

Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK - THE PAST RECAPTURED

We've been looking at old publications of the Society, motivated by requests from a few people for more stories from Schenectady's past. From Volume I, Number ii, December 1957, we bring you an article about some of the Society's paintings. The information fleshes out what we'd previously been told, and may be new to some of our more recent membership. The was no by-line to this story; perhaps the author is still one of our members. If so, let us know!

(From an article entitled "Historic Paintings Restored")

. . . Many of these paintings are undated, but are known to be over 100 years old. One is over 200 years old. Through the skillful work of the restorer, Henry Van Schie of Scotia, the dust of years [has been] removed and the bright colors of the original paint [were] brought back.

Most dramatic of all the Society's paintings is Samuel Sexton's portrayal of the burning of Schenectady in 1690. This detailed presentation of the terrible night of fire and slaughter was painted in 1833 when the artist was only twenty. It was given to the Society many years ago by Judge Austin A. Yates. Other paintings by Sexton in the Society's collection include portraits of Matilda Rosa Marselis, painted in 1848; her husband, Nicholaas Marselis; H. Nelson Walton; Reuben Barney and James Rosa, a former president of the Mohawk & Hudson Railroad.

Samuel H. Sexton was a Schenectady artist of note. Born in 1813 he was the first child of Ezekiel Sexton's second wife, Henrietta Hedden. Ezekial came to Schenectady from New Jersey and opened a shop on Front Street, producing the fist pegged boots and shoes in this area. Samuel worked for a while as a shoemaker, but after some years decided to make painting his career. For years he had a studio on the northeast corner of State and Ferry Streets. He was married to Sarah Fullanger and at various times lived at 37 Union Street, 17 Ferry Street, 14 Liberty Street and 29 Front Street. He painted many pictures, both landscapes and portraits, and achieved widespread recognition. He was an associate member of the National Academy, and exhibited in New York and Paris. He died in 1890.

Another painting of great interest in the Society's collection is a portrait of Helena Van Epps Pieterse painted in 1743 by an unknown hand. She was the daughter of Jan Baptist Van Epps and Helena Johannes Sanderse Glen who were married in 1699. Her father had been taken captive at the time of the Massacre at the age of seventeen, and carried off to Canada. Three years later he had escaped during an expedition of the Canadian Indians against the Mohawks. He had made his way back to Schenectady and thereafter, because of the knowledge he had acquired of the Indian language, was often called upon to act as interpreter in dealings between the colonists and the natives.

Helena VanEpps married William Pieterse in 1742 at the age of twenty-one, and the portrait was painted a year later. Portraiture was, of course, an old established art at that time in Europe and in older colonies of North America, but in frontier settlements such as Schenectady, it was comparatively rare. The portrait was present to the Society by C.F. R.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The latest from the Committee is Bill Massoth's new slide show on the Erie Canal. He has field tested this at Jefferson School, and it is slated for Duaneburg in early June.

LIBRARY POTPOURRI Elsie Maddaus, Archivist-Librarian

GIFTS TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Donor: Earl Brinkman Books, including one on American history

Donor: William Tannenbaum News items about Nicholaus' Restaurant

Donor: Stuart Murray Book: The Honor of Command

Donor: Donald A. Keefer Records: Albany St. Methodist Church

Donor: Ruth E. Hand Records: Cemetery, Bible, Family, etc.

Donor: Bob Yanosey, Pub. Book: Alco: Official Color Photography

Donor: Albany Colony Book: Richard Warren Mayflower Society

Donor: Scott Haefner Book: History of Public Park System, Schenectady

Donor: Church Benson 1922 Gazette Newspaper

Donor: Ona Curran Plans, Glen-Sanders Mansion

Donor: Gaylene Fairchild Old music programs

Donor: Ruth & Donald Hand Book: Driggs Family in America and Genealogy records

Donor: Elizabeth Francis 16 Vol.: Architectural Treasures of Early America

Donor: H. R. Kelly 5th ed. Kelly-Craig-Ferguson

Donor: Ralph E. Sackett, Jr. Copies, S. J. Vrooman Bible and letter

Donor: Virginia Mills Burial Plots, First Reformed Cemetery

Donor: Blythe Sesko Van Ingen Family Records

Donor: Carol H. Funk DeGraff Bible Records

AROUND THE COUNTY by Elsie M. Maddaus

DELANSON: There were several small businesses at Quaker Street Depot (later named Delanson) at the turn of the century. They included a coal business, conducted by Hicks Sheldon, whose later owners were Wilson C Briggs, assisted by Elisha Davenport, and then Harry A. Briggs and his son Bradford Briggs; a photography shop run by James Hall whose specialty was the tintype; a drug store managed by the Van Dorn family; and a newspaper, The Star, published by James Sheldon

DUANESBURG: There was an unusually long period of warm and delightful weather in September and October of 1947. No amount of rain fell for almost three months. Farmers hauled water for farm used from Duane Lake and Mariaville Lake. Small streams vanished. Even the Normanskill was dry, save for a few pockets of water here and there. The forests of six nearby states were closed to hunting. -Duaneburg Historical Bulletin, Vol. 2

GLENVILLE: In the years following the Emancipation Act, a few families of freed slaves lived in Glenville. Among them were Jeremiah and Polly Wilson. Jerry was unusually skillful in the care and management of horses and found employment as a teamster. Later he became sexton for the Reformed Church of Glenville, a position he held for a long time. Jerry and Polly are buried in the church cemetery that he served so long and faithfully. -Percy M. Van Epps

NISKAYUNA: Radio station WGY and TV station WRGB, formerly owned by General Electric Company, began in 1928. Both were pioneers in the early days of their respective forms of broadcasting. They served the eastern portion of New York State Between the northern suburbs of New York City and areas close to the Canadian Border. In 1954, WRGB broadcast the first network color spectacular. In 1957, it moved to 1400 Balltown Road. -Town Publication

PRINCETOWN: The early appearance of Princetown was thick woods, cut by several Indian trails. It probably was used for hunting and trapping and as a transportation route between the Hudson and Mohawk valleys and the Schoharie-Susquehanna valleys. The town suffered comparatively little fro Indian raids during the early colonial period. It was sparsely settled during the Revolutionary War. -Irma Mastrean, Town Historian

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTING DURING FEBRUARY AND MARCH 1999

Without you we would be nothing!

FOUNDATIONS:

The Walter S. Quinlan Foundation Carlilian Foundation

BUSINESS SUSTAINING

Trustco Bank

BUSINESS SPONSOR:

Pattersonville Telephone Company

MVP Health Plan

BUSINESS: SUPPORTING:

Bell Atlantic of New York

HANDICAPPED ACCESS

There is an elevator between the entrance vestibule at the back entrance, and the main floor. If you are on wheels, walker, or cane, enter through the parking space entrance and our staff will be happy to help you with the elevator

Mission Statement: Grems-Doolittle Library

The Grems-Doolittle library is a historical, biographical, and genealogical reference library whose purpose is "To gather, preserve, display and make available for study, books, manuscripts, papers, photographs and other records and materials relating to the early and current history of Schenectady County and of the surrounding area." The collection includes many histories and genealogies. Because it is a reference library, none of the material is permitted to leave the building so that it will be accessible to researchers at all times.

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Historical material and comments, including letters to the editor, are welcome and may be submitted to the editor

(We want to share the following social note from the Evening Star, August 17, 1899)

AN EXCITING FOX HUNT HELD ON VAN SLYCK'S ISLAND LAST SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Eleven Hounds were Entered and the Winner is Owned by Mr. Wilber of Quaker Street.

The Betting was Five to One in Favor of The Fox - Several Ladies Present.

The famous old country sport of fox hunting was indulged in by some Schenectady county sportsmen Saturday afternoon; the hunt being held on Van Slyck's island, the big island in the Mohawk, opposite this city. The hunt was arranged several weeks ago by William H Mudge, proprietor of the Freeman House, and William Youngs of upper State street, both well known sportsmen. The fox was captured and turned loose on the island two weeks before the hunt. There was plenty of food for him on the island which is large, and he was in splendid condition Saturday. He had been hunted a little on two or three occasions before Saturday, in order to train him to exercise his well known natural cunning.

The attendance at the hunt Saturday afternoon was not large, but several ladies were included in the number of spectators and what the crowd lacked in numbers was more than made up in enthusiasm. The crowd was transported in boats from the mainland to the island by Mr. Mudge. The start was made a 2 o'clock Saturday afternoon. Eleven dogs had been entered, the entrance fee being merely nominal to pay for the prize offered the winner, a beautifully decorated dog-collar and name plate.

The referees were Dr. R. D. Austin and William Youngs, who were on horseback.

It took quite an hour of hard hunting to locate Mr. Reynard, as the island is large and has many covers of brush. The betting was 5 to 1 in favor of the fox. Reynard gave the hounds a three-quarter hour run, and he could easily have evaded the hounds all day had he kept to cover, but he evidently thought he had a cinch and broke cover. The dogs broke cover about 100 feet behind the fox, and then commenced the race for life. The slower dogs were soon left in the rear and the faster ones slowly gained on the fox. At last the race dwindled down to the fox and three dogs. The fox stumbled, and quicker than a flash the foremost dog nabbed him. Over and over they rolled in a brief scrimmage, and then all was over. The winner was proudly claimed by Mr. Wilber of Quaker street.

Grems-Doolittle Library is compiling a list of Ethnic Organizations in Schenectady County. We need to know the name of such an organization, the name of a contact person such as the chairman or president, and the telephone number.

Call Giny LaGoy at 374-0263

Wanted!

Someone to do filing in the library. Our librarian can never catch up.

Great opening for volunteer with unsatisfied clerical lust! Call Librarian at 374-0263.

Wanted!

Someone to do data entry on one of our wonderful computers. You do not have to be a computer geek; you just need enthusiasm for the work of the society plus the ability to follow directions. Call Librarian at 374-0263.

Wanted!

A real extrovert to organize boat and bus trips. There are wonderful places to go around here, but all the board members are maxed out and we need fresh blood, verve, muscle and know-how to plan trips. Call office at 374-0263.

Wanted!

Two or three clever people to work on a book of photos. We have all these great photos that Bill Massoth has been developing and they're just crying to be put into a book -- or maybe two. Got the time? An afternoon a week? Every other week? Call librarian at 374-0263.

Wanted!

A grant writer. We know the grants are out there; we just need that certain person with the time to ferret out where the grants are hidden so we can continue to enhance the work of the Society. Call President or office manager at 374-0263.

Wanted!

Docents. A docent is a tour guide. We're running out of docents and we want fresh troops. Come now: you know that you've always secretly wanted to show people around the Museum. Follow Jo or Sally or Wayne or Ann a time or two and you'll get the hang of it. Call Jo Mordecai at 374-9263.

My New Spell Checker

Eye halve a spelling chequer

It came with my pea sea;

I t plainly marques for my revue

Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.

Eye strike a key and type a word

And weight for it two say

Weather eye am wrong oar write

It shows me strait a weigh.

As sewn as a mist ache is maid

It nose bee fore two long;

And eye can put the error rite

Its rare lea ever wrong.

Eye have run this poem threw it;

I am shore your pleased two no.

Its letter perfect awl the weigh--

My chequer told me sew.

Welcome to new Trustees

Heather Ward

Jeff Parry

Ed Reilly

Ellie Riemer

