

Schenectady County Historical Society



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Women of GE: Edith Clarke, Katharine Burr Blodgett, and the Female Experience at the Schenectady Works

By Mary Oldendorf

Between spending this summer working as an intern at the Schenectady County Historical Society, writing my senior history thesis at SUNY Geneseo on the relationship between General Electric and the city of Schenectady, my love for Kurt Vonnegut, and my family history in the city (my mother and paternal grandfather both worked at GE), I tend to have a romantic view of General Electric in its glory days and of the people who worked there in its prime. Although many of the “big name” scientists of General Electric (Charles Proteus Steinmetz, Ernst Alexanderson, and Irving Langmuir, to name a few) were male, General Electric also employed women at all levels of production. From the Schenectady Works’ opening in 1886, women worked at the plant, and, during World War II, they accounted for one third of the workforce. Women played an important part in General Electric’s success, not only as production and support workers, but also as scientists. Among the first “technical women” hired by GE were engineer Edith Clarke and chemist Katharine Burr Blodgett.

Edith Clarke was born in 1883, at a time when it was rare for a woman to have an undergraduate education, let alone a graduate degree and a professional career as an engineer. Clarke had a tragic childhood, losing both of her parents by the time she was 12. Her uncle sent her to a boarding school, and when she turned 18, Clarke used her inheritance to attend Vassar College, where she received a degree in mathematics and astronomy. In 1919, after several years working as a teacher and then as a “computer,” she became the first woman to graduate MIT with a master’s in electrical engineering.

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

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

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

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www.schenectadyhistorical.org

President's Letter

Collections are critically important to museums. They constitute the core of any museum's activities: exhibitions, education, research, and more. Simple, right?

Not really. There was a time, not too long ago, when museums considered it their principal mission to collect and preserve the sacrosanct artifacts that their curators deemed worthy enough to suit the tastes and interests of their founders and benefactors. And while some museum-goers considered exhibitions in these institutions to be prestigious, others found it a little self-serving to, in effect, simply display high-class collections. Indeed, this philosophy got as old as the artifacts that some museums were collecting. In comedian John Hodgman's mind, museums were becoming "amusing relics of our past;" when asked what he would put in a museum, he answered, "probably a museum."

Today, however, lots of museums are doing more than just venerating artifacts. They're collecting and using objects to tell stories that hold meaning for increasingly diverse audiences, particularly in their own communities. Take William Torsell, the onetime chief executive officer of Canada's Royal Ontario Museum, who envisioned museums as "places where you raise questions, not just show stuff." Libraries and archives are likewise collecting and making available materials that are more and more relevant to community audiences.

With this in mind, SCHS staff recently updated our organization's Collections Development Plan. Principal authors of the plan include curator Suzy Fout, former librarian/archivist Mike Maloney and executive director Mary Zawacki.

Overall, the plan positions SCHS to develop a collection that is more fully representative of Schenectady's diverse, often underrepresented communities and industries; a plan that enables the telling of more dynamic and significant Schenectady County stories; and one that promotes more collaborative and non-competitive relationships with other area educational and cultural institutions.

Specifically, the plan takes into account recent community-wide surveys to make the following recommendations for new acquisitions:

- Artifacts and documents that tell the story of the colonial period in Schenectady, c. 1660-1775.
- Artifacts, documents, and oral histories that tell the story of the African American community and its experience in Schenectady.
- Contemporary artifacts or documents that pertain to Schenectady's diverse communities and current events.
- Contemporary artifacts that pertain to locally manufactured goods.

The plan also recognizes the importance of keeping its collection alive by continually reassessing existing collections for consistency with changing organizational values and mission. The plan consequently includes professionally sound recommendations for deaccessioning damaged, duplicative, inauthentic, hazardous, or otherwise inappropriate items. This will help provide for more storage room, and better enable us tell the stories we feel we should be telling.

So I'm very pleased to let you know that we now have a collections development plan that should be a model for every other county historical organization in New York State (and beyond), and I encourage you to tour our exhibitions and take advantage of SCHS programs—and to give us your feedback and any ideas that can help us better serve everyone in Schenectady County now and in the future.

Happy New Year to all!

- Robert Weible, PRESIDENT@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG

Volunteer Profile: Vicky Bohm

by Marietta Carr, Librarian



Vicky Bohm doesn't consider herself a writer, but she definitely has a way with words and a flare for storytelling. "I was the kind of student who turned in 12 pages when the assignment only called for 6," she says. "I had to learn to be concise, but then when I wrote my master's thesis, I had to unlearn it again. My advisor asked for clauses in sentences, and I gave him clauses!" She has used these gifts to write a novel about a group of 20th century people who find themselves living in the Dark Ages, and to translate into English the 15th century Germanic poem "Ship of Fools" by Sebastian Brant. These are the sorts of projects she has done for fun, just because they interest her.

Similarly, Vicky volunteers at SCHS because she's interested in local history, and the projects help maintain her mental acuity. She started volunteering about 6 years ago when she moved to Schenectady. Raised in the suburbs of Detroit, Vicky has ties to the Capital District through her mother's family. She has fond memories of traveling to visit relatives in upstate NY and New England throughout her childhood. When she

retired after 20 years as a librarian at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she decided to relocate to Schenectady permanently. She has since gotten to know the area's history through projects like researching street names and the city's mayors.

Currently, Vicky is transcribing marriage indexes in the Grems-Doolittle library collection. She says that it's her favorite project thus far. "I enjoy getting to know the people and their stories in these records," she elaborates, "there are some fascinating trends shown in this one event in their lives." This is a prevailing theme in Vicky's history of volunteering, both here in New York and in her hometown of Detroit. Before moving to Schenectady, she volunteered at the Scarab Club, an artists' club in Detroit, where she organized their archive and collated biographies of club members. Vicky also volunteered at the Detroit Historical Society where she was a costumed docent. She enjoys volunteering in historical societies and small museums because they provide so many opportunities to stumble upon people she's never heard of and information she didn't know. She's learned that history is made up of more people than just the big names that everyone knows.

In addition to her work at SCHS, Vicky spends her time volunteering at the New York State Museum as a curatorial assistant, attending exercise classes and lectures around the area, and visiting museums like the Clark Art Institute and the Bennington Museum. She is passionate about art and dance, describing herself as a "sucker for landscapes, especially the Hudson River School." Vicky is a member of the National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals, and works with clients to organize and de-clutter their files and possessions. She serves as her family's tacitly appointed historian, which has helped her to connect with older relatives and bond with her sister-in-law.

Vicky's long term plans are to keep up her current lifestyle. She explains, "I'm really quite happy here and would like to continue as long as I can." She encourages others, especially fellow retirees, to stay active and consider volunteering. "If you still have the mental capacity," she says, "volunteering greatly improves quality of life."

REVIEW: *Tributaries: A Lazy Academic's Look at Some Streams, Creeks and Kills Around Schenectady Way*

Review by Martin Strosberg



Above: Brandywine Dam Break, c. 1915

Dale Wade-Keszey is an unabashed creek enthusiast. In fact, he is a connoisseur of our local waterways' history, geography, geology, nomenclature, name derivation, fun facts, folklore, folksongs, and poetry. And in *Tributaries*, a slim volume, written in a conversational and folksy style, he shares his research and personal memories.

A Creek By Any Other Name

In our area there are hundreds of meandering tributaries, many with no name, finally flowing downhill into the Mohawk or Hudson. To narrow the focus of his inquiry, Dale asked whether the creek might have played a role in local or national history or whether the creek's name itself might tell us about bygone days. Rivers are excluded from consideration. The Mohawk and Hudson have already received enough attention.

Among the waterways that meet these criteria are: Sweet Hill Kill, The Great Mohawk Kicks, Normans Kill, Washout Creek, Evas Kill, Spiritual River, Alplaus Kill, Lisha Kill, Mourning Kill, Verf Kill, Park Brook, Plotter Kill, and Fallentree Kill. In brief profiles, the reader gets quite a history lesson. For example, we learn that the Alplaus Kill, once known as "Eel Place," was noted for supplying the Native Americans and Dutch settlers with an important source of protein, i.e., eel. Washout Creek, formerly Arent Mabie's Kill, flowing into the Mohawk near Rotterdam Junction, got its name after a huge cloudburst on August 12, 1885 washed out a New York Central Railroad bridge. In 2011, Washout Creek, powered by Hurricane Irene, caused serious damage. A Lisha Kill millpond in Colonie was "repurposed" to become Rudd's Beach, Saloon, Dance Hall and Hotel. Active from the 1930s to the 1950s, Rudd's establishment maintained the pond for swimming and boating and a nightclub for dancing, dining, and adult merriment. Dale tells us that Jackie Gleason once played the nightclub.

The Life and Afterlife of Schenectady's Creeks

In chapters dealing with Ghost Creeks and Kills of

Schenectady, Dale chronicles what happened to the once vibrant creeks that coursed through downtown Schenectady, not only powering mills but also, as an added benefit, providing ponds for swimming, skating, and fishing. There once was Poenties Kill, Sweet Hill Creek, Mill Creek, Brandywine Creek, Cowhorn Creek, and Grootes Creek. Urbanization and suburbanization have driven Schenectady's creeks underground, into pipes and culverts on their way to the Mohawk. Out-of-site and out-of-mind – almost. Cowhorn Creek makes a brief appearance in Vale Park, and a branch most likely feeds Central Park's Duck Pond and Iroquois Lake. Grootes Creek, also known as College Creek, makes an appearance in Jackson's Gardens of Union College before disappearing underground. To Union alumni this creek is known as "the brook that bounds through old Union's grounds" or sometimes as "the creek that reeks."

Dale reminds us that because of flooding and erosion, it would not be feasible or prudent for a city to allow meandering waterways to disrupt urban life. Just think about the cost of not only building and maintaining the creek channels, but also the cost of building and maintaining all those bridges. However, in the suburbs, there has been concerted effort to preserve local waterways in their natural environments. Notable examples include: the Lisha Kill Preserve (Niskayuna), Indian Kill Preserve (Glenville), Ann Lee Pond Nature Preserve (Colonie), and Tawasentha Park (Guilderland).

Extra-Added Bonus

At the beginning of the book the reader will find Dale's lyrics to a song entitled Tributary. And you can hear the song performed by the musical group, Everest Rising by going to their website at [HTTPS://EVERESTRISING.COM/TRIBUTARY](https://everestrising.com/tributary).

Tributaries can be purchased from the Schenectady County Historical Society Museum and Library or the Mabee Farm Historic Site.

From the Library

Note from The Librarian

As part of getting to know the collection and the history of the county, I've spent a lot of time reading the library's blog. I'm grateful to the librarians and library volunteers who authored past posts. I hope to uphold the standards that they set.

However, the blog is not the only place I've been looking for information. The library's Collections & Catalog page on the SCHS website includes guides and articles composed by library volunteers, historians, and local researchers which shed light on the collection and stories from our community.

One recently added article is *How GE Corporate Research & Development Led to the Success of GE Ultrasound Medical Imaging* by Sharbel E. Noujaim, PhD. It is part of the on-going series "The GE Research and Development Center: Stories of Innovation from the Front Line."

The website SCHENECTADYHISTORY.ORG, a service of the Schenectady County Public Library coordinated by Bob Sullivan, is another valuable resource. Lately, I've been reading the newsletters from the Project to Discover Schenectady County's Eastern European Roots, edited by Phyllis Budka and Bernice Izzo, which are available on this site.

- Marietta Carr, Librarian/Archivist



Blog Posts You May Have Missed

The Grems-Doolittle Library Collections Blog (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 of months.

Apples Of My Eye

by Marietta Carr, Sept 12, 2019

In this post, Marietta highlights recipes from the library's cookbook collection. She encourages readers to try them with heritage variety apples like the Wolf River apples grown in the orchard at Mabee Farm.

200th Anniversary of the Great Fire of 1819

by Gail Denisoff, Nov 17, 2019

This essay follows up on a 2014 post on the Great Fire of 1819, one of the most destructive events in Schenectady's history. The post examines the aftermath of the fire, the ways our community supported the victims, and the steps the city took to prevent future tragedies.

Recent Donations

Additions to the Don Ackerman Political Memorabilia Collection

Gift of Don Ackerman

Letters written by Lemuel Smith to Jim Leggett

Gift of Robert Leggett

Additions to the Robert J. Mielke Collection

Gift of Evelyn Thode

Scotia Rotary Club 1979 Photo

Gift of Lynne Samuel

Helen Mynderse Postcards (addition to the Mynderse Family Collection)

Gift of Doug Klein

Left: Foremen (fireman) of Van Vranken Hose Co.#2, South Church St., 1890. Foreman William P. Daly, 1st Asst. Foreman Henry L. Van Slyck, 2nd Asst. Henry Rosa Yates

What's Happening?

EXHIBITS

The Folk and Their Art

February 1 - November 16 2020 @ 32 Washington

SCHS' folk art collection represents everyday people. Who were these industrious artisans? Why study their creative expressions? What does the art of the common man say about our past, and what can we learn through its study? This exhibition will dive into these questions, exploring how folk art invokes meaning beyond aesthetics and artistic ability. Made and used by ordinary people, folk art reflects our needs, values, and desires. By studying both the folk and their art, we invite a deeper understanding of our region, its inhabitants, and the role of creativity in people's lives

Rural Modern

Through 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

Farming the Valley

Ongoing @ Mabee Farm

The transformation of Mabee Farm from a colonial homestead into a prosperous farm, and now a dynamic historic site is the culmination of generations of hard work, daring, and change. This exhibition delves into the history and legacy of Mabee Farm, and showcases some of the Farm's most significant artifacts!

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.

TALKS & BOOK GROUPS

True Crime, An American Genre: Discussion Group

Dates to be determined

Using readings from the true crime genre, and materials from the library's collection, we'll explore the history of crime, journalism, public reaction, and sensationalism in Schenectady. Chris Leonard, city historian, will lead our discussion group and expose some of the crimes that shaped our region.

"Complex Evidence: Untangling Multiple, Same-Name Individuals" with Judith Herbert

Saturday, Jan 11 - 10am @ 32 Washington

You've found a John Smith in your ancestry and the question becomes, "Which of the possible John Smiths

is my John Smith?" The lecture will provide tools and techniques for separating persons of the same name in an area, to ensure that researchers are locking onto the correct individual. Strategies for planning and conducting a surname study will be covered; as well as tips for making sure all possible sources have been consulted, which could help to identify the right John Smith.

"Stoneware: Art for the People" with John Scherer

Saturday, Feb 1 at 2pm @ 32 Washington

Join us at the opening reception for *The Folk and Their Art* as we discuss stoneware. Often, utilitarian stoneware containers were decorated with cobalt blue designs to make them more attractive. These decorations are now considered examples of American folk art, and New York State has among the finest collections.

"Exploring the Worlds of Everything Worthy of Observation" with Paul G. Schneider

Saturday, Feb 8 at 2pm @ Mabee Farm

Schneider will discuss the *1826 New York State Travel Journal* of Alexander Stewart Scott, a young Canadian man who visited Schenectady twice on his steamboat journey across New York State. A keen observer, the twenty-one-year-old meticulously recorded his travel experiences, observations about people he encountered, impressions of things he saw, and reactions to events he witnessed.

"The Woodland Period in Eastern New York: The Archaeology of a Changing Landscape" with State Archaeologist Christina Rieth

Saturday, Feb 15 at 2pm @ Mabee Farm

NYS Archaeologist Rieth will discuss NY's Woodland Period (c. 1000 BC - 1500 AD), its archaeology, and an ongoing excavation at the Pethick Site in Schoharie.

Race, Law, and Culture with Prof. Kenneth Aslakson

Saturday Feb 22 at 2pm @ 32 Washington

Kenneth Aslakson, professor of history, Africana Studies and American Studies at Union College, will speak on a topic related to the intersection of law and culture with a focus on issues of race.

Geology, Landscape, and the Iroquois Homeland with Dr. Chuck Ver Straeten, Geologist, NYS Museum

Saturday, March 7 at 2pm @ 32 Washington

The bedrock of New York and its erosion created the landscape the Iroquois peoples made their home. It influenced their territorial boundaries, defenses, settlement patterns, trail systems, agriculture, and key natural resources. Chuck Ver Straeten is Curator of Sedimentary Rocks at the New York State Museum. He investigates the Devonian Period, c. 400 million years ago.

Edison, Westinghouse, & Schenectady with George Wise

Saturday, March 14 - 2pm @ 32 Washington

Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse were two of the greatest inventor-entrepreneurs in world history. They were also great self-promoters, a skill that has somewhat

obscured the nature of their roles and rivalry. This talk will try to clarify both their contributions and conflict, with focus on how those two aspects came together in Schenectady in the eventful year 1886.

Kurt Vonnegut in Schenectady with Alplaus Historian Jessica Polmateer

Saturday, March 21 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm

Alplaus' village historian will be here to take us through author Kurt Vonnegut's time working for GE in Schenectady, and the people and places he encountered while living in the region.

"A Nest of Rascally Rebels: Scots-Irish Revolutionaries of Corry's Brook" with Terry McMaster

Saturday, March 28 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm

Local Scots-Irish settlers were highly rebellious toward British rule, and, almost to a person, fought for the Rebel American side during the American Revolution. Terry McMaster is an independent historian whose research focuses on the American Revolution in the Mohawk Valley and on the settlement patterns, family connections and border warfare along colonial New York's western frontier in the 18th century.

National Archives Resources for Genealogists with Tracy Skrabut

Saturday, April 25 - 2pm @ 32 Washington

Learn about the resources available at the National Archives to explore your family's history. Tracy Skrabut, archives technician at NARA Boston, will introduce you to the types of records NARA collects, what tools and materials are available online, and what to expect.

TOURS AND TRIPS

Pre-registration is required for most programs.

Bus Trip to the American Museum of Natural History

Wednesday, Feb 12 • \$85

The AMNH is the world's largest natural history museum, packed with dinosaurs, a planetarium, the giant blue whale, fossils, gems, anthropological collections, and striking animal dioramas.

Bus Trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Wednesday, March 18 • \$85

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.

WORKSHOPS

Craft Workshop: Delft Plates

Saturday, Jan 18 - 11am @ 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.

Garden Workshop: Kokedama

Saturday, January 25 - 10am @ Brouwer House Creative • \$65

Kokedama is super trendy these days. It's no wonder

why! By ditching the pot and, instead, growing your favorite houseplants in moss-covered ball, you give them a distinctive, modern look. Chris Kirksey, Cornell Master Gardener, will be here to lead a fun morning workshop where we will create our own take-home kokedama!

Garden Workshop: Terrariums

Saturday, February 1 - 10am @ Brouwer House Creative • \$65

Grab your ticket for our Terrarium Workshop, led by Cornell Master Gardener, Chris Kirksey. Take a seat in our plant jungle and learn step by step how to create your own beautiful garden. You'll learn tips and tricks to keeping your terrarium plants alive and thriving. All the materials you will need are provided including a large glass vessel, healthy plants, and decorative accessories.

Garden Workshop: Bird Feeders

Saturday, March 7 - 10am @ Brouwer House Creative • \$65

Get ready for spring bird-watching with a bespoke bird feeder! Led by Cornell Master Gardener, Chris Kirksey, this workshop will teach participants to attract different birds to their yards. All the materials you need to build your own backyard birdfeeder will be supplied!

Craft Workshop: Painted Tin

Wednesday, March 11 - 6pm @ 32 Washington • \$30

In conjunction with the *Folk and Their Art* exhibition, curator Suzy Fout will lead a workshop on painted tin, with each participant decorating their own piece to take home.

FOR FAMILIES

American Girl Tea

Wednesday, Feb 19 - 2pm @ 32 W • \$8

Join us for an elegant tea and tasty treats! This season our host will be Felicity Merriman, a spunky girl whose creativity and wit carried her through the colonial period into the American Revolution. Guests will make a craft inspired by the ongoing Folk Art exhibition on display at SCHS!

FOOD, DRINK, AND PERFORMANCES

Drink the Seasons: Winter

Date TBD - 6pm @ Brouwer House • \$25

Led by historian John Gearing, we'll sample a variety of seasonal libations. Get cozy in Schenectady's oldest home as we taste the flavors of winter!

Wine Tastings at the Brouwer House: Spring

Thursday, April 2 - 6pm @ Brouwer House • \$25

Join City Historian and wine aficionado Chris Leonard for an evening of fine wine tastings inside Schenectady's oldest house. Our inaugural wine tasting event will feature four different wines and light fare, curated by Chris.

The Glass Menagerie | by NorthEast Theatre Ensemble

March @ Brouwer House | Details: northeasttheatreensemble.com

Join us for NorthEast Theatre Ensemble's site-specific brand of theater as we visit 1937, and live Tennessee Williams's beloved play about family, frustration, longing, and abandonment.

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Around the County

by Bill Buell, Schenectady County Historian

Working on a book about George Lunn, the only Socialist mayor in Schenectady's history, you run the risk of spending too much time looking into a number of tangential figures who entered his orbit more than a century ago. But, what a wonderful diversion. Franklin Roosevelt, Al Smith, Helen Keller, Eugene Debs, and Walter Lippman were among the nationally prominent individuals who crossed Lunn's path, but there were also plenty of fascinating local people who rubbed elbows with the popular minister-turned-politician. And many of them were women.

Lunn welcomed females to the voting booth in Schenectady and throughout New York in 1918, two years before the 20th Amendment granted suffrage to women all over the country. Like most Socialists, Lunn had long argued for giving women the vote, and when he took over the mayor's office, he showed he was serious by appointing Mary Van Vorst to the newly-created public welfare board in 1912, and Dr. Emma Thompson-Wing to the park commission, also a brand new entity, in 1913. In my book, "George Lunn: The 1912 Socialist Victory in Schenectady," those two women get a brief mention, as do Rose Perkins Hale, a suffragette and early female county legislator, and Dr. Elizabeth Gillette, one of the city's first female physicians, and the first woman to be elected to the State Assembly outside of New York City.

An even more significant figure in my book is Bertha Sanford, who married into the wealthy Stanford family and became a long-time city resident. All of the women mentioned above deserve a much closer look, and giving them a line or two in my book will hopefully be the catalyst for some other researcher to cast more of a spotlight on these individuals. How about a Schenectady County Women's Hall of Fame?

There are plenty of candidates. Lucia Olivieri and her daughter, Jeanne Robert Foster, are two fascinating women to look into from the first half of the 20th century, as are Izetta Jewell and Harriet Leonard Colburn. Olivieri was a prominent Socialist in Schenectady who didn't quite make it into my book, and her daughter was a poet, model, and activist who in the 1960s was still fighting for minority housing rights.

As a Gazette writer, I had the opportunity to do stories on Olivieri and Foster, and as a historian, it's great to see people such as Colburn and Jewell getting some long-awaited recognition.

Colburn, a Chicago native and long-time Schenectady resident and early suffragette, was honored with a historical marker put up near the corner of Union and

McClellan Streets earlier this year, thanks to the efforts of Darlene Lee, former president of the Schenectady County Republican Woman's Club. Jewell, meanwhile, an actress who moved to Schenectady to marry Union College professor Hugh Miller in 1927, later served as Schenectady's Commissioner of Public Works and was selected for a post in Franklin Roosevelt's administration. Thanks to the wonderful work of Anne Rockwood, Jewell is getting some well-deserved attention of late, and it was great to see a big turnout at the Karen B. Johnson County Library last month for Rockwood's presentation on the life of Jewell.

Also shining a light on important women in Schenectady history is Rebecca Cleary, who opened Bex Salon on Union Street in the Stockade earlier this year. Cleary did a little research and came up with a handful of women with strong Schenectady connections and matched them to a hairstyle. Customers can stop in and get a "Jeanne," a "Hattie," or an "Elizabeth," in memory of Foster, Colburn, and Gillette, or they can decide on a style named after other prominent women such as Julia Foote, Catalyntje De Vos Bradt, Carmela Ponselle, and Katharine Burr Blodgett.

If those names sound familiar but you can't quite recall their significance, go ahead and google them. It's wonderful history, and they all lived most of their lives right here in Schenectady County. In 2020, the country will begin celebrating the 100th anniversary of women getting the vote all over the U.S. While many famous females such as Susan B. Anthony will receive plenty of well-deserved attention over the next 12 months, let's not forget that Schenectady County had its own pioneers in the long struggle for women's equality.



Above: Dr. Elizabeth Gillette

Hospice of Schenectady: A Brief History

by Rudy Nydegger, Ph.D., ABPP and Phil DiSorbo, M.S.

In the late 1970s, very few Americans had ever heard of “hospice,” and the idea of providing professional care to dying patients outside of a traditional hospital setting was not something that most people even considered. For hospice to emerge at all was surprising to many, but to emerge in Schenectady, NY was an unforeseen event that required the serendipitous interaction of the right people, the right institutions, and the right time; it all came together, perhaps mysteriously, but certainly fortuitously for the benefit of the community and patient-families who would ultimately benefit from hospice services.

The story begins with a course being offered at Union College in 1975 by Dr. Adelaide Oppenheim titled, “Women in Management.” Catherine Woodford, a British nurse with a background in hospice care in the U.K., took this course and as a term project she investigated the possibility of a hospice program in Schenectady. She talked about her ideas with several people in Schenectady and Albany, and a subsequent group of six interested people came together in a small apartment on Lark Street in Albany to talk about hospice, and how to proceed. This group included Catherine Woodford, Margaret Stringer (later to become the hospice Director of Volunteers), and Rudy Nydegger (later to become hospice Vice President, President, and Consulting Psychologist for hospice). This group formed a planning committee, recruited civic leaders, and ultimately formed the organization's initial board of directors.

At first, the emerging organization incorporated itself as the Capital District Hospice, Inc., but, after learning that a group at St. Peter's Hospital was also working to form a hospice program, and the group from Schenectady added aka Hospice of Schenectady to its official name. As the Board formed, they made an attempt to have an active and involved group that represented the major and interested stakeholders in this new approach to health care. Companies like General Electric and Golub Corporation became involved, as did local hospitals, clergy from local churches and synagogues, representatives from business and financial organizations, and men and women from the community who were responsible for many of the fundraising and community service activities in the Schenectady region.

In 1978, Catherine Woodford, working with David Smingler of freshman State Senator Hugh Farley's office, led the drafting of New York State legislation that introduced the Hospice Demonstration Project. When Senator Farley introduced the legislation, it passed, thus representing the first hospice legislation in the United

States. Working with space provided by Union College, New York State Hospice Association was incorporated in 1979, and fledgling programs started to emerge. One very important development in 1979 involved GE General Manager Carl Hudson announcing a GE/Union new retiree hospice benefit, which was very probably the first Hospice benefit provided in the U.S.. Hudson went on to join the Board of Directors of Capital District Hospice.

Still operating with volunteer staff and board members, Cliff Thorn of Empire Blue Cross announced a \$5,000 grant to Capital District Hospice which enabled the organization to hire a director and to begin moving forward with fund raising and hiring staff. Thorn's associate at Blue Cross, James Stewart, became the first President of the Board, and along with Dr. Rudy Nydegger as Vice President, they advertised in the local newspapers for an Executive Director. After interviewing a number of good applicants, the team decided to hire Phil DiSorbo as the first Executive Director of the hospice program. Soon, in a small building at 514 McClellan Street in Schenectady that St. Clare's Hospital's made available, the Capital District Hospice aka Hospice of Schenectady started hiring staff, officially beginning work on May 20, 1980. Very generously, St. Clare's also donated operating and communication resources that gave the young and financially-challenged organization the capability to start operating. Some of the key contributors and supporters from St. Clare's Hospital were: Jerome Stewart, President; Douglas Menzies, Vice President, and Frank Forget, Chief of Maintenance.

The initial hospice staff was hired after DiSorbo became the Executive Director and included: Gail Dagastino, Office Manager; Louis Wertalik, M.D., and Charles Reilly, M.D., Co-Medical Directors; Sister Jean Kinney, OP, Chaplain; Scott Hicks, MSW, Social Worker; Carol DeSantis, Patient Care Coordinator, and Margaret Stringer, Director of Volunteers. In addition to hiring and training staff, Hospice of Schenectady began to develop a volunteer group and a program to select and train the volunteers. In addition to his work on the Board, Rudy Nydegger, Ph.D., served as a consulting psychologist and helped design and conduct the staff and volunteer training programs.

As mentioned, James Stewart was the first President of the Board of Directors of Capital District Hospice, and was instrumental in providing the necessary leadership to get the organization formed, established, and functioning. The second president was Rudy Nydegger, Ph.D., who was involved in the program as it became licensed. Nydegger provided services, and his

contributions were primarily in the areas of organizational functioning and establishing clinical services. The organization's third president was Mark Handelman, who took over as the organization was established and functioning, and now needed leadership to set the course for the future and to establish organizational processes that would allow the Hospice program to grow and flourish. Since that time, there have been many presidents and board members who have contributed key and vital functions as the needs and regulatory requirements of hospice have evolved.

In 1980, Capital District Hospice hoped to be able to start delivering care to patients and families. However, because there was no licensure category for Hospice to provide direct services in New York State, a partnership was formed to have the Schenectady Visiting Nurse Association provide the initial nursing services for hospice patients. Hazel Carlos, Pam Kane, Gwen Gabriel, and Jeanne Tomb were key VNA staff who assisted with this early phase. At the same time, the board launched a \$250,000 fund drive to provide full funding support for hospice operations with the expectation that Medicare would begin providing the financial support for hospice services in the next 3-6 years. With the leadership of Lewis Golub of the Golub Corporation, and many other civic and business leaders, the fund drive was successful, and in the autumn of 1980, Capital District Hospice admitted its first patient to hospice care. DiSorbo, Nydegger and many others became active with the National Hospice Education Project, advocating for federal legislation to enact a Medicare Hospice benefit. The Schenectady group, and others around the country, were supporting a benefit that stressed the importance of hospice services being provided in the patient's home when possible, that would cover broad access by all Medicare beneficiaries based on advanced illness at or approaching end of life, in a medically-directed program with volunteer services. Other groups around the country wanted a hospice model based entirely on volunteer services, and some wanted hospice services to be primarily provided in hospital settings. Ultimately, the new legislation supported the model that was favored by the Schenectady group—hospice services would be provided by a medically-directed, multi-disciplinary team with a strong volunteer component, and the goal would be to provide most services in the home when possible, with in-hospital care available in the minority of cases where in-home care was impossible or not in the patient's best interest. As support for hospice services began to grow, research and clinical literature also started demonstrating that hospice care was not only clinically effective, but also a very efficient way to provide very important medically-directed care for patients and families during the last phase of the patients' lives. This multi-disciplinary care involved medical, nursing, mental health, and spiritual support (when requested) as well.

On August 22, 1982 Congress passed and President Reagan signed the National Hospice Reimbursement Act as part of

the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act (TEFRA), which set the statutory requirements for hospice care under Medicare Part A, a new per diem reimbursement methodology, and a general outline for Conditions of Participation to be issued by the Department of Health and Human Services. The aim of these efforts was the implementation of hospice as a service available to Medicare Part A beneficiaries on November 1, 1983. Since Capital District Hospice had been working toward the establishment of a structure and processes to be compliant with the anticipated legislation, on November 1, 1983, the Department of Health and Human Services provided an operating certificate for Capital District Hospice as a certified Hospice Program in Medicare—the first authorization in the United States. The new Medicare Hospice legislation required hospices to directly provide their own "core services," and so Capital District Hospice began to hire its own nursing staff and to expand regionally, while working with the New York State Department of Health on New York State Hospice Legislation, Regulations, and Medicaid reimbursement. Ultimately, in 1985, Capital District Hospice became the first Article 40 Hospice Program in New York State.

As the need and effectiveness of hospice services were established, Capital District Hospice expanded into Montgomery, Saratoga, and Warren Counties, working with hospice advocates in each of these counties. Working with people in the local areas, hospice services could be provided in communities where these services were both needed and welcomed. In 1997, Capital District Hospice merged with St. Peter's Hospice to cover six counties, becoming the largest hospice program in New York State. Capital District Hospice (a/k/a Hospice of Schenectady) is presently named "The Community Hospice," and is a component corporation of St. Peter's Health Partners.



Above: *Winter Landscape* by Ruth de Monchaux



Despite her impressive academic record, Clarke had trouble finding work in her field, stating that “no one wanted a woman engineer.” General Electric initially hired her in 1919, not as an engineer, but as a computing clerk. Before electronic calculators were widely available, women often worked as “computers,” performing calculations by hand. While working in this position, Clarke filed a patent application for the invention of what has come to be called the Clarke calculator. This graphical calculator was designed to solve line equations involving hyperbolic functions. In 2015, Clarke was elected to the Inventor’s Hall of Fame for her Clarke calculator.

In 1922, after a brief stint teaching physics in Turkey, Clarke returned to GE as its first salaried female engineer. She worked in this position for more than thirty years, until her retirement in 1956, at which point she joined the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin as the nation’s first female professor of electrical engineering.

Katharine Burr Blodgett was born in Schenectady in 1898, shortly after a burglar killed her father. George R. Blodgett had been a famous patent attorney for General Electric, and although GE offered a reward for the conviction of his murderer, the suspect in custody hanged himself in his jail cell before the case could be brought to trial. After Mr. Blodgett’s death, the family moved to New York City.

Katharine Blodgett graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 1917. While attending Bryn Mawr, she visited Irving Langmuir’s laboratory in Schenectady, and he encouraged her to seek a research position at General Electric. She went on to earn a master’s in chemistry from the University of Chicago, and, in 1918, began working in Langmuir’s lab. Blodgett was the first woman to work at the General Electric Laboratory in Schenectady. After several years assisting Langmuir in his work on monomolecular coatings, she was encouraged to pursue

a doctorate. Blodgett left GE for Cambridge University, where she studied under the “father of nuclear physics,” Ernest Rutherford. Blodgett thus became the first woman to graduate from that institution with a PhD in Physics. She then returned to General Electric and continued working until her retirement in 1963. During this time, she received six patents for her work in film chemistry, while continuing work in monomolecular coatings with Langmuir. Blodgett also discovered the exact thickness necessary for a film of barium stearate on a glass surface to diminish reflections. This discovery nearly eliminated glare, allowing for glass to become “invisible.” Today, invisible glass is crucial in the production of eyeglasses, cameras, telescopes, and microscopes. Blodgett received many accolades for her work in physics and chemistry, including the American Chemical Society’s Garvan Medal, the Photographic Society of America’s Progress Medal, and a posthumous induction into the Inventor’s Hall of Fame. She was also a longtime Stockade resident and lived at 18 North Church Street.

Despite all of the successes that female scientists such as Edith Clarke and Katharine Burr Blodgett accomplished at General Electric, women still faced challenges working in male-dominated fields, at a time when women working outside of the home was uncommon. Although General Electric had employed women since the founding of the Schenectady Works, professional women such as Clarke and Blodgett were very much the exception when it came to the types of jobs that women held in the company in the early 1900s. Most women were hired by General Electric as support staff (such as cleaners and food service workers), secretarial staff, or unskilled factory laborers. Even scientists such as Clarke and Blodgett were paid hourly, while their male colleagues received salary pay. Women were also initially excluded from General Electric’s medical and retirement benefits. However, female workers eventually pressured the company into changing its benefits policies. Women organized a women’s section of the General Electric’s Employee Benefits Association, and, as early as 1917, more than 600 women were members. However, even after becoming eligible for retirement benefits, women were mandated to retire at age 60, as opposed to the age of 70 for men.

Female production workers, although receiving higher wages than women in office and support jobs, were typically paid two-thirds as much as male workers doing equivalent work, even though they too often faced dangerous working conditions. Helen Quirini, who began as a factory worker during World War II and remained for 39 years, wrote in her memoir that her starting paycheck as a factory worker was as much as an office worker’s with five years of experience. Women were especially prominent in the ceramics and wire departments, where they worked as polishers, coil winders, grinders, and light machine operators, and were often exposed to dangerous ceramic or metal filings, harsh chemicals, engine oil, and toxic fumes.

During World War II, women were aggressively hired to replace male workers leaving to fight abroad. They worked in increasingly “masculine” jobs, operating heavier machinery than they had prior to the war. Women comprised upwards of 50% of the workforce in some General Electric departments, such as aircraft



Front: Women participating in a group exercise class at GE'S French Point Camp, Bolton Landing, NY, 1919. Image courtesy of miSci

Left: Dr. Edith Clarke, inventor of the Clarke calculator. Image courtesy of miSci.

Above: Katharine Burr Blodgett appears fourth from the left in this photograph of scientists posing in the hallway of the new General Electric Research Laboratory in October 1950. Image courtesy of miSci.

instruments and electric meters. Yet even as women worked on heavy machinery alongside male colleagues, they still earned lower pay rates.

Although women faced sex discrimination at the Schenectady Works (as has generally been the case throughout the American workforce), General Electric did provide some exclusive benefits. When office women formed the General Electric Woman's Club (GEWC), the company provided them with one thousand dollars to get the club off the ground. GEWC membership quickly grew to over one hundred members, and they rented a residence in Scotia to serve as the clubhouse. General Electric paid for two tennis courts to be built on the property, and continued to provide financial support for the organization. The GEWC helped foster a sense of community among the female white-collar workers at the Schenectady Works, hosting workday lunches,

sporting events, dance classes, and social events with the Edison Club. With the help of the company, the Women's Club purchased a clubhouse at 32 Washington Avenue, which they ultimately donated to the Schenectady County Historical Society in 1958. General Electric also purchased a lodge on Lake George, called French Point Camp, for General Electric women to use during the summer months.

The impact of General Electric on the city of Schenectady, and the men and women who have lived here, continues to be palpable. It seems as if most residents of the area have at least some connection to the company. The women who worked at General Electric in the 1800s and 1900s are not as commonly celebrated as Steinmetz, Langmuir, and other male luminaries of the company, but they nevertheless played a vital role in the company's successes.

The Folk and Their Art

By Suzy Fout, Curator



"The Ancient and Mystic Order of the True Blues" was a peculiar, eccentric, and short-lived social fraternity which mysteriously appeared in Schenectady in 1867. Made up of local businessmen, rogue Union College faculty, and several "youthful" Schenectadians, the True Blues had one mission: promote Schenectady. And promote the city they did. Their lavish parades and carnivals consumed the entire city, bringing thousands to Schenectady.

The parade floats were over-the-top mechanical contraptions featuring fantastic, literary, and historical figures. The True Blues never shied from lampooning prominent Schenectady institutions; they reveled in the opportunity to ridicule local politics. Newspaper reports described knights in period garb, people dressed as King Lear, Hamlet and Ophelia, a division of Zouaves from the War of 1812, three full-sized marching bands, and an animal section which contained a baby elephant named Ho-Olah, bears, and other beasts. The miniature model of the Neptune float, pictured here, was featured at the 2nd annual True Blue parade on September 3, 1868. That parade attracted 20,000 visitors to Schenectady.

What might a strange, miniature parade float have in common with a portrait of Christopher Yates, a hand-carved cookie mold, or a hand sewn quilt? These objects, imbued with creative flair, are excellent examples of folk art.

Hard to define, yet easily recognizable, traditional

American folk art consists of a wide range of distinctive, aesthetically-pleasing objects that were fashioned by craftspeople and tradespeople, amateurs and students. Whether creating for play or for personal pleasure, these amateur artisans were motivated by the desire for artistic expression. It is an aesthetic impulse, a search for beauty that is pervasive in us all. And it is this need to create that is at the core of the Schenectady County Historical Society's collection of folk art.

SCHS' folk art collection represents everyday people, as well as those for whom they worked. It is this pull between the common and the elite, the urban and the rural, which defines so much of Schenectady's past. Who were these industrious artisans? Why study their creative expressions? What does the art of the common man say about our past and what can we learn through its study?

Our upcoming exhibit "Handcrafted: the Folk and their Art" will dive into these questions and more. Folk art does not exist in a vacuum. It invokes meaning beyond just superficial aesthetic quality and artistic ability. Made and used by ordinary people, it reflects our needs, values, concerns, and even desires. By studying both the folk and their art, we invite a deeper understanding of our region, its inhabitants, and the role of artistic expression in people's lives. The exhibition opens on February 1 with guest speaker and retired NYS Museum curator John Scherer, and will run through November 2020. I hope to see you there!

Around the Society

From top left: Visitors to the FallFest; attendees at Mabee Farm to Fork; our new permanent gallery at Mabee Farm; an autumn aerial view of the Mabee Farm; Representatives Santabarbara and Tonko with SCHS staff; The SCHS Festival of Trees.



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OPENS FEBRUARY 1 AT SCHS

