

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

We recently received a letter from Society member Louis S. Meyer, Ph.D., of Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania. He writes of his Schenectady-based family's "peripherally related connection" to the promotion of daylight savings time. A copy of Dr. Meyer's letter is included in this Newsletter. Cambridge Springs is located on French Creek and is the next village south of Waterford, PA. Our then 21-year-old patriarch, George Washington, must have passed through that site while going to and from Waterford while on his diplomatic mission to encroaching French forces. He probably even stopped for a drink of the spring water.

Dr. Myers closes his letter by revealing his family's connection to my old home town of Erie, PA. His grandfather had a men's clothing store there. A small world gets smaller. The P. A. Meyer store was next door to the Warner theater where my father worked. Also, my wife reminds me, it was 49 years ago that we picked out my wedding suit at P. A. Meyer's. (No, it doesn't fit anymore.)

The Warner theater in Erie opened on April 9, 1931, after two years of construction. It was an opulent showcase, built at the end of a period when similar "palaces" were built in larger cities. At a time of financial crisis for many people, the Warner's interior was decorated with gold and silver leaf. It had glass chandeliers imported from Czechoslovakia and marble from Persia. In today's world it sounds like something one would find in a Las Vegas casino. The theater obviously had been designed and financed in the heydays prior to the stock market crash. The theater was designed to accommodate stage shows. There are dozens of dressing rooms and a greenroom. (Did you know that the "green" room at Schenectady's Proctor's has blue walls?) The stage has high bays to store sets, and one of the largest light switchboards in the country at the time built.

Do you enjoy replacing burned-out light bulbs? The Warner has 24,000 interior lights and another 8,000 colored lights on the marquee. In those old days the movies were shown continually. You could enter and be seated in the middle of the show. It took a few minutes for your eyes to adjust to the darkness. You'd see the end of the movie before seeing the beginning. This made for some confusion about the plot, but it reduced the theater's need for a large lobby. Between the showing of the main attraction(s) there would be an animated cartoon, the world news in review, and, if you were lucky, a new episode of the documentary "The Passing Parade." Oh, there were also Coming Attractions, the only filler which seems to have survived. (The cartoon at the one theater in Erie was a sing-along with the bouncing ball. My mother was a non-participant.)

Stage shows differed from movies in the way the audience was batch-fed (to use garbage disposal terminology) into the auditorium. This resulted in the need for a large lobby to serve as a holding tank for the incoming audience and during intermissions. "Smoking in the outer lobby only, please." The lobby of the Warner (it's still there) is a three-story-high vaulted hall of glittering brass and mirrors. Proctor's use of the arcade pales in comparison.

Before the start of the stage show the house lights in the auditorium were all turned up. There was time to sit and absorb the exotic ambiance while listening to Tony Conti on the organ. You knew the show was about to start when Tony and the organ sank out of sight. My father's job was-- well, unusual, but probably typical for any large movie theater of the 1930s and '40s. There were two men who looked after the theater's physical plant. They were lovingly referred to as "Mike and Ike, they looked alike." My father was Mike even though his given name was Adolph. (His father was Adolph.) Ike's name was really Roy and he had no need to change it. They were the Jacks of all trades. He did the stage with its light-dimming switchboard and set riggings. He also got to change the marquee. My father was downstairs. He got to watch over the heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning systems, and the diesel-driven electrical generator.

Since the theater opened at noon, my father took the bus to work at 10:30. He would come home for dinner, but then had to go back to close down after the last show, probably 10:30 going on 11:00. He had a long day. If everything was under control, he had free time. He seemed to know all the lawyers, bankers, and business owners downtown. He also got to associate with some of the acts working the theater. Does anyone but me remember Joey Penner of "You wanna buy a duck?" fame? I didn't think so.

Because of its use as a performing arts center the Warner is still there and has benefited from financial support from the community and the State of Pennsylvania. They no longer use the electric generator, and are replacing the air-conditioning system. But after 70 years, it was probably overdue.

My father gave me some advice which I'll always remember: If a movie has lots of advance publicity, it probably isn't worth seeing.

**-Bill Dimpelfeld**

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## CALENDAR

**Saturday, September 8, 2001**

**1:30: Refreshments**

**2:00: Program: Ancient Herbs: Modern Uses**

**Presenter George Farrall**

**Saturday, September 8, 2001**

**(Rain date, September 9)**

**Annual Stockade Art Show**

**Tuesday, September 18, 2001**

**7:30 PM**

**Board of Trustees**

**Saturday, September 29, 2001**

**WALKABOUT!**

**Saturday, October 13, 2001**

**1:30: Refreshments**

**2:00: Program: Ancient Photographs (Archives Week Program)**

**Presenter: Wayne Harvey**

**Tuesday, October 16**

**7:30 PM**

**Board of Trustees**

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## WE GET LETTERS...

*Dear Mr. Dimpelfeld:*

*Your article on Daylight Savings Time (DST) in the July-August issue of the Newsletter caught my eye and I thought you might be interested in an aspect of DST that has largely gone unnoticed over the decades.*

From 1914-1917, Marcus M Marks was the president of the Borough of Manhattan and during that time he created the phrase “daylight saving” after reading about Summer Time” on the continent. He was instrumental in getting daylight savings passed in New York state and fought vigorously when an attempt was made by the NY Assembly to repeal the law. The Bill to repeal was amended to give cities the option to adopt or not daylight savings. Marcus organized the national Daylight Savings Committee and became the president of the National Daylight Savings Association. In 1916 he initiated the daylight savings movement in the United States.

In July of 1941, Warren Marks, the son of Marcus Marks wrote a letter to the New York Times in which he stated, “Between that time [1916] and March 1918, when the law finally went into effect, my father devoted a great deal of his time in executive work, speeches, conferences with President Wilson and various members of the Senate and Congress, and the writing of articles, the object of which was to acquaint the general public with the idea and the reasons for adopting it. From the time the Daylight Saving Law was put into effect my father was regarded as the father of daylight saving.”

Marcus M. Marks was born March 18, 1858 in Schenectady, NY, the son of David and Leontine Meyer Marks. David Marks came to America in 1849 and went to Schenectady upon his arrival, living in the 2nd Ward, according to the 1850 Federal Census. He opened a merchant tailoring establishment on State Street — the 1857-58 Schenectady City Directory shows his home at 200 State Street and his business at 152 State Street. By 1865 when David and his family moved to Manhattan, his business had moved two times. . . In a related development, David’s sister, Bertha, a milliner. . . married Cohen Levy who worked for David Marks. . . but. . . left the Marks establishment and opened his own business at 130 State Street.

David and Leontine Meyer Marks were my great uncle and aunt, Leontine being the sister of my grandfather, P. A. Meyer, who got his start in the clothing business in Schenectady under David Marks and later settled in Erie, PA (see President's Letter) and, with David Marks' brother, Charles Marks, opened a very successful clothing business. It all just goes to prove the old adage about the smallness of the world!

*Sincerely,*  
Louis S. Meyer, Ph.D.

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<a href="#">MORE GIFTS... MORE GIVERS</a>		
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Recently we were pleasantly surprised by a visit from the General Electric "Gift Patrol" which arrived with an array of balloons and a festive cake to present to Treasurer Beryl Grant with a check of \$12,115.80 representing the Grant matching the donations that those of you with GE ties have made during the past year. Thank you, General Electric. We assure you the money will be well spent in preserving our area's history. And thank you, donors for your continuing generosity.

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**THE ODYSSEY OF MOSES VINEY**

**Part Three: Schenectady's African-American Community**

**By Neil B. Yetwin**

**We continue the saga of Moses Viney and marvel at the strength of his vision.**

When Moses Viney arrived in 1840, Schenectady's African-American community numbered about 80 individuals, some of whom were descended from a group of slaves who had been in the city since the last decade of the 17th century. The city was a thriving metropolis of about 6700, "the broom-corn center of the world", its streets filled with merchants, canal men, fashionable ladies in hoop skirts and "blasphemous German teamsters." Thousands of families came through Schenectady on their way West via the canal locks at Little Falls and Rome, and the city was enjoying an economic boom that had begun in the aftermath of the War of 1812.

The first Africans to arrive in New York (then New Netherland) were 11 individuals imported by the Dutch West India Company in 1626. Within a century blacks came to make up 15% of New York's population, making them the single largest minority in colonial New York, which came to have the largest slave population among the non-plantation English colonies in the New World.

A number of factors leading to the eventual abolition of slavery in New York came into play during and after the American Revolution. The British offer of paid labor and asylum for any slaves who joined their forces against the Americans forced New Yorkers to make concessions to slaves. Masters were encouraged to allow their slaves to enlist in the Continental Army in return for 500 acres of public land. In 1785 the Legislature finally prohibited the importation of slaves for sale; in the Act of 1817 it was stated that "every Negro born before the 4th day of July, 1799, shall, from and after the 4th day of July, 1827, be free." Slaves could still be brought into the state by outsiders, but from 1817 on no New Yorker could own a slave. By 1841, one year after Moses Viney arrived in Schenectady, transients and part-time residents were forbidden to hold slaves within state borders.

It is known that there were 16 male and female slaves present in Schenectady at the time of the Massacre of February 8-9, 1690. Within 20 years there were signs that the town's African-American community was assimilating to some degree. In 1710 the Reverend Thomas Barclay established an English school to teach Dutch children, and tried unsuccessfully to convert the local Native Americans. But he was more successful with the local black population, many of whom he baptized and converted. Four years later there were about 45 slaves in Schenectady in a total population of 591.

Yet violence against non-whites was a fact of life in colonial New York as it was in the rest of the growing nation. Whipping posts and stocks were found in nearly every town and village, and blacks were not the only victims. In 1756 an Indian named "Jerry," who had betrayed General Braddock to the French, was hunted down and discovered hiding in the Schenectady cellar of one Harman Van Slyck. After being lynched and beheaded, his head was exposed on a pole just outside the Stockade along Ferry Street. Contemporary records indicate that

as soon as he was captured he "began to sing his death song and continued to do so till he was killed." In 1740 a slave belonging to Simon Toll was burned alive at the stake for allegedly committing arson. This execution, which took place at the bottom of the State Street hill, was the only recorded instance of such a punishment in Schenectady's history.

Throughout the 1760s, New York's slave population began to move upstate as the white populations of the upper Hudson River counties increased. By 1773 the Reverend John Doty of Schenectady's St. George's Church has gathered together 20 black students "who by their diligence and improvement fully recompensed his pains and became sober serious communicants and happily continued in a blameless conduct. . ." Even George Washington had limited contact with Schenectady's African-American community. When the general visited Schenectady during one of his three stops here, he tipped his hat to a black man. When an aide suggested that this might have been improper for a man of his station, the future President replied, "I cannot permit a poor Negro to be more polite than I."

With the passage of time, Schenectady slowly acquired a reputation for tolerance toward African-Americans. Since the 1830s the city had followed New York City's example by allocating funds for an African Free School to educate poor black children. It also hosted abolitionist speakers, at least one black convention, and served as a station on the Underground Railroad. Here Moses Viney would live for the rest of his long life - except for the two years he was about to spend as a fugitive slave once again.

The **Mabee Farm Committee** invites all members of the Historical Society to attend the Farm Festival September 9th. This year, our first season open, has seen great progress. The Dutch barn has been completed and the stabilization of the Brick house is done. The Mabee family artifacts are out of storage, unpacked and selected items on view in the buildings. Our first exhibits are installed in the Dutch barn:

**QUILTS PLUS and ROTTERDAM JUNCTION: A PICTORIAL HISTORY.**

If you have never visited the Farm or it has been a while, mark September 9 on your calendar now. There will be activities, food and fun for all. The Farm is becoming more visually attractive every day as our volunteers and contractors bring out the inherent beauty of the property and buildings; it is also attractive in the sense of magnetic, drawing people who wish to share their own historical interests. Already a broom maker, a blacksmith, barn preservationists, archeologists, garden clubs, square dancers, military reenactors, quilters and those seeking the right home for cherished family heirlooms have been drawn to the Farm. Our displays are enriched and the Farm is coming alive with activities.

For military history buffs, we draw your attention to two important artifacts revealed in the Mabee collection. The first, a sword believed to be from the War of 1812, has been cleaned and reconditioned by John Ackner. The mounts are coin silver and the grip is whalebone. Ackner's opinion is that it is American, probably of Boston and of the Revolutionary period. There is also a gun which is being cleaned by Ackner's father, William Ackner. It appears to be American and of the Revolutionary War period. It has an English Brown Bess type barrel, an earlier French lock, and an American black walnut stock. It was the practice of the Committee of Safety to purchase parts in Europe and have them assembled here. Ackner has found

An Historic Foliage Tour is planned for Sunday, October 14th, 1- 5 for a \$10.00 fee. The tour will start at the library in Scotia — the Abraham Glen House just off the Western Gateway bridge on the right— at 1:00 PM. It will be an easy driving tour along the Mohawk River through Rotterdam and Glenville, highlighting places of historic interest. The Flint House, Lock 23 Restoration, Swart House, Green Corners School and the Mabee farm will be open for tours. Complimentary refreshments will be served at the Mabee Farm to end the afternoon.

Finally our hearty thanks to William and John Ackner for their professionally done work on restoring the antique sword and gun.

**PAST TIME FOR RESTORING THE OLD AND ACQUIRING THE NEW Funds are needed**

The Schenectady County Historical Society has a collection of over fifty paintings dating from the 18th century to the late 19th century. The paintings reflect the landscape of the area and the people who contributed to the area's rich history. There are paintings of members of the Yates, Wemple, Romeyn, Glen, Walton, Potter, Van Eps, DeGraff, March, Dunham, Dunlap, Marcellus and Stauring families and others who played roles in Schenectady's 350 year history. It is the society's mission not only

**ART RESTORATION**

Many of our paintings are in need of appropriate frames. Storage facilities for them are currently inadequate. From time to time, a painting of importance to the area's history appears on the market. The society does not have the funds for such purchases, and the painting disappears to another location and an historic document is lost to the community. Funds are needed to keep such items in the area. Contributions to this fund are tax-deductible and can be made in your name or in memory of a deceased relative or friend or anyone whom you wish to honor. Checks should be made payable to Schenectady County Historical Society with a notation that the check is for the **ART RESTORATION AND ACQUISITION FUND**. The Society thanks you for your support -Ona Curran

the two minor parts that were missing. The gun and the sword will be on view at the Farm Festival and the Stockade Walkabout.

to collect but to preserve Schenectady County history. As we are a nonprofit organization, funds are limited and much depends on the generosity of the public. Funds are needed to strengthen the existing restoration fund which is nearly depleted. Many of the paintings are in need of cleaning and professional conservation. Conservation of artwork is costly and can run \$500 to \$5000, depending on the work to be done.

**Walkabout Goes Dutch for 2001**

**Saturday, September  
29  
10am - 5pm**

**THE•MABEE•FARM**

**MABEE FARM PROJECT**

**Ticket price (\$15) includes:  
Guided tours of the interiors  
of seven  
18th and 19th century homes**

**Open house at three historic  
churches:**

**St. George's Episcopal Church  
Holy Cross Church  
First Reformed church**

**Trolley rides to and guided tours of the Dutch Mabee Farm. Carriage rides through the Stockade's charming streets Guided walking tours highlighting Dutch architecture. Dutch dancing by a local heritage group And Much More!**

**Become a Patron of the Humanities! Be one with the Medicis!**

Here is a golden opportunity to support a once-in-a-lifetime mind-boggling project. The most definitive history of Schenectady, surpassing the Nineteenth Century efforts of Jonathan Pearson, is nearing completion. Much of the exhaustive research has been done using the primary sources in the Grems Doolittle Library of the Schenectady County Historical Society. Replete with an authoritative narrative, maps and charts, this book promises to be the ultimate work on Schenectady for the foreseeable future. BUT the final stages of completion take time and money. Grants have run low; much meticulous final work needs to be done—and this costs money—money for transportation; money for duplication of documents, money for preparing the index;

and money to get the manuscript camera-ready for printing Here's where you come in. For a Gift of \$1,000 you become a Patron of the Humanities. Your name will be included on a special page in the final volume, where you will be listed as a Patron. Checks should be made payable to the Colonial Schenectady Project (a 501 (c)(3) organization), 1127Avon Road, Schenectady, NY 12308.

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