



Clinton County Historical Association North Country Notes

Issue #425

June, 2020



CCHA Responds to COVID-19 Crisis

By Helen Allen Nerska

CCHA Director

**Thank you for
picking up our
newsletter!**

The Clinton County Historical Association (CCHA) is a non-profit organization that is chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. We collect and preserve items that have relevance to Clinton County.

Like most organizations, the Clinton County Historical Association was basically stopped in its tracks as the novel coronavirus pandemic hit the North Country. We closed our museum to the public, and we postponed our extensive slate of events indefinitely. We have no idea when it will be safe for visitors to the Bluff Point Lighthouse, which also remains closed until further notice. And we were forced to adopt new policies on the fly, while planning for what remains a completely unknowable future.

Yet all in all, CCHA has been fortunate. To the best of our knowledge, all of our staff, trustees and volunteers have been healthy. We have been thoughtful, careful and fastidious in keeping to state recommendations on closing, reopening and implementing proper safety measures.

Through use of technology, work from home, and constant communication, our Board of Trustees and Executive Committee have been able to keep the association active and productive even as our buildings and events have been shut down.

While we were definitely disappointed that we could not roll out our wonderful programs this spring and summer, all speakers and program co-hosts are look-

ing forward to a time when we can again safely get together.

Moreover, we do have good news on several other fronts. First, Collections Assistant Makenzee Bruce and I have been able to continue important museum work at home.



CCHA Director Helen Allen Nerska

Makenzee's project is to finish putting our hundreds of postcards into our museum software program, Past Perfect. Eventually these postcards will be available for

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President's Report: Keeping Busy while Staying Safe

By Geri Favreau
CCHA President

These are definitely different times we are living in, though anyone who follows history knows that people have been through crises like this before. For many of us, our grandparents survived the Spanish Flu a little more than 100 years ago, a pandemic equal to or worse than the novel coronavirus that struck this past spring. It would be interesting to see how historians 100 years from now will talk about COVID-19.

One thing we're learning: Even in the course of world-shaking historic events, the passion to preserve our area's history marches on.

While the CCHA Museum has been closed to the public and volunteers have been unable to come in during the pandem-

ic, the Executive Committee and former Trustee Maurica Gilbert are still making sure the association is running smoothly.

We either work from home or on-site, social distancing whenever there are two people in the building. The Executive Committee—all of the officers you see listed on Page 1 of North Country Notes—is still meeting weekly via teleconference, and the entire CCHA Board meets monthly using Zoom.

Before the pandemic, CCHA had made plans to install some new lighting, and to repaint the entry, lobby, stairway and upstairs hallway. Those plans are moving forward, with most of the painting now complete. A new window was installed to replace one with a rotted frame in the accounting office, part of a long-term plan to modernize every window in the museum. Only 30 to go!

Thanks to Assemblyman D. Billy Jones, CCHA is eligible for a \$5,000 grant from the state of New York, which will be put toward a new front door. The old double doorway in front is not energy efficient and has a rather primitive lock. The new door, a single-panel design with sidelights, will greatly add to the curb appeal of our beautiful historic building.

It will complete a process of refurbishing our entrance; the windows on either side of the front door were replaced last year, and the front porch a few years ago. We are very thankful to Assemblyman Jones for his continued support of CCHA.

The outbreak has given the Board time to discuss other long-term repair projects, such as replacing the museum's roof. Strong winds often leave shingles all over our yard and parking lot; we're exploring something beyond patchwork fixes.

The year 2020 is the 75th Anniversary for CCHA. We had hopes of having a gala dinner and a new exhibit celebrating this milestone, but that may not be possible with the virus. There is always next year, and we can celebrate "75+1."

Thanks to careful financial management and our dedicated volunteers, CCHA will survive the pandemic. It's certain that things will be different when we emerge from this crisis.

That's OK. The world changes, and we change with it. We will reopen to the public, we hope better than ever.

Thank you for your support at this difficult time. Please stay safe and stay healthy!



Painter Jerry Hamel (left), with CCHA Vice President Jerry Gagnier, chair of the association's buildings and grounds committee, in the newly painted front hall of the CCHA Museum.

Harriet Stewart Miner: Painter of Orchids

By David Patrick

Found in the Clinton County Historical Association’s collections is a series of floral paintings made by artist Harriet Stewart Miner. It was recently discovered that Harriet was a distinguished American botanical illustrator of flowers and publisher of the first color book in America about orchids.

Harriet Stewart Miner, who was called Hattie, was born in 1840 in Penn Yan, N.Y. and was the third child of Rev. Ovid Miner and Eliza (Moore) Miner. Ovid was born in Middletown, Vermont, on July 7, 1803. He first worked as a journalist and founded two small newspapers in Poultney and Castleton, Vermont. He then attended the Auburn Theological Seminary in Auburn, N.Y. and graduated in 1834 where he was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church. Ovid married Eliza Moore that same year.

Eliza was the daughter of Champlain resident Noadiah Moore and grand-daughter of Judge Pliny Moore. Noadiah Moore founded the Champlain Agricultural Works which manufactured farm equipment for about 100 years. He was also a major influence in the temperance and abolitionist movements and operated the last leg of the Underground Railroad in Champlain.



Eliza (Moore) Miner. Courtesy CCHA.

After Rev. Miner was ordained, he practiced in Peru, N.Y. (1834-36), Penn Yan, N.Y. (1837-1844), Syracuse (1846-1849), Hoyleton, Ill. (1856-1864), East Poultney, Vt. (1870-1873) and Syracuse again (1873-1891). He was also a traveling lecturer in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s and gave speeches at temperance and abolitionist meetings. Ovid died in Syracuse in 1891 and was buried there.

Harriet’s older brother was Brinkerhoff Noadiah Miner and he enlisted in the 34th NY Infantry in 1861 at Champlain, was captured by the Confederate Army and sent to the notorious Libby Prison where he contracted TB. He died in 1871 of the disease.

Harriet’s family was very close to the Nye and McLellan families of Champlain. Eliza Miner’s sister, Laura (Moore) Nye, lived at the Locust Hill estate on Elm Street in Champlain (later called the Savoy Hotel in the 1930s and 1940s; it burned down in February of 2003).

Ovid and Eliza were uncle and aunt to Champlain

residents Hugh and Malcolm McLellan. Hugh was a printer and collector of history and also one of the founding members of the Clinton County Historical Association. His son Woody printed the North Country Notes newsletter starting in 1960. Malcolm McLellan is the great-grandfather of this author. While visiting the Miner family at Syracuse in 1881, their older brother Donald contracted meningitis and died at the age of eight. Hugh McLellan wrote in 1941: “Syracuse has a very warm spot in my heart, for we had many happy days with Rev. Ovid Miner and his wife, who was a sister of my grandmother – we called her Aunt Miner.”



Rev. Ovid Miner (left) is shown with Charles McLellan and his sons Hugh (right) and Malcolm (center), October 6, 1886, in Syracuse. Courtesy of a private collection.

Harriet Miner was born in 1840 and attended Oberlin College in Ohio in 1860. She was an accomplished painter and teacher of painting and painted portraits and landscapes. Many of her paintings were placed in homes around Syracuse. Her specialty was painting flowers, especially orchids. She became a self-taught botanist and painted flowers in astonishing detail. The Clinton County Historical Association owns at least seven floral paintings that were signed by Harriet Miner and possibly others that were not signed (see the paintings at the end of this article). These paintings found their way to Champlain and later



Harriet S. Miner in Ilion, N.Y. Courtesy CCHA.



Harriet Miner's art (cont.)

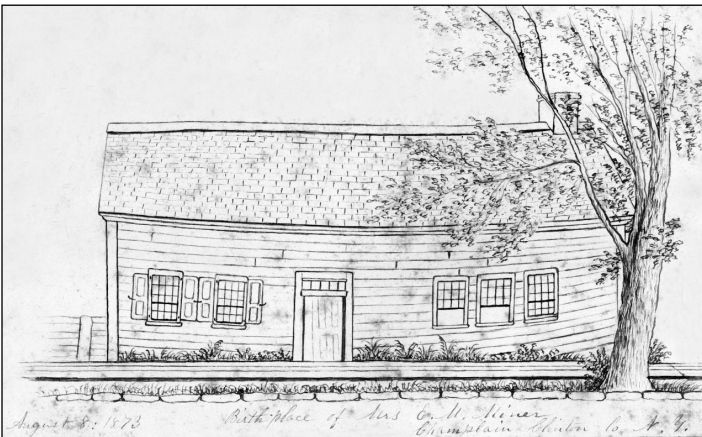
came to the museum in the early-1980s by a donation from Woody and Hulda McLellan.

The significance of the CCHA paintings was not realized until recently when a letter by Hugh McLellan was uncovered at Special Collections at the Feinberg Library at Plattsburgh State. In 1954, McLellan wrote to a person in Syracuse who was researching Ovid Miner. In the letter, he mentioned that Harriet had published a book about flowers. McLellan wrote: "I was 17 years old

when he [Ovid] died, and of course remember "Uncle Miner" as we always called him. We used to visit Aunt Miner, and their daughter, Cousin Hattie, quite often, they would visit us in New York City... As I remember him he was a most lovable person and so was his wife...They had three children. I remember only their daughter, who we called "Cousin Hattie". She was an artist, especially of flowers, and only last week I received a catalogue of old books which offered: "MINER,



Harriet Miner, shown painting a landscape with a friend in a photograph taken in Syracuse. Courtesy CCHA.



The first home of Noadiah Moore on Main St. in Champlain east of the old Village Hall (corner of Main and Church Streets). His second home was on Church St. but burned down in 1873. Harriet Miner made a drawing of his first house in 1873, noting the birth of her mother Eliza: "Birthplace of Mrs. E.M. Miner Champlain Clinton Co N.Y. August 8 1873." Courtesy CCHA.

Harriet S. Orchids; Royal Family of Plants. 1885. Folio. Colored plates. \$25.00."

After it was discovered that Harriet Miner had published a book on orchids, an Internet search revealed many images from her 1885 book. The style of these paintings was similar to the paintings at CCHA. It was discovered that Miner's book was the first color plate orchid book published in the United States (it was simultaneously published in England by a different publisher).

Miner's orchid book contained 24 large-format chromolithographs that were printed using a special French lithographic process (the designs were engraved on stone). The scientific name of each flower was given as well as details of its growing location and life history. Miner had access to orchid collections in the Syracuse area, Albany, New York City, Boston, Philadelphia and Cincinnati and spent years preparing her book. The book also contained many poems written by guest authors. The book was sold at the steep price of \$15 and \$30 [\$432-\$864 today] depending on the paper and binding.



A contemporary view of the Pliny Moore house in Champlain (corner of Oak and Elm Streets) painted by Harriet Miner on a ceramic plate. On the back is written "Experimet [sic] 1880 H.S.M." Courtesy CCHA.

Many reviews gave favorable comments about Miner's book. Professor Charles Wesley Bennett, a founding member of Syracuse University's Ranke Library, described Miner's work as "very striking, the ranking work on the subject." Another review noted: "The plates are the finest specimens of art printing ever produced in any country... Evidently the artists and printers were given carte blanche in this volume, for nothing so beautiful was ever before attempted."

The book became a major resource for botanists as well as lovers of flowers.

In July 1887, two years after Miner's book was published, she visited Philadelphia again to paint flowers. A local newspaper wrote of her visit: "...She is a skillful artist, having

already attained an enviable name in her profession, and she is sketching some of the many natural beauties of which Philadelphia can boast, to be reproduced in future paintings. Mrs. Miner will be best remembered as the author of "Orchids," a rare book of art recently published by Lee and Shepherd, Boston, and illustrated by herself. It contains plates and minute descriptions of nearly all the varieties of this eccentric family of plants, painted from nature, while in bloom, and appearing in all their quaint and surpassing beauty. The book has had a wide sale."

The Oberlin College newspaper *Oberlin Review*, described Miner's book in a short announcement published on June 26, 1888:

"A beautifully illustrated book on orchids has lately come to the college library through Rev. C.C. Creegan, '76 Theo. The author is Miss Harriet Stewart Miner, who was a student at Oberlin in 1860. Miss Miner has made color drawings of about twenty-five handsome species, scatter through thirteen genera, and are finely reproduced in chromo-lithographic plates of quarto size. The text, also by Miss Miner, gives descriptions of the order and the varieties represented, the whole being freely interspersed with choice selections from the poets and best writers upon these wonderful flowers. Lee & Shepherd of Boston, issue the work in a very attractive semi-portfolio style. The work is rather artistic and literary than scientific, still no one will find greater delight in it than the lover and student of flowers."

Harriet Miner also published a pamphlet that is very rare. It is called "A Christmas Garland" which was a compilation of poetry and flower paintings. The poetry was written by her father, Rev. Ovid Miner, and also Prof. Charles W. Bennett (of Syracuse University), John Greenleaf Whittier, and Rev. Dr. Minot J. Savage of Cleveland, Ohio.

Harriet Miner was ill the last four years of her life and died of pneumonia on February 23, 1895, at the age of 55. Her obituary gave details about her painting, her orchid book and her life:

"Harriet Stuart Miner, daughter of Mrs. Eliza M. and the late Rev. Ovid Miner, whose death occurred at her home in the Eleventh ward Saturday evening, was widely known in central New York as an artist and a student. The work of her pen and brush adorn many of the cultivated homes of the city. She was a native of New England but the greater part of her life has been spent in Syracuse. As a botanist and a painter she had become very familiar with all the interesting natural features of the county and the sublime hills of old Onondaga had not many more enthusiastic admirers. Her

forte as an artist was flower painting, and in this she did much faithful and notable work. Her beautiful treatise on orchids published by Cassell & Co., about five years ago, has been accepted as authority in some of the best schools of the United States, both as to text and drawings. The author spent many years in preparing the work and had access to all the noted orchid collections in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Albany and Cincinnati. The task was also charmed by the privilege of personal association with some of the distinguished scholars of the age, including Phillips Brooks [author of the Christmas carol 'O Little Town of Bethlehem'] and James Freeman Clarke. Miss Miner suffered severely during the last four years, but she never lost her enthusiasm nor skill." [Syracuse Daily Standard, 1895]

Three weeks after Harriet's death, her mother Eliza was taken to Champlain but died of a stroke. Hugh McLellan wrote in 1954:

"After Harriette's death on February 23, 1895, my grandmother (Aunt Miner's sister [Laura Nye]) went to Syracuse, closed up things there and brought Aunt Miner to Champlain. As they entered grandmother's home [the former Savoy Hotel], Aunt Miner had a stroke, and died almost immediately. She is buried in the cemetery here."

Eliza's death occurred on March 16 and she was buried in Glenwood Cemetery next to her father, Noadiah Moore. The rest of her family, including Harriet, are buried in Syracuse at the Oakwood Cemetery.

Eliza's name is on her father's stone as well as her family's stone.

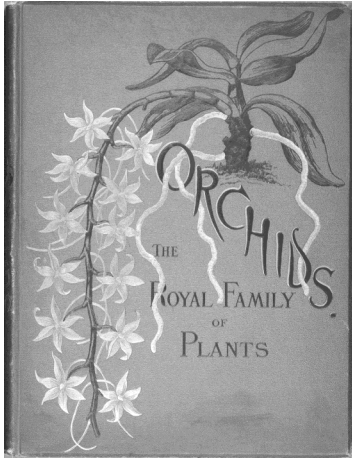
Today, Harriet Miner's flower paintings are as timely now as they were when published in 1885. Her book "Orchids: Royal Family of Plants" is found in libraries around the world and online. Her CCHA paintings are shown on the next page as well as on the web.

About the Author

David Patrick is a descendent of Judge Pliny Moore of Champlain through his oldest child, Noadiah. He has written extensively about the Moore, Nye and McLellan families of Champlain and the history of the village and town of Champlain. Research material courtesy Special Collections, Feinberg Library, State University of New York, College at Plattsburgh as well as internet sources. Images for this article are courtesy of the Clinton County Historical Association and a private collection.



Harriet Miner's Art (cont.)



Harriet Miner's orchid book is found at: "<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/111457#page/2/mode/1up>"
Color images of Harriet Miner's unpublished paintings at CCHA as well as additional information can be found at www.moorsfieldpress.com at the page for "Harriet Stewart Miner."

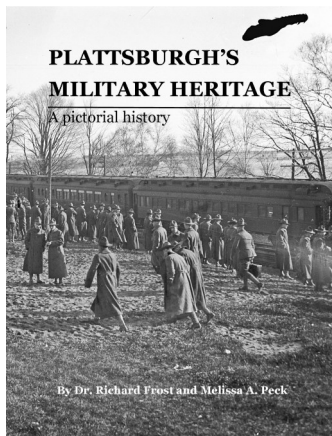
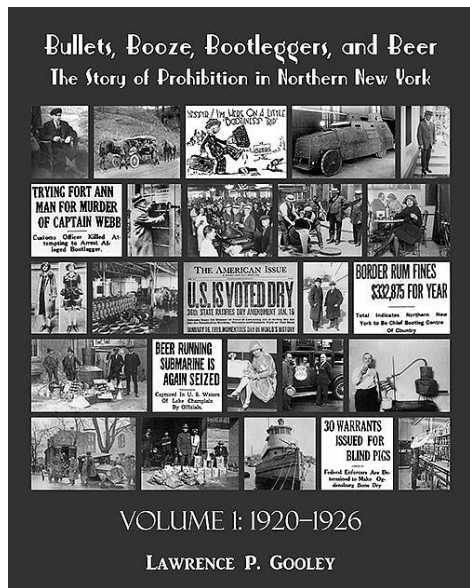
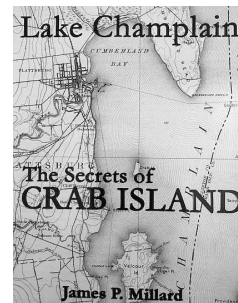
The top two left-most images courtesy archive.org. All others courtesy CCHA.

In the Gift Shop

The CCHA Museum building is closed to the public because of COVID-19, but you can still take full advantage of our store-house of knowledge. Our gift shop remains well-stocked with volumes about Clinton County history, and we'll be glad to take your order for some local favorites.

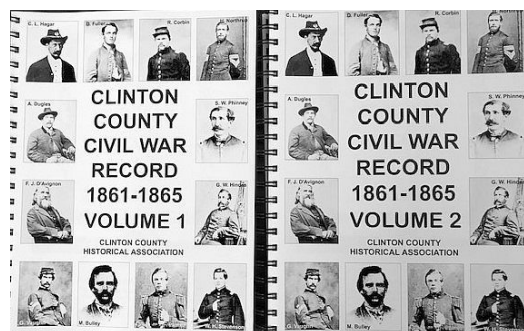
Send an email to director@clintoncountyhistorical.org, and let us know what you're looking for. In the meantime, take a look at a sampling of some of our favorite titles.

Prolific local writer James P. Millard knows his Lake Champlain geography, and that wisdom is on full display in "The Secrets of Crab Island," a source of both natural beauty and historic wonder.



Northeast New York state has a distinguished military legacy, one often mined by historians. Two rich veins are contained in these books: Richard Frost's and Melissa Peck's gorgeous "Plattsburgh's Military Heritage" (left) and the CCHA-produced "Clinton County Civil War Record" (below), an invaluable research resource.

Lawrence P. Gooley's first volume on Prohibition in the North Country, "Bullets, Booze, Bootleggers, and Beer," is more than an exercise in alliteration. It's an entertaining history of the border region's trade in illicit inebriation.



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CCHA Responds to Pandemic

(cont. from Page 1)

public viewing through our new Diviner software.

Which leads me to more good news. Our web site is being redesigned under the leadership of Roger Black. We are looking at an early July relaunch.

The refurbished CCHA website will include access to our negative collection of scenes and portraits through Diviner, which we received as part of a partnership with North Country Public Radio's North Country at Work project in 2019. The images will have captions with photo essays available for popular photo groupings, including the Catholic Summer School of America, the Royal Savage Inn and the Witherill Hotel.

We will explain in more detail the scope and opportunities of this project, which will give the public a chance to enjoy our extensive collection in new ways, in our next NCN.

The museum community has rallied statewide and made available a number of opportunities for financial support to help us get through the economic dislocation of the pandemic. Most recently, CCHA received a grant from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation to provide Makenzee with a proper laptop and screen from which to do her work from home, and to

aid with the expenses for our web site development.

The Stewarts/Dake Foundation also granted us monies to help with the development of virtual programming and our website.

And lastly, we qualified for the Payroll Protection Plan through the federal government which covers our staff salaries for eight weeks. We suspect grant opportunities will be reduced in the coming months, so we feel pleased and privileged to have received these.

Communications during this period are critical, and we have tried to provide members with information in a timely fashion. We have an email vehicle called Mail Chimp and are using it to periodically email updates to members.

If you are not getting these emails, please send your email address to me (director@clintoncountyhistorical.org), and I will include you in these communications.

You will also notice that our Facebook pages continue to offer stories and updates thanks to our Trustee Emeritus Julie Dowd. Research requests are being handled as received.

We appreciate everyone's patience and look forward to seeing you again soon.