

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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No. 16

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

Jan. 1964

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## *The Next Meeting*

will be held on Monday evening, Jan. 6, 1964, at 8:00 o'clock, in the Association Rooms over the Plattsburgh Public Library. The speaker will be MR. DAVID MARTIN, a member of the English staff at the Chazy Central Rural School, who will talk on "THE WRITING OF THE HISTORY OF CHAZY." Mr. Martin is assisting Mrs. Nell B. Sullivan, Town Historian, in preparing for publication her History of the Town of Chazy. The public is cordially invited.

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## *Champlain and His Valley*

will be the subject of the February 3 meeting, by Miss Minnie Stoughton. Miss Stoughton has spoken to the Association before, and is well known for her research on Redford glass and on the early settlement and industries of the Salmon River.

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## *Plattsburgh's New Museum*

On the evening of November 26, a new museum opened in Plattsburgh. The Lake Champlain Historical and Research Club opened its doors at 75 Miller Street on their naval museum of artifacts found in our Lake. Most of the objects were recovered by members of the Club, some have been loaned and some donated by non-members.

The sponsoring club is the outgrowth of a "Wreck Raiders Diving Club" formed in August 1962. It is an organization of divers who saw the need for a safety program after two tragic water accidents. Members receive a course of instruction and are on call at all times when marine accidents occur; they have already given great assistance.

The members of the club have pooled their underwater treasures to establish the museum. In the display are a variety of anchors, muskets, shot and cannon balls, pottery and coins, taken from the sites of the naval battles of Plattsburgh Bay and of Valcour.

The museum has no regular hours this winter, but can be opened to school groups or individuals by appointment. Interested persons should call the president, Mr. Frank Pabst, at JO 1-6827.

## The British Raid on Fort Montgomery in 1865

Here are extracts from a translation made by Hulda B. McLellan from "Zouaviana" by Gustave A. Drolet, published in French in Montreal in 1893 and reprinted in 1898.

Drolet was a professional soldier, serving in many parts of the world. For some years he was in the Papal Zouaves, the personal guards of the Pope. This is an amusing account of his first military venture, while serving as commandant of the garrison at Lacolle, Canada.

I dreamed of new glories. Our post was very near Lake Champlain, immortalized by 150 years of battle. I felt the blood of my ancestors course through my veins when I looked upon this body of water, so often red with the blood of the defenders of Forts St. Frederic, Carillon and Ile-aux-Noix, all made famous by brave combats.

Several miles from Lacolle stood the remains of an old fort, the celebrated Fort Montgomery, just over the border, and which the American government had lately ordered restored. I don't know what plagued me, but this devil of a dismantled fort kept running through my head, and it seemed to me that it would be a good trick on the Americans garrisoned at Champlain to take possession and establish myself there with my Red Coats. This was in April 1865, several days after the assassination of President Lincoln.

I talked it over with my two lieutenants; they could not see the *Joke* with the same eye as I. Although I was their superior officer, they were each not less than a dozen years older than myself; I think that they had good sense in proportion to their age, I in proportion to my rank.

So it was that one day, accompanied only by my orderly, I resolved to reconnoiter Fort Montgomery, to formulate my plan of attack, my means of defense, my future supplies. As I went, I became absorbed in my thoughts. I well foresaw that the Americans would be disconcerted (*feraient un nez*) on learning of the occupation of the old fort, and that they would demand that I leave. I would refuse. Then they would send troops to dislodge me. I would resist. Some of my men would be killed, I would kill some of theirs. England would be forced to intervene. This would perhaps be a *Casus belli*. What a grand affair! Forward!

While I was lost in these thoughts, bumping along in my buggy, I was suddenly awakened from my reverie by a cannon boom which gave me such a start that I was almost thrown out of my carriage. At a crossroads I told my orderly, instead of going to the left to Fort Montgomery, to go to the right. We came to the pretty village of Champlain. All the troops were under arms, taking part in the funeral honors in memory of President Lincoln. It was a salvo of artillery, fired by a battery in battle formation, which had brought me back from the land of dreams.

I quickly took in the new situation; after having my horse put up, I followed the crowd into a Protestant temple. I took my place on a bench and waited. Alas, unfortunately, I didn't know what Providence had in store for me!

A minister ascended the pulpit and pronounced the funeral oration for Lincoln. He said that all the Powers of the earth participated in the grief of the American people, and that England, among other marks of sympathy, had delegated for this occasion a distinguished officer from her regular army, whom he saw in the church, mingling his tears with theirs—and so on and so on (*et patati et patata*). I could not believe at first that these words could refer to me, but, being in doubt and not wishing to attract attention, I did not move, despite the desire which devoured me to look around to see this English officer.

At the conclusion of the service, as I prepared to leave my pew, an officer in full dress came to ask if I were not the commandant at Lacolle. I replied affirmatively. "Then," the officer told me, "I have been charged to present you the compliments of Colonel *What's-his-name* and to invite you to come to our garrison." I was well the delegate of the English army! Alas!

I was presented to about twenty artillery and cavalry officers. They were charming to me and were polite not to let me see that they read on my face the baseness of my project regarding Fort Montgomery.

I was given Bourbon-whiskey, then the colonel so graciously insisted that I accept his invitation to dinner. I was seated at the table near a cavalry officer, Captain B., who heaped attentions on me, and continuously more Bourbon. I had also near me a civilian guest, a lawyer I believe, who drank *sec*, and who every five minutes asked me if I had been in the Crimean campaign (in 1854, when I was nine years old)!

Briefly, when we arrived at the time for toasts, I was as drunk as the lawyer, but much less than the captain, who insisted that we were destined to become friends, and who did not let the hand of the clock run very long without inviting me to click glasses.

The colonel raised his voice in emotion, and in sentimental terms proposed a toast to the lamented Abraham Lincoln. This toast was drunk by all of us in silence except for my fiery neighbor, who tried in vain to sing *For he was a jolly good fellow*.

The colonel, rapping on the edge of his plate to attract attention, complimented the English army which had sent one of its most brilliant officers to the funeral ceremony. The colonel added that he would be lacking in hospitality if he did not invite his officers, all old veterans of Sherman and Grant, to drink to the health of Queen Victoria.

Everyone rose. Captain B., after having tried unsuccessfully to sing *God Save the Queen*, turned toward me and cried: "*To old Vic, my boy.*" I looked at him full in the face, bowed, and said, "*To her most gracious Majesty, our beloved Queen Victoria.*"

All drank this toast, then B. put down his glass and demanded if I had intended giving him a lesson. I said "no" and appeared astonished at his question. The captain repeated his words and affirmed that in looking at him insolently I had wished to give him a lesson. The other officers intervened, but uselessly. My ears began to get hot. At the end, annoyed at this amiable drunk, I said, "Well, yes, I did wish to give you a lesson, and I hope you will profit from it."

I thought to myself, I cannot take Fort Montgomery today, but I can cross swords with an American officer. He is drunker than I, and I am a pretty good swordsman.

The captain said that I must render him satisfaction. "But yes, with pleasure," I replied. I asked two of the officers to serve as my seconds. B. left the table, reeling, to get his saber. I prepared to follow, but the tipsy captain, running into a chair, fell flat on his face.

I looked at my adversary and thought of the easy triumph I would have, when we heard a loud noise at the door. The guard had arrested a person whom he believed to be Booth, the assassin of Lincoln!

Everyone left the table to look at the prisoner. I met again, some moments later, Captain B., who, not remembering that he had wanted to slit my throat, said that he desired to escort me when I departed for home.

After having seen the prisoner, and escorted by four or five officers including my new friend Captain B., I took my leave of the colonel and his officers, saying not goodbye, but "au revoir".

But we lost our way and had to return to Champlain for the night. Decidedly, I was not in the mood this day! I was happy that I had not risked my company in attacking Fort Montgomery, a day so ill-omened!

The next day I returned to Lacolle, calm and refreshed. Captain B. accompanied me, with three cavalry officers of his regiment. There I became their host; we took advantage of the presence of an artist from Plattsburgh to pose as a group. I still have this photograph, and never look at it without thinking of my banquet in Champlain.

Since then I have visited many military posts, but I rarely remember more charming company than the old *culottes de peau* of the Army of the Potomac.

### *Women . . . !*

Isaac Finch was a member of the House of Representatives from the North Country, his home being at Jay, New York.

Shortly after his arrival in the City of Washington in 1830, we find in a letter to "Mrs. Martha Finch" at home in Jay, this chiding paragraph:

"And lo! and behold! there were letters . . . on one of which was to be sure endorsed in Your hand writing Announcing health. And Martha Finch, this was all well so far, but I would thank you to be a little more courteous in your next, for a Woman that can talk 6 hours without Cessation and that too without being at a loss for a subject, can make no apology for not filling at Least one side of a Sheet . . ."

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### *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 a few interesting items.

### *"Alexander Macomb at Plattsburgh, 1814"*

In the October issue of *New York History*, the quarterly magazine of the New York State Historical Association, appears an article under the above title by one of our editors, Dr. Allan S. Everest. This has been expanded from a talk given before our own association a few years ago.

Alexander Macomb was one of the few military leaders during the War of 1812 to bring credit to the American land forces during that war. His achievements at the battle of Plattsburgh contributed greatly to the ultimate victory. But, as Dr. Everest points out, "in the public mind, his role is second to that of Macdonough. Yet the evidence is clear that these two young men deserve more nearly equal honor. They complemented each other, and in the battle of Plattsburgh, each might have met a different fate without the other."

This article is a valuable addition to our expanding knowledge of North Country history.  
C.W.M.

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*David W. Fuller, Secretary*

*46 Oliveti Place, Plattsburgh, New York*

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