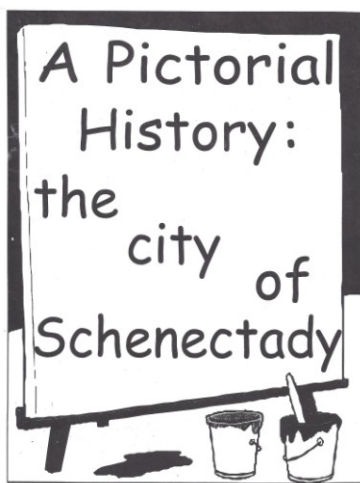




INTERPRETATIONS OF SCHENECTADY'S HISTORY

In 1960, for the 300th Anniversary of Schenectady, Edwin Becker painted two murals portraying the City's history. Here is the artist's description of the murals. A few updates/corrections have been added in parenthesis. The bank, now First Niagara Bank, welcomes visitors to view the murals anytime during their regular banking hours.



Artist Edwin Becker's Description of His Murals April 1960

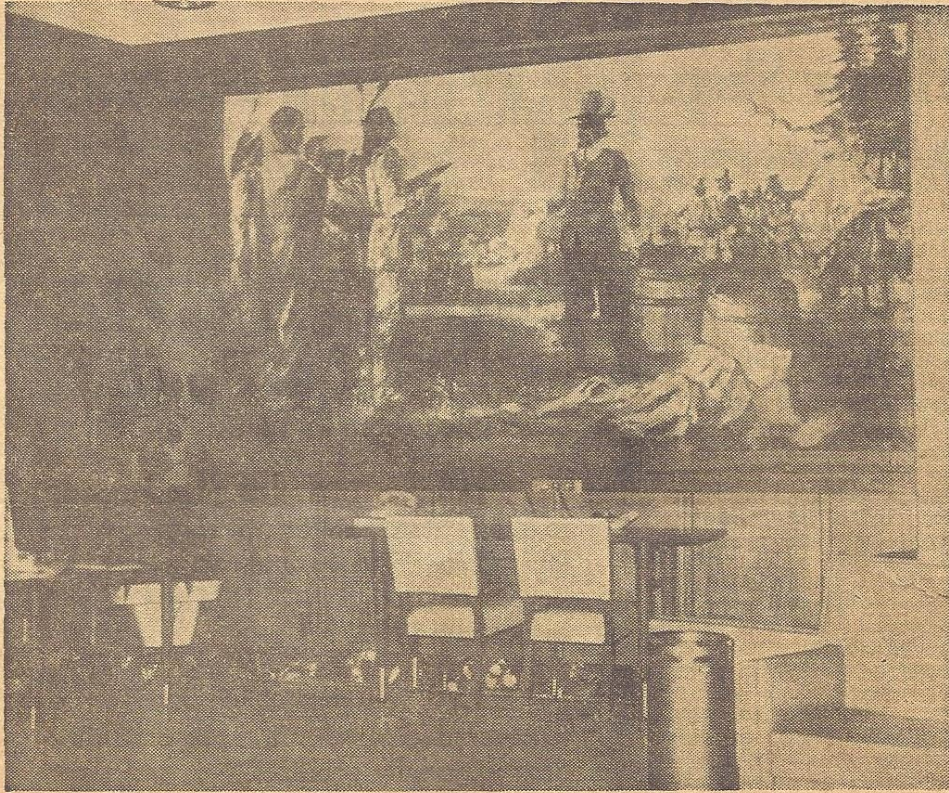
A Pictorial History: the city of Schenectady

Two historical murals have been painted for the new Schenectady Savings and Loan Association building by Edwin Becker, an area artist. Both were painted in oil paint on linen canvas in Mr. Becker's studio and later mounted on the bank's walls with white lead and dammar varnish. The first rough sketches and research were begun in November, 1959, and the murals were completed and mounted in April, 1960.



The first mural is on a wall in a main floor lounge at the front of the building which has been set aside for the convenience of the public. [A photograph of Mural No. 1, rather than the actual mural, may now be seen at the 251 State Street entrance to First Niagara Bank.]

Mural Depicts Purchase of City's Site



Arendt Van Corlaer is pictured in this mural purchasing from the Mohawks the land on which Schenectady was established. The mural, in the Schenectady Savings and Loan Association office at 251 State St., was painted by Edwin Becker. It is a feature of the bank's lounge, provided for downtown shoppers who wish to relax or use the telephone provided.

History leading up to the scene pictured in this mural tells that in 1642 Arendt Van Curler visited the vicinity of Schenectady on errand of mercy in an attempt to obtain the release of white prisoners from the Indians.

On his return he wrote to the Patroon Killian Van Rensselaer in Amsterdam, Holland, for whom he was acting as an agent in America, and stated that "a half day's journey from the "Colony" on the Mohawk River there lies the most beautiful land that the eye of man ever beheld."

In 1670, Van Curler, after receiving permission from Peter Stuyvesant paid 600 hands of good white Wampum, 6 coats of wool, 30 barrels of lead, and 9 bags of powder to the Mohawks.

This purchase was later submitted to the English Governor Thomas Dongon for a patent, which was granted in 1684 and this patent is the source of all legal titles to land embraced within 128 square miles of territory given subsequent to that time.

The 6' x 12' foot mural shows Arendt van Curler with the conveyance to be signed by the representatives of the Mohawks. Around him are the goods of payment, to his right, rear, are companions, guides and horses, used in transporting the materials.

Mural No. 2 - size 51'5" x 55 1/4"

The Mohawk Valley before the arrival of the white man was inhabited by the Five Nations known as the powerful Iroquois Long House.

Beginning at the left, we see these Indians observing the white man entering his lands.

In the foreground, an Indian stretches a beaver pelt on a circular frame of bent willow. The Dutch forest runners, as they were called, came first to trade for these pelts, and later settled to make homes and farms.

The community of Schenectady remained on friendly terms with the neighboring tribes and prospered. However, during the wars between the French and English, a party of 210 soldiers and Indians led by the French descended from Montreal as part of Count Frontenac's plan to strike at several English settlements. They attacked Schenectady on the night of February 8, 1690. In the massacre that ensued, 60 people were slaughtered and 27 taken captive. The entire settlement with the exception of 3 houses was burned to the ground. The mural shows this attack with the village in flames.



The next section shows the city rebuilt, at a period around the time of the war for Independence. Most of the buildings shown here are still standing today. They are from left to right, the Abram Yates House, the Mabie House (oldest house in the Mohawk Valley), St. George's Church, and the birthplace of Joseph C. Yates, first Mayor of Schenectady and afterwards Governor of New York State. Around these houses are shown various people of the colonial period, a soldier of the Continental Militia and officer on horseback, a trapper with his furs in a birchbark canoe.

Schenectady has been called the Gateway to the West. Through it has passed traders, trappers, and western-bound pioneers. This flow of colorful traffic is shown in the center of the mural.



The next section shows the great period of transportation expansion. In 1825, the Erie Canal was open and on August 13, 1831, the engine "DeWitt Clinton" drew the first train between Albany

and Schenectady. These two momentous events profoundly affected not only the city, but methods of transportation all over the United States and the rest of the world. Industry's importance to the country began to be understood in the middle of the last century, and had its start in the city around that time.



In 1886, the Norris Bros. began the manufacture of locomotives. Then came the Edison Machine Works, and in 1894 [1892] General Electric was formed and made its headquarter here. From then on the city grew, doubling and redoubling its population. The mural pictures this era, starting with the South College Building built in 1813 as part of Union College which had been founded in 1795,

The two soldier heads, one in a Civil War uniform, the other in one of the first World War, symbolizes the many Schenectady men who have served their country in war. In the background are scenes of the city's growing influx of population and industrial might which drew many men of wide professional renown. Two of the most famous, Edison and Steinmetz are depicted working together as they so often did. [Edison and Steinmetz did not work together. This image is from a photograph taken during Edison's visit to Schenectady in 1922. Edison toured General Electric's Schenectady Works, and spoke with Steinmetz after watching a demonstration of Steinmetz's lightning generator.]



The mural's story concludes showing our world today, and some of the tremendous forces molding the shape of things to come. A man and woman look towards the future...they are aware of the forces that have been unlocked and are determined they shall be used for a better world for all mankind.

Edwin Becker
April, 1960

This updating of artist Becker's description, with added opening comment, images of the murals and news clipping, was done by Carol DeLaMarter and Laura Lee Linder for the 52nd Stockade Walkabout, September 23-24, 2011. This Walkabout is focusing on Interpretations of History in celebration of Schenectady's 350 years of history.