Some toys are never out of date. Pictured above are youngsters having fun with the games of yesteryear at the recent Canal Fest along the Mohawk River.

Photos by Ann Aronson
EXHIBITS:

“A Desirable Residence”: Schenectady and the Erie Canal – Explore the deep impact, both positive and negative, that the Erie Canal had on Schenectady. This exhibit uses first hand accounts of the canal as well as historic images and artifacts. Enjoy this new exhibit at the Historical Society and learn some of the interesting history of Schenectady’s connection with the canal.

Date: June 15th – September 30th
Time: Monday through Friday 1:00 – 5:00; Saturday 10:00 am – 4:00 pm
Cost: Free - for just the exhibit

Tours of the Historical Society - $4.00 for adults; students and members free

Mourning Customs, and the ideas behind them – This exhibit will be based on the book by Dr. Robert Wells entitled “King of Terrors” – Death and Society in an American Community, 1750 – 1900. As this book implies, facing death has had a profound effect on people. Dr. Wells’ book deals with the community in and around Schenectady. Articles from the Society’s collections will illustrate mourning practices.

Date: October 14, 2006 – March 15, 2007
Time: Monday through Friday 1:00 – 5:00; Saturday 10:00 am – 4:00 pm
Cost: Free and open to the public
In June of 2006, the county historian’s office asked the city engineer’s office for permission to monitor excavations that were taking place around the city for improving and replacing the city’s old water pipes. It was felt that any work underground in the Stockade district could uncover important archeological remains. It took only one day to prove that theory correct. Workers under contract by the city uncovered a 6-foot long section of a wooden water pipe that was part of the city’s first municipal water supply of 1836. The 6 foot log, probably elm, has a 3-inch hole drilled through its length and was connected to another wooden pipe by a cast iron pipe. The pipe was located under Union Street at the junction of South College Street.

This water supply seemed to survive until around 1872 when Senator Charles Stanford (in the NYS legislature) organized a company to take water from the Mohawk River. Stanford was the brother of Leland Stanford who founded Stanford University and one of the leaders in connecting the east and west coast via the transatlantic railroad.

In 1836, Jabez Ward established a small water works using a spring, dammed to form a pond, at the foot of Engine Hill at Vedeer Ave. This is the present day site of the Goodyear Tire & Auto Service business and across State Street from the former NYS Armory. The water was brought into the village by means of wooden logs that had holes bored through them with a diameter of about two to three inches and used the gravity system for distribution. Ward’s logs were laid in State Street down to Washington Avenue, with connections to Ferry, Front and Union Streets. The log found at the Union Street and South College Street intersection had a 3-inch diameter hole. The water supply seemed to survive until around 1872 when Senator Charles Stanford (in the NYS legislature) organized a company to take water from the Mohawk River. Stanford was the brother of Leland Stanford who founded Stanford University and one of the leaders in connecting the east and west coast via the transatlantic railroad.

Stanford used what was known as the Holly system and installed a powerhouse at the foot of Ferry Street. The Holly System was named after Birdstill Holly who was born in 1820 in Auburn, New York. In his lifetime he made great contributions to the fields of mechanical and hydraulic engineering and held over 150 American patents, and several foreign patents. The system of pressurized municipal water supply was one of his major inventions and still used today. One of his other inventions is the fire hydrant.

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Stanford’s water supply was ample but also carried typhoid germs and death to every section of Schenectady. The city secured control of the plant and took steps to procure a proper water supply. In 1885, the Common Council purchased the water works for $90,000 and eventually in 1904 used water from springs in Rotterdam for a safe water supply. Water from the Rotterdam aquifer is still the source of the City’s water supply. One of the city’s water commissioners, George T. Ingersoll, who became known as the “Father of Water,” was an early proponent of sanitary water conditions. When he died in 1913, he left his estate to form a home for aged men, known today as the Ingersoll Residence. Ironically, this was the same home of Charles Stanford who died in 1885. The home is in danger of being destroyed for a commercial development in Niskayuna.

At the request of the historian for the city and county, the city engineer’s staff picked up the wooden water pipe and brought it to the Schenectady County Historical Society where it will be cleaned, preserved, and displayed. Along with the water pipe, three sections of planks used for a plank road (on Union Street) were recovered and will also be donated to the Schenectady Historical Society. This successful rescue mission proves that with cooperation among the city, county, and private sector, our city’s historic resources can be recovered and protected. While the wooden water pipe isn’t pretty, it’s an important part of the history of Schenectady.

Related events:
Lecture on Mourning Customs - Author and Union College Professor Robert Wells will give a presentation based on his book, Facing the “King of Terror.” Come and hear this fascinating speaker and take the opportunity to speak with the author. Signed copies of his book will be available for purchase.
Date: October 21st
Time: Refreshments 1:30 pm; Program 2:00 pm
Cost: Free and open to the public

Gravestone Preservation – New York State Historical Association conservator C.R. Jones will speak on the importance of preserving one of our most valuable genealogical resources, gravestones. Although these artifacts appear indestructible, gravestones are susceptible to everything from the environment to human error. Learn the history, preservation, and importance of gravestones from one of the leading experts!
Date: October 14th
Time: Refreshments 1:30 pm; Program 2:00 pm
Cost: Free

TOUR at Vale Cemetery: Symbolism and Statuary – Meet at the Caretaker’s House at 907 State Street in Schenectady. Wear comfortable walking shoes. Your guide will be Christopher Hunter, a Trustee of the Historical Society and the principal archivist at the Schenectady Museum. The Cemetery is on the National Register of Historic Places and there is a wealth of fascinating material to explore.
Date: October 8th
Time: 2:00 pm
Cost: $5.00 per adult; children 12 years and younger, free

Library and Archives Photographs
Can anyone identify these men? Does anyone know where or when this photo was taken?

Events: September and October

Musicians of Ma’alwyck – Enjoy an intimate evening of music in beautiful surroundings. The Historical Society will be the setting for the performance of music from the nineteenth-century by the accomplished “Musicians of Ma’alwyck.” This will be a trip back in time to the gracious enjoyment of beautiful music in an intimate setting. Come join us for this very special occasion.
Date: September 9th
Time: 7:00 pm
Cost: $20.00 per person

The Stockade Walkabout – an annual favorite! The Schenectady County Historical Society will have an open house, provide free guided tours of the building, free light refreshments, and a last chance to see the Erie Canal exhibit.
Date: September 30th
Time: 11:00 am – 5:00 pm
Cost: $20.00 per person day of event – includes all of the venues.

Children’s 1920s Halloween Party – Come in costume to our vintage 1920s Halloween Party. There will be candy that children of that era enjoyed plus activities that include period crafts.
Date: October 28th
Time: 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Cost: $3.00 per child

In the foreground is the A.A. Van Vorst & Peter Vedder Lumberyard on Pine Street, with Union College campus in background. (Circa 1872) Note the circular base of the Nott Memorial, under construction.
On November 24, 1888 the Schenectady Evening Star carried several articles marking the anniversaries of such Civil War battles as Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge, the lives and exploits of Generals Grant and Sherman, and the courage of those Schenectady veterans of the 134th New York Infantry. On page 4 of that same edition of the Star there appeared the following notice:

“DIED JACKSON—In this city, Nov. 21st, 1888, Jared A. Jackson, aged 48 years. Relatives and friends are respectfully invited to attend his funeral Sunday afternoon (Nov. 25th), at 3 o’clock, from the African M.E. Church, Jay street.”

What was not mentioned in the Evening Star was that Jared Jackson had been a corporal in Company N of the 20th Regiment U.S. Colored Troops and served as one of 200 black soldiers who helped guard more than 12,000 Confederates at the Elmira Prison Camp during the latter half of the Civil War. The paper also neglected to report that those same 200 guards were unjustly blamed for a prisoner escape from Elmira for which they all paid a heavy price.

Jared Jackson was born in Bethlehem, New York on May 20, 1840. His parents, George and Jane Ann Jackson, were originally from New York City and settled in Bethlehem with a group of African-Americans following the total emancipation of this state’s slaves in 1827. The Jackson’s were tenant farmers and Jared Jackson’s later enlistment papers record his occupation at that time as “farmer.”

On March 23, 1863 the War Department established the “United States Colored Troops” or “U.S.C.T.,” one of which was the thousand-man 20th Regiment. Jackson, then 23, enlisted in Company N of that regiment on December 14, 1863 at Albany. On January 18, 1864 the 20th was sent to the Elmir a Military Rendezvous for basic training, then assembled at Riker’s Island, New York Harbor, on March 5th. Eight hundred soldiers of the 20th were then shipped down to Louisiana to work as army laborers. The remaining 200, including Jared Jackson, were transported back to Elmira, where the military training depot had been hastily converted into a prison camp for Confederate soldiers.

Conditions at the Elmira Prison Camp had already deteriorated by the time the new guards arrived in mid-July. Nearly 35,000 underfed and poorly clothed prisoners were forced to live in 35 makeshift barracks and 1000 tents, none of which had floors or blankets. Substandard medical care led to epidemics of pneumonia, cholera, dysentery, scurvy, and smallpox. Many prisoners were reduced to eating garbage and rats. With a death rate of 5% a month, or eight prisoner deaths a day, the camp became known as “Hellmira.” The Southerners, enraged at the thought of black guards with guns, spit and swore at them and shouted racial slurs. One prisoner tried to approach a guard and was warned several times to stop before being shot and wounded. Despite the abuse, the guards maintained their dignity.

Jared Jackson cont. from p4.

In Memoriam — Elsa Church (1911 - 2006)

Elsa Kjolseth Church died in Greenville, South Carolina on July 7. From about 1974 to 2006, Elsa was a member of the Society, serving at various times as Librarian, Trustee, and as a leader in the effort to bring about the creation of the Greens-Doolittle Library, devoting not only her time, energy, and talent to that enterprise, but along with her husband, giving one of the larger monetary gifts that made that Library possible.

One can delineate titles and name all the roles Elsa played more easily than one can characterize the presence of Elsa here during the time she served the Society. Her warmth, wisdom and good humor always helped to create a welcoming atmosphere that was inevitably part of the experience for anyone who came to 32 Washington Avenue.

While Elsa was here entry into the Society was gained through the front door. As soon as you entered you were greeted by Pauline Wood, whose desk faced the hall. Elsa was behind Pauline in the room, then serving as the “library,” which is now the dining room. At the table behind Pauline you would often see Helen Mynderse seated. Helen was then the Society’s Assistant Treasurer. Conversation abounded in those cluttered rooms along with lots of laughter, a sense of genuine effort to answer any question you might have, and, inevitably, some sort of candy in a dish on the table. It was almost a pleasant place to come to and spend time in.

Elsa was a caring person in every sense of that expression, from her conscientious effort to answer any question, to the most casual genealogist might have to a concern the mother of three children, and ultimately, the grand- mother of eight.

Fortunetly for us, and for the entire community of which she continued to be a part, she extended her energies and her talents to teaching part-time and to becoming the librarian for the children’s section of the Scotia Public Library, and ultimately the SCCHS Librarian.

Increasingly, the passage of the years leaves me with the impression that I am looking back on a stream of people moving through time. The memory of all those I have had the opportunity to meet as they have come through the portals of the Society is certainly marked by the presence of Elsa and the positive difference she made in the lives of so many of us. Because of her, the institution we continue to enjoy has become a better place, with more of the resources that support an interest in genealogy and local history and with surroundings that more easily and more comfortably accommodate the people who wish to use them. Elsa made a difference in all our lives.

Francis R. Taormina