

Annual Report

of the

Schenectady County Historical Society

2021-2022

Minutes

Annual Meeting of the Schenectady County Historical Society | April 22, 2021

President Bob Weible opened the annual meeting of the Schenectady County Historical Society at 6:33pm. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Trustees in attendance were: Marianne Blanchard, Ellen Fladger, Sarah Kirby, DJ Leblanc, Chris Leonard, Sherri Lullo, Hannah Miller, Kevin Richard-Morrow, Robert Sullivan, Dave Trestick and Robert Weible. Mary Zawacki and Mary Treanor also attended.

President Bob Weible said that when the year ended, he read about what a terrible year it was, but we had a good year – we survived the pandemic in good stead and economically we are doing well, thanks to our board members and staff. We did not lay off any staff last year and we were rewarded by what they did. Many people are looking to get out of their houses and they will be ready to see us, and we're waiting for them.

Secretary Bob Sullivan asked if anyone had corrections to the minutes of the 2020 annual meeting. John Gearing moved to approve the minutes and Dave Trestick seconded; passed unanimously.

Ellen Fladger, as chair of the Nominating Committee, thanked all the other members of the committee who worked very hard. The four trustees who are leaving the board are Robert Carney, Ellen Fladger, Richard Lewis and Martin Strosberg. The slate of nominations is divided into two categories, current members who will be coming back and new candidates. John Halstead, Sarah Kirby, Chris Leonard and Kevin Richard-Morrow are returning. Mark Vermilyea is the candidate for vice president, as Richard Lewis is leaving. The two new board candidates are Hannah Miller and Sherri Lullo. Ellen asked for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, she asked for a motion to approve the candidates. John Gearing moved to approve the slate of trustees and Marianne Blanchard seconded. Ellen declared the slate as presented by the Nominating Committee had passed unanimously.

Bob Weible said any one of you would be missed, but all of you leaving at one is a whole shoe store waiting to be filled. This concluded the nominations part of the annual meeting.

John Gearing moved to adjourn and Mark Vermilyea seconded at 6:42pm.

The speaker at 7:00 was Dr. Andrea C. Mosterman, Associate Professor of history at The University of New Orleans, specializing in Atlantic and Early American History. Dr. Mosterman spoke about "Enslavement and the Dual Nature of Early New York Homes." These are places where people were enslaved, and it's important that we shift our perspective in how we think about these homes and talk about them.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Secretary Robert Sullivan



Born in spring 2021, Annie joined the herd at the Mabee Farm as a lamb. Today, she's a favorite of school kids and families.

President's Report

I'm once again pleased to say that the Schenectady County Historical Society enjoyed another challenging but winning year in 2021. "Challenging" because we were once again faced with a deadly public health crisis that curtailed some of our operations, particularly during the early and later months of the year, but "winning" because we stayed true to our mission throughout the year and continued to serve our members, visitors, and community with distinction. All good.

And now, with the end of the COVID virus in sight, I think we're well positioned to make 2022 one of our most successful years ever. That's really saying something, I think, given our many productive years of researching, interpreting, and preserving Schenectady County history.

I've said many times that I believe SCHS can become the model for other historical organizations in New York to emulate. And now, thanks to all of you—Trustees, professional staff, members, donors, volunteers, and community partners and supporters—I believe that we have, in fact, become that model.

As I wrote in my most recent President's message in the SCHS newsletter, however, we're not done yet. "Successful institutions know they can only prosper if they keep up with the unceasing winds of change and not resist them. The really good organizations, though, know they have to anticipate change, keep slightly ahead of it, and lead others to a better future. And that's us."

So bring on the new year. We're ready. Let's go.

In the meantime, I need to mention that this is the time of year when we say goodbye to some of our Trustees and recognize their contributions to SCHS, while also welcoming new members to the Board.

Those new members include an old friend and former Trustee, Bob Carney, and Tracey Chance, who will be serving on the Board for the first time. Bob, as many of you know, is a distinguished attorney and accomplished public servant, and Tracey is a history lover and the head of the Schenectady County Conflict Defender's Office.

Departing Trustees include John Gearing and one other.



Farmer John and baby Ellie.



Christmas Carols in the FEC.



Hugh Platt Garden Club decor at Mabee Farm.



2021's big exhibition at 32 Washington Ave featured garments from our collections, and contemporary creations from students at SUNY Oneonta.

John has been a Trustee since 2012, and during that time he's never failed to provide everyone with good fellowship and thoughtful, candid advice on a variety of issues: all while serving as a historian, author, legal counsel, and tour guide.

That other person leaving the Board is, of course, me. I don't quite know what to say about myself, only that I leave the presidency in the capable hands of my friend Mark Vermilyea and consider it an honor and a pleasure to have served on the Schenectady County Historical Society Board for the past six-and-a-half years. I've learned a lot from everyone and greatly enjoyed working with all of you. And I'll look forward to staying in touch and watching as SCHS keeps on winning and winning and winning. Thanks.

-Robert Weible, President, 2018-2022



Executive Director's Report

In my own work as a historian, I'm inclined to study trends, themes, and the bigger picture when looking at the past. Sometimes, though, figures are what really stand out to make a point. One of my favorite figures is 90%. That's how many Americans lived on farms in the 1800s. Today, that figure is 1%. I can't think of anything else that so succinctly captures that massive demographic change in our nation's history.

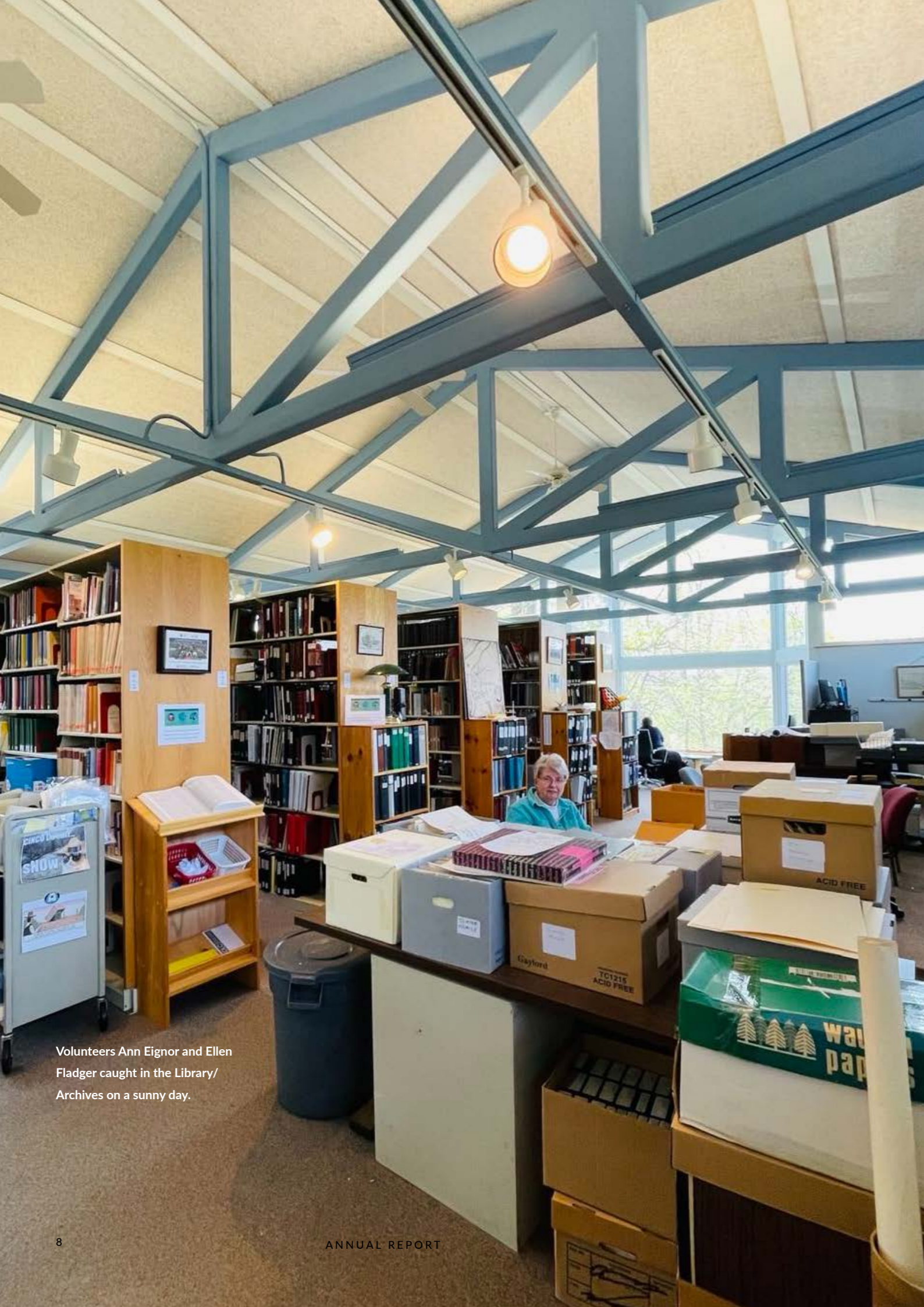
This year, however, when preparing this Annual Report, I found an additional "historical" figure that astonished me: 200. See, this past December we asked for your help in replacing the roof at 32 Washington Avenue. We hoped to raise \$26,000 to complete the project. The response from you, our members, was astounding. Exactly 200 people donated to the cause, for a total of \$33, 147! We've never seen such overwhelming support for a project before, in terms of both amount raised, and number of donors. Wow!

I'm awed that local history has so many advocates in our small county; that so many of us here in Schenectady recognize the deep significance of local history. Schenectady County Historical Society only exists because of you, our generous members. But, more importantly, we also exist for you. SCHS is yours: your museum, your archives, your stories. And 32 Washington Avenue, new roof and all, is your home for history.

For a great year here at SCHS, I must thank SCHS' passionate and dedicated staff, board, and volunteers. Particularly, our outgoing President, Robert Weible, who has expertly guided our organization forward. Bob, to say we will miss you at the helm is an understatement. So much of SCHS' ability to make a difference and to grow is because of your vision of what local history can and should do for its community.

And, above all, I should say that nothing SCHS does is possible without the ongoing support and zeal of our 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 hope you'll join us in making 2022-2023 an even better year for Schenectady!

-Mary Zawacki, Executive Director



Volunteers Ann Eignor and Ellen Fladger caught in the Library/Archives on a sunny day.

Grems-Doolittle Library and Archives

Library Use

During the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the Library had 258 visitors. The librarian and volunteers answered 171 reference questions by email, mail, phone, and Facebook. In addition to our visitors and remote reference questions, we received 45,509 visits to the library's blog, over 6,500 visits to our New York Heritage Digital Collections, and 2,460 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 2,878 hours to the library and six new volunteers joined our team. In the summer, the library hosted an intern from the University of Albany's library science master's degree program who worked on answering remote research requests, digitizing materials, transcribing documents, and creating metadata for a new NY Heritage Collection. Some of the projects completed by volunteers this year include: digitizing back issues of the "Stockade Spy," digitizing the map collection, preliminary processing of the SICM collection, and the Hometown Heroes Banner application.

Grant Funded Projects

We worked on three grant-funded projects this year:

- **Schenectady County Civil War Collection:** funded by the Capital District Library Council (CDLC) to digitize items created by or received by Schenectady County soldiers in the course of their service during the American Civil War, 1861-1865. The collection is available on our New York Heritage site.

- **African American Historical Records Project:** a public history and archival documentation project which seeks to identify, catalog, and preserve historic materials created by African Americans in Schenectady County. Using an award from the NYS Archives Documentary Heritage Program, we completed the first stage, created a plan for the project, and developed a survey to distribute throughout the community. We received an award from the Schenectady County Legislature to continue the project.

- **NYS Consider the Source Diversity and Collaborative Knowledge Program:** The NYS Archives Partnership Trust received a grant to create a network of educators, archivists, and librarians working to make primary sources more widely available in K-12 classrooms. SCHS was asked to serve as the project's regional hub for the Capital District which includes working with records holders to digitize their materials and helping regional teachers and librarians to access newly digitized primary sources.

Library Resources Online

New York Heritage Digital Collections (<https://nyheritage.org/organizations/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 twelve collections on our NY Heritage site, including one new collection added this year: Schenectady County Civil War Collection. Our most used collections this year were Natural Disasters in Schenectady County and Schenectady County Deeds.

We continued to add new posts on the Gremms-Doolittle Library Collections Blog, which can be found at <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 Ghost Train of Mont Pleasant," "Odors of the Erie in Schenectady," and "The Day the Circus Came to Town."

The library joined the Empire Archival Discovery Cooperative (<https://www.empireadc.org/>), a finding aid and archival description search site run by the Empire State Library Network. Similar to NY Heritage, EmpireADC allows researchers to search and browse collection descriptions from a large number of NY cultural heritage organizations. We currently have 31 finding aids uploaded to our EmpireADC site.

We also converted our online catalog to the newly available PPWeb Public Access site. The new site is more functional and user friendly than the previous catalog. For example, records added or updated in PPWeb are automatically available on the Public Access catalog within a few minutes (instead of several hours after a manual integration), and researchers can see preview thumbnails within records that have attached images (e.g. maps and photos).

Collection Care & Preservation

The library has continued to make progress in preserving and processing collections in our archives. Processing includes arrangement, description, and rehousing. This year we've completed processing on the following collections: the Scrapbook Collections, the Ottaway Scrapbook and Diary Collection, the Irma Hamilton Collection, and the William Ackner Collection.

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 map collection, the "Stockade



The "stacks" in the Library/Archives basement hold a wealth of historical treasures.

Spy," and the glass plate negative collection.

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 110 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 ledgers from the Schenectady County Sheriff's Office, the Stockade Pump Station Collection, the Ferguson House History collection, 2020 city directory, and the Conte Postcards collection.

Library-Sponsored Programs and Outreach Activities

The library sponsored several great programs and participated in several outreach events throughout the year. Library programs included speaker series talks by Judy Russell, Dr. Cheryl Gooch, and Sarah Schmidt. In February, we hosted a Facebook event to kick-off the African American Historic Records Project survey which featured memories from Miki Conn, Walter Simpkins, and Adonis Richards. The library has partnered with several local historians and institutions to increase preservation and access for their historical and archival collections, including digitizing the Alplaus village archives and digitizing early church records with the Schenectady First Reformed Church.

- Marietta Carr, Librarian & Archivist



Operations

Development

Grants: SCHS received a total of \$29,388 in grants this fiscal year, a 225% increase from last year:

New York State Archives Partnership Trust: \$2,138
Erie Canalway Heritage Fund: \$1,000
Humanities New York: \$5,000
Capital District Library Council: \$3,500
William G. Broughton Charitable Foundation: \$5,000
County of Schenectady: \$2,000
NYS Council on the Arts: \$10,750

Fundraisers:

2x Arts & Crafts Markets: \$12,966
Festival of Trees: \$4,260

Donations: SCHS received 306 individual donations for a total of \$167,780.

Exhibits and Interpretation

We were thrilled (and relieved) to present two new major exhibitions in 2021, after a brief exhibits pause due to the pandemic. Curator Suzy Fout developed "Redesigning Fashion: Transgression & Identity in Women's Historic Dress," which was on exhibit at 32 Washington from March to November. Funded by a NY Humanities Grant, the exhibit was very popular, bringing in over 700 visitors during its run.

At the Mabee Farm, we opened "Crafted in Schenectady: the Building of a Community" in the fall 2021. The exhibit will continue to run through most of 2022. It explores the evolution of Schenectady's craft economy, its vital role in the development of the Mohawk Valley and in the building of our community. The exhibition brings together many of the tools and crafts we have in our collection.

Suzy also developed and installed a series of new outdoor interpretive signage at the Mabee Farm Historic Site. The bright blue panels are impossible to miss, and provide brief explanations of the property's structures.

Finally, in the summer of 2021, Suzy spent a week at the Marshfield School of Weaving in Vermont learning how to weave on historic barn looms. This was an important move for SCHS, as we have a large historic loom in our collection, and have long been searching for uses for it. As a result, we will be creating a new exhibition and demonstration space dedicated to the history of this traditional craft in the Mohawk Valley.

Programs and Special Events

We returned to pre-pandemic levels of programming this year with 150 individual programs. Some highlights include:

Walking Tours: Walking Tours at the Schenectady County Historical Society remain a popular way for guests to explore the history of the Stockade District. More than 300 people attended a slate of walking tours covering a range of historical subjects from the Colonial period to the 20th century. Additionally, our October Candlelight Tours reached perhaps their widest audience yet in October of 2021. More than 600 tickets were sold to the general public, requiring the SCHS to schedule several extra dates to handle the demand. An additional 100 students and parents from Union College Homecoming Weekend bought tickets in a specially arranged tour.

Howlin' at the Moon: The premiere bluegrass concert series of Schenectady County returned. With Covid precautions still in mind, the concerts nevertheless drew an impressive crowd. Each of our five shows attracted more than 100 guests with the October concert exceeding 150.

Kayak Tours: Perhaps the most unique tour our Historical Society can offer, the Kayak Through History programs continue to grow. This year, we began to offer an exciting tour through the locks of Waterford in addition to our tour from Mohawk Harbor. We held 10 such tours this past year, each sold-out with 20 guests.

Mabee Maple Day and Nature Tours: In addition to Mabee Maple Day, the Mabee Farm Nature trail saw dedicated use this past year with a new type of program- A Midwinter's Night Walk. Planned on February's full moon, this simple free public program was meant as a trial for future development of nature programming at the Farm. To our surprise, despite cold temperatures and icy conditions, more than 50 people attended this event which holds great promise for future iterations of it.

Programs, Tours, Speakers: Throughout the year, the SCHS hosted numerous family programs at both the Mabee Farm and 32 Washington. One of the main offerings was the Colonial Kids Day, an adaptation of our public school program format, but open to the general public. We also offered a variety of miscellaneous programs such as Young Farmer's Day, Yoga on the Farm, Tales from the Bottle, a comedy performance, a Corn Husk Doll Workshop, seasonal tours of the Mabee Farm and Stockade, Book Club, Podcast Club, bike tours, a cider program, A Mabee Christmas Carol, and a half-dozen in-person lectures.

Seasonal craft workshops for adults: Led by curator, Suzy Fout, these included Painted Plates, Painted Tin, Broomcorn Wreaths, and Sinterklaas Gourds.

Arts and Crafts Festival: We welcomed over 1,100 to the Mabee Farm for a full day of browsing and shopping for locally handmade crafts.

FallFest: An almost complete return to our favorite family event of the year, featuring animal rides for kids and a full craft market. This year's event brought several thousand people to the Mabee Farm on a Sunday afternoon in October.

Festival of Trees: 2021 was our most successful years yet with over 1,000 visitors.

Speaker Programs and Videos: Importantly, SCHS was successful in reaching people online. Through virtual talks with experts and YouTube videos, we reached tens of thousands of people. Virtual talks and videos in 2021-2022 included:

- *The First Freedom Rider* with Jerry Mikorenda
- *Enslavement and the Dual Nature of Early New York's Homes* with Dr. Andrea Mosterman
- *Schenectady's Battle Against Contagious Disease* with Drs. Jim and Martin Strosberg
- *Who Runs This Town?* with Don Ackerman
- *Metrofix* with William Patrick
- *A Schoolmaster...under their direction:" Mohawk Control over Preachers and Teachers in the 18th Century* with Century William Hart
- *Rare Books* with Sarah Schmidt
- *Iroquois/Haudenosaunee Material Culture, 1700-1815* with Carl Benn
- *War in Ukraine* moderated by Michael Diana featuring experts from UAlbany
- *Mrs. Mary Potter of Schenectady New York* with Cheryl Gooch
- *The Archaeology of Indigenous Plant Use in the Mohawk Valley* with Scott Ferrara
- *Finding the Law* with Judy Russell
- Video: *A History Erased: Rediscovering Black Schenectady* by Michael Diana
- Video: *Visions of the Mohawk Towpath Byway* by Michael Diana
- Video: *Mabee Maple Day* by Michael Diana and Mary Zawacki

Collections

SCHS staff returned to work managing historic collections, though work was a bit slow moving in 2021, since our long-time collections volunteers moved on to other things during the pandemic. We did, however, welcome some new volunteers in the fall who have been a huge help in our main project to fully photograph the collection. Importantly, we began the process of appraising collection, and the final report will be available later in 2022. This moves us towards our goal of accreditation.

In 2022, SCHS received several donations of historic artifacts, and of particular note was the accession of the 13' Photo-Lab sign. We also renewed long term loans, including the Governor Yates portrait & Mohawk Covered Bridge to NYS Governor's Office, and with ACHA for our 19th c. furniture for display at Ten Broeck. Our artifacts can be spotted out in the community at the Capital Region welcome center off I87, and at the new Schenectady Train Station.

Education and Community Outreach

Our education programing continued to face serious disruptions. Nevertheless, while public schools were still prevented from visiting our site during Covid, many private home school groups visited us in 2021-22. A total of eight such groups averaging about fifteen students each attended special programs designed for them.

Technology

We continued our work of updating technology, including moving to new online ticketing and donation systems. However, the biggest change has been migrating from a local version of PastPerfect to an online version. Now, our databases are instantly accessible and searchable from anywhere in the world.

Brouwer House Creative

Now operating as five artist studios, 2021 saw Brouwer House expanding into retail. Sweet Sprig, our resident soapsmith converted the first floor into a boutique, focusing on her handcrafted skincare, and other delightful gifts. The house was also featured on the 2021 Stockade Garden Tour.

Volunteers

Volunteers are an extraordinary asset to SCHS, and help us accomplish a variety of projects at our sites, including special events, library research, and buildings and grounds improvements. Though volunteer levels dipped during the pandemic, we were pleased to welcome many new volunteers to our sites in 2021. 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, Education and Programs Manager
-Susanna Fout, Exhibitions and Collections Manager
-Mary Zawacki, Executive Director



Rooster at the Mabee Farm.



Sinterklaas Gourds.



Mabee Maple Day.



Fall at SCHS.



Leah LaFera of Sweet Sprig in the Brouwer.



Herb Garden at Mabee Farm.

Buildings & Grounds

The Buildings and Grounds Committee oversaw the completion of several important projects over the past year. Some of the highlights include:

Mabee Farm Historic Site

- Painted exterior of Mabee House
- Fence Repair
- Replacement of the Brick House shingle roof
- Upgrade and repair of picnic tables
- Started repair on drainage system Stone House
- Gutter repair and slate repair on Education Center
- New chicken house and flock of chickens
- Carriage Barn door repairs
- Red Barn bathroom remodel
- Jacked-up carpenters shop
- Evaluation of 1180 Main St
- Introduction of two new sheep and two new goats

Brouwer House Creative

- New heating and AC unit

32 Washington Avenue

- New garden shed

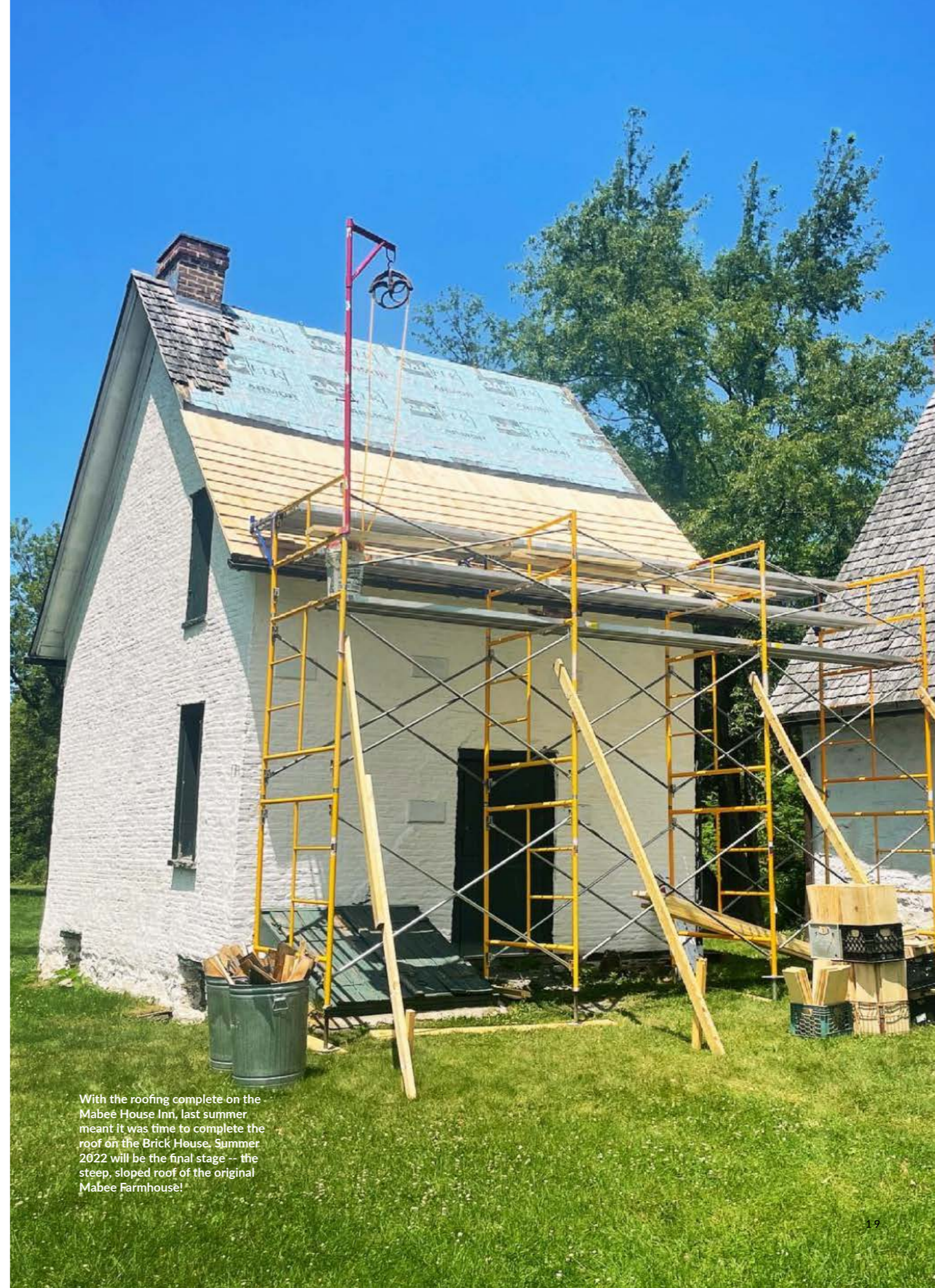
- Dale Wade-Keszey, B&G Chair

(Below)

A Kayak Through History tour on the Mohawk.

Master Gardener Chris Kirksey getting the Brouwer House gardens ready for the Stockade Garden Tour.

An Amish-built chicken coop houses our flock of about 20 chickens.



With the roofing complete on the Mabee House Inn, last summer meant it was time to complete the roof on the Brick House. Summer 2022 will be the final stage -- the steep, sloped roof of the original Mabee Farmhouse!

Membership

During this past fiscal year, the Schenectady County Historical Society added 147 new memberships, resulting in a total of 751 “membership units.” Gift memberships were purchased for 10 people, and 4 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



Our big exhibition at Mabee Farm.

Finance

The Profit & Loss Statement and Balance Sheet for fiscal year 2021/22 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

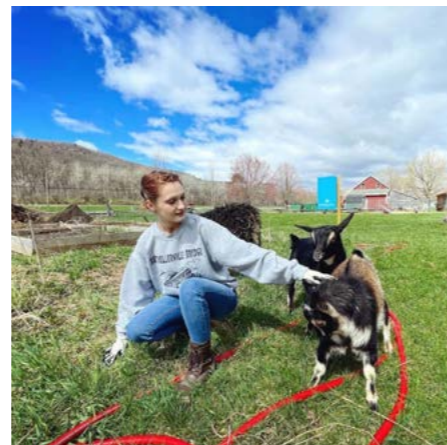


FallFest at Mabee Farm.

Site Rentals

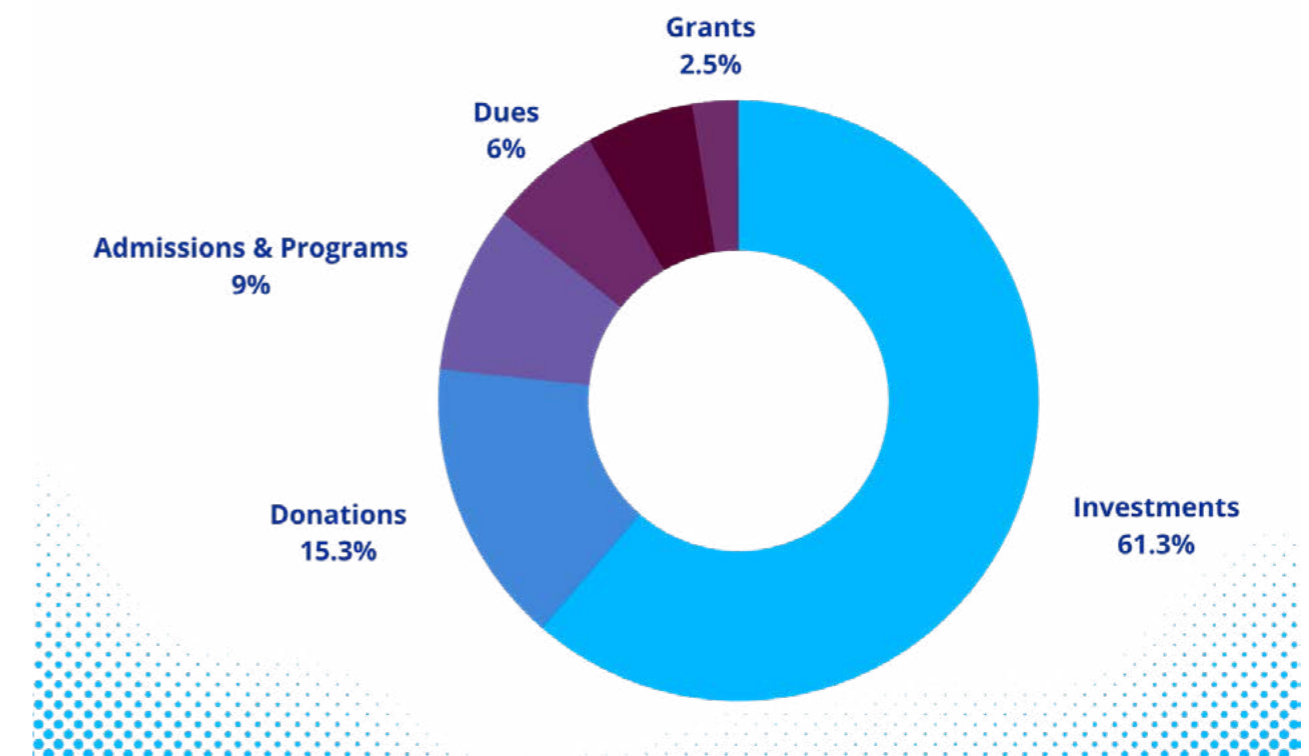
We were still feeling the effects of COVID during most of our barn wedding season. With eleven weddings booked, and two of those canceled, it was a much shorter season than in previous years.

- Mary Zawacki, Executive Director

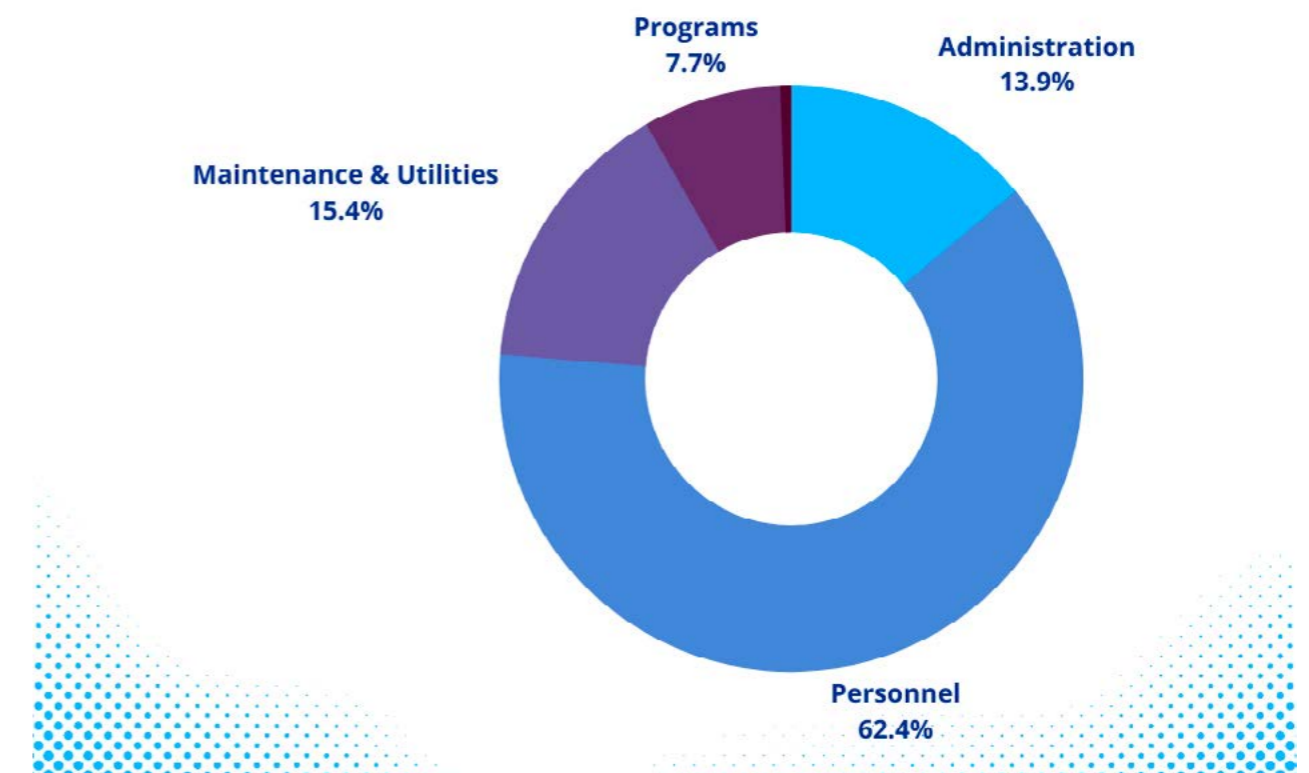


Volunteers and baby goats!

2021 Operating Income



2021 Operating Expense



2021 By the Numbers

Support and Revenue

Operating Income: \$640,364

Non-Operating Income: \$574,559

Total Income: \$1,214,923

Expenses

Operating Expense: \$774,807

Non-Operating Expense: \$94,280

Total Expenses: \$869,087

The full Profit & Loss Statement and Balance Sheet for fiscal year 2021/22 are available upon request.



Staff and volunteers jacked up the Carpentry Shop.

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.