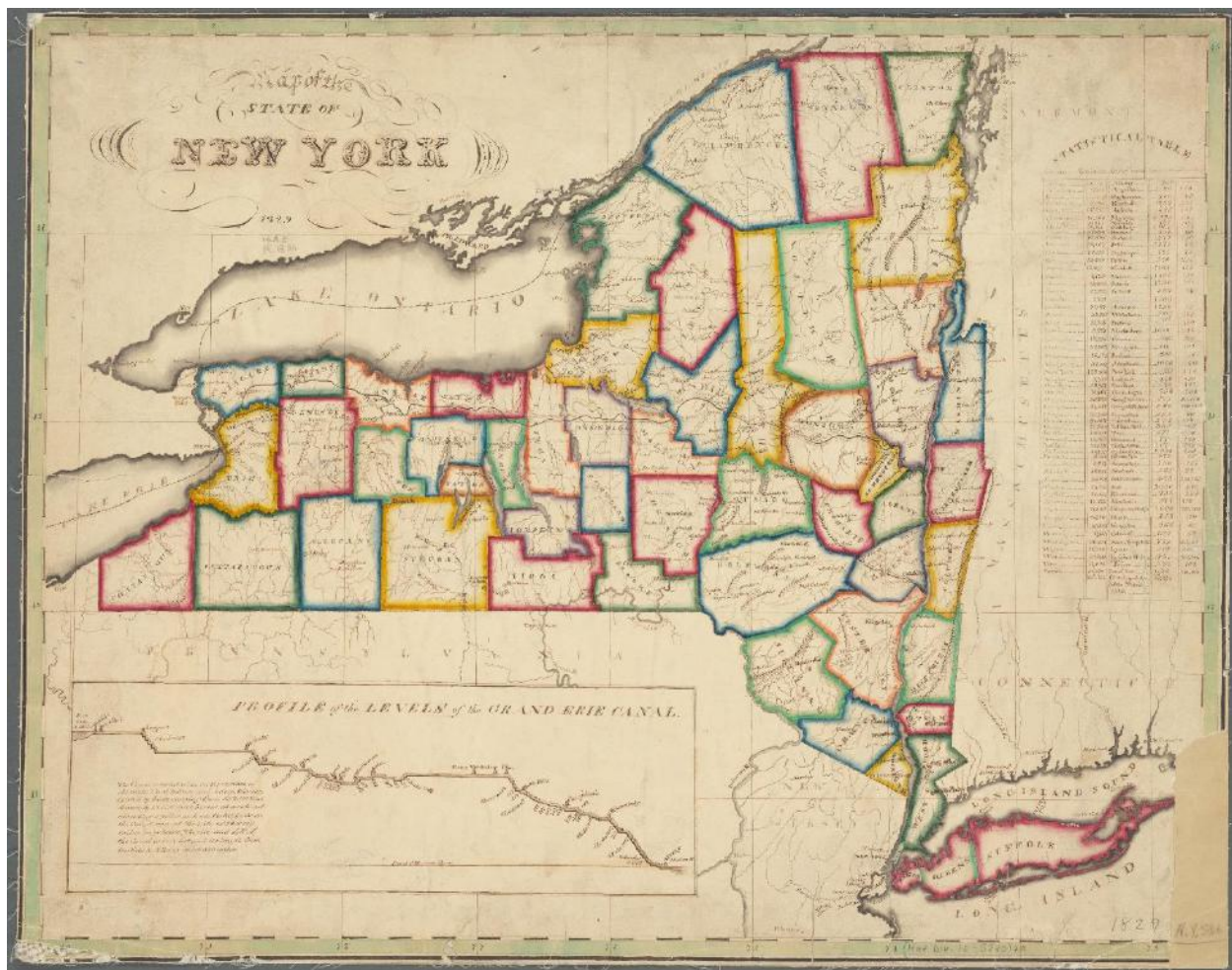




HISTORICAL SOCIETY *of the* NEW YORK COURTS

History of Rensselaer County

Bench and Bar



Hon. Christopher T. Maier*

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I. County Origins

a. General Narrative: History of Rensselaer County

In 1524, Giovanni Verrazzano, the famous Florentine explorer, having been commissioned by King Francis I of France, set off to explore unknown lands in the new world and first encountered the continent of North America off the coast of what is now North Carolina.¹ Sailing northward, he entered the Bay of New York and discovered the Grande River, as the Hudson was then known, in the domain claimed by France as Francesca.²

In 1609, Henry Hudson, employed by the Dutch West India Company to find a route to Asia, sailed up the Hudson to what is now Waterford, where, unable to sail any further, he turned around and went back to Holland.³

Hudson reported to his employers about the beaver fur trade that the French had been conducting with the Native Americans at the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, across from what is now Rensselaer County.⁴ Desirous of engaging in the profitable trade, the Dutch West India Company received a charter from the government of Holland to trade with the natives.⁵ The area on the east side of the Hudson, which would eventually become Rensselaer County, was home to the Mohicans, who conducted trade with the Dutch. In 1630, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, a pearl merchant in Amsterdam, encouraged the settlement of the area near the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, and established, under the auspices of the Dutch West India Company, a manor or patroon called *Rensselaerwyck* consisting of what is now Albany, Rensselaer and Columbia Counties.⁶ Between 1630 and 1776, the land which now comprises Rensselaer County passed between Dutch and British control until the American Revolution.

¹ Weise, A., *City of Troy and its Vicinity*, p. 2.

² Weise, A., *supra*, at p. 2.

³ Weise, A., *supra*, at p. 2.

⁴ Weise, A., *supra*, at p. 2.

⁵ Weise, A., *supra*, at p. 2.

⁶ Weise, A., *supra*, at p. 2.

b. Legal Beginnings

Rensselaer County was named in honor of the Van Rensselaer family and was originally a part of Albany County and set off by an act of the State Legislature on February 7, 1791. Almost all of Rensselaer County, except for the towns of Schaghticoke, Pittstown and Hoosick, was a part of the Rensselaerwyck Manor, which was granted by the Dutch West India Company in 1629 to Kiliaen Van Rensselaer.

Dutch control of the Rensselaerwyck Manor was ceded to the English for the final time in 1664. The English would hold the territory until the American Revolution. The first Assembly, convened in the province of New York under Charles II of England in 1683, divided the colony into “shires” or counties which included the counties of New York, Westchester, Ulster, Albany, Dutchess, Orange, Richmond, King, Queen Suffolk, Duke’s and Cornwall.

After the creation of Rensselaer County in 1791, the first meeting of the County Board of Supervisors was held. At that time, Rensselaer County consisted of seven towns: Rensselaerwyck, Hoosick, Troy, Schaghticoke, Pittstown, Petersburg and Stephentown. In 1807, the towns of Brunswick and Nassau were created from the rural sections of Troy. The City of Troy was incorporated in 1816. Over time, out of those original towns, land was set-off and subdivided to create the present configuration of 14 towns and two cities.

The first county officers assembled at Ananias Platt’s Inn in Lansingburgh on April 15, 1791, and took their oaths of office. First Judge was Anthony Ten Eyck. Other judges included John Van Rensselaer, Israel Thompson, Robert Woodworth and Jonathan Brown. Assistant justices John Knickerbacker, Jr., John W. Schemerhorn, Jonathan Niles, Benjamin Hicks, Nicholas Staats, Robert Montgomery, Moss Kent and John Van Alen. Justices of peace were also appointed.

The population of Rensselaer County was 30,442 in 1800.

c. Timeline

- Before 1609** The indigenous Mohican People inhabit the areas at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers.
- 1609** September 22, Henry Hudson sails up the Hudson River and arrives in the area of the present-day Rensselaer County.
- 1629** Rensselaerwyk Manor colony is established by grant from the Dutch West India Company to Killaen Van Rensselaer. The manor comprises the present-day Albany and Rensselaer counties and parts of Columbia and Greene counties.
- 1664** The Dutch cede control over Rensselaerwyk to the English.
- 1673** The Dutch retake control of Rensselaerwyk.
- 1674** The Dutch surrender the colony to the English, who hold the territory until the American Revolution.
- 1683** The first colonial Assembly is convened in the province of New York and acts to divide the province into “shires” or counties including Albany County, which encompasses the Rensselaerwyk Manor colony.
- 1691** The Assembly passes an act that sets up a new judicial system consisting of the Court of Chancery, the Supreme Court of the Judicature, the Court of Common Pleas, Courts of Sessions and Justices’ Courts.
- 1777** The First Constitution of New York State is adopted at Kingston, NY. Under this Constitution the area that comprises the present-day Rensselaer County is part of Albany County.
- 1791** Rensselaer County is established by act of the New York State Legislature from lands set off from the larger Albany County. The new county is named in honor of the Van Rensselaer family. The act provides for the establishment of the Court of Common Pleas and the Court of General Sessions of the Peace. John Woodworth is examined for his ability to practice law and is the first attorney admitted to the bar of Rensselaer County.
- 1796** The New York State Legislature divides the state into seven districts with an assistant attorney general to serve in each. Rensselaer County is grouped in the Third District with Columbia County.
- 1801** The Office of District Attorney is created. Rensselaer County is grouped with Columbia and Greene.
- 1807** Rensselaer County is reorganized with the creation of towns in the rural areas.
- 1816** The City of Troy is incorporated as a City.

- 1870** The Legislature establishes four judicial departments in the state. Rensselaer County is in the Third Department, which consists of the Third, Fourth and Sixth judicial districts, as it does so today.
- 1901** Rensselaer County Bar Association is incorporated.
- 1970** The Rensselaer County Legislature is created, replacing the Board of Supervisors form of government. Two years later the position of County Executive is created.

II. County Courthouses

A Temporary Solution

The first session of the Court of Common Pleas and the Court of General Sessions was held in the Village of Lansingburgh in May of 1791, at the tavern of Ananias Platt.⁷ That session met for three days and was then adjourned to the Inn of Stephen Ashley in Troy.⁸ Court sessions were held alternately between the two villages until the erection of a courthouse in Troy in 1794.⁹ Troy was chosen as the County seat because it pledged more money for the building of a courthouse and jail than its rival, Lansingburgh.¹⁰ Troy became a City in 1816.

The First Courthouse



The first courthouse was erected in Troy on the corner of Second and Congress Streets, “within sixty rods” of Stephen Ashley’s Inn.¹¹ The Court of General Sessions of the Peace sat for the first time in the building on the second Tuesday of November in 1794.¹² A jail was built in the rear of the courthouse. A whipping post and stocks were placed in the yard, and occasionally punishments against criminals were meted out by the Sheriff.¹³ Over the next thirty years, the facilities proved to be inadequate for the community’s growing needs, and so in 1826, the county supervisors received approval from the State Legislature to raise funds for a new courthouse.¹⁴

⁷ Chester, A., *Courts and Lawyers of New York: A History 1609-1925*, p. 1060.

⁸ Chester, A., *supra*, p. 1060.

⁹ Chester, A., *supra*, p. 1061.

¹⁰ Weise, A., *City of Troy and its Vicinity*, p. 86.

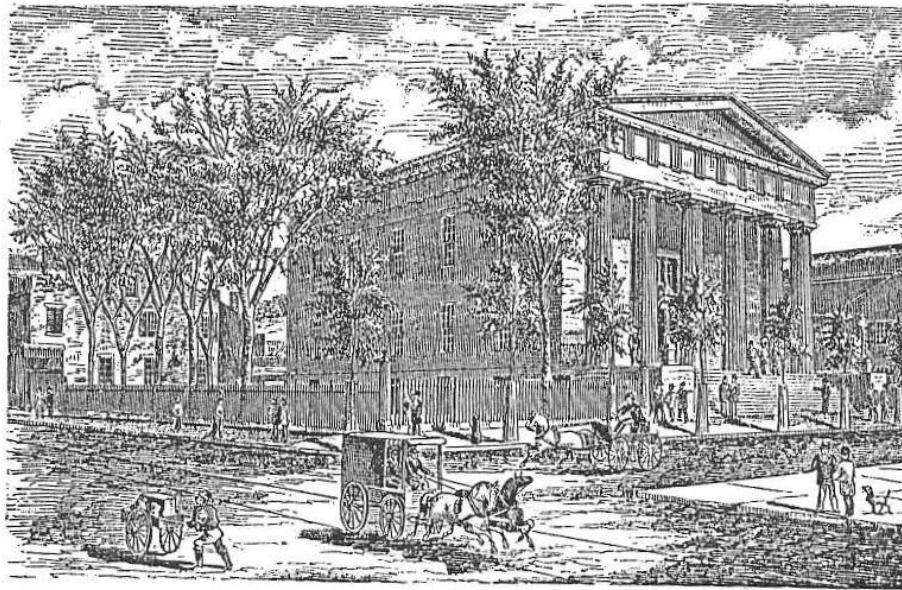
¹¹ Weise, A., *supra*, p. 88.

¹² Weise, A., *supra*, p. 88.

¹³ Weise, A., *supra*, p. 88.

¹⁴ Chester, A., *supra*, p. 1061.

The Second Courthouse



RENSSELAER COUNTY COURT HOUSE, 1831.

The original courthouse was demolished, and work began on the erection of a new, larger building. During the construction, Court was held in the Methodist Church.¹⁵ In 1831, the new courthouse was completed in the Doric style fashioned after the Temple of Theseus.¹⁶ Some city offices occupied the new structure, including rooms for the mayor and common council.¹⁷ The county jail was moved to Fifth Street.¹⁸

¹⁵ Chester, A., *supra*, p. 1061.

¹⁶ Weise, A., *supra*, p. 88.

¹⁷ Weise, A., *supra*, p. 88.

¹⁸ Chester, A., *supra*, p. 1061.

The Third and Present Courthouse



The third and present courthouse was built between 1894 and 1898 on the same location as its predecessors at the corner of Congress and Second Streets.¹⁹ The three story structure is considerably larger than the earlier courthouses and was expanded in 1912 through the acquisition of the adjoining Second Street Presbyterian Church which was constructed about 1833.²⁰ The courthouse complex underwent extensive renovation and restoration between 1996 and 2002 which adapted the courthouse for modern use while restoring its original grandeur. The jail, which had been moved to the corner of the Fifth and Ferry Streets when the second courthouse was constructed, had been empty since the construction of a new jail in South Troy in 1992. In the late 1990's, the old jail was renovated and converted to house the Rensselaer County Family Court.

¹⁹ Hayner, R., *Troy and Rensselaer County: A History*, Vol. 1 p. 164.

²⁰ Hayner, R., *supra*, p. 164.



III. The Bench and the Bar

a. Judges

Supreme Court under the Constitution of 1821

Woodworth, John: Born in the Town of Schodack in 1768. Appointed in 1819 to the New York Supreme Court which at that time was the only court of review below the Court for the Trial of Impeachments and Correction of Errors;²¹ appointed Attorney General of New York State in 1804; Postmaster of Troy 1797 to 1800; Surrogate of Rensselaer County 1793; member of the New York State Assembly in 1803 and a member of the Electoral College.²²

Marcy, William L.: Associate Justice of the New York Supreme Court from 1829 to 1831. (Full biography under “Governors.”)

State Court Judges prior to Constitution of 1821



Clowes, Thomas (1791-1886): Rensselaer County Surrogate 1811-1827; Canal Appraiser 1840-1844, 1847; Postmaster of Troy 1851 and 1862.²³



Cushman, John Paine (1784-1848): Born in Pomfret, CT; attended Yale College and Litchfield Law School; admitted to the bar in 1809 and commenced practice in 1809 in Troy; U.S. House of Representatives 15th Congress (1817-1819); Regent of the University of the State of New York (1830-1834); District Attorney of Oneida County (1818-1821); Recorder of the City of Troy (1834-1838); Judge of the Third Circuit (1838-1844).

²¹ Anderson, George Baker, *Landmarks of Rensselaer County*, p. 154.

²² Hayner, Rutherford, *Troy and Rensselaer County: A History* Vol. II, p. 473.

²³ Bartlett, Nathaniel B., *History of Rensselaer County*.

Hogeboom, James (1766- 1839): Member of the New York State Assembly, 1804-05, 08; Judge, Court of Common Pleas, 1805-1808; member, New York State Constitutional Convention of 1821; member, U.S House of Representatives, 1823-1825.²⁴

Masters, Josiah (1763-1822): Practiced law in Schaghticoke, New York; member, New York State Assembly, 1792, 1800 and 1801; Supervisor of the Town of Schaghticoke in 1796; Justice of the Peace in Rensselaer County 1801-1805; member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1805-1809; Judge, Court of Common Pleas, 1808-1822.

Ten Eyck, Anthony (1739-1816): Member of Constitutional Convention of 1787; Judge of the Court of Common Pleas; member, New York State Senate, 1796-1801.

Woodworth, Robert (1743- unknown, after 1806): Served as a Captain in the Fourth Regiment, Rensselaerwyck Battalion; elected New York Senate 1792 to 1796; Judge, Court of Common Pleas, following his serving in the Senate.

Court of Common Pleas under the Constitution of 1821



Buel, Jr., David (1784-1860): Member, New York State Constitutional Convention of 1821; Judge, Court of Common Pleas, 1825-1828.

Davis, George R. (1788-1867): Judge, Court of Common Pleas, 1829, 1838 until 1847 when the New York State Constitution of 1847 took effect; member, New York State Assembly, 1819, 1830, 1831 (Speaker of the Assembly), 1842 and 1843 (Speaker of the Assembly).

²⁴ Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.



Huntington, Samuel G. (1782-1854): Judge, Court of Common Pleas, (after 1825).²⁵



Knickerbocker, Herman (or Knickerbacker or Knikkerbakker) (1779-1855): Member, U.S. House of Representatives, 1809-1811; member, New York State Assembly, 1816; Judge, Court of Common Pleas, 1828-1838.

Mann, Francis N. (1802- 1880): Judge, Court of Common Pleas, (1840-1845); Mayor, City of Troy, 1847.²⁶



McConihe, Isaac (1787-1867): Judge, Court of Common Pleas, 1828; Rensselaer County Treasurer, 1831; Postmaster of Troy.

²⁵ Hudson-Mohawk Genealogical and Family Memoirs: Huntington (online resource).

²⁶ Hayner, Rutherford, *Troy and Rensselaer County: A History* Vol. II, p. 482.

Romeyn, Jeremiah (1808-1871): Born in Catskill, N.Y.; Judge, Court of Common Pleas, 1834-1846; Judge, Rensselaer County Court, 1867.²⁷



Willard, John D. (1799-1864): Judge, Court of Common Pleas, 1834 -1840; member, New York State Senate (12th District), 1857.²⁸

State Courts and Local Courts following the Constitution of 1847



Bull, Archibald (1789-1865): Member, New York State Assembly, 1834; Judge, Court of Common Pleas of Rensselaer County, 1857-1859.

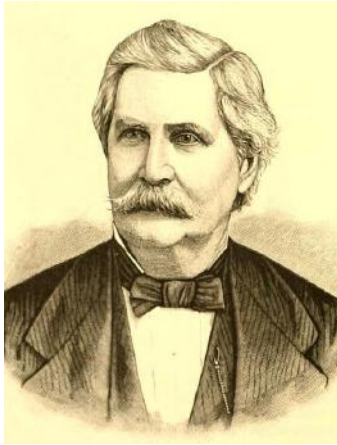


Heaton, Willis Edgar (1861-1930): Born in Cicero, New York. Following his graduation from Albany Law School in 1882 and upon admission to the Bar the following year, on the advice of Surrogate Skinner of Oswego County, for whom he clerked, he moved to Hoosick Falls to start a practice. In 1901, he was elected Surrogate of Rensselaer County and then re-elected in 1907. It was during his term as Surrogate that he began work on his treatise regarding Surrogate Court procedure. As a president of the New York State Surrogates' Association, he undertook the drafting of a new Surrogate's code at the direction of the Legislature. He first published this in 1907 which

²⁷ Albany Law Journal, Vol 3. January 9 to July 22, 1871, p. 78.

²⁸ Anderson, George Baker, *Landmarks of Rensselaer County* p. 160.

is now entitled *Warren's Heaton on Surrogate's Court Practice*, which remains to this day a leading reference for Surrogate's Court practice.



Robertson, Jr., Gilbert (1815-1896): Judge, Justice Court in Troy, 1847-1852; Judge, Rensselaer County Court, 1859; Postmaster of Troy, 1873 and 1877.²⁹



Strait, Ebenezer Smith (1824-1881): Member, New York State Assembly, 1857 and 1863; Rensselaer County Surrogate, 1859-1870; Judge, Rensselaer County Court, 1871-1881.

Nason, Henry T. (1865-1903): Judge, Rensselaer County Court, 1897-1903.

Tierney, Michael A. (1869-1930): Judge, Rensselaer County Court, 1903-1914.

New York Court of Appeals: 1847 to Date

Gould, George (1807-1868): Born in Litchfield, CT; Ex Officio Judge of the Court of Appeals, 1862; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1855; Mayor, City of Troy, NY, 1852-1853.

Ingalls, Charles Russell (1819-1908): Judge, Court of Appeals, 1870 under the New York State Constitution of 1846 while serving as Justice, New York Supreme Court, first elected in 1864 and subsequently re-elected in 1873; appointed member of the General Term of the Supreme Court of the First Department in New York City in 1877.

²⁹ Sylvester, Nathaniel B., *History of Rensselaer County 1825-1894*.



Read, Susan Phillips: Born in Gallipolis, Ohio in 1947; Judge, Court of Appeals, 2003 to 2015; Presiding Judge, New York Court of Claims, 1998-2003.

Supreme Court, Appellate Division: 1894 to Date



Carpinello, Anthony J.: Born in 1948, a native of East Greenbush, NY; Justice of the Town of East Greenbush, 1992-1994; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1994; Appellate Division, Third Department 1996-2008.



Casey, John T. (1921-2014): Born Troy, New York; Rensselaer County District Attorney, 1956-1963; Rensselaer County Judge, 1964-1968; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1968-1979; Appellate Division, Third Department, 1979 to 1997.



Fursman, Edgar L., (1838-1910): Born in Charlton, Saratoga County, moved to Troy in 1866 to practice law; Judge, Rensselaer County Court, 1883-1888; Justice of the Supreme Court, Third Judicial District 1890-1902, and during the years of 1897 to 1900, he sat on the New York City criminal bench; Justice of the Appellate Division, Third Department 1902.



Hamm, Herbert, D., (1896-1972): Born in Poestenkill, NY; Rensselaer County Attorney, 1940-1945; County Judge and Judge of the Children's Court; Justice of the Supreme Court 1951-1964; Appellate Division, Third Department, 1964-1966.



Howard, Wesley O. (1863-1933): Born in Troy, NY, attended Lansingburgh Academy and afterwards studied law in Troy; Rensselaer County District Attorney, 1897-1902; elected to the Supreme Court in 1902; served on the Appellate Division, 1913-1916; returned to trial bench voluntarily after re-election to Supreme Court in 1916 through 1925.



Mahoney, A. Franklin (1921-1994): Born in Troy, NY; Rensselaer County Surrogate, 1965-1968; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1969-1976; Appellate Division, Third Department, 1976-1993; Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division, Third Department, 1978-1991.



Russell, Pierce, H. (1878-1952): Born in Troy, NY; County Judge and Judge of the Children's Court, 1916-1925; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1926-1947; Appellate Division, Third Department, 1947-1948.



Spain, Edward O.: Born in Troy, NY in 1941; Judge, Troy Police Court, 1978-1985; Judge, Rensselaer County Family Court, 1985-1991; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1992-2013; Appellate Division, Third Department, 1994 to 2013.



Taylor, Donald S. (1898-1970): Born in Troy, NY; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1949-1968; Appellate Division, Third Department, 1961 to 1968.

Judges of the City of Troy

Police Court Judges and Criminal Part Judges

1829	Daniel H. Stone		Assoc. Justice, Michael H. Myers
1830	George Butler		
1831-1834	Daniel H. Stone	1887-1899	William Donohue Asst. Magistrate, Cornelius Hannon 1892
1849-1852	Gilbert Robertson, Jr.		Asst. Magistrate, John Judge
1853-1857	Charles Brintnall	1900-1908	Abbott Jones
1857-1858	James M. Landon	1909-1911	Frank Valentine
1859	Moses Warren	1912-1946	James F. Byron
1860	Franklin J. Parmenter	1948-1961	Thomas O'Connor
1861	James M. Landon	1962-1965	Joseph F. Daly
1862-1863	Franklin J. Parmenter Assoc. Justice, John Flagg	1966-1969	Timothy J. Fogarty
1864	John Flagg Assoc. Justice, Thomas Cornelius	1970	Abraham C. Goldstein
		1970-1977	Kyran P. Molloy
1865-1870	Thomas Neary	1978-1985	Edward O. Spain
		1985-1993	Patrick J. McGrath
1872-1875	John J. Conway Assoc. Justice, William Donohue	1994-2004	Henry R. Bauer
		2005-present	Christopher T. Maier
1876-1880	William Donohue Assoc. Justice, Lewis E. Griffith	2015-2021	Jill A. Kehn
1881-1886	Richard C. Jennyss	2022-present	Anne L. Coonrad

Judges of the City of Troy

Justices of the Peace

1829	Isaac McConihe	1861-62	Uriel Dexter
1829	Daniel H. Stone	1862-1865	John L. Flagg
1835-1838	David Gleason	1863-1865	Thomas J. Cornelius
1835-1838	Henry V.W. Masten	1864-66	Uriel Dexter
1835-1838	Cyrus Sheldon	1865-1870	Thomas Neary
1848-1852	G. Robertson, Jr.	1866-1875	Richard C. Jennyss
1848-1852	Seth H. Terry	1867-1875	William Donohue
1848-1852	J. Fairfield Wells	1872-1876	John J. Conway
1853-1857	Charles Brintnall	1876-1886	T.J. Guy
1853-1857	Moses Warren	1887-1890	J.P. Curley
1853-1857	George R. David, Jr.	1887-1890	Thomas Fagen
1858-1859	Uriel Dexter	1891-1895	W.J. Ludden
1858-1859	Moses Warren	1891-1895	John J. Kennedy
1858-1859	John M. Landon	1896-1899	James T. Murray
1860-1861	Dexter Landon	1899	Thomas F. Powers
1860-1863	Franklin J. Parmenter		

Troy City Court Judges, Civil Part

1900-1904	Rufus Townsend	1926-1946	Bertram Kavanaugh
1900-1904	Thomas F. Doherty	1946	John J. Sweeney
1905-1906	Fred E. Bowen	1947- 1950	E. Stewart Jones
1906-1908	Timothy J. Quillinan	1947-1950	Elmer M. Rasmussen
1908-1913	Fred E. Draper	1951-1957	Joseph B. Mullholland
1909-1913	Herbert F. Roy	1958-1969	Matthew M. Dunne
1914-1924	Edmund J. Sweeney	1970-1998	Dan G. Farano
1914-1924	Frank S. Parmenter	1999-2022	Matthew J. Turner
1926-1946	Edward L. Nugent	2023- present	Marc R. Pallozzi

Rensselaer City Court

Rensselaer City was created from the Town of East Greenbush in 1897. Portions of Towns of East Greenbush, North Greenbush, and Bath on Hudson were annexed in 1901.

1897-1898	D. Oscar Denison	1944-1972	LaVerne G. Lewis
1899-1902	Charles Melius	1973-1982	Thomas J. Delaney
1903-1904	Frank Wilson	1983-1989	Richard F. Reilly
1905-1912	George W. Stevens	1990-1995	Frank C. Kepura
1913-1924	Homer S. Barnard	1996-present	Kathleen L. Robichaud
1925-1929	John S. Wolfe	2007-3/2014	Carmelo Laquidara
1930-1932	Walter H. Keenholts	1/2015-2/2020	Carmelo Laquidara
1933-1934	Charles G. Maloy	2020-present	Linda B. Johnson
1935-1943	Peter J. Conlin		

County Court Judges

Year Appointed or Elected:

1791	Anthony Ten Eyck	1903	Michael A. Tierney
1803	Robert Woodworth	1915	Pierce H. Russell
1805	James L. Hogeboom	1930	James F. Brearton
1808	Josiah Masters	1941	Harry E. Clinton
1823	David Buel, Jr.	1951	DeForrest C. Pitt
1828	Harmon Knickerbocker	1964	John T. Casey
1838	George R. Davis	1969	Lawrence Bizzaro ³⁴
1847	Charles Parmele ³⁰	1970	Timothy J. Fogarty
1855	Archibald Bull	1974	Constantine G. Cholakis
1859	Gilbert Robinson, Jr.	1979	M. Andrew Dwyer
1867	Jeremiah Romeyn	1993	Patrick J. McGrath
1871	E. Smith Strait ³¹	2007	Robert Jacon
1881	James Forsyth ³²	2009	Andrew G. Ceresia
1882	Edgar L. Fursman	2013	Debra J. Young
1890	Lewis Griffith ³³	2018	Jennifer Sober
1897	Henry T. Nason		

Hitchens, Stephen C., *Civil List and Constitutional History of the Colony and the State of New York*. Source for information for early judges

³⁰ Office made elective following Constitutional Convention of 1846.

³¹ Appointed *vice* Romeyn, deceased.

³² Appointed *vice* Strait, deceased.

³³ Appointed *vice* Fursman, elected to Supreme Court.

³⁴ Appointed *vice* Casey, elected to Supreme Court.

Court of Claims Judges

1977-1986	Edward M. Murray	2008-2019	Michael H. Melkonian*
2006-2022	Henry F. Zwack*	2020-present	Adam W. Silverman*

**Designated as an Acting Supreme Court Justice.*

Family Court Judges

1954-1963	Marcus L. Filley (Children's Court)	1985-1991	Edward O. Spain
1962	New York voters approved a State Constitutional amendment creating the Family Court (NY Const. Art. IV, Sec. 13)	1985-1992	John T. Perkinson
1963-1971	Marcus L. Filley	1993-2002	Christian F. Hummel
1972-1982	Alan Dixon	1995-2009	Linda C. Griffin
1977-1982	Robert P. Reeves	2009	Richard A. Hanft ³⁵
		2002-2021	Catherine Cholakakis
		2010-present	Elizabeth M. Walsh
		2022-present	Jill A. Kehn

³⁵ Appointed *vice* Griffin, retired.

*Surrogates**

1791	Moss Kent	1883	William Lord
1793	John Woodworth	1889	James Lansing
1803	Jeremiah Osborne	1901-1913	Willis Edgar Heaton
1806	Allanson Douglass	1914-1919	Calvin S. McChesney
1813	David Allen	1920-1934	Chester G. Wager
1815	William McManus	1935-1940	Bertram P. Kavanaugh
1818	Benjamin Smith	1941-1952	Edward J. Donohue
1820	Nicholas M. Masters	1953-1964	Maurice D. Isenbergh
1821	Thomas Clowes	1965-1968	A. Franklin Mahoney
1827	Philip Viele	1969	John E. Mirch
1835	Job Pierson	1970-1974	Matthew M. Dunne
1840	Cornelius L. Tracy	1974-1986	F. Warren Travers
1844	Stephen Reynolds	1987-1993	George B. Ceresia, Jr.
1847	George T. Blair	1995-2001	Conrad H. Lang, Jr.
1855	Robert H. McClellan	2002-2012	Christian F. Hummel
1859	E. Smith Strait	2014-present	Paul V. Morgan, Jr.
1871	Moses Warren		

* List of earlier Surrogates found in Hitchens, Stephen C., *Civil List and Constitutional History of the Colony and the State of New York*.

Supreme Court Justices for the 3rd Judicial District

The Third Judicial District is composed of the counties of Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Schoharie, Sullivan, and Ulster. The following list is of Rensselaer County residents, past and present, who have served or are serving as Justices.

1829-1831	William L. Marcy	1969-1991	A. Franklin Mahoney (App. Div., 1978-1991)
1855	George Gould (Ct. of App., 1862)	1975-1979	William R. Murray
1863	Charles R. Ingalls (Ct. of App., 1870)	1978-1986	Con. G. Cholakis
1889	Edgar L. Fursman (App. Div., 1902)	1987-2001	F. Warren Travers
1902-1925	Wesley O. Howard (App. Div., 1913-1916)	1992-2005	James B. Canfield
1925-1927	James V. Coffey	1992-2013	Edward O. Spain (App. Div., 1994-2013)
1926-1948	Pierce H. Russell	1994-2015	George B. Ceresia, Jr.
1939-1950	William H. Murray	1995-2007	Anthony J. Carpinello (App. Div., 1996-2007)
1948-1968	Donald S. Taylor (App. Div., 1961-1968)	1997-1998	Mary O. Donohue
1963-1976	DeForest C. Pitt	2009-2022	Patrick J. McGrath
1951-1966	Herbert D. Hamm (App. Div., 1964-1966)	2012-2020	Raymond J. Elliott III
1969-1997	John T. Casey (App. Div., 1979-1997)	2013-present	Richard J. McNally, Jr.
		2016-present	Andrew G. Ceresia (App. Div. 2022 -present)
		2022-present	Laura M. Jordan

Federal Judiciary

Cholakis, Con. G. (1930-1996): Born in Troy, NY; United States District Judge for the Northern District of New York, 1986-1996; Rensselaer County District Attorney, 1968-1974; Rensselaer County Judge, 1974-1977; Justice of the Supreme Court, 1978 to 1986.

Cipperly, Clark (1886-1956): Born in Troy, NY; Commissioner for the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York, 1948-1956.

Dunne, Matthew M. (1910-1974): Born in Troy, NY; Commissioner for the United State District Court for the Northern District of New York, 1956-1958; Troy City Court, 1958-1969; Rensselaer County Surrogate' Court, 1970-1974.

Foley, James T. (1910-1990): Born in Troy, NY; United States District Judge for the Northern District of New York, 1949-1990, serving as Chief Judge, 1963-1980. Assumed senior status in 1980 and served until his death.

Hummel, Christian F. (b. 1956): Magistrate Judge-United States District Court for the Northern District of New York, 2012-present; Judge, Rensselaer County Surrogate's Court, 2002-2012; Judge, Rensselaer County Family Court, 1993-2001; Justice, Town of East Greenbush, 1986-1992.

Mahoney, Justin J. (1919-1994): Born in Troy, NY; Referee in Bankruptcy, United States District Court for the Northern District of New York, 1969-1994; United States Attorney, Northern District of New York, 1961-1969.

Spain, John H. (1909-1989): Born in Troy, NY; Magistrate Judge for United States District Court for the Northern District of New York, 1973-1981; Commissioner for the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York, 1958-1973; Assistant Attorney General, State of New York, 1941 and 1949.



Treece, Randolph F. (b. 1948): Born in Troy, NY; Magistrate Judge for United States District Court for the Northern District Of New York, 2001-2015; Counsel to the Office of the New York State Comptroller; Assistant Attorney General, State of New York; the first Deputy Capital Defender of the New York State Capital Defender's Office; Assistant Public Defender, Rensselaer County. Judge Treece was the first African American to be appointed to the Federal Judiciary in the Northern District. Judge Treece presently serves of counsel to the firm of E. Stewart Jones Hacker Murphy LLP in Troy, NY.

b. Attorneys and District Attorneys

Governors



William Learned Marcy: Born in Southbridge, Massachusetts, he moved to Troy following his graduation from Brown University in 1808, and commenced the study of law with William M. Bliss. He subsequently read law with John Russell and was admitted to the bar in 1811, and commenced practice in the City of Troy.³⁶ He fought in the War of 1812, attaining the rank of Captain. He served as Adjutant General of New York, New York State Comptroller and a Regent of the University during the same period, and was an Associate Justice of the New York Supreme Court from 1829 to 1831.

In 1831, the New York State legislature elected him to the United States Senate where he served until 1833 when he was then elected Governor. He served as Governor until 1838. He later served as U.S. Secretary of War in 1845 under President James K. Polk during the Mexican American War. In 1853, he served as U.S. Secretary of State under President Franklin Pierce. As Secretary of State, he was instrumental in negotiating the Gadsden Purchase, the last major land acquisition by the United States, which presently consists of Arizona and New Mexico.



Frank Swett Black (1853-1913): Born in Maine, he graduated from Dartmouth College in 1875; and eventually moved to Johnstown, New York, where he was employed as editor of the *Johnstown Journal*. He then moved to Troy. He worked for the *Troy Whig* and the *Troy Times*. During this time, he also studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1879. He began practicing in Troy and became politically active as chairman of the Rensselaer County Republican Committee. He was elected as a Republican to the 54th United States Congress, and served from March 4, 1895, to January 7, 1897, when he resigned to become Governor of the State of New York, serving from 1897 to 1898.

As Governor, he saw the construction of the New York Capitol through to completion which had been under construction for years.

In 1898, he fought for re-nomination at the Republican state convention, but was defeated by the Party leaders who favored Theodore Roosevelt. Afterwards he resumed the practice of law, including keeping a law office in Manhattan to which he commuted by train each week from his home in Troy. Interestingly, Gov. Black was part of the defense of Roland B. Molineux, whose conviction for murder was overturned and resulted in the “Molineux Rule,” which limits the

³⁶ Anderson, George Baker, *Landmarks of Rensselaer County*, p. 156.

prosecution in using prior crimes as proof at trial of a defendant's propensity to commit the crime charged.

He died in Troy on March 22, 1913. His remains were cremated and placed in a sepulcher on his farm near Freedom, New Hampshire.

Lieutenant Governor

Mary O'Connor Donohue (b. 1947): Born in Troy, NY; Lt. Governor Donohue was the first woman elected as Rensselaer County District Attorney, 1992; Justice of the Supreme Court, Third Judicial District, 1996; Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York, 1998-2006; Judge, New York State Court of Claims, 2007-2009.

Attorneys

Bird, John (1768-1806): Born in Litchfield, CT, moved to Troy in 1793 following graduation from Yale University and engaged in the practice of law; Member, New York State Assembly, 1796-1798; U.S. Representative, 1799-1801.

Colby, John H. (1835-1886): Born in Troy, NY. District Attorney of Rensselaer County, 1861; Author of *Colby's Criminal Law and Practice of the State of New York* (1868).

Cushman, John P. (1784-1848): Born in Pomfret, Ct; Graduated from Yale University in 1807, moved to Troy in 1809 and commenced the practice of law; U.S. Representative, 1817-1819; Recorder of Troy, 1834-1838; Judge, Circuit Court of the Third Circuit, 1838-1844.



Dickinson, John Dean (1767-1841): Born in Middletown, CT; after graduation from Yale University he moved to Lansingburgh, NY, 1785; U.S. Representative, 1819-1823, 1827-1831. Trustee of the first bank in the County. His bust is on display at the Rensselaer County Courthouse.



Flagg, John L. (1835-1874): Born in Nashua, NH; Admitted to the Bar 1858; Mayor of Troy, 1866 and 1867; member, New York State Assembly, 1868, 1869, 1870 and 1871.

Hall, Benjamin H. (1830-1893): Born in Troy, NY; Admitted to the bar in 1856; Troy City Clerk in 1858; Chamberlain of Troy 1874-1877 and 1884-1885; well-known author of many books including a history of Vermont; built one of Troy's most architecturally significant buildings at the corner of First and River Streets, presently known as the Rice Building.

Hayner, Henry Z. (1802-1874): Born in Brunswick, NY; Admitted to the Bar in 1830; Member, New York State Legislature, 1846; Chief Justice, Minnesota Territorial Supreme Court, 1852-1853. Commissioned Major in the United States Army during the Civil War.

Hunt, Hiram P. (1796-1865): Born in Pittstown, NY; studied law at Litchfield Law School and commenced practice in 1819 in Pittstown; U.S. Representative, 1835-1837, 1839-1843.

Jones, Abbott H. (1876-1939): Born in Troy, NY; Judge, Troy Police Court; Rensselaer County District Attorney, 1920-1922; Attorney in private practice handling civil and criminal matters achieving notoriety for representing Jack "Legs" Diamond.

Jones, E. Stewart (1911-2001): Born in Troy, NY; Achieved national notoriety as a trial attorney and a pioneer in the areas of medical malpractice and products liability; Served as judge in the Troy City Court, 1947-1950.

Kent, Moss (1766-1838): Born in Rensselaer County; Appointed first Judge in Jefferson County, NY, 1795; Member, New York State Senate, 1799-1803; Member, New York State Assembly, 1807 and 1810; Judge, Jefferson County, 1810; U.S. Representative, 1813-1817.

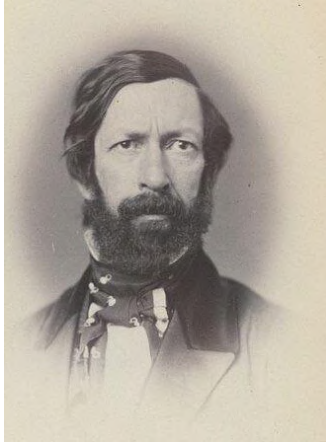
Lee, Harry O. (1913-2006): Born in Troy, NY; Admitted to the Bar in 1940. Appointed by Gov. W. Averell Harriman to the Office of Legal Consultant to the Governor; Partner, Lee & LeForestier; Co-Author, *Review and Reduction of Real Property Assessments*.

LeForestier, Wilford: (1917-1966) Born in Troy, NY; Partner, Lee & LeForestier; Co-Author, *Review and Reduction of Real Property Assessments*; Corporation Counsel, City of Troy.

Lovett, John (1761-1818): Born in Newent Society in the present township of Lisbon, CT; Member, New York State Assembly, 1800 and 1801; military secretary to Gen. Stephen Van

Rensselaer during War of 1812; U.S. Representative to the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Congresses, 1813-1817.

McManus, William (1780-1835): Born in Brunswick, NY; commenced the practice of law in Troy in 1817; Surrogate of Rensselaer County, 1815-1818; District Attorney of Rensselaer County, 1818-1821; U.S. Representative, 1825-1827.



Olin, Abram (1808-1879): Born in Shaftsbury, VT; admitted to the Bar in 1838 and commenced the practice of law in Troy; Recorder of City of Troy 1844-1852; U.S. Representative from New York, 1857-1863; Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia, 1863-1879.



Pattison, Edward H. (1896–1986): Born in Troy, NY; partner in the firm of Smith, Pattison, Sampson & Jones for over 50 years; widely respected for his involvement with creating and supporting charitable organizations.



Pattison, Edward W. (1932-1990): Born in Troy, NY; practiced law with the firm of Smith, Pattison, Sampson & Jones; Rensselaer County Treasurer, 1970-1975; U.S. Representative from New York, 1975 (94th District), 1977 (95th District).

Patterson, Charles E. (1842-1913): Born in Corinth, VT; Member, New York State Assembly (Rensselaer Co.), 1881 and 1882; elected Speaker of the Assembly in 1882.

Pierson, Job (1791-1860): Born in East Hampton, NY; admitted to practice in 1815 and commenced practice in Rensselaer County; District Attorney of Rensselaer County, 1824-1833; U.S. Representative, 1831-1835; Surrogate of Rensselaer County, 1835-1840.



Roche, William J. (1853-1929): Born in Troy, NY; Corporation Counsel of the City of Troy, 1883-1885, 1890-1900; Delegate New York State Constitutional Convention of 1894; Trustee of the Supreme Court Library at Troy.



Seymour, David Lowrey (1803-1867): Born in Wethersfield, CT; moved to Troy following his graduation from Yale in 1826 and commenced the practice of law; Member, New York State Assembly, 1836; Rensselaer County District Attorney, 1839-1842; Master in Chancery, 1839; U.S. Representative, 1843-1845, 1851-1853.



Sweeney, John E. (b. 1955): Born in Troy, NY; Commissioner of State Department of Labor, 1995-1997; Deputy Secretary to Governor George E. Pataki, 1997; U.S. Representative from New York, 1999 (22nd District), 2003 (20th District).



Taylor, Dean Park (1902-1977): Born in Troy, NY; Assistant United States Attorney, Northern District of New York, 1927-1930; U.S. Representative from New York, 1943 (29th District), 1945 (33rd District), 1953 (31st District).

Thompson, Isaac Grant (1840-1879): Born in Rensselaer County. Admitted to the bar in 1865; founded *Albany Law Journal* in 1870. The *Albany Law Journal* sought to publish “the latest intelligence of interest on all subjects pertaining to the law.” According to one writer, the publication was a spectacular success for over forty years, far outlasting similar publications and spawning scores of other similar journals across the country.³⁷ Thompson spent most of his life in Rensselaer County and was also responsible for writing and publishing other law related publications.



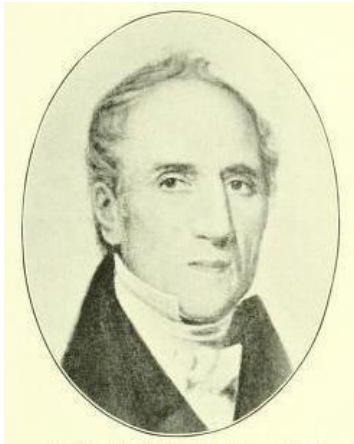
Townsend, Martin I. (1810-1903): Born in Hancock, MA. Admitted to the bar in 1836 and commenced practice of law in Troy; District Attorney of Rensselaer County, 1842-1845; U.S. Representative, 1875-1879; US Attorney, Northern District of New York, 1879-1887.

Mr. Townsend was one of the most prominent members of the Rensselaer County Bar and was known as the “Grand Old Man” of the legal fraternity. At the time of his death in 1903, he was recognized as the oldest living member of the Bar Association. He was widely known for his legal acumen and involvement with some of the most important cases in the City of Troy. As early as 1842, he defended Antonio Louis, who was held as a fugitive slave. Some 20 years later, he defended Charles Nalle, who was also held as a fugitive slave. Nalle’s escape from the custody of a US Marshall with the help of a Troy crowd marked one of the most dramatic episodes in the city’s history. His most famous case concerned the murder trial of the so-called “Veiled Murderess.” In that case, he advanced the defense of insanity long before the age of modern psychology which resulted, on appeal, with the defendant’s commitment to an insane asylum rather than the imposition of the death penalty.

³⁷ Sheppard, Steve, *The History of Legal Education in the United States: Commentaries and Primary Sources* Vol. 1 (Salem Press 1999), p. 974.



Wellington, George B. (1856-1921): Born in Troy, NY; Assistant United States Attorney, 1887-1888; Corporation Counsel for the City of Troy, 1906-1912; member, New York State Senate (29th District), 1916-1918.



Williams, Nathan (1773-1835): Born in Williamstown, MA; Studied law in John Woodworth's office in Troy; U.S. Representative to the Ninth Congress 1805-1807; Member, New York State Assembly (Oneida Co.), 1818; Regent of the University of the State of New York, 1817-1824; District Attorney of Oneida County, 1818-1821; Judge of the Fifth Circuit in New York 1823-1834.

*District Attorneys*³⁸

Ambrose Spencer	02/23/1796	Abbott H. Jones	11/02/1920
Ebenezer Foote	08/13/1801	Timothy J. Quillinan	02/07/1922
Moses Cantine	03/05/1805	Timothy J. Quillinan	11/07/1922
Thomas P. Grosvenor	04/03/1810	Frederick C. Filley	11/03/1925
Moses Cantine	02/15/1811	Frederick C. Filley	11/06/1928
Job Pierson	02/15/1818	Harry E. Clinton	11/03/1931
William McManus	06/11/1818	Charles J. Ranney	11/06/1934
Job Pierson	02/15/1821	Charles J. Ranney	11/02/1937
Samuel Cheever	03/31/1821	Charles G. Maloy	07/24/1940
Job Pierson	10/03/1823	Earl J. Wiley	11/05/1940
Jacob C. Lansing	01/28/1833	Earl J. Wiley	11/02/1943
John Coon	02/08/1836	Earl J. Wiley	11/02/1943
David L. Seymour	10/14/1839	Earl J. Wiley	11/05/1946
Martin I. Townsend	10/14/1842	Timothy F. O'Brien	11/08/1949
Robert A. Lottridge	06/07/1847	Timothy F. O'Brien	11/04/1952
Robert A. Lottridge	11/05/1850	Edward M. Murray	11/08/1955
Anson Bingham	11/08/1853	John T. Casey	11/04/1958
Robert A. Lottridge	11/04/1856	John T. Casey	11/07/1961
George Van Santvoord	11/08/1859	Pierce H. Russell	01/23/1964
John H. Colby	11/04/1862	M. Andrew Dwyer	11/03/1964
Robert A. Lottridge	11/07/1865	Con Cholakakis	11/07/1967
Timothy S. Banker	11/03/1868	Con Cholakakis	11/03/1970
Timothy S. Banker	11/07/1871	Con Cholakakis	11/06/1973
Francis Rising	11/23/1871	Pierce H. Russell	03/15/1974
John C. Greene	11/05/1872	Pierce H. Russell	11/05/1974
Albert E. Wooster	11/02/1875	Charles J. Wilcox	11/08/1977
Samuel Foster	11/05/1878	Charles J. Wilcox	11/03/1981
La Mott W. Rhodes	11/08/1881	James B. Canfield	11/05/1985
LaMott W. Rhodes	11/04/1884	James B. Canfield	11/07/1989
Lewis E. Griffith	11/08/1887	Louis B. Cantone ³⁹	03/04/1992
John P. Kelly	01/02/1890	Mary O. Donohue	11/03/1992
John P. Kelly	11/04/1890	Mary O. Donohue	11/07/1995
John P. Kelly	11/07/1893	Kenneth R. Bruno	11/04/1997
Wesley O. Howard	11/03/1896	Kenneth R. Bruno	11/06/2001
Wesley O. Howard	11/07/1899	Patricia DeAngelis	07/08/2003
Jarvis P. O'Brien	11/04/1902	Patricia DeAngelis	11/04/2003
Jarvis P. O'Brien	11/07/1905	Richard J. McNally, Jr.	11/06/2007
Abbott H. Jones	11/03/1908	Richard J. McNally, Jr.	11/08/2011
Clarence E. Atkin	11/07/1911	Joel Abelove	11/04/2014
John P. Taylor	11/03/1914	Mary Pat Donnelly	11/06/2018
John P. Taylor	11/06/1917		

³⁸ List of names from 1796 to the present taken from the Historical Society of the New York Courts.

³⁹ Appointed after Canfield elected to Supreme Court.

c. Rensselaer County Bar Association

Association Beginnings

The first mention of the legal profession in Rensselaer County is made in local records in 1791, the year Rensselaer County was established.⁴⁰ The creation of a new Court required the formation of a governmental structure, including a county courthouse.⁴¹ Two months after the county's designation, a meeting was held in Lansingburgh, then a separate Incorporated Village north of what was then the Village of Troy, at which officers were appointed and plans were made for the holding of court.⁴² A second meeting was held about a month later and established the Court of Common Pleas⁴³ and the Court of General Sessions.⁴⁴ It was also at this meeting that the Rensselaer County Bench and Bar saw its beginning when a group of men were admitted to practice as attorneys and counselors at law.⁴⁵ Sixteen lawyers, including John Dean Dickinson and John Lovett, are counted as having established law practices in Troy at this time.⁴⁶

Over the next three years, Court was held alternatively in Lansingburgh and in the Village of Troy. Ultimately, Troy was named the county seat, having raised the most money for the erection of a courthouse.⁴⁷

The Rensselaer County Bar Association was incorporated in 1901. The Certificate of Incorporation stated that “[t]he objects for which the [Bar Association] is to be formed are for the purpose of cultivating the science of jurisprudence, promoting reforms in the law, facilitating the administration of justice, elevating the standard of integrity, honor and courtesy in the legal profession, and cherishing a spirit of brotherhood among the members thereof.”

The number of directors was set at fifteen. The following were to serve as directors until the first annual meeting, which was to be held on the second Monday of May and on the same day each year thereafter: James Lansing, Charles E. Patterson, John H. Peck, Lewis E. Griffith, William J. Roche, Seymour Van Santvoord, William Shaw, Calvin S. McChesney, Thomas S. Fagen, John T. Norton, Willis E. Heaton, Wesley O. Howard, William W. Morrill, Charles I. Webster and George B. Pattison.

⁴⁰ Hayner, R., *Troy and Rensselaer County: A History*, Vol. 2, p. 471.

⁴¹ Hayner, *supra* at 471.

⁴² Hayner, *supra* at 471.

⁴³ Hayner, *supra* at 472.

⁴⁴ Chester, A., *Courts and Lawyers of New York: A History 1609-1925*, p. 1060.

⁴⁵ Hayner, *supra* at 472.

⁴⁶ Hayner, *supra* at 471.

⁴⁷ Hayner, *supra* at 472.

Presidents: Rensselaer County Bar Association

James S. Scott	1928	Richard D. Ceresia	1989
William R. Murray	1951	Robert A. Smith	1990
Thomas P. McLaughlin	1952	Patrick J. Tomaselli	1991
Elmer R. Rasmussen	1953	Patrick T. Morphy	1992
Ely S. Koplovitz	1955	Miriam M. Netter	1993
Paul R. Jones	1961	William J. Aram	1994
Bruce W. Hislop	1962	Anne Reynolds Copps	1995
William R. Jubie	1963	Edward R. Marinstein	1996
Edward J. Malone	1964	Arthur F. Glass, Jr.	1997
Richard Y. Bayly, II	1955	C. Michael Reger	1998
Raymond T. Finnan	1966	Paul G. Toomey	1999
George W. Singiser	1967	Alan H. Sunukjian	2000
George W. Lettko 1	1968	Gerald H. Katzman	2001
F. Warren Travers	1969	Karen L. Marbot	2002
Edwyn L. Shudt	1970	Christopher T. Maier	2003
James F. Cleary	1971	Michael E. Ginsberg	2004
Joseph J. Martin	1972	Richard J. McNally, Jr.	2005
Charles Cohen	1973	Marcla J. Doyle Stallmer	2006
Edward W. Pattison	1974	Andrew G. Ceresia	2007
J. Paul Troue	1975	Thomas D. Spain	2008
Joyce Galante	1976	Mickki Harrington	2009
Owen D. Connolly, Jr		Stephen A. Pechenik	2010
Donald J. Shanley	1977	Carolyn A. D'Agostino	2011
James R. Reilly	1978	Jonathan G. Schopf	2012
Elliott F. Marinstein	1979	Rachel E. Kruse	2013
George B. Ceresia, Jr.	1980	William L. Fox	2014
Thomas V. Kenney, Jr.	1981	Kelly A. Cramer	2015
Charles F. Carletta	1982	James E. Prout	2016
Michael E. Rourke	1983	Olivia Karis-Nix	2017
Linda C. Griffin	1984	Jessica B. Mocerine	2018
Kevin P. Glasheen	1985	Dana L. Salazar	2019
William P. McGovern, III	1986	Michael J. Derevlany	2020
Richard A. Hanft	1987	Jennifer C. Shatz	2021
James A. Millea, Jr.	1988	Linda B. Johnson	2022
		Jaime B. Thomas	2023

d. Women Attorneys

History of Women in The Rensselaer County Bar

The presence of women members of the Rensselaer County Bar Association is first apparent in the 1928 Association's compilation photograph in the Courthouse. Gertrude M. Keefe, Elizabeth Gannon and sisters Thelma and Sylvia Kovitz appear along with about 132 men. This writer has found no evidence of women practicing law in Rensselaer County prior to Elizabeth Gannon's admission in 1919.

Elizabeth Gannon McAuliffe (d. 1954): Born in Troy; was admitted to the Bar in 1919 following her graduation from Albany Law School. Initially, she was affiliated with the firm of Thomas Powers until 1928. Subsequently, she practiced with Edward J. Poland and with the legal department of the State Division of Placement and Unemployment Insurance. Upon her passing, several courts in the County adjourned proceedings as a show of respect to her memory. According to Maurice D. Isenbergh, Surrogate, Mrs. McAuliffe was the first woman to practice in Rensselaer County.⁴⁸

Gertrude M. Keefe Wilsey: Born in the City of Rensselaer, Miss Keefe graduated from Albany Law School in 1920. She was affiliated with the firm of Fitzsimmons & Keefe. In 1925, Miss Keefe was the president of the Women Lawyer's Association of the Capitol District. She was active in this organization for a number of years in the 1920's, according to contemporary newspaper accounts. Miss Keefe was featured in a newspaper article in 1931, which focused on her thoughts about her profession. Interestingly, it was noted that she was known in her private life as Mrs. L.A. Wilsey, indicating that she maintained her maiden name professionally. Additionally, the article referred to her as a modern day "Portia," that being a reference to Shakespeare's character, Portia, in his play *The Merchant of Venice* who disguises herself as a man, assumes the role of an apprentice lawyer and saves the life of the character "Antonio" in court. Portia was sobriquet given to women lawyers during that period.⁴⁹

Thelma Kovitz Benjamin (d. 1939): Raised in Troy, Mrs. Benjamin attended Albany Law School. She and her sister were associated with the firm of Murphy, Aldrich, Guy and Broderick with a practice concentrated in Real Estate matters.⁵⁰

Sylvia Kovitz Friedlander (1902-1964): Raised in Troy, Mrs. Friedlander graduated from Albany Law School and practiced in the area of Real Estate with her sister at the firm of Murphy, Aldrich, Guy and Broderick.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *The Troy Record*, Sept. 22, 1954 and Sept. 23, 1954.

⁴⁹ *Knickerbocker Press*, Aug. 7, 1925; *Albany Times Union*, Sept. 13, 1931.

⁵⁰ *The Troy Record*, June 26, 1939.

⁵¹ *The Troy Record*, June 26, 1939 and *Times Union*, May 19, 1964.

e. Early African American Attorneys

Frederick A. Chew (1868-1931)

Early Life

Frederick A. Chew was born about 1868 in Troy, New York. He was the son of Daniel Boston Chew, a prominent African American restaurant proprietor and abolitionist in Troy. Daniel Chew was reported to have been active in the “underground railroad” and aided many enslaved individuals in escaping to freedom.⁵² His son, Frederick A. Chew, was no doubt influenced by his father’s commitment to social justice as he pursued legal studies, which led to a career dedicated to pursuing racial equality under the law.

Frederick A. Chew was educated in the Troy public schools. He did not attend law school, but instead, at the age of 14, he began to study law in the Law Office of John A. Cipperly which was a common method at that time to become a lawyer.⁵³ He passed the bar examination in 1884.⁵⁴

Career

Mr. Chew had a very wide and lengthy law practice that took him into many local, State and Federal Courts and that extended for nearly 50 years.⁵⁵ According to a published memorial, he was active in public affairs and numerous organizations, and enjoyed the “respect and confidence of judges and fellow attorneys.”⁵⁶ Some of his cases and civic activities provide a glimpse into his commitment to social justice. In 1929, Mr. Chew assisted District Attorney Abbott Jones in successfully prosecuting Proctor’s Theater in Troy for violating the Civil Rights Law by depriving Mrs. S. Clarissa Evans, an African American woman, equal privileges and accommodations on account of her race by forcing her to sit in the balcony section of the theater rather than a section of her own choosing.⁵⁷ In 1910, Mr. Chew gave testimony before the New York State Assembly in opposition to a bill prohibiting marriages between whites and African Americans.⁵⁸ In 1905, Mr. Chew served as an “incorporator” in the establishment of a central trust company to engage in general banking business and establish a chain of banks in the southern states to be controlled and managed by African American men.⁵⁹ Mr. Chew was also active in the local Republican Party,⁶⁰ the Afro-American Equal Rights League,⁶¹ was a delegate from New York State to the National Negro Suffrage Convention,⁶² as well as having served on the executive committee Troy branch of the NAACP.

⁵² *Troy Times*, January 21, 1892: 1 col 8.

⁵³ *Troy Record*, February 25, 1932: In Memoriam.

⁵⁴ *Canajoharie Radian*, December 4, 1884.

⁵⁵ *Troy Record*, February 25, 1932: In Memoriam.

⁵⁶ *Troy Record*, February 25, 1932: In Memoriam.

⁵⁷ *New York Age*, November 26, 1887: 4.

⁵⁸ *Utica Daily Press*, March 31, 1910.

⁵⁹ *Indianapolis Recorder*, November 25, 1905: 1.

⁶⁰ *The New York Freeman*, October 17, 1885: 1.

⁶¹ *The New York Times*, August 4, 1903: 6.

⁶² *Wayne County Review*, June 18, 1903.

Later Life and Death

Mr. Chew practiced law up to the time of his death in 1932. Upon his death, the Rensselaer County Bar Association fittingly described him as follows: he “gave freely of himself in the service of his church and in numerous organizations for the welfare of his own people, to the cause of whose continued advancement he was devotedly attached and to which his own life he made no small contribution.”⁶³

Mr. Chew is buried in the Oakwood Cemetery in Troy, New York.

Samuel Gibson (1859-1917)⁶⁴

Early Life

Samuel W. Gibson was born about 1859 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He subsequently moved to Troy, New York, and he received his early education at the William Rich School, which was established in 1829 as a segregated school exclusively for the education of African American students.⁶⁵ Following the adoption of the 13th and 14th Amendments to the United States Constitution, William Rich School students were admitted to public schools,⁶⁶ and Mr. Gibson then attended the Seventh Street Grammar School.⁶⁷ The *New York Age* reported that he received his legal education at the Union College Law School at Albany,⁶⁸ though Albany Law School has no record of him having matriculated there.

Career and Civic Participation

It appears most likely that Mr. Gibson received his legal training by “reading the law” through an apprenticeship in law offices in Troy. According to city directories between 1879 and 1881, Mr. Gibson was a “student” with business addresses at local law offices. He was reported to be the first African American attorney in Rensselaer County, having been admitted to the bar in 1882.⁶⁹ The 1883 Troy City directory lists him as a practicing lawyer. He apparently practiced for a period of time in New York City before returning to Troy. One newspaper, *New York Globe*, described him as the “Legal Light of Troy”⁷⁰ and later noted that Troy “must have an attraction for him” when reporting his return to Troy from New York City in 1883.⁷¹ According to his obituary, he worked many years as an accountant for the E. O. Howser Collar Co. and later

⁶³ *Troy Record*, February 25, 1932: In Memoriam.

⁶⁴ Information regarding Samuel W. Gibson and citation to newspaper articles referenced here appear in an article from the Lansingburgh Historical Society website. The author wishes to acknowledge and credit this helpful resource in the preparation of this biographical sketch.

⁶⁵ Hayner, Rutherford B., “Troy and Rensselaer County New York: A History” Vol. I, pg. 284; Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc. New York and Chicago 1925.

⁶⁶ Hayner, pg. 284.

⁶⁷ *Watertown Daily Times*. January 30, 1882: 2, col 3.

⁶⁸ *New York Age*. November 22, 1917: 3 col 3.

⁶⁹ *Watertown Daily Times*. January 30, 1882: 2, col 3.

⁷⁰ *New York Globe*. August 25, 1883: 1.

⁷¹ *New York Globe*. December 15, 1883: 4.

the United Shirt & Collar Co. of Troy.⁷² In 1909, Mr. Gibson took a position with the State Department of Public Buildings in Albany.

Mr. Gibson was active in local civic organizations including the United Colored Republican Club and the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church of Troy. He held the position of Vice President in the United Colored Republican Club. In 1900, the Club held what was described as “one of the most successful political meetings in the history of the city.”⁷³ Mr. Gibson is reported as having given a “forcible address, in which he advised colored citizens to vote for [William] McKinley and Sound Money [the Gold Standard].”⁷⁴

Later Life

Mr. Gibson worked at the State Department of Public Buildings in Albany until his death in 1917. He was survived by his wife, a son, William Gibson of Troy and a daughter, Edith Gibson of Philadelphia. He is buried in the Oakwood Cemetery.

⁷² *New York Age*. November 22, 1917: 3 col 3.

⁷³ *Troy Daily Times*, November 1, 1900: 3 col 5.

⁷⁴ *Troy Daily Times*, November 1, 1900: 3 col 5.

f. Current Judiciary (2023)

Supreme Court

Andrew G. Ceresia (App. Div.)
Laura Jordan

Richard J. McNally

County Court

Debra J. Young

Jennifer G. Sober

Surrogate's Court

Paul V. Morgan, Jr.

Family Court

Elizabeth M. Walsh

Jill A. Kehn

Court of Claims

Adam W. Silverman (Acting Supreme)

City Court

Troy Christopher T. Maier
Anne L. Coonrad
Marc R. Pallozzi

Rensselaer Kathleen L. Robichaud
Linda Blom Johnson

Town and Village Justices (alphabetical by Court)

Berlin Jan L. Hunt
Donald W. Sweet

Hoosick Town Thomas G. Restino, Jr.
Harold J. McClellan

Brunswick Terrance Buchanan
Robert H. Schmidt

Hoosick Falls Village
Thomas G. Restino, Jr.
Harold McClellan

East Greenbush Kevin J. Engel
Jessica Mocerine

Grafton Francis M. Higgins
Joseph R. Alund

Nassau Town Robert A. Schuman
Emmalynn S. Blake

Nassau Village Michael C. Conway
Mark Greenberg

North Greenbush George B. Burke III
Kathryn Dell

Petersburgh Richard Snyder
Amy Manchester

Pittstown Paul J. McNaughton
Kenneth J. Marbot

Poestenkill Thomas F. Slavin, Jr.
Gregory T. Kronau

Sand Lake David W. Fryer
Scott A. Paul

Schaghticoke Jaime B. Thomas
Scott T. Ryan

Schodack Paul W. Peter
Ryan P. Mullahy

Stephentown John M. Meekins
Cyril A. Grant

IV. Cases and Trials of Note

The Trial of Jack “Legs” Diamond



The infamous bootlegger and gangster Jack “Legs” Diamond was tried in Rensselaer County. During Prohibition, Diamond engaged in bootlegging and hijacking up and down the Hudson Valley. In 1931, he was charged with the kidnapping and torture of Grover Parks in Catskill, New York.⁷⁵ Parks was transporting hard cider, and Diamond believed that it was destined for an applejack still that was not under his control, so he employed some coercive and violent tactics against Parks to learn where he was headed.⁷⁶ As a result, Diamond was arrested. Daniel H. Prior, a prominent Albany lawyer, was Diamond’s attorney, and he successfully moved for a change in venue to Troy.⁷⁷

Troy attorney Abbott Jones served as co-counsel to Prior. Despite a reputation as a ruthless and cruel criminal,⁷⁸ Diamond was popular among the general public. According to Abbott Jones’s grandson, Attorney E. Stewart Jones, Jr., Diamond would bask in the adulation of Trojans as he walked each day to the courthouse from Jones’s office.⁷⁹ He was acquitted on

⁷⁵ Kennedy, William, *O Albany: An Urban Tapestry*, p. 200.

⁷⁶ Kennedy, *supra* at 200.

⁷⁷ Kennedy, *supra* at 201.

⁷⁸ Kennedy, *supra* at 201.

⁷⁹ Times Union, December 11, 2013.

December 17, 1931 after a brief trial, but was shot to death at his Albany apartment in the early morning hours of the next day.⁸⁰ The perpetrators were never apprehended and their identities have remained a mystery.

Matters of John Merrill

John Merrill was the former construction superintendent for the Crowe Construction Company, which was responsible for building the Troy High School in the early 1950's. He and one James Connors were indicted for the theft of 22 tons of steel from their employer. At trial, Connors testified against Merrill, and a conviction resulted which was upheld on appeal. *People v. Merrill*, 286 AD 307 (3rd Dept. 1955). However, prior to the trial on the larceny charges, Merrill was tried for bail jumping when he failed to appear for the larceny trial, and it is this trial that made headlines.⁸¹

The bail jumping trial of Merrill in 1952 has the distinction of drawing an estimated 500 spectators, purportedly the largest audience for a trial in the Rensselaer County Courthouse.⁸² It was not the charge before the court that drew the crowd, but rather Merrill's allegations of wrongdoing by local officials in connection to the building of the high school.⁸³ Merrill's attorney, E. Stewart Jones, in his opening statement claimed that "no political organization and no one else will stop me from giving the full information on the background of the case."⁸⁴ Fortunately for Merrill, he was acquitted of bail jumping. Unfortunately, Merrill's legal troubles continued.

Following his acquittal, Merrill was then charged by way of an eight-count indictment with perjury, related to his testimony at his bail jumping trial. At trial, he implicated employees of the high school building project with financial improprieties by working free of charge on the home of the Corporation Counsel of the City of Troy.⁸⁵ At trial, Merrill was found guilty of perjury.⁸⁶

The Trial of Bartholomew Shea

In 1894, Robert Ross, a member of a wealthy and prominent Troy family, was shot dead in a polling place in Troy's Thirteenth Ward. Ross, a self-appointed poll watcher, was stationed along with his brothers at the polling place to prevent fraudulent election practices such as ballot box stuffing. Bartholomew "Bat" Shea was a local Irish ruffian hired to throw the election. At the polling place, a melee broke out, gunshots were fired, and Robert Ross was shot dead. Shea

⁸⁰Parker, Joseph A., *Looking Back: A History of Troy and Rensselaer County 1925-1980*, p. 24.

⁸¹ The Times Record, November 20, 1952, p. 29.

⁸² Parker, J. *supra* at p. 24.

⁸³ Parker, J. *supra* at p. 24.

⁸⁴ The Times Record, November 20, 1952, p. 29.

⁸⁵ The Times Record, May 29, 1953, p. 17.

⁸⁶ Parker, J. *supra* at p. 24.

was charged with his murder, asserted his innocence, but was convicted and sentenced to death. His appeals were denied despite the confession of an accomplice who claimed that he was the actual shooter responsible for Ross's death. Shea maintained his innocence to the end but was executed at Dannamora Correctional Facility on February 11, 1896. The trial stirred the passions of many Trojans on both sides of the case. Newspapers reported that his verdict was greeted with thunderous applause. But Shea's plight also captured the sympathy of another segment of the public. When his body was returned to Troy, some 10,000 people attended his funeral.⁸⁷

Robert Ross is memorialized by a statue in the Oakwood Cemetery.

Jack Casey, a member of the Rensselaer County Bar, wrote a fictionalized account of the saga, in his historical novel *The Trial of Bat Shea*. Casey explores the themes of class warfare, anti-immigration sentiment, religious bigotry, political corruption and injustice.

The Leonard Scarnici Trial

Leonard Scarnici was tried for the killing of a police officer during a bank robbery in Rensselaer on May 29, 1933. Scarnici was an infamous gangster associated with Lucky Luciano and the murder of fellow gangster Vincent "Maddog" Coll in New York City. Scarnici's first trial in Troy ended in a mistrial, but his second trial, was held in Schoharie due to a change of venue, resulted in a conviction. Scarnici was executed at Sing Sing. The case drew statewide attention.⁸⁸

The Trial of John Ramahlo

John Ramahlo, an engineer with Knolls Atomic Power Plant and Town of North Greenbush Councilman, was convicted of manslaughter in the death of his wife Pamela Blanchett Ramahlo on December 31, 1991. Ramahlo covered his sleeping wife's face in a chloroform-soaked tissue ostensibly to render her unconscious so that he could search her purse for evidence of an affair. Ramahlo's misadventure resulted in his wife's death. He maintained the death was an accident. During the trial his two eldest children testified against him. It was reported at the time that Ramahlo showed little grief, showing up to work and serving as a councilman following his wife's demise. His perceived lack of remorse resulted in twice being denied parole.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ The account of the trial of Bartholomew Shea is a compilation of information taken from newspaper accounts in the Times Union, July 5, 1894; February 11, 1896, p. 1; and information on the website of the NY Correction History Society which attributes its information from a contemporary newspaper account from Albany, New York.

⁸⁸ Cobleskill Index, March 1, 1934, p. 1.

⁸⁹ The Record, August 19, 2000.

The Case of the Veiled Murderess

Henrietta Robinson, a woman whose life was surrounded by mystery, became notorious in the annals of Troy history as the veiled murderess. Robinson had a mysterious reputation even before the trial during which she earned the strange moniker. Reportedly a beautiful woman, she lived a life of seclusion and was the subject of stories concerning episodes of her strange behavior and speculation regarding her background. In 1854, Robinson was convicted of poisoning her neighborhood grocer Timothy Lannigan and his sister-in-law Miss Catherine Lublee, who had invited Robinson to dine with them. Robinson poured powdered poison into the beer of her host and hostess which resulted in their agonizing death. During the trial, she wore a heavy veil that covered her face. The trial garnered much publicity throughout the United States and Canada. Many newspaper articles were written which claimed to disclose her true identity. Sentenced to death following her conviction, her lawyer, Martin I. Townsend, was able to get her sentence commuted to life in prison. If in fact her true identity was not that of Henrietta Robinson, she died in Matteawan State Hospital in 1905 without ever disclosing her secret.

V. County Resources

a. Bibliography

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b. County Legal Records and their Locations

Court records are maintained under the aegis of the Rensselaer County Clerk, Frank Merola.

The County Clerk's Office is also the repository of records regarding incorporations, deeds, mechanic's liens and other miscellaneous documents.

The Office of the Rensselaer County Clerk
105 Third Street
Troy, New York 12180

Records available at the Surrogate's Court:

Wills: 1791-1941
Probate packets: 1794-present
Surrogates Index: 1794-1916

The Surrogate's Court of Rensselaer County
Rensselaer County Courthouse
80 Second Street
Troy, New York 12180

The Troy Public Library is the repository of many records related to legal matters including the following:

Calendar of Wills: 1626-1836
Abstracts of Wills for Rensselaer County from 1787 to 1850.
Troy City Directories from 1829 to 1974
Rensselaer City Directories
Early New York Naturalizations: Abstracts of Naturalization Records from Federal, State and local Courts: 1792 to 1840

The "Troy Room" at the library contains many historical documents and a microfilm collection related to Troy and Rensselaer County.

Rensselaer County Court Naturalization records.

The Troy Public Library
100 Second Street
Troy, New York 12180

Records are available at The Hart Cluett Museum (formerly known as the Rensselaer County Historical Society)

The Hart Cluett Museum manages and maintains the largest local history library, archives and research collection in Rensselaer County. The archives has a collection of early Wills.

The F. Warren Travers Supreme Court Library

The F. Warren Travers Supreme Court Library houses many transcripts of important and noteworthy trials as well as books and materials on local history. The library also houses **the Spencer C. Rodgers Archives**. According to retired Principal Law Librarian Laura Barber in her report on the scanned collection of the Rogers archives, the collection consists of books that “are illustrative of the type of trials that were recorded for posterity and were meant to enhance and illuminate the practice of law.” The materials include individual trials, criminal confessions, government documents and other material from the past, including European, English and American legal literature and ephemera, including items of local interest.

F. Warren Travers Supreme Court Library
Rensselaer County Courthouse
86 Second Street Courthouse Annex
Troy, New York 12180

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d. Other Resources

Find-a-Grave: Find-a-Grave has a searchable database of what it describes as the world's largest gravesite collection. A successful search will result in the date of birth, date of death and burial location of the searched person along with ancestors and descendants. It will also usually include a photograph of the deceased and the deceased's gravesite.

FultonHistory.com: Fulton History is a website of over 50 million pages of historic newspapers including papers from Troy and Albany. According to the Hon. W. Dennis Duggan, Albany County Family Court Judge and Acting Justice of the Supreme Court (Ret.) in the "History of the Albany County Bench and Bar" which he authored, the master of this web page is Tom Tryniski, retired director of the IT Department at Davis-Standard Paper Plant in Fulton, NY. According to Judge Duggan, Tryniski, starting in 1999, has digitized over 50 million pages of historic newspapers and other material dating back to the early 1800's.

Getty Images: Getty Images has an enormous collection of old photographs which are available for purchase.

Google searches, Google Books and Google Images: Google searches can reveal a wealth of information on any given topic. Google Books contains scanned copies of millions of books including many out-of-print volumes that concern local history. Google Images also contains millions of images including old photographs of local interest.

History, Art & Archives: United States House of Representatives. This website is a collaborative project between the Office of the Historian and the Clerk of the House's Office of Art and Archives. The site studies and documents the history of the House of Representatives and contains biographical information for members past and present.

Library of Congress: The Library of Congress is the largest library in the world. Much of its collection of millions of books, recordings, photographs, maps and manuscripts are available to remote digital searches.

National Archives: The National Archives has an easily searchable interface that provides entry into the voluminous records of the United States government.

New York State Archives, Cultural Center, Empire Center, Albany, NY, archref@nysed.gov, 518-474-8955. The New York State Archives is part of the Office of Cultural Education within the New York State Department of Education. It is the official repository of New York State records, such as Legislative Bill and Veto Jackets. It also contains a large searchable digital collection.

New York State Library, Cultural Education Center, 222 Madison Avenue, Albany, NY, 12230, 518-474-5355. The New York State Library was founded in 1818 and is this state's equivalent of the Library of Congress. It has a massive digital collection which includes New York Census records, indexes to State documents, Laws of the State of New York, Native

American materials, histories of the New York State Constitutional Conventions, the New York State Redbook, New York State History relating to counties, cities, towns and villages.

New Netherland Research Center: The NRC operates in conjunction with the New York State Library and the New Netherland Institute. Since 1974 the Center has been translating Dutch language documents from New York's Dutch colonial period. For example, it has translated the first ordinances passed to govern New Netherlands between 1647 and 1658, and the Fort Orange Records, 1656-1660, which include the first governing documents of Albany when under Dutch rule.

New York Times: The New York Times has a searchable, digital database back to 1856 through the Times Machine feature. There are also several other sites that provide searchable data bases for multiple newspapers and periodicals. The New York Times site is especially helpful when looking for the obituaries of famous people.

PoliticalGraveYard.com: This site specializes in U.S Political personages and is searchable by name, place, time, office, and other parameters. Its database contains over 300,000 persons.

Rensselaer County NYGenWeb: This site contains many links to historical resources covering the genealogy and history of Rensselaer County. It also contains contact information for all county, city, town, and village historians in Rensselaer County.

Troy Public Library: 100 Second Street, Troy, NY, 12180. The Troy Public Library has specific resources that are invaluable to historical research of Troy, Rensselaer County and the Capital District. There is the "Troy History Room" which is dedicated to the history of the Troy and Rensselaer County and the repository of many historical references, including Troy City Directories from 1829 to the present. There is also a clipping files collection from the local newspapers, which is indexed, dating back to the 19th century.

Wikipedia The articles contained on the website Wikipedia also contain information regarding local history, though the accuracy of its entries sometimes has been called into question, it is nonetheless a source to be consulted subject to verification. Additionally, it has a list of online newspaper archives.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives. This site covers the world and indicates whether it is free or requires a subscription.