

Civil War photographer's work displayed in Syracuse

By Tom Magnarelli

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A camera from Barnard's time.

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An exhibition at the Onondaga [Historical Association](#) Museum in downtown Syracuse displays the work of 19th century photographer George Barnard. Barnard kept studios in Syracuse and Oswego and took some of the first photographs there in the 1850s.

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Barnard had an affinity for 19th century American landscape painting and that's apparent in his work. His photographs of a burning [grain mill](#) in downtown Oswego are considered by some to be the first action news photo. It was Barnard's first taste of photographing the American landscape with destruction at the forefront but it wouldn't be his last. Barnard was a photographer for the Union Army during the [Civil War](#) and captured the aftermath of General William Sherman's march from Tennessee to Georgia.



A mill burning in Oswego in 1853, considered one of the first action news photographs.

Credit George Barnard

"Barnard saw an opportunity after the war to, like many others, to [sell photographs](#). The photographs he took were the official property of the federal government. The government allowed him to keep some of his negatives but those that he was not allowed to keep he had to go back and photograph," said Onondaga Historical Association [Museum Curator](#), Tom Hunter.

Hunter says although the exhibit is to help commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, its essence is to show the varied work of Barnard's long career. He traveled to Chicago after his brother-in-law invested in a new studio there for him and five months later, found himself photographing the Great Chicago Fire in 1871.



Tom Hunter, museum curator at Onondaga Historical Association.

Credit Tom Magnarelli / WRVO

"Barnard and one of his photography assistants ran into Lake Michigan after grabbing some of their valuable equipment. There were many people who tried to escape the fire by running into Lake Michigan

to survive. After that, then they were able to go back to the studio and get some things and start taking photographs," said Hunter.

Barnard was also able to capture images of the end of slavery; in Charleston, South Carolina he took portraits of newly freed African Americans. The exhibition runs until September.