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**QUARTERLY**

Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

October 1985

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**Cover:** Flyers announcing passage to North America on "fast" ships with "fine cabin accommodations" were widely circulated throughout Ireland. Competition among ship owners for emigrant passengers was intense, and their methods of attracting desperate people were often less than honest. Adam Scott landed at Quebec aboard the *Annie* in 1847 with 150 of his neighbors. (*Print courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association Archives*)

## Reflections: Fifty Years in the Life of a Country Veterinarian

by D.O. Bixby

*Nineteen eighty-five marks a half century of veterinary practice for Norfolk native Dr. D.O. Bixby. Here he reminisces on those decades, noting among other things the substantial changes in veterinary education he has seen.*

As were most such occasions in 1912, my arrival on planet earth, attended by Dr. A. W. Wheeler, the much-loved physician of this area, took place in the farm house where I spent my early years. Dr. Wheeler came in a horse and buggy; since I was born in August, I doubt if there were any snow problems. However, if it had been winter, he would have driven over a road or trail made by sleds and cutters, for there were no plowed roads at that time and certainly no automobiles roaring by on our road in winter time.

My parents, Roy and Hazel Munson Bixby, were farm people who worked hard, loved each other and also loved the land; they had no desire to move to what some would call the better life. Field work was done with horses; oil lamps and lanterns provided the light, and wood fires provided the heat to warm us on those cold winter days. Much of our food was grown, harvested and stored for off-season use. Laundry was done in winter in the large farm kitchen in a hand-operated washing machine. In the summer it was done, assisted by a gas engine, in a nearby building. Water was heated on a wood stove. Ironing was done with irons heated on that stove. Calls of nature were accomplished in a building not attached to the house. On a cold winter night, one made sure the trip was necessary before venturing forth.

Since my topic is changes in veterinary medicine over the last fifty years, you ask, "Why all of this?" I would, too, but since we are talking about change,



*D.O. Bixby, D.V.M., shown here as a candidate for the St. Lawrence County legislature from District 16. (Photograph courtesy of Irene McGee Bixby)*

I think it well to introduce life as it was then in Norfolk, New York, on Plum-brook Road, at the Bixby farm home-stead, a family-owned farm since the early 1800s.

Early school was district school with all grades, twenty to thirty students, one teacher, in one room, with a wood fire and an outhouse. I was fireman for one year and got \$12 for the job. I also swept the school each day for 50 cents a week. That was the teacher's job, but she hired me to do it. I had to arrive early enough to get the place warmed up by school time. I'm not sure it was always 70 degrees away from the stove.

I did seventh and eighth grade together and then went to the Union Free High School in Norfolk. Transportation was by horse at first; later I rode with another student. There was never a bus. After I was sixteen and

had a driver's license, I drove the family car to school. After high school graduation, I had the bright idea that I would stay out of school a year and earn some money. This was in 1930, not long after the 1929 crash, and, as some of you may remember, money was scarce. At the end of that year, I had a new suit. I had allowed myself one night a week out, and I had a few dollars left after paying the \$25 registration fee to Cornell University for admission to the New York State College of Veterinary Medicine.

Just why would a boy growing up under these conditions want to become a veterinarian? At an early age (I'm not sure when) I developed a burning desire to be involved in some branch of medicine and surgery, probably rooted in the fact that Dr. A. W. Wheeler, mentioned before, was loved, admired



*The Bixby homestead in Norfolk.* (Photograph courtesy of D.O. Bixby)

and respected by all. Perhaps that served as a catalyst in whetting my ambitions in the direction of some form of medicine. Even though I harbored such desires and longings, I seemed always to believe that this was beyond the economic reach of my family. My sister, two years younger, and my brother, seven years younger, would also be entitled to education. Therefore, in the early years, these thoughts of college were kept on the back burner. When my parents found out about this, they encouraged me, and, typical of people of that time, said "We'll find a way."

All through this time of growing up, I realized more and more what a serious financial setback the loss of a farm animal was to the family. We on occasion employed a veterinarian, Dr. George A. Baker of Brasher Falls or Dr. David Deming of Massena, and the more I had opportunity to observe their work, dedication and value to the farm community, the more I believed that this was for me.

Bovine tuberculosis was a serious problem of dairy and beef herds in this country, and even more importantly a serious health problem to humans drinking raw milk. In the early 1900's, the federal and state governments undertook the awesome task of eradicating bovine tuberculosis in the United States. When I was sixteen years old, that program was at work in our area, and one of the doctors who was in our town working on this program hired me to assist him, keeping records and chauffeuring him around in a new Buick, no less! He paid me \$3 per day, unheard of wages for a kid at that

time. Well, that did it! I knew what I wanted to be and do. This helps you to know the processes at work in making my decision to become a veterinarian. There was no guidance or testing from school to help me make a choice. Background and the described experiences plus encouragement from my parents were all that was involved in the decision.

Getting into college was a little different from now. I drove some 4H youngsters to Cornell to some event. While there I went to the College of Veterinary Medicine, had my *unannounced* interview, and was accepted. It may be of interest to note that they accepted 84 of us and after taking a closer look, graduated 56. In the Fall of 1931, I headed for Cornell. My parents took me down. I had a room for \$3 a week. I needed to find some work to help with expenses and soon found part-time work at fraternities working for meals. Finally in January I got a steady job at Kappa Sigma where I worked for three and a half years washing pots and pans, serving as assistant to the chef, dishwashing, waiting tables, then becoming head waiter. They treated me very well, too, even inviting me to social functions after I served a meal. That was when I was head waiter.

Our class time was Monday to Friday all day and Saturday mornings, as much as twenty-two hours per term sometimes—a lot packed into four years. Today all must have a bachelor's degree before beginning the four years of professional school. In a few instances, it can all be done in seven years but usually isn't. In such cases,

both degrees are awarded at the end of the seven years. So, the preparation time is very different now.

In those days, most graduates either hired out to someone for low wages or tried to start a practice. I really didn't know what I would do, although I had thought over the options. During Easter break of my senior year, I visited Dr. George Baker of Brasher Falls. I had known him a little as one who came to our farm. I wasn't really job hunting, but after a lot of searching questions and looking me over with those piercing eyes of his, he asked me to help him castrate some colts when it got warm. I agreed to do that, and between graduation and state boards I took a week and helped him. We castrated 45 colts. I remember that some of the aseptic procedures were less than I thought best, but I did learn a lot about handling colts as well as their owners. Something was right as the colts all did well, and he asked me if I would like to join him in his practice. I gave this a little thought and not long after told him I would. There was no time limit, no contract, no fringe benefits, no set hours, no wages, but a percentage off the top of cash practice and what went on the books I would wait for. He paid me little dribbles of money for several years after I had left his practice as people paid on bills. I remember some weeks I did not make enough to pay my gas bill.

On July 1, 1935, I moved to Brasher Falls. I had a room in the house with his 90 plus year old mother and his sister, a maiden lady of many years. Now mind you, I moved from the college scene, living in a fraternity and with young people. My boss was now 65 years old, and those in the house where I lived were older. You had better not be caught smoking in this house, and if you ever took a drink, no one in town should know about it. The phone rang in the office and Dr. Baker's house, and night calls were delivered to me by the doctor from across the road. Once he was up, I often wondered why he didn't go and do the call. However, I was young, ambitious and eager, so didn't mind.

My best learning experiences there were not so much scientific veterinary medicine but dealing with people and handling animals. I remember one time a call came in from St. Regis Falls. Dr. Baker said, "A mare is trying to have a foal. Go up and see what you can do." Well, I must confess I never delivered a foal, and while I thought I understood many of the problems and corrective procedures often needed, I was scared to death. When I arrived, four or five large, burly, rough-looking men were standing around outside in the yard expecting to

greet Dr. Baker, (He had not told them I would be coming.) I introduced myself. One said, "We sent for a doctor." As well as I could, I tried to tell them I was one and would try to help them. There was staring, a conference, and more questions; finally they said I could look at the mare. I've always been quite religious, and I think I practiced a little prayer then. Anyway, we went in the barn, and would you believe—the mare had had her colt. What a relief! I expect to them, too; probably the last thing they wanted was that young upstart, inexperienced, said-to-be veterinarian working on their mare. After some friendly exchanges and a cursory check on the mare's and colt's conditions, one of the men said, "How much, Doctor?" At this point I was surprised he had called me Doctor. I said, "I didn't do anything. If you don't mind, how about a dollar for gas." That went over well, and I got along fine there ever after. One other time I made a call and charged \$3. The man handed me a \$5 bill and I couldn't change it. It probably pleased him; I expect Dr. Baker collected it, for I never did.

I remember one late winter night a call came in and I was told that a neighbor of the person calling had a cow that had a prolapsed uterus, or, as he said, had cast her weathers. If you have farm experience, you know what this can mean. For those who don't know, it is a difficult procedure under difficult conditions. When I arrived, I found an old man, feeble and alone there. The only light was from a lantern in a small dingy stable with five or six cows in it. He had about a quart of tepid water (I needed ten gallons or more). The sick cow was lying in the dirt in the gutter. What an experience! Recruit help, water, and do this job. Believe it or not, the animal survived. I don't know why. I'm thankful they were not all like this.

Practice here was busy with a surprising amount of small animal work too—quite a bit of small animal surgery. I wasn't very happy with conditions and updated them as much as I could, which was considerable. I always admired Dr. Baker for the way he would cautiously accept a new idea. Some of the new things we started using were IV anesthesia in small animals, calcium therapy for milk fever cases (After agreeing to try it, he bought three 250 cc bottles of calcium gluconate; now I would buy twelve dozen bottles of 500 cc or more), epidural anesthesia, and use of a stomach tube for certain treatments. Once he saw these tried, he would adopt them and was a great salesman for "this latest treatment which this new doctor knows how to do." Remember, his school-

ing had finished at least forty years before I came there, so it's easy to understand how something which I accepted as routine was new to him.

There are some memories that come to mind that perhaps have a place here and probably would never occur to a younger reader. Now, mind, I do not intend this to bring forth a feeling of pity or feeling sorry for me or for those of my time. I felt fortunate to be able to do what I did; I enjoyed it and felt that I was always providing a necessary, needed and worthwhile service. How many would remember that roads were dirt and very muddy in spring and wet times? Farmers did not have plows and front-end loaders, so often their driveways were not plowed. You walked in from the road and carried the needed supplies in and out. None of the farmers had hot water in the barn or milk house. They all do now and did when I stopped large animal practice in 1957. If you wanted warm water for clean up, it came from the house; warm water in summer at an hour other than meal time might require a wood fire to be built and a wait for water to heat.

After a year, with the promise of a high school sweetheart to be my wife and the feeling that I would be better off in my own practice, I told Dr. Baker that I would be leaving. Irene McGee, a school teacher at Norfolk, New York, and I were married November 26, 1936, and from that time on I worked out of Norfolk. I did, for the next several years, go to Brasher Falls once a week and do Dr. Baker's elective surgery.

As I mentioned earlier, the United States government and New York State were jointly engaged in eradication of bovine tuberculosis. Animal disease prevention always seemed the best approach to me, and probably because of this and a desire for additional security (remember, we were still in the midst of a depression), I took a federal and state civil service exam, which, if I passed and I was high enough up on the list, would qualify me for a position in Disease Control. As a result of this, I was offered three positions in federal service, all of which meant a move. I turned them all down knowing that after three refusals my name would be removed from the list. I passed the New York State exam and in 1937 was offered a position in the Department of Agriculture and Markets with the Division of Animal Industry. For the next 37 and a half years I was closely involved in the diseases of farm animals that were eventually eradicated from the New York State herds, such as bovine tuberculosis, brucellosis (causes undulant fever in humans), scabies, and many other related problems.



*D.O. Bixby in 1935 upon graduation from the New York State College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University. (Photograph courtesy of D.O. Bixby)*

There never seemed to be an end to new diseases or revival of old ones, all of which made my work a challenge and exciting. In June of 1938, I was called out to a farm on the edge of Norfolk. On my arrival the owner told me he had a dead cow down in the field. He said, "Doc, she was OK earlier in the day; I'd like to know what she died of. You know, I've lost one or two or more a year like this, and one time I had one looked at and was told it was something she ate." (His advice was from a non-graduate of any formal veterinary college, a self-styled first aid man, so-to-speak, and even though he did his best, his advice often left something to be desired.) I did an autopsy, and to my startled eyes there were all the signs of anthrax, an acute infectious disease of cattle and sheep that can be contracted by humans. (I was thankful that I had been wearing rubber gloves.) Anthrax had not been heard of in forty or fifty years—I'm not exactly sure just how long. Since this was a first in a long time, I called on a colleague to consult on the case. Dr. Grant Kaley came over; he was as surprised and shocked as I was but agreed. We sent a specimen to the lab and were notified by phone two days later that we did indeed have a case of anthrax. I was asked many questions, was visited by state health officials and made many reports. The word spread and those unexplained cattle deaths were checked more often. From this time on I saw several other anthrax cases, vaccinated many herds, and eventually did not see any more of it.

Over the years I have spent many



*Dr. George A. Baker (1864-1960) in front of his hospital at Brasher Falls. Dr. Baker began practicing as a veterinarian about 1880, although he was not registered as a veterinarian until 1887. In 1916, he received a diploma from the Veterinary Science Association of Canada. (Photograph courtesy of Ruth Ober and Rachel Baker)*

weeks at local and state fairs checking health papers and watching for signs of distress or disease. Horses, sheep and poultry also were checked at local and state fairs. In 1939 there was a World's Fair in New York City (at Flushing, New York). One of the exhibits at that fair was a herd of several hundred cows from all over the United States. I was assigned to the fair for three weeks, which was an interesting and enjoyable experience. There were four or five of us there most of the time. One job we did while I was there was to conduct a routine tuberculosis test on the herd. When I made the reading of the group that I tested, I found one suspect. This was reported to the U. S. Department of Agriculture Animal Disease Control office in Albany. Dr. H. B. Leonard, the head of that office, came rushing down and asked if I was sure. I said I did the test properly and I could not with a clear conscience pass the animal. "That's all right. If that's the way you feel, I can accept that." The animal went to slaughter and in thirty days the herd retested, and all was OK. Frequent testing and removal of dis-

eased animals was the method that proved successful in eradicating tuberculosis. Until this herd tested clean, it was considered infected and no animals could return to the home state. This herd was in constant change, for just freshened, heavy-producing animals were wanted for the public to view. The cows were milked on a rotalactor (a large rotating circular platform) inside a glass enclosure and people could watch.

Another interesting experience was my first case of canine rabies. We had not heard of it in this area although it was prevalent in some other parts of the state. In July of 1961 a man walked into my office with a beagle dog. One look and I suspected rabies, which the lab confirmed a few days later. From that time, St. Lawrence County was listed as having rabies; public health then required vaccinations for dogs prior to licensing. A rabies coordinator was appointed and free clinics were started which we still have. A fox-trapping program was put in place to cut down on the fox population, since the Health Department thought that foxes were a principal carrier involved

in the spread of rabies. Since that time, we have had rabies in, but not limited to, dogs, cats, rats, horses, cows, skunks, bats, and foxes. I have seen many cases and have real respect for a rabid sick animal since humans are susceptible. The Health Department takes a real interest in rabies and is responsible for handling the control procedures.

These were interesting and busy years. In the mid fifties, my limited practice turned more to small animals and evening hours for the most part. There is considerable difference between large and small animal practice; also the people are somewhat different. The owner of an animal that is supposed to provide some of the livelihood and income for a family is looking at the cost benefit factors. These people will gamble some, but for the most part if you can't make or save them money, they lose interest in treatment. The small animal pet owner, on the other hand, is emotionally involved and costs are not nearly so important. While they don't want to be overcharged, they spend to save or improve the life of a pet, knowing that it is not for profit. I firmly believe that the role

of a veterinarian when dealing with a family pet is more important than often realized. You can bring encouragement and joy sometimes, but at times the real truth is not what the owner wants to hear. However, with time, experience and understanding, they will respect you, and when all is done they can feel comfortable knowing that you did all you could, that the treatment was properly done with feeling for the comfort of the patient. This is most important, and I hope improves in all of us with time and experience.

Most animals have what I call a special personality (perhaps we should coin a new word for that), which often I believe is the product of environment and training. I recall many interesting cases, but one which comes to mind now is a black lab retriever named Buck. He often stayed in my hospital while his owner traveled on business. When the owner drove in, Buck hopped out of the car and waited at the office door. When the door was opened, he gave me a look and greeting, then proceeded to the kennel room and stopped in front of the first empty large cage. When I opened the door, Buck went in, turned around, sat down and looked at me while I closed the door. The same routine happened not once, but many times.

Veterinary medicine, over the past fifty years, has undergone many changes. I expect some of these changes that come to my mind would also be true of other healing professions. How many of you would like to have your veterinarian have to treat your pet or farm animal without the benefit of antibiotics? They were not available when I started practice. The cortisone groups are new. Anesthesia, with sophisticated modern equipment, is much improved, safer and more effective. Tranquilizers, oral and injectable, are new. Vaccines are much improved. Of course, we have some new diseases to contend with, too, such as parvo virus in dogs, but we have a vaccine for it. We also now have a vaccine for feline leukemia which we welcome. Fluid therapy is commonly used now and such a help in many cases. Good lab work is readily available to the veterinarian. Fractures are handled much more efficiently now with X-rays as diagnostic improvement to help decide which procedure is best. Surgical treatment of fractures with pins, screws, and plates is now common in the well-equipped veterinary hospital. I often wonder how we got along. I remember how successfully Dr. George Baker adopted new procedures; we all have to do that, and I'm sure the next fifty years will bring about many more changes. Continuing education is an important part of every veterinarian's time schedule even though it takes time away



*Dr. Birby at work, about 1972.* (Photograph courtesy of D.O. Bixby)

from practice.

I was very pleased when our oldest son, Robert, announced that he would like to study veterinary medicine. My first comment was, "If you want to do this, fine, but I would not want you to do it just for me." He assured me that practicing veterinary medicine was what he wanted to do. I was truly pleased and glad to have him and his wife return to Norfolk in 1965. This was three years after his graduation from veterinary college at Cornell. Those three years had been spent in New Jersey where Bob did a residency in a small animal hospital.

Over the years I have counseled many young persons about veterinary medicine and tried to help them define their interests whether it led them to veterinary medicine or some other field. I have been on the secondary school committee for Cornell University for a number of years and have enjoyed talking with many young people.

I have enjoyed my professional life more than I can tell in a few words. It has been exciting, challenging, changing, and rewarding. I feel that I have had the privilege of getting acquainted with, serving, and hopefully helping the nicest people one could ever hope to meet. I always felt my work was important, but I have never believed I could not be replaced nor that there were not others who could do just as well or better.

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#### About the Author

Dr. D. O. Bixby, in addition to his veterinary practice and active membership in national, state, and local professional organizations, served twenty-four years on the Norwood-Norfolk School Board, seven as chair; four years as town supervisor of Norfolk, and ten years as a St. Lawrence County legislator.

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# A Tale of Two Brothers:

John H. and George J. Finnigan

by Ruth Finnegan Garner

*A product of Irish immigration into St. Lawrence County, the Finnigan/Finnegan family has made many contributions to this county's history. One small but fascinating segment of that history is recounted here.*

The early morning air promised the usual mid-summer heat that sixth day of August, 1927, but the weather was not much on my mind that day. After weeks of anticipation and preparation by my family, the big day had finally arrived, and my parents, Dennis and Isabelle Dame Finnegan, had, after much discussion, decided that, at age twelve, I was old enough to participate. Eight-year-old James, my brother, on

the other hand, was considered too young. Jubilation on my part, not to mention a new dress and new shoes, flowed from the delicious sense that my parents considered me sufficiently adult not to embarrass the Finnegan family on this long-awaited occasion. For days before that wonderful sixth of August, Mother drilled me in table manners and social graces, for the day was to include dinner at a hotel, a thrilling

enough adventure for me.

The memorable event of that August 6 was a pontifical mass to be celebrated at St. Mary's Church in Potsdam, New York, by the Right Reverend George J. Finnigan, newly consecrated bishop of the diocese of Helena, Montana. It was to be the first pontifical mass celebrated in this parish, and the celebrant was a native of Potsdam and of St. Mary's parish, and the only member of the Catholic hierarchy from St. Mary's to be elevated to the bishopric. Bishop George, as his family called him, was, at age 42, the youngest of seventy-five American bishops. The mass at St. Mary's was to be his first after his consecration several days earlier, and all the Finnigans and Finnegans (different segments of the family used different spellings) from far and wide had been invited to attend.

George Joseph Finnigan was born 22 February 1885 in Potsdam, New York, the fifth of six children and the third son of John C. and Louise (Canton) Finnigan. John C. Finnigan was born in 1852 in Newburyport, Massachusetts, a son of Patrick and Mary E. (Tourney) Finnigan. John had an older sister, Abigail, who was born in 1850, and eventually married Milton Garfield in the Potsdam Methodist Church in 1870, for which she was virtually disowned by her staunchly Catholic family. Nevertheless, in that same year, 1870, eighteen-year-old John was living with his sister on the Garfield farm. Five years later, in 1875, he married the Irish-born Louise Canton.

Until 1901, John and Louise lived at 14 Willow Street in Potsdam, where their children were born: Mary in 1877, John H. in 1879, Francis X. in 1881, Bernetta in 1883, George J. in 1885, and Rose in 1887. In 1901, the Standard Oil Company, for which John worked, transferred him to Malone. John and Louise were dedicated to their family and determined to provide all of them with good educations. All eventually attended Potsdam Normal School and some had further education. But first and foremost came religious education. The family watchwords were duty, honor, service, first to God, second to family, third to country. Following the tradition of many Irish Catholic families, John and especially Louise, probably wanted



*Louise Canton Finnigan was the mother of John Henry and George Joseph Finnigan. (Photograph courtesy of Ruth Finnegan Garner)*



their eldest son, John H. Finnigan, to enter the priesthood, but that was not to be. Their oldest daughter, Mary, did, however, enter the Order of the Sisters of Mercy. She died about 1966. Rose became a teacher and eventually married William Hurley of Brasher, New York. Bernetta also taught prior to her marriage to Thomas McKee of Malone, New York. She died in 1957. Francis X. worked for Standard Oil and married Mary Ellen Driscoll of Potsdam. He died in 1942.

It was the third son, George, who more than fulfilled his parents' hopes for him, though neither lived to see him become a bishop. John died in Malone in 1908, seven years before his son's ordination in 1915, and Louise died in 1922. By the time of his mother's death, George J. Finnigan was already a prominent member of the American hierarchy, which must have given her much satisfaction. George J. earned a Bachelor of Literature degree from Notre Dame University in 1910 and a Doctor of Philosophy at the Gregorian University in Rome in 1912. In 1915 he was ordained a member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, which administers Notre Dame. In 1916, he received a Doctorate in Sacred Theology at Laval University in Quebec. He served as a chaplain during World War I, having been commissioned a lieutenant in 1918 and a captain in 1919. Following his military service, in 1919 he became rector of Holy Cross Seminary, and, in 1925, vice-president of Notre Dame University. In 1926, George J. Finnigan became provincial of the Congregation of the Holy Cross and was in that position when he was appointed Bishop of Helena in 1927.

None of this was of interest to me on that August day in 1927. We dressed early and drove to Potsdam from Norwood, my father driving his prize possession, an Essex Whippet complete with button-on isinglass curtains. I sat as still as a statue for fear of getting a spot on my new dress or shoes, and I can well remember how intent my parents were on arriving early at St. Mary's. Their eagerness was almost tangible.

My own memories of the mass itself are kaleidoscopic—a blend of impressions of scarlets and greens and golds, of silks and velvets, and of a joyous religious celebration. As I refresh those memories with a perusal of the newspaper accounts of that day, I can well understand why the recollections of that event have stayed with me for well over half a century. Most of all I remember the family gift to Bishop George, a crozier which he used for the first time that August day. It had been the subject of much talk and many letters and conferences among family mem-



*George J. Finnigan as a chaplain in World War I. (Photograph courtesy of Ruth Finnegan Garner)*

bers about its selection and cost, for it represented a considerable monetary sacrifice, at least for my parents. The crozier was handcarved in Ireland. The wood was encrusted with silver and set with rubies and emeralds. It was beautiful. The crozier and other of Bishop George's regalia are now at the Museum Archives at Notre Dame.

The mass was followed that afternoon by a dinner for about eighty people at the Arlington Inn. The clan was there in force. How I wish I could remember

what was served! That day left a lifelong impression on me of family and of rejoicing. Unfortunately, George J. Finnigan had only a short tenure as Bishop of Helena, for he died in 1932, only five years after becoming a bishop. He is buried at Notre Dame.

Bishop George's life touched mine, however briefly. That of his eldest brother, John H. Finnigan, the first-born son of John C. and Louise, ended just about the time mine began. In a strange quirk of fate, in the very recent



"Bishop George," as his family called him, served as Bishop of Helena, Montana, from 1927 to 1932. (Photograph courtesy of Ruth Finnegan Garner)

past, John H. Finnigan has become a part of my life.


John H. Finnigan graduated from Potsdam Normal School in 1900 and taught for a year in the Churubusco, New York, schools. Then, as did members of a later generation who went into the Peace Corps, John responded to the call for American teachers to go to the Philippines to help establish an educational system there and to "civilize" the islanders. He was perhaps in part inspired in his decision by the idealism of the Progressive Era in the United States, and perhaps, one can only speculate, personally motivated to escape from parental disappointment over his failure to find a priestly vocation. For whatever mix of reasons, John H. Finnigan was one of the scores of American teachers who sailed for the Philippines on board the U.S.S. *Thomas* in the summer of 1901. St.

Lawrence County and its schools contributed more than their share of New Yorkers to the *Thomas's* passengers, who were known afterwards as Thomasesites. In addition to John, there were C. P. Bancroft of Hannawa Falls, an 1887 graduate of Potsdam Normal, and W. B. Burt, also of Hannawa Falls, an 1896 Potsdam Normal graduate. Frank Clapper of Castleton-on-Hudson had graduated from Potsdam Normal in 1894. J. F. Connolly of Fort Montgomery was another Potsdam Normal graduate, as was A. K. Hitchcock of Plattsburg. D. M. Kirby of Potsdam had graduated from Potsdam Normal in 1896. And there was W. J. Scruton of Madrid, a 1901 Potsdam graduate as well as E. B. Sanford of Nicholville who graduated in 1900. A. Wagner of Ogdensburg was a 1901 Potsdam graduate, and I. R. Wellington of Canton was a product of St. Lawrence University. Of the six-

ty-three New Yorkers listed in *The Log of the "Thomas"*, eleven had St. Lawrence County connections.

John H. Finnigan taught first at Antinoma in Luzon. He married Nieves Orgino and they had a daughter, Rosemary, who was born in 1910. About 1911, John Finnigan was transferred to Palawan on the island of Aborlan. According to his *Courier and Freeman* (December 9, 1914) obituary, Aborlan was "inhabited by one of the most savage of the many tribes of natives and at the time Mr. Finnigan went there it was considered so dangerous a place in which to reside that he left his wife and child in Luzon." At Palawan John H. Finnigan supervised an agricultural school, now the Palawan National Agricultural College. He was murdered at the school by an escaped convict in 1914 and buried in the Del Norte Cemetery in Manila, in a plot reserved for the Thomasesites. To this day, one of the main streets of Palawan bears his name. Ultimately, John's daughter, Rosemary, came to the United States, graduated from St. Mary's College at Notre Dame and later taught Latin and Greek there as well as Spanish in Florida schools. She died in St. Petersburg in 1976. Her mother, John's wife Nieves, became the housekeeper of General Douglas MacArthur and his first wife, Louise Cromwell Brooks, even accompanying them to New York City. She was never accepted by the Finnigan family and returned to the Philippines where she died in 1942.

And there the story of John H. Finnigan in the Philippines might have ended had it not been for the determined and herculean efforts of Alicia Sylvia Finningan Palanca to assert her mother's claim to American citizenship. Maria Rosario Finnigan y Joya, born in Aborlan, Palawan, on October 9, 1914, was the daughter of Quintera Kimko Cursod Joya and John Finnigan! A copy of her birth certificate plus an affidavit and an official 1984 Resolution (No. 72) from the Office of the Sangguniang Bayan of the Municipality of Aborlan in the Province of Palawan left the fact of John's second family beyond all doubt. John H. Finnigan married Quintera Kimko Joya on 2 January 1914 according to the minority custom called "Bandi" before the Masicampo, the highest official of the Taghanua tribe. Their daughter, Rosario, was an infant at the time of her father's murder. Quintera died in 1979. John H. Finnigan has eight grandchildren in the Philippines. For Rosario to claim American citizenship, she had to prove that her father was an American citizen. Her daughter Alicia set out to prove this, trying every avenue imaginable, including a letter to the Registrar of Potsdam College, for her grandfather



## Certificate of Baptism

Parish of Immaculate Conception  
Puerto Princesa City  
 Diocese of Palawan

**This is to Certify**

*That* Maria Rosario Finnigan y Joya  
 child of John Finnigan and Quintera Kimko Curesod Joya  
 born in Aborlan, Palawan  
 on the 9th day of October 1914  
**was Solemnly Baptized**  
 on the 11th day of April 1915

**According to the Rites of the Roman  
 Catholic Church**  
 by the Rev. Fr. Javier Ariz  
 the Sponsors being Gonzalo Merino  
 and Flor de Liza, Elvira Manalo  
 as appears in page 135 of the Baptismal Register No. 5  
 Church Dated April 11, 1915  
 Date of issue: September 10, 1984  
 Purpose: Records

**Parish Priest**  
 Rev. Fr. Federico P. dela Rosa,  
 Vicar General

*The baptismal certificate which indicated that John H. Finnigan fathered Maria Rosario. John's American citizenship had also to be demonstrated satisfactorily for his daughter to gain American citizenship. (Document courtesy of Ruth Finnegan Garner)*



*The American Teachers Memorial in Del Norte Cemetery, Manila, near which John H. Finnigan is buried. (Photograph courtesy of Ruth Finnegan Garner)*

had been listed as a Potsdam Normal School graduate in the Thomasite records. The Registrar passed on the letter of inquiry to the St. Lawrence Valley Genealogical Society where I learned of it and eventually became convinced that Rosario was indeed John's daughter. With proof of his American birth forthcoming from Potsdam, New York, the path was cleared for Rosario Finnigan Palanca to have her American citizenship acknowledged. On April 21, 1985, that important event occurred. Some of her children became automatically entitled to American citizenship through her. Others, because of changes in American law, must petition for citizenship. As one of her sons wrote, "To be an American citizen is a dream of every Filipino. It's a very, very precious gift we can give to our children. Our country is now in crisis . . . Civil war right now is still manageable but I

doubt [if it will be] in the near future because many people are starting to join the movement to overthrow the government because of poverty." Over seventy years after John's death, his second Filipino family has established contact with his American kin. In fact, the lives of the Finnigans have been strangely intertwined with the Philippines. Bernetta (the sister of John and George Finnigan) McKee's son Robert, a priest, was a Japanese prisoner of war in the Philippines for four years. He met Nieves Orgino Finnigan before her death, and he learned of the burial place of his uncle, John H. Finnigan. My only brother, James Finnegan, died there in 1942 at age 23. He was on the Bataan death march. One can only conjecture about the forces that led these two Finnigan brothers, John H. and George J., in such seemingly different directions.

And yet, for all the obvious superficial differences, weren't there some similarities? At the very least, the idealism that must have motivated the priest at some level also compelled his older brother to go half way around the world to teach in the Philippines, and to leave his mark permanently on the history of those islands.



**About the Author**  
 Ruth Finnegan Garner was for many years a businesswoman in Potsdam and served as mayor of the village from 1976 to 1980.



*The fiftieth wedding anniversary of Jeremiah and Mary Sullivan, Irish immigrants who settled on the Madrid Road in Potsdam in the 1860's. Shown here are twelve of the couple's fourteen children. Ellen Sullivan O'Leary, top row, and Julia Sullivan Fay, middle row, fourth from left, made the voyage from Ireland as babies. (Photograph courtesy of Anne O'Leary O'Brien of Canton)*

## Irish Immigrants in St. Lawrence County

*by Richard Rummel*

*Irish immigrants, both Catholics and Protestants, came in substantial numbers to St. Lawrence County before, during, and after the Great Famine of the 1840's. Richard Rummel's article is a survey of aspects of Irish immigration to this county.*

Probably no other immigrant group in America had more appalling reasons to leave their homeland than did the Irish. The severe potato famine of the mid-1840s dramatically increased an already considerable emigration from Ireland. An estimated one million people, many of whom ultimately arrived in the United States, departed

between 1846 and 1851; at about the same time approximately another million perished from starvation or famine-related disease.<sup>1</sup> When the full effects of this devastating experience were finally realized, the population of Ireland was reduced from eight million to four million. The impact of wide scale Irish immigration on the United

States is evident in the fact that by 1860, nearly half of New York State's million foreign-born were Irish.<sup>2</sup> Statistics from the New York census of 1855 indicate that of St. Lawrence County's population of nearly 60,000, over six thousand, or 10 percent, of that total were born in Ireland, a figure six times that of the next

## Irish Immigrants in St. Lawrence County

	1855		1865	
	Total Population	Ireland Born	Total Population	Ireland Born
Brasher	2126	442	2493	429
Canton	—	—	4874	499
Colton	—	—	1187	126
Dekalb	2255	186	2632	196
Lawrence	2066	177	2223	279
Lisbon	3532	1045	3712	820
Louisville	—	—	1666	182
Madrid	3521	252	1698	150
Morristown	1732	106	—	—
Oswegatchie	5960	1790	6987	1342
Potsdam	5528	405	5352	354
Rossie	1137	117	1429	151
Stockholm	3380	172	3326	211
Waddington	(no record)	—	1895	250

*County towns with at least 100 Ireland-born residents, showing increases and decreases from 1855 to 1865.*

highest group.<sup>3</sup> By 1875 the figure had dropped to 7 percent.<sup>4</sup> Allowing for such factors as death and migration out of the county by first generation Irish, Irish immigrants still constituted by far the largest European immigrant group.<sup>5</sup>

The plight of Ireland during the worst of the famine years prompted widespread relief efforts in the United States. Irish Relief Societies sprang up around the country. St. Lawrence County was quick to respond when in March, 1847, a meeting was held at the Presbyterian House in Ogdensburg, with Henry Van Rensselaer as president.<sup>6</sup> The committee's appeal to the public said, in part:

"The wail of distress has come upon us, not in the single and casual cases of contagion and disease, or mingled with the shouts of victory from the battlefield, but in the deep and dying groans of thousands dying for want of food . . . . We have here at the outset, the offer of the gratuitous conveyance of donations by the principal steamboat line from this place as far as their boats run, on the route towards the seaboard and . . . no charges will be made for storage, etc."<sup>7</sup>

This appeal had an effect throughout the county, and on the 2nd of June, the committee forwarded to Ireland 367 barrels of provisions: 243 of wheat and cornmeal, 43 of rye, 6 of oatmeal, 12 of beans, 4 of peas, 7 of pork, and one cask of "sundries." The committee in its report to the national committee in New York made special note of the efficiency of aid received from Massena and Potsdam.<sup>8</sup>

The effect of such aid on the "Irish problem" was very likely minimal in light of the magnitude of the famine disaster. Statistics attest to the decimation of Ireland's population; and for the Irish peasant, sometimes forced to live a brutal existence, beset with poverty, illiteracy and disease or to leave his homeland forever bespoke a desperation far more critical and a national problem far more complex than foreign aid crossing the ocean in the 1840's could ever hope to cure.

Not all emigrants were destitute and wretched, especially those who came prior to the Great Famine, but a majority of the famine migrants possessed little more than a few personal belongings and hope for a better life. Thousands ill with famine fever crowded ships, and many thousands more who had the fortune of being free of the disease contracted it once on board. If life in Ireland was intolerable, life aboard ship was less so only for the hope of what the voyage promised at its end. Emigrant ships, often advertised as comfortable, fast and with the best accommodations, were in reality floating houses of horror. Carl Wittke in *The Irish in America* gives this account of an Irish emigrant's lot aboard ship:

During the famine years, conditions on shipboard approached the unbearable . . . . As a rule, single women were quartered at one end, the men at the other, and married couples in between. Irish steerage passengers lived largely on oatmeal porridge. The supply of fresh water generally did not last out the voyage, and there was no water for washing. The crowded quarters were fumigated with

vinegar. Moreover, the lack of common toilet facilities was appalling. The sick were without medical help; there was no privacy during the voyage, even for the change of undergarments.<sup>9</sup>

Death ravaged emigrant ships. One report lists that of 552 passengers aboard the *Avon* bound for Canada in 1847, 263 died before reaching their destination.<sup>10</sup> The voyage took anywhere from four to ten weeks, depending on the prevailing winds.<sup>11</sup> Adam Scott, who in 1847 settled near Heuvelton after landing at Ogdensburg, set sail from Belfast aboard the *Annie* on April 28, 1847, and reached Quebec on May 26.<sup>12</sup>

Irish immigration to St. Lawrence County came almost entirely through Canada. Like Adam Scott, thousands of Irish took advantage of the larger Canadian ships, which carried more passengers, and cheaper Canadian fares; but despite Canadian debarkation, Irish immigrants were almost unanimous in their choice of ultimate destination. Of 274,000 immigrants who landed at Montreal and Quebec, 250,000 came to the United States.<sup>13</sup> For one thing, employment opportunities were greater in the United States than in Canada. For another, terms for settling on and acquiring land were easier.<sup>14</sup> Land agents working on behalf of wealthy land owners, such as David Parish, met emigrant ships in Canadian ports for the purpose of recruiting people to settle on their employer's land and work in whatever industry he might own. Parish's lead mines in Rossie were exploited through the labor of Irish and Scottish immigrants, who were paid a dollar per ton hauled and a dollar per hundred length of timber cut for the charcoal ovens. Five hundred Irish were already employed there in 1836.<sup>15</sup> Parish also extended generous terms to anyone wanting a parcel of land, going as far as giving them livestock to help in getting settled. But such fortune and magnanimity did not extend through the ranks of workers and their families. Evert's *History of St. Lawrence County* relates an incident of ethnic prejudice in 1837 at Parish's mine when, "on the evening of St. Patrick's Day . . . some mischievous persons had suspended by the neck an effigy in Irish costume . . . and affixed a label, 'St. Patrick,' and a wish that this might be the fate of every Irishman . . . . This gave origin to a feud, which continued for a long time . . . ."<sup>16</sup>

The reasons for Irish immigration to the United States are understandable, but they do not explain the geographic distribution of immigrants once they arrived here. The New York census of 1855, for instance, revealed that nearly

30 percent of the population of Lisbon was Irish and almost 50 percent of Madrid's while Gouverneur had only a little more than two percent and Canton less than one percent.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, a town's proximity to the St. Lawrence River was a major factor in determining where the Irish settled, as immigrants made their way up river by whatever means of transportation they could find or afford. The Durham boat, about as sophisticated a craft and probably as comfortable as a barge, plied the St. Lawrence with immigrant traffic, bringing many Irish into the county. These crude boats were usually rowed or pushed along with long poles, or pulled by oxen walking the shore. One such trip was made by Michael and Elizabeth Griffin, grandparents of William Griffin of Star Lake, who recently told of the couple's ordeal of being blown in a storm into the Bay of St. Lawrence after emigrating from County Cork. From there they traveled by Durham boat up the St. Lawrence to Oswego, a voyage of more than a week's time; then, in 1840, they came by ox cart to the town of Fine, where they built and lived in a one room cabin and grew buckwheat to make a living.

Probably the most important factor of all in the formation of Irish "pockets" in the county is that immigrants tended to follow other immigrants. Lisbon's large Irish population in 1855 may perhaps be attributed in part to the fact that a native of Ireland, Andrew O'Neil, was the first to settle there as well as to its location on the St. Lawrence and its proximity to Ogdensburg, where most Irish coming to the county landed. Letters sent by settled immigrants to family and friends in Ireland, as well as the appearance in newspapers of announcements extolling the virtues of a place, often gave fearful Irish wanting to emigrate the necessary incentive to leave. News of favorable employment prospects, whether they were real or not, and the availability of land, which other Irish had already taken advantage of, were responsible for the formation of several Irish settlements. Today, we see reminders of these settlements in the many Irish Settlement roads traversing the county. To an area west of the village of Canton came the Sullivans, Kains, Smiths, Gaffneys, Mallams, Rileys and Kellys. In Pierrepoint, the Millers, Fitzgeralds, Corcorans, Welches, Roaches, McCabes and Quinns settled. South Colton's Irish community claimed such families as the Hayeses, Donohues, O'Haras, Clohoseys, Bicknells, Coxes and Williamsons. In 1855 the town of Brasher had 442 residents who were born in Ireland, a figure that holds consistent into 1875, making it one of the largest

Irish communities in the county. The list of Brasher Irish is extensive, but some of the families are the O'Briens, McCarthys, Learys, Hallahans, Lantrys, Finnigans and Goggins. An anecdote is told there about an Irish emigrant coming to the docks to catch his ship. Having missed it, he leaped upon a log and paddled to Montreal, where, amazed at the city's size, he exclaimed, "If this be Montreal, what must Brasher be?"

Wittke in *The Irish in America* stated that about 10 percent of Irish immigrants in America took up farming, a small percentage in comparison to other groups.<sup>18</sup> The New York State census of 1875 listed laborers as the leading occupation group among Irish immigrants, followed by domestic servants, with farmers third.<sup>19</sup> Many, of course, had no choice but to stay in the cities where they landed. They were too poor to leave Boston or New York, much less to buy land elsewhere. Statistics aside, St. Lawrence County's Irish population pursued and were successful in a variety of occupations. Because so many were unskilled, their labor was exploited. The Northern railroad was made a reality through the labor of Irish workmen. It was Irish families from the "patch" in Ogdensburg who worked on the rail line cut through that city. The topographical atlas of 1865 revealed that in Madrid, Thomas McCaul was employed as a shoemaker, Jacob McCormick as a tailor, and that James Gillespie made cabinets.<sup>20</sup> Also, following the Civil War, many Irish were attracted by the growth of such towns as Potsdam, Canton, and, later, with the development of the power canal, Massena. Potsdam maintained a fairly large Irish population from the census of 1855 to that of 1875, while Canton experienced a dramatic increase from 41 born in Ireland in 1855 to nearly 500 in 1865!<sup>21</sup>

In many ways the history of Irish immigrants to St. Lawrence County reflected the experiences of their brethren elsewhere in the United States. In other ways, especially in the substantial numbers who took up farming, they diverged from the predominant pattern. It is important to remember that it was not only the cities of Boston and New York that felt the impact of the Great Famine and the decades of migration it engendered, but rural northern New York was also affected.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Patrick J. Blessing, "Irish" in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 529.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Franklin B. Hough, *Census of the State of New York* (Albany: Charles Van Benthuysen, 1857) p. 138.

<sup>4</sup> C. W. Seaton, *Census of the State of New York* (Albany: Weed, Parsons, and Co., 1877), p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> The 1875 census lists Canada as the leading country of nativity of the foreign-born population of St. Lawrence County. This does not take into account second generation Irish born in Canada who came to St. Lawrence County.

<sup>6</sup> Franklin B. Hough, *A History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, New York* (Albany: Little & Co., 1853; reprinted 1970) p. 519.

<sup>7</sup> Hough, p. 520.

<sup>8</sup> Hough, pp. 520-521.

<sup>9</sup> Wittke, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Seamus, MacManus, *The Story of the Irish Race* (New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1921), p. 609.

<sup>11</sup> Wittke, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Baxter, Compiler, *The Introduction of the Adam Scott Letters*.

<sup>13</sup> William Forbes Adams, *Ireland and the Irish Immigration to the New World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1932), p. 304.

<sup>14</sup> P. 304

<sup>15</sup> L. H. Everts & Co., *History of St. Lawrence County*, (Philadelphia, 1878. Reprinted by Heart of the Lakes Publishing Co., for the St. Lawrence County Historical Association), p. 315.

<sup>16</sup> Everts, p. 315.

<sup>17</sup> Hough, *Census*, p. 138.

<sup>18</sup> Wittke, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> Seaton, *Census*, p. 439.

<sup>20</sup> S. N. & D. G. Beers & Associates, *Topographical Atlas of St. Lawrence County* (Philadelphia: Stone & Stewart, 1865 Reprinted by Martin Wehle, Churchville, N.Y. 1976), p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Hough, *Census of 1865*, p. 151.

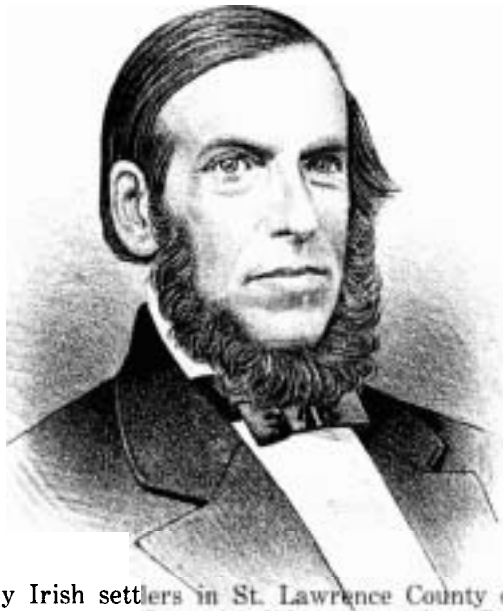


#### About the Author

Richard Rummel is Programs Coordinator of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.

#### CAN YOU HELP?

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association has received a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to research and plan in 1985 an exhibit on the county's various agricultural expositions from about 1850 to about 1930. Fairs were held in Potsdam, Oswegatchie (Ogdensburg), Hammond, Gouverneur and Canton. The SLCHA is seeking to locate all kinds of materials relating to these fairs, including written records, to establish an accurate history of the agricultural expositions held in this county. If you have or know of any written records (for example, letters or diaries detailing visits to a fair as well as any official minute books or other records) or artifacts, including prize-winning items, connected with any of the fairs, please contact John Baule or Judith B. Ranlett at the SLCHA in Canton. Please help us!



Many Irish settlers in St. Lawrence County did take up farming. One who did so was Adam Scott (1817-1889), who purchased land near Heuvelton and prospered there. Today, the Scott farm is occupied by his great and great-great grandsons. The excerpts which follow are from letters written by Scott to family and friends in Ireland. The complete collection is on file in the St. Lawrence County Historical Association's archives.

**November 12, 1848—Scott to his close friend Alexander Simms**

I have bought a lot of land of 50 acres at \$5 an acre. I get five years to pay the money. Fifty dollars per year is to be paid during that time, at seven percent interest. I have paid two installments, and I have let chopping and clearing of ten acres at \$2.50 an acre. Land sells here from three to \$30 or \$40 an acre, according to the situation of the buildings. You can buy fair land here for \$10 per clearance.

**July 12, 1850—to his brother, William**

I have not put up a house yet, as Jenny [Scott's wife, from Lisbon, whom he married in Ogdensburg in 1850] and I are both living with Mr. Ballentine, I was going on my own place in the spring but as I could not hand sow much crop and cows were higher in price than last fall, we thought it better to stop on as we were. We will, if health remains, go on after haying and harvest are over. What land is cleared I have in hay. I have no running water on my lot but I expect to get enough by digging six or eight feet.

**July 25, 1852—to his mother**

We are all well at present. Thank God for all His goodness to us, His unworthy children. Mother, there is no raising of rent here at the fall of your lease. A renewal of mine did not cost me a cent. I am sorry to think that you are among the number who have to crave mercy from an Irish landlord, for even the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel, and were you only here one year you would not go back to our old farm even at your own price.

**October 15, 1859—to his sister, Ann**

You speak of sending your wheel to me. It would be

very useful for twisting thread. I do all my wool-spinning on the large wheel. It makes better yarn than the other. We never have sowed any flax yet. It does not do as well here as at home.

**April 3, 1865—to his brother, William**

I hope that we begin to see beginning of the end [the Civil War], and we begin to breath a little freer. When they begin to arm their slaves, we think that is their last resource. If slaves fight for slavery, I say let them be slaves forever . . . It has made it hard to live here. Scarce anything we have to buy but is double or treble the price it formerly was, and it costs so much to get men—\$2,000 is now offered for a man who has seen service and \$1,400 to \$1,600 for a green hand.

**February 9, 1870—to his brother, William**

They do not bury twice in one grave here if they can help it, and they think little of moving a graveyard, or at least what they can get of their dead, to some newer or more fashionable place, for it seems that a Yankee does not care to be still, even in the grasp of death.

**February 2, 1869—to his brother, William**

Ogdensburg is now a city. Rensselaer Falls and Heuvelton grow larger every year. The railroad runs through both. I can send my butter to sister Mary's folks or any friends who want it at the New York city price . . . So you see we can turn railwaying to some account. We can also send by express for our tea or other groceries if we think them better.

**October 24, 1878—to his brother William**

One year ago, agents came around looking for subscribers for a history of St. Lawrence County on a grand scale. You had a chance to put in a biographical sketch, a view of your place and portraits of yourself and as many more of the family as you chose. The portraits were to be steel engravings. The view taken by their artist cost \$45 and portraits \$25 per head. I became a subscriber for the portraits of Jenny and me. I wrote a sketch of the Scott family from their coming to Ireland [from Scotland] and had it inserted in the book. They let me have a book free.



*Adam and Jeanette Scott are pictured above as they were "immortalized" in Everts' History of St. Lawrence County, published in 1878. (Picture courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association archives)*

# Bertrand H. Snell: A Pictorial History

by Marcia Radley

*Bertrand Hollis Snell was born in Colton, New York, in 1870. He graduated from Potsdam Normal School in 1889 and from Amherst College in 1894. In the early twentieth century, he played an important role in the lumbering and paper industries in northern New York. Elected as a Republican to the United States House of Representatives in 1914, he served there from 1915 to 1939, declining renomination in 1938. From 1931 to 1939, Snell was House Minority leader and an adamant foe of the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Snell chaired the G.O.P. National Nominating Convention in 1932, which nominated Herbert Hoover for re-election, and the 1936 convention, which named Alf Landon of Kansas to run against Franklin D. Roosevelt. After his retirement from Congress, Snell returned to an active and diverse business life. Five days after his death in 1958, the Bertrand H. Snell Lock on the St. Lawrence Seaway was named in his honor to commemorate his long and enthusiastic support of that venture. For additional biographical information, the reader is referred to Quarterly articles by Varick A. Chittenden (October 1968) and by Dee Little (October 1964).*

*The papers of Bertrand H. Snell, some 35,000 items covering the years 1902-1960, are housed in the archives of Potsdam College. The pictures shown here are all from the Snell collection.*

About the author: Marcia Radley is a 1985 graduate of Potsdam College where she majored in history and education.



*Bertrand H. Snell  
as a child.*



*Snell in 1889 upon his graduation  
from Potsdam Normal School.*



*Snell (extreme right) with his family about 1890.*



*Politicians are known for wearing odd headgear. In this 1899 photograph, Snell with Dr. Hugh A. Grant and friends seems to be practicing for his future career.*



*Shown prior to the inauguration of Herbert Hoover in 1929 are John I. Tilson, majority leader, Nicholas Longworth, Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Bertrand H. Snell, chairman of the House Inaugural Committee.*



*Bertrand and Sara Snell in 1937.*



*Bertrand Snell here umpires a 1938 Congressional ballgame. Sam Rayburn of Texas is the catcher; Speaker of the House William Bankhead is at bat.*



The mid-1930's were a hard time for Republicans, which is the subject of both cartoons by Clifford K. Berryman (1869-1951), cartoonist for the Washington Post and the Washington Evening Star. The upper cartoon comments on the paucity of Republicans in the House following the 1934 mid-term elections; the other comments on the resounding defeat suffered by Republicans in 1936. Berryman presented Snell with these and other cartoons which are part of the Snell collection.



# How to Find St. Lawrence County Newspapers

by David Trithart

*The first in what is intended to be an occasional series on practical aspects of carrying on historical research on St. Lawrence County, David Trithart's article tackles basic questions on locating newspapers. It is hoped that this article and others to follow will make doing such research easier and perhaps—who knows?—result in future articles for The Quarterly!*

One of the best sources for the feel and the data of everyday life of a place is the local newspaper. Historians have long recognized the value of these publications. By their very nature, newspapers are difficult to locate and to use. Frequently the only copy will be that held by a local library or historical society. With rare exceptions newspapers are not indexed. In most cases their fragile condition has meant that older newspapers must be microfilmed.

Compounding these difficulties is the fact that newspapers are so numerous. During the 18th and 19th centuries every prosperous town had its own newspaper or even several newspapers. In the period before 1820 more than half of all newspapers lasted less than two years. That harsh fact was probably little changed in the succeeding decades. This means that even to compile a list of what newspapers existed is difficult.

Despite these obstacles newspapers are worth the effort to historians. In the introduction to her classic work, *American Newspapers, 1821-1936*, Winifred Gregory writes,

The value of the information these papers contains can hardly be overestimated. They are the primary sources for national and local history and for the study of the evolution of economic and political opinion. Cases at law are frequently determined by citations from the press. In the advertising pages and commercial columns are found the record of our industry and business history.

The intent of this article is to describe some of the tools that can help a researcher who wishes to consult newspaper records, focusing on Northern New York. Using the reference books



*The Ogdensburg Journal was one of at least a dozen newspapers, including such short-lived ones as Boy's Daily Journal, Northern Light, and Daily Sentinel, to be published in Ogdensburg. This photograph was dated 1950. (Photograph courtesy of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association Archives)*

mentioned here a researcher should be able to identify newspapers of possible value and determine whether a microfilmed copy is available, and where it may be found.

Two works stand out for reasons of their scope—both geographical and temporal—and thoroughness. They are *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820*, by C. S. Bingham (1962), and *American Newspapers, 1821-1936: A Union List of Files Available in the United States and Canada*, by Winifred Gregory (1936).

Bingham's work was originally published in issues of the American Antiquarian Society Proceedings. Besides giving some very interesting history on early newspaper publishing, this two volume work lists by state and town the newspapers known to have been published there. Proprietors and the dates during which a paper published are given when they are known. Where actual issues were known to exist that location is also noted. There are over 230 pages of listings for New York State. This and the following book should be used mainly to identify titles rather than locations of copies since most of the microfilming which has made newspapers more available has been done since their publication.

Winifred Gregory's book was designed to take up where Bingham left off. It is an important compilation of known newspapers found in libraries and "as far as possible in county courthouses, in newspapers offices, and in private collections." Again dates for the papers are given here.

For the latter part of the 19th century, other tools become available to the researcher. *The Gazetteer of the State of New York* by J.H. French, 1860, is a very handy county-by-county look at New York State. Among the informa-

tion provided is a detailed survey of newspapers, including notes on their publishing history. See pages 573-574 for the list of St. Lawrence County newspapers. In most cases the name of the proprietor or publisher is given, as well as a useful characterization of the newspaper.

In 1880 N. W. Ayer began publishing an annual directory of American newspapers, usually referred to as *Ayer's Directory*. Still appearing annually, this book is the best source for names of newspapers in recent years.

Despite the central importance of these works, there have been numerous independent efforts to identify and locate newspapers. These have usually taken a narrower geographic or thematic focus. The State Library in Albany has recently compiled a bibliography of these works. *Bibliographies and Lists of New York State Newspapers: An Annotated Guide*, compiled by Paul Mercer, is a very valuable aid for persons interested in local newspapers. In the first part one finds 145 published international, national and regional bibliographies, including the ones mentioned above. The second part cites nearly fifty lists of New York State newspapers. The final part records unpublished (often typed or photocopied from card files) lists of often very local scope. Here one finds, for example, Milton Hamilton's *Anti-Masonic Newspapers, 1826-1834*. Most of the titles included in Mercer's bibliography are available at the New York State Library in Albany.

After establishing what newspapers existed for a particular place comes the job of locating a copy of those newspapers. Main efforts at newspaper conservation center around the microfilming of those newspapers for which a substantial run can be found. This

microfilming is carried out at locations throughout the country. It has fallen to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., to try to maintain a central list of these microfilms. Since 1941 they have been producing a continuously updated listing called *Newspapers in Microfilm*. Libraries, historical societies, and microfilm publishers report their holdings of microfilmed newspapers to this central agency. A supplement to *Newspapers in Microfilm* has been appearing annually. Its most useful feature is that it tells where the microfilm can be found, and the exact dates included in each collection.

Current methods for maintaining lists of library holdings make use of computer technology. Most libraries and other large repositories now operate within networks, each library connected to a central record storage unit through telecommunication equipment. One of the largest of these is the Online College Library Center (OCLC) in Columbus, Ohio. Through a terminal connected to this database a local library can ascertain which other libraries have recorded holdings of a given newspaper. As this system becomes more comprehensive (older materials are often the last to be added), it will be even more useful to persons searching for rare newspapers. More than 3200 libraries participate directly in OCLC, and even small libraries usually have ways to gain access to the information found there.

A concerted effort to identify and microfilm all important United States newspapers was begun in the mid-1970's under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Called the United States Newspaper Program, it will enable states to undertake projects to inventory, describe, and eventually microfilm their newspapers. To date, efforts have concentrated on six major collections, including those of the New York Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society. The New York State Library in Albany is coordinating the planning and gathering of information about other newspaper collections throughout the state. This information will be added to the OCLC database and kept continuously up to date. This project has passed the planning stage and will be sending out researchers to record detailed descriptions of newspaper holdings. If all goes according to plan, New York State should have a good comprehensive list of newspaper collections within the next few years.

Until that time one must rely on the several printed lists that have been compiled. For the State of New York the most important collection is that in the State Library in Albany. Their

recently published list, *A Checklist of Newspapers in Microform in the New York State Library*, is a key tool. For the North Country, there are two important union lists. *Historical Materials Relating to Northern New York: A Union Catalog* includes a listing of the newspaper holdings of public libraries, historical societies and college libraries in the North Country. The continually updated *North Country Union List of Serials* (current edition on microfilm) is the source to check for up-to-date listings of library newspaper holdings. This is a printed product from OCLC of the serials (including newspapers) in North Country Libraries. To record their continuing work of microfilming local newspapers, the North Country Reference and Research Resources Council (Canton, N.Y.) has printed a list of newspapers microfilmed with their funds.

Several institutions have been very active in collecting and preserving newspapers. The American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, has the best collection of newspapers from the early years of the nation and from the colonial period. Currently, the Library of Congress is receiving more newspapers than any other single source.

The Genealogical Society of Utah is well-known for its collection of microfilmed documents of local history, vital records and other materials of great value to genealogical researchers. They have not made a practice of collecting newspapers. Among their documents one will occasionally find files of newspaper clippings, usually relating to births, deaths and marriages. These materials are open to public use. A recent list of the Society's materials for New York is *Descriptive Inventory of the New York Collection*, by Arlene H. Eakle and L. Ray Gunn. See pages 179-188 for the listing of newspaper holdings.

Copies of old newspapers will continue to be discovered. Many of the sources mentioned above will be in need of correcting and supplementing. As long as researchers continue to find newspapers of value, efforts will continue to provide more accurate finding aids, and newspapers in danger of disintegration will be preserved.

#### ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY NEWSPAPERS ON MICROFILM

These microfilms are available at the St. Lawrence University library; the Potsdam papers are also found at the Crumb Library at Potsdam State.

#### CANTON

*Canton Commercial Advertiser* 1874-1957.

*St. Lawrence Plaindealer* 1864-date.

#### POTSDAM

*Potsdam Courier and Freeman* 1861-

date.

*Potsdam Herald-Recorder* (later *Potsdam Herald*) 1905-1951.

*St. Lawrence Herald* 1879-1905

*Potsdam Recorder* 1892-1905

*St. Lawrence County Mercury* 1847-1850

#### OGDENSBURG

*Boy's Daily Journal* 1855-1856

*The Union Farmer (Dairy Farmer)* 1938

*Daily Sentinel* 1848

*St. Lawrence Republican* 1852

*St. Lawrence Gazette* 1817-1818, 1826-1827

#### MADRID

*Columbian Independent* 1851

#### MASSENA

*Massena Observer* 1901-1959

#### HAMMOND

*Hammond Advertiser* 1886-1897

This is not a comprehensive list, but it represents important titles that are readily available on microfilm. Ask at your local public or university library for more information.

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#### About the Author

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John DeBell, owner of the 1902 Bartholomew, poses with the car in his Port Huron, Michigan, collection. (Photograph courtesy of John DeBell)

## A Bartholomew Postscript

by Donna Earle Seymour

Fourteen years after the Bartholomew left St. Lawrence County for a private collection in Michigan, the same print medium which advertised the car's availability on the antique automobile market was instrumental in tracking down its present whereabouts. Like all special interest groups of any size, the old car hobbyists support a number of national periodicals and newspapers offering advertisements, advice and information of interest to members. One of the best (and biggest with a monthly circulation of over 236,000 copies) is *Hemmings Motor News*, now in its 32nd year of publication.

*Hemmings*, as it is known, bills itself as the "world's largest antique, vintage and special-interest auto marketplace." Each issue contains from five to six hundred pages of advertisements of vehicles, parts, literature and events of interest to the hobbyist, including a selection of letters to the editor and a "cover car" photograph submitted by readers.

Knowing the wide circulation which *Hemmings* enjoys in the old car world, I submitted a photograph of the Bar-

tholomew along with a description of the car and a plea for information on its current location and condition. This appeared on the June 1985 cover. Less than three weeks later, John DeBell, a collector from Port Huron, Michigan, wrote that he "... was both surprised and pleased to see your feature on the cover of June *Hemmings*. I own the car you are looking for."

In the early 1970's John was searching for an early 20th century automobile to serve as a cornerstone of his private museum, the DeBell Automotive Collection, which consists of a dozen pre-1930 cars, the oldest and most unique of which is the Bartholomew. He answered an ad in the February 1971 *Hemmings* offering the Bartholomew for sale and made the trip east to look the car over. He purchased the car and trailered it home on 27 February in a severe snow-storm.

As is apparent from the photograph, the Bartholomew has had something of a face-lift from its original appearance. John added a pair of pre-1905 brass side lamps, a brass bulb horn and a brass "Bartholomew" script. All these

items are authentic pieces of automobile accessory equipment which the builder, George E. Bartholomew, could have outfitted his car with in 1902.

With the exception of the replacement rubber tires, everything else on the Bartholomew is the same, including the black paint with red trim and the beige upholstery. John even overhauled the engine in 1975, returning it to running condition, so the Bartholomew is as road-worthy today as in 1902. This was in preparation for a proposed road rally for pre-1904 cars which the Detroit Veteran Car Club tried to organize. Unfortunately there were too few road-worthy autos of the Bartholomew's vintage to participate, so the rally was never held.

Another by-product of the Hemmings article resulted in a Fulton, New York, woman contacting me about the George Bartholomew family. Linda Curtis Seabury received the Bartholomew article in *Hemmings* from a co-worker who knew of her interest in family history. Linda's paternal grandmother was Lucy Ann Bartholomew, the sister of George. The Bartholomew family members who provided information for the July 1985 *Quarterly* article could tell me only that Lucy had "died young." Linda confirmed that Lucy was indeed only 26 at her death, but that she had married and had a son. Lucy, born 13 May 1866, was married to Cyrus L. Curtis (1847-1917), the youngest of nine children born to Ashabel and Jane (White) Curtis of Russell, New York, on 2 October 1887. The young couple moved to the Territory of Dakota where their son, Stanley A. Curtis, was born in Alexandria, South Dakota, on 26 November 1889. Three years later, on 29 December 1892, Lucy died in Alexandria. Cyrus and young Stanley returned to Russell where Cyrus was a storekeeper until his death in 1917.

Linda, who inherited the Bartholomew family Bible, was also able to fill in some of the details about the other two Bartholomew siblings, Irvin Willis and Homer. Irvin was born 3 May 1871, married Lucy M. Fox of Clare, New York, on 31 May 1896, and died 31 July 1913, the victim of a motorcycle accident in Russell. The third brother, Homer D., was born 30 November 1874 and died 14 November 1935 in Russell.

George Bartholomew would no doubt be surprised to learn that his horseless carriage made its way to an automobile collection in Michigan, half a continent away from Russell, and that it would someday be instrumental in reuniting far-flung branches of the Bartholomew family.

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### About the Author

See the article by Donna Earle Seymour on George E. Bartholomew and his automobile in the July, 1985, *Quarterly*.

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