

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly By The Clinton County Historical Association

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MAY PROGRAM

We turn back the clock fifty years on the evening of Monday, May 1. Clinton County Government Center is the location and 7:30 p.m. the time for a presentation by Joseph McGrath and John Calkins about the military maneuvers that took place in Clinton County in 1939. Messrs. McGrath and Calkins have personal recollections of that event and they have been busy researching further details for a slide/lecture. Robert Sloma, CCHA's student intern from SUNY Plattsburgh, will also participate in the program. Bob's research will provide the basis of a photographic exhibition due to open in the Museum's small gallery in June. Members and friends who have memories of the maneuvers to share will be most welcome to do so.

1989 McMASTERS PRIZE IS AWARDED

Dr. Allan Everest, chairman of the McMasters Committee, reports that this year's winner is Gregory Cook of Burke, NY. His winning essay was titled in part "Towards A Definition Of New York's North Country." It is a skillful attempt to discover what is unique about the social and economic structure of the people and the area.

The year's essays came from Clinton, Essex and Franklin counties. The subjects were "The Domestication Of Betsy Ketchum"; "The Search For Footprints" (the Jabez Allen family); "History Of The Apple Industry, Peru, New York, 1988"; "The Debosnys Murder Case In Full", and "A History Of The West Beekmantown School District No. 8."

The Historical Association thanks all those who submitted entries and the judging committee - Margaret Engelhart, David Martin, James Dynko and Dr. Everest.

FLASH!! Please don't let your CCHA membership expire. Your past generosity has made many activities possible and your renewal will support the museum and other programs.

BRINGING WAR TO THE NORTH COUNTRY

By 1939 advancements in military technology since the First World War had drastically changed the ways and means of warfare as they had previously been known. The days of trench warfare were gone forever. Motorized vehicles, radio communication, and weaponry with greater fire-power and range allowed modern armies to kill more - more quickly, more effectively, and with less effort, than ever before.

The 1930s also brought growing international tension due to the militaristic activities of dictatorial countries such as Germany, Japan and Italy, therefore prompting the United States to reassess the strength of its own armed forces.

Realizing how far the United States Armed Forces actually lagged behind their European counterparts, a complete revitalization began to be implemented in 1939. This was to mark a military transitional period. Distinct changes in military organization and training were made, even to the point of a change in uniform. Military budgets called for an increase in funds for development, expansion and manufacturing. Appropriated along with one of the military budgets were funds for the planning of large scale military maneuvers to be held in the summer of 1939.

Unfortunately, very little remains in Plattsburgh of civic records from the period corresponding to 1939. Most of the materials and information for the museum's upcoming exhibition in June have been obtained from local residents and from newspapers. Clinton County residents most likely first read of the possibility of maneuvers in this area from local newspapers.

An article written in 1939 with reference to a Washington dateline release of January 18th, mentioned that budget approval had passed for First Army maneuvers some time next summer in the Northeast. Documents obtained from Robert Booth, dated late January, 1939 state, "Colonel Thomas L. Crystal, Commanding Officer of the Plattsburgh Barracks, has been informed that military authorities are giving serious consideration to holding next summer's grand maneuvers of the First Army in Clinton County, New York." Furthermore, Col. Crystal had been directed to investigate the possibility of getting use of the large area necessary for maneuvers in Clinton County, and if those arrangements could be satisfactorily negotiated the maneuvers would undoubtedly be held in Plattsburgh. Col Crystal invited prominent citizens of Clinton County to assist him in making a necessary survey to ensure that the 1939 maneuvers would be brought to Clinton County. This process involved obtaining trespass rights from land owners throughout the proposed maneuver area, and land leases on the areas in which temporary headquarters and campsites would be erected.

Although maneuvers were held in several locations, such as Hawaii, California and Virginia, the single largest concentration of troops was in Clinton County, New York, commanded by Lt. General Hugh A. Drum, commander of the Second Corps army. Over 52,000 men of the regular army, reserves and national guard participated in these, the largest ever peace time maneuvers in Clinton County since the Civil War. The maneuvers themselves were scheduled to be held August 13-27, 1939.

Reasons why Clinton County was chosen for the location of the maneuvers in 1939 range from the obvious to the sublime. Of all the resources available, the single most important

one which sheds the most light on the selection of Plattsburgh and its environs may be an article entitled "Expansion of Camp Assured", which may be found in the Watertown Daily Times, February 21, 1939. The article expresses the apprehension of the citizens of Watertown over the fact that the 1939 maneuvers were to be held at Plattsburgh instead of Pine Camp near Watertown where they were held in 1935.

Furthermore, in the article General Drum is reported as having said that there were two reasons for the selection of Plattsburgh. The first was in order "...to give officers and men a chance to work out problems on new terrain", since most officers were in the Pine Plains maneuvers in 1935. This was supposedly the main reason for the location.

Secondly, by having the maneuvers in Clinton County, costs would be considerably lower in transporting troops and thereby allow for an additional six regiments to be present including the mechanized cavalry from Fort Knox, Kentucky. Facts do not seem to support this statement, since in 1935 maneuvers at Pine Camp were conducted with 60,000 men as opposed to the 52,000 men present at Plattsburgh in 1939.

Congressman F.D. Culkin of the 32nd New York District representing Watertown assured readers that "there was no political nor any other influence which cut any ice in the Army's determination of the location of the maneuvers." It is the author's contention that Congressman Culkin's statement in itself may implicate him in an effort to ease public opinion in a political and economic rivalry between Plattsburgh and Watertown over the location of the 1939 maneuvers. The author further believes that lobbying over the location must have been quite keen, although documentary evidence to support this opinion is meager. A letter written by Senator Benjamin Feinberg to Judge Charles Harrington, dated February 2, 1939, supporting the choice of Plattsburgh (see North Country Notes, February, 1989) gives the impression that Senator Feinberg had just recently been informed of the possibility of maneuvers in Clinton County. Therefore, any lobbying that may have been performed in Washington on its behalf would most likely have been done by the Hon. Wallace E. Pierce, Congressional representative of this district. Nevertheless, the efforts of Col. Crystal, the military affairs committee of the Plattsburgh Chamber of Commerce among other groups and individuals were successful in bringing the maneuvers to Clinton County.

The 1939 "war games" held here had far reaching implications, locally, nationally and internationally. Next month we will examine how the maneuvers affected the county, the United States and, by extension, the world.

Robert Sloma, Intern
SUNY Plattsburgh

The Plattsburgh Public Library invited the Museum to install an exhibit of materials to complement its current humanities lectures on the 1930s. A number of interesting objects are on display, including a photograph of CMTC men, a crushed velvet evening coat and satin gown, invitations to banquets at the Witherill Hotel, a St. Jean Baptiste Ass'n ribbon, a man's one-piece bathing suit, and a 1932 Olympic Winter Games stub.

THE WILDLIFE HERITAGE OF CLINTON COUNTY

Over a hundred people attended the opening of "Wildlife" on April 7. Guest curator Mark Gretch was on hand to elaborate on the exhibition which will be on view through October 31. Thanks to the assistance of Rene Dufort, the Museum was able to publish a booklet to accompany the show. It is an adaptation of the longer local history manual, and it can be bought at the Museum Shop for \$3.00. We'll be happy to mail it to you for \$4.50 which includes a 10% membership discount, sales tax and shipping.

Sunday, June 25 is the date of a gallery talk on "Wildlife" by Mark Gretch. It's a fine opportunity to learn more about wildlife in the North Country and especially, about some of the birds and animals returning to this area after a long absence.

THE GREAT CCHA TRINITY PARK FLEA MARKET

It's that time of year again and dealers' spaces are quickly being snapped up. The event is scheduled for Saturday, July 8, coinciding with the Mayor's Cup Race. CCHA's Board of Directors recently decided to replace its "flea" stall with a different fund-raising activity and members will be apprised of it in due course. Many thanks to the members who sent junk/treasure in the past and those who organized and staffed the stall. More about the flea market in the June issue of Notes.

DID YOU KNOW that in mid-May, 1814 (175 years ago) a British flotilla sailed south on the lake, giving the alarm to residents and militia. Stay tuned for much more about the battle of Plattsburgh during this historic year of commemorative celebrations.

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