



Schenectady County  
Historical  
Society

# Newsletter

Volume 53 Number 9-10

September - October 2010

32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, New York 12305

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## *An Intriguing Collection of Glass Plate Negatives and an Archivist's Curiosity*

### *138 Front Street Glass Plate Negative Collection, c. 1901-1905*

by Cynthia W. Seacord

**Editor's Note:** Sorting through numerous boxes of glass plate negatives in the collection of the City of Schenectady's Efner History Center, Cynthia Seacord, Society Secretary and Archivist for the Efner, became intrigued by a collection of 4" x 5" glass plate negatives whose images provide intimate glimpses into the lives of a group of young people seemingly in their twenties in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based on various scraps of information written on the negatives, and on the envelopes in which they were enclosed, she concluded that most of these individuals were boarders at 138 Front Street, in the city's Stockade section. This address is in an area where a number of homes welcomed boarders and the people in these images looked as if they might be employees of the rapidly growing General Electric Works a short walking distance away. She labeled the collection *The 138 Front Street Glass Plate Negatives Collection, circa 1901-1905*. The identity of the photographer is unknown. With her curiosity piqued, Ms. Seacord set out to learn more. This is a personal tale of curiosity, persistence, and an archivist's desire to provide provenance for the collection. Her narrative begins on page 4. See SEACORD.



*This is a current picture of #136 Front Street, known as the Glock house, constructed c 1887, and is immediately west of the #138 Front Street house in this story. It is very likely that #136 and #138 were built about the same time and looked very much alike in the years when the glass plate negatives were made. The style is very similar to several other examples on this street and may have been built by the same contractor.* Photo by Rob Petito.

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## HOURS

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

**MABEE FARM**  
Tuesday-Saturday  
10 am - 4 pm

## Letter from the President

Within just a few days, the Society was stunned by the death of a long-serving trustee, **Stephanie Albers**, two life members of great prominence, **Norman Rynders** and **Dorothea Godfrey**, and two long-time members, **Israel Jacobs** and **Richard Sills**, both accomplished engineer-scientists who were my friends and colleagues. Stephanie was a Society volunteer or trustee for 37 years, and president of the Society from 1977 to 1979. Norman, who died in Marlton, NJ, was a Korean War veteran who, for most of his life, lived near his ancestral stomping grounds of Rynex corners near Mariaville Lake. Dorothea Godfrey of Niskayuna died on August 1 at the Ellis Rehabilitation Center. Born in 1921 in Cleveland to the late Clark and Margurite Furman Godfrey, she was raised in Ohio until moving to Schenectady in 1928. Dorothea was the great-granddaughter of the legendary Colonel Robert Furman and Eve VanGuysling. Furman Street, VanGuysling Avenue, and Godfrey Lane are all named for Dorothea's ancestors. Her father, Clark Godfrey, was the developer of Rosendale Estates. The legacy of all these people now adds to the history of the Society itself, and to that of the Schenectady area, dissemination of which is at the heart of our mission.

In that same time frame, we also suffered a loss of a different kind, the fact that our curator, Kathryn "Kate" Weller, has resigned in order to accept the position of Executive Director of the Slate Valley Museum in Granville, NY. While we regret the loss, we are proud that the excellence of her work here has justly earned her such a significant promotion. The message on the cake in the photo, taken at a farewell party on August 4, quickly disappeared, but through the photo, lingers on.



One tidbit of good news before I sign off: Beginning on September 16, the Society's museum and library at 32 Washington Avenue will remain open on Thursday until 8:00 p.m. Volunteer Bill Buell will serve as museum docent and trustee Carol Lewis will oversee the Grems-Doolittle Library. Thursday is shopping night in downtown Schenectady, so please stop by, see the current exhibit, and buy a few good books.

*-Ed*

## In Memoriam

**Stephanie Lewis Albers**, 75, of Galway, NY died on August 3 at Ellis Hospital in Schenectady. Born on July 21, 1935 in Schenectady, Stephanie was a lifelong area resident, a graduate of Scotia High School class of 1953, and Middlebury College, class of 1957. After graduation, she taught at Hamilton Elementary School in Schenectady. In 1978 she began a 32 year career in real estate as an agent and broker. She was a past president of Girl's Incorporated of Schenectady, a trustee and past president of SCHS, the first woman to serve on the Glenville Town Board, and a tireless participant in countless other civic endeavors. She was also co-owner of A/Z Property Management Co. of Schenectady, experience that she put to good use as chair of the Society's Building and Grounds Committee. On behalf of our entire Board, we extend our condolences to her four children, three grandchildren, and her brother H. Richard Lewis. We miss her greatly.

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

**MUSEUM:** The exhibit *Faces of Schenectady: 1715 – 1750* will continue until November 1<sup>st</sup>. A *Faces of Schenectady Seminar* on this exhibit will be held on October 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> sponsored jointly by the Society and the First Reformed Church located at 9 North Church Street. Friday's session at the Society will be an Exhibit Tour with Gallery Lectures from 1:30 PM to 5:00 PM. On Friday evening at the First Reformed Church there will be Evening Fare and Folklore from 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM. On Saturday at the First Reformed Church there will be morning lectures from 9 AM to 12 noon; a Dutch-themed luncheon from 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM and a series of lectures from 2:15 PM – 5 PM. For details and registration information, see [www.schist.org](http://www.schist.org).

**Saturday – October 9** 2 PM Program  
*Around the Kitchen Table: Stories, Folklore and Customs of the lower Mohawk Region* – by Nancy Gifford, Librarian at the Schenectady County Public Library, and Ellen McHale, Director of the New York Folklore Society. Before the Internet, we had books; before books we had storytelling. Ellen McHale will share her knowledge of folklore of the lower Mohawk Region and focus on harvest and fall folk traditions. Many of these customary practices come to us through oral tradition just as a family story teller passes on family lore from one generation to the next. Then storyteller Nancy Gifford will relate two classic and timeless tales from this region.

**Saturday – November 6** 10 AM to 4 PM  
**Genealogy Day**  
There will be four speakers on genealogy topics, a brown bag lunch, and an introduction to genealogy for beginners. The Library will be open for research. Seats can be reserved by calling the Society or sending an e-mail to the Library – [librarian@schist.org](mailto:librarian@schist.org). Speakers will be **Frank Taormina** on city churches and ethnic groups in Schenectady; **Robert Sullivan** on finding digital newspaper archives online; and **Katherine Chansky**, SCHS Librarian, on getting started with genealogy. Admission is \$5 but free for Society members.

*Lecture series at the Schenectady County Community College jointly sponsored by SCCC and the SCHS.*

This series was developed, beginning with those offered in the spring of 2010, by Babette Faehmel, Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences at SCCC, and by Kate Weller, SCHS Curator. Free to the public.

**Wednesday, September 22** 7- 9 PM  
Stockade Building Room 101  
**“1912: George Lunn and the Socialist Takeover of Schenectady,”** by Bill Buell  
George Lunn, a former pastor at the First Reformed Church in the Stockade, became the first and only Socialist Mayor of Schenectady on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1912, a year in which the Socialists enjoyed stunning victories at the local and state level all over the country. Bill Buell, a feature writer for the *Daily Gazette*, holds a degree in History from the University at Albany, and is the author of *Historic Schenectady County: A Bicentennial History*.”

**Friday, October 22** 7- 9 PM  
Stockade Building. Room 101  
**“Heroic Females?: Women Boxers in Eighteenth-Century Britain,”** by Adam Chill  
Dr. Adam Chill is Assistant Professor in the History Department at Castleton College in Vermont where he teaches a variety of courses: Masculinity, the British Empire, European Women, and Sports History. He holds a Ph. D. from Boston College where he became interested in the connection between boxing, masculinity and national identity. He is the author of several scholarly journal articles.

**Schenectady East Rotary Presents**



**Patriots Day**



**Antique/Classic Car Show**  
Sunday, Sept 5<sup>th</sup>  
10 am - 3:30 pm (Rain Date Sept 6)

Music, food, fun, vendors, 50/50 raffle  
Classics, antiques, hotrods, muscle cars, trucks & motorcycles  
Judging - 12:30 pm for pre -1990 only  
*Fun for the whole family!*

**Vote for your favorite!**

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



*138 Front Street Glass Plate Negative Collection,  
c. 1901-1905, by Cynthia W. Seacord*

Within this collection, I noticed many clues pointing to the identity of some of the gentlemen in these pictures, and quite possibly that of the “mystery photographer.” Ascertaining that I was viewing boarders at 138 Front Street was rather simple. Most revealing was the 1901 photo labeled “group on front stoop, 138 Front Street”



*Group on front stoop, 138 Front Street*

Research in the 1905 New York State census records confirmed that the family at this address consisted of John Lahmer, the 48-year-old head-of-household who, according to the 1882 Schenectady atlas, owned this parcel of land. Living there also were his 32-year-old wife Amelia; Della Hebner, a 16-year-old niece; and boarders Lloyd Place, a 22-year-old electrician, Miles Stuart, a 24-year-old electrician, and Mark Hanna, a 25-year-old electrician. “M. Hanna” is a notation on some of the plates. Apart from the names of Hanna, Place, and Stuart, more bits of information about the identity of other boarders prior to 1905 came from inscriptions on some of the plates and photos and just plain good luck.

The early-1900 Schenectady directories do not supply resident information in alphabetical street address order (that feature was added in 1930). However, the owner’s name, Lahmer, which appeared in the 1892 atlas as residing on Front Street, was further researched in the alphabetical residents listing of the 1903 Schenectady directory. Coincidentally, on the very page of this directory that listed Lahmer of 138 Front Street as a blacksmith by trade, I found another boarder at this address. He was listed as G. Laidlaw and employed at “the Electric Works.” I found Mr. Hanna’s last name recorded on the label for a glass plate negative showing him on a climb in the Helderbergs. Mark Hanna’s first

name is listed as the subject, along with “Lady,” on one glass plate negative, and his last name appears on an envelope containing a glass plate image of a hike that GE workers took with their friends. Their favorite hiking spots, according to several similar prints, included the Helderbergs in Albany County and Walkers Falls, and Plotterkill Falls, both in Rotterdam. Other images in the collection are of well known sites in the Stockade area near 138 Front Street, such as the statue of Lawrence the Indian and the First Reformed Church. And another subject is of the Mohawk River at the end of winter when the ice breaks up to form logjams and causes the annual flooding of Stockade streets near the river.

Another glass plate negative was inscribed with the initials “O.M.B.” That led me to a productive search through the same 1903 Schenectady directory for persons with first names beginning with O and surnames starting with B, and I found the name O.M. Bixby, “draughtsman,” who boarded at 138 Front Street! Undoubtedly all or some of these fine fellows are the ones featured in two amusing images from 1902 that the photographer entitled “Bedtime, Schenectady.” They depict a group of young gentlemen comically posed in



*Bedtime, Schenectady.*

bedtime garb. Perhaps ‘twas the night before Christmas.

This same collection of glass plate images includes a small subgroup of other Schenectady residents from this same time period, namely the family of W.W. Brown who were more than casually acquainted with some of the 138 Front Street boarders. One photo lists “The Browns’ at 138 Front Street, sitting on the stoop.” Other photos depict scenes as being “at the Browns’ Thanksgiving dinner table.” In the 1903 Schenectady directory I discovered that “W.W.” could be none other than Walter W. Brown, age 29 as of the 1905 census, in which he was described as a GE draughtsman residing at 24 Eagle Street with his wife Ella, age 21. That census also shows that at that address there lived a Boswell Smith, clerk, age 27, his wife Grace, age 27, and Dorothy, their child, age 4. These might be some of the others seated with the Browns in some of those photos.

When I found a 1903 image in this collection containing a reference to “the Misses Thomas,” I tried to determine their identities as well. The Schenectady directory of 1903 provided two instances of adult women named Thomas living at the same address.



*The Misses Thomas.*

Presuming that they were visited at the same residence by the photographer, I added to this information vital statistics contained in the 1905 state census records in order to make some educated guesses about who the Misses Thomas were. Miss Hattie and Mrs. Nancy Thomas, ages 52 and 81 respectively, of Yates Street, appeared to be too old to be the likely subjects. But Josephine Thomas, a widow and 60 years of age in 1905, and Miss Lillian Thomas, a 25-year old teacher, of 832 State Street, have great potential. And the photographer might well have been interested in a young teacher in his age range.



I have not attempted an identification of the Pearl and Willie who are shown sitting on a bench at their “summer house” in 1904. The collection contains several photos of Pearl with a dog named Nix, and one with Willie, presumably Pearl’s son, brother, or nephew.

A 1904 image indicates that the photographer was present at the trial runs of the New York Central electric locomotive #6000 built jointly by ALCO and General Electric. This ALCO engine, with its electric motor built by General Electric in Schenectady, was designed especially for use in New York City, where limitations on smoke emissions had been issued. Other photographs of the #6000 engine can be found in the Efner History Center’s Photo History Collection in its locomotives section. Beautiful panoramic photographs of the General Electric plant dated 1904 complete this special little glass plate collection. These images along with the locomotive images, suggest that the photographer was interested not only in his friends, neighborhood, and local pastimes, but also in the industrial giant, General Electric, where I believe he was employed.

**ADDENDUM**: by Robert A. Petito Jr., SCHS Trustee,

*The following notes are taken from deeds and a subdivision map recorded at the office of the Schenectady County Clerk, and City Directories on file at SCHS. Obituary records were found on microfilm at the Schenectady County Public Library. The date of John L. Lahmer’s death is taken from the notice reported in the Schenectady Gazette of Tuesday, January 8, 1907; the notice for Dorothy B[arbara] Lahmer was reported in the Schenectady Gazette of Thursday, January 28, 1904 .*

#### **Ownership Chronology from Deeds**

1879 – First Reformed Church removes burials from Old Dutch Cemetery to Vale Cemetery

1880, April – Minister, Elders, and Deacons of First Reformed Church file subdivision plan with County Clerk’s Office – shows old cemetery subdivided into lots

1881, November – Minister, Elders, and Deacons of First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church sell to John J.

Lahmer Lot No. 9 for \$700.00. This property becomes known as 138 Front Street.

1926, January – *Amelia D. Lahmer Weidman* sells property to Brona Kuczynski and Agnes Kuczynski.

Records support the belief that Amelia was the daughter of Theodore Lahmer and his wife Dorothy B. (Fisher) Lahmer and the surviving sister of the blacksmith John Lahmer. At marriage her surname became Weidman.

#### **Obituaries:**

*1904, January: Dorothy B. [Barbara] Fisher Lahmer, wife of the late Theodore Lahmer, died, aged 70 years ; funeral from her late residence, 138 Front St. Three years later in 1907, January: John L Lahmer, son of the late Theodore and Dorothy Lahmer, died at his last residence, 138 Front St.*

## *LIBRARY NEWS - Books and documents added to the Library*

*Schenectady's Part in WWI, 1919*, a historic booklet donated by Peter Graham

10 Books of Catholic Church Records, donated by David L. Bonitatibus: These churches are in Troy, NY with the exception of St. Joseph's, which is in Cohoes, NY

*St. Mary- Burials, 1844-2007; St. Mary-Baptisms (in 3 volumes), 1844-2007;*

*St. Patrick- Marriages (in two volumes), 1872-2000; St. Jean Baptiste- Baptisms, 1852-1970;*

*St. Joseph-Baptisms (in three volumes), 1868-2005.*

*Celebrating 100 Years of Ministry, 1907-2007* – a booklet about Faith United Methodist Church, donated by Gail A. White

*Great Inventors of New York's Capital District* by Timothy Starr (2010), a library purchase

*The Teller Pasture: an investigation of a place, people, and events that changed Schenectady* (2010) by Claire Hamilton, gift of the author

*The Two Hendricks: unraveling a Mohawk mystery* by Eric Hinderaker, (2010) donated by Ona Curran

### **Donations of videotapes:**

2 videotapes donated by Nancy Papish - *The Batteau Discovery* filmed in 1993

3 videotapes donated by Leiah Bowden - *Friendship Proclamation Weekend – Tree Planting – May 19, 1990; Wood Creek/ Sylvan Beach of Rome "Discovery"; and Tree of Peace Planting May 1990*

### **Donated Library Equipment**

A lightly used Hewlett Packard Desktop Inkjet printer has replaced an older library computer printer, thanks to Merritt and Pat Glennon.

## *MABEE FARM - workshops and upcoming events*

**Saturday – October 2** 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM

**Adirondack Pack Basket** – Workshop.

Instructor is Beverly Cornelius.

Cost is \$140 including all materials

Make your own traditional Pack Basket using a continuous weave technique. Students will use reed to shape one of the most recognizable objects associated with the Adirondacks. The finished basket is approximately 20" tall, including harness. Some basket making experience is helpful but not required.

**Saturday – October 9, Sunday October 10**

12:00 noon – 4:00 PM both days

**Intermediate Blacksmithing** – workshop.

Instructor is John Ackner. Cost is \$150.00 including materials. This intermediate class is for students who have some prior experience in the basics of blacksmithing. Instruction will cover more advanced versions of bending, twisting, and joinery as well as the fabrication of decorative elements. Forge welding, tempering, and metallurgy relevant to the blacksmith will be discussed. Class size is limited to permit individualized instruction.

### **Fall School Programs**

The Mabee Farm is now accepting classes for school programs devoted to colonial life. The classes run from approximately 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM from the end of September through the second week in October. Included in our program offerings are: blacksmithing, sheep to shawl, colonial militia, butter making, tours of the historic buildings on this site, Native American interpretation, and the history of local slavery. Our programs supplement New York State Social Studies Standards. The Mabee Farm is listed with the BOCES Arts & Enrichment Program. **Please call (518) 887-5073 to book your class.**

### **Mabee Farm interns**

We are indeed grateful to our two interns, Emily Wroczynski and Bridget Sweeney, for all their hard work at the Mabee Farm this summer. This has been the second summer here for Emily who has cared for the collections as part of her endeavor to pursue a career in museum conservation. This fall Emily will intern at West Lake Conservators in Skaneateles, NY. Bridget is a graduate student at SUNY, Albany who will resume her career path this September in public history. We wish them both nothing but the best.



# History Fair

Sat, Sept 11th from 10 am—4 pm

## FROM WAR TO PEACE: Western Expansion in New York

Anne Clothier from the Shaker Heritage Society speaks on the shaker's history, innovative spirit and their influence on American culture.

Mary Liz and Paul Stewart, founders of the Underground Railroad of the Capital District discuss the importance of the local area in abolishing slavery.

Al Sterling, retired Chief of Interpretations at Herkimer Home will speak on "The Carry at Little Falls" and the role it played developing transportation to the west.

+ much more!

### TREASURES IN YOUR ATTIC

Bring your treasures to the farm & have them identified by an expert - Ona Curran!  
(\$5.00 donation per item - goes to Mabee Farm)

## MABEE FARM HISTORIC SITE

Route 5s, Rotterdam Junction  
(518) 887-5073 [www.mabeefrm.org](http://www.mabeefrm.org)



Summer interns Bridget Sweeney(above) and Emily Wroczyński (R) at the Mabee Farm.



# Farm & Foliage Day

Free Admission

Sat, October 16th  
11 am - 4 pm



Scarecrow making  
Pumpkin painting  
Kids activities  
Hay rides  
Pony Rides  
Animals  
4-H Club

Produce for sale  
Donuts & cider for sale  
Great Fun  
for the family!



Bluegrass music  
with the  
Riverview  
Ramblers

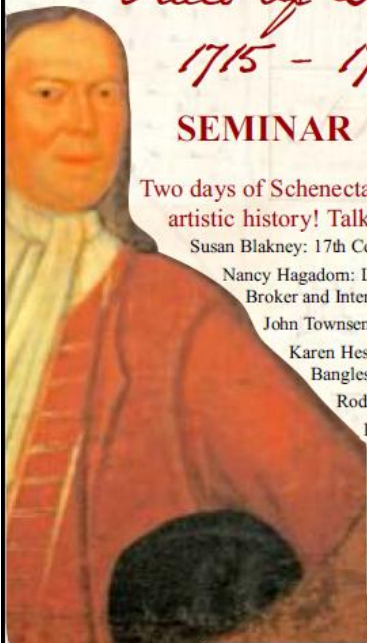
## Mabee Farm Historic Site

Route 5S, Rotterdam Jct. (518) 887-5073  
[www.mabeefarm.org](http://www.mabeefarm.org) [mabeefarm@gmail.com](mailto:mabeefarm@gmail.com)



(L.) Congressman. Paul Tonko and (R.) Christopher Shaw, storyteller/musician at CanalFest

# Schenectady County Historical Society



*Faces of Schenectady:*  
*1715 - 1750*

**SEMINAR** *October, 15 & 16*

Two days of Schenectady's cultural, political and artistic history! Talks by:

Susan Blakney: 17th Century Double Wedding Portrait  
Nancy Hagadorn: Laurens Claese Van Der Volgen – Cultural Broker and Interpreter  
John Townsend: The Mohawk Prayer Book  
Karen Hess: The Indomitable Arianthe Coeymans: Bangles and Beads – Jewelry in Portraiture  
Rod Blackburn: Scripture Paintings  
Rod Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka: The Data Base of early 18th c. paintings.  
Ona Curran's Gallery talk on the artists of 18th century Schenectady

Registration includes:  
Lectures, Exhibit Tours of "Faces of Schenectady" and, Dutch inspired Luncheon on Saturday

**REGISTRATION**  
**Faces of Schenectady: 1715 - 1750 Seminar**  
\$75.00 Per Person (10% Discount to Members \$67.50)

Friday: Exhibit Tour with Gallery Lecture  
Saturday: Lectures and Luncheon  
Number of people \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Friday Night: Fare and Folklore  
Additional \$10.00 Per Person  
Number of people \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_




Please reserve my copy of *Faces of Schenectady: Portraiture in a Colonial Dutch Town* by Ona Curran for \$19.95  
Number of copies \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill in the form below and mail or e-mail to:  
Schenectady County Historical Society  
32 Washington Avenue  
Schenectady, New York 12305  
office@schist.org

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Type:  
Credit Card \_\_\_\_\_ Cash \_\_\_\_\_ Check \_\_\_\_\_  
Visa \_\_\_\_\_ Master Card \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_  
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