



Schenectady County  
Historical  
Society

# Newsletter

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November-December 2014

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*The second home of the **Second Reformed Church of Schenectady** on Morris Avenue whose cornerstone was dedicated on April 23, 1910, by Dr. Charles C. Duryee, the son of Isaac Duryee who had died 56 years earlier. But the building incorporates the bell tower and several stained glass windows from the original church that had been built by the Reverend Isaac Groot Duryee in 1855 (see page 5). The Church ceased operation in 1997 and the building was sold to the **Tabernacle of New Hope** in 2001.*

## THE REVEREND ISAAC GROOT DURYEE, SCHENECTADIAN

By Frank Taormina

What possession can be of greater value to a human being than "personal dignity"? As the question is asked it brings to mind the memorable words of the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, "that all Men are created equal", "that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness..." And what greater violation of human dignity can there be than the assertion that one human being has the right to enslave another? There are few persons who voiced these sentiments with greater persistence and determination than Isaac Groot Duryee, who was at one time, pastor of the Second Reformed Church and hence a member of the Schenectady community.

*continued on pages 4-5*

## *Letter from the President*

### **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

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*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.**



Fall is "Back to School" time, and the school bell has been ringing hard at the Historical Society. The Education arm of the Society at the Mabee Farm Historic Site has held seven student programs ranging from our established "Colonial Kids" to "The Apprentice" and "History Mysteries," both newly developed by educator Jenna Peterson-Riley. At the Grems Doolittle Library, Librarian Melissa Tacke has hosted Babette Faehmel's Schenectady County Community College's American History class as students learned to use original documents to research their topics. The River Run Montessori School's fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students also visited Melissa to learn about maps, and took advantage of Assistant Curator Kaitlin Morton-Bentley's recently designed Colonial Walking Tour of the Stockade. Students from Schalmont High School also participated in the Colonial Walking Tour of the Stockade and took a tour of our Museum with Curator Mary Zawacki.

The staff has also hosted eight interns from local colleges this past year, both bachelors and masters candidates from SUNY at Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, and New Paltz State Colleges; and at Hamilton, Union, and Monmouth College of Illinois. The interns learned by working with our collections and helping with planning education programs and designing exhibits.

The Society has been incredibly fortunate to have many dedicated volunteers whose labors extend our ability to serve those who visit our museum, library, and Mabee Farm Historic Site far beyond what our professional staff could do alone. We love them all, and thank them from the bottom of our hearts. This year we began a new tradition of choosing two "Volunteers of the Year," so congratulations to *Gardener Extraordinaire* Nancy Wasmund, and *Wearer of Many Hats* John Angilletta. Those who have visited us at 32 Washington Avenue recently have seen the results of Nancy's work on the front garden and side planters, and at the George E. Franchere Education Center at the Mabee Farm you had a chance to admire her wonderful work all around the site. John has done almost every volunteer job we have, as a docent, tour giver, receptionist, handy-man who comes running whenever needed. Thank you both!

In the last issue of this Newsletter, I mentioned the "Get Ready" grant from The Museum Association of New York that has helped us to begin work on a new five-year plan for the Society. We would be interested in any thoughts members might have on these questions:

1. **Why did you choose join the Schenectady County Historical Society?**
2. **What do you most value about your membership?**
3. **How do you envision our role in serving Schenectady County in the future?**

We'd be happy to receive any thoughts you might choose to share by dropping off a note to me at HQ or by email to [president@schenectadyhistorical.org](mailto:president@schenectadyhistorical.org)

*—Marianne*



## **Where Do You Come From?**

**-An exhibition of artwork exploring our community's roots.**

**Exhibition opens Saturday, November 15, at 2:00 pm.**

**Visit [schenectadyhistorical.org](http://schenectadyhistorical.org) for more information.**

## *Exhibits and Programs – November and December 2014*

For more information, please check our website, [www.schenectadyhistorical.org](http://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**

Through November 14 – *Canals & Railroads*

A traveling exhibit exploring the beginnings of the canal era and New York State's early railroads.

November 28 through December 12

#### **8th Annual Festival of Trees**

A glittering display of lit trees, decorated by local businesses, organizations, and families. This year's festival is complemented by a special exhibition of teddy bears!

**Locations:** 32 & 44 Washington Avenue

**Cost:** \$5.00 adults, \$2.00 children, children 5 and under free. Purchase of a ticket applies to both display venues.

Opening January 10 – *Boomtown: Immigration, Technology, and Schenectady*

Schenectady's population exploded in the early 1900s as immigrants from Poland, Italy, and beyond streamed into the city. This exhibit explores Schenectady's "boomtown" era, and the vital relationship between industry, technology, and immigration.

#### **@ Franchere Education Center, Mabee Farm**

Through February 7 – *Hops & Hogsheads: Beer from Colonial to Craft Brew*

The exhibit explores the impact beer has had in the area, from the early Dutch settlers and winding through history to today's two Schenectady County breweries.

Opening November 11 – *Where Do You Come From?*

Featuring original artwork from local artists, *Where Do You Come From?* explores identity, heritage, and the tapestry of cultures that makes up Schenectady County today.

### **PROGRAMS**

**Friday, November 7 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

#### ***Howlin' at the Moon Concert***

**Performers:** Everest Rising

**Location:** Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

**Cost:** \$5.00

**Saturday, November 8 – 9:00 a.m.**

#### ***Scandinavian Ornament Workshop***

Participants will create three wheat ornaments including a large star suitable for tree topping, and a reindeer ornament made using ash or painted watercolor paper.

**Pre-registration required; call 518-887-5073.**

**Location:** Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

**Cost:** \$50.00; includes materials.

### **PROGRAMS, continued**

**Saturday, November 8, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.**

**Sunday, November 9, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.**

#### ***Capital District Civil War Roundtable***

See [www.cdcwrt.net](http://www.cdcwrt.net) for program details and registration.

**Location:** Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

**Cost:** \$65.00 (11/8), \$30.00 (11/9). Not including meals.

**Saturday, November 15**

***Where Do You Come From? Student Heritage Essay Seminar – 12:00 p.m.***

***Where Do You Come From? Art Exhibit Opening – 2:00p***

**Location:** Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

**Thursday, November 20 – 6:00 p.m.**

***Electric City: General Electric in Schenectady – Book Talk and Signing***

**Speaker:** Julia Kirk Blackwelder

**Location:** 32 Washington Avenue

**Saturday, November 22 – 2:00 p.m.**

***Upper Hudson Valley Beer – Book Talk and Signing***

**Speakers:** Craig Gravina and Alan McLeod

**Location:** Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

**Saturday, December 6 – 8:00 a.m.-8:15 p.m.**

#### ***Brooklyn Museum Bus Trip***

Travel in style with SCHS for a private guided tour of the Brooklyn Museum's Dutch period rooms and collections. Afterwards, explore the Brooklyn Museum's exhibits, grab a bite to eat, and enjoy New York City at Christmastime!

**Pre-registration required; call 518-887-5073.**

**Location:** Bus leaves from Mabee Farm Historic Site.

**Cost:** \$85.00; includes bus, admission, and guided tour.

**Saturday, December 13 – 2:00 p.m.**

***A Folklorist's Look at the Changing Demographics of Schenectady and the Mohawk Valley***

**Speaker:** Ellen McHale

**Location:** Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

**Sunday, January 4 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

#### ***Howlin' at the Moon Concert***

**Performers:** To be announced.

**Location:** Franchere Center, Mabee Farm Historic Site

**Cost:** \$5.00

**Saturday, January 10 – 2:00 p.m.**

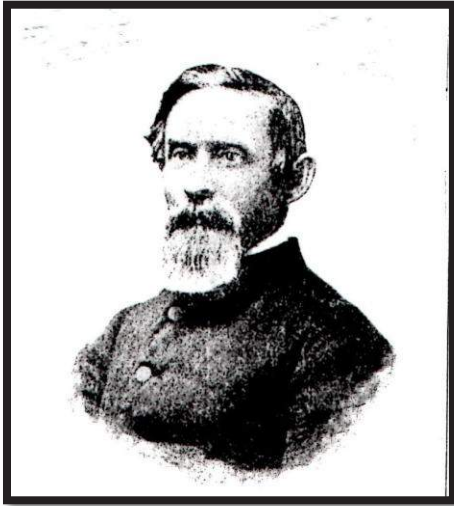
***Shtetl on the Mohawk: Jews of Schenectady***

**Speaker:** Harvey Strum

Also opening reception for exhibit *Boomtown: Immigration, Technology, and Schenectady*.

**Location:** 32 Washington Avenue





*The Reverend Isaac Groot Duryee (1810-1866)*

Isaac Groot Duryee was born in Glenville on July 29, 1810, graduated from Union College in 1838, went on to become a clergyman, served as pastor of Reformed Churches in Woodburne and Glenham in Sullivan County for ten years, and returned to Schenectady in 1852 to serve as the first minister of the Second Reformed Church. He became the Chaplain of the 81<sup>st</sup> Regiment of the Union Army during the Civil War, and shortly after completing that service on February 8, 1866, died of sickness contracted during his military service. A surviving document cites this more detailed summary of his life:

**Born Schenectady, N. Y. July 29, 1810**

**Phillips Academy**

**Union College 1838**

**Yale Seminary 1839-40**

**Andover Theological Seminary 1841**

**Ordained July 13, 1842**

**Pastor, Reformed Church, Fallsburg, NY 1842-51**

**Glenham 1851-52**

**Schenectady 2<sup>nd</sup> Reformed Church 1852-58**

**Port Jackson Reformed Church 1859-62**

**Chaplain 81<sup>st</sup> NY Vols 1862-66**

**Died Schenectady February 8, 1866**

We are reminded of Isaac Groot Duryee's presence in Schenectady by the Duryee Memorial American Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Memorial Church, a historically African-American denomination. The church, at 307 Hulett Street, exists because "By his earnest personal efforts he succeeded in erecting it for the exclusive use and benefit of our colored population." He achieved this while he was in his junior year at Union College. At the dedication of the church shortly after its completion, he, along with

Union College President Eliphalet Nott, gave speeches at a ceremony attended by most of the Union faculty.

That Reverend Duryee understood and valued the right of every individual to the possession of "personal dignity" is testified to by the role he played as an abolitionist in the communities where he served as a minister in the Hudson and Mohawk Valley. A typical tribute to him stated that "He was an abolitionist and not afraid to speak when it was yet unpopular to advocate the rights of common humanity for all."

In June of 1855 he is quoted: "The question of Slavery is the great question of the Christian Church, and when the line is drawn I shall not be slow to show which side I am on. Sir, I am on the side of Liberty – Freedom. Here I stand as a Man and as a Christian Minister." And again, in the same discourse, he states his feelings: "I am a northern man; I have been reared under the principles of Liberty and Freedom. But Sir, I must say for myself, that I am not here prepared to discuss the question of the sinfulness of Slavery *per se*, or whether it, or the great principles of Abolition be right or whether it be proper to receive those who hold slaves in the Christian Church. I am in conscience opposed to the system of Slavery, and I can say on this floor as a once a distinguished member of this body said of it on another occasion, that however I may feel about individuals, I hate it—I abhor it."

Married to Lydia Augur Bennington on June 1, 1842, he and his wife became the parents of eight children, the youngest of whom, Charles, went on to become a prominent member of the Schenectady Community as a Medical Doctor who served as Mayor of Schenectady from 1898-1899 and 1910-1911, and, we note with pride, additionally, from 1907 to 1909, as the second President of the Schenectady County Historical Society.

From the records we have, we learn that Isaac Duryee came to Schenectady from Glenville in 1826 when he was 16 years old. He earned a living, first as a clerk in a grocery store, then later as a businessman who started his own grocery store. What seems notable to me is that he did not enter college until after he completed an apparently successful, five-year career in business, a decision that deferred his graduation until 1838, when he was 28 years old, which was very unusual for the time he lived in.

Duryee's interest in religion can be traced back to 1832 when he "experienced Religion at a revival, united with the Dutch Reformed Church under the care of Dr. Jacob Van Vechten, and very soon after began his studies preparatory to the ministry." In his preparation for the ministry, he didn't go directly to Union College, but first attended Phillips Academy in Massachusetts.

A lengthy article in our Historical Society files emphasizes the zeal he possessed for the anti-slavery movement: "As a young man, Duryee's devotion to the abolitionist cause became apparent. By the mid-1830s, he was contributing to the American Anti-Slavery Society. During his time as a student at Union College, from which he graduated in 1838, Duryee co-founded an Anti-Slavery Society at the college in 1836 and one for the City of Schenectady in 1838. He also helped to found the first African-American church in Schenectady, known as the African Church (now the Duryee Memorial AME Zion Church), in 1837. As President of the Union College Anti-Slavery Society, Duryee wrote that the group would "cease not in every proper way to vindicate [slaves'] cause until their wrongs shall have been redressed and the last vestige of slavery be wiped from our beloved republic." In addition to his public agitation for the freedom of slaves and the rights of African-Americans, his granddaughter, Ruth M. Duryea, wrote in 1937 for a Union alumni record that Duryee was active with the Underground Railroad, helping "many an escaping negro from Schenectady to the next stop, with the negro lying flat under hay in the back of the wagon."



*The original Second Reformed Church  
at the corner of Jay and Liberty Streets, 1856-1909*

His obituary in the *Schenectady Republican* of February 10, 1866, notes his effort in the creation of the building which once housed the Second Reformed Church at the corner of Jay and Liberty Streets. In an entry in the Historical Society files we read: "November 18, 1852, the Reverend I. G. Duryee was installed pastor of the church. In 1854, the lot for the church was purchased, and the work of raising funds to build a church was immediately begun. On July 4, 1855, the cornerstone of the present church was laid, and it was completed a year later, in September, 1856."

The Second Reformed Church prospered greatly under Rev. Duryee's pastorate until the spring of 1858, when his health failed and he took what he thought would be a brief vacation to recuperate. The church agreed to "supply" the pulpit in his absence, and the Reverend Artemus Dean was engaged to serve in his absence. But the change ultimately led to a conflict within the congregation, and Reverend Duryee was never allowed to return to his post as Pastor. Disheartened, he left Schenectady and went to Port Jackson in Montgomery County. Three years later, a year after the outbreak of the Civil War, he joined the Union Army as Chaplain of the 81<sup>st</sup> regiment. He was assigned to a Confederate prison in Richmond, Virginia.



*Libby Prison, Richmond, Virginia*

Libby Prison had an infamous reputation for the overcrowded and harsh conditions under which Union prisoners of war were kept. They suffered from disease, extreme malnutrition, and a high mortality rate, and chaplains suffered as well. A mere five months after his discharge in 1865, Reverend Duryee died in Schenectady on February, 8, 1866, and was buried in Vale Cemetery. His gravestone reads "A firm friend of the colored people."

Isaac Groot Duryee's obituary concludes with this moving description: "Mr. Duryee was preeminently a man of warm heart and great purity of purpose. His life has been one long, earnest struggle against great difficulties on one hand and the accomplishment of important undertakings on the other. He made many friends, and though ever grateful to all, and to none more than to the late Cornelius S. Groot, who gave him assistance and encouragement in his times of greatest need, all can see that his success was secured by his incentive to noble exertion, as his death is an encouragement to faith. A more high-minded citizen, a more honest and noble souled man, a more sincere and devoted Christian minister does not survive him. We mourn his departure."

-Frank Taormina

The author is indebted to **Melissa Tacke**, Librarian of the Society's Grems-Doolittle Library, for posting her research regarding Isaac Groot Duryee on the Library blog. Select: [gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com/search/label/Churches](http://gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com/search/label/Churches).

## *Mobile Compact Shelving Installed in Archives Storage Area*

The Grems-Doolittle Library has received a donation of mobile compact shelving from Legere Restorations of Schenectady. The shelving has a maximum storage capacity of over 1,500 cubic feet.



*View of mobile compact shelving from center aisle*

The addition of mobile compact shelving to one side of the Library's archival storage area has increased its maximum storage capacity by over 40%. The added space provided by the mobile shelving allows for the Library to better care for its unique collections of personal papers, photograph collections, organizational records, and business records, and makes room for new acquisitions. The reconfiguration of the archival storage area also provides a work area for processing incoming acquisitions and storage space for paintings.

Mobile compact shelving consists of shelving that is mounted on wheeled carriages that travel on rails mounted on the floor. With mobile compact shelving, fixed aisles are not required between every stack; the stacks can be compressed into a smaller space and a single aisle is created as needed by rolling the stacks apart to access a specific section. The shelving, which had been used for document storage by Legere Restorations, was donated to SCHS in September and installed by them at cost. The Library has sorely needed mobile compact shelving for our archival storage area for many years, but the cost of such shelving was far out of our reach. To have it donated to us is truly a dream come true, one for which we are very thankful to our donor, Legere Restorations. —MT



*SCHS Librarian/Archivist Melissa Tacke smiles across empty shelves after the installation.*

## *New Materials in the Library*

### **BOOKS**

*Abel Brown, Abolitionist* ed. by Tom Calarco  
*Congressman John L. Schoolcraft and His House* by Alice Begley  
*Diners of the Capital District* by Mike Engle  
*ECOS Ski & Snowshoe Tips* by ECOS  
*Forgot to Say Goodbye: The Cherelle Clarke Story* by Lisa Seymour  
*Ghosts of Proctor's Theatre* by Winifred Elze  
*Keeping Time: The Life and Loves of Drummer Fred Randall*, gift of **Angela Cave**  
*People of Albany and the Civil War* by Peter Hess  
*Pictorial History of Albany's Jewish Community* by Morris Gerber  
*To Elevate and Adorn the Mind* by Louise Copeland Marks

### **DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS**

A reply postcard to the Schenectady Fire Department and 6 NYCRR tickets, gift of **Leonard Monte**

A 1936 photograph from the Princetown school on Pangburn Road, gift of **Evelyn Incitti**

### **YEARBOOKS**

Draper H.S. (1958, 1959), gift of **Robert Rourke**

Draper H.S. (1941, 1944), gift of **Evelyn Incitti**

Schalmon H.S. (1965), given in loving memory of **Dave Pasquariello by his family**



## Around the Society



*Samantha Couture checks Flo Bigelow's book for preservation.*



## Walkabout 2014



*Photos: Ann Aronson*

## Brooklyn Museum Bus Trip



**Saturday December 6, 2014**

Enjoy a private, guided tour of the Brooklyn Museum's Dutch period rooms and collections!

\$85.00 for bus, admission, & tour

Departs Mabee Farm at 8:00 AM

More info at [schenectadyhistorical.org/bus-trip](http://schenectadyhistorical.org/bus-trip)

## BOOMTOWN



## Immigration, Technology, & Schenectady

Exhibit opens 01/10/15 at

Schenectady County Historical Society

2:00 PM reception will feature a talk by Harvey Strum, titled *Shtetl on the Mohawk*

\$5.00, free for members





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

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## *Schenectady County Historical Society*

# 2014 Festival of Trees

November 28 - December 14

Monday-Friday 9-5

Sunday & Saturday 10-4

Adults \$5    Children \$2

Children under 5 free

Presented by the Schenectady County  
Historical Society and the YWCA

32 & 44 Washington Ave. Schenectady

[www.schenectadyhistorical.org](http://www.schenectadyhistorical.org)  
[www.ywca-northeasternny.org](http://www.ywca-northeasternny.org)