

SCHS and Keepers of the Circle sign Mabee Farm land purchase agreement.



Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter

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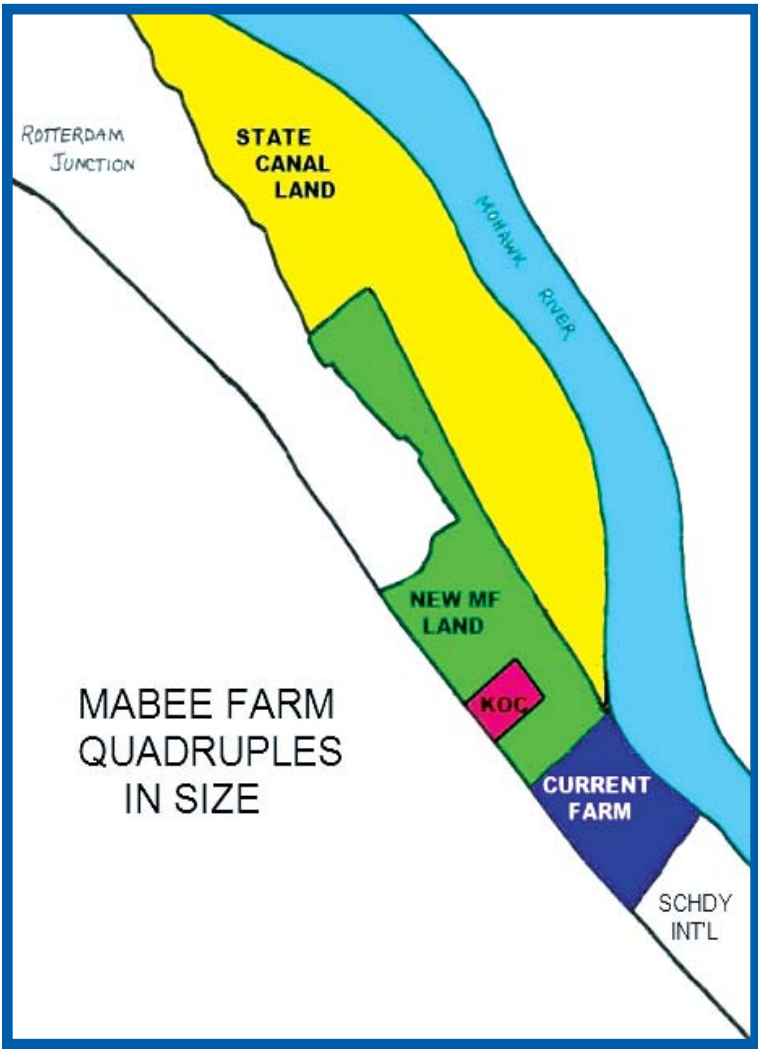
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HISTORIC AGREEMENT WILL ENLARGE MABEE FARM



On Wednesday, January 31, representatives of the Society, the Keepers of the Circle Native-American Cultural Center, and Schenectady County signed a historic agreement whereby the Society will purchase 26.4 acres of the County's 29 acres immediately to the west of the current 9-acre Mabee Farm in Rotterdam Junction, nearly quadrupling its size. The Keepers of the Circle (KOC), by agreement, will receive 2.6 acres and its Bradt House for continuation of their American Indian cultural activities. The area immediately to the west of the current Mabee Farm and east of KOC will be the site for the new George E. Franchere Educational Center, named in posthumous honor for the person who gave the Farm to the Society and provided for its care through his will and trust agreement.

Signing for the Society were President Ed Reilly, Vice President Kim Mabee, and Trustee Merritt Glennon, Chair of the Society's Mabee Farm Committee. Representing Schenectady County were Attorney Chris Gardner, Deputy County Attorney Don DeAngelis, and Steve Feeney of the County Planning Office. Seven members of its Executive Board signed for the Keepers of the Circle (see photos on page 8). The agreement was then embodied in the necessary enabling resolution which was passed by the County Legislature on February 13.

Now the County will proceed to survey the properties, seek subdivision approval from the Town of Rotterdam, and to set a closing date. The Mabee Farm's Education Center subcommittee for Design and Fundraising is proceeding full-speed ahead, working with architect Keith Cramer to perfect the design and exact location of the Center. President Reilly, Vice President Mabee, and subcommittee chair John van Schaick, who proposed the construction and naming of the Center years ago, are busy doing a price comparison for shiny new shovels in preparation for a late spring groundbreaking.



Historical Society Newsletter
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HOURS

MUSEUM
MONDAY-FRIDAY 1-5
SATURDAY 10-4

LIBRARY

MONDAY-FRIDAY 1-5
SATURDAY 9-12

MABEE FARM

OPENS MAY 1ST
TUESDAY-SATURDAY 10-4

Letter from the President

WITHOUT A TRACE

The big news this month is certainly the cover story about quadrupling the size of the Mabee Farm. And I do hope that you will join us at our Annual Meeting of April 14 to celebrate, participate in the business session, and enjoy the historic bottle talk described elsewhere in this issue. Mr. Edison is excused, of course, but I do wish to tell you a bit about why he's up above and looking at you.

As a downtown plaque attests, Thomas Edison came to Schenectady in 1886 to plant the flag of his Edison Electric company, but seldom came back to visit the one into which it morphed—General Electric. But he did make an auspicious return on October 18, 1922 to visit famous local GE scientists such as Whitney, Coolidge, and Langmuir and electrical wizard Charles Proteus Steinmetz. I was only minus ten at the time, but my Dad did introduce me to Irving Langmuir when he brought me to work one day in 1940 when I reached plus eight, 18-years too late for the celebration.

The preparation for the occasion was glowingly described in an issue of the GE Schenectady Works News of November 3, 1922 called to my attention by SCHS member Nancy Myers-Pardi. The star of the story was one Julius Pardi, the grandfather of Nancy's husband Laurence. Julius was an employee of the GE Porcelain Department known for his artistry. He was asked to design and mold a commemorative plaque, the beautiful one shown in color above and in the photo below as mounted above the rear entrance to GE Building 5. In the picture, Edison and Steinmetz are readily identifiable, and Julius Pardi is standing on the first step at the lower right. The man with the pocket handkerchief just above Steinmetz's legendary cigar is Gerard Swope, the elected GE president in that very year of 1922. (He served until 1940, but wasn't there to greet me when I arrived.)

Most unfortunately, the Edison plaque is no longer on Building 5, nor do we know what happened to it. Trying to find it is a very cold case indeed, but perhaps someone reading this can help warm it up. The plaque, if indeed it has survived, should be rescued and honorably and prominently displayed, most appropriately, perhaps, at the Edison Exploratorium. On your mark, sleuths, go!

- Ed Reilly

SEARCHING FOR JULIUS PARDI'S ART WORKS – CAN YOU HELP?

During the course of his 47 year career at GE (1902-1949), my Grandfather, Julius Pardi, created hundreds of beautiful porcelain and ceramic objects. They were in the form of bas relief plaques (such as the Edison one atop the page), plates, vases, bowls, lamps, and statues. All were beautifully painted. Most were signed J. PARDI and dated. Many were commissioned at the request of GE and gifted to GE executives and others as a symbol of GE friendship and respect. If you own one of his works, could you be so kind as to send us a picture of the piece so we may include it in our family history album? -Laurence Pardi, (518) 861-8004; lapardi@nycap.rr.com.

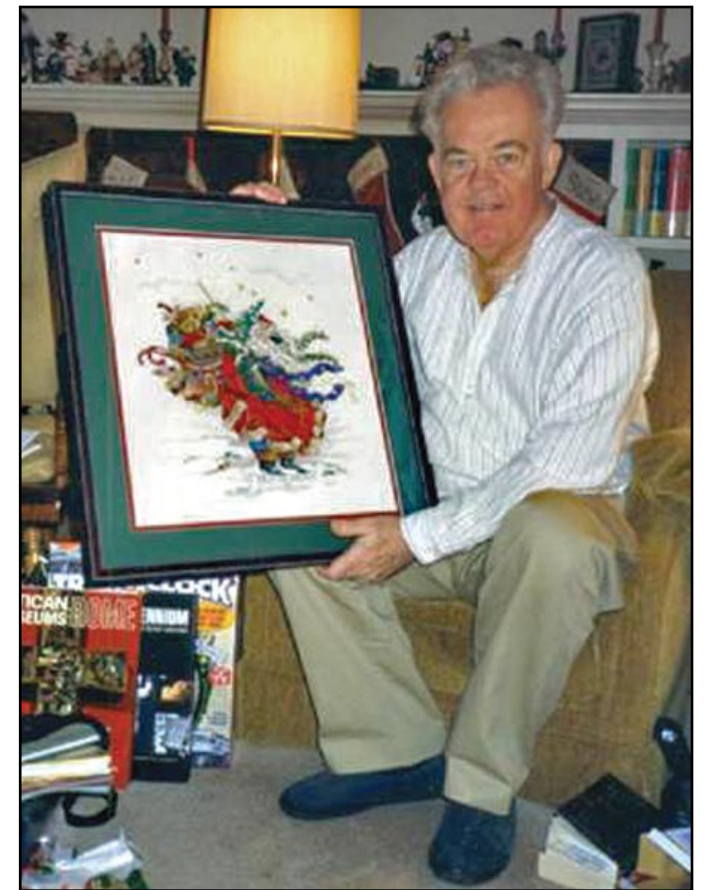


In Memory of Larry Rainey

by Frank Taormina

Anyone who has an interest in history eventually becomes aware that the lives of human beings are marked with “passages,” from the first moment of infant awareness to the last sense of final departure. Each passage has its accompanying set of emotions – its joys and its sadness. Each challenges us to respond appropriately.

In this instance, the “passage” is the loss of a friend and a valued member of the community and the Schenectady County Historical Society, Laurence Rainey. His costumed presence will not be with us at the Walk-About next year, or at the Girl Scout River Walk. A list of all the ways he used his gifts and his talents to enrich the lives of all of us fortunate to share this community with him is offered with the trepidation that something that should have been included will be left out, because the list is so long! As a photographer, he was without a peer. His interest in cross-stitching so wonderfully presented in the piece illustrating Russian Orthodox Churches was entirely unique. As a teacher, his reputation was outstanding. His travels in Europe, especially in Holland and Russia, were pursued not just in the interests he shared with his wife Janet, but also to be shared with others. His interest in local history, especially in the history of Glenville, the history of the Johnson family, and many other aspects of the life and history of the Schenectady Community are crowned by the contribution he made of the History of St. John the Evangelist Church.



Lawrence Rainey 1937-2007

I end these brief remarks with a sense that for me, all his accomplishments notwithstanding, I will miss most his decency, his warmth, his good humor, and the conversations we shared at lunch and on the phone about our mutual interest in the history of our locality and in history in general.

On February 7, 2007, Schenectady Mayor Brian Stratton reenacted Schermerhorn's ride to Albany of February 9, 1690.



MABEE FARM – CALENDAR for 2007

WORK DAY

Saturday, April 4th from 10 am – 4 pm

Please join us for the Mabee Farm's annual Spring Work Day. We will prepare the Farm for an exciting 2007 season. This will be a pot luck day so please bring a dish to share.

VOLUNTEERS & DOCENT TRAINING

Saturday, April 21 from 10 am – 1 pm

Mabee Farm will hold a Docent Training Day. The Mabee Farm Historic Site is looking for volunteers who are willing to assist at events. We are particularly interested in people willing to be docents or tour guides to explain the story of the Mabee Family throughout its 300 year ownership of the property, and farm life from the 17th through the 20th centuries. Light refreshments will be provided. If you are interested, please call (518) 887-5073.

EARTH DAY

Sunday, April 22 – Join us for a Celebration of the earth in cooperation with the *Environmental Clearinghouse of Schenectady (ECOS)*. (See ad)



Sunday, April 22nd - 11 am—3 pm
Sponsored by ECOS

Kids environmental educational games
Storytelling
Nature walks
Environmental Exhibits
Amphibians & reptiles and more!

MABEE FARM HISTORIC SITE
Route 5S, Rotterdam Junction, NY
(518) 887-5073

CAPITAL DISTRICT BLACKSMITHING ASSOCIATION - *Demonstration*

Sunday, April 29 – Come and see the lost art of blacksmithing. (See ad)

OPENING DAY

Tuesday, May 1st

Mabee Farm Historic Site will open for the season. Regular hours will be Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 am – 4 pm or by appointment.

MOHAWK RIVER / ERIE CANAL - TRANSPORTATION AND RECREATION

Saturday, May 5th, opening of exhibit about historic activities along the Mohawk River throughout the seasons and emphasizing the use of this important waterway by local people. Highlights will include swimming, boating (both recreational and competitive), fishing, ice skating, and ice boating.

BLACKSMITH DEMONSTRATIONS

Sunday, April 29th

11 am—4 pm



Celtic (5th C) and Norsemen (11th C) blacksmiths use their centuries old forges to create iron and steel tools and implements for household use. A real educational experience!

BLACKSMITH WORKSHOP (*beginners*)

May 5-6 and May 19-20. John Ackner will teach two workshops in the lost art of Blacksmithing. Call 887-5073 for more information

RE-ENACTMENT ACTIVITIES

2-day event **note new date**

Saturday, June 2nd 9:30 am – 9:00 pm

Sunday, June 3rd 9:00 am – 4:00 pm:

Militia counter attacks by British troops and Indians; amphibious battles with period bateaux; land battles and skirmishes; Cavalry demonstrations with Sheldon's Horse from Connecticut; camp tours; colonial artisans selling period items; and much more! In addition, on Saturday there will be a Barn Dance with live music beginning at **7:30 pm**. On Sunday, a Church Service will be held at **10 am**.

Painting Schenectady: Samuel Sexton and His Works

Exhibit opens: Monday, April 16th; there is a charge of \$4.00 for adults.

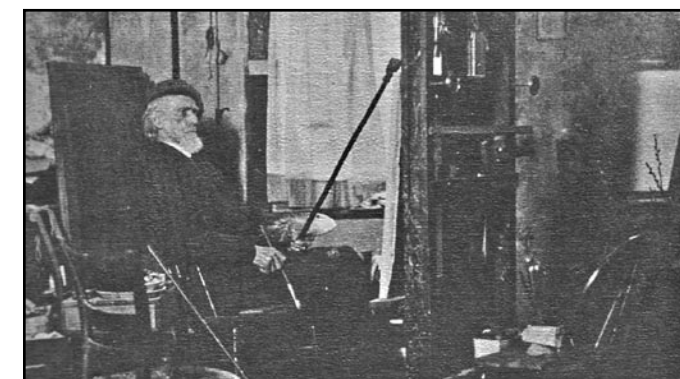
Exhibit is free for members and students.

Before we had photographers we had itinerant portrait and landscape painters. A likeness was captured that survived and became a valuable historical record even if not always masterful as art work. There were also artists who did become famous for the quality of their portraits and other representational works. In April there will be a new exhibit at the Schenectady County Historical Society (SCHS) entitled *Painting Schenectady: Samuel Sexton and His Works* and featuring a collection of his works. While Samuel Sexton never achieved national acclaim, his portraits document many of the people who lived in the Schenectady area during the 1830s and into the 1870s. He is also famous locally for his rendition of *The Schenectady Massacre*, an event which occurred in February of 1690. While it has a number of inaccuracies (he was not present nor even alive at the time of the event) it has become locally an iconic representation of this historic attack.

Little more than the bare statistics are known concerning the life of Samuel Hayden Sexton. Neither a diary nor an account book has been found

to shed light on his personal life and business affairs, and no family papers are known to exist.

Available records indicate, however, that Sexton was a native of Schenectady and lived in the city throughout his lifetime. He was born in 1813, the first son of Ezekial Sexton, who reportedly was born in Monmouth County, New Jersey, and his second wife, Henrietta Hayden, daughter of Samuel Hayden, a miller from Glenville, New York.



The above information was drawn from the book *"Painted by S. H. Sexton"* by Ona Curran and is used with her permission.

The 1918 Spanish Flu in Schenectady - with Dr. James Strosberg

March 10th 1:30 Refreshments 2:00 Program

Epidemics by definition threaten whole communities. Schenectady was not an exception when the Spanish Flu affected the area in 1918. The Spanish Flu derived its name because its effect initially was so widespread in Spain although it went on to affect other countries around the world. World wide it killed as many as 25 million people in the first 25 weeks of being identified. The Spanish Flu became a dreaded disease for soldiers and civilians alike during World War One. The mobility of troops and civilian conditions in times of war were also aggravating conditions in the spread of this disease.

The Schenectady County Historical Society has an ongoing exhibit *Facing the King of Terrors: Death and Society in Schenectady*, so the subject of the Spanish Flu and its death toll is very germane to the history of Schenectady. We are pleased to have this dynamic local physician, Dr. James Strosberg, who will speak about how this deadly disease affected Schenectady when it hit in 1918.

Schenectady's Bottle History – with John Rudzinski, local collector and bottle historian.

April 14th 1:30 Refreshments 2:20 Program

Bottles have a history and they have become an interesting collector's item because they can reveal many things about the communities in which they were made and used. They were more than just containers; they also helped advertise their wares. Molded bottles could indicate the manufacturer, address, and type of product thus acting as a constant reminder of the contents until empty. Often discarded quickly, many bottles have survived in old trash pits to be discovered over a hundred years later. These discarded bottles are sometimes the only tangible evidence of long lost businesses and products once abundant in the Schenectady area. Join us for this fascinating look at the history to be found in old bottles discovered and recovered. Our speaker is an avid collector; many of his bottles date back to the years of the Erie Canal.

History of the Schenectady County Clerk's Office

By John J. Woodward, County Clerk

The office of County Clerk is of historic importance to every citizen of Schenectady County. County Clerks wear many different hats: Clerk of the Supreme and County Courts; Registrar of Deeds; County Commissioner of Motor Vehicles; County Filing Officer; Chief Notary, and elected County Officer. The Clerk's office provides a wide array of services that involve the federal, state and local government; and it is the chief depository of important records and documents that reflect important milestones in life such as buying a home, registering a car, suing someone in court, or filing papers to begin a new business. The County Clerk's Office in Schenectady holds over 6 million records - census data, 13,000 survey maps, court actions, naturalization records (from 1810), and deeds for Schenectady County's 60,000 parcels of land. As we approach Schenectady County's 200th birthday, only 23 individuals have held this elected office.

The office of County Clerk, while steeped in history and tradition, is still an office prepared to face the future challenges of government. Established by the New York State Constitution, its heritage dates back to medieval England. The clerk was appointed by the King to travel with the Circuit Court Judge. He was responsible for maintaining court files, documenting land

transactions, and representing the crown at local occasions. Over 800 years have passed and the clerk is still responsible for property transfers and court records along with such newer duties as issuing passports, pistol permits, and swearing in new American citizens.

In Schenectady County, our first County Clerk was Peter Veeder appointed by Governor Daniel Tompkins on March 11th, 1809. County Clerks were appointed by the Governor until 1822 when they became directly elected by the voters. Our early County Clerks were from prominent families with names such as Veeder, Fonda, Vrooman, Campbell, individuals clearly reflective of Schenectady's Dutch heritage. In most cases, they were "gentlemen farmers" who often did their recording work in the evenings. There are examples of old deeds from the 1830s that were logged in at 7 pm at night.



There have been four different buildings housing the clerk's office. The first clerk's office was located in what today is the rear parking lot behind the Stockade Inn on North Church Street. The office was moved to the Old Courthouse on Union Street, and then moved again in 1913 to the newer courthouse built at 612 State Street. Our current location is 620 State Street in the "new" County Office Building built in the mid 1960s.



The history of the individuals who held the office in the 20th century is particularly interesting to me.

George T. Bradt served as Clerk from 1917 through 1936. Bradt was removed from office by Governor Herbert Lehman because his employees stole \$22,000 in public funds—a staggering sum in its time. Bradt served time in state prison for the theft.



Bradt's successor was Carroll "Pink" Gardner who served in office for 33 years from 1936-1969. Gardner, the former sheriff and World Wrestling Champion, was completing his 11th term when he died in 1969. His tenure stretched from the middle of the Great Depression to the time of the first moon landing. His father-in-law was George R. Lunn, Schenectady's socialist Mayor and former Congressman and Lt. Governor.

All Photos courtesy of John Woodward,
County Clerk



Merritt C. Willey succeeded Gardner as Clerk and spent 25 years in office. Willey, many Schenectady residents will remember, ran a bakery on Union Street and was very involved in numerous community activities. Gardner and Willey were excellent public servants who advanced the office and served the public well for a combined 58 years!

Annual Meeting

***The Annual Meeting
of the Society
will be held on Saturday, April 14
in the Vrooman Room***

***1:30PM Refreshments
2:00PM Business
2:20PM Program (see page 3)***

***Business will include distribution
of the Annual Report
and the election
of Trustees and Officers.***