



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

Volume 55 Number 1-2

January-February 2012

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The Gilbert and Ellice Islands are neighboring groups of South Pacific islands named, respectively, for Thomas Gilbert and Edward Ellice (1783-1863), son of the Schenectady fur trader Alexander Ellice, the subject of this month's cover article.

Across the Pond: The Search for Alexander Ellice in England

By Heather Cunningham

Readers may remember my article that appeared in this Newsletter in 2009 about the fur trading Ellice brothers. That article introduced them as prominent residents of Schenectady prior to the American Revolution. Being a loyalist family, all but one of the Ellice brothers left Schenectady in the 1770s. But what became of them after they left Schenectady, and did they maintain ties to either the place or the people? These are questions that deserved further study, and so my search for more information about the brothers extended across the Atlantic, to England.

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

TURNING, TURNING, TURNING THROUGH THE YEARS

I write a few days before New Year's Day, with a song from the 25th Anniversary celebration of *Les Miserables* playing in the background, the inspiration for my chosen title. The lyrics of the song, *Turning*, are rather pessimistic, which doesn't fit my mood now, or ever. As historians, we study and promulgate the past, but do so while planning to tell its story in the future. 2011 "was a very good year" as Frank would say. (No, not Frank S., Frank T., T as in *Taormina*, a past president whom I call the *Dean of our Trustees*, and "our MVP.")

Frank is also chair of our Program Committee, but he tells me that our young new energetic staff has been scheduling programs, events, and displays so fast that he hardly ever needs to call a committee meeting. Peek ahead to pages 3, 6, and 8 and count what's ahead for our members and visitors as we start *turning* into just the first two months of the New Year. I count two Exhibits, one in the Vrooman Room and one at the new George E. Franchere Education Center at the Mabee Farm, and seven Programs. Nine events in two months must surely qualify for the *Guinness (Stout?) Book of World Records* (for a historical society, that is). Something for everyone.

Of these, the annual Schenectady Colonial Festival is the most significant with respect to Society finances. Proceeds from every year's Festival always go to some Schenectady not-for-profit organization, but only in special years is SCHS the beneficiary, and 2012 will be one of them. More specifically, funds raised are targeted to support Mabee Farm operations. As I mentioned in my last Letter, we expended a great deal of capital to build the gorgeous new Franchere Education Center (FEC), and the added expense of running it six days a week will present a challenge to our ability to craft a balanced budget for our 2012 fiscal year that starts April 1 (no fooling). In keeping with this year's Colonial Festival theme, the event will be held right in the *John & Sally van Schaick Lecture Hall* (and dining room) of the FEC. The co-chairs of the event are Trustee Laura Lee Linder and Mabee Farm Historic Site Manager Pat Barrot. See the back cover for the colorful details. More particularly, *turn* to the bottom of page 7 and reach for your scissors. Come. Bring money. It's for a great cause. ('cause we need it, that's why.)

—Ed



Jo Mordecai

IN MEMORIAM

We note with great sadness the passing of Jo Mordecai, the Society's *Coordinator of Exhibits* for sixteen years until her retirement in 2004. Born Joan Boniface in Maidenhead, England, in 1923, she died on October 21 at St. Mary's Hospital in Amsterdam, NY. She had met her future husband, Max Mordecai, during World War II while she worked as a volunteer telephone operator in England and Max was serving with the US Army in France. Max died in 2001 after 55 years of their marriage. The couple had three children, Vance, Mallory, and Glen. Jo loved to paint, read mysteries, and sing. She was much beloved, and had a special bond with the professional co-workers of her era, Librarian Elsie Maddaus and Office Manager Johanna Woldring.

Requiescat in pace

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

Opening January 16 @HQ

Highlights of the Mynderse Collection

Free to members - \$5 to non-members

Courtesy of the Schenectady Museum, SCHS recently acquired a massive collection of artifacts 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 Schenectady. This exhibit will highlight a small sampling of this donation, parts of the ceramic, textile, and doll collection. Also on display will be objects such as powder horns, furniture, and paper objects. This is a great opportunity to see a one-of-a-kind collection that spans the 18th through the 20th century.

Now on view @FEC: *Light on New Netherland*

Free to members - \$5 to non-members

Light on New Netherland is a traveling exhibition designed by the New Netherland Institute. Its content goes far beyond what is currently offered on the subject and presents material not readily available to the public. The exhibit consists of 28 panels that introduce adults and children to important but not well-known aspects of American history and culture. Panel topics include: Introduction, *Patria*, the Dutch Seaborne Empire, Ships and Sailing, the Atlantic World, the West India Company and New Netherland, New Amsterdam, Fort Nassau, Fort Orange and Beverwijck, Patroons, Wiltwijck, Long Island, New England, New Sweden, Schenectady, *Zeewant*, Agriculture, Personalities (Hudson, Minuit, Stuyvesant), the People of New Netherland, Family Life, Religion, Slavery, the Fur Trade, Relations with the Indians, Education, and the Dutch Legacy.

PROGRAMS @HQ

Saturday, January 14th 2 pm: *Scrimshaw of Upstate New York*, presented by Dr. Stuart Frank, Senior Curator, New Bedford Whaling Museum, and Director, Scrimshaw Forensics Laboratory

Free to members - \$5 to non-members

Scrimshaw consists of elaborate engravings in the form of pictures and lettering on the surface of the bone or tooth of a whale, with the engraving highlighted using a pigment, or, less often, small sculptures made from the same material. Dr. Frank will give a comprehensive

introduction to scrimshaw as an art form and occupational genre, including materials and methods. He will illustrate the works and careers of scrimshaw artists from the Empire State. Those who own scrimshaw are urged to bring it in for analysis after the presentation.

Thursday, February 2nd 6–8 pm: *Radical Schenectady: The Industrial Workers of the World at G.E.*, presented by Dr. Gerald Zahavi, Professor of History and Director of the Documentary Studies Program at the University at Albany, and Director of the *Schenectady General Electric in the 20th Century Oral History and Documentation Project*.

Free to members - \$5 to non-members

Saturday, February 11th 2 pm: *Loyalists in Schenectady*, presented by attorney John Gearing.
Free to members - \$5 to non-members.

In doing research at the Society, many people come across the roles that Schenectady Patriots played during the American Revolution. John Gearing, who is currently writing *Schenectady Genesis, Volume II*, will offer a different perspective and focus on those from the area who stayed loyal to the British crown during the Revolution. He will talk about those individuals who lived locally, their travels during the Revolution, and what ultimately happened to those Loyalists.

PROGRAMS @ FEC

Saturday, January 21st 2 pm: Book Talk and Signing – *Stories from the Mohawk Valley: The Painted Rocks, the Good Benedict Arnold & More*, presented by Bob Cudmore.

Free to members - \$5 to non-members

Nestled along the banks of the Mohawk River are the many communities of the Mohawk Valley. These villages, towns, and cities of the Mohawk Valley have unique histories that are inextricably united by the routes and waterways that run through them. The mills, railroads, and the Erie Canal sustained early growth, and tales from the local Mohawk Nation still enrich the folklore. For well over a decade, Bob Cudmore has documented interesting and unusual stories from the region's past, and he has compiled the best of them.

For additional Franchere Center events, see column 2 on page 6.

The oldest of the Ellice brothers, Alexander, left Schenectady rather suddenly in 1775. In May of that year he had “endeavored to discourage [the people of Schenectady] from forming a committee of safety,” an action that resulted in his being branded a traitor. He liquidated most of his assets and signed over the rest of his possessions to his brother James, including his house and warehouse. He then headed to Montreal, where he settled for a few years before moving to England in 1779 and remained there until his death in 1805.

One of my first steps toward learning more about Alexander was to request a copy of his will from the United Kingdom’s National Archives. The hope was that Alexander would make some reference to possessions he had once held in Schenectady, but that was not the case. His will makes only one reference to “my lands in the United States of America.” It cites no specific places in the U.S., but does mention lands on Prince Edward Island and in Godmanchester, Canada.

The will was able to answer some questions that my earlier research had not. Alexander Ellice mentions ten children in his will, three daughters and seven sons. His eldest son was William not Edward, as I had previously thought. Edward had followed his father into the trading business, whereas William entered politics. The other eight children were Robert, George, James, Alexander, Russell, Mary, Helen, and Catherine. William was baptized in 1782 and Edward was born in 1783, so we know that none of Alexander’s children were born in Schenectady.

Even though none of his children were born here, Alexander’s move did not completely divorce this branch of the family from business in New York; he maintained his North American connections up to the time of his death. Afterward, Edward took over his father’s business ventures and later became the director of the Hudson’s Bay Company and a Member of Parliament. He married twice, both times into noble families, and he is the son for whom a group of Pacific Islands is named.

Edward seems to have been the only Ellice son ever to return to the Schenectady area. His first trip was in the autumn of 1808 when he attended the wedding of Sarah

Duane and George Featherstonhaugh, a fellow English gentleman. Alexander’s will reveals that his brother Robert, the partner in charge of the Montreal office, predeceased him. The will mentions “what was left by my brother Robert,” but none of his other brothers are mentioned. We know that James died in the late 1780s, but there is no reference to William or John, nor is there evidence of either having ever lived in Schenectady. One or both may have returned to Scotland.

One unsolved mystery is Alexander’s relationship with his business partner James Phyn. Phyn, another Scotsman who remained loyal to the crown, was in business with John Duncan in the Schenectady area when Alexander immigrated and joined the partnership. Indeed Alexander’s move to Schenectady seems closely linked to James Phyn and he may have been his brother-in-law. Phyn was from the same part of Scotland as Alexander, so a wedding relating them could have occurred before Alexander moved to Schenectady.

If, indeed, Alexander was married in England, what happened to this wife after he immigrated? I have been unable to find any reference to her death in Schenectady records. Did she move with Alexander to Montreal in 1775? Did Alexander abandon her somewhere in his travels and marry his second wife Anne upon returning to London? Their marriage record lists Alexander as a bachelor in 1781, which seems to indicate that Anne was his first and only wife. And no one knows the reputed first wife’s name; she is simply an alleged sister of James Phyn. But all of his siblings can be found in church records except for this mysterious sister. Some sources credit Phyn’s sister with being the mother of Edward Ellice, but from the known timeline that is not possible.

Apparently, early historians were mistaken when they claimed that Phyn and Ellice were brothers-in-law; it is much more likely that they were cousins. Alexander’s mother was Mary Simpson of Gartly, Scotland, and James Phyn’s mother was Janet Simpson, also of Gartly Scotland. Unfortunately, neither birth is recorded in Gartly parish records, so the sister relationship cannot be proven. Yet, it is a much more likely explanation for the Phyn-Alexander relationship than the highly uncertain existence of a nameless sister and wife.

Besides providing information about Alexander's familial relations, his will also provides us with another interesting piece of his life. It mentions that Edward and William are to get their share of the house in Mark Lane, London. At first I assumed this was a house, their London residence. However, with further research I discovered that it refers to their custom house, located at 27 Mark Lane. This would have been a very prominent location, as can be seen on the accompanying map. Mark Lane was not far from the River Thames and the docks. To provide further orientation, to the right beyond the scope of this map is the tower of London and just beyond that the tower bridge, which would not have been there in Ellice's time. Of course, the lot numbers on Mark Lane have probably been reassigned since 1805 which, with the fact that most of London was destroyed by bombing in WWII, means that no architectural remnants of Ellice's 27 Mark Lane customs house can be seen today.



Detail from the 1799 map of the city of London by R. Horwood

Alexander's will also confirmed that he had left London sometime after 1803 and resided in Bath until his death. It is also in Bath where Alexander is buried, so I headed to Bath Abbey to look for his gravestone. And I was not disappointed in the least, as Alexander had not one, but two gravestones, both located in different parts of the Abbey. The first of these gravestones is embedded in the floor of the nave of the Abbey cathedral. A set of pews sitting on top of this gravestone obscures part of its inscription, but it is known to list the lifespan dates of three Ellices in the order of their death: Robert, born 6th May 1747, died 19 June 1790; Charles born 10th Dec 1797, died 10 March 1799; Alexander born 15th June 1743, died 28th Sept 1805. The second stone is



Exterior view of Bath Abbey, looking from the East

hanging on the east wall of the South Transept and is decorated in a neo-classical style, which would have been popular in the middle of the 19th century. This stone has a much more detailed inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF ALEXANDER ELLICE, BORN AT ANCHELY ABERDEENSHIRE, JUNE 15th, 1743, AND DIED AT BATH SEPT. 28th, 1805; AND TO ANNE, HIS WIDOW, DIED AT BATH APRIL 30th, 1847. SACRED ALSO TO THE MEMORY OF CHARLES SON OF ALEXANDER AND ANNE, BORN DEC. 10th, 1797, DIED MARCH 10th, 1799; AND TO ROBERT, BROTHER OF ALEXANDER ELLICE, BORN MAY 6th, 1747, DIED JUNE 19th, 1790.

It is clear from both the style of this second stone, along with the language used and the inclusion of Anne Ellice, that it was erected after her death in 1847. Anne survived Alexander by forty-two years, and no doubt decided to provide him with a more prestigious gravestone.

These stones in Bath abbey also indicate that Alexander had yet another son, Charles, who lived only two years. Including Charles, Alexander and his wife Anne had eleven children, ten of whom outlived their father. It is also intriguing that Robert Ellice is listed on his brother's stones, as I had thought he died in Canada and was most likely buried in Montreal. Confirmation that Robert actually is or is not interred in Bath would be helpful. My next step will be to go to Montreal to find out more about the life of Robert Ellice. And whatever became of James, the brother who was left behind in Schenectady? Residual mysteries are the fated lot of any extensive genealogical endeavor.

New Materials in the Library

BOOKS

An Investigation at an Area of the Garden and Animal Enclosure, Mabee Farm 2011, gift of authors

Ronald R. Kingsley and Diana Carter

BPOE #2157: Our Colorful Elks Heritage, gift of author **Robert Creatura**

Edge of New Netherland by Len Tantillo

Finding Home in Niskayuna (revised edition), gift of author **Denise Stringer**

Great Migration: Immigrants to New England, 1634-1635, Volume VII, T-Y by Robert Charles Anderson

Life of George Washington by John Marshall (5 vols.) and *Portrait of an Era: As Drawn by C.D. Gibson* by Fairfax Downey, gifts of **Vaughn Nevin**

New York State Folktales, Legends, and Ballads by Harold W. Thompson and *Turning Memories into Memoirs: A Handbook for Writing Lifestories* by Denis Ledoux, gifts of **Elsie Maddaus**

Schenectady: The Making of a Place, gift of the author, **Ryan Smithson**

Six Belts of Wampum: A Guide to the Schenectady Stockade by Stockade Association, gift of **Carol Lewis**

Van Deursen Family by Albert Harrison Van Deusen, gift of **Clara Clack**

HISTORIC DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

1886 diary of Sarah "Sadie" Levi of Schenectady, gift of **Richard Poole**

Digital copy of Genealogy Day presentation regarding Zych, Gzyms, Korycinski, and Rozanski families, gift of **Phyllis Zych Budka**

Booklet: *A Legacy of Love: The Story of How a Community Built Its Own Senior Center* (Scotia-Glenville Senior Citizens). Gift of **Elsie Maddaus**

Draper High School yearbooks: *Draperian* 1942, 1943, 1951, 1952, gifts of **Leonard De Masi**

Photographs of Ethel Spiegel and maternal family (Mead), gift of **Penelope L. de la Rocha**

Near and Far (DVD re: WWII experiences of Edward Bloch), gift of **Edward Bloch**

CD of information related to WWII service of Joe Cintula, gift of **Kurt Von Maucher**

CD of genealogical information about William H. Sullivan and descendants, gift of **Joyce Bazar**

Two ALCO photographs circa 1940s, gifts of **James E. Donahue**

RECORDS AND FAMILY PAPERS

Records of the First Baptist Church of Schenectady.

Includes membership records, church bulletins, minutes, reports, budgets, maps and plans, copies of incorporation documents, information about ministers, photographs, scrapbooks, clippings, church directories. Also contains material related to

George Westinghouse Jones House (Caermarthen) in Niskayuna, including plans, files on architecture and artifacts, history, historic site application, and information about George Westinghouse Jones, Sarah Phillips Jones, and the Westinghouse family.

Gift of **First Baptist Church of Schenectady**

Mynderse Family Collection. Includes photographs, greeting cards, postcards, place cards, calendars, family documents, autograph albums, and books.

Gift of the **Schenectady Museum**

FINDING AIDS for the following collections have been added to www.schenectadyhistory.net/library/collections:

Laura Brown Slide Collection; Phyllis Zych Budka Collection; E.Z. Carpenter Collection; Linda Champagne Slide Collection; Francis Poulin Scrapbook Collection; Schenectady City Politics Scrapbooks; History of Medicine in Schenectady County [research guide].

And at the Franchere Center

Apple iMac desktop computer, gift of **Ernie Tetrault**. Many thanks to all of the aforementioned donors.

PROGRAMS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Tuesday, February 7th at 7 pm *A Reception and Storytelling Performance* by **Alden (Joe) Doolittle: If The Portraits Could Speak – the Stories They'd Tell**, a performance in recognition of the 322nd anniversary of the Schenectady Massacre. **Cost: \$15 for individuals; \$30 per family** Sponsor-level contributions of \$100 or more are welcomed and will be acknowledged. The Reception is part of the 2012 Colonial Festival calendar. The evening will include coffee, tea, dessert, and wonderful stories. In 2010, as part of our *Faces of Schenectady 1715-1750 Exhibit*, storyteller Doolittle presented a program based on several of our ancestors whose portraits are in the collection. This year he will reprise several of these stories, and provide new material drawn from events of the early period of Schenectady. The evening will also mark the release of a CD of the 2010 performance. Each individual or family attending will receive a copy of the CD entitled *If the Portraits Could Speak – the Stories They'd Tell!*

Saturday, February 25th at 2 pm *Great Graves of Upstate New York* presented by Chuck D'Imperio. **Free to members - \$5 to non-members.** The speaker, one of the longest tenured morning radio hosts in Upstate New York, vividly tells the tales of the great lives in his book—Annie Edson Taylor, Ernie Davis, Kate Smith, Grandma Moses, and Kentucky Derby winner "Old Bones," one of the longest shots ever to win the Kentucky Derby. The speaker's books will be available for sale.

Around the Society



Ralph Boyd, WWII veteran



Emma - Festival of Trees



Volunteer Holiday Party



Matt Zembo - Civil War Weapons

Photos: Ann Aronson, Evan Keller

		<h3>Annual Colonial Festival Dinner</h3> <p>Saturday, February 4th - Tickets</p>	
<p>Yes, I would like to be a Patron of the Colonial Festival Dinner, seating with special guest and recognition in the program.</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> Captain's Table - \$150. <input type="checkbox"/> Native Trader Table - \$100. <input type="checkbox"/> Bateauaman Table - \$75. </p> <p>I would like to be listed in the program as: _____</p> <p>The Schenectady County Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Your contribution is tax deductible within the limits of the law.</p>		<p>Name: _____ Email: _____</p> <p>Address _____ Phone: _____</p> <p>City _____ State: _____ Zip: _____</p> <p>Patron category: ___\$150. ___\$100. ___\$75. ___ General Ticket \$50.</p> <p>Number of persons attending ___ x Category = \$ _____</p> <p>I am unable to attend, however I would like to donate \$ _____</p> <p>Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____</p> <p>Payment Type: Check _____ Visa _____ Mastercard _____</p> <p>Payable to: Schenectady County Historical Society</p> <p>Mail to: SCHS, 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305</p> <p>Credit Card # _____</p> <p>Expiration date ___/___ Security Code ___ (far right side, back of card)</p>	



Cut and mail to SCHS

Schenectady County Historical Society



Schenectady Colonial Festival Dinner

Saturday, February 4, 2012 ~ 6-9 pm

George E. Franchere Education Center

Mabee Farm Historic Site

Route 5s, Rotterdam Junction, NY

A Property of the Schenectady County Historical Society

Go back in time to the 1700s and enjoy an Evening of Fine Fare and Merriment!

Be in the company of 18th century guests as we recreate Jacob Mabee's Inn

Hear stories of their lives and travels along the Mohawk River

18th Century Music, First Plate (hors d'oeuvres), Cash Bar, Second Plate (dinner)

To benefit the Mabee Farm Historic Site. (See inside for ticket order form)

Special seating
for Sponsors
and Patrons.

Special Opportunity: Guided Tour of the Exhibit *Light on New Netherland*

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