



A Sampling of History and Trivia about Cayuga County



History Happened Here

- Settled in 1799 by Col. John Hardenbergh, a Revolutionary War officer, Auburn was once the largest community in New York state.
- The Seward House, located in Auburn, was once the home of William H. Seward, co-founder of the Republican Party, Secretary of State to Presidents Lincoln and Johnson, and a leading figure in the purchase of Alaska, then known as Seward's Folly.
- Auburn Correctional Facility was originally constructed in 1816 and is the oldest continuously operating maximum-security prison in North America. The woodworking shop at the prison was run by Gustav Stickley, a leading figure in the American Craftsman movement and founder of what is now called the L. & J.G. Stickley furniture company in Manlius, New York.
- In 1852, the pastor of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church on Sand Beach Road bought a 70-acre farm next to the church and built a boarding school for boys. Today that building is the Springside Inn, a popular restaurant, banquet and lodging facility. The church itself is now called "The Point" and is a unique meeting and banquet space.

Notable Figures

- After the Civil War, **Harriet Tubman** settled in Auburn, having completed her heroic work on the Underground Railroad. She is said to have led scores of slaves to freedom. Today, visitors can tour the Harriet Tubman Home, the home she built for aged blacks, which is part of the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park in Auburn. Fort Hill Cemetery, also in Auburn, is Tubman's final resting place.
- **Henry Wells**, founder of Wells Fargo, American Express and Wells College, began his career in Port Byron as a shoemaker and mechanic. Wells College, in the picturesque village of Aurora, was established as a women's college in 1868 and remained an all-female institution until 2004, when it became co-educational.

- **Millard Fillmore**, our 13th president, was born, raised and trained in law near the village of Moravia. A replica of his cabin is located at Fillmore Glen State Park.
- **Abner Doubleday**, baseball's legendary founder, spent much of his life in Auburn. Auburn's minor league baseball team, the Auburn Doubledays, is named in his honor.
- The E.B. Morgan House in Aurora is named in honor of notable resident **E.B. Morgan**, the first president of Wells Fargo & Company, founder of the United States Express Company and first president of American Express Company. Today, the historic E.B. Morgan House is a distinctive lakeside facility designed for lodging, special events and retreats.

Arts & Architecture

- **Seymour Public Library** in Auburn was designed by Carrère and Hastings, a New York City architecture firm that also designed the New York Public Library.
- **St. Matthew's Church** in Moravia (c.1820) is decorated by extraordinary Bavarian oak carvings and is also where Millard Fillmore, the 13th U.S. president, was married.
- The **Willard Memorial Chapel** in Auburn was designed by Louis C. Tiffany and is the only complete unaltered Tiffany chapel known to exist. The chapel interior showcases 14 opalescent nave windows, a nine-paneled rose window, nine Mooresque-styled chandeliers, a large mosaic bronze and gilt tablet, hand-carved furnishings of oak inlaid, a ceiling with gold leaf stencils and extensive mosaic flooring.
- New York State Governor DeWitt Clinton laid the cornerstone of the **Masonic Lodge** in Aurora in 1819. The Masonic emblems incorporated in the design of the structure still survive today.

Agriculture

- Cayuga County is the number one soybean producing county in New York state.
- Cayuga County is the second highest milk-producing county in New York state.
- In the 1800s over 90 percent of the population in Cayuga County was engaged in agriculture as an occupation. Today it's less than 2 percent.



What's in a Name?



- Cayuga County is named for the Cayuga Native American tribe, one of the original five members of the Iroquois Confederacy. Cayuga means “people of the wetlands.”
- Members of the Cayuga Nation who inhabited what is now the village of Aurora named their settlement Deawendote, or “place of constant dawn,” because the eastern ridge above the village prolongs the dawn. Today, Aurora is sometimes referred to as “Little Florida,” because the microclimate favorably tempers the weather in the village and along the lakeshore.
- Military Tract Township # 3, originally called Cato, was so large that a petition to split the township was initiated. Some were for the split and some were against it. In the end the state government passed the law authorizing the split. Those in favor of the split celebrated by naming their town “Victory” and “Conquest.” Those that opposed the split named their town “Ira,” which comes from the Latin word for anger! The fourth town kept its original name, Cato, named after the Roman statesman of that name.
- The town of Scipio, formed in 1790, was named for the Roman general of that name. Over 45 Revolutionary War veterans and 156 Union veterans were laid to rest in Scipio cemeteries, where their monuments continue to be preserved and cared for today.
- The meaning of Owasco Lake is “floating bridge” or “crossing point.”
- The meaning of Skaneateles Lake is “long lake.”

Geography

- Cayuga County has eight lakes: Owasco, Cayuga, Skaneateles, Cross, Duck, Otter, Como and the Great Lake Ontario.
- There are 11 Finger Lakes (listed west to east): Conesus, Hemlock, Canadice, Honeoye, Canandaigua, Keuka, Seneca, Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles and Otisco.
 - All 11 are north-flowing lakes into Lake Ontario.
 - Seneca Lake is the deepest Finger Lake at 618 feet.
 - Cayuga Lake is the longest Finger Lake with a length of nearly 40 miles.
- Cayuga County has more freshwater coastline than any other county in New York state.
- The village of Union Springs on Cayuga Lake has its own island called Frontenac Island.
- Little Sodus Bay, located in Fair Haven, is the brown trout capital of the world.

Along the Erie Canal

- Cayuga County has 12 miles of canal, from the Richmond Aqueduct in Montezuma to Lock 51 on the Onondaga/Cayuga County line. The Canalway Trail, which follows the historic canal towpath, is a recreational trail for hikers, bicyclists, horseback riders and, in winter, snowmobilers and cross-country skiers.
- The Old Brutus Historical Society in Weedsport houses a full-scale mock-up of an early Erie Canal boat cabin interior.
- Erie Canal Lock 52 was one of the few locks along the Erie Canal that allowed boats to travel in both directions at the same time. The remains of the lock can now be seen from the New York State Thruway near Weedsport.
- Visitors can explore walking trails and get an authentic glimpse into life on the Erie Canal in the mid-19th and early 20th century at the Port Byron Old Erie Canal Heritage Park.



We Did It First

- The first commercially successful system of sound film was invented in 1923, in the Case Research Lab in Auburn. The rights were later sold to Fox Studios.
- The insanity plea was first used as a defense in a case represented by William H. Seward in Auburn.
- The first electric chair and the first successful electrocution were completed at Auburn Correctional Facility.