

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly by the Clinton County Historical Association

48 Court Street, Plattsburgh NY 12901, 518-561-0340

No. 324 PRESIDENT: Mark A. McCullough EDITOR: Helen W. Allan October 1995

OCTOBER PROGRAM

An enduring theme in Clinton County's history is the subject of this month's Monday evening program. Sean Moore of Champlain will present a lecture entitled "Community Enforcement In Upstate New York During National Prohibition." Mr. Moore's presentation derives from his master's thesis at SUNY Albany where he continued his education after attending St. John's High School and State University in Plattsburgh. According to our speaker, his interest in this subject began while taking Dr. Altina Waller's local history course at SUNY Plattsburgh. He was also inspired by Dr. Allan Everest's "Rum Across The Border", written in 1978 and recently reprinted by Syracuse University Press. In addition to writing and speaking on local history, Sean Moore is an independent researcher in genealogy.

The program will be held in the Government Center meeting room at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, October 2. It is free and open to the public.

ANNUAL DINNER

The Association's Board of Directors is pleased to announce that the annual dinner will be held on Saturday, November 4 in the Centennial Room at State University College, Plattsburgh. The evening starts with a cash bar at 6:00 p.m., followed by dinner at 7:00 p.m. An insert in this issue of the newsletter lists the entree and includes a tear-off reservation form. Reservations and payment must be received by Tuesday, October 31. This event is co-sponsored by the History Department at SUNY Plattsburgh.

We are fortunate to have as our speaker Joseph Meany, Acting State Historian. Mr. Meany's subject will be "Native Sons and Daughters: New Yorkers and the American West." His presentation will explore the role of New Yorkers in American migration to the west. This topic will be of special interest to researchers of the westward departure of many 19th century Clinton County residents.

*** Christmas is coming! Watch for news in November of CCHA's second annual tree and shelf ornaments, available in time for decorating your tree or giving to a relative or friend. This limited edition series of ornaments depicts historic structures in Clinton County. The 1995 ornament is sure to please everyone.

THE END OF A TRADITION

Editor's note: The announcement in 1993 that Plattsburgh Air Force Base was scheduled for closure came as a severe shock to our community. The end of a very long military tradition in Plattsburgh is now at hand. Clinton County Historian James Ciborski has contributed an article to this month's issue of *Notes* describing the 1890s expansion of the barracks which may have led to the establishment of PAFB in Plattsburgh half a century later. Mr. Ciborski deals at length with the local politics, national military needs and economic ambitions inherent in the story of Plattsburgh Barracks' expansion. Instead of closing in 1882, as had been recommended by General Sherman, the Barracks took on new life and vitality. The following excerpt is taken from an original paper which may be accessed at Special Collections, Feinberg Library, SUNY, Plattsburgh.

"Captain George E. Pond, Assistant Quartermaster, arrived from Fort Riley, Kansas, in the spring of 1892 and assumed control of all construction activities. Pond had earlier gained great respect for originating the design and supervising the construction of Fort Riley. Based on his experience and the size of the the expansion, Plattsburgh officials expected they would soon have the most modern and efficient military post in the country. In June, Capt. Pond advertised that he would be accepting sealed bids for the initial stages of work involving grading of an oval parade ground and a macadamized road surrounding it. Construction of new buildings was not expected to begin until the 1893 season, but bids were to be taken in the fall of 1892 for a four-company barracks building, fourteen sets of officers' quarters, a guard house and a mess hall. By fall, workmen completed the parade ground grading and concentrated on laying water mains, hydrants and sewers. Although many of the contractors hired local workers, most of the profit made from the expansion undoubtedly went to the contract firms themselves. In lieu of U.S. Army records, local newspaper accounts indicated the majority of contractors came from other cities in New York, and even other states.

"Construction proceeded in earnest throughout 1893 as work on many of the major structures began, including the administration building with its mess room for up to 700 men, a guard house, enlisted barracks, and officer family housing units. The *Plattsburgh Morning Telegram* reported 'The post when completed will be one of the finest in the United States. From a sanitary point of view the new quarters will be far in advance of anything in the department of the east'.

"In 1895 the *Plattsburgh Sentinel* described the reservation as 'By far the busiest place in Plattsburgh... where buildings almost without number are in course of construction.' At that time, the commanding officer's quarters, fire station and tower, the post hospital (with its distinctive Mansard roof and cupola), a drill hall, forage storehouse and wagon shed were all under construction. The 'Old Post', as the 1838-era reservation became known, was not ignored as the soldiers' barracks (Old Stone Barracks) received renovations for occupancy by the regimental band and noncommissioned officers.

“Extensive work continued during the fall of 1896 when the weekly payroll exceeded \$1,200.00 for approximately one hundred workers. Capt. Pond remained in charge of the work and by 1897 contractors had completed most of the major structures. Three four-company barracks stood on the oval, each measuring 299 x 48 feet and featuring steam heat and gas lighting. Twelve double sets of officers’ quarters measuring 62 x 42 feet were ‘fitted with every modern convenience, including bathrooms, etc. They are lighted by gas and heated by furnaces . . . making most comfortable and commodious quarters for the officers and their families.’ An officers’ mess also featured a social club for the 21st Regiment ‘to which a limited number of civilian members are admitted.’ By 1897, one source estimated that \$520,000.00 had been spent on the expansion whose modern facilities housed the 21st Infantry Regiment. The regiment had little time to enjoy its new home, however, as it soon became embroiled in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection - President McKinley’s expansionist undertakings. Plattsburgh once again had war heroes to honor and local officials dedicated a plaque in the new Administration/Headquarters building listing the names of those killed in Cuba. The village, soon to become an incorporated city (in 1902), considered the post one of its major attractions and valued the social influences of the garrison. The *Plattsburgh Republican* stated ‘the post is made a full regimental station equal to any important army station in the country. The expectation is that the population will be something like 1,200 with a complement of officers. The presence of such officers and their families will add to the present charming resident society of Plattsburgh and the summer resorts in that vicinity.’

“Plattsburgh Barracks became a huge military reservation with the potential for even further enlargement. Later expansion did in fact occur. Prior to WW I, the training of citizen-soldier officers developed the “Plattsburgh Idea” and C.M.T.C. encampments. The U.S. Navy returned to Lake Champlain’s shores to use the versatile post’s land and water facilities to train its new officers (training included courses in basic seamanship conducted on the waters of the lake). Military hospitals converted the buildings constructed in the 1890s into medical care facilities to care for both WWI and WW II servicemen. Once the post’s military usefulness supposedly ended, those same facilities proved the perfect setting for a college campus, known as Champlain College. And, of course, community leaders in the early 1950s used the extensive facilities as primary rationale for the biggest expansion of all - Plattsburgh Air Force Base. All of these later enlargements and mission changes were made possible by the infrastructure established during 1892-97.”

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48 Court Street
Plattsburgh, NY, 12901

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DOCTORING THE ARMY, 1898

Editor's Note: The journals of Dr. David S. Kellogg, M.D., edited by Allan S. Everest, noted the presence of the 21st Infantry Regiment at the recently expanded Plattsburgh Barracks. As Dr. Everest mentions in "Doctor At All Hours", troops who had served in Cuba were put into quarantine at Montauk Point, Long Island, to prevent the spread of contagious diseases.

"Sept. 13 - This evening between six and seven hundred members of the 21st (Regiment) came up from Lithia Springs, Georgia. These were the recruits to the twenty first.

Sept. 14 - The town is thickly dotted with soldiers. The real 21st is expected tomorrow from Montauk Point. I understand they are to come via New London and Burlington.

Sept. 15 - The 21st came home from Cuba today via Montauk Point. Two sections of the train were used. The first train had the invalids and the second the well ones. I doubt if Plattsburgh ever had a greater celebration. Thousands and thousands of men, women and children were out, and hearty greetings met their sadly decimated ranks.

Sept. 26 - At sick call at the Barracks 121 men presented themselves. Many of these were in the Cuban War and have had yellow, typhoid or malaria fever. Poor fellows. They are brown, yellow and white combined.

Sept. 27 - One hundred and forty eight men on sick call this morning. I prescribed for them in 160 minutes."

CIVIL WAR DAYS

Researchers of the Civil War will want to know about a series of events scheduled in St. Albans, VT in October. Don Miner, a presenter in CCHA's series of education programs last year, tells us that "Civil War Days" will take place October 5-8 with showings of the film "Glory", reenactments of musters, drills and skirmishes, a roundtable discussion, and a session with noted Vermont author Howard Coffin. A roundtable on Sunday, Oct. 8 includes such topics as railroads during the Civil War, the U.S. Sanitary Commission's role, and the St. Albans raid and its aftermath. For more information call 802-524-2444. The St. Albans Historical Museum is a co-presenter of "Civil War Days."

Clinton County Historical Association's
ANNUAL DINNER

Centennial Room, Angell Center, SUNY Plattsburgh
Co-sponsored by the History Department, SUNY Plattsburgh

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1995
Cash Bar 6:00 p.m., Dinner 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Joseph F. Meany, Jr., Ph.D.
Acting State Historian
Program: "Native Sons & Daughters: New Yorkers
And The American West"



Entree: Boneless Breast of Chicken Cordon Bleu
Price: \$ 15.00 per person

*For further information, telephone 561-0340.
Please note that the banquet takes the place of CCHA's November's meeting.*

Reservation Form

Reservations are requested for _____ persons at \$ 15.00 each. Enclosed is a check for \$ _____, payable to the Clinton County Historical Association.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Reservations must be made by **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 31.**

Please send reservations and checks to:

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