

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 62

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

February 1970

THE FEBRUARY MEETING

February 2, 1970—The meeting will be held in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library at 8:00 P.M.

The subject of the evening will be "Noah John Rondeau, Adirondack Hermit," presented by Maitland De Sormo, author of the recently published biography with the same title. Mr. De Sormo is currently a lecturer on Adirondack history at the North Country Community College in Saranac Lake. Among his other writings is "Told Around the Campfire," together with some 30 articles which feature famous northern tier people and places.

The public is cordially invited to all meetings of the Association.

OUR NEW OFFICERS

At the January meeting of the Association, the following were elected as our officers for 1970:

Dr. Eugene P. Link—President
Mr. Evalon A. Merritt—Vice President and Chairman of Program Committee
Mr. David K. Martin—Secretary
Mr. John A. Caramia—Treasurer
Mrs. Ruth Hecht—Curator

WHILE THE CAT'S AWAY . . .

Dr. Allan S. Everest is loafing in Europe for six months or so. (According to him, he will be working—teaching the American version of our history in the Department of American Studies at the University of Hull, in Hull, England.)

During his absence, Mr. Glyndon Cole will assist the co-editor in producing these **North Country Notes**. Correspondence (complimentary, of course) should be addressed to C. W. McLellan, Champlain, N. Y. Material for inclusion in the Notes is always appreciated.

PROFIT IN MAKING HATS

(George Freligh to his brother, Dr. Michael Freligh, at Watervliet. George was then in business on "Middle Hero," Vermont, but was soon to settle in Plattsburgh. From the collections at the Feinberg Library.)

22d Aug 1803

Dear Brother

. . . . It is the hatting business which I have commenced and is very lucrative in this country. I have had nearly 100 hats made. The greatest part I have sold for \$4 and many for 7 & 8, some few wool hats for \$2. From the above you can form an idea how immensely lucrative the business is when I tell you that the stock for a hat does not cost over 150 cents, for wool hat not more than 75 cents. You will be a little surprised, perhaps to hear I am at work myself at the trade. But it became absolutely necessary to inform myself of the nature of the hatting business as well as the art to carry it on to an advantage.

AN INVESTIGATION OF COUNT CHARLES DE FREDENBURG

The Count Charles de Fredenburg was the first white settler in the area now called Plattsburgh. However, there is not much more than that known about this man. Mystery surrounds his background and his death.

What IS known of de Fredenburg is that he had been a captain in the British army during the French and Indian War. In the autumn of 1766 de Fredenburg accompanied General Moore and General Carleton to the Lake Champlain area in order to set up the boundary line between New York and Canada. This was apparently de Fredenburg's first visit to the area. The land must have impressed him very much, because the next year he and nineteen others petitioned for a twenty-thousand-acre grant at Cumberland Head. A warrant of survey was issued in 1768, and on January 11, 1769 he was granted thirty thousand acres directly by the King of England, as a reward for his military services. The grant included the land just opposite Valcour Island, both sides of the Saranac River and the point of Cumberland Bay (then called Squinanton).

One of de Fredenburg's closest neighbors was John La Frombois, who settled on the lake shore in what is now Chazy in 1763 with two other men—Goude and Swarte. William Hay and Henry Cross were also neighbors of the Count. They lived on Friswell's Patent opposite Valcour Island. Lastly, William Gilliland was a neighbor. Although his settlement was at the mouth of the Boquet, in 1766 he set up a small cabin that never became a permanent dwelling, at the mouth of the Salmon River. He did this to deter de Fredenburg from extending his claims at Gilliland's expense.

An air of mystery also surrounds de Fredenburg's private life. He was married, and some claim that his wife had once been a lady-in-waiting at the English court. De Fredenburg brought his wife, his children and twelve workmen to help set up a permanent settlement. They reached Lake Champlain by travelling up the Richelieu River. They portaged around the rapids at Chambly, entered Lake Champlain and stopped at the mouth of the Saranac River.

De Fredenburg and four others went about two and a half miles up the Saranac, where they found a falls just below which they built a saw mill. It was located on the north side of the river. The area can be described as follows: The bank on the north side (the mill side) is about eight feet above the river and then gradually rises to about forty feet. The south side of the river has a steep fifty-foot bank which levels out on a plateau upon which Indians once had a camp. Woods surrounded the river and covered the whole area of de Fredenburg's settlement.

De Fredenburg built a home for his family on what is now Bridge Street, at the mouth of the Saranac, on its south bank. At first all structures were built of logs, for temporary use. Then de Fredenburg built a sawed lumber house which he and his wife furnished lavishly. They planted crops, operated the saw mill and made plans for their settlement, which they called "Fresburg".

Indians who were friendly to the settlers apparently first brought news of the Revolution. It was rumored in 1776 that Benedict Arnold was going to command a fleet on Lake Champlain, so de Fredenburg decided to leave. He took his family to Montreal during the summer. He remained a Loyalist throughout the Revolution. After the war, in 1785, he returned alone to his settlement in New York and found that Fresburg had been entirely burned. After de Fredenburg had seen the destruction of his property and hopes (probably through action of both Patriot and British forces), he reportedly appeared and disappeared at the premises for periods of time. Eventually he disappeared altogether. Most people believed he had been murdered, with robbery as the motive. Another theory of the times was that he had been tomahawked after an argument with some Indians.

On June 14, 1894 a discovery brought the de Fredenburg mystery back into public interest. During excavations at Fredenburg Falls for a pulp mill, workers found a skeleton that had been buried in a very shallow grave. Some doubted that the body was de Fredenburg's, but rather a part of an ancient Indian burial ground. But the shallow grave seemed to convince most people that the person had been murdered. Also, as far as anyone knew, no one except the Count de Fredenburg had been reported missing and not accounted for afterwards.

Scientific evidence also added to the belief that the skeleton was de Fredenburg's. The bones were found 118 years after his disappearance and the amount of decay indicated that the body could not be much older or younger than that. Also, the bones were of an adult and were found very near to the place where the de Fredenburg mill had been. So, at the present time the theory is that de Fredenburg was robbed and then murdered.

After de Fredenburg's "disappearance" and after the war had been over for a while, the count's descendants tried to reclaim his land. They were not successful, though, because it had been confiscated by the state as Tory property. Also, Zephaniah Platt of Poughkeepsie (who was a close friend of Governor George Clinton, also from Poughkeepsie) decided that he wanted to establish a settlement on Lake Champlain. With the Governor's help, he and thirty two others bought 31,500 acres of the de Fredenburg land on October 26, 1784. (On August 12, 1784, he and the thirty two had obtained a certificate stating that the de Fredenburg lands were "vacant and unappropriated"). The land title to Cumberland Head was taken over by William Gilliland.

In New York City the new owners decided to give exclusive title to the lots at the mouth of the Saranac River (fifty acres on the south side and one hundred acres on the north side) to any men who would build a dam and mills on the river within two years. The land to be granted included what was to become the heart of the city of Plattsburgh.

Twelve of the original thirty two landowners took up this challenge. They held a meeting in Poughkeepsie on December 30, 1784. They decided to build a saw mill, a grist mill and a forge. In the spring of 1785 they moved to the Saranac region and began a new settlement on the site of Fresburg.

Carol Wartberg, SUC

HIGHER EDUCATION IN 1841

Dr. Alexander Taggart McGill was the grandfather of Mary McGill, who married the Rev. Joseph Gamble, for many years the Presbyterian minister in Plattsburgh. In 1841 Dr. McGill was offered the presidency of Lafayette College in Easton, Pa., and the Trustees of the college painted a rosy picture of the academic life:

"As to the duties of the President—the amount of teaching is not the matter desired of him. Moral Philosophy, Metaphysical Evidences of Christianity and a few minor branches of the same nature are all that would be expected and certainly all that would be required. His principal duty would be to superintend the whole establishment—certainly not to teach Latin and Greek.

"You ask : Is the promised salary sufficient to support a family comfortably? I have no hesitation in replying to this in the affirmative. The salary to be paid you will be \$1000 per annum, with a commodious and pleasant dwelling . . . As to preaching, about four times a week."

BLOW SUGAR BUSH GRAVEYARD — ALTONA

(This is the first of a series on abandoned graveyards in Clinton County, copied by the McLellans, which will be continued if interest is created. Comments, additions and corrections will be appreciated.)

This abandoned graveyard is located on the 80-acre Refugee Lot #110, in the southeast corner made by the road running to Sciota, and that running to Woods Falls, about 600 feet from the latter road, in the so-called Blow Sugar Bush, on the top of a hill overlooking a gravel pit. Completely neglected, with only two stones standing, when copied in 1940.

Names found include Ella E. Wood, wife of Leonard E. Averill; Mary, wife of Lewis Chamberlain; Frederick Davis; Wallace, son of M. & S. Thornton; Grover C., son of Joseph & Zoä Pyper; also Presilla, John, Carrie, Joseph J., Angela L. and Frankie Wood.

Of particular interest are: Ebenezer Wright, who married Matilda K., daughter of Simeon Wood and his first wife Phebe Stockwell—Matilda was born May 30, 1802, the first birth in the town of Altona; also Sarah Smith (the second wife of Simeon) who died in 1867, aged 80. Simeon and his first wife are buried in the Douglass Cemetery, in the southeastern part of the town.

The oldest date found was 1856, the most recent 1894.

THE SALE OF VETERANS' RIGHTS

(The following document represents the transfer of one kind of claim against the government into the hands of speculators after the Revolution. It was these speculators that Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton later sought to reward by redeeming their paper at par, giving them a huge profit. George Freligh was the father of John and George Freligh, who settled in Plattsburgh. From the collections at the Feinberg Library.)

I the subscriber, William Thornton, for and in consideration of the sum of twenty pounds lawful money of the State of New York, to me in hand paid by George Freligh, the receipt of which I hereby acknowledge, Grant and transfer unto the said George Freligh, his heirs & assigns for ever, all such wages as are due to me for the service as a matross in the New York Artillery, together with such gratuities or bounties of monies & lands I am indebted to, Pursuant to an act of Congress of the United States of America & the resolves of the legislature of the said state of New York, as witness my hand & Seal this 12th day of September, Anno Domini 1783.

his
William X Thornton
mark

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Answer to the old riddle: The old Plattsburgh M. E. Church on Court Street, next to the county buildings. The original M. E. church burned in 1846, and was rebuilt—the new structure lasting until 1969.

New riddle: What is the full name of "Hurd" who published county histories during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, including the "History of Clinton and Franklin Counties" in 1880?

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Issued by the
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

David K. Martin, Secretary
West Chazy, New York

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