

A Self Guided Tour...

QUESTIONS??

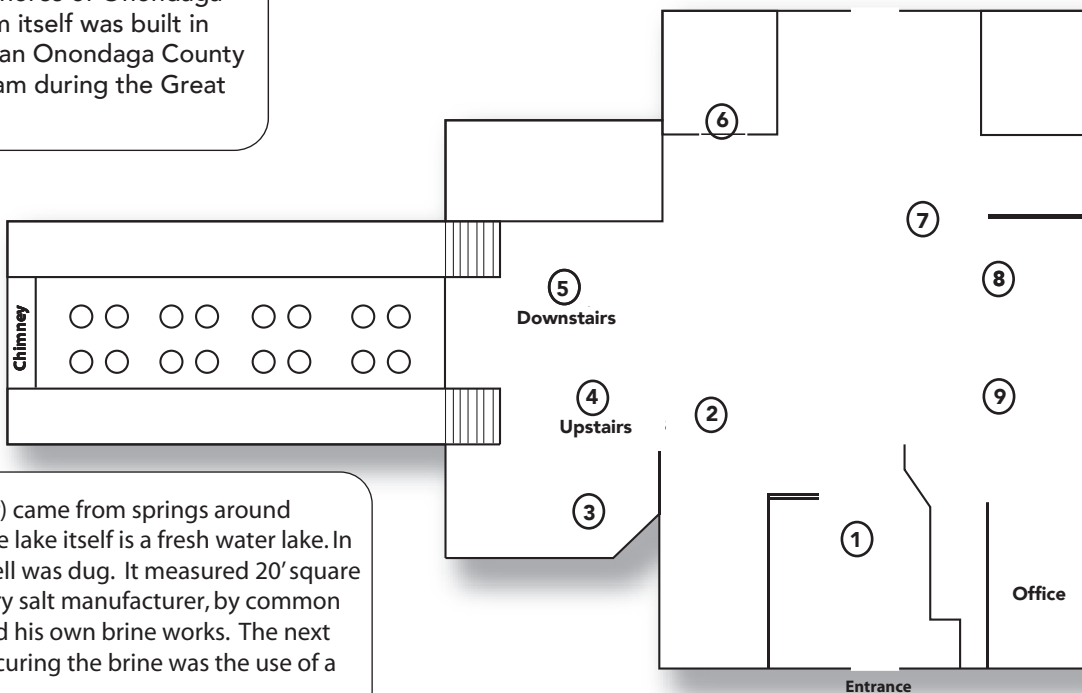
Contact Onondaga Lake Park at
(315) 453-6712 or olp@ongov.net

Self guided tour written by Friends of Historic Onondaga Lake.

1 The Salt Museum stands as a reminder of the great industry that once occurred on the shores of Onondaga Lake. The museum itself was built in 1933 as a part of an Onondaga County work relief program during the Great Depression.

Guided School/Group Tours
are available, May-October,
by reservation only.
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2 The brine (salt water) came from springs around Onondaga Lake – the lake itself is a fresh water lake. In 1806, the first salt well was dug. It measured 20' square by 30' deep and every salt manufacturer, by common hand pump, supplied his own brine works. The next development in procuring the brine was the use of a large drilling rig.



3 Although the Onondaga People were aware of the brine springs and had shown them to Father LeMoynes in 1656, they were not utilized until after the Revolutionary War. In 1788, two Revolutionary War Veterans – Asa Danforth and Comfort Tyler – came to the area and with the help of the Onondaga erected the first salt works.

4 Brine was released into the kettles and brought to a boil by heat from the firing pit. As the brine boiled, impurities called bittern settled at the bottom of the kettle onto a bittern pan. Salt crystals that formed at the top were removed with a wooden shovel and placed in splint ash baskets to drain and then stored to dry for two weeks.

6 The Salt Industry prompted the creation of many other businesses such as basket weaving (splint ash baskets), blacksmithing (salt scoops and bittern pans), and coopering (barrels for shipping the salt).

5 In the firing pit, fires were built under the first few kettles. Parallel flues ran beneath the rows of kettles. The 100' tall chimney would draw the heat (and smoke) under the remaining kettles. Because there were usually up to 50 or more kettles in the block, the kettles became progressively smaller and also of thinner material.

9 The salt industry began to decline when rock salt and stronger brine deposits were discovered in western New York, Michigan, Texas, Kentucky & Utah. As production in these regions grew, annual output decreased in the local industry. The final blow came from a hurricane in 1926 which did extensive damage to the solar sheds. Later that year, the last local salt manufacturer ceased operations. More than 125 years of local salt production had come to an end.

8 By 1848, due both to salt production and intensive farming, the supply of wood was nearly depleted and the manufacturers began to use coal from Pennsylvania for their fuel needs. Of course, this added to the cost of producing the salt. At this time, the industry changed over to the solar salt method. Before the brine was brought to the "aprons" or covers, it was allowed to sit while the impurities settled to the bottom of the holding vats. As the salt crystals formed, the men would push them (with a tool called a muddle) to the front of the apron. Here they would be placed in wooden buckets, which had holes in the bottom for drainage. The salt was then taken to the salt warehouse.

7 Weather in this area is, of course, not always sunny! The manufacturers each had a Salt Boss who kept an eye on the weather. If rain threatened, he would ring the bell. Everyone, no matter what they were doing (including children), were responsible for responding quickly to push the covers over the "crop" so it wouldn't be spoiled.

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