Imagine you are a fourth grader on a class tour of the Ten Broeck Mansion. The guide leads you into a room with red walls, asks you to gaze out the windows overlooking the gardens, and tells you to imagine a time when there were no other buildings in sight. Well, except for two brick structures. The guide explains that these structures were likely used as a summer kitchen and sleeping quarters for the slaves owned by the Ten Broecks.

“We’re going to meet some of the slaves who once lived here,” the guide tells you. But how do we know about these individuals?

I spent a large portion of my time as the intern at the Ten Broeck Mansion uncovering what little information is available about the people enslaved on the property. To supplement what I learned, I also researched the lives of enslaved people in similar circumstances. By the end of my research, I’d figured out what kind of work each person was likely tasked with, what kind of clothing they would have worn, and what their daily lives may have been like.

I started with Susannah, who we know about only because of her manumission papers. While these papers are currently all we have of Susannah, they are an excellent start. Combined with research about the duties of domestic female slaves during the time period, I was able to imagine what Susannah’s work life may have been like. She was most likely responsible for caring for the Ten Broeck children, as well as her own, preparing the family’s meals, warming their beds on chilly nights, purchasing goods from the market, and making and mending clothing.

Next, I searched for the names of any other slaves who lived on the Ten Broeck Mansion grounds. Through the Albany Institute of History and Art, I found record of a male slave named John acting as a courier for the family. While it’s not much, it was enough to get me started.

Based on the fact that the mansion was not a working farm, it’s safe to conclude John was a domestic slave, much like Susannah. He acted as a courier, certainly, and likely did other household chores commonly assigned to domestic male slaves such as repairing any damages to the home, chopping firewood, driving the horse-drawn carriage (if the family owned one), and tending to any gardens on the property. He may have had a specialized skill, as male slaves usually did, such as carpentry or blacksmithing.

In order to give students a full range of the forms of slavery in the Albany area, I decided to include one more enslaved man, Peter, who was enslaved by Stephen I. Schuyler. Schuyler, unlike Ten Broeck, owned a large piece of farmland, so Peter’s work was quite different from that of Susannah and John. He likely tilled the fields, planted, tended to, and harvested crops, and took care of livestock. He may have felled wood like John, and likely had a specialized skill he used when not in the fields. Including Peter was important to me because when we talk about slavery in New York we tend to focus on the lives of domestic slaves, which is important, but often means we ignore the fact that there were many, many slaves working our farmland.

My hope is that by getting to know these three individuals who lived in and were enslaved in Albany, students can begin to put names and faces to the rather abstract concept of “slavery.” I believe history is best learned through the narratives of people who lived it, and is especially powerful when the stories they have to tell aren’t often told. I also hope that this basic information on Susannah, John, and Peter may lead to more research into their lives and those of the other enslaved individuals who lived on the Ten Broeck property. We cannot forget: the history of the mansion belongs just as much to them as it does the Ten Broeck family.

Jesse Serfilippi
Executive Director’s Corner

Members and Friends–

I have some exciting news to share, the stork will be dropping off a baby boy this summer and we are overjoyed! While my husband is hopeful the baby will take after him, I’m positive we’re actually growing a future Albany historian!

With this good news also comes some hard news. After six wonderful years, I’ll be leaving ACHA in mid-July to focus on my family. I am so very grateful for my time here and the many unforgettable memories and friends I’ve made. It’s tough for me to put into words how much this organization has become a part of who I am, but I do know it’s because of all you, our amazing supporters, who have tirelessly contributed so much of yourselves to build ACHA into what it is today.

Our hiring committee is hard at work finding the perfect candidate to take on this important and fulfilling role and we plan to have them in place by mid-June. I welcome you to stop by this summer so I can say goodbye and introduce you to ACHA’s new Executive Director!

The People of Prospect

We are excited to announce that our new school program, “The People of Prospect” is almost complete. Jessica Serfilippi, our Fall 2016 education intern, was gracious enough to return to lead a group of ACHA trustees in the first run-through of the program in April. Our trustees did an outstanding job of looking at the program through fourth grade eyes, asking questions, and offering feedback. I can only hope that all fourth graders are as prepared and well behaved as our trustees!

“I think the fact that there are so many hands-on and participatory activities in the tour will really engage the students. It certainly did for us!”

– Wendy Burch, ACHA Trustee

The period of history our program explores is perfect for fourth grade students. We invite them to consider what life was like for the people who lived at Ten Broeck Mansion near the end of the 18th century. We illustrate the roles different people played and the connections between them by investigating the objects they used on a daily basis. Participants are also introduced to some of the rights and restrictions experienced by those living at different social and economic levels.

“I think the activities where some kids are assigned to an inferior role in society are very effective. By the cards or historic objects they are given, they find themselves a woman, a slave, or a man who doesn’t own property and thus can’t vote. Kids have a strong sense of fairness and will respond to the injustice of this system they are suddenly placed in. They will recognize that, as students in the same grade, they are somewhat equal, but the roles they have been asked to play are far from equal.”

– Worth Gretter, ACHA Trustee

We were fortunate to be able to purchase a number of reproduction handling objects for the school program. Objects are one way into the personal stories of those who lived and worked at “Prospect.” Even the most ordinary objects in a home can have a complex story to tell. Among our objects is a chamber pot. This artifact will lead into thought-provoking discussions about status within the household, the work of slaves, and how the lack of basic infrastructure impacted everyone in some way.

It was wonderful to see the good work of our education interns come alive during the tour. The content and activities were strong, and the trustees’ participation provided excellent insight. “The People of Prospect” will demonstrate the value of Ten Broeck Mansion as a historical resource that lends itself to many facets of the public school curriculum.

Thank You Docents!

Last weekend was our second annual docent brunch at Ten Broeck Mansion. It was a pleasure meeting ACHA’s veteran docents. It is heartening to know that visitors are being greeted by such intelligent and dedicated interpreters who clearly love Ten Broeck Mansion and are devoted to telling our story. Our winter docent recruiting efforts were a great success and I was happy to see so many new faces. This summer we are planning some fun outings for our docents to both inform their tours and show our appreciation. I am planning a docent visit to Schuyler Mansion and some guest speakers to bring some fresh perspectives to the stories we tell at the museum. The spring flowers are up and blooming in the garden at Ten Broeck Mansion. In a few weeks our doors will be open and tour season will begin. I am looking forward to a great season with all of our docents! Happy Spring!

Karen Giordano
Meet our Intern

Name: Jessie Serfilippi
Hometown: Delmar, NY
Current Enrollment: MFA in Creative Writing at The College of Saint Rose
Intern Project: Finishing school group tour, designing pre- and post-visit materials for students, and rewriting tour script for students.

Here’s what Jesse had to say about her time at ACHA:

“From the start of my time at ACHA all of my tasks centered around the new education program — a specialized, interactive tour for 3rd through 8th grade students. Only one lesson still needed designing by the time I arrived: the one that discusses slavery.

In face of such a heavy topic, I decided that the best way for students to learn about the day-to-day realities of slavery at the Ten Broeck Mansion was through the eyes of some of the individuals who actually lived it. After much research, I found three people — two of whom lived at the Ten Broeck Mansion — who could the broader story of slavery in Albany.

My hope is that this lesson in particular will make a meaningful impact on students and inspire them to learn more about history. My time here has also shown me that I really can use my background in writing and my love of early American history to pursue a career at a museum or other history-related field, which has always been a dream of mine.

I hope that the work I did while at ACHA is helpful to the students who’ll attend these tours, and that it will help them become more informed, interested, and engaged citizens of the city and world we all share. I am so grateful for the time I got to spend here and for the opportunity to design such an educational aspect of the program. I enjoyed myself so much that I never wanted my time here to end!”

Albany Facts with Brahm the Beaver!

Hi, Brahm the Beaver here with a fun fact about Albany! Did you know that the New York State animal is me, the beaver? The Beaver was adopted as the state animal in 1975. Adult beavers are three to four feet long and weigh 40 to 50 pounds. In the 1600’s, Dutch fur traders settled near the present capital, Albany, to buy beaver pelts and trade with the Native Americans. Check me out on the Albany coat of arms!

ASK ACHA

Welcome to our feature where we answer our readers’ most pressing questions about Albany County History. This week our subject is a timeless one.

Q: What was life like for the enslaved people living at Ten Broeck Mansion?

It is difficult to know exactly what the enslaved people at Ten Broeck experienced on a daily basis, but based on some surviving documents, the architecture of the house, and some archeology, however, a faint picture begins to emerge.

When the mansion was built in 1797, Abraham Ten Broeck’s architect designed the mansion to accommodate his slaves with separate living quarters and work spaces (likely in the attic and basement). The mansion also featured separate, enclosed staircases that allowed the enslaved occupants to move about the house largely out of sight of the family and their guests. These have since been removed and obscured. In addition, two small outbuildings were built at the rear flanks of the mansion intended for housing and work space for the slaves (Figure 1).

In all, about 10 enslaved people lived in the mansion in 1800. These individuals (men, women, and children) were tasked with many of the menial household chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, sewing, gardening, and the serving of food and beverages.

By 1799, New York adopted legislation that began the process of gradual freedom or emancipation for slaves. Following Abraham Ten Broeck’s death in 1810, his widow Elizabeth manumitted (conditionally freed) a slave named Susannah, as well as her three daughters. The manumission only provided limited freedom for this enslaved family as they were required to return to the mansion once a week to do the “washing, ironing of the family, and spring and fall in every year assist in whitewashing and cleaning house and helping at the killing as usual... without price, fee, payment, or reward.” Evidence of some of these tasks has been recovered in recent archeological excavations (Figure 2).

It is hard for me to say with certainty what life was like for the enslaved at Ten Broeck. Based on the scant evidence available it was a physically and psychologically demanding, if not outright demoralizing, existence. And unfortunately for folks like Susannah, conditions do not appear to have improved after their emancipation.

Answer generously provided by Matt Kirk, Hartgen Archeological Associates.

If you have a question pertaining to the Ten Broeck Mansion or Albany County History please email karen@tenbroeckmansion.org. One question will be selected and answered in our next newsletter.

Call to the Public for Help in Curating the 1812 Room!

We are on the verge of installing new wallpaper in the 1812 Room. It is going to be furnished as a ca. 1840 bed chamber of a retired officer from the War of 1812. We have some items on hand, but we need more to complete the space. Donations of decorative arts or textiles for dressing the bed would be welcome; an overshot coverlet from the 1830’s with American eagle or similar design would be appropriate. Funds for reproduction window dressings and wall-to-wall carpeting are also needed. If you have a relevant piece you would like to see immortalized in a museum, please contact the Albany County Historical Association at 518-436-9826.

Left top, the 1812 Room currently. Left bottom, the 1812 Room in the 1950s. Right, examples of appropriate coverlets and decorative arts for 1840s interpretation.
HELP US PRESERVE A RICH HERITAGE

The Albany County Historical Association (ACHA) is a private non-profit chartered in 1942. ACHA’s mission is to preserve, present, and promote the rich history and culture of Albany County. Membership proceeds go towards educational programming and preservation of the historic Ten Broeck Mansion.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

We cordially invite you to join the ACHA and enjoy the many benefits of membership, including free admission for Mansion tours and lectures, newsletters and advance notice of upcoming events, discounted ticket prices to a variety of events, and much more! Please visit our website for complete membership opportunities—www.tenbroeckmansion.org.

- Student $25
- ACHA Partners $25
- Individual $40
- Family $50
- Patron $100
- Sustaining $250
- Benefactor $500

Membership: NEW ( ) RENEWAL ( ) Amount Enclosed: ____

Name: ________________________ Email: ________________________ Phone: ________________________

Address: ________________________ City: ________________________ State: ______ Zip: ____________

Make checks payable to Albany County Historical Association, 9 Ten Broeck Place Albany, NY 12210

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram @tenbroeckmansion to stay updated on ACHA and Mansion news and events!

Upcoming Events:

**Tour Season:** May-Oct Thurs/Fri 10am-3pm & Sat/Sun 1pm-3pm—Guided tours of Ten Broeck Mansion are available through the fall!

**Annual Meeting at University Club:** Thursday, June 8, 4:30pm—ACHA’s Annual Meeting will review our accomplishments over the last year and our nominating committee will introduce a slate of new and returning nominees to elect to our Board of Trustees.

**Archaeology Camp Open House at King’s Place Gallery:** Friday, July 14 2:00pm—Join us for an open house showcasing what our archaeology campers have been hard at work digging up during their week!

**Theater in the Gardens, “Sleepy Hollow”:** Aug 4-6 & Aug 10-13, Various Times—It’s time for our annual Theater in the gardens presented by Confetti Stage, Inc. This year’s family friendly play is “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.”

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram @tenbroeckmansion to stay updated on ACHA and Mansion news and events!