

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly by the Clinton County Historical Association

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

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## MARCH PROGRAM

James Bailey, Plattsburgh City Historian and former Clinton County Historian, will be the main speaker at our March program meeting. His topic will be "The Community of Valcour in the Town of Peru, New York." Based on his study of land transfers and genealogical records, Mr. Bailey's presentation focuses on the history of Port Jackson (now Valcour) and the Jackson family for which the port was named.

The program is scheduled for Monday, March 4, 1996 at 7:30 p.m. in the first floor meeting room of the Clinton County Government Center. It is free and open to the public.

## SUMMER EVENT

CCHA's Third Annual Antiques Show and Vintage Car Meet Festival will be held July 6 and 7, 1996 at the Old Plattsburgh Air Force Base. With the cooperation of the Plattsburgh Airbase Redevelopment Corporation (PARC), we expect this year's event to be bigger and better than ever. The festivities will include activities for the entire family. Work has already begun to stage this major fundraising event. Volunteers are needed to make this event a success. If you can help, please call our office.

## EXHIBIT PLANNING UNDERWAY

Preliminary planning and research have begun for a temporary exhibit on Irish immigration to the North Country. It will examine the history of Irish immigration to the United States and Canada by focusing on the stories of Irish immigrants who made permanent homes in Clinton County. If you are a descendant of one or more of Clinton County's Irish immigrants, we would like to talk with you about your family's history as we continue our research. We are also seeking loans of artifacts for this exhibit.

Contributions from Robert J. Fitzgerald, Bill McBride, and F. W. Myers & Co., Inc. will make this exhibit possible. Additional momentary donations are solicited and will be gratefully accepted.

## THE EDUCATION OF A GENTLEMAN DOCTOR

*(Editor's note: The following two-part profile is culled from the Northern Lancet and Gazette of Legal Medicine, published in Plattsburgh in 1850 by Horace Nelson, M.D. The text is copied as originally printed, leaving in place the inconsistent spelling of names and places. CCHA thanks Special Collections, Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh for permission to reprint the essay.)*

BENJAMIN JOHN MOORES, M.D.

B. J. Mooers, the Dean of the Medical profession in Clinton County, and only child of John Mooers, was born in Haverhill, Mass., on the 11th Sept., 1787. Shortly after, the father left Haverhill for Corinth, N.H., with the intention of bettering his circumstances, and there applied himself as a farmer; but the labor incidental to the cultivation of a large farm, with the rude, cumbersome and profitless implements of the day; a constitutionally feeble frame and declining health, rendered his situation precarious, and filled his mind with gloomy thoughts relative to the future welfare of his little family; when a home was kindly tendered to him by his brother, General Benjamin Mooers, a wealthy and influential citizen of Pointe-aux-Roches, then Plattsburgh. On the 25th of March, 1793, John Mooers, his wife and child six years old walked over broken and breaking ice from the Grand Isle, to the Northeast part of Plattsburgh, now the East district of Beekmantown. Dr. Mooer's father, was immediately engaged by his brother, as superintendent of a business carried on a very extensive scale, combining that of tradesman and manufacturer.

The majestic forests, with their broad and deep foliage shading the sites of Chazy, Point-aux-Roches, and Beekmantown, were thinly settled, with a few scattering huts of the primitive Indians, the remains of a once noble and powerful race - here some squatters and hunters had pitched their temporary tenements, reaping a rich return from the varied and bountiful game which enlivened every scene - and there, the log cabins of a few respectable French families, descendants of the original settlers of Canada, were the inhabitants of that large tract of land, at this day one of the wealthiest portions of the county. John Mooers remained three years at Point-aux-Roches, during the last of which, his brother, the General, erected a large white house on Cumberland Head, now occupied by A. Phelps; the establishment at the Point was broken up, the goods removed to Plattsburgh village, John and his family settling on the Head. At that time one of the first district school houses was rudely built on the farm now occupied by Mr. Hagar, and young Benjamin, then a boy of 12 years, here received the rudiments of the English language, having, however, previously attended three months a school kept in the barn now standing on the above farm. He had received a few lessons from a kind and affectionate mother, and succeeded under her tuition, in mastering words of three or four syllables. In the Autumn, the log school house being completed, the doctor was one of the many gay and happy scholars who in after years became the prominent and business men of our village, and passed off the stage leaving proud and respected names - the Woolseys, the Platts, and the Adams (*Addoms - Ed*).

In August 1803, John Mooers died, after a few days' sickness, leaving his wife and child in dependent circumstances; deprived of a father and protector, a youth of sixteen, who till that sad event, had never looked to his own energies for his support, and without any settled determination, save that of rendering himself capable, at some future time, of affording resources and a home to his widowed mother, lived three years with his uncle, engaged in agricultural pursuits seven or eight months of the year, while in the winter he attended the school of the Rev. Frederick Halsey, where he completed his English education, and became familiar with the classics. The 6th June, 1806, he closed his engagement with his uncle and apprenticed himself to Dr. John Miller,

reputable practitioner of Plattsburgh, and living in the house now occupied by G. V. Edwards, on Broad Street. His assiduity, industry, and perseverance, with advantages the most limited, the fears and doubts of qualifying himself for a profession one of the most honorable, but one of the most responsible, and never thought of but the day previous to entering the surgery of his preceptor, secured for him the encomiums of his friends and the encouragement of the public. The President of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York, forwarded a circular to Dr. Mooers of Champlain, chairman of the Clinton County Medical Society, informing him that the society was privileged in sending to New York a student of limited means, recommended by his moral character and industrious disposition.- The invitation was tendered to young Mooers as the most worthy, and who seeing this fortuitous call, the dawn of a cheering future and the fulfilment of his expectations, readily accepted the honor, and sailed from Plattsburgh, in Nov., in Capt. Elijah Boynton's sloop, for Whitehall.- He spent the winter attending the lectures in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, seizing every opportunity of perfecting himself in his studies, and numbering among his college friends, many a student who has since become an honor to the profession, and an honor to the country - among others the celebrated Valentine Mott of New York. At the expiration of the session in March 1809, he returned to Plattsburgh, forced by circumstances to become a practitioner almost before a student, he was in May of that year at the request of Dr. Miller, engaged in the active duties of his profession; sickness, disease and mortality then raging to an alarming degree. He continued the (as) assistant of his protector and friend till 1811 - a few months' relaxation allowed him time to review his studies, and in January 1812, submitted to an examination before the county Medical Society, and received his licence, secured to him after six years of close and constant study, two of which were passed in the practice of the profession.

The young doctor was soon in the enjoyment of extensive patronage, and was reaping the rewards of his perseverance and industry, when the fearful clouds of warfare were thickly darkening the political horizons of England and America - preparations being made on an extensive scale, the militia was drafted, and detachments of the army daily arrived at our village, to meet the invading foe at the boundary line. The outposts were garrisoned by the 36th Regt. N.Y. Militia, under the command of Col. Thos. Miller, who made Champlain his head quarters. Dr. Mooers received a commission of surgeon's mate, and ordered to report for immediate service. Thus unexpectedly and hastily compelled to break up his practice and attend this honorable call, he promptly took leave of his patrons, placed his patients under the care of another practitioner, and repaired to head quarters, where he remained till the 13th Jan., 1812. Endowed with a strong constitution, and great powers of endurance, he performed with credit to himself the arduous duty which had devolved upon him, frequently visiting three times during the day outposts and guards thrown out several miles from head quarters, apart from constant attendance at the regimental hospital; practising, also, extensively among the inhabitants of Champlain and vicinity. His time of service soon expiring, he was requested by several of the most influential men of that village to settle with them. His exertions were also appreciated in another quarter, by rapid promotion, first to Regimental Surgeon, and shortly afterwards to Surgeon of Division. He continued with the Regt. till Nov. 1813, when the militia being disbanded, he returned to Plattsburgh.

Having once more established himself in this village, on the 30th Dec., 1813, he married Mary, daughter of William Pitt Platt, Cumberland Head. He soon regained his first position and enjoyed an extensive and lucrative practice, possessing to the highest degree the confidence of those who were once his patients. I may be allowed to mention a rather extraordinary circumstance: when yet a young practitioner, he was present at the birth of a child, who has since grown to be an influential resident of Plattsburgh, and it was but a few days since that he attended the confinement of this same person's wife, with her sixth child. In 1833, he received the honorary diploma of Doctor of Medicine, from the state medical society.

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### CCHA RECEIVES STATE GRANT FOR LIGHTHOUSE

The Historical Association has been awarded a grant from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund for preservation of the Valcour Island Lighthouse. Commissioner of NYS Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Bernadette Castro recently announced the award of \$5,000 which will be matched from the Association's restricted lighthouse endowment fund. The funds will allow the Association to proceed this summer with major restoration of the structure including replacement of cellar beams and first floor decking.

Although the structure of the Valcour Island Lighthouse is considered to be thoroughly stable, interior degradation had occurred over the years prior to the granting of a conservation easement to the Historical Association by the previous owner. Deterioration was due to a concentration of humidity in the unventilated cellar. Major construction and rehabilitation made possible by the EPF award is expected to accomplish the first stage of returning the lighthouse's interior to its original state.

CCHA's application was one of only 79 grants that were approved this year. Commissioner Castro commented that "the need for this funding is demonstrated by the extremely keen competition for the first year grants" (from the Environmental Protection Fund). Thanks to our successful application, the Historical Association anticipates a truly productive season at the lighthouse in 1996.

(Gentleman Doctor continued from page 3)

Doctor Mooers was remarkably well calculated by nature for the profession he so unexpectedly assumed; courteous to his brother practitioners, solicitous for the welfare of his patients, uniformly kind, gentlemanly and upright in his deportment, he is proud in having secured the good wishes of every man, and the respect of all who have had the advantage of knowing him, whether as a citizen or a practitioner, at home and abroad. For some years past, he has refused the practice of surgery, devoting himself solely to that of medicine. Dr. B.J. Mooers is now in the 63rd year of his age; and daily exercising the profession, to the interests of which he has successfully and unceasingly labored for forty years.