

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 45

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

May, 1968

## *The May Meeting*

*of the Association will be held in the auditorium of the Public Library in Plattsburgh on Monday evening, May 6th, at 8 o'clock. The speaker will be Everest Allen of Peru, who will talk on "The Romance of Old Clocks". Mr. Allen will illustrate his talk with some clocks from his collection. He is a retired school administrator who has for years collected and restored clocks and other antiques.*

*The June meeting of the Association will consist of the summer trip and picnic. On Saturday, June 9th, members and guests will tour the early homes of southern Clinton County, a continuation of the tour conducted in the summer of 1966. Further details will appear in the June issue of the "Notes".*

### MOOERS MATERIALS

As the Kent-Delord papers, on loan to the Feinberg Library at the College, continue to be catalogued, more and more of the papers of General Benjamin Mooers emerge. Eventually his important role in the development of the North Country will be ascertainable in more complete detail.

John Mooers Idle of Chicago has recently offered for sale the portrait of his ancestor, General Mooers. The portrait is unsigned, but is the one reproduced on page 53 of Mrs. Tuttle's **Three Centuries in the Champlain Valley**. Perhaps a friend or member of the Association would like to donate it to the Museum. The price is so far unstated.

It has recently been learned that the uniform Mooers wore as a lieutenant in the Revolution is on display at the Army Quartermasters' Museum at Fort Lee, Virginia. An effort will be made to acquire it as a loan or a gift to the Association's museum.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NORTHERN NEW YORK

An important new work, **Historical Materials Relating to Northern New York; a Union Catalog**, has just been published. It is sponsored by the North Country Reference and Research Resources Council in cooperation with the Adirondack Museum. A committee headed by Glyndon Cole of the Feinberg Library at the College in Plattsburgh directed the work, whose editors were Mr. Cole and Miss Dorothy Plum, retired Vassar College rare books librarian.

The book contains 316 pages which list more than 2700 titles and their location in the libraries of Clinton, Essex, Franklin, St. Lawrence, Jefferson and Lewis counties and the Adirondack Museum in Hamilton County. Included are books, pamphlets, maps, newspapers, periodicals and broadsides, all of which should prove invaluable to historians and librarians. Copies are available at \$12.50 and may be ordered from the North Country Reference and Research Council, c/o Library, State University College, Potsdam, New York 13676.

## THE PLATTSBURGH Y.M.C.A.

### *The Depression Years 1932-1937*

Although the Young Men's Christian Association had its beginnings in Plattsburgh in 1886, the present building was not erected until 1908. Only then did this national institution offer any kind of social and/or athletic program to the community. It provided outlets such as swimming, bowling, basketball and tennis to young, active men as well as a library, game room, auditorium and workshops to less active people and outside groups using its facilities.

The depression years saw a remarkable change in spirit and vigor at the Y.M.C.A. Plattsburgh was not unlike many other communities during this period. Young men with energy and imagination were lying idle on street corners from the lack of economic opportunity at the time. The General Secretary painted the grim picture of a dying institution in July 1932 which might have to close its doors for its deteriorating physical condition, lack of public support, small membership and poor services.

Mr. Freeborne began his administration as General Secretary at that time. From the beginning the Y.M.C.A. began to take on a new look. During his first year the lobby was repainted, along with general face-lifting work. The funds were supplied by Mr. Ernest Turner, one of his many financial contributions to the Y.M.C.A. The Ladies' Auxiliary provided the funds for the purchase of a complete set of new chairs for both the auditorium and other rooms in the building. This organization also provided free of charge a complete maid service for the "Y" dormitory, which included extras like new draperies and bed sheets along with a few new pieces of furniture from time to time. Otto Bolles, Bert Copeland, Dr. Leonard Schiff, George Elmendorf, Dr. Roswell Hogue and Thomas R. North all contributed their time and energies to this reviving enterprise.

Freeborne initiated new programs geared to the tempo of the young men. Under his leadership a city basketball league was formed which grew to include almost twenty teams. These games accommodated every age group from youngsters of eight years to full-grown men. By 1936 the Y.M.C.A. had a budget of \$8273.62. This small amount served the needs of 36 different outside groups with an attendance of 17,890 people; 53 groups in institutional membership with an attendance of 10,974, plus general activities of the membership of 37,299, making a grand attendance of 55,189 for the year.

Yet during this period the "Y" was always having trouble making ends meet. Its endowment funds did not provide enough income to make community support unnecessary. However, there seemed to be a blessing at every turn. In January 1937, Dr. Gilbert Dare presented ten shares of Kennecott Copper worth \$45,000, which were immediately sold and applied toward the current bond issue. Other civic-minded citizens contributed in smaller ways. C. W. Brown bought and donated an extension telephone. George Butler, past board president, made an interest-free loan of \$1000. Gestures such as these not only lightened the financial burden but also contributed to the spirit and vigor of the institution. Yearly membership drives netted approximately \$1000, which was applied to the bond issue.

As the Y.M.C.A. became a more respectable place, more and more community organizations used it for meetings. Its cosmopolitan use seemed to make it the town civic center of the time. Work for underprivileged boys was stressed by the "Y". The Neighborhood League for Underprivileged Boys, initiated in 1934, provided odd jobs around the building for boys from low-income families. Tasks such as cleaning, the responsibility for athletic equipment, and general small labor were provided these lads if just to keep them off the street.

The personal dedication of Secretary Freeborne was noteworthy. Although his was an office position, he served as bookkeeper, electrician, plumber, carpenter, and general repairman when the budget made these professional services out of the question. He was behind in his salary at least a quarter of the time, with as much as \$600 back pay in September 1936. It is doubtful that the association could have initiated and performed its functions successfully had it not been for the dedication and conviction with which he served it.

These were growing years for this organization. Through the conscientious efforts of many of the community's citizens, the Board members, and Secretary Freeborne, a new era of unparalleled activity sprang forth in the form of new and worthwhile community services for its people.

Ted Robinson, SUC

## *The First Bridge Across The Saranac*

In 1893 Henry K. Averill, Jr., surveyor, patent agent, draftsman and civil engineer, undertook to settle the dispute concerning the location of the original "Great Bridge" across the Saranac River. Was it, as some people contended, at the site of the present bridge on Bridge Street; or was it farther down the river, near its mouth?

The former location was soon ruled out because Averill had "very good evidence that it (the first bridge constructed on the site of the one in present use) was built in 1807, the year in which Bridge Street was first laid out as far as Green Street". Averill then offered justification of his conviction that the "Great Bridge" traversed the Saranac at or near the place where the railroad now crosses.

Prior to the day of bridges, a fording place was necessary. Since the Saranac was swift-flowing, it seemed natural to Averill that the best place for fording would be "where the swift water of the river joined the still waters of the lake." The main route of travel from the south came "by way of the forts and Peru Street to where Noah Broadwell lived (at 9 Peru Street), and there angled a little to the westward to the south end of Green Street to the river at the foot of the rapids, then fording the river and rising the land on a dug way eastwardly and running around the 'Point' near the shore. Since the travel followed this route, it would be natural that when a bridge was constructed, it would be built at the original fording place.

As additional support to his location of the Great Bridge, Averill presented two old documents. One was a petition to the Highway Commissioner, in 1792, for a road to be laid out from the house of Nathan Averill "east till it intersects the highway near the Great Bridge". Since Nathan's house stood at the corner of Cornelia and Margaret Streets, where Mason's showroom now stands, a road to the east would follow lower Cornelia Street to the northern end of the bridge.

The other document was a deed of 1790 from Charles to Nathaniel Platt for some property running easterly from Nathan Averill's property to the "Big Bridge". Without giving a reference, he also stated that the bridge was "two chains or 8 rods east of the west line of the Peter Saily farm (at 3 Cumberland Avenue).

From his sources Henry K. Averill, the great-grandson of Nathan Averill, Sr., surmised that the bridge followed approximately the route of the present railroad. The exact year in which the bridge was built is not known. However, since it was used to pinpoint surrounding property, it must have been built sometime before 1790, and after 1785, the year in which the first permanent settlement was begun at Plattsburgh.

Elizabeth Barrett, SUC

## *The Ausable Horse-Nail Company*

The Ausable Horse-Nail Company was organized in 1863 with \$40,000 beginning capital. The business proved successful, for in 1865 the stock was raised to \$80,000. And in 1883 when the charter was renewed the sum was redoubled to the amount of \$160,000. The enterprise consisted of three main factories located along the Ausable River with water power supplied by three dams. Two of the dams were in Keeseville and the third was above Ausable Chasm.

Daniel Dodge of Keeseville invented the machine which made possible the successful mass production of horse nails. He began his experiments in 1884 with a small scale model. In 1854 he constructed a completely new machine which in 1862 had been perfected, patented, and put on the market for \$500. Dodge's was "the first successful machine for making forged horse-shoe nails in the United States." This machine must have been quite a milestone in the history of nail production, for an experienced man ordinarily hammered out about ten pounds of nails a day, but with the machine a 16-year-old boy could produce two hundred pounds of equal quality nails in the same amount of time. In 1880 Dodge's horse-nail machines were operating in Keeseville, Chicago, Abington, Massachusetts, and Vienna and Berlin.

The Ausable Horse-Nail Company carried on business in ten separate buildings covering two acres. Included in these buildings were fifty-five nail machines, a saw mill, a rolling mill, a machine shop, a box shop, and storage space. Iron was imported from Norway in bars 1 1/8 inches square. At first the bars were rolled

into rods in New England and then shipped to Keeseville, but a few years later the company erected their own rolling mill between Keeseville and Ausable Chasm.

Each machine was attended by a boy who directed heated iron rods into the nail-forming mechanism. A small coal furnace adjacent to each machine kept the rods at the proper temperature. An air tube controlled by a valve channeled the rods into the machine. The machine actually forged the nails. Each nail received exactly eighteen hammer blows in the space of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  seconds. Forty-five nails per minute were ejected from the machine. They were then sorted and any imperfect nails put aside to be reworked and finished by hand. They were not put on the market, but sold to local persons for home use. All other horse nails were boxed in 25-pound packages. A company-owned saw mill cut raw lumber into boards for the nail boxes. Employees assembled the boxes and carefully weighed and measured the finished nails into them.

The nail works operated only during the daylight hours and gave constant employment to over 200 persons. The employees were paid in cash every Saturday afternoon. In 1869 the boys earned from \$.50 to \$1.50 a day.

The company began production in 1863 with ten machines and sold about 100 tons of horse nails during the first year. In 1869, 500 tons of nails were produced at a total value of \$250,000. By 1880, fifty-four machines were in operation, producing 1000 tons of finished horse nails. About 1000 tons of hard coal and another 1000 tons of soft coal were consumed at this time in the nail production process.

Edmund Kingsland organized the business and was president of the company until his death in 1884. Nelson Kingsland was vice president. James R. Romeyn and Abraham Bussing were secretaries, and Edmund K. Baber was treasurer. In 1885 the officers were: Abraham Bussing, president; Daniel Dodge, vice president; James R. Romeyn, secretary; and Edmund K. Baber, treasurer and manager.

The factory continued producing horse nails after the turn of the century. The business was sold to Michael Callanan of Keeseville in the summer of 1918. Rufus and Roger Prescott purchased the land and buildings in 1925 to enlarge and carry on their furniture business. Nail production was discontinued and the machines were dismantled.

Susan Laundree, SUC

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David K. Martin, Secretary

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