

Broome County FastFacts

- Created March 28, 1806 from Tioga County
- Population:
 - 8,130 in 1810
 - 200,536 in 2000
- 16 townships, 6 villages and 1 city comprise the county
- 9 county parks, 2 nature preserves and many local parks
- The Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena hosts sports such as hockey (the Senators) and concerts
- The Forum (Broome County Center for the Performing Arts) hosts the Tri-Cities Opera and the Binghamton Philharmonic
- The Binghamton Mets play at NYSEG Stadium
- The annual Spiedie Fest and Balloon Rally brings over 30,000 to Otsiningo Park
- Broome County is home to Binghamton University (SUNY-Binghamton) and Broome Community College and 9 school districts
- Major employers include IBM, BAE Systems, L-3/Link and Universal Instruments



Lewis Street bridge over the Chenango Canal, c. 1860

the Cold War growth of the defense business. IBM, General Electric, Universal, Link and others relied heavily on those dollars, and with the ending of the Cold War, many businesses saw those markets evaporating. The area hit an economic slump, which left many to believe that the "Valley of Opportunity" was gone. But a resurgence based on diversity of business and slower growth has helped to bring the area moving back toward its former levels of employment and industrial strength.

Despite our rich business history, it has always been the story of our people -- the thousands of immigrants and their distinct ethnic food, costume, languages, "Gold Dome" churches, and heritage that have made this region a true melting pot. The legacy of businesses such as E-J, and our continual ethnic and business heritage make this region a strong and vibrant part of the American Culture.



Broome County Local History & Genealogy Center

The Broome County Local History & Genealogy Center is a cooperative facility that combines the collections of the Broome County Public Library, the Broome County Historical Society, the Broome County Historian and the City of Binghamton Historian.

The Center is open Monday-Thursday from 10-8 and Friday & Saturday from 10-4.

Gerald Smith, Broome County Historian, heads the center

Broome County Local History & Genealogy Center

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BROOME COUNTY, NEW YORK



BROOME COUNTY
LOCAL HISTORY & GENEALOGY
CENTER

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Broome County: A Brief History



Joshua Whitney (1773-1845) land agent for William Bingham and major leader of Binghamton

Until the end of the American Revolution, the Broome County area was inhabited by Native Americans. Two main settlements were found at Onaquaga, near present-day Windsor, and Otsenigo, located along the Chenango River, just north of the present-day City of Binghamton. Smaller settlements could be found at Chugnuts, Castle Creek and the

Vestal area. As part of the Iroquois Confederacy, and considered a threat to the Revolutionists' efforts, the Sullivan-Clinton campaign was used to remove the Native American population. After the conclusion of the Revolution, the land was divided among many land speculators, including William Bingham, who obtained over ten thousand acres at the confluence of the Susquehanna and Chenango Rivers, and the developers of the Boston Purchase (also called Boston Ten Towns) that encompassed much of northern Broome, as well as parts of Chenango, Tioga and Tompkins Counties.

William Bingham was a wealthy Philadelphia banker whose interest after the Revolution was in land. Aside from this area, Bingham also owned over 500,000 acres of land in the state of Maine. Bingham envisioned a new village at the meeting of the two rivers and hired local merchant Joshua Whitney to be his land agent. Whitney was responsible for the first street plan of the village, worked to entice new settlers to the area, and became the area's first elected representative to Albany. Bingham died in 1804, never visiting the area that would bear his name. Nonetheless, Whitney continued to work diligently to build the new town. In 1806 the area was separated from Tioga County, and the new county was named after Revolutionary War veteran and then Lieutenant-Governor John

Broome. With the opening of the Erie Canal, this area, like many, sought their own canal to connect to the Erie to aid development. Finally in 1834, work began on the Chenango Canal, a 97-mile long engineering marvel which connected Binghamton in the south with Utica and the Erie Canal in the north. The first packet boat arrived in 1837 and new development followed the route of the canal. Despite the economic failure of the canal (it never made a profit), the county benefited from the arrival of new settlers and merchandise, as well as providing a means of shipping finished goods in and out of the area. Mills sprang up along the southern end of the canal, and department stores and hotels rose along the retail corridor. In 1848, the Erie railroad arrived, and the coming of the iron horse spelled the end for the canal. Within two decades the area had become a transportation hub, with north-south and east-west railroad lines and the canal. But by 1874, the Chenango Canal route was closed in Binghamton, the only remnants being a proposed expansion along the Susquehanna River that would later become part of the Vestal Parkway.

The period surrounding the Civil War saw great change for the area. Its leading politician, Daniel S. Dickinson, served in the United States Senate from 1844-1850, and after the outbreak of the war spoke countless times in favor of the Union. The need for munitions and other war products brought assembly-line factory work to the area, and guns and other products were developed in this region. After the end of the war, the area enjoyed the fruits of the Industrial Revolution, and new major industries opened. Stow Manufacturing relied on the invention of the flexible shaft. The lumber industry was transformed into a large furniture and wagon business. By far, however, the area was truly changed with the arrival of the first cigar manufacturing company in the 1870's. By 1890 over fifty factories were operating with five thousand people involved in the manufacture of over 100 million cigars



Birds-Eye View of Binghamton, 1873

each year. Binghamton ranked only behind New York City as the top cigar-making city in the country. Immigrants from Eastern Europe and other countries poured into the area to work in this industry, or one of the many other companies producing over two hundred different types of products by the turn of the century.

As the area's population was doubling every ten to fifteen years, so were the area's municipalities. By 1900 the county had 16 towns, six villages and one city. Binghamton had the largest population. Despite the largeness of the cigar making industry, it had all but disappeared by 1930 due to the rise in popularity of the cigarette, automation, and labor unrest. Many of the former cigar workers took solace in finding employment in the factories of the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Corporation. Begun as Lester Brothers Boot and Shoe Company in Binghamton in 1854, it moved to create its own company town, Lestershire, to the west of Binghamton. Financial problems forced the sale of the company to a creditor and fellow shoemaker, Henry B. Endicott of Massachusetts in 1890. In 1899 he made former Lester Brothers factory foreman, George F. Johnson, his partner. Johnson's Square Deal program quickly transformed the company into an industrial giant, with over 20,000 employees by the mid 1940's, and a production of 52 million pairs of shoes each year. Both Johnson and E-J's philanthropy included the donation of parks, land for churches, two libraries and the six wooden carousels still in use today.

At the same time Johnson City (formerly Lestershire) and the planned community of Endicott (incorporated in 1906) were growing, so too was a firm that started in Binghamton in 1889 as the Bundy Manufacturing Company. Involved in time clock production, it merged with several other firms and went through a variety of names before hiring Thomas Watson, Sr. in 1914. His corporate leadership moved the company into a new era, and in 1924 he changed the name of the company to International Business Machines. IBM has since become the area's leading employer.

During the height of the Great Depression Edwin A. Link followed his dream to develop the pilot trainer, or flight simulator. Link Aviation, through its many forms has led the world in training of pilots, and the technology has evolved into a virtual reality world of products on today's markets. Like Link, many other companies were involved in