A Voyage through ACHA’s Collections: The Celestial Globe

One highlight of the Ten Broeck Collection includes a celestial globe supported by a three-legged wooden stand. This globe has been on loan from Mrs. Gladys C. Clark since 1978. The maker is Murray & Johnson. The charts on the globe are printed on paper covered in varnish. A wooden rim with engraved scales and names of constellations surrounds the globe, as well as a metal scale. When the wooden scale and the metal scale are used together, they can measure longitude and latitude to give precise coordinates.

When I first heard of this star chart, certain questions started to nag me: “What is its significance: utility, mysticism, or a mere interest in star gazing?” At first glance, we may think, wait, the sky isn’t spherical – perhaps the spherical celestial globe was based on historical misconceptions of the heavens as a spherical entity. From the ancient Greeks to Dante’s Paradiso, it was, in fact, believed that the heavens were a sphere surrounding the earth. However, the non-Euclidean accuracy of the astronomical sphere is still used by astronomers today to locate stars in relation to one another based on our viewing from the spherical earth.

This proves that the celestial globe was capable of scientific accuracy and utility. It was especially important for seafarers to be able to identify constellations with accuracy because, when at sea, constellations could be used for navigation. The North Star, located just above the North Pole, appropriately indicated north, as would a compass. Other constellations would rise and set, such as Orion, which rises in the East and sets in the West. This predictably positioned rising and setting give an indication of a “true east” and a “true west.” However, not all constellations are visible at different parts of the globe in different parts of the year, so an understanding of several constellations was integral to navigation. Failure to navigate accurately often meant shipwreck or starvation. You’ll notice two different means of charting stars on this map: one is by locating stars that would appear stationary and unchanging throughout the year, like the North Star, and another for stars that would appear to move throughout the year, like the Scorpio constellation. The moving constellations, such as Scorpio, are associated with their alignment with the sun during certain months, such as November. It is through this system that horoscopes have been defined for centuries.

You’ll notice that the globe is actually mounted upside down. This might suggest that the globe was used for close study and utility; perhaps the person using it was attempting to navigate and memorize the constellations of the Southern hemispheres. While many celestial globes were used as decoration, those globes usually charted stars with elaborate images depicting the literal interpretations of constellations, for example, Leo as a lion. This globe, however, is highly focused on means of measurement and accuracy, suggesting that its primary use was scientific utility. Innovations in longitudinal cartography were made as a result of the relative positioning of stars. For example, regions of the earth such as the Tropic of Capricorn were recognized and plotted in relation to the stars positioned directly above those areas of the earth. You’ll notice stars on the celestial globe charted regionally. On this map, those regions include Pneum atica and Argo (which was named after a ship in Greek mythology.) New constellations and methods of charting stars are being created all of the time, and, by the 18th Century, there were so many overlapping and conflicting constellations that different kinds of constellation maps were made in conflicting astronomical schools. According to UNESCO, “by 1880, the New General Catalogue listed 7840 ‘non-stellar objects’ – star clusters and nebulae that we now know as galaxies.” It’s probable that regions like “Pneum atica” are specific to contemporary changes in the charting of stars because it is difficult to find documentation of the celestial region of Pneum atica elsewhere. Interestingly, “pneumatic” can mean several different things, including a scientific meaning of something that contains air or gas; it can also mean “relating to the spirit,” or even “having a well-proportioned female figure, especially bust.” These many meanings make the region of Pneum atica all the more mysterious. It could have astrological significance relating to air, or it could have a mystical connotation relating to spiritualism.

-Anna O’Meara
ACHA Assistant Administrator
IT'S BEEN AN EXCITING SUMMER at the Ten Broeck Mansion. Some highlights include our Archeology Field School where student campers continued their work on the Thomas Elkin’s property and uncovered a variety of important artifacts. Our partnership with Confetti Stage, Inc. continued this year with the delightful play, “Robin Hood,” performed for two full weekends in our gardens. Over three hundred people came to the Mansion to watch this locally written play and we were so pleased to offer two free shows. We also hosted an enchanting Murder Mystery evening centered on the Mansion’s previous owner Dudley Olcott. The gardens continue to amaze visitors with their beauty and the Mansion’s back porch was painted thanks to a generous donation from ACHA Trustee Joanne Justice.

We’re busily preparing for the upcoming holiday season and I’m thrilled to announce our first annual Holiday Gala at 677 Prime on November 19. We’ll continue to offer old favorites as well such as holiday teas, music events, lectures, visits with Sinterklaas, and much more. Make sure your December plans include a visit to the beautifully decorated Ten Broeck Mansion.

As we celebrate all of these exciting events and improvements this year we know there is still much more to do. ACHA recently sent out the annual appeal. I urge you to contribute by making a tax deductible donation, or attending our Holiday Gala. It is thanks to the support of people like you that allows ACHA to continue its quality programming and preservation of the historic Ten Broeck Mansion.

Jillian Altenburg

New Hire

My name is Anna O’Meara and I’m the new Administrative Assistant here at Ten Broeck. I’m honored to contribute to the Albany County Historical Association’s mission to preserve, present, and promote the rich history and culture of Albany County. I’ve been working with museums and galleries since 2008, and I’m looking forward to growing and sharing my interests in history and education.

To introduce myself, I thought it would make the most sense to talk about why I’ve become so specifically interested in the history of Albany County. As someone who grew up in Indiana, many people ask me why I’m interested in Albany. I find Albany to be an ideal location for anyone with a deep interest in American history. I have a specific interest in historic sites and houses as sorts of primary sources for understanding the past. Albany has an incredibly dynamic history, from its Dutch heritage, to British conquest, to its role in the American Revolution and the Civil War, and its key role in industrial modernization in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

As a new staff member at Ten Broeck, I’m looking forward to becoming part of this vibrant community. I believe in the importance of conversation and collaboration. I find that the support for history and heritage in Albany is very strong, and I’m excited to find such heightened general interest and support for history and for informal education. I encourage you to reach out to me with any questions or suggestions you have via email at anna@tenbroeckmansion.org.
Upcoming events

Lecture, “An Appalling Calamity” - Wednesday October 28, 6pm
Architectural Historian, Walter Wheeler, will discuss spooky accidents and tragedies of Albany’s past. $5/Free for ACHA members.

Historic Haunted Pub Crawl - Thursday, October 22, 6pm, 6:30pm, & 7:00pm

Lecture, “The Spirit of New York” - Thursday, November 12, 6:30pm

Holiday Gala at 877 Prime - Thursday, November 19, 6:30pm
Enjoy a three-course dinner honoring Times Union journalist Paul Grondahl. Mingle with like-minded supporters and history enthusiasts. $100 per person, reservations required.

First Look - Thursday, December 3, 5:30-7pm
Join us for a preview of the Mansion’s gracious rooms and halls beautifully decorated for the holidays by community volunteers. Enjoy light hors d’oeuvres and a holiday gift shop. $10/5 for ACHA members.

Holiday Tea - Friday & Saturday, December 3 & 4, 1pm-3pm
Enjoy a festive Holiday Tea served in the formal dining room and beautiful parlors. $25/$20 ACHA members. Reservations Required.

Lecture, “Scrooge” - Wednesday December 9, 1pm
Carlo DeVito will give a talk on his book, “Inventing Scrooge.” $5/Free for ACHA members.

Musicians of Ma’alwyck - Friday, December 11, 6:00pm
Enjoy refreshments while listening to this talented duo play a variety of Christmas tunes of different nationalities and early music. $25 per person/$20 for ACHA Members. Reservations Encouraged.

Open House - Saturday, December 12, 12pm – 3:00 pm
Stroll through the beautifully decorated house, buy homemade cookies and let the children enjoy a visit from Sinterklaas. $5 per adult/$1 for children under 12

Candlelit Tour - Thursday & Friday, December 17 & 18, 7pm
Take a candlelit tour through the beautiful Ten Broeck Mansion and journey through the history of the American Christmas. $15/$10 for ACHA Members. Reservations required.

Children’s Story Hour - Saturday, December 19, 10:30am - noon
Bring your children to hear holiday stories read by Sinterklaas, decorate cookies and enjoy simple holiday refreshments. (Recommended ages 3 to 10). Free admission.

Holiday Madrigals, Coffee & Desserts - Saturday, December 19, 1:30pm – 4:00pm
Enjoy afternoon coffee & desserts and holiday songs performed by the full ensemble of the Helderberg Madrigal Singers. $25/$20 for ACHA Members. Reservations Encouraged.

For more information on our schedule of events contact us at 518-436-9826 or www.tenbroeckmansion.org

Daughters of 1812 Return to ACHA

In March, the Ten Broeck Mansion hosted the New York Society, U.S. Daughters of 1812, for its spring Board of Management meeting. Up until the late 1950s, the Capital District was represented in this women’s service organization through the Ten Broeck Chapter which met at the mansion and worked to help curate a second floor bedroom. The room in the northeast corner still bears a plaque designating it as the 1812 Room. Due to declining membership, the Chapter disbanded and the relationship between ACHA and the National Society also dissolved.

Now, after almost a 50-year absence, the Daughters of 1812 are again supporting ACHA, becoming a corporate sponsor, and assisting with the planned reinterpretation of the room into an 1845 bedroom/study of a War of 1812 Veteran. This is especially significant as Stephen Van Rensselaer III, Major General of US Army of the Centre during the War of 1812, was the nephew of Elizabeth Ten Broeck and Abraham served as his guardian. It is certain that General Van Rensselaer would have visited his relatives at the mansion when in Albany.

Local interest in the Daughters has increased enough that a new Chapter, Ten Broeck–Van Rensselaer, was officially chartered during a ceremony earlier this year. The new Chapter welcomes membership inquiries.

ACHA is so pleased to announce that we have received three grants so far this year!

Hudson River Valley Greenway awarded us a $4,000 Hudson River Valley National Heritage matching grant in March of 2015. With this ACHA was able to further establish a groundbreaking collaboration with historical societies through the county, and work cohesively to promote and present Albany County History to a wider audience. We’ve created a website that will serve as a one-stop-shop for visitors and residents alike. We are proud to announce our new website, www.albanycountyhistory.org is now up and running!

In April we were awarded a $10,000 matching grant from the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution to repair weather related damages in the Mansion. Thanks to this funding we are replacing rotted window sills, repairing and painting damaged walls in two bedrooms and a bathroom, and wallpapering the Lady’s Bedroom. The work will be completed by June 1, 2016 and an unveiling ceremony will be planned.

Last but not least, ACHA received a $3,000 grant from the Capital City Fund to increase the amount of free shows we offered during our 2015 Summer Theater in the Garden. Thanks to this funding over 160 people were able to attend our production of, “Robin Hood,” for free!

New York State Society President Jan Johnpier, far right, presents the Charter of the Ten Broeck – Van Rensselaer Chapter to Organizing Officers. Pictured from left are Kristen Moore, Historian, Dianne Fullam, Chaplain, Lisa O’Brien, Treasurer, Carol Felsen, Vice President, and Melinda McTaggart, President.