

Onondaga historical association's HISTORY

OHA

highlights

summer • fall 2005

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A DOCUMENT'S STORY

History Rediscovered

On the second floor, a second new display features a May 26, 1775 manuscript from the collection that is considered a seminal document in New York's march to the American Revolution. It was re-discovered during OHA's recent archival cataloging project and has not been publicly exhibited since 1948. Known as The General Association, it is signed by the delegates to New York's First Provincial Congress and states the colony's objections to British acts that had culminated in the recent bloodshed at Lexington and Concord. While the document stops short of independence and offers hope for reconciliation, historians of the period consider it a clear statement of New York's support for the rapidly expanding revolutionary war. It is also significant in that the Provincial Congress was an illegal assembly that was assuming control of the colony in a distinct challenge to traditional British rule. This Congress would eventually form the roots of today's New York State government. This manuscript helps document that birth.

The exhibit, entitled *History Rediscovered*, tells both the background story of this document as well as its remarkable and mysterious survival. Long considered to have been destroyed in the tragic 1911 fire at the New York

-cont'd on back cover

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

OHA Special Events this Fall!

As usual, fall is a time of extra special events for OHA and 2005 is no exception! We are bringing back our hugely successful Haunted History Happening Ghost Walk on TWO weekends this year (9/30 & 10/1 and 10/7 & 10/8 7-9pm each nite) and it will be even bigger and more exciting than last year's inaugural event. Following closely on its heels, our 10th Anniversary Under the Eye of Gambrinus Brew Fest will take place on October 14 from 5:30 to 8:30 pm. Next up is our celebration of Our Glorious Workplaces, OHA's Black Tie Gala being held this year at Lockheed Martin Maritime Systems & Sensors, Salina on November 5.

And if all this weren't enough, we have been approached by the USS Constitution Museum in Boston to partner with them in bringing their award-winning national outreach program, "Old Ironsides" Across the Nation, to The Onondaga County War Memorial in October 29 & 30 (watch OHA's website www.cnyhistory.org for details on dates and times). The photos illustrate the exhibit which will be in the Memorial Hall across the promenade from the OHA exhibit in the War Memorial. A key part of the



weekend events is the live demonstration by the naval gun crew using a replica long gun seated on a section of gun deck from the ship. These demonstrations, held every hour and lasting 15-20 minutes, show the teamwork required on board ship during 19th century battles at sea. There will also be special events and school outreach programs.

All in all a busy fall as always at your OHA!


Paul H. Pfanz



From left: OHA Archivist Michael Flanagan and past-presidents of the Men's Garden Club of Syracuse Ben Nichols and Jim Whitbread with the club's 1937 charter and a hand-crafted model of the club's logo.

MEN'S GARDEN CLUB

When new collections arrive at the Wright Research Center at Onondaga Historical Association, they might be in any state of disorder and neglect. It then becomes the job of the OHA Archivist to arrange and describe them in a logical way that will make them most useful to future users of the records. All too often, this involves a bit of educated guessing when the person or group who collected the records is no longer available to assist in this process.

When long-time member of the Men's Garden Club of Syracuse Ben Nichols recently contacted OHA to investigate the possibility that we would acquire the club's records, we were delighted to find the opposite was true. They were unusually well cared for and organized by the organization which boasts about 100 members. The collection includes newsletters, newspaper clippings, meeting minutes, rosters, photographs, films, a handcrafted model of the club's logo and even the group's original 1937 charter.

Early on in the Men's Garden Club of Syracuse's history, many prestigious citizens filled its ranks. The club has always been civic-minded and lends its collective skills to beautify the grounds of the Ronald MacDonald House, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo and Elmcrest Children's Center where members also introduce students to the joys of gardening. Stop by the club's booth at the New York State Fair next year and say "hello" and learn more about the activities and accomplishments of the Men's Garden Club of Syracuse.



Above: Children in area schools, like these students at Syracuse's H. W. Smith Elementary, are a vital audience for OHA's educational offerings.

THE KNOW-IT-ALLS... OHA EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



The Know-It-Alls aka the OHA Education Department have been very busy this summer. Massive cleaning, sorting and organizing of the OHA Ed Office took place in June. Two Educational Assistants were hired and put to work right away. "E" or "ED" Kits are being completed on Primary Sources and Women's Rights while the current Freedom Bound Kit is undergoing a reconfiguration. A wide selection of museum themed school tours including two outreach "living history" programs is being offered to schools for the upcoming school year. Then there's CNS Teacher Development Day where teachers from the Cicero-North Syracuse Schools descend upon OHA for enlightenment to help inspire them to reach their curriculum goals.

Following that is the SUNY Cortland annual "Professional Partnership in Education Conference" at the Oncenter (an orientation to the CNY area for new teachers from Cortland, Onondaga, Oswego and parts of Madison County, attended by nearly 400 freshmen teachers) that introduces new educators to resources available to help them enhance their in-class lessons. Add to that the partnering of OHA with CNY Teacher Centers to offer the first annual OHA Teacher Open House and we're out there!

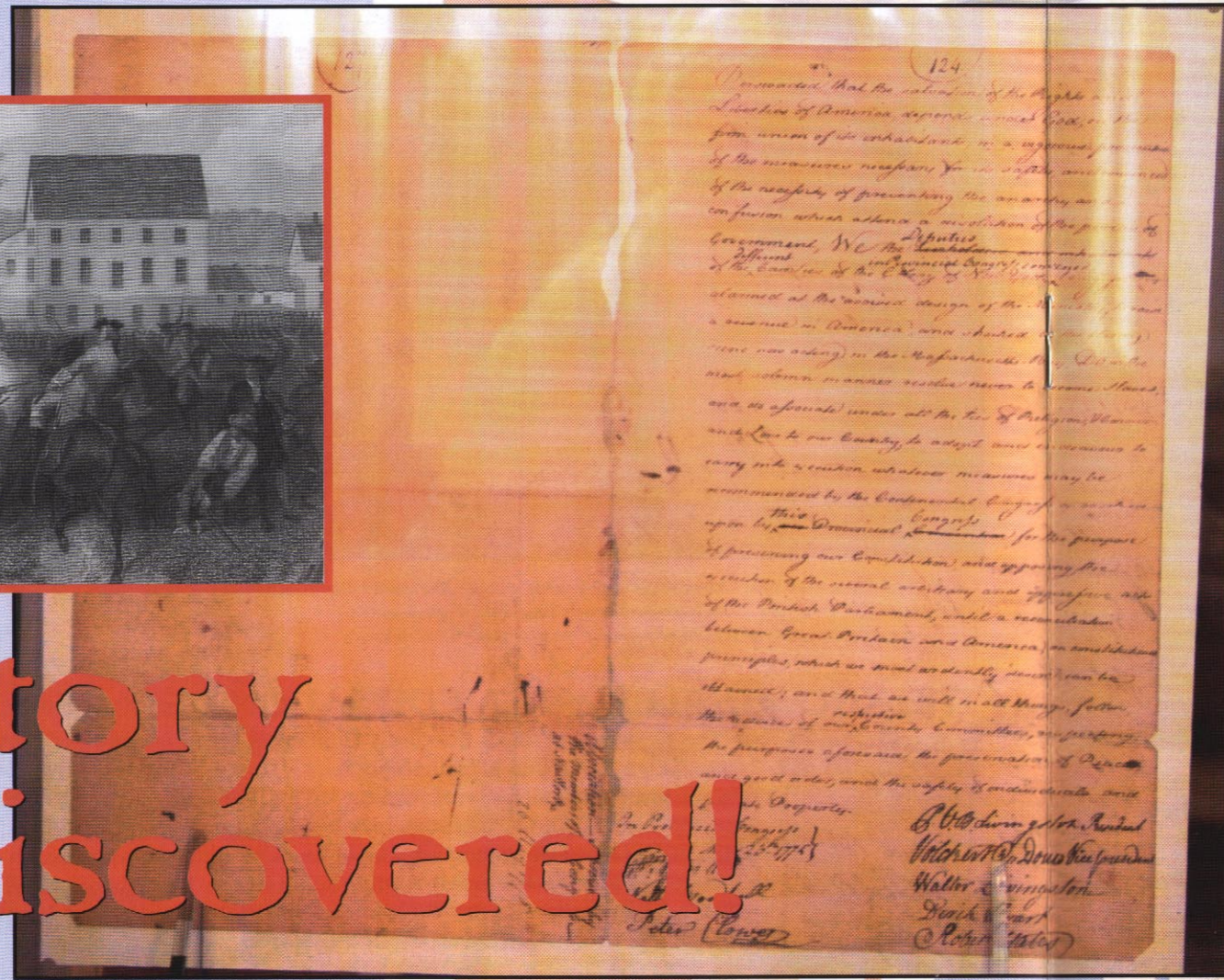
And don't forget to join us for the kick-off event for the SU CNY Reads Program on October 2 to learn about this program to get groups in CNY to partner up to read Miriam Grace Monfredo's

Northstar Conspiracy, a historical mystery set in ante bellum Seneca Falls. Characters from the book, quilting demonstrations and kids activity, African American spirituals, Harriet Tubman and more will be on hand to make the anniversary of the Jerry Rescue one to remember. Coming in winter and spring 2006 the Know-it-alls will be involved with new kids winter and spring break camps. An all new CNY OHA History Day partnering with SU and the CNY Council for the Social Studies will introduce the community to this worthwhile program that allows participating junior and senior high school students to release their creativity around a theme in American history through exhibits, documentaries, essays, and live presentations. There is also a history mystery theater in the works. The know-it-alls are everywhere. If you have a great idea for a program, do not hesitate to call 428-1864 to let us know what you know. . .

History Rediscovered!



History Rediscovered!



Above: Views of the actual 1775 document (front).
Inset: Battle of Lexington Engraving

A Pivotal Document in the OHA Collections

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Throughout the early 1770s there had been a series of escalating disagreements between Great Britain and its American colonies. These reached a climax on April 19, 1775 with the infamous exchange of gunfire at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts.

In the neighboring colony of New York, news of the battles reached New York City on April 23, just a day after the colony's revolutionary Provincial Convention had adjourned. They had convened for only three days in order to select New York's delegates to the Second Continental Congress scheduled to meet in Philadelphia.

The news of the skirmishes in Massachusetts rallied New York's most radical revolutionary leaders, ones usually associated with the Sons of Liberty organization, to action. They seized 600 muskets from a government arsenal and called for a permanent revolutionary government for the colony. The existing, Loyalist controlled colonial assembly had adjourned on April 3. It would never gather again and a vacuum existed.

The revolutionaries in New York City were being guided by a "Committee of Observation" composed of 60 members. It had been formed in November of 1774. On April 26, recognizing the serious escalation in the conflict, its leaders called for the election of an enlarged Committee of One Hundred to guide the actions of New York's revolutionaries and, essentially, to serve as a government for the city. On April 28, The Committee of Sixty also sent a letter to their parallel committees in other counties of New York, calling for election of a

new Provincial Congress as a permanent revolutionary body with power to assume all functions of the colony's government.

The Committee of Sixty also decided that a document needed to be drafted which freemen in the colony could sign to demonstrate their unified opposition to current British policy. Those refusing to sign it would also identify themselves as likely Loyalists to the crown in the coming fight. A sub-committee consisting of James Duane, John Jay and Peter Van Schaack was chosen to draft this device for "associating" with the revolutionary cause. On April 29, the document entitled, "A General Association", agreed to and subscribed by the Freeholders, Freemen, and Inhabitants of the City and County of New-York" was adopted by the Committee of Sixty.

It called for citizens in the colony of New York to "associate" themselves with a public declaration that protested recent British actions, pledged loyalty to the Continental Congress, and vowed its signers to oppose further British actions until an acceptable "reconciliation between Great Britain and America" was obtained. Copies of this General Association would be circulated around the state. The committee encouraged all colonists to sign on to this public declaration.

The specific wording was copied (or in some cases a printed version was prepared) and men began to sign them across the colony. One copy, dated May 17 of 1775, was signed by 225 citizens in the Coxsackie district of Albany County. It is now in the collection of the Albany Institute of History and Art.

Meanwhile, the election of representatives to what would be the First Provincial Congress proceeded. That body assembled in New York City on May 22, 1775. It reflected both the radical and moderate voices in the conflict. Some of the most radical of New York's revolutionaries, such as Issac Sears, John Morin Scott and Alexander McDougall were members.

This extralegal Provincial Congress assumed leadership of New York's resistance to the British and essentially became the first revolutionary government of New York State. It also functioned to carryout instructions from the Continental Congress then meeting in Philadelphia.

War was already underway in the New York colony as on May 10 Ethan Allen had raided and captured Fort Ticonderoga from the British. Although the Provincial Congress discouraged further unauthorized attacks on British forces, it did recommend that New Yorkers arm themselves and it advanced various preparations in the colony for war.

It seemed to some members of the Provincial Congress that, as the acting colonial government for the entire colony of New York, they too should adopt and sign the General Association. This would put the colony of New York formally in the revolutionary position of resistance to the British. Although the document did not call for independence, its adoption and approval by this Congress would constitute a first step for New York towards union with the twelve other colonies.

The motion that "every member of this Congress be desired to sign the General Association" was made on May 26, 1775 by David Clarkson of New York City. It was seconded by Colonel Abraham Ten Broeck of Albany County and subsequently approved.

Likely, a clerk wrote out the specific words of the General Association, first composed by the Duane, Jay and Van Schaack sub-committee a month earlier, making a few changes in the wording to institutionalize the document as the act of a legitimate government body. One hundred members of the New York Provincial Congress came forward to sign the document. The signatures form a virtual inventory of New York's revolutionary leaders. It was a brave act as they were risking serious personal and financial repercussions from the British. This original document is now in the collection of the OHA.

Three days later, the Provincial Congress called on "every inhabitant of this colony" to subscribe to the General Association with all convenient speed. It asked that every county committee oversee that process and then return these signed copies of the Association to the Congress along with the names of those who shall neglect or refuse to sign. Such "non-associators" would later be scorned as enemies of the Revolution. These submittals were to be done no later than July 15.

The proceedings of this body, published as the Journal of the Provincial Congress in 1842, records that several local communities did submit these documents. They were "read and filed" as part of the official record of the Congress. Transcripts of these various Association documents, including the list of those who signed and those who refused to sign, were reprinted in their entirety in the Calendar of Historical Manuscripts Relating to the War of the Revolution, published in Albany in 1868. This reprint also includes a transcript of the May 26, 1775 version signed in the Provincial Congress.

The 1868 publication stated that the originals of all these original, signed Association documents were housed at that time in the office of the New York Secretary of State. Subsequently, these documents were stored in the State Library in the Capitol Building, which suffered a severe fire in 1911. All of these seminal Association documents were believed to have been destroyed in that fire.

A 1976 inventory of Revolutionary War manuscripts in the New York State Library confirms that the journals of the various New York Provincial Congresses "... including related documents were burned in the fire of 1911 and now comprise twenty manuscript boxes." They were not included

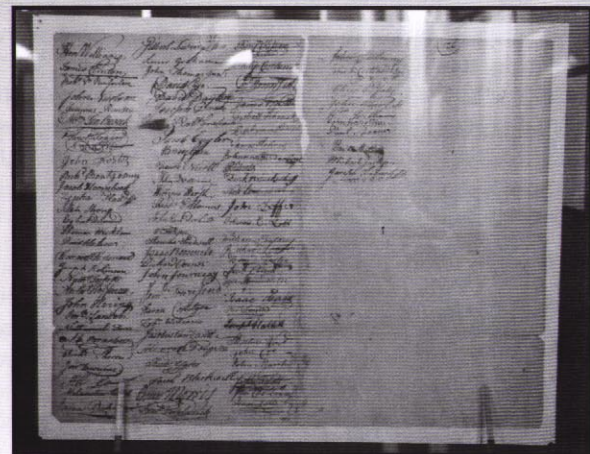
THE STORY OF HISTORY REDISCOVERED

-cont'd from page 5- in the 1976 inventory, apparently because their charred condition did not allow them to be examined or described.

Perhaps the most historically significant version of the various General Association manuscripts that were signed throughout the colony during 1775 was the one signed by the members of New York's Provincial Congress on May 26, 1775. However, that particular manuscript was not in the State Capitol in 1911 and was not destroyed. By 1928, it had mysteriously turned up in the collection of the Onondaga Historical Association. Those mysterious circumstances appeared to have, ironically, led to the preservation of one of the most important documents in New York State's history.

According to Professor Steven Webb of Syracuse University, this 1775 document "... is the political event which marked the advent of the Revolution in New York State for it demanded that New Yorkers transfer their allegiance from the British crown to an independent structure of American government." Dr. Roger Sharp of the University also believe it might be considered the origin of New York State's own government, as it marks the effort to establish a de facto state government in the face of the disintegration of the Crown's authority in New York. Although it stops short of calling for independence, it clearly is a precursor to the Declaration of Independence, which would follow in little more than one year.

Dr. Joseph Tiedemann of Loyola Marymount University, an authority on New York's role in the Revolution, believes that the signing of this document was a watershed event that made it clear to all the citizens of New York "... that what was taking place was a revolution." There could be no turning back. Residents were forced to either side with the King or with the American cause.



Our new Marsellus Casket Company exhibit, like History Rediscovered reflects the depth and variety of OHA's collections.

This exhibit is a modification of the ongoing Heart of New York gallery. The final section of this main exhibit deals with some of the companies and occupations that have provided a living for local citizens. The Marsellus family approached OHA last year with an interest in helping create an interpretive display on the rich history of the Marsellus Casket Company, a Syracuse institution that ended production in 2003. The family has donated artifacts, photos and manuscripts documenting the company history from the 1870s on, along with generous funding support.

OHA staff saw this as a valuable opportunity to renovate a portion of the permanent exhibit and to place the history of the Marsellus company within a broader context of American funeral history. The exhibit features a wall-size photo mural of the Richmond Street factory interior, c1910, several historic images, early catalogs, a video documentary of the construction process and a sales sample of a mahogany casket. The latter illustrates the incredible quality of the Marsellus product, which was considered the best wood casket in the world. That is documented, in part, by its selection as the burial container for four U. S. presidents. There is also a section on Marsellus employees, the changing locations for the company's factories and an interactive game where visitors can test their knowledge of different wood species.



Above: The Kirkpatrick Room on the 3rd floor of OHA's headquarters as it looked in the 1950s. Left: The triple arched space, newly visible with the relocation, was partially obscured by OHA's large library collection.

OHA RESEARCH CENTER BUILDING SOLD

It was with more than a little sadness and after much discussion and deliberation that the OHA Executive Committee recommended to the full Board that the Association sell the smaller of our buildings at 311 Montgomery Street. 311 Montgomery Street was the first telephone company building in Syracuse built in 1896. When they outgrew it in 1906, thanks to the generosity of the Kirkpatrick family, it became OHA's first permanent home. However, much as we would have loved to retain the building, the burden of maintenance on both 109 year old and 99 year old buildings was just too much for OHA to bear.

The sale was completed on July 18, 2005 to Linda Henley and Russ Andrews, longtime downtown residents and proponents. Linda and Russ are already at work renovating the building and plan to move in the fall of this year as their home. They will also provide rental office space. They are committed to the building's preservation and OHA is happy to have them as our new neighbors.

Our sincere thanks to the committee headed by Board member Bill Burrows and comprised of Board members M. Higgins, B. Kenan, J. King, C. Lozner, V. Sciscoli and W. Young for its work in concluding the due diligence required in the building sale. Special thanks to Bill Burrows and Bond Schoeneck & King, PLLC for all the time and effort expended by Bill and his firm in the negotiation process as well as the completion of all the considerable and detailed legal documentation required for the transaction. The sale could not have been successful without him.

Also, many thanks to Board Member Mark Weimer for guiding the physical move of collections to the museum, as well as disposing of out of scope material.

History Rediscovered!

OWN A PIECE OF HISTORY TODAY

Exciting changes continue at the expanded OHA Gift Shop.

Book titles devoted to the Underground Railroad/ Civil War and local Native Americans as well as unusual and interesting vintage booklets from the 1940's to the 1970's are now available.

Check out our collection of town and village maps that will look great at home or the office.

Greatly expanded choices from the OHA Limited Images™ line of photo reproductions selected from our vast archives should be available soon.

The gift shop is open during regular Museum hours.

Remember your OHA Membership entitles you to 10% off any Gift Shop purchase. Stop in soon for holiday sales and special member offerings.

History Highlights

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Subscription is available as a benefit of membership.

Onondaga Historical Association chartered by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York. Its programs are supported, in part, by funds provided by Onondaga County, New York State, the City of Syracuse and our members.

J. Warren Young, President

Paul H. Plantz, Executive Director

Onondaga Historical Association gratefully acknowledges Ansun Graphics for the printing services and Mark-Paul Senfing.

OHA thanks corporate sponsors

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Behind the Iron Gates

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A DOCUMENT'S STORY

cont'd from front cover - State Capitol in Albany, the manuscript had, in fact, passed into private hands and eventually was donated to the OHA in the 1920s. It surfaced briefly in the 1940s but was again lost to memory until OHA's recent project. Current plans call for OHA to present the 1775 artifact to the New York State Archives in a future ceremony, but Central New Yorkers are encouraged to visit this rare piece of American Revolutionary War history while it is on display here in Syracuse. This exhibit was researched and prepared by OHA's curator of history, Dennis Connors. OHA is grateful to both the DestiNY USA project of the Pyramid Companies and the Gaylord Bros. Company for their support of History Rediscovered.

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