



# Oswego County Historical Society

THE YEAR OF DR. MARY WALKER • OUR NEW MISSION STATEMENT  
DHPSNY GRANT AWARDED FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING • VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS  
THE POWER OF PLANNED GIVING • AMANDA CALI'S VICTORIAN OBJECT CAPSTONE  
DIARY ENTRIES FROM THREE OSWEGO COUNTY WOMEN • ANNUAL GIVING

Richardson-Bates  
House Museum



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

**"The Oswego County Historical Society seeks to interpret its collections to connect the community to past, present and future topics relevant to local history, and to promote a public interest in Oswego County's historical resources."**

This is our newly adopted mission statement. I hope you like it!

We preserve the past, but we don't live in it. As satisfying as it is to explore the documents, photos, and diaries we possess that illuminate our collective history, we are always seeking to share it with those whose personal narrative it chronicles. Research into ancestry has never been more popular. We are comforted by knowing who our people are and where we came from. How can we feel grounded in the world today unless we have those deep roots to provide stability in the present moment and inspiration as we plan our future?

At the Historical Society, we are in a race against time to make it all shareable! In the last twenty years, the world has come to expect information at their fingertips with a few keystrokes into a Google search. OCHS is a repository for tens of thousands of unique documents that exist nowhere else in the world. We are playing catch-up with getting them available to the public. We have only had scanners for three years and have no permanent staff devoted to collections. Volunteers personally answer dozens of requests by phone or email each month from journalists, book authors, and anyone looking for a mention of their ancestors in our archives. But we've barely cracked the surface in providing quick and convenient accessibility to ourselves, much less offering searchable databases and collections online. (The exception is our three collections at nyheritage.org.)



Some important archives projects were accomplished this year:

- ❖ Physically preserving our rarest paper collections by moving them from attics to better storage on the more temperature-stable floors.
- ❖ Describing in detail and scanning some of the most important collections, including photographic portraits, stereoscope slides, postcards, and photo negatives.
- ❖ Listing miscellaneous archives that were simply in boxes by the year that they were donated.

Completion will take years or decades and the labor of many volunteers and interns to list, scan and transcribe old archives. Find ways to join us throughout this newsletter if these projects sound of interest to you!

After an exciting spring of Strategic Planning from which that fresh Mission Statement emerged, we are focused and ready to provide meaningful service to anyone exploring Oswego County History.



*Mary Kay Stone*

**Mary Kay Stone**  
*President, Board of Trustees*

President Mary Kay Stone (leftmost), Eva Corradino and Evelyn Frederiksen recently represented the Society at the Museum Association of New York Annual Conference. Pictured with Mercedes Niess (rightmost) of the H.Lee White Maritime Museum.



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### The Richardson-Bates House Museum

135 East Third Street, Oswego, NY  
Thurs. – Sat.: 1:00 – 5:00 PM,  
April through December

(315) 343-1342

[www.rbhousemuseum.org](http://www.rbhousemuseum.org)  
[ochs@rbhousemuseum.org](mailto:ochs@rbhousemuseum.org)



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## DHPSNY Grant Awarded for Strategic Planning

In the spring of 2023, OCHS embarked upon a strategic planning process to lay the groundwork for the organization's future. Funding was secured through a grant awarded by the Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York program (DHPSNY), and the planning process was facilitated by Barbara Paxton from the New York Council of Nonprofits (NYCON). A strategic planning committee was established, led by OCHS President Mary Kay Stone.

The multi-phase process began with a comprehensive review of the organization via online survey by board members, volunteers and stakeholders. Participants assessed the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats; and provided comments and suggestions.

A June retreat led by Paxton allowed participants to review the survey results and begin to identify needed changes to achieve a forward leaning vision. After compiling input and discussions from the retreat Paxton presented a report to the committee. She identified action items and timelines for priorities to set the Society's course for the next three to five years.

With buy-in by the committee a yearly strategic work plan was generated. Produced in concert with an updated Mission Statement and Vision, goals were defined along key strategic categories: Collections Care, Management, and Access; Facilities Management; Museum Programming; Revenue Generation and Fundraising; and Organizational Infrastructure and Leadership.



## Annual Giving

We are all very excited by the national recognition being given to one of our local heroes, Dr. Mary Walker, who was born in 1832. In honor of her birth year, we set a goal for the 2023 Annual Giving campaign of \$18,320. Thank you to the many donors who are helping us reach our goal!

## A Tale of Two Trees

Did you ever notice the beautifully shaped tree on the north lawn facing Mohawk Street (pictured, below)? It is a rare Copper Beech tree, one of only three identified in the city of Oswego. We were concerned about a weeping sore on the base of it, and striations of green on the bark. It had also grown to such proportions that it overlapped the house, and rested on the roof. Bartlett Tree Experts provided treatment for the canker and pruned the canopy, preserving it, we hope, for many decades to come.

A Norway Maple on the south west corner of the building, however, was removed by Anthony Pauldine Construction because it was dead at the top and dropping branches dangerously close to the windows. Its root mound also diverted rainwater toward the stone foundation and into the basement. We can now access and examine an area of soffit behind it that is showing extreme damage in that corner. There are plans to replace the shade it provided with one or more trees planted further away from the foundation.





## Volunteering Opportunities

Have a passion for historic preservation? Do old diaries and journals intrigue you? Volunteer transcriptionists are needed at OCHS to increase accessibility of historic documents by making digitized materials more readable and searchable.

Background as a teacher or presenter? Love to learn and share knowledge about historic homes? Interact with friendly people who share your interests while volunteering as a docent at the beautiful Richardson-Bates House. Learn more at our Docent Open House.

Find your volunteer niche at the Oswego County Historical Society. Call us today at 315-343-1342 to discuss your opportunity.



## Planting the Seeds

The Oswego Garden Club was formed in 1938 with a focus on members' beautiful rose gardens and flower shows. In 1947, the club joined the NYS Federated Garden Clubs with an emphasis on promoting civic beauty through restoration and conservation. By invitation from OCHS, the club has completed several projects at the Richardson-Bates House this year: a south lawn hosta and daffodil garden; expanded plantings on the northwest corner and front of the house; and clearing an overgrown area by the garage in preparation for future planting.

2024 plans will begin the process of making this garden not only lovely to look at but bring the vision of what the Bates family might have had for this space. Club members are busy saving seeds, rooting plants and taking cuttings of things for this area. A variety of plants are being considered including Rose of Sharon, hydrangea, iris, lilies, daisies and, of course, Oswego Tea. In honor of the family's cherished garden a few rosebushes are also planned.



## Consider Becoming a Member Today!

There are individuals who have been Oswego County Historical Society members for 10, 20, 30, 40+ years, and we're happy to have them. Memberships provide 24% of the yearly operating budget, and a strong member & volunteer corp is an important factor in winning grants.

Our members contribute in many ways to our mission. They donate items to our Collections, Silent Auction and yard sale, share their stories, and help spread the word about the Society and Richardson-Bates House to others.

Membership has benefits, too. Members are invited to special 'Members Only' events like the recent viewing of Dr. Mary Walker's Medal of Honor. Also, members can tour the Richardson-Bates House for free, obtain advance notice for upcoming events, and receive emails and the newsletter filled with interesting tidbits.

You can continue this great tradition. Perhaps ask a friend or neighbor to join. 2024 Membership mailings are coming in February. Whether you are a new member or a longtime friend, we thank you. Let's make history matter in Oswego County together!



## Excerpts: A Day in the Life of Three Oswego County Women

From her diary Saturday, December 27, 1884:

*Naomi Bennet Richardson*

MATRIARCH, RICHARDSON FAMILY (1817-1890)



“A pleasant day. I went to Mrs. Gordons to try on my dress, to the bakers for some bread, to Mr. T. Harts got a peck of red apples. Long & Brothers and I got a peck of Hickery nuts, then came home. We had a Christmas box from “Yeah Wagh” he remembered us all. Bell came and got a pattern, Floy Came in the Evening.”

“I went to work by the day, cleaning house. A dollar for ten hours work. Wash and scrub the floors. Wash and iron, wash windows...Put a little alcohol in the water. Oh, they shine beautiful. And a sponge if you can get a hold of one. Sponges are awfully dear. If you can't, get a nice soft piece of towel...you ain't got to have no soap or soapsuds and oh your windows will shine.”

From interview by Dr. Judith Wellman, 1975:

*Carrie Scott Dietz*

DOMESTIC SERVANT (1874-1978)



From her farm ledger, June 1904:

*Gertrude Tallman*

FARMER'S DAUGHTER,  
HANNIBAL N.Y. (1873-1905)



<i>Eggs</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Day Week</i>	<i>Weather</i>	<i>Principal Occupations of the Day</i>
18	11	Sat	Cool plea	Ida churned 2 1/2# butter I took B + Roy to Stephen Olivers after 2 heifers. swept dining room cleaned lamps worked butter +c
37	13	Mon	Warm, clear	I made yeast churned 2# butter washed milk cans sprayed rose bushes worked butter +c





# THE YEAR OF DR. MARY WALKER



**Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, born in the Town of Oswego in 1832**, is the most significant historical figure from Oswego County. A Civil War surgeon and only the second woman in the United States to earn a medical degree, she was an ardent abolitionist, suffragist, and dress reform advocate. Dr. Mary Walker is, to date, the only woman to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor — out of over 3,500 honorees. Yet, 90% of the visitors to the museum, including many local residents, have never heard of her!

However, throughout this year and next, Dr. Mary Walker is getting the spotlight she deserves.





**LEFT** The recently-held Mary Walker Medal of Honor viewing event at the Richardson-Bates House Museum. From left, Jonathan Kobelia, George DeMass, Danielle Funciello as Dr. Walker, and Howard King **INSET** The approved design of the upcoming American Women quarter featuring Dr. Mary Walker.

On August 25, 2023, Fort A.P. Hill near Richmond, Virginia was renamed Fort Walker, the first fort in the United States to be named for a woman. In June of 2024, she will be one of the five women honored on the US Mint American Women series of quarters. The attendant publicity is raising her profile nationally and internationally.

George DeMass, the Town of Oswego historian, has created a 32-member committee composed of Town and City residents, historians, educators, civic leaders and their representatives, to create events and celebrations around the new honors awarded to Walker. Some of the highlights include a one-woman Mary Walker-inspired show, driving tour website, a current Medal of Honor recipient to speak at SUNY Oswego, and more.

But the biggest goal is ours! Although one of the largest exhibits at the Richardson-Bates House Museum is devoted to artifacts and the story of Dr. Mary Walker, the Society has been unable to display her most valuable one: the Medal of Honor. It requires a controlled environment and more security than the museum currently can provide.

Many museums have asked to borrow the medal over the years. Charles H. Coolidge Medal of Honor Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee flew their curator to Oswego in 2019 to beg for it and the National Medal of Honor Museum in Arlington, Texas requested the loan of the Medal. The coordinator of the dedication

“ I have got to die before people will know who I am and what I have done. It is a shame that people who lead reforms in this world are not appreciated until after they are dead; then the world pays its tributes.”

**DR. MARY EDWARDS WALKER**

ceremony in August for Fort Mary Walker also offered to send an Army courier to Oswego to personally deliver it to the ceremony if we would loan it. All were refused.

Aligned with our Strategic Plan, the board has decided that it belongs in Oswego and we should do what it takes to display it. Towards this objective we held a members-only one day viewing of the medal on November 18 to kick off a special fundraising campaign.

The goal is to have the Medal on display sometime in 2024. Grants, including

\$13,000 recently awarded by the Richard S. Shineman Foundation, will provide for some funding, but we have to match many of them with private donations.

Below is the estimate of requirements and costs for the project:

- ❖ **\$20,000.00** for a 4' by 60" case with adjustable glass shelves, UV-filtering acrylic, LED lights, security screws, silica gel (to absorb moisture) and shake alarm.
- ❖ **\$1,000** for delivery to the second-floor gallery and assembly.
- ❖ **\$1,000** for 5 additional motion detectors
- ❖ **\$6,350** for a CCTV security system installation, and all necessary cameras (six in total)
- ❖ **\$9,100** for purchase and installation of an oversize metal door and lockset in an open hallway to the gallery that is not secure.
- ❖ **\$300** for a period correct, antique looking, keyed single cylinder deadbolt for the antique 1870's door.

If you can help us with this goal, please send a donation earmarked "Medal of Honor Display." Donations through the website ([www.rbhousemuseum.org/donate](http://www.rbhousemuseum.org/donate)) should have a note added that designates it for the Medal display. Thank you! ■

To see the video of the Fort Walker renaming ceremony featuring an inspiring speech by Retired Surgeon General Nadja West: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6vtUUP-rf0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6vtUUP-rf0)

For more information on Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, see our online collections and teacher resources:

[www.nyheritage.org/collections/dr-mary-edwards-walker-collection](http://www.nyheritage.org/collections/dr-mary-edwards-walker-collection)  
[www.rbhousemuseum.org/education/dr-mary-walker/](http://www.rbhousemuseum.org/education/dr-mary-walker/)





## Amanda Cali's Victorian Objects Capstone

This past spring, former intern Amanda Cali came back to the Society to complete her capstone project for her last semester at SUNY Oswego. An Anthropology and Native American Studies student, Amanda was inspired by Max's collection of unique artifacts housed in the tower of the Richardson-Bates House.

The Victorian Era was considered the "Era of the Object". Victorian homes like the Richardson-Bates House were filled with art and artifacts from across the globe as a result of obsessive collection of everything deemed lavish and "exotic". Max Richardson, like many men of his social stature, acquired a variety of items via mail order catalogs, international travel, or local artifact dealers. This collecting habit was part of a larger movement to preserve non-Western cultures for future study while ignoring the systematic and legal subjugation of these same cultures.

Max's collection of Egyptian and Native American artifacts, scrapbooks of indigenous peoples from the United States and Africa, and even the sphinxes on the steps of his home convey his personal fascination and interest in cultures and peoples that differed from his own. Much of his collection still remains with OCHS, though not on display.

As part of her capstone project, Amanda applied for and was granted the SUNY Oswego student mini grant. This grant awarded her nearly \$500 to purchase rehousing materials to ensure the future safety of the collection. With



these new boxes, tissue paper, and other archival materials, Amanda reboxed all of the artifacts in the tower in boxes that would protect them from light, heat, and humidity. She was also able to reorganize, reinventory, and research many of the pieces in the collection that were either unidentified or mislabeled. Thanks to Amanda, this collection is now prepared to be moved down to the second floor, where we have better control of the climate in collections storage.

Additionally, having a better understanding of what was in the collections allowed us to recreate a portion of Max's bedroom in the temporary gallery. Here, you can see the bookcase filled with books



owned by the family as well as a selection of artifacts from Max's tower collection.

Amanda, who graduated from SUNY Oswego in May of 2023, is now a graduate student at the University of Denver in their Anthropology department. We are so thankful for what she has done for us, and wish her luck in her future endeavors!

**FROM LEFT** Amanda Cali reading through a scrapbook kept by Max Richardson on Native American practices and culture; the new bookcase exhibit featuring Max's objects now on display! **FEATURED IMAGE** Max's personal museum collection in the tower, c. 1889.



# Interns Spotlight

We had a record number of interns this year — seven students from SUNY Oswego working on independent projects, and two New Visions high-schoolers who spent their semester learning about how a museum functions.

For her second internship with OCHS, **Nerissa Conklin** took a leadership role. She spearheaded the application of UV resistant film on the windows in the period rooms, and she delved deeper into collections cataloging. After graduating from the college's Anthropology program Summa Cum Laude, Nerissa is now attending University of Denver for a Master's in Anthropology with a concentration in Museum and Heritage Studies.



**Sam Roy**, a Junior Art History major, was looking for an internship that would prioritize her interest in art conservation. She focused heavily on cleaning the period rooms, repairing broken vessels, and entered collections into our digital cataloging software. Additionally, she assisted Nerissa in applying UV resistant film to the windows in the period rooms.

Three interns focused heavily on archival projects. History and American Studies student **Robert Hoffman** was interested in working with primary resource documents. His main project was inventorying the postcard collection in preparation for digitizing. **Zach Scoville** dabbled in inventorying archives, and eventually focused on uploading our collections to the online repository NYHeritage.org. While this sounds simple,

Zach had to learn an entirely new software in order to connect information about the archives to their digital scans. While Zach focused on photos of buildings in Oswego County, **Leondra Morgan** also worked on uploading to NYHeritage. She focused



on the Dr. Mary Walker collection, which is composed of original letters, portraits, and diplomas. You can now see this full collection online thanks to Leondra. She was even highlighted as an intern by SUNY Oswego!

**Rhys Amos Knechtel**, an Illustration major, was looking to branch out. He dabbled in many different projects,



including cleaning, inventorying, and digitizing. His skills in Photoshop were particularly helpful when editing scans in preparation for uploading online.

This year, along with our SUNY Oswego interns, we were able to host two New Visions interns. This program helps high school seniors gain experience to pursue a specific career field. Both students had an interest in a future career in real estate, and were able to get relevant experience in different ways. **Alyssa Craver** did research on different architectural features of the house. She made interesting social media posts to inform the public of our museum's unique attributes. **Shelby Spath** inventoried our postcard collection, which predominantly features historic buildings in Oswego, many of which are no longer standing. She was able to scan these postcards in preparation for uploading them to NYHeritage.org.

Creating his own internship with OCHS, **Zach Kingsley**, Human Development major, aimed to increase accessibility of the museum. He not only directed and filmed a tour of the second floor, but



reached out to professors at the college to assist him in translating the tour script into different languages. Now, the second floor of the museum is accessible via video for disabled patrons, and the entire tour is accessible in multiple languages. ■



## Volunteer Highlights



Alyson DeCosa

Oswego County Historical Society would like to formally acknowledge our volunteer board of directors who devote many hours each year to work on events and fundraisers, we appreciate the entire volunteer workforce who make our historic mission possible!



**Eva Corradino** has been sorting through boxes of donations that have been backlogged since we lost paid staff in 2009. She's making decisions about what to put in the permanent collection and what to pass on to somewhere else. She also gives tours and manages the membership and annual giving drive.

**Neal Johnson** continues to "save the house" by looking at the facility with his discerning eye. He has rebuilt the north attic windows so that they open for some passive ventilation, improved the steam boiler and radiators output, and repaired the frames of the stained glass windows that hang in the Reception Room. He even donned a hazmat suit to crawl into the corner of an attic to examine above eaves that are deteriorating from water



Neal Johnson

penetration. With **Brian Folgherait**, he has repaired a retaining wall slab and checked for damage on the roof. He supervises all aspects of facility management in the building.

**Alyson DeCosa** has continued inventorying and reassessing most of the clothing collection, and has mounted two garment exhibits in Naomi's bedroom: one on Victorian day dresses; and one on corsets, hoop skirts and undergarments, with tie-ins to Dr. Mary Walker. Come see the latest in the spring!

**Nan Moore**, who has been volunteering for seven years, is making headway on accessioning hundreds of items into PastPerfect, the museum software.

**Dan Ruddy** continues to improve the electrical systems in the museum. His contribution this year was exploring and recommending a new security company that will save us thousands in security costs. He and fellow electrical engineer **Brian Drain** have checked every circuit, outlet, and fixture in the building and replaced many deteriorated units. They completely replaced all the fixtures in the third floor library and permanent gallery displays with energy-efficient LED lights.

**Diana Dean** has quickly learned the tour script and started as a docent, but has also been invaluable in the yard sale preparation and website reimagination.

**Rosemarie Pupparo** has done everything from collection inventory to general office organizing.

**Eugene Ossa** continues to give tours with a Victorian-era gentleman's perspective.

**Linda Ruddy** served on our Strategic Planning Committee this spring, and has taken on the role of editor of the newsletter. Thank you to her and **Joey Sweeney**, board member and graphic designer, for creating this newsletter, and the editions moving forward.

**Pat Brhel** has been listing the articles in several scrapbooks that Max Richardson kept about the Fire Department of the 1880's and 90's.

**Mary Himes** started transcribing the records from the Oswego Orphanage.

**Joe Dolan** sorted hundreds of book donations to select what to add to the library.

**David D'Ambrosio** has spent hours cleaning the museum and garage.

**Kristen Nysten**, who owns the Kingsford-Higgins House, has indexed newly donated scrapbooks from the Kingsford family.

**Amelia Ellingson** did some meticulous cleaning of artifacts.

We also acknowledge the volunteers who give tours, serve on committees and work special events: **Carol Shannon, Silvia Langdon, Dee Gemmel, Meg Schneider, Joe Corradino, and Mitchell and Zoey Hudson.**

The **Oswego Garden Club** continues to maintain and enhance the grounds and we were delighted to host their summer picnic and awards ceremony on the south lawn in July.

We are also grateful to the fraternity and sororities from the college who helped us with moving and cleanup projects.

We acknowledge the lecturers we had this year: **Marjorie Allen Perez** on "Oswego County's African American Civil War Soldiers" and **Karen Lankeshofer** on "Elsa Von Blumen, Famous Bicycle Racer from Oswego." ■



# Thank you to our 2023 members, donors and sponsors!

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# Oswego County Historical Society

Richardson-Bates House Museum  
135 E. Third St., Oswego NY 13126

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Oswego County Historical Society is a member of **Leave A Legacy, Inc. ([www.oswegoleavealegacy.org](http://www.oswegoleavealegacy.org))**, a not-for-profit devoted to helping people learn about charitable giving through a will or estate plan. Leave a Legacy's program is a cooperative effort to educate community members as well as legal and professional advisors as to the importance and impact of charitable planned giving in our County.

Oswegonians have a proud tradition of preserving and passing on stories for the education and enrichment of future generations. As today's stewards of history, we take great pride in carrying on this commitment of making history matter in our community.

We invite you to partner with us in this effort by making a current or deferred gift to the Oswego County Historical Society. Your gift will provide ongoing support and benefit future generations for years to come.

Discuss 'Qualified Charitable Distribution' made through your RMD (Required Minimum Distribution) or other gifting options with your financial advisor or estate planner. Even a small gift can have a tremendous impact on the preservation and creation of history in the County.

### Information needed for designating your gift:

**Legal Name: Oswego County Historical Society, Inc.**  
**EIN #: 15-6024641**

To ensure your planned gift has the impact that you desire, and to make it easy for your heirs to enact, please give us a call at 315-343-1342 to chat about your gift.



Are we already in your will? Please let us know so that we can thank you in our next newsletter!