

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 73

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

March 1971

## *The March Meeting*

of the Association will be held on Monday evening, March 1st, at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. Mr. LeClair Smith, curator of the Kent-Delord House, will speak on the subject of "Delving into Local History". Through his research Mr. Smith has shed light on many of the treasures of the Kent-Delord House. As a collector, he amassed a notable collection of Henty first editions, which he has recently donated to Cornell University.

The public is cordially invited.

## RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old riddle: The first professional group to organize in Clinton County was the County Medical Society, in 1807. Nine doctors took part in the organizational meeting at Israel Green's tavern.

New riddle: Where and when was the first county fair held?

## REGULATION AFTER THE FACT

*(This letter of 1818 to the Commissioners of the Land Office for New York State is a clear and early example, so much favored in Plattsburgh to this day, of carrying through a construction project and then getting permission to do so from the proper authority. The letter is to be found in the Kent-Delord Collection at the North Country Research Center in the College Library.)*

Gentlemen

The undersigned Petitioner begs leave to represent to your Honble Body that he has been at a very great expense in erecting a wharf for the accomodation of vessels of the public generally at his point of land in the Village of Plattsburgh, commonly called Saily's Point and by said Peter Saily sold to Zephaniah Platt Esq., deceased, since which said tract has been laid out in town lots, a map of which is hereunto annexed.

Your Petitioner therefore prays for a grant of the land under the water opposite to his land, running so far into Lake Champlain as may be necessary to gain a sufficient depth of water for vessels of any burthen which now ply on said Lake or which may hereafter be built for the transporting of merchandise, etc. The lots belonging to your Petitioner are No. 1, No. 2 and 3, as will appear by the map.

Your Petitioner would further beg leave to state to your Honble Body that he has allready progressed in wharfing out into the Lake so far that the steamboat during the last summer frequently lay alongside the outer pier and unloaded with ease and safety. Not knowing that it was necessary to make an application to you for a grant for this purpose, your Petitioner now wishes a regular grant, having advertized for six weeks in the PLATTSBURGH REPUBLICAN and a copy of which has been posted on the Court House door of the County of Clinton during said term agreeable to the Law in such case made and provided. And your Petitioner will ever pray --

Nathl. Z. Platt

# Man and Woman

## *The First to be Executed in Clinton County*

Since the organization of Clinton County, there have been six public executions presided over by the civil court and one military execution ordered by the military authorities.

Plattsburgh has had six areas in which hangings have taken place: 1. the Lake Shore at the north end of town; 2. Brinkerhoff Street; 3. the Tom Miller Road; 4. the Jail Yard; 5. the Arsenal Lot; 6. Sandy Rise. It is ironic that Sandy Rise and the Arsenal Lot became the future sites of Mount Assumption and Saint John's Academy which still exist today, a possible way of sanctifying the land.

The executions that took place were not depressing affairs to some. In fact, records indicate that hangings drew great crowds, some from as far as Vermont and Franklin County. For them it was a festive occasion, and after the execution the observers would patronize the local stores.

My two so-called victims provided such occasions, and they also have the distinction of being the first man and the first woman to be hanged in Clinton County.

The first murder occurred in early 1813 at a time when shipments of wood were needed for winter fuel. James Wait, the victim, was contracted to deliver a load of firewood from his land on the Salmon River Road in Schuyler Falls, a distance of about five miles. The wood was to be delivered to Pike's Cantonment, the first and long-lost barracks at Plattsburgh. An argument ensued between Wait and Private James Dougherty, the alleged murderer, over who would unload and stack the wood. Several witnesses observed the argument and heard the harsh words between the two men. Wait was shot while returning home, and Dougherty was arrested for the crime.

There was considerable disagreement between the military command and the civil authorities over who had the right to prosecute. Because a well-known citizen was the victim, the military did not insist on jurisdiction. Trial was held in June court (Oyer and Terminer). It was presided over by Judge James Kent who later became Chancellor of New York State.

Although no one had seen Dougherty commit the crime, witnesses who had seen the argument and heard the threats the alleged murderer had made provided the prosecution with a motive. Witnesses to the character of James Wait portrayed him as a diligent worker and an asset to the county, while others asserted that Dougherty was "hot-headed and impulsive". Whether or not Private Dougherty actually committed the crime, the court found him guilty and sentenced him to be hanged on Friday, August 6, 1813. The execution took place at the Lake Shore location at the north end of town; his body was given to the Clinton County Medical Society for experimental purposes.

Ironically, the property of James Wait was to have been auctioned on the sixth of August, but the hanging proved so popular that the auction was postponed until the following week.

The first woman to be executed in Clinton County was Peggy Facto (Facteau). It was considered the most infamous crime of the period. Her trial was held on January 23, 1825 in Oyer and Terminer court under Judge Reuben H. Walworth. In the course of the trial it was proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that she had committed the crime of infanticide.

Peggy Facto, married and already the mother of two children, confessed to the crime of strangling her infant child with a cord tied around its neck, after which she threw the body into a fire in order to destroy it. Unfortunately for Mrs. Facto the body was not completely cremated, and the charred body was hidden under a rubbish pile in the woods. The crime might never have been discovered if neighborhood dogs had not found the body and dragged it from its hiding place.

Many stories arose during the course of the trial. Some individuals believed that she was insane, but it was not proved. Others circulated the story that the child was not produced by her husband but by her secret lover, Francis La Bare. La Bare was also arrested and charged as an accessory to the crime. In the course of his trial he was acquitted.

Mrs. Facto was found guilty of the crime. The vivid presentation of the sentence by Judge Walworth evokes the mood of the trial:

Peggy Facto, you have been found guilty of the unnatural and aggravated crime . . .

The burden of disgrace that you have placed upon your husband whom you have driven from your bed and your relatives will never be removed.

Even the dogs would not eat the flesh of your unholy act.

The presentation was filled with such words and phrases as: infamous, unnatural, wretched woman, miserable, deprived, righteous punishment which God has sanctified, and God will know how to deal with the likes of you.

After the publication of the judge's statement, a group of concerned citizens attempted to arouse opinion against the court and jury. General Benjamin Mooers, for whom Mrs. Facto once worked, always believed she was innocent. There was a plea to commute her punishment to life imprisonment, but the Governor, Dewitt Clinton, upheld the decision on the grounds that it was a just verdict and that the court was not proposing to take a life needlessly. Thus after rejection by the Governor, she was hanged on March 18, 1825. She had the distinction of being the first person executed on the Arsenal Lot on Broad Street.

There are stories told around Clinton County of the ghosts of the people who were hanged in the early years. On moonless nights the cries of a baby were allegedly heard in the area where Mrs. Facto committed her crime, as well as strange sounds around places where hangings had occurred. Who can say how such stories began?

Jerome J. Moore, SUC

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## PICTURES AND INFORMATION WANTED

Richard Ward has been researching the New York connection of the Portland and Ogdensburg, or St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain Railroad. According to Plattsburgh newspapers and other publications, that line built a new railroad paralleling the older Central Vermont tracks from Maquam Bay at Swanton, Vermont across the town of Alburg to Rouses Point in 1883. A bridge was built 200 feet north of the C. V. bridge for the new line at Rouses Point. Apparently this connection was operated only a short time and then failed and the tracks were torn up.

He would like to locate any pictures of the bridge and would especially like to locate one showing both bridges. He would also be eager to talk with anyone who has any information about the 1883 bridge and St. J. & L. C. rail connection from Rouses Point to Maquam. He may be reached at 44 Leonard Avenue in Plattsburgh or at 563-4181 or 563-8190.

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## PERU IN 1810

*(Excerpts are taken from Spafford's GAZETTEER of 1813)*

Peru, a post-township at the south end of Clinton County, 130 miles north of Albany, according to the postmaster's estimate: bounded north by Plattsburgh; east, by Lake Champlain or the State of Vermont; south, by Essex County; west, by Franklin County. The river Au Sable forms about half of the southern boundary; the Saranac crosses the northwest corner; and there are several branches of these, with smaller streams also that run into the lake which, altogether, supply a great abundance of mill-seats. Little Au Sable is wholly in this town, and supplies many good mill-seats.

The land is principally held in fee-simple. There are in this town 3 or 4 corn-mills, 18 saw-mills, a fulling-mill, carding machine, 2 bloomeries for making bar iron, a rope-walk, 4 tanner's works, and a distillery of grain and fruit spirits. The roads are pretty good, and the inhabitants are remarked for habits of industry, temperance and economy. It was settled about 1789, principally by farmers from the county of Dutchess. A pretty large proportion of the inhabitants are Quakers, who have a meeting-house in Union village, as have the Methodists also in that of Hackstaff's Mills. There are in all 22 schoolhouses.

The trade of this town is principally to Canada, the distance to Montreal being 70 miles, to Quebec 230, and St. Johns on the Sorel River about 50 miles by water. It is supposed that \$60,000 worth of produce was conveyed to Canada from this town in 1810. And my correspondents state that various articles of foreign growth or manufacture may be had here from Canada about 30 to 50 percent cheaper than by the way of Albany.

There are 2 small villages: Union, with about 45 houses and stores, and Hackstaff's Mills, 35 houses and stores, 2 miles northeast of the former. The post office is in Union village, which is pleasantly situated on a handsome plain 3 miles north of the high bridge across Au Sable River. The whole population of this town in 1810 was 1933, when there were 162 electors.

1891

Two serious fires took place in Clinton County. On New Year's Eve much of Clinton Prison in Dannemora was destroyed and the state spent \$150,000 on its reconstruction. In the summer the Lake View House burned at Ausable Chasm.

Plattsburgh escaped major calamities; on the contrary its citizens welcomed some promising new developments, big and small. The breakwater was extended 300 feet in order to check the force of southeasterly winds. Nearly half a million logs were floated down the Saranac in the spring, about three fourths of them headed for Plattsburgh sawmills. Congress appropriated \$200,000 for major new construction at the Barracks, contingent upon gifts of the necessary land. Since the expansion would provide quarters for a regiment and a half, and since every added company presumably spent \$12,000 a year locally, citizens and business firms readily subscribed the money for 500 acres southwest of the existing post.

Two Chinese were arrested for smuggling when a quantity of opium was found under their train seat at the Plattsburgh station. They were merely fined in a downstate court. More desirable visitors came this way, including Secretary of War Proctor and Vice President Morton.

Farmers of the county happily applied for the new two-cent bounty on American sugar, including maple sugar, that was mandated by the McKinley Tariff of 1890. The farmer movement continued active locally; one thousand people came to the farmers' picnic in August. Yet after the national Farmers' Alliance joined the new People's (Populist) Party in May, the Clinton County Farmers' League condemned the action and the platform. The county's farmers wished nothing to do with third-party movements.

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