



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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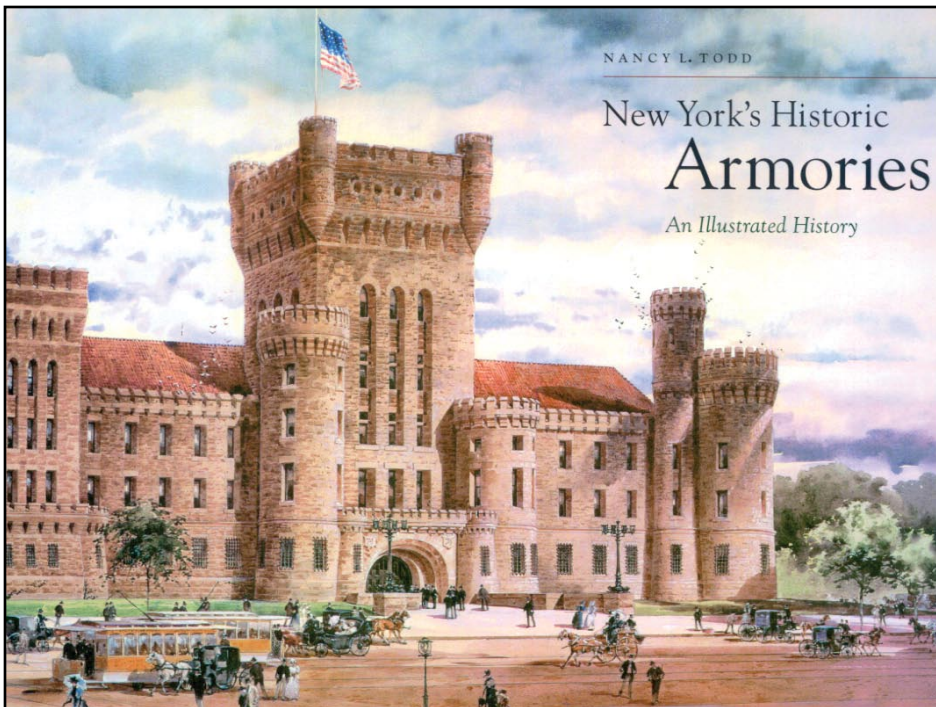
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Historic Armories of New York State

New York's arsenals and armories are among the most imposing monuments to the role of the citizen soldier in American military history and were built to house local units of the state's volunteer militia. Approximately 120 armories were built in New York State from about 1799 to 1940. Most date from the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the National Guard was America's primary domestic peacekeeper during the post-Civil War era of labor-capital conflict. As a building type, armories served as arms storage facilities, clubhouses for the militiamen, and civic monuments symbolizing New York's determination to preserve domestic law and order via military might. Most armories—particularly those built during the last two decades of the nineteenth century—are (or were) medieval-inspired, castle-like fortresses. Of the nearly 120 armories built in the state, about 60 still exist. Almost half of these house National Guard units. The remaining 30+ buildings serve a variety of purposes: some are owned by local governments and house community education and / or recreation services; some are privately owned and house commercial enterprises or residential units.

Together, all extant armories chronicle the history of the volunteer militia from its emergence during the early years of the Republic, through its heyday during the Gilded Age as the backbone of the American military system, to its early twentieth century role as the nation's primary armed reserve force. Come to the lecture on January 13th and learn all about the Washington Continentals, the Schenectady Citizens' Corps, the Thirty-sixth and Thirty Seventh Separate Companies, and the 105th Infantry Regiment and their respective arsenals and armories.

In 1992, the New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA), the agency in charge of the Army National Guard, entered into partnership with Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to identify and evaluate all pre-World War II armories in the state. With funding provided by the U.S. Department

of Defense's Legacy Resource Management Program, DMNA sponsored the nomination of most of its historic armories to the National Register of Historic Places. Nancy L. Todd, on staff at OPRHP since 1982, directed the project. In 1994, Todd obtained additional grant monies from Legacy to continue the agencies' efforts to preserve, promote, and protect these architectural gems. One component of the 1994 grant project was the production of a coffee-table book that provided a comprehensive overview of all armories ever built in New York State.

Todd spent many years researching the histories of the various individual armories and visiting many of the ones still in existence. Archives at the state level, including the collections of DMNA as well as the State Library, provided much needed background information. But the bulk of the information—especially rare photo documentation—was usually found at the local level: community public libraries and local / regional historical societies were treasure troves of information. At SCHS, the late Wayne Harvey was instrumental in helping locate valuable information about Schenectady's armories and its volunteer militia.

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HOURS

MUSEUM

MONDAY-FRIDAY 1-5
SATURDAY 10-4

LIBRARY

MONDAY-FRIDAY 1-5
SATURDAY 9-12

MABEE FARM
RE-OPENS IN SPRING

Letter from the President

In the last issue, I discussed the danger that the historic 12-acre Schuyler-Stanford-Ingersoll parcel opposite Mohawk Commons in Niskayuna, the remainder of what the Stanfords called "Locust Grove," would be converted to a strip mall. Please mark the date and time of **Tuesday, January 23, 7 PM**, when the Niskayuna Town Board will hold a public hearing as to whether or not a Special Use Permit should be granted that would allow multiple buildings and uses at the site.

As of this issue, the news is slightly better in that citizen opposition has persuaded prospective developers not to risk damage to the Stanford mansion by attempting to move it (at a cost of a million dollars!) to the periphery of the site. Instead, it will be left on its promontory and become a restaurant called "The Stanford House." But the revised site plan still includes two additional restaurants, a bank, a Walgreen's drug store next to the CVS in Schenectady, and two retail buildings which, collectively, will make the House hard to see much less find from either Balltown Road or State Street. Readers who care deeply should make every effort to attend the public hearing and express their opinion as to whether they prefer that the site be left as is or whether they are champing at the bit to fight the traffic lined up to dine at places like Red Robin and TGI Friday's.

Whatever the outcome, the issue has prompted considerable research as to the extensive significance to our area of the Stanford families, those of the brothers Leland and Charles. Society Trustee Gary Hermanson, the author of the profile of Charles in the last issue, just sent me email to this effect:

About 1860 Lewis Vrooman, son of Niskayuna Town Supervisor John L. Vrooman, a former owner of Locust Grove, started a mission in Schenectady. In 1889 Welton Stanford, son of Charles Stanford, bought the Laden homestead at State Street and Consaul Road and the existing house was converted for use as a mission. In June 1902, Welton donated the property to the Albany Street Methodist Church with the stipulation that any church built on the new property would be named after the Stanford family. And so it was, incorporated as the *Stanford Methodist Church* in 1908. Its foundation was laid in 1925 and the present church, shown at the left below, was completed in 1953.



Finally, for this issue, I am pleased to report phone discussions with three Stanford descendants, all residing in California—Tom Stanford, Robert Huntsberger, and Glen Huntsberger III. And Glen III has just emailed 19 fascinating photos of Locust Grove and the interior of its mansion taken "before 1900." I have space for only the one at the above right. Perhaps those books are still there and 110 or more years overdue at the Library.

Ed Reilly

SCHS Saturday Programs for January and February

January 13th - New York's Historic Armories

1:30 PM refreshments; 2:00 PM program

Nancy Todd, a life-long resident of the Capital District region, will present an illustrated talk about her new book "New York's Historic Armories: An Illustrated History." See cover story in this issue.

February 10th - Historic Crafts of the Mohawk Valley

1:30 pm refreshments; 2:00 PM program

As part of Schenectady's Colonial Fest celebration the Society will offer the opportunity to learn about many of the crafts necessary for life in the New World. Artisans will talk about the history and use of numerous items while demonstrating their construction. Not only will you learn about the difficulty and challenge in fabricating these pieces but you will be able to purchase some of them. Even the refreshments will be examples of 17th and 18th century food preparation.

February 17th - Chocolate: From Medicine to Milk Chocolate with Susan McLellan Plaisted

1:30 PM refreshments; 2:00 PM program

Reservation required, call 374-0263.

Calling all chocoholics! Enjoy an afternoon of everything chocolate. Continuing with the celebration of Schenectady's Colonial Fest, the Society is offering an opportunity to learn about the history of chocolate and the making of chocolate edibles from an authority on the subject. The milk chocolate bar of the 21st century had its origins in the New World cacao bean. This program explores the discovery and transformation of the cacao bean into an ingredient for beverage, for medicine, and for milk chocolate candy. Program cost is \$7.50 for members and \$10 for non-members and includes the tasting of historic chocolate.

For more information on any of the above programs please contact SCHS at 374-0263 or e-mail curator@schist.org.

Museum Volunteers Needed

The Schenectady County Historical Society continues to grow. We have increased our program offerings in general; and now we are receiving requests to provide school programs and special tours. We have also embarked on an ambitious project to develop and maintain an inventory of our extensive holdings and a cataloging system for them. You can be a valuable part of this process by volunteering to spend a few hours with us each month. We will be holding training sessions very shortly and you are welcome to attend one or all. All sessions will take place at SCHS, 32 Washington Avenue in Schenectady. For more information, call 374-0263

January 10th at 10 AM - Volunteer Training for Guides

Participants will learn about the history of Schenectady County and the creation of SCHS in 1905. They will receive training on how to give informed guided tours of our downtown museum. Information packets will be available to bring home.

January 24th at 10 AM - Volunteer Training for Inventory

The Society's collections have not been inventoried since the early 1970s. An accurate inventory is vital to keeping records and knowing the condition and location of the artifacts in our care. This session will teach participants how to record artifacts and their condition.

February 7th at 10 AM - Volunteer Training in PastPerfect

Cataloging helps a museum record information on its collection while making it accessible for researchers. *PastPerfect* is a computer program that provides a means for museum personnel to incorporate information on a collection into a database that is simple and easy to use.

Efner History Center and Research Library

Volunteers are still needed and welcomed! We again ask you to consider spending a day a week, or even one a month, to help. We are open from 9 AM to 1 PM Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, except for major holidays. Stop by or give us a call at 382-5088 to discuss how you might help us in our mission to improve the city's archives. The History Center is on the third floor of City Hall, accessible by elevator from the ground or first floors.

Our newest volunteers are two gentlemen from the ALCO Historic Photos Project, Efner Center neighbors at City Hall. They are Harry Steven of Niskayuna, and Ed Fernau from Ballston Spa who will be spending some of their time on Wednesdays working on identification of ALCO and other railroad photos. Welcome!

The first shipment of the John Papp Photo Collection was featured in an article by Jeff Wilkin back in October in the Daily Gazette. That encouraged a number of readers to visit us. Two were fellow musicians and friends of Mr. Papp, and they were able to identify some of the musicians in his collection on area musicians. We expect a second shipment of photos to arrive soon, and will welcome help in processing them. Come see the photos on display in the Archives, as well as the new "Glimpses of Winters Past" photography display that will run until spring, located just outside the Center.

We have a wish list for the New Year. We really need a scanner! We could also use a small canister vacuum cleaner.

Cindy Seacord

Textile Grant

Through the efforts of Curator Kate Weller, SCHS has received a \$5,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to fund a professional assessment of the conservation and storage needs of the SCHS textile collection. The collection contains irreplaceable treasures from Schenectady's past including 18th-century textiles, an extensive costume collection, our Liberty Flag, and various dolls, quilts, and accessories. These items are the most vulnerable objects in our collection. This survey is a necessary prelude to protecting them for future generations. The project was considered so important by the NEH that it was given the designation of being a "We the People" project. The goal of that initiative is to "encourage and strengthen the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture through the support of projects that explore significant events and themes in our nation's history and culture and that advance knowledge of the principles that define America."

The Reverend Horace G. Day of the First Baptist Church

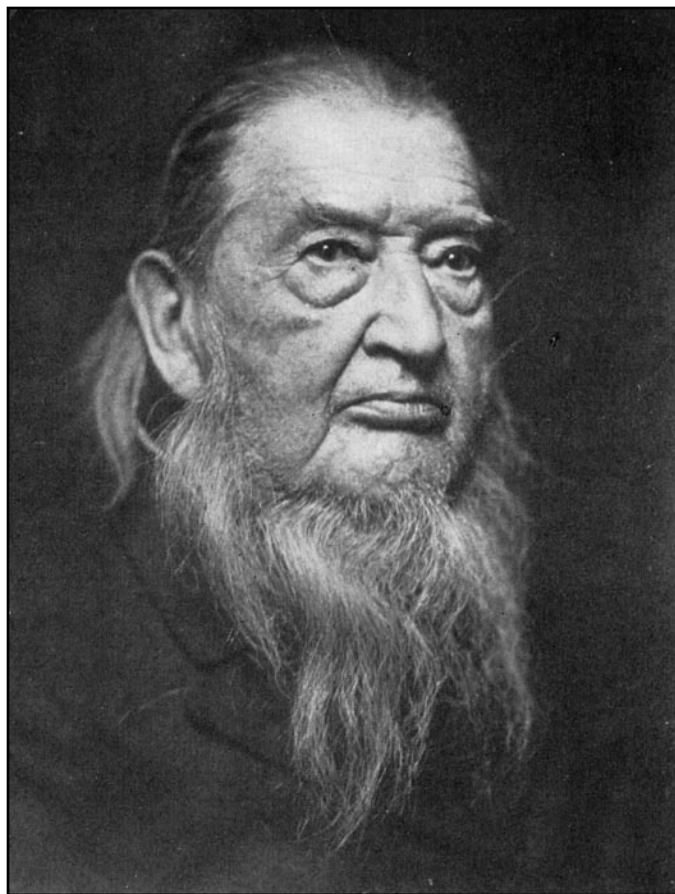
By Neil B. Yetwin

From Sunday, January 10 to Wednesday, January 13, 1897, Schenectady's citizens engaged in a city-wide celebration honoring one of its most venerable figures. Clergymen, academics and politicians joined representatives from over 30 military and fraternal organizations to express their gratitude and respect for their "Grand Old Man." Postcards bearing the honoree's likeness – several survive to this day – were distributed throughout the city and contributions were gathered to be offered as a parting gift.

At the center of the festivities stood the Reverend Horace G. Day, now retiring after 50 years as pastor of Schenectady's First Baptist Church. Day was being honored not only for his spiritual leadership, civic dedication, and sheer longevity, but also for his unswerving stand against the evils of slavery before and during the Civil War.

Day was born at Hudson, New York on September 13, 1819 to Horace and Millicent (Hildreth) Day. Tragedy struck the Day family when Horace, Sr., then just 25, died suddenly of heart failure while visiting family in his hometown of Hartford, Connecticut. Horace, Jr. went on to attend Hudson's Baptist Sunday School and Hudson Academy, and eventually taught at and acted as superintendent for the Baptist School. Haunted by the fear that he would die young like his father, he chose to enter the ministry and preach the Gospel in the time he believed he had left.

Day commenced his pastorate in Schenectady on January 1, 1847, succeeding the Reverend William Arthur. For the first two years he lived in a boarding house on Franklin Street (the building now houses the Katbird Gallery) and roomed with Rev. Arthur's 17-year-old son, the



future President Chester A. Arthur. Fifty years later Day would vividly recall his first experience at the First Baptist Church, then located at the corner of Franklin and Centre (Broadway) Streets. The prayer meeting, he recalled, "was held in the basement, which was dimly lighted by oil lamps. Everything was depressing, except the spirit of the people. Their faith and fervor drew my heart to them from the first."

On Thursday, November 29, 1855 Day was invited to preach a Thanksgiving sermon at Schenectady's First Dutch Church, during which he praised abolitionists as heroes and slave-traders as evil "traffickers in human flesh." Attorney David Cady Smith, a church deacon and editor of the Schenectady *Reflector*, issued a very sharp statement the next morning characterizing Day's sermon as "a desecration of the day and place, and an insult to his audience." A rancorous 10-week debate ensued in the local press over the appropriateness of Day's use the pulpit to discuss the major political issue of the day,

but the controversy did nothing to diminish his reputation. In fact, Day's patriotic speeches, his allowing the use of the church's lecture room as a hospital for wounded soldiers, and his poignant words at the funerals of Schenectady's war dead earned him such titles as "the Lord's Day" and "the Soldier's Friend." The Grand Army of the Republic counted him as one of its own, and at the marking of the 25th anniversary of his pastorate, Day's congregation presented him with a gold-headed cane and a \$500 bond.

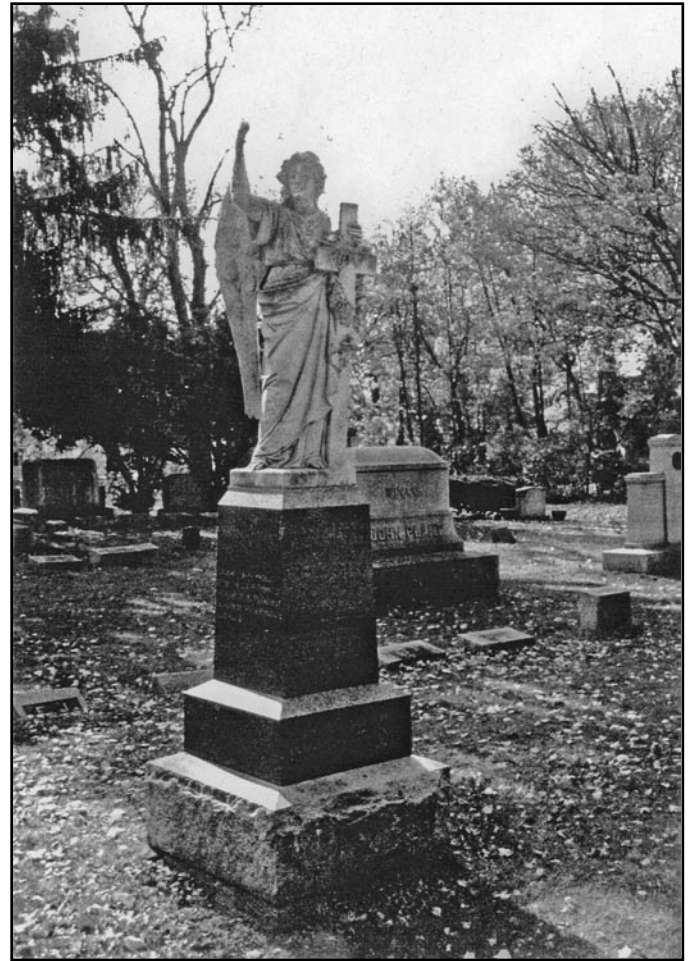
Over the next 20 years, Day was named a Trustee of the Home of the Friendless, served as president of the Schenectady YMCA, and received an honorary Master of Arts degree from Union College. Judge John Sanders wrote of Day in his 1879 *Early History of Schenectady and Its First Settlers*: "None in our border are more beloved and respected than himself." A true, earnest and eloquent soldier of the cross, his manners are so gentle, he seems unconscious of his own power." When Day announced his retirement in the fall of 1896 there was a dead silence of 8 minutes until "one of the brethren mustered courage" to accept his resignation.

Among the many accolades offered Day during the festivities was one humorous one by Reverend Thrall of Schenectady's Lutheran Church. Thrall observed that because of Reverend Day's efforts, "it is the Baptist throughout the length and breadth of this city at the present time. Why, a woman of this city, on asking at the window of our post office for a stamp, was asked of what denomination, her reply was 'Baptist'." Thrall's anecdote, according to the local papers, elicited "much laughter."

Several benefits were held to support Day in his declining years. In October, 1901, for example, a donation of \$20 was offered for Reverend Day's care. The contributor was none other than David Cady Smith, the man who had taken such

offense at the Reverend's antislavery sermon 46 years earlier.

Day passed away on the evening of October 3, 1904 at the Albany Street home of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ham, who had cared for him in the last seven years of his life. He was interred at Parkview Cemetery.



Grave site at Parkview Cemetery, Schenectady, NY

Horace Day's devotion to his faith and to the people of Schenectady was unquestioned throughout his long life. But it was as a champion of the Union cause that the Reverend Day – "the Soldier's Friend" – would be long remembered.

Author's Note: A special thanks to Rodena Bosch, archivist-historian of the First Baptist Church, for allowing the author access to materials not available elsewhere.

Cocoa and Chocolate in Early North America

The cacao bean originated in South America and it has been used in that area and elsewhere for numerous products ever since. Native people including the Aztecs created the spicy beverage *xocolatl*. This is not the cocoa or hot chocolate drink that we know today but even in that early version it became a favorite beverage for the native people in South America as well for the European explorers who took large amounts of the cacao bean back to Europe where it became very popular. Later, European explorers and colonists brought to North America a more varied approach to using the cacao bean – it was not just for use in making a beverage. Different groups developed characteristic products with the addition of spices among other ingredients.

Join us at the Schenectady County Historical Society on Saturday, February 17th for a program by culinary historian Susan McLellan Plaisted, the owner and operator of *Heart to Hearth Cookery*, a food history business based in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Her credentials are impressive and her knowledge of food history extends far beyond chocolate.



Viennese etching: making chocolate, 1775

Refreshments offered in advance of the program will include chocolate products made from early seveneenth and eighteenth century recipes.

Please note: Reservations are required. The cost is \$7.50 for members and \$10 for non-members. Space is limited so make your reservations early .

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Nancy L. Todd, the author of *NEW YORK'S HISTORIC ARMORIES*, is a life-long resident of Schenectady County and a National Register Field Representative at the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. She has been at OPRHP since 1982 where she is in charge of all state and federal preservation programs in the Finger Lakes region of New York State.



Above: With its asymmetrical massing and four-story corner tower, the Schenectady Arsenal, overlooking Crescent Park, was completed in 1868.

Left: Post card of Schenectady Armory, 1898-1899, which replaced the above Arsenal.

Mabee Farm

FARM AND FOLIAGE DAY

In cooperation with the County of Schenectady and to the delight of many a child, the Farm held a Farm and Foliage Day on Saturday, October 14th. A big thank you goes to the County, which organized the event with eight other farms in our county. The highlight of the afternoon was making the best scarecrows this 300-year-old farm had ever seen! Thanks also to Price Chopper, which supplied pumpkins, cider, and donuts.

MABEE FARM FLOURISHES IN THE MID 19TH CENTURY

On a recent trip to the library, I discovered some very interesting information on agriculture at the Mabee Farm in 1865. We knew that there was farming at the Mabee property, but exactly what was grown has never really been researched. We hope to add some of this information to our docent notes in the Spring. We do know that eight people lived at the farm in 1865: Simon Mabee (59) and his wife Hannah (54); their children: Jacob (29), Margaret (21), Hester (18), and Rachael (15). Also living on the Farm were: a nephew John P. Mabee (21), who was a Private in the 13th Regiment, and a German male servant named Christian Otte (15). The family worked 75 acres of the original 111 acres of land, which was worth \$8,000 at the time. Presently, the farm has 9 ½ acres.

In 1865, 15 tons of hay were harvested, 200 bushels of oats (8 acres), 70 bushels of winter rye (6 acres), 75 bushels of barley (2 acres), 40 bushels of buckwheat (2 acres), and 200 bushels of Indian corn for grain (5 acres). 150 apple trees gave them 400 bushels of apples and 18 barrels of cider, and ¾ acre of potatoes was planted. Beehives produced 107 pounds of honey. Farm calves helped produce 700 pounds of butter, and 900 pounds of pork were produced from 17 pigs, and 50 pounds of wool were shorn from 19 sheep. Poultry was valued at \$2,500, and the value of an untold number of eggs sold was \$1,500. *Yes, this was in 1865!*



Chris Temple, scrimshaw artist.

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS

The Mabee Farm is looking for enthusiastic individuals who are interested in expanding their role in the community. Volunteers, current members of the Society or those wish to join, work directly with visitors to the site and also have opportunities to assist with special projects and events. Duties may include serving as tour guide (docent), clerk at the gift shop, parking director for events, hands-on craft demonstrators, building construction or renovation assistants, and more. Call Site Manager Pat Barrot at (518) 887-5073 or email her at mabee@nycap.rr.com. A volunteer training session will be held in early spring.

WRAP UP OF EVENTS AT THE FARM IN 2006

In April we had some exciting times and some wet ones. The year kicked off when the Environmental Clearinghouse Of Schenectady (ECOS) sponsored "Earth Day." It poured for the second year in a row, but that didn't dampen the spirits of those who were there to inspire awareness of and an appreciation for the planet's fragile environment. In May, our Revolutionary War Re-enactment took place with more rain, which prompted cancellation of the event on the 2nd day due to dangerous conditions for the men with muskets and the fantastic horses. These magnificent animals were brought to the event by Sal Tarantino with the 2nd Continental Light Dragoons (returning this year) hailing from Connecticut. They put on a spectacular educational display which was followed by one of the best battles ever fought on the Mabee Farm. In June we had Forefathers' Day, a warm day that featured the hot bluegrass music of the "Riverview Ramblers."

July 8-9 was Canalfest. Wonderful music was provided by two dynamic couples: *Chris Shaw & Bridget Ball* and *John Kirk & Trish Miller* as well as *The Riverview Ramblers*, *Annie & the Hedonists*, *Whitman & Pantell*, and *George Ward & Gary Van Slyke*. Also on the slate were kayak demonstrations and fantastic music workshops for kids. The annual Historic Erie Canal Bike Tour, about 400 strong, visited the Farm the following weekend with wearied travelers stopping at the farm for a rest and tour. July 17-21st was Louise Basa's Archaeology Kids Camp with SCCC, another successful sold-out class. The Early American Industries Association held its regional meeting at the Mabee Farm on July 22nd for the first time. Speakers included Bill McMillan, Charlie Long, and John Ackner.

August was another busy month. Early Technologies Day was expanded from Flint Knapping / Archaeology Day. Besides the always interesting knapper and atlatl thrower, Barry Keegan and his group, we had displays and demonstrations that included a tinsmith, scrimshaw carver, ropemakers, wild edibles, flammable mushrooms, early weaving, and primitive displays. The Antique Outboard Motor Swap Meet was held August 19th. It was coupled with a tour by the Antique Car Club which brought in about 130 people. August 26th brought the annual Arts & Crafts Festival which is supported with a grant from *I Love NY*. Over 1,000 people attended this increasingly popular event and helped raise money for the Farm.

Our school programs brought in over 3,000 students this year. An Enslaved Peoples program was introduced with the very talented Cliff Mealey re-enacting the Mabee 1755 slave "Jack." Early reports from the 7th grade classes who attended this program have brought raves from students, teachers, and parents alike.

Workshops proved very popular with the public led by John Ackner's Blacksmithing Workshops which were always sold out. We were thrilled when Ev Rau reported that he would do another Timberframing Workshop, which helped construct the Corn Crib. Pam Bucci conducted her first Dutch Oven Cooking Class, and most of her students were male! Pam also held a spinning class, and a "Make a Gourd Birdhouse" workshop. A big thanks to all of you who helped out at the Mabee Farm this year. We couldn't have done it without you.

Pat Barrot, Site Manager



Farm and Foliage Day at the Mabee Farm.

Counterclockwise: Painting pumpkins, making scarecrows, and the winning scarecrow!



Photo by Ann Aronson Photography

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