

The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Volume 12, No. 2

April — June 2016

Confederates in Colonie!!!



Submitted by Mark T. Bodnar, President

Even before the first shots were fired on Ft. Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina in April 1861, a fervor of patriotism was sweeping over our young nation. But it was a divided patriotism. Many factors entered into the decision of the American public. States rights. Slavery. Moonlight and magnolias. Strong central government. Hawk or dove. Each man had to weigh the options and choose a side: the Union of the North; or the Confederacy of the South.

In this issue you will read about four men with Southern heritage. Four men who served in the Army of the Confederate States of America and fought in the War of the Rebellion, or as the South called it, the *War of Northern Aggression*. Four men, each with interesting life stories. All four of them now interred for eternity in the soil of the North, the victorious Union.

Who are these men? What are their stories? And why are they buried in the Town of Colonie?

ROBERT JOHNSTON had the inestimable birthright of an honorable lineage, being a member of one of the old patriotic families of Virginia. He was born in Richmond, Virginia on July 2, 1830, the son of Captain James McCaw and Maria Friend Johnston. His father was a man of military tastes and experience and served as captain of the Richmond Light Infantry Blues, one of the oldest military organizations in the United States. The son, bereaved at an early age by the death of the father, was nurtured by a devoted mother and received his education under her direction in the private schools of Richmond.

At the age of fifteen he entered his stepfather's business, evidently intending at that time to devote himself to a business life. But an event happened shortly afterwards that changed the nature of his career. Through the friendship of his uncle, Dr. Robert Johnston, with Congressman James A. Seddon of Virginia, he was offered an appoint-

ment to the United States Military Academy at West Point. His inherited military instincts led him promptly to accept the appointment and he entered the Academy as Cadet No. 1477, Class of 1850, on July 1, 1846. His course at West Point was dominated by the idea that mere scholastic ambition was unworthy of a soldier. His ambition was to be the best soldier at West Point and his desire was realized when he was made First Captain of the Corps of Cadets. He was the youngest man in his class.

Upon his graduation, he was assigned to duty as a Second Lieutenant in the First Dragoons, with headquarters at Santa Fe, New Mexico. In obedience to orders to join his regiment at once, Lt. Johnston traveled by railway and steamboat to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and onward across the plains on horseback to Santa Fe. The horrors of this trip left an indelible recollection. The country was then in the midst of the excitement of the passage of the Omnibus Bill, and New Mexico had no government other than the military authority. Moreover, an epidemic of cholera was raging, and during the journey down the Ohio River the boat on which Lt. Johnston was traveling used to stop each midnight to bury the dead. He often related that one day while seated at the dinner table he saw a man die in the stateroom opposite his chair. His destination was reached, however, in safety, in October 1850.

During the following six years his life was the well known hard, isolated life of a frontier cavalryman of the time. Campaigning occupied the summers and often the greater part of the winters. In addition, the army officers had charge of the construction of post roads, and were responsible for the protection of the settlers and travelers from the Indians and outlaws. While he was in New Mexico, Lt. Johnston became intimately acquainted with Kit Carson, the famous government scout, and with Lucien Maxwell, who accompanied John C. Fremont on his path-finding expedition. On one occasion Carson and his men became surrounded in the mountains by Indians who were intent on killing them. He succeeded, however, in sending a messenger to the military post at Santa Fe for assistance. Lt. Johnston was detailed to go to his relief and arrived in time to save Carson and his party from death. In the spring of 1855 the men of Troop H, to which Lt. Johnston was attached, attempted to mutiny while halted in the plaza at Taos, New Mexico. The Captain having absented himself, Lt. Johnston assumed command, and by bold and vigorous action succeeded in restoring military discipline. On account of this occurrence the officers of Troop H were subsequently ordered to appear before a court martial. Lt. Johnston's conduct was completely vindicated by that tribunal, the evidence showing that he had quelled the mutiny almost single handed.

Among the members of Troop H was one man named Stevens. During the mutiny Stevens attempted to shoot the Major of the regiment, but was disarmed and arrested by Lieutenant Johnston. For this crime Stevens was sentenced to the military prison at Fort Leavenworth. He escaped from the prison, however, and became a member of John Brown's band in the Kansas border warfare. Subsequently he followed Brown to Virginia and shared his fate at Charleston.

In 1856 Lt. Johnston was ordered to Albany, New York, on recruiting service. He remained on duty at Albany until the spring of 1858, when he was hurriedly ordered to join his troops then stationed in the territory which later became the state of Washington. Hostilities had broken out with the Indians in that territory, and the government sent out an expedition from New York by sea to assist in quelling the disturbance. Lt. Johnston proceeded with this expedition to Washington. He served in Washington and Oregon until 1861, with headquarters at Walla Walla and The Dalles. While stationed at Walla Walla, he took part in an expedition for the purpose of surveying and constructing a road to Salt Lake City.

In March 1861, Lt. Johnston came east upon a leave of absence. During this leave of absence, Gov. Letcher signed the ordinance of secession for Virginia, and Lt. Johnston, deeming it his duty to offer his services to his native state in the impending conflict, immediately resigned his commission in the army and hastened to Richmond. Almost immediately upon his return to Virginia he was appointed Colonel of the Third Virginia Cavalry. He served with that regiment in the Army of Northern Virginia, during 1861. In 1862 he was appointed Instructor of Cavalry Tactics, and attached to the headquarters of the Confederate Army operating in the Peninsula. Just before the Seven Days' battles he was attacked with malarial fever and was completely disabled for several months. Upon his recovery he was temporarily attached to Gen. George E. Pickett's division. He served with this command until after the battle of Fredericksburg, when he was again detached and ordered to Richmond. During the rest of the war Col. Johnston served at headquarters at Richmond, except for a short period during the siege of Petersburg, when he was detailed to participate in the defense of that city. Col. Johnston's active military career ended with the capitulation of Richmond.



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COLONEL ROBERT JOHNSTON.

Photo Courtesy US Military Academy at West Point

At the conclusion of hostilities, in 1865, Col. Johnston rejoined his family and removed with them to Suspension Bridge, New York, where he had accepted the position of Instructor in Mathematics and Tactics in De Veaux College. His connection with De Veaux College continued until 1870, when he removed to Geneva, New York. Geneva then became and continued to be his home until the time of his death.

While stationed at Albany, in 1857, Col. Johnston married Miss Catharine Sanders Van Rensselaer, daughter of Judge John S. Van Rensselaer, of Albany. To them were born seven sons and one daughter: Robert; Dunkin V. R.; Russell M.; Catharine V. R.; Leonard K.; James M.; Charles V. R.; and Malcolm S. The death of his eldest son, in 1887, was a severe affliction to Col. Johnston.

During his thirty-two years' residence in Geneva, Col. Johnston was one of the best known and most esteemed townsmen. In his private life he returned to the ideals of his childhood, always wearing the long coat and slouch hat peculiar to the Southern gentleman of a generation before. It was his custom, when in health, to walk much

about the streets of Geneva, and his exquisite courtesy and fine military bearing commanded the respect and admiration of all the residents of Geneva. In the smaller circle of personal friends it was a privilege to come in contact with the kindness of heart, the courtliness and native elegance which were his by nature. Col. Johnston was an insatiable reader, and his special fondness for the physical sciences, military science and English literature had led him to acquire an exhaustive knowledge of those subjects.



After a prolonged illness, Robert Johnston died July 8, 1902, at the age of 72. His body was laid to rest on the Middle Ridge, Lot 18, Section 56, in a plot adjacent to many Van Rensselaer relatives interred in Albany Rural Cemetery.

If anyone has the book "Town of Colonie: A Pictorial History", and/or the book "Wolf Road: A Century of Development" that they'd like to donate to the Society, we'd gladly accept all offers. Please contact Mark Bodnar at 459-5147. Thank you!

ABSALOM RUGGLES BAINBRIDGE was born in Friedland, King George County, Virginia, in 1847. At the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861, Bainbridge joined the 3rd Virginia Cavalry, CSA. At times he also rode with the 1st Virginia Cavalry, 43rd Battalion, of the famous Mosby's Raiders.

Two weeks after John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln, Booth and co-conspirator David Herold were on the run, being pursued by Union cavalry units. While waiting to cross the Rappahannock River, three horsemen approached the men. They were Lt. Mortimer Bainbridge Ruggles, his cousin Lt. Absalom Ruggles Bainbridge, and Pvt. William Storke Jett. Herold informed the three Confederates that he was with John Wilkes Booth, the man who had killed Lincoln. The Confederates escorted Booth & Herold across the Rappahannock to the farm of Richard Garrett, a Confederate sympathizer.

Leaving Booth at Garrett's home, the three cavalrymen and David Herold continued on. The next morning, all but Jett returned to the Garrett farm. There, cousins Ruggles and Bainbridge left Herold with Booth and said goodbye, but came galloping back a few minutes later to give the assassin distressing news: Federal troops were crossing the river at Port Royal. Again Ruggles & Bainbridge hurried off. Early the next morning, Union Cavalry surrounded the tobacco barn where Booth and Herold were hiding. Herold gave himself up, but Booth was shot in the Garrett barn, purportedly by Sgt. Boston Corbett.



Absalom Ruggles Bainbridge, c. 1903
Photo Courtesy The Surratt Society



Ruggles, Bainbridge and Jett were rounded up and sent first to the old capitol Prison in Washington for interrogation. Later they were sent to Johnson's Island, a large Prisoner of War camp for Confederates on Lake Erie, off the shore of Cleveland. They arrived, but without the necessary paperwork. The commandant of the prison sent the three men back to Washington.

Released from custody after swearing an oath of allegiance, Absalom Bainbridge moved to NYC where he married a woman named Elizabeth Cabot. Their union produced three children, but the couple divorced after 11 years. Years later, in 1901, he married Georgia A. Wiltsie of Schoharie Village, NY.

Absalom Bainbridge worked for the A.T. Stewart Dry Goods Company in New York City as an interior decorator. His job took him to various cities such as Cincinnati, St. Louis, Philadelphia and Albany, NY. He made friends in all these destinations. On May 31, 1902, Absalom Bainbridge died of cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 54, and was buried on the South Ridge in Lot 279, Section 26 of Albany Rural Cemetery. He is buried in the plot, next to his friend, plot owner Harriet Hotaling.

Welcome New Members!

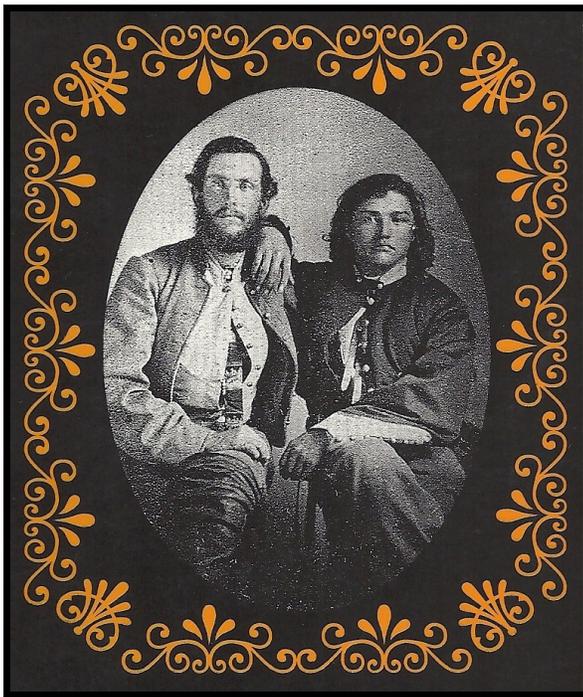
The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie would like to welcome our newest members:

Edward Delehanty, Albert J. Frankovic,
William Collins, and Steve Trimm.

Welcome Aboard!!

SAMUEL OSCAR BERRY was born in Missouri in 1838. A graduate of the Kentucky State Normal College in 1858, he became a schoolteacher in Mercer County, Kentucky. He lived for a time with the Shakers, and also became an ordained minister in the Christian Church. When his sister was bayoneted to death by a Union soldier, he joined Co. G of the 6th Kentucky Cavalry under Gen. John Hunt Morgan. After Morgan's defeat in 1864, Berry wound up with the band of guerillas led by Henry C. Magruder. Berry's right arm had been severed below his elbow, although there is conflicting information as to the cause. One report indicates an agricultural accident, while another account points to amputation from a wound during the war. Either way, forever after he was known as "One Armed" Berry.

A cohort of Berry was **Marcellus Jerome Clark**. Clark was born in Kentucky. His aunt Pauline was married to the "Gray Ghost", John Singleton Mosby, a Confederate army cavalry battalion commander. Clark was better known by his sobriquet, "Sue Mundy". Rumor was that he got the name "Sue Mundy" from a woman who fell in love with him, but not in the normal way. It was claimed that in Boston, Clark became obsessed with the woman and stole her clothes and horse. He donned her clothes and, imitating her, rode sidesaddle around Boston. Clark himself insisted the name came from a girl who was a horse thief and tried to blame him for her thefts.



Samuel O. Berry (left) with "Sue Mundy"
Photo Courtesy John Stickles, author of "The Legends of Sue Mundy & One Armed Berry: Confederate Guerrillas"



In 1861, "Sue Mundy" was a member of the 4th Kentucky Infantry, CSA. He was captured during the fall of Ft. Donelson and sent to a prison camp. It was there that he developed a strong hatred of Yankees. Escaping from his imprisonment, he served with several different Confederate units, eventually leaving the regular army and joining Henry C. Magruder's band of guerillas in 1864. This is where "One Armed Berry" met "Sue Mundy."

In September 1864 a train derailed in Kentucky and suddenly highwaymen appeared from nowhere and held up the surviving passengers. A one-armed bandit waved his pistol at them and took their money. He was identified as "One Armed Berry." Another was identified as "Sue Mundy." Later in September they held up a drug store, pistol whipping the clerk. In October they held up a stagecoach. Again they were identified by the passengers. Later that day they robbed a bank, holding hostages and firing their revolvers. The town resident returned fire, and Mundy's horse was killed during the getaway. Angry at the residents of the town, Berry shot and killed a hostage.

On Nov 5th the 37th Kentucky Mounted Infantry caught up with the gang. Berry was shot in the side, but Mundy escaped. Three of the gang were killed. The gang banded together again and held up the same drug store a second time. While in town they also held up the

sheriff and stole his wallet, saddlebags and all the guns from his office. Leaving town they stopped at the home of John Foster and robbed him. Then they asked him which army he belonged to. When he answered, "None," they shot him in the face and killed him.

Fifteen miles down the road they came to the William Yager farm. They robbed Yager & killed his houseguest. In the morning they arrived at the farm of William Yates, robbed him & his widowed daughter and stole their horses. At the Thomas Hall farm they killed Hall as he & his wife begged for mercy – then burned their children's clothes and blankets.

At Springfield, Kentucky the gang robbed a bank and held up most of the businesses and town folk, murdering two of them. In early December 1864 they learned of four blacks (2 men, 2 women) who had been arrested for arson. They abducted them from the jail and murdered three of them. On December 29 they were accused of murdering a soldier and a physician. For the next several months they continued their carnage, and at times they joined up with Bill Marion, William Quantrill, James Younger, and Frank James and their gangs.

In February 1865, "Sue Mundy" & Henry C. Magruder were ambushed in Tennessee. Magruder was severely wounded. A doctor was sent for, but the doctor turned him in to a local Wisconsin military unit. The soldiers surrounded the barn they were hiding in. After a gun battle, Mundy & Magruder were captured. Mundy was taken to Louisville where he was sentenced to hang. When he dropped from the gallows, his neck didn't break – he strangled to death. He was just 20 years old.

"One Armed Berry" continued his rampaging ways with a new gang, adding rape his growing list of atrocities. Finally, in the end of 1865, Berry was arrested and taken into custody. His trial opened on Jan 14, 1866. He was charged with 6 counts of robbery, 2 counts of rape, and 12 counts of murder. He was found guilty of all counts and sentenced to hang in March 1866.

Under peril of a reprisal by the local citizenry, who threatened to overwhelm the local sheriff's deputy and drag Berry from the jail cell to lynch him, and also in the spirit of reconciliation, Gen. John McCauley Palmer, the post-war Commanding Officer of the Department of Kentucky, commuted Berry's sentence to 10 years hard labor at the state prison in Albany, NY.

While in Albany, Berry continuously demanded his release. His defense was that the crimes he was accused of, if they were even true, occurred during the war. Now that the war was over, he insisted, his record should be cleaned and he should be released from prison.

Interesting concept, indeed. Berry even wrote to then President Ulysses S. Grant for a pardon. If the request ever even reach Grant, it was obviously never acted upon. On July 3, 1873, "One Armed Berry" died of

consumption in the Albany Penitentiary and was buried on the North Ridge of Albany Rural Cemetery, Single Grave 19, Tier 9, Section 98, in a plot reserved for prisoners from the penitentiary. He was 34 years old.

WRITER'S NOTE: There is an alternative history of One Armed Berry. This biography asserts that all these charges were drummed up – that Berry was a good soldier and a decent man. It also refers to Berry as "Captain." It's important to note that this biography happened to be written by Thomas F. Berry, One Armed Berry's brother. You decide.

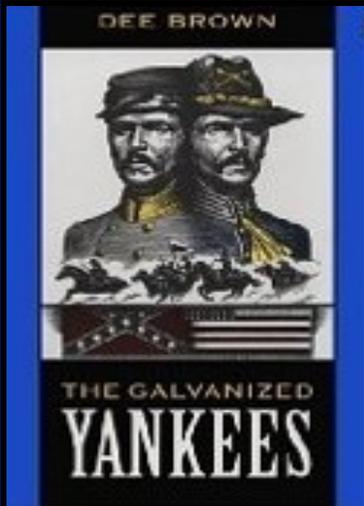
JEREMIAH STOKES was born in 1834 in County Tipperary, Ireland. Jeremiah's birth is recorded in the Church of St. Mary's Irishtown, an Irish ghetto outside the walls of the city of Clonmel (about mid-way between Waterford and Limerick). He was taken by nuns to a workhouse, where he was afforded no education. At 15, he was sent away from the workhouse and went to Liverpool.

In November of 1856 at the age of 22, Jeremiah sailed to America, landing at the Port of New York. Afterward he travelled to Savannah, Georgia where he worked in a brickyard. In March of 1863, several days before the Confederate conscription took effect, he enlisted in Confederate service. Enlisting before being conscripted, he qualified to receive an enlistment bonus. He served with the 63rd Georgia Volunteer Infantry Regiment, part of the Confederate Army of Tennessee.

Stokes was captured by Union troops on June 16, 1864 during a night withdrawal of his regiment at Golgatha Church, Georgia (near present day Atlanta), and sent to a northern prison camp in Rock Island, Illinois. Not long after, President Lincoln, under great political pressure to lighten the draft quotas in the northern states, sent a trusted young Army aide, Captain Henry Reed Rathbone, to Rock Island Barracks to form three regiments of "Volunteer Infantry" from among the Confederate prisoners.

WRITER'S NOTE: Capt. Rathbone was from Albany, and was the son of Jared Rathbone, the first Mayor of Albany to be elected by popular vote. His father having died, he was at the time the step son of U.S. Senator Ira Harris of Albany, who had married Rathbone's widowed mother, Pauline. Captain (later Major) Rathbone was also engaged to Ira Harris' daughter, Clara Harris. In April 1865, Henry Rathbone and Clara Harris were sitting in the balcony with President & Mrs. Lincoln in Ford's Theater the night Lincoln was assassinated.

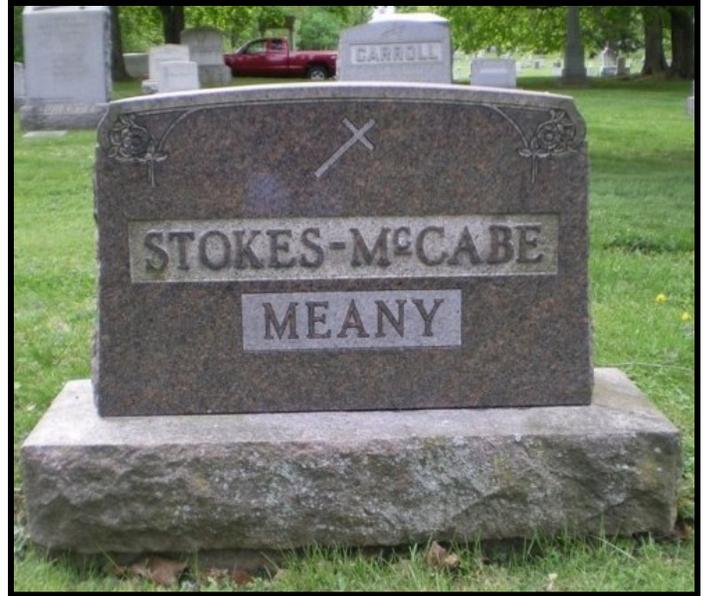
Stokes enlisted into the Union Army, thereby becoming a “Galvanized Yankee”. The term Galvanized Yankee was chosen because when an electric current is passed through tin it changes from a grayish to a bluish hue. Stokes was placed in the 2nd US Infantry and sent to Fort Leavenworth for the Indian Campaigns. His unit escorted trains, stages, and guarded outposts on the Santa Fe Trail. He was mustered out at Ft. Leavenworth in Nov 1865.



There is no extant photo of Jeremiah Stokes. Pictured is the cover of a book about “Galvanized Yankees”

Jeremiah Stokes eventually settled in a house on Clinton Street in Albany in the “Sheridan’s Hollow” section of the city. The house still stands.

Jeremiah Stokes lived through three momentous periods of American History: The Irish Immigration, the Civil War and the Indian Campaigns, all before



the age of 35. Jeremiah Stokes died in Albany in 1915. He was 81 years old.

WRITER’S NOTE: Special thanks to Dr. Joe Meany, descendant of Jeremiah Stokes, for allowing his research to be published in this newsletter

Coming soon in your mailbox - the flyer on our upcoming
45th ANNUAL DINNER of the HSTC!
 Thursday, May 19, 2016 at Shaker Ridge Country Club

Below are some photos of last year’s Dinner.



Yes, I would like to become a member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$ _____ is enclosed.

Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues
<input type="checkbox"/> Students and Senior Citizens . .	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100—\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Business	50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$250.00 & Up

Please accept my additional donation of \$ _____ as a gift to the Historical Society. *The Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation.*

Name _____

Address _____

Cit/Town _____ Zip Code _____ Home Phone # _____

Cell Phone Number _____ E-Mail _____

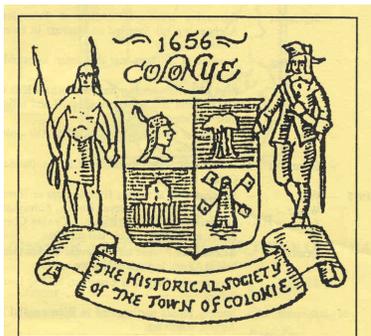
Please mail to Membership Chairperson c/o Historical Society, Memorial Town Hall, Newtonville, N. Y. 12128-0508

CHARTERED BY THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE TOWN OF COLONIE**

Kevin Franklin: Town Historian

Current Officers of the Society



Historical Society Founded 1971

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Support the Society's efforts to stimulate an appreciation of the historical heritage of your community. Join Now!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The content of this newsletter is a mirror image of one I wrote for Albany Rural Cemetery in 2015, with one additional story: that being the tale of a Rebel soldier buried in St. Agnes Cemetery. Most people aren't aware that members of the Confederate Army are interred this far north, let alone in our local cemeteries! I hope you enjoy the read.

Our **Annual Dinner** will be held on **Thursday, May 19th**, at the **Shaker Ridge Country Club**. HSTC Members Bob Mulligan and Randy Patten will co-present a Power Point presentation titled, "*David C. Lithgow: Albany Artist.*" A flyer will be mailed to all members very soon. Hope to see you there!

This is my final newsletter as President of the HSTC. My two, two-year terms expire at our Annual Dinner in May and a new President will be elected. It has been both an honor and a pleasure to serve you. In my four years as President I have learned a great deal about the history of the Town of Colonie. My sincere gratitude to every Board Member that served and contributed to the success of the Historical Society during my tenure as President. We are indeed fortunate to have such a dedicated, involved group of people. I know the Board and the membership will support my successor as you did me as we endeavor to grow and continue in preserving the history of our Town. See ya in the funny papers!

Mark Bodnar, President