



Schenectady County
Historical
Society

Newsletter

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July - August 2010

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Faces of Schenectady: 1715 -1750

by Kate Weller



Laurens Van Der Volgen by Nehemiah Partridge c. 1725

Late in the evening of February 8th, 1690, 114 French troops with their Native American allies mounted an attack on the village of Schenectady, one forever remembered as the infamous Schenectady Massacre. In the early morning hours of February 9th, Laurens Claese Van Der Volgen, along with 26 men and boys, left the still burning remains of Schenectady with his captors for the long, cold journey to Canada. Sixty men, women, and children were killed in the initial attack while 27 men and boys, including Laurens, were taken captive. They survived a grueling journey to French Canada, a feat that was not accomplished by many of the attackers. The French account notes that the 50 horses captured at Schenectady had to be killed for food on the trek back; many of the stragglers disappeared along the way; and the French were themselves harassed by English and Mohawk troops

from Albany almost “to the gates of Montreal.” Despite these hardships, Laurens survived and was adopted into a Native American community.

The community that Laurens lived with during his captivity is not known, but it is highly possible that he lived with or at least interacted substantially with the Catholic Mohawks (Kanien’Kahake) who allied themselves with the French. Some of the Native American forces in the attack on Schenectady were Mohawk and Laurens became fluent in their language, knowledge he put to good use in his later years.

Laurens stayed in Canada for ten years before coming back to Schenectady. By that time, he was a young man in his early twenties. His exact reason for returning is unknown, but the oral tradition in the Van Der Volgen family is that he stayed on in the Schenectady area instead of returning to Canada because his sister cut off his scalp lock. There is no documented account of this interchange, but it is possible that he changed his mind about a brief visit and decided to settle in Schenectady.

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HOURS

MUSEUM & LIBRARY

MONDAY-FRIDAY 9-5

SATURDAY 10-2

MABEE FARM

Tuesday-Saturday

10 am - 4 pm

Letter from the President

As predicted last issue, June did bust out all over. Early in the month, the Society received five very competitive bids for the major phase of construction of the George E. Franchere Education Center at the Mabee Farm. The low bid was submitted by Hoosick Valley Contractors (HVC) of Melrose, NY. After extensive analysis and clarifications of detail, the Franchere building committee met on June 21 for the contract signing ceremony. Contractually, I got to play "owner" and Scott Wiley of HVC, the "contractor," two of the nine smiling faces shown below.



Left to right and clockwise are John Fitzmaurice of AKW Consulting; Tony Ward of AKW, our construction manager; Sam Campagnano representing Stracher, Roth, Gilmore Architects; SCHS Vice President and Franchere Committee Chair Merritt Glennon; SCHS president Ed Reilly, Scott Wiley, VP for Operations of HVC; principal architect Keith Cramer; and SCHS trustees Kim Mabee and Jim Eignor.

The colored caption is to remind you that we are building a green building, complete with solar panels and geothermal heating and cooling. The photo was taken by Katherine Chansky, librarian of our Grems-Doolittle Library, our venue, whose own abundant greenery is visible through its picture window.

Two other contractors, both from Schenectady County, also received substantial contracts. Bellamy Construction of Rotterdam has been working for months installing the needed septic system, driveway, and parking lot, and is now ready to excavate in preparation for what HVC must do. Olde Mohawk Restorations of Niskayuna, the firm that put the new roofs on the original farm buildings shown on page 8, will install the slate roof on the Center itself (for which owner Ward Hamilton donated the slate), all other needed stonework, and the roof on the solar-panel support building (disguised as a picnic pavilion). Join us at *Canalfest*, August 14-15, to watch the building emerging from the ground. (See page 6.)

-Ed

Howlin' at the Moon Music Series

July 26: 7 - 9 pm
*Three Quarter North
 & Dan Johnson*

August 27:
*Running the River
 & more*



Mabee Farm - Route 5S, Rotterdam Jct.
 (518) 887-5073 www.mabeefarm.org

exhibit; it is a window into the early life of Schenectady. The Society has published a catalogue, *"Faces of Schenectady: 1715 – 1750, Portraiture in a Colonial Dutch Town"* by Ona Curran. For more information or to order copies of the catalogue, call 518-374-0263 or email office@schist.org.

July 9th through 11th — A Celebration of Laurens Van Der Volgen

Members of the Van Der Volgen family will visit Schenectady on this weekend. There will be a reception open to the general public for the family at the Society. This is an opportunity to thank the family for its generosity in making the gift of the Laurens Van Der Volgen portrait and various other related artifacts. Come and speak with family members about their history, and talk with Ona Curran, guest curator of the exhibit. During the weekend there will be special tours of the Mabee Farm Historic Site, Vale Cemetery and other locations associated with 18th century Schenectady. Prices will vary for different tours offered. For more information call (518) 374-0263.

Hugh Platt Garden Club

The generosity of the members of this garden club is long overdue for recognition. Wilma Corcoran, the President of this group, and her group's members assume the responsibility of donating the floral decorations of the Society for major events like the Walkabout. They arrive on the Friday before the event with the most beautiful floral arrangements in their own, often historically inspired, containers. They also do the floral decorating for the Christmas Holiday season. The Society is grateful to all these volunteers who make the Society "bloom" on special occasions.

Early Technologies Day

August 7th from 10 am - 4 pm
*Co-sponsored by the Native American Institute
 of the Hudson River Valley*



*Fire starting
 Deer sinew
 Beading*

*Flint Knapping & atlatl throwing
 Brain tanned leather & buckskin
 Basket making
 Artifact ID—NYS Archeological Assoc
 Primitive weaving
 Blacksmithing
 Tinsmithing
 Rope making*

**MABEE FARM
 HISTORIC
 SITE**

**Route 5S
 Rotterdam Jct
 Exit 1A/I-890**

(518) 887-5073
www.mabeefarm.org
mabee@nycap.rr.com

Ongoing at the Museum

The exhibit *Faces of Schenectady: 1715 – 1750* will be at the Society through October. It reflects the work of at least three important New York artists and includes artifacts illustrating the material culture of the period. This is more than a portrait

Faces of Schenectady — continued from page 1

His actions were not typical of other captives who chose to remain in Native or colonial French society. One of the more famous of these captives, Eunice Williams, married one of the Catholic Mohawks. Despite attempts on behalf of her father, Reverend John Williams, and her brother, Reverend Stephen Williams, to “redeem” her, she remained with her adoptive community for the rest of her life.

Laurens made use of his knowledge of Native culture and language after his return to Schenectady, a fact attested to by the numerous land deeds and official documents that bear his name. Along with another former captive from the Schenectady Massacre, Jan Van Eps, Laurens became a translator between Native People and the Colonial New York Government then under the English. According to Susan Staffa, in her book *Schenectady Genesis*, Laurens acted as an interpreter in 1724 between the leaders of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy and the governors of New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. He was also instrumental in the founding of the British fort and trading post at Oswego.

Although his interactions with government leaders were important in the development of New York, his work for Domine Bernardus Freeman and the Reverend Andrews has proved to be the most useful for modern historians. Under their direction and guidance, Laurens translated the morning and evening prayers, the litany, a church catechism, family prayers, and several chapters of the Old and New-Testament into the Mahaque Indian language. The collection was printed by William Bradford in 1715 and was probably intended to help in the conversion of the Haudenosaunee to Christianity. Fewer than ten copies of these translations have survived.

Laurens’ amazing story and contributions to Schenectady’s history would have remained largely unrecognized if it were not for the efforts of a number of people. In the summer of 2008, Mary Chatfield, a descendant of Laurens Van Der Volgen, visited SCHS. During her visit she told Society board member and volunteer Vaughn Nevin that she had a portrait of “Lawrence the Indian.” This led to some initial confusion about the term “Lawrence the Indian,” who is memorialized in a

statue in the Stockade section of the city. This Lawrence was a Christian Mohawk Indian and a great friend of the early settlers who were attacked in the Schenectady Massacre of 1690. He tracked the departing war party of French soldiers and their Indian allies, and managed to rescue three of the prisoners. As the discussion continued, it became clear that the portrait was of Laurens Claese Van Der Volgen, known within that family as *Laurens the Indian* because of his long captivity by Indians and his eventual return to the Schenectady area.

Mary Chatfield’s gift of this collection inspired co-curators Ona Curran and Kathryn Weller to bring together a collection of as many of the early portraits of Laurens’ Schenectady neighbors as possible, a difficult task since almost all of the portraits are located outside of the Capital Region, some as far away as Virginia, and the location of others presumed to exist is unknown. Eight original portraits are on display as well as eight high-quality prints. These portraits and the accompanying artifacts help illustrate the world in which Laurens lived.



Portrait of Helena Van Eps Pieterse by John Heaton 1743

The portrait of Helena Van Eps Pieterse, the daughter of Jan Van Eps, depicts a woman who was born in a less turbulent time than her interpreter father but who was held in high esteem for her diplomatic qualities according to the inscription on her gravestone which reads:

“She did bear Virtues Fame & none could her excel
In hospitality which has been prov'd full well
By all, especially by Strangers of another Nation,
They being entertained by her with Kindness and
Discretion. But to sum up the whole Course of her
life, She's been a friend to all, a Mother and a
loving Wife.”



Portrait of Deborah Glen by Pieter Vanderlyn c. 1739

Other children of survivors of the Schenectady Massacre also helped Schenectady prosper. Four portraits from the Glen Sanders family and a number of important artifacts represent the wealth of this family and its dominance in the community. Colonel Jacob Glen, whose portrait adjoins that of his wife Sarah Wendell Glen, commanded the colonial militia west of Albany which at one time consisted of 3,000 men. Their daughter, Deborah Glen, married John Sanders, from Albany, in 1739. The changes they made to the original house are still visible today. Along with their portraits, the exhibit includes a 1770s gown and matching shoes owned by Deborah. Portraits of Adam and Catherine Swart reflect the close connections between Schenectady and the Schoharie Valley. Born in the Schoharie Valley in 1718, Adam Swart did not move to Schenectady until his marriage to

Catherine Van Patten in 1742. Their son Nicholas built the Swart Tavern in the late 18th century, a building which is still standing, but no longer in use as a tavern. A circa 1840 painting of the Swart Tavern is also on display.

Preparations for this exhibit have uncovered other little-known artifacts relating to Schenectady's earliest residents. Anna Fairly Mol Beck, and her husband Caleb Beck probably moved to Schenectady to be closer to her family, the Mabees. The Becks operated a tavern and dry goods store on the corner of Church and Union Streets. After her husband's death in 1733, Anna continued to run the tavern and store. Anna's *Day Book*, part of a collection in the Union College Schaffer Library, reads like a Who's Who in Schenectady. The accounts, in both Dutch and English, list the products owed to or received from many of Schenectady's residents. The *Day Book's* importance in recreating the daily lives of these people is immeasurable. Sir William Johnson, Tobias Ten Eyck, John (Jan) Baptiste Van Eps, and Jacob Glen, are all referenced as well as the goods they bought from or owed to Anna Beck.

The exhibit *Faces of Schenectady: 1715 – 1750* reflects the work of at least three important New York artists and includes artifacts illustrating the material culture of the period. This is more than a portrait exhibit, it is a window into the early life of Schenectady. To document this exhibit, SCHS has published a catalogue, *"Faces of Schenectady: 1715 – 1750, Portraiture in a Colonial Dutch Town"* by Ona Curran. For more information or to order copies of the catalogue, call 518-374-0263 or email office@schist.org.

The Society acknowledges the many contributors who helped with the creation of this exhibit, which will be on view in the Vrooman Room through October. As the Curator of the Society, I wish to extend my personal thanks to Mary Chatfield and her family members for their generous gifts; to Ona Curran for her expertise and efforts in researching and writing the exhibit catalog; to Laura Lee Linder for her help in editing that catalogue; to Schenectady County for generous grant support; and to the institutions that loaned portraits, prints, and artifacts or were otherwise supportive: the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the Albany Institute of History and Art, the Everson Museum of Art, the First Reformed Church of Schenectady, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, the National Gallery of Art, the New York Historical Society, the Schaffer Library of Union College, the Schenectady Museum, the Shelburne Museum, and the Van Cortlandt Manor House.

MABEE FARM CLASSES

FOR JULY

CORN HUSK DOLLS –

Saturday, July 3 (10 am – 12 noon)

We get many good things from corn: popcorn, corn on the cob and even ethanol to power engines. Native American children also had fun making dolls from the corn's husk. This class will teach you how to make a traditional Iroquois cornhusk doll. A great class for everyone! (Children under 8 years old must be accompanied by an adult). Each participant will leave with their very own cornhusk doll! Cost: \$25.00 (\$20.00 + \$5.00 materials)

SPINNING WITH A DROP SPINDLE –

Saturday, July 3 (1 pm – 4 pm)

The dreaded drop spindle need not be feared! All it takes is a little practice and a sense of humor. Spin alongside Badger the sheep, who is providing the wool. By the time you finish, you will be well on your way to creating your own handspun yarn. Use our spindles or bring your own. Cost: \$30.00 (\$25.00 + \$5.00 materials)

BASKET MAKING – NEW ENGLAND TOTE

Saturday, July 10 (9 am – 5 pm)

Make a beautiful large size, Native American market basket, Penobscot style. This version was designed by Diane Stanton and has two swing straps for carrying. The finished basket size will be approximately: 12 ½" x 12" x 9". Please bring a bag lunch. Cost: \$75.00 (\$40.00 + \$35.00 materials)

BEGINNING BLACKSMITHING – Sat. & Sun.

July 10 & 11 (12pm – 4pm each day)

Watching the hot glowing metal take shape under the pounding force of your hammer is a powerful

experience. Explore a variety of techniques and build your blacksmithing skills in this 2 day class. Learn the basics (nails, S hooks) as well as to how to care for a forge and your equipment. Cost: \$150.00 (includes materials)

Canalfest

Alpin Haus

Aug 14 & 15

12 noon - 5 pm

FREE ADMISSION

Saturday, August 14th

Sloan Wainwright
Chris Shaw
Kevin & Kate McKrell
Beaucoup Blue

Sunday, August 15th

John Kirk & Trish Miller
with Ed Loman
Woods Tea Company
Kyle Miller

HISTORIC BOAT TOURS

on the Wofford
\$15.00 pp
Reserve now!!

MABEE FARM HISTORIC SITE
Route 5s, Rotterdam Junction
(518) 887-5073



Arts & Crafts Festival

Saturday - August 28th
10 am - 5 pm

The best in fine art, soaps, candles, photography, jewelry, handwovens, candles, wood turning, basket weaving, jams, and much more!

\$4. adults, \$3. children & seniors or \$10. carload

MABEE FARM HISTORIC SITE
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For an application call: 518-887-5073



Happenings around the Society:



Faces of Schenectady 1715-1750 Exhibit.



Photos: Ann Aronson

Museum Children's Program – making ice cream!



Schenectady County Historical Society



Mabee Farm buildings with their new cedar roofs



Tug of war at a recent Mabee Farm school program



John Ackner demonstrates basic blacksmithing.

Photos: Ann Aronson, Pat Barrot

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