



**Town of Ontario
Historical & Landmark
Preservation Society
NEWSLETTER**

www.heritagesquaremuseum.org

April 2025

Volume 1



Many small-town everyday people in the 19th and early 20th centuries did not trust banks. Stories of bank robberies and failed or corrupt banks forced many of these early folks to find other ways to safeguard their small savings. Many an early farm wife hid her egg money in a jar on the pantry shelf. There are tales of farmers and merchants hiding their money under their mattress or in a box buried in the yard.

The following story is told to visitors to the Ruffell Log Cabin located at Heritage Square Museum on Ontario Center Road in Ontario. "An 1894 newspaper article printed in the *Williamson Sentinel* told the story of how 'old Jimmie Ruffel on his death bed pointed toward the clock and struggled to tell his family something.' He died before he could deliver his message. Years later when the Ruffell grandchildren were playing 'hide the marbles,' they found \$200 in gold and \$133 in silver stuffed in the logs behind the spot where the clock had been."

According to an article written by Johnson S. Albright for *The History of the Town of Ontario 1807 – 1957* edited by Augusta Trimble, the first bank in town was the State Bank of Ontario which was built by the old Young, Beach and Maher Lumber Company in 1913. The original certificate of incorporation was signed by David T. Craven, Charles A. Harris, Helena A. Grandin, Walter J. Mepham, William A. Tummonds, John Keymel, Glen C. Cone, Charles R. Pratt, Johnson S. Albright, Jonathan S. Pratt, Isaac Porrey, Arthur S. Pratt, Frank J. Pratt, Henry E. VanDerVeer, Martin F. Maher, James Colwell and Charles C. Young. Those of you familiar with the history of the Town of Ontario will recognize the names of many of Ontario's prominent citizens of that era.

The bank's total capital funds at incorporation were \$33,000.00. The bank opened for business in February of 1914 and received deposits of about \$24,000.00.

Cynthia Howk of the Landmark Society of Western New York spoke about the architecture of Ontario in a program for the Ontario Historical and Landmark Preservation Society in 2002. Speaking about the architecture of the bank building, she stated that during that period of history "banks were highly suspect. Therefore, they were designed to appear as a temple of commerce – very strong and safe." Town's people needed to feel that their money was safe. A bank was usually the most imposing building in town – built to look like a fortress.

The original bank building consisted of tellers cages on the first floor. The ceiling was open to the second floor where the offices were located. The bank officers could look down to the floor below to observe the activity. The president of the bank even kept a gun in his upstairs office in case of the threat of a robbery.

In his article about "Growing Up In Ontario in the 1940's and 50's" written for *Ontario's History 1807 – 1993* edited by Virginia Scully Hill, Bob Biviano remembers the Bank: "Across the street was a very important institution, the State Bank of Ontario, the financial district of town. It was overseen by Ray Peer, and the day-to-day activities were in the capable hands of such people as Fred Perrin, Howard Bassage, Mabel Brandt and, of course, Mary Conway – the lady with the beautiful hats. The façade of the bank was impressive with its high, arched, center windows and entrance. The brick front was covered with ivy giving a green contrast to the orange brick in spring and summer. Starting at about three feet off the pavement, there were horizontal rows of brick indented about three inches. These indented rows continued up the building to the large overhang that wrapped around the roof edge. On "slow" evenings some of us townies would use these narrow ledges as toe holds and scale the bank as if it were some dangerous precipice overlooking a bottomless gorge. It was a measure of one's courage to count the levels he could rise to without chickening out or sliding down using some contrived injury or cramp as an excuse."

Carol Slocum Boughton worked at the State Bank of Ontario from 1963 until it was taken over by Manufacturer's Hanover in 1974. She remembers the bank being opened Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. On Friday, it also reopened from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. "Friday nights were very busy. There were usually five or six tellers. People sometimes smelled of fish fry or aftershave because they usually had cleaned up and gone out to dinner before coming into town."

During the 1960s Carol remembers that everything was done manually. "Every check that came in was manually checked for signature and endorsement. They were also checked to make sure that the amount written numerically was the same amount as written out on the check. They also were checked for stale dates. They were then sorted alphabetically and posted. The checks were then filed in a drawer until it was time to make out the statements. Occasionally an error was made and a check ended up in the file of another person – usually a relative. At statement time, the checks were brought out and the statements were manually made up."

Banking was very personal at that time. Customers even received a phone call if it appeared that their account would be overdrawn if a check was cashed. "We gave them an opportunity to come down to make a deposit to cover it." Loans were sometimes begun with a handshake and the paperwork done later.

Carol also mentioned that it was a matter of great pride that the State Bank of Ontario never closed during the Depression years.

In 1973, the State Bank of Ontario became affiliated with Manufacturer's Hanover Corporation and according to an article in the *Wayne County Mail* on September 14th, "changes its name . . . to Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company/Genesee /Region. . . The banking facility in Ontario will, of course, remain open and in full operation. Only the name will change."

Over the years, the bank's name has changed several times -- Chemical Bank; Fleet and finally Bank of America. In 2012, the Bank of America branch in Ontario closed its doors, and the building was eventually sold.

Banking for the average small town resident has also changed over the years. No longer does one need to rush to the bank on his or her lunch hour and wait in a long line at the teller's window. Credit cards, checks, drive-thru windows, ATM machines, 24-hour telephone and on-line banking and federally insured accounts have drastically changed the way banks do business today. No longer do we feel the need to bury our savings in the backyard – or in the wall behind the clock!

2025 Membership Renewal and Volunteer Sign-Up

Another year has sped by and it's now time to renew your membership in the Historical Society!

Membership letters will be arriving in the mail around April 1st. Please return your membership form and payment promptly so that a costly second mailing will not be necessary. *The following are the new membership rates: Youth \$15; Senior Citizen \$20; Senior Couple \$30; Individual \$25; Family \$40; Patron \$100; Business \$125.

Volunteer Sign-up Day

When: April 26th from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm

Where: The Brick Church music room

Who: Anyone wishing to volunteer for the following events ...

- Barn Sale
- School Tours
- Summer Kids Programs
- Weekend Guides
- Gift Shop
- Special Events

Heritage Square Barn Sale

May 8th & 9th from 9 – 7

Saturday, May 10th from 9 – 12

\$5 bag sale or 50% off (bring your own Wegmans/Tops bag)

You never know what you will find: antiques, collectables, household items, tools, furniture, jewelry, dishes, toys, ornaments, books, games, puzzles. This is a great way for young people just starting out to furnish their apartments/homes. We are always surprised!

Donations may be made:

Saturday, April 19th & 26th from 9 – 12,

Thursday, April 24 & May 1 from 4 – 7

(no clothing or electronics)

This year we have a special donation from the Denisons's.

A Beautiful 9 Piece Dining Room Set!

\$500/best offer

Expandable table, 6 chairs, buffet and high boy

Call Rich Denison at 315-524-3726 after 4/9 to make an offer.

(See photo next page)



**All proceeds go to Heritage Square Museum
Make an offer!**

**Barn Sale Help Wanted!
For both set-up and sale days**

We do need help to make our Barn Sale a success. This is **one of our major fund raisers** for Heritage Square. Jean Johnson will be calling for your help for the days of the sale but there is a great deal of work to be done setting up and taking down. Remember: If you help on the Barn Sale you may come to the early sale on Wednesday, 5/7 from 4 - 6

Call Joyce Lyke (585-738-9476) to offer your time. The following are the days/times that we need help with organizing, tagging, etc. Some slots also include public drop-off times.

Monday, 4/14, 8 – 12
Tuesday, 4/15, 8 – 12
Saturday, 4/19, 9 – 1 Drop off

Monday, 4/21, 8 – 12
Thursday, 4/24, 4 – 7 Drop off
Friday, 4/25, 8 – 12
Saturday, 4/26, 9 – 1 Drop off

Monday, 4/28, 8 – 12
Thursday, 5/1, 4 – 7 Drop off
Friday, 5/2, 8 – 12
Monday, 5/5, 8 – 12

By Popular Demand, another Barn Quilt Class!!

September 20, from 9 – 5

Everything will be provided! - \$105

Leave with a sign ready to be hung!

**We can only accommodate 20 participants. So, sign up early! Call Joyce Lyke,
585-738-9476 for further information.**



School Tours

Our schedule is set for the spring.

Sign-up for docents is Saturday, April 26 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the North Ontario Methodist church (Brick Church) music room. **Bring your calendars!**

May 20 – Gananda – 4th grade
May 22 and 23 – Plank South – 4th grade
May 28 and 29 – Wayne – 2nd grade
May 30 – Sodus – 5th grade
June 6 – Marion- 4th grade and Rochester Christian – 3rd grade

Tours begin around 9:30 with the arrival of the students, teachers and chaperones.

Students line up in front of the barn in ten groups. Each group follows a docent to their first building:

Group 1 goes to the Barn, **Group 2** goes to the Carpentry Shop, and so on.

After 10 to twelve minutes of instruction on the building's history and purpose (information sheet provided) the school bell rings and the students progress in an orderly way to the next building.

A map is provided to direct the group. **The docent stays with his/her building.** After the students have toured all the buildings, they return to the barn to board the buses or to enjoy a bag lunch in the pavilion. The docents may visit with the students and chaperones or go directly home. The total time required for docents is two hours. Period dress is encouraged but not required.

Volunteer for one tour or several, and enjoy a fun morning at Heritage Square. Can't make the sign-up? Call Ann Welker at 315-524-9330.

Stepping Back in Time at Heritage Square – Part 2

A free educational program for children ages 6 – 10 focusing on daily life during the 1860's. Each session will include an interactive glimpse into history, a craft activity, and an opportunity to play games of the period.

Thursday, June 26 – 10:00 – 11:30 AM – Children's Activities in the 1860's

Thursday, July 24 – 10:00 – 11:30 AM – Apples, Apples, Apples

Thursday, August 28 – 10:00 – 11:30 AM – Music in the 1860's

In Passing

We would like to offer our condolences to the following members:

Jean Davis on the passing of her sister-in-law and brother-in-law,
Joyce Smith on November 15, 2024 and Donald Smith on November 30, 2024
Sue Yantch on the passing of her mother, Janet Yantch, on March 16, 2025
Bill Bridson on the passing of his wife Marge Bridson

Heritage Square Highlights: Preserving Ontario's Past, Together

Dear Ontario Members,

As we look back on a successful year at the Town of Ontario Heritage Square Historical Society and Museum, we want to share some exciting highlights from our programs and initiatives. Thanks to your ongoing support, we continue to preserve and share Ontario's unique history in ways that educate, inspire, and strengthen our community.

Over the past year, the Society has organized impactful programs and events that directly benefited our community. Here are some key achievements and statistics highlighting our work:

Youth Education Programs: We welcomed over 500 students from the Ontario school district and neighboring areas on field trips to Heritage Square. These educational tours included interactive activities, where students engaged with 19th-century farming tools, historic artifacts, and learned about local industrial milestones. Feedback from teachers shows that 95% of them rated the program as "highly effective" for enriching students' understanding of local history. We held summer sessions for kids 5-10: "Stepping Back in Time" that included games, crafts and discussions. This program will be repeated this year.

Community Heritage Square Events -- Workshops, Lectures, and Cultural Programs: Our events drew more than 1,200 attendees in 2024 alone—a 20% increase from last year. These events offered live historical reenactments, blacksmithing demonstrations, Fall Festival, Ice Cream Socials, Apple Dry House demonstrations, and more. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with attendees indicating they would return for future events. Most participants expressed a greater sense of local pride and historical awareness after attending.

Historic Preservation and Restoration: In the past year, we completed the restoration of several buildings and chinking the 1820s Log House on our museum grounds, funded by community donations and small grants. This work preserves key historical structures that are among the few remaining of their kind in Ontario, allowing them to be safely accessible for generations to come. However, due to the many structures on the grounds and their historic nature, maintenance is costly and requires constant attention. Any additional support to offset these costs would be invaluable, helping us protect these historical treasures. We currently maintain a collection of over 5,000 artifacts and documents, catalogued meticulously by volunteers, which has doubled in size in the past five years due to ongoing preservation initiatives.

Volunteer Involvement: This year we had more than 100 volunteers who contributed 2,000 hours to our work. We are fortunate to have such a passionate and dedicated team supporting Heritage Square. Our volunteers make every event possible and keep our museum running smoothly. Please volunteer for the events this year. It's guaranteed you will have a enjoyable time.

2025 Scheduled Events and Programs: Our commitment to inspire and educate our community includes some new programs this next year, such as talks on the Erie Canal, Unique Cobblestones discussion, barn square painting, Celebrate Our Independence Festival in July, Fall Leaves bus trip in October, Getting to Know the Alpacas Day with processing, felting, etc., and a family camp out adventure.

Looking Ahead: Thanks to our members, Heritage Square is more vibrant than ever. We're reaching more people, making history come alive, and preserving Ontario's story for generations to come. Thanks you for being a part of this journey with us. With your help. We'll continue to preserve Ontario's legacy, share its stories, and strengthen our community ties. Here's to more wonderful events and shared memories in the coming year!

Warm regards,
Frank Robusto
President

Heritage Square Museum and
The Town of Ontario Historical and Landmark Preservation Society

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2024-2025

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Town of Ontario Historical & Landmark Preservation Society
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costs nearly \$2.