



Canandaigua Lake Steamboats



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List of Steamboats

Several of the historical steamboats that once navigated the waters of Canandaigua Lake from the mid 1800s to the early 1900s are featured in the lobby and conference rooms throughout Town Hall and the Highway Facility. Here they are in order by their launch date:

- *Joseph Wood*, 1855-1868
 - Town Hall, lower level, first door on right from the main entrance
- *Canandaigua*, 1865-1889
 - Town Hall, lower level lobby/entrance area
- *Ontario*, 1867-1887
 - Town Hall, main level, small, glass-walled conference room in the Development Office
- *Onnalinda*, 1888-1913
 - Town Hall, lower level courtroom, double doors on the right from the lobby/entrance area
- *Ogarita*, 1889-1914
 - Town Hall, main level, to the left from the main entrance, second door on the right
- *Genundewah*, 1889-1894
 - Highway Facility, to the left from the main entrance, last door on the right
- *Oriana*, 1896-1926
 - Town Hall, lower level, to the left from the main entrance, last door on the left

Though not exhaustive, this list features some of the most prominent steamers on the Lake in their time. Each one is represented in a different conference room with one or more photographs or illustrations and is accompanied by a short description. Feel free to visit the rooms during your visits to Town Hall.

Following is a brief history of the Steamboat Era of Canandaigua Lake followed by a longer history of each of the seven featured steamboats.

Canandaigua Steamboat History

Canandaigua Lake was never connected to Seneca Lake or Cayuga Lake by canal or any natural navigable waterways, so all commercial traffic was over local roads until the coming of the railroad. Its early steamboat business was localized between Naples at the head of the Lake and Canandaigua at its foot. Lumber from Woodville to Canandaigua for home construction, and fresh produce for the palate constituted most of the early northbound trade, while manufactured goods constituted most of the southbound trade.

Canandaigua Pier

In 1847, the Village of Canandaigua built a municipal pier well out into the Lake, which facilitated the loading and unloading of passengers and produce for a number of steamboats. In 1887, the Northern Central Railroad installed tracks down the west side in front of the boathouses.

The Woodville Pier was enlarged to 200 feet with the help of a good deal of dredging. Other landings soon followed suit, which attracted the construction of larger steamboats with deeper drafts.

In 1904 the Canandaigua Pier was rebuilt and enlarged. The Northern Central Railroad was relocated to the east side and the electric trolley tracks of the Rochester and Eastern Rapid Railway were run down the west side. The boathouses were moved to new side piers during the winter of 1903 – 1904.

Steamboat Builders

At the height of the Steamboat Era on Canandaigua Lake, in March of 1880, the Canandaigua Lake Steam Navigation Company was formed by prominent Canandaigua businessmen. Included was James McKechnie who owned the *Canandaigua*. Their goal was to establish a regulated steamboat schedule on the Lake. They purchased the *Ontario II*, eliminating competition. Naturally, fares went up immediately.

At the time, the Canandaigua Lake Steam Navigation Company operated four small steamboats. However, the boats were small and were not successful as transportation boats. These boats included the *Fairy*, built in 1887 and used by F. F. Thompson to go to his cottage on Pine Bank; the *Vanderbilt*, built in 1888 and

had a short commercial run; and in 1895 Wally Reed built the *Mayflower* and the *Wallanick* which were equally unsuccessful.

Alonzo Springstead (1844-1939) was one of the most prominent steamboat builders in the Finger Lakes. He built most of the boats featured in the Town Hall including the *Onnalinda*, *Genundewah*, *Ogarita*, *Oriana*, and *Onanda*. He also built the *Eastern Star* and many additional steamboats for Seneca, Keuka, Cayuga, Otsego, and Owasco Lakes. Just prior to the *Onnalinda*, in 1885, Alonzo built the *Maid of the Mist III* for Niagara Falls, which would stay in service for 70 years until 1955. Alonzo even piloted the vessel for the first three months of her service. Alonzo was 94 years old when he passed away, still a very active man!

Points on the Lake

Steamboat passengers were carried to and from many places along the Lake. One popular stop was the Seneca Point Hotel, rebuilt to grand proportions in 1888. It burned down in 1899. Another was the Woodville Hotel, especially popular during the duck and deer hunting seasons. The hotel was built in 1856 and in the 1870s changed its name to the Steamboat Hotel when Mr. and Mrs. W. Russell Standish bought it. It was sold again in the 1920s and demolished in 1924.

Other public points on the Lake were Willow Grove at Vine Valley, and Linden Lodge at Cook's Point. Many cottage owners used the steamboats for transportation to their cottages, both on a daily, short-term basis, and also for extended vacations. Some even commuted to their place of employment via the steamboats.

Passengers awaiting the steamboat at Black Point in 1893. Note the signal flag held by the man at the right.



Joseph Wood

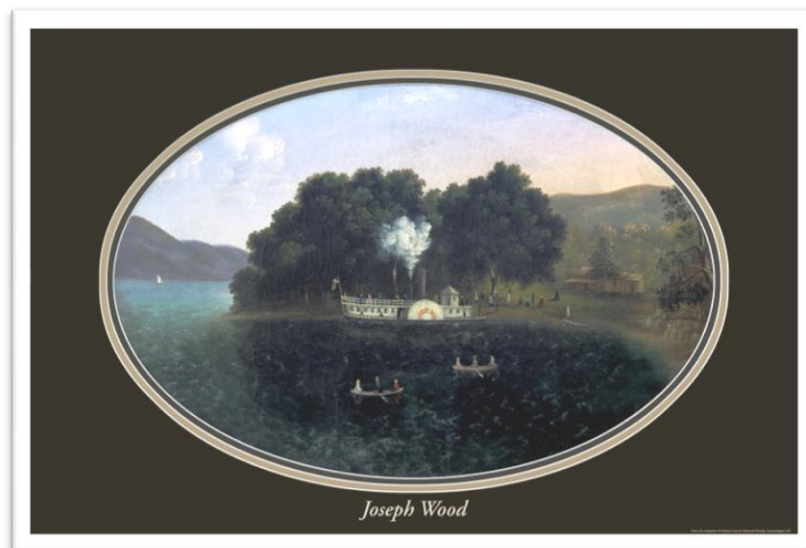
1855-1868

The *Joseph Wood* was launched in 1855. This boat was the first side-wheeler on the Lake. It was built by Benjamin Springstead and commissioned by David and Allen Wood at a location just west of the present day Canandaigua City Pier. Several photos of it have survived. The "Joe Wood" was 91 feet long, 18 feet wide, and drew only 18 inches of water. The boat was named for David and Allen's father by Benjamin Springstead of Geneva.

So began the long career of Capt. Allen Wood, which would influence the steamboat trade on Canandaigua, Keuka, and Seneca Lakes. The Joseph Wood benefitted from the new Canandaigua village steamboat dock that was built in 1847. This pier would, in time, be lined with warehouses and equipped with its own narrow gage railroad. Canandaigua, by the early 1850's, was now part of the growing rail system and it made sense to run rails right down the dock. The overhang of her paddle wheels and deck made about 30' wide at her paddle guards.

-excerpted from
It Started with a Steamboat
by Steven Harvey

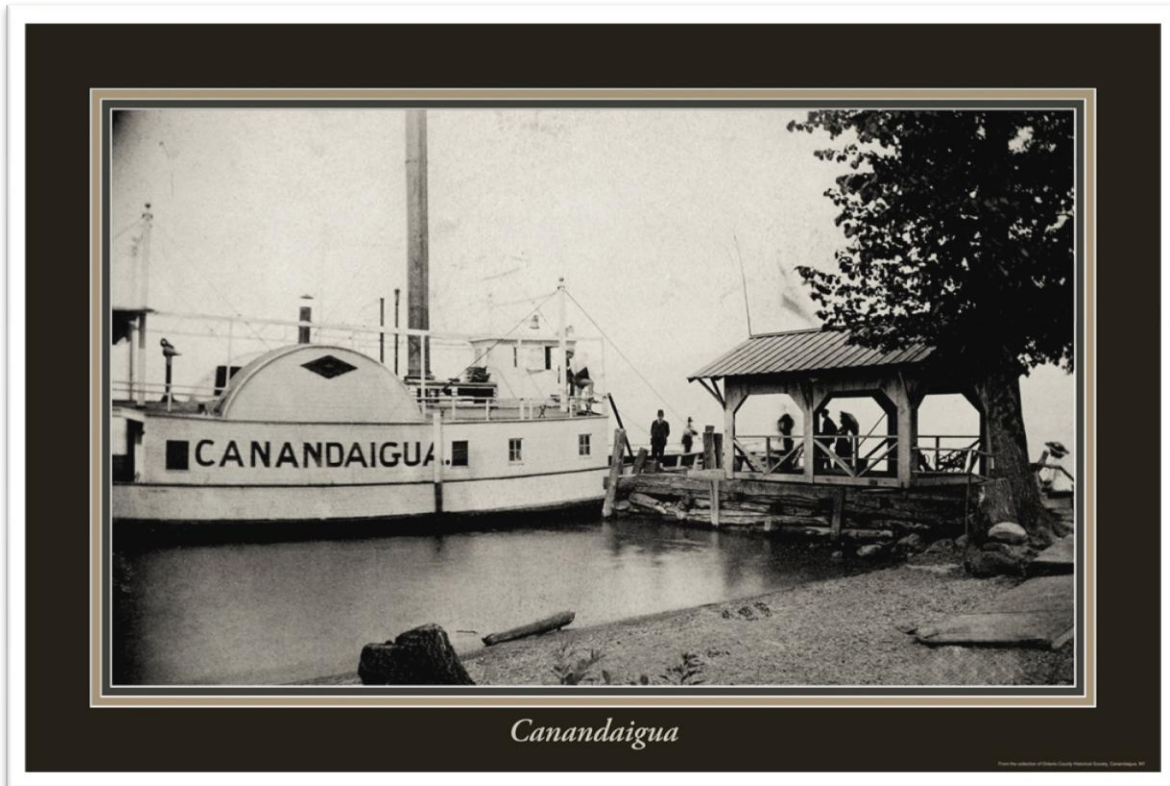
The *Joseph Wood* was rebuilt in 1863 by Benjamin and Alonzo Springstead and sold to the Standish Brothers of Naples. A high-pressure horizontal engine powered the boat. It was crushed in the ice at the end of the Canandaigua City Pier in March of 1868.



Canandaigua

1865-1889

The *Canandaigua* was launched in 1865. Built by Benjamin Springstead for the Warner Brothers of Canandaigua, she was 110 feet long and 18 feet wide. For years it was owned by James & Alexander McKechnie, well-known brewers in Canandaigua. A soft coal burner, the *Canandaigua* produced “whoof, whoof” clouds of dark smoke, had a side-wheel, and operated on the Lake for 24 years. A very popular early pilot was Marshall Cooper. She was dismantled in 1889 and her engine was used to power the new steamboat, *Ogarita*.

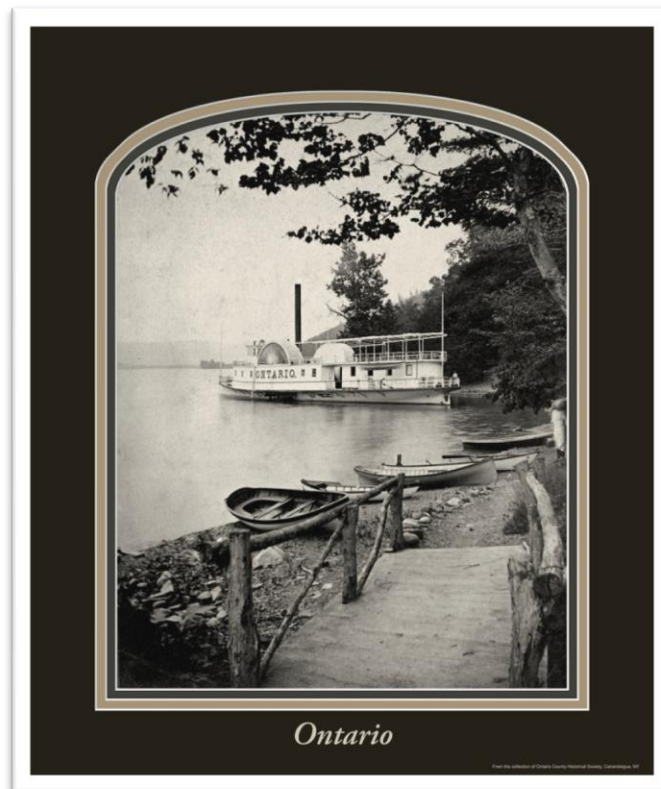


Ontario

1867-1887

The second of its name, the *Ontario* was launched in 1867. Not much is known about the first *Ontario* and no known photos remain. The latter *Ontario* was christened by Miss Julia Phelps of Canandaigua. It was built in Woodville by Benjamin and Alonzo Springstead for the Standish Brothers, Henry and Sales, of Naples. The *Ontario* was captained first by Henry Standish, and later by Edward Herendeen. The *Ontario* was 120 feet long and 19 feet wide. Her paddlewheels were 19 feet in diameter with the axles so high (4 feet above the deck) passengers had to duck under them to get past. Like other early boats on the Lake, such as the *Lady of the Lake* and *Joseph Wood*, the *Ontario* had a very shallow hull that drew only 18 inches of water because of the great shallows that ran from the shores out into the Lake on each point.

The *Ontario* was the only wood burner on this Lake, fueled by 6 foot long logs. The ship was docked in Woodville and trips were taken up the West River to collect wood. Her boiler was low pressure and very silent. In 1880 the *Ontario II* was taken over by the Canandaigua Lake Steam Navigation Company. She burned at the Canandaigua City Pier in July 1887.



Onnalinda

1888-1913

When Alonzo Springstead (1844 - 1939) was asked in 1888 by James McKechnie of Canandaigua Brewery fame, to build a large, new steamboat for the Canandaigua Lake Steamboat Company—the largest ever built for Canandaigua Lake—the timing was perfect. Alonzo already had a great deal of experience in steamboat construction. Starting in the business when he was 16 with his father, Benjamin Springstead, (both of Geneva) they had already rebuilt the *Joseph Wood* for the Wood Brothers, and built the *Canandaigua* and *Ontario II*, along with several other boats for Cayuga, Seneca, and Keuka Lakes. Alonzo went into business for himself at age 21.

Alonzo's masterpiece, considered Canandaigua Lake's "Queen of the Steamboat Era," the Onnalinda, could carry 600 passengers on summer Sundays, with another 400 on a boat in tow.

-excerpted from
Slim Fingers Beckon
by Arch Merrill

Launched on May 18, 1888 and christened by Miss Maud Sayer, a niece of Mr. James McKechnie, the *Onnalinda* was 142 feet on the keel with a 40 foot beam (22.5 feet between the paddles). She was powered by a 40 pound boiler and a 34 inch diameter, low pressure, 250 horsepower engine. Due to the improvements to the Canandaigua City Pier, the Woodville Pier, and other landings, the size of the *Onnalinda*, requiring a 32 inch draft, could be accommodated by nearly all of the docks on the Lake.

Her launch was recorded by the media of the time:

Last Saturday morning the new steamboat was launched according to the announcement. Although the weather was extremely unpleasant a large crowd gathered to witness the interesting affair, not only from this village but a large number came from up the Lake. When everything was ready the props were removed, a push from the Northern Central engine sent the new craft down the incline and she rested in the water like a duck.

-excerpted from
Repository and Messenger
May 24, 1888
p.3 col. 5

It took about three months after her initial launch until the *Onnalinda* was ready for regular trips. It was felt by many to have been the most elegant steamboat on the Lake. It was often chartered by different organizations for picnics and "Moonlight Excursions." They were carried to places like the Seneca Point and Woodville Hotels, Willow Grove at Vine Valley, and Linden Lodge at Cook's Point.

According to the *Ontario County Times*:

The steamer Onnalinda that first slid into the water in 1888 has been doing great work as a freighter all the fall, carrying from 30-50 tons of fruit a trip. She passed the official inspection, was given all the repairs that seemed necessary and is making good in every way.

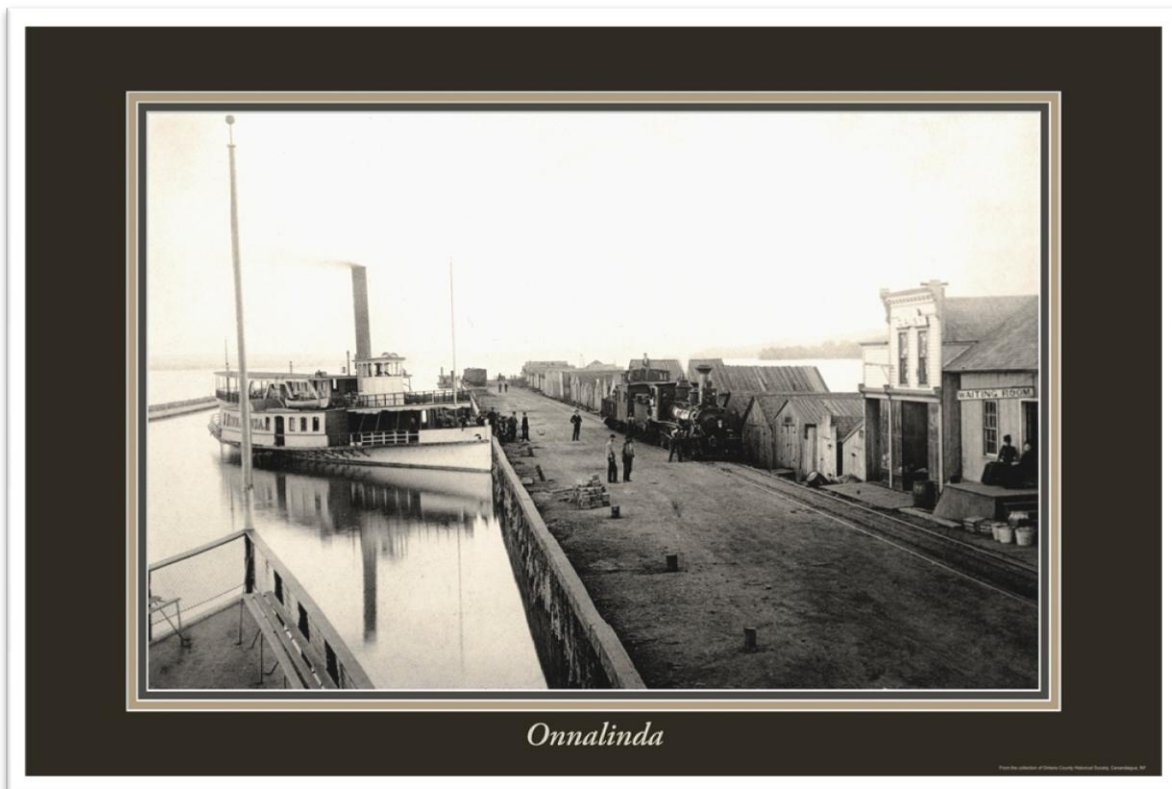
Due to the length of this steamboat, the heavy weight of the engine, and her relatively shallow draft, an effort was made to keep the boat from sagging in the middle around the paddle wheels through the installation of a "trestle" type structure. Similar to bridge trestles, it was incorporated to spread the weight evenly along the length of the ship.

The *Onnalinda* was the only boat operating in the Finger Lakes that had 14 foot diameter feathering paddlewheels, which had buckets mounted on pivots that could be adjusted by connecting rods for finer tuning. The effect was that the buckets would enter and leave the water in a much cleaner manner than the old paddles, which tended to slap the water. This gave the *Onnalinda* greater speed and efficiency than older steamboats. However, this made the steamboat harder to manage and the pilots required additional training.

The interior construction of this larger, more modernized steamboat provided other amenities for the clientele of the day. She was one of the first to have plumbing and Ladies' and Gentlemen's restrooms. Some Private Cabins were also available and it had a snack bar.

One of the most recognizable features was something which identified every steamboat that Benjamin Springstead was involved with: a hand carved eagle with spread wings perched on top of the pilot's cabin. Benjamin often provided this ornament on his boats due to his love for woodcarving.

The *Onnalinda* remained in service from 1888 until 1913, after which time she was dismantled and sunk opposite the Canandaigua Yacht Club in 1913. For a period of time the rudder was used as a table top at the Yacht Club.



Ogarita

1889-1914

Shortly after the Canandaigua Lake Steam Navigation Company was reorganized to form The Canandaigua Lake Steamboat Company, Alonzo Springstead was engaged to build the *Ogarita*. She was launched in 1889 and was owned by the Canandaigua Lake Transportation Company, as were the *Onnalinda* and *Oriana*. Work was begun in May of 1889 on the new 100 foot long steamer. She carried up to 250 passengers. *Ogarita* was built for \$15,000 and named after the daughter of the owner. She could take the place of the *Onnalinda* when needed or handle large excursion groups in the summer. She was dubbed the "O'Garrity" due to her Irish crew.

The Canandaigua Lake Steamboat Company's 1889 fleet featured the *Onnalinda*, *Ogarita*, and *Seneca Chief*. The *Ogarita* provided Lake service for 25 years with George Stempel as pilot. She burned to water level at the Woodville Pier in 1914.



Genundewah

1889-1894

The *Genundewah* was another Alonzo Springstead-built boat and was the second one he built in the year 1889. *Genundewah* was 112 feet on the keel (117 feet overall), 19 feet on the beam, and 32 feet on the deck. With a 150 horsepower, high pressure engine, it was claimed the *Genundewah* could reach 16 miles per hour. Her name is the Native term for Bare Hill and her nickname was the "Gee-Whiz," reflecting her ornamentation and grace. Later on she was owned by George Mueller, whose son, John, would serve for a while as her pilot.

She burned at the height of the competition with *Onnalinda* on December 8, 1894; the fire being of suspicious origin.

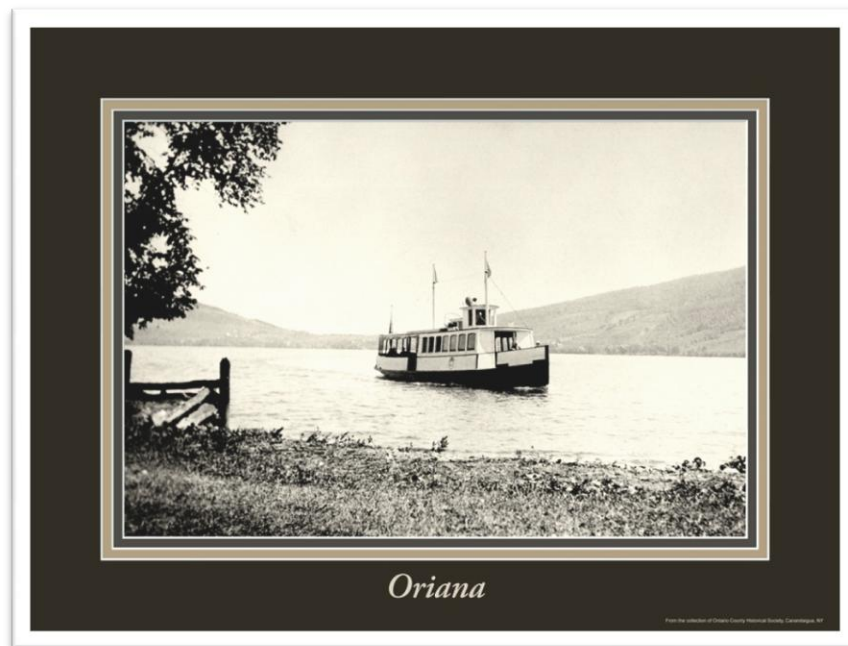


Oriana

1896-1926

The *Oriana* was built in 1896 by Alonzo Springstead for the Canandaigua Transportation Company using the boiler from the dismantled, smaller steamer, *Seneca Chief*. Like most other steamboats, *Oriana's* name was painted along both sides of her hulls. However, an extra "N" was added to one side with no explanation and it was never changed. Both she and the *Onanda* were named for Iroquois maidens.

In 1910 the *Oriana* was rebuilt; she was cut in half and her length was extended by 11 feet, and her powering system was changed from steam to a gasoline engine. She could carry 125 passengers and held the record for the longest commercial service of 30 years. The *Oriana* was abandoned and left to rot in 1926.



Acknowledgments

This project was spearheaded by the Town of Canandaigua's own, all-volunteer Local History Team and its very dedicated and knowledgeable membership:

- Ray Henry, Co-Chairperson, Town Historian
- Saralinda Hooker, Co-Chairperson
- Lois Golbeck
- Donna West
- Richard West
- Ed Varno
- Sarah Reynolds, Staff Liaison

Members gathered the steamboat history, collected and assessed images of each ship, and coordinated the naming of the conference rooms. This project would not have been possible without their knowledge, time, and dedication.

Additional appreciation goes to:

- Town Historian, Ray Henry, for gathering the history of Canandaigua Lake's Steamboat Era and its many steamboats;
- Saralinda Hooker, for helping to locate images of each steamboat; and
- Richard West, for his expertise and time spent arranging and printing the steamboat images.

The Team is also grateful for the reference materials and assistance provided by the Ontario County Historical Society.

Want to know more?

Town Historian, Ray Henry, is a wealth of information on steamboats and their builders and is always happy to share his knowledge with eager listeners. He can be reached by phone or email and is available to meet at Town Hall by appointment. Contact him at (585) 394-1120 x2249 or (585) 944-1506 or by email at rhenry@townofcanandaigua.org.

Additionally, many of the references listed on the following page can be found at the Wood Library and/or the Ontario County Historical Society.

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- Canandaigua Lake Steamboat Era* – Robert & William Vierhile: 1978
It Started With a Steamboat: An American Saga – Steven Harvey: 2007
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