

The City of Oswego

Recognizes

the Bicentennial Anniversary of the Creation of the County of Oswego,

s, Oswego County was formed in March 1816 out of portions of Onondaga and Oneida Counties by the State of New York; and

s, the City of Oswego has served as the county seat of Oswego County since the inception of said county two hundred years ago; and

s, the City of Oswego has a significant and distinguished heritage, including:

The geographic area that was to become Oswego was originally the homeland of the Onondaga tribe of the Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. It is from this proud and legendary Native American civilization that we receive our name: Os-we-go, which means a pouring out place.

During the colonial era, Oswego was the jewel of empire vied over by the British and French due to its strategic location and natural transportation advantage. It played a strategic role in the French and Indian War of the 18th century. The first British fortress - Fort Oswego - was built in 1727 on the west side of the Oswego River and later to be followed by addition of Fort Ontario in 1755.

In 1756, during the Seven Years War, the commander of all the French forces in North America, the Marquis de Montcalm, laid siege to the British garrisons at Oswego, utterly destroying them and declaring victory on August, Friday the thirteenth of said year. Upon disembarking, Montcalm erected a giant cross near the ruins of Fort Oswego and took with him many British prisoners of war, among them being a future signer of the Declaration of Independence, Francis Lewis.

In 1759, the British returned to Oswego to rebuild Fort Ontario under the guidance of Sir William Johnson. In 1761, under Sir Jeffery Amherst, the British amassed a force of 12,000 men - the largest military force ever assembled in North America to date. It was comprised of British regulars, colonial militias, and Native American allies. With this unprecedented military force based in Oswego, they took Montreal and Quebec, thus effectively breaking the French power in North America.

In 1766, the final peace conference ending the Native American uprising known as 'Pontiac's Rebellion' convened at Fort Ontario. In attendance was none other than Pontiac, the fabled Ottawa chieftain himself. He met in council with Sir William Johnson, British agent of Indian affairs, to negotiate the final terms of the peace agreement. Upon fortification, Oswego was the first harbor and starting point of commerce on the Great Lakes. Furthermore, the first British navy built on the Great Lakes was here in 1755. In 1799, Oswego was designated the first freshwater port in the United States. Today, Oswego is known as the Port City.

Although a frontier outpost, Oswego played a strategic role in the Revolutionary War on several occasions. In 1777, British General Barry St. Leger and his army passed through Oswego on their way to defeat at Oriskany and Fort Stanwix, never to rendezvous with the armies of Howe and Burgoyne at Saratoga. Furthermore, George Washington himself planned the last expedition of the Revolutionary War, led by Colonel Marnus Willett, otherwise known as "Defender of the Northern Frontier." This expedition was launched to take back Oswego from the British, who had reoccupied Fort Ontario. Due to a misfortunate chain of events, Willett was forced to abort his cover after marching from Rome to Oswego by cover of night in the dead of winter. However, a woodcutting party detached from the fort detected him at dawn, thus saving the expedition's element of surprise. Upon the solemn return of the Willett Expedition to Fort Stanwix, news of peace talks in Paris had arrived. Oswego remained under British control along with other key, strategic northern outposts until the British surrendered the fort in 1796 under a provision of Jay's Treaty.

As the terminus of the canal system, Oswego played a critical role in the growth and prosperity of our state, and in the westward expansion of our young nation.

In 1804, Founding Father Alexander Hamilton purchased a large triangular swath of land comprising much of the present day east side of Oswego subsequently known as Hamilton Gore.

In 1808-09, the soon-to-be-father of American literature, James Fenimore Cooper, a midshipman in the U.S. Navy, was stationed at Oswego under commander John Brooks Woolsey during which time he helped to construct the first navy warship on Lake Ontario - the 16-gun Brig Oneida. Furthermore, Oswego, the Oswego Falls (Fulton) are the backdrop of Cooper's novel, "The Pathfinder", part of the epic Leatherstocking Tales.

In 1810, Revolutionary War veteran and one of the principle leaders of Shay's Rebellion, Eli Parsons, opened a tavern in Oswego. He is buried at Riverside Cemetery.

In 1839, during the Patriot War Crisis or Upper Canada Rebellion, Oswego landholder President Martin Van Buren visited our city and made a speech at the Welland House, calling for upgrades to Fort Ontario. Furthermore, Van Buren's ancestors were pioneer settlers of Oswego County and the eighth president had his childhood home in Oswego.

In 1841, Oswego shipbuilder Sylvester Doolittle introduced the first commercial vessel, The Vandalia, to feature the Ericsson screw propeller. It revolutionized commerce and transport on the Great Lakes.

In 1848, Thomas Kingsford founded the Kingsford Starch Factory along the west bank of the Oswego River on the old Varick Canal. Kingsford Starch produced worldwide name brand recognition as a result of its reputation for quality.

The first photograph published in a newspaper was of the Great Oswego Fire of 1853. Pioneer American photographer George Barnard, who resided in Oswego at the time, took the image. Barnard later went on to great acclaim as a Civil War photographer, working for Mathew Brady. Barnard was with William Tecumseh Sherman at the Battle of Vicksburg.