



North Country Notes

Issue #418

Spring, 2017

The Summer White House by Steve Frederick

This year's holiday ornament sold by the Clinton County Historical Association happens to be one of my favorite images of the Hotel Champlain. The original photo was taken in 1904 and produced by the Detroit Publishing Company. While there are so many interesting stories I can share about the hotel and its guests over its sixty-one year history, this article is about President William McKinley's Summer White House in 1897 & 1899.

President McKinley's wife, Ida Saxton McKinley, suffered from epilepsy and needed a quiet place to rest and escape the high summer heat and humidity of Washington, DC. Vice President Garret Hobart had visited the Hotel Champlain previously and highly recommended it to the President. The fresh cool breezes off Lake Champlain and clean Adirondack air would be very refreshing for both the President and First Lady.

The party arrived by special train in Plattsburgh on July 29, 1897, then proceeded to Bluff Point by carriage. The president signed the register simply "William McKinley and wife, Canton, Ohio," a humility local newsmen suggested "would indicate that the President desired to be considered a plain American citizen while here, rather than the Chief Executive of a great nation." (Frost, Richard. *Hotel Champlain to Clinton Community College: A Chronicle of Bluff Point*. Donning Publishers, 2011)

Even though the President had traveled to Bluff Point to rest and relax, he still found time for official government business, attending a variety of local churches, as well as meeting local citizens. Unlike today, the average American seemed to have much more access to their President. Two such stories are shared in Richard Frost's wonderfully written book titled *Hotel Champlain to Clinton Community College: A Chronicle of Bluff*

Point. The first story tells of how a man named Stiles McMullen, age 101, came to see McKinley. Family lore had it that during infancy, George Washington had patted McMullen on the head. He wanted, before he died, to be able to claim he'd met both the first and the last presidents of the United States. The other story is of a 70 year old farmer from West Chazy who walked fifteen miles to Bluff Point just so he could shake hands with the President of the United States.

Unlike President William Howard Taft (a future guest of the Hotel Champlain), William McKinley was not interested in playing golf at the adjacent Bluff Point Golf course. Connected to the Hotel Champlain grounds, Green Drive was a favorite carriage ride for McKinley on his way to sit, read for hours and watch the golfers. He had a favorite pine tree - dubbed the "McKinley Pine" - to sit under that offered great views, cooling shade, and peace and quiet. On September 6, 1901, McKinley was assassinated in Buffalo and Vice President Theodore Roosevelt became the 26th president of the United States. Interestingly, the "McKinley Pine" was struck by lightning around the same time and was blown to pieces! Today a monument stands where President McKinley once sat under the great pine. All the mature pine trees growing there now are the seedlings from the destroyed "McKinley Pine." Sadly, vandals stole the bronze tablets that once adorned the monument. Due to many years of inclement weather, the monument is now in poor condition. But, one can still clearly see it, on the right, as you drive up to the Bluff Point Club House.

The President and Mrs. McKinley must have had a wonderful time in 1897 as they arrived again at the Hotel Champlain on July 27, 1899 and stayed for a month. If readers are wondering why he did not

_____ **Summer White House (cont on Page 4)**

President's Corner and Director's Report

President's Corner

Your Association's Executive Committee and Board are ready for an exciting 2017. First, I can bring you up to date on our decision with respect to a new Director. Effective February 19, Helen Allen Nerska resigned as CCHA Board President and was hired as Director of the museum. Helen had been voluntarily managing the museum since September so it was a natural and practical move for her and for CCHA. This is a part time position, and we are fully confident that this was a good decision based on the very talented support of our volunteers. As I was Vice-President, I have taken over as President and am very enthusiastic about the coming year. We continue to work diligently to preserve our extensive collections and to determine the very best use of our space. Going forward we hope to add our building to the historic register and to make our wonderful location - the Old Base Museum Campus - a destination. We have many exciting projects needing volunteers and we have a great environment to work in. Please call us (561-0340) or drop by to discuss the projects you may find of interest.

CCHA is pleased to announce that Luke Cyphers has returned to our Board and is lending his talents to our Communications and Outreach Committee. Jerry Gagnier has more recently joined the Board and we are very pleased to have a second native of the Town of Clinton as a Trustee (your Board President being the other!) Jerry is a member of the Buildings & Grounds Committee.

Geri Favreau, President.

Director's Report

We are in the process of finalizing our events for the year. You can expect to receive your postcard of events within a few weeks. We can confirm our May 8th Lecture with Peter Sorrell's "*The Art of the Dig: Metal Detecting for History*." An introduction of the techniques and resources that can be used to locate old homes and sites of historic significance and how this information can help gain new knowledge about our early county residents and how they lived. Peter is a member of the Collections Committee. The presentation will be at 6:30 pm, at CCHA.

Do also mark Museum Weekend on your calendar. The date has been changed to June 17 & 18. There will be free entrance and special activities at CCHA and museums all around Clinton County.

CCHA will sponsor two special commemorations this year: The November 6, 1917 vote which gave New York State Women the right to vote in Federal and State elections; and The Plattsburgh Idea which is recognized as the first program to prepare students and businessmen for the military in case of war.

Additionally, we are excited to report that Richard Frost and Melissa Peck (our former Director) have written and are busy finalizing a book entitled "The Plattsburgh Military Reservation: A Pictorial History." The publishing of the book is made possible by a grant from the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership and the Lake Champlain Basin Program. You will be notified of the special event planned for the roll out of this book.

We hope members will take the opportunity to use social media to stay up to date with all CCHA events and activities through our web site www.clintoncountyhistorical.org and our Facebook pages: Clinton County Historical Association, Clinton County Civil War Record - 1861 to 1865, and Bluff Point Light House on Valcour Island or by emailing director@clintoncountyhistorical.org

Have research questions? Please call the museum for an appointment or email us. We are open from 10 am to 3 pm, Wednesday through Saturday and other times by appointment.

Helen Nerska, Director

The Town of Clinton, by Geri Favreau (aka Geraldine Watson)

Tell people you are from the Town of Clinton and first of all they might look at you with a puzzled look or if they are even aware of the Town of Clinton, they think it's in Franklin County! And of course, there's also a Clinton, NY. But tell them you're from Churubusco and everybody knows where that is!! Or mention "Lagree's" or "The Hotel" at least by people of my generation.

The Town of Clinton, more commonly known by the name of its largest hamlet, Churubusco, was formed on 14 May 1845 from the Town of Ellenburg. It is located in the most northwest corner of Clinton County. One of the major industries for years was farming but now most of the farms are gone, and many people have wind turbines on their property. You can see the turbines for miles!

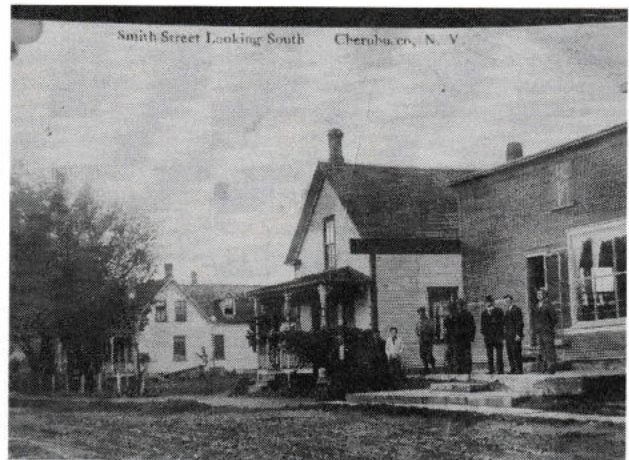
At one time it had four hamlets: The Frontier (first settlement), Clinton Mills (timber and the railroad played a major part in developing this community), Wrightsville (located on the Military Turnpike) and Churubusco, the highest point of land in the area. Of the four, Churubusco is the only one that remains as a viable community. Wrightsville was located along the Marble River just east of the Franklin/Clinton County line. It is long gone with the only remnant remaining being the foundation of a butter factory. Clinton Mills had a major fire in 1877 which destroyed almost all the buildings. One time in Clinton Mills to satisfy a political bet, they actually "painted the town red." The Frontier which is located right on the Canadian border consists only of a few houses these days.

Churubusco (or Cherubusco) was named in honor of the American soldiers who fought in the Battle of Churubusco in 1847 in the Mexican-American War and then moved to the Town of Clinton. In 1927, Churubusco (no "e") became the official name.

At one time there were 13 one-room schools and one four-room school in the Town, one in each district except District 5 located in

and around the hamlet of Churubusco. This district had a one-room school which was replaced by a four-room school in 1910. Two of those one-room school buildings still exist today and the four-room school was renovated and became senior housing a few years ago. Today it is apartments.

A small wooden chapel was built in 1855 to serve the Roman Catholic Parishioners. St. Philomena & St. Bridget (renamed Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1961) was built in 1888-1892, the Methodist Church (transformed into a private home many years ago) was built in 1897 and the Apostles of Infinite Love had a presence in the town in the 1970's.



There are many interesting stories about "Churubusco" but in honor of **Black History Month** here's one about Isaac Johnson. He was a Freed Slave who laid the cornerstone for the Catholic Church. Isaac was born in Kentucky in 1844. He was sold to his master at the age of 10 for \$700. He attempted to escape many times and in 1861 he ran away and joined the Union Army. He moved to Waddington, NY in 1884 and began his work as a mason and stonecutter in 1887. In 1888, he supervised the cutting of the huge stones for St. Philomena & St. Bridget Catholic Church in Churubusco. He moved to Ogdensburg, NY in 1890 where he died and was buried in 1905. [Taken from *Isaac Johnson - From Slave to Stonecutter* by Hope Irvin Marston, 1995 and 2003.] Isaac wrote a book about his experiences as a slave: *Slavery Days in Old Kentucky by Isaac Johnson, A Former Slave*, written in 1901. His life's story

Communications & Outreach—Bernie Bassett

In 2016 I was appointed by our President to Chair the Communications & Outreach Committee. Other Committee members are Julie Dowd and Luke Cyphers.

The Committee is authorized by Section 11 of the By-Laws. It is the Committee that manages the face of the Association outside our doors and is responsible for all mass communications to the public helping to promote everything that CCHA does.

The Committee works to interact with the community to help share programs and opportunities to promote the goals and objectives of the Association and to improve the visibility, understanding and appreciation of the Association.

Committee members are available to help with publishing joint or individual research studies; newsletter to members, bulletins, or books; for publicity; and for staging radio and television programs. Once publication projects are approved by the Board, the Communications & Outreach Committee will help by supervising their design, printing, distribution, and sales if required.

Summer White House (cont from Page 1)

vacation at the hotel in the summer of 1898, it was because the United States was fighting the Spanish American War in Cuba. The President needed to stay in Washington DC to be close to the war effort.

Steven Frederick is the Vice President of Institutional Advancement at Clinton Community College and the college's "unofficial historian of the Hotel Champlain."

A Hotel Champlain Holiday Ornament is for sale in our shop at \$15 plus tax. We also have an Old Stone Barracks Ornament available for the same price.

Town of Clinton (cont from Page 3)

is very interesting, and this is just a very small part of it. Both books are available for purchase at CCHA. There is an article about Isaac in The Ogdensburg Journal, dated December 5, 1905 on the NNYLN.org website under Historical Newspapers.

Please come and visit our exhibit on the Town of Clinton. It is such an interesting Town! You'll see stories about Esmond Decosse who invented the pull-out sides for a travel trailer/camper in the 1950's, the Gagnier Potato Industry (early 1900's to 1990's), Jack Lagree who built bobsleds for the 1980 US Olympic Team, the Churubusco Live-In that never happened (1970), John Laclair, the Churubusco Healer (mid-1930's) and the Gibson Brothers who grew up in the Town of Clinton and learned to play banjo and guitar from Eric O'Hara (from Mooers) at Dick's Country Store (Gas, Groceries, Guns, Guitars)!

Thanks to Lawrence P. Gooley (Bloated Toe Publishing) "History of Churubusco and the Town of Clinton, Clinton County, New York" (2010), the Town of Clinton History Committee "Town of Clinton 'Churubusco'" (2010) and the Bicentennial Committee "Town of Clinton 1976" (1976) for all their wonderful research and publishing their books! The two books published in 2010 are available for purchase in the Museum Shop. AND, a huge thanks to the Town of Clinton who very generously sponsored our exhibit and Diane Lagree, Town Historian, without whose help, I could not have done the exhibit! Watch for a walking/driving tour of the Town in the Spring/Summer.

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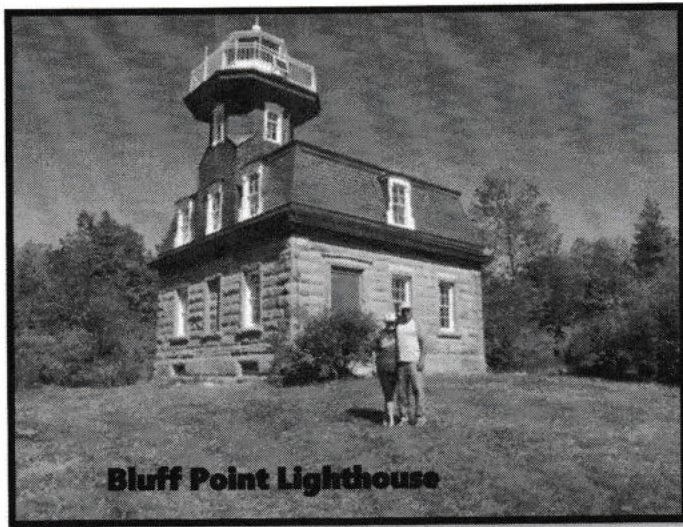
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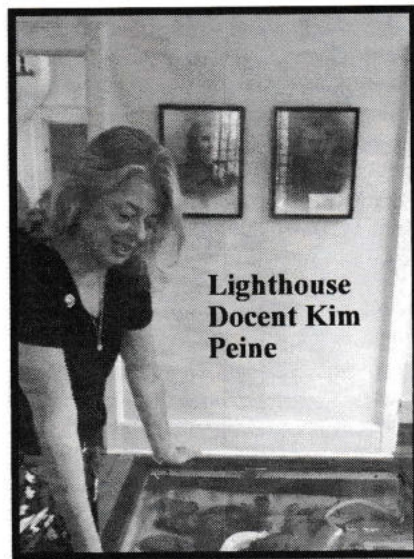
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Photo Splash



Bluff Point Lighthouse



**Lighthouse
Docent Kim
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Valiant Ambition: George Washington, Benedict Arnold and the Fate of the American Revolution (Nathaniel Philbrick) - \$25
The Life of Commodore Thomas Macdonough (Rodney Macdonough) - \$20
A History of the Town of Chazy (Nell Sullivan and David Martin) - \$50

TOWN OF CLINTON RELATED BOOKS:

Isaac Johnson – From Slave to Stonecutter (Hope Irvin Marston) (used) - \$20
Slavery Days in Old Kentucky (Isaac Johnson) (used) - \$12
Of Little Faith (Carol Hoenig) - \$14.95
Without Grace (Carol Hoenig) - \$14.95

DVDS:

Heart's Delight – The Story of William H. Miner (Paul Frederick) - \$15
Pioneers of Rural Schools (Rick Bechard) - \$15

T-SHIRT – Bluff Point Lighthouse - \$20

COLORING BOOKS – *A Walk in the Woods, Godey's Fashions, Medieval Fortress* - \$3.99
Early American Trades, Forest Animals - \$4.99

NOTECARDS

By Barb Spencer: *CCHA Bldg., Lighthouse, Claire & Carl's, First Presbyterian Church, First Baptist Church, Regina Maria Retreat House, St. Mary's of the Lake, Ferry "Vermont," and St. John's Academy.* - \$2.25 ea
 By Dick Brogowski: *Clyde Lewis Park, Macdonough Monument in Winter with Christmas Wreath and St. Peter's Church with Christmas Wreaths.* - \$2.25 ea.

GIBSON BROS. CD'S - \$15 each

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Ring The Bell (2009),
Help My Brother (2011)
They Call It Music (2013)
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GENTLY USED:

Adirondack Guide – An Almanac of Essential Information and Assorted Trivia - \$10
Alexander Macomb (Everest) - \$12
Chateaugay Lakes-(Whalen) - \$50
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Final Invasion (Fitz-Enz) - \$25
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PLEASE CALL FOR PRICES ON SPECIAL PACKAGES:

William H. Miner Book, *Heart's Delight* DVD, and *Pioneers of Rural Schools* DVD

Songs to Keep Song Book, Songs to Keep CD, and *Songs to Keep* DVD

Contact the Museum if you are interested in ordering any of the 170+ titles available in the Museum Shop. Complete list on CCHA website: www.clintoncountyhistorical.org Shipping, handling and tax may apply.



CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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Issue 418, Spring 2017

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This just in . . . At the regular March Meeting, the CCHA Board of Trustees appointed Bernie Bassett as Vice President.

Looking Back

From North Country Notes, Jan. 1961:

Bill of Sale – 1793: The only Negro slave known to have been owned in Champlain Town was the one named in the following bill of sale to Judge Pliny Moore: Know all Men by these presents that I Isaac Van Slyck of Kinderhook, County of Columbia & State of New York have this day sold and conveyed to Pliny Moor of Champlain Town Clinton County and to his heirs and Assigns a Negro girl five Years old named Phillis for the Consideration of 14 Pounds Lawfull Money of New York to me in hand paid before the ensealing & delivery hereof, the Receipt whereof is hereby Acknowledged, & hereby Warrant the said Negro girl to be my property free of any former sale & incumberance whatever. As Witness my hand & Seal at Kinderhook this first day of March in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven hundred and Ninety three. Sealed & delivered In presence of John J. Vanslyck – his mark Isaac X Van Slyc

A Slave's Grave: On Route 9, four miles north of Plattsburgh, in a pasture between the road and Treadwell's Bay, is a small enclosed burial plot, in which is an old gravestone which bears the following inscription: *PHYLLIS – Old Phyllis the slave was of African birth and she died long ago, long ago, and her sad last request ere she passed to her rest, was Lay me at old Massa's feet.* Phyllis (not the same slave mentioned in the Bill of Sale) was buried actually across the foot of the grave of her owner, Hon. Thomas Tredwell (1742-1832). He was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1788, a Congressman, and Clinton County Surrogate.