



Schenectady County  
Historical  
Society

# Newsletter

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***The Seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the Distance*** by Thomas Cole, founder of the Hudson River School, an American art movement, was commissioned in 1826 by George W. Featherstonhaugh.

## *George W. Featherstonhaugh – a remarkably gifted man*

by Frank Taormina

Stand on the shore of Featherstonhaugh Lake at the eastern end of the mile long expanse of Featherstonhaugh State Park along Lake Road in Duanesburg and think: A lifetime of 86 years during which George William Featherstonhaugh shared his talents in so many ways that his lifetime is a virtual “catalogue of achievements.”

He was born in London, England on April 9, 1780 and died September 28, 1866 at age 86 in LeHavre, France. He is buried at Tunbridge Wells in northern England. He grew up and had his early schooling in Scarborough on the shore of the North Sea.

Continued on pages 4 and 5

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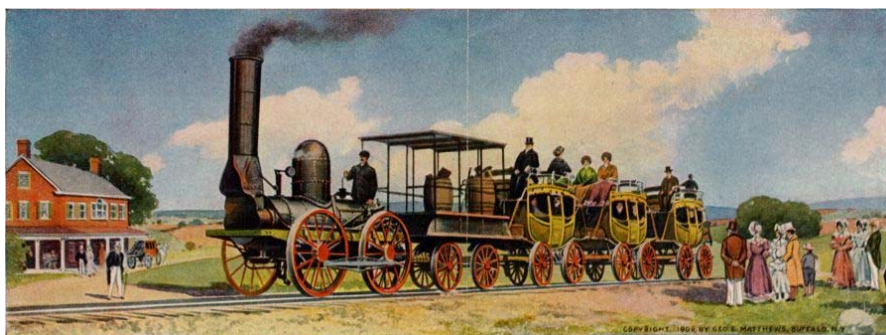
Mon-Fri 9-5  
Sat 10-2

MABEE FARM  
Closed until May

## Letter from the President

### TRAIN OF THOUGHT

By whatever coincidence, DeWitt Clinton was featured in both our first Newsletter of the year and then again in this one. Last time, he was the Governor, and hence a person. In this issue, "he" is the historic train, but not a person such as Thomas the Tank (or any corporation). And the *DeWitt Clinton* appears here because of the reference to it in the Featherstonhaugh article of pages 1, 4-5, and (full disclosure), we had no room for it on any other color page (1, 7, or 8).



I really enjoy these opportunities to contribute to our Newsletter, but being (allegedly) human, things can go wrong. One task I often undertake is to surf the Web looking for images to illustrate our stories. Last month, I sought one for Canadian Jesuit François-Joseph le Mercier (1604-1690), cited by local author Neil Yetwin, but came up with one for Cardinal François-Joseph Mercier (1906-1926). Justifiably, we received a kindly reprimand from J. Stuart Freeman, Jr. of Philadelphia for the 3-century anachronism. Mr. Freeman said that he thought that we would find his correction "irritating." Not so; when we err, we want to know. But in a P.S., he wrote "I am the grandson of John T. Freeman, Superintendent of Schenectady Schools from about 1905 to 1908, at which point he was discharged. He too had a knack for irritating people."

Me Culpa. I appeal with a favorite quote, that of the 99th mayor of New York City, Fiorello H. La Guardia, "The Little Flower": "When I make a mistake it's a beaut!"

-Ed

### IN MEMORIAM: The Society mourns the death of two dedicated former trustees:

**William M. "Bill" Massoth**, 80, of Pattersonville, NY, died suddenly December 21, 2009, at Sunnyside Hospital. Born in 1929 in Schenectady, Bill served as an SCHS trustee from 1990 through 2000. Before, during, and after that period, he gave frequent Saturday presentations on his favorite subjects, railroading and the Erie Canal, always well attended and greatly appreciated. He was a consummate gentleman who is sorely missed.

**William H. "Bill" Milton III**, 84, a self-described "3-sticks dude" via his email address, died at home in Galway, NY on December 28, 2009. Bill served as trustee from 1985 through 1999. He co-chaired our Investment Committee, his area of interest as a retired Vice President of the Trust Division of Trustco Bank. Bill was instrumental in building the Society's endowment from virtually nil to the robust state it enjoys today. Our memories of his considerable accomplishments and of him as a person will long endure.

## *Events and Programs at the MUSEUM and the GREMS-DOOLITTLE Library*

### **Saturday – March 13**

1:30 pm Refreshments 2:00 pm Program

***Films in the Society's Larry Hart Collection*** – presentation and discussion by his son, Alan Hart

Alan Hart grew up in Scotia and now lives in West Glenville. He was once a sportswriter for the Albany *Times Union* and is now a deacon at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Lake Luzerne. He is the author of four books relating to his father; the village of Scotia; and other topics of local interest.

Larry Hart was born in Schenectady in 1920 and spent most of his working life in this city. He was a photographer and reporter for the *Schenectady Gazette*, author of many books on local history, and author of the newspaper column, "Tales of Old Dorp." Mr. Hart was President of SCHS (1965-1968 and 1979-1981) and a trustee for many years. He was both city and county historian. Upon his death in 2004 he left to the Society a large collection of photographs, films, oral history tapes, books, scrapbooks, and files about Schenectady and the lower Mohawk region. The films in this program include events such as the great fire at First Reformed Church in 1948; Charles Lindberg's visit to Schenectady airport in 1927; and one of the last rides on a Schenectady trolley.

### **Saturday – March 27**

2:00 pm Program 3:00 pm Refreshments

***A Garden Sweet: Favorite Art Songs*** – a newly released CD presented by Sylvie Briber

*A Garden Sweet* is a collection of art songs, poems set to music by recognized composers, sung by Sylvie Briber, and accompanied by pianist and voice teacher Karen Ranung. Excerpts from the CD will feature poems by Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, and William Butler Yeats, and music by Ralph Vaughn Williams, Samuel Barber, and Randall Thompson. The story of this CD begins in a Stockade garden. In the early 1970s, Sylvie Briber was living next to the Schenectady Conservatory of Music at 230 Union Street where she studied voice with Karen Ranung. It was Karen who introduced Sylvie to the art song: poetry set to music. This CD is a collection of some of Sylvie's favorites. It was in a recent conversation with Karen that Sylvie learned about

the long history of the Conservatory which began in 1909. Its longest serving musician was Cecil Wright, organist and choir director for the First Reformed Church, who was the Conservatory's director and its president for over 54 years. The Conservatory closed its doors shortly after his death in 1972.

### **Saturday – April 10 ANNUAL MEETING**

1:30 pm Refreshments 2 pm Business 2:15 Program

***Architectural Style in Schenectady*** - by Robert Petito, architect, and Frank Taormina, historian and photographer

This will be a fascinating exploration of Schenectady's distinctive neighborhoods and the architectural styles that distinguish them. Sometimes you just have to walk through neighborhoods and look at how and where architecture affected people's ideas about the kinds of houses they wanted to live in. Changing times and needs are all reflected in a neighborhood's buildings.

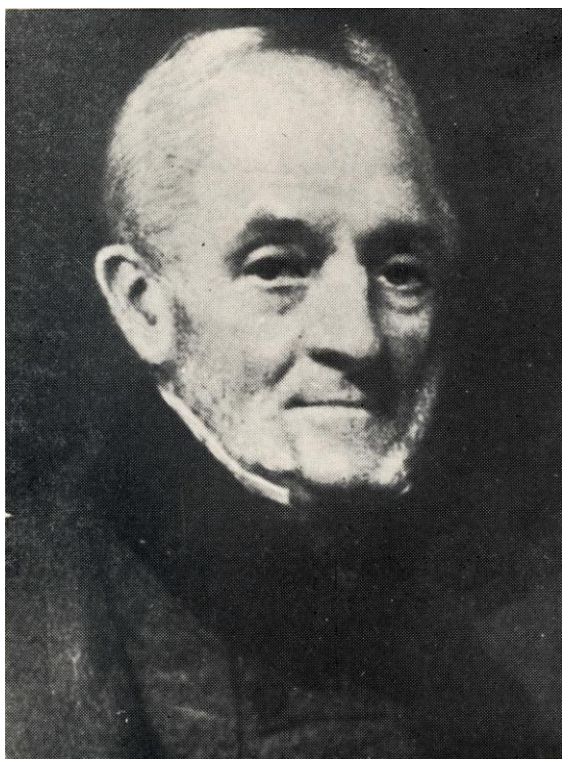
### **EXHIBIT - *Faces of Schenectady 1715-1750***

This exhibit will open in May with the Society's own portrait of Helena Van Epps Pieterse plus two recent gifts from descendants of the Van der Volgen family. One of these gifts is a portrait of Laurens Claese Van der Volgen who was taken prisoner during the Schenectady Massacre in 1690, lived with the Native Americans for about ten years, returned to Schenectady, and became a respected interpreter. In celebration of the acquisition of this portrait, the Society has planned an ambitious undertaking: to exhibit all known portraits of persons who, during this period in Schenectady history, were neighbors of Claese Van der Volgen. We have identified a total of 23 such portraits, including three of our own. The names are all familiar to those who have studied this period: Sanders, Glen, Swarth. Beck, Dunbar, Ten Eyck, Truax, Post, Veeder, Van Slyke, Lawyer, Van Dyke, and Vrooman. Most of these portraits are in the possession of other institutions. We are still seeking funds for the cost of shipping, insuring, installation, production of an Exhibit Catalog, and guest speaker fees for a seminar. Please call the Society at (518) 374-0263 for information as to how you may support this exciting venture.



Continued from page 1

His intellectual interests continued with his travels in Europe after he finished his education at Oxford in 1801. He traveled in France, Switzerland, and Italy, not only mastering the languages of those countries, but also Greek and Latin as well. In the meantime, he had managed to translate into English a number of well known Italian works, including Dante's *Inferno* as well as several Greek and Latin classics, including the works of Cicero. Being a restless sort he came to the United States in 1806 with money inherited from a grandfather with the intent to study languages of the North American Indians. He arrived in Philadelphia in 1808.



George William Featherstonhaugh - GWF

Much as we marvel at his accomplishments, we can recognize his humanity by the fact that what brought him to Duanesburg in the first place was that movement in the mind and stirring in the emotions caused by his first sight of Sarah Livingston Duane in Philadelphia when she stepped out of a carriage whose runaway horses he had brought to a stop. That first encounter led to a wedding joining George W. Featherstonhaugh and Sarah Duane in marriage at Saint George's Church in Schenectady on November 6, 1808 and to his residence in that part of the world.

He and Sarah had five children: Sarah Georgianna, George William Jr., Ann, James Duane, and a second Sarah Georgianna.

When you consider that for many of us, what he did as a language scholar would be considered a worthy lifetime achievement, you may be surprised to learn that in the hills of Duanesburg he became noted for his knowledge of agriculture and his effort to improve the animal stock commonly used by farmers by importing better animals from Europe and for encouraging improved techniques of farming. He was the first to organize a State Board of Agriculture here in New York and he published two books on improved methods of farming.

And then we learn that he was a person whose interest in geology was so well noted by his peers that he became known as "the father of American Geology," was the publisher of the first edition of the monthly *American Journal of Geology and Science*, the first person appointed to the role of United States Geologist, and a member of the Geological Society of London. He began, as a result of a government appointment, the geologic exploration of the United States, a long and adventurous part of his life.

But before he did all these things with geology, he was anxious to have better transportation for his agricultural goods rather than relying on waterways which froze in the winter. Through his friendship with an Englishman named George Stephenson, the inventor of the steam railroad, George W. Featherstonhaugh began in 1812 to agitate for the construction of railroads and the general use of this form of transportation in the United States. His persistence and efforts resulted in a state charter being granted on April 17, 1826 for the construction of a railroad between Albany and Schenectady. On August 13, 1831, the locomotive *DeWitt Clinton*, named for the state's governor, completed its first trip from Lydius Street in the western suburb of Albany to Engine Hill near the top of Crane Street in Schenectady.

It was the first railroad in New York, the second, and at that time the longest railroad in the entire United States. So ring up another one for Mr. Featherstonhaugh!

In 1827 and 1828, before the completion of the railroad, tragedy befell him and his family. First, he and his wife suffered the death of their two daughters. Following this painful event, their house on the shore of Featherstonhaugh Lake burned down, causing them to move out of Duanesburg to New York City where, it is painful to relate, his wife Sarah died.

After the loss of his two daughters and the death of his wife, Featherstonhaugh returned to England but his son, GWF Jr., retained his connection to the local community, graduating from Union College in 1834, and eventually living out the rest of his life in Duanesburg.

Featherstonhaugh later returned to the United States and, on January 28, 1831, married Charlotte Williams Carter in Schenectady County, New York. They had three children: Albany, Georgianna, and Henry.

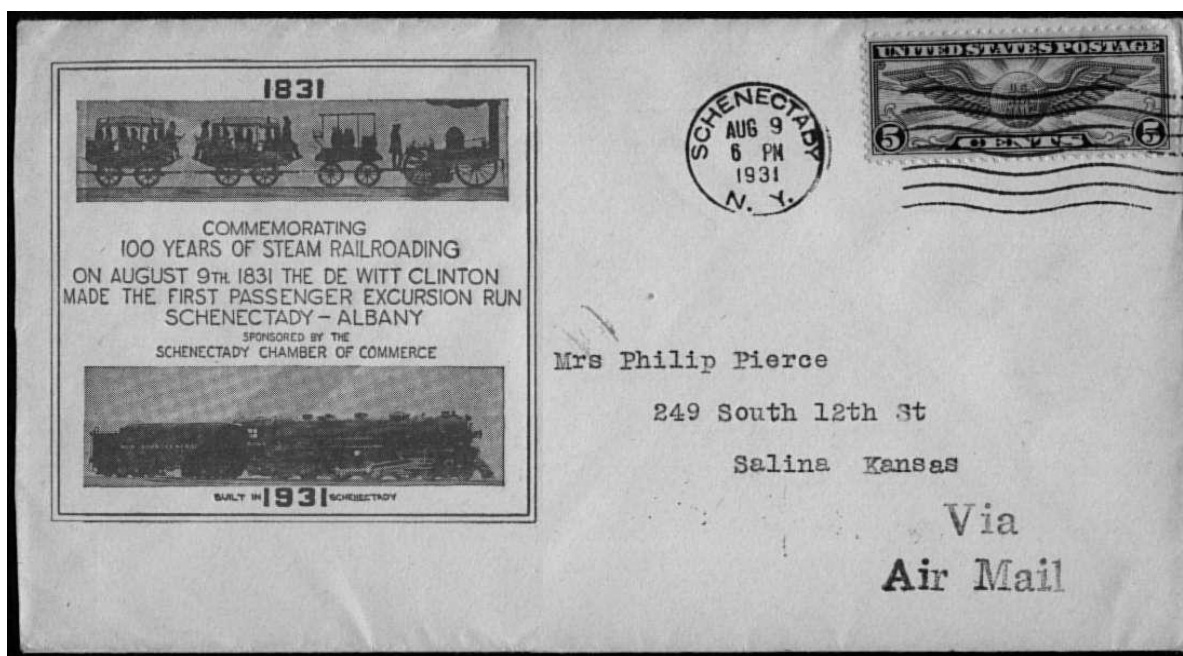
In 1834 GWF, newly appointed as the first U.S. government geologist, was instructed to examine the elevated country between the Missouri and Red Rivers and to report his findings to the Topographical Bureau. He traveled with his son, George Jr., as his assistant. This was part of an effort by the U.S. government to document topography and mineral resources in the territory of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 following the territorial explorations of Lewis and Clark in the years 1803-1806.

The journey by George W. Featherstonhaugh and his son, GWF Jr., took almost three years. In addition to producing voluminous geological observations and measurements, Featherstonhaugh later wrote extensively of his observations on American life in two journals: *Excursions through the Slave States* in 1844, and *Canoe Voyage up the Minnay Sotor* in 1847.

In 1839 GWF, Jr. joined his father who, at the behest of both the governments of the United States and Great Britain, had been asked to survey the boundary separating the State of Maine from the Province of Brunswick in Canada. He completed the job in 1844, and in a way that should hardly surprise us, received the heartfelt gratitude of both governments for the work he did.

In 1845, Featherstonhaugh returned to living in England with his wife and young children, and was appointed to a diplomatic mission in France in the employ of the British government. In that role he managed to rescue King Louis Phillippe of France during the Revolution of 1848 from persons, it was feared, who had the intention to bring his life to the same end as Louis the Sixteenth experienced.

In 1866 the life of George W. Featherstonhaugh ended at Le Havre, France. We can only gasp in admiration when we consider what he managed to do in the time he was allotted!



## *Library News and Accessions*

### *Genealogy Reference Materials added to the library*

***The Donald A. Keefer Collection:*** Genealogies, church records and bible records for numerous families with roots in the Glenville and Schenectady area including: *Bolt, Dawson, Dewitt, Fonda, Hallenbeck, Harmon, Knapp, Marlatt, Reynolds (Ulrich and Kile), Rynex, Sanders, Teller, Truax, Van Epps, Van Vranken, Van Wormer, Viele, and Yates*, gift of Donald A. Keefer.

*The John Muir Family of Schenectady, NY and Descendants: 1700s-2009*, gift of author

*Polish Roots* (1993) by Korzenie Polskie, purchased

*Jacob Scherp Genealogy*, by Janet Derbyshire, gift of Barbara Jeffries

*Stewart: Heather Lost, the Great Escape*. (2009) by Maddox Stewart, gift of the author

### *New and out of print research books added to the library shelves*

*Dutch New York Between East & West: the World of Margrieta van Varick*, New York City: Bard Graduate Center, 2009

*The First Respectable House: Brookside and the Growth of Ballston Spa* (1984)

by Field Horne, gift of Kim and Gary Mabee

*Galway Yesterday and Today* (1988), gift of Kim and Gary Mabee

*Ghosts of NY's Capital District* (2009) by Renee Mallett, gift of Lewis Carol

*The Presidencies of James A. Garfield & Chester A. Arthur* (1981) by Justus D. Doenecke, 1981, gift of Edwin Reilly

*Reading Early American Handwriting* (1998) by Kip Sperry

*Remembering Albany, Heritage on the Hudson* (2009) by Don Rittner

*Schenectady Ancient and Modern* (1914) and other published Schenectady histories, collected by Warren O'Neal, gift of his daughter, Kristen Raffan.

*A Tour of Galway Today with Glimpses of the Past* (1975), gift of Kim and Gary Mabee

*Union Street Historic District: Nineteenth Century Growth and Architecture, a public history project-thesis*. (1992) by Charlotte R. Stearns, gift of the author.

### *Donated Historic Documents added to the library collections*

Golden Jubilee Tennis Program, Central Park (1972), Sandra Paige Sorell

Mont Pleasant yearbooks (1936-1938), Earl Brinkman

New York Central Railroad Ticket (1969), Mark D'Attilio

SCHS Yearbooks and late 19<sup>th</sup> century business documents, Robert Iovinella

### *Library Equipment*

A new digital scanner, gift of Peter Sisario, Scotia, NY

### *Efner City History Center News:*

In January, Mr. Joe Jackson, Jr. began working in the City History Center under the County Senior Aide Program. He works 20 hours a week and is invaluable. Mr. Jackson's current responsibilities are to re-fold and re-box numerous documents in the Efner Center that have been housed for decades (yes, decades!) in non-archival, yellowed folders containing staples, mending tape, and acidic cardboard stock. Because of his diligence we may witness in 2010 the re-housing of Mr. Efner's famous "duct tape and cardboard" multi-volume, 7-drawer indexed scrapbook. Mr. Jackson and our volunteers will continue to do photocopying, filing, and processing of items in storage that were inventoried under a NYS Archive Grant received four years ago. To volunteer, contact Cindy Seacord, managing archivist, 382-5088, or e mail [HsCenter@nycap.rr.com](mailto:HsCenter@nycap.rr.com).

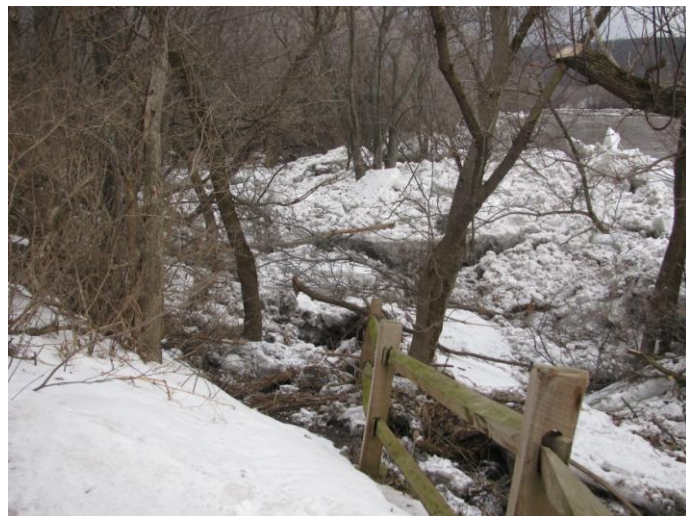
### *Mabee Farm – news and activities*

The Historical Society is grateful for two very generous recent gifts to the George E. Franchere Education Center at the Mabee Farm: the first is for \$10,000 from Steve Mabie, Vice-President of the Maybee Family Society, and the second is for \$1,500 from Tim Mabee and the Mabee Family Association of Saratoga. Construction activity for the Education Center is now underway. Hanson Well drilling has completed its part of the construction schedule. There will be more construction activity over the coming months.

***Volunteers wanted for the Mabee Farm's 2010 season opening in May.*** There are openings for tour guides, gardeners, event helpers, and other activities. Learn more about this fascinating site at a Welcome Session on Saturday, April 24 at 10:00 am at the Mabee Farm. Prospective volunteers will be led on a tour of the historic buildings and that will be followed by light refreshments and a question and answer session. For more information please call 887-5073 or e-mail: [mabeefarm@gmail.com](mailto:mabeefarm@gmail.com).



## *Recent happenings around the Society*



Mohawk River ice jam at the Mabee Farm



Philip Lord Jr. – New York's First Canals



Geothermal well drilling for the Franchere Education Center



Our Museum school programs

Photos: Pat Barrot, Ann Aronson



# *Schenectady County Historical Society*



*Swart Tavern – artist unknown*



*Old Dutch Church – artist unknown*



*Old Mohawk Covered Bridge – by W.H. Yates*

*Newly on display in the Museum*

Non-Profit Org.  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Permit No. 942  
Schenectady, NY



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