

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 66

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

June 1970

The June Meeting

of the Association will be a guided tour of the "Ghost Towns of Clinton and Essex Counties" with possibly some in Franklin County, as well. The date is Saturday, June 6th. The starting time is 9 a. m. A bus will leave from the Saranac Dining Hall at the Plattsburgh State University College; the cost is \$2 a person.

This will be a conducted tour under the guidance of Miss Connie Pope, Acquisition Librarian at the Feinberg Library. Time permitting, it will include some 27 Ghost Towns, all within a forty mile radius of Plattsburgh. There will be a stop at each, with comments by Miss Pope.

There will be a stop for a picnic lunch at STOWERSVILLE (near Lewis, N. Y.) Bring your own luncheon. Please let Mr. Evalon A. Merritt, our Program Chairman, know how many will be with you, so that space will be reserved on the bus.

All members, their families and their guests are most cordially invited to attend.

RAIN OR SHINE.

EDITORIAL

This issue is largely devoted to a fine study of a now extinct Clinton County organization. The Editor(s) would welcome similar articles about former groups, societies, clubs, or what-have-you, as being important elements in the cultural development of our county: early Suffragette groups, Townsend Clubs, the I. O. F. (was this "Foresters"?), various church or fraternal societies, musical or literary groups, etc. They all are part of our history!

INFLATION — IN THE 1920's

Campbell's Tomato Soup or Pork & Beans	8c
Kellogg's Corn Flakes	7c
Seeded or Seedless Raisins (15 oz.)	9c
100 lb. sack Granulated Sugar	4.70
Iceburg Lettuce 2 for 25c Cabbage, lb.	8c
California Oranges, dozen	29c
Brookfield Bacon, pound	31c
Swift's Brand Frankfurts, pound	15c
Fresh Pork Shoulder, pound	14c
2 lbs. Lean Hamburg	24c
Butter, 2 lbs. 65c Eggs, dozen	20c
Fancy Western Sirloin Steaks, lb.	29c
Large Ripe Tomatoes	1b. 29c
Fresh Strawberries, 2 baskets	29c

PLATTSBURGH'S FIRST MASONIC LODGE — 1806-1832

(The following has been greatly condensed from a research project by Paul C. Edwards, Plattsburgh State University College.)

In 1784 Zephaniah Platt and thirty other persons applied for and received a patent which encompassed the area now known as Plattsburgh. It was but seventeen years later that a petition was received by the Grand Master of Masons in New York State, then Jacob Morton, requesting permission to form a Masonic Lodge in the area.

The reasoning behind this petition, dated May 6, 1801, was that Plattsburgh was "at so great a distance from any regular Lodge as to make it very inconvenient to attend . . ." The nearest Lodge was in Kingsbury, over a hundred miles distant.

The new Lodge was to have been called "Hiram Lodge." The proposed first master was to be General Melancthon Lloyd Woolsey (a Past Master of Solomon Lodge in Poughkeepsie), with Henry Delord as Senior Warden and George Marsh as Junior Warden. Also signing the petition were Nathaniel Platt, John Hamilton, Abraham and Aaron Beeman, Jehiel Barnum, Isaac Griffen, Moses Warren, Jephiah Savoy, Oliver Barker, John C. Marion, Nicholas Palmer, T. Chandonet, Aaron Graham, Simon Bateman, Nathan Commins, and Amasa Ladd.

This petition, however, was rejected by the Grand Lodge, largely because of a rebellion between city and country Lodges. Thus ended Plattsburgh's first attempt at forming a Masonic Lodge.

The spirit that attempted it, however, was to remain dormant for but five years. On September 30, 1806, a second petition was sent to New York City for approval. There were two major differences between this petition and the one that had been submitted earlier: the name had been changed from "Hiram" to "Clinton," and the prospective first Master was no longer Melancthon Woolsey, but Melancthon Smith.

Smith's father had represented this state in the Constitutional Convention (of the proposed Federal Constitution), as one of the leaders of the Anti-Federalists. As such, he had been closely associated with George Clinton, and had known the Governor's nephew, DeWitt, who had just assumed the post of Grand Master of the New York Masons. Furthermore, Smith's father had been one of the original investors in the Plattsburgh venture with Zephaniah Platt. All of these assets, plus the fact that Melancthon junior was a lawyer of no small reputation, totalled to what appeared to Plattsburgh Masons as the best candidate for the post of Master. Even the able and experienced Woolsey could not compete with the popularity and respect the mere name of Melancthon Smith attracted.

First, of course, came the all-important petition. This time there were fewer names. Included as prospective officers, in addition to Smith as Master, were again Henry Delord and George Marsh as Wardens. Among the regular members were Melancthon Woolsey, Jonathan Griffen, T. Chandonet, Cyrenius Newcomb, David G. Bright, John C. Marvin, and Timothy Balch. It was upon the reputation of these men that the Masonic Lodge would finally be started in Plattsburgh.

The formal warrant from Grand Lodge was issued by Grand Master DeWitt Clinton on December 3, 1806. The name was to be "Clinton Lodge No. 151."

The years from 1806 to 1815 are to a great degree unilluminated as far as the history of the new Lodge is concerned. No records for this period are available save for a few newspaper articles and some remarks found in the later records of the Lodge.

Prior to 1810, William Swetland was admitted as a member. Also initiated in the pre-1815 period was Reuben H. Walworth. He was destined to serve Clinton Lodge as Master and as Secretary; in civil life he was to become a circuit judge, a U. S. Representative, and finally the last Chancellor of the State of New York. Masonically, in 1853 he assumed the office of Grand Master of the state (one of the most controversial ever to hold that position).

During this 1806-1815 period the Lodge grew from the original twenty-five petitioners to over sixty-five members.

It seems that almost all the members were professionals in their fields, and also had community and religious interests at heart. Professional groups in the 1820's and 1830's (such as the Plattsburgh Bar) were generally dominated by Masons, and perhaps no finer demonstration of community spirit could be shown than by pointing

out that most of the trustees of the Plattsburgh Academy were Masons. Further, the organizing group of the first political newspaper (the "Republican"), was almost entirely composed of Masons. Melancthon Smith, in fact, served as its first editor.

Religious participation is perhaps the most common Masonic trait. The Board of Trustees of the Episcopal, Presbyterian and Baptist churches had well over a majority of Masons in each.

Occasionally the Lodge would gather to celebrate days of especial importance within the fraternity. One such case was the celebration of St. John's Day on June 24, 1811. That day the members gathered at eight o'clock in the temple for services. This was followed by an address by Mr. Swetland from the courthouse later in the afternoon.

Masonic gatherings were not limited to joyous occasions. One of the most important and imposing of these ever to occur in Plattsburgh was on August 29, 1818, at the funeral of Colonel Melancthon Smith, the founder of Clinton Lodge. It was a ceremony containing "all military and Masonic honors accorded to officers of high grade in both these associations."

The years from 1815 to a few years before the last of the Returns of the Lodge were handed in to Grand Lodge could best be termed as progressive. The high point of Lodge membership was reached in 1822, when it was seventy-five strong. After this, however, membership steadily deteriorated.

One of the causes of this loss in membership could have been a rumor that was spread throughout Plattsburgh in 1822 to the effect that Clinton Lodge had been suspended for non-payment of its Grand Lodge dues. Although the Lodge was actually in good standing, the Master, Charles D. Backus, found that "the affairs of the Lodge have been so badly managed for several years that I cannot ascertain to what time the dues have been paid." The damage was great to the morale of both members and prospective members.

By this time the Lodge had initiated into its membership persons who would rise to the fore after its reactivation. One such person was General St. John B. L. Skinner. It was he, in fact, who would become the first Master of the new Clinton Lodge (No. 155) in 1847. He later served as Assistant Postmaster General under both Lincoln and Grant. Initiated also was a host of Platts (three Zephaniah's, a Charles and a Levi), three Mooers (including Benjamin and Richard), Joseph Green, and many others well remembered in Plattsburgh even today.

As with all Masonic Lodges, Clinton Lodge always responded to go to the aid of a member who was in need, whether it be financial or otherwise. Funds were collected to aid such cases as were within the capabilities of the Lodge. When the need was truly great, an appeal would be sent to Grand Lodge. Such was the case of Clinton Allen, a former Master. In 1824, he had been "stripped of all of his property by fire; that he had a family which with himself was ordained to absolute penury." The appeal was answered by Grand Lodge, the only time that Clinton Lodge felt obligated to appeal outside the confines of its own Lodge.

The incident which caused the end of Clinton Lodge No. 151 occurred in western New York in 1826, with the threat of a then little-known man, William Morgan, to publish the "secrets" of Masonry. The subsequent events soon spread nationwide, and eventually led to the creation of an Anti-Masonic political party.

It took approximately two years for the Anti-Masonic feeling to spread to any degree to this area. In 1828, six new members joined the Lodge. This was the last year that Clinton Lodge created any new members.

The Anti-Masonic Party and protest reached its peak in 1832. Things looked so bad then that DeWitt Clinton advised the closing of Lodges until the storm passed over. Clinton Lodge No. 151 in that year closed its doors for the last time and surrendered its charter.

Clinton Lodge was one of 420 Lodges that closed during this crisis (out of an original number of 502).

It was not until fifteen years later, in 1847, that a new Clinton Lodge was formed, this time with a new number—No. 155. The Lodge then formed is still in existence today.

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Answer to May riddle: Churubusco was variously designated as Summit Station, Summit Depot, or just The Summit. Correctly answered by Mr. Andrew Broadwell and Mr. J. F. Ladue.

New Riddle: What is the present name of the community once known as Schieffelin's Mills?

STILES CEMETERY — WEST CHAZY

About a half mile north of West Chazy, in the Town of Chazy, on Route 22. This small graveyard, well-kept and fenced when copied in 1937, was on the farm of Mr. William E. Stiles. Although not shown on Beer's 1869 Atlas, it may be more clearly indicated as on Lot 49 of Dean's Patent, near the south side of a brook called in the Atlas as Boyington Brook, on the east side of the road, and about four hundred feet from it.

Twelve stones were found, under five surnames: Clark, Lyons, Merrihue, Stiles and Watson.

Martha M., daughter of Nathaniel and Mary Clark, died in 1832, aged 2 months.

Eliza, wife of Rev. Edwin Lyons, died 1847, aged 29.

Adalaide E., daughter of Horace and Olive Merrihue, died 1845, aged 6 months.

Mary, wife of Pike Watson, died 1845, in her 27th year; also their daughter Electa A., died 1845, in her 8th year.

Reuben Stiles, died 1840, aged 70 years.

Asa Stiles, died 1836, aged 68 years, and his wife Olive, died 1843, aged 75 years.

Stephen Stiles, his two wives Electa and Elizabeth, and a son of Stephen and Electa, Thomas W. Stephen died in 1836, aged 43 years; Electa in 1833, aged 32; Elizabeth in 1837, aged 42; and Thomas in 1830, in his 5th year.

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Issued by the

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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West Chazy, New York

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