

Schenectady County Historical Society



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The Tale of an Inn

By Suzy Fout

A behemoth at the center of its neighborhood, the Stockade Inn stands out amongst its neighbors. The facade is sombre and stately. Tall, elegant windows flank the street level view. Sturdy brick walls tower over passersby, while the beautifully embellished main entrance on Church Street hints to the luxurious architectural details inside.

The Inn is a popular building in the Stockade; those that live here know it well. Some know it as the old bank, or as its stint as one of Schenectady's first high schools. Some recall the former stomping grounds of the Mohawk Club. A plaque at the corner of Union and Church harkens back to the Stockade's beginnings, proclaiming the site as the first residence of Schenectady's colonial founder, Arent Van Curler. In more recent years, visitors were likely to book a room for a night's stay, or catch a live jazz performance.

Today, the building is eerily quiet. A kitchen fire in early 2020 forced the inn to close its doors. For the first time in many years, few sounds emerge from within. The faint smell of smoke permeates the building, lingering in the air. The inn has been emptied, the contents sold off. Vacant signs posted at the main entrances indicate that a new chapter has begun. There's a buzz about the community, a sense of anxiety around what will happen to this beloved structure. These feelings are not without merit — Schenectady has a complicated — if not troubled — history when it comes to preserving its historic buildings. Change, especially when mired in uncertainty, tends to bring out apprehension. So what is putting the community on edge?

In The Beginning

In 1661 Arent Van Curler paid "660 hands of good, white Kampum, 6 coats of wood, 30 barrels of

Continued on page 10

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Library & Museum | by appt.
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President's Letter



Image by Michael Diana

History is always changing, often so slowly we don't even notice. But in truly historic times—right now, for example—history changes with incomprehensible speed.

The recent police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd have dramatically—and quickly—raised public awareness of essential race and criminal justice issues. Reputable polls have in fact shown that, in the two weeks following Mr. Floyd's murder, American support for the Black Lives Matter movement increased by nearly as much as it had during the previous two years.

We've all witnessed many hundreds of thousands of activists of every description who have been marching in cities and towns across the nation and around the world to demand long overdue social, political, and cultural changes. And as many of us know, Schenectady itself has been the site of multiple protests: lots of marches and signs, lots of passion and outrage.

So where are we headed at this potentially critical moment in our history? No one knows. But we do know two things: one, that our understanding of the past is our best guide to the future, and two, that historical change doesn't just happen, people make it happen. Barack Obama knew this when he said "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

For its part, the Schenectady County Historical Society is dedicated to this kind of democratic vision. Our agreed-upon values call for us to commit "to diversity, professionalism, and community engagement." And our stated vision is to work with all of our community members, share authority among ourselves, and together become better informed history makers.

We believe in particular that Black lives do indeed matter, and we look forward to listening to and learning from Schenectady's African American community and creating a more just, more meaningful, and more usable understanding of Schenectady County history.

If you have a moment, consider visiting the "Talking About Race" portal presented by the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>). The portal helps people and communities talk about racism and the ways in which race shapes every aspect of our society, from economy, to politics, to American culture.

- Robert Weible, PRESIDENT@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG



Meditations on Fallen Statues

Opinion piece by Michael Diana

In the course of the national turmoil surrounding the most recent police killings of African Americans, our country will have much to reckon with. And while police brutality and systemic racism are the most pressing issues of public discussion, another subtler issue has manifested. I'm referring, of course, to the removal of statues around the country. From the Deep South to New York City and Albany, various monuments are being newly scrutinized. Some are being deemed problematic for the likeness they bear while others

are objected to for the way in which they depict historical figures or events. For our local community, I believe this all crystalized with Albany mayor Kathy Sheehan's announcement that the figure of Philip Schuyler would be removed from the lawn of City Hall. That has certainly enflamed passions on both sides of the issue. In this essay, I'd like to meditate on the subject of public monuments and when, if ever, they should be dismantled. Surely, I could fill this entire newsletter with my self-indulgent, pseudo-philosophical ramblings and specific judgments about this statue or that. But I feel that I have no authority to pass such judgements when they might be misconstrued as the "official" stance of the SCHS. Our organization seeks to provide space for people of all opinions and here you can just consider me another member sharing my perspective. And so I'll simply offer some points for you to consider as you debate our national legacy and how that should be publically represented.

I think it's vital we begin this discussion with a question: what is the purpose of public monuments the first place? After all, these things aren't cheap to commission and aren't even cheap to maintain once they stand. For instance, in an article written for Smithsonian Magazine in 2018, Brian Palmer and Seth Freed Wessler document the tens of millions of American tax dollars spent on maintaining Confederate monuments. If the costs can be so high, there must be a good reason to justify our public expense. One obvious purpose for public monuments is to beautify an area. And a statue of a historic figure can certainly accomplish that function. But let's put that point aside for now. Monuments are not being removed anywhere for aesthetic reasons. The figures that are igniting our passions now are those that serve as icons to our past. So let's talk about those.

You might argue that public monuments are vital tools for public history education. To remove them would be to render ourselves willfully ignorant or to even destroy our history as we understand it. I'd offer two challenges to that line of thinking. First of all, I'd argue that statues are poor mediums for teaching history. Scholarship on the past should, figuratively and literally, never be set in stone. Indeed, our understanding of history is currently evolving as new historians enter the field or new evidence comes to light. If a large monument of marble or bronze makes a claim about the past, that statement could be factually misleading for academic or even political reasons. And yet, regardless of the quality of scholarship it represents, the narrative conveyed in a public monument is more compelling and more imposing for a largely uncritical public. They see it and accept it as orthodoxy. The classic case of this gone horribly wrong is the Lost Cause mythology of the Confederate monuments. Taken as a whole, the countless statues and memorials to Confederate leaders and soldiers present the argument that the succession movement was somehow inspired by notions of state's rights, tariffs and southern pride, in addition to slavery. But I assure you this is an elaborate fiction. If you simply read the various declarations

of succession or even testimonials from non-slave owning Confederate soldiers, it becomes abundantly clear that the succession of southern states in 1860 was motivated almost entirely by the desire to preserve and expand the institution of slavery. All this is to say that if your goal truly is to teach the public about history, don't bother with a statue. An interpretive panel is the more practical option, capable of a more nuanced narrative. It will be cheaper to place and when the scholarship inevitably changes in 20 years, it will be cheaper to replace too.

But I would make a more fundamental challenge. I'd say it's a matter of empirically provable fact that statues are not erected to teach history at all. Instead, they are erected to celebrate history. And that's an incredibly important distinction. When we teach history, we make a primary observation- that is to say a statement of fact which can either be correct or incorrect. When we celebrate history, we make a secondary observation- we take a statement of fact and add to it our own moral judgement. And in the case of public monuments, the moral judgements we make are always positive or celebratory. Imagine all the figures of American history who are vital to know and yet have no statues anywhere. Benedict Arnold, for instance, is strategically and thematically a crucial figure to understand the American Revolution. And yet he has no public monument except for an undignified stone boot at the Saratoga National Historic Park. This *damnatio memoriae* refuses to even mention his name but solemnly notes a certain soldier was wounded there. Why is this? It's because we have deemed him unworthy despite his historic significance and even despite his early death-defying contributions to the Revolutionary cause. I could go on and on here. Would you like to see a statue of Lee Harvey Oswald erected anywhere in this country? How about Bernie Madoff? Would you be willing to help pay for that? Of course you wouldn't. "Villains," as we judge them to be, don't get statues. Only "heroes" do. And so it is that the monuments we keep in public spaces say so much more about us than they do about the past. They show what actions or traits we value and, indeed, what actions or traits we're willing to forgive.

But this presents us with a new problem: how can we judge historical figures? I've often heard the argument that people should be judged by the moral standards of their time. This is a misguided approach that could lead to some repugnant conclusions. First of all, it's really a difficult academic exercise to understand the "conventional" morality of a time period. And it ultimately begs the question: why should we celebrate someone for embodying what is essentially a foreign morality to our own? Who cares if a certain figure was, let's say, the "kindest" robber baron of their day? No, if we are going to the trouble to build or maintain a monument, it should speak to our values and our needs today. You might object that it's an impossible standard to expect someone from a century ago to anticipate and adhere to the conventional morality of today. And on that point I would agree.

So rather than looking for moral perfection, I would suggest



King George III plunges from his plinth in this romanticized version of the July 9, 1776 event in New York City. Courtesy New-York Historical Society.

the following approach. If we choose to memorialize a figure, we must first take a holistic look at their life and legacy. We shouldn't concern ourselves at all with the rank or position a character reached in their lifetime- being socially prominent and being good are two unrelated traits. Instead, we must weigh their virtues against their vices and their contributions against their failures. It's not a science and there can be no objective criteria for how to do this. But if after due deliberation we can agree this person helped bring about the type of change we want to see in the world, then they might deserve to be celebrated. Even then we should not fall into hero worship. The monument we erect in someone's honor must be specifically crafted to show why we're honoring them and should even acknowledge the things we find objectionable about them. For my money, that's what a constructive public engagement with history looks like.

I've seen many people alarmed by our current reckoning with public monuments. For some, it's as if our history is being erased

before our very eyes. I can assure you, that's not the case. Our history is not predicated on statues any more than your knowledge of Benedict Arnold is predicated on having seen his anonymous boot monument. Our past will always be kept vibrant in the various museums and historical organizations we're fortunate to have in our backyard. As some statues fall and others are spared, there will be outcomes you agree with and some you disagree with. For my part, I'm very glad to see some more Confederates finally dismantled but was dismayed to see Ulysses S. Grant torn down in San Francisco. However, through it all, what we're seeing is the vital and inevitable process of people engaging with their own history. We don't study history to forbear it or put it on a pedestal. We are not passive recipients of what has come before. We study history in order to inform what our present and future should look like. And yes, nitpicking statues at a park or museum is an indispensable part of that process.

What's Happening

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This month, we re-opened our Museum, Library, and the Mabee Farm to the public. The pandemic is far from over, however. So, in re-opening, we've had to make some adjustments to keep everyone safe and healthy.

Should you be planning a visit to our sites, please keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. All tickets and reservations must be made online, in advance, at least 24 hours before your visit. You can do this by visiting [SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/PROGRAMS](https://schenectadyhistorical.org/programs) or by calling us. Admission is still free for all SCHS members, but we do need you to call us in advance and make an appointment, as our capacity is reduced. We cannot accept walk-in visitors or researchers at this time.

2. All visitors are required to wear a face mask inside SCHS sites, and to maintain social distancing of six feet with other visitors, and SCHS staff and volunteers.

Note also that in August we are resuming outdoor programs that can be held in a socially-distanced way.

I look forward to welcoming you back to our sites. In the meantime, we'll continue to provide entertaining and educational virtual programs, such as our slate of YouTube videos, and our weekly Facebook Livestreams. Check out what we've produced so far by visiting:

[SCHS on Facebook Live:](https://facebook.com/schenectadyhistorical/live_videos)

[FACEBOOK.COM/SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL/LIVE_VIDEOS](https://facebook.com/schenectadyhistorical/live_videos)

[SCHS on Youtube:](https://youtube.com/channel/UCvcvAZG9KIRrk0YJK3TKHUA)

[YOUTUBE.COM/CHANNEL/UCvcvAZG9KIRrk0YJK3TKHUA](https://youtube.com/channel/UCvcvAZG9KIRrk0YJK3TKHUA)

- Mary Zawacki, DIRECTOR@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG

EXHIBITIONS

Virtual Exhibitions

During the quarantine, we digitized a few exhibitions, and created a few new ones! Check them all out at [SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/EXHIBITS/VIRTUAL-EXHIBITS](https://schenectadyhistorical.org/exhibits/virtual-exhibits)

Handcrafted: The Folk and Their Art

Ongoing @ 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

Ongoing @ 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.

Farming the Valley

Ongoing @ Mabee Farm

The transformation of Mabee Farm from a colonial homestead into a prosperous farm, and now a dynamic historic site is the culmination of generations of hard work, daring, and change. This exhibition delves into the history and legacy of Mabee Farm, and highlights some of the Farm's most significant artifacts!

Beyond the Pines: Early Schenectady

Ongoing @ 32 W

Explore Schenectady's beginnings: its founding, its people, and what life was like for early Schenectadians.

Mapping Schenectady

Ongoing @ 32 W

A selection of our most interesting maps are on permanent display in the Map Gallery.

PROGRAMS

Mabee Farm Craft Market

Saturday, Aug 22, 10am-3pm @ Mabee Farm | \$5

We're bringing together the very best of the Capital Region's handcrafted goods! Join us as dozens of artists and crafters spread out over the Mabee Farm grounds with their eclectic, beautifully handcrafted items. All items are handmade here in our region, and include jewelry, home decor, fine art, ceramics, artisan foods and wines, soaps, candles, woodworking, and more!

This event is a fundraiser for the Mabee Farm. Admission is \$5/person, and tickets must be purchased in advance, due to COVID-19 restrictions. Face masks and social distancing required as well. Please purchase tickets online at [SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/PROGRAMS](https://schenectadyhistorical.org/programs)

Kayak Through History

Wednesday, Aug 12 at 5:30pm @ Mohawk Harbor | \$20

Saturday Aug 15 at 10am @ Mohawk Harbor | \$20

Wednesday, Aug 25 at 5:30pm @ Mohawk Harbor | \$20

Saturday, Aug 29 at 10am - Special *Flight of Locks* Tour | \$20

Saturday, Sept 5 at 10am @ Mohawk Harbor | \$20

Wednesday, Sept 9 at 5:30pm @ Mohawk Harbor | \$20

Explore Schenectady from a different vantage point: the Mohawk River! Starting out from Mohawk Harbor, we'll paddle our way upstream to the Glen Sanders Mansion and back, passing under railroad bridges and around wild islands. The paddling will be done by you. The learning will come from an SCHS guide, who will discuss the history of the river and its surroundings. Kayak from Upstate Kayak Rentals is included in the price. Please purchase tickets online at [SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/PROGRAMS](https://schenectadyhistorical.org/programs)

Campfires at the Mabee Farm

Wednesday, Aug 19, 6-8pm @ Mabee Farm | \$8

Wednesday, Sept 16, 6-8pm @ Mabee Farm | \$8

Wednesday, Oct 7, 6-8pm @ Mabee Farm | \$8

Join us for a few fine evenings around the campfire! Come share share ghost stories and other local tall tales with us. We'll have s'mores and hot apple cider readily available. Please be ready to don a mask, and practice social distancing. Tickets available at [SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/PROGRAMS](https://schenectadyhistorical.org/programs).

Walking Tour: Colonial Schenectady

Friday, Aug 14, 6pm @ 32 Washington | \$10; free for members

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 generations of Schenectadians.

Walking Tour: Gossips and Gadflies

Friday, Aug 18, 6pm @ 32 Washington | \$10; free for members

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 neighbor's dirty laundry!

Walking Tour: Black History in Schenectady

Wednesday, Aug 26, 6pm @ 32 Washington | \$10; free for members

Schenectady is filled with Black history and culture. Join us for a walking tour as we explore the people and places that make Schenectady's Black heritage so vibrant. From the Underground Railroad to the Great Migration and the Civil Rights movement, Black Schenectadians have created a proud and tangible legacy in Schenectady County's history!

Walking Tour: The Civil War in Schenectady

Friday, Aug 28, 6pm @ 32 Washington | \$10; free for members

Though no Civil War battles were fought in New York, the state was nevertheless a major source of troops, supplies, equipment and financing for the Union Army. We'll explore what role Schenectadians played in the War Between the States.

Walking Tour: Revolutionary Schenectady

Friday, Sept 4, 6pm @ 32 Washington | \$10; free for members

From forts to barracks and from patriots to loyalists, Schenectady had it all during the American Revolution. Journey with us to Colonial America as we discuss how Schenectady fought for America's independence in the 18th century. Included on the tour is a peek at the incredibly rare Liberty Flag, housed at the SCHS Museum!

Walking Tour: Scandalous Schenectady

Friday, Sept 11, 6pm @ 32 Washington | \$10; free for members

Every city has its fair share of scandal! Scandalous Schenectady recalls some of Schenectady's more nefarious characters. Bold bootlegging, cruel kidnappings and maybe even a few mysterious murders...this tour has it all!

Candlelight Walking Tours

Fridays in October @ 32 Washington | \$12

Our Candlelight Tours are BACK this October (with a few changes, of course). Final details are still to come, but we hope to see you Fridays in October for ghosts and ghouls of the Stockade. This event is presented in conjunction with the Schenectady Heritage Foundation, and is a fundraiser for both organizations.

Around the County with Bill Buell, County Historian

I've spent some time this year marking the 100th anniversary of women getting the right to vote by looking into the lives and careers of Jean Arthur, Ginger Rogers and Donna Reed, three iconic actresses from the 1940s and '50s all with connections to Schenectady.

But there's another woman with an even stronger and longer tie to the area that I shouldn't forget, and that's Maureen O'Sullivan, an actress who became a huge star in the 1930s playing Jane in the Tarzan movies with Johnny Weissmuller. O'Sullivan moved to Niskayuna in 1983 when she married James Cushing, a Schenectady native and owner of Cushing Stone. They lived at the corner of Union Street and Balltown Road until O'Sullivan passed away in 1998 at the age of 87.

I never saw O'Sullivan around town, or if I did I never recognized her, because I will always think of her as Jane. The Tarzan movies, made from 1932-39 with O'Sullivan as Tarzan's mate, were often on television on Saturday mornings back in the 1950s and '60s, and I must confess I was a regular viewer.

In the 1980s, I can remember walking into the Price Chopper on Eastern Avenue and over-hearing two women talking about how they had just seen O'Sullivan in the store and that she often went there to shop. For the next few months that Price Chopper became my store of choice for all kinds of groceries, but I never caught a glimpse of Jane. Or, like I said, if I did, I never realized it. She also was often seen at the House of Charms Beauty Salon on Union Street. Jean Reilly, wife of former historical society president Edwin Reilly, told the Gazette in 1998 that O'Sullivan was personable "and very friendly to everybody."

When she died back in 1998, the Schenectady Gazette had two reporters covering her memorial service and wake, and the mourners included her daughter Mia Farrow, also a famous actress. Held at the Gleason Funeral Home on Union Street in Schenectady, the wake lasted more than three hours as family, friends and fans all paid their respects. A private Mass of Christian Burial was held the next day at the St. Mary of Angels Chapel at Siena College in Loudonville.

Born in Ireland, O'Sullivan and Cushing had homes in Schenectady County and Scottsdale, Arizona, where she spent much of her time as she got older. Her first movie credit was "So This is London," dating back to 1930, and the final piece of work she did, according to her IMDB page, was a TV movie,

"Hart to Hart: Home is Where the Heart Is," in 1994 with Robert Wagner and Stephanie Powers. Along with starring in "Tarzan," some of her more memorable films include "Anna Karenina," "Cardinal Richelieu" and "Price and Prejudice."

At the House of Charms, a family business which has been in its Union Street location for 42 years, O'Sullivan is still fondly remembered. "She was a wonderful, lovely person," said Sue Durfee, who did O'Sullivan's hair countless times in the 1980s and 1990s and still works at the salon. "I loved her. She told me once that she was the sexiest Jane they had. She was very funny that way. I asked her once how many grandchildren she had and she told me she didn't know because her daughter kept on adopting kids," added Durfee. "She was a real down-to-earth person and very easy to talk to."

O'Sullivan and Cushing, who died in 2011, were big supporters of Siena College and St. Clare's Hospital. They are both buried at the Most Holy Redeemer Cemetery in Niskayuna.



From the Library

NOTE FROM THE LIBRARIAN

As we all know the library has been closed for the last few months, but the library's activities haven't stopped. Several of the library's volunteers have been working on remote projects like adding content to our NY Heritage repository (<https://nyheritage.org/contributors/schenectady-county-historical-society>) and writing indexes for digital materials. New archival materials have been donated and added to the collection. We're exploring ways to work with groups who are fighting for equity and justice to document their activities and contributions to our community. Thank you to everyone who has continued to support the library!

UPDATE ON THE COVID-19 ARCHIVE PROJECT

Since March, SCHS has been collecting materials that document the COVID-19 pandemic, including

photos and stories. In the future, we expect to collect journals, scrapbooks, art, and personal papers (e.g. letters and emails). As our region reopens, we'd like to collect stories of how the community is preparing and reacting to this new stage in the pandemic. How are you adapting to the latest information and guidelines? What are your thoughts on the progress of reopening? What do you want future researchers to know about how the pandemic has impacted you? If you'd like to submit your story, you can find the link on the library's blog post "COVID-19 Archive Project" or the SCHS Facebook page. Please contact Marietta at librarian@schenectadyhistorical.org if you have questions or would like to donate materials.

BLOG POSTS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

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

Elizabeth Gillette, Schenectady's First Woman Surgeon

by Gail Denisoff | March 25, 2020

Dr. Gillette was the first licensed female surgeon in Schenectady County. In this post, library volunteer Gail Denisoff describes her career in medicine and politics, volunteer activities, and legacy in the community.

Historical Significance and Historical Markers

by Marietta Carr | April 29, 2020

In this post, Marietta explores the concept of historical significance and the role of historical markers in remembering and understanding history.

Preservation Month Series

May 2020

In May, SCHS joined the nation-wide celebration of Preservation Month. Preserving our historic collections is a key component of SCHS's mission. As part of our celebration, SCHS staff presented live videos addressing common preservation questions on our Facebook page and shared resources for preserving personal and family archival collections on the library's blog. The blog also featured interviews with Hannah Miller, Mike Diana, Suzy Fout, and Marietta Carr, sharing their experiences with caring for our collections and historic buildings.

Image: "Big Foot's Ready for My Close Up" photo by S. Clark. COVID-19 Archive, S. Clark Photo Collection.





lead and 9 bags of powder” to the Mohawks for the small flat of land on which Schenectady would be built. It is only fitting that 150 years later, the town’s first official banking institution would be built on that same land.

The Mohawk Bank started in a small, Federal-style home on Church Street. The bank rented the home of Mrs. Campbell at a rate of 70 pounds per year, and opened to the public on April 15, 1808. Prior to the bank there was no standard currency, so transactions, like those of Arent Van Curler, were conducted through trades and the bargaining of goods. After the American Revolution, Schenectady was part of a burgeoning new country with a new financial structure, and thus needed a centralized bank to standardize money and invest in local projects. The Mohawk Bank’s board of directors, made up of local businessmen with a keen interest in the vitality and growth of the city, fervorously financed new innovations and businesses leading to growth. Then, as Schenectady grew and changed, so did its local banking institution.

In 1815, the bank purchased the plot directly across from the Campbell house and began planning its expansion. Though records are unclear, the Board of Directors most likely hired Philip Hooker, New York’s pre-eminent architect, to design their new facility. A native of Albany, Hooker was no stranger to planning grand buildings; most of the churches, banks, and other public structures built in Albany at the turn of the 19th century—including the former Capitol building—were designed by Hooker. A contractor by trade, Hooker had no formal education in architecture but became an architect out of a need to draw the buildings he was asked to construct. Like others in his profession, Hooker drew on classic Greek and Roman motifs for his designs, a style popular in a nation wanting to align its image with these ancient democracies. His exteriors show a decisive severity, contrasted with carefully executed ornamental details. True to form, the Mohawk Bank displays the same power and grace. Though it would take nearly three years to complete, this classic structure was the perfect silhouette to add to the city’s skyline. The Mohawk

Bank stood as a symbol of Schenectady's transformation from a small trading village to a manufacturing town.

Originally, the building's main entrance was on Union Street, and was reserved for use by customers of the bank. A side entrance on Church Street was used by the cashier, David Boyd, who occupied the upper floors. In the early days of banking, a cashier acted as a bank manager of sorts, and often lived on premises. The bank was state-of-the-art for its day. The vault, built into the basement, had masonry walls three feet thick and was surrounded by a tunnel used for patrolling the perimeter. Local lore has it that Boyd was so nervous about theft that he paced this tunnel every night with a shotgun and a watchdog, guarding the bank and its contents. The grand facade built around the burglar-proof vault left customers none the wiser of what was buried deep underground.

The bank's new headquarters fit right in with its neighbors. At the time of its construction in 1815, the Stockade district was still a prominent residential and commercial center. Merchants and traders kept warehouses along what is now Washington Avenue and Front Street, storing goods and produce coming up the river. Businesses scattered throughout the neighborhood offered a number of professional services. But as the commercial and industrial location of the city migrated, so did the bank. In 1853, the Mohawk Bank moved to a brownstone on State Street, a location more conducive to Schenectady's sprawling urban center. And so began the building's first transformation.

Transitions

Chauncey Vibbard was a local businessman with a keen interest in the railroad industry. Educated in Albany, Mr. Vibbard spent some time in New York City and Alabama, before making his way to Schenectady in 1836. After helping to consolidate several small, local railroads into the formidable New York Central Railroad, Vibbard became the company's first superintendent. In need of a grand new residence to match his grand new title, Vibbard purchased the Mohawk Bank, converting it into a mansion. Known around town as a high-roller, Vibbard spent a small fortune refurbishing the interior. A cupola was added and the Union Street entrance closed off. Soon, 1 N. Church Street became renowned for its rosewood staircases, luxurious ballrooms, wine dinners, and lavish parties. Over the next two decades, the old bank remained a residence. In an ironic twist of fate, the building's next occupant was Edward Delevan, founder of the American Temperance Union. Instead of dinners flowing with wine and revelry, 1 N. Church Street became known for thoughtful political discourse and a hub of activity for outlawing the consumption of alcohol. After Delevan came Henry Crane, owner of the Brandywine Textile Mill. A dollar and cents kind of man, Crane's residency was rather uneventful. There were no more parties, no more heated political debates. Crane's tenure was short lived, three years to be exact, and soon the halls would be filled with the laughter of young students.

As one of the United States' oldest institutions for higher education, Union College was keenly aware of Schenectady's need for a secondary school to prepare bright city students for college. In 1872, Union College purchased the elegant Delevan home and converted the residence into the Union Classical Institute, or UCI to the locals. Students studied the "classics" such as algebra, Latin, English, and Ancient History. Throughout the three year curriculum, students moved on to advanced mathematics and sciences. The atmosphere at UCI was intimate and family-like; classmates shared in the highs and lows of youth. In the fifty years that UCI operated at 1 N. Church, hundreds of bright young minds went through its doors. Yet, the incredible growth of Schenectady which had prompted the move of Mohawk Bank to State Street is the same growth which would bring about the building's third transition.

Throughout the 1800s, Schenectady had spread like a river in a flood. With each new population boom, the public school system became inundated. The UCI building, which by the turn of the century was nearing its centennial celebration, had become too small, too outdated, and too costly to maintain. So, in 1904, the students moved into a brand new facility: Nott Terrace High School became Schenectady's first official public high school. It was then that the community began to ask the same questions we are asking today. What would happen to the old building now? Who could possibly be willing to take on an old, drafty school with strangely divided rooms, narrow hallways, and an inadequate heating system? Luckily, a group of rabbit hunters was willing to take on the challenge.

The Mohawk Club began in 1877 as a sports club for local men with an interest in hunting. By the early 20th century the club had expanded into an elite, private social club attracting a select group of business, civic, and professional leaders. The Mohawk Club purchased 1 N. Church Street and began extensive remodeling, including the removal of the cupola and enlarging the dining room. Deep in the basement, the old stone vault was converted into a meat cooler, and Vibbard's wine cellars were once again stocked with wines, scotches, and cognacs for club members. For the next 100 years the Club flourished and the building began to resemble the one we see today. An addition was added to the Church Street side of the building and the upper floors were further subdivided into guest rooms for overnight stays by club members. But as is the case with many city clubs in modern times, memberships began to decline, forcing the group to sell its beloved clubhouse. And, yet again, the building began another transformation. The same questions were asked, the same fears faced. Thankfully an intrepid father-son-duo saw potential in the old club.

Jack MacDonald and his son Jeff purchased the Mohawk Club in 2003 with a grand vision in mind. The multiple rooms and elegant ballrooms were perfect for a boutique inn and event space in the heart of a historic district. Jack was not new to rehabilitating historic buildings; in 2000 he and his brother converted an old print shop into a successful bar and restaurant, Pinhead Susan's. Believing in the vitality of

Schenectady, he brought his son into the family “business” and their vision quickly came to life. The former club was transformed into the Stockade Inn: a Victorian styled hotel and a fine dining restaurant with multiple banquet rooms. The inn’s billiards room and lounge bar harkened back to the building’s former glory days as a clubhouse.

Some called them crazy to start an inn in a troubled city. But the McDonalds knew Schenectady was ready for a comeback. It has been a long journey, but they were right. Schenectady, in the near 20 years since the inn opened, is once again on the rise. In 2019, the McDonalds chose to sell the inn to hotelier Robert Gregor in order to focus on their other properties. After a series of unfortunate events, 1 N. Church Street is once again for sale, and finds itself at yet another crossroads. The question is, what happens to the building now?

Historic Preservation

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, communities around the country became increasingly concerned with protecting their landmarks from an onslaught of “revitalization” programs which typically bulldozed historic areas in the name of progress. In response, the creation of historic districts sought to protect these buildings and sites. Linked either historically or aesthetically, a historic district can be anything from a residential area, farm, or large estate, to a downtown business district or industrial site. Though the National Register of Historic Places was created in 1966, placing a property on the register is not always enough to protect it; these listings are mostly symbolic and do little to legally protect the structures. The real power lies with local historic commissions.

Many people confuse the Schenectady County Historical Society with a building preservation or enforcement organization. Besides the preservation of structures we own, the SCHS has no legal authority over other buildings in the county. In Schenectady, the Historic District Commission (HDC) is the governing body which wields this power. Composed of local residents who have knowledge and experience in the field of historic preservation, the group reviews and approves applications for projects based on the guidelines set forth by the city council and approved in the city code. Their jurisdiction is only applicable to “changes visible from the public way and on the exterior features of a building or structures ... and shall not consider interior arrangements.” As the Stockade Inn faces another transition, the HDC, along with the Schenectady Board of Zoning Appeals, will help determine its fate.

The good news is, the Stockade Inn is not currently in danger of being torn down. The disagreement lies on what to do with it next. Its current owner, Gregor, seeks to sell the building. Until July 2020, Redburn Development Partners sought to purchase the building from Gregor, and convert it into 23 apartments. However, many residents of the Stockade felt that the conversion of the structure into apartments went against the city’s plans for revitalization of the neighborhood, and would mean the loss of a “majestic” and “spirited” public space. Over 120 residents signed an open letter in protest of Redburn’s

proposed conversion. Alternatively, supporters of Redburn argued that the building’s only viable use is housing. Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in between. Regardless, pressure from the neighborhood caused Redburn to withdraw their interest in the property.

There is a pervasive idea that building preservation is only about preserving old buildings for the sake of history and museums. While this may be true in some cases, most historic preservation is about finding a balance between history, change, and community. Cities and towns that have embraced their heritage and allowed it to remain intact take on a vibrant, eclectic feel that cannot be replicated. But this means adapting and reusing existing structures to fit the current needs of the community. Preservation is about asking where we have been, and what our needs are moving forward. And that is where the Schenectady County Historical Society comes in.

The mission of the SCHS is to document Schenectady history and share the stories of the county, its people, and its culture. We’re not in charge of what happens to the Stockade Inn; that’s not our provenance. What we can do, however, is to be an advocate for historic buildings by documenting and sharing their history. By understanding our county’s past and the characteristics that make this place unique, we can all better understand our present and our future. As we have seen, the story of 1 N. Church Street is the story of Schenectady. From its beginnings as the Mohawk Bank to its recent status as a boutique inn and restaurant, every iteration of the building represents a new chapter in Schenectady’s story; a story of growth, strength, change, and adaptation. What will the next chapter bring? Only time will tell. We will be here to document it.

If you have stories, items, or photographs of the Mohawk Bank during any period of its history please share them with us! Email exhibits@schenetcadychistorical.org.

HELP NISKAYUNA HISTORY!

The **Niskayuna Historical Advisory Committee** is asking for the community's help in learning about interests and preferences with respect to the preservation and study of Niskayuna Town history. You can help by taking their survey, available at:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/NTHACsurvey

Made up of the Niskayuna Town Historian and a group of citizen volunteers who were appointed by the Town Board, the Niskayuna Historical Advisory Committee supports the Town Historian’s efforts to research, communicate and educate, preserve, and advocate the distinctive history of the Town of Niskayuna.



Page 1: A recent image of the Stockade Inn. Page 8: The Union Classical Institute c. 1905, from the Grems-Doolittle Library.
 Page 11 top: Postcard from the Wayne Tucker Postcard Collection at the Grems-Doolittle Library.
 Page 11 bottom: A private dining room inside the Mohawk Club, c. 1985, from the Grems-Doolittle Library.

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Around the Society

Without visitors, our attention has been directed at sharing history from spots throughout the county, and on the Mabee Farm gardens. Here, we're happy to share a few images of the Farm's bounty, as well as our masked staff, excited to greet visitors again. Bonus if you can spot Farmer John!





Mike at the Mabee Farm



Suzy at the Museum

Handcrafted: The Folk and their Art

Bright, bold colors. Quaint and genuine. Beautiful in an unrefined way. These are just a few characteristics of "folk art," a genre difficult to define, yet easily recognizable.

American folk art was born in the pre-industrial era, and consists of diverse objects created by regular people as a means of expression. This creative impulse, and our universal search for beauty, are at the core of the Schenectady County Historical Society's folk art collection.

Made and used by ordinary people, the folk art here reflects human needs, values, concerns, and desires. The art expresses the contrasts between the common and the elite, the urban and the rural, which characterize Schenectady's past. At the root of the exhibition we ask, who were these artisans, and what does their art say about our shared past?

Journey with us through our region's folk art, interpreted here in terms of utility, community, creativity, and symbolism. As you make your way through the gallery, we hope the pieces on display will inspire a deeper understanding of art's role in people's lives: both yesterday and today.

"Handcrafted" was co-curated by Susanna Fout and Marilyn Sassi. A special thank you to the museums, institutions, and private individuals who contributed to the formation of this exhibition: Fulton County Historical Society, Van Alstyne Homestead, New York State Museum, Arkell Museum, Marilyn Sassi, Deborah Lambeth, Arthur Dell, William Ackner, and Nancy Wassmund.





Marietta at the Library & Archives



Mary Z. at the Mabee Farm