



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

Volume 57 Number 3-4

March-April 2014

32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305

(518) 374-0263 FAX: (518) 688-2825

Website: www.schenectadyhistorical.org

Email:

Editor: rbergero@nycap.rr.com

Library: librarian@schenectadyhistorical.org

Museum: curator@schenectadyhistorical.org

Office: office@schenectadyhistorical.org

mabee Farm: (518) 887-5073 FAX: (518) 887-5746



A 2008 photo of the GE Realty Plot home built in 1903 and occupied by Irving Langmuir, who, in 1932, became the first G.E. research scientist to win the Nobel Prize. The home was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

The Magnificent Achievements of John A. DeRemer

—by Frank Taormina

Every day we observe the surroundings we live in, noting, if we have been here for a period of time, the disappearance of buildings and streets we had become accustomed to seeing and the appearance of buildings and streets and roads in places we once denoted as “woods” and “pastures.” Among the many changes Schenectadians have experienced, and are still experiencing, are the creation, over a hundred years ago now, of the General Electric Company on the south side of the Mohawk River, on the “Great Flat” just west of the city, and the transformation of the 75-acre plot immediately east of Union College known as the “College Woods” into an upscale residential area with a history of its own. Significant municipal advances don’t just happen, they are brought about by people—particular individuals who undertake the activity necessary to bring about the change ultimately desired. This article is about one of them, John A. DeRemer, the person who played a role in helping to bring about both these changes – General Electric in Schenectady and the creation of the 75-acre residential area known as the “GE Plot.”

continued on pages 4-5

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MERRITT GLENNON
PRESIDENT

JAMES EIGNOR
VICE PRESIDENT

JOHN HALSTEAD
TREASURER

MARY TREANOR
ASSISTANT TREASURER
CYNTHIA SEACORD
SECRETARY

ANN ARONSON
RUTH BERGERON

MARIANNE BLANCHARD

ROBERT CARNEY
DEBORAH CROSBY
ELLEN FLADGER

JOHN GEARING

FRANK GILMORE

MICHAEL KARL

CAROLINA LAZZARI

CAROL LEWIS

RICHARD LEWIS

KIM MABEE

LAURA LEE LINDER

ROBERT PETITO

EDWIN REILLY

JAMES STROSBERG

ROBERT SULLIVAN

FRANK TAORMINA

STAFF

MELISSA TACKE
LIBRARIAN-ARCHIVIST

Vacant
CURATOR

JENNA PETERSON
*ASSISTANT CURATOR /
EDUCATOR*

JENNIFER HANSON
OFFICE MANAGER

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

As I write, the thermometer on my porch is stuck at four degrees and my house is surrounded with 15 inches of snow. I pray that the fat, furry Pennsylvania critter's prognostication is wrong!

Our calendar of events for this month and next offers many opportunities to forget the winter chill. An exhibit "The Story of Shoes" will open at the Franchere Center and local historian and former SCHS curator Marilyn Sassi continues her series on "Early Mohawk and Hudson Valley Life." At 32 Washington Avenue on March 25, local historian, author, and musician Neil Yetwin will speak of the exploits of War of 1812 hero Mordecai Myers. This winter and early spring the Mabee Farm's *Howlin'* music series has moved inside. On Friday March 14th Sean Quinn will provide an **Irish night**, and on April 15th the folk group Shadowland will perform.

The Society's Annual Meeting will be held on Saturday, April 12, at 32 Washington Ave. The Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2013 will be distributed, and the business portion of the meeting encompassing election of officers and trustees will be followed by the program "Professional Baseball in Schenectady, 1895-1904" by Frank Keetz. I ask Society members who cannot attend to help us ensure a legal quorum by mailing to the Office Manager at 32 Washington Avenue or emailing to office@schenectadyhistorical.org a message that names "SCHS Secretary" or a person of your choice as your proxy.

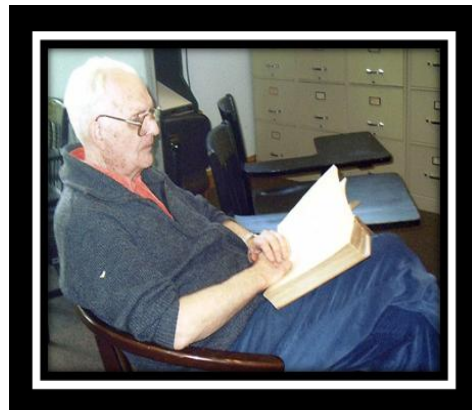
The early winter months have brought us sad news of the passing of our past president Bill Dimpelfeld; long time member Carolyn Veeder; and Mabee Farm Committee member, demonstrator, and local environmentalist Elwin "Win" Bigelow. Our condolences are extended to their families; we shall greatly miss their friendship and support.

Our preservation appeal letter has brought in \$7,700 to date, about a third of our goal. There is still ample time to send a donation, and, if you wish, to specify that it is a memorial to one of those mourned above. The proceeds will be used to scrape and paint 32 Washington Avenue and replace the flat roof area of the building.

Stay warm, we'll be able to put away our snow shovels soon. Come out and enjoy our many programs, events, and activities. And we would always welcome new volunteers who would like to help at our History Museum, Grems-Doolittle Library, or Mabee Farm.

Merritt

In Memoriam



Former Society President Bill Dimpelfeld doing research at his favorite spot in the Grems-Doolittle Library. Engraved in our memory, the photo will hang there forever.

William Anthony "Bill" Dimpelfeld, 84, died in Ellis Hospital on January 14. He was a native of Erie, Pennsylvania who subsequently lived in Virginia, Ohio, and New York. He was a Mechanical Engineer for G.E. for over 40 years, a resident of Scotia for 48 years, and a hands-on president of the Society from 1999 through early 2004. He loved architecture, music, gardening, and visiting historic sites. He was strong of hand, intellect, and personal generosity with a legacy that will be long remembered.

Exhibits and Programs – March and April 2014

For more information, please check our website, www.schenectadyhistorical.org or call us at (518) 374-0263 and listen for the option describing Programs. Please call (518) 887-5073 regarding programs at the Mabee Farm or Franchere Education Center. **EXHIBITS** and **PROGRAMS** are free for Society members; a \$5.00 charge for non-members applies unless otherwise noted.

EXHIBITS

@ 32 Washington Avenue

Portraits of Schenectady

Portraits of Schenectady citizens from the 19th and 20th centuries, chosen for their vibrancy and personality. Works of local artists Ezra Ames, John Wilkie, and H.M. Mott-Smith are included, as well as four sets of husband and wife portraits.

@ The Mabee Farm

Through April 29 – *Visions of the Past: Artwork of Jennifer Richard-Morrow*

New exhibit highlighting the work of local artist Jennifer Richard-Morrow's captivating images from around the Mohawk Valley, past and present.

Opening March 8 – *The Story of Shoes: Walking, Working, and Dancing Through the Ages*

A bride steps into her satin heels on her wedding day, a farmer pulls on his wooden clogs to head out into the fields, a businessman laces up his shoes before going into the office. The *Story of Shoes* exhibit showcases the stories hidden in our soles.

PROGRAMS

Tuesday, March 4 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Early Mohawk Valley Life ... Part 2: Revolutionary War

Speaker: Marilyn Sassi

Location: Franchere Center

Saturday, March 8 – 3:00-5:00 p.m.

The Story of Shoes Exhibit Opening

Come wearing your favorite shoes! The attendee wearing the shoe with the most interesting story will receive a special prize.

Location: Franchere Center

Tuesday, March 11 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Early Mohawk Valley Life ... Part 3: Post-Revolution

Speaker: Marilyn Sassi

Location: Franchere Center

Friday, March 14 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Winter Howlin' Concert

Performer: Sean Quinn

Location: Franchere Center

Cost: \$5.00

PROGRAMS, continued

Saturday, March 15 – 10:30 a.m.

Volunteer College: Introduction to Volunteering in the Grems-Doolittle Library

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Cost: Free for current or prospective volunteers

Tuesday, March 18 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Early Mohawk Valley Life ... Part 4: 19th Century

Speaker: Marilyn Sassi

Location: Franchere Center

Saturday, March 29 – 2:00 p.m.

Major Mordecai Myers: An American-Jewish Hero of the War of 1812

Speaker: Neil Yetwin

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Cost: Free and open to the public. Made possible through the New York Council for the Humanities *Speakers in the Humanities* program, with the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Saturday, April 12 – 2:00 p.m.

Annual Membership Meeting

Refreshments at 1:30, Business Meeting at 2:00,

Speaker at 2:15.

Professional Baseball in Schenectady, 1895-1904:

A Fascinating Footnote in Local History

Speaker: Frank Keetz

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Tuesday, April 15 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Winter Howlin' Concert

Performers: Shadowland

Location: Franchere Center

Cost: \$5.00

Saturday, April 26 – 11:00-3:00 p.m.

Earth Day Celebration

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: Free and open to the public

Saturday, May 10 – 2:00 p.m.

Anne Northup, Wife of Solomon Northup, Overcame Adversity

Speaker: David Fiske

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

John A. DeRemer was a graduate of Union College in 1857 at the age of 21, having come to that institution from the place where he grew up, the Town of Charlton, in Saratoga County. After graduation, he served for a period of time as a mathematics teacher, evidently pursuing the study of law at the same time, which would explain how and why he was admitted to the Bar in 1867. His law office, shown



above, was at 269 State Street, a building erected in 1811 by Sir John Johnson for Clarissa Putman, the mother of two of his children. When she died, Clarissa left the building to her daughter's husband's family and they named it Van Horne Hall. Sadly, it is no longer in existence.

DeRemer was active in many community activities through the Masons and through his role as a Union Alumnus, and somehow he established a relationship with Charles Stanford, who, in turn, established a relationship with Walter McQueen, an engineer employed by the Ellis family, to build locomotives. The ultimate result of these relationships was that Stanford wound up hiring McQueen to build locomotives and erected a two-building factory called the "McQueen Works" where this could be done. The lawyer who handled Stanford's business was none other than John A. DeRemer! So, when Stanford died and McQueen went back to work for Ellis, Edison's agent found the empty McQueen Works which Edison, who wanted to leave New York City, could put to good use. Who was it that handled the financial transaction that actually moved Edison's money into the hands of the Stanford family? It was John A. DeRemer!

Ultimately, the buildings Edison bought became the location where, in 1892, six years after Edison made his

purchase, at the behest of J. P. Morgan, the institution we call the General Electric Company came into existence.

Before the century ended, DeRemer became involved in another transformational event. G.E. had grown from 300 employees in 1886 to over 7,000 by 1899, and its leadership was concerned that Schenectady lacked the quality housing needed to attract and keep its top engineers and executives. At the same time, Union College was struggling with indebtedness. On March 1, 1899, the *Schenectady Evening Star* printed an announcement by John DeRemer, representing Union, that the College was willing to sell a 30-acre tract west of the campus known as the "College Pasture" and a 75-acre parcel to the east called the "College Woods." In the same issue, the paper editorialized that this represented an opportunity for an "enterprising syndicate" to purchase the land and establish some first class "villa-style" homes. Less than two months later, on May 6, 1899, this land was deeded to the Schenectady Realty Company, a G.E. subsidiary, and the process began which brought into existence the neighborhood now known as the GE Realty Plot. By 1927, the Plot contained over 100 homes, and in 1980 the entire neighborhood was recognized as a historic district and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. See www.realtyplot.org.

DeRemer's obituary in the Amsterdam, NY *Evening Recorder* in July of 2007 tells of his significant role in the community:

"John A. De Remer, 72, died at his home, 9 North Church Street, Schenectady, at 1:30 O'clock, Sunday morning. Death was due to Bright's disease, from which he had suffered for some months past. He was taken sick on January 16, and had been confined to his house since then. Mr. De Remer was one of the most prominent men of that city and had been associated with its affairs for years past. He was born in Charlton, Saratoga County, on October 14, 1835. In 1857 he was graduated from Union College and from 1858 to 1866 he was an instructor and professor of mathematics at the institution. He later studied law in the office of Judge J. S. Landon. He was admitted to the bar in 1867 and then associated in business with Judge Landon for a number of years. He was

appointed postmaster of Schenectady by President Grant In 1871 and then again later by President Garfield.

“At the time the McQueen locomotive company, which formerly owned a portion of the land now occupied by General Electric, became financially embarrassed, Mr. DeRemer was appointed Receiver. He sold the property to the Edison Electric Company, [one of the two] predecessor[s] to General Electric, and was instrumental in having it locate in Schenectady.

“Up to the time of his death, Mr. DeRemer was President of the Mohawk National Bank, the Vale Cemetery Association, a Trustee of Union College, a Trustee of the Children’s Home, and for some time was president of the national organization of the Phi Beta Kappa fraternity, an

office formerly occupied by Bishop Potter of New York. He was a member of the Alpha Delta Phi fraternity. For a long time Mr. DeRemer was a vestryman in St. George’s Church and was prominent in Masonic circles, being a past master of St. George’s Lodge number 6, F&AM, a member of St. George’s Chapter 157, former member of the Grand Lodge of the State of New York. As a lawyer he was widely known as the senior member of the firm of DeRemer and Angle.”

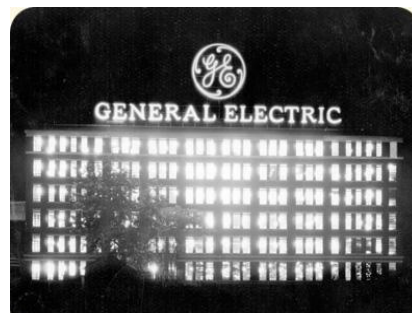
John DeRemer and his wife, Laura C. Warring DeRemer, rest quietly beneath a simple dignified cross which marks their resting place in Vale Cemetery, which he once served as president along with the many other roles he played in Schenectady in the service he so capably offered his fellow citizens before his life ended on July 1, 1907.



The partially completed GE Realty Plot in 1903



The Plot thickens



DeRemer’s other legacy

New Materials in the Library

BOOKS AND DVDS

Advanced Genealogy Research Techniques by George G. Morgan
Alplaus United Methodist Church: Centennial Memories, 1913-2013, gift of **Clifford Hayes**
Association Island by Timothy W. Lake
Black Soldiers of New York State: A Proud Legacy by Anthony F. Gero
The Evolution of an Historic House: The Saga of 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, 1703-1921 by Susan Staffa, gift of **Werner Feibes**
The Family Tree Problem Solver: Tried-and-True Tactics for Tracing Elusive Ancestors by Marsha Hoffman Rising
A Far Cry From Freedom: Gradual Abolition (1799-1827): New York State's Crime Against Humanity by L. Lloyd Stewart
From D'burg to Jerusalem: The Unlikely Rise and Awful Fall of a Small-Town Newsman by Carl Strock
Hidden History of the Mohawk Valley by Bob Cudmore
From Vision to Action: Best Practices to Reduce the Impact of Poverty in Communities, Education, Healthcare, and More by Bonnie Bazata, et al.
A History of Negro Slavery in New York by Edgar J. McManus
The Genealogist's Guide to Researching Tax Records by Carol Cook Darrow
German Folk Arts of New York State by Mary Antoine De Julio
Insects of New England & New York by Tom Murray
Integrating Delmar: The Story of a Friendship by Cunningham and Westbrook
The Jarring Interests: New York's Boundary Makers, 1664-1776 by Philip J. Schwarz
Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877 by David N. Gellman
Land & Property Research in the United States by E. Wade Hone
Lemuel Smith and the Compulsion to Kill: The Forensic Story of a Multiple Personality Serial Killer by Denis Foley
A Light in the Window: The City Mission of Schenectady by Chris Graf
Military Bounty Land, 1776-1855 by Christine Rose
The Navigators: A Journal of Passage on the Waterways of New York, 1793 by Philip Lord, Jr.
No Votes for Women: The New York State Anti-Suffrage Movement by Susan Goodier
Opening Statements: Law, Jurisprudence, and the Legacy of Dutch New York by Albert M. Rosenblatt

BOOKS AND DVDS, continued

Philip Hooker and His Contemporaries, 1796-1836, gift of **Werner Feibes**
The Pieces Come Together...At Last: The Memoirs of an Adult Adoptee and Her Sister by Patricia Walsh and Arlene Loucks
The Place Beyond the Pines (2012)
They Became Americans: Finding Naturalization Records and Ethnic Origins by Loretto Dennis Szucs
Transatlantic Pieties: Dutch Clergy in Colonial America by Leon van den Broeke
Union College Alumni in the Civil War, 1861-1865
Unpuzzling Your Past: A Basic Guide to Genealogy by Emily Anne Croom, gift of **Mary Lynn Davidson**

HISTORIC DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

27 Schenectady ham radio QSL cards, ca. 1950s, gift of **Shaun Purcell**
Seating arrangement program from Samuel Stratton dinner (1988), gift of **Mardy Moore**
Slides of home and gardens of H.G. Reist of Avon Road (1962), gift of **Augusta Prince**

Library Seeking Telephone Books

The Grems-Doolittle Library is currently seeking local telephone books for the years 1969-1974, and any local telephone books issued before 1960. Please call Librarian/Archivist Melissa Tacke at 518-374-0263, option 3, or email librarian@schenectadyhistorical.org if you are interested in donating telephone books. We are also continually seeking yearbooks from public and private schools in Schenectady County.

Help Make Our Wishes Come True!

The Grems-Doolittle Library is reaching out to members and friends to raise funds to purchase a digital microfilm reader/scanner. The Library's microfilm reader is frequently used by our researchers and volunteers. Researchers can only print to paper, and the image printed from microfilm is often not of the highest quality. The traditional microfilm reader also offers a relatively dim backlight, which can make microfilm difficult to read. The investment in a digital microfilm reader/scanner would allow for greater flexibility in output (printing, scanning and saving to PC or to flash drive) as well as increased readability. This investment would allow us to better serve our researchers, and make important volunteer tasks, such as microfilm indexing projects, more efficient. If you're interested in contributing, please contact Librarian/Archivist Melissa Tacke at 518-374-0263, option 3, or email librarian@schenectadyhistorical.org.

Around the Society



Trustee Bob Carney sworn in as Schenectady County District Attorney at the Franchere Center.



Jean Reilly and Congressman Paul Tonko getting refreshments.



Trustees Bob Carney and Ed Reilly enjoy the reception.



Trustees Laura Linder and John Halstead recruiting new members.



*Win Bigelow
[3/17/1936–1/16/2014]
A long time
Mabee Farm
volunteer whom we
sorely miss.*



Howlin' at the Moon - Running the River

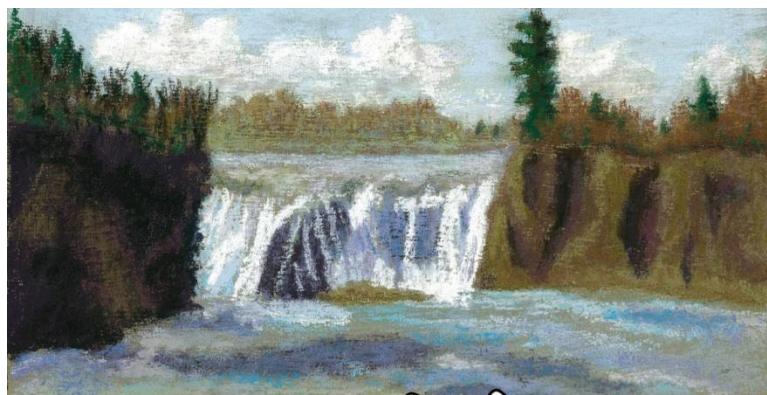


Schenectady County Historical Society
32 Washington Avenue
Schenectady, New York 12305

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 862
Albany, NY

Schenectady County Historical Society



Visions of the Past

ARTWORK BY JENNIFER RICHARD-MORROW

On Display January 31st - April 29th - Exhibit Reception 3/22/14 @ 3:00pm
Mabee Farm Historic Site - 1100 Main Street Rotterdam Junction, NY - (518) 887-5073



If your shoes could speak,
what would they say?

On Display March 8 - June 28 @ Mabee Farm Historic Site
Opening Reception 3/8/14 @ 3:00pm