

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 74

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

April 1971

The April Meeting

of the Association will take place on Monday evening, April 5th, at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. Mrs. Sally Baker of Saranac will speak on "The Plank Road Gazette," a presentation of unusual news clippings of the 1870's. By means of an overhead projector she will also be able to illustrate her talk with cartoons by Mrs. Luthera Edie, also of Saranac. Mrs. Patricia Allinson will also assist in the program.

Mrs. Baker is the author of the two-volume *THE SARANAC VALLEY*, the second volume of which "The Boom Days," is currently available. Mrs. Edie and Mrs. Allinson collaborated on this work as well.

The public is cordially invited.

INVITATION TO A HANGING

(From the Saily papers in the possession of Miss Saily Warren of Plattsburgh.)

Sheriff's Office, Plattsburgh
20 March 1855

L. D. Brock, Esq.
Dear Sir

You are hereby invited to attend the execution of Joseph Centerville which will take place in the yard of the County Prison on the 28th instant, between the hours of 12 M and 2 P.M. Be pleased upon receipt of this to acknowledge it and say whether or not you will be present.

Very respectfully yours,

J. D. Warren, Under Sheriff

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old riddle: The first Cattle Show and Fair was held in Champlain on October 14, 1819. Not surprisingly, Champlain farmers and their wives won most of the premiums. The Clinton County Agricultural Society had been formed earlier in the same year.

New riddle: The population of what two towns in Clinton County has at some time exceeded that of Plattsburgh?

MEETING OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The Daughters of the American Revolution will meet at the DAR house on Saturday, April 3rd. Mr. David Martin of West Chazy will address the group at 3 p. m. on The History of Chazy. The meeting is open to the public and the Chapter particularly extends an invitation to the members of the Historical Association.

Reminiscences of Plattsburgh from 1812 to 1818

(The following are extracts from reminiscences by Mrs. Susan Fillmore, formerly Susan F. Cook, who was living in Providence, R. I. in 1888 at the age of 94 years. She studied and taught at the Plattsburgh Academy but had not visited Plattsburgh in more than 70 years. Her recollections were printed in the PLATTSBURGH REPUBLICAN on November 17, 1888.)

When Vermont was called the "New State" my father settled there (he was a surveyor) and when I was in my 14th year (1808) he sold his estate there and removed to the town of Jay, Essex County, New York, where he became a small farmer. He had a family of eight children and although he did considerable public business as a justice of the peace and in other town and some State offices, his means were very moderate and we were early taught to help ourselves as best we could.

After my 14th year, having been through our town schools I began to teach district schools in the summer, spin the wool in the fall and help mother make up the cloth in the winter, my mother being an expert in the manufacture of every garment then worn by man, woman or child. I was then thought to be old enough to cut and make my own dresses and did so from that date. I loved books and study and was very desirous to extend my education, which could not be done in our schools, and there was no high school or academy nearer than Plattsburgh, forty miles away.

Some time during 1812 I saw in our weekly paper, the PLATTSBURGH REPUBLICAN, an advertisement of a military tailor for skilled young women to take to their homés and make officers' uniforms, pants and vests to be trimmed with gold and silver braid. The price offered was liberal for those times (one dollar each) and I besought my father to take me to that tailor, which he did in a sleigh. I examined his work and told him I had never done work of that kind but had no doubt I could do it to his satisfaction if he would trust me. This was the first time I was ever in a tailor's shop. He referred us for board to a lady who took the same kind of work from him, Mrs. Burnham. She wanted a single boarder, and my father left me there, where I remained until the war was over, going home on the approach of the battle and returning when the village became quiet.

Mr. Stead, the military tailor, stayed until the last troops were ordered to other stations. In the meantime, as one detachment after another left, Mr. S. would fail to supply us with the accustomed amount of work and we would have a day or two of leisure; at such a time it happened that a gentleman drove up to the door and inquired if there was a tailoress there whose name was Miss Cook. I told him I could make clothes if they were cut; he said they were cut. I asked what the garments were, as I had but three days to spare. He said it was a nice overcoat for his son. I told him I had no press board or goose for such work and he said they should be supplied. He wished to take me right along in his sleigh and I went rather reluctantly, not knowing who he was until on the way we passed a gentleman who saluted him as Doctor Miller.

It was a common practice in those days for families of high standing, especially large ones, to have their garments cut by a tailor and to employ a woman to make them up in the house, as a very proper and respectable economy. I made the coat—it was like a modern frock coat with longer skirts and a cape, a very becoming fashion—and Sammy Miller, who was just out of his teens, was very proud of it. I finished it before the end of the third day and asked for some more sewing to make out the day; they said I had done three good days' work and should do no more. One of the daughters asked if I could make dresses; I said I made my own. They brought me one partly done and I finished it.

This was my first acquaintance with Plattsburgh people. Mr. Burnham was not a citizen of the place but simply an agent for some army supply. I had made no acquaintance while there, my work filling all my time, while I communed with my own heart. The house Mr. Burnham occupied, a very pleasant one on the confines of the village in the direction of the forts, was owned by Judge Delord, who occasionally called for his rent. Once when he called, the door of the parlor where we sewed was open between it and the reception room and he took a seat very near our door, addressing Mrs. Burnham and bowing to me. He asked to look at my "beautiful work" and praised it with many compliments such as none but a Frenchman could improvise. I ventured to say, "I think Judge Delord knows my father ('Esquire' Cook, as he was called) of Jay." He exclaimed, "Ah! indeed I do, a very honorable man." My father had transacted business with him when he (the judge) lived in Peru and was himself a justice of the peace. I said, "My father respects Judge Delord so highly that he has named his youngest son Henry Delord," which seemed to please him much. After that, whenever he came to see Mr. Burnham he invariably

seated himself near our door, very politely bowing and opening conversation, so that jestingly we claimed his calls as ours and his business a pretext.

When the last troops left, Mr. Stead and Mr. Burnham also left and my aspirations were then directed to the academy which was undergoing repairs, having been vacated before the battle and used for barracks by the British soldiers, and so I was obliged to wait; but fortunately Sammy Miller's coat had advertised me at Judge Platt's, Col. Miller's and Mr. Davidson's and my trunk was transferred to Col. Miller's, where my services were wanted. I had work in some one of those four families whenever I could do it while I stayed in Plattsburgh.

But when the academy was opened I became a pupil. Our preceptor was a young graduate from Middlebury College, Mr. Wall. Males and females occupied one large room, sitting on opposite sides, but in some of the classes reciting together; we did not leave our seats to recite, merely rising in them, which I thought a wise arrangement. The young ladies in our class were Phebe Miller, Phebe Bailey, Phebe Mooers, Julia Platt, Delia Mann, Caroline Halsey, Jane Durand and some others. I remember the names of many of the young gentlemen in the highest classes: George Marsh, Harry Averill, Samuel Pitcher, "Jack" Skinner (St. John B. L. Skinner), Theodore Bailey, Anthony Bleeker, etc.

If Jack Skinner were alive he would remember me; he was a cordial, honest, open-hearted fellow; no flirt; all the girls liked him. If he were alive he would remember my working the form of a bugle horn on the ends of his coat collar with gold thread. A few young men about his age formed a musical club, their uniform being a tartan-green frock coat with standing collar, light pants and vest and a Scotch cap. They serenaded us one moonlight night in Dr. Miller's front yard, dancing around in a ring and all playing wind instruments which glistened brightly in the moonlight. It seemed the most like the realization of a scene in a fairy tale of anything I had before or have since witnessed. Delia Mann and I boarded there; we heard the music first and awoke Phebe Miller and hastened to the front windows and peered out, regretting that we had not some fresh bouquets with which to greet them.

There was not so much taught in this academy at that time as is now taught in our common schools. The first term, with the exception of two or three pupils in Latin, there was taught, besides the three R's, grammar, geography and history. Geography was taught on an improved plan with an atlas and questions on the maps. I had never before seen an atlas to accompany one. I had studied Morse's large geography at our town schools but to very little purpose without maps. I think this Willet's little geography was the first one of the kind published in the United States. It made geography pleasant, easy and a very profitable study. The next term we took rhetoric and drew maps and we were told that at the close of the term there would be a public examination and premiums awarded for excellence; we were each to present a map.

Rev. Mr. Hewitt, our minister who boarded at Dr. Davidson's, suspected that Mr. Wall was not a very efficient teacher, so Mrs. Davidson told me, and that he didn't think there was a scholar in the academy who could conjugate a verb. I thought I was a pretty good grammarian before I came to Plattsburgh and told Mrs. Davidson that Mr. Hewitt might find himself mistaken should he examine them. The very next day he came into the school and asked Mr. Wall if he should ask the classes some questions, to which Mr. W. at once assented. Mr. Hewitt came direct to me and gave me a regular verb to conjugate, which I did without any trouble; he then passed it through the class, some of whom were correct while others stumbled considerably. He then gave me an irregular verb to conjugate and I made no mistake in that. He then took leave, saying he would ask the young men some questions the next time he called. But ever afterwards he was my particular friend; he made me a number of presents of books, stationery, etc.

I will here record to the honor of the best people of Plattsburgh that I never realized any social proscription on account of my independent, self-sustaining position. Plattsburgh at that time was noted for its social parties, select balls and assemblies, as they were called when they occurred at stated intervals. I was always invited with the young ladies with whom I associated in the academy and was never neglected. I didn't attend all the dances, although I was fond of the exercise, for the sole reason that my wardrobe contained a less variety of costumes than that of the majority of my friends, though I made all the variations tact could devise with my limited resources; and to the polite manager who came for me when not prepared, the most plausible excuse was made consistent with probability. My better instincts scorned conventional duplicity, but vanity sometimes got the mastery and acted independently.

(To be continued)

Governor Clinton on the Subject of Peggy Facto

Governor Clinton on the Subject of Peggy Facto—12 pt. Old English

(The following are excerpts from a letter of Governor DeWitt Clinton to Peter Saily of Plattsburgh, dated February 28, 1825. The letter is in the possession of Miss Saily Warren of Plattsburgh, a descendant of Peter Saily.)

In Judge Walworth's official report of the case of Peggy Facto dated the 24th of January, after stating the facts, he says, "I became satisfied that the woman was perfectly abandoned and depraved and that she had destroyed this child and probably the one the year previous, not for the purpose of hiding her shame which was open and apparent to everybody that saw her but for the purpose of ridding herself of the trouble of taking care of them and providing for their support."

In a subsequent communication of the same Judge dated the 13th of February, he enclosed a petition signed by yourself and a number of respectable citizens soliciting a pardon for the said Peggy Facto either on condition of leaving the United States or otherwise. The petition states three grounds for the interposition of the Executive.

And the Judge observes, "Although I have no doubt of her guilt, and I sincerely believe that her execution would have afforded an example beneficial to the community **particularly in that County where many offenses of that kind have been committed**, I have now no hesitation in saying that the execution of this woman would be worse than useless, as in this County no capital punishment can with propriety be inflicted contrary to the general wishes of the community; and believe also as I do that the commutation of the punishment by changing it from death to imprisonment in a case where there was no pretence of insanity or doubt of the guilt of the convict, would in its effect upon the community be much worse than a free pardon, which few would ever hope to obtain, I do therefore join with the petitioners in recommending a pardon for this unfortunate woman."

Desirous of manifesting all due respect for the opinions of my fellow citizens and of dispensing mercy in all proper cases, I am reluctantly compelled by an imperious sense of duty, to refrain from changing the sentiment of the law. If a pardon were granted in this case it would be a virtual declaration of the impunity of infanticide.

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Issued by the

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