

THE QUARTERLY

Published by the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

Editor - Atwood Manley, Canton, N.Y.

Associate Editors - Nina Smithers, Bette L. Mayhew, Charles Lahey

Vol. IV, Number 1

Canton, N.Y.

January 1959

THE LITTLE-KNOWN ALEXANDER MACOMB

A Biographical Sketch

By

Atwood Manley

Frequent requests are made by North Country people for information about that somewhat legendary figure, Alexander Macomb. Nowhere in North Country literature, historical or otherwise, can anything be found approaching an adequate sketch of his life, to say nothing of a definitive or accurate biography. The explanation, of course, is understandable. Alexander Macomb arrived on the scene too early and departed too soon. He became the chief principal in the prologue to the whole North Country Drama, the scene of his activities being in New York City. During seven intensive years of that city's galloping post-Revolutionary War days, Alexander Macomb cut quite a figure. His rise was rapid and his fall precipitous. It was a period in which The North Country was poised on the threshold of transition, the transition from a red man's wilderness to a white man's settlement. Either by design, or fortuitous circumstance, Alexander Macomb held the center of the stage in a prologue which ended abruptly. As a result, before the curtain went up on the opening scene of the first act of the main performance, he had been relegated backstage and cut from the cast. Because Macomb took no active part in its early settlement, and none in its development, historians have consistently failed to accord him more than casual attention or passing reference. Alfred Donaldson's "A History of the Adirondacks" does him more justice and greater honor than any other. Unfortunately what appears there deals largely with the land transactions themselves, Macomb's downfall, and then his later life, following his financial debacle. The last forty years of his life were unrelated to The North Country history.

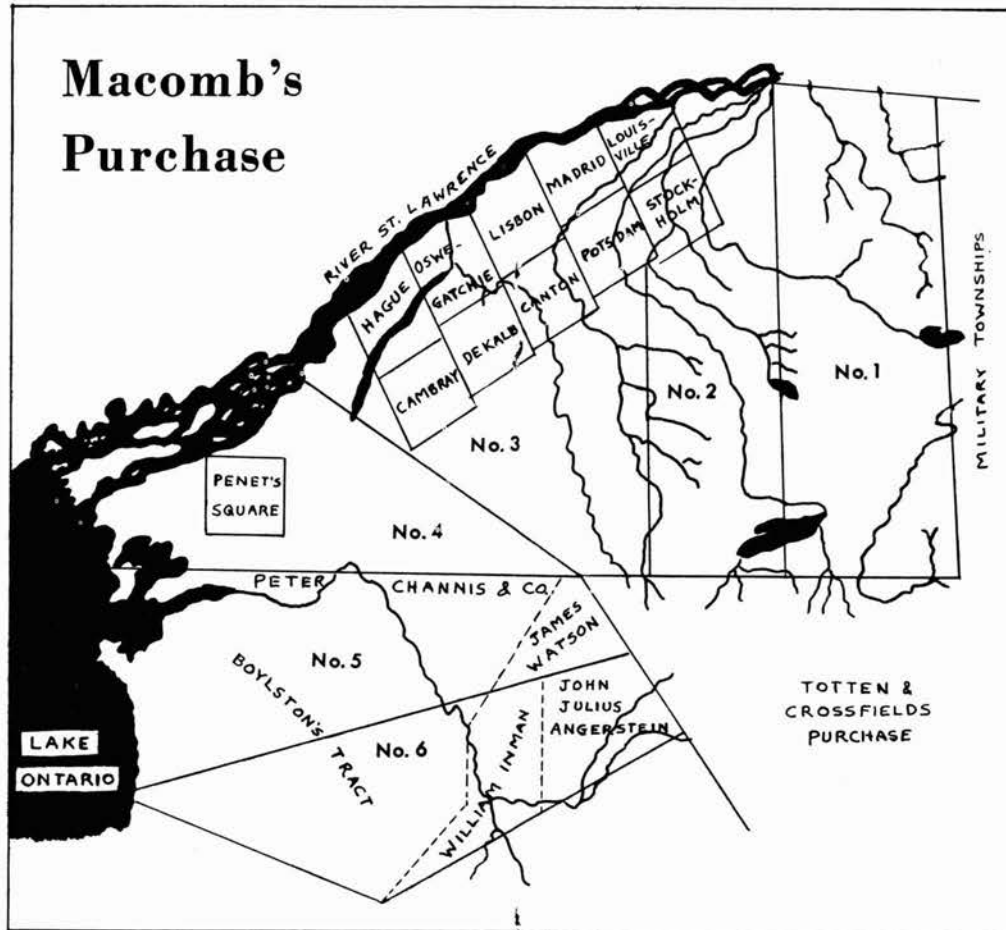
Lochinvar-like Alexander Macomb came out of the west from Detroit. Instead of a broadsword he was armed with much fine gold. What his ambitions may have been one can only surmise from some knowledge of his past and his family background. Obviously he was not bent on wooing any fair Ellen for at that time he was married and already the father of eight children. His quest seems to have been completely commercial, profits to be made in a city which was at that time budding with profiteers. He was a daring gentleman. Like the ardent young knight of fiction "he stayed not for brake, and he stopped not for stone." A former subject of the British Crown, he was of that group which for the better part of valor found it expedient to enlist under the stars and stripes of American freedom. The opportunity for self-improvement via the ready channels of business beckoned many who but recently had been profiting handsomely under crown contracts. There is no evidence that Alexander Macomb ever aspired to public office or the halls of statesmanship. He became recognized as one of New York's princes of

speculation, a capitalist who eagerly invested venture money in numerous get-rich-quick schemes. However, he also became a man of prestige and influence intimately associated with the upper crust of the city's elite and many of the nation's great. In time he became surrounded by sons and sons-in-law who were of the military cast - able, loyal, noted citizens of the new nation. His namesake, General Alexander Macomb, Jr., was the hero of the Battle of Plattsburgh in the War of 1812; and later became the Chief of Staff of the U. S. Army, 1828-1841. In more than one respect, land, Alexander Macomb commands our interest.

Specifically his name has become firmly entrenched in North Country history through the very speculations which brought his downfall. He belonged to that coterie of New Yorkers who staked huge sums on wilderness land investments, investments made primarily for profit. Whatever empirical aspirations may have grown from these speculations, the immediate motive was that of making money. For some reason never adequately disclosed Alexander Macomb became the key figure, in this business, occupying the leading role in the prologue. Succeeding events established beyond the peradventure of a doubt that he was not acting alone in these transactions. We know from the record, however, that it was Alexander Macomb, who by name at least, became the single largest purchaser of New York State's unappropriated lands north of the Mohawk. By direct and indirect acquisitions he bought from the State almost all of the Ten Towns at the auction on June 10, 1787, in the Merchants Coffee House in New York, about 640,000 acres. This was the first of the extensive land sales made by the State in this area. Four years later Alexander Macomb's name commanded even greater prominence. In 1791, following months of negotiation with the State; Macomb effected the purchase therefrom of a far vaster domain, Six Tracts embracing a total of 3,693,755 acres. These Six Tracts included all of what became Lewis and Jefferson counties, practically all of St. Lawrence, approximately half of Franklin, and some of Herkimer and Oswego counties. Across the cartographical expanse of these Six Tracts was inscribed the name "Macomb's Great Purchase." It appears so on all of the original maps. Macomb received land patents giving him outright title to his purchases in the Ten Towns, and for Tracts Nos. IV, V, and VI of his "Great Purchase." In other words he paid for the same in full and conveyances by the State passed the title to him. He was under contract to pay for the remaining three tracts, Nos. I, II, and III in six annual installments, without interest. He paid twelve pence per acre for the Six Tracts, and eight pence per acre for the Ten Towns. His "Great Purchase" still stands as the largest single land transaction in the State's entire history. Macomb was unable to fulfill the terms of his contract and never received the patents covering Tracts I, II, and III. In 1792, when his star of success seemed to be reaching the zenith of its orbit, he was suddenly involved in financial difficulties. From the very pinnacle of fame and fortune he plunged almost overnight to the ignominy of the debtor's prison. To his everlasting credit and that of his friend, William Edgar, he eventually retrieved a modicum of his former prestige and position. The sunset of life found him and his second wife, Jane, living in serenity and comfort in the home of his son, the General, in Georgetown, D.C. He died there in 1831. Ten years later St. Lawrence County erected a new town, partitioned from four of the original Ten Towns, and named it for him.

Thus, we see that the name of Alexander Macomb has become indelibly an historical part of the North Country. Professional searchers and abstractors of land conveyances testify that nearly all land titles within the Ten Towns and Macomb's Great Purchase have their origin in his purchases, and that these titles stem from him. Consequently our entire structure of land titles throughout this whole area go directly back to his transactions and as a result his name will go down to posterity in that connection. In land titles and in the town bearing his name, Alexander Macomb's memory will forever be preserved as a part of the North Country's past, present and future. In the light of these facts why have North Country historians treated Alexander Macomb so casually? Of such an intriguing personality is it any wonder people now frequently ask, "Just who was this man Alexander Macomb, anyway?" It is also interesting to note that the area embraced by his purchases was later given the name of "The North Country" by Irving Bachler. Herewith is presented at least a partial chronological biographical sketch which it is hoped will be helpful to the interested.

Macomb's Purchase



The Ten Towns and the Six Great Tracts

Alexander Macomb's ancestors were of Scotch extraction. For some reason they crossed to Northern Ireland. There they put their roots down in Antrim County, not far from Belfast, and established their family manor of Dunturky. It was there on July 27, 1748 that Alexander Macomb was born of John Gordon and Jane Gordon Macomb. In addition to Alexander, the Macombs had two other children, William, three years the junior of Alexander, and a daughter. It is suggested that the gathering clouds of the Seven Years War as well as a family kinship with General James Gordon may have influenced the family to migrate to America about 1755. The General is reported to have been engaged in the fur trade with the American colonies, and to have been under contract with His Majesty to furnish supplies to the British troops garrisoned there. Such business, the fur trade and the contracts, was highly lucrative. The General might well have felt the need of a relative as his agent or representative overseas. So, why not John Gordon Macomb? Be that as it may, the record states that about 1755 the John Gordon Macombs located at Albany, New York. Albany was then an important clearing point for the fur trade with the Indians farther west. Both the Dutch and the British used it as a base for such operations. John Macomb seems to have prospered at first in Albany, but later suffered reverses. After ten years or so in Albany the family located for a time in New York. This would have been during Alexander's early youth. None of our North Country historians have made even passing reference to these early New York State associations.

Among the Horatio Seymour papers which have turned up in Albany - Seymour was Governor Marcy's Secretary of State - has been found a letter written by Alexander Macomb. It is now in the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library. Also, among the Burton Collection is a biographical leaflet published in 1931 by M. M. Quaife, of Alexander Macomb and his illustrious son, the general. The letter furnishes the year date when the Macombs moved to Detroit. Alexander wrote this letter May 26, 1769 from Niagara, N.Y., to his friend, Rutger Bleeker, Attorney at Law, in Albany. In it Macomb informs Bleeker that "I arriv'd at this place/ about four days/ since,/ without any material

incident happening on the way. We were alarm'd at this place by news/ from Detroit early in the Spring, informing us of their/ apprehensions of disturbances from the Indians, & desiring/ the boats might stop'd here untill further advise should/ be sent. Yesterday the Vessel arriv'd from Detroit by/ which we learn that every thing, is quiet & intercourse between/ the Traders & Indians as formerly; so that now each/ trys who can proceed fastest:---thus much for/ savage News."

From 1769 until after the American Revolution Detroit became the scene of activity of the two Macomb brothers. In 1769 Alexander was twenty-one, and William was eighteen. We are indebted to Quaife for what is now given about the Detroit period. Reference is made to Detroit of that day as being only "a stockade of log huts." Elsewhere we are informed that Detroit was thriving with economic activity. As the principal outpost on the western frontier, it was originally under French and later under British rule. Among its leading citizens was Robert Navarre, first as the French intendant and notary, then during the British regime as a notary. Under the British Detroit became a strategic centre for colonial expansion as well as for trade with the Indians. It also became a point of military operations. The American Revolution soon had the whole Atlantic seaboard in its grip, but in the new west Detroit was secure and immune. From the British Exchequer vast sums flowed through that point to promote commercial and military activities. This was big business for Detroit which prospered mightily and grew rapidly in size.

Attention now focuses upon the two Macomb brothers. Opportunity was knocking at every "hut" door and they were not reluctant to answer. Those were the days when youth was daring and venturesome. Alexander and William Macomb became the fiscal agents of the British government in Detroit, a position of influence and great pecuniary advantage. From their various operations they reaped "enormous profits." Their revenues exceeded half a million annually, a stupendous sum in those days. Socially as well as economically they were among Detroit's leading citizens. From the "Michigan Pioneer Collection" Quaife quotes: "They were Indian traders, general merchants, real estate dealers, and bankers, and probably carried on many more pursuits that were required in the village." From this comes some insight into Alexander Macomb's early background, experience and environment. Without doubt, he was acquiring those qualities which in ten years brought him to the fore in New York. Nowhere does Quaife suggest that Macomb took trips to Montreal via the St. Lawrence, nor that he thus became interested in the possibilities of the lands bordering on the southern shore of the great river. However, Dr. Hough in his histories does present such possibility.

There is another pertinent item to be taken from this account of Macomb's residence in Detroit. It was there that Macomb formed his first business association with William Edgar, later to be continued in New York. In the Burton Historical Collection are five record books of the firm of Macomb, Edgar and Macomb of Detroit of that period. Later William Edgar became tremendously wealthy as one of New York's merchant princes. More insight into the association of these two men, Edgar and Macomb, would possibly shed much valuable information about the succeeding eventful years in Macomb's life.

In Detroit Alexander Macomb became enamored of the beautiful daughter of the former French intendant, Robert Navarre. Alexander and Catherine Navarre were married May 4, 1773. She bore him ten children, the last two after the family moved to New York. Catherine died in that city in 1789. The seventh of their ten children was Alexander Macomb, Jr., the general.

Precisely why and when Alexander Macomb decided to move from Detroit and settle in New York is one of the many questions yet to be answered. But move he did, shortly after the close of the Revolution when about thirty-five years of age. His brother, William, remained a successful Detroit merchant. There is the logical deduction that the members of the firm of Macomb, Edgar & Macomb decided that their interests could be best served under this new arrangement, Alexander in New York, William in Detroit.

It may be helpful to pause and consider what New York was like, and the

general condition of affairs in the new nation, at the time of Macomb's arrival in the city. The star of economic destiny was shining over Manhattan Island. Rehabilitation from war's devastation was practically completed. The departing British troops and fleeing Tories had left much of the city in smoking ruins. Colonists had flocked back to salvage what was to be saved. The Tories who remained did the double-quick reverse, hurrying to entrench themselves under the new order. Social status, national loyalties and business alliances often became completely scrambled in those post-war years. They were stirring, turbulent, vigorous years. The future of the city and of the nation hung in the balance. Alexander Hamilton was fighting to get a new federal government organized and functioning. George Clinton as Governor of New York, took the position that what was good for New York was good enough for the nation. He was a die-hard anti-federalist. He was a difficult man to deal with, but of great power and influence. This antipathy between Clinton and Hamilton may explain why Hamilton never became deeply interested in northern New York wilderness lands. Hamilton succeeded in getting the Continental Congress organized, but New York was to be new nation's capital.

Such unity as existed between the thirteen former colonies rested not in the Continental Congress but in the Declaration of Independence. Both the nation and the individual states were buttoned down tight with debt. John Adams had been in Europe desperately striving to discover some basis for credit of which there was none worthy of the name. World commerce was in utter chaos. The Barbary Coast pirates still sailed the main. England was at swords points with France, and both of them with Spain. Conscienceless pirates and often British frigates overhauled American ships, confiscated their cargoes and sometimes sold their crews on the slave markets of Algiers and Tripoli or hailed them before an admiralty court. Competition between the thirteen states was ruthless. Taxation had become a favorite tool. A Connecticut Yankee could not row down the East River to deliver a load of fire wood at the back door of a Beekman Street place without being taxed almost to death. New Jersey farmers could not deliver their garden produce at the Battery without being taxed into ruin. There were more schemes under foot on Manhattan Island for making money quickly than you could shake a stick at. All during and after the Revolution the Country was short on cash and long on land. Land had become the chief asset behind national and state securities. Gouverneur Morris was still striving to devise the monetary decimal system and thus establish the dollar as the rate of exchange. His Majesty's monetary units of the pence, the shilling and the pound still prevailed. Due to the dismal state of world finances these units of exchange had fallen to an all-time low. As a result government and state paper as well as land values dropped and dropped, again and again.

It was into this state of affairs that Alexander Macomb stepped on arriving in New York. The situation was made to his pattern. While public debt and public finances were at a low ebb private fortunes were being made right and left. Merchants of Old New York were not on poverty street. Their agents were trading with the Indians for furs in the west. New ships were being built at the Walton shipyard to chance the dangers of capture enroute to foreign ports, especially to the Orient. It is not surprising to learn that Alexander Macomb, blessed with a family of eight children and two still to come from Catherine, his first wife, should thrive. Macomb is referred to as a man of wealth, active in the mercantile business, apparently something of an architect, indulging in banking, a daring speculator in real estate in the city, and then turning his eyes northward toward that vast wilderness beyond the Mohawk, north of Fort Orange and Fort Stanwix. In addition there was speculative opportunity on a grand scale in state and government securities. Security trading was something new. Macomb plunged with zest into it all.

Dr. Hough's histories of Lewis, Jefferson, St. Lawrence and Franklin counties, tells us that Macomb was a member of "a company" of three which became engaged in land speculations. This was but one phase of his business interests. The other two members Hough lists as William Constable, the wealthy merchant, banker, and shipper; and Daniel McCormick, that colorful entrepreneur of finance who lived so heartily and so well at No. 57 Wall Street to the day of his death. Dr. Hough presents the idea that these three, Macomb, Constable and McCormick, formed a boyhood friendship during their youth in Ireland. We know definitely

that Macomb and Constable were born there, with four years but many miles between them. Constable was born in Dublin in 1752, and Macomb far to the north, near Belfast in 1748. This contention seems a bit dubious, far more likely that another bond of interest, possibly the St. Patrick's Society in New York, drew them together thirty odd years later. These are but two of the many men of prominence with whom Alexander Macomb soon found himself associated in numerous ventures. New York was a city of only 10,000 inhabitants. Its residential and business center was south of Central Park. Wall Street was more residential than business. Many of the more eminent capitalists of the day were communicants of Trinity Church, such as the Constables, Clarksons, Ogdens and Harisons. Of these Many fascinating personalities none figured more intimately in Macomb's affairs and friendship than his former Detroit partner, William Edgar. Apparently Edgar confined his interests largely to the mercantile trade and banking. He does not seem to have ventured into land speculation on any such scale as Macomb. He became rated as among the city's most successful and wealthiest merchants. The Edgar's were listed by Walter Barrett in "Merchants of Old New York" as being of the "creme de la creme" of the city's society. William Edgar's offices were on Washington Street and his residence, a pretentious marble structure, stood at 7 Greenwich Street. William Edgar served as Vice President of the famous St. Patrick's Society, which unquestionably places him among the sons of Ireland. He sat on the first Board of Director's of the first specie bank established in New York. This was "The Bank of New York," still doing business. It was this man who the record indicates came to Macomb's succor when the latter found himself in the hour of greatest need and utmost despair.

Of all the influences which brought this group of men together to invest in North Country wilderness lands the famous St. Patrick's Society offers the most logical answer. Daniel McCormick was a life-long member, and served as its president. Others whose names became indelibly attached to North Country land speculations were also members: William Constable, William Edgar as a vice president, and John McVickar. The Society was non-sectarian, having been organized for the sole purpose of aiding any and all sons of Ireland who upon migrating to America needed a helping hand. It was a favorite meeting place. Daniel McCormick, its president, was treasurer of the Grand Lodge of Masonry, a member of the committee appointed to restore the Presbyterian Society in New York following the Revolution. He was a bachelor, one of New York's best liked, most respected and influential citizens. He came to this country a poor boy, and rose to fame and fortune. From 1791 until his death in 1834 he lived ostentatiously in a blue-stuccoed house at No. 57 Wall, often sitting on the front stoop passing the time of day with his friends, sipping brandy, taking a pinch of snuff, regaled in cocked hat, white powdered hair, silk top-coat, knee breeches, white stockings, shoes with silver buckles. His table was generous, and of the best, for McCormick was a gourmet, a lover of fine wines and foods, devoted to cards, and always insisting that his guests be present in odd numbers. He had his fingers in many business pies. For sound business methods and shrewd investments New York had few wiser or more able capitalists. Could it be that about his table the planners in those vast land speculations met, drew those early maps, laid out the areas they intended to purchase, later subdivided the Six Great Tracts into towns and gave names to those towns? It could be. Those names almost without exception related to these men, or their friends who bought land from them. Before the curtain fell on those land manipulations and transactions nearly every prominent business, professional and public man in the city owned some of today's North Country.

Alexander Macomb's position was not mediocre in New York. On April 30, 1789, following George Washington's inauguration before the Federal Building at the corner of Broad and Wall streets the inaugural parade formed and wended its way uptown to Chestnut Street where the city had prepared a residence for the nation's First President. All along the way homes and business houses were profusely decorated. The press of the day stated that none was more bountifully and attractively festooned than that of "Alexander Macomb, the architect," unless it was the mansion of William Edgar. Macomb lived in one of the city's finest homes of his own planning. When Washington found the Chestnut Street house not to his liking and too far up-town, he personally went downtown and purchased of Alexander Macomb his residence. It became the nation's first White House. Macomb associated in his daily life with many of America's greatest early statesmen such as, John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, Gouverneur Morris, Robert H. Morris, General Knox and others.

One always comes back to the prodigious research done by Dr. Frederick B. Hough for his histories when one attempts to unravel the threads of Alexander Macomb's career in New York so far as his land deals were concerned. Hough's records indicate that Macomb was largely occupied, so far as his North Country speculations were concerned, in rounding out his purchases in the Ten Towns from 1787 to 1790. In 1791 his purchase of the Six Great Tracts was no sooner effected than he and his colleagues obviously put in motion a sales program. No doubt Macomb was in need of money in order to meet the installments due to complete the purchase of these tracts. Hough informs us that in 1791 Alexander Macomb "appointed William Constable to go to Europe and sell lands, which he did." Such evidence would indicate that Macomb was not acting as a dummy in his purchases, but rather that he held the key position. The whole situation seems to have been extremely complicated. Constable was a great New York merchant, also engaged in banking and the House of William C. Constable & Company had especially strong and influential European connections in Amsterdam, London and Paris. As early as 1773 Constable was rated among New York's foremost merchants, when only twenty-one.

William Constable was the intimate and the partner of Gouverneur Morris in numerous business matters. The two were of identically the same age. Morris had served brilliantly as one of Washington's aides and advisers during the Revolution. He was the assistant to the great Revolutionary financial genius, Robert H. Morris. In 1789-1799 Gouverneur Morris was in Europe engaged on three fronts: commercially in his own and Robert Morris's business interests; to represent the United States government as counsel at Paris; and to sell lands from among his and his associates extensive holdings in America. It was G. Morris more than any other person who was most influential in interesting the LeRay de Chaumonts, the Parishes and other European capitalists in buying North Country lands - in which Morris was personally speculating. Sparks in his biography of Morris makes this clear, and says that Morris was among the fortunates who made a fortune from land speculations. Dr. Hough verifies Gouverneur Morris' participation in the "Great Purchase" holdings. Also to be included in this coterie of speculators with Macomb were Samuel Ogden and Robert Morris who was of no kin of Gouverneur Morris. From Ogden comes evidence that right from the start, 1787, "myself and my associates have paid into the public treasury a large sum of money for this tract of country." Ogden was referring to the Ten Towns. There seems to be no available source to prove who, or how many, of these associates were banded together in these land speculations, Dr. Hough's company of three to the contrary.

In January 1792 both Constable and Morris were in Europe. Their first efforts to interest people over there in making land purchases apparently failed. By June 1792 the entire state of affairs in New York had radically changed. Constable was back. The first major financial panic in the city's history broke unexpectedly. Alexander Macomb, along with another of his speculating associates, William Duer (and others as well) soon found himself completely engulfed in the catastrophe. Not only was Macomb deeply involved in land speculations up-state, but also in city realty, and especially in the new security market. With William Duer he had been plunging by buying and selling government debt paper.

William Duer was another one of those interesting personalities. He was born in Devonshire, England, in 1747 and arrived in New York in 1768 to buy timber for ship masts. He found this country to his liking and remained, joining the cause of the colonies. He was the friend of both Washington and Hamilton; served ably in the Provincial Congress and then in the Continental Congress. Resigning from the later he secured valuable contracts to supply Washington's armies and devoted himself to his personal business schemes. During Macomb's years of ascendancy in the city Duer was considered a financial genius, the greatest speculator of his day according to Pomerantz in his book, "New York, An American City, 1783-1803." Duer served as Alexander Hamilton's assistant during the latter's term as Secretary of the Treasury in Washington's administration. However, brightly his genius may have burned, it is said that his business schemes more often than not miscarried. Macomb became closely associated with Duer, especially in speculating in government securities. Apparently these two, with some of their colleagues were pyramiding their holdings.

Government and state securities offered a ripe field of speculative investment. The public, new to such offerings, bought recklessly and avidly. Apparently both Macomb and Duer were loaded with commitments which in the panic they could not possibly meet. Macomb's land speculations merely added coal to the fire. Also, as our historians have emphasized, Macomb had unfortunately taken a hand in trying to establish a new bank as a rival to "The Bank of New York." This was a bubble which burst before it became full-blown. "The Bank of a Million" failed to materialize. Both Macomb and Duer were thrown into debtor's prison. Duer's ruin was complete. He died several years later "with the jail limits" in Elizabeth, N.J. Another to suffer in like manner was Robert H. Morris who finally emerged from prison a broken old man. It is interesting to note that during all of this period Gouverneur Morris was in Europe. Nevertheless he survived the depression and emerged strongly entrenched. His holdings were vast. Upon returning to America in 1799 he proceeded to capitalize handsomely on these ventures. Constable, too, escaped Macomb's fate. So did Daniel McCormick, and Samuel Ogden.

There is much about Macomb's sundry connections and dealings which are now difficult to explain. Macomb's friends McCormick, Constable, Joshua Waddington, William Edgar and others were among the founders of The Bank of New York. In 1791 when that bank received its official charter (it was organized in 1784) Alexander Macomb owned one share of its stock. Yet a year later Hough claims he was trying to set up a competitive bank. Dr. Hough's records indicate that when disaster crushed Macomb his most intimate associates, Constable, McCormick, G. Morris, Samuel Ogden, and others were his chief creditors and that Macomb conveyed title to most of his extensive land holdings to them. It was following the panic that William Edgar entered the picture, buying up large tracts of Macomb's former lands, in order to hold them in trust until such time as Macomb might recover them. That Macomb succeeded in retrieving some of his former prestige is apparent from what Alfred Donaldson so ably presents. In time he erected a mansion fifty feet square on one of New York City's most favored sites. He also operated a mill. Then he retired and moved with his wife to Georgetown, D.C., where they lived out the balance of their years with his celebrated son. General Macomb had but recently been made Chief of Staff.

There has been some confusion and inaccuracy about Alexander Macomb's second marriage. Catherine, his beautiful first wife, died in 1789. Donaldson would have him then marrying Christina Livingston of New York. This statement is obviously in error. Quaipe informs us that in 1791 Macomb married Mrs. Jane Rucker, the widow of a New York merchant. Hough verifies this when he records that "Jane the wife of A. Macomb" signed certain conveyances of land following her husband's financial disaster. To Macomb and his second wife, Jane, seven children were born, making seventeen in all sired by Alexander Macomb. Christina Livingston, daughter of Phillip Livingston, married Macomb's son, John.

This, in brief, is but part of the biographical narrative about the man who, had fate decreed otherwise and had there been no collapse in the government security market in 1792, might well have played a conspicuous and influential role in the subsequent settlement and development of the North Country. His failure, ironically, sparked a new burst of public interest in land speculation. Two years after Macomb's downfall Samuel Ogden sent Nathan Ford to Ogdensburg to promote his land sales and establish a full-fledged settlement. McCormick, Gouverneur Morris, and Constable were soon selling land in about every office, tavern and parlor in New York City. Vermont pioneers, Connecticut Yankees and Dutch from the Mohawk Valley were soon yoking their oxen to carts and heading into the North Country Wilderness. French emigres were hopefully planning a new empire in this North Country to be ruled by Napoleon. Land speculation on a grand scale spread, settlements sprang up, surveys established property lines. The red man had departed. So had Alexander Macomb.

THE ANNUAL MEETING

Bert J. Rogers, Vice President of the First National Bank of Canton and President of the St. Lawrence County Tuberculosis and Health Association, was elected President of our Historical Association, succeeding Andrew K. Peters, at the annual meeting October 18. Mr. Peters has served the past two years. Mr. Rogers served twenty-five years as the 4-H Club Agent in St. Lawrence County, and is a former resident of Winthrop.

Other officers elected were Mrs. Ethel C. Olds, Waddington, Waddington Town Historian, Vice President; Malcolm A. Booth, Hammond, re-elected Secretary; and Carl E. Burns, Lisbon, St. Lawrence County Treasurer, re-elected treasurer.

Trustees elected were: Mrs. Doris Planty, Town Historian of Morristown, to succeed W. Allan Newell of Ogdensburg; Mrs. Ella R. Lahey, Massena Town Historian, to succeed herself; and Mrs. Virgie B. Simons, Rossie, Rossie Town Historian, to succeed herself.

The speaker at the meeting was Senator Robert C. McEwen of Ogdensburg, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Historic Sites, who addressed the group on the work of his committee, and the ways in which the Association could participate in the state-wide history program.

A proposed revision of the Association's Constitution and By-Laws was referred back to committee after being read and discussed. Members of the committee which presented the report were: Dr. William R. Willoughby, Canton, chairman, Carlton B. Olds, Waddington, and Atwood Manley, Canton.

The proposed revisions would have amended the Constitution to make all active members, either residing within or outside of St. Lawrence County, eligible as officers or trustees, and also proposed a new schedule of dues. A Special Committee headed by Treasurer Burns recommended that the dues be two dollars for a single membership, instead of one dollar, Three dollars for a husband and wife receiving one copy of The Quarterly, Five Dollars for a sustaining membership, and Fifty Dollars for a life membership.

In returning the whole report back to the Committee on revision the meeting voted before submitting said amended articles the proposed new Constitution and By-laws be published in The Quarterly before next year's annual meeting.

The Treasurer presented a report showing receipts of \$507, expenses of \$433.32, leaving a balance on hand of \$415.57, including the balance carried from the previous year.

The Board of Trustess met at Potsdam December 6 to organize for 1959, in view of New York State's "Year of History." Among other items considered by the Board were the election of Past President Peters as an ex-officio member of the Board and the decision to publish a one-page newsheet, "Trustee's Topics," for the trustees whenever the President directs

WITH NO APOLOGIES

Due to illness Dr. Charles E. Lahey has been unable to prepare the second installment The Parish Story, or "Parishville-A North Country Experiment in Hothouse Settlement." It has been promised for the next issue. Illness in the homes of others of The Quarterly staff has also delayed this issue, and has prevented Bette Mayhew in getting out the usual "Cracker Barrel" items.

1959, THE YEAR OF HISTORY

The Year 1959 has been proclaimed the "Year of History" by the Temporary State Commission on Historic Observances of the New York State Legislature. Senator Ernest Hatfield has been named Chairman: Carl Carmer, Vice Chairman, William F. Passannante, Secretary. Early last fall county committees were set up in the sixty-two counties of the State for the purpose of conducting the celebration. In St. Lawrence County Mrs. Nina Smithers was appointed Chairman; Atwood Manley, Vice Chairman; Leonard Prince, Secretary. Others who have been named to the committee are: Bert Rogers, President of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association; Charles E. Lahey, Potsdam State Teachers College Historian; Mrs. Doris Planty, Morristown Town Historian; Bligh Dodds, Collector of the Port of Ogdensburg; Malcolm Booth, Secretary of The County Historical Association; and Roger Cota of Canton, who is State President of the Yorker Clubs.

The Year 1959 marks the 350th year anniversary of when Henry Hudson sailed up the river and gave it his name, and Samuel de Champlain sailed into Lake Champlain and did the same. What started as a celebration of these events in the Hudson-Champlain Valley has spread to the entire State of New York in a movement to stimulate and accelerate interest in local history.

Dr. Albert B. Corey, State Historian, in a statement made at a meeting of the Commission at Albany last September said that the 1200 city, county and town historians and the historical societies of the state were being contacted in an effort to focus attention on New York history, particularly local history. He stressed the fact that this celebration should not last for just a day or two and be forgotten. Permanent results such as publications and exhibits should be emphasized. All schools of the state, particularly on the seventh grade level, were urged by Dr. Corey to place attention upon New York and the local history. Joseph R. Shaw, President of The Associated Industries of New York State said he believed we had a magnificent opportunity to do something for all our State. In as much as we have the most colorful background of all the original thirteen colonies, with the possible exception of Massachusetts, we need to inspire our people to learn of its traditions.

St. Lawrence County will have a series of major events and it is hoped that each town will arrange some event to commemorate this "Year of History." Our Publicity Committee will keep you informed by announcements from time to time. Members of the Historical Association, Town and Village historians, interested groups everywhere, can make a real success of this by a united effort. Lets do our best.

COMMUNICATION

Editor The Quarterly:

The "Quarterly" is getting better every issue and it should keep its forward progress active and well supplied. You know that if ideas can come from anywhere they can come from St. Lawrence County. I know, as I was born two miles from Pope Mills. Regards to my old friend from Depeyster - Mrs. Nina Smithers.

I have a couple of ideas to give to you for possible consideration at the next meeting:

1. A new name is needed for the paper, one that means more than the drab "Quarterly." I would suggest a name, which in the history of new country, has done as much to stabilize each and every community as any other one item and certainly it has been true in St. Lawrence County. The name should be short and basic of nature and worth. That title is "The Millstone."

The pamphlet should now grow a cover which should change pictures upon each publication. The edition should be made perhaps 25% larger to accommodate more information from the many town historians. They like to see their items in print. It would be a stimulant toward more accurate and voluminous work. There should be more picture documentation to impress the reader. This pamphlet is precious north country history of worth.

2. In order to finance such a forward step it is necessary to have a decent budget balanced by a set standard income and also by a flexible income. I therefore recommend the following: (a) Starting next year - raise the dues to \$2.00

per year. The Association's worth is now of much higher appraisal, (b) Inaugurate an "Antiques For Sale" page which in no time is very liable to double or triple its space. A reasonable rate to be charged the advertiser while also giving a 10% discount to dealers who invariably would insert larger ads. Such a page or pages is synonymous with the work of historians. It would give an outlet for sale of many antiques which people desire to turn in to money.

Keep the good work up, and I hope to hear from you as to what action was taken on these thoughts.

November 4, 1958
Rochester 18, N.Y.

Sincerely yours,

Chelson E. Sayer

HISTORICAL OBSERVANCES FOR 1959
Prepared by Malcom Booth

- Ogdensburg: 1809, July 4: Launching of Schooner "Experiment," first boat built in city. 1809-10: Construction of Parish mansion at Ogdensburg. 1859: Skillings & Whitney Brothers begin lumber business at Ogdensburg. 1834: Northern Light changed to Times. 1834, Feb. 4: St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society formed at Ogdensburg. 1784, Dec. 1: Birth of Smith Stilwell in Saratoga County. 1809, March 22: First Masonic meeting in Ogdensburg. 1809, Sept. 6: Masonic charter obtained. 1809, Nov. 24: Rossell grants building for school for 30 children, with Richard Hubbard as teacher. Building was previously destined to be Captain Cherry's bivouac. 1834, April 24: Trustees of academy authorized to grant licenses for ferry. 1834, May 22: Rent of ferry established at \$300 per annum, beginning June 1. 1834, Oct. 8: Taylor Lewis appointed first principal of Ogdensburg Academy. 1809, June 30, Organization of First Baptist Church. 1859, April 24: Organization of St. John the Baptist French Catholic church.
- Canton: 1859-60: St. Lawrence Mills constructed on the island. 1784, Nov. 22: Asa Conkey born in Pelham, Mass. 1859: D.N. Jones and H.L. Sackrider open hardware store. 1834, July: Luminary of the North started.
- Potsdam: 1809: Bridge built across Racquette River at Potsdam. 1809: Liberty Knowles settled at Potsdam. 1834, Nov. 11: First resident Episcopal priest, Rev. Richard Bury. 1859: Erection of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church. 1809, Feb. 9: St. Lawrence Chapter, 24, R.A.M., organized at Massena. 1809, Aug. 5: Birth of Luther S. Owen at Burlington, Vt.
- Waddington: 1809: First resident lawyer, Capt. Mathew Myers, admitted to bar. 1834: Ogdens build "quarter furnace." 1839: Incorporation of village of Waddington. 1859, Nov. 22: Creation of town of Waddington. 1859: Two-story school house built at Waddington.
- Norfolk: 1809: First settlement by Erastus Hall. 1834, April 15: Part of Stockholm annexed to town.
- Parishville: 1809: Surveyed by Joseph Crary. 1859, Sept. 4: Free-Will Baptist Church organized in southwest part of town, and church built later in year at cost of \$2,000. 1859-60: Parsonage of Methodist Church built. 1809, Aug. 9: Birth of David Daggert in Cornwall, Vt.
- Gouverneur: 1809: Joseph Bolton cleared 80 acres at Natural Dam, and Isaac Austin erects a saw-mill and grist-mill for Gouverneur Morris. 1809: First merchant, John Brown, opened store at east end of bridge. 1834, April: Gouverneur Wesleyan Seminary opened as Gouverneur High School. 1859: Baptist Church at North Gouverneur reorganized. 1809: Log schoolhouse built. Silas Brooks of Antwerp begins teaching, but becomes homesick the first week. 1859, Jan. 29: Incorporation of Gouverneur Agricultural & Mechanic Society.

Dekalb: 1809: Jonathan Haskins of Richville and Solomon Rich receive licenses for keeping taverns. 1809: Penalty of \$1 voted for allowing Canadian thistles go to seed. 1859: Construction of First Congregational Church at Richville for \$2,500. 1859: Construction of Welsh Congregational Church near Richville for \$550. 1859: Construction of Kendrew Methodist Church for \$1,000.

Morristown: 1884, April 1: Morristown Village incorporated. 1859: Building of Union Church at Brier Hill. 1859, Feb. 14: Organization of First Universalist Church at Brier Hill. Church erected for \$1,250.

Fowler: 1809: Hailesboro grist-mill carried away by flood.

Hammond: 1834, April 19: Commissioners appointed to open a road from the Clayton-Lyme town line to the Chippewa Bay-Ogdensburg road, through French Creek, Alexandria Bay, and Hammond.

Stockholm: 1809: First school district organized.

Louisville: 1809: First marriage performed in town. 1834: Grist mill erected at Chase's Mills.

Massena: 1809: Wolf bounty of \$3 voted. 1859: Massena Baptist Church built. 1834, Sept. 4: Second Congregational Church formed. 1809, April: birth of William G. Barnhart, Jr., on Barnhart Island.

Brasher: 1809, March 18: Philip Brasher acquires title to western third of town. 1859, March 7: Incorporation of Methodist Church at Brasher Iron Works, followed by construction of \$1,600 church during the year. 1834: Joseph Merrill opened store at Brasher Falls.

Lawrence: 1809: Ephraim Martin builds sawmill at Lawrenceville.

Russell: 1809, March 27: Reuben Ashman elected supervisor in special meeting to succeed Russell Attwater. 1809: \$250 raised for support of the poor. 1809: \$250 raised for support of the schools. 1809, Feb. 24: Passage of act allowing the governor to order 500 stand of arms in such place in St. Lawrence County as he should select. 1809, July 15: Organization of Russell Baptist Church.

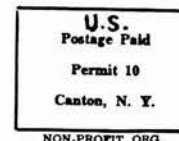
Hermon: 1809, March: Thomas Tanner settles in town. 1859: Hermon Christian Church built at Marshville. 1834, Feb. 28: Town of Depeau changed to Hermon.

Edwards: 1859, July 6: Wildwood Lodge, F. & A.M., organized.

Fine: March 28: Amasa I. Brown begins first permanent settlement.

St. Lawrence County Historical Association

P. O. Box 251
CANTON, N. Y.



T H E Q U A R T E R L Y

Published by the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

Editor - Atwood Manley, Canton, New York
Associate Editors - Nina Smithers, Bette L. Mayhew, Charles Lahey

Vol. IV, Number 2

Canton, N.Y.

April 1959

PARISHVILLE - A NORTH COUNTRY EXPERIMENT IN

HOTHOUSE SETTLEMENT

By Dr. Charles W. Lahey

Second and Last Installment

In 1812 Parish had new plans for the development of Parishville. Earlier he had maintained that the American frontiersman required only a minimum of improvements, roads, and mills, to attract him to the area. Now in 1812, after visiting the township for the first time, he projected developments in the "hothouse" tradition of Charles Williamson of the Pultney Tract. This included the construction of an entire village on the St. Regis River.

Parish had always prized this area as his most valuable purchase and his investigation in 1812 confirmed this view. The natural advantages and beauty of Parishville prompted him to exclaim that he would construct a country house or manor for himself at Allan Falls, one of the truly scenic spots of St. Lawrence County, two miles north of the village.

He agreed with Daniel Hoard that Rosseel had selected the most advantageous spot for the village at the high falls of the St. Regis River and noted that it had already become a transportation center as roads radiated out to the neighboring townships. He also sensed that the St. Lawrence Turnpike divided the township into two distinct regions which would definitely affect settlement. The St. Lawrence lowland merged gently with the Adirondack foothills in the area northwest of the turnpike while the more rugged foothills dominated the section southeast of the road. He planned to develop the northern section into an agricultural region and reserve the southern portion as a forest and hunting preserve.

Parish, torn between the grandeur of his own planning and his business acumen, decided to proceed with his plans even though Parishville was a potential war theater. American troops had to utilize the St. Lawrence Turnpike in passing from Plattsburg to Sacketts Harbor, the two main northern American bases. This in itself would cause a great deal of congestion and also invite a British invasion.

To facilitate operations he placed Daniel Hoard in complete charge of Parishville and only required him to file monthly reports of his construction disbursements and yearly reports of the land agency with Rosseel in Ogdensburg. Parish urged Hoard to start the construction work as soon as he could secure the necessary labor and materials and emphasized that Hoard should concentrate on the village projects. Once erected, he assured his agent that settlers would be attracted in great numbers.

The inexperienced Hoard struggled for the next three years constructing the village. In spite of war he miraculously secured skilled help and materials and commenced operations in the fall of 1812. He soon ran into complications when he started to haul the materials into Parishville. The supplies had to pass over the same roads utilized by American troops. The army usually respected private property but frequently "pressed" the horses and vehicles into service and then dumped the materials by the wayside. In the spring of 1813 Hoard located quantities of it along the roads but it was mid-summer before all of it was hauled to the village. The practice of "pressing" horses became so acute that Hoard suggested that they should substitute oxen for horses.