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## ***Your Hometown:* Salt City**

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*Salt has many uses. It's a dinner table staple, helps melt ice in the wintertime and is used in medicine. You can get it anywhere, but in the mid 1600s, the Syracuse area was the main producer of the mineral in the country. In this week's Your Hometown, our Iris St. Meran has more on the Salt City and its impact in the salt industry.*

ONONDAGA COUNTY, N.Y. -- At one point in time, this area was the producer of salt for many places around the country. The waters of Onondaga Lake served as a way to transport it. The industry created jobs and was a welcomed asset to the community. Before it took off, it took some convincing to show it was a good thing.

Onondaga County Parks Senior Recreation Leader Eric Sopchak said, "Father Simon LeMoyne who was a French Canadian up from Quebec came down from Central New York area. He came across some Native Americans here in the area, the Onondagas who showed him these evil springs, this bubbling crude that came up from ground. And it smelled funny and it tasted weird."

Sopchak said the Onondagas thought it was haunted and didn't use it. LeMoyne showed them it wasn't and the brine actually had a purpose for medicine and food. In 1656, salt production in Central New York began.

"Salt was in a liquid form, a brine. A heavy salinated water. And this brine was in underground aquifers or pockets. And they would extract this water this brine from these underground pockets through system of hollow logs, hollow tubes," said Sopchak.

The water would be pumped into a different location where it would be boiled in giant kettles using very hot water. The water boiled until it evaporated and what was left behind was salt which would then be dried to be sold.

Onondaga Lake was used to transport salt across the country and world. This region was a huge employer for the industry. Many people worked in various roles from transportation to production to making the containers it was held in. The Salt City got its identity.

Sopchack said, "We now have a Central New York food staple called salt potatoes because of the salt industry here in the Central New York area. New York State. The government of New York State while it was in its infancy started to realize we can tax the salt. What can we do with the money we earn from taxing the salt? We can build the Erie Canal with it."

Even good things have to end. Salt was found in rock form in other parts of the country. It could be mined. Combine that with the price of coal used to heat it, that industry in this region began to weaken. But they began to rely on Mother Nature itself.

"They would literally let the brine sit there and the sun beat down on it for weeks and weeks at a time until finally all the water was evaporated and what was left was a much coarser larger granular of salt," said Sopchak.

The last barrel of salt was made in 1926. It is on display here at the Salt Museum. Although Syracuse isn't known as the Salt City anymore, its history isn't forgotten and can be explored further here.

*A special thanks to the Onondaga Historical Association and the Salt Museum for their expertise while putting this story together.*