

April 2021



History Happenings

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Last Month at The History Center...

6th Annual Fab5 Young Professional Awards - virtual

History Center Director Ben Sandberg received the "Rookie of the Year" award for the 6th Annual Young Professional Awards. These awards celebrate the achievements of young professionals who are excelling in their fields and making an impact in Tompkins County. This year the committee specifically honored those who have excelled in their positions despite the impacts and difficulties of Covid-19.

Ben is humble, but 2020 was his first full year as director of The History Center in Tompkins County and he excelled despite every challenge. We're grateful to the committee for recognizing his work, and look forward to his second year being a little smoother to navigate.



Tune in at the 30 minute mark of the "livestream" award program to hear some words from Ben Sandberg about why he was drawn to work at The History Center and the powerful impact of supporting museums and the arts in the community. Listen to the full program to hear about the amazing programs in our community, and keep an eye out for some special celebrity appearances! <https://youtu.be/N5jc5tuRVmo?t=1772>

Upcoming Events - thehistorycenter.net/events

April is Black Women's History Month! Explore the stories of historic black women, and engage with curriculum and virtual exhibits on our [Black Women's History Month](#) web page. Stop by our Exhibit Hall and learn about the phenomenal lives of women civil rights leaders in the "Sisters of Change" exhibit in our atrium, and other historic Black women of Tompkins County throughout our [Exhibit Hall](#).

Wednesday-Saturday Every Week - [EXHIBIT HALL IS OPEN!](#)

[Hours & Safety Guidelines](#) - Schedule a [private visit!](#) ** Our current exhibits will only be on display for 2 1/2 more months before we transition to our long awaited Breaking Barriers exhibit unveiling in July! Be sure to visit the [Exhibit Hall](#) to see our current displays before they are taken down.**

April 14th - [There's Your Ready Girl - Virtual Screening & Discussion](#)

Dorothy Cotton was a bold, highly effective and important civil rights leader, the only woman on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Executive Staff. In celebration of Black Women's History Month, The History Center is sponsoring a screening of the award-winning short film THERE'S YOUR READY GIRL, which was produced during the pandemic with footage from the feature-length documentary currently in production [MOVE WHEN THE SPIRIT SAYS MOVE](#), about Dorothy's life and legacy. Screening of the 11-minute film will be followed by a panel discussion on the role of women in Civil Rights history, featuring excerpts from a newly recorded interview with Ambassador Andrew Young and appearances by filmmaker Deborah C. Hoard, Dorothy Cotton Institute Fellows Laura Branca and Margo Hittleman and special guests. [REGISTER HERE](#). *This program is free to attend for all ages.*

April 3rd & 17th - [Virtual HistoryForge Transcription Sessions](#) - 11am-1pm

Help be a part of building history! THC's digital history project, HistoryForge, relies on volunteers like you. At our bi-weekly virtual transcription sessions we are currently entering records from the 1940 census for the City of Ithaca! **Learn more about the project [here](#).** Contact Eve historyforge@thehistorycenter.net to join.

[In Appreciation and Recognition of Jane Marcham](#)

The History Center would like to honor [Jane Marcham](#), long-time volunteer and generous benefactor, who died on February 26, 2021. Jane was a journalist who brought her writer's sharp eye to archival collections work for many years. A former member of both [Ithaca's Common Council](#) and [Planning Board](#), she was well versed in local history, and her love of Ithaca's past informed her work chronicling local organizations and businesses. She was adept in the painstaking organizing of archival materials, skillfully sorting donations into user friendly collections. But her greatest skill was in the essential work of description. An indispensable accompaniment to an archival collection is a [finding aid](#), which serves like the table of contents of a book, introducing users to a collection of materials. These need to be detailed enough to be helpful, but not so long as to intimidate a casual browser. Jane found that perfect balance; she was a master at synthesizing a broad sweeping history into a concise and beautiful introduction. Users have been benefiting for years from Jane's first pass at the history of such local notables as [Morse Chain/Borg Warner](#) and the Family and Children's Service, to name just a few.



Jane was always kindly and thoughtful, and her Thursday mornings in the archives always began with a chat and a recap of the news of the day. Her astute political observations blended with her kindly inquiries about family and friends. She was the widow of the late [John Marcham](#), another generous benefactor of The History Center's, whose long history of involvement and support can never be forgotten. She was a mentor and an inspiration, and she will be sorely missed. Our sympathies go out to her children and grandchildren in their sad loss.

Finger Lakes - National Heritage Area Feasibility Study



Finger Lakes National Heritage Area Feasibility Study

Harness the power of maps to tell stories that matter. ArcGIS StoryMaps has everything you need to create remarkable stories that give your maps meaning.

[Read more](https://storymaps.arcgis.com)
storymaps.arcgis.com

The National Park Service is [conducting a study](#) to determine the feasibility of designating the Finger Lakes region of New York as a **National Heritage Area (NHA)**. This [website](#) is intended to familiarize the public with the feasibility study process and share what the study team has learned about this special place. As you scroll through these pages, please consider what you value about the Finger Lakes region and how it is a unique place within the cultural and historic fabric of the United States of America. The National Park Service study team needs your help to better understand the cultural heritage of the Finger Lakes and needs your opinions on the appropriateness of designating and managing a National Heritage Area if it is created.

A NHA designation would positively impact the work and programs of The History Center in Tompkins County, and we encourage everyone to take the time to submit public comments in support of the NHA designation for the Finger Lakes region.

[PUBLIC COMMENT](#)

Civic Ensemble Oral History Project to be added to Archives

Founded in Ithaca NY in 2012, Civic Ensemble creates theatre by, with, and for the community by engaging audiences in dialogue about pressing questions and concerns. Through



weekly sessions, participants work alongside life practice artists to shape their stories, ideas, experiences, and dreams into original, fully produced professional plays in the community.

In 2020-2021 the [ReEntry Theatre Program](#), a project of Civic Ensemble's working with formerly incarcerated people in the community, is partnering with [College Initiative Upstate](#) to explore how personal narratives can impact a community.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2020, Civic Ensemble recorded oral history interviews with members of the ReEntry Theatre Program. These interviews will be added to The History Center's [Oral History collections](#), and selected interviews will be made available on free platforms for community educators as part of our [two year grant](#) with the Institute of Museum & Library Services.

Civic Ensemble has been selecting clips from these interviews and posting them on their [SoundCloud](#) account - we encourage everyone to listen to these perspectives and experiences of life in Tompkins County (*no account needed to listen*).



Oral History clip 2 by Civic Ensemble

Interview selection from College Initiative Upstate and the ReEntry Theatre Program's Oral History Project.

[Read more](#)
soundcloud.com

Arts & Development Grant from the Tompkins Tourism Program



The History Center in Tompkins County was awarded funds from the 2021 Arts and Culture Organizational Development Grants coordinated by the Tompkins County Tourism Program and the Community Arts Partnership of Tompkins County.

These funds will be used to support programs, and community outreach related to heritage tourism and historic arts programs offered through The History Center in Tompkins County.

New Spaces to Explore & Connect about Tompkins County History

The brand new **Newfield History & Activity Center** held two open houses in March to celebrate its new space on Main St beside the Newfield Public Library. The Newfield Historical Society and their archival collections had been housed in the top floor of the library for many years. This new space allows the Historical Society space to host programs, exhibits, conduct genealogical research, and other community programs. Their transition out of the library has also allowed the library larger space for their own programs. [Learn more and get involved.](#)



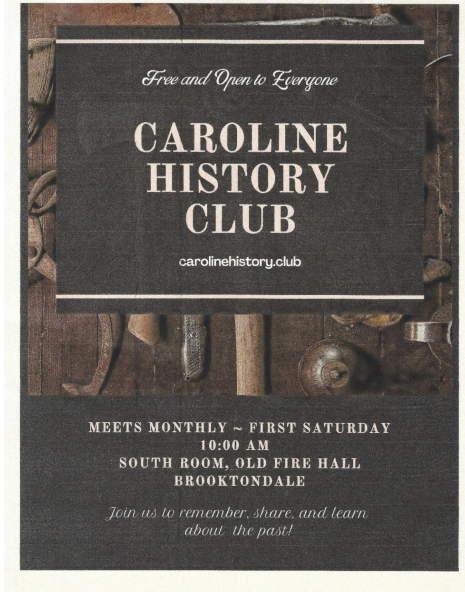
[Caroline History Club](#) has been an active virtual space since January 2021 for people to share the history of the Town of Caroline.

For folks looking to connect with others about history, stories, and community in Caroline, Brooktondale, Slaterville Springs and surrounding area you can join in the fun in a few ways:

Facebook: [Caroline History Club](#)

Monthly Meetings: First Saturday of each month in the [Old Fire Hall in Brooktondale](#)

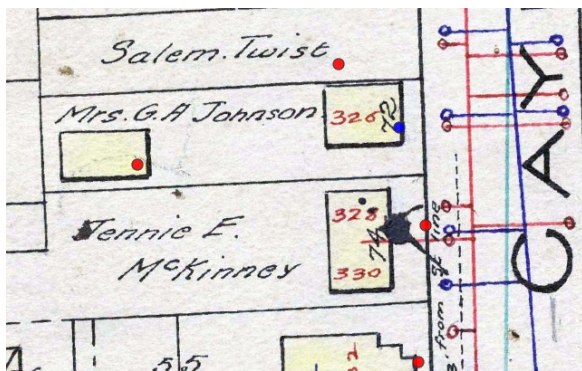
Blog: <http://carolinehistory.club>



The History Center Blog

Who Can You Find on HistoryForge? - Jessie Johnson

by Kate Delaney - Writing Intern at The History Center in Tompkins County



[Jessie M. Johnson](#) is believed to have been the first Black student to graduate from Ithaca High School, graduating in 1879. This was possible due to a New York State law put into effect in 1874 that required all children to attend school.

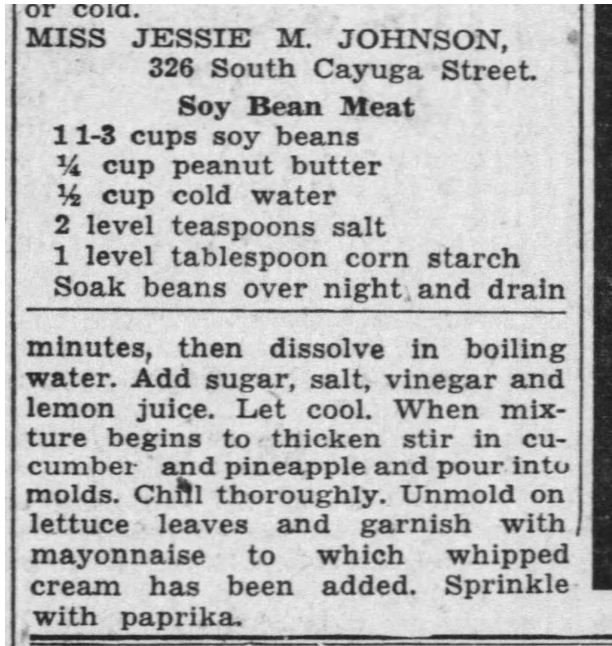
Johnson was one of very few Black students at the school. The superintendent's report from 1884, five years after she graduated, stated that 3% of the school district's population was Black, a total of 92 children. By 1930, there had been only 40 Black students who had graduated from Ithaca High

School, illustrating that while Black children were allowed to attend school, they were still at a massive disadvantage and not given the same resources necessary to succeed.

After graduating high school, Johnson remained in Ithaca, becoming a piano teacher. Her students' recitals were often advertised in the Ithaca Journal. She lived in a [two story wooden frame house on South Cayuga Street](#) on property that had been in her family since 1824. The image above notes her residence at 326 S. Cayuga St. on the Crandall 1899 City Engineering Map, although her name is listed with her father's George Armstrong Johnson, initials. Previously, her grandfather's house stood on the property, but Johnson tore it down due to structural concerns. During that process, they

discovered that the house had likely been part of the Underground Railroad. One construction worker found a trap door in the top step of a stairway that led to a room in the back of the house. It was thought that people who had been enslaved could hide out there and be kept warm by the large oven underneath the room.

Her father George Johnson (1835-1919) had been a barber and a known participant in the Underground Railroad local efforts. It's believed he may have used his skills as a barber to assist in disguising those escaping enslavement; George is credited with assisting at least 114 people self-liberate through raising funds, gathering clothing, and helping people board the *Simeon DeWitt*, a Cayuga Lake Steamer who had a captain sympathetic to the passengers on the Underground Railroad. A bridge crossing Six Mile Creek on South Plain St. was later named in his honor. Jessie Johnson passed away in 1951, and per her will the proceeds from the sale of her house were split between the [Southside Community Center](#) and the First Baptist Church.



We were unable to find an image of Jessie Johnson in our archives, but did find this 1936 recipe of hers in the Ithaca Journal archives for making "Soy Bean Meat." Please let us know if anyone tries out the recipe!

The History Center in Tompkins County

Exhibit Hall, Research Library, Archives, and staff offices are located at 110 North Tioga St. (Inside the [Tompkins Center for History & Culture](#)) Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

Web: www.thehistorycenter.net

Phone: 607-273-8284

Email: Staff emails can be found [here](#)

Hours: *Wednesday-Saturday 10am-5pm**

**Please note our hours have changed due to COVID-19 and may be adjusted on a week to week basis depending on local health recommendations.*

Follow us on social media
[@TompkinsHistory](#)



Contact Us!