



Schenectady County  
Historical  
Society

# Newsletter

Volume 55 Number 3-4

March-April 2012

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## TITANIC – The Schenectady Connection

by Ed Reilly

April 15 will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragic sinking of the Titanic. The basic facts regarding the event are extremely well known and can be expressed in one long and heart-wrenching sentence: On April 3, 1912, the Royal Mail Ship *RMS Titanic*, the largest ocean liner built to that date, left Belfast, Ireland, near where it was built at the Harland & Wolff shipyard for J.P. Morgan's White Star Line; took on passengers at Southampton, England, Cherbourg, France, and Queenstown, Ireland; began its maiden voyage on April 10 bereft of binoculars in the crow's nest because of an oversight, bound for New York City carrying 20 lifeboats whose combined capacity was only a third of that needed for all passengers, steamed on under command of Captain Edward John Smith, who, despite eight wireless warnings of floating ice in the shipping lanes, was ordered by White Star Line's Managing Director, J. Bruce Ismay, to maintain maximum speed of 22½ knots along a minimum distance great-circle route in hopes of reaching New York on Tuesday, April 16, a day ahead of schedule; sideswiped a large iceberg at 11:40 p.m. on a calm moonless night, Sunday, April 14, 375 miles southeast of St. John's, Newfoundland; suffered a 300 foot gash below its waterline that flooded more watertight compartments than the 4 of 16 it could tolerate; began to sink at midnight; sank below the waves at 2:20 a.m. on the next day, drowning 1,530 people, mostly men, leaving adrift in lifeboats 705 survivors, mostly women and children, who, two hours later, were rescued by the *S.S. Carpathia* and brought 963 miles southwest to New York City to continue their lives as best they could.

Continued on pages 4-5

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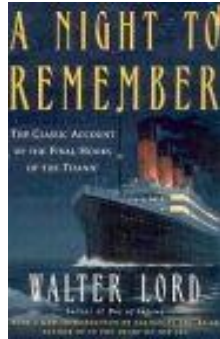
**HOURS**  
**MUSEUM & LIBRARY**  
Monday-Friday 9-5  
Additionally Thursday 5-8  
Saturday 10-2

**MABEE FARM**  
Monday-SATURDAY  
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

## Letter from the President

### A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

There is a rather obvious double meaning to the above caption, one being the enormously successful Colonial Festival Dinner held at the George E. Franchere Education Center on the evening of February 4. I thank all who attended or contributed to such an enormous outpouring of support. The photos on page 7 speak for themselves, and I'll defer to trustee Laura Lee Linder, co-chair with Mabee Farm Site Manager Pat Barrot, to supply the final word right after this Letter.



The other allusion signified by the caption is that it is both the name of Walter Lord's famous book about the *Titanic* and of the movie based on it released in 1958, the same year as the *Titanic* movie whose poster Nellie Hambly is eyeing on page 5 of my cover story. April 14-15 will be *Titanic* weekend at SCHS, 100 years to the successive days when the ill-fated ship hit the iceberg and sank with great loss of life on the following morning. Our Annual Meeting will be at 2 PM in the Vrooman Room, and the program that follows will memorialize the tragic event. Please come and help form the quorum needed to elect trustees and officers for our 2012 fiscal year (see page 3.) Then, the next day, Sunday at 2, come to a showing of *A Night to Remember* at the Franchere Center. Admission is

free, but we would appreciate a donation (or purchase of traditional outrageously priced popcorn).

You've heard of a silent auction—we had a very successful one for the opening of the Tantillo exhibit of 50 of his paintings last October—but probably not of a silent fundraiser. Well, there has been one going on with the object of our being able to afford a second Tantillo painting, the first being the beautiful *Schenectady Town*, commissioned for the Society's Centennial of 2005. What we greatly desire is a painting of the historic Mabee Farm farmhouse and inn. So far, only Mabees and Mabee relatives have been solicited. They have given generously, bringing us within 90% of our goal. Now it is time to end our silence. Surely there are among you those who are ready and willing to push the drive closer to the top.

This is my last *Letter* as President, but not, membership willing, the end of my service to the Society. Six years is enough in the lead capacity, a record I didn't intend to set. I hung around because I so much wanted to help shepherd the Franchere Center to completion. The *Titanic* theme for April 14 is certainly not a metaphor of any kind; on that day, with your help, we'll elect a capable captain to steer the ship. Please be there for the election. Practice for November.

*-Ed*

### A Successful 2012 Colonial Festival Dinner

The Colonial Festival Dinner, the featured event of the Schenectady Heritage Area's annual Schenectady Colonial Festival, was held February 4<sup>th</sup> at the new Franchere Education Center to benefit the Mabee Farm Historic Site. Participants were taken back in time to Jacob Mabee's Inn of the late 1700s. They shared an evening of fine fare and merriment with frequent guests of the inn, travelers along the Mohawk River such as military leaders, Indian traders, bateaumen, soldiers, merchants, and land speculators, along with members of the Mabee Family and their household.

Author and *Gazette* reporter Bill Buell served as Master of Ceremonies, welcoming and thanking Sponsors, Patrons, Donors, *Liaisons Plaisantes* musicians, reenactors with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Albany County Militia, organizations whose members filled tables, and the SCHS Committee and Staff responsible for arranging and carrying out the successful event. Dr. Charles Gehring, Director of the New Netherland Research Center, presented the exhibit *Light on New Netherland*, citing connections to Schenectady, the northernmost part of New Netherland.



Our newest trustee, John Gearing, researcher and author of *Schenectady Genesis Volume II*, shared exciting new findings about Schenectady's early history. Jack, one of the Mabee Farm slaves, closed the program, expressing thanks for being included. Without his story, the extensive history recited during the dinner would not have been complete.

*-Laura Lee Linder*

*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.*

## EXHIBITS

**Now on view @HQ *Highlights of the Mynderse Collection***

**Free to members - \$5 to non-members**

SCHS recently acquired a massive collection of objects that were once owned by Helen Livingston Mynderse, the last of a line of a mostly Dutch family that traced its roots back to some of the earliest settlers in New Netherland. Exhibit highlight include ceramic objects, textiles, and a doll collection.

**Opening Thursday, March 8<sup>th</sup> at 4 pm @ FEC**

***Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic: School Days of Yore in Schenectady County***

**Free to members - \$5 non-members**

This exhibit traces the evolution of the local education system from the founding of Schenectady to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Learn of the one-room school-house and what was taught there; of the strict and respectable lives teachers were expected to live; and of the role of religion in early schooling.

## PROGRAMS @ HQ

**Saturday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2 pm *The Life of Daniel Butterfield* presented by Frank Taormina**

**Free to members - \$5 to non-members**

An 1849 graduate of Union College, Daniel Butterfield may be best known for writing the famous bugle call "Taps." Frank Taormina will discuss Butterfield's civilian life, military service in the Civil War, and his creation of one of our most recognizable melodies.

**Saturday April 14<sup>th</sup>**

**2:00 pm Business - ANNUAL MEETING**

**2:15 pm Program**

***Passage on the Titanic* Presented by Sue McLane.**  
**Free to members, \$5 non-members**

On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day the Titanic struck the infamous iceberg, Sue McLane will discuss how first, second, and steerage class passengers traveled at the turn of the 20th century. McLane brings this period to life with costumes and stories of steamship voyages while telling the story of this maritime disaster.

## PROGRAMS @ the FEC

**Sunday, March 4<sup>th</sup> at 2pm *A Talk on the Fur Trade*, and a screening of *Jeremiah Johnson***

**presented by Nancy Papish**

**Free to members - \$5 to non-members**

A discussion on the Fur Trade followed by a screening of *Jeremiah Johnson* starring Robert Redford. Nancy Papish introduces us to the Canadian Fur Trade, the Fur Trade in the United States, and sets the stage for the movie, which covers the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade.

**Sunday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2-6 pm *Cabin Fever Benefit Concert – Chili dinner and other refreshments to follow* - \$8 admission charge**

**Join *Mark Jones & Friends, Everest Rising, and Fairview Avenue Bluegrass* for this unique Benefit Concert.** All proceeds go to School Bus Transportation grants for Mabee Farm school field trips.

**Sunday, March 18<sup>th</sup> at 3 pm**

***1948: Harry Truman's Improbable Victory and the Year that Transformed America***

**Presented by David Pietrusza and co-sponsored by the Schenectady County Public Library**

**Free to the public**

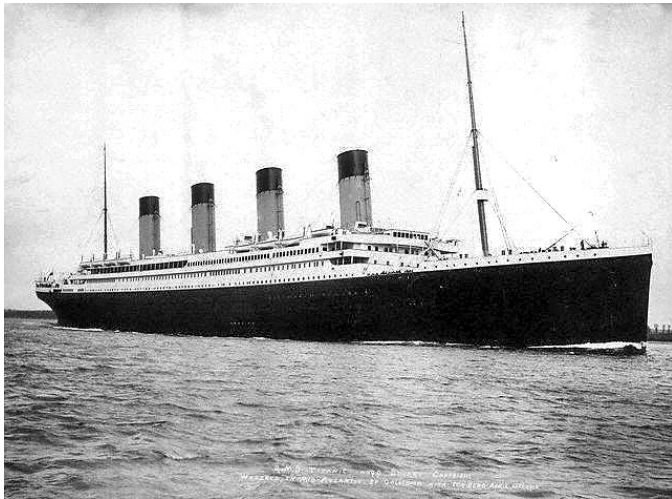
Recall the iconic photo: jubilant Harry Truman brandishing his copy of the *Chicago Tribune* proclaiming **DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN**. The 1948 election was much more than a single headline. We go behind the headlines to place in context a down-to-the-wire election against the background of an erupting Cold War, the Berlin Airlift, the birth of Israel, and a post-war America facing exploding storms over civil rights and domestic communism.

**Tuesday, March 20<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday, March 21<sup>st</sup> at 10:00 am and 12:30 pm (each day)**

***The Amazing Erie Canal* – an original musical play by Ruth Henry which celebrates the bold vision of "Clinton's Ditch" from concept to reality, performed by 29 youthful members of *DRAMAcademics*. Admission: \$6 adults, \$5 for SCHS members, \$4 for children ages 3-15. Reservations recommended. Call (518) 434-2704.**

**Still more on Page 6!**





*RMS Titanic leaving Southampton on April 10, 1912*

This actual photo is the last one taken of the *Titanic* afloat. The cover image is a romanticized artifact, a still used to promote James Cameron's movie *TITANIC*. Used with the stated editorial permission of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, it was formed by superimposing an image of a 90% scale model ship on a photo of a gorgeous sunset.

### **New York State connections**

At the time of the tragedy, no passenger was a resident of Schenectady, but one survivor who was heading here, Ellen "Nellie" Hocking, subsequently became one. Her story, the principal focus of this essay, will follow a brief digression about those with other local connections.

Five members of the Ryerson family from Cooperstown were on board. Four survived, but its patriarch, Arthur Larned Ryerson—described in several *Titanic* accounts as a wealthy "steel magnate"—did not, nor did his close and more famous friend, John Jacob Astor. But the Ryerson family would not have been on board the *Titanic* had they not received a wireless message that Arthur L. Ryerson, Jr., age 20, had been killed in an automobile accident in Haverford, PA, on April 8.

Survivor Gilbert M. Tucker, Jr. of Albany landed on the first lifeboat to leave the ship. Tucker's account of the disaster was published in the *Albany Times Union* of April 19, 1912. Tucker died at age 88 in California and was returned home to be buried in the Albany Rural Cemetery in Menands. And according to records from the same cemetery, English crewman Arthur Bright

stayed in America, moved to 50 Dove St. in Albany, and died there in 1921. But according to *Encyclopedia Titanica* ([www.encyclopedia-titanica.org](http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org)), Bright died in England in 1955 and is buried over there.

Miss Kornelia Theodosia Andrews, vice-president of the Hudson City Hospital, was returning home with her sister, Anna Hogeboom, and their niece, Gretchen Longley. All three boarded Lifeboat 10 and survived, but Miss Andrews died of natural causes in Hudson, NY, on December 4, 1913, less than two years later. Niece Gretchen Longley (later Leopold), died on 11 August, 1965, aboard a cruise ship, the S.S. Constitution, in the Mediterranean. Even more ironically, Robert DiSogra, the president of the *Titanic* International Society at the time, was a waiter aboard the Constitution, knew of Mrs. Leopold's death, but did not learn until years later that she was a *Titanic* survivor.

### **The Schenectady connections**

To repeat, no survivor or victim was a resident of our city or county as of April, 1912, but two listed their intended destination as Schenectady. One was 18-year-old Edward Willey, a farm laborer from Drayton, England, who boarded the *Titanic* at Southampton as a third class passenger. He was travelling from Drayton to Schenectady, possibly to work at one of the many farms in Glenville, Niskayuna, or Rotterdam, perhaps even our own Mabee Farm. His body was either never found, or he may be one of several unidentified *Titanic* victims who were recovered and buried in one or another of three cemeteries in Halifax, Nova Scotia where 121 victims are interred. DNA analysis may yet discern the identity of some of the unidentified victims, and poor Ed Willey may be one of them.

The other person heading to Schenectady with the intention to live here was 20-year-old Ellen May "Nellie" Hocking, the fiancée of Schenectadian George Charles Hambly, born in Penzance, Cornwall, England, who had come here to work for ALCO. Ellen Hocking was also born in Penzance, but two years earlier, 5 November 1891, the daughter of Mr. William Rowe Hocking and Mrs. Eliza Needs Hocking. She was sister to William, Thomas, Sidney, Richard, Horace, and Emily. Nellie travelled second class on the *Titanic* with her widowed mother, Elizabeth "Eliza" Hocking, her sister, Emily Hocking Richards, her brother, Richard

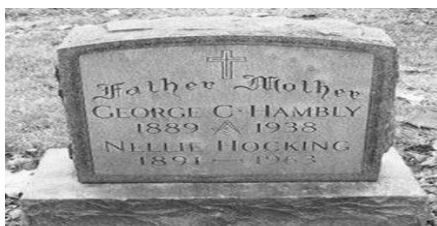
Hocking, and her two very young nephews, George and William Richards. All survived the sinking except for her brother Richard.

Eliza Hocking's sons Sidney and Richard had immigrated to America in the early 1900s and were living in Akron, Ohio. She was traveling to Akron to live with them and be there for the planned marriage of Ellen to George Hambly. I suspect that the Hocking and Hambly families knew one another in Penzance and it was there that George met, courted, and proposed to Ellen. Because of the trauma and mourning associated with the disaster, the wedding did not take place until May 14, 1913. Eliza lived in Akron for two years until her death in a streetcar accident on 15 April 1914, precisely two years to the day that the *Titanic* disappeared into the depths of the Atlantic.

In Schenectady, Ellen and George Hambly had two sons, William and Robert. Ellen worked at General Electric and later at Ellis Hospital. According to City Directories, at one time or another the Hambly family lived at 337 Avenue B, 435 Avenue A, and 1674 Avenue A. With them or near them at other Schenectady addresses over several years were George's mother Mary, his brother Walter, his sister May, and his sister Lavenia, a cashier at the Wallace Company. George died at age 49 on December 10, 1938, making Ellen a young widow of 47, but she never remarried. His obituary said that at the time he was a cost accountant for General Electric.

### **Titanic, the Movies**

Films about the Titanic tragedy have appeared regularly over the years, from mid-1912 through the Cameron movie **TITANIC** of 1997. In May of 1953, 61-year-old Nellie, a Schenectady resident of 40 years, was a guest of Proctor's Theatre for the **TITANIC** that starred Clifton Webb, Barbara Stanwyck, and Robert Wagner. At the time, Ellen was living at 2105 Dean Street in Niskayuna. The story of her visit to Proctor's was colorfully told by



*The Hambly Gravestone in Parkview Cemetery*



*Something in the poster catches Ellen's eye.*

Jeff Wilkin of the *Daily Gazette* in his *Life and Arts* blog of Wednesday, October 16, 2008.

Ten years later, on October 14, 1963, Ellen Hocking Hamby died at age 72 in Middletown, NY while visiting her son William, a building contractor. Her obituary in the *Schenectady Gazette* said that she had retired after working for General Electric and Ellis Hospital in Schenectady where she had been living at 1475 Kingston Avenue, and that she was survived by her two sons and five grandchildren. Both she and her husband, George Charles Hamby, are buried in Parkview Cemetery.

### **Hambly Genealogy**

A search of online White Pages revealed that there are many Hamblys living around the country, none in Schenectady, most in our western states. One entry, that for an "Alison Hambly," seemed to indicate that she had once lived here, so I emailed: "*Alison, would you be the granddaughter of Nellie Hocking Hamby, a Titanic survivor who lived in Schenectady, NY?*"

A scant five hours later, she replied: "*Yes, I am. And I love Schenectady, the town where I was born.*"

And so do we, Alison. Come back to see us soon.

## *New Materials in the Grems-Doolittle Library*

### **FAMILY PAPERS & HISTORIC DOCUMENTS**

McWilliam Family Papers. McWilliam family of Charlton/Glenville and allied Parkhill and Simpson families. Includes family bibles, photographs, correspondence, and genealogies. Gift of **Kathleen Johnson**

Gaige Homestead Papers. Gaige family of Delanson. Includes deeds, mortgages and leases, correspondence, receipts. Gift of **John Barr** on behalf of **Joyce Gaige**

Photographs of Eastholm Aviation Field. Gift of **Marilyn Bisgrove**

### **YEARBOOKS**

Vocational High School yearbook: *The Anvo* 1938, gift of **Fred A. Randall**

### **BOOKS**

*The Carr Family: A Book of Memories and Guide to the Records of the Sons of Italy in America*, gifts of **David V. Vrooman**

**FINDING AIDS** for the following collections have been added to [www.schenectadyhistory.net/library/collections](http://www.schenectadyhistory.net/library/collections): James Frost Papers; Charles and Douglas Snell WWII Correspondence

### *The Grems-Doolittle Library Blog*

Visit the Grems-Doolittle Library Blog today at: [www.gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com](http://www.gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com)

Readership of our Grems-Doolittle Library Blog has more than doubled in the past two months! The blog, which is updated about once a week, focuses on our collections and features brief posts about interesting events, people, and places in Schenectady's history. It is a great way to learn about resources we have to offer in the library and explore various aspects of local history. A few past blog topics include the Liberty Flag in Schenectady, a profile of Irving Eaton, the last surviving Civil War veteran in Schenectady County, and a look at the history of the phrase "Schenectady Lights and Hauls the World."

### **Workshop: Introduction to Genealogy Resources in the Grems-Doolittle Library**

Join us and discover the resources available for genealogical research in our library. Participants will develop strategies for best utilizing the Library's collections in researching Schenectady-area ancestors from the seventeenth through the twentieth century. The workshop will also include some time to conduct research in the library.

Choose one of two dates for this workshop: **Saturday, March 24, 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm**, or **Saturday, April 28, 2:00 to 4.00 pm**. Free for SCHS members, \$5 for non-members.

Registration is required and limited to 16 participants per workshop. To register, contact Melissa Tacke, Librarian/Archivist, at 518-374-0263, option 3, or by email to [librarian@schist.org](mailto:librarian@schist.org).

## **March - April Classes @ FEC**

**Saturday, March 17, 10 a.m. –noon: "Working with Polymer Clay,"** taught by **Deb Crosby**.

Learn to make polymer clay beads. Basic materials will be provided but students are encouraged to bring their own additional material. This class is for beginners through advanced. \$50 tuition plus \$35 for materials.

**Saturday, March 31 – Sunday, April 1**  
**Rectangular Market Basket** –Beverly Cornelius  
See [www.schenectadyhistory.net](http://www.schenectadyhistory.net) for details.

**Saturday, April 21, 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.**  
**Williamsburg Basket class** – Beverly Cornelius  
See [www.schenectadyhistory.net](http://www.schenectadyhistory.net) for details.

## **Programs, continued from Page 3**

**Saturday, March 31<sup>st</sup> at 2 p.m. @ the FEC**  
**"The Interpreter – A Story of Two Worlds"** lecture and book signing by author, **Robert Moss**. This is a vivid narrative of the clash of cultures on the colonial New York frontier. **Free to members - \$5 non-members**

**Saturday April 7<sup>th</sup>, at 2 p.m. @ the FEC**  
**Constructing Slavery: House form and Households in New York State, 1620-1827** Presented by **Walter Wheeler**. Little critical work has been conducted regarding the housing of slaves in New York State. House forms provided visual and spatial separation between the households of masters and enslaved servants. We explore spatial relationships in three types of kitchen.  
**Free to members, \$5 non-members**

**Sunday April 15<sup>th</sup> at 2 p.m. @ the FEC**  
A screening of the movie *A Night to Remember*, 100 years and one day since the night being remembered. **Admission is free, but donations appreciated**. This is a 1958 docudrama film adaptation of Walter Lord's 1955 book of the same name, recounting the final night of the *RMS Titanic*. This is by far the most historically accurate of the many *Titanic* movies made from 1912 through 1997; none of the actors plays a fictitious person.



## *Around the Society*



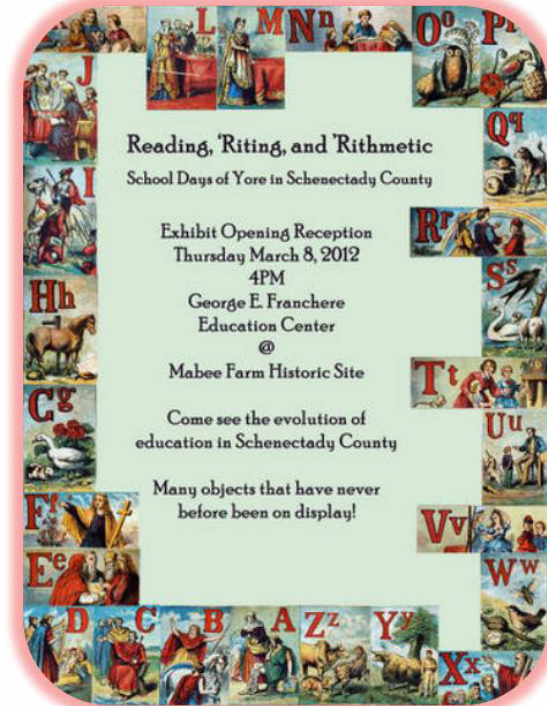
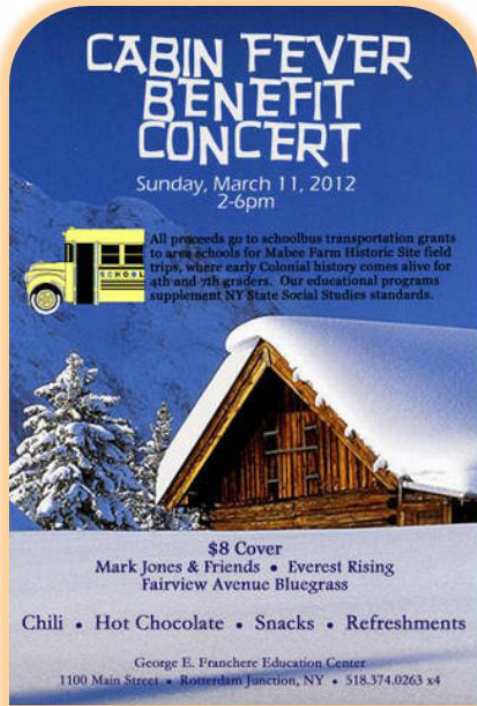
*Dr. Stuart Frank: Scrimshaw of Upstate NY program.*

*Photos: Kim Mabee, Jim Eignor, Laura Linder*

### *Colonial Festival Dinner at the George E. Franchere Education Center*



# Schenectady County Historical Society



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