

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly By The Clinton County Historical Association

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JANUARY PROGRAM

The Association's 1990 series of monthly programs begins with the showing of an acclaimed film entitled "An Empire of Reason." Produced by Middlemarch Films in 1988 to celebrate New York's Bicentennial, the 60-minute film is called 'innovative and creative' by Paul Finkelman, SUNY Binghamton, in the Journal of American History. Well-known broadcasters such as Walter Cronkite, John Chancellor, Charlayne Hunter-Gault, William F. Buckley, Jr. and Robert McNeil report the news of the struggle over ratification of the federal Constitution in New York State in the style of a modern documentary film. Governors Mario Cuomo of New York and Thomas Kean, New Jersey, Mayor (as of this writing) Ed Koch of New York City and the Hon. Sol Wachtler, New York's chief judge, also have roles. According to Finkelman, the film is 'charming, humorous and entertaining.' "An Empire of Reason" will be shown after a brief business meeting in the meeting room (ground floor) of the Clinton County Government Center on Monday, January 8 at 7:30 p.m. After the screening, Drs. Allan S. Everest and John L. Myers, American historians, will be on hand to answer questions and discuss issues raised by the film. CCHA thanks Dr. Stephen L. Schecter, executive director of the NYS Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, for permission to use the film free of charge.

CCHA'S OFFICERS IN 1990

At a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Association held on December 6, the following individuals were elected to office:

President: Ralph (Pete) Hubbell	Secretary: Mark Bennett
Vice-Pres: Joann Perry	Treasurer: Martha Lockwood

The slate of nominees published in the December issue of Notes was accepted with unanimous approval at the December 4 meeting of the general membership. Committee appointments will be made by President Hubbell.

In BRIEFLY TOLD: Plattsburgh, New York, 1784-1984 the author, Allan S. Everest, refers to Smith M. Weed as a 'wealthy industrialist who promoted railroads, hotels, a hospital and the Plattsburgh Theatre, three times a delegate to the Democratic National Convention and nationally known for his work in the Democratic party.' He was also the owner of a large, handsome house on Cumberland Avenue in Plattsburgh which houses the American Legion, Post 20. The mansard roof that was probably added by Weed was removed later. The opulence of Mr. Weed's house was matched by the landscape design of his property, as we are told in an article in the Plattsburgh Republican, July 15, 1882. Entitled 'A Handsome Work of Art', the essay reads: 'Hon. Smith M. Weed has just erected a fountain in his grounds on Cumberland Avenue, which will prove one of the main attractions of this locality. The main basin is of iron, with cement lining, and is 21 feet in diameter. From the centre rises a massive stone pedestal upon which stands the fountain proper, consisting of a shaft supporting two octagonal basins, six and nine feet in diameter, ornamented at the angles with animals' heads, through which the overflow passes, the whole being surmounted by the principal figure, a half draped "Venus rising from the Sea," standing on her fabled shell, and supported by two Cupids on dolphins' backs. There are something over one hundred water jets in all, one set of which forms a dome of spray over the Venus, which faces the north, and is of about three-quarters life size. The whole structure is finished with elaborate ornamentation, being of metal, in imitation of bronze, and rising twenty-five feet above the base. We congratulate Mr. Weed on the display of good taste in this selection, and also citizens of the village, in having so fine a work of art set up in their midst. A handsome summer house built entirely of small logs, has also been recently added to the grounds, which when finished will form one of the most charming little parks in the village.'

Alas, Smith M. Weed's park disappeared a long time ago, but collectors of historical postcards are probably familiar with a view of it. There is also a photograph of the park and fountain in the Plattsburgh Daily Press's Industrial Edition, 1897, an excellent copy of which is presently consigned for sale in the Museum Shop.

Also in the Plattsburgh Republican, April 23, 1881:

'Enormous quantities of fish - chiefly wall-eyed pike - have been caught this spring in Missisquoi Bay and northern parts of Lake Champlain, and shipped from Rouses Point and Alburg. The fish are caught in seines which are drawn under the ice, trenches being first cut so as to make it possible to handle the ropes.'

WE'RE THRILLED by the speedy response of many members to our membership billing in November. We hope you've enjoyed receiving Notes each month and the Antiquarian just recently. To present several exhibitions each year and maintain our current services, we need your support more than ever. Please help us to save money by mailing your check quickly, thus eliminating the need for further billing. Thank you!

When Lake Champlain freezes, as is happening unusually early this winter, it's hard to recall balmy summer days when a boat trip to Valcour Island would be a pleasure. However, CCHA's custodianship of the Valcour Lighthouse requires advance planning even in the depths of winter. The Plattsburgh Republican, June 22, 1878 featured an item that concerns the lighthouse: 'There is not a better kept light house on Lake Champlain than that on Valcour Island and, kept by Capt. W.G. Herworth, who enlisted in Capt. John McDermott's Company during the last war as a private - subsequently promoted through the intermediate grades to Captain, and Brevet Major. He was wounded twice at Port Hudson, and has carried one bullet in his body ever since, besides having an ugly hole torn in his cap at Irish Bend, La., by a fragment of a shell. The gallant Capt. takes just pride in exhibiting this cap to visitors, as he does also everything in and about the faultlessly kept premises of which he has had charge about two years.'

Then a sad note in the same newspaper, February 19, 1881: 'Major William G. Herworth, keeper of the Valcour light house, died at his residence on Valcour Island, Thursday last. His remains will be taken to Redford, on Sunday, at 12 pm. The remains will leave this village Sunday morning at 8 o'clock. The Major was a social, genial, kindhearted gentleman, and had won many friends in this locality. He enlisted in the war and was a member of Capt. McDermott's company. He was several times promoted for bravery on the battle - field.'

And a sequel to the story on March 19, 1881: 'The widow of the late Major Herworth, light house keeper on Valcour Island, has recently been appointed to the same office. This is as it should be. Mrs. Herworth had charge of the light for a long time previous to her husband's death, and the work connected with the office will be just as faithfully done as ever, and this has for years been considered one of the best kept light houses on the lake.'

CCHA is most anxious to interview anyone with information about the light house and its operation. Please call us if you have a story to share or know someone else who does.

Current exhibits in the museum include paintings, furniture and other objects from the Keese homestead, courtesy of Mrs. Ann Keese Chien; a silver bowl engraved with an image of Heart's Delight Farm, Chazy, presented by Philip & Shirley Gordon; a toy steamboat given by Frank Morrison; an 1829 map of Clinton Co. published by David H. Burr and other maps of the county and lake; Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt's handkerchief, presented by her in 1901 during a visit to Mooers, and a favorite footwarmer, just right for this time of year.

Scheduled for March: a special exhibition interpreting the experience of the Normal School classes who graduated from City Hall after the disastrous fire of 1929 destroyed the school. Comprising photographs and memorabilia, this exhibition is part of the celebrations for the centennial of State University of New York at Plattsburgh.

NEW FACES OF 1990

Actually, they are not new, but quite familiar to CCHA members. Julie Robinson is a former assistant curator at the museum and Robert Sloma is a 1989 SUNY Plattsburgh graduate who was our student intern during the spring semester, concentrating specifically on the 1939 maneuvers in Clinton County. Julie will soon rejoin our staff to work on a project funded by the New York State Council on the Arts to research and plan an exhibition on the history of fire and fire control in Clinton County. Bob has been hired, also through a NYSCA grant, to catalogue and store CCHA's large collection of photographs. The collection has been growing rapidly in recent years and has become a much-used community resource. We'd like to welcome Julie and Bob on their return to the County Museum.

A sincere pat on the back is deserved by Jim Bailey, City of Plattsburgh historian, who has made it his business to keep the city's monuments tidy - and even to plant a Xmas tree at the Champlain Monument in nearly sub-zero weather. Jim also organized volunteers to clean up the banks of the Saranac River in downtown Plattsburgh at the Macdonough Monument - a potentially lovely spot where it's pleasant to pause on a hot day and watch the Saranac River roll by. Plattsburgh's downtown has benefited from Jim's efforts to highlight historic sites and markers which remind us of its truly beautiful location on Lake Champlain. A letter from Charles Platt to Dr. Samuel Jenner of Northfield, Mass. in 1809 describes his arrival on the western shore of the lake in 1784; it was 'an entirely new country and (we) called the town Plattsburgh.' Another reminder: Plattsburgh is fortunate in having an outstanding City Hall designed by the nationally known architect John Russell Pope. Built in 1917-18, construction was made possible by a bequest in the will of Loyal Smith, a benefactor to other Plattsburgh institutions as well. See page 2 for a forgotten park.

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Clinton County Historical Assn.

Box 332

Plattsburgh, N.Y. 12901

518-561-0340

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