

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 69

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

November, 1970

## *The November Meeting*

of the Association will be held at 8 o'clock Monday evening, November 2nd, in the Auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. The speaker of the evening will be the noted Director of the Chateau Ramezay, Museum in Montreal, Mr. J. D. King, who will talk on "The Richelieu and Lower Lake Champlain." His museum was visited by Association members on their trip in June 1969. Its collection of Canadiana is outstanding and includes mementoes of the American occupation of Montreal in 1776.

## **An Author Relaxes**

Making the index to a large book is drudgery, and the index to our history of Chazy seemed to drag on, day after day, all summer and well into September. The work did have its moments, however, and I would like to share the lighter side.—D. K. Martin.

## **A Chazy Shopping List**

(composed from the Index of A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF CHAZY  
by Neil J. B. Sullivan and David K. Martin)

This trip will ask you to TREADWELL (p. 196) through the BURRS (pp. 173-4), the HEDGES (p. 111), and the BUSHES (pp. 310, 319) on the GRASS (p. 175) River among the STONES (p. 293) across the BRIDGES (p. 307) over the WATERS (p. 4) of the RIVERS (p. 316) to visit the BUTCHER (p. 319), the BAKER (p. 44), the BREWER (p. 327), the GROSS (p. 327)er, and the CLOTHIER (p. 63) (or is it the TAYLOR (p. 179)?). If some of the twists of the TRIPP (p. 339) don't give you too much PAYNE (p. 177), or make you too TREMBLAY (p. 65), give a YELLE (p. 316) and ask for MOORE (p. 1).

## **THE SHOPPING LIST:**

A. BACON (87)	SUGAR Tare 80 (317)
John HAMstrank (43)	Mrs. FLOWER (87)
Miss DRAKE (262)	Isaac RICE (96)
H. C. FISH (166): SOLE Supervisory	Peter BUTTER (325)
School Dist. (312)	Glen CHEESEman (316)
Heman PIKE (312)	Elder SPICER (230):
SALMON River (38)	Mrs. DILL (262)
John TART (309)	Herman GARLICK (227)
Alvah CHAMPAGNE (316)	R. L. MACE (192)
BRANDYWINE (Penn., 48)	Samuel SAGE (63)
Harry PEASE (5)	Moses PICKLE (95)
John BEAN (273)	Sally BUTTON (96)
David LEEK (226)	BOQUET River (38):
ORANGE River (2)	Mr. ROSE LILLIE (273)
Nemiah BERRY (90)	Peter TULIP (207)
Alive JELLY (194)	Cubus TOBACCO (34)
All to be STOWED (196) in several STRONG (100) BAGGS (272) and carried HOLMES (29).	

## *The Plattsburgh Theatre 1893-1928*

The expanding community of Plattsburgh had long been desirous of a public assembly hall where popular concerts could be performed and items of general interest debated. The problem was solved in 1892 when a leading citizen, Smith M. Weed, announced his plans for such a building. The site chosen was on the corner of Court and Marion Streets. Here would eventually be centered the town and village offices with vaults for public documents and records (available for a moderate rental fee), a local lock-up, a large assembly room and, most of all, a large theatre.

The finished structure extended 111 feet along Court Street and 66 feet on Marion Street and was four stories (90 feet) high. Marion Street boasted the front entrance, modeled in the Italian Renaissance style; the Court Street side was relatively unornamented; and the other two walls were plain in anticipation of future annexes.

The grand opening of the Plattsburgh Theatre, popularly known as the Weed Building, was set for April 5, 1893. Since many people wanted both to occupy choice seats and express their appreciation of Mr. Weed, it was decided to auction the seats for the first performance and donate the proceeds to him. The auction was held on March 29th, on the stage of the theatre. John Farnsworth acted as auctioneer and music was provided by the Plattsburgh Banjo Club. By bidding the highest, Mayor Baker received the first choice of boxes for \$100; J. B. Riley the second for \$60; Henry Davis the third for \$100; Charles Martin the fourth for \$35; John Ross the fifth for \$25; and J. C. Smith the sixth for \$35. The first orchestra seat went to A. M. Warren for \$15 and the first balcony seat to T. F. Conway for \$10. Thereafter the seats sold for \$11, \$10, \$5, and down to \$2. Approximately 275 positions were sold for a total of \$1,700. The sale of the remaining seats began on April 3 at prices ranging from one to fifteen dollars.

To provide transportation for persons from out of town, special trains were operated from Ticonderoga, Rouses Point, and Chateaugay to Plattsburgh and return on the same night.

The building cost about \$80,000, most of which went into the theatre. The large main lobby was done in Louis XVI style. The dimensions of the auditorium were 63 by 50 feet with a full view of the stage from every seat. It had a capacity of 1002—the orchestra with 440 seats, the balconies 307, and the galleries 255. When used as an assembly hall and utilizing stage and standing room, there was space for approximately 1800 persons.

A capacity crowd turned out for the opening night performance by Thomas W. Keene and supporting company in **The Merchant of Venice**. As reported in the **Plattsburgh Republican**, "8:00 found the audience of 1,000 people—representing the wealth, fashion, culture, and refinement of Plattsburgh and Clinton County", in thunderous applause as the lights came on and the orchestra led by Professor Le Jeune played "Hail Columbia". Although everyone agreed that Mr. Keene gave an excellent performance as Shylock, the **Oxford Companion to the Theatre** declares that Keene was "somewhat old-fashioned in his acting, being most popular in the smaller and less sophisticated cities."

The newspapers were loud in their praise of Smith M. Weed but there seems to have been an undercurrent of speculation that he stood to make a good profit from renting the theatre and office space. Dr. D. S. Kellogg probably reflected this opinion when he wrote in his journal: "Last evening was the opening of the Plattsburgh Theatre. Thomas W. Keene played the Merchant of Venice. The house was full. The seats were auctioned off to give Mr. Weed a profit." Dr. Kellogg's second experience at the theatre, in May, led him to record of **Robin Hood**: "The play was mediocre all through. I presume I should have enjoyed it more had we not sat too near and had not the space been so narrow I could not stretch out my legs. We could see the paint and lines and colored lashes and eyebrows of the actors, and through these and the stage smiles we could see the sad, natural faces of the actors. Many a time they lapsed back into sadness."

The second performance, **One of the Bravest** by Charles McCarthy, called for "six beautiful snow-white Arabian horses, a real steam engine and hose carriage, and a trick pony" to appear on stage. In contrast to the opening night presentation, the prices were 75c, 50c, and 25c. Apparently during this show a short man had the misfortune to sit behind a lady with a big hat. His creative instincts were inspired and he wrote a poem describing his unhappy experience.

## The Reverie of a Short One at the Plattsburgh Theatre April 17, 1893:

Oh theatre hat! Oh theatre hat!  
What fiend possessed your owner  
To make you grow so rank and tall,  
And right there rear you like a wall?  
Oh theatre hat! Oh theatre hat!  
What fiend possessed your owner?

A platter flat, a spike of jet,  
Two great big bows, a rose, and yet  
A squirrel's tail. Some grass,

Alas!

Oh drat

That hat! . . .

For several years in the early 1900's few stage performances were put on. Benefit plays were sometimes staged by local people to raise money for community projects. Political rallies were held in the auditorium. Miss Emily McMasters recalls hearing Teddy Roosevelt speak in 1912 when he was running for office under the Bull Moose Party. The Elks held impressive memorial services here every first Sunday in December. Summer school classes also met in the auditorium. Frank Provost recalls that theater productions were revived during World War I when the Plattsburgh Barracks offered a series of training camps. Many New York shows were imported to entertain the officers. When motion pictures became "the thing" the theatre was outfitted with the proper equipment to keep in step with the times. Vaudeville acts were shown between the film features. Travelling minstrel shows featuring Honey Boy Evans, Lou Dockstadter, or Gus Hill frequently performed at the theatre.

The Plattsburgh Theatre continued to entertain the townspeople until the spring of 1928. Then disaster struck! In the early hours of March 17th a spark from a defective wire in the Clinton Theatre next door ignited into flames which in a few hours destroyed both the Clinton and Plattsburgh Theatres. Fire-fighting was made more difficult because a fuse blew at the Gas and Electric Company, thus dousing the lights of the whole city for nearly a half an hour. The distressed firemen had to direct the beams of car headlights onto the scene in order to manage their equipment properly.

Shortly after 2:00 A.M., Ralph J. Henry, manager of the theatre, smashed his way into the box office to retrieve the money and records kept there. Despite heroic efforts by city and Barracks firemen, the Plattsburgh Theatre was completely destroyed. Only the four 90-foot-high brick walls remained standing. Marion and Court Streets in the immediate vicinity were placed off limits for the protection of the flocks of people who came from miles around to see the results of the disastrous fire. The ruins were soaked down all that day and night.

Although the municipal offices had long since moved into the new City Hall, commercial offices located in the Weed Building included the Mountain Lumber Company, the New York Life Insurance Company operated by William Mayette, and the Opera Beauty Salon. A newsstand, the Frigidaire Company, and the Maytag Washing Machine agency were also either totally or partially lost during the fire. Although today only a parking lot occupies the site of the once-elegant Plattsburgh Theatre, it lives in the memories of the city's long-time residents.

Susan Laundree, SUC

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## RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

October riddle: this was answered by J. F. Ladue of State Road, Plattsburgh, who says, "It was sort of a rest home for invalids. It was west of the Moffitt Road and south of the Pardy Road near Dead Creek."

New riddle: What prominent residents of the county died, one minus an arm and the other minus a leg?

Anyone who gained the impression from the last "Notes" that we had seen the last of Woody McLellan is bound to be disappointed. He has not only returned from his trip but has resumed his activities with the Historical Association, the Masons, the Stamp Club and other groups too numerous to mention.

## MEMBERSHIP IN THE ASSOCIATION

At its fall meeting the Board of Directors of the Association revised the schedule of annual membership dues, effective January 1, 1971, as follows:

Student membership .....	\$ 2.00
Adult single membership .....	3.00
Contributing membership .....	10.00
Patron .....	25.00

The Board also decided that, effective in 1971, memberships that have not been renewed by July 1st will be dropped from the mailing list.

New memberships from today forward will cover the rest of 1970 and all of 1971. Renewals are acceptable at any time and applications should be addressed to the Treasurer, Mr. John Caramia, at 75 Court Street, Plattsburgh.

The Secretary and Treasurer of the Association have been collaborating recently on a revision of our mailing list. If you know of any error in address or difficulty in receiving Association mail, please contact the Secretary whose address appears on the NOTES.

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## THE ANNUAL BANQUET

The Association's annual banquet at the Royal Savage on October 5th was attended by a record crowd of more than 100 members and friends. Mrs. Ross White (Katherine Leddick) and her husband presented a program of beautiful hand-painted slides more than a century old and illustrative of the early history of the nation. Unfortunately, in emphasizing the sentimental and the moralistic aspects of that history the speakers made numerous misstatements of elementary facts concerning the Revolution, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin. In contrast with the freshness and beauty of the slides, the commentary sometimes seemed to be a parody of American history.

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Issued by the

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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West Chazy, New York

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