

# THE QUARTERLY

Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

April 1981



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VOL. XXVI

APRIL 1981

NO. 2

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*The Quarterly* is published in January, April, July and October each year by the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.

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Editor: Varick A. Chittenden

*This publication is made possible in part with public funds from  
the New York State Council on the Arts.*

**Cover:** A reprint of a rare sketch by Frederic Remington, known as only his second to be published, from the 1882 St. Lawrence University student yearbook. At the time, Remington was on a visit to his girl Eva Caten, and her brother, who was a member of Beta Theta Pi fraternity at St. Lawrence. This illustrates a student "field trip," a survey of the Grass River on a spring day, 1882. See other early St. Lawrence sketches beginning on page 15.

## From Smallpox to Antibiotics:

### 150 Years of Medical Practice in St. Lawrence County

by Stuart A. Winning, M.D.

*The history of modern medicine and medical practice has been remarkable and it has reached over the years into the most remote areas of America, places like our own. Our author, a physician and surgeon known to nearly everyone in our County for his distinguished career of service here, summarizes the highlights of medical history from 1800 to 1950. He also relates accounts of many contributions made locally, by individuals and institutions, to the health and comfort of our County's people.*

When one reviews the history of any particular time and place, it is helpful to indicate limits to be considered, otherwise he may find himself in the situation of the old Dutch headmaster who, when addressing a graduating class, said: "For the sake of brevity we shall begin with the Creation."

For our consideration we may appropriately begin with the year 1800 and the years immediately following, because they marked the establishment of St. Lawrence County as a political entity and also the arrival of the first physician to establish practice within its borders. Each of the three half centuries thereafter brought about such distinctive changes in medical cases as to alter the quality of life not only for the people in St. Lawrence County but for the whole world—hence the period from 1800 to 1950 provides more information than can be presented not only in one hour but actually in one week.

I realize that most people today would be interested in individual physicians whom they have known, who perhaps were family related or whose fame has been a part of a community legend. These are important to be sure but I think equally important were the kinds of medical problems with which they



*Dr. Socrates Norton Sherman, prominent pioneer Ogdensburg physician and surgeon, 1801-1873. (Photo courtesy of the author)*

were surrounded and the nature of the people who contended with them.

These people in St. Lawrence County in the years from 1800 to 1850 ranged from a few hundred in the various settlements established along various river banks which provided power for their mills to well-defined communities during the latter part of this first half century. Transportation and communication were limited to plank roads but did not deter the spread of communicable diseases from one part of the county to another. The population consisted of three main categories—native Indians of whom there were many, the French who had crossed the river from Canada, and the settlers from New

England who felt the urge to migrate because of the crowding in Massachusetts and Connecticut and those from Vermont who came here attracted by opportunities to acquire farm and forest land.

Probably the most devastating of the diseases which swept the area was small pox. It is a fact that there are certain degrees of social and regional immunities to various diseases which lessen the severity of them in epidemics, but against which the Indians had no protection. Whole tribes were literally decimated by the disease and the French and Anglo-Saxons suffered their share of casualties. The death rate was staggering. Remember that Jenner in

England had discovered the effectiveness of vaccination in 1796, only four years before the period we are reporting. It took several years not only for this information to reach our shores but several more before such practice was accepted. For more than that first half century, vaccination against small pox was accomplished by finding a portion of a scab from another vaccinated person or from the pus of an afflicted person into a portion of the skin of the one to be protected. Not infrequently other types of infection resulted from this contamination which were more detrimental than small pox.

While many of the diseases known to man at that time occasionally invaded the area, there were some that were ever present. The list is long and formidable: tuberculosis which appeared in several forms—lungs being the most common and the most fatal; bone tuberculosis which frequently involves the spine and resulted in a collapsed vertebra producing the common sight of “hunch back”; and tuberculosis of the intestinal tract, largely the result of drinking milk from tubercular cows.

One of the most ghastly contagious diseases that pervaded these early settlers was diphtheria, a disease that mainly attacked children and young people who gradually asphyxiated from the sticky membranes that closed their throats. It was not until the second half century of the period we are considering that there was any effective measure of help for these choking, dying youngsters.

It was not until the beginning of the third half century of our review that there was any known association of contamination as a cause of typhoid fever. The fact that the convenience of having the outhouse and the pump close to the home was not recognized as a danger to health until the early part of this century, nor was the possibility of contaminated food caused by the handling of food by carriers associated with typhoid fever.

Those of you whose families were among the early settlers of this county or of any New York State county for that matter, can trace your history to young fathers being left with the responsibility of caring for a family of children because of the tragic death of a young mother caused by so-called childbed fever. Remember that physicians were few, distances were great and the importance of sterility at childbirth was not known. Physicians were called upon for deliveries only when complications ensued and usually by that time the various measures of treatment had caused more harm than good. It was not until this second half century that even physicians knew to wash their hands before delivery as well as after. Neighbors became midwives by experience

rather than by training. I remember my own grandmother going out to assist in a delivery, carrying with her a flannel belly band recently ironed and two raisins to be applied to the infant's umbilicus to assure its inversion. A ruptured uterus or a non-deliverable child had but one result—death to either the mother, the child, or both.

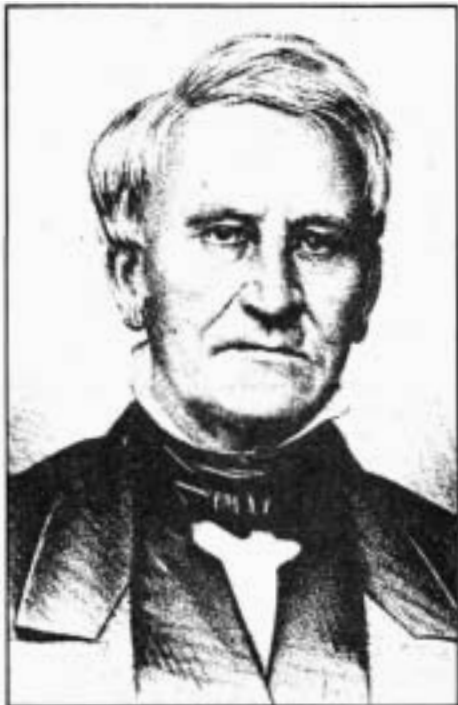
Infant and child mortality was high—very high—and the death rate of very young adults was heavy. Infants and children succumbed to diphtheria, small pox and appendicitis, which was known only as inflammation of the bowels. Infants fell victim to what was called “Cholera Infantum.” The latter of course was infantile diarrhea, resulting in dehydration and death, and usually arose from contaminated milk or other food.

What was “blood poisoning?” We know now that it was a blood stream

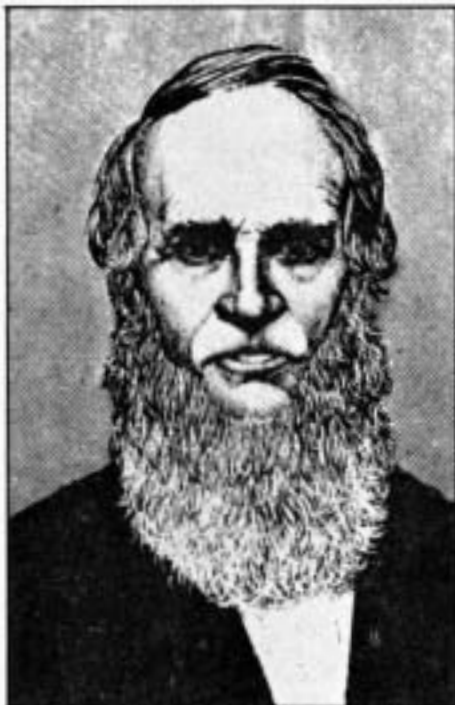
invasion caused by any organism, the most common and most lethal in one form or another of streptococcus. This could follow such common situations as “sore throat,” scarlet fever and (most frequently) accidents in which the body protection of skin had been invaded. In the primitive outdoor life of these pioneers, accidents involving lacerations and fractures were most common. Among the latter if a fractured bone protruded through the skin, amputation was the most effective preventive measure adopted to forestall a bone or blood stream infection. Tetanus or lock jaw was always a treatening possibility in these instances. It was not until 1876 that Lister in Scotland dared sterilize a protruding tibia (“shinbone”) and restore it to its normal surrounding and found it to heal without separation—a landmark in surgical progress, but not



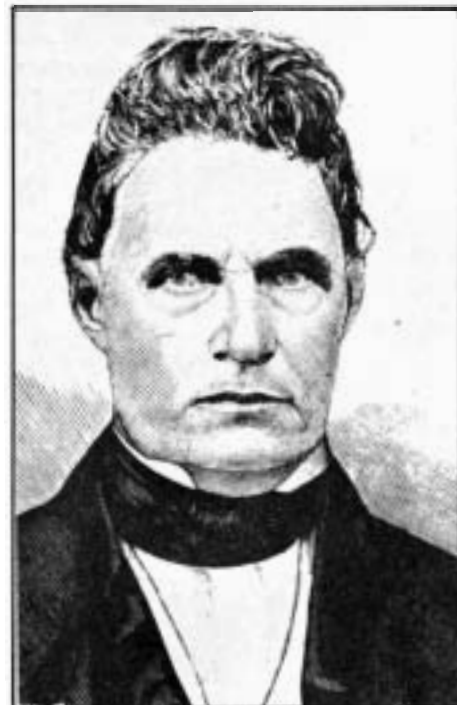
*“The Old Bullis Cottage” in Canton, on the west bank of the Grass River, known locally as the “pest house,” where people infected with highly contagious diseases were taken for quarantine. Similar buildings existed in many communities. Pencil sketch by Henry de Valcourt Kip about 1890. (Courtesy of Edward J. Blankman)*



*Dr. Francis Parker, a surgeon in the War of 1812, established his practice in Parishville in 1819. (Courtesy of the History Center Archives)*



*Dr. Darius Clark settled at Canton in 1824 and later served as an inspector of New York State prisons from 1848-54. (Courtesy of the History Center Archives)*



*Dr. William Floyd, Norfolk, practiced there, and at DeKalb and Madrid, beginning in 1829. (Courtesy of the History Center Archives)*

yet in St. Lawrence County.

A clue to this aspect of life can be gleaned by visiting the many small cemeteries that can be seen throughout the county and observe the young age at the time of death of so many of these early settlers. Among the others there were such problems as the "friend of the aged" as pneumonia was often called and then there was and always has been cancer. Cancer of the stomach, bowel, breast and uterus were not uncommon and all had the same outcome.

Of all of the conditions I have mentioned, what effective treatment was there that could be applied by the members of the medical profession who filtered into the area, usually from New England? Before 1850 and for at least a half of the next century, treatment consisted largely of herbs digested, opium poultices, plasters, leeching, bleeding, and purgations.

Surgery which was performed in a house or barn consisted largely of sewing up lacerations, probing for bullets and amputations of injured arms or legs. Certainly in this first 50 year period, anesthesia consisted usually of a bottle of whiskey and four strong men to hold the patient on the kitchen table. But in the very latter part of this period (1843-1850), three discoveries were made which changed the history of surgery and obstetrics—the three were chloroform, ether and nitrous oxide, each of which could provide anesthesia

for surgical procedures and for child-birth. These discoveries laid the ground work for many major achievements that took place during the second half century.

Before we leave the grim history of the first half century, we must not neglect or ignore the efforts that were made by the sturdy and courageous men of the medical profession who came into the area to help in coping with these problems and to alleviate disease and suffering as much as was within their capacity to provide.

Except that there may be an occasional person today who would have an interest in a particular ancestor, neither space nor interest would suggest that the biography of every physician who has practiced in St. Lawrence County be reviewed. There were some exceptions among them, however, such as Dr. Joseph Smith who was the first physician to settle in the county when—as Gates Curtis reports in his history—"the duties of the profession were of the most arduous character and the financial rewards hardly significant." Dr. Smith studied medicine in Vergennes, Vt., and graduated from Middlebury Medical School in 1802. In 1803 he moved to Lisbon from where he was called upon to attend the sick in several surrounding towns. It is said that on one occasion he walked to Canton in the night carrying a torch to attend an ill patient. In 1807 he moved to Ogdensburg at which time he

was instrumental in forming the St. Lawrence County Medical Society and became its first president.

The organization of the medical profession into societies was begun in the State of New York early in the century under a law passed for that purpose in 1806. There were not many physicians at that time in St. Lawrence County, but those who had become residents acted promptly and in October 1807 organized the St. Lawrence County Medical Society. At the first meeting the following officers were elected: President Dr. Joseph Smith, vice pres. I.W. Pier, secretary W. Noble and treasurer B. Holmes. An excellent oil portrait of Dr. Smith hangs in the library of the A. Barton Hepburn Hospital in Ogdensburg.

The records of the society from its inception until 1856 have been lost but it is known that among them was Dr. W. Noble, the first physician in Canton, where he settled in 1805 or 1806 and on whose land the house in which I live was built. Dr. Pierce Shepard settled in Potsdam in 1808. Previous to his arrival the sick had been cared for by Canton physicians. Dr. Henry Hewitt came to Potsdam in 1840. Described as progressive, self reliant and restless, he engaged not only in the practice of medicine but founded the town of Hewittsville where he built and operated a lumber mill.

Dr. Robert McChesney came to Madrid in 1810, Dr. Townsend to Gouver-

neur in 1804. The list is long and the biographies fascinating, especially in relation to the educational backgrounds of each and the extent to which their preparations varied. By the years of 1830-40, practically every community had one and frequently more than one physician. Dr. Charles Benton who settled in Oxbow was the first of four generations of physicians and the Sherman family in Heuvelton and Ogdensburg were distinguished in their field and in public education. Dr. Robert Campbell was the first physician in the town of DeKalb, being one of the party of early settlers in 1803. It is noted that nothing is known of his later life. Of Dr. Robert Burns, graduate of the Glasgow (Scotland) Medical School, it is said that he came to Brier Hill early and died in Morristown. The record goes on and on of these intrepid men who devoted their lives to the care of the sick and who worked so long with such limited knowledge and equipment. One more event occurred in the first half century—the arrival of the first dentist in St. Lawrence County, Dr. Blodgett in 1847.

The second half century brought two fundamental changes in medical care: the use of anesthesia which greatly increased the range and scope of surgical procedures and the recognition and acceptance of antiseptic and aseptic surgery and obstetrics. No longer would it be necessary to amputate arms and legs because of infection and to control bleeding with a hot iron. The American Civil War in which many from this county participated provided opportunities to physicians to become acquainted with what was developing. Pasteur in mid-century provided the basic information on which Lister could base his concept of the transmission of infection and on which Semmelweis relied, each of whom discovered the importance of washing his hands prior to an operation or a delivery. This simple act changed the whole world of medicine and its various branches. In the early stages Lister promoted the idea of antiseptics—killing organisms by the use of strong antiseptics such as carbolic acid. In Edinburgh where I had my surgical training, I have seen the operating room equipment by which phenol was sprayed into the room during an operation which has led to the repetition of a legend of irreverent students at the beginning of an operation whispering, "Now let us spray". The practice of antiseptics eventually led to that of aseptic procedures of providing sterility for all phases of an operating procedure. There were several efforts made to sterilize surgeon's hands without success until Halstead of Johns Hopkins seized upon the idea of boiling gloves customarily worn by undertakers for their own protection. The story of the introduction of anes-



*Early view of the Administration Building, St. Lawrence State Hospital [Psychiatric Center], Ogdensburg. (Courtesy of the History Center Archives.)*

thesia and of the struggle of Semmelweis in Budapest and of the observations of Oliver Wendell Holmes, poet and professor of obstetrics at Harvard, in their effort to reduce the mortality in obstetrics is far more exciting than any television thriller you can find.

You may well wonder what all of this has to do with the history of medicine in St. Lawrence County. It has everything to do with it because out of these developments the quality and quantity of medical care advanced for the benefit of the residents of this area. In the early 1890's one of the early women physicians came home to Canton. Dr. Lucia Heaton added more to the community than the practice of medicine.

In 1889 another milestone appeared in surgical progress in the treatment of what had been referred to as inflammation of the bowels, usually accompanied by a large abdominal abscess or more often generalized peritonitis and frequently death. Dr. John B. Murphy in Chicago believed that if one recognized this condition in its beginning and would remove the appendix, these dire results would be avoided. Following the outcome of having operated on about one hundred cases with a very much reduced death rate as compared with the previous treatment of watching and waiting, he felt justified in urging everyone to pursue such a course. He believed the public should be educated to act promptly should the characteristic symptoms develop.

These developments were demanding two things, physicians trained and qualified to take advantage of these achievements and places where such work could be done. Until well into the third half century (1910), the level of medical education varied a great deal

and often left much to be desired. There were the old and well established schools that graduated physicians with maximum training for their day but there were a great many more small schools organized by a few physicians, who gave lectures and whose program of education consisted largely of apprenticeship and one year of lectures. Obviously these latter were not able to take advantage of the great steps forward that could be available to the rural population of an area like our own.

There was another aspect of medical education whose reflection appeared in St. Lawrence County, a new theory of treatment known as Homeopathy. There was a small number of graduates of Hankiman school in Philadelphia and the Flower Hospital Medical School who came to the area and practiced the new methods. In 1871 the St. Lawrence County Homeopathic Medical society was organized. Within my own acquaintance were two highly respected and revered graduates of the latter school—Dr. Frank Williams who practiced for more than 50 years in Canton and Dr. Melvin Stearns in Ogdensburg, who died last summer at the age of 96. Harmony did not always prevail between the two medical societies, but as years passed their differences faded away and their methods became the same.

The first community effort to provide better care for sick people in Northern New York came about as a result of the state legislature being made aware of the overcrowding and unbelievable conditions in what was referred to as "insane asylums" throughout the state of New York. In most communities persons who became mentally deranged were sent to the poor house and, if completely incapable of living among other people,

were kept locked up, usually in jail. General Newton Martin Curtis of Civil War fame, later an assemblyman for this area, promoted the idea in the legislature that a state institution for the care of the mentally ill be established in St. Lawrence County. Plattsburgh tried hard but St. Lawrence won in 1887. The plan of construction differed greatly from the four and five story buildings usually provided for such institutions. It consisted of several two story buildings, referred to as the cottage plan, and was situated on the St. Lawrence River below Ogdensburg. The original plan would comprise nineteen buildings, including service buildings and accommodations for an assistant physician, a supervisor, 314 patients and forty attendants.

One of the attractions offered follows: "Friends from abroad and pleasure seekers who may visit Ogdensburg with a view of going to asylum grounds can take the overland route, either by stage, by street car or by private conveyance, or may take the little steamer which in the summer season plies between the city and the grounds. By either conveyance the pleasure seeker may take an airing and visit one of the most beautiful and comfortable hospitals to be found in the United States or even in the world."

This hospital met a tremendous need for the area and gave relief to the over crowded institutions in other parts of the state. Its excellent care continued during periods of expansion so that by 1950 it had met its full capacity of at least 2,400 patients. Its facilities were capable of providing medical and surgical care for its patients.

This second half century brought with it, of course, a whole new generation of physicians all of whom were pretty much limited to the villages in which they lived and limited by the constraints of medical knowledge. Some however

did travel to educational centers and proudly brought back to their colleagues such new information as was available. Journals were scarce and text books limited.

A great granddaughter of Dr. Benjamin Hicks of Morley and Madrid has told me of a breast operation he performed on his own daughter which necessitated the invention of nursing bottles for the use of her baby in the 1850's. There is a world of such anecdotes related to medical problems, some of which I encountered during my years as a student at St. Lawrence University during the 1920's and later during years of practice in the county.

As medical progress became more and more apparent, the need for some type of hospital facility became evident and the first effort to meet it was the establishment in 1885 of the Ogdensburg City Hospital and Orphan Asylum, through the efforts of Bishop Wadhams. It was located in the old Ford Mansion, which had been built for Nathan Ford in 1805. It was moved across King Street into a new building provided through efforts of George Hall and others—\$30,000 in 1902—and was there known as the Ogdensburg City Hospital until 1918. Its nursing school graduated its first class in 1905.

A. Barton Hepburn, a native of Colton, gave more than \$1,237,500 to the hospital so that it could be expanded and could serve the whole of the North Country. It was named for him in 1918. The Nurses Home was built in 1921 as a result of a gift from Mr. Hepburn and the main hospital building was expanded with a new wing in 1932.

The expanding and improving facilities for better medical care of the people of the North Country came about because of the presence and the influence of a young surgeon named Grant Madill who had appeared on the scene in

1888 and who was dominant in the medical world of the area for more than half a century. Physically, professionally and intellectually monumental, his influence extended considerably beyond these borders as evidenced by his involvement in professional organizations such as the New York State Medical Society of which he was president, the American College of Surgeons of which he was a regent. He was also president or trustee of many local institutions, widely known and respected for the high professional standards he maintained.

Dr. Madill's parents lived in Lisbon, migrated to California in the gold rush where he was born in 1864; at five months of age he returned with his family to Lisbon. Educated in Lisbon schools and Ogdensburg Free Academy to which he usually walked (from Lisbon) each day, he later graduated from Bellevue Medical School in New York, trained at Presbyterian Hospital and came to Ogdensburg in 1888.

Many other physicians were attracted to the area because of the facilities at Ogdensburg, unique for this type of remote rural area. Specialists began to appear such as Dr. George Bell, Dr. Cattley, Stearns, and three generations of Bentons, Dr. Stacy, a graduate of Johns Hopkins in 1906, came as an assistant to Dr. Madill, whose discipline was difficult to swallow.

The year 1900 ushered in the third century of our story and the beginning of what has rightly been regarded as the golden age of medicine. More fundamental progress was made in these 50 years than had been made in the previous 5,000 years. The number of beneficial discoveries are almost without end but there are five that have occurred in this century that make it possible for the medical profession to justifiably claim for the first time in its history to be able to prevent disease or to successfully treat it once it actually exists. Previously so-called medical ailments were treated symptomatically, hoping the bodies' own powers would overcome illnesses. But a new day was arriving.

Typhoid fever was being eradicated through improved sanitation in homes and in communities. This was a big step and along with these measures in 1929 the pasteurization of milk and the inspection of dairy herds made great strides against milk-borne tuberculosis, brucellosis and undulant fever. Some of you can remember as I do the number of cattle which had to be destroyed in this county because of the detection of these infections. What a change this made in the health and lives of thousands of people, particularly children.

In the one community hospital in the county to which I have referred, life was also changing by having available three more fundamental innovations. The

*City Hospital, Ogdensburg, N. Y.*

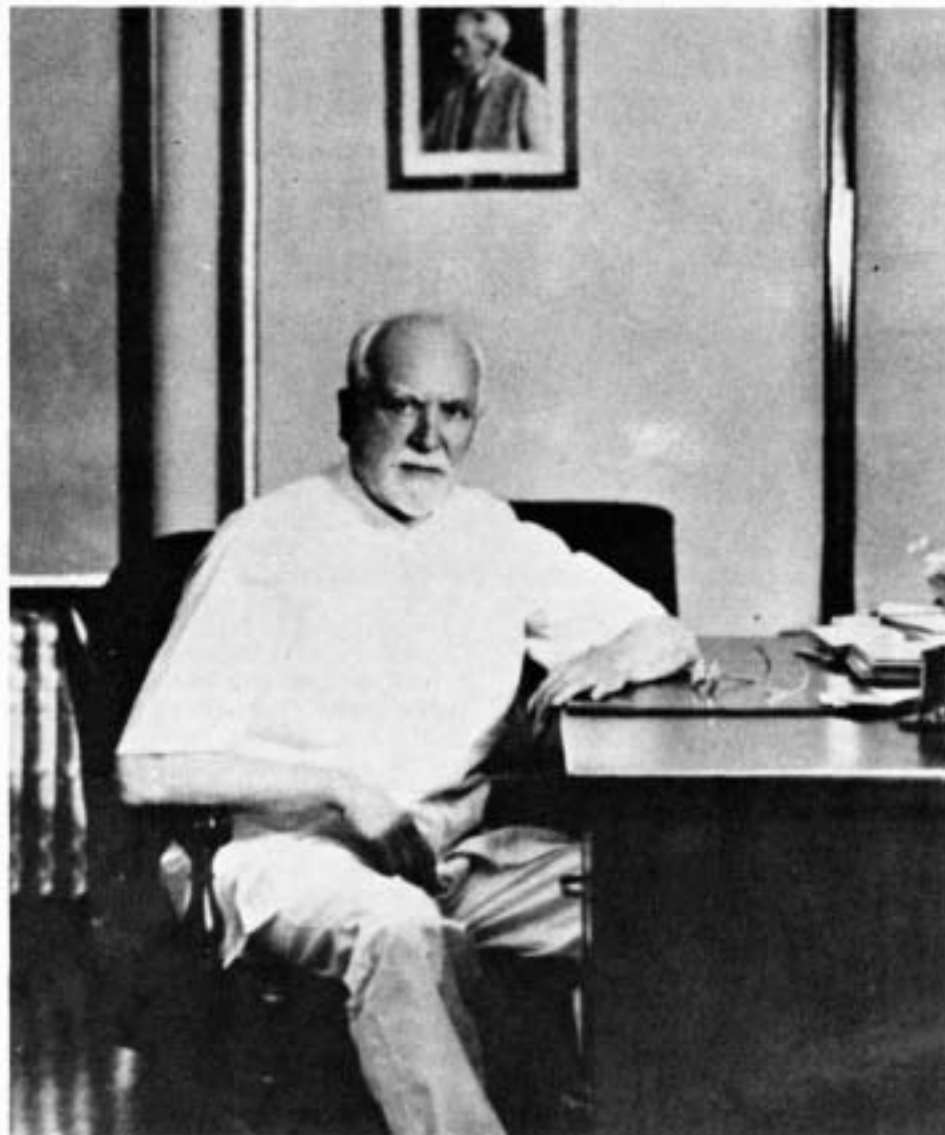


*Early view of the Ogdensburg City Hospital, before it became the A. Barton Hepburn Hospital, with its several additions. (Courtesy of the History Center Archives)*

first was being able to use blood for transfusion—transfusion to save lives in the event of hemorrhage due to many causes, to extend the range of surgery by providing patient support. For many years, efforts had been made to introduce the blood of one person into another, sometimes with great benefit but all too often with fatal outcome. No one knew why. Blood was blood, what was wrong. Karl Landsterner, a Vienna-born Jew, had been trained in the rigid authoritarian, anti-Semitic tradition of German medicine. In 1900 as a young man of 32, he had discovered the Human Blood groups, a discovery which for the first time made possible safe transfusion of human blood. You are familiar with its widespread use and life sustaining power and many of us have made our contribution of a pint now and then to keep the remarkable blood program functioning in St. Lawrence County. The methods have changed from the time when as a young intern I sat at the bedside of a patient or operating table with the donor lying along side and passing syringe-fuls of blood from the donor to the patient. Now we send it to Syracuse or to the battle fields.

I remember also during my first semester in medical school the excitement and skepticism in 1922 which accompanied the announcement of the discovery of insulin, a second major development. No longer would children in St. Lawrence County need to die of starvation and infection at age 11-12-13 because of diabetes. The third great adjustment to hospital care was the introduction of X-ray. Its use began early in the century in fairly primitive form and was used primarily for the detection and evaluation of fractures. No one knew the extent of its value (nor of its dangers). The latter became apparent when physician's fingers began to drop off from exposure to X-ray and patients developed deep unhealed ulcers, especially on their faces, after X-ray treatment of skin rashes. I have amputated the fingers of several old physicians who manipulated fractures under X-ray visibility without any protection.

This period 1900-50 was marked by several events which affected medicine in the area—two world wars, the influenza epidemic in 1918-19 in which nearly 300,000 people died in the United States and many hundreds died in St. Lawrence County, and the migration of large numbers of physicians from Central Europe—Germany, Austria and Hungary—from 1935 until 1942-3. During World War I a few physicians in the area volunteered (among whom was Dr. Madill), but in World War II a large proportion of physicians enlisted, leaving many of the communities short handed. Tuberculosis had become so



*Dr. Grant C. Madill of Ogdensburg. (Photo courtesy of the author)*

prevalent that New York State required the establishment of TB sanatoriums in each county in the state. St. Johns in Ogdensburg was one of them.

Each of these episodes would warrant extended discussion but time does not permit identification or description of the influential activities in medicine of a great many outstanding persons who have faithfully served the people of the North Country. Three generations of Drury's in Gouverneur, Williams, Andrews and Laidlaw and Sanford in Canton, to name some. The State Hospital had its share of eminent directors—Taddiken, Hutchins and Pritchard.

Communities of increasing population and their physicians became aware of the limitation of having but one hospital in the area and several small hospitals were established, usually in converted homes such as the Van Duzee Hospital in Gouverneur in 1929 and a similar one in Canton in late 1939-40. A hospital was built in Potsdam in 1931, but it had two predecessors in homes. Drs. Thomas

Watkins and William Carson were early staff members there. The concept of organizing a hospital in Potsdam was first realized on June 14, 1920 when Henry P. Foster bequeathed \$50,000 for the establishment of the Potsdam Hospital (incorporated on January 10, 1922). A legacy left by Gilbert French was utilized for the establishment of the Potsdam General Hospital (incorporated on October 12, 1920). The two organizations subsequently merged to form the Potsdam Hospital on November 10, 1923.

In July of 1924, Mr. John L. Brown offered the use of his house, lot, and premises located at the corner of Waverly and Cottage Streets, for hospital purposes for a period of five years. This temporary facility admitted its first patient on March 13, 1925. Mr. Brown indicated to the board his approval of the hospital and its services and eventually willed the house and property for hospital purposes indefinitely.

In 1928, Mrs. Edwin A. Merritt, Jr.





*St. John's Hospital, 1900-1955, Ogdensburg, established as a tuberculosis care facility. (Courtesy of the North Country Research Center)*

and her daughter Mrs. Stanly H. Sisson donated nearly four acres of land on the corner of Leroy and Cottage Streets, the hospital's present location.

In 1929, a campaign was organized to raise funds for a new 50 bed hospital building to be erected on the recently donated land. The building was completed in 1932, admitting its first patient on October 17.

As I approach my terminus in this discussion of 1950, there was a surge of interest on the part of the federal government to support the construction of hospitals all over the country. This was implemented by the Hill-Burton Fund which allotted money to each state for distribution to communities which qualified by demonstrating need and by a willingness to provide one half of the cost. Mr. Edward John Noble, a native of Gouverneur, was instrumental in the

construction of hospitals in Canton, Gouverneur and Alexandria Bay in 1949-50 after that incentive.

The outstanding achievement in medicine in the first half of the twentieth century has been the discovery and use of antibiotics. It is hardly possible to comprehend the change and the benefit that has resulted from their use.

Sulfa drugs were produced in the mid 30's, followed by the discovery of penicillin by Dr. Fleming in England in 1940. It was important to determine their use and their limitations but, within the limits of my own fifty years of involvement, I can only measure how things are now with how they were when I left Canton to enter medical school and during the first decades of my practice. I think of the people with peritonitis who died from overwhelming infection; of the larger number who succumbed to

pneumonia; of hospitals having several children each with emphysema following pneumonia and from whom sections of ribs had to be removed to introduce tubes for draining pus; of adults from whose chests quarts of pus would be withdrawn; of the number of mastoid operations that followed from ear infections; of the deaths from meningitis; of bone infections requiring extensive operations; and of operations that could not be done because of the danger of infection. The list goes on and on of things that no longer exist. Vitamins were discovered while I was in school and have surely become a part of our understanding of how life goes on.

It is so difficult to crowd the history of one hundred fifty years into one presentation that many incidents of great interest have been passed over. But perhaps enough of it has been recalled to make each of us tremendously grateful to those who worked so hard and who laid the groundwork for the excellence of the medical care that is available to all of our North Country people.

You are familiar enough with the history from 1950 to the present to enjoy living in 1980 with great confidence, security and gratitude. That story is waiting to be written.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### About the Author

Dr. Stuart Winning, Chief of Surgery at A. Barton Hepburn Hospital from 1950 to 1969, is a graduate of St. Lawrence University and the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical School and a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. He is a former president of the St. Lawrence County Medical Society.



## Dr. Kerr of Hammond: A Poor Country Bonesetter

by Hans Zinsser

*In 1940 Hans Zinsser wrote a biography of "R.S.," a New York City physician of considerable renown, which he titled As I Remember Him. Phyllis Forbes Clark, a founding member of SLCHA, has provided The Quarterly with an excerpt from the book on Dr. R.G. Kerr (as R.S. remembered him) of the Chippewa Bay area in Hammond. It tells of the remarkable skill and dedication of a simple country doctor that only another doctor could write.*

Early in my medical career I developed a deep and lasting admiration for the old-fashioned, self-reliant country practitioner, the "horse and buggy doctor" so sympathetically described in the recent book by Dr. Hertzler. While a medical student in New York, I was accustomed to recuperate from strenu-

ous days and nights under a lamp by spending occasional week ends on my father's farm in Westchester County. I slept in a cold house, with a wood stove in my bedroom, stoked till the lid glowed red, with my collie dog keeping my feet warm. All day and into the night I would ride the horses—each one in turn—across

country over the snow-covered hills. Those were unforgettably lovely vacations. The utter loneliness of the big house (the farmer lived at the other end of a beech wood), the nights silent except for the cracking of the frozen branches

*(continued on page 23)*

# Salt Pork, Rizz Biscuits . . . and Other Common North Country Food Traditions

by James Davey

*Common daily food of farm and working families is rarely the subject of cookbooks or of food magazines because it seems so ordinary and is so taken for granted. The author here discusses many food traditions common in old North Country homes after he interviewed his grandmother, Myrtle Davey of Raymondville, about food at home long before the days of instant breakfasts and T.V. dinners.*

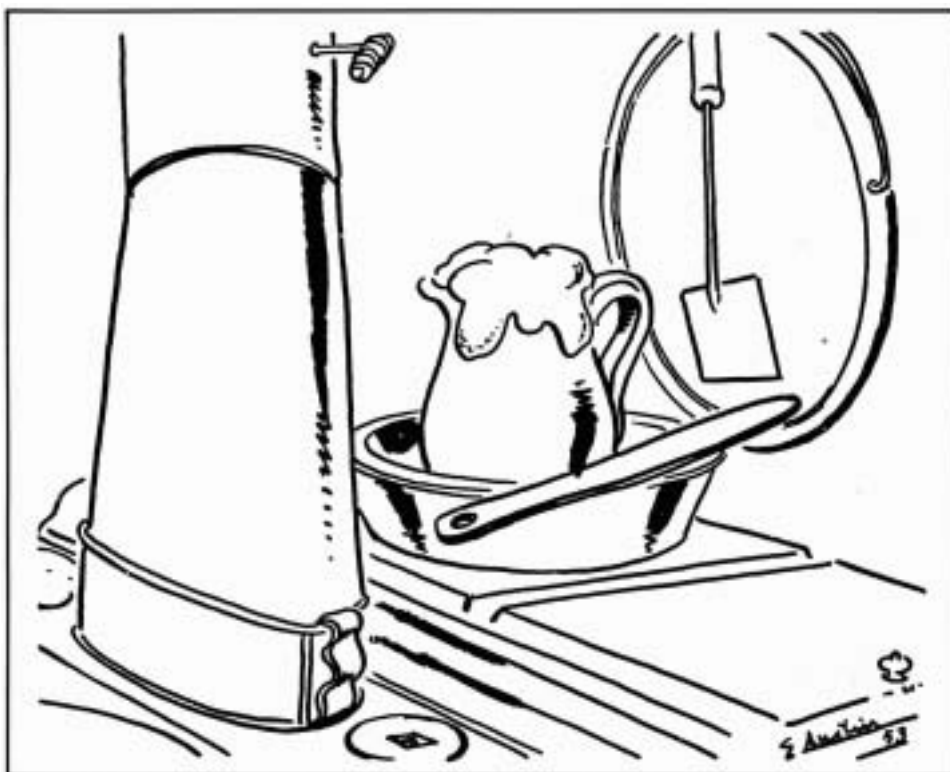
The start of every day on the farm usually began before sunrise. Lighting the fire was the first job for the morning. Men of the house would get up to gather kindling wood that they had brought in the house the previous night, start the fire, and then they would go out the door to tend to milking the cows and other chores around the farm.

Just after the men went out to do the chores, the women of the house would get up to start one of the most important events of the day, breakfast. After three or four hours of working at the chores, the men most inevitably would return to the house with a big appetite and normally were accommodated by a good meal. Gram called the meal a typical "country breakfast." One common food item included in most meals, especially breakfast, was warmed-up potatoes. Another interesting food item was fried mush. Mush is short for cornmeal mush. Mush was initially prepared hot the previous night, poured into a shallow cakepan and allowed to sit overnight. When the cold mush was prepared for breakfast, it was cut into block sections and fried in grease or butter.

Fried mush was commonly served with eggs. It was unusual to have a farm without at least a few chickens. Some farms raised geese whose eggs are much larger than chickens' eggs.

Other common breakfast foods were: pancakes, salt-pork, and hot breads. Because the men would be doing chores for as long as four hours, the women had plenty of preparation time and often made hot breads to include in the breakfast.

Making bread was a common task at the farm. Several types of bread were made including lazy bread, steamed bread, ginger bread, brown bread, white bread, zucchini bread, and banana bread. Lazy bread was made with biscuit batter spread thinly in a cakepan, baked, and then cut into blocks. Because lazy bread was the fastest and easiest bread to prepare, it was often served as a snack. Steamed bread was made by placing the bread dough in cans, then placing the cans into kettles of water (being careful not to let the water



*Batter for buckwheat pancakes.* (From *The Golden Age of Homespun* by Jared Van Wagenen, Jr., courtesy of the New York State Historical Association)

level exceed the lip of the can), then finally placing the kettles on the back portion of the cookstove, allowing the water to steam-cook the dough. Making steamed bread was an all-day process and consequently the job was generally unattended. This type of cooking humidified and scented the air, giving the house a "homey" atmosphere. Naturally, the colder months were more suitable for making steamed bread because of the consistent use of the cookstove as a source of heat. White yeast bread was the favored bread. From the dough of the white bread, "rizz" biscuits and turtles were made. Rizz biscuits were simply baked, roll-formed, bread dough. Turtles were flattened bread dough, deep-fried in lard to become delicious, puffy, golden brown "goodies". The remaining types of bread—ginger, zucchini, and banana—were more cake than bread and were served as desserts.

Of course, with all of these breads, butter was generously used.

Dairy products were very important to the farm. Milk was a source of food for the farm animals as well as the family members. Dairy products produced on the farm were cottage cheese, cream, sour milk, sour cream, and milk. Butter was made with the use of an apparatus called a butter churn. Making butter was usually an every-other-day task for the housewife or some other female member of the family. To make butter the housewife would put slightly soured cream into the churn, place the mixing part of the churn (dasher) into the barrel, sealing the top of the churn. She would continue by sitting comfortably and singing as she pumped the dasher. A tune commonly sung would go something like this: "come butter, come butter, come butter, come." Sometimes the housewife would also have a baby in

her arm as she pumped the dasher. So in this case she would sing the baby to sleep as well as cut down on the tediousness of the job. When the cream in the churn reached a desired viscosity, salt was added as a final touch.

Cottage cheese had a variety of names, some of which were farmers' cheese, Dutch cheese, and pot cheese. Cottage cheese was made by cooking sour milk at a low temperature until the curds came to the top of the liquid. The final stage would be to strain and salt the curds.

Of course, milk was one of the most common beverages and was normally served at every meal. Other beverages served on the farm were coffee, tea, burnt bread tea, cider, apple jack, cocoa, and lemonade. Coffee and tea were always considered adult beverages, however, children would sometimes have a weak concentration.

A favorite drink for the children was called burnt bread tea; which is boiling water poured on top of burnt toast with cream and sugar added. Gram said, "the children would call it coffee because burnt bread tea had such a dark color.

When autumn came around and apples were harvested, apple cider was the common drink. If cider was left to age, it would become a slightly alcoholic drink called apple jack. Gram has told me that occasionally her father would have a group of men come to the house to "talk politics". At these meetings Gram's father would always impress the men with some special treat. On one particular occasion, Gram's father was going to serve his favorite batch of apple jack (which he had saved for a special occasion). To Gram's father's surprise, the men started choking. Bewildered as he was, Gram's father took a drink only to find out that the apple jack had turned to vinegar. Gram said, "All the men started laughing. Daddy was so embarrassed he didn't know what to do."

If a person wanted to turn cider into vinegar faster than the natural aging process, an ingredient called "vinegar mother" was added to the cider. Vinegar mother was a greenish color and had a slimy texture.

There were usually quite a few "get togethers" in Gram's community. One of the most popular community affairs was the church supper. In the event of a church supper everyone involved would bring his or her own dish of food and place it on a long table. When people were ready to eat they paid a penny or nickle for each dish they helped themselves to. The most common name for this type of affair was a penny supper.

There were a few special occasions for the children of the community, one of which was the taffy pull, when a certain family would invite neighboring children to come to the house to assist in the making of taffy. The ingredients of the

taffy followed a 1:2:3 ratio, one part vinegar, two parts sugar, and three parts water. The ingredients would then be boiled until a drop of the pre-taffy would form a ball when dropped into a glass of cold water. When this stage was complete, after cooling down, the clear colored pre-taffy would be divided among the children. From this stage on is when the children had fun. The children would stretch, pull, yank, toss, and handle the pre-taffy until the clear color turned white. Then the taffy was made, and the head of the household usually had quite a mess to clean up.

Another treat for the children of the community was maple sugar on snow. Every year, close to the end of sugaring season, the men who were sugaring usually would have a party for the children who helped them gather wood. First the children would gather snow, which sometimes was hard to find. The children often would resort to going into the woods to get the snow. Once the snow was packed on the ground, boiling maple syrup would be poured on top of the snow. Then each child would place a fork at the edge of the cooling syrup, spin the fork, and pick up slabs of semi-hard syrup. Gram said, "The kids would be happy and content all day, carrying around with them a fork of hard maple sugar wherever they went.

An event that was more family oriented was the making of popcorn on Sunday nights. The popcorn was stored on the cob in the attic of the house. The children would have to go up in the attic and shell a few ears of corn in order to have popcorn.

Of course, every holiday was a special family celebration. Gram remembers a common dessert served at nearly every holiday celebration; it was called "suet pudding". Gram says, "I guess you would call it a cheap fruit cake now." Suet pudding consists of plums, raisins, dried fruits, and brown bread dough. These ingredients were then steam-cooked until it was done. Gram put together a song that she sings about the renowned turkey of Thanksgiving. The song goes like this:

*Thanksgiving turkey so big and so grand. He strutted and strutted all over the land. He said, "Look at me, I'm the grandest of birds." But Daddy stood by and he overheard. And when he stepped out with his ax in his hands, he said, "Mr. Turkey, you're ever so grand, but tomorrow you'll be on our table at noon, and we'll all eat a piece of you very soon. Your drumsticks will jingle, your bones crack and crinkle, when we get through with you."*

There were several types of preservation in the past. Among these different types were canning, salting, smoking, and freezing. The process of canning usually involved fruits, berries, and

vegetables. Jams and jellies were often made and canned from the fruits and berries. When canning jams and jellies, currants were added to enhance the preserving attributes. Making and canning jams and jellies was a time consuming and tedious job. Some of the fruits and berries used for jams and jellies were apples, peaches, black berries, blueberries, raspberries, and grapes.

When canning vegetables, an ingredient called brine was added to enhance the preserving attributes. Brine was a combination of horseradish leaves and a byproduct of green grapes.

Another way of storing vegetables (usually root vegetables) was to keep them in a cool, dry place; this would normally be a cellar bin. Some vegetables stored in the cellar were potatoes, squash, and cabbage.

Meats were preserved a variety of ways but generally if there was to be a slaughter, it would take place in the colder months of the year when the meat could be frozen immediately. Gram said, "The cold weather months were handy times."

When an animal was butchered, the cuts of meat would be hung up outside somewhere where the stray dogs couldn't reach it. When the meat was frozen solid, it would be wrapped in newspaper and buried deep in the oats.

Sausage was preserved in a way of its own. First a layer of fat was placed in the bottom of a large crock. Then a layer of sausage would be placed on top of the fat. Again a layer of fat would be placed on top of the second layer of sausage, following this same procedure until the crock was filled. The full crock would then be placed in a cool, dry place.

Meat was also smoked. The first step in the process of smoking meat would have been to salt it. Salting meat would draw out some of the moisture allowing the meat to become crusted and firm when cooked. The second step would be to start a fire in the smokehouse. The fuel burned in the fire would be either hickory, apple, or corncobs. The meat would be placed in the smokehouse and allowed to cook for as long as four days. When the meat was done it would have about a quarter of an inch of crust as an outer layer. The crust of the meat was a favorite treat for the children.

These were some of the many food traditions commonly found in a North Country farm family until a few years ago. Many, like my grandmother, probably remember them well.

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#### About the Author

James Davey was a student in the American Folklore course at Canton ATC when he prepared this study; he, too, is a native of Raymondville.



The "Busy Corner" in Oswegatchie. (Photo courtesy of the author)

## A Guided Tour of Early Oswegatchie

by Richard F. Seifert, Jr.

*Tucked away in the northern Adirondacks are many tiny communities settled in the nineteenth century along railroad tracks or near mining or lumbering operations. Such a town was Middle Oswegatchie which still maintains a sense of community and pride in its past. The author is a descendant of the Humbles, early residents of the area.*

In the year 1900, Harry and Maude Humble moved to the Aldrich area from Canada. Aldrich, though small at this time, was fairly well settled. Upon arrival, the Humbles set up a small general-purpose store in which they sold clothing, hardware, foodstuffs, etc.

In Aldrich, at this time, the main business was the sawmill, owned and set up by the Rich Lumber Company. There were approximately twelve small company houses to accommodate the mill workers. From the sawmill there ran a small railroad to Streeter Lake, used to transport the logs from the logging jobs to the mill. This rail was a spur from the main one that ran between Carthage and Newton Falls.

The only other dwellings in Aldrich at this time were five or six privately owned houses. True, these houses were little more than small shacks, but they were the homes of several families.

A short distance from Aldrich is Middle Oswegatchie, beginning at the

Little River and extending up the hills to just beyond the railroad tracks.

At the foot of the first hill on the far side of the river stood an old sawmill, powered by a dam in the river. On the near side of the river stood a grist mill, also powered by the dam. These two businesses were owned by Claude Colton. By 1952 the wood flume in the dam had rotted out and the system was replaced by an electrically powered one.

After ascending the first steep hill, the road gradually slopes downward. At the bottom of this gradual slope, there begins another steep hill, at the foot of which now stands the Town of Fine Highway Barn.

Up from the Town Barn and on the other side of the road is a big old gray house. This building was once a general store owned and operated by Tom Scruten.

Up the hill a little more, on the same side of the road, there stands another big old house—this one green. This building

used to be a small library run by the Brown sisters. It remained a library through the years until 1918, at which time it was converted into the post office. This building housed the post office for fourteen years, until 1932. During this time, Maude Humble was the postmistress. After the post office was moved elsewhere, the building became the private residence of the Humble family. To this day, it is owned by a member of the Humble family.

Just above this house is an empty lot, which at one time held an old blacksmith shop. The smith would shoe horses and do general iron-working jobs. To this day, one can dig up corroded, rusty spikes and an occasional horseshoe or two. This building burned in or around the year 1922.

Up the hill a little farther, just before the railroad tracks, on the left, there stands a very old, run-down, gray house. This house served a double purpose. It was owned by Harry Humble where on



*Harry Humble, early storeowner in Oswegatchie. (Photo courtesy of the author)*



*Maude Landon Humble, former postmistress of Oswegatchie. (Photo courtesy of the author)*

the first floor he had a store and his living quarters. The second floor served as the Odd Fellows Hall. They rented it from Mr. Humble for dances and meetings.

Just across the road from this house there is a dirt road. This looked quite different from the way it does now. It used to be a rather busy, prosperous street. The first building on the left was the old railroad depot. This was about 150 feet long and was right up next to the tracks. It had wide, opening doors on both sides to load and unload goods. The boxcars would be pulled up next to one of the doors. Then a little board ramp would be put down to cover the space between the train and the depot. This way the goods and materials could be loaded and unloaded with ease.

Although not in this specific order, the following are some of the buildings and businesses which were on this street. There was a small garage, owned and

operated by Elton Scruten where he repaired automobiles and sold Cleveland's, a make a automobile back then.

Also on this road there was a big, three-story house. On the first floor was a general store. On the second floor were the living quarters of John Irving and his family. On the third floor there was a hall used as a meeting place for different clubs, such as the Rebecca's.

On this road also there was a small bungalow which was inhabited by another of the Irving family. There were also other privately owned buildings on this road.

The railroad station in Oswegatchie was operated by Howard Weigel from 1917 until 1953; when it was discontinued. It was at this time, or shortly after, purchased by Jim King. He bought only the building, however, so he had to move it to another location. He moved it to the other side of the dirt road, where it stood until it burned. The

burned-out remains can still be seen.

Just above the tracks and off to the left, there is an empty lot which used to contain the building was used to house railroad workers and various officials of the railroad.

Above this empty lot there is a small, brown house. This house, or a building which was on the same lot, used to be the Oswegatchie House, a big 40-room hotel. Just behind the hotel there stood an old ice-house. The men would go to the lake, cut blocks of ice, and store them here in sawdust.

This has been a guided tour of the early Oswegatchie area, up in the Adirondacks, through the eyes of a modern observer. What to many was only a stop twice a day on the little railway from Newton Falls to Carthage (and back) was and is home to a few stalwart families, in this village in the woods.

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#### About the Author

Richard F. Seifert, Jr. is a student at Clifton-Fine Central School and a descendant of early Oswegatchie families.

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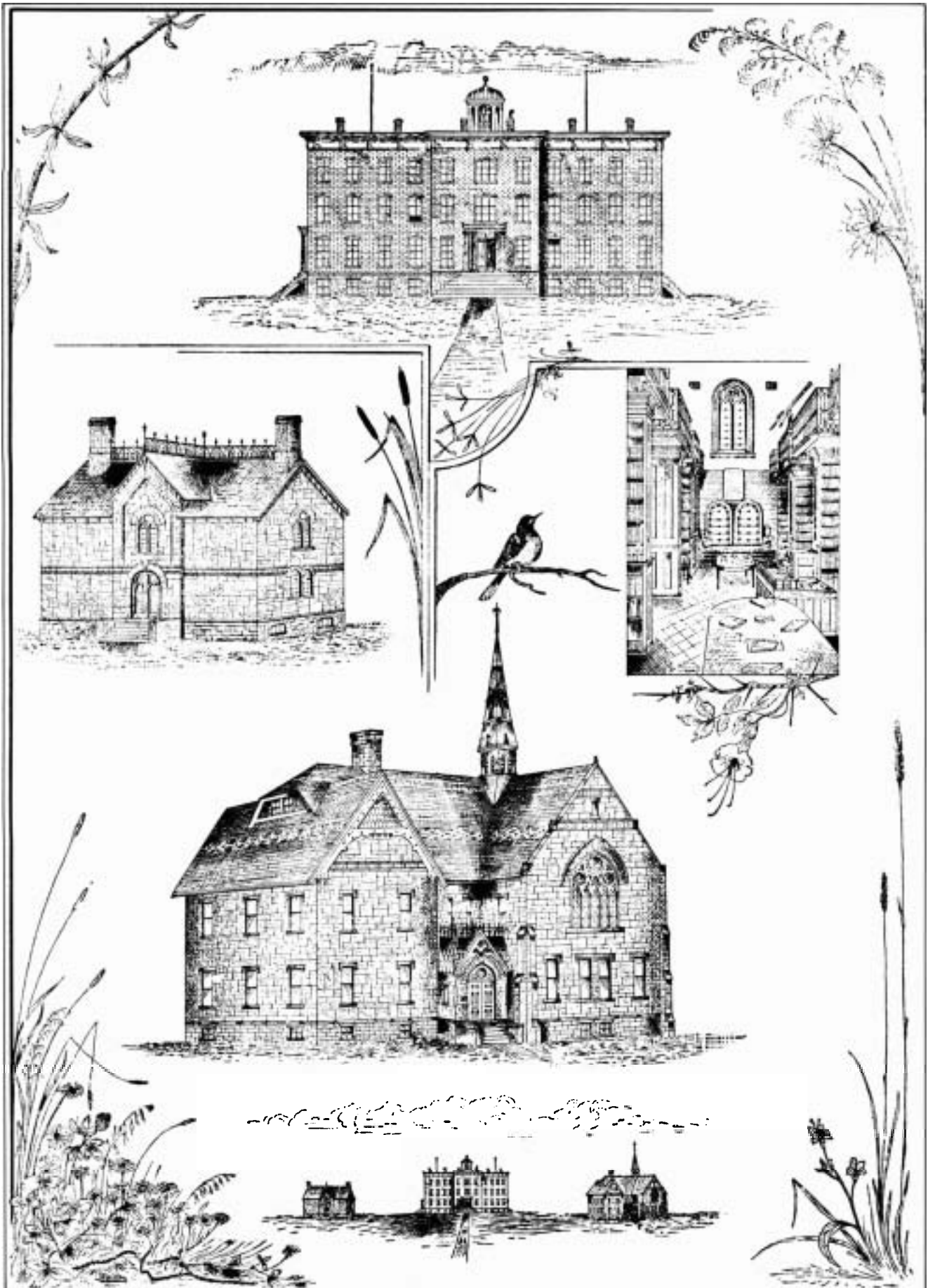
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*Former Oswegatchie post office. (Photo courtesy of the author)*



*Richardson Hall, Herring Library (exterior and interior), and Fisher Hall, the home of the Theological School, St. Lawrence University, 1882.*



AN INDIAN WRESTLE



BETA MUSICAL QUINTETTE

## A Tribute to Old St. Lawrence

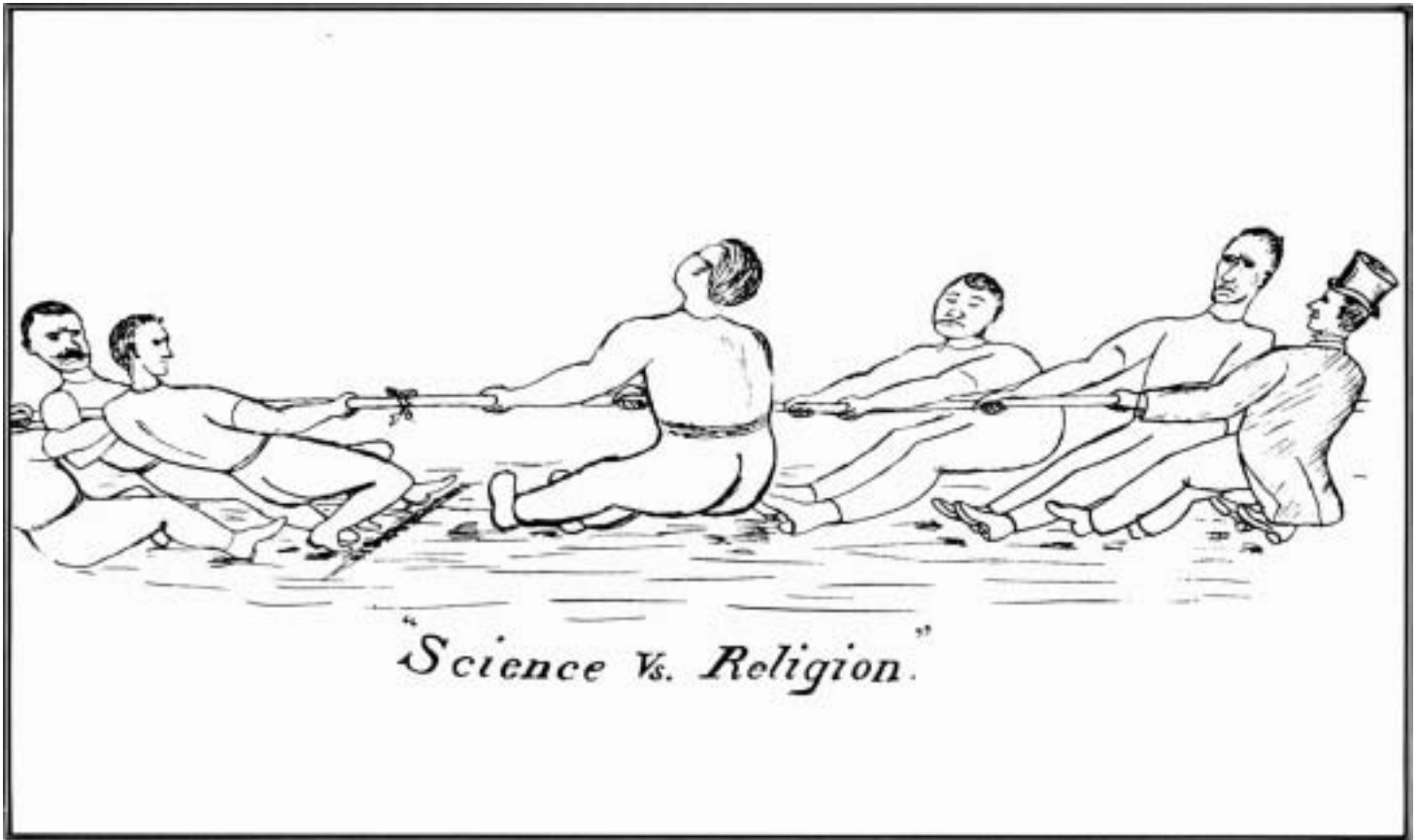
*St. Lawrence University observes its one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary in 1981. As a tribute to the University and its contributions to the County, The Quarterly here includes some rare early sketches, published in the first and second student yearbooks, in 1880 and 1882. The Gridiron, as the yearbook has been titled since the beginning, is so called to honor the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence in A.D. 258, when he was burned to death on a gridiron. In a more humorous view, the first editors explained the name as "emblematical of the tortures they have undergone stewing and frying their brains" in study and work. These sketches, done by students, represent some of the early student activities and pranks. Some things never change! Materials are provided courtesy of Edward J. Blankman and the St. Lawrence University Archives.*



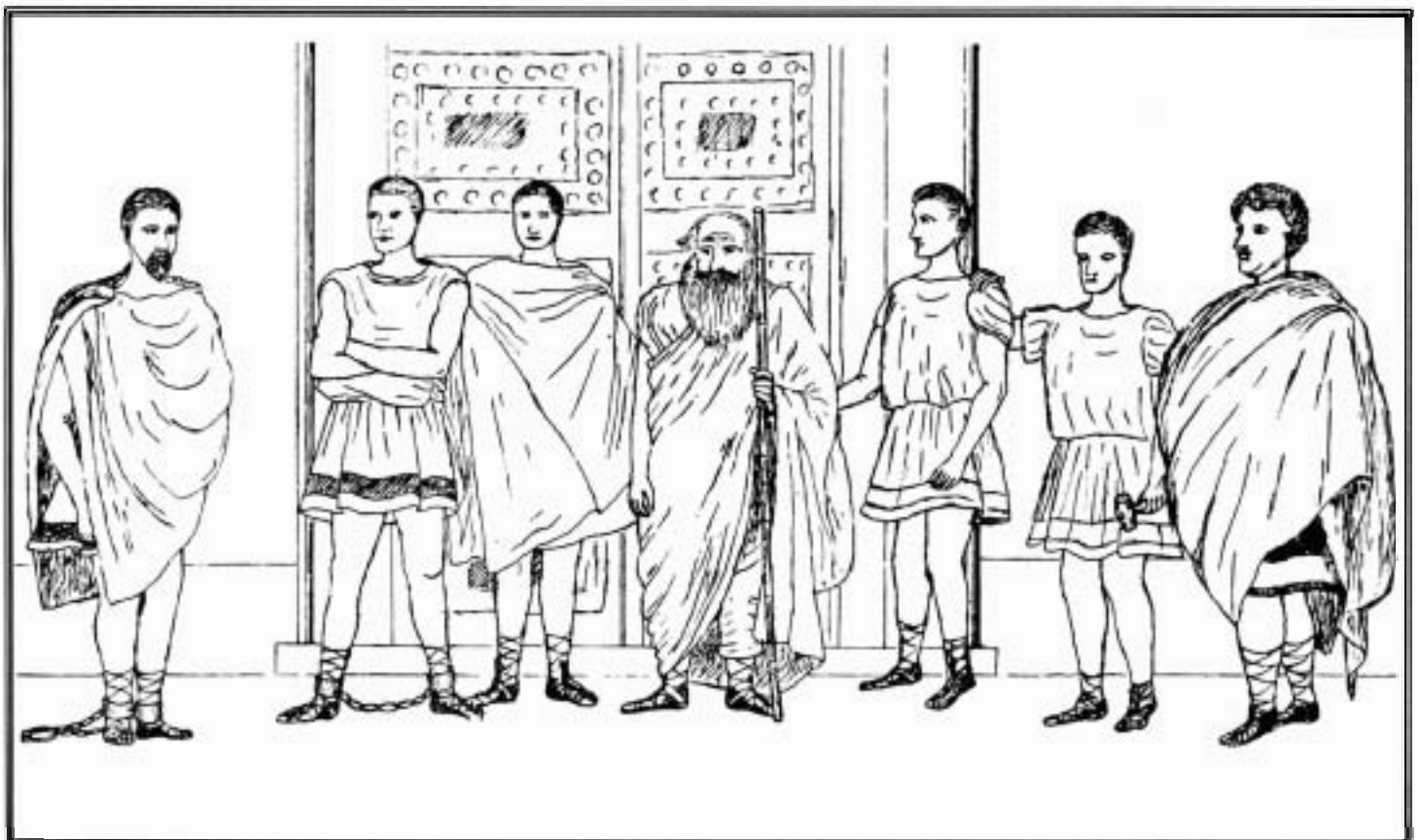
THE READING ROOM IN WINTER



A FOOTBALL MATCH



*A symbolic tug of war (actually students may have participated in the real thing!) between science and religion, such as the liberal arts and theological philosophies probably produced in St. Lawrence's early days, 1880.*



*The Captives, a Latin play, was performed at St. Lawrence in 1882, said to be the first time such a performance was done on an American stage. It was presented by the Class of '83.*



# TREE HOLIDAY — A "Festival" peculiar to St. Lawrence



ye too common Way of  
Planting Ye Trees



Tree planted by Ye too  
Common Way, after  
5 years growth

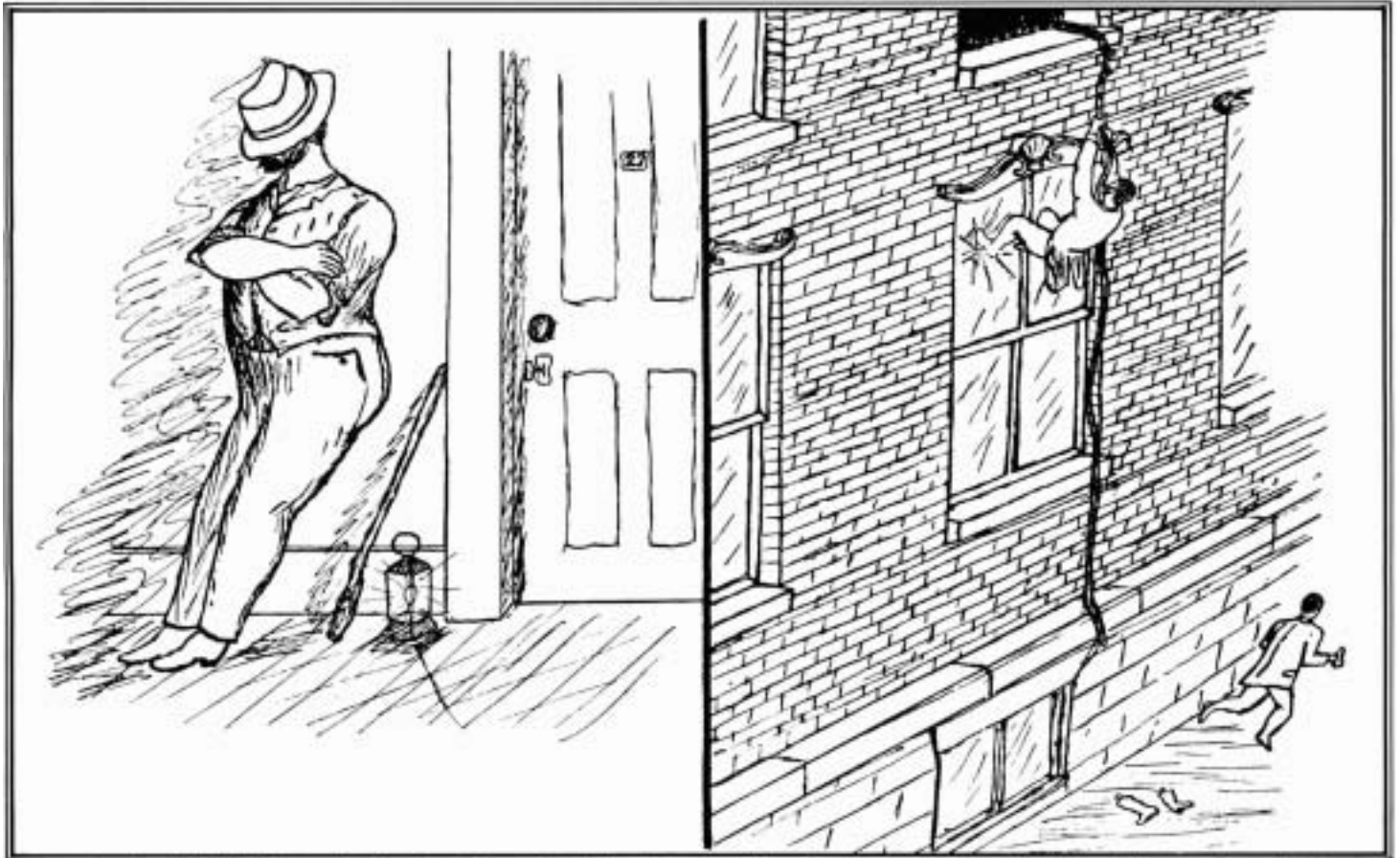


Ye Gallant Fresh who plants  
14 Young Ladies' Trees.

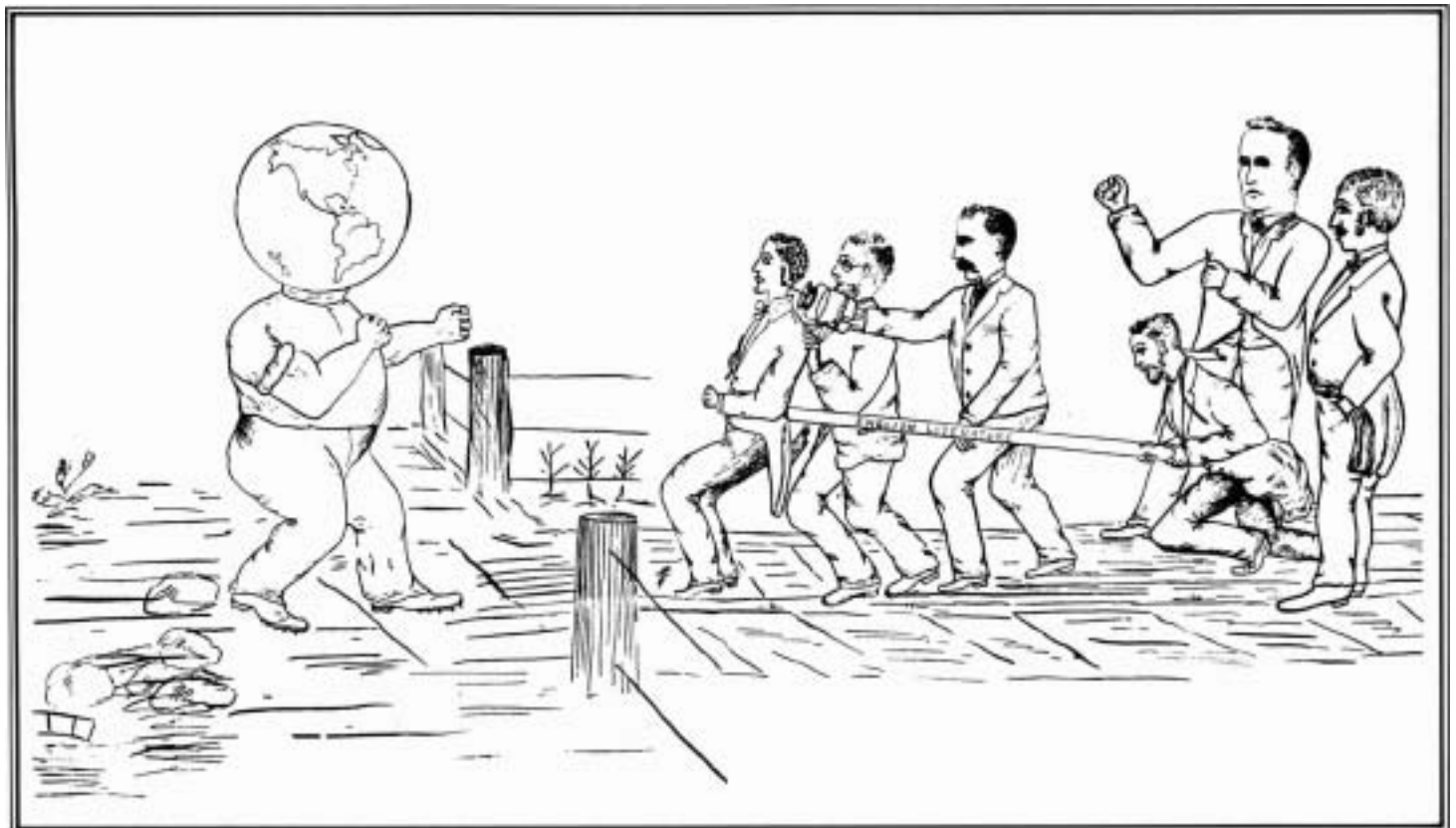


Appearance of Ye part of Campus set  
apart for Ye Exercises

On Friday, April 30, 1880, students and faculty participated in a "Tree Holiday," a spring rite with tree planting on the young campus, games, special meals, and an "illumination." This, like Arbor Day, went on for many years.



An "inside joke" about the sleeping Steward while the "exitprising Sophomore" is "larking" (breaking curfew rules), 1880. Richardson Hall was classroom and dormitory at the time.



Several professors—among them Gaines, Maltby, and Gunnison—line up to send the not-so-anxious St. Lawrence student to meet the "cold, cruel world," 1882.



*Children outside Hale School in 1926, perhaps ready for a skit or play. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Daniel [Muriel] Sandborn)*

## After the Pledge of Allegiance Came Grape Jelly Sandwiches

Reminiscences of a Hale School Student

*by Warren C. Dean*

*There are many Americans still around who remember fondly their days as students in one room schools. This nostalgic and humorous essay by one former student at Hale School (District Number 13 in the Town of Stockholm) will evoke many memories for Quarterly readers of certain vintage. Many, like the author, may wish those days and ways were still with us.*

Mention a "one room" school to a youngster today and you will either draw a complete blank or get that "look" which means that one room schools and dinosaurs both disappeared with the ice age. Actually there were still 6,500 one room schools in operation in the United States in 1966. Hopefully, some of these are still going strong. The one room school is a part of rural America that should be preserved.

In the early 1940's I had the good fortune to attend one of these schools. Hale School, formally known as School District number 13, was a venerable one room school in the town of Stockholm. As near as I can tell, the school was located the maximum distance possible from every school age child in the district. I have always believed that the sigh of

relief from many harassed mothers was in direct proportion to their distance from the school. Among the children, the distance was even more important, the most status going to the kids who trudged the farthest. Since there was no way to measure, and since this annual fall argument was traditionally resolved by fist-fights, it was generally conceded that the biggest kid in the school traveled the farthest, and the frailest came the shortest distance. If they were both in the same family, well—this was an anomaly we could live with.

The unsung heroine of the one room school was the teacher. The expression "overworked and underpaid" may have been coined to describe her. She had complete charge of from 10 to 40 children from age 5 to voting, was

expected to keep them educated, entertained, exercised, and alive. When a hardworking rural mom sent you off to school, you had best be bleeding pretty badly before you came home early. The teacher had to keep the building warm, teach one class while keeping an eye on five others, supervise sports activities for the group (who refused to play together because of age differences), sort out winter clothing and dress smaller children with no big sister in school, keep the building and grounds clean, and search for livestock in the kids' hair when that particular problem arose. Amazingly, the teachers I had (veterans all) did these things with aplomb.

The school day in the one room school was fairly well structured, with the

built-in flexibility that isolation provides. In the winter, one of the older boys would take the key home, unlock in the morning, start the wood fire, and fill the water bucket. The fire-building chore was quite an honor, and the importance of this position was thoroughly impressed on the boy selected. Most rural children were intimately familiar with wood fires, and there was little danger of any problems with the fire. The building would be frigid in the morning, but it was small and the stove would heat it fairly quickly. Everyone shed coats, mittens, scarves, sweaters, etc., as the room gradually warmed up.

Seating in Hale School was arranged by grade. The teacher's desk was at the front of the room (quite near the stove) and slightly to one side. The desks immediately in front of the teacher had seats on the front in a sort of bench arrangement. Seated immediately behind the benches was the first grade, behind them the second, and the last rows in this half of the room held the third grade. In the other half of the room, the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades were arranged front to back. As you progressed through your school years you gradually moved farther away from the teacher.

Class changes were a simple matter. The class due to "recite" a lesson moved to the benches in front of the teacher's desk, the lesson was taken care of, and the class returned to their desks. Although it sounds as if the instruction would disrupt the "studying" students, this was rarely the case. Everyone listened when something new or interesting was being presented, and was able to "tune out" any lessons already learned. If you attended the same school from grade one through grade six, there were few mysteries left by the time you hit the sixth grade. Twenty-five years after I left the one room school I was solemnly informed by a college professor that repetition was an excellent method of instruction.

A typical class day would begin with a summons from the school bell. The bell ringer was derisively referred to as teacher's pet by those who would have given their eye teeth to ring the bell, but couldn't stand the teasing.

Classes started with a Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag. Not to participate in this ceremony was unthinkable. In mid-morning a 15 minute recess was taken, the kids all ran around like idiots, and the teacher regained her composure. After recess classes resumed until 12, when the lunch bags, packets, pails and buckets came out. The daily sandwich swap would have given many mothers gray hair, with a lovingly prepared meat and lettuce sandwich being traded for a gooey mess of bread and grape jelly. Without grape jelly, many a



Schoolhouse with woodshed and "outhouse" as it still stands on the Knapps Station-Winthrop road. This district number 12 in the Town of Stockholm was the nearest neighboring schoolhouse to Hale School. (Photo courtesy of the author)

rural youngster would have had a hungry afternoon.

Classes resumed at one, and an exercise period began about two, the highlight of the afternoon. Every one room school I ever saw in New York State had a swing set with exactly four swings. In

some cases a slide was available but this was rare. The sports equipment for our school consisted of one bat and one softball. Every child in grades 1 and 2 took turns on the swings; everyone else played ball or headed for the local woods for games of their own. A favorite spring



A certificate [with 5 stars] given to Daniel Sanborn in 1926 at Hale School for recitations from memory. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Daniel [Muriel] Sanborn, who later taught in Hale School)



*A 1926 photograph of the front of Hale School building with some students and a teacher. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Daniel [Muriel] Sanborn)*

diversion was the hunting and eating of wild leeks, a local cousin of the onion, famous for its pungent after effects. If enough kids could be persuaded to consume leeks, school was often dismissed for the remainder of the day. The odor from 15 or 20 kids exhaling leeks was almost visible. The teacher always threatened dire consequences if the crime was repeated, but I think she enjoyed these unscheduled breaks as much as we did. In any event, everyone's taste buds were sufficiently destroyed after about three leek orgies to eliminate the problem.

Classes after the exercise period continued until 4 at which time nearly everyone headed for home. Some incorrigibles would, as a last resort, be kept after school. In those days, the teacher's disciplinary problems were easily solved. Late arrival at home, coupled with an espionage system composed of numerous little brothers and sisters, insured justice would triumph. There was very little discussion of guilt or innocence. The teacher was a highly respected member of the community, and whatever crime resulted in your being kept after school made you automatically guilty. The home punishment was always worse than school's, and many a stand-up supper was eaten after making the school teacher unhappy. Fortunately for us, our teacher was well aware of these facts, and rarely found our crimes deserved the double jeopardy.

Many times in the fall, school would be interrupted by the arrival of a pick-up truck in the yard, an event that stopped all work. Generally some farmer needed help harvesting corn, potatoes, or tomatoes. He would pick out whichever children looked big enough and strong

enough to work and they would be dismissed for the day, a great break and a chance to make a little money. It is amazing to think of the authority the teacher had to release children for these purposes. Think of the confusion with today's complications of insurance, child labor laws, safety regulations and the like.

All was not perfect and ideal at the one room schools, and battles of epic proportions were fought among the older children. During one particularly violent altercation a huge kid threw the wastebasket through a window and then threw his adversary through the same hole. The two culprits were missing for a few days, the window was mysteriously fixed one weekend, and our education continued.

We had our built-in gossip system and every sin or imagined sin among our schoolmates was discussed, savored, embellished and repeated—exhaustively. Rumor had it that one girl (who looked about 28 years old) chewed tobacco. This resulted in her desk being surreptitiously searched almost daily for evidence (which was never found). A late rumor was that the same girl ate fishworms, but this story was too much even for us, and that particular fairy tale died quickly.

One of our favorite happenings was to have someone accused of having lice. This could not be ignored by the teacher, and an intensive investigation followed. Each girl (boys didn't have hair enough) was taken to the cloakroom and the teacher pulled a fine toothed comb through her hair for "evidence." The teacher was smart enough to check every girl, so the rest of us never knew which one, if any, was guilty—for a

while. The mystery never lasted long unfortunately. In those days, the treatment for lice was a particularly vile smelling ointment, and there was absolutely no disguising the odor. For some reason, the victim was always returned to school before the smell dissipated.

Current day television delights in scenes where the country boy's faithful dog follows him to school and waits for him. The facts are a little different. The only dog which stayed at the school was the meanest one anyone owned, and the establishment of this canine pecking order was some dandy dog fights each fall when school resumed. The dog fights naturally progressed to the masters, and some year-long animosities developed the first week in September. A common sight on school mornings was a child walking a recalcitrant dog home to save its life.

The school grounds around one room schools contained three buildings: the school, a large woodshed, and a double "boys and girls" outhouse. The woodshed was filled each fall by some farmer who got the job by bid. Similar bids were made to clean the outhouse, and this little chore was taken care of during the summer break. The outhouse was unheated, of course, and in the middle of a New York winter there were some unrecorded speed records set answering calls of nature.

When I think about the one room school, I often wonder if we progressed when we closed them. It is hard to find an adult who attended one who ever had scholastic problems in later years. Our teachers were respected, liked, and obeyed. Children were instilled with a respect for their country, their family and their education. I doubt if a healthier bunch of little animals was ever assembled. We walked anywhere from one-half to two miles to school in all kinds of weather, played outdoors, and entertained ourselves without structured supervision or equipment. Modern education can probably supply a hundred reasons for closing these schools, but anything that worked so well couldn't have been too bad.

If I had any choice, I would have liked to have my children attend a one room school for their basic education. I can't think of any school setup today that accomplishes the same mix of elemental education and social awareness.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **About the Author**

Warren C. Dean is retired from a career in the Air Force and has returned to St. Lawrence County where he is presently a full-time student at Canton ATC. He attended Hale School for several years in the 1940's.

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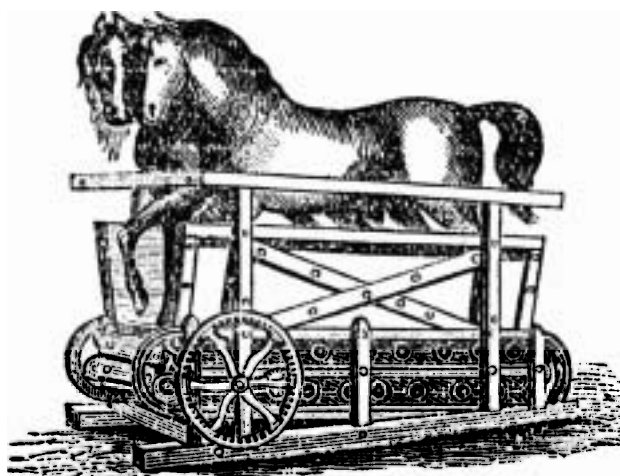
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**Kerr, A Country Bonesetter**

*(continued from page 9)*

of the big trees in the wind, the brittleness of the air and the incandescent brilliance of the stars! And the rides! Physical fitness that could spend itself on three successive unexercised horses, and the spiritual peace that only a good horse or a small boat at sea can give—the white landscape, woods and fields crisp, cold, and lifeless except for the silent testimony of tracks in the snow, an occasional squirrel and, once in a while, a flock of crows angrily clamoring away from a leafless perch. I knew all the paths and openings and the hidden spots in the birch woods where, in the summers, I hunted birds; where the foxes went to earth; and where, among the big rocks on Piano Mountain, one could get a glimpse of the Hudson. I still remember those rides as among the happiest gifts of a Providence that has been munificent. Often, galloping through the fields and across the hills between snowbound villages, I would see far off on the valley roads the familiar “cutter” sleighs of our local doctors—Jenkins and Hart—answering calls that often meant hours of driving and small fees, irrespective of roads or weather, with an unfailing and expected fidelity not demanded of the rural delivery. Sometimes I would meet one of them, whiskers frosted, nose red and dripping, with not much more showing than these between the fur cap and the muffler. Always they stopped for a chat, to tell me about the case and exchange medical gossip—for they treated me as a professional equal who was getting things they wished they had time to catch up with. For their difficulties made them modest; whereas I, with the arrogance of a young and silly student (arrogance, being a state of mind, I have noticed is always intensified by sitting a horse), was just a trace patronizing. I lost all that as a matter of course when I tried to practice by myself. But a good deal of it was jarred out of me by the episode of Dr. Kerr.

Dr. Kerr is now dead. He is probably forgotten by all but a few old farmers' wives. He had neither fame nor more than a frugal living. He was probably unhappy, while he lived, not for the reasons mentioned, but because he never could do for his people as much as he wanted to do. He practiced in St. Lawrence County, near Chippewa Bay. His office was a little surgery extension of a small village house. He was tall, thin, and very dark, with hairy wrists, a big nose, a bushy moustache, and kind, tired brown eyes. I was camping on my island in the bay and was known to the grocer in the village as a young doctor from New York. One day at about 4 a.m. a motorboat approaching my island aroused me and the grocer's son shouted through the fog and drizzle that Dr.

Kerr needed my help in a difficult case. He landed while I dressed, and we were off four miles to the village. There Dr. Kerr was waiting for me with his buggy. I had never seen him before and he impressed me, in my young self-confidence, as probably a poor country bonesetter whom I would have to show how a case should be handled. This, however, lasted only until we were bumping along a muddy country lane and he had begun to tell me about the patient.

It was a woman, a farm hand's wife, who was having her first baby. She had developed eclampsia seven months along, and the child had died. She was having convulsions. The problem was to deliver the dead baby from a uterus with an undistended cervix, and the mother dangerously toxic. At this point, I was thoroughly scared. I had had training at the Sloane Maternity, but this was a “high forceps” under difficulties, a case for Professor Cragin in a well-equipped operating room, with an assistant and two or three nurses.

We drove about four miles into the river flats. I could see the little unpainted cottage next to a haystack a mile away. I offered no suggestion while I was trying to recover my old ambulance courage. He didn't ask me any questions.

The place was a picture of abject poverty. The husband, a pathetic little bandy-legged, redheaded fellow in torn overalls, was waiting at the door, anxious and silent. The kitchen was a mess from his efforts at housekeeping. In the next room the woman, half-conscious, her bloated face twitching, lay on a dirty double bed, on a mattress without sheets under an old quilt half kicked off, leaving her almost naked.

While I stood looking at her with frightened sympathy, Dr. Kerr unpacked his bag. Without asking me to do anything, he filled a wash boiler with hot water from a kettle, added a little lysol, and put on his forceps to boil. Then he took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, filled a basin, and began to soap and lysol his hands. Not until he was doing this did he speak.

Then he began to give me directions. In a few minutes I was cleaning up the patient, spreading clean towels under her, preparing a chloroform cone and jumping at his words as though in Dr. Cragin's clinic. With no essential help from me, he performed as neat a cervix dilation and forceps delivery as I had ever seen. When, after the long and arduous task, with everything complete as possible, he began to clean up, he didn't even thank me. He took it for granted that, being a doctor and being in the neighborhood, I was on call. It was his only compliment, except for a friendly smile.

He asked me to stay there the rest of

the day while he made his rounds, gave me a few directions, and left a sedative. Then he went out, patted the husband on the back, and drove away. The woman recovered. Dr. Kerr, I heard later, spent the first two nights after this on a rocking chair, drinking cider with the husband, and napping when he could. His fee, I also heard, accepted to please the husband, was a peck of potatoes.

Some time later, I had occasion to ask him to open a boil on my neck. He sat me down in a chair, wiped my neck with alcohol, took a knife out of a little leather case, wiped that with alcohol, and let me have it. I made no suggestion whatever. I saw him often after that, and I sincerely hope—even now—that he liked me.

One of Dr. Kerr's colleagues from up near Ogdensburg, whom I had met at this time, did a most extraordinary thing. I met him on the river one day when we were both fishing off the head of Watch Island. Just as I came in sight of him as I rounded the point, he pulled out a magnificent pickerel.

“Good for you, doctor!” I shouted to him.

“What d'ye think, young feller?” he called back. “I caught that fish with a nice fat appendix I took out this mornin'.”



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