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The staff of the Schenectady County Historical Society is pleased to offer a wide variety of outreach presentations to community groups, businesses, and organizations. These programs are given free of charge, although donations to the Historical Society are welcome. Below is a current list of programs we are able to offer. If you are interested in booking an outreach program with us, please contact our Educator, Jenna Peterson Riley, at (518) 887-5073 or email educator@schenectadyhistorical.org.

“Behind the Gown: Displaying and Wearing Historical Fashion” with Kaitlin Morton-Bentley, Assistant Curator

What goes into putting together a historical clothing exhibit? From choosing each historical item to recreating the silhouette of a dress with mannequins and bustles, the trends of fashion throughout history must be studied to bring gowns to life. Beyond displaying historical fashion, wearing historical fashion today requires attention to fabrication, style details, and accessories to achieve “The Look” to help you step right out of the past.

“Boomtown: Immigration, Technology, and Urban Schenectady” with Mary Zawacki, Curator

Humans are always on the move. We seek new opportunities and face challenges as we adapt to changes in the world around us. For tens of thousands of immigrants, Schenectady County offered its own opportunities and challenges. This talk explores why people immigrate and the unprecedented impact of immigration and technology on urban Schenectady.

“Erie Agriculture: How the Erie Canal Changed New York’s Farms” with Jenna Peterson Riley, Educator/Assistant Curator

Prior to the construction of the Erie Canal, farmers in the Mohawk Valley played an important role in grain production, sending their crops into all thirteen colonies. Following the completion of Clinton’s Ditch, their lives saw dramatic changes as the types of crops they could sell at markets shifted.

“From Colonial to Craft Brew: The Local Story of Beer” with Jenna Peterson Riley, Educator/Assistant Curator

From the first Dutch settlers arriving in New Netherland to today’s growing craft beer trend, beer has played an important role in our history. Agriculture, transportation, technology, politics, and social issues have all played a part in beer’s history, and it in turn has affected our own lives.

“It Came From Schenectady: Science Fiction in the Capital Region” with Mary Zawacki, Curator

What if you had a superpower? What if you could travel through time? What if machines overtook Schenectady? "What if" questions inspire writers, artists, and filmmakers to create new worlds and imagine alternate realities. This talk explores the "what ifs" that inspired the creations of local science fiction innovators, including Kurt Vonnegut, P. Schuyler Miller, Ray Nelson, Glendora, and Pamela Sargent and the legacy of science fiction in Schenectady County.

"Finding Your Schenectady County Ancestor" with Michael Maloney, Librarian

Genealogy research in New York State can often be frustrating and time consuming. This overview of genealogical resources in Schenectady County will guide you towards local resources and repositories to help you research your ancestors from Schenectady County.

"Making History: The Schenectady County Historical Society" with Mary Zawacki, Curator

Is history relevant today? How can we bring it to life for people of all ages and backgrounds? In what ways can we promote the vibrant culture of our region? The Schenectady County Historical Society staff and volunteers ponder these questions and more, distilling the region's rich heritage and history into exciting programs and exhibits. Join us as we explore initiatives, ideas, and challenges faced by local historians in the 21st century.

"Moving the Mohawk: Changing Transportation in the Mohawk Valley" with Jenna Peterson Riley, Educator/Assistant Curator

Once considered the best way to head west, the Mohawk River served as a gateway for travelers, traders, and settlers moving to lands beyond. From the early boats traveling by river to today's interstate system, transportation has a long history in the Mohawk Valley.

"Mysteries of the Mabee Farm: Uncovering the Story of a 300 Year Old Farmstead" with Jenna Peterson Riley, Educator/Assistant Curator

Scattered across the Mabee Farm Historic Site are roadside signs boasting of the history of this Dutch farmstead. Not only do they differ in size and design, the information listed on them varies dramatically. According to one, the Mabee home was built in 1670, making it one of the oldest standing buildings in all of New York. Another claims 1680 and a third puts the date firmly in 1705. Which of these is the truth, and what other mysteries surround this home?

"Preserving Family Photographs and Documents" with Michael Maloney, Librarian

Do you have old family photographs, letters, diaries, or other precious items that you would like to preserve? This presentation will discuss how to properly preserve your family's important documents and photos. It will also provide tips on how to store, display, label, and handle these materials. Preserving these materials will assist family members, now or in the future, to retrace and reconstruct your family history.

"Swept Away: The Surprising Local History of Brooms" with Jenna Peterson Riley, Educator/Assistant Curator

You have probably heard that Schenectady was the city that lit and hauled the world, but did you know that it swept it too? Although using some combination of brushes and grass has likely been around as long as there have been floors, the modern evolution of today's broom has a surprisingly local history.

"Voices from the Haunted Past: Ghost Stories and Folklore from the Stockade" with Kaitlin Morton-Bentley, Assistant Curator

For centuries folks of all backgrounds have lived their lives in the Stockade neighborhood and as folklore has it, some of them never completely left. Stories about spirit sightings and strange occurrences reveal the rich history of this historic area.