Sunnyview Rehabilitation Hospital: A Ninety-Year Journey

By James Strosberg and Robert Bylancik

Beginnings

The story has it that Schenectady Fire Chief Henry Yates and Kiwanis Club President Dr. Alfred Warner spied a young crippled boy struggling to sell newspapers when they were driving along the street on a September afternoon in 1922. The boy had polio. But it could just as well have been tuberculosis of the spine, osteomyelitis, or a number of other maladies. Sadly, the sight of crippled children and adults was not rare in Schenectady. Spinal and skeletal deformities were a major cause of draft deferment from the recent Great War. Yet, the image of the boy spurred the men and their organizations into action.

The Schenectady Reconstruction Home for Crippled Children was incorporated in 1926, and due to the efforts of the Permanent Firemen of Schenectady, the Kiwanis Club, and an outpouring of contributions from Schenectadians, a ten bed facility opened on Rosa Road with the first children arriving in 1928.

Over the next 90 years, Sunnyview Hospital – the name the institution became known by – underwent a remarkable transition, greatly expanding its geographical reach, the types of patients served, and the types of services delivered. Today, there are few rehabilitation hospitals nationally that can match the comprehensive programs available at Sunnyview.

The 90 years of remarkable progress and growth could not have happened without the extraordinary civic and medical leadership that Schenectady has always seemed to produce when the occasion warrants. But, as we shall see, government policies also played an important role in shaping Sunnyview’s history.

Continued on page 12
I recently traveled to Lowell, Massachusetts, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Lowell National Historical Park. Chances are that some of you have visited the Lowell park, and if you have, you may sense—as I do—a connection to Schenectady.

Lowell, like Schenectady, played a pivotal role in the country’s industrial revolution. In the 1820s, that city’s textile mills became the model for America’s industrial growth, and Lowell prospered for much of the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, though, Lowell’s industry sputtered, and so did its fortunes.

Certainly, this is a history that should resonate across upstate New York—and in Schenectady in particular. Schenectady is, after all, a place with both a consequential industrial past and a more recent history of industrial decline.

I mention Lowell, because in the 1970s, city leaders who had grown up denying their industrial heritage chose instead to embrace their working-class ethnic culture and make it the focal point of their city’s revitalization. This was for them a radical and risky choice: it required determined leadership from local, state, and federal officials; commitments from both the public and private sectors; and a new level of cooperation among people who had once spent considerable energy competing with each other for a bigger piece of a smaller and smaller pie.

Gaining support from the National Park Service was only one seemingly insurmountable challenge, and success was anything but assured. Nevertheless, during the ten years I spent in Lowell, I witnessed how a cultural renaissance could lead to a dramatic economic turnaround. By 1984, Lowell was a destination for 600,000 visitors a year, private investors were spending nearly two-hundred-million dollars on downtown developments, real estate prices were skyrocketing, and unemployment figures were plummeting.

Decades later, of course, it’s unlikely that Lowell’s experience can be fully replicated in Schenectady or anywhere else (for one thing, the window for new national park authorizations closed years ago). Even so, we can still recognize—as Lowell’s leaders once did—that history isn’t simply about the past. It’s about the change that people make over time. Importantly, if we realize this and agree to cooperate with each other and use the power of history, not to resist change, but to make it, we enhance our ability to build a better future for everyone.

During the past few months, happily, this message has become clear to Schenectady County Historical Society trustees and staff as we listened to our many stakeholders in preparing our society’s strategic plan. We’ll soon be releasing that plan and believe that it will enable us and our many prospective partners to better educate each other about our heritage, improve our quality of life, and promote smart economic development throughout our large and diverse community. Stay tuned.

I would also like to take a moment to pay tribute to a man who helped make a real difference in Schenectady County. As many of you know, Dr. Edwin D. Reilly, Jr., passed away in August. Ed will always be remembered as one of SCHS’ most prominent leaders. He served as a trustee from 1999 through 2016 and as President from 2006 through 2012. During this time, he led the Schenectady County Bicentennial, built the SCHS’ first web site, shepherded the initiative to build the Franchere Education Center, and much more. We’ll miss him.
If I asked twenty people what history is, I'd get twenty different answers. I think most of the responses would be positive, but then again, my job puts me in contact with people that are exceptionally passionate about history.

History is a difficult term to define; my own working definition is ever-evolving. So, instead of defining history, I considered some common misconceptions I've heard from those a little less passionate about it:

1. **History is boring.**

   No! Have you ever wondered "eek, did someone die in my bedroom?" Or, "Is it true this mall used to be a gigantic chicken farm," or even "just why is Elvis such a big deal?" That's history. That's not boring.

2. **History is facts and dates.**

   No! Those are devilish details. History is understanding competing philosophies, understanding the systems that govern our lives today (and how they were established), and understanding the foundations for the endless changes and developments we see in the world around us.

3. **History is memorization.**

   No! History is thinking creatively and with wonder and curiosity about the world around you. It's critical thinking, analysis of information, and developing theories on why everything is the way it is.

4. **History is static.**

   No! The more we learn, the more our ideas about historical truths change. History can be subjective—there's always more to know, more to add to our understanding of the world and how we got here.

5. **History is reading a book or visiting a museum.**

   Sometimes! But it also means taking a drive and thinking about how the land developed. Or looking at the beams of an old house and imagining its construction. Or farming rye, small scale, by hand, to experience what bread tasted like before the modern food industry developed.

At SCHS we try to produce exhibits, programs, and media that prove these misconceptions wrong. I hope that people who visit us, or interact with us online, leave with their own, positive definition of history. Mostly, however, I hope that people who visit us are inspired to keep exploring!

Mary Zawacki, Executive Director
DIRECTOR@SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG
Around the County

Thomas Cole Painted Duane Lake...well, maybe?

By Alan Knight

This article is adapted from a version published in a 2016 edition of the Duane Lake Association newsletter.

It was a tantalizing prospect.

Was it possible?

Could it be possible that Thomas Cole, one of the most famous landscape painters in American history, painted the old North Pond, built in Duanesburgh (as it was spelled in the early 1800s), drained for farming in the 1880s, and later rebuilt as Duane Lake?

It sure looked like it when a reader of the Duane Lake Association newsletter sent in a digital copy of “Landscape, the seat of Mr. Featherstonhaugh in the distance, 1826,” by Thomas Cole, the leading light of the so-called Hudson River School of American landscape artists.

The Duane Lake Association, focused on a 117-acre man-made lake in Duanesburgh, publishes a quarterly newsletter. Its purpose is twofold: to keep residents informed about issues affecting the neighborhood and the waters of the lake, but also to subtly preach a reverence for the local ecosystem and its history. And here was a reader fully on-board with that.

For many, it may come as a surprise to learn that in the early 1800s George Featherstonhaugh, himself an excellent sketcher (and gentleman farmer, founder of the New York State Agricultural Society), saw great potential in Thomas Cole and invested in the budding young artist, paying him to spend a summer painting in Duanesburgh.

Cole produced at least four remarkable landscape paintings of the locale: three of the Featherstonhaugh estate and one of the Schoharie Creek.

And as the inquiring reader quickly noticed, one of the Duanesburgh paintings depicts a pond with a shoreline that looks very much like the peninsula behind the old North family mansion that guards the mouth of the cove at the northwest corner of what today is called Duane Lake. Cole painted-in the Helderberg on the far horizon.

And the Featherstonhaughs were related by marriage to the North family, so it seemed quite plausible that Cole could have set up his easel on the banks of North’s pond—today’s Duane Lake.

What an exciting thought—that the famous artist Thomas Cole might have painted “the old Duane Lake.”

Umm—not so fast.

It turns out after a bit of walking around and visualizing, plus some hours of reading and research, there are a couple of problems with the idea.

First, all the Cole paintings done for Featherstonhaugh show the Featherstonhaugh mansion far off in the distance at the top left, behind the pond. It’s the same mansion in all three. And one of the paintings is clearly titled by the artist as being at Lake Featherstonhaugh, about four miles west of Duane Lake, not North’s Pond.

By the way, that Featherstonhaugh mansion burned down in 1827. James Madison sent a letter to Featherstonhaugh offering condolences. At that point, Featherstonhaugh pretty much closed the Duanesburgh chapter of his life, electing to leave his once-model farm and start the next chapter of his remarkable life. His life story is well told in George William Featherstonhaugh: The First U.S. Government Geologist, by Edmund Berkeley Jr., and Dorothy Smith Berkeley.

But the real veto of the “Cole did Duane Lake” idea comes from Duane Lake resident, owner of North mansion, and local-history buff David Vincent.

Vincent showed me a copy of an 1840 survey commissioned by the North family that shows North Pond. There is no cove on it. The old North Pond had no cove, at all, and thus no peninsula.

“The cove would have been scraped out by a bulldozer in the 1920s when the developers cut a new outlet for the lake after damming it up again,” says Vincent.

Oh, well.

Sometimes fiction is more attractive than truth.

I think I’ll get a big print made for framing of this Cole painting with what looks like Duane Lake and say, “Close enough.”
Blog Posts You May Have Missed

The Grems-Doolittle Library Collections Blog (www.gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com) is a great resource for learning more about Schenectady County’s rich history. Here are a few of the posts from the past couple months that you might have missed.

**The Mabee Farm’s Great Fires: Revealed in Documents and by Trowel**
*By Ron Kingsley – July 12, 2018*

Mabee Farm Archeologist Ronald F. Kingsley, based on archeological investigations and document review, describes two fires that occurred on the Mabee Farm in 1883 and 1970. Kingsley notes, “While documents are helpful to understanding the recorded past, archaeology continues to provide researchers with unwritten and sometimes unknown evidence that will continue to enhance knowledge of the past, dispel legends and reveal evidence of the life-ways along the Mohawk.”

**Rotterdam Sesquicentennial Parade**
*By The Librarian – August 30, 2018*

With Rotterdam’s bicentennial coming up in 2020, we thought it would be a good time to share some photos of the town’s sesquicentennial (150th) anniversary parade. There are some very creative floats shown in these photos so be sure to check them out.

New York Heritage Update

Our New York Heritage page (https://nyheritage.org/contributors/schenectady-county-historical-society) is one of our favorite ways to share our collections with you, and our friends at the Capital District Library Council have consistently supported our efforts to do so. We are happy to announce that another collection has been scanned and uploaded to New York Heritage.

This collection is in collaboration with Ellis Hospital who previously donated hundreds of photos along with other material to the Grems-Doolittle Library. The New York Heritage collection is focused on the photos in the Ellis Hospital Collection. Thanks to a grant from the Capital District Library Council, we were able to upload 300 photos to New York Heritage. A special thanks goes to our volunteer Angela who scanned and provided metadata for the photos.

The history of Ellis Hospital is documented through these photos with the majority of them showing hospital operations in the 1950s and 60s. The photos also show the construction of the current hospital building, nurses and other staff testing equipment, patients receiving treatment, and one interesting image labeled “bone room” circa 1900 which was located in the old Ellis building.

This collection is a very interesting look at an institution that has been a large part of Schenectady life for 125 years and we hope you find it useful as well.

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**Bus Trip to the New York Public Library**

*When:* Friday, October 19, 2018  
*Cost:* $85

Pickup at 1st Reformed Church in Schenectady  
Join us on a trip to NYPL. This trip will include a class focused on the resources of the Milstein Genealogy Division and a guided tour of the Schwarzman building. This trip has a limit of 40 people. Find the itinerary at: [WWW.SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/BUSTRIP/](WWW.SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/BUSTRIP/)
What’s Happening?

EXHIBITS

Changing Downtown: The Rise, the Raze, and the Revitalization of Schenectady
Through November 2018 @ 32 W
By exploring the people & events that shaped our city, we better understand ourselves and our vision for the future.

Beyond the Pines: Early Schenectady
Ongoing @ 32 W
Explore early Schenectady: its founding, its people, and what life was like for early Schenectadians.

Mapping Schenectady
Ongoing @ 32 W
A selection of our most prominent and interesting maps are on permanent display in the Map Gallery.

In Harm’s Way: Community Responses to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee
Ongoing @ Mabee Farm
A partnership with the NY Folklore Society, this exhibition explores local responses to hurricanes, the impact of natural disasters, and the resiliency of our neighbors.

TOURS AND TRIPS

Pre-registration is required for most programs.

Candlelight Walking Tours
Fridays, October 12, 19, & 26 - 7pm & 7:30pm @ 32 W • $12
We’re back with new spooky tales for 2018! Join us as we explore the historic Stockade after dark and discover the neighborhood’s haunting past! Includes entry to museum, and refreshments and live music after the tour. Your choice of "Colonial Hauntings" or "Ghostly Victorian" tour. Co-sponsored by the Schenectady Heritage Foundation.

Secret Stockade
Wednesday, October 10 - 10am @ 32 W • $20
Join us for a morning of mysteries as our guide leads us through the Stockade, and inside two Stockade homes, each with their own legends and lore. Refreshments served.

Bus Trip to the New York Public Library
Friday, October 19 • $85
Join us for a genealogy focused bus trip to the New York Public Library. Included in this trip is a workshop introducing you to the extensive genealogical and historic resources of the Milstein Division. After the workshop, we'll tour the Schwarzman Building, the NYPL’s “main branch” and home to the library lions, Patience and Fortitude.

Haunted Brouwer House
Saturday, October 27 - 7pm @ Brouwer House • $20
Sunday, October 28 - 7pm @ Brouwer House • $20
Wednesday, October 31 - 7pm @ Brouwer House • $20
Prepare to be scared as you enter Schenectady's most haunted house. Using history and legend, the NorthEast Theater Ensemble will bring to life the region's ghastliest ghost stories. An immersive Halloween experience.

Bus Trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art
Saturday, January 12 • $80
Experience the best of human creativity from across the globe. With collections spanning more than 5,000 years of culture, from prehistory to the present, the Metropolitan is a journey through the world’s greatest art.

TALKS, WORKSHOPS, & RECEPTIONS

Reception for Preservation League of NYS Awards
Friday, Oct 5 - 11am @ Brouwer House • Free
PLNYS is hosting their annual grant award ceremony at the Brouwer House, which is the recipient of a grant this year!

Talk: Ethnicity, Alliance, Conflict: Scots-Irish Immigration Patterns & the Borderlands of Colonial NY
Saturday, Oct 6 - 2pm @ 32 W • $5; free for members
Historian Terry McMaster will present on the settlement and development of western New York by Scots-Irish settlers in the mid-1700s. His research explores the unstable frontier boundaries of villages, and the impact European-Americans had on the Native American population in the region.

Reception for the Mabee House Interpretation
Friday, October 12 - 5:30pm @ Mabee Farm • Free
For the first time in decades, the Mabee House comes alive with new stories, new characters, and hands-on reproductions of colonial life. Join us in celebrating this new chapter in Mabee House history as we enjoy light food and drink around a campfire on an autumn evening.

Mabee Night Inn
Friday, October 12 - 7:30pm @ Mabee Farm • $20
We’re hosting a pilot program, Mabee Night Inn, to celebrate the site’s new look and tour, and inviting 8 people to spend the night inside the Mabee House.

Reception for Together Until the End @ Proctors
Wednesday, October 17 - 3pm @ Proctors • Free
SCHS is partnering with the Albany Symphony Orchestra and Proctors to present an Armistice Centennial Celebration, featuring talks, concerts, and an exhibition curated by SCHS on display at Proctors. Robert Weible, SCHS President and former NYS Historian, will speak.

Workshop: Hooked on Blacksmithing
Sunday, October 21 - 9am @ Mabee Farm • $150
Join our resident blacksmith we we learn to make hooks and adjustable fireplace trammels.

Talk: Preservation in the Netherlands with Andre Hoek
Saturday, October 27 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm • $5; free for members
Dutch restoration architect, André Hoek, will discuss the preservation of Dutch architecture and Dutch techniques and tools developed to study, restore, and maintain historic structures.
buildings and gardens. Hoek will discuss whether these methods can apply to historic buildings in New York, and the difficulty in retaining the ‘Spirit of Place’.

Workshop: Secrets of the Tarot
Monday, October 29 - 6:30pm @ Brouwer House • $50
Embrace the esoteric this Halloween inside Schenectady’s oldest homes as instructor Jeannie Thomma delves into the Secrets of Tarot. The Tarot is full of imagery, symbolism, and secrets that can help you to find answers to your most pressing questions. Seasonal refreshments served.

Talk: Together Until the End @ Proctors
Thursday, November 1 - 6pm @ Proctors
Professor Richard Fogarty, a UAlbany associate professor and expert in 20th century war and society, will speak about World War I. This talk is in partnership with the Albany Symphony Orchestra and Proctors to present an Armistice Centennial Celebration in Schenectady.

Workshop: Traditional Cornwashing Basket
Saturday, November 3 - 9am @ Mabee Farm • $85 + $25/materials
Weave your own basket, based on ancient Native American traditions. Take home your creation and use it to store Indian Corn, yarn, or magazines!

Buttons on the Binnekill
Saturday, November 3 - 11am-2pm @ 32 W • $5 for three buttons
Ever wanted a button of your favorite Schenectady County landmark? Now is your chance! Join us for this fun button making program.

Talk: The Featherstonhaugh State Forest
Saturday, November 10 - 2pm @ Mabee Farm • $5; free for members
History and lore of the Featherstonhaugh State Forest, presented by Lorrie Runnels.

Talk: UNESCO’s Year of Kosciuszko
Saturday, November 17 - 2pm @ 32 W • $5; free for members
It’s UNESCO’s Year of Kosciuszko! But who is Tadeusz Kosciuszko, and why are the Northway’s Twin Bridges named after him? Polish-American expert Dr. James Pula of Purdue University will discuss the notable military leader and his contributions during the American Revolution

FOR FAMILIES

Build-a-Bauble Day
Saturday, December 1 - 10am-4pm @ 32 W • $5/ornament
We’ll provide the materials needed to make your very own tree ornament, plus plenty of historic ornaments on display for inspiration. When done, kids can take their crafts home, and admire them throughout the holiday season.

American Girl Tea with Samantha Parkington
Saturday, December 8 - 2pm @ 32 W • $8
Join us for an elegant holiday tea party! Our Festival of Trees will be in full swing, making a glittering holiday backdrop for the occasion. We’ll have baked goods and stories to share, and make a wintery craft to take home. Our host will be Samantha Parkington, who grew up during the Victorian era.

A Very Mabee Christmas
Thursday, December 27 - 12pm @ Mabee Farm • $8
Zalig Kerstmas! This program welcomes all families to share in Dutch holiday traditions. Our historic house will be warm, cozy and decked for the season. With riddles and clues to guide them, kids will hunt for small gifts to take home. Of course, we’ll enjoy some Dutch sweets.

FOOD AND DRINK

Drinking the Seasons: Autumn Cocktails
Thursday, Oct 11 - 6pm @ Brouwer House • $25
Led by historian John Gearing, we’ll sample a variety of seasonal libations, made with locally grown ingredients. Get cozy in Schenectady’s oldest home this autumn, as we mix and mingle with spirits — of both kinds, perhaps!

Tavern Night
Friday, November 2 - 5:30pm @ Brouwer House • $40
Enjoy a three-course meal in a traditional tavern setting! SCCC’s Chef Thomas Dowd will prepare cider cheddar soup, and heritage beef with ragout, served with fresh country bread and finished off with an apple dessert. Local beverages will accompany the fare.

Night of Lights
Friday, November 30 - 6pm @ 32 W • $15
Come celebrate the beginning of wintertide enchantment with the Night of Lights, an exclusive evening of radiant fir trees, live music, great food, special cocktails and more!

Drinking the Seasons: Winter Cocktails
Thursday, Dec 13 - 6pm @ 32 W • $25
Led by historian John Gearing, we’ll sample a variety of historic libations, made with locally grown, seasonal ingredients. Join us in celebrating the season with a few rounds of drinks amidst holiday splendor

FESTIVALS, MUSIC, & MORE!

Schenectady County FallFest
Sunday, October 14, 11am - 4pm @ Mabee Farm
A celebration of all things fall! Join us for a FREE community festival featuring live music, hay rides, pony rides, petting zoo, hot cider, dog-herding demonstrations, live birds of prey, pumpkin painting, craft fair, beer, and more!

Festival of Trees
December 1 - 16, 10am - 5pm @ 32 W
Celebrate the season as we fill our galleries with lighted fir trees! Decorated from classic to kooky Christmas styles, the trees glow with the enchantment of the holidays. Co-presented with the YWCA NorthEastern NY. Consider sponsoring a tree: SCHENECTADYHISTORICAL.ORG/TREES.

Howlin’ at the Moon
Sponsored by Wolf Hollow Brewing Company
Upcoming concerts include:

Peggy & the Delivery Boys
October 24 at 7pm • $6
Three Quarter North
November 24 at 7pm • $6
Greetings to New & Renewed Members!

**Benefactor**
Neil & Jane Golub  
Christopher Marney & Chris White  
John & Cindy Seacord  
John & Donna Spring

**Sponsor**
Philip & Jo Ann Adams  
John & Carolyn Assini  
Sharon Bell  
Denis Brennan  
Andrew & Heather Chestnut  
Anne Christman  
Karl Dis & Frances Ray-Dise  
Worth Greter  
Analine Hicks  
Martha Leonard  
Robert & Mary Liebers  
Michael & Nancy Ottati, Jr.  
Thaddeus & Sylvia Raushi  
Ralph Rosenthal  
Doug Sayles  
Dr. John Schenck & Dr. Susan Kalia  
Roger Sheffer  
Paul K. Tracy  
Fred & Valerie Woodward

**Family**
Harvey & Mary Alexander  
Ray & Laurel Andrews  
John & Deborah Angilletta  
Robert & Marianne Bailey  
David & Marianne Blanchard  
David & Karen Bradley  
Mark & Debbie Cieslak  
Russell & Beverly Clark  
Robert & Carol Clemens  
Ronald & Patricia Cookingham  
Penelope de la Rocha  
Linda Dettbarn  
Norman & Mildred Gittinger  
Constance Glasgow, MD  
Phillip & Janet Grigsby  
Aaron Gruenberg & Rosalie Fadem  
Stanley & Barbara Harris  
Dr. & Mrs. David & Anne. Harris  
Andrew & Karen Hess  
Julia R. Holcomb  
Randall & Donna Karl  
Bas Korevaar & Kati Illoz  
Robert C. & Dorothy W. Kuba  
David & Deborah LaMontagne  
Stanley & Fern Lee  
John & Traute Lehner  
Robert Lemmerman & Gloria Kishton  
David Lowry  
Edwin & Cheryl Lucier  
Robert & Maryanne Mackey  
John & Anne Marie McLaughlin  
Richard & Peggy Mele  
Tony & Lois Miller  
Emily Miller  
John & Linda Milligan  
Hugh & Vaughn Nevin  
David Oggsbury & Connie Carter  
John & Nancy Ostapow  
Bruce Piasecki  
Ronald & Geraldine Pinkerton  
Stephen Piraino & Gayle Rosenfeld  
Richard & Barbara Preisman  
Patricia A. Renna  
Robert J. Ringlee  
Cindy Sagendorph  
Robert & Donna Schick  
Stephen & Alexandra Schmidt  
William & Judith Schultz, Jr.  
Ron Simmons & Laura Conrad  
Charles Snyder  
Anton Solomon & Jane Meader Nye  
Wayne & Betty Jane Somers  
Paul & Cynthia Stambach  
Roger Stites & Shannon Barr  
Donald & Rochelle Stracher  
Owen & Betty Sutton  
Dale & Joan Wade-Keszy  
Matthew Wall  
Paul & Doris Ward  
Robin T. White  
Irene Wickham  
Ben & Sharon Wiles  
Albany Public Library-Delaware Branch  
Albany Public Library-Howe Branch  
Albany Public Library-Pine Hills Branch  
Albany Public Library-Washington Ave. Branch

**Individual**
Yolanda S. Adams  
Eleanor Alger-Monlea  
Henry J. Bastian  
Karen Baumis  
Joanna Begg  
Barbara Bilins  
Scotty Birdsey  
Dr. Joan Wemple Burns  
Sandra Mabie Caldeira  
Dr. Thomas Capuano  
Rodgers Cheeks  
Stuart Cohen  
Donald E. Coons  
Dave Cornelius  
Steven Cornick  
Betsy Cotton  
Clara Courtenay-Clack  
Peter Cross, MD  
Nelson Curtis  
Holly Delape  
Gail Denisoff  
Paul L. Dimon  
Kayla Diso  
Joann Dunham  
Glenda Eager  
Elizabeth Early  
Therese Early  
James J. Elbrecht  
Joy P. Favretti  
Beverly A. Filkins  
Brian Flahive  
Catherine Anne Foyle  
Jeni Friedland  
Gail George  
Donald Gleason  
Matthew Grumo  
Megan Haessig  
Jayne Hanson  
Diane B. Harper  
Russell Hart  
Donna Hogerhuis  
Helene Iler  
Frances L. Jackson  
Susan J. Jackson  
Emily Ann Jensvold  
Diane Kaladjian  
Frank Keetz  
Ronald F. Kingsley  
Kathy Kochen  
Denise Lagasse  
Mary Lavigne  
Janet Liszewski  
William Loeber  
Rob Mabie  
Robert J. Mabie  
Anne Mancuso  
Blanche Mandel  
Brian G. Maybee  
Reba Mehan  
Barbara Hayes Muhlfelder  
Janet L. Nelson  
Elizabeth J. Nelson  
Nancy Nessler  
Deanne Newman  
Richard Ognibene  
William Patrick  
Ann M. Perry  
Sandy Phillips  
Marguerite Pileggi  
Teresa V. Pistolessi  
M. Frances Porter  
Janet I. Rainey  
Jeana Reed  
Nancy Rheingold  
Kellen Rieil  
Gretchen Riley  
Jane Robbins  
Nancy Robinson  
Alice Rudnick  
Hon. Angelo Santabarbara  
Nancy Saupp  
Gordon Schaufelberg  
Shirley A. Schleier  
Jane Scrafford  
Kathleen Secker  
George Seeger  
Patricia A. Shoemaker  
Mary Sieder  
Judy Sogian  
Harvey Strum  
Brenda H. Thomas  
Janice Thompson  
David Tieman  
Lois E. Truxa  
Arlene Turner  
Timothy Van Heest  
Gloria Vassolas  
Christine Vermilyea  
Patricia A. Walsh  
Carole Warburton  
Margaret M. Watrous  
Margaret Wexler  
Robert J. Woods, RA
Volunteer Spotlight on Nelson Curtis

By John Angiletta

If you've ever taken a tour of the Mabee Farm with Nelson Curtis, two things are immediately evident: Nelson possesses a truly amazing speaking voice, and has an intense passion and extensive knowledge of local history.

The voice is a result of his childhood in Petersburg, Virginia, just south of Richmond. Nelson is indeed a true southern gentleman. His interest in history comes from a childhood spent visiting historic sites in his native state with his family. It also comes from his education at the Virginia Military Institute, where Nelson graduated with a degree in history.

Following college, Nelson spent three years in the U.S. Navy, ending up in Charleston, South Carolina. It was there that he met his wife Pam, who was living in Charleston at the time, but originally hailed from Scotia, New York. South Carolina's loss was our gain as Nelson and Pam moved to our area to raise their son and daughter and pursue their careers.

Nelson soon began to delve into the history of Schenectady and the Mohawk Valley and its rich legacy of Dutch and English colonial life. This interest led Nelson to begin volunteering at the Mabee Farm Historic Site over 15 years ago. Nelson recalls how different the site was then, compared to today. In the early 2000s, Nelson notes, there were only a few structures at the site besides the original farm house. Nelson also recalls that the caretaker of the property still lived upstairs in the house. The Inn and the “Brick House” were mainly used for storage of artifacts which are now housed in the Franchere Center. The site was only open to the public a few times a year back in those early days.

Nelson helped in the construction of both the blacksmith shop and the tool shed, contributing greatly to the development of the site and its appearance today. He was also part of some of the excavations around the original house and property, which helped with our ongoing reinterpretation of the history of the Mabee Farm. This varied experience makes Nelson among our most knowledgeable volunteers. Today Nelson continues to volunteer at the Mabee Farm, and also assists each month at the SCHS Museum at 32 Washington Avenue.

When asked about his favorite part of volunteering, Nelson responded that it includes interacting with visitors and teaching them about the history of the farm and the area. His least favorite part was the yearly cleaning out of the Dutch Barn which was always a difficult (and messy) springtime chore. Although not yet retired, Nelson likes to spend his leisure time with his family (two grandchildren and one on the way). Nelson is a member of a local singing group called Rock Voices, which regularly performs concerts of classic rock songs around the Capital District. This seems like a perfect fit for Nelson's great voice.

While his roots may be in Virginia, the Schenectady Historical Society and the Mabee Farm are extremely lucky to have Nelson as part of our family and we are honored to have him as our Volunteer Spotlight.
Most interior decorators don’t start their projects in the library. Of course, I am not a professional designer, nor was I asked to “redesign” just any old house. The reinterpretation of the Mabee Farm has been two years in the making. This site-wide initiative includes restoration projects, new programming, new furnishings, and new signage, all anchored around a brand new tour. Now, with the project’s completion, we are able to tell the unique stories of the people who lived, worked and visited the farm throughout the years, thereby creating a broader narrative about life in the Mohawk Valley; one that reflects the centuries of change that occurred at the farm. My job was to restage the Mabee House in a way that would bring those stories to life. I wanted the home to feel lived in. I wanted the visitor to be transported back in time and place, fully immersed in the stories we were telling.

The Mabee House needed to be representative of not only the Mabee family, but also of the Dutch colonial period and rural life in the Mohawk Valley. Using the new tour script as my guide, I headed to the library. I collected inventories from 17th, 18th & 19th century homesteads in the region; I examined the findings of archaeological digs at the Mabee Farm; I read descriptions of Schenectady written by its earliest settlers, studied the paintings of Dutch masters, and researched Dutch colonial material culture and decorative arts. All of this information helped me to better understand the use of space in New York’s earliest homes. By the time I finished, I was ready to reinterpret the Mabee House, this time using objects instead of words.

The first step in staging the house was to determine which pieces would be staying and what new items we would need to purchase. Unfortunately, very few original artifacts from the farm’s early years remain. While we still have a few pieces of original furniture, the items which made up daily life were missing. This challenge turned into opportunity. By using a mixture of authentic artifacts and reproductions we are now able to offer visitors an interactive experience. For example, a newly built reproduction pencil post bed (complete with a straw stuffed mattress!) allows visitors to lay down on and test an 18th century bed. I scoured the internet and found regional artists who could reproduce the plates and silverware, the case bottles, the redware pottery, and even the chamber pot. One of my favorite finds is a redware pitcher with ochre glaze and brown decorative dots that now sits on the table in the “Kitchen Room.” A mug with the same glaze and ornamentation was found on the Mabee Farm during an archaeological excavation!

Earlier this spring, I had the pleasure of visiting Marilyn Sassi, the former SCHS curator and local decorative arts expert. She was kind enough to give me a tour of her home and share with me objects from her own collection. We talked ceramics and textiles, furniture and mezzotints - all of the beautiful items that graced colonial homes in our region. My visit with Marilyn was the inspiration for my personal favorite detail: the bed curtains. Towards the end of my visit, Marilyn showed me a beautiful 18th century, blue resist bedspread that she had saved from a farm in Kinderhook, NY. The fabric was gorgeous. The vibrant blues and deep indigos formed a swirling floral and peacock pattern. This type of resist-printed fabric, she told me, was...
made in India and shipped to Europe, then to America. Typically, printed fabrics were expensive but by the mid 1700s, blue resists had become so popular that even rural homes in the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys were able to afford them. I knew I needed a fabric just like this one. It would be perfect for the curtains on the newly-restored alcove bed. Luckily for me, Colonial Williamsburg has a line of reproduction fabrics and I found a pattern similar to the one on Marilyn's coverlet. Our pattern is a replica from a pair of 1770s curtains in the collection of the Winterthur Museum in Delaware.

While I had to be as historically accurate as possible, a certain amount of creative license was also needed. We may never know where the Mabees' set their table, where they placed their cabinets, or even what curtains hung from their bedposts. We don't have all the answers, and perhaps we never will. That's part of the fun of history, part of the fun for visitors, and definitely part of the fun for me. Thinking critically, analyzing the evidence, and making educated guesses about the realities of life in time periods we will never truly know. From the boots by the door, to the faint smell of burning wood, to the drying herbs hung in the window, each element was placed with care to bring the house to life. I hope you all will get a chance to visit us and experience the fun, exciting changes that are happening at the farm!

Editor's note: This project was possible only with the support of our friends, who donated generously to the Historic Building Fund in 2015 and 2016. To you, we say thank you!

We're also proud to announce that the Mabee Farm reinterpretation project won Greater Hudson Heritage Network's 2018 'Award for Excellence', which recognizes and commends exceptional projects that exemplify creativity and professional vision resulting in a contribution to the preservation and interpretation of the historic scene, material culture and diversity of the region.
Expansion: Geographical Reach and Physical Capacity

In 1929, Troy industrialist and philanthropist Ellis L. Rowe, president of the Rensselaer Valve Co., made possible the transition of the Schenectady Reconstruction Home to the Eastern New York Orthopedic Hospital-School with the expanded mission to serve the counties of eastern New York. Mr. Rowe's generosity also enabled the purchase of additional land at the Rosa Road site with an eye toward future expansion.

In 1937, Sunnyview expanded from ten to thirty-five beds in a new fireproof addition that included boys' and girls' dormitories, three classrooms, nurses' quarters, auditorium, library, dental clinic, cast room, nursery, isolation quarters, and elevator. The estate of Anna Électra Collins (1845-1922) funded this expansion; Anna had grown up in Scotia in a very wealthy and charitable family. The institution exclusively served children and the children stayed a long time, some more than a year. Some had to remain horizontal in bed, their bodies encased in long plaster casts so their spines could heal in good position. During this time, children attended school, even while remaining in bed.

Since 1937, Sunnyview undertook several more major expansions financed through private contributions and federal construction grants. General Electric and its employees were particularly active in fundraising. Much of the early success of Sunnyview was due to Dr. William Gazely, the first medical director and a pioneer in pediatric orthopedic surgery. Due to his national reputation, major teaching hospitals (e.g. Mayo Clinic) sent their residents to train with Dr. Gazely. He served as medical director and later as chief of staff until 1971.

Transition from a Children's Orthopedic Hospital to a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Hospital

Since its founding, Sunnyview had been essentially a children's orthopedic hospital with the primary admission being polio. Hospitals from twenty-three counties transferred their polio patients to Sunnyview after the communicable phase of their disease was completed. The late 1950s saw a dramatic decline in the number of pediatric patients. The Salk and Sabin vaccines eliminated new cases of polio, and antibiotics prevented much of the damage from osteomyelitis. By 1957 there were only a handful of polio patients in the hospital. Additionally, newer orthopedic techniques and procedures decreased the length of stay of non-polio patients. In light of the precipitous decline in admissions, the Sunnyview board made the decision to change it mission to become a comprehensive rehabilitation hospital.

In 1957, Dr. Gazely invited Dr. Robert S. Hoffman to join the consulting medical staff at Sunnyview. Earlier in his career, Dr. Hoffman was a general practitioner in Colonie. After World War II, he went to New York University School of Medicine to train with Dr. Howard Rusk in the new specialty of physiatry or rehabilitation medicine.

Physiatry focuses on the patient's disability, rather than a specific disease. The goal is to maximize patient function and activities of daily living. The physiatrist is usually a member of a team that includes physical and occupational therapists, social workers, speech therapists, vocational counselors, rehabilitation nurses, and psychologists, amongst others.

The significance of Dr. Hoffman's association with Dr. Rusk and its impact on Sunnyview cannot be overstated. Dr. Rusk is considered one the most important pioneers and advocates for rehabilitation medicine in the world. Like his mentor, Dr. Hoffman became an innovator and an institution-builder.

In 1957, Dr. Hoffman admitted the first non-orthopedic patient to Sunnyview, an elderly hemiplegic stroke patient for rehabilitation – a seminal event in the evolutions of Sunnyview. In 1962, Dr. Hoffman became the full-time Chief of Rehabilitation. Through his vision and leadership, along with that of Hospital Administrator Robert Ward, Sunnyview became a trendsetter in rehabilitation medicine. Dr. Hoffman started the Amputee Clinic, Multiple Sclerosis Clinic, Spinal Cord Clinic, and Stroke Clinic. He helped develop the Departments of Social Work, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Vocational Rehabilitation. The Rehabilitation Medical staff expanded to five physicians. Especially after the 1967 expansion of adult inpatient beds, almost the entire hospital became dedicated to adult rehabilitation. This transition was greatly aided by the passage of Medicare in 1965 that gave the hospital a new lease on life after the remarkable decline in the pediatric patient population.

In 1976, Dr. Hoffman started the Department of Rheumatology, eventually staffed by four physicians. At that time rheumatoid arthritis and other rheumatic diseases were not as successfully treated with drugs as they are today, and bed rest along with multiple rehabilitation therapies were required.

For two years US News and World Report voted Sunnyview as one of the top rheumatology hospitals in the nation. This was because the patients were admitted to a specialized comprehensive rehabilitation hospital, with all the needed staff and facilities rather than to an acute care general hospital.

Sunnyview has played a leading role in professional education with affiliations with dozens of physical therapy and occupational therapy colleges. Residents from Albany Medical College, Ellis Hospital, and foreign medical schools came for training.

Medicare: A Boon to Sunnyview and Adult Rehabilitation

The 1965 passage of Medicare, as part of Social Security, created an important new revenue stream for Sunnyview, resulting in a remarkable expansion and enhancement of its adult rehabilitation services. In addition to covering people over sixty-five for services delivered in general and rehabilitation hospitals, Medicare paid those hospitals on the basis of their costs, further encouraging expansion and enhancement of services. But along with this expansion and enhancement came rising health care costs. Thus began Medicare's ongoing struggle to rein in exploding federal budgets by altering the way it paid hospitals.

Initially Medicare was not only a boon to Sunnyview, but also a catalyst for other hospitals in the area to start up their own rehabilitation units. By the 1990s, Medicare
covered the vast majority of Sunnyview admissions. At the turn of the century, Sunnyview was one of four freestanding, independent rehabilitation hospitals in New York State, and there were only twelve comparable hospitals in the U.S. Controlled by its own board, Sunnyview was in charge of its own destiny. But the forces unleashed by Medicare drastically changed the institutional landscape in the Capital District.

**Mergers: Northeast Health and St. Peter’s Health Partners**

To contain costs, Medicare, in 2002, changed its hospital payment system and, as a result, threatened the bottom line of rehabilitation hospitals across the country. To protect its financial health while preserving its quality and scope of service, the Sunnyview Board considered its options. In 2007, Sunnyview decided to merge with Northeast Health, a healthcare system headquartered in Troy, and became part of their full continuum of care. And, four years later, when Northeast Health merged with St. Peter’s Healthcare Services and Seton Health in Troy to become St. Peter’s Health Partners, Sunnyview became the only institution offering acute rehabilitation service for the entire system. Now, rather than struggling to survive, Sunnyview was able to increase the bed capacity to 115 with growing, sustainable operating margins and a strong bottom line while remaining in full compliance with Medicare payment guidelines.

Chief Yates and Dr. Warner would be extremely gratified by the progress made by their ten-bed home for crippled children, as it grew to a nationally recognized, regional comprehensive rehabilitation hospital. Clearly this 90-year journey could not have been possible without dedicated and talented medical and civic leaders supported by donors, volunteers, and the wider community.

An expanded version of this article can be found online on the Schenectady County Historical Society website, at [https://bit.ly/2xjhNdd](https://bit.ly/2xjhNdd).

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**Help Wanted**

Do you like to play in the dirt? There is a need for temporary volunteer(s) help at the Mabee Farm after mid-October, as Nancy Wasmund, our volunteer gardener, will be out of commission until next year. Volunteering is primarily clean up of perennials and frosted annuals to get ready for winter. Nancy eagerly awaits your call: 518-884-2959 or N_WASMUND@YAHOO.COM. Thanks!
The summer draws to a close, sunsets come sooner and the first leaves turn their colors. Here at the Mabee Farm, we’re harvesting the last of our garden and field crops. It’s a fine yield— an abundance of rye, pumpkins and onions for our educational purposes. They’ll make a tasty addition to the Farm to Fork dinner as well. However, the Farm produces only a fraction of what it did historically and all too often I fear our visitors leave with the impression that agriculture is done in Schenectady. But if you veer from the main roads, drive or bike through the hills above the river, you’ll see this is not the case. There you’ll find patchwork of tilled fields, orchards and pastures. It’s a scene and a lifestyle that would be perfectly recognizable to even the earliest residents of Schenectady. It’s a lifestyle we will explore with our upcoming "Rural Modern" project at the SCHS. An ambitious project, made possible by a Vision Grant from Humanities New York, it will combine artifacts, photography and oral histories, collected from local farmers. The project opens with a reception and farm day in June 2019 that will feature local farmers on site, showcasing their cultivated talents. The project is in part inspired by SCHS’ ongoing collaboration with the Schenectady County Farm Bureau. I, personally, have met plenty of these farmers who heroically labor in the fields from sunrise to sunset. Some take on this work to preserve a family tradition, while others, as Farm Bureau President Mike Nally once told me, are just too stubborn to do anything else. Whatever their reasons, farmers make up a valuable part of our economy today and will hopefully continue to do so into the distant future. "Rural Modern" will be their story.
Around the Society

From top left: Educator Mike Diana gives a tour to Union College President David Harris; Farmer John and the brewers at Mad Jack discuss Upstate Harvest Ale; The Schenectady Symphony audience at Mabee Farm; pony rides at CanalFest; crafter tents at the Arts & Crafts Festival; Kayak Through History tours on the Mohawk; John Gearing offers historical insight for a new documentary on the Schenectady Massacre.
FESTIVAL OF TREES
December 1 - 16 at SCHS