

Schenectady County Historical Society



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A Dotted Landscape: Piecing Together the History of Schenectady County's Forgotten Farms

By Julia Walsh

Schenectady County is in a state of revival. New events, businesses, initiatives and people have been coming to the city and surrounding communities to make their mark on one of the oldest settlements in New York State. As a native to the area, I see two sides to this; it is great to see a new swing of development, making Schenectady attractive to those who don't already call it home. However, as developers seem to be changing the cityscape ever faster, it is interesting to note where nature has taken its course.

As part of my 2018 internship with the SCHS, I explored several locations in rural Schenectady County abandoned by their former residents. For most of its history, Schenectady County's economy was primarily agricultural. Farms dotted the landscape from Duanesburg to Princetown to Rotterdam. With the 20th century came a transition from farming to industry. Suburbs began to sprawl, bolstered by the growth of GE and the development of the automobile. The landscape and the culture of Schenectady County changed dramatically during the 1900s, as towns like Glenville became suburbs of city employees. Locals shifted their aspirations from self-sufficient or market-enterprising farms to a house in the GE plot and a college degree. The demographics of Duanesburg and Princetown changed as suburbanites moved in and farmers moved out. Today, many farms lay abandoned, their fields ever fallow.

But, just like the stories that come from the rise of bedroom communities and the transformation of the "Schenectadian Dream," these farms hold stories about their prime. Their current state of disrepair does not tell the whole story, only their end. I set off

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President's Letter

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Brouwer House | by appointment
14 N Church St, Schenectady, NY

CONTACT

www.schenectadyhistorical.org/people

Most everyone will agree that SCHS has much to be thankful for this past year. Our staff demonstrated its capacity for creating sound, interesting, and popular programs that attracted growing numbers of visitors. Our financial base remains strong. And, we made many new friends throughout Schenectady County and across the state and region.

Not only that, our future is looking more than promising. Armed with a new strategic plan (SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/ABOUT), SCHS is now prepared to move into the twenty-first century as one of NYS' leading historical institutions. The plan emphasizes community service; greater diversity among the trustees, staff, and audience; partnerships with other organizations and with the public and private sectors; and a more modernized administrative structure.

As many of you know, we worked for months to solicit candid and critical input from community members and stakeholders through surveys and public meetings. We also met amongst ourselves (with guidance from the New York Council of Nonprofits) to draft a plan that we believe will be a model for other historical organizations.

SCHS is at heart an educational institution. We believe that as educators we not only teach history, we listen and learn from our audiences. This is a considerable change from a century ago, when most historical societies were founded (SCHS was itself created in 1905). In those days, historical societies reflected and supported the interests of the most deeply rooted and privileged members of communities, and offered nostalgic recitations of past glories and triumphs. But organizations like those don't work anymore. Communities are more complex and diverse than ever, and people demand more from institutions like SCHS.

Every one of us may be his or her own historian, as historian Carl Becker once famously suggested. This is certainly true for individuals. We all tend to build historical memories on our own experiences, and for better or worse, people from different backgrounds don't always see eye-to-eye. This can be a challenge. People can choose to unite and appreciate each other. Or they can focus on their differences, and promote conflict, even chaos.

Well, if it is a challenge for people in a community to hold conflicting historical memories, then it's the kind of challenge that historical societies should be able to meet. Why? Because professional historical organizations undertake and promote unbiased, fact-based research and interpretation. And because our historical institutions are not just places to explore the past, but comfortable places for people to confront uncomfortable issues.

Indeed, history organizations can make a positive difference in any community—but only if they have the vision, skill, and commitment to work responsibly and respectfully with everyone. This is the kind of organization we envisioned in our strategic plan: one that can provide the foundation for a happier, more just, and more prosperous future, not just for SCHS and its members, but for many others in Schenectady County.

So, if you're not a member yet, join us. If you are, get more active. Let us know what you think. Spread the word. And remember: we can all study and enjoy history, but if we fail to use our understanding of the past to make a better history for ourselves, someone else will shape our future for us.

Robert Weible, President
PRESIDENT@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG

From the Executive Director

I suspect when it comes time to draft our annual report, I'll be scratching my head, worried I'm forgetting one of the myriad projects we completed in 2018. What I won't forget, however, are all the people and partners who made 2018 such a success. So, without further ado, my deepest gratitude to:

The granting organizations that provide financial support for SCHS projects. A grant from DPHNYS helped us complete our [Strategic Plan](#). The Preservation League of NYS is currently funding a [historic structure report of the Brouwer House](#). And grants from the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, the Capital District Library Council, NYSCA, Humanities NY, and the Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region helped us with programs and professional development in 2018!

Our community partners. The Electric City Food Co-op and Wolf Hollow Brewing Co made [Mabee Farm to Fork](#) a huge success. Northeast Theatre Ensemble helped us develop [new programs at the Brouwer House](#). The Albany Symphony Orchestra invited us to share the history of WW1 through an [exhibition at Proctors](#). Plus, our neighbors at Discover Schenectady, the YWCA, the Stockade Association, and Schenectady Heritage helped us to promote Schenectady and its history.

Schenectady County for providing vital support and friendship for community events, like Fall Foliage Festival, and the July 3 Fireworks.

New York State for inviting SCHS to develop a stunning [exhibition on Schenectady's history in the new Union Station](#).

Greater Hudson Heritage Network for recognizing our Mabee Farm Interpretation in their [2018 Awards for Excellence](#).

The students of the Cornell Historic Preservation program. Your community service helped us to construct the [Education Lean-to](#), and do a [major clean up of the Dutch Barn](#) and Mabee Houses.

The SCHS board of directors and staff for endless positivity, wit, and creativity. Working together, we completed the [Mabee Farm Interpretation](#) and made major [interpretive updates to the Museum](#).

Our volunteers, the beating heart of SCHS. Because of you, we have made great strides with our [library digitization](#). Our 150+ annual programs run seamlessly. Our grounds and gardens are ever-blooming and the public is greeted by smiling faces at all of our sites.

Our 20,000 annual physical and virtual visitors. Welcome, and thanks for your curiosity!

You, our Membership, for visiting us, for supporting us, and for giving us a reason to keep moving forward. Thanks for a wonderful 2018, and we will see you in 2019!

Mary Zawacki, Executive Director
DIRECTOR@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG

Around the County

Crucible Along the Mohawk: An Historical Novel by Johnny T. Rockenstire

Review by Martin Strosberg



In *Crucible Along the Mohawk*, historical fiction author Johnny T. Rockenstire tells the story of the Schenectady massacre of February 8, 1690, the darkest and most tragic episode in Schenectady's history.

In Rockenstire's novel, voice is given to the people of this saga through the everyday comings and goings of the family of Harmen Vedder, Schenectady trapper and trader of beaver pelts. Vedder's family consists of his wife, two daughters, and four sons. In particular we follow the trajectory of teenage son Johannes during the period 1689-1692. Although the Vedders are central characters, they share the stage with some very important figures of North American history. Through their stories we gain a deeper understanding of the forces leading to the French and Indian raid on the small Dutch frontier village, surrounded by a fortified stockade.

The Geo-Political Context

The central theme of the novel is the war between the French and British Empires for mastery over North America and control over the beaver trade. Allied with the English and the original Dutch communities of erstwhile New Netherland are the powerful Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederation. Allied with the French are the Algonquin and other tribes of the St. Lawrence region of Canada. The Indian allies of the French, and the Indian allies of the English are long-standing

enemies. One reason for the French and Indian attack on Schenectady is to retaliate for the brutal Mohawk raid in 1689 on the Canadian village of Lachine, near Montreal. In the bigger picture, the Schenectady raid is part of an overall strategy of coordinated attacks on the New York and New England colonies to drive the English out of North America. The campaign is overseen by the Governor General of New France, Louis de Buade Frontenac, whom we meet in Quebec.

In Rockenstire's sweeping narrative, we learn that the French-English war is not the only conflict enveloping the Vedder family. We travel to Fort Orange and meet the "Albany Aristocracy" whose political and economic power sustain a fur trade monopoly much to the disadvantage of the Vedders and other Schenectadians. In particular, Rockenstire paints vivid portraits of Pieter Schuyler, Robert Livingston, and Kiliaen Van Rensselaer. The Albany-Schenectady rivalry is part of a much more complex struggle over control of the entire colony of New York. Here, Rockenstire takes us to New York City and Jacob Leisler.

After the Catholic English monarch King James II was deposed and replaced by Protestant King William of Orange (from Netherlands) during the Glorious Revolution of 1688, Jacob Leisler leads an armed insurrection to take governmental control from the appointees of King James in New York City. Supporting the Acting Lieutenant Governor Leisler are many in the lower socio-economic strata who resent the economic and political advantages of the rich. As Rockenstire portrays, the turmoil caused by the conflict between pro and anti-Leisler factions in Schenectady and Albany has direct consequences for the defense of the village during the raid.

During the raid and its aftermath we hear not only the tragic voices of the Vedders and other villagers in their final dialogues, but also of well-known persons such as John Alexander Glen, Symon Schermerhorn, and Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville.

About the Author

Johnny Rockenstire was born and raised in Schenectady. After high school graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps, where he served as a Data Systems Technician. It was at this time that he wrote and published his first novel, *Forty Feet Below*. After leaving the Marines, he earned an Associates Degree in criminal justice from Schenectady County Community College. He currently works in the IT field, and resides in Schenectady County. He has been a member of the SCHS since 2013.

In his acknowledgements section of the book, Rockenstire recognizes: "The Schenectady County Historical Society and the Gremis-Doolittle Library, where some of my initial research took place many years ago. And to that unknown librarian who assisted me the day I asked for every scrap of documentation regarding the events described in this novel. They brought out a heap of papers for me, and let me pour over them, recording everything I needed to get started."

Crucible Along the Mohawk, published in 2018, can be purchased on Amazon (paperback and ebook) at [AMAZON.COM/CRUCIBLE-ALONG-MOHAWK-JOHNNY-ROCKENSTIRE-EBOOK/DP/B07K5GTYF9](https://www.amazon.com/Crucible-Along-Mohawk-Johnny-Rockenstire-ebook/dp/B07K5GTYF9). People can also buy it on Smashwords (and other ebook platforms).

From the Library

Blog Posts You May Have Missed

The Grems-Doolittle Library Collections Blog (www.GREMSDOOLITTLELIBRARY.BLOGSPOT.COM) is a great resource for learning more about Schenectady County's rich history. Here are a few of the posts from the past couple months that you might have missed.

The Pastor's Ledger

By the Librarian – October 16, 2018

A ledger kept by Scotia Reformed Church pastor Herbert B. Roberts holds some interesting genealogy information as well as the sermons and hymns that Herbert Roberts used during his time at the church.

Armistice Day in Schenectady

By the Librarian – November 9, 2018

Armistice Day in Schenectady was one of the grandest celebrations in the city's history. Parades and festivities lasted throughout the morning and night of November 11, 1918.

The Jersey Ice Cream Company

By Gail Denisoff – November 28, 2018

The Jersey Ice Cream Company kept Schenectady cool during the 1910s through the early 1930s with "bricks," moulds, frozen puddings, and mousse.

Recent Donations

Genealogical materials related to the Pearson Family, compiled by Jonathan Pearson

Gift of Jonathan Pearson IV

Additions to the Don Ackerman Political Memorabilia Collection

Gift of Don Ackerman

Records from the Franken-Samler Mercedes Benz/Studebaker Dealership

Gift of Waldek Cyrulik

Additions to the First Baptist Church Collection

Gift of Rodena Bosch

Keeping the Library Cool

It's sad, but our library heating and cooling systems are coming to the end of their lives.

They've had a very important job for the past 26+ years keeping our library and archives climate controlled. But, after a malfunction during last year's heat wave and some emergency soldering work, we decided that it is time to part ways.

Proper heating, ventilation, and cooling systems are extremely important in preserving the documents, photos, and other media that we hold in the Grems-Doolittle Library and Archives.

An environment that is too humid and too hot will encourage mold growth, while conditions that are too dry will cause paper to become brittle. These paper items help tell the rich and interesting history of Schenectady County, and properly preserving this history requires stable temperature and humidity.

Our current systems were installed in 1991 and lack a lot of the features more modern systems have. A Wi-Fi thermostat will give us much more control over temperature settings than we have now. Our new furnace and A/C will also be much more efficient, which will reduce energy use. We are also looking to install a whole zone humidification system to replace our dehumidifier and further control humidity in our archival storage areas.

We need your help! Your donations can help our HVAC dreams become HVAC reality, and you can play a vital role in helping us preserve Schenectady's history and keep our collections safe for current and future generations. Donations can be made through our website at SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/GIVE.

-Michael Maloney, Librarian/Archivist

What's Happening?

EXHIBITS

Back in my Day: Childhood, Play, and Schenectady

Opening Reception Jan 19 @ 32 W

Are play and childhood toys a reflection of larger social, cultural, and technological developments? This exhibition examines that question, focusing primarily on cultural and social influences on childhood in the 20th & 21st century. The exhibit also integrates personal childhood experiences and memories from members of our community.

***A Dishonorable Trade:**

Human Trafficking in the Dutch Atlantic World

Opening Reception Jan 26 @ Mabee Farm

A traveling exhibit curated by NYS Department of Parks and Recreation. Divided into two parts, the exhibit examines the role that slavery played in the creation and maintenance of the Dutch trading empire, and delves into the lives and stories of the people affected by the trade.

**Part of the Dishonorable Trade exhibition & lecture series.*

Beyond the Pines: Early Schenectady

Ongoing @ 32 W

Explore early Schenectady: its founding, its people, and what life was like for early Schenectadians.

Mapping Schenectady

Ongoing @ 32 W

A selection of our most prominent and interesting maps are on permanent display in the Map Gallery.

TOURS AND TRIPS

Pre-registration is required for most programs.

Bus Trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Saturday, Jan 12 • \$80

Experience the best of human creativity from across the globe. With collections spanning more than 5,000 years of culture, from prehistory to the present, the Metropolitan is a journey through the world's greatest art.

Bus Trip to the Brooklyn Museum

Saturday, Feb 23 • \$80

Explore the diversity of the Brooklyn Museum's exhibitions! Housing collections from many cultures, as well as visiting exhibitions from a wide variety of geographic locations and time periods, the Brooklyn Museum creates inspiring encounters with art that expand the ways we see the world.

TALKS AND WORKSHOPS

Workshop: Discovering Your Family History

Wednesdays, Jan 2 to Feb 27 - 6:30pm @ Mabee Farm • \$275

Save your spot for this 8-week course with Judith Herbert, Certified Genealogist®. We'll focus on locating, analyzing & assessing the value and accuracy of genealogical records.

Workshop: Genealogy 201: Military & Court Records

Saturdays, Jan 5 to Feb 16 - 10am @ Mabee Farm • \$240

Intermediate genealogists should join us for this 6-week course with Judith Herbert, Certified Genealogist®, focused on using military and court records to solve difficult questions of relationship (parentage, spouse, children) and add biographical detail to the lives of ancestors.

Workshop: Delft Plates

Saturday, Feb 23 - 10am @ Mabee Farm • \$30

SCHS curator Suzy Fout will discuss the history of delft ceramics, using examples from the SCHS collection. Participants will decorate their own plates to take home.

Workshop: Hooked on Blacksmithing

Sunday, April 28 - 9am @ Mabee Farm • \$150

Join our resident blacksmith John Ackner as we learn to make hooks and adjustable fireplace trammels.

A Toast to Temperance with Chris Leonard

Thursday, Jan 17 - 7pm @ 32W • Free!

It's the 100th anniversary of prohibition! Join Schenectady City Historian Chris Leonard on an examination of the effects of the 18th and the 21st Amendments on Schenectady. We'll toast the passage and repeal of the Amendments. Similar events will be taking place the same night in bars across Schenectady!

Back in my Day: Stories from Childhood and exhibition opening reception

Saturday, Jan 19 - 2pm @ 32 W • Free for members or \$5

Join us for an afternoon of storytelling and reminiscing with members from our local guild, Story Circle of the Capital District. Their personal stories of growing up in the region will be sure to move and entertain, reminding us of our own favorite childhood memories. Refreshments served.

***An Overview of the Slave Trade presented by the Underground Railroad History Project**

Saturday, Jan 26 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm • Free for members or \$5

Mary Liz and Paul Stewart of the URHP will be at the exhibition opening reception of *A Dishonorable Trade* to provide an overview of the slave trade, and to discuss slavery research resources. Followed by a 30 minute Q&A. Refreshments served.

Iroquois Women with Dr. Maeve Kane

Saturday, Feb 2 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm • Free for members or \$5

Dr. Maeve Kane of UAlbany will discuss the Haudenosaunee women of the Six Nations Iroquois, and how they shaped their communities' engagement with colonists, and rejected colonialist constructions of civility and savagery. Kane will explore Iroquois community and identity formation, drawing on material culture, archaeology, and history to examine indigenous women's agency.

A Chilly Winter's Eve: How the Dutch Survived Winter

Saturday, Feb 9 - 2pm @ 32 W • Free for members or \$5

Shelby Mattice, curator of the Bronck Museum, will look at how the early Dutch settlers of the Hudson Valley survived the harsh reality that is a rural upstate New York winter.

*Slavery in the Capital Region: A Conversation on African American History with Dr. Oscar Williams

Saturday, Feb 23 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm • Free for members or \$5

Dr. Oscar Williams, Chair of UAlbany's Africana Studies department, is an expert in African American history. Join us for a conversation on the history of slavery in our region.

Who was the "Miss" that became Mrs.?

Saturday, March 9 - 2pm @ 32 W • Free for members or \$5

Join genealogist Tina Post for a program that will help both novice and intermediate genealogists. March is Women's History Month. Have you found the elusive maiden name of the women who married the men in your family tree? This talk will provide some case studies and clues to aid in finding her identity!

*Slavery and Dutch-Palatine Farmers w/ Travis Bowman

Saturday, March 23 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm • Free for members or \$5

How did middle class farmers in New York interact with slavery? Travis Bowman, Senior Curator of the New York State Bureau of Historic Sites will discuss the surprisingly large role that slavery played in colonial and revolutionary era New York. Mr. Bowman will examine how slavery evolved in New York under the Dutch, British, and American systems of government, and how the institution was utilized at a local and personal level among immigrants and their descendants in the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys.

Terminal Contracts: The Barge Canal and Public Access with Craig Williams

Saturday, March 30 - 2pm @ 32 W • Free for members or \$5

Craig Williams, formerly of the NYS Museum, is our region's foremost scholar on the Erie Canal. Join us for a conversation on Barge Canal terminals, including the now-gone terminal in Schenectady, and how these public access points are still important today.

Where to Find the Historic Erie Canal w/ Kenneth Silber

Saturday, April 13 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm • Free for members or \$5

Kenneth Silber, author of *In DeWitt's Footsteps: Seeing History on the Erie Canal*, will present an illustrated talk on exploring Erie Canal historic sites, including remnants of the original Clinton's Ditch.

The "Willigee Negroes" with Dan Weaver and SCHS Annual Meeting

Saturday, April 27 - 1:30pm @ Mabee Farm • Free for members or \$5

Following our annual meeting, Dan Weaver will discuss the settlers of the Willigee Patent, the first permanent settlement in the Mohawk Valley west of Schenectady. Weaver will also discuss the identity of the mysterious "Willigee Negroes" mentioned in Sir William Johnson's Papers. Weaver owns an antiquarian bookstore in Amsterdam, and writes a local history column for the

Amsterdam Recorder.

FOR FAMILIES

Schenectady Scavenge

Wednesday, Feb 20 - 10am- 2pm @ 32 W • \$8

Our museum has a new exhibit exploring childhood and play in Schenectady. We've devised a riddling scavenger hunt to guide kids through the artifacts. Follow the clues, complete the hunt, and receive a prize!

Family Game Night

Thursday, Feb 21 - 5-7pm @ 32 W • Free!

A night of playing the games that make childhood rich and entertaining. Intergenerational participation is encouraged!

American Girl Tea

Saturday, Feb 16 - 2pm @ 32 W • \$8

Join us for an elegant tea and tasty treats! This month our host will be Addy Walker, a brave girl born into slavery who escapes to a new and uncertain life. Guests will make a bracelet inspired by Addy's first novel. All dolls welcome!

Day on the Farm Program

Wednesday, April 24 - 10am @ Mabee Farm • \$8

Spring is here and the growing season has begun! We're getting an early start on our crops this year but we need your help! Kids will go from farm to fork- planting, milling and baking a fresh loaf of bread.

FOOD AND DRINK

Drink the Seasons: Ides of March

Friday, March 15 - 6pm @ Brouwer House • \$25

It's the Ides of March, a day celebrating the first full moon of the new year. And indeed, spring is on its way! Led by historian John Gearing, we'll sample a variety of seasonal libations, made with locally grown ingredients. Get cozy in Schenectady's oldest home as we welcome spring!

Tavern Night with Chef Thomas Dowd

Date TBD @ Brouwer House • \$42

Enjoy a lively three-course meal in a traditional tavern setting! SCCC's Chef Thomas Dowd will work from historic recipes, preparing a tavern-inspired feast.

MUSIC, FESTIVALS, & MORE!

The Capital Region Grown-Up Easter Egg Hunt

Saturday, April 27 @ Mabee Farm • Time and price TBD

A "grown up" version of the childhood egg hunt, with prizes for adults. All proceeds for this event benefit the Melissa Daniels' Memorial Scholarship Fund (a component fund of the Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region). Featuring food, beer, fun and games!

Howlin' at the Moon

Sponsored by Wolf Hollow Brewing Company

Upcoming concerts at Mabee Farm include:

Running the River

January 23 at 7pm • \$6

Rusticator

March 22 at 7pm • \$6

Washington County Line

February 19 at 7pm • \$6

The Nellies

April 18 at 7pm • \$6

Thanks to our members!

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New Brews

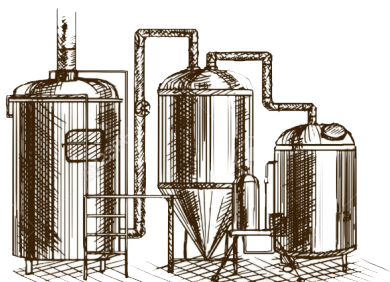
By Michael Diana

The classroom is dark, softly lit by the projector screen at the front. The speaker I watch is a student, a young man who perhaps hasn't yet found his footing as a public speaker. The professor sits at the back, making the occasional note in his book. The other students sit around me, some paying polite attention, others not-so-secretly studying for their next classes. After the students finish their presentations, I'll present as well. Of course, I'm not here for a grade. For me, this is an Outreach Program. My audience is the Schenectady County Community College Craft Beer Brewing program. While these students are looking to their futures, I hope to give them a glimpse into the past.

I'll tell them the stories of brewers and distillers of old. I'll share tales of troublesome tapsters like Van Slyck and Viele, and how they feuded for first place amongst the settlers of Schenectady. I'll tell them how female tavern owners like the indomitable Antonia Van Cuyler and Anna Kendall held their own in what was an overwhelmingly male environment. I'll try to show the students that as years passed and morals morphed, beer always played an immutable role in the social and economic life of our county. In the 1800s, prim politicians like mayors Abel Smith and Henry DeForest did their level best to control people's appetites for beer – to no avail. In the beginning, beer was brewed at home and nearly every household knew how to do it. As Schenectady and the nation industrialized, these skills were mostly forgotten. But that's now changing.

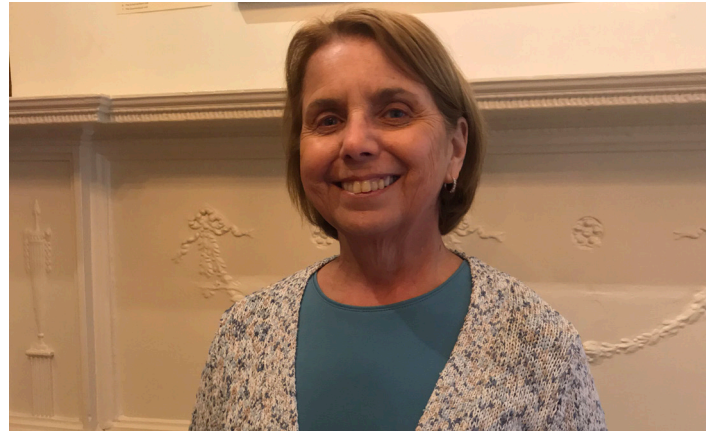
The nervous young man concludes and receives his applause. The last student steps up to the podium with some apparent self-confidence. She begins her pitch for a new way for small breweries to cross promote themselves... or something like that. I'm lost in my own thoughts now. It occurs to me that the presentations here – yes, even mine – will eventually be forgotten. This quiet Wednesday afternoon will never be cited by future generations as a pivotal moment. Nevertheless, I like to think these students are part of something bigger than they might realize. Schenectady is in the midst of a craft beer renaissance, now with four breweries in the area and the much anticipated Ale Trail to connect them all. We at the Historical Society will be sure to thoroughly document and build programs around these breweries.

I survey the students one last time as the teacher introduces me to the class. What will they go on to accomplish? In ways big and small, the future is in their hands.



Volunteer Spotlight

By John Angilletta



When **Connie Emery** says that she “digs” being a volunteer for SCHS, she means it literally. Connie began her volunteer work with us in 2002 as a member and graduate of the Community Archeology Project at SUNY Schenectady. Connie and her fellow students spent most of that summer digging on the grounds around the Mabee House and Inn.

As part of that program, Connie helped uncover many artifacts from the Farm's history. She also helped to identify, catalog and store the artifacts now housed at both the Mabee Farm and the SCHS headquarters.

Connie, who grew up in Charlton and attended Burnt Hills schools, came by her love of history during her college days as an English major at SUNY Plattsburgh. Plattsburgh was also the place where she met her future husband Gary (who just happened to be a history major). Connie and Gary moved to Scotia in 1974 where they raised their son and daughter. They still reside in Scotia today.

Connie is truly a “super” volunteer; she is equally at home helping with special events at the Mabee Farm and assisting with school programs. She has also spent many hours downtown at the Grems-Doolittle Library doing research and assisting wherever she is needed. As if this were not enough, Connie also finds time to volunteer at the Whitney Book Corner on Union Street.

From parking at special events to working with visitors, Connie enjoys it all. She is also a fan of the recent restoration work and interpretation of the Mabee Farm, noting that the project shows real progress in the way that we tell the story of the Mabees' to the public, while also putting a more personal stamp on our tours.

In her spare time, Connie enjoys time with her family, reading, and exploring her family's genealogy. Connie has discovered that she can trace her family history back to Hendrick Vrooman, who was slain during the Schenectady Massacre of 1690. This really cements her ties to SCHS and to the Stockade area of Schenectady.

We are fortunate to have dedicated volunteers like Connie who give their time and energy to SCHS and the public, and we are proud to have Connie in our volunteer spotlight.

A Dishonorable Trade

By Susanna Fout

This past summer I spent several months studying 18th and 19th century wills and inventories of landowners throughout the Mohawk and Hudson Valley. During my quest to study the material culture of early New York, I was reminded of a much darker truth. There, among the lists of furniture, tools, livestock and other items of value, were African men and women. Though sometimes identified by Anglicized names, most were listed just as “negroe woman” or “young negroe boy” – and always with a price attached. These lists were a somber reminder of the role of slavery in our region, and the once accepted practice to barter and trade human lives.

When we discuss the history of our region – the growth of agriculture, the establishment of skilled trades, or the development of infrastructure and transportation – we often forget the hands that made it possible. The very survival of early colonists rests, in part, on the backs of those who became enslaved laborers in foreign lands. The profits from the slave trade and products of slave labor helped to fuel the world's first industrial revolution. By the early 1800s, however, moral outrage against slave trading emerged in New York. And, as abolitionist and anti-Southern sentiments rose during the mid-1800s, the memory of slavery in northern states grew dimmer. Time has only seemed to perpetuate the misconception that slavery was a scourge of the South. Many of us have forgotten that slavery in North America proliferated on the Hudson and Mohawk rivers, introduced by the Dutch who colonized New York State in the 1600s.

New York was rich in natural resources. Navigable rivers linked the Atlantic with the interior and supplied a steady stream of furs; thick forests provided game and plenty of timber for building; and alternating seasons and arable lands were ripe for farming. However, amidst this abundance, there was one resource Dutch colonists lacked: labor. The systematic use of slave labor in New Netherland began as early as 1626 in New Amsterdam and capitalized on the need for manpower to cultivate New York's natural resources. As the colony made its way up the Hudson River, the Dutch West India Company grew dependent on the labor of African slaves to clear forests, build roads, construct houses and produce food, all of which made the colony viable. As the settlement continued to expand during the 1700s, the economic practice of

slavery expanded to the Mohawk Valley and surrounding region. We know that 11 of the 60 people killed in the Schenectady Massacre of 1690 were slaves, demonstrating that slavery was a way of life in Schenectady from the time of its first settlement.

In early 2019, SCHS will receive the traveling exhibition “A Dishonorable Trade: Human Trafficking in the Dutch Atlantic World.” The exhibit examines the early development of the Dutch slave trade and the effect this commercial

Mr Ryer Schermerhorn.

Albany April 30. 1772.

There are at present no Vessels
at New York that are going to Pensacola —
therefore have spoke to Cap^t. Dean. who is a
going in about Ten Days from this Place
for the West Indies — he says he will take
y^r. Negro wench a long Hfe for Rum
or Sugar. — Bring the Returns with him —
I would advise you to come down & agree
with Cap^t. Dean — I expect to see you every
minute — when he comes will immediately
let you know — I remain your friend &
most Hum^l servant
John Hansen

SLAVERY
Ex Misc 135

The futures of countless Mohawk slaves were scrawled in ink, such as in the letter above. In this 1772 letter from John Hansen to Ryer Schermerhorn, Hansen proposes trading Schermerhorn's unnamed "Negro wench" for rum and sugar. In another document retained by SCHS, Phillip Vedder grants permission for his female slave to marry Peter Jackson. Enslaved people in Schenectady, as elsewhere, faced numerous restrictions on their behavior and needed permission from their owners for many life choices, in addition to being used for their labor. Source: SCHS Collection.

enterprise had on the lives of Africans enslaved by it. A final look will delve into the history of slavery in Schenectady and will give voice to the enslaved Africans who lived and worked at our own Mabee Farm. As visitors explore “A Dishonorable Trade,” they may notice one striking difference between this and other SCHS exhibitions: a complete lack of artifacts. Slaves, who were only as valuable as the labor they produced, left little material evidence of their existence. Their history is relinquished to transactional records, inventories, receipts, newspaper advertisements, and other legal documents. Rarely do we hear the voices of enslaved Africans in the north, let alone see objects of their daily life.

“A Dishonorable Trade” was created by NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation for the Crailo Historic Site in Rensselaer, NY. Research and development of the exhibit was spearheaded by a grant from the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Abolition and Resistance. Crailo staff worked with Yale History professors, the Gilder Lehrman Center, the American History Workshop, the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture, and experts in the interpretation of the history of slavery and civil rights. Artists, curators and educators offered creative ways to interpret the history of people whose own words and objects are often missing from the historical record.

The exhibition is part of a larger series, featuring lectures, continuing from January to May in the Franchere Education Center at Mabee Farm Historic Site. We are grateful for the opportunity to display this exhibition and bring in lecturers, as we engage people in this often forgotten, but important history.



This engraving, a propaganda piece to encourage the settlement in New Amsterdam, is the only known illustration of blacks in that colony. Source: Dutch, mid-1600s, The New York Public Library.



Len Tantillo's 2013 painting, *Legacy: Mabee Farm, A Dutch farmstead on the Mohawk River circa 1800*, uses modeling and historical research to make history come alive. *Legacy* helps capture and reflect the spirit of the Mohawk Valley, and of life on an early American farm. Featured in the foreground is Jack, a slave whose story is documented in the Mabee family records. Source: SCHS Collection.



Above: Though tall grass and a crumbling roof dominate the foreground, the fields behind the Plotterskill Farm's barn were neatly mowed in late summer. Front: A recent photograph of the Pine Grove Farm. Sources: Julia Walsh.

"Forgotten Farms" continued from page 1

to learn more about what these farms were like in the past, and make a trip to the farms in their current state. My research focused solely on abandoned farms; the Schenectady County farms that are still in operation will be examined in 2019 in the exhibition "Rural Modern" at the SCHS.

From today's vantage point, the abandoned farms seem old and forgotten. My first day of exploration led me to an old farm on the corner of Pattersonville-Rynex Corners Road and Mariaville Road. As I surveyed the land, I felt peaceful and spooked at the same time. The air was cool and dead-still; the light hazy-warm and seemed to saturate the colors of foliage and fallen farm structures. This strange medley of sensations exemplifies the state of this place: lost in time and claimed by the earth it sat on. The barn had collapsed in the middle, and some windows were removed, so the interior was exposed and condensed with fallen beams and left over equipment. Contradicting this scene was the mowed grass that surrounded the barn, a sign of ownership, however absentee. There was a certain ethereal beauty – and a real sadness – that a remnant of a family's livelihood was so dilapidated. I wanted to know the people of this place.

And there began the more difficult part of my journey, the research. I emailed the Princetown historian, Robert Jones, for information on the location. We are lucky at the SCHS that the Mabree Farm was lived in and taken care of until the SCHS obtained the property; the fate of abandoned farms is often ruin. If a private owner is not taking care of the property, it is unlikely that the site's history is being maintained either. Thanks to Mr. Jones, I could get started looking for the former proprietors of

what I now know is the Plotterskill Farm and Inn.

My next resources came closer to home, in the form of the SCHS librarian and archivist Michael Maloney. With some direction through the library, and a few search queries, I came across a lead. Using the newspaper database Fulton Search, I found a legal notice from a June 1939 copy of the Schenectady Gazette that stated a Clarence Gregg gave a parcel of the land from his dairy farm to the county, as part of making Mariaville Road the more official Route 159. The name was familiar, as I had attempted to take Lower Gregg Road to the farm initially. Now that I had a family name, I checked out the Gregg family in the extensive family records of the Grems-Dolittle Library. These types of breakthroughs are the fun part, especially when finding the faces of those you did not know you were looking for.

Clarence Gregg was the second child of Milton Gregg, the earliest proprietor of Plotterskill Farm that I could find. Milton and his wife Ella Aurelia Kline Gregg ran the white house on their property as the Gregg Inn. I found a photograph taken at the Gregg Inn in 1905. In the photo, a seven-and-a-half-year-old Clarence is wedged between his aunt and uncle to commemorate the Gregg-Kline family reunion. The adults have faces that are serious and pleasant; Clarence's mischievous grin is indicative that this photo was a brief break from the toil of a working family. On the day of the reunion, this farming family was relaxed.

Clarence Gregg went on to Union College to become a civil engineer, and was an alignment engineer in 1923 on some of the first vehicle tunnels built from Manhattan to Jersey City under the Hudson River. It is unclear when he returned to the Plotterskill Farm, but upon his return, he became a staple of the Boy Scout community as a



Above: This Gregg-Kline family photo from the SCHS archives shows a 1905 reunion on the grounds of the Plotterskill Farm. Source: SCHS Collection.

Scout leader for Troop 1 in Schenectady. Clarence was also the caretaker of the Schuyler Mansion, and an avid community volunteer; his name appears near constantly in the newspaper for committees and events during the 1970s. He still lived on his childhood property, but it is unclear what happened, as information about the modern Greggs seems to dry up.

Looking back at the photographs of the farm that I took before my archival research, their color and emotion take on a new meaning. Rather than the spookiness I had initially perceived, I now felt more of a bittersweet sadness, appreciative of the farming family's memories and livelihoods, while also mourning the decay of what once was.

As I continued exploring the area, I learned of a fallow farm on Route 7 in Duanesburg. At first, the only information I could find on the property was a series of black and white photos taken in winter. The photos depict pines shielding the barn, and its name, the Pine Grove Farm. With some help from Michael Maloney, I began to locate the Pine Grove Farm's history.

Pine Grove Farm was purchased by Joseph DeMarco in 1919. DeMarco used the farm to supply his creamery on Ferry Street in Schenectady. The farm grew in production and prominence over 20 years, until a huge overhaul from 1949 to 1950. The farm became a technological pinnacle for the area. Nearly fully-automated, the farm also increased the number of cows and chickens it could hold and care for. A new sanitation and cooling system were added, which reduced the number of necessary employees, but increased the health and quality of the cattle.

This renovation of the Pine Grove Farm led to an annual event in the 1960s called the "Rural-Urban Mixer" which encouraged collaboration between Schenectady city and county officials and residents to deal with new issues caused by the rise of suburban communities. Photos from the 1969 event seem like Norman Rockwell scenes; long tables with fresh food, and conspicuously dressed individuals. By this point, Joseph DeMarco had died, and the farm had passed to one of his six brothers, Ernie. After Ernie, Pine Grove Farm changed hands several more times until it closed in 1980. By this point, the farm had expanded, and its processing plant was located next to Morette's on

Erie Boulevard, where a gas station now stands.

Once I had gathered the story of Pine Grove Farm, I took a ride down Route 7 for a visit. In front of me was a similar view to the Plotterskill Farm. Two houses stood adjacent to the barn, which was clearly not in use. A mowed lawn encircled the enormous barn complex and the overgrowth it anchored. However, the feeling here was very different. The barn was weathered, but was standing strong. A proud metal sign ran across the roof line, silos tall despite the plant growth that climbed them. My visit was curtailed by a fact that the adjacent homes seemed to be occupied. Not wanting to trespass, I took a few photos and left.

When I arrived back at the Mabee Farm to our preserved house and barns, I silently thanked the people that have maintained its house and barns over three centuries. For years, the Mabee family remained dedicated to the land, farming all manner of crops and livestock. Since the Mabee Farm passed into the hands of SCHS, volunteers have dedicated countless hours to the preservation and maintenance of the site's structures. Today, the Mabee Farm tells the story of farming in Schenectady County, a story – and a lifestyle – that may be otherwise lost to time.

Of course, there are still farmers in Schenectady County. SCHS is now beginning to document and share these farmers' stories as part of its "Rural Modern" project. But, it is all too easy for the county's myriad micro-histories to be forgotten. To that end, I encourage everyone interested in local history to stay curious, to stay involved, to take ownership of your history, and to preserve stories for those that come after us.

A Preservation Survey

By Michael Maloney, Librarian/Archivist



Last year, we were fortunate enough to receive a grant through Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York (DHPSNY) to help with our strategic planning process. With that accomplished, we turned to them for even more assistance in the form of their preservation survey. DHPSNY is a statewide program that supports the vast network of unique library and archival repositories that safeguard New York's historical records. They also provide a range of free services to eligible cultural institutions throughout the state. These services include strategic planning, archival needs assessments, preservation assessments, and more.

Since the library and archives needs a new HVAC system (see page 5), we thought it might be a good idea to take a look at all aspects of how we are preserving the 200 linear feet of documents, 7,000 books, and the thousands of photographs that we keep in our library and archives. We want to know what we are doing correctly, but even more importantly, what we can improve on. We were awarded the application, and in February 2019, DHPSNY's preservation specialist will be visiting SCHS to take a thorough look at how we are preserving our collections.

Before DHPSNY gets here, we have to do a self-assessment that includes a 27-page questionnaire designed to make us take a close look at everything from day-to-day housekeeping practices, to our current policies and procedures. This questionnaire will not only help their preservation specialist, but it will allow us to think about aspects of our collection that we may not have thought about before. After we submit the questionnaire, DHPSNY's preservation specialist will make a trip to SCHS and spend a full day with our librarian/archivist, facilities manager, and executive director to go over the questionnaire and guide us towards changes to make.

This preservation survey will be a great next step in preventing further damage and mitigating deterioration of our collections. It will also help us secure grant funding, as a preservation survey is often a prerequisite for grants and other funding opportunities. We are extremely excited for this opportunity and for the opportunities that the preservation survey will bring in the future.

From top left: Mabee Farm to Fork; Executive Director M. terklaas during the Festival of Trees; Tavern Night at the



Around the Society

Jary Zawacki in a televised interview for Fall Foliage Festival; the opening reception for the Mabee Farm Interpretation; Bill Buell as Sim-
Brouwer House; the Festival of Trees; the Mabee House decorated for the holidays; dog-herding demos at Fall Foliage Festival.



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A Dishonorable Trade: Human Trafficking in the Dutch Atlantic World

exhibit and lectures at the Mabee Farm Historic Site
January - May 2019



BACK IN MY DAY: CHILDHOOD, PLAY, AND SCHENECTADY

Exhibition at the Schenectady County Historical Society:
January - November 2019

