

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 9

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

May 1962

The Next Meeting

will be held on Monday evening, May 7, 1962, at 8:00 o'clock, in the Association Rooms over the Plattsburgh Public Library. The speaker will be MR. LAWRENCE C. KISTNER, who will talk on "POST OFFICES OF CLINTON COUNTY." His work on the topic results in part from his extensive stamp collecting activities, during which he has discovered many half-forgotten hamlets that once boasted their own post offices.

The public is cordially invited.

Members are reminded that the meeting on June 4th will again be devoted to the exhibit of historical items brought by members and guests.

The Association's summer outing will consist of a talk and guided tour of the operations of the Chateaugay Mine at Lyon Mountain. The date is Saturday, July 28th.

The Association's Drive

for new members during the month of March resulted in the addition of eighty names. We welcome them and hope that they will become actively involved in the activities of the Association. We invite contributions of material for this publication. Total membership now numbers 321.

Plattsburgh News Items 75 Years Ago

The PLATTSBURGH REPUBLICAN on January 14, 1893, surveyed the principal events in the area since 1876.

Nov. 4, 1876. Plattsburgh's first drinking fountain commenced running in front of Reed's store, head of Bridge street, gift of Plattsburgh Women's Christian Temperance Union.

In the spring of 1882, the subject of removal of Plattsburgh Barracks to Rouses Point was agitated, a bill having been introduced in Congress on May 1st by General John Hammond providing for such removal.

Dec. 2, 1882. Public meeting to consider the building of an opera house. Committee appointed. No action.

Nov. and Dec., 1882. Anti-Bribery movement in Plattsburgh. Political Anti-Bribery Society organized Dec. 19, 1882. . . . Society dissolved Nov. 5, 1883, for lack of support.

Feb. 1, 1889. Free postal delivery system went into operation in Plattsburgh.

Clinton County and the California Gold Rush

By early 1849, the residents of Clinton County were agog with the news of gold in California. The county contributed its share of hardy souls who made the trip across country or by boat via Cape Horn or Central America and up the Pacific coast. The *Plattsburgh Republican* gave its readers full reports for several years, coinciding with the arrival of vessels in eastern ports bearing gold dust and news. Much of the news was such as to stir the cupidity or the adventurous spirit of easterners.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

As early as January, Plattsburgh merchants had started to advertise their wares with catchwords such as "Gold Mine in California!" or "Gold at Home!" The *Republican* of February 17 pointed out that "so conversant have become the people with all the minutiae of the journey, that a trip to the 'gold diggings' is spoken of as an adventure of merely enough hazard to make it exciting. Associations are being formed in every nook and corner—each one embraces the very best materials for securing the greatest possible amount of gold in the smallest possible space of time.

"Meanwhile, it is amusing to notice the many humbugs which this gold mania has started into existence. A glance at the city papers, now-a-days, will satisfy any one that Yankee ingenuity is not 'clean tuckered out' yet, but is continually on the rise, successfully applying its skill to the accommodation of the numerous and increasing wants of this great and gullible republic of ours."

The article lists several examples of humbuggery, including :

"Persons going to the gold regions should pay strict attention to their teeth, as there is no practical dentist in that section of the country. Procure a package of the Premium Vanilla Tooth Wash, which will preserve your teeth, give a healthy action to your gums, and a beautiful fragrance to your breath; warranted to keep in any climate."

The writer, with tongue in cheek, calls this a very honest advertisement because "if you find anything to eat, either on your way to California or when there, you will find that it will require good teeth to masticate it. (An experienced traveller in that region says that a file may always be used to some advantage in sharpening the teeth while your buffalo meat is being roasted.)

"Other numerous advertisements tell us that we should not 'forget to take' this, that and the other thing to California—indeed, so many things seem to be absolutely necessary, that every adventurer should go in at least two ships.

"There are one or two things we are not told are necessary to be taken with us—a sound body, great patience, large hope, and the means of getting back again—or a coffin.

"And there are two things we shall most certainly not bring back with us—perfect health and content. Better a little with happiness than a great deal without it."

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

And still the thousands flocked westward, spurred on by reports such as that of October 6 that an average of \$2,000,000 in dust was being brought out each month, or the bland assurance in a dispatch on November 17 that contrary to the general impression, on the overland trip, "aside from the ordinary fatigues and privations of the journey, no suffering has as yet been experienced."

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

The wary could also find in the *Republican* good reasons for staying home. Several dispatches commented on the shortage of lumber and housing in California, prophesy-

ing hardship during the rainy season. Others chronicled the high prices, such as flour at \$10, mess pork at \$20, molasses at 40 cents a gallon, and white sugar at 16 cents.

On December 15 was printed an ominous account from Panama that "Passengers sufficient to fill the next two steamers, besides several large sailing vessels, were waiting passage on the departure of the *California*. The discouraging reports brought by the *California's* passengers, with the more undeniable evidence in the haggard looks and wasted frames of many unfortunates, has induced many on the Isthmus to take the back track."

And from Fort Laramie came the report, printed in the *Republican* of August 17, 1850:

"For a few days past the emigration has very sensibly diminished, but still the road is thronged, and a large crowd yet behind. Up to last evening the number of names registered at this place was 38,312. The number of wagons 8,773. . . .

"The leading trains passed here two months since, and must now be in the vicinity of Sacramento. Between that point and this, there is one continuous line of gold diggers dragging its slow length towards the Pacific. From the scarcity of provisions among many of the emigrants, there can be little doubt that the suffering will be frightful in the California mountains. . . .

"The sickness this season has been much more fatal than it was last. A gentleman just from the frontier, states that he counted no less than six hundred and forty-five new graves along side the road."

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

On February 6, 1849, A. C. Moore of Plattsburgh printed a handbill in an effort to raise an emigrating company. (An original copy is on view at the Kent-Delord House. Your editors cannot discover whether or not Moore's effort was successful.)

The handbill reads in part as follows:

"An effort will be made to organize a Company of from 50 to 100 persons to pass by the most feasible Northern overland route to California upon the following principles:-

"The members of this Company must be healthy, hardy, of a good size, industrious, of a good moral character, accustomed to labor, and principally Americans.

"They must be bound to render to the Company their faithful services for the space of two years from the 10th day of April next, in any way required. Each member of the Company will be provided with a rifle, Revolver, Hanger, uniform Cap and Hunting Shirt, or Poncho of India Rubber or some suitable material, Belt, Horse or Mule and equipments at the expense of the subscriber Moore and the expenses of the journey paid.

". . . . After the journey is accomplished the supplies of the Company will be taken from their earnings, and each member of the Company will be entitled to one half of the nett proceeds of the earnings of one member of the Company, and the subscriber to the other half for the two years. Total abstinence from intoxicating liquors will be required. No gambling will be allowed. No traveling or working on the Sabbath will be permitted. . . .

"Security satisfactory to the subscriber, to the amount of \$300, for the due performance of the agreement on the part of each member of the Company will be required.

"The earnings of the Company will be collected each week, weighed, insured and forwarded monthly or as often as safe passage can be obtained to some safe depository in Plattsburgh, Troy, New York or Philadelphia to be held, invested or divided according to the agreement."

Crossing the Isthmus

From letters of Wallace W. Bordwell of Champlain, to Benjamin Booth.

Navy Bay [Panama], Mch 22, 1852
Friend Benj'n,

We have had a *very* pleasant passage thus far, and evry prospect of one the rest of the voyage.

It is very warm here, you do not feel cold with nothing on but your Shirt and Pantaloons, quite a change. We shall be on *Terra Firma* in about one hour. . . .

Your friend,
W. W. Bordwell

Franklin House, San francisco
April 16, 1852

Friend Benjamin

. . . at Navy Bay; we landed there in preference to going up to Chagres (which is some 8 miles up the Bay) as we could go Eighteen miles by Rail Road, and save about 26 miles of the River passage.

We then engaged small Boats to carry us to Gorgona (the head of navigation).

We then hired mules to ride to Panama, a distance of twenty eight miles.

Ben, could you have seen us mounted on our mules, going over Mountains that you could scarcely see the tops of, when standing at the foot, and when you had arrived at the top, to look down and see what a descent you had to make—you'd have thought as I did, that the Champlain Roads, with their dust, or mud up to the hubs, were far preferable.

We had any quantity of fun in crossing. The Natives all speak Spanish, and they are some of the d--dest Natives that you ever saw too. Men, women and children all perfectly Naked—in the Boat that we came up the river in were four Ladies, it made them blush a little at first. We were two days in crossing at an expense of \$20.

We . . . then went aboard Steamship *Northener*, bound for San francisco, and touching at Alcapulco and San diego, and arrived here on the morning of the 14th Inst all well and in good spirits.

From your friend
W. W. Bordwell

9 May '62

☆ NORTH COUNTRY NOTES ☆

ISSUED BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Allan S. Everest, Co-editor

26 So. Catherine St., Plattsburgh, New York