

Oswego County Historical Society

Winter Newsletter, 2021–2022

Richardson-Bates House Museum, 135 E. 3rd Street, Oswego, NY 13126 | (315) 343-1342 | www.rbhousemuseum.org



2021: A Special Year in Review

The Oswego County Historical Society proudly celebrated its remarkable 125th anniversary, and the 75th anniversary of the historic Richardson-Bates House Museum in 2021. There was a successful yearlong series of celebrations. The society was so honored to partner and participate in many endeavors to celebrate the pioneers and founders that created this lasting legacy to promote and preserve the remarkable history of Oswego County.

To start out the year, the City of Oswego graciously sponsored the Annual Meeting event at the McCrobie Civic Center. Showcasing some of our local landmarks was part of the day, along with the display of special works of art from the society collection by the famed local marine artist Charles Grant.

Then came a collaboration celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Oswego City Hall. Working with Mayor Billy Barlow, displays of the collection of the society of the historic landmark from the 19th and 20th centuries were on display in the city hall council chambers. This included two original portraits from the society collection: one of the first Oswego Village Mayor, Alvin Bronson and one of the first Oswego City Mayor, James Platt. This was to showcase and share publicly some of the rare collections of the society. This was done with the dedicated volunteer time and collaboration of Oswego City Historian, Mark Slosek, who beautifully arranged the setup. In addition, the historical society was honored to receive proclamations for its two anniversaries from the City of Oswego, presented by Mayor Billy Barlow,

and from the County of Oswego, presented by legislature chairman James Weatherup, and from the New York State Assembly, presented through the assistance of past Oswego County Legislator and current Oswego County Clerk Terry Wilbur on behalf of Assemblyman Will Barclay.

The historical society has a very close and longtime connection to the Fort Ontario State Historic Site in Oswego. This past year was a very well-organized celebration of the *Evacuation of the British from Fort Ontario in 1796*, when Oswego became free as the last territory relinquished by the British thirteen years after the end of the American Revolutionary War. With an incredible team of the Fort Ontario staff, under the leadership of site manager Paul Lear, we joined in commemoration of that momentous time in American history. Special thanks to the Friends of Fort Ontario, several re-enactment groups, local historians and volunteers for making it a memorable success.

This year the Association of Public Historians of New York State successfully held their annual conference in the City of Oswego at the Lake Ontario Conference Center. It was a combination of in-person and virtual options, with many scholars and guest speakers with very educational presentations. This well-attended event brought public historians throughout the state to Oswego. Vendors and local organizations

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Officers

Mary Kay Stone, *President*
Charlene Mitchell, *Vice President*
Eva Corradino, *Secretary*
Jennifer Bertollini, *Treasurer*

Board of Trustees

Peg McKinstry
Justin White
Lyn Patterson
Mary Shanley
Mary Roman
Robert Perkins
Jeremy Pekarek
Joey Sweener

Attendance

Though we didn't reopen until July 1, attendance was good this year. We gave tours to 475 people, many of whom were from out of town and the vast majority had never visited the museum.

Dehumidifiers

Does anyone have a dehumidifier that they would donate to us? We have an urgent need to dry out our basement. Water is seeping in through the foundation and until we can landscape around the house to bank dirt away, we need to dehumidify. If you can help us, please leave a message at the museum: 315-343-1342.

Leave a Legacy Gift

Would you remember us in your will with a bequest or consider a gift of stock in this year? This is what your financial planner or lawyer will need to know:

Legal name: Oswego County Historical Society, Inc.

Address: 135 E. Third St., Oswego NY 13126

EIN: 15-6024641

Thank you for considering a lasting contribution to preserving Oswego County history.



At the annual meeting, the Oswego County Historical Society was honored to receive proclamations from the City of Oswego honoring our two anniversaries. Councilman Rob Corradino (center) presents the honor on behalf of Mayor Billy Barlow. Pictured from left to right: Bob Perkins, Mary Shanley, Charlene Mitchell, Jeremy Pekarek, Mary Roman, Peg McKinstry, Rob Corradino (City Council President), Mary Kay Stone, Eva Corradino, Lyn Patterson, Tim Plunkett (Ward 6 City Councilor) and Justin White.

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provided exhibits, including displays by Oswego County organizations and our local government. Field trips to each of the museums in the city was another activity that was extremely popular, and showed what Oswego had to offer.

Every year ends with the popular Victorian Christmas Open House. This is a way for the society to ring in the season with old-fashioned holiday cheer. The house was fully decorated for the season, and large poinsettias decorated each of the period rooms, courtesy of Lowe's. To mark the society anniversaries, board member Joey Sweener created two 2021 souvenir Christmas ornaments for the event. The collaboration of the Holiday History Shoppe in Downtown Oswego, hosted by the City of Oswego at the

new Visitor's Center, brought a nice local Christmas shop destination, all while supporting local historical organizations.

We are extremely grateful to all that supported our fundraising events of 2021, which included our Landmark Lawn Sale, Classic Movie Night and Trivia Night. The generosity of local businesses, event sponsors and event coordinators are extremely appreciated to make everything possible. Additionally, sincere thanks goes to our continued membership and the annual giving support. Now we look forward to continuing our mission in 2022!

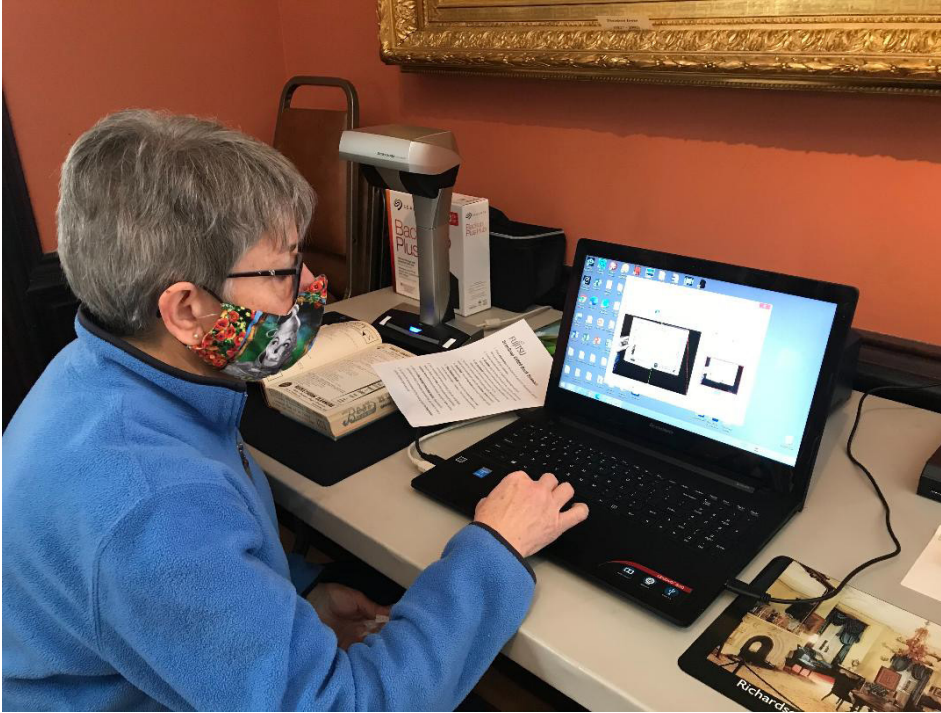
Justin White,
Oswego County Historian,
OCHS Board Member

Except for the rare grant, please remember that we are funded solely through our members, fundraising events, and donations. Nearly all of our funding goes directly to preserving the historic Richardson-Bates House Museum.

Thank you to all the recipients of this newsletter!

This Year's Major Projects

The OCHS volunteers and museum assistant made major accomplishments at the museum this year, in repairs to the physical structure of the house, organizing physical items in our collections, and digitizing those collections to share with the community. Below are some of the highlights of this hard work.



Eva Corradino uses our recently-acquired Fujitsu book scanner to scan one of the Oswego City Directories from our collection. This entire digitization process, though still in the early stages, positions the society to better embrace changes in how patrons access our historical artifacts.



Joey Sweener demonstrates how the book scanner works during a demo of the hardware in early winter, 2020.



Our new museum assistant, Evie Frederiksen, hangs our annual Christmas decorations at the museum. She is dragging us, kicking and screaming, into the modern age with her fresh ideas!

Headway on the Digitization Front

Two project assistants, Joey Sweener and Eddie Heinrichs, organized, inventoried and scanned two major collections: the Dr. Mary Walker Collection and the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter Collection.

Volunteers Eva Corradino and Nan Moore also scanned 37 volumes of Oswego City Directories from the 1800's to the 1990's in preparation for submission to the website NYHeritage.org. A grant from the Northern N.Y. Library Network and the digitization equipment we got from a Pomeroy Foundation grant in 2020 made this project possible.

Getting Organized At The Museum

Under the tutelage of our new museum assistant Evelyn Fredriksen, the society has been slowly but surely making its way into modern museum technology. Evelyn, who just received her degree in Art and Museum Studies from SUNY Oswego, has been organizing various collections while still performing museum assistant duties, and has also been getting our digital files organized, to boot. She's a lovely addition to the museum, and we're lucky and ecstatic to have her onboard!

Meanwhile, Colleen Manion has been volunteering for a year to inventory in detail the vertical file cabinets, while Rosemarie Puppato is organizing a portion of the photo collection.

Jessica Berg has been graciously donating her expertise in photography and online marketing to set up our Amazon

Wishlist and Amazon Smile, while also continuing to encourage us to regularly update our Facebook and Instagram pages to draw new eyes to the museum.

Along those same lines, **Marianne Natoli** gave us a great new promotional video, “2 Minute Tour of the Richardson-Bates House Museum,” which you can find on our homepage. It provides a great overview of the museum, and we intend to reuse it often!

Rachel Geiogamah, an intern from Syracuse University, inventoried, cleaned, organized and recorded in software about 175 paintings and works on paper in one of the painting storage rooms.

Physical Repairs, Renovations, and More

Neal Johnson, new volunteer, and a team of retired engineers from FitzPatrick Nuclear Power Plant have taken on many urgent projects around the museum.

Neal and **Dennis Hillpot** did a survey of 75 of the windows in the house (not including 10 in the basement and 10 in the second floor porch) and discovered much deterioration, most of it caused by rot on the insides from too much condensation on the windows.

Neal and **Brian Folgherait**, with help from **Dan Ruddy** removed the 5 worst windows and Neal rebuilt and refinished them in his home workshop.

Dan Ruddy replaced the antiquated and broken phone system with a new (donated) set of cordless phones so calls can be answered in a variety of places around the museum. With the help of **Brian Drain**, he is looking at electrical systems and repairing non-working light fixtures.

The perilously tipping 9-foot finial decoration on top of the tower was removed for restoration by **Dave Bock** of Minetto Painting with help from **Jon Pauldine** of Everroof Standing Seam Metal Roofing. The fiberglass at the base of the finial was split and sagging because the wooden lining was rotted. We will be looking for a restoration company to work on this in 2022.

The octagonal shed next to the garage, a rare architectural structure, had its roof rebuilt and was shored up by **MJP Construction Company**. **Michael J. Porter** also took on the restoration of the 19th century bathroom basin bowl whose painted decorative interior was almost completely eroded by water. With advice from a Boldt Castle restorer and Alfred University, he is almost finished restoring it.

Although we were unsuccessful for the second year in getting a Greater Hudson Heritage Network grant for the \$7800 restoration of the velvet and painted “tapestry” that hung in the hallway for 150 years (pictured next page) we will be looking for funding through private donations for the repairs in the coming year. □



From left to right: Brian Folgherait, Neal Johnson, Brian Drain and Dan Ruddy have all been a tremendous help this year in physically repairing and assessing the construction needs of the museum. Neal Johnson removed, renovated, and reinserted 5 windows in dire need of repair in the museum this year, with plans to fix more in 2022.



Rachel Geiogamah stands in the newly-inventoried painting storage on the second floor of the museum. Thanks for your hard work, Rachel!



Top: The house museum decorated for Christmas, prominently featuring the tapestry in need of repair.

Above: Progress photo of the roof repairs to the octagonal rubbish shed on the museum grounds.

Right: Jon Pauldine stands atop the house museum while Dave Bock lowers the removed finial to the ground.



Significant Donations



Dare to compare? The recently donated photo of Norman Bates (left, circa 1872) surprised us all when we compared it to the hanging portrait of young Norman in the second floor portrait gallery (right); it's the same image! Historian Justin White dug deeper into the connection, and found an interesting story along the way. Note that the portrait features the tower of the Tuscan Villa house museum peeking through a ring of trees, something not present in the photograph.

Rare New Collection of Richardson-Bates Family Archives

The Board of Trustees extends gratitude to the very generous gift of rare new items to the Richardson-Bates family archives. Sincere thanks go to sisters Sarah Barber and Tilly Grey, the daughters of Sally Bates and granddaughters of Norman and Florence (Morley) Bates.

The donations include more than one hundred items. Among the collection is four generations of family photographs, letters, journals, diaries, and a handwritten recipe journal kept by Florence. Additionally, personal ephemera such as a dance card fan, family calling card and handwritten postcards from friends and family are included. Of particular note is a personal family photograph album

started in 1899, after the marriage and honeymoon of Norman and Florence. This is a never-before-seen series of candid pictures of their first home and their first two children, which has illustrated a whole new story of its own. The collection also includes a large group of documents and photographs of Sally Bates and her illustrious career as a leading actress on Broadway for two decades. This new collection has added to our history of the family that makes the Richardson-Bates House one of the most intact house museums in New York State and a favorite local landmark in the Oswego Community. More will be shared in future displays and articles for the membership and public visitors to enjoy.

Dare to Compare?

One of the most charming artworks of the original contents of the Richardson-Bates family collection is the large painted portrait of Norman Lawrence Bates as a child. It has been prominently displayed in its custom frame in the second-floor hallway family portrait gallery for over 150 years. Among the items from Sarah Barber is a small original photograph of Norman as a child, in a studio sitting on a prop of a tree stump. We did a double take and realized it was identical to the scene of his large hanging portrait!

It was learned that an unidentified photographer took the photograph, and we can approximate that Norman is about eight years old in the photo, dating it circa 1872. With a new Tuscan villa home, it's no wonder a portrait was commissioned!

One mystery remains, however, about

the identity of the portrait artist. We suspect that it was a traveling portrait artist. Many portrait artists remained anonymous at this time, unknowingly leaving a lasting impact on their clients when portraits were completed. The donated photograph would have been taken and given to the portrait artist, so a young Norman would not have to sit still in the studio while the artist worked. The portrait was always a favorite of Norman's children. After the house was gifted to the historical society in 1946, the framed portrait was included with the donation and has been prominently displayed since. The acquisition of this photograph adds greater context to an already impressive portrait, and we're especially thankful to Sarah Barber for continued family donations of this kind!

Other Donations

Two James Gale Tyler paintings were donated by **Jodi and Stephen Lerner** of Long Island. Tyler Art Gallery and Tyler Hall at SUNY Oswego were named after this Oswego born artist.

Neal Johnson donated items from his Reid/Warren family who owned Reid & Sons Hardware on W. Bridge St. in the early 1900's

The First Communion dress and photo of Frances L. Barry, former teacher at Fitzhugh Park School and niece of Dean Michael Barry of St. Paul's Church was donated by her niece **Kathi Johnson**.

A portrait of Dr. LeRoy Hollis, founder of Camp Hollis, was donated by his family through the efforts of **Jim Farfaglia**. □



James Gale Tyler, "Square Rigged Ship at Sea" c. 1900. Donated to the Oswego County Historical Society summer, 2021.

New Fundraising Efforts

The board got inventive with fundraising this year!

A successful lawn sale in August replaced the Not So Silent Auction with many businesses and individuals donating items and gift certificates to be sold. Some donations were so special, like an Art Deco chandelier and some sterling flatware, that they were sold at auction online.

Classic Movie Night, chaired by **Justin White**, with the feature *The Maltese Falcon* was the successful fall fundraiser at the historic Oswego Cinema.

A Fall Fun Trivia Night, created and hosted by board member **Jeremy Pekarek**, brought 50 people to a brain challenging event in November at Steamers.

A COVID Recovery grant of \$5,000 through the City of Oswego was awarded to us to replace the door and ramp providing handicapped accessibility to the museum.

The Holiday History Shoppe downtown in the City of Oswego Welcome Center was a successful venture, netting about 3 times more in gift shop sales than the whole of the year. **Bob Perkins's** three books and the two new Richardson-Bates House Holiday ornaments were the most sought after items. □



The restored marquee of the landmark Oswego Theatre announces our Classic Movie Night fundraiser, featuring the 1941 classic movie "The Maltese Falcon." It was one of the first movies to ever play at the Schine's Oswego Theatre when it opened in January 1941, so it was great to see the movie return to Oswego in such a knock-out fashion!

Other Historical Happenings

Not-So-Silent Auction

The board of trustees is in the process of finding a venue for our annual Not-So-Silent Auction, as ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines make it difficult to secure a space.

As always, our Not-So-Silent Auction is a yearly fundraising event, and our largest, where we auction off donated antiques and historic items to secure operational funding for more projects at the Richardson-Bates House Museum.

While we are currently planning on the event happening in May, stay tuned for more correspondence from us regarding specific dates and times.

SUNY Oswego Anthropological Field Study – Summer 2022

Alanna Ossa, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at SUNY Oswego, has received a Shineman Endowed Grant to create a project called the “Richardson-Bates House Historic Preservation Field School.”

Next summer, her students will do an archeological dig in the spot identified as the “rubbish area” in the 1920’s drawings of Florence Bates’ garden on the south lawn. They will train students to do the work done at a professional excavation, including cataloging and analyzing their discoveries. Hopefully they will uncover artifacts from the Richardson-Bates families or the older residences that existed on-site!



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Historical Society**

Richardson-Bates House Museum
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Oswego, NY 13126

