



North Country Notes

Issue #409

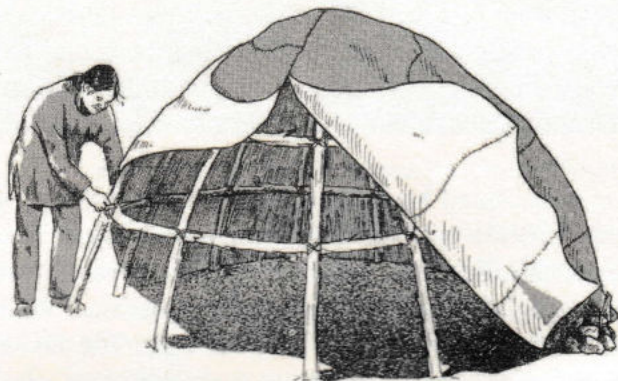
Spring 2012

The First Immigrants by Thomas Pray

It was with anxious eyes that the hunter looked downstream; he had come to this spot in anticipation of the herd's return. Last year, his family had settled here for a few days collecting a harvest of meat from three caribou for instant consumption, smoking and drying. From the low sandy terrace above the flood plain, he could see where earlier herds had already progressed across the flats, grazing, and then moving steadily onward. He hoped they had not come too late.

While the other five hunters and their families slept under a canopy of low, thick, pines, and hides, he kept watch. Further upstream, from where he hid, the river became even more shallow and the land, more flat. The lush growth of lichen, sedges, and green fields of grass beckoned the herds onward in their migration. Downstream, the lush fields had been broad and flat, but here the river took a sharp turn. A narrow channel forced the caribou between steep slopes on either side of the river. It was the only way to proceed upstream without turning back and taking a longer route. It was a perfect hunting spot to take a few animals as the herd crowded within the narrow confines. His stomach growled as he held his spear tighter and turned his eyes downstream to where, out of the foggy morning mist, the first caribou stepped.

Fifteen thousand years ago, the last vestiges of the Wisconsin Ice Sheet were melting and retreating from New York State. The late Pleistocene era was ending; at its zenith the ice sheet had covered New York as far as Long Island with a thickness from one to three miles deep. From 15,000 to 11,000 years ago, with shifting environmental changes, the huge ice mass steadily melted. In that 4,000 year span, what is now New York State



went from barren ice to tundra conditions. Low-lying grasses, sedges, lichens, mosses, and other small plants covered the ground for about 30 to 50 miles in front of the retreating ice. Hemlock, Spruce, Jack Pine, and Birch advanced northward to about 150 miles from the perimeter of the retreating glaciers. The land was filled with occasional pockets of small forest and flood plains filled with lush vegetation. Melting water filled low lying areas with shallow ponds of fresh water.

Bison, mammoths, mastodons, caribou, elk, and musk oxen colonized the tundra. Horses, camels, and antelope lived here along with short faced bears, dire wolves, sloths, peccaries, tapirs, beavers, squirrels, ducks, geese and other fowl. Into this land filled with teeming herds also came the early bands of Paleo Hunters. These early hunters moved steadily northward into the Champlain Valley following the migratory herds of caribou and elk in a circular, seasonal pattern. Though they may have taken an occasional mastodon or woolly mammoth, evidence for such in the confines of the Champlain Valley does not exist. Most likely they hunted the smaller game and foraged for edible plants frequently. These early bands brought with them and utilized the best cherts and flints. These included exotic flints from Pennsyl-

The First Immigrants continued

vania, Ohio, Western and Southern New York, and as far South as the Virginia area. They also brought with them a well developed arsenal of weapons and hunting skills honed by thousands of years of Old World, Western, Eastern, and Southern Continental hunting. This tool kit consisted of bi-faced knives, bi-faced flakes, end scrapers, side scrapers, abraders, and fluted projectile spear points. Caribou herds normally travel 800 miles or more in one direction seasonally. Hunters following them into the Champlain Valley would soon leave a diversity of flints and cherts found over widespread locations.

Most sites found have been fairly small, suggesting highly mobile groups consisting of three to four nuclear families with numbers probably from 15 to 30 in a band. Such bands would sometimes meet with other bands but large sites are rare. The Davis site in Crown Point appears to be a one time stopping spot for a small band on or near the shore of the Champlain Sea. A few projectile points and some side and end scrapers make up the majority of the tools. Such is what would be expected for a small hunting camp. No evidence of structures exists for this camp. Archaeological evidence, while not finding any indication of post molds for hut structures, finds artifacts in small circular clusters and patterns suggesting small circular hut or coverings of some type. These bands entering the Champlain Valley picked camping spots along the migratory routes and the high terraces near the developing river systems and melt waters from the glaciers.

The region of Lake Champlain is not without its abundance of good flints and cherts for making



tools. The Mt. Independence chert is from black to blue in color and quite strong. The Beekmantown area flints are blue/grey in color and highly prized. Red jasper from the Colchester region, quartzite from the Winona Lake area and Bristol are other good stones utilized by Paleo Hunters. Outcroppings of black flint occur from Willsboro to the Port Henry region. Green flint from Coxsackie and black and green from around Albany are other types carried north into this region.

When the ice sheet had passed what is now the St. Lawrence valley the sea level was higher than the trough gouged out by the glacier. Into the Champlain Valley rushed the ocean, creating the Champlain Sea. It brought further food supplies, such as seals, fish, more water fowl, along with clams, and other mollusks. Now sites were located near slopes by this deep salty arm of the ocean. It would take about 1,500 years for the land to rebound upward from the massive weight it had been under, and in that time the salt water Champlain Sea would slowly turn brackish and then back to fresh water. In those 1,500 years, herds would still traverse the area and Paleo hunters would follow them. The river systems would become teeming with smaller game. Foraging for plant life could take place anywhere around and near the lake. Scattered finds of Paleo projectile points have been found along the Boquet, AuSable, Saranac, Chazy, and Lachine river systems in New York's part of the Champlain Valley. On the Vermont side the Winona Lake region, Otter Creek, Winooski, and Mississquoi areas have produced points showing a pattern of travel on either side of the glacial melt waters, Champlain Sea, and finally the fresh water lake we enjoy today.

Unfortunately much of the Paleo Tool kit may have been made of bone, wood, and ivory. The acidic and damp soils of our region destroyed any evidence of such. We do not know what plants they foraged for. Also absent is much evidence of decoration or human adornment though some evidence of talc pendants from the Reagen Site near Alburg, Vermont points to some form of decorating. A few

The First Immigrants continued & new exhibit of artwork

stones have also been found with what appears to be etching or drawing. In the ensuing 2,000-3000 years after the Paleo hunter colonization, nearly half of the animal life on the tundra and in the low arboreal forests became extinct. Environmental changes surely dispatched many of the Pleistocene species but the hunters surely contributed to the demise of others. As the Champlain Valley changed, the herds of elk, caribou, and musk oxen traveled further north where they remain today. The Paleo residents may have followed, but it appears some stayed and learned to adapt to the changing habitat here in the Champlain Valley. For 3,000 years the mobile hunting system had worked, but it was time for change. Some of the tool making procedures would continue but new foods would require new methods of procurement. The hunters would continue to inhabit the valley.

For the next two years the Clinton County Historical Association will be showcasing artifacts from Native American cultures in the Champlain Valley. From Paleo, through Archaic and into the Woodland period, various artifacts, panels, illustrations, and information about Native American settlement patterns and their abundance in this valley will be revealed. The Champlain Valley was not the barren, empty, little utilized region that 19th, 20th, and even some misinformed historians of today claim. Come visit the museum and learn the true story. William Ritchie, former New York State Archaeologist, identified 40 different cultural groups that lived in New York State. Artifacts from all of those groups have been found within this valley. Some of those groups' arti-

CCHA thanks Thomas Pray for sharing his extensive knowledge and collection for the new exhibit *Cultural Crossroads & Conflicted Territory* which highlights Native American artifacts at the museum.

facts are on display. Come see them.

The exhibit at CCHA was funded by a 2010 Champlain Quadricentennial Legacy Grant from the



Paintings by David Kanietakeron Fadden featured at CCHA



Dancing on Turtle Island by David Fadden

Clinton County Historical Association is pleased to feature nine paintings by David Kanietakeron Fadden for a special temporary exhibition which can be viewed through Museum Weekend, June 2 & 3. The artwork is a complement to the new exhibit highlighting the museum's collection of Native American artifacts.

CCHA's Director/Curator Tricia Davies shares, "We have been very fortunate to have the assistance of David's father John Kahionhes Fadden in creating our new exhibit, and now I am thrilled to offer our visitors an opportunity to enjoy David's evocative artwork. His work brings vibrant color to the museum and helps us interpret aspects of traditional and contemporary Mohawk culture as represented in each painting."

According to his artist statement, David's first influence is his father, who illustrated over 50 books and was a teacher for 32 years. David explains, "Growing up in a traditional Mohawk household, I was taught from the beginning to respect all living creatures and to view everything as living and having a spirit. I try to reflect this notion in my paintings."

David's latest work is a picture book entitled "When the Shadbush Blooms," published by Tricycle Press. His work can also be seen at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC and New York City.

“Merkel”

A Gem from the Glass Negatives Portrait Project

Gordon Pollard, Professor Emeritus, SUNY Plattsburgh

It is possibly the most unusual studio portrait among the more than 550 that have been posted so far on the CCHA glass negatives project website. A seated man is posed holding a shot glass of whiskey from a bottle that sits on the small table beside him. The photo had been taken on November 4, 1902, and the only name on the negative slipcase was “Merkel.” Who was this Mr. Merkel, and why did he choose to be portrayed this way? With a little research, answers soon began to emerge.



I had been perusing the glass negative images online to see if they might contain photos of individuals who had been involved with Plattsburgh’s 19th century beverage bottling businesses (CCHA had published my book on *Bottles and Business in Plattsburgh, New York* back in 1993). I knew that families with names such as Scheier, Mendelsohn, Schiff, Columbe, Kahner, and Merkel had been prominent in the local tobacco and bottling industry, but known photographs of key individuals were extremely rare. Here was a “Merkel,” but what was his first name?

The Clinton County Historical Museum has a photo of Isaac Merkel, who in 1873 opened a cigar and liquor business on Margaret Street, but the relatively young Merkel in the 1902 photo clearly wasn’t Isaac. Biographical sources indicate that Isaac and his wife Jeanette Kahner (the first Jewish wedding in Plattsburgh) had at least five children: Abraham, Joseph, Rebecca, David and Aaron. All four of these sons also became involved in tobacco and liquor businesses, and Rebecca married Henry Scheier, a son of Isaias Scheier who had opened a cigar store in Plattsburgh several years before Isaac Merkel. It was David and Aaron who maintained the deepest connection with their father’s company, officially becoming partners as “Isaac Merkel & Sons” on January 1, 1905. I had suspected that the studio portrait was of one of these sons, and confirmation finally came from two sources: a 1906 Plattsburgh newspaper article about the company, which included small photos of the three men, and a large collage photo in the CCHA collections (thank you, Maurica!) that had obviously been



“Merkel” continued



made in conjunction with the newspaper article. The studio portrait was of Aaron Merkel.

So, why did Aaron pose as he did in the studio portrait? The answer to that question came when I remembered I had an old trade card of the “Isaac Merkel & Sons” company, which had established its bottling works on Bridge Street by 1905. On the card is an engraving of their building, and a bottle of “Bachelor Rye,” a whis-

key blend that Isaac had created and begun bottling in 1895. Lo and behold, the label on that bottle included a graphic virtually identical to Aaron’s 1902 portrait. Aaron wasn’t posing for the family photo album, but as the prototype for a new label for the bottle! Now the Merkel photo made perfect sense.

“Bachelor Rye” clearly was one of Isaac Merkel’s big sellers, as the name even embellished the cupola atop the Bridge Street blending, bottling and shipping works. Part of that building still stands next to the Saranac, but the upper floor and cupola were removed long ago. The popularity and promotion of “Bachelor Rye” must have been significant, as I recently discovered that acid-etched shot glasses were also produced with an image based on Aaron’s studio photo. Such glasses are now rare collectors’ items.

Perhaps coincidentally, Aaron himself was indeed a bachelor. Tragically, however, his life ended much too early. Aaron was 29 years old when the studio portrait was taken in 1902, and just seven years later he became ill with an “incurable malady” that took his life at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York

City on April 8, 1909. Like other members and generations of the Merkel family up to the current day, Aaron had been a highly respected businessman and prominent member of a number of fraternal and social organizations in Plattsburgh. He was interred in Beth Israel Cemetery here three days after his death.



CCHA’s glass negatives portrait project is a wonderful repository of studio portraits of thousands of individuals of our region taken between 1897 and 1929. Search the online lists and photographs at your leisure, and enjoy the images (<http://clintoncountyhistorical.org/portraits1.html>). And don’t overlook the delightful studio shots of Mabel Peck from 1904. Her pose on ice skates is simply priceless!

Other News and Upcoming Events

SUMMER SUNDAYS IN 2012 at the BLUFF POINT LIGHTHOUSE on HISTORIC VALCOUR ISLAND

The Lighthouse is open for tours hosted by
CCHA Volunteers on the following dates

from 1-3 pm

May 27, September 2,

and every Sunday in July & August

Transportation to the island is the responsibility of the visitor.

Civil War Camp Enlisting Local Youth for 3rd Summer

Who: Girls and Boys age 9-14 years

When: July 10-13 or July 17-20

Where: CCHA, 98 Ohio Ave. Plattsburgh

How: There is a \$10 registration fee payable
to CCHA. Call 561-0340 to sign up.

Civil War Camp 2012 is funded in part
by The Chapel Hill Foundation Inc.
and Clinton County.



Memberships, Donations and Other Support Received Oct. 14, 2011—Mar. 31, 2012

Robert and Mary Adams, Jane Alexander, Allen Co. Public Library, Ron and Carol Allen, Donald and Madeleine Ambrose, Arnie's Restaurant, James and Anne Bailey, Cliff Barrette, John Barton, Sylvie Beaudreau, Linda Bedard, Eleanor G. Berger, Dr. Howard Black, Kit and Sally Booth, Dr. John Boule, Tom Braga, Terrence and Michele Branon, Eileen Brewer, Ellsworth and Dorothy Buchanan, Carolyn Burakowski, Edgar and Emily Burde, Kenneth and Trudy Burger, Joseph and Joan Burke, William and Margaret Caldon, Ann Chien, Mark and Holley Christiansen, Jane Claffey, John and Penny Clute, Conroy and Conroy, Bill Conway, Jan and Dave Couture, Bill and Pat Crosby, Alita and Mark Desso, Nelson Disco, Anne Doherty, Gerald and Ruth Dominy, Barbara Dorrance, Jerome and Janet Downs, Nancy Duquette-Smith, Vickie Evans, Geri Favreau, Laurie Feinberg, Connie Fisher, Mason and Joan Forrence, Nancy Frederick, John and Barbara Gallagher, Robert Garrow, Maurica Gilbert and Noel Sowley, Roderic and Doreen Giltz, David and Lynne Glenn, Morris Glenn, William Glidden and Martha Bachman, Alfreda Guay, Robert Haley, Frank and Jane Hamilton, Anne Handly, Ramona Harlem, Stephen Harstedt, Roger Harwood, Rebecca Hayes, Judith Heintz, June Heming, Heritage Printing, Patricia Higgins, Frank and Carol Hochreiter, Bart and Maryanna Holm, Claudia Hornby, Ralph and Cheryl Hospodarsky, Jacqueline Huru, Helen Ianelli, Mick Jarvis, Lola and Ray Johnson, Euclid and Susanne Jones, Caroline Kehne, Richard and Susan Kelley, Bill and Jane Kelting, Key Foundation, Frank Kinnelly, Don and Peg Kinneston, Harold Klein, Robert Kovacs and Mary Hildebrand, Dan Ladue, Art Lajoy, Connie Lalonde, William and Beverly Leege, Brinley and Dorothy Lewis, James Lindgren, Roland and Martha Lockwood, Dennis and Marie Lyriotakis, Stephen Martin, Beverly Maynard, Patricia Maynard, William and Scarlett McBride, John McGaulley, Ann and Ron Merkley, Elizabeth and Thomas Metz, Howard and Myrna Miller, Marilyn Morton, Brian Murphy, David Murray, Nancy Myers, Anna Nardelli, Merrie Nautel, Helen Nerska, Sylvia Newman, Mary Nicknish, Northern Insuring, NYS Library, Nancy Olsen, Don Papson, Patricia Parker, David Patrick, John Patterson, Pfizer Foundation, Dennis Hulbert & Photo-Pub, Preservation League NYS, Pearlie Rabin, James Racette, Donna Racine, Stan and Chris Ransom, Sharon Ratner, Marianne Rector, Bill and Bunny Rowe, John and Judy Russell, John and Jean Ryan, Kevin and Mary Ryan, Herbert Sanders, Kathy Schumacher, Richard and Margaret Schwartz, Douglas and Evelyne Skopp, Charles Smith, Jr., Frederick Smith, Dr. John Southwick, Skip Sprague & Tip-Top Framing, Jeffrey Stephens, David and Sandra Stortz, Martha Strack, John and Louise Tanner, Town of Peru Historian- Ron Allen, Donna Toye, Jamie Trautman, Gary and Billie VanCour, Stuart and Linda Voss, Alan Weil, Steve and Sue Welch, Kay Wellman, Phyllis Wells, Lorri Wetzell, John Willey, Robert and Shari Williams, William and Lucy Wilson, Richard and Bonnie Wingler, Dale Wolfe, Joel and Marla Wolkowicz, John Zurlo and Clinton County.

Photos from Recent Events



Three generations of the Boulé family, Milton, Darlene and Daisy, visit a display about their relative, Mitchell Bulley.



High School students attending SUNY Plattsburgh's Youth Leadership Program join in weaving during CCHA's Pack Basket Workshop lead by Mick Jarvis.



Friends, Aili and Harper, make bags inspired by a strawberry basket during Family Fun Days at CCHA.



CCHA Member Ken Burger and recent CCHA intern Melissa Peck catch up during the Members' Preview of the new exhibit.

Programs Spring 2012

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, JUNE 2-3 MUSEUM WEEKEND, 10-4 both days

Two days of free admission at 22 local museums. CCHA's Museum Weekend features the new exhibit *Cultural Crossroads & Conflicted Territory*, paintings by David Kanietakeron Fadden, and archaeology lab sessions at 10:15, 12:15 & 2:15 during which kids can simulate a dig, discovering objects in a sand tray.

Monday Night Lecture Series

At CCHA, 7 pm, Free and open to the public.
Sponsored in part by Clinton County

MONDAY, JUNE 4

Elizabeth Fisk Looms:
The Story of a Weaver by Marty Dale

MONDAY, JULY 9

The Civil War Through Quilts by Vickie Evans

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Program Reminder: May 12th - Chazy Tour with Historian Bob Cheeseman

New in the Gift Shop

From Forest to Fields, A History of Agriculture in New York's Champlain Valley by Andrew Alberti and Anita Deming. 2010. 49 page booklet which leads visitors through the working landscape in Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Warren and Washington Counties of upstate New York. Along the way readers will learn to identify historic and contemporary agricultural crops, structures and practices while visiting farms, museums, fairgrounds and farmers' markets. \$1.00

Lyon Mountain, The Tragedy of a Mining Town by Lawrence Gooley, 2004. The story of the Lyon Mountain miners and the mining community, focused on the pre-1920 era. Extensive research, combined with personal interviews by the author, have kept the story alive. \$22.00, never before in our shop.

A History of the Altona Flat Rock, Silver Anniversary Edition. This updated version of the 1980 original work takes the reader directly to the source, with many new photographs documenting the Flat Rock's features, both natural and manmade. It's the next best thing to being there. \$22.00

Coming soon: **Plattsburgh** by Kelly Sexton, an Arcadia book packed with local photos. All royalties to benefit the Friends of the Plattsburgh Public Library, and thus support the Library itself. **Plattsburgh** is part of the *Images of America* series, which uses vintage photos and other images to tell the story of our community. Kelly Sexton has chosen images from the CCHA glass negative archive and the Plattsburgh Public Library's Cole Collection to illustrate Plattsburgh's fascinating history.