

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association
QUARTERLY

Volume XXXIX - Number 3 - Summer, 1994



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Volume XXXIX
Summer 1994
No. 3

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

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ISSN: 0558-1931

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The Quarterly is published Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall each year by the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.

Additional copies may be obtained from the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, 3 East Main Street, Canton, NY 13617 at \$4.00 each, plus \$1.00 for postage and handling.

Contributions: *The Quarterly* welcomes contributions in form of manuscripts, drawings, and photographs. We request that documentation conform to the *MLA Style Manual*. A summary of the *MLA* format is available from the editor. Please address communications to The Editor, *The Quarterly*, St. Lawrence County Historical Association, Silas Wright Museum, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.

Mission Statement

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a not-for-profit educational resource center and museum that researches, collects, preserves, and interprets St. Lawrence County history through collections development, publication, exhibition, and programming; whose purpose is to help establish the intellectual and cultural connections that expand awareness and place St. Lawrence County in its state and national context, while revealing its unique identity. The Association examines different aspects of life in St. Lawrence County from multiple and diverse resources through community partnerships and collaboration.

SLCHA values quality, integrity, and accessibility and operates within established museum standards befitting its AAM accredited status.

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Cover:

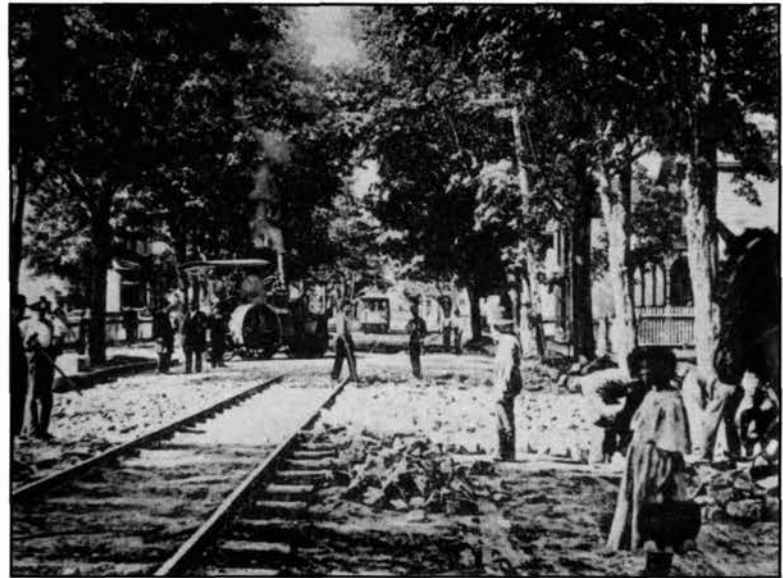
Detail of postcard showing the trolley line
on Ford Street in Ogdensburg.
(from the SLCHA postcard collection)

The Ogdensburg Trolley: 1895-1932

by Scott Wich

In the late 1800s, industrialized cities across the country began operating street railway public transportation systems. Although they operated with amazing efficiency, they began to give way to motorized bus systems in the 1930s. This switch was partially due to the decrease in demand for public transportation as many people purchased automobiles, which consequently placed major economic strain on trolley companies. However, sociologists have recently pointed to other factors, mainly the self-serving diversification of the General Motors Company (GM) into public transportation, which caused the streetcar's demise. For example, Bradford Snell's essay "American Ground Transport" asserts that GM entered the bus production business for the express purpose of replacing trolley systems throughout America. They did this because their sales hit a plateau in the 1920s due to a saturation of the automobile market, and they intended to solve the problem of decreased sales by entering the urban and inter-city bus operation market. They acquired Yellow Coach in 1925, and aided in formulating the Greyhound Bus Lines one year later.

General Motors did not stop at that point, however. They joined



Souvenir of Ogdensburg, N.Y.

*Road construction on Ford Street in Ogdensburg, 1895.
Note the trolley tracks and car.*

Greyhound in an effort to convert passenger rail operations to inter-city bus lines, with great success. Indeed, the routes of our own New York Central Railroad were replaced by Central Greyhound Bus Lines in the late 1930s. Simultaneously, GM "undertook the direct operation and conversion of...local electric streetcar and trolleybus systems to city bus operations.... At first, its procedure consisted of directly acquiring and scrapping local electric transit systems in favor of GM buses."¹ They created holding companies to provide the capital to make the conversions in cities throughout the nation, and by 1949 they had replaced 100 elec-

tric transit lines in 45 cities in this fashion.²

Ogdensburg's electrical street railway began around the turn of the century, and saw its collapse in 1932—the same year that Snell mentions in his essay. Therefore, it is possible to question whether General Motors was involved in the demise of the Ogdensburg trolley. It is true that the closing down of the Ogdensburg Street Railway Company occurred at the same time of GM's questionable practices and that it was replaced by an urban bus system, but before any conclusions can be made about the very real possibility of it involving a corporation such as GM, we must first

look at the history of the trolley in Ogdensburg.

The Ogdensburg Street Railway, established in 1886, was the only trolley system in any city on the St. Lawrence River. Its first car ran on October 14th of that year as a result of the efforts of a group of local investors led by H. B. Howard and Robert E. Waterman. The first cars were actually drawn by horses over two miles of track, extending from the intersection of Ford and Spruce Streets, down Ford Street to Water Street, to New York Avenue via the Lake Street Bridge, and continuing down New York Avenue to the fairgrounds and city limits. There were also short spurs off the main track that extended to the cemeteries, railroad depot, and ferry dock. Cars ran from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. in intervals of 15 minutes, and the fare was 5 cents. The company employed almost ten Ogdensburg residents, who served simultaneously as drivers and conductors aboard the first trolleys, and it housed six cars and twelve horses in its Catherine Street garage.

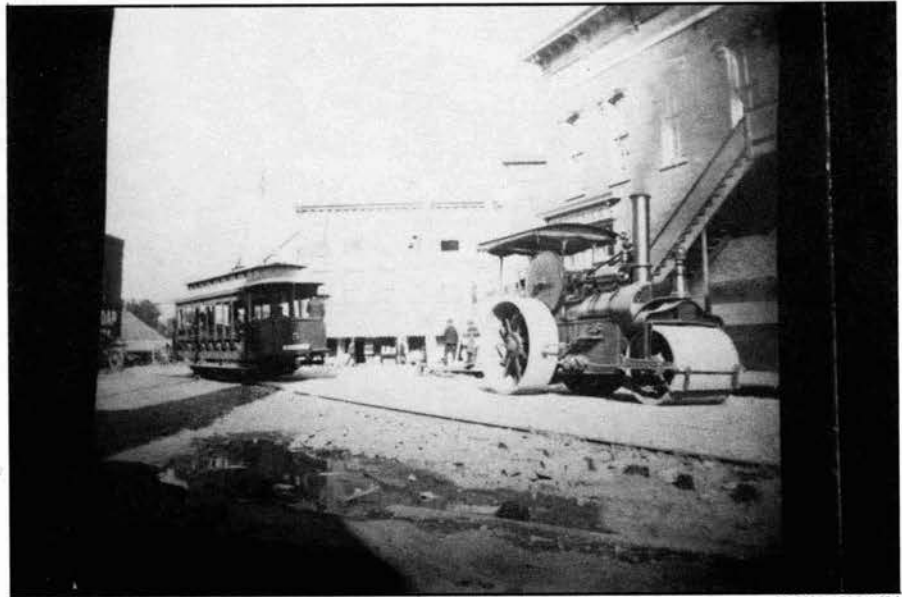
Among these drivers/conductors were "Polly" Measaw, Phil Bennett, Tom Devitt, and Tommy Herriman; however, it was John Fox who was the true heart and soul of the Ogdensburg Street Railway Company. Fox led the first team of horses, named "Nell" and "Charlie," up Ford Street on the morning of October 14th, and he continued driving trolleys until the end of the company in 1932. During that time, Fox accumulated many memories and anecdotes about the early days of the railway. Perhaps the most humorous story

was that of a small farmer who resided on Heuvelton Road, who spent much of his time in an inebriated state in a Ford Street saloon. Strapped for drinking money after an afternoon binge, he sold the two horses that he rode in on to the Street Railway. The next day, when Fox led the two newcomers on their first run on the trolley system down Ford Street, he sat in astonishment as the team instinctively pulled up to the same saloon that they had visited so many times with their former owner. He was unable to move the team for almost an hour, a habitual process that continued for weeks.

Despite such unforeseeable breaks in service, the horse-drawn variety of trolleys worked quite well, until technology left them behind in 1895. At this time, the Street Railway was sold to a group from Easton, Pennsylvania led by Henry Sage, who began making plans to electrify the system. A

man named John Cotter was brought up from Norwalk, Connecticut to survey and build the hydraulic power house by the Lake Street Bridge on the Oswegatchie River. Sage also brought John Dolan from Elizabeth, New Jersey and S. C. Gano from Geneva, New York to construct the power lines, which were made of wire from the Roebblings Company and Ohio Brass Company. The poles were carried by train all the way from Georgia, a peculiar fact considering the abundance of lumber available in the North Country. Sage purchased six open-topped and four closed cars from the American Car Company of St. Louis, which were equipped with two 25-horsepower Westinghouse motors and one or two Peckman trucks each. The open cars were 28 feet in length while the closed were 18 feet.

In addition to the new cars, the Company also added two all-important cars in order to deal with



SLCHA 1000-1624

1890s Harry W. Smith photograph of an Ogdensburg trolley car. A steamroller is seen on the right.

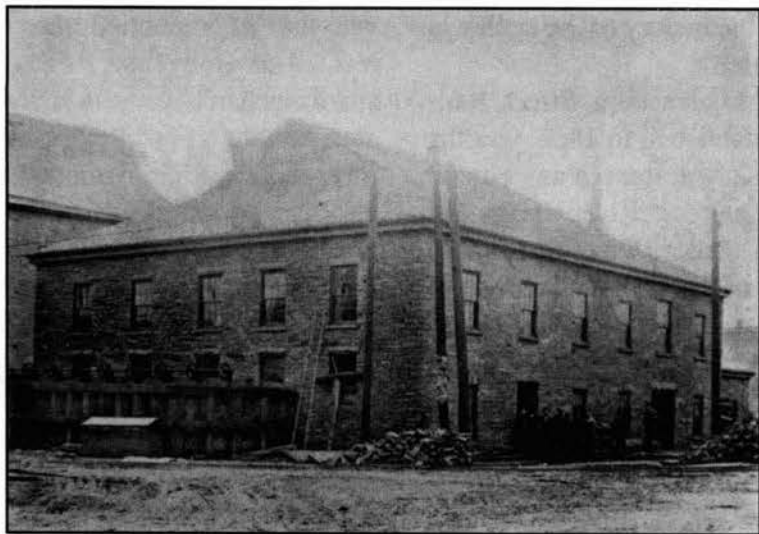
the harsh winters of the North Country: first, a snowplow car, which could clear the streets at the beginning of the day and as necessary as the day progressed; second, a snow-brush car, which could carry passengers while simultaneously clearing the tracks for the other cars. These cars added to the efficiency of the line, keeping runs on time in even the harshest conditions. Unfortunately, with the earlier cars the conditions were not as good for the drivers, who remained outside despite brutal and frigid weather. The passengers, without heat in the cars, were comforted only by straw thrown on the floors in wintertime.

Nevertheless, the electric railway began carrying passengers by summer 1895, leaving behind the days of the horse-drawn carriages. Another anecdote from John Fox tells the fate of the horse-teams of

the early days: "Old Mag" and "Tommy Boy," two of the oldest veterans of the street railway, were sold off to local farmers when electricity was installed. Until their respective deaths, the two horses were found virtually every morn-

ing by their new owner at the switch at Ford and Catherine Streets, still longing to pull the electric trolley that rendered them obsolete.

The trolley, once freed of obstructing horses, was able to expand to meet the needs of the grow-



Souvenir of Ogdensburg, N.Y.

Ogdensburg trolley power house in 1895.



SLCHA 1000-1231

The power house at Lake and River Streets, seen on August 5, 1932.

ing city. The track now extended ten miles, with the Ford Street line extending the considerable distance to the State Hospital, which was of obvious benefit to employees and visitors of the complex. A new State Street line began in 1898, continuing to the fairgrounds and cemeteries. Business and cultural activities now thrived around the trolley. It was cheap and simple for visitors from Canada and local residents alike to attend events all over town, especially in the summer when the Sandy Beach area was alive with dancing, concerts, and sports almost every night. Therefore, traffic on the line increased, and the Company became quite prosperous.

The Ogdensburg Public Library has in its archives, records of the Railway Company dating from March 1, 1905. The records, which indicate that the railway was enjoying economic success at this time, are in the form of a daily log of the conductors. On March 1st, 21 runs were made, totalling \$49.20 in fares. The conductors who signed in were B. Lordwell, Wm. Pitts, F. Boyer, R. Douglass, H. Perry, E. Powers, and Lockren. The Company made efforts to increase revenue by running special cars for groups in the area, by placing advertisements on cars for \$3.33 per day, and by running mail across town for as much as \$37.50 per day.

Throughout 1905, the Company was collecting an average of \$55-\$60 per day in fares, with significantly greater total fares on Easter Sunday (\$78.80), Decoration Day (\$158.65), Independence Day (\$553.70), and Labor Day

(\$308.55). The log left a margin for conductor's remarks, which varied from the weather conditions to the events occurring around town on a particular day. Throughout the summer, fares peaked at an average of \$100 per day, aided by the opening of Sandy Beach for picnics and dancing on July 26th. These figures improved throughout 1906-1908, with a record day on July 4th, 1907. On that Independence Day, almost 30 runs shuttled people to and from the various events of the day, including sports at the fairgrounds in the afternoon and fireworks and dancing at the beach in the evening, totalling \$772.42 in fares.



Ogdensburg Illustrated

Office of the Ogdensburg Street Railway Company, Power and Light Company, and Gas Company, 1909

These records also show the problems that plagued the electric trolleys. First, the lack of heat in the cars became a major vexation for patrons of the street railway. The frigid conditions prompted a letter of complaint from attorney, and later mayor, Edward P. Lynch. Lynch, interestingly enough, was the first patron of the horse-drawn trolley and the last to ride on the electric trolley in 1932. In this letter, he asks superintendent Mr. Darrow if he would not "favor [him] and some of the other patrons of the road by having the counsel direct the Company to heat its cars." Stoves were installed in the cars in the late 1910s, which solved that difficulty. A second, more acute protest was made when the Company raised the fare on the hospital run to ten cents on December 1, 1906. The increased fare infuriated passengers, who in some cases refused to pay it, or walked instead. The situation came to a head on December 3rd, when a driver and a conductor of a trolley were arrested for literally throwing a fare dodger off the train. To avoid further protest and legal entanglements, the fare was reduced to its original price on December 4th.

Other problems with the trolley road were far more serious and more difficult to solve. There were frequent power outages on the line due to toppled or failing wires. The longest of these outages occurred on Friday, May 10, 1907, and lasted for more than a week, as a new power generator was installed. These outages not only frustrated would-be patrons, but also severely reduced revenue for the Company.



SLCHA 1000-1479

Trolley barn of the Ogdensburg Street Railway Company, located on New York Avenue, 1932.

The obstacle of mildly declining profits was compounded by a fire that swept through the car barns on Catherine Street on July 24, 1911. Although the sweeper, snow-plow, and three closed cars were saved by brave employees, the Company suffered \$16,000 in damages. The Company was insured by the Chapin and Lancto Company, but their policy only covered \$12,500 of their losses, and did not include the rebuilding of the barn, which was finished in March 1911 at a cost of \$3,500. These losses took their toll on the already weakened Company.

The advent of the automobile was the major deathblow to the trolley system. Not only did the competing traffic of slow and stalled cars on the street hinder the passage of trolley cars, but the trolley lost its "snob appeal" as the

affluent portion of the population purchased their own mode of transportation.³ Besides the obvious decrease in the number of people who used public transportation, automotive transport caused the Company other critical difficulties as the city began to pave its roads to accommodate automobiles. When the trolley began with its horse-drawn cars in the 1890s, a state law was passed that obligated the Company to pave between, and two feet outside, its rails, based on the fact that the constant traffic would severely damage the roads. At the time of its passage this law made perfect sense, but it became quite a burden as revenue decreased and assessments from the city's rapid and extensive paving efforts increased.

The Company was able to meet its financial obligation until 1919,

when its fiscal trauma made full payment impossible. Partial payments were made in the years 1920-1922, until the Supreme Court of New York declared the Ogdensburg Street Railway Company bankrupt. As a solution to its financial imbroglio, the Company applied to the City Council for permission to close the State Street branch in early May 1924. However, the mayor at the time was Edward P. Lynch who, as we know, was an assiduous supporter of the trolley and therefore did not want to see it close completely. With Lynch's influence, the Council denied their petition, instead allowing them to limit their service on the State Street line to peak hours and busy days.

This limitation of service proved to be a temporary solution to a long-standing problem, as the Company's December 31, 1926

report from the Public Service Commission of New York indicates. It showed that in 1926, the railway suffered a net loss of \$4,004 for that year alone. When added to the \$10,455 which they owed in interest on their debt and the \$70,223 in previous losses, the Company found itself in \$84,682 of total debt. Pressure on the Company to pay its back taxes and assessments became intense. When a new mayor came to office in 1926, talk circulated in the newspapers that the railway would be supplanted with a bus line if those payments were not made promptly.

Many citizens, who voiced their thoughts through the *Ogdensburg Journal* and the *Ogdensburg Advance* and *St. Lawrence Weekly Democrat*, were outraged at the thought of scrapping the trolley:

The Street Railway Co. is a big asset to Ogdensburg. [It] increases the value of property and gives a superior air to the City. [It] is a great benefit to the people and particularly the State Hospital.... Remove the street railway and the City will become stagnant.... A bus line will never take its place. No bus or taxi line will carry a passenger from the city to the State Hospital for 8 cents, and the hospital depends in a large measure on the Ogdensburg Street Railway.⁴

In 1928, with Mayor W. Allan Newell now in office, the Company once again petitioned the City Council to allow them to terminate the State Street line and to reach some sort of agreement on the street-paving debt issue. The Council decided that: 1) the Company would pay \$4,906 for the previous paving done by the city within the



Ogdensburg Illustrated

Ford Street, Ogdensburg, 1909.

pre-existing trolley tracks, 2) that the Company would pay \$5,000 for the paving done within its tracks on the King Street extension, and 3) that the State Street line would cease operation. Mayor Newell and the Council had indeed been generous in their decision because they recognized the many benefits of the system. In his statement of the decision, Newell claimed:

Although the Street Railway Co. was not an asset to its owners...it [is] an asset to the City. It may amaze...that this road carried in the year 1927 nearly half a million passengers, exactly 470,353. It provides [a] year-round system of transportation for the employees of the State Hospital, who bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars of trade to the city merchants every year.... In addition, it must be remembered that the Street Railway has about 20 employees with a payroll of over \$23,000 per year.⁵

Despite the considerable kindness of the Council, the Company

failed to rebound from their heavy losses, and were forced to terminate operations in 1932. The Council asked for bid submissions for weeks, but received only one application for the replacement of the trolleys by a bus line by Ralph A. Lalonde, a local truckman. Lalonde was a private investor who purchased five buses and promised the Council an extensive schedule. Therefore, Lalonde's bid was unanimously accepted, and bus service began at noon on April 1st, 1932.

The trolley men, including John Fox, were made obsolete by technology in much the same fashion as "Old Mag" and "Tommy Boy" were in 1895. The 18 men who were put out of work stood around the last electric trolley car on the morning of April 1st posing for posterity before the last run, which was made at 11:15 a.m. A glamorous period in the long history of Ogdensburg had ended, leaving many North Country residents with

joyful memories of riding aboard the electric cars, and leaving us with faded pictures and relayed anecdotes.

Due to the circumstances surrounding the collapse of the Ogdensburg Street Railway Company, it is extremely unlikely that an outside corporate interest, such as General Motors, had much to do with the replacement of the North Country's only trolley system. The end came with the Company's growing financial problems, compounded by the surprising success of the automobile among middle-class residents. The financial entanglements came in stages through the early 1900s. First, power outages occurred and re-occurred throughout the period, particularly in 1907, when the entire generator was replaced only to be burned out again. Second, a fire roared through the Catherine Street garage on the morning of January 24, 1911, causing considerable loss for the Company. Third, traffic on cars decreased significantly due to the advent of the automobile in the 1920s. Lastly, and most critically, massive debt accumulated over the years 1914-1926, due in large part to a New York statute that mandated that the Company pay for the city's sizable paving efforts along its tracks.

It is clear that the city and its people did everything that they possibly could to save the trolley that they admired, but the long history of financial distress made its de-

mise inevitable. There is no doubt that the presentation of a viable alternative to the streetcar, namely the autobus, made its cessation more acceptable to the public. However, there is no evidence that the trolley system was replaced by buses under clandestine circumstances: the lack of a counterbid to Lalonde's offer or of any attempt to takeover the street railway by any of General Motors' holding companies show that the demise of the Ogdensburg Street Railway was legitimate, and is without the conspiracy that Snell speaks of in analysis of other trolley systems in the United States. The slight possibility that Lalonde himself had a tie-in with General Motors remains a mystery, one which may perhaps be solved with future research.

Regardless of any conspiracy theories, it is fascinating to think that, within the last century, trolley cars ran on the streets of Ogdensburg. A walk or a drive around town gives little evidence that the street railway ever existed. For example, the Lake Street Bridge, once a center of activity, is now closed to traffic and appears relatively bleak. A more extensive investigation reveals the positive contributions that the street railway made to the geographic, economic, and cultural growth of the city in the early 1900s; sadly, it also reveals the loss of allure that the community suffered when the trolley line ceased operations.

Notes

¹Snell, Bradford. "American Ground Transport." In Jerome Skolnick and Elliot Currie, eds., *Crisis in American Institutions*. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1992) 319-320.

²Snell, 323.

³Bovard, L.G. "When Trolleys Rumbled through Ogdensburg Streets," *The SLCHA Quarterly*, Fall, 1964: 9.

⁴"Street Railway May Oppose Paving in New York Avenue," *Ogdensburg Advance and St. Lawrence Sunday Democrat*, 3 June 1926: 5.

⁵"Settlement is Made With the Trolley Road," *Ogdensburg Advance and St. Lawrence Sunday Democrat*, 23 September 1928: 2.

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"Street Railway May Oppose Paving in New York Avenue." *Ogdensburg Advance and St. Lawrence Sunday Democrat*. 3 June 1926: 5.

"Trolley Line." *Ogdensburg Journal*. 31 August 1895: 4.

"Trolley Line Purchase." *Ogdensburg Advance*. 28 February 1895: 5.

"Trolley Power House." *Ogdensburg Journal*. 5 March 1895: 4.

"Trolley Street Railroad." *Ogdensburg Journal*. 1 June 1895: 2.

National Airmail Week in Ogdensburg, 1938

by Persis Yates Boyesen

The Ogdensburg Airport, a WPA Project, was used for the first time 56 years ago on Thursday, May 19, 1938. That date also marked the first time in history that a dispatch of mail left from Ogdensburg by air for Syracuse where connections were made with air routes to different points in the United States.

This event celebrated the 20th anniversary of scheduled air mail service in the U.S. and was in honor of National Air Mail Week.

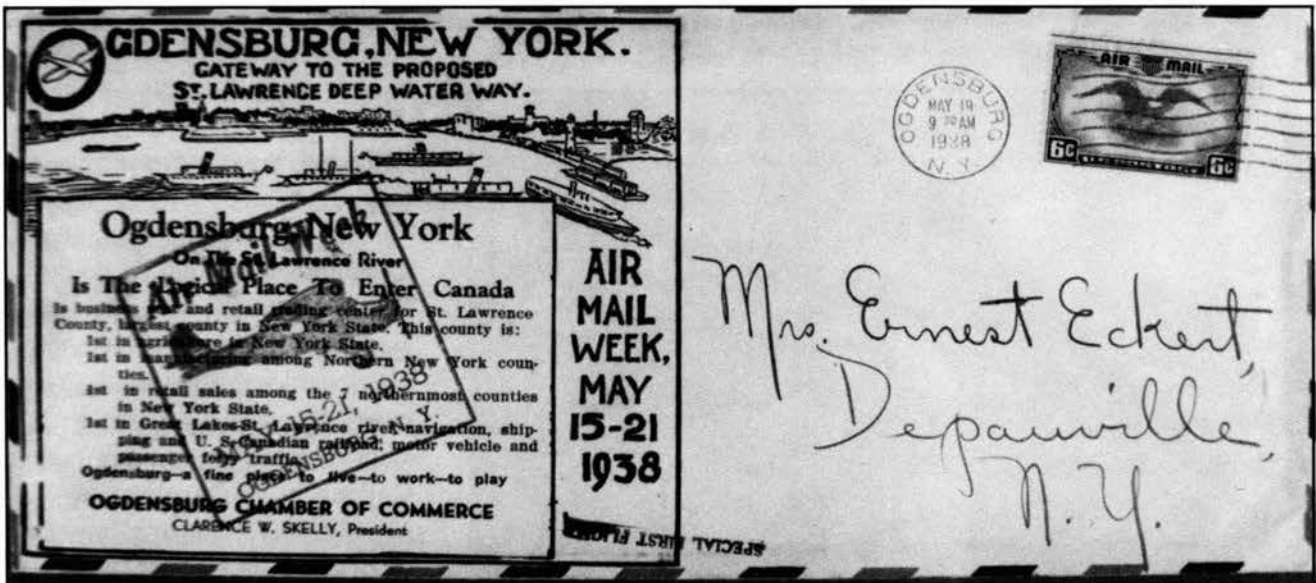
The Ogdensburg Post Office, through the courtesy of the St. Lawrence County WPA officials, was granted the use of the local

airport as a landing place for the airplane that was used to transport the airmail from the City of Ogdensburg. This gesture on the part of the WPA was an opportunity for those who wished to witness the first flight of U.S. mail solely by the air route and to get a glimpse of the progress made in the construction of the local airport. Local postal officials and members of the Ogdensburg Chamber of Commerce proclaimed this "to be an unique event in mail transportation."

Dwight P. Church of Canton, piloting his own plane, was designated by the Post Office Depart-

ment to carry the airmail on that day. Mr. Church was given an honorary commission by the Post Office Department for this service as he had volunteered to cooperate with many other private pilots who took part in the Air Mail Week observance throughout the country.

The airmail itinerary included Massena, Canton, Hammond, Gouverneur, Alexandria Bay, Adams, Lowville and other places in this vicinity creating a "feeder" system to the main lines at Syracuse. The idea of a "feeder" system for northern New York was a special service offered by the Post



Courtesy of Lisa A. Sizeland-Ross

Envelope, designed by S.D.P. Williams, celebrating National Airmail Week in 1938 and the first air mail delivery from Ogdensburg. A hand stamp is seen over the cachet. The envelope measures 9 1/2 by 4 1/4 inches.



Courtesy of the St. Lawrence University Archives

Photograph of Dwight Church with his airplane. Church was the pilot for the first airmail delivery from Ogdensburg and the County.



Courtesy of the St. Lawrence University Archives

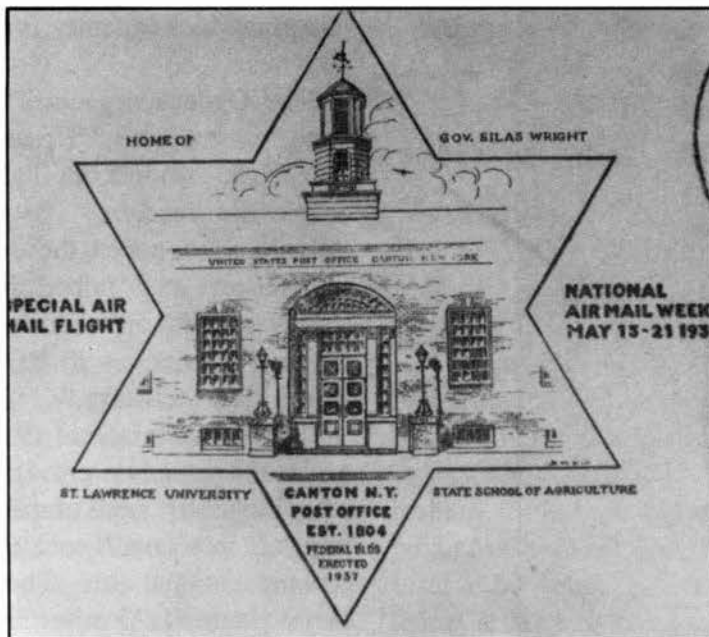
Dwight Church's airplane, c. late 1930s.

Office Department to demonstrate the efficiency and rapidity of air mail service.

The once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to advertise the City of Ogdensburg all over the country arrived with the distribution of a special "Ogdensburg" envelope.

Clarence W. Skelly, President of the Ogdensburg Chamber of Commerce, requested S.D.P. Williams, architect, to make a drawing featuring Ogdensburg as the gateway to the St. Lawrence Seaway. This cachet was imprinted on a number ten size envelope and depicted pictures of two dams on the St. Lawrence River and power lines emanating from them. Ogdensburg was pictured as a prosperous river harbor city with sea-going vessels in the foreground. Mr. Skelly said, "This is an excellent opportunity to advertise the possibilities of Ogdensburg and the St. Lawrence River through the contemplated seaway project and the vast power resources at our doors through the medium of Air Mail Week, and also manifests our friendly cooperation with the Post Office Department in commemorating the 20th anniversary of the transportation of mail by air."

The Ogdensburg Chamber of Commerce, a leader in the agitation for the Seaway construction, as a complement of the Chamber, distributed many thousands of these envelopes free of charge to individuals and business firms in Ogdensburg for posting during Air Mail Week. The special envelopes were intended to advocate the Seaway not only in Ogdensburg but all over the country. The design on the envelope took up approximately



Courtesy of Herbert F. Judd

Special envelopes from Massena, Potsdam, and Canton were also designed for National Air Mail Week in 1938. Shown above is the cachet from Canton. This cachet, depicting the new Canton Post Office, was commissioned by Postmaster Grace Sullivan, and designed by well-known, local artist, Benjamin M. Kip.

one half the face of a number ten envelope which is nine and one half by four and one fourth inches in dimensions. This design also incorporated a slogan bearing on Ogdensburg as being the first to sponsor the contemplated Seaway promotion.

These specially designed envelopes were distributed by NYA boys to every industrial and business firm, as well as hotels, stores and rooming houses in the city. However, some of the special "Ogdensburg" envelopes were not used in the manner proposed by the Chamber, but instead, used by some businessmen to send out statements and bills. The deadline for mailing via airmail was at 9:45 a.m. at the Post Office on the morning of May 19th. Any late arrivals were relayed to Syracuse by train. Six cents postage carried the airmail

letter.

So great a crowd was expected to line up along the runway when the plane arrived that a special police attachment was assigned at the field to assure safety and order among the onlookers.

Dwight P. Church of Canton, photographer-pilot took off from Canton on schedule at 8:25 a.m. carrying 1,204 letters from the county seat. They weighed twenty-one pounds including the weight of the pouch. He arrived at Gouverneur slightly ahead of schedule, loaded mail, and then flew to Potsdam, still ahead of time. From there he went to Massena and then to Ogdensburg where he landed ten minutes behind schedule.

The first person to sight the approach of the plane at the field was Edward P. Benton, local NYA su-

pervisor. Over five hundred people were present at the Ogdensburg airport. Among officials there to greet Mr. Church were Postmaster Arthur J. Belgard; Lawrence Ewart, Superintendent of Mails; Mayor J.J. Livingston; William F. Dineen, Democratic County Chairman; and Clarence Skelly, President of the Ogdensburg Chamber of Commerce.

Postmaster Belgard greeted the pilot as he climbed out of the cockpit. "Dangling from the covering over the plane seat were six rabbit feet and apparently doing their best for the pilot," so the *Ogdensburg Journal* reported. Pilot Church shook hands with the Postmaster, signed the receipts for the mail and took off from the Ogdensburg Airport with 2,000 letters in the Ogdensburg pouch at 10:10 a.m.



SLCHA Archives

Pictured here is the cachet of the special "First Flight" envelope from Massena. Although the Massena envelope did not have an illustration, the above text was distinguished by having an aluminum-silver background.



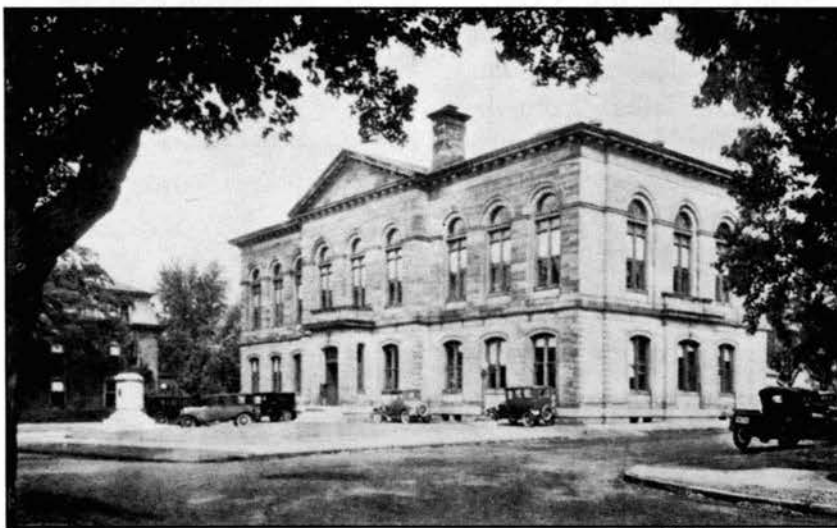
SLCHA Archives

The envelope cachet from Potsdam celebrating National Air Mail Week in 1938.

His next stop was Hammond.

On arrival at Lowville about 11:25 a.m. the plane crashed when a strong wind hit the plane as it was about to land and forced it into a ground loop. The left wing, wheel and propeller smashed. Church escaped without injury. The mail

was undamaged. The six bags of mail, along with the Lowville pouch was taken to the Lowville Post Office and dispatched by car to the Syracuse airport about 12:30 p.m. Church had planned to pick up mail at Lowville and Adams and continue to Syracuse.



SLCHA postcard collection

Postcard view of the Ogdensburg Post Office in the 1930s.

His plane had capacity for eight pouches.

The Ogdensburg covers were rated “crash covers.” Up until the time of the accident the flight was a splendid success. Postmaster Belgard pronounced the event a fine success and “hoped that the time was not far off when a regular air mail service could be established in this territory.”

The air mail plane of 1918 was a wartime plane converted to carry a few hundred pounds of mail. The pilot sat in an open cockpit with few navigational aids. The plane cruised around 90 miles an hour and flew only during the daytime. Air mail time coast-to-coast in 1920 was 78 hours and 30 minutes.

In 1938, United Air Lines flew Douglas Mainliners over the same mid-continent, main line airway pioneered by the Post Office from New York and Chicago to the Pacific coast. In addition to large mail and express compartments, the Mainliner carried 21 passengers in lounge chairs, or 12 in large berths on overnight trips. It was powered with two 14 cylinder Wasp engines and cruised at 205 miles per hour. It flew coast-to-coast in 15 hours and 30 minutes.

That was National Air Mail Week in northern New York 56 years ago in 1938.

Sources

Ogdensburg Journal: May 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 1938.

Note

This article was originally published, without illustrations, in the *Ogdensburg Journal*, May 23, 1973, page 7.

Father James Salmon, Pioneer Settler

by Rev. Msgr. Robert J. Giroux

St. Lawrence County records at Canton, New York show that James Salmon and John McCormick purchased 50 acres from Joshua Waddington. They received a deed dated May 17, 1826 (Liber 9, page 63). The price was \$175. Later that year James Salmon partitioned the easterly half of the land to John McCormick and wife Mary and received a mortgage for the same secured for \$63.67. The property was on the north side of the Irish Settlement Road, near its intersection with the Franklin Road, then Town of Madrid, now in the Town of Waddington.

That was the farm on which Father James Salmon built a stone house where he lived for about ten years. In 1825 he was the first Roman Catholic clergyman appointed in the Diocese of New York to serve the Catholics north of Utica, from Carthage in Jefferson County through all of St. Lawrence County. A Catholic Church had already been built at Carthage in 1819. Tradition indicates that a log church was built in the present town of Waddington in 1825 on the Franklin Road, near Chamberlain's Corners. The church may have been there before Father Salmon came to

settle. A land contract probably was obtained from Joshua Waddington. Then, as happened frequently elsewhere, the church building was erected a few years before a deed was signed.

A religious corporation was formed on May 28, 1829. Trustees of "The First Catholic Congregation of the Town of Madrid" were John Hanlon, William Fitzgerald, Patrick Welch, Thomas Fay and Michael Hughs. A deed was granted to the corporation by Joshua Waddington on April 10, 1831. The one acre of land was the location of the log church that later burned down and a Catholic Cemetery, still to be seen, in back of the buildings at William and Marcia Dalton's farm. Two surviving monuments there are for burials in 1829, so we know the land was occupied before the deed was granted.

Father Salmon was over sixty years of age when he settled in Waddington. He is described in John Talbot Smith's *History of the Diocese of Ogdensburg* as "a Connaught Irishman, tall, thin, and dark-featured, somewhat advanced in years, and of a stern disposition." One source gives his birth date as 1764, and says that he was ordained in June 1819. He would have been 55 years of age. Evidently he had little formal educa-

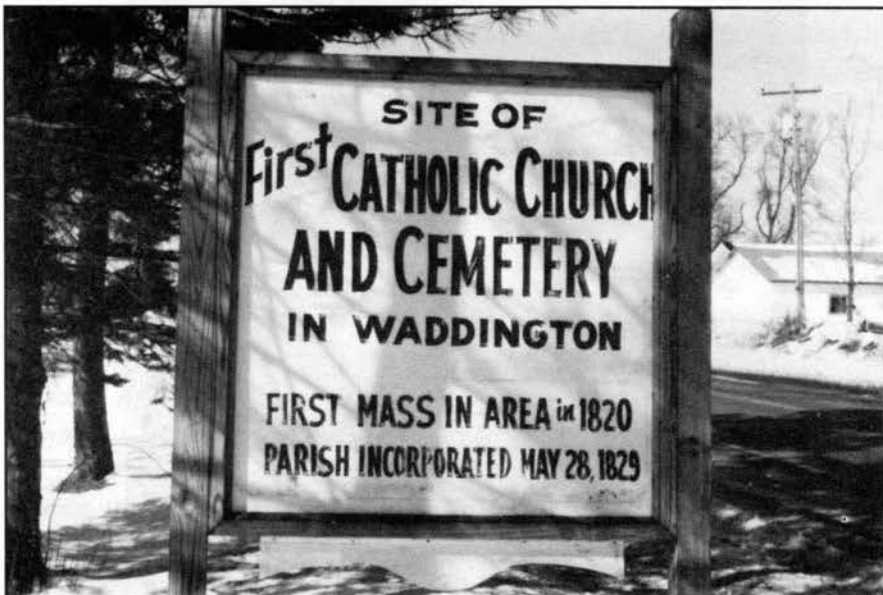


Photo by Stewart Wilson

Sign between Waddington and Chamberlain Corners, marking the first Catholic Church and cemetery in Waddington.

tion. He may have studied with a local priest at home during the years of repression when seminaries were not allowed in Ireland. Young Irishmen at the time were smuggled overseas to study: at Salamanca, Spain or Louvain, Belgium or at Paris and Rome. The first college for Catholic students in Ireland opened only in 1795 and men could officially study for the priesthood when further freedom came to Ireland with the Catholic Relief Act of 1829.

Archives at Kingston, Ontario show that Father Salmon came to Quebec, then the Diocese for all of Canada. From there Bishop Plessis sent him to Kingston under the charge of his Vicar General, Rev. A. McDonell, together with a letter stating that "Rev. Mr. Salmon is a pious and sober priest who may hold the mission (at Kingston) as far as his reduced talents will allow." Dated November 16, 1818, the letter indicates that Father Salmon was already a priest. Other correspondence suggests that Father Salmon originally intended to do missionary work in Kentucky.

When Father Salmon wrote to find out whether or not he was to be considered for appointment as the parish priest of Kingston, he talked again of going to Kentucky. Bishop Plessis did not judge him suitable for that important parish and so he was appointed briefly to Perth and Richmond, Ontario. However, a letter dated August, 1822 indicates that Father Salmon had then returned to Ireland. His service in Upper Canada seems to have lasted just over three years.

We next find Father Salmon in New York City. Possibly this time



Photo by Stewart Wilson

Above and below: The cemetery at the site of the first Catholic Church in Waddington. The cemetery is now behind the buildings of the Dalton farm.

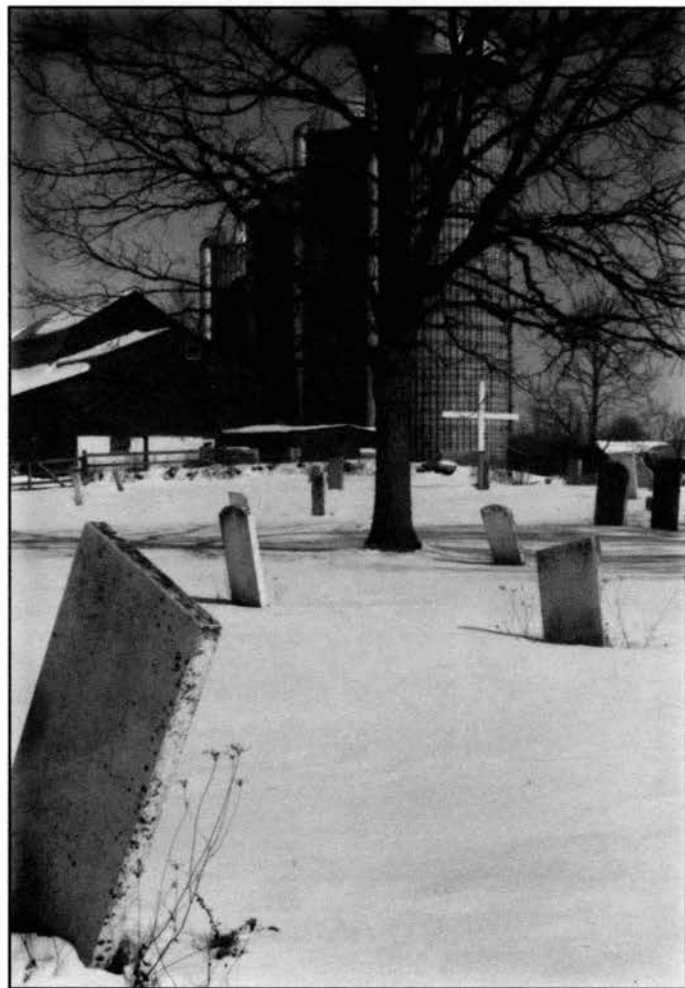


Photo by Stewart Wilson

he had come from Ireland, with his brother's family. His arrival followed the death of New York's Bishop John Connolly, O.P. in February 1825. Father Salmon was appointed to the North Country in the summer of 1825 by Rev. John Power, the temporary Administrator of New York. A letter from Father Salmon written at Utica, dated July 28, 1825, to the congregation at Carthage states: "I beg to inform you that I am appointed Pastor of Sackets Harbour, Brounville, Carthage, Ogdensburg & so forth with full powers to administer Sacraments Preach the Gospel & all other priestly functions...."

"Let them [the parishioners] know," Father Salmon continues, "that it will be necessary for them to consult together to provide me a suitable dwelling for my reception.... Confidently hoping that I will be satisfied with ye as my most dear children in the Lord, if ye be equally so with me as your Father...." The letter is signed, "Your very humble servant, R. James Salmon." We do not know how long he stayed at Carthage, or even if he did at all.

In October 1826, when Bishop John Dubois was installed as third Bishop of New York, Waddington was its most northerly parish and Father Salmon was already in residence. An article in a Catholic newspaper at New York, *The Truth Teller*, dated July 1, 1826, in praise asserts that "Mr. Waddington, a gentleman of high character and reputation in this city, has thro his agent, Mr. Ogden, given a grant of land, of fifty acres, at Waddington, near Ogdensburgh, State Of New

York, in fee simple for ever, for the use and benefit of the Roman Catholic Church there, of which the Rev. James Salmon is the pastor. Such an instance of liberality and christian charity in that part of the union certainly is most unexpected and redounds highly to the benevolence of the donor. We understand the Rev. Mr. Salmon, who is sixty years of age, had been settled in Waddington for several years, and we trust that by the providence of God, he will live to see a Roman Catholic church built there, worthy of the holy religion of which he is pastor."

We do not know the meaning of the suggestion that "Father Salmon has been settled in Waddington for several years." Did he already know something from Irish friends or from his time at Kingston about Waddington's need for a priest? We can only guess what Bishop Dubois thought of the situation when he first came to visit. He found that the farm actually belonged to Father Salmon and his tenant and not to the congregation. Moreover, the people had built their church further from the village at another site. The fact that title to the church land was in the name of trustees, and not the Bishop's name, also could have been a source of tension. The recurring question of how Catholic church properties were held in New York State was not resolved until 1863.

Bishop John Dubois, a venerable elderly priest from France, had founded Mount St. Mary's College at Emmitsburg, Md. He was an early friend and counsellor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821) the remarkable widow who

founded the Sisters of Charity. Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton was a sister-in-law to Charlotte Seton Ogden. This relationship made the Bishop welcome at the Ogdens when he visited Waddington. A copy of the diary of Charlotte Ogden at the Waddington library, under the date Saturday, August 11, 1827, reads: "Rev'd Mr. Dubois (a Catholic Bishop) dined at the Island with the Rev'd Mr. Powers and Salmon." On that visit the Bishop travelled from Waddington to St. Regis and then to Montreal, where in September he ordained Fr. John Walsh a priest for the Diocese of New York.

On Monday, March 17, 1828, Charlotte Ogden noted in her diary: "Mr. Salmon, the Catholic Priest at the head of 60 Irishmen, paraded in front of our house [Ellerslie], gave three huzzas in honor of the day, and departed." On Friday, October 10, 1828 she wrote: "Rev'd Bishop Dubois (Roman Catholic) arrived" and on the next day, "The Bishop came here to pass of few days. Mr. Salmon the Priest and Wm. Ogden dined here." On Sunday she remarked that she: "went up to Ellerslie to dine with the Bishop" and on Monday "lighted candles in the office for the Bishop to write by." Finally on Tuesday, October 14 she observed that, "G. Ogden went up to Court [at Ogdensburg], accompanied by Wm. Ogden and Bishop Dubois, who is on his way to New York".

Other excerpts from the diary of Charlotte Ogden include Tuesday, March 20, 1832: "Right Rev'd Bishop Dubois and curate Mr. McKay [probably Rev. James B.



SLCHA Archives

Charlotte Seaton Ogden

McCahill, of Utica] dined with us, and slept." March 21st: "Rain or showery all day. Bishop went to the Irish Settlement this afternoon and to sleep." March 22nd, a Sunday: "Bishop and curate returned to dine at 5 o'clock," and on Monday, the 23rd: "The Bishop left us for Potsdam, etc. etc."

In all, Bishop Dubois of New York seems to have visited Waddington, and was a guest at the Ogdens at least four times. The last visit was on Friday, August 21, 1835, about a month after Father Salmon's death: "The Right Rev'd Bishop Dubois arrived, and priest [Patrick] Foley, [who had taken over at Ogdensburg and Waddington], and chaplain McGuire." Rev. Timothy Hugh

Maguire, referred to here, had served at Waddington as curate for a time. The diary continues on Saturday, August 22nd: "Bishop, Priest and Chaplain dined with us today and left after dinner for the Irish Settlement." The word "chaplain" as used by Charlotte Ogden could have two meanings. Father Maguire could have been traveling as chaplain to the Bishop or he could have been in charge of the Catholic "chapel" at Waddington.

St. Mary's at Waddington does not have any records or even a scrap of handwriting from the time of Father Salmon. Any records that he kept were probably lost in the fire that consumed the log church on the Franklin Road. The date of the fire is not known, but it

probably occurred in 1846 or the spring of 1847 because the deed for a new church in the village is dated September 7, 1847.

There are frequent references to Father James Salmon in Father Smith's *History* already cited. The dates are not reliable, but the recollections from others who knew him or about him are vivid and given at some length. He is mentioned in the parish histories of Carthage, Rossie, Ogdensburg, Potsdam and Waddington. It seems that Bishop Dubois in his frequent visits to Waddington repeatedly urged Father Salmon to do more to organize the congregation at Ogdensburg. The fact that Father Salmon insisted in living on his farm was a source of irritation. It gave the impression that the priest was engaged in a forbidden commerce.

Father John Talbot Smith writes, "Father Salmon said Mass in a log hut on the outskirts of the Irish Settlement, where now stands the old cemetery; and went occasionally to the 'burg, living as much by the products of his farm which he had bought, as by the aid his parishioners afforded him, for money was a rare thing then, and the people were poor. After remaining at Waddington nearly ten years he was dismissed by the Bishop, and continued to live on his farm until his death. He was much loved by the Irish as had held firmly to the faith; but already a spirit had crept into some which brought trouble to Father Salmon and to his successors, and prevails in some degree up to the present time" (p. 90). Those words could have come from the recollections of Father James Mackey, who died at Ogdensburg

in 1883. Father Smith's *History* appeared in 1885.

Father Smith's history of the Ogdensburg church indicates that Father Salmon "had begun to build a small stone church on the spot occupied by the present cathedral [on Franklin Street where St. Joseph's Home now stands] saying Mass meanwhile in private houses, of which Mr. Conway's and Mr. Fanning's were the principal" (p. 80). The records show that Father Salmon had a lot surveyed on June 22, 1832 for a Catholic Chapel on Franklin Street. On May 1, 1832 he had already purchased a house and lot in his own name on Caroline Street from the executors of Nathan Ford for \$125. He must have stayed there when in Ogdensburg. His successor, Father Patrick Foley, acquired his own house on Caroline Street in February, 1836.

Father Smith's *History* adds that "Father Foley completed the church and brought Bishop Dubois to dedicate it." That may have been in 1835 when Bishop Dubois and Father Foley are mentioned in the Charlotte Ogden diary (August 21, 1835). Father Salmon also organized the congregation at Rossie and began a church there. He travelled to say Mass at Potsdam and probably also for the Irish at Hogansburg and to the St. Regis Indian Mission in Quebec, where Father Marcoux was the only nearby Catholic priest.

Regarding Father Salmon, Smith's *History* also says: "his decade of service was one of continual bickering, and in the end they [the parishioners] triumphed over him. He was suspended from his functions by Bishop Dubois,

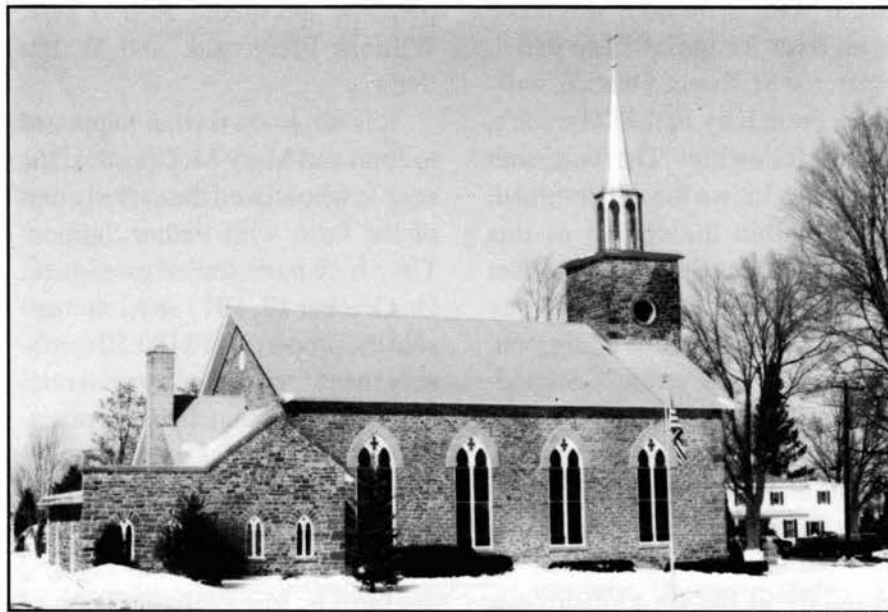


Photo by Stewart Wilson

Recent photograph of St. Mary's Church in Waddington. This church building was erected in 1847, twelve years after Father Salmon's death. The church was rebuilt in 1923.

probably on the occasion of his visit in 1835" (p.79 ff.). That seems highly unlikely, because Father Salmon had already died on July 11, 1835, and the Bishop's visit that year was in late August. Besides, we are told that no record of any censure or disapproval is contained in the archives of the New York Archdiocese regarding Father Salmon. History books can be confusing.

Our best insight into Father Salmon's country life may be contained in his last will and testament, filed in Canton (Liber 1, page 109 ff.). The will was drawn up on July 10, 1835, signed by Father James Salmon, and witnessed by Robert Tate, William Fitzgerald and Walter Drew. Mr. Michael Salmon, Father Salmon's first cousin, was named executor. Apparently Michael Salmon was given the farm because he and his wife Bridget were living with and car-

ing for the elderly priest.

The last will and testament details the portion of the farm owned outright and the portion farmed for a time by John McCormick, on which the mortgage was still outstanding, plus interest. In addition, Michael Salmon received a two year old mare, oxen, cows and sheep, hay, farming utensils, wagons, carts, sleighs, cutters and any other personal property on the farm lot or premises occupied by him. His house and lot in Ogdensburg were left in trust to his niece Mary Ann Salmon of the City of New York, when she came of age. His nephew James Salmon, son of his late brother Michael Salmon, also of New York City, received his gold watch and chain, his riding mare and young colt.

The will continues: "I desire to be decently buried in the ground belonging to the Roman Catholic Church at Saint Regis." Having

died at Madrid, his body was taken down river for burial. The parish register at St. Regis, Quebec, written in French by Father Marcoux, adds the following: "The fourteenth of July, 1835, we the undersigned, buried within the church of this Mission, James Salmon, a Roman Catholic Priest, who died the day before yesterday at Waddington, age seventy-one years." Signed: Patrick Foley, Lawrence Tarbell, and Francis Marcoux, priest.

Although Father Marcoux at St. Regis Church indicates that death occurred on July 12th, the sworn testimony at the time of probate states that Father James Salmon died at Madrid on or about the 11th day of July. We do not know which is correct. Appearing at the Surrogate Court on October 5th, 1835 were all the witnesses and beneficiaries: Michael Salmon of Madrid (cousin), James Salmon and Mary Ann Salmon of New York City

(nephew and niece), Robert Tate, William Fitzgerald, and Walter Drew.

It is not known what happened to John and Mary McCormick, the couple who shared the easterly part of the farm with Father Salmon. They may have settled elsewhere. On October 13, 1837 an auctioneer sold the property for \$189.50 (probably the principal and interest due) to Michael Salmon, legal representative of the late James Salmon. The mortgage records at Canton also show that Michael Salmon and Bridget, his wife, twice mortgaged the farm to Mr. Walter Wilson of Waddington, once to secure \$100 and later to secure \$190.

Things must have gone badly on the farm for Michael and Bridget because on April 21, 1842 the sheriff sold the mortgaged property, all fifty acres, for \$200 to Daniel Desmond. For years thereafter the farm was known as the Desmond

place. James Salmon, the nephew, and Mary Ann, the niece, must have gone back to New York City. In May 1848 they sold the house at Ogdensburg that belonged to Father Salmon.

Father Salmon was succeeded at Ogdensburg by Rev. Patrick Foley, who is mentioned in Father Salmon's will, as "of the Roman Catholic Church in Madrid and Oswegatchie." A provision was written to make Father Foley a trustee to hold the house at Ogdensburg until the niece Mary Ann came of age, but that was changed further in the will. Possibly Father Salmon's house at Ogdensburg was rented and occupied by Father Foley. He is recorded as a witness to the burial of Father Salmon at St. Regis Church. Tragically, Father Foley died young and was buried at Ogdensburg under the original church in August 1839.

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