



SCHENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Fear and Loathing on Green Street

by John F. Gearing

It was a loathesome spot, “a desolate place,” with “no shade or foliage.” This was “a plague spot,” where “horrible fertility grew hideous weeds” covering mouldering mounds and black, watery pits teeming, overflowing, with deadly disease. Steamy summer rains brought “miasmas,” and malaria and worse rode the dismal currents, carrying Death into the wider world. Yet, this place was not in Mordor. It was in Schenectady. This is how the Hon. Austin Andres Yates described the First Reformed Church's cemetery between Green and Front Streets in Schenectady looked in the years immediately following the Civil War, in his 1902 book “Schenectady County, New York: Its History to the Close of the Nineteenth Century.” Yates' words paint a damning portrait of neglect and a dire threat to public health. And now, the rest of the story.

It has long been customary for churches to bury their dead in consecrated ground immediately surrounding the church building, and sometimes within the building. Two of the churches in Schenectady's Stockade Historic District, St. George's and First Presbyterian, did just that, and their churchyard cemeteries may be visited today. While there is some documentary evidence suggesting that the First Reformed once had a churchyard cemetery, by the 1730s, a new church building had been erected in the public square formed by the intersection of today's Union and Church Streets. There would have been no churchyard cemetery there, so it seems likely that the cemetery between Green and Front streets was established no later than that time.

As 1840 approached, First Reformed's leaders realized the Green Street cemetery was soon to reach capacity, and sought land in the rural part of the city on which to establish a new cemetery. In April, 1841, the church

Continued on page 18

Letter from the President

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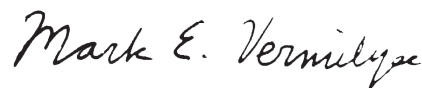
Fall is in the air! As I write this, we're seeing mornings down into the 40s, I'm getting out my warmer cycling clothes, and some leaves are starting to turn. So...my favorite season comes around again.

As I rode along the Mohawk River recently, I thought about how our relationship with rivers has changed over the centuries. The geography of our river was the reason that Schenectady was settled; rapids downstream made moving goods from the then-wild west to the placid Hudson easier over land. Hence the King's Highway, that has since become King's Road. We even created a man-made river – the Erie Canal – to move goods more easily from Buffalo. That is, until trains changed the game, and then trucks changed it yet again. Today, trucks carry 80% of domestic freight, rail 15%, and only 5% is moved over water!

On a global scale, oceans are still the principal means of long-distance transportation of goods, and only high-value cargo and people now move intercontinentally through the air. As for our rivers, many have become places for recreation as well as water supplies for communities and industry. I spent a week in Colorado last month, visiting my three cousins, and so much of the culture and history there is related to water use; initially for agriculture, and more recently to support the rapidly growing population. I also keep up with a college friend in Phoenix, and we frequently discuss how much water affects the politics and culture there – I even wonder if there will come a day when Sunbelt migration will be curtailed! We in the northeast are fortunate to have no such worries about running out of water in our rivers.

My recent reading has included starting a biography of Chairman Mao. Given China's increasingly important role in the world, understanding more about the beginnings of their present political system seems a good thing. Since I have plenty of free time, I also took out Don Quixote, and have been pleasantly surprised at the humor and wisdom therein, and how little has changed in human interactions over the 410 years since its publication.

I hope you and yours have a relaxing fall, and enjoy our uniquely American holiday on November 28th with family and friends. We all have some things to be thankful for, and it's healthy to take some time to think about them on this special day. Of course we have another important American event on November 5th that has received much attention this year, and I counsel everyone to participate that day and realize that our country has a complicated and multifaceted culture that's reflected in the electorate. Let's embrace that reality while working to make our personal corner of it better in any way we can. Keeping an historical perspective is helpful when the negative slant of media rhetoric can become overwhelming. Regardless of the outcome, our country will continue to be a beacon of hope for much of the world as long as its people continue to work together for the common good.



Mark Vermilyea, SCHS President



Note from the Executive Director



Vice President, David Trestick, is getting married next month in the Pacific Northwest.

Yet with all these weddings going on, we've still had time to dive into **strategic planning** with Susan Weinrich, our facilitator from NYCON. You may have seen the community survey that was circulating online over the summer. If you took part in it, I thank you. We can't move this process forward without the valuable insight of our members and local community. We'll use the results of that survey, plus responses to an internal SCHS board and staff survey, to develop a strategic plan that will guide us through the next 3-5 years at SCHS. I'm excited to see what we come up with at our retreat later this month!

In other news, the **Brick House and Inn stabilization and masonry work** is nearly complete! Following a critical building conditions survey last year, engineers indicated that the three historic Mabee Farm buildings needed significant restoration work. We are thrilled that this first phase of work is nearly complete, and are grateful to the many donors who made this project possible. Once masonry and stabilization projects in the Brick House and Inn are finished, we'll move on to masonry repairs of the 1705 Mabee House and carpentry repairs on all three structures.

Dear Friends,

As we enter our busy season here at SCHS, I feel unusually refreshed and clear headed. It might be because I'm eager to dive into autumn programming (my favorite), or it could be because I just returned from a beautiful two-week honeymoon in Italy. I will spare you the vacation details, but my now-husband, Roland, and I had a wonderful late summer wedding day here at Mabee Farm, surrounded by friends and family.

And I'm not the only one celebrating nuptials at SCHS! When you see Audrey Humphrey (now Jones) at the front desk, be sure to wish her congratulations; she was also a Mabee Farm bride this summer. And our

Wishing you a beautiful autumn and holiday season, and I hope to see you at an SCHS program soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Zawacki Graves".

Mary Zawacki Graves, SCHS Executive Director

P.S. If you haven't yet visited the **Autumn Glow Festival** at Mabee Farm, I highly recommend it! The enormous luminaries are truly a sight to behold, especially after dark.

Photo by Simone Fox

From the Library

Recent Additions in the SCHS Library and Archives

Helen Quirini Scrapbook 1981-1998 transferred from the Edison Tech Center

Daisy Mae and George Sherman Collection donated by Patty Soellner

1895 NYS Assembly Portrait Compilation donated by Holly Griffin

Schenectady Museum (miSci) Haunted House Scrapbook donated by Mandy Moore

Hadassah, Schenectady Chapter Records donated by regional representatives

John Duncan/Sam Tuttle Collection donated by David Duncan

Central Park Jr. High School 1929-1956 Scrapbook donated by Katie Walters

Sacandaga School 1937-1939 (Mary Gonyea Foster) Photo Album donated by Lynn King

Tom Monlea Drawings and Prints Collection donated by Randall Kot

Nancy Curran Genealogical Collection donated by Nancy Curran

James Duane and his Offspring by David Vincent

How Much Are These Free Books? By Judy Hoff

The Schermerhorns of Schenectady: Roots of the American Experiment by W. Scott Hicks

The Forgotten Heroes of the Balkan Wars by Peter S. Giakoumis (includes a case study of the Greek community in Schenectady and their response to the Balkan Wars)

Recent & Upcoming Blog Posts

Daniel Campbell: Businessman, Patriot, Human

by Bob Baldwin, August

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.

Niskayuna's Newstead: Distinguished Nuclear Advisor

by Michael Davi, October

Local author Michael Davi reflects on the incredible life of Charles Newstead.

Schenectady's Own Band of Brothers

by Gail Denisoff, November

The DeForest family of Rotterdam sent five sons to serve in the Union Army during the Civil War. Library volunteer Gail Denisoff recounts the lives and service of these men in honor of Veterans' Day.

Pharmacies around Schenectady

by Marietta Carr, December

While the concept of creating and selling the remedies for what ails us can be traced back to medieval apothecaries, pharmacies as we know them today are only about 200 years old. This post highlights materials in the SCHS collections related to the early history of pharmacies in our area.

REVIEW:

The Raging Erie: Life and Labor Along the Erie Canal

by Martin Strosberg

The Erie Canal, perhaps the most significant public works project in American history, is the engineering marvel that transformed the economic and social fabric of our country. The canal – completed in 1825 – is accepted as the foremost example of American spirit and ingenuity in the early days of the Republic. But be prepared for a different perspective in Mark S. Ferrara’s *Raging Erie, Life and Labor Along the Erie Canal*.

Ferrara paints canal life as a picture of desperation, social disintegration, and of “the menial labor of tens of thousands of people” who “strung together livelihoods at the economic fringes of society,” and who “left no paper trail and endured and were shaped by the soft underbelly of American progress.” Extreme poverty, child labor and exploitation, prostitution, crime and violence, drunkenness and degradation, Native American removal, racism, anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice, accidents and disease, animal cruelty – just some of the facets of canal life that may be distressing for readers who have been accustomed to singing “I’ve got a mule, her name is Sal, 15 miles on the Erie Canal.”

In his well-researched and detailed chapters, Ferrara tells the stories of the underclass who toiled on the canal or who worked in the factories and mills that sprouted in the cities that boomed and prospered along the canal’s banks.

Woven into the narrative is the broader sociological and historical context. From Ferrara’s perspective, exploited workers suffered not only from an “unbridled form of early capitalism,” but also from the reaction of nativists and white supremacists.

Along the way we are treated to some eye-popping anecdotes. For example, we find that Watervliet (West Troy), on the side-cut section of the canal, was known as the “Barbary Coast of the East” reputed to have witnessed 100 fights a day and a body a week in the canal. In Schenectady, drunken brawls discouraged respectable citizens from walking the streets after dark.

Ferrara also gives us a picture of the Underground Railroad after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), which required slaves to be returned to their owners, even if they were in free states. Many escaped slaves sought work on the canal, often setting off violent conflict between abolitionists and law enforcement officials attempting to capture and return slaves to the South.

All in all, Ferrara succeeds in presenting the other side of the story.

Mark S. Ferrara, *The Raging Erie: Life and Labor Along the Erie Canal*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2024.

Clara Barton, “Angel of the Battlefield,” Spoke in Schenectady in 1866



Anthony Hall, next to the City Hotel, c. 1890, from the Grems-Doolittle Library collection, SCHS.

by Neil B. Yetwin

Throughout the 19th century, American women began to make an enormous impact on literature, education, medicine, and social action. Names like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriet Tubman, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louis May Alcott, and Sojourner Truth are likely familiar to the reader. Often included in this roundup of 19th century dames is Clara Barton, whose devotion to nursing during the Civil War inspired soldiers, field surgeons, politicians and the press to call her “the true heroine of the age, the angel of the battlefield.” Six months after the war ended, Barton undertook an ambitious lecture tour, captivating audiences with anecdotes about her often harrowing experiences in that conflict. One of her stops included Schenectady.

Barton was born on Christmas Day, 1821, in North Oxford, Massachusetts to a family whose ancestors had fought in the Revolution. Despite painful shyness and chronic anxiety, she graduated from the Clinton Liberal Institute at Clinton, New York and went on to teach in Cedarville and Bordentown, New Jersey. She successfully built the Bordentown student body from 6 to 600 pupils in just one year, but the school board decided to replace her with a man they thought more qualified. Barton suffered a nervous breakdown, recovered, and then found work as a recording clerk at the Patent Office in Washington, D.C. The incoming Interior Secretary, however, opposed having women as federal employees, and demoted her. But with a change in administration in 1860, Barton regained her former position with a salary equal to that of her male

colleagues.

When the Civil War erupted, Barton collected and distributed supplies from her apartment to Massachusetts troops stationed in Washington D.C. until she was granted permission to go to the battlefields. Throughout the war she worked as a nurse with a “flying” or mobile hospital, extracting bullets, assisting with amputations, and comforting the dying. Barton sometimes labored 72 hours nonstop, her skirts “heavy with blood,” and her face “blue from gunpowder.” She was present at 16 battlefields during the war, including the aftermath of the assault on Ft. Wagner by the all-black 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (as portrayed in the 1989 film “Glory”). At the end of the war, Barton established an office of Missing Soldiers, locating or identifying thousands of the dead, missing or imprisoned, and providing valuable information or closure to families about their loved ones. Once again, she encountered animosity from a male-dominated bureaucracy, and was replaced by a former Union Army captain.

Barton’s wartime reputation had preceded her, however, and soon lyceums, literary societies, and veterans’ organizations were inviting her to speak. She hesitated at first because of her anxiety, depression, and fear of public speaking, but with no immediate prospects she finally agreed to try. In 1866 she began what became a nearly two-year lecture tour of 300 cities and towns throughout the East and Midwest, often mesmerizing rapt audiences with vivid descriptions of her wartime experiences. Barton was soon earning \$100 per appearance and scores of Americans began naming their daughters after her.

Clara Barton’s Schenectady appearance was sponsored by the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Union of the State of New York, a veterans organization created at Albany in 1866. The Union lobbied for employment and financial assistance for veterans or their widows and orphans, as well as for those who had been disabled. It also called for the erection of monuments so that soldiers’ sacrifices would not be forgotten. Six Schenectady veterans were present at the Union’s first Albany convention, including Eliphalet Nott Schermerhorn (1838-1905), a Union College and Albany Law School graduate, who fought at Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. After the war he served as Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue for the 18th Congressional District, was a director of the Schenectady Savings Bank, and president of the Schenectady School Board. Schermerhorn was also chairman of the Union committee that booked Clara Barton’s Schenectady stop.

In late October 1866, the Schenectady *Evening Star* announced that “Miss Clara Barton, Soldiers’ & Sailors’ Friend” would be speaking about “Work and Incidents of Army Life” at Anthony Hall (located

at the northeast corner of Liberty and Ferry Streets) Saturday evening, October 27th at 8:00. Tickets were 35 cents. Barton’s Schenectady booking was just her second public appearance, the first one having taken place at Poughkeepsie two days earlier. When she arrived at the Schenectady train station that Saturday morning, she noted in her journal that she was met by “Mr. Schermerhorn, Chairman, and a number of their committee.” Another group had accidentally booked Anthony Hall for a speech by Gideon Hawley, Superintendent of Public Instruction for New York State. Hawley graciously offered the site to Barton, who at first refused until she observed that “my committee were Copperheads.” “Copperheads” was a derogatory term for Northerners who had initially spoken against the war and wanted a negotiated settlement with the South. Barton had once agreed with the Copperheads but vowed to support the fighting until slavery was abolished.

Barton, an impatient and compulsive workaholic who disdained leisure time, complained to her journal that she “wasted all day at the Carley House” (located at the corner of State and Centre Street, now Broadway) before making her way to Anthony Hall. The *Evening Star* of Monday, October 29th reported on her 90-minute presentation:

“MISS BARTON’S LECTURE. – Those attending Anthony Hall Saturday evening were served to a treat. Miss B. in the true dignity of woman, addressed the audience on her work as agent, or assistant, or volunteer nurse to the federal soldiers, in a most effective manner. Miss Barton is one of nature’s noblest. With soul too big for common limits, and heart too warm for indifference to suffering patriots, she braved shells, danger, death and suffering, to carry aid and mitigate the agony of the wounded on the field of battle. Nobly did she do her work. In the discharge of her mission a shell passed between her arm and body and killed a wounded soldier she was raising to administer to his wants. As a speaker Miss B. has but few equals, calm, dignified with no pretense to airs, yet with conscious queen-like bearing, and with facts most telling and speech most chaste, metaphor most thrilling, she carries her hearers with tears and transport. An appreciative audience gave most convincing evidence of her power.”

Barton always held herself and others to almost impossible standards and interpreted the experience differently, reporting in her journal that “the audience was smaller and less appreciative” than at Poughkeepsie, and that while it was “a good enough audience in size” it was “not refined – not quite bad and not good.” She was paid \$50, but vowed that she “should never answer a call from them again.” Barton left Schenectady for New York City at 9:00 that Sunday morning, and on Monday evening presented the same lecture in Brooklyn, this time receiving a standing



Carley House c. 1900, from the Grems-Doolittle Library collection, SCHS.

ovation.

Barton's grueling, seemingly endless schedule of little sleep, smoke-filled train cars and often substandard accommodations eventually exacted a heavy toll. Her tour was cut short when she suffered another nervous breakdown. Doctors suggested that she recuperate in Europe. While abroad, Barton learned of Switzerland's Red Cross, which ministered to soldiers, civilians, and refugees during the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. Working with the Red Cross, Barton helped establish a work center for impoverished women at Strasbourg. A third nervous breakdown in 1873 forced Barton's return to America, where she was treated at the Danville, New York sanitarium.

Once recovered, Barton dedicated the rest of her life to a staggering array of good works, most notably founding and presiding over the American Red Cross. Barton also continued her career in public speaking; she was the featured speaker for the 50th anniversary of the Grand Army of the Republic and for the First International Women's Suffrage Convention. Her dedication to people

in distress continued as well; Barton obtained relief for the victims of famine in Russia, the Armenian Genocide, and six American states that had been struck by epidemics, tornadoes, hurricanes and floods, including the 1889 Johnstown (PA) Flood. And in 1898, at the age of 76, Barton went to Cuba to personally coordinate Red Cross activities during the Spanish-American War. Though Barton was the recipient of the Prussian Iron Cross, the Russian Silver Cross, and the International Red Cross Medal, she was never honored by her own country.

Clara Barton, who spoke for one evening in Schenectady as America's premier "Soldiers' & Sailors' Friend," finally retired to Glen Echo, Maryland where she succumbed to pneumonia on April 12, 1912 at the age of 91. Her Glen Echo, Maryland home became a National Historic Site in 1974, the first dedicated to the achievements of a woman.



Volunteer Spotlight: Kathy Burke

by John Angiletta

Four years ago former SCHS Curator, Suzy Fout, was interviewed in the *Daily Gazette* about our organization. During the interview, Suzy mentioned how much we rely on our volunteers. Fortunately for us, Kathy Burke read the article and immediately contacted Suzy with an offer to volunteer.

Suzy quickly responded and Kathy joined our ranks of volunteers. She began by helping with collections and artifacts on the second floor of our headquarters on Washington Avenue. Kathy processed period clothing, photographed artifacts, and updated our database. One of her earliest projects was to catalog an extensive collection of Boy Scout memorabilia that had been donated to SCHS. The collection included years of badges, uniforms, and photographs.

After Suzy left SCHS, Kathy remained with us offering her help in the Library to Librarian/Archivist Marietta Carr. Since then, she's become one of our invaluable library volunteers. Kathy initially worked on digitizing Ellis Hospital newsletters and uploading them to New York Heritage. She is currently working on cataloging family documents.

Kathy's ties to Schenectady go back nearly 30 years in working for the County. First in the District Attorney's office, and then in the Social Services legal department. Her last 16 years were spent working at SUNY Schenectady.

When asked what her favorite part about volunteering is, Kathy replied that it was interacting with her fellow volunteers and exchanging stories about the projects that they are currently working on.

In her free time Kathy also volunteers at her church and at the Animal Protective Foundation. She also enjoys collecting antiques which she says she does more for their historical interest rather than their monetary value. When relaxing, she loves spending time with her two daughters and taking walks with her Boston terrier, Fiona.

We are lucky that Kathy answered that call for volunteers four years ago, and we look forward to having her as a volunteer for many years to come.

Photo: Kathy at work in the Library

HistoryForge Forges Ahead!



that will provide a new way of exploring local history!

HistoryForge is powered by volunteers who transcribe census records, enter building information, connect digitized documents and photos to people and building records, and layer digitized historic maps over a live modern map. Thanks to a dedicated team of SCHS library volunteers and community support volunteers from MVP Health Care, we've made significant progress.

At this point, we have added 13 historic maps, transcribed over 7,600 census records, added 480 photos, and mapped about 570 buildings. For the demographic data, we focused on transcribing records from the 1910 census. We've completed data entry for Schenectady Ward 1 which includes the Stockade neighborhood. Now, we've started working on records from Rotterdam. As a testing partner for the NEH grant, we chose the maps and census data that would allow us to test all of the features and procedures available in the HistoryForge platform during the grant period.

The maps available on our HistoryForge site span 1834 to 1914, including the 1866 Beers Atlas of Schenectady County, the 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Atlas of Schenectady and Scotia, and the

by Marietta Carr

For the past year, SCHS library volunteers have been working steadily on our **HistoryForge** project. HistoryForge is an open-source platform that combines historic maps, photos, and documents with demographic data from census records to create a dynamic research tool and visual representation of local history. The platform was launched by Bob Kibbee, David Furber, and The History Center in Tompkins County, New York, in 2016. A grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities enabled The History Center in Tompkins County to continue to improve the open-source software, add more data, and engage more partners.

Last year, the SCHS Library was invited to partner with the HistoryForge team to test new features, refine user manuals, and suggest improvements to the project. Along with partner institutions from around the country, we've been building a full-featured web environment

1913-1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Atlas of Schenectady/Scotia/Rotterdam Junction. These are some of the most heavily used maps in our collection, but they are large, fragile, and sometimes difficult to orient. Their utility is much greater now that researchers can easily and quickly compare them directly to each other and a present-day map.

The most difficult part of this project is the amount of time spent on deciphering, transcribing, and reviewing the census records. Many census documents are difficult to read, or require research to confirm spellings, dates, or relationships. Using genealogy databases like FamilySearch and Ancestry.com helps, but the HistoryForge platform does not currently allow direct ingest of data from these sites.

Working with the census records reminds all of us that historical records are reflections of the time in which they were created and the people who created them.



Some of the census enumerators were notably diligent and detail-oriented with excellent handwriting, but many were not. Perhaps they were crunched for time, working in nasty weather, or feeling ill and unable to bring their best to the job? Perhaps they struggled with language barriers, reluctant or ill-prepared informants, or poorly worded questions? Whatever the reason, mistakes, misspellings, and missing data slow down our processes. We appreciate all of the work that the census enumerators put into documenting our county's population in 1910, but sometimes we wish we could go back and ask them for a do-over!

While we still have a lot of information and digitized materials to add to our HistoryForge database, researchers have already started using it to answer questions about our area. One researcher from Virginia used the maps and photos to create a virtual tour for her elderly aunt whose relatives lived in Schenectady in the 1910s and 1920s. Several researchers used the maps and census data to confirm when the house numbers changed on their street or when their house was built.

While working on this project we've noticed a few interesting census records that may lead to further research. In the Mohawk Theater and Hotel at 10-12-14 S. College St., for example, all of the residents in 1910

are employees of the theater or hotel. What were their lives like, living and working in a vaudeville house? Over 650 lodgers are listed as living in Schenectady's Ward 1 in 1910, including a student from Oklahoma who gave his name as True C. Blue. Was that his real name? About half of these lodgers listed GE as their employer. Were there differences in demographics and life experiences between lodgers in the Stockade and the other neighborhoods of Ward 1? As we continue to improve the platform and add more data, the research possibilities will grow.

If you're interested in volunteering or learning more about HistoryForge, please contact Marietta Carr at librarian@schenectadyhistorical.org. To see our progress, visit schenectady.historyforge.net.

Image, above: MVP Volunteers helping with census data entry in August 2024.

Image, left: A clip of the 1914 Sanborn map on HistoryForge. The dots represent buildings where lodgers were recorded in the 1910 census.

Op-Ed: Who Cares about the Schenectady Massacre Anyway?

by Mike Diana

Who knew massacres could be so fascinating? Well maybe not in the moment but give it a few centuries and gruesome details become a guilty pleasure. As you certainly already know, Schenectady had its own infamous massacre, which took place early in the year of 1690. And as an educator, I find myself talking about it so very often. For many people, it seems our city's history can be neatly surmised by GE, the Erie Canal and that one time the Canadians marched down and killed everybody. People who don't have any other questions to ask, always ask me about the Massacre. Indeed, that bloody February night has become almost cliché for me. In all this time I can't help but wonder why this subject so captures our attention. Why do we care so much, 330 years later?

I don't ask this question rhetorically. I think the Massacre does warrant attention, as it can teach us about the human condition. We should care about the Massacre. However, we must be critical of our reasons for caring. As I'll show here, generations of Schenectaidans have misunderstood the Massacre, reducing it to a simplistic narrative that is more misleading than educational. To this day, vestiges of this historic misrepresentation can still be seen in our city's landscape and in the questions people ask me.

First, let's talk about what actually happened at the Massacre. A full account of the event could fill pages. But to be brief, the Massacre was one manifestation of the cutthroat politics and violence that plagued the Northeast during the 17th century. The Dutch and later English of New York had allied themselves with the Five Nations of the Haudenasuane. For Schenectady, the Mohawk were the closest and most consequential of these allies. Meanwhile, the French of modern day Canada had allied themselves with several groups of Algonquin peoples. Complicating the story, the French also had allies in members of the Mohawk nation who removed themselves to Montreal after conversion by Catholic Jesuit missionaries. Intermittent warfare between these two regional alliances would flare up, often in conjunction with wars in Europe. The Mohawks attacked and destroyed the French settlement Lachine late in 1689. The French and their allies sought revenge and launched retaliatory attacks against the English, the allies of the Mohawk. Our massacre was perpetrated by 114 Frenchmen and 96 Native warriors of various backgrounds on February 8 of 1690. The facts of this story are complicated and nuanced. But the way it has

been portrayed in popular histories is simplistic to the point of error.

To illustrate what I mean, I'd like to begin with the most enduring image of the Massacre: Samuel Sexton's large 1836 oil painting of the event. Of course, Sexton was painting 140 years after the event, and was no scholar of history. To no one's surprise the painting is riddled with factual errors in the architecture and the clothing. But the most significant error is that no French invaders are depicted in the scene. Instead we have an attack on helpless Dutch men, women and children being carried out by ruthless and fanciful caricatures of Native Americans. And I don't think it's just bad scholarship here, although that is certainly part of it. I believe there's an unstated ideology behind these errors.

Samuel Sexton was painting in the 1800s, at a time when the idea of a Manifest Destiny was widely embraced, even if the phrase had yet to be articulated. The expansion of American settlement – or the expansion of “white civilization” – was accepted as an unqualified good. Consciously or not, by erasing the French from the massacre, Sexton frames the massacre as an attack by the savage world on the civilized one. He's justifying and participating in the process by which Native Americans would be increasingly pushed to the margins of the continent. And in this context, the slain people of Schenectady become martyrs in this project. The “civilizing” of this wild continent imposed a terrible cost on the civilized, and the 60 dead represent Schenectady's greatest contribution, its highest sacrifice in this quest. For Sexton's generation, that was the importance of this dark day in history.

If we fast forward 100 years, popular understandings of the massacre remain just as simplistic and erroneous. In 1925, the Schenectady Chamber of Commerce erected several signs to welcome people to the city. Curiously, one of these signs depicts the Massacre of 1690. How welcoming it is. Even though the sign plainly states the Stockade was “burned by the French and Indians,” it visually depicts only Indian attackers beyond the walls. It further imagines a fiery siege as the savage figures try to breach the Stockade when, in reality, there was no pitched battle of the sort. To belabor the point, this sign even depicts two Native figures arriving by canoe – which would be impossible in the frozen winter of 1690.

I invite you to offer your own interpretation of this sign, but I can't see it as anything other than a depiction of civilization under siege. It's a spaghetti western



cast literally and figuratively in only two dimensions. Much like Sexton's generation, the people behind this "welcome" sign saw no problem with the white washing of the continent and its past. The American conquest was already complete, and the victors were writing the story. The drama inherent in a mass killing is further enhanced by the "otherness" of the attackers. By reducing one group to an uncivilized caricature, we can imagine heroes desperately resisting villains instead of just senseless violence. I wish I could say that the narratives written centuries ago have lost their hold on people today. But alas, this same sign still stands in prominent view at the intersection of State and Church streets. It was refurbished in 1977, and again in 2008. In all that time, no one in the general public has deemed it necessary to give the sign, or the story it represents, a critical look.

So I'm not really surprised that I often encounter people who seem to think that "Indian attacks" were a persistent threat to Colonial Schenectady – when they really were not. Some even conflate the Mohawks and the rest of the Haudenosaunee with the vague "Indian" threat when, on the contrary, the Haudenosaunee

were long allied with the Dutch and English of our town. Bad tellings of history cast a long shadow of misunderstanding. It takes time and a lot of work to change a popular narrative.

For me, the Massacre still has important lessons to teach us. Chief among these is the cyclical and escalatory nature of violence. The attack on our town was preceded by decades of political tensions and provocations. The people of Schenectady were mostly bystanders to the great game of colonial ambitions, and yet they suffered for their proximity to it. But perhaps there's a note of hope in this otherwise morbid lesson. I always think of the anecdote of John Glen who prior to the massacre had worked to free French prisoners from Mohawk captivity. Famously, he and his household were spared on that gruesome February night. And so we see that just as an act of violence can beget further violence, an act of humanity can inspire greater humanity. And isn't that the most important lesson of all?

Photo: "The Schenectady Massacre" oil painting by Samuel Sexton, 1836, in the SCHS collection. The painting is on display at the Schenectady Historical Museum.

AROUND THE COUNTY with Bill Buell

by Bill Buell, County Historian

Way back in 2008, I asked Bob Sullivan when he thought he might get done digitizing local history.

I realized, before the words were even out of my mouth, that it was in many ways a silly question. Sullivan responded by suggesting that he might never get done, and it looks like he may have been right.

Sullivan is still digitizing local history, but that's no reflection on him or his work ethic. The winner of the 2011 Alice P. Kenney Award for "contributions to the understanding of the Dutch colonial experience in North America," Sullivan is a tireless researcher and still hard at work – because our history is so vast and seemingly endless. A reference librarian for 33 years at the Schenectady County Public Library, Sullivan retired in 2018 but is still working there on a part-time basis. His latest project is digitizing *The Citizen*, a Schenectady-based newspaper created in 1910 by the local Socialist Party and Schenectady's George Lunn, our city's only Socialist mayor.

"As a gold mine of information about the development of Socialism in Schenectady, making *The Citizen* more accessible has been a long-term project of mine," said Sullivan, the man most responsible for the county library's Schenectady Digital History Archive – a piece of work that took nearly 10 years and has now been an on-line source for history buffs for more than two decades.

As fellow researchers who enjoy digging into the microfilm files at the library will realize, reading old newspapers can be fun but also a bit tiring. There are issues to deal with, but because of Sullivan's digitizing efforts you can struggle with the fine print while relaxing in your own home in front of your computer screen.

However, his work putting *The Citizen* online, has at times been arduous.

"Six months ago, I began doing some test scans on our microfilm reader, experimenting with the settings to get a legible image," Sullivan said. "Changes in format and image size made this a challenge, but after six months of trial and error, I am ready to start testing with real researchers to see if it meets their needs."

I enjoyed spending hours at the New York State Library in Albany reading *The Citizen* on their microfilm machines while I was researching my 2012 book, *George Lunn; The Socialist 1912 Takeover of Schenectady*. However, it would have been nice to be able to sit at home and do that work instead of jumping in the car and

driving to Albany.

When Sullivan wraps up his work on *The Citizen* it will soon become available to those interested in the early 20th century in America through the Schenectady County Historical Society's website, which is another fine place to idle away a few hours if you enjoy diving into local history.

A Schenectady native who now lives in the town of Princetown, Sullivan is a Union College graduate who went on to get his masters in library science at the University at Albany.

"I was always interested in reading, and when I got out of Union with a computer degree, I went to library school," Sullivan told me back in 2008. "To me, it seemed like a good idea to put it to use in a library. There weren't that many people with a computer degree becoming librarians back then. It's much more common now."

I've always had the desire to jokingly question Sullivan about why he didn't start all this sooner. The Schenectady Digital History Archive is such a gem, it would have been great to have it back in the '70s and '80s. Of course, you may remember there was a time before words like "online" and "laptop" were part of the American lexicon.

"In the fall of 1992, we had some old newspaper volumes," said Sullivan, telling me how the whole thing got started in a 2008 Gazette story. "So I started indexing the obituaries in them because we got requests for those kind of things. A few years later, the library started its own web site, and I slowly started putting things online, like the obits, and then the first book was probably Yates' history of Schenectady County,

"Before I got done with that," continued Sullivan, "I also started working on some Civil War soldiers. I can remember that while my wife was shopping, I was proofreading the Civil War records. Then I started putting in Pearson's book, *The History of the Schenectady Patent*, and adding other things."

Sullivan's selection as the 2011 Alice P. Kenney Award winner was a great choice. Given by the New Netherland Institute based in Albany, other winners include Russell Shorto (*The Island at the Center of the World*), East Greenbush author Shirley Dunn (*The Mohican World*) and our own Susan Staffa (*Schenectady Genesis*).

Kenney, whose ancestors included early Dutch settlers in the New World, grew up in Albany and went to college at Middlebury before heading onto Columbia University for



her Ph.D.. A researcher for the Albany Institute of History and Art, Kenney also wrote two books cherished by early New York historians, *Stubborn for Liberty* and *The Gansevoorts of Albany*.

When he won the award back in 2011, Sullivan was quite surprised.

“I know that Russell Shorto and Susan Staffa have won this in the past, and to see my name with theirs, well, I just don’t think of myself as being in that kind of

company” Sullivan said. “It’s a real honor.”

It is certainly an honor, and one very well deserved.

Bob Sullivan, pictured above, has served as an SCHS trustee since 2005, and as the secretary of SCHS since 2015.



Green Talk with Jenny Ye of Nautilus Solar Energy

by Mary Zawacki Graves

You may have noticed a bright new face at some of our big events this year. Jenny Ye is the Community Development Analyst for Nautilus Solar, a solar energy company that generously sponsored the SCHS festival scene this year. Partnering with Nautilus Solar was a no-brainer for us, as the stewards of the “Electric City’s” history! We’ve been committed to energy efficiency since 2011, when the solar-powered Franchere Education Center was built. And as we work to preserve historical buildings, documents, and stories, we also recognize that conserving our beautiful planet and its resources must also be taken into account.

I sat down with Jenny over a cup of coffee at Arthur’s Market to talk about Nautilus Solar’s mission, and her own interest in clean energy. For Jenny, solar power is important because of the potential it has to help communities. She explains, “I spent a lot of time in college and beyond working with organizations that were actively combating nuclear waste dumps or coal-powered plants in their communities that were directly

negatively impacting their physical health. Solar power is a method to transition away from harmful energy sources.”

According to Jenny, there are many benefits of solar energy. The primary benefit is that solar energy reduces greenhouse gas emissions while adding a renewable mix to the grid, and making it more reliable. Community solar has extra benefits. Subscribers save money on their annual electricity bills simply by choosing solar. “Community solar is one of the easiest, most cost-effective ways to make a real environmental impact, and the only investment is the time to sign up,” says Jenny.

In some ways, Jenny’s work mirrors the work we’re doing here at SCHS. Both Jenny and our staff are focused on the community – making a positive impact by making Schenectady County a better place to live. Since moving to the Capital Region, Jenny has enjoyed being part of events, including 4th on the 3rd and FallFest at Mabee Farm. “I like meeting everyone, and I enjoy being a part of the community and showing support for different initiatives as well. Every event I host or attend brings



me a different perspective, and I enjoy learning and experiencing new things.” The sentiment is shared; our staff feels the same way when we’re out tabling at local events.

Jenny studied environmental science in college, though she wasn’t sure what sector of environmental science to pursue. She tried out biological field research, water quality testing, and finally settled on energy and policy. “I wanted to work at a community solar company to be a part of a positive change in the renewable energy sector, and I loved working with different communities.”

And why SCHS, I asked her. Why would a solar company and a historical society make good partners?

“We wanted to work with SCHS because of how well-connected they are with the community. We were just building out our presence in the Capital Region, and we were looking for an organization to work with that had a strong local presence and that hosted events for their community. That’s why we were excited to partner with SCHS! I hope Nautilus Solar and SCHS can continue to partner on events, or potentially even co-host events together in the future.”

Same, Jenny!

About Nautilus Nautilus Solar Energy®, LLC is a leading community solar company, providing clean energy to residential and commercial customers in local communities like in the Capital Region. Founded in 2006, Nautilus has helped shape the future of solar to provide an equitable and affordable renewable energy choice for all. Nautilus operates and manages solar farms in 12 states and is responsible for financing, development, maintenance, and customer service for the project's lifetime. In New York State, the future of community

solar is bright! The state hit a record two gigawatts (GW) of community solar installed! That’s enough to power nearly 400,000 homes. New York has also become Nautilus Solar’s largest community solar market. They own and operate 44 community solar farms and have over 13,000 subscribers throughout the state.

Want to get involved?

Residents can receive the positive benefits of renewable energy from community solar farms by subscribing. Community solar, also called shared solar, provides an opportunity to access local solar energy for those who can’t, or don’t want to, install panels on their own homes or businesses. Here in National Grid’s territory, everyone is eligible to participate. The easiest and best way for folks to get involved is to sign up for community solar! Nautilus provides a 10% discount on your electricity bill’s supply charge, and it gets taken right out of your National Grid bill. Learn more at nautilussolar.com.

Editor’s note

This summer, our own Gabby Baratier attended a tour at the new Nautilus Solar Farm in Altamont. The farm is located on the former site of the Schenectady Army Depot (1941-1969). We made a video documenting the experience and the site’s history, which you can view at youtube.com/watch?v=plVosQkirt8.

Photo, left: The first community solar farm developed on a Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS) officially opened at the site of the former Schenectady Army Depot-Voorheesville Area in Guilderland, NY.

Photo, above: A tour group explores the solar farm located on the site of the former Schenectady Army Depot-Voorheesville Area.

"Fear and Loathing" continued from page 1

purchased a part of a six acre plot with frontage on what was then called "the Albany Turnpike," today's State Street. The four and a half acres were bordered by private property and by the Hospital Farm, which was owned by the City.

First Reformed's new cemetery provided a much more beautiful setting for a final resting place than did the old cemetery on Green Street, and it seems highly likely that the church's members put it to immediate use for new interments. It's also likely that families moved their loved ones from the old cemetery to the new one. In 1861 a devastating fire swept through part of Schenectady, destroying many buildings, including that of the First Reformed Church. The Church incurred significant debts in the re-building, which took two years to complete. At the same time, Schenectady was beginning to develop its industrial core along the Erie Canal, and developers were eager for more building lots downtown. If First Reformed could clear the Green Street cemetery of its burials, the land could be sold, and the profits used to help pay down the Church's debt.

All went well, at first. But soon it was determined that the last fifteen or so graves had gone unclaimed by the deceased's next of kin. Without their consent, the dead could not legally be removed. This left the Green Street cemetery with the emptied graves (pits) and mounds of dug out earth so powerfully described by Judge Yates. A bill granting the First Reformed Church the authority to remove the unclaimed dead and sell the old burying ground began to make its way through the New York State Legislature. The bill was passed in 1867, and went into effect in late April of that year.

The new law's provisions included substantial notice requirements aimed at providing a reasonable opportunity for the next of kin to learn of the impending removals. Within three months after passage, a notice of the impending removals had to be published in all Schenectady newspapers for four consecutive weeks. In addition, notice had to be given during morning services at the Church on at least four Sundays during the ensuing year. There also had to be made a reasonable attempt to find the next of kin, and if known or found, to provide them with written notice of the impending removal within thirty days of the removal. Next of kin could remove and re-inter the remains themselves, but were also given the right to designate any cemetery to receive the remains, with the move's cost to be paid by First Reformed. The remains that were moved to "the new burying ground on Albany Hill adjoining Vale Cemetery" were to be placed in separate graves, with their headstones moved and placed, all at the Church's expense. Lastly, the new law authorized the "Dutch Reformed Church" to sell the former burying ground and apply the proceeds to church debts or for putting up a

new fence around the church lot on the corner of Church and Union Streets where the new church building had been constructed and for laying new sidewalks on Church and Union Streets.

At this time, the expansive Vale Cemetery – with plots on the terraces of the Cowhorn Creek ravine – was quite new. It was not until 1847 that New York had a law authorizing the establishment of rural cemetery associations, and 1857 when Vale Cemetery was opened by Vale Cemetery Association. Soon after incorporation, Vale realized expansion was necessary. In the spring of 1858 the City sold the Hospital Farm to Vale Cemetery Association for \$800. This was the parcel of flat land that comprises most of Vale's 60+ acres today. This acquisition put the two cemeteries, Vale and First Reformed, on adjoining parcels.

In the Fall of 1867 the First Reformed Church sold its new cemetery to Vale Cemetery Association, reserving the plot holding the graves of those removed from the old Green Street burial grounds along with the right to make future interments there. Today, the main gate into Vale Cemetery, at 907 State Street, leads into the former church cemetery. The plot known as "the old Dutch church plot," holding the graves from Green Street, lies at the end of the long, straight road leading from the gate, on the right hand side. Many of Schenectady's illustrious early citizens lie within, including a number of Revolutionary War veterans. The plot is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence and a locked gate. Cemetery staff can provide access for interested visitors.

We are left with an effort to understand the situation of the Green Street cemetery as presented by Judge Yates in his book. Surely he was describing the cemetery in its near end-state, when only the few unclaimed graves remained to be removed. It's not reasonable to think that the Church would have let the cemetery lie in that condition for decades. Although Yates refers to a vigorous debate in the local newspapers regarding the state, and fate, of the cemetery, this author's search of available historic Schenectady newspapers of the time found no evidence of such debate, nor of any public controversy concerning the Church's plans to sell the old burial ground. The events described above took place after Judge Yates returned home after serving as an officer in the Union army during the Civil War. Perhaps his experiences during the war gave rise to the feelings of horror he held for the old cemetery when he saw it upon his return.

Cover image: Illustration to "The Four Bridges", Jean Ingelow's 'Poems', 1867; scene in a graveyard, copyright The British Museum.

Calendar of Events

TOURS AND MORE

Candlelight Tours

October at 32 Washington | \$15

Meet Stockade spirits and learn the spooky stories of New York's first historical district on this haunted tour.

Spirits of the Full Moon with NorthEast Theatre Ensemble

October 17-19 at Mabee Farm | \$20

Gather with the spirits this season as we partner with NorthEast Theatre Ensemble to bring immersive theatre to Mabee Farm.

Holiday Stockade Stroll

December 18, 19, 20, and 21 at 32 Washington | \$15

Explore the lights and sights of this historic district while learning the ways in which generations past celebrated the season.

FOR KIDS

Museum Kids: Cabinet of Curiosities

November 16 at SCHS | Free - \$10

A costumed storyteller will regale you with the tales of precious artifacts, and of the distant past from which they came.

American Girl Holiday Tea Party

December 21 at SCHS | \$15

Join us for an elegant holiday tea party! Our Festival of Trees will make a glittering holiday backdrop for the occasion.

FOOD AND DRINK

Full Moon Tavern Night at the Mabee Inn

November 15 at Mabee Farm | \$25

Join historian Nate Hoffman as we sample some light tavern fare.

Schenectady Wine Society: Sparkling Wines

December 11 at SCHS | \$33

Join your hosts, Buffy Leonard and city historian Chris Leonard on a tasting and history tour of their favorite sparkling wines.

Chocolate Haus: Holiday Edition

December 13 and 14 at SCHS | \$35

Living historians will tempt your pallet and tickle your tastebuds with a trio of historic hot chocolates.

FESTIVALS

Autumn Glow Festival

Thursday-Sunday through November 3 @ Mabee Farm

Step into a dazzling and whimsical world of light with over 1,000 Chinese lanterns. Tickets at autumnglowfestival.com.

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 and crafts.

Festival of Trees

December 7 - December 28 @ SCHS | \$6

The galleries of SCHS are transformed into a land of wintertide enchantment.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Workshop: Floral Embroidery with Artist Mallory Zondag

January 18 @ Mabee Farm | \$55

Create a colorful, textured, embroidery garden!

Winter Paint pARTy

February 15 at Mabee Farm | \$35

Instructor Karen Anthony of Karen's Paint pARTies will teach us to paint a cozy winter scene.

Workshop: Needle Felted Fungi with Mallory Zondag

April 5 at Mabee Farm | \$55

Create a woolly mushroom felting colors together!

WINTER SPEAKER SERIES

We are still finalizing details, so please visit schenectadyhistorical.org/events for information.

January 8: Bruce Dearstyne, TBD

January 15: Anna Mazurkiewicz on intelligence officer Bill Tonask

January 22: Johan Varekamp on "The Life and Times of Adriaen Block"

February 1: Archives Open House and Black History Month

February 5: Christopher Scott, "Chain of Title: An Adventure to Uncover the 350-Year Legacy of the Old Grist Mill"

February 12: Tyler Putman from the Museum of the American Revolution, "Following the Army: Soldiers and Civilians in the Revolutionary War" including the Liberty Flag

March 1: Dana Cudmore, "The Cave Electrician's Widow"

March 5: John C. Winters, "The Amazing Iroquois and the Invention of the Empire State"

March 12: Mark Ferrara, "The Raging Erie"

March 15: Terry McMaster, "The Scots-Irish of the Old Schenectady District"

March 26: Catherine Haag on GE armature workers

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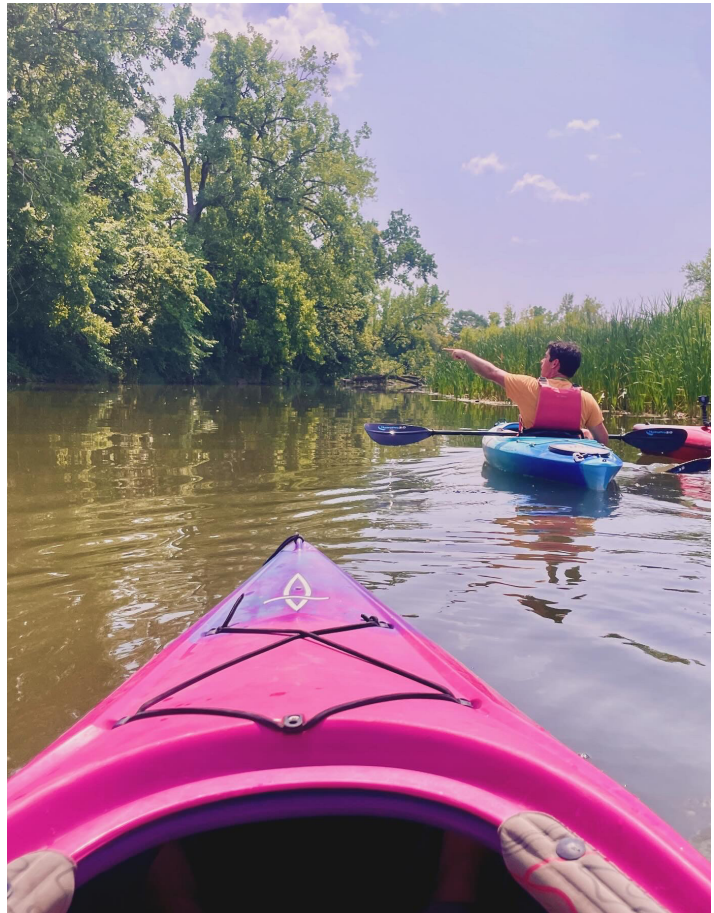
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Will you support the long term sustainability of the Schenectady County Historical Society by joining **The 1661 Society**? Please contact Audrey Jones at OFFICE@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG to make your pledge.



Around SCHS



Left page:

A group of actors pause for a break on the set of HBO's "The Gilded Age," this summer at SCHS.

Schenectady students visit Mabee Farm for summer enrichment programming.

Educator Mike Diana leads a Kayak Through History tour on the Binnekill.

Right page:

A scene from HBO's "The Gilded Age" is filmed on Washington Ave in the Stockade.

One of the hundreds of Chinese lanterns on display at Autumn Glow at Mabee Farm.

Stabilization and restoration work begins on the Brick House at Mabee Farm this summer.



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