

THE
QUARTERLY

Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

July 1981

FOURTH OF JULY !
AT
OGDENSBURGH, N. Y.



THE COMING ANNIVERSARY OF
AMERICAN
INDEPENDENCE

Will be celebrated at OGDENSBURGH in accordance
with the following Programme :

At Daybreak, ONE GUN.

At Sunrise, a National Salute of Thirteen Guns.

Flags hoisted and Bells Rung one hour.

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VOL. XXVI

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Editor: Varick A. Chittenden

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Cover: Detail from a rare broadside announcement of Fourth of July festivities at Ogdensburg(h) in 1865. See page 9 for "The Glorious Fourth," a report and analysis on late nineteenth century Independence Day celebrations in St. Lawrence County. See page 11 for your very own actual-size reproduction of this broadside. (Courtesy of Special Collections, Owen D. Young Library, St. Lawrence University)

Young Man With Flute:

Washington Irving's Travels Into Northern New York

by Paul F. Jamieson

In much the same manner as foreign travelers coming to the United States in the early nineteenth century were keeping journals and writing their observations of this new way of life, Washington Irving, one of America's first men of letters, came to the North Country and recorded his impressions. In fact, he came twice. Here are the two accounts, written fifty years apart, first of primitive conditions and later of a resplendent city on the frontier.

Today we drive from Utica or Syracuse to Ogdensburg in three hours. In 1803, when the Black River valley was still wilderness, a party of seven New Yorkers spent nine exhausting days in making the same journey. One member of that party kept a journal. It has survived—probably because his name was Washington Irving.

In 1803 Irving was an immature youth of twenty employed as a clerk in the New York City law office of Josiah Ogden Hoffman. Bored with office routine and longing to travel, young Irving snatched at his employer's invitation to join a combined business and pleasure expedition by way of Albany, Utica, and the Black River valley to Ogdensburg, with a return by Montreal. Irving had already become an intimate member of the Hoffman family circle. He looked upon Maria Fenno Hoffman, the young second wife close to his own age, almost as a sister. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman and a daughter, Ann, by Hoffman's first marriage, the travelers included Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Ludlow Ogden and Miss Eliza Ogden. The two heads of family were large landowners in the towns of Oswegatchie, Lisbon, and Madrid of the recently created St. Lawrence County. There would be some exchanges of property to transact. Irving doubtless knew



Washington Irving at 22. From an engraving of the crayon drawing by John Vanderlyn, Paris, 1805. (Courtesy of the author)

that he would be called on to draw up a few papers, but he was also prepared for a pleasure trip. He took along his flute and a copy of Shakespeare's plays.

Travel conditions were relatively civilized in the first stage of the journey, which took them by Hudson River sloop to Albany and then by stage to Utica, with stops at Ballston Spa, Saratoga Springs, and Canajoharie. So far it was an unalloyed pleasure trip, with dancing and singing in the evenings. Irving basked in the presence of three young ladies. On Sunday, August 8, in Utica he went to church with Mrs. Hoffman and heard "a decent moral sermon."

Next day the party set out for the Black River in two wagons. A third wagon with their luggage had gone ahead. "The roads were very bad," wrote Irving that day, squandering a superlative that might better have been reserved for what lay

ahead. "The old French road," as it was later known, had been cut through the forest only a few years earlier by the Castorland Company to open the Black River valley to French refugee settlers. The first day out of Utica was not so taxing but that Irving and the girls read passages from Shakespeare to one another as the wagons jolted along. In the evening at "Sheldon's, a very decent log house tavern," Mrs. Hoffman sang and Irving accompanied her on his flute.

This entry for August 9 is the journal's last mention of Shakespeare readings, singing, and fluting. From then on till arrival at Ogdensburg the energies of the party were directed toward survival. There was, however, one more diverting adventure. At "High Falls" (Lyons Falls) they transferred from their wagons to a sailing scow for a two-day float down the Black River. The afternoon of the first

day on the water they were caught in a torrent of rain and spent the evening in a log house drying their clothes. They slept on the floor. But skies cleared in the afternoon of the second day. Rounding a bend, they saw a deer swimming and two canoes chasing it. A bizarre comedy ensued as they joined French settlers in the chase. The wife of one settler somersaulted into the water as she tried to strike the deer with her paddle. She had to be rescued from drowning. The scow and one of the canoes then overtook the swimming doe. Irving grabbed an ear, Mr. Ogden a leg, and one of the Frenchmen another leg as they dragged the deer to shore. That night the party dined on the haunch of venison that fell to their share.

The venison was their only consolation that night in revolting quarters which Irving called "the Temple of Dirt." The site was "Long Falls" (Carthage), where their 40-mile river cruise ended. The tavern was kept by one "Babtist," probably Jean Baptiste Bossout, who had settled there in 1798. Before leaving the next morning, Irving penciled over the fireplace in a couplet of 18th century clichés:

Here Sovereign Dirt erects
her sable throne,
The house, the host,
the hostess all her own.

Passing that way some years later, accompanied by Mr. Hoffman, Judge William Cooper, the father of the novelist James Fenimore, added a penciled rebuke:

Learn hence, young man,
and teach it to your sons,
The wisest way's to
take it as it comes.

Part of this message missed the mark. Irving had no sons. After the early death of his enamorata Matilda, a younger sister of Ann Hoffman, he remained a bachelor.

But in the next five days he himself certainly learned to take it as it comes. The hardest part of the journey lay ahead as they again took to wagons on the notorious French road. Here is the account in Irving's own words. At 20 he was still far from master of the prose style he later developed as the nation's first man of letters to attain a world reputation. The spelling, grammar, and syntax of the journal, written under trying conditions, are characteristic of a youth whose schooling ended at 16. He never attended Columbia College as his brothers did. The quoted passages are from Journal, 1803, by Washington Irving, edited by Stanley T. Williams, and are reproduced here with the permission of the editor's son:

Friday 13th

We prepared to leave the Temple of Dirt and set out about 60 miles thro the woods to Oswegatchie [Ogdensburg]. We eat an uncomfortable breakfast for

indeed it was impossible to relish anything in a house so completely filthy. The landlady herself was perfectly in character with the house. A little squab french woman with a red face, a black wool hat stuck upon her head her hair greasy & uncombed hanging about her ears and the rest of her dress and person in similar stile We were heartily glad to make an escape from a house so extremely disgusting. We set off in caravan style two waggons for ourselves and another drawn by Oxen for our Baggage. Beside our three drivers we had a civil active young fellow by the name of Rockwell to act as guide and assist in loading unloading etc. etc.

We found the road dreadfully rugged and miry. The horses could not go off of a walk in any part. The road had not been made above a year and the stumps and roots of trees stood in every direction. The waggon in which I rode was driven



Ann Hoffman. From the painting by Edward G. Malbone. (Courtesy of the author)

by a Mr Simmons an honest country man. He talked considerably of a brother of his who was a Member of congress and seemed highly proud of the honor he derived from the relationship. He entertained us very much with an account of Dr. Faustus & the Devil and of old Father Columbus and his discovering America. He also gave us a long detail of a lonesome journey of his through the woods during the war which he told us was all set in ryme by a Poet in his neighborhood and how they made very mournful humorsome verses. He repeated us several of them which were most laughably pathetic.

The driver of the other waggon seemed expert at nothing but tumbling out and running against stumps of trees.

We were several times obliged to get out of the waggons and walk as the road was so bad that the horse could scarcely get along.

As we were riding along we saw Mr Hoffman ahead talking to two or three men, one of them had a remarkably striking appearance. He was dressed in light under clothes a red jacket with something like military decorations his black round hat was stuck on one side of his head & his hair hung about his ears in wild disorder he had a bundle slung over his left shoulder on the end of a cutlass and his countenance was rugged and almost savage. I found out he was a deserter from the english garrison at Montreal and was making over for the Black river. The whole groupe, of which this was the most prominent figure had a singular appearance as they stood Under a twisted tree that grew in the middle of the road. These were the only travellers we met with in the course of the day. We continued our journey for some distance thro thick woods the road hardly to be distinguished from the other parts of the forest. At length the other driver run his waggon against a tree and the axle tree gave way. All hands were immediately employed to make another. They singled out a tree and had it down in an instant. We were too impatient to wait for the waggons being repaired and walked on. We provided the ladies with walking sticks and on we trudged as we were extremely hungry. We at length came to the place of our destination which was a log hut about 10 miles from the temple owned by Mr Barnes, a brotherinlaw to Rockwell our guide. The Hut was very small consisting but of one room. the Fire was made in one end where the earth was left uncovered with boards and there was a large hole left in the roof for the smoke to escape. The sides of the house were in many places open as the spaces between the logs were not well filled up with clay. The house however was clean & neat and after leaving The Temple of Dirt it was delightful The people were very civil and attentive. We had an excellent supper of Tea with Venison and boiled corn. Rockwell took his gun and went after patridges but was unsuccessful. At night our hostess stretched a long blanket across the room and divided it into two on one side we spread our mattress for the ladies and great coats blankets etc for ourselves The other side was left for the drivers etc. We made out to sleep very soundly.

Saturday 14th

After a very early breakfast we got our things in order to resume our journey. We were sorry to find that one of honest Simmons's horses was lame from a fault in the shoeing. There was no help however, we must proceed. The next log hut was at the distance of 11 miles we intended to endeavor to pass it and reach one 4 miles beyond.

We were very much annoyed in the



Hunter's shanty similar to those that sheltered Irving's party on August 14 and 15, 1803. Some had siding of bark, others of logs. Roofs were of bark or boughs. Shanties also provided temporary housing for pioneers pending the building of log cabins. Daniel Boone left a trail of them on his way to Kentucky, and Abe Lincoln's family lived in a three-sided shanty their first year in Indiana. Shanties were the ancestors of the Adirondack lean-to of today. (From Harper's Magazine, 1859)

morning by Hornets whose nests were disturbed by the horses feet. several of us were severely stung by them. After riding some distance, We were overtaken by the driver of the other waggon who informed us that the new axletree which he made the day before was bent, they had therefore to go to work and make another. The ladies got out of that waggon and mounted the one that was whole while the gentlemen proceeded on foot. It began to cloud over very fast and in a short time the rain came down quite briskly. We got under a tree for shelter. We travelled for some distance in this manner some times stopping under trees when the rain was very hard at length the other waggon rejoined us.

We then got in our former situations and pushed forward. The Woods were tiresome from their continued sameness not the least opening to amuse the eye or divert the attention all one cheerless monotony we now and then passed a place where a traveller had passed the night which might be seen from the little shelter of branches he had made for his head and the place where the fire had been kindled at his feet. This is the common way of their sleeping when passing thro the wilderness where no house is near.

We passed by one place where a Deer had been killed by a wolf as might be seen by the tracks and by the remains of

the deer. The rain that fell encreased the badness of the road and the waggon in which I was riding at length stuck fast in the mire and one of the horses laid down refusing to budge an inch further we had therefore to get out as well as we could and travel after the other waggon where the ladies all mounted. The drivers got levers and attempted to raise the Waggon but in vain the horse that had laid down had no notion of resuming his labor. As the rain was fast encreasing Mr Ogden undertook to drive the waggon in which the ladies were seated.

The road by this time was full of deep mud holes and the waggon proceeded with great difficulty till at last it fairly stuck fast in one where the mud & water almost covered the Horses back. The poor animals were too fatigued to extricate it and there was no alternative but for the ladies to get out and walk. The rain by this time descended in Torrents. In several parts of the road I had been up to my middle in mud and water and it was equally bad if not worse to attempt to walk in the woods on either side. We helped the ladies to a little shed of bark laid on crotches about large enough to hold three when they set down; It had been a Nights shelter to some hunter but in this case it afforded no protection, one half of it fell down as we were creeping under it and though we spread great coats on the other, they

might as well have been in the open air. The rain now fell in the greatest quantity I had ever seen. The wind blew a perfect hurricane. The Trees around all shook and bent in the most alarming manner and threatened every moment to fall and crush us. Nothing was seen now but a scene of confusion. The ladies were in the highest state of alarm and entreated that we should walk to a house which we were told was about a half a mile distant. We therefore dragged along—wet to the skin wading through mud holes—it seemed as if the whole forest was under water.

we passed several old trees that seemed ready to tumble with the blast. The wind however subsided in a few moments had it not it is very probable that some of us would have been crushed. After a most painful walk of half a mile we arrived at the hut. It was a square building 18 feet one way & 16 another the fire place (which was nothing but a large part of the floor left bare and an aperture in the roof over head) took up a fourth part of the room, the spaces between the logs were not filled up and admitted the light & air in every direction. the house was inhabited by a man who had lately come into the country to settle and had left his family in pennsylvania. Every thing therefore was in the rudest style in one corner was a berth raised for a bed and on it a piece of old carpet by way of mattress—An old

chest of drawers laid on their back & shoved under the berth. two or three crazy chairs a rough table & 4 or 5 kegs of rum made up the furniture of this dwelling. Mr Hoffman had walked ahead of the waggon and reached the Hut before the storm commenced, he therefore was dry and able to get things prepared for us against our arrival. We were all soaking wet and had to wait above half an hour for the waggon to come in which were our Trunks that we might change our clothes. At the hut we found beside Mr Hazelton (the owner) two men by the name of sharp who were driving an ox team through to Oswegatchie. They were extremely noisy and boisterous, one of them in particular was the most impudent chattering forward Scoundrel I ever knew. The waggons at length arrived and we contrived to get on dry clothes. Our Trunks however were several of them wet through. The drivers entered the house to dry themselves, at this time there were 15 people in this small room the Men began to drink immediately and were very noisy in their greetings and welcomings to each other. The Ladies appeared almost ready to give up we had now been two days travelling and had got but 21 miles into the Wilderness.

Simmons went out to cut some wood and wounded his foot very badly with the axe he entered the hut with his foot bleeding, we endeavored to keep the sight of him from the ladies and got him to go out of doors. Mrs Hoffman however saw it and the sight of it, after the fatigue & trouble of mind & body she had undergone was too much. she fainted away almost immediately.

I now gave up all hopes of getting along we were here in a wilderness, no medical aid near, among a set of men rough and some of them insolent (the sharps) with ladies of delicate minds and constitutions sinking under fatigue and apprehension. I expected every moment to see them sink into Mrs Hoffman's situation, however they stood it suprisingly well. Mrs Hoffman came to in a little while; we got some tea made and with the addition of boiled corn and potatoes enjoyed a comfortable meal.

As we were to pass the night in this Hut we began to arrange beds. We made a tolerable one for Mrs Hoffman & Ogden on the berth and drawing out a chest of drawers from under it we placed it along side & spread a Mattrass on it for the Girls.

The drivers and the Sharps seated themselves in a corner and began to play cards for liquor, they were very noisy in their amusement, particularly after they had drank considerably. One of the Sharps was very boisterous. The ladies were much alarmed and Ar.n Hoffman was in tears. I drew two chairs beside the Girls bed and spreading great coats



This fort, maintained by the French from 1749 to 1760, was named for the first day its founder, Father Francois Picquet, visited the site—November 21, 1748, the feast of the presentation of the Blessed Virgin. It was built on the point at the mouth of the Oswegatchie River. As Fort Oswegatchie, it was occupied by the British till 1796, when it was evacuated under the provisions of Jay's Treaty. The next occupant, Judge Nathan Ford, agent for landowners, was host to Irving and his party in 1803. (Courtesy of Elizabeth Baxter, City of Ogdensburg Historian)

over the backs of them in some measure intercepted the view of the gambling Gentlemen. I stretched myself on the chairs and passed the night in that situation. Mr Hoffman & Mr Ogden laying on the floor at the foot of the bed after some time the Gentlemen retired from their amusement almost intoxicated and laying themselves on the floor went to sleep. I never passed so dreary a night in my life. The rain poured down incessantly and I was frequently obliged to hold up an umbrella to prevent its beating thro the roof on the ladies as they slept, I was awake almost all night and several times heard the crash of falling trees, and two or three times the long dreary howl of a Wolf. I expected to find in the morning the roads totally impassable from the quantity of rain and trees that had fallen.

Sunday 15th

After taking a cracker and glass of wine we prepared to resume our route. We found it impossible to travel the roads with horses and therefore engaged the sharps to take our baggage through on their ox cart while the ladies should ride in the ox waggon that had hitherto carried our luggage and that the Gentlemen should walk.

In this manner we set out and a dreary prospect we had befor us, the woods was a continued marsh and as the waggon dragged heavily along to the oxens breasts in water in many places, we were obliged to jump from trunk to trunk of dead trees that laid along side of the road, those places where it was not over our knees we generally walked through. Our progress was much impeded by trees that had fallen down in the course of the night and which we had to cut away before we could pass. The day however was very fine and not a

cloud to be seen in the morning.

About eleven Oclock we reached a Mrs Vromans, a widow woman who with two daughters lived in a log hut on the banks of the Indian river. Here we stopped to get some bread a tea kettle & other articles as we expected to pass the Night in the woods the next hut being too far off for us to reach that day. Having procured the articles we wanted we continued our route and after a fatiguing days journey of 11 miles we arrived at our intended quarters. This was a rude kind of hovel about ten feet square formed of logs for the temporary accomodation of hunters. these Cabins are called by the people about here Shanty's. At the front of the hut there was a large tree at the root of which we lighted a fire and put over a little Iron pot which was to serve in quality of tea kettle corn boiler potatoe pot & every thing.

We made a hearty supper on boiled corn & potatoes and some bread which we had got at Vromans (our crackers & gingerbread were ruined in the storm). We were much annoyed by the Musquitoes and punkies or gnats an insect so minute that you cannot see it till it is on your skin where it bites very severely. they were very troublesome to us throughout the Journey We were also much worried by the insolence of the sharps. One of these was particularly familiar and impertinent He was continually addressing us in the most unceremonious and familiar manner and his language was often extremely rude & disrespectful. His brother had less tongue but equal impudence, and when we were eating would help himself off of our table without ceremony.

It was not the least of our inconveniences on this journey that we had to bear with these scoundrels; but we were in



Father Francois Picquet, founder of the first settlement at Ogdensburg.
(Courtesy Betty Steele Photography)

their power, as by refusing to go on with us they might have placed us all in a dismal situation.

As we were to sleep in the Shanty that night we endeavored to fit it up in as comfortable a style as possible. We placed trunks etc on the roof (which was flat) to keep the dew from falling on us, and stretched sheets over the sides to keep out the cold air We spread boughs on the floor and laying the Mattrass in one part & great coats etc over another we made tolerable beds At the other end we made a large fire and slept with our feet towards it. during the night one or two of the ladies imagined they heard the howling of wolves and were much alarmed but were soon reasoned out of their apprehensions.

Monday 16th

On looking over our stores we found we had but a small loaf of bread & a few potatoes left we were therefore obliged to be economical as we should not reach

any house till evening. We cut the loaf in two and dividing one half had each about a mouthful to eat the potatoes were also boiled and shared. After this breakfast which only served to whet our appetites instead of satisfying them, we pushed forward at our usual snails pace. The travelling was the same as the day before, through deep mud holes over stumps & stones, and we were still obliged to cut our way through fallen trees.

Toward the middle of the day we began to find ourselves very hungry not having had any breakfast and having such constant exercise. We at last came to a fine spring of water and agreed to stop & divide our half loaf. On looking for it however we found it was gone, we had either left it behind us at the shanty or the dog had stolen it. We now looked blank enough, we were faint with hunger and yet had to be jolted about several hours before we could satisfy it—luckily we happened to have about a

pound of flour & some butter with us and the ladies set themselves to work to make a couple of small cakes. A fire was made at the root of a tree and they were roasted before it. While they were making one of the drivers had seated himself in a shade and began to amuse himself with the contents of his wallet, he offered me a slice from a junk of raw pork he was eating and I do not know any morcel I ever eat that was so acceptable.

having demolished our cakes which were hardly sufficient to stay our Stomachs we again proceeded. Mr Hoffman & Ogden walked a head and were soon out of sight as they wished to reach the house before us and have things in readiness

Five or Six hours jolting brought in sight of the house and no sight could have been more pleasing as we were half famished. We found them all busy in preparing supper for us, and we made a very hearty one. We could have slept sound enough that night had it not been for a few thousand fleas. As the house did not boast of a brace of rooms we were all obliged to find lodgings in one.

Tuesday 17th

We had now fourteen miles to go before we reached Oswegatchie. We were six miles from Oswegatchie river which we would have to cross. This would have been a troublesome business had not Judge Ford of Oswegatchie received notice of our coming and Sent men to make a raft and assist us in crossing—On crossing the river we found a couple of horses waiting to take some of us to the Judges. Mr Hoffman and Mr Ogden each mounted one of them & Mrs Hoffman and Mrs Ogden rode behind them I staid behind to travel on in the waggon with the girls. This part of the journey seemed more tedious than any so near the end and yet obliged to travel no faster than the lazy pace of oxen.

On one part of our road we were assailed by a number of Hornets (a poisonous kind of insect which had frequently annoyed us on the road) two or three of us were stung and the waggon Stopped for a moment.

This was the most fortunate circumstance as a very large rotten tree fell a little distance ahead of us just about the place where we would have been had we continued on without stopping. We had to ride out of the road round the tree as it would have detained us too long to cut through it. At last to our great joy we came in sight of Oswegatchie. The prospect that opened upon us was delightful after riding through thick woods for several days where the eye is confined to a narrow space and fatigued with a continual repetition of similar objects, the sight of a beautiful and extensive tract of country is inconceivably enlivening.



Ogdensburg in 1836. Midway on the point are the remains of the old fort and to the right the lighthouse, built in 1835. In the foreground is a ferry landing. The large stone building was the Parish store, now the Custom House. On Irving's second visit in 1853, all trace of the old fort had disappeared. (Courtesy Betty Steele Photography)

Close beside the bank on which we rode the Oswegatchie wound along about twenty feet below us. After running for some distance it entered into the St Lawrence forming a long point of land on which stood a few houses called the Garrison which had formerly been a fortified place built by the French to keep the Indians in awe they were now tumbling in ruins excepting two or three which were still kept in tolerable order by Judge Ford who resided in one of them and used the others as stores and out houses. We recrossed the Oswegatchie river to the Garrison as we intended to reside with Judge Ford for some time.

We found the rest of our party there they had arrived two or three hours before us. The Judge is a most hospitable open hearted man very lively in his discourse & gentlemanly in his manners his company therefore is highly pleasing.

The entries over the next two weeks spent in Ogdensburg and vicinity are very brief but suggest that pleasant pastimes were mixed with the law clerk's sober duties of drafting bonds and deeds. The pleasures were magnified when, revisiting Ogdensburg 50 years later, Irving recalled the events of his first journey and sojourn there. The following letter, dated September 19, 1853 from his home Sunnyside, is addressed to a niece, Mrs. Sarah Storrow, in Paris:

One of the most interesting circumstances of my tour was the sojourn of a day at Ogdensburg, at the mouth of the Oswegatchie River, where it empties into the St. Lawrence. I had not been there since I visited it fifty years since, in 1803, when I was but twenty years of age; when I made an expedition through

the Black River country to Canada in company with Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman, and Ann Hoffman, Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow Ogden and Miss Eliza Ogden. Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Ogden were visiting their wild lands on the St. Lawrence. All the country then was a wilderness; we floated down the Black River in a scow; we toiled through forests in wagons drawn by oxen; we slept in hunters' cabins, and were once four and twenty hours without food; but all was romance to me.

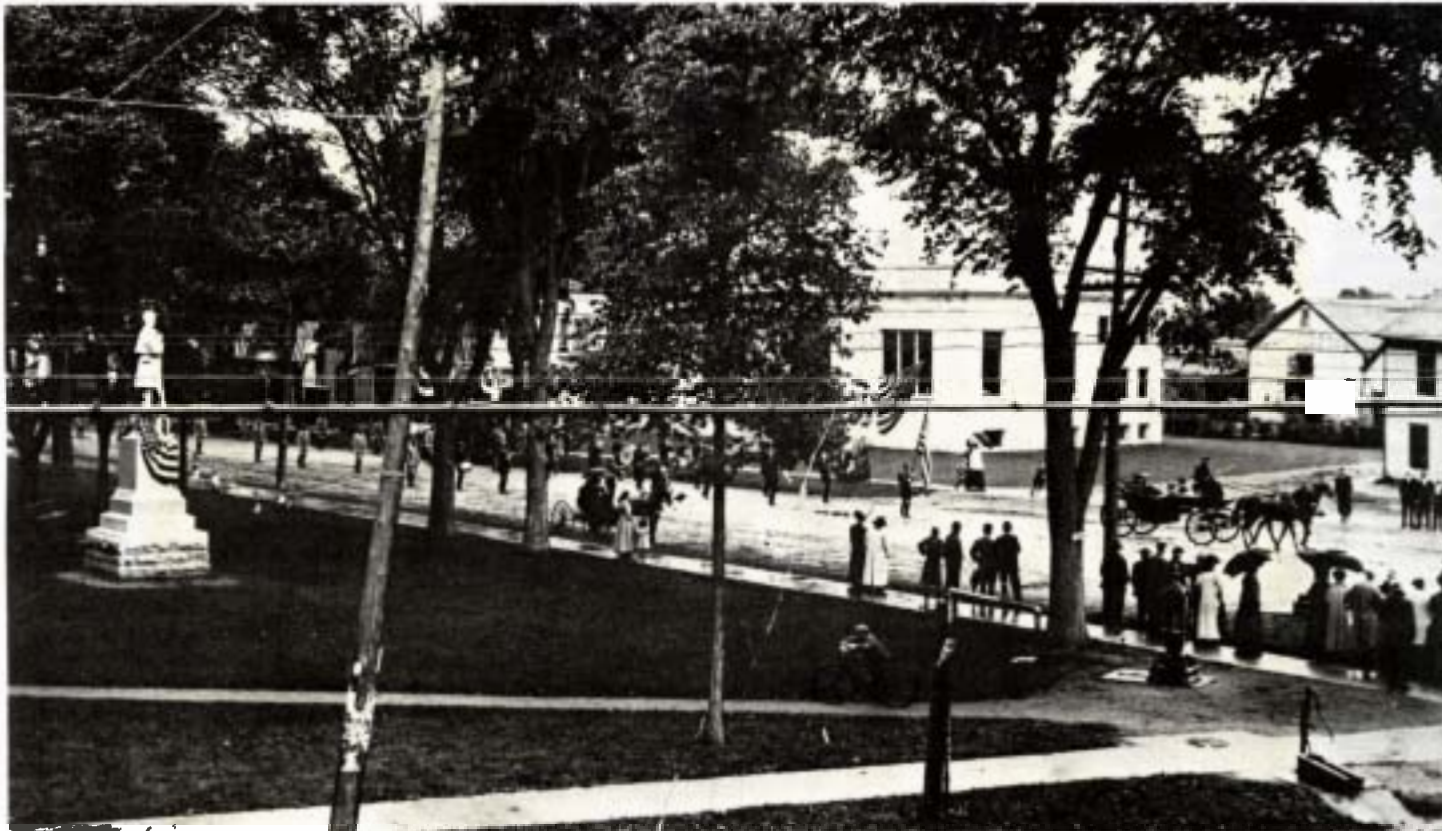
Arrived on the banks of the St. Lawrence, we put up at Mr. Ogden's agent, who was quartered in some rude buildings belonging to a ruined French fort at the mouth of the Oswegatchie. What happy days I passed there! rambling about the woods with the young ladies; or paddling with them in Indian canoes on the limpid waters of the St. Lawrence; or fishing about the rapids and visiting the Indians, who still lived on the islands in the river. Every thing was so grand and so silent and solitary. I don't think any scene in life made a more delightful impression upon me.

Well—here I was again after a lapse of fifty years. I found a populous city occupying both banks of the Oswegatchie, connected by bridges. It was the Ogdensburg of which a village plot had been planned at the time of our visit. I sought the old French fort, where we had been quartered—not a trace of it was left. I sat under a tree on the site and looked round upon what I had known as a wilderness—now teeming with life—crowded with inhabitants—the Oswegatchie River dammed up and encumbered by vast stone-mills—the broad St. Lawrence ploughed by immense

steamers.

I walked to the point, where, with the two girls, I used to launch forth in the canoe, while the rest of the party would wave handkerchiefs, and cheer us from shore; it was now a bustling landing-place for steamers. There were still some rocks where I used to sit of an evening and accompany with my flute one of the ladies who sang. I sat for a long time on the rocks, summoning recollections of bygone days, and of the happy beings by whom I was then surrounded; all had passed away—all were dead and gone; of that young and joyous party I was the sole survivor; they had all lived quietly at home out of reach of mischance, yet had gone down to their graves; while I, who had been wandering about the world, exposed to all hazards by sea and land, was yet alive. It seemed almost marvellous. I have often, in my shifting about the world, come upon the traces of former existence; but I do not think any thing has made a stronger impression on me than this second visit to the banks of the Oswegatchie.

What a contrast is here! More than the scene has altered. A selective memory, given fifty years to work in, has transformed the hardships of a wilderness journey into romantic adventure. A capacity for self-improvement, hidden in the young man of twenty, has turned the crude jottings of the diarist into the easy, flowing, impeccable style of the master; of the Irving who became the pride of a young nation for writing as well as Addison or Goldsmith in the Old Country and who contributed much toward humanizing the "dark unstoried woods" and the vacant sun-drenched prairies of a new continent.



Fourth of July parade coming down Park Street in Canton, with numerous village landmarks of the period in full view. (Photo courtesy of Edward J. Blankman)

The Glorious Fourth

by D. Lynn Case

Little would a modern reader guess that the towns of St. Lawrence County in the late nineteenth century were settings for elaborate and exciting celebrations of the anniversary of America's Independence Day. This thorough account of such celebrations, based on a search of county newspapers of the period, reveals the seriousness with which our forebears took their national holiday and the immense amount of fun there was for all.

"The glorious Fourth." It's a phrase we've all heard, but to our cynical modern ears it carries a burden of Victorian sentimentality, and we would feel more than a little silly uttering it ourselves. Oh yes, most of us are glad enough to be living in the United States, but the idea of spending our precious day off from work listening to flag-waving speakers or taking part in patriotic tableaux just isn't our cup of tea. Consequently, the Fourth of July celebration in Canton has come to consist of a brief parade (dwarfed by that of the previous month in honor of the Dairy Princess), the occasional family picnic, and, for the hardy in spirit, perhaps a trip to Norwood to see the fireworks—pleasant enough, but hardly "glorious." There was a time, however, when things were different. A hundred years ago, the

country was younger, and memories of our struggle for independence were fresher. There was no television to bring the Macy's parade or the World Series into people's homes; those who wanted entertainment or pageantry had to create their own. It was a time of hard physical work, when opportunities to socialize with friends and family often had to be deferred to the necessities of obtaining food and shelter—and consequently were more appreciated when they did occur.

A broadside in the collection of the library at St. Lawrence University was my introduction to the North Country Fourth of July celebrations of a century ago. A long, thin poster topped, of course, by a gallant eagle, it lured readers to Ogdensburg for the holiday with an irresistible list of attractions such

as brass bands and tub races. I was hooked! I had to find out more about that extravaganza and to see whether it was an isolated event or whether other towns in the county celebrated in an equally elaborate fashion. An examination of the *Canton Commercial Advertiser* and the *St. Lawrence Plaindealer* for the years 1875-1900 provided the answer to that question with a wealth of detail about July Fourth celebrations in Canton, Potsdam, Madrid, Brick Chapel, Hermon—indeed in every town in which people gathered "for the purpose of commemorating that memorable day in a manner worthy of those who secured to us our independence, and planted upon our virgin soil the Tree of Liberty." (*Plaindealer*, June 27, 1878)

Most striking of all of these accounts was the magnitude of the celebrations.

In a time when travel was primarily done on foot or behind horses, one might expect that each small town would hold its own little festivity and that communication among the towns would be minimal. Instead, although Ogdensburg seems to have held an annual celebration, the other towns in the county took turns hosting giant events which drew thousands to their streets and fairgrounds. There are constant references such as this one from the 1895 *Plaindealer*, to quiet holidays occasioned by the migration of the entire population of a town to a nearby village to celebrate:

Canton was like a grave yard on the Fourth. The early trains took every able bodied person out of town and the noon train took the residuum. Streets were deserted save for an occasional bicycler, who with muscles drawn and perspiring countenance, was hustling to some neighboring town to assist in saving the nation.

In 1893 when it was Potsdam's turn to play host, 350 people from Canton alone went over to join them. Canton was not always ignored, though. In 1885, the *Commercial Advertiser* proudly reports that ten thousand people had already arrived at the Canton depot by 10 A.M., followed by more who poured in on later trains. Ogdensburg, of course, had the added advantage of a second transporta-

tion network to bring in revelers. In addition to extra holiday train coaches, there were steamers from Kingston, Clayton, and Ganonoque to help carry the huge crowds. Even with this knowledge, it is still rather startling to read that in 1888, there were twenty thousand spectators to watch the Ogdensburg fireworks. Even more arresting, perhaps, is the crowd of 1500 which took part in the 1880 celebration in land-locked Russell.

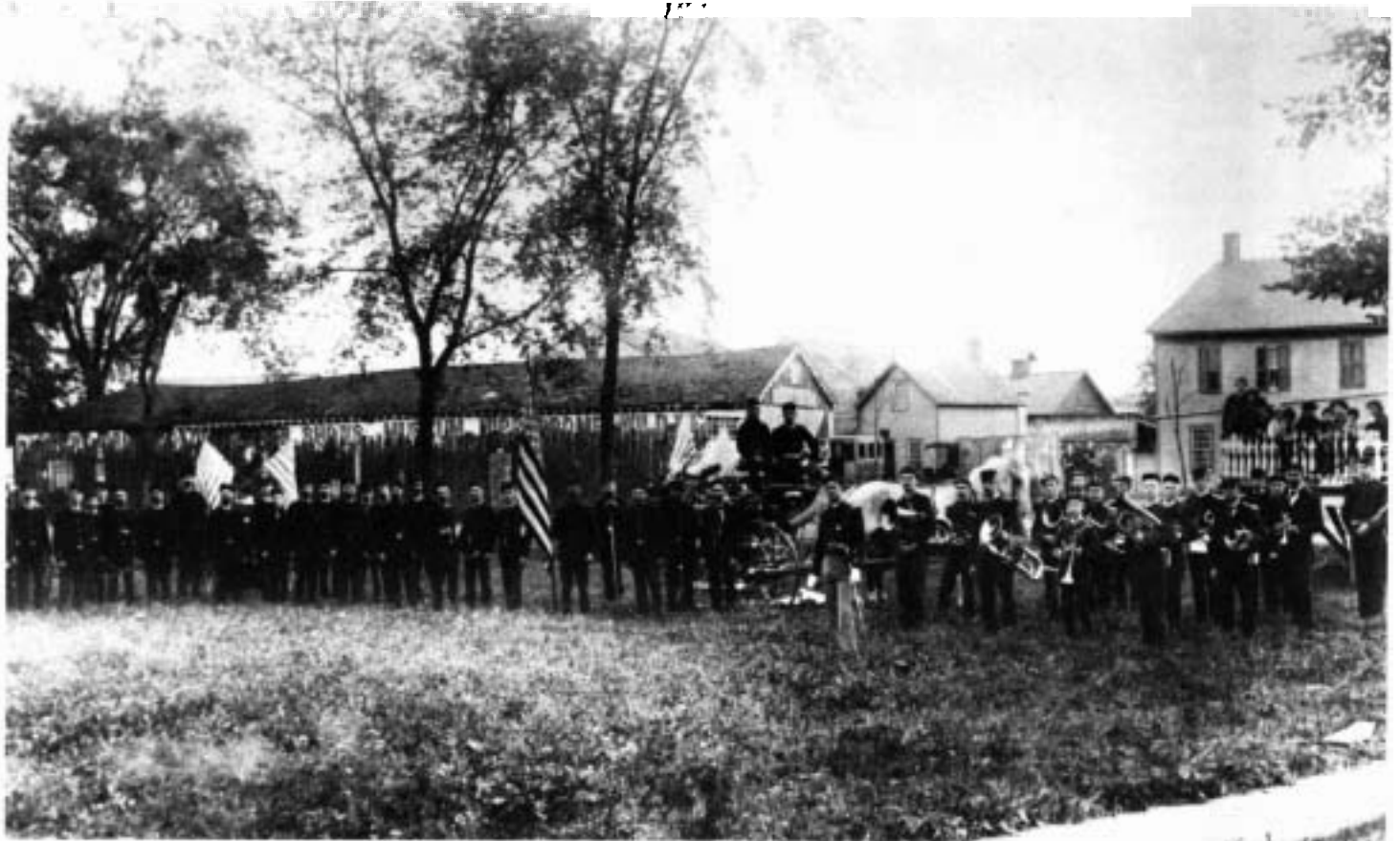
Clearly, these Fourth of July festivities were powerful magnets with the ability to draw so many to them, but what exactly was involved in a North Country Fourth? These celebrations varied little from town to town or year to year. Each consisted of a number of elements, none of which could be left out without risking protest by outraged merry-makers. The Glorious Fourth, as it was invariably called in these newspaper accounts, began at midnight with the firing of a cannon, sometimes borrowed especially for this purpose if a town did not possess its own. Even if a cannon was not available, there was always a church or two to usher in the holiday with pealing bells. For the remainder of the night, there was an almost constant racket, as small boys shot off firecrackers purchased with money carefully hoarded ever since the previous Fourth and local bands

marched up and down the streets of the town, playing as loudly as possible. Then, at dawn, came more firecrackers, cannons, church bells, and a thirteen-gun salute in honor of the original colonies. The Russell correspondent in 1887 rather peevishly expressed one point of view toward this aspect of the celebration:

We wish there was some law that would prevent patriotism from bubbling over before break of day on the 4th of July. It is bad enough to suffer the din of guns, bells, and crackers after one has had a reasonable amount of sleep.

The continued popularity of this kind of noisemaking, however, leads one to suspect that more people agreed with the Canton reporter of 1899 who felt "a celebration of the Fourth would not be complete without the cannon to get people up bright and early to enjoy things."

Music played a large role in the Fourth of July celebration—and not only in the middle of the night. Glee clubs and community choruses usually took part in the official program, as did harpists and violinists, but the main attraction was always the bands. Each little town had its own cornet band, which it proudly sent forth to take part in the local festivities. No Fourth of July celebration



Canton firemen and village band gathered in park on a Fourth of July around 1890. Farmers' market sheds, the American House hotel and bandstand in park line the rear. (Photo courtesy of G. Atwood Manley)

FOURTH OF JULY!

AT
OGDENSBURGH, N. Y.



THE COMING ANNIVERSARY OF
**AMERICAN
INDEPENDENCE**

Will be celebrated at OGDENSBURGH in accordance
with the following Programme :

At Daybreak, ONE GUN.

At Sunrise, a National Salute of Thirteen Guns.
Flags hoisted and Bells Rung one hour.

At 11 o'clock, A. M., a procession, consisting of the following organizations, will form at the Seymour House, under the direction of Col. GEO. R. MYERS, Marshal of the Day, and march through the principal streets to the grove, on the west side of the bridge, where the exercises of the day will be held :

Band,
Military,
Band,
The Fire Department.
Band,
The F. & A. Masons,
Odd Fellows,
Sons of Temperance,
Band,
Carriage, containing thirty-six young ladies representing the Union,
The Catholic Benevolent Society,
Sabbath Schools,
Band,
The St. John Baptiste Society, with visitors from Malone,
including 1000 children,
Drum Corps,
Village Authorities,
Committee of Arrangements,
Citizens and Strangers,
And it is expected the 106th and 142d Regiments, will be here to take
part in the procession.
President of the Day—Hon. DAVID C. JUDSON.
Orator of the Day—W. H. BURLEIGH, of New York.
Reader of the Declaration of Independence—LOUIS HASBROUCK, Jr.

During the moving of the Procession a salute of

Thirty - Six Guns

Will be fired and the Bells rung one hour.

IN THE AFTERNOON

A TUB RACE

Will take place in the Oswegatchie River, near the bridge.
First Prize \$15 ; Second \$10 ; Third \$5.

At four o'clock the Renowned

FRONTIER TERRIBLES!

Will appear and march through the principal streets.

At Sunset, One Gun and Flags Lowered.

In the evening a Grand Display of

FIRE WORKS

Will take place, on the West side of the Bridge, and close the festivities of the day.

Tickets at half-fare will be sold on the Northern Railroad, good for two days, and it is expected a similar arrangement will be made with other lines leading into Ogdensburgh. A general invitation is extended to the people of Northern New York.

Come One! Come All!!

A. M. HERRIMAN, Secretary.

A. B. JAMES,
Chairman of Committee of Arrangements.

LONG LIVE THE REPUBLIC!

Broadside advertising Fourth of July activities, Ogdensburg(h), 1865. Actual size reproduction. (Courtesy of Special Collections, Owen D. Young Library, St. Lawrence University)

worth its salt had less than three or four such bands to escort new arrivals from the depot to the fairgrounds, to march in the parade, to perform in the official program, to stroll up and down the streets or play for picnickers, and to provide the music for the evening dance. In 1885, Canton enjoyed the services of the Potsdam Cornet Band, the Malone Band and the Brasher Band, in addition to those of their own Farmers Band. Ogdensburg in 1890 outdid themselves and their neighbors by inviting six local bands to take part in their celebration, then importing Liberati's fifty piece military band from New York City to supplement the area talent!

Around 10 A.M. a procession formed, always drawing heavily on the services of the indefatigable bands. This procession marched through the streets of the town until it arrived at the Town Hall or, sometimes if the weather was good, at a platform in the park. Then began the formal Fourth of July exercises. There was not a trace of our modern embarrassment in the face of sentiment, and songs, readings, prayers, and orations were unabashedly patriotic. Although the items on the program might vary from year to year, a main attraction was always the reading of the Declaration of Independence, followed by a patriotic oration. There is no need to quote from several of these orations; they had a comfortable sameness which allows a description of one to stand for all. The speech delivered by the Honorable George Gleason of Gouverneur in Canton in 1889 is a representative sample.

It was replete with sound sense and patriotism, and contained numerous eloquent passages. The speaker opened with a tribute to Silas Wright, 'almost under the shadows of whose monument' the company were assembled. He spoke of the important significance of the day we celebrate, of the peace, plenty, and prosperity that crown our land, of the growth, progress, and greatness of our Republic. He referred in glowing terms to the struggles of those who founded the Republic, whose glory was to be that its every citizen should be a sovereign. They preferred war with all its dangers and

trials to peace purchased at the price of liberty. The war of the Revolution and the progress that followed in the years of peace were pictured, and in thrilling terms the War for the Union was depicted, with a rapid glance at some of its most salient incidents. The nation's present greatness was delineated and made emphatic by statistics showing the marvelous extent of our material development. The address closed by setting forth in a concise and pointed manner the duty of American citizens to maintain a spirit of union, to foster a spirit of improvement, a spirit of industry, a spirit of education, and a spirit of Christianity.

The roots of today's back-to-the-earth movement are clearly visible in the exercises held at Brick Chapel in 1886. There, the speeches dwelt on the evils of city life and the moral benefit of living on a farm, and the program concluded with the soliciting of volunteers to act as hosts for Fresh Air children.

Once the formal program had ended it was time for lunch. Huge repasts were spread out, often by the women of a particular congregation to raise money for their church or by the town women to pay for new uniforms for the local band. According to the reporter from South Colton, in 1881 the united length of the picnic tables was 271 feet! Although the details of the food were not generally given in these accounts, one can theorize plenty of ham, fried chicken, biscuits, and johnny cake in addition to the lemonade, ice cream and strawberries which did make their way into the reports.

The end of lunch was the signal to move on to the fairgrounds for the afternoon contests. Horses were vital to the rural American a century ago, and horse-racing was a major sport. No Fourth of July would have been complete without a full afternoon of racing. In addition, there was always a baseball game between teams from local towns—Canton against Gouverneur, or Potsdam against Madrid. In Ogdensburg, there were also lacrosse matches which pitted American against Canadian teams. For those who enjoyed competition, but preferred to rely on their own abilities rather than those of teammates or horses, there was a huge

variety of individual contests from which to choose. There were standard foot races, such as the 100-yard dash. In addition, for those who wanted a bit more variety, there were sack races, three-legged races, wheelbarrow races, barrel races, and potato races. The fat man's race provided humor, along with the greased pole climbing and the catching of a small, very swift and very greasy pig. Wrestling or boxing and tests of strength, such as shot putting and throwing the heavy hammer, finished out the program of competition, unless one lived in a place like Waddington or Ogdensburg where such water-based sports as a tub race or a punting or a sculling race could be added.

Around 4 P.M. the parade began, and an amazing thing it was. All the visiting bands took part, of course. Added to these were local and visiting fire companies with their big wagons pulled by sturdy horses. Then came the part everyone had been waiting for—the "horribles" or "terribles" or "terrifics"; the nomenclature varied from town to town, but the creatures were the same. Unfortunately, there were no photographs in those days to document these parades, so we have only the written descriptions of the local correspondents to guide us as we try to imagine them. It seems they must have been much like our modern Halloween costume parties or like the Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans, for participants dressed up in costumes and painted their faces in fanciful designs. With more than a hint of hyperbole, the Madrid correspondent writes of a "monster Hippodrome with terrible terribles" which took part in the parade of 1893. The report continues, "More than one rustic swain had to invest in a five cent soda or lemonade to revive his fainting sweetheart when it had passed." In Canton, at least, this event was called the "Parade of the Mighty Murioitrischilioi", and the leader of the grotesques was called Major-General Xylopolaetricorythusuxii. He grouped his marchers into tableaux on floats representing such patriotic themes as the Statue of Liberty, George Washington, and the freeing of the slaves. In 1887, the parade took the form of a roast



Two views of "horribles," or "terribles," or "terrifics," in Fourth of July parades, Canton. (Photo courtesy of G. Atwood Manley)

of Queen Victoria with such floats as "Ireland—Evicted," "Sympathy with the South," and figures representing her dowered and pensioned relatives. Other marchers did not take part in floats, but simply went in costume, impersonating Devils, gaily painted Indians, animals, and other typical masquerade characters.

Those who were hungry again after their afternoon of excitement could now snatch a quick bite to eat before the beginning of the evening dance. Then, after the sun went down, the final part of the celebration began—the illuminations and fireworks. Even in this day of neon-gaudy Times Square and night baseball played in stadiums which a finger flick can flood with light, it is difficult to imagine the fascination which our ancestors had with illuminations. There is something about a glow highlighting one aspect of an otherwise darkened area that can turn an everyday object into one of mystery and surpassing beauty, as everyone who has ever attended a candlelight dinner or seen the fire falls at Yosemite knows. How much more wonderful such sights must

have been to people who were unused to street lights and huge neon signs! In 1874, fifteen thousand Chinese lanterns of various sizes and shapes were hung in the trees of the town on the evening of the Fourth. With a little imagination, it is not difficult to forgive the effusion of the reporter who gushed that this illumination was "without exaggeration the most beautiful, delightful, brilliant, and gorgeous thing of the kind ever presented to human eyes." The citizens of Ogdensburg had the benefit of the St. Lawrence River to add the beauty of reflection to their illuminations, and they took advantage of the fact by sailing lighted flotillas past the crowds assembled on the banks to watch the fireworks. Another type of illumination was practiced in Madrid—the torchlight parade. In 1874, the Madrid reporter gives a vivid description of "100 beautiful little girls all dressed in white, with head wreaths and blue sashes, each carrying a rod, from the top of which was suspended a Chinese lantern" marching through the darkened streets of the town, performing drills and counter-marching as they went.

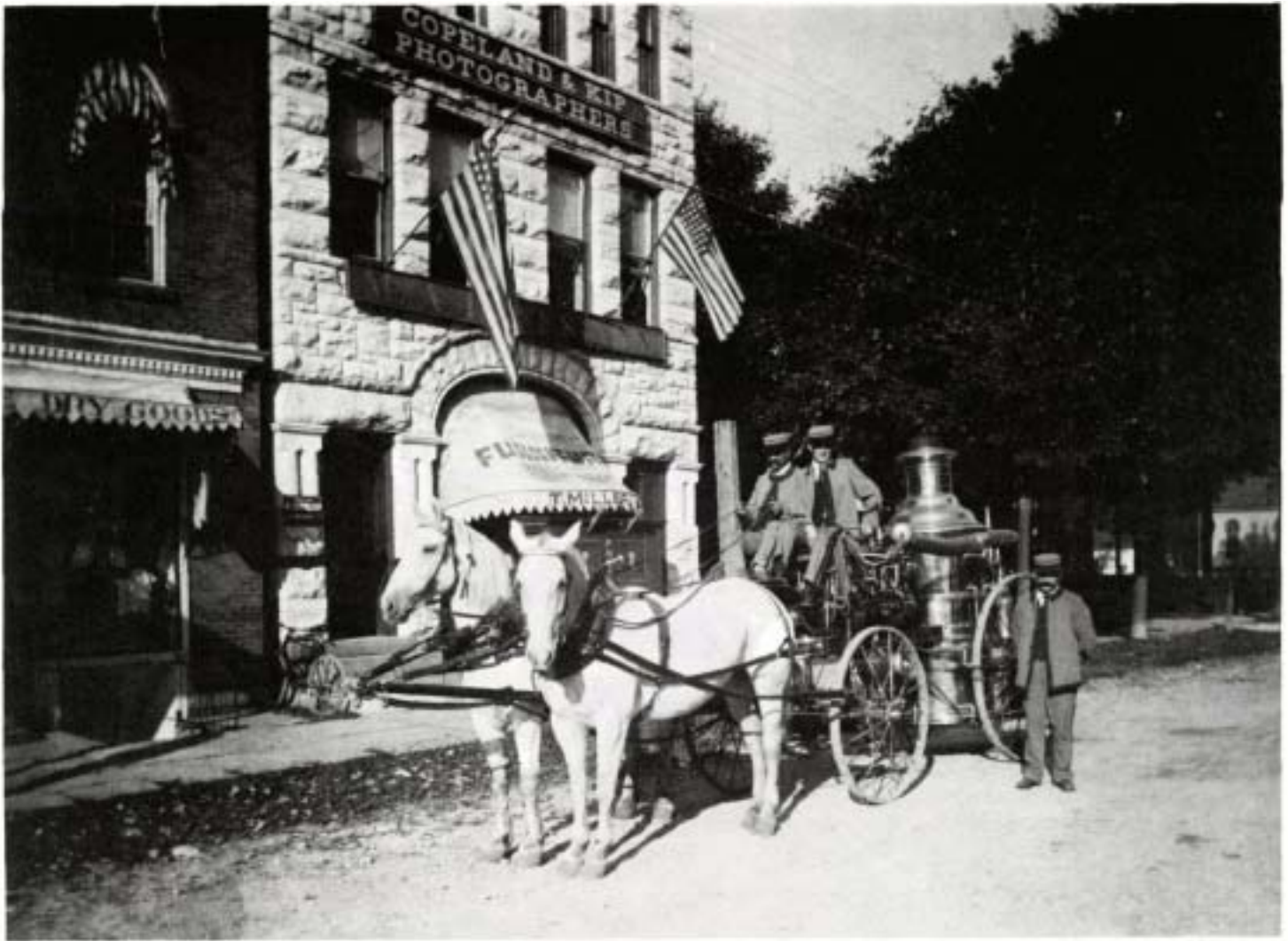
Not content with illuminating the objects around them on the ground, people have always been fascinated by fireworks which can conquer the darkness of an entire sky. Then, as now, the Fourth of July was not complete without fireworks. In those days when a dollar *was* a dollar, one can only guess at the cost of the full two hours of fireworks enjoyed by the citizens of Russell in 1880. In 1887, the *Plaindealer* printed a detailed list of the fireworks which were to be displayed at the July Fourth celebration in Canton. Unfortunately, it is much too long to reproduce here. The best that can be done is merely to provide an appetite-whetting glimpse of such wonders as "The Man in the Moon (A large, round, laughing face, illuminated from behind with fires of great brilliancy, and cases of sun fires, throwing out in different directions showers of brilliant scintillations)" or "Colored Harlequinade Rockets (These at first display a shower of variegated stars and release in mid-air a number of floating, twisting and gyrating figures representing aerial contortionists—an amusing and novel effect)" or "Sparkling



Canton band in linen dusters, headed down Main Street. (Photo courtesy of G. Atwood Manley)



Firemen's races on Main Street in Canton. (Photo courtesy of G. Atwood Manley)



Fourth of July in Canton with Canton Fire Department's Silsbee Steamer, the "Silas Wright." Driver is Dick Fobare, engineer Charlie Cook (seated), foreman George Maine (standing), and team Belle and Lora. Taken ca. 1912-15. (Photo courtesy of G. Atwood Manley)

Waterfall (Opens with a crimson illumination, changing to a beautiful cascade of liquid fire, terminating from within with crimson and blue Saxon rosettes, which reflect through the falling spray innumerable tints by illuminating fires from behind and showers of brilliant spin fire radiating in different directions.)" Often the program of fireworks culminated in the ascension of a fire-balloon, sometimes with additional fireworks attached to it.

This, then, was the Fourth of July in St. Lawrence County a century ago. Reading through twenty-five years of holiday descriptions, one is struck by how little they seemed to change. The weather, of course, had an influence. Rain could wash out a celebration, and days "hot enough to evaporate an elephant" could cause a parade route to be shortened. National disasters, such as the shooting of President Garfield, could occasion special prayers at the morning exercises, and more local crises, such as the loss of an arm due to misfire by one of

the men shooting the dawn thirteen-gun salute in Gouverneur, could cast a temporary pall over the festivities. For the most part, though, the celebrations floated on through the years almost untouched by the forces which were acting on the everyday lives of the revelers. When electricity came to Canton in 1887, it was simply incorporated into the illumination display "with beautiful effect." When the craze for bicycles hit the North Country, as it did everywhere in the 1890's, bicycle races were added to the afternoon contests at the fairgrounds. A new means of locomotion had been added, but the basic drive to join with others in a huge festival of celebration had not been altered, as can be seen in this report of the quiet Fourth which resulted when all the Canton inhabitants went to Ogdensburg or Madrid in 1896:

Some went by cars or horses, but by far the most went by bicycle, and by the middle of the forenoon every bicycle livery in town was cleaned out, and one dealer

informed us that he had 150 applications after his wheels had all been taken.

Since I stopped my reading at the papers of 1900, I can not say when or why the changes began to creep in; that is another project. All I can say is that we live in a very different world from that of those people who packed the Town Hall to hear the Declaration of Independence read, and most of us can not honestly say we would wish to trade places with them. Yet, if we are to maintain that honesty, we must admit that we feel a twinge of regret for the special feeling that died when the Fourth ceased to be "Glorious" and became just another three-day weekend.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

About the Author

Lynn Case, a past contributor to *The Quarterly*, has recently been appointed Special Collections librarian and university archivist at St. Lawrence University.

'Old Hollywood', Delightful Account of a Summer Colony in Canton

BOOK REVIEW by Lew Weeks

One of several positive reviews of the SLCHA reprint, this first appeared in the Courier and Freeman, Potsdam, August 5, 1980. Copies of the book are still available from area bookstores and at the Silas Wright House and Museum.

Old Hollywood: The Story of the Jordan Club 1890 to 1980 by Lewis Fisher. Edited by Paul Jamieson, Canton, N.Y.; St. Lawrence Historical Association, 1980.

In 1966, a limited edition of Lewis Fisher's *Old Hollywood* was published for the enjoyment of the few; now, fortunately, the St. Lawrence Historical Association has made a new edition, edited and with a forward by Paul Jamieson, available for the delight of the many.

Primarily the book is the story of a small summer colony enthroned at the confluence of the Jordan and Raquette rivers and located in the township of Hollywood in the town of Colton. For those who love the Raquette River and the Adirondacks, it is a special treat, dealing as it does with a small section of the river, both before and after it became the present Carry Falls Reservoir. For those who have not yet fallen under the spell of river, woods, and mountains, *Old Hollywood*, touching upon many of their features, will prove a persuasive advocate.

For anyone privileged to know intimately a summer camp community on lake, shore, stream, or mountain, the book will sharply awaken a host of memories; for anyone not so privileged, it will help create, through the evocative magic of words, a vicarious experience that will linger long in the memory. However, *Old Hollywood* has a much wider appeal than merely to the nostalgic or the nature lover. For so small a book, about one hundred pages, it has unusual variety.

There is, in the first chapter, ancient history, folklore, and even a bit of mythology. For those especially interested in sociology and class structure, the second chapter draws a generally kindly picture of the year-round residents, who live, if not exactly on the wrong side of the tracks, at least, "across the Raquette."

In quite sharp contrast, chapter three takes us across the river to another and rather different and privileged world, that of the Jordan Club. Here, through both time and space, we wander, on lovingly described paths, downstream and across the Jordan, and further down the Raquette, visiting in turn special places hallowed by long use or made almost sacred by fond memories of meaningful events. Along the way, we visit each cottage; and we make the acquaintance of the families that are the

heart of this little summer paradise, set off from the rest of the world by the forest on the east and the Raquette on the west. Of course, there is an occasional serpent present in this Garden of Eden, for truth and reality's sake.

From the shore, chapter four takes us out onto the river and recreates for those readers who never knew it, the Raquette running free before the dam at Carry Falls turned it into a seven-mile-long lake. We begin this part of the Hollywood story in the midwest, with Lewis Fisher, and journey through the oft described "trip to camp" sequence, climaxed in this case by the crossing of the river, which places us "already at home, because we live very much with the river."

Battle Against Dam

The author's next three chapters are for the politicians, the economists, and the environmentalists. They detail the long, heartbreaking, and futile struggle of the colony and especially the author to prevent the building of the dam and the impoundment of the Raquette for power development, a move that was to drown the colony. It is an instructive and engrossing story, with its heroes, its generosities, its pathos, and even its moments of humor.

Though, for various reasons, the power company's victory was long in becoming a reality, the Jordan Club members were finally flooded out. However, through the cooperation of the power company and the Federal Power Commission, an exodus rather than annihilation occurred. It became possible, for those who wished, to build anew or to move their cottages to favorable sites on the newly formed lakeshore; and the club did survive.

Time, the automobile, and changing vacation customs have greatly altered the nature of the colony; and the fact that Carry is merely the feeder source for maintaining the water level of numerous other reservoirs and their generating plants downstream, means that, as the summer wears on, the level of the lake may be lowered significantly, altering the shoreline and exposing unsightly reminders of the past. But such is the price of progress!

Lewis Fisher has a sharp eye, keen senses, a nimble mind, and a nice sense of humor. His style is a bit convoluted, and his book ought to be read in a leisurely way appropriate to vacation reminiscences. Above all, he has a poetic imagination and makes us experience,

along with him, the joys, the fun, the sadness, the beauty, the frustrations, and the delight in people that make life rich and rewarding. He enjoys character and has a way of presenting the telling insight that makes us feel we know and like the people of the Jordan Club and Hollywood, warts and all. Who will forget Mr. Flood and his iron soles or "Unc" Barnum and his selective and singular detestations?

Other attractions of the book are its extensive and informative notes and especially its "Amplifications," the reminiscences of various members of the Club, concerning aspects of life in the cottages or places mentioned in the book. Maps, photographs, good print, attractive margins, and the cover, showing islands in the Raquette now under water, all make this book both attractive and useful.

On my workshop wall are a few pieces of rusty iron that we brought back years ago from a fall trip to the Parmeter Campsite at the head of Carry. The water was low, and we could walk down the usually flooded road to what used to be Hollywood. We noticed old pilings, brick from chimneys, and other relics from the past, that stirred our imaginations but of which we had only superficial knowledge. Now we shall return to Carry, with our own pleasant and personal memories enriched by a surer and shared knowledge of the past. With *Old Hollywood* in hand, we shall make our next trip to Carry something of a pilgrimage and a rediscovery. I hope the present members of the Club will not object to such gentle, discreet, and affectionate intrusions as Lewis Fisher's book may inspire in its readers.

In his foreword to this edition, Paul Jamieson, who set the new *Old Hollywood* project afloat and edited it, tells of the trials that mortals must make to reach the "Other World." He goes on to suggest that the crossing of the Raquette by boat or canoe to the Jordan Club partook somewhat of this ritualistic trial and gave an added sense of privilege and value to the arrival in "the Promised Land on Jordan's shores." Those of us who do not actually visit and enjoy the Jordan Club or the state land on the other shore of the Raquette can for the easy "trial" of a mere \$5 purchase *Old Hollywood* at local bookstores and make the privileged journey in our imaginations.

Reprinted from the Courier and Freeman, Potsdam, Aug. 5, 1980.

My Front Yard Miniature Bridge

by Steven R. Pike

While many of us take bridges for granted as the quickest and easiest means to reach the other side, there are some that are great works of art and engineering. One such structure is the suspension bridge over the Grass River at Massena Center. The author here describes that bridge's history and praises the work of master bridge builder Holton D. Robinson.



Suspension bridge over Grass River in Massena Center. (Photo courtesy of the author)

A graceful bridge is the combination of imaginative design, engineering, and architecture. It is a utilitarian structure, of course, but also a visual pleasure.

Each day I see such a bridge. By present day standards, it's much too narrow for comfort, but still it stands there—a proud, silent testimony to its designer. Spanning the Grass River at Massena Center, the miniature structure is barely 400 feet long and 12 feet wide. The design classifies it as a suspension style, the weight of the road bed being supported by slender cables. In Massena Center we have grown accustomed to crossing it by car, and even risking an occasional two-car encounter. However, a visitor to the area would have reservations regarding this maneuver. We can, in fact, generally identify our visitors quite easily. Before attempting to cross the structure, we are treated to several horn blasts from either side. I expect these would be to announce to another potential user at the other end the folly of attempting to cross!

Toward the village of Massena about one half mile upstream, there is a much more modern concrete girder type bridge. This one carries two lanes of traffic comfortably and efficiently from Route 37 toward the Seaway area. Although I do enjoy the very small suspension, I have often wondered why the Town of Massena would go to considerable expense to maintain and repair the old structure. After all, it only serves to connect two small settlements, and the other bridge could just as easily be used. I decided to attempt to find the

reasons, and in this process I discovered an interest in general bridge structure as well.

Certainly the idea isn't new. Man has always managed to find a way across the water. From the most primitive log to the magnificent Golden Gate, there is a way to span the water.

There are essentially three different types of bridge structure, or combinations thereof. The beam or girder is a simple arrangement of a flat bed supported by strategically placed beams. This type can easily be lengthened by adding intermediate piers. In the cantilever arrangement, the ends are anchored, and projectory beams form spans with their tips touching. The cantilever is generally lengthened by use of a center insert of a suspension nature, but the entire arrangement still generally remains a simple beam structure.

The arch design is a second major classification. In this type, the arch carries the load of the road bed by pressing into the outward thrust of the ribs. Many of our small local structures are designed in this manner.

The suspension, my front-yard miniature, is the third type. The road bed is literally slung from cables. I read descriptions of the main designs several times, and still encountered difficulty really visualizing the structures. Simple illustrations make the mental picture much clearer.

What factors determine the type of structure to be used in any given locality? One, of course, is the preference of the designer, the level of skill and

talent that he can call on to create the work. Current successful models will be copied and improved upon. It's much easier to use a tested design than to attempt a radical change that ends up in the water instead of across it. Are the materials readily available in this culture to make the project feasible, and finally why is the structure needed? Will it carry a railroad bed or is it a multi-level structure intended for both cars and trains? What depth is the river it will span, and how wide must it be? Any or all of these factors must be considered by the design engineer.

Of the three main types the arch or arch-cantilever is considered a superior design for railbeds. Because of the great weight of the "live load" and the wear and tear on the joints that trains impose, another design would be impractical. There are some difficulties in using this design, though. Today, a 2000-2500 foot span is considered the safest maximum length. Construction is quite expensive, especially on spans approaching 1000 feet. The design requires bedrock to set the foundations, and when working in very deep water, the dangers of construction can easily be imagined.

An interesting and famous example of the arch-cantilever structure is the Eads bridge over the Mississippi River. The river is 1500 foot wide at that point, with depths varying from 54 to 136 feet below high water. In 1869 James B. Eads, who was not a bridge but a *steamboat* engineer, was appointed engineer for the mighty bridge. It would have to carry traffic on the upper deck and two

railroad tracks on the lower. Mr. Eads designed three arches with two side spans of 502 feet, and a center span 520 feet long. The structure was completed in 1874, and carries traffic even today. Many feel that this accomplishment has not since been equaled. Locally, observe the small spans in surrounding towns. One can see clearly designed arches; the seams of strengthening are usually quite visible. Massena has one of these in the business district.

The cantilever-suspension construction was employed in the design of the Firth of Forth Bridge in Scotland. It is notable because of its sheer size. At the time of its opening in 1890, it had the two longest clear spans in the world. Designed by Baker and Fowler, it also remains in full service today.

Since 1930, steel with its high tensile strength and modern cablization methods have made possible the suspensions of today. They can be erected quickly and construction is much less hazardous than it used to be. Extensive scaffolding to set the cables is no longer necessary, since the cables are now pre-assembled and fitted into the towers at the location of manufacture rather than the bridge site. Suspensions are the practical type for multi-deck auto traffic and even for elevated railway decks. They are not as expensive to construct generally, since the ends are anchored and extensive bedrock installation under the water is not required.

Think of the Golden Gate Bridge at the entrance to San Francisco Bay. Even though many have never actually seen it, because of the publicity given the structure visualizing it is quite easy. Officially opened in 1937, it boasts a main span of 4200 feet. Designed by Joseph Strauss, for 27 years it was the longest suspension span in the world. It lost that record in 1964 with the erection of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge in New York City. This one, designed by O.H. Ammann, boasts a main span of 4260 feet! Very impressive, but still the Golden Gate remains in the mind as *the* suspension bridge. This isn't so for me. New York City is welcome to the Verrazano Narrows, and San Francisco can keep the Golden Gate. I will happily settle for what is reputed to be the smallest bridge of its type in the country.

The design of this suspension is quite unusual. Observe the superstructure and see what would be the future of bridge building. Yet, note that the macadam surface on the narrow road bed covers wooden planking. The past and the future are represented here. The man responsible for this particular structure was Holton D. Robinson.

In 1909, the Town of Massena decided that a bridge at Massena Center was necessary. They contacted Mr. Robinson and he agreed to design the structure.

There was a stipulation, though. The Town Board had only \$40,000 to spend for the project. The design submitted by Robinson was given to local contractors for bids. All agreed that such a bridge couldn't be built for less than \$60,000.

Mr. Robinson decided that he couldn't accept this verdict. Confident that he knew his subject well, the man came to Massena Center and proceeded to act as his own contractor. The bridge is truly his—from original idea to completion. And the final cost? Holton Robinson completed it in ten months at a total cost of \$39,000! Small corners were cut for the sake of economy. The cables were not protectively wrapped and actual construction is visible on examination. The first road bed was made of simple wooden planks. The bridge stands today just as safe and sturdy as it was in the



Holton Duncan Robinson. (Photo courtesy of G. Atwood Manley)

year 1910. A macadam surface now covers the planking, and the bridge is wearing a rather odd shade of green paint. (I'm not certain that the latter was an improvement.)

Mr. Robinson knew this area of Massena Center very well. It pleased me to learn that he spent his boyhood here. He attended the little Massena Center School (no longer standing), and he would have played along the banks of the very river that he later returned to. In fact, one of his reasons for returning to build the structure was his admitted fondness for his former hometown.

When he came home in 1909, he was already well established in the engineering field. From 1899 to 1903, Mr. Robinson had been in charge of the construction of the Williamsburg Bridge in New York City. This bridge, designed by

Leffert Buck, was the first large suspension constructed with steel towers. An interesting encounter with Mr. Buck, who was a brother-in-law of George Robinson, led Holton into his eventual chosen field. By this time Holton was living with his Uncle George in Canton and attending St. Lawrence University. The young Robinson came upon some linen rolls showing designs for spectacular bridges stored in his uncle's attic. These designs fascinated Mr. Robinson. Later, he had the privilege of meeting Mr. Buck in Canton. Mr. Buck was so impressed with Robinson that in 1886 he invited him to join the Leffert Buck Engineering Firm in New York City.

Holton Robinson did have a favorite bridge. Certainly it isn't the largest of his works, but he was extremely pleased with the Thousand Islands International Bridge. When the bridge was nearing completion, this man climbed the towers to the platform some 185 feet above the workmen. Against a thirty-five mile an hour wind, with nothing to hold on to, he took a handkerchief from his pocket and allowed the wind to carry it as far as his eye could see. He was 78 years old at the time! His remark later to a friend, "Not so bad at my age, was it?" seems to tell us a great deal about the personality of Mr. Robinson. Comments by people who were well acquainted with him indicate that he was a modest, unassuming individual, content to get on with his work. He wasn't a glory seeker, nor an idle boaster. Mr. Robinson died in 1945, and the world lost an outstanding person. I certainly never had the pleasure of meeting him, and still I like him. If this is possible, then his work must tell quite a story. Perhaps that explains my fascination with the little bridge.

He designed, engineered or acted as a consultant on every continent except Africa. At 75 years of age he was 1000 miles north of the Arctic Circle, consulting on yet another bridge. He has designed every type, yet he is most famous for his innovations on the cablization process and necessary machinery for suspension spans. The great suspension spans of today owe a great deal to the efforts of Holton Robinson.

Previously, methods used to set cables were dangerous, time-consuming and expensive. The first step in cable erection is establishing a connection between the two river banks. Next, working platforms must be constructed to allow supervision of the splicing of the wires from reel to reel and regulation of their length. Another preliminary detail is the traveling rope—an endless wire suspended across the river and driven back and forth by machinery to draw all of the wires from one bank to another. After 200-450 wires were drawn, they were tied together at intervals to form



Aerial view of Thousand Islands International Bridge, described by H.D. Robinson as "his greatest satisfaction." At 78 Robinson walked the complete length of both suspension cables in its final inspection.

bundles, or strands. This tedious process is now done by flat-band "seizings" invented by Mr. Robinson. Strands do not have to be squeezed in successive layers, since the flat-band seizings can remain in the cables. They simply burst and become a part of the rope cable. Mr. Robinson also invented and developed the hydraulic squeezers necessary to allow the strands to be compressed into a cylindrical cable. After the cables have been set, the suspenders hung, and the floor constructed, the cable is covered with a protective wire wrapping. The wrapping machine was also the "brain-child" of Mr. Robinson.

One can easily note the improvement in cablization by studying the time factor involved. Previous to Mr. Robinson's inventions, the Brooklyn Bridge, completed in 1883, took thirteen years to complete. The cables on this one, requiring 900 tons of wire per cable, took twenty-one months to spin in place. In 1939, the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge was completed in twenty-three months. This structure required 2000 tons of wire per cable, and spinning took a total time of two months. These drastic time reductions are a direct result of the improved cable spinning. Quite an accomplishment by one man!

Mr. Robinson also had the wisdom to select an equally talented partner, Mr. David B. Steinman. The latter played a most important part in the aerodynamic safety so necessary for the design of a suspension bridge. He form-

ulated a "coefficient of rigidity" to set the standards for allowing successful construction (and remaining stability) of the bridges. Mr. Steinman was an author in addition to his other skills. I have taken the liberty of using his *Bridges and Their Builders* extensively for this article.

Robinson and Steinman were responsible for so many grand structures that enumeration would take several pages. Let's simply say that they are both world famous. Check the index of any major work on the art of building bridges, and their names will appear.

It will be obvious to the reader that this paper is not intended to be a technical treatise. I have neither the knowledge nor the desire to build a bridge. I can appreciate them, and be content to recognize the structures. I can now especially appreciate my own front-door suspension bridge.

A Partial List of H.D. Robinson's Projects

1. Williamsburg Bridge, *New York City*
2. Driving Park Avenue Bridge, *Rochester, New York*
3. Rondout Suspension Bridge, *Kingston, New York*
4. Bear Mountain Bridge over *Hudson River*
5. Mid-Hudson Bridge, *Poughkeepsie, New York*
6. General U.S. Grant Bridge, *Portsmouth, Ohio*

7. Mount Hope Bridge, *Rhode Island*
8. International Bridge, *Detroit, Michigan*
9. Hudson River Bridge, *New York City*
10. Henry Hudson Arch Bridge, *New York*
11. Waldo-Hancock Bridge, *Maine*
12. Lions Gate Bridge, *Vancouver, British Columbia*
13. St. Johns Bridge, *Portland, Oregon*
14. Proposed Liberty Bridge, *New York City*
15. Marine Parkway Bridge, *New York City*
16. Skyride and Observation Towers, Century of Exposition Center, *Chicago, Illinois*
17. Rip Van Winkle Bridge, *Catskill, New York*
18. Topeka Avenue Bridge, *Topeka, Kansas*
19. Triborough Bridge, *New York City*
20. Coolidge Memorial Bridge, *Northampton, Massachusetts*
21. Philadelphia-Camden Bridge, *Camden, New Jersey*
22. Florianopolis Bridge, *Mainland Brazil to island city of Florianopolis*

About the Author

Steven R. Pike lives right next door to the bridge in Massena Center, works for a musical supply store and as a musician, and completed this article for a writing course at Canton ATC.



Unpainted ram and bird on nest. (Courtesy of Judy and Varick Chittenden and Kay and Robert Wyant)

Bill Queor—A Right Temperament . . . and Sharp Knives

*by Varick A. Chittenden
Photographs by Lisa Morss*

From January 18 to February 22, 1981, the Silas Wright House and Museum hosted an exhibition of selected works of two contemporary woodcarvers, Hazel Tyrrell and William Queor. Here we present a photographic sample of the works of Bill Queor, a man of great talent and imagination who humbly kept an important artistic tradition alive and shared it with us.

"You need two things—the right temperament and sharp knives." That was the basic answer Bill Queor would give when asked about how to become a good wood carver. He would then add that other people had carved with him, "but they give up when it don't come out right the first time."

William J. Queor (1910-1980) of North Lawrence carved wood "to keep his hands busy." He lived nearly all of his life in the area of eastern St. Lawrence County and the northern Adirondacks. For most of his years he worked in the lumber woods or as a hired man on farms, always moving on after a little while.

Bill's father, Duane, made ax and hammer handles—and other tools—out of necessity and young Bill would always watch. "You know kids," he would say; "I'd have my nose right in it." The older Queor would occasionally carve life sized interpretations of domestic ani-

mals. Nicholville residents remember a remarkable replica of a big watch dog in the family yard on the Port Kent road, just outside of town.

Bill Queor took up carving about twelve years ago, after he gave up the hard work of the woods. He had loved animals and hunting and fishing. He felt inspired to create miniatures of all kinds: animals like deer, bear, elk, moose, horses, and birds. But he also recreated with considerable accuracy farm implements and horse drawn vehicles—like haywagons and logging sleds remembered from his working days—and insisted on his own accuracies, in such things as loggers' tools and the manner of harnessing horses for work or light driving. With a few rough tools—a few jack knives, one hunting knife, a chainsaw file, and sandpaper—he would shape a wide variety of objects from cedar, basswood, and cherry, never pine. "Pine has too many knots in it, which I

have to carve around," he would say.

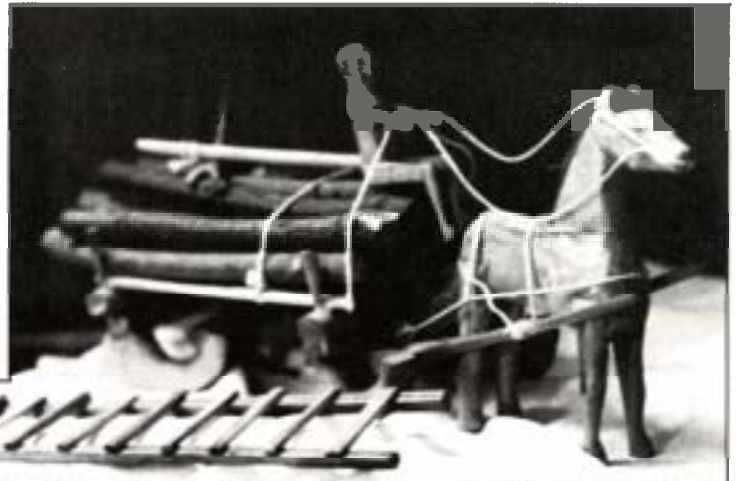
To paint or not to paint (?) was never very much of a question for Bill. He would paint as the spirit moved him, or as some customer might request it. When he did, he always worried about the color, although he relied on what he could find to come as close as he could. Bill was a genuine folk artist. He actively carried on a traditional means of expression (and amusement) common to two groups with whom he shared a heritage: French Canadians and woodsmen. He had no art training whatsoever and little self-consciousness about the "rules" of sculpture or art. He did have his own sense of aesthetics, however, and labored hard to please himself and his friends. Quiet and reserved, he (and his work) was not widely known, but he was gaining a reputation as an inspired and skillful artist at the time of his death in September 1980.



Doll in rocker. (Courtesy of Mrs. David Foster)



Painted trotting horse and sulky. (Courtesy of Hebert W. Hemphill, Jr.)



Unpainted logging sled, the first of many carved by Queor, ca. 1970. (Courtesy of Mrs. David Foster)



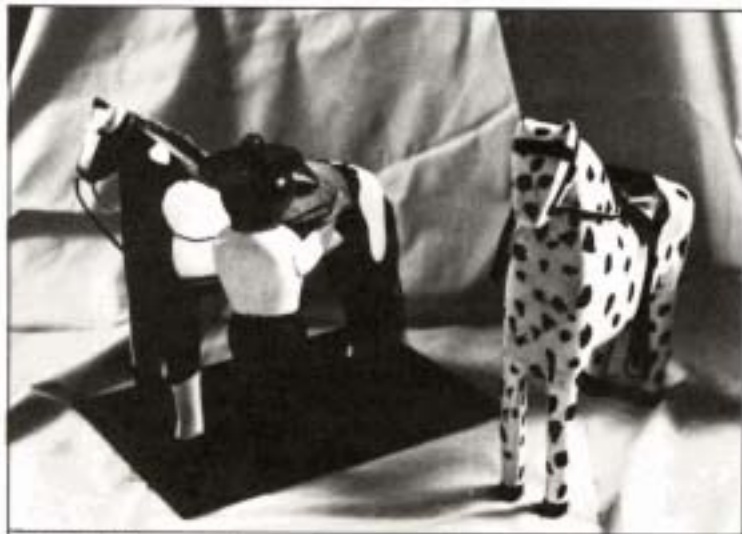
Unpainted dolls, cradle. (Courtesy of Jill and Terry Martin)



Unpainted woman nursing baby. (SLCHA Collection, gift of Johannes Van Riet)



Painted hunter and deer in boat. (Courtesy of Marilyn and Allen Splete); *Painted fisherman and fish in boat.* (Courtesy of Barbara and Robert Bethke)



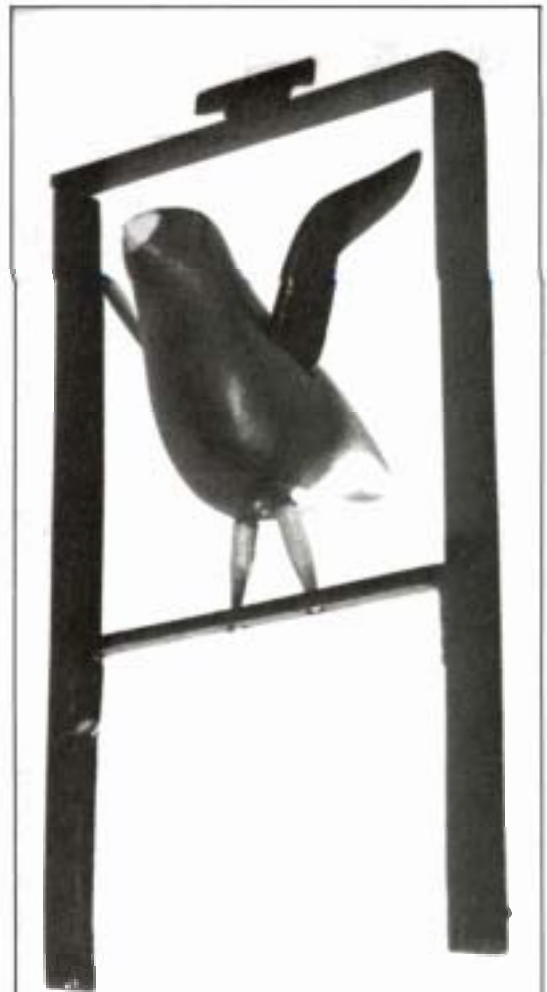
Painted horse and standing man. (Courtesy of Herbert W. Hemphill, Jr.); *Painted spotted horse.* (Courtesy of Judy and Varick Chittenden)



Unpainted bird tree. (Courtesy of Jeremy Wyant)



One piece chains, painted floral wreath, painted snake, and painted whimsy. (Courtesy of Sally and John Van de Water, Herbert W. Hemphill, Jr., and Judy and Varick Chittenden)



Painted bird on perch. (Courtesy of Herbert W. Hemphill, Jr.)



Bill Queor at his workbench, North Lawrence, 1980. (Photo courtesy of Johannes Van Riet)

We Are Pleased to Announce . . .

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association has received an award of merit from the Regional Conference of Historical Agencies (RCHA) for the publication of the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of "The Quarterly." The publication began as a 12-page mimeo form in 1956, and received its new format in 1977. "The Quarterly," edited by Varick Chittenden, reached a high standard in content and format with the 1980 issues. "The Quarterly," available to the members of St. Lawrence County Historical Association, explores all fields of county history. "The Quarterly" can serve as a model of high quality publications by historical agencies within the service area of the Regional Conference.

The awards committee of the RCHA announced eight Award of Merit winners during its annual meeting in Syracuse on April 25. Winners were selected

from among 350 historical agencies within the 23 county service area of the Regional Conference. The awards are presented for outstanding accomplishment of a project or program in the field of state, regional or local history. The awards are a public acknowledgement by RCHA that the selected projects or programs deserve the adjective "excellent."

The Regional Conference of Historical Agencies is a service organization for historical societies, museums, historians and interested individuals within a 23 county service area in central and northern New York. The RCHA Award of Merit program was conceived in 1979, with the first 10 awards being presented in 1980. The awards are a recognition of outstanding work by historical agencies in serving the public and preserving New York State's cultural heritage.

ADDITIONS & CORRECTIONS

(to April, '81 List of Official Historians)

Fowler: Connie Bishop

R.D. 3, Gouverneur

Macomb: Julia Kittle

Madrid: Lourene Pierce

Piercefield: Beulah Dorothy

Russell: Pat Hogle

Villages of Canton, Massena, and Hammond have same historians as towns.

Village of Hermon: C. Walter Smallman

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Chairman, RCHA Board of Trustees


Chairman, RCHA Awards Committee

Date April 25, 1981

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If your corporation or institution would like to support Association work, a representative will gladly discuss details with you.

When You Think of Giving Think of SLCHA

As the *St. Lawrence County Historical Association* continues to grow, we urge our members to consider the opportunities available to you in terms of charitable gifts.

Basically, gifts to the *St. Lawrence County Historical Association* fall into three categories, all of which provide considerable tax benefits to the donor.

1. **Current Gifts:** These support the current on-going programs of the *Historical Association*.
2. **Bequests:** A clause in a donor's will leaving money or property to the *Historical Association*.
3. **Deferred Gifts:** Here assets are transferred to the *Historical Association* by a donor who retains income rights or other benefits from the gift during his lifetime.