

The Chronicles

of the Ontario County Historical Society

Established 1902



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Connecting our Community with its Past

June 2022

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Fibers of Our Lives: From Practical Craft to Decorative Art

By Wilma Townsend

The new exhibit, *Fibers of Our Lives: From Practical Craft to Decorative Art*, is now open!

For thousands of years, humans have used natural fibers, such as flax, wool, cotton, and silk, to produce everyday practical items and to create stunning decorative art. The earliest Anglo-European settlers of Ontario County in 1789, grew and processed flax for linen, and raised sheep for wool. From these, they spun yarn and thread, and wove fabric. Mills for carding, fulling, spinning, weaving, and dyeing quickly sprang up, shifting production away from the home. By as early as 1810, dry goods stores in both the villages of Canandaigua and Geneva offered a wide variety of imported fabrics and goods for clothing and household needs.

As the 19th century progressed, Victorian taste for decoration grew as did the offerings in village and rural stores. Ladies' magazines and books published all sorts of patterns to create fine linen and cotton embroidered collars and cuffs, towels, doilies, and tablecloths, knit and crocheted woolens, linen and cotton stockings, bonnets, jackets, and many other décor items.



Wilma Townsend - Curator



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While hand sewing and fine needlework continued into the 20th century, the introduction of the sewing machine in about 1860 dramatically changed the speed and quantity of clothing and other items produced in the home and in retail settings. By the beginning of the 20th century, manufactured clothing and household items were available for purchase in local Ontario County stores and through catalogs.

On exhibit are early spinning wheels and wool winders, handmade linens and clothing, 19th century sewing machines, lace, embroidery, knit and crocheted items, and quilts and coverlets. Please stop by the OCHS museum to enjoy and marvel at the stunning items made and/or used by past residents of our county. You can also try your hand at weaving or creating a quilt square!

This exhibit will be open until April 2023.



In the OCHS Bookstore

As a fun and unique way to encourage people to learn about history, we teamed up with CDGA Coffee Company who has created a special OCHS blend of coffee to benefit OCHS.

CDGA Coffee Co. will generously donate 10% of their proceeds from the month of June to the Ontario County Historical Society. So, if you like coffee, make sure you stock up on these amazing coffee bags. They will be available in the museum gift shop as well as at the Canandaigua Farmers Market.

Each bag highlights one of the hundreds of artifacts that are displayed in our new exhibit *Fibers of Our Lives: From Practical Craft to Decorative Art*.



From the Director's Desk

By Cody Grabhorn

New Mission and Vision at OCHS!

During the winter months I began to think more about our mission and vision here at the museum. I thought about our core values and what we want to do as a museum staff and board. After numerous conversations with both the board and the staff, it was decided that we should update the mission and the vision so that they align with our short term and long term goals. What we came up with are as follows:

Mission: To nurture and add value to a county-wide community by preserving and presenting our historic collections in a way that provides accessible educational opportunities and encourages dialogue.

Vision: To be a culturally inclusive partner, inspiring our future through interpretation of our past.

As mentioned above, I wanted to address our core values as a staff, board of trustees, and membership organization. In this process, four words stuck out to me: Collections, education, community, and dialogue. As a way to better explain the process behind creating our mission, I would like to explain why each of those words is so important.

Collections: Stories are what allow us to connect with the past. What is often forgotten, however, is that each artifact that we have in our collections can share a story. Therefore, our collections is what makes us a museum and it is crucial for us to preserve and present what is in them.

Education: We are, and always have been, an institution that exists to present the stories of our county's past as well as the lessons they hold. It is our goal to make sure that our audiences, whether they be locals or out-of-towners, step away from our interaction with them with a little bit more knowledge of the past.

Community: We preserve and present what is in our collection in an educational way so that we can help to build a stronger and more knowledgeable community. Furthermore, we want to highlight the individual communities that make up our larger county-wide community. We are proud to have members from many of the towns and villages throughout the county and we feel it is important to put in even more effort to ensure that we are connecting with the whole county.

Dialogue: After all is said and done, we want to have a lasting impact outside of the museum and our events. We want to create enthusiasm that will last. In other words, we want our programs and exhibits to encourage visitors to keep talking about the unique history that we have here in Ontario County. What we do at the museum will teach others about the history and show them how to share it with others.

We are excited about this mission and vision because we believe they give our institution a meaningful purpose that connects us with our own institutional past and will make an impact on the future of the county. It also ensures that we stay true to our name and serve the whole county rather than a select few towns or villages. Striving to be a historical society that reaches the whole county is a hard task and we understand it will be difficult at times. However, we feel that we owe it to our past members and to our future generations to help nurture a community that knows and values its history. This is our way of doing exactly that and we hope to have your support in this fun endeavor.



Cody Grabhorn - Executive Director

Having an Impact

By Ben Falter

Sometimes you can be surprised by the people you are able to impact. I was reminded of that fact recently when I was contacted by Bill Sullivan, a teacher at Suffield Academy all the way in Connecticut. Mr. Sullivan was teaching social studies to a class of seniors, and they were doing a project with the Phelps-Hathaway House all about Oliver Phelps. To say I was surprised that I had been contacted by a social studies teacher in Connecticut would be an understatement. But Mr. Sullivan explained to me that the project his class was working on was to create a modern, holistic account of Oliver Phelps's life. Any such account would have to incorporate his time in Ontario County. So, on Mr. Sullivan's request, I agreed to speak to his class over Zoom about Oliver Phelps, the Phelps and Gorham Purchase, and his later years living in Ontario County.

I was able to help the class either confirm what they knew, expand their knowledge, or learn new information about Oliver Phelps. For instance, I helped them understand the details around the Pre-emption Line: how it was initially charted incorrectly so that Geneva was not part of the county, how that led to Canandaigua becoming the county seat, and how the line was later corrected to include Geneva. I helped them understand the Mill Tract, a stretch of land west of the Genesee River that Phelps convinced the Haudenosaunee to sell to him despite their initial reluctance to sell him any land west of the Genesee River. I introduced them to Israel Chapin, a key player in negotiating the Canandaigua Treaty in 1794. The class had not come across his name before, and had believed that Phelps had perhaps played a larger role in negotiating that treaty between the Haudenosaunee and the nascent United States government. More than all of that, I helped them understand not only Phelps's story in Ontario County, but the lasting impact his efforts have left on our county in the years since. I thoroughly enjoyed talking to Mr. Sullivan's class and sharing relevant pictures with them from the OCHS collections. Before Mr. Sullivan reached out to me, I would not have thought that what we do here could be so relevant to people so far away.

In a similar vein, we recently held a book talk with author Kathleen Earle, who wrote a book about an event called the Yankee-Pennamite Wars. Some of the participants in this conflict would go on to flee to Ontario County and settle here. While we held the book talk in person, we also streamed it virtually, allowing people to watch from home. One person who watched it live was from the Midwest and was able to find family connections to these events thanks to Dr. Earle's book talk. Another person, who lives all the way in Seattle, left a comment on the YouTube video after the event ended thanking us for helping him on his quest to uncover some of his own family history that ties back to Ontario County. He later wrote a post on his personal blog sharing that he had discovered that his ancestor, Jabez Darling, had settled near Canadice Lake in 1829. Jabez's son, Ezra, another of this gentleman's direct ancestors, was born on that farmstead in 1830. These are people who, like many of us, are interested in their own family histories who were able to continue that journey of discovery thanks to our educational programming and outreach. Despite living far from Ontario County now, our online educational presence helped them find these connections to their roots.

You never really know who you are going to impact. And I have been so pleasantly surprised by just how much reach our historical society has. We are making an impact, helping students learn about important chapters in our past, helping adults looking into their genealogy find their family ties. What we do here matters, and it is having an impact on our community and beyond. Much further beyond than I had expected. I am excited to see how much further we can reach moving forward!



Ben Falter – Director of Education

Research Team

By Betty McMahon, Volunteer Researcher and Genealogist

(Part 2 of an ongoing series. For past issues of the Chronicles, please go to www.ochs.org.)

From Pomegranates to Community Leader

The African-American community in Geneva grew up on High and West Streets around the property owned by John Bland. By 1860, the Black population in the Ontario County census numbered 639 people – the largest Black population of any county in Western New York. Former slaves from the farms of Wayne, Ontario and Seneca counties and fugitives from the South comprised the bulk of the new residents.

After John Bland's first wife Maria died, he married again. His second wife was Priscilla, who was working as a cook at the time of their marriage. The 1860 census listed John Bland, age 72 with his wife Priscilla, age 50 and his grandson, John, age 17, living at 979 West Street. John and his grandson, John, were both day laborers. John's property on High and West Streets were valued at \$1000! His personal property was estimated to be \$100 in value. It was a substantial sum for the times, especially for a Black family.

The question was "Why was John Bland caring for his grandson? Why not his father, George Bland?" On October 7, 1840, at age 21, George married Mary A. McQuon. Their son was born about 1844 and named after his grandfather. Mary A. Bland may have died when her son was born. Unable to care for a baby, George entrusted the care of his little boy to John and Priscilla. By 1845, George had married again, to Mary J. (--) Bland. The marriage took place in Troy, NY. Mary J. Bland had graduated from a teacher's college in Troy, New York in 1840. She was one of the early Black educators in Western New York. She conducted the High Street African School with N. T. B. Carlin for several years. She was also an author. Although it is speculation, it is possible that George met his second wife as a result of canvassing for a teacher for their school – and the teacher's college in Troy admitted Black students.

Racial segregation existed in Geneva as in most communities in the antebellum period. New York law did not require segregation of schools, but it existed in practice. The Episcopal and Presbyterian churches had provided Bible instruction for Black children, but formal education was non-existent until the late 1820s. African-Americans in Geneva were determined to build their own school. In 1834 they began a Sabbath School in the Chapel on High Street. There were 72 students.

John Bland and others pressed the Geneva school district to construct a proper school for their children, but it took over 10 years to finally result in the creation of a branch school referred to in 1853 as the "colored school" on High Street. It was built on land owned by John Bland. Although there are few records that have survived about the school, the construction records did survive. The total cost of the school was \$1,113. It did not include furnishings or instructional materials. There was considerable disagreement about the quality of instruction at the school. But at least, there was finally a school!

John continued his role as a leader in the Black community until his death, sometime between 1860 and 1865. There is no record of John's death in a newspaper and no gravestone surviving. But an article published by the Geneva Historical Society stated that John Bland was interred in the Washington Street Cemetery with his first wife and daughter.



Cont. on p. 7

Your Historical Society



On May 14, 2022 we hosted our first classic car show. This year we had it at Onanda Park. We are happy to report it was a smashing success! Forty-two classic cars registered and over three hundred spectators enjoyed the day.

Left: many of the volunteers for the OCHS Classic British Car Show.



Left: We have many researchers who come to explore our archives. These proud OCHS members came from Michigan and filled in some of the gaps in their family tree.



Right: Ben began giving his first walking tour for OCHS in May and it has been a great success! Every other Thursday he shares his research with patrons to the museum and it has garnered quite a bit of interest from members and non-members.

See upcoming events on page 12 for tour dates.

Arts Corner

By Judi Cermak, President OCAC

Putting together an exhibit

When I look at the new exhibit *Fibers of Our Lives* I'm overwhelmed by the amazing collection of artifacts that are presented. What intrigues me even more is the knowledge and talent it takes to put together a historical display.

The composition of photos and information is unified by the color choice and stitching around the edges of each panel. Large items such as the spinning wheel to the tiny cube pin holder all have a place in the exhibit telling the story of people in Ontario County through their fibers. I discover something unique each time I look.

Well done Wilma!



Cont. from p. 5

Priscilla was listed in the 1865 New York State census as a widow, living in the house next to George J. Bland on West Street. She lived over twenty years after her husband's death. Priscilla Bland died in Geneva on December 7, 1887 and was buried in the Washington Street Cemetery.

George J. Bland inherited several plots of land from his father, among them the acreage on High Street and property on West Street. Perhaps "inherited" is the wrong word as George paid \$250 for the acreage on High Street that his father had purchased originally for \$65.

John Bland's legacy was more than the ownership of land. It was more than the love and care of the pomegranate orchard that his daughter-in-law, Mary J. Bland, carried on. He raised his son and grandson to believe in and to promote education for Black children. He encouraged the Black community to work toward the end of segregation in the Geneva. At the time of John's death, George was working as a whitewasher, but spent much of his time promoting Black civil rights and trying to improve the lives of his neighbors.

On August 12, 1873, the Civil Rights Act passed. In Geneva, the day was commemorated by ringing bells and firing salutes. Black people from different parts of the county arrived. At nine o'clock a procession formed at the corner of High and Pulteney Streets. A stand had been erected in the Pulteney Park on Main Street. A large crowd gathered there as the parade reached the park. Mr. George J. Bland, President of the Day, gave a short address about how colored people benefited from the law. He believed that the primary benefit would be the desegregation of schools. He then introduced the main speaker for the event.

George J. Bland died on September 15, 1886 at age 67. He is buried in the Washington Street Cemetery. The work for Black civil rights carried on by George and the other members of the Black community were a tribute to the foresight and work that John Bland pursued throughout his life as entrepreneur and community leader.

News and Announcements

Covid-19 and Masks—At this point in time we do not require masks in the museum. We still strongly suggest wearing one out of respect for anyone who might be immunocompromised or unable to receive the vaccine. Thank you for understanding during these odd times.

Our 2022 exhibit “Fibers of Our Lives: From Practical Craft to Decorative Art” is now open. This exhibit is held in conjunction with the Ontario County Arts Council’s exhibits, programs and workshops on art created with a variety of fibers including wool, silk, cotton, flax, and other natural fibers.

OCHS and CDGA Coffee Co. have partnered to raise money for the museum! CDGA Coffee Co. has created a special OCHS blend of coffee that highlights the “Fibers of Our Lives” exhibit! Even better yet, 10% of the proceeds they make during the month of June will be donated to OCHS. So, if you are a coffee drinker or you know someone who is, make sure to stop by the museum or Canandaigua Farmers Market to support us and get your caffeine!

Book Talk with Richard Hermann July 7th. Hermann will give a book talk about his most recent book “Eminent Riparians” at 7 PM at the museum. Signed copies will be available for purchase at the book talk.

A few education programs to highlight one more time are our Church Walking Tour and a series of talks. The Church Walking Tour takes you up and down Canandaigua’s Main Street while talking about the history of religion in Ontario County. These tours begin at the museum at 1:30 P.M. on June 16, June 30, July 14, and July 28. On June 16 we will also have a virtual talk to commemorate pride month and the history involved with it. Then, on July 7 we welcome author Richard Hermann to talk about his book.

Our Garden Tour is back for its fourth year! Mark your calendars for July 16th from 11 - 4 P.M. so you can visit some unique gardens in the extended area. Tickets will be \$25 per person. If you want to support the museum by being a patron for \$50 please contact Cody at Cody@OCHS.org. Being a patron helps us to meet our fundraising goals and therefore better support the mission and vision of the museum.

Did you know you can use your IRA via Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) as a way to help OCHS?

Investors age 70 ½ and older can use distributions from their traditional IRAs (not employer sponsored plans) to make donations directly to qualified charities, such as the Ontario County Historical Society, even though the new RMD age has been increased to 72. Such distributions are not taxable. If you are in RMD territory, you can reduce your adjusted gross income (and taxable income) dollar-for-dollar by the total of QCDs in any one year up to \$100,000 per tax payer. This is particularly advantageous if you do not itemize deductions.

We Welcome These New Members

Christopher Bennem
Diane Breton
Nicole D’Orazio
Robert Marvin
Maureen McCarthy

Laurie Phillips
Jane Pierce
Jean Randall
Debbie Rought
Pam Sitler
Lynn Thurston

Canandaigua Botanical Society
Canandaigua Record Exchange
Old School Café
Ontario Insurance Company
Pieceful Seams Quilt Shoppe
Sanford Industrial Contractors, Inc.

Historical Society Corner

As a way to highlight as much local history as we can throughout the county, this space in the Chronicles will be used in future issues to highlight the town historical societies and their research. We are excited to add this piece to our newsletter since it will give every community in our county a sense of belonging at OCHS. We also want to hear as many stories from around the county as we possibly can and this will help us to do that.

We look forward to sharing this space with other historical societies because the more we encourage the success of every museum in the county, the more our community will understand and value its history. Since each historical society will be able to contribute if they desire, this piece will help explain and display the complexities of our county.

We are currently in conversation with other historical societies and we cannot wait to have them use this space as a platform for what they are doing and the history they have to share. While it is bare for this issue, we hope that it can be another full size article to add for our readership. Stay tuned for our partnerships with other institutions in the area!

The 2022 Garden Tour is here!

The gardens have been selected and we are gearing up for our fourth annual garden tour! July 16 is the day and anyone who purchases tickets will be able to visit each location from 11 AM till 4 PM.

Tickets are now available on the homepage of our website or at the front desk of the museum. \$25/person or \$50/person if you would like to be recognized as a special garden tour patron.

Tour booklets, which serve as your ticket, will be available for pick-up in early July. It is encouraged that you pre-order tickets for this event.



The OCHS Organization

Staff

Cody Grabhorn	Executive Director
Wilma Townsend	Curator
Benjamin Falter	Director of Education
Barb Hill	Part-time Receptionist
Webmaster	TLC for Coaches
Betty McMahon	Research Coordinator*
Gene Rogers	Building Support*
Linda Alexander	Librarian*
	*Volunteer

Board of Trustees

Chris Hubler – President
Charles Parkhurst – Vice President
Tricia Carey – Treasurer
Carole Lillis – Secretary
Geoff Astles
Alana Bernhardt
Gloria Dancause
Natalie DeTraglia
Linda Hawks
Kathleen Hendrix
John Michalko
Dave Sanford
Jeanna Savage
Jack Schuppenhauer
David White

We wish to extend a special thanks to all of the volunteers who donate so many countless hours in support of the Historical Society.

Address correspondence to:
Ontario County Historical Society
55 North Main Street
Canandaigua, New York 14424

Phone: 585-394-4975
Webpage: www.ochs.org
Email: newsfromochs@gmail.com

We are open Tuesday through Friday 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.,
Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Please “Like” us on Facebook! Just go to www.facebook.com and search for the Ontario County Historical Society.

Business Members

We wish to thank the business members listed below for their continued support. Please consider them when purchasing goods and services. In addition to these business members, we also appreciate the small donations we receive from dozens of local businesses in Ontario County each year.

Allen County Public Library
B & E Electric
Bella Rose Bed & Breakfast
CJ Meder Library - Periodical Dept.
Canandaigua Botanical Society
Canandaigua Insurance Agency
Canandaigua National Bank
Canandaigua Federal Credit Union
Canandaigua Record Exchange
Canandaigua Traveler’s Club
Charlotte Julienne
Cindy’s Glass, Crafts &
Collectibles
Clifton Springs Historical Society
Dancause & Sons Inc.
Edelweiss Properties Realtors LLC
Granger Homestead Society

Farmington Historical Society
G.W. Lisk Company Inc.
In.Site: Architecture
J. D. Chapman Agency Inc.
Johnson-Kennedy Funeral Home Inc.
Lyons National Bank
Mayflower Gardens Ltd.
Mid Continent Public Library
Mitchell Pierson Jr. Inc. Realtors
Monica’s Pies
Naples Historical Society
Old School Cafe
Ontario Insurance Company
Paychex
Phelps Community Historical Society
Pieceful Seams Quilt Shoppe
Preston Pierce

Rachel’s Heartfelt Designs
Randall Farnsworth Auto Group
Renaissance - The Goodie II Shoppe
Reliant Community Credit Union
Sanford Industrial Contractors, Inc.
Saralinda Hooker Planning and
Development Consultant
Stomping Grounds
Town of Farmington
Town of Manchester
Unique Toy Shop
Velmex Inc.
Village of Clifton Springs Historian
VR Food Equipment Inc.
West Bloomfield Town Historian
Wizard of Clay



Membership and Benefits

The Ontario County Historical Society

55 North Main Street

Canandaigua, NY 14424

Name(s) _____ Email _____

Phone _____ Alternate Phone _____

Address _____

Business Address _____

General Membership: ___ Sr Citizen \$30 ___ Individual \$35 ___ Family \$50 ___ Friend \$75

Centennial Club: ___ Centennial \$100 ___ Benefactor \$150 ___ Heritage \$250 ___ Director \$500+

Business: ___ Small \$100 ___ Business \$250 ___ Corporate \$550 ___ President/CEO \$1000+

Additional tax-deductible donation of \$ _____

Method of Payment: ___ Cash ___ Check # ___ Credit Card M/C or Visa No ___ - ___ - ___ -
___ Exp. ___ VC _____

Signature _____

Member Benefits

- Subscription to our quarterly newsletter
- Free access to our research room
- 10% off in museum gift shop
- Discounts on certain events and programming



Calendar of Events - Call or visit website for more details

June 16 & 30, 1:30 PM: Historic Church Walking Tour

June 16, 7 PM: OCHS Virtual Speaker Series—Pride Month with Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project

July 7, 7 PM: Richard Hermann Book Talk—*Eminent Riparians: Biographical Sketches of Finger Lakes Luminaries and Leading Lights*

July 14 & 28, 1:30 PM: Historic Church Walking Tour

July 16, 11 AM - 4 PM: OCHS Garden Tour

July 16, 1 - 3 PM: OCAC Fiber Exhibit Opening

July 30, 5 PM - 8PM: Retro Nigh at the Museum: Vinyl Record Night

NOTICE: If your address changes seasonally, please let us know the alternative address and the effective dates.

Or Current Resident



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Canandaigua, New York 14424

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