

• A Look Back.....In History

1788 – Herkimer County was formed. The area included what is now Oneida County.

1794 – The first meeting of the courts was held in January at the Presbyterian Church in what is now the Village of New Hartford. Colonel Colbraith then of Herkimer County attended this first session. The church was not finished when court was held and a story is related that the court convened on this very cold day and the bench announced that it would have to adjourn because of the cold. Colonel Colbraith was equal to the problem and produced a bottle of gin which revived the circulation of the men and court continued.

1798 March 15 – The County of Oneida was erected by an act, which set provision for holding courts and for the erection of a court house and jail. The establishment of the county included in its boundaries the present counties of Lewis, Oneida, St. Lawrence, Jefferson and Oswego.

1798 – Colonel William Colbraith of Rome was appointed Sheriff of Oneida County. A genial Irishman, Colbraith was a veteran of the revolutionary war and was previously Sheriff of Herkimer County. Colbraith was appointed to one-year term.

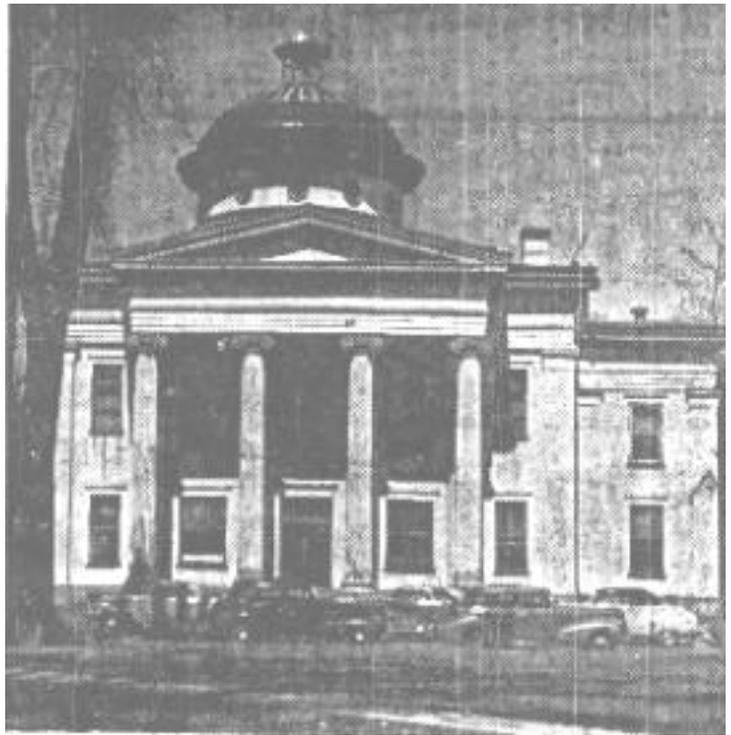
1800 – Dominick Lynch donated a site for the Rome court house and jail located one mile from the Fort Stanwix in the Village of Rome.

1801 – Hugh White donated land in Whitesboro (on what is presently Park Ave.) for the building of a courthouse.

1802 January – The County's first jail, with walls three feet thick, was built in Whitestown near what is now the Village Park. Prior to this, prisoners were housed in Herkimer County. The Rome jail followed shortly afterward.

1806-7 – **Built were courthouses near the jail in Whitestown and in Rome**. The Whitestown Court building is still in use as the Town Hall and Court. It was said that it would cost \$4000 in taxes to do both courthouses.

1808 – The Rome Court house opens. The courts would now be held alternately in Rome and Whitesboro.



Rome Court House built in 1806

1813 – It was proposed to build the first Utica Court house on Chancellor Square near John Street.

1817 – Prisoners of the Rome Jail attempted to escape by setting fire to the jail. As related “ It was long before the doors opened, and they came near dying. One was killed in attempt to get out or suffocated.” Five of the prisoners were indicted for arson, tried and convicted, and sentenced to be hung. The day of execution was mid winter and it is related that men, women and children came in sleighs from Boonville and other directions riding all night to be present at the spectacle. Hours before the execution time, a reprieve cam from the governor, commuting the sentence to imprisonment in the state prison. Being deprived of the real hanging, a number of the spectators erected a gallows in the woods and hung the prisoners in effigy.

1818 – Proposed in 1813, the first Utica school, Courthouse and Town Hall were built on Academy Street at Chancellor Park – Utica was created as a separate town from Whitesboro.

1821 – John Hinman became the first elected Sheriff p He was elected to a term of 3 years. The Sheriff kept the jails, served court papers and transported prisoners. These roles continued to be the primary functions of the department until the 1940's.

1846 – County Court was created by state constitution.

1847 – A new Rome Courthouse was opened on the east side of James Street.

1848 March 17 – “The Rome Courthouse and Jail in this village were entirely destroyed by fire on the afternoon and evening of March 15, 1848.” The prisoners, 3 men and 1 woman, were removed safely. The fire started in the jail and spread to the courthouse 40 feet away connected by a one-story building. The Courthouse looked like the building currently in use in Whitestown.

1848 – Utica became a half shire town, but the courts continued to meet in Whitestown until 1852.

1851 – A replacement for the Rome jail and courthouse destroyed by fire was built at the cost of \$12,000. The construction used columns from the burnt courthouse. The courthouse is in use to this date. The Rome Courthouse was enlarged in 1897 and again in 1903.

1851 – **The Whitestown jail is closed and a new one is created on Mohawk Street, Utica.** This would be in used until 1883. The Whitestown Courthouse and jail reverted back to the heirs of Hugh White according to the original deed. The property and building were sold to the town for use as a Town Hall and is still used today. The jail was converted to a dwelling.



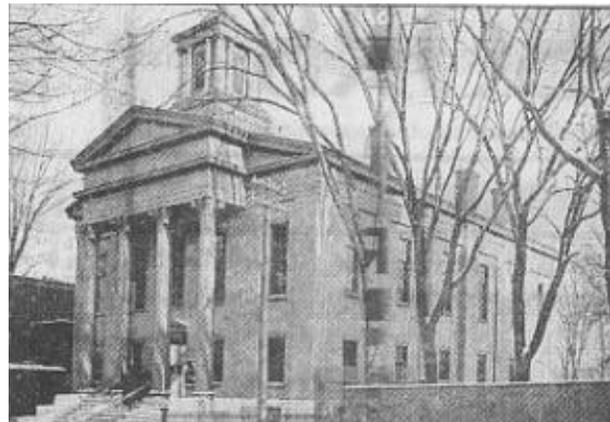
Mohawk St. Jail Utica, 1853

1851 – **A new Utica Courthouse on John Street was finished** This building was built immediately to the rear of the old one built in 1818. The County Board of Supervisors met alternately in Utica and Rome.

1860 – The legendary Pony Express began service between St. Joseph, MO and Sacramento, CA.

1882 – A new jail was built in Rome on North James Street in back of the courthouse. It would actually be on the corner of Stanwix and Church Streets.

1909 – New Utica Courthouse opened on the corner of Elizabeth and Charlotte Streets. The Board of Supervisors opposed this new construction. A planning commission appointed by the state legislature took the County Board to court to get the funding totaling 1 million dollars for this project.



John St. Courthouse 1952

1908-9 – New York State created the probation commission and probation services were then provided to courts in Oneida County.



1911 – **A new county jail was built at 731 Bleeker Street, Utica.** It was fronted by a Victorian house that served as the Sheriff's residence. Sheriff's received no salary and were allowed to keep fees from serving legal papers and transporting prisoners. An Observer Dispatch article reported that this house was built in early 1880 and torn down in 1967.

1911 July – An escape from Rome jail resulted in a search in Rome that proved negative. There were sightings near Delta Dam and the Black River locks in the canal.

1911 August 23 – A resolution was proposed and passed before the County Commissioners. This may have been the first Oneida County Work Offender Program. (See inset)

1912 – “The experience of stone braking does not appear to accomplish what it is designed to do. It is not expected to be financially profitable, but to justify itself by keeping the population down.” Stone breaking was discontinued.

1913 – A State prison commission reports that the Utica jail was housing 106 prisoners with 30 cells. It further notes that none of the jails, lockups and police stations in Oneida County are modern except the city jail in Rome. “Vernon lockup OK. Camden lockup condemned. New Hartford in basement fairly good with little use. Present quarters in Boonville are objectionable. Clinton lockup not satisfactory. No facilities for sanitation in Oriskany Falls. Recommended that Waterville provide a sanitary lockup without further delay.” The report shows admission for the Utica jail from January to July was 1,634 and in Rome jail but 223, showing a need for a larger jail in the county. It is also noted with regret that the County Commissioners had removed 2 guards and thus the breaking of stones by the prisoners had ceased, causing a lost to the county besides not giving the prisoners proper exercise. The report recommends building a newer larger jail.

1913 July – The prison commissioner visits the Rome jail. Population 10 male sentenced, 20 male held for Grand Jury, 2 female sentenced prisoners. Recommended new boiler and new mattresses.

1913 August – Headline in Rome Sentinel – Deputy frustrates Rome jail escape, saws to be used in escape were secreted in a shoebox and found during a search.

1913 August – A news article reports “28 men, not one a resident of this county and most of them giving their place of residence as outside the state, have been taken from trains in the Town of Verona the past few days, by railroad detectives usually as they just on the point of leaving Oneida County. They were then rushed to the justice of peace and sentenced to jail for 5 to 20 days. In that additional burdens have been heaped upon the taxpayers of the county who must board the prisoners. To board a prisoner a week, including the cost of board, salaries of jailers, matrons etc will exceed \$3.00. A prisoner committed for 20 days meant that taxpayers have to pay from \$11 to \$15 additional for him. Those who have to pay the bills say they would much prefer to have the train riders get out of the county than become burdens of Oneida County. Sheriff Donnelly would also much prefer to have some other county bear the burden of all these arrests that are made about this time each year. The population of the Rome jail is 55 men and 3 women of that 21 are court prisoners.

Resolution

Whereas, Many non-residents of the county of Oneida are being sentenced to the county jails at Utica and Rome for trivial offenses and

Whereas, All prisoners retained in said jails are supported in idleness at an expense and with out profit to said county,

Resolved, That the Sheriff of Oneida County be hereby empowered and instructed to procure and keep on hand a constant supply of stones purchased in the open market at the lowest cost to said county, together with a sufficient number of stone hammers for use by all able bodied prisoners retained in said jail and be it further,

Resolved, That said Sheriff hereby is instructed to keep all able bodied prisoners confined to said jail on sentences employed breaking stones for at least 8 hours per day on al days excepting Sundays and that he sell said stones, when broken, for the best price obtainable therefor the proceeds thereof to belong to the county of Oneida New York and to be expended toward the maintenance of said jails and prisoners, and be it further

Resolved, That the forgoing be put into operation forthwith.

1914 – New York State recommends closing of the Rome jail.

1918 – To fuel the Rome jail in the winter due to a coal shortage during below zero weather in January, prison crews cut wood from the county farm on Bell Road. Jail trustees act as firemen keeping track of the boiler. Also, prisoners planted crops on the Bell Farm on Bell Road in the summer, demonstrating that the prisoners earned their keep and also saved the county money.

1922 November 28 – The county got its first woman supervisor appointed to the Board of Supervisors.

1934 – New York State Law requires Sheriffs be paid a salary and that fees revert to the county. The first Sheriff paid a salary was Sheriff J. Bradbury, a German, who was paid \$6,000.

1948 – **The Sheriff's Department entered a new phase by establishing a 2 car night highway patrol housed at the Airport terminal building.** Development of the patrol led to reports of controversy from the State Police.

1952 – The Legal Aid Society was created by the Oneida County Bar Association.

1958 May 7 – An Oneida County Grand Jury, apparently powerless to develop legal evidence upon which to act against crime and corruption in Utica, has left behind an indictment against the apathy of the citizenry. In an unusual letter to Utica Clergy, the Grand Jury stated “We have found.... a lethargy on the part of a sizable group of citizens to follow through on things that need to be done to make this area a better place to live-in.... The lethargy of the citizens of Oneida County and past lack of action is perhaps the great strength of the organized criminal element alleged to be with us today.



1960 – New York State passed a law requiring that all police officers have at least 80 hours of training.

1960 – **A Water Patrol was established in the Sheriff's Department and expanded in 1962 and 1966.**

1961 September – Oneida County was preparing preliminary plans for a new jail to be built in the Town of Whitestown. (Current Jail)

1961 – Family Court System established.

1965 August – Old Rome jail demolished. It was 83 years old. Some of the handsome gray granite blocks of the 83-year-old structure will be preserved and transported to Fort Bull in Rome.

1965 – Public Defenders office opened.

1965 May – Dedication of new Jail on Judd Road. It would be called the Law Enforcement Building and would include a jail and Sheriff Headquarters. The Highway Patrol was installed in this new facility and radio communications was moved from the airport. 164 cells – 20 female cells – Cost 1.7 million dollars, Archie G. Eastman was Sheriff. The Utica and Rome jails were closed and later demolished. This officially replaced the old dual jail system in Utica and Rome.



1968 – Former Utica Police Inspector Joseph Picolla was appointed Sheriff, increased staff and instituted the civil service system of appointment of new Deputies.

1969 – Juvenile Aid Training, and Criminal Investigation Divisions were established.

1975 – New York State required that all counties provide a non-secure detention facility for children awaiting court. This was opened in 1975 at the former superintendent's home at Broadacres.

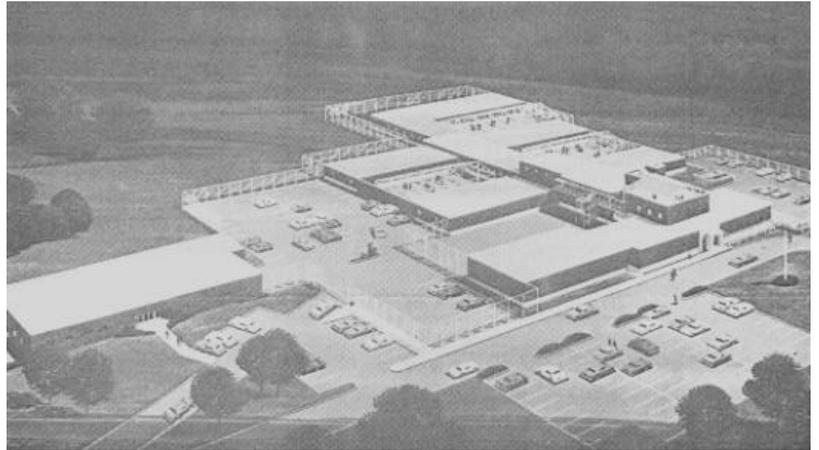
1980 – An Emergency Response Team is created in the Law Enforcement Division.

1984 – The Sheriff's Department establishes patrol K-9 Teams.

1985 November – A new 40-cell block at the Oneida County Jail is completed. Ground was broken in August 1984 for the \$3.4 million improvement project. Besides building a new cellblock, an Administrative Building was built to house Sheriff's Administrative Offices, Law Enforcement and Communications. Moving the administrative offices away from the main building makes room for another 14 cells plus a contact visitation area. William A. Hasenauer was the Sheriff.

1987 July 3 – As of this morning, there were 202

male prisoners in the jail that is designed to hold 195 male inmates.



1985 Artist Rendering of Jail and New Law Enforcement Building

1989 – Portable Dormitory Detention units, guard station and connecting corridor have been installed at the rear of the jail to provide temporary housing due to overcrowding.

1991 – Sheriff Gerald F. Washburn announced that the first Sheriff's Patrol Field Office was opened in the Village of Waterville. This is the first time deputies would be stationed at a location other than the Law Enforcement Building in Oriskany.

1992 – Sheriff's Department begins a D.A.R.E. program for elementary schools throughout Oneida County.



Jail Construction 1996

1993 – Offenders Work Program became operational. Alternative to incarceration, that diverts jail bound offenders into supervised community labor.

1995 – Sheriff Daniel G. Middaugh appoints Lt. Karen Szczesnaik the first female Captain of the Corrections Division.

1995 December 11 – The county's 911 Emergency telephone system is turned on with 4 Public Safety Answering Points. One each in Utica, Rome, New Hartford and at the Sheriff's Law Enforcement Building.

1996 April 7 – More than \$23 million in contracts are awarded so work will begin this month on the long awaited project to expand the cramped and over-crowded county jail.

1996 May 13 – The county jail made tobacco free. Inmates and employees will soon be prohibited from smoking or chewing tobacco.

1996 October 13 – Already spending nearly \$30 million on a jail for 592 adult inmates, the county discusses construction of a lockup for some troubled juveniles. The county presently averages 6 to 8 juveniles housed elsewhere for about 1.8 million per year.

1996 October 24 – Four temporary modular units called the “Arthur Buildings” opened. These Units are dorm style and will operate under the new “Direct Supervision” method that will be used in the new expanded jail. The opening of these units expanded cell capacity to 401 from 359. Seven portable dormitory detention units installed in 1989 were removed to make room for the jail expansion projects. These units added 70 beds to the 289 bed jail and were anticipated to be usable for 5 years.

1997 – February 8 – A \$1.4 million federal aid package for the county jail means the Whitestown facility under construction will house up to 35 federal prisoners.

1997 July 26 – Camden Village considers dropping its police department and having deputies patrol there as the village looks to make up shrinking revenues.

1997 August 20 – Camden Village residents turn out in force to oppose any move to eliminate their police department in favor of Sheriff’s protections.

1998 – City of Rome consolidates its public safety communications at the County of Oneida 911 center at the Sheriff’s Law Enforcement Building

1998 – June – The newly constructed Correctional Facility is opened. This facility is designed to house 600



1998 Opening of New Correctional Facility

inmates.

1998 – July 29 - The Sheriff’s Department celebrates its 200th year anniversary.

1999 July – The former Griffiss Air Force Base hosts the national Woodstock Music Festival .



1999 – 911 Communications begins construction of new building located to the rear of the Sheriff’s Public Safety Complex.



911 Building construction 1999

Executions

Excerpts from Trials and Tribulations – A Judicial History of Oneida County by John J. Walsh.

During the 19th century, the penalty of death was carried out by hanging the condemned person. This awesome responsibility fell upon the Sheriff of the county. At first the Sheriff would choose a particular spot in the county and select an appropriate tree. Thousands of people would flock to witness the event. In 1840 the State Legislature prohibited public hangings and decreed that all hangings should be done within the jail itself or an enclosed jail yard. In 1889 hanging was replaced by electrocution in a state prison.

On June 16, 1801, George Peters, a Montauk Indian who resided in Brothertown, was tried and convicted in Rome for the murder of his wife. It appears that his was overly friendly with another man, and when George found her drunk in a local tavern with the other man, he hit her over the head with a stick thus killing her. On August 28, 1801 under the direction of the Sheriff, he was hanged upon the hill west of the Village of Whitesboro.

The next case involved John Tuhi who killed his brother with an axe on May 1, 1817. The two men, Indians who lived at Brothertown were intoxicated and quarreled over a sum of money. John became so enraged that he split his brother's head with an axe. Tried in the Rome Courthouse, he was found guilty and hanged by the Sheriff on July 25, 1817 from a tree on Corn Hill. The Sheriff, and his Deputies, joined by accompany of the infantry started in Whitesboro and proceeded slowly through Utica. The military force was necessary to force the way through a waiting crowd of 15,000.

Robert Miller was convicted on circumstantial evidence of killing a man during a drinking affair in Utica. In April of 1839 he was hanged in the Whitesboro jail.

To Mary Runkle went the questionable distinction of being the only woman ever executed in Oneida County. She was convicted of strangling her husband in Utica and was suspected of drowning her two children in Montgomery County. Convicted in 1847, she was hanged in the Whitesboro jail. To spare her the sight of the gallows, a whole was cut in the upstairs floor and the rope passed down to the office below. She was hanged while sitting in a chair.

On November 1855, John McCarron who killed a man with a knife during a fight in Boonville and was executed in the jail yard in Rome.

In January 1869, William Henry Carswell was executed in the jail yard in Rome for the murder of a little 8 year old girl in the Town of Annsville. Large crowds of people assembled and the 33rd Rome regiment of militia 200 strong had to take up positions outside the fence.

During Christmas time 1880, William Henry Ostrander shot and killed his brother at west Camden. A short respite was granted to permit him an appeal. The appeal was based upon a claim that while the trial was in progress, the jurors were occasionally taken for a walk around Rome. While on a walk the jury was taken to the Evans brewery on Liberty Street and several jurymen admitted that they had a "small beer". Others insisted that it was half a barrel. The Appellate Court decided that the fact would not violate the conviction. Ostrander was hanged in 1883 at the jail yard in the county jail on Mohawk Street. This was the last hanging at this jail as the jail closed shortly afterwards.

Clement Arthur Day convicted of stabbing to death a woman, with whom he had been living, was hanged in the jail yard on Bleeker Street in 1888.

On Sunday morning in January 1888, Virgil Jackson, who was having an affair with Mrs. Norton Metcalf, walked her home from church services in the Town of Augusta. When they reached her home, Mr. Norton Metcalf came outside and protested the attention being paid to his wife. Virgil proceeded to draw a gun and shoot Mr. Metcalf. Convicted, Virgil was hanged at the Bleeker Street jail in 1889, the last person to be hanged in Oneida County.