



What is the process for donating an item to your collections?

Step 1: Obtain a “Potential Acquisition Questionnaire” form, available on-site or on our website.

Step 2: Complete the form and submit via email at ochs@rbhousemuseum.org or through the mail to the address on the back of the brochure.

Step 3: Each potential acquisition is then reviewed by the Collections Care Committee. The committee votes to accept or decline each offer.

Step 4: Museum staff contacts the potential donor and informs them of the decision. If accepted, the museum accepts custody of the object(s) and the donor completes a Deed of Gift.

Founded in 1896, the Oswego County Historical Society has preserved and promoted the history of the greater Oswego area for over 100 years.

In 1946, the Society received the generous gift of a historic 19th century Italian Villa on Oswego’s east side to serve as a permanent headquarters and historic house museum.

Listed on the National Register of Historical Places, the Richardson-Bates House Museum offers a unique glimpse at the lifestyle of a wealthy and prominent Oswego family, and is the most intact house museum in central New York. The museum routinely offers educational programs and exhibits interpreting the history of the people and places of Oswego County.

CONTACT US

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Donating to our Collection



Oswego County
Historical Society

Thank you for your interest in donating objects to the Oswego County Historical Society & Richardson-Bates House Museum.

All donations undergo a review process from our Collections Committee to ensure that your donation fits within the scope of our collections, that we can properly house it, and that the acquisition can be exhibited alongside other objects to tell new and interesting stories.

Here is a look into the Collections Committee's assessment process, and answers to some frequently asked questions.



Mary Edwards Walker, Medal of Honor, Nov. 11 1865. Photo courtesy of Library of Congress.

ON THE COVER: Portrait of Louisa Irwin by Jenni Loop, c. 1900.

What is the Oswego County Historical Society collection?

The Oswego County Historical Society collection consists of art, artifacts, photographic materials, published works, manuscript collections and other printed ephemera that document the people, places, and events that continue to shape Oswego County.

How big is the collection?

There are hundreds of objects in our primary collection. In addition, the Society owns over 6,000 artifacts relating to Oswego County history, and approximately 100,000 historically important documents and photographs.

Does OCHS still collect, and do you accept every donation offered?

We continue to collect objects for our collections, both historic and contemporary, but we unfortunately will not accept every donation. We are looking to refine our collections, not just grow them. Donations of generic items will never be considered.

How long does the assessment process take?

It can take anywhere from a few weeks to multiple months. We are happy to answer questions along the way and do our best to keep potential donors informed throughout the committee's assessment process.

Can I leave my donation at the museum while it is being assessed?

In some circumstances, yes! You will complete a "Temporary Custody Receipt," giving the museum permission to house the object(s) for a designated period of time. By signing the receipt, you agree to accept full responsibility for retrieving the item from the Richardson-Bates House Museum if it is not accepted into the collections.

What is the museum looking for during the assessment process?

- Does the item fit the mission and collection scope of the Oswego County Historical Society?
- Does the Society already have this item?
- What is the physical condition of the item?
- Is heavy conservation work needed?
- What is the research or exhibition potential of the item?
- Is the item better suited for another museum, library, or historical society's collections?
- What are the costs associated with accepting the item?



Photo of the house museum front steps, taken by Norman Bates, Aug. 1889.

Costs? What costs? I'm giving you my object(s) for free.

There are a number of costs associated with each new acquired item into the collection, along with maintaining the existing collection. This includes:

- Archival quality housing and supplies
- Environmental and climate control
- Storage space within the museum (shelves, racks, vaults, etc.)
- Conservation
- Professional staff time
- Insurance

Does the Society ever purchase entire collections?

Occasionally. The criteria and evaluation process for museum purchases is virtually identical to individual donations.

Can I give you an item as a long-term loan?

The Society will occasionally accept loans as needed for specific changing or temporary exhibitions.

Is my donation tax deductible?

Donations above a certain monetary value to the Oswego County Historical Society are deductible from taxable income in accordance with provisions of the Federal Income Tax Law. However, the IRS requires that donors obtain a professional appraisal for such tax purposes. The museum does not offer appraisal services.

If I donate my object(s) to the museum, can you guarantee it will always be on display?

The Oswego County Historical Society does not guarantee the permanent exhibition of any donation. Items from our collections are rotated through our exhibits from time to time, are available for scholarly research and, at times, are loaned to other museums for specific exhibitions.