

Onondaga Historical Association will give historical document back to New York state

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By **Teri Weaver / The Post-Standard**



Mike Groll / AP

A shroud covers a skylight over the Assembly staircase at the Capitol in Albany, N.Y., on Tuesday. Gov. Andrew Cuomo recently picked out dozens of state artifacts for display in the Capitol. The documents, antique motor cars and even an Adirondack guide boat are being readied for display in time for his State of the State address on Wednesday. The skylight is also expected to be unveiled.

Syracuse, NY -- For most of the past 100 years, the document declaring New York's independence from British rule was long-forgotten among thousands of papers at the Onondaga Historical Association in Syracuse.

The two-page declaration, dated May 26, 1775, was supposed to have burned in a 1911 fire in Albany's capital. That didn't happen. Instead, it ended up in the hands of a private collector and former president of the OHA, who donated his collection to the association in 1927.

Except for a short-lived display at a Syracuse bank in the 1940s, the important paper went unnoticed until 2007, when the OHA re-cataloged its inventory and discovered the missing piece of history.

Today, the document will become a part of the Hall of Governors display in the State Capital, according to Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the OHA. In March, the document will return to Syracuse and later this year, at a date to be determined, the OHA will transfer ownership of the document back to the state, according to an association news release.

"It's a phenomenal document," said Tripoli, who will be in Albany today for **Gov. Andrew Cuomo's State of the State address**. "It was the precursor to the Declaration of Independence. It

belongs to the people of New York.”

The document was signed by 100 men who were members of New York colony’s provincial congress, which represented an area covering New York City, the Hudson Valley and parts of what now is Vermont. At the time, similar petitions were circulated in parts of the colonies and signed by local residents.

But this paper — officially called the “General Association Document” — marked the first time New York’s government officials took sides in the building conflict. In their declaration, the co-signers resolved simply “never to become slaves.”

As part of their argument, the men declared their alarm at new taxes and shock at bloody fights happening in nearby Boston. They pledged to follow directions from the fledgling Continental Congress and oppose “the execution of the several arbitrary and oppressive acts of the British Parliament.”

Tripoli said the document has been authenticated, though its path from Albany to Syracuse remains unknown. “It’s a great mystery,” he said.

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Gov. Cuomo to unveil historic artifacts in Capitol

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Gov. Andrew Cuomo is using an old wooden Adirondack boat to help guide New Yorkers’ appreciation of state history.

The canoe, light enough to carry on a hiker’s shoulders from lake to lake, is among the artifacts he found in a state archives warehouse to display as symbols and inspiration. He’s picked dozens of items, from slavery records before President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation to rickety early cars and trucks that are now parked on the concourse of the Empire State Plaza in Albany.

The artifacts are being readied for display in time for his State of the State address on Wednesday, along with the unveiling of a restored skylight in the Assembly staircase. The skylight was covered over during renovation work in the 1940s.

“History educates us for the future,” Cuomo told The Associated Press this week.

The historic items depicting milestones of the executive and legislative branches and the press corps will be available for tours by school children and others. He said they’ll help bring state history alive to students and attract more tours.

The displays will be outside his office in the Hall of Governors and in front of the Assembly and Senate chambers and along press row, between the two chambers.