



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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Artist Mark Priest's 2008 painting, "The Altruist," depicts the event of April 27, 1860, whereby escaped slave Charles Nalle was kidnapped from a Troy, NY bakery and taken to the District Circuit Court at State and First Streets where he was to be returned to a slaveholder in Virginia in accord with the Fugitive Slave Act. Hundreds of people, including Harriet Tubman, rushed to the site where a riot ensued, allowing Nalle to escape across the Hudson to West Troy and ultimately to his freedom. (Rensselaer County Historical Society)

ANTEBELLUM SLAVERY IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

by Hannah Hamilton, Niskayuna High School

Beneath the decks, dozens of dark bodies laid side by side. Shackled and surrounded by the stink of excrement, sweat, and disease, the prisoners were rocked day and night by the waves of the Atlantic. The only sounds were of forlorn weeping, moaning, and the hacking of the sick. The wailing of children and rattling of chains mingled with the footsteps of the strange, pale men above; those who had dragged them from the hot West-African sunlight and trapped them in this realm of cold and darkness.

Continued on pages 4-5

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HOURS

MUSEUM & LIBRARY

Monday-Friday 9-5
Saturday 10-2
and Thursday 5-8
September-JUNE only

MABEE FARM
Tuesday-SATURDAY
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.



Letter from the President

Good tidings and best wishes to all for a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year! On January 1st, 1863 President Abraham Lincoln issued an Emancipation Proclamation declaring all slaves within the Confederate States free in hopes of pressuring the Southern States to lay down their weapons. While the War did not end in 1863, the Proclamation became a major step in the action leading to the conclusion of the War and abolition of Slavery. In January, to commemorate this significant event, the Society will host a Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History traveling exhibit, *Freedom: A History of Us*, detailing the history of Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation at the Mabee Farm's George E. Franchere Education Center. The commemoration will extend throughout the month with related events and activities leading up to the start of February—national Black History Month.

Beginning in February and extending into March, we will have a show of noted artist James Whitbeck paintings in the Center's Gallery. At 32 Washington Avenue in Schenectady a new exhibit, *Mohawk Giants* (Schenectady's independent Negro Baseball team), will open in January and the *Medicine on the Mohawk*, and the *Dolls and Desserts* exhibits will continue (see page 8). As a reminder, your membership provides free admission to all of these events and exhibits.

During the winter months our staff and volunteers will be working to develop and schedule events and programs for the upcoming New Year. This past year we have seen a significant increase in school programs and special events attendance, collections care growth and needs, and requests for library and genealogical research. With the conclusion of 2012 and the start of 2013, it appropriate that we say Thank You to our staff members and all of our dedicated volunteers. Their hard work and assistance is very much appreciated! And we recently received a generous donation of meeting room equipment from the New York State Restaurant Association as facilitated by Keith Cramer, Monica Miller, and J & P Builders of Schenectady. Thank you all!

In closing, I leave you with a recent statement from SUNY Plattsburg history professor James M. Lindgren:

"Just as Barack Obama represents a changing America, so, too, must preservation adapt to the increasing diversity of our population. Additionally, historic preservation, like history in general, must speak to the present, to the many who still hope that it is a land of equality, opportunity, and justice for all. History must not become irrelevant, as it seems increasingly to be."

-Merritt

Exhibits and Programs: at 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady (HQ) or at the George E. Franchere Education Center (FEC) on the Mabee Farm historic site in Rotterdam Junction

For more information about all the events occurring @ 32 Washington Avenue, or @ the Mabee Farm Historic Site, or @ the George E. Franchere Education Center (FEC), please check the Society's website, www.schist.org, or call the Historical Society at (518) 374-0263 and listen for the option describing Programs. Call (518) 887-5073 regarding programs at the Mabee Farm or at its George E. Franchere Education Center (FEC).

Admission to exhibits and programs is free to Society members and students and \$5 to others.

EXHIBITS

@ 32 Washington Avenue:

(ongoing) ***Medicine on the Mohawk: The Collection of Dr. John M. Spring***- a collection of objects that cover over 200 years of Schenectady medical history.

(ongoing) ***Dolls and Desserts*** – with a focus on the different styles of dolls from the 19th and 20th century; and classic gelatin desserts made before the invention of instant gelatin.

(opening in February) ***The Mohawk Colored Giants***

This Schenectady team was founded in 1913 and became one of the most successful independent black teams. The exhibit is based on a recently donated collection of memorabilia donated by Frank Keetz.

@ the Mabee Farm's FEC

January 1st–25th: *Freedom: A History of Us*:

A travelling exhibit, courtesy of the Gilder Lehrman Institute. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson based the colonists' right to form a separate nation on the English King's denial of their freedom – their “unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The principle of freedom has evolved over 225 years. This exhibition invites the modern-day viewer into the lives of men and women who forged this nation, whether they arrived in this land by choice or in chains. Documents and photographs illustrate how Americans succeeded in redefining the meaning of freedom. There will also be a supplementary exhibit on the history of slavery in New York with emphasizing the Schenectady area in general and the Mabee Farm in particular.

@ the FEC, continued:

February 2nd–March 15th: Inspiration from the Past: *The Art of James Whitbeck*. Whitbeck was a native of the Berkshires whose work was inspired by the 16th and 17th century Dutch masters. His images appear vividly real. At the opening of the FEC exhibit on **February 2nd at 2:00 PM**, the artist will discuss his own style.

PROGRAMS

@ the Mabee Farm's FEC

January 1st, 2:00-4:00 PM : Opening introduction to the exhibit ***Freedom: A History of Us*** – commemorating the sesquicentennial of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation will be recited by Keshon Bailey, a talk by the Rev. Horace Sanders, Jr., and musical selections from a local choir.

Saturday, January 5th at 2:00 PM: Lecture – ***A Far Cry from Freedom: Gradual Abolition in New York State, 1799-1827***, a lecture by L. Lloyd Stewart.

Saturday, January 26th at 2:00 PM: ***The Role of Black Troops in the Civil War***, a lecture by Dr. Allen Ballard.

@ 32 Washington Avenue

Saturday, February 9th at 2:00 PM: ***Black Baseball Players, White Crowds: The Mohawk Colored Giants of Schenectady*** Speaker: Frank Keetz

Saturday, February 16th at 2:00 PM: ***Researching the History of your House: Resources in the Grems-Doolittle Library***. Speaker: Melissa Tacke

With no knowledge of where the slaves were going, they subdued themselves to wait out their journey in near-silence. They could not move, for their wrists and ankles were bound in iron. Many were naked; others wore rough garments of sack cloth and linen. Their bodies ached, their tongues were dry and stomachs empty. They only saw light when the white men came in the morning, bearing lanterns, to collect the dead.

One day, excited shouts and stomping could be heard from above. Somewhere in the darkness, a woman began to chant a song of mourning, and they all started to think that death was near. Their ship was sinking; in moments the freezing water would rush in and they would all be drowned. The silence was broken only by the woman's singing.

Hours passed. They wondered what was happening, since the boat had not sunk. All at once a door slammed open above and half a dozen white men pounded down the steps. They belted orders in their strange, guttural tongue at the row of people closest to the door, unlocking their shackles and kicking them to their feet. The people were astonished, and tripped into each other as they stood up for the first time in months. They were put into a line and led up the steps, through the ship and into the open air.

Their eyes, which had grown accustomed to darkness, were blinded by the bright sunlight—a colder, farther sun than in Africa. The people held onto each other for support as their legs remembered how to bear weight. They shivered in the frosty wind and blinked out at a foreign land.

The white men shouted directions to one another, then led the prisoners down the gangplank, and in 1626, they became the first Africans to set foot on New York soil. Snatched from their villages in the African interior, they had been carried halfway around the world as victims of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Though the Dutch West India Company had not initially relished the idea of importing slaves to their colony of New Netherland, they had eventually succumbed to the need for cheap labor in what is now New York State. These prisoners would be sold off at markets in New York City, like cattle, to the highest bidders. Some would remain in the city. Others, however, would be led up the Hudson River to work in agricultural communities throughout the colony.

In 1664, The Netherlands surrendered their territory of New Netherland to the English, and James, Duke of York, assumed power over the colony of today's New York. The Duke was one of the leading officials of the English Royal African Company, which dealt exclusively in the slave trade; and as a result, slave importation to the newly christened "New York" increased exponentially. Statistics tell us that by 1737

there were 9,021 blacks in New York, 14.7% of the colony's total population. New York had, for a time that lasted well into the 19th century, the largest slave population north of Maryland.

One of Schenectady County's most notable historic sites, the Mabee Farm located in Rotterdam Junction, was settled in 1705 by Jan Mabee and his family. The Mabees left Schenectady to start a farm on the banks of the Mohawk on property first acquired and settled by Daniel Janse Van Antwerpen in 1671. Due to good relations kept with the Native Americans, the Mabee House has survived three centuries, and comes down to us today as one of the most important resources for knowledge into African Slavery in Schenectady County.



An image of the Mabee Farm in spring. To the left of the main house stands the Brick House, which would likely have served as a Summer Kitchen, and where female slaves would have worked with the Mabee women.

Jan Mabee operated the farm with the help of his three sons, Peter, Jacob, and Abraham. Jacob in particular was responsible for bringing slavery to the Mabee Farm, as he is noted in a historical document as having possessed slaves as early as 1727. It would have been almost impossible in the early 18th century for the family to operate a farm of this size on their own, especially without the help of modern agricultural technology. Hiring the number of farm hands necessary for the job would have been extremely costly, so Jacob Mabee made the then seemingly rational decision to utilize slave labor instead.

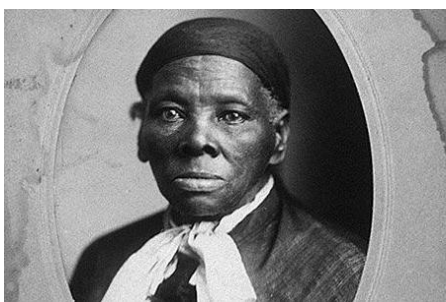
The Mabees kept slaves into the early 19th century. Female slaves would have worked domestically while males took part in farming and animal husbandry. If a mid-18th-century account holds any authority, we can assume that the dynamic on the Mabee Farm was relatively humane. In 1757 Jacob Mabee entrusted one of his slaves, a man named Jack, to lead a team of horses with a wagon load of store goods for the Crown Point Expedition amassing in Fort

Edward. The record of this event exists in the form of a bill penned by Katrina Mabee which was submitted to the Continental Army. Such a relationship as this between slave and master was typical of homesteads where the two worked alongside one another, which would have been the case on the Mabee Farm.

Despite the probability that the Mabees treated their slaves with a degree of kindness and civility, they did not immediately manumit them after the 1799 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in New York State. This Act decreed that all slaves born after July 4th of 1799 must go free, though not immediately. Rather, in order to facilitate payment of their masters' investments, males would not receive their freedom until their 28th birthday and females not until their 25th. The Mabees were noted as having kept at least one slave whose birth date was prior to the July 4th deadline.

Another interesting look into the African-American heritage in Schenectady County is the tale of Charles Nalle. Nalle fled slavery from Virginia in 1858, eight years following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which ordained that all Americans must aid in the recapture of escaped slaves. Nalle came to New York and found work in Troy, NY, living for two years in relative peace. However, following his arrest by Deputy U.S. Marshall John W. Holmes and slave-catcher Henry Wale, Nalle faced a trial that would surely send him back to the South.

Many of Troy's citizens were attracted by the spectacle of Nalle's trial and flocked to the scene. A crowd of people soon assembled, and among them was the famous Harriet Tubman. Tubman was said to have quickly disguised herself as an old woman and aided in Nalle's escape, wrapping her arms around him and not letting go despite the blows that rained down upon her (*see* cover painting). Countless others joined in the fight to free Nalle and, rallied by Tubman, dragged him down to the river where he escaped in a rowboat.



Harriett Tubman, often called the conductor of the Underground Railroad.

Nalle lay low in Niskayuna until it was considered safe for him to return to Troy. In the time that followed, his

friends raised funds to purchase his freedom, and, years later, Nalle died a free man.

Moses Viney is yet another fascinating character in area history. Viney fled slavery in Maryland at the age of twenty-three, and in 1842, two years after coming to Schenectady, was hired by Eliphalet Nott, president of Union College. Viney developed a friendly relationship with Nott, and upon hearing of the Fugitive Slave Act, went straight to him and revealed that he was a runaway slave. Rather than turning his back on Viney, Nott sent his friend to Canada, and in 1855 purchased his freedom for \$120.



Sitting proudly atop his newly purchased horse-drawn wagon, Moses Viney poses for a photo.

Viney remained loyal to Nott and his wife, Urania, for the rest of their lives, and was even included in Nott's will. With the money bequeathed him, Viney was able to own a home and buy four subsequent plots. Viney displayed his gratitude towards Nott by caring for Nott's widow as well as remaining loyal to Union College. Following the death of his wife Anna, Viney purchased a horse and three-wheeled carriage, and began a small livery. Viney was well-respected at Union College, where he participated in college events until a year prior to his death in 1909. At his funeral, it is said that mourners spelled out the word "FREE" with flowers atop his casket.

Although Schenectady is often overlooked by those researching African-American history, we are, as Black History Month is celebrated in the U.S. and Canada each February, asked to remember that past history. Last year, the National Parks Committee did Schenectady the honor of adding the Ancestral Burial Ground of Vale Cemetery, where Moses Viney and many other African-Americans are buried, to the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. Though Schenectady County of today is very much different than it was in the days of slavery, events such as those cited herein cannot help but resonate. Constant reminders of our significant African-American legacy are compelling reasons to remember and promulgate it.

New Materials in the Library

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

Artists & Activists: Making Culture in New York's

Capital Region by Joseph Dalton

At Any Cost: Jack Welch, General Electric, and the

Pursuit of Profit by Thomas F. O'Boyle

Crime and Law Enforcement in the Colony of New

York, 1691-1776 by Douglas Greenberg

Death of a Notary: Conquest and Change in Colonial

New York by Donna Merwick

George Westinghouse: His Life and Achievements by

Francis Ellington Leupp, gift of **Ed Reilly**

Hockey in the Capital District by Jim Mancuso

Honor Roll: The World War II Dead of Amsterdam, NY

by Robert N. Going

How to Be South Asian in America: Narratives of

Ambivalence and Belonging by Anupama Jain

Longshore Soldiers: Life in a WWII Port Battalion by

Andrew Brozyna

Railroad Wars of New York State by Timothy Starr,

gift of the **Daily Gazette**

The Smalbanac: An Opinionated Guide to New York's

Capital District by Christine Garretson-Persans

That's All She Wrote: A GE Speechwriter Tells

(Almost) All by Joan A'Hearn

Upstate Travels: British Views of Nineteenth-Century

New York, ed. by Roger M. Haydon

Upstream: A Mohawk Valley Journal nos. 1 & 2

Winter Sports by Norman Dibelius, gift of **John**

Gearing

HISTORIC DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Profit-sharing stamp books from Scotia businesses, gift of **John Ackner**

Elliscope vol. IV, no. 1 (Jan 1955) and Duanesburg

Historical Society calendar (1993), gift of **Anne**

Christman

Sign for Schenectady builder H.W. Chubb, gift of **Deb**

Crosby

Directory of Graduates, 1901-1951: 50th Anniversary,

Apprentice Training Courses, Schenectady Works

and 40th Anniversary Celebration, Schenectady

Works Apprentice Alumni Association, gift of

Connie Emery

Schenectady Turnverein photographs and publications,

gift of **Walter Herderich**

Issues of *Terrace Tribune*, photographs, and reunion

materials for Nott Terrace High School Class of

1949, gift of **Marie Castelli Stine, Gilbert Henry**

Priess, and Samuel Wait, Jr.

Prints of drawings from H.S. Barney Collection, gift of

Trudi Thun

Linton High School yearbook (1971), gift of **David**

Katz

Give Your Attic Treasures a New Lease on Life!

The Grems-Doolittle Library is always seeking material related to the history of Schenectady County to strengthen our collections and make our library a more useful destination for researchers. Your donations of books, magazines, maps, photographs, and original documents help to document and preserve the history of the people and places of Schenectady County for generations to come!

Information about some of the categories of material we are seeking is listed below. If you are interested in donating materials to our library, or if you have any questions, please stop by the library or contact Librarian Melissa Tacke by phone at 518-374-0263, option 3, or email librarian@schist.org.

The Library is currently seeking:

- Books and pamphlets related to the Schenectady County area (history, sociology, nature, etc.), histories of the region or New York State, or biographies/memoirs of local people
- Local magazines or newsletters from any time period related to Schenectady County topics or local organizations
- Photographs from any time period that document people, places, businesses/organizations, events, or activities in Schenectady County
- Maps from any time period showing Schenectady County, the city of Schenectady, or towns within the county
- Yearbooks, school newspapers and school literary journals, graduation programs, and class reunion materials from public or private schools in Schenectady County
- Brochures, publications, or advertisements from Schenectady County businesses and organizations
- Original documents created by local people, businesses, or organizations, such as letters, diaries, drawings, speeches, press releases, sheet music, receipts, reports, meeting minutes, event programs, etc.
- Unpublished original research, such as a history of your house or an academic paper about a local history topic
- Telephone books for Schenectady for the years 1969 through 1974
- City directories for Schenectady for the years 1866, 1867-1868, 1887, 1899, 1901, 1903, or 1913

Around the Society



Len Tantillo signing new book "The Edge of New Netherland"



"Medicine on the Mohawk" Exhibit opening. L-R: Dr. James Strosberg, Deb Crosby, Dr. John Spring, Ryan Mahoney.



Holiday Fair at the Franchere Center



Festival of Trees - Our library's 'book tree.'



History of the Snowman, by Bob Eckstein



Dolls & Desserts Exhibit


Schenectady County Historical Society

DOLLS AND DESSERTS

ANTIQUE AND VINTAGE DOLLS FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE
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EXHIBITED WITH HANDMADE MINIATURE

CAKES, COOKIES, PIES, CANDY AND FRUIT



NOVEMBER 24- FEBRUARY 2013
SCHENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
32 WASHINGTON AVE., SCHENECTADY, NY 12305
518-374-0263

COME VISIT THE 1834 YATES DOLLHOUSE \$5 ADMISSION, CHILDREN \$2



Ann Arason Photography

From "Views of the Farm," a photo exhibit on display in the George E. Franchere Education Center at the Mabee Farm Historic Site.

Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm

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