Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter Volume 37 - Number 5-6 January - February 2001 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, New York 12305 (518) 374-0263 Web site: http://www.schist.org

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CALENDAR

Saturday, January 13, 2001

1:30 PM Refreshments 2:00 Program: Captives and Slaves in the New York Borderlands

[Pending] Presenter: Theodore Corbett

Tuesday, January 16, 2001 7:30 PM Board of Trustees

Saturday, February 10

1:30 PM Refreshments

2:00 Program: Art and the Erie Canal Presenter: James Crawford

Tuesday, February 20, 2001 7:30 PM Board of Trustees

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

For many years when my wife wanted to get away from "people" we would retreat to the side of a tiny stream which runs down the very peaceful Wolf Hollow. Wolf Hollow (road) is located a half mile north of Hoffmans, which is eight miles west of Schenectady along Route 5. In many places the Hollow is a deep ravine with the tiny Chaughtanoonda Kill crossing back and forth from one side of the road to the other.

This idyllic setting has a state historical marker:

Wolf Hollow

A fault and displacement of 1000 feet in Earth's surface rocks. Here in 1669 the Mohawks ambushed their Algonkian invaders.

The Hollow wasn't always a quiet scene.

Algonquin Indians lived along the lower Mohawk River Valley before being forced out by the Mohawks. The Mohawks were a tribe of the Iroquois Confederation which had moved into upstate New York from the west. The invading Algonquins were the Mohican and Narragansett tribes living in Massachusetts. The Mohawks and their Algonquin neighbors weren't about to get along since both wanted to control the Mohawk River valley, the gateway for trade with land west of the Appalachians. The Massachusetts Algonquins learned that the Mohawks had fared badly in fights with Canadian-based Algonquins. From their base in Massachusetts they decided to attack the Mohawks's eastern-most "castle" near Fonda, NY, 23 miles west of Schenectady. (I'm using current place names to identify locations.) They followed traditional Indian trade routes. Crossing northern Massachusetts along the Mohawk Trail, they followed the Hoosic River out of Massachusetts to the Hudson opposite Stillwater. They dropped down the Hudson a few miles to Mechanicville and then headed westward again through Round Lake. They followed the creek which flows from Ballston Lake to Round Lake and branched off onto Mourning Creek (along Route 67 and Brookline Road). They went through Charlton, by West Glenville, and down Wolf Hollow to the Mohawk River, 18 miles east of Fonda. It helps to have a topographical map to follow their routes and realize that like the railroads they tried to avoid steep grades and going up and down hills.

The Algonquins attacked the Mohawk "castle" for two days without success. With supplies running low they decided it was time to go home. They camped overnight on Touareuna Hill which had a steep "nose" abutment next to the Mohawk adjacent to Chaughtanoonda Kill. (Widening of Route 5 has now cut the tip off the nose.) The next morning, when they started up Wolf Hollow, they found their egress blocked by Mohawk warriors who had moved in overnight. Their retreat was similarly blocked by additional warriors at the lower end of the Hollow. They were trapped fore-and-aft in a steep-sided ravine. To say the least, an embarrassing situation.

They fought all day in a losing struggle. Many of the Algonquin leaders were killed. when darkness came those remaining managed to slip away. The Algonquins never tried again to regain the Mohawk River Valley.

For a quiet retreat on a hot summer day, I'd recommend a visit to Wolf Hollow. See if you can find the "coal mine" in the wall of the ravine where a vain attempt was made to find coal. Its cave-like entrance is abut all that's left of the tunnel.

- Bill Dimpelfeld -

January Program

Theodore Corbett comes to us with a program co-sponsored by the New York Council for the Humanities. We're keeping our fingers crossed that the paperwork goes through on time.

February Program

James Crawford comes to us highly recommended by the New York Council for the Humanities. His topic Art and the Erie Canal couldn't be more timely in this anniversary year.

November Program

We hope you didn't miss the November program. Malcolm Horton presented us with a gripping slide show developed originally by a Mr. Alcot, a descendant of the Abraham Van Santvoort family, who began developing the Hudson River Day Line in 1828.

Two projectors simultaneously dramatized for us the growth of the steamship activity on the Hudson and the grandeur of the Hudson itself. A person can learn more with a trip to the Kingston Lighthouse or a visit to the Hudson River Maritime Center at Rondout.

December Program

Wayne Harvey, king of the postcard kingdom, gave us a meaty discourse on the history of the post card. He

exhibited a fascinating display of cards old and new and also introduced us to the Society's new set of reproduction of old cards. Sets of these are available in the office for \$8.00. Wayne's talk was preceded by a savory collation prepared by Stasia Berdy and Ann Karl, assisted by various helpful society members.

MUSEUM NEWS -Jo Mordecai, Coordinator of Exhibits

Christmas 2000

The 2000 holiday season at the Dora Jackson house was very successful. "Teddy Bears on Parade" in the Vrooman Room was popular with both children and adults, partly thanks to the great write-up Jeff Wilkin gave us in the Gazette.

I must give a big thank-you to Carol Lewis for the loan of many of her more than three hundred bears. Carol, a retired school librarian who works with Ginny in the library, is a great asset to the Society. And also a thank-you to Paul Gonsowski who brings down all the things I need from the attic and sets up the trees with lights for me.

Another thank-you must go to the ladies of the Hugh Plat Garden Club who each year decorate the mantels and stairway for us, as well as the centerpiece for the dining room. They give our house that special finishing touch with evergreens, cones and holly. Many of our visitors remarked on how beautiful the house looked.

Next year, thanks to a generous donor, we are to have an additional ten foot tree, complete with decorations. I can't wait to see the effect in the Vrooman Room.

The rest of the Jackson house featured all our antique dolls, prams, carriages, sleds and dolls' tea sets of the late Victorian age in the double parlor. The Victorian study featured toys for the boys and Papa too, with the old penny farthing bicycle that once belong to Dr. Herman Mynderse displayed in the corner. I love that bicycle although I do think it should be painted black, not silver.

Our Holiday program was visited by two classes from the Brown School, three classes from John the Evangelist school, and classes from Glen Cliff School, the Magic Kingdom Nursery School and A Special Place for Children. In all we were visited by just over 300 people this holiday season.

I so enjoy decorating this old house; it's not work, it's really a joy, and I always find another little treasure to tuck in a corner for a special effect. thank you for all the support during the year; the cards and little notes you send me are so appreciated.

May you all have a wonderful New Year, full of good health and good luck.

-Jo Mordecai-

Docent Needed

This is the perfect position for the retired elementary teacher who would like to keep his or her hand in, once in a while, with younger children. It's more important that you have a rapport with youngsters than an encyclopedic knowledge of everything we have in the museum.

Typically we tell them a little bit about the early days of Schenectady, about the Colonial period, and then talk about a few of the items that might be of special interest to them -- like the ancient gramophone which is the great-grandmother of the CD.

From Your House to Our House

- Donor Marlena Amalfitano Collection of commemorative plates
- A. Bicentennial of Rotterdam, 1776-1976
- B. Westminster Presbyterian church Bridgeport, CT
- C. Town of Rotterdam Sesquicentennial 1820 1970

Donor Wayne Harvey

A. Small penknife Centennial celebration Schenectady, NY

in plastic case

B. Black plastic card holder "Carls" printed in gold

Donor Carol Harvey

One grinder (circa 1920 belonged to Mrs. Harvey's mother, Miss Marion L. Price; later Mrs. LeRoy C. Brandt. Made in Connecticut.

Donor Susan Hampson

One dressmaker's dummy

Three books on costume design

Ten pairs of chopsticks

One fan

One pale green rice bowl

One pair metal chopsticks with chain

One ladies' Chinese costume in ivory raw silk and pale blue linen

One man's Chinese costume: jacket, pants, wrapper, and stockings in black; Long blue satin damask mandarin coat

One Pale green satin robe, dragon design.

All the above were donated by the daughter of Maxine Hancock, the widow of John Hancock. John was a devoted member and trustee of the Historical Society for many years, and was much involved with the building of the Grems Doolittle library. The Chinese items were acquired during their last visit to China.

LIBRARY DOINGS -Virginia LaGoy, Librarian

UPDATE: The Duanesburg Memorial Census is still in the works and will soon be available for a modest price.

DONATIONS TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

DONOR ITEM

- Laura Cantini Various photos, school documents, pins. letters
- Bill Dimpelfeld Book: The Forgotten Art of Building a Fireplace by Vrest Orton
- Susan Rosenthal Periodicals: NEXUS-1986-1996; NEHGR--1990-1997; Mayflower Quarterly-1995-2000

Heather Ward Book: Locomotives of Standard Design for All Classes of Service or From Designs Furnished by Railroad Companies (Catalog 5th ed.) from Schenectady Locomotive Works

- Scrapbook of Ellis family clippings
- Record of horse purchases and sales by Edward Ellis
- **Copybook of letters by Edward Ellis**
- Mary Scheible Folder: A survey of the Empire group (maps of NY c. 1908)
- **German Bible**
- Ruth Hand Bible record: Adams, Ames, Barker, Billings, Riker families
- Cemetery records: Dimick Cemetery Saratoga Co.; Wellwood Cemetery Oswego County
- Articles on Clifton Park by John Scher
- Newsletters: The Patents Nov.-Dec. 1996; Nov-Dec 1997; Sept-Oct 1998; The Lone Sailor, Fall 2000
- Church Records: Microfim of the Fordham Manor Church, 1793-1967

Family records: Aird, Ames, Alexanderson, Andrews, Angel, Archer, Arnold, Bailey, Ball, Barton, Beal/Beals, Bentley, Erwin, Kingsbury, Lent, Seymour, Wilson

- ESTATE OF JOHN HANCOCK Large collection of books and pamphlets on Genealogy and history
- **Building plans for Grems-Doolittle library**
- Photographs of construction and surrounding area
- **Materials on Glen-Sanders Mansion**
- Take note: This is an exceptional acquisition!
- Weller, Ralph H. (author) 'Book: The Hieronimus Weller Family in America

M. J. Beaulieu Pamphlets about Schenectady; store Christmas catalog from Carl Company 1985; Democratic Party official primary ballot-1920

DEFINITION DEPARTMENT

Genealogy: Disturbing the Dead and Irritating the Living.

(Thanks to Jane Howard)

A WORD FROM THE LIBRARIAN

WANTED! Copies of Family Bible Records for our Family Files.

P.S. We don't really want whole Bibles!

Have you filled out your pedigree chart yet? A number of them have come in, but we sent out 600 and we'd love to have 600 new files.

STROLLING THROUGH THE ARCHIVES ON A RAINY DAY...

No sooner had the State of Florida come down with a rash of disputed ballots than scholars began digging up evidence of other cases in which elections found themselves in contest. Our local scholar-sleuth, Susan Staffa, has come up with evidence of a 1761 election that came under fire. We show a portion of the original document of complaint and we produce below the allegations. Note: in 1761 all voters had to be male property owners.

LM 24.

List of the voters, and objections against those, who have at the last Election at Schonectady voted in favour of Ryer Schermerhoorn, the Present Sitting member, Made by Nicolaas Groot the 21th Day of April 1761 In Pursuance of an order of the general assembly of the Province of New York for that Purpose xx Objections.

Wouter Swart... That he has Conveyed the Lands for which he voted to his Son Tunis Swart Before the Day of Election, and that he is a Non Resident in the Township of Schonectady --

Dirick Bradt . . . That he had no Lawfull Title the Day of Election and that he is a Non Resident in the Township of Schonectady --

Anderies Treuax ... That the Lands for which he voted is not worth forty Pounds--

John Glen, Jr.... That he has no lawfull Title, Because the Estate for which he voted at the Day of the Election was Vested in his Mother during Life... [she is] yet alive --

John Jacob Mebie... That he has no Lawfull Title, Because the Estate for which he voted, at the Day of the Election was vested in his mother During Life. The mother yet alive.

John Teller... That he has Either no Title or if any Title, That it was Executed To Late to Intitle him to a vote in the Election --

Christopher Velthuyson . . . That he is an Alien and no Engelish man and therefore a Real Estate Cannot Be Vested in him And therefore has no vote --

Andries Burns . . . That he has no Title, And if any Title, That it was Executed To him by Samuel Burns Dec. Son, who was within Age when he Executed the Same to him --

David Marienis . . . That he has no Title, or if any Title that the Lands are not worth forty pounds and that he is a non Resident in The Township of Schonectady ---

Claas Spack . . . A Black Negroman, and that he has no lawfull Title for the Ground for which he voted and that he is not a Resident in the Township of Schonectady--

Crownage Kinkade ... That he voted in Consideration of a Promise, or other Security by Deed Made to him by Reyer Schermerhorn, and that he is a Non Resident In the Township of Schenectady and therefore has no vote --

Helmer and Pieter Veeder... That they voted in Consideration of a Deed Executed to P. Helmer Veeder by Reyer Schermerhorn, For to Entitle him to past or Shear (share?) in the Towns land xxxxxx a Division Should be made hereafter--

William and Nicolaas Stevens, Jr.... That They Voted in Consideration of a Promise made by Reyer Schermerhorn That he would give a bond of Indemnification to Said William Stevens for not to molest or Disturb the Voters for any land in our Township in their xxxxxx or of their Liberties --

The last entry was effaced with a large "X" but the word "admitted" was written underneath the Stevens' names. We did not include all the entries in the document, preferring to give samples of the different objections.

Once there was a periodical in Schenectady called "The Cabinet." On November 24, 1819, it published the following story, headed "Destructive Fire!!!"

On Wednesday morning last, between the hours of 4 and 5, a fire broke out in this city, the most destructive we have ever witnessed. It originated in Mr. Haight's Currying Shop in Water-Street, and communicated from thence to Mr. Moyston's dwelling-house and store, which stood on the opposite of the same street--these with some of the adjoining buildings were soon reduced to ashes,-- A strong S. E. wind fed the fury of the raging element, so that it could not be arrested, until it had crossed State-Street, and swept away, in its desolating course, almost every building between that street and the Mohawk Bridge, which having been on fire in several places, was with difficulty saved.

Thus in about the space of six hours, the western part of our city, exhibited a melancholy scene of devastation and ruin. The cellars of the buildings consumed, continued to smoke and burn for several days subsequent. From the happy circumstance of the wind's continuing to blow in one direction, the ruin was not so far spread, as it otherwise would have been; and owing to this, and the unremitting exertions of some individuals, the buildings on the west side of Church-Street, with 2 or 3 exceptions, were not materially injured. Many persons were much injured and bruised while lending their aid to save the furniture &c of the unhappy sufferers.

The number of buildings destroyed, including barns and outhouses is about one hundred and sixty of which at least 90 are swelling-houses, stores and offices, as may be seen by the subjoined statement. Besides the buildings, (not more than 7 of which were insured) we have to lament the loss of much valuable property, such as fruit-trees, furniture, &c. and a great quantity of grain and provisions; and the take will scarce be half told, when we add that not a few have been literally burnt out of their homes, and cast without shelter or the means of subsistence, at this inclement season of the year, upon the charity and protection of their friends; yeas, some have lost their all. No correct estimate of the loss can be formed, but we shall not exceed the bounds of truth it we say it is somewhere near 150,000 dollars.

The indefatigable labor of all, but more particularly of strangers and the Students of Union College, in rescuing property from the devouring flames, merits the warmest thanks.

Amid the sincerest feelings of regret, we rejoice, and we do it with emotions of gratitude to the Supreme Disposer of events, that during this awful visitation of His Providence, no lives have been lost. We also feel great satisfaction in stating that the corporation of this city are pursuing measures for the relief of the sufferers.

Next issue we will reproduce the listing of the sufferers. It's a long list but is worth reproducing as it contains information that is of relevance to many of our present day citizenry.

John Duncan is back with another of his fascinating sidelights on regional heroes.

A FEW RESOURCES ABOUT TWO MORSES -John Duncan

Yes, Samuel F. B. Morse is usually credited with inventing the telegraph, although some authors assert that Morse should share the honor with several other pioneers. In any case, just north of Poughkeepsie is a handsome old home, well worth visiting, called the Young/Morse Historic site, where Mr. Morse and his family lived for many years before selling the place to the Young family.

We do know that Samuel Morse occasionally visited a cousin in Cherry Valley, NY, and his prowess as a fine artist, beyond question, is sometimes featured in the Fenimore House in Cooperstown.

It does appear that Samuel F. B. Morse inherited some of his abilities from his father, Jedidiah, who is credited as being the father of geography in the USA. Indeed, it was Jedidiah Morse who wrote the first American historical gazetteer -- an alphabetical description of towns and cities at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, shortly after the turn of the 1800's.

Those of us in the Schenectady area may enjoy some of Jedidiah's description of our area, although his alphabetical sequencing broke down when he spelled our town as Skenectady. All the same, he gave us a flattering intro, as follows:

"Schenectady . . . an ancient and respectable city in Albany county, pleasantly situated in a vale bordered with hills to the southward and eastward, on the margin of the Mohawk River.

"The houses, numbered between 300 and 400, compactly built, chiefly of brick, on the old Dutch stile, on the side of the river. Few of them are elegant.

"The public buildings are a Dutch, Presbyterian and an Episcopal church, and a large and handsome college edifice.... The windings of the river through the town and fields, which are often overflowed in the spring, afford a rich and charming prospect about harvest time.

"This town, being at the foot of navigation, on a long river which passes through a fine country, rapidly settling, it would be natural to conclude, would embrace much of its commerce; but originally knowing no other than the fur trade which since the revolution has almost ceased, and having taken no advantage of its happy situation for other commerce, the place has considerably decayed. The chief business of this town now is to receive merchandise from Albany, and to put it into bateaux to go up the river, and forward to Albany the returns from the back country.

"Union College was established and incorporated here in 1794, and is under the direction of 24 trustees. It took its name from the various denominations of Christians in the establishment. The Dutch were, however, by far the most liberal benefactors to this institution. It is well situated for the conveniency of the northern and western parts of the state. In June 1796, there were forty students; the annual expense of education here, including board, tuition, etc. is less than one hundred dollars. The library consisted of about 1,000 volumes.

"The city of Skenectady at this time contains 5289 inhabitants. It is 416 miles form Washington.

"Nisqueiana, a settlement on the Mohawk River between Albany and Schenectady, is the principal seat of the society called Shakers."

Author's note: Your author believes it is high time to honor both Jedidiah as well as Samuel F. B. Morse. If Jedidiah had a few problems in spelling Niskayuna and Schenectady, who among us has perfected his or her spelling?

MABEE FARM NEWS

Thanks to a group of Seabee volunteers, much of the siding is up on the Nilsen barn and all of the siding on the English barn. Everything is looking more pulled-together. To be sure the rafters are not yet up on the Dutch barn; it turns out that we were not able to salvage all of the rafters from the Johnstown location which meant new rafters had to be cut and it's not that easy to find trees from which you can cut 36' rafters. But we're getting there.

Many thanks to John Mabee who secured a traveling scaffold from Albany Ladder, making the siding of the barns much easier.

Many thanks too, to all the people who have come together at the end of the year to donate once more to the Mabee Farm project, and especially to our ever-generous George Franchere and a lesser anonymous donor who sweetened the matching grant from the Schenectady Foundation.. As the airplane ads used to say: "Getting there is half the fun!"

We single out Stanley Lee who made restoring the old trolley stop his pet project. We also thank Kim Mabee who gets out to the farm and paints every time she has a free moment. Those two are representative of the tireless efforts put forth by many people.

HOUSE COMMITTEE NEWS

WHERE ARE THEY?

Ten corduroy covers that were made by members of the Auxiliary have been misplaced. Please report any sighting to Jo Mordecai.

OOOOPS!

Cynthia Brott Biasca observes that she is the author of Descendants of Albert and Arent Andriessen Bradt which we failed to report in a recent issue. Sorry, Ms. Biasca.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

Wanted!

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

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!

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 374-926 for further information.

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