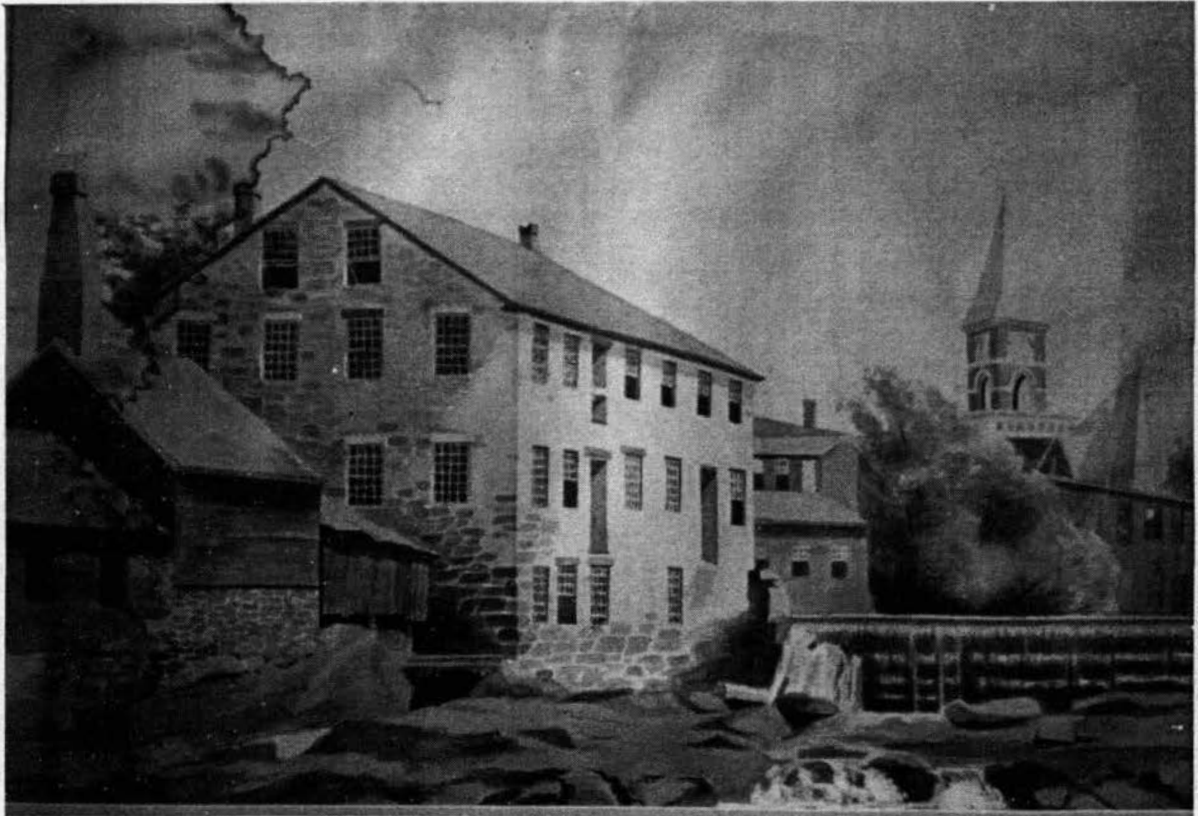


The St. Lawrence County Historical Association
QUARTERLY

Volume XLIX

Number 3

Summer 2004



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.

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The Quarterly is endowed in memory of Albert Priest Newell and Ella Waterman Newell.

Publication of *The Quarterly* is also made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State agency.



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

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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Volume XLIX Number 3, 2004

ISSN: 0558-1931

CONTENTS

From the County Historian <i>Trent Trulock</i>	2
The North Country's Lost Frescos <i>Malcolm McCormick</i>	4
News from 1878 <i>Reprinted from the Gouverneur Herald</i>	20
Tale of the Baby of Crossover Light <i>Mary H. Biondi</i>	21
Hon. Silas Wright	23
Mystery Photo	24

Issue Editor:
Cathie O'Horo

On the Cover

Large pencil and wash sketch (18x26) by H. D. Kip looking south along the east channel of the Grasse River in Canton. In the foreground are the pocket furnace, foundry, and machine shop operated by Nathaniel and Barzillai Hodskin (afterward by David M. Jones) where stoves, plows, and castings were manufactured. At the right behind the dam, the Hodskin Hotel and the clock tower of the Town Hall are visible on Canton's Main Street. (SLCHA collection, gift of Atwood Manley)

From the County Historian

Historic buildings are a lot of fun. They are fun to see, fun to go into, and fun to research. It is entertaining to think about who lived in them, how they lived, and what their dreams and aspirations were. But anyone who has an “old house” is liable to tell you that besides being fun they can be a lot of work! This is as true of the Silas Wright House as of any other historic structure. And like any house there is always something that needs to be done. For instance, this year the cedar-shingle roof of the Silas Wright House is being replaced.

Over the years the Wright house has had a great deal of work done to it. The original house consisted of 2 rooms and was built by Moses Whitcomb in 1832-33. Silas Wright purchased the house and several acres of neighboring land in 1834 and the Wrights expanded their house by adding a kitchen, entryway, parlors, and second story bedrooms. In 1890 the house was sold to the Universalist Church, which added a second floor to the original portion of the house and porches onto both wings. The house was used for a number of purposes during these years, including a boarding house and restaurant, parsonage, and private residence of the Zasa family, who operated a pizza parlor in the old livery stable on the back of the property. In 1973 the St. Lawrence County Historical Association purchased the house, which was restored and officially opened to the public as a museum in 1978. In 1986-87 a new wing was added to the rear of the house and in 2000-01 the Red Barn Addition was added to the rear of the house. At the same time the 1986-87 wing was renovated. So the house has seen many changes and additions over the years.

The Silas Wright House roof was last replaced in the 1980's, and now the time has come to again replace it. Anyone who has looked at the roof over the last couple of years



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

might have noticed the green tint the roof had taken on, a symptom of a roof that stays wet, as well as the curling of some of the cedar shakes. The roof has also suffered from a common malady of North Country roofs, ice dams, over the years. Ice dams are formed when snow and ice melts at the peaks of the roof, flows down the roof as water, and freezes at the eaves. Eventually a dam of ice forms along the eaves and as more water collects at the dam it begins to find its way under the shingles and into the house.

Planning for the roof project began in May of 2002. Alan Cerny from the architectural firm of Mesick, Cohen, Wilson, Baker in Albany, the same firm that designed the Red Barn Addition, was brought in to draw up plans for the roof restoration. And Wayne Latham, a general contractor from Ogdensburg, was the successful builder on the project. Between the raindrops of a very wet July 2004, Wayne and his crew began work on the roof.

Replacing a roof the size of the Wright House is an expensive proposition. In this case the total project budget is \$67,625, which includes some interior plaster repair and painting as well as the addition of some insulation. Fortunately the historical association was awarded \$29,362 from an Environmental Protection Fund Grant through New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. This grant will partially pay for the roof. The remainder of the

project will be paid for with bequests from the estates of Lloyd Redmond and Bernadine Howe, which were restricted by the donors for capital projects. The thoughtful and generous planned gifts that Lloyd and Bernadine made in the late 1990's allow us to make the Silas Wright House roof sound again today.

I am grateful to our friends who believe so much in our mission to collect, preserve, research, and interpret the history of St. Lawrence County that they remember the historical association in their wills, trusts,

and estate plans. The generosity of people like Lloyd and Bernadine, who placed such a high value on the county's history, ensures that the Silas Wright House will be here for generations to come. I'm appreciative to all of you who are interested in and supportive of St Lawrence County's history, and I invite all of you to come over and see the new roof when it is completed this summer.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association regrets to inform its readers that Dorothy Gaffney, who was profiled in the last issue of *The Quarterly*, passed away on August 7th, 2004. The Association extends its deepest sympathy to her family, and we will miss her.

The North Country's Lost Frescos

By Malcolm McCormick

History teaches us that the passage of time inevitably means loss. This has been especially true in America where a collective consciousness tends to confound change with progress—where progress and loss go hand-in-hand in a delirious onrush of bulldozers, dumpsters, and modernity. But accustomed as we've become to living with an abstracted or absent past, it still comes as a shock to realize the swiftness with which even relatively recent history can succumb to forgetfulness and neglect, the finality with which achievements of only a century past can be lost sight of. This has been the case with the artist Henry DeValcourt Kip and his photographer son, Benjamin, both prominent figures in Canton between 1850 and 1957 whose massive accumulations of paintings and photographs of local scenes and people—along with Henry DeValcourt's numerous frescos in public buildings, businesses, and homes, throughout the north country—have virtually disappeared and faded from communal memory.

The Kip family genealogy had 17th century roots in Holland. It branched in America from Hendrick Kype (as the name was originally written) when he emigrated in 1635. His son, Jacobus, built the historic family residence at Kip's Bay on Manhattan Island where 35th Street now meets the East River. A second son, Hendrick Jr., married Anna, daughter of the Hon Nicasius de Sille, First Counselor to Peter Stuyvesant and their descendants became the Kips of Kingston, N.Y.—in turn, the progenitors of the Canton Kips. Henry DeValcourt's father, Albert Ryckman Kip (1794-1880) was a blacksmith and ironworker who moved

north with his wife and daughter, first to Albany and then to Watertown where Henry DeValcourt was born in 1830. Ten years later, the family came to Canton, having taken title to a comfortable home built by David C. Judson (for whom Canton's Judson St. is named). It was located in the center of the village on a property extending from what is today the corner of Chapel and Hodskin Streets to Riverside Drive and in an eastern direction almost to the rear of the commercial buildings on Main Street. This homestead—a domestic farm with quarters for animals, gardens, and an orchard, was home to four generations of Kips until Albert Ryckman's great-granddaughter died there in 1960.

We have no reliable information concerning DeValcourt Kip's childhood but Atwood Manley, who knew him for many years, speculates that his artistic bent may have been nourished by Salathiel Ellis, an artist who at one time kept a paint and picture shop in Canton. Today Ellis is remembered for a fine set of lithographs made from his sketches of properties belonging to the Ogdensburg land baron, George Parish. He was engaged in cutting cameo portraits in Canton and obtained many commissions from the government as a medalist when he moved to New York City in 1842.

DeValcourt Kip was only ten when he arrived in Canton in 1840 but there is evidence that his lifelong infatuation with art may have begun or congealed through contact with Ellis during the two years before his departure. During the disbursement of the Kip estate one hundred and eighteen years later, a plaster relief by Ellis was found in the attic of the old home on Chapel Street on the back of which was written, "S. Ellis-made Parish drawings—friend of H.D. Kip who visited him in 1850." We also know that five years later, when



Mr. and Mrs. French, c. 1860. Mr. and Mrs. French were relatives of Dr. Caleb Pierce who lived in Madrid from 1823 to 1871. From the Potsdam Public Museum's collection of 19th century portraits. Henry Devalcourt Kip (19th century) Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas J. Smith.

DeValcourt's brother, Frank Everington, started for the California gold fields, he was delayed in New York waiting for a packet boat to take him through the Isthmus of Panama to San Francisco and wrote home that he had twice called at Ellis's office but found him absent both times.

From the earliest of Kip's daybook-diaries in the St. Lawrence County Historical Association's archive, we learn that by 1853, at the age of 23, he had become an itinerant portraitist. After a brief comment on the weather, his daily entries concentrate on his artistic projects, giving an interesting picture of the life of an artist on the road in the North Country—living for weeks at a time with the people whose portraits he was commissioned to paint, with ample time between sittings for socializing, church-going, and side trips to neighboring villages with his client/hosts. In

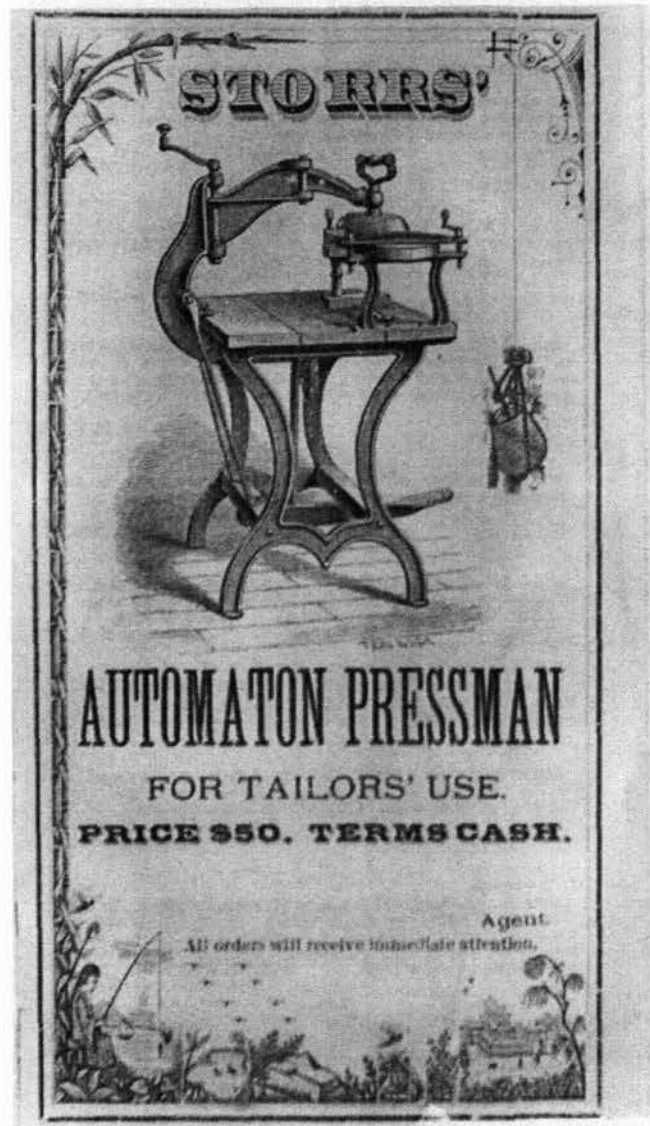
the early months of 1853, work kept him in the Lowville/Carthage/Watertown district where portraits in oil earned him \$11.00 to \$15.00. On average he appears to have spent about ten days on each but often worked on several at a time over longer periods. Pencil or wash portraits in India ink, which took only a day or two to complete, brought in one or two dollars. He was frequently asked to create likenesses derived from daguerreotypes of deceased parents or absent friends and relatives and occasionally there were requests for landscapes and "moonlight pieces" to grace parlor walls. Kip also mentions work undertaken based on his imagination and in one instance we find him borrowing the outlines of an engraving in *Harper's Magazine* for a painting of "the convent of St. Catherine."

Letters from home are always mentioned in the daybook as were those he wrote



An example of the cottage style furniture made by Kip and Ball, false-grained and decorated with landscape vignettes by H.D. Kip. In 1863 a set of this bedroom furniture consisting of 1 bedstead, 1 bureau, wash stand, towel rack and 2 chairs was "sold to King the Magician" for \$15.00.

to his family in Canton just as frequently and he keeps a record of his attendance at church services—sometimes as many as two or three of different denominations on a Sunday. In the worst of the winter weather there was invigorating travel by horse and cutter with frequent overturnings and pile-ups in drifting



The pressing machine invented and manufactured in Canton by Levi Bidwell Storrs. Kip's daybook/diaries indicate he was ornamenting them by 1857 and continued at least through 1875; 86 in 1870, 29 in 1874, and 38 in 1875. Storrs was a tailor by trade who also sold ready-made clothing and was one of the founders of St. Lawrence University in 1856.

snowbanks. When the weather improved, Kip began making frequent trips to Canton to help his father “turn horseshoes in the shop.” In late February, with this in mind, he “started for Canton about six in the morning [from Carthage]—arrived in Antwerp at 10—was obliged to wait until 6 in the evening for the Watertown stage. Arrived in DeKalb at 12:00—started for home on foot, arrived there 3:15 o'clock—stage fare \$2.00.” He notes that he was tired the next day but enjoyed a long walk after work. While visiting Canton through the next few months, Kip “painted the dashboard of a coach for Mr. [Judge Leslie] Russell,” painted a portrait of his brother Frank, as well as a small oil of his cabin in the gold fields based on Frank’s rough sketch, “made a drawing of Mr. Sherman’s horse,” gave lessons in perspective to a Miss Eastman and a Miss Teal, “finished Permins’s picture of life in California,” heard Horace Greeley lecture on temperance [probably in Ogdensburg], worked on a violin, and “gave Miss Wood my picture of Selamis.” He also continued writing “dissertations” which he delivered at funerals or as a lay preacher substituting for the Rev. Seth W. Remington in the Universalist Church. In August, Kip writes that he “went to Ogdensburg on the Prentis Express—arrived at Mr. Joice’s at dusk” and several days later “commenced ornamenting railroad cars,” a well paying sideline that occupied him throughout the next few years.

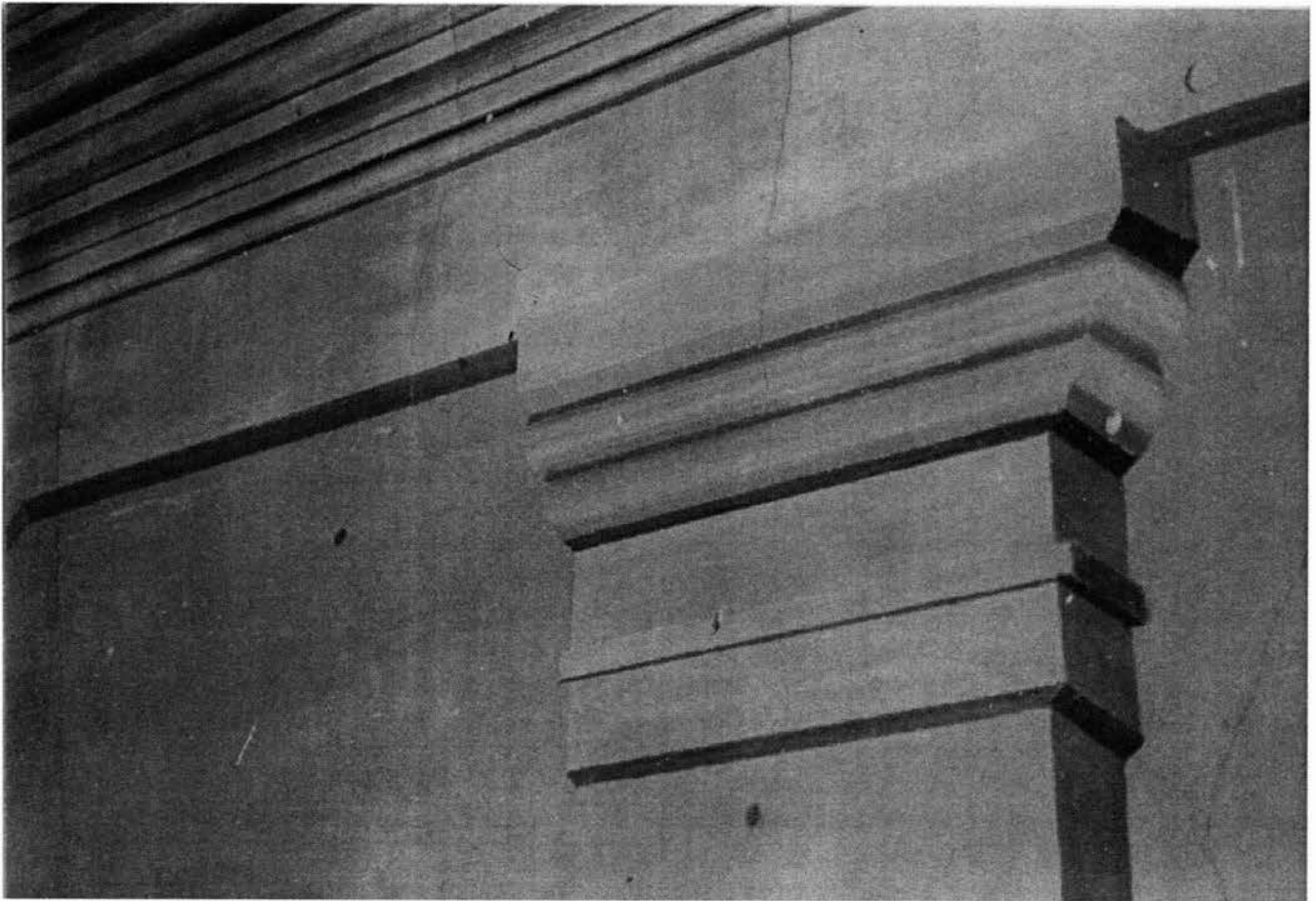
The highlight of every fall season in Canton was the fair held on outer Water Street (now Riverside Drive). DeValcourt’s daybook mentions the rainy opening day in 1853 when he “carried some paintings. Cornelia [his sister] carried book shelves and flowers” to Floral Hall where a competition in domestic arts was always held. Two days later he “rec. first premiums on oil paintings, \$3.00. Sis rec. \$1.00 on shelves and one on flowers.” The following day, “a very pleasant day—several thousand attended—one man kicked by a horse and died.” In subsequent years, newspaper accounts of the fair’s prize giving indi-

cate that Kip often took first premiums for his oils.

Through the remainder of the decade, entries become less frequent and unfortunately several of the little volumes from this period are missing. We learn from his obituary that DeValcourt married Harriet Hall of Madrid in 1859, an event apparently too personal for mention in his daily jottings. The romance, as it developed, may well have been a factor causing him to spend less time on the road and more in Canton where he broadened his range of skills considerably. In addition to painting signs and decorating a great many buggies, cutters, and sleighs, he did paper hanging, upholstering and wood graining, stuffed mattresses and pillows and repaired, painted, and ornamented furniture. In 1861 Kip formed a business partnership with his brother-in-law—Kip and

Ball—located on Court Street opposite the fire hall. Their business profile was typical in the 19th century, combining cabinetmaking with coffins and a hearse for funerals. A line of “cottage” furniture decorated by DeValcourt in a distinctive style featuring landscape vignettes and “faux bois” (graining) was sold to retailers. However, he mentions a set of bedroom furniture sold to King the Magician for \$15.00. It included a bedstead, bureau, wash stand, towel rack and two chairs.

Kip and Ball also did furniture repairs, mixed and sold paint, rented paint brushes, and DeValcourt continued to provide the myriad artistic services for which he was known in the community. By 1863 he was also ornamenting pressing machines invented and manufactured in Canton by a local tailor, Levi Bidwell Storrs, and as of 1870 was painting, lettering and lining as many as 96 of these elabo-



Brick Chapel fresco. Detail of a capital painted in trompe l'oeil.



A portion of the frescoing which still remains in the Brick Chapel church probably painted soon after the old church edifice was replaced by a new brick building in 1858. Shown are a painted cornice, ceiling moldings, and the capital of a column motif repeated throughout the interior, and a decorative window cap. It was done in shades of grey accented with black.

rate cast iron devices each year for an international market.

Meanwhile Kip established himself in a field that makes him unique in the annals of art in the north country. The first extant reference to frescoing in the daybooks is an entry for November 6, 1856 in which “work on a church” is mentioned. No location is given and this may or may not be his first commission to decorate a large public interior space, but it is evident that by this date he has begun to develop the specialty for which he became so well known.

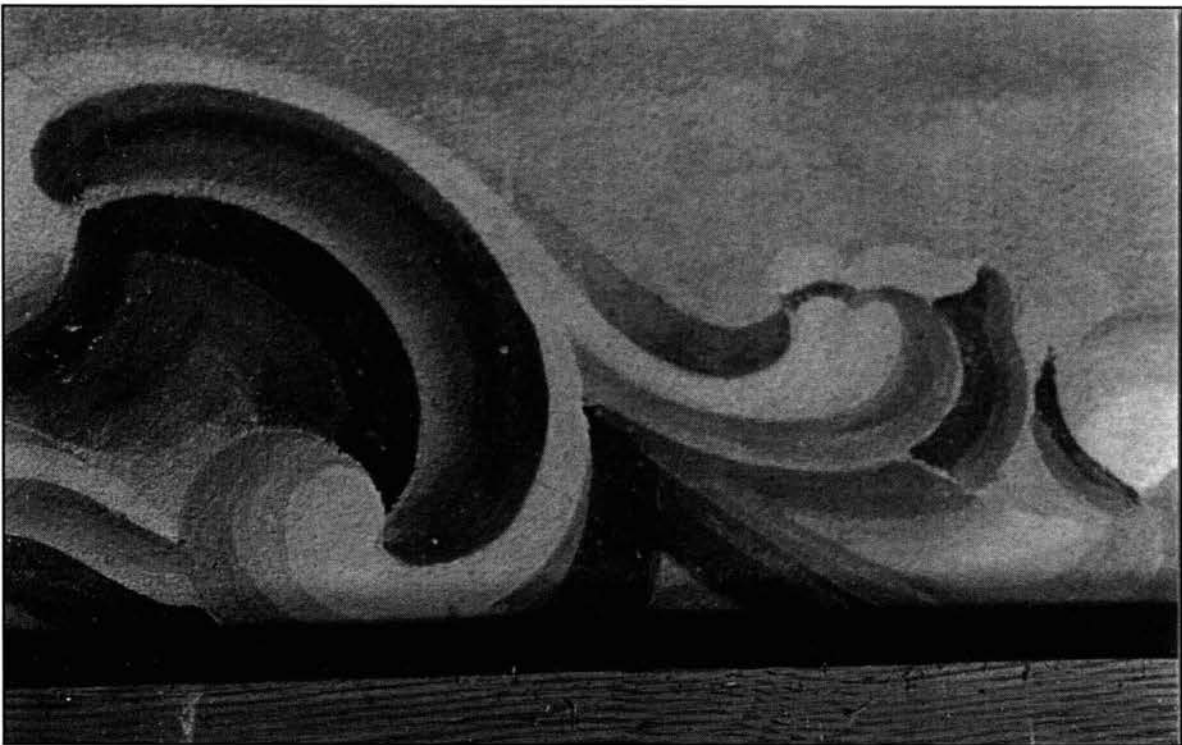
Historically, painting in fresco (“fresco secco”) was a method of applying pigment, water, and lime to freshly laid plaster so that images impregnate the wet plaster ground and become an integral part of the wall. In this way they become very durable, even washable. Fresco as a method of painting murals

has been in use since the time of the early Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, and relics of some of the most ancient frescoes are still perfectly resistant to even severe outdoor weather conditions. Many of the great works of art of the Italian Renaissance are in this medium.

The difficulty for the artist in frescoing lies in judging the condition of moist plaster in order to seamlessly join relatively small areas of wall surface that can be painted while they remain receptive. Maintaining consistent color tonalities requires the utmost dexterity and experience. To avoid the pitfalls of the demanding medium, artists of the Victorian era developed alternative methods of painting murals on dry plaster, using casein or oil based paints but continued—as Kip did—to call their work fresco. His daybooks indicate sizable purchases of white lead, tur-



Brick Chapel Church. Stained glass window with painted cap and faux bois wood grain painted window frame. Remnants of Kip's frescoes can be seen in a closed-off choir loft above the entryway. The remainder of his work was painted over and replaced by stenciled designs.



Detail of a window cap in the Brick Chapel church with wood graining visible at the bottom.

pentine, linseed oil, size (animal glue) and whiting; but until a chemical analysis is made of the surface of his work, we can only speculate about his choice of pigment and the medium he employed. Whatever his formula was, one example of his work on hand is remarkably stable—shows no discoloration (other than soil) and appears to be impervious to the various kinds of deterioration that befall works of art.

We have no evidence or indication that Kip sought formal instruction in art at any time during his lifetime and based on what we know of his ability to improvise his own methods in so many avenues of interest, it seems safe to assume that for the most part his frescoing techniques were self-invented. During Kip's lifetime, painters' receipts and instruction for mural decoration were readily available in popular manuals. Whatever Kip's choices were, they were sound. The loss of all but a few fragments of the frescoes he executed throughout the north country and southern Canada is due to posterity's indifference and neglect, not to the artist's self-taught methods.

Kip's first step in decorating large halls, churches, schoolrooms, courtrooms, etc. (after arranging room and board with a neighboring family or at a hotel) was to gain access to the walls and ceiling by means of scaffolding. In at least one instance at the Union Church in Richville, we learn that "the committee built the staging" but it appears that Kip usually did this work himself with the help of an assistant—his father, Bragdon, Ben, Bell, and Miner are mentioned through the years. He records that in one location the scaffolding collapsed. The question remains whether it was customarily stationary or movable. Fixed seating—pews and the like—in large halls where ceiling decorations were called for very probably called for stationary scaffolding.

Several days were spent "laying in the ground color" on areas to be decorated and if work was being done on newly dried plaster this ground probably included a coat of primer—a mixture of whiting and animal glue

as used in the preparation of a canvas on a stretcher. On wintry days it was necessary to build a fire in a wood stove or stoke the furnace to insure that paints would flow and adhere properly.

Next, having conceived and sketched designs on location during evening hours, Kip would commence transferring them to the walls. No mention is made of his method for doing this. It may have entailed "squaring" the ground using a snap line dipped in lamp black or he may have used the traditional fresco method of pouncing the outlines of his designs onto the wall through perforations in his sketches, using a bag of powdered charcoal. Running borders may have been executed with stencils. There is no mention of them in Kip's daybooks but they were a very fashionable method of wall decoration in his time. His notations suggest that he often introduced painting architectural motifs—arches, columns with capitals, panel moldings, ceiling medallions, cornices and window caps—painted in trompe l'oeil. This was the case in an example of Kip's frescoing that can still be seen in the walled-off choir loft of the Brick Chapel church in the south Canton area. It was executed soon after the old wooden structure was replaced in 1858. The architectural motifs that remain visible would originally have extended into the rest of the church hall, giving it an air of spaciousness, sanctity and order.

The monochromatic and rather neutral color scheme the artist used at Brick Chapel relates this work to the murals he painted for the Masonic Lodge in downtown Canton in 1871-72, indicating that it was characteristic of his frescoing in general. The Masonic murals were an ambitious use of trompe l'oeil approaching the effect of "grisaille"—a simulation of carved stone or plaster-work using shadows to dramatize the illusion of three dimensionality. Nearly life-sized figures, seemingly carved in stone, represented the symbolism used in Freemasonry's rites. In contrast to this restrained use of color, in other locations Kip is known to have utilized the rich hues he employed in his canvases, where he adhered to the painterly conventions of the Victorian era.

In one instance he depicted the Last Supper on the wall of the Hermon Baptist Church in an image measuring 15 by 7 feet. Unfortunately it was lost in the fire of 1891.

The following is a list of frescoes executed by Henry DeValcourt Kip between 1856 and 1879, as noted in the extant daybook/diaries of that period of time.

**A Partial List of Frescoes
Executed by Henry DeValcourt Kip
Between 1856 and 1879 – as Noted in his Daybook/Diaries**

LOCATION	SITE	DATE	REMUNERATION
Adams	Masonic Hall		
Alexandria Bay	M. E. Church	11/9-23, 1874	\$87.00
Bangor	church	9/8-?, 1873	
Brasher Falls	church	1/22-2/12, 1872	
Brockville	Presbyterian Church & Old Kirk	6/9-9/8, 1879	
Brockville	Town Hall	9/23-10/10, 1879	
Buck's Bridge	church	11/20-12/1, 1876	
Canton	Universalist Church	1865?	
Canton	Masonic Hall	8/18-1/?, 1871-72	\$124.00
Canton	Baptist Church	1872	
Canton	Hodskin House Hotel	1874, 1876	
Canton	M. E. Church		
Canton	Episcopal Church		
South Canton	M. E. Church	c. 1858?	
Chaumont	M. E. Church	7/13-29, 1874	
Chazy	M. E. Church	6/15-7/6, 1874	\$84.00
DeKalb	M. E. Church		
DePeyster	M. E. Church	8/30-9/29, 1871	
Dunbar, Ont.	Church	10/28-11/17, 1873	\$100.00
Evans Mills	M. E. Church	10/21-11/8, 1872	\$83.00
Fort Covington	M. E. Church	11/30-12/14, 1874	\$68.00
Gouverneur	M. E. Church	8/23-9/1, 1870	\$164.00
Gouverneur	Masonic Hall	11/24-12/31, 1875	
Gouverneur	Masonic Hall	1/11-3/24, 1876	
Gouverneur	Baptist Church		
Hammond	Presbyterian Church	1871	
Hammond	M. E. Church	5/12-9/1, 1873	\$80.00
Hermon	Baptist Church	11/3-12/23, 1869	\$107.00
Hermon	Last Supper	1/11-1/15, 1870	\$60.00
Hermon	Seymour's Store	1872	
Hermon	Catholic Church	11/9-24, 1875	
Hermon	M. E. Church		
Heuvelton	M. E. Church	9/26-11/12, 1870	\$264.50

LOCATION	SITE	DATE	REMUNERATION
Hopkinton	Town Hall	1/18-2/2, 1871	\$60.00
Hopkinton	Congregational Church	10/7-?, 1873	\$75.00
Hopkinton	church		
Kemptville, Ont.	Methodist Church	11/11-12/24, 1872	\$135.50
Lawrenceville	Baptist Church		
Louisville	M. E. Church		
Madrid	M. E. Church	3/2-5/6, 1869	\$150.00
Madrid	Town Hall	6/17-7/26, 1872	\$74.25
Madrid	Baptist Church	1/22-2/15, 1873	\$70.00
Malone	Episcopal Church	1859	
Malone	Presbyterian Church		
Massena	M. E. Church	6/13-7/21, 1870	\$136.50
Massena	Baptist Church	1870	
Moira	M. E. Church	7/12-8/24, 1869	\$105.00
Moira	Town Hall	1872	
Morewood, Ont.	Church	1/26-2/18, 1875	\$100.00
Morristown	M. E. Church	1/1-8, 1874	\$65.00
Norfolk	M. E. Church	1871	
North Bangor	Masonic Hall	2/13-3/10, 1874	\$78.25
North Lawrence	Union Church		
Nicholville	M. E. Church	10/23-11/13, 1876	
Ogdensburg	Catholic Church	10/13-24, 1873	\$62.00
Ox-Bow	M. E. Church	1/12-21, 1875	\$55.00
Parishville	M. E. Church		
Plessis	Presbyterian Church		
Portage Du Port	M. E. Church		
Potsdam	school house	1859	
Potsdam	Town Hall	1859	\$100.00
Potsdam	Baptist Church	5/17-6/10, 1875	
Potsdam	Universalist Church	2/17-3/20, 1877	
West Potsdam	M. E. Church	8/12-9/24, 1870	\$100.00
Rackett River	church	1/19-29, 1874	
Raymondville	church	1873, 1/6-17, 1874	
Rensselaer Falls		12/16-?, 1879	
Richfield Springs	church	7/10-8/8, 1873	\$260.00
Richville	church	1859	
Rodman	church	12/4-1/4, 1876-77	
Shingle Creek	M. E. Church	12/8-20, 1873	
Theresa	M. E. Church		
Watertown	M. E. Church	1872	
Unknown location	church	1865	

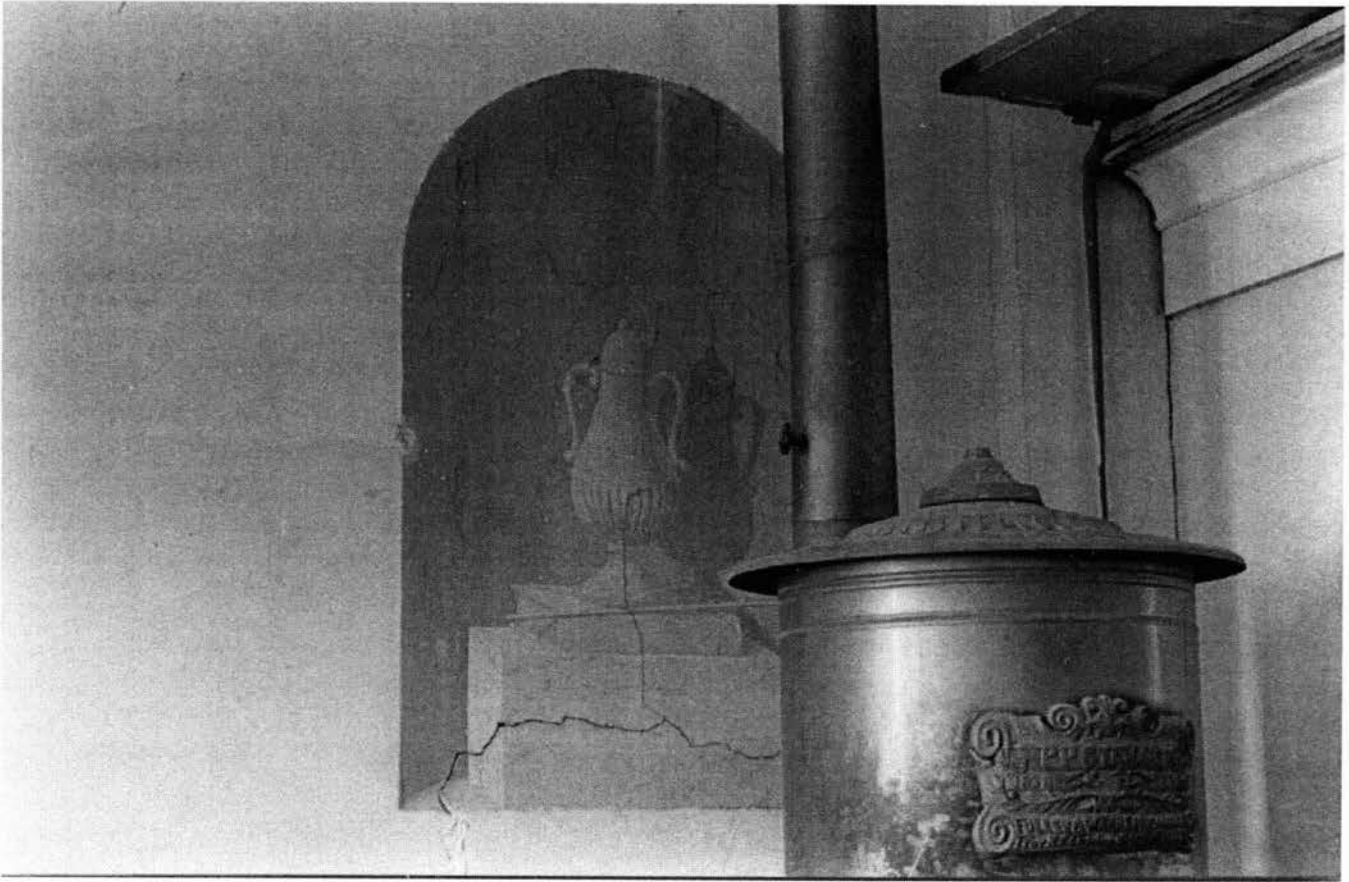
This list indicates a total of 71 projects undertaken over a period of a quarter of a century in 49 locations throughout the north country and Canada. However, Kip's day-books cover only half of these years and in diminishing detail as time passes. In the '60s he appears to have lost interest in maintaining a daily record and often, for months at a time, there are very sparse entries or none at all. These sporadic jottings tend to cover expenditures and money received. And the above list does not include frescoes executed in private homes which are frequently mentioned by family name only, giving no location or other information. We know that Kip remained very active as an artist in other media until shortly before his death in 1909 at seven-nine. Nothing suggests that he gave up frescoing as early as 1879, the year of the last of the daybook/diaries when he was only 49. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that he did a great deal more fresco work of which we have no record.

On average, frescoes in large public spaces took from four to eight weeks to complete and Kip appears to have charged for them accordingly. The decoration of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Heuvelton (1878) was completed in seven weeks for which he received \$265.50: frescoes at an unidentified church in Hammond begun on Nov. 6, 1871 "with all hands on" (probably three men working) were completed by Nov. 24 at a cost of \$100.00; in Oxbow in 1875, the Methodist Episcopal Church decorations took ten days for which Kip was paid \$55.00. These commissions often entailed the (painted) graining of woodwork and furniture, along with the lettering of pews, frosting of glass windows, and other finishing work that could not be done hurriedly. Kip frequently worked on more than one project at a time, accommodating drying time of paints and varnishes, the weather and the other exigencies of travel between two or more locations in order to remain regularly employed. He was a longstanding member of the Masonic lodge when that organization was forced to find a new location for their meetings after a



Nearly life-size representation of George Washington painted by H.D. Kip on the wall of the Masonic Hall in Canton, 1871-72. Washington's membership was a source of pride to Masons in that the affiliation of "a man so eminent for virtue" was proof of Masonry's moral and religious character.

fire devastated the north side of Canton's Main Street in 1870. The new hall was located on the top floor of the Conkey block where Kip commenced work on August 18, 1871 and was still adding finishing touches in January of the following year. Albeit other work was undertaken during this five month period, Kip was an active Mason and his work on the Masonic frescoes in comparison to the payment received—only \$124.00—suggests that this project was a labor of love. (The Masons later moved to the adjacent building on the corner of Main and Court Streets where some fragments of Kip's frescoing have survived recent remodeling of the top



Masonic Hall, Canton. A funeral urn--the Masonic symbol of the Temple of Solomon, of life and the receptacle of truth.

floor; indicating that the move took place before the artist's death in 1909.)

It is clear that a major portion of DeValcourt Kip's life was spent on the road traveling from commission to commission with regular trips to Canton to be with a family that by 1871 included three sons and a daughter. He mentions travel by stage, sleigh, train ("taking the cars") and frequently on foot but we are left wondering how he transported the considerable amount of equipment needed in his work: carpentry tools, cans of paint and solvents, brushes, pigments, drop cloths, tools for graining and gold leafing, paper for patterns, the many and sundry items art work requires. In addition he would have needed all-weather clothing and personal items during his sometimes prolonged stays away from home.

Throughout the final, quieter decades of Kip's career there were always cutters, carriages, pressing machines, signs, and more furniture waiting to be painted. He also became well known for creating the theater drops and flats used in performances at the opera house in Canton's town hall. His infatuation with Grasse River scenes, rustic Adirondack campsites, and picturesque north country terrain, continued to inspire a steady flow of sensitive watercolors. And as the following newspaper clippings indicate, portrait work continued:

Mr. H. D. Kip, the artist, has produced from a small photograph a striking likeness in India ink of Mr. M. E. Turner, deceased, of Potsdam. Mr. Kip's portraits in this style well deserve the admiration they excite. (*The Hermon Courier*, 1879)



Masonic Hall, Canton. In Masonic rites, the weeping virgin with disheveled hair - holding a sprig of wheat and with Saturn, or Time, standing behind her, is an emblem of the immortality of the soul based on astronomical and biblical symbolism.

Mr. Pliny Wright has made a present to the county of a lifelike portrait of the late David C. Judson, of Ogdensburg, done in India ink, by Mr. H. D. Kip, of this village. This picture, with an equally admirable likeness of the late Silas Wright, done by the same hand, were hung up in the Deputy's room, of the county Clerk's office, on Thursday morning of last week. (*The Hermon Courier*, 1879, *Canton News*)

A fine portrait.—Mr. H. D. Kip has just finished a full length portrait, in India ink, of Mr. H. C. Wiser, of Kansas, son of J. P. Wiser, of Prescott, Ont. The figure is about half live size, and

is on a canvas measuring twenty four by fifty inches. It is a perfect likeness, and one of the most striking pictures we have seen from the pencil of this accomplished and painstaking artist. It may be seen for a few days in the window of Mr. Ralph's store, in the Hardie block (*Commercial Advertiser*, April 23, 1885)

There is in the show window of E. E. Stevens' store, a picture by one of our Canton artists, which is worthy of a criti-



Masonic Hall, Canton. The Penitent Pilgrim, a term used in Masonic Templarism referring to the pilgrimage for which Christianity promises the remission of sins and various spiritual advantages. The painting moldings (frames) and other architectural elements that originally surrounded these frescoes have been painted over.

cal examination. It is a portrait of Master Bing Stevens in India ink, executed by Mr. H. D. Kip. The walls of a good many of the homes of Canton are adorned with fine portraits by Mr. Kip, but we have not seen among them a more striking likeness, or a more perfectly finished picture than this. (*Commercial Advertiser*, Jan. 7, 1891)

When the artist died at the age of 79 in 1909, and was buried at Evergreen Cemetery in Canton, the *Commercial Advertiser* published a tribute by G. R. H.—George R. Hardie, for many years a professor of Latin at St. Lawrence University:

...before his strength was impaired Mr. Kip was a fresco painter of repute. Endowed with fine taste and with the eye of an artist, he was by nature fitted for his occupation, and to the other qualities which made him an expert workman were added a painstaking disposition and endless patience in the performance of his work. In his later years he devoted his skill and leisure to the painting of portraits and landscapes. On the walls of many homes, delicate water colors attest his sympathetic appreciation of natural beauty and the fidelity with which he presented it. In perspective he was excellent. His pictures generally show a wide stretch of peaceful landscape spread beneath a northern sky. He belonged to no school of art; he was unhampered by convention. He was no impressionist. He painted "the things as he saw them for the God of things as they are." Of poetry, too he was fond, as he was of all things that appeal to a refined taste: and his friends know that he wrote verse of genuine merit...Mr. Kip was a man of singular serenity of temper; he was averse to ostentation and avoided rather than sought prominence in the community, but in his long life he became known and he received and de-

served universal respect.

Benjamin, the youngest of DeValcourt Kip's three sons, was born in 1871. He inherited his father's artistic talent but with the difference that he had the advantage of several years of professional art training in New York City before returning to Canton in 1892 to open a photography studio the following year in partnership with Harry B. Copeland. They were located in the L. B. Storrs block where *The Plaindealer* is today and after a decade moved east to the Drury block (the Savings and Loan Association building) where Benjamin continued in business alone after 1906 until retirement in 1948. For over half a century he photographed Canton's residents, young and old, from all walks of life, surely accumulating an invaluable historic resource had it been preserved "in toto." St. Lawrence University's Owen D. Young Library has about 200 of Ben Kip's early glass plate negatives but his life's work and his presence in the community—as significant as his father's—has suffered a similar eclipse. He is remembered, if at all, in connection with a series of small viewbooks published in partnership with the Potsdam photographer N. L. Stone in the 1890s. These show some of the public buildings and well kept homes in Canton, Potsdam, Gouverneur, Massena, and Ogdensburg; and are still in circulation and sought after by collectors of north country memorabilia.

Ben Kip's only child, Wealthia, born in 1909, was the last of the family in Canton. At the time of her death in 1960, a will dispersed three generations of accumulated family belongings, including a store of paintings and drawings by her father and grandfather which were divided among four friends or relatives. Atwood Manley (for many years publisher of *The Plaindealer* and Canton's pre-eminent historian) urged the designated legatees to leave this cache of art and history in Canton long enough to arrange an exhibition and permit a representative of the state historical society to inspect it. "Unfortunately," he writes, "they were in no mood for delay."



Left to right. Henry Devalcourt Kip: his son, Albert Frederick; daughter in law, nee Ida Allen; and wife, Harriet, in the Chapel St. home, c1890 when Kip would have been 70 years old. His paintings can be seen on the parlor walls.

But as one of the appraisers of the estate, Atwood was able to save items the heirs were not interested in from being sent to the dump. They included a number of oils and watercolors by both Kips, family letters and documents, the cameo by Salathiel Ellis, and some material relating to Frederic Remington. These "finds" comprise the bulk of the material and information relating to the Kip family that remains in collections at St. Lawrence University, the Canton Town and Village Historian's office and SLCHA.

Among her bequests, Wealthia gave a pen and ink sketch of the American Eagle to the Potsdam Public Library and afterwards two oil portraits attributed to H. D. Kip were acquired by the Potsdam Public Museum from a donor in Madrid, N.Y.

Ironically, the sole example of Kip art to find its way into a major museum collection was one of DeValcourt's juvenile attempts at handling oil pigments on canvas, which he signed and titled "Attack of the Bears." It fell into the hands of a Boston dealer who shrewdly marketed it abroad where there has always been a

special interest in roughcast American “genius.” Today it is rather deceptively on display as a primitive work (rather than juvenilia) at the American Museum in Bath, England.

SOURCES AND POSTSCRIPT:

Most of the information in this article concerning DeValcourt Kip’s frescoing is taken from his daybook/diaries, sixteen of which can be found at the SLCHA archive and another at the Canton Historian’s office in the town hall. Varick Chittenden very generously gave me access to a large cache of correspondence, photographs, family documents, and notes he accumulated in preparation for a master’s thesis which was never completed. His files also included correspondence, notes, and essays by Atwood Manley, a close friend of the Kip family for many years through whose efforts what little information we presently have about them was preserved and eventually made accessible in public archives. The Owen D. Young Library at St. Lawrence University has an interesting file on the Kips that includes photos of a performance at the Canton town hall opera house for which DeValcourt designed and painted scenery. There are also several examples of Benjamin Kip’s pencil sketches showing the high level of academic proficiency he attained before abandoning art for photography. The Brush Art Gallery at St. Lawrence has several prime examples of DeValcourt Kip’s watercolors (among them views of Cranberry Lake, Massena Springs, and the old Canton orphanage) as well as large portraits done in pencil and wash of Silas Wright and the artist himself as an elderly man. From these and other examples at SLCHA and the Historian’s office it is possible to discern painterly characteristics based on which the work of father and son are distinguishable.

Many of DeValcourt’s watercolors are dated and signed “H. D. Kip”. When not, there is the risk of misattributing work by his many students to him. In receiving instruction they were apt to imitate his rather “dry” technique using short overlaid brush strokes rather than loose washes as well as the teacher’s prefer-

ence for the vivid yellow-greens in nature. A watercolor recently acquired by the SLCHA (a gift from the estate of Helene Infantine) though unsigned, can be authoritatively attributed to DeValcourt Kip by means of both provenance and tell-tale signs of the teacher’s hand. Varick Chittenden’s extensive but unfruitful search for examples of Kip’s frescoes (along with my own) suggests that none have survived the fires, renovations, and demolitions of years past and do not remain to be rediscovered. We are fortunate to have photographs taken by Herb Judd of those that until quite recently were still visible on the walls of the old Masonic assembly room. However, it is very likely that there are numerous works in oil and watercolor still to be found and identified, particularly in the Canton area. It is hoped that this article will draw attention to that possibility.

All the photographs accompanying this article courtesy Malcolm McCormick.

News from 1878

Reprinted from the *Gouverneur Herald*

William H. Vanderbilt, the railroad king, with wife and daughter, have recently visited the Thousand Isles.

An exchange accuses Susan B. Anthony of footing all the bills of the woman's suffrage jamboree at Washington. Susan's feet must be of masculine proportions.

Rev. Ward W. Hunt has closed his relations as chaplain of SingSing Prison and is again in Adams. The confinement of the work and the climate affected his health.

Amerry party of about fifty ladies and gentlemen of Hammond and Oxbow chartered the steam yacht *Lizzie*, of Chippewa Bay, and enjoyed a pleasant trip to Alexandria Bay on the dedicatory exercises at Westminster Park.

The new talc mill near Hailesborough will be completed by May 1st.

Joseph Davis of Braise Corners, Macomb, left an Englishman to do his chores, Sunday. In his absence the man absconded with horse, harness, watch and chain, a coat, a pair of pants, revolver, three hams, some butter, some silver knives, forks and spoons. At last accounts he had not been captured.

Albert Fulton of Canton swallowed some false teeth which are likely to cause his death.

The undertakers of Ogdensburg are discouraged because it is so healthy.

Mrs. Charlotte Jane Powers, who died at Canton a few days since, settled in the town of Russell in the year 1809.

E. A. Parish of Fine left at our office last Saturday a corn stalk measuring twelve feet eight inches.

J. W. Dayton & Son, of Potsdam, have shipped to Boston this season 4,500 turkeys, 1,200 chickens and 600 geese.

The new county clerk's office at Canton will be ready for the archives about the first of May. The county is now well provided with commodious buildings for conducting its affairs.

The Board of Supervisors in this county now stands 33 Republicans and one Democrat.

Hiram Hutchins, while hunting on Jot Pond, near Racket River, killed a panther which measured six feet four inches.

Alpheus and Louisa Clark celebrated their golden wedding at Crary's Mills. They came from Vermont.

Morristown has two active old men. They are Justice White, aged eight-four, and Colonel Hooker, the custom house keeper, aged eighty-two. The latter is said to do the work of two ordinary men.

The next annual fair of the St. Lawrence County Agricultural Society will be held at Canton, September 17th, 18th and 19th, 1878.

The Exhibition. St. Lawrence County should be well represented by its choicest stock at the Exhibition. Hermon has at least five valuable colts that should be on the ground. Edwards has two at least, to our knowledge, and Russell as many more. Canton has been breeding good ones for years, and Ogdensburg cannot be far behind.

Tale of the Baby of Crossover Light

By Mary H. Biondi,
Town of Hammond Historian



OWL'S HEAD LIGHT.

Illustration from Harper's New Monthly Magazine, Vol. 55, No. 327, August, 1877, p. 345.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This article was submitted by Valera Bickelhaupt, Town of Hammond Historian. It was previously published in an unknown newspaper.

HAMMOND – We heard recently a story about life in the early days on “Stony Lonesome,” which was established in 1848 in the main channel of the St. Lawrence above Oak Point. This important channel light was discontinued in April, 1941, and the island is now privately owned.

The writer says, “My father kept the light on Crossover Island. We did not have a grassy yard to play in but a flat rock set right in the St. Lawrence River. One of my jobs was to see that the younger children did not fall into the river and drown. We could barely land when the wind blew.”

“One thing we enjoyed was to watch the ferry boats crossing the river from Oak

Point to Canada and the boats going up and down the main channel to Montreal, Que. and Halifax. We had oil lamps. Boats would come along and leave oil which we had to dip out and carry up to the big lamp on the top of the house. There were windows all around the lamp which we had to keep clean. Sometimes when the wind blew a gale, birds would fly against the window with a bang. Before we had kerosene we used whale oil. They were certainly glad to get kerosene. Life was fun sometimes, too. People would stop along to see us. Many times Indians would paddle by in their canoes. We were poor but my father always seemed to find enough to share at our table with those who stopped by. Sometimes the ferry boat would give us a ride. There were no motors in those days and the boats were rowed. The big river boats had steam engines but not the small ferries that crossed near us.”



AS NATURE HAS ORDAINED.

Illustration from Harper's New Monthly Magazine, Vol. 52, No. 310, March, 1876, p. 545.

"Our youngest sister was born in the light house. Everyone that summer was upset about something. The baby was not well and mother and father, thinking she was going to die, had not even given her a name. We children helped the best we could. One day the Indian woman who came every year to sell baskets up and down the river stopped at our island. She, paddling a canoe piled high with sweet grass baskets, came along side the island, drew up her canoe, and came in. She noticed my mother's face and the new baby. Then she said, "Baby sick, very sick. I go. I come back." Unloading her canoe, she paddled back up river and in a short time returned. She had collected some herbs which she cooked up. Then taking the baby in her lap as she sat cross-legged on the floor, she said to mother, "You sleep, I keep baby."

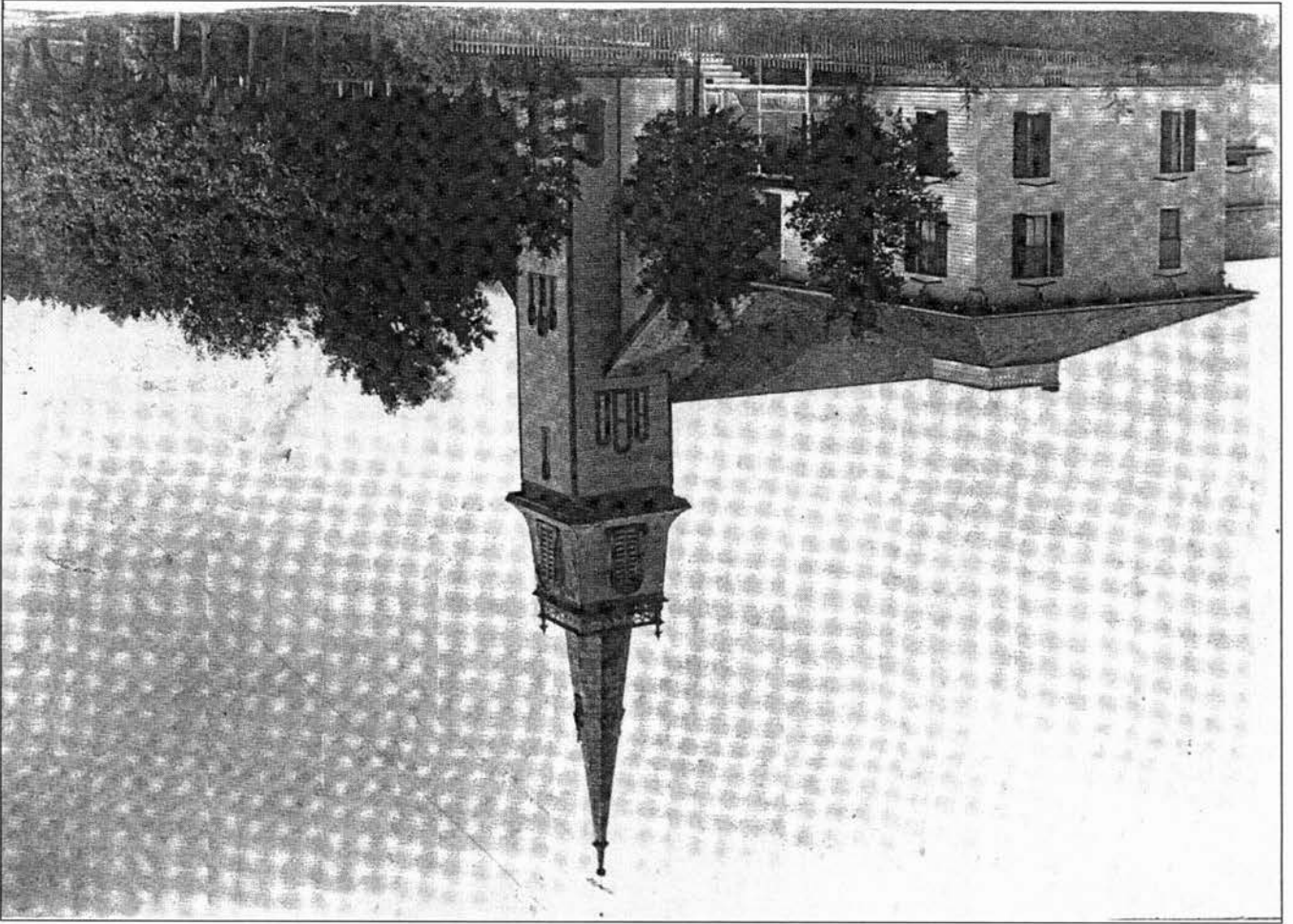
"She would spoon a few drops of medicine into the baby's mouth, then wrap her shawl around the little thing and croon and rock back and forth. What she sang sounded like, Onne-ione. She did this day after day. I don't know when she slept. She insisted on my poor mother getting her rest. At last, one day she rose from her place by the fire and put

baby into mother's arms. "Baby well, baby live now," and she silently left the room, boarded her canoe, and paddled down the river and we waved as long as we could see her. After she left, mother said, "She has saved our baby's life. Let's name her "Onie-Ione." We never knew what it meant and we called her Ione for short. We left the lighthouse the next year and moved to DePeyster. We always thanked God for our good friend who loved the baby and fed her medicine, drop by drop, until she was well. We could never have had a doctor in the middle of the St. Lawrence, not knowing what medicine to get. We always said the Indian lady loved the baby back to life."

NOTE: In checking with the Six Nations Museum at Onchit, it appears that the Mohawk words O-ne-iga-ah probably were spoken or in English, Little One or My Little One.

This is a true story. We know because the baby became Supervisor Stan Dewan's mother at DePeyster.

Mystery Photo



This photo is from the collection of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association and simply has the caption "unidentified church". If you recognize this building please contact the Association so we can better identify it.

David Martin, a volunteer with the Historical Association, identified last issue's mystery photo as being one of the construction of the powerhouse at the end of the power canal in Massena around 1896.

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Friday Noon - 8 p.m.
(and by Appointment)
Admission Fees:

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

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If you're planning to be out of the area and would like to have uninterrupted service on your membership, please phone, e-mail or drop us a note with your seasonal address.

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