

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Shirley L. Koester, Editor

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## ***The Next Meeting***

will be February 7, 2000, at 7:30 PM, in the first floor meeting room of the Clinton County Government Center, 137 Margaret Street, Plattsburgh, NY. The newly formed Friends of Lyon Mountain Mines, will present a program on the mines during the period of the mid 1800's to the mid 1900's. Tony Shusda and Norman "Stubby" LaMare will be on hand to give a personal view of the mines from the worker's point of view. Taped interviews with miners, from a program in Lyon Mountain during the summer of 1999, entitled "Mining Our Heritage," will be featured. We look forward to hearing "living history!"

*In case of inclement weather please listen to WEAV radio or WKDR, for notice of meeting cancellations.*

## **Textile Collection at CCHA**

In 1996, the association received a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, for textile conservation, providing proper, museum quality storage boxes. During 1999, through the hard work of Denise Tammany, an intern from SUNY Plattsburgh History Department, plus the help of many volunteers, we are now able to access our collection more easily and to facilitate research. Throughout the years, residents have brought their treasures to the museum. They range from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many items are in prime condition, however some are only suitable for research and documentation.

## *Recollections of My Boyhood*

Arnold Ellis Button

Although our grand-parents had many hardships, there were hardships left for us, their descendants. The remembrance of some of these I will strive to relate for the benefit of the younger generation.

My father settled in Peru, Clinton County, N.Y., in the year 1813, and struggled along there on a tract of land, gradually cutting off the timber. The price of lumber kept decreasing, still father kept cutting it out until it did not pay expenses. Lumber in those days was rafted down to Quebec and there sold. Finally a man by the name of Moore, and father, rafted together; and Moore, getting word that lumber was way down, sold out his share to father, who took the raft to Quebec. Upon reaching his destination with the timber he found it worth nothing, and then knew the reason his partner wished to sell his share. Not having as yet, paid Moore for the lumber, and knowing that there was a Canadian law of imprisonment for debt, he left the lumber and started home—practically a bankrupt.

He made another start by buying a farm in Franklin County, N.Y., of his nephew, Harry Button, where he lived for three years. He then traded that farm for an improved one in Clinton County. At that time I was eight years old, considered a big boy and expected to do my share of the work. We used to hoe the corn three times a year. My younger brother Elisha and I together were expected to do a man's work, hoeing together except when we disagreed on weighty matters, and then father put us on separate rows, hoeing half one way and finishing up on our return, so as to keep up with the men.

Doing this and various other work found on a farm an going to school winters, I passed away my time. The summer I was eleven years old I was given a team to drive, helping father get out lumber again, brother Elisha and I drawing the lumber

from the saw-mills in the woods, ten miles to the docks on Lake Champlain, where it was sold by count, i.e., instead of by the thousand ft. each piece was counted and had to be not less than 1 in. thick, 6 in. wide, and as long as a log.

The next summer [1837] my father sold his farm of eighty acres for \$1,600, and trading another wood lot for a span of fine gray horses, he made ready to move the next winter to a farm he had bought in Somerset, Niagara County. After long preparation, one Thursday in February, just after noon, we left Peru on our long journey. Father lead off with the team of grays, his sleigh piled high with household goods and furniture. Elisha drove his team on a sleigh on which was fastened a very large box filled with bedding, crockery, etc. I brought up the rear, driving a balky mare and a French horse not any too good, hitched to a covered sleigh containing my mother and seven children. That night we reached Chateaugay, where lived Schuyler Button, a cousin; who was also a brother of Fred Purdy's mother. We stayed with them over night and the next day started on, reaching Fort Covington in Franklin Co., by night-fall. We visited Harry Button, who still lived here. We stayed with him over night and next day, Saturday, father traded two wagons left in Peru, for groceries out of Harry's store. Sunday morning, feeling we had made them twice glad, we started on. Just as my sleigh was ready to leave, cousin Harry put a bolt of gray full cloth [cloth on which the nap has been raised, to increase the ability to provide warmth] of forty yards in it, as a parting gift. From Sunday until friday we passed on through Canton, Potsdam, Watertown and other places. Friday afternoon at about four o'clock it began to storm, and while still four miles from Oswego, it stormed so hard we had to stop for the night. The storm continued and we had to lay over the next day. On Sunday morning, the storm having cleared, we started on again, passing through Oswego. We found the snow so deep and the roads so badly drifted that the horses could not go off a walk.

That day we drove only 20 miles, while before we generally made 40. Toward the close of the next day we neared

Rochester, crossing Irondequoit Bay on the ice. The snow on the ice having melted, the water came up to the bottom of the sleigh. Soon after this we crossed the Genesee River at Rochester and put up for the night at a cousin of mother's, a Mrs. Kenyon, in Greece. Tuesday we went to Brockport to visit a cousin, Mr. John G. Crandall. We stayed there over night and the next day was the last one of our journey, for that night we put up at the home of our sister Mary Benedict, who lived at Somerset. We stayed with them two nights and one day. Mr. Benedict having rented another log cabin near by, we moved in for a few weeks.

Father, in the mean time, had taken the Ray place on the Lake Road to work on shares. He was to break up the clearing and give the owner one-third of what was raised. The season was so wet that it was impossible to burn the brush, so nothing was raised on the clearing--the next year it grew up so green it could not be burned, and perhaps you can imagine the time we had ploughing among stumps from which the trees had been cut only two years before.

But at last the wheat was sown and the next year in due time a fair crop was harvested, threshed and drawn from Somerset to Reynales' Basin, where it brought a very low price.

The next spring father rented a farm for one year on the Slayton Settlement Road, which farm is now owned by Mr. Horace Silsby. He was to pay \$300 cash rent. Father started moving April 1<sup>st</sup> by sending my brother Lyman, who was ten years old, and myself up with a flock of 40 sheep, driving them the nearest way, by what is known as the Quaker Road. It was at the time of year when roads are always poor, and in those days, not being graveled, the mud was unfathomable. There was a stretch of corduroy road for over a mile through the swamp. The water in some places was running over the logs in streams and when the sheep came to these places I had to carry two or three over and then the rest of the flock would follow. when within two miles of our destination, one sheep played out entirely so I tossed it over the fence, and by the time we reached the farm, both sheep and boys were about fagged out; it being about dark

when we got the sheep turned on the farm. We stopped at Mr. Abel Bugbee's, who lived near and Lyman stayed all night. Tired as I was, I started toward home through mud and dark, lonely woods and finally reached my sister's home on the Quaker Road about 10 P.M., and stayed all night.

We did well on the farm that year. The next spring father rented the farm now owned by Frank Button, for two years, at \$500 a year.

Hard times now began and we, like others, lost money. Wool which ought to have sold for 40 cts. per lb. only brought from 20 to 22c., and other products in proportion. While on this farm we raised many head of live stock. The spring we moved on our own farm, father did not have a wagon, so he traded one pair of young steers, one heifer and calf by side, a fine two year old colt and five sheep for just the bare running gear of a wagon.

I was at this time out of my teens, so this will end the recollections of my boyhood days.

May no other member of the Button family ever have to undergo the perils and hardships we have undergone; and if ever discontented in life, may they remember their father's experiences, and count the many blessings of the Twentieth Century, which they enjoy.

*Gasport, N.Y., Sept. 5, 1903.*

*This reminiscence which tell the saga of one family and its struggle for a living in early New York State, appeared in "Sketches of the Button Family", a small privately published booklet. Gardner Button, was born in Wallingford, Vermont on January 2, 1793. He married Lydia Ellis, who was born on December 2, 1793 in West Greenwich Rhode Island. It is their son, Arnold, who was the author of this article.*

## **McMasters Prize for the Writing of History**

This marks the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of this prize, established in honor of Emily McMasters. The deadline for the submission of papers is April 1, 2000. A submitted paper should have a minimum length of 3,000 words and be of high literary quality, original and soundly researched. Please contact the museum at: 518 561-0340 to request guidelines for this writing contest.

Note: Although the theme must be about the North Country, it is not necessary to be a resident to submit an entry for this writing prize.

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
48 Court Street  
Plattsburgh, New York 12901

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