

Schenectady County Historical Society



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Fallen Game Wardens of New York and the Mystery of Game Protector John Woodruff

by Tim Huss

Thirty-two-year-old John Woodruff of Scotia, New York was a rugged outdoorsman and a crack shot with a firearm, so it was no surprise to those who knew him when he left his job at the real estate office of J.A. Lindsley on State Street in Schenectady to join New York's Game Protector force. The prospect of an exciting career as a Game Protector was something that appealed to many men who sought to make a living in the outdoors. John Woodruff's goal was achieved when he was appointed by New York State Conservation Commissioner George D. Pratt on November 1, 1919, having finished first on the competitive civil service exam. Had John Woodruff known how short-lived his career would be, and the fate that was about to befall him, he may have had misgivings about the road he had chosen to travel. One hundred years ago, in April 1921, after missing for a year and a half, the mysterious fate of Game Protector John Woodruff would culminate with the discovery of his remains buried in the bed of Rotterdam Creek in Schenectady County.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Mark Twain once described a “valedictory” as a farewell in which “a man who has been annoying the public for ten years cannot take leave of them without sitting down to cry for a column and a half.” Good point. I tried to keep this in mind as I wrote my last president’s message. You’ll forgive me, I hope, if I’ve gone on longer than a column and a half. I had a lot of ground to cover.

First of all, it hasn’t been ten years, only about six-and-a-half, since I showed up for my first Trustees meeting in 2015. I had known from my days as the New York State Historian that SCHS was one of the most reputable historical organizations in the state, so I was happy to accept Jim Strosberg’s invitation to join the board.

Marianne Blanchard was president then. Actually, she was more than that. She was also serving as the society’s uncredited and unpaid executive director. This surprised me, because I knew that it was no longer common practice for board directors of leading non-profits to be managing the day-to-day operations of their organizations. So when Dr. Strosberg asked me a year-and-a-half later if I would be willing to serve as SCHS president, I told him “yes, reluctantly, but not as executive director.” Surprisingly—at least to me—everyone seemed okay with that. I thus became vice president in the spring of 2017, and Marianne appointed me chair of the committee to hire a paid fulltime executive director (committee members included Ellen Fladger, Carolina Lazzari, Marty Strosberg, and Dale Wade-Keszey).

All good. We undertook a national search, interviewed a list of highly qualified candidates, and wound up offering the position to one of our own: Mary Zawacki, then serving as SCHS curator. We had also arranged for the prestigious Cooperstown Graduate Program to review our society and offer opinions on ways in which we might improve our governance and operations. And that, in turn, laid the groundwork for the revision of the society’s by-laws and a formal strategic planning effort. Marianne appointed me chair of an ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee (members included both Marianne and Mary, along with Tom Dunn, Ellen Fladger, and Richard Lewis), and Mary secured a grant from Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York that allowed us to retain the strategic planning services of the New York Council of Nonprofits.

Planning was well underway the following spring, when I assumed the presidency and made it my priority to keep things moving. And we did just that. SCHS unveiled its board-approved strategic plan in the fall of 2018. Essentially, it focused our attention on community service over internal concerns, diversification of our operations at every level, and the development of partnerships with other public and private organizations. And since then, we’ve been doing well. Very well.

For starters, we’ve rationalized board operations by reducing the number of Trustees, enforcing term limits, and streamlining our committee structure. The board has consequently been able to focus its efforts on setting governing policies and maintaining our strategic direction, providing financial and legal stewardship, and monitoring and evaluating the executive director’s performance and organizational effectiveness.

I can’t imagine that there’s another non-profit organization in New York that does a better job of managing its finances and investments than SCHS. John Halstead, our treasurer and Finance Committee chair, is competent beyond all reasonable expectation and is a joy to work with. Plus he enjoys the everyday support of Mary Treanor, our wonderfully skilled and dedicated administrative officer. At the same time, Carolina Lazzari and Marianne Blanchard have ensured our financial health through their deft management of our Investment Committee.



The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. (1832). Schenectady, New York

There’s more, too. Bob Carney (with Marianne’s involvement) has made the sometimes challenging job of protecting our legal interests look easy. Former Vice President Richard Lewis, Marty Strosberg, and Secretary Bob Sullivan have done yeoman’s work chairing our Personnel Committee. And Jim Strosberg, Ellen Fladger, and who-else-but Marianne have together kept our organization forever vital though their chairmanship of our Nominating Committee.

Al Ferradino, Mark Vermilyea, and Dale Wade-Keszey have meanwhile overseen our Buildings and Grounds Committee, and with the capable services of our maintenance chief, John Ackner (now a Schenectady County Historical Society legend, by the way), they’ve kept our facilities safe, secure, and attractive. Our property holdings have grown during the past few years, too, with the acquisition of the Brouwer House downtown and farmland surrounding Mabee Farm.

As I’m sure everyone knows by now, Mary Zawacki has distinguished herself in just a few short years as the most capable executive officer of any county historical organization in New York State. Thanks to her leadership, we’ve increased earned income from our many programs and services—while at the same time bringing in even more dollars from donations (thank you, thank you, thank you to all our generous donors, including in particular the Kindl Family Trust for donating the Brouwer House and helping to maintain it), grants (both operating and program support), and an ever-expanding membership. Cooperation, Mary knows, is a better guarantor of success than control. That’s one big reason why our community service is now second to none. Under Mary, we’ve developed working partnerships and relations with area schools, other cultural and educational organizations, neighborhood groups, countywide businesses, and other public and private institutions—and these new relationships have made a real difference, not just in our organization, but in the quality of people’s lives.

As for those “state-of-the-art programs and services,” well, Mary and her talented professional staff (librarian/archivist Marietta Carr, education and programs manager Mike Diana, and exhibitions and collections manager Suzy Fout) have established new standards of excellence that educate, grow, and diversify our already substantial audience. The secret here is, once again, our openness to the community. We no longer talk down to people and pretend to have all the answers; we now listen to our audiences, provide fact-based research, raise questions, and encourage a synthesis of our various understandings of the past into one that works for all of us.

Nothing illustrates these efforts more than our current African American Historical Records Project. We’ve recognized that SCHS hasn’t always done a good job of incorporating the African American experience into our understanding of Schenectady County history, so with funding from the New York State Archives and the Schenectady County Legislature, we’ve been working intensively and sharing authority with members of Schenectady’s African American community to survey and create an online catalog of historical records. The project is ongoing and the first of what we hope will be many more. For the moment, though, we know we’re off to a promising start, thanks especially to Marietta, trustee Philip Fields, and the members of our AAHRP advisory committee.

Our museum exhibitions and educational programming (in-person, online, and in print) offer other examples of our more inclusive way of doing business. We are well past the time when exhibits simply told dry, technical stories about the objects in a museum’s collections. We now use our collections to tell fact-based, sometimes celebratory, sometimes difficult (even controversial) stories about the people who made, and are still making, Schenectady County history. A special shout-out here to our collections and exhibitions manager, Suzy Fout, for developing programs and exhibits that demonstrate our more inclusive way of operating. At the same time, we’ve come to expand the reach of our exhibitions with educator Michael Diana’s high quality educational programming. Our programs, I’m happy to say, have generated favorable media attention in the New York Times and through more than a few television, radio, online, and print outlets.

We’ve also done an outstanding job, I think, of professionalizing our work through rigorous planning processes. During the past few years, for example, we’ve refined our library policies and instituted a new exhibitions plan (it runs through 2024), an interpretive plan, a collections plan (for both museum and library collections), and a disaster management plan. Plus, we devised a use plan for the recently acquired Brouwer House before developing it as a “vibrant centerpiece of Schenectady city culture.” The house, one of Schenectady’s oldest, is occupied by working artists and crafters; its attractive grounds include a formal garden sculpted by Cornell Master Gardener Chris Kirksey.

All the planning in the world, though, couldn’t have prevented the Covid pandemic that we and everyone else experienced in 2020. No matter. Despite the fact that we would be forced to reduce or cancel many of our popular tours and in-person programs, and although our volunteer support—normally one of our biggest assets—would necessarily decline in the face of the pandemic, our strategic planning would provide us with the strong foundation it would take to handle the shifting winds of change. That is, we had modernized our organizational structure and clarified our goals just in time. Our planning exercises had focused our thinking and enabled us to act quickly and decisively to ensure staff and visitor safety and to secure the \$70,000 federal Payroll Protection Plan grant that sustained us through the crisis without having to lay anyone off. A good thing, too, because staff used their time to undertake research and collections management initiatives (documenting the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, among other things) and to take strategic advantage of our technological capabilities. We upgraded our website and developed livestreams that attracted thousands of individual viewers, produced YouTube videos, hosted virtual talks by professional historians from around the globe, and developed a well-received series of online exhibitions. We also published Jim and Marty Strosberg’s timely book, *Schenectady’s Battle against Contagious Disease—From Smallpox to Covid-19*, while supporting the works of various other authors.

So . . . I apologize for going on so long. But it’s hard for anyone to summarize the contributions that so many people have made to the recent SCHS success story (actually I think I need to apologize to all the Trustees, staff, volunteers, members, donors, partners, co-operators, supporters, and friends whom I’ve left out of this narrative). The real point, though, is that we’re not done. Successful institutions know that they can only prosper if they keep up with the unceasing winds of change and not resist them. The really good organizations, though, know that they have to do more than that: they have to anticipate change, keep slightly ahead of it, and lead others into a better future. That’s us. And I think that—with our dynamic new president (the community-minded Mark Vermilyea), continuing leadership on our ever evolving board, first-rate professional staff, dedicated volunteers, an active membership, and an engaged community—I think we’ll do just fine.



Robert Weible, SCHS President

FROM THE LIBRARY

A Note from the Librarian

SCHS recently upgraded our cataloging system to PastPerfect Web. The new system includes a variety of improvements, including a new online catalog! The new catalog looks very similar to the old online catalog, but researchers will notice several significant changes. One of the most impactful changes is the addition of thumbnail previews for records with attached images. As you may know, our map collection and a significant portion of our photo collections have been digitized. Researchers will be able to see these digital images in the catalog, and easily determine which items are most relevant to their research prior to visiting the library. As we add new records to the catalog and update information in existing records, the new catalog will update in real time. There are more fields and hyperlinked data in the new catalog which will increase the ease of use for researchers and the discoverability of the library’s collections. If you haven’t used the library in a while, I encourage you to check out our new catalog and see what new resources inspire your research! At [SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.CATALOGACCESS.COM](https://schenectadyhistorical.catalogaccess.com).

AAHRP Update

The African American Historical Records Project is pleased to announce the next phase in the project – the launch of our community survey! The goal of this phase is to collect information that will help expand our knowledge of the history of Black people in Schenectady and illuminate the historical records preserved within the community. There are two surveys: one for individuals and families, and one for organizations. The individual/family survey will request information from individuals to better understand personal and familial histories, interconnections and important memories of “Black Schenectady.” The focus of the survey is to encourage individuals to consider the records that may exist within their families, and understand their significance in reflecting the diversity within the Black community and in preserving the Black stories of Schenectady. The organization survey will allow us to better understand Black networks and community spaces in Schenectady and focus on the records created by organizations that serve, support, and celebrate the culture, history, and people of Black Schenectady. For more information or to fill out the surveys, visit [HTTPS://SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/AAHRP/](https://schenectadyhistorical.org/aahrp/).

Image, right: Bartlett Jackson was born into slavery in North Carolina and moved to Schenectady in 1865. He held a variety of jobs, particularly at the NY Central Railroad Depot, and was well known as a strong and amiable person by travelers and merchants. This photo was taken in the late 1890s. Mr. Jackson passed away in 1901 and was buried in Vale Cemetery.



New in the Library

Air Racing, vol. IV, by Gary Williams
Delivery With Grace: Bellevue Maternity Hospital, by Don Rittner
For the Good of their Souls, by William B. Hart
Scotia-Glenville Bicentennial Celebration: Book of Remembrances June 18-26, 1976
 Booklets written by Percy Van Epps:
Historical Gleanings from Old-Time Maps and Deeds
The Brass Bands of Glenville, N.Y.
The Flowing Springs of Glenville, N.Y.
The Wolf Hollow
The Schenectady Patent of 1684 and the Common Land of Glenville, N.Y.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Exhibitions

CRAFTED IN SCHENECTADY: THE BUILDING OF A COMMUNITY Through October 2022 at Mabee Farm

Join us as we examine the evolution of Schenectady's craft economy and reveal its critical role in the development of the Mohawk Valley. On display are our favorite pieces from our large crafting collection!

FROM HOBBY TO HISTORY: THE COLLECTIONS OF SCHENECTADY

Through November 2022 at 32 Washington Ave

Why do we collect things? Join us as we dive deep into the world of collecting. Through both museum and private collections, we will discover how objects, art, and other ephemera can inform our understanding and perspective of history, build community memory, and create a meaningful sense of place.

Talks & Tours

Please register in advance at schenectadyhistorical.org, or for free member registration, email office@schenectadyhistorical.org

SECRET STOCKADE

First Wednesdays, May-November @ 10am-1pm at 32W | \$35

The Stockade and its secrets come to life on this colorful journey through the neighborhood. Walk its storied streets, meet local characters, and learn its legends and lore with us. Tickets include exclusive access to private Stockade homes and gardens, guided tours of the neighborhood and the museum, a visit with the artists of Brouwer House Creative, Schenectady's oldest house, and lunch at Arthur's Market. This program lasts approximately 3 hours and includes about ~1 mile of walking on uneven paved terrain. Lunch and drip-coffee provided.

SCHENECTADY BEERS, BIKES, AND BARGES

July 21 at 6pm @ Druthers | \$20 BYO bicycle

SCHS is partnering with the Erie Canal Museum for this hourlong cycling tour through Schenectady looking at the city's Erie Canal and brewing history, as you ride along the historic Mohawk River. The ride begins and ends at Druthers Brewing Company, where you will be treated to a beer as part of your ride as well as a brief history of the brewery itself. Register at ERICANALMUSEUM.ORG.

WALKING TOURS

Save the dates for these walking tours with Educator Mike Diana that explore different themes in Schenectady history. Tickets are \$12, or free for members. All tours meet at 32 Washington Avenue, unless otherwise noted.

Beyond the Pines: Colonial Schenectady Friday, May 6 @ 6pm

This walking tour takes us back to a land you may know but a world that's unrecognizable. In the 17th century, Schenectady

sat at the crossroads of many competing empires, where European colonists met native American nations. Come see how our city's story began!

Revolutionary Schenectady

Thursday, May 12 @ 6pm

The American Revolution is, of course, a pivotal moment in the history of our city and our nation. Come explore a conflict that sundered families and communities alike. What does it mean to be a Patriot?

Gossips and Gadflies

Friday, May 20 @ 6pm

Can you keep a secret? This tour explores the Stockade through the writings of Harriet Mumford Paige, Schenectady's own version of Lady Whistledown. 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!

Canal Days

Friday, May 27 @ 6pm

With the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, New York truly became the "Empire State." Once a sleepy farming town, Schenectady experienced a dramatic transformation of its own during the canal era.

The Civil War in Schenectady

Friday, June 3 @ 6pm

It's the middle of the 19th century and America has been fractured in two. As Union and Confederate forces battle, the fate of the nation hangs in the balance. In this tour we'll examine how Schenectady fit into this struggle. We'll walk the streets and meet the people who lived through this crisis.

Scandalous Schenectady

Friday, June 10 @ 6pm

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!

On the River

KAYAK THROUGH HISTORY

@ Schenectady and Waterford | \$35 includes kayak rental

This year, the popular Mohawk river paddling tours return to both Schenectady and Waterford. For centuries, Schenectady's history has revolved around the mighty Mohawk River. Our Schenectady kayak tour takes you from the modern Mohawk Harbor to the site of our city's ancient port. In nearby Waterford, history lives at the meeting of New York's two great waterways! The town of Waterford has long been a vital crossroads for the people of this area. Our

Waterford tour takes you between picturesque islands and through the grand locks of the Erie Canal. Along both routes, our expert guide will regale you with the history of the area. Guests will be provided with a kayak, life vest, and paddle. Guests should be prepared to paddle for about two hours. There are no bathrooms at either site.

Schenectady Dates:

meet at Mohawk Harbor near Druthers

Wed, June 15 @ 6pm Sat, June 18 @ 10am

Wed, June 29 @ 6pm Sat, July 2 @ 10am

Wed, July 13 @ 6pm Sat, July 16 @ 10am

Wed, Aug 31 @ 6pm Sept TBD

Waterford Dates:

meet at Waterford Boat Launch at First and Front Street

Wed, June 22 @ 6pm Sat, June 25 @ 10am

Wed, July 6 @ 6pm Wed, Aug 10 @ 6pm

Sat, Aug 13 @ 10am Sept TBD

Workshops

WINE BOTTLE PLANTERS

May 21 at 2pm @ Mabee Farm | \$15

We love a good upcycle art project! In this workshop we'll turn old wine bottles into new, self watering planters. We'll fill them up with rich, composted soil from the Mabee Farm and start you off with a homegrown herb seedling

PUNCHED TIN WORKSHOP

July 16 at 2pm @ Mabee Farm | \$35

In Colonial America, punched tin was a favorite artform in rural homes used on lanterns, pie tins, cupboards, and more. In this workshop, we'll do it just as they did in the old days, using geometric patterns to update rustic designs & creating a modern piece worthy of display. This workshop will require a bit of elbow grease, but the end result will be worth it!

For Families

Please register in advance at schenectadyhistorical.org, or email office@schenectadyhistorical.org

COLONIAL KIDS FRIDAYS

June 24, July 15, and August 5 at 10am @ Mabee Farm \$10/free for members

On these special dates, the Mabee Farm will be open just for kids! Tour the entirety of our farm with special demonstrations of colonial crafts. Butter making, barnbuilding, blacksmithing and meeting the free-range farm animals are just some of the activities available.

CAMPFIRE NIGHTS

July 22 and Aug 19 at 7pm @ Mabee Farm | \$10/free for members

Join us for a spooky evening! We'll kindle the campfire, roast s'mores, and take an after-dark tour of the Mabee Farm while sharing local ghost stories and tall tales.

Music, Festivals & More!

HOWLIN' AT THE MOON CONCERT SERIES

@ Mabee Farm | \$7/person

Save the dates for a full season of Howlin' at the Moon! Our concert series showcases regional bluegrass, Americana, folk and indie music while providing an authentic musical experience for both audience and musicians. We invite you to come out and enjoy the music and tranquil scenery.

June 16: Peggy and the Delivery Boys with Everest Rising

July 14: Dyer Switch with Everest Rising

Aug 11: Sten and Maria Z with Everest Rising

Sept 15: Rusticator with Everest Rising

Oct 13: Lost Radio Rounders with Everest Rising

SCHENECTADY COUNTY'S INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION

July 3, 5pm-9pm* @ Mabee Farm | Free

Join us for a free, outdoor, riverside concert as we celebrate Independence Day! Fireworks will close the show. Food and alcoholic drinks will be available for sale, and crafters and vendors will be on site as well. With a special sound installation by Today, a local sonic refinery. **Tentative times.*

MABEE FARM ARTS AND CRAFTS FESTIVAL

Aug 27, 10am-3pm @ Mabee Farm | \$10/parked car

We're bringing together the very best of the Capital Region's handcrafted goods! Join us as 70+ artists and crafters spread out over the Mabee Farm grounds with their eclectic, beautifully handcrafted items. All items are handmade here in our region. With live music and farm tours.

STOCKADE WALKABOUT

Sept 24, 11am-5pm @ 32 Washington Ave | \$ TBD

Schenectady's Historic Stockade, New York State's first historic district, invites visitors for a rare opportunity to step inside a series of private homes and experience living history! Tickets will be available at: HISTORICSTOCKADE.ORG/WALKABOUT

FALLFEST

Oct 9, 11am-3pm @ Mabee Farm | Free

A celebration of all things fall! Join us for a free community festival featuring live music, boat rides, pony rides & petting zoo, hot cider, fall activities, craft fair, craft beer, and more!

AROUND THE COUNTY

with Bill Buell, County Historian

A visit to the home of Don and Carolyn Keefer in West Glenville was always a treat, and back in 2004, the former Schenectady County and town of Glenville historian told me precisely the time period that was most intriguing to him.

“I’m not that interested in the Civil War,” said Keefer, who was the sixth generation of his family to grow up in upstate New York. “The American Revolution was fought right here, and I love this area. Our favorite thing to do is to just get in the car and drive out to the Mohawk Valley. It’s a beautiful place.”

I was a much younger man at the time, and the idea of just getting in a car and driving seemed a bit mundane to me. However, I get it now. And what a wonderful idea it is.

While heading out Route 5 in the direction of Amsterdam was a good option, Keefer told me the best road trip involved crossing the Mohawk and getting over to Route 5s, and then heading west on the south side of the river. There is so much to see and enjoy, so much interesting history, that I recommend the trip to everyone, even if you’re under 40. And you don’t have to make plans. Just let the adventure unfold before you.

Getting to 5s from Schenectady involves heading out 890 in the direction of the Exit 26 Bridge, but don’t go over the river. Instead, get off the highway and get on 5s and your trip is well under way. The first item of interest you’ll see is a historic marker which was put up in May of 2021, thanks to the efforts of Rotterdam resident Nancy Papish. The spot is where the Plotterkill Creek comes down from the Rotterdam Hills and empties into the Mohawk. At that location are the remnants of an aqueduct, one of 32 built to navigate the Erie Canal in 1841.

To best enjoy the experience, park at the nearby Rotterdam Kiwanis Park on the banks of the Mohawk and walk just a few feet back to the east along the bike path to read the sign and appreciate the history in front of your eyes. The Kiwanis Park, which serves as a boat launching area, is a good reason by itself to stop at that location, and right across Route 5s is the Hungry Chicken General Store, one of my favorite places for fudge and other delights.

When you get back on Route 5s and continue west, before long you’ll come across the Mabee Farm, owned and operated by the Schenectady County Historical Society. Every member of the family will find something there of interest, whether it be farm animals or a series of interpretative panels focusing on local history. Also, don’t forget the farm house itself, oozing with fascinating history about Schenectady’s role as America’s western frontier in the 17th and 18th centuries.

When you leave the Mabee Farm, continue west on 5s through Rotterdam Junction, and, if you’re into checking out old cemeteries, a stop at the Woestina Reformed Church is a good way to spend some time. Then, back on Route 5, and head through Pattersonville. There are short side trips you could take on Scotch Church Road and Pattersonville Road that will offer some great views of the Mohawk Valley, but you better do that on a different day. Besides, there are plenty of good views right on 5s that will satisfy you without the detour.

One look at the landscape to your north as you’re driving out of Schenectady County into Montgomery County will conjure up memories of the thriving industrial city Amsterdam used to be when it was a key cog in the carpet-making industry from 100 years ago.

But don’t stop there. If you continue along 5s you’ll come along some of the most historic sites in Montgomery County. There’s the Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site at Fort Hunter, with great access to the bike path and Erie Canal history, and a few miles further west you come to the Our Lady of Martyrs Shrine, perhaps the most beautiful setting in the Mohawk Valley. There’s the coliseum to see, the visitors center and a hiking trail, but the view is what steals the show. And take a few minutes to stop at the small museum there and learn about Kateri Tekakwitha, also known as the Lily of the Mohawk. You’ll find her story fascinating.

You’re getting well beyond Schenectady County by now, but the trip isn’t over with. There is the Arkell Museum in Canajoharie and the Fort Plain Museum to take in, both wonderful enough to be day-long destinations that offer complete satisfaction to history buffs and art lovers.

Further west there’s the home of General Herkimer and Fort Stanwix, but by then it might be time to cross the river and head back home on Route 5, stopping along the way at Johnson Hall or Fort Johnson, two more fabulous state historic sites connected to the American Revolution.

Keefer, who passed away in 2014 at the age of 88, suggested that anyone interested in such a road trip might like to do a little reading to help prepare them. He had 2,000 books in his collection relating to New York State history, and nearly all of them were non-fiction.

“I don’t read fiction, unless of course it’s a historical novel about this area,” he told me. “Now ‘Drums Along the Mohawk,’ that’s a great book.”

I heartily endorse Keefer’s recommendation. In fact, go ahead and watch the 1939 movie with Henry Fonda based on Walter Edmonds’ 1936 book. Both are satisfying experiences, especially the book. I’ve read it twice. So do both and then take your road trip. You won’t be disappointed.

Images: Both Pattersonville, both undated, from the Larry Hart Collection at the Grems-Doolittle Library



REVIEW: *METROFIX:* *THE COMBATIVE* *COMEBACK OF A COMPANY* *TOWN*

by Martin Strosberg

William B. Patrick, an award-winning author of non-fiction and fiction, has written a captivating account of Schenectady's remarkable transformation from a dying rust-belt town to the "comeback city" with a future. This is the book that many of us have been waiting for.

Patrick carefully lays the groundwork for telling Schenectady's impressive story; he begins at the beginning. The arrival of Edison Machine Works (i.e., GE) in 1886 unleashed the forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, which, by the 1920s, helped create the "city that lights and hauls the world." GE's and Schenectady's fortunes rose in tandem. But by the 1960s, Schenectady started its steep decline, while GE continued on its upward trajectory. In the 1980s, CEO Jack Welch began selling off or transferring industrial divisions out of Schenectady, especially to non-union states. Furthermore, he hitched his wagon to the financial services business of GE Capital, which was more profitable than manufacturing. Many believed that GE had abandoned its company town.

The road back from a crime-ridden, moribund downtown was a tortuous one with many false starts at urban renewal and economic development. Early on in his narrative of Schenectady's comeback, Patrick appropriately recognizes the role of Bill Golub -- Price Chopper supermarket pioneer, philanthropist, and dedicated civic leader. Bill Golub refused to give up on Schenectady. In the early 1990s, he donated \$1 million to serve as the catalyst for the creation of Schenectady 2000, a broad-based coalition of hundreds of civic-minded citizens who volunteered their time to improve the quality of life in the city. Led by Neil Golub, Bill's son, in partnership with Union College President Roger Hull and others, Schenectady 2000's mission included developing a plan by the year 2000 for the city's revitalization based on a viable funding source.

And the mission was accomplished. Metroplex, a state-chartered public authority established in 1998 and sustained by one-half percent of county sales tax revenue, became the engine that drove Schenectady's economic 21st century development and revitalization. And it was not easy to establish Metroplex. In a fascinating chapter entitled "Battle for Metroplex," Patrick gives us the behind the scenes "Perils of Pauline" account of the successful efforts to surmount the formidable political hurdles encountered at the city, county, and state levels. Now we know the rest of the story.

The physical reality of Metroplex's work can be seen throughout Schenectady, e.g., the MVP headquarters, the Proctors block revitalization, Mohawk Harbor and the Rivers Casino, the Amtrak station, the numerous apartment complexes, and much more. The result: the attraction of new businesses and residents, the creation of new jobs, and the subsequent rebirth of a lively downtown with restaurants, hotels, a movie theater, and of course, Proctors.

Patrick's book is much more than a chronicle of the struggles and triumphs of Metroplex. We read about Mayor Al Jurczynski's efforts to attract the Guyanese population living in Queens to settle in Schenectady. Mayor Al's incredible one-man show was an exercise in neighborhood revitalization. The newly arrived Guyanese bought and fixed up abandoned houses and put them back on the tax rolls. And they also started businesses, becoming productive members of the community. We also read about the inspiring decades-long struggle by dedicated community members to save and revitalize Proctors Theater, starting with the last-minute reprieve from the wrecker's ball in 1977. Under the leadership of Philip Morris, who arrived in 2002, Proctors was built into an entertainment and economic powerhouse and the primary anchor of downtown Schenectady. One development that was not covered in the book was the stabilization and revitalization of the properties along deteriorating Seward Place and the surrounding neighborhood on the western flank of Union College, under the leadership of Roger Hull. This is also a story that deserves to be told.

Perhaps the most poignant chapter of Patrick's book consists of the personal accounts of the heartbreaks and heroics during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, as vividly told by community and business leaders, government officials, and non-profit executives. These accounts speak to the social as well as the economic damage of the pandemic. More than this, they reveal the long-standing grievances and levels of mistrust that continue to exist in Schenectady's minority communities.

To research his book, Patrick interviewed over 100 key players in addition to reviewing newspaper articles, government documents, and reports. He skillfully weaves the many strands of Schenectady's comeback into an engaging and eminently readable narrative enlivened with his personal takes on dozens and dozens of Schenectady worthies. Furthermore, the narrative is buttressed by many insights from the scholarly literature on city planning and revitalization.

This book is not to be missed.

William B. Patrick, Metrofix: The Combative Comeback of a Company Town, Downtown Publishing, 2021.

Image, right: State Street, downtown, 1964, from the Larry Hart collection at the Grems-Doolittle Library



THE TABLETS TELL A (TALL?) TALE

by Michael Diana, Education and Programs Manager

A monument to history often tells you more about the people and time period that created it and less about the people or time period it's supposed to describe. They are more aspirational than academic. And indeed, once produced, it's hard to revise or edit anything carved in stone – white out just doesn't do the trick. Walking past City Hall along Jay street, you'll find an interesting example of this phenomenon. There, you'll see the grand neo-Federal facade with its imposing columns and entablature. And flanking both sides of the main door are two grand tablets of black marble with tarnished, fading letters. Squinting hard, you might still be able to discern what they say:

THE SITE OF SCHENECTADY WAS BOUGHT OF THE INDIANS BY VAN CURLER IN 1661 AND A PATENT GRANTED IN 1684. THE TOWN WAS BURNED BY THE FRENCH IN 1690. UNION COLLEGE WAS CHARTERED IN 1795. THE CITY WAS INCORPORATED IN 1798 AND IN 1831, BECAME THE WESTERN TERMINUS OF THE MOHAWK AND HUDSON RAILROAD. LOCOMOTIVE BUILDING WAS BEGUN HERE IN 1848 AND THE ELECTRICAL INDUSTRY WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1886. THE SCHENECTADY AIRPORT WAS OPENED IN 1927.

SCHENECTADY- FOUNDED IN WILDERNESS BEYOND FEUDAL CONTROL INHERITS THE SPIRIT OF LIBERTY AND PROGRESS. HERE OUR FOREFATHERS ESTABLISHED A COLLEGE FREE FROM SECTARIANISM. THEY HELPED TO DEVELOP THE STEAM RAILROAD AND INLAND WATER TRANSPORTATION THAT CARRY THROUGH HER GATES THE COMMERCE OF OUR NATION. IN PLACE OF BUSINESS IN WORKSHOP AND LABORATORY HERE CITIZENS STILL LABOR TO PROMOTE THE ADVANCEMENT OF CIVILIZATION.

Now, of course, we could simply ignore these tablets. After all, very few people know they're even there and perhaps fewer care what they say. Ask yourself, dear reader, were you even aware of them? The large imposing doors they guard are no longer used as a main entrance, and the area is roped off. Their obvious state of disrepair is a testament to the lack of attention they've received even from City Hall itself. But perhaps that's too easy. These inscriptions tell a certain story- they interpret the past in a certain way. Great effort and expense went into carving these words into stone. And given their location at the heart of our municipal government, perhaps that story is worth our attention if only for the sake of argument.

In the tablet on the left, we see a very basic list of important dates in our city's past. The dates are factually accurate but, on their own, don't really mean anything. Some of the choices seem quite strange and irrelevant: who really cares when the airport was opened? Though, arguably, an airport was a big deal to Schenectady's denizens a century ago. To me, however,

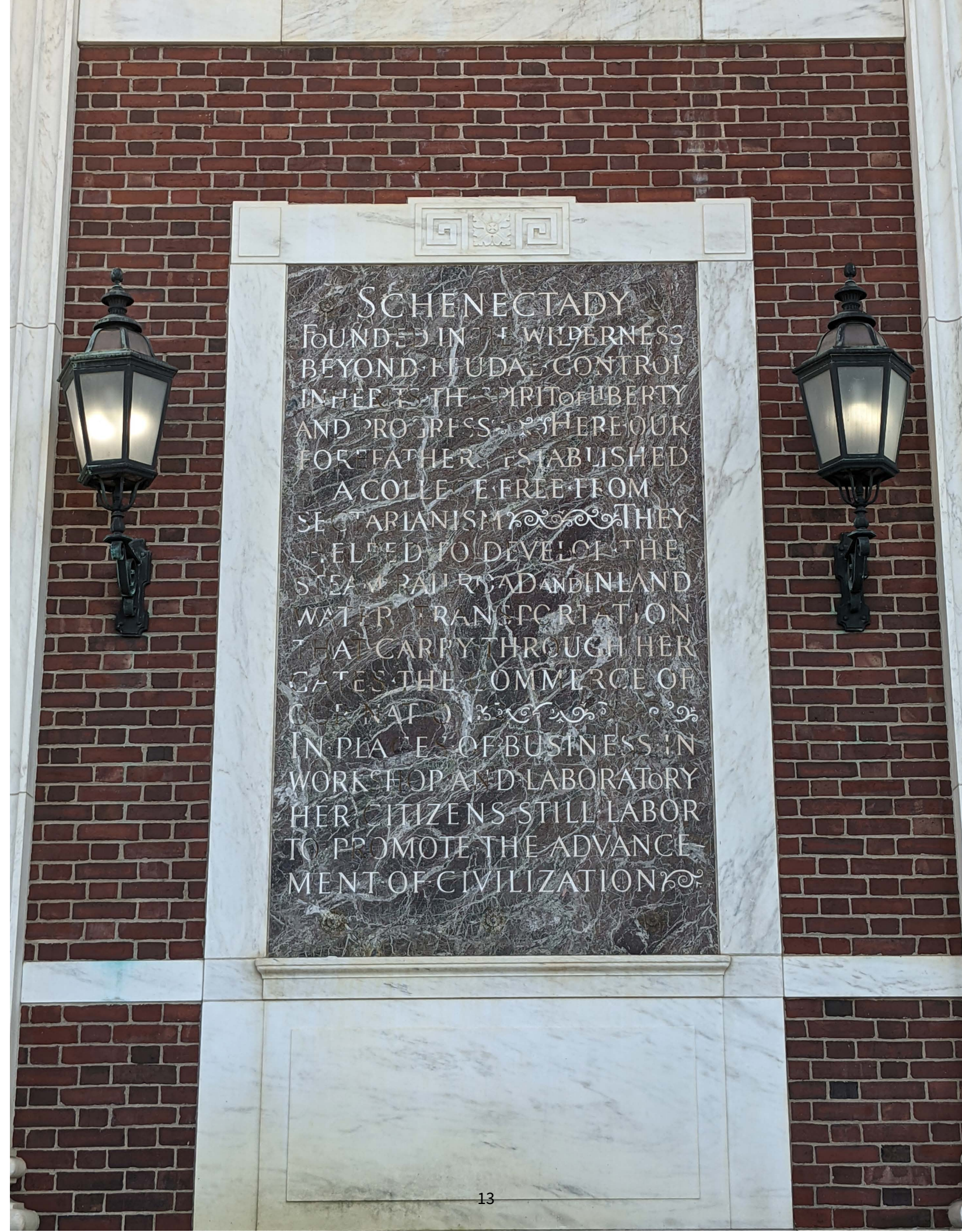
this first tablet serves almost as an appendix to the one on the right, which tells a more interesting story. A story which I think is only partly grounded in reality.

It begins by claiming that Schenectady was founded “beyond feudal control.” But surely this is misleading? Indeed, the very patent mentioned in the first tablet confirms the influence of the king of England this far into the “wilderness.” Even if the monarchy didn't have an intrusive influence on everyday life here, Schenectady's first inhabitants were deeply entrenched in that feudal mindset. They created a hierarchical society for themselves with aristocrats at the top, enslaved people at the bottom, and every order of person in between. It's quite silly to suppose that our modern notions of “progress and liberty” are inherited from these first Schenectadians. Instead, surely these are ideas that are reinvented with each generation. One might further wonder if the founders of Union were indeed “free of sectarianism” or if they only failed to discriminate between different Protestant denominations. How did Jews or Catholics fit into early Schenectadian's idea of “non-denominational?” And, while the railroads and canals did once carry the commerce of the nation through Schenectady, I wonder if we can still claim that in the present tense. And, of course, do we as a community still “labor to promote the advancement of civilization?” Perhaps our priorities are more humble these days.

This might all seem like pointless nit-picking and maybe it is. But it raises important questions about our identity as a city, and how that changes over time. What is our identity, who gets to decide that identity, and how do we advertise it to the broader world? If these tablets were carved today, what would we want them to say? These are the vital discussions we must constantly engage in at the intersection of the past, present and future. And I won't attempt to answer these questions here.

All this being said, I do think there is some historic insight in these tablets. The current City Hall building was built in 1933 during the administration of mayor Henry Fagel. The construction took place during some of the darkest days of the Great Depression. At the time, there was little Mayor Fagel or his contemporaries could do to alter the course of the global economic crisis. But they could at least make a grand statement in the form of the new City Hall. The architecture serves to grab the passerby with its ostentatious beauty and imposing presence. And these two marble tablets tell a comforting fairytale of heroic forebears, past tragedies, and stubborn perseverance. While I might disagree with the story as it's told in 2022, perhaps it's the story people needed to hear in that uncertain time. And that's certainly something we can relate to today.

Image, right: View of City Hall, as described



BUBBLE GUM & WAR PROPAGANDA: THANKS, CAPITALISM!

by Susanna Fout, Collections & Exhibitions Manager

Jacob Warren Bowman was physically imposing. Standing at six-foot-three, the 220lb jack-of-all-trades was known for his booming voice, quick wit, and silver tongue.

Born in Ohio in 1895 and raised on a ranch in New Mexico, Bowman was "married, divorced and bankrupt" before the age of 21. He tried his hand at everything; a used car business in Los Angeles which went bankrupt due to WWI; a short stint as a police officer; a fruit trucking company in California. An opportunity in the steam-laundry business took him to Mexico, but that didn't pan out either, so he tried his hand in the logging business, and then coffee roasting. Then, in the early 1920s, on his way to Detroit in search of success in car manufacturing, a chance encounter on the train with a chewing gum salesman catapulted Bowman into the fame and fortune he was desperately searching for.

In 1929, Bowman founded his chewing gum company, Gum, Inc., in Philadelphia, PA. Their most popular product, Blony, was an instant success. Blony gum was flavored with what Bowman called "fruit characteristics," weighed 210 grains, and proudly proclaimed "Three Big BITES for a penny" on its packaging. It was the largest piece of gum available for that price. It also came with colorful trading cards on various topics, one of which was war.

As early as the 1930s, "Bubbleman Bowman," as he had come to be called, was using a popular advertising medium known as the "trade card" to promote his product. Originating in the United States, trade cards were first used inside cigarette packets to stiffen them. Printed on cheap, thick paper, cigarette cards featured advertising for various businesses. The designs were not always product-related, but could be humorous or beautiful, depending on the perceived tastes of the consumer.

Cigarette cards became so popular that other businesses, like Bowman's Gum, Inc., began to add them as prizes in their merchandise. Typically gum cards were slipped into each packet of gum and featured baseball players, famous politicians, and actors. Manufacturers published sets of cards to encourage customers to purchase even more product. People, specifically children, began to trade cards in order to obtain a complete set, hence the origins of their name.

In 1938, Bowman released the "Horrors of War" trade card set, a series of 288 cards detailing various contemporary military conflicts throughout the world. On the front, the cards featured graphic battle scenes, attacks on civilian populations, and propaganda-like descriptions on the back. Nicknamed "War Gum," the series was a financial success, earning

Bowman millions of dollars in sales. It was one of the most successful ad campaigns of its time. The campaign, however, was not popular with everyone. Parents and teachers recoiled in horror at the cards, considering them too gruesome for their young target audience. Many American parents confiscated the cards at purchase, or tried to prevent their children from purchasing the one-cent gum altogether.

In Japan, the cards became a bone of diplomatic contention since a majority of the cards depicted scenes from Japanese conflicts. Japanese-Americans feared the series would provoke a nativist backlash reminiscent of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Opposition to the series went so far that, in 1938, Japanese Embassy officials in Washington, D.C. presented a formal protest to the American State Department, insisting that Bowman remove his cards and gum from the market. The State Department declined. Bowman was declared an "enemy of state" by the Japanese government, and was forced to close all his factories located in Japan.

Bowman insisted he was trying to promote peace by exposing the horrors of war. On the back of each card was printed the inscription: "To know the HORRORS OF WAR is to want PEACE." Even President Franklin D. Roosevelt used the cards as a way to describe to Americans the terrors of war and to promote isolationist sentiment leading up to World War II. However, it is difficult to tell how genuine Bowman's intentions were. By the time the United States finally entered the war in 1941, Bowman conveniently had a new series, "Uncle Sam Home Defense," ready for the market. This time, the cards featured colorful scenes depicting the possibilities of military action on the home front, and, of course, pro-America text on the back.

Jumping ahead almost 100 years, America still has a fascination with trading cards. Our modern obsession with Pokémon and Magic cards, sports cards, and even digital cards can all be traced back to Bowman's bubble gum propaganda pieces, and perhaps even farther. In 17th century Paris, trade cards were used as a kind of business card. Small, rectangular pieces of paper with printed or handwritten designs, were distributed by businesses to clients and exchanged in social circles to draw in new potential customers. They functioned as both advertising and as maps, directing the public to the merchants' stores. These types of business cards, cigarette cards, and trade cards are part of a larger collection of material culture now known as "ephemera."

What makes these objects so interesting?

Ephemera – objects that are created, used, or exist for a short period of time – are the fragments of everyday life. They are the bits and bobs of daily activity, typically made of paper, produced for some immediate, practical purpose, used briefly,



88 "Human Hands" Warn Newspaper Publishers
Japanese terrorists, as well as Chinese, kept the military police of Shanghai constantly on their toes during the occupation of the city by Tokio troops. Japanese soldiers were at the mercy of attacks from embittered Chinese, while the Chinese newspapers of the city were constantly in peril of Japanese terrorists. On March 1, 1938, a messenger entered the office of the Ta Mei Wan Pao—the Chinese edition of the American-owned Shanghai Evening Post—with a large package under his arm. Hurling it on the desk of the mystified editor of the newspaper, he turned to run away when he was caught by a policeman who had become suspicious and had followed him inside the office. The box contained a ghastly warning . . . dismembered human hands, and a written threat against anti-Japanese activities! The newspaper office had previously been bombed, and this new warning was believed to be the work of the same Japanese terrorists.

To know the HORRORS OF WAR is to want PEACE
This is one of a series of 240 True Stories of Modern Warfare. Save to get them all. Copyright 1938, GUM, INC., Phila., Pa.



**100. Uncle Sam's HOME DEFENSE
Air Raid Warden**

The training of Air Raid Wardens for Home Defense also comes under the supervision of the Chief of Police in New York City and as a pattern for the rest of the cities of the country to follow. Sector Air Raid Wardens may be either men or women and they must be respected members of their communities. There will be one for each 500 population, distributed on the basis of police precincts. They will be the connecting link between the people and their various air protection services. They are chiefly concerned with "preventing panic that shatters morale." Their duties will include the enforcement of blackouts, directing Civilians to air raid shelters (see picture), clearing streets, keeping traffic moving, reporting fires, bombs and enemy planes, administering first aid, etc. Each applicant is investigated and fingerprinted before being assigned to duty.

Ask for Uncle Sam Bubble Gum and complete your collection of cards Nos. 1 to 96 picturing U. S. Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen in training to Defend America.
Copyright 1941, GUM, INC., Phila., Pa. Printed in U. S. A.
Buy U. S. Defense Savings Bonds or Stamps

1938 "Horrors of War" Trade Card by Gum, Inc. (above) and 1941 "Uncle Sam Home Defense" Trade Card by Gum, Inc. (below)
Can you spot any noticeable differences between the two depictions?

and then discarded. You have probably used and discarded numerous ephemera in this past week alone.

Along with Gum, Inc.'s trade cards, SCHS has a number of items in its collections which highlight the diversity of the genre. Theater programs, posters, ticket stubs, restaurant menus, matchbooks, stamps, postcards, trading cards, bumper stickers – the examples are endless. Photographs, paper currency, or objects as diverse as license plates, children's books, toys, and curios can also be considered ephemera, even if they are a bit on the periphery.

Some ephemera at SCHS belong to specific collections, such as the Wayne Tucker Postcard Collection, the Stafford Matchbook Collection, or the Don Ackerman Political Memorabilia Collection. Other ephemera have been carefully preserved in scrapbooks, photo albums, archival donations, and personal collections of family members. These collections

richly illustrate how ephemera is both valued for its vibrant, full-color imagery and as a record of local and national industry, artistic tastes, cultural values, and societal interests.

Ephemera has existed in some form for centuries, though the genre as we understand it today is a product of modernization and mass production. When the printing press was brought to Massachusetts in the 1630s, what followed in North American colonies was a revolution of printed ephemeral literature. Broadside, pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines helped to spread new ideas and discoveries, along with promoting commerce and business through printed advertising materials. By 1843 the steam powered rotary press allowed millions of pages of printed material to literally roll off the presses in a single day. The jobbing press and color lithographic printing, two other mid-19th century inventions, allowed thousands of colorful impressions to be printed per hour, all with only one pressman at the helm. Small-sized

jobs such as business cards, trade cards, postcards, posters, product labels, and other advertising materials were now able to be printed en masse, quickly and cheaply.

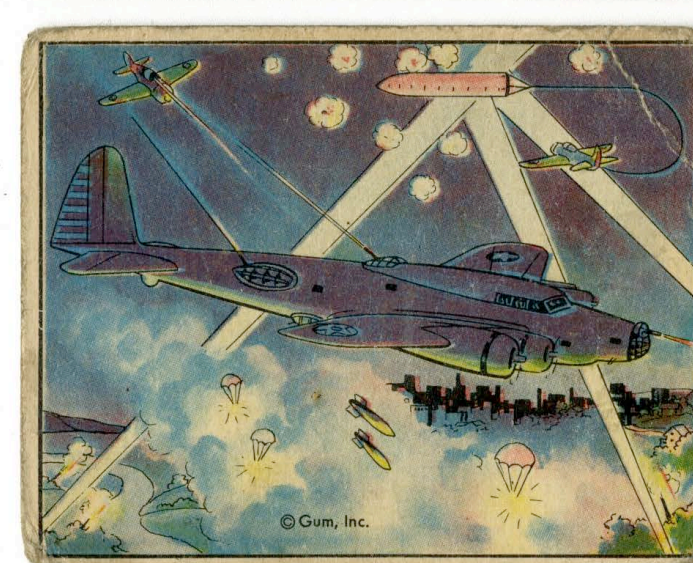
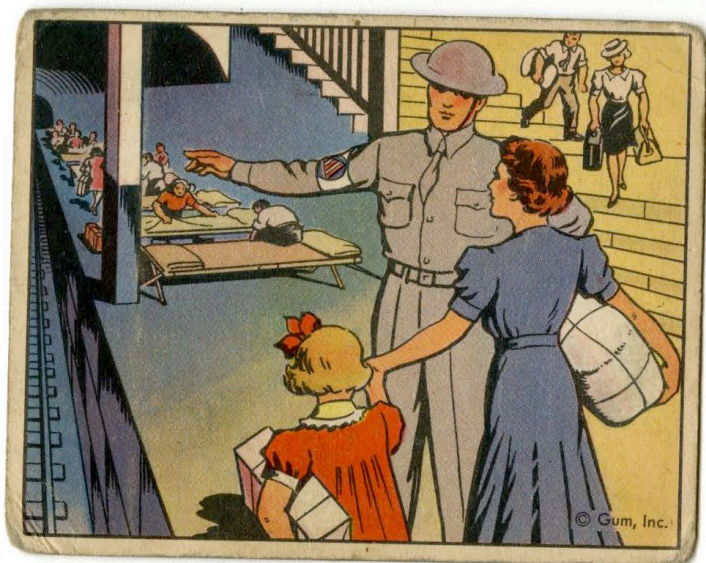
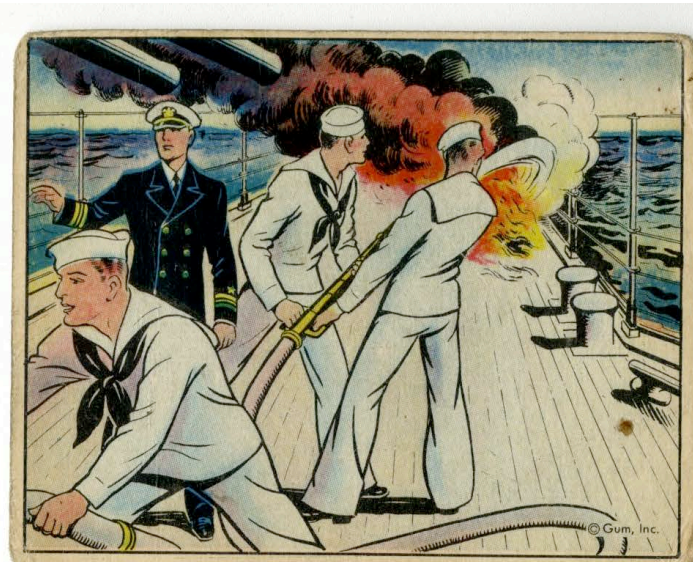
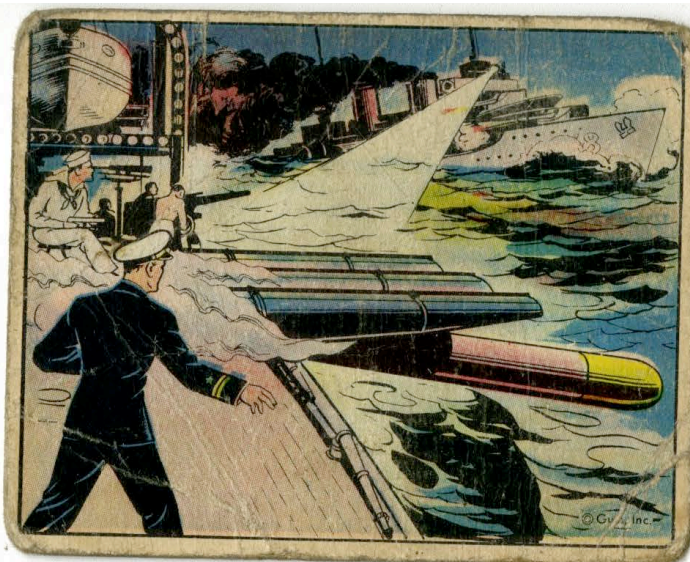
A by-product of exuberant capitalism, these items, produced with no thought that they would be saved or preserved, tended to fall between the cracks of traditional collecting. Not books, not “art” in the formal sense, not manuscripts, nor antiques, ephemera was instead gathered into scrapbooks and albums. Colorful and vibrant, these pieces were preserved by everyday people as personal mementos, cherished for their representation as fleeting moments in time. In ephemera we can see how people moved about their world, how they interacted with one another, what they consumed, what they feared, what they loved, and what they believed was important. By holding on to the world’s least-prized fragments, these collectors have provided future generations with a snapshot in time, both literally and figuratively.

Today, ephemera is highly sought after and collectible. Perhaps the main appeal is in its fragility and vulnerability, the improbability of its survival. In a temporary world, there is a power in preserving that which is not meant to last. Collecting the ephemeral can create order and consistency in an ever

changing cultural landscape. Ephemera is much more than just tomorrow’s garbage, it provides a unique insight into history, treasured just as much for its beauty as its importance.

Currently on display at the museum at 32 Washington Ave is a select portion of SCHS’ ephemera collection. Trade cards, postcards, matchbooks, scrapbooks and more are available for browsing as part of our latest exhibition “Hobby to History: the Collections of Schenectady.” The exhibit dives into the social, cultural, and psychological impulses of collecting. Looked at individually, collecting may seem like nothing more than a hobby or a niche interest. Taken together, however, collections can tell a story. They are the story of what we value in our community and how we are connected to the world around us. Creating a special framework for how the world’s “stuff” can be appreciated, collections from both museums and private collectors help us discover how our objects inform our understanding of history, build our community memory, and create a meaningful sense of place.

Below: 1941 "Uncle Sam" Trade Card series by Gum, Inc., including "War at Sea," "Fire at Sea," "Public Shelter," and "Night Bomber."



Front page image: Thomas Cole, *View Near Catskill*, 1828-29. Oil on wood panel, in a private collection

Above image: Photograph of JA Rickard & Co., a fishing and tackle shop at 253 State St., 1902, possibly known to Woodruff

...*"Fallen Game Wardens"* continued from page 1

Game Protectors in New York had been in existence for only 39 years when John Woodruff joined the Game Protector force. In 1880 Governor Alonzo B. Cornell (1880 – 1882) appointed eight Game Protectors to serve in the Fish and Game Division of the State of New York Conservation Commission, part of a growing national effort to protect declining fish and game populations. New conservation laws were being passed yearly, and with new laws came the need for men to enforce them. The eight men in plain clothes assigned to patrol 54,566 square miles of New York State were faced with a daunting task, but it was a start. In 1899 Governor Theodore Roosevelt, one of the nation’s earliest proponents of conservation, took an interest in the Game Protector force declaring that he wanted “... as game protectors, men of courage, resolution and hardihood who can handle the rifle, ax and paddle; who can camp out in summer or winter; who can go on snowshoes, if necessary; who can go through the woods by day or by night without regard to trails.” The Game Protectors soon became a force to be reckoned with, growing to 131 uniformed Protectors by 1919 and achieving a reputation as men who took their mission to protect the state’s fish and game seriously, despite the inherent dangers of the job. However, the formative years

for game wardens in New York during the first two decades of the 20th century would prove to be a period of tragic encounters for some of the men who were devoting their lives to protecting fish and wildlife.

In 1901 Sam Taylor was a guard at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo when President McKinley was assassinated. He was reportedly the first man to come to the aid of the mortally wounded McKinley, not knowing that he would meet a similar fate years later. On the morning of Sunday, April 5, 1914, Game Protector Samuel Taylor, 38 years old, of Bouckville, New York in Madison County joined forces with Game Protector John Willis of Oneida to patrol along the banks of the Mohawk River in the city of Rome to check the area for illegal duck hunters. Moving in to investigate the sound of gunfire, the Protectors observed several men shooting robins. As the Game Protectors confronted the violators, advising them that they were under arrest, one of the men carrying a shotgun fired upon them, striking Taylor in the chest and abdomen. He fell to the ground mortally wounded. Protector Willis who just missed being shot himself, drew his service revolver and returned fire. Despite John Willis’ heroic efforts, shortly after midnight on April 6, 1914, Game Protector Taylor died at Oneida County Hospital, the

first New York State Game Protector to die in the line of duty. Two local suspects were apprehended, questioned, and released. No one was ever charged in the murder.

Despite this tragic incident, there was no shortage of men willing to join the Game Protector force. Game Protectors approached their jobs with much enthusiasm, beginning the tradition of a specialized police force whose members protected their assigned areas as if they were their own. During his brief career, John Woodruff was said to be “hated by hunters of game out of season,” and that he was “zealous in his prosecutions of men caught violating state law”.

At 7am on Thanksgiving morning, November 27, 1919, Game Protector Woodruff, on the job for less than one month, bid good-bye to his wife and two young daughters, Ferris and Ruth. Mrs. Woodruff was undoubtedly worried whenever her husband would go to work. She was aware that he had already received threats since his appointment as the local Game Protector. Recently she had watched with great concern as he read a letter wherein the writer wrote “I’ll get you”, and “I’m not afraid of you.” She watched with great concern as her husband tore up the letter stating, “Well, they’re not going to get me.” Mrs. Woodruff tried to brush aside her fears that Thanksgiving Day as she watched her husband leave their home on 41 James Street in Schenectady, confident in his abilities to get the job done.

Exactly what happened that fateful Thanksgiving Day remains tangled in a web of contradictory facts and questionable evidence, complicated by the passage of time and faded memories. When John Woodruff did not return home to enjoy dinner with his young family that evening, Mrs. Woodruff became understandably alarmed. She called the police fearing the worse, hoping for the best, and praying her husband would soon be home.

The reaction of the local authorities was swift. The newly organized State Police, founded only two years prior in 1917, joined in with the local Game Protectors, sheriff’s deputies, and Scotia Police, concentrating their search in what was then the wilds of South Schenectady, Guilderland, and Carman. Even the local Boy Scouts pitched in to help. Despite the intensive effort, after several days the search was called off, the whereabouts of Game Protector Woodruff a mystery.

There were initially very few leads in the case. In 1920 a witness, 21-year-old Rotterdam Junction resident Fred Ferredino, provided a statement to the Schenectady District Attorney. He stated that at approximately 11am on the day of Woodruff’s disappearance he was in the waiting room of the local railway near the Nine Mile Bridge and Lock #9, waiting for a trolley, when he observed two men near the tracks. He could overhear one of the men telling the other that he was under arrest, as well as a somewhat heated discussion about ferrets, the use of which had been outlawed for hunting. The hunter was in possession of a shotgun. The men walked past the waiting room and into the woods, but not before the hunter fired two shots into the air from a revolver, later assumed by

investigators as an attempt to get his hunting dogs to come to him. The two men then disappeared into the woods. The vague description of the hunter included the fact that he was a “foreigner” who spoke with an accent. However, this incident would later be discounted as there were conflicting reports of Woodruff being sighted later that evening.

After Woodruff’s disappearance in 1919, the local newspapers carried the story for several days but then both the trail and the media coverage went cold. However, on April 3, 1921, sixteen months after John Woodruff had failed to return home, George H. Barrett, a railroad car repairman from Rotterdam, was hiking through the woods near Amsterdam Road (NYS Route 5) near the Nine Mile Bridge on what was then known as the Johnson farm, in search of arbutus, when something out of the ordinary caught his eye in the bed of Rotterdam Creek. George became increasingly alarmed as he realized that what he was looking at were the skeletal remains of a man with two gold teeth. The remains were held down in a depression in the stream bed by heavy slate stones that had been placed atop of the body forming a partial tomb. Game Protector John Woodruff had been found.

The reaction of the local authorities was swift, again involving the State Police, the Scotia Police Department and the Schenectady County District Attorney’s office. Governor Nathan Miller directed the Conservation Commission to assign Game Protector and Confidential Inspector Delbert Speenburgh of Catskill to the investigation. Speenburgh later went undercover, spending time working with a suspect who had gone to Canada, hoping to acquire clues to the Woodruff murder. Now searching the area where John Woodruff had been found, Speenburgh and the other investigators looked upon the tragic scene. Woodruff’s skull had been smashed open. His hunting boots and other clothing, a gold watch, Conservation Commission identification, some Conservation Commission related papers, and a holster for a .38 caliber revolver were found with the remains. The revolver however, and John Woodruff’s #68 Conservation badge were missing.

The remains were taken to the office of local Coroner Alexander. G. Baxter, who determined that Woodruff had been killed by a blow to the back of the skull made by a “powerful man.” Given Woodruff’s prowess with a revolver (he had just recently won a shooting contest at a Game Protector’s event) as well as his physical abilities, it was assumed that the assailant had taken advantage when John had turned his back on him. Despite Speenburgh’s best efforts, and interviews of various suspects, the identity of the assailant remained a mystery.

John Woodruff was interred at the Vale Cemetery in Schenectady. The loss to his family was devastating. The \$50 per month stipend his wife received from the Conservation Commission was not enough to support the young family, and according to Woodruff’s surviving great-granddaughter they lost their home. The case lay quietly until February 1947, when the State Police reopened the investigation based upon a new lead that had been provided by the FBI’s Buffalo office.



Above image: Undated photograph of men hunting, from the Grems-Doolittle Library collection

Two men had come to the Buffalo office on February 7, 1947 to relate to Agent Robert Stone that their stepfather claimed that he and an accomplice had murdered a man in the woods in Schenectady about 20 years before. Reportedly, the victim had attempted to arrest the stepfather for shooting a bird illegally. After identifying and interviewing this suspect, the story was discounted. However, two facts interested the investigators.

According to the two informants, their stepfather claimed he had tied the victim to a tree, and following a severe snowstorm, the victim died of exposure. The stepfather also claimed that he had killed his victim with a blast of a shotgun to the head. In fact, on Thanksgiving night 1919 there was indeed a severe winter storm, which led investigators at that time to believe John Woodruff’s remains were buried in a snow drift. Also, when interviewed by investigators in 1947, Speenburgh stated that his observation of Woodruff’s remains in 1921 noted that a portion of Woodruff’s skull had in fact been shot away by what appeared to be a shotgun. However, during a lie detector test, one of the stepsons claimed that they had made the story up in an attempt to get their stepfather out of the way due to a family dispute. State and local police investigators could not make an arrest based upon their interviews of the persons involved.

Investigators continued to work on the case, interviewing the witness Mr. Ferredino again, who stated a photo of the stepfather from Buffalo was not the man he had seen with

Woodruff in 1919. The District Attorney even offered to exhume Woodruff’s body if enough evidence was found to warrant this. Then once again, the investigation went cold. In the early 2000s a rumor emerged of a deceased Glenville man who had told his wife that he had killed John Woodruff. The validity of this story remains unconfirmed, however.

Sadly, the killing of Game Protectors did not end with the murder of John Woodruff. In 1929, Game Protector William Cramer of Queens, NY was slain by a shotgun blast as he and his partner, Game Protector Joseph Allen, attempted to arrest songbird hunters in the woods along the shores of Jamaica Bay, near present day JFK Airport. His assailants were brought to justice however, and sentenced to prison in Ossining.

Today, John Woodruff’s murder remains a mystery. His sacrifice, as well as that of Game Protector Sam Taylor and Game Protector William Cramer have not been forgotten, however. Current members of NYSDEC’s Division of Law Enforcement ensured that their names were added to the Police Memorial in Albany, and they have commemorated their memories at gravesite ceremonies in recent years. The Samuel Taylor award for bravery has been established by the Division, and two of the Division’s K9s, “Woody” and “Cramer” have been named after the men who gave so much in their devotion to duty and the protection of New York’s vital natural resources.

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Above: Educator Mike Diana leads a campfire at Earth Night at Mabee Farm.

Right: Earth's Children performs a set inside the Barn at Mabee Farm, on Earth Night; Farmer John and the critters; signs of spring at 32 Washington Ave.



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