



North Country Notes

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Plattsburgh, the Cold War and the Atlas F Missile

By Carol Blakeslee-Collin

Depending on your generation, the rivalry and suspicion between the United States and the Soviet Union following World War II either brings back memories of community-wide fear and anxiety or the sense that our parents and grandparents must truly be exaggerating. Both nations had emerged from world war superpowers with economic and military blocs in a surprisingly symmetrical standoff, which became known as the Cold War. Europe was divided by an "Iron Curtain," with the massive military forces of the United States and its NATO allies on one side and the massive military forces of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies on the other.

As the Soviet Union attained nuclear parity with the United States in 1949, the Cold War entered a new phase more dangerous than anything our nation had faced before. A technological arms race began with each side continually improving its weapons. When it became apparent that each side was capable of totally destroying the other, our defense strategy evolved into the officially accepted military doctrine known as Mutual Assured Destruction, or MAD. Based on the concept that neither the United States nor its enemies would ever start a nuclear war because of the prospect of annihilation, MAD remained the central theme of American defense planning for well over three decades. In short, whoever shoots first dies second.

On the local front, Plattsburgh's long military history made it an ideal choice for an Air Force Base and a wing of the newly formed Strategic Air Command, or SAC. In 1955, the Plattsburgh AFB

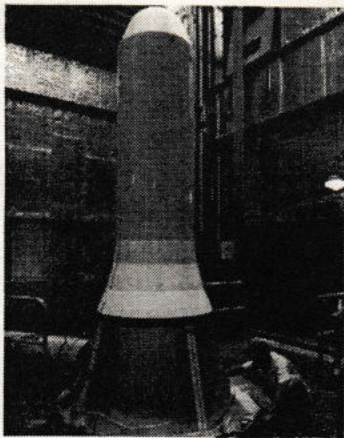
became the home of the 820th Strategic Aerospace Division, and \$100 million was spent on the construction of the base. The Strategic Air Command was a cornerstone of American defense strategy with an arsenal of nuclear-armed bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) on continuous alert for the duration of the Cold War. Accompanied by refueling squadrons, combat ready B-47s and B-52s from the 380th Air Bombardment Wing flew long missions from Plattsburgh to Greenland and North Africa. On the base, 24-hour alerts with planes fully loaded and ready for takeoff were a part of everyday life.

In January 1960, the United States Air Force announced the building of 12 Atlas "F" Missile sites around Plattsburgh in a fifty-mile radius, making its strategic importance all the more obvious. These were to be the only ICBM missile sites east of the Mississippi with 10 in New York and two in Vermont. President Kennedy's more aggressive defense posture accelerated the construction schedule, and the Army Corps of Engineers spared no expense. Each site was built to withstand nuclear attack and cost between \$14 and \$18 million. Some two thousand workers were under constant pressure to meet overlapping deadlines and round-the-clock construction schedules, even pouring concrete in the middle of winter. Eight workers died and more than a hundred were severely injured.

By September 1961, the elite 556th Missile Squadron began arriving for the Phase II installation; six months later came the actual missiles. After months of testing, the Strategic Air Command planned to take over all the sites by December 1962.

Missile

During that same spring of 1962, Premier Nikita Khrushchev grew concerned that his nation was terribly behind in the nuclear arms race. He knew that Soviet missiles were only powerful enough to reach Europe, while U.S. missiles were capable of striking the entire Soviet Union. Khrushchev decided to place intermediate-range missiles in Cuba, doubling the Soviet strategic arsenal and providing a deterrent against a potential U.S. attack. With Fidel Castro's approval, the Soviet Union worked quickly to build its missile installations in Cuba. By October 1962, American U2 spy flights confirmed the presence of the Soviet missiles. On October 22, President Kennedy informed the world of the secret missile bases 90 miles from Florida, demanded that Khrushchev remove the missiles, and ordered a naval blockade of the island. In response, Khrushchev authorized his Soviet field commanders to launch their nuclear weapons if invaded by U.S. forces. For the next seven days, the two leaders stared each other down.



In Plattsburgh, the Strategic Air Command Base went on full alert. The Atlas missiles in at least 3 sites were fully armed and ready to launch their nuclear payloads a quarter of the way around the world in a half hour. The remaining missile sites not yet ready were rushed to

alert status. Eight B-47 bombers were dispersed to the Burlington Municipal Airport, ten to a base in England, and KC-97 tankers to Labrador. The remaining aircraft, crews and support personnel in Plattsburgh stayed on alert, combat ready around the clock. Aware that Plattsburgh was a ground zero target, many families of the pilots and missileers evacuated to safer places. Peru teacher Lynn Wilke and his wife decided it was time to build a fallout shelter.

The worst day of the crisis was October 27, when a U-2 spy plane was shot down over Cuba. Tensions eased a day later, when Khrushchev announced he would dismantle the installations, return the missiles to the Soviet Union, and order all Soviet supply ships away from Cuban waters. After several days of teetering on the brink of nuclear war, the world breathed a sigh of relief.

Back at Plattsburgh AFB, the Strategic Air Command ordered the officially unaccepted sites back to more normal testing and checkout until the planned takeover in December. Meanwhile the liquid-fueled Atlas "F" was already becoming obsolete. More advanced electronics in the Titan II and the newer, safer, solid-fueled Minuteman missiles proved much more effective on long range targets. As quickly as they were built, the government decommissioned the Atlas missile sites. By 1965 they were a relic of the arms race. Plattsburgh continued as an important Strategic Air Command Base with the arrival of the B-52 Stratofortress Bombers and accompanying refueling tankers in the mid 1960s and the FB-111 fighter-bomber in 1970. The Cold War effectively ended with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The Plattsburgh Air Force Base saw one more important conflict during Operation Desert Storm, or the First Iraq War, in 1991 before being inactivated in 1995.

Civil Defense in Plattsburgh

During the Cold War, Plattsburgh and the surrounding area was deemed a Category 1 target. Within ten minutes of launching from a Soviet submarine, nuclear-armed missiles could turn much of Clinton County into an irradiated ruin. As Plattsburgh's vulnerability became more apparent, its citizens began to turn their basements into fallout shelters. The base's biggest promoter, Clyde Lewis, built his new home on Cumberland Head with basement walls 2 to 3 feet thick. Assemblywoman Janet Duprey remembers her family's basement fallout shelter having enough canned goods to feed the whole town of Peru. Lynn Wilke says that when

Missile

he heard the planes revving on the Air Base runway on 24-hour alert, he put mattresses all over his cellar and began to turn it into a fallout shelter.

In the 1980s, the Defense Department estimated about 30 percent of the population would survive a nuclear attack on military, urban, and industrial targets, but that an effective relocation plan could increase the survival rate to about 80 percent. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, they helped Plattsburgh establish the nation's best evacuation plan in case of an attack warning. Four pages of evacuation instructions were published in the telephone directory, including a map of routes to reception centers, 15 to 25 miles away and a list of items to bring such as extra socks, credit cards, a crowbar, and the family will. In a 1982 news article, Plattsburgh's civil defense director James P. O'Connor said, "Our plan is to get as far away as you can and hope for the best."

On Museum Day, June 5, 2010 a new exhibit will open on *Plattsburgh and the Cold War* at the Clinton County Historical Museum.

The Herwerth's of the Bluff Point Lighthouse

By Kim Peine

William Lewis Daniel Herwerth was born on September 18, 1826 in Germany. He came to the US in 1849 from Germany at the age of 23 on the Swedish ship the "Frau Charlotte". According to the ship logs he arrived alone in New York on April 27, 1849. Upon arrival he moved to Schenectady, NY where he worked at the Schenectady Locomotive Works. He later moved to Scotia and worked at the Scotia Steam Mill. In approximately 1852, he moved to Redford, NY and married 17 year-old Ann Jane McCasland who was born in Ireland. Ann died on April 2, 1860 during the birth of their second child. It is also assumed that their two children

Herwerth

died around the same time since they are buried together under one headstone in the Redford cemetery.

The 1860 federal census listed William, then 35, as living in Redford with his daughter Eliza, age 7. It is believed that she died shortly after the census was taken, and then buried with Ann and the other child.

On November 9, 1860 he married Mary Jane Hooey. She was born September 30, 1842, the daughter of Irish immigrant John Hooey. He came to America in the late 1820's and was a metal mixer at the famous Redford Glass Factory. Mary Jane's mother was Jane Davidson, the youngest daughter of John Davidson who came from England in 1825. John and 5 of his sons were master glass blowers and they all worked for Redford Glass. The Clinton County Historical Association houses samples of the glass such as pitchers and glasses.

In 1861, shortly after the birth of William and Mary Jane's first child, William Lewis, William Sr. enlisted as a first lieutenant in the 91st New York Volunteers Company C. Although he was under no obligation to serve during the Civil War as a new immigrant, a newspaper article at the time stated, "*he thought because he had some military knowledge he ought to go and do what he could for his country.*" In the 1840's Germans were required to serve three years of military duty upon reaching the age of twenty. Perhaps he moved to America at age 23 after having served his 3 years of what was known to be difficult, grueling service.

On May 27, 1863, Herwerth was wounded twice at Port Hudson, LA. One fragment tore through his hat and it is said that he took pride in showing it to everyone after the war. On June 16, 1863 he was shot in his right side at Irish Bend, LA—an injury that would eventually be the cause of his untimely death. He was promoted to a full captain on June 22, 1864.

Herwerth

On March 31, 1865 Herwerth was engaged in a battle at Gravelly Run, VA and was captured by the Confederates. Two Union soldiers from Wisconsin rescued him along with two other prisoners. They were subsequently awarded Medals of Honor for their bravery. He was mustered out on July 3, 1865 near Washington, D.C. and returned home to Redford. In honor of his skill and bravery, five of the companies he served with gave him a gold watch worth \$200. According to the December 6, 1866 issue of the Plattsburgh Sentinel he was brevetted major.

"Good Act - Governor Fenton has remembered another of the Boys In Blue - Capt. Wm. L. Herwerth, of the 91st New York, who was one of the best and most faithful officers in the service. For his adopted country no native of the soil had a more ardent love, or more generously labored to preserve it. In commendation of the bravery and



Mary & William Herwerth

gallant services of Capt. Herwerth, Gov. Fenton has bestowed upon him the Brevet Commission of Major, an act that all the co patriots of the Captain in the 91st will joyously approve. Capt. Herwerth is now on duty at the Clinton Prison, and we say at this time, as we have said to him personally, that his place is in the regular army, where his soldierly qualities, and his unexceptionable character, would not fail of a proper recognition."

From then on he was referred to as "The Major." In 1866, he was also appointed Sergeant of the Guard at Clinton Prison in Dannemora, a prestigious position he would hold until 1875. That same year Mary Jane gave birth to two more children, Estella (Stella) in March, and Elizabeth (Lizzie) in December 1867.

In June of 1867, The Plattsburgh Sentinel reported, *"Maj. W.L. Herworth, formerly of the 91st, has received notification of his appointment as 2d Lieut. In the Regular Army, with orders to proceed to join the 31st U.S. Infantry at Fort Rice, Dacotah Territory, if he passes a satisfactory examination. He passed through Plattsburgh for New York on Thursday for an examination."* Shortly thereafter he reported back that the wounds he had suffered in battle made it difficult to ride a horse, which was a necessity for service in the western plains.

The growing Herwerth family was living in Schuyler Falls when another daughter, Clara, was born in 1870, John Franklin followed in 1871. Unfortunately Clara died in 1873, but a fourth daughter Alice was born in 1875 in Dannemora.

The management at Clinton Prison was ousted as a result of a political upheaval in 1876 and Herwerth lost his position but quickly found another one. As the Plattsburgh Sentinel reported on July 7, 1876, *Major W.L. Herwerth has been appointed keeper of the Valcour Island Light House, taking charge of the same on the 14th.* It was common at the time to appoint Civil War veterans, especially those with rank, as lighthouse keepers. The Herwerth's took up residence on July 14, 1876 when Mary Jane was 8 months pregnant with their 7th child, Minnie, who was born on August 12, 1876 at the lighthouse.

It appears that the Herwerth family lived year-round at the lighthouse. In March 1879, The Plattsburgh Republican reported that *"Capt. Herwerth, light-house keeper on Valcour Island, was in town a few days ago, laying in his necessaries for the coming season, in order to get them to his island*

Herwerth

home while the ice bridge is serviceable."

Census records from June 1880 show that William, Mary and five of their children, Stella 14, Lizzie 12, John 9, Minnie 8 and Alice 5, lived in Peru at the lighthouse, which they all helped maintain. In September of 1880, the last child of their marriage, Garfield, was born.

Over the years, the Major was ill many times due to the bullet that still resided in his side next to his kidney. In 1881 he succumbed to his injuries and died of what was termed kidney disease even though there were rumors and even a newspaper article that alluded to him having been drowned by a former inmate.

The Plattsburgh Sentinel reported on February 25, 1881, *"The genial and patriotic Major Herwerth died at his residence on Valcour Island, Thursday of last week after an illness of several months. Major Herwerth was one of our most gallant Union soldiers in the war of the rebellion, carrying to his grave many honorable scars and suffering during the remainder of his life since the war, from wounds received in fighting for his country. In 1876 Maj. Herwerth was appointed keeper of the Valcour lighthouse where he has since resided with his family. He leaves a wife with a number of children. The remains were brought to Plattsburgh on Saturday and on Sunday were taken to Redford, his former home for burial. Major Herwerth was 55 years of age."*

His death left Mary Jane alone at the lighthouse to care for 6 children (William Jr. having moved out in 1878) and the light. William was buried next to his first wife in Redford cemetery with Masonic honors (meaning he himself was a Mason). At that time it was unheard of to have a woman lighthouse keeper, but state politician and businessman Smith M. Weed intervened and had Mary Jane appointed the keeper after the Major's death. She held the position for 23 years until her death of liver disease in 1903. She was one of only a handful of women who kept a light.

On March 16, 1900, The Plattsburgh Sentinel reported, *"It has been with a good deal of unpretentious heroism that this "lady of the isle" has kept the beacon burning since the death of her husband; and all done with a brave cheerfulness that has made all who know her fast friends."*

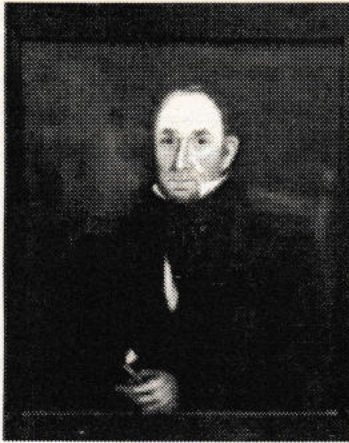
When Mary Jane died on January 19, 1903 her son John Franklin had the Major's remains moved to be beside her in the Gilliland Cemetery located on Route 9 south of Plattsburgh near Lake Champlain and Valcour Island.

The author, Kim Peine is William and Mary Jane Herwerth's great great granddaughter. They are her second great grandfather and grandmother on her mother's side. The Herwerth's youngest daughter Alice is the author's ancestor. Today William and Mary Jane's portraits, passed down through the Herwerth women, grace the author's home. William and Mary Jane are also honored by having copies of these portraits in their former home of many years, the Bluff Point lighthouse. As a descendant of these brave and hardworking people, Kim Peine is honored to enjoy the lighthouse, and to be able to share their story with you. For more information about the Herwerth family, go to the author's website at www.lein-lavoie.com.



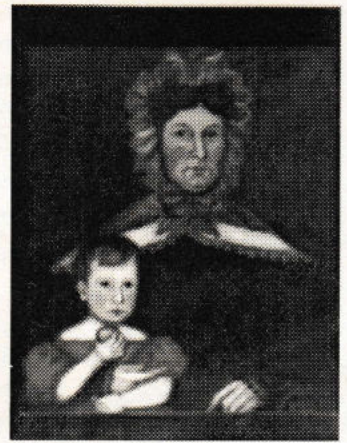
Mary Herwerth at the Lighthouse

Gift of Dewey Portraits



Elias Dewey

The portraits of Elias and Lovisa Hamilton Dewey with their son Silas were done by an itinerant painter circa 1815. They were given to CCHA by John Fitzpatrick of Topeka, Kansas. Elias and Lovisa Dewey arrived in Champlain in 1797 and built a log cabin where they lived until 1800 when they moved to a fifteen-room frame house that Elias Dewey built for his growing family. The Dewey's built a seven-room addition they used as an inn called Dewey's Tavern. The left wing of the British army camped here in September 1814 during the Plattsburgh campaign. The tavern was also the meeting place for POW negotiations in the winter of 1813 and 1814.



Lovisa & Silas Dewey

Memberships, Donations and Other Support Received From September 17, 2009 through March 6, 2010

Robert Ackerson, Robert and Mary Adams, Adirondack Mountain Club- Algonquin Chapter, Joseph and Janet Alexander, Jane Alexander, Alice T. Miner Collection, Allen County, Ron and Carol Allen, Donald and Madeleine Ambrose, Arnie's Restaurant, Association of Air Force Missileers, James and Anne Bailey, Clifton Barrette, John Barton, Donna and Jack Bell, Eleanor G. Berger, Roger and Christine Bigelow, Howard Black, Kit and Sally Booth, Jennifer and Alan Booth, Robert and Helen Booth, John Boule, Thomas Braga, Eileen Brewer, Worth and Dorothy Buchanan, Carolyn Burakowski, Edgar and Emily Burde, William and Margaret Caldon, Mark and Holley Christiansen, Alice Church, City of Plattsburgh, John and Ruth Clackler, Jane Claffey, Joan Clark, Ralph Clark, John and Penny Clute, Jan and Dave Couture, Bill and Pat Crosby, Cumberland Head Tomorrow (Memory of George Pasti), Jennifer and Randy Dame, DAR Library, Larry and Christine Davidson, John Dawson, Conrad and Vreni DeBeaufort, Heidi Dennis and Roger Columbus, Msgr. Lawrence Deno, Mark and Alita Desso, Nelson Disco, Anne Doherty, Gerald and Ruth Dominy, Robert and Mary Donlan, Barbara Dorrance, Ernest and Mary Dossin, Julie Dowd, Jerome and Janet Downs, Herman Drollette, Steve and Karen Engelhart, Ron and Linda Everleth, Geri Favreau, Laurie Feinberg, Jack Fitzpatrick and Anne Francis, Ellen Fleming, Mason and Joanne Forrence, Nancy Frederick, John and Barbara Gallagher, Robert Garrow, Maurica Gilbert and Noel Sowley, Roderic and Doreen Giltz, David and Lynne Glenn, Morris Glenn, William Glidden and Martha Bachman, Robert Grady, Joyce Grover, Alfreda Guay, Francis and Jane Hamilton, Arthur and Anne Handly, Stephen Harstedt, Linda Harwood, Roger Harwood, Joseph Heath, Robert Heins, Judith Heintz, June Heming, Donna Herbold, Heritage Printing, Patricia Higgins, Frank and Carol Hochrieter, Bart and Maryanna Holm, John Homburger, John Huru, Richard Jarrette, Arnold and Theresa Jensen, Lola and Raymond Johnson, Euclid and Susanne Jones, Marceline Kavanaugh, Robert and Lori Keever, Richard and Susan Kelly, Bill and Jane Kelting, Key Foundation, Debra Kimok, Donald Kinneston and Peg Donegan, Harold and Carole Klein, Carol Klepper, Estate of Frances Krinovitz, Arthur Lajoy, Constance LaLonde, Joseph Laundry, William Laundry, William and Beverly Leege, Dennis LeTendre, Brinley and Dorothy Lewis, James Lindgren, Martie and Roland Lockwood, Howard and Sandy Lowe, Dennis and Marie Lyriotakis, Stephen Martin, Beverly Maynard, Patricia Maynard, William and Ginny McBride, John and Nancy McGaulley, Ron and Ann Merkley, Howard and Myrna Miller, Rolando and Mary Jane Miranda (Memory of Addie Shields), Charles and Joan Mitchell, Miles and Kelly Moody, John Moravek, Henry Morlock, Marilyn Morton, James and Janet Murnane, Patrick and Sheila Murnane, Brian and Cynthia Murphy, Nancy Myers, Anna Nardelli (Memory of Frank Nardelli), Merrie Nautel, Alexander Nerska, Helen Nerska, Chris and Sandra Neuzil, Sylvia Newman, John Nordhouse, Northern Insurance, New York State Library, Celine Racine Paquette, David Patrick, John Patterson, Peru Central School, Dennis and Karen Hulbert, Pearl Rabin, Donna Racine, Stan and Chris Ransom, Marianne Rector, Bill and Bunny Rowe, Ellen Ryan, John and Jean Ryan, Kevin and Mary Ryan, Herbert Sanders, Kathleen and Stanley Schumacher, Richard and Margaret Schwartz, Elsie Shemin-Roth, Doug Skopp, Frederick Smith, Nancy Duquette Smith, Merritt and Joan Spear, Jeffrey Stephens, Catherine Stone, David and Sandra Stortz, Martha Strack, Barbara Straw, Jack Swan, Virginia Swift, John and Louise Tanner, Anthony Tommell, Town of Schuyler Falls, Donna Toye, Lee Turner, Upstate History Alliance, Stuart and Linda Voss, Irv and Marlene Waite, Steve and Sue Welch, Kay Wellman, Phyllis Wells, Lorri Wetzel, Ruth Whalen, Josh Wingler and Kristina Parker-Wingler, Richard and Bonnie Wingler, George Wurster, John Zurlo and Clinton County.

Programs and Events 2010

Saturday, April 24: Faces of Clinton County 1880-1920: The Brush Studio Portraits Celebrating the opening of the CCHA collection online and available to the public, wine & cheese, 7-10 pm at the Museum. Free

Monday, May 3: Shot Down over Nazi Germany by J. Frances Angier Angier, a former B17 pilot will discuss his experience in Nazi prison camps, 7 pm at the Museum.

Saturday & Sunday, May 15 & 16: Civil War Encampment & Reenactment New Civil War exhibit at the Museum, open both days.

Saturday, June 5: Annual Museum Day & opening of Cold War Exhibit Open 9-4, special children's activities.

Monday, June 7: How Cars Conquered our Cities by Brian Ladd Cars have permitted us to go more places, more quickly than ever before but have profoundly changed our cities. A joint presentation of CVTM and CCHA, 7 pm at the Transportation Museum.

Monday, July 5: A Revisionist Interpretation of the Battle of Valcour by David Glenn 7 pm at the Museum.

Monday, August 2: Trunks & Travel: A 19th Century Journey, with Mary Jeanne Bialas Join a Victorian industrialist and his family as they pack and vacation. 7 pm at Lake Forest.

Monday, September 6: The Adventures of Beekeeping with Dick Crawford 7 pm at the Museum.

Saturday & Sunday, September 11 & 12: Battle of Plattsburgh Commemoration Museum open both days, docents needed.

Saturday & Sunday, September 25 & 26: Fort Montgomery Days . Free and open to the public at Fort Montgomery, 9-4

Monday, October 4: The People and Art Behind Redford Glass by Julie Dowd Dowd invites you to bring your Redford Glass to share with others. 7 pm at the Museum.

Saturday, November 7: Annual Meeting of the Membership At the Museum, save the date, formal notice will be mailed.

Monday, December 6: The Makeup of North Country Prison Labor in the 19th Century by Amy Godine 7 pm at the Museum.

Civil War Camp

CCHA Civil War Youth Camp

When: July 12-16, 9 am to 3 pm

**Where: Clinton County Historical Museum
98 Ohio Avenue**

**Who: 20 boys and girls from 9 to 15 years-old
with Camp Director Matt Hewson**

The camp will be a hands-on immersion into the daily lives of Civil War soldiers. Campers will experience the process of becoming a soldier by enlisting in the Union Army and filling out the appropriate paperwork. After receiving their uniforms

and training rifles, they will learn how to drill according to the basic manual of arms, undergo inspections, train, parade, and eat period food and rations of the Union forces. Campers also will learn the historical background of the soldiers' lives they are experiencing. The goal of the camp is to give the participants an appreciation of the Civil War and the men who fought and died in it.

The camp is free and open to the first twenty 9 to 15 year-olds who apply. Call 561-0340 or email director@clintoncountyhistorical.org.

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www.clintoncountyhistorical.org

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New in the Gift Shop

Flying High Again: PARC's Redevelopment of Plattsburgh Air Force Base by Marian Calabro. \$5.00

Relishing Our Resources: Along Lake Champlain in Essex County, N.Y. by Virginia Westbrook. \$9.95

Survival of Families in Beekmantown NY in the First Half of the 20th Century by Addie Shields. Hardcover \$33.00, softcover \$18.00

Waterways of War, The Struggle for Empire 1754-1763 by Steve Benson & Ron Toelke. A traveler's guide to the French and Indian War forts and battlefields in New York and Pennsylvania. \$10.00

William H. Miner: The Man and the Myth by Joseph C. Burke. \$25.00

The Lighthouse will be open 1-3, May 30th, Every Sunday in July & August, and September 5th

Third Annual Civil War Encampment

The Clinton County Historical Association is pleased to sponsor the third annual Civil War Weekend on Saturday and Sunday, May 15 & 16. Over one hundred reenactors will put up camp again near the War of 1812 Museum. On Saturday, there will be a cannon demonstration at 1 pm, and two battles at 11 am and 4 pm. On Sunday, there will be a cannon demonstration at 10 am and a battle at 1 pm. The camps are open to the public both days from 9 to 5 and for a candlelight tour Saturday at 8:30 pm. A new Civil War exhibit will also be opening that weekend at the Museum which will be open both Saturday and Sunday from 10 to 3.