

## THE MOOERS SWORD RETURNS TO CLINTON COUNTY

The possibility arose this summer that a magnificent acquisition might be made by the County Museum. Mr. Paul Hyland of Colorado, a descendant of Major General Benjamin Mooers, informed us that he was interested in donating the general's dress sword to an appropriate museum collection. The sword was presented to General Mooers by the New York State Legislature in recognition of his service during the War of 1812 and the Battle of Plattsburgh. The fact that the sword still existed was thrilling since research in 1987 had shown that of the 13 swords presented to heroes of the War of 1812, three were still unaccounted for, their locations unknown. The number dropped to two "lost" swords in 1989 when a descendant of General Alexander Macomb presented his sword to the museum, leaving unknown the swords of General Mooers and Joseph Miller, a War of 1812 general most of whose service took place on the Niagara frontier.

In due course Mr. Hyland agreed to donate the Mooers sword, a family treasure, to the Clinton County Historical Museum. On arrival, its excellent condition was immediately apparent. Also, CCHA member and authority on armament Rodney Ralston verified the fact that the blade is original whereas in some swords the blade has been replaced. Mr. Ralston's research indicates that the sword hilts and scabbard mounts of these presentation swords were made by John Targee, a New York gold and silversmith. The handles, counterguards and scabbards are highly decorated with etchings of patriotic events and nature scenes. The Mooers and Macomb swords include an etching of the desperate 1814 action at the Bridge Street bridge in Plattsburgh between American and British forces. Both swords are fine examples of the workmanship of early 19th century gold and silversmiths.

While Alexander Macomb's sojourn in Clinton County was relatively brief, Benjamin Mooers was a lifelong resident after the Revolutionary War and an important person in the community. The following biography of Mooers was written by Dr. Allan S. Everest for this publication. Dr. Everest was instrumental some years ago in the acquisition of the Mooers archive by Special Collections, Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh.

"Benjamin Mooers was born in 1758 in Haverhill, Massachusetts. He was the nephew of Moses Hazen with whom he later shared a long association. He served during the American Revolution in the militia at Ticonderoga and Saratoga, but then he joined his uncle's regiment (the Second Canadian) as ensign and adjutant. He was later promoted to lieutenant.

"In the postwar era he became an agent of Hazen in establishing the first permanent settlement in Clinton County at Point au Roche in 1783. As a veteran he was eligible for four lots in the Canadian and Nova Scotia Refugee Tract. As a trusted fellow member of the old regiment he was frequently given power of attorney to dispose of other lands. He began a

strenuous campaign of buying lands in Clinton County, some of it at eight cents an acre. At his peak as a landholder in 1817, he owned 49,400 acres, more than 37% of the entire Tract. So great were his holdings in some areas that when the town of Mooers was established in 1804, it chose the lieutenant's name.

"After tiring of Hazen's illogical directives from a distance about how to run the settlement at Point au Roche, he moved to Cumberland Head and started a farm of his own in 1794. His home was located opposite the present fire station. He married three times and fathered a large family. In 1788 he was chosen the first sheriff of the new Clinton County, and also the first county treasurer, an office he held for 42 years. He was recognized as the first citizen and the largest landholder of the county. He was elected four times to the State Assembly and once to the State Senate. When the War of 1812 erupted, Mooers was made major general of militia, a post that covered all of northeastern New York. This was his highest military role, which he executed with great energy as an adjunct of the regular army.

"He bought his new home in the village of Plattsburgh at the time of the War of 1812. This is the brick structure at the corner of Peru and Bridge streets which still contains a cannon ball lodged in an interior wall. After the war he bricked over the house and nearly doubled its size by the addition extending along Peru Street. In his later years he became land poor because so much of his land was not saleable, and by the collapse of the Plattsburgh Bank in 1828. In 1834 he deeded much of his property to his lawyer son-in-law Amasa Moore, in return for the settlement of his debts and the care of him for the rest of his life. Late in life he underwent amputation of an arm without anaesthetic. He died in 1838 at the age of 80 years."

The general's sword joins other objects in the museum's collections with links to his military and civilian careers. His uniformed portrait hangs in a gallery, his signature appears on a Clinton County Bank two-dollar bill, and various documents attest to his prominence in the county. We now thank Paul Hyland for adding to the general's legacy with a most generous gift that will be of national interest to military historians.

## **ANNUAL MAGAZINE IS MEMBERSHIP BENEFIT**

Copies of the *Antiquarian* sometimes go astray (it's such a desirable publication), but we have noted all the 911 changes of address that members have sent us and we hope your copy has reached you safely. We also hope you enjoy this year's contents. The eleventh edition of the magazine is the last one edited by Allan S. Everest who has signed off, having served as editor since 1984.

## NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Clinton County Historical Association  
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## SHOP TALK

The shop committee wants you to know that a very special Christmas ornament will be available in the Shop by early December. CCHA plans to produce a series of quaint tree ornaments beginning, fittingly, with the museum building at 48 Court Street. Each year a different building in Clinton County will be featured. Hand painted on thin plywood, the ornament costs \$8.00. A larger shelf version is priced at \$10.00. Let us know how many you want before supplies run out!

The first caller can acquire a fine copy of *From Bull Run To Chancellorsville* by Newton Martin Curtis, published by G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1906. Accompanied by a tag reading "With the Compliments of the Author", the book is in excellent condition. It has been consigned to the Museum Shop at \$100.00. We also have in consignment an immaculate copy of the Redford Glass Company's price list, dated 1850. The list was printed just a year before Matthew Lane, proprietor of the glass works, had to close the plant due to lack of capital, difficulties in transportation, and other problems. The price is \$175.00.

We have diminishing supplies of the following titles: *Clinton County: A Pictorial History*; *History of Clinton & Franklin Counties*; *Doctor At All Hours*, and *War of 1812 In The Champlain Valley*. Some of these books are out of print.

## PAYMENT RECEIVED (WITH DIFFICULTY)

Members should be aware that it has become increasingly difficult for CCHA to cash U.S. postal money orders made out to the Association. The Postal Service insists that a money order be made out to an individual, but our internal controls prohibit that method. Neither will some banks allow USPS money orders to be deposited in accounts. Caught between the two, we must ask that payments be made by check only.