

FAST FACTS

Preserving Oswego County History

- The name Oswego comes from the Iroquois word Oswegeh translated as “pouring out place,” as the Oswego River pours into Lake Ontario.
- Oswego is considered the oldest fresh water port on the Great Lakes, established by the United States Congress in 1799.
- Oswego was the location of three military forts: Fort Oswego, Fort Ontario and Fort George. In 1796 Fort Ontario was the last British holding that was relinquished in the United States.
- The Oswego Canal opened in 1828 and the same year Oswego became a village. This created a major revolution in transportation trade and established significant economic benefits for the Oswego River valley.
- In 1848, Oswego was incorporated as a city. That same year the city welcomed the first railroad and the establishment of the Oswego Starch Factory, which would become the largest of its kind in the world.
- In July 1853, Oswego photographer George Barnard took what historians believe to be the first live active news photograph of the burning of the Ames Grain Elevator. Barnard went on to work for celebrated American Civil War photographer Matthew Brady, and helped document the battlegrounds of the war.
- During the American Civil War, an estimated 11,000 men from Oswego County served in the Union Army. It is believed that Oswego County enlisted more men than any other county in New York State.
- A lifelong resident of the town of Oswego, Dr. Mary E. Walker was a pioneer female physician and the only woman to serve as a surgeon during the Civil War. She is also the first and only woman ever awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroic services during wartime.
- In 1944, the Fort Ontario Refugee Shelter was established by the President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to serve as a safe haven for 982 Europeans fleeing the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. This was the only shelter of its kind in the United States of America.