

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

J.B.

No. 98

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

December, 1973

The December Meeting

of the Historical Association will be held on Monday evening, December 3rd, at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. The program of the evening will consist of a talk by Mr. Robert Crepeau, teacher of English in the Peru schools, who will present a paper, illustrated by slides, on "Ralph Waldo Emercon in the Adirondacks."

MEMBERSHIP IN THE ASSOCIATION

Readers may have little conception of what your membership means to the Association, which functions largely on its membership dues. This is the time of year to join or rejoin for 1974. In spite of inflation, the rates remain unchanged:

Students	\$2.00
Adults, single	3.00
Family	5.00
Contributing	10.00
Patron	25.00

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old Riddle: In 1889 Clinton County still was using 23 of the state's 54 log schoolhouses. Franklin County had 13, St. Lawrence 8 and Essex 5. The North Country thus accounted for 49 of the 54.

New Riddle: In what year were both the present Clinton County courthouse built and incandescent street lights first used in Plattsburgh?

1900 CENSUS INDEX FOR SALE

Stemming from the efforts of David Martin, the 1800 Census Index of Clinton County is now complete and available to interested persons. Copies may be obtained from Mr. Martin in West Chazy, 12992 at \$1.50 a copy, all proceeds to go to the Association treasury.

THE EDITORS

welcome material for inclusion in these North Country Notes, as well as your comments and criticisms. Look through your scrapbooks and family papers for items that can be made into interesting articles.

The Quaker Meeting Houses in Old Peru

The history of any aspect of the Quaker Union in Peru should start with the story of William Keese. Keese was a Quaker from Nine Partners in Dutchess County. During the late 1780's he worked as surveyor on Zephaniah Platt's tremendous land holdings in Clinton County. After completing the job Keese accepted an offer from Platt to purchase 425 acres of his choice in the area.

In the spring of 1789 Keese built a log cabin on his chosen site, not far east of the Little Ausable River. A short time before, another of Platt's surveyors, Captain Edward Everett, had settled with his family in the same area. Upon completing his cabin, Keese returned to Nine Partners, married, and brought his wife back to Peru the following year.

John Keese, William's father, and a number of his other sons soon followed and settled on the neighboring farms in the early 1790's. Other Quakers, mostly from Dutchess County, New York, Ferrisburg and Danby, Vermont, Long Island, and Berkshire County, Massachusetts started to settle around the nucleus which was stated by the Everetts and Keeses.

As the population of the Union grew, religion quickly became the most important aspect of life in the community. A log Meeting House was built at the corner, opposite from what was later the Beadleston farm. The exact date that this building was constructed is not known; however it was standing when Cyrus Benedict and Hannah Barker were married there in 1799. It may have been built as early as 1795.

It should be noted that the Quakes never called their place of meeting and worship a church, but a Meeting House. They were plain people who believed in plainness of speech and action as well as dress. They also never referred to their place of burial as a cemetery; it was simply a burying ground. The Quake preachers occupied a "high seat" rather than a pulpit.

The Peru Monthly Meeting for business and discipline was comprised of friends from Peru and South Hero (Grand Isle County, Vermont). This meeting was first established in 1799; however there is some evidence that weekly or semi-weekly meetings for worship were held in the log Meeting House for several years before this time.

Although the minutes of the Peru Monthly Meetings before 1828 are no longer available, past historians who had examined the minutes reported that the first of these meetings was held on the twenty third birthday of American Independence. At this first meeting a committee was established to select a suitable place and price for a new Meeting House and burying ground. Late in 1799 it was reported that an agreement had been reached with Henry Green for the transfer of three acres for a price of 30 pounds (about \$75).

After a lengthy debate on the exact size and design of the building it was finally agreed that the new Meeting House should be thirty-two feet by forty-eight feet with twenty-foot posts. Most of the construction took place in 1802, but it was not until the yearly meeting in April of 1803 that the report was made, "One Meeting House in Peru."

The cost of this Meeting House was about 440 pounds (almost 1100 dollars). It was built of white oak with an interior gallery and removable partitions. The high-backed pine benches were painted white and arranged with a row on each side of a center aisle. Across the front of the Meeting House there were three rows of facing benches. These seats were reserved for elders, distinguished visitors and preachers.

On the first and fifth days of each week (Sunday and Thursday) the Friends would gather in the Meeting House at 11:00 A.M. for worship. The meetings would open with the people engaged in silent prayer or meditation. After a while, some member would speak out on an issue of mutual concern. Usually discussions would follow. References from the Bible and prayers were often offered at these meetings, but singing was never heard. The Friends would conclude the meeting with handshakes and conversation.

On the fifth day of each month the Monthly Meeting for business was held. The members would remain after worship and the partitions, which were open for worship, would be drawn shut. This was done to enable the sexes to meet in separate groups. At these monthly meetings applications for membership and questions pertaining to the conduct of present members were considered, so it was "deemed wise to free both men and woman from inhibition in the name of frankness." After a period of discussion the partitions would be re-opened and each situation would be dealt with by the entire group.

For more than a quarter century the Peru Friends all met in one house for worship and discipline. Around 1828, however, the preaching of Elias Hicks of Long Island caused a division among them. Hicks was an earnest reformer who never intended to cause the split in the Society that has become associated with him. He simply believed that one's religion should not be taken for granted, a person should consciously live his religion. Hicks felt that the laxity in the attitudes of the Orthodox Quakers was weakening and threatening the

basic structure of the Society. Unfortunately, the movement that became associated with his name caused a more disastrous effect on the religion than anything Hicks had imagined.

There is evidence in Hicks' *Journal* that his influence upon some of Peru's Friends may have been direct. He visited Nine Partners several times before some of the residents moved north in the late 1700's. Also, in 1803 Hicks traveled in Northern New York. However, it is not known whether or not he traveled through the Union.

The dissension in Peru's Society of Friends became so strong by 1832 that the Orthodox Quakers built a new Meeting House on the same lot directly south of the 1803 building. It is interesting to note that although the Hicksites (the liberal Friends) were outnumbered almost two to one, they were obstinate enough to retain possession of the old Meeting House.

The separation eventually proved to be disastrous to the Union. Not only the community as a whole but even individual families were split by the decision.

For a while both meeting houses continued to function. After the 1850's, however, the Quaker Union was dying. The final marriage recorded by the monthly minutes took place in 1861. The regular meetings for worship were discontinued for lack of attendance about 1870 and the last recorded meeting took place in 1879. There are actually a number of causes for the sudden death of the Union, but it is generally agreed that the Hicksite separation was by far the most significant.

Only the headstones in the burying ground and a few remodeled buildings remain as reminders of the Peru Quakers. In the lot where the Meeting House once stood, tall grass now grows. Not a single record or even a memory concerning the fate of the original log Meeting House has survived. Of the many theories dealing with this small building, perhaps the most accurate was presented by nineteenth-century historian J. W. Harkness: "It may have been used as a school house until the Union Academy was built around 1812, but if so it cannot be proved by the writer who was born in '48."

The 1803 Hicksite Meeting House was eventually sold to Henry Arnold for \$150 and moved to his farm (now owned by Forrence Orchards). The building was used as a horse barn for several years before it was destroyed by fire. The lock and key, which are now owned by Rodney North, are the only remaining artifacts of the Meeting House.

The Orthodox Meeting House was sold to James T. Felio about 1903 and was moved across the Union (Rogers) Road. To this day it still stands on the plot of land where Henry Delord, the original owner, had his home and Post Office. The building, however, was drastically remodeled when it was converted into a family house. The structure which is presently owned by Robert Rulfs is hardly recognizable as a Quaker Meeting House.

The Union is an important part in Peru's history that died almost as quickly as it grew. Although there are only a few reminders along Rogers Road of the community that once flourished there, the Quakers did leave their mark on Clinton County. Such familiar village names as Harkness, Keeseville, Peasleeville, and Lapham Mills were named after descendants of some of the original Union Friends.

1893

Pressures were generated throughout the state for further electoral reform. But the legislature failed to provide the single ballot containing all parties and candidates, and it refused to require personal registration. Both were the source of corruption at election time. However, the new Myers voting machine was tried downstate, and the tabulations were made in one minute! Although the legislature in 1892 sanctioned female suffrage in school elections, the state Supreme Court in 1893 voided the law unless the constitution was amended. One hundred twenty eight women in Plattsburgh had registered to vote.

This was the year of the Columbian Exposition, and a surprising number of Plattsburgh citizens went to it. The designs of the big Columbus stamp pleased the users who nevertheless resented the extra moisture required daily as enough "to float a ship of the line."

The great panic and ensuing depression began to be felt locally by summertime. As late as April real estate was still booming, with property on Clinton Street bringing \$100 a foot. But in July wheat was being quoted at 55 cents, but no comparable drop in flour or bread. Local businessmen began to postpone long talked-of projects. They applauded President Cleveland's efforts to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act as the cause of hard times. Meanwhile speculation was rife over the President's health, and only years later were all the facts known about his secret operation for cancer of the mouth.

Plattsburgh opened its new Opera House, a new shirt factory and its first session of the Catholic Summer School. But the local iron industry began to contract slightly with the closing of the Catalan forge at Bellmont. The method of making iron with charcoal had become outmoded by the new and cheaper processes.

FREE NEGROES AND SLAVES IN EARLY CLINTON COUNTY

In the Federal Census returns for Clinton County in 1800, as discovered by David Martin, there were 11 free Negroes ("all other persons") and 49 slaves in the county. "Other persons" included:

- 1 in the household of Jehiel Beardsley of Peru (later Ausable)
- 1 in the household of John Miller of Plattsburgh
- 1 in the household of Benjamin Mooers of Plattsburgh
- 2 in the household of William P. Platt of Plattsburgh
- 2 in the household of John Ransom of Plattsburgh
- 4 comprising the household of John Walker of Peru

The slave distribution was:

- 3 in the household of John Addoms of Plattsburgh
- 2 in the household of John Bailey of Plattsburgh
- 1 in the household of William Bailey of Chateaugay
- 2 in the household of William Coe of Plattsburgh
- 3 in the household of Henry Delord of Peru
- 1 in the household of Joseph I. Green of plattsburgh
- 3 comprising the household of James Hick of Plattsburgh (they are marked as "slaves" and not "other persons")
- 1 in the household of Eleazer Miller of Plattsburgh
- 2 in the household of John Miller of Plattsburgh
- 1 in the household of Thomas Miller of Plattsburgh
- 2 in the household of Benjamin Mooers of Plattsburgh
- 3 in the household of Charles Platt of Plattsburgh
- 3 in the household of Nathaniel Platt of Plattsburgh
- 5 in the household of Theodorus Platt of Plattsburgh
- 3 in the household of Zephaniah Platt of Plattsburgh
- 1 in the household of John Ransom of Plattsburgh
- 3 in the household of Peter Saily of Plattsburgh
- 4 in the household of Thomas Treadwell of Plattsburgh
- 6 in the household of Melancton L. Woolsey of Plattsburgh

No. 98 December, 1973

★ NORTH COUNTRY NOTES ★

Issued by the

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

William Stanford, Secretary
RD 1
West Chazy, New York 12992

U. S. Postage
PAID
Plattsburgh, N. Y.
PERMIT NO. 13

notes at 12/31/73 meeting

*Concord Libs - basement
Paint by Stillman
Phil Camp*

Jan meet - File

MR. JAMES BAILEY
11 WEST COURT ST.
PLATTSBURGH, N.Y. 12901