

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 63

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

March, 1970

The March Meeting

March 2, 1970—The meeting will be held in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library at 8:00 P.M.

The subject of the evening will be "Doctors and Democracy: New York Physicians in the Rebellion of 1837." The speaker will be Dr. Eugene P. Link, professor of History at the College and, needless to say, our Association President.

The April meeting will feature a talk on "Elkanah Watson" by Mr. Stuart D. Ludlum.

The public is cordially invited to all meetings of the Association, and hopefully to become members.

IN APPRECIATION

Mr. J. Bernard Stratton served our Association as its Treasurer, and Miss Emily McMasters as its Curator, for as many years as we can remember. In recognition of their outstanding contributions and services, the following letters of appreciation have been forwarded to them:

Dear Mr. Stratton,

Long and devoted service to the history of Clinton County and the North Country deserves public recognition. The Board of Trustees of the Clinton County Historical Association has voted unanimously to extend to you, Mr. Stratton, their sincere thanks for the years of splendid work you have given as Association Treasurer and to state their recognition of the long hours you have given to nursing our finances and keeping proper track of our money. As a token of our appreciation we would like you to have this letter and this gift.

Very sincerely,

David Kendall Martin, Sec'y

Dear Miss McMasters,

Long and devoted service to the history of Clinton County and the North Country deserves public recognition. The Board of Trustees of the Clinton County Historical Association has voted unanimously to extend to you, Miss McMasters, their sincere thanks for the years of splendid work you have given as Association Curator and to state their recognition of the long hours you have given to caring for and extending our collections. As a token of our appreciation we would like you to have this letter and this gift.

Very sincerely,

David Kendall Martin, Sec'y

The gift of the Association will be a copy of the forthcoming "History of the Town of Chazy" by Mrs. Benjamin F. Sullivan and Mr. Martin.

THE HISTORY OF FORT IZARD

On the tip of Cumberland Head, there is an apple orchard which is part of the Alfred Hagar farm, and which holds more than just passing interest for a few local historians. Through the trees, on an autumn day, one can view rather peculiar mounds of earth. These are all that remain of the 1814 fortification—Fort Izard.

Fort Izard was never engaged in any battles, and so its historical significance has been blotted away with time. Nonetheless, the fort was intended for a very specific use, and contrary to most written accounts, the fortification was no blunder.

By late 1813, it was apparent that the British forces were building up in Canada. Already a ship-building race was in progress on Lake Champlain, with Macdonough in command of the United States fleet. General James Wilkinson was in command of the ground forces. Wilkinson was a conservative general and his failure to launch any real offensive soon brought Major General George Izard to relieve him.

George Izard was born in South Carolina. In 1794 he was made lieutenant of artillery and assisted in the construction of the fortifications at Charleston. In March of 1812 he was promoted to colonel, and to brigadier general in 1813. By 1814, he had achieved the rank of major general.

By the time Izard took command of the Champlain forces, in May 1814, Macdonough feared that the British were leading the race to build a naval force at their base on Isle aux Noix. Consequently he asked that a fortress be built at Rouses Point to deny an enemy fleet entrance into the lake.

In May 1814 the Secretary of War issued an order to construct a fortress at the narrows north of Rouses Point. The orders stated that the purpose of the fortification was to protect the American fleet on Lake Champlain. After careful consideration, Izard replied that he had decided to fortify Cumberland Head instead.

It is General Izard's decision concerning where to build the fort that often comes under attack. Author John Ross believes that the battle of Plattsburgh would never have taken place had a battery been erected at Rouses Point. General Izard's objection to a fortification there was, however, quite logical. With the concentration of British forces at Isle aux Noix, defense of the fort from a land attack would be hazardous, if not impossible. Also, one must remember Izard's training, and therefore not lose sight of his special skill with fortifications.

A second opposition was presented by Izard's own lieutenant of engineers, Colonel Totten. He argued that a battery of cannon "would not impede or materially injure a passing fleet." Izard was ordered to defend the fleet, not the lake from invasion, and he believed the Cumberland Head fortification could do this more than adequately. Its cannon could protect Plattsburgh Bay, and therefore an American fleet could seek refuge there.

The construction site was on the property of retired Revolutionary officer Melancthon Lloyd Woolsey, who aided in its erection, some sixty rods west of his house. With Totten and Captain De Russy at his disposal, General Izard himself took charge of engineering the fortification. First, he built a battery along the shore, placing four, eighteen-pound cannon in it. Then he took on the construction of the main redoubt. The work consisted of earth and stone walls surrounded by a moat. At each of the four corners of the fortress, wooden towers were built. And thus the construction went on into the summer months of 1814.

In August 1814, Izard received orders to move most of his troops to Sackets Harbor. Although earlier in the summer Izard had proposed such a move, he now objected since he was painfully aware of the mounting British strength north of the border. Hoping for a change in orders, he delayed his withdrawal, and on August 20th he wrote to the Secretary of War: "I must not be responsible for the consequences of abandoning my present strong position." He went on to say that within a few days after his withdrawal, the British would take over the area, save for his system of fortifications.

Late in August he departed, leaving invalids and about 1,500 men fit to garrison the Plattsburgh area and to finish the forts on Cumberland Head and the mainland, under Brigadier General Macomb. On the third of September, Izard paused at Lake George to await a reversal of his orders, but no such directive came. He then moved on to Schenectady, and later to Sackets Harbor.

Author John Ross saw the possibility of the approaching British fleet, under Captain Downie, being pincered between the Cumberland Head fortification and Macdonough's fleet. However, this was not to be the case, for General Macomb saw the uselessness of the fortification in checking the enemy once he was in the lake. And so, upon Izard's withdrawal, Macomb ordered the removal of the heavy guns and supplies from Cumberland Head, the better to enable him to defend Plattsburgh.

The ensuing events at Plattsburgh occupy a prominent place in the history of the War of 1812. Fort Izard is now an obscure segment of that war, and only an ambitious explorer will ever be intrigued by the mounds of earth and stone on the Head. Nonetheless, the fortress is very real and in no way is it a blunder of the past. A fortress at the border might have prevented the British from entering the lake, if the fort itself could have been built and protected so near the enemy lines; Izard felt that it could not. Yet Macomb was probably correct in pulling in his lines for his eventually successful defense of Plattsburgh and the Bay.

Peter Makowsky, SUC

FRENCH CANADIAN NAMING IN THE 18th CENTURY

Pvt. Baptiste Amlane (Amlen, Amlaw) was born in Canada, a son of Jean Baptiste and Marie Francois (Sulliere) Amelin. He is sometimes called Charles and sometimes Baptiste. When he was questioned about this for his military pension at Plattsburgh in 1820, he stated that "his parents were Canadians; that he was the oldest son and it was customary among Canadians to call the oldest son of the family by the surname or family name only, designating younger sons by their Christian names, so during his youth he was simply called Ameline. When abroad, was occasionally called Baptiste, a name given to persons who were first christened by a different name which was his case known in service as Baptiste, but christened name was Charles." Later he was called "Old Amlaw" to distinguish him from his son Baptiste, Jr.

(From "A History of Chazy" by Nell Jane Barnett Sullivan and David Kendall Martin)

VILLAGE ORDINANCES

By-Laws adopted by the Trustees of the Village of Plattsburgh, July 18, 1815:

Be it further ordained, that from and after the first day of August next, it shall not be lawful for any carman in said village to receive any greater compensation for services as carman or carrier of goods than at the following rates: For any load to be carried not exceeding one-third of a mile, twelve and a half cents; over one-third and not exceeding one-half of a mile, nineteen cents; and at the same rate for any greater distance; excepting hogsheads or pipes of molasses or liquors, including cider, which shall be at double those rates. And any person who shall receive any greater compensation than at the above rates shall forfeit and pay a fine of two dollars, to the use of the said corporation, to be sued for and recovered with costs as aforesaid.

(Plattsburgh Republican, Sept. 18, 1915)

NEW SWEDEN CEMETERY — AUSABLE

This abandoned cemetery, containing in 1940 but 10 gravestones, is near the former community of New Sweden, a few miles north of Clintonville, in the town of Ausable. It is on a high hill, and although enclosed by a wire fence, is quite neglected with many stones down and broken. The dates range from 1836 to 1858, and include Harriet A., wife of S. K. Bagley; Mary K. Pierce, wife of Daniel D. Deuel; Eliza Ann, wife of Joshua C. Finch; Timothy J. and John T., sons of J. W. & A. Lennon; Catharine Boynton, wife of W. C. Pierce; and Maria Louise, infant daughter of B. C. & C. R. Pierce.

The oldest burial is that of Earl Pierce, in 1836, aged 51 years. He was the founder of the community, which was first called Finchville, but soon after was named New Sweden. In 1860 the village contained two forges and some 150 inhabitants, and possessed a post office. Earl Pierce died from the effects of a fall from a hayloft, while attending an auction sale. His epitaph reads:

Unveil thy bosom faithful tomb,
Take this new treasure to thy trust,
And give these sac(r)ed relics room
To seek a slumber in the dust.

ANOTHER ANSWER

Our January "Riddle of the Month" asked: What old Church in the county was demolished during 1969? Last month we gave the answer as: The old Plattsburgh M. E. Church on Court Street.

Since then, the following letter has been received from Dr. Leonard J. Schiff:

"The answer to the riddle in the January issue is, of course, the Beth Israel Synagogue on Oak Street. Strictly speaking, the building at the time of demolition was a synagogue rather than a church. It had however been originally constructed as a church by the Universalist Society which was organized in Plattsburgh in 1844 and erected their church on Oak Street in 1846. Membership in the Society gradually decreased and in 1853 the church was leased to the Oblate Fathers. It was used as Saint Peter's Church until the present Saint Peter's was completed in 1855. On 4 April 1866 the building was purchased by Beth Israel Congregation and converted into a Synagogue. This small building served as a house of worship for many faiths. Unfortunately it was not possible to preserve it."

The editor of these Notes who furnished the riddle and the answer has made his escape to England, and the co-editor takes refuge behind the editorial "we."

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Answer to the old riddle: The full name of the publisher of the 1880 "History of Clinton and Franklin Counties" was Duane Hamilton Hurd. Correct answers were given by Mr. Andrew Broadwell of Rouses Point, Mr. Neal Burdick of Plattsburgh, and Mr. Maurice C. Turner of Keeseville.

New riddle: When and where was the first "Cattle Show and Fair" of the Clinton County Agricultural Society held?

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Issued by the

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

David K. Martin, Secretary
West Chazy, New York

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