

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2025-26

OSWEGOHISTORICAL.ORG



Oswego County Historical Society

— AMERICA —

250



*Oswego Celebrates
America's Founding*

How quickly 2025 has passed! It's been a busy year, full of tours, events, new faces to our Board of Trustees, and more.

Our number of volunteers and supporters has continued to outpace itself, making it possible for us to accomplish major projects; please join us in acknowledging all of them at the end of this newsletter. Our calendar was full of events, and I hope you were able to participate in some of them. The year came to a close following our Holiday Open House and a Victorian Magic Lantern show in the museum's drawing room, performed by **Dave and Todd MacLean** and the **Good Night Ladies**. Oh, and have you seen the new sign outside? It was created by board members **Joey Sweeney** and **Dan Ruddy**, and paid for with a generous donation from two of the Society's newest members, **Brian Frey** and **Troy Mangibin**. A tremendous thank you to them!



What's old is new again! We continue to fulfill our mission to educate, promote, and interpret Oswego County History. As you will read in this newsletter edition, some very old and very important documents were rediscovered in our collections that we're happy to finally unveil, which the Society will be presenting in conjunction with the America 250th celebration in 2026. A huge thank you goes out to **Mary Kay Stone**, **Deb Allen**, and the volunteers of the **Oswego History Records Center**, who painstakingly scanned and processed these remarkable documents into our digital archive this year.

Museum assistant **Jacob Maloney** supervised three SUNY Oswego students during the fall semester: interns **Merin Hemminger** and **Claire MacEachern**, and **Zachery Vaseleck**, a project volunteer who researched local baseball stories for social media and our website. Both Merin and Claire learned an overview of historic house operations with short projects like house cleaning and tours before turning to their first large projects of creating and designing exhibit panels. These panels focused on the Underground Railroad in the city and county and were displayed at the Brewerton Erie Canal Bicentennial Event on October 6th. For the rest of the semester, Merin, an anthropology major and Spanish minor, digitized institutional film slides and selected the photos for this newsletter's article showcasing 250 years of Oswego County history. Claire, an English and history double major, worked on the Joel Turrill Collection. His personal letters, as consulate to the Kingdom of Hawaii, were well researched, digitized, and transcribed for future use thanks to her.

Additionally, we have formally kicked off a capital campaign for an elevator at the Richardson-Bates House Museum, searching for grants and corporate sponsors to help us reach our goal to make the second floor of the museum, which houses the Dr. Mary Walker exhibit featuring her Congressional Medal of Honor, accessible to all. Keep an eye out for more information about this project in the coming months.

I look forward to spring and the start of our 2026 season with the opportunity to welcome you to events and tours of the Richardson-Bates House Museum!



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.

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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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Cover: Oil painting of Mexico Point
c.1883, by unknown Mexico teacher.
(69.434). Digitized by Merin Hemminger.

“The Bicentennial Issue,” In Retrospect

The year 2026 marks the 130th anniversary of the Oswego County Historical Society; the 80th anniversary of the Richardson-Bates Family offering their familial home as headquarters for the society; and the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation. As we start to shift our attention to the celebration of these momentous milestones, we tend to look back at our history and reflect. What I’ve been looking at periodically during my first year as Museum Assistant is our archive of yearly Society Journals, the best example of local history done on Oswego County history for more than 40 years. These are a collection of historical articles that were initiated by Society board president Edwin M. Waterbury (from 1937 to 1949), who was also the publisher of the Oswego-Palladium Times. The best description of the work presented in these journals can be found in the 1976-77 Bicentennial Issue on Page V: “a work that demonstrates grassroots level interest in our country’s history as it unfolded on the local scene.”

I think this should remain our largest takeaway; regardless of how people are celebrating America’s Semiquincentennial, the most successful projects are to be done at the local level.

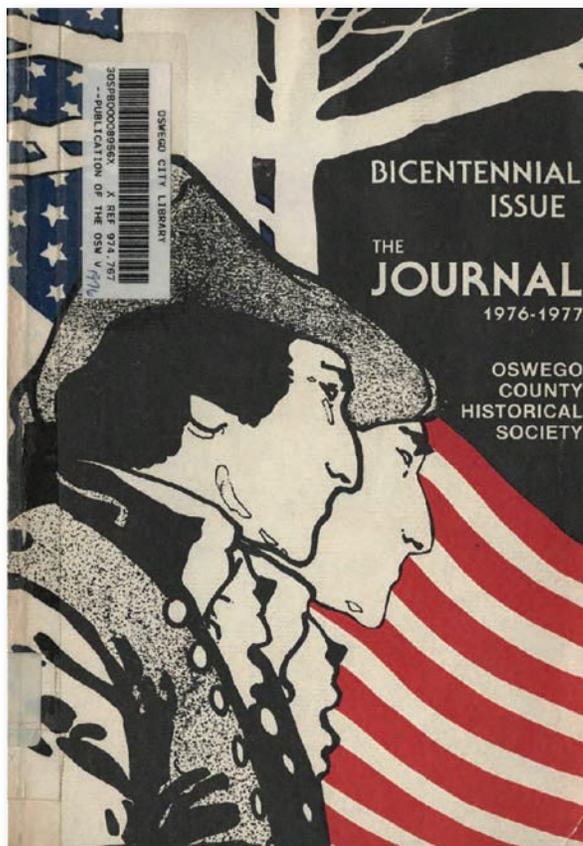
Despite this, national level efforts this year are very reminiscent of those initially formed by the National Bicentennial Commission in 1966. The *Heritage ’76* program was aimed at reimagining the foundation of our nation and what that meant for different groups of people; this year’s *Our American Story* will do something similar by traveling the country and highlighting everyday Americans important to their individual communities. *Open House USA* was the call for tourism that would expand our knowledge of the country; *America’s Field Trip* will do the same by asking students “What does America mean to you?” for a chance to visit some renowned historical and cultural sites. The third and final theme, which I

think is the most community-focused, is *Horizon ’76*; much of today’s program *America Gives* is solely concentrated on community building projects in the same way. Unfortunately, without the support of congress and President Nixon, these 1966 themes were never fully realized. We will have to wait and see how they are used during this celebration

As early as 1971, people here in Oswego County were writing about how to celebrate the bicentennial. Many criticisms of the federal and state-level ideas are very reminiscent of our troubles today, including a lack of priority in what Americans actually want. The author of “1776 and All That”, Frederick L. Rath, writes that community-level projects bring

everyone together for a common goal that benefits them. As we start this year, let’s take a page out of our historical journals—especially the sentiment from 1976—and focus on our community. The Richardson and Bates families were supporters of community improvements including the construction of the Richardson Theatre on E 1st St. in 1895 for entertainment and Naomi’s involvement in raising funds for the Ladies Home on the corner of E 3rd St and Utica St. Let’s use the celebration as a stepping stone for greater community involvement and improvement.

What are the most important issues that our communities face today? What can we do to better our communities for the next 250 years? —*Jacob Maloney*



The cover of the 1976–1977 issue of the Oswego County Historical Society Journal, celebrating the Bicentennial. Our journals offer a unique glimpse into local history as told by writers from the community.

THE
John Laurance
 PAPERS

Revolution, Prosecution, Legislation, Land Speculation!

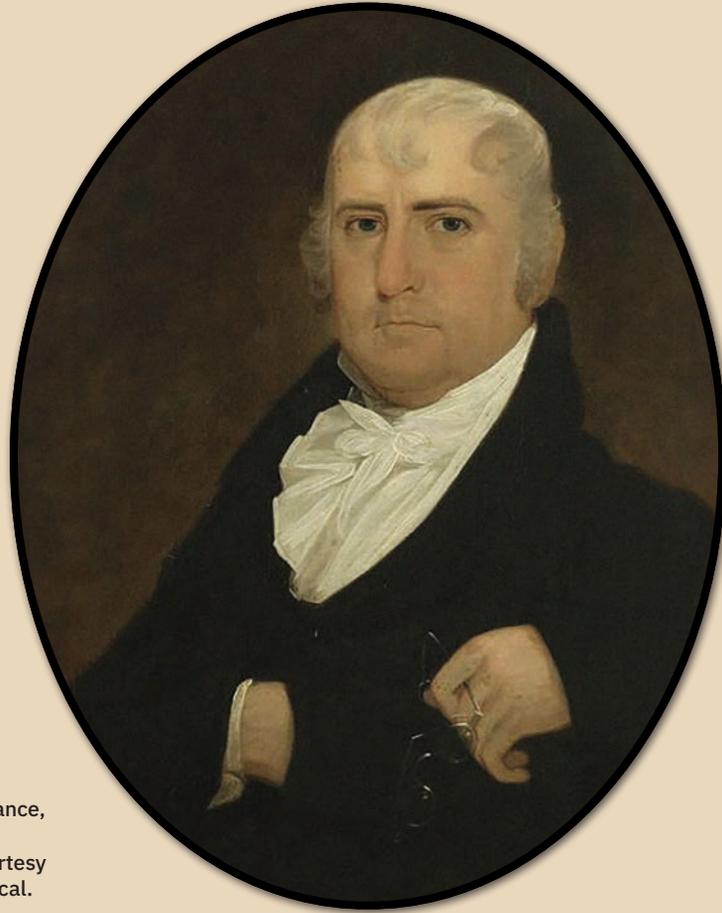
By Mary Kay Stone

Founding father John Laurance was a significant figure in the Revolutionary War and early colonial government, but has been largely forgotten, possibly because so few of his papers have survived. Oswego County Historical Society holds a fairly large collection of approximately 70 letters and documents—dating from the 1770s to early 1800s—first discovered in 1966 in Laurance’s son-in-law George McWhorter’s 1828 Oswego home and donated to the Society. In the early 1970s, some copies were shared with institutions such as Mount Vernon, West Point, University of Virginia’s Library for the Papers of George Washington, as well as to Princeton for inclusion in their

papers of Thomas Jefferson. The collection was used briefly by Keith Marshall Jones III, who wrote the biography, “John Laurance: The Immigrant Founding Father America Never Knew,” but until this year had never been properly indexed or digitally archived by our organization.

The Society was grateful this year to be awarded a \$10,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to create an exhibit at the Richardson-Bates House Museum that will feature Laurance’s collection for the 250th commemoration of America’s founding. After displaying it at the museum, we plan to share the traveling exhibit with any other institutions that are interested in showcasing the material.





Portrait of John Laurance, oil on canvas, artist unknown. Image courtesy The New York Historical.

WHO WAS JOHN LAURANCE?

John Laurance was an immigrant from Cornwall, England who moved to New York in 1767. His success was impacted by his ability to associate with well-connected men. Determined to become a lawyer, he borrowed law books from Lt. Governor Cadwallader, and after years of self study, Laurance was able to enter the New York Bar in 1772.

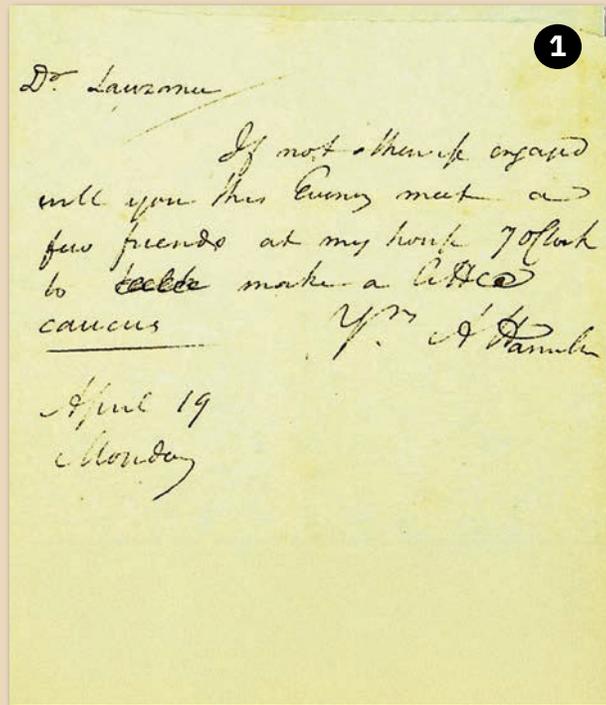
Alexander McDougall, a member of the clandestine society Sons of Liberty, became a huge influence in Laurance's life. Through McDougall he established his revolutionary leanings. In 1775, he married McDougall's daughter Betsy. On his father-in-law's promotion to General, Laurance became his aide-de-camp and paymaster.

As a member of the Continental Army, Laurance became a second lieutenant and took part in the unsuccessful invasion of Quebec under the command of Benedict Arnold, who he later prosecuted in his

capacity of Judge Advocate General. He was named Judge Advocate General on General Washington's staff in 1777, holding this post until he resigned from the army on 3 June 1782. After the war Laurance was active in the law and politics, but also land speculation: from 1785 to 1800 he represented New York in many Federal and state legislative and judicial positions. As a close friend and real estate partner to Alexander Hamilton, he invested in large portions of Oswego County in 1796, never settled, but travelled here to survey his land.'



Our collection consists primarily of letters sent to Laurance, including ones from the offices of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. We have one letter from A. Hamilton to Laurance in this collection. It is suggested by biographer Jones that there is little extant correspondence between them



because they lived so close to each other in New York that they may have seen each other on a daily basis. Laurance was such an intimate friend that he served as a pallbearer at Hamilton's funeral and was among the people who settled Hamilton's debts by buying property from the estate.

Laurance was not untainted by greed in the land speculation that followed the Revolutionary War. As son-in-law to General McDougall, as military paymaster, as judge advocate and in legislative positions, he was positioned for insider deals. He often was the judge in the trials, drew up the deeds and did the paperwork. Laurance invested in Military bounty lots, confiscated Loyalist properties, and vacated Native American tracts. With Alexander Hamilton and other wealthy, well-connected men in the new government he obtained property in Manhattan, Westchester County and upstate NY.

What is fascinating about this collection is the diversity of documents, some created before and during the Revolutionary War in New York City, Boston and West Point, and some Oswego-related items collected after Laurance's death by his McWhorter family descendents.

For instance, take the 1827 handwritten list of auction lots in West and East Oswego with their prices and buyers (5). The most famous names in Oswego's earliest settlement are scattered throughout: Alvin Bronson, Gerritt Smith, Abram Varick, Elijah and Frederick Carrington, and Joel Turrill to name a few. The creator of this ledger is unknown, though it's likely to be son-in-law

George H. McWhorter, who inherited a number of Laurance's Oswego properties. The year following would be when McWhorter built the stone house on East Mohawk and 6th Street where this collection was first uncovered. McWhorter's stone house is today owned by Matt and Katie (O'Brien) Beaudry.

The Society, in partnership with the volunteers of the Oswego History Records Center, have indexed and scanned the collection and looks forward to exhaustively researching it and presenting it to Oswego and the wider historic community.

This article was made possible with the notes taken by Joan DeCosa from the biography of John Laurance by Keith Marshall Jones III.

1. Note from Alexander Hamilton to friends requesting a caucus at his house on Monday April 19, undated. Note Hamilton's signature on middle right! (66.1.39)
2. 1777 Letter to General Alexander McDougall from Colonel Marinus Willett. Willet led the last campaign of George Washington's in the Revolutionary War: an unsuccessful attempt in 1783 to capture Fort Ontario from the British. (66.1.25)
3. Lot map of the village of Oswego, c. 1830.
4. 1806 Land Sale (Indenture) document from Alexander Hamilton's estate to John Laurance, detail. (66.1.58)
5. Land auction lots, c. 1827. Famous early Oswego settlers like Gerrit Smith and Joel Turrill are included.

LAKE ONTARIO



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100



This Indenture, made the *twenty fifth* day of *April* - in the Year one thousand eight hundred and *five* - BETWEEN GOUVERNEUR MORRIS, RUFUS KING, EGBERT BENSON, OLIVER WOLCOTT, and CHARLES WILKES, Trustees for the Subscribers to the Loan for the benefit of the estate of the late ALEXANDER HAMILTON, of the one part; AND

John Laurance Esq. of the other part, Witnesseth, That the said parties of the first part, in consideration of the sum of *Twenty one hundred thirty seven and 41/100* dollars, to them paid by the said party of the second part; the receipt whereof the said parties of the first part do hereby acknowledge, have granted, bargained, sold, and released, and by these presents do grant, bargain, sell, and release, to the said party of the second part, All those two certain lots of land in the Township of *15 of Scriba's - Patent*, and distinguished on the Map of the said Township by *N^o 35 - cont^y 126 1/2 aces*, & *N^o 105* (subject to the Contract of *John Kendall*, dated on or about the *28th Oct. 1805*) containing *149 1/4 aces*.

Likewise all those six certain lots of land distinguished

2

Port Constitution March 20 1777

Hon^r Sir

Inclosed I send you a return of our regiment as far as it is in my power headed exactly like the copy received from you, but with submission they leave to mention whether the head would not be more proper thus, a return of a detachment part of the third new york regiment commanded by Peter Genswoort Esq? Port Constitution

Have the pleasure to inform you that those difficulties formerly mentioned to you are mostly removed except the blankets which I shall endeavour to follow your directions about, as there is provision made for purchasing arms if to be had I have had some opportunities and have embraced two without any orders for that purpose -

Feel myself happy in the offer of your assistance to the troops under my command, as relying upon your candor shall make free to refer to you for assistance when necessary - you may depend upon it none shall be more ready to aim at meriting your attention than

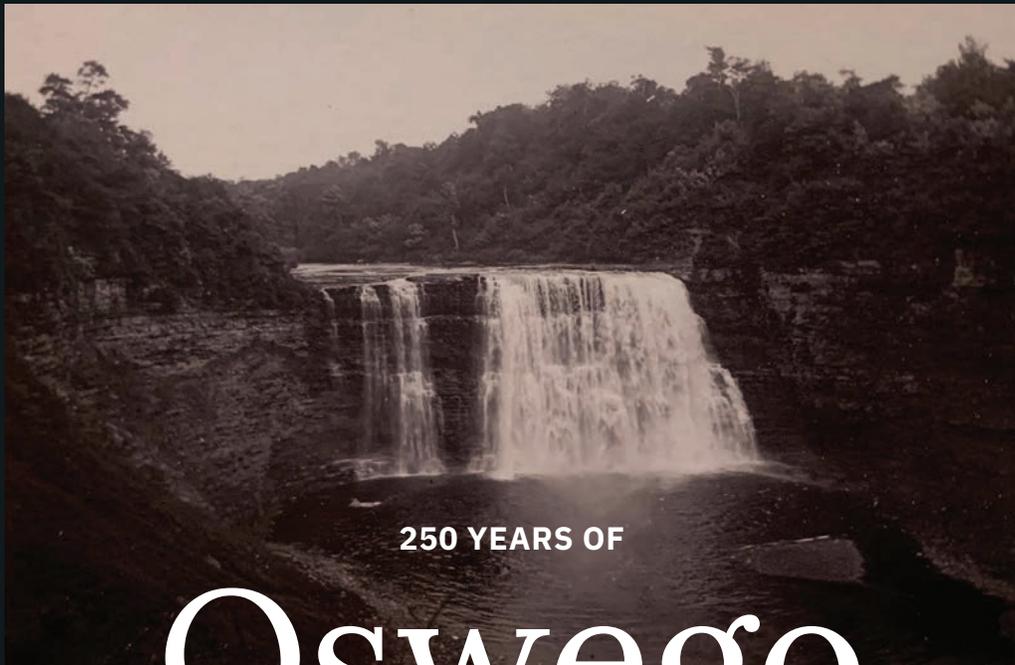
Hon^r Sir
Yours most obedient
Humble Serv^t
Marinus Willett

Gen^l M^o Douglass

5

74	North	1/2	A. Varick	150
"	South	1/2	do	140
75	North	1/2	do	170
"	South	1/2	F.S. Morgan	140
76	North	1/2	J. Cochran	250
"	South	1/2	A. Varick	210
77	North	1/2	G. Smith	275
"	South	1/2	G. P. Wyckoff	405
79. 80. 81			J. Furill	260
82			A. Varick	145
83			do	140
84			Ph. T. Rowe	145
85	North	1/2	A. Varick	150
"	South	1/2	Sarah Bevell	135
86	North	1/2	Mr Bristol	150
"	South	1/2	A. Varick	155
87	North	1/2	J. Furill	150
"	South	1/2	F. S. Morgan	155
88	North	1/2	do	220
"	South	1/2	do	200
89	North	1/2	A. Varick	325
"	South	1/2	do	400
91. 92	With street		Benj: Burt	100
93. 94			Orlando Parker	175
95. 96. 100			Commis for cemetery	352

Taking the varied fabric of our county's history and putting it in a neat package of visuals is no easy ask. Nevertheless, I posed the question to museum assistant **Jacob Maloney** and fall intern **Merin Hemminger**, and they answered in-kind with the following selection of images from the Society's archives. The portrait these two have thoughtfully painted of Oswego County's 250-year history highlights the way our county's identity has been formed by our connection to the Erie Canal and Lake Ontario, even in places that never touch the water. I can't think of a better representation of our 250th celebration than this. —*Joey Sweeney*



Oswego County

A 19th century photograph of Salmon River Falls in Orwell, NY. The river is world renowned for its salmon fishing in the fall months. The town of Orwell developed in 1817 around the many rural industries like logging, which utilized the power of the river. (93.5.63)



A map of settlements in the Scriba Land Patent purchase of 1794 taken from a *Mexico, Mother of Towns* scrapbook in our collection. Notice all of the original settlement names include Vera Cruz, Fredericksburgh, and Metz. Is the name of your area the same or has it been changed?



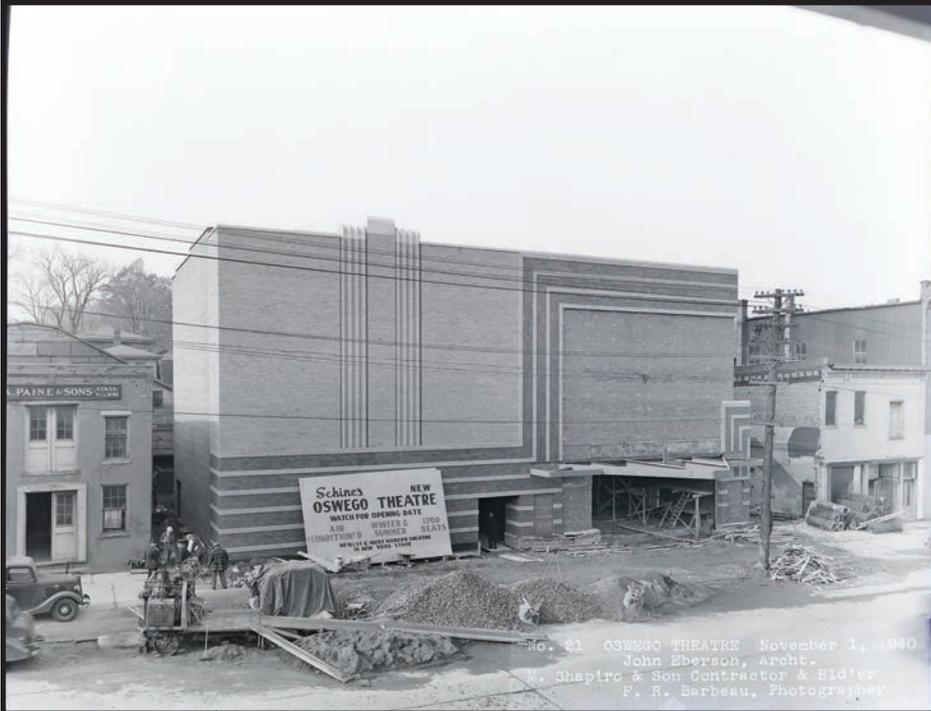
An aerial photograph of Fort Ontario c. 1960–1970. Fort Ontario State Historic Site has had fortifications on this site since 1755. First built by the British, it was once the longest garrisoned post in the country. The fort continues to be a major attraction for our region.



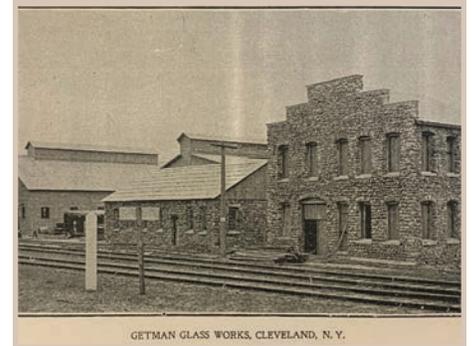
Scene from the Safe Haven Emergency Refugee Shelter, depicting some of the 982 refugees housed at Fort Ontario from Aug. 1944 to Feb. 1946. As the only refugee shelter in the United States, people from 19 European countries fled and were housed here.



The Schroepel Mansion in Pennellville was originally built in 1818 with additions to the rear of the house in 1836. George Schroepel was a local merchant and sawmill owner for whom the neighboring town is named. Generations of the same family lived in the mansion until it was sold in 1948. (73.61.07)



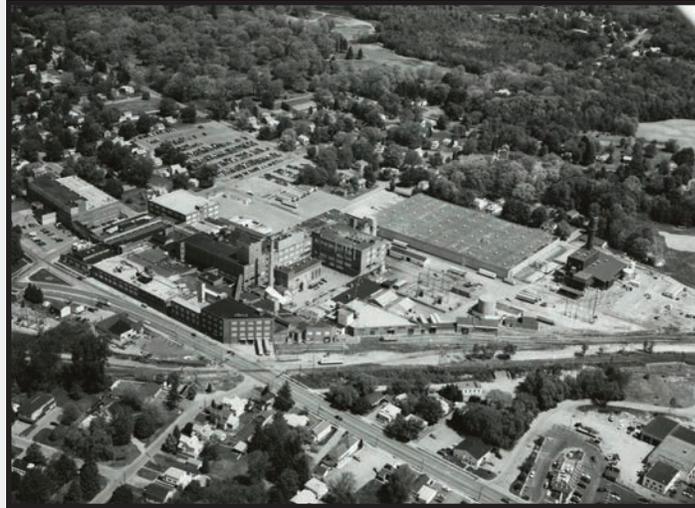
This photograph by Frank Barbeau shows the Schine's Oswego Theatre, now known as Oswego Cinema 7, as it was being constructed in 1940. Oswego used to have several theatres for productions and film during the late 19th and 20th centuries. Now, only a few theatres remain in the county. (99.10.0375)



Cleveland is located on the north shore of Oneida Lake in the southeastern corner of the county. The original glassworks factory was established in 1840 by Anthony Landgraff. By 1863, the company was sold to Crawford Getman and a partner, then eventually owned entirely by him. Cleveland experienced a boom period of 40 years in the 19th century with businesses like the glassworks appearing along the canal.



Selkirk Lighthouse, c. 1885-1898, located in Pulaski, NY. The lighthouse was built in 1838 at the mouth of the Salmon River, where it connects to Lake Ontario. The tower still contains one of the few remaining "birdcage" tower styles in United States lighthouses. The mouth of the Salmon River was used for fishing by the Haudensaunee and was the site of a 1684 diplomatic meeting with the French. (83.1.167)



An aerial photograph of the Nestlé Plant in the city of Fulton, c. 1991. This was the first Nestlé factory in North America (1900) and is where the Nestlé Crunch, Nesquik, and Toll House Morsels were invented. The factory was closed in 2003. (91.18.3)



West 1st and Bridge Streets in Oswego, 1908. Notice the political banner for presidential nominee William H. Taft prior to the 1908 election. The building in the center now houses the Children's Museum of Oswego. This corner continues to be a major hub for commerce and entertainment for downtown Oswego. (79.57.6)

HONORING OUR

FEATURE



Deb Allen represented the 250th Commission at Fort Ontario's Haudenosaunee Conference Commemoration on June 21, 2025. Photo provided.

Oswego County Historian Deb Allen has been busy this year—and not just because she joined our Board of Trustees in May. She recently sat down for an interview covering Oswego's history, in addition to her own. The following is a condensed snapshot of that interview. **By Andrea Vickery**

Andrea: You've been involved with Oswego County's 250th commission. Could you tell us about some of the key initiatives you're working on to commemorate this period in our county's history?

Deb: We're working on outreach, trying to get into the schools and involve the kids. We're trying to start a contest that features essays, art, and even video created by local kids. We're also working to encourage towns and municipalities to have some kind of commemorative event. We're also working on two books, one on the Revolutionary War Veterans of Oswego County and the other updating an unpublished manuscript by the prior county historian, Tony Slosek. This second project focuses on the history of Oswego County through the end of the British Occupation of Fort Ontario in 1796.

Andrea: What drew you to local history, particularly this era?

Deb: I started in local history with my own genealogy. My great-great-great grandfathers were in the Civil War, I had documented a Revolutionary War soldier in my family and I'm now a member of the D.A.R. [Daughters of the American Revolution]. I found there was nothing written on the Revolutionary War soldiers of Oswego County.

I had no idea how many soldiers were here! Almost every town in Oswego County has at least one veteran of the Revolutionary War. We (Deb and Shawn Doyle, Richland Town Historian and Half-Shire Historical Society President) have applied and received grants to fund twelve Patriot Burial markers from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation for cemeteries where Revolutionary War veterans are buried. We've also applied for two more markers this year.

Andrea: What are some of the surprises you've uncovered in your research?

Deb: I learned that the last action of the Revolutionary War was when George Washington ordered Marinus Willett to take Fort Ontario. It was a flop. The United States army

gained several of our soldiers from that, and it just amazes me that these guys came up from Fort Herkimer in a lake effect storm, had frozen feet and nearly starved to death. Yet so many of them came back here after the war ended. Obviously they realized it was a really beautiful area and there was lots of land. There were also deserters of the British forces who settled in New Haven after the Battle of Saratoga, including two British soldiers and one Hessian soldier.

Andrea: When we're thinking about Oswego's history, what do you think are some of the most important lessons from 250 years ago that resonate with us today?

Deb: Well, you know when I was in school, we learned about the French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812. The one thing they forgot to tell us? It happened here. We thought it happened out west. We didn't know we were the western frontier at the time.

Andrea: If you could fast forward 50 or even 250 years, what do you hope future residents will say about Oswego County and the work being done today to preserve its history?

Deb: I would hope they say, "Hey, they did a great job." In reality, I expect they'll say the same thing we say now: "They missed so much!" They didn't have the tools we have now, and we don't know what their future will look like.

Andrea: What are you most excited about contributing to our working board?

Deb: The records—I'm all about the records! I was a records manager before serving as town historian, so I love paper and seeing new records and scans. When I saw Marinus Willett's signature in the John Lawrence papers I hyperventilated! To have that record here in Oswego is really amazing.

The full transcript and video of Deb Allen's interview will be available at oswegohistorical.org/press this spring.

“Every Town Has a Story”

There are 22 towns, 2 cities, and 7 villages in Oswego County. Each story is being told by local historical societies and museums. Many have historical cemeteries in which Revolutionary veterans are buried. Deb Allen, Oswego County Historian, has been performing research in conjunction with the DAR and SAR to locate veteran burial sites. Many of these veterans moved to Oswego County to live their lives after the war. Their descendants

continued to prosper and became integral in the growth and success of their communities. Here is a sampling of our partner historical societies and museums within our county and open to the public.

Collecting, preserving, and archiving historic documents allows us to interpret the stories of our history. Please consider visiting these organizations, and let them know we sent you!
— *Linda Ruddy*



Fulton Friends of History
177 E.1st St, Fulton, NY;
315-598-4616

John Wells Pratt House holds countless pieces of local history, with permanent displays of Fulton’s industry, heritage, people, and geographical history.



Half-Shire Historical Society
1100 County Rte 48, Richland, NY;
315-298-2986

Historical archives for the towns of Albion, Amboy, Boylston, Mexico, New Haven, Orwell, Parish, Redfield, Richland, Sandy Creek, and Williamstown.



Hannibal Historical Society
923 Cayuga St, Hannibal, NY;
315-564-9995

Maintains a permanent museum collection and features other temporary exhibits within the community.



Mexico Historical Society
3250 Main St, Mexico, NY;
315-963-7853

Owens and maintains the Starr Clark Tin Shop and Underground Railroad Museum, and The Chandler-Ames Bank Museum, both containing artifacts relevant to Mexico NY history.



Oswego Town Historical Society
2320 Co. Rte. 7, Oswego, NY;
315-420-0000

Collects, preserves, and interprets all aspects of local history, including Dr. Mary Walker and the Underground Railroad.



Pulaski Historical Society
3428 Maple Ave, Pulaski, NY;
315-298-4650

The museum is filled with artifacts, records, and exhibits of the village and area history.



Sandy Creek History Center
1992 Harwood Drive, Sandy Creek, NY;
315-387-5456

Contains a wealth of information and research materials regarding the history of Sandy Creek.



Schroepel Historical Museum
486 Main St., Phoenix, NY;
315-695-6641

The museum displays historic documents and artifacts of Phoenix and the Town of Schroepel.



Volney Town History Center
1445 County Route 6, Fulton, NY;
315-593-8288 x7

The center collects census records, photographs, family records, genealogies of Volney and Fulton families, and research on the Underground Railroad.

Thank you to our 2025 donors, members, sponsors and volunteers.

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