

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly By The Clinton County Historical Association

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Editor: Helen W. Allan

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## JANUARY PROGRAM

CCHA members have a treat in store for them on Monday, January 9 at 7:30 p.m. The first program of our 1989 season features Leo Perry and his recently compiled slide/lecture on the history of Morri~~son~~ville. Mr. Perry has spent a number of years collecting oral history of the village and his accompanying slides will provide an intriguing glimpse of life in that section of Clinton County. Scheduled to take place at the Clinton County Government Center in Plattsburgh, the program is open to the public. Please note that this month the meeting is on the second Monday.

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HATS OFF!

As the County Museum enters another busy year with multiple events and exhibitions scheduled to take place, we salute our loyal docents who staff the institution during public visitation. Grateful thanks are due to Edwidge Brunet, Beth Brush, Ruth Patterson, Nancy Smith and Connie Wheeler for their help in 1988. We've been helped in the office by Thelma Neveu and on the road by John Coolidge of Bekins/Coolidge Movers. A dedicated board of trustees is essential to the successful operation of the museum. And we are fortunate in having access to SUNY Plattsburgh's staff at Special Collections where help and advice are always available. The college's student intern program supplies bright young people such as Joanne Guardino and Robert Sloma who become totally involved in all types of museum work and historical association activity. Two former interns from other colleges have gone on to museum careers, and we like to take a tiny bit of credit for that. So it is with much enthusiasm that we enter 1989, wishing the Clinton County Legislature, the City of Plattsburgh, New York State Council on the Arts, the Institute of Museum Services, New York Council for the Humanities, and all our members and friends a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.

1777 AND ALL THAT

(The successes in America referred to in this letter from Thomas Forsythe, Esq. to George Selwyn included the defeat of the advanced body of Washington's army by Lord Cornwallis, on the 26th of June; Howe's victory over Washington at Brandywine on the 8th, and the occupation of Philadelphia by General Howe on September 22nd.)

London, December 3, 1777

Dear Sir:- Before this can reach you, the Gazette will inform you of the various successes of our army under General Howe, which, as usual, does not give the satisfaction that the multitude looked for. But they are imperfect judges of the matter, and perhaps it is as much as we can expect, from situation and circumstances. Perhaps they would have been better pleased if, unfortunately, advices had not arrived last night from Quebec, giving an account that poor General Burgoyne, after having fought and held out until he was almost starved, had been obliged to capitulate, and had become a prisoner of war. It is said that he is wounded, as is also General Phillips, and General Frazer is killed. The former is to come to England by way of Quebec, and all the others (who are bound not to serve again against the Independent States of America) are to be sent to England by way of Boston. This is the report of the day, and from the best account I can learn, it is only a report. It is true that the Warwick man-of-war is arrived, and government has received by her the account of the action of the 19th of September. She sailed from Quebec the 24th of October, and in coming down the river St. Lawrence they were informed that the report of General Burgoyne's disaster had reached Quebec, but they bring no particulars.

I have seen a Mr. Strachan, a merchant of eminence, who came home by the fleet under convoy of the Warwick, and he assured me that when he left Quebec Burgoyne's defeat was only a report. On the other hand, I have also seen a letter from a gentleman at Quebec, which gives a dismal account of the situation of our army in Canada; encompassed by thirty thousand militia; destitute of provisions; and fatigued and reduced in numbers; all which indicates something very unfavourable, and I am rather disposed to dread that the report will prove true intelligence. If so, American independence will be the result, and we shall totally lose what we have been in vain attempting to regain.

Your most obedient servant,

Thomas Forsythe

Memoirs of the Court of England, Vol. 3

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McMASTERS WRITING PRIZE

February 1 is the deadline for submission of manuscripts for the 1989 competition. Minimum length of a paper must be 3,000 words and the manuscript must be in completed form. Authorship of the paper should accompany it in a cover letter. For more information, call CCHA at 561-0340.

## MORE ABOUT ALTONA

From the writings of Frank P. Conners

The kilns of Altona were round, dome-shaped structures forty or more feet in diameter and were built of stone lined with bricks. They looked like an old-fashioned bee hive. A large opening was on the top through which they were filled with ten or twelve cords of 4-foot wood. This opening had an iron cover that could be opened or closed at will. It was necessary to have it opened for the first four days after the kiln was fired or until the flames were seen coming from the opening which took about that time. It was then closed and remained so until the charcoal was made. It was a process which required eight or nine days. At the bottom there was a large iron door and it was through this opening that the fire was started and it was also used for removing the finished charcoal. It was very dirty work and the men who worked at it were black from head to foot. They were paid 75¢ for a ten-hour day.

About three feet above the ground the ventilating openings were located. They were about ten feet apart and circled the kiln. It took four bricks to fill them when it was necessary to check the ventilation and bring about the proper draft. They could also be removed to increase it. Too much draft would cause the wood in the kiln to burn to ashes and there would be no charcoal and a loss to the owner in wood and labor. If not enough, gases would form and cause the kiln to explode. The men who carried out this important work were known as Kiln Burners. It required great skill and responsibility on their part. The sound of burning wood within the kiln governed them in their operation of the vents. As stated above, it required eight or nine days to make the charcoal, and the Kiln Burners had to watch them closely both night and day.

There were many such kilns located in the town in the early days and they were built along the side of a hill or embankment and a platform extended from its top to the opening in the kiln. The wagons loaded with wood were driven on to it and their cargo was placed into the kiln where men piled it and placed it in the proper manner necessary for burning. It gave employment to many people. The wood had to be cut and hauled to the kilns; men were needed to carry on the operation; others were required to remove and transport the charcoal to the forges located along the Chazy River and to the railroad station for shipment.

The several forges in the town carried out the work of smelting iron ore which came from the mines at Lyon Mountain. Wood could not produce the intense heat required for this purpose so charcoal was the answer. It could do what was needed. Many men were also employed in the forges. The population of the town of Altona in those days (1880) was 3,570.

Here is a list of some of those kilns:

There were four at Woods Falls owned by Wallace W. Wood & Co. The Palmer Forge at Altona had four. They were located not far from the forge on the side of a hill. There were three at the Stackpole Forge which stood near the upper Miner dam. The eight Frenyea kilns were located near the Richard Boulerville place. He shipped all his output to other places. There was also a large sawmill near his home. Frenyea operated a boarding house where Richard Boulerville later lived. The Palmer forge at Alderbend had two. They were located near the present cement bridge. Francis Oryell had two at Alderbend. The eight Duprey kilns were on

the Coon Terrian Farm at Alderbend. The Smith Wood kilns were near Crowleys on the Turnpike. There were four kilns about a half mile south of the kilns on the Smart place. At Irona there were two or three called the Reynolds Kilns. At O'Brien's Corners the Olyer (?) Kilns were located. There were two kilns across the Rutland Railroad on the Hanley place, later occupied by Cecil Gero. East of Jericho there were two and much of their remains can still be seen. Near the Charles Chamberlain place which was located on the road which crosses the Blueberry Rock from Barnaby's Corner to the Turnpike there were four called the Cheeseman kilns. There was a small settlement there comprising five log houses and one frame house. There were five kilns on the Shaw place; four on the Duley place; Burnham had two on the Smart place; there were six Kenney kilns on the Rock and a settlement there of eight or nine houses; two on the Elijah Wood place, and two near the Irving Bruce School.

Fred Johnson, father of John Johnson, was one of the most outstanding Kiln Burners. He was the last man to burn a kiln in the town. He was hired by Fred E. Purdy to burn the Burnham Kilns. He received \$7.00 a week and his board, and occupied a small wood camp containing a stove, cot, table and cooking utensils, and he was on duty night and day for eight or nine days.

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During the month of January there's plenty of color in Gallery #2. Seven quilts made in the Town of Plattsburgh during the nation's Bicentennial year, 1976, are on view to delight the eye. In February work will begin in that gallery to install a special exhibition on the wild-life heritage of Clinton County. Guest curator Mark Gretch has spent the past year creating the show, arranging loans from museums throughout the state, and compiling the fifth in CCHA's series of local history manual. This will be a show for visitors seven to seventy plus - a pleasure for all of us who treasure the natural world around us and want to learn more about its origins. Read about this unusual exhibition in a later issue.

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