

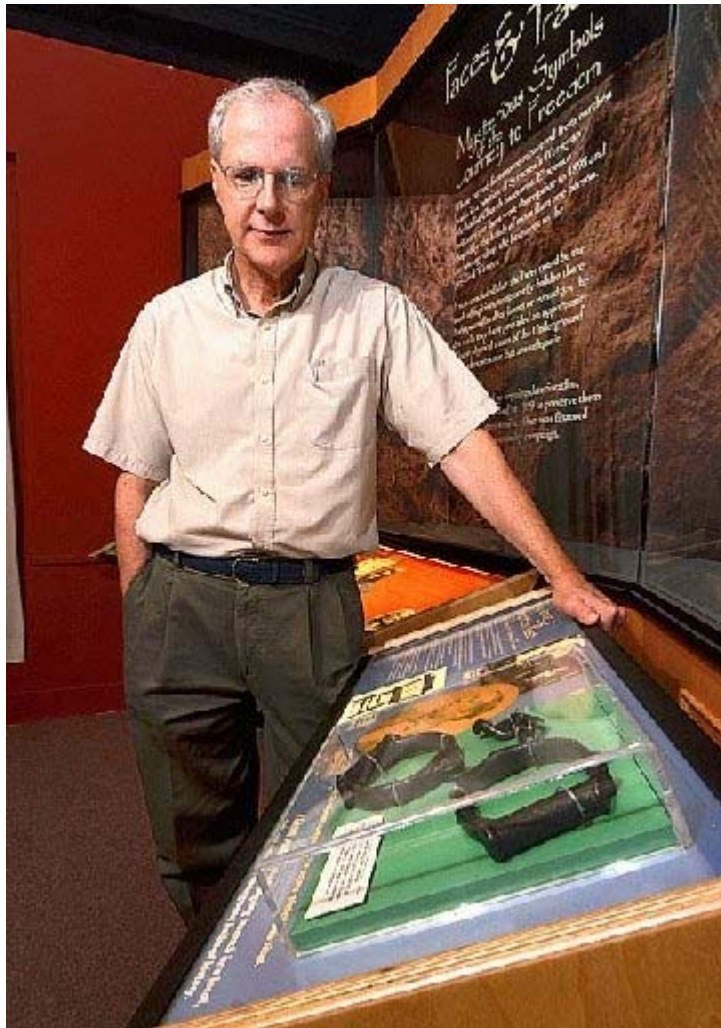
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## Onondaga Historical Association opens new display marking the 160th anniversary of the Jerry Rescue

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By



Dick Blume/The Post Standard

Dennis Connors, curator of history at the Onondaga Historical Association, stands next to a new display Monday about the rescue of fugitive slave William "Jerry" Henry in 1851 in Syracuse. The new exhibit will open on Saturday. The museum is at 321 Montgomery St.

Saturday is the anniversary of the famed Jerry Rescue.

It happened 160 years ago, in Syracuse's Clinton Square. The building's gone, the memories linger.

In 1851, a fugitive slave, William Henry, aka "Jerry," was forcibly set free from federal authorities. The event rippled across the continent. Southern newspapers condemned it. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass praised it and several of the conspirators fled to Canada, including 'Jerry' who died in Kingston, Ontario, just two years later. He was 41 years old.

A new display of items connected to the rescue opens Saturday at the Onondaga Historical Association museum at 321 Montgomery St. On Sunday, the OHA will host a free lecture by Warren F. Broderick, archivist emeritus of the state Archives in Albany. Broderick will talk about the strange history of a painting of radical John Brown being led to the gallows. The talk's at 2 p.m.

The painting, which was destroyed, was by Louis Ransom, a Utica artist. Dennis Connors, the association's curator of history, said the painting generated a tremendous amount of national

interest in the months just before outbreak of the Civil War. It was displayed in Syracuse and at P.T. Barnum's museum in New York City.

### **The Jerry Rescue** from **Jeremy Ross** on **Vimeo**.

The new OHA exhibit, which will run for a month, will include a new video production of "Jerry's" story by Jeremy Ross and Michelle Revoir as well as a wooden chair made by the former slave in Kingston. The association has a permanent exhibit on the Underground Railroad, called "Freedom Bound," about Syracuse's role as a strong abolitionist community. This includes the manacles that shackled "Jerry" at his first arrest.

"Jerry" was the son of a white, slave-owner father and a black mother, who was a slave. He had fled a plantation in Missouri and was working in a barrel shop in Syracuse when he was arrested as a fugitive. After a local crowd freed him from federal authorities, he was hid in homes here and in the village of Mexico, before being spirited to Canada, where he worked in a furniture factory.

The so-called "Jerry Chair" was donated to the historical association in 1925 by the son of the man "Jerry" made it for. The rescue is recalled in a memorial in Clinton Square by sculptor Sharon BuMann. It's opposite the southwest corner of the square where the "Jerry Rescue" building stood.

In 1990, when the monument was dedicated, I traveled to Kingston, looking for traces of William Henry and his burial place. With the help of an Anglican Church archivist, I turned up a record of Jerry's death. He is believed to have been buried in an unmarked grave in Cataraqui Cemetery, just outside of Kingston.

### **A first step**

Last summer, I wrote about the effort of a group called the Willard Cemetery Memorial Project to recognize the thousands of former Willard residents who are buried in unmarked graves in a large field near the hospital. Willard stopped taking patients back in 1995.

Originally, burials were marked by a pylon with a number. Over time, those markers have been lost under a sea of grass and trees.

Colleen Kelly Spelley of Waterloo heads the project, which is trying to match names to numbers in the cemetery, so far without much success, because of privacy laws. Last week, the group took a first step toward memorializing the

patients: installation of a sign at the cemetery entrance. It reads:

“Willard Cemetery. This cemetery was used from 1870 to 2000. Here laid in rest are 5,776 departed Willard patients.”

Colleen said in an e-mail that she’s working with John Allen, assistant to the commissioner of the state Office of Mental Health, to expand the project’s goals. Allen’s to be at Ovid Firehouse Community Room Oct. 13 to give a talk on further plans for the cemetery, including cutting underbrush, planting wild flowers, creating wheel-chair accessible paths and reconstructing a section of a parking lot.

Colleen said members of her committee agreed to take a course to work with computers in searching records. They would seek permission from kin to memorialize patients by inscribing their names on a obelisk in the cemetery.

### **Moose recall**

Members of a Moose basketball team held a 50-year reunion over the weekend. They are Jimmy McDonald, Dennis O’Donnell, Jim Derito, Tom McCarthy, Terry Quigg, John Kelly, George Dooher, Pete Ganley, Dick Mulherin and Mark Wadach. All players were 12 years old at the time.

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