

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 78

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

October, 1971

## *The Annual Dinner*

*of the Historical Association will be held at the Royal Savage Inn on the evening of Friday, October 8th, at 7 o'clock. The speaker of the evening is Dr. Myron Luke, professor of history at C. W. Post College, whose topic will be "The Day I Met Lincoln." Dr. Luke is a summer resident of the North Country and has long been associated with the archeological work at Crown Point. He is currently writing a history of Long Island.*

*Reservations may be made with the four officers of the Associations: Richard Ward at the Clinton-Essex-Franklin Library System, Daniel Shea at 40 Morrison Avenue, John Caramia at 75 Court Street, all in Plattsburgh; and David Martin in West Chazy. The price is \$4.75 a person for dinner and gratuities, and payment should accompany reservations. The deadline is Wednesday morning, October 6th.*

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## TRAFFIC FLOW AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Members of the Historical Association will wish to acquaint themselves with the alternatives that are being considered by the State Department of Transportation as it prepares long-range plans for a belt line to speed traffic through Plattsburgh. Two public hearings will be held on the matter in the coming months.

The Department is currently considering seven alternate plans based upon three essentially different routes. One, with variations, will bring traffic from the south into the city via a new bridge across the Saranac from South Platt Street, joining Broad Street where the junior high school now stands. Another, again with variations, brings traffic into the city along Peru and Charlotte to Bridge street, then crosses the river on a new high-arched bridge over the railroad, joining Saily Avenue on the north side. The third brings traffic in the same way, but puts a low bridge over the river and around the Macdonough monument into Lower Cornelia. Each of the routes ties in various ways to Cornelia, Broad, Oak and North Catherine Streets to create a smoother flow of traffic.

The hearings, perhaps this winter, will be publicized well in advance. Members will want, among other considerations, to know which alternatives threaten our historic old buildings and which do not. Taming the traffic is a desirable objective, but not at the cost of destroying our environment.

## *Louis Riel in the North Country*

Two of the most serious rebellions in Canadian history were led by Louis Riel, a metis (half-breed), born at Saint Boniface, Manitoba in 1844. Between the rebellions he spent several periods of time at Plattsburgh and Keeseville, New York.

In 1869 the territorial rights of the Hudson's Bay Company were transferred to the Dominion of Canada. Included in this transfer was the metis settlement at Red River to which Louis Riel had returned in 1868.

Up to that time the people of Red River had enjoyed the slack rule of the Hudson's Bay Company. Though not legally autonomous the settlement had rarely seen any intervention from the company. But transfer to the Dominion meant immediate interference from the Canadian government. When the intentions of the Dominion became clear the metis, angry and under the leadership of Louis Riel, staged an aborted uprising later called the Red River Rebellion of 1869-1870. The rebellion crushed, Riel escaped to the United States.

In 1873 Riel, having returned to Canada, was elected to the Parliament as a delegate from Provencher. Fearing the Ontario authorities, he refused to go to Ottawa to take his seat and instead fled first to Montreal and then to Plattsburgh, New York.

While in Plattsburgh, Riel spent considerable time with the Oblate Fathers located there. He was at that time in ill health. George F. G. Stanley, in his biography of Louis Riel, says that Riel also chose Plattsburgh because "its proximity to the French-Canadian lumbering community of Keeseville might help remove some of the strangeness that Riel had found so oppressive in St. Paul," referring to Riel's stay in Minnesota following the Red River Rebellion. But apparently there was still another reason. Evidently Riel had relatives living in the Champlain Valley, according to Mrs. Marjorie Porter of Keeseville. Indeed, there is today a Riel family in the area that claims relation to the famed Canadian.

Keeseville, in fact, turned out to be the bigger attraction. While there Riel stayed, not with relatives, but with the parish priest, Father Fabien Barnabe, with whose sister Evalina he fell in love.

Riel stayed in the Plattsburgh-Keeseville area from November 1873 to mid-January 1874, when he traveled to Montreal to re-enter politics.

In September 1874 Riel was re-elected to parliament and again did not attempt to take his seat. In November of that year he was back in Keeseville. He felt it was safe there and yet convenient to Montreal should he have to return there. Of course Evalina and Father Barnabe were there also.

While at Keeseville this time Riel received word that the Canadian government had passed a sentence of banishment upon him. This proved to be too much for his mind to stand. After several fruitless journeys in an effort to find work he became so unstable that Father Barnabe had to call for Riel's relatives in Canada to come and take him. About a year later he was committed to the asylum at Beauport, on January 19, 1877. He remained there until his release, January 23, 1878.

Upon his release from Beauport Riel returned to Keeseville. Father Barnabe assured him that he would have no worry about money. But Riel wanted employment to enable him to support a family and to allow him to marry Evalina. To this end he traveled to New York City and while there he and Evalina exchanged many letters.

Failing to find work Riel returned to Keeseville. Father Barnabe wrote letters indicating that Riel was ill again but did not need the asylum. Barnabe encouraged Riel to join Bishop Ireland in Minnesota and work for the Bishop's Catholic Colonization Bureau.

Riel went to St. Paul and had an interview with Bishop Ireland but the latter decided not to employ the by now frustrated Riel for fear he would be more involved in politics than in the colonization bureau. Riel then went to Pembina, Minnesota.

Father Barnebe apparently thought of leaving his parish in Keeseville and joining Riel in Minnesota. He received a letter from a Father Payette of St. Paul urging him to reconsider. Father Payette said, "Think about it seriously. I am very much afraid you will regret such a move . . . life is difficult here." Barnabe did not go.

Riel and Evalina were engaged to be married before Riel left for his interview with Bishop Ireland. In a letter to Riel she warned him not to mention the fact in his letters because she read them to her brother. Why this was a secret engagement is not clear; they were obviously headed for marriage before Riel left for the mid-west.

Riel, however, had no intentions of returning east when he left for St. Paul. He wrote thus to Evalina while enroute. He realized his banishment would end in early 1880 and he desired to return to Manitoba. He wrote that she must join him there but he did not really intend to bring her to the rough life of a metis settlement.

He soon broke off all correspondence with Evalina without warning. Thus ended his romance with Evalina and his association with Keeseville. In 1881 Riel married a metisse, Marguriete Monet, dit Bellehumeur, in Montana.

After several years in Montana Riel went west to Saskatchewan and again trouble began. Another uprising, the Saskatchewan Rebellion, occurred. This time Riel was captured. He was convicted of treason and hanged in November of 1885.

Louis Riel used Keeseville as a refuge. His romance with Evalina Barnabe and his close friendship with her brother were not enough to overcome his desire for Canadian politics.

Riel, though he would eventually fight the Fenian movement in Canada, did have an association with the movement while he was in New York State. **The New York World** reports that he met with Fenian leaders at least once at Sweeney's Hotel in New York City. Thus even while in exile and in ill health he could not resist the temptation of involvement in politics, even though this behavior led him farther away from his desired marriage to Evalina.

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### Letter from Pliny Moore to Governor Daniel B. Tompkins

Champlain 23d March 1808.

Sir

The arms & ammunition your Excellency was pleased to intrust to my care on the application of the Committee of Safety for this Town & for which I am personally responsible arrived safe & were delivered to the Committee & a similar Bond to the one I executed to the Comissary of Military Stores, from the whole Committee is in my possession. The expence of bringing them—advanced by individuals besides time—is \$47.66. I submit to you whether as the Legislature has provided by Law that Arms & ammunition be furnished the frontier Settlements & that they be Transported whether it will not be reasonable this expence should be Refunded.

The Arms & amunition have been secreted with all possible precaution & are as yet in safety—how long they may continue so will depend on contingencies—if we are at war with England they will be immediately exposed—they as well as we know that we have such a deposit—the exact Quantity or places is known only to the Committee yet our neighbors on the other side the line can nearly Judge of their situation & with a small party, unguarded as they are, might suddenly deprive us of them unless better secured than it is in our power without means to secure them. I thought it my duty to make this Communication & pray your Excellencys directions on this Subject to the Committee or to me.

Our prospects so far as I can Judge from what is given to the public does not appear less Alarming than it did last October & the danger equidistant—a state of suspense is an evil but I have thought it prudent to with hold my apprehensions In hopes they never may be realised but must acknowledge it is in my mind like hoping against hope

I am Most Respectfully  
Your Excellencys  
Obedt Hmbl Servt  
P. Moor

(From the McLellan Collections)

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### RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old riddle: It was answered correctly by J. F. Ladue of Plattsburgh, who states that Altona was the last town in Clinton County to be organized, in 1857.

New riddle: What was the county's longest plank road, and when did it come to an end?

## CAPTAIN PLATT IN THE REVOLUTION

Upon one occasion a divine of Long Island pronounced, from his pulpit, a severe philippic against the Patriots, stigmatizing them as rebels, robbers and assassins. Information of the high tory character of the discourse was carried to Captain Nathaniel Platt, a most zealous Patriot, who commanded a company of Long Island Militia. Capt. Platt immediately called out his men, seized the minister and carried him to the liberty pole, around which the company were formed. The minister was there severely reprimanded and forced to walk up and kiss the pole as a punishment for his political heresy. On the next Sabbath Captain Platt was at the church, to see what effect his "discipline" had produced upon the man of God. For a long time the discourse was unexceptionable, but, while the minister was portraying the enjoyments of heaven to the true Christians, he gave expression to his feelings by turning towards the Captain and exclaiming, "there are no rebels in heaven, my brethren, —No! and you will find no Nathaniel Platts there, nor any accursed liberty poles to kiss."

*From Palmer's History of Lake Champlain*

*(Nathaniel Platt was to become one of Plattsburgh's early settlers, and the one who defied the British Army during the occupation of 1814.*

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Issued by the

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West Chazy, New York

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