

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 37

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

June, 1967

The June Meeting

of the Association will be co-sponsored by the Humanities Division of the College and the Historical Association. It will be held on Monday, June 5, at 8 o'clock in the small auditorium of Hawkins Hall at the College. The program will consist of the film "Uncle Tom's Cabin", part of which was filmed in Clinton County in the 1920's. An effort will be made to have music appropriate to the era during the presentation. The public is cordially invited.

Saturday, July 22 - Reserve this date for the annual picnic and trip of the Historical Association. Details will be forthcoming at a later date.

IT WAS A SIN . . .

(From the records of the Champlain Presbyterian Church)

Apr. 7, 1809. Voted that it is unsuitable for church members to bet or lay wagers.

Sept. 12, 1835. On motion, the Church voted, almost without exception, to discountenance, hereafter, the Exhibition of Public Shows, such as Caravans of Animals, Circuses &c &c as they are ordinarily presented to the public, believing them to be very prejudicial to the good taste of public morals; & therefore wrong for Christians either to attend themselves or to encourage their Children & friends to attend.

Resolved—that this Church will adopt for itself the pledge, & endeavour to promote in others, the practice of Total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks, except for Sacramental & medicinal purposes.

Dec. 1, 1843. Resolved that as a church we regard human slavery as a sin and that as such it is not only the privilege, but the duty of Christian communities to bear testimony against it.

Feb. 27, 1846. Resolved, That we consider dancing an amusement entirely inconsistent with that sobriety & watchfulness & spirit of prayer which the Bible demands of professing Christians, and as leading directly to pride & levity, to a disrelish for the self denying duties of religion, to a sinful conformity to the world, and as destructive of personal Christian influence & bringing a scandal upon the Church of Christ. Resolved therefore, that we hereby condemn the practice as a violation of Christian obligations and as a church we will hereafter consider those who engage in it or promote it, as deserving church censure.

Apr. 3, 1857. Resolved That we consider card playing in private families, or elsewhere, an amusement inconsistent with that propriety of character which every professor of religion is bound to maintain, as indicating a worldly spirit and is a violation of their covenant engagements, which if persisted in, will deserve the censure of the church.

(McLellan Collection)

Gold Story - 1879

Much excitement prevails here at present, caused by the reported discovery of the burial place of a large amount of British gold, together with much other valuable treasure. The hiding place is said to be in what is known as "Hay's Woods", so-called from the owner Mr. F. J. Hay and situated about two miles northeast of this village. (Chazy).

The first indications of anything more than ordinary about this spot were noticed about one week ago, and consisted of ghostly apparitions, white and blue lights, unearthly screeching, and low muttering sounds like distant thunder which seemed to come from the very center of the earth; these signs, taken in connection with bits of information collected from many old residents, were interpreted by knowing ones to mean "gold sure".

Operations for unearthing the treasure were at once commenced, and up to the present writing still continue unabated. So far only eight dollars have been raised, but the prospects grow brighter as the diggers go deeper. The latest report that we have been able to get is that at 12 o'clock midnight of Wednesday, August 28th, a heavy iron ball was unearthed and upon thorough examination by experts was decided to have been forged out of genuine English steel not less than 300 years ago. It is supposed to have belonged to a very large vessel in which the treasure was deposited before burial.

After the finding of this, the working gang was doubled, making nearly one hundred diggers to each "tour". Although but a comparatively short time has elapsed since the indications were first observed, several thousand people have already visited the spot, and still they come, from 50 to 500 each night, (for reasons best known to themselves they all go in the night). Not only nearby but from East Chazy, Champlain, Mooers, Altona, Ellenburg and even over the border into Canada. Merchants and mechanics, preachers and plow jiggers, saints and sinners; all seem to be greatly interested in this (to be) great discovery. We are told by one who has visited both places that even Australia "in her loudest days" was absolute silence compared with the excitement at these diggings.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have already been offered Mr. Hay for his farm but at present he declines to sell. In this we consider him level, as a large party of capitalists have already started from the Black Hills, with the avowed intention of purchasing the farm if such a result can be secured with money; evidently there's millions in it. A party of Plattsburghers tried to purchase the farm but had no success.

The digging still continues. The most remarkable manifestation of any yet observed occurred on Monday night last, and consisted of the ghost or phantom of an Indian chief, nearly nine (9) feet in height, arrayed in war paint and feathers, and armed with all the implements of war in use among the Lo F Family one hundred years ago. He was mounted on a horse equally as large in proportion to himself, and which seemed to be composed entirely of living fire. When first seen this apparition was about three (3) rods north of where the workers were at work, moving to the right and in a circle; this course was followed until the horse and rider had passed around the terrified men three times, when, like the screech of 17 locomotives, they disappeared in the same direction where they had come. This fearful demonstration was witnessed by nearly twenty-five persons, some of whom were completely paralyzed with fear, while others ran off as if for their lives and could in no way be induced to return.

Upon the disappearance of the ghostly chief and his charger, work was immediately resumed by those remaining, and resulted in finding several Spanish coins of the dates 1709 and 1761. The coins are of silver and resemble in size the American double eagle.

Excitement regarding the buried treasure still runs high, the bones of a human arm were unearthed at exactly midnight of Sept. 9th, and notwithstanding the claims of some that the so-called ghost has been completely routed, etc., the unearthly sounds and ghostly apparitions still appear nightly.

Neal Sylvester, Nom de plume

(The above was furnished by Mrs. Benjamin F. Sullivan, who adds: "Clarence D. Hay gave me the exact location of this "gold digging"; it was south of the F. J. Hay residence and west of and in line with the Horace Brown house on the Hay Road in Lot 29. The F. J. Hay house is on the south side of 348, second building west of the turn from 348 to the Ridge Road. The Horace Brown house is now occupied by James Perry. Freehold Sheldon wrote this; he was Station Agent at West Chazy many years."

The Iron Industry At Clinton Prison: 1845-1877

Contrary to popular opinion, Clinton Prison was not originally located at Dannemora because of its isolation. The site was actually decided upon in 1845 for its proximity to iron ore deposits.

There had been some controversy about the employment of State prison inmates in productive tasks. Often such a practice created competition with free artisans. A new penal labor law in 1842 authorized further study of the suggestion that inmates be employed in the production of iron in northern New York counties. Free workers did not object, for they foresaw no competition.

Ransom Cook, a Saratoga County inventor, was assigned the task of investigating the possibilities and of locating a new State prison in northern New York. In 1843 he reported to the State Legislature that convicts could feasibly be used to mine and manufacture iron, and that he had "located a tract of land seventeen miles west of Plattsburgh which was capable of being mined with comparative ease and possessed favorable access to fuel supplies for smelting."

In 1844 a legislative committee introduced a bill for the "establishment of a State's prison north of Albany", and in May of 1845, Governor William C. Bouck personally journeyed to the North Country to inspect the proposed site. After making the seventeen-mile trek from Plattsburgh (three miles on foot), he gave his approval to the iron mining project and the site. A few weeks later the legislature formally approved the project.

Mr. Cook was named the first agent and warden of the new Clinton Prison. In the spring of 1845 he began stockading twelve acres of land for a prison enclosure, with some difficulty caused by severe weather conditions. The wooden stockade which he erected was repeatedly blown down by strong winds, and finally in 1885 was replaced by a stone wall.

In June 1845, fifty convicts were transferred from Sing Sing to Clinton Prison, and later forty came from Auburn. These men lived in temporary quarters until, during the summer, they completed a one-story frame building measuring 150 feet by 24 feet. A reporter for the *Plattsburgh Republican* in August found several buildings under construction, including a section of 126 cells which was supposed to be completed before winter set in. He commented on the scarcity of building materials such as lime, brick and slate, and the difficulty of transporting them to such an isolated location because of the terrible roads in the vicinity.

Despite all the difficulties, by January 1846 the prison grounds included a storehouse, office, lime house, machine shop, carpenter shop, foundry, and a dwelling for the clerk and the agent. By spring a saw mill had been erected and the mine opened.

With Ransom Cook as warden, the new prison developed rapidly. Kind but firm treatment of the inmates made him an excellent manager. As for the iron industry, his inventive abilities had led to the building of a group of machines to purify iron ore after it was extracted from the ground. Mr. Cook devised an ingenious method of using the heat escaping from the Catalan forge to run other machinery, thus eliminating the need for water power. His invention was called an electro-magnetic ore separator. Since the ore in the area was black magnetic oxide, it could be separated by means of this magnetic device instead of the older and more complex water separation method. The new ore separator was a great improvement in iron production.

Although it seemed to local observers that the prison industry improved rapidly, the financial returns were not sufficient to please some legislators. To those who had not visited the prison, it seemed that the iron production was not progressing fast enough. Mr. Cook was released from his position in January 1848 following a change in the political control of the board of prison inspectors.

The loss of Warden Cook was a blow to the struggling young institution. The iron industry suffered. Production, which had reached \$75 worth of ore every 24 hours, slacked off. But the iron industry was not the only change for the worse after Cook's departure. The first act of Isaac N. Comstock and John B. Gedney, new inspectors in charge of Clinton Prison, was to build a water-torture machine.

Other difficulties beset the prison in the late 1840's and the early 1850's. Owing to its isolated location, it was difficult to market the iron products and just as difficult to keep the prison supplied with the goods needed for survival. The previous estimate of the amount of ore in the ground had been greatly exaggerated, and by 1852 it was practically exhausted. In order to keep the industry

going, the state paid high rents to private interests for the privilege of working adjacent lands.

Private concerns set up the machinery for a nail factory at the prison during the early 1850's. This practice of allowing private individuals to take part in the prison industry continued for a few years, until the State took over the nail factory in 1866. However, the small factory continued to lose money. Although production was good (ore was mined, purified and made into several hundred barrels of nails per day), the transportation and marketing of the nails was extremely difficult, and there was still the added cost of rent of ore beds. In 1877 the iron project was finally abandoned as a losing venture. The closing of the nail factory marked the end of the attempt to make the institution self-supporting.

Constance Miller, SUC

NEWS ITEM

The Quaker Union Society will hold its summer meeting at the Keese Homestead in AuSable on Saturday, June 24, at 1:30 P. M.

The Kent-Delord collection of papers and documents is on long-term loan to the College library, where they are being catalogued for the use of researchers.

Riddle of the Month

The May riddle: as a result of extending credit to too many soldiers who were subsequently transferred, the firm of Bailey and Delord went bankrupt. Henri Delord lost his home and property, which were later restored to his wife and daughter through the generosity of friends.

New riddle: where did Arnold build his fleet for the battle of Valcour in 1776, and Macdonough his for the battle of Plattsburgh in 1814?

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