

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 44

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

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The April Meeting

of the Association will be held in the auditorium of the Public Library in Plattsburgh on Monday evening, April 1st, at 8 o'clock. The speaker will be Edgar J. Blankman, Associate Professor of English at St. Lawrence University at Canton. Dr. Blankman is the University Archivist and Historian who is currently working on an area museum. He is also vice president of the St. Lawrence County Historical Society. His topic will be "E. G. Blankman, North Country Map-Maker and Novelist." He will display copies of his father's well-known maps and books. The public is cordially invited.

Riddle of the Month

The February riddle: both Maurice Turner of Keeseville and David Martin of West Chazy correctly identified Lac du Saint Sacrement as modern Lake George. Only David Martin knew that Long Island was the early name for Grand Isle.

New riddle, submitted by David Martin, who apparently seeks an answer himself: What does French mean on page 39 of his Gazetteer of New York by this statement: "All roads must be fenced by the owners of adjacent lands, unless liable to be overflowed by streams, when the overseers of highways must erect and keep in repair good swinging gates at the expense of the lands benefitted; and persons leaving such gates open are liable to triple damages".

THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT HARRISON

1. H. L. Webb in New York to Mrs. Swetland (his mother-in-law) in Plattsburgh, 3 April 1841: (Kent-Delord Collection)

The sad, **very sad** news of the death of our Pres. Harrison reached here last evening. He had the confidence of the people and will be remembered with love & respect. For his fame it was the right time. I hope that he was prepared. For our Country, I fear. But safe strong men have confidence in Tyler. The all-wise Providence has done right. This we know.

2. From Brooklyn Henrietta writes to her step-mother, Mrs. Swetland, on April 17, 1841. (Kent-Delord Collection)

We all went over to the city to see the funeral procession in honour of President Harrison, which took place on last Saturday. It was a splendid sight, though the day was bad. We saw Bishop Onderdonk in the carriage as one of the officiating clergymen.

THE LYON MOUNTAIN IRON MINES

The earliest iron industry in the North Country seems to date from a Catalan forge in 1798 on the Saranac River in Plattsburgh. The Catalan was a centuries-old process of smelting to make crude bloom iron. After the development of this forge, the iron business began to grow. Year after year new ore deposits were discovered and ironworks started. The Saranac River, with its many rapids and falls, was a fruitful source of power. Timber for charcoal was abundant and this section of northern New York became an important part of the American bloomery.

In 1803, William Bailey erected a Catalan forge on the Chateaugay River about five miles below the outlet of Lower Chateaugay Lake. He probably obtained his ore from the "Prall Vein" (now Lyon Mountain) and transported it down lake and river by boat for a time. A trapper named Collins probably discovered the ore in 1823 and Lloyd Rogers, who bought the land from him, made an agreement which he did not keep to give him one-third interest in the ore.

In 1868 Foote, Weed, Meade and Waldo bought the land from Rogers. Even then, little development took place until Andrew Williams and Smith M. Weed founded the Chateaugay Ore and Iron Company in 1873. A plank road was built from Russia (near Saranac) through twenty miles of wilderness, thus connecting the Saranac River with the Lyon Mountain area.

For about four years only the outcroppings were worked, allowing loading directly into wagons. As the pits became deeper the sides were sloped so that wagons could still reach the floor of the bed. In time the depth of the operations made this impractical, so the ore was hoisted to the surface in small cars by means of a whimsey, with power supplied by horses. It was then loaded into wagons and transported to Russia where it was made into blooms in the six-fire forge.

In 1874, ground was broken for a dam and iron works (20 Catalan forges and charcoal kilns) at Belmont at the outlet of Chateaugay Lake. Operations, all water-driven, began there in 1875. Wood, coal and ore were moved on the lake in barges hauled by steamboat in summer and by horses and sleds in winter. The blooms and billets of almost pure iron were hauled by wagons and sleighs to Chateaugay and shipped via the Ogdensburg and Lake Champlain Railroad to steel mills in Pennsylvania and Ohio. This was the largest Catalan forge in the country and perhaps the world at the time. It turned out 15 gross tons of half-blooms per day.

Such a large production necessitated better railroad communications with the great iron markets of the country, and in 1874 the Chateaugay Railroad Company was organized. A line was planned to connect the mine at Lyon Mountain with the existing Plattsburgh-Dannemora line, and in December, 1879 the first load of ore was transported to Plattsburgh. In 1881 incorporation brought mines and railroads under one management. The Delaware and Hudson Canal Company became closely associated with the new company. By 1885, the mills and mines were producing concentrated ore for some 60 forges in Clinton and Essex Counties, and Lyon Mountain had become a thriving community of 3,000.

In 1885, the company began to build a blast furnace at Standish and to extend the railroad from Lyon Mountain to that point, and later to Loon Lake. In 1886, the Catalan forges at Standish were temporarily abandoned and the making of pig iron commenced in the new blast furnace, using charcoal as fuel. This resulted in the development of an entirely new market, pig iron being a different product from the bloom iron produced by the Catalan forges. Steel making by the Bessemer process was gaining by leaps and bounds, and the Chateaugay iron, being extremely low in phosphorus, was in great demand. The village of Standish expanded and began to make industrial history.

During the great depression of the 1890's the company moved the forges from Belmont to Standish so that both bloom and pig iron could be made at one point and shipped to market by rail. The late '90s brought an economic revival and a new separator—the Ball & Norton magnetic separator—was installed. This made possible a concentrate of 60% iron with only a 7% iron tailing and production at the rate of 10 tons per hour per machine.

As the demand increased for steel from the Bessemer process and wrought iron from the puddling process, the market for Catalan blooms decreased. The Company subsequently abandoned its Catalan forge operations and continued making low-phosphorus pig iron in blast furnaces, using charcoal as fuel and continuing to ship concentrates and lump ore from mines at Lyon Mountain.

Because of the exceptional quality of the ore, demand for it continued to

increase, and a larger operation appeared desirable. The Delaware and Hudson Company had a considerable financial interest in the Chaateaugay Ore and Iron Company and in 1903 it took over the Company. The narrow-gauge railroad to Lake Placid was supplanted with a standard gauge line. A large steam power plant was built and two electric generators were installed to furnish power for the motors. Two air compressors were also installed and the Standish furnace was changed from a charcoal to coke furnace.

Between 1903 and 1907 much of the light equipment was replaced with more substantial equipment. Output of ore and pig iron was greatly increased. In the years immediately preceding World War I a study revealed that the Chateaugay ore beds were tremendous in size, containing an almost endless supply of iron ore practically free from sulfur and phosphorus.

In 1914, plans were made for a new hoisting shaft 1600 feet deep. The work was well underway, the shaft down 900 feet, when the wartime demands for iron became so great that work on the shaft was postponed. In 1919 construction was resumed and by 1924 all mining operations were confined to the new shaft. In 1921, a sintering plant was built at Lyon Mountain. In May 1924, the separator which had been completed in 1918 was destroyed by fire; a new and larger separator and concentrating plant, built entirely of steel and concrete, was put in operation in June, 1925.

Early in 1939, Republic Steel, having taken over the Witherbee-Sherman mining operations at Mineville and Port Henry, looked with interest on the Chateaugay works at Lyon Mountain. The Delaware and Hudson Company saw a better future if its property was operated by a large steel company, so an agreement was consummated and Republic immediately prepared for an expanded production. Fortunately, wartime demands for this low-phosphorus ore resulted in doubling the output. Wet drilling and wet concentration were adopted and installation of appropriate equipment was completed. In 1939, when Republic leased the property, the blast furnace at Standish was abandoned and ore and sinter shipped direct to the Company's blast furnaces at their various steel plants.

During its early development the Lyon Mountain area appeared to have enough ore to last forever. However, with the development of ore beds elsewhere, Lyon Mountain ore was too remote from markets to ship profitably while at the same time the richness of the ore began to diminish. Finally it was no longer profitable to keep the mines operating, and so, in June 1967, over a century of production came to an end.

Susan Gregory, SUC

PERTAINING TO A NEW FERRY

(R. A. Hiern of Willsboro to Benjamin Mooers of Plattsburgh, Clinton County representative in the legislature: from the Kent-Delord Collection at the Feinberg Library)

Shiraz, Wilsborough 31 Jan 1804

Dear Sir—I am engaged in establishing a ferry from my farm at Grog Harbor in Wilsborough to Ferrisburgh in the State of Vermont across a part of the Lake only 1½ miles wide. My boat, a schooner of about 15 tons burden, will be built early in the spring. I have already advanced money toward cutting a road four rods wide leading from a landing on the east bank of the Lake to meet the Post Road between Vergennes and Burlington, not far from Fraser's Mill. More than half of this road is already finished and the remainder will be cut as soon as the weather will permit. A bridge exceeding 30 rods in length must be thrown across the dead waters of a low marsh, which the road intersects. To accomplish this, I have reason to expect assistance from the inhabitants of Vergennes, several of whom, I am informed, will subscribe towards it. The workmen will begin the bridge very shortly.

The objects contemplated by establishing the aforesaid are first to accommodate the public by shortening the road for travellers going northward from Vermont through our State, and *vice versa*. A distance of not less than 4½ miles will be saved by those who cross here instead of crossing at the new ferry between Judge W. Neil in Charlotte and Judge Ross in Wilsborough; and the road equally good, except the new part (only about 3½ miles) which being laid on proper land requires merely a little time to become as good as any other part. The second object is to enhance the value of my situation by opening a travelled road through it. A considerable sum must be expended to complete these objects, but as I have embarked in the business, and feel confident of success, and having already made

some large disbursements, am induced to make you fully acquainted with the undertaking in the hope of obtaining your support in the Legislature against Judge Ross, who I am informed intends to petition for an exclusive privilege to ferry from Wilsborough to Charlotte in Vermont. This act I should consider very oppressive; however, I trust that a candid statement by a person so well acquainted with the premises as yourself will prevent the Legislature from passing a bill so injurious to the rights of other citizens.

I lament, on account of the trouble I am giving, the necessity of making my application to you, the Member for another County, but feel satisfied that you will pardon it when you recollect that the member for the County I belong to is the brother of my opponent, and, as I am credibly informed, was brought into the House of Assembly at no small expense for the express purpose of advocating the exclusive privilege aforementioned.

Should it be required I can furnish you with a correct map of the country in contemplation by which you may observe that the distance from Vergennes to Judge Neil's landing is 13 miles; and from thence across the Lake to Judge Ross's ferry about $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles; all in all $16\frac{1}{4}$ miles. Whereas from Vergennes to the landing opposite to Grog Harbor is $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles, thence across the Lake to Grog Harbor $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, thence by land to Judge Ross's ferry $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles; in all $11\frac{1}{2}$ miles, being about $4\frac{3}{4}$ miles shorter than the other route.

CONCERNING ICE HOUSES

(H. L. Webb in Connecticut consults Mr. Swetland in Plattsburgh in 1846 about his modern kind of ice house: Kent-Delord Collection.)

I wrote you yesterday since which I have a letter from my brother asking for information as to the modern manner of building ice houses above ground. I take the liberty to ask the favor of you to write him as to yours—plan of construction, quantity of ice it will hold, etc.

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David K. Martin, Secretary
West Chazy, New York