

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly by the Clinton County Historical Association

48 Court Street, Plattsburgh NY 12901, 518-561-0340

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## APRIL PROGRAM

This month we welcome another Vermonter to the Historical Association's spring series of Monday evening programs. Victor R. Rolando is the author of *Soot and Sweat: The History and Archeology of Vermont's Iron, Charcoal, and Lime Industries*". When it was reviewed in Vermont's The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology, 1993, the book was called a basic industrial archeological research volume that addresses ironworks, charcoal kilns, and lime kilns. Mr. Rolando describes his expertise as lying in the processing aspect of iron mining, that is, blast furnaces, bloomery forges, and foundries.

Entitled "The Archeology of the Champlain Valley Iron Industry", the slide-illustrated program will concentrate on 18th and 19th-century blast furnace and forge construction and operation, and the relationship between archeological evidence found in the field and the actual industry in question. It will be held in the first floor meeting room of the Clinton County Government Center on Monday, April 3 at 7:30 p.m. The program is free and open to the public.

## McMASTERS PRIZE WINNER

A presentation of the 1995 prize for an essay about North Country history was made at the Association's March meeting. Awarding the prize to Mary B. Hotaling for her paper entitled "Edward Livingston Trudeau, M.D.: Pioneer Medical Scientist", committee chairman Dr. Allan S. Everest commented on the excellent research in Mrs. Hotaling's work. He noted that she became interested in Saranac Lake's most famous doctor while she was Executive Director of Historic Saranac Lake, an historic preservation organization with offices in the Trudeau Institute. More recently, she wrote the nomination for the Trudeau Sanatorium to the National Register for Historic Places.

Appointed to the State Board for Historic Preservation in 1993, Mary Hotaling is a candidate for the M.S. degree in historic preservation at the University of Vermont. Her thesis will be written on Saranac Lake architect W.L. Coulter (1865-1907).

## LETTER FROM THE WEST

*The following copy of a letter in the museum's collections was written by Proctor Pierce (1811-1874) to his wife Huldah Ann (Reed) Pierce. It was mailed from Chicago on October 15, 1846 and the postage was 10 cents. The Proctor Pierce family lived on Beckwith Street, and the address was Plattsburgh, Clinton County, N.Y. The Town of Schuyler Falls was not established until 1848. Sections of the letter appear below. Reading them, one wonders about Mrs. Pierce's emotional state as her husband roamed the West, leaving her with two children, albeit with the support of grandparents.*

"My dear Wife,

Six weeks have now passed since I left home and I have traveled three thousand miles. I have visited all the cities and towns on the way and am now in the city of Chicago. Uncle Timothy is keeping the Vermont Temperance House.

"Tomorrow I intend leaving Town for the purpose of visiting Uncle Buck, living about sixty miles Southwest. Now I have a word to say to the boys. Tell Goerge to be a good boy and mind his grandpa and grandma and likewise Merritt. I have not yet concluded to return home this fall. My money is going some and as business is brisk and wages high, I shall probably go to work and earn more. I think the best business in these parts is Doctoring and Preaching Funeral Sermons. This is a beautiful country - the face of it consists of vast prairies, some of them twenty miles square, destitute almost of trees but possessing a soil the most fertile that can be found in the Union. They are, however, tilled very poorly and consequently in a great many instances no more than two thirds of a crop is yielded. Then the tillers consider they have an abundant harvest. The method which they pursue in breaking up the prairies is as follows: They have a tremendous plough of about twelve feet in length with a land side (*board*) four feet and a mold board having a regulating wheel. It can go into the ground but about two inches, but it turns over a furrow of from 18 to 22 inches in width. On this sod they go along with a hoe, give it a little hack, and put in the corn, kick a little dust over it, and leave it till husking. The weeds often get ahead of the corn and sometimes in the fall they are much the higher.

"They pursue much the same barbarous method with their wheat, but as the soil is rich, it springs up thick and smothers the weeds. The fact of it is the farmers, before they came here, were puffed up with the idea that things would grow on the prairies without much labour and they have not laboured much accordingly, but I think they will come to that in a little while. There are perhaps five hundred loads of wheat coming in daily on an average and among all the farmers who bring them in, it is rare to see a respectable looking man. They look more like Arabs. Some of these have built tolerably fair houses, but the most of them live in log cabins through the sides of which you can see the stars. Their living is pretty uniform,

consisting of potatoes, bacon, johnny cake, milk and sometimes coffee. Very often you will find in the log cabins (if you drop in at night) two or three dogs, a flock of ducks, sometimes a pet pig. I lodged in one of them and was surprised in the night to hear a dozen biddies crowing in the loft.

"I come now to speak of the dress. This by no means consists of broadcloth and silk, but of the coarsest homespun. The Norwegians are coming in by the hundreds and farming large settlements. Many of the people in this region are moving still farther West, some of them going even beyond the Mississippi and a few to the Rocky Mountains. The country between this and the Mississippi in a northwesterly direction is made up of prairies and a few groves. The land along the Mississippi is very hilly and the climate very unhealthy. There is a town within four miles of it on the edge of Wisconsin with only one house inhabited - the rest are deserted on account of sickness. It is the town of Parish. The fact is, sickness has raged over the country to a great extent and the great mass of people present a sickly appearance. You will meet people in the streets and in the country in great numbers who look almost like corpses so pale and thin are they. A man who presents a healthy appearance here is soon noticed by the pale faced, ague-shaken, fever-scorched natives, and marked as one who will soon be a victim to the climate.

"I must now conclude, although the half is not told. I will reserve the rest for the next letter. With this I remain,

Your Affectionate Husband,  
Proctor Pierce"

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## QUEST FOR PHOTOGRAPH

David Martin, editor of the Antiquarian, is searching for a photograph of Emily McMasters, a former curator of the Historical Association. Miss McMasters included a bequest in her will that enabled the Association to establish the Emily McMasters Writing Prize in 1976. The museum's collections contain a snapshot of Emily on the porch of her house, Green Lawns, and a group photograph of the dedication of a flagpole at PAFB in which she is shown. Anyone willing to lend a different photograph that will reproduce well is asked to call David at 493-3041 or the museum at 561-0340.

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### LUNCHTIME PROGRAMS

CCHA's series of lunchtime brown bag programs certainly has appealed to our membership and the public. Both of the March programs were quickly filled up. Next month's programs begin on April 11 with Jim Bailey's presentation on documents and their importance in our cultural heritage. On April 25 Jim Ciborski will share his research on the Plattsburgh Military Barracks, using materials from the museum's collections.

On May 9 Janet Garrell, director of the Kent-Delord House Museum, will utilize her knowledge of the County Museum's collections gained during her tenure as CCHA's assistant curator. The series ends on May 23 with Joe Swinyer's program on two 18th c. pioneers in Clinton County - Peter Sailly and Pliny Moore.

This series was made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts. We sincerely hope that the gargantuan cut in NYSCA's budget proposed by the Governor will not be reflected in the budget soon to be passed by the State Legislature. It would be foolish to assume that current programming and services offered by museums, arts groups and libraries could be sustained if NYSCA's funding level is slashed as currently proposed.

### SUMMER FUNDRAISER

Planning is in progress for our second annual antiques show and vintage car meet on July 8 and 9 at Clinton Community College. Car meet chairman Randy Beach is appealing for donors of trophies for the event. Randy says that \$50.00 will pay for a trophy for a first, second or third class of car. Every trophy donated by members and friends will help to increase the revenue from this fundraiser which is so vital to the Association's financial well-being. Won't you consider underwriting a trophy or making a donation towards one? (You don't have to know a thing about vintage cars to be a donor!)