

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 40

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

November, 1967

## *The November Meeting*

*of the Historical Association will feature the Scuba Explorers, who will talk on the subject of "Treasures from the Bottom of Lake Champlain" and display the artifacts they have been able to collect. The meeting will be held on Monday, November 6 at 8 o'clock in the Association rooms over the Public Library, to which the public is cordially invited.*

### **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**

Volunteers are needed during the next two or three months to type names from the Clinton County census records of 1820, 1830 and 1840. The records are on microfilm in the Feinberg Library at the College. The censuses of 1800 and 1810 have already been done. The Official Board plans eventual publication under Association sponsorship of an alphabetized listing of the names of Clinton County residents for the years 1800 to 1840. Volunteers who can donate an hour or so occasionally should contact David Martin in West Chazy or Allan Everest in Plattsburgh for initial instructions.

### **AMENDMENT TO ASSOCIATION CONSTITUTION**

Notice is hereby given that a proposed amendment to the Constitution of the Historical Society will be voted upon at the annual meeting on January 8, 1968. The proposal stems from the Official Board and would add a Section 3 to Article IV of the Constitution:

"When a vacancy occurs during the term of an elected officer, the President shall appoint a person to complete the unexpired term. When a vacancy occurs in the office of the President, the Vice President shall become President for the unexpired term."

### **PLACE NAMES**

**Winchell Bridge** was the old name for the Catherine Street bridge over the Saranac River in Plattsburgh. It and the road (now Riverside) leading to it were named for Martin Winchell, whose house stood about where the Broad Street school now stands.

**Halsey's Corners** are at the junction of the old Beekmantown Road and the Tom Miller Road in Plattsburgh. They were named for the Rev. Frederick Halsey, who lived in the stone house nearby, now owned by Mrs. Robert Sechler. At the Corners the Americans challenged the advancing British army on September 6, 1814, and a stone marker commemorates the skirmish.

**Morrisonville**—so-called from Daniel Morrison, whose house still stands on Beckwith Street, just south of Morrisonville. He first started a grist mill there early in the nineteenth century.

**Rand Hill** is named for Israel Rand, an early settler whose house still stands, owned by the Rand family until 1861.

**Providence Island** in Lake Champlain is said to be named for the refuge it provided for some of the survivors of the burning of the **Phoenix** nearby on September 5, 1819.

## A VISIT FROM VAN WYCK BROOKS

by Gertrude B. Myers

In early 1954 we were visited by a distant cousin whose roots were planted deep in Clinton County soil, Van Wyck Brooks, a direct descendant of Zephaniah Platt and his wife, Mary Van Wyck. Mr. Brooks was a prominent author of many books of literary history and criticism, among them "The Flowering of New England," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. In his boyhood he had spent many happy weeks visiting his grandmother and grandfather in the gray stone house which later was owned by the McMartins, up a long lane off Cornelia Street. His grandmother was married to Admiral William Bailey; she herself was a daughter of Nathaniel Platt.

On the 1954 visit Mr. Brooks brought with him a beautiful china tea set to be presented to the Historical Association. It had belonged to the Nathaniel Platts, and he wanted to return it to its own home territory. He also brought with him a great curiosity about the accuracy of his childhood recollections. So we started off to revisit his early haunts.

Our first call was at the grave of his Bailey ancestors at the north entrance of Riverside Cemetery. There he found that the legend around the edge of the marble monument read:

"Now therefore, my sons, be ye zealous of the law. Give your lives for the covenant of your fathers. Call to remembrance what acts your fathers did in their time: So shall ye receive great honor and everlasting name."

From the cemetery we went to the entrance of the lane leading to the stone house. Mr. Brooks' chief concern there was the old hedge he remembered, and he wanted to know whether it had survived. It had. Neither he nor I could identify it, but he took some leaves of it away with him, and made a point of learning its name before he wrote Chapter IV of a book called "Scenes and Portraits: Memories of Childhood and Youth."\* In it he speaks of his grandmother's stories of her great grandfather, Zephaniah Platt, raising the first liberty pole of the Revolution on Long Island. There were also tales of her uncle, James Kent, and the Davidson sisters. He writes:

"Although the links were growing thin that bound her to the Plattsburgh past, my grandmother kept up her connection with it, and I dimly remember my great grandfather, that Luther Burbank of the north, with a paisley shawl wrapped around him, sitting by the fire. In his youth he had been in New Orleans, but unable to endure the climate there, he had returned to spend his life in the old Plattsburgh house (the Bailey house), with its long driveway that was lined with locust trees and a buckthorn hedge, the house that my grandmother sold after his death, destroying the barrels of papers she found in the attic. She had these brought down and dumped in the garden, where they were burned like leaves. A few of the papers blew off in the wind, and someone noticed that one of them was a letter from George Washington, written to my grandmother's grandfather in Poughkeepsie. When I saw this later in an uncle's house, I wondered what else had rekindled the flames of this all too final holocaust in the ancestral garden.

"As for my own grandfather, I was five when I saw him, as he was seven when the Battle of Plattsburgh occurred, and I recently discovered an old interview with him in which he related his memories of it. He had picked up on the family grounds after the battle, the cannon balls that were piled in a pyramid in the circle of the driveway. He must have had some help, for there were fifty of them and some of them were thirty-two pounders. They were missiles of the American troops who had bombarded the old stone house because they knew the British had commandeered it. That was in 1814 when his father had taken the family to a neighboring farm seven or eight miles away, for safety, while his grandfather Captain Nathaniel Platt refused to leave the place, and stayed there with the British General and his staff. During the Revolution Nathaniel had raised the first company of soldiers on Long Island, before going to Poughkeepsie. He said he had never turned his back on a Red

Coat yet, and did not propose to do so then (in 1814). When a young officer asked him insolently who he was, he replied, 'Captain Platt of the Revolution, and be damned to ye, young man.' When the Yankee ships won the fight, he said to the officers, 'Wait til tomorrow and you will be Burgoyned, every soul of you.'

"The British broke camp that night and left, burning fences behind them. Yet after the war the British General sent the old man a dinner service, of which two plates remained, when I was a boy."

After digressing with an essay on the Federalists, Mr. Brooks went on to say:

"To me as a child, how picturesque was the tale of the Founding of Plattsburgh, when these forbears sailed up the Hudson and into Lake Champlain, in what they called their batteaux, the low boats containing their possessions and their slaves . . . they brought seasoned Poughkeepsie timber to use, with the stone, in their dwellings and seeds of the Poughkeepsie poplars to plant by the lake. From these were to spring all the poplars of Plattsburg, Port Jackson (Valcour), and Cumberland Head."

Mr. Brooks closes his chapter on Plattsburgh and his early recollections of it by saying that he found relatives on all his journeys—in London and Dresden, in Charleston and San Francisco, and even in Holland and Paris. His grandmother had made them all so real to him that he felt they expected him and welcomed him wherever he met them. But as he grew older, he said they grew more and more remote, until at last they were at best shadowy phantoms melting in the air.

\*SCENES AND PORTRAITS Memories of Childhood and Youth, by Van Wyck Brooks. E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc. New York, 1954.

## *Early Travel On Lake Champlain*

(From "Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828" by Captain Basil Hall, Royal Navy. Vol. 1, Philadelphia, 1829)

But we had experienced the true joys of a steam-boat during the previous night when making the voyage from north to south along Lake Champlain. The machinery was unusually noisy, the boat weak and tremulous, and we stopped, backed, and went on again, at no fewer than eleven different places, at each of which there was such a racket, that it was impossible to get any rest. If a passenger did manage to doze off, under the combined influence of fatigue, and the monotonous sound of the rumbling wheels, which resembled eight or ten muffled kettle-drums, he was sure to be awakened by the quick "tinkle! tinkle!" of the engineer's bell, or the sharp voice of the pilot calling out "Stop her!" or he might be jerked half out of his berth by a sound thump against the dock or wharf. If these were not enough, the rattle and bustle of lowering down the boat was sure to banish all remaining chance of sleep.

In the cabin there was suspended a great staring lamp, trembling and waving about, in a style to make even a sailor giddy. While underneath its rays were stretched numberless weary passengers—some on mattresses spread on the deck, others on the lockers, or on the bare planks—the very picture of wo, like the field of battle after the din of war has ceased. Amongst these prostrate objects of compassion, various stray passengers might be seen picking their way, hunting for their bags and cloaks, and talking all night, in utter disregard of the unhappy wretches cooped up in the sleepless sleeping-births round about them. At every stopping place, fresh parties either came on board, or went away, or both, so that the overcrowded cabin was one scene of buzz! buzz! during this very long night.

I went upon deck once or twice, when worried almost to death by the incessant bustle, but the scenery was not very interesting; for though the moon was only a little past full, and the sky overhead clear and sparkling, the lower atmosphere was filled with a muggy sort of red haze or smoke, arising, I was told, from the forests on fire, which gave a ghastly appearance to the villages and trees, seen through such a choky medium. On one occasion only, when this mist cleared off a little, I was much struck with the appearance of a town near us, and I asked an American gentleman what place it was. "Oh! don't you know? That is Plattsburgh—and there is the very spot where our Commodore Macdonough defeated the English Squadron."—I went to bed again.

## *A Civic Dinner For Macdonough*

Shortly after the battle of Plattsburgh, the citizens of the village, who had returned to their homes, resolved to give a public dinner for Commodore Macdonough. On September 23, at 3 P.M., Macdonough, Generals Macomb and Mooers and other officers of the army and navy, who were invited guests, joined 53 local citizens who bore the cost of the affair, in a banquet at Israel Green's Inn. Macomb's band furnished the music and Peter Saily presided. Seventeen regular toasts were drunk. The following bill, in Green's favor, captures some of the flavor of this happy affair. Apparently Mr. Green operated on some cost-plus basis, for the current taxes on "segars" and beverages were not enough to account for a 50 percent markup.

September 24th 1814

Committee	
To I Green .....	Dr
To 85 Dinners @ \$2.25 .....	\$191.25
"Cash paid Capt Vaughan .....	15.25
" $\frac{1}{4}$ Segars .....	4.50
add 50 p. c. ....	2.25
"100 Segars .....	2.00
50 p cent .....	1.00
"2 Galls Brandy 3.50—\$7.00	
add 50 p ct .....	3.50
13 Dinner fr Music .....	6.50
"50 p Cent on 20 Galls Wine	
bot of M Tyler @ \$7—\$140 .....	70.00
"Safford bill of Cider	
p. cent on the same .....	3.50
p Cent on M. Delords bill of Porter .....	13.50
	<b>\$320.25</b>

40 New 67

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