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Oswego County Historical Society

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OSWEGO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Thirty-third Annual Publication

Oswego County Historical Society
Richardson-Bates House
135 East Third Street
Oswego, New York 13126

Founded in 1896

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Oswego, New York
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1973

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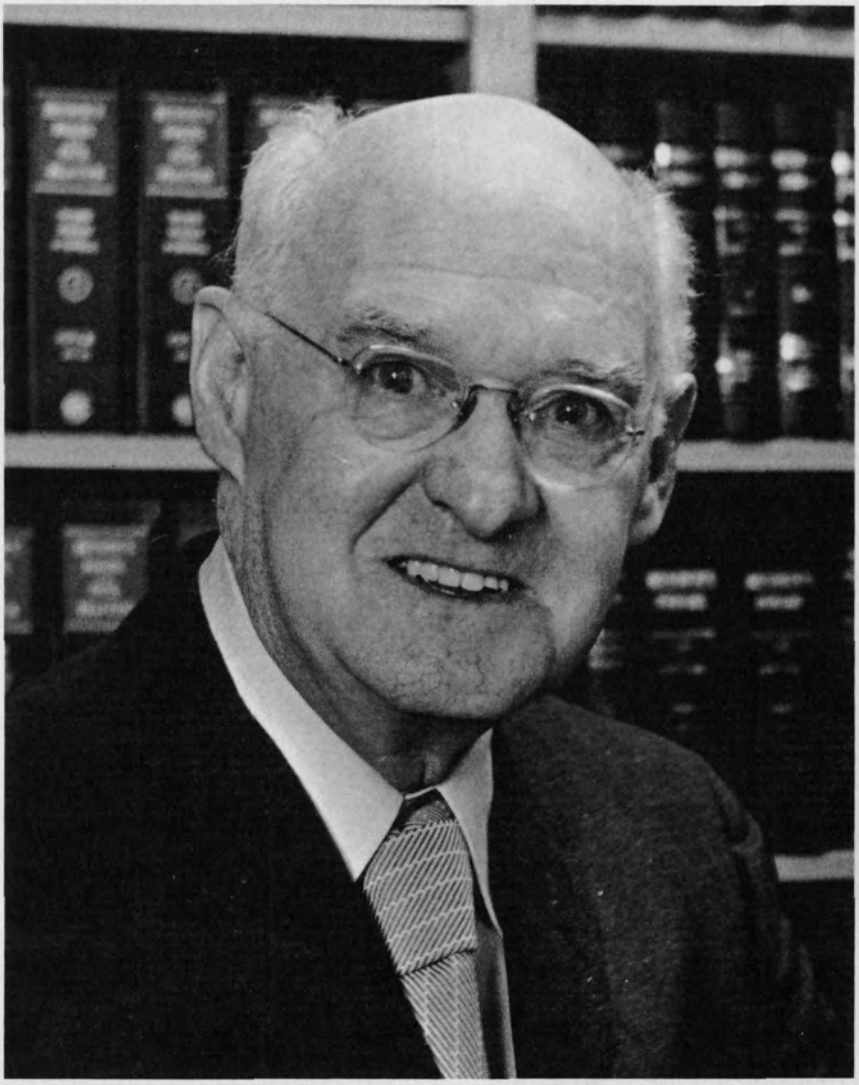


J. Leo Finn

Dedication

There occasionally appears a combination of circumstances that leads to the production of a work significant to a community, even to a region. In one instance the man on the scene was J. Leo Finn and the place was Finn's Tavern in historic Oswego on Lake Ontario.

Born into a family of sailors at the turn of the century, Leo was brought up on the waterfront at the foot of West First Street. His father and his four brothers were steamboat cooks. At one time his father was a lighthouse keeper on Lake Erie; Leo was once a harbor master and a customs officer. Leo and his wife, the former Rosalyn Mather, have a daughter who resides in Rochester, New York.

Leo operated a waterfront tavern for forty-one years, retiring in 1964. The tavern was a sailor's first and last stop and was known from Duluth to Nova Scotia. Not only was it frequented by sailors, but by many others, especially the college students. Leo was made an honorary member of D.K. and Mrs. Finn, a member of A.D. The tavern was an institution; originally on Front Street, it was moved to West First and Van Buren Streets, then to its present location, West Second and Lake Streets. This atmosphere led to Leo's intensive interest in the activities of the waterfront, past and present. Encouraged by local historians, particularly Ralph M. Faust, Leo spent seventeen years collecting, researching and writing the chronicle of Oswego's great maritime past with the assistance of his wife, Rosalyn. *Old Shipping Days in Oswego* was published in 1972 as the product of one man's devotion to an important segment of local history that would have otherwise been lost. As a local historian, Leo can be called a "modern Van Cleve."

For his many contributions to local history, the Oswego County Historical Society dedicates this *Journal* to J. Leo Finn.

A.M. Slosek
August, 1973

President's Message

Change, it has been said, is one of the few inevitables of history.

Today our nation and our localities stand on the verge of steadily increasing pressures for meaningful re-evaluation of the past, redefinition of our common principles, and rededication toward the unfinished tasks of the American experiment.

Projections for the future of Oswego County indicate that there may be even more striking changes within the County during the next half-century than have been experienced over the last two hundred years. The implications of these changes offer tremendous challenge and opportunity for the Oswego County Historical Society as our organization seeks to gather, to preserve, to advance, and to disseminate knowledge about the past that must serve as the basis for the future.

Under circumstances such as these, the Society cannot remain static in its program and services. There must be a continuing effort to improve and expand its services to the people of the entire County, to stimulate an awareness and appreciation of the County's heritage that will bring increasing involvement and support, and to provide an accurate interpretation of the life and resources that have shaped the County.

A most significant forward step, made possible through the increased support of the Oswego County Board of Legislators, during 1972 was the recruitment of a professionally trained and experienced full-time director. Months of diligent and intensive effort on the part of a recruitment committee consisting of Mrs. Katherine Carter, chairman, and Miss Dorothy Mott, John C. Birdlebough, Mrs. Frances Breads, and Charles McC. Snyder led to the appointment of William D. Wallace to this position by the Board of Managers near the year's end. Mr. Wallace brings to Oswego County the expertise and administrative skills that will insure the effectiveness of the Society's day-to-day operations and the co-ordination of other staff and volunteer efforts in areas of research and library services, collections acquisition and management, physical preservation of the Richardson-Bates House and its grounds, interpretive services, community relations, and other activities.

In an effort to further broaden the museum exhibition program in the Richardson-Bates House and to develop modern means of interpreting through both permanent and short-term displays the history of the entire County as well as to launch an educational program to serve schools throughout the County, application was made for a grant to the New York State Council on the Arts and by year's end word was received that $3,500 would be available from this source to initiate these projects in fiscal 1973.

The Society's annual publication, previously known as the *Yearbook,* was given a new format and retitled as the *Journal* to make it a more readable and fitting vehicle for the presentation of scholarly articles and information pertaining to Oswego County's past, an effort of Mrs. Joan A. Workmaster that has won considerable praise from members and others.

The physical needs of the Richardson-Bates House—including refinishing of the exterior front doors, replacement of the main boiler and other repairs to plumbing and heating systems, replacement of part of the roof at the rear of the structure, attention to a crumbling chimney, and replacement of part of a property line fence—represented positive steps toward preservation of the Society's historic house.

Efforts begun in 1971 in cooperation with the Oswego City Library Board to permit restoration of the Gerrit Smith Library, a significant 1855 structure on the National Register of Historic Places, resulted early in 1972 in the appropriation of a special historic preservation fund of $15,000 by the Oswego County Board of Legislators to be channeled through the Society and be combined with other funds from the city of Oswego, the Enlarged City School District of Oswego, and the federal government in a $150,000 program.

By the end of 1972 interest and initial organizational steps were underway toward the observance of various community anniversaries and the Bicentennial of the American Revolution and the Society was cooperating with other local groups and individuals in these efforts. Continued liaison and vital contact with other historical agencies in twenty-three upstate counties also was maintained through participation in the activities of the Regional Conference of Historical Agencies and the Society was represented on the RCHA Board of Trustees by its president.

Well attended monthly program presentations, the popular holiday open house, a special reception for retiring officers Charles McC. Snyder and Johnson Cooper, valuable accessions, a continuation of essential cataloging and collections management activities, a variety of research services, the cooperation with museum training classes through the art department of the State University College at Oswego, and increased organized group and public visitation at the Richardson-Bates House were among the other highlights of a most busy 1972.

One of the older historical societies in New York State, the Oswego County Historical Society is demonstrating increasing vitality and is developing as one of the State's leading historical agencies—progress seen in the glowing faces of interested younger people who are being attracted to join with "older hands" in enthusiasm for the cause of Oswego County's heritage.

Respectfully submitted,

WALLACE F. WORKMASTER
President

On Stage Tonight: A Study of the Amateur Theatre in Oswego, 1868 to 1875

*Alfred E. Rickert**

The early establishment of a significant amateur theatre in Oswego was related to the decline of the professional stage in the city after the Civil War. Resident stock companies dominated the theatrical scene in Oswego during the decade before the war when no fewer than 335 different play titles were presented by companies, but after 1860 only limited professional theatre existed. Over one thousand performances of the standard works of the day were given during the twenty-one theatre seasons held in the city between 1850 and 1859; whereas in the period 1860 to 1869, about four hundred performances were given. Of that number something just under 300 performances were presented during the period 1860 to 1864, and just over one hundred were given in the period 1865 to 1869. During the years 1870 to 1875, when the Academy of Music opened, approximately one hundred professional performances were presented. Clearly the activity of the professional stage was severely curtailed after the Civil War. This significant decline was related primarily to the development of the road show. Undoubtedly the effects of the war, the progress of a developing nation, and economic factors not always directly controllable by the theatre created the circumstances that made the road show rather than the stock company the prevailing theatrical form for much of the nation after 1865. Most important to the development of the touring show, however, was the improvement in transportation made prior to and during the Civil War. The relative ease with which a manager could move actors and scenery from city to city because of the growing railroad network was the primary factor which enabled the touring show to succeed. Managers were quick to realize the gain to be achieved by sending a company to tour in a new play while that play was still in production in New York. This technique

* Associate professor of English at the State University College at Oswego, Dr. Rickert is recognized as an authority with a broad scholarly background in drama and theatre. He is editor of *Theatre Journal,* a publication of the New York State Community Theatre Association; the author of numerous articles published in professional publications; and a frequent contributor to the Society's *Journal.* Dr. Rickert is listed in *Who's Who in the East* and in *Who's Who Among Authors and Journalists.*

was used perhaps first by Dion Boucicault in 1860 in an attempt to obtain greater financial security and recognition for the playwright. In spite of some difficulties, Arthur Hobson Quinn observed, "The success of the project from a financial point of view led the managers, one by one, to adopt the new idea and the disintegration of the stock companies began."[1] In places like Oswego this disintegration created the conditions which provided the impetus for an amateur theatre.

The professional stage in Oswego, so active in the decade prior to the Civil War, did not maintain the same level of activity because the demands for adequate physical facilities made by the touring shows could not be met. The resident stock company could adapt its repertoire to the facility available; the road show could not. If a given play required scenic devices which the theatre did not have, the stock company eliminated that work from its repertoire. The only option available to the touring show if adequate facilities were not available was to by-pass that city. Since the road show was mounted entirely in New York City, scenery was constructed of given dimensions, lighting was predicated on certain equipment, and special effects might require specific kinds of facilities, *i.e.*, a trapped stage or a fly gallery. Because of these demands all of the stages had to conform to a minimum standard in terms of size and equipment. Oswego despite the great amount of theatrical activity in the past had never built a totally adequate theatre. Doolittle Hall, built in 1853, was, in fact, designed as a lecture hall-concert hall rather than a theatre. While it was used with great success for many years as a theatre, it was essentially less than adequate for the production of some plays. The fact that so many successful theatre seasons were held during the 1850's is a tribute to the excellence of the theatre artists and managers who staged the plays there. But while professional theatre in Oswego ceased to have vitality, a significant amateur theatre developed, even if it existed for only a short time.

Amateur entertainments in Oswego were not new. The earliest amateur entertainment on record was held in 1816 several years before the community was incorporated as a village. The performance was a concert and was given in the school house, the only building large enough and suitable for performance.[2] Many such amateur entertainments were given in the city over the years, and even when the professional theatre was in operation these amateur entertainments continued, although they were mostly musical presentations rather than dramatic. For example, on March 9, 1852, several well-bred gentlemen of the city gave a vocal and instrumental concert at Franklin Hall which then was the largest auditorium in the city. The hall was at capacity, and the performance was well received. "The singing was of the first order, the young gentlemen acquitting themselves with great propriety and their performances elicited no little éclat from the

audience."[3] The proceeds of the concert were donated to the Oswego Orphan Asylum. The gentlemen of the city and occasionally the ladies frequently used amateur performances to raise money for charitable purposes. On another occasion some of Oswego's stage struck gentlemen joined forces, and on December 17, 1857, presented a program of songs to an "overflowing" house in Doolittle Hall. The group, composed of John A. Barry, J. Adams Smith, William Mayer, Levi Beardsley, and Henry Thornton, were men of good families with time on their hands and an inclination for the glamor of the stage. They were delighted when they had the opportunity to serve as extras and play walk-on parts or small roles with Jordan's theatre, one of the popular theatre companies playing Oswego at that time. These young men, performing in Oswego and the surrounding communities, were financially successful in their efforts to raise funds. Typical of their benefits for local charity was the concert held March 9, 1858. The price of admission was twenty-five cents, and the receipts from the concert amounted to $297.00, which means that if everyone who bought a ticket attended at least one thousand one hundred eighty-eight persons packed Doolittle Hall for the performance. The expenses incurred were given as $62.11; the rest of the money, $234.89, was contributed to the Oswego Orphan Asylum.[4] The large audiences at each concert attested to the popularity of the performers. The Oswego *Daily Palladium* observed that "home talent is intrinsically superior to the great bulk of the itinerant performers, who take our quarters and give us a very flat return."[5]

These amateur presentations, and many more which could be cited, were of a musical rather than a theatrical nature, The first activity which can be viewed as significant amateur theatre began in 1868. It is important to recognize that 1868 is considerably earlier than the date generally assigned to amateur theatricals worthy of consideration. For example Kobbe cites April, 1881, as the date for "the first notable amateur dramatic performance" in New York City. He suggests that prior to the 1880's amateur theatricals were not noteworthy because the performances were given in private as "drawing-room entertainments, gotten up in a happy-go-lucky way for an evening's diversion."[6] Kenneth Macgowan does not recognize any amateur stage activity prior to the art theatre movement in the early years of the twentieth century as significant. He dismisses the amateur acting societies of the nineteenth century as interested in the drama only as a social event and as a means for their self aggrandizement.[7] In a similar manner Sheldon Cheney advises that "A clear distinction should be made between the old-time dramatic-social clubs and the theatres developed by organizations interested primarily in the art of the Theatre."[8]

The assumption has been that no amateur activity prior to the

twentieth century was either interested in the "art of the theatre" or took that art seriously. Evidently the amateur stage in Oswego was an exception, at least the activity of the Amateur Art Association should be so noted because it can be viewed as a forerunner to the art theatre movement so popular at the beginning of the twentieth century. Amateur theatre in the city of Oswego may have begun as "drawing-room entertainments" as Kobbé charges or as social endeavors and for self gratification and casual amusement as Macgowan and Cheney suggest, but after 1868, with the founding of the Amateur Art Association, Oswego amateur performers took themselves seriously and were treated as respected performers by the community. The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate that a serious amateur theatre existed in Oswego from 1868 to at least 1870, and probably for a year or two beyond, and that amateur theatricals flourished during the period 1870 to 1875, although the artistic value of the activity during the later years is perhaps somewhat questionable.

The fact that, relatively speaking, so few professional companies came to Oswego during the Civil War and the years immediately thereafter quite possibly motivated the people of Oswego to become seriously interested in amateur theatricals. The Amateur Art Association was founded by some leading citizens in the city to produce plays and on February 25, 1868, *Still Waters Run Deep* by Tom Taylor was performed in Doolittle Hall. Actually, available records do not make clear if the citizens who staged Taylor's play in 1868 founded the organization and then produced the play or if the people got together because of their interest in the drama, decided to produce a play, and the Amateur Art Association was a result of that production.

The Amateur Art Association produced many of the popular plays of the period during the next few years, and several other amateur dramatic clubs were founded in the city soon thereafter. I should like to discuss briefly the activities (at least as much of them as is known) of these several groups.

The Amateur Art Association secured Union Hall located on the second floor of the Tanner Building on the west side of the city and arranged it as a small theatre. Since the performances were for members and their guests only little is known of this private theatre, but John Barry reported that the audience represented "the beauty, intelligence, refinement and culture of the city."[9] We do know, however, that between 1868 and 1870 the following plays were staged by the Amateur Art Association.

The Rivals	by Richard Sheridan
Still Waters Run Deep	by Tom Taylor
She Stoops to Conquer	by Oliver Goldsmith
London Assurance	by Dion Boucicault
Caste	by Thomas Robertson

Money	by Edward Bulwer-Lytton
Handy Andy	by W.R. Floyd
Everybody's Friend	by Joseph Coyne
All That Glitters Is Not Gold	by John Morton
Woodcock's Little-Game	by John Morton

Since an occasional reference to a supper party held after the theatre was found in the social news of the newspaper and the theatre referred to was not identified, quite possibly the local thespians produced more than the ten plays indicated. Unfortunately, no records of any additional production in the Union Hall theatre are available.

Indications are that the stage of the little theatre was well appointed and that the equipment and facilities were better than those at Doolittle Hall which at that time was the largest and most frequently used theatre for professional performances. Doolittle Hall, of course, had a far larger auditorium than did Union Hall. The best estimates indicate that the association's theatre had a seating capacity of one hundred and fifty (only slightly larger than the theatre used today by the Oswego Players located in the Oswego Arts Center) whereas Doolittle Hall could seat approximately one thousand persons, greater than the seating capacity of Sheldon Auditorium at State University College at Oswego.

By eliminating amateurism, by presenting plays of merit (as seen by the critics of that time), by maintaining its own theatre facility, and by keeping foremost its dedication to the art of the theatre, the Oswego Art Association endorsed the principles which gave focus to the art theatre movement which developed much later, during the early years of the twentieth century. Clearly the contribution of the Oswego Art Association was an unusual but significant development in the history of the American theatre.

In addition to the performance for the members of the Amateur Art Association, the players, also performed in an effort to raise funds for public charities. When this was the case Doolittle Hall, because of the greater seating capacity, was used. The Old Ladies Home and the Oswego Orphan Asylum were frequent recipients of the funds raised by the local thespians.

On one such occasion, February 9, 1869, *The Rivals* by Richard Sheridan was presented in Doolittle Hall in an effort to raise money to benefit the poor of the city. The disbursement of the receipts of the production, $286.27, was reported in the newspaper. Fifty dollars of the proceeds were given to the Oswego Orphan Asylum, and the remainder of the money was used to buy bread to be distributed to the poor of the city.[10]

The amount of money realized by the players would indicate that the production was financially successful. Assuming the cost of a ticket was twenty-five cents (a minimum cost) at least one thousand one hundred forty-five people bought tickets for the event. Local

performances were generally artistically successful also, according to reports in the newspapers.

> All the stage accompaniements, costuming, etc. were appropriate to the correct representation of that admirable comedy . . . As an amateur entertainment, last evening's performance was highly satisfactory, and certainly reflects great credit on those who appeared in it . . . We take pride in the fact that there is so much and so excellent dramatic talent among us, and we take pleasure in seeing it fostered and developed.[11]

Another organization active in staging plays at this time was the Oswego Amateur Dramatic Association. On March 9, 1869, the association presented *The Rough Diamond* by John Buckstone and *Ireland As It Is* by J.H. Amherst in Doolittle Hall. Tickets were priced at thirty-five cents (fifty cents for reserved seats) and were available to the general public. The players grossed $332.10. Even if everyone paid fifty cents for his ticket, an unlikely occurrence, the receipts would indicate that six hundred sixty-four people purchased tickets. Since the seating capacity of Doolittle Hall was approximately one thousand, it is probable that, in fact, around a thousand tickets were sold. Production expenses amounted to $135.00, and the balance, $197.10, was utilized to purchase bread for the poor. The Oswego *Commercial Advertiser and Times* reported that the theatre was crowded and that the play was "well presented and showed the characters had been well studied and carefully prepared."[12] Several individual performers received favorable comment. The performance was sufficiently successful to encourage the amateurs to repeat it, and on March 20, 1869, *Ireland As It Is* and *The County Cousin* (instead of *The Rough Diamond*) were presented. The proceeds, again, were to be used to aid the poor. The newspaper reported "visible improvement in the case of some performers."[13] Unfortunately, because inclement weather prevented many people from attending, production expenses were not realized. The newspaper reported that the creditors, in an act of liberality, reduced their bills to equal the receipts which were $76.15.[14]

On November 1, 1869, *Rob Roy*, probably by Isaac Pocock, and *Nature and Philosophy* were performed in Doolittle Hall also by the Oswego Amateur Dramatic Association. While this organization was not the same as the Amateur Art Association discussed above, it is possible that the Father Mathew Temperance Society and/or the St. John's Temperance Society and the Oswego Amateur Dramatic Association were essentially the same group operating under different names, because many of the same people belonged to all three groups. Although *Rob Roy* was not reviewed, the performance evidently had

sufficient merit to warrant a repeat performance. The second performance was reviewed, and it was noted that the thespians had improved. The reviewer found much merit in the production but also offered advice to the group.

> The play last night was very well brought out. The costuming, etc., was in character, and with a little closer attention to the details of the drama, and a little more distinctness and positiveness about it they would have done themselves greater credit. The object of this organization is improvement—a worthy object, and pity it is there are not more men and women in Oswego willing to band their energies together for a like purpose—and they will take it in good faith if we beg leave to suggest an idea or two for their assistance. We would simply say, read "Hamlet's Instruction to the Players," and throw yourself more heartily into your cast. First study and understand it historically, then throw yourself into it fearlessly. There were two or three—we won't call them by name—who did this last night, and they acquitted themselves with credit, and deserve applause. We have no disposition to play the "carping critic" on our Dramatic friends, for they did well in a play which has various difficulties.[15]

On April 18, 1870, *Rob Roy* and *Irish Assurance and Yankee Modesty* were performed to benefit the library fund of St. Paul's Temperance Society. Tickets were priced at thirty-five cents and according to the Oswego *Daily Press,* Doolittle Hall "was packed from the stage to the entrance door."[16]

A group identified as the Amateur Dramatic Company of St. Paul's Temperance Society was scheduled to present *The Day After the Wedding* by Marie Therese Kemble and *The Irish Boy and Rankee Girl* in February of 1871 in Doolittle Hall. No information was available to determine if these plays were performed.

Whether or not Oswego Amateur Dramatic Association ceased to exist after 1870 is unknown. No reference to the name was found after 1870. However, the St. John's Temperance Society with which the Amateur Dramatic Association had been linked produced several plays during the years 1873 to 1875.

Ten Nights in A Bar Room by William W. Pratt was presented in St. John's Hall on October 18, 1873. Because hundreds of people were turned away, the society announced a repeat performance to be given in Doolittle Hall on November 8, 1873. Also presented in St. John's Hall was *The Drunkard, or The Fallen Saved* by William H. Smith on December 17, 1873. The always popular *Ten Nights in A Bar Room* was given again on March 17, 1874, in St. John's Hall to a "densely packed, large audience" who were so noisy that the play could not be

heard.[17] That same year, *Kathleen Mavourneen* by W. Travers and *Flat Foot Jake* were produced by the society. The plays were performed in Grace Church on June 26 and 27, 1874. The last reference to the society's dramatic activity was found in the Oswego *Daily Times* of April 5, 1875. A variety entertainment consisting of tableaux, dialogue, singing, and a play entitled *Old Plantation*, was scheduled for presentation in St. John's Hall on April 6, 1875.

A performance identified only as a dramatic entertainment was announced for June 24 and 25, 1875. It was to be held in the basement of St. Louis Church. The name of the producing organization is unknown.

A small segment of the community raised the question of the propriety of "respectable society" participating in the amateur performances. The question of propriety was answered by the Oswego *Daily Press* reviewer.

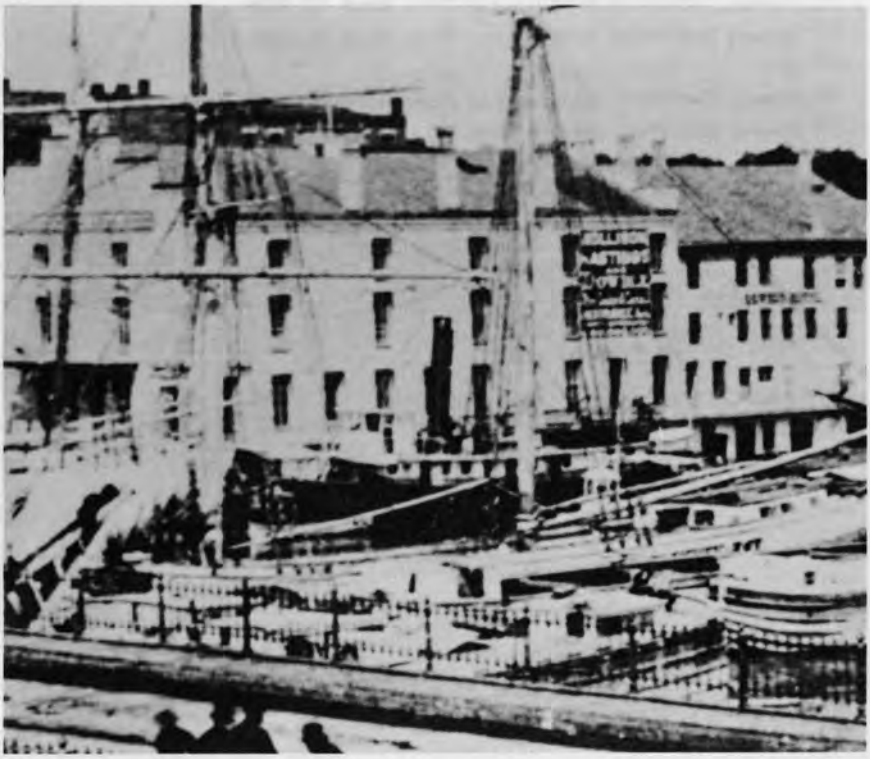
> We have lived to become sincerely suspicious of the piety of those who do not love pleasures and innocent relaxation in any form. We cannot trust the man who never laughs, who is always puckered up like the belly of a fiddle, but who has no apparent outlet for natural springs of sportiveness, or the ebulition of pent-up joyousness and gaiety that are perennial in the human soul. We know that nature takes her revenge on such violence. We expect to find secret vices, malignant sins, or hidden crimes cropping out of this hot bed of confined and imprisoned feelings, that does violence to our better nature. It therefore gives us a sincere moral gratification, anywhere and everywhere in the community, to see innocent pleasures and popular amusements rising superior to this selfish, anti-christian narrowmindedness, and resisting the religious bigotry and intolerance that frowns so unwisely upon them. Anything not vicious or in bad taste, is better than the dark, dead unhappy monotony of social life,–a prey to anxious and morbid excitment, and as against this we heartily commend the amateur dramatic entertainment.[18]

The success of each of the groups would suggest that the opponents of the theatre, as in the past, constituted a small minority of the city's population.

It is very likely that additional plays were staged although this is only conjecture. We do know, for example, that *Money* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton was to be presented at the home of William H. Herrick, Esq., on April 30 and May 1, 1874. Also, an unidentified "dramatic entertainment" was scheduled for presentation at Luther Wright's residence on May 6 and 7, 1875. What is unknown, of course, is how many of these private theatricals were given or what the quality was. It

is not unlikely that they were on the order of the "drawing-room entertainment" discussed by Kobbé, more a social event than serious theatrical endeavors.

Clearly there was considerable theatrical activity at the community level in Oswego between 1868 and 1875. We have already given the reason (or at least the probable reasons) why amateur theatrical activity began. The question that comes to mind now is why did it cease. Quite simply, little amateur theatre was presented in Oswego after 1875 because the professional theatre was again available to Oswegonians. A new theatre, the Academy of Music, opened its doors in 1875 with adequate facilities to support the professional road show, and once again professionally produced plays on a regular basis were staged. The opening of the Academy of Music marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the theatre in Oswego. It, however, also marked the end of any serious amateur theatrical activity in the city for many years.



The Academy of Music was located in this building known as the Doolittle Block on the west side of the river next to the Market House. The theater had originally been known as Doolittle Hall. *Courtesty of J. Leo Finn.*

NOTES

1 Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War,* 2nd ed. (New York: F.S. Crofts, 1944), p. 388.

2 Crisfield Johnson, *History of Oswego County, New York* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts, 1877), p. 143.

3 Oswego *Daily Commercial Times,* March 10, 1852.

4 Oswego *Daily Times,* March 13, 1858.

5 Oswego *Daily Palladium,* December 18, 1857.

6 Gustav Kobbe, "Amateur Theatricals," *The Century Magazine,* NS 15 (March, 1889), p. 749.

7 Kenneth Macgowan, *Footlights Across America: Towards a National Theatre* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), pp. 46-47.

8 Sheldon Cheney, *The Art Theatre* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1917).

9 John A. Barry, "Reminiscences" (material taken from a scrapbook, property of Charles McCool Snyder, Oswego, New York).

10 Oswego *Commercial Advertiser and Times,* February 12, 1869.

11 Oswego *Commercial Advertiser and Times,* February 10, 1869.

12 Oswego *Commercial Advertiser and Times,* March 12, 1869.

13 Oswego *Commercial Advertiser and Times,* March 31, 1869.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Oswego *Commercial Advertiser and Times,* November 9, 1869.

16 Oswego *Daily Press,* April 19, 1870.

17 Oswego *Daily Press,* March 18, 1874.

18 Oswego *Daily Press,* April 8, 1870.

Glimpses at Early American Photography

*John C. Fuller**

For today's snapshooter but a few seconds separate the click of a shutter and the revelation of a finished *Polaroid* print, monochrome or full color. While such technological achievements have done nothing to improve the vision expressed in such photographs, the "instant" process is a far cry from the laborious efforts scientists and artists made to capture on paper, metal or glass the "fairy image" traced by the sun's rays. Although accounts of the *camera obscura* were recorded back in the tenth century by an Arabian scientist, the mystery of fixing an optical image eluded artists and scientists until the nineteenth century, when, in 1839, the public was apprised of two distinct processes for making pictures with a camera.

In France the noted diorama artist, Jacques Louis Mandé Daguerre, aided by experiments of this late partner, Joseph Nicephore Niépce, succeeded in creating unique images on silver plates. Closely paralleling this feat was the English scientist, William Henry Fox Talbot, who produced "photogenic drawings" on paper, which led to the negative-positive process with its capability for unlimited duplication.

In this year of photography's "official birth," the American artist-scientist, Samuel F.B. Morse, was in Paris and secured a meeting with Daguerre, where they shared their interests in the telegraph and the daguerreotype. After published accounts of the daguerreotype process reached the United States on September 20, 1839, Morse and his colleague, Dr. John W. Draper, of the University of the City of New York, actively pursued the new discovery.

Always an astute promoter, Daguerre, meanwhile, sent Francois Gourard to this country to demonstrate and sell daguerreotype cameras before enthusiastic audiences in New York, Boston, and Providence.

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*John C. Fuller has been a member of the State University College at Oswego art faculty since 1967. He earned the associate of applied science degree in photography at Rochester Institute of Technology, and received the bachelor's and master's degrees in fine arts (art history) from Syracuse University. A well-known art historian and specialist in architecture of the Oswego area, he holds a Ph.D. degree from Ohio University, and taught there and at Syracuse University prior to coming to Oswego.

Resembling a spy glass more than the usual wooden box *camera obscura,* this metal camera took daguerreotype plates 9 cm. in diameter. Designed by Joseph Petzval in 1841, the camera was manufactured by Voigtlander, still a respected name in photographic apparatus. *Collection of the International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.*

The wave of interest in daguerreotypy which swept the country created a demand for instruction, and Morse found that photographic teaching was more profitable than traditional art lessons. His efforts in teaching Americans how to polish silver plated to copper, sensitize it with nitric acid and iodine, focus the camera, make the long exposure, develop the latent image with mercury fumes and fix the image with hyposulphite of soda have earned this artist-inventor the title "Father of American Photography."[1]

The American pragmatic nature focused on vocational rather than aesthetic pursuits in photography, and soon daguerreotype studios opened in every city, while itinerant daguerreotypists drove darkroom wagons into rural areas to meet the widespread demand for this democratic form of portraiture. People from all walks of life took up daguerreotypy, and the public accorded the new artisans the title of "Professor," as though they were magicians. One such entertaining "Professor" was John Plumbe, Jr., who established a chain of daguerrian galleries and advertised his salons as "constituting the oldest and most Extensive Establishment of the kind in the World, and containing more than a thousand portraits, embracing those of the most

distinguished individuals in the U. States."[2] When George N. Barnard was working in Oswego, his daguerreotypes were favorably compared to those of the famous Plumbe, and his studio facilities were claimed to be equal to or better than any this side of New York City.[3]

"Daguerreotypomania" swept not only France but this country as well, and cartoonists found abundant subject matter in stately people rigidly posing before the camera, their heads held securely with a metal clamp. The medium became an integral part of our culture, as indicated in Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables,* in which a central and somewhat mysterious character, Holgrave, is a Daguerreotypist. The new invention also made its mark on geography, for along the banks of the Hudson, a town was named Daguerreville.[4]

Noted Oswego daguerreotypist, George N. Barnard, created this genre study titled "The Woodsawyer's Nooning" in 1853. The actual daguerreotype plate was lost and this reproduction derives from a crystallotype copy in *The Photographic and Fine Art Journal. Collection of the International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.*

The daguerreotype's significance to the painter was emphasized in a talk Morse gave before the National Academy of Design on April 24, 1840. Speaking as the Academy's president, he saw the daguerreotype as beneficial to art, since the painter could collect aspects of nature more readily and accurately than by sketching. Scholars in recent years have offered much evidence to show the great influence photography has exerted on painting, so the claim that photography produced a visual revolution comparable to the discovery of perspective in the Renaissance is not without justification.

While portraiture was a mainstay for the early photographers, architectural studies were also undertaken with success. The extreme detail of the daguerreotype made this an especially suitable process for recording architecture. Architecture, likewise, was well suited for early photography, since it was motionless and tonal relationships of grey

stone or white wood buildings could be correctly rendered, Early emulsions were "color blind," which meant they recorded mostly the blue end of the spectrum, so that red clothing was rendered nearly black, while blue skies came out cloudless. Despite the many limitations of the new medium, genre scenes, religious and historical tableaus, aerial views from balloons, as well as valuable naturalistic and astronomical studies were attempted.

The tendency prevails to regard any old photograph found in the attic as a daguerreotype. While Talbot's paper process did not catch on in America, since a patent covered its professional use and Americans preferred the sharper images on silver, other inventions were soon to eclipse the daguerreotype. In 1851, another Englishman invented the wet collodion process, which enabled photographers to produce negatives on glass. These were mounted against a black background, placed in a case and gave the general appearance of a daguerreotype. Called ambrotypes after a Greek word for imperishable, these were very popular in 1856 and 1857, and then gradually lost ground to the new paper positive prints found in old family albums and on stereograph cards. The prints were made on albumen paper, so called because the whites of eggs—by the millions—were used as a binder for chemicals in coating the paper.

A modification of the ambrotype is the tintype, which was very popular during the Civil War, since soldiers could mail home camp photos without damage. Tintypes are also mistaken for the silver daguerreotypes, but the former are poor cousins, being an emulsion on blackened iron and lacking the brilliant mirror image.

The ambrotype is frequently mistaken for the silver-plated daguerreotype. Here, the glass backing has been removed from half of the glass ambrotype to show the negative-positive effect. *Collection of the International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.*

If the tintype represents the hack element of photography, the thousands of glass plates made by Mathew B. Brady's and Alexander Gardner's photographic staffs reflect one of the greatest photo-documentary efforts of all time. Along with these impressive records of the Civil War go the photo coverage of Sherman's march to the sea by George N. Barnard, who served as an official Government Engineer Corps photographer.

As a government photographer for the Engineer Corps, George N. Barnard documented Sherman's march to the sea. Now using the glass plate wet collodion process, Barnard revealed his sensitivity for the picturesque in this view of the Savannah River, near Savannah, Georgia. *Collection of the International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.*

Although large, 8 x 10 inch cameras were used extensively by Civil War photographers, the greatest number of pictures were taken with stereoscopic cameras, twin lens cameras that produced two slightly divergent views of a given scene on plates usually 3½ x 7 inches. The prints from these negatives were mounted on cards and then viewed in a simple optical device called a stereoscope.

After the Civil War photographers followed the renewed westward expansion, photographing with governmental survey teams, documenting transcontinental railway construction and imaging for an eastern populace the sublimity of the West. Huge cameras, some taking glass plates 20 x 24 inches were loaded on mules along with darkroom tents and chemicals for treks across deserts, along canyon beds and to the tops of mountains. Many of the resulting photographs still reveal a fresh, direct vision that marks a new chapter in landscape art.

A wood engraving suggests the difficult task of photographing the West. Bulky equipment weighing up to 120 pounds would be carried on mules or the photographer's back and set up each time an area was to be documented. The tent shows the darkroom apparatus used to coat and process the large glass plates. *Collection of the International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.*

Among the greatest photographers of the West was William Henry Jackson, whose monumental photographs of Yellowstone played an important role in obtaining Congressional action to preserve these lands as the first national park. The work of Jackson and other frontier cameramen has been honored by naming geographical sites after them; Jackson Canyon in Wyoming, Mt. Watkins in Yosemite, Mt. Hillers in Utah and Mt. Haynes in Yellowstone are some examples.

The difficult wet-plate process that imaged the Civil War and the frontier slowly gave way to a dry gelatin emulsion. By the late 1800's George Eastman, a manufacturer of the new dry plates, was marketing box cameras with roll film which was processed at the factory. The *Kodak,* along with the slogan, "You press the button,we do the rest," made everyone a potential photographer. This development brought to a close the arduous and often brave efforts of early photographers, who with their clumsy, difficult medium were the visual historians of nineteenth century America.

George Eastman, who opened up a new era of amateur photography, is shown taking a snapshot with a Kodak No. 2 box camera abroad the S.S. *Gallia.* The circular photo of Eastman was made by Fred Church in 1890. *Collection of the International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.*

NOTES

1 Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene* (New York: Dover, 1964), p. 38.

2. *Ibid.,* p. 51. From an advertisement in *Scientific American,* September 11, 1845.

3 Oswego *Palladium,* March 9, 1847.

4 Taft, p. 63.

5 Richard Rudisill, *Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1971), p. 57.

Oswego's Heritage: Past and Future

*Charles M. Snyder**

Through the years I would have to confess to occasionally twisting arms, ever so gently, of course, to induce Oswegonians to undertake the study of regional and local history. And while confessing, I might add that my debut as a local historian was the result of a bit of arm twisting. A few months after settling in Oswego, just over a quarter of a century ago, Dr. Seward Salisbury advised me that E.M. Waterbury needed a speaker for a forthcoming meeting of the local historical society and had suggested that I speak on the Oswego Canal. It just happened that Mr. Waterbury was the chairman of the Board of Visitors at the college and that Dr. Salisbury was the chairman of the social studies department and my employer. I took the hint, and set out to find the Oswego Canal!

And, if I have said little about the eye-strain and dust pollution incidental to the handling of old documents and much about the thrill of discovery, it is because I have enjoyed the activity and considered it to be significant.

While history may be passé in this "now' generation, studies in local history have occasionally had impacts upon national interpretations. A study of voting behavior in colonial Massachusetts by Robert E. Brown,[1] for example, has dramatically changed our interpretation of democracy in Puritan New England, and local studies are currently correcting

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The following address was presented to a joint meeting of the Heritage Foundation of Oswego and the Society on March 21, 1972, at the Richardson-Bates House.

misconceptions about the nature of Jacksonian Democracy. And I might add that our own Dr. Luciano Iorizzo, through his research in local communities, including this one, has changed the interpretation of the padrone in Italian-American history.

I would have to concede that local history is not prestigious. In the "pecking order" of historians diplomatic and intellectual history are more attractive; furthermore, local history would not have been Horatio Alger, Jr.'s, path to fame and fortune. But lightning does strike occasionally. The most profitable publication ever to roll from the Syracuse University Press was a volume on the town of Cicero's history written by septuagenarian Anne Gertrude Sneller, titled *A Vanished World.* It became a selection of the Senior Citizens' Book Club and sold more than 20,000 copies!

The farsightedness of the Board of Managers of the Oswego County Historical Society in 1939 in publishing a yearbook from papers read before the Society has provided local historians with an outlet for their research and writing, and I think that I do not exaggerate when I say that no county's history across the length and breadth of New York State had been published as voluminously as Oswego's over the past thirty years.

The earlier historians were particularly interested in the military history of the region, and for obvious reasons: the strategic location of Oswego as a fur trading center and military outpost during the century-long French and Indian struggle for the interior of the continent; the spectacular destruction of the three forts here by General Montcalm in 1756; the English expeditions launched against Fort Niagara and Fort Frontenac, and Amherst's campaign against Montreal; Sir William Johnson's historic meeting with Chief Pontiac; St. Leger's invasion from Canada along the Oswego River axis against Fort Stanwix in the Revolutionary War; Silas Towne's alleged spying at Mexico Point; Colonel Marinus Willett's "snow march;" and the British invasion and destruction of Fort Ontario in the War of 1812. These stirring scenes, the ruins of Fort Oswego and Fort George, and the continuing presence of Fort Ontario attracted the attention of local historians, and the *Yearbook* testifies to this interest.

Through subsequent years, the harbor; business developments and transitions; outstanding personalities such as George Scriba, Alvin Bronson, D.C. Littlejohn, Dean Barry, Dr. Mary Walker, Edward Austin Sheldon, the Kingsfords, and the Shepards of New Haven; social movements; social reform; and local politics have attracted their share of followers. What then remains to be done? A great deal, but I shall limit myself to a few suggestions.

One of Oswego's dreams for three generations was a Niagara ship canal—a plan to by-pass its arch rival, Buffalo, by constructing such a waterway on the American side of the Niagara River which, it was

assumed, would overcome the limited capacity of the Welland Canal and provide Oswego with lower shipping costs. The drive was initiated as early as the 1830's only a few years after the building of the Erie and Oswego Canals. It revived in the Civil War when the possibility of an armed conflict between England and the United States threatened the closure of the Welland Canal to American ships. In 1864, Congressman D.C. Littlejohn obtained the passage of a canal bill in the House of Representatives, but it failed in the Senate. Two years later he drove the bill through the Assembly at Albany only to see it crippled by amendments and nullified in the State Senate. Again, in 1890, William Pierson Judson, George B. Sloan, and others spearheaded a campaign for the elusive canal, only to have the panic of 1893 destroy it. Today, the St. Lawrence Seaway provides a partial answer, but the dream of an American canal pouring riches into Oswego remains unanswered. The story of this dream deserves a writer.

Some of Oswego's outstanding political leaders of days-gone-by also await a rebirth from the pen of a local historian. Joel Turrill, for example. You will recall that we have a street named for him. Young Turrill came to Oswego about 1820 from Middlebury College to practice law with Rudolph Bunner and handle his land deals while Bunner was in the Legislature and in Congress. Turrill subsequently entered politics, and like his mentor served in the Assembly and in Congress. A bachelor during his early campaigns, he was held up by his Antimasonic opponent as a menace to the community, a "selfish, sly, calculating lawyer, forever moving about, caring for no one but himself, having neither wife nor child; and distrusting everybody."[2] (Incidentally, he still won!)

Turrill was a friend of President Martin Van Buren, and like him, speculated heavily in Oswego lands in the boom period just before the panic of 1837. As a ranking Democrat he was named by President Polk as Consul to the Sandwich Islands (as they referred to the Kingdom of Hawaii in those days). There are Turrill papers among our collection here; there are others at the New York State Historical Association at Cooperstown, the New York Historical Society in New York and the Library of Congress; and some of his Hawaiian correspondence has been published in the *Journal* of the Hawaiian Historical Society.

The McWhorters, Hudson River patricians, who speculated in Oswego land, were also friends of Van Buren, local office holders, and contemporaries of the Bunners, who, in turn, were land speculators, politicians, publishers and journalists. Both families deserve an historian. The same might be said for the Bulgers, Mayor William J. and Recorder Charles N., Democratic party chieftains at the turn of the century. We have no comprehensive article on George B. Sloan, one of the city's most astute businessmen and a power in Republican politics. He was thrice a State Senator, a Speaker of the New York State Assembly, and a leader of

the "Half Breed" faction of his party. Nor has there been a paper on Theodore Irwin, partner with Sloan in the Northwestern Elevator, a power in the Democratic party, a collector of rare books and prints, owner of a Gutenburg Bible, and donor of the rare Louis XV commemorative medal to the Historical Society. And not to be overlooked is Judge William F. Allen, holder of many political offices, Judge of the New York Court of Appeals, and Comptroller of the State of New York.

Moving into the twentieth century, one might single out Luther Mott and Francis Culkin, Republican leaders and Congressmen; also Judge Merrick Stowell; and Oswego's colorful mayor, Congressman-at-large, and labor leader, John Fitzgibbon.

Few small cities in the United States felt the impact of Irish immigration as much as Oswego. Yet the story of the Irish here has never been adequately told. It is to be regretted that it was not recorded a half-century ago when the first generation could still recall their experiences. But anecdotes are still exchanged in Oswego wherever men and women gather, and the old newspapers contain scattered items; most of them, I might add, unfavorable.

Reflect for a moment upon the potential for local history in the story of the street-car and of Oswego Beach, a product of trolley transporation; of strawberry growing and the strawberry markets at Pulaski, Lycoming and Oswego, when Oswego berries were the most highly prized on the New York City market.

The Historical Society recently heard a splendid presentation on Dr. Ralph W. Swetman, a former president of S.U.C.O.; but what of the Pouchers, Isaac B., successor to Sheldon at the Normal School, and his wife, Matilda S. Cooper Poucher, called a "consummate artist of the classroom," and William A. Poucher, mayor, Assemblyman, and United States Attorney for Northern New York, and adviser to President Cleveland; or Hermann Krusi, distinguished Pestalozzian; or James Riggs, principal of the Normal School and prominent local historian and citizen; or Edwin M. Waterbury, publisher and community leader.

I would also like to suggest the, so-called, "Gay Nineties." It was one of the turning points in Oswego's economy, when the mills burned and industry replaced shipping. There was also the panic of 1893 and unprecedented labor unrest in the region.

This decade was also a fruitful period for women's liberation in Oswego. Elmina Spencer and the irascible Dr. Mary Walker, local Civil War heroines, scarcely needed press secretaries, both finding ways and means to obtain wide coverage. But almost forgotten is Mary C. Vaughn, local journalist and lecturer and president of the Women's State Temperance Society. There was also the team of Mrs. E.S. Coit, Mrs. G.M. Gardenier and Mary J. Harmon who worked as one in the

1890's for woman's suffrage and the broader goals of feminists. Mrs. Gardenier held an office in the state branch of the Woman's Suffrage Association, and the trio published a women's edition of the Oswego *Daily Times* on July 4, 1895, which they wrote and typed themselves.

Not to be forgotten also is Dr. Mary V. Lee of the faculty of the Normal School. She introduced bloomers in her physical education classes and donned them herself, and wore her hair short. Lamenting the pinched waistlines dictated by current styles, she wrote, "Very few will take off their corsets, but nothing good goes fast."[3]

And still remembered by some of us here this evening is the late Dr. Lida S. Penfield, distinguished professor at the Normal School, chairman of the English department, author and historian. Finding that a doctor of philosophy degree would be an asset in proving that the Normal School deserved collegiate status, she began and completed her doctorate after she had turned sixty. Recently a diary of her father, Joel B. Penfield, one of Oswego's most successful millers, has turned up. A paper on father and daughter should follow.

Turning from the printed page, I would like to focus for a few moments upon our heritage in bricks and stones. Last year this community lost a canal lock which lay almost buried in the berm of the old hydraulic canal near the eastern foundation of the railroad bridge. It was an original lock on the Oswego Canal of 1829 and had the same tiny dimensions as those in Clinton's Ditch. But a large pipe, a section of the east side sewer line, was being rolled into place, and a level bank would facilitate the process. In a few minutes a giant earth mover completely obliterated the ancient structure.

The once handsome Market House on the west side of the river survives because a metal roof has sealed it thus far from the elements. But when can we expect to hear of its collapse?

Only frantic, last-minute action may yet save the historic Gerrit Smith Library from a generation-long neglect. Our Mansard-roofed City Hall enters its second century stained and porous; snow filters into the attic, dampening records piled high on the floor. By contrast, "Uncle Sam" recently treated our 1858 post office to a sandblast and overnight its original charm has been restored.

Oswego has an unusual heritage in its newspapers—they extend almost continuously from 1819 to 1972. But a single fire could destory them, and we would indeed be the poorer for it. A microfilming project initiated a decade ago, but suspended for lack of funds, should be revived and this precious heritage saved for future generations.

I would urge both the Heritage Foundation and the Historical Society to concern themselves with the preservation of our fine old buildings. Except for the ephemeral log cabin and an octagon house razed in 1910 to make room for the Oak Hill School, we have scattered about us almost every style of nineteenth and early-twentieth

century architecture. This is one of the blessings of remaining a small city; the "desecration" of James Street and other parts of Syracuse suggests the perils of rapid growth.

George Scriba's salt-box home of late-eighteenth century design still stands in Constantia. It has had a checkered life, but at last report was in "good hands." Federal-style houses of the first quarter of the nineteenth century continue to grace Oswego and Fulton streets: the Pease farm house on the Rural Cemetery Road, the McWhorter-Farrell-O'Brien house at 69 E. Mohawk, the Bonesteel-Mott house at 64 West Fifth, the Bronson-Poucher-Culkin residence at 60 West Cayuga; and in Fulton the Lord-Thayer house at the corner of Cayuga and Third Streets. The Greek revival remains in the Perry-Ward-Peckham house on Perry Hill and later versions of this mode in the Randall-Davis home at 68 E. Mohawk, the Penfield-Conway-Castaldo house with its massive columns at 124 W. Fifth Street, and north of Fulton near the West River Road the David Van Buren house.

Considering the popularity of the cobblestone style in counties to our west, it is surprising to note that we have but two of them in Oswego: the Chase-Taylor-O'Reilly verson at 95 W. Cayuga and the Orphan's Home-Russo house at 147 W. Sixth Street.

The Italianate of mid-century is represented by the Pardee-Downey-Sigma Tau house at 8 Montcalm Street, the Bunner-Emerick-Delta Kappa house next door, the Wright-Jermyn-Hamm house at 40 W. Sixth, the Bond-Davis home at 113 E. Seventh Street with its unusually fine doorway, and in Fulton by the Pratt house at 177 South First Street.

We have Tuscan villas in the guise of the Sloan-Hawley mansion at 107 W. Van Buren and the Richardson-Bates house at 135 E. Third Street. We have Victorian cottages such as the Irwin-Davis house 177 E. Utica and the Nesbitt home at 119 W. Fourth, and several of Claude Bragdon's neo-classical creations dating near the turn-of-the-century including the Mott-Emerick house at 59 W. Fifth, the Higgins-Kingsford-O'Brien house at 40 W. Oneida, and the Miller-Salisbury home at 44 W. Fifth Street.

I have omitted more than I have mentioned, but could not the owners of such memorials to the ways-of-life of previous generations be encouraged to preserve and cherish these structures by a program of recognition? The alternative is apt to be neglect, deterioration, and finally abandonment. And what do we have to offer in their places? Reinforced concrete! And in the Oswego climate this means in a few years cracked concrete! Will it be said of Oswego in a few years that it looks just like all of the others—just as impersonal and tasteless?

A project of recognition might be county-wide and eventually incorporate the publication of a volume such as the one published in

Onondaga County, but titled, "Buildings Worth Saving in Oswego County." Obviously, some of the old structures cannot be saved: a church without a congregation, an abandoned village hall without a source of revenue, a mansion too costly to maintain—these may present insuperable problems. A broader awareness of the beauty and workmanship and a recognition of their long-term value to the community could be persuasive in saving more of them.

The Heritage Foundation has given a good deal of attention to Fort Ontario, and deservedly so. The color guard and costumed hostesses have sparked interest and visitors have come in unprecedented numbers. The extra mile here has made a difference.

In closing I would like to mention the possibility of a professional director here at the Richardson-Bates House, a goal we have looked forward to for a long time. It would provide an additional service for local historians, coordinate county-wide programs, and improve and expand the functions of our museum. In short, it would be a boon to the entire spectrum of heritage activities. Now it can become a workshop and, along with the archives of the college, a depository for documents relating to local history.

I see no lack of challenges during this bicentennial decade of our national independence; I am confident that Oswego will respond.

NOTES

[1] Robert E. Brown, *Middle Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691–1780* (Ithaca, 1955).

[2] Oswego *Free Press*, October 27, 1830.

[3] Dorothy Rogers, *Oswego: Fountainhead of Teacher Education* (New York, 1961), p. 49.

George Beale Sloan: A Man and His Era

*Charles E. Moore**

An old proverb states that a man's wealth may be superior to him.[1] However, in the case of George Beale Sloan this was not the situation, for the reputation of his strength of character, honesty and constructive ambition seemed to far outweigh the reputation of his wealth, although it too was notable.

A well-worn but apt cliche applies to Sloan: he was a "self-made man" who rose from "rags to riches" through his industriousness and ambition.

George Beale Sloan, Sr., was born in Oswego, New York, on June 20, 1831, the first son of James and Ann Sloan. Mrs. Ruth Danenhower Wilson, great-granddaughter of James Sloan, relates the following about her Sloan ancestors as she describes members of the family and the emigration of James Sloan to Oswego.

> My grandfather Sloan's social acceptance was not prevented by the fact that at the age of fifteen he had become a clerk in a drygoods store. Possibly at that time there were none in Oswego who considered themselves the social upper crust, or if there were any such, perhaps they knew that he was the son of a banker in Boston. Since he was orphaned at an early age (James Sloan), he was brought up in one of the two stately homes in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, owned by his mother's people, the Larkins. His maternal grandmother, although she and her husband had brought up twenty-two children of their own, added him to the group. Two unmarried daughters helped her in the care of the grandson. The Larkins were shipbuilders, some of whose ships were commissioned as privateers during the War of 1812. Instead of serving on one of them, my great-grandfather, at the age of twenty-four, volunteered in the navy and was appointed Paymaster on the U.S.S. *Saratoga*,

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*Mr. Moore is an industrial arts teacher. While pursuing a master's degree in vocational education at the State University College at Oswego, he enrolled in Dr. Charles Snyder's course in local and regional history. This paper is a product of research undertaken for that course.

> Admiral McDonough's flagship on Lake Champlain. Since this was in the days before the Naval Academy existed, Admiral McDonough apparently did not feel capable of writing a report to the Congress of victory at the battle of Plattsburg [*sic*]. So, as some of the historians of that time relate, Paymaster James Sloan wrote the report.[2]

Mrs. Wilson's account continues:

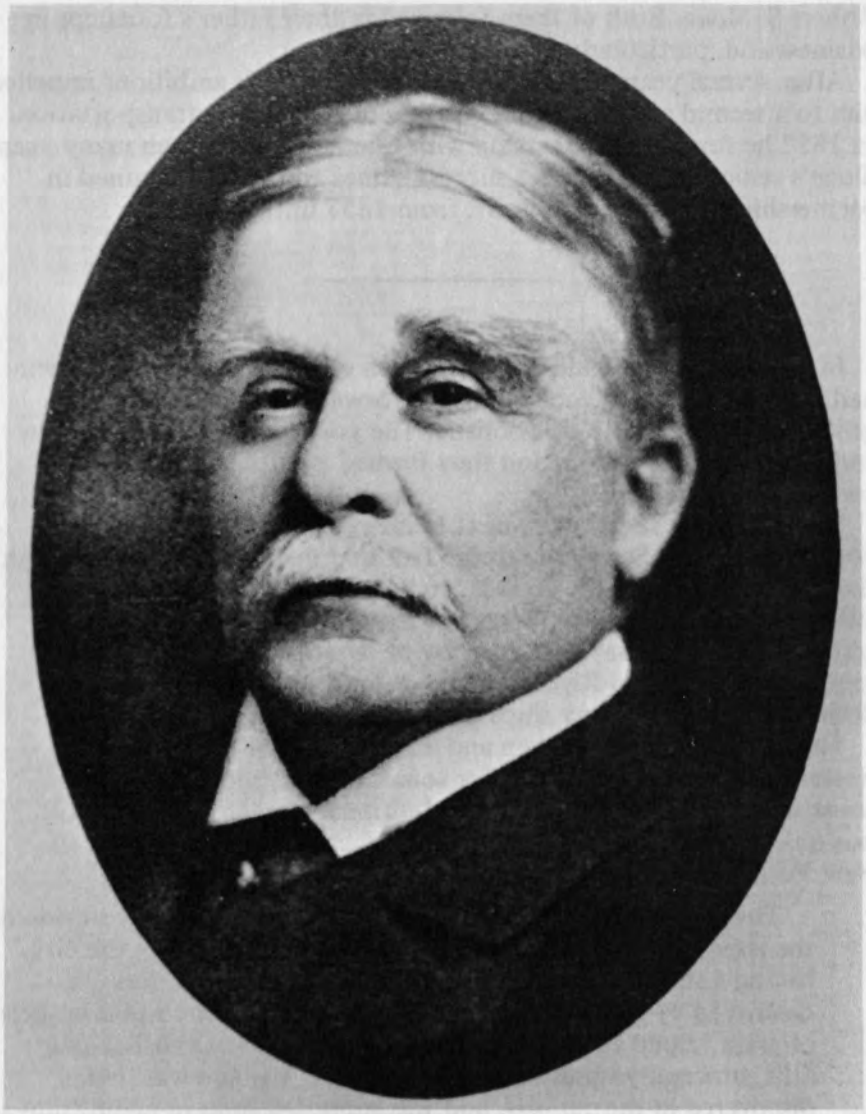
> On his return from the war James Sloan shocked his relatives by announcing that he wanted to marry a Portsmouth girl from the wrong side of the cowpath, as it were, one Ann Coffin Swett. . . . My great-grandfather married her, but said he would not stay in Portsmouth to have his grandparents and aunts turn up their noses at his bride; so he took her to the frontier, which at that time was the village of Oswego on Lake Ontario. There he opened a book shop. It was not a very successful enterprise as he was said to be so deep in reading his books that he begrudged leaving them to serve his customers.[3]

James Sloan and his wife took up residence at 17 East Fifth Street, about 1828. Approximately three years after arriving in Oswego, George Beale Sloan, the first of five children, was born.

George Sloan attended the public schools in Oswego until 1846, completing approximately eight grades. At the age of fifteen, he became a clerk in a dry goods store, compelled to face the serious side of life at an early age because his father lost his book business. Sloan, in contrast to his father, became so eager to obtain a knowledge of business that he paid close attention to details. For example, while working in the dry goods store, he could not be fooled by a customer who was purchasing a few yards of calico. She said, "Now boy mind ye be careful ye don't cut your finger," thereby hoping he would move his hand and measure incorrectly so she would get a few more inches of calico. [4] Because Sloan did pay close attention to detail he was given more important duties and it soon became his responsibility to supervise the shipping and receipt of dry goods.

After working a few years he entered into partnership with a friend, Henry C. Wright, in a milling and transportation business. The enterprise, however, failed and in the early 1850's Sloan took another salaried position.

When he was twenty-one, in 1852, George Sloan married Alvira Crane, the daughter of Albert Crane, a prominent Oswegonian whose family had been residents of the area for some seventy years. The Sloan's first home was a small dwelling on East Sixth Street across from Grace Lutheran Church. Their first child was a daughter, Helen Lafflin Sloan.



George Beale Sloan. *Courtesy of Charles Moore.*

Helen Sloan, later in life, married Lieutenant John W. Danenhower, one of the first to volunteer for the Jeannette Expedition to the north pole, an ill-fated adventure. Danenhower was later to take his own life, a shock to the world as well as to the Sloan family.[5]

The Sloan's other children were two sons, George B., Jr., and

Robert S. Sloan. Both of them followed in their father's footsteps in business and, particularly, manufacturing.

After several years of marriage, George B. Sloan's ambitions impelled him to a second attempt at the business of milling and transportation. In 1857 he formed a partnership with Cheney Ames, a man many years Sloan's senior. The business a success, Ames and Sloan remained in partnership for some seven years, from 1857 until 1864.

In 1864 another up-and-coming citizen of Oswego, Theodore Irwin, had just dissolved a partnership in the forwarding business with a gentleman by the name of Doolittle. The young entrepreneurs, Irwin and Sloan, became friends and they formed a partnership as grain commission merchants.

Oswego in the 1860's was, next to New York City, the greatest port in New York State, due to the fact that many ships came through the Great Lakes from the West laden with grain to be transferred to awaiting boats. Mrs. Wilson recounts in her manuscript, "My grandfather used to say that as a boy he would walk across the wide mouth of the Oswego River near the outlet to the lake, jumping from deck-to-deck of the many ships moored there."[6]

The business house of Irwin and Sloan, known as the Northwestern Elevator, was to stand for some twenty years. Originally constructed in 1865, but destroyed by fire a year later, the elevator was quickly rebuilt. A report of the spectacular fire appeared in the New York *Times.*

> The Northwestern Elevator, which was built on the west side of the river in 1865-by Irwin and Sloan, and the largest in the city, having a storage capacity of nearly 300,000 bushels, was destroyed by fire last night. There was stored in it 15,000 bushels of grain valued at $150,000 and insured for $80,000. The loss falls principally upon Eastern companies. The fire was first discovered in the cupolas, and was supposed to have taken from a spark of a passing propeller. The fire will not interfere with the handling of grain at this port, for the storage capacity is at present about 2,000,000 bushels.[7]

When the Northwestern Elevator was rebuilt it was expanded and became the largest elevator in the port, with a capacity of 450,000 bushels of grain. It was one of the finest elevators on the lake for one of the largest dealers of grain. The firm handled annually several million bushels, including large quantities of wheat, corn, barley and oats for shipment to ports on the east coast as well as to Canada.

The *Oswego City Directory* describes the establishment in 1867 as:

> General Produce Commission Merchants and Proprietors of Northwestern Elevator, Oswego, New York . . . General office 72 & 74 East First street . . . particular attention given to filling orders for wheat, corn, oats and barley for rail and canal boat shipments.[8]

while the Oswego *Daily Times* further describes the type of business carried on by the firm:

> The propeller St. Albans, Capt. Knopp arrived here last night from Milwaukee with 10,000 bushels of wheat for Irwin and Sloan. This is the first arrival from Lake Michigan this season.[9]

There was a decline in the marine trade at Oswego in the 1870's due to changing economic conditions apparently caused by the shift from a toll to a toll-reduced canal from Buffalo to Albany. With this decline, Irwin and Sloan began to turn their attention to other avenues of business and by 1882 both had relinquished their interests in the Northwestern Elevator.

Extending over many years, their partnership was one based on friendship as there was never a written agreement between them. Similarly Sloan was well-known throughout the region for his courtesy toward his many employees at the elevator. He took a deep interest in the welfare of those about him, giving many Oswegonians their start in life. When the captains of the various grain vessels would call at the foot of Schuyler Street, at Northwestern, Sloan would bring them up the hill to 107 West Van Buren Street for dinner. When Sloan travelled throughout the city he was friendly and often gave people a ride in his carriage. Such friendliness not only enhanced his business but also brought him respect which he commanded throughout his life.

Early in 1872 the Oswego Shade Cloth Company was established by Irwin, Sloan, Wright and Gray. A pioneer concern, the company was the first such enterprise in which shades were introduced as a marketable item. The machines of the factory were all designed under the supervision of Neil Gray, the general manager. By 1878 the capacity of the plant had quadrupled and the work force had increased accordingly.[10]

A description of the role of shades as an important factor in home decor written by Richard Spenlow appeared in the New York *Times* on Sunday, November 20, 1887.

> Dressing the window properly is an art. While attractiveness is of course the great desideratum, there are many and important points to be considered regarding the texture, quality, and color of the furnishings that shall best be adapted to this important

The Northwestern Elevator, as rebuilt in 1865, home of the Irwin-Sloan partnership until the firm was dissolved in 1882. *OCHS Collections.*

feature of interior decorations. The cornice should, of course, harmonize with the surrounding woodwork, and the draperies must naturally be in sympathy with the coloring and tints elsewhere in the apartment, and the lace curtain, being a matter of taste and expense, is left to the ideas of beauty and expenditure of the purchaser, but the question of what kind of material the window shade shall be composed of gives the careful and painstaking housewife an amount of considerate attention that is a result of her laudable desire to be wise in the selection of a fabric that shall be strong, durable, and at the same time pleasing to the eye. Harmony of coloring is, naturally, a feature which is not lost sight of, for this is a point that every house-furnisher, whose ideas of indoor arrangements have been properly educated, will not for a moment overlook through any enrapturing ecstasy over beautiful things not easily blended into their surroundings. The window shade, therefore, while apparently a matter of little importance to those who are not familiar with the multifarious details of house furnishings, is in reality given much careful and painstaking attention for those who have discriminative judgment and the means to gratify their desire appreciate only the best of everything and demand the best even to the smallest items. The opaqued Hollards, familiarly known to all established

> householders by the Indian word "Chouaguen," have become universally recognized as the leading shade cloth of the market. Their soft neutral colors, firm, even texture, smooth finish, and great wearing qualities have made these Hollands more generally used then any one material ever made for this particular purpose. These goods are manufactured by the Oswego Shade Cloth Company, Oswego, N.Y., and come in all colors and in widths of 38, 40, 42, and 45 inches. The production of this concern being recognized as the standard shade cloth, all shade trimmings, cords, tassels, fringes, &c., are made to match the Oswego shade cloth colors. They are sold in all the leading establishments of the country.[11]

In 1882 Sloan once again diversified his business interests by providing the capital for the formation of the Spring Company of Cliff and Righter. In the beginning, employment was given to only fifteen or twenty hands; the labor force expanded as the employers began to find a new market.

Soon after selling the Northwestern Elevator in 1884, Sloan became president of the Second National Bank, a position he held until his death in 1904. This bank was located at East First and Bridge Street and the structure still stands although under another name.

In banking, George Sloan was widely known. He handled the most difficult banking problems with wonderful ease and intelligence. Sloan was a member of the State Bankers' Association and was a familiar figure at gatherings of financiers. In fact, in 1896 he presented a paper, entitled "The Uses and Usefulness of Banks: An Address," to the annual meeting of the New York State Bankers' Association held at Niagara Falls.[12]

Sloan's interests also extended to the community. He was an active member of the boards of trustees of several prominent corporations and benevolent institutions. He served for many years as a member of the Oswego Board of Trade and was also a member of the Oswego Waterworks Company prior to the acquisition of the water plant by the city.[13]

He also held membership on the local board of the Oswego State Normal School. The citizenry of Oswego were shocked when he sent his daughter, Helen, to school there—apparently a milestone in the progress of the school.

> Faculty members were especially grateful to the families of George B. Sloan and Judge Churchill for their help in breaking down local prejudice. They accepted the students as their social equals, and Helen Sloan, a strong-minded, noble girl, had herself enlisted as one of the students of the school. Her example was followed by others and, the institution became more respectable.[14]

Also, a trustee of the Oswego Orphan Asylum, Sloan was one of the several benevolent citizens who, in 1872, incorporated the Home for the Homeless.[15]

As a model citizen of the era, Sloan also had a strong religious affiliation. He was, for many years, a member, regular attendant, and leading benefactor of Christ Church. On one occasion he proposed to carry out the original plan whereby the chancel of the church was deepened and many other improvements were made at his personal expense of several thousand dollars.[16]

Sloan's business acumen, reputation as a good citizen, and general popularity led to politics. It was written of Sloan that in politics he was a Republican of the highest type, loyal always to the principles of his party and active in promoting its interests and the election of its candidates.[17] In fact, Sloan was a staunch supporter of the Republican party throughout his long public and business life. He became a Republican when the party was born in 1852.

During the reconstruction period immediately following the Civil War Sloan ran for mayor of Oswego but was defeated. It was thought that his "political defeat . . . was caused by his having been driven by a negro coachman during his campaign . . . Anti-negro feeling had grown up because of excesses committed by the newly freed slaves."[18] However, Sloan overcame this defeat and was elected and considered for more important offices. In 1860 and 1861 he became alderman of the third ward of the city of Oswego.

Sloan first went to the New York State Assembly in 1874 for the ninety-seventh session from January 6 to April 30, during which he was appointed to the Canals and Insurance Committee. In the Assembly chamber he held seat number eighty-five, one of three from Oswego County representing the towns of Oswego, Scriba, Hannibal and the city of Oswego. While serving in the Assembly, Sloan made his residence at the Delevan House in Albany where many other members also resided.[19]

During his tenure in the Assembly Sloan became known as an independent Republican. His activity along the lines of reform placed him in the forefront of legislative activities aimed at civic betterment.

Sloan was not re-elected in 1875 but was in 1876 to the ninety-ninth session from January 4 to May 3. This session he served as the chairman of the important Ways and Means Committee. [20] He distinguished himself in this post; according to the New York *Times:*

> Mr. Sloan may take a just pride in the success with which he has carried through the important bills coming from the Ways and Means Committee. The Appropriation bill was disposed of by the Assembly in two sittings, and the Supply bill, first taken up on Thursday, passed in its third reading yesterday by unanimous vote of the House. It is doubtful whether these bills were ever before put on their passage with such ease and speed. No more flattering evidence could be given of the confidence of his fellow-members in the ability and integrity of the gentleman who had charge of them.[21]

During the ninety-ninth session Sloan occupied the thirty-fourth seat in the chamber, a much better location in the center of the room.[22]

Oswego County returned Sloan to the Assembly on November 7, 1876, for the one hundredth session, of which he was soon to be elected Speaker *pro tempore.* Sloan outlined his opinions and intentions regarding the position in a letter written from Oswego on November 22, 1876, which was reproduced in the New York *Times.*

> I have yours of the 21st, and have read with care all that you say as regards the Speakership. I have said to every one who has addressed me on the subject that while I should not seek the place, in the event of there being a very general desire on the part of the Republican members of the Assembly to elect me, I would not feel at liberty to decline. This, it seemed to me, was tenable ground; but to be a candidate in the sense that the word is often used is not quite to my liking, and I cannot do it. I cannot negotiate and bargain to secure it, and I should not enjoy your confidence were I to do so. I am very greatly obliged for your interest in the matter, and may need your further advice and counsel in the same connection . . . [23]

Sloan was elected to the position and the New York *Times* praised Sloan and the decision of the Assembly.

> The election of Mr. GEORGE B. SLOAN to be speaker pro tem. of the Assembly, is a graceful recognition of the ability and

integrity of one of the best representatives the Republican Party has sent to the State Legislature, Mr. SLOAN'S course in the last Legislature so favorably commended him to members of both political parties, that his selection for the important post of Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in this was received with cordial approval. As Chairman of that committee he recently carried through the Annual Appropriation bill in one day's sitting—an almost unprecedented event—and in the debate on it agreeably surprised the House by the perfect familiarity he evinced with the various and complicated laws under which the bill is drawn up. The Oswego grain merchant proved himself on that occasion to be equal to any lawyer on the floor. Mr. SLOAN'S election to the Speaker's chair was unanimous.[24]

Sloan's election, however, was not unanimous as the description of the commencement of the first day of the session relates:

> The House then proceeded to the election of the Speaker. The two names which were echoed in the halls were George B. Sloan of the First Assembly District of Oswego County, 69 times and Luke F. Cogans, a Democrat from the 14th Assembly District in New York, 57.[25]

After the proper administration of the oath of office by the Secretary of State, Hon. John Bigelow, Sloan addressed the Assembly.

> Gentlemen of the Assembly: I am deeply sensible of the honor conferred upon me by the vote just announced, which designates me as your presiding officer. While offering you my grateful acknowledgements for this expression of your confidence, I may well observe that you have honored me not only beyond my deserts, but beyond any aspirations I have ever felt at liberty to entertain; and, I may also add that when I call to mind the delicate and oftentimes trying duties of this position, and the signal ability displayed in the same relation by my immediate predecessor, as well as by other gentlemen whose accomplishments have graced the office on former occasions, it is not easy to escape a sense of oppression which burdens me even now, as I enter upon the task you have given me to perform.
>
> I might well shrink from assuming these responsibilities, were I not encouraged by circumstances which lead me to attempt their fulfillment.
>
> I recognize many members of this body largely experienced in public affairs, among whom are not only gentlemen who have served with distinction in this branch of the Legislature, but those whose names are honorably written on the journal of the Senate

as well; and to such I believe I may confidently turn for that advice and counsel of which I shall so often stand in need.

Others there are of whom it may be said, though yet untried in the work of legislation, they are nevertheless strong in the knowledge of practical affairs, who are ready and willing to join their efforts in producing those salutary results which I have reason to think are desired by every member of this House: and persuaded as I am that all are animated by a common purpose to uphold the honor and integrity of the State, I anticipate such wise and judicious action as shall occasion no feeling of regret that we have had a part in its accomplishment.

We meet at a time of unusual solicitude and interest—a time when public attention is anxiously directed to the extraordinary circumstances attending the late presidential election. Differing opinions as to the methods to be employed in solving the question are entertained by gentlemen of distinction in the two political organizations, and it may naturally be supposed that these opinions are influenced to greater or less extent by the predilections of the individuals themselves.

But however this may be, so pronounced is the determination of the people for a just and peaceful settlement of the matters in controversy, that violent or unconciliatory counsels are regarded by thoughtful and right minded men of either party as little less than vagaries not worthy of serious consideration. It may therefore be assumed, that patriotic effort, united with calm deliberation, having the support of an assuring public sentiment, looking to the welfare of the country as above and beyond all partisan considerations, will be found effectual in arriving at such results under the Constitution, as shall allay existing irritations, and be acquiesced in by the people generally, as just and equitable to all parties concerned.

Turning from the broader field of national affairs, to glance at what may be regarded more legitimately within the province of our own duty, we find promise of being able to answer the reasonable expectations of the people. The desire evinced in all parts of the State for rigid economy in every department of the public service, is one likely to overshadow demands that might otherwise be made upon us. It is, therefore, a satisfaction to know that the present condition of the finances, and the diminished public debt, are elements exceedinglys favorable in adjusting the rate of taxation to correspond with the prevailing depression in all departments of commercial and industrial pursuits. So far reduced are the financial obligation of the State that the requirements for the payment of the principal and interest are comparatively trifling. We have, therefore, only to exercise

moderate prudence in appropriating for the other purposes of government to render the burden of taxation so lightly as to be in no degree oppressive.

It will be a part of your duty to consider the question of reapportioning the Senate and Assembly districts of the State, in conformity to the provision of the Constitution, which demands such supplemental action after each enumeration of the inhabitants is made.

Another subject of moment will also engage your attention in the form of legislation required to give effect to the Constitution, approved by two previous Legislatures and ratified by the people at the last election. I refer to the amendments changing the system of management of the canals and the State prisons. It is not necessary for me to urge the desirability of early and painstaking consideration of these measurers, since you fully understand and appreciate their importance; but may I not in this connection take the liberty of suggesting the great advantage to be gained by promptly acting on ALL matters that may be brought to your attention?

Close and earnest application by the various committees of the House to the work in hand during the early part of the session, will render practicable that necessary attention to measure which, under other circumstances, are apt to be imperfectly prepared and much too hastily enacted.

By early action in the direction indicated, it may also be assumed that bills of doubtful utility will be more likely to be defeated than if allowed to linger on your files, until the hurry of the closing days of the session shall lend facility to their passage.

. . . It only remains for me, therefore, to give assurance of my desire to co-operate with you in every practicable manner, to secure the best results in whatever we may undertake as members of this body, and to further add that, however conspicuous may be my faults as your presiding officer, the fault of intentional injustice to any member of this floor will not be found among them.[26]

The various legislative endeavors of which Sloan spoke in his introductory remarks at times proved problematic, especially since the Governor, Lucius Robinson, was a Democrat and powerful partisans such as James Husted and Thomas G. Alvord frequently attempted to exert influence upon legislation in favor of their own interests. However, generally speaking, Sloan led the Assembly successfully though its one hundredth session.

Considering the activities of the various branches of state administration, a number of bills were passed in the Assembly under the lead-

ership of Speaker Sloan: a bill defining the duties and compensation of the Superintendant of Public Works and his subordinates; various bills concerning the sale of lateral canals, canal management, and canal management, and appropriations; measures providing for the regulation of prison officials and their control over institutions under their supervision; a County Treasurer's bill, encompassing the entire state, and of great importance in the interest of honesty and good business management; a general game law for the entire state; a bill prohibiting pool selling; constitutional amendments relating to the government of cities; as well as the annual tax appropriation bills.[27]

On Thursday, May 24, 1877, Cogans, the man defeated by Sloan for the position of Speaker, offered the following resolution:

> RESOLVED: That the thanks of this House are due and hereby earnestly tendered to the Honorable George B. Sloan for the able, dignified, courteous, and impartial manner in which he has discharged the duties of Speaker during the present session of the Assembly.[28]

The resolution passed and prior to adjournment, Sloan addressed the House:

> Gentlemen of the Assembly: For more than one hundred and thirty days you have been in almost constant association with each other, in the discharge of duties committed to you by the people of a great and prosperous commonwealth . . . In laying down this solemn trust, you naturally ask yourselves the question "have the obligations resting upon us been well or ill performed?" Time forbids a searching retrospect . . . But parting as we do . . . I am constrained to believe I overstep no propriety of time or place in saying this much: All that you have undertaken you have conscientiously striven to perform. You have wrought assiduously in the direction of what the people most demanded. Keeping constantly in view the purpose of lightening the public burdens, you have endeavored to promote new methods of retrenchment, new ways of economy; and in this you may fairly claim a reasonable measure of success . . . Regarded as a whole, therefore, what you have done may in all candor be said to have been wisely done; and if criticism be made at all I am fain to believe it must of necessity be the criticism attaching to the lesser fault of omission, rather than that which applies to acts committed . . . [29]

At the conclusion of the address, during the delivery of which the members remained standing, and as the Speaker struck the desk declaring the House adjourned, a loud and hearty burst of applause—

lasting some moments–greeted Sloan. Hand-shaking and congratulation on all sides followed and the members slowly and lingeringly dispersed.

Following his term as Speaker, Sloan was prominently mentioned for the Republican candidacy for Secretary of State, as reported in an article in the New York *Times*.

> The Oswego Times of Saturday thus comments: "The Albany Evening Journal of Thursday states that among other good names for the Republican State ticket that of Hon. George B. Sloan, of this city, is prominently mentioned as a candidate for Secretary of State, and the Journal heartily seconded the suggestion as to the fitness of the nomination, but hopes that Mr. Sloan will be returned to the Assembly from this district. We are not authorized to speak for Mr. Sloan on either of these points, but it is reported that he declines a re-election to the Assembly."[30]

In 1878 Sloan was re-elected to the Assembly for a fourth term to serve in the one hundred second session from January 7 to May 22, under the Speakership of Thomas Alvord of Onondaga County. During the session Sloan was again made chairman of the Ways and Means Committee.

As his political career progressed Sloan gained a reputation as an opponent of the Stalwart machine headed by Roscoe Conkling. Although personally he admired Conkling, Sloan did not like scandal in any form or in either of the parties. Continued support of President Ulysses S. Grant by the Stalwart faction pained Sloan greatly. He was equally disturbed by scandals in New York State, such as the Canal Ring and the Tweed faction in New York City.

Other than in the instance of his great distaste for scandal, Sloan had a flexibility of mind which gave him great distinction. He possessed charm, firmness and power; he was a competent and resourceful businessman, keen, active and, above all. honest. These were the qualities which made him Speaker of the Assembly in 1877 and provoked the suggestion of his name as a candidate for Governor in 1879.

> In reply to a letter from Hon. James A. Briggs, of Brooklyn, in which he informed Hon. George B. Sloan, member of Assembly from Oswego County, that, very many Republicans of this State would be pleased to support him as the next candidate for Governor, that gentleman writes, under date of March 14: "I have always treated the subject when mentioned to me as a possibility so remote that serious consideration of it was quite unnecessary . . . I never have been, and am not now, and shall not be, a candidate for the Gubernatorial nomination; and I am right glad to have this opportunity of saying so in terms not to be

mistaken or misunderstood."[32]

Sloan eclipsed his public career in 1879 when, at the Republican Convention at Saratoga, he suddenly voted for Alonzo Cornell who won by eight votes. Sloan's former associates never forgave him. No one could understand why Sloan switched his vote to Cornell, although various reasons were advanced. Sloan wanted to have his friend, John C. Churchill, nominated for the position of State Comptroller, but he was hissed down on the first ballot. Some thought Sloan became tired of opposing the powerful machine of Conkling and merely gave in.

In the years following, Sloan remained rather divorced from elected politics; although, he was appointed by the Governor to serve as one of three Commissioners of Banking in May, 1880–positions created by the Assembly early that year.[33]

Sloan was elected to serve in the one hundred ninth session of the State Senate to represent the 21st District of Oswego and Jefferson Counties, to begin in 1886. During that term Sloan served on the Finance, Canals and Rules Committees. He was re-elected to the one hundred tenth session, during which he served as chairman of the Committee of Finance.[34] Again in 1888, Sloan's reputation and experience afforded him easy re-election to both the subsequent sessions.

In 1889 Sloan and Chauncey Depew presided over the Republican State Convention held at Saratoga on September 25.

> "Ballot and Temperance Reform" was the watchword of the Republican State Convention held at Saratoga on September 25. Depew and George B. Sloan presided over its sessions. The gathering was entirely harmonious and the ticket was made up after Conferences among the leaders. The only rivalry displayed on the floor of the Convention was between Albert Haight of Buffalo and Alfred C. Coxe of Utica–a nephew of Conkling, who had died in the preceeding year, for Judge of the Court of Appeals, and nomination went to Haight, largely for geographical reasons. The platform repeated the former arraignment of Hill for his vetoes and commended Republican legislative policies, including the taxing of collateral inheritance and corporations.[35]

Sloan was again elected to the Senate for the one hundred thirteenth and fourteenth sessions, during 1890 and 1891.[36] Sloan's interest and support for the preservation of the forests in the Adirondack area were mainfested during the sessions. A number of bills relevant to the Adirondack preserve were passed, including one extending the duties of fire wardens and another formulating a policy for the State's

acquisition of lands to be included in the preserve. The advantage of Adirondack preserve as a place of recreation for the people of the cities was fortunately recognized during the 1890 session.[37]

In 1892 Sloan was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis. That same year he expressed an interest in running for Congress, but he was unable to secure the nomination.

George Sloan served in a number of appointed offices. He was one of the Commissioners for New York State at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1892-1893. Governor Black also appointed Sloan as one of the members of the State Canal Commission, an appointment which developed into a deep interest in the matter of canal improvement.[38]

In 1896 Sloan was a Republican presidential elector. He also served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention which renominated McKinley in 1900. Sloan numbered McKinley among his friends, as well as Theodore Roosevelt and New York's Senators Thomas Platt and Chauncey Depew.[39]

On Christmas Day, 1902, Theodore Irwin, with whom Sloan had been intimately associated in business for nearly forty years, died; his passing was very depressing to his surviving partner. Up until this time Sloan had enjoyed excellent health but the death of his old friend and partner so upset him that six weeks later he suffered a stroke of apoplexy.[40]

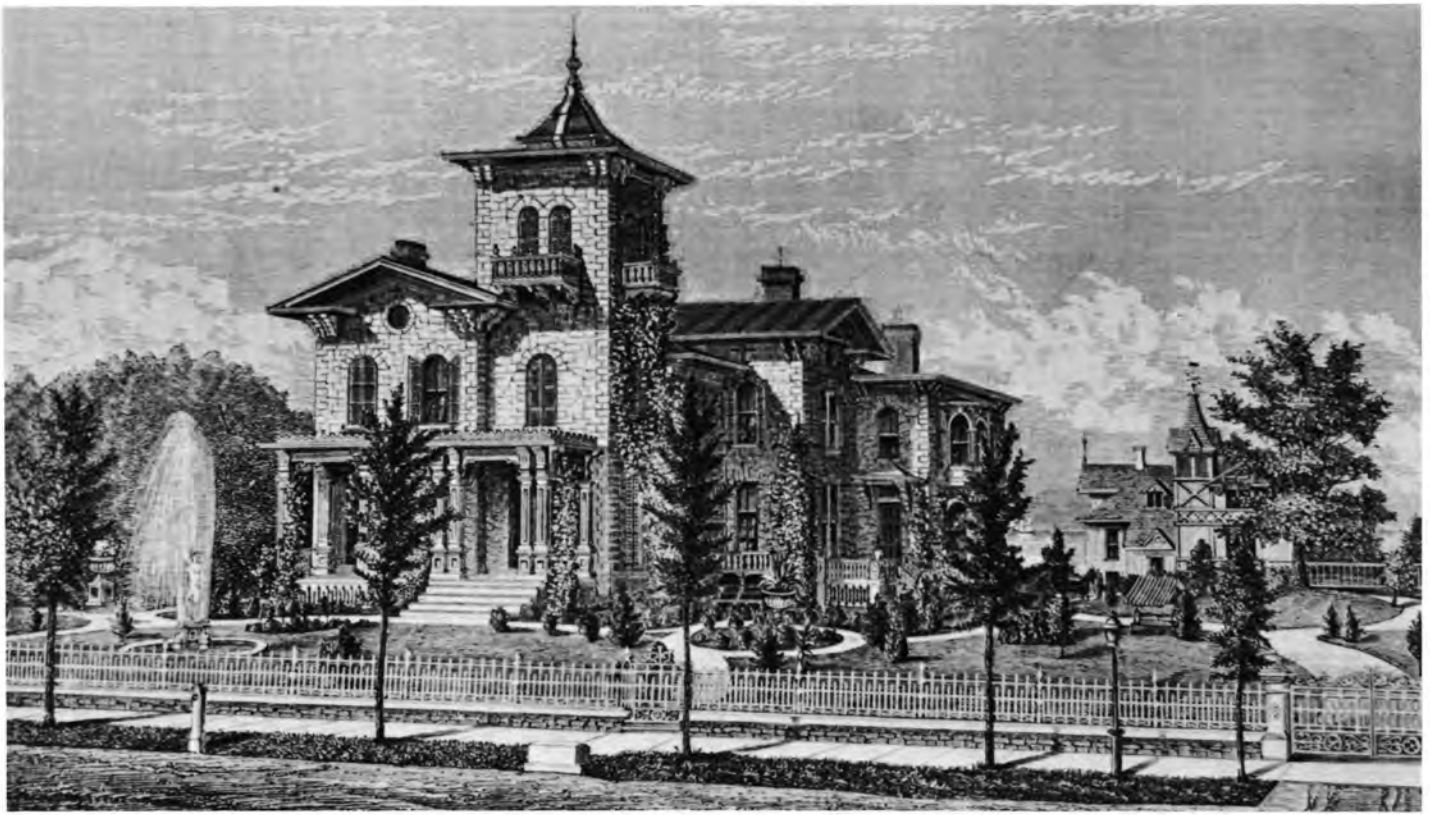
Never regaining his health and vigor, the Honorable George B. Sloan died on Sunday, July 10, 1904, in Oswego where he had been born and had known a rich, full and exciting life. He left a widow and three children, as well as a proud heritage. He lays at rest in Riverside Cemetery on East River Road.

Bleak House

During his life, George B. Sloan amassed a considerable fortune. Although philanthropic, he also considered his own creature comforts as reflected in the house in which he lived at the corner of West Eighth and Van Buren Streets. When the Sloan family resided there it was known as "Bleak House," named under the influence of Dickens, perhaps because of its exposure to the wind and cold as it overlooked Lake Ontario.

As an old adage states, "A man's home is his castle." Castle-like is a term which can be easily applied to the Italianate or Tuscan villa styled home of George B. Sloan.

The design precedent for the Tuscan villa is the Renaissance



Crisfield Johnson, *History of Oswego County,* opposite p. 138.

Residence of George B. Sloan

architecture of Tuscany in central Italy.[42] Because Italy was tree-poor, masonry architecture was used.[43] This type of architecture became popular in England during the 1820's and spread to America circa 1830, reflecting the fact that American housebuilders were becoming increasingly impressed by classical influences and ideas developed in foreign lands.[44] However, American Italianate houses were only "second cousins" to the real villas of Italy. Architects complied with increased interest in the classics by designing large residences for their prosperous patrons which were free adaptation of dwelling traditions of older nations such as Egypt, Spain and Italy. Designs were subsequently included in English pattern books (some of the most successful architects of this style were from Britain). [45] Finally American builders adapted these designs to the desires and status of the men for whom the urban and suburban homes were erected. Thus the Italianate villa was conceived.

One of the most striking features of Italianate villas in America was the tower. Characteristic of the 1860's and 1870's, the tower was square, three-storied, equipped with a low-pitched roof, and most often located on a corner of the main facade of the building. The tower was usually built for pleasure.[46]

Ironwork often decorated the towers and verandas of such Italianate and Tuscan villas. However, wood was often substituted, as on the Sloan house. The substitution was perhaps due to the fact that the original builder "Long John" Mott was a lumber dealer. Also, Oswego shipped the greatest amount of lumber of any port during the last half of the nineteenth century.

Other architectural characteristics of the villa style which abound on the Sloan house were low-pitched roofs and curved and bay windows.

The style belonged to the Victorian era whose architects concerned themselves with the total effect of the estates they planned. They recommended embellishments such as urns, sundials, fountains, and tree-shaded promenades.[47] The Sloan estate created the desired effect: a fountain in the form of the goddess Venus graced the front of the building and was flanked by large six-foot-tall urns filled with plants and flowers; gardens were located in back of the house and in front of the carriage house (the gardens contained fruits and vegetables as well as flowers); and an elaborate iron fence with monogrammed gate posts surrounded the better part of the estate.

The scene of many fashionable parties during the occupancy of the Sloan family, "Bleak House" remains impressive with extremely large rooms and high ceilings. In the main hallway there is a curved central staircase which runs from the first to the second floors. In the main entry the floor is covered with heraldic-style tile work and there hangs an intricately-worked, patterned-glass and brass chandelier with sun-flowers engraved in the brass.

To the left of the main entrance is the drawing room. Its focal point is a large inlaid wood and marble fireplace with a tall and wide mirror above it. At the west end of the drawing room is the solarium which was originally heated by its own furnace. During the Sloan's residence many plants were grown here during the winter months by a full-time gardener who was closely supervised by the master of the house.

Behind the drawing room was the sitting room with another fireplace, which has since been closed up. Also on the main floor, facing north, was a summer dining room. Panelled in solid cherry, this room gave the family a perfect view of Lake Ontario during their meals. Etched in three of the stained glass windows facing the lake are the initials of the Sloan children. This room was so cold in the winter that it could not be used.

The central hall ran most of the depth of the first floor to the back portion of the house. This hallway has since been closed off in order to create several apartments, work undertaken by the St. Regis Paper Company in 1946.

The first floor has a second entrance on the east side of the house, near the large oak tree. Now used for the second apartment, this was the entrance used by those who visited the house by carriage. Once in this east entrance, to the left of a short hallway, is a door with glass panels etched with classical Greek figures. Tile adorns the floor here, as in the main entrance. The short hallway led into the main library which, in turn, led to the dining room.

A hand-carved white oak fireplace commands the attention in this latter room. Carved with the head of Bacchus, the god of wine, in its center, a lion's head supports each side of the mantle which is believed to have been carved by a well-known local carver, Louis Lavonier, Sr. There was originally a splendid gas-fired chandelier in the center of this room. The ceiling is of pressed wallpaper with different kinds of fruit surrounding the chandelier; heavy oak furniture once filled the room.

Off the dining room was the kitchen, ice room, butler's pantry and baker's room, all necessary to the preparation of sumptuous meals.

Bedrooms and the family's private sitting rooms made up the second floor and in the attic were quarter's for the housekeeper. (The Sloans employed seven servants most of the time and hired extra help when entertaining). Large storage rooms completed the attic.

In the cellar or basement was a large laundry. Next to a cistern which provided the water supply was the wine cellar; Sloan was not fond of hard liquor. In addition, the game room was located in the basement. Once equipped with a billiard table for the Senator's sons, the room has a working fireplace. The cellar also had five rooms which were used for storage.

In all there were fourteen main rooms and some nine auxiliary rooms, a total of twenty-three or more rooms. The Sloan family,

guests and servants inhabited them all.

The most striking feature of the estate, other than the house, is the large carriage house. It appears to be of a Gothic-style design and probably would be termed "carpenter Gothic." The carriage house sports a tower with four steep gables, one on either side. The tower itself is divided into sections by horizontal moldings and diagonal cross-pieces. As with other Gothic revival structures, the Sloan carriage house consists of board and batten siding. It is two and one-half stories high. In the upper area, facing Van Buren Street, the fashionable carriages were kept—two for winter, with runners, and two for the remainder for the year. On the lower, or Bronson Street side, the cows were kept.

The property is part of the original Van Buren tract sold by the President in 1837.[48] From then until 1866 it changed hands twelve times. In 1866 John Mott, Jr., better known as "Long John" Mott, had just returned from the Civil War and very quickly became a prominent lumber merchant, bought the property. He built the original house between 1866 and 1870. Facing bankruptcy in 1870, he sold the house and property to Sloan and his wife for $37,000, quite a sum of money for that day. "Bleak House" remained in the hands of the Sloan family for sixty-three years until 1931.

Next to the Sloan house stands the former Littlejohn residence, commanding one of the loveliest locations in the city overlooking the lake. Built of red brick in the early's 1850's, some fifteen years before "Bleak House," it was the home of Dewitt C. Littlejohn, a prominent orator and politician who served as Speaker of the Assembly, as did Sloan. Littlejohn and Sloan were close friends; they had happy parties on many occasions on the grounds between the houses. The Littlejohn house is now painted pink and is occupied by the V.F.W. The massive yards used to extend into one another where fruits trees stood and children played until 1968 when the V.F.W. purchased the property and converted the yards into parking lots.

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The Black 369th in Oswego (1941)

*James J. Cummings**

Although Oswego in its earlier days had considerable contact with black folks through its underground railroad, very few blacks have ever lived in Oswego. Thus, the people of Oswego have been denied the opportunity to live with and know black people. When Dr. Lapping, of the S.U.C.O. history department, mentioned that an all black regiment had been stationed at Fort Ontario in 1941 I thought it would prove interesting to investigate the story behind the stay of the regiment and the relationship it had with the Oswego community.

Since this regiment was comprised of 1,800 men it increased the population of Oswego a great deal percentage-wise, thus causing overcrowding in areas of entertainment, housing, and eating. Of specific interest is to see how both groups (soldiers and Oswegonians) handled their situations. Were there tensions and antagonisms? Did both groups try particularly hard to have rapport? Was it successful as an experiment in social integration? Were traditional barriers and myths between blacks and whites at least partially destroyed? Could the relatively quiet community of Oswego fulfill the needs of this group of men accustomed to the cosmopolitanism of Harlem, New York? How were Oswego residents affected?

To the above questions I have, on the whole, addressed myself during my research and in this paper.

Because no one, to my knowledge, has written about this subject before, a great deal of my information was acquired through personal

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testimony. I tried my best to determine what was true from recollections often blurred by over twenty years time.

In gathering information for this study I utilized much of the local media. The editor of the *Palladium-Times* was kind enough to print two separate articles about the study along with my request for personal recollections. In addition, I spoke briefly on the two local radio stations, WSGO and WOSC, outlining my subject and again requesting information. I received close to twenty replies from people who relayed their recollections and opinions to me and directed me to others for more information.[1]

It could be said that my information was obtained in such a manner as to meet only favorable responses because those with negative feelings might have been reluctant to contact me. In addition, I have obtained scores of opinions from people I have had contact with in everyday life in Oswego and who remember the regiment.

The overwhelming majority of opinions were quite positive, as I have reported. No doubt there are some inaccuracies in this paper, which is the risk in dealing with oral history, but I have done my best to make them as few in number as possible by double checking stories, dates, etc., with as many sources as possible.

The 369th Coast Artillery was recognized as a National Guard unit and was called into federal service on January 13, 1941, to prepare for the possibility of United States entry into the already raging war. Originally it was organized on June 2, 1913, as a "Negro regiment" designated the 15th Infantry and was cited for bravery eleven times for action in World War I. It was reorganized as the 369th Infantry in 1924 and remained so until it was converted into a coast artillery regiment in August of 1940. The 369th consisted of two anti-aircraft gun battalions and a searchlight battalion.

In early January of 1941 the Oswego *Palladium-Times* started mentioning the 369th and its planned arrival. Thirty barracks for enlistees, sixty-five buildings in all, were built for the new regiment by Witaka Construction Company at a cost of $600,000. Included were a new theater, barbershop, canteen, and recreation hall.

The outfit was commanded by Benjamin Davis, the first black general in America, until January 14, 1941, whereupon Colonel Chauncey Hooper took command, a position he held throughout the remaining stay of the 369th in Oswego.

The regiment was sent to Oswego to train on the shores of Lake Ontario since it was an anti-aircraft coast artillery unit. The training

was going to be intense because not only was the newly converted unit "green" as an anti-aircraft outfit but they also had to learn how to use the latest sophisticated equipment.

There is some question among several residents over the true reason for the 369th being sent particularly to Oswego. Although Lake Ontario was quite suitable for the unit's training because its expansiveness allowed safe practice shooting at targets towed behind planes, a number of residents believe the unit was sent to Oswego by President Roosevelt in retaliation for Oswego's behavior in the 1936 presidential election. Roosevelt won the election by a great landslide; however, Oswego gave Roosevelt's opponent, Landon, its majority.

Although I cannot be certain it seems that this opinion, held by a minority of those interviewed, overlooks several factors. First, if there were any hostilities between the 369th and the city, most likely the soliders would have gotten the worst of it, and Roosevelt had no quarrel with them. Secondly, there were more effective ways of gaining revenge, if that is what Roosevelt wanted, such as cutting federal patronage to the area and instigating tax investigations of local leaders. Thirdly, Roosevelt was absorbed with issues of much

Men of the 369th Regiment stationed at Fort Ontario in 1941 learn the operation of anti-aircraft equipment. *OCHS—Mowers Collection.*

greater importance such as the nation's economy and the impending war. It is doubtful that he would play with an important segment of the nation's defense to avenge a relatively insignificant event which had taken place five years earlier.

Generally, upon hearing that an all black unit was being sent to Oswego, the people were somewhat anxious for two reasons. One, the regiment was 1,800 strong and that would create overcrowding at recreational, entertainment, and eating facilities of the city. Second, in the very early 1900's a black infantry unit had been stationed at Oswego for a time and there supposedly had been a significant amount of tension.

The Oswego *Palladium-Times* and many leaders in the military and the Oswego community were aware of these anxieties and were careful in trying to establish a cordial atmosphere. The *Palladium-Times* printed several quotes from various sources noting the 369th's valorous history, its respect and dignity, and the assets it would bring to the community. Many military leaders praised the unit and predicted a very favorable relationship. Many local leaders were anxious for a good rapport and made statements to insure that there would be. One leader in particular, Charles Riley, Superintendent of Schools, sent a letter on January 23rd to all of the faculty members. It reflected somewhat how a sizeable number of local leaders felt. The letter also appeared in the *Palladium-Times* and it read as follows:

> With the advent of the colored troops at Fort Ontario a problem is presented which perhaps needs some attention from our schools. I refer to the thoughtless, discourteous, and slurring remarks that young people and adults make on the streets and in public places within hearing distance of colored soldiers.
>
> Democracy does not discriminate between race, color, or creed. Democracy knows no classes but expects each citizen to carry his share of the load. Uncle Sam has called this regiment of the National Guard to the regular army for a year of intensive training so that they may be ready to fight democracy's battles.
>
> May I therefore urge every principal and teacher to discuss this problem with their students to insure a square deal for this group during their stay in Oswego.
>
> This is a guidance problem involving courtesy and tolerance in the American way. Fraternity is not involved.[2]

On Wednesday, January 22, 1941, the 369th arrived in special trains from New York City after being sent off by a crowd of over 5,000. The barracks at Fort Ontario had been set up with cots, blankets, tables, and other necessities by a small unit which had come in advance. The soldiers were generally pleased with their new setting and their relative proximity to New York City.

Soon after their arrival several facts were made known which would benefit Oswegonians. The 369th would be paid a total of $110,000 a month which local businessmen were happy to hear. Also, the unit had several notable personalities, an excellent band, a basketball, rifle, baseball, and track team, and several amateur boxers.

Among the notable personalities was Reverend Benjamin Richardson who was the 369th's Congregational chaplin. He had studied at Harvard and Columbia and besides being an excellent speaker, he was a poet, author and artist. Some of his art works were on exhibit at Symphony Hall in Boston and his murals could be viewed at the Howard Divinity School and at some of the state buildings of his native Florida. Later he published the *Post Hole* for the 369th at Fort Ontario.

"Long John" Woodruff, who left his work for his master of arts degree at New York University to join the 369th, was a gold medal winner of the mile run at the Olympics at Berlin in 1936. Called "Long John" because of his exceptionally long running stride (over nine feet), he performed in several track exhibitions for the community.

Russell A. Wooding, the 369th bandmaster, was quite well known, particularly in New York City. He had directed the orchestra at the Apollo Theater, directed the New York Giants' football team band, arranged music for several Broadway musicals for George White, Irving Berlin, and the Schuberts. Not only did Wooding direct the 369th's formal marching band but also led its jazz band which had among its ranks such people as Reuben Reeves, who attended the American Conservatory of Music and had played with Cab Calloway at the Cotton Club and toured with Connie's Hot Chocolates, and Otis Johnson, who played with Benny Caster and Don Redman's band and spent three years with Louis Armstrong's band.

This jazz band was carrying on a musical tradition started in the unit by Jim Europe during World War I. Jim Europe and his manager, Noble Sissle, were inducted into the 15th Infantry (now the 369th) and made band leaders of the regiment. Europe's band gained fame from playing in parades and for men in France just back from the front lines. Eventually Europe and the band toured the entire United States. Jim Europe was later involved in an incident in which he was fatally stabbed and it is said that on his deathbed he said,"Sissle, carry on as I have outlined," and died. Since then music has been a tradition of the 369th.

Time did a feature article on the band in March of 1941 and said, "The United States band which speaks for itself with the most authority is one at Fort Ontario."[3]

It did not take the 369th long to get itself settled. Soon after their arrival liberty was granted to soldiers between 5 p.m. and 11 p.m. and many strolled through the city to familiarize themselves with it. Entertainment facilities were not able to satisfy the large numbers of men but the problem was partially alleviated by the organization of weekend bus trips to Syracuse where they were entertained by many local blacks at the Dunbar Social Center. Also, some special trains were arranged for occasional weekend trips to New York City (these usually occurred around pay day).

The fact that many of the men were leaving Oswego to spend their money was cause for some concern among local businessmen, however, the *Palladium-Times* was pleased to point out that the great marjority would stay in Oswego to spread their wealth!

Captain Steele wasted no time in re-organizing the outfit's basketball team which first competed at the Dunbar Center and then at the Oswego YMCA. Eventually the team played regularly in Fulton and Oswego and went on to play in both city championships. It won the championship in Fulton but lost in Oswego to the Oswego Merchants.

The track team, headed by "Long John" Woodruff, treated the soliders and local civilians to several activities. Because of a personal friendship with a member of the team, Jessie Owens, often called "the fastest man alive," came up to Fort Ontario and put on a running exhibition. Melvin McFee, then coach of the Oswego High School track team, informed me that several exhibition meets were held between the school and the military teams. These proved very interesting to local residents, especially on Independence Day when the largest exhibition occurred.

At the final Oswego basketball championship game the overflow crowd was treated by Wooding's jazz band at half-time. Oswego was often entertained by the jazz, symphonic, and marching bands. Many of those whom I interviewed mentioned that every evening at the flag lowering ceremony the band would play and, when the weather permitted, would be quite well attended. The band also was a major feature in parades on Army, Memorial, and Independence Days.

The jazz band was generous with its time and energy, playing free of charge at many town dances (often held at the Oswego Armory) and at charity affairs, church affairs and sometimes in Washington

Park on East Bridge Street. Some of the Oswegonians who heard the jazz band described it as "fantastic." During this period of time it was quite customary to dance when a jazz band played, but, as one person told me, at a dance played at the Armory most people just sat and listened "with their mouths hanging open!"[4] (Oswegonians themselves also enhanced the music playing–nine pianos were donated to the Fort.)

A story was related to me by Mrs. Doris Allen of Oswego which is important as one indication of the nature of the feelings between the local people and the 369th. A play, *East Lynn*, was staged in April of 1941 at St. Paul's Church by the Black Friars, an acting group of which Mrs. Allen was a member. The 369th was invited and many attended. The event became increasingly lively and finally at the end of the play some of the men gathered up on the stage and played and sang for the cast and audience until four in the morning. One could certainly conclude that for something as warmhearted as this to have taken place there must have been a feeling of cordiality.

Of great significance reflecting the attitude or state of mind of Oswegonians toward the black 369th is the fact that almost every well-known organization in the area invited at least one representative, usually an officer, of the 369th to be a guest speaker at least one of their gatherings. The Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Boy Scouts, Knights of Columbus, Chamber of Commerce, veteran's groups, women's organizations, churches and local schools all heard a member of the unit speak at least once. Quite often Colonel Hooper, Chaplin Ben Richardson (offhand I have counted fifteen church functions at which he spoke, and there were several more), A.G. Fallings (in charge of most recreational activities), "Long John" Woodruff, and Colonel W.F. Lucas were all called upon by groups not only in the city of Oswego, but in the entire surrounding area including Fulton, to speak.

Almost every guest speaker dealt with the black man's situation in society. For example, A.G. Fallings spoke at a Kiwanis Club luncheon and stated that the white world had created a neighborhood out of the world but not a brotherhood. He further stated that "Negroes" had always protected the freedom of the country but had been given the short end of the deal at home. The white world was a prejudiced world.[5] When Fallings addressed the Senior and Freshman classes of the Oswego Normal School, he urged the students to educate their emotions as well as their skills to help blacks build a better world for themselves.[6] Ben Richardson spoke of such things as the integration of the black man into American culture.

The most significant thing about the speakers was that they were often invited to come again or another member of the unit was invited. So not only were many of the blacks willing to speak of things such as race relations, but many of the white groups were quite eager to

listen.

I believe the primary reason for the eager reception of the black speakers lies in the fact that most Oswegonians had not had much previous contact with blacks. So possibly a good part of the racism that did exist existed on a somewhat dormant level. That is, quite often in places where there is a greater black population the whites often have deep racist feelings because characteristics that are taken as deplorable are often attributed to the black race rather than the socio-economic problems that plague the black man in America.

Also, Oswego's location and resulting economy did not have ties or dependence on black labor, thus freeing it from the antagonistic situation that exists in the South.

All of this must be accepted in the relative sense. It would be foolish to say racism, overt or covert, did not exist in Oswego. I mean, simply, that racial prejudice was at a *relatively* low, or perhaps more sedate, level thus allowing Oswegonians to be somewhat more receptive to the black soldiers.

The 369th, according to most of those interviewed, did not act much differently from other units stationed at Fort Ontario. But there was definitely more of an introversion on the part of the 369th than most other units.

Most of the men did their drinking and were entertained at Whitey's Savory, a restaurant-bar on the northeast corner of East Seventh and Seneca Streets. When the 369th came up from New York, Herbert White, who owned the well-known Savory's in New York, came up and opened Whitey's Savory in Oswego specifically for the 369th. Many of the men in the unit were his personal friends from New York.

Along with drinks, delicious fried chicken could be obtained and often women dancers from New York would entertain. An interesting and revealing letter written by Herbert White appeared in the *Palladium-Times.* It read as follows:

> Sir—The situation is real grave when Herbert White, owner of Whitey's Restaurant is refused accommodation. What are we to do? We are respectable and clean living. Why should color discrimination be held against us, when we are willing to pay our way?
>
> The people of Oswego have plenty of rooming accommodations but refuse to cooperate in anyway. I am bringing entertainers

from New York at my expense but, as an example, cannot find, because of refusal, a place for them to stay.

We came to Oswego with good honorable intentions, but why are we though of as otherwise. We are not squatters, but expect to be members of a respectable community.[7]

Every person I interviewed remembered Whitey's and all had opinions about this place. Most agreed that Mr. White ran an orderly establishment but many Oswegonians mentioned that there was some resentment in the city over the fact that some local women would frequent his place.

Mr. White was a fairly important man to many of the 369ers for several reasons. Primarily, of course, he provided the men with a place of their own in which to feel totally at ease and accepted. His secondary functions were twofold. First, he acted as a link, a dispenser of information, from Oswego to New York. He was friendly with several of the men and, because of his establishment in New York, would often know "what was happening" back home. His very presence was comforting in that he was an extension of the home community. Second, he was a man who could be relied upon to help in rough times for he often lent money to the men when it was needed.

So Herbert White's functions, both formal (as owner of the restaurant-bar) and informal were quite important both to the 369th and the Oswego community. Had not Mr. White provided a place the soldiers could call their own, feelings might have been tense. There would have been no specific place to "hang out" and relax, and very possibly the men would have been treated as intruders in many other establishments.[8]

By the summer of 1941 the 369th was fairly well accepted as part of the Oswego scene. In fact as I was researching this subject day by day in the *Palladium-Times,* I could guess with quite a bit of accuracy just what would happen in each succeeding week. There would always be a few accounts of the subjects discussed by guest speakers from the 369th at various organizational functions (almost every week Chaplin Richardson spoke somewhere!), coverage of the local contests between sports teams of the 369th and local teams, the band would be mentioned as having played, announcements of future planned marches, motor-marches, or equipment exhibitions, etc.

(Each month it was amusing to see how the *Palladium-Times* would carefully note how much money was paid to the soldiers and

how many would not be going to Syracuse or New York to spend it.)

As a point of interest I might mention that the ghost which haunts Fort Ontario did not bother the men of the 369th. The story goes that a regiment from Scotland was stationed at the Fort in 1760. They were not used to the food here and so petitioned Britain for regular rations, particularly oatmeal. Several soldiers died because they could not adjust to the diet. The ghost, the spirit of one of those who died, appears wearing his white breeches and red coat before most units to see if they have a provision of oatmeal with them. It reportedly was seen by two outfits previously stationed at the Fort—the 23rd and the 28th Infantries.

One person who contacted me claimed the soldiers of the 369th were particularly afraid of ghosts and were unwilling to walk lonely night posts once they heard about the legend, but I have found nothing to support this claim. Neither were the soldiers anymore afraid of ghosts than other outfits nor were they anymore unwilling to accept lonely night posts.

As I have already mentioned, there were various sports activities carried on between the regiment and the local area. At this point it would be important to mention that, as far as I have been able to determine, all of the events were carried out with cordiality. If any over-riding tensions existed between the local people and the soldiers they would have been evident in these sports activities. If the tensions were strong these events would have turned out to be more than simple athletic games. Resentment and hostility could easily have been vented with the sports competitiveness acting as catalyst, but they were not.

This is strong evidence supporting the opinion which contends that relations between the local people and the 369th were relatively very good. Mention should be made of an incident that almost put a shadow on the record of the 369th. I interviewed Frederick Scharf who is now Chief of Police in the city of Oswego but was a regular officer at the time of the 369th's stay. Although nothing was mentioned in the newspaper (and Chief Scharf cannot remember the date), a near "riot" broke out on the corner of East First and Oneida Streets in front of the old Valencia Theater, which is no longer there. Approximately fifty Southern white soldiers were sent up to Fort Ontario for training. Apparently the 369ers did not hit it off so well with the Southerners!

The uncomfortable situation climaxed in front of the Valencia one evening with a number of Southerners on one side of the street and some of the 369ers on the other side. Chief Scharf said they were on the verge of coming to blows and probably would have had it not been for the skillful diplomacy of an Oswego policeman (whose name he did not mention). Needless to say, the Southerners were in Oswego only for a very short time.

Even if they had clashed in violence a case could be made that it would not have significantly marred relations with the local community (except if there was property damage) because the conflict was with other outsiders, not with Oswegonians.

The soliders' stay in Oswego was proceeding smoothly up until early June when, for a brief time, it looked as though good relations were shattering.

On July 6th Mrs. Daniel Conway (wife of Oswego's mayor at that time) was alone in her home when a black man in a soldier's uniform, upon being discovered by Mrs. Conway, began choking her. A few days later the military police were ordered to patrol residential areas.

On July 10th Pvt. W.E. McRae was seized by an officer and Mr. Bartholomew of East Fourth Street, who claimed McRae (who was then walking back to the Fort along the railroad tracks near East Fourth Street) was the man his wife saw trying to enter the rear of their home a couple of days earlier. The positive identification of McRae was very uncertain, to say the least, but he was nevertheless given sixty days in jail by Judge Hardie for "disorderly conduct." Colonel Hooper, who acted in defense of McRae, said Bartholomew's testimony was prejudiced by the Conway incident.

Later, on the 21st of July, a story appeared in the *Palladium-Times* indicating that many merchants believed, because they were noticing a slack in business, that Colonel Hooper had ordered an economic boycott of the city in protest to the sentencing of McRae.

Colonel Hooper denied giving any such order but that he did mention to the soldiers that there were some establishments in town that they had better stay out of "for their own good." He added that the soldiers may very well be boycotting on their own initiative.

Judging from the coverage of these incidents in the *Palladium-Times* it certainly appeared that a "black scare" was on. However, all of those residents whom I interviewed and questioned about this apparent "scare" denied that one had existed. The last mention of these incidents was on July 24th in the *Palladium-Times* which stated that Pvt. McRae's sixty-day sentence had been greatly reduced on an appeal.

This is further evidence supporting the view that the 369th's stay was a relatively successful one. If relations had been anything but stable, the above incidents would have had a greater impact. If there had been hostile relations certainly the local community would have protested strongly, but instead things returned to normal quite rapidly.

Members of the searchlight battalion of the 369th Regiment prepare equipment for use during evening anti-aircraft drill on Lake Ontario. *OCHS–Mowers Collection.*

On August 17, 1941, orders were received by the 369th informing them that by early September they would no longer be stationed at Fort Ontario. Their new base would be at Camp Edwards in Massachusetts. The orders came as a total surprise to the outfit because originally they were supposed to be in Oswego for at least one year of training and it had only been about seven months at that point. The orders were received with mixed feelings by the men, but there was a general negative reaction among 200 some odd relatives and friends of the men who had moved into Oswego–this meant moving again. Some of them appealed to the New York Legislature to keep the 369th in Oswego but to no avail.

The fact that Camp Edwards was in generally flat, sandy, scrubby area, and that there were several other outfits there (which meant that they would no longer be the center of attention) were a couple of the disadvantages. An advantage to the move was the fact that fifty miles from Camp Edwards was a black population of 25,000. Also, some claimed, it was less traveling time to New York City.

It was unfortunate that the 369th left Oswego in September. If

they had stayed the expected year some interesting movements that were just beginning would have developed to maturity. Many of the relatives and friends of the men were really just getting themselves settled as residents of Oswego. Because of the sudden move, there was no time to see how well a small residential black population of about 200 could be absorbed and accepted in Oswego. One particular segment of the black civilians were trying to get themselves well acquainted with Oswegonians. They were about twenty officers wives who formed the Officers' Wives Association. Mrs. Benjamin Richardson appeared to lead the group and every few days during the month of August there would be a letter from the group in the "What People Say" columns of the *Palladium-Times.* Each letter would introduce one of the members. It would give her name, address, and a brief background. The group never got to finish introducing itself.

Most indications seemed to reveal that most of the men, while feeling they had been treated well in Oswego and the location had been fine, did not mind that they were leaving. The *Palladium-Times,* however, wrote the following:

> Many members of the 369th appeared somewhat downcast at leaving Fort Ontario, particularly after some of their number Edward [*sic*] and reported back Edwards is garrisoned by 27,000 troops, sand, and scrub trees.[9]

One group affected by the move certainly knew how to view the bright side of things–the local merchants. It was reported the 198th Artillery, replacing the 369th at Fort Ontario, had more men and thus received $10,000 more in pay.

All in all, judging from the local newspaper and all those interviewed, the black 369th had a relatively pleasant and cordial experience in Oswego. Certainly the vast majority of those to whom I spoke or had correspondence with felt that there had been no particular tension or hostility between the local people and the soldiers. Police Chief Scharf said that there had been no greater number of incidents with the 369th than with other outfits stationed at the Fort.

It appears that the soldiers also felt that their stay had been one which produced positive feelings. (I say "appears" because I have only been able to correspond with two members of the 369th.) Mr. Joseph H. Newman, a former member of the 369th, wrote to me the following opinion:

> I think, on the whole, the Negro troops were warmly received by the people in Oswego. Being a Roman Catholic I attended Mass at St. Paul's on Sundays. In fact there were a number of Negro Catholics who went to Mass there in a body (by the truck loads).

And I can remember the kindly Father Howard who warmly welcomed the outfit.

There was much interaction at our Post Exchange and especially through the Evening Parades and Concerts—both jazz and symphonic.

I was personally fortunate in meeting people of Oswego who became my life long friends like the Kelley's. When they had the Boat House a number of the fellows were invited to go for rides out on the lake.

Many of the veterans that I talk to have fond memories of Oswego and its citizens.[10]

The *Palladium-Times* wrote:

Many of the regiment expressed regret at leaving Oswego. The great majority of the officers and men feel they have been well treated by the townspeople, and say as much.[11]

On September 1st the regiment moved out of Fort Ontario and camped on the nearby Johnson farm, so the 198th could move into the Fort. Early on Wednesday, September 3rd, the 369th left Oswego and started their 400 mile journey to Camp Edwards in a long motor convoy of 258 trucks. Some final celebrations and farewell ceremonies which would have included a parade and a concert, planned for the last few days of the 369th's stay were cancelled because of rain and some other complications. So the epic ended with a whimper, not a bang!

It was interesting to find that the only recurring negative feeling, which was one of resentment held by some of those interviewed, was due to the fact that several local women found many of the black soldiers attractive. Several people related to me, with a touch of bitterness, that many white women would go to Whitey's and date the soldiers.

A story relating to this was told to me by J.B. Kelly (one of the Kelly's referred to in Joseph Newman's letter) who at the time owned a small boat rental business. He said that local women would come in the evening and rent boats, taking them over to Fort Ontario. From then on he would not rent his boats to women in the evening.[12]

I will not try to deal with the reason for this resentment over those women who accompanied black soldiers. I would have to get to the roots of racism to explain it and that is a task which I am incapable of

performing nor is it the main subject of this paper. However, it is significant enough so as not to be totally ignored in this paper.

Its significance lies in its revelation of the point to which cordial relations extended. It is evident that throughout the stay of the 369th, the relationship that existed between the regiment and the local people was one of polite cordiality and toleration, but by no means total acceptance.

Most military outfits stationed at the Fort were treated as outsiders and transients, and have never really been accepted as Oswegonians. But the fact that the men were black added to the distance between Fort and city.

On the whole it must be said that the 369th left a relatively positive impression both as a military unit and as representatives of the black race. Benjamin Richardson called the 369th's stay at Oswego "an experiment in social integration." A.G. Fallings said the coverage of the 369th was the friendliest he ever saw given to any such group.[13]

The 369th contributed to the community through its bands–military, symphonic and jazz. Entertainment was provided by sports activities, parades, military equipment exhibitions, ceremonies (particularly the retreat ceremony). In addition, and most importantly, the 369th, through its quality as a military outfit, its respect, and its dignity, helped to shatter many of those racial myths that have caused America to weaken internally by polarizations of large segments of its population.

By far the majority of people contacted in relation to this paper were pleased and impressed by the successful visit of the 369th and the respect it demanded and deserved.

NOTES

1 Among those interviewed were Thomas Christian, Melvin McFee, William DeFossett (president of the 369th Veterans Association), Frederick Scharf, Joseph Newman, Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Kelly, J. Leo Finn, Francis T. Riley, Mrs. Cavanaugh, Mrs. Frank Costello, Mrs. Edwin Tifft, Jane Woods, Dorothy Sheldon, Donald Pullen, Harold Clark, Leonard Weeks, Anthony Crisafulli, Harold Newstead, Mr. and Mrs. David Russell, Samuel Cutro, Wallace Workmaster, Frank Barbeau, Richard Clark, Doris Allen, Richard Smith, Kathryn C. Murphy, Richard Pettie, and many others whose names I did not record.

2 Oswego *Palladium-Times,* January 23, 1941.

3 "Jive in the Barracks," *Time,* XXXVII (March 17, 1941), p. 52.

4 Interview with Mrs. Edwin Tifft, secretary of the Red Cross in 1941. Oswego, New York, April, 1972.

5 Oswego *Palladium-Times,* February 27, 1941.

6 Oswego *Palladium-Times,* March 18, 1941.

7 "What People Say," Oswego *Palladium-Times,* July 28, 1941.

8 Mr. White stayed in Oswego after the 369th's departure and eventually died here.

9 Oswego *Palladium-Times,* September 3, 1941.

10 Letter from Joseph Newman to James J. Cummings, June 14, 1972.

11 Oswego *Palladium-Times,* September 2, 1941.

12 Interview with J.B. Kelly, Oswego, New York, May 1972.

13 Oswego *Palladium-Times,* March 18, 1941.

This Columbian doll, a gift of Mr. George Ruttan to the Society, exhibits the traditional painted face that was an Adams' trademark. She was dressed by Mrs. Charles M. Snyder for the presentation on April 17, 1972. *OCHS Collections.*

The Columbian Doll Story

*Esther Ruttan Doyle**

Emma E. Adams, born in 1858 at Oswego Center, was the originator of the Columbian dolls. Her sister, Marietta, designed the wardrobes and her parents, William and Mary Adams, assisted in the business. William made the tools for stuffing the cloth bodies from wagon wheel stock used in his carriage shop.

At the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 the dolls were awarded a Certificate of Honorable Mention and orders came from Marshall Fields Co., Wanamakers and others. The home on Maple Avenue became a factory.

Emma, the artist, painted the faces until her death in 1900. Later commercial artists were employed and Marietta, who became Mrs. William Ruttan in 1906, carried on the business until about 1917.

In 1899, a Columbian doll was added to Mrs. Horton's famous International Doll Collection and was chosen as "the best of American dolls" and sent on a three-year trip around the world for children's charities. "Miss Columbia" is now the "Queen" of the doll collection at the Wenham Historical Museum in Wenham, Massachusetts. The log of her journeys and some of her trophies are with her.

Marietta was my mother. I remember, a little, helping to get the dolls dressed and ready to ship. The four children in our family all had dolls to play with, as did our friends.

It wasn't until 1940 that it occurred to me that I should have my mother help me set down some of the facts of the doll story for our family records. During the talks I realized that we didn't know much about "Miss Columbia," the good-will ambassador. There was a

*Mrs. Doyle holds a B.A. degree in English from Syracuse University. While attending college she held a state scholarship which she supplemented by writing magazine articles. Prior to her marriage she taught English in Frankfort and Cazenovia; however, since the death of her husband she has managed the family's radio-electronic business. Mrs. Doyle has two children, Diana, a graduate of St. Lawrence University, and Dr. Walter Doyle, an internationally known analytical physicist. She is a prominent member of the Syracuse University Alumni Association and the Mohawk Valley Radio-TV Guild and is the officially-appointed area UNICEF representative.

The Columbian Hand-Made Dolls.

These dolls are painted in oil by experts.

They are the most economical to buy, as they will last for years.

The faces, hands and feet can be easily washed.

They are light in weight, from 9 oz. to 24 oz.

They cannot break.

The clothes are made to be put on and removed, the same as a child's.

We are the makers of "Columbia," the doll chosen by Mrs. E. R. Horton of Boston, owner of the International Doll Collection, from all American dolls, to take a trip around the world, and called the *queen* of her collection of 600 dolls.

Received diploma, World's Fair, Chicago, 1893.

For descriptive price list, see third page.

Address all communications,

MISS MARIETTA ADAMS,

OSWEGO CENTER, N. Y.

The first page of the only known surviving advertising brochure for Columbian dolls demonstrates visually the varieties of dolls being made. Marietta Adams used this brochure after 1900. *OCHS Collections.*

scrapbook of press clippings which took her through the U.S. and Alaska, but no record of her farther journey nor if she ever came home. This led to some research.

With the help of *Hobbies* Magazine and Mrs. Earle Andrews, of Winchester, Massachusetts, we found the doll in the Wenham Museum. Once more she became a personality. Aided by the museum staff, she received my husband and me and our two children in October, 1941. We learned the story of her trip around the world and her return to Boston. In 1969 I took my two grandchildren and their parents on a similar trip!

Expo '67 in Montreal revealed another exhibit. There we saw the original Columbian doll which gave so much impetus to the project in 1893!

The research and subsequent reports made the Columbian dolls collectors items. I am always willing to help authenticate such a doll for any owner.

In 1970 I visited Jennie Thorpe in Schenectady, New York.

THE COLUMBIAN DOLL.

PRICE LIST:

No.	1,	15 inch	Doll	in	Gown, ...	$1.50
"	2,	15 "	"	"	Dress, pink or blue Gingham,	2.25
"	2½,	15 "	"	"	Baby dress, white, . .	2.50
"	3,	19 "	"	"	Gown, ...	1.75
"	4,	19 "	"	"	Dress, pink or blue, . .	2.75
"	5,	19 "	"	"	Baby dress, white, . .	3.00
"	6,	19 "	"	"	Boy's Suit, ...	2.75
"	8,	23 "	"	"	Gown, ...	2.00
"	9,	23 "	"	"	Dress, pink or blue, . .	3.25
"	10,	23 "	"	"	Baby dress, white, . .	4.00
"	11,	29 "	"	"	Gown, ...	3.25
"	12,	29 "	"	"	Dress, white, . . .	5.00

ORDER BY NUMBER.

SEND ORDERS TO

MISS MARIETTA ADAMS,

OSWEGO CENTER, N. Y.

This page of the advertising brochure indicates the variety of dolls available with prices. *OCHS Collections.*

I think she was the last living person who worked in the doll business. Her brother, Fred Wright, is here to-night. He knew all the family well and remembers seeing the dolls being made but says he remembers best, the "real living dolls" who made them!

Emma and Marietta Adams deserve their place in history for ingenuity and enterprise at a time when little was expected of women.

The present member of the family who occupies the house where the dolls were made is George Adams Ruttan, Marietta's son. He is making the presentation of a doll to the Historical Society to-night.

This doll, originally exhibited at the Columbian Exposition in 1893, was also a part of the United States toy exhibit at Expo '67 in Montreal. *OCHS Photo.*

Colonel Thomas Standish Meacham
Portrait of an American Folk Hero

*Rosemary S. Nesbitt**

"Things of high and rare delight to my young nature."[1]

The epic is a poem or tale of extended length made up of traditional stories centered around a particular hero or group of heroes. Its scope is enormous, its expression eloquent and its ideals the highest of the culture from which it comes. Every great race or tribal organization has its epics. The Norsemen have given us the "saga." These Icelandic, Scandinavian masterpieces originated primarily in the "Eddas" which were semi-mythological collections of history and folk tale in the Scandinavian areas. The epic is mainly pre-Christian, although here and there reference to some Christian symbol may occur, often appearing to be interpolated as happens in "Beowulf." The origins of the epic are lost far back in time. They began with the oral tradition and assumed written form one thousand years before Christ with Homer and the "Illiad."

Romances, such as "The Song of Roland" and the great chivalric masterpieces of the Arthurian cycle, differ from the epic only in their reflection of the spread of Christianity throughout the Middle Ages. In both the epic and the cyclical romance there is one outstanding, overpowering theme. This is the emergence of the individual, of man as a hero. In these great literary milestones the heroic image of humanity grows in dignity and in courage until he is able to confront every contingency fate may offer, even those culminating in death. Thus was the folk hero born.

To many people, even to scholars, the folk hero became confused with mythic concepts and so came to be judged as entirely legendary. When the term "folk hero" is used, too often names like Paul Bunyan,

*Mrs. Nesbitt, a member of the speech and theater faculty at SUCO, is director of the Oswego Children's Theater. She is the author of two historical novels written for children, *The Great Rope* and *Colonel Meacham's Giant Cheese,* based on incidents from Oswego County's early nineteenth century history. A 1972 selection for the Syracuse *Post-Standard's* Woman of Achievement Award, she was also recently included in the 1972 listing of *2000 Women of Achievement of the World* by the organization's London office.

Sangaree and Pecos Bill come to mind. This is unfortunate because the true folk hero is real, did live and did contribute to the ethno-ethnic development of his people and his time. For example, few scholars today will argue that there was a real Arthur Pendragon, that Guinevere, Lancelot and even the Grail figured in the history of early Anglo-Saxon times. Much of the truth was and is confused in a legendary mist, but the kernel of reality is there. And it is this kernel of truth which builds the legend, which makes it grow until it is part of the cultural and historical heritage of a country. All people need folk heroes. If they did not exist it would be necessary to invent them. Stories grow up around the heroes that are pure fiction, not because of a deliberate desire to lie, but because these people always are larger than life and anything attributed to them seems possible.

It is important to remember, also, that tales about the folk hero were born of great emotional intensity and this is one of the reasons for their great hold on the imagination of children. It is also why these tales and the heroes they present are so important to the developing mind of a child. The stories of the great folk heroes are not the expression of one author's convict ion and emotion, but of an entire culture's interpretation of the experience of life and of man's ideal role in a given society. *The experience of life and man's ideal role in it.* I am repeating that phrase here because it contains two of the most important things any child can learn. The genuine folk hero not only reflects the experience of life, but represents the best that the life experience can offer. At his best, he reflects the inner meaning, the symbols, the religious beliefs and the codes of ethics that have been hammered out by centuries of communal life.[2] In other words, he reflects "the folk," the people–what they are, what they think, what they believe, what they would all like to be. "Folk" doesn't mean legendary, it means "of the people." Therefore, at some point as a given culture is developing, the ideal hero evolves to become the image for the future, an ongoing source of pride, energy and inspiration. It is not necessary to belabor the obvious by pointing out the number of times in history that nations have risen in support of this ideal. Often only the image of the national hero has held a people together until a final victory was achieved. A good example of this was the symbolic importance of Roland to Charlemagne in the Holy Wars of the eighth century. Out of all this, of course, comes nationalism, what Bernard Berenson describes as "orgies of communal self-importance."[3] That the hero becomes mixed in fact and fantasy, that legend builds and often obscures the fact is of secondary importance when considering the impulses both emotional and intellectual which inspired the stories in the first place. There is no disputing the fact that no modern hero, no cartoon star can command the excitement and the intensity of emotion aroused by the heroes of epic and romance. They are the apogee of the

societies that produced them in a climate which was primarily naive, direct, and unselfconscious, the climate of childhood itself.[4]

I write for children. I do so for several reasons, the most important among them being my very strong belief that a resurgence of literature dealing with the American folk hero is desperately needed at this point in our development as a nation. The advent of scientism, necessary though it is, has all but erased the life-oriented, liberal arts approach to children's literature. The folk hero is being phased out as our children are "programmed" into the complex future they face. The programming is necessary, but it is my belief that you can't have one without the other. Ideals, images, heroes are as needed today as they ever were but I believe that there is another dimension we have been ignoring. This involves the local folk hero, the grass roots descendant of Arthur and Roland. He is easier to identify with and he can make even the most skeptical and unromantic young spaceman take another look at his beginnings. The local hero is down to earth and he is real because he lived right around the corner.

Such a man was Thomas Standish Meacham of Sandy Creek, New York, who is the subject of my most recent book, *Colonel Meacham's Giant Cheese.* The story deals with the Colonel's desire to honor Andrew Jackson and tells how he made a giant cheese for Jackson and eight others for lesser luminaries of the time. Of how he carried all of this down the Erie Canal and thence to Washington and of the adventures and mis-adventures that happened on the way.

Johnson, Sickles and Sayers in their excellent book, *Anthology of Children's Literature,* list several qualities they believe essential if the tale of the folk hero is going to capture the imagination of children. One of these we have already discussed: the intensity of feeling which engenders such a tale. Another is the symbolism of the story; Johnson quotes G.K. Chesterton as saying, "Every great literature is always allegorical. The 'Illiad' is great because all life is a battle, the 'Odyssey' because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle."[5]

The other qualities which flesh out the tale of the folk hero are: the basic elemental emotions with which they deal; the simple dignity they maintain; the unwavering nobility of the hero, even in defeat; the concepts of courage and loyalty; the emphasis on physical prowess; the vigor of the hero; and the clearly outlined action of his life. I have subscribed to these criteria and have found them most useful and accurate in the classroom. Now let us apply them to Colonel Meacham and see if he qualifies as a genuine grass roots folk hero.

Let us begin by examining the intensity of feeling which surrounded Colonel Meacham and his cheese. I think this can best be established by quoting from a letter made available to me while doing research for the book. The letter was written by Merritt Switzer, an attorney from Pulaski, who was in correspondence with Mr. Corse, owner of the Corse

Press in Sandy Creek. Mr. Switzer was supplying Mr. Corse with information on the Meacham family in general and Colonel Meacham in particular.

> Of Colonel Thomas S. Meacham, it is known that he stood for something. He stood for progress, for achievement, for the upbuilding of his community and for high ideals. He had, to begin with the blood of a strong family in his veins. His life was lived at a time when big enterprises were beset with difficulties and immeasurably so were they in the country. The Colonel with his admirable characteristics was the embodiement of kindness and generosity.[6]

Further establishing the intensity of feeling surrounding the Colonel is this quotation taken from a story entitled "Moving Day at the White House," written by Margaret Morris.

> When the day came to start the great cheese on its journey to the White House, Colonel Meacham had forty-eight gray horses decorated with flags and plumes to draw the bunting-trimmed wagon to Port Ontario where a boat was waiting. A band headed the procession, and behind the cheese came a long line of carriages and wagons. All along the way people from miles about were there to see the procession pass and to wonder what the president would do when the big cheese reached the White House.
>
> On November 15, 1835, the boat left Selkirk and as it drew away from wharf, cannons were fired, flags unfurled and the crowd shouted itself hoarse. At Oswego and Syracuse there were similiar ovations and all along the Erie Canal to Albany people assembled to see and cheer the big Oswego County Cheese.[7]

In continuing to examine the evidence for establishing the Colonel as a folk hero it would appear redundant to more than mention the next quality Johnson says is essential. The symbolism is very clear. Once again we have the great allegorical journey referred to by Chesterton. As the Colonel makes the trip to Washington surmounting all the obstacles on the way, he is reflecting the universal journey through life. A child can readily understand that and while he may not be consciously aware of the allegorical significance, nevertheless it is there in the inner reaches of his mind.

Johnson continues by asserting that the tale of the folk hero deals with basic, elemental emotions. Certainly these are evident in the Colonel's story. He has a deep, straightforward and abiding admiration for Andrew Jackson. He has a great love and respect for his neighbors. This is most obviously displayed when he gives the huge party for the whole county just before leaving for Washington and when he builds

the Agricultural Hall for the benefit of his neighbors.[8] The Colonel is not only deeply loved, but he returns that love, and there is no ulterior motive involved. All of this is pure emotion, given and received. In a day when nearly everything seems to be motivated for individual gain, children and adults alike can renew their faith in people when they read about men like the Colonel.

Johnson goes on to say that one of the most outstanding qualities of the folk hero is his dignity. The Colonel displayed this characteristic most frequently when he was being lionized for his accomplishments. The Albany and Washington papers of the day describe his "dignified mein and modest attitude when being praised for his marvelous cheese."[9]

One of the qualities Johnson ascribes to the folk hero which I find most attractive is his "unwavering nobility, even in defeat." Eyewitness accounts of the trip describe the Colonel when he returned from his first trip to Washington having been unable to present the cheese to the president because of Jackson's illness. "Never did he betray by word or action his great disappointment. But we all knew how keenly he felt about personally meeting Andrew Jackson."[10]

I deal at some length with the next quality in three episodes in my book. The Colonel's courage was legendary in the North Country. It was most impressively reflected in his dramatic rescues of the cheese during the course of the journey. The first occurred when the boat taking the cheese from Port Ontario to Oswego was involved in a severe lake effects storm. That time the Colonel swung out over the open water on a rigging rope and managed to close the open loading gate before the cheese, which had broken its moorings, could slide into the raging water. Again in Troy, on the edge of the "bloody cut," the local name for the short waterway connecting the Erie Canal with the Hudson, he saved the cheese. This time it was threatened by a gang of toughs who hated Jackson. The Colonel faced them and his courage combined with his quick wits again averted destruction of the cheese. Finally his incredible rescue of the cheese from the great fire which almost totally destroyed New York City on the night of December 16, 1835, surely must go down as one of the great acts of courage in the history of the North Country.[11]

Incidentally, I must digress for a moment here and point out that these three incidents cannot be proved. They are the result of another source which the teller of the folk tale must use in abundance—tradition. These episodes in the Colonel's life are part of the oral tradition and I filled in many of the gaps with conjecture. But they illustrate so well how the character of the man influenced his contemporaries to the degree that they would, in his lifetime, tell stories about him, embellishing the facts here and there if need be, because with the Colonel anything was possible.

Johnson's final three qualities are so obviously a part of the Colonel

that it would be foolish to dwell on them. The Colonel's physical prowess is self-evident. Tales of his incredible horsemanship and his remarkable strength are woven throughout the stories the county people still tell about him. That he was full of vigor needs no further evidence and the "clearly outlined action of his life," is plainly revealed in everything that was ever written or said about him.

I think there can be little doubt that Colonel Meacham fulfills the ascribed to the folk hero, but let us be very clear on one important point. The Colonel is a local hero, a "grass roots" folk hero. No one is ascribing the qualities of an Arthur or a Roland to him. How he would have hooted at the thought. The Colonel had no desire to expand his horizon, he wasn't interested in conquering or influencing the world. He cared about northern New York. The North Country people were his people. It was their destiny and their welfare that concerned him throughout his life.

I think the best summation of the Colonel and the affect he had on his times can be offered through this quotation from the citation presented to him by Governor Marcy and the State Legislature when he stopped in Albany on his way to Washington.

> We, the undersigned, Citizens of Albany in the State of New York, have with much satisfaction examined the National Belt and the Mammouth Cheeses intended for the president, vice-president and the Congress of the United States and we cordially respond and agree with the sentiments inscribed upon the National Belt as reflecting credit on Colonel Meacham for his patriotism. [12] And we also concur with the printed circular and the resolutions comprised in the former part of this book in regard to such specimens of the Agricultural Produce of this state as exhibited by Colonel Meacham. This intention to present them to the Chief Officers of our country will have a beneficial influence on our Agricultural prosperity and tend to strengthen the bonds of affection among our citizens.
>
> In furtherance of such desirable objects, we would invite all the friends of our happy government to join with us who have set our names and subscribed for the purpose of carrying into effect the praise-worthy efforts of Colonel Meacham in the name of the whole people of the State of New York.[13]

Colonel Meacham was a genuine folk hero to the people of Sandy Creek, although I am sure they did not call him that. He is a genuine folk hero today. I have visited many schools and talked to many children about the Colonel. They are delighted to meet him. They are pleased beyond measure to discover that they have a hero of their own, one who lived right here in New York State and one who left them

something to look up to and be proud of.

As we have said before, with the passage of time, the legend builds, some of it purely imaginary. But with our folk hero, the story lives on in a very real way. One of the extra cheeses the Colonel made was for the mayor of Rochester, New York. The mayor had done the Colonel a favor by helping him organize a local militia unit. The cheese was the Colonel's way of saying, "thank you." The mayor auctioned off his cheese and realized $1,237.83. This started a fund for injured policemen and firefighters and their families. Interest mounted and that fund, still in existence today, is now in excess of a quarter of a million dollars.[14]

Colonel Meacham did not live to be an old man. He died in 1847 at the age of 52. But every man, woman and child in and around Sandy Creek was a little wiser, a little better and a great deal happier for having known him.

In Rochester today there are people who are better and happier because they feel they still know him. The Colonel and his cheese are still going strong, benefitting others and making certain that there is a little niche in time permanently reserved for Thomas Standish Meacham, authentic American folk hero.

NOTES

1 Richard Hakluyt, "Voyages."

2 Johnson, Sickles and Sayers, *Anthology of Children's Literature* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1959), pp. 469-473.

3 Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), p. 92.

4 Johnson, Sickles and Sayers, *Anthology*.

5 G.K. Chesterton, "A Defense of Nonsense," *Stories, Essays and Poems* (London: Everyman's Library), p. 126.

6 Letter from Merritt Switzer to Mr. Corse, from the files of the Corse Press, Sandy Creek, New York, Vol. IV. These files are separate from the Sandy Creek *News* files also at the Corse Press and deal extensively with the history of the area.

7 Margaret Morris, "Moving Day at the White House," *Saturday Evening Post* (February 4, 1933), in the Corse Press files. Additional information is available in the newspaper files of the libraries of the cities of Utica, Rome, Troy, Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Syracuse, New York and Oswego.

8 The Richland *Examiner,* November 15, 1835. In the files of the Oswego County Historical Society, Oswego, New York.

9 The Washington *Globe,* February 23, 1836. In the files of the Library of Congress.

10 Letter, signature illegible, May 15, 1836. In the manuscript collections of the Oswego County Historical Society.

11 Rosemary S. Nesbitt, *Colonel Meacham's Giant Cheese* (Champagne, Illinois: Garrard, 1972), pp. 33-48.

12 The National Belt was a large paper girdle which encircled the cheese and bore the inscription "The Union, it must be preserved."

13 Citation from Governor Marcy to Colonel Thomas S. Meacham, November, 1835. In the Archives of the State of New York, Albany.

14 Related materials are in the archives of the Monroe County Historical Society, Rochester, New York.