The Dora Mumford Jackson House, the current headquarters of the Historical Society

The Origin and Growth of the Schenectady County Historical Society

By Frank Taormina

The structure at 32 Washington Avenue, the current headquarters of the Schenectady County Historical Society, became a part of the community of Schenectady in 1895 when it was built by Jones Mumford Jackson to serve as a home for his widowed mother, Dora Mumford Jackson, and himself. The people who lived just prior to this event included members of the Jackson, Mumford, Paige, Bowers, Potter, Watkins, and Duane families, whose number and activities are legion. The histories of these families and their relationships one with another are a lengthy story that is not necessary to discuss here; those interested can find abundant information at the Historical Society. My purpose in this article is to assemble some basic information about the three successive structures in which Society headquarters has been housed, how we acquired and expanded the Mabee Farm, how all of this came into existence, and something about the many people who made it all happen.

continued on pages 4-5
Kudos and a big thank you to all our members who either attended the Annual Meeting of April 11 or who returned their proxies. Between the two, we had over 50% of our members represented, a feat that has no parallel in our history! At that meeting, membership elected two new trustees, Martin Strosberg and Kevin Richard-Morrow, who replaced retiring and long-serving trustees Frank Taormina and Frank Gilmore, and Bob Sullivan as Secretary to replace Cynthia Seacord, who, I am pleased to say, will remain on the Board of Trustees.

I am also delighted to report that we have a new face on staff with the addition of Michael Maloney, who has joined us as our new Librarian / Archivist. You will find a picture and profile of Mike on page 10.

It is my sad duty to report the passing of our immediate past president, Merritt Glennon. Merritt died on March 27th due to complications from surgery. He was an active member for 15 years, having been drawn to us by his love of history, and more specifically, his love of what he called our treasure, the 1705 Mabee farmhouse. Merritt first served on the Mabee Farm Committee as a volunteer and later as its chairman, vice President for five years under President Ed Reilly, and then later as President from 2012 to 2014.

Generous with his time and energy, Merritt was a staunch supporter of our mission, and his lively spirit will be sorely missed. His family has asked that memorial donations be made to the Altamont Community Food Bank or to the Schenectady County Historical Society for support of the Mabee Farm. (See Ann Aronson’s photo tribute on page 11.)

Welcome to our newly elected Trustees

Martin A. Strosberg of Niskayuna, a professor at Union College for 30 years, earned his bachelor’s degree from Union, his MA and MPH from the University of California at Berkeley, and his PhD from the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. He is also on the faculty of the Union Graduate College’s Mount Sinai School of Medicine Bioethics Program. He served as a founding board member of the Schenectady Free Clinic and is currently on the Board of the Hudson-Mohawk Area Health Education Center and chair of the Advisory Board of Schenectady County Public Health Services. Marty, for whom history is one of many avocations, is particularly interested in Twentieth Century Schenectady history.

Kevin Richard-Morrow was born in Troy but raised in Albany and is a 1971 graduate of Albany High. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Rhetoric and Communications and a Master of Library Science from SUNY Albany. He recently retired after over 36 years of NY State service. He has been an active volunteer for historic sites for 20 years. He has served on committees at the Old Stone Fort Museum in Schoharie and is past president of and still a Trustee of the Friends of Schuyler Mansion in Albany. He is a founding member of the 2nd Albany County Militia, 1775-1782. He is a very active member of the Society’s Mabee Farm Committee, for which he tends to the care, feeding, and peregriinations of our bateaux.

Mary Zawacki with Barry Longyear, author, at the opening of ‘IT CAME FROM SCHENECTADY’ exhibit in the Franchere Education Center.

Raidlin Morton-Bentley and friends at VanAntwerp Middle School Career Day.

Farewell to our librarian Melissa Tackey - Thank you and best wishes in your new endeavor.

Thank you friend for all that you’ve done for the Society. ‘You will be missed.’

Merritt Glennon 1945 - 2015

-Marianne
Meet our new Librarian/Archivist—Michael Maloney

I am pleased to report that Michael Maloney has begun work as the newly appointed Librarian/Archivist of the Society’s Grems-Doolittle Library. Michael comes to us from the Albany County Hall of Records, where he had been an Assistant Archivist. Previously, he worked as an archives intern at the NY State Archives, a Circulation Supervisor at Skidmore College, and as a clerk at the Howe Branch of the Albany Public Library. A native of Utica and now living in Albany, he holds a B.A. in history from SUNY New Paltz and a Masters degree in Information Studies from the State University of New York at Albany.

In his application for our open position, Michael wrote: “I am familiar with the work done by the Schenectady County Historical Society through the use of digital materials available in New York Heritage Digital Collections and through the Grems-Doolittle Blog on your website. I believe my educational background and employment history will make me a strong addition to the Grems-Doolittle staff.”

And so he is! Please stop in to welcome Michael.

-Marianne

Volunteer Spotlight on John Angilletta

What do John Lennon, Hillary Clinton, and Walter Cronkite have in common? They’ve all met John Angilletta. And if you’ve visited Mabee Farm Historic Site recently, it’s likely you too have had the great pleasure of meeting John.

John came to us in 2013, just as he was retiring from the New York State Department of Tax and Finance, where he worked as a warehouse supervisor. He was looking for something different to do in retirement, and with his love for history, the Mabee Farm seemed like a natural fit. Four years later, John is a reliable and beloved volunteer.

Though John is involved with most aspects of the Mabee Farm’s operations, his favorite activity is house tours: “I love meeting people. My wife and daughters say I’m something of a blabbermouth, and I love to talk. I love working with kids, and I love the fact that kids that young are interested in history.” For those who have a chance to join John on a tour of the Mabee House, the past is truly brought to life. His knowledge and kindness shine through in every conversation he holds with school groups and visitors.

John’s regional roots run deep. Aside from his time studying journalism at SUNY Morrisville, and a few years in the Syracuse area, he has spent his entire life in Schenectady County. He’s connected to the area, and has always had a particular interest in local history—and fishing. “I love to go fishing and spend time in the Adirondacks. Most nights in the summer I’m at Kiwanis Park with a chair and a fishing pole.”

As for afternoons in the summer (and winter, and spring, and fall!), John is here at the Farm, greeting visitors and sharing stories. He notes, “I’m very happy that I was given the opportunity to volunteer at the Farm. I look forward to coming out here all the time.”

Well, John, we’re very happy—and lucky—to have you here with us!

-Mary Zawacki

Programs and Exhibits – May-June 2015

For more information, please check our website, www.schenectadyhistorical.org or call us at (518) 374-0263 and listen for the option describing Programs. Please call (518) 887-5073 regarding programs at the Mabee Farm. Programs and exhibits are free for Society members, $5.00 for non-members unless otherwise noted.

Program Calendar

Saturday, May 2 – 10 a.m.  Discover Colonial Schenectady Walking Tour  Location: 32 Washington Avenue Cost: $5.00  A walking tour of the Stockade District. Go back in time from the founding of the colony up through the American Revolution. Pre-registration requested.

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Wednesday May 6, 11 am, 32 Washington Ave.  Secret Stockade: A Historic Tour and Lunch  Cost: $20.00 (lunch included)  A walking tour of the Stockade, a peek inside a private 1820s house, a visit to our History Museum, and lunch at Arthur’s Market. Pre-registration required.

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Saturday, June 6  11 a.m.–7 p.m. at Mabee Farm Sixth Schenectady Celtic Heritage Day, presented with the Ancient Order of Hibernians  Celebrate local Celtic history in this fun-filled day of family events and activities–music, tours, and live performances that bring Schenectady’s Celtic heritage to life.  Cost: $10 per vehicle.

Saturday, June 13 – 7 p.m. at the Mabee Farm A Celebration of Traditional NY State Music*  Performer: Dave Ruch  Join us for a night of traditional New York music as we celebrate the end of our “Exploring Schenectady County’s Immigrant Past” project. Musician Dave Ruch will perform songs of real-life New Yorkers from days gone by, farmers, lumber-men, children, immigrants, Native Americans, and more! Beer and wine will be available for purchase.

Friday, June 26 – 6 p.m. at 32 Washington Avenue  A Night on the Town in Schenectady 1850-1930: One Hundred Years of Fashion and Frivolity  An Exhibit Opening in our Schenectady History Museum. Explore the fashions of Schenectady from the Victorian era through World War II.

Saturday, June 27 – 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.  Civil War Living History Day at Mabee Farm  Cost: $5.00 for adults, students and children free  Living history educators will bring the past to life. Demonstrations include a Civil War surgeon, craft and trade demonstrations, a children’s muster, and more!

Wednesday, July 1 – 7–9 p.m. at Mabee Farm Howlin’ at the Moon Concert  Performers: Running the River  Cost: $5.00  Toe-tapping music inside our historic 1760s Dutch barn!

Exhibits

Hops & Hogheads: Beer from Colonial to Craft Brew  Previously at Franchere Center, now at 32 Washington Avenue, 2nd floor.


Continued on page 9
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Schenectady’s first Public Library, built in 1903 with funds from Andrew Carnegie and General Electric.

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Ten years later, in honor of local writer, historian, and former Society President John J. Vrooman, the Historical Society put an addition on the former home of Dora Jackson. On February 14, 1968, it was reported that “The dedication ceremony took place Saturday afternoon in the new meeting hall to be known as the Vrooman Room. About 150 persons attended the program and open house.” John Vrooman, 1882-1960, was a prolific author whose works such as Council Fire and Cannon, The Massacre, Forts and Firetides of the Mohawk Valley, Clarissa Putnam of Tribes Hill, and The Promised Land are still being read. A newspaper article of 7 March, 1985, featured a picture of SCHS President Wayne Harvey and early computer expert Mandalya Grems who stated that Mandy was giving a matching grant of $100,000 to be used for the construction of a library “to be known as the Grems-Dodittle Library in honor of her parents. The grant was given because of her awareness of the limitations of the present structure. As an active member of the Society’s library planning committee and student of genealogy, she noted that the Society’s present facility lacked sufficient work space.”

The Schenectady County Historical Society, 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305

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Continuation of Page 3:

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This exhibit at 32 Washington Avenue showcases evening gowns from our collection and explores the nightlife of yore.

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Witness to Assassination: President Lincoln and the Schenectady Connection Through July 31 at the Franchere Center Artifacts that capture the shock and sadness of America in April 1865 and reveal many Schenectady connections to the assassination.

Thank you!

Your generosity and support is greatly appreciated and essential to the continuing success of the Society.

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Thank you!
In the January-February 1993 issue, John wrote again: "The acquisition of the Farm and property and a check for $17,500 to maintain the property during the next three years." In essence, then, December 1992 marks the date of the Society’s acquisition of the Mabee Farm and property. In the March-April 1993 Newsletter, John wrote a much longer article giving much information about the Mabee Farm Historic Site, which the Society has now owned and operated for 22 years.

John van Schaick wrote again in our September-October 1993 Newsletter: "The Jan Franchere Education Center, one whose realization is due in large part to the friendship that former President John van Schaick cultivated with George Franchere.

"Franchere gave what the Society calls a ‘generous endowment’ in order to jump start the 2.1 million dollar project. So far, two-thirds of the needed funds have been generated and fundraising is planned to raise the rest.

"In the new building, the Historical Society hopes to blend the best of its heritage with the best of modern technology. The new center will be built to look like and to fit into the rest of the Mabee Farm, but will feature new technology to make it environmentally friendly.”

In 2010, competitive bids were taken for construction and furnishings and a construction manager was retained. Work began in earnest and proceeded rapidly.

The completed George E. Franchere Education Center, Keith Cramer, architect.

On October 7, 2011, at dedication of the finished George E. Franchere Education Center, the ribbon was cut by President Reilly and Gary Mabee with a coterie of trustees, Mabee Farm volunteers, and local dignitaries, pleased and proud to be present at the historic event.

So there we have it. Starting in the old Public Library, then moving to 113 Union Street, then to the home of Dora Jackson, to which was added first the Vrooman House, then moving to 113 Union Street, then to the home of Dora Jackson, to which was added first the Vrooman House, then moving to Main Street. A few spadefuls of earth were turned to plant the seed of an idea. A machine will come to dig a big hole and out of the hole will come the George E. Franchere Education Center.”
In the January-February 1993 issue, John wrote again: “The acceptance moved a step nearer on December 7 when the ad hoc Jan Mabee committee met with George Franchere to receive a gift of the furnishings at the Jan Mabee property and a check for $17,500 to maintain the property during the next three years.” In essence, then, December 1992 marks the date of the Society’s acquisition of the Mabee House and property. In the March-April 1993 Newsletter, John wrote a much longer article giving much information about the Mabee Farm Historic Site, which the Society now owns and operated for 22 years.

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In 1995, while Bob Sager was President, the November-December Newsletter contained an article by Kathy Johnson, co-chair of the Mabee-Farm committee, that read: “The most exciting news is that we are negotiating with Linda and Richard Nilsen of Johnstown, NY, who are donating their circa 1780 Dutch barn to the Mabee Farm. According to Everett Rau, it is a magnificent two-story, one-of-a-kind structure with details that make it one-of-a-kind.”

The Nilsen Barn at the Mabee Farm

In essence, then, So it has begun.

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TAORMINA – continued from page 1.

The earliest advocate for establishing a historical society in Schenectady was Professor Jonathan Pearson of Union College, a distinguished historian in his own right. He first recommended this in 1845, but inaction compelled him to repeat his proposal in 1862. The Schenectady County Historical Society as we know it was finally commissioned in 1905, 16 years after Pearson’s death in 1887 at age 74.

By 1958, the Historical Society had been in existence for 53 years. From inception in 1905 to 1912, its HQ was in the Public Library, a “Carnegie library” at the northeast corner of Union Street and Seward Place which is now a dormitory of Union College.

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- Mabee Family Foundation
- Open Door Bookstore
- Pattersonville Furniture Store
- Pedone Business Enterprises
- Schenectady Chapter, D.A.R.
- Senator Hugh T. Farley
- Slick’s Restaurant & Tavern
- Wright Family Foundation

To donate, please complete and mail the authorization form below, or for inquiries and assistance, call 518-374-0263, option 5, or email office@schenectadyhistorical.org.

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Wednesday June 3, 11 a.m. 32 Washington Avenue Secret Stockade: A Historic Tour and Lunch A walking tour of the Stockade, a peek inside a private 1820s house, a visit to our History Museum, and lunch at Arthur’s Market. Cost: $20.00 Pre-registration required.

Programs and Exhibits – May-June 2015

For more information, please check our website: www.schenectadyculturalhistorical.org or call us at (518) 374-0263 and listen for the option describing Programs. Please call (518) 887-5073 regarding programs at the Mabee Farm. Programs and exhibits are free for Society members, $5.00 for non-members unless otherwise noted.

Volunteer Spotlight on John Angilletta

What do John Lennon, Hillary Clinton, and Walter Cronkite have in common? They’ve all met John Angilletta. And if you’ve visited Mabee Farm Historic Site recently, it’s likely you too have had the great pleasure of meeting John.

John came to us in 2013, just as he was retiring from the New York State Department of Tax and Finance, where he worked as a warehouse supervisor. He was looking for something different to do in retirement, and with his love for history, the Mabee Farm seemed like a natural fit. Four years later, John is a reliable and beloved volunteer.

Though John is involved with most aspects of the Mabee Farm’s operations, his favorite activity is house tours: “I love meeting people. My wife and daughters say I’m something of a blabbermouth, and I love to talk. I love working with kids, and I love the fact that kids that young are interested in history.” For those who have a chance to join John on a tour of the Mabee House, the past is truly brought to life. His knowledge and kindness shine through in every conversation he holds with school groups and visitors.

John’s regional roots run deep. Aside from his time studying journalism at SUNY Morrisville, and a few years in the Syracuse area, he has spent his entire life in Schenectady County. He’s connected to the area, and has always had a particular interest in local history—and fishing. “I love to go fishing and spend time in the Adirondacks. Most nights in the summer I’m at Kiwanis Park with a chair and a fishing pole.”

As for afternoons in the summer (and winter, and spring, and fall!), John is here at the Farm, greeting visitors and sharing stories. He notes, “I’m very happy that I was given the opportunity to volunteer at the Farm. I look forward to coming out here all the time.”

Well, John, we’re very happy—and lucky—to have you here with us!
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Kudos and a big thank you to all our members who either attended the Annual Meeting of April 11 or who returned their proxies. Between the two, we had over 50% of our members represented, a feat that has no parallel in our history! At that meeting, membership elected two new trustees, Martin Strosberg and Kevin Richard-Morrow, who replaced retiring and long-serving trustees Frank Taormina and Frank Gilmore, and Bob Sullivan as Secretary to replace Cynthia Seacord, who, I am pleased to say, will remain on the Board of Trustees.

I am also delighted to report that we have a new face on staff with the addition of Michael Maloney, who has joined us as our new Librarian / Archivist. You will find a picture and profile of Mike on page 10.

It is my sad duty to report the passing of our immediate past president, Merritt Glennon. Merritt died on March 27th due to complications from surgery. He was an active member for 15 years, having been drawn to us by his love of history, and more specifically, his love of what he called our treasure, the 1705 Mabee farmhouse. Merritt first served on the Mabee Farm Committee as a volunteer and later as its chairman, vice President for five years under President Ed Reilly, and then later as President from 2012 to 2014.

Generous with his time and energy, Merritt was a staunch supporter of our mission, and his lively spirit will be sorely missed. His family has asked that memorial donations be made to the Altamont Community Food Bank or to the Schenectady County Historical Society for support of the Mabee Farm. (See Ann Aronson’s photo tribute on page 11.)

-Marianne

Welcome to our newly elected Trustees

Martin A. Strosberg of Niskayuna, a professor at Union College for 30 years, earned his bachelor’s degree from Union, his MA and MPH from the University of California at Berkeley, and his PhD from the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. He is also on the faculty of the Union Graduate College’s Mount Sinai School of Medicine Bioethics Program. He served as a founding board member of the Schenectady Free Clinic and is currently on the Board of the Hudson-Mohawk Area Health Education Center and chair of the Advisory Board of Schenectady County Public Health Services. Marty, for whom history is one of many avocations, is particularly interested in Twentieth Century Schenectady history.

Kevin Richard-Morrow was born in Troy but raised in Albany and is a 1971 graduate of Albany High. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Rhetoric and Communications and a Master of Library Science from SUNY Albany. He recently retired after over 36 years of NY State service. He has been an active volunteer for historic sites for 20 years. He has served on committees at the Old Stone Fort Museum in Schoharie and is past president of and still a Trustee of the Friends of Schuyler Mansion in Albany. He is a founding member of the 2nd Albany County Militia, 1775-1782. He is a very active member of the Society’s Mabee Farm Committee, for which he tends to the care, feeding, and peregrinations of our bateaux.

Thank you friend for all that you’ve done for the Society. ’You will be missed.

Merritt Glennon 1945 - 2015

Mary Zawacki with Barry Longyear, author, at the opening of IT CAME FROM SCHENECTADY exhibit in the Franchere Education Center.

Mary Zawacki, Marianne Blanchard

Photos: Ann Aronson, Kaitlin Morton-Bentley, Mary Zawacki, Marianne Blanchard

Merritt E. Glennon 1945-2015

Raidlin Morton-Bentley and friends at VanAntwerp Middle School Career Day.

Farwell to our librarian Melissa Tack - Thank you and best wishes in your new endeavor.

CAME FROM SCHENECTADY
The Dora Mumford Jackson House, the current headquarters of the Historical Society

The Origin and Growth of the Schenectady County Historical Society

By Frank Taormina

The structure at 32 Washington Avenue, the current headquarters of the Schenectady County Historical Society, became a part of the community of Schenectady in 1895 when it was built by Jones Mumford Jackson to serve as a home for his widowed mother, Dora Mumford Jackson, and himself. The people who lived just prior to this event included members of the Jackson, Mumford, Paige, Bowers, Potter, Watkins, and Duane families, whose number and activities are legion. The histories of these families and their relationships one with another are a lengthy story that is not necessary to discuss here; those interested can find abundant information at the Historical Society. My purpose in this article is to assemble some basic information about the three successive structures in which Society headquarters has been housed, how we acquired and expanded the Mabee Farm, how all of this came into existence, and something about the many people who made it all happen.