

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 94

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

May, 1973

The May Meeting

of the Association differ from the regular schedule. Please mark them on your calendar.

Monday, May 14 — The regular meeting of the Association will be held in the Council Chambers on the second floor of the Plattsburgh City Hall at 8:30 p.m. The speakers will be Dr. and Mrs. Adolph Dittmar, who will present their personal reminiscences of Noah John Rondeau, Adirondack hermit. From 7:30 to 8:30 on the same evening members of the Association, but not the general public, are invited to a pre-opening view of the Museum on the third floor of City Hall. The Museum will be in the process of preparation for a public opening later in the month.

Thursday, May 24 — The formal opening of the Museum will take place, to which the public is cordially invited. It will be held between 7 and 9 p.m. on the third floor of City Hall. Watch for further details in the local news media.

June — the Program Committee is preparing a traditional field trip, the date and place of which will be announced in the June "Notes".

SYMPOSIUM ON THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

On Saturday, May 12, the State Bicentennial Commission, in conjunction with the History Department of the College, will present a symposium on the regional aspects of the American Revolution. It will be held in Communications Lecture Hall, room 202, at the College from 9 to 12 and 1:30 to 4, and the public is cordially invited.

Films on Fort Ticonderoga and Saratoga will be shown and four papers presented by specialists. The speakers include Prof. Donald Higginbotham of the University of North Carolina, Prof. H. N. Muller of the University of Vermont, Prof. Ian Pemberton of the University of Windsor and Prof. Allan Everest of SUC, Plattsburgh.

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old riddle: Adgate Falls and Biringham Falls were the early names for Ausable Chasm.

New Riddle: Who were the elected officers of the first company of volunteers that left Clinton County for the Civil War?

The Continental Row

The Upper Hudson, Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River were once the only means of transportation between Albany and Canada. Whoever controlled Lake Champlain could hold Forts Crown Point and Ticonderoga. In early May 1775 Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen captured both posts for the Americans. Later in the same month Arnold took St. Johns, Quebec from the British, giving the Americans temporary control of the lake. However, this was threatened when the Americans retreated from Canada a year later. In June 1776 Arnold urged the building of 20 or 30 gondolas, row-galleys and floating batteries to maintain control. This is the first mention of row-galleys for the defense of Lake Champlain.

Meanwhile Captain Jacobus Wyncoop was already at Skenesborough (Whitehall) building a small fleet. On June 13th General Horatio Gates, commander of the Northern Army at Ticonderoga, directed Arnold to take charge of the construction. On July 1st, the Second Continental Congress resolved "that the Marine Committee be empowered to contract with shipwrights, to go to Lake Champlain." By this action the Lake Champlain Fleet of 1776 can be considered a part of the Continental Navy.

By August 7th the row-gallery CONGRESS had been started, with Arnold overseeing its construction, assisted by General Waterbury. Cheshire's mills at Skenesborough were used to saw the lumber for the ship. The carpenters for the CONGRESS were from Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, and the Marine Committee paid them \$32 $\frac{2}{3}$ per month, one-half ration and one-half pint of rum per day, and allowed them one day's pay for every 20 miles they travelled between Skenesborough and their homes. The CONGRESS was built of white oak obtained from the forests around Crown Point, Ticonderoga and Skenesborough. Axes, nails, bellows and blacksmith tools came from the south by way of Fort George, and then by cart to Skenesborough and Ticonderoga.

The CONGRESS was designed for easy handling in shoal water. She was round-bilged, the length of the deck was 72 feet 4 inches, the length of the keel for tonnage 60 feet 6 inches, the breadth moulded 18 feet 7 inches, and the depth of the hold 6 feet 2 inches. She contained two masts, about half the waterline length in height. Each mast contained one yard about two-thirds of the waterline in length. Each mast was rigged with a Spanish-style high-pointed lateen sail. The galley was powered by seven pairs of sweeps, each worked by two or three men. The oars were manufactured at Crown Point. She had a proper gundeck and a 20-foot quarterdeck. The storage space under the gundeck carried more than a month's supplies. The design of a row-gallery was a compromise resulting from lack of materials and skilled workmen, an inexperienced crew, weather conditions on the lake and the short time for its construction.

On August 7th Arnold informed Gates that the galleys would be launched in two weeks, but on August 22 Waterbury, who was now overseeing the construction of the CONGRESS and the other galleys, informed Gates that work on the row-galleys had been retarded because of sickness among the carpenters. Nevertheless, Arnold sailed north from Crown Point with the entire fleet except for the row-galleys. On August 26, Gates sent additional men to Waterbury to help finish these vessels, and on August 27 Waterbury requested that the men at Ticonderoga rig the galleys as they were finished. By September 2 the rigging, cables and blocks were at the Fort, and on September 10 Waterbury was there with the CONGRESS and other galleys.

Waterbury was in charge of equipping the galleys and Lt. Bowman was to complete the iron work on galleys and gun carriages. On September 12 Gates wrote Arnold that "Your barge is here and most elegantly painted and finished. (According to Chapelle it was painted red.) She will be sent by Captain Arnold." By "finished" Gates apparently meant that the CONGRESS was rigged, because the cordage and gun carriages were not completed until the end of September. Between

September 12 and 30, the blacksmith's work delayed the sailing of the galleys. The CONGRESS, TRUMBULL and WASHINGTON were finished by September 30 and they sailed for Valcour Island on the morning of October 2.

According to the Captain's receipt of October 2, the CONGRESS carried two 18-pound cannon, two 12-pounders, six 6-pounders and eight swivels. British General Guy Carleton reported that the two 18-pounders were in the bow, the two 12-pounders in the stern, the six 6-pounders on the sides and the swivels in the stern. Each cannon was mounted on a wooden gun carriage, and the carriage was secured to the ship's side by heavy rope called breeching. The cannon were made of iron and the swivels of brass. The 18-pounders were six feet long, weighed 2,700 pounds, and had a 6.3-inch caliber. The 12-pounders were 7.5 feet long, weighed 2,900 pounds and had a 4.644-inch caliber. The 6-pounders were seven feet long, weighed 1,900 pounds and had a 3.67-inch caliber. These cannon used round, double-headed grape and chain shot. The powder, lead, flints, musket cartridges and cannon were obtained from Fort Ticonderoga since Schuyler could not obtain them elsewhere. The brass swivels were 2-pounders and were carried in brackets on the bulwarks of the stern. The weapons of the marines and seamen on board the CONGRESS consisted of muskets and Pennsylvania-type rifles.

The CONGRESS sailed for Valcour Island on October 2, carrying 14 barrels of rum and fresh beef for the fleet. She rendezvoused with Arnold on the east side of Valcour at 2 o'clock in heavy weather and gale winds. On the morning of October 11 the British fleet was spotted off Cumberland Head. Arnold now made the CONGRESS his flagship. At 11 o'clock the CONGRESS, the ROYAL SAVAGE and the two galleys boldly attacked the British fleet, then returned to their battle-line between island and mainland. From 12:30 to 5 o'clock the battle "became very warm and general." The guns of the CONGRESS were pointed mostly by Arnold himself and she received "seven shots between wind and water and was hulled a dozen times." Her mainmast was wounded in two places and her yard in one.

About 6 o'clock a council of war was held aboard the CONGRESS, where it was decided to steal through the British fleet at night. Thick animal grease was used to silence the oars during this maneuver, and the CONGRESS brought up the rear of the retreat at 10 o'clock. The fleet arrived at Schuyler Island, ten miles south, early the next morning. Here the ship's carpenter and boatswain went to work repairing the ship. At 2 P.M. the CONGRESS and the fleet weighed anchor for Crown Point with a south wind. At 6 o'clock the next morning they were off Willsboro Point. The wind now changed to the north, giving a distinct advantage to the pursuing British fleet.

At 11 A.M. the British caught up with the CONGRESS, which was bringing up the American rear. She immediately opened fire on the MARIA with her 12-pounders. The galley WASHINGTON fell behind and struck her colors. As the men on board the CONGRESS rowed to near-exhaustion, two British schooners and the INFLEXIBLE fired broadside at the CONGRESS. She was surrounded by seven British warships, which kept up incessant fire with round and grape shot.

After 2½ hours of a running fight, in which the CONGRESS returned fire briskly, Arnold decided to take his battered fleet into Ferris Bay on the east side of the lake. According to Arnold, "The sails, rigging and hull of the CONGRESS were shattered and torn to pieces, the First Lieutenant and three men killed, when to prevent her falling into the enemy's hands, who had seven sail around me, I ran her ashore in a small creek ten miles from Crown Point on the east side; when, after saving our small arms, I set her on fire with four gondolas." From that day until now Ferris Bay has been known as Arnold Bay. Squire Ferris, who witnessed the event, reported that Lt. Goldsmith lay wounded on the deck of the CONGRESS when it blew up. Arnold's orders for his removal had not been carried out. Arnold and his men then retreated on foot to Crown Point.

From the time the CONGRESS was sunk until a part of it was resurrected

late in the century, many parts of the boat were taken. When the water was low, her remains could be seen near a large rock at the north end of the bay. The local gentry made walking canes from her white oak timbers. Grape and musket shot have also been salvaged. Tucker reports that an 18-pound iron cannon and a 2-pound brass howitzer (swivel) were also salvaged; the cannon ended up in Burlington and the swivel in Boston.

Toward the end of the 19th century, a third of the CONGRESS was salvaged and placed at Chimney Point, Vermont. In 1909 Walter Witherbee, John H. Booth and John B. Riley were charged with finding a suitable use for her remains, but nothing came of their efforts. Today the keel and ribs remain at Chimney Point.

Stephen B. Riley
SUC

MUSEUM NOTES

After its formal opening on May 24th, the Association expects to keep the Museum open several days a week through the spring and summer months. Admission will be free, but a donation box will invite guests to help with the Museum's work.

The Association is particularly grateful for the labors of a dedicated group that has been working on the Museum all winter and spring: Tom Holland and Derek Allan on general construction and lighting; Helen Allan, Nina Holland and Norma Kinney on cataloging, designing and constructing displays. The Association also gratefully acknowledges the anonymous gift of electrical fixtures for the displays.

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