

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 61

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

Jan. 1970

Coming Meetings of the Association

January 5, 1970—The meeting will be held in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library at 8:00 P. M. The speaker of the evening will be Miss Phyllis Wells, who will speak on "The Romance of the Covered Bridges of New York State." Miss Wells is an assistant librarian at the Feinberg Library at the State University College in Plattsburgh. She has spent recent years tracking down, studying and photographing the covered bridges of the state, particularly in the North Country.

This will also be the annual meeting of the Association. A nominating committee chaired by Mr. Leclair Smith will present nominations for officers for 1970.

February 2—The subject of the evening will be "Noah John Rondeau, Adirondack Hermit," presented by Maitland De Sormo, author of the recently published biography with the same title. Mr. De Sormo is currently a lecturer on Adirondack history at the North Country Community College in Saranac Lake, and has written numerous articles on Adirondack history and lore.

The public is cordially invited to all meetings of the Association.

THE CLINTON COUNTY MUSEUM

Since last summer both the Historical Association and the Plattsburgh Chamber of Commerce have been interested in Air Base Colonel Gunn's proposal that under certain conditions the old stone barracks and about seven acres of land, including the old military cemetery, might be made over to a local agency for development as a museum.

The Association and the Chamber created a joint committee to pursue the matter. At their request, the State Council on the Arts commissioned H. J. Swinney, director of the Adirondack Museum at Blue Mountain Lake, to make a feasibility study. On the basis of his detailed report, the joint committee made a presentation to the County Board of Legislators for support. Although the Board did not budget any funds for the project, it did agree to undertake its own feasibility study.

The proposal from the Air Force requires the recipient of the property to be a governmental body, which the joint committee hopes the County will agree to be. Major unanswered questions include the terms of the Air Force transfer (deed or lease, with probably a recapture clause); possible source of funds for renovation and operation from state or federal agencies; and availability of any funds if the property is held by lease only. Studies will also undoubtedly be made of alternate sites for a museum, taking into account factors such as ultimate cost, clearness of title, location, and adequacy of the structure for the needs.

George W. Palmer

George W. Palmer was one of the North Country's leading citizens for much of the nineteenth century. He was not a native, having been born in Hoosick, New York. He was the oldest of eight children of William and Ruth Haynes Palmer. When he was still young his family moved to Plattsburgh where his father constructed a flour mill, a business in which George later became a partner. His father built another flour mill at the Upper Bridge which was eventually purchased by George. After operating it alone for some years he leased the mill and invested in a local sawmill and two iron forges. This was approximately the extent of George's business career in the North Country.

George received a very good education. After leaving the Rensselaer school district he pursued his studies at the academies of Greenbush and Schodak. He received further college preparation at the Plattsburgh Academy and then entered Yale University. Of his early life and schooling he said: "I spent the summer of 1836 in the little village of St. Denis, Lower Canada, living with the family of M. Thibaudau. I was eighteen and had been sent there to learn French. In the autumn of 1836 I returned to Plattsburgh. I am not sure about the date of my entering Yale, but I think I was there during the summer of 1837. I was only there a few months, leaving on account of an attack of typhus fever and it seems that I must have been back in Plattsburgh in the fall or early winter of 1837."*

His study of law began in the office of John Palmer. He later studied with Messrs. Swetland and Beckwith before finishing his studies with Daniel Gardner in Troy. He was admitted to the bar in 1843 and began his law practice with P. S. Palmer under the name of Palmer and Palmer in Plattsburgh.

In 1844 he was appointed surrogate of Clinton County by Governor Bouck, a position he filled until it was abolished in 1847. Nine years later he was elected Congressman and in 1858 he was re-elected. President Lincoln recognized the ability of Palmer and appointed him a consul at Crete in 1862. He was later appointed a judge on a mixed court which was established at Sierra Leone by Great Britain, the United States and other world powers for the suppression of the African slave trade. He held this office until the court was terminated by treaty.

In his early years Mr. Palmer was a follower of the Democratic party. In the Presidential election of 1840 he voted for the Democratic candidate, Martin Van Buren. With the emergence of the Free Soil Party in 1848, he became one of its followers and voted for its candidates, Van Buren and Adams. The Compromise of 1850 reunited the Democratic party of New York, causing Palmer to vote for Franklin Pierce in 1852. When in 1854 the Douglas Bill repealed the Missouri Compromise, Palmer would not sanction it on the grounds that it would extend slavery into free territory. In 1855 he and other state Democrats organized the Republican party in New York. His local district sent him in 1856 as a delegate to the Republican nominating convention which chose John C. Fremont for its Presidential candidate. In 1864 he went as a delegate to the Republican convention which renominated Lincoln.

Not until 1884 did he return to the political scene. He was elected Assemblyman in the state legislature. Re-elected in 1885, he was appointed chairman of a committee concerned with state prisons. Mr. Palmer was described in 1886 in the following words: "Palmer is a careful and painstaking legislator. He is 68 years of age and the second oldest man in the house. He is short in stature, with large, well-shaped head, which is well protected with a covering of thick gray hair. Mr. Palmer wears a stubby gray mustache and has a strongly marked face."

Mr. Palmer had his disappointments during his long and eventful life. On June 15, 1843 he married Frances E. Lynde and three of their eight children died in infancy. His surviving children included one daughter, Helen M., and four sons, Owen A., Charles G., Lynde, and Francis Stern. On August 10, 1849 a disastrous fire burned down the entire business district of Plattsburgh, including the Palmer home. Soon afterwards he and his family moved into a large brick house which he had been building on Oak Street (previously called Lover's Lane). This was the first house on the west side of the street north from Cornelia except one on the northwest corner of Oak and Cornelia, then occupied by George Buck.

Few people in the North Country have been as influential as George Palmer in state and national politics. He zealously represented the interests of the people, especially of his beloved North Country. He died in his 98th year in 1916.

Preston Gilroy, SUC

*See the "Notes" for May 1966 for Palmer's involvement in Papineau's Rebellion. (Ed.)

The New York-Quebec Boundary

(To The Editor of NORTH COUNTRY NOTES:)

Since I was born and raised in Mooers, New York within walking distance of the Canadian line, I have long had a curiosity about the origin of that important political boundary. I have recently found partial answers to my questions in a thick U. S. Government publication, perhaps little known even in Clinton County. It is entitled, **Joint Report upon the Survey and Demarcation of the Boundary between the United States and Canada from the Source of the St. Croix River to the St. Lawrence River.** (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925). From the Historical Sketch, which appears as Appendix I, I note that the present boundary had its origin in 1606 when King James I of England granted to the London Company the right to form settlements 100 miles square along the Atlantic seaboard of North America between parallels 34° and 41°, and to the Plymouth Company the right to form similar settlements between parallel 38° and parallel 45°. The titles overlapped. The last named parallel now forms the approximate boundary between the Province of Quebec in Canada and the states of New York and Vermont in the United States. The French, in the eighteenth century, claimed the territory along the St. Lawrence River basin, their claim resting on Cartier's voyages 1534 and 1535. Henry IV of France had previously given a charter to DeMonts in 1603 for the seacoast and territory of America lying between parallels 40° and 46° under the name "Acadia." This title overlapped both the London Company and Plymouth Company's claims.

Even though England claimed in her earlier boundary disputes with France that the provinces of Massachusetts and Nova Scotia extended westward to the St. Lawrence River, she did not in mid-eighteenth press those claims. The issue was resolved when England wrested Quebec City from the French in 1759 and took possession of all of Eastern Canada. In 1763, a royal proclamation creating the new province of Quebec included all the south bank of the St. Lawrence in that province and specified the 45° of north latitude crossing both the St. Lawrence and Lake Champlain as part of the southern boundary.

In 1766, observations for latitude were made at several places on the shores of Lake Champlain near Windmill Point and a point was agreed upon as being on the 45th parallel. It was subsequently agreed that this line should extend eastward as far as the Connecticut River which ultimately determined the boundary between the province of Quebec and the State of Vermont. In the years 1773 to 1774, this line was surveyed from the St. Lawrence River to the Connecticut river by Thomas Valentine for New York and John Collins of Quebec. At the Office of the Boundary Commission in Washington, this line is still called the Valentine-Collins line. While not quite as famous as the Mason-Dixon line, yet it is an important political boundary. The Quebec Act of 1774 reaffirmed the 45th parallel from the east bank of the Connecticut River westward through Lake Champlain to the St. Lawrence as part of its southern boundary. Hence, the 45° of parallel mentioned in the old grant to the Plymouth Colony was now firmly fixed as the dividing line.

Subsequent surveys showed that the Valentine-Collins line was slightly in error, since it did not follow exactly the 45th parallel. This uncertainty in the location of the true boundary embarrassed the United States when it was discovered that Fort Montgomery (Fort Blunder) was actually being built on the Canadian side.* Consequently, at Rouses Point the present international boundary is about 7/8 mile north of the true 45° of latitude. At Mooers's customs office, the boundary is about 1/3 mile north of the 45° line. The two lines cross north of Clinton Mills, and from thence westward to the St. Lawrence River near St. Regis the 45th parallel is entirely in Canada.

The Joint Boundary Commission in 1922 issued topographic maps which show in great detail a strip about one nautical mile (1' of latitude) wide straddling the boundary line. On this map, all boundary monuments, which are spaced one-half mile apart, are clearly indicated by serial number. The maps show that the boundary line crosses a wide variety of terrain, open fields, wooded areas and swamps. For example, in Mooers it cut directly across "The Gulf," a deep ravine, a sort of miniature Ausable Chasm, which is perhaps the most striking physical feature within the township. Roads, railroad crossings and buildings are clearly indicated. Although now nearly half a century out of date, the maps are still useful.

The New York-Quebec boundary is 64.6 miles in length. The land portions of the line were monumented first in 1845 with cast-iron posts. In 1902, the New York-Quebec line was remonumented with granite posts and a joint resurvey was made by

the State of New York and the Dominion of Canada "without a formal treaty but by the joint and concurrent actions of the Government of the United States and Great Britain."

The Joint Boundary Commission now maintains a "vista" a few yards wide each side of the boundary. I should like some day (outside the mosquito season) to hike the length of the vista that touches Clinton County and report my experiences.

Sincerely yours,
Rutherford J. Gettens
Washington, D. C.

*(Ed. Note) After the War of 1812, the United States and Canada sought to redefine the Canadian boundary. When the line between New York and Quebec was resurveyed in 1818, the error was discovered. All work on the fort was suspended pending referral of the dispute to the King of the Netherlands as arbitrator. However, his decision was rejected by the United States, and not until the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842 was the dispute settled. The two countries decided to go back to the original but incorrect boundary.

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old riddle, answered by Mr. Halsey Shields of Keeseville: "Carleton took possession of Crown Point after the battle of Valcour until the 3rd of November, when he retired into Canada for winter quarters. After the American ships beat the British in a vicious fight the British army under General Prevost retreated at once." (Ed.) Actually, Prevost's men got about half way to South Plattsburgh before they were recalled.

New riddle: What old church in the county was demolished during this year?

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