



SCHENECTADY COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT

April 2024 - March 2025



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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

SCHS Mission

We share stories, inspire dialogue, and encourage understanding of the history, people, and cultures of our region.

SCHS Vision

The Schenectady County Historical Society strengthens our community as an increasingly vital destination and resource for exploring history.



From the Executive Director

Dear Members and Friends,

As the SCHS president, Mark Vermilyea, wraps up his tenure, I'd like to thank him for his leadership over the last three years. Mark has stewarded the organization through some big changes, including important updates to our bylaws and the creation of a new strategic plan. And while he's retiring as president, I'm happy to say he's sticking around as a board member and volunteer. Mark's building & grounds expertise has been invaluable as we've completed several major preservation projects with him at the helm. Mark's skill as an educator has also been a wonderful addition to our school programs. We're glad he's here to stay.

I'd like to welcome our incoming president, Suzy Unger. Suzy has been a friend and neighbor to SCHS for over a decade. She's also a retired teacher and historic preservation professional, two areas of knowledge that we welcome at SCHS. Under her leadership, I'm sure SCHS will continue to flourish.

Looking back on the last twelve months, 2024/2025 was certainly an exciting time at SCHS. For me, the highlight was hosting the new Autumn Glow Festival at Mabee Farm. With over 20,000 attendees this fall, Autumn Glow doubled our annual visitation. It was a lot of fun, and we received great feedback. In fact, it was so successful that we're hosting it again this year.

When I look at our statistics, I'm amazed. In total over the last twelve months, SCHS hosted over 120 public programs, welcomed 40,000 visitors to our sites, and served over 4,000 school children. That's in addition to 40+ outreach and community events we participated in. We also wrapped up vital stabilization and preservation work on the Brick House and Inn at Mabee Farm, and installed a new roof on the 1705 Stone House. Plus, we adopted two donkeys and served as a film location for HBO. It was a great year, and I'd like to thank you for your support in making all these wonderful initiatives possible.

As we head into 2025-2026, we have a new strategic plan to guide us, and plenty of programmatic and preservation opportunities to keep us busy. If I didn't see you in 2024, I hope I'll see you in 2025 and beyond!

-Mary Zawacki Graves, Executive Director

Image: scene from "Settlement of Schenectady, 1680"





From the President

After three years as board president, I've decided to step back to enable new ideas and approaches that will help the Society continue to flourish. I'll remain as a trustee for another three-year term. I've learned a lot in this role and enjoyed working with Mary and the Board during a period of growth and new ideas. We've welcomed many new trustees to the board, each bringing their unique personalities and talents.

Recently, the Board and staff completed the new Strategic Plan, and developed a comprehensive table of action items with responsibilities and expected time frames that will make the Society even more successful in carrying out its mission. I look forward to being part of the team as we roll up our sleeves and work together.

As always, I'd like to thank our members and generous donors for all of your support over the past year. With that support, we continue to take care of important maintenance on our historic buildings at Mabee Farm and in the Stockade so that future generations will enjoy them as we do now. I'd also like to thank several trustees who have made my role much easier:

- David Trestick, our Vice-President, for his leadership of the Governance Committee which has implemented several important improvements to our operations, including the creation of the new Strategic Plan and some relevant updates to our bylaws.
- Sarah Kirby, our Development Committee chair, who continues to create new ideas to improve the Society's financial position.
- John Halstead, our Treasurer, who works with David to monitor and stabilize our financial position.
- Christopher Marney, who agreed to take over the important Buildings and Grounds Committee to ensure that our historic structures are taken care of.

Finally, as always, I encourage all of you to continue to expand your knowledge of history in whatever areas you find compelling. There is so much to learn and bring to bear on how to best navigate and understand the present! I read a lot of historical fiction and non-fiction, peruse Wikipedia and other online sources, and do my best to recognize that almost anything one might find troubling or challenging has historical precedents. Human nature hasn't changed much over time, and learning how past societies and people navigated challenging times is motivational and uplifting.

- Mark Vermilyea, SCHS President



Year in Review

Exhibitions and Interpretation

We renovated the main exhibit gallery at SCHS with new paint and carpet, and installed an updated and expanded version of our *Beyond the Pines: Colonial Schenectady* exhibition. We worked with Professor Jaap Jacobs and graphic designer Suzy Fout to bring the story to life in an accurate, engaging, and colorful way. Also at SCHS we reconfigured the upstairs galleries to include *A New Nation: Schenectady in the Early Republic*, *Crafted in Schenectady: the Building of a Community* and the Yates family dollhouse. We look forward to a new exhibition opening in the "temporary gallery" downstairs at SCHS this spring, and plan to change out that space yearly. In 2024 we completed a new virtual exhibition, *Mapping the LGBTQ+ History of the Stockade* which is available at <https://storymaps.com/stories/28f0544b74a24931af9a7daf9ed28523>. We also worked with a group of student interns from Union College to produce a pop-up exhibition, *Break a Leg: Performing Arts at Union College*.

Collections

Our major museum collections project this year was photographing and digitizing the textile collection housed at SCHS. Those records can now be found on our online catalog. We also continued to clean up our PastPerfect database, including identifying and deleting over 1,200 duplicate records. To accomplish refinement of our collections and free up much needed space, we deaccessioned several items. Photography, digitization, and deaccessioning work will continue in 2025.

In the library, the primary focus of our collections work this year was ensuring archival collections were properly housed. Proper housing includes storing items in the correct size boxes, using acid-neutral folders and boxes, and situating items on shelves so that they are stable and accessible. We started working on constructing custom boxes for fragile and unusually-sized archival materials and shifting collections to best utilize supplies and storage space.

We also continued to inventory and process the library's archival collections. We completed the inventory for the Family Files and the Family Documents collections, and we processed processed the Van Epps and Poland Business Records, the SCPL Teen Writing Club Literary Magazine, the Albert Carmichael WWI Scrapbook, Sebring Field Books Collection, and Korean War Going Away Committee Collection.

The library added over 150 accessions of donated and purchased books, maps, photographs, genealogy research, ephemera and collections of personal/family papers and organizational records. The new archival materials in our collection include the Tom Monlea Art Collection, Frank Taormina Research Collection, John Duncan Collection, Fisher Cemetery Burial Books, Dante Venditti Scrapbook, and additions to the Goose Hill Neighborhood Memories Collection, Yearbooks Collection, Documents Collection, General Photographs Collection, Family Photographs Collection, and Family Documents Collection.



Programs and Special Events

Over the past year, we hosted a variety of public programs, and we are proud that we can offer such a robust schedule year-round. Programs range from large-scale events with thousands of visitors to intimate workshops. Many programs are geared towards adults, while others target families. Guests reviews of our programs are overwhelmingly positive. Perhaps the most significant addition to our calendar this year was the Autumn Glow Festival in September and October. This event, unique for our site as well as the whole Capital Region, featured hundreds of fun, lighted displays as well as incredible acrobatic performances. Over several weeks, this event attracted approximately 20,000 people to Mabee Farm, many from beyond our local area.

Tours and More

Walking tours kept us busy throughout most of 2024. Our standard walking tours were rebranded as Wine and Walk Fridays. Thanks in part to the rebranding, these were all filled to capacity. Additionally, our seasonal tours like the October Candlelight Tours and December Holiday Stockade Strolls, remained popular despite challenging weather. We had a unique opportunity presented by the HBO filming to host a Gilded Age tour which was wildly popular. Various groups requested private tours as well. We continued to develop our nature trail use with our Full Moon Walks. These evening programs have become very popular, drawing more than 80 people at a time. Anecdotal evidence indicates that most of these guests are newcomers to Mabee Farm, making this an excellent way to broaden our audience. Perhaps the most unique tour we offer, Kayak Through History, continued to be popular over the summer of 2024.

The library sponsored several great programs and participated in several outreach events throughout the year. Library programs included a living history event in August highlighting nineteenth century African Americans from Schenectady, three book talks, and our annual Archives Open House. We worked extensively with local municipal historians, including helping the Alplaus historian digitize the hamlet's archival collections and supporting the Schenectady, Scotia, and Glenville historians in processing and preserving their collections.

Farm, Food, and Family Workshops

Throughout the year, SCHS hosted numerous family and adult programs. Craft workshops continue to be popular, like our series of needle felting classes which always sell out. The working, reconstructed hearth in the Mabee Inn has opened up a variety of exciting possibilities for food based programming such as the Mabee Kitchen. We also had a great turnout with our Schenectady Wine Society tastings, Chocolate Haus, and other food and drink workshops. After a long pandemic-related hiatus, we hosted our first Bus Tour to the Metropolitan Museum which was a great success.

Special Events

We hosted several special events this year:

- 1st Annual SCHS Gala Honoring Len Tantillo
- Chris Thomas and his Smoke Dancers: A Haudenosaunee Social Dance
- "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" with NorthEast Theatre Ensemble
- Howlin' at the Moon Concert Series presented by Everest Rising
- Schenectady Living History: 19th Century African Americans
- Independence Day Celebration with Schenectady County
- Mabee Farm Arts & Crafts Festival
- Autumn Glow Lantern Festival with Kaleido Entertainment
- Stockade Walkabout with the Stockade Association
- FallFest with Schenectady County
- "Spirits of the Full Moon" with NorthEast Theatre Ensemble
- Festival of Trees

Winter Speaker Series

Following the successful format for the previous years, we designated the cold months for a series of expert talks with historians. Some were virtual and others were in person, for a total of 14 talks. Attendance for each ranged from 40-100 people.

Education and Community Outreach

School Programs and Summer Enrichment

2024 was another great year of school programs at Mabee Farm. Between spring and fall we welcomed more than 3,850 students from dozens of regional schools. The vast majority of these students were 4th graders, though we also had several visits from high school and college students. For the third year running, we also offered summer enrichment programs to 350 students within the Schenectady City School District. These took place in-classroom at schools, and on-site at Mabee Farm. Our staff, part-time educators, and volunteers did an incredible job rising to the challenge.

Outreach Programs

Our outreach programs served hundreds of people in the Capital Region this past year. Many of these outreach programs cater to senior living homes, allowing us to reach an audience who largely cannot visit us at our various sites. Church groups, neighboring historic societies, and other non-profit organizations are also frequently reached through these programs, fulfilling our role as a community organization.

Media

Our programs and sites are increasingly visible to an ever-expanding audience thanks to our effective engagement with media. Our collaboration with local film maker George Paul resulted in the *Ghosts of the Mabee Farm* documentary which premiered at our last annual meeting. Now uploaded to YouTube, the film has gained more than 30,000 views — an unprecedented number for our online uploads. We also worked with producers and directors from WMHT/PBS and the NYS Office of General Services to help tell the story of the Black community in Schenectady and the Hamilton Hill Arts Center in the annual documentary, *We Press On: NY Celebrates the Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

We greatly benefited from HBO's decision to film portions of their Gilded Age drama in the Stockade and even used our museum to host their cast and crew. We also have undertaken a new partnership with Open Stage Media to produce professional quality podcasts. Beyond all this, local news media frequently interview our staff and spotlight our programs.

The January 2025 issue of the *NY Archives* magazine and *Archives Jr.* supplement featured an article about Samuel Jones, a nineteenth century politician, judge, and diarist from Schenectady, and highlights our Jones Family Letters collection on NY Heritage. The article was written by Siena undergraduate students in Dr. Dorsey's History of NY Honors class last spring with research support by the SCHS Librarian and several library volunteers.

We continued to add new posts on the Grems-Doolittle Library Collections Blog, which can be found at <http://gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com>. The blog highlights materials from our library and archive collections as well as interesting pieces of local history. The most popular posts this year include "Aloha Schenectady," "A Stockade Icon," and "Schenectady in the 1970s and 1980s through the Eyes of John Papp."

Special Projects

The long search for the enslaved cemetery at Mabee Farm has finally borne tangible results. For this project, educator Michael Diana worked with Christopher Wolf, faculty anthropologist at the University of Albany. Our search took us off of SCHS property to a neighboring parcel once owned by the Mabees. Working carefully and respectfully with the owner, we believe we have located one of the headstones for this burial site. More work will follow in 2025.

Library and Archives

Library use by the numbers:

Visitors and research appointments: 79

Research questions: 102

Library blog pageviews: 28,854

New York Heritage Digital Collections pageviews: 7,568

PastPerfect Catalog pageviews: 10,699

Grant Funded Projects

Historic Newspaper Digitization: funded by the Capital District Library Council to digitize microfilm reels of nineteenth century Schenectady newspapers. The Northern New York Library Network is processing the microfilm for inclusion in the NYS Historic Newspapers online database.

African American Historical Records Project

This is an ongoing public history and archival documentation project which seeks to identify, catalog, and preserve historic materials created by African Americans in Schenectady County. With funding from the Schenectady County Legislature and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, we continued the community survey phase of the project and started the cataloging phase. We continued the Summer Youth Ambassadors program. Elijah Powell, one of the AAHRP Youth Ambassadors, won a Good Neighbor Award from the Goose Hill Neighborhood Association for his work preserving local history.

Library Resources Online

New York Heritage Digital Collections (<https://nyheritage.org/organizations/schenectady-county-historical-society>) is a free research portal to access primary sources and archival materials about the people, places, and institutions of New York State. We currently have 15 collections on our NY Heritage site, and added new items to several collections. Our most used collections this year were the Sports and Recreation in Schenectady, Natural Disasters in Schenectady, and Ellis Hospital collections.

Our HistoryForge combines historic maps, documents, and demographic data with a current online map to create a dynamic visual representation of our area's history. We've uploaded 18 digitized and geo-rectified maps, 12,000 census records, and 480 photographs to the database. Explore our work on <https://schenectady.historyforge.net/forge>.

Brouwer House Creative

The site continued to operate as five artist studios and Sweet Sprig's soap and gift shop. We are very grateful to the Kindl family for providing funds that enable us to preserve and share Schenectady's oldest house (c. 1735).



Volunteers

Volunteers are an extraordinary asset to SCHS and help us accomplish a variety of projects at our sites, including special events, buildings and grounds improvements, and in the library assisting researchers, answering remote research requests, inventorying materials, processing archival collections, creating finding aids and catalog records, digitizing materials, transcribing documents, creating metadata, and writing blog posts. This year, volunteer teams from MVP Healthcare assisted with data entry for our HistoryForge project. . The board and staff at SCHS are grateful to our volunteers.

We also hosted several interns, independent study students, and service learning students this year from Siena College, Schenectady High School, SUNY Schenectady, and Union College. Students received meaningful experience that contributed to their academic resumes and expanded their knowledge of and appreciation for local history. Students contributed to progress on ongoing projects like exhibition development, condition reports, collection descriptions, digitization, transcription, and collection preservation.

Membership

During the past fiscal year, the Schenectady County Historical Society added 143 new memberships, resulting in a total of 768 membership units. Gift memberships were purchased for 12 people, and we had 9 business members.

We continue to be part of the North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Association, giving our members at the Sponsor+ levels free admission to a mosaic of 1,369 art museums and galleries, historical museums and societies, botanical gardens, children's museums, zoos, and more throughout North America. We also continued our enrollment in the Empire State Museums Reciprocal Program, enabling SCHS members to access over 30 museums, art galleries, historic sites, and other institutions across New York State at no charge.





Development

Foundation Support

Golub Foundation: \$500

Mabee Family Foundation: \$1,000

Grants

County of Schenectady: \$8,000

Institute of Library & Museum Sciences: \$20,000

New York State Council of Arts: \$30,000

The Arts Center of the Capital Region: \$4,000

Fundraisers (net)

Arts & Crafts Festival: \$5,649

Gala: \$6,410

Festival of Trees: \$12,276

Stockade Walkabout: \$5,998

Corporate Sponsors

Fenimore Asset Management- \$500

Kingsway Community- \$1,000

M&T Bank- \$2,000

Nautilus- \$3,000

Rivers Casino- \$1,000

Stewarts Shops- \$1,250

Donations

We received 375 individual donations totaling \$48,662.

Business Sponsorships

We had 9 business members this fiscal year.

Lockkeepers

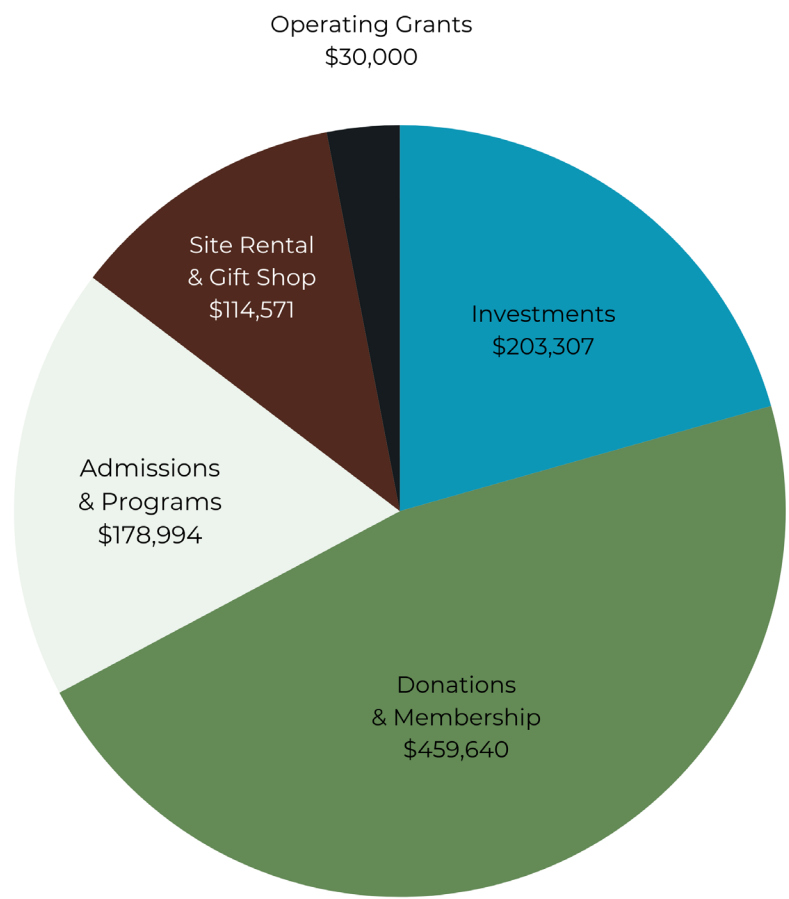
Our monthly donor program, the Lockkeepers, safeguard SCHS through consistent, monthly giving. At the end of this fiscal year, there are 14 Lockkeepers.

1661 Society

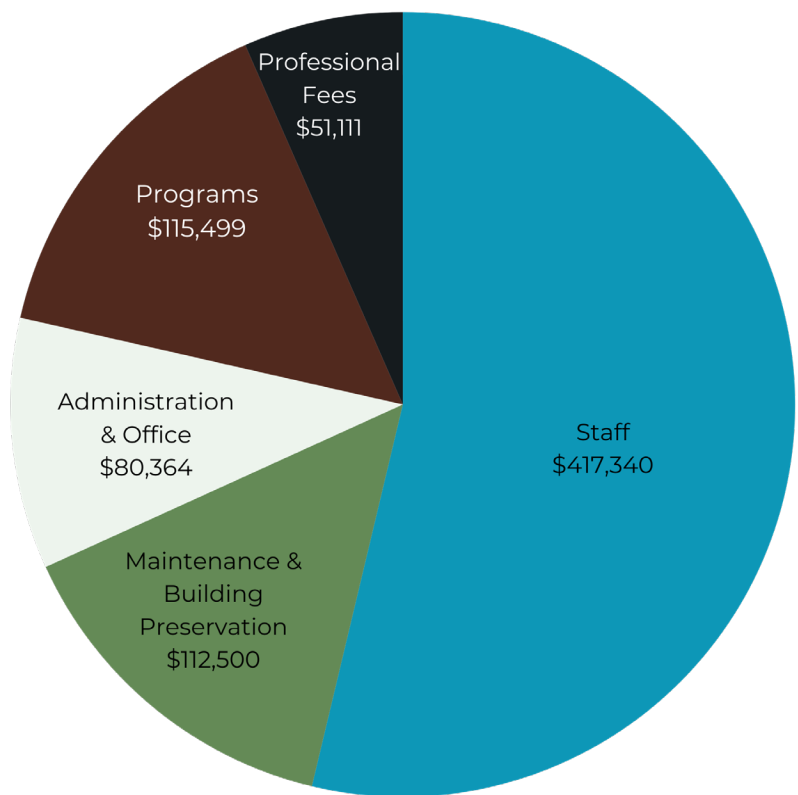
The 1661 Society, named for the year Schenectady was settled, recognizes those generous individuals who are leaving a future legacy to SCHS. We currently have 9 members.



Operating Income and Expense | FY24-25



Income



Expense

Buildings and Grounds

Several significant preservation projects were completed at Mabee Farm this year. First, the wood shingle roof on the 1705 Stone House was fully replaced in the fall. This was a big project that encountered several delays due to Covid.

Next, our contractors, PCC, completed the stabilization of the Brick House at Mabee Farm, as well as significant masonry work on both the Brick House and the Inn at Mabee Farm.

Seasonal maintenance continued throughout 2024-2025. The animals remain healthy in their enclosures, though a custom donkey shelter may be needed in the future. Other improvements include:

- Replaced and painted the Brouwer House porch
- Painted the porch and exhibition gallery at 32 Washington Avenue
- Installed a new animal fence at Mabee Farm
- Installed a new fence at Brouwer House
- Replaced the carpet at 32 Washington Avenue
- Removed drywall from the Stone House porch at Mabee Farm
- Removed several trees from 32 Washington Avenue and Mabee Farm
- Installed gates on driveway at Mabee Farm to reduce cars driving on lawn
- Cleaned out the Red Barn at Mabee Farm, and disposed of unwanted lawn equipment and other items

Looking ahead, we'll continue to work with PCC on Stone House preservation projects and window restoration on all three 18th century buildings at Mabee Farm.

- Christopher Marney, B&G Committee Chair

Finance

After our annual audit, final figures will form the basis for our IRS 990 form to be filed in August. Visit and register for the free website www.guidestar.org to see our last 990 form or ones for any other not-for-profit organization in the United States.

- John Halstead, Treasurer

Governance

This year the Governance Committee was solely focused on constructing and adopting our Strategic Plan for the next five years. The Society received a generous grant from Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services of New York to help us seek out consultation support to facilitate this endeavor. Susan Weinrich was assigned to us from the New York Council of Nonprofits.

Susan did an incredible job of canvassing our key stakeholders and she identified a list of our main focuses. Through several different workshops she led, we were able to come up with our final version of our 2025-2029 Strategic Plan. In our March meeting, the full board adopted this plan and we will begin our work in the new fiscal year to bring these goals to fruition. An abridged version of the 2025-2029 Strategic Plan can be found on our website

- David Trestick, Governance Committee Chair

Minutes

Annual Meeting of SCHS | May 4, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 2:02pm by Mike Diana, Director of Education, who welcomed everyone and started the business meeting. He announced that Schenectady City Historian Chris Leonard would be speaking about “Enduring Myths of the American Revolution.”

Trustees in attendance were: Bob Carney, Sarah Kirby, Chris Leonard, Bob Sullivan, David Trestick, Jill Bogdanowicz-Wilson, Russ Hart, Sonia Sandoval, Suzy Unger and Kimberly Waldin.

Vice President David Trestick conducted the meeting. He noted what an amazing year it’s been with visits by Lt. Gov. (and Schenectady native) Antonio Delgado and others, the amazing projects we’re working on, and the new painting by Len Tantillo which was introduced at our gala. He thanked outgoing trustees Sheri Lullo, Kevin Richard-Morrow and outgoing vice president Hannah Miller, who is pursuing a wonderful opportunity in London.

2023 Annual Meeting Minutes – David Trestick asked for a motion to approve the 2023 minutes. David moved, Chris Leonard seconded; passed unanimously.

New trustees – David Trestick moved to approve new trustees: Sarah Kirby (reinstated), Jill Bogdanowicz-Wilson, Russ Hart, Sonia Sandoval, Suzy Unger and Kimberly Waldin. Chris Leonard seconded; passed unanimously.

The business meeting ended at 2:08.

Chris Leonard gave a fascinating presentation on “Enduring Myths of the American Revolution” which tested us on the truth of some of those stories we learned growing up.

Mike Diana introduced a moving account of stories of enslaved people at the Mabee Farm. We are limited because we have so little evidence of these people, who are largely invisible in the historical record. Documentary maker George Paul was in attendance at the meeting; he had approached the society with the idea to make this film, *Ghosts of Mabee Farm: An Account of Slavery in New York*. Everyone who worked on the film was a volunteer.

A somber note – re-enactor Paul Supley passed away a few weeks ago and this was his last project. Principal photography took place on March 2nd and he passed away shortly thereafter.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Mark Vermilyea, acting for board secretary Bob Sullivan

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