

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association

Quarterly

Volume XLV- Number 1 - Win. 2000



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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Our Mission

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a not-for-profit membership organization and museum which serves as an educational resource for the use and benefit of the citizens of St. Lawrence County and others interested in the County's history and traditions. The Association collects and preserves archival material and artifacts pertinent to the County's history. In cooperation and collaboration with other local organizations, the Association promotes an understanding of and appreciation for the County's rich history through publications, exhibits, and programs. The St. Lawrence County Historical Association operates within museum standards established by the American Association of Museums.

SLCHA Membership

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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The SLCHA Quarterly welcomes contributions. To submit a manuscript, or for further information, please contact the editor through the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. Please address communications to: Managing Editor, *The SLCHA Quarterly*, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.

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Issue Editor:
Pamela Ouimet

Cover Illustration

Logs are traveling down the Racquette River, Town of Potsdam.
Photo taken in July, 1903.

Courtesy of SLCHA

Editor's Note:

The stories printed in this edition of the Quarterly were submitted by Susan Lyman quite some time ago. Please be aware that some of the information pertaining to some of the more recent statistics (i.e. home ownership, etc.) may now be outdated.

We appreciate your attention to these details.

Correction from vol. 44, no. 3 (Summer 1999):

Page 4, column 3, paragraph 8 includes incorrect information. Courtesy of Susan Lyman, Village of Norwood Historian and author of this article: the founder of the Village of Norwood was Benjamin Baldwin, not Benjamin Raymond.

Town of Potsdam

By Susan Lyman,
Retiring Town of Potsdam Historian

Like ancient Gaul, Potsdam is divided into three parts. To the north is the Village of Norwood, which was known by a bewildering series of names from 1850 to 1875, and to the west are the hamlets of Slab City and West Potsdam (Smith's Corners).

The history of St. Lawrence County and Potsdam township dates from the close of the Revolutionary War in 1783, when there was a need to promote settlement of the northern part of New York State in order to create a buffer zone for the Mohawk Valley. The English had been stripped of vast tracks of unexplored land south of the Saint Lawrence River, which had been acquired through English crown grants and treaties with the Indians.

All of what is now Norwood was once Indian country; part of a vast timbered unknown and unsettled hunting territory of rival tribes. By 1650, the Iroquois tribes, home based in the Mohawk Valley, had driven out their enemies and the Mohawks enjoyed the spoils of their victories, the Raquette River full of fish and the forests full of game.

A land commissioner committee was created in 1786 to provide for the sale of this land, divided into 10 townships of 64,000 acres. In each township a Gospel and school lot were set aside. These townships were sold at a public auction in New York City in 1787.

Land speculator Alexander Macomb bought almost the entire area, making two purchases, one in 1787 and the other in 1792. He had over-extended his resources and was forced to sell his holdings to wealthy New York City men. William Edgar, Daniel McCormick, and William Constable bought land including the Town of Potsdam and conveyed tracts of land to Garrett Van Horne & David Clarkson. Herman LeRoy, Nicholas Fish, Levinus Clarkson, John C. Clarkson, William Bayard, Thomas Ogden and James McEvers acquired land through separate deeds.

A party of men led by Benjamin Wright arrived in 1799 to explore and survey this Macomb purchase. They have been said to be the first white men who trod in the virgin woods of Northern New York. They were also interested in the Raquette River as a means of transportation and to learn how far it was navigable.

Potsdam, named for the ancient Prussian capitol, was first settled about 1803 by Benjamin Raymond, land agent for Clarkson and Associates. People came from the over populated New England states and from Central New York.

According to Marguerite Gurley Chapman's Early History of Potsdam, there were four main Indians trails through this wilderness.

The main war and fur trader route to Albany was up the Mohawk River, across the carry where Rome stands today, over the Oneida Lake and down the river to Oswego, down Lake Ontario to the St. Lawrence River. It was this route that Benjamin Raymond used.

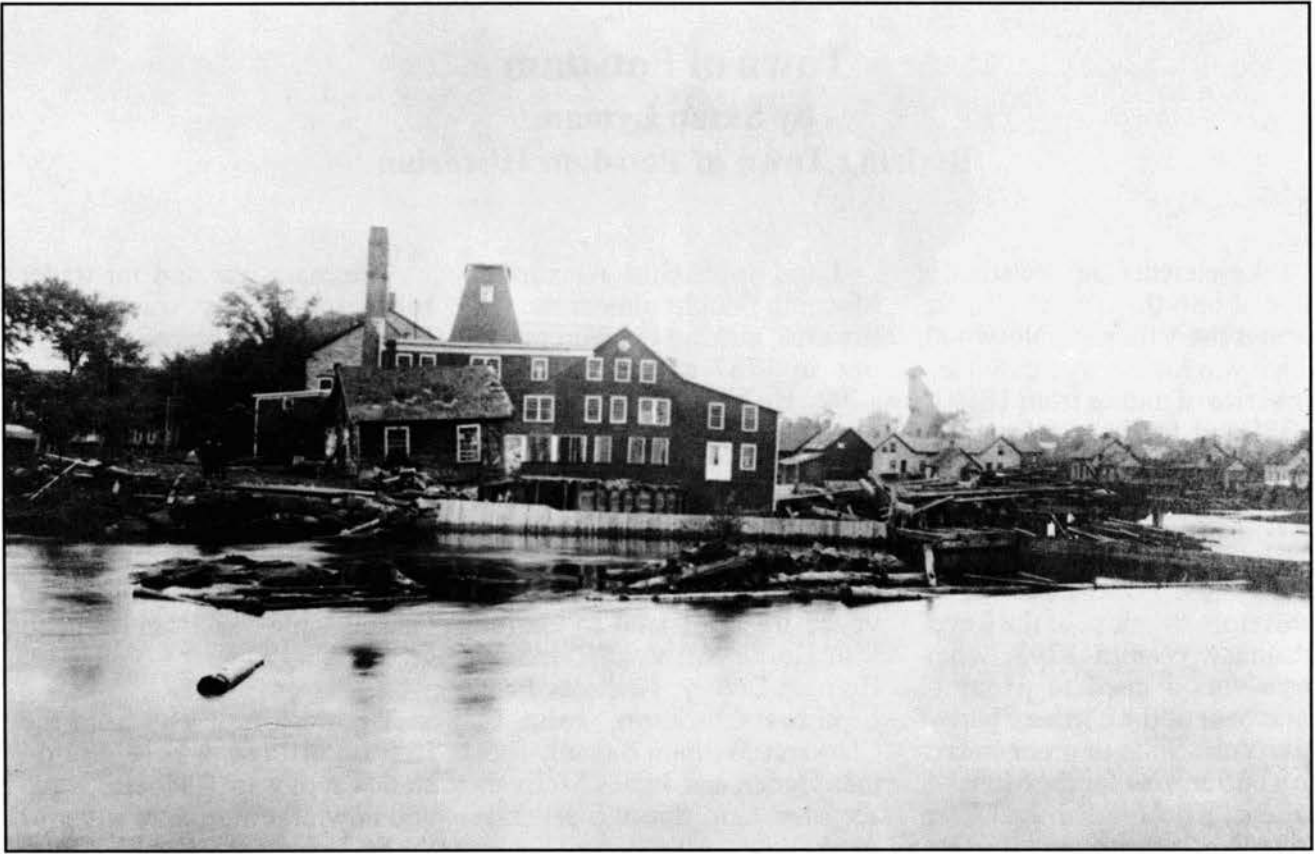
The second trail was the Oswegatchie trail from Rome to Ogdensburg.

The third trail was from the Indian village where Fonda stands today to Raquette Lake and down the Raquette River to the St. Lawrence River. Sir John Johnson, his Tory friends and Indian allies, including Joseph Brandt, used this route to escape to Canada early in the Revolutionary War.

The fourth trail was from Onondaga Castle near Syracuse to Clayton.

Another jumping off place for New Englanders was Royalton, Vermont, across the Chateaugay swamp and west into the rich farmlands of St. Lawrence County.

The Potsdam Township, number three of the ten townships, was formed in 1806. The Village of Potsdam was incorporated in 1831. It rapidly became a cultural and trading center because of the early churches, schools, newspapers and library, along with industries of every sort.



Courtesy SLCHA

Logs being processed down the Racquette River in Potsdam

Dr. Henry Hewitt, a Potsdam physician interested in hydro-power, asked the state legislature for \$10,000 to help improve the river's channel so that logs could be floated down to be sawed into lumber. When his request was affirmed and the improvement made in 1849, Dr. Hewitt set up a gang saw mill and the hamlet of Hewittville came about.

The Raquette River Paper Company, which was built in nearby Unionville in 1891, has changed hands a number of times but is still operational.

In 1804, about fifteen families from New England purchased more than 2,400 acres of land about two miles north of

Potsdam and formed a commune, "The Union." The property was held in common stock, each family sharing equally in the proceeds of their labor. It was dissolved in a few years when the industrious members resented their indolent partners. Lands were divided and most of the members continued to live on the trade and run prosperous farms.

A Seventh Day Adventist Church was formed in 1856 at Buck's Bridge with fifteen members. The church is now in Canton.

John Smith, uncle of Mormon leader Joseph Smith, was a very early settler in Potsdam. He went to Utah where he became a high

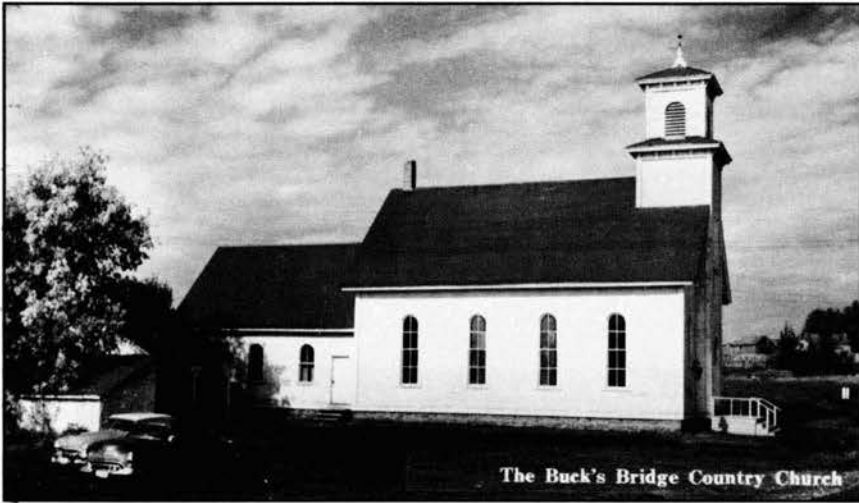
priest in the Mormon Church. A very active Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is in Potsdam and makes its vast genealogy records available to the public on a weekly basis.

The Village of Potsdam supported the usual foundries: machine shops, grist and saw mills, tanners, lumber businesses, sash and door factory, cutlery works, milk condensing plant, cheese factory, Sandstone quarries, Thatcher's milk bottle and butter color factory, milk sugar factory, textile mills and paper mills, along with merchants.

But education has been Potsdam's main industry for more than a century. As early as 1811, Potsdam's children were



Sandstone Quarry



The Buck's Bridge Country Church

Buck's Bridge Country Church

All three photos Courtesy SLCHA

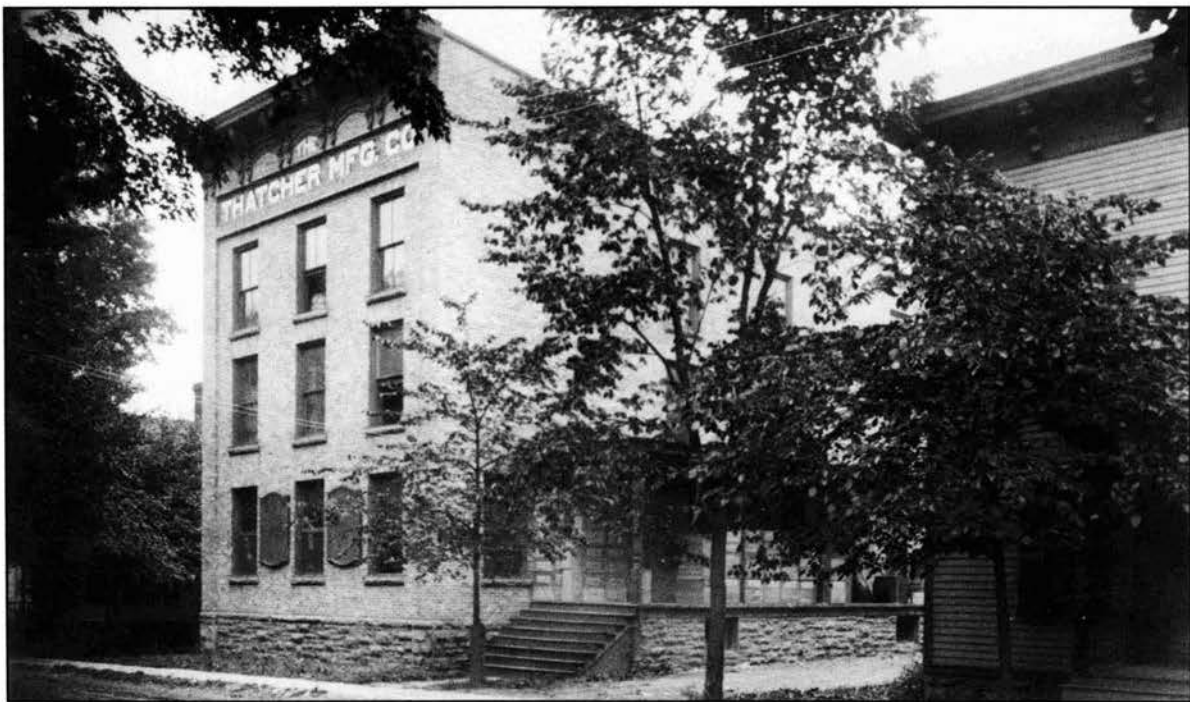


Sandstone Quarry



Courtesy SLCHA

D. A. & W. A. Moore's Door, Sash, & Blind Factory



Courtesy SLCHA

Thatcher Manufacturing Company

taught by James Johnson, a teacher-minister and Harvard graduate, in a church-school on Union Street. By 1825 the building became too small so the first building in what became the St. Lawrence Academy was built. In 1835, another sandstone building was erected and used for teachers' training. When the State decided to establish a Normal School, they chose Potsdam because of the fine record St. Lawrence Academy had made in teachers' training. The Academy was sold to the State and the first Normal School was built in 1867 and rebuilt in 1917. It became Potsdam State Teachers College in 1942, and in 1948 moved to a new campus on Pierrepont Avenue (Route 56) and became part of the State Univer-

sity system. The campus has more than two dozen buildings including those used by the Crane School of Music, which had been established in 1886 by Julia Etta Crane.

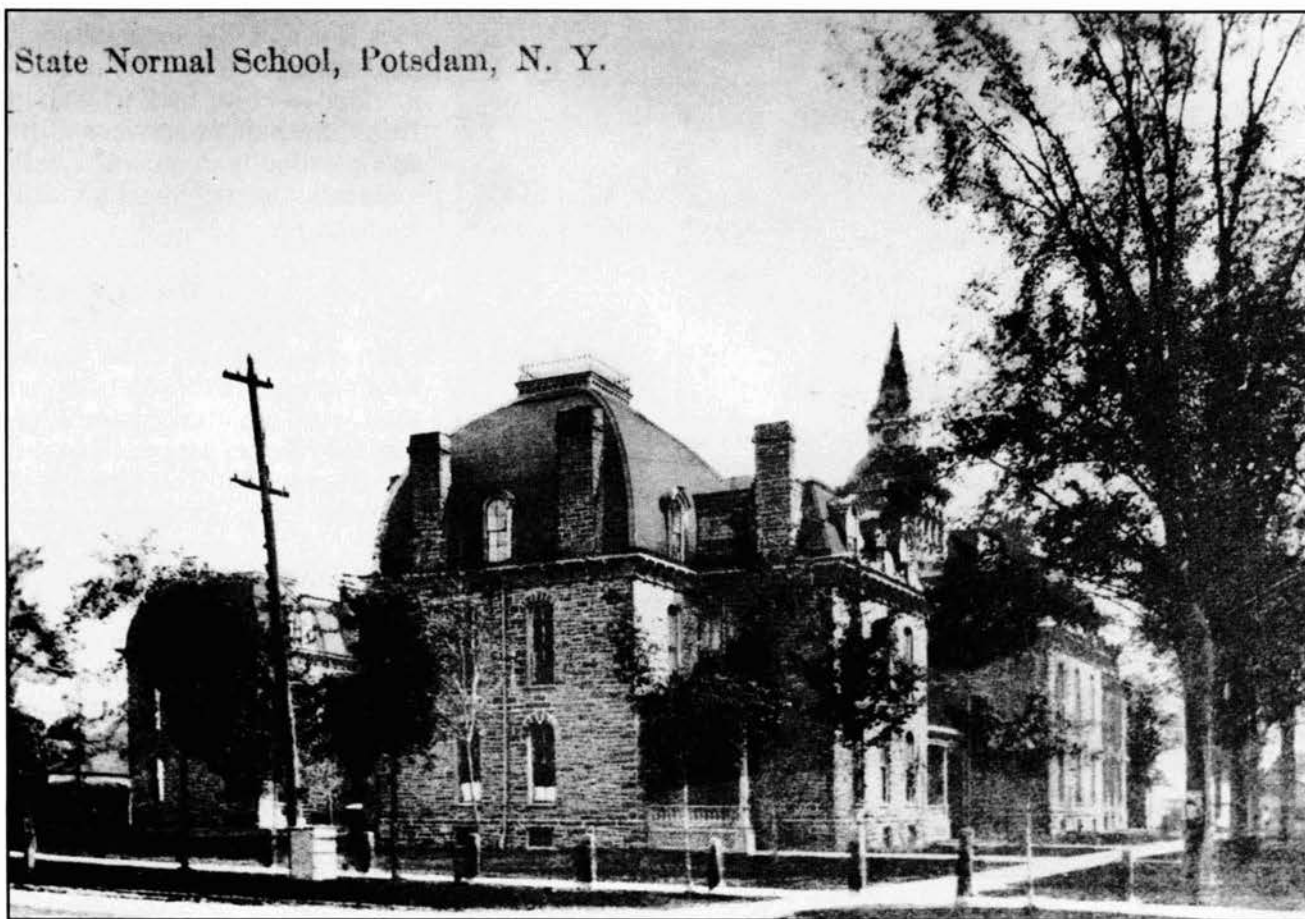
Graduates of the Crane School of Music teach in schools all over the United States. The famous Crane Chorus was selected to sing the National Anthem at the 1980 Lake Placid Winter Olympics and a tape of that rendition begins Potsdam radio station WSNN99's day.

The Thomas S. Clarkson Memorial College of Technology with a motto, "A workman that needeth not be ashamed," was founded in 1896 by the misses Elizabeth, Frederica and Lavinia Clarkson as

a memorial to their brother who had been killed in an accident at his sandstone quarry in 1894.

In addition to a curriculum in engineering, the school offered a domestic science course for young ladies. That course was discontinued in 1908, and the college was all-male until recent years when women became interested in engineering.

The original Clarkson building was a handsome red sandstone structure built on Potsdam's Main Street in 1896 and is now known as "Old Main." A number of other buildings were erected as student enrollment and course offerings increased. In 1956, the college began a campus expansion on the



State Normal School, Potsdam, N. Y.

State Normal School, Potsdam, NY

Courtesy SLCHA

Clarkson farm which had been given to the college by descendants of the early Clarksons. This campus overlooks Maple Street (Route 11). Almost the entire college is now on "the Hill," where much sophisticated research is conducted by the distinguished faculty and students. A crystal growth experiment produced at Clarkson was one of the payloads aboard the recent NASA shuttle flight. Clarkson College was a pioneer in computer science.

The rapid growth of Clarkson College has been such that since 1984, it has been designated as Clarkson University and the first college in the north to be given its

own zip code, 13699.

These two prestigious institutions of learning have brought faculty and students from continents around the globe. Their cultures have blended with those of the sturdy New Englanders, Scots, Irish and other ethnic groups of earlier settlers to create a cosmopolitan community whose population doubles when the colleges are in session.

Potsdam State's hoopsters, the "Bears," and the Clarkson "Golden Knights" icemen bring home championship trophies frequently and are a source of pride to the townspeople.



Courtesy SLCHA

Crane Normal Institute, Potsdam, NY

In war time as in peace, Potsdam Township has been a leader. The newly settled community was called upon to supply militia in the War of 1812 when increased vigilance was needed along the St. Lawrence River.

One of the two St. Lawrence County women who served as Union Army nurses was Ellon Luby. She lived in Norwood (then Potsdam Junction) before 1860 and died there in 1922. When she learned of her husband's injuries on July 30, 1864 at Petersburg, Va., she went to New York and volunteered as a nurse. She rendered aid to soldiers at the battles of Cold Harbor, Spottsylvania, Culpepper and Alexandria, Va. She was then stationed at Fort Sandy Hook, and was later transferred to Central Park Hospital. She received commendation from Col. Stein, commander-in-chief at Fort Sandy Hook, for gallant services. She was personally acquainted with generals Curtis, Sheridan and Burnside.

According to the New York State Archives, no records are kept of volunteers. Their names never appear on muster rolls and their work is not recognized unless their names happen to appear on documents. This applies to all volunteers, doctors included.

The men and women residing in Potsdam Township have always readily responded to America's call to arms and a goodly number of them have made the supreme sacrifice. Their names are engraved on the Roll of Honor at the St. Lawrence County Court House. Volunteers trained by the American Red Cross helped out at hospitals where nursing ranks were thinned by trained nurses called to service. Other women rolled ban-

dages, taught home nursing or conducted meal preparation with what foods were available and not rationed. They worked in war plants and on farms.

Urban renewal has changed the appearance of downtown Potsdam with a near-Victorian façade on many buildings. A handsome hotel has replaced demolished, out-dated buildings. A considerable amount of shopping is now done in the two plazas on the northern outskirts of the Village.

The building of homes and businesses have increased since the end of World War II, to the extent that Route 56 north from Potsdam to Norwood, once a sparsely settled rural road, is now almost completely built up. The same may be said of roads extending from Potsdam Village in other directions.

Education continues to grow in Potsdam, as can be seen by the new state-of-the-art Clarkson University Campus, along with increasing enrollment at both colleges.

There have also been several additions to the Canton-Potsdam Hospital since it opened as a general hospital sixty years ago. Capable doctors with many specialties and well-trained professional staff members provide the most advanced medical care in Northern New York.

How Norwood Received Its Name

By Susan Lyman,
Village of Norwood
Historian

The residents of Potsdam Junction were irked for many years by a name that indicated the village was a sort of tail to the Potsdam kite. They wanted a new name for the village, for the railroad station was named Potsdam by the officials of the Northern Railroad and was so printed in the time table of the North Country's pioneer railroad when it opened for business in 1850.

Four years later when the Potsdam and Watertown railroad began business, the name of the station was changed to Potsdam Junction.

The time when the impatience of the residents rose to fever heat was probably the early 70s. The prime mover in the agitation was Rev. Chase, a Methodist minister.

A public meeting was called to consider a change of name. There may have been some differences of opinion about the new name but there was unanimity as to the crying need for the change. Evidently, the Rev. Chase was a persuasive person for it was he who suggested the unpopular name of Potsdam be changed to Norwood. And why was that name selected?

It seems that Henry War Beecher had expressed the opinion that he could write as good a novel as his sister did when she wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin." To

prove it, he wrote a novel called "Norwood", but it was a flop. But Rev. Chase liked the name and proposed that it be adopted. He pointed out that it was an easy name to write because there were no "T"s to cross or "I"s to dot and no letter went above or below the line.

Rev. Chase's proposal was promptly adopted and that is how Norwood got its name.

An examination of the minutes of the village board of Potsdam Junction, N.Y. shows that on March 30, 1875 a resolution was passed. The president and trustees of the Village petitioned the State of New York to change the name of the post office and railroad depot from Potsdam Junction to Baldwin, but it was discovered that there was already a post office named Baldwin. On April 5, 1875, a meeting was held in Yale Hall to decide on a name. (There is a newspaper clipping of this meeting in the minutes book at the Village Clerk's office.)

The results of the balloting at this meeting were:

The name of Norwood received 42 votes

The name Potsdam Junction received 19 votes

The name Onawa received 12 votes

The name Oakley received 5 votes

The name Duck Pond received 1 vote

On May 11, 1875 the Village Clerk was instructed to prepare a petition for the Village Board to send to Washington to change the name of the post office to Norwood.

Norwood Dance Hall

By Susan Lyman,
Village of Norwood
Historian

One of the popular entertainment spots before World War I was McNulty's Hall on Mechanic Street, upstairs over the bar and grill presently operated by William Casey.

A drug store operated by Henry L. McNulty was on the street floor and the upper story was used by any group or organization that wished to sponsor a dance or use the kitchen facilities for "oyster feeds." The Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs frequently used this hall.

About 1915 or 1916 an orchestra, consisting of Lyle Austin at the piano, Norman Austin playing the violin, Paul Oliver on the horn, and Victor Jones on the drums, was in great demand to furnish music for dances. Any special occasion was regarded as a good reason to have a get together; hence there were Silver Gray Balls, Harvest Balls, and Thanksgiving Balls, as well as the usual holiday season festivities.

Mr. Ray Binan of Brushton held dancing classes in McNulty's Hall at about this time. There were other dancing instructors who came at various times to keep the patrons of dance up-to-date on the latest round and square dances. The Quadrille, Two Step, and Portland Fancy were among the most popular dances.

Dr. Kissane, Sr. and the dentist, Dr. Reynolds, were in regular attendance at the dances, their practices permitting.

A few dances were held in a hall over the Norwood Bakery but it never became a popular spot, even though everyone always had a good time.

Shepard's Furniture Store, located between the Santimaw and M.J. Reagan stores, used their upper floor as a dance hall. This building burned many years ago.

The Wolfe brothers from Potsdam were popular as callers. Mr. Potter, who lived in Parishville, had an orchestra which played frequently. It is said that if Mr. Potter noticed a dance set making a mistake, he would angrily rap on the back of his fiddle and order that the steps be repeated correctly.

The Frank Henderson home on the Daily Ridge Road had a workshop which was the scene of many a good time for the friends of Will, Mae and Gertrude Henderson. It is said that a hay or sleigh ride party could always pull into Henderson's and be sure of a hearty welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Henderson. The shop would be hastily opened and Mr. Henderson, who was an excellent fiddler, would get the dance underway. Mrs. Henderson

would enjoy watching the young folks square dance to the lively strains of Will's music.

Often there were three or four sets dancing in this shop. These were not public dances, being of the private party variety, although all friends were always welcome.

Circus Train Wreck Of August 22, 1889 By Susan C. Lyman

Barnum and Bailey's Circus, "The Greatest Show on Earth," had not scheduled a stop in Potsdam during their swing about the northern part of New York State. But due to a tragic accident, they did stop that dark Thursday night of August 22, 1889 - and drew a crowd estimated to have been more than 2,000.

"It was an evening exhibition, held in a farmer's field, under the stars and lighted by the fitful glare of bonfires and with the groans and shrieks of the wounded and dying animals instead of the blare of a brass band," *The Courier Freeman* reported in 1889.

The circus had held a performance in Gouverneur Thursday afternoon and foregoing an evening show, had loaded up three special trains and started for Montreal, where an exhibition was set for the next day. The first train contained the tents and other circus equipment; the horses, camels and other animals were in the second train; while the third carried the circus personnel, as well as the cages of wild beasts.

The three trains passed through Potsdam Village at about 9 o'clock that evening. All went well until approaching Clark's Crossing about 2 ½ miles below Potsdam on the Potsdam-Norwood Road, when disaster struck. The second train was running at a moderate 25 miles per hour when an axle broke on a car near the engine. The car scraped along a few rods and just after passing the crossing, it

doubled up under the following car. There was a crunching, grinding noise and then a tremendous crash as the great railway smashup occurred. Six cars lay piled upon one another. One car telescoped the entire length of another, one was lying crosswise of the track, another was crosswise with one end over-topping the highest part of the wreck and others had plowed deep furrows in the earth. The cars contained elephants, camels and horses, as well as attendants sleeping in nearly every car. Only two men were slightly injured but all had to be removed through the roof of the cars.

The engine of train two and the cars containing the elephants were not derailed and came to a standstill a short distance below the wreck. The first train, unaware of what had happened, proceeded to Canada. Frantic signaling brought the third train to a halt near the Sissonville siding, only a little way from the scene of the crash.

Half-owner of the circus J. A. Bailey, and Acting Assistance Superintendent of the Rome-Watertown-Ogdensburg Railroad Frank Brown were on the third train and at once organized the men to rescue the imprisoned animals. Proprietors, ring-masters, performers, and attendants all lent a helping hand. With saw, ax, bar and every implement at hand, openings were made in the cars and the animals released as rapidly as possible. Bonfires were built on either side of the wreck to furnish light and as fast as openings could be made

in cars the animals were led or dragged out. The greatest mortality was among the horses.

Many of the poor beasts pounded themselves and each other to death in their terror and frantic efforts to escape. The Arabs and Moors worked unceasingly to rescue their horses and the swarthy visaged Bedouins of the desert, clad in flowing white robes, flitted about like ghosts, making a picture which seemed unreal.

Twenty-eight horses, two camels, a white trick mule, several trained ring horses, a number of Chariot horses and Arabian ponies, and a stallion, "Abdullah," valued at \$10,000 by his owner Mrs. Adam Forepaugh, Jr. were killed.

The following day the dead animals were drawn to an adjoining field and buried in a trench 100 feet long, 10 feet wide and 8 feet deep on the west side of the Potsdam-Norwood Road, south of the tracks. I have been told that members of the Clark family always pointed out this spot to their visitors.

S.S. Clark, who resided on the farm adjacent to the railroad tracks, provided places for the 80 rare animals which were taken from the wreck alive. Scattered about his premises were Burmese cows, blooded horses, trained ponies, huge elephants, the sacred ox, camels quietly grazing, oryx, zebras, llamas, ibex and other curiosities from the Old World. Of the rare animals, only two camels were killed.

News of the accident spread like wild fire throughout the countryside. A large number of people from Potsdam and the surrounding area, coming on foot and by every type of transportation, visited the scene Thursday night. Friday morning thousands of people from miles around were on hand. Photographers N.L. Stone & Son, A. B. Eaton and Miss Emma Clarkson were on the grounds Friday and obtained views of the wreck.

Several years ago while I was discussing this accident with two senior citizens of Norwood, Mrs. Lillian Morgan Powell and Mrs. Katherine Bicknell Haggett, both now deceased, I was glad to learn that they both remembered the excitement created by the disaster although both were very young at the time.

"My father took my brothers in the morning and we girls in the afternoon and they were burying the trick horses when we got there," Mrs. Powell said. Mrs. Haggett's most vivid memory was her horror at the sight of so many dead animals.

Although as a child I heard tales of snakes apparently as big as the Loch Ness monster having crawled under the barns and that the largest elephant on earth had been killed, no newspaper account of the accident mentions either. The Aug. 28, 1889 issues of the *Potsdam Courier Freeman* and the *Norwood News*, competing weekly newspapers of that time, carry pretty much the same list of casualties. The *Courier Freeman* account was emotional and lengthy while the *Norwood News* was briefly factual.

A wrecking train arrived early Friday morning and the tracks were cleared and ready for passage of trains by 1:30 p.m. that afternoon. By 4 p.m. the animals had been loaded into cars obtained for that purposes and two trains started for Montreal.

Mr. and Mrs. Clark did a thriving hotel business Friday, furnishing meals for the men and forage for the animals.

A telegraph office was established in the meadow Friday, from

which operator Frank McCormick sent messages until the track was clear.

P.T. Barnum was vacationing at Paul Smith's summer resort at the time of the wreck and his reply to the telegram informing him of the incident was, "The show must go on." Sometime later a friend who was close to the great showman said that Barnum also said, "Thank heavens no one was killed or badly injured."

Thirty horses were sent to Montreal from the training stables at Bridgeport and the show did go on, Saturday, only one day late.

The loss to the Barnum and Bailey Circus was estimated at \$40,000 from the wreck and \$18,000 due to the loss of receipts Friday. The cars were owned by the circus but according to their custom, were hauled by the engine of the railroad serving the area, in this case the R.W.O. Since a broken axle was the cause of the wreck, the railroad company was not held responsible.

SLCHA 53rd ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, October 28th, 2000,
Uncle Max's Restaurant
7492 U.S. Rt. 11, Potsdam



*New York State Trooper Sue Hayes
speaking on "Women in the history of
the New York State Police."*

Photos by: Carl Goodrich,
Town of Brasher Historian



SLCHA display on "Women in their town's history" & wooden miniatures

SLCHA 53rd ANNUAL MEETING



A full house turned out to listen to Trooper Hayes

Photo by Pamela Ouimet



SLCHA display on "North Country Women in the Civil War"

Photo by Carl Goodrich

SLCHA 53rd ANNUAL MEETING



Personnel Committee Member and Board Trustee Robert Wells presents Judith Wagner with a volunteer recognition award for her work on the newsletter.

Photos by Carl Goodrich



Town of Brasher display on "Women in Brasher History."

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