

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly By The Clinton County Historical Association

No. 259 President: John L. Myers Editor: Helen W. Allan November, 1989

NOVEMBER EVENTS

CCHA's Oct. 28 annual banquet takes the place of a regular November program. At the museum there are two special exhibitions to be viewed: "The Battle of Plattsburgh, 175th anniversary" and "Revenue Must Be Had." "Revenue" closes on Nov. 30 and "Battle" will continue until Dec. 15.

THE McMASTERS WRITING PRIZE, 1990

The McMasters Committee reminds us that it is time to encourage the submission of entries for the Feb. 1, 1990 deadline. Papers should have a minimum length of 3,000 words and be of high literary quality, original and soundly researched. It may be a piece of historical fiction if clearly indicated by the author. The manuscript must be in a completed state. All manuscripts become the property of the Historical Association which reserves the right of first publication, wholly or in part. Manuscripts should not reveal the author's identity; a cover letter with name and address should accompany the paper.

DUES ARE DUE

The Historical Association hopes to increase its membership by 20% in 1990. This ambitious goal is motivated in part by diminishing state and federal funding for historical agencies and museums, requiring more support on the local level. Loyal support from the Clinton County Legislature and the City of Plattsburgh has enabled CCHA to retain its modest scale of subscriptions. When you think how far \$10-\$20 does not stretch these days, the Association offers a great deal in return as most members are quick to agree when they receive a monthly copy of Notes with news of programs, museum activities, excerpts from historical manuscripts, plus our annual magazine, the Antiquarian. Members have free admission to the museum and receive 10% discount on publications in the Shop. Your support will help us to preserve the best of the past for the future.

A CHILDHOOD IN ROUSES POINT

by Marjorie Ladd Saxe

All my life seemed to be connected with the Custom House. My earliest recollections are watching for my father to come home from the Custom House and having him say at any time during the day or night, "I have to go down to clear a tow." He would know about what time a string of canal boats were coming from Canada or going to Canada and he would go through the boats looking for smuggled goods.

When I was very small the tendency was to smuggle Chinamen (as we called them) into the country. I recall once crying because my father had discovered two Chinamen in a large ice chest. I was sorry because he had to seize not only the men but the boat as well. I heard him say that he felt sorry for the boat owner's wife and children. The boat owner had two children. Families lived on canal boats and it was like having your home taken away. It was gone for good. The wife and children began to cry when my father discovered the Chinamen. I cried when Father told Mother about it. He said the Chinamen were very frightened and said nothing when he took them to the jail in Rouses Point. The government sent them back to China.

Many Chinese were seized in Rouses Point about 1905-1912. I remember that a load of hay came through the customs once and one of the customs officers took the pitchfork from the hay load and, in pushing it into the hay, he hit a Chinese man who yelled and jumped out of the hay. At that time a Chinese would pay \$100 to anyone who could get him into our country. I recall going by the jail and feeling sorry for the sad-looking men waiting to be shipped back to China. The jail or "lock-up" as it was called was on Lake Street.

During the early days of the automobile, the roads were not paved in northern New York State. One night my father received a telephone call from a Rouses Point taxi owner, Peter Sequin. Pete said he was suspicious of some passengers he had and that he was taking them to Sweet's Ferry at Chazy Landing. He thought that two of his party were Chinese. A man had hired Pete to take him and his two elderly aunts to the Ferry. There they would be met by another relative. Pete noticed that his hire, who seemed nervous, did not speak to his aunts. The road to Chazy Landing was rough so when Pete came to a farm house where he knew there was a telephone, he told his passenger that his car had overheated and he would get some water at the farm house. It was then that he made a quick call to my father. I was frightened when I heard my father call Jack Sabourin, the sheriff, and tell him to get a car and pick him up right away. I knew my father took his revolver.

It seemed a very long wait before my father was home again. When he reached Sweet's Ferry, Pete Sequin was waiting for him. The man renting the car started to fight and tried to push my father off the dock but Jack Sabourin soon had him handcuffed. The two heavily-veiled elderly aunts were indeed Chinese men and as usual they were frightened and said nothing. They never resisted arrest, and they were almost always sent back to China.

We lived by the lake and canal boats were a familiar sight. Chinese men were also found between piles of lumber on canal boats. The boats were sometimes tied together in twos. The tow could be as many as 10 to 20 boats long. The tug would whistle for the

drawbridge to open and it was then that my father would have to clear the tow. The jail then was in the brick pump house near the lake on Main Street. The lock-up was a small room with a barred window facing the street. Later the jail was put at the back of the building facing the lake.

At that time, when my father was the collector of customs, the port of Rouses Point was one of the most important on the Canadian border. The trains, highway and water travel all went through Rouses Point to Montreal. The first Custom House I recall was located on the street leading to the lake from Main Street. Newton's Drug Store was on one corner and the Holland House was on the other. The Custom House was on the south side of the street. Some officers I recall were Jim Otis, Will Shaw, Frank Clough, Herbert Trombley, Merrill Weed, Charles Rennell, Roy Delano and Hoffnagle. Will Minkler was custodian. Later the F.W. Myers building was built and the second floor became the Custom House. Half of the lower floor was the post office and the other half the offices of F.W. Myers Customs Brokers.

Prohibition came in and the customs officers were very busy with extra help. Every conceivable device was used to bring alcoholic beverages into the country from Canada. Liquor that was seized was stored in the basement of the Myers building. One time a man claimed he was bring his grandmother's body to the U.S. for burial. The next month the same man came through Rouses Point with another supposed relative for burial. My father ordered the coffin removed from the train and opened it. They found it loaded with expensive liquor. Cars had to be searched carefully for liquor could be hidden almost anywhere. Very often it would be in the cushions or rolled up in window curtains. Once a car came to the Customs House with two sisters of charity in the back seat. The inspector could see nothing wrong with the car until the driver started to drive off. Then a tire blew out. One of the sisters got out and swore. The officer noticed men's shoes under the flowing black outfit. The "sisters" were taken back to the Custom House where it was discovered that they were men with choice liquor tied round their waists. The car was seized and they were arrested. When a number of cars were seized, the government held a public auction. Many people bought a good car that way.

Diamonds were also smuggled in from Canada. One time when my father was Collector, he had a tip from the New York City customs that a certain man would be coming through. There was reason to believe he was a diamond smuggler. When he came through, Father had the man's luggage brought into his office. The contents were examined. The customs men carefully checked the lining of the bags and there was no sign of diamonds. The suspect looked very pleased and was about to put his clothing back in the bags when Father looked at an oblong clothing brush. He picked up the brush and, taking his pen knife, ran the knife along the back of the brush. The back fell off. Out tumbled diamonds all over his desk. My father's picture and the story were printed in Liberty magazine soon after. Some time later a leather pouch of diamonds was discovered in a bathroom in the Holland House. The suspect in this story was also apprehended.

Ed. note: Many thanks to Mrs. Ladd for allowing us to use an excerpt from her reminiscence of her childhood in Rouses Point.

"REVENUE MUST BE HAD"

Among the many fascinating items of information in the exhibition honoring the Bicentennial of the U.S. Customs Service are 19th c. duties levied against certain imported goods and even individuals. For example:

COCKADES, coachmen's	35%	LEECHES	free
COBBLESTONES, as crude materials	free	LENSES & LENSE glass for U.S.	free
CIGAR CUTTERS	60%	Light Houses	
COCAINE, crude, as an alkaloid	25%	MAGIC LANTERNS	45%
COTTON CORSET LACINGS	15%	MUSKETS made into shot guns	25%
COTTON UNION SUITS	25%	OPIUM cannot be imported by	
COWHIDE WHIPS	35%	Chinese subjects for any purpose.	
CRINOLINE CLOTH per sq. yd.	10¢	OPIUM prepared for smoking \$6 per lb.	
CUSPIDORS, indurated fiber wear	35%	PARASOL ribs & stretcher	50%
DAGUERROTYPE PLATES	45%	SEALING WAX	20%
DEATH OF IMMIGRANTS on shipboard,		SILK WORMS' EGGS	free
vessels must pay \$10 for each, whether		SKELETONS	free
corpse is landed or not.		SNUFF & SNUFF FLOUR per lb.	50¢
DRESSED & FINISHED BIRDS for hats	50%	SOCIETIES charging admission fees	
ELEPHANTS' TEETH or TUSKS	free	are not entitled to import items	free
FANS, painted or paper	50%	STEREOSCOPES	45%
FEATHERS, for beds	15%	TEAMS OF IMMIGRANTS, inc. harness,	
FLAT or SAD IRONS per lb.	8/10¢	tackle & vehicles in actual use	free
FROGS, alive	20%	VELOCIPEDES	45%
HARMONIUMS	45%	VESSELS of U.S. cannot use boilers	
HOOPS, toy	35%	taken from a foreign wreck.	

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