

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 3

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

Mar. 1961

## *The Next Meeting*

of the Historical Association will be on Monday evening, March 6, at eight o'clock, in the Association Rooms over the Plattsburgh Library. The speaker is MR. JOHN ROSS, historian of Rouses Point and writer and lecturer on North Country history. His topic will be "THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL RAILROAD"—an account of the building of the railroad from Canada to Rouses Point, the first railroad to cross the international boundary. The public is cordially invited.

### *Exhilarating Gas*

*Taken from a letter written by Amasa Corbin Moore in 1819 while a student at Middlebury College, to his father, Pliny Moore, at Champlain. (McLellan Collection)*

We have had a curious exhibition of the effects of the exhilarating gas. Professor Mussey (who has been delivering lectures on Chemistry here), having obliged a number of the students (who wished it) to exhaust all the atmospheric air from their lungs, gave them this exhilarating gas to breathe, and as soon as they had breathed a sufficient quantity they were deprived of their reason, their spirits were raised to the highest pitch and they were inspired with a contempt for all around them. Some danced, jumped, hopped, sung, and appeared too happy to contain themselves, while others ran, fought with all who came near them, talked of war, spoke Greek, and were furious and distracted. This lasted but a few moments, when they would come to themselves, blush at the situation in which they found themselves, and take their seats. Their features were, generally, distorted and a deathlike paleness spread over their countenances, but they almost all agreed that they never felt happier.

### *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Concord, 15 June, 1867.

My dear Sir,

It was very kind of you to send me, now many days ago, four interesting photographs of the Adirondack Country. I refreshed my memories of the Gorge at Keeseville especially, and refreshed also my wish and hope to see the lakes again. The visit to Malone and Champlain, the maps & conversations there seen and enjoyed have revived the old & added new interest in your highlands for me, and I have to thank you particularly for your friendly part.

If you come into this region, it will give me pleasure to show you the smallest river and the lowest hills that a Clinton County man can imagine.

With grateful regards,

R. W. Emerson

R. Corbin Esq<sup>re</sup>  
Champlain, N. Y.

(McL. Coll.)

## *The Cholera Scourge of 1832*

*Taken from an eye-witness account quoted in Hurd,  
"History of Clinton and Franklin Counties, New York"*

In midsummer of 1832, the Asiatic cholera reached Quebec from Europe, and soon appeared in Montreal. The alarmed citizenry of Plattsburgh, in a public meeting, designated Dr. Kane to go to Canada to investigate the disease and study the treatment that had been devised. But before he could conclude his mission, the disease struck Plattsburgh.

As nearly as could be learned, it leaped by a single bound over the seventy miles from Montreal, carried by an unknown agent. It appeared in a small hamlet at Delord Point, at the mouth of the Saranac and on its northern bank. Here lived in considerable squalor and filth a group of people, largely fishermen. The disease was very deadly, but for a time was confined to the small locality. Shortly, however, it began to spread to other parts of the town, although it seems to have done its worst work among the very poor.

An informal meeting of the leading citizens was held to decide upon a course of action. After flirting with the idea of flight, the group deliberately chose to remain, run the risk of contagion, and take care of the sick.

So little was the cause of the disease understood that the writer points out that after a few days the flies began to disappear. Soon none were alive, but they were found lying dead in heaps. He concludes that although their real function was to give man security by extracting the impurities from the atmosphere, "the venom of the cholera imparted to the air was too great for the capacities of the flies."

Business was almost wholly suspended, since the energies of all were taken up with the crisis. The steamboats were laid up and Plattsburgh was cut off from the world "like a people enclosed by a stern behest of quarantine."

The mortality was high in Plattsburgh, but was even worse in other communities such as Whitehall. The danger of contagion from the living and the dead was realized, but only imperfectly understood. One woman who contracted the disease and died within the same day was described as bringing unusual peril "from the augmented diffusion of the choleric effluvium."

One by-product of the hysteria was a closing off of every avenue leading from Canada to interrupt the usual stream of destitute and perhaps infected immigrants. Those already in the area were transferred to a large wooden barracks, erected near Dead Creek, where they were isolated but where the town took care of their needs for several weeks. When the town confidently appealed to the state for help with the heavy expenditures, the claims were rejected on the grounds that such expenses were an incidental local burden to which every county was constantly exposed. A heavy tax was subsequently imposed on the county.

With the coming of fall the disease disappeared, after a thorough disruption of life in the county. It was probably the worst epidemic in the north country's history.

A. S. E.

### *Clinton County Place Names*

*Previous to December 2, 1857 (when the Town of Altona was set off from Chazy) the present village of Altona was known as AARONSBURGH, as is shown on a Clinton County map printed in 1856. The late James P. Hanley, of Altona, informed us that Aaronsburgh was named for Aaron Allison, a conductor on the railroad and a citizen of Champlain, who was killed by the cars near that community on July 11, 1853.*

# 1961 SPRING AND SUMMER PROGRAM

MARCH 6	-	"The First International Railroad"	-	John Ross
APRIL 3	-	"Industries Along The Salmon River"		Miss Minnie Stoughton
MAY 1	-	Tour of the Sheridan Iron Works at Champlain, with an account of its history	- - -	John Zurlo
JUNE 5	-	Annual Members' Exhibit Night		
JULY 29	-	Trip to Blockhouse Point, North Hero, Vermont "Revolutionary Raids in the Champlain Valley"		Oscar Bredenberg

## *A General Storekeeper and His Merchandise*

About 1799 Charles Lewis Saily, son of Peter Saily of Plattsburgh, opened a general store in Champlain. Here are selected items from an inventory of "goods to Sell for Chs L Saily at the following prices—" dated November 29, 1801. Selling prices are given in shillings and pence—20 shillings (1 pound) equalling 4 dollars if in "Halifax" currency and about \$2.50 if in "York" currency. From other documents found with this inventory, it appears that Halifax currency is here used, 1 shilling equalling 20 cents. (McLellan Collection)

2 P <sup>s</sup> Black Calimanco		24 doz Cups & Saucers	2/3
	60 yds 3/	6 q <sup>t</sup> Decanters	4/6
1 piece Dark Calico	14 yds 3/	1 doz wine Glasses	1/
1 piece light Chintz	14 yds 3/9	6 lb Pepper	3/9
1 piece white flanel	23 yds 3/9	4½ lb Alspice	2/
22 Ivory Combs	1/6	3 Tin Pans	2/
1 doz red Pocket HandK	3/	28½ lb Nails 10 <sup>d</sup>	1/6
11 p <sup>r</sup> Men Cotton Stockings	5/6	1 Blanket	18/
36 paper Pins	1/6	1 Cravate	6/
34 Yds Hair Riband	1/	4 Setts Knives & forks	7/
6 Lives of Washington	2/	9 Pewter Bassons	5/
23 Spelling Books	1/6	5 Hatts	12/
3 Salms Books	3/9	6 Snuff Boxes	1/6
4 Watt's Hymns	5/6	3 loaves Sugar w <sup>t</sup> 21 lb 12	2/6
3 bibbles	7/	6 Looking Glass	4/
3 Fans	13/6	12 Strings Beads	1/6

In a letter from Peter Saily to Charles, written in 1799 soon after the store was opened, is the following paternal advice:

You will see by Y<sup>r</sup> Grocery Bill that Y<sup>r</sup> Liquor is pretty High, that all Y<sup>r</sup> Liquor is 4<sup>th</sup> proof. So you will try and reduce it . . . if You are wise You will sell Y<sup>r</sup> Liquor for ready pay only as it is probable it is all You shall get this Winter. I shall not sell any at all but for ready pay, not even to Yourself if You Wanted it.

## Early Inoculations

At a Special Town Meeting held at the Dwelling house of Aron Benedict senior on Wednesday March 1st Day 1797 for the purpose of stoping any Infectious Dis-temper Exposing the Inhabitants of this Town thierto—

Meeting opened Agreeable to Law—  
Edward Everitt by a legal vote Chosen Moderator

Voted that there should be a committee chosen for the Purpose of overseeing the several Enocelations in this Town and to appoint places Convenient for pest houses and to Consult with the Doctors and take Every precaution that is Con-venient for the good of this Town.

Isaac Wright  
Edward Everitt Committee  
Abm Beman

Attest Reuben Arthur T- Clerk

Submitted by Mrs. Laurinatis, from the Peru Town Records copied by J. Warren Harkness in 1902.

## Bank Bills

The following, dated 1864, is all on a single letter sheet. From the McLellan Collection

C. A. Bolton, Oil City, Pa., to  
Essex County Bank, Keeseville, N. Y.

Enclosed please find mutilated bill on your bank, for which please mail me another, this being too badly mutilated for circulation.

Essex County Bank to C. A. Bolton:

We can't afford to pay a premium on our worn out bills of three per cent. You will please send enough to pay return postage, and also the postage on this letter, when we will send you greenback for the one you sent us.

C. A. Bolton to Essex County Bank:

I enclose 2 three cent stamps.

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