

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 88

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

November, 1972

The November Meeting

of the Historical Association will be held on Monday evening, November 6th, at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. The program will consist of a talk by Major Paul H. Peck of the Air Force Base on "Weapons Patented by Orville Robinson and Manufactured in Plattsburgh by the Adirondack Rifle Company."

Major Peck is a native of Pawling, New York who has served at home and abroad in the Air Force for 18 years. In two years he hopes to retire to Alaska to hunt, fish, photograph, write and do all he can to prevent or delay the ruination of that state.

By avocation the Major is a taxidermist, fly tier, carpenter, photographer and gunsmith. His articles include one on mushrooms in *ADIRONDACK LIFE* and one on gunsmiths in the October issue of *GUNS AND AMMO*.

The public is cordially invited.

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old riddle: Mr. Robert C. Booth suggests that most of the islands in Lake Champlain belong to Vermont because in the treaty of 1790, New York finally recognized the independence of Vermont and agreed to the lake's channel as part of the boundary. Since the channel runs nearer to the New York shore, most of the islands fell to Vermont.

New riddle: What commemorated events occurred on October 13, 1775, October 11, 1776 and September 11, 1814?

MORE ABOUT NORTH COUNTRY ARCHITECTURE

The Association-sponsored book, *NORTH COUNTRY HERITAGE: BUILDINGS WORTH PRESERVING IN CLINTON AND ESSEX COUNTIES*, originally scheduled for September, is now due in mid-November. It will be available at local bookstores and from the publisher, Tundra Books, 18 Cornelia Street, Plattsburgh. It is being offered at a pre-publication price of \$3.95. Orders for five or more copies will be accepted before and after publication at the same price. Otherwise, the post-publication price is \$4.95 a copy.

A PLEA FOR NATHANAEAL GREEN PAPERS

A request comes from the Rhode Island Historical Society for information about any papers of the Revolutionary General, Nathanael Greene (1742-1786). An edition of his works in several volumes is being prepared.

Address communications to Richard K. Showman, Editor, Nathanael Greene Papers, 52 Power Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02906.

A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Jackson

The purpose of this article is to give a history of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Jackson from 1827 to 1874. After 1874 it became known as the Valcour Methodist Episcopal Church. This is the only comprehensive history of the church known to the writer.

Methodism was founded by John and Charles Wesley in England about 1729. It came to America in 1760 via immigrants from Ireland. On December 24, 1784 the Christmas Conference was held in Baltimore, Maryland. At this conference the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States was born on the principles of John Wesley. The states were divided into conferences, and preachers to each were appointed. The Reverend Freeborn Garrettson was appointed to the New York Conference in 1788. Also in 1784 the New York legislature passed a statute that permitted all religious bodies to incorporate and hold property.

In 1799 Alexander M'Lane became the first stationed preacher of the Plattsburgh Circuit. In 1824 the Peru Circuit was formed from Plattsburgh. It was under the Peru Circuit that the Port Jackson church was located. The Peru Circuit included Peru, Port Jackson, Peasleeville and several others. One circuit-riding preacher covered all of these churches until the late 19th century.

According to tradition, the Port Jackson church was built in 1827. The founders of the church were Robert Platt, Judge Jonas Platt and Rufus Day. They proposed to build the church on the knoll across the road from its present site but better judgement reigned. The church building was built on the west side of Route #9 in the Town of Peru, New York, just south of the Old Plank Road.

The building was constructed of limestone blocks taken from the high bluff on the southwest corner of Valcour Island. The outside walls were approximately two feet thick and plastered with mortar. The floor was pine and the roof had wood shingles. The building was 35 feet wide, 46 feet long and 25 feet high at the peak. There were four windows on the north and south sides and two doors and a window in the front.

The interior had five rows of pews seating three or four people. There were three aisles, one in the middle and one on each side. A balcony was in the back having four or five chairs, and the stairs to the balcony were on the left as one walked in. This gave the church a seating capacity of approximately 35 to 40 people. The pews were wooden benches and the pulpit was in the front center.

On March 26, 1832 a public meeting was called at Port Jackson (now Valcour) for the purpose of incorporating a religious society. Rufus Day was elected president and Isaac Lyon was elected secretary of the meeting. The people present elected to have the "house" recently built called the "Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Jackson." They also elected by majority vote Robert Platt, Rufus Day, Isaac Lyon, Hiram Lyon and Samuel Brace as trustees. On November 28, 1832, Robert Platt and his wife sold "sixty rods of ground" and the church building to Rufus Day, Isaac Lyon, Samuel Brace, Hiram Lyon and Robert Platt, Trustees of the Methodist Church at Port Jackson. The deed stated that "in trust that they shall rebuild if necessary and cause to be upheld and continued forever, a house or place of worship for the use of members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America." This deed was not recorded until April 25, 1946, which is odd since Robert Platt was a very good businessman.

A Class leader was a church member whose duty was to oversee the spiritual welfare of a group of members. The Peru Circuit was made up of several classes with Port Jackson being one of them. Rufus Day was the first class leader from 1832 to 1841. The class leader kept account of the class collection and attended the quarterly meetings of the circuit as a representative from Port Jackson. At these meetings, appropriations, additions and repairs to the various churches, probationers to membership and class elders were discussed. The place of these meetings was rotated among the different churches of the circuit. The other class leaders of Port Jackson were Leonard C. Howe from 1841 to 1854 and William Day from 1854 to 1874 (?).

The number of members of the Port Jackson church varied. According to the class register of the Peru Circuit the Port Jackson class had 51 members in 1841, 20 members in 1845 and 25 members in 1864. The Peru Community Church possesses the Peru Circuit records and they are very comprehensive. They give an almost complete list of members for the Port Jackson class from 1835 to 1872.

The collections of the church varied from quarter to quarter, with the smallest contributions in the third quarter. In 1836 the Port Jackson class contributed \$38.45, in 1846 \$76.30, in 1856 \$69.00 and in 1866 \$60.15.

The preacher of the circuit received about \$550 a year at this time. There was

one preacher for the entire Peru Circuit, thus the church services were conducted at different times. The Port Jackson Class was preached to on Sunday afternoons and a prayer meeting was held, probably on Thursday nights. The preacher lived in the parsonage in Peru village, but occasionally stayed at the Class leader's house. Rufus Day, Port Jackson's first class leader, was noted for boarding the itinerant preachers. The names of the Peru Circuit preachers are to be found in the Peru Circuit records, and they show that many of the preachers remained for only a year or two. Trustee Rufus Day's father was Amos Day, who was one of the Peru Circuit's early preachers.

Most of the members were farmers and adhered to Methodism closely. Almost every family at this time had a family Bible. It was read extensively and the family records were kept on the designated pages between Old and New Testament. This is important since very few vital statistics were kept by the town.

In 1874 the Methodist Episcopal Church at Port Jackson was combined with the Methodist Episcopal Church at South Plattsburgh to form a separate charge. On September 25, 1876 a meeting was held to decide on a name by which the Port Jackson Church should be called. They voted to name it "The Valcour Methodist Episcopal Church." Volume 6 of the Peru Circuit Church records is the church record of this charge. In 1880 this church was valued at \$2,000 and the parsonage, which was built upon the formation of the charge, was valued at \$800. It contained 40 members and probationers.

This charge existed until 1945. On October 2 of that year the Troy Annual Conference of the Methodist Church decided that "the Methodist Society in Valcour be discontinued and abandoned." On July 6, 1946 the Community Church of Peru sold the church building and lot to Josephine S. Heathcote of Franklin, Pennsylvania for \$2,200. On June 15, 1959 James A. Fitzpatrick, successor trustee of Josephine S. Heathcote, sold the abandoned building and property to the Coastland Development Corporation for \$1,000. During 1970 the church building was torn down, and the ruins remain on the site.

Stephen B. Riley, SUC

ISRAEL GREEN'S INN

It never had a constant name, in my day, save "Grandpa Green's House"; yet Judge Palmer in his history calls it "Israel Green's Inn", dubbed later "The United States Hotel". Nor did I ever know the names of its front and side streets, which are now and may have been then marked as Bridge and Green.

The community of Quakers, relatives from Keeseville, Peru and The Union — the Hallocks, Keeses and their families — universally spoke of it as "Uncle Israel's", where they always found hospitable quarters and entertainment. Both preachers and their attendants stayed here when travelling on the yearly missions up and down the district, which included Grand Isle and parts of Canada.

As to the age of this habitation, whatever its name, history attests a building on the site as early as 1767, erected by Count de Fredenburg, who had received from the British government 30,000 acres of land lying on Saranac River. De Fredenburg resided here until the Revolution, when he mysteriously disappeared and is believed to have been murdered somewhere in the forest that surrounded his mill on the Saranac.

The building which is closely identified as the home of my childhood was built in 1795, and was headquarters of the American force during the siege of 1814, being peppered all over with canister and shot. The dwelling must have been built by strong and sturdy hands, and the material of lasting caliber, to be tested as it was by war, fire and flood for half a century and more.

The first recollection I have of any stirring event of interest to myself is the burning of the grist mill nearby. This occurred in 1822 and must have proved an immense drawback to the young settlement which had just begun to recover from a quartette of evils, the last one a ruinous financial crisis. It is more pleasant to look over the ancient premises as they were in 1818 to 1828, which comprised the last ten years of my grandfather's occupancy.

The original structure was two and a half stories high, having a touch of old-fashioned respectability about its plain architecture. There was a square front stoop, not more than eight or nine feet each way with a seat on either side. Here often came Judge Platt from the mill, and his nephew Harry Platt from his store one block away, Dr. Samuel Beaumont and the neighbor, Mr. Walford, to while away the passing hours in town gossip, and sometimes political wrangle.

When the Spring Freshet came tearing over the dam, this little Dutch stoop formed a favorite post of observation. The heavy front door opened into a dingy hall, on one side of which was the "Stranger's Sitting Room", opposite it the family parlor, and at the further end the dining room. The men who sat around the long table in 1827 - 28 - 29 rise up before me as I write. Mr. William Swetland, grave and dignified, a leader in his profession; Hiram Walworth, a young brother of the Chancellor; George Moore, who married Miss White in her father's home on Broad Street (later the Home of the Friendless) in 1831, were among these.

The family parlor contained a fireplace so unique that I have never seen one elsewhere. It was wide enough for three-foot wood and was as high from the floor as an ordinary pattern of brick. However, it had the depth of only the width of a common brick. This brought the fire-dogs far out of the broad hearth. When the red glow of a wood fire roared up the chimney flue like a furnace, a sheet iron guard resembling a hat imbedded in the brick and forming the upper strata of the fireplace, prevented all danger to the high wooden mantle.

The upper hall or corridor was reached by an enclosed staircase. In room No. 3 hung a life-sized portrait of Governor George Clinton by the elder Trumbull, presented by the Governor to my Grandfather Melancton Smith (Sr.) in 1789 or 1790. They had been warm personal friends through all the years of our national struggle for independence. The portrait was said to have been as perfect a likeness of the Governor as it was fine in execution save for one radical defect. The picture had but one eye. The lost one had been thrust out by a dagger by some mischievous hand during the Plattsburgh siege in 1814. This gave to it a sinister as well as comic expression, noticeable even to a child who gazed at it half in wonder, half in fear. When the house was vacated this historic painting was forgotten and, although diligent search was instituted afterwards, the old heirloom was never recovered.

From this corridor open stairs, very steep, narrow and long, carried one to the half-story, or attic that extended the entire length of the main building. The oblong apartment with slightly arched ceiling had been furnished in appropriate design as a Masonic hall in the early years of the century, having a neat robing room adjoining. It was always called the "Lodge Room" even after it became the repository of dried corn and barrels of apples.

Stepping down the long, steep flight of stairs from this attic, one entered the large assembly hall where for many years town meetings and other gatherings were held. To this famous old inn, the early residents of Plattsburgh resorted for their most important ceremonies. Here the town honored Commodore Macdonough at a public dinner after the battle of Plattsburgh in 1814. Here also President Monroe was given a reception during his visit in 1817. Thus this hostelry served the young community variously and well.

(Excerpts from a talk given by Mrs. Ross Lobdell in 1931. It is based upon an article written in Wisconsin in 1892, and published locally, by Mrs. Elizabeth Smith Martin, daughter of Col. Melancton Smith, of fame in the War of 1812, and granddaughter of Israel Green.)

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Issued by the

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