

WTB Monthly Meeting 3/27/22 at 3 PM Jowonio School and Zoom

“A Brief History of Syracuse and its Neighborhoods” – Minutes

About 20 women and men gathered in person and 27 on Zoom to learn about the history of Syracuse and the diverse cultures that came together over the years to create our community. Melek Yavuz set up the Zoom so that the speaker and slides were visible online. At Jowonio, chairs were spaced apart and masks were worn unless eating or speaking.

President Barb Bova welcomed everyone. Carol Lipson read the WTB Mission Statement and Sue Savion read the Safe Place Declaration. Barb reported that WTB had been matched with an Afghan family (single father with 3 children); anyone interested in helping with this project should speak with Liz Spence who was present. Barb announced that on May 22nd WTB would be presenting “American Dreams,” a collection of monologues about immigrant experiences. Sue Savion had a script available. Anyone interested in reading or writing a monologue was encouraged to sign up or talk with Sue.

Barb then introduced our presenter, Gregg Tripoli, Executive Director of the Onondaga Historical Association (OHA). Mr. Tripoli narrated a fascinating 45-minute slide show that went back to the earliest days of our community. It is truly impossible to summarize the wealth of information Mr. Tripoli offered in this information-packed overview. *The summary below is made from my notes; I don't vouch for the absolute accuracy of every point, but it should give a sense of the program to those unable to attend.*

Mr. Tripoli pointed out that the seal of Syracuse has three images that symbolize our city: Salt, the Erie Canal, and intersection of north/south and east/west travel. He spoke of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Great Law of Peace, the Onondaga Nation's matrilineal society that later inspired Women's Right's advocates, and their invention of lacrosse. After the “discovery” of the area by Samuel Champlain in 1615 and the colonial period of French and English influence/settlement, Syracuse begins with the confiscation of Onondaga Nation Land into a “Military Tract,” portions of which were allotted to Revolutionary War Veterans. The three early main areas were the Valley (Onondaga Hollow), Salt Point (Salina SE) and Geddes (SW). Downtown Syracuse was marshland, but the Erie Canal would go right through its center in 1825. Syracuse was incorporated in 1848.

- 1848-1859 salt manufacturing was dominant; in 1863 we accounted for 85% of US salt supply and this was a boon for the North in the Civil War
- 1900 – trainlines went through Syracuse streets; the elevated tracks were removed in the 1930s
- Immigrants came to Syracuse to work in the Salt mines and later our industries
 - Mid 1840s - Irish (potato famine) and German (political unrest) immigrants worked in the salt mines; Irish boiled potatoes in the brine inventing salt potatoes! Germans settled on the North Side founded candle making (still operational) and breweries
 - Jewish settled SE of Downtown; Temple Concord built at site of Everson Museum; later Shubert brothers created “Broadway” from Syracuse
 - 1890s – Italians came and settled in NE; St. Peter's built at Burnett and State St. Replaced Germans in area forming “Little Italy” by 1899
 - Immigrants from Eastern Europeans settled on West Side; Polish built Sacred Heart in 1909; Armenians fleeing genocide; Ukrainians built St John the Baptist.

- In 1870 Syracuse University was established; in 1887 the forerunner of Crouse Hospital (Syracuse Women's Hospital and Training School for Nurses) was founded; the East Side became known as "eds and meds" and fostered liberal neighborhoods like Wescott St.

Syracuse became known as a haven for enslaved people; in 1851 a group of abolitionists (including Gerrit Smith and Samuel May) broke into Syracuse's police station to free "Jerry" Henry who was about to be returned under the Fugitive Slave Act. However, black residents generally held menial jobs as porters, domestics, and day laborers. AME Zion and Bethany Baptist were the earliest Black Churches. As African Americans moved here during the great migration north beginning around the 1920s, African Americans replaced the Jewish inhabitants in the 15th ward. Due to red-lining and other factors, they were concentrated in this area of the city.

Among the industries in Syracuse – Franklin Automobile inventors of the air-cooled engine now used in airplanes; Solvay Process which made soda ash using limestone and salt; its waste product was dumped in Onondaga Lake leading it to eventually become one of the most polluted lakes in the country; Syracuse China which make most of the China used in RR dining cars.

Among the Architectural Styles associated with Syracuse: Art Deco (National Grid and State Tower buildings); Everson (I.M. Pei); Arts and Crafts Movement fathered by Gustav Stickley. OHA is involved in restoring Stickley's home on Comstock Ave into a museum and Bed and Breakfast. (heritageparksyracuse.org)

The 1920s was a boom time – under NYS Governor FDR the East Shore of Onondaga Lake was turned into a park becoming a model for later New Deal programs; the southern shore collected oil drums.

In 1938 Syracuse became one of the first cities in the nation to build public housing. During WW II Syracuse industries (Carrier Corp, General Motors) switched to manufacture war materials. Hancock Army Base later became Hancock Airport.

The 1950s and 1960s saw growing suburbs and construction of the interstate highway system. Latinos moved into to the Near West Side. In 1960s the poor housing in the 15th Ward (red-lining) led to picketing and Civil Rights protests which exacerbated White flight to the suburbs. When the 15th Ward was obliterated by the routing of Route 81 in 1965-66, African Americans relocated largely on the South Side. As diverse groups of immigrants and refugees settled on the North Side, that area faced an increased poverty rate and threats of clashes over culture.

The 1980's saw the further deterioration of Syracuse due to the loss of tax base, the massive loss of industrial jobs as plants moved out, and the continued growth of the suburbs. The SW area of Syracuse now contains one of the highest areas of concentrated poverty in the nation.

Mr. Tripoli also spoke of the positive things going on right now—abandoned industrial districts restored and repurposed for trendy housing and boutiques, an expansion of "eds and meds," the Onondaga Creek Walk, improvement of the Lakefront district including the Amphitheater and Destiny, the cleanup of Onondaga Lake. He also highlighted the projects that OHA has been part of including the Ska nonh Great Law of Peace Center (Haudenosaunee) and the Gustav Stickley House Restoration.

Mr. Tripoli graciously answered questions for a full thirty minutes—his extensive knowledge of our history and the people who peopled our past is a true gift to our community. Oral histories from our

area can be found on cnyhistory.org. He spoke of plans to represent the different heritages of Syracuse in Heritage Park (“with or without the statue of Columbus”) as a way of celebrating all our richly diverse community.

After thanking Mr. Tripoli for this wonderful program, Barb invited people to stay, partake of refreshments and continue the conversation.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Bova,

Substitute Sunday Secretary