

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association

Quarterly

Volume XLIV- Number 1- Winter 1999



The St. Lawrence County Historical Association at the Silas Wright House

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a private, not-for-profit, membership organization based at the Silas Wright House in Canton, New York. Founded in 1947, the Association is governed by a constitution, by-laws, and Board of Trustees. The Historical Association's membership meets annually to elect its officers and trustees.

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Membership in the St. Lawrence County Historical Association is open to all interested parties. Annual membership dues are: Individual, \$25; Senior/Student, \$20; Family, \$35; Contributor, \$50; Supporter, \$100; Patron, \$250; Businesses, \$50 to \$1,000. Members receive the *SLCHA Quarterly*, the Historical Association's bi-monthly newsletter, and various discounts on publications, programs and events.

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Cover Illustration

The grist mill on the Racquette River in Potsdam built in 1835. Torn down in 1972, it stood on the site of what is now a fast food restaurant just to the west of the Maple Street bridge.

Courtesy of Potsdam Museum (P2329h)

Building with Potsdam Red Sandstone: The Early Years

By Susan Omohundro

Introduction

One of the distinguishing characteristics of St. Lawrence County's architectural history is the prevalence of sandstone masonry. Use of sandstone for construction began early in the nineteenth century but tapered off after 1900. The quarries on a short stretch of the Racquette River near Potsdam produced a distinctive red sandstone. Forty buildings composed of that red sandstone remain in the county. This article is based on an inventory of those buildings undertaken in preparation of a group nomination for the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination identifies two distinct periods of sandstone use based on typical features of masonry and architecture. This article will report on the first, or pioneer period.

Potsdam Red Sandstone

The geological formation known as Potsdam sandstone was deposited about 500 million years ago in the late Cambrian to early Ordovician period. Within the state of New York, it occurs in a wide band that stretches across northern New York from the Thousand Islands in Jefferson County to Lake Champlain in Essex County. Geologists propose that these deposits represent a near-shore marine environment. By the late Cambrian period, the "Potsdam Sea," a shallow inland sea, lay north of the Adirondack Mountains. The clean sands were laid down near shore, until the land

began to rise, ending the deposition of new sand layers and beginning the long process of erosion.

It is the fine-grained quartz that makes Potsdam stone unusually durable for a sandstone and thus a good building material. When first removed from the beds, the wet stone may be cut or split fairly easily with hand tools, but exposure to air hardens it.

Major quarries in the Potsdam sandstone formation were located at Hammond, Malone, Fort Jackson, and Keeseville, but the "type site" geologists have adopted for the description of Potsdam sandstone is the Parmeter Ledge, located on the Racquette River near the Potsdam-Pierrepont town line. Ironically, the stone at this site is atypical of the unit as a whole because of its complex layering of beds, which may be the ancient remains of a river delta or sand dunes (Van Diver 1976:82). As well, the ledge's dark red color, which comes from iron, is not often seen in Potsdam sandstone elsewhere in the state.

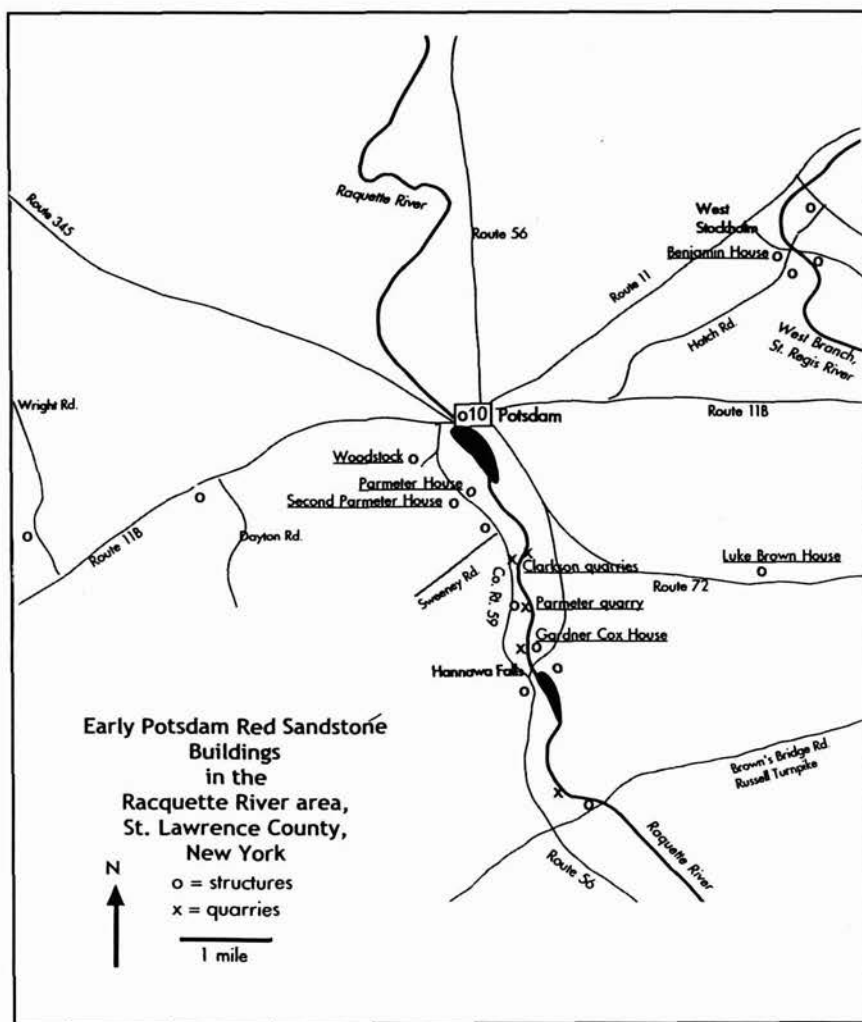
Quarries

The largest and most numerous quarries for Potsdam red sandstone in St. Lawrence County were located on the banks of the Racquette River, mostly on the west side, in the two mile section between Sugar Island (two miles south of Potsdam) and Hannawa Falls.

The layers of stone suitable for building material are about seventy feet thick.

The earliest Racquette River quarry is the Parmeter Ledge. It was opened by Nathaniel and Solomon Parmeter some time after 1809. By 1813, the *Gazetteer of the State of New York* reported, "Five quarries of stone are found on the Racket River, and by the remarks of a Correspondent, I should suppose they embraced both marble, and a reddish sand or free-stone." (Spafford 1813).

In the latter 19th century the Parmeter Ledge was expanded by the Potsdam Red Sandstone Company, which also took stone from several other locations opened by its predecessors along the Racquette's west-side riverbanks from the Parmeter Ledge south to Hannawa Falls. The Clarkson Sandstone Company quarries were closer to Potsdam village, on both sides of the river. Its earlier quarry was on the west side near where the Sugar Island dam was built in 1922. A later quarry was opened on the east side in 1877 just north of the present-day Hannawa Falls hydroelectric station. Unfortunately, to date we have found only a few scraps of documentation about any of these quarries. Most of these quarries were abandoned by 1922 when the Sugar Island dam was built, flooding the area. The Parmeter Ledge is the only site still being worked today.



Courtesy of John Omohundro

Periods of Sandstone Construction

Construction using Potsdam red sandstone occurred in two distinct periods, the pioneer and the industrial. The pioneer period began in the 1810s, when the first quarries were opened. Churches, barns, factories, commercial buildings, and, most notably, residences were built, all within a short distance of the quarries. The numerous local quarries made the stone accessible to private citizens, who used it to display their growing affluence and expectations of long-term socioeconomic stability. Masonry was usually laid in courses of smooth-surfaced stones of modest size. The pioneer period

ended about 1850, when there occurred a fifteen-year hiatus in sandstone masonry.

The industrial period began in 1868 when the quarries were mechanized and cut stone was transported by rail throughout the northeastern United States and into Canada. Most structures built in the industrial period were large institutional or commercial buildings in the newly popular ashlar masonry style, which used rough-surfaced, rectangular, randomly-sized blocks. Red sandstone industry and architecture flourished in the 1880s and 1890s, then gradually declined to extinction around 1920.

Early Masonry and Architecture

In the pioneer era, people tended to build their houses and work buildings with readily available materials. Stone was quarried and shaped using hand tools, then transported by cart, so it was carried only a few miles. Thus, the quarries were small and conveniently located, usually where sandstone was exposed naturally, along streams or cliff faces. Most of the early structures were private homes, mills, or farm buildings within ten miles of the quarries.

At first, the pioneer period's masonry style featured simple rectangular blocks in courses. The blocks typically measure three or four inches high and about twelve inches wide. Thus at a distance such masonry resembles brickwork. Usually the grain is horizontal. Normally only the front wall—the most prominent—has coursed rectangular blocks while the other walls employ smaller, more random stones.

There remain today only four buildings featuring rectangular blocks laid in courses: three residences and one commercial building.

The plain coursed-block style appears mostly in the oldest structures dated to the first half of the 1820s. Portions of a few buildings, especially their foundations or ground floors, may have been built before 1821, but the first sandstone structure for which reliable records remain is the 1821 Raymond-Knowles commercial building at 30 Market Street in Potsdam village, now occupied by Deborah A. Cady Jewelry. The Raymond-Knowles building is often de-



Potsdam's first sandstone building, at 30 Market Street. Note the small size of the stones.

The 1823 John Call house, now the Elks Club, has acquired a Victorian porch and roof brackets.



scribed as an “experiment” in sandstone construction. Good records kept by Sewall Raymond document the work of the masons for this building. Work began on May 26, 1821. The chief mason was a young immigrant, Anthony Furness. He and his helpers finished the masonry walls on August 14. For his seven weeks’ work, Furness was paid \$98.25 by Raymond and his partner, Liberty Knowles. Carpentry and ground leveling lasted into

September. Weather permitting, six to eight men might work on any given day. Many of them, including Furness, were boarded as part of their pay. The group of men also received about two bottles of whiskey a day from Raymond, who on two occasions complained about men who imbibed too much. Apparently Furness did not remain in town after his assignment was completed; he continued his trade in Ogdensburg and the St. Lawrence River valley.

Another mason, George Train, built what was probably the first red sandstone dwelling in the village of Potsdam. This is the John Call house at 10 Elm Street, built in 1823 in the simple rectangular coursed block style. This house is a five-bay, two-story Federal house with gable-end chimneys. The front of the house is rectangular stone blocks in courses, while the two sides have quite small, more randomly placed rectangular blocks. This building has been greatly modi-

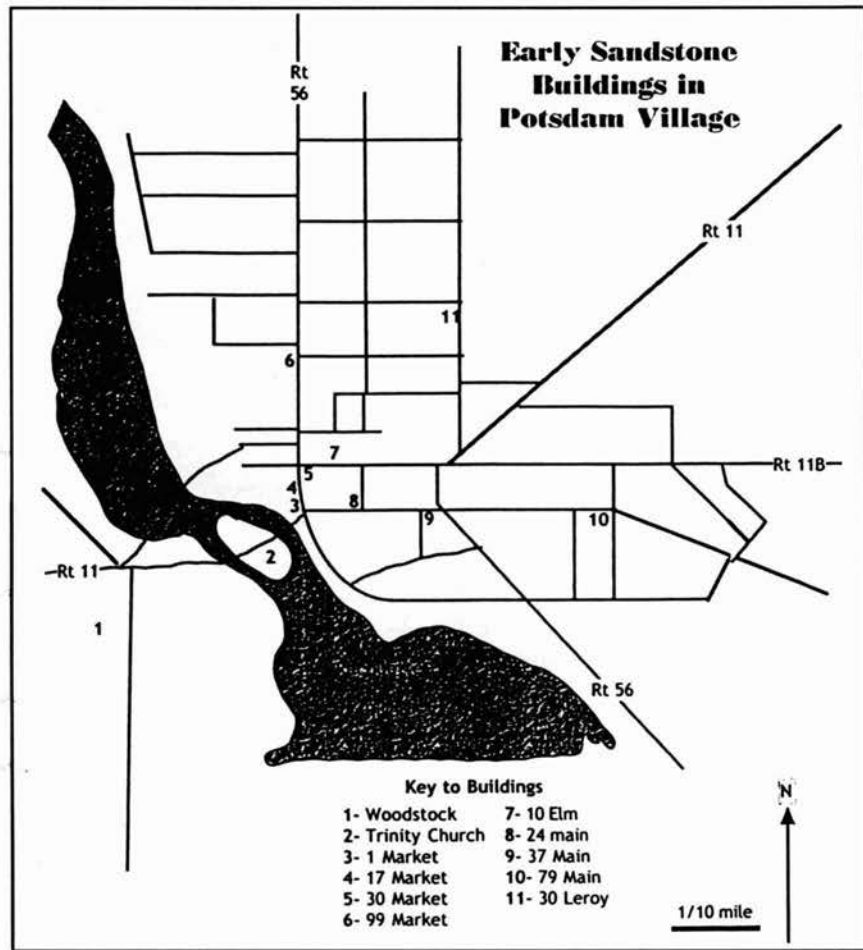
fied with additions and rearrangement of the interior and has served as a clubhouse since 1895.

The Luke Brown house on the Potsdam-Parishville Road (Route 72) is another two-story house built in 1823 using blocks in courses. This is also a five-bay, two-story Federal house. As in the Call house, the front wall has the most even and carefully composed stonework. The back wall of the house is buff-colored Fort Jackson sandstone, not Potsdam red sandstone. The windows have flared stone lintels but wooden sills. Another distinctive feature was a massive center chimney rather than the more common gable-end type. This house remains a family home, restored and maintained by Gary and Jane Snell.

The Slab and Binder Style

Following the plain coursed-block style of red sandstone masonry is the "slab and binder" style, which predominated in residential architecture from 1827 to 1850. This style seems to be unique to the Potsdam region. Its heyday was brief but it was very popular: the nineteen slab and binder houses extant today comprise almost half of the red sandstone buildings in the county. Several are (or were) farmhouses, and others are found in the hamlets of Hannawa Falls and West Stockholm as well as in the village of Potsdam. Two commercial buildings and one church in downtown Potsdam also display this style.

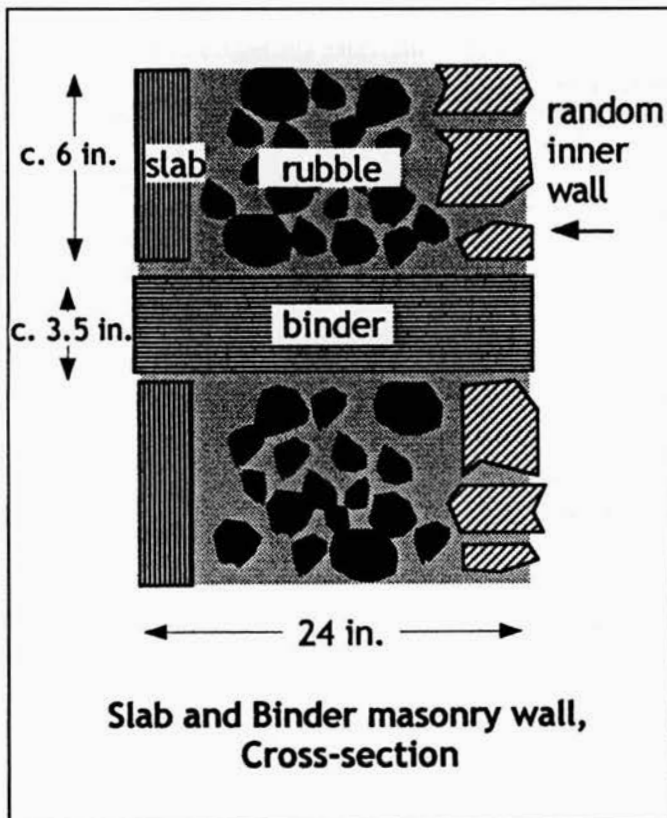
"Slab and binder" is a local label for a style in which even courses of stone alternate in width and the direction of layering. The binders are relatively



Courtesy of John Omohundro



The 1823 Luke Brown house, with circa 1870 additions on left.



Courtesy of John Omohundro



This close view shows the alternating layers of slab and binder masonry

narrow horizontal pieces reaching from front to back of the wall. They are usually three to four inches tall and have horizontal grain. The slabs are taller, thinner face pieces, laid so the layering is vertical, with mortared rubble behind. Walls are typically about two feet thick, including the inner wall of random stone and the rubble interfilling. It seems this style developed locally. The layering of the sedimentary quarry beds encouraged the use of large flat slabs; the binders create a strong wall, and the alternation of horizontal layering with the vertical slabs is visually pleasing, providing a brick-like regularity with long straight joints and rows varying in texture. In one or two cases, care was taken to choose slabs and binders that also differed dramatically in color.

Some buildings exhibit slab and binder masonry on all four sides, but often it is seen on only the front or the front and sides, the walls most often viewed by passersby. The less "public" walls in these houses are laid up with blocks of varied heights and widths, almost all with horizontal grain. Random stonework probably saved labor and, hence, money. In two houses the back, largely unseen, wall is not even of Potsdam sandstone.

Beginning in the latter 1820s, the "slab and binder" masonry style took the Potsdam area by storm. In the space of a few years, many residences and commercial buildings arose in village and countryside, all exhibiting this masonry style. By 1836, it was reported that "The use of Potsdam sandstone had been

steadily growing into favor, and many dwelling-houses had been built of that material, besides nearly all the large important buildings requiring great solidity" (Everts 1878:246).

Who invented the slab and binder style? Alternating thick and thin or rough and smooth courses in bricks and stone is not a rare practice, but we have found no antecedent for mounting the slab course on its edge. The closest parallel found to date is in the block-and-stack limestone buildings of southern Wisconsin, built between 1855 and 1885 by Swiss masons, but in this case, large blocks alternate with stacks of small horizontal stones within the course (Eisely 1991). The Vermont State Historical Office can locate no evidence that the slab and binder style developed

in their state (Gilbertson 1995). Was it a local innovation, relying on the strength of the rock and elaborating on the preceding simpler style of horizontal coursed blocks? Did the Clarksons import the style, per-

haps from New York City, or instigate its invention? The 1823 Luke Brown house offers some clues. Close examination reveals that portions of two walls adumbrate the slab and binder style. Several rows of the upper west

wall forward of the attic window alternate slabs and binders. Also, the upper left quarter of the back wall has rows of slabs and rows of binders, but not in alternation; slabs can be separated by one to four rows of binders. This house shows great variation in masonry on its four walls, and it looks like the masons were doing their best, most uniform work on the front wall and experimenting a bit on the other walls.



Now known as "Woodstock," this former Augustus Clarkson residence provides offices and meeting rooms for Clarkson University.

The 1825 St. Lawrence Academy (replaced in 1868) is said to have been slab and binder (Chapman 1956:11), but a rare pre-1868 photograph (Potsdam Museum, P848) shows that the front wall was a sterling example of fairly large rectangular blocks in uniform, even courses, while the side (north) wall had courses of smaller pieces over a foundation that appears to be slab and binder. The mason is said to have been a man named Alanson Fisher (Hough 1853: 540).



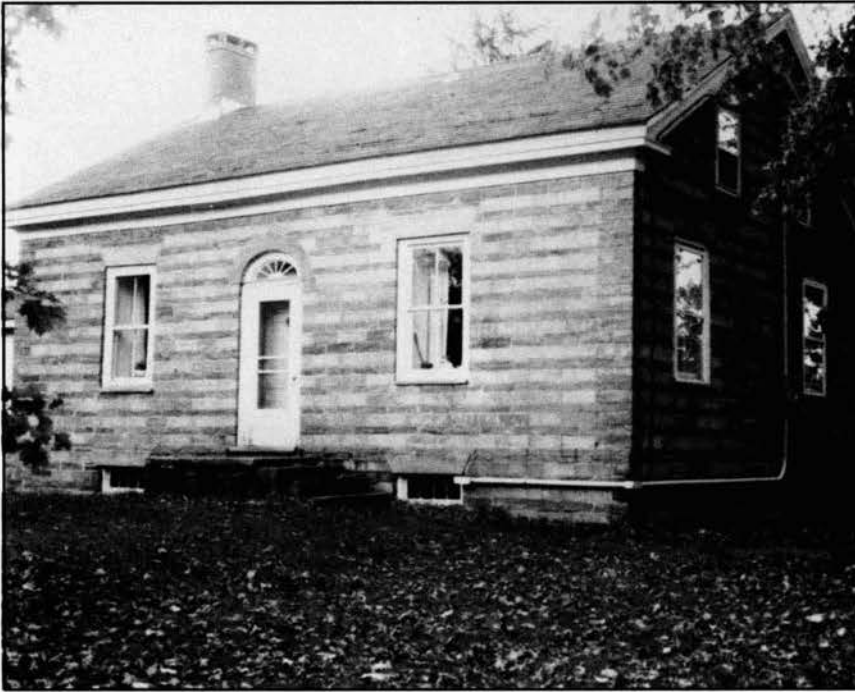
Courtesy of Potsdam Museum

The Jonathan Wallace house as it appeared around the turn of the century. About 1915 it acquired its current roofline and porch. In recent decades it has been owned by the Kaplan family.

In sum, the evidence suggests that the slab and binder style developed indigenously between 1823 and 1827. It is worth noting that the 1827 Clarkson house displays perfectly executed slab and binder work on all four sides, so it remains a possibility that Augustus Clarkson took a fancy to the style and/or that his family employed an anonymous, but creative and experienced, mason who realized the possibilities of the technique and used it to full effect. The origin of the term "slab and binder" remains obscure.

Slab and Binder Houses

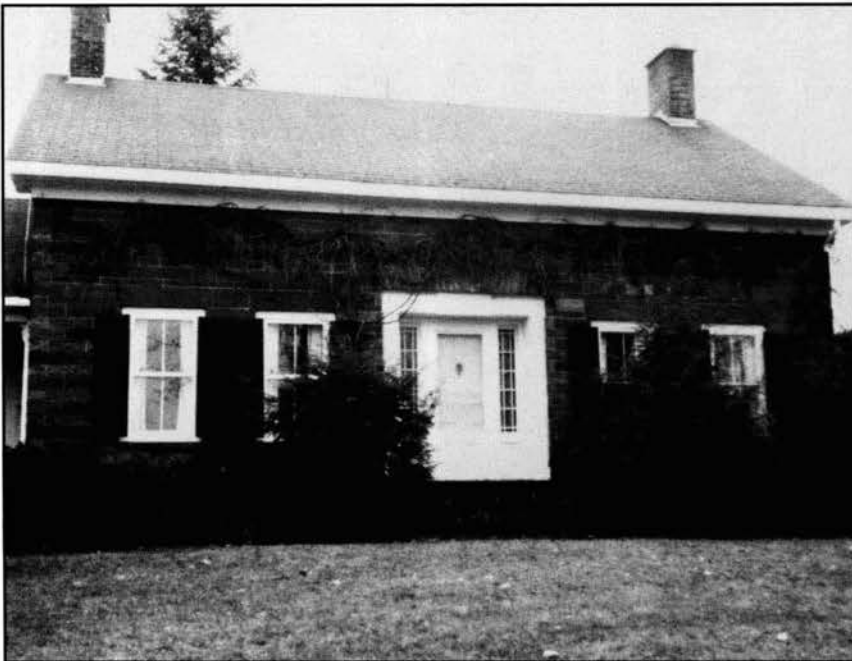
The first securely dated "slab and binder" house was built in 1827 in Potsdam on the Clarkson estate for twenty-five year old Augustus Clarkson. This build-



The Nathan Parmeter Sr. house, finished about 1830, probably by Nathan's son, Nathaniel. It has been owned by Dorothy Gordanier since 1935.

ing began as a five-bay house no more than forty feet wide, with a centered front doorway of Georgian style, excellent slab and binder masonry on all four sides, and a raised cellar. This house had two chimneys in each gable end, and was amply supplied with fireplaces on the ground floor, first floor, and second floor. A large stone addition on the right dates to the 1840s. The masonry matches the original work perfectly. The building did not have porches originally.

The second slab and binder house was built in 1828 on Market Street in Potsdam for Jonathan Wallace, a Universalist minister. It is a symmetrical, five-bay Georgian house with slab and binder masonry on the front and sides, while the back wall is more random. The house has a large slab and binder stone addition in back, dated about 1846. The hipped roof of this house makes it unusual in this region. Inside, many original features remain; the Adam-style woodwork over the fireplace is particularly attractive.



The Nathan Parmeter Jr. house, circa 1839, now the Garner residence.

On the Back Hannawa Road (County Rt. 59) two excellent examples of slab and binder masonry face each other. Both were built by the Parmeter family, well known as operators of the first and best quarry about two miles south at the Parmeter Ledge. The earlier example, on the east side of the road, was finished about 1830. It is a Federal cottage with slab and binder masonry on three sides. On the west side of the road is a Greek Revival cottage, also built by the Parmeter family, again with slab and binder masonry on three sides. It was built about ten years later, and changes in style are pronounced. The stone in the earlier house has

an orange tone, whereas the later house is deep red, a color which grew in favor. The earlier house is relatively unadorned on the exterior, though the front doorway has an attractive one-piece stone arch and fanlight. The later house has abundant decorative stonework and woodwork, as shown in the front doorway, where twenty-one tapered stones, called voussoirs, form a flared lintel. The earlier house retains three fireplaces, including one on the ground floor; by 1840 cast-iron wood stoves were in vogue. The second Parmeter house is the only early stone farmhouse to possess a stone barn.

The Clarkson-Knowles house at 37 Main Street in Potsdam is a well-preserved Federal cottage built between 1830 and 1837, probably for use by families whose heads worked at the St. Lawrence Academy or its trustee, the Presbyterian Church. The front has slab and binder masonry. Its historic value was recognized in 1995 when it was placed on the National Register.

The first red sandstone house built in the Greek Revival style was built by David Clarkson in 1836 on his farm just north of Potsdam village (now Leroy and Garden Streets). Here we see the first use of voussoirs to form a flared lintel over the front doorway and decorative woodwork around the doorway. This house has slab and binder masonry on all four sides (except for part of the back wall where there once was a porch). The house looks large and impressive, yet is only twenty-eight feet deep. It is important to note that the massive Greek Revival porches (removed in 1999) and wooden wing were added by General Edwin Merritt when he bought the house after



Bob and Ellen Burns restored the Clarkson-Knowles Federal cottage in Potsdam.



The 1836 David Clarkson mansion, later known as the General Merritt house. The Clarksons' influence in sandstone architecture is evident in that several stone houses in the Greek Revival style were constructed soon after this one.



The Cox house in Hannawa Falls.

Note the similarity of the Greek Revival front doorway to that of the Nathan Parmeter Jr. house, which was built just one year later.

the Civil War. This entailed altering stonework around some of the windows and doors. In 1937 the David Clarkson mansion became an apartment building and the interior was modified, but some original features remain, chiefly fireplaces and moldings.

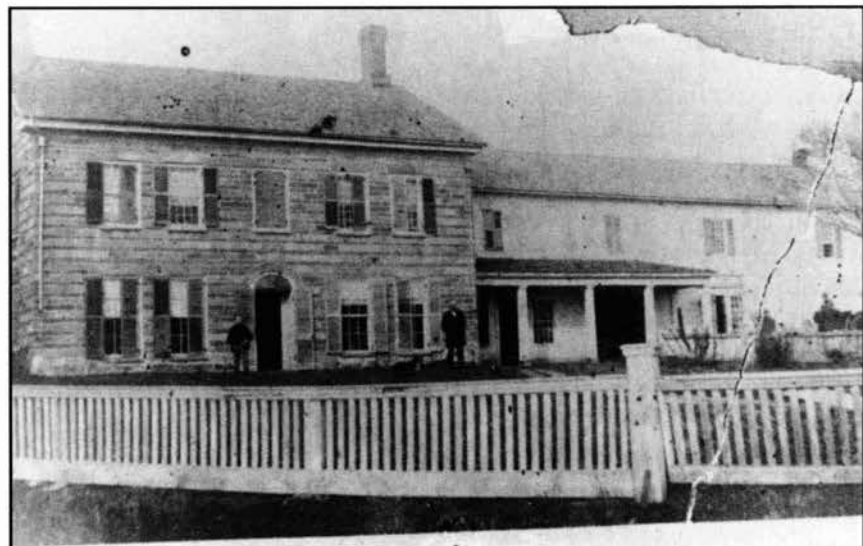
Aaron Hopkins built a substantial slab and binder stone residence at 24 Main St. in 1837. It features a Greek Revival front entry. The woodwork around the fireplace matches that on his nearby stone tannery's facade between the second and third stories. Furthermore, there are numerous similarities of floor plan, decoration, and masonry with the 1838 Cox house in Hannawa Falls.

Hannawa Falls is an outlying hamlet featuring a number of red sandstone houses. Of these, the most prominent was built in 1838 by Gardner Cox, the

founder of Hannawa Falls, using stone taken from his own properties along the Racquette River. The house has slab and binder masonry on the front and sides,

random stone on the back. This house, while traditional (Georgian) in layout, features Greek Revival embellishment. It is one of our best-preserved stone houses and was listed on the National Register in 1985.

The hamlet of West Stockholm boasts four houses that incorporate slab and binder sandstone masonry. Of these, the best example is the Benjamin house. Though built by the Bicknells, the founders of West Stockholm, probably around 1828-1830, it has been known as the Benjamin house for the long-time 19th century cheese factory owners. This house is unusual in its design: it is a bank house, with one primary doorway on the ground floor facing east toward the St. Regis River and a second primary doorway on the second floor facing west, where the original road was located. The sandstone is laid in slab and binder on all four sides of the house.



Courtesy of Stockhom Historical Organization

The Benjamin house in West Stockholm as it appeared when it was owned by the Benjamins.

Characteristics of Sandstone Houses

The twenty-three early sandstone houses share several characteristics. About half are one-and-one-half story cottages. Most of these cottages were farmhouses. Some are plain and utilitarian, but the majority have enough embellishment to show that the farms were prosperous when their farmhouses were erected. An indication of how much the local economy has changed is that no stone farmhouse still sits on a working farm. However, most of the rural properties retain most or all of their acreage, and some retain outbuildings, so the change in function is not immediately apparent.

The typical stone house from the pioneer era, whether in slab and binder or in plain coursed block, has a centered front doorway. All houses have one or more auxiliary entrances on the side and/or back. Some cottages have three bays, some five; the two story houses are all five bay. All but the Wallace house has a gable roof, usually with one chimney at each gable end. Side walls usually have two windows per floor. Often, the cellar is raised and receives natural light.

The majority of the pioneer period houses have wooden wings. Many houses had them by design, to contain summer kitchen, workrooms, storage, privy and similar rough functions. Some, like the Benjamin house, acquired them later, when more room was needed.

With few exceptions, windows have flared or square stone lintels and stone sills. Originally, the larger windows were twelve over twelve sash, while the smaller ones were usually nine

over six. Cellar windows often had a single row of panes. Only a few buildings retain original window sashes.

Inside, a centered front hall is typical, with one or two rooms on each side. The stairway to the second floor is narrow and enclosed (but some of these have been altered). Upstairs, the larger houses have four or five bedrooms, and the smaller houses two or four. The majority of the cottages have acquired dormers, as their owners realized the upstairs rooms were too low and dark for comfort.

The Federal houses tend to possess less ornament than the Greek Revival era houses, and some have little or no decorative moldings around doorways and windows. Some of the Greek Re-

vival houses display a variety of individually created moldings in public rooms and around doorways, windows and fireplaces. The bigger houses have paneled doors and window embrasures and sometimes paneling under the windows of formal rooms.

Early Sandstone Public Buildings

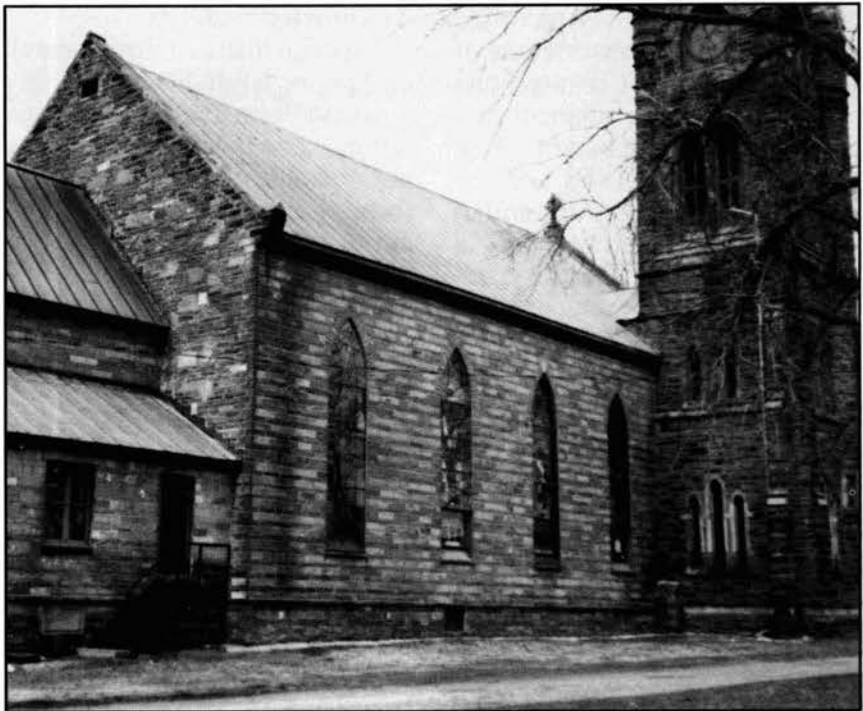
Two commercial buildings feature slab and binder masonry. Both are on Market Street in Potsdam. The corner building at 1 Market Street was built by Aaron Hopkins about 1840 as a tannery. The front portion of the building measured about twenty by twenty-five feet; the back half is an early, non-stone addition. The masonry is in good condition. On the side wall is a circa 1880 stencil of a horseshoe; the building continued to house a



The former Hopkins Tannery at 1 Market St. is a well-preserved example of slab and binder masonry in a commercial structure.

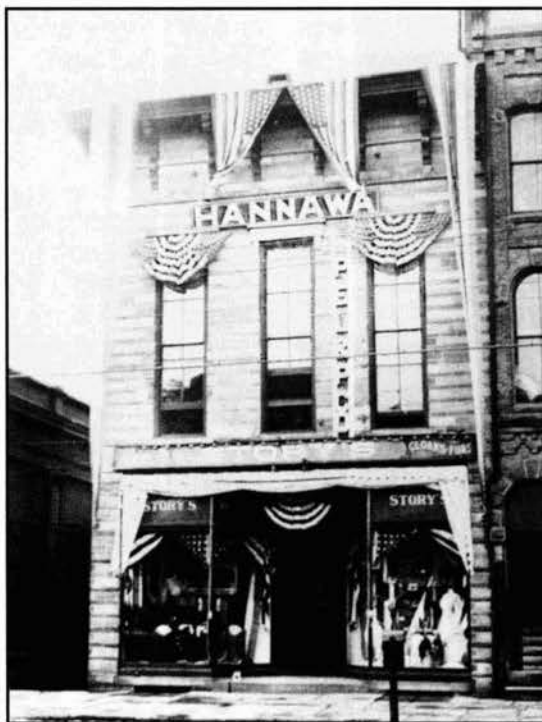
harness and leather business until after 1915. At some point the style of the roofline was updated with Italianate brackets, but the other wood trim appears to be original.

The other slab and binder commercial building is at 17 Market Street. It was built in 1835 by Zenas Clark, a local businessman of many pursuits. This was a general store. The front and side walls are slab and binder, the back wall random. Examination of the walls shows extensive alteration over time, with many doors and windows filled in with stone. In particular, around 1875-1880 the building was remodeled from three stories to two; all the front window openings were altered at this time and the cornice modified.



Potsdam's beautiful Trinity Church was largely a creation of the Clarkson family.

This view shows the slab and binder masonry of the side walls.



Courtesy of Potsdam Museum (P659)

A 1909 photograph of 17 Market Street showing Story's Dry Goods on the first floor and Hannawa Electric Light and Power Company on the second floor. This circa 1835 building is now occupied by the Isle of You.

The slab and binder walls of Trinity Episcopal Church on Fall Island in Potsdam rose in 1835, using sandstone donated by the Clarkson family, on land donated by the Town's founding proprietors. John Clarkson took a personal interest in its design, specifying that it should be "a neat Gothic edifice of stone, forty-four by sixty-four feet," and modeled on Trinity Church in New York City. The church was greatly enlarged and modified in the 1880s and now shows an ashlar red sandstone facade. However, the original slab and binder side walls remain.

The Settlers' Legacy

The pioneer period's use of slab and binder masonry diminished noticeably in the 1840s. The last known house built in the slab and binder style was the Alexander Brown house in Hermon, dated 1854 (demol-

ished in 1995). The last recorded slab and binder construction of any sort occurred at Trinity Episcopal Church. The chancel and sacristy were added to the 1835 building in 1858 and the west side wall was extended fourteen feet forward in 1886. In fact, until ashlar masonry became popular, beginning in 1868, little sandstone construction of any sort was undertaken for about fifteen years. I can only speculate about the reasons for this hiatus. Probably several factors were involved. After the railroad arrived, in 1850, brick became a popular building material. Also, lumber, a more convenient building material than the labor-intensive sandstone, was becoming cheaper and more abundant as gangmills spread throughout northern New York in the late 1840s (McMartin 1994:27). Finally, also, it is likely that the disruptions of the Civil War temporarily weakened local industry.

It is hard to imagine future conditions under which Potsdam red sandstone masonry would be revived and local quarries would once again produce blocks and slabs for local residences and public buildings. Meanwhile, approximately half of the early sandstone buildings are still standing, although most are threatened by neglect or misuse. This stems partly from economic pressures, of course, but partly from lack of appreciation.

About the Author

Susan Omohundro and her husband John began to investigate local history and sandstone construction after they bought the Gardner Cox house on the Racquette River in Hannawa Falls in 1983.

Acknowledgements

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Credits

All illustrations are courtesy of the author except where otherwise noted.

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Mial R. Pierce: Clergyman/Soldier

by Richard G. Hutchinson

Mial Richard Pierce was an unlikely soldier when he enlisted in the 92nd Regiment of New York Infantry being raised in Potsdam during the fall of 1861. At the age of forty-six, he was already older than the average recruit by some twenty-eight years and had three grown sons and a daughter by his first wife, Provider Roxford of Black Lake. His second wife was Elisabeth Colburn of Waddington, and she would provide him with two daughters during the course of the war.

He was well-known throughout the North Country as a circuit-riding Methodist minister, preaching to congregations throughout much of St. Lawrence County from his home base in Norfolk. During this period he became convinced of the evils of slavery, and was active in the abolitionist movement. It was this conviction that led him to enlist in the Union Army despite his age (and over the objections of his wife).

Regardless of his age, Mial Pierce was an imposing figure. In an era when recruits averaged approximately five feet eight, he stood six feet two and had piercing black eyes that commanded attention from those around him. Perhaps it was these qualities that persuaded the commander of the 92nd (Colonel Jonah Sanford) to appoint him as Regimental Chaplain to the thousand men now gathered in Potsdam. His second eldest son, James, enlisted in the same regiment and

became Second Lieutenant of Company "C". His other two sons later joined other regiments.

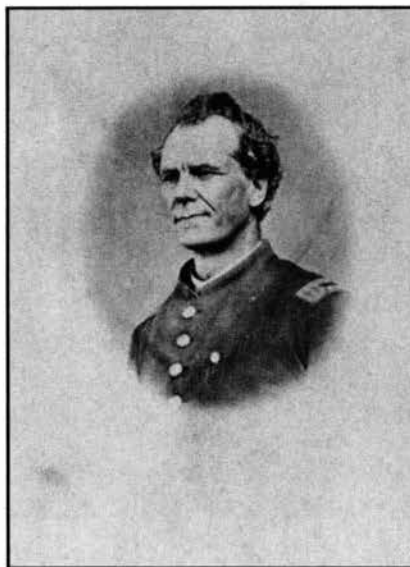
During the fall of 1861 and early winter of 1862, the regiment trained at "Camp Union" sprawled across the fields between Market and Leroy streets and back as far as Castle Drive. By February of 1862, the regiment was deemed fit for combat and left Potsdam by train for Washington D.C. and thence to the battlefields of Virginia.

By May of 1862, the regiment was thrust directly into the Peninsular Campaign southeast of Richmond, and was engaged in several major battles including Yorktown, Williamsburg, Fair Oaks and Seven Pines. This Union offensive fell apart when

the Confederate forces now under Robert E. Lee counterattacked and drove the entire Union Army back to its fortifications along the James River. During that Confederate attack, the 92nd was mired in the Chickahominy River swamps, dealing not only with the enemy but with rain and suffocating heat. Disease took a heavy toll, and one of those struck down with a near-fatal case of typhoid was Mial Pierce. Weakened by his ordeal, he spent the remainder of the summer in the hospital, and in September he was honorably discharged at Fort Monroe, Virginia, and came home to Norfolk.

After convalescing at home during the winter of 1862-63, and fretting about his disease-shortened military career, he set out to raise a company of North Country men (approximately 100) and was himself mustered back into service, this time as captain in the 14th New York Heavy Artillery, commanding the company he had raised. After training during the fall and winter of 1863, he moved to the command of two companies of the 6th New York Artillery, and found himself in the bloodbaths of Spotsylvania (May 8-21, 1864), and Cold Harbor (June 1-3, 1864), as Grant tried to break through Lee's lines defending Richmond.

As an indication of the fact that life went on even under the dreadful circumstances of these battles, there is a note among his



Courtesy of Richard G. Hutchinson

*Captain Mial R. Pierce
in uniform, 1861.*

personal effects dated June 11, 1864, with the heading "Bivouac at Cold Harbor" in which he promised to pay \$10.00 "for value received" to another soldier. Since he obviously got the note back, we can only assume that the debt was paid.

In any event, the swampy terrain around Cold Harbor (and Richmond) claimed him once more. What the affliction was is never fully stated in medical papers from the National Archives, except to mention that he had a high fever, asthma, and a numbness in the lower part of his legs and feet. He was transferred to a hospital in Washington, and his wife was sent for in the fear that he might not live.

Despite his many afflictions, however, Mial Pierce came home, and after the war he moved to Burke in Franklin County to become the minister of the Methodist Church in that village. Like many of his comrades, he never fully recovered from the ravages of disease, and was eventually granted an invalid pension of \$20.00 per month by the government.

Mial Pierce died in Burke in 1887, and there is an imposing monument to his memory in the cemetery just outside of town. Like so many thousands of others during that turbulent period in our history, he was a unique example of conviction and courage under the most trying of human circumstances.

About the Author

Dr. Hutchinson is a Professor Emeritus at SUNY Potsdam and is a great-grandson of Mial Richard Pierce.

Sources

Recollections, notes, and personal effects of Mial Pierce kept by the author's mother and grandmother: Minnie Pierce Smith (daughter of Mial Pierce), Elisabeth Smith Hutchinson (granddaughter of Mial Pierce)

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Potsdam Museum, Potsdam, New York



Courtesy of Richard G. Hutchinson

*Mial R. Pierce and his family about 1875 or 1876.
From left: second wife, Elizabeth Colburn Pierce;
daughters, Minnie Pierce (author's grandmother) and Louise Pierce.*

Grandpa Charles Haley: October 18, 1859-June 14, 1936

An excerpt from
The Nichols Family Biography
by James S. Nichols

Hackmen at the turn of the century plied the streets of Ogdensburg with their rigs before the days of automobiles, taxis, and traffic jams. Charles Haley for thirty-eight years was one of the city's leading hackmen—horse-drawn cab drivers.

Grandpa Haley got started in the hack business with the help of Dr. Benton, a friend who worked with my Grandmother, Mrs. Charles Haley, ministering to the poor, unfortunate and the afflicted. Dr. Benton was famous for forgetting purposely to charge

his patients but had acquired a hack which had been given to him as payment on a bill.

One of Dr. Benton's workers on his farm was Albert Haley, Grandpa's brother. When visiting his brother one day on the farm, Dr. Benton approached Grandpa with a proposition.

"Charlie, this hack isn't doing me any good sitting here. Why don't you take it and go to the Ogdensburg fair and we'll divide whatever you make in half."

"But I've only got one horse."

"Well," said the Doctor, "you can take one of mine which is a good match with yours."

So Grandpa spent a week in September working the Ogdensburg fair. At twenty-five cents a fare, it was a lucrative business. Dr. Benton was so impressed he suggested that Haley go to the Canton fair (eighteen miles) and to the Gouverneur fair (thirty-one miles). Upon conclusion of the



Courtesy of James S. Nichols

Ogdensburg hackmen—Charles Haley, Joseph Tovette, and Saul Grenier—about 1915.

fairs, the doctor said, "You seem to be pretty good at this business. I'll tell you what. Let's settle on a price and I'll take what you've given me so far as a down payment on the horse and the hack." Grandpa agreed and was in business driving the hack for the next thirty-eight years.

The standard hack was a handsome coach with a door on either side of the cab and two seats facing each other. Thus there was room for four passengers and room for one more passenger up front with the driver. The hacks were built so that in the winter the wheels could be removed and replaced with sleigh runners. To fight the cold of Ogdensburg winter, Grandma Haley would heat four or five bricks in the oven, wrap them in newspapers, and Grandpa would place them on the floor of the cab to keep the passengers' feet warm.

Most hackmen took great pride in their rigs. However one hackman's cab and horses were not so well kept. His hack was popularly known as "the boneyard" because that is where it looked like his horses should be heading—shot and buried.

Old timers recall the story about a man hiring a hack at the Seymour House Hotel to take him to the Rutland Railroad one mile away. As soon as he got in, he fell through the floorboards. The driver did not hear his shouts and the unfortunate passenger had to run all the way to the depot.

One year, my grandfather and a friend went to Rochester, picked up a number of hacks and wagons to sell in Ogdensburg. The big lamps which eventually

adorned my Uncle Fred and Aunt Liane's front doorways at 600 Proctor Avenue, Ogdensburg, were purchased on this trip. Grandpa paid fifty cents for the pair of lamps.

The hackman started his day early. He might have a call to take someone to catch the milk train which left the Rutland Depot at 7:30 a.m. Hackmen usually met all the trains—New York Central, Rutland, DeKalb Line—and the ferry from Prescott, sometimes calling out, "Hack for Seymour House Hotel" or "Hack for Normand Hotel."

Between meeting the trains and ferry if a driver had no other business, he would wait for calls at the hackstand on State Street close to the Seymour House Hotel. Sometimes, he was lucky to get business at christenings, marriages, or funerals. Standard fares were twenty-five cents anywhere in the City of Ogdensburg, fifty cents to the State Hospital. On a good day, a hackman made about six or seven dollars. Fifteen dollars was fantastic.

I can remember the story I heard years ago of Grandpa holding out his hands with pennies he had earned in his fists. His children—my aunts, my mother, and my uncle—were to guess the number. If correct, they were rewarded.

The State Hospital had an arrangement with Grandpa to carry patients and attendants from the train station to the hospital. He was paid \$1.50 for each trip, a distance of about eight miles.

The hack was the transportation of choice for the businessman and the middle class. The horse-drawn hack offered as

much safety and comfort as almost anyone could ask. As the nineteenth century receded into the past, the existence of the hack became more and more threatened. Eventually, the hack could not compete with the speed of the newcomer, the automobile.

My grandfather retired from the hack business during the 1920s and he started a truck vegetable farm including corn for thirty cents a dozen, thirteen ears to a dozen. He delivered all over the city in horse and wagon. Often his son, Charles Frederick Haley, assumed the duty of delivering the vegetables. The Nichols boys, Howard, James, and Frederick, sometimes accompanied them.

About the Author

Born and raised in Ogdensburg, New York, James S. Nichols attended Ogdensburg Free Academy. After graduating from St. Lawrence University in 1935, he worked for Alcoa for thirty-three years beginning as a clerk and becoming the chief of production planning, first at the Massena works and then at the Edgewater, New Jersey works. He then worked for fourteen years for John Royal & Sons, a machinery manufacturer. He now resides in Whiting, New Jersey. His complete *Nichols Family Biography* is in the archives of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.

Sources

An article by Brian Gardam in the "At Your Leisure" section of the Ogdensburg *Advance News* Feb. 13, 1977 provided the author with background information for this story.

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