



North Country Notes

Julian O. Davidson, Marine Artist

Joy A. Demarse, Ph. D

On June 21, 1912, the *Plattsburgh Sentinel* reported that the Honorable Smith M. Weed had invited "the Tercentenary Commission and the rest of its distinguished party" to his house on July 6 to view the *Battle of Plattsburgh*. The painting to which the Honorable Mr. Weed referred also was known as the *Battle of Lake Champlain* and had been commissioned by Weed in 1884 from American marine artist Julian Oliver Davidson.

It would not have been unusual for a man of Smith Weed's prominence or fortune to commission a work of art, nor would it have been unusual for Weed to request a depiction of the naval battle at Plattsburgh on September 11, 1814, the most important battle in the War of 1812, from someone as renowned as Davidson. Davidson, whose studio was located in New York City, was well-respected for his work and "of all the marine artists that worked during this era, only Julian O. Davidson would throughout his career specialize in historical naval paintings" (Beman 11). And as Beman notes, "The residents of the small upstate New York village have always been justifiably proud of their contribution to the American cause" (24).

But Smith Weed's selection of Julian Oliver Davidson to

paint the historic naval battle at Plattsburgh reflects not only an acknowledgement of Davidson's artistic skill but also Davidson's Plattsburgh connection: the artist was a nephew of the Honorable Smith M. Weed. Davidson's mother, Harriet Standish Davidson, and Weed's wife, Caroline Standish Weed, were sisters.

Julian Davidson's mother, Harriet Standish Davidson, was the daughter of the Honorable Matthew Miles Standish and Catherine Phebe Miller Standish. Davidson's father, Matthias Oliver Davidson, was the son of Dr. Oliver Davidson and Margaret Miller Davidson. Matthias Davidson was brother to Lucretia Maria Davidson and Margaret Miller Davidson, both of whom gained international fame as poets. Lucretia Maria Davidson's poetry was reviewed by Southey in the *London Quarterly Review* (Sedgwick 73) and Margaret Miller Davidson's poetry was collected and published by Washington Irving.

Julian Davidson's childhood included visits to Plattsburgh, the home of his parents and his famous aunts, and at least one photograph, taken in Plattsburgh in 1862, of Julian and his sister Kate, survives (Beman 13). Although Julian Oliver Davidson never lived in Plattsburgh, New York, his depiction of the naval battle at Plattsburgh "is still considered to

be the best painting of this important American naval battle" (Beman 45).

Was Julian Davidson's depiction of the naval battle at Plattsburgh influenced by his visits to his parents' family home? Did the reminiscences of his grandmother, "Events of a Few Eventful Days in 1814" (Davidson 17-88) about the September 11 battle spark his curiosity? Did the descriptions of Lake Champlain from his aunts' writings spur his imagination? No one knows. What is known is that Julian Davidson considered the *Battle of Lake Champlain* his most successful painting (Beman 32).

The *Battle of Lake Champlain* is on permanent display at the Key Bank Gallery, Battle of Plattsburgh Association Museum.

Works Cited:

Beman, Lynn S. *Julian O. Davidson, 1853-1894, American Marine Artist*. New York: Historical Society of Rockland County, 1986

Davidson, Margaret M. *Selections from the Writings of Mrs. Margaret M. Davidson, The Mother of Lucretia Maria and Margaret M. Davidson*. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1843.

(continued page three)

Lucretia Maria & Margaret Miller Davidson

On our very own shores of Lake Champlain emerged two well-respected and talented poets - their fame earned by their considered and accomplished writings during their short lifetimes of less than seventeen years each.

Lucretia Maria Davidson and Margaret Miller Davidson were both born in Plattsburgh, and although often cited together in written works about their lives, only shared two years of their lives together. Lucretia Davidson died on August 27, 1825 - just one month shy of her seventeenth birthday - when her younger sister Margaret was only two years old. Margaret's memory of Lucretia was largely based upon reports from others, but she took on a passion for poetry upon hearing of her sister's considered abilities. It is reported that within a year of Lucretia's death that Margaret beseeched her mother to "teach me to be like her!" Margaret began writing and made known that she did so to follow in the footsteps of her sister. Each sister wrote prose about the other illustrating the literary impact that the sisters had on each other's writings - albeit the post-humous effect Lucretia had on Margaret.

Margaret and Lucretia were two of nine children of Margaret M. Davidson and Dr. Oliver Davidson. The Davidson family was generally known as being sickly - seven of their children died at or before the age of thirty. The mother Margaret, who spent much of her own life suffering from various ailments, became a poet in her own right. However, she is best known for her dedication to her children and educating them. Lucretia attended the Troy Female Seminary (Willard School) and Miss Gilbert's School in Albany with the financial support of Moss Kent who learned of her abilities and offered to fund her education. She was unable to complete her studies there due to her illness, and ending up returning home within months to die. Margaret was taught by her mother Margaret, and lived with her family in Plattsburgh until they relocated to Ballston in Saratoga County not long after Lucretia's death. Margaret died November

25, 1838, just four months shy of turning sixteen.

Both Lucretia and Margaret died of tuberculosis, commonly referred to at that time as consumption. It was widely believed that contracting consumption caused an individual to achieve a higher level of thought, ability, or beauty. As a result, the poetry emanating from these two young women was romanticized as the result of their sickness.

Lucretia's works were published after her death in 1829 by Samuel F. B. Morse in a book entitled *Amir Khan, and Other Poems*. (Morse was actually a third cousin on the girls' father's side.) Margaret was admired by well-known writer Washington Irving, who was introduced to her by her mother. He often wrote about her and her close relationship with her mother. After Margaret's death, Washington Irving contacted her mother Margaret and encouraged her to print her daughter's poems. Her works were published by her mother and edited by Washington Irving in a book entitled *Biography and Poetical Remains of the Late Margaret Miller Davidson* in 1841.

Soon after, their mother sought to publish a larger volume of Lucretia's work entitled *Poetical Remains of the Late Lucretia Maria Davidson*, 1843, which she dedicated to Washington Irving in thanks for his encouragement of her two gifted daughters.

Lucretia Maria Davidson



Swetland Collection Letter Yields Poem

The museum is in the midst of an ongoing project regarding the William Swetland letters collection Edward English donated in the fall of 2005. Two dedicated volunteers, Ken and Ada Bills, have been spending every Saturday morning reading these letters, sleeving each one and creating an index regarding their dates and contents.

The collection covers most of the nineteenth century and is a mixed grouping of affectionate personal letters, business correspondence, genealogical notes and other writings, some from William Swetland, some from his wife Henrietta, and many others.

In the midst of this was a letter dated April 2, 1837 fondly written from one teenager to another. The letter is addressed to Miss Henrietta Swetland (daughter of William Swetland) Plattsburgh, NY and is signed just "Margaret". The postmark is New York, April 14.

Margaret Miller Davidson



Initially we thought we had no hope of discovering the identity of the writer because there was no return address. Margaret mentions missing Lake Champlain and moving to Balston. She also exclaims over Henrietta turning sixteen. The fact that the middle section of the letter contains a poem about Lake Champlain and certain phrases in it made the internet, and especially Google, worth a try.

The outcome of our research is that Margaret Davidson wrote this very letter to Henrietta, and both the poem and the letter itself are quoted in Washington Irving's 1841 work, *Biography and Poetical Remains of the Late Margaret Miller Davidson*. Most of our letter, but not all, and the poem it contains are quoted in the Irving book. No other identifiable letters from Margaret to Henrietta have turned up yet in this collection although many are cited in the Irving book.

"Should the first glance at my well-filled sheet be followed by an impatient yawn, or its last word be welcomed with a smile, you must blame your own imprudence in bringing down upon your luckless head the accumulated nothings of a scribbler like myself. It is indeed true that "we shall not return", my dear Henrietta, and as much as I long to revisit the home of my infancy, & the friends of my earliest remembrance, I shall be obliged to relinquish the pleasure in reality, though Fancy, unshackled by earthly barriers, shall direct her pinions to the North, and linger, delighted, on the banks of our beautiful Champlain."

The following page contains the entire text of the poem from Margaret's letter.

Continued from page one-

"Hon. S. M. Weed's Cordial Invitation." Plattsburgh Sentinel 21 June 1912. 5.

Irving, Washington. *Biography and Poetical Remains of the Late Margaret Miller Davidson*. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1841.

Sedgwick, Catherine Maria. *Poetical Remains of the Late Lucretia Maria Davidson*. New York: Clark, Austin & Co., 1851.

Joy Demarse is a member of the Battle of Plattsburgh Association.

To My Old Home at Plattsburgh

By Margaret Miller Davidson (1837)

*That dear old Home, where past my childhood's years,
Where fond affection wiped my infant tears;
Where first I learned from whence my blessings came,
And lisp'd, in faltering tones, a mother's name;
That dear old Home, where mem'ry fondly clings,
Where eager fancy spreads her soaring wings;
Around whose scenes my thoughts delight to stray,
And pass the hours in pleasing dreams away.
Oh! Shall I ne'er behold thy waves again,
My native Lake! - my beautiful Champlain?
Shall I no more above they ripples bend
In sweet communion with my childhood's friend?
Shall I no more behold thy rolling wave,
The patriot's cradle and the warrior's grave?
Thy mountains tinged with daylights parting glow?
Thine islets mirror'd in the stream below?
-Back! back thou Present-robed in shadows lie!
And rise thou Past before my raptured eye!
Fancy shall gild the frowning lapse between,
And Memory's hand shall paint the glowing scene;
Lo! How the view beneath her pencil glows,
The floweret blooms, the winding streamlet flows,
With former friends I trace my footsteps o'er,
And muse delighted on my own green shore!
Alas! it fades! -the fairy dream is past;
Dissolved the veil by sportive fancy cast!
Why? why should thus our brightest dreams depart,
And scenes illusive cheat the longing heart?
Where'er through future life my steps may roam,
I ne'er shall find a spot like thee, my home!
With all my joys, the thoughts of thee shall blend,
And joined with thee, shall rise my childhood's friend!*

The version of the poem we provide comes straight from her letter to Henrietta Swetland, written when she was just fourteen. The poem has no title in the letter but it is given the title above in her later published works. The poem is also changed slightly in the Washington Irving compilation of her works and it again changes in other published versions.

The Irving book has two separate sections: her biography and her "remains". The poem as quoted in the biography section (as part of our letter to Henrietta) is much closer to the original than the poem shown in the later remains section.

"And muse delighted on my own green shore" becomes "and muse delighted on thy verdant shore"

"Thy mountains tinged with daylights parting glow" becomes "thy banks, illumined by the sun's last glow"

"Lo! How the view beneath her pencil glows, the floweret blooms, the winding streamlet flows" is completely replaced by "And I shall view my much-loved home again, My native village and my sweet Champlain"

Clearly there was some post-death editing occurring here, either by her mother, or Irving or later publishers or editors. We are sure that our letter, the original source of the poem, is the original version.

Recent Gifts and Bequests

CCHA will very shortly receive its bequest under the will of Vera Hirsch of Plattsburgh. Mrs. Hirsch, widow of former CCHA President Hans Hirsch (1958-1959), died on January 22, 2006 and left more than a third of her residual estate to CCHA, Plattsburgh College Foundation at SUNY and Elon College of North Carolina. The Historical Association's share is over \$30,000.

A long-term loan of paintings to the museum was transformed into a gift in December. Jane Myers Baker, as executrix of the Estate of Gertrude Savage, donated the oil portraits of Robert Platt (1778-1858) and John Freligh (1780-1826) to CCHA. Both paintings had been on loan since 1984.

Museum Theft & Recovery

Matthew Boire was arrested in August 2007 in connection with items he allegedly removed from the Clinton County Historical Association Museum.

Mr. Boire pled guilty to misdemeanor offenses of petit larceny and fifth degree possession of stolen property in January 2008 and was sentenced to three years of probation, a \$1,000 fine, restitution, and 300 hours of community service. He also was required to write a letter of apology to the museum.

Boire was a Board member from late 2005 until his dismissal from the Board in 2007 after his arrest for the theft.

The complete list of museum collections actually connected to the case and recovered are:

Harper's Ferry Pistol
Pratt Ceremonial Sword
Pearl Pommel Saber
Ivory Grip Saber
Sharps M 1859 Rifle
16th NYVI Flag and Confederate Guidon Flag
Starr Single Action Revolver
Smith & Wesson .32 cal. Pistol

Members addressed questions about the incident at the Annual Meeting in November 2007, however, the case was still pending at that time so complete information was not available at the meeting or at the printing of the last North Country Notes. The Historical Association has been deeply impacted by this violation of trust. We are looking ahead to a new year with many opportunities and plenty of work ahead.

2006 Audit Report and 990 Tax Return

The audited financial statements and 990 Form for the year 2006 are available for inspection at the Museum. Copies are available upon request for a very modest copying charge.

Patriots of Color, 1775: Bunker Hill

George Quintal, Jr. of Gardiner, Maine has published *Patriots of Color, 1775: Bunker Hill*, part of the *Patriot Chronicles*, a book on the subject of African Americans and American Indians at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

From the preface by Dr. Alfred Young, Senior Research Fellow, Newberry Library, Chicago:

The scope of his research on the patriots of color at Bunker Hill and Battle Road is staggering....Quintal began with the United States Census for 1790 which designated every family of color. Armed with these names, he turned every page in the seventeen volumes of "Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the Revolutionary War" and the comparable compilations for the other new England states....He hunted for evidence from primary sources for every "name" he had, and not for their military service alone but for their life histories. After almost three years of research, George Quintal reports there very likely were 103 "patriots of color" at Bunker Hill.

The book is available for sale in the bookshop.

New CCHA Publication

CCHA will soon be publishing a new book by Vickie Evans, *Recollections of the Civil War: The Journal and Letters of Lt. Col. Frank Palmer*. Vickie has been working on transcribing the Palmer Journal and letters in our collection for approximately eighteen months and we are prepared to have copies available in coordination with the upcoming Civil War Encampment in May. Vickie is an avid re-enactor and history buff. She is the author of a previous book *My Duty is Here: The Civil War Journal and Letters of Rev. Francis B. Hall* in 2006. All book sales proceeds will belong to CCHA.

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from November 11, 2007 through February 29, 2008***

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Upcoming Programs and Events

Monday April 7th, 2008, program at 7 pm.

Penny Clute will again join us to speak on the subject of Judge Reuben Walworth, nominee to the Supreme Court in a program titled **Politics and the 1844-45 Supreme Court Nominations of Chancellor Reuben Walworth.**



Reuben H. Walworth was born in Connecticut in 1779, studied law in Troy and settled in Plattsburgh. Admitted to the bar in 1809, he served in Congress from 1821-1823, was a circuit judge from 1823-1828 and was chancellor of New York from 1828-1848. He died in Saratoga in 1867.

Upcoming CCHA Programs:

All are scheduled to be held on site at the Museum at 98 Ohio Avenue, 7 pm program, refreshments to follow.

Monday, May 5th, Sue Walters will host a program on Civil War dress and clothing construction in conjunction with our May Civil War Encampment.

Monday, June 2nd, David Glenn, *Who Was the First Settler in Clinton County?*

Monday, August 4th, Don Papson, *Maria Hayes: One of the Last Female Slaves in Plattsburgh*

Upcoming Battle of Plattsburgh Association Program

Wednesday, May 14th, Darren Bonaparte on the Akwesasne's Involvement in the War of 1812. In the War of 1812 Museum Theater, 7pm

The Civil War Comes to Clinton County! Civil War Encampment, May 17-18

Where can you find the roar of the cannons, the sounds of Union and Confederate troops marching, and President Lincoln speaking in Upstate New York? They can all be found in Plattsburgh this May. The Clinton County Historical Association, with the 11th N.Y. Battery Light Artillery and the Alexandria Battery CSA, will host a Civil War Reenactment on May 17th and 18th on the grounds of the old Air Force Base.

Over 70 re-enactors will set up camp, re-enact battles and for two days relive this stirring period of American history. There will be tours of the encampments, a special dance performance, and period items for sale. The event will also be honored by a visit from President Abraham Lincoln who will graciously speak to the crowds. You are encouraged to stroll through the encampments and speak with the soldiers and the camp followers who can help you gain an insight into army life in America during this defining time in our history. Although battles were not fought in our region, Clinton County and other counties in New York supplied troops who were present at many of the major confrontations in the War Between the States.

Join us this May and experience the Civil War right here in the North Country!



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Bluff Point Lighthouse 2008 Open Days Schedule

The Bluff Point Lighthouse on Valcour Island will be open to the public again this summer. The Lighthouse will be open the following Sundays, free of charge from 1 pm to 3 pm.

May 25th, July 6, 13, 20, 27

August 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

Volunteer docents are being scheduled now for this summer. Please call 561-0340 if you are interested. CCHA does not provide transportation, but be on the lookout for information about the *Weatherwax*, which may be running again this summer, sponsored by the Champlain Valley Transportation Museum.

New in the gift shop

French Cooking in Early America by Patricia Mitchell

At only \$3.50 this small cookbook is a bargain. Combining history, customs, quotations and French influenced recipes, Mrs. Mitchell is interesting and informative.

If food affinities can be inherited genetically, Patricia Mitchell came by her love for French/Creole/Cajun cuisine rightfully: she traces the roots of her family back to French Huguenots who settled in Maryland and Virginia. She comments, "My love for France was deepened by years of living in the Vieux Carre of New Orleans, and by trips to France."