



Photos: Ann Aronson Photography



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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A TANGLE OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: the Yates family, the Butler family, and three Bradt sisters

So we have three sisters and three brothers-in-law, all married in Schenectady during the period following the British victory, with the help of their American Colonial allies, in the French and Indian War. No hint of Revolution was in the air.

The scene would change for these three families as the American Revolution became a reality. Then it was not an uncommon part of their lives as residents in Schenectady to witness directly the refugees, “in a Doleful, Lamentable, and Helpless Condition” streaming eastward from the destructive raids being carried out by Colonists who had remained loyal to the British Crown and their Native American allies.



Christopher Yates 1737-1785
Copy by G. Mungboch circa 1900

To examine the connection between the Yates family and the Butler family, we must first start with the Bradt family, particularly with three Bradt sisters. They were Catherine (1735), Jannetje (1743), and Harriet (1747). Catherine Bradt married John Butler of the prominent Butler family in Fonda in 1752. Jannetje (also known as Jane) married Christopher Yates of Schenectady in 1761. Harriet Bradt married Jellis Yates, Christopher’s younger brother, in 1768.



Joseph C. Yates 1768-1837
By Ezra Ames circa 1825

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HOURS

MUSEUM & LIBRARY

MONDAY-FRIDAY 9-5

SATURDAY 10-2

MABEE FARM

TUESDAY-SATURDAY 10-4

Letter from the President

I write on the second of what may be a spate of late June days with temperatures in the mid 90s. That would be great if we had solar panels on the roof of the Jackson House to generate the electricity to run our A/C, but there was no thought of using as yet uninvented technology to do that in 1895. We do have a chance to do so now, however, with regard to the Franchere Educational Center to be built on our newly acquired land adjacent to the Mabee Farm.

Archeology on the footprint of the new Center has started, and design is well along. Depending on several factors, groundbreaking could be as soon as Fall, but more likely will be Spring next year. One of the factors is that though the Center will be “green” with regard to energy efficiency if not in color (your President is only one-fourth Irish), it will take a bit more green stuff to build it.

George Franchere left the Society well-provided for with regard to our ability to operate the Farm into the indefinite future, but not so well that we have accumulated the full amount needed to complete the Center. But his name need not be the only one associated with it. Several naming opportunities for the interior rooms are still available for donations ranging from the cost of a new Toyota to a new Mercedes, but they will go fast. (That last sentence is deliberately ambiguous, but you know what I’m hoping for.)

A new IRA rule in place for this tax year but not necessarily for next makes it especially advantageous to make large donations to charity. An IRA owner, age 70 or over, can now directly transfer, tax-free, up to \$100,000 per year to 501(c) 3 organizations such as SCHS. (Distributions from employer-sponsored retirement plans, including SIMPLE IRAs and simplified employee pension (SEP) plans are not eligible.) To qualify, the funds must be contributed directly by the IRA trustee to the eligible charity.

Look below. Everything is coming up roses!

Ed Reilly



The Vrooman Room on June 23, 2007 courtesy of the Schenectady Rose Society. Photo: Will Cusey

WHERE IS JOSEPH C. YATES?

On a recent trip to the State Capitol in Albany, Bill Buell, a regular SCHS volunteer, noticed the large oil-on-canvas paintings of various New York governors hanging on the wall. He remembered that the lone Schenectady native to hold this high office was Joseph C. Yates and went looking for his portrait—to no avail.

Bill made a phone call to Capitol Architect Jim Jamison, who revealed that there are quite a few governors who are not up on the wall — perhaps as many as 12 or 13. When informed that the Schenectady County Historical Society might have a painting of Yates in our collection that they would be willing to loan to the Capitol, Jamison was genuinely excited by the prospect. SCHS president Ed Reilly and curator Kathryn Weller both support the idea of loaning the Society’s early 20th century painting of Yates by H.L. Mott to the State Capitol. We would, of course, leave the more famous



Ezra Ames portrait hanging in the parlor of the Dora Jackson home right where it is. (See cover image)

A second phone conversation with Jamison revealed that the state is undergoing policy discussions to determine just what it wants to do with its missing governors. Once they decide, they will get back to us and, if all goes well, Joseph Yates will take his place in the Capitol hallway where he belongs.

Re-enactment – Mabee Farm, June 2, 2007

Photos – Ann Aronson Photography



Notes from the Library by Katherine Chansky

New in the Library

In April and May there were several donations to the library of interesting new photographs, family genealogy materials, and books, which included:

Thomas McIlworth Colonial New York Painter by Ona Curran; *The Woman's Club of Schenectady Remembrance Book* donated by Patricia Binzer; *The Spencer's of Cherry Valley* by J. M. Spencer; *The Maternal Ancestry of Mary Rae Thompson* by John E. D'Anieri; *Vital Records of Niskayuna Reformed Church, 1783-1861*; *Adirondack Fire Towers Their History and Lore* by Martin Podskoch.

Photographs were donated from many people and included images of members of the VASA Club, a Swedish/Scandinavian fraternal organization; of the toll gate on Broadway donated by Dr. and Mrs. Schlansker; and Schenectady in the 19th century, a gift of Mary Fraenckel.

A new addition to the Historical Society's collection of Schenectady school records came from John Ackner who donated Mont Pleasant High School Football Programs from the 1950's.

Alexandra Preuss -- Library Intern

In April we interviewed for the new library internship position and hired Alex Preuss, a 2007 graduate of the University at Albany. We welcomed her to the library on June 1st and she will be with us throughout the summer to catalog collections into the new Past Perfect software program, as well as assist with library projects. In her short time here she has already inventoried our growing collection of genealogy records on CD, indexed the bi-centennial history of Glenville, and is creating a finding aid for the records of the Historical Society—no small project.

Library Volunteers Start New Projects

The library volunteers have been a terrific asset to the library by helping the new librarian, Katherine Chansky, find her way to the best resources, whether it be a book, a photo, or a document. They continue to create more access to the collections with indexing and sorting projects and, being a very energetic group, they are collectively and individually launching into a few new projects.

Niskayuna Book

Ask the library volunteers what the hot topic of the day is and you are likely to hear about the Niskayuna *Images of America* book that this group is working on. The library volunteers are out in the town taking pictures and look-

ing for more pictures of Niskayuna. If you have pictures of old Niskayuna, or you know of someone who has a cache of prints they would let us use in the book, please contact Carol Lewis, Beth Pfaffenbach, Ann Eignor, Ann Aronson, or Cindy Seacord. Pictures must be at the library by August 31st to make it into the new book.

School Groups in the Library and the Museum

In May and June Carol Lewis and Katherine Chansky hosted programs on the Erie Canal for elementary classes from Elmer Street School and the Pashley School in Glenville. The children spent half their time in the Museum and the rest of the morning in the library. The students were cheerful, energetic and had fun with the "Then and Now on the Erie Canal" activity developed by Carol and Katherine. The children examined copies of older photographs of the Erie Canal within the City of Schenectady, comparing these images to the same, or nearly identical, views of Erie Boulevard.

Efner Center Announces Summer Hours

Cynthia Seacord, Archivist

During the months of June, July and August the Efner History Center located on the attic level at City Hall will be closed on Fridays. On Mondays and Wednesdays it will be open from 8:00 AM – 1:00 PM and by appointment. Please contact archivist Cincy Seacord at 382-5088 for arrangements to visit at non-regular hours.

New volunteers at the Efner center are **Melissa Tacke**, a recent graduate of SUNY's Library and Information Science program, and **Jennifer Anderson** who will matriculate into that program this Fall. We are deeply grateful for contributions of the following volunteers: **Alan Karey** and **Pilar Seacord** for organizing the substantial photo and negative collection, a gift from the late P. Schuyler Miller, photographer and former Historical Society member, which dealt with the Department of Public education in the 1930s and 1940s. Other volunteers include **Ed Fernau** and **Harry Steven** who organized our Schenectady Locomotive-ALCO photograph collection, the railroad materials donated by Francis Poulin, and the Schenectady Railway Papers that include maps and photographs of Schenectady's trolley and early bus system.

This summer, City and County Historian Don Rittner is setting up his office at the Efner Center. Don's new book, *Schenectady Then and Now*, will be available for purchase at the Efner City History Center.

Canal Fest –

July 14th 11:00 – 4:00; July 15th 12:00- 4:00

This yearly event celebrates the role of the Erie Canal in upstate New York. Come and see the ongoing exhibit "A Desirable Residence" – Schenectady and the Erie Canal".

On **Saturday, July 14th** – free tours of the Historical Society Museum every hour on the hour between 11:00 AM and 4:00 PM as well as free tours of the Stockade District all day. On the Society grounds there will be outdoor activities for the whole family all day such as games and various handcrafts that were popular in the Erie Canal era.

On **Sunday, July 15th** – from 12:00 – 2:00 enjoy a "**Taste of the Erie Canal Era**" thanks to the generous donation of food from the Glen Sanders Hotel and Restaurant while watching **a Special Presentation by Captain Kelsey** (also known as Michelle Henry, a first-person interpreter). The Captain's tandem grain boats, each 96 feet long, carry 200 tons of grain from Buffalo to New York City. We will see life on a canal boat as it moves through the state during some very exciting times. The Captain has a variety of stories to tell involving ghosts, runaway hoggees, horse thieves, fugitive slaves, abolition and women's rights. History comes to life in this interactive performance as the Captain interviews audience members for a new hoggee to drive the mules along the Erie towpath. The Captain brings a fine blend of storytelling, history and humor with a dash of creativity that kids from 9 to 99 will enjoy. There will also be free tours of the Historical Society Museum between 1:00 and 4:00; and children's games available outdoors.

A Traditional Victorian Tea Party

Sunday, August 26th from 1:00 – 4:00

\$15.00 per adult \$10.00 per child

\$30.00 per family; reservations recommended

Dress up in your best party attire or come in your Victorian finery to celebrate one of the classic traditions of the Victorian age in America. Americans became fascinated with everything English during Queen Victoria's reign in England.

...Continued

including the English tea ceremony and the very un-English Christmas tree.

Sample a variety of teas served (along with punch) while enjoying traditional treats like tasty tea sandwiches and *petits fours* as well as more traditional fare. Discover how adults and children entertained themselves before the electronic age. Learn about children's fashions in Victorian times. Try your hand at a variety of crafts that children would have made such as a hair bow barrette, a folding fan, or a Victorian pinwheel.

The Stanford Legacy in Schenectady

by Garrett Hermanson

August 18th 1:30 refreshments 2:00 Program

Long before Leland Stanford helped connect the eastern and western parts of our country with the Central Pacific Railroad, his family was making an impact on Schenectady County that continues to this day! The Society will open a new exhibit in August, **The Stanford Legacy in Schenectady**, which will explore this fascinating family and the home its members inhabited for over 100 years. It was then known as Locust Grove but is now known as the Ingersoll Home. To celebrate the opening of this new exhibit, we are pleased to welcome as our speaker Garrett Hermanson, a dedicated volunteer and former SCHS trustee. He has done extensive research on the Stanford family and is currently working on a book about the Stanfords and the world they lived in. He has contributed material on the Stanford family for previous newsletters, and is collaborating with our summer intern William Cusey to present this exhibit.

Sexton Paintings to stay at the Schenectady County Historical Society

The Schenectady County Historical Society is pleased to accept six new paintings into its collection by the Schenectady artist, Samuel H. Sexton. The gifts include four portraits, one landscape and one copy made of another artist's work; they cover the period from the 1830s to the 1890s. Thanks to this generous gift from the Schenectady Museum, the Schenectady County Historical Society can now claim representation from the whole span of this painter's works. This exhibit opened in April and continues through early August.

That these were perilous times for the “Old Dorp” is borne witness to by Governor George Clinton’s message to General George Washington that in 1780 Schenectady was the westernmost point on the frontier separating the forces loyal to the British from those struggling to make American independence a fact of political and economic life.

The space we have does not permit us to go through the succession of events that brought about the changes which wracked the American Colonies from 1763, the end of the French and Indian War, to 1775, the outbreak of conflict at Lexington and Concord. Both John Butler and his brother-in-law Christopher served heroically in the French and Indian War. Both were well known to Sir William Johnson. But after 1775, events took a radical turn in the lives of both men.



Yates’ house – 17 Front Street, Schenectady, NY
Photo: Ann Aronson

John Butler (1718-1796) was a Loyalist who led an irregular force known as Butler’s Rangers in the Mohawk Valley and along the Northern Frontier during the American Revolution. As a land owner of 26,000 acres of land he was second only to Sir William Johnson. Historians tell us that it was John Butler (married to Catherine Bradt) who played a major role in persuading the Iroquois Confederation (all except the Oneidas) to take up the British cause before the Battle of Oriskany in the summer of 1777. He also played a leadership role in the Tory raids which have come down to us in history as the Wyoming Valley Massacre and the Cherry Valley Massacre. Walter

Butler (1752-1781), the oldest son of John Butler and Catherine Bradt, was a very energetic leader on the Loyalist side during the Revolution. He acquired the reputation of being “the most hated ranger” of all the Tory raiders particularly for the role he played in the Cherry Valley Massacre. He was killed on the bank of the west Canada Creek on October 30, 1781 and immediately “tomahawked and scalped” as he was considered “the terror of the Mohawk Valley.” News of Walter Butler’s death was greeted in Schenectady “with great rejoicing. The Whigs illuminated their houses and the Tories, under threat of being mobbed, were forced to do likewise.”

How did Jane Yates react to this news about her nephew, her oldest sister’s son, a sister whose wedding she undoubtedly attended and remembered well? Is it possible that she remembered cuddling her nephew Walter when he arrived as her older sister’s first child?

In the meantime, John Butler’s brother-in-law, Christopher Yates (1737-1785), after serving briefly as the first Chairman of the Schenectady Committee on Safety in 1775, went on to play a role which entitled him, according to Jephtha Simms, a Mohawk Valley historian, to be called “the best informed patriot in the Mohawk Valley.” He became a Lieutenant Colonel in the Second Albany County Militia. The account of his activity in that role occupies more space than that of any other individual in Willis T. Hanson’s book, “A History of Schenectady During the Revolution.” Among many other things, in 1777 he was the leader of “a detachment of Schenectady Militia detailed for fatigue duty... busily engaged in felling trees and in otherwise rendering impenetrable the wilderness that lay between Skenesborough and Fort Edward.” Later that year, as a surveyor, he helped lay out the American defenses at Saratoga in preparation for what is generally acknowledged as the battle which was the turning point of the American Revolution. In 1779, under the command of General James Clinton, he supervised the construction of two hundred bateaux for the transportation of men, supplies and equipment into the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign against the Iroquois in the effort to stem the raids of the Tories and Indians in the Mohawk and Hudson Valleys.



Gravestone of Christopher Yates
located in Vale Cemetery –
epitaph inscription appears below

Photo: John Bergeron

Christopher Yates esq. MORTAL Whosoever Thou art whom chance or inclination has led to this consecrated spot KNOW That beneath this stone is deposited all that can die of Christopher Yates Esq. and while thou droppest a pious tear to the Memory of a Hero, a Patriot & a Friend of Mankind. Be assured that rather on the grateful Bosoms of his Fellow Citizens thereon this frail Stone is inscribed this Eulogy. In earthly life under the banners of his Sovereign He saught the Palm of Military Glory, while Dependence on Britain was consistant with the Liberties of America His Loyalty was firm and exemplary But when the course of events a disunion of Empire became neccessary he took an early and determined part in the interest of his Country with his Sword and Councils. He asserted & promoted the Revolution. His private character was amiable. The Sincere Friend, The tender Husband, The indulgent Parent were iminently displayed in Him. Deeply regretted by an numerous train of Relativ's and Acquaintance on 1st September in M.D.C.C.L.X.X.X.V. He expired at Schenectady, a. 48.3.17.

Jellis Yates (1744-1812), Christopher’s younger brother, also served in the Colonial American Militia, though he did not play as prominent a role as his older brother. Indeed, if “the walls had ears” what sorts of conversations would they have

recorded for us at 17 Front Street, the Yates family homestead, during these stressful times when the two men playing important roles on opposing sides were brothers-in-laws? What would have been the honest emotional reaction of Joseph C. Yates (1768-1837), the son of Christopher Yates, when he learned, at the age of 12, that his first cousin, Walter Butler, had been killed under dramatic circumstances, and when he witnessed the celebration this elicited in the community in which he lived?

Joseph Yates also continued in the family tradition of public service by becoming the first Mayor of Schenectady and eventually the Governor of New York. And finally, while we are wondering how everyone handled all these events in the Yates and Butler families, let us ask what the conversation was like when Joseph C. Yates’s older sister, Eva, married at the Reformed Church in Schenectady in 1794 none other than William Johnson Butler, Walter Butler’s brother, and another first cousin of Joseph C. Yates. The tangle of these relationships could only have been explained by our late friend, Robert Sager, the consummate genealogist, but the rest of us, limited only to our own emotions, can only wonder how all these people handled their feelings under these remarkable circumstances.

Researched and written
by Trustee Frank Taormina.



Christopher Yates died at age 48 in 1785. Janet died at 79 in 1822. They were re-interred in a family gravesite at Vale Cemetery shortly after 1857 when the cemetery opened.

Photo: Ruth Bergeron