

Clinton County Historical Association and Museum

North Country Notes

Spring 2006
Number 398

Donation of the William Swetland Letters

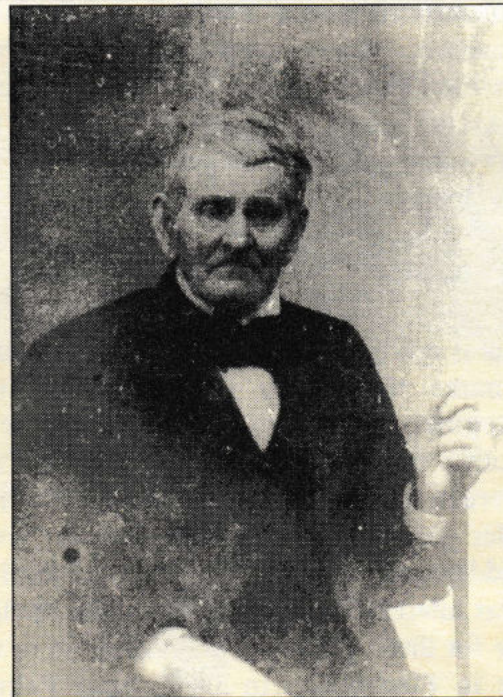
By Mike Kulik

The intimate and romantic side of a young William Swetland fell into the lap of the Clinton County Historical Association literally out-of-the-blue. One day late last fall our docent, Ken Wray, received a telephone call from California. Mr. Edward English of Atascadero had some family letters, deeds and documents that we might be interested in, and which he subsequently mailed to us as a donation.

This wonderful gift contains the personal papers, important speeches and documents and, yes, the almost 200 year-old love letters of William Swetland to his beloved Henrietta Kirtland Swetland. In this beautifully handwritten treasure trove is a tiny three and a half, by two and a half-inch green bound book of household hints, a detailed "Garden" journal, a published *Memoir of Lt. Col. Tench Tilghman*, a distant relative of our kind donor, and the Constitution of the Granville, N.Y. Literary Society, written with an exquisite hand by Swetland himself. The box also contained the lengthy "Musings of a Departing Spirit by the Death of Charles Saily," legal correspondence signed, with a flourish, "William Swetland, Esq.," business and professional correspondence up until the late 1850s, an "Address" delivered at Plattsburgh on December 28th, 1818 at the celebration of St. John the Evangelist, a Swetland Family History, letters from his daughter, Henrietta, and notes from a meeting held on 17 Nov. 1831 of Wardens and Vestry men

of the Trinity Church. Last but not least, it contains the elegantly written letters to Henrietta, only a tiny taste of which we offer in this spring edition of North Country Notes.

We are looking forward in the near future to sharing these gems with the Kent Delord House Museum, the home in which William and Betsy lived as husband and wife for many years.



William Swetland, Esq.

Image courtesy of the Kent-Delord House Museum

William Swetland: The Public and Private Man

Most of what we learn about any prominent early resident of Plattsburgh comes from reading a history book or attending a lecture. Most of what we know about famous persons such as Thomas Macdonough, Alexander Macomb and Benjamin Mooers comes from the exciting re-enactment of the Battle of Plattsburgh every September. We can learn much more from a biography, of course, but biographies of many of the prominent people who lived and died in early Plattsburgh are very rare. The late Allan S. Everest did write a thin book about *The Military Career of Alexander Macomb* and David Curtis Skaggs wrote an excellent book about the military career of Macdonough, but those are the only two that come to mind.

Another way we can learn about a person is by reading his or her letters. Back in the 18th and 19th centuries, writing a letter with quill pen and ink was the only way to communicate with a loved one or a business associate. Minutes of town meetings were recorded that way, as well as deeds and financial logs. Unfortunately, most of the surviving correspondence of men like Macdonough, Mooers, and Macomb deals with professional military matters and not with matters of the heart.

This is not the case with William Swetland, a name that many of you might not recognize unless you are familiar with another modest pocket-sized book by Dr. Everest: *Henry Delord and His Family*. After graduating "with high honors" from Middlebury College, VT, where he took a great interest in literature, Swetland studied law for three years and was admitted to the bar in Plattsburgh in 1811. Peter Palmer called Swetland "the great lawyer of northern New York." The *only* battles he fought were inside the courtroom. In fact the description of him in *Hurd's History of*

Clinton County is almost Perry Mason-like. Says Lemuel Stetson: "In open court he was great in the examination of a witness, and if he suspected prevarication he placed his eye upon the witness and never withdrew it till the witness *proved* his innocence or stood exposed." Swetland's "light blue eyes," Stetson continues, "when fixed upon a doubtful witness" were "unrelenting as the grave." Six feet tall, pale-faced and standing there in the courtroom, he could have been mistaken for Abe Lincoln.

But in 1811 these same steely blue eyes turned sweet and adoring when he gazed upon Henrietta Julia Kirtland, who he married on November 19th in Granville, NY. Now this would be just another small fact in a local history book had our Historical Association not received from a kind donor living in California, a large package of material that contains the letters, journals, documents and papers of William's love letters to Henrietta. Many of these letters are reveal a very *different* side of the cool, tough north country lawyer. They show a young man in his late twenties who is almost foolishly devoted to his wife-to-be and is very hurt by her silences. For example, as their wedding gets closer, William's letters increase. At the time he was seeking steady work as a lawyer. In March of 1811, while in Albany, he mildly scolds Henrietta for not writing more often: "...I have come to a resolution to allow you but little time for any other employment than reading my letters...and by the way you must answer them all..." In May of that year things begin to come together when he is offered a law partnership in Plattsburgh. Henrietta, of course, cannot follow. But he still expects her to write often. The strain of not hearing from his beloved shows on October 28th when late at night, after a long day in the courtroom, William writes, after a visit to Henrietta in Granville: "It is now two months nearly since I left you--since with a

lacerated heart I parted from her my soul adores & still adores--and not a syllable have you written me..." A little over two weeks after the wedding, his pen strikes a much different tone in this mother of all greetings: "My dearest and only beloved Girl--nay more--my *own* dear *Wife* and lovely Partner of my bosom."

Ten years later, when his "charming Girl" died soon after she bore a second child, he took care of his two girls, Henrietta and Lucy Ann, by himself for the next eight years. Then affection or expedience or both brought him back to the house of his old friend, Henry Delord, who had died in 1825. William Swetland and Betsy Delord married on June 6th, 1829. Both were only in their

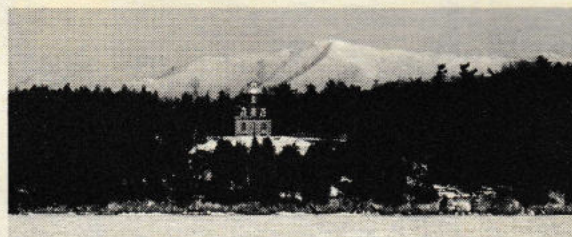
middle forties. The letters that William writes during this period are, of course, far different than the ones he wrote to his beloved Henrietta. But as a loving and devoted husband to Betsy and as a devoted "father" to Frances and to his own two daughters, we see a man who has struck a perfect balance between that of a gentle and caring private man and that of a good lawyer and "a public-spirited citizen."

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William Swetland". Below the signature is a decorative flourish consisting of several overlapping loops.

Anything Goes Event

CCHA raised over \$1,100 in profits at our recent fundraiser, **Anything Goes**. This musical event featured the bluegrass band Three Doug Knight from Keeseville as our talented guests. The event was held at the American Legion on the Quarry Road in Plattsburgh. We truly appreciate all your support in buying tickets for this event and we hope to see you next year as well.

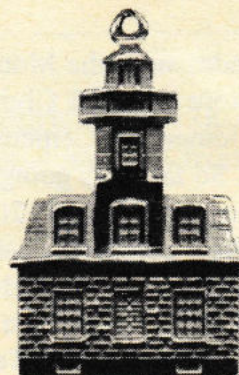
Lighthouse Openings for 2006 are as follows: **May 28, July 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, August 6, 13, 20, 27, and September 3**. Thank you to Carolyn Burakowski whose name was omitted from the 2005 docent listing. Local artist Fred Arce will be donating this popular print to CCHA at the Lighthouse season opening on May 28th.



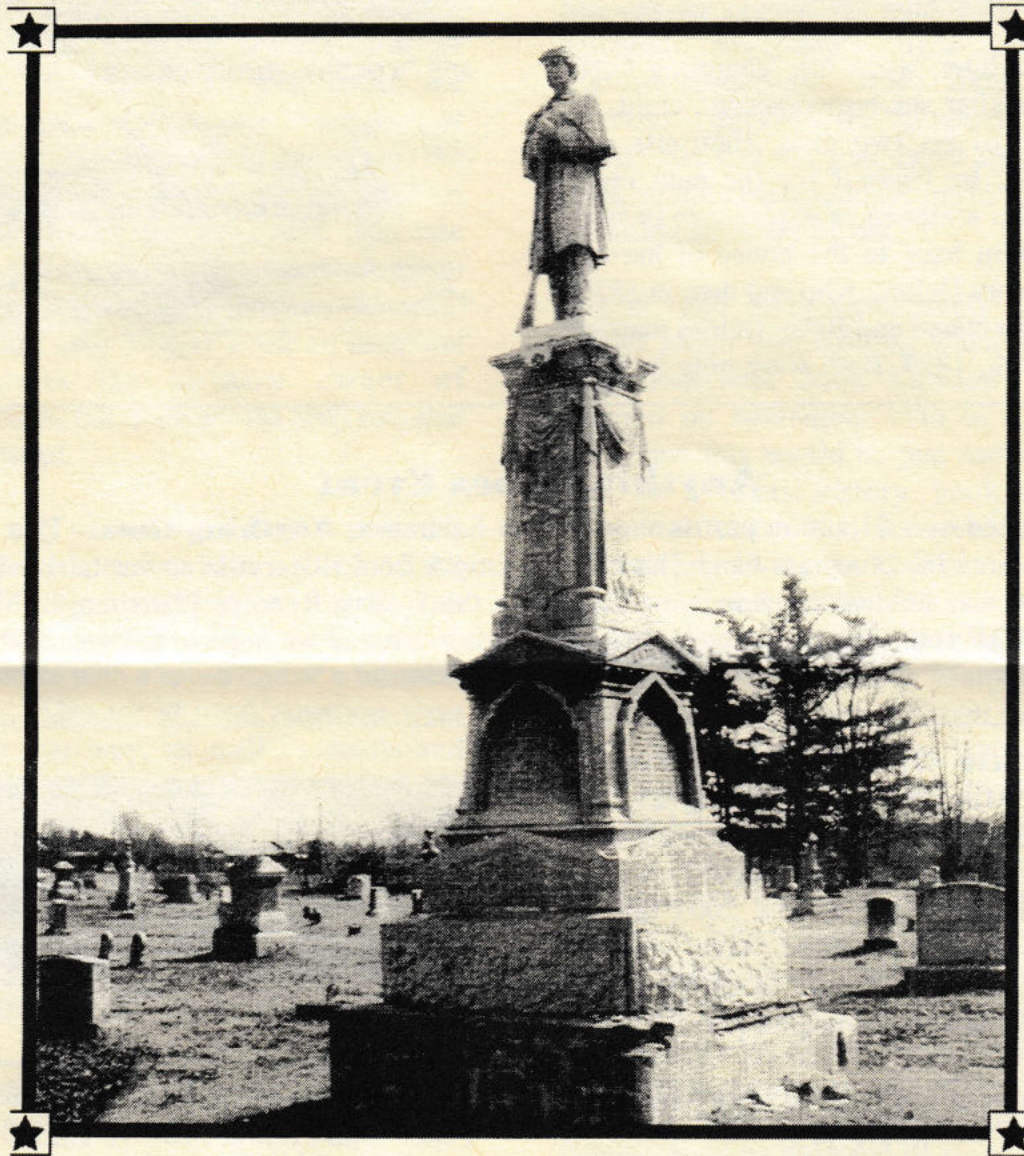
Lighthouse Charm Brings Monies to CCHA

Greg Light of Light's Jewelry Store designed a Lighthouse charm for the 2005 Christmas Holidays. The idea came to him while visiting the Lighthouse. The charm is available in silver or gold with an option of having a diamond in the light tower. The Light family has generously agreed to donate 10% of the sales proceeds to CCHA, the caretakers of the Bluff Point Lighthouse.

To purchase contact Light's Jewelers in Plattsburgh Plaza at 518-561-6623.



1888 Civil War Soldiers Monument Saranac, NY



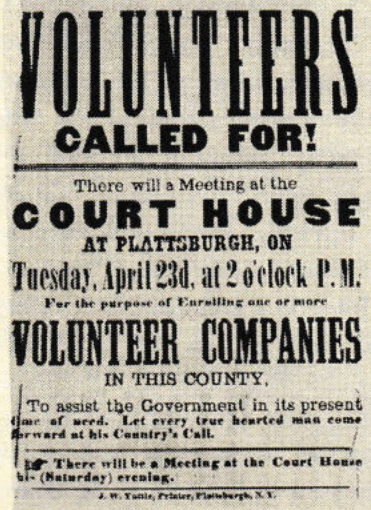
After a year of fundraising, the Monument Restoration Committee in the Town of Saranac has raised funds to restore the 1888 Civil War Soldiers Monument at Independence Cemetery. John Rock and friends joined the Cemetery Association along with Warren and Sylvia Newman in taking on this task. So far all is going well and restoration is underway. The Committee will have a rededication Ceremony May 28, 2006 at 1:00 PM in the cemetery located on Route 3 near the 7-11 Citgo store. The ceremony will include cannons and a musket gun salute by Civil War reenactors, taps, a band, and much fanfare. A reception will follow the ceremonies at the American Legion Post on the Wilson Road, Redford, NY.

For more information contact Sam Tedford at 293-7020 or Sylvia Newman at 293-73

New Exhibit at the Museum:

Clinton County and the Civil War

A new exhibit opened at the museum on February 28th. It features artifacts from our collections and items on loan to highlight the War Between the States and its effect on Clinton County. We wish to thank the Kent Delord House Museum for generously lending us Reverend Francis B. Hall's Medal of Honor which is a featured part of this display.



Building 610 Update

The elevator shaft is finished and we are awaiting the arrival of the elevator from the manufacturer. The roof was repaired last fall and the front steps are scheduled to be repaired this spring. Insulation of the attic has been done. The Museum Committee is currently planning the layout of CCHA's new home.



From the CCHA collection

Be sure to visit our website: www.clintoncountyhistorical.org Look at our feature Collection Highlights where each month we showcase an item from our collection.

Susan Skinner has recently joined CCHA as our new Director of Development. We look forward to working with her.

Notes on a Gem in our Collection: The Baird Clock

By Matt Boire

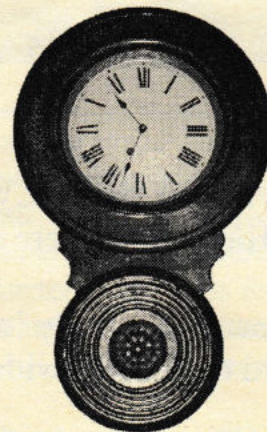
Edward Payson Baird was born in Philadelphia in 1860. As a young lad, he showed a great affinity for the new technological marvels of the dawning modern age, especially clocks. Growing up in New Jersey, Baird became a great childhood friend of Seth E. Thomas, and by the time he was a teenager, the young Baird was hard at work in the Thomas Clock Company in Wolcott, Connecticut from 1879-1887. The following year, Mr. Baird ever being the young entrepreneur, ventured out on his own and founded the Baird Clock Company in Montreal in 1888. Baird specialized in a process to make clocks for the advertising trade. This process utilized a wooden clock skeleton and decorative advertising panels of molded and pressed paper mache. Two years later in 1890, sensing a growing industrial presence in the area and cheap waterpower, Baird moved his clock works to Plattsburgh.

The factory was established in a building at 18 Bridge Street which is now part of the city parking lot. From here Baird turned out clocks at a rapid pace. Even before the door of the Plattsburgh Works had opened, the firm already had a contract to turn out 10,000 advertising clocks. Edward Baird also enjoyed his new home here in Plattsburgh. As an aficionado of the new sport of bicycling, he had won a great many medals atop his high-wheeler bicycle. Baird was quickly elected to be Captain of the newly formed Plattsburgh Bicycle Club and their place of meeting was, of course, the clock factory.

For six years the Baird Clock Company turned out their finely crafted advertising clocks, for such now famous names as Coca-Cola and Winchester Arms. But in 1896,

owing to a lack of business and several fires at the clock works, the Baird Clock Company was no longer profitable and closed its doors forever. The founder, Edward Payson Baird, moved on to Chicago, Illinois where he started several businesses dealing with locks and early telephone equipment. When he died in 1929, he had no sons or partners to carry on and his business interests dissolved. The age of the papier-mache advertising clock was over.

CCHA is proud to have on display a fine example of Edward Baird's craft. This Baird clock is exceptionally rare in the fact that it is not one of his more common advertising models and features an all-wood case. It is believed that this clock, which once graced the walls of the Plattsburgh Public Library, was one of several presented by Baird to each of the Plattsburgh hose companies which responded to a fire at the clock works in March of 1892. This clock is known as a "figure of eight" clock as can be noted from the distinctive design. The artisans work can also be seen in the fact that to save money, all the grain of the case was hand painted to imitate maple, an almost perfect illusion, and a true masterpiece.



Thank You to Our New and Renewed Members,
Sponsors and Donors
From September 16, 2005 through February 28, 2006

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Preserving our past for the future

May Program

**BLUFF POINT LIGHTHOUSE:
ITS HISTORY AND
RESTORATION
A PROGRAM
WITH
ROGER & LINDA HARWOOD
ON
MONDAY MAY 1, 2006
LAKE FOREST RETIREMENT
COMMUNITY
LAKE FOREST, RTE. 9, PLATTSBURGH
REFRESHMENTS AT 7:00 PM
PROGRAM AT 7:30 PM
ALL ARE WELCOME
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