

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 41

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

Jan. 1968

The January Meeting

of the Association will be held on Monday evening, January 8, at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Public Library. It will feature a talk by Dr. Eugene Link on "Plattsburgh's Medical School and Journal" which will describe the unique role that Plattsburgh played in medicine in the mid-nineteenth century. Dr. Link is a professor of history at the College who has been on leave this semester in order to pursue his research on the social role of America's physicians.

This will also be the annual meeting and election of officers. The nominating committee consists of Robert T. Booth, chairman, Mrs. Benjamin Allen and Hans Hirsch.

Plattsburgh Military Discipline

(General Izard, in command of the Northern Army at Plattsburgh between May and late August 1814, complains to Henry Delord about the carelessness of local citizens. The letter is to be found in the Kent-Delord papers on deposit in the Feinberg Library.)

Northern Army
H. Q. Plattsburg
May 22, 1814

Sir

Not being acquainted with the names of those gentlemen who constitute the municipal authority of Plattsburgh, but understanding that you are in the Commission of the Peace, I have the Honour to address myself to you on a subject intimately connected not only with military service but with the safety of the inhabitants of this village.

Some individuals in the garb of citizens are in the Habit of discharging Fire-arms in the Streets and Grounds adjacent to Buildings whether public or private. This morning a Person fired a Piece immediately in Front of my Quarters and at the distance of not more than one hundred yards from the Ordnance Store. He is placed under guard and for the purpose of preventing a Repetition of similar Occurrences, I have given orders to arrest in future all persons who shall commit similar offences against the public safety.

All the ground within the Circle of my Outpost, from the Bridge at Dead Creek to the Picket on the Chateaugay Road and from thence to the Upper Bridge on the Saranac is occupied as a Military Position and is considered to be subject to the Regulations of Police established for the Troops under my command. You will oblige me by communicating the purport of this note to all concerned.

I am respectfully, Sir, yr. most obed. sevt.

Geo. Izard

General Wilkinson To General Mooers

This important and hitherto unpublished letter rehearses Wilkinson's grievances after the War of 1812. His military career spanned the period of the Revolution to 1814, some of it at Sackets Harbor and Plattsburgh and none of it outstanding. There is nothing in this letter to suggest that he was once the subject of a Congressional investigation and of two courts-martial, the latest in 1815. We now know that for years he was in the pay of the Spanish government at the same time that he was commanding general of the American army. Thus his denunciations of other leaders in the War of 1812 and his protestations of virtue and patriotism have a hollow ring. He is beginning work on his memoirs, and writes to Plattsburgh for details. ..(From the Kent-Delord collection, on loan to the College.)

Philadelphia March 19th 1816

If you knew how much pleasure your letter of the 4th instant gave me, you would be recompensed for the trouble you had in writing it; the bare remembrance of an old brother soldier & he a man of virtue,* is more acceptable to my breast than popular adulation, the hosannas of the giddy multitudes, or the wishes of the public servants who, forgetting their origin & their stations, contrive to raise themselves into a sort of regal dignity.

I hope the works I have in hand, which will be finished in August, may meet your approbation; whatever may be its other merits, I shall endeavor to avoid untruths, & shall suppress nothing which I know to be true; I write to inform, and not to flatter; and therefore when I strip the **splendid military feats** in your quarter, and the bloody but inhuman, useless, and unnecessary scenes on the straits of Niagara of the false glare and fantastic dress in which they have been laid before the country, to impose on the honest credulity of the people; your Jacobs, and Winfields, and Alexanders etc., etc., will be brought down to the size of ordinary men.

In former days, and more trying times, I think the people were not so mad and foolish as they make themselves in these. We had a great deal of hard **fighting**, without much **feasting**—or **swords**—or **medals**—or **snuff boxes** or **pictures**. The richest reward we could then receive was the conscientiousness of having done our duty and served the cause of our country. At present, cowards shut their eyes and make a show of courage, and desperadoes, with unreflecting temerity, rush upon danger, they know not why or wherefore; and then occupy themselves in telling lies to deceive the Government, cheat the people, and encircle their brows with a radiance of glory little short of divinity.

I sicken at such spectacles, and sometimes think I dreamed it. Alas my friend! times and principles and men are on a rapid decline, and unless the people can be roused to look and see and act and decide for themselves; unless a recurrence to the principles which gave birth to the revolution can be accomplished, the republic will hardly last your time or mine. When our national Legislature shall say that what was **unconstitutional yesterday** is **constitutional** today; when they countenance and connive at the monstrous abuses in the Post Office department, and screen from justice public defaulters, and suffer their honest clerks to be ruined; when they venture by their **own** act nearly to double their own compensation, on the flimsy and hypocritical pretext of economy—when political influence, and not public virtue, is considered by the executive the highest qualification for office; when men, whose lives have been devoted to the military service of the country, and whose services have been acknowledged by the Congress of 1777, by Washington, Adams, & Jefferson, are turned adrift in old age, to struggle with penury in a hard hearted world; I think it is time for a recurrence to first principles & a total change of men. I wish to see the Augean stable of corruption at Washington, which festers and ferments in its filth, cleaned and swept. I speak of things which you may think incredible, but which from 25 years' connection with different Presidents & Administrations I know to be true.

In the conduct of the late war, the constitution and the laws were no more respected by Mr. Madison or his Secretary Armstrong than if they had no existence; and the public treasure was dissipated with a degree of shameless profligacy, to forward Armstrong's intrigues for the Presidency.

I sat down to write you about the **Battles & Sieges** of Plattsburgh (not forgetting the Pine tree, and Macomb's Marquee under the hill, and his barges at the

shore) and have entered into a long political discussion on the state of the Government; eh bien, I answer you I have the honor to be a free citizen, and as such the constitution, the laws, the public weal, & the conduct of the public servants have claim to my first attentions. I fought for the independence of my country, and will struggle for the independence against internal corruption or external force, so long as life lasts. I have lived and will die a republican.

Munroe and Crawford are desirous to seat themselves in the Presidential Chair, and this is natural enough. The first is desirous to finish his career with **dignity & comfort**, the last desires to commence his career with **power and glory** before he has earned either. I have strong objections to both those Gentlemen, tho Munroe & myself served together in 1776 and were at the taking of the Hessians at Trent Town. But he never should be pardoned for the late reduction of the Army, which I have good reason to believe was settled between him, Madison, and the **Scoundrel Scott**, for the purpose of favoring M's election, and gratifying Madison's **hatred** and Scott's **fear of me**, who knew I understood his **villainy**, of which you shall have a full account. He is (Mr. Munroe), moreover, too slow, too temporizing and indecisive, and besides, I consider it an outrage on political justice to elect another Virginian in succession to the Presidency.

Cannot you find some suitable person east of the Delaware? In the rotation of office, the strongest section of the Union certainly has a fair claim to the chief magistracy in turn. And let me tell you, if you place the administration of the Government in a southern man the next eight years, you must bid farewell to all hope of a President east of the Delaware so long as the Government lasts; which, under such circumstances, will not, I fear, be long; and I wish to avoid whatever may lead to such an event as the greatest evil which can befall our Children and Grandchildren.

I do not, personally, know Mr. Clinton, but from what I have heard of him, he is the fittest man for the Presidency in the US. His moral character is, I believe, without blemish, his love of country is not denied, and his understanding, I am told, is superior; but, 'tis said, he consented to be supported by the Federalists, at the last election, and what of that? Mr. Munroe was supported by the Federalists, who were counted by his friends, and there is not a man among our great office hunters who would not avail themselves of federal support, wherever it falls in their way. Was not judge Spencer a federalist, & General Armstrong & Jacob Brown & Alexander MaComb, and was not, and is not, Mr. Dexter a decided federalist, tho he is now the republican candidate in Massachusetts?

When I look at these things, the questions which would determine my choice are these—is he a man of sound moral character, is he a firm friend to his country, is he experienced in public affairs, and of competent Talents & Judgments. I give you these feelings and sentiments of my heart. I give them to you in confidence, as a Brother of the Revolution who fought at Bemis Heights & assisted in obtaining a victory which gave independence to our country, and I shall be glad to hear from you in answer to this, & to know, in confidence, whether Mr. C will be put up or not for the Presidency. If he is, I am convinced Pennsylvania will vote for him, as the democratic majority of the Legislature has lately rejected Mr. Munroe 32 to 30. This is a matter of fact.

And now to the affair at Plattsburgh. I shall thank you & our friend Mr. Walworth for every the most minute information you can give me on the subject, as to the time & circumstance of the enemy's advance, the resistance made to him, the several skirmishes which ensued and the measures taken to harrass him on his retreat, with delineation of the theatre of operations, reduced to scale, for notwithstanding I have a clear general idea of the ground, I cannot define courses and distances. I should be glad also to know the particular circumstances of Forsyth's death, for altho a very bad man, I should wish to do justice to his military character. And it will be very material to know what were the precise position and dispositions of the British force; when General Izard's division marched from Plattsburgh. This is a very material point, and I wish it marked to a day. I have been told by Lieutenant Riley, whose party killed the scoundrel Mahew, that Prevost's front was at Champlain when Izard's rear left Plattsburgh.

Fearing that you may have left Albany, I send this to the care of my friend Colonel Rensselaer, who made his novitiate in service under my orders in the western country when a beardless youth, and whose gallantry I have witnessed

more than once. Do you not, my friend, turn your back upon such a meritorious son of Columbia. And that the supreme power which created, governs and disposes of all things, may bless and prosper you, your family & prosperity, is the fervent wish of

Your revolutionary Brother
and Friend
J. A. Wilkinson

P S Pray drop a line
in answer to this

* I have kept bad company in my time but hereafter will associate with none but men of virtue, and therefore you will say I shall live very much by myself—that is my plan.

MUSEUM MOVING DAY

On Saturday, December 9, the Association's museum was moved into temporary storage in the DAR house. This was necessary because the Public Library needed the rooms hitherto occupied by the museum, and because we do not yet have permanent new quarters. Members and friends should not be deterred from making gifts to the museum because although now out of sight, it must continue to grow toward the day we have adequate display space.

Moving day turned out to be a long and strenuous one. The Association is deeply indebted to the following who generously donated their time and energy: Miss Emily McMasters, Miss Betty Collins, Mrs. Marion Hallock, Chandler Bragdon, Fuller Allen and his son, Dr. John Allen and four sons, Ignatius Lacombe and two sons and Paul Allen, who provided the truck.

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