

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 71

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

January, 1971

## *The January Meeting*

*of the Association will be held on Monday evening, January 4, 1971 at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. The speaker, Dr. John G. Clifford, assistant professor of political science at the University of Connecticut, will talk on "The Plattsburgh Business Men's Camp of 1915". This is a part of a larger study he is making about the Plattsburgh training camps. He is the author of several articles, the latest of which will appear in the winter issue of NEW YORK HISTORY: "General Wood, Samuel Gompers and the Plattsburgh Training Camps: A Note."*

*The annual business meeting and election of officers will also be held. Nominated at the December meeting were Gene Ward, president; Dan Shea, vice president; David Martin, secretary; John Caramia, treasurer, and Ruth Hecht, curator. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor.*

## **Kellogg Papers Donated to Library**

During the autumn three descendants of Helen Kyle Platt and one of Theodora Kyle Chase spent a week end in Plattsburgh in order to honor their great-uncle, Doctor David Sherwood Platt (1835-1909) and to present his manuscripts to the North Country Historical Research Center at the college library. It is from some of these papers that the recently-published A DOCTOR AT ALL HOURS was prepared.

From Chicago for the occasion came Professor George and Mrs. Theodora Platt Brobrinskoy, Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood Kellogg Platt and Mr. Henry Platt. Their mother was Helen Kyle, whom Doctor Kellogg reared in Plattsburgh, and their father was Henry Russell Platt, who also grew up locally. From Dover, Massachusetts came Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Chase. His mother was Theodora Kyle, also brought up in Plattsburgh. Professor Brobrinskoy is a retired Sanskrit scholar of the University of Chicago; the other men of the family are lawyers of Chicago and Boston. Joining them in Plattsburgh was Emeritus Professor Richard Crooks of UVM and Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Greene of the Stephen Greene Press that published A DOCTOR AT ALL HOURS. While they were in Plattsburgh the family sought out spots in the countryside that Doctor Kellogg referred to in his journal.

## **RIDDLE OF THE MONTH**

Old riddle: Button Brook runs through the village of Peru and is a tributary of the Little Ausable River. True Brook empties into the Saranac River at Moffitsville. Both are named for early settlers along their course.

New riddle: What canal was once planned to cross Clinton County?

# *Clinton County's Man in Alaska*

*Joseph Ladue*

There is a strong tendency to forget the part our own local area has played in great historical events of the past. After a generation passes, these incidents are forgotten. Such was the case of Joseph Ladue who, for some twelve years, was Clinton County's genuine representative in our far domain of Alaska. Today many have forgotten that Ladue was a native of Schuyler Falls and the founder of Dawson City. It was in 1896 that he founded Dawson. He bought the town site long before there was any suspicion of gold in that section. Oddly enough, it turned out to be part of the Klondike.

We have no absolute proof of Joseph Ladue's parents. In the Clinton County Gazetteer of 1862, listed under Schuyler Falls as bricklayer, is the name of Francis Ladue, undoubtedly the father of Joseph. We do know that when about fourteen years of age, young Ladue went to live with James Henry Lobdell, a farmer, just north of Schuyler Falls. He attended school and had a great yen for fox-hunting and trapping. He probably sold some muskrat pelts for as much as fifteen cents each and was able to save enough money to think of seeking his fortune.

It was about the year of 1873-74 that this young man decided to become a miner. So he followed the admonition of Horace Greeley to "Go West, young man". He went to the Black Hills of Deadwood, South Dakota, named for a stand of burned timber. Wild Bill Hickok, whose mother was from North Hero, arrived in Deadwood in 1876. That was the year of the fabulous gold strike in that area. AMERICAN HERITAGE describes Deadwood as "one of the rowdiest towns of the old west". I presume Ladue saw and perhaps knew some of the famous personages of that town.

He was in Schuyler Falls in 1879, where he stayed with the Lobdells until he returned in the spring to Colorado with a Mr. Arnold Lewis. Some of the young men who went west went for their health, especially for consumption, and were cured. Mr. Lewis was one of these. Joseph drifted to the Southwest, perhaps to Tombstone, which has been characterized as one of the most notorious of all mining towns. He got to California. We are uncertain how long he stayed there but he moved on to Alaska, always prospecting.

Alaska is as wide as the United States, and north and south it measures over 1,400 miles. Its name is a corruption of an Aleutian word meaning mainland and referring to what is now called the Alaskan Peninsula. After its purchase from Russia in 1867, it received little attention until the gold rush. Joseph Ladue had one of the rare exceptions to the opinion that it was a worthless piece of property.

Little is known of his trials and privations from 1882 to 1895. He was continually on the move, and his boyhood trapping experience helped to sustain him through the rugged conditions of Alaska. He lived through the long summer days with their curse of mosquito and gnat. He lived through the long winter nights for about fifteen years. He lived with the Eskimo and the Indian. He prospected without any luck and in 1883-84 started trading for the Alaska Trading Commercial Company. In 1886 he went to Forty Mile Gulch, known as Franklin's Gulch, named for H. H. Franklin, who founded Juneau. He mined for two summers and did well; then he went over the boundary about 300 miles to Fort Selkirk, where he began ranching. He raised potatoes, turnips, radishes, cabbage, barley and oats, but frost nipped everything, so he gave that up to build a sawmill and start trading for the Alaska Commercial Company.

Ladue knew many of the Canadian and American government men, for he is mentioned in their reports. Lt. Henry Allen, United States Surveyor under General Miles, was ordered to make the first survey of the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk rivers of Alaska. In March 1885 he set out with three men. They suffered great hardships. While suffering from scurvy, they met Ladue and McQuisten of Fort Reliance, who were generous enough to share flour and game. Lieutenant Allen's report in book form, a very comprehensive survey, is worth reading.

Ladue grub-staked Robert Henderson of Nova Scotia for four years with the understanding that he would have fifty percent of anything that he would make. He was the first to hear of and to stake out a claim in the Klondike. He selected 178 acres of government land at \$1.25 an acre at the intersection of the Klondike and Yukon rivers. He persuaded George Dawson, a Canadian mining engineer, to survey the site into lots. He named the place after Mr. Dawson.

After the strike of 1894-95, Joseph was again in Schuyler Falls, at the Lobdell's. He would take the young friends of Will Lobdell to town for the plays, including such numbers as "Uncle Tom's Cabin". He issued a warning to people planning to go to Alaska. He advised them to wait until spring, indicating that 2,000 people would be wintering there, too great a number to feed and provide for.

He returned to Alaska in the spring of 1895, accompanied by two young men of Schuyler Falls, Ellis Turner and Willis Lamay. Turner wrote very descriptive letters that were printed in the Plattsburgh papers. Ladue wrote to the editor of the SENTINEL, advising all those thinking of the north to consult the Alaska Commercial Company of San Francisco, since it was straining to keep the country supplied with equipment and staples. Turner and Lamay returned home; since they did no prospecting but worked as laborers, they amassed no fortune because living costs were too high.

On July 18, 1897 the Associated Press thought Ladue important enough to send out the following dispatch: "Joseph Ladue, the owner of the townsite of Dawson City, Alaska, the nearest town to the Klondike region, started tonight for his home in Plattsburgh, New York. Besides having the townsite of Dawson, where land is already selling for \$5,000 a lot, Ladue brought with him enough gold dust to keep him comfortable for some time to come. About 40 men came with him and their gold dust amounted to about \$2,000,000."

It is not hard to imagine the effect of this event on the quiet farm home of James Lobdell. Every man who lived within a radius of ten miles and had a horse and buggy drove over to shake his hand. It was like the County Fair. One reporter said he found Ladue hiding in the barn, the sorriest looking man you could wish to see. Begging letters began to arrive. Others asking for advice came by the thousands, so that Ladue made arrangements with a publisher to publish KLONDIKE FACTS, a book of 224 pages with a map, selling for ten cents in paper and fifty cents in cloth. It is now listed at more than fifteen dollars.

On December 15, 1897 he married Katherine Mason of Schuyler Falls. "Kitty" had lived next door to the Lobdells. An article in a Troy paper asserts that he gave his bride \$1,000 in gold and that he gave the minister, Reverend Henry G. Petty, a \$100 gold piece. The couple left on the south-bound train for an extended honeymoon. In Washington they were received by President and Mrs. McKinley, who gave Kitty red roses that were kept dried in the family Bible.

In New York they were joined by E. F. Botsford, a Plattsburgh attorney, where they formed the Joseph Ladue Gold Mining and Development Company, with a capital stock of \$1,000,000. Ladue was president, Botsford was secretary-treasurer. Shares sold for \$100 so that the stock could be listed on the New York and London exchanges. The office headquarters were in Plattsburgh and Jersey City. The company took over the property owned by Ladue, including his real estate at Dawson and eleven mines, said to be among the richest in the Yukon Valley. A mining plant was planned at the time of incorporation, with Ladue as superintendent.

Ladue and Botsford left Plattsburgh for Alaska in March 1898. Kitty went with them as far as San Francisco. She described that trip to the author as a nightmare, because of the crowds of men who rushed onto the train at every stop, all seeking GOLD. There was no privacy on the train, and it was sometimes delayed for hours. Joseph made several trips to Dawson. The book GOLD HUNTING IN ALASKA by Joseph Grinnel (who was there in 1898) tells of the reputation of the miners at that time.

In 1899 he made the last trip from the Yukon with a man named G. Baker, who was an agent for the Trading Company. The San Francisco papers gave a vivid account of their dangers. Baker started with a basket sleigh and five dogs. Malumet had a toboggan drawn by five dogs with fish for the dogs. The temperature was 25 below zero. His sleigh was wrecked; so he sent one of his Indians to an Indian camp to get a new vehicle with which he made the last of the 100 miles to Sixty Mile where he joined Ladue, who was about to start for Frisco. They doubled up, hitching seven dogs to Ladue's sleigh and two more to the toboggan, and started with two Indian guides. Between 500 and 600 miles of ice lay between them and the Dyea Inlet where they were to take the steamer to Juneau. The thermometer dropped to 63 below. The travellers tramped over the ice and deep snow, wearing snowshoes because they had to go ahead to make a trail for the dogs. Three valuable dogs were lost on the trip, their feet having been cut to pieces by the sharp ice, although they were shod with moccasins. In spite of the ice and strong winds, they made as much as 23 miles a day, even though they were on the verge of starvation.

One of the men associated with Ladue was Dr. T. Bates Cook, a graduate of Dartmouth Medical College who came to Plattsburgh as the physician in charge of the Hagey Institute (Keeley Cure) on Bridge Street. Later he became manager of the store department of the Ladue Company of Dawson. Our Historical Association has a gold nugget stickpin and a ring that the doctor gave to a friend in Peru.

Barney Gibney, a colorful character born on Rugar Street, Plattsburgh, was a river driver before he went to Alaska. There he was the proprietor of the Gold Saloon of Dawson City. The bar, made of solid mahogany, was used for Barney's cof-

fin when he died at the age of 69. He sent furs to relatives in Cadyville and Morrisonville. Joe Putraw was another resident of Rugar Street who struck gold. He settled and died in Oregon. Several other local citizens were drawn to the Yukon and each has left a story-book of adventures.

In the fall of 1900 Joseph and his wife went to Colorado Springs for his health. They returned home in May 1901 without finding relief. He continued to fail. He had made his will in November 1900. He left all of his estate, real and personal, to his wife. He died on June 27, 1901. But articles are almost annually appearing about the Klondike in which Joseph Ladue is given his due for his heroic years in Alaska and the Yukon.

*(The above is a part of an address given by Miss Emily McMasters to the Historical Association on January 10, 1966)*

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## IMPORTANT MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS

Through the great generosity of Mrs. Katherine Wilson of New York City, daughter of the late Mrs. Ross Lobdell of Plattsburgh, the Association is the recipient of some remarkable artifacts of Plattsburgh's early history. They will be loaned, probably to the Kent-Delord house, until the Association has a museum. Among the items are portraits of her great, great grandparents, Judge Levi Platt, the first village president, and his wife Eliza Miller, daughter of the first doctor; wedding dress and trousseau of her great grandmother Platt, and three chairs brought over the ice from Poughkeepsie by Zephaniah Platt about 1798.

A Wellington typewriter, made in Plattsburgh in 1890, has recently been given to the Association by Mr. Ed Murray, Plattsburgh locksmith.

The Association already owns a sewing machine, also made in Plattsburgh at about the same time. These two items are suggestive of the rich industrial history of Plattsburgh which will almost certainly be traced some day in an Association museum.

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Issued by the

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