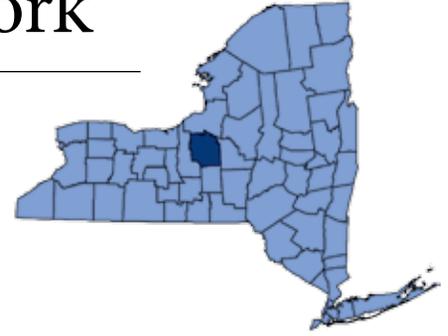




Henry B. Hoff, CG, FASG, is Editor of *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. His interests include *New York and the West Indies*, and he is the author of many articles in genealogical journals.

focus on New York



Upstate New York Research: Skaneateles, Onondaga County, as an Example

As long as I can remember, my father talked about Skaneateles. He spent summers there as a child, and his parents were married there. My father indicated that his maternal grandfather's family lived in Skaneateles, and that the latter's mother was Mary Jane Horton (1823–1901).

Once I became interested in genealogy, it was relatively easy to determine just who lived there—and even where they had come from. However, I was not prompted to investigate this family further until I started working on my Horton family for an article published in 2009.^[1] Further research during a recent trip to Onondaga County uncovered more about the family, and also resulted in the present article, which provides an overview of the resources available to genealogists researching in the area.

Geography

As can be seen from the map on page 58, the Town of Skaneateles extends around the upper part of Skaneateles Lake, one of the Finger Lakes. The Village of Skaneateles is at the north end of the lake, but in this article “Skaneateles” refers to the town. The area was settled in the 1790s when it was part of the Town of Marcellus; Skaneateles was set off as a separate town in 1830. Originally from Hebron, Connecticut, Stephen Horton settled with his wife, Heyltje Van Dyck, and children in Marcellus about 1807, and was buried in the Marcellus Village Cemetery in 1816. His daughters generally remained in Marcellus, while his only son, also named Stephen (1793–1832), opened a store, evidently in the Village of Skaneateles.

So far we have five potentially relevant jurisdictions:

- Town of Marcellus
- Village of Marcellus (incorporated 1853)
- Town of Skaneateles
- Village of Skaneateles (incorporated 1833)
- Onondaga County

For researching a family living in Skaneateles, we must add Auburn as the nearest other town (seven miles to the west of the Village of Skaneateles), incorporated as a city in 1848, and the county seat of Cayuga County. Since the early nineteenth century, Auburn had churches (with surviving records) and newspapers,^[2] both of which included events in Skaneateles.

Repositories

The most important repository for Skaneateles research is the Onondaga County Public Library in Syracuse, especially for its unique material on Onondaga County families, including the Pioneer Index card file.^[3] The former head of the Local History and Genealogy Department was Gerald Parsons, FASG (1924–2003), who built up the collection substantially. He was considered to be the best upstate New York genealogist of his time. Other important repositories include the Onondaga Historical Association (also in Syracuse), the Marcellus Historical Society, the Skaneateles Historical Society, and the offices of the town and village historians for Marcellus and Skaneateles. The holdings of local libraries are included in the catalog of the Onondaga County Public Library, which shows, for example, that the only

library in the system with a copy of *Birth, Marriage, and Death Records of Early Residents of the Skaneateles Area* (1984) is the Skaneateles Library.

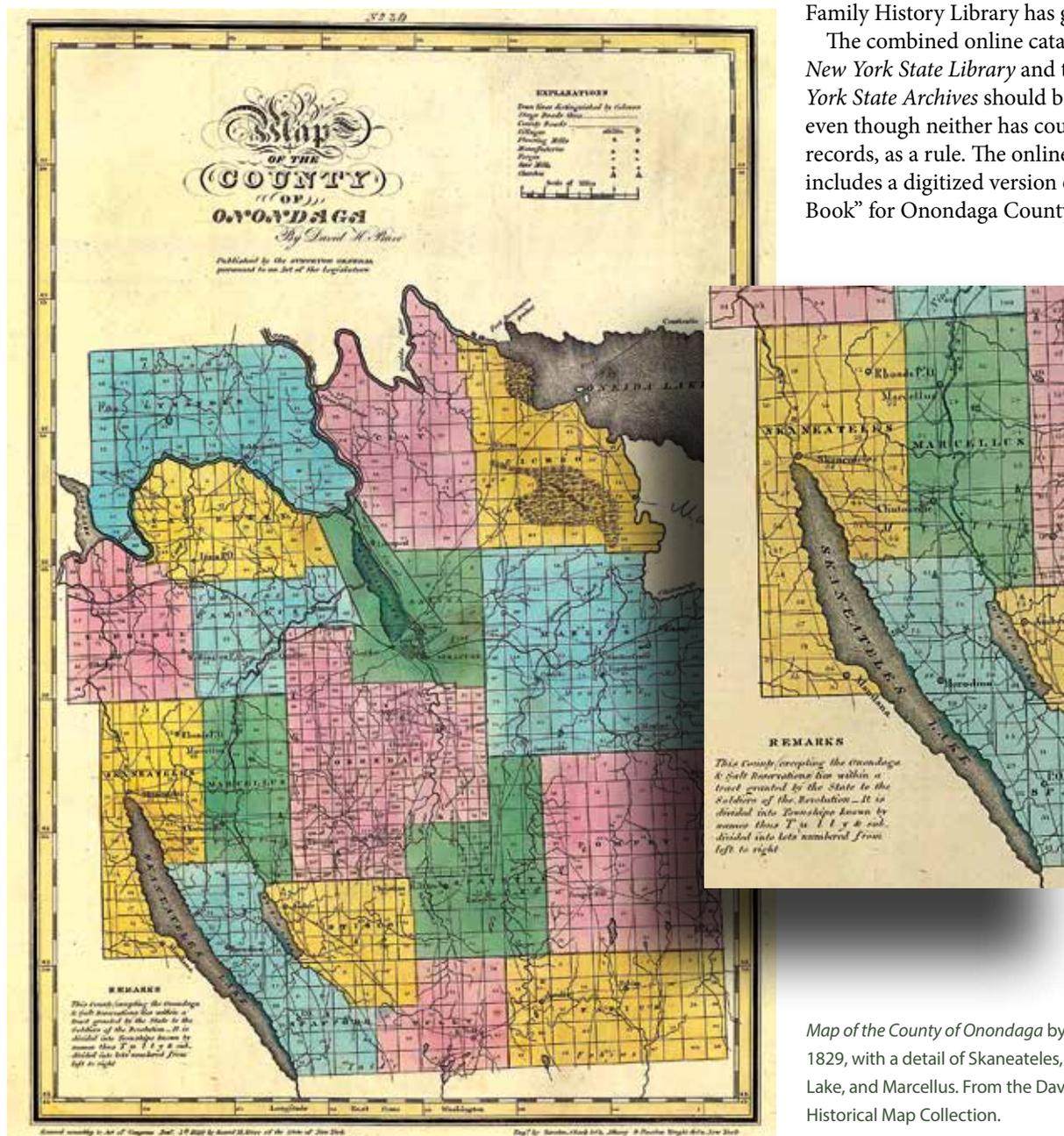
The key document for my Horton article was the 1843 probate petition for Stephen Horton's widow, listing her living children and the children of her deceased son. These petitions are not available on microfilm from the Family History Library,^[4] so a visit to the Onondaga County Surrogate's Court was necessary.

Although many repositories have Onondaga County material, I want to mention four major ones. The *Family History Library* has an extensive collection of microfilmed Onondaga (and Cayuga) County records, including probate and deeds. For Skaneateles the FHL has microfilmed manuscripts of church records, probably filmed at the Onondaga Historical Association. Although the vital records of St. James Episcopal Church in Skaneateles begin in 1831, a leading Onondaga County

historian, Rev. William M. Beauchamp (1830–1925), went through the earlier records of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Auburn and extracted all entries relating to Skaneateles—and the microfilm has been digitized and is available via the FHL catalog.

The *New York Public Library* (in New York City) has more Onondaga County material than one might expect, much of which was from the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. An important collection is a six-volume typescript by Lester Card, with a completely different title from the one the Family History Library has given it.

The combined online catalog of the *New York State Library* and the *New York State Archives* should be reviewed, even though neither has county-level records, as a rule. The online catalog includes a digitized version of the "Red Book" for Onondaga County,^[5] which is



Map of the County of Onondaga by David H. Burr, 1829, with a detail of Skaneateles, Skaneateles Lake, and Marcellus. From the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

also available in many libraries in hard copy. The New York State Archives has microfilms of some original records for both Marcellus and Skaneateles.^[6]

Books, Wikis, and Websites

Three books I use frequently for upstate New York research are French's *Gazetteer* (see note 2), Dollarhide's *New York State Censuses & Substitutes*,^[7] and Remington's New York probate guide.^[8] For Onondaga County, there are two wikis you'll want to consult. The first is on the Family History Library website (*FamilySearch.org*), and the other is on the website of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society (*NewYorkFamilyHistory.org*). The NYG&B will include all its Wikis for New York counties in a forthcoming work, *New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer*.

USGenWeb has a website for Onondaga County, but I have found no regional website like the Northern New York Libraries Network (*nnyln.org*). I use the DAR website for the online index to its thousand-plus volumes of New York records,^[9] although the 1998 published subject index (see note 2) is still useful. So, for example, the records of St. James Episcopal Church in Skaneateles were abstracted in volume 38 (1932) of the *New York Genealogical*

Records Committee reports. I also use *AmericanAncestors.org* for Onondaga County research, mainly for "Abstracts of Wills, Administrations, and Guardianships in NY State, 1787–1835" and Onondaga County guardianships, 1815–1849.

Periodicals

Useful source material is often contained in periodicals, particularly *Tree Talks*, the quarterly publication of the Central New York Genealogical Society. Currently, three of the four issues of *Tree Talks* published each year include a lead article (see, for example, note 3), two pages of source material for various upstate New York counties (always including Onondaga), and book reviews. The two pages per issue for each county are also available for sale by the Society as a packet.^[10] The fourth issue is usually a census transcription, such as "Mortality Schedules of the 1850 and 1860 Onondaga County, New York, Federal Census" in 2009. The index to each volume should be reviewed; each fourth issue has its own index. A published subject index covers volumes published through 1988.^[11] PERSI is useful for identifying the contents of subsequent issues and relevant source material published in other periodicals.

However, it is very difficult to find genealogical articles on families in upstate New York counties—or indeed anywhere. Periodicals rarely index place names, and PERSI does not have a search-by-place-name-in-title feature. Using my Horton article cited in note 1 as a test, I found it cited under *Horton* plus *Mayflower*, but not under *Fuller* plus *Mayflower* since PERSI had given the article an entirely new title that omitted the surname Fuller and place names. Current online searches of periodicals tested show that the *Register* and the *Record*, at least, have a search-by-place-name-in-title feature.^[12]

The "Seen Elsewhere" feature published annually in *American Ancestors* lists articles in non-New York publications with New York content.^[13] Sometimes specific counties are noted. You should also keep current with the *Record* and with *Tree Talks*, as well as periodicals for the areas of upstate New York that interest you.

Research in other upstate New York towns and counties presumably is comparable. Some towns and counties have more microfilmed records available and/or abstracted records in print, while others have less. You just hope your ancestors left records, wherever they lived in upstate New York. ♦

Notes

- 1 Henry B. Hoff, "Stephen Horton of Hebron, Conn., and Marcellus, Onondaga Co., N.Y.: Establishing an Edward Fuller Line," *Mayflower Descendant* 58 (2009):1–10, 175.
- 2 *Revised Master Index to the New York State Daughters of the American Revolution Genealogical Records Volumes, Book 1* (Zephyrhills, Fla.: Jean D. Worden, 1998), 223 (churches); J. H. French, *Historical and Statistical Gazetteer of New York State* (Syracuse, N.Y.: R. P. Smith, 1860; repr. Interlaken, N.Y.: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1980), 198 (newspapers).
- 3 See Jean B. Palmer, "Researching in Syracuse: Central Library of Onondaga County Public Library," *Tree Talks* 48 (March 2008):3–8.
- 4 For counties whose probate petitions are on microfilm at the Family History Library, see the list by Gordon L. Remington in *AMERICAN ANCESTORS* 12:4 (Fall 2011):56.

- 5 *Guide to Historical Resources in Onondaga County, New York, Repositories*, 3 vols. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1984). It shows, for example, that the Skaneateles Historical Society has an account book collection for 1835–1916, with eleven volumes.
- 6 *Guide to Records in the New York State Archives* (Albany, N.Y.: University of the State of New York, 1993), 440–42.
- 7 William Dollarhide, *New York State Censuses & Substitutes* (Bountiful, Utah: Heritage Creations, 2005).
- 8 Gordon L. Remington, *New York State Probate Records: A Genealogist's Guide to Testate and Intestate Records*, 2nd ed. (Boston: NEHGS, 2011).
- 9 At the present time, the actual records are available to the public only at the DAR Library in Washington, D.C.

- 10 Indexes for some counties are on the Society's website (*rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nycnygs/index-master-htm*), but not Onondaga or Cayuga so far.
- 11 Jean D. Worden, *Tree Talks: A Publication of Central New York Genealogical Society, Subject Index for Volumes 1 to 28* (San Dimas, Calif: the compiler, 1988).
- 12 The *Record* refers to *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*. A keyword search in an online library catalog should turn up a place name in the title of a book, and this method would presumably work for any article that a library had catalogued.
- 13 This feature is also published in *The New York Researcher*, formerly *The NYG&B Newsletter*.