

**Remembering Our Founding Fathers**

**OSWEGO COUNTY** – Oswego County was incorporated on March 1, 1816 and the Legislature commemorated this milestone as well as the county’s founding fathers at its monthly meeting that same month. Legislator Shawn Doyle, District 3, chairman of the Oswego County Bicentennial committee and historian for the town of Richland, presented another “History Moment” to showcase these men.

“As the county was founded, New York State appointed three representatives to act as commissioners who would make recommendations for the first officers, locate the county seats and select sites for county buildings,” said Doyle. “They included state Senator Perley Keyes, former state Assemblyman Ethel Bronson of Jefferson County, and state Senator Stephen Bates of Ontario County.”

The board considered candidates for the positions of Judge of Common Pleas, Surrogate Court Judge, six associate justices, nine town supervisors, sheriff and undersheriff, and county treasurer and clerk.

Its recommendations for the first appointed officials included Justice Barnet Mooney as Judge of Common Pleas; Justice Elias Brewster as Surrogate Court Judge; and justices Peter David Huginin, Edmund Hawks, Daniel Hawks Jr., Smith Dunlap, Henry Williams and David Easton as associate judges. Four of these judges would also serve as town supervisors.

Mooney stood for the town of Hannibal; Brewster served the town of Mexico; Williams represented the town of Williamstown and Easton acted for the town of New Haven. Other town supervisors included William Lord as representative of the town of Redfield; John Cephas Pride as agent for the town of Richland; Samuel Tiffany as the delegate for the town of Scriba; and Oliver

Burdick as the officeholder in the town of Volney. The first supervisor for the town of Constantia is unknown as official records were lost in a fire in 1853.

John Smith Davis of Pulaski was named as the first county sheriff and Pliney Jones, also of Pulaski was appointed as his undersheriff. The initial county treasurer was Peter Pratt of Mexico and the original county clerk was James Adams of the town of Oswego.

Doyle continued, “The lives of these men have been researched as part of the bicentennial to try to learn a little more about whom they were and where they came from. Some commonalities emerged, such as the origin of all but two men being New England states; nine from Connecticut, three from Massachusetts, and two from New York. The remaining two were from New Jersey.

“It also seems that some of these men knew one another in their earlier lives and possibly moved to this area together in a chain migration, which is not unusual in the western movement of people in this country. Most of them remained here the remainder of their lives, while others moved on to Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan.”

The state-appointed board of commissioners also named two county seats, one in Oswego and the other in Pulaski, rather than one as a compromise to the long-debated issue.

From the late 1700s, borders continuously changed as counties and towns were formed and modified. In 1804, there was a discussion to form a new county from portions of Lewis, Jefferson and eastern Oswego counties, making the town of Redfield the county seat. In 1808, residents and landowners in Camden, Redfield, Florence, Mexico, Williamstown and Fredericksburgh signed a petition to establish Scriba County. In 1810, residents of the village of Oswego began a campaign to form a new county; locating the village in its center.

All of these efforts failed and, in 1813, new discussions took place in which Oswego leaders proposed including Hannibal and Lysander in the formation of a new county and moving the county

center further west. This plan was opposed by leaders in the town of Richland, who sought to make that township the county seat. Finally, the new boundary lines were accepted and two county seats were established, thus making Oswego County a ‘half-shire’ county.

The townships in the two shires were split between Albion, Amboy, Constantia, Hastings, Mexico, New Haven, Orwell, Parish, Redfield, Richland, Sandy Creek, West Monroe and Williamstown to the east; and Granby, Hannibal, Oswego, Palermo, Schroepfel, Scriba, Volney, and the city of Oswego to the west.

From 1816 to 1851, the county clerk alternated office space between Oswego and Pulaski every three years until a permanent office was built on its current site on East Bridge and Second streets in Oswego. The Pulaski Courthouse was erected at its present location on Bridge Street in 1819 and the first Oswego Courthouse was built in 1822 with the present building completed in 1858. In the mid-1800s, the New York State Legislature required the Oswego County Board of Town Supervisors to alternate annual meetings between Oswego and Pulaski; however, by 1895, they were authorized to hold all of their meetings in Oswego. Today, the Oswego County Legislature holds its August meeting at the Pulaski Courthouse every year in honor of the county’s heritage as a half-shire county.

For more information about the county bicentennial, find Oswego County on Facebook or visit <http://visitoswegocounty.com/historical-info/bicentennial-of-oswego-county/>.

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**PHOTO CAPTION:**

**COMMEMORATION HIGHLIGHTS THE MEN WHO STARTED IT ALL – Oswego County Legislator Shawn Doyle, District 3, chairman of the Oswego County Bicentennial**

**Committee and town of Richland historian, addresses the full Legislature during its March meeting to discuss his research of the county's founding fathers in this bicentennial year. The county's first leaders included a Judge of Common Pleas, Surrogate Court Judge, six associate justices, nine town supervisors, a sheriff and undersheriff, treasurer and county clerk, all appointed by New York State in 1816.**