, attendance jumped from 3,000 last year to over 7,000 at this year's "Sundae on the Farm" on September 19th. People were everywhere! Kids and parents alike enjoyed free ice cream, farm games, live animals, a chicken barbeque, crafts and demonstrators, a hay maze, milking contest – the list goes on! Our very own Mabee Farm Committee member, Dale Wade-Keszey really sparked the festivities with his blue grass band, the "Riverview Ramblers". What a terrific event. Thanks to the use of the County property, we were able to park the many, many, many cars. Great thanks is also due to all our fantastic and dedicated volunteers and committee members who turned out in force to help make this such a memorable event.



Steve Jones (archaeologist) and Louise Basa (SCCC Archaeology Professor sift through the dirt excavated from the Slave Quarters.

CELLAR DIGGING

Steve Jones (archaeologist) along with Louise Basa (SCCC Archaeology Professor) and many volunteers excavated the Slave Quarters in August. All kinds of "stuff" were found such as: jambless fireplace chains, 3 shoes, pottery, pipes, a ginger bottle and lots of decaying wood and cobbles. Two jugs were found. One was labeled "Norton & Fenton E. Bennington, VT" but was stamped upside down! This jug dates to between 1844-1847. Just about everything in the cellar dated to the 1800's – leaving us (as usual) with more questions.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE

Think about having your meeting, reunion, conference or wedding at our inspirational site. Call 887-5073 for more information.

THE EFNER HISTORY RESEARCH LIBRARY

The institution housed in the attic of City Hall has been called by several different names: History Center, Efner Center, and more recently, Efner History Research Library. By whatever name, it is an awesome place to work if you like to get your hands dirty (and I mean that literally!) and learn about your area's history at the same time.

Over the summer we worked hard to make "the Attic" at the City Hall look more like the library that it is. Most of the collections of notes, transcriptions, and scrapbooks belonging to the late Mr. Efner, a former City Historian for whom the library was named, were moved back into the library, while several of the large artifacts that you may recall seeing at the Library were put into storage. The Library changes daily as we reorganize to fully utilize the 51 linear feet of library-quality adjustable metal shelving that was given to us by our Schenectady History Alliance partners at the Schenectady Museum. One third of the shelving has been installed, and we are in the process of carefully moving collections from less desirable wooden shelves to the metal shelving. With the new shelving, we should be able to return to the Efner Library a good number of books and collections that have been kept in storage, and still manage to keep working areas open on the floor for the continuous task of creating finding aids, and helping researchers.

We invite the public to come in to see our election exhibit. The Efner's big display case tells the history of voting in the United States. We used on-line information from the Smithsonian's American History Museum to help us exhibit a voting machine teaching unit dating from the 1950's. We also have some of our collection of campaign posters, flyers and other election ephemera on display.

The Efner History Research Library may experience an expansion of hours in the future, for it is our goal to encourage utilization by our local schools and colleges. We want to make the Efner History Research Library a place where those who love history, and are interested in learning more about archival work and preservation, can come and learn in a "hands-on" setting. Currently, the Library is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9-1, and by appointment. (HsCenter@nycap.rr.com or 382-5088) Stop by to see what's new at the "awesome attic" at City Hall!

Cynthia Seacord, Acting Archivist

WISH LIST

The Efner History Research Library is in need of a good basic copying machine.



The Grems-Doolittle



Kim Mabee, president of the Society and Virginia Bolen archivist/librarian accepting the bible from H. John Ouderkirk.

THE OUDERKIRK BIBLE

A 1741 edition of the Keur Bible used in the Dutch Reformed Church was recently donated by the Ouderkirk Family Association to the Schenectady County Historical Society. Printed in Dutch it is a magnificent book with hundreds of engravings, a leather cover and hand crafted ornate brass clasps.

In addition to the bible, the family also gave to the Society a copy of THE OUDERKERK FAMILY SAGA, 350 YEARS IN AMERICA edited by H. John Ouderkirk. The Library and the Museum are thrilled to have both the bible and the family saga.



Members of family at presentation

ACQUISITIONS

Images of America, Herkimer County Valley Towns
by Jane W. Dieffenbacher

DONATIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Donated by Malcolm Horton:

Field Trip Guide...Adirondack Reservoirs,

Canal Society of New York State

*Field Trip Guide...The Chenango Canal: Utica to
Hamilton,* Canal Society of New York State

Donated by the author:

Elias: Ersatz Prinz: Union Patriot:

A True Story by Robert W. Kotzbauer

Donated by Beryl Grant:

*Everyone has Roots: An Introduction to English
Genealogy* by Anthony J. Camp

The Family Tree Detective by Colin D. Rogers

*My Ain Folk: An Easy Guide to Scottish Family
History* by Graham S. Holton and Jack Winch

Tracing Your British Ancestors by Colin R. Chapman

*Tracing Your Scottish Ancestors: A Guide to Ancestry
Research in the Scottish Record Office* by Cecil Sinclair

Genealogy is More Than Charts

by Lorna Duane Smith

*Tracing Your Ancestors in the Public Record Office,
5th rev. ed.,* ed. by Amanda Bevan

Donated by Judith Bresler:

2 books of literature owned by Helen Clute

*"Schenectady Railway Company: Rules governing
operation controlled by automatic block signals on the
Albany Division..."* 1918, gift of the Rensselaer
County Historical Society

Donated by Kitty Craven:

*The Peck/Pake/Peck Genealogy: The Descendants
of Jan Peck of New Amsterdam* by Ross R. Pake,
purchased with a gift from Forney W. and Jane Miller
in honor of John E. *The Diary of Jonathan Pearson,*
ed. by Harold C. Martin, 2 vols.



Scene along the trolley lines at Stop No. 20. The picture was made from a glass plate negative. Do you know where Stop No. 20 was?

2005 CALENDAR NOW AVAILABLE!

1905 2005 1905 2005 1905 2005 1905 2005 1905 2005
SCHENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2005

CELEBRATING A CENTURY



The Historical Society, 32 Washington Avenue



Greenes Doolittle Library



Former Historical Society Building
Union Street, Next to the Stockade Inn

1905 2005 1905 2005 1905 2005 1905 2005 1905 2005

Our 100th Anniversary Calendar is illustrated with
photographs from the Society's collections and features
photographs from 1905 our founding year.



A view of the Mobawk Flats taken from Summit Avenue by William Ashdown in the early spring of 1887. On the left, in the distance, is the Jones Car Works. On the right is Building 10 and 12 of the Edison Machine Works. In the foreground is a Schermerhorn broom corn farm. The road is now Broadway.

We now accept credit cards—
MasterCard and VISA.



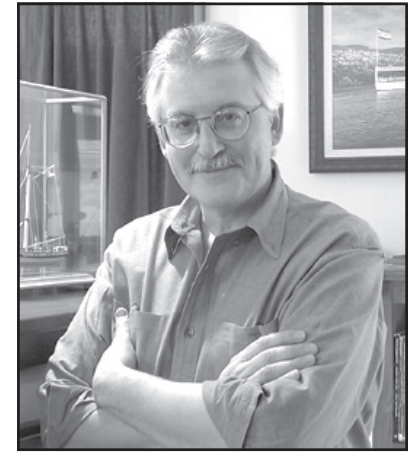
Museum News



PAINTINGS BY L.F. TANTILLO CENTENNIAL

Schenectady County Historical Society is pleased to announce that plans are underway for L.F. Tantillo to paint a historic rendition of the Schenectady Stockade in the early days of the settlement prior to the fateful Massacre. It will depict as much as current documentation and early records allow, a historically correct rendition of the area, its architecture and the people as they went about their daily lives. The painting will be unveiled in early April at the opening of the Centennial Symposium Week.

Leonard F. Tantillo was born in Poughkeepsie New York and grew up in New Paltz. He graduated from Rhode Island School of Design in 1969 with a degree in architecture but found painting and history, New York history in particular, were really his primary interests. In his paintings his goal is to recapture scenes from New York's past utilizing his architectural and archeological expertise. Among his many notable paintings are Fort Orange 1635, the Bradt sawmill 1660, Elias 1664, Return of the Experiment and last but not least SCHENECTADY HARBOR 1814. His paintings are in private and corporate collections. He is a member of the prestigious American Society of Marine Artists.



Plans are in progress for the Centennial. Festivities will start with Colonial Festival Week in February when there will be a dinner, a fund raiser to benefit the Society. On February 12 Allan Cross, a Revolutionary War Reenactor who casts Spanish silver dollars, will discuss the casting of Spanish coins which were legal tender in the United States until 1857. During Symposium Week there will be guest speakers speaking on topics related to the history of Schenectady, a picnic at the Farm in July celebrating the tricentennial of the Mabee House and Farm and the 100th Anniversary of the Society. In August a garden Tea Party on the back terrace of Society Headquarters is planned in conjunction with the Canal Fest. End the year with a traditional holiday program. We will keep you informed as plans progress.

OCTOBER LECTURE SERIES

FRIDAYS IN OCTOBER was highly successful with multiple members of the community participating in each lecture. The Society's collections were explored and 18th and 19th century paintings and decorative arts from other museums were also discussed. The Society was delighted with the community's response and we hope to do this again in the future. One of the highlights of the series was the discovery of an engraving in the 1741 Ouderkerk Dutch bible which was the source of a design for an 18th century blue and white Dutch tile also in the Society's collection. Early 18th century Dutch Bibles with their many engravings were often the inspiration for 18th century religious paintings and ceramics. The bible is a recent donation to the Society. Lecture fees will be used for future programs and exhibits.

The Society's Centennial exhibit will feature the people of Schenectady County and events that occurred between 1905 and 2005. Do you have photographs or other memorabilia relating to the last 100 years that the Society could borrow for the exhibit? Call our curator Kate Weller at 374-0263.

SAGAMORE CONFERENCE

In September, the SCHS's curator Kate Weller and Mabee Farm's site manager Pat Barrot received grants for and attended the Museum Institute at the Sagamore 2004 conference. Set at the beautiful Great Camp Sagamore Pat and Kate worked with other museum professionals learning the latest strategies and techniques for collections care and management. This seminar not only gave them a chance to listen to some of the dynamic professionals in the field but also to try out some new surveying skills at the Adirondack Museum on Blue Mountain Lake. This new knowledge along with the contacts made at the conference will help both tackle the society's unique issues and problems.

**Thank you to James Eignor for building
free standing panels for museum exhibits.**



LINEN PRESS
New York
circa 1790-1800
Mahogany, pine secondary wood

Recently restored, this piece served as a storage unit for clothes and linens. It shows Federal period styling with its splayed front legs, shaped apron at base, crest with brass finials

resting on square plinths. The piece is in three sections with three drawers beneath two doors and topped by the crest. *Gift of Helen deLancey Watkins 1954*

MOURNING SAMPLER

Embroidered on silk dated 1806

It was customary in the early 19th century to memorialize the deceased by creating a needlework reminder of the person who died. In this piece the



wife is weeping at the tombstone of John Swain who was the grandfather of Howland Swain Barney, founder of Barney's Department Store in Schenectady. The willow tree was a typical mourning motif used in the Federal period. It was used on tombstones as well as in needlework. Recently, this sampler too has had conservation treatment.

Gift of Marjorie Donnan Cox 1952



Portrait Howland S. Barney
Gift of Judge Wm. Hahn circa 1970

RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTION

The Society has a Rights and Reproduction policy which is in accordance with other museums and historical societies. If you need photographs of items in the Society's collections please contact the curator Kate Weller at Society Headquarters (374-0263) for further details. Only photographs supplied by the Society can be used for publication. There is a charge for photographs and there also is a fee for the use of the photographs. Fees vary depending on whether the photographs are to be used by a nonprofit institution or for commercial use.



The Schenectady County Historical Society, as a non-profit organization depends on its members for support. Members provide the means to conduct programs and plan exhibits that relate to the community and tell the story of Schenectady County. Welcome to our new members. We hope you will extend an invitation to your friends to join, so they too can take part in the upcoming Fall and Spring programs.

Please note the List of Contributors as previously listed in each issue will be published yearly at the end of the fiscal year in the Society's expanded Annual Report. The Society thanks each and every one of you for your continued support.



MEMBERSHIP FORM

Schenectady County Historical Society

Please indicate one of the following for your membership:

- \$25 Individual
- \$40 Family
- \$50 Donor
- \$100 Sponsor
- \$500 Patron
- \$1000 Lifetime

Please mail this form with your check or credit card information to:
 Schenectady County Historical Society
 32 Washington Ave., Schenectady, NY 12305

Your Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Check enclosed

Please charge my credit card: MasterCard VISA

Acct # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

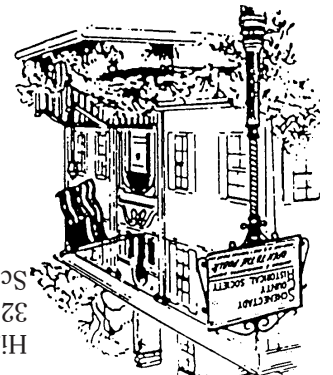
Also enclosed is a gift of \$ _____ for special projects designated as follows:

Museum: Art Restoration _____ Acquisitions _____ Publications _____ Programs _____

Library: Equipment _____ Publications _____

Mabee Farm: Preservation _____ Education Building _____ Programs _____

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