

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 38

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

September, 1967

## *Fall Programs, 1967*

September 11—“Pioneer Homes of the Champlain Valley” by Dr. Allan S. Everest. This illustrated talk traces the evolution of pioneer homes on both sides of the lake from log cabin to high Georgian style. It will be given at 8 o'clock in the Association rooms over the Public Library.

October 2—An address by Dr. Louis L. Tucker, the topic to be announced later. Dr. Tucker is the Assistant Commissioner for State History, a position formerly known as the State Historian. This is Dr. Tucker's first visit to the North Country, and it gives him and us an opportunity to get acquainted. The public is cordially invited to both of these programs.

## *Riddle of the Month*

The June riddle: Mr. Neal Burdick of Plattsburgh first answered the riddle—that Arnold built his fleet for the battle of Valcour in 1776 at Skenesborough, now Whitehall; and that Macdonough built his for the battle of Plattsburgh in 1814 in Otter Creek, near Vergennes, Vermont.

New riddle: Mr. Halsey Shields of Keeseville submits the following: What famous boat, although officially given a new name, has always been referred to by its original name?”

## **EARLY BAPTISMS**

(From the history of the “West Plattsburgh Baptist Church, 1811-1966” by Sarah Smith Baker.)

Baptism by total immersion was a requisite of the faith. For many years this was practiced in the waters of the Saranac River, climatic conditions being no deterrent. If the event were to take place in winter a hole was chopped in the ice for the purpose and no one was ever supposed to catch cold during Baptism. Contained in a previous history is reference to Mrs. Mary Bradford who “was baptized in the river during winter in her girlhood”. This time of year was not reserved for the young, as Levi Smith in his diary describes the baptism of Mrs. Elijah Weston on Feb. 20, 1835. She had been for a long time trying to seek religion and live it secretly. Recently she had felt that would not do and had openly said she meant to try to serve God. Going down the steps of ice into the water she said, “Bless the Lord”. Other members baptized that same winter were George Pierce, Miron Reed, Sophia Morrison, William, Harvey, Lottie and Rufus Dodge.

## *Wool on the Battle of Plattsburgh*

John E. Wool (1784-1869) was a major in the regular army at the battle of Plattsburgh. His later military career included the position of Inspector General and service in both the Mexican and early Civil Wars. He was retired as a major general in 1862. Excerpts follow from a letter he wrote B. J. Lossing, a historian of the War of 1812, in which he comments on Dawson's earlier history of the war. His eyewitness account challenges some of the traditions concerning this battle.

Troy, New York,  
May 10, 1860.

My dear Lossing,

In his account of the battle of Plattsburgh Mr. Dawson says, in page 379 and 380, that "the enemy on the 5th, continued his march, in the course of which he met serious obstructions from the trees which had been felled in the roads and from the removal of the bridges on his route—a duty which had been efficiently performed by General Mooers, of the New York Militia, seven hundred strong." General Mooers, on the 4th, as it appears from General Macomb's report, "collected about 700 Militia and advanced seven miles on the Beekmantown road to watch the motions of the enemy, and to skirmish with him as he advanced—also to obstruct the roads with fallen trees and to break up the bridges." It is due to truth to say that the General, nor his Militia felled trees in the roads, removed bridges or skirmished with the enemy previous to, or on the morning of, the 6th, when the enemy took possession of the village of Plattsburgh.

On the 5th. General Mooers with his Militia was encamped on the Beekmantown road, four or five miles from Plattsburgh. Majors Appling and Sproul were ordered on the direct road to Chazy with directions to obstruct the enemy's advance on this road. This service was performed by them on that, and on no other road was a similar duty performed. Up to the 5th not a shot had been fired at the enemy. It was this circumstance which induced me to call on General Macomb, when I remarked I thought we ought not to permit the enemy to reach Plattsburgh without some evidence of a determination to resist him and to defend our position; and requested permission to go out on the evening of the 5th with the troops under my command, the 29th Regiment, only then 200 strong, when I would reach the enemy's camp before morning, beat up his quarters and perhaps take from him some prisoners from whom the General might learn the state of their forces. This he objected to saying I might be captured and he had no men to lose. In the course of the day I again called on the General and made the same application but with no better success. About sun down however he called at my quarters and directed me to go out the next morning at sunrise with two hundred and fifty infantry, and at the same time said Captain Leonard with his Artillery will go with you—the Captain was present and heard what the General said. Afterwards I induced the General to change the order from sunrise to 3 o'clock. Captain Leonard refused to march with me, because, as he said, he had not received orders to do so. The remarks of the General that he would go with me he did not consider an order. I halted at the camp of General Mooers when I learned the enemy was encamped at the junction of the two roads leading to Chazy, about four or five miles from the General's camp and nine miles from Plattsburgh. I recommenced my march and at daylight I met the advance of the enemy at Howes, seven or eight miles from Plattsburgh, and from this point I disputed every inch of ground. . . . I received no aid or assistance from General Mooer's Militia save about thirty men who volunteered to join my command and remained with it until my arrival at Plattsburgh. It is however due to General Mooers to say that he endeavored to bring his troops into action but did not succeed. They fled without firing a gun, and did not stop until they crossed at or near Pike's Cantonment, except a small party, which defended the upper bridge. These I am under the impression, were the twenty-five young men of the village, who formed themselves into an independent Volunteer corps for the occasion.

In page 383, Mr. Dawson gives credit to Captain Leonard of driving the enemy out of the house in the village with hot shot. This service was performed by Captain Brooks of the foot Artillery. Captain Leonard was with my command at the bridge. One building only was burned. During the siege, from the 6th to the 10th, nothing of importance transpired except that the enemy established their several batteries preparatory to the attack on the 11th, and the gallant service per-

formed by Captain McGlassin, who with fifty men surprised three hundred men and drove them from the construction of a mortar battery a short distance from Fort Moreau. Although sick in bed McGlassin volunteered to perform this gallant act, which I think Dawson ought to have noticed. On the 11th on the approach of the British Fleet to attack McDonough, the troops on land opened their batteries upon the works of General Macomb, but without much effect. Their fire was briskly and efficiently returned from Forts Moreau, Brown and the block-houses. The enemy formed in two columns preparatory to an assault intended as soon as the anticipated victory obtained over the fleet of McDonough. One column moved near the bridge in the center of the village to be in readiness to cross, and the other crossed the ford at Pike's Cantonment without resistance from the Militia, who retired as the column advanced, the head of which halted within a short distance of the rear of our works and remained there until the engagement of the two fleets was decided. This being in favor of the Americans, Provost recalled his columns of assault and immediately commenced preparations for retreating to Canada. The column in rear of the American works recrossed the Saranac without interruption, excepting the company in advance which not receiving the order to fall back and after waiting some time for the main column, went back to learn the cause of the delay, when they came in contact with General Strong's Vermont Militia, who killed and took prisoners the greater part of the company. Thus ended the battle of Plattsburgh, excepting on the retreat of the enemy some of the Militia followed and picked up as prisoners 250 or 300 deserters.

In conclusion I have only to remark that much of General Macomb's report of what took place during the siege, and on the 11th, for instance, the resistance and repulse of the attacking columns, is considered by those who were present apocryphal. On reflection however it may be well to give the following facts in order that you may form a just estimate of the character and conduct of each officer in the battle of Plattsburgh. In designating the officers assigned to their several positions and commands Mr. Dawson omitted to mention myself. When Appling was assigned to the command of one of the Forts, I was assigned to the command of his rifle corps and a detachment of the sixth infantry. On the 11th, the day of the engagement, I was officer of the day. In the afternoon, soon after the defeat of the company in the advance of the British column, in the rear of the works, I met a person who I took to be a Militiaman, on horseback, with a British soldier behind him. I said, my good fellow where did you get this soldier,—his reply was out yonder in a skirmish with the enemy. I asked him who commanded,—he said everybody. I conducted him and his prisoner to General Macomb, when he was introduced to me as General Strong of the Vermont Militia. In the evening I was informed by a person who appeared to be well acquainted with the movements of the British that Governor Provost had retired from Plattsburgh with all his forces except one regiment which was ready and would soon follow. I immediately called on General Macomb and gave him the information, and requested permission with my command to go in pursuit. An Engineer happened to be present and suggested that it might be a ruse to draw us from our position. This decided the General and my application was refused. Early the next morning finding the enemy had retreated he ordered me with my command to follow in pursuit. In a few moments I was on the march. Major Appling finding that I had left with his rifle corps, applied for the command which was granted. He overtook me about four miles from Plattsburgh and took command, he being the senior. Soon after it commenced raining and he ordered a counter-march, and we returned to Plattsburgh, thereby losing the finest opportunity of acquiring military distinction that had occurred. I regretted the circumstance for I had anticipated the taking of many prisoners.

I am truly

Your friend

John E. Wool

To, B. J. Lossing Esqr.  
Poughkeepsie  
N. Y.

P.S. It is due to my friend Mr. Dawson to say that when I wrote to him on the subject of the battle of Plattsburgh, he had not completed his history of that battle.

## LOCAL HISTORY ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

The Office of State History will conduct a Local History Enrichment Program, September 15-16, 1967. The sessions, to be held in Chancellor's Hall in the State Education Building in Albany, are designed for the 1000 Local Historians of the state and for local society members concerned with enriching their own programs.

A notable panel of scholars will speak. On Friday afternoon Professor Allan Nevins will talk on "The Importance and Meaning of History." Other speakers on Friday include Professor Thomas Cochran of the University of Pennsylvania and Professor Paul Gates of Cornell. Saturday morning's panel discussion will be devoted to "Rural and Contemporary History." The moderator will be Professor Norman Graebner of the University of Virginia and panelists will be Professor Dewey Grantham of Vanderbilt, Professor Arthur Link of Princeton and Professor David Shannon of the University of Maryland.

Further details may be had from the editors of the "Notes" or by writing Mr. John F. von Daacke, Coordinator, Local History Enrichment Program, Office of State History, State Education Department, Albany, New York 12224.

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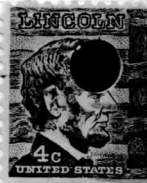
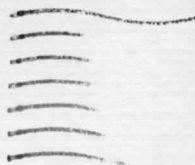
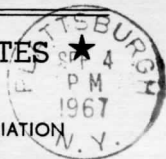
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