

# Schenectady County Historical Society



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## Schenectady Hosted “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”

By Neil Yetwin

On the evening of January 11, 1917, the Schenectady Daily Union announced the passing of William Frederick “Buffalo Bill” Cody, who died the day before in Denver, Colorado, at age 71. The *Union Star* described Cody as a “remarkable man,” “hero of thousands of exploits,” and published a photograph of Cody with an extensive survey of his life and career as a guide, trapper, Pony Express rider, stagecoach driver, Civil War veteran, Medal of Honor recipient for gallantry, buffalo hunter (thus the nickname “Buffalo Bill,”) and master showman. Tributes poured in from presidents, prime ministers, generals, industrialists, and European royalty. Over 20,000 people attended the funeral at Lookout Mountain, just above Denver.

For over 40 years, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” show travelled thousands of miles, performing in countless cities and towns throughout the United States and Europe. The show captivated audiences with sensational portraits of an American frontier that was retreating in the face of settlement and exploitation. One of these fortunate cities was Schenectady, which hosted Buffalo Bill no less than six times from 1874 to 1911.

Shortly after the Civil War, Cody had a chance encounter with journalist-promoter Ned Buntline, who began turning out popular stories that transformed Cody into a national celebrity. The two men formed a Wild West acting troupe that included another scout-turned-actor, “Texas Jack” Omohundro, and his wife, Italian singer-dancer

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## VISIT

Library & Museum | M-F 9-5; Sat 10-2  
32 Washington Ave, Schenectady, NY

Mabee Farm | Tues-Sat, 11-4  
Guided tours at 11am, 1:30pm, and 3pm  
1100 Main St, Rotterdam Jct, NY

Brouwer House Creative | by appt.  
14 N Church St, Schenectady, NY

## CONTACT

[www.schenectadyhistorical.org](http://www.schenectadyhistorical.org)

# President's Letter

As many of you know, the Schenectady County Historical Society has been in the news lately—and for good reason. Our Washington Avenue headquarters was featured in a recent Albany *Times Union* article describing the evolution of grand private homes into public museums. Our building dates to 1895, but its days as a private residence were numbered. General Electric acquired the house in 1918 and turned it into a women's club. GE was thriving at the time and likely envisioned its new acquisition as a means of raising the quality of life for its employees. Then, in 1958, as GE extended its interests elsewhere, the company donated its Washington Ave. building to SCHS, which—perhaps predictably for the times—transformed it into a house museum.

House museums, though, were undergoing an evolution of their own. There were only about twenty of them in the United States in 1895, but that number increased five-fold within fifteen years. Why such growth? According to Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Michael Wallace, wealthy individuals—alarmed by the mass immigration that was making industrial growth possible—founded early 20th century house museums to help “Americanize the immigrant working class.” Apparently immigration was a lively issue then, even as it is today. House museums nevertheless fell out of favor during the Great Depression, and declined slowly but steadily as America modernized after WWII.

By the 21st century, aging house museums were everywhere, facing financial failure. SCHS made the decision to replace its tastefully furnished but deady dull period rooms with more relevant and professionally researched exhibitions. This was a decision very much in keeping with professional practice at the time—as described by Linda Norris in her thoughtful 2008 blog entitled “What Makes Historic House Tours So Boring?” Here’s a link: [UNCATALOGEDMUSEUM.BLOGSPOT.COM/2008/05/WHAT-MAKES-HISTORIC-HOUSE-TOURS-SO.HTML](http://UNCATALOGEDMUSEUM.BLOGSPOT.COM/2008/05/WHAT-MAKES-HISTORIC-HOUSE-TOURS-SO.HTML).

Today, the museum world continues to change, and SCHS is on the cutting edge of that change. As Kenneth Turino and Nina Zannieri write in *The Inclusive Historians Handbook* ([INCLUSIVEHISTORIAN.COM/HISTORIC-HOUSE-MUSEUMS](http://INCLUSIVEHISTORIAN.COM/HISTORIC-HOUSE-MUSEUMS)), “History museums of all types are facing the reality of a society where the meanings of inclusion, diversity, access, and equity are changing.” Audiences are different than they were, too, and Schenectady, perhaps ironically, is now the multi-ethnic, working class community its political leaders feared it might become. Happily, though, these are changes that SCHS embraces. Our strategic plan calls for us “to expand community engagement, to increase program attendance, to become more relevant to the diverse population of Schenectady, and most importantly, to move from the fringes of the community into the position of cultural leadership in the region.”

The Schenectady *Gazette*, meanwhile, recently described the SCHS commitment to expanded community service at another of our properties. After the Kindl family generously donated the Brouwer House (named for its first residents), Past President Marianne Blanchard and Executive Director Mary Zawacki carefully considered the options for developing the property and, with co-operation from within SCHS and without, created what is now an innovative and “vibrant centerpiece of Schenectady city culture:” the Brouwer House Creative.

So I’m happy to say that the good times continue to roll at SCHS, and we look forward to making history with everyone in the community—and sharing it with visitors from other communities in NYS and beyond.

- Robert Weible, [PRESIDENT@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG](mailto:PRESIDENT@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG)





## A Note on COVID-19

Dear Members,

Like every organization in the state and nation, SCHS is responding to the national emergency caused by the spread of the coronavirus. Everyone is adjusting to living at home and avoiding normal social contacts, and many of us are also impacted by the decline in economic activity and the loss of income and job security. And in New York State, our historic sites and museums—along with other “non-essential” businesses—have been necessarily closed for an indeterminate period of time. It’s a serious crisis, and it affects us all.

Given this crisis in our history, we would like to update you on how SCHS is staying true to its mission, while also suggesting ways that you can work with us to continue serving the community. We will continue to work with schools, community groups, and other organizations to co-ordinate activities and share information.

With the state’s closure of operations such as ours, we are required to remain closed indefinitely. Despite the closure, SCHS employees are working from home, where they will be sending out regular e-blasts with updates and historical information that you can use in your own home. At the same time, staff will be available to respond to your questions by email.

We are increasing our digital outreach by creating the COVID-19 Archive project, and ramping up our social media outreach. Please stay tuned for additional developments. We are also managing essential buildings & grounds projects at our historic sites. This includes opening our Mabee Farm nature trails for the spring. You are permitted to walk our trails and grounds while following current NYS guidelines on social distancing. Please note that restrooms are closed.

As historians, we know that facts matter. So, stay current with the latest guidance from experts and medical professionals, and don’t get distracted or frightened by baseless rumors and misinformation. It’s likewise important to stay connected to others. History has shown that it’s essential for us to maintain strong, united communities in the face of crises. Here at SCHS, we are all history makers who study—and learn from each other—the past in order to prepare ourselves for the future.

We want to express our continuing gratitude for your support, and our sincere best wishes for you and your family during these trying times. Stay strong. Stay healthy. Remember that this will pass. And know that we’ll be seeing each other in better days. We’re looking forward to it.

Sincerely,

Robert Weible  
President, SCHS

Mary Zawacki  
Executive Director, SCHS

# REVIEW: *George Lunn: The 1912 Socialist Victory in Schenectady*

by Martin Strosberg

George Lunn, Schenectady's first and only Socialist Party mayor (one of the very few in US history), served from 1912 to 1913 and from 1916 to 1917. Subsequently, he switched to the Democratic Party and served as Democratic Congressman, Lieutenant Governor, and Chairman of the NYS Public Utilities Commission. In his well-researched book, Bill Buell tells Lunn's remarkable story concentrating mostly, as the title suggests, on his life as a socialist and a Socialist Party member.

Lunn's election as mayor came at the high-water mark of the Socialist Party movement. With its surging population of immigrants working for GE and ALCO, Schenectady played an important part in this movement, which occurred in the midst of the Progressive Era, 1890-1920. To put Lunn's story within a national context, Buell gives us glimpses of the significant figures of the times: Emma Goldman, Eugene Debs, Mother Jones, Helen Keller, Lincoln Steffans, and many more. And, we get fuller portraits of two socialists who worked directly with Mayor Lunn: Charles Steinmetz and Walter Lippmann, who, in a future career, would become arguably the most important newspaper columnist of the first half of the 1900s.

## PASTOR LUNN

The pulpit was Iowa native Lunn's first calling. It was as pastor of Schenectady's First Reformed Church from 1904 to 1909 that Lunn first gained city, state, and even nation-wide recognition. In a city where labor unrest was common, Lunn's sympathies lay with the workers. His well-attended sermons (e.g., "The Anomaly of Child Labor in a Christian Land" and "The Relation of Jesus to Politics") and activism on behalf of the downtrodden resonated more with the up-and-coming Socialist Party than with the Republican Party, with which he had initially affiliated. Because of his continuous crusading, in 1909, church leaders and Lunn both agreed that it would be best if he stepped down from his position. Accordingly, Lunn started his own church, United People's Church, which met at the Mohawk Theater and drew thousands of worshippers. Lunn also started a weekly newspaper, *The Citizen*. Lunn soon capitalized on his celebrity status and launched his political career. In late 1910, he joined the local Socialist Party, and in 1911 he became the mayoral candidate.

## MAYOR LUNN

In the three-way race among Democrats, Republicans, and Socialists, Lunn, along with several Socialist Party city council candidates, were swept into office with the support of disgruntled voters from the two rival parties. The socialist experiment in Schenectady had begun. What were his administration's accomplishments? According to Buell, they included: an increase in minimum wage from \$1.75 to \$2.25 for city employees working an 8-hour day; the creation of a garbage disposal plant and free garbage collection; construction of three new school

buildings; the establishment of a new park system (which created Central Park); and the establishment of the City Planning Commission. Lunn's most notable activity did not take place in Schenectady, but in Little Falls, New York. Buell devotes several chapters detailing Lunn's sustained activism on behalf of the workers of the Little Falls Textile Strike of 1912. The striking union was organized by the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies). Lunn made many public speeches in support of the strikers. For his efforts, he was arrested by the Little Falls police and jailed for a short time, an event that made the front page of the *New York Times*.

## LUNN: RADICAL OR REFORMER?

Buell helps us unravel the complicated question of where Lunn really stood on the ideological spectrum. At least rhetorically, Lunn attributed the sorry state of the American worker to the capitalist system and advocated its elimination. Pointedly, he questioned why "1% of the families in the U.S. owned more general wealth than the other 99%." However, Lunn's proposed program for Schenectady, enunciated at his inaugural address, was much more in keeping with the reformer mode:

*(1) We must guard and promote the health of the community. (2) We must enlarge the scope of education until it includes men and women in a continued process of increasing enlightenment. (3) We must do what we can to establish economic security. (4) We must have efficiency clearly distinguished from red tape. (5) We must have true economy -- a thing which is not the equivalent of mere expense cutting.*

Apparently, Lunn's program did not alarm GE President Charles Coffin who stated in an interview that "Dr. Lunn was the best man that had ever been mayor of Schenectady." On the other hand, Lunn's young assistant, Walter Lippmann, quickly abandoned him because he thought he lacked a "bold plan" and was in reality a proponent of "good government politics," a distinguishing characteristic of the Progressive Movement rather than the Socialist Party.

Buell's conclusion, convincingly argued, is that Lunn's tenure as Socialist Party mayor "undeniably changed life in Schenectady for the better." Ironically, after Lunn left the Socialist Party and joined the Democratic Party, his past history as a socialist came back to haunt him, preventing him from seeking high political office on the Democratic ticket.

*Bill Buell, George Lunn: The 1912 Socialist Victory in Schenectady, The Troy Bookmakers, Troy, NY, 2019, 214 pages. Available for purchase at SCHS and SHOPTBMBOOKS.COM.*

# From the Library

## NOTE FROM THE LIBRARIAN

One of the things I appreciate most about our community is the level of engagement and excitement around creating and promoting history. Members of our community participate in historical work in a variety of ways: writing and presenting new research on our area's history, working with schools and students, collecting artifacts and archives, and advocating for history education and preservation.

There are a number of resources for individuals and organizations doing historical work. For the history practitioners in our community, I recommend checking out *The Inclusive Historian's Handbook*, a digital resource that seeks to help anyone doing history to center inclusivity and diversity. The articles combine practical advice with critical reflections and comprehensive bibliographies. You can read my full review of the handbook on the library blog and check out the handbook at [INCLUSIVEHISTORIAN.COM](http://INCLUSIVEHISTORIAN.COM)

## BLOG POSTS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

The Grems-Doolittle Library Collections Blog ([GREMSDOOLITTLELIBRARY.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://GREMSDOOLITTLELIBRARY.BLOGSPOT.COM)) is a great resource for discovering Schenectady County's history. Here are a few of our recent posts:

### Fun in the Snow Long Ago

by Diane Leone, December 21, 2019

Wintry pastimes in Schenectady!

### Schenectady in the Election of 1860

by George Wise, February 22, 2020

This essay examines the complicated political gymnastics that arose during the election of 1860 through a local lens. New information technologies, issues of immigration and race, and the power of corporations directed the political conversation in Schenectady while the question of slavery dominated the national discourse.

### What's in the Box? Opening the County Home Time Capsules

by Marietta Carr, March 12, 2020

Bill Buell recently donated two time capsules found in the county offices and the SCHS staff was excited to open them. This post documents the contents of each capsule and explains a little about the general practice of creating time capsules.

## RECENT DONATIONS

### The Schenectady Community Ministries Archive

Founded in 1967, Schenectady Community Ministries, formerly known as Schenectady Inner City Ministry (SiCM), is a partnership of 50 congregations for ministries of social service and social justice, working within the city of Schenectady to address public health needs, racism and diversity concerns, and community enhancements. Recently, Rev. Phil Grigsby, SiCM's newly retired executive director, contacted SCHS to find a home for their large collection of archival materials that document the organization's work and impact on the city. The Grems-Doolittle Library is honored to receive the SiCM Archive Collection. The collection is one of the largest the library has ever received, and arranging transfer of the approximately 130 cubic feet was a significant undertaking. Thanks to Rev. Grigsby, SCHS library volunteers and student volunteers from Union College (who did most of the heavy lifting), we successfully transferred the first half of the collection to the library in February. We'll move the second half later this spring. We are working on a plan for processing the collection, and will post updates on the blog as the project moves forward.

**Below:** Bill Buell inspects the time capsule.





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# What's Happening

## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

We're living through a historic time right now. These moments, spent in solitude, will be with us forever. Our lives during this pandemic will be a subject for future historians to study, to mull over, to wonder about. Right now, I write to you from quarantine, knowing that you're likely also isolated. Perhaps in Schenectady County, perhaps further afoot. It doesn't matter where; we're all here in this moment together. My thoughts go out to you, and I hope very much that you and your loved ones are safe.

To do our part in keeping everyone safe, SCHS is strictly following state and federal guidelines. This means we are closed to the public indefinitely, and all of our April and May programs have been either cancelled or postponed. That includes the Annual Meeting, which we hope to reschedule later in the year.

The programs listed here are, at this point, tentative. Our priority right now is safety. If that means postponing our summer programs, we will indeed do so. So, please keep these dates in mind, and we'll hope everything is back to normal soon. But bear in mind, our schedule, like everyone's, is subject to change.

## EXHIBITS

### Handcrafted: The Folk and Their Art

Through November @ 32 W

Bright, bold colors. Quaint and genuine. Beautiful in an unrefined way. These are just a few characteristics of SCHS' folk art collection. Journey with us through our region's folk art in an exhibition co-curated by Susanna Fout and SCCC folk art professor Marilyn Sassi. *Handcrafted* features over fifty carefully selected pieces, most of which have never been displayed.

### Rural Modern

Through October @ Mabee Farm

Rural life and farming – and with it, the hard work, the understanding of the land, and the stories of those who farm it – is at the heart of Schenectady County. Today, after centuries of fields and flocks, we have created a rural landscape that is fruitful, beautiful, and largely misunderstood by those who live in cities or suburbs. This exhibit explores the stories of Schenectady's rural farmers.

## TOURS AND TRIPS

### Secret Stockade Saturdays

Saturdays: June 13, July 11, Aug 8, Sept 12 at 10:30am • \$20

The Stockade and its secrets come to life on this behind-the-scenes journey through the neighborhood. Refreshments will be served inside the Stockade's oldest home, the historic Brouwer House.

### Colonial Walking Tour

Saturday, June 6 at 10am @ 32 Washington • \$10, members free

The shaded streets of the Stockade were first laid down in 1661. Travel back with us to a time when our city was simply the "Place Beyond the Pines," a tiny trade post where diverse cultures and languages met. We'll relive the remarkable stories of the first Schenectadians.

### Gossips and Gadflies

Saturday, June 20 at 10am @ 32 Washington • \$10, members free

Can you keep a secret? This tour explores the Stockade through the writings of Harriet Mumford Paige. Living in the early 19th century, she was an ordinary woman with an extraordinary penchant for peddling rumors. Together we'll air out all of her neighbors' dirty laundry!

### Kayak Through History

Wednesday, June 24 at 5:30pm @ Mohawk Harbor • \$20

Saturday, June 27 at 10:00am @ Mohawk Harbor • \$20

Our educator, Mike Diana, will guide paddlers upstream from The Waters Edge Lighthouse and back, passing under railroad bridges and around wild islands, discussing the history of the river and its surroundings. Ticket price includes a kayak rental.

## MUSIC

### Howlin' at the Moon with Washington County Line

Thursday, June 4 - 7pm @ Mabee Farm • \$6

Washington County Line will be here to howl at the Strawberry Moon, bringing their traditional bluegrass, early country, folk, and contemporary tunes to the Howlin' stage. Sponsored by Wolf Hollow Brewing Co.

## FOOD AND DRINK

### Drink the Seasons: Summer

Thursday, June 11 - 6pm @ Brouwer House • \$25

Made with unique local ingredients — some sourced from our own garden — historian John Gearing will mix up a variety of tasty drinks for us to sample. We'll taste 4-6 alcoholic drinks, each drawing on inspirations of tastes and tales of the past.





## Help SCHS build an archive of COVID-19 stories

We are all making history right now, as we live through the COVID-19 pandemic. It's an emergency of historic proportions, and has been compared to the Black Plague, or the 1918 Spanish Flu. Like those past crises, COVID-19 will be a major topic of study for future historians. Years from now, Schenectadians will look back and wonder, "how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect Schenectady County? How did our ancestors respond to the crisis?" "What was life like for people quarantined, for months?"

You can help future researchers understand for themselves what life right now is like. You can help future historians understand the pandemic's immense impact on our community, and on ourselves, and on our way of life. You can help future historians understand how this international emergency changed your life, and changed our world, forever.

Consider recording your unique perspective for inclusion in the SCHS archives. Diaries, scrapbooks, photo albums, letters, songs, poems, short stories, and other works of art are all important sources for future historians. Be creative: there are infinite ways

you can express yourself, and document the impact of COVID-19 on you, your loved ones, and your neighbors. Help us, by:

--Contributing to a global collection: [HTTPS://COVID19.OMEKA.NET/](https://COVID19.OMEKA.NET/)

-- Share your story using our form: [SHORTURL.AT/OPBMX](https://SHORTURL.AT/OPBMX)

--Creating a personal diary, scrapbook, or photo album (analog/physically or digitally)

--Collecting the letters, emails, and notes that you've created or received to stay in touch or communicate with others during this difficult time of isolation

The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact is an on-going, changing situation. It will take time to document how we are all affected. If you have questions about ways you can contribute to the SCHS archive collection, or about documenting your experiences, contact the SCHS librarian, Marietta Carr, at [LIBRARIAN@SCHENECTADYCOUNTYHISTORICAL.ORG](mailto:LIBRARIAN@SCHENECTADYCOUNTYHISTORICAL.ORG).

# Visualizing Niskayuna History

by Denis Brennan, Niskayuna Town Historian

Guy Spiers arrived in Niskayuna from Virginia in 2011 and moved to Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 2019. Fortunately for Niskayuna, he left behind an extraordinary gift in the form of a report, “A Graphical History of Niskayuna Housing, 1650 – 2009,” which colorfully visualizes Niskayuna’s housing growth, and clearly reflects the town’s physical transformation.

The document has three sections. First, there are lists of the oldest existing house on each street, indexed by street name and by year. Second, he created maps by decade showing the location of new housing and existing housing. Third, he developed maps by year, similarly marked. There are 179 maps in 188 pages, and, although house addresses are not included, town residents can easily discern the first house on their street, their own house, their street’s growth, and compare development to the rest of town.

Spiers spent about three years working on the project, which he freely acknowledged, “became a bit of an obsession.” In addition, he admitted, “I enjoy maps – always have,” and he recently said that he might consider doing a similar project in Portsmouth. The information he used was publicly available from the town assessor’s office, although, unfortunately, there exist no records for housing destroyed before the assessor’s database was created.

Obviously, this article cannot provide a complete or comprehensive analysis of Spiers’ report, however, some clear perspective about town growth can be suggested by examining three maps – 1899, 1949, and 2009.

Niskayuna was formed in March 1809, but had been identified, under a variety of spellings, in many colonial era maps. The Mohawk people who inhabited the area before European colonists arrived provided both the word which became the town’s name and the agricultural heritage the name suggested: “fields of corn.” In 1809, the Spiers’ map shows 21 houses. Over the next 90 years, the town added 103, for a total of 124 on the Spiers’ 1899 map.

Clearly, the town was growing, but just as clear is the slow rate of growth accompanied by limited diversity. Niskayuna remained a rural farming community. Howell and Munsell’s *History of Schenectady County* described Niskayuna lands in the late 1800s as still yielding “rich harvests, in many cases to the descendants of original white settlers.” Indeed, the Beers 1866 map of Niskayuna identified housing by family name, and almost 30% of those names were town-founding family names, including Creiger, Van Vranken, Winnie, Vedder, Vrooman, and Clute.

The next Spiers’ map, just 50 years later in 1949, shows what might be described as a remarkable bifurcation in Niskayuna. Housing numbers exploded during the period; by decade the town added 136, 175, 534, 690, and 842 homes, bringing the housing total to

just over 2,500. Despite the Great Depression and two world wars, mid-century Niskayuna housing swelled by more than 19 times the number in 1899.

However, a quick glance between the two maps graphically reveals that the most dramatic growth was located in one part of the town now commonly, if erroneously, called “Old Niskayuna.” This section initially became the “Grand Boulevard Plot” when a new town resident, W. Garner Bee, purchased Christian Schopmeier’s farmhouse and 140-acre farm in 1906. His team laid out lots, graded roads, and planned water and sewer services as Grand Boulevard became the locus for a new residential community.

According to “family lore” as explained to *Daily Gazette* reporter Bill Buell in 2014, Thomas Edison encouraged Bee to come to the area from New York City. Bee was both an attorney and architect, and Edison explained that “he was building his business in Schenectady [and] his workers were going to need new homes.” Bee’s plan would provide those homes.

By 1918, growth in the “Plot” motivated creation of the Grand Boulevard Association to facilitate organization, improvement, and development. Trolley lines on Grand Boulevard carried workers to and from Schenectady, the Grand Boulevard Fire Company was formed, the Van Antwerp School expanded several times, the Association boundaries grew beyond its original Nott Street limit, and residential Niskayuna became the heart of the town’s social and cultural life. A “new” Niskayuna core was aborning.

Spiers’ project concludes six decades later with his 2009 map, marking over 7,400 homes in Niskayuna. Furthermore, the residential transformation was nearly complete; unlike a century earlier, today there are only two farms remaining within the town boundaries. Outside of “Old Niskayuna,” more farms transformed into residential communities, including Rosendale Estates, Woodcrest, Orchard Park Estates, Avon Crest, Merlin Park, Edison Woods, and several others. Modern Niskayuna took shape.

Niskayuna’s growth and transformation enabled it to be classified by New York State as a First Class Suburban Town. Guy Spiers’ “Graphical History of Niskayuna Housing” vividly provides a stunning visual imagery which accurately complements the narrative of Niskayuna’s history.

The complete 188 page Spier’s Report can be found at [HTTPS://BIT.LY/2W05Q1G](https://bit.ly/2W05Q1G).



# Volunteer Profile: Kathy Van Flue by John Angiletta



Kathy Van Flue began her journey to SCHS as a young girl growing up in Hudson Falls, NY. She often rode her bicycle to the Hudson Falls Free Library, which piqued her interest in books and libraries.

Kathy attended SUNY Potsdam where she received her BA in Political Science. Upon graduation, Kathy accepted a position with the NYS Consumer Protection Board, and then went on to work for the UAlbany Dewey Graduate Library. In 1993, Kathy earned her Master's Degree in Library Science and began work at the Schenectady County Public Library. In her twenty years at the SCPL, she worked occasionally with former SCHS Librarian, Melissa Tacke, who introduced her to volunteering with the historical society.

When Kathy first began volunteering with SCHS we were between librarians, so Kathy was introduced to the wonderful world of museum collections. She catalogued many artifacts from our collection, and spent many hours organizing our extensive collection of antique firearms. In addition to her help at our headquarters, Kathy volunteers at many of our Mabee Farm events, including stirring the hot cider at the annual FallFest. She enjoys all aspects of being a volunteer, and is always eager to lend a hand wherever she is needed. She says that her favorite part of volunteering is constantly learning new things, and working with staff and other volunteers.

Kathy and her husband Bob make their home in Glenville. They are the proud parents of a daughter Liz, son Mike, and granddaughter Natalie. Kathy said that her free time is spent helping out at SCHS and cheering for and attending Boston Red Sox games. With

her extensive library background, and willingness to help with all activities, Kathy has become a valued member of our SCHS volunteer family, and we are lucky to have her.

## Inventory, Inventory, Inventory! by Suzy Fout

Last summer I was excited to report on the progress we were making in SCHS' artifact collections management. At that point, we had made major strides in rehousing and reorganizing our storage areas, and set in motion plans to begin SCHS' first ever full inventory of our 12,000+ artifacts. And so began the long dredge of counting objects, recording their locations, and marking them "2019INV" (a.k.a, inventoried). Unless you're a fan of data entry, it's not a project for the light hearted. Thanks to a grant from The Felicia Fund we were able to hire former intern, Julia Walsh, to help with the project. Julia worked diligently throughout her summer and winter breaks to inventory artifacts located at 32 Washington Avenue and Mabee Farm. What she was unable to complete, I have picked up.

Now, another year has come and gone, and I have spent many cold, quiet days at the Mabee Farm, tucked away inside collections storage, with only Katje\* to keep me company. So where are we now and what comes next? As with any large scale project, there are unforeseen complications that create setbacks. Record inconsistencies, misplaced objects, and misidentification has pushed the end-of-February deadline

into the spring. While the process can be rigorous (and, if I'm honest, frustrating at times), there is a silver lining. For one, inventory has given me the opportunity to learn more about the collection. Over the winter we "rediscovered" interesting artifacts that have inspired new exhibit ideas. Several of these objects made their way into "Handcrafted: The Folk and Their Art" and accompanying exhibit catalog. The process has also allowed me to assess the overall state and health of the collection, identifying areas for improvement and growth.

Once the inventory is complete, the next steps are to match misidentified objects to old Deeds of Gifts, consolidate object records, and fix object file discrepancies. In time, SCHS will have a collection that is better documented, managed, and more accessible. Collections projects are never-ending; as soon as one ends, another begins. For me, this means its back to planning mode. Luckily, it also means job security.

*\*For those who are unaware, Katje is our loveable farm cat. Not a ghost.*



Giuseppina Morlacchi. When Buntline left the show, Cody and the remaining members formed the “Buffalo Bill Combination” which toured the American theater circuit. On March 2, 1874, the Schenectady *Evening Star* announced that “The Buffalo Bill Combination,” featuring Cody, Texas Jack, and “the peerless Morlacchi” would appear that night in “Scouts of the Plains” at Union Hall, the second floor of a building that stood at the northwest corner of State and Jay Streets. The *New York Herald* described the show as “so wonderfully bad it’s good” and the troupe received glowing reviews for their performance the previous night in Albany.

There was another attraction on the bill that night at Union Hall that was guaranteed to draw a large and curious audience: James Butler “Wild Bill” Hickok. Cody and Hickok had been friends growing up in Kansas, and Hickok had already made a name for himself as a gambler, gunfighter and lawman in some of the frontier’s toughest towns. As in Cody’s case, dime novels had transformed Wild Bill into a famous figure, and though he enjoyed his new-found fame, he disliked being stared at by strangers. Nevertheless, Hickok, after repeated entreaties by Cody and short on cash, reluctantly joined the “Combination” in December, 1873. Standing just over six feet, and sporting shoulder-length hair, full moustache, frock coat, checked trousers, calfskin boots, black sombrero, and a pair of ivory-handled Colt revolvers tucked menacingly into a bright red sash around his waist, Hickok was an imposing presence wherever he went. He was also a man of unpredictable moods, often tangling with citizens and law enforcement alike in the gambling dens, pool halls, and taverns that he frequented during his stint with the “Combination.” He was already creating problems for the show during its New York City dates, to the point where he began loading his pistols with live ammunition instead of the blanks he was supposed to use in the shows. Hickok startled the Rochester audience and enraged the theater owner by shooting out a stage light that he claimed irritated his eyes.

Despite Wild Bill’s volatility, the March 3 *Evening Star* reported that “Union Hall entertained the largest audience last evening that has been within its walls since the grand opening of the hall three years ago.” Hickok played himself, declaiming: “Fear not, fair maid! By heavens, you are safe at last with Wild Bill, who is ever to risk his life and die, if need be, in defense of weak and defenseless womankind!” By the time the troupe arrived in Binghamton nine days later, Hickok and Cody had amicably agreed to part ways. Cody gave his old friend a \$1k loan (\$17k today) and Hickok returned to his familiar haunts out West. Just two-and-a-half years later, Wild Bill was shot to death during a poker game in a Deadwood, South Dakota saloon. There is no indication that Wild Bill encountered any trouble during his short stay in Schenectady, but the vision of the legendary Wild Bill Hickok sampling downtown Schenectady’s nightlife in 1874 remains an intriguing one.

The “Combination” returned to Union Hall on February 2, 1875 to present “Life on the Border,” following appearances at Albany, Troy, and Cohoes, with the local press describing the show as “quite thrilling.” But the troupe was persistently

plagued by financial difficulties, and it would be 20 years before Buffalo Bill Cody returned again to Schenectady.

In the interim, Cody developed the show that would be known thereafter as “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West.” With advice from Barnum & Bailey’s James A. Bailey, Cody’s show became an enormous undertaking, with its own electrical department and portable grandstand that could seat up to 20,000 spectators. Hundreds of cowboys, cowgirls, gauchos, Cossacks, Native Americans, African American “buffalo soldiers,” and Arab horsemen performed in races, sharp-shooting contests, reenactments of battle scenes, buffalo hunts, and stagecoach robberies which were presided over by Buffalo Bill on his white stallion. During his eight European tours, Cody performed before Queen Victoria, the future Kaiser Wilhelm, King Edward VII, future King George V, and Lord Randolph Churchill, who introduced Buffalo Bill to his thirteen-year-old son Winston. Cody was also granted an audience with Pope Leo XIII in the Sistine Chapel. By the 1890s, he had become, according to one biographer, “the most recognizable celebrity on Earth.” It was with great anticipation and excitement when, in the spring of 1895, local newspapers announced that Buffalo Bill would soon be coming back to the Capital District.

Fifty tightly packed cars of the Delaware & Hudson Railway delivered “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” to Schenectady at 4:30am on May 15, 1895. Tickets ranged from 25 to 60 cents for each of the two shows, which took place at the Schenectady Driving Park (present day Hamilton Hill). The May 15 *Evening Star* reported that “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders” (a term later borrowed by Teddy Roosevelt) attracted a huge crowd. The cavalcade moved across State Street and onto Brandywine Avenue to Union Street, down to Centre Street (now Broadway), then back to State and up to the fairgrounds. “No newspaper description can do justice to the big parade,” stated the *Evening Star*. It was led by Buffalo Bill in an open carriage, followed by contingents of Comanche, Sioux, Arapaho and the Royal Irish-English Lancers. The old Deadwood stage followed next, carrying 73 year-old John Y. Nelson, who had guided Brigham Young and the first Mormons into the Salt Lake Valley a half-century earlier. “Women waved their handkerchiefs and strong men yelled themselves hoarse” as Cody doffed his hat in salute. The US troops in the parade “were cheered wildly by their fellow soldiers of the United States recruiting agency in the Union Hall block.” The show featured a buffalo hunt, an “Indian attack” on the Deadwood stage, and an exhibition of Buffalo Bill’s skill with various firearms while on horseback. But a main highlight was the appearance of Annie Oakley, whom the *Evening Star* noted “did the impossible with rifles and clay pigeons.”

The show’s stay in Schenectady was not without incident, though. Cody noted the following in his log for May 15: “At Schenectady, N.Y., in bringing the stock to the train, a buffalo cow got into the canal and was drowned.” Additional details were provided by the May 2 Daily Union: As the train was being loaded for the show’s May 16 appearance at Gloversville, the bison “became unmanageable and darted up the track at



terrific speed,” followed by cowboys and Indians on horseback from “the Central railroad below State street,” who rode up and down the “track, jumping switches, etc...The loss to the Wild West management will be considerable.” In addition, Cody was forced to fire two of the Irish-English Lancers who had been drinking heavily and verbally threatening spectators and Cody himself. Cody personally requested Schenectady Police Officer J. E. Van Vranken to arrest the two men, who were taken to the Wall Street police headquarters. According to the *Weekly Union* of May 23, both men were found guilty and were “sent to jail to serve a sentence of ten days each.”

The show returned to Schenectady on July 14, 1899 after two performances in Saratoga. Once again, thousands came out to cheer the parade and attend performances which again featured Annie Oakley. Cody also added soldiers from Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines to mark the United States’ acquisition of those territories. The show then moved on to Utica, leaving a minor incident in its wake. The *Evening Star* reported that 22 year-old Daniel Sutton had stolen a wagon wheel from Schenectady banker H.M. Wallace and sold it for \$3.00 to one of Cody’s unsuspecting employees. Cody asked Detective James W. Rynex to try and recover the item. Rynex, the first police officer to patrol Schenectady on horseback, and later the city’s Chief of Police, went to Utica, recovered the wheel, and returned to Schenectady to arrest Sutton, who received thirty days in jail. When the show came back on June 12, 1901, Schenectady Mayor John H. White formally presented Buffalo Bill with the key to city.

Cody’s “Wild West” appeared again in Schenectady on July 2, 1908, following a triumphant tour of Europe. The

Schenectady County Fairgrounds, which for a time had been the “Poorhouse Farm” and site of the County Almshouse near what is now Emmett, Craig and Steuben Streets, had been converted to a 116-acre residential area to accommodate the city’s growing industrial workforce. This compelled the show to set up on “the old rugby (or circus grounds),” roughly bounded today by Rugby Road, McClellan Street, Grand Boulevard and Regent Street. Football had become popular, so Cody presented “football games” between cowboys and Native Americans on horseback.

The *Daily Union* announced that on June 19 and 20, 1911, Buffalo Bill would be doing his usual two shows at 2:00pm and 8:00pm on the Rugby Road grounds, but added that Cody “is making his last visit here today at the head of a great show depicting scenes of his early career on the plains.” Both performances sold out, but the growing popularity of motion pictures and professional sports were causing a general decline in attendance at Wild West shows. Facing financial and health problems, Cody finally retired. The show itself continued under various owners, including heavyweight boxing champion Jess Willard, but without the charismatic Buffalo Bill, the show finally closed for good in 1917.

Buffalo Bill Cody’s exciting and evocative panoramic version of the “Wild West” made an indelible impression upon two generations of Schenectady’s citizens, and left a popular cultural legacy that continues today in our enduring fascination with the Old West.

*The author would like to thank Robert Sullivan and Matt Forst, Adult Services Librarians at the Schenectady County Public Library for their help, patience and expertise.*

# Around the County with Bill Buell, County Historian

With America having been forced into World War II, Corinne Conde's job as "society editor" of a daily newspaper in upstate New York wasn't nearly enough to keep her happy.

Born in Schenectady in 1909, Conde left Schenectady High School before graduating, and started her adult life as a physiotherapist at Ellis Hospital. She became the first woman in Schenectady to become a licensed pilot in 1931, and in 1937 she landed her editing gig at the *Daily Gazette*, where she worked for nearly six years. Then, early in 1942, just a few months after Pearl Harbor, Conde left her hometown to seek new and broader challenges.

She got a job as an editor with the *New York Times*, and then worked as bureau chief for the International News Service in St. Louis and Denver. In 1945 she worked as radio news editor for the Office of War Information, and then moved to the Voice of America in Washington, D.C. The VOA was formed in 1942, and its mission statement was to "broadcast accurate, balanced and comprehensive news and information to an international audience."

Conde went on to work with the Gallup Poll and with the Agricultural Department and the Federal Reserve Board. She later returned to the VOA and was named a recipient of the group's meritorious service award. She retired in 1968 and moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, but not before working with some of the top people in the news industry, such as Edward R. Murrow and William Randolph Hearst.

A few years after her death in 1997, a friend named Edith Adams sent some information about Conde to the SCHS Grems-Doolittle Library: "Corinne Conde was the most interesting friend of my life," wrote Adams. "Many people admired her and a number urged her to write an autobiography or to speak her memoirs into a recorder, but she refused."

In 2010, Adams contacted the society by phone to add a few more details about Conde's life. She confirmed that Conde never graduated from high school, because she boycotted gym class when she was a senior, and she also never went to college. Both of those life choices, according to Adams, were supported by her parents. Adams also told us how Conde spent part of her time at VOA working in Jakarta, the Philippines, and how she also loved animals and spent a few months working at the Bronx Zoo soon after high school. Doris and Don Wenig, two more close friends of Conde's

from Arizona, also wrote to SCHS after her death, letting us know that the former journalist remained a voracious reader throughout her life, and "continued to edit everything she read."

As someone who spent more than 40 years in the newspaper business writing about the people and places in Schenectady's long and cherished history, Conde's story is particularly interesting. It's also nice to know, while we're celebrating the 100th anniversary of women getting the vote throughout the country, I will never run out of interesting subjects.

Most Schenectady history buffs will recognize the name, Conde. Corinne was the daughter of Edwin G. Conde, an Amsterdam native and long-time Schenectady resident whose life and varied resume is nearly as interesting as his daughter's.

Born in 1871, Conde was a Schenectady Postmaster, a member of the County Board of Supervisors, a Republican Party boss, city historian (1940-1945) and a long-time advertising manager for the W.T. Hanson Company. He was also a city editor at the *Schenectady Gazette* relatively early in his career (soon after the *Gazette* became a daily newspaper in 1894), and before that, just after graduating from Union College in 1893, he worked in New York City for the *New York Herald*, the *Associated Press* and *United Press International*.

In 1941, Conde wrote an unpublished history of Schenectady called "The Most Beautiful Land," available for researchers at the Karen B. Johnson County Library and the SCHS Grems-Doolittle Library.





**SCHS staff practicing social distancing while cleaning up the Mabee Farm gardens.**





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