

**Preserving | Engaging | Educating**

*“Welcoming and connecting people to our shared cultural heritage through exhibitions and programs that provoke, delight, and inspire.”* Adopted by the Board of Trustees, 2006

The New York State Historical Association (NYSHA) was founded in 1899 by a group of New Yorkers who were interested in promoting greater knowledge of the early history of the state. They hoped to encourage original research, to educate general audiences by means of lectures and publications, to mark places of historic interest with tablets or signs, and to start a library and museum to hold manuscripts, paintings, and objects associated with the history of the state.

It was an ambitious undertaking proposed by the five founders when they held their first official meeting on March 21, 1899, in the village of Lake George. But time has justified their optimism and the Association has grown dramatically since its formation into a successful and multifaceted institution with over 2500 members.

NYSHA’s history has been marked by several important stages since its establishment, the first of which came with the gift of a new home in Ticonderoga, New York. Given to the New York State Historical Association in 1926 by Horace Moses, a New York businessman, the building was a replicated version of John Hancock’s renowned Boston house, known as the Hancock House. In addition to the Hancock House, Moses also gave the Association a generous endowment to assist with its general operating costs.

In 1939 a second major opportunity presented itself when Stephen Carlton Clark, a native of Cooperstown and one of the heirs to the Singer sewing machine fortune, offered the Association a new home in the village of Cooperstown. Clark, a leading philanthropist and visionary art collector, took an active interest in expanding the Association’s holdings and in 1944 turned over Fenimore House, one of his family’s properties, to be used as a new headquarters and museum. The impressive neo-Georgian structure was built in the 1930s on the site of James Fenimore Cooper’s early 19th century farmhouse on the shore of Otsego Lake, Cooper’s *Glimmerglass*. Fenimore House was large enough to have both extensive exhibition galleries as well as office and library space. Today, Fenimore House, aptly named the Fenimore Art Museum, has superb holdings in American folk art, fine art, and American Indian art that span the entire North American continent.

As in any long-lived institution, the vision, dedication and hard work of individual people have made the Association what it is today. Among the most influential during the early years of the Association’s history was Frederick B. Richards. One of the original members of the board, Richards served as secretary for many years and held the Association together throughout its first decades. Dixon Ryan Fox, the dynamic president of Union College, was president of the Association from 1929 to 1945. He greatly invigorated the activities and led the move from Ticonderoga to Cooperstown. Stephen C. Clark utilized his experience as a founding trustee of the Museum of Modern Art to transform the collection of the Association and created holdings in American fine and folk art. Louis C. Jones, a folklorist and university professor who was director of the Association

from 1947 to 1973, provided the energy and expansive personality to make the Association an innovative force among the many historical associations and museums in the state.

In 1919, the Association introduced *New York History*, a quarterly publication devoted entirely to the history of New York State. To reach a broader audience, a popular annual history magazine, *Heritage*, was begun in 1984 and has won several awards for design and printing. The Association also encourages individual scholarly research and gives annual monetary prizes to the authors of the best article published in *New York History* and the author of an unpublished manuscript dealing with some aspect of New York history. In addition, the Henry Allen Moe Prize, named for a past chairman of the board, is awarded annually to the author of the best catalogue of an art exhibition shown in New York State during the previous year.

In 1968, a full service research library was created to house the Association's ever expanding collection. The original collection, which began with a few periodicals, has grown to over 80,000 titles, of which about 20 percent are very rare or unique to this institution. The holdings of 19<sup>th</sup>-century New York State periodicals and first editions of James Fenimore Cooper's works are particularly significant. The manuscript collection includes important records of many early New York State businesses as well as family papers in the form of letters, diaries and receipts. Resources for genealogical research in New York State families are particularly extensive.

In 1998 the Association became the headquarters for *New York State History Day*, a competitive program that brings over 300 students from all over the state for competitions in drama, video, lecture and written papers based on a single historical theme. The Association also co-sponsors the Cooperstown Graduate Program, one of the nation's premier museum training graduate schools, which grants a master's degree in History Museum Studies.

Today, the New York State Historical Association is a private, non-profit educational institution dedicated to collecting, preserving, and interpreting art and historical artifacts that are unique to and representative of New York State's rich cultural heritage and rural past. It has preserved tens of thousands of documents, books, artworks, photographs, and artifacts and uses its comprehensive collections in innovative and nationally touring exhibitions and educational programs. The Association operates the Fenimore Art Museum and a non-circulating Research Library and offers a membership program for those who share an appreciation of American culture and New York State's rich cultural history.

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