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FESTIVAL OF TREES

at the
Schenectady County Historical Society
and
YWCA of Schenectady

NOVEMBER 17 through DECEMBER 9
Daily from 10 AM to 4 PM

Beautiful Christmas trees decorated by local organizations
festive holiday music on Saturdays and Sundays
raffle for trees, \$5 per ticket drawing December 10

Adults \$6 children 5-15 \$3 children under 5 Free

32 & 44 Washington Avenue
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Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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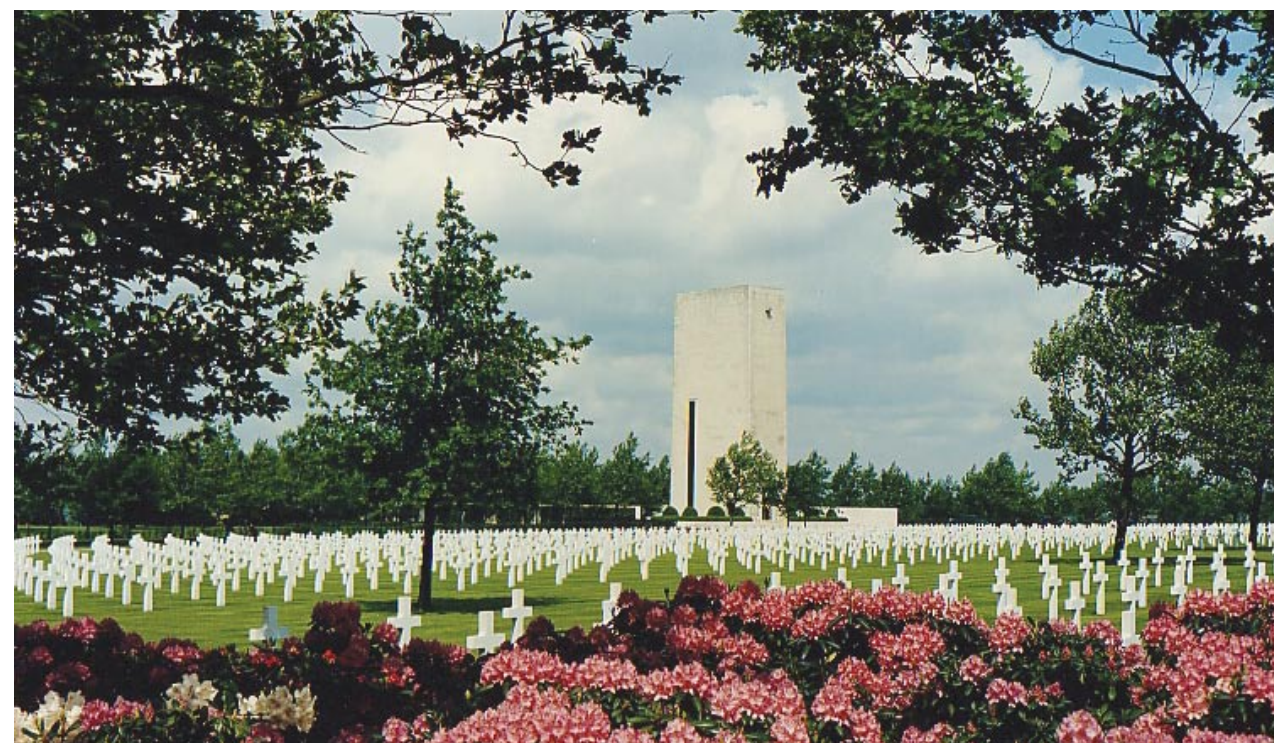
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Margraten Cemetery, Holland

A WAR, TWO CONTINENTS, AND TWO BROTHERS

material researched by John D'Anieri

This story begins with two brothers who grew up in the Village of Scotia in the 1930s. Both joined the U.S. Army shortly after Pearl Harbor to serve in World War II. The younger brother enlisted in the Army in December of 1941; the older brother joined after graduating from college. This was just another pair of enlistments until May of 2007 when a letter from Holland was sent to the Schenectady Museum and then a labor of love in Holland bore fruit in Schenectady, NY.

The letter from Holland came from Louis Hengens, a 45 year old Dutch music teacher in Limburg who had recently volunteered to care for the grave of Pvt. John S. Hemstreet, an American soldier who was killed in action on Oct. 17, 1944 and buried at the American War Cemetery

in Margraten. It was not enough for Louis simply to care for the grave. He “adopted” John. He knew that John was from Schenectady County in New York State, and he began his search to learn more about him by writing to the Schenectady Museum. His hope was to establish contact with John’s family if there were surviving members. At the Museum, archivist Christopher Hunter forwarded the letter to the Schenectady County Historical Society for research. That brought John D’Anieri into the picture. He works part time at the Society as a volunteer genealogist and he relishes a challenge.

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32 Washington Avenue
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HOURS

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

MABEE FARM
CLOSED FOR
THE SEASON

Letter from the President

TRIFECTA



The Trustees of the Society set policy—that's what trustees do—but it is our staff members, assisted by our many valued volunteers, who must transform the intangible principles of that policy into the tangible services delivered to our members and to the community at large. This month, I want to tell you how proud I am of three of our professionals—our Curator, our Librarian, and our Mabee Farm Site Manager.

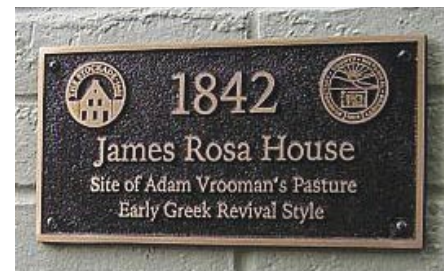
In late August, we heard that in response to a grant request prepared by Curator Kate Weller, the Society will receive the \$7,180 needed for the repair and cleaning of our Samuel H. Sexton painting of 1834 that depicts the tragedy of the Schenectady Massacre of 1690. (See top left.) Despite its known inaccuracies—there is not enough snow on the ground, the people depicted are not clad for February weather, and the Dutch architecture depicted is an anachronism—the painting has always been a popular attraction. But it needed help badly, and help is now on the way. In time, the more serene Leonard Tantillo painting of the Stockade as envisioned on the eve of the massacre, one that we commissioned in our centennial year of 2005, will be appreciated just as much. In fact, it was featured in the February 2007 issue of the New York State *Conservationist* magazine. Nice going, Kate!

In October, the Society received an award from the Board of Regents of the New York State Archives in recognition of the excellence of the Grems-Doolittle Library archives supervised by Librarian / Archivist Katherine Chansky, with attendant recognition of the cooperation between Katherine and Trustee Cindy Seacord, Secretary of the Society, the volunteer manager of the Efner Center archives at Schenectady City Hall. The award was accepted on behalf of the Society by our two archivists at a State Archives luncheon on October 22. Congratulations to Katherine and Cindy.

On the facing page, Mabee Farm Site Manager Pat Barrot is shown receiving the Schenectady County Chamber of Commerce's *Say Schenectady* Award for doing so much to increase tourism in our county. Oh, I'm there with her, but it is Pat and her cadre of volunteers at the Farm that earned the prize; she is the one who makes the Site such an attractive destination for the hundreds of school children that, literally, have a field day there. Thanks for all you do, Pat.

Other kinds of plaque are worthy of note, too—those sanctioned by the Society for placement on the façades of historic houses. None had been commissioned in several years, but with the initiative of Robert Woods of 7 North Ferry Street in the Stockade, through his extensive research vetted by Trustee Frank Taormina, the two depicted below were installed in time for the Walk-about of September 29. These are the first plaques to carry not only the seal of the Society, but also the logo of the Stockade Association. The one at the left is on Robert's home, the other is across the street. Go take a look at the real things.

— Ed



Recent events around the Historical Society & Mabee Farm



Recent Gifts to the Museum and to the Mabee Farm

The Society's Accessions Committee has recently reviewed and accepted several items. It has been guided by a collections policy adopted by the Society's Board of Trustees last year. Acceptable items need to relate to the history of Schenectady County and its surrounding area, the development of its social history in agriculture, transportation, education, domestic life, buildings, religion, entertainment, occupations and trades, science and technology, business and commerce, local governments, military events, and major events in the life of its peoples. The Mabee Farm focuses on the history of the Mabee family and on artifacts and documents related to the agricultural history of the Mohawk valley. Artifacts must be historically significant, in acceptable condition, and of a form that can be adequately and appropriately conserved, catalogued, and stored.

The Society greatly appreciates the donation of the following items since the last report of the Accessions Committee:

Recent acquisitions:

- ❖ Silver communion set from the former Mt. Pleasant Reformed Church.
- ❖ Schenectady schools paper programs and photos.
- ❖ Auxiliary police patches of Schenectady County, circa 1940-80, plus a political campaign button for the late Charles Mills as Schenectady Commissioner of Public Safety; donated by Hershel Graubart.
- ❖ Handmade ladder; donated to the Mabee Farm by Leonard Pulaski.
- ❖ Six coin silver spoons inscribed with name "Mabee" made or sold by D. S. Hulett, a Schenectady silversmith and jeweler, c. 1840-1860. Purchased from Mr. Clarence Spain, who called the society to offer the Mabee Farm first refusal.
- ❖ Gown and Queen's tiara from Colonial Festival of 1988; donated by Fred Randall.
- ❖ Collection of tokens - Schenectady Trolley donated by John Ackner.
- ❖ Collection of glass canning jars; donated to Mabee Farm by Mary Jane Beaulieu.

- ❖ Glass bottle from Henry Heilbronner & Co., Importers and Wholesale Liquor Dealers, Est. 1865-1918; donated by John Ackner.
- ❖ English Delftware pitcher, c. 1890, accepted for the Mabee Farm; donated by Linda Post.
- ❖ Piece of white oak wood from Lock 23 catwalk with accompanying picture of area; donated by Trustee Carol Lewis.
- ❖ Hand-pumped vacuum cleaner, c. 1907; donated by Kim and Gary Mabee.
- ❖ Handmade wheelbarrow with wrought iron wheels made by local blacksmith and carpenter in West Glenville; donated by Robert McCullough.
- ❖ Railroad car bell, with clapper mechanism; donated by John and Ann Kulak.
- ❖ Handmade wood-planes, used by local carpenter, donated by Paul Rankin to Mabee farm.
- ❖ Late model multi-function printer donated by Carolina Lazzari.

Mabee Farm – end of season information

The Mabee Farm received a Tourism Award from the Schenectady County Chamber of Commerce, which was presented at a banquet at the Glen Sanders mansion on October 16th.

Tour Guides wanted for the 2008 season –

The Mabee farm is looking for people willing to be Tour Guides for the Mabee Farm's historic buildings and to explain aspects of colonial life. It's really a lot of fun to interact with our many visitors. If you are interested, please contact Pat Barrot at (518) 887-5073.

Mabee Farm winter hours – The Mabee Farm is now closed for the season. However if that cousin of yours from Europe hasn't seen it yet and is visiting you sometime during the winter, we will be happy to give you a tour. Please call (518) 887-5073 to arrange an appointment. We will open again on Tuesday, May 6th, 2008 for our regular hours of operation.

Schenectady County Historical Society - lectures, events and activities

Adirondack Fire Towers – illustrated lecture by author Marty Podskoch

Saturday, November 10th

Refreshments 1:30 PM

Program 2:00 PM

The lecture will be based on his book *Adirondack Fire Towers: their history and lore; the Southern Districts*. This past June he collaborated with the well-known graphic artist and comic book illustrator, Sam Glanzman, to produce his latest publication entitled *Adirondack Stories – Historical Sketches*. Mr. Podskoch is the author of several books about fire towers in the Adirondack and Catskill mountain regions. Signed copies of his books will be available for sale.

Festival of Trees – a joint presentation by the SCHS and the YWCA of Schenectady

November 17th through December 9th – daily from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM at both locations

Various organizations in Schenectady County will decorate trees that will be placed for raffle for the benefit of both SCHS and the YWCA on the last day.

During the display period there will be festive holiday music on Saturdays and Sundays.

ADMISSION: \$6 for adults; \$3 for children 5-15 years old; children under 5 admitted free. Here is your opportunity to acquire a unique tree and contribute to a worthy cause. See top of page 8.

Family Day and Ornament making – on Saturday, December 1st from 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Bring the whole family for a session of ornament making, story telling, festive music, and yummy treats.

SCHS Open House

Saturday, December 8th from 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Enjoy a visit with Santa, see all the beautifully decorated trees, and enjoy refreshments and festive music.

Throughout December – SCHS will have on display in our Victorian Study one very special Christmas tree surrounded by antique toys from our collection and decorated by Robert Halley with antique Christmas tree ornaments from his extensive collection.



THE MABEE FARM RECEIVES TOURISM AWARD FROM THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

On October 16th the Mabee Farm Historic Site was honored to receive the Schenectady County Chamber of Commerce 2007 "Say Schenectady" Tourism Award from Marty Finn, Chairman of the Chamber Board at an awards dinner at the Glen Sanders Mansion. The award honors local businesses which have contributed to a thriving business climate in Schenectady County.

L-R: Ed Reilly, President, SCHS; Pat Barrot, Mabee Farm Site Manager; Marty Finn, Chair, Schenectady County Chamber of Commerce.

John, in his correspondence with Louis Hengens, asked what prompted his interest in tending this grave. Louis explained that his father, now 75, had often told Louis of his experiences as a young boy in World War II. His father was eight when Germany invaded the Netherlands in 1940. Over the years his many war stories covered the time when American soldiers were stationed on the family farm after the liberation of the Netherlands. This nurtured in Louis a lifelong interest in the war. When a local newspaper article noted the need for new volunteers to replace older people who had adopted gravesites of soldiers buried in Holland's Margraten Cemetery, he volunteered and was assigned the graves of John Hemstreet and an American airman.

John relied on a number of resources at SCHS such as city directories from the 1940s, the family surname file, the obituary collection, as well as Internet sources. He was able to find some interesting information. It turned out that Hemstreet is an old Dutch name that started out in Albany in the 1600s as Van Heemstraaten and then evolved to Heemstreet and finally to Hemstreet.



7 James Street, Scotia, NY

John Hemstreet was one of three children of James and Grace Hemstreet, who lived at 7 James Street in Scotia from at least 1930 to 1941.

He was born about 1920, graduated from high school, and went to work at the General Electric plant along with his father and older brother, both named James. His older sister Janet was a nurse. John Hemstreet enlisted in the army on December 12, 1941, just five days after Pearl Harbor. He served with the 29th Division, which went ashore on D-Day at Normandy, fought across France and Belgium, and helped to liberate The Netherlands before proceeding into Germany, where he died on October 17, 1944 in the bloody battle for Aachen, just across the Dutch border. The U.S. 9th Army entered the outskirts of Aachen on October 10 and the city finally fell on October 21.



L-R: John S. and James A. Hemstreet, late summer, 1943, Scotia, NY.

The local phone directory contained several Hemstreets in the Capital District, but unfortunately none of them was related to this particular John. There was better luck with the obituary file, which had an obituary for John's father, still living on James Street. He had died in 1966 and was survived by his son James of Vestal, NY, among others. A current phone number and address was found on the Internet

for a James Hemstreet in Vestal, NY. This person turned out to be John's 89 year old brother. There was a pleasant conversation with James and his daughter Mary which resulted in their expressing a desire to be contacted by Mr. Hengens. John D'Anieri has since heard from both Louis Hengens and James Hemstreet's daughter Mary both of whom expressed elation over finding information all considered lost after so long an interval.



A follow-up interview with Mary Hemstreet revealed a few more details about her late uncle and her father. John Hemstreet was originally christened Jack and is known by that name to this day in the family. His family belonged to the Scotia Methodist Church. He had red hair, blue eyes, and a mischievous but very likeable personality. He was always bringing home stray animals to care for. As a youngster he belonged to a Cub Scout troop in Scotia, said to be the first such troop in the United States. While at Scotia High School a teacher told him that his name



Louis Hengens at John Hemstreet's gravesite in Holland.

Jack was "not a Christian name" and he would get nowhere in this world unless he changed it to John, so he did. While in Great Britain training for the Normandy invasion he met and became engaged to a Scottish girl who was then serving with the British armed forces.

John's older brother James earned an engineering degree and served during the war in Europe as a Captain in the Army Corps of Engineers. He worked as an engineer at the Schenectady General Electric plant after the war where he stayed until his transfer to the GE plant in Johnson City in 1966. He remained there until he retired. James had visited his brother's grave in Europe shortly after the war, but about 10 or 15 years later the family was told that the grave would be relocated and they would be told of the new location after he was re-interred. The family never heard from the government again. Not knowing where his brother was buried left a wound in his heart which has festered all these years. Mary says that her father was overwhelmed with a deep sense of joy and peace upon learning where his brother was buried and that his remains were being so lovingly cared for. "It was as though he had a piece of his heart put back."

The staff at the Society is very proud of the role played by Grems-Doolittle volunteer John D'Anieri in facilitating such a wonderful labor of love from across the ocean. Not only did John Hemstreet give his life for his own country, but before he died he helped liberate the land of his forebears. What a noble heritage to pass on to future generations!