

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 3451

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McClellan, Editors

January, 1969

The January Meeting

of the Historical Association will be held Monday evening, January 6, at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. The speaker of the evening will be Dr. Ludwig Fink, chief of psychiatry at Clinton Prison in Dannemora, who will speak on "The History of Dannemora Prison."

The Association will also hold a short annual meeting and election of officers. The public is cordially invited.

The Slowness of Prison Reform

When Auburn prison was established in 1816, it embarked upon daringly advanced reforms for the day—group work in the daytime, solitary confinement at night, and silence at all times. However, it relied mainly upon corporal punishment to enforce discipline.

With the establishment of Sing Sing in 1825, the idea of extreme coercion, together with skepticism about the possibility of rehabilitation, reached its apogee. Under the ruthless direction of its first two heads, corporal punishment was lavishly dispensed. Flogging might consist of 50 to 400 blows. The favorite weapon was the cat-o'-nine-tails. One type was a "cat" each of whose tails was wound with three quarters of an inch of wire. Punishments, whether with cats, canes, boards or whips, caused grievous physical agonies and sometimes suicides of the inmates.

The Prison Association, a private group of reformers, arose in 1844 to agitate against corporal punishment. Its publicity helped to ameliorate the practice, and a new law of 1847 authorized only solitary confinement as a punishment. By not specifically forbidding other practices, some of them were continued, and had to be dealt with in later laws.

In the middle of the agitation against corporal punishment, Clinton Prison at Dannemora was established in 1845. From the beginning Clinton seems to have had a relatively good record. Of 36 punishments when it was small in 1846, fourteen were given solitary confinement and only two the "cat." In the same year Sing Sing punished 691, giving 267 the "cat," 103 deprivation of food, and only 63 solitary confinement. Auburn punished 311, of whom 258 received the "cat." The year before, Auburn had punished 1278 of 1279 offenders with the "cat." Already reform was becoming effective. Increasingly other punishments were being used—the "bath; deprivation of bedding, food or tobacco; solitary confinement; ball and chain; and admonishment.

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ENROLLED FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

By formal certification, the State Commissioner of Agriculture in 1917 certified the stallion, Bercini, as "sound" and therefore "enrolled for public service in this State."

Bercini's appearance in Plattsburgh was heralded by large posters detailing his pedigree in large print and assuring potential customers that:

"Bercini Will Make the Season at Frank A. Smith's Stable, Fair Grounds, Plattsburgh, N. Y. Terms: \$25.00, to Insure a Living Foal; Payable by Note Due in Eleven Months from Date. Plattsburgh, N. Y., May 1st, 1917."

Nathan Beman at Ticonderoga

(Nathan Beman died at Chateaugay in 1846 in his 90th year. Not long before his death he published an autobiographical article in which he described his part in Ethan Allen's capture of Fort Ticonderoga. It is notable for contradicting the traditional account of the presence of Benedict Arnold.

(After the Revolution Nathan lived for a time on Cumberland Head, and his father, Samuel, is buried in Riverside Cemetery. Nathan was a pioneer settler of Chateaugay in 1796.)

I well recollect all the circumstances attending the transactions. I was then eighteen years old, and resided with my father, Samuel Beman, in the town of Shoreham, Vermont, nearly opposite the fort. I had been in the habit of visiting the fort very frequently, being well acquainted with Capt. De la Place's family and other young people residing there. On the day preceding the capture, my father and mother dined, by invitation, with Capt. De la Place. I was one of the party, and spent the day in and about the fort. On our return to Shoreham in the evening, and just as we were landing, we discovered troops approaching, whom we soon ascertained to be Allen and his party. To my father—with whom he had been well acquainted—Allen stated his object, and the proper measures were at once concerted for accomplishing it.

It was agreed that I should act as a guide, and I believe the usual statement of the manner of the capture to be substantially correct. There is, however, one error of very considerable importance. Arnold did not accompany us as a volunteer, or in any other character. He was not present at the capture of the Fort. According to my recollection of the facts, as stated and believed at the time, Arnold wished to assume the command at Castleton, but the troops would not consent to serve under him, and he did not accompany them to Shoreham. It was some days after the capture of the Fort before Arnold arrived at Ticonderoga.

Before the arrival of Arnold, we had thrown a floating bridge across the narrow part of the Lake, from Ticonderoga to Mount Independence, on the Vermont side. Arnold and Allen first met, after the capture, on this bridge. I was present at the meeting. Arnold handed to Allen a paper, understood to be an authority for him to supercede Allen, and take the command. I well recollect the laced jacket, ruffles and cocked hat of Arnold, and that in the dispute which arose on the occasion, Allen struck off the hat of Arnold from his head, into the water, where it sunk from the weight of the tinsel with which it was adorned, and was lost.

I accompanied Col. Warner to Crownpoint, and was present at the taking of

that fortress. I shortly afterwards enlisted in Col. Warner's regiment and served in it during the war. Had I time and health, I could relate many of the spirit-stirring adventures of that day—many, that shortly, with the few surviving actors of them, will sink into oblivion and be forgotten.

(Written) Malone, Franklin co., N. Y., May 26, 1835.

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

The answer to the December riddle: The early name for the Richelieu River was (in French) "River of the Iroquois"; of Crab Island, "Ile St. Michel."

New riddle: What were the original names for the villages of Peru and Ausable Chasm?

JANUARY 1st IN HISTORY

1806 Ben. Benj. Mooers, his home being then on Cumberland Head near the mouth of Dead Creek, gave as a New Year's gift to his negro girl "Ann" her freedom.

1818 Theodore Bailey, son of Judge Wm. Bailey of Chateaugay and Plattsburgh, entered the Navy as midshipman.

1860 At her home, present site of County Clerk's office, died Helen Hascall, daughter of Ralph and Mary Sterne Hascall, of Essex, and wife of Judge Lemuel Stetson. The Stetson Memorial Chapel presented to Trinity church by her only surviving son, Francis Lynde Stetson of New York, perpetuates her memory.

Tuttle, Three Centuries in Champlain Valley

34 JAN '69

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

David K. Martin, Secretary
West Chazy, New York

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