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Transformation of the Historic Poor Farm Property Continues

The transformation of the former "[Poorhouse Campus](#)" located on Onondaga Road in the Town of Onondaga is progressing. Onondaga Community College acquired the property in 2007 in a transfer from Onondaga County. The College plans to utilize the property, located adjacent to the main campus, to meet its expanding enrollment demands, particularly for adult students.

Currently underway is the renovation of the former "second hospital," built in 1928, into a [Regional Higher Education Center](#) that will serve as home to the College's Continuing and Extended Learning department, the Small Business Development Center, workforce development, and several four-year colleges and universities who partner with Onondaga Community College to offer bachelor's and master's degrees from the Onondaga campus.

Interior remediation work on the second hospital building began this summer. Upon commencement of the site work this fall, the College and general contractor, C&S Engineers, requested comment from the New York State Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau due to the historic nature of the property. The College has also been working with the Town of Onondaga Historical Society and the Onondaga Historical Association since the property was acquired. [Photos of the progress.](#)

"We have a tremendous privilege with this project to transform a property and to pay honor to the poignant history of the people who lived and worked at the Poorhouse. As educators, we know that there is much to learn from our history and we will take the time necessary to discover the property's past. We will pay tribute to the individuals who came before us by transforming a building that was essentially a place of no hope for those who had no other choice but to go to the Poorhouse, to a place of tremendous optimism for people, regardless of socio-economic status, to pursue the opportunities made possible through higher education," said Onondaga Community College President Debbie L. Sydow, Ph.D.

The New York State Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau requested an archaeological survey and C&S Engineers contracted with archaeologists from the [Public Archaeology Facility \(PAF\) at Binghamton University](#), who are currently working on site. As a result of digging test holes for a new retention pond that will capture rainwater from surrounding parking areas, the archaeologists discovered 22 sets of remains buried in unmarked gravesites. Daniel Seib, PAF's project director on site, estimates that the remains are from the mid-19th century.

In addition, the archaeologists have identified a foundation from an 1827 barn, powerhouses, the foundation from the main poorhouse, a well, underground steam tunnels, and bits of ceramic sherds, glass, smoking pipes, and shoe leather.

"Through excavation and analysis of artifacts left behind, archaeologists are able to understand pieces of the unwritten history of those who were part of this past community. Our archaeologists are honored by the privilege of telling part of the story of those individuals buried in these gravesites," said Nina M. Versaggi, Ph.D., RPA, Director of the Public Archaeology Facility at Binghamton University.

Human remains discovered at the site will be exhumed and transported to Binghamton University for examination by a forensic archaeology team headed by Dr. Dawnie Steadman. The Town of Onondaga Historical Society has also provided historic records. Following completion of the archaeologists' work, the human remains will be released back to Onondaga Community College. The College will work with the County Medical Examiner and a local funeral director to reinter the remains at the Loomis Hill cemetery.

"The Poorhouse and the folks who lived there were a very important part of the life of Onondaga Hill for almost 200 years. It's great to see the care and consideration that OCC has put into making this campus a vital part of the community again," said Jane Tracy, Town Historian, [Onondaga Historical Society](#).

"Onondaga Community College engaged the services of Onondaga Historical Association from the very inception of this exciting project in its desire to ensure that proper and accurate respect for the historical significance of the property is honored. OCC has continued to be conscientiously sensitive to the historic nature and importance of the site throughout the planning and construction processes. Its

commitment to the use of historic perspective, both in the renovation and in the finished product, is a fitting tribute to the tremendous history that encompasses the entire property," said Gregg Tripoli, Executive Director of the [Onondaga Historical Association](#).

Interior work on the regional higher education center continues. Site work will resume following completion of the archaeologists' efforts.

The regional higher education center at Onondaga Community College is scheduled to open in 2011. The first floor of the building lobby will be dedicated to a historical exhibit chronicling the history of the Poorhouse property, being developed by the College in collaboration with the Onondaga Historical Association and the Town of Onondaga Historical Society. A community open house for the public is planned.

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