



# North Country Notes

Issue #417

Spring 2016

## Author Spotlight More on the Witherill Hotel by Sue Howell Hamlin

I've been very pleased to learn that readers have enjoyed *Welcome to the Witherill*. Many people have asked how I happened to write this book.

When my mother (Mary Howell) broke up housekeeping in 2000, moving to northern Virginia with my sister, Bonnie and I helped go through household items and make tough decisions about what to keep and what to toss. When we got to my dad's office and storeroom, there were boxes of photos, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks and other items pertaining to the Witherill Hotel. When I asked Mom what she wanted me to do with all of that "stuff," she quickly said, "throw it out!" My reply was that I couldn't do that. So I toted it all back to Elmira, where it stayed in my basement for fourteen years (until my project began). I can only hope that my mom and dad, my grandparents and great-grands would be pleased with the end product.

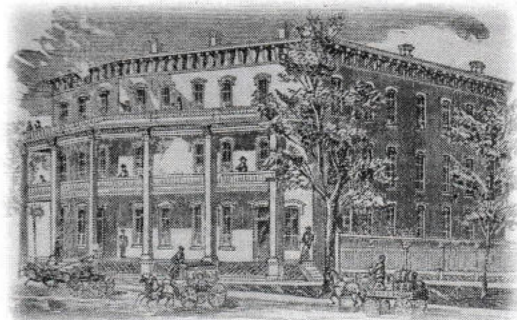


Image from *Witherill Hotel Stationary, 1883*  
2013.071.0001 - CCHA Collection

Old friends, Don and Barb Benjamin (The Royal Savage Inn), were really the inspiration to get moving on the project. At Don's urging, I realized that I did indeed have plenty of material for a book about the Witherill and the Howells, and got to work in the fall, 2014. A year later, *Welcome to the Witherill* made its debut at CCHA.

Post book production - further digging through those old papers has turned up interesting information about my great-grandfather, Major William T. Howell who leased, in 1884, and then purchased the Witherill House in 1886. My book relates how Howell was keeper of the Senate Restaurant

starting in 1872 for about three years, and then went to work for the U.S. Customs Department, which is how he happened to arrive in Plattsburgh after a stint in Ogdensburg. From Customs he went to the Treasury Department, but was still assigned to Plattsburgh as his base of operation.

Major William T. Howell was in government service for about 20 years, resigning when the government arranged his transfer to San Francisco to help enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act (enacted in 1882 by President Chester Arthur). Among some of the papers, I discovered the government's proposed travel plans for William T. in 1891, taking him south, through Panama (before the canal existed) and then by ship, the rest of the way to San Francisco, where his headquarters were to be located.

I can only surmise that these plans didn't sit well with him, as he was well settled in Plattsburgh by that time, and must have decided to retire from government service and continue to operate the Witherill (with its 18 rooms and one tin bathtub).

From correspondence to his wife, my great-grandmother, Sarah, I discovered that great-grandfather William T. Howell enlisted in the New York Militia in Syracuse in 1863 at the age of 20. From further correspondence, I am hoping to learn more about his military service during the Civil War.

Further, I am still sorting through many letters, papers, and government reports from the 1870s through the 1890s, mostly handwritten, that I discovered in a large tin box with flaking black paint. Painted on the lid in red and gold is the description *Tutti Frutti Cash Box*. I surely wonder where that came from.

The moral of this story is - don't throw away old documents you find in a relative's attic or basement. You may just have the makings of a book, if not to publish but to share with family, and hopefully learn a little more about your family roots.



William Howland, Jr.  
Howell Family Collection

## Announcements

### Year-End Annual Appeal Results

In 2015, the *Year-End Annual Appeal* generated approximately \$6,200! A sincere thank you to those who were able to contribute. This is a record amount for the Association. Please think of us again this August. Every little bit counts!

### Committee Projects

We are one of THE busiest non-profit organizations in Clinton County. With just one paid staff member, the majority of our human resources are secured through volunteers. These faithful individuals dedicate hours of their time working with our Director to plan and execute strategies to increase fundraising efforts, develop new exhibits and educational programs, secure and promote collections, build community outreach efforts, and so much more. Major committee projects this year include preparing for the Suffrage Centennial, a Porch Renovation Project, planning for the 2017 "Plattsburgh Idea" Commemoration, developing a 5-year exhibit schedule, and securing partners for our new school outreach programs.

### Volunteer Accomplishments

Every year, our volunteers go well beyond their call of duty, many of which are fulfilling the duties of several jobs! While their accomplishments are almost too many to name, 2015 was a very special year for the Association's collection of artifacts. Thanks to our dedicated collections team, Staff Volunteers: Jan Couture, Victoria Evans, Roger Black, Mary Nicknish, Louise Patinelli, Theresa Passantino, Julie Dowd, Penelope Clute, Elizabeth Rogers, and SUNY Plattsburgh Interns: Mikayla Ploof, Andrew Tedford, and Grace Carlin, the Association now has an additional 2,500 artifacts documented and scanned in the permanent and education collections.

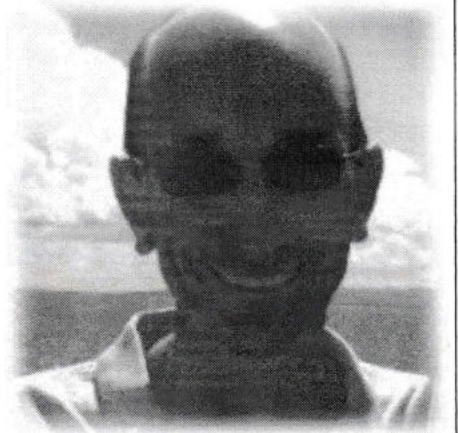
### Bluff Point Lighthouse Renovation

If you follow the Bluff Point Lighthouse Facebook page, you may have seen the tremendous amount of work completed at the Bluff Point Lighthouse on Valcour Island. Thanks to the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Bluff Point Lighthouse has undergone a complete facelift! Roger Harwood and his team of volunteers will continue to oversee the opening of the lighthouse this season. If you are interested in volunteering at the lighthouse, please contact our Director. It's a wonderful opportunity to meet people and enjoy the beautiful views of Lake Champlain.

## Trustee Highlights



In 2016, CCHA welcomed two new Trustees to the Board - Bernie Bassett and Jules LaPoint. These gentlemen bring a wealth of knowledge to our Association. Bernie recently retired as Town of Plattsburgh Supervisor, and we welcome his interest in history and his leadership experience. As an educator in a previous life, he currently sits on our Education Committee. Jules LaPoint is the Resident Hall Project Manager at SUNY Plattsburgh, and he hit the road running at CCHA by generously applying his experience and expertise as Chair of our Buildings and Grounds Committee. Jules and Bernie replaced John Con-



ley and Luke Cyphers. John was our previous Buildings and Grounds Committee

Chair and Luke was a member of our Communications and Outreach Committee. We wish them both well and thank them for their many contributions to CCHA. Officers elected for 2016 include Helen Nerska, President; Geri Favreau, Vice President; William Laundry, Treasurer; and Jan Couture, Secretary.

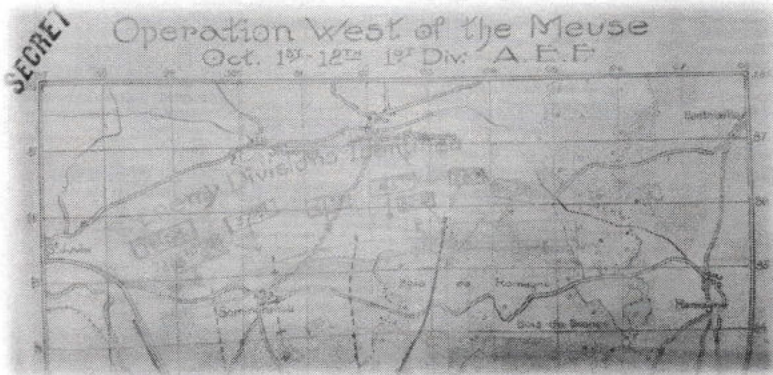
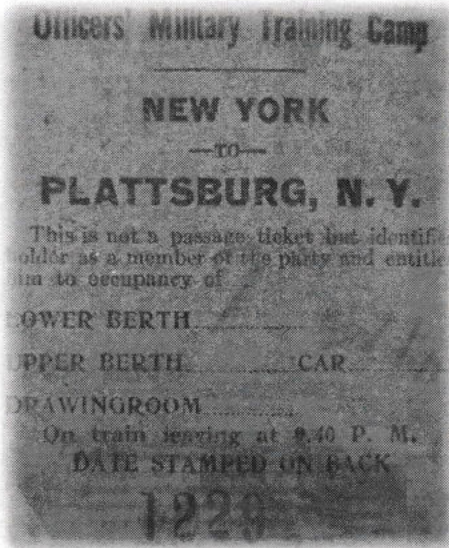
## Collections News

As part of a large scale inventory project in progress at the Association's Museum, Collections Volunteer, Penny Clute recently discovered a large box marked, "Plattsburg Military Training Camp." Within the box, a 18"x12.5" ledger book marked "Invoices" was discovered. Upon further investigation, the ledger was discovered to be a scrapbook, highlighting the service history of a Captain Edwin Serre Murphy. Captain Murphy trained as an officer at Plattsburgh in the May 8, 1917 Officers' Military Training Camp. The United States declared war on Germany just a month earlier. He graduated from Fordham University in 1914 and Fordham Law School in 1917.

Murphy was ordered to France on August 22, 1917 with the American Expeditionary Force, Second Provisional Regiment, as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Field Artillery. His scrapbook begins with his acceptance into the Plattsburg Training Camp and his train ticket here. There are more than 50 pages that document his movements through the end of the war on November 11, 1918, and beyond to a U.S. Army Horse Show in Germany in March, 1919, and his Honorable Discharge in July 1919.

The scrapbook and its 125 items are now fully accessioned into CCHA's collection. Highlights include: many maps with hand-drawn trenches and troop placements, for battles throughout 1918, including several marked "Secret;" printed Order No. 232 from General Pershing to the First Army on December 19, 1918 phrased as a "tribute to the victory of the First Army in the Meuse-Argonne battle . . . the last campaign of the war . . . ;" humorous memos and poems for 1918 Christmas celebrations; and an 11 page, single-spaced unattributed manuscript entitled "On Active Service with the A.E.F. What was done: Why it was done: How it was done." Since everything else in the scrapbook is specific to Captain Murphy, it is more than likely that he wrote this.

As a Collections Volunteer at the Association, Penny Clute took on the task of inventorying, then scanning, each piece of the scrapbook so that all is readily accessible to the public. Recently, she located Captain Murphy's granddaughter, who lives in Connecticut and did not know of the scrapbook's existence. She did know her grandfather fought in WWI, and we found her because she posted some photos of him in uniform on the internet. She told us that after the war, he practiced admiralty law in New York City.



## New Acquisitions Fund Announced

In honor of the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Helen Allen Nerska, President of the Clinton County Historical Association (CCHA) Board of Trustees, family and friends made contributions to CCHA to establish a fund for acquisition of objects for accession. This fund will allow the Association to purchase an object (document, letter, map, photo, book, etc.) relevant to the history of Clinton County and not available through donation for inclusion in the CCHA Museum collection.

The majority of objects preserved in the Museum's collection are the result of the generosity of the residents of Clinton County. However, there are those occasions when a relevant object to the County's history becomes available through auction (e.g. Ebay) or private sale. It is precisely with regards to these opportunities that this fund was established.

To date, approximately \$5000 has been donated to the fund. It is the intention of the Association to accept donations to the fund on an ongoing basis. Anyone interested in making a contribution to this fund should feel free to do so at any time. Simply indicate in some fashion that your donation is to be applied to the Helen Allen Nerska Fund. Periodically, objects purchased through the fund will be featured on the CCHA website [www.clintoncountyhistorical.org](http://www.clintoncountyhistorical.org) and Facebook Page (Clinton County Historical Association).

Please mail your tax deductible donation to CCHA, 98 Ohio Ave., Plattsburgh, NY 12903.  
For more information, call 561-0340.

## Looking Back: North Country Notes, May 1966

### *The Next Meetings*

*of the Association will be held in the Association Rooms over the Plattsburgh Public Library at 8 o'clock on the following dates. The public is cordially invited to all meetings.*

*May 2—"The New State Curriculum in the Social Studies" by Benedict Hausdorf of Peru. Mr. Hausdorf teaches social studies in the Peru school system.*

*June 6—Annual Members' Exhibit Night. Start deciding which of your historical treasures to bring, and watch for further information.*

*July—The Program Committee is tentatively suggesting a tour of the county's old or historic homes as the Society's summer outing. Your ideas on this or other possibilities are invited.*

*This is the last issue of the "Notes" this Spring. The editors urge members to submit their manuscripts or at least call their attention to materials in your possession, on which articles may be based. With your help, an interesting series of "Notes" can be published in the fall.*

## Summer Events

**SATURDAY, JULY 2, and SATURDAY, JULY 9**  
**9 AM-2 PM at the City of Plattsburgh Parking Lot Pavilion**

***History on the Go - Outreach Event***

Members of the Clinton County Historical Association Outreach and Fundraising Committees will be participating at the Farmer's Market in Plattsburgh to promote new books, gift merchandise, volunteer activities and upcoming events. If you haven't yet, stop by. We would love to meet you!

**TUESDAY-FRIDAY, JULY 12-15, 9 AM - 3 PM at the Museum**

***Civil War Youth Camp***

Cost is \$50 per camper. Designed and instructed by local educator, Matthew Hewson. For ages 9-14. Please call 518-561-0340 to pre-register. Sponsored in part by the Stewarts and Chapel Hill Foundations and Bill Ryan.

**TUESDAY-FRIDAY, AUGUST 16-19, 9 AM - 3 PM at the Museum**

***WWI/Citizen Soldier Youth Camp***

Cost is \$65 per camper. Designed and instructed by local educator, Matthew Hewson. For ages 9-14. Please call 518-561-0340 to pre-register. Sponsored in part by the Stewarts and Chapel Hill Foundations and Bill Ryan.

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 18, Starting at 6 PM at the Plattsburgh Public Library**

***Introduction to Genealogy with Julie Dowd***

The Clinton County Historical Association is partnering with the Plattsburgh Public Library and the Northern New York American-Canadian Genealogical Society to present a program covering the basics of genealogy. The program is free and open to the public.

**\*Please visit [www.clintoncountyhistorical.org](http://www.clintoncountyhistorical.org) for the full summer and fall schedule\***

## In Memory of Joseph S. Congelosi



**Joseph S. Congelosi, Jr.**

1982 - 2016

We are saddened to report the tragic death of CCHA Board Trustee Joseph Congelosi, Jr. on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Joe was a dedicated member and loved researching and sharing the history of our county. He will be missed. His family has requested that donations in his memory be given to the Clinton County Historical Association.

*Helen Nerska*  
*President*

## 2015-2016 Business Sponsors and Grantors

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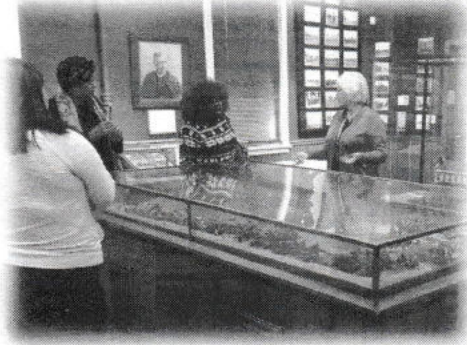
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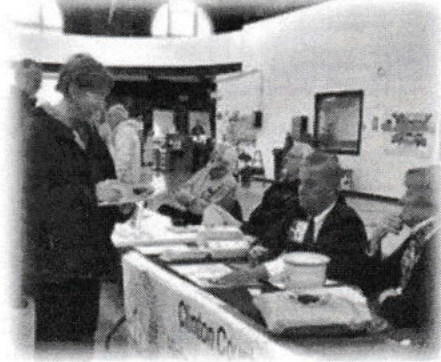
### Memberships, Donations and Other Support Received September 7, 2015 through June 1, 2016

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## Photos from Recent Events



The Association enjoyed hosting a group of travel writers from New York City this past February. The tour was organized by the Adirondack Coast Visitors Bureau. Jan Couture, CCHA Secretary and Education Committee Chair is pictured here touring our visitors around the Museum



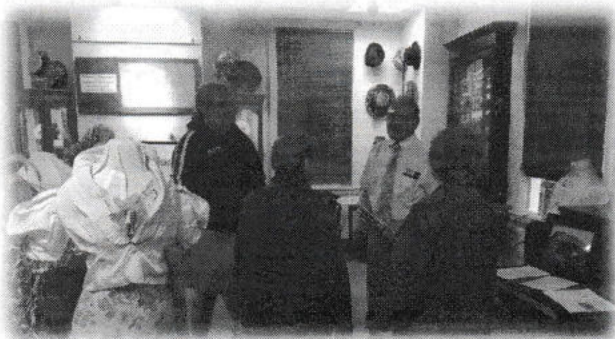
CCHA Trustees greet potential volunteers at this year's first Discover Service event organized by the City of Plattsburgh. We are always looking to expand our pool of volunteers! There is a place for everyone! If you would like to get involved, please contact the museum at 518-561-0340.



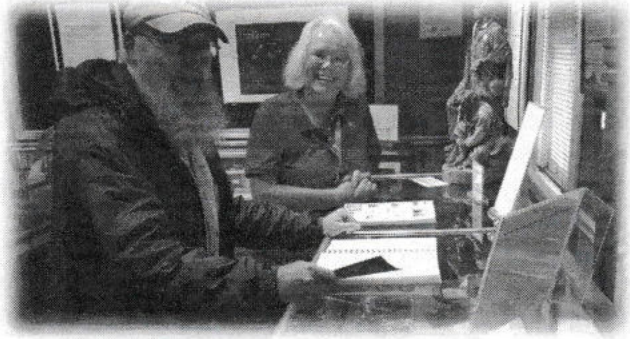
Geri Favreau and William Laundry, CCHA Trustees seen wearing their community outreach hats for CCHA at April's Most on the Coast. On the far left, Sandra Geddes, City of Plattsburgh Events Coordinator is responsible for leading this event, which is in it's second year.



Sixty 4th graders from Saranac Elementary School visited the CCHA and Museum Campus this past April. Their visit was the culmination of a 4-part educational outreach program lead by Jan Couture, Saranac Town Historian. This project was funded by a grant from the Lake Champlain Basin Program and presented by the CCHA.



This year marked the 9th Annual Museum Days weekend in Clinton County. CCHA volunteers hosted approximately 150 visitors throughout the weekend. Jim Bailey, CCHA Trustee can be seen here sharing some history with our visitors in the Destination Gallery.



Julie Dowd, CCHA Trustee meets with one of our facebook friends, Guy Stephenson. Guy has been following the Association's "Clinton County, NY, Civil War Record: 1861 to 1865" Facebook page from the start! Guy is a Trustee at the Wilmington County Historical Association and has expressed great interest in our 2015 publication, *Clinton County Civil War Record: 1861-1865*.

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
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www.clintoncountyhistorical.org

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Issue 417, Spring/Summer 2016

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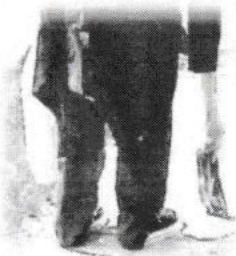
**Jules LaPoint**

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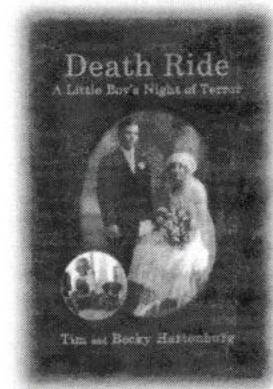
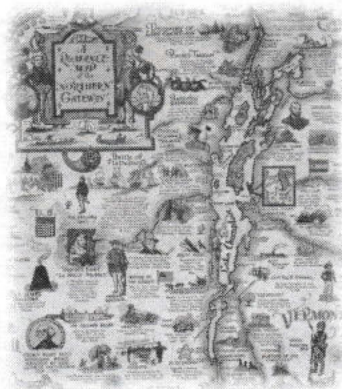
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**New in the Museum Shop Spring/Summer 2016**



**Strictly A Loner**

My Life and Times with  
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