



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

Volume 51 Number 9-10

Sept - Oct 2008

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

JAMES DUANE – an unsung hero

By Ruth E. Bergeron, based on research and a presentation given by Francis R. Taormina to the Duanesburg Historical Society in 2008



Duane Lake

James was the son of Anthony Duane (1679-1747), an Irish immigrant from County Galway who joined the Royal Navy. He first came to New York as a ship's purser in the British navy in 1698 where he met Eva Benson, the daughter of local merchant Dirck Benson. In 1702 Anthony Duane left the navy to settle in New York City, pursue a mercantile career, and marry Eva. There were two sons by this marriage: Anthony (1720-43) and Richard (1721-41). Eva died in 1729 at age 36, 12 years after marriage. About one year later, Anthony remarried, this time to Aeltje (Althea) Ketteltas who bore him five more sons. James was the third son of this marriage, born February 6, 1733. Sadly, Althea Ketteltas Duane died in 1736 when James had just turned 3 years old. His father Anthony married a third time, this time to a widow named Grietje (Margaret) Riker (1685-1775). The new stepmother had no children of her own but she was greatly loved by the Duane sons. Anthony Duane died in 1747 when James was 14 years old. James was especially

fond of her and watched over her after Anthony's death. Anthony's early business associates were William Johnson and Robert Livingston. A claim that James Duane was "adopted" into the family of Robert Livingston, the Third Lord of Livingston Manor (1708 – 1790), seems historically dubious. There is ample historical evidence that the two families were well acquainted.

James Duane studied (clerked) to become a lawyer and was admitted to practice in 1754 at age 22. Five years later he married Robert Livingston's eldest daughter, Mary (Polly) Livingston on October 21st, 1759. Lake Maria and Mariaville in the Town of Duanesburg are reminders of this marriage.

As was so common with many women in the 18th century, Mary Livingston Duane gave birth to many children – ten in all – but had to endure the painful tragedy of losing five of them either to miscarriage or death as infants. The five surviving children were: **Maria** (Mary) (1761-1813) who became the wife of William North; **James Chatham** (1770-1842) who became a lawyer and had a home on Union Street in Schenectady; **Sarah** (1775-1827) who became the wife of George W. Featherstonehaugh; **Catherine** (1779-1852) who did not marry; and **Adelia** (1782-18??).



Christ Episcopal Church

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SATURDAY 10-2

MABEE FARM

OPEN MAY 1ST

FOR THE SEASON

Letter from the President

Across the River and into the Trees

-with apologies to Ernest Hemingway



In life, as in chess, an organization sometimes needs to make a defensive move before it can continue to advance its strategic plan. The river above is, of course, the Mohawk, and the trees on the far side are the great great grandchildren of those that graced the shoreline hundreds of years ago. Just as there are watersheds, there are viewsheds, and preserving this one to the north of our Mabee Farm in Rotterdam Junction is important to the Society. As we stroll the grounds of the Farm, it is imperative that we feel that we have traveled three hundred years back in time, to 1708, when the Farm was already a going concern and the view across the river was virtually identical, tree for tree, leaf for leaf, ripple for ripple on the soothing water.

But for two years, and up to a few weeks ago, this viewshed was threatened by the onrush of modernity. A proposal for a large 60-acre condominium project was before the Glenville Planning Board, which told the developer to come back when he gained control of all the land he planned to build on, including the nine acres depicted owned by the NY State Canal Corporation. The developer then persuaded the Corporation to advertise the acreage for sale via sealed-bid auction. Short story: Bidding was held, the Society was the only bidder, and we now await closure.

The cost was high and will impact fund-raising for the George E. Franchere Education Center. But George, were he still with us, would be pleased. He was a Civil War buff who knew that Hemingway's title, borrowed for this piece, was a slight paraphrase of Stonewall Jackson's last words. A few moments before he died, he cried out in his delirium: "Pass the infantry to the front rapidly! Tell Major Hawks—" Then he stopped, sentence unfinished. Presently a smile of ineffable sweetness spread over his pale face, and he said quietly, and with an expression of relief: "Let us cross over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees."

And now, so may we.

-Ed

SCHS – exhibits and programs

Exhibit – Heritage Home in Schenectady

The exhibit opens on **Sunday September 7 with a reception from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm in the Vrooman Room and will continue until Friday November 7th**, during the usual Monday to Saturday hours. The Heritage Home exhibit celebrates both the 140th anniversary of the founding of the Home and the transfer in 2009 to the Historical Society of a unique collection of historical materials documenting women's history in Schenectady. The Heritage Home for Women is a Schenectady residence for elderly women now located on Union Street with a long history in the City of Schenectady. The exhibit is based on archival records dating back to the Civil War era in Schenectady. This collection of

photographs, newspaper accounts, trustee minutes and artifacts tells a unique story of the founding of Schenectady's oldest, continuously operated, residential home for qualifying elderly women.

The Erie Canal: From Here to There – lecture by Craig Williams

Saturday – October 11

1:30 p.m. Refreshments 2:00 p.m. Program

The Historical Society will celebrate Archives Month with a talk by Craig Williams, a history curator at the New York State Museum since 1983. He also manages its collection of photography and political history, and will present an overview of the history of the Erie Canal using individual recollections from published accounts and oral history recordings.

LIBRARY NEWS

New materials in the library:

Records of the Freedom Forum of Schenectady, NY, donated by Richard Sills;

The Bickelmann Family Papers and records of the Bickelmann Jewelry Store, gift of Janet Oertling;

Grand-Daddy's Drawings and True Stories for Boys, by Edgar Knowlton, gift of Ted Alderson;

Jean Latourrette and Pierre Peiret: Huguenot Refugees, their roots in Osse, Bearn, by John E. LaTourette, gift of the author;

DeGraff Genealogy by Peter DeGraff Cross, gift of the author

Schenectady memorabilia from Robert J. Coan:

- 1.) The Mohawk Club 1885-1907 (a red covered membership booklet);
- 2.) Mohawk Golf Club: Three-quarters of a century by W. R. King 2nd ed. 1987;
- 3.) Framed aerial view photo of GE Schenectady;
- 4.) Dr. Ernst F. V. Alexanderson's letter of decoration and certificate of Royal Order of the North Star March 5, 1948.

The Captain Richard Duncan Estate Inventory, 1819

The Duncan Estate Inventory is an original Schenectady document from 1819 which the library purchased to add to our large holdings of historic documents. Probate records, such as estate inventories, are examples of primary source materials often used by historians to gain insight to an earlier time. We can learn a great deal about the life of Captain Richard Duncan from his estate inventory, not the least of which was that he was a wealthy man and owned slaves. Richard Duncan's property

at the time of his death in February of 1819 included household furnishings, carriages, and two people, "negro boys," Bill, 16 years old, and Jerry, 15 years old. The notion that these boys were in some sense wards of the Duncan family is impossible to maintain when we read in the inventory that the boys were given a monetary value of \$60, the same amount appraised for a pair of horses.

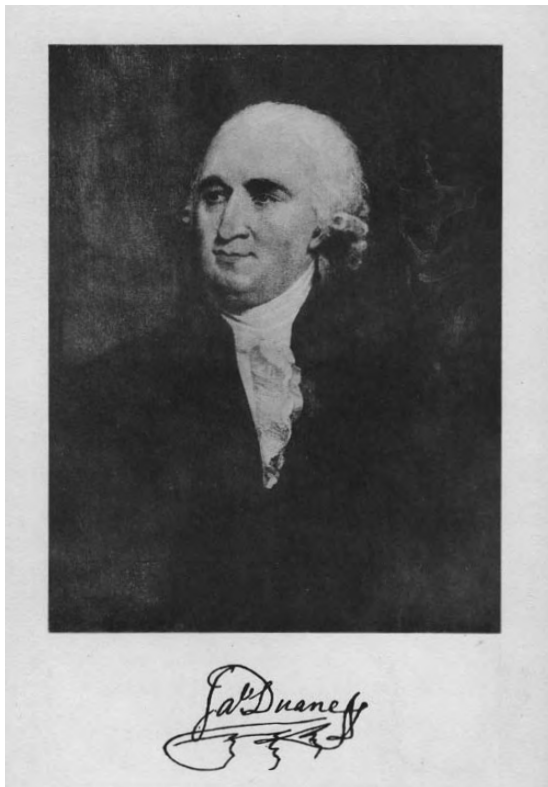
There is additional information about the Duncan family in the books and documents stored in the Gremis-Doolittle Library. We know that John Duncan was originally from Scotland. In 1791 Richard Duncan inherited property from his father, John Duncan, a Schenectady merchant and partner in the late 18th century firm of Duncan and Phyn. It was John Duncan who had built the farm and house called "The Hermitage" on property in Niskayuna.

We know that John Duncan corresponded with Sir William Johnson and was present at his funeral in 1774. According to Schenectady historian, Jonathan Pearson, Richard Duncan was a captain in the British army under Sir John Johnson. Many Loyalists left this area during the Revolutionary War to live in Canada, among them, Sir John Johnson, but John Duncan and Richard Duncan, who were loyalists as well, managed to remain in Schenectady during and after the Revolution. The Richard Duncan estate inventory of 1819 is a long list of household goods and farm equipment that were a part of the large Niskayuna estate called Heritage Farm built and maintained by John Duncan and later by his son Richard Duncan. The Duncan family home on the Hermitage farmland was designed by Samuel Fuller, an officer under John Duncan.

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continued from the cover story

Much of his legal business had to do with the settlement of land claims. Apparently in 18th century New York there were many disputes about land ownership and the location of boundaries when conflicting land claims were filed. He spent 20 years working in his chosen profession, from 1754 to 1774, living with his family in New York City on an estate now known as Grammercy Park, and spending a good bit of his time as well at Livingston Manor, his wife's home. It was during this period that he continued to add to the 6,000 acre piece of land "upstate" that he inherited from his father. By 1765 he had acquired enough land to arrange for the creation of what he named the "Town of Duanesburg."

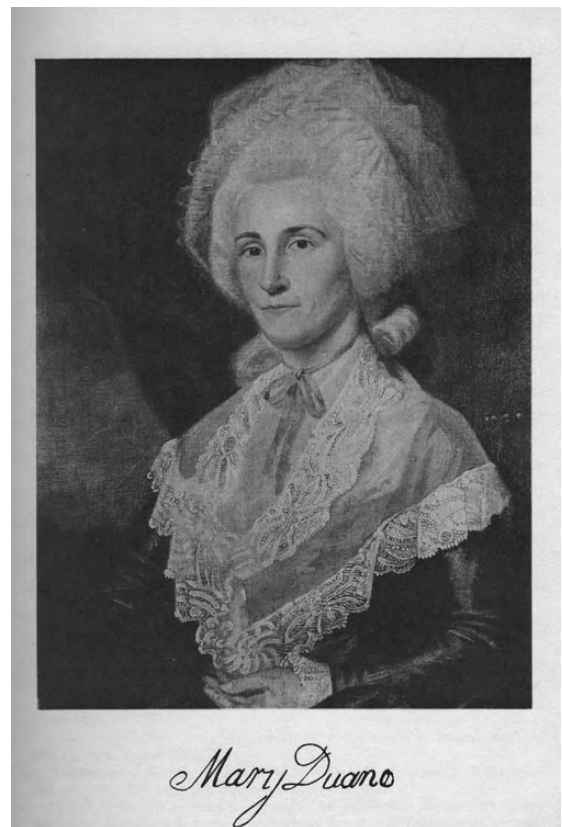


In 1774 this busy lawyer and land speculator was elected by his fellow citizens of New York to attend a meeting in Philadelphia of representatives from all the British colonies in North America except Canada, to try and reach an accommodation with the British King and Parliament over several issues that the colonists felt the British government had dealt with unjustly. Trade embargoes and taxation without representation had become vexing matters. As it turned out, James Duane spent the next ten years of his life as a member of that group of colonists (the First and Second Continental Congress) struggling to create a new government. He served in that capacity longer than any other New Yorker, spending much of his time trying to solve the financial problems faced by the

Congress as it tried to wage the war that became known as the American Revolution.

During this same period he also played an important role in the formation of the state government of New York. He won the admiration and respect of many people including George Washington with whom he apparently developed a warm personal relationship. In 1783 when the war had ended, Duane moved back to New York City with his wife and family. One can only imagine what the City was like having been occupied by the British from the summer of 1776 until November of 1783. James Duane, Governor George Clinton, and George Washington took part in the parade which was held when the British forces finally boarded their ships and left.

Governor George Clinton, at the urging of many prominent New Yorkers, appointed Duane as the first Mayor of New York City. He served from 1784 to 1789. As Mayor he played an important part in helping to restore the city and helped with the restoration of Trinity Church (Episcopal). He was active in the revival of "Kings College" focusing on the role of the college in education generally in New York State, but also in changing its name to "Columbia College." He even persuaded the Governor's nephew, a young man named DeWitt Clinton, to attend Columbia rather than go to Princeton!



Almost his last act as Mayor was to preside over a party held in May of 1789 celebrating the inauguration of George Washington as the first president under the United States Constitution. In the absence of Mrs. Washington who remained at Mount Vernon, festivities were begun when President Washington had the first dance with “Mayoress” Mary Livingston Duane.

At the time of his death in 1790, Robert Livingston, the Third Lord of the Manor, divided his estate among four heirs (the Livingston estate included large portions of



Road sign in Duanesburg for Christ Episcopal Church

what are now known as Dutchess and Columbia counties.) James Duane was one of those four heirs. The four were all men who had distinguished themselves during and after the American Revolution and two of them were his sons: *Philip Livingston*, a delegate to the Continental Congress and signatory of the Declaration of Independence; *William Livingston*, Governor of New Jersey and signatory of the United States Constitution; *William Alexander*, a major general in the Continental Army; and *James Duane*, delegate to the Continental Congress and the first Mayor of New York City

On September 30th, 1789 James Duane received a note from President George Washington in which he was informed that he had been appointed the first Federal District Court Judge from New York. The note ended with this sentence: “I have endeavored to bring into the high offices of its administration such characters as will give stability and dignity to our national government.”

James Duane was a staunch Episcopalian and decided to build a church in his Town of Duanesburg. He hired Jeremiah Purdy who set about building a chapel worthy of his patron. Construction began in 1791 and was completed in 1793 at a personal cost to James Duane of £ 800. There was (and still is) a Duane family pew at the

front of the church with a curtain to keep out prying eyes when the good judge knelt in worship. Trinity Church in New York City made a gift of 100 prayer books and a contribution of £300 toward a parsonage.

James Duane retired from his role as a Federal judge in 1794 and was living in Schenectady at the corner of what is now the southeast corner of Union Street and Washington Avenue while awaiting the completion of a new home in Duanesburg.

Sadly, the new home was never completed. He was stricken by a heart attack and died at his residence in Schenectady on February 1, 1797, five days short of his 64th birthday. He is buried in the crypt beneath Christ Church.

There was certainly no doubt about the importance of the role he played at the local, state, and national level by the people who knew him and they would have



Interior of Christ Episcopal Church – burial crypts in right rear.

placed his name alongside those other New Yorkers as renowned as Philip Schuyler, Alexander Hamilton, George Clinton, and Gouverneur Morris.

NOTE: A principal source of information on James Duane is “A Revolutionary Conservative, James Duane of New York” by Edward P. Alexander, Columbia University Press, 1938.

Photos: Ann Aronson

continued from page 3

This house burned in 1793. The Duncan farm eventually became the property of Charles Stanford and is now the site of the former Ingersoll Home at the corner of State Street and Balltown Road.

Sources for this article on the Duncan family are the Duncan family file in the Society library, Monroe's book "Schenectady Ancient and Modern," and the Jonathan Pearson Collection of historic Schenectady documents. We are grateful to Frank Taormina for sharing his research on the Duncan family.

MABEE FARM FUNDRAISER

To benefit the George Franchere Education Center



DINNER – MUSIC – CRUISE on the WOFFORD

Save this important date: **Friday, September 12th**

Sign up early – these tickets will go fast!

\$50.00 per person

Dinner and music begins at 5:30 pm.

Cruise begins at 6:30p.m.

Dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m. in the 1760 New

World Dutch Barn. While dining you will be serenaded by the Riverview Ramblers, well known for their performance of bluegrass/Americana music. After dinner, relax and enjoy a summer evening's cruise on the Wofford.

CANALFEST 2008

Canalfest on July 12 and 13 was a tremendous success! We exceeded the number of attendees from last year's event to a whopping 3,300 visitors! Among the many talented performers were Jay Ungar and Molly Mason, Roy Hurd, Little Toby Walker, and the Brooklyn based group Yarn, whose lead singer, Blake Christiana, grew

up in Schenectady. The mixture of boat tours, music, workshops, hayrides, artisans and great food offered something for everyone. THANK YOU to all our volunteers. We couldn't have done it without all your help

ROTTERDAM SQUARE MALL DISPLAY

Look for the Schenectady County Historical Society and the Mabee Farm displays near the food court at Rotterdam Square Mall. Members of the Mall's administration were enthusiastic and very helpful in helping us to mount this display.

Schenectady East Rotary Presents

 **Patriots Day** 
Sunday, Sept 7th
Antique/Classic Car Show
10 am—3:30 pm

To benefit **Mabee Farm & Jack Falvo III Foundation**

Music, food, fun, vendors, 50/50 raffle

Vote for your favorite! Classics, antiques, hotrods, muscle cars, trucks & motorcycles

Judging - 1 pm for pre -1988 only
Trophies presented at 3 pm

 **Northeast Country Music Association**
Open mic from 1 - 5 pm

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

Farm & Foliage Day

Free Admission **Sat, October 18th**

11 am - 4 pm
Scarecrow making
Pumpkin painting
Hay rides
"Badger" the sheep
Produce for sale
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Great fun for the family!



 **Bluegrass music by the Riverview Ramblers**

HISTORIC BOAT TOURS on the Wofford
Call (518) 887-5073 for reservations: \$10.00 pp

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Ethyl – Mabee Farm mascot



Roy Hurd performs at CanalFest

History
Fair
Sunday
Sept 14th
10 am - 4 pm



Historians, Museums, Historical Sites, Historical Societies, Historical Authors come together to share their stories & experiences with the public & each other!

Speakers include:

- ◀ **Janny Venema** - "Beverwijck: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier"
(Assistant to Charles Gehring, NYS Translator-Historic Dutch Documents)
- ◀ **Tyrone Keels** - African American Genealogy *(National Archives Technician)*
- ◀ **Andy Morris** - The Erie Canal *(Assistant History Professor at Union College)*
- ◀ **Mark Brogna** - Historic Albany Foundation's Architectural Warehouse
(Manager of Architectural Warehouse)
- ◀ **Dave Cornelius** - Native American Genealogy
(Native American Interpreter)

BOAT TOURS
11 am, 12:30 & 2 pm
\$10.00 pp

MABEE FARM HISTORIC SITE
Route 5S, Rotterdam Junction

(518) 887-5073
www.mabeefarm.org

Canalfest at the Schenectady County Historical Society's Mabee Farm



Photos clockwise from top:

Molly Mason & Jay Ungar perform at Canalfest;

YARN - Folk/country/bluegrass band. L-R Blake Christiana, Jay Frederick, Rick Bugel, Andrew Hendryx, Trevor MacArthur, front – Mabee Farm interns: Courtney Weller, Emily Wroczynski.

Kevin Furst softening a hide

Photos: Pat Barrot



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