



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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BASEBALL IN SCHENECTADY

by Frank Keetz

"Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball."

—Jacques Barzun

Between 1895 and 1957 Schenectady was home to three professional baseball teams and it was truly a time for "Take Me Out To The Ball Game." It was also a time of explosive local population growth, a harsh economic depression, and two horrific World Wars. In 1895 and again from 1899 to 1904 there was a local team, the **Dorps**, designated a Class "B" team in the New York State League. In 1946, there were the **Schenectady Blue Jays** which stayed until 1957. The team was a farm team for the Philadelphia Phillies. Between 1904 and 1946 there was also a talented professional Negro team, the **Mohawk Colored Giants of Schenectady**.

Baseball was a popular local sport from 1895 to 1957. It was truly the "national pastime." There was no NBA. The NFL was a fledgling operation. Baseball stars were national idols with names such as Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Lefty Grove, Grover Alexander, Dizzy Dean, Joe Di Maggio, Lou Gehrig, Bob Feller, and Hank Greenberg.

The players on these local teams were sturdy, mostly young, "imported" players, i.e. non-residents. They came from Kansas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Florida. The ones from New York mostly came from the Bronx, Buffalo, and Syracuse. They were paid,

full-time players, which meant playing seven days or nights a week. It was a summer life of long bus rides, mid-sized towns, woolen uniforms, crowded sweaty locker rooms, small hotel rooms, nagging injuries, fan adulation, camaraderie, constant pressure, modest paychecks, and disappointments - but always there were dreams. The dream of the players, whether white or black, was to reach the major leagues. A few (about 5%) did.

(continued on pages 4 and 5)

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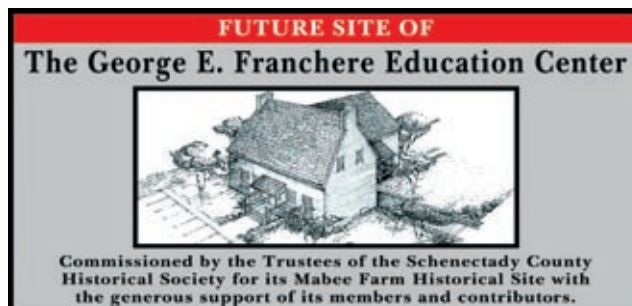
MUSEUM
& LIBRARY
MONDAY-FRIDAY 9-5
SATURDAY 10-2

MABEE FARM
OPEN

MAY 9 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 26
TUES-SAT 10AM-4PM

Letter from the President

So it has begun. The sign is in place at the Mabee Farm close to Main Street. A few spadefuls of earth were turned to plant the seed of an idea. (See page 8.) A machine will come to dig a big hole. The seed will be nourished with loving care and pecuniary attention, and out of the hole will arise the George E. Franchere



Educational Center. Under its future paved parking area, another 18 holes will be drilled, each about 133 yards deep, not long. (We're not talking golf here.) The pipes in the holes will be filled with water, spiked with a little glycol to keep their uppermost cubic feet from freezing in the winter, capped off, connected with energy efficient equipment in the building to form a geothermal system, and paved over with something better than asphalt to accommodate cars and school buses. And that system will keep us warm in winter and cool in summer.

On the roof will be slate, and the rains will come to help us keep it clean. And the portion of the roof that faces south will be covered with photovoltaic cells that caress sunlight and turn it into electricity to light the Center, drive its computers, power its audio-visual equipment, and elevate its elevator. And on a sunny future day when the law allows, the electric meters will run backward as current is fed back to National Grid.

On the main floor will be a gift shop. On the floor below will be a large lecture room. So after just one more winter of discontent when the Farm lays fallow, children will sit in a large circle surrounding a historian and learn how American and Native-American children of the 18th century did without cell phones, iPods, laptops, X-boxes, and instant messaging in an era when "text" was a noun and not a verb. And the Keepers of the Circle will look upon them and see that this is good.

Ed

At a book signing at the Open Door Bookstore in Schenectady on July 17, Trustees Frank Taormina and Ed Reilly co-signed 30 copies of the new Arcadia book *Niskayuna*. The book is also available at the usual member's discount in our own gift shops, and can be ordered from the Society's online gift shop at schist.org. The Society had previously published the Arcadia books *Rotterdam* and *Glenville*, and others have published *Duanesburg / Princetown*, and *Schenectady*. Bill Buell's *Historic Schenectady County* will be published in late September.



photo by Ron Ratchford

MUSEUM – lectures and exhibits

Educational Programming – Professional research

has shown that seven years old is the ideal age to reach out to children for generating a life - long interest in what museums have to offer to challenge intellectual



curiosity. It is less a matter of hands-on experience as it is the actual artifacts that intrigue a child's imagination. It could be a dollhouse, a model train, an eighteenth century weapon, a weird piece of nineteenth century pottery. All these items can grab a child's attention and create a lifelong memory. These are the aids that help an interested child become a museum advocate as an adult. School field trips appear to be incredibly important not only to learning in the short-term, but also for the long-term sustainability of museums and to create a strong pipeline of museum professionals.

The Museum offers theme-based educational programs for children at many age levels who are in schools or at camps, who are home-schooled, or children on vacation. Please give us a call to schedule an opportunity for your children or grandchildren to explore local history, or to schedule a group program. Help ensure that Schenectady's history is preserved for the next generation!

Exhibit on gravestones: This will open in October and is based on three gravestones found in the museum's collection. Emphasized will be examples of gravestone art, meaning of motifs, and the significance of stone shapes and styles. Gravestones are worth preserving for what they can reveal in genealogy as well as the culture that gave rise to them.

Ode to our volunteers

Volunteers are indispensable to the Schenectady County Historical Society. For the past three years, at least three mornings each week, the volunteers in the museum have worked to photograph, inventory, and re-house nearly all of the artifacts at the Society. They have researched unknown artifacts and resolved questions on objects' ID numbers. Beginning with our textile collection, they have begun the process of documenting artifacts "found in the collection."

Their efforts have greatly improved the condition of our collections and have added immeasurably to our knowledge of them.

We now have over 400 pages of inventory sheets documenting more than 3,000 artifacts. Many of these now documented artifacts did not have a history or a "story" to go with them until the volunteers began their work. Sometimes it was easy to locate a gift receipt or catalogue entry but more often than not it was a treasure hunt for a needle in a haystack, or a wild goose chase! We are indeed grateful to these loyal volunteers and we now say a special, "Thank you!" to Mona Graves, Ann-Marie Rutkowski, Phillip Falconer, Allan Shartrand, and, David Waytho.

Gary Van Slyke – History in Song – Traditional, Original and Period Music of the Mohawk Valley performed on guitar, banjo, harmonica, pennywhistle, and mandolin.

Saturday – October 10 1:30p.m. Refreshments 2:00 p.m. Program



Gary Van Slyke combines his love of local history with his musical talents to create a program filled with songs and stories heard around the county in earlier centuries. He sets each piece he plays in historical context and takes the audience on a musical journey through time as he tells stories of early days in the Mohawk Valley through song and storytelling.

Stockade Walkabout

Take this rare chance to see inside the beautiful and historic homes in Schenectady's one-of-a-kind Stockade District! See enclosed brochure for more information.

Prices: Until September 15th \$15.00,
September 16th-25th-\$20.00, 26th-\$25.00
Date: Saturday, September 26, 2009
Time: 10:00am - 4:00pm
Location: Schenectady's Historic Stockade District
Street: 32 Washington Ave.
City/Town: Schenectady, NY
Phone: 518 374-0263
Email: office@schist.org

(continued from pages 1)

The Baseball Hall of Fame includes two African-American players who briefly wore a Schenectady uniform for the ***Mohawk Colored Giants***: Oscar Charleston, a first baseman, and Smokey Joe Williams, a pitcher. Both played at some point for the Homestead Grays and would play elsewhere on occasion. There was also one white player: ***Schenectady Blue Jays*** pitcher Tommy Lasorda. In 1948 Lasorda played an entire season as a left-handed pitcher for the ***Schenectady Blue Jays***. The Phillies chose not to keep him when the season ended. The Brooklyn Dodgers grabbed him and he is still with the Dodgers organization 60 years later.

Both the ***Schenectady Blue Jays*** and the ***Mohawk Colored Giants*** have an interesting history. For the ***Schenectady Blue Jays*** it was the ownership by the McNeary brothers, Jim and Pete, local beer distributors and entrepreneurs. In



McNearney Stadium, circa 1947.

1946, they acquired a National League franchise for Schenectady in the renewed Class “C” Canadian-American League. The brothers were serious in this venture. Using their own money, they built an attractive stadium, called the McNearney Stadium seating 4,500 in the Woodlawn area of the city. The team was received with wild enthusiasm and the team responded by winning both the regular season and the playoffs in 1947 with record attendance. The McNearney brothers had a dispute after the 1947 season. Jim stayed with the beer business; Pete took over ownership of the baseball team, took the family name off the stadium, and re-named it the Schenectady Stadium. In 1950 the franchise was upgraded to Class “A” and became part of the Eastern League.

To understand the history of the ***Mohawk Colored Giants*** there are four names to remember: Bill Wernecke, George “Chappie” Johnson, William “Buck” Ewing, and Henry (Hank) Bozzi.

Separation of Negroes and whites prevailed in the workplace and in sports. The original ***Mohawk Giants***

had a sudden brilliant appearance in 1913 only to disappear in 1915 after playing only three games that final year. That first local Negro team was launched by Bill Wernecke, a husky GE factory worker who quit playing for the ***GE Refrigerators*** team. Somehow he got the playing rights to Island Park, the city’s best baseball park which was literally located in the Mohawk River – access was by a rickety bridge. Today it is the parking lot for the Schenectady County Community College. Wernecke decided to bring in outside professional colored players through an “overground railroad” from the New York City metropolitan area and even Chicago. Wernecke was known as an optimist and a risk taker. His best player was Frank Wickware, then 25, and a fabulous talent - one of the greatest early black hurlers - despite his fondness for alcohol, a trait shared by many white and black players. Wernecke was a great promoter but it was still a huge gamble to bring a resident Negro baseball team to Schenectady. In 1915, the team fell apart for a variety of complicated reasons. For the next 12 seasons there was no high caliber Negro team in the city.



William “Buck” Ewing - photo courtesy of The Gazette.

However, a young man named Henry Bozzi was gaining baseball management experience and nourishing contacts not only locally but in a gradually expanding area beyond Schenectady. From 1920 – 1923 Bozzi was the booking agent and general business manager for the Knights of Columbus, a semi-pro baseball team, known locally as the Caseys (KCs). The team invested heavily in the renovation of Island Park by building a new grandstand and bleachers and it was renamed Columbus Park. Access was provided by a pontoon bridge. During this time period several games were played against the touring ***Chappie Johnson’s Colored All Stars*** of Philadelphia. Numerous problems caused the collapse of the ***Knights of Columbus*** in late August of 1923.

Bozzi became involved in Negro baseball as a co-owner with Chappie Johnson of the **Chappie Johnson's Colored All Stars** which dominated baseball in the region for the next three years. Chappie was both field manager and part owner of the team. Hank Bozzi was the other owner as well as the booking manager. The main attraction of Chappie's team, apart from Chappie himself, was a young catcher from Ohio named William "Buck"



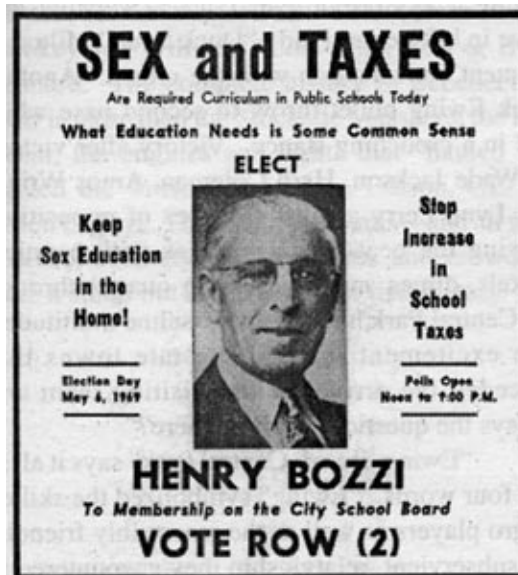
January 1982,
Henry (Hank) Bozzi, barber,
photo courtesy of *The Gazette*.

Ewing who had been playing since 1920. Chappie Johnson had been playing since the 1890s. Under Johnson, Ewing became a fine defensive catcher and emerged in 1924 as a slugging power hitter. In 1927 Chappie Johnson left the area, the team remnants became part of a team named **Buck Ewing's Colored Stars** with Buck Ewing as the field manager, and Hank Bozzi became the owner. The games were played on what is now known as the "A" diamond

in Central Park with no fence surrounding the field. Thousands came to most games on hot summer afternoons and evenings. Team owner Hank Bozzi had a free admission policy. Times were tough and money was scarce. Cigar boxes were passed through the crowds. Contributions were voluntary. There would be pennies, nickels, dimes, and occasional quarter—often nothing. These overwhelmingly white spectators were rooting for the home team, the all-Negro home team.

The team played area black teams as well as white teams. Many of the games were played "on the road." In 1929 Buck Ewing accepted an offer to play for the **Homestead Grays** located near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and soon became their regular catcher. Bozzi had an established team but without a star player named Ewing. Bozzi re-named the team the **Mohawk Colored Giants**, a formidable and unaffiliated minor league Negro team whose players were a mix of young players "on the way up" and older players "on the way down" from the Negro major leagues. Buck Ewing returned to Schenectady in 1932 to provide the city with a major league talent in a minor league setting for another 20 years. For 13

years the **Mohawk Colored Giants** played well over a thousand games, winning 75 percent of the day or night contests. Bozzi kept the team functioning year after year during the Depression years of the 1930s. He was its moving force. He did the scheduling, the promoting, the advertising and paid the bills. He would advance money to his players and find jobs for them during the winter months. In 1941 the **Mohawk Colored Giants** became a losing semi-pro team for many reasons. Bozzi severed all relations with the **Mohawk Colored Giants** on May 18, 1942.



1983, ad appeared in *The Gazette*.

Buck Ewing stayed on as a resident in Schenectady for the rest of his life and mentored many a young local baseball player. He died in 1979. On May 16, 1983 the City of Schenectady honored Ewing by naming the main baseball diamond in Central Park "Buck Ewing Field." Frank Wickware died at a young age in Schenectady and is buried in Vale Cemetery. Bozzi remained active in civic affairs. He was even re-elected to the Schenectady City School Board in 1981 at the age of 91 running on a platform of "No New Taxes and No Sex Education". Bozzi died in 1984 but not before, earlier that year, Mayor Karen B. Johnson had conferred on him the city's highest honor, designation as a Patroon for his civic participation.

By 1958 there was no longer a professional team in Schenectady. This was not an isolated incident. Nationwide, more than 300 teams disappeared between 1948 and 1958 as did 34 complete leagues. Both the **Schenectady Blue Jays** and the **Mohawk Colored Giants** were among the teams that disappeared. The economics of the times were largely responsible, as well as television competition for audience interest.

Library News

New books

- * *Civil War Memoir of William T. Levey*, Howard, 2009
- * *Explorers, Fortunes & Love Letters, a window on New Netherland*, Shattuck, 2009
- * *George Westinghouse, Gentle Genius*, Skrabec, 2007, gift of Betty Pieper
- * *Ghosts Along the Erie*, Johnston, 1995
- * *Place Names in New York*, Gazda, 1997

Donated Historic Documents:

- * Caswell Postcard Collection, Albert Caswell
- * Coggeshall Family Letters from Japan, 1910 – 1914, Martha C. Leonard
- * Male Family Collection, Judith M. Henery
- * Professional Baseball in Schenectady – The Frank M. Keetz Collection, donated by Mr. Keetz
- * Schenectady photos by Harold Woodworth, Shirley Crane
- * Schenectady School District Centennial Files - 1954, Neil Yetwin
- * Schenectady County books, brochures, maps, memorabilia, and booklets - Robert Royer, Stephanie Albers, Warren O'Neil, and Gail Denisoff
- * Wolfgang Riemer Papers - on the New York State Constitutional Convention -1967, Elliess Riemer

MABEE FARM TO BE PART OF THE WESTERN FRONTIER

SYMPOSIUM

The Mabee Farm is pleased to announce its participation in the 2-day Western Frontier Symposium which will begin at Fulton Montgomery Community College on Saturday, October 17, 2009 when the topic will be "Early Transportation in the Mohawk Valley."

On Sunday, October 18, the venue will move to the Mabee Farm's Dutch Barn for a discussion on Colonial Bateaux by Dave Manley, who is a Mabee Farm volunteer, bateaux enthusiast, and belongs to the 2nd Regiment of the Albany County Militia Re-enactment group. For more information, call (518) 887-5073.

In Memoriam

The Society gratefully acknowledges a renewal of membership at increased level from Bruce Anderson in memory of his wife, Susan Berical Anderson, who died of cancer on May 23, 2009. Mrs. Anderson had spent many years researching the history of the Westfall family and donated the fruits of her labor to the Grems-Doolittle Library several years ago.

Schenectady East Rotary Presents

 **Patriots Day** 
Sunday, Sept 6th
Antique/Classic Car Show
10 am - 3:30 pm (Rain Date Sept 7)

Music, food, fun, vendors, 50/50 raffle
Classics, antiques, hotrods, muscle cars, trucks & motorcycles
Judging - 1 pm for pre -1988 only
Fun for the whole family!

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

History Fair

Sat, Sept 12th from 10 am—4 pm
Dutch Legacy in New York

Speakers include:
Robert Trent: former Curator of furniture at Winterthur, Consultant for Chipstone Foundation, Sotheby's and Christie's, will speak on Dutch furniture.
John Stevens: Author of Vernacular Architecture in North America, Architectural Historian for Old Bethpage Village - will speak on Dutch Vernacular Architecture in the New World.
William McMillan: Supervisor of Restoration for the 300 year old Historic Richmond Town for 40 years, trades teacher at Eastfield Village & Colonial Williamsburg will do an architectural tour of the Mabee Farm buildings.
.....and more!!!!

TREASURES IN YOUR ATTIC
Bring your treasures to the farm & have them identified by experts!
(\$5.00 donation per item—goes to Mabee Farm)

 **MABEE FARM** 
Route 5s
Rotterdam Junction
Explore NY400.com

Farm & Foliage Day

Free Admission

Sat, October 17th
11 am - 4 pm

Scarecrow making
Pumpkin painting
Hamster ball
Hay rides
"Badger" the sheep
Produce for sale
Pies for sale
Donuts & cider for sale
Fun for the family!

 **Bluegrass music by the Riverview Ramblers**

HISTORIC BOAT TOURS on the Wofford
(518) 887-5073 for reservations: \$12 - 15 pp
Brought to you by the County of Schenectady

Mabee Farm Historic Site
Route 5S, Rotterdam Jct. (518) 887-5073

A busy summer at the farm... Canalfest



Photos: Jim Eignor, Pat Barrot, Ruth Bergeron



George E. Franchere Education Center groundbreaking



Schenectady County Historical Society

Groundbreaking for George E. Franchere Educational Center

at the Mabee Farm Historic Site, August 12, 2009



Photo: Jim Eigner

L-R: Gary Mabee (Mabee descendant and Mabee Farm Committee member), Judy Dagostino (County Legislator - Rotterdam and Vice Chair, Schenectady County Legislature), Tim Mabee (Adirondack Trust and Mabee descendant), Kim Mabee (Former SCHS President and Mabee Farm Committee member), U.S. Congressman Paul Tonko, Ed Reilly (President, SCHS), Steve Tommasone (Rotterdam Town Supervisor), Angelo Santabarbara (County Legislator - Rotterdam), Patricia Barrot (Mabee Farm Site Manager), Mary Kuykendall Weber (Mabee Farm Committee member), Mike Mansion,(representing State Senator Hugh T. Farley).



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