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THE AXE AND IT'S HANDLER

By

Lindon E. Riggs

Town Historian, Stockholm

When one speaks of an axe, one naturally thinks of the tool with which the pioneer carved his farm from the wilderness, namely the single bit axe with its special shaped handle; it has come down through the ages with very little changes.

It is not of this axe which I am about to write, but of the one called the "BROAD AXE", with a much simpler handle. This was the tool used to fashion the large beams of which our farm barns and most of our houses were constructed. An old saying was "HEW TO THE LINE BUT DON'T OVERDO IT!"

The line was a chalk line down the log from end to end, and to this line, a man called a "SCORER" with the chopping axe at short intervals, soored or chopped into the log, and followed by the "HEWER" with his great broad axe, proceeded to smooth off the chips to the line, leaving a smooth straight side, then rolling the log one-fourth. The process was repeated until the log was square. A work well done!

I remember as a boy, after we had moved to another farm, looking about and around the buildings to see what curiosities I could find, of a battered, rusty old broad axe with about three inches broken from one corner. On showing ti to my father, he took it and looking it over said, "Can it be possible that this is the same one." He then related to me the following. "When I was young and first married, I was helping your Grandpa Graves over in the big swamp get out ties for the Northern

Railroad. We were cutting tamerack, being dry and very hard, especially the knots. They were, as I remember, in seven foot lengths to be hewed on two sides. Instead of using a chalk line, we used what we called a rack consisting of two straight edges fastened to each other, eight inches apart. Placing this ontop of the tie we proceeded to hew, not to a line, but to the straight edges. Grandpa had one of the best broad axes I ever saw, must have been fourteen inches wide and shiny as silver and sharp as all get out.

Lym was a hewing away and I, young and brash, said to the old gentleman. "Look out uncle on those knots or you will break your axe!" To which Mr. Lincoln replied, not even stopping work, "Well, I guess not. This axe has got good stuff in it." Nevertheless about the next blow it broke three inches from one corner, making the axe useless. Mr. Lincoln could hardly believe his eyes. Holding the axe up and looking at it with tears running down his cheeks, he was heard to say, "Now I got to get me another." By saving a penny here and there out of a days work of fifty cents, it is more than likely that he got another.

In his time Lyman Lincoln was unappreciated, but according to what I have been told, he must have been a great man with very little schooling. It was said one could ask him most and question and he would come up with the right answer. I have heard one of my aunts speak of the time when as a small girl attending Sunday School at the Brookdale White Church, the teacher gave her a verse to locate in the Bible. I do not remember the verse, it was not of much importance, being mostly jaw-breaking words. Unable with the help of her mother to find it, grandma told her to ask Lym Lincoln and sure as shooting Mr. Lincoln without hesitation told her the exact chapter and verse.

Did you ever hear of LINCOLN BRIDGE over the St. Regis river in Stockholm? Mr. Lincoln resided and had a shop nearby. Above the bridge a boom was kept in the river to catch sticks, pieces of board and trash thrown into the river by the saw and shingle mills up-stream. A team would be hitched to the anchoring chain drawing the boom toward shore with its' accumulation of debris. This was then racked on shore, allowed to dry and thus furnish a good supply of fuel.

Mr. Lincoln manufactured the famous "LINCOLN LOG PUMPS." Most of the wells for miles around had one of these pumps. The first of these pumps I remember seeing was in my grandpa Graves' well. It was aggravating to a small boy desiring a drink because the handle was always high in the air, too high for short arms to reach. Incidentally, this farm is the one my wife and I have resided on for over thirty-nine years. Mr. Lincoln was the great grandfather, on the maternal side of five stalwert Stockholm men, carpenters, masons, Alcoa workers and farmers. Namely: Howard, Leon, Glen, Elwood and John Page.

Elwood resides in the house of his great grandfather. Now rebuilt was remodeled. I can not tell you dates of birth or death of Mr. Lincoln. No monument marks his grave in the Sanfordville Cemetery. There are few who know of his final resting place. History does not say he was a relative of Honest Abe, but he may very well have been. He had much the same build, an ingenious, hard worker, poor in worldly goods and honest.

Grandma Graves told to me of the time Mr. Lincoln was visiting at her house and she asked him to stay for dinner. Grandma could whip up a meal fit for a king out of very little. Having only one piece of pie, she placed it at Mr. Lincoln's place. After making a good meal and coming to the pie, Mr. Lincoln cut it through the middle and placing half of it on his tea "sasser" proceeded to feed it to his dog, saying, "When I have pie, Rover has pie."

Last Summer while cataloguing the Sanfordville Cemetery and while standing near the grave of Mr. Lincoln, I had the thought that if he should awake like Rip Van Winkle, and look around he would no doubt first notice with satisfaction that his grave lot was a immaculately kept as those of the more well-to-do. And then expecting to see the oxcarts and one horse shays of his day-seeing for the first time the huge trucks and the multitude of cars on the super-highway nearby, and overhead the roar of many air-liners, and nearby the many newly constructed homes of architecture much different than he ever saw. I could imagine him saying, with a mixture of pleasure, awe or perhaps fear, "What hath man wrought!"

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#### WEST MAIN STREET BRIDGES

By

Helena C. Johnston

Gouverneur, Town Historian

Construction of the sixth bridge across the Oswegatchie River at West Main Street, Gouverneur, was started by the New York State Highway Department August 3, 1955 and this new bridge, one of four lanes and of six feet of sidewalks and railings on either side, making a structure of 60 feet wide, was completed in September 1956.

Involved with the bridge contract held by the D. A. Collins Company of Mechnicville, New York, is the widening to four full lanes and reconstruction of about one-quarter of a mile of highway on either side of the bridge. Work on a foot bridge to carry pedestrians during the new bridge construction was begun July 22, 1955.

There were originally three islands, the eastern most being about 100 feet from the eastern bank. Two of the island exist in the form of piers under the bridge now being built. A natural water channel formerly ran across West Main Street about thirty-five feet west of the west end of the bridge, which channel was filled in after a heavy freshet in April, 1918 washed out the walls of the sluice bridge that then existed. As the waterpower that was developed from this channel had become entirely useless, this water course was filled and most people at the present time either do not know that it existed or have forgotten about it. The area of the present dam and West Main Street bridge was the site originally of a sort of cataract falls caused by the rock formation and in the early official recordings, "The Falls" was used in some surveys in village history.

Isaac Kendall built the first bridge in 1807 at a cost of \$500. One pier was required in the 100-foot span to the east bank, the other three spaces being cared for by great trees from the native forests. The first piers apparently were of the flattened log or ribbed type with stone and other filling in the center. This bridge had no railings, save beams pinned to the sides for protection. James Parker built the second bridge about 1820 - somewhat more substantial and an improved pier.

The date of the erection of the 3rd bridge is mentioned in Jay S. Corbin's 1905 Centennial history but the date is not given nor the builder. This third bridge had railings of turned balusters according to early historical reports. It was this third bridge that was damaged by fire in 1853 when fire swept through four of the various mills that then existed on the dam that had been built in 1814. The use of river water by a bucket brigade is said to have saved the wooden structure. In 1876 the fourth bridge was built - quite pretentious according to that period and of iron construction. The islands were walled up at that time as they appear now under the new bridge.

The West Main Street end of the bridge is solid rock while the east end is clay and mud formation. The piles from the early pier in the mid-river, between the eastern island and the east bank, were used in part in the 1876 bridge. Although rated as an iron bridge, it was extremely light construction and five tons was about its limit. When the steam roller was bought by the village at a later date, the 1876 bridge was not safe for the roller's weight and it had to be transported by the railroad when work was being done on the west side and likewise, when returned to the east side.

The 1876 bridge was not to cost over \$15,000 but this fund was expended before the bridge was completed, requiring the taxpayers of the town to present a petition to the Board of Supervisors for permission to borrow the amount needed, which request was granted by the county legislature.



The 1905 bridge of the plate girder type was considerably ahead of any bridge around the country at that time. In erecting this fifth bridge, one of the girders fell but luckily no one was hurt, neither was the girder damaged. The town expected it would cost \$18,000 to build as the abutments were so well preserved as to need no changes save a relaying of the top courses or a substitution of concrete caps of one to two feet in thickness.

\$18,000 Bond Issue Vote - Town Meeting a Union Hall, February 14th, 1905: Aye, 235; no, 169; Total 422 Votes.

The lowest bid was from the Oswego Bridge Company, on March 20, 1905, of \$14,980.

An interesting feature of the new 1956 construction is that in the removal of the abutment at the east end of the 1905 bridge, old flattened logs were found that may have been used as early as 1807 or 1820. When taking down this 1905 bridge, the two girders over 100 feet long were in such good condition that they can be used in the construction of a new bridge 3-1/2 miles from Gouverneur village. The question arose, how can they be taken to the site of the new bridge? A route 12 miles long was chosen. The girders were loaded on two very large trucks and moved slowly by way of the new Elmdale bridge and the George Lockie farm. It took ten hours to cover these twelve miles. When these long girders are used, the County will build the bridge. The towns now do not build bridges over a certain length.

I am unable to tell you how much our 1955-56 bridge will cost. I will tell you at some later date but I am sure it will cost more than the one built in 1905. What do you think?

Mr. Julius Bartlett, our Village Historian, has given me data for this article and some has been taken from Centennial Souvenir History, published in 1905. Mr. J. S. Corbin wrote the history of Gouverneur in this 1905 book and it is very interesting reading.

We Gouverneurians are very proud of our 1956 West Main Street bridge and its approaches.

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#### FROM THE COUNTY'S CRACKER BARRELLS

(Including the names of all Town Historians together with a continuing report on their activities.)

BRASHER (Mrs. Joseph O'Brien) Continues her research on the History of St. Joseph's Academy which was sold last spring. It has been replaced

by a new convent school. CANTON (Mrs. Karl M. Mayhew, Jr.) Data was copied from the tombstones of two cemeteries before the snow fell -- the Jerusalem Cemetery on the Lincoln Road and the Norton Cemetery on the Ogdensburg -Canton Road. In september a letter written by the historian and signed by Canton's Acting Postmaster, Eldred Wood, was sent to the United States Post Office, Washington, D. C. This Letter started the research for the History of the Postal Service in the town. The names of Village postmasters and the dates of their appointments before 1930 have been coming in from the General Services Administration National Archives and Records Service, Washington 25, D. C. After 1930- Post Office Department Division of Postmasters processes these records. Information about rural mail carriers and routes comes from Federal Records Center, 1724 Docust St., St. Louis 3, Missouri. Mail route contracts information can be had for a fee from Mr. William Galbraith Smith, Box 7319, Benjamin Franklin P.O., Washington, D.C. Horton Howard gave the historian the names and routes of the first rural carriers and Mrs. Albon Ames remembered when the first village carriers delivered mail out of the post office in June 1909 when it was located in the present J. J. Newberry store block. RENSSELAER FALLS (Mrs. Nina Wilson). CLARE (Mrs. Leslie Colton) has sent in her annual report. CLIFTON (Mrs. George Reynolds) I bought a new file and am trying to get my newly collected items organized. Our oldest resident, Mrs. Glencore Wescott, whom Mrs. Smithers interviewed by tape recorder at our regional meeting last June, slipped and broke her hip and is in Clifton Fine Hospital in Star Lake. We hope she will be back running her outboard motor when the ice breaks up in Cranberry Lake. COLTON (Mrs. Judson Miller) DEKALB (Mabel Sheldon) has written a short article for the Quarterly on "The First Post Office in DeKalb Junction) DEPEYSTER (Mrs. Emery Smithers) The Punchlock Historical Club erected an old time Christmas tree in the Brown General Store. Members of the club spent an evening stringing popcorn and cranberries to decorate the tree. At its base was a lovely old iron tea kettle for mother, a foot warmer for grandmother and a hearing aid for grandfather. The young man of the family was given a beautiful string of bells for his driving horses. Sister found her name on the China doll. Baby brother had a long white dress carefully handmade by mother. College miss had a beautiful pair of hand knit white wool stockings. This club also placed a small Christmas tree in the Peterson Nursing Home in Canton and sent Christmas Greeting cards to shut-ins. They gave an original Christmas play at the Annual Grange Christmas Party. Their own Christmas Party was held at the home of the county historian. A picnic supper was attended by thirty people including members and their parents. Gifts were exchanged. EDWARDS(Leah Noble) "I have met with the Yorker Club several times and helped them to have a display of old

and new dolls in the Grange Hall window at Christmas time. The oldest doll was about 75 years old (China doll) and the youngest one year old. FOWLER (Helen Cunningham) "Hibernating" FINE (Helena Johnston) GOUVERNEUR VILLAGE (Julius Bartlett) was the first historian to send in his annual report. "In 1800 there began in Gouverneur village a sort of golden age in the form of marble quarries. The marble plants situated on the southern edge of the village employed men who reside almost entirely within the village limits and the population gain was 1,389 from 1880 to 1890. The village population became 3,459. The Talc industry in Fowler and Edwards began at about this same time. But relatively few laborers in the talc mills resided in Gouverneur, but some did, and all the executives made Gouverneur their home. The first quarry names were the Davidsons--The Gouverneur Marble Co., Extra Dark Marble; St. Lawrence Marble Quarries, Empire Marble Co, Northern New York and in other locations; The White Crystal and the Rylestone Co. The quarry business was virtually ended by 1920. The Balducci Crushed Stone Co. is employing at full strength about 20 men for making commercial lime fertilizer is all that is left of the once 150 man business. HAMMOND (Mrs. Lottie Simons) HERMON (Mrs. Kellogg Morgan) Having just taken over the duties of Historian, I really have not started on any project. Mrs. Hance has several cards started on the boys in service so I expect to first complete as many of those as possible. HOPKINTON (Mrs. Dorothy Squire) "I'm working on the project of how Hopkinton people got their mail, from the days of the earliest stagecoach to the present postoffice and R. F. D. Service. Sanford's History gives the story of a mail route which started about 1830 and was the forerunner of the Stagecoach Route. This book declares that John Thompson of Lalone began carrying mail between Ogdensburg and Plattsburg, through Hopkinton, on foot with the mail bag on his back. He covered the distance of 118 miles in about a week each way. After about six months he bought a horse and made the trip on horseback. Then seeing the necessity for carrying passengers and parcels, he got a span of horses and a wagon. He soon exchanged the wagon for a coach and added a second span of horses. LAWRENCE (Mrs. Gordon Cole) LISBON (E. Earl Jones) LOUISVILLE (Mrs. Lorraine Bandy) "I am completing a scrapbook of the houses and their history along the St. Lawrence River that have vanished because of the Seaway. The pictures are in color. Also included are some of the camps, familiar landmarks and beautiful views that will be completely changed. I have been before my town board with my annual report and also sent a copy to Dr. Corey and Mrs. Smithers. I completed the History of Chase Mills and History of Methodist Church at Chase Mills. Also turned in 89 military records. MACOMB (Mrs. Inda Murton) "I am working on my new clippings and scrapbooks. Also doing research and trying to write stories of local

history. MADRID (Mrs. Arthur Thompson) Reports the passing of Edward Martin former supervisor. A coffer dam across Grasse River in the fall of 1956 saved the use of built-in flumes. MASSENA (Mrs. Ella Lahey) The second annual January window exhibit is the thing of interest at the moment. We are showing wooden ware used in the early part of the 19th century in Massena: firkins, sap buckets, dough trays, butter bowls, ladles, molds, churns, spice boxes, etc. The program for the meeting of the Historical Association will be a discussion of the uses of the articles in the exhibit. MORRISTOWN (Malcolm Booth) Even though the historian resigns to become the Watertown Daily Times Reporter for Canton, he is continuing his interest in the history--"I have been given a roving assignment within St. Lawrence County on historical subjects." An Article "Black Lake-Transportation and Communication" was written for the 1957 Semi-annual pamphlet of the Black Lake Chamber of Commerce. We are in for a treat this fall when this historian presents his address "Bootleggers and Moonshiners in St. Lawrence Co. to help commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the birth of Alexander Hamilton, first Secretary and originator of the U. S. Bureau of Internal Revenue. The historian bequeaths a fine set of scrapbooks on Morristown to his successor, Mrs. Ernest Planty. NORFOLK (No Historian) OSWEGATCHIE (Mrs. Monna Mayne) HEUVELTON VILLAGE (Mrs. Ida Downing) PARISHVILLE (Doris Rowland) "Mrs. Smithers spent a day with me last fall. Between us we completed records of Fairview Cemetery. I have done some work on Hillcrest Cemetery and learned of some isolated graves on White Hill. Have nearly completed military records since 1945. Potatoes have always been an important crop in this sandy soil. But I was surprised to happen on the fact that there was at one time, a starch factory at Joe Indian. Mrs. Daniels presented me with some historical material including a scrapbook containing some of her own articles. PIERCEFIELD (Mrs. Beulah Dorothy) "Been busy collecting and preserving old school records as our district became centralized this past summer. By having an old collectors book, gave proof of the purchases of land the school now stands on. Have a new steel cabinet for historical records which is taking much time to get in order. PIERREPONT (Millard Hundley) Nothing new to report this time. PITCAIRN(No historian) POTSDAM (No historian) ROSSIE (Mrs. Murray Simons) "I am in the final stage of research for a history of the Rossie hotel which was built by David Parish in 1811. British soldiers were overnight guests here in 1813 when they surrounded Rossie looking for horse thieves.

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