

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly By The Clinton County Historical Association

No. 252 President: John L. Myers Editor: Helen W. Allan March, 1989

MARCH PROGRAM

"The Champlain Waterway, 1783-1897" is the title of the Association's next program, scheduled on Monday, March 6 at 7:30 p.m. in the community meeting room of the Clinton County Government Center, Plattsburgh. Dr. Charles F. O'Brien, associate professor of history at Clarkson University in Potsdam, N.Y., will talk about the historic efforts to construct a Champlain Waterway during the 18th and 19th centuries. His presentation explores the economic, diplomatic, military and technological factors which affected the plans for a major commercial link between Lake Champlain and the ocean by way of the St. Lawrence River. A native of Burlington, VT., Dr. O'Brien is a graduate of St. Michael's College and earned his PhD from Brown University. This program is open to the public.

McLELLAN BEQUEST

March 1 is the deadline for applications for support from the Hulda B. McLellan Bequest. Such funds are available to assist individuals, Centers, departments or programs to teach a course about the history of Northern New York State and will cover the cost of a teaching salary. Applications should be sent to Joseph Swinyer at Special Collections, Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh. For further information call Mr. Swinyer at 564-5206, Suzann Buckley at 564-3150 or Douglas Skopp at 564-2213.

Thanks to his abiding interest in printing and presses, CCHA member Jim Nolan was able to elaborate for us on the subject of Ben Franklin's press in the Smithsonian Institution (North Country Notes, Feb., 1989, "A Good, Healthy Breakfast"). Brought to America in 1842 aboard the packet ship United States, the press became available thanks to the generosity of a wealthy American, John B. Murray. Although some of the history surrounding the press is cloudy, Franklin's use of it makes it a significant early 18th century handpress.

ACQUISITIONS

The museum's collections have benefited recently by the acquisition of an oil painting by the 19th c. North Country artist Aaron Dean Fletcher. Given by Virginia and Charles Burdick, the picture is a tranquil scene of deer in a woodland setting. Painted in 1884, it is one of the few nature scenes by Fletcher who was primarily a portraitist, having painted during his career such Clinton County residents as Mary Broadwell, Mrs. Elizabeth Earle Hoag, George Macomber and Mrs. Horace Ackley. A.D. Fletcher was born in Springfield, VT in 1817 and died in Keeseville, NY in 1902. Not much is known about Fletcher's life, particularly in his late years, but he was remembered as an old man wearing a flowing cape who was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Keeseville. Many thanks to Mr. & Mrs. Burdick whose gift is a timely one on the eve of an exhibition on the wildlife heritage of Clinton County. It is also significant as the first Fletcher painting to enter the museum's collection of original art.

Recent acquisitions also include an exquisite collection of fans given to the museum by Mr. & Mrs. Christopher "Kit" Booth. The fans originally belonged to the John Pomeroy Townsend family, and are accompanied by a charming "bachelor's bag", a silk embroidered shawl and a parasol. The owner of the velvet and needlework bag, John P. Townsend (1832-1898), went into business in New York City about 1850 and married Elizabeth Baldwin in 1853. The collection is beautifully preserved.

Other gifts in recent months are a rarely seen Hotel Champlain individual silverware cocktail shaker; a two-dollar Bank of Plattsburgh note, dated 1824 and signed by F.C. Saily & Benjamin Mooers (payee: E. Warren) donated by Maurice Gilbert, and several documentary artifacts collected by Richard Ward, chairman of the acquisitions committee.

THE WILDLIFE HERITAGE OF CLINTON COUNTY

The museum's temporary exhibitions gallery is a busy place these days as work proceeds on a major exhibition due to open on April 7. Guest curator Mark Gretch and trustee Pete Hubbell have begun installation of the show which will interpret the history of wildlife in Clinton County and the Lake Champlain basin. Bird and animal specimens have been lent by the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the NYS Museum in Albany, the Pember Museum in Granville, NY, SUNY Plattsburgh's Dept. of Biology, the Paine Memorial Library in Willsboro, the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation, the Adirondack Center Museum in Elizabethtown, and private collectors. Carved decoys and birds are on loan from the Adirondack Museum at Blue Mt. Lake and Dr. Loy S. Harrell, Burlington.

Cont'd

Wildlife of our region is the subject of a local history manual (the th in our series), this one written by Mark Gretch. The manuals will be offered to schools but they will also be available in the Museum Shop. A shorter version without a teacher's guide will accompany the exhibition instead of a catalogue. Mark will present a program at the Association's April meeting and he will also offer a gallery talk in the museum, the date to be announced later. Scheduled to run through Oct. 30, this exhibition will be a unique presentation by the County Museum.

FOX SKINS

The Subscriber wishes to purchase FOX SKINS for which he will pay a liberal price.

James Trowbridge.

Plattsburgh Republican, January 17, 1818

MRS. D.K. GILBERT - AN EXCEPTIONAL WOMAN

Soon after publication of CLINTON COUNTY - A Pictorial History, letters began to flow to the authors, congratulating them on the book and adding some hitherto unknown details about families included in the publication. One such letter arrived from Mrs. Wm. R. Eisenmann, granddaughter of Della Kate Frisbie Gilbert (Mrs. Gilbert, druggist, 14 Brinkerhoff Street, Plattsburgh). According to Mrs. Eisenmann, her grandmother was an unusual person. "She was widowed at age 32 and had three children, Caroline, Hazel and Harry. Her husband, Walter, was a pharmacist. After his death, unlike most women of her time and age, Grandmother Gilbert went to college. She was the first woman to receive a degree in pharmacy from Cornell University. She then returned to Plattsburgh and took over her husband's pharmacy. She sent her three children to college (Cornell, Wellesley and Stephens) and continued a life most modern day women would envy. She was very active at the Military Post in Plattsburgh and at the beginning of World War I was requested by Washington to travel to various military installations throughout the eastern U.S. to set up Hostess Houses and to organize women of the community to run them. These were the forerunners of the U.S.O. She truly was a woman before her time. At the time of her death in 1925 she was Head Pharmacist at a New York City Hospital."

"MILLINERY & MANTUA-MAKING: Miss Flagg and Miss Rogers inform the public that they have commenced the above branches of business, in the building lately occupied by Messrs. A.J. & G. Sperry, and next door South of the office of the Republicans. They have just received from New-York, a choice assortment of Silks, Laces, Ribbons, Merino Trimming, &c. and have been furnished with the latest fashions. They have ready made, a variety of fashionable Caps and Bonnets, composed of the best materials." Platts. Republican, Jan. 17, 1818

WAR GAMES IN CLINTON COUNTY

CCHA member Joe McGrath and PSUC student intern Bob Sloma report good progress in their research for a program and exhibit on the 1939 military maneuvers that took place in Clinton County. Below we reprint an article from the Plattsburgh Daily Press, published on August 2, 1939, which sets the stage for the ensuing events.

"TANKS SPEED THROUGH CITY - Battalion of 66th Infantry Pitches Camp At East Beekmantown Site

United States army tanks sped through the streets of Plattsburgh for the first time in history last evening and by the time the last truck had rumbled through town the main body had pitched camp at East Beekmantown and field kitchens were preparing the first meal for the 400 officers and men of the 66th Infantry's tank battalion.

Under the command of Lieut. Col. Vernon Evans, the body of men traveled in 37 light field tanks which bristled with machine guns, 100 light service trucks, motorcycles and huge convoy trucks. In the meantime, three barges, one loaded with tanks and the others with supplies docked at the Barge terminal yesterday.

The tank battalion arrived shortly before seven o'clock and about an hour later had completed its march from Fort Devens, Mass. The convoy entered Plattsburgh by way of the Lake Shore road, United States Avenue, Peru street, Charlotte street, Bridge street, City Hall Place, west on Cornelia to Beekman street and north on Beekman to Halsey's Corners and then straight north to East Beekmantown, five miles away.

The convoy was escorted to the camp by State police in a white patrol car."

In the same issue the Daily Press reported a speech by Maj. Gen. I. A. Drum at a dinner given by the Rotary and Kiwanis clubs and various members of the citizenry. Robert C. Booth made an ideal toastmaster, "introducing those at the Speaker's table in a happy manner".

*** Researchers McGrath and Sloma are still eager to hear members' reminiscences of 1939.

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