

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2024

OSWEGOHISTORICAL.ORG



Oswego County Historical Society



THE FRANK BARBEAU COLLECTION IN PHOTOS • REMEMBERING NEAL JOHNSON
OSWEGO COUNTY LEGISLATURE PROVIDES FINAL PUSH FOR MARY WALKER CAMPAIGN
THE ALL-NEW SOCIETY WEBSITE • DR. WALKER'S MEDAL OF HONOR NOW ON DISPLAY
HISTORY OF THE OSWEGO YACHT CLUB EXHIBITION • INTERNS SPOTLIGHT

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

MARY KAY STONE

What a pleasure and privilege it has been to serve as your President for the last few years. As my term is ending, I would like to credit previous presidents **Peg McKinstry** and **Justin White** for getting the Society through the truly traumatic 2000s and early 2010s after our governmental funding was abruptly withdrawn and the professional museum staff of six was reduced to a single, part-time assistant. In 2016, then-president **Rick Sivers** had a vision for our volunteer-led society and mentored me to learn the basics of running a museum. It's a challenge to maintain a large, expensive historic house while continuing to do the work of a historical society: answering researcher's and genealogist's questions, providing access to collections, creating exhibits and programs, and preserving tens of thousands of artifacts, while maintaining solvency and doing it all with volunteers.

What I've been able to bring to the President's role is an ability to secure grants and a determination to recruit talented volunteers who know how to do the things that I don't—people like **Neal Johnson** and **Dan Ruddy** who took responsibility for saving the deteriorating physical structure.

We've also moved dramatically forward in the digital era. No one has been more influential in putting us on the right platforms than the current museum assistant, **Evie Frederiksen**. Going above and beyond the job title, she has managed digital projects for interns and volunteers and implemented many goals in our strategic plan. Credit also to **Joey Sweeney**, who started fresh out of college as a contract employee, digitizing the Mary Walker collection and since joining the board has transformed our website, this newsletter, and more.

The most steadfast volunteer through these years has been **Eva Corradino**. She has devoted many hours every week to giving tours, processing collections, and managing our fundraising campaigns. She's attended workshops, training classes, museum conferences and has brought herself up to speed on all things museum management.

She was a natural candidate to elect to the position of President of the organization and will guarantee our continuing prosperity and success in fulfilling our mission. Congratulations to our new president!

EVA CORRADINO

I am honored and excited to take on the role of President of the Oswego County Historical Society. I never expected when I started training as a docent in 2017 to find myself immersed in the workings of the Society, or finding such a passion for it. I hope to be able to facilitate the continuation of the work being done and the tremendous progress that is being made in both the care of the Richardson-Bates House itself and the many physical projects and digitization efforts that will make our collections more accessible to everyone.

I am becoming more aware of the many responsibilities and moving parts that are involved in leading the Board and keeping things moving forward. As Mary Kay has pointed out, it is a team effort. We have a wonderful museum assistant in **Evie Frederiksen**, great Board of Trustees, and dedicated volunteers. Everyone brings different strengths and skills that come together to help us reach our goals, and create informative, entertaining, and fun events.

I need to thank **Mary Kay** for her mentorship, which I hope will continue, and **Peg McKinstry** for initially welcoming me into the fold. I am proud to be part of OCHS and look forward to what we'll accomplish in the future.



Mary Kay Stone
Eva M. Corradino



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.

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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.oswegohistorical.org
ochs@rbhousemuseum.org



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Updates to Bylaws

At the annual meeting on June 2, 2024, important revisions to the Society's bylaws were approved unanimously. These updates bring them into compliance with NYS law and go into effect immediately. The main changes allow for electronic meetings and voting, include our new mission statement, and enact term limits for board members. The language was also updated to include gender neutral pronouns (the previous bylaws used he/she references but retained vestiges of only "he," from when the founding board and membership were exclusively male 1896-1923.) The amended bylaws are available to read on our website.



Oswego County Legislature Provides Final Push for Dr. Mary Walker Campaign

The fundraising campaign to raise almost \$40,000 for a secure exhibit of the Dr. Mary Walker medal of honor and artifacts was sent over its target when the Oswego County Legislature made a resolution to grant \$10,000 to the Oswego County Historical Society for the campaign. Thank you, Legislators!

The exhibit—which features Dr. Mary Walker's Medal of Honor, surgeon's pin, hat, boots and medical kits—are now on permanent display in a large museum grade case on the second floor of the Richardson-Bates House Museum. Campaign funding also went toward additional motion detectors and a camera system, along with door and entrance improvements to make the museum more secure. Dr. Walker's medal is the most valuable artifact that the Society owns, and the Legislature's additional grant helped guarantee our ability to display it safely.

FEATURED IMAGE From left to right, George Demass, Oswego Town Historical Society, Legislator Paul Connolly, District 20, Legislator Mary Ellen Chesbro, District 10, and members of the Oswego County Historical Society, Eva Corradino, Mary Kay Stone and Linda Ruddy.



The All-New Society Website!

The Oswego County Historical Society and the Richardson-Bates House Museum kicked off our 2024 season this April with a brand new website, built from the ground up in WordPress, under the new domain name oswegohistorical.org and with loads of new features.

Led by board member Joey Sweener, the volunteer subcommittee—Mary Kay Stone, staff member Evie Frederiksen, and volunteers Diana Dean and Steve Vicario of Team V Technology—took on the task of building brand-new pages in WordPress, writing brand-new content, and sourcing all-new material to expand on our educational and digital collection offerings.

Read Joey's behind-the-scenes post on the new website, where he details goals of the redesign and more: <https://oswegohistorical.org/education/new-historical-society-website/>

History of the Oswego Yacht Club Exhibition Now On Display

“*Ah! what pleasant visions haunt me
As I gaze upon the sea!
All the old romantic legends,
All my dreams, come back to me.

Sails of silk and ropes of sandal,
Such as gleam in ancient lore;
And the singing of the sailors,
And the answer from the shore!*”

Excerpts, “The Secret of the Sea” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(from Seaside and Fireside, 1850)

In 1881, a group of Oswegonian “dreamers of the sea” including businessman and banker John T. Mott, founded and adopted a constitution for the Oswego Boat Club. Very quickly the name changed to the Oswego Yacht Club (OYC) in 1882. An official charter was granted in 1883, making the organization the oldest officially incorporated and chartered yacht club on the American side of Lake Ontario.

The OYC's storied history—from its modest 1883 Stick Style clubhouse, to expansion into what is now the McCrobie Building, through its decline in the 1920s and revitalization in the modern day—is now on display through September at the Richardson-Bates House Museum.

Nancy Mott Frank, great-granddaughter of John T. Mott, founder of both OYC (1881) and the Oswego Historical Society (1896), graciously loaned historic family artifacts for this exhibition. Other items include watercolor sketches of Oswego yachts by James Gale Tyler; an 1899 scrapbook from the collection showing Norman and Florence Bates on the Mott boat, Pappoose; various Oswego Yacht Club flags; and newer items demonstrating the historical timeline of the organization. Other items were loaned by the H. Lee White Maritime Museum of Oswego and the Oswego Yacht Club.



Eva Corradino and Nancy Mott Frank in front of John T. Mott case at the new Oswego Yacht Club exhibit, now on display.



Dr. Alanna Ossa



Dan Ruddy

The Society Welcomes 2 New Board Members; Says Farewell to Others

With the passing of the new bylaws at June's Annual Meeting, two board members' terms were up and would not be renewed. We would like to offer our sincerest gratitude and fondest farewells to **Bob Perkins** and **Justin White**. Both Bob and Justin have served the Society as board members for over a decade, and continue to foster a passion for Oswego history in the general public through their personal and professional work. Thank you both for your years of service.

The new bylaws also present new opportunities for growth in the organization. To help facilitate that growth, we invite you to help welcome two new board members!

☛ **Dr. Alanna Ossa** is the Department Chair and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Coordinator of the Anthropology Department at SUNY Oswego. She has over 20 years of experience in Cultural Resource Management and historic preservation. Additionally, she spearheaded the 2022 Richardson-Bates House Archaeological Field School, where students conducted a six week dig of our 'rubbish area' in the rear of the museum's grounds under her supervision.

☛ **Dan Ruddy** is a retired electrical engineer who worked at the Fitzpatrick Nuclear Power Plant for most of his career. Recruited by late board member Neal Johnson, Dan has worked as a volunteer at OCHS for three years. He currently serves the Historical Society as the volunteer facilities manager of the Richardson-Bates House Museum, the position previously held by Neal.

Dr. Mary Walker Celebrated Across Multiple Events



The ceremony featured a panel discussion about Dr. Walker's life and the design of the coin. From left: Jennifer Herrera of the National Women's History Museum; Charles Hastings of the Whitman-Walker Foundation; Phoebe Hemphill, coin designer; George DeMass, Town of Oswego Historian.

MICHELLE MARRA, THE GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRAND NIECE OF DR. MARY WALKER, STOOD PROUDLY on the stage of the Oswego High School on June 8 at the ceremony announcing the release of Dr. Mary Walker's American Women's Quarter. She noted the family resemblance of her bold chin to that of her childhood hero, her Aunt Mary, and told a poignant story. In 2007, her husband, a soldier deployed in Afghanistan, was severely injured and taken to Germany. She and her five month old baby immediately flew to the US Army hospital in Landstuhl. Jet-lagged and scared, she walked the halls and came upon the "Hall of Heroes" that is present in every military command building. On that wall was only one woman: her Aunt Mary. Looking into her eyes and realizing what she sacrificed during the Civil War gave Michelle the courage to face, as Mary did, the challenges that her country needed her to face.

The ceremony had many inspiring speakers: **Melanie Barber** of the U.S. Mint, **Jennifer Herrera** of the National Women's History Museum, Oswego Mayor **Rob Corradino**, and a panel discussion

including: **George DeMass**, Town of Oswego Historian; **Phoebe Hemphill**, designer of the U.S. Mint quarter; and **Charles Hastings** of the Whitman-Walker Foundation in D.C.

The rest of the program was a concise 90 minutes of amazing moments:

- ❖ **Kathie Barnes** performed a short dramatic scene from the play "Independence: the True Story of Dr. Mary Walker" by Lloyd Schwartz. The full play is coming to Oswego in October, hosted by the Society!
- ❖ A ceremonial coin pour of 2000 Mary Walker quarters included **Mary Kay Stone** representing the Oswego County Historical Society.
- ❖ The Fort Ontario color guard and Oswego High School Brass Ensemble participated.

It was a great event. Oswego had the highest attendance for any of the 13 coin release ceremonies to date. Following the event, the quarter was released to the general public; keep on eye on your loose change and see if you can spot Dr. Mary.

If you can't seem to find her, special sets featuring all of the American Women's Quarters can be ordered through the U.S. Mint's website.

Special viewing of Medal

On the morning of June 8, the board of the Historical Society invited the out-of-town Mint ceremony participants and the descendants of Dr. Mary Walker's sisters for a private viewing of the new exhibit on Dr. Mary Walker at the Richardson-Bates House Museum. For the first time in history, the only Congressional Medal of Honor ever awarded to a woman is on permanent display. Jennifer Herrera, from the National Women's History Museum, brought her whole family to the city because of their roots. Her father-in-law is Jim Walpole, who grew up on the east side and graduated from Oswego Catholic High School in 1962. ■

A recording of the mint event can be found on YouTube at youtu.be/_l4PLVp3ppw

Dr. Walker's Medal of Honor is now on display at the Richardson-Bates House Museum.

Photos from the Barbeau Collection

In 1999, Tom and Kathryn Graham were cleaning out their basement when they made a remarkable discovery: thousands of photographs stashed behind a cellar bulkhead entrance. Boxes upon boxes of prints and negatives—reeking of mildew and so brittle they could barely be handled—were recovered.



↑

The 369th Regiment was a Black anti-artillery regiment that was stationed for eight months at Fort Ontario in 1940. They are pictured at New York Telephone Co., c. 1940. (99.10.0333).

Though thousands of the prints were unfortunately destroyed by their poor storage, over 4,700 negatives were able to be saved. The Grahams donated what remained to the Society shortly thereafter.

The photos, dated roughly between the 1940s and 1970s, highlight Oswego-based businesses, people, and events. We identified the photography as the work of Frank Barbeau (1893–1983), a third generation professional photographer based in Oswego, NY. He owned and operated the Barbeau Studio from 1915 to

1978. Barbeau likely left the negatives in his home when he moved into an apartment in the Pontiac building in the late 1970s.

Twenty five years later, a Documentary Heritage Program grant through the New York State Archives has allowed us to digitally preserve these images and share them with the public. The images will soon be available online at NYHeritage.org. The work isn't done yet, however. Many images are still unidentified. It is our hope that by sharing this collection online, we can identify more images for the future. — *Evie Frederiksen*



← New York Air National Guard Airplane Crash. (99.10.4276)

An example of the collection's portraiture is this photograph of an unidentified young woman. (99.10.4092)



← Schine's Theatre, c. 1940. Now the Oswego Cinema 7. (99.10.0374)



← The Oswego County Courthouse, c. 1940. (99.10.0560)



↑ Thing's Shoe Store and Wayne Drug Store, c. 1960. (99.10.0288)

Interns Spotlight

Every semester, we're lucky enough to host SUNY Oswego students as interns, putting in over 100 hours to expand their knowledge of museums and hone their skills in data management, archives, and collections care.

In the Spring, **Grace Zlöbl** acted as a textiles assistant to Alyson DeCosa as she inventoried and organized textile storage. Alyson and Grace were able to completely reorganize the collections on new



shelves built by facilities manager Dan Ruddy. Grace reorganized and rehoused part of the Beadle-Bentley collection, a massive collection of letters, diaries,

and other ephemera from the family of Nathaniel Beadle; some from his time as a quartermaster in the Civil War. She even found time to finish scanning the postcard collection, a project that has been worked on for the past year and a half. Grace graduated from SUNY Oswego with a degree in History and a minor in Museum Studies in May.

For the first time, we also hosted an intern over the summer! **Owen Delepine**, a senior History major, worked on research, archival management, and education. Owen was interested in exploring different career paths in the museum sector. He started his internship by transcribing old articles from the OCHS Yearbooks onto our new website's education section. He then worked on digitizing many of the scrapbooks and photo albums in the Society's collections. "It's been a wonderful



experience," Owen said, "[Interning] has not only opened my eyes to Oswego history, but also the history of the United States as a whole." Owen is currently working on writing new educational material for the website, specifically focusing on the Underground Railroad's impact on Oswego County. Check out his essay on D.C. Littlejohn's sword on the opposite page!

Volunteer Spotlight: Alyson DeCosa



One of our most dedicated volunteers is **Alyson DeCosa**. You can find her almost every Thursday and Friday at the Richardson-Bates House, often on the 3rd floor without any air conditioning, meticulously inventorying our clothing and textile collection that spans the years

between the 1860s and the 1920s.

Alyson looks at each item and makes an entry that describes it, including date range, materials, and aspects of its construction, fashion trends, and anything that might be useful for future exhibits. On her own time, she has done a lot of reading of 19th century fashion magazines, dressmaking manuals, and etiquette books to better understand these clothes. When she found a rare early paper pattern from an 1864 ladies magazine in a scrapbook from our collection, she searched and found a copy of the magazine at an auction.

She also works with our interns, guiding them to a better understanding of the collection and how to handle these precious items. This spring SUNY Oswego

intern Grace helped Alyson inventory early 20th century women's clothing and inventory and organize the shoe collection, which ranges from the 1850s to 1930.

Alyson creates the seasonal temporary exhibits of clothing in Naomi's bedroom. Currently it features 1860s dresses and crinolines to give an example of the clothing worn by women during Dr. Mary Walker's early dress reform efforts. Next will be a display on the first floor of the museum of 1900-1910 dresses and accessories to coincide with the upcoming event, Salon on the Lawn.

In Alyson's own words: "I have really enjoyed seeing the clothing up close and have developed a greater appreciation of fashion of the 1860s -1880s".

Dewitt Clinton Littlejohn's Sword

While originally donated to the Oswego County Historical Society in 1969, this sword dates all the way back to 1862. It was gifted to Oswego hero Colonel Dewitt Clinton Littlejohn, leader of the 110th regiment of New York during the Civil War. The sword, as seen on the blade, was made by Tiffany and Co. The design of this sword doesn't go unappreciated, with in depth details and designs like fauna, fish skin scales, and a Roman Soldier at the hilt, accompanied by the flag of the United States along the panels of the scabbard. This sword has a gold hilt, and a gold scabbard as well. The silver blade, while rusted, has stood the test of time and still looks in good condition. As a gift presented to D.C. Littlejohn, this sword is a testament to his involvement within the Civil War and his duties as a public servant.

Life and Business

Colonel Dewitt Clinton Littlejohn was born on February 7th, 1818, in Bridgewater, NY. A business oriented individual, he used his connections to build railways and sailboat passageways that connected Oswego to other major points of commerce, such as New York City. Prior to his military and government service, he engaged in the manufacture of flour, and brought major industry to the Oswego area.



← Colonel Dewitt Clinton Littlejohn, 1866.



↗ Detail: the Roman soldier on the handle of the sword.

Roles in Government

Throughout his life, D.C. Littlejohn was a public servant. He held many roles in local, state and federal government, including Mayor of Oswego (1849-50), member of the New York State assembly, and member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

110th Regiment

Littlejohn used his political connections in 1862 to secure commission as Colonel of the 110th New York Volunteer Infantry, a regiment he helped raise through his personal efforts. D.C. Littlejohn recruited hundreds of Oswegonians to volunteer against the rebellion. He trained his troop at Camp Patterson near Baltimore, Maryland. The 110th regiment was stationed in many areas throughout the Civil War, including Baltimore, Baton Rouge, and Fort Myers. After the Battle of Fort Myers on February 20th, 1865, and a small union victory, the fort was abandoned, and the 110th regiment detached.

D.C. Littlejohn died on October 27th, 1892, aged 74 years old. He is interred at Riverside Cemetery, alongside other pioneers and important people to Oswego history. — *Owen Delepine, summer intern*



In Tribute to Neal Johnson (1953-2024)

The Richardson-Bates House is the house that Max Richardson built. Over 100 years later, it has become the house that Neal Johnson rebuilt. Max hired the best woodworkers and artisans that money could buy. Neal depended on his skills as a woodworker, mechanic, man of many talents and a cadre of friends to save features of the house that have been ravaged by time.

His multi-project legacy includes: huge original windows removed from frames to be completely repaired, reglazed, renewed and painted; the dark, wet and scary basement brightened, dried and reinforced with new masonry; and a new accessibility ramp to allow visitor access. If he didn't know how to fix a problem, he studied and researched until he found an answer; although the steam heating system had him flummoxed.

He achieved all of this with dedication, passion, skill and resolve. He was paid back with admiration, friendship and an invitation to become a member of the Society's Board of Trustees. He stepped into that role with determination and dependability, even as his life was full with his many other interests and responsibilities.

Neal left us too soon, but he touched countless lives, as was demonstrated by the overflow of friends from all walks of life at his memorial service. Many of these friends and family have donated to the preservation of the Richardson-Bates House in his name. Restoring the finial at the top of the house has been suggested as a fitting tribute.

His was a life well lived and well loved. Every year, his Christmas card contained a poem by Margaret Mead entitled "In Memory of Those We Lost." The last line reads:

*"For if you always think of me,
I will never be gone."*

Thanks to our donors and sponsors of these recent funding efforts.

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Retro Movie Night

Back to the Future kicked off our first Spring Retro Movie Night. Thanks to our sponsor **Robert Berkley Physical Therapy** for making this inaugural event a huge success.

Mary Walker Campaign Donors & Sponsors

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Give Today

Your contribution helps us in our mission to connect the community to the past, present and future of Oswego County history. You can donate in-person or online. Regardless of how you give, we thank you for your generosity.

Leave a Legacy

When you include Oswego County Historical Society in your estate plan, your generosity ensures ongoing support of our mission for generations to come. Please contact us at 315-343-1342 for more information on how to include us in your estate plan.

Make a Tribute or Memorial Gift

Honor a loved one that was involved in local history by contributing a memorial gift to the Society.

Volunteer

Volunteers are at the core of our organization, and we offer many ways to get involved. Let us help find your volunteering niche with Oswego County Historical Society.

oswegohistorical.org/donate



Oswego County Historical Society

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Dr. Mary Walker's Medal of Honor

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Image credit:
Original design for Army Medal of Honor, c. 1860.
National Museum of the United States Army.

