

RESEARCHING IN SYRACUSE: CENTRAL LIBRARY OF ONONDAGA COUNTY

by Jean B. Palmer, MSLS

Nearly every day out-of-town visitors come to the Local History/Genealogy department of the Onondaga County Public Library. They are looking for records of ancestors or fleshing out personal information about them, as well as studying events that occurred here or in the states that are the focus of our collection: New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and all the New England states.

Onondaga County Public Library

Had it not been for the Military Tract, the Salt Reservation, and the Erie Canal, Syracuse might not have developed where it is. The Military Tract was set apart in 1782, with Revolutionary War soldiers drawing lots as payment for their service in 1791. Two years later the first cauldron kettle arrived to boil brine found around Onondaga Lake, thus beginning a trade that encompassed a square mile reserve surrounding the lake. The following years saw the completion of the Erie Canal influencing the development of Syracuse and evolving into the present day Barge Canal. Many Irish settlers came to help build the canal, to work the salt, and to build the railroads. Germans arrived to contribute to the salt industry by fashioning vats and barrels needed to ship the salt. Naturally the salt was transported on the canal. In this way, Syracuse grew and prospered interdependently.

By 1862 nine million bushels of salt per year were being produced. Meanwhile other industries such as foundries grew up to make fundamental equipment for the salt industry. Also in this mid-century the New York State Fair had its beginnings here. The central library was formed by consolidating school libraries in 1857. Syracuse became home to notably diverse industries: candles, steel, typewriters, Franklin and other automobiles, bicycles and beer. Niagara Mohawk's headquarters were here. In the twentieth century General Electric, Carrier Corporation of air conditioning fame, and the pharmaceutical company Bristol Myers Squibb were among the famous industries in Syracuse.

Local History/Genealogy

All of these aspects of Syracuse history can be researched in the Local History/Genealogy department. This department

originated under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Ezekiel Mundy (1880-1915) who began the collection and invented a classification system for local history materials. It is still in use and we are still proud of it. At the time of the move into the Carnegie building in 1905 the collection was called Local and

Family History. It contained about 8,500 volumes of which thirty-five percent were related to the topic of genealogy, including family genealogies. The name of the collection varied over the years, but there were always librarians fascinated with the subject who assisted users and who created unique finding guides to enhance accessibility.

Gerald J. Parsons, MSLS, FASG, was the department head who created a mature collection with unique holdings. In upstate New York this department is

recognized as an outstanding site to do genealogy. In 1988 the library moved to a multipurpose building called The Galleries of Syracuse where the library occupies one tower. As of 2007 there are 43,000 books, plus major collections of microfilm (such as 4,200 rolls of Syracuse newspapers), microfiche, CD ROMs, and maps.

Researching Local Families

Pioneer Index

One dedicated librarian indexed early Onondaga County families in the genealogy collection thus creating the Pioneer Index. This card file is arranged alphabetically by individual names with notes about the family and citation of the source. Although this file has not been expanded in years, it is large and remains the first place to look for families arriving in Onondaga County before 1850.

The Onondaga Families vertical file includes notes and letters written by users and librarians over the course of a hundred years. During the Depression, the Works Progress Administration hired people to index nineteenth century Syracuse newspapers and scrapbooks at the library and historical association. There are more than two hundred boxes containing abstracts of articles and their citations arranged by such topics as Residents: Early, Clergy, Attorneys and Judges,



An entrance to The Galleries of Syracuse, home of the Central Library of Onondaga County.
Photo courtesy of Richard F. Palmer.

Researching in Syracuse, *continued*

Deaths, Marriages, and Persons Prominent. These are all about people who lived in Onondaga County. There are subject files as well on such topics as industries, businesses, and the various towns and villages in Onondaga County.

Syracuse and suburban directories

Local History/Genealogy owns a set of Syracuse and suburban city directories. The first city directory in 1844 was quite brief. Suburban directories began in 1957. These provide a wealth of information including names (eventually spouse's names were included), addresses, occupations and locations of churches and schools which are also of interest to genealogists.

Cemeteries

During the 1970s, Local History/Genealogy staff compiled a card file of cemeteries in New York State, arranged by county and town. This continues to be of significant use in spite of information on the Internet. In our Local Databases accessed now in our department (but eventually on our website) we have Woodlawn Cemetery. We have a printout of Oakwood/Morningside Cemetery along with seven rolls of microfilm of the early Oakwood books. Another set of books lists birth, death and next of kin of those buried in Oakwood between 1859 and 1966.

Newspaper Clippings

Practically since the beginning, departmental librarians have selected and filed newspaper clippings about a wide variety of subjects. Over the years clippings were gathered into scrapbooks which are now photocopied onto acid-free paper and bound. Some are indexed, such as the obituaries which are divided into two sets: pre-1926 and 1926-1996. Many fewer clippings are kept these days since there are two online databases covering the Syracuse newspapers.

Newspaperarchive.com (attempting to include all years) and Newsbank (articles since 1987) are available for use here in the department. These databases have literally opened up a wealth of information to the researcher who can search by name, date and/or subject. Librarians are available to explain and troubleshoot use of these.

For limited subjects we will search and email pertinent articles to persons who email us [lhg@onlib.org] or call us by telephone [315-435-1900]. There is no charge for this service. However, when the desired information is not found on the databases, staff will search for five days on the microfilm. Dedicated searching does incur some costs to the patron.

Lesley E. Voorhees Collection

The library received the Lesley E. Voorhees Collection in 1970. Her research was in-depth on families of the Onondaga County Towns of Van Buren and Lysander and the village of Baldwinsville. It includes separate genealogies of individual families as well as thirty-eight volumes of collected genealogies arranged by surname. She also compiled cemetery listings, transcribed Bible records and vital records, as well as notebooks and indexed extracts from diaries and scrapbooks.

Wills and Deeds

When the microfilms were made of the New York State censuses in Onondaga County, the library also received

microfilms of the Onondaga County Surrogate Court Index and the Deed Indexes. Some rolls of early deeds beginning in 1799 and some rolls of early wills are owned by the library. Those we do not own can be found at the Courthouse one block away.

Atlases and Land Ownership Maps

The oversize Syracuse atlases dated 1892, 1908 and 1924 answer many questions about city places but the 1874 *Sweet's Atlas of Onondaga County* and the other landownership map microfiche for our county (1852, 1859, 1860, and 1889) are helpful to researchers of local families. Additionally there are complete sets of nineteenth century New York county atlases and landownership map microfiche.

Native Americans

The Native Americans must not be overlooked, for the Iroquois had been here long before the first Europeans. Father LeMoynes opened a Grand Council with them in the mid-seventeenth century. We have a large and respectable collection of materials about the Iroquois and other Native Americans in New York State, including the New York reels of the Indian Census covering 1885 to 1924.

Church Records

The collection of church records includes four microfilm rolls of records from German Lutheran churches on Syracuse's north side. We have printed records from a number of other Syracuse churches as well as from many churches throughout Onondaga county. The Church of the Assumption records are currently being transcribed. The significance of these records is that many early Catholics from around the county went to Assumption for sacraments before churches were built in their towns.

Pamphlet Collection

A large collection of early pamphlets was microfilmed on ninety reels. Although there are pamphlets for other states as well as for New York, the primary use of these microfilms is to learn about Syracuse area social and educational organizations as well as businesses and churches - including their memberships.

New York State research

Vital Records: Thanks to Rochester Public Library paving the way, we also have the New York State Vital Records Index, a collection of 5,000 fiche, covering births, deaths, and marriages in New York, excluding New York City and Buffalo. Civil records were not uniformly kept in New York until 1881 with many localities not consistently keeping records until the early 1900s.

There are long privacy periods for these records, such as death and marriage indexes which are kept private for fifty years, and births for seventy-five years. The indexes do provide the full date of the event, location, and the certificate number if one wishes to purchase the certificate from the appropriate county or from Albany. Once one locates the date, say of a death, newspapers are available to search for obituaries. If the death was not in a location covered by the Syracuse Newspapers, often the appropriate newspaper can be borrowed from the New York State Library - a free service. There are

Researching in Syracuse, *continued*

several sets of books which act as substitutes for civil vital records for the pre-1881 period. We have most of Royden W. Vosburgh's Collection of Church Records, mostly Dutch, for the Hudson River valley, and all of the Fred Q. Bowman books of extracted newspaper vital records for New York State. Gertrude A. Barber transcribed church records, wills, and cemeteries which cover a good portion of New York. We own the majority of these.

Federal and State Censuses

In 4,800 rolls of Federal Census microfilm we have a complete set of films from 1790 to 1930 for all of the focus states: New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and all the New England States. For New York State we have the mortality schedules. Also, we currently own 400 rolls of New York State censuses which were recorded, basically, in years ending in 5 between 1825 and 1925. This is a collection we are working to complete this year by purchasing all the remaining counties available. Many of the Federal and a few of the state censuses have printed indexes which take up many shelves. Soundex reels are owned for New York State only: 1880, 1900 and 1920 in nearly 1800 reels. Several databases include indexes to the federal censuses and images of the records can be brought up. We make *Ancestry Library Edition* available in the library only; *HeritageQuest Online* can be accessed from home with an OCPL Central library card. Both of these databases cover a wide variety of information besides the censuses.

Military Records

The Selected Revolutionary War Pension Papers fill nearly 900 rolls of microfilm. The Index to War of 1812 Pension Application Files is 102 rolls of microfilm. For the Civil War we have *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* in 152 volumes. This set provides the context for individual service, with reports for battles. For New York State we have three important sets: the Adjutant General's reports for Civil War service. Now there is a book that acts like an index to the Adjutant General's reports regardless of whether you know the unit. The *New York Town Clerk's Registers of Men Who Served in the Civil War* are on 37 rolls of microfilm, and the *1890 Special Census of Union Veterans and Widows* in New York on film with an index. The Town Clerks' Registers may provide names of parents. The draft cards for World War I are online.

Researching Other States

Special Microform Collections: The library has been collecting vital records for the New England States for many years:

The **Vital Records of Connecticut** by Lucius Barbour are on ninety-eight rolls of microfilm. A large portion of this set is an alphabetical index after which one can look at the rolls organized by town on microfilm or in the more recently published books. These generally cover up to 1850 as do the **Vermont Vital Records**, alphabetically arranged in nearly 300 rolls.

We have been collecting the **Maine vital records** as they have been published in book format; last year Picton Press

began issuing them on CD ROM and we have purchased 200 so far.

Rhode Island vital records for the colony and state were compiled by James Arnold many years ago; these are also available on Primary Source microfiche of the Local History and Genealogy Collection published by UMI Corporation. We also have a newer set of Rhode Island vital records prepared by Alden Beaman.

Massachusetts vital records transcriptions were made available decades ago in print format but Jay Mack Holbrook has made huge collections of original vital records for many many towns available on microfiche. There are eight drawers of these fiche which are challenging to use but usually rewarding to the dedicated researcher.

The **Corbin Collection**, on fifty-five rolls, contains genealogical information especially on the western Massachusetts counties of Hampshire, Hampden, Franklin, and Berkshire but includes information on other counties as well.

The **Local History and Genealogy Collection**, published by UMI Corporation, was a huge undertaking. We have purchased 54,000 microfiche issued in parts consisting of Genealogies, Genealogical Serials, Local Histories and Primary Sources. Since these parts were not limited to our focus states, we have an abundant collection of titles that hugely enhance our department. The genealogies chosen were selected from Kaminkow's *Genealogies in the Library of Congress*. These titles are included in our online library catalog accessed via our website at www.onlib.org. Since not all our books are in good enough condition for us to photocopy for you, we can fall back on the microfiche editions of them to provide copies.

Genealogical and Local History Periodicals

We receive the standard genealogical periodicals such as the *American Genealogist* and *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, and local journals such as *Tree Talks* published by the Central New York Genealogical Society. We also receive titles from other states, such as *Connecticut Ancestry*, *Rhode Island Roots*, *Vermont Genealogy*, and the *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society*.

Other CD ROMs

In addition to the Maine vital records, we have such titles as *English Parish Records*, *Vital Records of the British Isles*, *Bible Records from the New England Historic Genealogical Society*, *Church Records from Boston*, *War of 1812 Muster Rolls* and *Index of Irish Wills*.

Visiting Our Library

Department name: Local History/Genealogy

Library: Robert P. Kinchen Central Library of Onondaga County Public Library

Address: The Galleries of Syracuse, 447 South Salina Street, Syracuse, New York 13202-2494

Phone: 315-435-1900

Fax: 315-435-8533

Library website: www.onlib.org

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Email: lhg@onlib.org or via "Ask a Librarian" button on our website.

Hours: 9-5 Monday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; 9-8:30 Tuesday and Wednesday

Equipment in this department:

- Three computers limited to genealogy and local history searching
- One computer limited to our online catalog
- Three microform reader printers
- Scanner and traditional photocopier used only by staff to copy books and articles
- Ten microfilm readers
- Five microfiche readers

Policies:

- We make photocopies of all print materials for you
- Use of digital cameras is permitted
- You may bring your own copy paper for our computer printers or purchase it here.
- This is a reference facility and no materials circulate.
- Food and drinks are not permitted.
- The reader/printers use dimes; you are encouraged to bring dimes.
- A large part of our collection is in an adjoining temperature and humidity controlled room. We pull this material for you whenever you present a valid OCPL library card. Library cards are free to visitors and available with identification on the lobby level.

Parking and restaurants

Two-hour meters on the streets on either side of the library. An open lot on the Salina Street corner is more economical, about \$5.00 per day. Some parking is available within the The Galleries, at about \$7.00 per day. The city does not monitor the parking meters on Saturdays or after 5:00 pm on weekdays. Numerous restaurants are within walking distance.

NEWS OF NYG&B MEMBERS

The Board for Certification of Genealogists recently announced that NYG&B member Leslie Corn had completed the necessary requirements and had achieved the designation of Certified Genealogist. Certification indicates proficiency in "research, evidence analysis, kinship determination, and reporting."¹

Ms. Corn, a professional genealogist, is a Fellow of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. She is also a member of our Education and Library Committees, and has long been a very active member, annually leading a group to NARA as part of our Repository Tours; organizing the *DNA for Genealogists* workshop; and participating in the *New Yorkers and the Military*, *Crossing the Boundaries*, and *Find Your Family in New York* programs, in addition to many others.

We at the NYG&B congratulate Leslie on a job well done!

¹ Press Release, Debbie Mieszala, for the BCG, 28 April 2007.

ELDERHOSTEL EVENT AT NYG&B

The NYG&B will host an Elderhostel program: *A Day of Discovery, Your Family History: A Beginner's Workshop*, in September and December, at Society headquarters, 122 E. 58th St., in New York City.

The one-day beginner's workshop will include an introduction on how to research vital records, church and bible records, census, newspapers, and county histories. Attendees will learn how to keep family records on Pedigree Charts and Family Group Sheets. The afternoon will include a discussion of records available at the NYG&B and a tour of the Library.

The Elderhostel program will be offered on four different dates: September 27 & 28, and December 11 & 12. Registration is at 9:00 a.m. and the program concludes at 4:00 p.m. The one-day program is \$79.00, including a box lunch. To enroll visit <http://www.elderhostel.org/> or call (800) 454-5768. This is program #15873.

September's workshops will be taught by Marty Hiatt, CG, who developed the program in 2006 for the National Genealogical Society, to help people interested in family history begin their research. In December the one-day workshop will be taught by Arlene V. Jennings, CG, a Director of NGS; Lauren Maehrlein, MA, Director of Education; and Edward H.L. Smith III, MLS, Director of the Library and Research. All are members of the NYG&B Education Committee.

For additional information about the program call NYG&B (212) 755-8532, ext. 36.

WELCOME NEW STAFF MEMBER

M. Pamela Campbell is a native of Jamaica, West Indies. She came to the United States twenty years ago and graduated from Baruch College with a B.A. in Accounting. She has extensive business experience in the home care supply industry where she worked in all areas of accounting.

Pamella says that she likes working with figures and enjoys working at the NYG&B Society. She hopes her employment here will help her to better understand genealogy. She began her interest in the subject after watching Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s genealogical research program on Public Television and hopes to find out more about her heritage.

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