



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, New York 12305

(518) 374-0263

Web site: <http://www.schist.org> • Editor email: rbergero@nycap.rr.com

FAX: (518) 688-2825

Librarian email: librarian@schist.org • Curator email: curator@schist.org



Mordecai Myers

“Albon Man: The Physician Who Saved the Life of Schenectady Mayor Mordecai Myers”

by Neil B. Yetwin

For nearly 2000 years, physicians have pledged by the Hippocratic Oath that “the regimen I adopt shall be for the benefit of my patients according to my ability and judgment” in order that “I be respected always by all men.” By the early 19th century, New York State was just beginning to press for higher standards in the medical arts and sciences; one of the Empire State’s most dedicated but obscure medical practitioners was Dr. Albon Man of Constable, NY. Man was already a highly-respected and well-established physician when, during the War of 1812, he saved the life of a wounded infantry captain who would later become Schenectady Mayor Mordecai Myers.

Man, born in Kent, Connecticut on January 8, 1769, was the son of Dr. Ebenezer Man, a Brigade Surgeon under Washington at White Plains. The elder Man taught his son to mix drugs, compound his own medicines, prepare bandages and, according to the best

medical practice of the day, bleed, blister, purge, cup, sweat, and leech his patients. Man married twice – his first wife died of consumption – and had a large family consisting of 10 children. The family moved first to French Mills, then to Constable, NY, where he continued his practice while operating a farm and sawmill and serving as Town Supervisor. “I can still see him as he then looked,” recalled his daughter Susan in a brief memoir. He was “a very handsome man, with chestnut hair slightly grey, high forehead, clear complexion, and very brilliant black eyes. ..and he was “...gentle and loving in friendship but very stern for an offender against humanity, law, or order. He was a Physician of large practice, often riding forty or fifty miles to visit a patient, sometimes as far as Montreal in Canada.”

Continued on pages 4-5.

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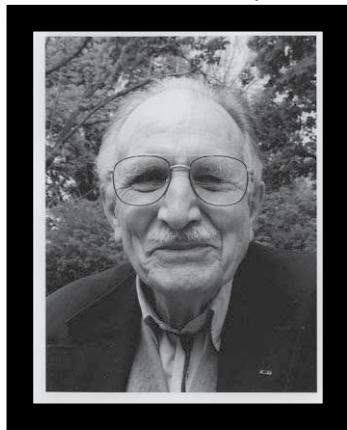
MUSEUM
& LIBRARY
MONDAY-FRIDAY 9-5
SATURDAY 10-2

MABEE FARM
Re-opens 5/3/2011

Letter from the President

THE PATROONS OF SCHENECTADY

In 1954, Schenectady City Mayor Archibald C. Wemple established the Order of Patroonship and populated its rolls with the City's seven living former mayors. Since then, Mayor Wemple and his successors have named many additional Patroons. Most were city or county residents at the time, others had been before achieving fame elsewhere, and still others were dignitaries who visited from time to time. Among the latter were future President Ronald Reagan, who had passed through as a public relations advisor to GE, and former Senator and Vice President Hubert Horatio Humphrey [H³], here to speak at Freedom Forum. NBA Miami Heat coach Pat Riley, born in Rome, NY but raised here, is the best example of a sports figure named Patroon. But no local residents have ever been more worthy recipients than the husband and wife team of John and Sally van Schaick, teachers of students, teachers of us all.



John Hardwick van Schaick

Sally was the first to be inducted Patroon, way back in 1958, and then was named again by Mayor Brian U. Stratton along with husband John in 2007. The couple was cited for many accomplishments, the one deemed most noteworthy by the Mayor was their having founded the Friends of Educational Television, the foundation for the later development of local community TV. Sally, a former Trustee of the Society and former editor of this very Newsletter, still lives in the family home on Stratford Road. We join her in mourning the death of John, who died on January 4, shortly after his 90th birthday.

Former SCHS President Frank Taormina's personal remembrance follows my comments, which I close with my tribute to a truly remarkable man. John van Schaick, SCHS President from 1992 to 1994, remained active with the Society until close to his death. He had been my unappointed but greatly appreciated mentor since the advent of my own presidency in 2006. The Society won't be the same without him, but we and the whole Schenectady community, forever in his debt, will never forget him.

A celebration of John's life was held Saturday, January 8th at the First Unitarian Society of Schenectady. The full biography that appeared in the *Schenectady Gazette* has been posted on the Web by John and Sally's youngest daughter, Kate Dalby, at www.dalbytestprep.com/johnhardwickvanschaick.html.

—Ed

The departure of John Van Schaick on January 4, 2011 leaves the Historical Society without the presence of a person whose talents and largeness of spirit contributed substantially to making us the organization we continue to enjoy today. It was John who, along with Bill Milton, put us on the path to financial independence by taking the lead in making better use of our fiscal resources. The wisdom with which he guided us and the insistence with which he demanded the disciplined use of those resources set a tone we have benefited from ever since.

When, in 1990, the Historical Society was offered the Mabee Farm, it was John Van Schaick, who, more than any other person, took the lead in maintaining a warm relationship with the ultimate donor of the farm, George E. Franchere. John assured him that the Historical Society would accept that responsibility in a manner that would be respected by the large number of descendants of the Mabee family. John's energy, his sense of humor, and all his many talents so generously shared with the entire community have made an enormous difference in our lives. He will certainly be missed. —F.T.

Events, Programs, and Exhibits at the SCHENECTADY HISTORY MUSEUM and GREMS-DOOLITTLE LIBRARY

Current Exhibit

The Art in Cartography: Highlighting the Collection of the Schenectady County Historical Society (opened in February; runs through May 31).

This exhibit features maps, atlases, and artifacts from the Society's collection, including its two most recently conserved objects: maps of New York State completed by Simeon Dewitt (1802) and Claude Joseph Sauthier (1779), displayed alongside other state, city, county, and land plot maps. Using maps from the collection of the Schenectady County Historical Society, this exhibit will focus not only on the evolution of cartography, but also on the cartographers themselves. It will take note of the artwork that many of these maps showcase. From the hand drawn maps of James Frost to the engravings included on the maps of John Calvin Smith, this exhibit will be visually exciting and interesting to all visitors. **NOTE:** Special thanks to Jim Eignor and John Ackner for their extensive help in creating this exhibit.

Saturday, March 5

1:30 PM refreshments–2:00 PM Program

History Written on the Horn of a Cow

Presented by John Proud

Carved American powder horns have captivated collectors and historians for a long time. The depictions that show up on these powder horns offer snap shots into the time period during which they were carved. John Proud will discuss powder horn history, art, and recreation of this art. John is a serious student of 18th century powder horns, which has enabled him to create authentic reproductions. He was one of the collaborators for the book *The Hartley Horn Drawings*. John is also a charter member and past Guildmaster of the Honourable Company of Horners, which has honored him as a Master Horner, and is a charter member of the Contemporary Longrifle Association.

Saturday, March 26

1:00 to 2:00 PM Book Talk in the Grems-Doolittle Library: *My Name Is Mary Sutter* by Mary Oliviera

Katherine Chansky, the Society's librarian, will lead a discussion of Mary Oliviera's engaging and finely crafted first novel *My Name is Mary Sutter* (2010), Schenectady County's selection for the 2011 One County, One Book. The novel is set in the American Civil War. It offers readers a fascinating look at the war from the point of view of medicine and the front lines. The heroine is a woman from Albany who works as a nurse during the War in Washington, D.C. and in Virginia.

To participate, please register personally in the library, or call 374-0263, or email librarian@schist.org. Books are available from the Schenectady County Public Library.

Saturday, April 9

1:30 PM refreshments–2:00 PM Program

Life of a Civil War Soldier–Private George of the 134th New York

Presented by Matt George

Matt George, member of the Capital District Round Table, will present a two part program. In Part One he will be dressed in character as Private George of the 134th New York and discuss his experiences in the war. Although there was no actual Private George, every event, individual, and location discussed is historically accurate. In Part Two of the program, Matt comes out of character and explains the nature of the weapon that he uses, the uniform, camp life, medicine, and many other aspects of a soldier's life. Objects will also be passed around for the audience to examine.

Saturday, April 16

10:00 AM–4:00 PM at the Mabee Farm

Civil War Living History Day

In collaboration with the Schenectady County Public Library's *One County One Book* program, which is based on the novel *My Name is Mary Sutter*, the Schenectady County Historical Society will be hosting a Civil War living history day at its Mabee Farm Historic Site. Activities for the day include cavalry horse demonstrations, interactive infantry drilling, a look into camp life, Civil War Music, Living History Speaker Series, arts and crafts, and much much more. For further information, contact Curator Ryan Mahoney at curator@schist.org or 374-0263.

Man had a concern for patient and public alike and tried to raise medical standards in what one historian has called the then “wild lands” of Clinton and Franklin Counties. On October 6, 1807, he and several fellow physicians met at Plattsburgh to form a medical society, of which Man was elected vice-president. “This society,” stated its by-laws, “may try any of its members for malpractice, intoxication, or speaking disrespectfully of any of their medical brethren with an intent to injure the same.” Man was also appointed the society’s “censor” in charge of examining prospective doctors to determine if they were fit to practice. Two years later, Man and three colleagues noted that a like organization was needed in Franklin County and withdrew from the Clinton County Medical Society to form the Franklin County Medical Society. When the War of 1812 broke out, Man represented Constable on the Franklin County Committee of Safety, whose six members were charged with maintaining protection against British attack. But he was soon to play a more direct role in the conflict that became known as “Mr. Madison’s War.”

In October 1813, General James Wilkinson, the American commander on the Niagara Frontier, decided to lead a 300-vessell flotilla down the St. Lawrence in an attempt to capture Montreal. From November 9th - 10th, 2000 British gunboats and land troops showered artillery and musket fire onto the exposed Americans. By the evening of the 10th the flotilla had reached the head of the 9-mile-long stretch of dangerous rapids known as the “Longue Saulte,” but when the pilots refused to enter the rapids in the darkness, Wilkinson ordered the fleet to dock near the farm of John Chrysler. By the end of November 11th, the British had defeated the Americans in what became known as the Battle of Chrysler’s Field. It was not until the late evening of November 15th that the decimated American army arrived at French Mills (now Ft. Covington) to take up winter quarters. There, inadequate food, clothing and shelter, poor sanitation, epidemic levels of dysentery, pleurisy and typhus, and temperatures of -30 degrees plagued the exhausted troops.

Dr. Man made an attempt to help the sick and wounded. “There were no Army surgeons in General Wilkinson’s Army,” Susan Man remembered; “Therefore he requested my father to take the place on his staff. So the wounded were brought to our house which was the only good one in the neighborhood.” Among the casualties brought to the Man homestead was 38-year-old Captain Mordecai Myers of the 13th

Infantry. “The wounded were put in the best rooms in the house,” wrote Susan Man. “Major Myers (he was later promoted) was placed in my Father’s office. The sun shone in the windows in the eyes of the wounded man and my mother asked Charlotte Bailey to take the baby’s highchair to stand on and hang a curtain at the window. Major Myers was not so badly wounded, but that he remarked the beauty of the girl and the delicate symmetry of her foot and ankle.”



Charlotte Bailey Myers, circa 1816

17-year-old Charlotte Bailey, the daughter of Man’s brother-in-law Judge William Bailey of Plattsburgh, had been sent to her Uncle Albon’s at Constable for safety in case of a British attack on Plattsburgh. According to Susan Man, Captain Myers “said that he fell in love then and there” with the Judge’s vivacious daughter. Myers was in fact severely wounded: a musket ball passed through his left shoulder while he was leading 86 men during the battle. 40 years later he wrote: “I was invited to take up my quarters at the house of Dr. Man. I procured a horse and when we arrived at Hitchcock’s Tavern, we met a small party at dinner, among them Miss Charlotte Bailey of Plattsburgh, who was then visiting her uncle, Dr. Man.

I finally reached Dr. Man's house, where I had a comfortable room, and was shown every attention by the family. My wound had been neglected, and I had taken a severe cold by remaining on duty. A fever



New York State historical marker in front of Man house near Constable, NY

ensued, and I suffered everything but death. At one time, the Doctor feared that he could not save me.”

Man found that the musket ball had “shattered the head of the humerus, cutting the deltoid muscle destroying the power of the joint and rendering the arm useless...” The head of the humerus itself was shattered into 30 fragments. The recommended treatment for such wounds was immediate amputation, but Man chose instead to remove all 30 fragments and try to save the arm. With Charlotte Bailey tending to him, Myers recovered in three months. And though discharged as a disabled veteran with a left arm “shortened by loss of parts about six inches,” he married Charlotte and had nine children with her over the next 15 years. Myers also went on to serve 6 one-year terms in the New York State Assembly (1828-34), acted as mayor of both Kinderhook (1838) and Schenectady (1851 and 1854), became Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the State of New York (1853-56), ran unsuccessfully for Congress at age 84 (1860), and became the great-great-grandfather of the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Robert Lowell. He would go on to live to the ripe old age of nearly 96—all due to the skill and dedication of Dr. Albon Man.

Man was appointed Franklin County Surrogate at the end of the war and continued his medical practice

until September 23, 1820. While riding home that day from treating a seriously ill patient in Ft. Covington, his horse stumbled. The 51-year-old physician was thrown, his skull fractured. “He was found by two men who had worked for him and loved him,” his daughter wrote. “They took him tenderly to the farm house near and then came for my eldest brother who was a young physician, in his Father’s office. He sent after Dr. Powell of Malone, Father’s best Medical friend. Everything was done that kind friends and best skill could do, but I only saw my Father once again, when on his deathbed he knew us all and bade us goodbye. Probably there never was a physician more respected and loved by all who knew him.” Man was recalled as “an affectionate Husband, a loving Father, a skilful (sic) Physician, and an equitable Judge” who “faithfully discharged every duty with virtue and ability” and interred in Constable’s Pine Grove Cemetery.

Mordecai Myers never forgot his debt to Man. According to Susan Man, “the friendship between these families has continued for several generations....When I was in New York, Mrs. Myers was exceedingly kind to me, as was Major Myers.” Myers himself wrote to Man’s son in 1836 of his “long acquaintance and much Esteem for your family and your father’s Memory.”



Man Homestead, Westville Corners, near Constable NY.

As a peace officer, judge and “Physician of large practice,” Albon Man was indeed a humanitarian and guardian of the public welfare. Expecting little of material compensation for his services, he devoted his life and skills to the betterment of his community, his state and his country, and in turn had a significant impact on the political history of Schenectady.

Library News

BOOK TALKS IN THE LIBRARY - The book discussion on January 29th about John Vrooman's novel, *Clarissa Putman of Tribes Hill*, drew a large group of 22 people, including, Dave Vrooman, the author's grandson. Mark your calendar for the next book discussion on Saturday March 26th at 1:00 pm in the Grems-Doolittle Library. See Page 3 for details.

Books and other materials added to the library:

The Dutch in the Americas, 1600-1800, by Wim Klooster, Providence, RI: JCB Library, (1997)

The History of the County of Albany, 1886, donated by **Barbara Savery**

Stockade in all Seasons, a photo album, (2011) by Peter Sisario

Albany and Schenectady 19th century business directories (2) and a *Schoharie Gazetteer*, donated by **Rob Petito**

Historic Documents added to the collection:

Manuscript maps and blueprints depicting Schenectady City real estate development in the late 19th century, from the Godfrey Estate, donated by **Cal Welch**.

Transcription of the Ellis Family Scrapbook, by **David Vincent**.

Microfilm of the GE Schenectady Works News, 1934 – 1951, donated by **The Schenectady Museum**.

Schenectady postcards from **Christine Connell**.

Photographs of the Schenectady County Medical Society, 1926, 1937, 1947, donated by **William M. Sherry**.

Thank you to all those who made gifts to the library in the form of books, documents, and their valuable time as volunteers.

Mabee Farm – news

The Mabee Farm opens officially for the season on May 3rd, but on **Saturday, April 16th** from 10:00 – 4:00 PM at the Mabee Farm there will be a *Civil War Living History Day*. See page 3 of this Newsletter for details.

SEE US AT ...The Mabee Farm will have an information booth to promote the Schenectady County Historical Society and its Mabee Farm Historic Site at the following locations:

March 16th at **Woodlawn Elementary School's History Day in Schenectady, NY**

April 9th at **Russell Sage College in Troy, NY** for the *Underground Railroad History's 10th Annual International Conference*

On April 17th at the **Schenectady Greenmarket in Proctor's** on State Street in Schenectady, demonstrators Pam Bucci and Beverly Cornelius will be at their Community Table with promotional materials for SCHS and its Mabee Farm Historic Site.

May 14th and 15th

Revolutionary War Re-enactment and Voorjaar Fest (Spring Fest) co-sponsored by the 2nd Albany Militia. Saturday 10:00 am–9:00 pm; Sunday 10:00 am–2:30 pm

On this weekend, the Mabee Farm Historic Site becomes a military encampment with re-enactors doing battle on land and on the Mohawk River. There will be cannons, drill demonstrations, fireside cooking, a Punch and Judy Show, a Saturday night barn dance, and—throughout the weekend—a splendid array of period vendors selling their wares.

May 17th – first in this season's **Howlin' at the Moon** concert series



Civil War Living History Day	
Saturday, April 16: 10 am - 4 pm	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Horse Demonstrations• Camp Demos• Speaker series• Drilling• Civil War Music	FREE Admission
CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES Including letter writing to current troops, kids drill demonstrations, crafts & more!	
Sponsored by the Schenectady County Historical Society, the Schenectady County Public Library and the Mabee Farm Historic Site	

MABEE FARM HISTORIC SITE, Route 55, Rotterdam Junction, NY (518) 887-5073 www.mabiefarm.org

Past and Present Society Events:



L. Wanda Burch: Slavery at Johnson Hall

R. Artist Len Tantillo and Mayor Brian Stratton at the Colonial Festival Dinner.

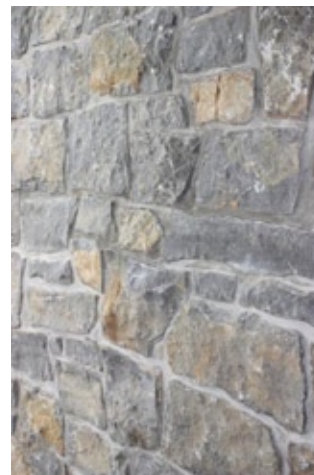
Photos: Ann Aronson, Jennifer Hanson.



Museum exhibit: The Art in Cartography.

Photos: Ann Aronson, Ryan Mahoney

Schenectady County Historical Society



Franchere Education Center at Mabee Farm- February, 2011

Brick and Stone Work Done

Photos: Merritt Glennon, Pat Barrot

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