

THE QUARTERLY

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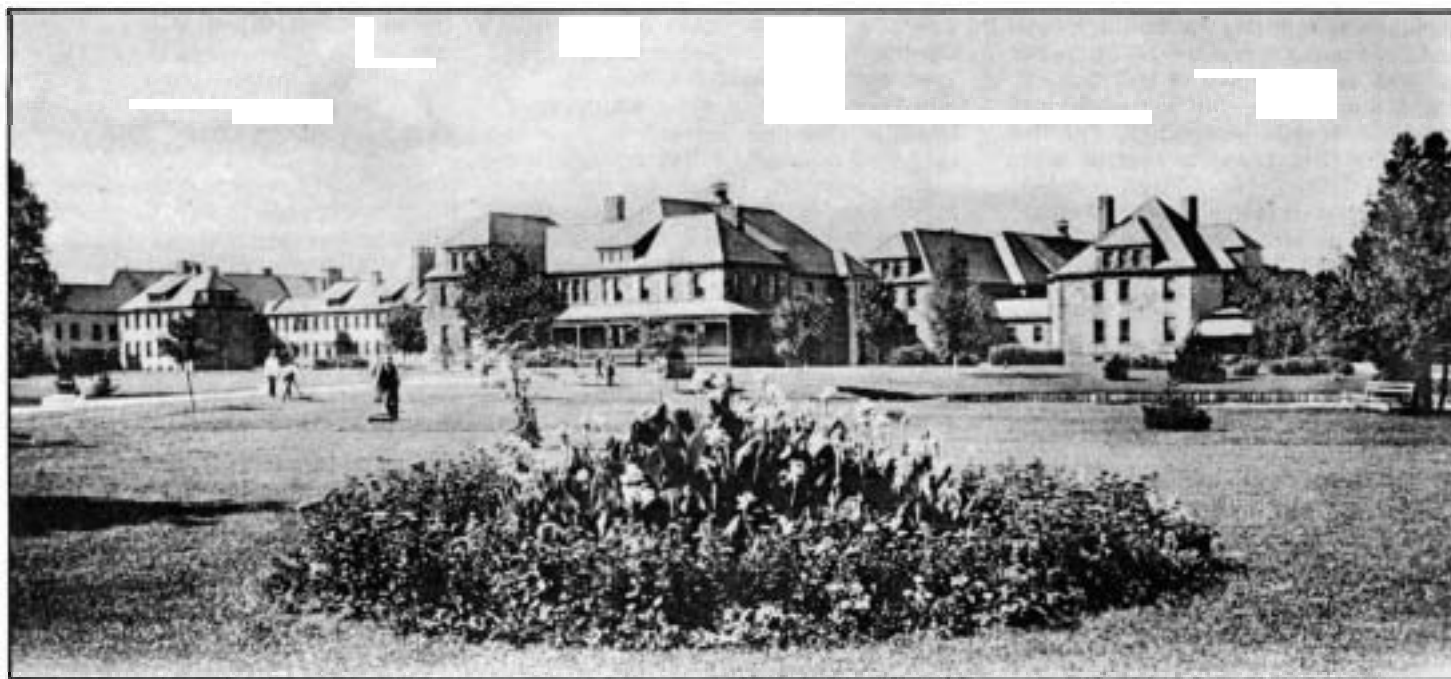
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Editor: Varick A. Chittenden

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Cover: Interior of sun rooms at the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center at Ogdensburg. The glass ceilings were removed in 1948 to allow for construction of more office space. See historical synopsis of Psychiatric Center on page 3. (Photo courtesy of St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)



An early view of the Flower Memorial Building. The landscaping of the grounds rapidly became a source of pride for both the patients and area residents. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Co. Historical Association)

A Healthy, Fertile Location - An Historical Synopsis of the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center

by John A. Baule

Since its founding in 1866 to the present, the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center in Ogdensburg (earlier the St. Lawrence State Hospital and at first the State Asylum for the Insane) has been a large and innovative force in the state's care for the mentally ill. Hundreds of acres and many buildings have been developed into this large complex. Here the author presents a social history of the Center, based on an initial study he has done in preparing for the nomination of the buildings to the National Register of Historic Places.

"A healthy, fertile location that admits of perfect sewerage, secures pure air, and boasts attractive scenery"—these words in 1887 described the preferred location near Ogdensburg for the construction of a new state hospital in Northern New York. This new hospital, now known as the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center, has become a highly respected public institution not only for its pioneering advances in the care and treatment of the state's mentally ill, but also for the beauty of its grounds and the architectural significance of its structures.

Its story begins on April 29, 1886, when General Newton Martin Curtis, then a New York State Assemblyman from the Town of DePeyster, secured approval of his bill authorizing the appointment of five commissioners to find a location for a mental hospital

somewhere in Northern New York State. Governor David B. Hill appointed Dr. Peter M. Wise, William Pryor Letchworth, C.C.B. Walker, James Spencer, and Joseph M. Cleveland to survey various sites during the summer of 1886. It was fortunate for Ogdensburg that Hill chose Letchworth, for it was the persuasive influence of Letchworth that secured approval of a point of land along the St. Lawrence River east of the City of Ogdensburg. Alternative locations near Plattsburgh, Gouverneur, Watertown, Carthage, Adams, Oswego, Lowville, Malone, and Greenfield were rejected when the Ogdensburg choice was made on November 10, 1886.

The commission's selection of "Point Airy", a local name for the site, was ratified in Chapter 375 of New York State Law, which was passed on May

18, 1887. William L. Proctor, Chairman; George Hall, Secretary; and John Hannan—all of Ogdensburg—comprised the first Executive Committee of the first Board of Managers, which was organized in Syracuse on October 27, 1887. The first task of the managers was to actually secure the land to be used for a new "State Asylum for the Insane". This they did by purchasing 760 acres of farm land at Point Airy for \$66,933.50.

Isaac G. Perry, State Architect in Albany, was selected by the Managers as Chief Architect. To ensure a harmonious whole, Perry was charged with the responsibility of drawing plans for a hospital to serve 1500 patients even though the enabling legislation had suggested a beginning capacity of 500. The resulting preliminary plans called for a central

group of administration buildings and cottages to accommodate 600 patients, as well as a complex of outlying cottages and colonies for 900 additional. Portions were to be erected as needed with the first phase to cost no more than \$300,000.

The rationale behind this preliminary design is summarized in Perry's first report, dated September 28, 1887. In this document Perry called for buildings ". . . to meet the varied needs for the successful care and treatment of the bodily and mental conditions of inmates at a minimal maintenance cost." He had consulted several medical superintendents, including Dr. Carlos F. MacDonald of the State Asylum for Insane Criminals, before drawing the first plans. These consultations led Perry to believe that no building should be more than two stories, with the first story devoted to day use and the second for sleeping. Also, buildings for the feeble, helpless, and greatly disturbed should be only one story; interior arrangements should approximate domestic life; and most importantly, there should be a number and variety of buildings to allow for ample classification and housing of patient disorders. These principles, especially the concern for the adequate separation of patients by type of disorder in connected cottages, resulted in what is known as a Kirkbride style hospital. This style had been recently and successfully inaugurated by Dr. Kirkbride at the new Buffalo State Hospital, where treatment was being accomplished through the establishment of quasi-family groups.

Isaac Perry's first specific recommendations, therefore, proposed the construction of five major groups and fourteen detached cottages. Each group was to contain as many as 22 separate buildings attached by corridors. There were to be distinct spaces for recent admissions, the infirmaries, patient treatment wards, housing for the physically mobile patients, housing for the chronic bedridden insane (then called the feeble and filthy patients), dining areas, kitchens, employee housing, administration, workshops for occupational therapy, and recreation.

The spirit of this design was eventually incorporated in the buildings actually constructed, but even by January 27, 1888, Perry was submitting a reduced plan both to meet the state's budgetary limitations and upon the advice of Dr. MacDonald and Dr. Stephen Smith, State Lunacy Commissioner.

By the end of 1888 the Board of Managers had purchased more land to bring the total acreage to 950 at a total cost of \$90,500. Construction had begun on September 10, 1888, with the

groundbreaking for what is now called Center Hospital or Center Group. This inter-connected complex includes the administration building; a structure housing sunrooms, a medical dispensary, and a library; infirmaries for the care of the sick; cottages for the housing of physically competent patients; a central kitchen; and a laundry. The kitchen and laundry were connected via underground corridors vented to the outside with ceiling light and air shafts.

At the same time, construction also began on a second separate group of one-story pavilion buildings for the

"feeble and filthy classes of chronic insane"—in other words those patients in need of constant nursing and for whom the chances of complete recovery were considered slight. This second group was named Letchworth in September 1912, and is known by that name to the present day. Central heating, electric generation, water, and sewer facilities sufficient to handle a future load of 1500 patients were begun as well.

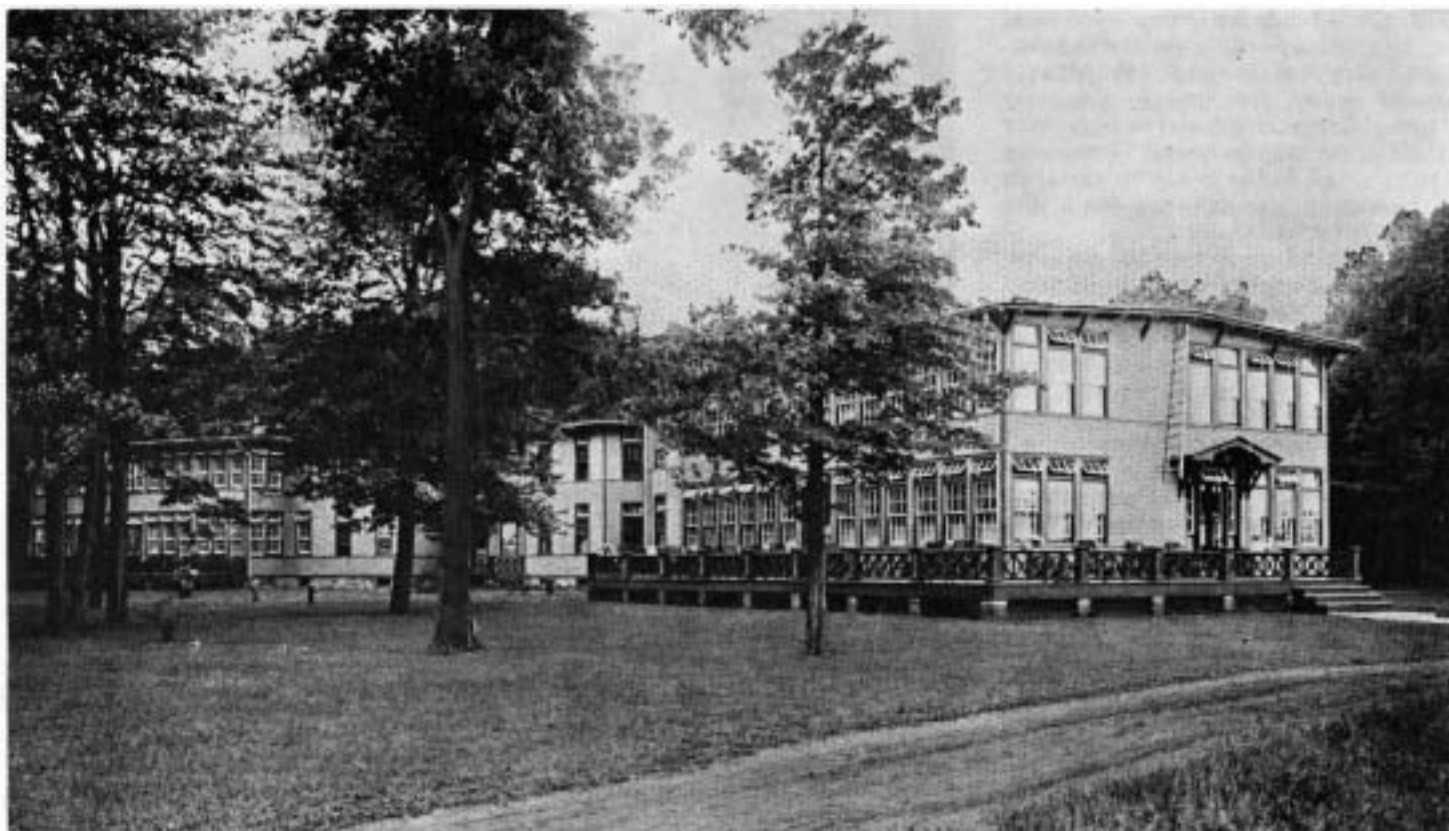
Perry continued to obtain advice from Drs. Smith and MacDonald as well as Dr. Peter Manuel Wise, then Willard Asylum Superintendent, and



A Sunday evening song fest, ca. 1900. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)



Employee dining room. Note the nurses' uniforms as well as the way the silverware is arranged on the table in the foreground. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)



Inwood, built for the tuberculosis patients. The many windows admitted quantities of fresh air, which was believed to be the cure. Demolished in the early 1970's. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Co. Historical Association)

Dr. G. Adler Blumer. With his first plans being executed, Perry summarized his architectural aims in his **January 12, 1889, report to the Board of Managers:**

“Buildings are to have abundant air and sunlight, also grouped and massed so that the outlines produce the main feature representing their leading purpose, and harmonizing with their surroundings, ornamentation having been almost entirely avoided. The intention has been to produce a sense of solidity and a style of architecture requisite and proper for asylum purposes, and the buildings are characterized by discreteness, moderation, and propriety.”

In contemporary terminology, Perry created buildings in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, which was very popular for public buildings in the late nineteenth century. The style typically incorporates rough-faced stone facades that cause the structure to appear very massive, heavy, and permanent.

In 1889 the Board of Managers was authorized to secure complete plans for a 1500 patient hospital at a cost not to exceed \$1,150 per capita. The managers stressed the asylum would then have two divisions: a hospital department for the concentration of the professional

treatment, to be headquartered in the Center Group; and a maintenance department for the chronic insane, to be headquartered in Group Two (Letchworth).

On August 29, 1889, Dr. Peter Wise was appointed the first medical superintendent. He applauded the design of the new hospital for its lack of monotonous corridors and its generally cheerful aspect. He did, however, recommend the name of the hospital to be changed to the “St. Lawrence State Hospital” because of the negative connotations associated with “State Asylum for the Insane”. This was formally done in 1890.

The new St. Lawrence State Hospital opened on December 9, 1890, following the partial completion of the Center Group and Letchworth. The first patients arrived during the nights of December 9, 10, and 11, 1890, via special train coaches and then horse-drawn sleighs from the Rome, Watertown, and Ogdensburg Depot in Ogdensburg. It was bitterly cold weather and since the hospital’s electric light plant was not yet in operation, the admission of over 140 patients was done using lanterns. Dr. Wise wrote in his first report that the successful receipt of so many patients in so short a time was “. . . an achievement which

has never before been equalled in the history of the care of the insane in this state.”

Over the next four years, buildings under construction, or approved for construction at the time of the opening, were gradually completed and occupied. These included all of the present Center Group, most of the present Letchworth complex, the superintendent’s residence, the carriage-house and stables, the boiler and electric dynamo houses, a pump-house adjacent to the river, and Group Three. Group Three, named in 1912 in honor of Governor Flower, was built as an enormous series of buildings to house female patients and related staff. In March 1893, shortly before the first patients were to be admitted, a massive fire heavily damaged much of the group. Governor Roswell P. Flower urged the state legislature to appropriate an additional \$181,000 for repairs even though \$221,750 had already been given that same fiscal year for the same building. The emergency measure passed both houses of the legislature and was signed by Flower the next day.

Thus, the group was finally occupied in late 1893 and is directly behind Center Hospital. Group Four, a companion structure for male patients, was designed for a location west of Group

Three, but funds for Group Four were never appropriated. Crowding and contact between male and female patients caused severe problems in the early years of Group Three, and on December 4, 1907, the men in Group Three were transferred to the State Hospital in Binghamton in exchange for a like numbered group of women.

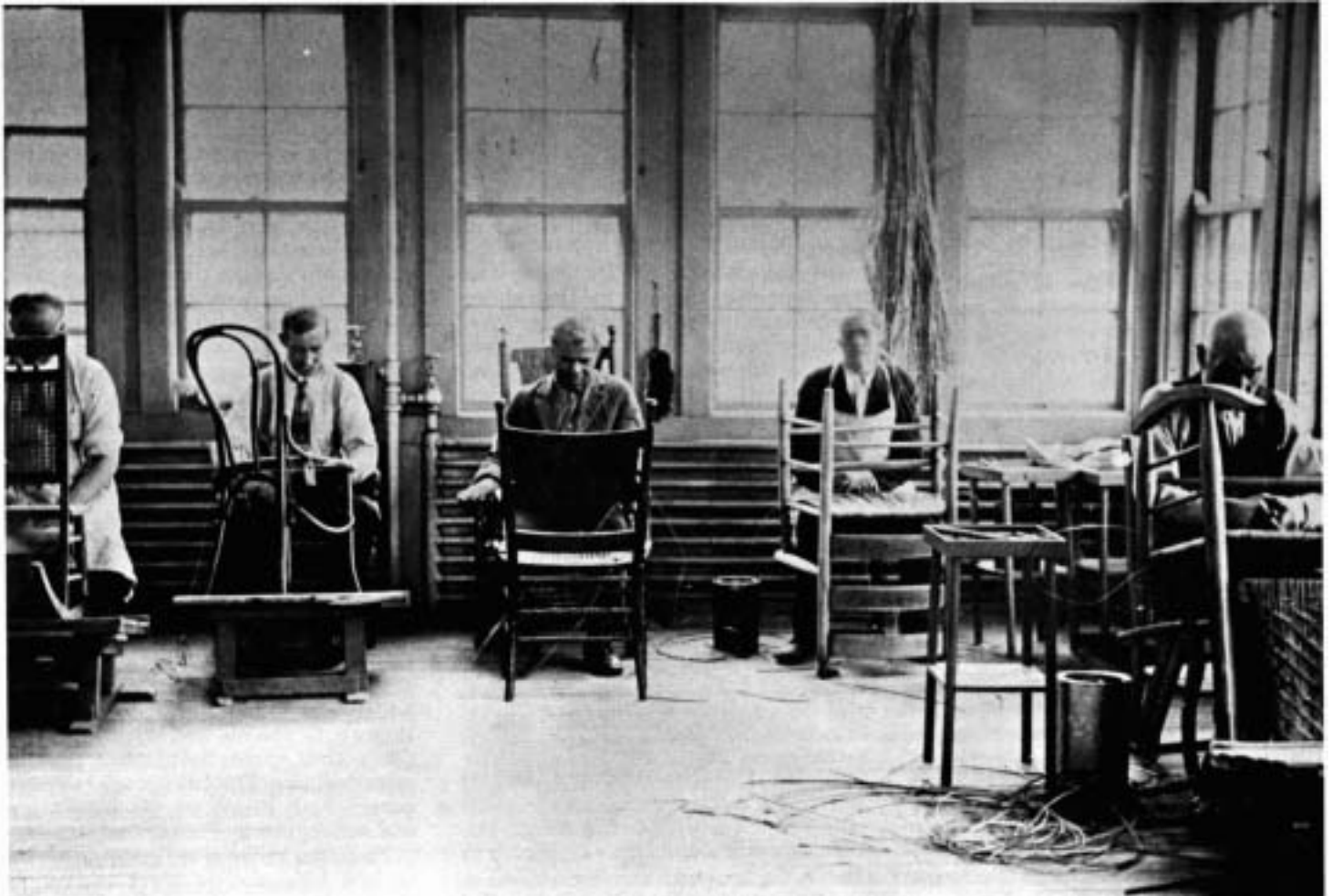
Other buildings soon joined the complex. The gardener's cottage, a large brick farmhouse purchased along with acreage to the west of Center Group, was remodeled and expanded to house 35 patients assigned to work in the hospital's extensive flower and vegetable gardens, which soon became such a showplace that they were a regular stop for visitors to the Ogdensburg area. In 1893 a cottage to house employees was approved and begun to the west of the central kitchen. This structure was later used by student nurses and is now called the Education Building. The recreation building, named in 1910 for General Newton Martin Curtis, was completed in 1896 after several earlier vain attempts to secure the necessary state funds. And even when the recreation hall was finally author-



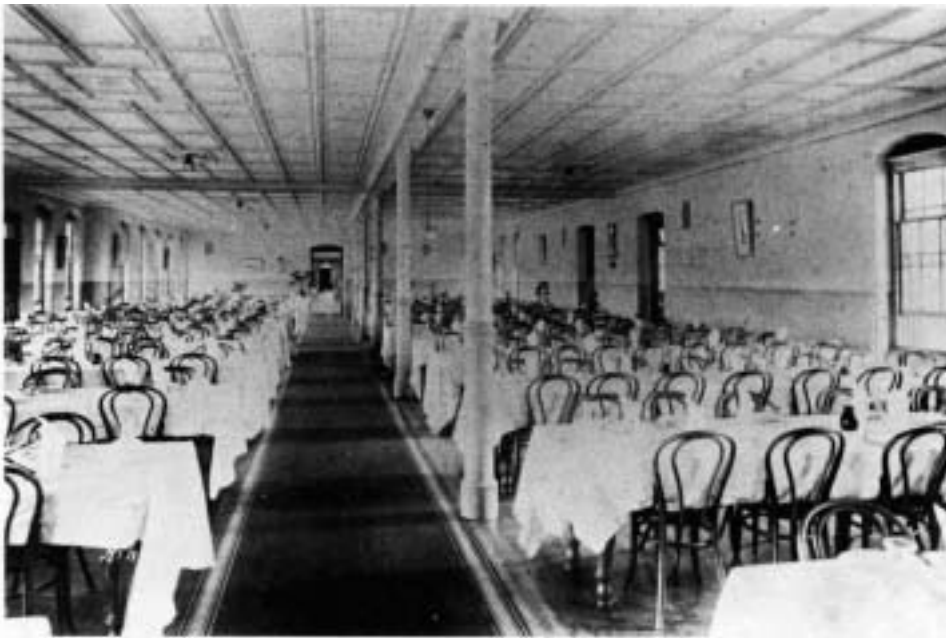
*Class in the preparation of foods for the patients by nursing students, 1913.
(Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)*

ized, plans for a basement bathhouse and a gymnasium separate from, but connected to, the auditorium and stage,

were deleted. Curtis Hall, however, is one of only a few 19th century Northern New York theatrical stages still



*Chair caning class. One of the many craft classes taught at the hospital.
(Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)*



*Dining Room, Flower Building or Group Three as it was known until 1912.
(Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)*

surviving.

In 1899 two infirmary wings were added to the Letchworth complex to

complete its present configuration, and in 1898 a brick cottage to house the patients assigned to work on the hospi-

tal's farm was occupied. In addition, service buildings, barns and outbuildings for the farm operation, ice and storage houses, a milk house, and a boat house for the hospital-owned steamship "Dorothy" were all in place by 1900.

A landscape plan was drawn by J. Weidmann of New York City, and throughout the next 25 years there were regular state appropriations for walkways, trees and shrubs, and the creation of artificial scenic lakes. To ensure the elimination of typhoid believed to result from the use of tainted St. Lawrence River water, the City of Ogdensburg began to supply water from the Oswegatchie River in December 1900. Also, the hospital built its own pond behind the Central Kitchen specifically for the harvesting of sewage-free ice after discovering in 1902 that river ice was causing typhoid.

Construction of new auxiliary and support buildings has continued to the present day. In 1904, Inwood, a frame structure with large open porches for the fresh air treatment of tuberculosis, and Invernith, an isolation cottage for contagious diseases, were opened. In



Looking across an artificial lake toward the power station and fire hose tower. The open building on the right was the terminus for the trolley from Ogdensburg. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)



Ward in Letchworth. One of the aims of the new hospital was to create a homelike atmosphere, as is apparent in the ca. 1900 view. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)

1906 a surgical pavilion was built adjacent to the central group to provide a better medical facility. Also in 1906 a New York State law allowing religious societies to erect chapels on public hospital grounds took effect. Immediately thereafter, Ogdensburg's St. Mary's Cathedral and other local North Country Catholic parishes, gave a Roman Catholic chapel, St. Vincent de Paul's, to the hospital. A Protestant/Jewish facility was similarly donated, but not until 1958. Eastwood, an employee dormitory, was opened in the spring of 1910 to provide housing for those working nearby in the tuberculosis wards at Inwood.

State appropriations allowed the complex to continually expand after 1900 with numerous storage buildings, barns, and remodeling projects; as well as with the purchase of more acreage. By 1917, the St. Lawrence State Hospital owned 1,219¼ acres, cultivated 966 acres, valued its real estate at \$3,015,900; employed 400 people, and

cared for 2,158 patients.

The Board of Managers, however, continued to petition the State Legislature for expansion to relieve overcrowding and provide better staff housing. In 1923 a \$50 million bond issue for state ward care was approved by New York State voters. The St. Lawrence State Hospital secured a share of this money and between 1928 and 1931 built new staff housing, a reception hospital (later named Pritchard Pavilion after one of the medical superintendents), a nurses' residence, and a new TB pavilion, called Southwood. Better exit facilities and mechanical systems were installed in many of the older buildings at the same time. Inwood, the only existing building to be specifically replaced in this expansion, was converted for use as a crafts center.

During the 1930s basic repair and maintenance continued at an accelerated pace with WPA assistance. Major new construction during the post World

War II era consisted of a new central power house in 1949-51, two new staff residences in 1951, the Protestant/Jewish Chapel in 1958, and Trinity Building, a major patient care facility to replace Curtis Hall and the Flower Building, in 1979-81.

Since 1890, these buildings have housed a functioning hospital that remains well-regarded for the fine quality of patient care. Voluntary admission of patients began in 1908 and was believed to be effective in eventually removing the social stigma associated with mental illness and mental institutions. In March 1910 an outpatient department, then called a free dispensary, opened as the first of its kind in any state institution.

One of the most extensive early treatment techniques was occupational therapy, which by 1908 was highly organized and used to re-educate patients' attention and personal volition. The farming and gardening were especially thought to be beneficial to mental



Letchworth day room. Note the open truss ceiling. One of the tenets favored by Dr. Wise was that each patient was to have 600 cubic feet of space. One way to do this without increasing the building dimensions was to build up—hence the high open ceilings. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)

health since so many of the hospital's patients came from rural backgrounds. Farm and garden products included milk, oats, beef and pork, potatoes, cabbage, lettuce, mangel wurtzel (beets for cattle fodder), radishes, celery, carrots, silage corn, fruit, and squash. Examples of sewing room articles were aprons, dresses, napkins, rag rugs, pillow cases, sheets, shirts, roller towels, underwear, and blankets. Sewing shops, the production of tinware, brushes, and brooms; shoe shops; farming; and gardening were instituted also to supply the hospital's own needs. Some occupations—most notably a canning plant, a logging department, fluid milk sales, livestock sales, and the production of such field crops as hay and potatoes—produced considerable income for the hospital as well. Most of this type of occupational therapy is no longer in existence—for a variety of reasons. Evolving theories of the causes for mental and emotional disorders called for other methods of treatment;

the hospital began to purchase more of its own supplies rather than remaining self-sufficient; and by the early 1960s federal and state laws discouraged the use of non-compensated patient labor. The farm closed permanently at the end of 1959.

Throughout its history, the hospital has also prided itself on the variety of social activities and recreational opportunities. These have included popcorn and sleighing parties, picnics, berrying excursions, an annual field-day, an annual masquerade ball, theatrical and musical performances, movies, a Sunday evening song service, access to a supervised river beach on the grounds, and weekly dances. A patient library was established in 1892, and grew through donations by Ogdensburg and area residents. Early contributors to the library included Elizabeth Strong, Edward Strong, and Louis Hasbrouck. From the late 1890s until World War I, the hospital owned a steamship, "The Dorothy", for summer excursions on

the St. Lawrence River and as a ferry to summer camping at state-owned Lotus Island, four miles below Point Airy. Regular trolley service from the center of Ogdensburg down Proctor Avenue to the hospital existed from 1896 until 1932 for the use of those visiting patients or simply making excursions to the hospital grounds. Bus service replaced the trolley until it too was discontinued in 1955.

The hospital is also noted for one other major program—a school of nursing. When the hospital opened in 1890, it became apparent that there was a shortage of nurses trained in the care of the mentally ill. Accordingly, a nurses' training school was opened on December 10, 1890 and graduated its first class of nine women and one man on May 23, 1893. Considerable effort was expended on the training program over the years both in the development of innovative courses and in field work. An affiliate exchange program with other psychiatric nursing schools be-



Decorative gazebo on shore of the artificial lake in front of Letchworth.
(Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)



Invernith, the isolation cottage for patients with contagious diseases, was built in 1904. It is now used for staff housing. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)



St. Vincent de Paul Chapel, donated to the hospital by the Catholic parishes in Northern New York in 1907. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Co. Historical Association)



Medical library in building directly behind the administrative offices. Note the encaustic tile floor, which remains to the present day, and the balcony of white oak, which has been removed. (Courtesy St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center)

came quite successful. The last class was graduated in 1981, and further training is now the responsibility of nearby branches of the State University system.

There have been other major changes since the end of World War II. The introduction of tranquilizing drugs and the advent of an open door policy in the mid-1950s did much to change the hospital. Outpatient services, begun very early in the twentieth century, now became increasingly important. Physical change occurred as well. The building of the Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge required the hospital to cede 600 acres of land formerly used for flower and vegetable gardening to the Ogdensburg Bridge and Port Authority, which in the 1970s acquired an additional 100 acres of hospital property for a light industrial park. This shrinking in size did not materially affect the appearance of the main hospital grounds, for the Bridge and Port

Authority land is separated from the hospital buildings by a strip of dense woods. This wooded area is an original landscape feature and is the source for such building names as Inwood, Eastwood, and Southwood.

There has been remarkably little building loss considering the size and complexity of the hospital. With the exception of barns and other service sheds, the major buildings no longer in existence are the central laundry (replaced by a one-story brick building near the power plant in the mid 1960s), the pump-house near the St. Lawrence River (obsolete after the complex began to receive its water from the City of Ogdensburg), Inwood (demolished 1972-73), a greenhouse, and a fretwork gazebo on shore of one of the artificial lakes. Other buildings no longer house their original functions—for example Southwood is now a treatment center for emotionally disturbed children and adolescents; Farm Cottage

houses an alcohol treatment center; and the Flower Building is now the Ogdensburg Correctional Facility.

The Richardsonian Romanesque design of Chief Architect Isaac Perry has continued to lend an air of solidity and permanence to the operation of the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center. It is only hoped the present day New York State Office of Mental Hygiene will also continue to concur with Perry's nineteenth century view that this complex would ". . . meet the varied needs for the successful care and treatment of the bodily and mental conditions of the (mentally and emotionally disturbed) at a minimal maintenance cost."

About the Author

John A. Baule has been director of SLCHA since 1976 and has worked extensively with a variety of organizations and individuals in documenting historical buildings.

Bert Susice and the *Loup-Garou*

by Peter Van Lent

The ancient belief that human beings may temporarily assume the appearance and habits of an animal was very common in seventeenth century France. From there, fear of the loup-garou (lōō ga-rōō') or werewolf, was carried to the French-speaking parts of Canada and thence over the northern border of the United States. Here a scholar of French literature and folklore analyzes the folktale and its changes, as well as the transcription of one St. Regis Falls' man's version of the story.

The *loup-garou* or werewolf is the singularly most popular character in French folklore. When he arrived in Quebec with the seventeenth century French colonists, he already varied from being a man who turned into a wolf on certain occasions to being a vaguely defined creature who was part wolf and part human. The *loup-garou* always evoked great fear for he was reputed to attack or at least threaten those who ventured beyond certain acceptable social boundaries. In this way the function of the *loup-garou* myth was to serve as a sort of "threshold guardian" for a society both literally by scaring back those who would go out from the village into the forest or figuratively by discouraging those who were tempted to sin against some aspect of the community's moral or social code. Thus, the werewolf's name became familiar in French-speaking households as parents conjured him up to scare their children into staying close to home or into displaying good behavior.

Over the years stories evolved in which the *loup-garou* appears to have lost both his canine qualities and his original association as a punitive agent. The reasons for these changes are not evident. Perhaps the wolf was simply no longer a common enough animal in French America to evoke automatic fear. Perhaps religious and moral thinking had evolved to a point where remorse and shame rather than an outside force were more effective deterrents to sin. In any case, these changes in the *loup-garou's* nature are found in the following folk stories recounted in the summer of 1978 by Bert Susice, a French American living near St. Regis Falls, N.Y. Described more often as a "light" than as an animal, the *loup-garou* seems less to be concerned with punishing others, but rather is described as a character who is being "punished" himself. If the *loup-garou* inspires fear in Bert's tales, it is mostly due to his mysterious and unexpected appearance, although there is some evidence of evil intent in his desire "to get you lost." Indeed, the other characters in the stories do not seem to be sinners but rather hard working woodsmen or recreational fishermen. It may be possible to interpret the *loup-garou*

as a punishing figure in the episode describing the drunkenness which Bert says marked holiday celebrations, but the appearance of the wolf to the reveler is not directly cited as a punishment for or warning against alcoholic excess. If the implication is there, it is very oblique.

Other tales collected near Mooers in Clinton County depict the werewolf as a ghost who is being punished for debts and other failings by being condemned to wander restlessly over the countryside seeking excuses and forgiveness which he got sometimes by violent means. Thus the *loup-garou* of Mooers, as in the Susice stories, has both done evil and is capable of further inflicting it on the living—a modified satanic figure which seems to have been very popular in the oral folk tales of our New York French American communities.

Interviewer: Just what is the *loup-garou* supposed to be?

Susice: That's just a man. He's supposed to be punished some way. At night someone would fly like a light. It's a light. I seen the light; I didn't see the animal.

They fly, eh in the air, you know. Well up to, since it's been cold, last four or five years there, around 9:00-10:00, we go fishing. We'd watch him in the trees go right around the mountain. They did travel. Just a light the size of a crabapple. It didn't go on the ground; it was going on top of the trees. Right on top the mountain and back around there. I and my brother would go fishing at Goose Pond a little over a mile, and we'd see that there. My father, in the winter, he was working on the crop we call Popple Point. They were drawing wood there. They had to be there at 5:00 in the morning and they'd come back in the dark about 6:00 to 7:00 at night. They was unloading the sleds in a field they had there. Two fellows stayed, they built a shack. Stayed right there, on the river. Where they unloaded the wood, the pulp. Snowed about a foot of snow that night, and my father had to walk. He started up there early, I think about 4:00. When he got there, to the point, where they used to live at the landing. He see a light there at the landing, where they got the pulp. "They're not quick," he says, "they're

not down there." He look at his watch it's five o'clock. "Cripes!," he says, "Can't see nobody that early." He kept walking over there. When he got there, the light disappeared. He went all around all over there, you know, where they were working. He got over there, and looked: no tracks. He said, "Where's the two men?" They were just getting up. He says, "You didn't get up?" They says "No, we just got up. We didn't see no light." My father saw that light, he wasn't dreaming. He saw that light going around there, but before he got there, it disappeared. Well, he didn't say that but, I figured it was one of them men that stayed in that camp. The body stayed there said they fell asleep. The light could have reflected from their light. At least the body then runs all over like that. In form of a light.

Interviewer: Did you hear that sometimes it turns into a wolf? In the daytime.

Susice: Yeah, that's what I was gonna come to. Now they tell me, sometimes on the holidays like fourth of July, something like that, this fellow'd come down in the hotel to get some liquor; 'buys it by the gallon. There was probably 10-12 drinking it on the holidays, they stay up—half of us—stay up all night. Around 2:00 in the morning, half went to bed, half stayed up. They drink, it must be either Christmas or New Year's. He was coming down, and he saw that God-damn wolf up there, right in front of him on the tracks. He kept away. He kept going toward this way. He was kind of scared at first, but he didn't try to chase him or anything like that. If he got close enough, he'd run.

Interviewer: It was in the day time?

Susice: Just day light. It wasn't late; it was early. The train comes down at 7:00. He had to get going to get off the track. He said the God darn wolf was ahead of the train. Went around the corner out of sight, and it was still ahead of the train. It didn't catch up with him; he never saw it afterward. Never saw it on the track: the train didn't kill him. Must have been still running. He couldn't figure out where it was.

(continued on page 21)

The Day Billy Sunday Came to the Fair

Edited by Varick A. Chittenden

In 1931 the internationally famous evangelist Billy Sunday spoke at the Canton Fair, an event that was long awaited by many and very well attended. At age 69, only four years before his death, he was as athletic in his performance and as provocative in his message as he ever was. Here is the sequence of local newspaper articles that reported the anticipation of the event and the excitement of that day.

Good stories for *The Quarterly* show up everywhere, all of the time. One day not long ago, while I was waiting for an appointment at the SLCHA Archives, I noticed a recent gift of a stack of local newspapers, still sitting out on a table, waiting to be accessioned. While the papers were filled with the ordinary events of everyday life of the day (as one might expect), my eyes were suddenly drawn to a headline—'Billy Sunday for the County Fair'. I was interested. I had really not known much about Sunday, but he was a name to me, one that I had heard quite often in my youth, some years after his death. My interest increased as I found a few other papers of that year (1931), for it was very clear that the local newswriters had found him both fascinating and controversial. In this age of "electronic preachers," the story of Billy Sunday becomes even more interesting, for one can see in the stories that follow the great power that Sunday had—in the best traditions of camp meeting oratory, of "old time religion", and the typically American curiosity and taste for showmanship and hucksterism—and the great excitement and comfort he brought to Americans in the farthest reaches of the nation.

Scholars of religious history, such as our long time member and frequent *Quarterly* contributor William McLoughlin in his landmark study of Sunday's career and Bernard Weisberger in his *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists*



A 1928 photograph staged in an alley by a Detroit News reporter just in case the paper wished to publish it. By that time Sunday was no longer news and the picture wasn't used until after his death in 1935. (Courtesy of SLCHA Archives)

and *Their Impact Upon Religion in America* (1958), tell us that Billy Sunday's career and popularity peaked around 1920. For several years before that he had travelled with a large retinue of advance men and aides, filling the great stadiums and auditoriums in major cities throughout the land. By 1931, the year of his tour that brought him to Canton, he still had his old vigor but was only able to get bookings in the small towns and country fairs, a fact that seems to have made many of our citizens of the time most grateful. What follows are the several accounts that appeared in the two county seat newspapers of the time—the *Plaindealer* and the *Commercial Advertiser*. We submit them to you

as primary resource documents of one event in the county's history, with no further commentary or historical research. We would welcome any of our readers who recall the event to write us with their own recollections.



PLAINDEALER **MAY 26, 1931**
Billy Sunday for the County Fair
*Booked to speak on last day of fair.
 Famous Evangelist will make his first
 appearance in Northern New York.*

Fred J. Wheeler intends to round out his seventh year as President of the St. Lawrence County Fair by giving the people of this section the biggest and

largest exhibition seen in years. On top of the many attractions which are being booked, the latest and most interesting announcement has just been made. Billy Sunday, one-time professional baseball player and for many years known throughout the length and breadth of this land as an evangelist, has signed a contract to appear at the County Fair and deliver one of his whirlwind lectures.

The final arrangements for Mr. Sunday's appearance were concluded last week through the office of Secretary Benjamin Hosley, of the Fair Society. Mr. Sunday is to speak at Penn Yan the day before and at Columbus, Ohio the day after visiting here. He will speak from a specially prepared stand directly in front of the grandstand at 1:15 on Friday of Fair week. The management of the Fair has gone to large expense in securing Mr. Sunday; they appreciate that comparatively few people in this county have seen or heard of him; and that many will come miles just for this one part of the program.

With the regular program on the first three days being given the additional drawing card by the pressure of the famous squad of Rough Riders from the Oneida Barracks of the State Constabulary, who were here last year, and with Billy Sunday booked for the final day, everything points to a record County Fair.



COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER

AUGUST 18, 1931

Hear Billy Sunday at the Canton Fair
First visit of Famous Evangelist to North Country, Tho Often Sought

Something of the Life Story of Farmer Boy, Son of Union Soldier, Killed in Civil War—Early Life of Boy, Whose Health Was Frail—Joins Fire Department and was Finally Discovered by "Pop" Anson, Famous Baseball Director, and Made the Grade on Chicago White Stockings, Becoming a Brilliant Player—Becomes Converted and Enters the Ministry—A Great Day When Billy Sunday Comes to Canton.

When Billy Sunday comes to Canton to speak at the St. Lawrence County Fair Friday afternoon, August 28th, it will be his first visit to the North Country. The famous evangelist has never spoken in the territory north of Syracuse. Several groups in Watertown tried unsuccessfully to secure him for their city, at one time or another.

Mr. Sunday was born on a farm in Iowa. His father lost his life as a Union soldier in the Civil War. During Billy's

first three years, he was so weak that his mother often despaired of his life. Some herb remedies prescribed by an itinerant French doctor seemed to be what he needed and the sickly child rounded out into a healthy, robust boy. As a boy he worked on the farm of Col. John Scott, one-time Lieut. Governor of Iowa. Because of his fleetness of foot Billy was persuaded to go to Marshalltown, and join the Volunteer Fire Department, which was then the champion of the State. While there he worked for an undertaker and drove the hearse. It was there that "Pop" Anson discovered him and persuaded him to go to Chicago, where he was placed on the old Chicago White Stockings baseball team. "Pop" Anson said of Billy that, "Sunday was the strongest man in the profession on his feet. He could run bases like a frightened deer. He was a fast and brilliant fielder, a fine thrower and once on first he could steal more bases than any of his team mates."

Sunday was converted in a mission in Chicago and some time later studied for the ministry and was ordained by the Presbyterian Church. For more than thirty-six years he has carried on his work as an evangelist and probably has addressed more people than any other living man. He is the most spectacular and the most dynamic evangelist of our age. His messages are always "red hot," being born of conviction and dealing with live up-to-date issues.

Canton and the whole North Country will feel indebted to the management of the St. Lawrence County Fair for bringing Mr. Sunday here. There is no doubt about the crowd that will attend, for Mr. Sunday's presence and speech at the Fair is one of the features most talked of by folk as they read the Fair program. It will be a great day when "Billy" Sunday comes to Canton.



COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER

AUGUST 18, 1931

For the first time in the history of Northern New York fairs, an internationally known pulpit orator will appear in the person of the Rev. William Ashley Sunday—Billy Sunday. The name "Billy Sunday" is like a bugle call to millions of church people in America today. He is America's most forceful evangelical preacher. You don't have to belong to his church, agree with his method of preaching or subscribe to the doctrine he preaches—but you can hear him and enjoy him. He will be at the Canton fair on the last day, Friday, August 28. Thousands are planning to hear him.

PLAINDEALER AUGUST 18, 1931
Special Attractions Will Give Added Interest to Exhibit.

Large String of Race Horses Expected—Billy Sunday Sure To Be Big Drawing Card.

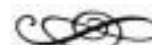
Next Tuesday, August 25th, the St. Lawrence County Fair will open its gates for its 81st annual exhibit and programme. With good weather the management predicts one of the largest and best fairs in the history of the society. There are many special attractions. Those who remember seeing the spectacular exhibit of rough riding by members of Troop D of the Oneida Barracks will enjoy seeing this squad of daredevil riders and their beautiful mustangs give new and added thrills this year. Last year saw one of the largest collections of race horses in the history of the society, every barn and every stall being filled. The outlook for fast and close finishes next week is promising. Another feature of the Fair which is receiving increased attention each year is the Junior Department and 4-H Club exhibit and the Educational Exhibit of the School Supervisory District. A Night Fair is to be given again this year, and the general attractions to appear before the grand stand during the race programs will be of high order. In the line of baseball the Brooklyn Royal Giants and the Stars of Cuba have been secured. These are two of the fastest colored nines working on the diamond this season.

Although it will be the last day of the St. Lawrence County Fair, Friday, August 28th, will be a red-letter day. For the famous evangelist, "Billy" Sunday, will be there to make his first speech in Northern New York. His previous farthest north has been Syracuse. Even Watertown has never heard him, although different groups tried to secure him on several occasions. He is to speak at Penn Yan the week before and at Watertown on the Wednesday evening after his Canton visit.

Canton and the North Country are to be congratulated on this opportunity to see and hear Mr. Sunday. This privilege will undoubtedly make Friday one of the biggest days of the Fair.

A new custom being started this year will be the free admission of all children under 14 years of age.

For the four Fair days next week, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, all roads will lead to Canton.



COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER

AUGUST 18, 1931

Price of Admission Not to Be Raised on Billy Sunday Visit

A report has gained strength in

Canton to the effect that the Fair Association intended to raise the price of admission to gate and grandstand on Friday, the day of the appearance of Billy Sunday. There is absolutely no truth in the report. No raise in price of admission at this fair now or ever. The admission to gate is 50 cents and the same at the grandstand.



COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER
AUGUST 25, 1931
"The Mask Torn Off"
Billy Sunday's Topic

Noted evangelist to speak at St. Lawrence Fair Friday afternoon

Something about the man who has for 36 years gone up and down the land speaking to tremendous audiences and who never lacks interest for those who hear him.

"The Mask Torn Off" is the title of the speech Billy Sunday is to deliver at the Canton Fair, Friday afternoon at one o'clock. It suggests that the famous evangelist has selected for his first Northern New York audience a typically Billy Sundayesque performance. Whatever the mask is and whatever lies under it, we can be sure that no shred of the mask will remain when Mr. Sunday is through with it.

Many people have been asking how old this Rev. William A. Sunday is. they can't remember just when they have not heard about him. Well, he will be 69 years old November 19, next. But he is in as fit condition as most men 30 years younger. His physical vigor and good health have always been the wonder of who know him well. When asked to explain his unusual physical condition he replied in characteristic fashion. He said, "Half of what you eat is half more than you need. Diet and exercise are the most important factors in the routine of the man who wishes to prolong his life. I am very careful what I eat and how much food I put into my stomach. 80% of all diseases can be traced to improper foods and excessive eating. We throw all sorts of rubbish into the fire box and then wonder why doctors and surgeons have to take out clinkers."

Mr. Sunday is built along the lines of a track athlete. The muscles of his legs are long and his body tapers from his shoulders down. There is not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his frame. In his speeches he is physically a baseball player in action. Again and again, all the man power that a player puts into action when he makes a three-base hit and tries to make a home run out of it, Billy puts into his expression of some ideas. That is one reason why he is so popular.

Another reason for his popularity is that his speeches are always on live issues. He talks right where people are working, playing and living. He has a powerful way of making each listener feel that he is talking to him personally. And as he throws all his personality into that kind of speech, it gets under the listener's skin, and he begins to ask himself: "What shall I do about this?" In that way Billy Sunday has made some hundreds of thousands face questions of personal living, and has set in motion influences that have changed their lives. It is estimated that he has preached to 100,000,000 people and has shook hands with more than a million "converts".

At the age of 69, and after 36 years as an evangelist, Billy Sunday still draws crowds larger than most halls can accommodate. Early this summer 20,000 people crowded into an auditorium in Buffalo to hear him and the next day in Rochester, 18,000 squeezed into an auditorium there and many were turned away in both places.

A special platform is to be erected in front of the grandstand at the Fair Friday. A microphone and amplifiers will carry the voice of America's most famous living evangelist to every seat on the grandstand and to various parts of the ground so all who want to may hear him. Judging from the interest being expressed one concludes Friday will be one of the best days of the Fair. Everyone who speaks of it predicts there will be a great crowd there to hear Billy Sunday.



COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER
SEPT. 1, 1931
Good Four Days

Billy Sunday, sensational drawing card for Friday, packs ground and stand.

St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society experienced a most successful four days during last week, at its eightieth annual fair. Months ago this fair faced rather a difficult situation with Franklin County Agricultural Society of Malone, dropping back to the Canton dates and advertising to show in opposition. With the Lowville Fair dates likewise conflicting with the St. Lawrence County Fair Dates, with a program of road building interfering seriously with through traffic, with the cry of depression and lack of money, the outlook was not promising. However, the society came through, and on Friday eclipsed all last days in attendance, if it did not equal the 2 preceding days, which are the big days. The

bringing of Billy Sunday to Canton Fair on Friday was perhaps the most ingenious stunt that had ever been pulled off at the local fair. We have had governors, United States Senators, great editors and other strong drawing cards, but nothing hitherto brought as an attraction for the County Fair drew as did Billy Sunday. Those who dislike him and are disgusted with him, went and paid their money to see and hear him and those who admire him for his ability to strike the things that they would have struck went and were pleased.

On the opening day there were the usual first day crowd, but Wednesday seemed better patronized than on last year, and on account of threatening weather the crowd was somewhat curtailed on Thursday, though the attendance was a very large one. Friday's crowd came early and kept coming. There were people from Syracuse, Oswego, Watertown, Plattsburgh, and many Canadians came to hear and see Billy Sunday. As a crowd getter Billy Sunday is a marvel. As a feature of the local fair the officers pulled a most sensational crowd getter, though opinion will be forever divided in whether Billy Sunday was worth it or not. Billy doesn't care, nor do those who agree with him and think he delivered the goods.



COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER
SEPT. 1, 1931

Days Visit to Canton

Although nearly 69 years old, Mr. Sunday threw himself into his address at Canton Friday, with an energy that amazed those who saw him for the first time. One might have guessed that he had a very restful day Thursday. As a matter of fact he spoke equally long and hard on Thursday afternoon at the Yates County Fair at Penn Yan, then was driven about 150 to Norwich and again spoke long and hard at the Chenango County Fair, then was driven some 70 miles to Utica, where he found he had to sit up and wait until 2:55 a.m. to get the sleeper for Canton.

On his mother's side, Billy Sunday is descended from Lord Dorey and a daughter of Sir Francis Drake; on his father's side from a Pennsylvania German. One readily sees that the adventurous spirit of Sir Francis Drake, the bold navigator and adventurer of Queen Elizabeth's time, easily dominates all the other inheritances from his ancestry. Back in good Queen Bess' time Sunday would have been roaming the seven seas and pouncing upon

Spanish ships quite as energetically as he has struck at life-wasting sins during the past 36 years.

Sunday might be described as a "preaching baseball player." The various sins of the day are the balls pitched to him while at the bat. He swings at them with all his might; he hits hard, and the home runs he has made in converting men and women, make Babe Ruth look like a piker. Or again, he is out in center field and evil influences are at the bat; the saloon keeper in the old days, the bootlegger today; the purveyors to the lusts of mankind or what Billy considers false teachers of religion, denying that the Bible is reliable—and Billy is on his toes to cover the whole outfield and frustrate the long hits those batsman of evil knock out. Again and again as he begins a sentence denouncing them, one can see him reaching away back over his shoulder for a high one, then advancing on his left foot, hurling his right hand and arm forward, as he leans away over the edge of the platform, his right foot in the air behind him, he finishes the denunciatory sentence just as the ball might be leaving his hand in a mighty throw to catch a runner out on third, or even at home.

"Say, I'll bet that fellow could play a pretty good game of baseball yet," was the remark of one man as he watched Billy get into action Friday. And probably he could. For a man only 14 months under 70 years old, he undoubtedly was the most agile man any of us have ever seen.

One horse-race fan who complained when he saw the carpenters erecting the stand for Billy in the middle of the track, partially cutting off the opportunity for warming up the horses and who vehemently declared that the low stand on which the acrobats perform was "good enough for that fellow," remarked to the writer after Billy had finished: "He's one of the greatest speakers there is."

Mason Taylor in his report to the Ogdensburg Republican - Journal summed up Billy's talk Friday in a very good way. Here it is:

The speaker treated a variety of topics—the current depression, the crime situation, the liquor question, the morals of our youth, the importance of home training, companionate marriage, divorce and birth control—all in less than 60 minutes; but so fervid was his speech that it is doubtful if any who heard him could fail to take home with

them a lot of worthwhile knowledge and food for thought.

From all of the many reports that have come in, one concludes that Mr. Sunday made a good many friends in his speech here Friday, many of whom will avail themselves of the first opportunity to hear him again. And, there were some old friends of his in the audience. One woman rushed up after the speech and shook hands with the evangelist and said she had come from Syracuse. Another said she had driven 70 miles to be there. A friend of Sunday's so delighted him that he asked the man to stop in at the hotel for a chat afterwards. This man was from Auburn. Mr. Sunday had a fine talk with him while waiting at the hotel for train time. That is the way with Billy Sunday. Very few men have so many friends and admirers, who rejoice at every opportunity to see him again.

One thing must be said: The Canton Fair management deserves great praise and credit for its initiative in bringing Mr. Sunday to Canton, especially as he had never before visited the North Country.

In the old days an address at the fair was one of the good things of the week. Governors and senators and noted agriculturists, great editors and politicians have been with us from time to time at the County Fair. Now and then a person remembers the visit here of Horace Greeley, and the present year a noted pulpit divine was brought to Canton—Billy Sunday. A good address is always something that helps the program, and when the person who gives the address has an international reputation it helps the gate.



COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER

SEPT. 1, 1931

George Bicknell, Friend of Bryan, With Billy Sunday

The Rev. William (Billy) Sunday was accompanied to Canton in his visit here by George Bicknell. The Redpath Chatauqua booking agent of Chicago, who arranges the speaking tour of the Evangelist, accompanies him to his speaking stands and looks after all arrangements during the engagement. Mr. Bicknell was a close friend of the late William Jennings Bryan and booked Mr. Bryan for fifteen summer speaking tours. He tells some very interesting stories of Bryan.

On the way here Mr. Bicknell was talking over the Canton engagement with Mr. Sunday. "Canton is a college

town," said Mr. Sunday. "Yes?" said Mr. Bicknell raising his eyebrows slightly. "And do you know whose college it is?" was the next question. Then Bicknell was really interested. "It's Owen D. Young's college," said the evangelist.

Mr. Bicknell, on arriving in Canton Friday morning, got busy, arranged for the erection of the platform on the race course, and did various points including University Campus, the Fair Grounds and the various sections of the village. He was looking for information and color. He expressed himself very much pleased with what he saw.



PLAINDEALER SEPT. 1, 1931 Billy Sunday in Canton

As was to be expected there is a wide diversity of opinion as to Billy Sunday's Canton appearance. Few criticize what he said. Probably no one can conscientiously do that. It was the manner of his saying and acting if anything that brought criticism.

It must be remembered that the North Country has not yet entirely thrown off its veneration for things religious, and coupled with veneration is a veneration for the minister, the man of God.

B. Sunday, without coat or vest, starting in expression, wild in gesticulation, was something new. Over back of the grand stand at the side shows, men were crying their tented wares. Over in front of the grand stand was a man crying his wares. Ball players were warming up for the game.

And yet what Sunday said, his commendation of the 18th Amendment, his statement that he would not pay alimony to a divorced woman unless she had children, his praise of the mother who guards her flock and his denunciation of the mother so intent on self that her children run wild in a wicked world, all these things and many more Sunday hammered home with no uncertain blows.

Sunday has a double force in the things he says and the way he says them. There are those in Canton who were much impressed. There are those who can not divorce what he said from the what he said from the way he said it.

It was easy to see how he can create great religious fervor in a crowded house how he can fill the "sawdust trail." It is easy to see how in the average city audience, loving and accustomed to the bizarre, his method of delivery would add force to what he said. Probably a majority of the critics of Canton are not yet educated to an appreciation of Sunday's method.

America's Ingratitude for Its Naming: The Tribulations of Signora Vespucci

by Allen Walker Read

One of the most fascinating women in America in the mid-nineteenth century was Signora America Vespucci who came to this country to claim land as a benefit of her descent from the explorer for whom the continent was named. Much has been written about her as the toast of Washington in the late 1830's and, especially, of her life as a chatelaine of George Parish, in whose mansion in Ogdensburg she was secluded for twenty years. The fictional account by Walter Guest Kellogg, entitled Parish's Fancy is well known to many Quarterly readers. Here a distinguished linguist and scholar of the history of names (onomastics) reveals his discoveries in numerous original sources that shed new light on this interesting personality.

If one were to ask for an episode in American naming history with remarkable romantic overtones, one need go no farther than the story of Signora Ameriga Vespucci, who came to this country in 1839 in order to receive benefit because of her descent from the explorer for whom the continent was named.

She was not an imposter, for she truly was a member of the illustrious Vespucci family of Florence and a direct descendant of Amerigo, bringing with her impressive credentials from the Court of France, where she had been living. She also had the blessing of the French legation in Washington. However, wild tales about her were soon in circulation, many of them of her own manufacture.

She arrived in Washington, D.C., on January 11th, 1839, and the correspondent of a New York City newspaper sent back the following despatch:

Last evening arrived in this city, that distinguished and accomplished lady *America Vespucci*, said to be a daughter of the illustrious house of *Vespucci* of Tuscany. According to accounts which we have received here, she is a lineal descendant of him, after whom our country has received its name, instead of *Columbus*. What is the object of her visit I am uninformed, but rumor says she would honor us with the acceptance of a state or territory, if we should think it expedient to make the cession. "Hail Columbia, happy land." [*N. Y. Morning Courier and Enquirer*, January 14, 1839, p. 2, col. 4.]

As the despatch said, rumor was swirling about her. She was an impressive woman, beautiful, charming, vivacious, and accomplished; and she soon made many friends among the senators and important people of Washington. Even Martin Van Buren, the courtly, decorous President, was impressed. As he was a bachelor, it was rumored that he might develop a romantic attachment.

There were many testimonials to her

remarkable personality. A member of the British Parliament, James Silk Buckingham, was traveling in this country, and in his travel book of 1842 he wrote down the following impression of her:

In person, she had the style of beauty which one sees in the finest statues of the antique—a noble head, regular and expressive features, a fair and stately

neck, dark eyes, dark hair, beautiful lips and teeth, a fine expanded chest, well-rounded arms, white and delicate hands, small feet, and an exquisitely graceful figure of the middle size. She appeared in a simple yet elegant and well-made dress of black silk, trimmed with blue lace. Her head was marked by a classic grandeur, though without any kind of ornament but her rich and



Portrait of America Vespucci by unidentified artist, oil on canvas, in the collection of the Frederic Remington Art Museum. (Photo courtesy of Frederic Remington Art Museum)

exuberant hair; her voice was full of music; and in her look and expression, dignity and sweetness were happily blended. Her age appeared to be about twenty-five or twenty-six, and her whole deportment presented the most agreeable combination of dignified self-respect with refinement, polish, and ease, that I ever remember to have witnessed.

He finished his encomium by writing:

It is not too much to say of her, that there is no throne in Europe, which she would not elevate by her wisdom; no court which she would not adorn by her manners; no family, that she would not delight by her conversation; and no man, however noble in birth, profound in erudition, high in station, or opulent in fortune, to whom she would not be a source of intellectual and social enjoyment, if he could but win her respect and confidence, and become the object of her esteem as well as of her affections. [James Silk Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (London, 1842), I, 392 and 394. The interview took place in New Orleans.]

She made a similar impression on the American poet Nathaniel P. Willis, a notable man-about-town and *bon vivant*. He wrote these verses—

TO AMERICA VESPUCCI

Blest was thy ancestor with deathless fame,
When to this western world he gave his name;
But far more blessed, methinks, that man would be,
Fair scion! who might give his name to thee.

The tale she told of herself was that she had been a fighter for liberty in the wars to free the states of northern Italy. The following is the account in the *Democratic Review*, a monthly magazine of Washington, D.C.:

In the attempted rising of August, 1832, and in the engagement with the Austrians on the banks of the *Rimini*, in which it will be remembered by our readers that young Louis Bonaparte took part, she conducted herself with great gallantry, and received a severe sabre stroke on the back of her head, from an Austrian dragoon (to whom, however, though nameless, the justice ought to be done to state that he did not know her to be a woman;) and in her fall to the ground, her right arm was broken by the weight of her horse falling upon it. [*United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, V (Feb., 1839), 240.]

Thereafter she took part in underground activities until she was forced to flee, upon twenty-four hours' notice, and take up residence in France, under the protection of the Queen.

After arriving in Washington, she immediately set about preparing her memorial to Congress, and it was presented on the floor of the Senate eighteen days later. The Washington correspondent of a New York newspaper gave the following account for January 29, 1839:

The Senate went through the usual routine of business, and among the memorials presented was one from America Vespucci, presented by Mr. [Thomas Hart] Benton. The memorial was written in English and French by America Vespucci herself. She asks Congress, I believe, for a grant of land and for the rights of citizenship. The memorial was read by the Secretary of the Senate.

Upon Mr. Benton's motion, the part of the memorial referring to a grant of lands was referred to the committee on Public Land and on Mr. Clay's motion, the second part referring to the right of citizenship, to the committee on the Judiciary. [*N.Y. Morning Courier and Enquirer*, Feb. 1, 1839, p. 2, col. 3]

Her petition was a long document, and from it I can quote for you only the two final paragraphs, as follows:

America Vespucci will make no demand on the American Government. Those who make demands are presumed to have rights to be established or justice to claim. She has neither. She knows that the Americans have been magnanimous towards all who have rendered services to the nation; that they have been generous towards all who have done a noble act for their country, and that they have, moreover, granted protection and even assistance to emigrants from other nations. There is but one Vespucci who has given his name to a quarter of the globe. Will the Americans do nothing for the descendant of Americus? She desires a country, she seeks a land that will receive her as a friend. She has a name: that is all her inheritance, all her fortune. May this hospitable nation grant her a corner of that land in which it is so rich, and may the title of citizen be bestowed upon the poor emigrant!

If Americus Vespucci were now alive the Americans would rush in crowds to offer him honors and rewards. In the nineteenth century will this civilized nation forget that in the veins of his descendant flows the same blood? America Vespucci collected all her little fortune in order to reach this country; now, she desires only to make known her position to the Congress of this great nation, feeling confident that the Americans will never abandon her. She will not ask, having no other claim than that of bearing the name of America, but she will receive a gift from the nation by which she hopes not

to be regarded as a stranger. That will not humiliate her. Such an act of generosity will console her feelings, honor her name, flatter her family, and even her country. The gifts of a nation always honor those who receive them. When the world shall know that the American nation has done an act of generosity in favor of the descendant of Vespucci, will not the approbation of all mankind be a glorious recompense? And true gratitude will remain in the heart of *America Vespucci*. [*United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, V (Feb., 1839), 240.]

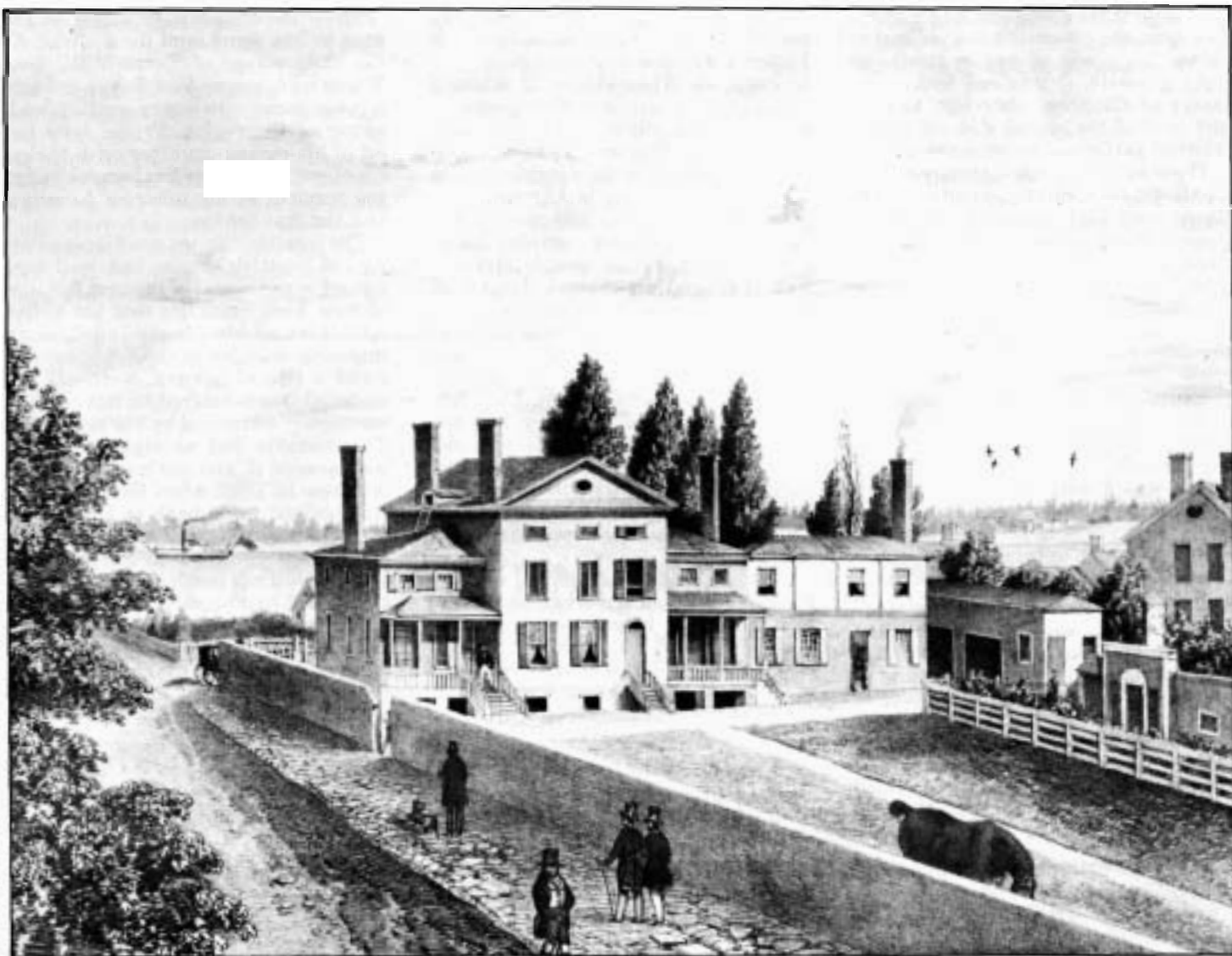
While her memorial was under consideration in the committees, much discussion, pro and con, took place both in Washington and over the country. One feature was a lampoon sent to a New York City newspaper and widely printed over the country. It purported to be from a descendant of Hendrick Hudson and was modeled closely on Ameriga's memorial. Its text began as follows:

Washington, 1st February, 1839

An illustrious stranger has just arrived at this Metropolis. Her name is *Grietje Truitje Hudzoon*, and she is a descendant, in a straight line, of the celebrated navigator, *Hendrick Hudson*, the European discoverer of your far famed island [Manhattan], and who gave his name to the noble river which washes your shores—the honour not having been filched from him by a ship-mate. The object of her visit is, I understand, to ask of Congress a corner (*een hackje!* she calls it) of land, and the rights of citizenship, or in her own words, of *Burgher Recht*. She has drawn up in her own language, a memorial—rather prolix, to be sure—in which, after tracing her genealogy, she details the circumstances under which she quitted the *Vaderland*. To liberal principles, she is, of course, a martyr—her ancestor having imbibed their spirit with the first breath of air he inhaled, that came from our shores, and handed it down as a sacred heirloom to all his posterity. The sufferings she endured in the cause of liberty, as well as those which were, by her account, inflicted on her, while passing through England on her way hither, from the combined dangers of steamships and rail-roads, are depicted by her in a most affecting manner. [*N.Y. Morning Courier and Enquirer*, Feb. 5, 1839, p. 2, col. 1.]

After further reportage the satirist concluded with this account of her reception:

Majuff vrouwe Hudzoon, as you may suppose, attracts considerable attention here. The President, and the Honorable the Secretary of the Navy, are unwearied in their attentions to her; the former, it is even said, has gone so far



View of the residence of George Parish, Ogdensburg, executed by artist Salathiel Ellis in 1838 as one of a series of eight scenes commissioned by the Parish family of their holdings in Northern New York. The mansion, with its eight foot stone wall, then faced the village of Ogdensburg; it is now the Remington Art Museum. Lithographed by Ciceri of Paris. (Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society)

as to offer her apartments in the White House, which she immediately however declined, on hearing he was a widower. *God bewaar ons! Neen!* she cried out—*myn Karakter!*

Adam Ridabock

Early in March the committee that considered America's memorial brought in their report, and it was very respectful of her as a person. Their report began as follows:

A descendant of Americus is now here: a young, interesting, dignified, and accomplished lady, with a mind of the highest intellectual culture, and a heart beating with all our own enthusiasm in the cause of American and human liberty. She feels that the name she bears is a prouder title than any that earthly monarchs can bestow, and she comes here asking of us a small corner of American soil where she may pass the remainder of her days in this

the land of her adoption. She comes here as an exile, separated forever from her family and friends, a stranger, without a country and without a home, expelled from her native Italy for the avowal and maintenance of opinions favorable to free institutions, and for the ardent desire for the establishment of her country's freedom. That she is indeed worthy of the name of America; that her heart is indeed imbued with American principles and a fervent love of human liberty, is proved, in her case, by toils, and perils, and sacrifices, worthy of the proudest days of antiquity, when the Roman and the Spartan matron were ever ready to surrender life itself in their country's service. [*Niles' National Register* (Baltimore), LVI (March 16, 1839), 41.]

The committee report has a special interest to students of onomastics, for it lauded America's name in the follow-

ing words:

... The American people... feel... pride and glory with us in the name of America. Throughout our wide extended country, among all classes, this feeling is universal: and in the humblest cottage the poorest American feels that this name, the name of his beloved country, is a prouder title than any that adorns the monarch's brow, and that, if he has no other property, this name, with all its great and glorious associations with the past, and hope for the future, is an all sufficient heritage to transmit to his children. [*Ibid.*, p. 41.]

That passage has special point because just at that time there was much discussion about changing the name of the country. Washington Irving had suggested that *Alleghania* or *Appalachia* would be better, and traditionalists were already mounting their opposition.

In spite of the kind words to Signora Vespucci, the committee felt obliged to refuse to accede to her requests, on legal grounds. It was not within the power of Congress, they felt, to cede any part of the public domain to one who had performed no personal service.

Their substitute suggestion was that a national subscription should be established, and that the gratitude of the American people would be enough to provide her with a home and support. The sergeant-at-arms of the Senate was designated to take in the contributions, which were received from many Senators from all parts of the Union, from Congressmen, from members of the Supreme Court, and from generous citizens. They enabled the Signora to travel widely over the country, presenting her case.

She was kindly received in many quarters; and even in England the denial of a grant to her was used as a club with which to belabor America. A London paper, the *Age*, declared itself as follows:

What a dirty souled confederation of blackguards these scoundrel Americans are. Swindlers in commerce, pirates, murderers, robbers, under the plea of universal liberty, whenever it suits their turn. What could poor Vespucci expect from the reprobate robbers of the universe? [*London Age*, as reprinted in the *Boston Morning Post*, May 17, 1839, p. 2, col. 2.]

Alas, the national subscription did not last long, so Ameriga returned to Paris to live with her sister. The American election of 1840, however, brought about a drastic change of direction, with the Jacksonians cast out of office. Friends of Ameriga sent word to her that her petition would stand a better chance with the new administration, and she returned in 1841, hoping for favorable action.

But reports began to trickle back from Europe that she had succumbed to the immoralities of the corrupt courts of Europe. The American puritanical outlook was such that the public spurned her, and she was left in desperate straits.

Still a very attractive woman, she became the mistress of America's most notorious roue, known as "Prince John," the son of the former President Martin Van Buren. After he took her as his sexual companion to the famous resort of White Sulphur Springs, she became a complete social outcast to the respectable families of the country. She continued to travel with him, putting him to bed dead drunk night after night as he descended further into alcoholism.

Another complication arose when reports came back from her family in Florence, who prided themselves on

their respectability. The American consul at Genoa was Charles Edwards Lester, a well-known author of popular biographies. When gathering material about the explorer Amerigo Vespucci, he became friendly with the contemporary family in Florence, and found that they were bitter in their condemnation of the errant member in America.

Lester found that they denied her stories of heroism and regarded her as a headstrong, unmanageable girl who had deceived them and disgraced them. They claimed that they had gathered their few resources together and sent her first to Brazil, where she presented her petition to the government and was turned down. They felt, as Lester reported, that "by her dissolute life and barefaced deceptions, she blasted the prospects of her family, perhaps for ever!" [Lester's letter of February, 1845, in his book, *The Artist, the Merchant, and the Statesman* (N.Y., 1845), II, 9.]

They themselves wanted to petition Congress just as Ameriga had done, and the consul helped them to frame their document. They secured an effusive endorsement from the Grand Duke of Tuscany, dated April 8, 1845, and their petition, entitled

To the Generous
American Congress

was soon afterwards submitted to Congress. Its concluding paragraph read as follows:

The remarkable political events which have of late years convulsed Europe, and destroyed the estates of so many ancient families, have also wrecked the fortunes of the Vespucci race. They are at present reduced to poverty, though they yet hope for better fortune, through the generosity of the great American people.

Signed, Amerigo Vespucci
Eliza Vespucci
Teresa Vespucci

[Charles Edwards Lester, *The Life and Voyages of Americus Vespuccius* (N.Y., 1846), p. 418.]

Let us return now to the unfortunate Ameriga Vespucci. Her later history became suffused with legend and unsubstantiated stories as fanciful as those she had once told about herself. These stories circulate in the northern counties of New York, for she settled for nearly twenty years in the town of Ogdensburg, overlooking the St. Lawrence River.

Hardest to believe is the story of how she got to Ogdensburg; but it is told for truth by Carl Carmer in his *Listen for a Lonesome Drum* (N.Y., 1936), pp. 358-64, and by several other local historians of the North Country. It is said that she was traveling with her

"Prince John" when he came to the area to buy some land for a client. At the little village of Evans Mills, near Watertown, young Van Buren got into a poker game with a very wealthy landowner of the region. Prince John lost all of his money, together with that of his client, and as his final wager he bet the services of his mistress Ameriga, and lost that bet too.

The wealthy winner was George Parish, of Scottish origin, but well connected with several of the best families of New York State. He took her to live with him as his "fancy lady" in an imposing mansion in Ogdensburg. She lived a life of luxury, with all her material wants catered to; but she was completely ostracized by her neighbors. The mansion had an eight-foot stone wall around it, and she lived within its confines. In 1859, when George Parish was obliged to go back to Europe, he settled an annuity on her for life, and she herself returned to Paris, where she lived till her death in 1866.

It is believed by some that a popular song, "A Bird in a Gilded Cage," was inspired by her situation. Do its words apply to her? This is the chorus:

She's only a bird in a gilded cage,
A beautiful sight to see.
You may think she's happy and free
from care,
She's not though she seems to be,
'Tis sad when you think of her wasted
life,
For youth cannot mate with age,
And her beauty was sold, For an old
man's gold,
She's a bird in a gilded cage.

[Sheet music, cop. 1900, words by
Arthur J. Lamb, music by Harry
von Tilzer.]

But the song was not composed until 1900, thirty-four years after her death, and it seems to me unlikely that there is any true historical connection.

The story of Ameriga Vespucci is a sad one, and she deserves our compassion. A lady of overwhelming charm and dazzling accomplishment, with an illustrious background in Tuscan history, was defeated by the lack of opportunities for women in her era. She is remembered now chiefly as what was then called a "kept woman." Yet she might, in other circumstances, have become a strong leader in some avenue of American culture.

About the Author

Dr. Allen Walker Read is Professor Emeritus of English at Columbia University. He has produced many books and articles on the study of language, naming practices and folklore, with such a variety of topics as graffiti and proverbs.

(Loup-Garou continued)

My uncle Fred saw the wolf, the Loup-Garou. He was strong; he drank, too. My father, he was following him too. You see, they went fishing I guess. He bring his gun, just like me, I always carried a gun with me. No matter where in hell I went. Then he saw a light, started to come from the river to the tracks, in the dark that God damn light started in front of him and went back and forth, up and down and all

around him. It get you lost if you pay much attention to it. You don't know where the hell you are. That light's always in front of you. He stopped, leaned against a stump and fired 7 shots at that light. He said the last shot was close. That thing took off, that light. He didn't see it no more. He said, "Must've been close because I had to stop and figure out where I had to go afterwards to hit the railroad tracks." It wasn't over 40 rod from the river to the track, you know. He didn't know

where he was going, the light was always in front of the gun. They used to say they'd do that on purpose to get you lost.

About the Author

Peter Van Lent is an Associate Professor of Modern Languages at St. Lawrence University with a special interest in French-Canadian and French-American folk culture.

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