

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 83

Allen S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

March, 1972

The March Meeting

of the Association will be held on the evening of Monday, March 6, at 8:00 o'clock in the auditorium of the Plattsburgh Public Library. The speaker will be Joseph L. Hennessy of Plattsburgh, whose subject will be "Historical Buildings of Europe." Mr. Hennessy is professor of art at the State University College. Last year he was on sabbatic leave and he and his family travelled widely in Europe. He will illustrate his talk with slides of some of the more famous buildings he studied and photographed.

Huldah Hoag

"Huldah Hoag removed with her husband into Vermont and settled there about the year 1791. It was almost an entire wilderness, and they had to encounter many difficulties, unavoidably incident to the settlement of a new country. They had four small children. It was about this time she was acknowledged a minister.

"She held the first meeting ever held by Friends on the west side of Lake Champlain, within its latitude, in 1792, and under circumstances of no ordinary difficulty. After arriving at the Lake about nine miles from her home with an infant daughter in her arms, she with a man and woman in company, took a small boat, having no other conveyance. In a short time they were overtaken by a storm of wind and rain, so that it was difficult to manage the boat and prevent it from filling with water. With great exertion, however, they succeeded in landing on an island known as one of the Four Brothers, drenched with rain and fatigued with labour. After several unsuccessful attempts to kindle a fire, she discovered that part of the clothes on her babe were dry, and by using it, they finally succeeded, and spent the night around the fire. Next morning they proceeded on their journey, having about ten miles to go by water, and then five by land. This last distance they performed on foot arriving just in time to attend the meeting which had been previously appointed.

"Not long after this visit, a Friends Meeting was set in that place, and subsequently a monthly meeting which still (1851) continues. She frequently went on horse back, the distance of 100 miles, carrying an infant in her arms, to attend monthly meetings; and on one occasion to New York near 300 miles to attend the Yearly Meeting.

"When Ferrisburgh Quarterly Meeting was established, she was placed at the head of the women's gallery; this position she occupied during the remainder of her life—about 40 years. During this time, of the many who believed themselves constrained to bear testimony to the Truth, more than 50 were approved ministers within the limits of Ferrisburgh Quarter, including four of her children."

This unsigned account is from the FRIENDS REVIEW of 1851, a religious, literary and miscellaneous Journal edited by Enoch Lewis in Philadelphia. Huldah (Case) Hoag, daughter of Nathan and Elizabeth (Hussey) Case, married Joseph Hoag in 1782. Ferrisburgh Quarterly Meeting was set up in 1810 and then included the Monthly Meetings of Danby, Ferrisburgh and Starksboro in Vermont and Peru. It is certain that the earlier meeting "on the west side of Lake Champlain" was held in Peru, since there is no record of other monthly meetings in the area. This means that Mrs. Hoag's boat trip must have been from Ferrisburgh diagonally uplake to Valcour.

(Contributed by Mrs. Virginia Burdick of Plattsburgh.)

The Palmer Hill Iron Mines

Typical of the terrain along the northern boundary of the Adirondack Mountains is a rocky outcrop a few miles north of the village of AuSable Forks. Palmer Hill, with a summit elevation of 1,024 feet, is more precisely located as being a portion of lots 7, 8, 15, 16, 29 and 30 in the eighth division of Livingston's Patent (Slocum Tract), town of Black Brook and County of Clinton. Black Brook was formed from the township of Peru on March 29, 1839. Many people know Palmer Hill by a fire tower on its summit or as the location of the so-called Palmer Hill "caves." These "caves" which literally honeycomb Palmer Hill are in reality abandoned iron ore mines. The fascination of exploring these mines is exceeded only by the exploration of their history which began in the 1820's and is mainly concerned with three large companies engaged in the early iron and steel industry in the United States. Several small concerns also held title to a portion of the renowned Palmer Ore Bed at various times, and eventually transferred their rights to either the Peru Iron Company, the J. and J. Rogers Company or the Peru Iron and Steel Company.

Palmer Hill was named for Zephaniah Palmer who, according to most old records, made the first discovery of magnetic ore in the area in 1824 or 1825, over ten years after the iron industry had begun in the AuSable Valley. Certain historic references claim that Mr. Palmer was a surveyor, an eccentric genius and the first settler of AuSable Forks. Prior to his discovery, Mr. Palmer had intended to use Palmer Hill for a sheep pasture, but when its value became known, many speculators and iron company representatives bought ore rights in the area or bought the land outright. Half Mile Square, as lot 15 became known, was soon partitioned into many individual claims.

James Rogers, born August 15, 1804, and his brother John, born May 9, 1813, had separate interests in the AuSable Valley iron industry until 1835, when they formed the J. and J. Rogers Company with James as the first president. Over the years the Rogers Company was able to obtain 5/8's interest in Half Mile Square, the primary location of the Palmer Ore Bed.

In 1824 the Peru Iron Company was formed in Clintonville with a starting capital of \$200,000. This company, first headed by Joshua Aiken, also began purchasing land and ore rights on Palmer Hill. On June 17, 1827, Stephen Palmer and his Judith "as settlement of a pending controversy" received \$500 for a parcel of land containing Palmer Ore. A few years before, on November 18, 1825, Francis and Nicholas Saltus had bought into the company with \$20,000 and Francis was made company president in 1826. On May 19, 1835, Nathaniel Starbuck received \$300 from Francis Saltus for 1/8 interest in a portion of the Palmer Ore Mines. In 1828 or 1829 he was able to obtain 3/8's interest in the Palmer Ore Bed for the company. On June 11, 1826 ore rights in lot 16 known as a part of the Palmer Ore Bed were purchased for \$3.50 per ton (2,240 pounds) from Peter McCrady and James Hagan by Loring Ellis. The mines on this property were later to bear his name and became property of the Peru Company. Such speculations and transfers of properties which took place for many years make a difficult job of piecing together an accurate picture of Palmer Hill and its many owners.

Inspection of the Palmer Hill Mines and surrounding area gives good support to the descriptions of early prospecting and mining methods. There are large outcrops of highly magnetic iron ore on Palmer Hill and Zephaniah Palmer is said to have made his discovery through surface indications and the attraction of a magnet. When the early mines were begun, pockets of very rich ore were taken that needed little refining to be processed into iron. Leaner ore was transported by wagon over plank roads to separators and very little ore ever left the area to be made into iron at distant refineries. In 1836 the Peru Iron Company installed a magnetic separator on Palmer Hill and from that time sent concentrated ore to their forge at Clintonville. This separator was apparently inefficient, and later separators on the site used the gravity method. The style of mining was semi-open pits set into a rather steep slope at between 30° and 70° to the horizontal, and owing to vertical faulting in the bed rock often had to trace the vein to various levels, thus forming vertical steps in the pit. A typical shaft was sunk and steps were subsequently cut away so that tracks could be laid and the early gravity cars, and later steam-powered trams, could haul the ore from the mine. The surface ore was often sufficiently abundant to permit the simultaneous digging of several pits which might then join to form one large underground pit. Eventually a row of shafts extended along lots 15 and 16 with the Rogers works to the left or West and those of the Peru Iron Company to the right or East. Names were given to the pits and their approximate locations recorded, although the names of many are missing. The Elliot, the last pit to be opened, and the White Flint, Summit and Lundrigan pits were at the western

end of the ore bed and belonged to the Rogers Company. To the east were the Little, South and Ellis Pits of the Peru Company. The Tindale or Big Pit in the central portion of the ore bed contained the often disputed division line between the two companies and they both worked it simultaneously. The pit was named by the Peru Iron Company for J. Tindale and their records show that in 1850 he delivered 5,084 tons of ore from the pit to Clintonville, which is perhaps a local mining record for that time. Accurate records for 1840-42 show that the monthly tonnage ran from one hundred tons in the winter months to as high as five hundred tons in good weather. The total for the year 1841 was 2,267 tons of primitive ore removed from the Peru Company mines. Of course, as methods improved, so did production. In 1848 monthly production reached 1,000 tons for the first time and in March of the following year, the mine payroll had reached \$1,000. Mining costs changed with the years also, from \$100. per month in 1840 to \$550. per month in 1847. In 1837 the Peru Company had built a new separator in Clintonville to handle the increased ore supply at a cost of \$2,783.21.

During the depression of 1857, the Rogers Company did business at a loss, which affected costs and wages. Due to various financial situations affecting the mining industry, wages fluctuated continuously and the passing years didn't necessarily mean an increase in salary. The early miners made one dollar per day or less. During depressions wages often dropped suddenly and the \$2.25 per day average wage of a miner in 1865 (for a 10-hour day) was lowered by 10 to 25 cents during hard times.

The Peru Company recorded descriptions of their holdings in 1864 and gave an approximate value for each. One of these, the **Winter Mine** valued at \$25,000 and named for Joseph L. Winter, is not included here because it is not at Palmer Hill but is located one mile northeast of Clintonville. The **Jackson Mines** are one mile away along the Palmer Hill ridge and will be excluded also. **Palmer Ore Bed**—"The mine has three openings now converged into one. Through two of these, railways have been laid and the ore is elevated to the surface by steam engine (replacing the old gravity method). The veins of ore have been followed about 400 feet. They dip at an angle of about 30°, varying in width and height, through the leads until they reach the converging point where the mine is about 300 feet wide and 30 feet thick. This bed seems to be inexhaustible and there is room to work men enough to get out 100 tons of ore per day." This bed is valued at \$100,000. **Ellis Ore Bed**—"This bed adjoins on the east of the Palmer Bed and should the latter connect with the veins of the former it will be desirable and worth more than the sum paid, viz., \$10,000, but at present it is not worked or needed for use and from the present appearance of the Palmer Bed will never be wanted for mining." In April 19, 1875 the south pit in the Palmer Bed was abandoned as being too lean and work began in the Ellis pit.

On April 5, 1865 the Peru Iron Company was succeeded by the Peru Iron and Steel Company under a fifty-year agreement. President Francis Saltus and the trustees, Charles Bliven, William H. Gunther, Hayward Harvey, Edward Buckley, William Keeney and Edward Dodge reported a capital stock of \$800,000. George Hodgson who had been with the former company remained as chief miner and later was superintendent. His correspondence to officials of the company often included statements which tell a more complete story of mining at the time. He indicates that it was continually necessary for representatives of both companies to visit the other's mine to check the inclination of the shafts and thus prevent one shaft from interfering with another. Veins of water would occasionally be encountered and it was found that one of his test drillings was draining an accumulation of water from Roger's pit and the Rogers Company was not pleased because they used the water for their boiler after pumping it to the surface with a one-horse shimsey. He also described a situation in which he and other officials would try to determine the location of the Rogers shaft by remaining in their mine and listening to the drilling and blasting taking place in the neighboring shaft.

The newspapers in the area often carried weekly stories about Palmer Hill, and newsmen would visit the mines to give an accurate description of the mining operations. The men used stairs with railings to enter the mines and these were illuminated by lanterns, as was all the work area. A signal boy was on duty to ring a bell in the engine room and make his intentions known by means of a code. The early bells, rung by pulling a long wire, were later replaced with electric bells. Track men kept the railroad tracks and pumping equipment in order. The miners used wheelbarrows to bring ore from all areas of the work face to the platform where the ore cars were loaded.

To be continued

(Written by Clifford Mossey, SUC. His primary source was the manuscript records of the Peru Steel and Iron Company at the Feinberg Library, SUC.)

ESSEX COUNTY LECTURE SERIES

Members are reminded of the final lectures in the winter series offered by the Adirondack Center Museum of the Essex County Historical Society at Elizabethtown. All programs begin at 8 o'clock and the Museum, artistically and professionally refurbished, is open at 7. Lectures are open to the public without charge. The remaining programs are:

March 3—"Early Firearms", by Marshall Fish, gunsmith of Westport.

March 10—"Climbing the Adirondacks in All Seasons", by Bruce Morrow of Keeseville, Explorer Scout, Post Advisor.

March 17—"The Essex County Cooperative Extension Agency", by Carl Ingelstrom, Agency Director.

Mrch 24—"The Adirondacks: Past and Present", a slide program by Francis Bayle of Glens Falls.

RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

Old riddle: According to the urban renewal map, the former Sperry's Tavern at 48 Broad Street is condemned and tentatively scheduled for demolition. Built by Gilead Sperry about 1800, it was for years a famous hostelry. Its ballroom was the scene of many civil and religious meetings. It was divided and reconstructed by Judge J. Douglas Woodward about 1850.

New riddle: At one time The Union in Peru contained two Friends' Meeting Houses. What was the fate of the structures, and do either of them survive?

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John Baxter, Secretary
Box 112, West Chazy, New York
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