

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 10

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

Sept. 1962

The Next Meeting

will be held on Monday evening, Sept. 10, 1962, at 8:00 o'clock, in the Association Rooms over the Plattsburgh Public Library. The speaker is Miss Saily Warren, a teacher in the Chazy Central Rural School. Her topic will be "THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PETER SAILLY." Miss Warren is a descendent of Saily, and lives in the Plattsburgh home built by him on Cumberland Avenue. The public is cordially invited.

COMING PROGRAMS

- OCTOBER 1 - *Tour of the Imperial Paper Company at Plattsburgh with an account of its history* Ellsworth Buchanan, Jr.
NOVEMBER 5 - "*The Davidson Sisters of Plattsburgh*" Charles W. McLellan
JANUARY 7 - "*The Geological History of Clinton County*" Prof. Guy Rooth
FEBRUARY 4 - "*The Climate of Clinton County*" Prof. Robert Macfarlane

A Country Doctor in the 1870's

Dr. Ira N. Vaughan of Mason Street, Morrisonville, New York, kept a ledger from 1875 to 1880. During these years, he maintained accounts with about 375 patients. There were Adcocks and Beckwiths, Broadwells and Emerys, Gadways and Harneys, Laports and Meads, Ostrandors and Spaldings.

The doctor's charges were modest by today's standards, and covered a wide range of services. Typical of the entries are these:

June 19, 1875	- To visit & med. for child	\$1.00
July 5, 1875	- To cough mix	.50
August 22, 1875	- To med. for baby	.50
October 25, 1875	- To extracting tooth	.25
November 13, 1875	- To opening finger	.75
January 12, 1876	- To office call	.50

In more cases than not, the patient paid little or none of his bill; the debit column is full, the credit column empty, or inscribed "No Pay." In several instances the doctor accepted goods or services as part payment for medical care. Such entries include: "By Washing Wagon, \$.50," "By making 2 shirts, collars & cuffs, \$2.00," "By 2 Bush oats, \$1.00." If the doctor's credit columns are complete, it is difficult to see how he took in enough money to live comfortably.

Local Boy Goes West: Miron Spaulding

In November 1855, Miron Spaulding of Black Brook leased a house and lot with an option to buy for \$412 according to a fixed schedule of payments. That winter he set out to seek his fortune in California, leaving a wife and four young daughters in their new home. In February 1856 he reached Jamestown, California, where he immediately started prospecting for gold.

Miron's letters home were full of "lonesome here when we aren't at work," "I should like to see you very much," and "tell the children to be good and I will bring them chunks of gold." To his wife's queries about how to make ends meet, he told her "you must do the best you can." Soon he was able to send money home.

Miron and two associates took out a claim and installed a water pump to help with sluicing. Thieving Indians were a threat, and a freshet washed out their works, but Miron was full of great expectations. He began to hint that he might come home in the fall "if our claim pays well."

He sent his first money to a friend's wife in Burlington, and told his own wife to go there and get it! "I am a little afraid to send the money to the Forks, there are so many post offices there." Later, he grew bolder and sent money directly home. He advised his wife, "do not keep much money in bills, keep the gold. That will not burn nor the banks will not fail."

He bought out his partners and hired two Chinese to work for him. For a time he cleared as much as seven dollars a day — "that is better than I can do at home. I keep the pick and shovel going all the time. I am very tired come Saturday night." He urged longer letters from home. "I want you should write about every thing you can think of. Get some big sheets of paper and write long letters. One of those little sheets half wrote over, that is not enough to read over Sunday."

Then the water supply dried up and operations slowed down for months. He worked his claim along, confident of its great riches even when he must delay his return home. He almost gave up, however, when he heard of his children's illness; meanwhile, "you must do the best you can."

In September he sold his claim, worked for others, and later bought another claim. He decided not to come home until spring because winter would bring water for sluicing, and "if I should come home this fall I should not do anything til spring only pay out money. It is not for pleasure that I stay here; I stay to try to make ourselves more comfortable when I get home."

With his promises to "come home in the spring" he began to propose moving his family back in the fall. "California is the place for farming and making butter; it is worth 75 cents a pound." He worried to hear that his family was boarding out for the winter at what he thought was an exorbitant rate, and that there had been sickness again.

In March 1857 he thought his return would be summer or fall "if I am alive and well. I hope we shall be spared to meet again." He sold his claim and took a summer farm job while he waited for the homeward fare to come down. He continued to press the idea of bringing his family back to California and taking a farm.

In all, Miron sent his wife about \$430 during the less than two years he spent in California. Torn as he was between love of family and love of California with its elusive prospects of fortune, he started for home in the fall of 1857. He was lost in a shipwreck en route to Panama. His wife somehow completed payments on the house, and eventually married an Elijah White.

The letters on which this account is based are owned by Mrs. Harry Booth of Plattsburgh, whose mother was one of the little girls left at home when their father went west.

The British at the Bridge

A little-noticed marker in Plattsburgh is a plaque on the west end of the Bridge Street bridge. The inscription reads:

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE
GALLANT AND SUCCESSFUL
RESISTANCE OF THE AMERICAN
TROOPS TO THE REPEATED
ATTEMPTS OF THE BRITISH ARMY
TO CROSS THE BRIDGE OVER
THE SARANAC RIVER AT THIS POINT
SEPTEMBER 5 - 11, 1814

ERECTED BY THE FACULTY AND STUDENTS
OF THE PLATTSBURGH NORMAL SCHOOL
JANUARY 1895.

Further investigation reveals how the plaque came into being. The students of the Normal had responded enthusiastically to an address by Dr. David Sherwood Kellogg of Plattsburgh, who urged that something be done to mark historic spots in the area. The students raised all the funds for the plaque. At that time there were 220 enrolled, of whom 180 were on campus.

To mark the occasion, a special program was presented at Normal Hall. The exercises were planned for February 9, 1895, but did not take place until February 12th. Postponement was caused by the "severest storm of the season and in fact the severest since the blizzard of 1888," according to the PRESS.

Insurance in the 1840's

The following are random excerpts from the handwritten instructions to Mr. Z. C. Platt, first Plattsburgh agent for the Aetna Insurance Company, in May 1846. The original is in the possession of George Brewer of Plattsburgh.

Sir,

We suggest a few hints which it may be useful to observe in the business of your Agency.

We would insure for none but men of integrity.

Rogues should be their own underwriters.

We aim to have our risks prudently scattered. In almost all places there are some portions densely covered with wooden buildings which are prone to be badly occupied, at least some of them. In such places we would be cautious and confine our insurance to such property as could be moved without serious damage in case of fire. Nor would we insure much in such places *at any rate*. Accustom yourself to look at property with a view to insurance, as you pass about town. . . . if we rely on the representation of owners in regard to value, we may be misled, and get too much.

The worst risks are Steam planing Mills, Sash and Blind factories, Joiners, Cabinet and Coachmakers shops and all others where shavings are made. No money can be made on these in a long run. We don't want them.

This is not mere conjecture — divers cases have occurred where men have appraised damages as high as \$1200 and subsequently, when the same men have found that others were likely to get the job, they have offered to do it for \$800 and even \$700.

. . . . Thus you will see how we are tried by the evil propensity of men — and you will understand why we deem it a duty to investigate all claims for loss. There are numerous other plans for defrauding Insurance Companies which have been resorted to, but we deem the above recital sufficient for this time.

Revolutionary War Pension Claims

In the middle of the 19th century, a large business was carried on by brokers who attempted to help families press their Revolutionary War pension claims. The family of Garrett Thew of Peru, New York, was besieged with letters and circulars from those who professed to have seen the name in Washington on the list of rejected claims.

Agents in Rouses Point, Buffalo, Washington and Ohio offered their services. Some sent powers of attorney for the family to execute in their favor. Their fee varied from a fifth to a half. One letter from Washington asserted: "My fee is one-fifth or 20 percent of the amount recovered, and the actual amount expended for certificates, proof, etc., which will not exceed \$20 and will probably be much less. I charge nothing unless I succeed with the claim. The usual fee here is, as I am informed, one half or 50 percent of the amount, which I think is more than should be required."

From Gallipolis, Ohio, came the following on May 22, 1854:

"Mr. Garrett Thew

Sir, I have in my possession a copy of the most important part of the proceedings in the pension Department at Washington City on your claim for a Revolutionary pension showing why said pension was not granted when it was applied for. If you will write to me and send me one dollar in gold I will explain the matter to your advantage. I am compelled to ask my pay in gold because of the present law of this state against small bills of other states.

Yours Respectfully,
Daniel D. T. Benedict
agent for pensioners"

16 SEP '62
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