Schenectady County Historical Society Newsletter

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

There's been a changing of the guard. Bob Sager, after many years as president of the Society, has sought relief. Bob will continue as chair of the Mabee Farm Project, so he wasn't completely burned out. At our April 10 annual meeting I was elected to take Bob's place. Another change effective at this time is our new treasurer, Howard Bliss, who replaces Frank Taormina in a very demanding job. Thanks to both. Derek Sayers will continue as vice-president.

While Bob Sager seems to be related to or a friend of half of Schenectady, I'm not related to anyone locally, and, being a loner . . . my relationship with Schenectady results from work for GE. I first came to town in 1951 on the Test Engineering program. Three months here, six months there, and all involved with testing. While in Schenectady I was in Building 37, the one with the sign that the last employee to leave the plant is supposed to turn off. In 1951 employment within the main plant was around 40,000. (It's now about 4,000.) My, how times have changed. "Our" return to Schenectady was 14 years later, still with GE but at least off Test.

My involvement with the Historical Society results from an interest in old houses. During the Korean Was (is it over yet?) "we" got drafted and I ended up at Fort Eustis (useless), VA. Fort Eustis is a few miles outside Williamsburg, and near Yorktown. A couple of the civilian engineers in my office live in rehabilitated houses in Williamsburg. On an Army salary of \$1,000/year, we lived in nearby Hampton (the oldest permanent English-speaking settlement in the country). One of the engineers in Williamsburg had a sheep for a lawn mover. The sheep was on a leash attached to one of those screw-in stakes that could be moved around the yard. A secondary benefit was that the sheep also helped fertilize the lawn. While we couldn't afford to go into the Williamsburg houses, the outsides were free to look at. I was hooked by those gambrel-roofed beauties.

After George Franchere gave the Mabee Farm property to the Historical Society in 1993, I kept bugging Bob Sager about when the house would be "opened." Since the answer was always "later," and he was tired of me asking, he invited me to join the Mabee Farm Committee. After a few months on the committee, I finally did get a tour of the building.

So I come to the Historical Society due to an interest in old houses. I've not been involved with Genealogy searches and can't trace my family back farther than my grandfathers (both grandmothers were gone before I was born). Maybe some day

If you are out looking at the Mabee Farm and you see someone raking leaves, weeding in the flower beds, or watering the broom corn, stop in and say hello. It's probably me.

- Bill Dimpelfeld

DOLLHOUSE ROOM GETS A NEW LOOK [picture]

Thanks to the generosity of the Women's Auxiliary and the energy and talents of Paul Gonsowski, the Dollhouse Room has a new look. We spoke with Paul who described the task in vivid terms: under four layers of old paint there was wallpaper; under the wallpaper there were holes, holes, holes. It took a gallon of filler just to take care of the holes before he could put on the oil-based primer. Now the dollhouse looks its best contrasted against the fresh, light blue walls. Be sure to visit the

room at your first opportunity. Thanks also to the Auxiliary	for agreeing to pay for paving the driveway. V	We are grateful to
them for their generosity, and their recognition of the need.		

MUSEUM NEWS - Jo Mordecai, Coordinator of Exhibits

Fathers' Day Celebration The next exhibit for the museum will be open all through the month of June, 1999. It will be a "Salute to Fathers' Day." Many of you remember in May of 1997 we had a similar exhibit saluting Mothers' Day. This proved popular with the many well-known people who participated, and I was asked if Father could also be honored. This June he will be.

The exhibit will feature framed photographs of fathers of many well-known politicians, local and state, as well as the fathers of popular personalities of the TV news media, anchors, reporters, sports and weather men of Channels 6,10, and 13. The vice-president has generously sent a photograph with his father, taken a year before Senator Gore passed away. The photographs will be displayed all through the parlor, music room, study, dining room and hallway of our lovely old house. A red rose will be placed by the photos of the living fathers; a white rose for those who passed away. I hope many members will come to honor these fathers whose sons and daughters hold them with esteem.

Fathers' Day is the day on which we honor our fathers whether in church or at home. It is celebrated in America on the third Sunday of June. The idea was originated by Mrs. John Bruce Dodd, who in 1909 persuaded the Ministerial Society of Spokane, Washington, to salute fathers with special services. The idea was officially approved by President Woodrow Wilson in 1916, and in 1924 President Calvin Coolidge recommended national observance of the occasion 'To establish more intimate relations between fathers and their children, and to impress upon fathers the full measure of their obligations.

From Your House to Our House Donor: Wayne Harvey, Collection of Commemorative Plates now part of the display in the Vrooman Room. Donor: Cathy Hasbrock, a Bicentennial Plate also included in display

Thank	vou	both	for	vour	generosity!
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MABEE FARM EVENTS

The buildings at the Mabee Farm are in remarkably good condition considering their age. The stone house, the oldest, surprisingly is holding up best. The infestation of wasps and powder- post beetles has been dealt with, and inspection is due this coming summer. The other two buildings, having been less well built initially, need much more attention. The most immediate need for the inn is restoration of the chimney: disassembly, repair of washed-out sun-baked brick, reassembly, and flashing. That work has been contracted with Matchless Chimney (the company that restored the chimneys at 32 Washington Avenue some half-dozen years ago). Work has been scheduled to start the third week in May.

The slave quarters are in worst condition. Some folks like to call this building the "brick house" because two of its walls are of brick (the other two are frame). Rob Petito of Waite Associates has the specifications almost ready for letting bids to stabilize the foundations a deteriorated brick walls. The foundation work is complicated by the need to have archaeologists on hand to check every spadeful of dirt dug out around the foundations. Bill Dimpelfeld (our new President) has been following this work being done under the State Parks Department grant, and will continue to do so in addition to his new duties.

The Nilson barn foundations were put in last fall, and the new sills have been delivered by Steve Swift of Restoration Supply. Steve declares his intent to set the sills before the end of April (the weather in March never gave him the break he needed) and to raise the timber (by crane) in May. According to Keith Cramer who is following the work after the roof goes on, then the 12-inch wide, 3-inch thick threshing and side-aisle flooring goes in, and then the siding goes on.

If all goes as planned, our annual Fathers' Day celebration and fund-raiser in June will give everyone a chance to see, and perhaps use, this addition to the farm that replaces the Mabee Dutch barn that burned well over a century ago.

The Mabee Farm Project wants to thank Mr. George Franchere for his gift of a waffle iron from the 1930's and a copy of Plants of Colonial Days by Raymond Taylor (Dover).

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Iroquois kits have been on the road thirty times this year. Several school's borrowed them more than once. The Colonial kits are ready to travel, a year ahead of schedule. We are including in the Colonial kits study material prepared by the New Netherland Project which has created an abundance of curricular material derived from and exhibiting primary sources.

Genealogy TIME!

The Capital District Genealogy Society is forming a Schenectady Interest Group. Interested people are invited to join us at an organizational meeting at the Schenectady County Historical Society on Saturday, May 8, at 10 AM. At that time the group will decide on a regular meeting time and on what interests Schenectadians want to pursue. We hope that people in the group can help each other researching Schenectady families, and help make records available to others doing family history.

The Capital District Genealogy Society also has several other interest groups. The computer users, German interest and Irish interest groups meet before the regular membership general meeting. The Rensselaer County interest group meets in Rensselaer County and is currently indexing the NY State census returns for that county.

The Society meets the 4th Saturday of January, February, March, May-September, and November in the Colonie Library at 2 PM. In April there is an all day conference, and in October a visit to a neighboring county. New members and visitors are always welcome at the meetings. For more information on the Schenectady Interest group, please call Elsie Maddaus at the Society Library.

Genealogitis (Poet unknown)

There is a new disease these days For which there is no cure. So if it gets a grip on you You've had it, that's for sure.

This ge-ne-a-lo-gi-tis
(At least that's what I call it)
Has no known vaccination that
Can ever quite forestall it.

It strikes the rich. It strikes the poor; The old and young alike; And every nation feels its sting When this bug makes a strike.

In fact, I'm struck with it myself And know whereof I speak.

One symptom of this dread disease Is buying up old books.
You find yourself in graveyards

This stuff has kept progressing; It almost leaves me weak.

Or dusty attic nooks.

You write a million letters; No stone is left unturned. Sometimes for only postage stamps A gold mine is returned.

Just let me say in closing
That when all is said and done,
This malady has brought me joy
AND SUCH A LOT OF FUN!

We thank the Montgomery County Heritage & Genealogical Society at Fonda, NY, for the use of the above verses which appeared in the first issue of Heritage, the Society's newsletter. We recommend those whose historical interest goes beyond Schenectady County to take a look at this new arrival on the historical literature scene. See Elsie Maddaus for further information.

THANK YOU

We have a lovely addition to the Shaker room -- a framed, hand-embroidered piece of Shaker folk art. It is a copy of the original inspirational drawing done by Sister Hannah Cohoon on July 3, 1854, rendered in color.

The Tree of Life is sometimes regarded as the symbolic emblem of the Shaker religion, indicating the productive unity of beauty of the Believers' communal life. Our new Tree of Life was beautifully embroidered by Mr. Lawrence C. Rainey, a trustee of the Historical Society. Embroidery is one of his many artistic talents. Larry is in good company; a number of the men of the English Royal family were enthusiastic embroiderers: among them the Duke of Windsor and his father, King George VI.

General Bernard Montgomery always had a project he could work on during World War II. In the trailer he occupied near his troops, pieces of his finished work could be seen. His troops said that good old Monty soothed his nerves that way. Thank you, Larry! -- Jo Mordecai --

ELSIE, WE'LL MISS YOU!

For the past seven years, the guardian angel of our library has been Elsie Maddaus. She combines the inquiring instincts of a Sherlock Holmes with the energy of that bunny on TV that marches up and down with drums. She has generated several seminars and workshops in various aspects of Genealogy; the most recent was entitled "Genealogy 101." She gets on the phone to quiz local dignitaries on information that people have been seeking. At an age when most of us are quite content to let the grandchildren run the technical equipment, she has learned word processing and "Computer 101", enabling herself to reach out to the community via the Internet.

Now Elsie has decided that it's time to retire again. At eighty, she and her husband, Dr. Ingo Maddaus, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics from Union College, feel the need to have a little free time, maybe travel, and maintain closer family contacts.

Maybe they'll even go to Australia; Elsie has always wanted to go to there.

Born in Atco, New Jersey (Camden County), Elsie was educated in Berlin, NJ and Paterson NJ schools. She graduated from Skidmore in 1964, and received a master's degree at the University at Albany in 1966, having raised her four sons first. She was the library director in the Ballston Spa Public Library for 20 years. After her retirement she came to the Grems-Doolittle Library, January 14, 1992. "I would have been here the whole time, if I had known about it," she said. "This is a great place to work. . . it was made for me. If I could live forever, I would stay." But she and her husband want to travel and have more free time. She promises that she'll be available as a volunteer. And of course she is a member of the society! It will be hard to fill her shoes.

MAY8 PROGRAM

Clifford Brown is Professor of Political Science at Union College and the Chairman of the Nott Memorial Exhibition Committee. In the latter capacity he did the research on the life of Solomon Northrup whose life and trials are the subject of the May 8 Society meeting. Northrup, born free to a father who had been freed, was enticed by kidnappers to travel to Washington D C to perform as a violinist. Instead he was captured and sold into slavery for prices that ranged from \$650 to \$950 -- a large sum in the ante-bellum South. Ultimately he was rescued and wrote a book of his experiences called Twelve Years a Slave," with the help of David Wilkinson, a graduate of Union College. Join us on May 8 for this enthralling story. Find out the other connections to Union College, and the exciting account of Northup's rescue.

LIBRARY POTPOURRI Elsie Maddaus - Archivist - Librarian

GIFTS TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Donor: George E. Franchere, Plants of Colonial Days Donor: Donald A. Keefer, Slave chains used locally

Donor: Catherine Q. Kindl, 6 books on World War II by Winston Churchill

Donor: Edwin L. Fisher, The Fisher Family

Donor: Montgomery County, Index to Pearson's Patent Book of History and Archives Donor: Roland Slingerland, Life and Public Services of General James A. Garfield

Donor: Bette Bradway, Mayflower Families, Vol. 17, Isaac Allerton

Donor: Wayne Harvey Booklet, "First Ladies" and six postcards of First Ladies

Donor: Annette M. Billmeyer, Several booklets, brochures, etc.

Donor: Myrna K. DeRonde, Vedder Family Bible

Donor: Paul Neubauer, stationery from the former Van Curler Hotel

Donor: Earl H. Brinkman, several books including one on American History

AROUND THE COUNTY by Elsie M. Maddaus

DELANSON: A list of names is given in the history of the Delanson Methodist Church representing the fist church school class. In those days, it meant that these people were taking instruction in catechism preparatory to church membership.

These same families are represented in today's classes.

-Rev. Roy B. Severance 1946.

DUANESBURG: "A Memorial Census for Duanesburgh" and a supplement were written by Clarence Foote, a former historian of the Town of Duanesburg. The booklets list 1800 names in 450 families of the burial records of the town and other towns bordering Duanesburg, including Esperance. It was published in 1935.

GLENVILLE: The first Glenville Town Board meeting was held at the tavern of Nicholas S. Van Patten on the first Tuesday of January 1821. This inn, known as "Lower Nicky's" was located on the corner of Sacandaga and Ridge Roads. At this meeting town officers were chosen. The only other business conducted at the organizational meeting was the appointment of an overseer for each of the 30 highway districts into which the town was divided.

-Scotia-Glenville Journal, Sesquicentennial edition

NISKAYUNA: For over a century there were only four district schools in the Town of Niskayuna. In 1954 the Central School District was established. In 1956, three modern elementary schools were dedicated, a former elementary school was converted to a junior high school, and in 1957 a new high school was opened. -Niskayuna school publication

PRINCETOWN: An interesting sight in the early 1900s was John Levey's horse-drawn stage coach. The coach was a large vehicle designed to carry passengers as well as freight between Schenectady and Mariaville. The passengers were traveling to Mariaville Lake, a summer resort, and the freight and various packages were mainly destined for Peeke's Store.

-Ruth Bradshaw, former resident and Princetown school teacher

ROTTERDAM: Rotterdam Junction, a quiet suburban community, might well have been called a "boom town" around 1883 when it was singled out at the ideal location for a railroad shipping center. However in November, 1931, railroad officials decided to shift all classification work to Mechanicville. -Knickerbocker News-Union Star, Sesquicentennial edition

SCHENECTADY: Like many other railroad centers, Schenectady became a distributing center for the surrounding country. The Schenectady Locomotive Works was established in 1848 and became on of the most important centers for the production of locomotives in the country. A locomotive could be completely manufactured in five days; that was considered very remarkable speed in 1855.

-Mary A. Wheeler, 1935

SCOTIA: Traffic problems grew fast in Scotia since the intersection of Mohawk and Ballston was the principal junction from west and north-bound traffic. So on Saturdays and Sundays in the summer it became necessary to have control. Monty De Graff, a perennial constable, was put in charge. He took his stance in the middle of the intersection. At first he would wave a car on in either direction. Later Monty was provided with a handmade Stop and Go sign that he could rotate to give the traffic their alternate chances. -Neil B. Reynolds

A WORD FROM PRINCETOWN

Irma Mastrean, Town Historian of Princetown, has sent us some nostalgic fare, related to the delivery of medical services in the old days. This month we publish Old Time Remedies which should carry us back to the 1800's and early 1900's. Does anybody remember those old time remedies? If you were a child in the early 1900's you probably recall dreading them more than the illness! From Colonial days through the mid-twentieth century, most of the medicine contained generous amounts of alcohol. Remedies were often lace with caffeine, cocaine, opium, or morphine. Laudanum (liquid opium solution) was prescribed for pain and a number of ills. Ergot (a narcotic) was also used to relieve pain. Ipecac was given for an emetic.

Elixirs were sold claiming that they could cure anything. Some residents remember Kickapoo Indians traveling throughout this area (and stopping in Mariaville) selling Kickapoo Indian Oil. Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup could restore anyone to health by taking only one bottle! For that "rundown" feeling Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound was used.

In 1845, a Mohawk Indian Herb Doctor visited Duanesburg. Among the herbs he brought were caraway, catnip, plantain, sage, snakeroot, tansy, horehound, horseradish, milkweed, and wintergreen. Many of the remedies originated with the Indians. They taught the early settlers the use of medicinal plants. Horehound and Sweet Flag were made into bittersweet candy for colds. Jimsonweed was once popular as an asthma remedy. Arnica was made into salves and liniment. Witchhazel

(still popular today) was also made into liniment.

For a cold or congestion, your chest was rubbed with turpentine and lard, camphorated oil, or the most dreaded, mustard plaster! Removal of it left red skin if it didn't come off with the plaster! For a sore throat, one teaspoon of sugar to which several drops of turpentine had been added was given.

To reduce fever, onions were fried for a poultice and placed on your feet. Apparently this was to draw the fever out of the body. Sulfur and molasses and castor oil were given for spring tonic to clean out the system. Babies were given catnip tea for colic. Paregoric (a mixture of opium and anise) was rubbed on their gums for teething and also used to keep them quiet.

There were no laws regulating medicine at all. Any one could call his medicine a "cure", though it had never cured anything. The very same medicine sold to people was sold for horses or cows. These absurd cure-alls were outlawed in 1906 when the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed.

Some of the old time remedies are still used. Lemon juice and honey still make a good cough syrup. Aren't you glad we live in an age of antibiotics and other modern drugs?

(Ed. Note: My mother used to give my baby sister Himrod cigarettes to smoke when she had a fit of asthma. Little did she know that they were composed of marijuana! Luckily my sister did not become addicted.)

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTING DURING FEBRUARY AND MARCH 1999

Without you we would be nothing!

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Ms Ellen de Lalla

HANDICAPPED ACCESS

There is an elevator between the entrance vestibule at the back entrance, and the main floor. If you are on wheels, walker, or cane, enter through the parking space entrance and our staff will be happy to help you with the elevator

Grems-Doolittle Library Mission Statement

The Grems-Doolittle library is a historical, biographical, and genealogical reference library whose purpose is 'To gather, preserve, display and make available for study, books, manuscripts, papers, photographs and other records and materials relating to the early and

current history of Schenectady County and of the surrounding area." The collection includes many histories and genealogies.

Because it is a reference library, none of the material is per-

mitted to leave the building so that it will be accessible to researchers at all times.

OFFICERS

President: William A. Dimpelfeld Vice President: Derek Sayers

Secretary: Ann Karl Treasurer: Howard Bliss

Assistant Treasurer: Ruth Ann Evans

STAFF

Museum Exhibits: Jo Mordecai Archivist & Librarian: Elsie Maddaus Office Manager: Johanna Woldring

EDITOR

Sally van Schaick

Historical material and comments, including letters to the editor, are welcome and may be submitted to the editor.

(We want to share the following social note from the Evening Star, August 17, 1899)

EXCITING FOX HUNT HELD ON VAN SLYCK'S ISLAND LAST SATURDAY PM

Eleven Hounds were Entered and the Winner is Owned by Mr. Wilber of Quaker Street.

The Betting was Five to One in Favor of The Fox -- Several Ladies Present.

The famous old country sport of fox hunting was indulged in by some Schenectady county sportsmen Saturday afternoon; the hunt being held on Van Slyck's island, the big island in the Mohawk, opposite this city. The hunt was arranged several weeks ago by William H Mudge, proprietor of the Freeman House, and William Youngs of upper State street, both well known

sportsmen. The fox was captured and turned loose on the island two weeks before the hunt. There was plenty of food for him on the island which is large, and he was in splendid condition Saturday. He had been hunted a little on two or three occasions before Saturday, in order to train him to exercise his well known natural cunning.

The attendance at the hunt Saturday afternoon was not large, but several ladies were included in the number of spectators and what the crowd lacked in numbers was more than made up in enthusiasm. The crowd was transported in boats from the mainland to the island by Mr. Mudge. The start was made a 2 o'clock Saturday afternoon. Eleven dogs had been entered, the entrance fee being merely nominal to pay for the prize offered the winner, a beautifully decorated dog-collar and name plate.

The referees were Dr. R. D. Austin and William Youngs, who were on horseback. It took quite an hour of hard hunting to locate Mr. Reynard, as the island is large and has many covers of brush. The betting was 5 to 1 in favor of the fox. Reynard gave the hounds a three-quarter hour run, and he could easily have evaded the hounds all day had he kept to cover, but he evidently thought he had a cinch and broke cover. The dogs broke cover about 100 feet behind the fox, and then commenced the race for life. The slower dogs were soon left in the rear and the faster ones slowly gained on the fox. At last the race dwindled down to the fox and three dogs. The fox stumbled, and quicker than a flash the foremost dog nabbed him. Over and over they rolled in a brief scrimmage, and then all was over. The winner was proudly claimed by Mr. Wilber of Quaker street.

The Grems-Doolittle Library is compiling a list of Ethnic Organizations in Schenectady County. We need to know the name of such an organization, the name of a contact person such as the chairman or president, and the telephone number. Call Elsie Maddaus at 374-0263

Second Annual Forefathers' Day Celebration

Mark your calendar for Sunday, June 20, 1999! Remember how much fun we had last Forefathers' Day? It was a beautiful June day with song and dance and good food, and a wonderful way to honor our forefathers (and foremothers too, of course!). Well, plans are under way to celebrate again, this June with an afternoon of good food, music, games and entertainment. And it looks as if the pre-Revolutionary barn we have moved (in pieces) from Johnstown will be in the midst of re-erection, so bring your camera to catch it in this brief, transitory stage. Details will follow as plans mature, so be sure to save that date.

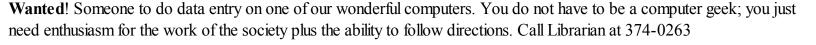
CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

Wanted LIBRARIAN - ARCHIVIST

The Schenectady County Historical Society is seeking an experienced Librarian with an interest in local history and Genealogy, and good computer skills, to manage its Grems-Doolittle Library. Hourly compensation will be based on 1/2 to 2/3 of usual work week. For a more complete description of the position, see our Web site: http://www.schist.org. Send resumes to Irma Mastrean, Chair, Librarian Search Committee, Schenectady County Historical Society, 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305-1601, or to her at librarian@schist.org.

Wanted! Someone to do filing in the library. Our librarian can never catch up.

Great opening for volunteer with unsatisfied clerical lust! Call Librarian at 374-0263



Wanted! A real extrovert to organize boat and bus trips. There are wonderful places to go around here, but all the board members are maxed out and we need fresh blood, verve, muscle and know-how to plan trips. Call office at 374-0263

Wanted! Two or three clever people to work on a book of photos. We have all these great photos that Bill Massoth has been developing and they're just crying to be put into a book -- or maybe two. Got the time? An afternoon a week? Every other week? Call librarian at 374-0263

Wanted! A grant writer. We know the grants are out there; we just need that certain person with the time to ferret out where the grants are hidden so we can continue to enhance the work of the Society. Call President or office manager at 374-0263

Wanted! Docents. A docent is a tour guide. We're running out of docents and we want fresh troops. Come now: you know that you've always secretly wanted to show people around the Museum. Follow Jo or Sally or Wayne or Ann a time or two and you'll get the hang of it. Call Jo Mordecai at 374-9263.

My New Spell Checker

Eye halve a spelling chequer It came with my pea sea; I t plainly marques for my revue Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.

Eye strike a key and type a word And weight for it two say Weather eye am wrong oar write It shows me strait a weigh.

As sewn as a mist ache is maid It nose bee fore two long; And eye can put the error rite Its rare lea ever wrong.

Eye have run this poem threw it; I am shore your pleased two no. Its letter perfect awl the weigh-My chequer told me sew.

-Sauce Unknown-

