

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Shirley L. Koester, Editor

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## *The Next Meeting*

Will be January 4, 1999 at 7:30 p.m., 137 Margaret Street, Plattsburgh, in the First Floor Meeting Room of the Government Center. The program will be presented by Kenda James of Willsboro, NY. The topic will be "Adirondack Women," and will include stories of outdoorswomen. Kenda is the founder of Adirondack Women in History, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to the research, publication and celebration of the contributions of women in the North Country. This program is made possible with public funds from The New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency and also The Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency serving the public by strengthening museums and libraries. It is free and open to the public.

## *Museum Events*

The Museum and Association Office will be closed for the month of January, 1999, to allow for care for the collections and grant preparation. If there is an emergency you may leave a message on the answering machine and we will return your call. The Museum will reopen on February 2, 1999.

We wish everyone a Happy and Prosperous New Year. To our many members and friends, our heartfelt thanks for your

## MEMOIRS OF THE HON. PETER SAILLY

Editor's note: The above edited news article is from the *Northern New York Historical Archives*, dated, March 8, 1872.

On the eight day of February, 1809, Mr. Saily, then in the fifty-fifth year of his age, and the twenty-fourth of his residence in the United States, was appointed, by Mr. Jefferson, to the office of Collector of Customs for the District of Champlain. He held this office until his death, which occurred on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of March, 1826. At the time of his appointment the whole country was agitated by the embargo against British Canada, then in force. The feeling of discontent was intense in the eastern parts of the New England States, and extended to the settlements upon the borders of Lake Champlain.

Six months before his appointment, a serious incident occurred. A party of smugglers and the Vermont customhouse officers were involved in a confrontation which resulted in the death of three individuals. Two smugglers and one customs officer were killed. The smugglers sailing on a boat aptly named *The Black Snake*, were apprehended by a revenue boat. The revenue boat fired on the *Black Snake* with a large gun called a "wall piece," killing two of the smugglers: Jonathan Ormsby and Asa Marsh. Ellis Drake, one of the revenue crewmen, was killed, in the ensuing gun fire.

On August 13, 1808, Cyrus Dean was convicted of the murder of Ellis Drake, sentenced for murder and executed on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November. Samuel J. Mott was indicted for manslaughter, sentenced to stand in the pillory for one hour, to have fifty lashes upon his naked back, at the public whipping post and to be imprisoned ten years at hard labor. The other accomplices were also convicted of manslaughter and received similar sentences to that of Mott.

The District of Champlain, which had been established in 1799, extended along the frontier, from Rouse's Point on Lake

Champlain, to the river St. Lawrence, near the west line of the St. Regis reservation, in Franklin County and included, along its northern bounds, the towns of Champlain and Mooers in Clinton County, and of Chateaugay and Constable in Franklin County. The French mills (now Fort Covington), situate on the Salmon river, near the Canada line and in the north-western portion of the collection district, was the most important point in Franklin County.

Within four weeks of his appointment, Peter Saily had personally visited the frontier from Rouse's Point to the French Mills, and had submitted to the Secretary of the Treasury, for his approval a plan which he considered "well calculated to put a stop to smuggling along the borders of the lake." The settlement in the northern part of Clinton County then extended back from the lake about eighteen miles. Upon this line he established five posts. Additionally he established a post on the lakeshore at Rouses Point to guard access to the lake and a guard on the bridge over the Saranac River over the at Treadwell's Mills. The inhabitants of Franklin County were shut off from Lake Champlain by a forest of trees and there were no roads cut and there had been uninterrupted commerce with Montreal and Quebec up to this point. There being no United States forces in the area at this time, Mr. Saily had to trust to his inspectors entirely for enforcement of the laws prohibiting commerce with Canada.

The act of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1809 prohibited exportations to the British territories "in ships or vessels only." This allowed offloading onto piers which straddled the border with Canada, and reloading onto ships on the Canada side, to circumvent the law.

Inspectors were reduced to watching this flaunting trade, contrary to the intent of the law, but not to the letter of the law. Lumbermen residing in New York and Vermont carried on a stiff trade, estimated in the spring of 1810 to contain about two and a half millions of cubic feet, one-eighth of which was white oak

and the remainder of Norway pine. Up to a half a million of cubic feet of this pine was obtained in the town of Plattsburgh.

In Spring of the year 1809, Mr. Sailly was appointed one of the commissioners for loaning money under the act of April 11<sup>th</sup> 1808. He was also selected by Governor Tompkins to purchase a lot and construct a State Arsenal in the village of Plattsburgh. The purchased contained one acre and fronted on Broad Street, a short distance west of the old Salmon river road. It cost \$150. The building was completed in August 1810. The roof was rendered fire proof by a thick coating of tar, Spanish brown paint and coarse sand, mixed together, and the windows protected by heavy shutters. A high picket fence surrounded the building. It was used as an arsenal until destroyed by the British, under Col. Murray, in August, 1813.

On the second day of February, 1811, orders were issued from the Treasury Department, forbidding all importations from Canada. At this time Montreal was filled with speculators, who had purchased large quantities of goods which they intended to pass into the United States. Measures were adopted by the collector about the plans to circumvent the inspection points and interior points of interception were established in the counties of Warren and Washington, effectually closing all roads leading to the cities on the Hudson River. Mr. Sailly urged vigilance throughout all possible routes of commerce, and through the ensuing months many thousands of goods such as six thousand dollars worth of silk goods were confiscated. Soon this problem escalated into violence. In January, 1812, a band of nine men forcibly entered Mr. Sailly's dwelling house, in the night time, for the purpose of retaking a quantity of merchandise which had been seized and stored there for safe keeping.

Mr. Sailly's house, in the village of Plattsburgh, was a "double one," the hall being in the center. The first door to the right, as you passed into the hall from the front, opened into his office. Back of this was his bedroom, also opening into the hall. The bedroom windows were furnished with blinds which, when

closed, excluded the light. During the day he kept in his office a double barrel shot gun and two brace of pistols; the latter always loaded. At night he would remove the pistols to his bedroom, where they lay on a stand near the head of his bed. It afterwards appeared that the desperadoes had broken open the front door and entered the office, intending to secure the pistols, but finding no arms there, except the shot gun, they bent the barrel so as to render it useless, and then Colberth, one of their number, went to the bedroom door; the rest remaining in the hall near the front door. The opening of his bedroom door, aroused Mr. Saily, but the room being dark, Colberth turned from it and crossed the hall to the dining room opposite. As he opened this door, Mr. Saily appeared at the bedroom door. Colberth, hearing the noise, turned instantly, which brought the two face to face, and about five feet apart. Colberth raised his pistol and snapped it at Mr. Saily, who fired in return, wounding Colberth severely. Mr. Saily then turned toward's the crowd near the hall door, the moon shining brightly into the hall, again fired and stepped back into his bedroom to exchange the pistols for the loaded ones. Some time after the transaction it was ascertained that the second shot wounded slightly one of the men standing near the front door. While he was exchanging his pistols, the whole party retreated to sleighs, which had been left standing in front of the houses. The affair occupied but a few moments. Mr. Saily reached the front door in time to see the party drive away at the top of their horses' speed.

The declaration of war with Great Britain was promulgated by the proclamation of President Madison, on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of June 1812. The news reached Plattsburgh, by express to Canada, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of that month at midday, but the official notification was not received by the government officers until the 7<sup>th</sup> of July, .Mr. Saily did not wait for this notification. Upon the first rumor, he repaired to the frontier and issued orders to his officers to prevent all intercourse with Canada.

### ***New Items in the Museum Shop***

Hand colored etchings of Bluff Point Lighthouse at Valcour by local artist Rennie Fenwick. This signed, limited edition print is available for: \$50.00 plus tx \$3.50 (shippil \$3.00). The prints are matted and measure 14" X 11".

We encourage your support through your membership and a gift membership for a friend. Membership brings the monthly publication North Country Notes and *The Antiquarian* plus a 10% discount in the gift shop.

From the Archives:.....Rouses Point was named from Jacque Rous, a Nova Scotia refugee, who settled there about the year 1790. The name was originally confined to the point on which Fort Montgomery stands. In latter years it has been applied to the whole settlement along the lake shore, from Point Au Fer to the Canada line. In 1800 there were only six small dwellings between the Canada line and the mouth of the Big Chazy River.

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