

# NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

ISSUED MONTHLY EXCEPT SUMMER BY THE  
CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

No. 95

Allan S. Everest and Charles W. McLellan, Editors

June, 1973

## *The June Trip*

of the Historical Association will be held on Saturday, June 9 and will be co-sponsored by the Adirondack Archeological Association. It will be a "Ghost Town Tour to Arnold Hill" under the direction of Randall Beach, program chairman, and Miss Connie Pope.

Those who wish to drive down together should meet at the College Gym on Rugar Street at 9 o'clock (others may wish to go direct from their homes). No bus or other fee will be involved, but private cars only. Miss Pope will have directions at the take-off point.

*The program at Arnold Hill:*

10:30 - a talk by Miss Pope on "The History and Industry of Arnold Hill."

11:30 to 2:30 - picnic and self-guided tour of Arnold Hill, Ferrona and Cooksockie, with the help of printed guide sheets.

All day - digs by the archeologists, or demonstrations of how it is done.

2:30 - wrap-up session and question-answer period, led by Miss Pope.

People who need transportation or have questions should get in touch with Miss Pope on week days between 8 and 5 o'clock at 564-3181. The public is cordially invited to participate in this event.

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## MELANCHTON LLOYD WOOLSEY TO SILAS HUBBELL

*(From the McLellan Collection)*

August 16, 1804

I have discovered among the writts returned three of yours with seals removed from old process for which I have charged you together with these four, & have written to inform the Sheriff that all process under the seal of this County must be considered as nothing unless my signature in my own hand is at the bottom.

I am very sorry to inform you that my famous Boar, having wandered to my neighbor Knapp's, has been deprived of his ability to render any service to your breed of swine — it was a rascally action & for which I shall endeavor to obtain satisfaction.

I bow to Mrs. Hubbell & kiss the baby.

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## RIDDLE OF THE MONTH

The first company of volunteers from Clinton County in the Civil War elected Frank Palmer captain, Royal Corbin lieutenant and Pliny Moore ensign. They left Plattsburgh on April 26, 1861, only two weeks after the firing on Fort Sumter.

New riddle: How did the Military Turnpike get its name?

## Defiance

In 1755 the French engineer, de Lotbiniere, laid out the plans for a fortress on the promontory where Lake George empties into Lake Champlain. This fort, called Carillon by the French, was destined to play a major part in the early history of the North American continent.

Lotbiniere's fort was basically the star shape that was typical of eighteenth-century military construction. It was originally a wood-and-earth structure, later replaced by stone. During the building it was found to be poorly placed to control the narrows of the lake, so outworks had to be built to enable the fort to perform this function.

Not until 1758 was the strength of Carillon tested. General James Abercromby, British commander-in-chief for the American colonies, attacked the fort with 12,200 regulars and militia. The French commander, Marquis de Montcalm, had only 3,500 men for defense. Because the fort held only 400 men, Montcalm had to make his stand outside the fort. The French in two days set up a log wall on the ridge called the heights of Carillon. Abercromby made the mistake of attacking this position without artillery support. When the smoke cleared, 1,610 Englishmen had been shot in the vain attempt to take that log wall.

During the winter of 1758-59, an event occurred that would be of great consequence for Ticonderoga nineteen years later. The new Commander-in-chief, General Jeffrey Amherst, sent an engineer to reconnoiter Carillon. In the course of his reconnaissance Lieutenant Deitrich Brehm climbed what the French called Rattlesnake Mountain; today it is Mount Defiance. In his report to Amherst, he said light howitzers and mortars could be placed on top of this 600-foot hill that overlooked all the surrounding area. If Amherst could put his guns there, the French would have to retreat. When Amherst appeared in force, the French blew up part of the fort and retired to Montreal, leaving Carillon, now Ticonderoga in British hands.

In the subsequent years of peace the British maintained a small garrison but made no attempt to improve the defenses, or even make routine repairs. When trouble appeared certain in the colonies in 1774, the British decided to see about fixing up the old French fort. General Haldimand, the Governor-general of Canada, sent his chief engineer, Colonel John Montrossor, to survey both Ticonderoga and Crown Point. Montrossor recommended abandonment of Ticonderoga and the strengthening of Crown Point. However, the British made no attempt to improve Ticonderoga's defenses, nor for that matter did they do any work at Crown Point.

Instead of abandoning the fort, as Montrossor recommended, the British maintained a small garrison. So in the spring of 1775, the fort was defended by two officers and 42 men. The fort fell to Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys without a struggle. The colonists held the place for two years until Burgoyne retook it in 1777. While they held it the colonists tried to make it their northern bastion. But they failed because they too had to abandon it without a struggle.

Why? When the Americans fortified the area they ignored the hill to the south, the one that Brehm climbed in 1759. This oversight was to lead to Burgoyne's easy victory that opened the way to Saratoga. Though in the end it turned out all right for the Americans, the disgraceful retreat from Ticonderoga could have signalled the end of American dreams of independence. Why was this vital height left without a fortification?

To discover the reasons for this tactical blunder, we must explore the situation at the fort during 1776 and 1777. In the summer of 1776, John Trumbull, the future painter and an officer from Connecticut, became concerned about the lack of defenses on Defiance. He was laughed at because everyone "knew" the mountain was inaccessible. So he arranged a test. He had a heavy cannon on the Vermont side double-shotted and fired at Defiance. The ball struck halfway up the hillside. A similar shot from the fort itself struck the summit. Trumbull proved that the hill was within easy range of the fort. Later, Trumbull climbed the hill with Anthony Wayne and a lame Benedict Arnold. If Arnold could make it to the top with only one good leg, the mountain was obviously not as inaccessible as everyone thought! Trumbull asked Congress to authorize construction of some works on Mount Defiance, but Congress refused.

The winter of 1776-77 was a hard one, even for the North Country. The troops at Ticonderoga were sheltered in tents. Disease was rampant. Morale was low after the retreat from Quebec. However, no one expected an attack to come down Lake Champlain, not after Arnold slowed the British down at Valcour. In fact Gates, the frontier commander, had "had the strongest assurances from Congress

that the King's troop were all ordered round to New York." Even though in November Congress ordered the fortification of Mount Independence on the Vermont side, no work was done.

In the spring work was finally started on a bridge across the lake to block the passage of ships. The fort in Vermont was also started. On June 6, 1777 Washington's chief engineer, Thaddeus Kosciuzko, arrived to look over the new works. How such an engineer as he could overlook the weakness in not fortifying Defiance is strange indeed. The spell of Ticonderoga seemed to work on all Americans.

On June 12th, a new commander arrived. Major General Arthur St. Clair, a former British officer, assumed command from Wayne. To St. Clair fell the task of defending Ticonderoga against the impending British attack. On the 19th, General Philip Schuyler, the northern area commander, arrived for a council of war. In attendance were Generals St. Clair, Patterson, Poor, and a French adventurer, Roche de Fermoy. The decisions reached by this council would prove fateful in producing the retreat to disgrace:

1) Both sides of the lake could not be defended, (good military logic) but both sides should be defended if possible (contradictory).

2) The New York side should be the first abandoned (again, good military logic).

3) The defenses on the Vermont side should be improved (Congress had already ordered this seven months before).

4) These recommendations should be implemented within six weeks.

5) PREPARATIONS FOR A RETREAT SHOULD BE STARTED.

The last point sounds as if the generals fully expected to be beaten. The entire list can be considered a blueprint for disaster. Also decided was that the garrison was inadequate and that extensive repairs were needed. All of this was just three weeks before Burgoyne attacked. No notice of the vulnerability of Defiance was taken.

On July 3rd, Burgoyne invested Ticonderoga. On the 5th, activity was noticed on Defiance. Early that morning, St. Clair held a council and the decision to retreat that night was made. Thus the great fortress of Ticonderoga was given up without a fight. The retreat was made before any cannon was fired from Defiance, in fact before any cannon were mounted there. An English officer described watching the guns go up the mountain at the time the Americans were retreating. The British were only moving two light howitzers to the top. But the threat of guns on the summit was enough.

The retreat led to a court-martial of St. Clair. The court found him innocent on the grounds that retreat was all he could do. Should St. Clair have been court-martialed at all?

Part of the blame can be laid to the myth of Ticonderoga's impregnability that had arisen over the years. It was based only on Amherst's bloody defeat at Montcalm's log wall in 1758. Everyone ignored the fact that Amherst fought a very poor battle. In 1759 Amherst took the fort without a struggle.

Part also belongs to the supposed inaccessibility of the slopes of Mount Defiance. Yet as early as 1759, Brehm reported that cannon could be taken to the top of the mountain. Trumbull demonstrated the danger in 1776. Yet the American high command chose to ignore the facts. St. Clair cannot take all the blame. Kosciuzko missed it, Arnold and Wayne ignored Trumbull, Congress refused to build works on top. Schuyler's council espoused a defeatist policy.

The major reason why Defiance was left undefended was the size of the American army. St. Clair was given too few men to stop Burgoyne. Montcalm had had 3,500 men to stop Amherst. St. Clair had 2,500 with which to man the French fort and all the works that the Americans had constructed. Also, Ticonderoga was built to defend from the south, not the north. Thus, to add Defiance to the American perimeter would have stretched the available manpower much too far.

The blame for St. Clair's defeat must be found at all levels, from Congress to Washington to Schuyler. The decision to defend Ticonderoga was militarily stupid. With only a small force, St. Clair should have made his stand at least at the head of the lake, if not on the Hudson. To defend Ticonderoga would have required approximately 10,000 men. If these were not available, no defense should have been made. Schuyler's council in effect said it was hopeless, thus decreasing morale among the leaders.

So when the fort fell, St. Clair became the scapegoat unjustly. He was given inadequate men, defenses and support. With this he was to stop Burgoyne. If a court-martial was held it should have included all the American commanders because all share the blame for the retreat to disgrace.

Allan J. Helmbrecht, SUC

## ODELLTOWN CHURCH RESTORATION

I would like to add a note of interest to members of the Association: The historic old Wesleyan-Methodist Church (built in 1823) on Route 9A in Odelltown, between Champlain, New York and Lacolle, Quebec, is finally being restored by one of three Local Initiative Program grants authorized by the Hon. Robert K. Andras, Minister of Manpower and Immigration in Ottawa.

This church was closely linked with the early days of Rouses Point, Champlain, Perry's Mills and Mooers.

Richard Patterson  
Verdun, Quebec

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## QUERIES ABOUT ANCESTRY

1. Mrs. J. R. Mitchell, 410 E. Dodge, Luverne, Minn. 56156 asks: Where was the birthplace and what date and to whom was **Robert Halston**, who married **Free-gift Stetson**, born? The same data is needed for **James Wesley Ralston**; relationship to the above is unknown. (Death certificates in Michigan state these three were born in New York about 1800-1808).

2. Mrs. Zoe Magden, 415 6th Ave., Apt. 409, Tacoma, Wash. 98402 asks: I am searching for a marriage record for my great-grandfather, **Ruluff White**, who married \_\_\_\_\_ **Annis**. He was born in 1781. His father, Andrew White, came from Dutchess County and was married to Amy Palmer. Andrew died in Peru in 1807. Ruluff's marriage record might be found in an old family Bible or the Peru Quaker records.

Any information should be sent to the inquiring person or to Norma Kinney (561-6127), chairman of the Genealogical Committee.

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Issued by the

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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