

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

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CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 57

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

Sept. 1969

The September Meeting

of the Association will be held on Monday evening, September 8th, at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. The topic of the evening will be "The Treasures of Our Lake Champlain". It will be presented by a panel including Assemblyman Andrew Ryan, Moses (Scotty) Aspinall and Richard Coffee. The Wreck Raiders will present a short film. The meeting is designed to inform the Association about the lake's artifacts and the need for a county museum to house them.

The public is cordially invited.

NEWS OF THE SUMMER

On Saturday, June 6th, a full busload of Association members and guests enjoyed a tour of Old Montreal under the leadership of Dr. Eugene Link, program chairman, and Mr. Fred Halla, director of the SUC Miner Center. A highlight of the trip was a tour of the Chateau de Ramesay personally conducted by its director.

On July 27th, Fort Ticonderoga commemorated the 210th anniversary of the capture of the fort by General Amherst in 1759. American and Canadian bands participated in the ceremony, and a French unit demonstrated the order of firing of the French army in the 18th century.

Mrs. Alice Dibble of Shoreham, Vermont, has recently finished a complex restoration of the 1812 portrait of General Benjamin Mooers, which is owned by the Association. She has also donated an appropriate frame. The work will be unveiled at the October banquet of the Association.

Mrs. J. B. Stratton died this summer after a long illness. She and her husband, J. Bernard Stratton, who survives her, have been active members of the Association, Mr. Stratton serving as treasurer for more than twenty years before his resignation last year.

On August 1st, Governor Rockefeller dedicated a new building at the Adirondack Museum at Blue Mountain Lake. On August 24th, Whitelaw Reid and August Heckscher of New York City helped dedicate the Adirondack Room in the Saranac Lake Public Library to the memory of the late William Chapman White, author of **The Adirondack Story** and other books and articles about Adirondack life.

Publication date for the journal of Dr. Kellogg, edited by Dr. Allan Everest, has been set for March 1970 by the publishers, Stephen Greene Press of Brattleboro, Vermont. The text will be illustrated with scenes in Clinton County at the turn of the century.

The First Twenty Years Of Ayerst Laboratories

Ayerst, McKenna and Harrison entered the biological and pharmaceutical field in Montreal in 1924. It was founded by William Ayerst, William McKenna, William Harrison and Hugh McPherson, all outstanding men in the field of pharmaceutical manufacturing. The firm expanded rapidly as its knowledge and high quality of production became known. In 1930-31, American medical journals began publishing reports of experiments and products which were being performed and sold by the Canadian factory. Orders for products began to come from the United States. In 1934, a depression year, so many orders for pituitary factors, estrogens, and other products were received from the States that the need for an American-based distribution outlet became evident.

Early in 1934, William McKenna was on a train running between Montreal and Plattsburgh. On the same train was Roy Delano, well-known customs official. Mr. Delano had traveled the route many times, and had become acquainted with several of the Ayerst officials. On this trip, he began a conversation with Mr. McKenna. He learned that Ayerst was interested in establishing a distributing outlet in the United States. McKenna told him that he was going to Plattsburgh in order to look over possible sites for the new center. If nothing was found to be suitable there, the branch would be set up in Brooklyn.

Delano asked why the firm did not locate in Rouses Point. He was told that the town did not contain a suitable building or space necessary for establishing such a fast-growing company. Delano told him of the old high school building which had been rented from the local school board by the Department of Agriculture, but which would soon be vacant. McKenna agreed to look at the site since the train stopped over in Rouses Point for a short period of time. Delano and McKenna drove to the Maple Street address in Delano's car. After looking over the building, the two men seated themselves on the front steps of the old building. McKenna told Delano that he was going to cancel his trip to Plattsburgh. He said he was tremendously impressed with the premises and thought the spot ideal for the new company. Thus Roy Delano, a one-man Chamber of Commerce, talked Ayerst, McKenna and Harrison right out of Plattsburgh and into Rouses Point.

But Ayerst had other good reasons for opening an outlet in Rouses Point. The transportation facilities were considered the best along the eastern border. Rouses Point was a thriving railroad center in 1934. Several trains were running daily between Montreal and the border village. This fact, along with its proximity to Montreal, made the village attractive to the Canadian sponsors. Finally, the old high school could be purchased at a low cost and there was plenty of land for expansion near by.

The Rouses Point outlet began operating on March 5, 1934, and the first order was shipped on April 6th of the same year. The original staff consisted of five people. The outlet began to supply not only American firms, but also Latin American and African countries with medical supplies. During the war years, operations concentrated on supplying pharmaceuticals and biologicals for the armed services as well as for civilian consumption. After the war, many new foreign areas were opened for business. Besides Latin America and Africa, shipments were now being sent to Europe and Asia.

The year 1935 brought the first physical expansion. An addition of 15,000 square feet of manufacturing space was added to the old school building. From a total of five employees in 1934 the number rose to 65 in 1938. In 1943, another 3,500 square feet of space was constructed. With this addition the number of employees rose to approximately 100. The final expansion programs of the early years were the post-war additions of 1947 and 1954. In 1947 the demand for products warranted the acquisition of additional property and the construction of 35,000 square feet of manufacturing space. The number of employees was now 165. The last program was effected in 1954, when a pharmaceutical development laboratory and a staff of scientists and technicians, together with extensive laboratory facilities, were added. This added 12,880 more square feet to the already-existing buildings. This year saw the rise in total employment to 185. The number of buildings was now seven. The company was an international business organization.

In the twenty years after 1934, three major changes altered the structure of the Rouses Point company. The first occurred in 1943. It was in this year that the entire company, both the American and Canadian firms, was sold to the American Home Products Corporation of New York City. It seems that after nearly twenty

years in the business, the original founders were looking toward their retirement. However, none of their children desired to take over the management of the business. So in order to secure the future of the company and its personnel, the firm was sold. The executive offices, which were previously centered in Montreal, were transferred to 22 East 40th Street, New York City.

The second change occurred in 1947 with the building of a power house, warehousing facilities, and more manufacturing space. This year is significant for two reasons. First, the buildings more than doubled the area which had been in use. Secondly, the construction of a power house made the Rouses Point company self-sufficient. It was no longer just a distributing outlet. It now became a manufacturing center which produced its own products. The final change occurred in 1953, when the United States division of the company had its name shortened to Ayerst Laboratories. The reason for the change was merely for convenience.

In the early years of the company, management was under the joint control of Franklin R. Forbes and Richard McKenna. The latter, a relative of one of the founders, was in charge of plant management; Forbes was in charge of plant production. After the sale of 1943, Forbes was placed in charge of the Rouses Point outlet. He later was named a vice-president of the larger company while retaining his position of plant manager in Rouses Point.

When the Canadian firm was established in 1924 its major products were pituitary factors and estrogens. As time progressed and the need arose, Ayerst moved into the veterinary field. The first products were feeding oils and fish-oil concentrates. When the company opened its Rouses Point outlet in 1934, the products remained the same as before. However, in 1947, when the power house was constructed, the Rouses Point company began producing products such as premarin, a hormone for women in the menopause. Then came the production of vitamins and other types of tablets and liquids. However, the major product remained premarin.

In the twenty-year span between 1934 and 1954, the economic impact of the pharmaceutical firm on the North Country was of great importance. As has been mentioned earlier, in the first twenty years of its growth, the company more than doubled in manufacturing space. The number of its employees rose to 185 in 1954. Employees were drawn not only from neighboring villages, but also from Plattsburgh, Vermont, and Canada. The company provided steady employment for these people as well as paying them more than \$700,000 in wages. It is to Ayerst's credit that in its first twenty years no one was laid off for lack of work.

The company also attracted many scientific and technological people to the North Country. The railroad was dependent on Ayerst products for years as a leading source of income. To the village of Rouses Point, the company paid thousands of dollars in taxes which helped promote better facilities in the village, along with improved education. The company helped to fill the void caused by the decline in the village's railroad industry. Finally, it is clear that Ayerst's first twenty years in Rouses Point were only a prelude to its expanded activities since that date.

James Hogle, SUC

ANNUAL ASSOCIATION BANQUET

The annual banquet of the Association will be held at 7 o'clock on the evening of Monday, October 6th. It will take place at the 13 Morgans on the Lake Shore Road and tickets are available at \$4 per person.

The program of the evening will include a talk by Frederick L. Rath, vice director of the New York State Historical Association, entitled "The Tale of Two Villages" (Cooperstown and the recreated Crossroads Village of the Farmers' Museum). He will illustrate the development of both places with slides. The restored portrait of General Mooers will also be unveiled at the dinner.

Members and guests are cordially invited to attend. For your convenience, a reservation blank is inserted in this issue. It **should** reach Dr. Eugene Link by October 3rd in order to assure accommodations.

WAR SCARE IN THE NORTH COUNTRY

(The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Mrs. Swetland in Plattsburgh to her son-in-law, Henry Livingston Webb. The letter is in the Kent-Delord Collection at the Feinberg Library and was discovered by Mrs. Elsie Everest. Mrs. Swetland, then Mrs. Delord, fled Plattsburgh at the time of the British invasion in 1814. She here describes the deteriorating British-American relations, which were fortunately reversed by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1842.)

March 12, 1841

We all fear war here, and we have reasons to do so, exposed as we are. Nothing to prevent them coming out in a few hours and burning our village, which we have every reason to expect they will. They have in fact a steam frigate all ready to put together at St. Johns and which can be completed in a very short time, ready for the Lake. Last summer several of the officers with an eminent engineer was all about our country and Lake, under pretence of fishing, and taking observations of everything of importance. They spent more than a week at this place and its vicinity and understand all its points and soundings of our Lake. How much more provident the British are than our people. We must hope for the best. I cannot yet believe we shall have war, but in case we should, we should pack up our valuables and take them south, probably about Saratoga—that would be as safe as anywhere. I would never consent to remain here another war. Our gentlemen would probably remain, but ladies and children better be off. It would cost me a severe trial to be obliged to leave our delightful situation with all its comforts.

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