

February 2021



History Happenings

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Last Month at The History Center...

Thank You for Supporting Our Year-End Appeal

The whole team at The History Center in Tompkins County wants to express our profound gratitude to everyone in the community who [donated](#) at the end of 2020, and beginning of 2021. Your generosity launched us by our ambitious goal of increasing our end-of-year appeal by 20%. Although the future remains unpredictable, we are truly lucky to move forward with you as part of our local history family.



We've received so many heart-felt notes over the past two months. Our community made donations in memory or in honor of extraordinary family members, to support continued care of our archives and collections, or because they remembered that one time Donna found a critical resource in the [Research Library](#) for their local history project. It was truly illustrative of the many ways The History Center reaches into individual lives to make a difference.

We will continue to work through the significant financial challenges of COVID-19 in the coming year. Integral to our mission is the belief that our community has a fundamental right of access to their community's local history. It's why the overwhelming majority of our offerings were provided without cost in 2020. None of the exhibits, programs, or available resources are possible without you believing that local history still matters. We hope to see you "distanced" and in person this year, and appreciate your continued support of The History Center in Tompkins County.

Upcoming Events - thehistorycenter.net/events

February is Black History Month! Learn about Black history in Tompkins County, historic Black residents, and engage with curriculum and virtual exhibits on our [Black History Month](#) web page. Also tune in to our social media feeds for posts highlighting local Black history. Stop by our Exhibit Hall and learn about the phenomenal lives of women civil rights leaders in the "Sisters of Change" exhibit, and explore exhibits on the Webbs, Levi Spaulding, and other notable residents of Tompkins County in the [Exhibit Hall](#).

Thursday-Saturday Every Week - EXHIBIT HALL IS OPEN!

[Hours & Safety Guidelines](#) - Schedule a [private visit](#)!

February 6th & 20th - [Virtual HistoryForge Transcription Sessions](#) - 11am-1pm

Help be a part of building history! THC's digital history project, HistoryForge, relies on volunteers like you. At our bi-weekly virtual transcription sessions we are currently entering records from the 1940 census for the City of Ithaca! **Learn more about the project [here](#).**

Contact Eve historyforge@thehistorycenter.net to join.

February 12th-28th - [Ithaca Loves Teachers Celebration!](#)

[Ithaca Loves Teachers](#) and so does The History Center in Tompkins County! Teachers are invited to book private visits to our [Exhibit Hall](#) on the Ithaca Commons Tuesday-Saturday, claim free [local history books](#) from our collections, and sign up for our virtual educator [events](#) from February 12th - 28th. Find details on our programs at thehistorycenter.net/Ithaca-Loves-Teachers. Teachers can register for the county-wide celebration and deals [here](#).

February 13th-March 13th - Learning to Fly with Tommy - Saturdays at 10am

Join us for weekly premieres on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) (IGTV) of our five-part web series exploring local aviation history with the Old Time Flight Instructor. These short episodes will be premiering on The History Center [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) profiles Saturday mornings at 10am February 13th-March 13th. [Like](#) & [Follow](#) so you don't miss an episode! Parents and educators can download worksheets for each episode on our [Learn with Tommy!](#) page on the website.

February 20th - [Tommy Plane Postcard Printing - Youth Program](#)

Kids (ages 4-12) & families are invited to learn about the [Tommy Plane](#) and how Ithaca was once a hub of early aviation industry! Laura Rowley of [Illuminated Press](#) will help children create their own prints and postcards with laser cut blocks using images from the Thomas-Morse Aircraft Corporation [archives](#)! Students will also get to assemble paper airplane gliders and compete for whose plane can fly the farthest!

All participants will leave with three high quality prints made with local printer and book artist Laura Rowley of [Illuminated Press](#), printed on locally made [Combat Paper](#) by local artist Nate Lewis. Participants may also make and take home as many practice prints on scrap paper as they would like. Scrap paper will be provided, but participants may also bring items from home if they'd like to test how they print! **Pre-registration is required, and space for each session is limited. [Register here](#).** This program is free.

Our thanks to the [New York Council on the Arts](#) and the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) for their funding of this program.

[Dorothy Bliss Remembers the DeWitt Historical Society](#)

Of all the kinds of local history that we preserve at The History Center, one of the more interesting ones is our own. We document the work we've done, and, when we can, the people who have come before us. So we were especially delighted when a former colleague, Dorothy Bliss, emailed last year asking if we were interested in a donation of her records from her time here at The History Center in the mid-20th century. She had collected Ithaca Journal articles,

photographs and other memorabilia, and also offered a brief narrative introduction to an autobiography she was writing. We were excited to receive Dorothy's materials, not only because they offer insights into a long-past era, but because Dorothy is African American, and her observations on race relations in mid-20th century Ithaca are invaluable.

Dorothy Simmons Bliss (Mrs. Wayne Bliss) started working at the [DeWitt Historical Society](#) (as we used to be known) in 1956 as a secretary to the curator, typing, taking dictation, mimeographing materials, and cataloging and labeling artifacts. At first she made \$31.60 per month, a modest amount which gradually increased. At the time she was a wife and the mother of two young children, and she became adept at juggling the responsibilities of her family with working outside the home. On her work days, she wrote, "I would run practically all the way home during the noon hour so I could see that everything was okay with my children when they came home for lunch." In addition to her work at the [DeWitt Historical Society](#), she took on freelance typing jobs for a variety of clients, often working for African American Cornell graduate students. Dorothy was glad for the example these high achieving scholars set for her children, and welcomed the encouragement they gave them.



Dorothy candidly relates the struggles and indignities she suffered at the hands of her boss, as well as others. "He thought that our race was moving too fast and that I was not ready to move up to more prestigious employment. My progress was slowed." One white researcher complained about having to sit near Dorothy as she did her work. But Dorothy was determined to control her anger and maintain her dignity despite this disgraceful affront. She movingly recounts her reaction: "I swelled up inside and didn't cry in her presence. But oh dear what does one do?" She then shares a source of strength and comfort: "So many have described having to bear up under insulting situations to put food on the table. Maya Angelou would write a poem entitled '[Still I Rise](#),' published in 1978. I would like to have given it to this woman right after she made her remark to me." Dorothy's situation is emblematic of what so many Black people have faced, and echoes the cries of today's Black Lives Matter movement, as well as Black people through the ages in America. It's painful to acknowledge that The History Center ([then the DeWitt Historical Society](#)) can't claim to have been any different than other employers of the time. That our atrocious behavior wasn't unusual doesn't diminish its shame. We're grateful to Dorothy for putting a spotlight on this sordid part of our past, and we're deeply sorry for what she experienced at our supposedly enlightened institution.

Dorothy worked here until 1960 and later went on to work at Cornell University. Last year she celebrated her 100th birthday and is currently working on her autobiography. Her materials are part of our [Black History Collection](#), and when her autobiography is published it will be added to a Dorothy Bliss Collection.

[Building the Covid-19 Pandemic Archival Collection](#)



Anna Kelles, former Tompkins County Legislator, now New York State Assembly Member

The Covid pandemic has been a calamity that has tested government on every level since early 2020, and is still doing so today.

In Tompkins County early in the crisis local officials moved quickly to provide critical support and information to the community at large. One was Tompkins County Legislator Anna Kelles. From the earliest days of the emergency she began compiling local, regional, state, and national information and resources on the pandemic and critical responses to it, and sent them out via email to several local listservs in a tremendous effort to reach as much of

the public as possible.

She included useful data on myriad aspects of the pandemic response at many levels, and also

covered a broad array of other topics helpful to the public at this challenging time. Specifics on food distribution to people in need; social justice issues; school and college reopening plans; regional drought concerns; mental health support; voting safety during the pandemic, are all just a few of the many topics she covers. The information has been buttressed by Kelles' warm and personal additions to the main text, conveying a palpable concern for the people of the community.

The History Center has collected every one of these summaries and added them to our Covid-19 Pandemic Archival Collection. A curated selection of 31 of them have been digitized and added to the [New York Heritage Digital Collections](#) website, and will be available to the public in February.

These indispensable reports will serve as the underpinning of the history of 2020 in Tompkins County and beyond, and will be used by researchers for generations to come.

The Covid-19 Pandemic Archival Collection is an ongoing collection. Contact archives@thehistorycenter.net to share materials and reflections of your experiences of Covid-19 in Tompkins County to help us build the collection for future generations.

Digitization of these materials was made possible by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities CARES Act funding.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this collection do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Two Year Grant from Institute of Museum & Library Sciences & Museum Association of New York to Grow Oral History Access

The [Museum Association of New York](#) (MANY) is thrilled to announce that 98 museums from across New York State have been selected to participate in "[Building Capacity, Creating Sustainability, Growing Accessibility](#)", an IMLS CARES Act grant project designed to help museums impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic share their collections and reach audiences who cannot physically visit their museums. 200 staff will be trained to use new hardware and software to develop programs that will engage their communities and reach new audiences.

In this two-year program, museums will identify a program to virtually deliver to their audiences, focusing on developing programs from stories found in their collections that reveal cultural and racial diversity in their communities.

The History Center in Tompkins County is excited to use this opportunity to expand access to our [Oral History](#) collections, focusing on those narratives that represent marginalized and under-represented stories and voices from our community and archival collections. Staff leads for this project, Cindy Kjellander-Cantu and Zoë Van Nostrand, have selected six collections from our existing Oral History archives as part of this project: Indigenous Experiences in Tompkins County, Herstory, Local Sisters of Change, Immigration & Food, Black Experiences in Tompkins County, and a new collection by Civic Ensemble's [Re-Entry Theatre Program](#) which includes interviews of Tompkins County residents who were formerly incarcerated, or have court experiences in the county.

We intend to make over 40 of these interviews available on free public streaming platforms with accompanying curriculum guides, lesson plans, and transcripts for use by educators and community members to learn about the rich and varied experiences of our region.

November 28th, 2020



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Zoë Van Nostrand
Marketing & Visitor Experience Coordinator
607-273-8284 ext. 229
community@thehistorycenter.net

**The History Center in Tompkins County Selected as a
Museum Association of New York Museum Partner for
Building Capacity, Creating Sustainability, Growing Accessibility**

The Museum Association of New York (MANY) is thrilled to announce that 98 museums from across New York State have been selected to participate in "Building Capacity, Creating Sustainability, Growing Accessibility", an IMLS CARES Act grant project designed to help museums impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic share their collections and reach audiences who cannot physically visit their museums. 200 staff will be trained to use new hardware and software to develop programs that will engage their communities and reach new audiences.

"We are honored to be awarded IMLS CARES act funding and excited to be able to make an impact on the work of our colleagues and their museums across New York State," said Erika Sanger, MANY Executive Director. "We are living in an age of transition, experiencing a radical shift in our ways of learning and communicating. The group selected captures the diversity of our shared history in NY and our nation. The stories embodied in the museums' collections and the storytelling talents of their interpretive staff are the heart of the project."

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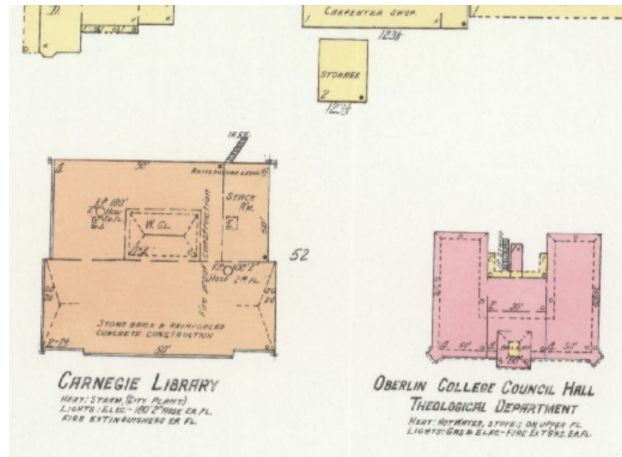
We've hit the ground running and already have two volunteer interns dedicated to the project for its first semester. Raia Guttman, a local high school student, is assisting in the office with organizing and digitizing the collections (Raia is a History Center Youth Ambassador, and was one of the student interviewers for the 2019 Herstory Oral History project), and Sophia Shi, a recent graduate of New York University with degrees in Film & Television and Business, is assisting with transcribing interviews remotely.

This project was made possible by the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#) and the [Museum Association of New York](#).

HistoryForge Expands in Upstate NY and Beyond!

HistoryForge is pleased to announce that our Oberlin, OH and Auburn, NY HistoryForge websites are up and that our testing partner communities are starting to hold volunteer transcription sessions based on our [Ithaca model](#). In addition, our partner in Elmira, NY has just hired a project coordinator and will be up and running soon.

Eve and Bob and several members of the Ithaca HistoryForge community trained volunteers in Oberlin in their first virtual transcription session in January and will do the same with Auburn in February and Elmira soon after.



If you have friends or family in any of these communities, please let them know about HistoryForge!

- Ithaca NY - historyforge.net
- Auburn NY - auburn.historyforge.net
- Oberlin OH - oberlin.historyforge.net
- Elmira NY - *Coming soon!*

All locations are eagerly seeking additional volunteers to help with the time intensive work of transcribing these historic records and maps. Please contact Eve Snyder (historyforge@thehistorycenter.net) or go to the volunteer page for a specific project to get involved!

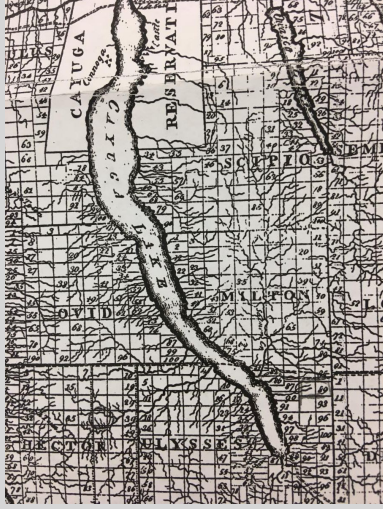
HistoryForge has it's own social media pages now! We're in early stages and could use some more followers, but please find HistoryForge on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#) to keep up to date as this innovative project continues to grow!



Then & Now - Ithaca Journal Column

The Balloting Book, and Other Documents Relating to the Military Bounty Lands - *by John Wertis - Ulysses Town Historian*

"The Balloting Book, and Other Documents Relating to the Military Bounty Lands in the State of New York, 1825 contains a frontispiece that is a map of the Military Tract as it existed in 1792. It shows the five easternmost Finger Lakes, Lots on 28 Townships laid out geometrically, and two reservations - the Onondaga Reservation at the foot of the Salt Lake and the Cayuga Reservation on either side of the north end of Cayuga Lake. The book documents the military enlistment policies of the Continental Congress and the State of New York and the subsequent fulfillment of land grant obligations to the



veterans of the Revolutionary War.

On the fifth page one finds an “Extract from the Journal of Congress” dated September 16, 1776, relative to the formation of the Continental Army that states “eighty-eight Battalions be enlisted as soon as possible, to serve during the present war....” It goes on to list the number of battalions expected from each of the thirteen colonies. New York was expected to raise eight battalions. Furthermore, it states that “twenty dollars shall be given as bounty to each non-commissioned officer and private soldier, who shall enlist to serve during the present war.”

[READ MORE](#)

Then & Now was a monthly local history column published in the Ithaca Journal for over 30 years. You can find past Then & Now columns on our [website](#).

[Do You Remember Local Snowstorms?](#)

Local history writer Jim Farfaglia is looking for stories about major Central New York snowstorms. In 2015, Farfaglia published *Voices in the Storm*, a look back at the Blizzard of '66 that included memories from over 200 Central New Yorkers. Now he is compiling stories that cover memorable winter storms from the last two hundred years. Did you, your family members or friends survive a particularly brutal winter? If so, please can contact Farfaglia via email, sjimf903@twcny.rr.com, or his website, www.jimfarfaglia.com, or by telephone, 315 402-6164 (leave a message).



[The History Center in Tompkins County](#)

Exhibit Hall, Research Library, Archives, and staff offices are located at 110 North Tioga St. (Inside the [Tompkins Center for History & Culture](#)) Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

Web: www.thehistorycenter.net

Phone: 607-273-8284

Email: Staff emails can be found [here](#)

Hours: Thursday-Saturday 10am-5pm*

**Please note our hours have changed due to COVID-19 and may be adjusted on a week to week basis depending on local health recommendations.*

Follow us on social media
[@TompkinsHistory](#)



[Contact Us!](#)