



# SCHENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## FROM THE ARCHIVES: An Account of Surgeries in 1897-1898

by Jim Strosberg and Martin Strosberg

It is only the oldest amongst us who can appreciate first-hand the wonders of modern medicine and surgery. Who remembers the summer scares of polio, the thick glass lenses in the spectacles of those who underwent cataract surgery, the rash and fever of childhood chickenpox and measles and mumps, or the sight of those afflicted with arthritis in their hips and knees struggling to walk with crutches and braces in the days before joint replacement surgery? Each year, there are fewer Schenectadians who can recall Glenridge Hospital, our county tuberculosis sanitarium, which opened in 1912 and closed in 1978.

Although nobody alive experienced the state of medicine at the end of the 19th century, our library has now in its collection an excellent primary source documenting the prevailing conditions of that time. Dr. and Mrs. John Spring, long-time members and supporters, have given the Schenectady County Historical Society a special gift. Dr. Spring is a retired Schenectady orthopedic surgeon and local pioneer in joint replacement surgery – some may remember visiting the exhibit of an old-time doctor's office in our museum's front room, composed of Dr. Spring's medical memorabilia.

Dr. Spring purchased at auction a 550 page, 14 x 8.5-inch handwritten log book recording the case summaries from the combined surgical clinics of Albany Hospital, Child's Hospital, and St. Peter's Hospital, from September 1897 to March 1898. Each case summary (approximately one case per page) includes date, name, gender, age, occupation, diagnosis, history, pertinent physical findings, prognosis, and need for a follow-up appointment. Additionally, the case summary includes a brief description of any surgical procedure performed. At

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# Letter from the President

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## Visit

Library & Museum  
32 Washington Ave, Schenectady, NY

Mabee Farm  
1100 Main St, Rotterdam Jct, NY

Brouwer House Creative  
14 N Church St, Schenectady, NY

## Contact

WWW.SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG

## Newsletter Contributors:

John Angilletta, Bill Buell, John  
F. Gearing, & Martin Strosberg

Happy summer! I hope people are getting out and enjoying the season, and especially taking in some of the programs that the staff have created and are running each week.

I have happy personal news, as each of my three kids has achieved a milestone recently. Our oldest daughter was married on June 1, our second daughter earned her Nurse Practitioner degree from UPenn on May 20, and our son has completed his doctoral work in Physics at UCSD and will defend his thesis in July! It's gratifying to see how they've grown over the past years as they've handled college and started careers. My wife and I must have done some things right along the way, and we feel very fortunate to have them in our lives.

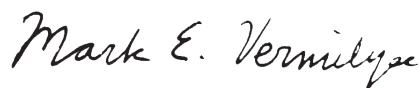
Of course, given my personal view of the importance of history and historical perspective, seeing the next generation achieve milestones makes me think about their future, as well as my past when I was their age. Even more historical perspective comes from thinking about when my parents and grandparents were their age -- the 1950s and 1930s respectively. What a different world it was at both of those times! Those decades bracketed the biggest war in history, and might be seen as bookends, showing some of the lows and highs of the American experience in the last century.

I'm almost done with Walter Isaacson's biography of Benjamin Franklin, which is a wonderful window into a much earlier part of American history. I find myself identifying with Franklin's view of one's place in society, as he believed in hard work and the intrinsic rewards of knowing that you did your best for others. Franklin's reach extends all the way to the present; I've been telling the students during the barn-building segment of the school programs that our barn has a lightning rod thanks to him!

Your SCHS board is doing a wonderful job working with the staff to continue the wide and exciting range of offerings that we provide to the community each year. The new board members have brought new ideas and energy, our finances are in great shape, and our future is really bright thanks to the efforts of everyone who supports our society and its mission.

One of our biggest initiatives this year is completing significant maintenance projects at the Mabee Farm, especially the Brick House and Inn. Your support of last year's annual appeal is being augmented by a grant to do the structural masonry work on the Inn, and we have a team of volunteers restoring the farmhouse porch this summer. Our Society was recently awarded an historic preservation award by the Schenectady Heritage Foundation for our continued upkeep of the Mabee Farm site, for which the staff is to be commended!

I hope everyone is enjoying their summer and will be able to spend some time relaxing either at home or on a vacation somewhere. I hope to see you at the Arts and Crafts Festival in August if you're in town.



Mark Vermilyea, SCHS President



# Note from the Director



In programming news, we opened **Ground to Gourmet: Tracing the Origins of the Food We Love** a few months ago. The exhibition was developed and designed in partnership with miSci, and hopefully it's the first of many partnerships with our friends over there. You can check it out at Mabee Farm.

SCHS is the proud recipient of a grant which will go a long way in addressing our historic preservation needs. The **Erie**

**Canalway National Heritage Corridor** awarded us \$24,000 to preserve the Inn at Mabee Farm. If you've been following along, you know that the four buildings at Mabee Farm Historic Site require about \$500,000 in preservation needs over the next five years. This grant makes a small, but vital dent in that sum, and we're eager to get started with masonry work.

Finally, since it's summer, it means our staff has increased; we welcome two Museum Assistants to our sites for the warm months. **Gabriella Baratier** and **Noelle Lennard** will be with us through September. Both young women worked at SCHS previously as interns. This summer the scope of their work will remain largely the same, but with more significant creative projects on their plates. More to come on that in the next newsletter.

Wishing you a sunny, not TOO hot summer, and I hope to see you soon!

Mary Zawacki, SCHS Executive Director

Dear Friends,

It seems a long time since my last letter; this year we decided to switch up our newsletter format, going from four issues to three issues plus the Annual Report. You should have received the Annual Report by mail or email. If not, here's the link: [schenectadyhistorical.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Annual-Report-2024.pdf](https://www.schenectadyhistorical.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Annual-Report-2024.pdf).

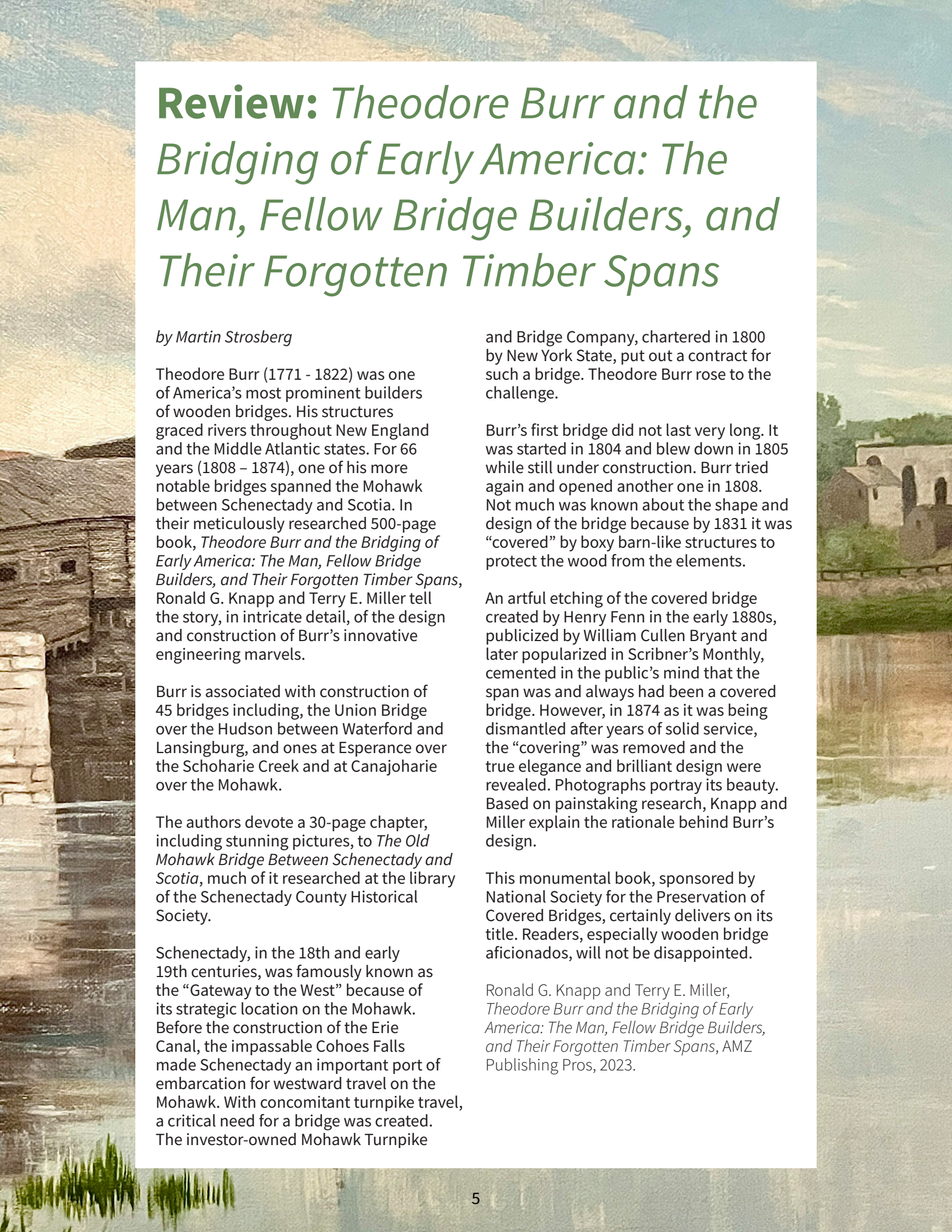
I'd like to extend a warm welcome to the five new trustees who joined our board this spring: **Jill Bogdanowicz-Wilson**, **Russ Hart**, **Kim Waldin**, **Sonia Sandoval**, and **Suzanne Unger**. All of these fine folks are connected to the Schenectady community, passionate about local history, and bring a new energy and vitality to our Board of Trustees. I'm excited to work with them.

Also new to SCHS are **Cooper** and **Dusty**, two miniature donkeys who came to us in need of a forever home. They've settled in nicely at Mabee Farm, and seem to enjoy the attention lavished on them by our staff, volunteers, and all the 4th graders who visited over the last few months. I'm no farmer, but I can tell you that taking care of donkeys is quite a bit different from the usual goats and sheep. It's been a learning curve, but we're getting there.









# Review: *Theodore Burr and the Bridging of Early America: The Man, Fellow Bridge Builders, and Their Forgotten Timber Spans*

by Martin Strosberg

Theodore Burr (1771 - 1822) was one of America's most prominent builders of wooden bridges. His structures graced rivers throughout New England and the Middle Atlantic states. For 66 years (1808 - 1874), one of his more notable bridges spanned the Mohawk between Schenectady and Scotia. In their meticulously researched 500-page book, *Theodore Burr and the Bridging of Early America: The Man, Fellow Bridge Builders, and Their Forgotten Timber Spans*, Ronald G. Knapp and Terry E. Miller tell the story, in intricate detail, of the design and construction of Burr's innovative engineering marvels.

Burr is associated with construction of 45 bridges including, the Union Bridge over the Hudson between Waterford and Lansingburg, and ones at Esperance over the Schoharie Creek and at Canajoharie over the Mohawk.

The authors devote a 30-page chapter, including stunning pictures, to *The Old Mohawk Bridge Between Schenectady and Scotia*, much of it researched at the library of the Schenectady County Historical Society.

Schenectady, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, was famously known as the "Gateway to the West" because of its strategic location on the Mohawk. Before the construction of the Erie Canal, the impassable Cohoes Falls made Schenectady an important port of embarkation for westward travel on the Mohawk. With concomitant turnpike travel, a critical need for a bridge was created. The investor-owned Mohawk Turnpike

and Bridge Company, chartered in 1800 by New York State, put out a contract for such a bridge. Theodore Burr rose to the challenge.

Burr's first bridge did not last very long. It was started in 1804 and blew down in 1805 while still under construction. Burr tried again and opened another one in 1808. Not much was known about the shape and design of the bridge because by 1831 it was "covered" by boxy barn-like structures to protect the wood from the elements.

An artful etching of the covered bridge created by Henry Fenn in the early 1880s, publicized by William Cullen Bryant and later popularized in Scribner's Monthly, cemented in the public's mind that the span was and always had been a covered bridge. However, in 1874 as it was being dismantled after years of solid service, the "covering" was removed and the true elegance and brilliant design were revealed. Photographs portray its beauty. Based on painstaking research, Knapp and Miller explain the rationale behind Burr's design.

This monumental book, sponsored by National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges, certainly delivers on its title. Readers, especially wooden bridge aficionados, will not be disappointed.

Ronald G. Knapp and Terry E. Miller, *Theodore Burr and the Bridging of Early America: The Man, Fellow Bridge Builders, and Their Forgotten Timber Spans*, AMZ Publishing Pros, 2023.



# From the Library

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ANN THOMAS

by John Angilletta



Ann Thomas has been a Library volunteer for several years now, though her relationship with SCHS began back in 2009, when she helped construct the Onrust (a replica 17th century ship) at Mabee Farm.

Since then, Ann has also been an active part of the boat crew, who man the two batteaux that are docked at the Mabee Farm. Ann has spent many hours at the oars of the boats on

the Mohawk and even up on Lake Champlain and Lake George where she was often dressed in period costume.

Ann grew up in Albany in one of the beautiful homes that became part of the College of St. Rose campus. She eventually moved to Schenectady where she worked at the Union College Library from 1980 - 2013 as a slide curator. While there she helped to scan and archive many historical documents from the college and Schenectady's history.

She came to volunteer at our library in December 2021 when SCHS neighbor Carol Delameter enlisted her help in scanning old issues of the Stockade Spy newsletters. This project lasted over a year and Ann came to be one of our "go to" people for scanning documents and publications. She is currently working on cataloging the recently donated collection of vintage postcards from Wayne Howard. Ann said that the postcards themselves are fascinating but the messages on them offer an intimate look into the lives of people from the past.

For Ann, the best part about volunteering at SCHS is working alongside other volunteers. She also enjoys working with the the historical images, documents and photos in the collections.

Ann has a sister in Albany and a brother in Delmar that she is very close with. She is also the proud parent of a filmmaker son who lives in Forest Hills, and a daughter in Washington D.C. who works as a librarian at the Library of Congress.

Ann spends her leisure time enjoying English country dancing which she became involved with in the late 1990s. The group does historical dancing as well as making their own gowns from that time period, a skill that helped her create the period clothing that she wears on the batteaux. In July, Ann will be involved in the Amherst Music Festival at Union College featuring medieval music and musicians. She also enjoys reading, and has been experimenting with water color painting as she collects old paint boxes.

SCHS is truly fortunate to have a volunteer like Ann who is involved in so many aspects of our local history. We're proud to feature her in this issue's Volunteer Spotlight!

## NOTE FROM THE LIBRARIAN

We had a productive winter and spring season in the library! We recently finished the inventory of our books and periodicals, including updating the catalog with titles and information to assist researchers. We've added 12 maps and several hundred census points to our HistoryForge digital mapping project. We are continuing work on the African American Historical Records Project, including the second summer of the Sankofa Youth Collective.

- Marietta Carr, Librarian/Archivist

## RECENT BLOG POSTS

### ***From Crescent Park to Veterans Park: An Evolving Story***

Veterans Park in downtown Schenectady has evolved from a little oasis of green on a bustling thoroughfare to a lasting tribute to Schenectady County's residents who served our country in the armed forces. Learn more about this transition in this post written by library volunteer Diane Leone.

### ***Schenectady Boot and Shoemakers***

In this blog post, library volunteer Susan Cromer examines a recently acquired collection of mid-nineteenth century business records from a Schenectady shoemaker and discusses what these records can tell us about their historical context.

### ***Daniel Campbell: Businessman, Patriot, Human***

Daniel Campbell settled in Schenectady in the 1750s and built considerable wealth as a trader. In this post, library volunteer Bob Baldwin uses a sociological and interpersonal lens to take a closer look at the Daniel Campbell Letters Collection.



# Calendar of Events at SCHS

We're always adding new programs to the calendar!  
For full event details, and to get tickets, please visit  
[schenectadyhistorical.org/events](https://schenectadyhistorical.org/events)

## TOURS AND MORE

### **Schenectady Living History: 19th Century African Americans**

*August 17 at 3pm @ 32 Washington | Free*

Join us in celebrating Schenectady's African American history! This program will feature living history performances highlighting three individuals who rose from the shackles and oppression of slavery to positions of prominence. The event will also include performances by from the Duryee AME Zion Church Choir.

- **Anthony Allen:** The Journey from Slavery in Schenectady to Entrepreneur in Hawaii by Donald Hyman
- **Julia Foote:** A Brand Plucked from the Fire by Amelia Paul
- **Moses Viney** by Walter Simpkins

This event is part of the Schenectady African American Historical Records Project, and is supported in part by funding from Schenectady County and the IMLS.

### **Secret Stockade**

*Aug 10, and Sept 14 at 2pm @ 32 Washington | \$25*

The Stockade and its secrets come to life on this behind-the-scenes journey through the neighborhood. Tickets include museum admission, a guided neighborhood tour, exclusive access to Stockade homes and gardens, and coffee and pastries at Arthur's Market.

### **Walking Tour: GE Realty Plot**

*July 20, Aug 17, & Sept 21 at 10am @ Steinmetz Memorial Park | \$25*

Join Schenectady City Historian Chris Leonard to explore the stately GE Realty Plot! We'll uncover stories about local leaders, plus discover the formation of this historic neighborhood, and ongoing efforts to protect these stately homes. Tickets include entry into one of the homes and snacks on its large front porch!

### **Kayak Through History**

*Through August at Mohawk Harbor | \$35*

Our Schenectady kayak tour takes you from the modern Mohawk Harbor to the site of our city's ancient port. Along the route, our expert guide will regale you with the history of the area.

### **Candlelight Tours**

*October at 32 Washington | \$15*

Explore the historic Stockade after dark, and discover the neighborhood's haunted past. Guided by expert storytellers, immerse yourself in the ghost tales of this 400-year-old neighborhood.

## FOR KIDS

### **Farm Kids Friday**

*August 2 at 10am at Mabee Farm*

Tour the entirety of our farm with special demonstrations of colonial crafts. Butter making, barn-building, blacksmithing and meeting the farm animals are just some of the activities available. This program is free for family+ members, but RSVP required. Non-members are \$10/person.

## LIVE MUSIC

### **Howlin' at the Moon**

Our full moon concert series returns to The Barn at Mabee Farm this summer, and our hosts Everest Rising are bringing you an incredible lineup of regional musicians. The music starts at 7pm, and tickets are \$10.

**July 18:** Goodnight Moonshine

**August 15:** Carolyn Shapiro

**September 19:** Belle-Skinner

### **Brick House Benefit Concert with Lost Radio Rounders**

*July 26 at 7pm @ Mabee Farm | by donation*

Lost Radio Rounders are NYS' premier Historic American Music trio, offering music that fuses information and entertainment in a style reminiscent of classic early 20th century string bands. Mark & Jill will open the evening. This concert is to benefit preservation work on the Brick House.

## FESTIVALS

### **Arts and Crafts Festival**

*August 24 at 10am-2:30pm @ Mabee Farm | \$10/car*

Join us as 85+ artists and crafters spread out over the Mabee Farm grounds with their eclectic, beautifully handcrafted items. All items are handmade here in our region.

### **Stockade Walkabout**

*September 28 at 11am-5pm @ 32 Washington | \$25*

Stroll through three centuries of history in New York's oldest registered historic district! Several neighbors have graciously agreed to open the interior of their homes, and tell secrets of the architecture and stories of the families that lived in them.

### **FallFest**

*October 13 at 11am-3pm @ Mabee Farm | \$10/car*

Join us for FallFest, a spectacular celebration of autumn and its bounty. Featuring family-friendly activities like pony rides, boat rides, crafts, and a petting zoo, along with live music, and local beer. Plus, 70 of our favorite artists and crafters will fill the grounds, selling their eclectic wares.



# URBAN VERNACULAR: Anatomy of Morris Avenue, an Early 20th Century Residential Subdivision

by Neil Larson

*This article was originally printed in the Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture newsletter. Photos by M. Zawacki.*

A short boulevard running south from Union Street to Eastern Avenue, Morris Avenue was one of a number of new middle-class neighborhoods developed in that part of Schenectady brought on by the rapid growth of local industry. This new development attracted not only newcomers moving into the city for white-collar jobs at the General Electric plant but also local merchants prospering from the swelling economy and removing themselves from older neighborhoods downtown, some in the path of commercial redevelopment. Morris Avenue built up between 1909 and 1915 with ten distinctive houses built in the Craftsman style. Half of the houses were designed by architects based in Schenectady or Albany; the rest were built from plans obtained from published sources by their owners or contractors providing new insight into the manner in which these and the hundreds of other up-to-date, stylish homes appearing in this period were conceived and realized.

The neighborhood was created with the 1909 subdivision of a parcel known as the Case Plot, being the remaining undeveloped portion of land associated with the estate of Sarah L. Case, who had inherited it from her grandfather Henry R. Wendell, it being a portion of his suburban farm. The plan was filed by DeForest-Nicklas Co., a real estate development firm headed by Henry S. DeForest, who is credited with building over 1,200 homes in the city. He was a former mayor, who was a member of the U.S. Congress at the time the Morris Avenue lots were being sold. William G. Nicklas, 26 years DeForest's junior, was a successful Schenectady real estate agent at the time he became his partner. Morris Avenue was named for Henry S. DeForest's daughter Pearl DeForest Morris.

It does not appear that DeForest-Nicklas Co. had a direct role in determining the architectural program for Morris Avenue. Typical of developer's deeds of the period, they placed restrictions on properties they sold as far as use (no manufacturing or establishments distilling or selling liquor), setbacks and house values. In this case, the \$3,500 requirement would have discouraged the construction of lesser houses; apparently multiple family dwellings, particularly two-family houses, which

were proliferating in working-class sections of the city, also were excluded.

The Arts & Crafts theme running through the houses built on the street is characteristic of this early 20th century period, it being the current architectural taste of the day and popular with many of the young professionals moving into the city. Local architects and builders in Schenectady were experienced working in the Craftsman mode, much of it promulgated by architectural journals, trade publications, building supply catalogs and mail-order houses. Most middling houses were based on Four-Square plans with Arts & Crafts materials and millwork; others were more progressive in forms following the introduction of the Bungalows and Craftsman Cottage.

In this period and in planned subdivisions such as this, pushing past the old city limits, and gobbling up farmsteads in their paths, a new urban vernacular emerged with the collaboration of landowners, real estate speculators, architects, building contractors and millwork manufacturers. This dynamic was not unlike that which existed in the 19th century, just significantly multiplied in scope. One historian has referred to this early decentralized practice of single-family home development in the early 20th century as "entrepreneurial vernacular," making it an apt subject for presentation here. By means of an introduction, thumbnail descriptions of the ten houses constructed on Morris Avenue between 1910 and 1915 follow below. Builders and architects have been identified for the properties based on building permit records.

## 2 Morris Avenue

A building permit for lot no. 4 of the Case Plot was issued to James Lindsay on 17 April 1912. Lindsay owned Lindsay Bros. Co., a shoe store at 311 State Street with his brother, John, and Edward A. Quiri, the prior owner. They also had a store in Amsterdam, New York, where James and his family had lived before moving to Morris Avenue. The Four-Square house with a stuccoed first floor and shingled second and a distinctive Classical porch is believed to have been built by Lewis E. Jeffers, a carpenter and building contractor. He was born on a farm in Rotterdam, and by the time he was 19 years of age he was working in that town as a carpenter with his older brother Allen Jeffers. Lewis E. Jeffers is recorded as the builder of three other houses on Morris Avenue at nos. 5, 9 and 15.





4 (right) and 6 (left) Morris Avenue.

#### 4 Morris Avenue

Lot no. 5 of the Case Plot was sold to Isabelle E. Gregg in 1909. Her husband, Alfred E. Gregg, was born on a farm in Rotterdam, graduated from Union College and was employed at the electric works. Their Four-Square house had stucco and shingled walls and a Craftsman porch. Records indicate the house was built by Henry J. Fuller, a carpenter-builder residing on Anthony Street in the city. Born in 1886 in Amsterdam, New York, he was the son of carpenter George H. Fuller and Mary C. Fuller. By 1910 Henry and his wife, Bessie Mae, were living in Schenectady. No other buildings associated with him have been identified.

#### 6 Morris Avenue

A building permit was issued on 14 April 1910 for the house to be built for William F. and Anna L. Hardstock at 6 Morris Avenue. Born in Schenectady to German immigrant parents, William F. Hardstock (1868-1927) was

a master plumber and vice president of the Levi Case Co. at the time. The elaborate brick and stucco house with a half-timbered second story was designed by the Albany architectural firm Fuller & Robinson Co. Albert W. Fuller (1854-1934) had already reached prominence when he partnered with William P. Robinson in 1910, towards the end of his long career. Known more for his schools, YMCAs, commercial buildings and elegant urban residences, the small-scale Hardstock House is an unusual example of his recorded commissions, which may reflect the work of Robinson and other younger associates in the office. William T. Thorpe was the builder of record. His business and home were located at 316 Lenox Road in the Schenectady Realty Plot, in which he likely constructed other houses. Born in England, he immigrated to the U.S. and Schenectady as a teenager in 1895 with his father John Thorpe, a carpenter with whom he apprenticed. Thorpe disappears from Schenectady directories after 1918.





*7 Morris Avenue.*

### **7 Morris Avenue**

After being sold in 1909, lot 17 of the Case Plot changed hands a number of times before being bought in 1913 by Homer J. Borst of Amsterdam, New York, for whom the Four-Square house with brick and stucco walls was built. Borst was a Harvard-educated lawyer and the son and partner of Henry V. Borst, an attorney in Amsterdam. It appears that Homer and his wife, Florence S. Serviss, and their infant son, Vroman, moved to Schenectady to open a second office for the family law firm. A building permit filed on 14 June 1913 identified William H. Putnam as the architect and builder of the house, although he was a harness merchant by trade who was engaged briefly in real estate, including the year the Borst house was built.

### **10 Morris Avenue**

George Gifford obtained a building permit on 18 December 1913, a few months after he purchased the southerly 38 ft. of lot 8 and the northerly 2 ft. of lot 9 from lumber yard foreman William S. Mischler. However, Gifford, a teller at the Mohawk Bank, was unmarried and lived with his parents at 303 Lafayette Street, renting the house for the entire time he owned the property. The building permit identifies William Gifford, George's father and a civil engineer, as the architect, which may explain the conservative design enlivened by a stolid porch. Carpenter Charles Weaver is listed as the builder. Like many contractors of that era, he left the family farm in Glenville to benefit from Schenectady's building boom.





*8 Morris Avenue.*

### **8 Morris Avenue**

William S. Frame, chief clerk for American Locomotive Co., and his wife, Elizabeth Stewart Frame, purchased lot no. 7 and the northerly two feet of lot no. 8 from DeForest-Nicklas Co. on 18 August 1910, although a building permit had been issued on 31 December 1909. Schenectady architect Cornelius Glen Van Rensselaer (1869-1944) reputedly designed the brick and wood shingle dwelling and its substantial Craftsman porch. He was the son of Visser Van Rensselaer of East Greenbush and a descendant of Killian Van Rensselaer, the legendary Dutch patroon of the manor of Rensselaerwyck. Among his documented commissions are the Veeder House on Union Street at Elmer Avenue (1904); Center Street School (1918); Draper Free School, Rotterdam (1920); Methodist Church, Alplaus (1929); Pleasant Valley Market, State Street (1931); and a three-story, fire-proof apartment block, Union Street

at Park Avenue (1925). The builder, John Erickson, was born in Sweden and immigrated to the U.S. as a young man in 1888. He appears in Schenectady censuses and directories from 1903 to 1920, living with his wife, Anna, and son, Wendell J. Erickson (a civil engineer educated at Union College).

### **9 Morris Avenue**

House builder Joseph H. Clements, Jr. purchased lot 16 and a portion of lot 15 in the Case Plot on 29 October 1909 and sold it to Henry C. and Hattie J. McLean in 1914, apparently with the wood shingled Bungalow with sweeping front roof. Henry C. McLean was a reporter (clerk) for the Supreme Court in Albany. He moved to Morris Avenue from Gloversville, and he and his family are listed in the 1915 Schenectady city directory. Documentation for the property compiled by a later owner cites Joseph H. Clements, Jr. as the architect and





9 Morris Avenue.

Lewis E. Jeffers as the builder. Clements was not known to be an architect. He was a builder himself and by 1914 he had become secretary treasurer for Peckham-Wolf & Co., a dealer in lumber and interior trim located on Dock Street. He likely was provided plans from an unidentified outside source. Jeffers also has been credited as the builder of houses at 2, 5 and 15 Morris Avenue.

#### 14 Morris Avenue

A small, stuccoed bungalow was built for William F. Skinkle on lot no. 10 in the Case Plot, which he bought from DeForest-Nicklas Co. in 1913. Skinkle was a traveling salesman for the Pioneer Broom Company; he and his wife, Helen, were in residence in time to be

listed at the address in the 1914 city directory. A building permit dated 1 May 1913 identifies John G. Smith as the architect and builder. Obviously, he had purchased plans for this simple cottage from another source, as it is a classic catalog house. John Gottlieb Smith was born in Pennsylvania to German immigrant parents. He appears as a carpenter in Schenectady directories in 1905 and by 1910 had graduated to contractor status, implying he ran his own business.

#### 12 Morris Avenue

Eugene W. Veeder, who operated a coal and lumber yard on State Street, purchased the southerly 40 ft. of lot 9 in the Case Plot from DeForest-Nicklas Co. in 1912. He





*12 Morris Avenue.*

was the son of Henry Veeder and Helen B. Newkirk and was born on the family farm in Rotterdam. The Veeder family has deep roots in the region; Eugene's brother Charles F. Veeder was one of the developers of the Union Triangle. Eugene married his second wife, Alice H. Dyer, in 1912, the year he hired architect Cornelius G. Van Rensselaer to design an elaborate stuccoed Four-Square house in a Craftsman style. (For more information on C.G. Van Rensselaer see entry for 8 Morris Avenue.) A building permit was issued on 19 October 1912 with Charles E. Varney recorded as the builder. Born on a farm in Kingsbury, Washington County, Varney worked as a carpenter in Glens Falls before moving to Schenectady. His business and home were located on Lenox Road

suggesting he had a role in the construction of similar houses in the Schenectady Realty Plot.

### **15 Morris Avenue**

The most elaborate house on the street, situated on a large lot on the corner of Morris and Eastern avenues, was constructed in 1910 by building contractor Lewis E. Jeffers on a lot he acquired from DeForest-Nicklas Co. for speculation purposes. At the time of the closing, Jeffers already had plans in hand drawn by architect William T.B. Mynderse (1871-1931), son of Barent A. Mynderse, a prominent local physician, and Albertina Sanders Ten Broeck. The Mynderse family could claim myriad ties to the region's colonial patriarchy. They resided on a large





*15 Morris Avenue.*

estate on the Scotia side of the Mohawk known as Lake Hill in a gambrel-roof house probably also designed by William T.B. Mynderse, as well as “Holland House”, a Dutch-styled house built on the family’s Scotia land for his own house (1916). He also was the architect for the Schenectady Day Nursery (1912); St. Andrew’s Mission Church, Scotia (1915-16); the McClellan Hospital in Cambridge, NY (1918-19); an addition to the Mohawk Bank, in the Stockade (1924); and Union College gate (ca. 1925). As the house was being finished, Jeffers sold the “land with buildings” to Lazarus Rubenstein, formerly a

jeweler but by then a real estate investor. He was born in 1874 to Polish immigrant parents in Syracuse where his father, Rufus, was a retail grocer. Twenty years later he was listed in the Schenectady city directory as a jeweler, apparently having spent some time in New York City. By 1906 he was engaged in real estate. Within a week of purchasing the house at 15 Morris Avenue, he flipped it to local lawyer Samuel Levy, who six months later transferred title to Lily S. Carl, wife of Charles W. Carl, president of the Carl dry goods company.





2 Morris Avenue.

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# REFLECTIONS ON LIBERTY

*by Michael Diana*

America's 250th birthday is coming up soon, and the semiquincentennial offers us an opportunity to examine and discuss the American "experiment," and our society's progress towards democracy. We kicked things off in January with a re-enactment Liberty Flag raising. You may know that SCHS owns the only surviving "Liberty" flag from the Revolutionary War, which was believed to have been carried by a New York regiment in the Revolutionary War.

Raising the Liberty Flag ignited a question for me: what even is liberty? It's a ubiquitous idea and it's invoked so often, that its meaning becomes muddled and elusive. The dictionary defines liberty as "the state of being free from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one's way of life, behavior, or political views."

But that definition doesn't actually answer my question. After all, no one believes that everyone should be absolutely free to do whatever they want, whenever or wherever they want. Plus, if there's no government power to impose restrictions on individual behavior, then there's nothing to stop individual persons from infringing upon the freedom and welfare of others. For instance, should people be free to drive on the left hand side of the road, or ignore stop signs? Certainly not. So Liberty can never be absolute; there must be restrictions on individual behavior.

So the question remains: What is liberty? What separates a reasonable restriction from an "oppressive" one? As we look through American history and our own local history, we see this question persist from generation to generation. And there never was, is not currently, and will likely never be one universally accepted answer.

As far as I can tell, the 1770s represented the first time Schenectady had a public reckoning with the idea

of Liberty. True, we might find some squabbles over trading privileges between the burghers of Albany and Schenectady all the way back when our town was founded in 1661. But it was a truly radical thing on January 26, 1771 when a pole was raised in secret in the center of the town. The pole was armored by iron studs and nails, and at its top waved a blue banner emblazoned with the word "Liberty." This liberty pole and liberty flag stood for at least three days, and was a source of great tension for the small Colonial town. Local authorities feared that any attempt to remove the flag would incite a violent backlash.



Given the time period, you might expect this liberty pole would somehow be related to the ongoing conflict between Britain and her American colonies. But, actually, this first Liberty Pole had nothing to do with that. Instead, it was a protest against purely local politics -- an ongoing and longstanding dispute about land ownership in Schenectady.

See, since the 1684 patent, Schenectady's common lands were controlled by a handful of appointed landowners

known as "trustees". New settlers could purchase this common land from the trustees, who theoretically would use the proceeds for the benefit of the community. Unfortunately, the mechanisms for becoming a trustee were poorly defined, leading to a dispute amongst the leading families of the town as to who could rightfully control the common lands. At risk was the validity of decades worth of deeds and property sales. So when this first cry of liberty rang out, it was not against some oppressive government body, but rather against private individuals seeking to usurp a common resource. In fact, the outrage was occasioned by a lack of a clear and formal town government to settle this weighty dispute.

The dispute amongst the Trustees had not yet been resolved and these local tensions still festered on



January 12, 1774, when the second Liberty Pole was raised. By this point, the crisis of British colonial governance had reached Schenectady, and a local chapter of the Sons of Liberty was in operation. This demonstration was bolder than the first, and a crowd of 50 men marched brazenly through town to raise the flag -- the very same blue banner from 1771.

There was no single leader of the group, but Claas DeGraff was identified as playing a leading role. When Henry Hill was sent to disperse them on behalf of the local justices of the peace, he was warned away by a mob that brandished axes and flails, ostensibly for raising the flag. When John and Henry Glen confronted the gathering, they too were ignored. The justices sought to charge some of the participants with "rioting," and declared the liberty flag itself a public nuisance as it stood in the center of the street. At certain points, the demonstration may have escalated to violence as happened with the liberty poles erected in New York City. But fortunately, despite flaring tempers, people kept their hands to themselves.

This second liberty pole was a protest against what many Schenectadians considered an overreach of Parliamentary authority into the affairs of everyday life. I'm sure you remember from grade school the various taxes which proved unpopular. You should also recall that when colonial Americans resisted these impositions, the British crackdown inspired only greater resistance. Likewise, as the crisis escalated abroad, Revolutionary sentiment grew stronger here in Schenectady. So here we have a cry of liberty which is very familiar. However, we should not fool ourselves into thinking that the people who took to the streets on January 12, 1774 shared our ideas of what Liberty meant.

To be fair, that crowd was probably quite diverse in their revolutionary motivations, just as we are diverse in our own beliefs. But the "liberty" that prevailed at Saratoga and Yorktown made no provision for women participating in government. It offered no relief for enslaved people, which in 1790 represented 8% of Schenectadians. The right to vote was not even extended to all white men but initially, just the propertied ones. Today all of these things are considered necessary and essential to our free society. Indeed, the consensus definition of liberty in the Revolutionary period was not just different than our modern consensus, it was fundamentally incompatible.

Of course, over the next 250 years, things changed. Each generation has had its own call to liberty -- or even simultaneous and competing calls to liberty. Even as early as 1789, the ratification of the Constitution forced drastic change to what "free" government looked like, leaving many revolutionary partisans feeling betrayed. In 1827, slavery in New York was abolished. Women were admitted to New York state's body politic in 1917,

just two years before the 19th Amendment expanded suffrage throughout the nation. And I could go on and on here, this is just the low hanging fruit.

I bring up all the aforesaid if only to show that now in 2024, we inherit a long tradition of Americans seeking liberty by various definitions and various means. My goal here is not to criticize or "cancel" past generations for the shortcomings of their morality. It is to show that we should be humble and open to revising our own beliefs in the face of compelling arguments. And as I elaborate on the impossibility of defining liberty once and for all, I don't want you to give up on doing so. Instead, I encourage you to reflect on the subject. It is our duty to ourselves and our fellow citizens.

Even though we may not agree with the worldview of that angry crowd 250 years ago, we still benefit from its effect, and the inspiration of their actions. The raising of the second liberty pole was just a small step in a small town, but it contributed to a revolutionary movement that made important and positive changes. A 15 year crucible, from Lexington and Concord to the Constitutional Convention created an American government in which change can be made through peaceful means. However, we should not just limit ourselves to voting.

Democracy is necessarily messy. Even with our representative government, it is still sometimes necessary to get loud, get organized and take to the streets just as they did in '74. Today on the news you'll hear of people marching and organizing for liberty. In 2020, how many demonstrations were made against the various restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic. "Reopen America," they said, "unmask our children." An altogether different movement took to the streets of Schenectady to protest not just the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, but various practices by local law enforcement that protestors found oppressive. These demonstrations shut down streets and occupied public places in a way that may have caused the same "public nuisance" John Glen alleged of the liberty pole. You may not always agree with these calls to liberty, but that's their prerogative, not yours. When people are too afraid or too lazy to stand up for their liberties, those liberties will disappear.

I'll ask one last time, "what is liberty?" It is incumbent upon us to keep this question in our mind. You know that the semiquincentennial of the American Revolution will soon be upon us. Schenectadians should take this impending opportunity to reflect even more acutely on our national and local history. We can not be afraid to ask difficult questions, confront difficult truths, and overturn popular narratives. We here at the Schenectady County Historical Society intend to do precisely that. And we'd like you to be a part of it.



# NEWEST LUNCH: Same As It Ever Was, Only Better



By John F. Gearing, Esq.

*Editor's note: this article is the first in a series we are planning that highlight Schenectady County's longest-running eating and drinking establishments.*

1921 was a year of notable firsts. The first major league baseball game was broadcast over radio. The fashion house Gucci was founded. A 16 year old girl named Margaret Gorman became the first Miss America. Coco Chanel launched Chanel No. 5. And the first White Castle restaurant opened. In Schenectady, 1921 marked the birth of what was to become one of the city's most venerable restaurants: The Newest Lunch. Located at 715 Albany Street, the new restaurant was barely a block from the county building and the courthouse.

Older Schenectadians may sometimes refer to Newest as "New Way," and therein lies a tale. The 1921 city directory has a listing for "New Way Lunch" on Albany Street, operated by Evagel Stathis and Peter Merigis. Stathis also owned "Home Lunch" at 3 S. Center St., and Merigis had "Handy Lunch" with a partner, George Manikas, at 140 S. Center Street, near The Albany Theater. It's possible that Peter Merigis developed what

was to become Newest Lunch's meat sauce recipe in 1921 when he was a co-owner of New Way, and passed it on to his Handy Lunch partner, George Manikas.

By 1922 New Way had moved to 710 Albany, and Merigis had left the business. The 1924 city directory (probably prepared in 1923) is the first to list Newest Lunch, at 715 Albany Street, operated by John Manikas and Nick Galionis. If Peter Merigis had passed his meat sauce recipe to George Manikas, John Manikas brought it to Newest when it opened. Deed records show that John and Dorothy Manikas bought the building at 713-715 Albany Street in August, 1924. Newest and New Way, just steps apart, remained friendly competitors for about 60 years, until a new owner of New Way converted the restaurant into a deli and grocery, which it remains to this day.

Soon, George Manikas joined John at Newest. George's daughter, Alice, worked at the restaurant too, alongside a young man named John Pappas. Love soon bloomed, the two were married, and eventually took over running Newest. In those days, the restaurant was probably open 24 hours a day, at least on Fridays and Saturdays. Although famous for its hot dogs with meat sauce, a





photograph of Newest's lunch counter, undated, but perhaps from the early 20s, shows a wide variety of dishes on the menu board, including steaks, chops, omelettes, breakfasts, and sandwiches. A close look reveals several large, striped sugar bowls with folding metal lids sitting on the counter.

Interviewed by Larry Hart in 1983 for his "Tales of Old Dorp" column in the Schenectady Gazette, John Pappas recalled the tables and chairs where booths now stand, and a row of pinball machines across the rear wall. He also recounted the night when he sold 2,900 hot dogs between the hours of 7pm and 7am. As one long-time Schenectady resident told me, "when the bars closed everyone would go to Newest for hot dogs. Some nights the line went down the block."

After being in the Manikas/Pappas family since its founding, John Paponikas bought the business in 1987, explaining to Gazette reporter Laura Rapaport that he would not have made the purchase without the original 1921 meat sauce recipe – in his view, that meat sauce was the reason why diners chose Newest Lunch. By 1996 brother-in-law Tom Plakas had joined "Uncle" John in the business. Today, another member of the Plakas family, George, is at Newest's helm. He grew up in the family's restaurant businesses, earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, and worked as an

engineer at GE for a number of years. Eventually he decided that the corporate world was not for him and returned to his restaurant roots.

Step inside Newest Lunch today, and the hot dog grill is on the left, with a pot of meat sauce ready to go. The long counter, with the original stools, stretches all the way to the kitchen at the back. And that sugar bowl? It's still there, just behind the counter. Booths run along the wall opposite the counter. Above them are hundreds of snapshots taken over the years of Newest's happy customers. Same as it ever was, only better, with a full breakfast menu, sandwiches, wraps, salads, and sides, and Uncle's famous cheesecake. And, of course, hot dogs and meat sauce.

Some customers eat at Newest every day, and some, more often than that. One such customer was Doris. When George and his staff realized that she had been born in 1921, they adopted Doris' birthday as the restaurant's birthday. When Doris turned 100, they gave her a birthday party at the restaurant, with cake, ice cream, decorations, and a YouTube video of the event. As George told your reporter recently, "this place is sort of like Switzerland. You leave your troubles and issues at the door and just come in, have a nice meal, and enjoy yourself."



# AROUND THE COUNTY with Bill Buell

by Bill Buell, Schenectady County Historian

In 1962, Union College senior Wayne Somers was awarded the school's Mrs. Edwin L. Rich Award as the "student who has built the best collection of books for use during his college years."

Sixty-two years later his collection continues to grow.

The owner of Wayne Somers, Bookseller on Union Street in Schenectady, Wayne has operated his store at its current location – just next door to the Union College campus – since 1981. Generally described as an antiquarian book store, the business began in 1971 out of Somers' home near Mariaville Lake. He says he has no intention of retiring anytime soon.

That's great news for book lovers. Every time you walk into Somers' place, if you're lucky enough to engage him in conversation, there's always a new story to hear about books and Schenectady's place in that realm. It's not necessarily a lofty place in literary circles, but when it comes to people who love books and who love reading about the authors of those books, we do have some intriguing stories to tell. Or at least Somers has them. Plenty of them.

I visited him last month and he told me about Peter Lefcourt and Paris Leary. Chances are you haven't heard of them, but they were both writers who carved out pretty good careers for themselves back in the 1970s and 80s. Lefcourt, who graduated a year after Somers at Union College and enjoyed plenty of success working in Hollywood as a writer and producer, is in his 80s and still alive and well and writing. Leary, meanwhile, a former curate (administrative assistant) at St. George's Episcopal Church in the Stockade, was a novelist and poet and wrote a half dozen or so works that were published in the 1960s and '70s.

Let's start with Lefcourt, a Queens native who told the *LA Times* in 2009 that way back in his early days he did actually produce a pornographic movie script. What he will be remembered for, however, is his 1985 Emmy Award for working as a writer and producer for TV's "Cagney and Lacy." He was also co-producer of "Desperate Housewives," and did plenty of other work in Hollywood for both films and television before becoming primarily a writer of novels.

He produced "The Dreyfus Affair" in 1992, a book about homophobia in major league baseball. In 1997, he followed that up with "Abbreviating Ernie," the story about a Schenectady housewife accused of murdering her urologist husband.

"He used the names of several of his old friends in that book," said Somers. "Much of the book is about the trial of the woman, and in the courtroom scene the name of the bailiff is Wayne Somers. The book did pretty well in the mainstream publishing world, but I've never had anyone come into my store looking for it."

Lefcourt has had his stories turned into HBO movies, and there was another novel, "Di and I," that seemed headed for success in book stores and eventually in tv or film. But then tragedy struck.

"It was a fictional story about the narrator's love affair with Princess Diana, and it was published about a week before she was killed in 1994," said Somers, "So the publisher, of course, withdrew it. It was doing pretty well, but it's hard to find a copy now."

Somers has one of those copies in his store, and when he says the book was well received, he isn't overstating things. In 1994, *Newsday* said the book "has enough page-turning hilarity and romance to make it a worthy candidate for beach reading." The *New York Times* said it "displays Mr. Lefcourt's bright conversational style and expert comic timing." And The *Boston Globe* wrote that "Lefcourt is a whiz at conducting you through farcical entanglements without ever losing his glancing comic touch."

Lefcourt is currently living in southern California with his wife, Terri, and is still writing plays.

And then there is Paris Leary. Born in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1931, Leary published nearly a dozen books, but the one connected to Schenectady is his 1963 work, "The Innocent Curate."

"He had started out as a young Episcopal clergyman who was assigned to St. George's in Schenectady a few years earlier," said Somers. "At that time he was serving as an assistant to Father Darwin Kirby, who was quite a colorful figure in the Stockade for a long time. Leary didn't use real Schenectady names, but people like Kirby and other Stockade residents appear as characters in the novel, and there were a lot of scandalous things going on in the book."

Leary used the fictional name of "Schinderhook" instead of Schenectady, and named his church St. Clement's instead of St. George's. The fictional rector, who Somers said was not a close model of Father Kirby, was Dr. Walter Groby. The book was widely criticized by everyone in the Schenectady community, including *Daily Gazette* columnist Neil Reynolds, who in 1970 called the novel "malicious; an attempted satire on





But while Leary can't argue his case, there are others who do. As recently as 2017, Rev. David Baumann, who served as an Episcopal priest for 39 years, many of them in Los Angeles, offered some high praise for Leary and his work. His decision to concentrate on poetry for most of his career seems to have disappointed Baumann.

Leary went on to write mostly poetry, a decision that Baumann talked about seven years ago for "The Living Church," a national publication of the Episcopal Church.

"Leary never wrote another novel," Baumann said. "This is terribly tragic, as he showed himself to be a gifted writer and insightful writer, skilled at many levels. I do hope that now that 'The Innocent Curate' is in the public domain, it will have a second chance to be recognized as a timeless classic of the Christian spiritual life, worthy of wide distribution and serious attention."

downtown Schenectady and one of its churches. It tries too hard to be funny, and so it isn't. The spite shows through. This is a book you can skip."

I'd love to have a conversation with Leary and ask him what prompted him to write the book, and if his work really was a "hit job" on St. George's and Schenectady like so many people thought back at the time. Unfortunately, Leary, who left the priesthood and went on to have long teaching careers at the University of Kentucky, Bard College and the University of Leicester in England, died in 2005.

While Somers has a copy of "Di and I," he does not have "The Innocent Curate."

"But I thought it was a very good book," he said. Coming from somebody who has been passionate about reading for more than six decades, that is very high praise.





## New in Collections

*by Mary Zawacki*

Artifacts tend to come into the museum collections in a sort of trickle. A few candlesticks here. A fur stole there. Maybe an 1840s coverlet once in a blue moon. You get the picture.

This winter was a big exception.

Since our last newsletter, we welcomed two major donations into the SCHS collection. Though different in size, scope, and provenance, both donations are highly significant, and quite rare. Both donations also speak to the experience of Schenectadians in its “colonial” period (1660-1780).

### Part I: The Furniture

I’ll start with the furniture. Over the years, certain artifacts that belonged to the Glen-Sanders family of Scotia, but were purchased by Colonial Williamsburg (CW) in the 1950s, have been returning home as CW deaccession things from their museums. It’s part of CW’s attempt to refine their collection. I also think they tend to focus on Virginia, and holding on to a lot of stuff from Upstate New York is probably a bit outside their scope.

Anyway, if you’re a real SCHS-head, you’ll remember that in 2018 we received some nice china and a stately china cabinet from CW. That china cabinet really whetted my palate for more colonial-era furniture, especially items made in New York. So you’ll have no trouble picturing

the eager grin on my face when, last fall, I received this email from CW’s curator of furniture:

“Dear Ms. Zawacki. We have a handful of additional pieces of [colonial] furniture that we wondered if you would be interested in acquiring through transfer... Please let me know if any of this material would be of interest to the historical society.”

The answer was obviously yes. The issue, however, was the cost of transporting a desk, a tea table, a pembroke table, and eight chairs from Virginia to Schenectady. A quote from an art handler said close to \$10,000. “Hmm,” I said, to no one in particular, “how about we spend \$700 on a U-Haul, drive down to Virginia, and handle it ourselves.” So we did.

Mike Diana and I got into Williamsburg early, spent a few hours strolling Colonial Williamsburg (for inspiration – we definitely did *not* order a bowl of the King’s Arms Punch), then loaded up the truck with the artifacts, making the 12 hour trip back to Schenectady the following morning. It took us 12 hours because anytime we went above 55 mph, the U-Haul started making a weird sound. And with such precious cargo in the back, we weren’t taking any risks. By midnight we were home, the furniture tucked into collections storage, and both of us hoping the SCHS president might let us come in a little late the following morning.





*Slant top scrutoir, 1730-1750, "Anna's desk." New York desks of the colonial period are quite rare.*



*Splat-back, Chippendale-style chair, 1760-1780. Its elegance reflects refinement in American craftsmanship.*

## Part II: The Painting

Around this same time, I got an intriguing phone call. Since it was a phone call, and not an email, I'll have to paraphrase what was said:

"Hi Mary. Would you be interested in a new painting by Len Tantillo for the museum? A mystery benefactor would like to commission a painting of Schenectady c. 1680 and donate it to you."

The answer, again, was yes. I also pretty much fell over. We have two Len Tantillo paintings in our collection, and each offers a glimpse into early Schenectady like nothing else can. Now we might be the proud owners of a third Tantillo painting?! I'm not exaggerating when I say I'd been dreaming of a new Tantillo painting for a decade. And that dream just might be coming true.

See, the "mystery benefactor" was Sandra Lazo, a Manhattanite with a deep love for colonial New York history (she's on the board of the New Amsterdam History Center). She also has family connections through the Van Slycks that place her ancestors in Schenectady in the 1680s. For Sandra, a Tantillo painting depicting the Schenectady her ancestors knew was also a dream. And she had the means to make it happen.

Over the course of the winter, I met with Sandra and Len on Zoom and in Len's studio in the Hudson Valley. Len explained his process, Sandra explained certain details she wanted included in the painting (her new

puppy), and I explained how grateful we were for this commission. The final painting had its big reveal at the SCHS gala in April. And I'm pretty sure I speak for all in attendance when I say, the painting is stunning.

Rather than describe the cheery scene (Boatmen! Merchants! Horses! Farms! So many tiny, detailed homes!), I invite you to come take a look for yourself. It's a striking and valuable addition to our interpretation of Schenectady's colonial period. The painting recreates our historic cityscape in vivid, living detail, making it easier for everyone to feel what this place looked like 350 years ago.

I also invite you to visit our sites to see the new Colonial Williamsburg furniture in exhibition.

You can see the desk (NY, ca. 1730) and a fine side chair (by Gilbert Ash, Albany or NY, ca. 1770) in our "Beyond the Pines" exhibition. The pembroke table (Albany or NY, ca. 1790) is on display in "A New Nation." And the tea table (NY, ca. 1765) and two of the chairs (NY, ca. 1770) are in the Mabee House.

What's next, I wonder. Just kidding, I'm not that greedy.

*Learn more about what we collect by visiting [schenectadyhistorical.org/about](https://schenectadyhistorical.org/about).*



the end of the book, three indices reference the contents by case number, patient name, and disease.

This book was compiled by Otis Bouton, who graduated in 1898 as valedictorian of Albany Medical College. Notably, he was recipient of a prize for the best report of surgical clinics (i.e., Dr. Spring's gift). Subsequently, Dr. Bouton practiced in rural Montgomery County and served as its coroner for 16 years.

One of the attending surgeons, among the four whose patients were seen in the clinics, was Dr. Albert Vander Veer, Dean and Professor of Surgery at Albany Medical College. A native of the Town of Root, Montgomery County, he was a surgical pioneer and may have been the first to remove a thyroid gland and also to use a Plaster of Paris jacket to treat curvature of the spine. He served as president of both the American Surgical Association and the American Medical Association.

So, what can we learn from Dr. Bouton's book 125 years later? The large majority of cases are ones which would still be seen in a surgical clinic today: hernias, abscesses, fractures, traumatic amputations, and tumors. However, there were some surprises. Duly noted were about a dozen cases of phimosis (swelling or tightening of the foreskin blocking the external urethra making urination difficult or impossible). Phimosis is now rare with almost universal circumcision. Several patients in addition to their surgical diagnosis were also diagnosed as "idiots," a term that had both a legal and medical meaning over a century ago.

Some of the cases are notable due to the identities of the patients. For example, the log documents the final moments of George R. Blodgett, a patent attorney at GE, who was fatally shot by a burglar in 1897. His unsolved murder captured significant attention at the time and stood out to Dr. Spring when he acquired the book.

But by far, the biggest surprise was the number of patients diagnosed with non-pulmonary tuberculosis, accounting for about 10% of the clinic visits. TB usually infects the lungs, but about a fifth of the cases occur in the skeletal or the lymphatic systems. It was these patients who were referred to the surgical clinic.

At the time, TB was the second most common cause of death in New York State. It was not until 1945 that Selman Waksman discovered the cure: the antibiotic, Streptomycin, for which he would win the Nobel Prize. In 1898, the surgeons at the clinic could only observe the natural history of untreated TB. For example, one of the frequent diagnoses was "amyloidosis of the liver." Amyloid is a substance that can accumulate and enlarge livers in some TB patients. Wait a minute – how could they know? There were no liver biopsies back

then! These doctors made the diagnosis based on their autopsy experience with TB patients and also by examining the enlarged livers under the microscope. Today, patients would be treated and recover before their livers could become enlarged.

Another diagnosis was Pott's Disease, TB of the spine. There were no X-ray machines then. Again, how could they possibly know? The answer – autopsy experience with patients with painful, deformed spines. It was probably one of these patients who received Dr. Vander Veer's Plaster of Paris body brace. Another surprise was the large number of TB patients with swollen lymph nodes or with joint swelling. After removal of fluid, they were given a good prognosis. Not every patient in these records died; in fact, most didn't. Some patients had outpatient surgery with ether general anesthesia, or under local anesthesia with ethyl chloride spray (used today) or 2% cocaine (not used today.)

Not surprisingly, some of the medicine practiced in the clinic was not so scientific. Extract of bone marrow was sometimes prescribed. The treatment of a painful shoulder (probably bursitis) was to paint the entire shoulder including the upper arm with iodine! And in describing the size of a swollen gland, instead of using inches or centimeters, the surgeon wrote "it was the size of a small butternut."

This short examination of Otis Bouton's clinic log book highlights the historical value of this type of artifact. As residents of the Capital Region in the 21st century, we might not realize how much has changed in the understanding and practice of medicine over the last century. After all, we just witnessed the rapid pace of development and deployment for treatments and vaccines for a novel virus that caused a global pandemic!

In Dr. Bouton's careful, meticulous script, we can see diseases, symptoms, treatments, and outcomes that have been almost completely removed from our lives. In another hundred years, how much more will doctors and other medical practitioners know and how many of our current ailments will be eradicated?



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