



Schenectady County  
Historical  
Society

# Newsletter

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May-June 2015

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*The Dora Mumford Jackson House, the current headquarters of the Historical Society*

## The Origin and Growth of the Schenectady County Historical Society

By Frank Taormina

The structure at 32 Washington Avenue, the current headquarters of the Schenectady County Historical Society, became a part of the community of Schenectady in 1895 when it was built by Jones Mumford Jackson to serve as a home for his widowed mother, Dora Mumford Jackson, and himself. The people who lived just prior to this event included members of the Jackson, Mumford, Paige, Bowers, Potter, Watkins, and Duane families, whose number and activities are legion. The histories of these families and their relationships one with another are a lengthy story that is not necessary to discuss here; those interested can find abundant information at the Historical Society. My purpose in this article is to assemble some basic information about the three successive structures in which Society headquarters has been housed, how we acquired and expanded the Mabee Farm, how all of this came into existence, and something about the many people who made it all happen.

*continued on pages 4-5*

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## HOURS

**MONDAY-FRIDAY 9-5**

**SATURDAY 10-2**

**MABEE FARM**  
**TUESDAY-SATURDAY**  
**10 a.m.-4 p.m.**

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Kudos and a big thank you to all our members who either attended the Annual Meeting of April 11 or who returned their proxies. Between the two, we had over 50% of our members represented, a feat that has no parallel in our history! At that meeting, membership elected two new trustees, Martin Strosberg and Kevin Richard-Morrow, who replaced retiring and long-serving trustees Frank Taormina and Frank Gilmore, and Bob Sullivan as Secretary to replace Cynthia Seacord, who, I am pleased to say, will remain on the Board of Trustees.

I am also delighted to report that we have a new face on staff with the addition of Michael Maloney, who has joined us as our new Librarian / Archivist. You will find a picture and profile of Mike on page 10.

It is my sad duty to report the passing of our immediate past president, Merritt Glennon. Merritt died on March 27<sup>th</sup> due to complications from surgery. He was an active member for 15 years, having been drawn to us by his love of history, and more specifically, his love of what he called our treasure, the 1705 Mabee farmhouse. Merritt first served on the Mabee Farm Committee as a volunteer and later as its chairman, vice President for five years under President Ed Reilly, and then later as President from 2012 to 2014.



**Merritt E. Glennon**  
**1945-2015**

Generous with his time and energy, Merritt was a staunch supporter of our mission, and his lively spirit will be sorely missed. His family has asked that memorial donations be made to the Altamont Community Food Bank or to the Schenectady County Historical Society for support of the Mabee Farm. (See Ann Aronson's photo tribute on page 11.)

**-Marianne**

## Welcome to our newly elected Trustees



Martin A. Strosberg of Niskayuna, a professor at Union College for 30 years, earned his bachelor's degree from Union, his MA and MPH from the University of California at Berkeley, and his PhD from the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. He is also on the faculty of the Union Graduate College's Mount Sinai School of Medicine Bioethics Program. He served as a founding board member of the Schenectady Free Clinic and is currently on the Board of the Hudson-Mohawk Area Health Education Center and chair of the Advisory Board of Schenectady County Public Health Services. Marty, for whom history is one of many avocations, is particularly interested in Twentieth Century Schenectady history.



Kevin Richard-Morrow was born in Troy but raised in Albany and is a 1971 graduate of Albany High. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Rhetoric and Communications and a Master of Library Science from SUNY Albany. He recently retired after over 36 years of NY State service. He has been an active volunteer for historic sites for 20 years. He has served on committees at the Old Stone Fort Museum in Schoharie and is past president of and still a Trustee of the Friends of Schuyler Mansion in Albany. He is a founding member of the 2nd Albany County Militia, 1775-1782. He is a very active member of the Society's Mabee Farm Committee, for which he tends to the care, feeding, and peregrinations of our bateaux.

## *Programs and Exhibits – May-June 2015*

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. Programs and exhibits are free for Society members, \$5.00 for non-members unless otherwise noted.

### **Program Calendar**

**Saturday, May 2 – 10 a.m.**

***Discover Colonial Schenectady Walking Tour***

**Location:** 32 Washington Avenue **Cost:** \$5.00

A walking tour of the Stockade District. Go back in time from the founding of the colony up through the American Revolution. Pre-registration requested.

**Sunday, May 3 7–9 p.m. at Mabee Farm**

***Howlin' at the Moon Concert*** **Cost:** \$5.00

**Performers:** Three Quarter North & Mark Baptiste!  
Great music in our 1760s Dutch barn.

**Wednesday May 6, 11 am, 32 Washington Ave.**

***Secret Stockade: A Historic Tour and Lunch***

**Cost:** \$20.00 (lunch included)

A walking tour of the Stockade, a peek inside a private 1820s house, a visit to our History Museum, and lunch at Arthur's Market. Pre-registration required

**Saturday, May 9 – 2 p.m. at Franchere Center**

***Science Fiction, Hollywood, and the 1950s***

**Speaker:** Dr. Rob Edelman

How the events that took place during World War II played a key role in the content and development of the sci-fi film.

**Saturday, May 16 – 2 p.m. at Franchere Center**

***Mad House: The Hidden History of Insane***

***Asylums in 19th Century New York***

**Speaker:** Michael T. Keene

Shocking tales of neglect, but also extraordinary stories of inspiration, hope, & healing. Welcome to Mad House.

**Friday, May 22 – 6 p.m. at Franchere Center**

***Zysk & Goodwin Art Exhibit Opening***

Join us for the opening of an art exhibit at the Mabee Farm Historic Site: The multimedia artwork of UAlbany MFA students Brennan Goodwin and Jackie Zysk.

**Tuesday, June 2 7–9 p.m. at Mabee Farm**

***Howlin' at the Moon Concert*** **Cost:** \$5.00

**Performers:** 13 Feet of Bluegrass & 2Late

Spend an evening enjoying great bluegrass music in our historic 1760s Dutch barn.

**Wednesday June 3, 11 a.m. 32 Washington Avenue**

***Secret Stockade: A Historic Tour and Lunch***

A walking tour of the Stockade, a peek inside a private 1820s house, a visit to our History Museum, and lunch at Arthur's Market. **Cost:** \$20.00 Pre-registration required.

**Saturday, June 6 11 a.m.–7 p.m. at Mabee Farm**

***Sixth Schenectady Celtic Heritage Day,***

***presented with the Ancient Order of Hibernians***

Celebrate local Celtic history in this fun-filled day of family events and activities—music, tours, and live performances that bring Schenectady's Celtic heritage to life. **Cost:** \$10 per vehicle.

**Saturday, June 13 – 7 p.m. at the Mabee Farm**

***A Celebration of Traditional NY State Music\****

**Performer:** Dave Ruch Join us for a night of traditional New York music as we celebrate the end of our "Exploring Schenectady County's Immigrant Past" project. Musician Dave Ruch will perform songs of real-life New Yorkers from days gone by, farmers, lumber-men, children, immigrants, Native Americans, and more! Beer and wine will be available for purchase.

**Friday, June 26 – 6 p.m. at 32 Washington Avenue**

***A Night on the Town in Schenectady 1850-1950:***

***One Hundred Years of Fashion and Frivolity***

An Exhibit Opening in our Schenectady History Museum. Explore the fashions of Schenectady from the Victorian era through World War II.

**Saturday, June 27 – 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.**

***Civil War Living History Day at Mabee Farm***

**Cost:** \$5.00 for adults, students and children free

Living history educators will bring the past to life. Demonstrations include a Civil War surgeon, craft and trade demonstrations, a children's muster, and more!

**Wednesday, July 1 – 7-9 p.m. at Mabee Farm**

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

**Performers:** *Running the River* **Cost:** \$5:00

Toe-tapping music inside our historic 1760s Dutch barn!

### **Exhibits**

**Hops & Hogsheads: Beer from Colonial to**

**Craft Brew** Previously at Franchere Center, now at 32 Washington Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

**Boomtown: Immigration, Technology, and Urban Schenectady**

Through June 14 at 32 Washington Avenue

Why people immigrate, and the impact of immigration and technology on urban Schenectady.

*Continued on page 9*



## TAORMINA – continued from page 1.

The earliest advocate for establishing a historical society in Schenectady was Professor Jonathan Pearson of Union College, a distinguished historian in his own right. He first recommended this in 1845, but inaction compelled him to repeat his proposal in 1862. The Schenectady County Historical Society as we know it was finally commissioned in 1905, 16 years after Pearson's death in 1887 at age 74.

By 1958, the Historical Society had been in existence for 53 years. From inception in 1905 to 1912, its HQ was in the Public Library, a "Carnegie library" at the northeast corner of Union Street and Seward Place which is now a dormitory of Union College.



***Schenectady's first Public Library, built in 1903 with funds from Andrew Carnegie and General Electric.***

In 1912, the Society moved its headquarters to 13 Union Street, a Schenectady County office building. The site, absent the building of course, is now a parking lot for the Stockade Inn.

In 1958, The Dora Jackson House was back in the news. A headline in the *Schenectady Union Star* read: "GE Gives Pioneer Site to the Historical Society," followed by the text "The former General Electric Women's Club, 32 Washington Avenue, will be donated by the General Electric Company to the Schenectady County Historical Society. On August 19, 1958, the *Star* ran a photo titled "Historical Society Packing up to Move."

Ten years later, in honor of local writer, historian, and former Society President John J. Vrooman, the Historical Society put an addition on the former home of Dora Jackson. On February 14, 1968, it was reported that "The dedication ceremony took place Saturday afternoon in the new meeting hall to be known as the Vrooman Room. About 150 persons attended the program and open house." John Vrooman, 1882-1960,

was a prolific author whose works such as *Council Fire and Cannon*, *The Massacre*, *Forts and Firesides of the Mohawk Valley*, *Clarissa Putman of Tribes Hill*, and *The Promised Land* are still being read.

A newspaper article of 7 March, 1985, featured a picture of SCHS President Wayne Harvey and early computer expert Mandalay Grems who stated that Mandy was giving a matching grant of \$100,000 to be used for the construction of a library "to be known as the Grems-Doolittle Library in honor of her parents. The grant was given because of her awareness of the limitations of the present structure. As an active member of the Society's library planning committee and student of genealogy, she noted that the Society's present facility lacked sufficient work space." The article goes on to describe Mandalay's professional accomplishments in the field of computers with the General Electric Company and the many services she offered the community.

We began moving into the new Library in July and August of 1991. In the November-December 1991 issue of our *Newsletter*, President Ruth Anne Evans wrote "Please come to see and stay to use your new library." The same issue has a picture of Mandalay Grems cutting the cake provided for the celebration at the opening of the library while Ruth Anne looks on smiling brightly. To reach that happy day, Mandy had contributed yet another \$50,000 to ensure its completion. Those of us who have been beneficiaries of Mandy's generosity and foresight for the last 23 years need to stop every once in a while to offer meditative gratitude in her memory.

In our *Newsletter* of July-August 1992, President John van Schaick wrote: "Re-enacting the departure of the expedition upriver 200 years ago, the crew of our bateau plans to touch ground at the Jan Mabee house in Rotterdam Junction where the original crew spent the night at the Mabee Inn. That inn still stands, one of the buildings that George Franchere, a Mabee descendent, has offered to donate to the Society."

In the next issue of the *Newsletter*, van Schaick continued: "In 1792 at four o'clock in the afternoon of August 22, General Schuyler's bateau left its mooring on the Binnekill and moved upriver. The first night of the journey the party spent at Mabee's Inn, the same property which George Franchere proposes to deed to the Society for display to the public. The property should be in the hands of the Society by mid-fall."

In the January-February 1993 issue, John wrote again: “The acceptance moved a step nearer on December 7 when the ad hoc Jan Mabee committee met with George Franchere to receive a gift of the furnishings at the Jan Mabee property and a check for \$17,500 to maintain the property during the next three years.” In essence, then, December 1992 marks the date of the Society’s acquisition of the Mabee House and property. In the March-April 1993 *Newsletter*, John wrote a much longer article giving much information about the Mabee Farm Historic Site, which the Society has now owned and operated for 22 years.

John van Schaick wrote again in our September-October 1993 *Newsletter*: “The Jan Mabee Farm on the Third Flat in Rotterdam Junction is now open to public exhibition by appointment. Work continues on planning for regular hours by 1995. The house, inn, and slave quarters are cleaned, the grounds and cemetery manicured, and a caretaker installed.”

In 1995, while Bob Sager was President, the November-December *Newsletter* contained an article by Kathy Johnson, co-chair of the Mabee-Farm committee, that read: “The most exciting news is that we are negotiating with Linda and Richard Nilsen of Johnstown, NY, who are donating their circa 1780 Dutch barn to the Mabee Farm. According to Everett Rau, it is a magnificent two-story structure with details that make it one-of-a-kind.”



*The Nilsen Barn at the Mabee Farm*

After the Dutch barn was accepted and carefully moved to the Farm and renovated under supervision of architect Keith Cramer, President of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society, a still-larger project would mark a turning point for the Society, one that came at the end of 2009 and announced in our September-October *Newsletter* by President Edwin D. Reilly, who wrote: “So it has begun. The construction sign is in place at the Mabee Farm

close to Main Street. A few spadefuls of earth were turned to plant the seed of an idea. A machine will come to dig a big hole...and out of the hole will come the George E. Franchere Education Center.”

In another article, Ed tells us: “Building an education center has been a longtime goal of the Mabee Farm Historic Site, one whose realization is due in large part to the friendship that former President John van Schaick cultivated with George Franchere.

“Franchere gave what the Society calls a ‘generous endowment’ in order to jump start the 2.3 million dollar project. So far, two-thirds of the needed funds have been generated and fundraising is planned to raise the rest.

“In the new building, the Historical Society hopes to blend the best of its heritage with the best of modern technology. The new center will be built to look like and to fit into the rest of the Mabee Farm, but will feature new technology to make it environmentally friendly.”

In 2010, competitive bids were taken for construction and furnishings and a construction manager was retained. Work began in earnest and proceeded rapidly.



*The completed George E. Franchere Education Center,  
Keith Cramer, architect.*

On October 7, 2011, at dedication of the finished George E. Franchere Education Center, the ribbon was cut by President Reilly and Gary Mabee with a coterie of trustees, Mabee Farm volunteers, and local dignitaries, pleased and proud to be present at the historic event.

So there we have it. Starting in the old Public Library, then moving to 113 Union Street, then to the home of Dora Jackson, to which was added first the Vrooman Room and then the Grems-Doolittle Library, then acquisition of the Mabee Farm, the Dutch barn, and finally, the Franchere Education Center. What next?

# Schenectady County Historical Society

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Jean Daley Gwynn  
Catherine Haag  
Claire Hamilton  
Jayne Hanson  
Diane Harper  
Barbara Harris  
Stan Harris  
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Christie Noble  
Theresa Nowicki  
Patrick O'Brian  
Patricia O'Clair  
Francis O'Connor, Jr.  
Kathryn Opdyke  
Michael Ostermann

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*Your generosity and support is greatly appreciated and essential to  
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Thank you!*

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### **Additional Exhibits**

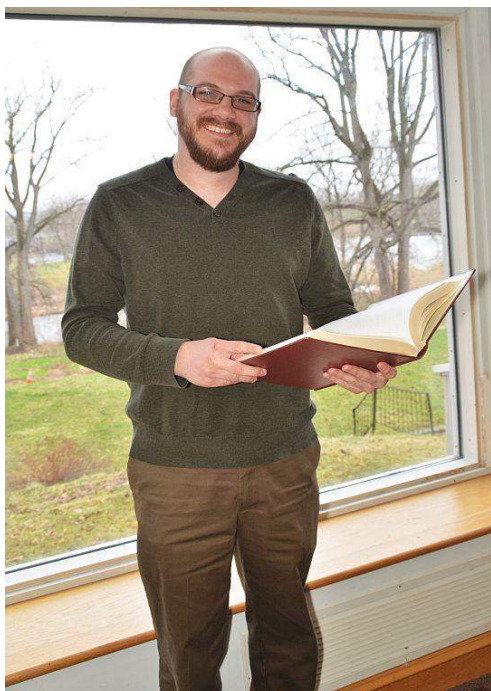
**Zysk & Goodwin**    *Opening May 22 at the George E. Franchere Education Center at the Mabee Farm*  
University at Albany MFA students Brennan Goodwin and Jackie Zysk explore nostalgia, a multimedia art exhibition showcasing their work.

**Works by Lisa David**, a local painter and teacher, will be on display at the Franchere Center through May.

**A Night on the Town in Schenectady 1850-1950: 100 Years of Fashion and Frivolity** *Opening June 26*  
This exhibit at 32 Washington Avenue showcases evening gowns from our collection and explores the nightlife of yore.

**It Came from Schenectady: Science Fiction & the Capital Region** *Through September at Franchere Center*  
Discover the inspiration behind creations of local science fiction innovators, including Kurt Vonnegut, P. Schuyler Miller, and Glendora. Join us on a journey through time and space as we explore the legacy of science fiction in Schenectady County!

**Witness to Assassination: President Lincoln and the Schenectady Connection** *Through July 31 at the Franchere Center*  
Artifacts that capture the shock and sadness of America in April 1865 and reveal many Schenectady connections to the assassination.



**Mike Maloney** at the picture window in the Grems-Doolittle Library with the Binnekill in view behind him



**John Angilletta**, pausing on the way to lead a tour of the Mabee Farmhouse in the background.

## Meet our new Librarian/Archivist—Michael Maloney

I am pleased to report that Michael Maloney has begun work as the newly appointed Librarian/Archivist of the Society's Grems-Doolittle Library. Michael comes to us from the Albany County Hall of Records, where he had been an Assistant Archivist. Previously, he worked as an archives intern at the NY State Archives, a Circulation Supervisor at Skidmore College, and as a clerk at the Howe Branch of the Albany Public Library. A native of Utica and now living in Albany, he holds a B.A. in history from SUNY New Paltz and a Masters degree in Information Studies from the State University of New York at Albany.

In his application for our open position, Michael wrote: "I am familiar with the work done by the Schenectady County Historical Society through the use of digital materials available in New York Heritage Digital Collections and through the Grems-Doolittle Blog on your website. I believe my educational background and employment history will make me a strong addition to the Grems-Doolittle staff."

And so he is! Please stop in to welcome Michael.

**-Marianne**

## Volunteer Spotlight on John Angilletta

What do John Lennon, Hillary Clinton, and Walter Cronkite have in common? They've all met John Angilletta. And if you've visited Mabee Farm Historic Site recently, it's likely you too have had the great pleasure of meeting John.

John came to us in 2011, just as he was retiring from the New York State Department of Tax and Finance, where he worked as a warehouse supervisor. He was looking for something different to do in retirement, and with his love for history, the Mabee Farm seemed like a natural fit. Four years later, John is a reliable and beloved volunteer.

Though John is involved with most aspects of the Mabee Farm's operations, his favorite activity is house tours: "I love meeting people. My wife and daughters say I'm something of a blabbermouth, and I love to talk. I love working with kids, and I love the fact that kids that young are interested in history." For those who have a chance to join John on a tour of the Mabee House, the past is truly brought to life. His knowledge and kindness shine through in every conversation he holds with school groups and visitors.

John's regional roots run deep. Aside from his time studying journalism at SUNY Morrisville, and a few years in the Syracuse area, he has spent his entire life in Schenectady County. He's connected to the area, and has always had a particular interest in local history—and fishing. "I love to go fishing and spend time in the Adirondacks. Most nights in the summer I'm at Kiwanis Park with a chair and a fishing pole."

As for afternoons in the summer (and winter, and spring, and fall!), John is here at the Farm, greeting visitors and sharing stories. He notes, "I'm very happy that I was given the opportunity to volunteer at the Farm. I look forward to coming out here all the time."

Well, John, we're very happy—and lucky—to have you here with us!

**-Mary Zawacki**



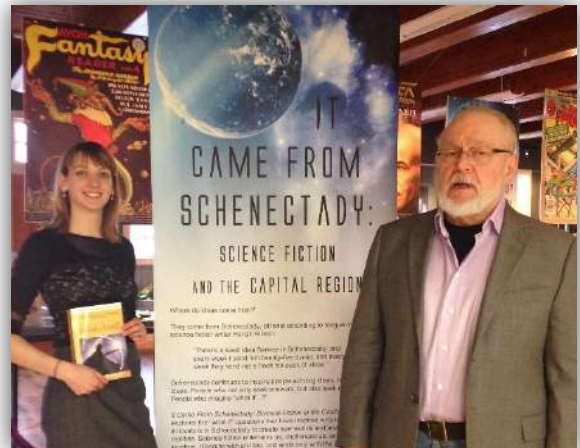
## *Around the Society*



*Thank you friend for all that you've done for the Society. You will be missed.*  
Merritt Glennon 1945 - 2015



*Kaitlin Morton-Bentley and friends at VanAntwerp Middle School Career Day.*



*Mary Zawacki with Barry Longyear, author, at the opening of IT CAME FROM SCHENECTADY exhibit in the Franchere Education Center.*



*Farewell to our librarian Melissa Tacke - Thank you and best wishes in your new endeavor.*

*Photos: Ann Aronson, Kaitlin Morton-Bentley, Mary Zawacki, Marianne Blanchard*





Schenectady County Historical Society  
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