

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SCHENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2020-2021

Minutes

Annual Meeting of the Schenectady County Historical Society | July 21, 2020

President Bob Weible opened the annual meeting of the Schenectady County Historical Society at 7:00 p. m. The meeting was held virtually via Google Meet due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trustees in attendance were: Marianne Blanchard, Tom Dunn, Philip Fields, Ellen Fladger, DJ Leblanc, Chris Leonard, Marty Strosberg, Robert Sullivan, Dave Trestick, Robert Weible, John Woodward

Michael Diana, Mary Treanor and Mary Zawacki also attended.

Executive Director Mary Zawacki asked to approve the minutes from last year's annual meeting. Ellen Fladger moved and Chris Leonard seconded; passed unanimously. Mary Zawacki asked if President Weible had any comments.

He said he was glad to see everyone who had joined us. We are keeping our heads above water, we have been doing research and planning for the future and keeping the money coming in. Our finances have been strong for many years, and we are still in a healthy financial position, but we appreciate any donations to help us during this situation. He also noted that in times of crisis, it is critical that the community stays in touch with its history.

Mary Zawacki turned the meeting over to Ellen Fladger, chair of the Nominating Committee. We are saying farewell to Laura Lee, Kim Mabee and Carolina Lazzari. We thank them for all the work they have done, collectively and individually. Our current slate includes Marianne Blanchard, Tom Dunn, Robert Sullivan, Dale Wade-Keszey and John Woodward. We have two new candidates, each with the first name of David. Dave Trestick is an accountant with the State of New York with strong interest in history and hiking. DJ Leblanc has an illustrious history with the Society, previously serving as an intern and administrative assistant.

Ellen asked for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, she asked for a motion. Chris Leonard moved to approve the slate of trustees and Philip Fields seconded. Ellen declared the slate as presented had passed.

This concluded the nominations part of the annual meeting. Mary Zawacki said we had no other business, which is unusual for the annual meeting. Ellen Fladger moved to adjourn and Chris Leonard seconded at 7:08 p.m.

President Weible declared the motion carried and said it was our shortest annual meeting ever.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Secretary Robert Sullivan

Andrew Lynch performs outside the Barn at Mabee Farm during the Fall Craft Market.



President's Report

It's safe to say, I think, that 2020 was a difficult year. Without doubt, we at the Schenectady County Historical Society are happy to have outlasted the year's many challenges and gotten all those hardships behind us. Still, there's more to it than just being grateful for having survived. After all, it wasn't just by chance that SCHS made it through the worst public health crisis in anyone's memory or the equally frightening economic calamities that followed. No, when we remember 2020, we should do so with justifiable pride and a strong sense of accomplishment. Why? Because all of us—from our Trustees to our capable staff and volunteers to our loyal members and gracious donors—rose up and proved something to ourselves and our community when we stayed focused on our collective vision and determined to overcome one daunting challenge after another. This was no small achievement. But guess what. We made it look easy.

Remember. We shut down our operations when the COVID pandemic first threatened and then took the time to prepare for a year that would be like no other. And after that, under Executive Director Mary Zawacki's leadership, our professional staff members distinguished themselves by developing an impressive array of thoughtful and innovative virtual programs. We also served researchers online or by appointment under safe and secure conditions. And then when we were able to open our doors again, we safely welcomed visitors to our sites through some modified but well-received outdoor programming. We also improved our physical facilities by replacing the roof at the Brouwer House, upgrading the heating and air conditioning system at our headquarters, and completing Phase I of the Mabee Farm roof replacement. Plus we were able to address our need to reach out to previously underserved audiences by securing funding and working with community members on our promising African American Records Project. Significantly, too, we were able to make all these good things happen, because of the generosity of our members and donors and the skillful fiscal management of our Trustees and staff.

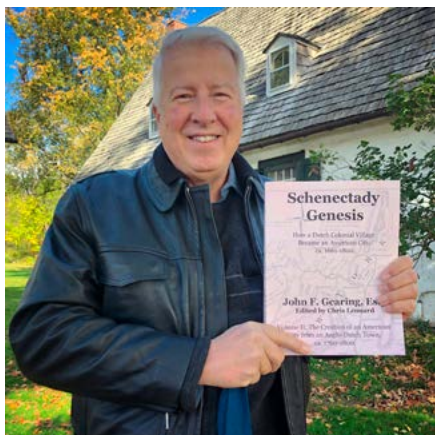
Sadly, meanwhile, we will be losing—as we do every year at this time—a few of our friends on the Board of Trustees. Bob Carney, Ellen Fladger, Vice President Richard Lewis, and Marty Strosberg will all be rotating off the Board this year after having each served for years with true distinction. We will miss each of them more

(Below)

A Mabee Maple Day participant samples the syrup

Delivery day for the SICM archival collection at 32 Washington Ave.





John Gearing, Esq. and his new book.



Staff tending to the Mabee Farm gardens.



A friendly (and stylish!) dog attending the August Craft Market at Mabee Farm.

than they know and expect none of them to be strangers. At the same time, we welcome back to the Board our Treasurer John Halstead, Secretary Bob Sullivan, Sarah Kirby, Chris Leonard, and Kevin Richard-Morrow—and two new Trustees: Sheri Lullo and Hannah Miller.

So now the good news is that we are itching to get back to business at full capacity: reopening all of our sites, welcoming more visitors, serving more researchers, working with more community groups, adding new members, and making new friends. All in all, I expect the coming year to be one of our best ever. There are people everywhere who haven't been able to get out of their homes for more than a year now and who just can't wait to come and see us. We will, of course, be equally glad to see them.

Kim Balfour did an incredible job replacing the wooden shingles on the Mabee Farm Inn's roof.



Executive Director's Report

For some time at SCHS, we've pondered what exactly "history in the making" is. How do you know if you're making history? How do you know what future historians will be interested in? And, to that point, what do we collect and examine from the present day, to best inform the future?

2020 gave us an answer of sorts to that question. Together, the unprecedented health crisis and important racial conversations of 2020 gave us the most memorable year of the century. Lives were changed -- and, sadly, lives were lost. 2020 took us out of our day-to-day routines, forced us to examine our choices and goals, and taught us to think outside the box. 2020 was truly history in the making. It's a strange thing to be a historical society and to finally live through something deeply historic. And, though SCHS weathered COVID and the economy successfully, I am glad it is behind us.

Looking ahead, I can't wait to see our members and volunteers on the grounds of Mabee Farm, or researching in the Library once again. I look forward to learning together, to exploring together, and to questioning the historical narrative, together.

Without a doubt, a solid understanding of history is essential in navigating our times. Armed with a deep understanding of the past, we are informed citizens of the present. History explains "why" and "how" the present came to be, enabling us to make better decisions about our shared future. And, perhaps most importantly, history expands our understanding of different people and different cultures. In understanding the struggles, the hopes, and the dreams of our predecessors, we are more empathetic citizens. Our minds are open to new possibilities, and to new ideas. In studying history, we see the bigger picture.

That we made it through 2020-2021, I must thank SCHS' passionate and dedicated staff, board, and volunteers. Particularly, our President, Robert Weible, offered countless hours of calm expertise when challenge upon challenge presented itself. But none of this would have been possible, of course, without the support of our incredible membership. SCHS members are the soul of our organization, and we're fortunate to have such dedicated students of local history in our community. Thank you, to every one of you who supports SCHS and local history. I really can't wait to see you all again!

-Mary Zawacki, Executive Director



Librarian Marietta Carr at the Grems-Doolittle Library, preparing for a livestream.

Grems-Doolittle Library and Archives

Library Use

During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the Library had 156 visitors. The librarian and volunteers answered 200 reference questions by email, mail, phone, and Facebook. In addition to our visitors and remote reference questions, we received 43,137 visits to the library's blog, over 6,800 visits to our New York Heritage Digital Collections, and 2,235 visits to our online catalog.

Volunteers

Our volunteers are vital to the library and we could not function as well without them. This year our volunteers contributed 1,264 hours to the library and adapted to changes caused by new COVID-19 protocols. Several of our volunteers took on remote projects. Three new volunteers joined our team. Some of the projects completed by volunteers this year include: photographing the Dutch Bibles for inclusion in a New Netherland database, scanning the SCHS board minutes, cataloging unbound newspapers, digitizing and transcribing documents for two new NY Heritage collections, and digitizing scrapbooks.

Grant Funded Projects

We worked on three grant-funded projects this year:

- **Documents About Enslaved People in Schenectady:** funded by the Capital District Library Council (CDLC) to digitize items from the Historic Manuscripts Collection that document enslaved people in Schenectady County. The collection is available on our New York Heritage site.
- **True Crime, An American Genre:** a series of reading and discussion group events funded by a grant from Humanities New York. Chris Leonard, Schenectady City Historian, and Bill Buell, Schenectady County Historian, facilitated the discussions which began on-site in February 2020 and continued virtually in the Fall.
- **African American Historical Records Project:** the first stage in a three-part documentation project which seeks to identify, catalog, and preserve historic materials created by African Americans in Schenectady County. In the first stage, we will create a plan for the project and develop a survey to distribute throughout the community. We received an award from NYS Archives Documentary Heritage Program.

Library Resources Online

New York Heritage Digital Collections (<https://nyheritage.org/contributors/schenectady-county-historical-society>) is a free research portal for anyone interested in learning more about the people, places, and institutions of New York State. We currently have eleven collections on our NY Heritage site,

including three new collections added this year: Pearson Street Books, Deeds of Schenectady County, and Documents About Enslaved People in Schenectady.

We continued to add new posts on the Gremms-Doolittle Library Collections Blog, which can be found at [HTTP://GREMSDOOLITTLELIBRARY.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://GREMSDOOLITTLELIBRARY.BLOGSPOT.COM). The blog highlights materials from our library and archive collections as well as interesting pieces of local history. Some of the most popular posts this year include the May *Preservation Series*, *Historical Significance and Historical Markers*, and *Marie Curie Visited GE*.

Collection Care & Preservation

The library has continued to make progress this year in preserving and processing collections in our archives. Processing includes arrangement, description, and rehousing. This year we've completed processing on the following collections: Bill Davis Postcard digital collection, Schenectady City School District records, and several Keefer research binders.

Digitization is an important component of the library's operations. Digitizing materials contributes to collection care and preservation by reducing the need for physical handling of materials, increasing the metadata and description for individual items, and increasing access through our online resources. Collections and materials digitized during this year include: the Laura Brown slide collection, the Irma Mastrean (Princeton Historian) slide collection, and the Schenectady Ancient Order of Hibernians scrapbooks.

We continued the "re-inventory" of our archives collections. The goal of this project is to make sure every collection in the archives has a corresponding record in PastPerfect, our collection management software. This project will also allow us to see which collections need further care and organization and establish priorities for future processing and preservation.

New Library Resources, Donated and Purchased

The library added over 100 accessions of donated and purchased books, maps, photographs, genealogy research, ephemera and collections of personal/family papers and organizational records. The new materials in our collection include the second half of the Schenectady Community Ministries (formerly Schenectady Inner City Ministry), Mohawk Club registers and ledgers, Feibes and Schmitt architectural drawings, Ron Kingsley archaeological research, and *Das Deutsche Journal* microfilm.

The library started the COVID19 Archive Project to collect the stories, photos, and documents that show how our community was impacted by the pandemic.

Library-Sponsored Programs and Outreach Activities

The library sponsored several great programs and participated in several outreach events throughout the year. Library programs included Genealogy Day, Ask an Archivist Social Media Day, a talk by Dr. William Griswold, and Facebook livestreams that highlighted materials in our collections.

Students from Professor Jennifer Dorsey's NY History class completed service-learning projects for the library, including metadata creation, transcription, and newspaper clippings.

A significant number of photos from the library's collection were included in a new coffee-table book called ***Capital Region Memories*** by Pediment Publishing, working in collaboration with the ***Times Union*** newspaper.

The librarian virtually hosted members of the Capital District Library Council for a tour of SCHS and Grems-Doolittle Library in July. In August, Marietta was a panelist for a webinar on reopening and adjusting to COVID-19 guidelines at smaller institutions, hosted by Foundation for Advancement in Conservation's Connecting to Collections program.

- Marietta Carr, Librarian & Archivist



Farmer John is half the size of his broomcorn crop in late summer, 2020.

Operations

Development

Grants: SCHS received a total of \$13,225 in grants this fiscal year:

New York State Archives Partnership Trust: \$4,975

Erie Canalway Heritage Fund: \$500

Humanities New York: \$7,750

Fundraisers:

Arts & Crafts Markets: \$11,787

Festival of Trees: \$4,099

Donations: SCHS received 396 individual donations for a total of \$107,963.

Exhibits and Interpretation

New exhibitions were put on hold for 2020, both at SCHS locations and off-site. Instead, curator Suzy Fout worked on digitizing exhibitions, culminating in three online exhibits and an interactive map of the Mabee Farm.

Though exhibitions were put on hold, planning for new exhibitions was not. Suzy spent the year collaborating with students in the SUNY Oneonta Fashion and Textiles. The collaboration allowed students the opportunity to work "hands-on" (virtually) with the SCHS historic garment collection. Students researched a garment of their choosing from the SCHS collection, and based on that research, designed its modern counterpart. The collaboration will result in a 2021 exhibition that explores the historical importance of women's clothing and fashion in the expression of cultural values and the creation of identity. Preparation for this exhibit was extensive, including rephotographing and digitizing a large portion of our garment collection so that it was accessible to students. A Humanities New York Action grant will help fund the exhibition.

Programs and Special Events

Most of our scheduled programming was cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19. However, we were still able to safely host several in-person events. This includes:

- A sold-out slate of Candlelight Walking Tours
- Numerous historic walking tours
- Kayak Through History tours on the Mohawk
- Two craft markets at Mabee Farm
- The annual Festival of Trees at 32 Washington Ave
- Mabee Maple Day
- Several workshops, small family programs, themed tours of the Mabee Farm and a book club

Importantly, SCHS was successful in reaching people online. Through nine virtual talks with experts, fifty livestreams around Schenectady County, and ten YouTube videos, we reached tens of thousands of people. This was brand new to SCHS, and took some adjusting. We look forward to continuing to bring our members digital content.

Virtual talks in 2020-2021 included:

- *The Americanized Greeks of Schenectady and the Balkan Wars* with Peter S. Giakoumis
- *Black Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow* with New-York Historical Society
- *Archaeology at Saratoga Battlefield* with Dr. William Griswold
- *Scots-Irish of the Currybush* with Terry McMaster
- *Becoming a "Nation of Statesmen: The Mohicans' Incorporation into the Iroquois League* with Dr. Evan Haefeli
- *Fearing too great a Correspondency: The 1690 Schenectady Massacre and Jacob Leisler* with Dr. David William Voorhees
- *An Upright Stockade and a Small Breastwork: Fortifications in New Netherland* with Dr. Jaap Jacobs
- *The Seneca Nation and Kinzua Dam* with Dr. Jason Corwin
- *The Wider World of Early Schenectady* with Dr. LH Roper

Collections

SCHS staff were forced to put collections work on hold for spring and summer, as staff worked from home. When collections work resumed, most of our efforts were put into updating our content management software, PastPerfect. The update will allow access to our collections data online, and will fix bugs and connectivity issues we have had at both of our sites.

Education and Community Outreach

Our education programing faced serious disruptions. Nevertheless, SCHS staff were quick to adapt and offer a wide variety of virtual programs through the worst of the pandemic. For more than thirty elementary school teams whose field trips had to be canceled, educator Michael Diana immediately produced a virtual field trip, uploaded on the Historical Society's Youtube page. In addition, SCHS staff collaborated on a long running series of Facebook live streams. Collectively, these livestreams account for tens of thousands of public engagements with an audience far beyond our local community. And, finally, our usual public lecture series was also brought into the digital age, allowing us to invite speakers from across the country and even across the Atlantic Ocean. While the pandemic certainly dampened some of the fun we might have had, our Society has learned valuable digital outreach skills which will ultimately strengthen it for the indefinite future. Throughout the pandemic, the SCHS offered small-scale, in-person tours to the public with strict

attention paid to Covid safety. However, this spring, the Mabee Farm has been able to open its doors to ever-larger tour groups. A variety of private groups, home schools and even some public school teachers are scheduled to visit. It may be a slow process, but we're confident that the rest of this year will see the SCHS return to the vibrant public offerings it is known for.

Technology

Thanks to the expertise of one of our volunteers, SCHS made strides in updating and upgrading our technology. This included migrating our servers to the cloud, familiarization with new virtual program formats (Facebook Live and Zoom), installing security cameras, and replacing outdated hardware with new MacBook Pros. We still have some work to do, but these changes helped SCHS adjust to the realities of a COVID and post-COVID world.

Volunteers

Volunteers are an extraordinary asset to SCHS. Though most of our regular volunteering opportunities were put on hold this year, volunteers still helped accomplish a variety of projects at our sites, including special events, library research, and buildings and grounds improvements. SCHS enjoys a reputation as a friendly and fun place to volunteer due to the welcoming, positive attitude of our volunteers. The board and staff at SCHS are grateful to our volunteers.

-Michael Diana, Educator

-Susanna Fout, Curator

-Mary Zawacki, Executive Director

Buildings & Grounds

The Buildings and Grounds Committee oversaw the completion of several important projects over the past year. We also welcomed a new member in DJ LeBlanc.

Two of our buildings received new roofs in 2021. The new wood shingle roof on the inn at the Mabee Farm is complete thanks to Kim Balfour and Joel Caraher. Kim will be making shingles for the farmhouse and brick house next, and will start those larger projects this summer. The slate roof at the Brouwer House was replaced with a new asphalt shingle roof, after approval by the Historic District Commission. That significant project was paid for by the Kindl family, and also involved removing several layers of past roofing and replacing the decking, as well as replacing the water dam between the House and 16 N. Church. The previous dam had a leak that allowed water to drain into the narrow area between the houses. Since that area has been opened up, the temperature in that previously closed space fell, and a water pipe froze and burst in the wall of the Brouwer House. That has been repaired, and the water shut off.

John Ackner has been maintaining the grounds at all sites, and made sure they were ready for the rentals we had. He also harvested and maintained the gardens and crops at Mabee Farm, and maintained the Winn Bigelow nature trail.

At 32 Washington Ave, the shed behind the library has been cleared out and reorganized for use by volunteers. We received a very expensive quote for repairing the holes made by squirrels in the front of the building near the roof overhang, then a more reasonable one from Home Evolution - they will perform the work this year. Home Evolution has also provided an estimate to repair torn and disconnected flashing and gutter sections at the Franchere Center; that will also be completed this year. The woodwork in the lobby was refinished and will help us put on our best face for visitors.

At the Mabee Farm, a new shed was built - with old-fashioned all-wooden construction similar to the barn - for a bake oven that will be housed under its pitched roof. The shutters were removed from the first-floor Education Center windows, and the brick facade looks much better without them. The Farm will also have a new chicken coop this year, tended by a volunteer - this will make it a more authentic farm! The orchard was expanded with additional new fruit trees, the garden fence will be upgraded, and new interpretive signs will be mounted - the posts are ready.

Finally, John Ackner has several ongoing maintenance tasks for all properties, which are not reported here but are included in a collaborative Google document that he, the Executive Director and the B&G chairperson all have access to. Others are welcome to be added to the access list. The document is updated approximately bimonthly, in line with the B&G committee meetings. Meeting minutes are also available there.

- Mark Vermilyea, B&G Chair

(Below)

The new shingle roof on the Inn looks great!

Contractors installing the new roof on the Brouwer House.





A beautiful night in Schenectady's
Riverside Park.

Membership

During this past fiscal year, the Schenectady County Historical Society added 133 new memberships, resulting in a total of 728 “membership units.” Gift memberships were purchased for 12 people, and 7 businesses utilized our business sponsor membership. Our board, staff, and volunteers are continuously recruiting new members amongst the patrons and visitors to our many programs, both on site and at various community outreach events.

- Mary Treanor, Administrative Officer

Finance

The Profit & Loss Statement and Balance Sheet for fiscal year 2020/21 are available upon request. After our annual audit, final figures will form the basis for our IRS 990 form to be filed in August. Visit and register for the free website www.guidestar.org to see our last 990 form or ones for any other not-for-profit organization in the United States.

- John Halstead, Treasurer

(Below)

A sunny day in the Grems-Doolittle Library.

32 Washington Ave lit up for the Festival of Trees.



2020 By the Numbers

Support and Revenue

Operating Income: \$588,851.20

Non-Operating Income: \$220,049.30

Total Income: \$808,900.50

Expenses

Operating Expense: \$486,957.78

Non-Operating Expense: \$78,549.60

Total Expenses: \$744,677.50

The full Profit & Loss Statement and Balance Sheet for fiscal year 2020/21 are available upon request.

SCHENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MISSION

The Schenectady County Historical Society shares stories, inspires dialogue and encourages understanding of the history, people, and cultures of Schenectady County.

VISION

The Schenectady County Historical Society will strengthen our community and be an increasingly vital destination and resource for those who wish to explore history.

The **Schenectady County Historical Society** brings to life the region's dynamic history through interactive exhibits and events for all audiences at the Mabee Farm Historic Site, the Grems-Doolittle Library, the Schenectady History Museum, and the historic Brouwer House.