

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 75

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

May 1971

The May Meeting

of the Association will be held on Monday evening, May 3rd, at 8 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. Dr. William Beezley will speak on "A York State Horatio Alger." Dr. Beezley is assistant professor of history at State University College, where his major interest is Latin American History.

His talk is based on the memoirs of Arthur Stilwell of Rochester, who rose through a series of curious adventures from destitution to great wealth in the railroad-building era. His greatest achievement was the construction of the railroad south from Kansas City and the founding of Port Arthur, Texas, which bears his name. He retired in New York, where he went bankrupt.

The public is cordially invited.

NEW AND RENEWED PUBLICATIONS

The Association's Board of Directors recently decided to publish the late Oscar Bredenberg's *BATTLE OF PLATTSBURGH BAY*, an account of the naval engagement from the British point of view. Members will be notified through the "Notes" about the publication date.

Meanwhile, the second edition of Allan Everest's *PIONEER HOMES OF CLINTON COUNTY* has arrived, in the paper-back copy only. Minor corrections and a different color on the cover are the distinctive features. Because publishing costs have increased since the first edition, the book will sell for \$4.50. However, by action of the Board of Directors, members only are entitled to a ten-percent discount, making the price \$4.05.

There are still some paper covers of the first edition available at \$3.75 less ten percent to members, or \$3.40. Either of the editions may be ordered from the Secretary, David Martin, whose address appears on the "Notes", or from Allan Everest at 26 South Catherine Street, Plattsburgh.

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old riddle: Mr. J. F. Ladue correctly answered the riddle by quoting the census of 1835 as showing that population of Peru substantially exceeded that of Plattsburgh, while that of 1855 showed Champlain also ahead of Plattsburgh.

New riddle: What town in Clinton County had the highest percentage of foreign-born in the last quarter of the 19th century?

Reminiscences of Plattsburgh from 1812 to 1818—

(This is Part II of the 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.)

The dreaded examination day at length arrived; we were questioned by Mr. Wall upon the branches we had studied the preceding term and then members of the committee asked miscellaneous questions; they said our class had done extremely well and they would only specify those who had been most prompt and had missed no question. This they did in the REPUBLICAN the week following and my name headed the list of names in all the branches. The girls said they knew it would be so and that it ought to be so; they were not envious, but very good girls. I had assisted several of them about their maps—I was nearly two years older than most of them. After all the classes had been examined we were directed to leave our maps with our names on them on our desks for examination after our dismissal. "The best map of the United States and the best two of the whole were drawn by Miss Cook." I left but one map on my desk, as but one was expected. I had finished my map of the United States early in the term and had commenced a map of Europe, which was not quite finished and was lying in my desk, which they must have opened and examined.

The winter following I was private teacher in Col. Miller's family. It was thought by many citizens that there ought to be a first class ladies' school in the academy, and in the spring its second story was fitted up for that purpose. Mr. Hewitt recommended a daughter of Judge Hern of Willsboro, who had been educated at a nunnery in Montreal and could do all kinds of ornamental work which it was then thought most proper and needful to "finish" a young lady's education. Miss Hern came and we (nearly the same girls) and a few from other towns attended. She proved deficient in the solid branches and in everything that could be called literature; but we embroidered and scalloped all our cambrics, muslins and laces. She said we might paint, but she had no patterns and knew not a single principle of the art of drawing; nevertheless we painted any picture we could pick up and copy. She had no specimens of her own. She was kind and amiable and made me a present of a box of paints. I presume she taught as she had been taught in the nunnery. But after the expiration of one term this "first class" ladies' school was given up; still we did not feel "finished."

Soon after this Mr. Hewitt attended the examination of a ladies' school in Burlington and gave a glowing description of what had been done in elegant maps, ornamental work, baskets of wax flowers and fruit and shell ornaments. We were all inspired with a desire to go there and "finish". Phebe Miller, Caroline Halsey, Fidelia Mann (daughter of Judge Mann of Malone), who had been attending the academy with us, had got permission to go thither.

I found that the expenses would exceed my means and told the girls I could not go. We were spending the evening at Judge Platt's and the girls were begging me to go and Judge P. joined with the girls and said: "Yes, Miss Cook, you must go." But I told him plainly that I had estimated the cost and with the clothes I must have and the incidental expenses that would attend so much ornamental work my means would not possibly hold out. He said, "They must hold out, and they should hold out" and "you must go to keep these girls regular." Thus I decided that night to accompany the girls, but not without misgivings. I had never been in debt but was now conscious I should be.

We four went to Burlington in the autumn of 1817, crossing Lake Champlain in the steamboat "Fulton". We went to board at a Mr. Read's. At Miss Brenton's school we continued the studies of history, rhetoric, ancient geography, elements of astronomy and mythology and a smattering of several other ologies. We each drew a large map of one yard square with a pentagraph which we ourselves lined with thick cloth and got them varnished and mounted. We made baskets and filled them with wax-work, and made many shell ornaments. Dancing was also one of the arts taught by Miss Brenton herself one evening in each week; we practiced the terpsichorean maneuvers from seven to eight o'clock, when the musician came and we danced until ten.

We had a very pleasant winter in Burlington and were treated very politely, the young ladies of the first families calling on us and inviting us to several parties; we also attended one ball. The day we left with the gentlemen who came for us

we visited the college, or "University of Vermont," after going through which we thought no question should be raised as to our education being "finished." The two gentlemen who came for us were Judge Platt and Rev. Mr. Halsey; they came with two sleighs across the lake on the ice to take us home to Plattsburgh. There were no "Saratoga" or "Elephant" trunks in those days, but our smaller ones with all the boxes we had in which to pack all the wonderful things we had done to surprise and rejoice our friends completely filled the sleighs.

While we were packing, the gentlemen settled the board bills with Mr. Read. Judge P. brought mine to me receipted. I told him I hadn't money enough to pay half of it but would give him all I had. He said, "Keep your money, you will need it. You may sew the debt out for Mrs. Platt." This I did and the account was balanced, although I never felt as if I had fully paid him, so great was the favor. I have never since incurred a debt; it was a blow to my independence.

A few days after our return to Plattsburgh I received a letter from Miss Brenton saying she had decided to remove her school to Troy in the spring and inviting me to go with her as an assistant. She could not name any terms of remuneration for my services but would divide the profits with me. I showed the letter to Mrs. Davidson before going to my father's a few days afterwards. I had been at home but a week when I received a letter from Mrs. Davidson advising me not to accept Miss Brenton's uncertain offer, that I was wanted in Plattsburgh. I had not formally left Plattsburgh, my effects were still there. I went home for a visit and to get money to pay Judge Platt provided I should decide to leave the place soon.

I returned to P. after an absence of two weeks. Judge P. said they would give me a room in the academy and he thought there might be quite a respectable number of girls of a younger class collected which would be better for me than an uncertainty; he said I should have Margaret and Mary and Dr. Davidson's two daughters (Ann Eliza and Lucretia) and lawyer Sperry's two daughters, Mr. Griffin's two daughters, etc. The aforesaid girls were ten years old and under. I decided to begin the school and had a very respectable number in a short time, but few of them being in their teens. The older girls in the village seemed to have finished their education, there not being one at this time in the male department.

The famed Lucretia Davidson was one of my youngest scholars when I taught in the academy. I think she was about seven years old and the only troublesome one I had. She sat in a seat with three other girls all somewhat older than she. She would not study nor let them, but whispered incessantly. She would rise up in her seat and reach over to the farthest girl and whisper to each one, and no persuasion or decisive measures could prevent it. She was troublesome at home. I thought Ann Eliza much the better character. But genius must not be judged by the rules that others are. I assisted Mrs. D. in deciphering her first poetry in printing letters, "An Elogy on the Death of a Robin." I think she was then less than six years old.

Once when I was there she had repeatedly disobeyed her father, and after he had decidedly told her he should punish her if she did so again. The offence was soon repeated. As he took a rod in his hand Mrs. Davidson hastened to me saying, "Oh! Miss Cook, do go and beg her off." I said, "Mrs. D., I cannot. It would be an insult to the Dr." "Oh, no it would not, do, do go," but I would not do such an injury to the child, and my own sense of propriety. I am not an advocate of Solomon's mode of government for children and never adopted it in any school nor in my family; still it would be an injury to a child to interfere with parental discipline unless it was in a case of unmerciful severity.

It was not just such a school as I wanted, and after one year I gave it up. Hearing of an academy in Chester, Vermont, where was wanted a lady principal for the female department, it being near the place of my nativity, and having relatives in the vicinity, I applied and obtained the situation and passed two very pleasant years there.

I had relatives in Boston who urged my coming there, and thither I went from Chester and had a prosperous private school there for two years, at the expiration of which time (1823) I was married in Boston to a clergyman whose name was Daniel Fillmore and whose widow I have been for more than thirty years.

"AUNT LIB'S" SCHUYLER FALLS DIARY

(Excerpts follow from the diary of 1869, kept by Mary Elizabeth Johnson ("Aunt Lib") of Schuyler. They were transcribed by a great-nephew, R. Arthur Johnson of Latham, New York, who has presented a copy to the Research Center at the college library.)

April 20—Pa went to Plattsburgh, carried our dried apples, bought Martha shoes. Martha's cow has a calf. Warmest day so far this spring.

April 23—Junius Weaver brought yarn and carpet rags for me to weave a carpet. Spooled in the afternoon.

April 24—Finished spooling then Ma, Ida and I went to Mrs. Lobdell's and warped it, then got it thru the harness.

April 29—Pa went to Saranac to sell some hay. Mrs. Stickles called after geese eggs. Ma called with Ida to Mr. Taylor's and got slippery elm at the woods then afternoon to Mrs. Stickles' & got wine plant on Henry's place.

May 2—Went to the woods for flowers. Afternoon begun to rain then turned to snow. Having a great snow storm for this time of year.

May 4—Rainy and gloomy day, cold. James Reed called, said the snow fell 12 in. there and 15 in Dannemora.

May 5—Finer today. Pa went to the Falls then went to plowing for the first time this spring.

May 8—Finished weaving this forenoon. There were 41 $\frac{3}{4}$ yds in all and Junius came for it tonight and paid me \$6.25 for weaving.

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