

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE  
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 80

Allen S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

December, 1971

## *The December Meeting*

of the Association will take place at 8 o'clock on the evening of Monday, December 6th, in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. The speaker will be the well-known North Country author of *Saranac Lake*, Maitland De Sormo, who will speak on "Old Times in the Adirondacks." His book by the same name was published in mid-November and is an edited manuscript by Seneca Ray Stoddard, noted Adirondack photographer. Mr. De Sormo's books include *TOLD AROUND THE CAMPFIRE* and *NOAH JOHN RONDEAU, ADIRONDACK HERMIT*, while his articles on Northern New York include more than thirty. His talk to the Association will be illustrated. The public is cordially invited.

## LUSTIG WRITES ABOUT LOUIS RIEL

Through an editorial oversight the name of Charles Lustig was omitted from the article about Louis Riel in the October issue of the "Notes". Mr. Lustig of Willsboro is a graduate student in history at SUC who devoted considerable travel and research to the preparation of the article.

## MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR 1972

By action of the Association's Board of Directors, membership dues for 1972 have been left the same as for 1971, except that a new category — family membership — has been added at \$5. The types of membership are thus as follows:

Student	\$2
Individual adult	3
Family	5
Contributing	10
Patron	25

As members re-subscribe, they are encouraged to join as Contributors or Patrons and are reminded that all subscriptions over the actual cost of membership are tax-deductible. By maintaining its current rates, the Association will be hard pressed to meet its operating costs, to say nothing of adding to its museum fund. For example, publication of the "Notes" alone costs \$420 a year, and postage adds another \$200.

# *The Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Plattsburgh*

*"O, Woman great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."*

*(Letter, Ellen L. Leuciny to Amelia Bidwell, 1890. Kent DeLord Collection.)*

As the various reform movements swept across the United States, Plattsburgh shared the same spirit. For one, the temperance movement had a strong hold there during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and overflowing into the beginning of the twentieth century. It was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in particular that is of interest in studying Plattsburgh's past, because of the Union's involvement, influence, and enthusiasm against the use of alcohol. This paper presents a brief look at this segment of Plattsburgh's history.

The Plattsburgh Woman's Christian Temperance Union was formed in 1874 with Mrs. J. D. Woodward as president and Mrs. Frances Hall as secretary. The purpose of this organization was to induce the ladies of Plattsburgh to mount a campaign, as Christian women, against the consumption of alcohol. The Union had meetings every week which were open to all who wished to participate. Most of the meetings were of a religious nature such as the prayer meetings at the Peristrome Church on Wednesday afternoons at three o'clock; at the Academy on Saturdays at three o'clock; or at the Temperance House at 64 Bridge Street, home of Mr. John G. Walters. Occasionally a special meeting was held, like the one on March 2, 1874. The Methodist Church conducted an all-day prayer meeting for the purpose of asking God's blessing on the no-license election. These meetings were often listed in the "Temperance" column of the **Plattsburgh Republican** newspaper, which was the Union's own column. Representatives to state and national temperance conventions were chosen at the meetings. Most urgently, ideas were exchanged on how to increase the membership of the Plattsburgh Union. As of January 2, 1890 there were sixty members of the Plattsburgh unit, paying both county dues (\$.10) and state dues (\$.20). The Union was constantly in the process of recruiting more members. One man, Henry G. Draw, suggested in his letter the following ways of increasing the membership:

a) Check the reason why individuals have not joined the Union already. This may be due to bad impression, neglect, or even satisfaction with doing individual efforts. The members in this case should prove the ideas wrong.

b) Find the line of temperance work that an individual is interested in. The members should show her how the Union is also interested and they could all profit by a joint effort.

c) Inform the individual of the Union's goals and views.

d) Make strenuous efforts to be friendly with the individual, and convince her they are her BEST friends.

e) Persuade the individual that her self-importance will grow only if she joins the Union.

Mr. Draw expressed the feelings of the Temperance Union in Plattsburgh in writing:

"One thought possessed the minds of its founders and the same thought is dominant today:

"The saving of mankind by the removal of the millstone from his neck; the millstone of intemperance which will, unless removed, drag him down into the sea of eternal ruin and death."

Another popular means of getting people to join the Union and the temperance movement was the hiring of noted lecturers to speak to the people of Plattsburgh. William Maxwell was one such speaker. After his first lecture, 300 people pledged not to consume alcohol, and on the following night, 800 to 900 signed allegiance to the cause. P. A. Burdick was another fiery speaker who condemned the consumption of alcohol. In the Music Hall in 1888, Mr. Burdick gave a series of 21 lectures for which the W.C.T.U. paid him \$600. The result was considered worth the money, for 1500 people pledged themselves against drinking, a successful means of persuading numbers of people, at least temporarily, to join the cause of temperance. Yet the **Republican** commented ironically that "Satan's kingdom trembles in Plattsburgh this week, with the temperance crusade and the Salvation Army, both laboring to rescue the perishing."

Once they achieved a good-sized membership, the Plattsburgh Union directed its energies toward their goal. By publicizing the social problems brought about by drinking, the ladies of the Union were able to communicate to the people on both the political and religious level about the temperance movement.

The licensing of shopkeepers to sell alcohol was a major political concern of the temperance ladies. By lectures, prayer meetings, and the use of their column in the **Plattsburgh Republican**, the Union made known its views on the sale of alcohol. To them, drinking was causing the town to go to ruin. According to Dr. Howard Crosby's article in the **Republican**, the drinker was considered a criminal and usually insane. On this note, the Union based its action. Members made appeals, offered pledges, and even went so far as to ask the shopkeepers and druggists to stop selling alcohol. The ladies blamed these men for the sin, misery, and destruction of the bodies and souls of their customers. Naturally the shopkeepers and druggists refused to go out of business just because some ladies had decided that the town's problems were their fault. The men reasoned that selling alcohol was a legal business and even if they did stop selling it, their customers would go elsewhere for it. Some pointed out that they should not be the ones to set an example, but rather the church. However, they did agree to go as far with the 'no license' idea as their competitors did, which meant going nowhere at all.

The W.C.T.U.'s efforts to ban the sale of alcohol thus were not effective. More successful was the religious aspect of their work. It is interesting to note the involvement of the Peristrome church whose minister was the Reverend Hall, husband of Mrs. Frances Hall, the secretary of the Plattsburgh Union. Ministers, influenced by the movement itself and by the W.C.T.U., gave fiery sermons against drinking, on the theme that 'no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.' Many of these sermons were printed in the **Plattsburgh Republican** for all to read. The need for curbing intemperance was highlighted by Rev. T. L. Cutler who pointed out that only one out of every fifty drinkers reform and that of them not more than a third live more than two years. As mentioned previously, prayer meetings were held several times a week at different churches, thus not limiting the Plattsburgh movement to any one religion.

With the courage of their convictions the members of the W.C.T.U. sought to educate young people against the evils of drink. By setting up quarterly sessions of Sabbath School for the Plattsburgh youth, the ladies thought they could kill intemperance at its source. The lessons were prepared by the National Temperance Society and cost \$200 per 100 copies. By teaching these temperance-oriented lessons through the church, they hoped that the young people would not be taken in by the blandishments of alcohol.

As for coping with the problem that already existed, the Union had, besides the ordinary pledges and meetings, their own special cure-all treatments. The Plattsburgh branch of the Hagey Institute was one of sixty branches in twenty-two states. It was formed by Dr. W. H. Hagey of Nebraska, whose treatment consisted of a tonic of bichloride of gold that was supposed to cure a person of drinking. This tonic was injected four times a day for twenty one days. The same treatment extended over four or five weeks would, it was claimed, cure an addiction for morphine, cocaine, opium.

Dr. D. S. Kellogg, the Plattsburgh physician, commented about the Hagey Institute in his Journal: "At any rate, it is expensive. One poor woman had saved a little money by working out before she was married. Her husband lost his position on the railroad on account of drinking, and would not try to work. A young fellow, under the pretense that some rich man had offered to pay his expenses at the Hagey concern, got the husband to begin treatment and then went to the wife and told her she must pay the bill, as it was only a ruse to get him to go for treatment. So the woman, in order to help her husband, grasping at the last straw, decided to pay the bill." The Doctor's account unfortunately does not tell what happened to the husband.

Nevertheless, the momentum generated by the W.C.T.U., the churches and other temperance groups at the turn of the century helps to explain Plattsburgh's vote for city-wide prohibition in the spring of 1918, two years before national prohibition. Ostensibly the move resulted from war-time patriotic impulses and the desire to protect the soldiers at the Barracks from alcohol. Nevertheless, the groundwork for prohibition had been laid years before—(over)

**"WHICH SHALL IT BE?"**

A temperance poem by Ellen M. Palmer  
A tidy little home for Betsey and me,  
With just enough room for one, two,  
three,  
Or a tumble down hut with a broken  
gate,  
And a sad eyed woman toiling early  
and late;  
Which shall it be  
For mine and me?  
A five-cent glass of beer for me,  
Or a five-cent loaf for all of us three?  
Beer or baby—wine or wife,  
Which do I hold more precious than  
life?  
Which shall it be  
For mine and me?  
Potatoes and salt with a crust of bread  
For the best little woman the Lord  
ever made,

While the rumseller's wife feeds on  
turkey and wine,  
Bought with my money—if I so incline.  
Thus shall it be  
For mine and me?  
Tatters and rags for my little one,  
My fair, comely baby, my own darling  
son,  
While the rumseller's children go warm  
and well clad  
On my earnings, wrested from my  
bonnie lad.  
Thus shall it be  
For mine and me?  
Well, man, d'ye think me a mole-eyed  
fool,  
Blindly to serve as the rumseller's tool?  
Ah! how can I hesitate which to choose,  
When it's all to gain—or all to lose;  
For mine and me,  
For mine and me?"  
Susan Gibson, SUC

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**RIDDLE OF THE MONTH**

Old riddle: Beekmantown was a 1769 patent to Dr. James Beekman, a physician of New York City who never visited his lands but expected to make a fortune from them. At the time, colonial law forbade the grant of more than 1,000 acres to any individual. Since Dr. Beekman wanted 30,000 acres, he got 29 friends and relatives to co-sign his application and after the land was granted, they all made over their shares to the Doctor.

New riddle: What is the difference between Fort Blunder and Fort Montgomery?

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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