

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly By The Clinton County Historical Association

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OCTOBER PROGRAM

The year of 1989 will always be remembered by the Association as one of anniversaries. An especially important event is the Bicentennial of the founding of the U.S. Customs Service, and we have a program and a museum exhibition to mark the occasion. On Monday, Oct. 2 at 7:30 p.m. CCHA's monthly meeting will feature Supervisory Import Specialist C. Lee Noyes as our guest speaker. Mr. Noyes' talk is entitled "THE CANADIAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT - WHAT DOES IT SAY AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?", focusing on the implications of the Agreement to both U.S. Customs and the business community. The program will be held in the first floor meeting room of the Clinton County Government Center in Plattsburgh.

"REVENUE MUST BE HAD"

A quotation by Alexander Hamilton is the title of an exhibition at the County Museum which will be on view through Nov. 30. Robert Fitzgerald, a retired Customs examiner and CCHA trustee, was essential to the success of the project in collecting loan materials and sharing his expertise and experience with the staff. Loans were obtained from the Customs Service at Champlain, Rouses point and Ogdensburg; Plattsburgh Public Library; Special Collections at Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh, and a number of private owners and collectors. The exhibition was made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts. Julie A. Davies is the guest curator and designer.

Mark your calendars! Saturday, October 28 is the date of the Association's annual banquet which takes place this year at the Royal Savage Inn. The special program is a new 20-min. multi-image show by James Bleecker, commissioned by Historic Saranac Lake, entitled "Unlocking The Wilderness - Settlement of the Adirondacks." Reservations can be made by calling CCHA at 561-0340. Tickets cost \$10.50, per person.

A LETTER FROM MELANCTHON WOOLSEY TO THOMAS MACDONOUGH
(describing his penurious condition)

Plattsburgh, March 5, 1818

"I came in 1787 to this then wilderness, to rise anew, or to starve unseen, - When I landed, there were not more than 6 families in Plattsburgh, but 5 between us and Ticonderoga and 1 between us and the line - save my little furniture and a small supply of provisions. I had nothing and was 5 worse than nothing thru the expense of getting here - I bought a new farm on credit and cut the first tree with my own hands - I hired half the mills - drew in my own logs, sawed them, and drawing deeds and recording and as the country settled and did all my writing at night, laboring to the extent of my bodily strength a days, I got up a little house and a good barn - The County was organized, we increased in population and I began to thrive, blessed beyond measure, blessed in my family, and perfectly contented - I paid for my farm - kept it for four years and sold it on being appointed Collector of the Customs with a salary of \$100 and the fees and perquisites as much more - with this noble help, I put Melancthon (now Capt. Woolsey) to the Flatbush Academy - the next year, my salary being raised to \$250, the fees and (&) increasing and the Clerkship of the County making up my income to about \$600. I sent Harry to the same Academy and Mary to boarding school in Montreal - when M. got to read Virgil and pretty forward in french, his uncle the present Judge Platt of the Supreme Court, then an eminent lawyer, proposed taking him into his office in the study of the Law - it was so done - but Mr. Platt being elected to Congress, the Clerks left pretty much to themselves and my boy ther 17 falling in love, where I conceived the connexion would be important - I proposed the Navy to him - it took and 6 weeks obtained his warrant as Midshipman - I am glad - but until he was promoted to a lieutenantcy he continued to cost me \$100 a year - He has since been of assistance to me and this last year I should have been deeply distressed but for an advance he made me of \$300 - Here we leave him - I went on comfortably and swimmingly, till the Embargo year 1808, and was at the close of the year worth \$13000 - After I had been Collector a year or two, I found it convenient to execute the duties of that Office to remove to this spot where I now live and purchased my 50 acres built my house by degrees - let my old farm, then grown to 500 acres for 3 years at \$100-250 a year with all the stock - 8 cows 50 sheep 2 pair Oxen and pair horses - at the end of three years I sold and bought your farm on it was not one rod of rail fences, and the log ones rotten about 30 acres cleared and as much more half-cleared - here again I went to work like a dog and in the course of 12 years had got 120 acres under fine improvement - full twenty thousand rails, nearly all cedar (the rails were on the whole farm what is now mine as well as yours) finely stacked, and was in circumstances to throw open my doors to my friends and to gentle strangers, my heart was always open, and disliked nothing so much as to eat my morsel alone - the hireling was never defrauded or delayed of his wages - the poor were never told to depart and "be ye warmed and be ye clothed" no merit in me, it was luxury, it was enjoyment, probably it was selfish, All that I have saved, is what I have given.

"The revenue ceased with embargo - I was inclined to execute it faithfully, my funds were exhausted and I supported the expense on my own personal credit - by loans from the Bank of Vermont without notes or endorsers, save in one instance Col. N. Pearl and G. King endorsed a note for 1000 dollars at 6 months - the Treasury department countenanced this transaction by paying my drafts and remitting to me, to enable me to pay, for some time, and never prohibited it - They sent me two companies of troops, these I had to cover, I had to provide with wood and sometimes with provisions - I had armed boats and vessels and about 40 men employed in them, besides inspectors at every landing place from Champlain to White Hall inclusive and on the (*indecipherable*) great leading roads, - of all these arrangements the Secretary of the Treasury was kept constantly informed - The whole country, federal and democratic was opposed to the measures and whatever I seized or detained, was almost always taken from me by fraud or violence - Rafts were taken by force, Vessels cut from their moorings and run over the line, with the hands belonging to them as prisoners, stores were broken open and the contents carried off - even the Revenue Boat with her colours flying was captured and carried below the line, and officers and men beat and abused - A great expense, was necessarily incurred - At last, in the beginning of 1809 (Gov) Tompkins supposed my office would suit Mr. Saily and by slanderous representations obtained it for him, and he took possession the 1st March of that year.

"As directed I closed and forwarded my public accounts, exhibiting a balance of nearly \$4000 my due - \$2900 of which I owed to the Vermont Banks; They waited patiently more than a year without calling, further than to inquire into the probability of my accts being settled - in the meantime I could hear nothing from Washington - my letters remained unanswered nor could I discover the cause till the winter of 1812. Mr Lloyd inquired into the cause, and discovered that Mr. Saily and Hicks had represented my accts against the War Department, for building barracks, as fraudulent, this they alleged as a reason for making no settlement with me; they, however, soon after, sent me a draft on the Collector of New York for \$2300 - I went immediately to Washington arranged and explained and received \$1200 more and this last November I obtained a further sum of \$468.14 - they allowed me nothing for interest nor for the costs of various lawsuits that I had to defend, in which I was implicated under the embargo laws and a variety of incidental expenses inseparable from the nature of my avocation - They at once doubled the Salary of Mr. Saily's appointment, raising it to \$500 - "

Ed. note: This correspondence offers a satisfying insight into the life of an early settler on Cumberland Head, his tenure as collector of the customs, and the effects on his appointment of the winds of political change, whether deserved or not. Woolsey's letter to Macdonough continues with a request that Macdonough use his influence to insure compensation for Woolsey's purchase of flour to bake bread for Macdonough's fleet.

BATTLE OF PLATTSBURGH EXHIBIT

We hope everyone will be able to visit this exhibit before it closes on Nov. 30. Some special objects on display are on loan from Fort Ticonderoga Museum and private owners. Fort Ti has graciously lent a dress sword presented to Midshipman Frank Ellery for his gallantry during the battle of Plattsburgh. Philip and Shirley Gordon once again made available their pieces of scrimshaw depicting the battle, and Rodney Ralston lent an infantry sword, an artillery sword and a Hall rifle (1838), all representative of the 1812 period. The Hall rifle is similar to those given to Aiken's Volunteers by Congress in recognition of their bravery. General Macomb's presentation sword, a stunning piece, is also on display.

Accompanied by summer weather, events planned for the 175th observance of the battle went off without a hitch. It was especially pleasing to have several descendants of Commodore Thomas Macdonough in attendance at the ceremonies. Mr. & Mrs. Rodney Macdonough, Jr., Mr. & Mrs. Howard Verkaart (Isabelle Macdonough) and Mrs. Isabelle Verkaart Makin made the journey to Plattsburgh to honor their illustrious great- (and great-great) grandfather.

Allan Everest's new book The Military Career of Alexander Macomb & Macomb at Plattsburgh is on sale in the Museum Shop at \$7.95 plus NYS tax and shipping. Checks should be made payable to CCHA for \$10.26.

Also on sale in the Museum Shop as ideal Xmas gifts: prints of the Valcour Island Lighthouse and the battle of Plattsburgh, both in striking color and priced at \$100.00, unsigned. A new book: The Hamlet of Lyon Mountain, \$3.00, researched and written by Helena T. Penalís in 1988 to celebrate the Bicentennial of Clinton County.

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