

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 14

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

Sept. 1963

The Next Meeting

will be held on Monday evening, Sept. 9, 1963, at 8:00 o'clock, in the Association Rooms over the Plattsburgh Public Library. The program will be a talk by Mr. Robert MacFarlane on "THE CLIMATE OF CLINTON COUNTY." Mr. MacFarlane is Professor of Science at the State University College and is also the official Federal Weather Observer for Clinton County. This is the program originally scheduled for February last, which was postponed because of inclement weather.

The public is cordially invited.

Litigation in Old Peru

The cash book used by a succession of businessmen and lawyers in Peru during the middle of the nineteenth century throws light on contemporary prices and types of litigation. The lawyers' accounts were with the Town of Peru, Beckwiths, Allens, Elmores, Keeses, McIntyres, Everetts, Watsons, Ackleys, and many others.

The earliest notation, May 21, 1842, recalls the importance of iron as a medium of exchange: "Recieved of Zimri Evans note for \$15 dollars to be paid in iron at 52 dollars per ton delivered in Peru the first day of June next. Also a note for \$19.23 payable one year from date in iron or grain at list market price with interest."

Between the 1840's and the 1860's, fees ranged from fifty cents to a dollar for a chattel mortgage; deeds at \$1.00; advice or counsel on suits involving oxen, horses, hired men and other subjects from one dollar up. Over a twenty-year period, \$150 was the highest recorded fee, for partitioning the tavern premises, the creditors being Gilliland and Merton.

When the lawyer was paid at all, it was usually in cash, but the records show bills paid with apples, butternuts and plowing. This cash book is in the College library in Plattsburgh.

Sports News

The game between the "Young Ladies" ball club of Ohio and the Beverwycks of Rouses Point last Friday was a burlesque. The females could not play ball anyway and most of them did not make any endeavor to. The score stood 8 to 10 in favor of the Beverwycks, who tried their best to let the visitors come out victorious, but were unable to do so. About 1300 witnessed the game and the girls carried off 85 per cent of the gate receipts.

(From the PLATTSBURGH SENTINEL of August 15, 1890)

The British Occupation of Point au Fer

After the Revolution the British did not comply with the provisions of the Treaty of Peace for the evacuation of all their military posts, but retained those at Mackinaw, Detroit, Fort Erie, Niagara, Oswego, Oswegatchie, Dutchman's (or Block House) Point, and Point au Fer. Their reason for holding these posts was stated to be that the claims of British citizens arising out of the war had not been settled by the United States as provided in the treaty. It was not until June 1, 1796, under Jay's Treaty, that these posts were finally surrendered.

Probably partially because of the uncertainty which these claims created regarding the title to Point au Fer, New York State did not include it in the Refugee Grant of 1784-87, but reserved its 500 acres "for military purposes."

In the *Pliny Moore Papers* are found many items relating to this British occupancy of Point au Fer. And this past winter Mr. Oscar E. Bredenberg discovered further documents in the Canadian National Archives at Ottawa, which help to clarify the peculiar situation in which our early settlers found themselves.

It appears that each side wanted to protect its claims by a strict official attitude short of actual force, and at the same time to maintain friendly relations with each other. Thus these papers contrast the courtesy of the British officers with the officiousness of the British Government.

The friendly relations are revealed by the many letters to Pliny Moore from the various officers at Point au Fer or on the warship *Maria* assigned to the post. In a letter of July 23, 1790, Captain John Steel of the *Maria* writes: "In my Cutter the Officer commanding at the Point & myself purposes to be up the Chazie tomorrow, Tuesday, or Wednesday, Taking with us a Cold-Colation for dinner, & begs you with Mrs. Moor to meet us at the foot of the Rapid on our Arrival there . . . Make my complement Agreeable to Mrs. Moor & all my particular friends in your Neighbourhood." And from William Stanton, written from the *Maria* in August of the same year: "I received a Small cask of Rum & a pair of Shoes . . . some days ago which I send by your Servant, as also 50 pounds of Flour and wish I could spare more but as we are only Victualled from Month to Month from St Johns and have already spared Some to your Neighbor at the Mill cant go any nearer the wind. Please make Capt'n Steel and my compliments to Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Rogers and Miss Charlotte, whose basket and Box I should have sent by this opportunity but that I promise myself the pleasure of seeing her along soon." In November he wrote: "Have just had the pleasure of your note of this day. I'm sorry that the uncertainty of the weather will prevent both Captain Steel and myself from having the happiness of being at your House warming."

A letter of June 1791 to Judge Moore is addressed to "Mount Independent," a friendly reference to Moore's refusal to recognize the official British position that he was trespassing on British territory. This is one of several letters from Captain Steel relating to the amiable "trade with the enemy" between them: "I have taken the liberty of Sending My boat for the Curl'd Maple Boards You so friendly Offer'd me. Should you by Accident find any Trees of Curl'd Maple in future, I Shall be happy in Procuring them, and Reasonable Expenche Shall be Gratefully Acknowledged."

In October 1791 Silas Pearson wrote from the *Maria*: "I Received your Note . . . with 16 Salmon and By the Same man I Send Two Bushels of Salt and Sir if you have aney more Salmon to Spare I will be Glad if you will Send me 20 more and I will Setel the Ballance when you Come, or Send to Saint Johns and if you Please Send them Down By the Soldiers that is on the Chersee." Again, in May 1792, Sergeant Peter Martin, of the 60th Regiment at Point au Fer, writes: "Captain Dodgson begs as a favour that you will be Kind Enough to lett the Bearer Corp'l Murphy have as much Pine Plank as will Make a Coffin for which he will pay you."

In contrast, several affidavits from Clinton County citizens reflect the official British attitude: "The Deposition of Samuel Ashman of the Town of Champlain in said County [of Clinton], taken on oath before me, Pliny Moor, one of the Justices of the Peace in and for said County this first day of February 1791, who saith, That on the thirtieth of January ulto there came to his house two men dress'd in the uniform of British officers. One of them asked the Deponent when he began to build his house, he answered a year ago last June. He then ask'd the Deponent how long he had occupied his house and if he had a message delivered him to remove from hence. He told him he had not in particular but that his neighbours had. The officer then told the Deponent he fancied it would be necessary for him to make no further improvements as he would be in danger of losing his labour and to get off as soon as the season would admit The Deponent then demanded his orders in writing which he declined giving by saying his fingers were cold and at best he was but a bad hand at it. The Deponent was immediately after they went away informed that it was Colonel Buckrege who spoke to him and that the other officer was his Adjutant."

Similar affidavits from Simon Chartie, Murdock McPherson, William Beaumont, Elnathan Rogers, Caleb Thomas and Pliny Moore, with varying details, but usually specifying that the soldiers were unarmed and that written orders were not available, are in the Canadian National Archives.

From Quebec, Lord Dorchester communicated in January 1791 to Lieut. Col. Buckeridge at St. Johns: "Should any of the persons who have already been warned to depart still remain on either side of the River Chazy, notwithstanding the injunctions given, you will be pleased again to inform them they must remove whenever the season will permit, and that their disobedience can only expose them to the loss of their labor and improvements. These orders Lord Dorchester desires may be frequently repeated, if necessary, without however using compulsion in case of non-compliance." And in February of the same year Dorchester again wrote: "Those who complied will have reason to be satisfied, but such as by stealth made a pitch, as they call it, and remain obstinate, will probably be punished more than could be wished, by the loss of all their time, labor and expence. You will therefore be pleased to have this repeated to them from time to time with civility and good humour; the matter does not require formality or written orders."

The official American position is reflected in the reply from Governor George Clinton, dated May 26, 1790, in answer to complaints from Pliny Moore and other inhabitants of Clinton County: "I immediately communicated the information they contained to the President of the United States whose indisposition prevented my . . . receiving any answer from him on that subject. I mentioned to him however, that I should advise the Inhabitants not to remove from their settlements unless they should be compelled to do it by an armed force . . . I am sensible at the same time that should this Conduct of the Officer at Point au Fer be the result of orders of the British Government, they will, in your present scattered & defenceless situation, be able to break up your settlement before you can obtain any effectual succour to prevent it; and under these circumstances all that I conceive prudent and adviseable is to make such resistance to their measures as to mark the aggression on their part with every circumstance of aggravation, so as to Justify whatever steps may hereafter be thought proper to be pursued on our part."

But, as Lord Dorchester wrote to Colonel Buckeridge in 1791: "Yet, as we are at peace with our neighbours, and wish to remain so, great prudence and moderation must be observed." And while the garrison at Point au Fer remained as a constant source of worry and inconvenience to Clinton County residents until its evacuation in 1796, the personal friendly relations between the opponents prevented the words being turned into actions. In fact, in 1792 Captain Steel married Miss Nancy Griggs, whose father lived in Alburgh, Vermont.

Birth Notice

In Plattsburgh, N. Y., August 28, 1880,
a son to Mr. and Mrs. WINSLOW C.
WATSON, JR.

The county judge came late to court

One day in busy season ;

Whereat his clerk, in great surprise,

Inquired of him the reason.

"A child was born," his Honor said,

"And I'm the happy sire."

"An infant judge?" "Oh no," said he,

"As yet he's but a crier."

PLATTSBURGH REPUBLICAN
September 4, 1880

In the News

The PLATTSBURGH REPUBLICAN reported excitement in Plattsburgh in April, 1881, over platinum diggings, as a round pebble said to contain ore of that metal had been found in the drift near the bank of the river, on the east side of River Street and north of Bridge Street.

"The Adirondack Bibliography"

This book, together with its four yearly supplements, provides the most complete key ever published to the innumerable books, pamphlets and periodical articles about the Adirondacks and the Champlain Valley. It lists material on every aspect of the history of upper New York State.

Sponsored by the Adirondack Mountain Club, the main volume of 7539 well-indexed entries costs \$10. Prepaid orders will include the four supplements, which otherwise are .50 each. The book may be ordered from Miss Dorothy A. Plum, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

The Editors

welcome material for inclusion in these North Country Notes, as well as your comments and criticisms. Look through your scrapbooks and family papers for a few interesting items.

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