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Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

Spring 1991

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**Cover:** Advertisement for Coates Brickyard, Raymondville, NY, *The St. Lawrence County Directory*, 1885.

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# The Forgotten Industry: Nineteenth Century Brickmaking in St. Lawrence County

by Harriet W. Liotta

## I. A Secondary Occupation

According to the New York State Census of 1845, there were 1,627 men who called themselves brickmakers.<sup>1</sup> Many of these were probably located in the lower Hudson Valley, where brickmaking on a fairly large scale began with the establishment of a plant near New York City in 1630,<sup>2</sup> and is today the major source of commercial red-burning brick in the state, due to the large deposits of fine glacial clays located there.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, though clays are to be found nearly everywhere to some extent, St. Lawrence County does not even rate a listing in the 1951 Department of Commerce study of the Clays and Shales of New York State.<sup>4</sup>

The lack of recognition on the state level is not surprising, for St. Lawrence County could not, by any stretch of the imagination, have been considered, at any time in its history, a major producer of brick. The clay beds, while quite numerous, were not large and were scattered throughout the Valley. Such beds were, indeed, fairly common throughout the country. The surprising fact is, however, the lack of recognition in local histories. The Paige Yards in Ogdensburg, for example, which began operations in 1830 and were still in operation in 1894, occupied 11 acres within village limits, produced 20,000,000 brick annually, and were said by Gates Curtis to "furnish employment to a considerable number of hands, this being an important factor in the commercial life of Ogdensburg."<sup>5</sup> The output by this yard equaled that of many of the Hudson Valley yards<sup>6</sup> and greatly surpassed that of the locally famous Raymondville yards (which, during peak years, produced no more than 1,000,000 bricks annually)<sup>7</sup> and yet, the only reference to be found was discovered in the Historical Sketches in the back of the Curtis volume. No mention was made in the town history in that volume, nor in the Hough or Everts histories. All of these contained some discussion of the brickyards at Raymondville. But perhaps most amazing of all is the fact that there is no listing of the Paige yards under "Industries Other Than Agriculture" in the local 1865 Census.<sup>8</sup>

It is equally difficult, though more understandable, to garner information concerning the other brickmakers of St. Lawrence County. One reason for this may be that many of the brickmakers themselves did not consider this to be their primary occupation. Child's



The home of Erastus Hall, the County's first brickmaker, in Raymondville, NY. (Courtesy of the Norfolk Town Historian)

*Gazetteer and Business Directory of St. Lawrence County* (1873-4) lists 15 "Brick Manufacturers,"<sup>9</sup> and 11 of these (under their individual listings by Town) indicate other occupations—9 farmers, 1 postmaster and town supervisor, 1 lawyer and justice of the peace. Indeed, even William Coates, the owner of the famed Raymondville yards wished to be listed also as "bricklayer, inspector of election district 2" and finally, "brick manufacturer."<sup>10</sup> This might be likened to the County's maple syrup producers of today, who would not, despite the fact that New York State is a leading syrup producer and that large amounts of syrup are produced locally, list syrup production as their primary occupation. It, too, is seasonal work.

In addition, brick production was a primitive kind of industry, especially when practiced on the small scale of many of the local brickmakers. It entailed no extensive building, as did the mills and foundries, no great feats of engineering, no complicated power sources. All that was needed was the raw material (clay), water for seasoning and mixing, man, ox or horse power for working the pug mill (if, indeed, such was used in the earlier days), man power for forming the brick, and fuel for firing the kiln. All were to be found locally in abundance.

## II. A Primitive Process

It is safe to say that the smaller yards probably used those unsophisticated

production techniques which were practiced by the early colonists. The yards were set up near clay banks, often in close proximity to a river or stream, and not far from a woodlot. The clay was then dug, thrown into a pit, covered with water and left to "season" for at least a week. Before the pugmill came into common use in the 19th century, the clay was dug in early autumn and piled in heaps, to be "seasoned" all winter by the snow. By spring it was considered fit for forming, and was spread on the ground, watered, and then tempered by being trod upon by the workers until of the proper consistency, after which it was pressed by hand into wooden molds.

The early pugmill was a tall wooden box containing a mixing shaft, which was simply a post from which projected a number of iron pins arranged in a descending spiral, so as to cut through the clay, while at the same time forcing it downward and ultimately expelling it through a hole at the box's lower end.

The common source of power for the pugmill was the ox, which had learned to follow a path without supervision, towing a long pole connected to the mixing shaft. This may have been true even in the North Country, where oxen are not commonly thought of as a part of the early local scene. For the Stone and Stewart *New Topographical Atlas: St. Lawrence County, New York* shows that, even as late as 1865, there were 44,247 oxen (or an average of 3 per





William Coates Jr., Brickmaker, Raymondville, NY. (Courtesy of the Norfolk Town Historian)

family) in the County, and less than half that number of horses.<sup>11</sup> Ox or horse power was also used in this fashion by early manufacturers of water pipe (in the boring of the logs used) and by tanners for grinding bark.<sup>12</sup>

At the pugmill outlet was a pit in which the Moldman stood, scooping the mixed clay as it was forced from the outlet, rolling it in sand, and forcing it into the sand-coated molds. The mold itself, usually made of wood, had spaces for from four to eight bricks. When these were full, the top was scraped smooth, and the mold emptied onto a board, where the green bricks were allowed to air-dry for from two to three weeks.

The early firing-chamber, or kiln, was fashioned from the green bricks themselves, which were stacked in such a manner as to form long tunnels connecting at each end with openings at the base of the kiln walls and allowing spaces for heat circulation between bricks. Several tunnels could be incorporated into each of these kilns, with a fire burning in each tunnel. The fires were stoked constantly with wood for a period of from one to ten days, de-

pending on the number of bricks. A variation of this type of kiln was the Updraft, or Scotch, kiln, consisting of four permanent brick walls perforated at intervals with fire holes from which the hot gases passed into the kiln and flowed naturally upward through and around the bricks. Both types used tremendous amounts of fuel (which was no problem locally where wood was plentiful) and resulted in unevenly fired bricks, which can be seen in the attractive light and dark patterning in the exterior walls of the older brick homes in the County. Indeed, the "Raymondville Pink" brick, lauded for its color, is probably as much a result of under-firing as it is due to the chemical composition of the clay used.

### III. The Raw Material— How and Where

The clay itself can be found in several locations throughout the St. Lawrence Valley and occurs commonly in layered deposits called "varves". One of the more recent encounters with this type of clay bed occurred during the construction of the new State University College campus at Potsdam. As noted

by a local geologist, "... practically every excavation encountered varves and they presented some critical construction and drainage problems."<sup>13</sup> These clay deposits were formed when streams resulting from glacial melting carried this fine sediment to a melt-water lake, of which there were many in the area, and deposited it on the lake bottom. The striation of these deposits is thought to be a result of the differences in settling during the different seasons of the year—the darker, finer deposits occurring during the winter months when the water was still and no new material was transported.<sup>14</sup> Hough refers to these varves as "Laurentian Deposit"—a formation "which skirts the northern border... from Ogdensburg eastward, [with] extensive occurrence in the Valley of the St. Lawrence..."<sup>15</sup> He even devotes considerable space to a discussion of the clay deposits found at Raymondville as having "... a peculiar columnar structure, very much like starch, and no signs of stratification whatever... [and belonging to] a marine formation of a comparatively very recent period."<sup>16</sup>

These St. Lawrence Valley deposits were apparently discovered very early and used by those mysterious tribes of Indians which roamed the valley and about which we know very little. Ancient pottery fragments of clay and sand have been found on the shores of several of the St. Lawrence tributaries—particularly on the banks of the St. Regis River, on the Racquette between Norwood and Norfolk, on the ridge between the Racquette and Grasse Rivers in Massena, and also in the towns of Oswegatchie and Macomb.<sup>17</sup>

Clay is also mentioned by Curtis as occurring naturally "through a greater part of the central portion" of the town of Depeyster and also within the town of Hammond.<sup>18</sup>

### IV. The Brickmakers

According to Smith's *Gazetteer* and its Occupational Census<sup>19</sup> there were, in 1855, six brick manufacturers in St. Lawrence County. Three of these were William and Thomas Coates, who operated the Raymondville yards, and Smith Paige, owner of the big yard at Ogdensburg. It is probable that Albert A. Paige, Smith's eldest son, then nineteen, was assisting his father in 1855, for he eventually inherited and ran the yard. And John Watson of Madrid was most certainly practicing the craft at that time.

The earliest local brickmaker on record was Erastus Hall, who opened the first Raymondville yard in 1817. That was the yard which was purchased by William Coates in 1841. Hall had emigrated from Tyringham, Massachusetts, in 1809 and was the first to re-

ceive a land contract in the area that eventually became Raymondville. He brought his family from New England in 1810, and he and Ira Brewer, also from Tyringham, cut a trail from Raymondville to Massena in that same year. The Hall yard produced some 200,000 bricks in each of the 24 years of its operation.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the yards operated by William and Thomas Coates from 1841 to about 1900, several others sprang up in the vicinity; in the 1870's Mould and Griffis (Joseph C. Mould also served as postmaster and supervisor) and one James Taylor, also a farmer,<sup>21</sup> in the 1890's the Harvey Gibson yards in Grantville, and another (unnamed) in the Hutchins Falls area. The Coates yards produced 1,000,000 bricks annually; the others, from 200,000 to 300,000.<sup>22</sup> These bricks, the so-called "Raymondville Pink," built approximately 25 homes in Norwood, probably most of the business blocks, the Music Hall, the school, and two churches. They were also shipped by barge down the Racquette River to Massena,<sup>23</sup> and apparently to many other areas as well.<sup>24</sup> The Raymondville clay beds are said to have been depleted by the turn of the century.

Smith Paige came from Thetford, Vermont, to Canton in 1818. In 1830, he moved to Ogdensburg and began what grew to be probably the largest brick-making operation in the county.<sup>25</sup> By 1862, his son Alfred, then age 26, was operating the yards.<sup>26</sup> His younger son,

John Wesley, entered the family business by 1873.<sup>27</sup> The City Directory for 1898-99 lists another Paige brickmaker, Fred, possibly Albert's son, since he "boards" at the same address.<sup>28</sup>

Three other brickmakers worked in Ogdensburg between 1862 and 1899—Joseph Johnson (1862),<sup>29</sup> William H. Johnson (1898-99),<sup>30</sup> and Warren H. Wood (1862)<sup>31</sup>—whether for the Paige yards or for themselves, there is no way of knowing. There was, in addition, between 1869 and 1873 a pottery in operation on Montgomery Street, J.J. and Company<sup>32</sup> (Joseph and William Hart<sup>33</sup> and George N. Green) which manufactured "stoneware, Buckingham ware, fire brick, [and] fire clay."<sup>34</sup>

John Watson came to Columbia Village (Madrid) from England, probably in the 1830's since at the time of the 1865 Census his eldest son was 19 years old, and it is known that the father had arrived some time earlier, had built a log house, and had twice returned to England. The second time he brought back with him a Scottish bride, Ellen Mein. The Watsons had eight children. Robert, the youngest, who was born after the 1865 Census was the only one of the four sons who showed an interest in the brick business. He ran the yards after his father, who must have been at least 70 years of age by the time this youngest son was old enough to take over. Robert's son, Alton, was still living in Madrid in 1977 and was able to shed some light on the operation of the

yard. It was essentially a family operation, with neighbors assisting whenever the kiln (Updraft Scotch) was fired. An amusing incident occurred during one of these firings and was often related by Robert to his son.

One night during a firing, one of the neighbors, being hungry, suggested that a couple of them steal a chicken to roast in the kiln. A group went up the road, leaving the others to stoke the fire, stole a fat rooster, plucked and dressed it, and brought it back to be roasted. All ate and enjoyed it, including the man to whom it belonged—one who had stayed behind to mind the fire.

The yard closed in approximately 1910, while Alton was still a child, but he recalls the vertical, horse-operated pugmill and the Moldman standing in a pit, pressing the clay into wooden molds. There was no sort of protective canopy over the kiln, but nearby there was a small log building, probably used either for storage of molds or to shelter the "green" bricks until firing.

John Watson, like the other settlers of that time, had eventually replaced his log cabin with a more pretentious dwelling, this one, naturally, of brick. The brick house was built sometime before 1865,<sup>35</sup> but Alton recalls the part of the original log cabin which served as a shed attached to the brick house. This and a long barn were still intact in 1915.



One of the most imposing buildings in the county made with local bricks, the Hatfield House, 1872-1932, in Massena. A hotel, it had 100 guest rooms for visitors to Massena's mineral springs. (Courtesy of the Massena Town Historian)



*White's Hotel on Main Street, Massena, another well-known structure from the heyday of Raymondville brickmaking. (Courtesy of the Massena Town Historian)*

*Hotel in the center of Madrid village. It was built with bricks from the Watson brickyard on the Chase Mills Road out of Madrid. Since the turn of the century, it has been known as McCall's Hotel. (SLCHA Archives)*



The Watson yard, though a small one, had by 1865 furnished brick for at least 32 houses, or one-tenth of all the dwellings in Madrid,<sup>36</sup> and eventually, for most of the buildings in the village's business section.

### V. A Tradition Abandoned

The ranks of St. Lawrence County brickmakers grew from 6 in 1855—although there probably were more, for these early directories tend often toward omission—to some 35 by the turn of the century. And it is doubtful that the accompanying list is complete, for other references continue to turn up in records. For example, a 1952 *Lisbon Tour Guide* refers to an "old brick kiln on Rutherford's Bay" which furnishes brick for many local homes and served,

in addition, as a fueling stop for wood-burning boats.<sup>37</sup> Also, it is said that there was a brickmaker in Hammond and that a part of his output was transferred in some manner through a local general store. But his name does not appear in any of the directories. Many of those names that do appear are, at this point, simply that—names. And they are not even so much as mentioned in any of the local histories. Jared van Wagenen makes reference to this general ignorance regarding the craft that was so much a part of our recent history.

So it was that just as soon as the new country was permanently occupied, the ancient and primitive art of brickmaking flourished in a multitude of places. As a case in point, I will cite the fact that

on my farm there is one point in a level field where the plow will never fail to turn up red soil and abundant fragments of brick. Without any questions, this little area is an abandoned brickyard. The rather astonishing circumstance is that, while my father's memory surely embraced the farm happenings and conditions of the 1840's, he had absolutely no knowledge concerning when brick was burned here or the extent of the operations. Here was an industry that arose and perhaps prospered, and which surely passed away leaving behind not even a tradition.<sup>38</sup>



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jared van Wagenen, *The Golden Age of Homespun*, Binghamton, 1953, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Brownell et al., *The Clays and Shales of New York State*, New York, 1951, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 227-349.

<sup>5</sup> Gates Curtis, *Our County and Its People: A Memorial Record of St. Lawrence County, New York*, Syracuse, 1894, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Brownell, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline Maxin, *Norfolk, New York, Massena*, 1976, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Census for St. Lawrence County: Madrid, Massena, Morristown, Norfolk, Oswegatchie, Parishville*, Canton, 1865.

<sup>9</sup> Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory—St. Lawrence County for 1873-4*, Syracuse, 1873, p. 397.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>11</sup> *New Topographical Atlas: St. Lawrence County, New York*, (Stone and Stewart), Philadelphia, 1865, p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> van Wagenen, pp. 125-129.

<sup>13</sup> Bradford Van Diver, *Rocks and Routes of the North Country, New York*, Geneva, 1976, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Franklin B. Hough, *A History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, New York*, Albany, 1853. (Reprint, Baltimore, 1970), p. 681.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-25. Modern anthropologists have confirmed in general Hough's reports.

<sup>18</sup> Curtis, pp. 640-651.

<sup>19</sup> R.P. Smith, *Historical and Statistical Gazetteer of New York State*, Syracuse, 1860, p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> Maxin, pp. 1-5.

<sup>21</sup> Curtis, p. 107.

<sup>22</sup> Maxin, pp. 9-20.

<sup>23</sup> Maude Wing, *Norfolk* (A paper filed in County Historian's Office).

<sup>24</sup> *St. Lawrence County Directory for 1885*, Advertisement, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> Curtis, p. 107.

<sup>26</sup> *Advance Almanac and St. Lawrence County Directory for 1862*, Ogdensburg, 1862, p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> Child, p. 397.

<sup>28</sup> J.E. Williams, *Directory of Gouverneur, Canton, Potsdam, Norwood, and Eight Other Villages, Carthage*, 1891, p. 248.

<sup>29</sup> *Advance Almanac*, p. 84.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, p. 195.

<sup>31</sup> *Advance Almanac*, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> Child, p. 423.

<sup>33</sup> M. Mallon, *City Directory of Ogdensburg, New York for 1869*, Ogdensburg, 1869, p. 103.

<sup>34</sup> Child, p. 363.

<sup>35</sup> *Census, 1865*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Historic Tour, Town of Lisbon*, (May 3, 1952).

<sup>38</sup> van Wagenen, p. 206.



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**Heuvelton:** Persis Y. Boyesen (see above)

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## CITY

**Ogdensburg:** Persis Y. Boyesen (see above)

# The Battle of Ogdensburg, 1813, from First-hand Accounts

by George F. McFarland

The military campaigns of the United States in 1812 had not yielded the quick and easy victory that the American government seemed to expect. One of the most disturbing defeats late in the first year of our second war with Great Britain had been General William Hull's shameful loss of Detroit to the brilliant British General Sir Isaac Brock whose honored name would soon be given to a village on the St. Lawrence River. (Reginald Horsman, *The War of 1812*, Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1969, Chapter 4)

Early in 1813 the new Secretary of War Armstrong fashioned a strategy that he hoped might forestall future losses on the Canadian border and cut off Britain's supply route to its western outposts by gaining control of both Lakes Erie and Ontario, if not the upper St. Lawrence River as well. Since the British had naval superiority on the lakes, the United States hurriedly put a lot of money and effort into refitting merchant ships and building new naval vessels. The first objective in the Spring of 1813 as soon as navigation opened once more on the St. Lawrence River was to attack and neutralize Kingston, thus gaining control of the eastern end of Lake Ontario, then attack York at the western end of the lake, and finally gain control of the Niagara River by taking Fort Erie and Fort George. However, the commander of American forces in the whole area, General Henry Dearborn, was as reluctant to attack Kingston in 1813 as he had been to move against Montreal earlier, preferring now to make "Little York" in the west the first target. At almost the same time that Dearborn put forward his objections, Armstrong started things moving to confront Kingston well before Spring, in part because of the long and dispiriting lull in the prosecution of the war along the Canadian border and because with Kingston in American hands that winter British supplies could not get through to the Great Lakes when Spring came. His new plan called for a military attack across the ice. Armstrong was encouraged in his thinking by an event at Ogdensburg, New York, in February, 1813.

In the early autumn of 1812, at the end of "the season" for both agriculture and warfare, Captain Benjamin Forsyth with a company of riflemen was assigned to man the garrison at Ogdensburg. They arrived just in time to join Brigadier General Brown in a successful confrontation with a flotilla of forty British vessels, led by two gunboats, headed upriver to Prescott. Hough's

account does not make clear the objective of either the flotilla or the 1200 American troops watching and harrasing from a position west of the village of Ogdensburg. (*A History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties*, p. 625) The three days of intermittent conflict ended on October 4 with the British in retreat and the Americans full of pride and confidence. Shortly thereafter General Brown left the area for the winter.

In Ogdensburg that winter, a hard one, there was much restlessness and frustration as well as a great deal of sickness. In late January the militia came down with "spotted fever." (*Parish Papers*, letter from J. Ross to David Parish, Jan. 23, 1813) A villager of substance, John D. Benedict, with the encouragement of Judge Russell Attwater, solicited the influence of David Parish, then living in Philadelphia, PA, in getting a commission in the US Army, perhaps as a colonel, perhaps as aide to a general. (Letter from Benedict to Parish, Feb. 2, 1813) Little, if any, business took place between Canadians and Americans, but clandestine movement, even encounters, was not uncommon. It seems that people on both sides of the river, soldiers and citizens, were conducting private raids or changing their allegiances.

There were, of course, many Loyalists on this side of the St. Lawrence River; indeed, desertions from the disbanded militia and the regulars got to be so much of a problem that winter that an attempt was made to alert the command to the nighttime desertion of men on guard duty in the village. Starting at sundown, on every quarter of an hour, sentries were to call out "All's well!" It proved ineffective. John Ross reported to David Parish (Letter Feb. 6, 1813) that even the guard at Captain Forsyth's house, after voicing a loud and clear "All's well," disappeared across the river. On the same day Joseph Rosseel, Parish's general manager in Ogdensburg, reported that the local wizards were prophesying an imminent attack by the British on the village (Letter to Parish, Feb. 6). Rosseel who had little stomach for war, pitied the men who had to pass their nights under arms.

In his next weekly letter to Mr. Parish in Philadelphia, Joseph Rosseel called attention to an account in the *Palladium*, Ogdensburg's newspaper at the time, of the latest exploit of Captain Forsyth. Rosseel could only have been referring to Captain Forsyth's lightning raid on Elizabethtown, now Brockville, on the night of the 6th of February. Since he

was sending Parish the newspaper story, Rosseel gave no details.

Hough tells us that Forsyth had received information from spies that the British had a sizeable number of Americans in prison at Elizabethtown and was treating them badly. Forsyth's official report of the mission spoke also of the repeated forays of British soldiers across the river to kidnap individuals who had left Canada to become US citizens. With a body of 200 men, and the newly commissioned Colonel Benedict among his officers, Forsyth crossed the ice on foot, starting at 9 pm from Morristown, and made a three-pronged attack on the village, the main body of troops in the center proceeding immediately to the square outside the jail. The Americans encountered no resistance, liberated their own people, took a few prisoners and some arms and ammunition, and got back to Ogdensburg by daylight.

Two men were wounded, one by a shot fired from an upstairs window, and the other, in that sadly crazy way that characterizes all warfare, by one of our own men when a who-goes-there challenge was misunderstood. (Hough's *History*, pp. 625-27)

News of that victory traveled very quickly to Washington. It was on the basis of that single, simple raid across the frozen river that Secretary of War Armstrong decided to instruct the American Commander-in-Chief, General Dearborn at Plattsburgh, to launch that winter a full-scale attack on Kingston, Ontario, before the ice broke. (Horsman, p. 90) General Dearborn steadfastly refused to comply, then and certainly after the Battle of Ogdensburg, which would take place in about two weeks.

Judge Nathan Ford of Ogdensburg, who was in Albany at the time, shared Dearborn's reluctance. In a letter dated February 18 to his brother David, who had already removed himself and family from the North Country to Ulster County, NY, the Judge complained: "I leave this place in the morning, and shall return by the way of Sackets Harbor. My object in this is to have a conference with Col. McComb [Maccomb?] for the purpose of restraining Capt. Forsyth in his Canada excursions. I fear he will lead us into some cursed scrapes. I think if something is not done he will land us in a broil, that will not be easily laid." (City Historian, Ogdensburg)

Even though a polite exchange of prisoners occurred only a few hours after the return of the American raiders



on February 7, Captain Forsyth and the ordinary citizens of Ogdensburg knew that there would come, sooner or later, some sort of reprisal. In the same letter of February 12, in which he had mentioned the attack on Brockville, Rosseel told Mr. Parish that the militia might be called back, though it was not; if it were, he thought that would be an added incentive to the British to attack Ogdensburg. At the same time he found comfort in the thought that the British build up of its batteries at Prescott was probably a defensive move. He feared that one might more likely be shot by one of our own untrained and gun-happy volunteers or regulars. (Rosseel to Parish, Feb. 12, 1813)

In a postscript Rosseel reported that Parish's influence with Captain Forsyth on behalf of a business friend, a Mr. Cox, had succeeded to the extent that the Captain had taken Cox under a white flag across the river to Prescott where the British commander informed them that he had no authority to give Cox the passport into Canada that he wanted; only the officials in Montreal could do that. Cox would later make a similar attempt to cross the border from Plattsburgh.

Some observers, then and later, have felt that Forsyth was an arrogant bully, a man who would not listen to reason. There is, nevertheless, other evidence that Captain Forsyth was by nature neither quixotic nor inflexible. Parish's friend John Ross reported that his brother Edward had very nearly been killed by a random shot from the military near his home. Forsyth immediately set about putting a lid on all such wild and prankish behavior. When his Lt. Beard got together some men one night and raided a house in Canada, taking the owner prisoner and threatening to shoot all his livestock, the Captain set the prisoner free and arrested his lieutenant instead. (Ross to Parish, Feb. 13, 1813)

At this time, at least, Parish's associates in Ogdensburg were not friends of the British and certainly not Loyalists. They seem to have wanted to be left alone so that their personal lives and their business operations would be safe, secure, and profitable, which was no doubt Judge Ford's interest as well. In a letter to his wife Joseph Rosseel tells her not to spend a lot of time talking with visitors about "this \_\_\_\_\_ war," and he will try to heed his own advice. (Letter Feb. 14, 1813) Many ordinary residents of Ogdensburg and the surrounding area were cold and sick, and so, even though they might have been eager for the Americans to beat the British, they had little interest in the war.

On February 17 David Parish wrote Rosseel (*Parish Papers*) to the effect



Lt. Col. "Red" George MacDonnell, Commander of the British forces who attacked Ogdensburg in February 1813. (Courtesy of Fort Wellington, National Historic Site, Canadian Parks Service)

that he had recently encountered in Washington a new-made Colonel Wadsworth, whom he had known formerly at Montreal, presumably in business. Wadsworth was now serving the United States in its Commissary General of Ordinance. Characteristically, Parish, never one to miss an opportunity to gain the financial advantage, offered to supply the Colonel's department with cannonballs, perhaps from his iron works at Rossie.

That report might shed some light on the position of Parish himself during the war. Parish was a European. His father's financial house had offices in London, Hamburg, and Antwerp as well as on this continent, and the family had done business throughout the period of the French Revolution and Napoleon's conquest of much of Europe. Parish would die a baron in Germany. Most of his key employees in northern New York were immigrants from Great Britain and the Low Countries. David Parish was a speculator and his managers were skilled in such things as mining, lumbering, iron-making, agriculture, merchandising, real estate, and finance, and so would want to stay as clear as possible of threatening political postures and alliances.

On the other hand, Captain Forsyth seemed to embody the characteristics of both patriotic Yankee and professional soldier. He had eagerly executed his daring raid on Brockville, but he did not condone the haphazard rowdy raids of either British or American civilians and soldiers. He maintained his garrison in readiness and mustered volunteers when there seemed to be a need. He would sue with the enemy for the safe passage of the businessman Cox, but he would not be bullied by the British commander at Prescott.

On the 20th of February, Rosseel

(letter to Parish) lamented the lack of mail despite the fine roads and reported to his employer that the sporadic nighttime stealing of Canadian horses by Americans continued in spite of the Captain's efforts and that Colonel Pearson at Prescott seemed unwilling to tolerate it much longer. Indeed, Pearson had sent word to Ogdensburg that it would now be an American scalp for every stolen horse. Upon receipt of the threat, Forsyth was by turns both explosive and level-headed. "Let them come and be damned!" he said, but added that he believed the horse thefts were entirely unwarranted. No doubt Pearson meant the threat to use Indians to strike fear into Americans, whether civilian or military. What the use of Indians at Ogdensburg or elsewhere seems to have done was to raise tempers and renew American hatred of the British.

The troops at Ogdensburg were, therefore, spoiling for a fight; if the enemy did not attack them, they would cross the ice again and take Prescott (Hough, p. 627) The interval since Forsyth's raid on Brockville might, nevertheless, have been getting too long for soldiers to maintain eagerness for actual engagement of the enemy.

Not knowing, of course, that the tension on the river had already been broken, Parish wrote on February 24 echoing Judge Ford's anxiety and deploring the "little warlike affairs" in the neighborhood of Ogdensburg. (Letter to Rosseel) "They can do no good and only invite retaliation." He had heard that one of his men in town, Mr. Silvius Hoard, had been called out on a one-day expedition to Brockville. He hoped that he had not voluntarily crossed the river. Indeed, he hoped that no one in his employ would do such things. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that S.



General Henry Dearborn, American commander of military operations on the Canadian border in 1812-1813. (Reprinted from Lossing, p. 249)

Hoard had been one of Forsyth's raiders. Anyway it was too late for calm detachment.

The invasion of Ogdensburg by the British had taken place on February 22, 1813. On Friday, the 26th of February, Joseph Rosseel wrote David Parish the details of the battle of Ogdensburg from, of course, his own point of view. The letter opens with responses to a couple of business matters, one of which is certainly intriguing. "President Bronson's [*war* written above the line] remittance also arrived . . . I immediately transmitted it intact to Mr. Sil. Hoard in Antwerp for endorsement who is to account to me for the same after which it will appear in your account."

Issac Bronson was president of the Bank of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Nevertheless, with currency in confusion, the identification of holders of bank notes had become most urgent. So one must observe the formalities even with such a trusted man as Bronson, who had worked with Alexander Hamilton between 1803 and 1805 to establish and charter the Merchants Bank in New York City and thereafter to systematize banking in this country. Highly

esteemed, he wrote widely on banking and might well have been involved in 1813 with Stephen Girard in Philadelphia, John Jacob Astor in New York City, and David Parish, the international financier, in their effort to get the government in Washington to establish a Second Bank of the United States. (Hammond, pp. 158, 179, 231) It seems entirely likely that financiers then, as now, were keen to invest in military undertakings, but as carefully as possible.

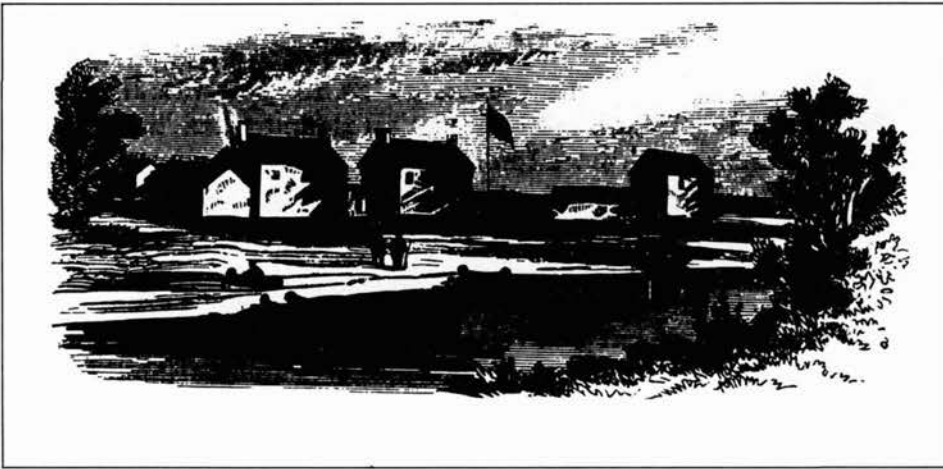
After addressing such fundamental matters of business, Rosseel felt free to expatiate upon the local war, not without occasional scorn for the ineffectiveness of the American defenders and gratitude for the style of British officers until the reliving of that shocking event unsettled the urbanity of his rhetoric.

"In the disaster that befell this place, last Monday, none of our friends have suffered in their persons, but many lost of their property. Early in the morning, when our officers were making their toilet and the men, in quest of their rations, scattered over the place, the British were seen marching over in solid columns swift and orderly. To the credit of ours be it said that it was not

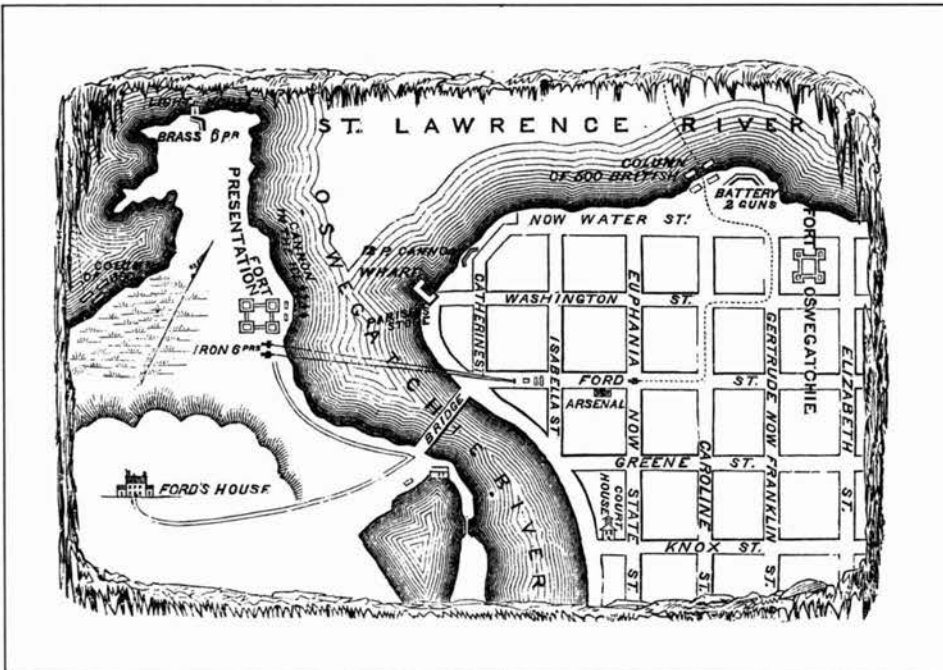
until the enemy landed at Ogdensburg that a canon was fired; the matches were not ready and the men not at their post!!! Five hundred British effected their landing behind my house whilst a party of 200 were making a sham attack upon Fort Rensselaer which kept Capt. Forsyth at bay. He was summoned to surrender, but preferred to fight. From the barracks, the militia, few in number, too wise to make resistance, drew in files into the village by Washington Street and firing as they yielded ground to the British, who rapidly and undaunted rushed forward to the charge partly by the latter street and partly Lisbon Street. The enemy was soon master of all—and of course, took all the public property; burnt the barracks, the old garrison, the vessels in the harbor, destroyed Fort Rensselaer, and burnt partly the bridge across the Oswegatchie. In a contest where the number of the one party was about treble to that of the other, where resistance on the one side was continually yielding and on the other pursuit in attacking readily relinquished, not many lives, of course, could be lost and but few made prisoners. Among the number of the latter is Lt. Baird [Beard] of the US Rifle-corps. He was wounded in his foot. The enemies corps was composed one half regulars, the other militia. I observed among the latter several of those with whom, before the war, I had been in habits of friendly intercourse.

"About the close of the fight, when our militia were put to flight up the state road and Forsyth retreating by the Black Lake Road, the Indians and some Jacobins from Canada came over and ransacked every house in this place where the inhabitants had fled. Mr. Lewis, Mr. Ross, Mr. Arnold, Mr. Plum, Mr. Hemenway, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Dunning, and myself were the only ones who staid to protect their property. Inured as it were by former scenes of soldier-like insolence and rapacity experienced on similar occasion, it happened in my native country, I was but little surprised at the conduct of the invaders towards the peaceable inhabitants. At one time they were carrying off some of my property and hurrying my person off for Canada when a British officer who knew me, happening to pass by my house, perceiving my embarrassment, rushed in, bid the ruffians desist and dispersed them. But I had like to have been completely undone. The sleigh by means of which Mrs. R, her sister, and the domesticks effected their escape the moment the British landed behind the house had but just passed clear of the mouth of a canon loaden with canaster shot posted in the center of Euphemia and Ford's Streets, when it was fired off at the enemy. A few seconds later, and \_\_\_\_\_ What retarded their





Fort Oswegatchie, 1812. (Reprinted from Lossing, p. 373)



Map of the site of the Battle of Ogdensburg, 1813. (Reprinted from Lossing, p. 580)

flight was our being destitute of a ready conveyance.—the sleigh was laden with firewood for you—and a confusion which I cannot describe—at two in the afternoon the British evacuated the place and after placing Mr. Plumb to watch my house I put the trunk of land office papers on his sledge and horse, the only beast of burden, (your mare excepted) the British had not taken away, and set out in search of my friends whom, thank Heaven! I found all safe at Mr. Kellogg's where I also met with Captain Forsyth and the greater part of his corps. They had cut short from Kelsey Thurbers thro' the wilderness. Captain Forsyth's hat and coat were pierced with bullets.

"The ensuing morning I moved with my friends to Mr. Miller's via Rossie

where I left them [the land office papers, no doubt?] and where they will remain. They have taken up several people from Lisbon who robbed here at nights. The houses are so shattered by the affair of last Monday as to be next to uninhabitable. Much of the window glass of your house is broken. In the land office we cannot live, the very sashes have been thrown in by the concussion of the air during the canonade. The lower end of your fence is pierced with grapeshot, the British in Washington Street fighting from behind your fence. The house I live in stood unhurt—Squire McColom's and Mr. Hasbrouck's are most damaged—when one views the destruction committed inside of the house it is obvious it was done wantonly—my man Tellier, went over to Canada to see his

parents there. He does not return. I presume they keep him prisoner there. I dine at Mr. L. Schw.'s and for the rest shift at home the best I can—the wheat has been taken up to Rossie—I will also send thither the whisky from Mr. D. Hoard as soon as it arrives." (*Parish Papers*, letter from Rosseel to Parish, Feb. 22, 1813)

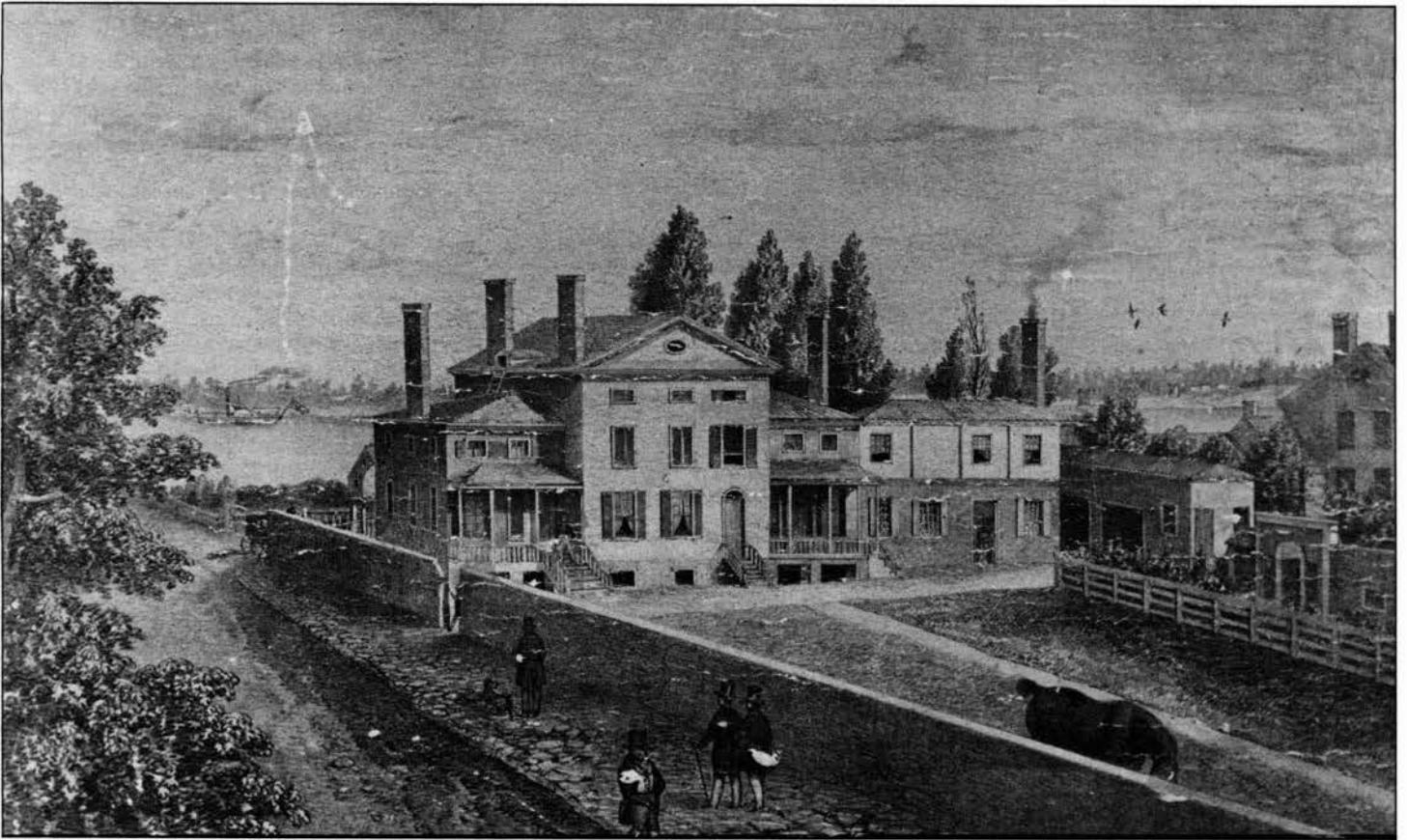
When Judge Ford got back to town at the end of the week, he reported to his brother David forcefully, but briefly on the public losses. (City Historian, Ogdensburg, letter dated February 27, 1813) "At present I can only tell you Ogdensburg has been taken and plundered. All the public stores, cannon etcetera. Many families have been stripped to the last shirt. The garrison is burnt and also the Barracks and also the schooner, together with my still-house."

David Parish's tone in response to Rosseel's report differed from the Judge's, perhaps because he had lost less or perhaps because he was less interested personally in the village than the judge. On March 10, in a letter to his agent, Parish commiserated with the sufferers over "the disasters which have befallen Ogdensburg. I am very much grieved to find that many of our neighbors have been severe sufferers, but trust that the committee which has been appointed will succeed in obtaining some compensation for them from the British. I presume it will be a difficult matter to decide the amount which ought to be made good, as I understand that our new blackguards have been plundering as well as those from the other shores." After congratulating the Rosseels on the narrow escape of the ladies from close-range cannon fire, Parish expressed his gratitude that his house had not been ransacked and his confidence that Rosseel would see to the repair of his windows and fence. (New York State Historical Society, letter from Parish to Rosseel, March 10, 1813)

One month after the "battle," on March 26, 1813, Louis Hasbrouck wrote to his wife Catherine, who like David Ford, the Judge's brother, had recently moved from the village to Ulster County, in order to report to her his safe return to Ogdensburg. After dining with the Judge at his "hospitable mansion," Hasbrouck, a businessman and the postmaster of the town, walked out to view the destruction, which he found much less than reports along the way home had led him to believe had occurred or one might gather from Rosseel's first-hand account. (Ogdensburg Public Library, letter from Louis to Catherine Hasbrouck, March 26, 1813)

"It is true the village looks desolate and deserted, but does not bear marks of that violent outrage that I was led to





*The Parish Mansion, Ogdensburg, lithograph, c. 1845. It was the corner of the stone fence at the left that was damaged during the battle on February 22, 1813. (Courtesy of the Remington Art Museum, Ogdensburg)*

anticipate. The windows of Mr. Parish house, Mr. McCollums, Slossons, Turners and mine are the greatest sufferers. The lower force of the British entered the village near the slaughter house, proceeded up the street till the rear of Mr. Rosseels and there divided, part going up the side of Mr. Parish's house and the others past Mr. Mayo's. The two met our forces (Lyttles) at Mac's corner, where the principal part of the engagement took place, and of consequence the houses on that corner suffered most [at Ford and State today]. When Lyttles men retreated the enemy took our cannon and placing it in the street near our house fired from there at Forsyth, which broke our windows about one half in the front and nearly the whole in the end toward the street. The party that attacked above the village was not exceeding 150 men and they were drove back by Forsyth, but when the village party succeeded they again pushed in when Forsyth retreated up the St. Lawrence toward [Millers] and from there crossed to the lake to Kelloggs, and next day proceeded to Sackett Harbour, there he now is and where Lytle's Company also are, who joined Forsyth a little before his retreat, crossing the bridge in going to him. The loss on either side was but small. We had three killed and they about twenty, but a good

many more wounded on their side and some have since died. None of the citizens were killed or wounded. A soldier's child was killed in Mr. Tuthill's house by a ball that passed thro. Indeed so completely were our people taken by surprise that many of the inhabitants were scarcely out of their beds, and the soldiers scarcely out of their beds, and the soldiers scarcely mustered before the British possession of the place. Their force was not exceeding five hundred from the best information I can obtain—ours nearly the same."

Hasbrouck retells the story of a cannon being fired over the heads of Mrs. Rosseel, her sister and servants as they hurriedly tried to escape the neighborhood in a sleigh. "... thought they were dead enough, but proceeding found themselves unhurt, went as far as Kellogg's and the second day returned home. Mrs. Rew remained in her house and neither herself nor property injured. He [presumably Mr. Rew] had not returned home." Bringing his wife up to date on her lady friends, he concluded that "the greater part of the female villagers happened to be absent." "Mrs. Scott remained in her house and saved her property. Mrs. York [the sheriff's wife] fled and lost all." One might easily conclude that both Messrs. Rosseel and Hasbrouck thought the better part of

discretion was to command enough valor to have remained at home. "Many of the male villagers were taken prisoner and carried across the river, but suffered to return the next day. A great deal of private property was plundered, and many have lost all their clothing, but I have no doubt from all I can learn that not a small part was taken by our own people, who in the general confusion decamped with their booty, such as Broker, Watson, Fitzpatrick, and such like characters. Some of the Lisbon people I am told came in for their share.

"... I went into my house to see the destruction there and am happy to tell you found it much different from what I expected. The inside of the house is not the least injured, neither is the furniture. Everything which was not carried off remains the same as I left it. Nothing that I can discover was taken out, but my new clothes and papers—many of my papers I fear are lost, but have not had time to look over them. The furniture in the rooms and the kitchen appear not to have been disturbed. On the whole I think we escaped pretty well..."

Although Louis Hasbrouck found little to grumble about in the condition of his house, clearly not the degree of damage and vandalism that Rosseel had thought there to be, the damage done

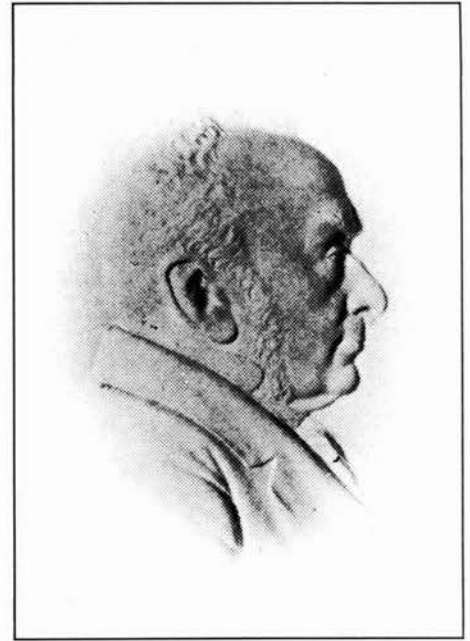
to his barn seemed to catch his interest. "My barn," he told his wife, "is finely peppered. The corner nearest the house and next to the street has upwards of 100 grape shot in it which was made by Forsyth shooting at the British while in front of my house. The piece appears to have been elevated a little too high, passed over their heads and entered the full charge into the barn." (Ogdensburg Public Library, letter from Louis Hasbrouck to his wife Catherine, March 26, 1813) That cannon seems to have been the same defective piece that frightened the escaping Mrs. Rosseel, but saved her life.

Joseph Roseel had been too close to the hostilities for comfort, Judge Ford was outraged by the loss of facilities and goods, Louis Hasbrouck looked back upon the results of the engagement with equanimity—no fear, no shame, no anger, no scorn. In January, 1973, *The Quarterly* published a burlesque of the battle of Ogdensburg written many years earlier by a Civil War veteran, Jarvis P. Blount. No doubt he had grown up hearing stories about the "fiasco." And no doubt the "battle" seemed all the more ludicrous to him after witnessing the terrible conflict between the North and the South. Though not wishing in any way to discredit the heroic men who stood fast in the village that bitter cold morning in February, 1813, the old soldier had a good laugh at the expense of the failure of the American forces to hold the town or turn back the enemy. "The Invincibles," as he called them, of the Brockville raid showed their true color; well before noon, they had given up the place and were in retreat to Depeyster and DeKalb. To understand better the reasons why what might have been a significant battle at Ogdensburg turned into what some have seen as an embarrassing, if not comic, rout, one must turn to Hough's *History*, the fullest account there is outside the official war records of both Canada and the United States.

In the two weeks between the raid on Brockville and the invasion of Ogdensburg, American spies had returned to Captain Forsyth with clear evidence of the strengthening of the garrison at Prescott and the intention of the British to attack Ogdensburg. Captain Forsyth knew that he could easily be overwhelmed by the reinforced enemy from across the river and urgently reported his conviction to General Dearborn at Plattsburgh. Dearborn's response, as paraphrased by Hough, was "that he could afford him no help, and that he must do as well as he was able. If he could not defend the place he was at liberty to evacuate it, and it was left optional with him to do this before or after making an attempt to defend it.



David Parish (1778-1826). (Courtesy of St. Lawrence University Archives)



Joseph Rosseel, the general manager of David Parish's interests in northern New York. (Reprinted from *The History of the City of Ogdensburg* by Rev. P.S. Garand, Ogdensburg, 1927, p. 185)

... the loss of the place might arouse the American spirit," intimating, as Hough saw it, "that the town was to be made a sacrifice for the good of the country." (p. 627) Forsyth and his staff decided to try to defend as long as they could in their straitened circumstances.

A redoubt, to be called Fort Oswegatchie, had been designed by the French engineer M. Ramee, who had served as architect for the Parish mansion in Ogdensburg and was that winter drawing the plans for the building of Union College at Schenectady. Work had begun on the stronghold the previous summer, but it was as yet unusable, nor was the old garrison sufficient to withstand any great force. Contrary to the belief of Rosseel, the drafted militia, which had long since departed, had not returned. Instead, Lt. Lytle had been authorized to collect under his command a company of volunteers. Lytle's limited success at recruitment added fewer than a hundred men to Forsyth's company of rifles. The day before the invasion Lt. Joshua Conkey of Canton arrived with thirteen men. There were a number of six and twelve pound cannon in the village in varying states of usability. Some were trophies from the defeat of General Burgoyne at Saratoga in the Revolutionary War; some small pieces had been taken off gunboats seized on the river; some of

the latter were still on the shore of the river hopelessly stuck in mud and ice.

Although the British attack on the 22nd of February did catch both the military and the citizenry at Ogdensburg by surprise, arrangements had been made the night before for a large cannon to be placed at Ford and State (Euphamia, it was called then) Streets, a second large piece near Parish's store, one smaller cannon at the arsenal in Ford Street, one where the old lighthouse used to be, another in front of the garrison, and two behind it. (Hough, pp. 627-28)

The British, it seems, misjudged the danger from Ogdensburg. They were afraid, for instance, that the visit of Lt. Gen. Sir George Prevost, governor of Upper Canada, in the third week of February, might precipitate another assault on their shores by the Americans. To protect the governor, who was merely inspecting installations along the border, Sir George and Colonel Pearson, scheduled to leave that day for Kingston, decided that Lt. Col. George MacDonnell should make an impressive demonstration of their strength, such as it was, on the ice before Prescott. Left in command on the 22nd, MacDonnell decided to carry the demonstration all the way to the opposite shore and into the village of Ogdensburg. (Horsman, p. 90)



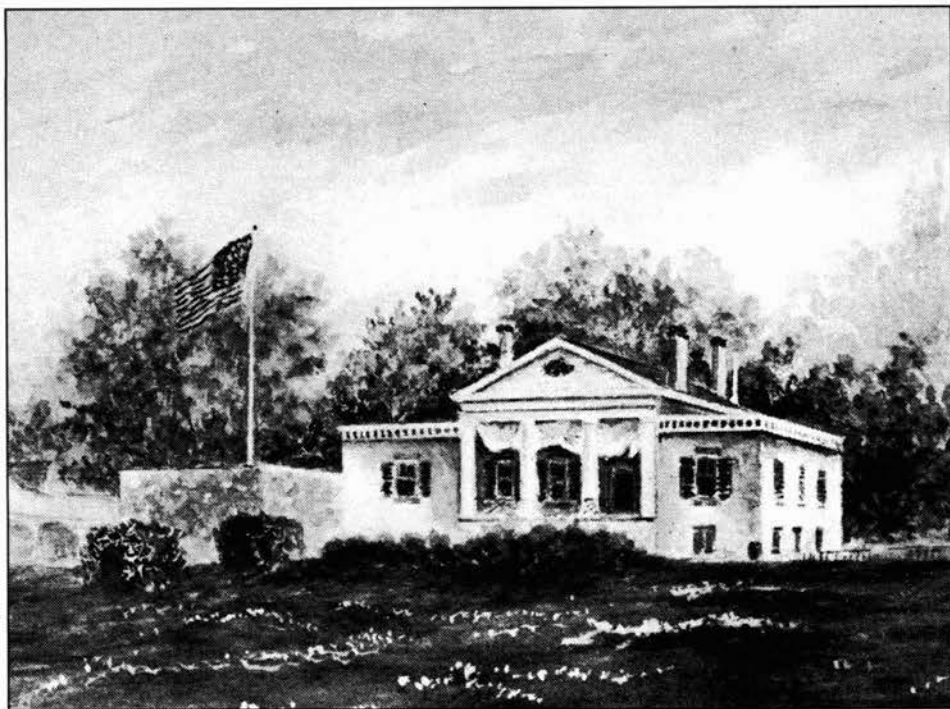
MacDonnell's plan called for a two-column thrust, a small detachment of militia and volunteers to approach downstream just north of the garrison and a much larger force of regulars, nearly 500, to attack Fort Oswegatchie upstream of the village. Obviously, his spies had not been able to tell him that the fortification there was not only unfinished, but totally unmanned. His mistake would prove most fortunate for his invaders and unfortunate for the Americans. He also overestimated the ease of the expedition. A recent snowfall slowed the march considerably; indeed, the cannon got so delayed by the heavy going during the crossing and at the American shoreline that his enterprise might well have become a painful humiliation.

With his riflemen behind the garrison, supported there by two cannons, Captain Forsyth told his men to await his command. When the lesser column of the enemy reached the shore and got bogged down in the deep snow, he gave the order to fire, and in no time at all the British confronting them scattered and withdrew. That early success at the garrison had been assisted by the cannon on lighthouse point. Even though its fire could not reach the main force of the British, that piece, commanded by a sergeant, continued its effective fire whenever possible throughout the engagement. (Hough, p. 629)

MacDonnell and his 500 regulars got ashore near Fort Oswegatchie without any resistance and made their way unchallenged into the village. There, they were met with repeated volleys from the cannon at the arsenal under the command of Sheriff York, until they overwhelmed the gun and took York prisoner. Captain Conkey, for no apparent reason, surrendered his cannon and himself without firing a shot. Could he have had trouble, as Rosseel reported was a general problem, with matches, or without them, to fire the charges?

The British, a short time later, found it impossible to burn the bridge across the Oswegatchie because of the snow and ice. Captain Kellogg got off one good shot from the big cannon in the center of town, only to find that its elevating screw, used for aiming the weapon, had just broken, rendering the piece useless. He and his men went to join Forsyth at the garrison.

With two cannon in front of him, Forsyth was waiting for the attack of the main British contingent when two of the enemy approached bearing white flags and an offer from their commander. "If you surrender, it shall go well; if not, every man shall be put to the bayonet." Forsyth's reply: "There must be more fighting done first!" After the emissaries were in ranks again in Ford Street, Forsyth had both cannon fired



*Joseph Rosseel's home across Washington Street from Parish's mansion. The British invaders marched up from the river behind his house. (Reprinted from Garand, p. 327)*

in that direction, but with little effect. (In a note, Hough suggests that the fault was Forsyth's for not allowing Kellogg, an artilleryman, to adjust the elevation the way he wanted to.) The British scattered, but quickly commenced heavy small arms fire from behind various barriers, notably Parish's stone store. With the wounding of two of his lieutenants, Captain Forsyth ordered his men to retreat to Thurber's Tavern on Black Lake. There they met later in the day and from there went on to Heuvelton. After the retreat and the last of resistance in the village, the vandalism and stealing, which so deeply impressed both Joseph Rosseel and Judge Ford, began and would continue for some time after the British had left. (Hough, pp. 629-30)

Although the count would vary, apparently according to the mood or special interest of the writer, five Americans were killed, eighteen wounded, and fifty-two taken prisoner. (Hough, p. 630) The garrison was destroyed, the barracks burnt, and the stone store emptied, but, curiously enough, the provisions taken from the store were paid for. (p. 631) All artillery pieces and many small arms were taken, and two gun boats and two schooners were destroyed. Three days later the Adjutant General's Office in Montreal claimed American personnel losses to have been "about twenty killed and a great many wounded." (p. 632) The British counted among their own casualties seven dead and fifty-three wounded. (p. 633)

In a letter dated February 22, 1813,

the day of the invasion, Forsyth hurriedly reported to the Secretary of War. "I have only time to inform you that the enemy, with a very superior force, succeeded in taking Ogdensburgh this morning, about 9 o'clock. They had about two men to our one, exclusive of Indians. Numbers of the enemy are dead on the field. Not more than twenty of our men killed and wounded; Lt. Beard is among the latter.

"I have made a saving retreat of eight or nine miles. I could not get all the wounded off.

"We have killed two of the enemy to one of ours killed by them. We want ammunition and some provisions sent to us, also sleighs for the wounded. If you can send me *three hundred men, all shall be retaken and Prescott too*, or I will lose my life in the attempt." (Hough, p. 633)

An extract of a letter written by Joseph Rosseel, to whom we do not know, reports that Parish's agent, perhaps on his way to the Rossie Iron Works later on the day of the invasion, carried a message to Captain Forsyth from General Arnold of the militia to the effect that Ogdensburgh might expect a second British attack that evening. Rosseel says of the General that he "was here prisoner on parole," and therefore incapable of doing anything himself. Nevertheless, after Rosseel's uneasy trip with his drunken teamster along the narrow and guarded road to Captain Kellogg's where he found "almost all Ogdensburgh, soldier and civilian," Captain Forsyth's response was immediate. He had the

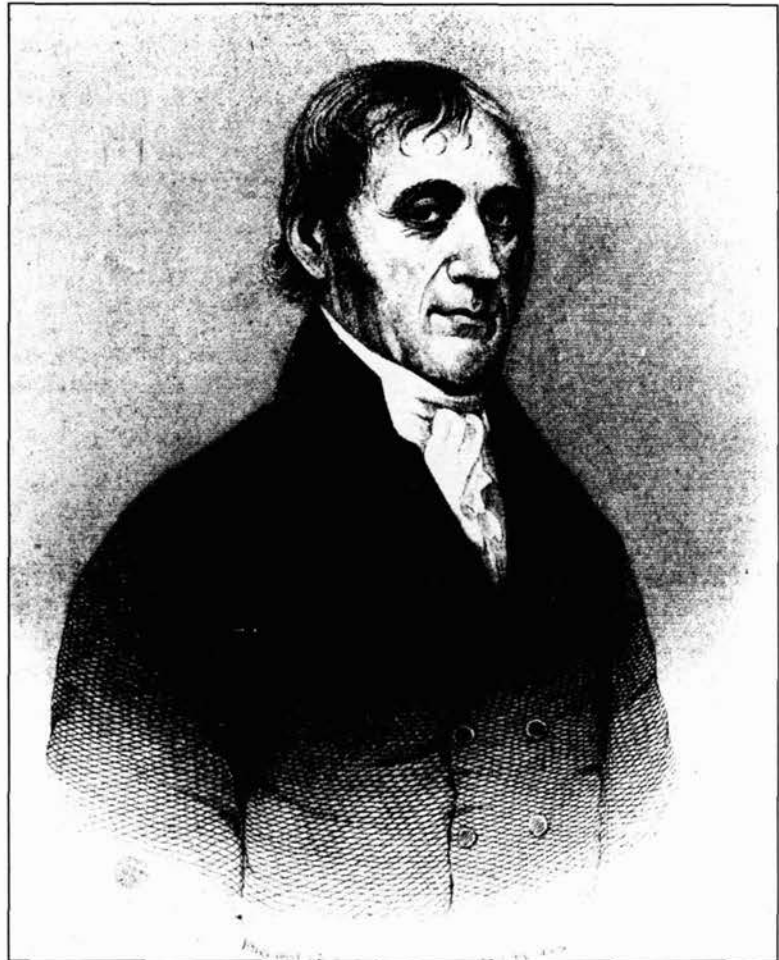


bugle sounded, his men on their feet and outside, and promptly on their way back to Ogdensburg. (Hough, pp. 633-34) The Captain's spirit, or hot-headedness, notwithstanding, the "Battle of Ogdensburg" was over. It is not known if the Captain and his men got back to town, but nothing came of General Arnold's warning. The next day, February 23, General Jacob Brown visited the scene of the conflict and, before leaving, ordered Captain Forsyth and his riflemen to report to Sackett's Harbor, which they did immediately.

There is not much in the record concerning the British use of Indians during the invasion. Rosseel noticed them, and Captain Forsyth mentioned them in his report to Washington. From the only other eyewitness account, that of Lavinia York, the wife of the captured Sheriff, we learn that the Indians on that occasion behaved no better or worse than other "irregulars."

Mrs. York's letter, dated February 26, 1813, was written to her brother in New York City who was no doubt responsible for its later publication in *Niles Weekly Register*. The following extract appears in Hough, p. 634.

"I did not leave the house until the British were quite close to it, and not until they had shot a great number of holes into it. I took nothing with me but some money, and my table spoons, and ran as fast as possible with a number of other women; our retreat was to the distance of about 15 miles. The next day I returned; our house was plundered of most everything, and my husband a prisoner on the other side. You can easier imagine my feelings than I can describe them. They did not leave any article of clothing, not even a handkerchief—they took all my bedding but left the beds; they broke my looking glasses and even my knives. Thus situated I determined to go over to Canada, and accordingly went to a flag of truce, which was then in this village, for permission, which I obtained. I went to one of my acquaintances on the other side, where I was favorably received. I applied to the commanding officer for the purpose of ascertaining whether I could procure any of my clothes; he assured me that I should have them if I could find them, but did not trouble himself to make any inquiry. My journey was not lost; I procured the release of my husband, who was paroled and returned with me. Most of the houses in the village were plundered. . . . You will be astonished when I tell you that they were not contented with what the Indians and soldiers could plunder during the battle, but after it was over the women on the other side came across, and took what was left." Unfortunately, that is all that Hough reprinted of such a fine letter.



*Nathan Ford, land agent for Samuel Ogden and responsible for the settling of Oswegatchie, later Ogdensburg. (Reprinted from Garand, p. 168)*

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association received permission in the Fall of 1990 from Stuart A. Goldman of Randolph, Massachusetts, to place in the county archives copies of letters in his possession written by various persons living in or near DeKalb and Depeyster in the early nineteenth century to members of their families remaining in Rhode Island. Written by women on their own in ordinary households on outlying farms, their husbands having joined the American army then at Sackett's Harbor, these letters give a different perspective on the invasion of Ogdensburg and the War of 1812. The two women seem to have been sisters, both of them daughters of Joseph Searle, from whose home in Rhode Island they left with their husbands to acquire land of their own in the new frontier along the St. Lawrence River.

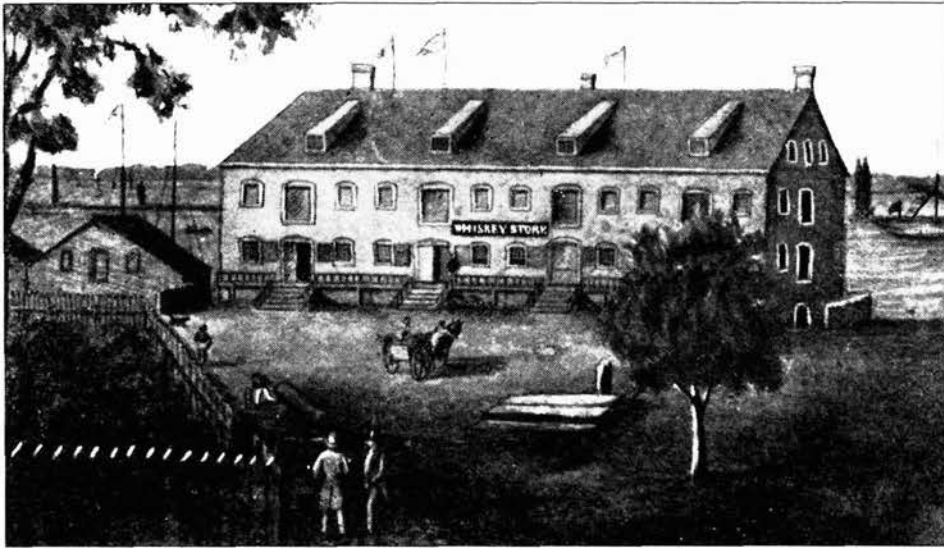
On February 28, 1813, Dorcas Arnold, wife of Ichabod Arnold, wrote home to Rhode Island.

"Dear Father,

I take the opportunity to inform you that we are well at present and hope that you are enjoying the same. We have

much to write but not time to write it. I must tell you that we have troublesome times in this land and we have no hopes for any better soon. We have had a severe attack of the British. They overpowered us and took our village on the twenty second of February. There was a number killed and wounded and sixty three taken prisoner, and one Lieutenant which was wounded and my husband one of them and is come home on provial not to fight anymore til exchanged. He listed for one year in the light horse company. George is in the same company, but they took his horse and he retreated with a rifle company and come across the woods and broke track five miles. He was the first to see of the army. O what if merciful God he can save in the midst of battle. O we think it a hard case that the New England states can't afford us troops to assist us on our frontiers. The Canadians are getting very strong against us and will not be conquered without a great deal of bloodshed. We hear the Americans have very good luck at sea. We have no more time at present so no more at present.

I remember my love [to] all my friends and relations in Rhode Island and want



David Parish's stone store, 1810. (Reprinted from Garand, p. 336)

to see you all very much."

Read on its own, outside the context of the battle of Ogdensburg, it might well seem that Dorcas Arnold was telling her father about an invasion of DeKalb. Although she might have lived about fifteen miles from the river, her life was deeply involved in that of Ogdensburg, especially since her husband Ichabod and her brother-in-law George Knight were in the army and serving there at the time. It is interesting to note that even ordinary folk at some distance from the scene of conflict resented keenly the lack of reinforcements from the east, which suggests that General Dearborn's reluctance to meet the British that winter on the shores of the St. Lawrence was widespread knowledge.

Still, word of Bonaparte's failure in Russia, which was taking place at just about the same time, had not yet arrived in North America with its dire implications for our war with Britain. As a result, Mrs. Arnold, like most other Americans, could continue to rejoice in the naval victories of their countrymen at sea in the Fall of 1812. Had splendid victories, such as Isaac Hull's in the *USS Constitution*, that is, "Old Ironsides," over *HMS Guerriere* in August, 1812, so heartened the United States that the war's objective had become the "conquering" of Canada? (Hickey, pp. 93-99)

Rehobe Knight, most likely Dorcas Arnold's sister, also wrote to the family in Rhode Island in February, but since she got no response, she wrote again on April 24, 1813, to summarize the events in their part of St. Lawrence County during the past winter. There was little news to report at Ogdensburg or Sackett's Harbor where her husband George was still in barracks. By early

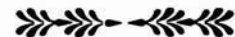
Spring, Secretary of War, John Armstrong, and General Dearborn must have come to some agreement about strategy along the Canadian border. George Knight, his wife reported, believed that his unit would soon be marching off somewhere, and Rehobe felt more and more cut off and lonely. General Dearborn's plan to avoid Kingston and strike instead at Little York near Toronto would soon be put into action.

The "Battle of Ogdensburg" had simply not been meant to occur. Although Captain Forsyth's raid on Brockville early in February had inspired the Secretary of War, the military command in the area had no intention of pursuing a major invasion of Canada across the ice at Kingston or along the St. Lawrence River. Nor did the British seriously contemplate attacking the American shore in similar fashion. Nor did Colonel Pearson at Prescott have any intention of taking Ogdensburg. He was in fact intent on joining his important visitor on an inspection tour of Kingston. Lt. Col. MacDonnell simply decided to "go for it," that morning just as Captain Forsyth had decided to "go for" freeing American prisoners held at Brockville. One might conclude that what occurred was yet another raid, but one that might have turned into something like a battle if the American forces at Ogdensburg had had better equipment, better fortifications, and a larger contingent of defenders.

In a more general way, it is likely that the inhabitants of Ogdensburg and the surrounding area were not fundamentally interested in the war. Harry F. Landon, former editor of the *Watertown Daily Times*, maintained in a 1954 article that St. Lawrence County was mainly Federalist and therefore politically

opposed to the war. Indeed, he would argue that David Parish and his associates were deeply involved in intrigue, even espionage for the British. ("British Sympathizers in St. Lawrence County During the War of 1812, p. 131) That Parish and his friends and employees made every effort after the invasion of Ogdensburg to heal the wounds of local hostilities and restore favorable business relationships along the river border is clear enough from the *Parish Papers* dated later in 1813 and 1814, which were the principal sources of Landon's argument.

Nevertheless, for farmers and recent settlers, everyday life, particularly in the winter months, was battle enough. They were for the most part abundantly patriotic, but war, with or without rifles and cannons, spelled a lot more hardship in their simple lives. For businessmen like Parish, Ford, and Hasbrouck and their associates, Federalist though they might have been, the primary object of living and working on the frontier was to make money from their development of newly opened lands, not to intimidate or destroy potential customers and markets. On March 13, 1815, Mrs. Dorcas Arnold wrote home again: "We have got the Happy news of peace and Ichabod took five barrels [of salt] to Canada and sold them for fifty-one dollars in silver and that night he stayed in Ogdensburg. They illuminated the village with nine candles to a window. The British offered them a cannon to rejoice with, but they did not accept of it."



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I am, first of all, indebted to those individuals and institutions that have allowed me to use manuscript materials in their possession as indicated in the text: St. Lawrence University for the *Parish Papers*; Mr. Stuart A. Goldman of Randolph, Massachusetts; the City Historian of Ogdensburg; the Ogdensburg Public Library; and the New York Historical Society at 170 Central Park West, New York, NY.

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# Miss Richmire at the Pine Grove School in Massena

by Katherine Briggs

May Richmire and the Pine Grove School no longer exist, but the memory of both is still cherished by many Massena citizens. Miss Richmire came to Pine Grove School in 1911. There, she taught second grade, and continued doing this after she became principal of the school in 1921. In addition, from 1921 to 1948, she was director of the Department of Adult and Immigrant Education at the Pine Grove Evening School. This was the school to which many of the parents of her second-graders came, to learn the English language and basic facts about American history and government so that they could become naturalized citizens. Miss Richmire and her teachers had a remarkable influence upon the many immigrant families who settled in the Pine Grove area near their jobs at the new aluminum plant.

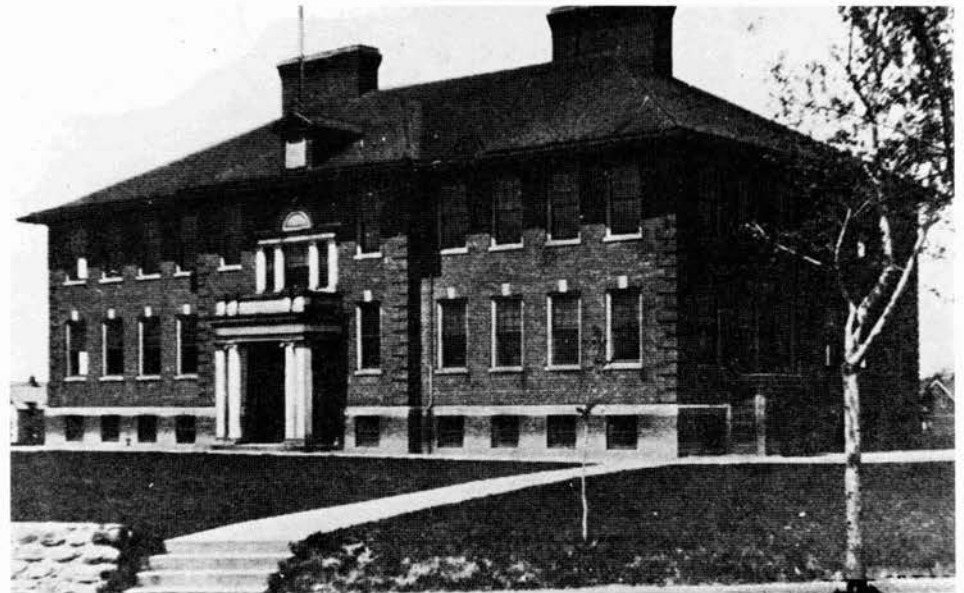
In 1897, Massena, a small but flourishing farming village and watering resort, received its first large group of immigrants from Europe. They came directly from New York City by train because the St. Lawrence Power Company had jobs for them. They were needed to dig a canal which was to connect the Grasse River to the St. Lawrence and provide a source of hydroelectric power. The Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa), formerly known as the Pittsburgh Reduction Company, had contracted to buy a portion of the electricity to be produced. They built a factory and began producing aluminum in 1903. More workers were needed.

The rapidly increasing work force for the new aluminum plant needed housing. In 1904, the company established the Pine Grove Realty Company to manage construction and sale of houses to employees. Workers could buy these houses, which were conveniently close to the plant or rent them until rental payments had equaled the purchase price, whereupon they obtained the deed to the property. The company also provided a recreation hall and athletic field. Long-time Massena residents still call the section of Massena up Center Street and down to North Main Street "The Grove".

The Massena School Board had to provide education for the children. Pine Grove School was built in 1908 on land given by Alcoa to the Massena school district with the stipulation that, if the school were discontinued for one year, the land would revert to Alcoa. The school was described as one of the most modern and up-to-date public school buildings in this part of the state. It had a heating and ventilating system, drink-



*Miss Richmire in the 1950's.*  
(SLCHA Archives)



*Pine Grove School, Massena, NY.* (Alcoa photo in SLCHA Archives)

ing fountains and flushing toilets. Showers with hot and cold water had been installed on the boys' side only. Perhaps it was assumed that the little girls would come to school looking clean and proper or not play so hard during recess. The school was razed in 1960 because it could not meet current fire and safety requirements. Pine Grove school yard is now the parking lot for the Alcoa playing field.

Pine Grove School was the hub of that community called The Grove for many years. The population of Massena grew rapidly during the early 1900's. By 1917, Pine Grove School was coping with as many as 72 children in a class. They started two shifts, 8 to 11 and 12:30 to 5. Miss Richmire observed that the children of immigrant families picked up the English language with little or no difficulty.



For their parents, learning English was more difficult, but their motivation was keen. Desire to "become an American" was very strong in many immigrants who had left a life of poverty and little opportunity in the old country and who already could see that some of their dreams were within reach. But first they had to master the language sufficiently to pass a citizenship examination. It was hard to get their tongues around these strange words, to make sounds which did not exist in their own language. Night school classes were large, but somehow Miss Richmire and her teachers managed to give them individual attention. One woman recalls her father telling them that, if someone could not pronounce a word, "Miss Richmire would sit there with you until you got it right."

English-language and Americanization classes were started in 1917 at the plant. Alcoa had recruited teachers from Pine Grove School for this job. In 1919, these classes were transferred to Pine Grove School, but Alcoa continued to sponsor the evening school until 1921, when the New York State Education Department assumed this responsibility.

ty.

Miss Richmire was highly praised in 1926 by the Bureau of Immigrant Education for the operation of the Americanization program in Massena. That year, Miss Richmire with a staff of 6 teachers, taught a total of 305 adult students. Songs and rote learning were the methods used. Some practices and rituals were introduced. Officers for evening-school were elected: president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, safety first director, physical director, chaplain, head usher, flag bearer and naturalization recruitment officer. There was also a president for each class.

Each student that year received an attractively printed booklet as "A little remembrance from your teacher to wish you a very happy Christmas and a bright and joyous New Year". The first page had a picture of the Chief of the Immigrant Education Bureau for the State Department of Education in Albany, New York. Next, members of the Massena School Board were listed; then the superintendent, the director of the Evening School, and the teachers. School officers came next, then the class

presidents. Names of the students were listed by class. These booklets have been kept as mementos by some families.

Pine Grove Evening School, with its Department of Adult and Immigrant Education, was described as a model, one of the finest of its kind in the state. Peak enrollment was 350. At one time, more than 31 nationalities were represented at "the school for the foreign-born". For students of the Evening Classes, citizenship papers were the graduation diplomas. It is estimated that Pine Grove teachers helped about 2,000 adult students to achieve that precious goal.

May Richmire retired in 1953 after a 50-year career in teaching. For 42 years, she had been at the Pine Grove School; and for 31 of those years, she also taught adults who learned English and became citizens. A letter to the editor on the occasion of the razing of Pine Grove School in 1960 paid this tribute to Miss Richmire: "She will be remembered not only for her work with the grammar school children, but also for the hard work and wonderful inspiration she gave to those in the night school who were seeking naturalization."



*Graduating Class in American Citizenship, 1925 or 1926, at Pine Grove School, Massena. (Courtesy of Mary Catanzarite)*

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