MEMBERSHIP FORM
Schenectady County Historical Society

Please indicate one of the following for your membership:

- $25 Individual
- $40 Family
- $50 Donor
- $100 Sponsor
- $500 Patron
- $1000 Lifetime

Please mail this form with your check or credit card information to:
Schenectady County Historical Society
32 Washington Ave., Schenectady, NY 12305

Your Name
________________________________________
Street
_____________________________________________
City ________ State _____ Zip ___________

Check enclosed

- Please charge my credit card:
  - [ ] MasterCard
  - [ ] VISA

Acct # ____________________________ Exp. Date _____________

Signature ________________________________

Also enclosed is a gift of $ ________ for special projects designated as follows:

- Museum: Art Restoration ______ Acquisitions ______ Publications ______ Programs ______
- Library: Equipment ______ Publications ______
- Mabee Farm: Preservation ______ Education Building ______ Programs ______

Your tax-deductible membership can be matched by G.E. (800) 305-0669

ED REILLY ELECTED PRESIDENT

Dr. Edwin D. Reilly, Jr., or just “Ed” to us, has been elected the 50th President of SCHS and the first in our second hundred years. He has been a Trustee for seven years and our Vice President for the last five. He began the computerization of our Society in 1998 and created our website. Dr. Reilly holds the Ph.D. in physics from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and is retired from the University at Albany where he founded its computing center and its department of computer science. Prior to his appointment at Albany, he was Manager of Digital Analysis and Computation at the (then G.E.) Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory. Partially concurrently with teaching but continuing for six years after retirement, he served for 18 years as Supervisor of the Town of Niskayuna. His interest in local history is reflected in many of the weekly columns he wrote for the Niskayuna Journal in the 1990’s and in the monthly pieces he writes as a regular contributor to the opinion pages of the Sunday Gazette. Professionally, he has written four textbooks on computer science and is co-editor of the Wiley Encyclopedia of Computer Science. He is the author of two books on the history of computing, one published in 2003 and the other in 2004. In the community, he is a Trustee of the Schenectady County Public Library and is past president of the Freedom Forum, Friends of the Library and the Schenectady Torch Club. Ed and his wife Jean celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2004. They have six children and 14 grandchildren.

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 2nd MABEE FARM OPENS FOR THE SEASON
May 6th SCHS 1:30 p.m.
ERIE CANAL
Frank Taormina
May 24th SCHS 7:00 p.m.
PRIVATE LEWIS COHEN
SCHENECTADY’S CIVIL WAR VETERAN
Neil Yetwin
May 25th PLANT BEAUTIFICATION DAY
SCHS 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.
The Society was saddened by the death March 2nd of former president of the Schenectady County Historical Society. Mr. Chismian died at the age of 97 in Ithaca, South Carolina where he lived since 1970. Mr. Chismian who was born in Danielsburg, NY was a pioneer in early local television, an accomplished writer, published poet and an ardent environmentalist. The Society extends its sympathy to his family.

Your Help Needed to Plant and Help Beautify the SchS Grounds.

Save Date May 25th 1-5 PM.

WANTED – Is your garden overflowing with abundance? Please share some of your extra plants with us. At 32 Washington Ave, we would like to improve our grounds and gardens. We have a wonderful new volunteer in Sharon Schiel, willing to help us make everything ship shape. During the month of May we would love to accept any of these plants you could bring us and possibly help on a plant and groundskeeping day. Call us if you have any questions.


UPCOMING EXHIBIT

The Schenectady County Historical Society History Museum is planning an exhibit of the work of Samuel Sexton foremost 19th century Schenectady artist who painted landscapes and portraits of many of the local residents of the time. If you own a Sexton and would like to have it included in the exhibit and updated catalog of the artist’s work contact Kate Weller at the Society or Ona Curran at occurran@earthlink.net.
Washington, D.C. attorney Simon Wolf had good reason to feel he had succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. Wolf (1836-1923) was a German-born American Jew who had arrived in the U.S. at age 12 and went on to become a judge, U.S. Consul to Egypt, president of B’nai B’rith and personal acquaintance of every President from Lincoln to Wilson.

But Wolf had also encountered personal and professional anti-Semitism and concluded that the best way to combat it would be to educate his countrymen about the Jewish contribution to American Democracy through their military service. After 5 years of painstaking research he published his findings in the 1895 classic, The American Jew As Patriot, Soldier and Citizen. Among the thousands of names listed in the book, this one appears on p 348: “Lewis Cohen – Co. F 122nd Penn. Infantry”. Cohen was one of 7000 Jews who fought in the Union Army during the Civil War and enjoys the distinction of being the only Jewish Civil War Veteran buried in Schenectady’s Vale Cemetery.

Lewis Cohen was born on November 11, 1845 in Hesse-Kassel, Germany, where as a child he learned the cigar maker’s trade. Poverty caused his parents to send him to America alone when he was just 12; once here, he travelled around the country as an itinerant trader in Philadelphia. On April 18, 1861, just 4 days after the fall of Ft. Sumpter, Cohen enlisted as a private in the 22nd Infantry Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers and completed basic training at Camp Curtin, Pennsylvania. He then worked as an ambulant surgeon on Governor’s Island, New York for next year until August 4, 1862 when he joined Co. F of the 122nd Pennsylvania Volunteers. Of the 527 Jewish Pennsylvanians who fought in the Union Army, Cohen was one of 8 who served in the 122nd Regiment.

The 122nd was almost ordered to participate in the Second Battle of Bull Run (August 28, 29, 1862) but wisely decided that the regiment was too recently organized and “too raw” to be placed at the front. Instead the regiment was ordered to Washington to protect the city from a possible confederate invasion. Within a few weeks, the 122nd moved with the Army of the Potomac toward Fredericksburg.

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By 1890 Cohen began suffering from a variety of ailments and was examined by several physicians in order to apply for a disabled veterans pension. The records describe him as standing 5’7”, weighing 135 pounds, with grey hair, blue eyes and “fairly well preserved for one of his age.” Cohen also began casting about for new opportunities as the small cigar manufacturers gave way to the large tobacco concerns. He had become the local commander of the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic), based in the Schenectady Armory. The G.A.R. championed veterans’ causes and officially was supposed to stay out of politics. But its membership had grown to such a degree that its voice in local and national politics became quite influential. This may have been the reason why in 1902 Schenectady Mayor Horace S. Van Vost appointed Lewis Cohen Chief Inspector of the Schenectady Health Department, a post he held for the next 29 years.

Throughout the 1920’s Cohen also received considerable help in upgrading his disabled veterans pension from Colonel Winfield Scott, Commissioner of Pensions in Washington, and thanked him profusely in a letter dated February 7, 1929. It is the only known piece of correspondence in Cohen’s own hand. “My dear Noble Sir,” Cohen wrote, “I fail in proper Expression to your Noble feeling on my behalf. May the Supreme Being, the Father of all, maintain you and your family with Noble thinking and Noble doing. I have maintained my good name in this town for 45 years and have been satisfied with what my beloved Country has done for me. To you I sincerely say my thanks. May the all loving God retain you in good health: You shall always be in my Memory as a Noble and good man. Sincerely yours, Lewis Cohen”

In the last 5 years of his life, Cohen was befriended and treated by Dr. Nishan A. Pashayan, whose office and home were located at 611 Union Street. Pashayan had fled his native Armenia in 1896 to escape the Turkish massacres and the 2 men from political oppression. “Lewis Cohen died in the early hours of March 14, 1936 at age 90 years, 4 months and 3 days, having proudly proclaimed to the end of his life: “I was one of the boys, under sixteen, who answered Lincoln’s first call.”

*Editor’s note: This article by Neil Yetwin is based on research of primary sources and has not previously been published.*

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Forefather’s Day
Sun. June 18
1-5 pm

ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

Full Dutch Colonial meal, colonial demonstrators, horses, children’s games & crafts and traditional music!

Family: $50.00, Couple: $40.00, Individual: $35.00. Please make reservations.

Mabee Farm Historic Site
Route SS, Rotterdam Junction
(518) 887-5073