

NEWSLETTER

| SUMMER 2025

| OSWEGOHISTORICAL.ORG



# Oswego County Historical Society



BRINGING DR. MARY WALKER'S STORY TO THE SCREEN • PERMANENT EXHIBIT UPDATES  
MUSIC AND MEMORIES FROM THE ERIE CANAL • BARBEAU COLLECTION DEBUTS AROUND OSWEGO  
THE CAMPAIGN TO INSTALL AN ELEVATOR AT THE RICHARDSON-BATES HOUSE MUSEUM  
UNRAVELING HISTORY: TUDOR AND GEORGE FRANKLIN GRANT • VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHTS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

**So far, 2025 is another year of progress and changes.**

Three of our long-standing trustees left the board in June due to term limits. **Mary Roman**, **Charlene Mitchell**, and **Mary Kay Stone** have given so much of themselves to OCHS for years. We are very grateful for their contributions. It is my hope that they won't be strangers, but will continue to bring their talents and skills to the events and projects that they enjoy.

Joining us this spring we welcome new trustees: **Debra Allen**, Oswego County Historian; **Candis Haak**, Director of the Digital Humanities minor, Associate professor in the History department, and Director of the School of Humanities; and **Michael Pittavino**, Curator at the H. Lee White Maritime Museum. I am sure that their varied interests, abilities and energy will be important additions to the board. **Jacob Maloney**, MA in Museum Studies, hit the ground running during his first year as our museum assistant. His day-to-day efforts, in so many areas, have proven invaluable.

Visitors to the museum have been steady and the tours are such fun to give. Keeping with our mission of sharing Oswego County history, scanning and digitizing collections has been moving along at a great rate thanks to the **Oswego History Records Center** volunteers and many others, including high school and college students. Amazing things are being found in the strangest places!

The cooperative effort with the **Friends of the Oswego Library** and library staff to host a display of thirty Barbeau photos introduced the collection and sparked lots of interest. Attendees to the May opening reception added more information about the photos. We're still looking for help identifying unnamed images.

Our 2nd annual Retro Movie Night presentation of "The Princess Bride" in March, sponsored by **Robert Berkley**, was a hit. The Not-So-Silent Auction in April was well received and continues to be our biggest fundraiser of the year. Our membership drive has surpassed our goals! We can't thank all of you enough for your continued support.

We welcome you to visit and view our latest exhibit in the Temporary Gallery on clothing and hand sewing in the 1800's, created by Trustee **Alyson DeCosa**, along with another look at the permanent display on Dr. Mary Walker. You will also notice new items arriving in our gift shop, including note cards, mugs, clothing items, books, and more. We'll have more events coming in the fall for you to enjoy, too.

I look forward to seeing you!



*Eva M Corradino*

**Eva Corradino**  
*President, Board of Trustees*



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.

**Officers**

- Eva Corradino, *President*
- Mary Shanley, *Vice President*
- Julie Laird, *Treasurer*
- Joey Sweeney, *Secretary*

**Board of Trustees**

- Jennifer Bertollini
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- Dan Ruddy
- Alyson DeCosa
- Andrea Vickery
- Candis Haak
- Debra Allen
- Michael Pittavino



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



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## The Campaign to Install an Elevator at the Richardson-Bates House Museum

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A century ago, the Otis Elevator Company advertised that they could install a personal-service elevator in your home “for the price of a better-class motor car.” In March of 1936, Mrs. Norman Bates hired Otis to install one in her house. The cab traveled from basement to attic and serviced all four floors. It could lift a load of 650 pounds. In 1946, the Richardson-Bates house was gifted to the Oswego County Historical Society by the Bates children. In May of 1947, the Bates’ children were very glad to approve the transfer by the Society of the elevator to a family friend. Mrs. Bond of West 5th St. paid the sum of \$1,500 for the elevator, plus expenses for its removal.

Today, the multi-story Richardson-Bates House Museum is in need of better accessibility for the many visitors coming to view Dr. Mary Walker’s Medal of Honor and exhibit, as well as for the researchers and volunteers who are studying and preserving the artifacts and archives. To accomplish this, we’ve worked with a consultant to find an elevator unit that can fit the existing shaft, followed by visits from City Code Enforcement and a structural engineer to verify the feasibility. We’ve additionally contacted a local contractor to provide an estimate for the cost of installation. **The projected cost for the structural upgrades, elevator, and installation is \$110,000.**

*“The price of today’s better-class motor car.”*

Now the real work begins. The Society board is launching a



capital campaign for this project. Applications for grants outlining all of the information that we have gathered are in the works. \$1,100 in donations have already been received from generous donors like you, our members and readers. To contribute to this imperative accessibility upgrade, donations clearly earmarked for the elevator can be sent to *Oswego County Historical Society, 135 E. 3rd St., Oswego, NY 13126.*

***Can we count on your generosity to  
give this project a lift?***



## Lights, Camera, Action!

The Richardson-Bates House Museum has been host to three film projects this year. In January, the United States Army sent a crew from the Enterprise Multimedia Center out of Fort Eustice, VA, to interview George DeMass for a segment on Dr. Mary Walker as part of a recruitment film for women.

Our Victorian period rooms served as the ideal backdrop for back-to-back filming days in March for SUNY Oswego seniors finishing their capstone projects with over a dozen students filling our halls and rooms. Under the guidance of Professor Jake Dodd, every technical and artistic department was accounted for ‘on set’ and on-the-fly decisions to make the most of our spaces.

Finally, an ongoing endeavor by cinematographer Shane Johnson, Multimedia Content Creator at LeMoyne College, to create a documentary on the life of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, has included the study of documents in our collection and the filming of interviews at the museum and Fort Ontario. This is only the beginning of the highly anticipated film. Read more about Johnson’s goals for the documentary on the next page.  
—Eva Corradino



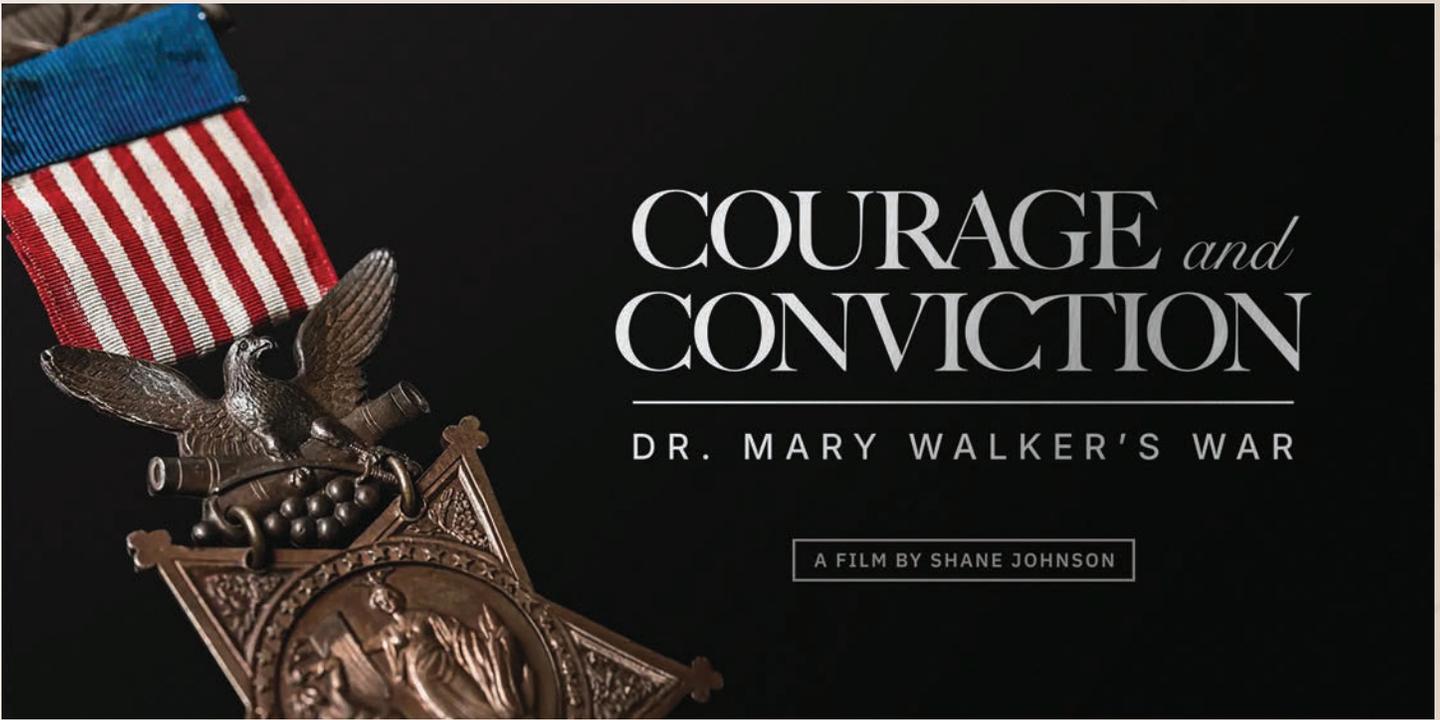
### Permanent Exhibit Updates Correct Native American History

Our permanent exhibit of Oswego County history, located on the 2nd floor of the Richardson-Bates House, debuted in 1984. It used outdated language and terminology while presenting artifacts from Indigenous groups from across the United States. Previous anthropology interns from the college drew attention to the misinterpreted objects and phrases, and determined the case needed to be reevaluated.

SUNY Oswego project intern **Jylene Figueroa** inherited this project of updating the exhibit case with my assistance. Our introduction poster now includes present day activities and resources via QR codes to reiterate the Haudenosaunee’s social and legal causes in Central NY.

Instead of the original, broader display, the new case will focus on the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the oldest participatory democracy in the world, and especially the Onondaga Nation, whose territory runs along Lake Ontario from the head waters of the St. Lawrence River down to Binghamton.

Topics including housing, hunting, agriculture and use of waterways will be displayed with appropriate representative artifacts. Please come to the museum in the fall to see the updated exhibit! —Jacob Maloney



## Bringing Dr. Mary Walker's Story to the Screen

By Shane Johnson

I'm honored to partner with the Oswego County Historical Society to produce *Courage and Conviction: Dr. Mary Walker's War*, the first feature length documentary to fully chronicle the life of Dr. Mary Edwards Walker (1832–1919): surgeon, suffragist, and still the only woman ever awarded the Medal of Honor. The film will trace Walker's path from her formative childhood in Oswego County, to her tireless fight for an Army commission during the Civil War, through her decades-long advocacy for women's suffrage and dress reform. It will also examine her legacy and the contested struggle around her memory.

This documentary represents the culmination of my professional and personal journeys. As a Central New York native with a deep appreciation for the region's history, I feel a profound connection to Dr. Walker's legacy and the environment that shaped her activism. As a filmmaker and historian, I am driven by a passion for uncovering stories that have been overlooked, misunderstood, or underappreciated. My work focuses on using the power of storytelling to educate and inspire, bridging the gap between the past and the present. Dr. Walker's story is a perfect example of a narrative that deserves renewed attention. Her life epitomizes the courage and determination needed to challenge the status quo, making her an enduring symbol of resilience and progress.

The themes of Dr. Walker's story resonate far beyond her era. Her bold refusal to conform and her relentless

fight for recognition echo in today's conversations about gender disparities in professional fields, military service, and political representation. Yet her contributions and memory remain contested. The 2023 decision to rename Fort A.P. Hill to Fort Walker paid overdue tribute to her service, but a recent federal proposal will reinstate the base's original name in honor of three male officers. This reversal only highlights that the struggle to acknowledge women's contributions is far from over, and underscores the importance of telling Dr. Walker's story. This documentary seeks not only to restore Dr. Walker's rightful place in our shared history and to illuminate her groundbreaking achievements, but also to remind viewers that the quest for equality and recognition she championed remains unfinished.

We are currently in pre-production: gathering archival materials, conducting initial interviews with local experts, and mapping out our 2026 shooting schedule. Producing a professional-quality documentary demands research, travel, archival clearances, production crews, and post-production artistry. While the Historical Society has made a foundational commitment and we are pursuing grants and corporate sponsorships to fund this project, community support will be vital. Please consider making a donation to the Oswego County Historical Society earmarked for the documentary. Together, we will inspire the next generation to carry forward Dr. Walker's legacy of courage and conviction. ■

LOCAL VOICES:

# MUSIC & MEMORIES FROM THE ERIE CANAL

BY JACOB MALONEY

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The Erie Canal was the largest New York State funded public works project of the 19th century, covering roughly 360 miles from Buffalo to Albany. Construction started on July 4th, 1817 in Rome and officially opened on October 26th, 1825 in Buffalo with a flotilla parade led by Governor Dewitt Clinton. Small community groups lobbied the state assembly to capitalize on the early success of the canal and construct lateral canals to connect their communities to the Erie Canal, effectively opening their markets to the Midwest and major shipping ports like New York City. The original Oswego Canal, constructed in 1828, connected to the Erie Canal at the Syracuse weighlock building, the busiest of the seven “toll booths” along the route.

With the Bicentennial celebration of the Erie Canal between 2017 and 2025, recent research has revealed interesting and diverse stories of Oswego County residents connected to this artificial waterway. One such story focuses on Phoenix resident Elizabeth “Lizzie” Sherman Sturgis. She was born in Phoenix to Melville and Barbara Keller Sherman in 1873 and married George B. Sturgis in April 1896. Her father worked on the canal during those “Erie Canal days” and taught her canal ballads including “Sailing in the Lowlands” (a traditional British ballad from as early as the 17th century also known as the ‘Green Willow Tree’ or ‘The Golden Vanity’) and “On the Banks of the Old Mohawk” (an American ballad from the 19th century). Lizzie sang these ballads while playing guitar, performing in Oswego County for years.

Our collection includes a dress and guitar used by Lizzie during the 1938 National Folk Festival in Washington D.C. The 5th Annual Folk Festival was held at Constitution Hall, a music venue built by the Daughters of the American Revolution roughly a decade prior. 1938 was a major year for the Folk Festival; Eleanor Roosevelt had become an honorary chair, and W.C. Handy, “Father of the Blues,” made his first appearance on a desegregated stage. Musicians from all over the country





↖ This guitar and dress were used and worn by Lizzie Sturgis during her performance at the 1938 National Folk Festival in Washington D.C. 40 years prior, the dress was also worn by another Phoenix resident to a tea party at the White House.



William Wallace Gibbs, the great-grandfather of Fay Colvin of Brewerton, was a lock tender at Lock 47 in Syracuse. Also called the “Lodi Locks,” it was the next set of locks after an eastward boat passed through the Syracuse Weighlock building.

came to perform including Appalachian choirs, indigenous, Hispanic groups, and small regional performers like Sturgis.

The dress she wore to perform is claimed to have been worn previously by J.I. Van Doren, also of Phoenix, to a tea party held by Mary Lord Dimmick Harrison at the White House around 1890. The guitar, which would have accompanied her singing, was purchased in a thrift store in NYC in the 1880s. The mother-of-pearl bridgeboard inlay was a common decoration on guitars of the time period. Collection notes conclude that Lizzie was too ill to attend any future folk festivals. Elizabeth “Lizzie” Sturgis died in April 1961 and is buried in Lysander, Onondaga County less than 10 miles away from Phoenix.

Another local story is a scrapbook of Fay Colvin’s family around the turn of the 20th century. Mrs. Colvin is the great-granddaughter of William Wallace Gibbs, an Erie Canal lock tender in Syracuse. William Wallace was born twenty years after the Erie Canal opened in Rome and married Laura Jane Clemons of

Oneida in 1866. They had seven children and the majority of them were born in Oswego County. This scrapbook includes photographs of the family, like their daughters Fannie and Clarrisa Gibbs, and William Wallace posing along Lock 47.

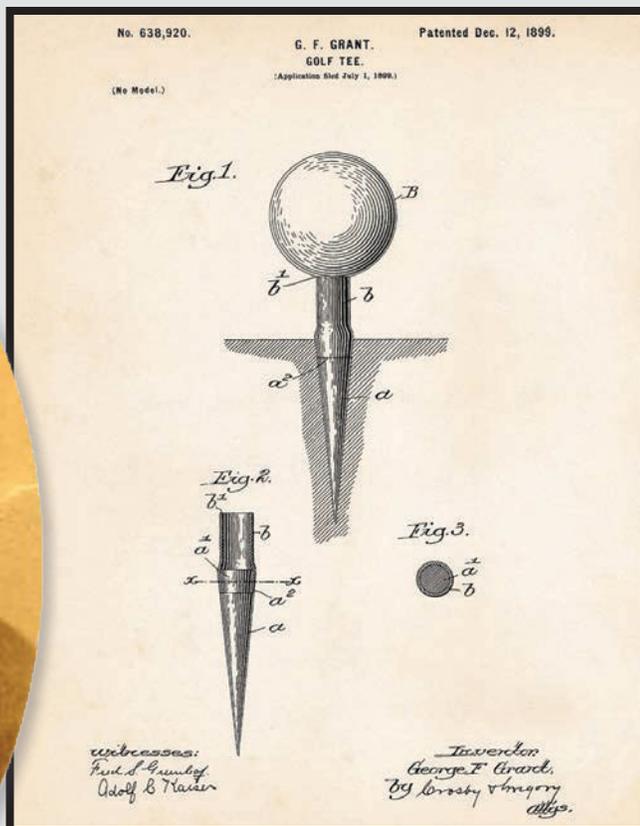
This set of locks, also known as the Lodi Locks (named after the small village adjacent to Syracuse) was a double lock which would allow traffic in both directions and the first lock going east about 8 blocks from the weighlock building terminus of the Oswego canal.

The Bicentennial continues to bring notice to the day-to-day experiences like these along this revolutionary infrastructure. Music along the canal can transcend beyond the regional level and allow new listeners, like those at the National Folk Festival, to enjoy these ballads like Lizzie had with her father. William Wallace Gibb’s story demonstrates a tradition of Oswego residents not only working on the Oswego canal but throughout the state in canal communities. It’s our hope that future stories can do the same. ■

# Tudor and George Franklin Grant

George Franklin Grant, 1870, at about 24 years old. Unfortunately, no photos exist of his father, Tudor.

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Grant's golf tee was patented with the U.S Patent Office on December 12, 1899.

**T**udor Elandor Grant was a formerly enslaved person from Maryland who settled in Oswego in 1832. Tudor had a barber shop in the Buckhout-Jones Building where the Children's Museum of Oswego now resides. He was active in Oswego at Anti-Slavery gatherings and his name appears on petitions to outlaw slavery. The Grant family, with 7 children, lived at 134 W. Bridge St. (the building is no longer there). They are among the names on the original members list of the Oswego Public Library which opened in 1857 to anyone regardless of race.

His son, George Franklin Grant, born in 1846, broke barriers of race in education. George began work at age 15 as an errand boy for Oswego dentist Dr. Albert Smith and soon became the lab assistant, learning the basics of a dental practice. In 1867, George moved to Boston and graduated from Harvard Dental

School in 1870—the second African American dental graduate in the country and later the first African American faculty member at Harvard. He specialized in treating patients with cleft palate, a congenital condition in which the bones and soft tissue in the roof of the mouth are not closed. Grant invented and patented a prosthetic device he called the oblate palate, worn by patients to help them speak and eat more normally.

But George is most popularly known as the inventor of the modern golf tee. An avid golfer, he wanted to make the ball easier to position and hit. Balls used to be placed on a mound of moist sand, so he invented a mount made of wood and gutta percha, the dried sap of the Sapodilla tree used as a filling material in dentistry, that looks remarkably like the root of a tooth, don't you think? He never profited from the patent, preferring to give the tees away. —Mary Kay Stone

# The Barbeau Collection Debuts Around Oswego

As a visual record of mid-20th century Oswego architecture, industry and people, the Barbeau collection is an unparalleled resource. In the 25 years since its donation, the collection existed as negatives only; now that the some 5,000 photos are digitized, we're asking the public's help in identifying the landmarks, people and places featured throughout Frank Barbeau's snapshots.

Photos from the Barbeau collection made their debut this spring at the Oswego Public Library, and more were shown in a presentation at July's History on Tap. There is still work to be done on the collection before it is ready to be uploaded to a digital database, but we will continue to share and ask the public for help in identifying images with no information attached. —*Mary Kay Stone*



Campbell's Department Store, 2-6 East Bridge St. Display. (99.10.0104)



United States Coast Guard Station, Bulkhead Construction & Dredging finished in 1951. (99.10.0709)



Interior, Thing's Shoe Store. 198 West First Street. (99.10.0291)



Boats at East Dock of Oswego Harbor, with Fredrick Co. Mill seen to the right. (99.10.0901)

## Intern Spotlight: Petula Morgan

We hosted a collections intern from SUNY Oswego this Spring, recognizing our commitment to education. **Petula Morgan**, a junior majoring in History and minoring in Museum Studies, completed over 100 hours under the supervision of Jacob Maloney, Museum Assistant. Petula helped organize and transcribe collections within the museum, including transcribing letters from the Joel Turrill Collection. Joel Turrill (1794-1859) was an Oswego politician, member of the United States House of Representatives, and served as Consul to the Kingdom of Hawaii from 1845-1850. Additionally, Petula researched the Richardson Theatre and created a social media post containing

photo slides, sharing these images located in her research on our Facebook and Instagram accounts. She also worked on the Beadle-Bentley Collection, developing technical data entry skills and knowledge of collections management software, Past Perfect. This software is the standard in many museums and having this hands-on experience will hopefully help Petula achieve her post-graduation goal of working in a museum.

We look forward to continuing to host interns in the future and continue our connections with local educational institutions. But internships are not the only way for young adults to be engaged and make history theirs. — *Andrea Vickery*



## Volunteer Spotlights

With so many volunteers to spotlight, we begin by recognizing **Carter Steffen** from Oswego High School. Carter was taught how to properly scan historic documents, and has been digitally scanning photos and letters as well as indexing them.



**Amelia Paige**, an Anthropology major from SUNY Oswego has been involved in museum organization and outreach including Retro Movie Night and Trivia Night. Amelia has even begun docent training to lead tours of the historic rooms



and permanent gallery. Virtual visitors to our social media pages may have seen the efforts of volunteer **Sam Citarell**, a Communication major from SUNY Oswego. Sam filmed, edited, and shared multimedia content covering exhibits and events including the Not-So-Silent Auction. Also volunteering at the Not-So-Silent Auction was **Kayden McLeod**, a Theatre and Communication double major from SUNY Oswego. Kayden helped behind the scenes in event management the day of the auction and also assisted

with digitization of the Oswego Orphanage records.

We also wish to recognize three special volunteers this month, showcasing the many ways our volunteers donate their time and talents and foster a lifelong commitment to the spirit of volunteerism. **Lisa Holgado-Mount** has returned to the region and has become an enthusiastic Harriett's Helper. Harriett's Helpers are our volunteers who clean and maintain our historic rooms. While her term as trustee may have ended, **Meg Schneider** has remained an active volunteer, serving as a museum docent and helping with outreach and events like the annual Not-So-Silent Auction.

And finally, it is with profound sadness that we recognize **Pat Brhel** who passed away in April. Pat was a long-time volunteer whose passion left an enduring impact. We are forever grateful for her contributions and work on Richardson genealogy and the Fire Department scrapbook prior to her death. — *Andrea Vickery*

# Thanks to our donors and sponsors of these recent fundraising efforts.

## Retro Movie Night

*The Princess Bride* entertained moviegoers at this year's Spring Retro Movie Night. Thanks to our sponsor **Robert Berkley Physical Therapy** for once again making this event a huge success.

## Not-So-Silent Auction Sponsors

Apartments-on-Fifth LLC  
(Sal Vasapolli)

Canale Insurance & Accounting  
Construction & General

Laborer's Union Local #633  
Eagle Beverage

Fulton Savings Bank

Glider Oil Co. (Gary Shanley)

KSG Law, PLLC

Laser Transit (George Joyce)

Mark Tesoriero and Thomas Stults  
Charitable Fund

Plumbers & Steamfitters Local #81

**In-kind donation of posters:**

Oswego Printing Company

**Thank you to GS Steamers for hosting History on Tap.**

## A special thank you to the Oswego Garden Club:

The Oswego Garden Club is a volunteer group that devotes their knowledge and time to many organizations. We are lucky to be one of the beneficiaries of their skill and attention. The spring daffodil garden was beautiful and transformed to a lush garden of hostas. Members continue to maintain the plants across the front of the museum and are developing two other areas on the south side, one near the ramp and another along the back fence. We were proud that they chose to hold their annual spring plant sale at our location.

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We look forward to seeing you at these upcoming events.

### A Victorian Tea Party

Sunday, Sept. 7th, 1:00 P.M. \$35-\$45.

An afternoon of tea and conviviality in a historical setting. The menu will include tea sandwiches, scones, sweets and other delicacies from a traditional afternoon tea.

### Holiday Open House

Sunday, Dec. 7th, 1:00 P.M. Free.

Experience Victorian Christmas through the eyes of the Richardson-Bates families. Christmas decorations and Victorian children's gifts are on display through the month of December.

## 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 to us in-person or online. 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. If you're interested in including us in your estate plan, please give us a call at 315-343-1342 for more information.

## Make a Tribute or Memorial Gift

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

## Volunteer

Volunteers are at the core of our organization, and we offer many ways to get involved on a schedule that works for you. Right now, we're actively looking for volunteer docents to help give guided tours of the Richardson-Bates House Museum. Those interested can inquire on our website or give us a call.

[oswegohistorical.org/donate](https://oswegohistorical.org/donate)



# Oswego County Historical Society

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

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RICHLAND, NY 13144



## These walls are full of history.

They protect the Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to Dr. Mary Walker. They hold artifacts and narratives of the people and events that tell the story that is Oswego County. They reflect the everyday life of a late 19th to early 20th century family and its staff whose members contributed to the progress of Oswego.

These walls welcome history buffs, authors, students from all over the country who come to visit the historic Richardson-Bates House museum and learn firsthand its fascinating secrets.

**OCHS relies on volunteers, lovers of history across all generations, to give tours and share these stories with our guests.** Volunteers have opportunities beyond giving tours to do research, help in our archives, learn preservation techniques, assist with exhibitions and more!

If you are passionate about history and love interacting with people, join our museum team today! Become a docent or volunteer for one day a week, or on a schedule that suits you. We are open to the public April–December; Thursday, Friday and Saturday, from 1–5 P.M. All training is included and schedules are flexible.

**What these walls can't do is talk. For that we need you!**  
**Call 315-343-1342 for opportunities.**