

NEWSLETTER

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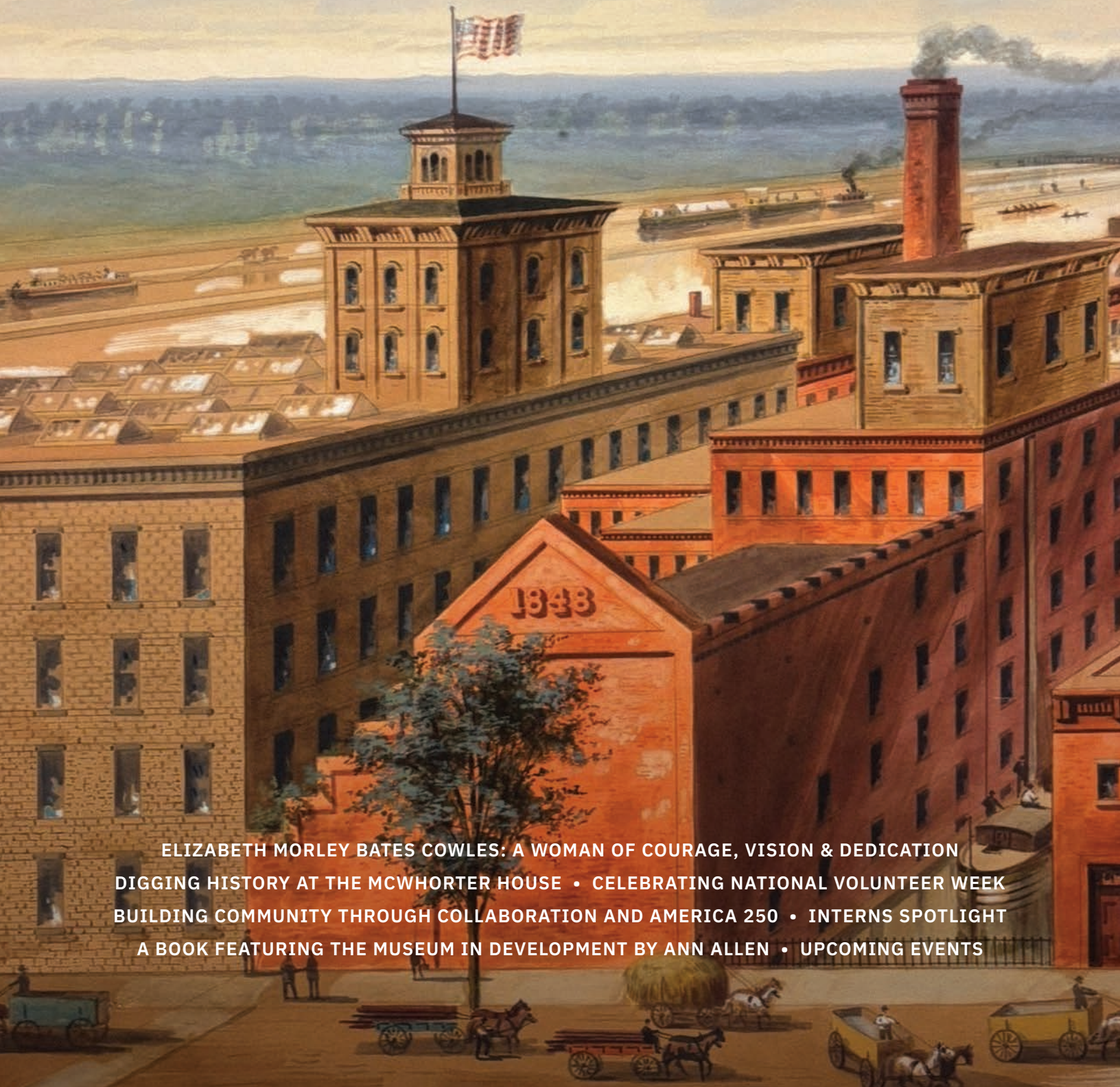
SUMMER 2026

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OSWEGOHISTORICAL.ORG



# Oswego County Historical Society



ELIZABETH MORLEY BATES COWLES: A WOMAN OF COURAGE, VISION & DEDICATION  
DIGGING HISTORY AT THE MCWHORTER HOUSE • CELEBRATING NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK  
BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH COLLABORATION AND AMERICA 250 • INTERNS SPOTLIGHT  
A BOOK FEATURING THE MUSEUM IN DEVELOPMENT BY ANN ALLEN • UPCOMING EVENTS

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Spring and summer have been very busy for the Oswego County Historical Society. The Richardson-Bates House has been bustling with visitors, volunteers, special tours, interns and more!

Special tours were conducted for groups including SUNY Oswego's Dr. Mary Walker Health Center, Oswego Public Library, Northern New York Library Network, National Medal of Honor Museum staff from Texas, and passengers from the American Cruise Lines. It is exciting to share with such a wide range of people.

Long-term board member, **Mary Shanley**, retired this year. Her contributions to the Society have been many and varied, and she will be missed. I know she will still be volunteering for events and hopefully join us, as so many past board members do, when it comes time for preparing our mailings.

Our record number of volunteers vary from high school age to retirees working on all sorts of projects, from digitizing and inventories, to tours and maintenance. **Mary Kay Stone** and **Dan Ruddy** are crucial to keeping all of these projects and volunteers moving forward. Museum Assistant **Jake Maloney** continues to juggle supervising interns with his many other tasks. He organized a celebration for our eight graduating former interns from SUNY Oswego this May. **Emma Green**, Museum Studies and History student from SUNY Fredonia joined us this summer. Her project on our John Laurance collection just recently showcased at the Oswego County Fair. How fun!

Retro Movie Night in March was a successful and fun event, hosted by **Dr. Shweta Singh** in honor of our original sponsor, **Robert Berkley**, who passed away last year. We are also sad to have lost **Dave MacLean**, who brought his Magic Lantern Show to us last December. Our biggest fundraiser, the Not So Silent Auction in May, was rewarding for all.

An exhibit for our Temporary Gallery was curated and presented by a new volunteer with a Masters in Art History, **Michael Parks**. His "Painting Oswego" gave visitors a glimpse at wonderful works by local artists which normally are in collections storage. A new exhibition of our John Laurance Collection will be taking its place in August, so be sure to stop in to see what we have from one of our country's founding fathers, as first unveiled in our last newsletter!



I look forward to seeing you soon at upcoming events and at the 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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Eva Corradino, *President*  
Alanna Ossa, *Vice President*  
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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](http://www.oswegohistorical.org)  
[ochs@rbhousemuseum.org](mailto:ochs@rbhousemuseum.org)



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Cover: Oswego Starch Factory, 1893, by John Z. Wood (81.28.141). Originally displayed at the Chicago World's Fair, 1893; now on display in "Painting Oswego," curated by museum volunteer Michael Parks.

We've been busy since opening our doors for the season in April! This year marks the 80th anniversary of the historical society's ownership of the Richardson-Bates House Museum, and the 130th anniversary of the founding of our organization. Here are some highlights of the recent happenings at the museum.

### *Painting Oswego Exhibit Debuts*

We featured a new exhibit, "Painting Oswego" in the second floor temporary gallery, curated by **Michael Parks**, volunteer researcher and adjunct faculty member at Pratt Munson in Utica. Focusing on the rich artistic and cultural history of 19th and 20th century works, highlights include *Children of the Sloan House* by *George W. King*, work by artist Eugene Kaskin, and a striking piece featuring the Oswego Starch Factory (a detail of which is the cover of this newsletter). In his presentation on the exhibit in May, Parks shared insights into the museum collections and his research on the featured paintings.

### *Walker Documentary Work Continues*

**Shane Johnson**—a Central New York educator, filmmaker, and storyteller—continues his collaboration with the Society to bring Dr. Mary Edwards Walker's story to the screen. He's created a short 'mini-doc' in anticipation of the larger *Courage and Conviction: Dr. Mary Walker's War* documentary, aptly titled "Dr. Mary Edwards Walker." This short documentary was accepted to the Hamilton International Film Festival and the Syracuse International Film Festival. We continue to be Johnson's nonprofit partner as he applies for grant funding and endeavors to complete the full documentary. Members of the Society interested in helping bring Dr. Walker's story to the screen can make donations toward the project and stay up-to-date at [marywalkerfilm.com](http://marywalkerfilm.com). —*Andrea Vickery*

## A Book Featuring the Museum is in Development

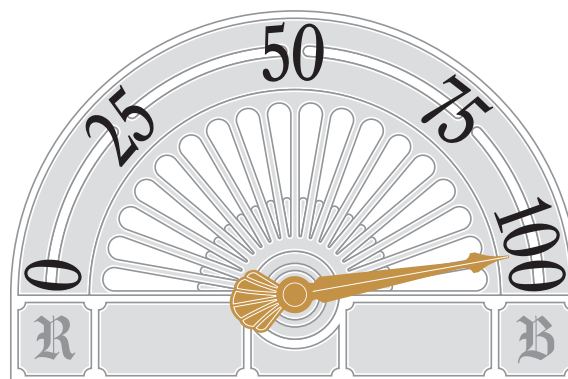


There is a book in the works! Ann Callaghan Allen has been doing extensive research on the families who built and lived in the Richardson-Bates house. She studied the 22 boxes of family archives and photos in our collection and then did exhaustive research in newspapers, discovering fascinating stories and unexpected drama. She has written a history with a projected publication date of early fall. The tentative title is "The Bennetts, The Richardsons, The Bates, and Oswego's Most Famous House."

Ann is the author of "The Madame's Business: the remarkable life and tragic death of Malvina Guimaraes" and "Holocaust Refugees in Oswego." —*Mary Kay Stone*

Something big  
is on it's way...

Follow us on Facebook  
**@RichardsonBatesHouseMuseum**  
for an upcoming announcement.





# DIGGING HISTORY *at the* McWHORTER HOUSE

Summer school is in session at Dr. Alanna Ossa's  
Archeological Field School. **By Andrea Vickery**

**Oswegonians typically look up at the McWhorter House**, admiring the architectural details of this stunning 19th century stone house. This summer, Dr. Alanna Ossa and her team of SUNY Oswego Archaeology Field School students have been spending their time looking down at the ground. Equipped with trowels and tape measures, they've transformed the grounds of the McWhorter House into a professional archeological excavation. Join us for a glimpse behind the scenes as history is uncovered this summer in Oswego.

## *No Ordinary Classroom*

Dr. Alanna Ossa is both a dedicated historical society trustee and active anthropology professor at SUNY Oswego. In her accredited Archaeological Field School, Dr. Ossa supervises students as they gain hands-on professional experience (and college credit) with surveying, excavation, and analysis. Like the historical society's intern program, the field school connects SUNY Oswego students to the rich community and history of Oswego and provides professional career preparation for the next generation of historic preservationists and cultural

ambassadors. The McWhorter House is the third site for this exciting educational experience: in 2022, the Richardson-Bates House Museum served as the inaugural site. After digging at the Van Buren Inn in 2024, the Field School returned to Oswego's east side this year at the invitation of Katie (O'Brien) Beaudry and Matthew Beaudry, current owners of the McWhorter House.

Mr. McWhorter was the Collector of Customs for the Port of Oswego (appointed 1834 and 1843). His home was built in 1828 on an extensive lot near Trinity Catholic School. There's a special connection that makes the McWhorter House particularly special during our collective celebration of the Semiquincentennial: McWhorter was the son-in-law of John Laurance, a revolutionary-era founding father, further establishing Oswego's connection to the founding of our nation. Viewers will recall that we've highlighted Laurance and his papers, discovered in the McWhorter House, in our previous newsletter.

## *Oswego's East Side: Economy and Energy in the 19th Century*

Dr. Ossa and her students started by digging through archives, not dirt. They scoured old property and insurance

maps and surveyed the physical grounds, looking for something not marked on maps. They're looking for the *midden*: an archeological term for a trash heap. This trash is treasured as it tells the record of everyday life at the house. Dr. Ossa and her team quickly located midden redeposits—refuse and trash that had been moved sometime in the last century—throughout the yard. They shared their preliminary findings on the last day of summer school session to an audience of their peers, professors, and other supporters.

These preliminary findings reveal the prosperity of the 19th century residents of the McWhorter House. Meals were prepared on stoneware heated over firewood-burning stoves and served on transferware, based on shards of ceramics and wood unearthed. These meals featured oysters, clams, and other main entrees like deer and cow based on the shell and bone fragments found. Fragments of glass with writing still visible were also located, a first for the field school. And, most notably, the field school found pieces of coal, a popular source of energy heating 19th century home fireplaces. Both the coal and oysters would have been shipped by railcar, reinforcing the Port City's history and the importance of the railway in Oswego's history.

Summer school may be over, but there's more to share as the full findings feature over three centuries of life in Oswego. We encourage you to attend the "Digging History" presentation on Saturday September 26 at 1:30 p.m. in the Community Room at the Oswego Public Library. Additionally, the final Field School Report will be deposited into public records of New York state's Cultural Resource Inventory website. ■



**FROM TOP** Dr. Alanna Ossa lecturing while at a unit on the McWhorter House grounds; students dig through identified midden redeposits dotted across the front yard.

*"I'd like to see you try."* A determined Betty accepted the challenge. Her efforts contributed to social change in the lives of women, the underserved, and minorities. **By Linda Ruddy**



# *A Woman of Courage, Vision & Dedication*

Elizabeth Morley Bates Cowles, Betty to her family and friends, was an American social reformer, philanthropist, patron of music and the arts, and founder of Planned Parenthood in Iowa. Born May 4, 1900 in Oswego, New York, she was the eldest of Norman and Florence Morley Bates' four children. When Betty was eleven years old the family moved into the house built by her great-uncle, Maxwell Richardson: known today, of course, as the Richardson-Bates House Museum.

**Upon graduating in 1918** from the independent girls school Rosemary Hall in Greenwich, Connecticut, the vivacious Elizabeth enrolled at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. While at Smith she met Harvard student John Cowles, son of an Iowa newspaper publisher. They married in Oswego on July 18, 1923.

The couple settled in Des Moines, Iowa. A young Elizabeth became active in civic life helping to establish the Civic Music Association with a first season of performances in 1925. But it was her passion, as a mother of four, to support women's reproductive health, racial justice and other social causes that blossomed in Des Moines.

The 1920's birth control movement was hampered by the Congressional Comstock Act of 1873. This sweeping yet vague legislation outlawed sending allegedly obscene publications and materials through the U.S. mail. The law specifically included birth control information and devices as obscene. Legal appeals eventually led to reinterpretation of the law allowing physicians to legally import and prescribe contraceptives.

When Elizabeth first became involved in the movement she was convinced that Iowa desperately needed a birth control clinic and tried out the idea on her father-in-law Gardner Cowles, publisher of the Des Moines Register and Tribune. "I'd like to see you try," he replied. She noted that he stressed the word 'try,' and so she did.

Elizabeth utilized her influential social network and considerable personal financial resources to ensure the movement's success. Her passion, drive and leadership inspired others to contribute their skills, time, and money. The Cowles family newspapers contributed to the effort by providing positive publicity, and offering advocates protection from opponents.

A meeting of like-minded citizens, held at the Cowles home, led to the formation of the Iowa Birth Control League. The assembled group took the courageous step of signing an agreement to create the league and pledged their support, an act potentially contrary to Iowa's obscenity law. Articles of Incorporation for the League, structure of the organization with executive and advisory boards were drawn up, with Elizabeth Cowles named as President. Supportive specialists in obstetrics and gynecology volunteered to serve as a medical board.

The Iowa Maternal Health League's birth control clinic in Des Moines opened in December 1934. It served married women who lacked access to birth control through private physicians. With support from wealthy benefactors the clinic ultimately became available to all women, regardless of race, class or economic need. In 1943, the successful organization changed its name to the Planned Parenthood Committee of Des Moines.

In 1938, Elizabeth, with her four children, moved to Minneapolis to join her husband. John, along with his younger brother, Gardner Cowles, Jr., had purchased the morning Tribune and afternoon Star aspiring to replicate the success of the family's Des Moines newspaper operation.

In Minneapolis she continued her volunteer work with Planned Parenthood, serving as president of the Hennepin County branch in 1942. Years later, a colleague recounted stories of Elizabeth "standing in front of Minneapolis City Hall handing out birth

control information and daring the police to arrest her."

Her passion for racial equality began after observing discrimination against African American servicemen returning from World War II and seeing the minority employees of the Cowles newspapers unable to obtain housing. She served on the board of the Minneapolis Urban League, was a charter member and national vice-chair of the United Negro College Fund, and a lifetime member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Elizabeth's letters reveal both her intense dedication to the birth control cause and her tactical and practical ability to make social change. Connecting the danger to women of being denied access to contraception to the damage that racism inflicted on African Americans, she regarded both as intolerable injustices. Her dedication to social justice drove her to make common cause with women across class and racial lines and to see their issues as universal.

Upon receiving an award from the National Urban League in 1948, Elizabeth explained her interest in racial justice. "I had long known that my own life was held cheap in two states. I knew that in Massachusetts and Connecticut I would have been denied preventive medical care to save my life or preserve my health as a wife and mother of four children. I felt a bond with colored people whose lives are held cheap in varying degrees in forty-eight states."

In 1966, Elizabeth was presented a silver platter awarded for her 'courage, vision, and dedication' in having started the Iowa Maternal Health League and its clinic, now known as Planned Parenthood. "There was very little negative reaction," she once recalled, looking back at those early years. "All of the pillars of society and the leading churchmen were in favor of the idea. I simply arrived at the right time with the right idea."

Her passion and dedication extended to her hometown of Oswego. In 1946, Betty, with her siblings Sally and Maxwell, donated the Richardson-Bates House and much of its furnishings to the Oswego County Historical Society in honor of their mother Florence Morley Bates. The family requested that the house be maintained as a public historical museum.

In the 1970's, the John and Elizabeth Cowles Foundation granted \$200,000 for much needed restoration and preservation of the Richardson-Bates House Museum. The project was completed before Betty's passing in 1976.

However, this was not the end of her story. In 2022, Oswego darling Elizabeth "Betty" Morley Bates Cowles was posthumously inducted into the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame: a fitting tribute to the woman who accepted and triumphed over the challenge of the word 'try.' ■

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**FEATURED IMAGE** Headshot of Elizabeth "Betty" Morley Bates Cowles as a young adult, c. 1930s. Photograph from the Richardson & Bates family archives, Oswego County Historical Society. (98.030.0008)

# EDUCATE, ENGAGE, UNITE



## Building Community Through Collaboration and America250

**FROM LEFT** Jacob Maloney, Grace Kelly, Aleesha Washburn and Amelia Paige visited the J. W. Pratt House as part of their 2026 spring internships; We held an intern graduation party at the Richardson Bates House Museum on May 2nd, 2026. Pictured from top row: Jylene Figueroa, Petula Morgan, Michael Stewart, Merin Hemminger, Claire MacEachern, Aleesha Washburn, Amelia Paige and Grace Kelly. Not pictured: Zachery Vaseleck; Summer 2026 Intern Emma Green with her traveling exhibit on founding father John Laurance, which was displayed at this year's Oswego County Fair and at Fort Ontario during recent tabling events.

America's 250th birthday has come and gone, but that doesn't mean our semiquincentennial efforts are over. The America250 initiative's three main projects remain not just nationally focused, but locally as well. Our American Story, America's Field Trip, & America Gives have all naturally aligned with many projects at Oswego County Historical Society through this celebration year, and especially when working with our college interns and volunteers. —*Jacob Maloney, Museum Assistant*

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## OUR AMERICAN STORY

The Society's continual connection with local colleges, especially SUNY Oswego, and high schools demonstrates our community building through collaboration and beyond the classroom experiences. Getting involved in your community through historical organizations provides not just further education and preservation of local history for future generations, it also gives people a sense of meaning in a time when political and social upheaval has started to tear us apart.

A lot of work goes into keeping our

museum's collections organized both digitally and physically which will allow us to maintain important local material for generations to come. Interns and volunteers, in turn, gain hands-on experience with primary and secondary source material that they may not see otherwise in their studies—like completely redesigning our indigenous people's exhibit case, reorganizing objects and archival material in our attic storage spaces, or helping work with 18th century documents for an upcoming exhibit.

## AMERICA'S FIELD TRIP

I've taken our more recent interns to the **John W. Pratt House** in Fulton, **Town of Oswego Historical Society**, **Fort Ontario** and the **H. Lee White Maritime Museum** to learn more about how other historical nonprofits operate and the wonderful work they've done to commemorate their histories. We plan on continuing this trend with other institutions, expanding our

network and bringing our incoming Fall interns to new and exciting places.

In addition, several of our intern projects have expanded outside of the museum and into the community through exhibiting material at the county fair or other tabling events and presenting researched material at school programming or a local historical lecture series.

## AMERICA GIVES

The museum has had a lot of college interns during my short time here, and although we've highlighted them throughout our previous newsletter editions, I want to personally congratulate those who graduated from SUNY Oswego back in May and offer good luck to our summer intern from SUNY Fredonia who plans on graduating in December. Without the tireless hours of hard work on all aspects by our volunteers, the museum would be stuck

in the past instead of looking optimistically toward the future.

This celebratory year is only half over but we have already had increased volunteer hours, community engagement at events, attendance with special group tours and general walk-in visitors. I hope this year becomes the example going forward for what bringing our community together can do, not just for our organization, but for the entire county as well. ■

## Where Are Our Interns Now?

Our 20+ interns over the last six years received valuable training across many aspects of museum collections management, and have since moved on to unique and interesting careers:

**Giovanni Anastasio** (Fall 2020) indexed building photography and set up our first digital scanning systems. He's now a Quality Systems Specialist at Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, where he develops and reviews the digital configuration of their documents before they're uploaded online.

**Rachel Geiogamah** (Spring 2021) created the first digital index of our largest painting storage (and reorganized it, too). She's now a NAGPRA Collections Assistant at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard.

**Nerissa Conklin** (Spring 2022–2023) indexed collections, helped install UV filtering film on the museum's windows, and concluded her participation in the Richardson-Bates House Museum Archaeological Field School with creation of an exhibit. She has since worked at the Yager Museum of Art, and just received her masters degree in anthropology.

**Leondra Morgan** (Spring 2023), who digitized collections, has since worked as a teaching assistant at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and is now pursuing a masters degree in social work.

## Oswego County Historical Society Celebrates National Volunteer Week



Our volunteers have been the lifeblood of the **Oswego County Historical Society** since the early 20th century, well before Richard Nixon issued the first Presidential Proclamation to officially recognize National Volunteer Week in 1974. This year, we engaged our social media channels to publicly thank and recognize over 100 volunteers who continue to contribute their time and talent to the historical society's archives, exhibits, events, maintenance, tours, and general operations. We additionally recognized three groups that have been key collaborators: **Kappa Delta Phi National Affiliated Sorority (NAS)**, the **Oswego Garden Club**, and, of course, the members of our **Board of Trustees**. It is a testament to the power of our volunteers that we could recognize a different volunteer group every day of National Volunteer Week, April 19-25.

The timing of National Volunteer Week coincided with our biggest fundraising event of the year: the OCHS Not-So-Silent Auction, a tradition for over 30 years. We were honored to recognize the

valuable work of our dedicated **Auction Committee** (pictured above), and the many other volunteers who show up and stay late to make that event, like many others, happen. Many volunteers attending the auction shared their surprise and appreciation at being recognized on our social media.



There are benefits to volunteering, with research studies supporting the positive impacts on volunteering to one's physical and mental health. There are also opportunities to develop lifelong and intergenerational friendships. If you've ever considered volunteering with a non-profit organization, now is the perfect time to come find your niche with us at the Oswego County Historical Society. —*Andrea Vickery*

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Visit [oswegohistorical.org/volunteer](https://oswegohistorical.org/volunteer) to learn more and submit an inquiry form to get started.

A tremendous thanks to the individuals and organizations who have contributed to our spring fundraisers.

### Retro Movie Night

*Raiders of the Lost Ark* entertained moviegoers young and old at this year's Spring Retro Movie Night. Thanks to sponsor, **Dr. Shweta Singh PT/DPT**, the owner of Sage Physical Therapy, in honor of **Dr. Robert Berkley**.

### Not-So-Silent Auction Sponsors

|                                            |                                |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Apartments-on-Fifth LLC<br>(Sal Vasapolli) | Glider Oil (Gary Shanley)      |
| Canale Insurance & Accounting              | KSG Law, PLLC                  |
| Construction & General                     | Laser Transit (George Joyce)   |
| Laborers Local #633                        | Mark Tesoriero & Thomas Stults |
| Eagle Beverage                             | Charitable Fund                |
| Fulton Savings Bank                        | Nettie Shigley                 |

Thank you for the in-kind donations of posters from Oswego Printing Company, and envelopes from Speedway Press.

Our gratitude to G.S. Steamers for hosting History on Tap.

A bouquet of thanks to the Oswego Garden Club members who contribute time and expertise to cultivate and care for the plants that beautify the grounds of the Richardson-Bates House Museum. And my appreciation and thanks to the unsung volunteers of the newsletter team: they tirelessly hand-fold and label over 200 newsletters, each edition, for mailing. Kudos! –*Linda Ruddy*

We look forward to seeing you at these upcoming events.

### “Digging History” at the McWhorter House

Saturday, Sept. 26th, 1:30 P.M. Oswego Public Library  
Join professor and Society board member Alanna Ossa for a presentation on the 2026 Archeological Field School conducted this summer at the historic 1828 McWhorter House.

### A Victorian High-Tea

Sunday, Oct. 18th, 1:00 P.M. Tickets TBD  
An autumn afternoon of tea and conviviality at the Richardson-Bates House Museum. The menu will include tea sandwiches, scones, sweets and more.

### 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.

### Participate in an Event or Fundraiser

The Oswego County Historical Society hosts a variety of fundraising events throughout the season that are family-friendly, history oriented, and just a jolly ol' time. Consider joining us in person for our next event. Visit the events calendar on our website for more information.

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



# Oswego County Historical Society

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

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## **FROM THE ARCHIVES**

From left: Norman Lawrence Bates, Jr., Elizabeth (Betty) Morley Bates, Sarah (Sally) Richardson Bates, and Maxwell Richardson Bates pose for their portrait, before moving from their west side home into the family's mansion on E. Third Street (sound familiar?). Learn more about Betty Bates in Linda Ruddy's essay on P. 6.