

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 27

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

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The Next Meetings

of the Association will be held on the following dates, at 8 o'clock in the Association Rooms over the Plattsburgh Public Library. The public is cordially invited to all meetings.

APRIL 4—"The Life and Works of George Alfred Henty", by LeClair Smith. Mr. Smith is the curator of the Delord House and has one of the largest collections of Henty books in the country.

MAY 2—"The New State Curriculum in the Social Studies" by Benedict Hausdorf of Peru. Mr. Hausdorf is a teacher of social studies in Peru.

JUNE 6—Annual Members' Exhibit Night. Watch for further directions.

QUAKER UNION SOCIETY

The Quaker Union Society held its first meeting in some time on Saturday, March 5, at the home of Mrs. Cora Stafford in Peru. Organized in 1950, its work has centered around recording the history of the Union and preserving its cemetery.

The president, Mrs. Eleanor Spaulding, presided at the business meeting. The newly elected officers are Mr. Roland Maders of Keeseville, president; Mrs. Spaulding of Ausable, vice president, and Mrs. Stafford, secretary.

The next two projects of the Society will be efforts to get back in the North Country the 15 volumes of records of the Quaker Union, which are now deposited in New York; and a work day on May 14 to clean up the Union cemetery and repair the stones.

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

What family once owned most of the land on which a town later developed? (There are at least three answers in the county.) Send a postcard with your answer to the Secretary, Mrs. Beyer.

No one answered last month's riddle about City Hall in writing, but Mr. Robert C. Booth did it over the telephone. The Plattsburgh City Hall was built in 1917. The architect of this Roman classical structure was the prominent architect, John Russell Pope, who also designed the Macdonough monument as well as the Jefferson Memorial and the National Art Gallery in Washington, and other noted works.

George Palmer and The Papineau Rebellion

The Papineau Rebellion of 1837-38 made subversion a popular activity in the border regions of New York and Vermont. North Country sympathy for the cause of the rebels in Canada created a problem which vexed even President Van Buren, who had no desire to become embroiled with Great Britain.

The role of George W. Palmer is typical of North Country involvement in events across the border. Palmer, a Plattsburgh boy, had spent the summer of 1836 learning French in a St. Denis household. There he met Dr. Wolfred Nelson, who practised medicine and was becoming involved in the Papineau revolt. Palmer went to Yale in 1837 but an epidemic of typhus cut short his college career. When he returned to Plattsburgh he caught the spirit of adventure from the Canadian refugees of the first uprising who were staying at Fouquet's Hotel and planning an "invasion" of Canada from Champlain. Dr. Wolfred Nelson had been captured and exiled to Bermuda, but his brother, Dr. Robert, was among the prominent "visitors" in Plattsburgh.

In both Upper and Lower Canada, discontent with the established order had long been seething. In Upper Canada (Ontario) William Lyon Mackenzie was the spokesman of the farmers against an oligarchy of "gentlemen" who ruled the province. In Lower Canada (Quebec) Louis-Joseph Papineau and his Patriotes worked for the rights of the French majority against the oppressive rule by a British minority. However, his movement attracted liberals of other races, such as the Nelson brothers.

In 1837 Mackenzie made common cause with Papineau in a situation rapidly tending toward violence. In November Wolfred Nelson led the rebels to their first and only victory, at St. Denis. But in a few days the Patriotes suffered a deadly setback at St. Charles. Nelson was captured but most of the leaders fled across the border. It was at this juncture that George Palmer became involved.

His first assignment was to take a roll of used Canadian bills to Montreal. Ostensibly he was exchanging them for American money; actually, each bill contained a Latin word which spelled out an appeal for funds from the Banque du Peuple. The bank officials refused to help and warned Palmer of his danger. A later mission was more successful. Carrying a letter from "an official of Essex County", Palmer went to the State Arsenal at Elizabethtown. The trip resulted in the enthusiastic but unlawful removal of guns, which were sent to Champlain to aid the Patriotes in their coming campaign.

Meanwhile, General John Wool was sent to Plattsburgh to enforce American neutrality. As major, Wool had played an important part in the skirmishes at Culver Hill and Halsey's Corners in 1814. He took into custody in Champlain an American organizer of aid to the rebels by the name of Bryant. Palmer "undertook to rescue him". He started for Champlain in a cutter drawn by a fast horse driven by Dryden Warren, great-grandfather of Miss Saily Warren. In a stroke worthy of Byron, Palmer strode into the midst of Bryant's guard, announced his intention, and whisked the prisoner away. He afterward reminisced that the guards never seriously tried to stop him, for they must have fired into the air instead of at his escaping sleigh.

Palmer's final role in the ragged rebellion was that of "aide-de-camp" to Dr. Robert Nelson, who led perhaps 2,000 men across the lake into Vermont and then into Canada in February 1838. At Caldwell's Manor an encounter with British regulars produced a quick decision to retreat, everyone for himself. In November Nelson led a final expedition, losing 50 men in the attempt, and the revolt of 1837-38 passed into history.

Dr. Robert Nelson settled in New York City. His brother Wolfred escaped from exile and lived for some time in Plattsburgh, where he published a medical journal, **The Northern Lancet**, between 1849-56 and **The Lancet** thereafter. George Palmer spent his life in Plattsburgh and in 1910, at the age of 93, gave an interview about his role in the Papineau Rebellion.

Keesville High School In 1896

(In 1896, Hattie Harkness of Hallock Hill attended Keesville High School. There follow some excerpts from her diary, which is now owned by her sister, Dr. Georgia Harkness, of Berkeley, California.)

Sept. 1—Pa brought me down this morning. We got here just late enough so that when we got up to school the seats were all taken nearly so that I had to take a seat way up in the front row. I am going to study Algebra, Drawing, English History and Geometry.

Sept. 8—Frank brought us down to school today. We came like the wind (?) He drove pretty hard anyway. Pa went to the fair this morning. I wish I knew how he got along with his separator, and if he got them put together straight.

Sept. 16—Minnie and I went down and got Nora and went to church tonight. When we got down there we found Sallie ready to go too so all went in a crowd. We all went down street right after school taking a walk for our health. When we got down quite a piece we looked back and there was Miss Parsons coming. We spoke about how we never could go down street without meeting some of the teachers and how they would think we don't study much. When we were coming back we had got nearly up to Mrs. Beadleston's and who should we meet but Miss Hallock going down. It is a wonder that we didn't meet the Professor. We do most every time but we saw him go off on his wheel before we left the school-house so we were comparatively safe on that quarter.

Sept. 17—We all went down street before breakfast this morning. We went down to the baker's and got a loaf of bread and got home about 7 o'clock. We didn't meet any teacher this time.

I went up to school early this morning and got there the first girl. There were a few boys who were provoking so that I couldn't study. I thought I would go up to Miss Hallock's room and study but couldn't get in there but I went into Miss Parson's room and there were a lot of boys in there and at last I took my books down to the girl's cloakroom and studied in there. I had not been there long before Flossie Ricketson came and others followed and study was soon out of the question.

Sept. 23—I had a terrible time at school today. I made the first bad failure that I have made in the Geometry class. I knew my lesson I thought but the Prof. drew the figure altogether different from the one in the book and twisted me all up till I couldn't get it at all. I am afraid of another failure tomorrow for he said he should make all sorts of figures and twist us if he could. It is a hard problem that we have for tomorrow's lesson anyway.

Sept. 24—In the Physiology class Miss Hallock accidentally tipped over a glass of water that she had some flowers in and made a little puddle of water on the floor and Charlie (Barber) happened to spy it. He sent the following note to Grace Butterfield and she passed it around to a few of the girls. "That puddle of water under the table is a dead give away on Aunt Emily." Of course the girls laughed, they couldn't help themselves but as it happened, Miss Hallock was giving us a description of something somewhat comical and she didn't suspect that the laugh was on her or but what it was all caused by what she was reading. Lucky for the girls.

Sept. 30—I went up last night and asked Miss Hallock about the statement that she made the other day about the battle of Hastings being the last fought on English soil with any foreign country. She had to own up that I was right and some others were fought with Scotland and looked in the book to show me that told what she said and found that in the book it said fought with any foes from the continent instead of any foreign country. I had to wait about an hour to get a chance to talk to her for she had the whole Arithmetic class upstairs at once but it was worth the waiting to see her give in.

Enjoying The Old Deeds

Many are the quaint and fascinating records in the office of the County Clerk. Deeds and mortgages are not only an invaluable guide to the county's history, but incidentally an indication of the glories and foibles of human nature.

History is brilliantly registered in the deed found in volume B, page 173 of deeds. Executed in 1798, it was a conveyance by William Gray to the chiefs of the St. Regis Indians of his sawmill and gristmill on the Salmon River. The price was 700 pounds, arranged in small payments. Each of the chiefs made his mark at the end of a very complex instrument.

Another deed of great interest is the one of 1787 from Zephaniah Platt for the original proprietors, who deeded 100 acres of land in West Plattsburgh to the infant Platt Newcomb "in consideration of love and good will as well as in consideration of the said Platt Newcomb being the first born male child in the township".

When Ebenezer Scott of Chazy built a third floor for the use of the Harmony Masonic Lodge of Champlain (in the present Colonial Museum), the Lodge got the right to build an outside staircase "with liberty of entering and departing thereto and therefrom at all times".

Particularly interesting are the terms used to convey or to describe a piece of property. One is deeded "for as long as grass is green and water flows". Piles of stones, stakes and notched trees are frequently used as guide marks, even "a marked tree turned up by the roots". More unusual is a boundary that runs "to a black hole on the ice". Or another that runs "north to a bird sitting on a branch". The wonder is that so much property changed hands peacefully over so long a period of time.

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