

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE  
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 20

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

Nov. 1964

## *The Next Meeting*

will be held on Monday evening, Nov. 2, 1964, at 8 o'clock, in the Association Rooms over the Plattsburgh Public Library. Mr. Oscar E. Bredenberg, of North Hero, Vt., will present a paper on "THE ROYAL SAVAGE," an account of that historic vessel from its launching in 1775 by the British, to its destruction at the Battle of Valcour some thirteen months later. Mr. Bredenberg has spent several winters of research in Montpelier and Ottawa, and is now producing articles and, we hope, a book on his discoveries. The public is cordially invited.

## *Coming*

At our January meeting Mr. Edwin Berry, the Director of the Clinton-Essex-Franklin Library System, will talk on "THE LIBRARIES OF THE NORTH COUNTRY." As usual, there will be no December meeting.

## *Benson J. Lossing and Winslow C. Watson*

Several letters were found among the papers of Winslow C. Watson, historian of the Champlain Valley, from Benson J. Lossing, author of such basic source books as *Field Book of the American Revolution* and *Field Book of the War of 1812*.

On March 20, 1872, Lossing wrote: "I thank you for your contributions to the Department of Notes and Queries of the *Record*. Such are always welcome, as will be any production of your pen. Your *Champlain Valley* paper is in the hands of the printer, and will appear in the May no. of the *Record*. . . . Among the papers of General Schuyler I found a watercolor of the *Royal Savage*. It will appear in my *Life and Times of Philip Schuyler*, now approaching completion. Over 600 of the about 1000 pages of mms. that will complete it are ready for the press. I hope to have it all done by June."

On December 30, 1872, he wrote: "Thanks for the paper on Sir William Johnson for the Feby no. of the *Record*. . . . Bancroft is very unreliable, both as to facts and opinions. In my *Life of Gen. Schuyler*, just finished, I have had occasion to give documentary proofs of the danger of following his facts or opinions. . . . I shall be very glad to have a paper from you on the Quaker settlement at Peru."

From a letter dated August 11, 1880: "I hasten to say in reply to yours concerning timber from the *Royal Savage* that I should be much gratified to have a piece of it as a precious relic, if the person has a piece to spare . . . and inform me what compensation must be sent to the owner of the relic."

(From the McLellan Collections)

## Crab Island

*From The Plattsburgh Republican of Nov. 7, 1903. It was again printed in its Historical Department on Sept. 8, 1906, identifying "C. Nichols" as Caleb Nichols.*

The following is the copy of a bill made out against the United States Government by C. Nichols (who was evidently at the time the owner of Crab Island) for damages sustained by occupation of the Government in 1814 of the island as a hospital, &c., as will appear by the bill itself. Whether this bill was ever presented to the government or not is perhaps not known, and whether it was or not is of little consequence compared with the historical facts which it strongly corroborates, namely: that there was a house upon the island previously to the battle, and that the land there was cultivated, and that 150 men—soldiers and sailors—were buried in the trenches there, instead of about 100 as has been generally supposed. This document which Mr. A. M. Warren, its owner, kindly consents to be published, is of especial interest at the present time, as the U. S. Government has just set up a flagstaff on the island, and also for the reason that a bill was introduced in the last Congress providing for the improvement of the island and the erection of a monument commemorating the Battle of Plattsburgh, Sept. 11, 1814, and to mark the last resting place of the dead of that battle. —Ed.

[COPY]

The United States,

To C. Nichols, Dr.

For rent of and damages done to Crab Island by Commodore Macdonough's Fleet before the 20th October 1814.

1st. For 50 Cords of wood taken from or used on the Island	50.00
2. For 10 Sticks of Timber for use of the Fleet	5.00
3. For building and occupying on the Island, one Hospital, one Store House and one House, one Kitchen and several Necessaries for the uses of Surgeons and Sick of the Fleet, by which, besides the Rent of the Island, it being proper for Naval purposes, on account of the Size of the Island and its Situation in the Lake to prevent desertion. The following damages were sustained.	

1st. Three acres of Meadow were so frequently run over by the Sick and dug up to get worms to fish with as to be destroyed so that it could not be mowed this year	50.00
--	-------

2. Occupying four acres of Garden or possessing them in Such Manner as to render them useless and for want of improvement to permit them to grow up to Canada thistles	100.00
--	--------

3. A Cow running over the whole for a long time	10.00
---	-------

4. Burying 150 men on the Island	150.00
----------------------------------	--------

5. Taking down a log house to use about building the Hospital, Store and houses	50.00
---	-------

Besides the above damages the Rent of the Island for Naval purposes, rating the Rent at the rate the army has paid for land which it used for Military purposes

200.00

615.00

## Caleb Nichols, Intelligence Agent

Caleb Nichols (1768-1858) was admitted to the bar in Plattsburgh in 1796. Prior to 1800 he was one of only three lawyers in the county. After the War of 1812 he was Judge of Clinton County Court of Pleas. During the war he served as a secret

intelligence agent in Plattsburgh for the Secretary of War, to whom he made numerous reports, which may be found in the Archives in Washington and, on microfilm, at the State University Library. In the light of subsequent events some of his information is proved to have been quite erroneous.

On June 23, 1814, he advocated the stationing of American troops over the line in Canada and their engaging in as many skirmishes as possible so as to give British soldiers the opportunity to desert while fighting in the woods. "No place on the whole frontier between the U. S. and Upper and Lower Canada is so favorable to ensure successful desertion as from the Stone Mill [Cantic] to Champlain, there being neither river nor lake to cross from the mill to Champlain and the distance very short and thro' the wilderness." He believed that if this had been done from the start of the war, it would have drawn off one-fourth of the troops in the area. In this, Nichols was undoubtedly correct, for Governor-General Prevost repeatedly complained about the large-scale desertions of his troops into the States; during his later campaign to Plattsburgh, 234 British desertions were reported.

On September 1, 1814, as Prevost's army moved on Plattsburgh, Nichols believed that the American army would be taken, and that it would have been better for the army and public property to have been removed. In this he seriously underestimated the valor of General Macomb.

On November 24, 1814, after the battle of Plattsburgh, he wrote: "Two-thirds of our whole active Navy has been on the Lakes instead of being, where it ought to be, on the ocean." Even on Lake Champlain a navy was unnecessary because the army could have prevented the British fleet from entering the lake. "Had these been upon the ocean instead of being upon the Lakes what havock would they not have made with the British commerce and sloops of war? The enemy knows this, and therefore will by every means in his power endeavor to draw our Navy from the ocean to the Lakes and he would be willing to employ half of his Navy to draw the other third of our Navy which is not yet on the Lakes from the ocean to the Lakes." He believed that even Perry's victory on Lake Erie and Macdonough's on Lake Champlain were nothing compared to what those officers could have done with similar fleets on the ocean. The British could even be made to pay the United States tribute. But Mr. Nichols overlooked the importance of controlling the Lakes, and the fact that the British navy, 1,000 ships of war, completely blockaded the American coasts. He was obviously an "army" man.

---

### *The Lost Asylum*

In 1886-87, Plattsburgh had high hopes of getting the new insane asylum which the state proposed to build. But so did Ogdensburg.

At first everything seemed to indicate the choice of Plattsburgh. The Governor appointed a five-man commission, headed by Dr. Cleveland of the Poughkeepsie Insane Asylum, to examine different sites and report to the next legislature. The committee visited Plattsburgh in September and seemed favorably impressed. Land was readily available; a gravitational supply of water would save the cost of pumping; low-cost shipping of freight by water was thought of as an advantage; and sewage could easily be disposed of in the bay!

The five commissioners signed a recommendation for Plattsburgh. But two of them produced a minority report at the same time which favored Ogdensburg. The decision rested with the state legislature, which was affected by political pressures as well as factors of population centers and geographical area to be served, which added weight to the arguments of Ogdensburg. Consequently, Plattsburgh lost this large state project to its rival on the St. Lawrence.

## Clinton County Place Names

(Readers are invited to send interesting additions for this series to the editors.)

### PLATTSBURGH

*Plattsburgh* - named for the Platt family, Captain Nathaniel Platt being the first settler in 1785.

*Helen and William Streets* - named after the children of Judge Douglas Woodward who lived at the corner of Helen and Broad Streets.

*Brinkerhoff Street* - so-called for Mary (Mrs. Peter) Brinkerhoff, daughter of Judge Zephaniah Platt.

*Cornelia and Elizabeth Streets* - named for the Haring sisters of New York City; Cornelia married Col. Melancton Smith. *Margaret Street* is named for his mother, Margaret Mott Smith, wife of Judge Melancton Smith of New York City.

*Platt Street* - so-called for the Platt family. An early name was *Stove Pipe Street*, because there were no chimneys on any of the houses, only stove pipes sticking out.

*Rugar Street* - named for John Rugar, its first settler.

*Sailly and Lorraine Streets* - named by Frederick L. C. Saily, son of Peter Saily, whose home stands on Cumberland Avenue. Lorraine was the French province from which the family migrated.

*Wells Street* - so-called for John Wells, resident and owner of much of the land in the vicinity.

*Catherine Street* - named for the wife of Gilead Sperry, who gave to the village the portion of the street which ran through his property.

*Rattlesnake Corner* - the northeast corner of Margaret and Bridge Streets, so-called because of a bookstore kept there by A. A. Prescott. As the gossips used to gather there, it received this name from Judge Daniel S. McMasters.

#20 NOV 64

---

---

### ☆ NORTH COUNTRY NOTES ☆

ISSUED BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

---

---

David K. Martin, Secretary  
West Chazy, New York