



North Country Notes

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Coop's Pork n' Fish Site: A Glimpse into the Daily Life of a Pioneer Family in Champlain By Andrew Black

Archaeology has been used for over a century to extract the story of past civilizations and people. We are all familiar with how archaeology has illuminated the lives of people in the prehistoric period. However it is an equally useful tool to explore life in the historic period.

When I tell people that I do archaeological research on historic period sites, I am often presented with the question: "Well why do the archaeology, isn't there historical records that can tell you the same thing?" My answer is that while histories, records, journals etc. give us some of the picture, it often leaves out much information. Historical records are great at recording events and facts and statistics, but not as good at describing the day to day lives of people.

So if I want to know what it was like to feed a family 200 years ago, or how a family coped with being far away from markets, or how people ingeniously figured out how to adapt to unexpected situations, or even just what life was like in a small log cabin, the histories, the letters, the journals are incomplete. This is where the value of archaeology comes in.

Archaeology uses the systematic exploration of buried (or sometimes not buried) deposits to "read" the story of the past. But instead of reading through pages in a journal, we "read" through the layers of soil, through the physical remnants and artifacts that are created when we simply go about our normal lives. Seeing how people built their structures, what foods they ate, what dishes, glass-

ware, and other items they bought can actually give us a tremendous amount of information on the lives and lifestyles of people in the past. The trick is knowing how to collect and decipher the information.

This story is about one such project that I am directing, looking at the life of a farming family who settled on the banks of the Great Chazy River at the start of the 1800s.

A Brief History

Before the Revolutionary War, European-American settlements in the Champlain Valley were few and scattered. After the war, some of the unoccupied lands around the Town of Champlain were settled by former soldiers and refugees exiled from Canada. Then around 1800, an increased wave of migration happened as families from New England and further south in New York State moved in to create new lives and new opportunities. Many of these early settlers acquired land and sought to establish small family farms out of what was then still wilderness. The most valuable lots, of course, were ones adjacent to the major water sources (such as the Great Chazy River or Lake Champlain).

For most of these early families, life was anything but easy. Imagine moving into an area of mature virgin forest, and with just axes and hand saws having to cut down the forest, clear the land and dig out the stumps just to create crop fields. New immigrants would often start by clearing a small patch and building a log cabin to live in. These cabins were often small and simple. On this initial clearing they would also begin vegetable gardens and create pens for the

Coop's Pork n' Fish Site Continued

few livestock they brought with them or bought locally.



Over the next few years the families would clear more of the forest, sending the logs to the nearest sawmill (to be used locally or shipped via Montreal back to Europe). This provided a modest income and allowed them to buy

goods they could not produce themselves (everything from dishes to sugar to nails etc.). In the meantime, the family farm would slowly expand. After many years the farm may have grown enough that the family could build a "proper" house and barns out of sawn lumber. The initial cabin would then often be abandoned (or used for resident help).

The early farms in the area were subsistence farms. They were designed to provide year-round food for the family, supplemented with wild game, fish, wild vegetables and nuts. Excess crops or meats could be sold at local markets, but these were not market based operations like the later dairy and mono-crop farms. The Coop's Pork and Fish site contains the physical remains of one of these early family farmsteads, buried in well preserved archaeological deposits underneath a current pasture. The Coop's Pork n' Fish name, derives from the abundance of pork and fish bones found in rubbish heaps at the site.

I first discovered the site in 1998 in the back pasture of a farm I had bought along the banks of the Great Chazy River, just north of the Hamlet of Coopersville. From the surface, there was little indication at all that there was ever a cabin, yard, pens or anything there. Local residents who grew up in the area knew nothing of the settlement. But having done archaeology for much of my adult life I saw traces, small traces, and bits of old rubbish (broken dishes, brick fragments, nails) that often indicate that something used to be there. Initial test-

ing of the soil proved that not only were there archaeological traces present, but parts of the area seemed to contain a good quantity and variety of artifacts that all dated to the very early 1800s.

In 1999 and 2000 I conducted preliminary excavations in a few parts of the site with student volunteers from SUNY's Potsdam and Plattsburgh. I was greeted with encouraging information: not only was this an early historical site, but the buried deposits appeared to be relatively undisturbed, and the preservation was unusually good. Along the river bank was an old rubbish heap rich in food and household remains. A secondary scatter of artifacts was found further inland about 50 yards from the main site. We also discovered a small portion of a buried drain made out of wood—with the wood planks still partially preserved! Analysis of the material showed that this was a small family farmstead. The dates would indicate the farm was created during the early wave of migration about 1800. The site was subsequently abandoned in the 1820's. Did the family leave, or just build a house on another part of the farm? Such well-preserved and well-contained sites are relatively rare, but when found can often provide a wealth of information on the time period.

Our initial investigations into the historical documents of the time proved less encouraging. Property deeds on the lot are very muddled before 1840, so I do not yet know the owner of the lot in 1800. The owner of the lot may not have been the same person who lived there—property owners would lease land to migrants. Sometimes people just ended up on the wrong parcel due to the inaccuracies of the land tract survey. So the names of the family members are still to be discovered, although even without these names, we can still tell their story.

After 2000 I suspended research at the site as I was busy with my business and growing family. However, after I began teaching part time at SUNY Plattsburgh, the opportunity arose in 2011 to go back to the site and continue my research with the help of Plattsburgh students and other volunteers. In 2011, we explored more of the rich rubbish heap left by the family. One man's trash is another's gold. We

Coop's Pork n' Fish Site Continued

also found more of the wooden drain system, but finding the location of the actual cabin eluded us. We returned again last summer, and towards the end of the season we finally found remnants of the old cabin. Luckily, soil buildup at the site was sufficient that plowing has done minimal damage to the structure. By the end of the season, we were able to uncover one small corner of the structure, along with deposits created in the crawl-space beneath the floor boards.

The cabin itself appears simple and non-elaborate in design. At one end, there is a 4 x 8 foot platform of fieldstones that likely supported a wood, clay, and brick-lined chimney.

The rest of the foundation appears to have consisted only of shallow pylons of stones set every few feet that would have supported the major sills of the cabin structure. There was



a crawl space beneath the cabin just a foot or two deep, at least at the north end, not enough for a basement, but enough to keep the floor dry (assisted by the wooden drain pipe). Amazingly, some of the boards of the structure were still partially preserved, enough that we can reveal their shape and orientation in the ground, but not well enough that we can actually remove them intact. The structural information of the cabin has been valuable, but it is the deposit of household artifacts that accumulated under the floorboards that has proved absolutely amazing: Buttons, beads, smoking pipes, sewing pins, combs, a jew's harp, and many clay marbles marking the family's children. Looking at the collection of personal items lets you almost imagine the family sitting there in the evening. But there were also indications that life at the cabin was not so bucolic—among a small scattering of seeds and animal bones from meals, were many, many teeth and bones of rats and mice.

The rubbish area, or "middens" as we call it, also proved rich with information. Besides the usual broken dishes, sparse glassware, stray nails and

brick fragments, were an incredible assemblage of food remains. Many of the soils in the region are acidic enough that animal bones do not preserve long, and botanical material such as seeds rot even in neutral soils. But at the Coop's site, the bones, both large and small, were quite well preserved.

My students and I are in the middle of the identification and analysis of the bones, which include a variety of domestic and wild animals (pig, sheep, cow, chicken, deer, goose), and a diversity of fish bones, even the scales of fish. Added to this, many grains and seeds had been charred before discarding, allowing them to be preserved and identified as well.

We are still in the midst of our analysis, but the preliminary findings show a small farm created and occupied by a nuclear (or slightly extended) family. The diversity of foods show they relied not just on their own animals and crops, but took ample advantage of the natural bounty of meat and vegetable foods in the surrounding land and river. The family was not poor, nor was it rich. Many of the household items were either made at home or inexpensively created in the local area, i.e. redware dishes, smoking pipes. But there is also a variety of ceramics imported from Europe. These were more likely the "special" or "holiday" dishes along with the few glass vessels. This assemblage contrasts to what we would normally see in middle-class households in more urbanized areas, which would rely to a greater extent on the more expensive imports.

This summer I will return to the site with students to explore the cabin further, and to examine an area away from the main site that may contain the buried remains of a barn. More research in the archives will hopefully identify the actual family who built the site, and gather as much documentary information on them as possible. Through the archaeology and historical record, we hope to add an important chapter to our knowledge of the early settlers in Champlain, many of whose descendants still live and work in the area.

Myths About Hotel Champlain

by Richard E. Frost

When researching my recent book on the history of Hotel Champlain, I avidly looked forward to investigating many of the stories I'd previously heard about the resort. If there's one thing that's learned from studying history, though, it's that much of what passes as common knowledge turns out to be inaccurate.

Even when a story can't be proven, it sometimes persists as myth. Such appears to be the case in a few instances that I examined.



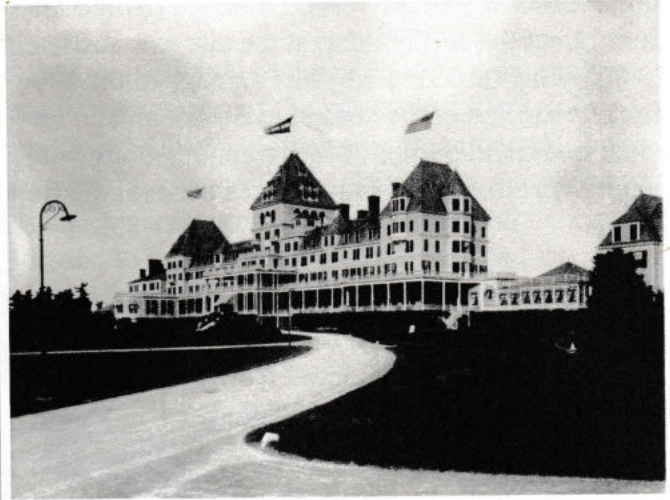
McKinley and Entourage, 1897

1. When President William McKinley spent parts of the summers of 1897 and 1899 here, essentially making Hotel Champlain the summer White House, he stayed in what's now known as McKinley Cottage.

Well, he didn't. On both occasions, The President and his wife occupied a seven-room suite in the hotel's new five-story annex. Built just south of the main building in 1892 to meet the demand for accommodations, the annex boasted capacity for two hundred additional guests. On both visits, the McKinleys had well-furnished rooms on the second floor, with good views and a private veranda.

Although I assume McKinley Cottage was named in his honor, I never found verification of this. When initially built, the hotel's cottages had the more utilitarian names of "Number 1", "Number 2", and so on. Today, McKinley Cottage serves as a child care center on the Clinton Community College campus.

View of Hotel Champlain before 1910 Fire



2. When the hotel burned in 1910, it was initially assumed that the resort would simply close.

Far from the case. Certainly it was disastrous to have the facility destroyed so close to the opening of a new season, but the Delaware and Hudson Railroad (owner of Hotel Champlain) announced almost immediately that it would rebuild. Ironically, the company's other hotel, the Fort William Henry on Lake Champlain, had burned the previous year. The decision was made to adapt architectural plans for reconstructing the latter facility and use them to rebuild Hotel Champlain. The new hotel opened on schedule in 1911.

Meanwhile, the resort was run as "The Cottage Colony at Bluff Point" in 1910. One cottage, known as The Old Bungalow, became the designated dining room. The other cottages were rented as accommodations. As a special lure, "golf links will be kept in order and no charge will be made to the guest for their use."

3. The United States Open Golf Tournament was held at Hotel Champlain.

No, it wasn't. Something called the National Golf Tournament was scheduled for the summer of 1911 and received wide publicity, even up to several weeks before its scheduled occurrence. But it never took place. The reasons are unclear. Tourneys of one sort or another were commonplace throughout the hotel's history, but never was a major professional contest played there.

Myths Continued



Rebuilding of Hotel Champlain After the 1910 Fire

Many of the top golfers of the era did come to play the course, including such notables as Walter Hagen and Gene Sarazen. Patty Berg was among the women's champions who gave exhibitions. Craig Wood played at Hotel Champlain while he was reigning U.S. Open champ. Perhaps the most famous golfer to tee off on the course wasn't a professional in that sport, but in another—the legendary baseball player Babe Ruth.



4. Marion Davies, the paramour of William Randolph Hearst, stayed at Hotel Champlain while filming a movie on the hotel grounds.

Close, but not quite true. Ms. Davies, accompanied by Hearst, did come to Clinton County in 1924 for the filming of *Janice Meredith*, an epic of the Revolutionary War based on the 1899 book of the same name by Paul Leicester Ford. Hearst and Davies stayed in his luxury rail car during their stay.

The movie did use sets in Clinton County. The Saranac River stood in during the scene in which George Washington crossed the Delaware. A replica of Trenton, New Jersey, with two streets and some four dozen houses, was constructed on the rifle range of Plattsburgh Barracks. Other sites used for the movie included the nearby Booth farm, and wooded areas near the city's carbide plant. But no filming was done on hotel property.



5. During its remodeling in the 1940's, the hotel made wide use of furnishings purchased from the one-time luxury cruise ship *Normandie*.

For the time being, I'm going to declare this untrue. The French ship *Normandie*, launched in 1935, was perhaps the premier luxury liner of its time. After a trans-Atlantic crossing in 1939, it sat docked in New York's harbor when Germany invaded France. The *Normandie* captain refused to return the boat to occupied France. It sat in dry-dock for a while.

Upon American entry into World War II, the United States seized the *Normandie* for transformation into the troop transport *USS Lafayette*. All contents were sold at auction before the renovation. Perusal of books and multiple newspapers from the time, plus examination of available auction lists for the *Normandie*, failed to produce confirmation of any large sales to Hotel Champlain. The vessel mysteriously burned at its New York pier in February 1942. I couldn't confirm anything from the ship made it into the hotel.

Other News

SUMMER SUNDAYS IN 2013 at the BLUFF POINT LIGHTHOUSE on HISTORIC VALCOUR ISLAND

The Lighthouse is open for tours hosted by CCHA Volunteers on the following dates

From 1-3 pm

May 26, September 1,

And every Sunday in July & August

Transportation to the island is the responsibility of the visitor

CIVIL WAR YOUTH CAMP ENLISTING LOCAL YOUTH FOR THE 4TH SUMMER

Who: Boys and Girls age 9-14 years

When: 9-3 pm, July 9-12 or July 16-19

Where: CCHA, 98 Ohio Ave. Plattsburgh

How: There is a \$20.00 registration fee payable to CCHA. 20 spots available each session.

Call CCHA to sign up.

Memberships, Donations and Other Support Received April 1, 2012— March 2013

Robert and Mary Adams, Jane Alexander, Allen County Library, Ron and Carol Allen, Donald and Madeleine Ambrose, Arnie's Restaurant, Ara Asadourian, James and Anne Bailey, Leslie Baldwin, Cliff Barrette, Gerald and Darlynn Bates, Thomas C. Beach, Sylvie Beaudreau, Linda Bedard, Jack and Donna Bell, Eleanor Berger, Roger and Bonnie Black, Howard and Sara Black, Roger Bonner, Kit and Sally Booth, Alan and Jennie Booth, Bob and Helen Booth, Tom Braga, Eileen Brewer, Dotte Buchanan, Carolyn Burakowski, Edgar and Emily Burde, Joseph and Joan Burke, Mark Christiansen, Jane Claffey, Penny and John Clute, Jim and Sue Coffey, William Conway, Dave and Jan Couture, Bill and Pat Crosby, John and Barbara Crotty, Richard Daly, John Dawson, Nelson Disco, Anne Doherty, Gerald and Ruth Dominy, Barbara Dorrance, Jerome and Janet Downs, Vickie Evans, Geri Favreau, Dan and Donna Ferguson, Connie Fisher, Jack and Andree Fisher, Mason and Joan Forrence, John and Barbara Gallagher, Maurica Gilbert and Noel Sowley, Rod and Dodie Giltz, David and Lynne Glenn, Morris Glenn, Bill Glidden and Martha Bachman, Alfreda Guay, Robert Haley, Linda Harwood, Roger Harwood, Rebecca Hayes, Judith Heintz, June Heming, Heritage Printing-Rod Conant, Patricia Higgins, Joan Hobbs, Frank and Carol Hochreiter, Jacqueline Huru, Helen Ianelli, Mick Jarvis, Ray and Lola Johnson, Euclid and Susanne Jones, Richard and Susan Kelley, Bill and Jane Kelting, Key Foundation, Don and Peg Kinneston, Harold and Carole Klein, Carol Klepper and Andrew Golt, Robert Kovacs and Mary Hildebrand, Dan Ladue, Arthur LaJoy, Connie Lalonde, William and Beverly Leege, Brinley and Dorothy Lewis, Jim Lindgren, Roland and Marty Lockwood, Dennis and Marie Lyr-iotakis, Steve Martin, Beverly Maynard, Marshall and Ann Maynard, Linda McGuire, Meadowbrook Healthcare, Ron and Ann Merkley, Jim Millard, Howard and Myrna Miller, Charles and Joan Mitchell, Marilyn Morton, David and Elizabeth Murray, Gil and Ellie Murray, Nancy Myers, Anna Nardelli, Merrie Nautel, Sylvia Newman, Mary Nicknish, Northern Insuring, Don and Vivian Papson, Pat Parker, David Patrick, John Patterson, Peru Central School, Dennis and Karen Hulbert-Photo Pub, Pearlie Rabin, James Racette, Christine Racine, Donna Racine - Village of Rouses Point, Rodney and Renee Ralston, Stan and Christine Ransom, Mariane Rector, Bill and Bunny Rowe, Thomas Rumney, John and Jean Ryan, Kevin and Mary Ryan, Herbert Sanders, Kathy Schumacher, Doug and Evelyne Skopp, Nancy Duquette Smith, John and Joanne Southwick, Jeffrey and Janet Stephens, Noel and Debbie Stewart, Dave and Sandy Stortz, Marty Strack, John and Louise Tanner, Gary VanCour -Town of Beekmantown, Donna Toye, Lee Turner, Stuart and Linda Voss, Dick Ward, Alan Weil, Steve and Sue Welch, Kay Wellman, Lorri Wetzel, John Willey, Robert and Shari Williams, Bill and Lucy Wilson, Josh Wingler and Kristina Parker-Wingler, Woodmen of the World and Clinton County.

Photos from Recent Events



CCHA hosted a Thank You Party for Matthew Orr and John Pelkey, local Eagle Scouts who are volunteering to work on the Civil War Committee's Cemetery Project. Their families and CCHA Trustees are shown here.



Joan Hobbs, Town of Ellenburg Historian, and Geri Favreau, Chair of our Civil War Committee review Joan's recent research on Civil War Veterans who were born, enlisted, or buried in the Town of Ellenburg. Establishing a list of all the Civil War Veterans who were born, buried or enlisted in Clinton County is one of the Civil War Committee's projects.



Ron and Carol Allen with the former owners of the Lyons Street school house - Marion (Lyons) and Allen Dixon, at the "Peru's Busy Past" exhibit opening.



UVM Archaeologist, Francis "Jess" Robinson and local collector, Tom Pray discuss Tom Pray's Native American Tools on display at CCHA. Robinson featured photos from the visit at a forum held at the New York State Museum in April.

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Spring Programs 2013

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 9-4 PM: *West Chazy Cemetery Tour hosted by Bob Cheeseman, Chazy Historian*
Tour sites will include the Rural, Ingraham and Slosson cemeteries in West Chazy and the St. Louis, Dragoon and Sciota cemeteries in Sciota. Call the museum for pricing information. Reservations required.

SUNDAY, MAY 26: *Opening Day at Bluff Point Lighthouse*
The Lighthouse Committee will be opening the Bluff Point Lighthouse on Valcour Island for the 2013 season. Hours of operation are from 1-3 pm. Free and open to the public. Funded in part by Clinton County.

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, JUNE 1-2, 10-4 PM: *Museum Weekend*
Enjoy free admission to the CCHA Museum this weekend! Saturday will feature special activities on the Civil War.

MONDAY, JUNE 3, 7 PM: *Archaeological Investigations at the Coop's Pork N' Fish Site in Coopersville, NY*
Join CCHA as Archaeologist Dr. Andrew Black reveals his findings from an excavation site in Coopersville, NY. His findings give us a glimpse into life in an early settlement in Clinton County.

FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 2 PM: *Adirondack Civilian Conservation Corps Camps Reunion*
CCHA hosts a reunion of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Author and historian Marty Podskoch will give a Power Point presentation on CCC's history.

MONDAY, JULY 1, 7 PM: *Lighthouses of Lake Champlain*
Roger Harwood presents a talk on the history of the lighthouses on Lake Champlain. Bluff Point Lighthouse is highlighted.

TUE-FRI, JULY 9-12 & JULY 16-19, 9-3 PM: *Civil War Youth Camp - 1st Session & 2nd Session*
The CCHA 4 day Civil War Camp immerses youth, 9-14 years old, in the history and daily life of the Civil War. Price is \$20/camper. Please call CCHA at 518-561-0340 to register your camper (s).

*See full descriptions of CCHA events on our website, www.clintoncountyhistorical.org, or on our Facebook Page.