

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly by the Clinton County Historical Association

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

No. 330 PRESIDENT: David C. Stortz EDITOR: Jane E. Rupp April 1996

APRIL PROGRAM

“Taking a Stand in History: *Individuals, Groups, Movements*” will be the theme of the Association’s April meeting. Students who participated in Clinton County’s National History Day competition on March 16, 1996 will exhibit their in-depth research projects based on this theme in an informal “history fair” setting. This year’s National History Day competition, the first of its kind in Clinton County, is co-sponsored by CCHA and the North Country Teacher Resource Center. Winning projects at the local competition will enter state competition in Binghamton; state winners will compete nationally. This promises to be an exciting evening for everyone as we view the results of several months of work by young historians.

In addition to our “history fair,” CCHA’s Publications Committee will award the 1996 Emily McMasters Prize for the Writing of History.

Please join us on Monday, April 1, 1996 at 7:30 p.m. in the first floor meeting room of the Clinton County Government Center. The meeting is free and open to the public.

ANTIQUES SHOW AND VINTAGE CAR MEET FESTIVAL

CCHA’s third annual Antiques Show and Vintage Car Meet Festival will take place July 6-7, 1996 at the Old Plattsburgh Air Force Base. This major fundraising event is being expanded to include horse-drawn vehicle rides around the Oval, a completely revamped raffle, and outdoor music featuring familiar tunes from the earliest days of the automobile era to the “Golden Oldies” of the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, the Festival Planning Committee is working to enlist period military reenactors and arrange walking tours of the historic Oval for the event.

The Association is seeking monetary sponsors for the Antiques Show. If you would like to contribute, please contact our office.

Staging an event of this magnitude requires the services of many volunteers with varying interests and abilities. If you can help, please call the CCHA office.

MAPLE SUGAR MAKING

[*Editor's note: The following is taken from A History of the Town of Chazy, Clinton County, New York by Nell Jane Barnett Sullivan and David Kendall Martin, published in 1970.*]

New York ranks second of the 26 states which produce maple syrup. A century ago Clinton County was first in total production, but it is now eleventh in the state. In 1959 12,530 gallons were produced in the county, most of it made in West Chazy. The various products derived from the sap of the maple tree were discovered by the Indians, and until the early nineteenth century were the chief sweetening agents in the area.

The first maple sugar in the North Country was made at Chateaugay in 1797 by Benjamin Roberts and Levi Trumbull of Plattsburgh. The occupation grew rapidly, and in 1816 the Town of Plattsburgh alone produced 64,000 pounds of maple sugar. The quantity produced, however, has declined in recent years because of the easy availability of good cane sugar and the rising cost of labor and fuel; many of our best sugar bushes were consumed as fuel in the local lime kilns for a quicker profit.

...Of the 13 or so species of maple trees, the ones used for the production of sugar are the rock maples and the sugar maples. The trees are tapped when the nights are cold (15 degrees to 25 degrees F.) and the days are warm (50 degrees or 55 degrees). The season usually lasts for about four weeks, from March 15th until April 15th, but this will vary from year to year. The periods of sap flow are known as "runs."

...The early method, called "boxing," was to cut two eight inch gashes diagonally across the tree about four feet from the ground. The point of the gashes led the sap into a rude spout; a chip was removed to leave a clean wound. Later, when men realized how damaging boxing was, they began to bore with an auger, at first two inch holes and then one inch holes. The buckets were first nailed to the tree until it was realized that the rusting nail contaminated the sap. Next eight to ten inch tapping irons were driven into the tree, the spout fitted into the iron below the gash, and the iron tightened or driven home. Troughs to carry the sap to the buckets were made by cutting basswood trees into two foot lengths, splitting them, and digging out the flat side. At the end of the season the troughs were turned upside down and left by the sugar bush for the next season. The buckets were made of wood and were smaller at the top than at the bottom.

The sap was gathered by hand, two pails carried on a neck yoke suspended from crotched sticks fastened to the yoke by moosewood bark. The sap was boiled in an open, potash kettle, with a fire built around it, kindled with birch bark. The firewood was green, cut only when needed. The kettle was kept full all day and into the night until it reached a density of about ten pounds to the gallon. It was then taken home to be reduced to tub sugar, after which it was packed in thirty-pound tubs. A small kettle, called a chaldron, soon replaced the potash kettle. It was suspended on a pole supported by two crossed posts; next came the sheet iron pan set on stone fireplaces put up without chimneys in the woods. In the open air cinders, dead leaves, bits of bark, small branches, melted snow, rain, and burned sugar all added to the flavor. Milk, egg whites, lard, and salt pork were all used to cleanse the brew. A bit of salt pork was suspended over the boiling sap to keep it from boiling over.

The trees were first tapped on the south side, as the season opened, and later on the north side. The best sap was found just under the bark. Wooden spouts were used until 1877; metal spouts were introduced with both auger and bit tapping...The sugar was first made to provide a home supply, with perhaps a little for trade in the local stores. Syrup was not made in the early days.

A great advance was the introduction of the sugar house with regular stone arches built for the pans and with chimneys. Building the arch was a very particular job, as the pans had to be kept quite level. The sugar house was built on a hillside or with a ramp so that the sap loads, now gathered by sled, could be driven to the upper side and emptied into the storage tanks by gravity. The sap was carried from the trees in a short, stubby

sled called a "pung," holding an 11 gallon barrel, hogshead, or puncheon in a box-like body and drawn first by oxen and later by horses to the boiling place. The tanks were outside the house and on the north side to keep them as cool as possible. An open woodshed was usually attached to the sugar house. The woodshed had been filled during the fall and winter months. Four foot lengths were used. Before the introduction of hydrometers, the density of the boiling sap was tested on the snow or with a wooden paddle about two inches wide with a square hole in the center of the wide part near the top. When the sap was of the proper consistency, the paddle could be dipped in and a succession of bubbles could be blown out into space from the hole.

...Sugar making was perhaps the most enjoyable of all farm work, coming as it did between logging and spring plowing. The proceeds were clear profit. It was also a time for "sugaring off" parties, when the young people gathered in early evening to sing songs, tell stories, wrestle, and throw snowballs, followed by eating sugar on snow. The syrup was boiled in small quantities until it would "candy." Each guest selected his own spot in the snow, patted it down hard, and was ready with his fork or spoon when the host came around to spill a patch of hot "jackwax" in the snow. Later, in the late 1880's and 1890's, the sugar parties were held in the house; snow was packed in large milk pans and placed on the table—one pan for every two people, with a saucer and spoon or fork for each person.

EDUCATION FOR YOUNG LADIES

[Editor's note: Advertisement from *The Plattsburgh Republican*, February 21, 1857.]

PLATTSBURGH ACADEMY

The Fall Term will commence Wednesday, Sept. 3d. Those wishing to join the Teacher's class should make application at once.

Miss EMMA FOSTER, late of Madame Chegaray's Seminary, an accomplished and successful Teacher, will have charge of the Young Ladies Department, for the coming year. The classes in French and Drawing will be under her immediate supervision. No effort will be spared in *any* of the Departments to secure that progress on the part of Pupils, which Parents so earnestly desire for their children.

JOSEPH W. TAYLOR, Principal.

VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE VALUABLE SERVICE

The Historical Association, like other non-profit groups, relies heavily on services provided by volunteers. CCHA volunteers lead museum tours, research questions related to Clinton County history, and assist with curatorial, office, and maintenance tasks. At present, six individuals are sharing their time and talents with CCHA. They are: Joan Duquette, Doris McKee, Nicole Rabideau, Nick Robinson, Freida Walker, and Connie Wheeler. We thank them for their dedicated service. However, the Association could accomplish even more with the help of additional volunteers.

If you believe that you could be of service in one or more of the areas mentioned above, and are willing to commit a few hours on a regular basis, please contact our office at 561-0340. We will be happy to discuss service opportunities with you.

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CCHA RECEIVES KENNEDY PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

Mrs. Ann Kennedy of Plattsburgh has graciously donated a collection of more than 40 photographic prints to the Association in memory of her husband, Roger Kennedy. The images include street scenes, groups, and significant events occurring in Clinton County in the early twentieth century. The collection will be an invaluable aid to those researching that era of local history. CCHA extends its gratitude to Mrs. Kennedy for choosing it to be the repository for this fine collection.

DEBUT OF NEW RAFFLE FORMAT

Tickets for a new raffle have been mailed to all CCHA members, who are being asked to sell them at \$5.00 each. The raffle drawing will take place on Sunday, July 7, at our Antiques Show and Vintage Car Meet Festival. First prize is \$1000; second prize \$500; and third and fourth prizes are \$250 each.

Because of the nature of this raffle, we must account for every ticket, sold or unsold. If you can sell more than your original allotment of four tickets, please contact the CCHA office. If, for any reason, any of your allotted tickets remain unsold, they *must* be returned to the office. Details are spelled out in the letter that accompanied your ticket allotment. Please call if you have questions.

IRISH IMMIGRATION EXHIBIT

Work continues on the Irish Immigration exhibit, scheduled to open in the fall of 1996. Now is a fitting time to be preparing this exhibit as 1996 marks the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Irish potato famine, the impetus for a great wave of Irish immigration to America. If you are a descendant of an Irish immigrant to Clinton County, please contact the Association office to share your family's history. Loans of artifacts are still being solicited. Monetary contributions to help fund the exhibit are being accepted; perhaps you would like to contribute in memory of your Irish ancestor.