



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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September-October, 2012

32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305 (518) 374-0263 FAX: (518) 688-2825

Website: www.schist.org

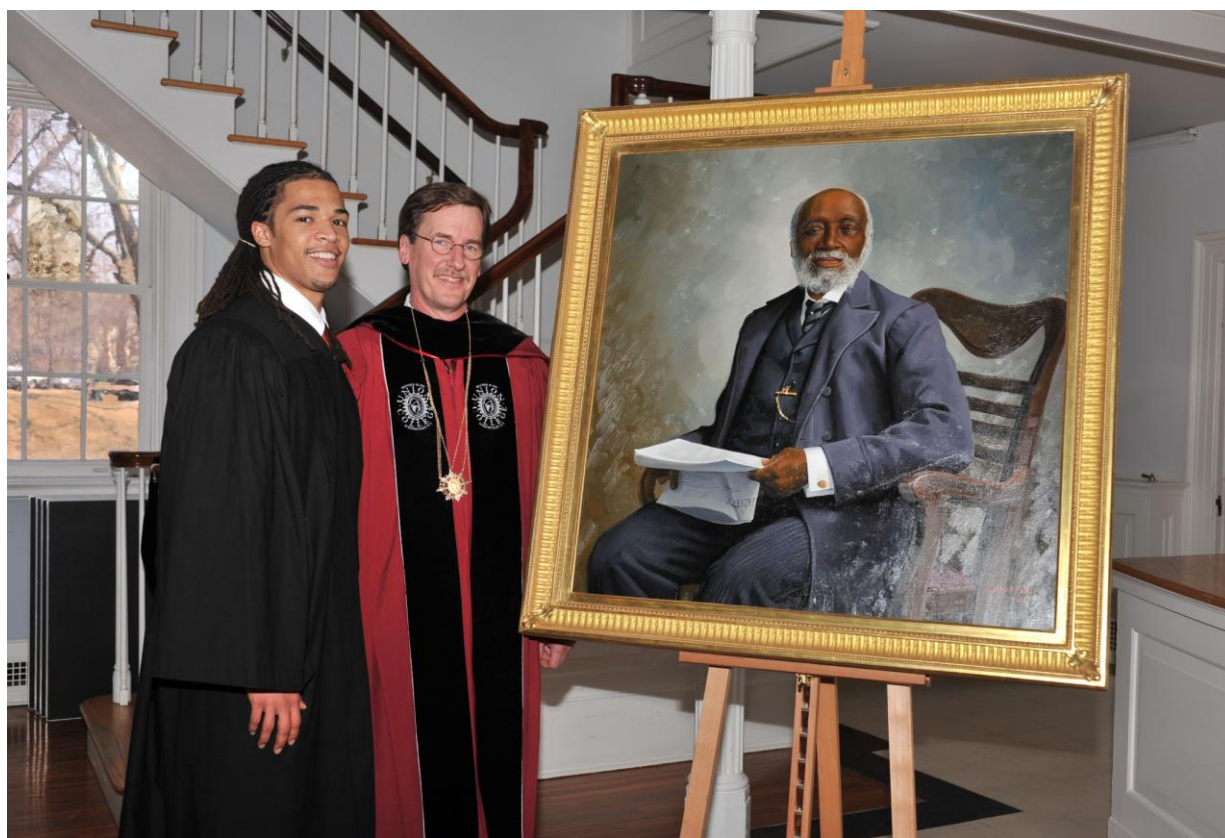
Editor email: rbergero@nycap.rr.com

Librarian email: librarian@schist.org

Curator email: curator@schist.org

Mabee Farm Historic Site 1080 Main St Rotterdam Jct., NY 12150

(518) 887-5073



Courtesy of Union College

Union College Founders Day of 2009 provided a venue for the unveiling of a portrait of Moses Viney by Jared Gourrier, Class of 2012 (at left), and President Stephen Ainlay (center). Viney was an escaped slave who fled from Maryland and found a new life at Union working for President Eliphalet Nott and his wife, Urania. The portrait was painted by renowned African-American artist Simmie Knox, who was present for the unveiling.

The National Negro Convention of 1844 in Schenectady

by Neil Yetwin

In 1817, African-Americans throughout the north began meeting to protest the American Colonization Society's plan to relocate free blacks to Liberia, West Africa. These gatherings gradually developed into the National Negro Convention, which sought to organize the abolition movement among free northern blacks, improve their socio-economic conditions, denounce slavery, and press for black voting rights. The Convention's first official meeting occurred on September 5, 1830 at Philadelphia's Bethel AME Church, and would convene 12 times prior to the Civil War in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Upstate New York, primarily at Buffalo, Rochester, Troy, and Syracuse.

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

This is a wonderful time of year for adventures visiting the various venues and beautiful historic places within the County of Schenectady and the Capital District region. Catch a show or concert; take a hike; visit a museum and one of the many historic sites. The Stockade Association has just launched a new smart-phone walking tour for the Schenectady Stockade detailing its architecture and chronological history. Printed copies of the instructions and a tour map are available at Society headquarters or can be viewed at the historicstockade.com website. What a great way to spend a late summer or early fall afternoon, wandering this unique, historically significant area!

The Society has been participating in the Blue Star Museums Program, offering free admission to all active duty service members and their immediate families, with many events scheduled for September and October: A War of 1812 Encampment weekend and one-day conference; presentations on trolleys and the African-American presence in Schenectady; workshops on basket making, nature painting, and drop spindles; a Fiber Fair; a Green Building tour; a Genealogy Day; and the Annual County-sponsored Farm and Foliage Day. Check the Society's webpage calendar for a full listing of all events.

Like to help the Society? Perhaps you have a life insurance policy that you really won't need for its originally intended purpose. Consider what a wonderful gift it could be. Bequeathing it to SCHS is quite easy; simply change its beneficiary to read *Schenectady County Historical Society* and let us know that you have done so. The proceeds will help further our work and your estate will benefit from an estate tax charitable deduction based on the value of the proceeds paid. It is even possible to obtain a current charitable deduction for yourself, depending on how the gift is made. To learn more about these and other possibilities, please call (518) 374-0263 (5) and ask for Donor Relations. Your gift will help ensure that Schenectady's heritage survives long into the future.

Enjoy the full benefits of your membership. Come and visit, early and often.

—Merritt



*Ona Curran at the Colonial Dinner at our George E. Franchere Education Center on February 4 of this year. Ona was a graduate of Hofstra University and held an M.A. in Museum Procedures from the State University's Coopers-town Graduate Program. She had been appraising art and antiques for over forty years, was a certified member of the Appraisers Association of America, and the author of several books on history and art, most recently, *Faces of Schenectady, 1715-1750*.*

In Memoriam

With great sadness, we regret to report the passing of Ona M. Curran, a towering figure in the history of the Society. Ona died on August 9 at age 88 in Esperance, where she had moved in 1990 after 25 years of residence in Schenectady and then Niskayuna. In death, she returned to both through her funeral mass at St. John's Church in the City and burial in Most Holy Redeemer Cemetery in Niskayuna. She is survived by sons Peter and Richard and grandchildren Hannah and Dylan. Her husband, Harold Curran, M.D., died in 2005.

Ona was a member of the Society for over 50 years. In the mid 1960s, she served as a Trustee and a one-year term as Director-Curator, then additional terms as Trustee in the early 1990s and again from 2004 to 2006. During that last term, she served as editor of this Newsletter and helped recruit our first full-time Curator, Kate Weller. As our "conservator of paintings," Ona reported that several of them needed restoration. To raise the necessary funds, she spearheaded an "Adopt-a-Portrait" project that realized \$19,000 in donations that was used to restore 15 paintings. No one in our history has had a greater role in raising the Society's level of professionalism.

Ave Atque Vale

—Ed Reilly

Exhibits and Programs: at 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, or at the George E. Franchere Education Center at the Mabee Farm Historic Site in Rotterdam Junction

For more information about events occurring at **32 Washington Avenue**, or at the **Mabee Farm Historic Site**, or at the **George E. Franchere Education Center (FEC)**, please check the Historical Society's website at schenectadyhistory.net or call the Historical Society at **(518) 374-0263** and listen for the option describing Programs. Call **(518) 887-5073** for information on programming at the Mabee Farm/ Franchere Education Center.

EXHIBITS – currently on display:

@ 32 Washington Avenue:

Smoke Eaters: History of Firefighting in the City of Schenectady

@ The FEC at the Mabee Farm Historic Site:

Quilting Through Schenectady County –
Displaying the Society's unique collection from the late 18th century to the mid 20th century, and:
Hurricane Irene: One Year after the August 2011 Storm - A photo exhibit

Programs

All programs are free for members and \$5 for non-members unless otherwise indicated.

Friday & Saturday, September 14 & 15, 2012

New Netherland Seminar

2-day seminar. Call the New Netherland Institute at (518) 486-1815 for information as to times, cost, and registration details. See also www.nnp.org.

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Sunday, September 16, 2012 at 2 PM

This Is Your Life in Quilts & Textiles

Speaker: Kris Driessen

Location: Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

Saturday & Sunday, September 22 & 23

War of 1812 muster – For details, see ad on Page 8

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Saturday, September 29, 2012, 9-11 AM

Drawing From Nature – taught by Deb Crosby

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site. **Tuition:** \$20

Saturday, September 29, 2012, 2 PM

Reflections on 19th-Century African-American

Presence in the City of Schenectady

Speaker: Marsha Mortimore

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Saturday, October 6, 2012, 10 AM - 4 PM

Annual Fiber Fair - For details, see Page 8

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Saturday, October 6, 2012 at 2 PM

Trolleys of the Capital District

Speaker: Gino DiCarlo

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Saturday, October 13, 2012

Farm & Foliage Day and Green Building Tour

For details, see ad on page 8. **Location:** Mabee Farm

Saturday, October 13, 2012 at 2 PM : Book Talk:

Longshore Soldiers: Life in a World War II Port

Battalion. Author: Andrew Brozyna. Discussion of the WW II experience of Schenectady native Cortland Hopkins: from welding tanks at ALCO, to storming the beaches in Normandy, to braving V-bombs in Antwerp.
Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Saturday, October 20, 2012, 10 AM – 4 PM

War of 1812 Seminar - Free and open to the public

See www.schenectadyhistory.net for speakers & topics.

Location: Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

Saturday, October 27, 2012, 9 AM to noon

Drop Spindle Class

Instructor: Pam Bucci. **Location:** Mabee Farm Historic Site. **Tuition:** \$50 plus \$5 for materials.

Saturday, October 27, 2012, 9 AM to 4 PM

Genealogy Day

Speakers: Michael Aikey- resources at the NYS Military Museum; John Gearing – understanding legal records; Joan Parslow – resources at the Albany Family History Center; Brian Kasler – funeral homes as a genealogy resource. **Location:** 32 Washington Avenue

October 27 - 28 Build a Shaving Horse

9 AM - 4 PM each day. **Location:** Mabee Farm Historic Site. **Tuition:** \$140 + \$40 for materials

October 27 - 28 - Beginning Blacksmith Class

9 AM - 1 PM each day. **Location:** Mabee Farm Historic Site. **Tuition:** \$150 including materials

On September 16, 1844 a delegation of African-Americans arrived at Schenectady's Union Hall (the site of the former Center City) to announce the fifth Annual Convention of the Colored Citizens of New York. The Rev. William Arthur (father of future President Chester A. Arthur, then a Union College freshman) of the Centre Street Baptist Church opened the church's facilities to the Convention, which began promptly on September 18th at 10:00 AM. The Convention's detailed minutes reveal a community with great hopes as well as many of the political and philosophical differences that would impact the African-American struggle for equality in the decades that followed. By the 1840s, for example, many black activists had become disillusioned by the "moral suasion" argument favored by abolitionists – that slaveholders would gradually come to see the error of their ways and free their slaves out of self-imposed guilt. Others continued to cling to the idea that emigration to Canada, Liberia, and the Caribbean would be preferable to a solid Black Nationalist movement in the United States.

It is not surprising that Schenectady was chosen as a site for that year's Convention. The city was a thriving metropolis of 6700 residents in 1844, and its prosperous merchants, humming factories, and the busy Erie Canal were fueling the economic boom that "the Gateway to the West" had been experiencing since after the War of 1812. More important, the city had become a kind of magnet for many of the era's activists and reformers, especially those involved in the abolitionist movement.



Gerrit Smith

Philanthropist-reformer Gerrit Smith, who helped found the antislavery Liberty Party and later lent financial support to John Brown for his raid on Harper's Ferry, had become radicalized after witnessing a violent mob attack upon 600 delegates at an 1835 antislavery meeting in Utica. On May 4, 1837 Smith brought his message to Schenectady's First Presbyterian Church, insisting that "the rights of men can no more turn on the color of the skin than on the color of the eye" and that "slavery is a crime" to be equated with murder and robbery, not be "enabled to find shelter behind the Constitution."

Moses Viney, a runaway slave from Maryland, arrived in Schenectady in 1840 via the Underground Railroad and was hired as a driver and messenger for Union College President Eliphalet Nott, who later purchased Viney's freedom.



Fugitive slave Charles Nalle is beset by an angry crowd in Troy.

The Rev. Horace G. Day, Rev. Arthur's successor at the Baptist Church, gave a fiery antislavery sermon on Thanksgiving of 1855 at the First Dutch Church, during which he praised abolitionists as heroes and damned slave traders as "evil traffickers in human flesh." Day's sermon ignited a rancorous public debate in the local press that lasted more than two months. And on April 27, 1860, Harriet Tubman personally escorted a manacled fugitive slave named Charles Nalle from the office of Troy's police commissioner. Amidst a shower of police clubs and objects thrown by an angry mob, Tubman ferried Nalle across the Hudson to Albany and put him on a wagon to Schenectady, where he escaped west via the Erie Canal.

The Schenectady Convention was held solely for the purpose of helping African-Americans “obtain an extension of the elective franchise.” Delegates pointed out that since America prided itself on the idea of the “consent of the people” and that “a numerous minority of the people of the state of New York (viz: the colored portion thereof) are not permitted fairly to vote,” then the Convention must “adopt all lawful and energetic means to secure an equally free exercise of the suffrage.”

County committees were directed to present relevant petitions to the state legislature as well as to the Convention’s Central Committee, which was then chaired by the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet. Garnet, the son of a fugitive slave, had attended New York’s African Free School, worked as a cabin boy on ships travelling back and forth to Cuba, and received theological training. He moved to Troy to teach school in 1839 and became pastor of the integrated Liberty Street Presby-



Rev. Henry Highland Garnet

terian Church three years later. Garnet became nationally famous for his “Call to Rebellion” at the August 1843 National Negro Convention in Buffalo, during which he encouraged African-Americans to “rather die freemen, than live to be slaves....Let your motto be resistance!” His appeal for armed black insurrection was voted down, but this did not stop him from urging a “black separatist” agenda at the Schenectady Convention. His stand on this issue has led many historians to characterize Garnet as “the Malcolm X of his day.” Garnet argued that since the Whig and Democratic parties had failed to press for black voting

rights, then blacks should refuse to support either party. The Schenectady Convention protested this tactic as “detrimental to that object” (obtaining the right to vote) and instead encouraged the delegates to support “the best interests of the whole people without regard to sect or party.” Garnet opposed this “Schenectady Resolution” as it came to be called, and moved to adjourn until later that evening.

The Convention resumed at 7:00 PM with Garnet decrying the “cunning of the delegates from New York City” who were trying to undermine his authority as Central Committee chairman. In his annual message, New York Governor William C. Bouck, a Democrat, had promised the committee his support for the black vote if the Convention’s minutes included expressions of support for his party, which the New York City delegates were anxious to do. The Convention then proceeded to vote on whether to follow Garnet’s lead in retreating from the political process or to continue petitioning whichever party agreed to support the idea of the black vote. Garnet’s local ties gave him considerably more influence than the three New York City delegates, even though they represented more than 20,000 free blacks. Of the 49 delegates, 38 fell in with Garnet; of these, 33 were from Schenectady and Troy, representing a total black population of less than 1000.

With Garnet’s victory, the New York delegation resigned from the Convention in disgust, stating that the vote “was a denial of the right of the people of New York.” Blacks failed to get Governor Bouck’s support for the vote because as one furious delegate pointed out, “those very minutes denounced the party to which Governor Bouck belonged.”

But Garnet’s militancy did not prevail. By 1848 the National Convention had permanently rejected all proposals supporting the use of force to promote black causes, suggesting instead that all policies be guided by “patriotism and informed opinion.” The final Convention would meet in Syracuse in 1864, just as 4 million African-Americans were about to be emancipated. Garnet died in 1882, only eight weeks after his appointment as the U.S. Minister to Liberia.

Despite the delegates’ vigorous disagreements regarding the different paths to equality, the Schenectady Convention’s concluding statement of September 20th best reflected its vision of the future: *“We ask for a citizenship based upon a principle so broad and solid that upon it black men, white men, and every American born can equally, safely, and eternally stand.”*

New Materials in the Library

BOOKS

Colonial Architecture for Those About to Build by

Wise & Beidleman, gift of **Vaughn Nevin**

The Do's and Don'ts of Yesteryear by Eric Sloane, *The*

Great Rope by Rosemary Nesbitt, and *A Land*

Beyond the River by Jack Casey, gift of **Carol Lewis**

Sgt. Frank L. Bush by Patricia Bush, gift of **the author**

Talk of the Town, v. II by Ed Reilly, gift of **Deb Crosby**

DVDs

Brieven Boven Water DVD (Episode airing June 6, 2012), gift of **Dutch public TV station KRO**

The Stockade: A Past Reclaimed DVD, gift of **Lee Bowden and Leah Bowden**

PERIODICALS AND NEWSPAPERS

Scrip (Central Park Jr. High newspaper),

1966-1969, gift of **David Katz**

Boulder (Oneida Jr. High newspaper) 1940-1975

(scattered issues), *Oneida Arrow* (1961-1966),

Accent (Linton H.S. literary magazine) 1965-1968, gift of **Donna Phillips**

HISTORIC DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Schenectady Blue Jays program (1946), score cards (1949-1957), and photograph, gift of **Rick Fitzgerald in memory of William J. Fitzgerald**

Lease between James C. Duane and Zacheus Mead,

Duanesburg, 1810, and notes from 1807-1812

Schenectady newspapers compiled by Alonzo P.

Walton, gift of **Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library**

Negatives of Nott Terrace H.S. and Central Park

School events, 1930s-1940s, gift of **Hershel Graubart**

Photograph of Schermerhorn House, Rotterdam, gift of **Marjorie Schmid**

Canal Square Existing Conditions Study and *Canal Square Corridor Redevelopment Plan*, gift of **Ruth Bergeron**

Photographs of Oneida School, gift of **Donna Phillips**

Unidentified photographs, gift of **Leonard Monte**

Slides of parades and bridge construction, Alplaus, 1968-1980, gift of **Susan Staver**

Print (drawing of Frank Taberski), gift of **Alan Ricker**

Material related to St. Columba's/St. Joseph's Schools, gift of **Eleanor-Ann Olbrich, Paul Swere, and Peter McGrath on behalf of the Class of 1961**

PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

Wadsworth S. Kokernak Photograph Collection, gift of **Michael Kokernak**.

The collection comprises one photograph album and numerous scanned copies of photographs taken by Wadsworth Kokernak, a photographer and for many years a lithographer for the Maqua Company. Subjects include GE outdoor lighting, family scenes, amateur and school sports, and the Crane Street neighborhood in Schenectady.

YEARBOOKS

Oneida Jr. H.S. (1929, 1971, 1972), Linton H.S. (1960, 1963, 1976), Nott Terrace H.S. (1948, 1950, 1951, 1957), gift of **Donna Phillips**

Nott Terrace H.S. (1950), Schenectady H.S. (1924) and Union College (1923), gift of **Frances H. Dowling**

Union College (1935-1938), Scotia H.S. (1939), and Central Park Jr. H.S. (1930), gift of **Marie S. Gorman**

Union College (1898), gift of **Joan B. Rogers**

Nott Terrace H.S. (1941-1942), gift of **Hershel Graubart**

NEW FINDING AIDS:

Correspondence (from our historic manuscripts collection);

Schenectady County Historical Society Slide Show Collection

To view these, visit

www.schenectadyhistory.net/library/collections .

Thursday Evening Hours Resume

After a hiatus during July and August, the Grems-Doolittle Library will remain open through 8 p.m. on Thursday evenings starting September 6.

Around the Society

Howlin' at the Moon with Everest Rising at the Mabee Farm



Early Technology Day at the Mabee Farm



Quilt Exhibit at the Franchere Education Center

Photos: Ann Aronson

Schenectady County Historical Society

War of 1812 Muster

September 22 & 23 (Sat & Sun)

10 am - 5 pm Sat and 10 am - 3 pm Sunday

Battles, cannon demos, drills, campfire cooking, kids drill, lecture on boats, mens & women's period fashion show.

\$4. pp, \$3. children & seniors (includes tour)

Mabee Farm Historic Site
Route 5s, Rotterdam Junction
887-5073

2nd Annual Fiber Fair

Saturday, October 6th

9 am - 4 pm



Handwovens, yarns, shawls, felt, scarves, hats, mitts, knitting kits and more. Dyeing demos, spinning, weaving etc.

\$3. adults, \$2. seniors & kids OR \$10.00 car

Mabee Farm Historic Site

Route 5s, Rotterdam Jct. (518) 887-5073

Farm & Foliage Day

Saturday, October 13th

11am - 4 pm



Pumpkin painting, scarecrow making, birds of prey, hayrides, pony rides, hands on activities with S/G Children's Museum, 4-H Club, music & much more!

Fun for
the whole
family!

Mabee Farm Historic Site
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