



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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GEORGE WESTINGHOUSE SLEPT HERE

by Betty Pieper

On a recent tour of Vale Cemetery, I was pleased to hear Don Rittner, Schenectady City and County Historian, mention that George Westinghouse, Jr. spent much of his youth here. For many years I have researched and written about the Westinghouse family but I'm amazed that here in Schenectady we know so little about the man who is often referred to as the first world-class industrialist. His father, George Westinghouse, Sr., and many of his family members are buried in Vale, but George and his wife Marguerite moved to Pittsburgh and are buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

At age 19, George designed a rotary engine for which he was awarded his first patent. Two of his early inventions were prompted by witnessing the aftermath of rail accidents. In 1867 he invented a "car replacer" to get derailed cars back on track efficiently. Later that same year he completely redesigned the railroad "frog," a piece of track that crosses over other tracks

and allows trains to switch from one to another. The Westinghouse frog design was unique because it made the frog reversible. These inventions were accomplished before he moved away from Schenectady.

In 1867 George married Marguerite Erskine Walker and in 1868 he moved to Pittsburgh to obtain cheaper steel and to arrange financing for his companies primarily associated with the railroad industry. The Westinghouse air brake is his most famous invention. The first patent for it was issued in 1869, but he continued to improve it over his lifetime. The air brake enabled railroads to haul heavier freight and to travel in mountainous regions that previously had been too perilous for trains.

George was born in Central Bridge in 1846 and moved with his family to Schenectady at the age of ten. His father, George, Sr., was well known for innovation and manufacture in the field of agriculture, for which he earned many patents. The Clute brothers and others doing cutting edge manufacturing here urged him to move to Schenectady in order to take advantage of skilled labor, the Erie Canal, and a railroad hub for distribution of his equipment throughout the country. I have seen century-old Westinghouse agricultural equipment sitting in abandoned orchards in Arizona.



Continued on page 4

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HOURS

MUSEUM & LIBRARY

MONDAY-FRIDAY 9-5
SATURDAY 10-2

MABEE FARM

OPEN

MAY 9 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 26
TUES-SAT 10AM-4PM

Letter from the President

It's in the mid-eighties outside as I write, but not in the Grems-Doolittle Library, which has been air-conditioned from the get-go, 1991. But now, for the first time, I can say, so is our museum. So is the Vrooman Room. Since last I wrote in this space, *Family Danz* of Albany has done what is often claimed to be impossible—providing proper year-round temperature and humidity control to a venerable building with no modern air-ducts. Regular attendees of our Saturday presentations will all remember what it was like in the museum on hot days in late spring or early fall and enjoy the new-found comfort. But much as we love you, people comfort was not the primary objective; it was for the sake of our artifacts and more especially our paintings that our trustees decided to make this major investment.

Surely you remember how Sexton's Massacre painting had warped and faded over the years and had to be sent to Williamstown for a facelift (but no Botox). That cost a pretty penny. Well, the new system cost far more, of course, but some of the cost will be recouped through energy savings. Not only was an unobtrusive Spacepack system installed throughout our first three floors, but an inefficient 70-year-boiler and supplemental gas furnace in the basement were replaced by a single modern high-efficient unit that does the job of both.



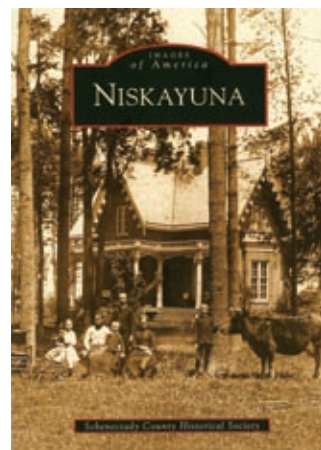
On May 20, the mighty *Orrust* was drawn from its cocoon, lifted high over an embankment, and lowered slowly and reverently into the water. It took a giant commercial crane to do that. (The one wading at the edge of the Mohawk held out for more money and missed his chance at history.) Congratulations to the *Orrust* construction team for an amazing feat. Our part was to loan a part of the Farm for its gestation and donate some tractor time, some space for human amenities, and a good bit of (electrical) juice.

There is book news too. The *Niskayuna* book is out, available in fine stores everywhere, just in time for the midpoint of that town's (and the County's) bicentennial year. This is the third Arcadia book that our library staff and volunteers have published, the earlier ones being *Rotterdam* and *Glenville*. The Duanesburg Historical Society did *Duanesburg / Princetown*, and the late Susan Rosenthal authored *Schenectady*. All are available in our gift shop, 10% off to members. And Bill Buell's bicentennial book *Historic Schenectady County* will go to press very soon.

Two weeks ago, the Rotterdam Planning Board gave final site plan approval for the George E. Franchere Educational Center at the Mabee Farm. The way is now clear for a ceremonial groundbreaking this month, though it will take a bit of time to get construction bids.

All in all, a pretty routine couple of months, eh what?

- Ed



GREMS-DOOLITTLE LIBRARY

Summer Intern Heather Cunningham is working on several library projects including a finding aid to the Larry Hart Collection; maintaining the library's computer-based catalog using PastPerfect software; and photographing and researching a gravestone that has found temporary residence in the library. The stone's lettering was difficult to read until Heather gently applied a little water to bring it in relief. It begins: *In memory of Joseph Lusher who died June 9th 1802 in the 28th year of his...* Heather will continue her research of the gravestone with the hope of locating Joseph Lusher's final resting place. Heather began work as the Library's summer intern in May. She graduated with honors from Schenectady High School in 2004 and graduated with honors from Union College last December. This fall Heather is heading to England to do graduate studies in archeology.

Quirini Donation One of the historic structures that has not survived into the 21st century is the Campbell Mansion that stood on the site of the present Rotterdam Mall. The Mansion was built in 1832 by Daniel D. Campbell. It was a magnificent house with grand rooms—one of the first in Schenectady to have a telephone line. The building intrigued many people with stories of a cellar that had once stored large quantities of Madeira wine. When the Mansion was purchased at auction in 1941 it came to the attention of Helen Quirini, who had just started working at GE. She had met many women working at the company who needed local housing. She wondered at the time if this large old home might some day provide housing for these women. With permission of the new owners, she toured the mansion shortly after the auction.

Helen thoroughly enjoyed her walk through the grand rooms and even visited the attic where she saw old newspapers and letters littering the floor. When she found out the new owner planned to send it out as trash, she offered to salvage what seemed interesting. We are very grateful that she did. In March of this year she donated to the Society a box of family correspondence and business ads sent to the Campbell home in the 1890s. There are letters from a young Julia Campbell (who later became Mrs. Simon J. Schermerhorn) sent from Temple Grove Seminary in Saratoga Springs. Some of the letters were addressed to her parents, John D. Campbell and Elizabeth Clute of Rotterdam. Other letters were from her brothers and her friends writing about their jobs, their studies, and their plans to marry. The collection gives the reader a glimpse into the world of young, well-to-do men and women living in Schenectady close to the turn of the century. They add to our understanding of the social history of that time.

SCHENECTADY HISTORY MUSEUM

Summer Intern Emily Ekland, this year's museum intern, attended high school in Saratoga Springs and graduated from Russell Sage College last May, Magna Cum Laude, with Honors in both History and Political Science. Her summer project is interpreting immigration to Schenectady at the turn of the 20th century with regard to how it affected socialist political movements. Additionally, she has started a historical society blog and is managing the historical society's Twitter account, both of which are intended to extend awareness of what the Schenectady County Historical Society has to offer local communities. She is also working on cataloging the most recent accessions from the Schenectady Museum and doing research on other recent donations. Emily will be attending Albany Law School this fall with hopes of becoming a human rights lawyer.

"The Most Beautiful Land": Schenectady County's History – A Bicentennial Exhibit will continue in the Society's Vrooman Room through September. The exhibit reviews the history of our county from its beginnings as a frontier trading community, its multi-ethnic heritage, and its heyday as an industrial center once known as "The City that Lights and Hauls the World." Prominent industries featured include General Electric, the American Locomotive Company (ALCO), and early Westinghouse endeavors. (See cover story.) Financial support for the exhibit was provided by the County of Schenectady and the New York State Council for the Humanities. Media Well Done, a local business, helped create and print the interpretive panels and timelines.

Society volunteers are documenting, packaging, and transferring over 40 items of decorative art generously donated by the Schenectady Museum. After three years of inventorying, Museum volunteers have reached their 3,000th artifact. As they record each item, they are properly rehousing the artifacts and helping to plan and organize our over-burdened storage areas.

We have expanded our means of communication to include 21st century electronic networking. The Society now has a page on *Facebook* and *YouTube* and an account on *Twitter*. We upload videos of exhibits and activities to *YouTube* on a regular basis.

As described in the President's letter, our museum and the adjoining Vrooman Meeting and Exhibit Room are now fully air-conditioned in the summer and will be more efficiently heated and humidified in the winter. This fulfills a decades-long goal of providing the year-round stability of temperature and humidity needed to preserve our precious paintings and artifacts.

The Westinghouse family lived on lower State Street and one son, Jay, lived on a stretch of Washington Avenue then called Rotterdam Street. The Westinghouse shops were located within a triangular area roughly bounded by State Street, Dock Street (which ran along a widened area of the Erie Canal known as “the basin”) and Railroad Street.



Westinghouse home, State St. c. 1895.

It was in his father’s agricultural factory that young George learned hands-on manufacturing. It was from his father and other Schenectady businessmen that he acquired his financial skills. In every way, he applied his brilliant and creative mind to finding better ways of doing things. He was a fierce proponent of giving value to both consumers and to his shareholders.

Schenectady was a major locomotive building center. Young Westinghouse is described by his biographer, Quentin R. Skrabec, as being the first to use cast steel for railroad frogs and one of the first worldwide to use cast steel for any purpose.* This casting was done at a foundry in Troy which used the Bessemer method. The inventive design work and the required patient experimentation were part of his lifelong insistence upon constant improvement and quality. George’s teachers saw his need to design and change things as a distraction to more formal learning, but invention was in his blood.

At the onset of the Civil War, George tried to join the Union forces by running off at age 15, but his father did not allow him to join his two older brothers in service until he was 17. He began in the cavalry and finally finessed an appointment as third engineer on board a ship where he could work with machinery. It is because of that military service that he and his wife are buried in Arlington.

*Quentin R. Skrabec, Jr., *George Westinghouse: Gentle Genius*, 2006, pages 35-36

After the war, George acquiesced to his father’s desire that he attend college, but he was a fish out of water during a brief stint at Union College. At this time, Union offered no curriculum or degree in manufacturing or industrial engineering, the fields that captured his passions. In 1890, Union College awarded him an honorary Doctor of Electrical Engineering degree, thereby adding to honors he had already received from various illustrious industrial societies.

The Westinghouse triumph over Edison in the often ugly “war of the currents” was a dramatic distraction from the real story—it was alternating current (AC) that made it possible to light America from coast to coast! If we had waited for direct current (DC) to do that, I might still be waiting for electric lights and other household appliances to this day. His foresight and commitment to research and development led him to purchase exclusive rights to Nikola Tesla’s AC motor patents in 1888. It was a daring risk because of the huge developmental work still required to make the motors adaptable to commercial use. Tesla, the famous electrical visionary, was quoted as saying that George Westinghouse, Jr. was the “only man alive who could go up against Edison and win,” thereby bringing Tesla’s astounding electrical achievements to the benefit of mankind.



Built to be a home for Westinghouse’s mother, but now the Bond Funeral Home.

The financial risks Westinghouse took drove technology forward by decades. He provided innovative workers’ benefits that made him deeply resented by the richest and most powerful men of his time. He paid dearly for his risk taking; in the press he was called “extravagant.” There were competitors who wanted to drive down the value of his stock in hopes that they could buy and control his companies. They even mounted publicity campaigns to promote the incongruous idea that the Westinghouse companies were in need of professional managers and bankers.



The Westinghouse, 234-236 Union St.

Westinghouse had a unique and valued relationship with his workers. While Andrew Carnegie and Henry Frick were hiring Pinkerton guards to shoot at striking workers at their plants just blocks from those of George Westinghouse, workers at his plants continued in full production fully loyal to their chief.

Westinghouse was not a robber baron. He was a man of integrity with a stunning mind that could grasp large visions and bring them to fruition. He was constantly developing new manufacturing methods and bringing them to commercial success. He hired one of the first female electrical engineers, Bertha Lamme, and allowed his workers to have the rights to their own patents, something that Edison did not do in his shops.

In Pittsburgh there are many tributes to George Westinghouse. Here in Schenectady, we have three: Westinghouse Place, a tiny triangular park between Guilderland Avenue and Broadway; the house he built for his mother that she refused to live in (now the Bond Funeral Home); and The Westinghouse, an apartment building on Union Street that was once a family home. The former Westinghouse Park at the base of the Western Gateway Bridge, now called Liberty Park, is a weary oasis where people wait for bus transportation. Historical markers honor free-masons and a tavern instead of a true son of Schenectady.

Industrial history gave Schenectady its famous slogan "The City that Lights and Hauls the World." The Agricultural era that gave birth to the Electrical and Manufacturing Era is epitomized by George Westinghouse, father and son.

Howlin at the Moon: Music Series



July 7 - 2 Late
Kyle Miller
Aug 6 - Happy Balky
& Good Livin
Drew Jacobs

6:30 pm - 9 pm

Mabee Farm - Route 5S, Rotterdam Jct.
(518) 887-5073

August Events at the Mabee Farm

FREE
Admission

Co-sponsored
by NAIHRV

Aug 1st

Early Technologies Day

Flint knapping & atlatl throwing
Brain tanned leather & buckskin
Basket making
Artifact ID by NYS Arch Assoc

10 am - 4 pm



Canalfest - Aug 8 and 9th

FREE ADMISSION

Saturday, August 8th
Riverview Ramblers
Mike & Ruthy
Pat Wictor

Sunday, August 9th
Mariaville Cattle Company
Black Creek
Red Molly



Hay rides, artisans, craftspeople: 12- 5 pm

Arts & Crafts Festival

Aug 22nd - 10 am - 5 pm



Fine art, soaps, candles,
photography, jewelry, jams,
handwovens, basket weaving
artisans and traditional music
\$3. adults, \$2. children
(includes house tour)



Historic Boat Tours

Aug 1, 8, 9, 22, Sept 12, Oct 17

\$12.00 per person

Route 5S, Rotterdam Junction (518) 887-5073
www.mabefarm.org mabee@nycap.rr.com

Archibald Craig: The Forgotten Mayor of Schenectady

by Cynthia Seacord, Archivist, Efner City History Center, and Secretary, SCHS

During preparation of the Historical Society's Arcadia book, *Niskayuna*, now on sale in its gift shop, Librarian Katherine Chansky posed a curious question to me. She showed me a copy of a newspaper obituary taken from the Craig family file in the Grems-Doolittle Library that mentioned that the decedent, Archibald Craig, had once been mayor of Schenectady. Yet, a prominent 19th century history on Schenectady written by Austin Yates does not include Craig in its list of Schenectady mayors. And the 1866 book *History of the County of Schenectady from 1662 to 1866* by G.R. Howell and J.H. Munsell (online at Google Books), cites Archibald Craig (1775-1846) for many accomplishments, but serving as mayor was not one of them. Those authors say that a different Archibald, one Archibald L. Linn, was mayor in 1831, 1835, and 1839. But another historical source, Jonathan Pearson's diary for December 6, 1831, notes in the entry for that day that "Archibald Craig is mayor of this city." Katherine was concerned about doing justice to the historical record, so she approached me for help.

Archibald Craig's name has indeed factored richly into the history of both Schenectady and Niskayuna. Think of the Craig School, the hamlet of Craig (Aqueduct Road at Balltown Road), and the Craig Hotel, once a prominent landmark on Aqueduct Road. We know a good bit about Archibald from his obituary and from property records. He was a graduate of Princeton, accredited as a physician at age 19, and was the first president of the Schenectady Bank. Archibald and his wife Margaret bought land on Aqueduct in 1830 and built the Craig Hotel on it in about 1835, and he or his wife and son operated it for another 23 years.

Research into the bound copies of the Minutes of the Common Council of Schenectady complicated matters. Katherine and I were unable to find anything there to back up the claim that Craig had ever been Schenectady's mayor. In fact, every printed copy of the annual minutes of the council up to 2009 indicated that the only "Archibald" who had ever been a Schenectady mayor was one Archibald L. Linn. Even the project undertaken by William Efner and other local historians back in the mid-20th century to secure photos or painted portraits of Schenectady's mayors (and these are hung in Room 110 at City Hall) yielded Archibald Linn as the only mayor of Schenectady whose first name was Archibald.

To resolve the issue, I became a History Detective in my own right, and went to the primary source documents. Within a vault at City Hall are kept the original *handwritten* minutes of the Common Council of the City of Schenectady. They date back to the first days of the incorporation of the City. At one time, the election for mayor took place in the council chamber, at the Council's first meeting of the year, rather than by popular vote.

Contained within the precious pages of these primary sources I found our answer. According to the original handwritten Common Council minutes for January 1831, Archibald Craig was duly elected as mayor. Several secret ballots had to be taken before he obtained the required majority, and he served in that capacity for only that single year of 1831. Archibald Linn was indeed mayor in 1835 and 1839, but it was Archibald *Craig* who held that post in 1831.

Now if only we knew what he looked like.

Notes from the Mabee Farm

A big thank you goes to the Altamont Fairgrounds and Joe Merli for lending us a wagon for use in our School Program presentation of Jack, the Mabee slave. Also, a big thank you to Sue and Chuck Deluca for lending us the horse fence for the 2nd Continental Light Dragoons visit to the farm for our French and Indian War Re-enactment. And thank you to the NYS Canal Corporation and the SI Group for use of their land for a very successful event that drew 5,000 visitors over two days.

EXHIBIT NOW OPEN — Supplying the Army: The French and Indian War

This new exhibit explains the efforts of the Mabee Family and Schenectady residents in supplying the army during the French and Indian War. The exhibit consists of muskets most likely used during the war and copies of original Mabee documents of that era. Thanks to the 250th *French and Indian War Commission* for a Dickinson Sponsorship Grant which enabled us to develop and install this exhibit. The exhibit can be seen Tuesday through Saturday 10 am – 4 pm through the end of September.

Around the Society

Launching of the Onrust at the Mabee Farm- May 20, 2009



More French & Indian War Re-Enactment and market Fair at the Mabee Farm - June 6, 2009



*Photos:
Ann Aronson*



Schenectady County Historical Society



Photos: Ann Aronson



French and Indian War Re-enactment At Mabee Farm June 6-7



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