

Schenectady County Historical Society



Newsletter Vol. 63, No. 3, Summer 2019 | 518.374.0263 | schenectadyhistorical.org



It Was Enough to Have Been a Unicorn: Kurt Vonnegut in Alplaus

By Jessica Polmateer, Alplaus Historian

In his debut novel, *Player Piano* (1952), Kurt Vonnegut transforms Schenectady into a dystopian society where machines replace the work of human laborers. Through satire and humor, *Player Piano* explores the implications of industrialization and the rise of major corporations like General Electric. Kurt's work was inspired by his three years as a public relations man for Schenectady's GE.

During his time at GE, Kurt lived in the hamlet of Alplaus, in a home that still stands, and still contains Vonnegut's writing desk. A World War II Purple Heart recipient, humanist, pacifist, and resolutely middle-class American, Kurt Vonnegut transcended the science fiction label to capture the essence of American society. For Schenectadians today, *Player Piano's* Schenectady is both familiar and jarring as we see just how real Kurt's automated world has become.

Kurt Vonnegut and his family moved to the small hamlet of Alplaus in the late 1940s, where they set down roots. The family became involved in the local community, and participated in volunteer activities. Kurt's neighbors remember the author walking each day to the post office to check his mail, taking his wife, Jane, and their children with him. Other neighbors discussed with Kurt his time in the war, or served alongside him in the volunteer fire department.

Born a mid-westerner in 1922, Kurt hailed from a wealthy but dysfunctional family. The Great Depression led to a decline in his father's architectural business, which in turn led to anger and depression issues in his mother. Sadly, Kurt's mother died of an overdose when he was in his early twenties. Though most believe it was a suicide, some family members

President's Letter

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Robert Weible
President

Richard Lewis
Vice-President

John Halstead
Treasurer

Robert Sullivan
Secretary

Marianne Blanchard
Immediate Past President

Robert Carney
Tom Dunn
Philip Fields
Ellen Fladger
John Gearing
Sarah Kirby
Carolina Lazzari
Laura Lee
Christopher Leonard
Kim Mabee
Kevin Richard-Morrow
Martin Strosberg
Mark Vermilyea
Dale Wade-Keszey
John Woodward

STAFF

Mary Zawacki
Executive Director

Mary Treanor
Administrative Officer

Vacant
Librarian/Archivist

Susanna Fout
Exhibitions & Collections Manager

Michael Diana
Education & Programs Manager

John Ackner
Facilities Manager

VISIT

Library & Museum | M-F 9-5; Sat 10-2
32 Washington Ave, Schenectady, NY

Mabee Farm | Tues-Sat, 10-4
Guided tours at 11am, 1:30pm, and 3pm
1100 Main St, Rotterdam Jct, NY

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

CONTACT

www.schenectadyhistorical.org/people

"I don't know much about history," declared Henry Ford, "and I wouldn't give a nickel for all the history in the world. It means nothing to me." "History," he famously said, "is bunk."

Ford wasn't the last person to suggest the futility of studying history, reading it, preserving it, or drawing any kind of meaning from it. Today, critics in the education field are even suggesting that history isn't as important as business, science, technology, or math. One university in Wisconsin tried (unsuccessfully) to stop offering a major in history, and Florida politicians tinkered with the idea of charging higher fees for history and other liberal arts degrees than for engineering or mathematics diplomas.

As the educators behind the nationwide History Relevance Campaign (HISTORYRELEVANCE.COM) have been stressing for the past few years, however, technical skills alone don't guarantee a healthy or prosperous future. And to make their point, the people behind the campaign have identified seven ways in which history is essential:

- **Identity.** History nurtures personal identity and values that guide each of us in our approach to life and each other.
- **Critical Skills.** History teaches independent thinking and builds skills that enable people to uncover and analyze facts and communicate their meaning to general audiences.
- **Community Service.** History strengthens our connections to each other and builds strong, resilient communities.
- **Economic Development.** Cultural heritage is a demonstrated asset which attracts talent and enhances development in any community.
- **Citizenship.** History teaches us the origins and meaning of our democratic values and strengthens our ability to work together.
- **Leadership.** Historical understanding provides leaders with the courage, skills, and wisdom to confront the challenges of our time.
- **Legacy.** History provides the grounding to appreciate what it means to be a member of a family, a community, or a nation.

No doubt about it. It really is essential for each of us—and all of us together—to appreciate, and make good use of our memories and our history. Consider, for example, what a tragedy it can be for a person to lose his or her memory. And consider how great the tragedy must be when whole communities lose the memories that bind them together.

Historical societies like ours are, in fact, the memories of our communities. We're not trivial, self-absorbed, or useless. We're essential. Remember that. And consider how you can help us—and everyone in our community—build a better future by making productive use of the memories and values that make Schenectady County so special.

SCHS is currently working to find new income streams to ensure our long-term sustainability. To that end, I encourage you to consider SCHS in your own plans. We just announced one new initiative, the 1661 Society, which recognizes those generous individuals who are leaving a future legacy to the Schenectady County Historical Society. We acknowledge a bequest intention or other planned gifts of any size with membership in the 1661 Society.

If you've already included SCHS in your giving plans, thank you! We would be delighted to include you in our 1661 Society. Kindly let us know your plans by contacting us at 518-374-0263x4.

- Robert Weible, PRESIDENT@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG

Welcome, New Trustees!

We're pleased to welcome Philip Fields and Mark Vermilyea to the SCHS Board of Trustees. Their terms are from 2019-2022.



Mark Vermilyea is a lifelong area resident with a rich and varied background in community and volunteer activities: Cub and Boy Scout leader, many reading and mentoring programs with local schools, ranging from elementary through high school, and a religious education teacher at UU Society of Schenectady. As a volunteer at SCHS, he researched and led a tour of the local Armory and has helped with the spring school programs at Mabee Farm. He's been working as a mechanical engineer and program leader at GE Research since an internship in 1977, and has degrees from Cornell, Stanford (Master's) and RPI (PhD). His work on MR magnets

and systems, x-ray tubes and imaging systems and composite materials and manufacturing have resulted in 75 technical publications and 58 patents. He's an avid hiker, cyclist, and woodworker. His interest in SCHS began with his grandmother's cataloging of Larry Hart's "Tales of Old Dorp" in the 70s when Mark was in high school.



Philip Fields is currently appointed as the Director of Budget for the New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee. Prior to that, he served as Deputy Fiscal Director and Senior Transportation Analyst for the Ways and Means Committee, Senior Analyst for the Corporations, Authorities, and Commissions Committee, and Analyst for the Real Property Taxation Committee. Philip is also the Deputy Chair of the Schenectady County Legislature and currently chairs the County Rules Committee as well as the County Ways and Means Committee. He is also Vice Chair of SEFCU Supervisory Committee, a volunteer on the Capital Region Youth Tennis

Foundation Board of Directors and other various community and cultural organizations. Philip earned Master's and Bachelor's Degrees in Economics from the University at Albany.

PrivileGEd: A Review

Review: *PrivileGEd: Experiences From My Unusual 40-year Career with One of America's Most Iconic Companies*, by Michael A. Davi

Review by Martin Strosberg



If you have little or no idea at all about what GE engineers do all day, either at the facilities in Schenectady or anywhere in GE's world, you will be in for an eye-opener with Michael Davi's book. His "unusual" 40-year career is remarkable for its twists and turns, as well as for the sheer variety of entries that undoubtedly appear on his C.V. For sure, words like routine, humdrum, or predictable simply cannot be used to describe his GE experience.

Warning: the language is often technical and full of insider GE terminology. But you don't need to be a mechanical engineer or a member of the cognoscenti (many of whom live in the Schenectady area) to appreciate his story.

Roots

Early in the book, Schenectady native Davi pays homage to his Italian immigrant grandparents, who first started working for GE in the early 20th century. It is obvious that Davi spent considerable time in the GE archives tracing their history. He expresses his gratitude for their sacrifices and accomplishments, and asserts that they would have been proud to see him become a professional engineer with the company. Clearly, GE was not just another job for Davi.

Work

On Davi's very first day at GE in 1976 as a "Measurement Service" engineer, even before he could complete all his employment forms, the recent RPI graduate was called away from his Schenectady base to help investigate the relationship between birds and GE aircraft engines. Several months previous, a DC-10 cargo plane had crashed after its GE engines ingested birds upon takeoff. The investigation was assigned to an elite team including an expert on aircraft engine noise, an ornithologist, and noted statistician Dr. Gerald Hahn. Davi joined the team as its most junior member.

This assignment was a prelude to more exciting things to come. Davi's very next job was testing the gas turbine engines on a large Navy cargo ship while crossing the Atlantic on rough seas. And this was just the beginning. Over four decades, Davi worked primarily with gas turbines such as industrial power generation equipment and aircraft engines. With the help of outstanding mentors, he was able to take on increasingly difficult and wide-ranging assignments with growing levels of responsibility.

Setbacks and Detours

Davi's career trajectory was by no means smooth, and there was no set career ladder to climb. Serendipity, not to mention the ups and downs of the turbine business, all had an influence. Indeed, after five years he was laid off due to a business downturn. Fortunately, he landed on his feet with a job at Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory in Niskayuna, an entirely separate division of GE. Here, on what turned out to be a three-year hiatus from the Gas Turbine Division, he experienced the austere and bureaucratic culture of nuclear defense contracting imprinted upon the organization by Admiral Hyman Rickover, father of the nuclear Navy. Nevertheless, during this time, Davi was able to form close, rewarding, and productive working relationships with his colleagues. Furthermore, with the support of the GE tuition-remission program, he finished an MS in Industrial Administration from Union College. This degree helped him return to and advance in the Turbine Division.

GE Chairman Jack Welch

No story of the turbine business in Schenectady could be complete without a discussion of Jack Welch, whose tenure as GE Chairman coincided with a drastic reduction in workforce. Although Davi devotes only a few pages to Welch, he does not mince his words about Welch's relentless push to maximize profits, regardless of the cost. "Welch's management style of instilling conflict and fear caused havoc throughout the Schenectady plant, creating adversarial relationships with the union and the city of Schenectady itself. Welch seemed to be conducting a personal vendetta against the Schenectady plant, particularly against the labor union, which represented thousands of hourly workers."

Davi contends that Welch's fixation on improving the quarterly financial results, regardless of the stage of the business cycle, while at the same time shortchanging long-term investment in research and new product development ended up costing the turbine business for decades.

Lessons

Readers, regardless of technical background, can fully appreciate Davi's central message: innovation and problem-solving in a complex and dynamic industry requires teamwork based on strong interpersonal relationships built on trust and friendship among highly skilled, motivated, and dedicated professionals.

Davi's memoir is an important addition to the historical record of GE in Schenectady, and reminds us what it took to become an iconic American company.

Michael A. Davi, *PrivileGEd: Experiences From My Unusual 40-year Career with One of America's Most Iconic Companies*, The Troy Book Makers, 2018, 197 pages. For ordering information see WWW.MICHAELDAVI.NET.

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.

Schenectady's Worst Flood

By Gail Denisoff – October 16, 2018

Schenectady experienced its worst flood in the spring of 1914 when a combination of heavy winter snowmelt and ice jams caused the Mohawk to flood. This flood was very well documented and many photos of the flood can be seen on our New York Heritage page at NYHERITAGE.ORG/COLLECTIONS/NATURAL-DISASTERS-SCHENECTADY-COUNTY.

Collection Spotlight: Mohawk Prayer Book

By Michael Maloney – March 6, 2019

In early March we were visited by a film crew shooting a documentary that focuses on the Mohawk people, both in Canada and throughout New York. They stopped by SCHS and we brought out our Mohawk language prayer book. The prayer book is not only very interesting, but it has a local connection in that Laurens Van Der Volgen helped translate it.

Collection Spotlight: Fayette W. Clifford World War II Collection

By Angela Matyi – May 2, 2019

Library volunteer Angela Matyi created this finding aid for the Fayette W. Clifford World War II Collection. Fayette Clifford fought during WWII and this collection contains photos, correspondence, citations, and other items from his time in the Pacific Theater.

The Blakeslee Family of Schenectady

By Erin Hill-Burns – May 16, 2019

A recently donated item documents the life of the Blakeslee family. Library volunteer Erin Hill-Burns conducted some extensive genealogy research on the Blakeslee family and even found an interesting connection between the family and the Schenectady County Historical Society.

Natural Disaster Collection

When we think of natural disasters in Schenectady, the first thing that comes to mind are floods. Records of Schenectady's floods date back to 1832 when the spring thaw caused an ice jam to break through the Erie Canal banks and flood Schenectady. The spring thaw and ice jams continue to cause problems in Schenectady up to the present day. Later floods are documented in photographs held by our library. The 1914 flood was historic and is considered the worst flood Schenectady has seen. Many of the photographs in this collection are of this flood, including the one seen below.

We thought this collection would be a great addition to our New York Heritage page, so we applied for and received a Regional Collection grant from CDLC (who has helped us digitize so many of our collections). Library volunteer Angela Matyi then went to work choosing over 300 photographs to be scanned. She then provided metadata for the photos and we uploaded them to our New York Heritage page.

The collection is not limited just to floods; there are also photographs of blizzards and other storms that devastated Schenectady County, making it a truly interesting collection.



What's Happening?

EXHIBITS

Back in my Day: Childhood, Play, and Schenectady

Through November @ 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

Through September @ 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.

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.

Rural Modern

Opens in October @ Mabee Farm

Rural life and farming – and with it, the hard work, the understanding of the land, and the stories of those who farm it – is at the heart of Schenectady County. Today, after centuries of fields and flocks, we have created a rural landscape that is fruitful, beautiful, and largely misunderstood by those who live in cities or suburbs. This exhibit explores the stories of Schenectady's rural farmers.

TOURS AND TRIPS

Pre-registration is required for most programs.

Secret Stockade Saturdays

Saturdays: July 6, Aug 3, Sept 7, and Oct 5 at 10am • \$20

The Stockade and its secrets come to life on this behind-the-scenes journey through the neighborhood. Join us for a morning of mysteries as our guides lead us from the museum, through the Stockade, and inside two Stockade homes, each with their own legends and lore. Refreshments will be served inside the Stockade's oldest home, the historic Brouwer House. This tour lasts three hours.

GE Realty Plot Walking Tours

Saturdays: July 20, Aug 10, and Sept 21 at 10am • \$20

Join Chris Leonard, Schenectady City Historian and author of Schenectady's General Electric Realty Plot, on a walking tour of the historic GE Realty Plot neighborhood.

Leonard will cover the dynamic events and unique cast of characters who have called "The Plot" their home. The tour includes stories and anecdotes about GE inventors and executives, Schenectady business and political leaders, entertainers, and other incomparable individuals, as well as the formation of the Plot and ongoing efforts to protect these stately homes. Some of the many luminaries covered include Charles P. Steinmetz, Irving Langmuir, Izetta Jewel Miller and Ernst Alexanderson. Tours last two hours and include refreshments.

Taste of Little Italy Tour

Wednesday, July 10, 2pm @ Warren Street • \$15

Che Bello! Come explore Schenectady's Little Italy in the best way possible- through its foods! We'll be visiting some of the best restaurants around and see how history brought these unique flavors to our town. The sights, the smells, the tastes...mamma mia!

African American History Tour

Wednesday, July 17 at 6pm @ 32 Washington • \$10, members free

Schenectady's black heritage is rich and storied — especially in the Stockade. Join us for a walking tour as we explore the people and places that make Schenectady's black heritage so vibrant. From the Underground Railroad to the Great Migration and the Civil Rights movement, African Americans have created a proud and tangible legacy in Schenectady County's history!

State and Jay Street Tour

Thursday, July 18 at 6pm @ 422 Liberty Street • \$10, members free

Downtown Schenectady is alive with a brand new energy! You may know the awesome restaurants and storefronts that make these streets unique but do you know the history? Take a walk with us as we see how the dusty "Road to Albany" became the heart of an American city.

Footsteps of Hamilton

Saturday, Aug 17 at 10am @ 32 Washington Ave • \$10, members free

Hamilton is in town! No, really! Join us as we celebrate the opening of HAMILTON at Proctors with a walk through Schenectady dedicated to the travels of Alexander Hamilton, and some of his contemporaries. We'll touch on Hamilton's friends, lovers, and politics, and explore how the American Revolution manifested in Schenectady.

Scandalous Schenectady

Friday Aug 23 & Thursday Aug 29 at 6pm @ 32 Washington Ave • \$10, free for members

Every city has its fair share of scandal! Scandalous Schenectady recalls some of Schenectady's more nefarious characters. Bold bootlegging, cruel kidnappings and maybe even a few mysterious murders...this tour has it all!

Schenectady Suds: Historic Beer Tour of the Stockade

Wednesdays, Sept 18 & 25 at 6pm @ 32 Washington Ave • \$21,

includes drinks at Frog Alley Brewing and the Van Dyck

Take a walk along what was once known as "Brewer's Street," looking at local history through the lens of a beer

glass. This walking tour of the Historic Stockade District will examine the history of brewing and its impact on our history, from the Colonial era to today's craft brew revival.

Stockade Walkabout

Saturday, Sept 28 @ 32 Washington Ave • Price TBD

Ever wanted to peek inside the beautiful homes that grace the Stockade? Mark your calendars! The Stockade Walkabout is your chance! Schenectady's Stockade is the oldest registered historic district in New York State. The Stockade Walkabout invites visitors to step inside privately-owned homes in the neighborhood, accessible to the public for one day only!

TALKS AND WORKSHOPS

Workshop: Genealogy 201: Military and Court Records

Wednesdays, Aug 28 to Oct 9 - 6:30pm @ Mabee Farm • \$240

Save your spot for this 6-week course with Judith Herbert, Certified Genealogist. Military and court records are some of most underutilized, valuable genealogical sources available. We'll focus on using these records to solve difficult questions of relationship (parentage, spouse, children), and add biographical detail to the lives of your ancestors.

FOR FAMILIES

Ghost Stories at Mabee Farm

Wednesday, July 24, 8pm • \$8

Join us for a spooky evening! We'll kindle the campfire, roast s'mores, and take an after-dark tour of the Mabee Farm while sharing local ghost stories and tall tales. Please register in advance!

The Apprentice

Wednesday, July 31, 10am @ Mabee Farm • \$15

In this program, kids will learn colonial trades. We'll open up our carpenter shop, and our blacksmith shop for some hands-on experience. Our apprentices will then build an authentic model of a Dutch Barn. Ideal for kids aged 8 to 14. Pre-Registration required.

A Day on the Farm

Thursday, August 8, 10am @ Mabee Farm • \$8 adults and kids

In this program, kids get hands on with history and agriculture! We'll start by planting some veggies in our kitchen garden. Next, we'll go from farm to table, harvesting our very own rye and using it to bake a fresh loaf of bread. Should be tasty and lots of fun! Pre-Registration Required.

American Girl Tea

Wednesday, August 14, 2pm @ Mabee Farm • \$8 adults and kids

We'll meet our host, Caroline Abbott, a brave girl from Sacket's Harbor NY in 1812 as we explore Mabee Farm's period boats and make a boat-themed craft to take home. Refreshments served.

FOOD AND DRINK

Drink the Seasons: Autumn

Thursday, Oct 3 - 6pm @ Brouwer House • \$25

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 fall!

Mabee Farm to Fork

Saturday, Oct 5 - 5pm @ Mabee Farm • \$50+

The Schenectady County Historical Society and the Electric City Food Co-op are teaming up once again to present Mabee Farm to Fork, a celebration of local foods! Join us for a pastoral evening in the Barn at Mabee Farm, as we celebrate the farm-to-table tradition. Our four-course meal features locally-grown foods served alongside craft beverages, live music by the Arch Stanton Quartet, silent auction and raffle with great prizes, and farm demonstrations. We're even sourcing ingredients from Mabee Farm's own fields!

MUSIC, FESTIVALS, & MORE!

CanalFest

Saturday, July 13, 11am-3pm @ Mabee Farm • FREE!

Join us for a day of FREE fun, family activities as we celebrate the Erie Canalway! The festivities include live music, petting zoo and pony rides, rehabbed wild animals, historic boat rides, kayak paddling, food and craft beer, barn-raising, kids activities, craft vendors, FREE ICE CREAM, demonstrations inspired by the Erie Canal, and family-friendly tours of the historic Mabee house. Sponsored by the Schenectady Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Stewart's Shops, and Schenectady County!

Arts and Crafts Festival

Saturday, August 24, 10am-3pm @ Mabee Farm • \$5

We're bringing together the very best of the Capital Region's handcrafted goods! Join us as 65 artists and crafters fill Mabee Farm with eclectic, beautifully handcrafted items. All items are handmade here in our region, and include jewelry, home decor, fine art, ceramics, soaps, candles, woodworking, and more!

Howlin' at the Moon

Sponsored by Wolf Hollow Brewing Company

Upcoming concerts at Mabee Farm include:

Washington County Line

July 16 at 7pm • \$6

Everest Rising

Sept 12 at 7pm • \$6

3/4 North

August 15 at 7pm • \$6

Hot Tuesday

Oct 17 at 7pm • \$6

Thanks to our New and Renewed Members!

Benefactor

Linda S. Flynt
John & Lucy Halstead
Donna Nealon Hoffman
Karen Brown Johnson
Charles & Debra McCambridge

Business Sponsor

Logical Net Corporation
Discover Schenectady
Doubletree & Hampton Inn
Charles Piotrowski

Sponsor

Philip & Jo Ann Adams
John & Carolyn Assini
Elmer & Olga Bertsch
Kenneth Chase
David Connelly, Jr. & Michol Murphy
Andrea Coppola
Carol Delamarter
Albert C. Di Nicola
Robert & Anastasia Fenton
Hon. Philip Fields
Ellen Fladger & Arden Rauch

Jocelyn Foley-Creech
Thomas & Nancy Gifford
Worth Gretter
Kurt & Janet Hollocher
Michael & Gisela Jakubowski
Mary Jefferson
Teresa Kennedy
Phil Kennicott & Mary Gray
Brenda Mabie
Dale Miller & Zoe Oxley
Andrew Morris & Mary Wallinger
Jonathan & Joan Pearson IV
Marguerite Pileggi
Kevin & Jennifer Richard-Morrow
Lawrence & Jennifer Schmidt
Peter Simmonds
Martin Strosberg
Frank Taormina
Bruno & Ruth Tolge
George & Katherine Trimarco
Samuel Wait, Jr.
David & Janice Walz
Greg Welsh
Chris & Jean Wisniewski
Ralph & Pauline Wood
Richard & Patricia Yager

Family

Sheldon & Rochelle Abelson
Philip & Linda Arony
Larry & Carolyn Bailey
Fred & Diane Barney
Randall Beach
John Beatty
Anthony & Patricia Bertino
Anthony & Julianne Bifaro
Bart & Marilyn Bisgrove
Alex Brownstein
Wayne & Amy Brule
Ronald & Wanda Burch
Peter Carman & Lynn Carman Bodden
Debra Carpenter
Diana O. Carter
Kevin & Vanessa Chamberlain
Christopher & Maria Conto
Keith & Syma Cramer
Sidney & Ann Cramer
Dan & Sue Dayton
John & Irene DeGraff
James & Judith DePasquale
Michael & Lillian DePetrillo
Greg & Lisa Diana

Bill Donato
Lawrence & Ellen Eisenberg
William & Donna Fairlee
Allan & LouAnn Falcon
Phillip & Jane Falconer
Renie Federighi
Robert Felthousen
Ruth G. Fitzmorris
Charles & Jenny Frank
James & Kathleen Frederick
Christine Galvin
Phillip & Janet Grigsby
John & Frances Gross
Gerald & Beatrice Hahn
Stanley & Barbara Harris
Harlan & Helen Harrison
Walter & Jean Hayes
Joseph Heyman
Don & Anne Hotaling
Bernice Izzo
Dugald & Sharon Jackson IV
Scott & Diane Kilbourn
Edward & Sharlene King
Douglas & Deborah Kreifels

Norman & Christine Kuchar
Livio & Carolina Lazzari
Benjamin C. & Leah J. Lee
Richard & Linda Lewis, Jr.
Richard MacKinnon
David & Heather Manthey
Joseph & Susan Masi
George & Lynne Matern
Bruce & Laura Matthews
Jane McCloskey
John & Anne Marie McLaughlin
Paul Meier & Elizabeth Snyder
Tony & Lois Miller
Robert Miller & Jo-Ann Lubinski
Eugene Monaco & Christine Katchmar
Mardy Moore
Harold & Jo Anne Moore
Friends of the Schdy Public Library
Michael & Barbara Naumoff
Paul & Deborah O'Brien
James & Christine O'Connor
Laurence & Nancy Pardi
William & Janet Pickney

Gerry & Eleanor Pierce
Ed & Tina Post
Rebecca Rider
Thomas & Barbara Rider
Kathryn Rose
Cynthia Sagendorph
Denis & Christie Sardella
John Scherer
Shawn M. Schultz
Scott & Jean Scofield
Daniel Seaver
Will & Lois Seyse
Laura Shore
Michael & Monica Short
Robert & Cindy Skala
William & Kathleen Slater
Peter Slocum & Ann Sayers
Roxanne Speck
Robert & Amy Sullivan
Donald & Holly Sweet
Thomas & Cheryl Swyers
Fred & Virginia Thompson
Peter & Joanne Tobiesen
James & Karen Trapini
Michael & Mary Treanor

Thanks to our Donors!

Edna Alvaro
In memory of Robert H. Hilicus
Dennis Angelo
In memory of Mary Liebers
Carol Borthwick
Sally Brillon
William A. Bronk
Debra Carpenter
Linda Champagne
Anne Christman

Andrea Coppola
Allen R. David
Albert C. Di Nicola
Sandi Donahue
Sharon R. Dunlap
Ellen Fladger & Arden Rauch
Jody Fleming
Katharine Friedman
In memory of Mary Liebers

Stanley Hickok
Harold Iselin
In memory of Mary Liebers
Hugh Jenkins
Carolina & Livio Lazzari*
James Lommel
Brian G. Maybee
Jane McCloskey
Dominick & Mary Miltano
In memory of Mary Liebers

Barbara J. Palmer
Carl & Joann Paulsen
Carol Reid
Keelin Reilly
Neal Reilly
Earl Shirkey
Michael & Monica Short
Joseph & Claudia Somers
In memory of Mary Liebers

Jon & Nancy Tobiesen
Paul Tonko
In honor of John Woodward
Thomas Urbano
Mark Vermilyea*
George & Ellen Woodzell
Mary Zawacki*
In honor of Mike Maloney

*Monthly gift

Bill & Mary Jane Valachovic	Barbara Cardwell	Matthew F. George, Jr.	Margaret Levine	David Peck	Mrs. Gilbert R. Smith
Robert & Kathryn Van Flue	Katherine Taylor Carney	Barbara Gestwick	Mary Lewis	David Pecoraro	David D. Smith
James & Nancy Wasmund	C. Donald Carpenter	David A. Giacalone	Fabrice Liegeois	Ellen Pemrick	Janet Snyder
Peter & Diana Weinberg	Pamela Casscles	Paul Gorgen	Mary S. MacDonald	Linda Perregaux	Linda Snyder
Vera Weiss	Donald J. Cerniglia	Carol Griesemer	James MacFarland	Amy Phillips	Paul Supley
Calvin Welch	Deanna Cerullo	Catherine Haag	Steve Maloney	Elizabeth Pieper	Donna Tansey
Andrew Wexler & Diane Leone	Linda Champagne	Kathy Nace Hall	Anne Mancuso	Mary Anne Pollack	Ann M. Thomas
George Wise	Lynn Christie	Shelle Hamil	Blanche Mandel	Kendra Pratt	Jane Thomas
Bernard & Christine Witkowski	Linda Ciabotte	Eric Hamilton	Paula Marshman	Michael Puma	Paul H. Tocker
Colleen Wygal	Rebecca Cleary	Daniel Hanifin	Joy Martin	Ronnie Quinn	Karen M. Tope
Bethlehem Public Library	Richard Cohen	Marjorie Hanna	Richard T. Martin	Kathleen Rafalik	Thomas Urbano
	Christine Connell	Sara Harmon	Ann Matthews	Mary Ann Randall	John Urbanski
	Al Cooper	Diane B. Harper	Brian G. Maybee	James Raymond	Mary Ann Van Alstyne
	Thomas D. Coulson	Russell Hart	Carole Lynn McCarthy	Carol Reid	Melissa Vanderwood
	Pauly M. Cox	Steven W. Harvey	Mary B. McClaine	Lorraine Reidel	Mark Vermilyea
Individual	Robert Creatura	Agnes Hedden	William McColl	Kathleen Reilly	Pamela Vittorio
Tracy Abbott	Susan Cromer	Stanley G. Hickok	D. Antoinette McEvoy	Neal Reilly	Catherine Walsh
William D. Ackner	Robert Cushen	Rebecca Hudak	Cindy-Lou McKeon	Keelin Reilly	Anita R. Walther
Charlene Aldi	Michael Davi	Ann Hunter	Rose Marie McLean	Rick Reynolds	Paul Warren
Eric H. Allen	Allen R. David	Janet Huston	Nancy G. McNabb	Steven Rider	Margaret M. Watrous
Barbara Arro	Helena A. DeCaprio	Marjorie Hyland	Susan Spring Meggs	John Robbins	Barbara Watt
Toniann Avery	Horst Delorenzi	Dusty Ann Ifflander	Reba Mehan	Johnny Rockenstire	Linda Weisel
Roxanne Babcock	James Denison	Helene Iler	Jo Ann Menzer	Paul Rosenberg	Sharon C. Wemple
Elaine Bailey	Paul Dichian	Evelyn Incitti	Ellen Messick	Sonia H. Rubenstein	John G. Wemple, Jr.
Monica Baldwin	Gary Dilallo	Carol Jabonaski	Cheryl A. Meyers	Mary Ann Ruscitto	Walter Wheeler
Monica C. Barrett	Maureen Dixon	Carolyn Jaskot	Barbara Hayes Muhlfelder	Ann-Marie Rutkowski	Luanne Whitbeck
Michael P. Barrett	Sandi Donahue	Diane Jazeboski	Michael Munson	Paul L. Ryan	Ronald White
Alexander Bedzis	Rosemary Duffy	Barbara J. Jeffries	Christie A. Noble	Mary Sack	Frank Wicks
Stephen Bedzis	Joann Dunham	Hugh Jenkins	Elaine S. Nollert	Mario Salerno, Jr.	Dick Williams
Victoria J. Best	Sharon Dunlap	Joyce Jewitt	Patricia O'Clair	Chandra Santiago	Jaimie Williams-Peterson
Victoria Bohm	Patricia Dwyer	Nan Johnson	Francis O'Connor, Jr.	Helen Ann Saunders	Johanna M. Woldring
Ann S. Bradburd	Stephen Dyson	Hasna Kaddo	Richard Ognibene	E. James Schermerhorn	Col. William Yates USAF
Susan Brady	Glenda Eager	Gerald C. Kammerman	Mary O'Keeffe	Kim Scheuerman	Bill Yunick
Stanley Breunig	Frederick Eddy	Ursula E. Keiski	Kathryn L. Opdyke	Nathaniel Schied	
Sally Brillon	Pamela Ellingson	Brendan Keller	Michael Ostermann	Vicki Schlierer	
William A. Bronk	Susan Felthousen	Kevin Kesby	Constance J. Ostrowski	Sharron-Linn Schmidt	
George Brougham	Darryl Ferguson	Sarah Kirby	Nancy A. Oxford	Amy Schoch	
Pat Brown	Albert Ferradino	Sally Knutson	Ashley Ozemba	Bill Schollenberger	
Pat Buczkowski	Brian Flahive	Barbara Kuban	Barbara J. Palmer	Kathleen P. Scutt	
Bill Buell	Jody Fleming	Dolores Kwolek	Julie Panke	Kathleen Secker	
Stephen Buonome	Robert Gaesser	Leah Lafera	Nancy Papish	Gwendolyn Sheldon	
Dr. Joan Wemple Burns	Jessica Galasso	Ruth Larson	Laura Paris	William Shirkey	
Sandra Busino	Joseph Gallagher	Donna Law	William Patrick	Earl James Shirkey	
Miriam W. Butzel	Renee Gandrow	Timothy Lederach	Ann Pawlik	Henrietta A. Slosek	
Dr. Thomas Capuano	Erin Gartley	Kathleen Lenahan			
	Carl J. George				

Around the County

Cheeseman's Tavern: Home of Princetown's Shinplaster Banker

By Robert Jones, Princetown Town Historian

For many years, a solid brick building sat on the south side of the King's Highway (a.k.a. the Great Western or Cherry Valley Turnpike) in the hamlet of Giffords, in the Town of Princetown, near the intersection of present day routes 20 and 406. There, the Cheeseman Tavern survived until 1992, when, sadly, it was demolished. The exact date of the Cheeseman Tavern's construction is uncertain; a 1936 report by the US Department of the Interior gives it a date of 1784, and an article from a local newspaper dates it to 1783. Yet other sources seem to suggest that the Cheeseman Tavern was built around 1815. The later date is significant as it marks the year during which the Tavern's famous and eponymous resident began printing shinplaster money for people passing through Princetown.

The Tavern's famous resident was a shinplaster banker named Calvin Cheeseman. Cheeseman came to the area as early as 1810 when he appears in the US Federal Census for Princetown. At that time, there were eight free white males living on his property, twelve free white females, and one slave. Cheeseman served in the War of 1812 and was stationed in Pittsfield, Massachusetts where, in 1815, he had a "contract to furnish provisions to the garrison" there. The war ended in 1815, and, as the earliest surviving examples of his shinplaster notes come from that year, he must have been back at the tavern by that time.

Also called "tavern money," shinplaster notes were

common as a medium of exchange during this time. The normal medium of exchange in the early 1800s was metal coinage, which was both heavy and difficult to come by. Shinplaster notes, on the other hand, were readily available and easy to make and carry. Of course, the name of this type of currency is bound to arouse curiosity, and there are several stories about the etymology of "shinplaster." One theory is that the name comes from horseback riders who wrapped their legs in paper to keep dirt from being splashed on them by horses' hooves. This paper was then recycled into paper notes. Wikipedia proffers that the name comes from American Revolution soldiers who thought their paper wages were worth about the same as the paper they stuffed in their boots to protect their shins from chafing. Merriam-Webster's "Word of the Day" suggests that the term comes from small squares of paper used as bandages on sore legs. Indeed, shinplaster notes were themselves often small squares of paper.

Enterprising businessmen like Cheeseman took to the idea of printing these paper notes, which were backed by metal coins already in circulation and kept by regional banks. Indeed, Cheeseman took the printing of his money quite seriously, even investing in engraved plates to help fight counterfeiting. His notes were widely circulated in the area, and his tavern came to be known as "Cheeseman's Shinplaster Bank" or more simply "The Bank," a moniker which long outlived the Cheeseman family's tenure in the area. Though Cheeseman's time in Princetown was relatively short, his family name remained in local lore for generations; at the time of the brick building's demolition, it was still known as Cheeseman's Tavern.



Unfortunately, Calvin Cheeseman's business acumen was not as resilient as his entrepreneurial spirit. Cheeseman failed after just two years in the shinplaster banking business, owing a sum of \$150,000 (\$2.8 million in today's dollars). Having failed miserably in his banking endeavors, Cheeseman and his son Elias removed to New Hudson, NY in 1824, where he later died, and was buried in the hamlet of Black Creek's cemetery.

Despite his business failures, examples of Cheeseman's shinplaster notes are still fairly common today. It's likely that more than one old Princetown family has a few of them tucked away in an old chest somewhere. They are considered collectible, and the notes come up for sale from time to time at auctions. Denominations ranged from six cents (about \$1 in 2019) to three dollars (about \$57 in 2019), and were printed to resemble other commonly circulated banknotes of the day. Cheeseman employed black ink for his shinplaster notes, and sometimes used colored paper. One example in this author's personal collection appears to have originally been blue paper.

The tavern itself lived on after the Cheesemans, and it must have been a fairly impressive structure in its heyday. Local and family legend has it that the bricks for the tavern's construction came from either the ballast for ships that had sailed from Europe, or that they were made in situ on the property. According to notes from the collection at the Princetown Town Hall, both stories probably inform the truth, with the handsomest bricks having been used for the front of the building, and the rougher ones used for the back and sides.

It is unclear when the tavern passed from the Cheeseman family's hands to someone else, but a note from the tavern's file says that it became Gifford property in 1856 when John W. Gifford and his brother Alexander bought the "buildings and waterworks there on" for the sum of \$4,000. At some time in the next twenty years, the Gifford family changed the name to "Gifford's Hotel." The property eventually became a hub for water supplied to local farms, and also housed a store and post office. The uppermost floor was a ballroom used by locals for community functions, and by the neighboring church for social gatherings and oyster dinners.

A committee from the Princetown Historical Society toured the property in June 1980. One member, Melvina Inge Gifford, hoped to buy the then vacant tavern and its remaining ten acres; apparently someone she knew had ideas about restoring it and reopening it as a tavern. Ultimately, however, Ms. Gifford reported that the building was too close to the church to make a tavern a viable option. Interestingly, the building's function as a tavern had not seemed to bother the parishioners of a century before. Yet, by 1980, the building was in very poor repair with cracking walls, sagging windows, and rooms strewn with rubbish. Princetown's stalwart "Bank" would not last into the 21st century.

Volunteer Spotlight: Sylvie Briber

By Mike Diana, Educator

It's no secret that volunteers are the heart and soul of SCHS. The historic tales and characters of Schenectady are kept alive not by money alone, but by passionate local citizens. The programs we're so proud to present are possible because of our volunteers' hard work. This issue, I'd like to take some time to spotlight the efforts of **Sylvie Briber**, a volunteer who I've gotten to know very well over the years.

I met Sylvie almost at random in 2015 as a recent college graduate with very little to do. One day I received a call that Sylvie was looking for some help weeding her garden and, quite sheepishly, I agreed. On a hot June morning I traveled to her house on Washington Avenue. She invited me in, and I got my first look at a home defined by elegant Victorian architecture and eclectic yet stylish décor. I did my paltry best to tidy up the flower beds in the back yard, and in the process I got to know Sylvie herself. I was immediately impressed with her passion for history.

While our meeting was a bit of serendipity, Sylvie's involvement with SCHS was no accident. Sylvie and her husband, Bob have lived on Washington Ave for more than 20 years. Even today, Sylvie refers to her home as an "Alice in Wonderland" house as its charm and secrets pull you ever deeper inside. Indeed, when she moved in, she was instantly captivated by a small inscription scrawled into her parlor window in 1883, the signature of a former resident Grace Watkins. Her curiosity led her across the street to SCHS and so began a quest for answers spanning more than two decades. Anyone who has spent any time at the Grems-Doolittle Library has doubtlessly encountered Sylvie combing through the archives. She has invited experts into her home and visited other historic homes to better understand the time period of her predecessor, Grace. As she discovered more and more about her home, Sylvie compiled her findings in a self-published book. Though I started as her gardener, Sylvie eventually asked me to help her with her book with my limited talents for photography and digital imaging. Dare I say we made quite the team! She's as pleasant to work with as it is to read her story-book style monograph.

As if writing her book wasn't enough, Sylvie goes even further to share history with the community. In conjunction with SCHS, Sylvie opens her home to the public on our Secret Stockade Tours. Throughout the year, Sylvie will open her doors to hundreds of visitors to share the story of Grace and recount her own personal quest to uncover the secrets of her home. What motivates her to do so much? Sylvie says it's the sense of community and connection. For her, there's nothing better than when people, strangers, even, get together to share stories and a passion for the past. And if that doesn't perfectly capture the spirit of our historical society, then I don't know what does.



Top left: The home in Alplaus where Kurt Vonnegut and his family lived during his time at GE.

Top right: Cheney's Store in Alplaus, where Kurt rented a room to do his earliest professional writing. Kurt's wife Jane is pictured far right, holding baby Edie. Their son, Mark Vonnegut, is in the buttoned jacket.

Bottom right: A handwritten note from Kurt to the Alplaus firefighters.

maintain that the death was accidental. After his wife's death, Kurt's father, Kurt Sr., dedicated himself to the arts—painting, sketching, and creating furniture. From this background came the man who would give us the darkly satirical best-selling novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

New York State, specifically Cornell University, brought Kurt eastward, toward Schenectady. He attended Cornell for a time, but his lackluster academic performance led to probation, and he eventually dropped out. From there, the would-be-author enlisted in the United States Army and was captured at the Battle of the Bulge. As a prisoner of war, Kurt survived the Allied firebombing of the city of Dresden by hiding out in an underground meat storage cellar. In the days after the bombing, Kurt was forced by his captors to pull dead bodies from the ruins of the city. It took him over twenty years to write *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a novel based on these events. This quarter century of mulling over trauma speaks to the emotional burden that the author carried throughout his life. When he returned home, Kurt married his high school sweetheart, Jane Cox. His brother, Bernard, worked as a scientist at General Electric in Schenectady, and in 1947 convinced Kurt to move to Alplaus, and take a job as a publicist in the GE News Bureau.

17 Hill Street in Alplaus is where Kurt and Jane settled; Kurt's brother lived just down the road in a large brick house that sat at the edge of the Alplaus Creek. Kurt settled into his new home and job at "Generous Electric," as employees often referred to GE. His dream of writing had not been paying the bills, but now he could be a "junior writer" for the News Bureau, and earn a salary that was enough to support his family. He was even able to buy some GE appliances to put in his new home, perhaps making family life a little easier. And so, Kurt went to work at GE every day. At night and on the weekends, he wrote at the upstairs hallway desk in his small home. Jane knew that if his typing was smooth and steady, the writing

was going well. If the typing was not going well, Kurt was not easy to live with. And, although GE was a good living, Kurt was not a "company man," and was fearful of becoming one. So Kurt wrote. And, after three years of working at GE, Vonnegut finally sold five magazine stories, his personal benchmark for writing success. He quit GE in December 1950.

Now that Kurt was a full-time writer with two young children (Mark and Edith) underfoot in the house, he needed a quiet place to write. Kurt heard from neighbors that local shopkeepers Sam and Ann Cheney had room to rent in their store on Alplaus Avenue. The Cheneyes had purchased the store in 1945 after the death of the previous tenant, Ed "Pappy" Maloney, the editor of the Alplaus Home Town News. Cheney's was a gas station and general store, and the room that Kurt rented faced Alplaus Avenue. He would watch the company men take the bus to GE in the morning, and feel a sense of satisfaction that he was now his own man. Kurt wrote his first published novel, *Player Piano*, in that little room he rented above Cheney's.

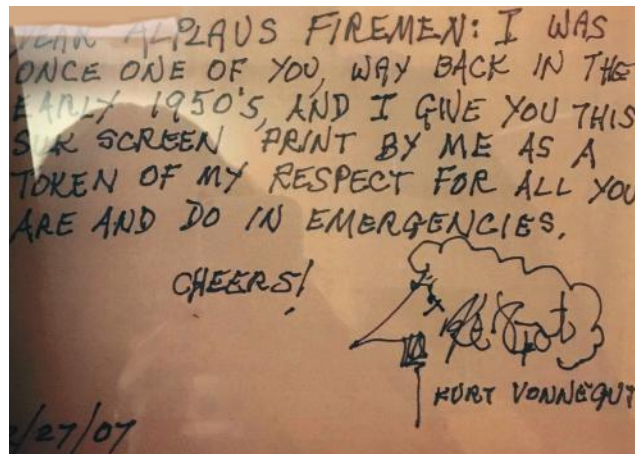
Player Piano's story of a changing society, and the trend toward mechanization of daily life, reflected the trend Kurt saw during his time at GE. Kurt worried about its implications. Though the novel was seen as a piece of science fiction, it was in fact based on Kurt's own experiences in Schenectady. This theme is not unique to Kurt Vonnegut, or to science fiction. Writers and philosophers have long pondered what technological progress means for humanity. As the author himself said: "I got classified as a science fiction writer simply because I wrote about Schenectady, New York... There are huge factories in Schenectady and nothing else... And when I wrote about the General Electric Company and Schenectady, it seemed a fantasy of the future to critics who had never seen the place." When *Player Piano* was published in August 1952, not a single book store in

GE-dominated Schenectady stocked the book.

While renting the room above Cheney's, Kurt joined the Alplaus Volunteer Fire Department and was issued badge number 155. According to one local citizen, at that time there were no young men around during the day to fight fires except Vonnegut and the local grocer. After one particularly smoky fire in Alplaus, Kurt was hospitalized for four days due to smoke inhalation. During this time, and in the following months, Kurt wrote the novel, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, which was based upon his time in Alplaus and his service as a volunteer firefighter there. The Alplaus firehouse siren is particularly loud, as residents can attest. In the novel, Kurt writes of a very loud siren at the fire station in Rosewater, Indiana. In fact, Kurt is actually writing satirically about the Alplaus fire siren: "About the fire horn: To the best of Eliot's knowledge, it was the loudest alarm in the Western Hemisphere. It was driven by a seven-hundred-horsepower Messerschmitt engine that had a thirty-horsepower electric starter. It had been the main air-raid siren of Berlin during the Second World War."

Kurt truly enjoyed his time as a volunteer firefighter, and before his death, he sent the fire department a small silk print with a Maltese cross. Alplaus residents remember the Vonnegut family for their volunteer activities, whether at the fire department, or helping the local school district. Having grown up with Midwestern values, and having lived through the tragedy of war, Kurt was in some ways ready to give back to those he felt were worthy of his service. Perhaps the gesture Vonnegut would have most appreciated was the decision by the Alplaus volunteer fire department, where he had served after the war, to lower the flag and ring its alarm bell with a 5-5-5 cadence - the traditional salute to a fallen brother.

Kurt Vonnegut and his family eventually moved on from the Schenectady region, as many people have. After a meeting in New York City with his editor during which he pitched another novel, Kurt and Jane realized that they no longer had to live near General Electric. They sold the Hill Street house at a profit of \$3,500 to Gloria and Jack Ericson and moved to Cape Cod.



Kurt died in 2007, and his books continue to be beloved by readers of all ages. Now, sixty years after his time in our region, what does Kurt Vonnegut mean to Schenectady and Alplaus? As Vonnegut's character Eliot Rosewater says: "I can't find the words." Indeed, the true worth of Alplaus' most famous citizen may never be realized, but Kurt Vonnegut is still fondly remembered in town. Kurt's father, Kurt Sr. was an architect and artist. At the end of his life, Kurt Sr. said, "It was enough to have been a unicorn." What he meant by this was that he got to create wonderful things. His son, Kurt, also followed his heart and made wonderful things. He left the company lifestyle that would have been so easy to retire into and made his own way, writing celebrated novels and living life on his own terms.

References:

- Adams, K. (2015, April 12) Vonnegut's work influenced by time in area. *The Daily Gazette*, pp. C5, C6.
- Finch, E. (1952, October 27) Ex-GE Publicist Writes Satire On Electronic Age. *Schenectady Biography*.
- Grondahl, P. (2010, December 12) Life with a dad called Kurt. *Times Union*, pp. A1, A13.
- Lopez, M. (1994, October 31) *God Bless You, Mr. Vonnegut*. *Times Union*, pp. B-1, B-5.
- New York State Writers Institute State University of New York. (2004, January 28) Kurt Vonnegut; New York State Author 2001-2003. Retrieved from <http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/vonnegutkurt.html>
- Peterson, R. (2007, April 22) Kurt Vonnegut was angry, funny voice for a generation. *The Sunday Gazette*, pp. F1, F3.
- Strand, G. (2015) *The Brothers Vonnegut: Science and Fiction in the House of Magic*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Sumner, G.D. (2011) *Unstuck in Time: A Journey Through Kurt Vonnegut's Life and Novels*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.
- Vonnegut, K. (1965) *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. New York, NY: The Dial Press.
- Vonnegut, M. (2010) *Just Like Someone with Mental Illness Only More So*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

Tidying up Collections

By Suzy Fout, Curator



Have you ever wondered how - or where- we hide all of our stuff? Finding space for 12,000+ objects can become quite a challenge. But it's a challenge I'd like to think I am particularly adept at fixing.

Though visitation at our sites slows after the holidays, behind the scenes, SCHS is busier than ever. It is during these first few months of the year that some of my most important projects take place: collections management and planning. While planning isn't the most glamorous of tasks, it is incredibly important for the work that we do. Our new collections management plan, written by staff and approved by the Board of Directors, will now help SCHS achieve tasks and realistic goals for our collections. And this winter, my goal was to reorganize the storage rooms at Mabee Farm.

Last year, SCHS finally finished relocating all of our artifacts from uninsulated historic buildings to our climate controlled storage area in the Franchere Education Center. Of course, this now meant that my once tidy storage room was packed, literally, from wall to wall. There was barely enough space to move, let alone find anything. What I needed was another 500 square feet of space I didn't have. So, what did I do? I used my wizarding powers to magically create more space! Well, not exactly. But I did have to think outside of the box. Working with John Ackner, we "MacGuyvered" some pretty interesting solutions.

First, we built a large platform, giving me the square footage I needed to double storage space for large items like chairs, trunks, and, well, dog treadmills. Repurposing some old gift shop display materials, I was able to create a hanging storage system for odd-shaped objects like saws, crutches, and portable oil lamps. I installed additional peg-board to accommodate some of our 19th century agricultural tools. The end result was hundreds of items rehoused and cataloged, as well as a clean, well-organized storage room and a work space that no longer gives me anxiety.

So what's up next? After decades of work, SCHS is finally able to say that our entire collection will be identified, documented, and tracked so that it can be professionally preserved for future generations. For the first time in SCHS history, this summer, we will be able to conduct a complete inventory of our entire collection!

From top left: William Starna of the New Netherland Ins new raised bed gardens; more glimpses into spring sch



Around the Society

stitute speaks at Mabee Farm; glimpses into our spring school programs; antique beds to finish off the Mabee Inn; Farmer John and our pool programs; and the first Kayak Through History of the season.



SCHENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
32 WASHINGTON AVE
SCHENECTADY, NY 12305

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 862
ALBANY, NY



Mabee FARM *to* FORK

*presented by the Electric City Food Co-op
and the Schenectady County Historical Society*

