

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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The March Meeting

of the Historical Association will be held on March 4th in the Auditorium of the Public Library in Plattsburgh. The speaker of the evening will be Mr. Lee Lapensohn, managing editor of the Plattsburgh Press-Republican, whose topic will be "Fun with Antique Newspapers." Before coming to Plattsburgh recently, Mr. Lapensohn was an editorial writer for papers in Savannah and Augusta, Georgia. He developed a hobby of collecting old American newspapers dated before 1800. Some finer specimens in his collection will be on exhibit in the Feinberg Library at the College during the month of March.

TWO LETTERS FROM THE KENT-DELORD COLLECTION

- (1. Part of a letter to Henry Delord from his wife Betsey. Steamboat travel was only a year old on the Hudson).

Hudson Sept. 8th, 1808 Thursday night

My dearest Friend,

We landed here yesterday at three o'clock, went on Board the Steam Boat precisely at eight, there were one hundred and ten passengers all, the most Gentele people of the state among whom were Chancellor Livingston and Lady, the Whole of the Livingston crew, Governor Crawford and Lady of Bermuda, Genl Moreau, indeed I don't know one Quarter, for we stand on Board a short time, having a fine wind together with the steam, we moved with astonishing Rapidity, had a pleasant time, everything on board in stile, if you had been with me I should have enjoyed myself highly, not a face I ever saw before, so when I was tired of viewing the handsome Prospects on the River, I amused myself with Plutarchs Lives, tho I could take but little sense of it, such a constant chattering among the Ladies; every party kept by themselves, We said nothing to anyone, Just had time before we stopt, our Dinner was superbly elegant.

- (2. Part of a letter from J. H. Webb to his brother Henry Livingston Webb, who later married Frances Delord. His comments about James Fenimore Cooper partially confirm the opinion of others that he could be tactless and caustic).

Rome 3rd April 1830

I yesterday with Cooper (the novelist) his wife and daughters—Mrs. Haslem and Richards from Phila and 3 or 4 others, went to Tivoli to see the falls and ruins—thence to Adrians Villa—celebrated and beautiful ruins of a villa, which once extended 3 miles in length and one in breadth. The day was delightful and I had a very pleasant and gratifying day—Cooper was uncommonly pleasant—I rode and walked with him and though he is a pedant, a man of uncommon strong prejudices and self-opinionated, he is one who converses admirably, has seen and read much, and when he pleases, is as entertaining and agreeable a companion as any one you know.

The Underground Railroad In Northern New York

The Underground Railroad originated more than thirty years before the Civil War. The name of the organization appears to have stemmed from 1831 when one Tice Davids, an escaped Kentucky slave, was swimming in the Ohio River, with his master in close pursuit in a skiff. Quite suddenly the Negro touched bottom, waded ashore, and subsequently disappeared near Ripley, Ohio. The master searched in vain for him, and then declared, "he must have gone down an underground road." Since the railroad was new at this time the name Underground Railroad was given to the operation.

As a result of this name, a new vocabulary developed: those who guided the slaves from post to post were known as "conductors"; the different hiding places as "depots"; the people at the depots were called "station agents" or "freight agents"; the routes were called "tracks"; and those who contributed money but no active support were "shareholders".

The first group to take an active part in the U. R. R. was the Quakers. The Baptists were next to join in, but the Methodists did not take a stand until much later, supposedly because their Bishops were slave-holders until shortly before the War. Many individuals were also active in the movement for humanitarian reasons, rather than purely religious ones.

The U. R. R. had well established routes from Washington and Philadelphia to western New York (particularly Rochester), and these were probably the most travelled routes to Canada. There were, however, other routes from New York to New England and also to Albany and northward.

One northern route which apparently was well travelled functioned under the auspices of a Wesleyan minister near Chestertown, who was closely allied with John Brown. The slaves, having come through Albany and Glens Falls, arrived in Lake George. From there they travelled to Chestertown, and were taken by Rev. Baker to a place in back of Schroon Lake, on to New Russia, and finally North Elba, where John Brown sent them to Canada.

Clinton, Franklin, and Essex counties had their share of activity. Stephen Keese Smith of Peru recalled: "Samuel Keese was the head of the depot in Peru, his son (John) and myself and Wendell Lansing, (Keeseville) were actors . . . there were stations at Albany, Glens Falls, and Peru. Noadiah Moore had one in Champlain". It is not surprising that Peru had depots—it was formerly known as the "Union", a Quaker settlement. Mr. Smith had a place in his barn (now on the Stafford farm) where he hid runaways.

According to an article in the Plattsburgh Press Republican, there was a third depot in Peru. It was once owned by the Ayres Whitcomb Tannery. A second cellar was discovered when the house was sold to a sergeant from the Plattsburgh Air Force Base. Other places which have been more or less verified as depots in this vicinity are the Green Apple Inn in Keeseville (now the nursing home), the Wendell Lansing home in Wilmington, and the Higly house in Port Kent. There seems to be some support that the home of Dr. Philip Barton on Broad Street in Plattsburgh was also a depot.

Operating a depot was not the only way in which individuals expressed their sympathies with the movement. Mr. Ashmun in Champlain was the editor of a newspaper called "The Herald of Freedom". This small newspaper was sent to local communities beginning in 1844.

Although the U. R. R. flourished for many years before the War, it gained momentum after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. This law was felt to be so unjust that persons previously not involved joined the movement. During and after the eight-day period before the law went into effect, thousands of slaves were channeled through the U. R. R. It is amazing to realize that, despite the dangerous handicaps to travel, there is not one reported case of recapture of a slave, once he had reached U. R. R. facilities. Travel was usually restricted to the night or very early morning, and one usually travelled ten to twenty miles between depots, in various kinds of accommodations. Charcoal carts were a favorite because of the very deep sides. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law,

anyone caught harboring or helping an escaped slave could be fined as much as \$1000 or imprisoned.

Because of the illegality of their activities, agents had to be extremely careful. "Copperheads" were always a threat, and in many localities they wore incense in their lapels to show their pro-Southern sympathies.

There are, unfortunately, no actual statistics of the number of slaves who were helped to Canada by the U. R. R. Barbara Walker in the **New York Folklore Quarterly** estimates that some fifty thousand slaves escaped during a period of fifty years.

Alayne Noyes, SUC

President Monroe In Clinton County

When President Monroe took office in 1817 he immediately made plans to visit the forts and posts along the seaboard from Baltimore to Portland, and from Portland westward to Detroit. After the War of 1812, Congress had voted large sums of money for coastal fortifications and frontier outposts; the President felt called on to make a personal inspection of the work in progress. He also hoped to bind up some of the partisan wounds left by the war. In May, the President left Washington on a three-and-a-half month journey through thirteen states.

When it was learned that the President would visit Plattsburgh, a meeting was called, a reception committee appointed, an orator chosen and money which had been accumulated for the purchase of a fire engine was appropriated to defray the expenses of his entertainment. Monroe came from Maine across New Hampshire and Vermont. From Burlington he went to Vergennes by boat, where he inspected the iron works and saw the shipyards where Macdonough had built his fleet. From there he took the **Phoenix** to Rouses Point, where he arrived at 4 a.m. on the morning of July 26, 1817. He went ashore at 6 with his party, which included Peter Saily, Henry Delord and C. P. VanNess of Burlington. They breakfasted at the home of Ezra Thurber, who then conducted them on a tour of the recently started fort north of the village.

At noon on the same day, the President and his party arrived at Cumberland Head and were taken to the wharf at the village on Colonel Atkinson's barge. From the wharf the President was escorted to Israel Green's Inn by several military units. At the hotel Reuben H. Walworth delivered an address of welcome. As the President passed into the Inn the young ladies from Miss Cook's and Miss Forrence's schools strewed flowers in his path.

In the afternoon the President reviewed the troops, inspected the barracks and visited the army hospital. He was pleased with the regimental library of 250 volumes. In the evening he went to a party at the home of naval Captain Sidney Smith on the site of the present YMCA. The next day, Sunday, he attended the Presbyterian church and in the afternoon took tea at the Delord home. Plattsburgh citizens warmed to their President for his modesty, informality and kindness.

On Monday, July 28, Monroe proceeded westward on the turnpike attended by a military escort of cavalry under command of Captain Sperry. He was also accompanied by a great number of citizens on horseback. The Plattsburgh committee served dinner for the President and his party at 2 o'clock near a triumphal arch of green boughs erected some 13 miles on the Chateaugay road. At that time the President gave the following toast:

The Citizens of Plattsburgh—May their future prosperity equal the renown which their place has acquired.

Monroe found the turnpike in a deplorable condition. Realizing the importance of a good road to Ogdensburg in a future war, when he returned to Washington he directed that the troops at the Plattsburgh barracks be put to work on it. Troops had already been employed on the fort at Rouses Point, but were sent back to Plattsburgh because of their loud complaints over the heavy work. They were no happier to be assigned to road-building, but for months they worked between Plattsburgh and Chateaugay. The road has since been known as the Military Turnpike.

What Were They??

Research for a history of the Town of Chazy currently being written by Mrs. B. F. Sullivan and Mr. D. K. Martin has turned up two items which cannot be precisely explained. Does anyone know or have a reasonable theory what these were or exactly how they worked?

No. 1. About 1806 Simeon Wood built a grist mill on the north branch of the Little Chazy at or near West Chazy Village.

He is said to have powered this mill with water from the second saw mill in West Chazy. The saw mill was built about 1802-3 by a man named Ormes about whom nothing else is known. The water is said to have been carried from the saw mill to the grist mill by a canal (sluice?) What was this canal?

No. 2. Before 1800 Lyman Clothier settled on the Military Turnpike.

On March 25th 1801, Pliny Moore of Champlain mentions in a letter "Clothier's apparatus transportation." What was apparatus transportation?

Riddle of the Month

The answer to the February riddle: the modern name of "Kruyn-Punt" or "Pointe a la Chevelure", according to Mr. Maurice Turner of Keeseville, who submitted the question, is Crown Point. The weight of historical evidence, despite W. C. Watson's writings and an Association member who answered the riddle, favors this interpretation. The French "Pointe a la Chevelure" (head of hair), the English though of as Scalp Point, but renamed it "Crown" Point.

New riddle: what are the modern names for Long Island and for Lac du Saint Sacrement?

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