

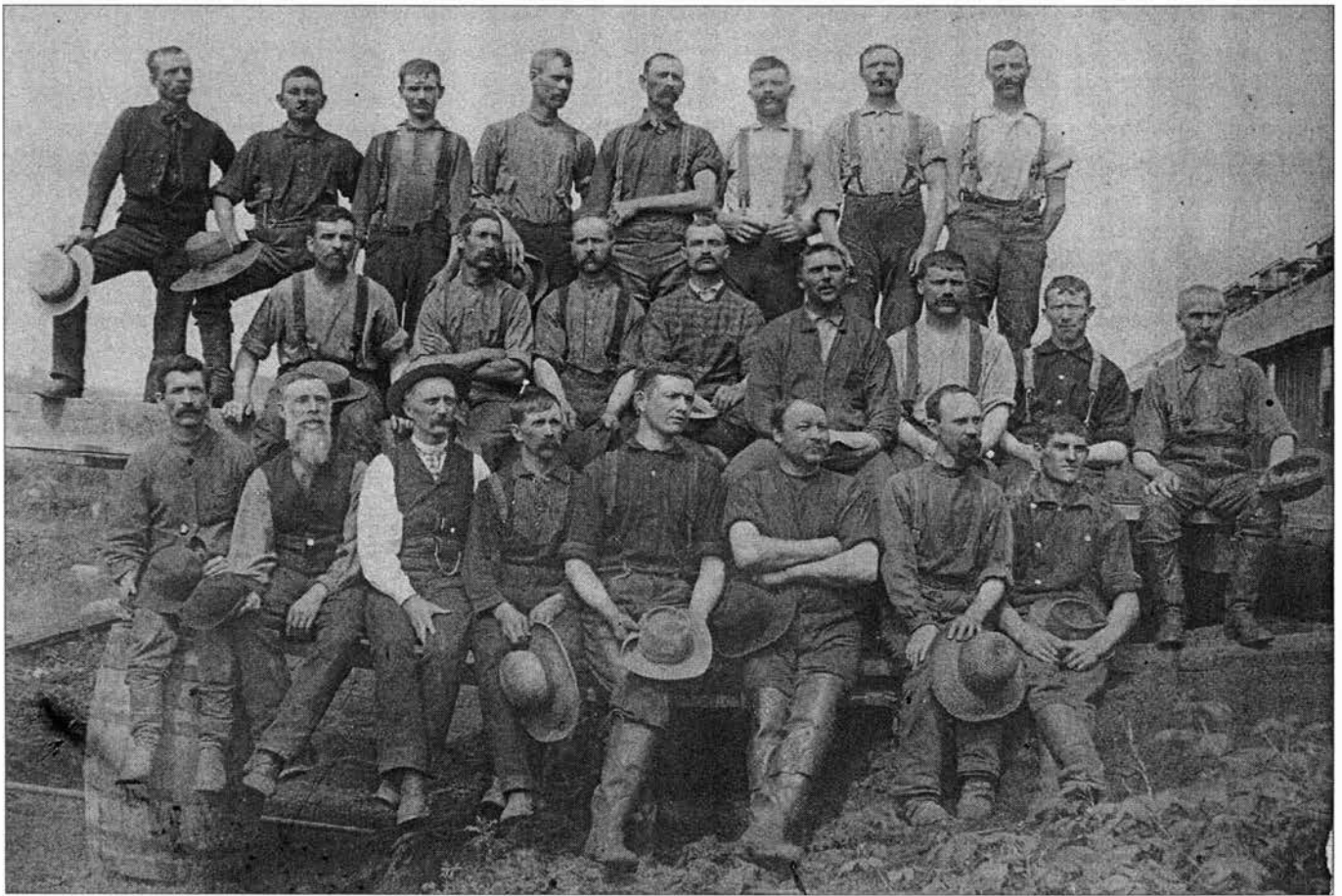
The St. Lawrence County Historical Association

# QUARTERLY

Volume XLVIII

Number 3

Summer 2003



# The St. Lawrence County Historical Association at the Silas Wright Museum

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 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 \$30; Senior/Student \$25; Family \$40; Contributor \$55; Supporter, \$100; Patron \$250. Members receive the SLCHA Quarterly, the Historical Association's bi-monthly newsletter, and various discounts on publications, programs and events.

St. Lawrence County Historical Association  
at the Silas Wright House  
3 East Main Street, P. O. Box 8  
Canton, New York 13617  
(315) 386-8133  
fax (315) 386-8134  
e-mail: [slcha@northnet.org](mailto:slcha@northnet.org)  
[www.slcha.org](http://www.slcha.org)

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Additional copies may be obtained from the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617 at \$4.00 each (\$2.00 for members), plus \$2.00 for postage.

**Contributions:**

*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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**QUARTERLY**

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### Issue Editors

John and Susan Omohundro

### On the Cover

*A photograph of the men who worked at the Scriba tannery in the Town of Fine, about 1888-1890. In the top row, left to right, are Del Powel, Will Watson, Ed Guiles, Ed Burns, Al Briggs, Buff McCormick, Mick Buckley, and Matt McCormick. In the middle row are Ed Lumley, Frank Backus, Frank Cook, John Forney, Walter Rosby, Charles Locke, Will Laide, and Isack King. In the front row are Charles Ayers, James Conboy Sr., Tanner Jones, James Shortt, Nick Revels, Charles Clark, Daniel Cahill, and Charles Labadee. SLCHA Archives File 1305.*

# From The County Historian

by Trent Trulock

The summer and fall are busy times around the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. We have had numerous visitors to the museum and researchers in the archives over the summer. In addition, the Rushton boat exhibit opened in June in time for the St. Lawrence County Dairy Princess Parade. This exhibit will be up for several years and is the inaugural exhibit in our North Country Annex, which was made possible by Nancy Seeley and the Ferguson Foundation. Over the summer we also had an exhibit of antique quilts that were loaned to us by residents of St. Lawrence County. This exhibit has closed, but more quilts will be displayed for the Holiday Open House on December 5<sup>th</sup>. An exhibit on Frederic Remington opened October 3<sup>rd</sup> as part of the Canton Remington Arts Festival. This exhibit displays the Remington works owned by the Benton Board of the Canton Free Library, as well as a traveling exhibit on loan from the Frederic Remington Art Museum.

We were also busy with events this summer. The Civil War Weekend was held at Robert Moses State Park on August 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup>. The turnout was great, with over 400 people attending and approximately 125 reenactors from four states and two Canadian provinces participating. The end of summer found us busy preparing for our annual garage sale held on September 13<sup>th</sup>, a special presentation on "Frederic Remington at Cranberry Lake" held on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, our annual meeting which will be on November 1<sup>st</sup> at the United Methodist Church in Potsdam, and our Brown Bag Lunch Programs that are held at noon on the third Thursday of the month through the fall and winter. None of these events or exhibits would be possible without the generous help of our volunteers and members.

This summer also saw the completion of a drainage project in the area between the SLCHA and the Unitarian Universalist



*The Silas Wright House, the home of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.*

Church. Ron Berry of Tisdale and Associates, Canton, developed plans early in 2003 to alleviate a problem of rainwater collecting by the northwest wall of the Silas Wright House basement. Bernard Reed of R & S Construction, Hermon, implemented these plans, and Witherhead's Professional Services, Canton, completed the project with topsoil and grass seed. Further landscaping of this section is taking place in October.

The SLCHA is currently working on plaques honoring the donors who named rooms in the Red Barn Addition, and we are in the process of ordering shelves for the Collections Repository on the third floor. These shelves will store our artifact collection and will be installed this fall. These are just some of the projects that are in the works. The jobs change throughout the year, but just like around your house, the work never ends!

Work is an appropriate word to introduce this issue of *The Quarterly*. If you think taking the family on a trip in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is hard, just wait until you read "Our Trip to Florida." Our thanks to the Village of Gouverneur Historian Joe Laurenza for sending this article our way. The theme of hard work continues with "The Colton Tannery," which was certainly not a place for slackers. This issue even ends with a mystery photo about work.

I want to thank you for helping the SLCHA continue its work. We could not do it without you.

# Our Trip to Florida

Clara Brown

*In 1917 a brave group of adventurers in two automobiles left Gouverneur on a trip to Florida. It took them 23 days to travel there. Motor touring was no simple matter in 1917: autos were unreliable, and tourist guides rare. U.S. Route 11, which the group followed intermittently into Virginia, had just recently been paved with macadam in 1912/13 in Gouverneur, and some of the southern highways were not yet paved. Interstate 81 closely parallels Route 11; the modern traveler can get to Staunton, Virginia easily in a day, whereas, with side trips and delays, it took the 1917 travelers over a week.*

*The group included six people: Elva and Lyall West in an Overland, the writer, Clara Brown, her mother, Sarah Brown, her sister, Rose, and Rose's husband, Joe Maloy, in a Paige.*

*You will notice the writer's informal style and frankness. The Quarterly has not corrected her language or her social attitudes.*

*This manuscript was contributed by Betty Bell, a great-granddaughter of Sarah Brown, and Joe Laurenza, Gouverneur Village Historian.*

This is Nov. first, 1917, the day set for our departure. Harold, Mamie, Mildred, Miriam, and Bertha [family members who stayed home] are all here and we are ready, waiting for the West family to come along. They came about nine o'clock and we are now on our way.

We left Gouverneur via West Main St. for Antwerp. Arriving there, we went to Philadelphia to cross the Pine Plains but found the road so muddy, decided to go by Theresa and Watertown but the road was closed from Philadelphia to Theresa so

we had to return to Antwerp to get on the Theresa road.

We arrived in Watertown about eleven thirty. The Overland was making a funny noise so Mr. West went to the Overland Garage and we went to the Paige Garage. When we were ready, we went to the Overland Garage and found Mr. West ready also. While we were turning around to get started for Lowville, the West family got lost and left Watertown via Washington St. which of course was the wrong road. We went back to the Garage and inquired for them, but they had'nt been there. Thinking they must be ahead of us, we started for Carthage, stopping between Watertown and Black River to eat dinner. Arriving at Carthage and not seeing anything of them, Joe 'phoned back to Watertown but they had'nt seen them, so we went on to Lowville, and found them waiting on the street for us. They had gone by Copenhagen instead of Carthage.

Once more together, we adopted a new plan which would make it easier to keep together. We then started for Utica and arrived there about dark. The West family did not intend to go any farther that night and it was a good thing as they just got to the Garage when the Clutch gave away. We went on to Ilion and stayed all night at a Hotel.

In the morning, Joe and I went to the Garage and Mother and Rose went to call on Mrs. Bouffard, a lady they were acquainted with. We 'phoned to Utica and found that the Overland would'nt be fixed until one P.M. About ten o'clock Joe and I went up to Mrs. Bouffard's and we all stayed for dinner. After dinner we went down to the Garage and waited and waited. When it got to be three o'clock and they had'nt come we decided we would'nt leave Ilion that day. They came

about 4 P.M. so they went to the Hotel where we stayed the night before, and Mrs. Bouffard invited us to stay with her if we decided to stay all night. After supper Rose and I went to the movies and then went home and went to bed.

Six o'clock soon came and we were ready to start at seven. We had driven about an hour and were just thinking how nicely we were getting along, when very suddenly one of our rear tires went "bang". We fixed it up and started on and had't gone but a short distance when Mr. West began blowing his horn as if something were wrong, so we stopped and he said our tire was going flat again. This time it took longer to fix it as we had to put in a new tube and that meant "pump". The rest of the day went fine with the exception of getting on the wrong road occasionally and we reached Albany about one o'clock. We went through Canajoharie where the big beechnut factory is located, but we didn't stop as we were trying to make good mileage that day. We reached Hudson about 3 P.M. and Mr. West said he would have to go to a Garage as only three of his cylinders were doing their work properly, afterwards learning that the skip was caused by a short circuit. Of course that was quickly repaired and we drove on looking for a place to camp, and found one about 4:30. We soon had our tents erected and were getting supper. Cold? Not at all if we kept moving and jumping up and down to keep our feet warm. After supper Mother and Rose and Joe took their stove and went over to Mr. West's tent to spend the evening and I got up in the car and wrote a letter. They soon came back and we began getting our beds ready for night. We went to bed with all our clothes on except our heavy coats and those we put over us, and tried to go to sleep. The wind was blowing so hard we surely thought it would blow the tent down. We all stayed in bed until 2 A.M. and then we thought it would be quite a rest to sit up a while, so we got up and took our beds down and sat around the stove until daylight. We then got breakfast. We had hot coffee, but before we could drink

it it was almost ice cold. Well we pulled up stakes and started on.

We had a very pretty drive that day all through the Catskill mountains. We crossed the ferry from Beacon to NewBurg and soon crossed the state line into New Jersey and all the afternoon we drove through one continuous line of cities, the first being Princeton and clear through to Newark. Mr. West had a friend living at Hilton, so he stopped to call on them and they invited them to stay all night, so we went to a hotel, and mighty glad we were of a warm place to stay and a good bed to sleep in. We had chicken for supper, feathers included.

Monday morning we didn't get started until nine o'clock. We went through city after city. At Trenton we inquired the way to Philadelphia, Pa. and just as we stopped, a little darkie boy saw us and said to his Mother, "Oh look, they are just like a circus". Some compliment. As we entered Philadelphia, there were miles and miles of parks with concrete roads running all through. It is a very pretty place but we had a terrible time getting out. Finally when we did get out of the city, it was nearly dark and we could'nt find any place to camp, so we drove through to Wilmington, Del. This was not quite as bad as Philadelphia, but owing to the darkness, it made it difficult to find our way out. After getting on the wrong road and turning around several times, we reached the outside of the city and drove to Elkton, Md. where we stopped at a small Hotel (I guess that is what they called it) any way it was some place. Dirt? Oh no, certainly not.

We left Elkton at 8 A.M. and camped for breakfast. We had lots of fun camping and a very nice breakfast. Boiled potatoes, fried eggs, hot coffee, and sandwiches. Seemed like Christmas. About a hundred school kids came along and I guess they thought it was a circus too.

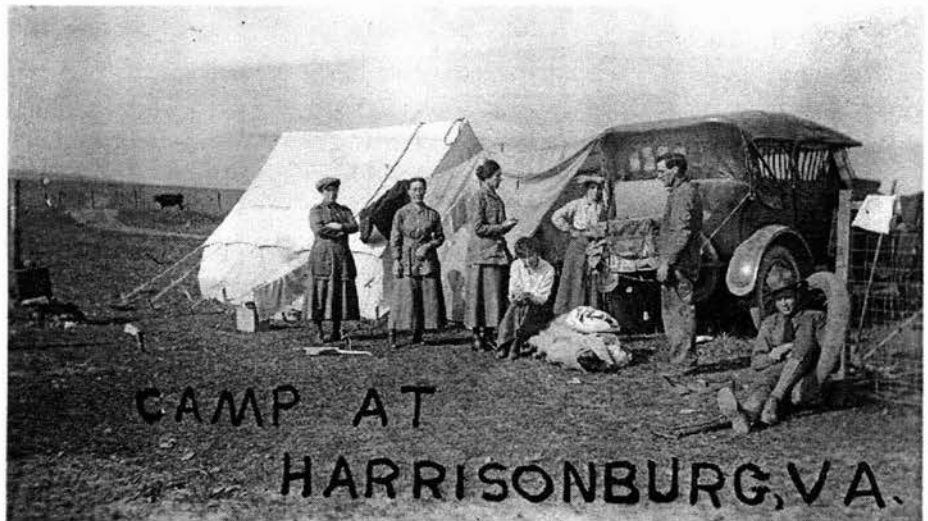
We left at 10 A.M. and arrived at Baltimore at 2:30 P.M. Here we parked while Mr. West went to call on Mr. V. P. Abbott. He returned at 3:45 and then we went to Laurel, Md. Laurel is a small village with a

Hotel, grocery store, garage, Post Office, and a picture show. We stayed at the Clover Leaf Inn all night. Elva had two cousins at camp Meade whom she wanted to see, so she called them up and they came up and had supper and spent the evening with them.

The next morning we got up early and went to the camp and then left for Washington. Arriving there we parked the cars and I started for the Post Office as I expected mail and was not disappointed. We went through the Capitol and saw the U.S. Supreme Court in session, the President's room and everything of interest. There were oil paintings of famous battle scenes and lots of statues. We did not hire a guide but started out on our own hooks and of course got lost immediately. We wandered around for some time, coming back again and again to the same place. After awhile a darkie came along and helped us out. One consolation was that the darkie told us we were not the first ones to get lost there. After seeing the Capitol, we went to Washington's Monument. It is over 500 feet high and there are stairs going up, also an elevator. We went up on the elevator. Every ten feet, or at each landing were large marble slabs in the wall given by each state in the Union. The slab from New York state was the largest and prettiest in my estimation.

From there we left for Staunton, Va. On our way out we passed the White House. We had great difficulty getting out of the city and at last met with an accident, as Joe took it into his head to knock the street car off the track, but instead, the street car hit the rear end of the car while we were turning around and broke the trunk and made a big dent in the back seat, gave Rose quite a jar, and in fact frightened us all, but no one was hurt.

It made a pretty sore looking sight of the car though. At last we struck the right road by mistake and crossed into Virginia about 3:00 P.M. and went to Fairfax. Here we inquired the way and found we were on the wrong road. We had to go back seven miles, so we went back three miles and found a good place to camp. There was a farm house just across the road where we went for water and who do you think lived there? Elmer Curtis' brother. It seemed quite like home to meet the brother of one of our neighbors. We put in a fairly good night but rather cold. Of course we had heard lots about the snakes,



*The six travelers from Gouverneur and one of their new-found Virginian friends, at their Harrisonburg campsite, with the Paige.*

Courtesy of Betty Bell

but nothing troubled us that night but a bear that came prowling around about midnight. I was sleeping or rather, staying in the front seat of the car, and as soon as I heard it I turned on the lights just in time to see it going around the car. I think he was pretty frightened for as soon as he heard a noise, he took for the woods and didn't show up again.

We arose very early in the morning and started once more for Staunton. The roads were terrible. Bump, bump all the way but we made fairly good time. We had struck a little better road and were driving along nicely, when "bang" went one of our

tires. Of course Mr. West didn't know that we had stopped, as they were ahead. As soon as they missed us they turned around and came back. We were just ready and when he went to turn around again, he broke the left rear axle. A man came from Winchester and fixed it and then we went to Woodstock. Here it was dark and we put up at the Hotel Hotzman for the night. It was nice and clean.

We enjoyed a good nights rest and arose very early in the morning to get a good start, but the Paige refused to go. Mr. West hitched a tow rope to her and drew her all around town and finally she started, so we left Woodstock at 8:00 and all went well until eleven, when we suddenly noticed the rear wheels on the Overland were spreading apart. We began to blow our horn and drove up close behind them but could not make

her house and the other lady accommodated Mother and Rose and Mrs. West. The men stayed at the tent nights.

The people down here talk so funny and have such queer ways of doing things, that we found it difficult to make them understand what we wanted at the grocery stores. They sell potatoes by the gallon and never heard of cookies, they call them cakes. Salt pork is country bacon and kerosene is coal oil. It makes one pay strict attention in order to understand and they don't like to have to repeat to you. Elva and I soon got acquainted with the town and had a pretty good time. Monday we went to an evaporating plant and found it mighty interesting, but when we saw a man walking around on the drying apples with his shoes on, we decided we didn't want any to eat.

Rose washed and hung her clothes on

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“They [Virginians] were just fine in every way. Not much like New York people.”

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them hear. The wheel came off and let the car down to the ground. Of course we were all frightened but no one was hurt. They 'phoned to Harrisonburg, Va. and a man came out and got the car and took it to a Garage. We got dinner beside the road and had a real good one too. A man came along with a Ford and took us into town and left us at the Paige Garage while Joe hunted up a place to camp. He found a fine place up on the Boom and came and got us. By six o'clock we were established in our new home and seemed to be the centre of attraction. It was not long until all the children in the neighborhood were here. We certainly couldn't have selected a better place to camp as the people were so good to us. One lady sent us fruit, hot biscuit, and a dandy pie for dinner. Another gave us a pitcher of thick cream for our coffee and loaned us an oil stove. They were just fine in every way. Not much like New York people. The second night, one lady gave Elva and I a nice room in

one of the guy ropes to dry. It made a pretty good clothes line. Tuesday morning Elva and I went down town and saw a car from Ohio. As they had a St. Petersburg banner on it, we inquired into it and found they were going to St. Petersburg too. They seemed to be very nice people and gave us their address. There were six cars in the party and they were living like gypsies, the same as ourselves.

When Mr. West came home to dinner he brought the good news that the parts for the car had come. Mr. West and Joe and the men at the garage worked hard all the afternoon and at six o'clock the Overland drove up to camp. I'll say it looked good to us.

We were all up early the next morning as we were anxious to get started on our journey, although we did regret leaving our good friends at Harrisonburg. We arrived at Staunton O.K. and then went to Lexington and Natural Bridge which was a very pretty place. Upon inquiring we found the tickets to



see the bridge were \$1.00 each, so we decided to move on. One thing they are up to their job on down here, is "soaking the tourists". We went on over the bridge and then stopped to view the valley beneath. There was a high board fence all around, so Mr. West and I took turns holding the rest up so they could see. I thought they were going to forget me, but Lyall and Elva remembered me and held me up so I might see too. It was a beautiful sight. The sides were covered with trees and everything was green and pretty. It was surrounded by mountains with snow covered

do build one they charge fifty or seventy-five cents to ride across on it. Every few miles from Staunton to Troutville there were negro convicts working on the roads in chains and stripes. When we got to Troutville, it was about five o'clock so we stayed all night and got our supper and breakfast in our rooms.

We left Troutville about 7:30 and went to Roanoke, Va. The roads were fair and only two toll stations in twelve miles. As we were leaving Roanoke, we came to a R.R. crossing just as the gates came down, so of course we had to wait for a long freight train to pass,



*The Paige advertised itself as "the most beautiful car in America" and "a perfect motor car," whereas the Overland stressed its low purchase price. Both vehicles suffered frequent breakdowns and mishaps on the trip to Florida. Published in Outlook Magazine, April 4, 1917.*

peaks which made a beautiful contrast with the green valley. We drove through mountains all the rest of the day and crossed eleven fords. Some were small and others were pretty good sized streams. Down in this part of the country they don't believe in building bridges unless a stream is so deep that a car would go in out of sight, and if they

and when we finally got across the track, we couldn't see anything of the Overland, so we followed the National Highway (such as it was) and drove quite fast hoping to catch the Overland. Several times we inquired if an Overland car with a camping outfit had gone through and everyone said "yes, just a few minutes ago", so we kept going but

didn't find them. Before we hardly realized where we were, we were climbing a very steep mountain, or as they call it down here "a right smart grade". Any way we kept going up and the roads seemed wet although there had been no rain for several days. After climbing up for a long time, the engine got so hot we were obliged to stop and let it get cool. While we were waiting, we heard the old familiar sound of the Overland coming up the mountain. They were not ahead of us at all, but back in Roanoke, they somehow lost sight of the National Highway signs and got on the wrong road. Of course they soon found out their mistake and then drove fast to catch us. Once more together, we began climbing the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, but we didn't see the trail of the lonesome pine. "We rode through the valleys but we walked up the hills for we feared much evil", "because it wasn't a Ford". The roads were very rough and slippery, being all red clay, but the scenery was beautiful. For

and are now camping in a school house yard. Upon examination, we found one of the windows open which made it quite easy to get in. The temptation was too great to resist, so as soon as it was dark we put our beds in through the window and found it to be a very good place to sleep. Mother made our bed on the floor with the cushions from both cars, and it sure made a dandy bed and much warmer than we had been sleeping. Every night afterward Elva and I made our bed the same way only on the ground. We were quite disgusted with ourselves that we hadn't thought of it before, but I will admit that every night when we went to bed, we thought of the possibility of a rattle snake crawling in, but when one is living the life of a gypsy they must not fear but take things just as they come.

The bridges down here, when you are fortunate enough to find one, are very ancient looking. They are all covered, something like a tunnel and only one car can pass through

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"The people down here talk so funny."

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miles and miles we didn't see a person, no not even an animal, when all at once we met a team of oxen coming down the mountain. Being the first team of oxen we ever saw, Elva asked permission of the driver to take a picture. To-day we crossed sixteen fords. One place we stopped we saw a path leading up a high mountain side, so of course we started to explore. Arriving at the top, we saw the most beautiful sight that I ever saw. Some of the trees were turning red and yellow, with evergreens mixed in and now and then a clearing with corn, sugar cane, and tobacco growing, and once in awhile a field white with cotton near a small log cabin occupied by negroes, made the most wonderful picture any artist could wish to paint. Some places where the road wound around the mountains, we had to look down to see the tops of the trees in the valley below. We have only traveled sixty-two miles today

at a time. The roads are better than they were through the mountains, but nothing as Joe says "to go and get drunk about".

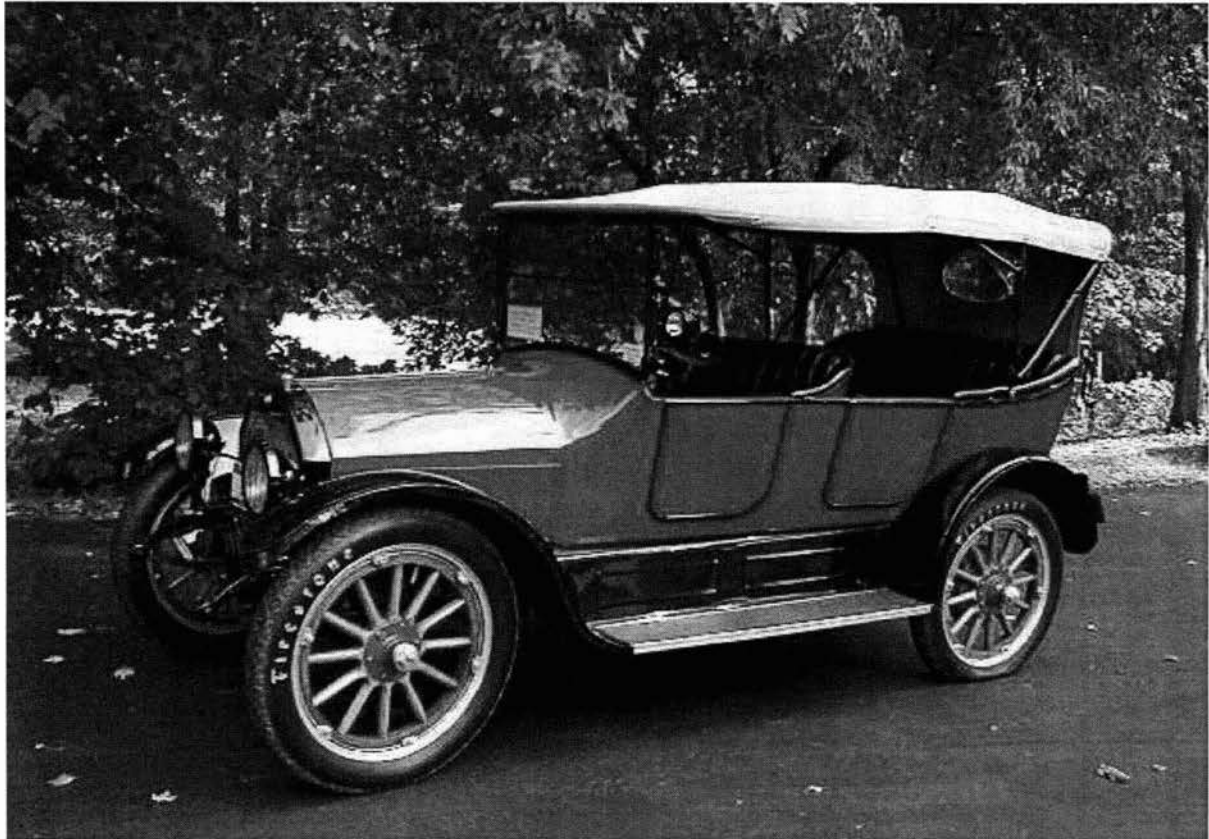
This morning, Nov. 16th, we came to a place where they were squeezing the juice out of sugar cane and boiling it down in an evaporator the same as we use for maple sugar up North. There was a long pole fastened to a mill with a donkey hitched to one end of it. He was walking around in a circle squeezing the juice out. The juice is light green, and from there it went to the evaporator and came out at the other end a thick syrup. The work was all done by negroes. They gave us some of the syrup to take with us. As near as I can describe it, it tasted like New Orleans cooking molasses but not quite so black.

When we crossed the boundary between Virginia and N.C. we found the roads much better, most of them being

convict roads. North Carolina has Virginia stopped a mile for a good looking country. All day we traveled through cotton fields on one side of the road and tobacco on the other. As the sun went down we began looking for a place to camp and finally a man told us

us would roll down grade, but we always got back all right.

We got up about five and after having breakfast, started on another days hike. We were still traveling on red clay roads and they were very dry and dusty, and as we were



Courtesy Glenn and Donna Seymour

*This 1916 Overland is owned by Glenn and Donna Seymour of Potsdam. The Overland was manufactured by Willys-Overland in Toledo, Ohio. It boasted an electric starter and headlights. Windshield wiping and turn signalling, however, were done by hand. Its tires were mounted on wooden spoked wheels, harking back to the horse-drawn buggy days. By 1919 the Overland was second only to the Ford for popularity on the road. The Willys Company went on to fame as the maker of the "Jeep" during World War Two.*

we could camp on his farm. The place he gave was quite near a pen of Razor backs. It was rather cool that night so Elva and I went down to the farm house to see if we could get a room so there would be more blankets for the rest of the people. "We always looked well for the rest, as well as ourselves". The lady gave us a room with a fire place in it, and built a fire for us. It was just dandy and we slept fine on a cornhusk mattress and pillows the same. Once in a while, one of

behind, of course we got all the dust. Mr. West heard a rattle and stopped to see what it was. While he was fixing the bumper, a Ford came up and stopped and said "anything serious?" Just as he said it another Ford came up and ran full force right into him. Mr. West said "No there was'nt anything serious but I guess there is now". When the two cars hit each other they jumped right up into the air about three feet. They got out and looked them over, straightened up the fenders and

went on. They settle things up in a hurry down here. We found a dandy place to camp that night in a grove of pine and oak trees, and got water just across the road where some negroes lived. It was nice and warm and for the first time we went around without any coats on. We slept fine in our camp, which Joe named "Camp Furious". From what source the name was derived, I do not know.

The next morning we got to Spartanburg, S.C. about nine o'clock. Here we met Joe's nephew, James Maloy<sup>†</sup>, and he took us all through Camp Wadsworth. It was a lovely camp and there were about 35,000 soldiers there. We also saw Donald Palmer from Gouverneur. From Camp Wadsworth we went to Greenville. We went through another camp that afternoon called Camp Sevier. Here there was about 40,000 boys. That night we had a very pretty camp in a grove of oak trees, and just across the road was a big field of cotton. We got up early in the morning and just at daylight, Mother and I went over and picked quite a lot of cotton.

We were on the road by seven o'clock. Nothing exciting happened that day only toward night it began to look like rain and it was very warm and muggy. Of course that pleased us. We found a camp but not a very good one. About supper time it began to rain, but not very hard until later in the evening. Across the road from our camp was a farm house which proved to be the home of fifteen or twenty negroes. We went over there after water, and somehow found out that they had an extra room, so mostly through curiosity, Elva and I rented the room, and much to our surprise we found it very clean and a good bed with a mattress and pillows made of cotton. When Elva got into bed, she remarked, "gee, this is the best bed I've seen since I left home", and I thought the same when I got in.

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<sup>†</sup> Lt. James L. Maloy was killed in action in the Battle of the Hindenberg Line on Sept. 27, 1918. The Gouverneur American Legion Post, established in June, 1919, was named in his honor.

They sure used us fine. Of course they only had kerosene lamps and that made it hard for us to see them only when they rolled their eyes or opened their mouth so we could see their white teeth. They played on the organ for us and in fact entertained us to the best of their ability! They seemed truthful and honest, but nevertheless, I put my pocket book in the pocket on my pajamas and slept better by doing so.

The next morning we could tell by the roads that it had rained very hard, as one would sink into the red clay most to their ankles, so we went down to camp to see what kind of a night they had put in and found they had passed a terrible one. Our tent was pitched on high ground, but Mr. West's tent was on a side hill. When they went to bed everything was fine and they soon fell asleep listening to patter of the rain on the roof. About midnight they were suddenly awakened by the tent falling down. When Lyall got out of bed, he found himself standing in about six inches of mud in his stocking feet. Mr. West managed to find one shoe and got that on the wrong foot. Any way he held the tent up until Mrs. West could get out. Remember it was all darkness and pouring right down. Finally the people in our tent were awakened by the cry "The tent is going down stream". Joe was so dazed when he woke up that he could'nt find his way out of the tent, and he also had his trousers off for the first time in many nights. After awhile he found them and got out. They moved the tent to higher ground, but there was'nt much sleep in the West tent the rest of the night. After breakfast we got ready to go, but again the Paige absolutely refused to go, so the men pushed it and I steered it out into the road. It was slightly down grade but it sank pretty well into the red clay. We all pushed, and going down the hill one cylinder fired two or three times, but it acted pretty stubborn about it. Mr. West then hitched a tow rope and drew it quite a distance, but there was nothing doing. We then decided we would walk to Florida and started. After awhile we found the difficulty. The carburator was full

of dirt and water. After cleaning it out she went fine. The roads were terribly slippery but we got through all right. Arriving at Perry, Ga. about dark, we decided to stay at a Hotel all night.

We got quite an early start the next morning and all day we drove through turpentine groves and peanut fields and some sweet potatoes. Between three and four in the afternoon, we crossed the line between Ga. and Fla. The roads were very sandy, but the country was beautiful. The trees were covered with Spanish gray moss and the swamps were a regular jungle. It looked as if there might be plenty of snakes there, but we didn't stop to see. We camped about two miles over the Florida line. A razor back occasionally went across our front lawn, but we didn't mind that much.

We broke camp early in the morning, Nov. 22, and traveled all day through swamps and white sand, and once both the Overland and Paige got stuck. We all got out and pushed the Overland through, and then they came back and helped us get the Paige through. The next time I go to Florida, I will go with a Ford as they are easier to push. But we made 120 miles that day and that wasn't too bad considering the roads. We camped just two miles out of Gainesville in a big turpentine grove. Pine needles and sand spurs made a very nice carpet. The Florida sand spurs are sort of a burr only very sharp. We had't been there very long, when another party drove in to camp. They were from Iowa and had sort of a truck and a trailer which was about the size of a small house. It certainly was a comicle looking outfit. They were going to Dade City, Fla. The night was nice and cool and we had a good sleep. The alarm was set for four o'clock, but Rose could't sleep so she turned it back to 3:30. Of course the rest of us did't know the difference until we were all up and dressed. We were all ready to start when Joe noticed that he had a flat tire. After fixing that he had engine trouble and we did't get started until nine o'clock.

We had a fairly good day's run, but

found the weather pretty cool for Florida. We passed a Ford car from Ohio, and looking back found it to be the same one that Elva and I saw back in Harrisonburg, Va. Some of their party had broke down and they were waiting for them. We camped that night near a great big spring. The water was just as clear as glass and the bottom was all colors with all kinds of plants and weeds growing. There was lots of fish too. I got my fish rod out and did a little casting but it was so near dark that I did't have any luck. Some people came along in a Ford and told us that the spring was ninety feet deep in the middle, and you could see the bottom just as plain as if it were only two feet deep. During the day we crossed the Blue Run river. The water was a bluish green and very clear. All along the banks were trees covered with moss and purple flowers. It was certainly a beautiful sight and the air, scented by the flowers, was very fragrant.

We arose early the next morning and got a good start. We were driving ahead of the Overland, and all at once we missed them, but the road was so crooked that we thought they were coming only a short distance back, so we kept on going but not seeing anything of them we stopped to wait. We asked a man who passed us if he had seen anything of them, and he said they were about six miles back having engine trouble. Finally they came along, but the car was't running good, so we stopped at the next place which was Southern for repairs.

After awhile we got started and reached St. Petersburg about noon, November 24th, 1917. After some searching, we are now located at 713 4th Ave. S., St. Petersburg, Fla. Please write.

THE END OF HARD TIMES.

# The Colton Tannery

Susan and John Omohundro



Colton Museum A1B095

*A late nineteenth-century view of the Colton tannery looking north from Ellis Hill on the east side of the Racquette River. We see the south end of the tannery, a two-storey wooden structure with a shed-style roof. The roof line is complicated and suggests the presence of several rooms.*

As you walk the Stone Valley Trail on the west side of the Racquette River heading north from Colton, you soon cross over the penstock and enter the woods along the river. If you pay attention, you notice the ground has been disturbed, and you see several stone walls. In fact, at one point the foot trail passes over the northwest corner of the foundation of the vat area. These are the remains of the Colton tannery, at one time, one of the largest in the state.

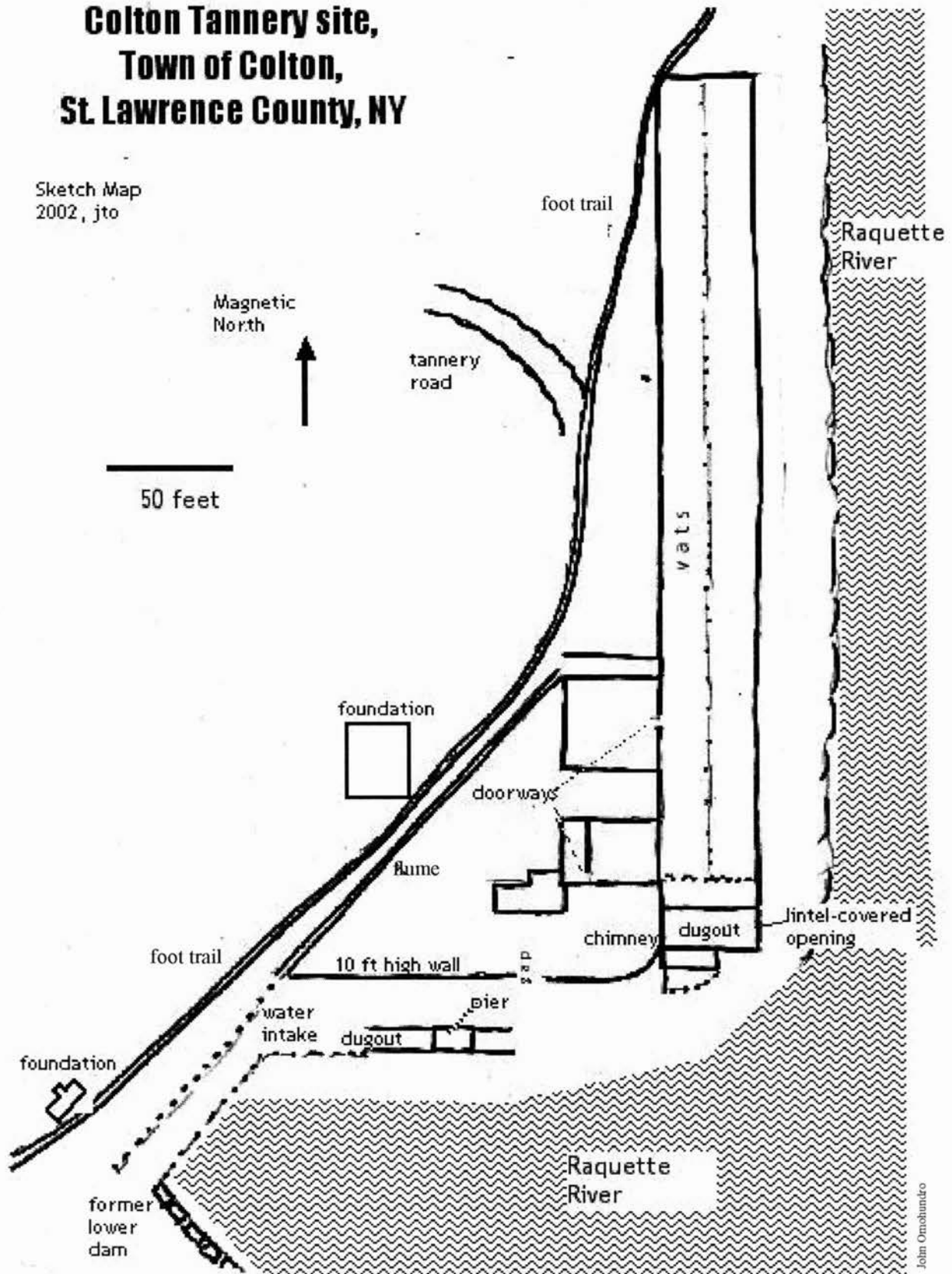
The accompanying sketch map was drawn after a surface survey of the site in the fall of 2002. It shows the features discussed below.

The Colton tannery was established in 1856, when Lorenzo Hull (sometimes misspelled as Hill (Beers) or Hall (Colton Historical Society; Curtis) bought a lot on the Racket (now spelled Racquette or Raquette) River from pioneer settler and industrialist

Hiram Pierce. This roughly triangular piece of land on rapids near the northern limit of Colton's industrial development measured 23 rods wide on the north side and was 30 rods long. In the early years, a tub factory was located just south of the tannery. A low wooden secondary dam several hundred feet below the main dam allowed diversion of water into a flume that fed into the tannery. The tannery building was long and narrow and sat only about 30 feet from the riverbank. A circular loop road approached on the west. The foundation just west of the former road (now hiking trail) represents a building of unknown function. The company maintained a tannery store, from which they supplied merchandise to workers and deducted the value from wages. It was probably southwest of the tannery; we have not located its foundation and so it is not shown on the sketch map. A hemlock bark

# Colton Tannery site, Town of Colton, St. Lawrence County, NY

Sketch Map  
2002, jto



John Omohundro

storage area was located in the northwest section of the tannery lot.

The tannery road permitted wagon access to the facility. Contractors brought out of the woods stacks of hemlock bark that had been peeled in the spring; seasonal surplus was stored near the road. At the south end of the building is the water intake that came from the dam, which led to a waterwheel and grinding machinery. The flume took some of that water and allowed fresh water to move into the vats. The chimney marks the approximate location of the boilers for heating the tanning liquor that was made from the hemlock bark. The room behind the chimney is probably where the hair from cowhides was removed by immersion in a vat of milk of lime. Wet hides were soaked and rinsed repeatedly for several weeks, until the hairs loosened enough to scrape off without injuring the skin. Once rinsed and cleaned, the hides went to the long, narrow vat room. They were placed between layers of ground

St. Lawrence Tannery.

Census records show that in 1860 Hull's business produced \$80,000 worth of sole leather (about 40,000 sides) and employed 26 workers, while by 1868 the St. Lawrence Tannery produced \$200,000 worth of sole leather and employed 33 men (McMartin:298-9).

This tannery was one of the largest in the state. The vat building contained 320 vats. These consumed 5,000 cords of hemlock bark per year. The heating plant required 800 cords of firewood. One wonders whether depletion of resources contributed to the declining fortunes of the enterprise: it took about 8 trees to produce one cord of bark. In the early years, leather was produced from American hides, but later buffalo hides were brought from the West and cowhides came from as far away as India. In the peak year, 56,500 sides of leather were produced.

After the senior Spaulding died in 1875, the firm drifted into bankruptcy under

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“Labor in the tannery itself was dirty and demanding.”

Rosemary Pelkey, “Tannery Row.”

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bark in vats of hot water. The wooden vats were sunk into the ground. The dotted line represents a raised walkway which gave access to the vats. The hides had to be stirred and fresh bark added in a process which often took six months to a year. The finished hides were then moved up to the drying room (note the ventilators under the roof line in the photograph on page 15) and hung on poles for a slow, supervised drying process.

The building as we know it now may date to the ownership of S. R. Spaulding & Sons, a Boston firm which owned a number of tanneries. Hull had not been able to succeed financially, and the Spaulding firm acquired his property in 1860. The Spaulding firm increased production around 1868, perhaps in an expanded factory, which they called the

his son Edward's management. Another Boston firm, Shaw Brothers, bought the tannery in 1879. Production returned to earlier levels, about 40,000 sides per year. This state of affairs did not last long, because the Shaw firm failed in 1883.

The tannery was next taken on by C. W. Clement, a trustee for the bankrupt Shaw firm. He kept it going for another fifteen years, until 1898, when the tannery closed for good after going bankrupt one more time. The method of leather production used at this tannery had grown outmoded and the site was allowed to fall into ruin.

The land on which the tannery ruins sit now belongs to Reliant Power Company and is inside the boundary controlled by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. This past winter we submitted an archaeological



inventory form to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The site has been added to the inventory and assigned the Unique Site Number (USN) A08905.000100

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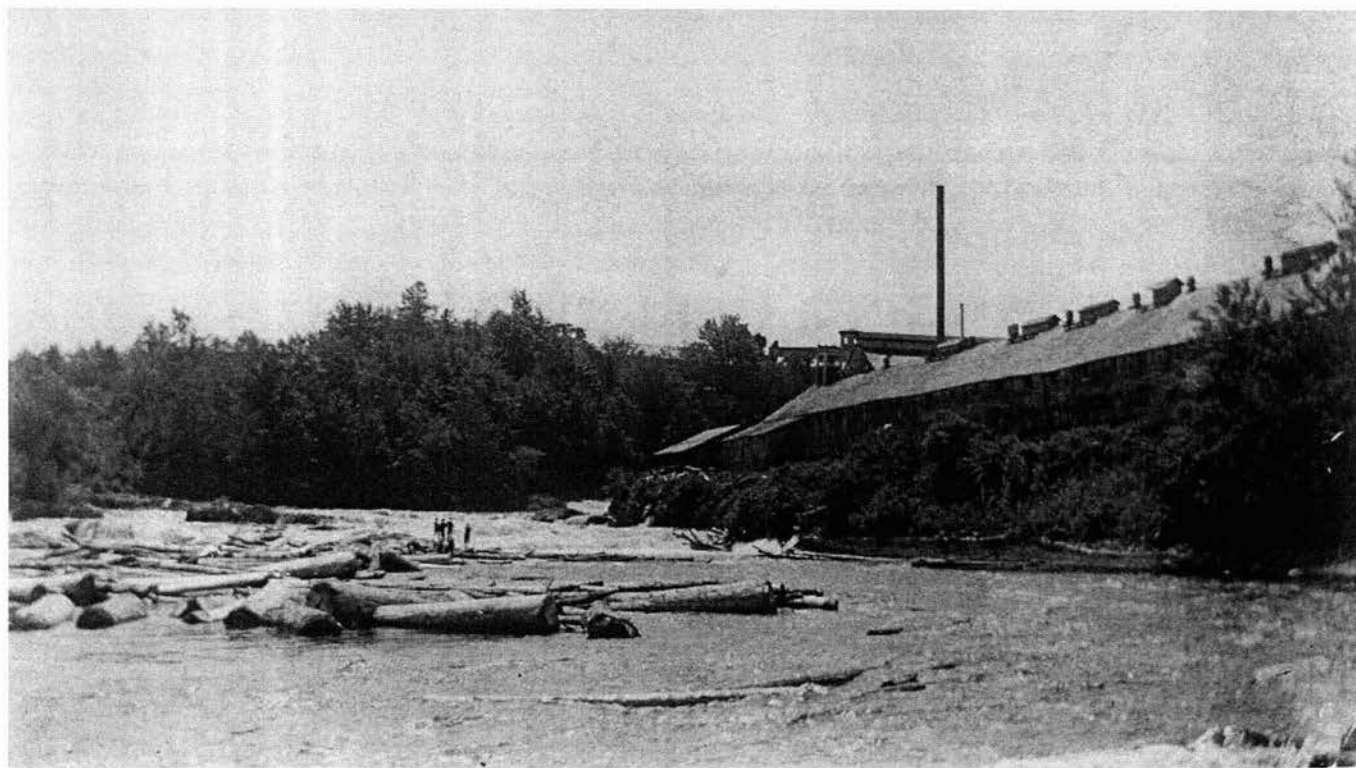
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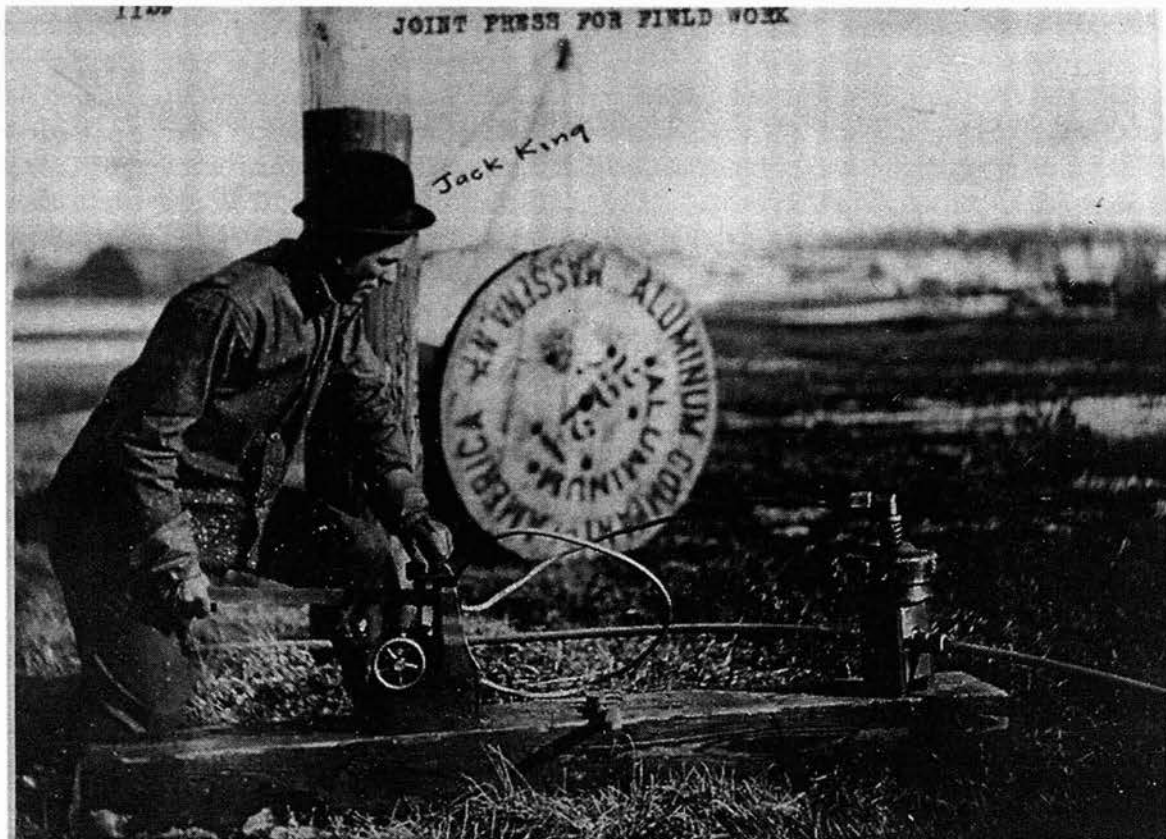
St. Lawrence County Courthouse, Canton, County Clerk's Office.



A late nineteenth-century view of the Colton tannery from the northeast showing the vat area. The vat building appears to be two-storey: there are two levels of windows, the higher just under the roof edge. The photo also shows a series of ventilators in the roof ridge. Some people are standing in the middle of the river. Note also the floating logs.

Colton Museum A1B066

# Mystery Photo



*A man identified as Jack King is operating a “joint press for field work” at the Aluminum Company of America in Massena. Does anyone know what Mr. King was doing with his joint press?*

## Alcoa Centennial

Alcoa is celebrating the centennial of aluminum production in Massena this year. Before industry found the location attractive, Massena was a small farming village. But in 1896, a number of investors formed the St. Lawrence Power Company and undertook construction of a power canal that would take advantage of the difference in elevation between the Grasse River and the St. Lawrence River to produce inexpensive hydroelectricity. The St. Lawrence Power Company recruited about 1,000 southern and eastern European immigrants from New York City to build the canal, thus transforming local society, though initially most of these men were housed in dormitories apart from the townspeople. In 1902 the Pittsburgh Reduction Company, which had been founded in 1888, was looking for promising sites for aluminum production using electrolysis. Massena was one promising site, because the company was able to buy much of the electricity produced there. The Pittsburgh Reduction Company (later known as the Aluminum Company of America or Alcoa) built its factory on the north bank of the Grasse east of the canal in 1902, and the first aluminum was produced in 1903. Massena as we know it today owes much to its long association with Alcoa and hydropower.

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your calendar for these museum programs

- Antiques appraisal - Oct. 25
- Annual meeting with lunch and speaker - Nov. 1
- Brown bag lunches - third Thursday of each month, beginning Oct. 16
- Holiday open house - Dec. 5

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## St. Lawrence County Historical Association

SLCHA Office, SLCHA Archives  
& Silas Wright House

### Hours

Tuesday - Saturday, Noon - 4:00 p.m.  
Friday, Noon - 8 p.m.  
(and by Appointment)

#### Admission Fees:

Museum	Free
Archives	Members - Free
	Students - \$2.50
	General Public - \$5.00

*From the editors*

### MORE ON THE NORFOLK PAPER MILL

On page 21 of the summer/fall 2002 Bicentennial Issue of *The Quarterly*, the name of the middle person at the Norfolk paper mill, spelled as Bill Mattison, should be Bill Mattson. This additional information was supplied by Bill's son, Bill, and by Bill's nephew, Chuck Morgan.

Bill's son confirms that Bill worked at Norfolk, not Raymondville. Chuck adds that "Bill" was actually just a nickname that everyone knew him by. His correct name was Almon D. Mattson."

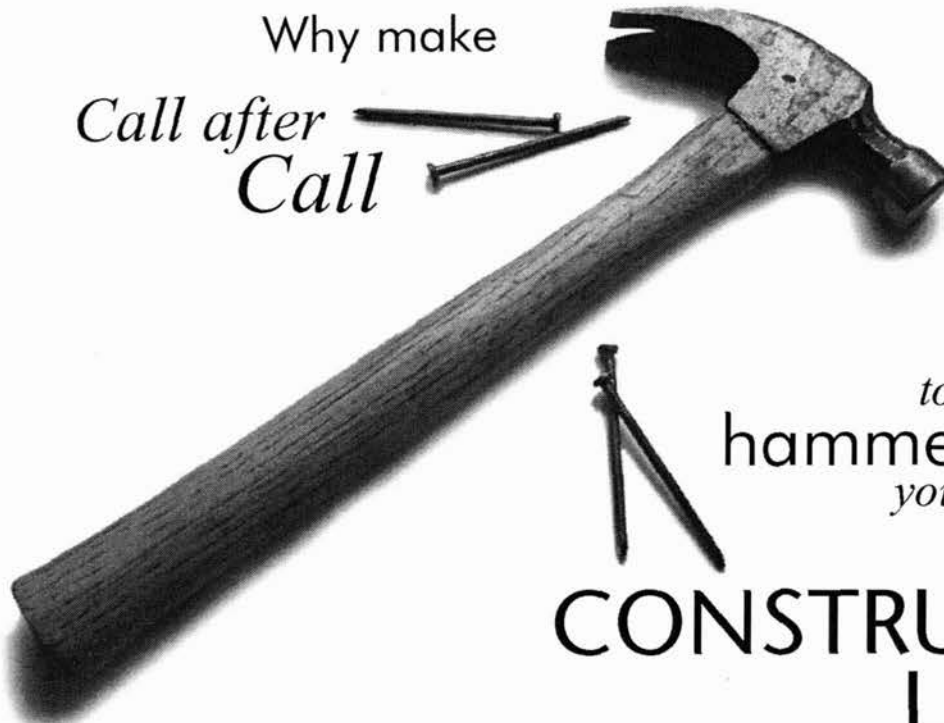
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