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Cover Photograph: Portrait of Mary Broadwell, 1862, by Aaron Fletcher. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew S. Broadwell.

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Of all the fourteen children of Zephaniah Platt, the founder of Plattsburgh, only two became next door neighbors in the North Country. These two, Robert and Jonas, shared a view of Mt. Mansfield from the lakeshore at Valcour seven miles south of Plattsburgh, where their dark gray limestone houses may still be seen. The stone for these houses was chiseled from a quarry up the road to the north.

In 1800 Robert Platt, Zephaniah's 10th child, received from his father a deed of 500 acres which included land stretching back from the lake to the Little Au Sable River to the west. From the beginning it was a farm.

When Jonas Platt (Zephaniah's 6th child) came back to Plattsburgh to retire in 1829 after a long career as lawyer, judge and politician, Robert deeded to him 190 acres of his farm, for the sum of \$1.00. The only clause in the original indenture, which describes the look of the land in those days, is Robert's stipulation that he retain the "right of cutting and carrying away as much of the Cedar timber on the land...for the next fifteen years" as

THE HOUSE THAT JONAS BUILT

by Margaret M. Byrne

he needed. No doubt the shoreline of Lake Champlain was peppered with cedar trees then, as it still is farther north along the same road.

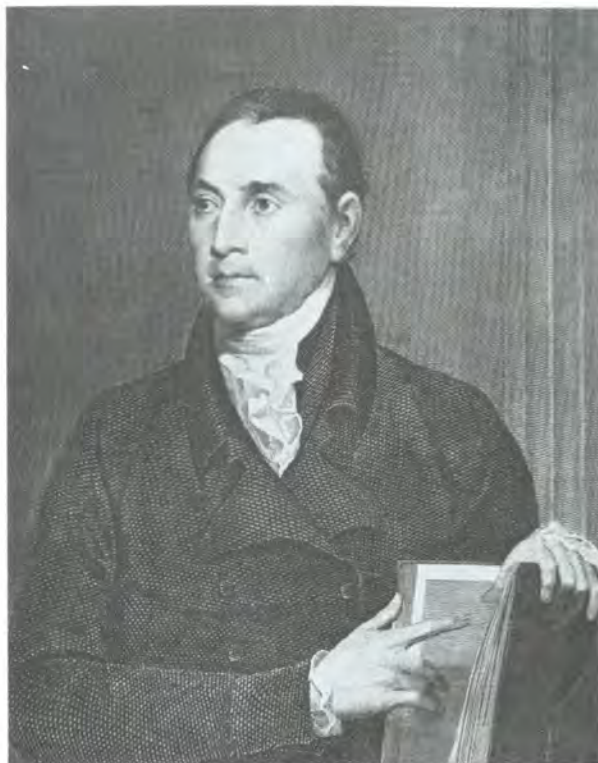
An old family story has it that all the Platts who sailed north from Poughkeepsie (up the Hudson, down Lake Champlain) in the late 18th century brought with them bundles of cuttings -- sticks --from the Hudson Valley Lombardy poplar trees they loved. It is certain that 50 years ago long rows of poplars could still be seen wherever one of the Platts had built a house. And the shoreline at Valcour was no exception -- there stood enormous trees which had grown around the fences along the road. Undoubtedly one of Robert's first acts on settling at Valcour was to plant a row of poplars in this family tradition. They certainly were there to punctuate Jonas' view thirty years later, and for a long time after that -- until age or the roadbuilders sealed their doom.

It seems reasonable to guess that Jonas planted a black walnut seedling in his new front yard -- the great old tree which stands to this day like an early landmark of his sense of property and roots.

Jonas Platt, born at Poughkeepsie in 1769, probably first came to the new settlement at Plattsburgh about 1785 with Robert (ten years younger) and the rest of the family. Jonas was educated at the French Academy in Montreal, and then studied law in New York. In 1790 he married Henry Livingston's daughter Helen from Fishkill in Dutchess County near Poughkeepsie. They went to live in Whitesboro, close to Utica, where Jonas became the first Clerk of Herkimer County. Soon he and his eldest brother, Zephaniah, opened a law office in Utica. Much later, as Supreme Court Judge, he would have another office in New York City.

A member of Congress in 1799-1800, a State Senator from 1809-1813, he also ran for Governor of New York State in 1810, but was defeated by the incumbent, Daniel Tompkins. As a State Senator he introduced the bill which proposed the building of the Erie Canal. In those busy years he was a friend of James and Moss Kent (whose sister married his brother, William Pitt Platt), and of James Fenimore Cooper and Samuel F. B. Morse. The latter painted two portraits of Judge Jonas: one hangs in the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, the other in the Brooklyn Museum.

The stone house which Jonas and Helen built at Valcour for his retirement in 1830 was originally a box 40' x 48', with four rooms downstairs (each with its own fireplace for heat), a central hall, and bedrooms upstairs. Probably the downstairs was divided into a parlor and library on the south side, another parlor and kitchen on the north. The



Judge Jonas Platt. Engraved by A.B. Durand. Private collection.

original kitchen, now used as a dining room, has a great open hearth with ovens, an iron crane to hold kettles and pots, and a sink, a large round iron pot, built into the side of the fireplace, heated by the fire below.

Certainly the gracious front door with its fan light and smaller lights on either side of the door, the tall windows, and the porch with its federal pillars, adorned the original house.

Jonas died at Valcour in 1834, only four years after he built his house. His wife lived two or three years longer. The Clinton County Historical Association recently printed Judge Jonas' recipe for boiling beef, to preserve it for the winter. After his retirement at sixty he evidently took the life of the frugal farmers seriously.

A title search of this Valcour property indicates that Jonas apparently willed it to his youngest brother James -- 20 years younger than Jonas. James had left Jonas' law office in Utica to move to the brand-new village of Oswego, where he became its first mayor. But in 1864 at the age of 76 (never, apparently, having lived at Valcour), James sold his mortgage on the property to Smith M. Weed of Plattsburgh.

Mr. Weed's colorful career blazes in North

Country history. Born in 1833 at Belmont, near Malone, he began his practise of law in Plattsburgh after graduating from Harvard and its Law School. In 1859 he married Carrie Standish, a descendant of Miles Standish of Plymouth. Aged 32 in 1865, he was well-launched on his political career as President of the Trustees of the Village of Plattsburgh. In no time at all he began to stir the State's political pot as a newly-elected Assemblyman, and became Counsel to the Canal Commission in Albany, for the promotion of a Lake Champlain canal. With an eye to his own future and a vision of the rich vein of iron at Lyon Mountain he bought those mines in 1867. In the 1870s he and his partner Andrew Williams began the promotion and development of a railroad through the wilderness of northern Clinton County to transport the ore. Land acquisition on a huge scale (35,000 acres), roads, a water transportation system to the north through the Chateaugay Lakes for the purpose of further development, were all part of the scheme. As a successful promoter (by North Country standards) he was able to memorialize himself - and Carrie -- in his large and elegant house on Cumberland Avenue in Plattsburgh in the 1870s, now the headquarters of the American Legion.

During the 1870s he also assumed the mortgage on the Jonas Platt house at Valcour. A picture of the house and grounds appears in Hurd's 1880 *History of Clinton and Franklin Counties*: "THE POPLARS," Summer home of Smith M. Weed.

Since Mr. Weed had been agitating for a railroad connection southward to Albany (a railroad already ran between Montreal and Plattsburgh), and the new road was opened in 1875, the picture contains, of course, his new train running behind his new summer residence.

An elegant horse and carriage, carefully groomed lawns and trees behind Robert's and Jonas' poplar trees, and a succession of outbuildings are indications of comfort, care and wealth. The four original chimneys, and perhaps the dormer windows, must date from Jonas' days. An architect's sketch of the house plan, drawn in preparation for further changes in 1908, indicates that the Weeds added a wood-frame wing behind the original kitchen. The old kitchen had become a den, and dining room, kitchen, laundry and an ice house had been included in Mr. Weed's new wing.

The title search shows that Smith Weed had promised his wife to give the house to their daughter Margaret Celeste. In 1889, as a spinster of 33, she became its owner. In 1908 she sold the property to her sister, Katherine Weed Kellogg.

Mrs. Kellogg's husband was Judge Henry T. Kellogg, a great-great-great nephew of Jonas. He was descended from Jonas' brother William Pitt Platt: a Platt had married an Averill, and a 3rd generation Averill had married a Kellogg, the father of Henry T. So now the house was in Platt hands again.



"The Poplars". Summer residence of Smith M. Weed. Illustration from Hurd's *History of Clinton and Franklin Cos.*, New York, 1880.

The first thing the Kelloggs did with their new property was to summon their architect friend, Hugh McLellan, to design extensive alterations for the house. In a letter dated July 30, 1908, McLellan discusses with his partner in the New York firm of Dillon, McLellan & Beadel the current condition of the house, and includes a sketch of its floor plan, and what he would do with it.

Aside from removing Smith Weed's addition on the northwest side of the house, Mr. McLellan built large stone wings on the north and south sides of Jonas' stone box, and a 46' enclosed porch (screens in summer, glass in winter) across the west face. He added a small brick terrace on the southeast corner of the new wing he had built for Judge Kellogg's law library. Above the front porch he added a white balcony railing echoing the one below, and enlarged the three dormer windows with one long dormer all across the front of the house, clearly to lighten the large bedrooms. The new north wing included a kitchen and butler's pantry with three maids' rooms above.

Inside, on the first floor Mr. McLellan removed Jonas' old partitions on the south side of the house to make a long drawing room (36' x 17') with two fireplaces. He designed six-foot paneled moldings to the walls of this room. When it was painted and furnished with fine antiques the Kelloggs had collected, it emerged like a butterfly from its tidy cocoon into an elegant showpiece. Interior photographs of the house in the 1920's include, for instance, the handsome chandeliers the Kelloggs had found in a crumbling church in Sicily and had brought home to place in the lovely room.

This was clearly a house redesigned for elegant living and entertaining with the help of a domestic staff and gardeners. Judge Kellogg had earned it, and Hugh McLellan, the old friend from Champlain with a successful architectural practise in New York, evidently provided exactly the right background for his client.

Mrs. Kellogg's talent for gardening is also evident in the photographs which show the full flowering of an extensive, formal garden. It was designed to be seen first from the front entrance of the house, through the wide hall, across the large porch, with a precise eye for a well-planned English garden. The overview reached across the flower beds to end in an allée of Lombardy poplars marching away in the distance to a cedar hedge with a tidy white bench in front of it. Haunted by Jonas and Robert, no doubt.

One of the pictures in the photographic collection of the Clinton County Historical Museum

shows a remarkable congregation of well-dressed ladies in hats and summer dresses, seated on wooden chairs on the lawn beside the garden, listening to what clearly is a political speech. Perhaps the Judge (who must certainly be one of the white-clad gentlemen in the picture) had arranged for some of the figures on the Albany political scene to visit and speak to their friends. Perhaps even Governor Al Smith -- the ladies in their finery, and the gentlemen in their white linen suits, would indeed have been worthy of him.

Judge Harry, as his friends called him, had been born in Plattsburgh in 1869; his wife, Katherine Weed, in 1878. Like his father-in-law, Smith Weed, the Judge went to Harvard and the Harvard Law School, and had begun to practice law in Plattsburgh. In 1903 he was appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court in Albany where the Kelloggs maintained another house until his permanent retirement to Valcour in about 1920. He died at Valcour in 1942 at the age of 73. Mrs. Kellogg continued to live there until 1946 when she went one day to call on her husband's 3rd cousin (and special friend), John Platt Myers, to offer him the house --to keep it in the family, she said.



Detail of drawing room, ca. 1920. Collection of Clinton County Historical Museum.

Like his predecessors in this house, John Myers was another mover and shaker in the community. Born in Plattsburgh, educated at Princeton, engaged in the operation of the hardware business his father had opened in 1867, Mr. Myers also served his town and his State in many ways. Chief, and most interesting to him, was his appointment to the New York State Board of Regents, which led to its highest position, the office of Chancellor, about 1950. He had been involved as well in banking, the City School Board, the Park and Beach Commission (when he persuaded the State to turn the sand dunes at the north end of Cumberland Bay into a public campsite), and all manner of other creative contributions to his town, his church and his State. With a wife who was equally enthusiastic about living in Jonas' house, Mr. Myers was delighted to accept Mrs. Kellogg's proposal, and ready to move from their old family home on Macomb Street in Plattsburgh to Valcour, moving there in the summer of 1946.

From the beginning the Myers enjoyed the space, the view, the grand old house with its feeling of permanence and history. They enjoyed the painting and repairs, the first refurbishing since Hugh McLellan's day. The overgrown garden and hedges responded quickly to their trowels and clippers. There were extra delights, like the little boathouse whence to launch their old red canoe for a paddle to Valcour Island, and the beach, perfect for picnics and swimming with their grandchildren. On a red-letter day Mrs. Myers stubbed her toe on one of Benedict Arnold's cannon balls from the Battle of Valcour in 1776, which had been buried in the sand.

Above all the Myers enjoyed, on a much less formal scale than the Kelloggs, filling up the house with people -- their many friends, and their children and grandchildren. With five comfortable bedrooms (not to mention three more in the maids' wing) there was always room for guests. They never had a political meeting, but two spectacular weddings took place in their garden.

Gertrude Benson Myers, called Kit by her friends, added a flair for color and design to the house, and a love of art inherited from her father and her uncle, John and Frank Benson respectively, both well-known artists in the first half of the 20th century. She was a painter herself and she turned the house into a fine showcase for paintings. Some of her own and much of her father's and uncle's art was nicely balanced with family portraits. Three of the Platt brothers who had known this house -- Jonas (commanding the scene from the Library),



Mr. and Mrs. John Platt Myers, photographed in the garden, ca. 1955. Collection of the Clinton County Historical Museum.

Robert and William Pitt -- all sons of Zephaniah -- hung on the walls, along with William Pitt's wife, Hannah Kent, who wore little black glasses to hide her blindness. And there were Benson ancestors as well, the bird etchings of Frank Benson, maps and sketches and photographs, and other treasures collected over several lifetimes. It was elegant, but not formal, and warm and gracious -- comfortable everywhere.

John Platt Myers died at Valcour in 1966, and his widow remained there, enjoying her beautiful house and her family and friends. Two years later she married an old friend, William Savage. For the next fifteen years they lived in New Jersey in the winters and Valcour in the summers, enjoying the garden and friends, the lake and the wonderful black walnut tree in the front lawn, planted so long ago by Jonas.

Now grown so enormous its long branches need props, it seems to keep the heritage intact, like the spirit of Jonas who built his sturdy house 150 winters ago.

Margaret M. Byrne descends from William Pitt Platt, brother of Jonas, and is a daughter of John P. Myers. She is a trustee of the New York State Historical Association and has published numerous articles.

FRONTIER WOMAN

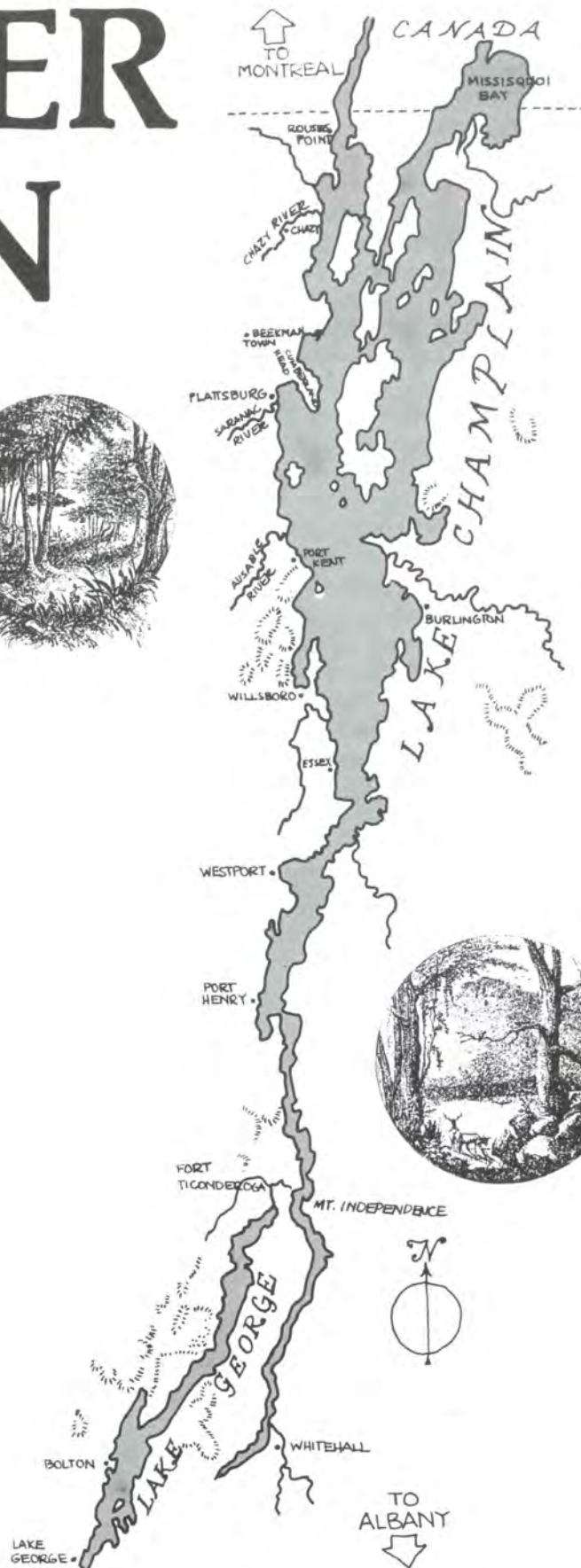
The Epic Life of Betsey Munro Fisher

by Harriette B. Davis

Between New York City and Canada runs an almost unbroken blue line of water consisting of two lakes with a river at either end—the Hudson, Lake George, Lake Champlain, and the Richelieu. In the 18th century, control of this Great Waterway was the prize in contention between the English and the French for its importance as a trade route. Furs from the wilderness were the country's most profitable export and the allegiance of the Indian tribes was a vital factor. After that the fur trade largely gave way to the needs of frontier settlements, and in the American Revolution the Waterway became of prime strategic importance. If secured by the British, it could serve to cut off New England from the other colonies.

In the colonial phase Harry Munro took an active part in the French and Indian War and, during the Revolution, a passive part as a Loyalist. His daughter, Betsey, driven from her home, witnessed the shelling at Saratoga. Later she traversed the length of Lake Champlain by bateau or sleigh many times. She wrote of her adventures in the *Memoirs*, which she herself had printed about the year 1808.

In the French and Indian War Harry Munro was chaplain to the Seventy-Seventh Regiment of Highlanders and with them made the difficult march across the wilderness of western Pennsylvania to Duquesne. The following year, 1759, the Seventy-Seventh joined Amherst's army in his counter-thrust, reaching as far north as Schuyler Island off Willsboro Point; a courier brought word of the fall of Quebec and a violent squall on the lake persuaded the general that it was too late in the season to attack Montreal. Winter quarters on Long Island were followed by the spring campaign



of 1760 and the Seventy-Seventh accompanied Amherst up the Mohawk and down the St. Lawrence to Montreal. The day of their arrival, amazingly, coincided with that of the other two prongs of his pincer movement, from Quebec and Lake Champlain, so that the city capitulated without a fight.

Back down the Lakes and the Hudson went the main body of the army; but then a contingent, which included the Seventy-Seventh, embarked for the West Indies to subdue the French there. On Martinique Munro suffered two attacks of yellow fever, which so undermined his health that he returned to New York and retired from the army on half-pay.

Between campaigns he had married, but his wife died giving birth to a daughter, Elizabeth, our "Betsey," whose story we now take up with the aid of her own words.

"I was born in Philadelphia the second day of December, 1759; my mother died three days after my birth and left me to the care of my father, who soon procured a wet nurse for me in Burlington (NJ), a quaker lady, with whom I remained till my father married the second time and took up his residence in Princeton, New-Jersey. I was then taken home to my step-mother; I became very fond of her, as she was fond of me, and soon forgot my nurse. Eleven months after her marriage she was delivered of a son. Some time after her recovery, my father took it into his head to go home to England to be ordained for the church of England, preferring that to the church of Scotland. But a few days after his departure, my step-mother was taken with a fit and expired in a few minutes. A servant was sent off in haste to New-York to inform my father; when the servant came to the ferry the wind was so high the boat could not cross that night; the next day my father heard the melancholy news; it was customary in those days to bury the dead by candlelight; when my father came home, my mother's corpse was gone to the place of interment — I remember my father wept bitterly. The next day my nurse was sent for from Burlington and my little brother and myself were given into her care.

"My father took his departure for England. A few months after, the nurse was alarmed by seeing the child in a fit; the doctor was sent for, but in vain. When my father arrived from London and the nurse informed him of the death of his son, his feelings were deeply wounded. He left me in the care of the nurse and came to New-York, having letters of recommendation to Dr. Auchmuty, then minister of old Trinity Church."

Through this association with Trinity Munro

met and eventually married Eve Jay, a sister of the future Chief Justice, John Jay, and brought seven year old Betsey to live with them. A son, Peter Jay Munro, was born, and the year after, in 1768, Munro accepted a call to St. Peter's in Albany, where he was concurrently Rector of St. Peter's, Chaplain to the Fort, and Missionary to the Mohawks.

Eve was temperamentally unfitted for marriage and parenthood and this took its toll on the family. Betsey, spoiled by her father and ill-treated by her stepmother, became rebellious and impossible to live with. Her father, who had been teaching her himself (and he seemed a gifted teacher) sent her to a boarding school in Albany.

In the summer of 1775, while Eve and young Peter visited her parents in Rye, Harry Munro took Betsey with him to the frontier country east of Lake George. Like other retired officers of the wars he had obtained a royal grant of two thousand acres near the head of Lake Champlain, the site of the present village of North Hebron. This he had divided into lots and now began renting them to new settlers. He had already built a log cabin there.

Betsey was seventeen. She continues her story: "I had not been there long before I had recovered my health and was much delighted with this change, being at liberty to range the woods as I pleased; my time was chiefly spent in seeking bird's eggs and catching little fish with a pin hook." Asa Fitch, a Washington County historian, adds that Betsey was "of such fascinating appearance and unsurpassed natural abilities as might have rendered her an ornament to the highest circles of society, (but) for want of due tutoring in her youth, she became one of the most wild, mischievous, reckless spirits in the whole country. She went wherever she chose and did whatever she pleased."

At the end of the summer Betsey wept to think of returning to Albany and begged to be left in the country. Her pleading resulted in her father boarding her with the William Reids of Salem. We know that at this time Munro, under surveillance as a Loyalist, petitioned the Committee of Safety for permission to go to Philadelphia or New Jersey, but was denied.

On his return to Albany he stopped in Argyle, five miles distant, at Duncan Campbell's, to wait out a storm. Duncan's son, Alexander, was seeking a wife, and the two fathers agreed that the two families should become allied. Munro wrote to his daughter: "My dear child, Mr. Campbell has requested the favour of me to consent that his son, Alexander Campbell, should pay his address to you; I have given my consent: now let me beg of

you to receive Mr. Campbell as a gentleman."

Then, Betsey records: "When Mr. Campbell paid his visit I was surprised. He was about six feet tall and forty five years of age — no teeth, — and gray hairs; of course I could not like him. After a few visits he asked me to marry him. My answer was no." Betsey's wildness and independence dictated her reply. In a later letter Harry Munro commanded his daughter to marry Campbell and she gave the following answer to Campbell: "Sir, as you have courted my father you may marry him, for I will never marry you."

Whether there was a dearth of eligible young swains in the region, we cannot say, but when Donald Fisher, tailor and ex-sergeant and probably twice her age, came to board at the Reid's, she accepted his proposal. Her father, upon hearing the news, responded with "Base Unworthy Child!" Betsey was hurt, being, as she says, very fond of her father. Instead of going to her father she and Fisher soon sought out the Dutch minister in Albany, who married them. There followed a little episode characteristic of Betsey, as reported by the historian Asa Fitch:

"In opposition to her father's wishes, she at the house of a friend married Donald Fisher. Shortly after the ceremony was closed she asked the company if they would not like to hear a verse of poetry; and receiving an affirmative answer, with a leering glance at her husband and a theatrical air, she recited the following lines:

'Donald Fisher's got a wife,
And finds he can na' guide her,
He puts the saddle and bridle on
And bids the devil ride her.'"

Near the end of April 1776, her father wrote to Reid: "Go to Donald Fisher and tell him to go to my patent and take possession, as I am not satisfied that my daughter is living with his people." Mr. Fisher did not wish to be beholden to my father, but I was rejoiced at the news. As I had lived there the summer before with my father, I thought it would seem like home to me; so we went there the first of May." They took with them Donald's half-brother, a nephew, and a niece, besides an indentured boy of her father's. "This constituted our family. The house was furnished and the farm stocked. As Mr. Fisher did not understand farming, all his business was left to other people. In June, "as the people were mowing grass," the barn burned, from Donald's carelessness in burning brush. On November 14th of the same year a son was born.

War had touched the borders of the area the year before, when Fort Ticonderoga was taken by Ethan

Allen and Benedict Arnold; at Whitehall, Skene's son and two daughters were captured by the Americans. Now Burgoyne came down from Canada, retook the Fort, and pursued the rebels through Whitehall, where Philip Skene was appointed to administer the oath of allegiance to the inhabitants. Donald Fisher and Jonathan Baker were sent there by Dr. John Williams of Salem to implore protection for the outlying districts. Baker returned, but Fisher joined the British army. Then, according to Betsey, their house was visited by a party of Patriots sent by Dr. Williams. Upon learning what Fisher had done they ordered her out of the house, "with a threat that if I did not immediately comply they would burn me in it. I took my child out of the cradle, sat down at a little distance, and observed them taking out all my furniture and then they burnt the house.

"I was at a loss what to do. At last, seeing a man drive a cow, I asked him which way he was going. He answered to the British camps. I asked him if he would let me go along with him. Yes, said he, if you can keep up with me. I rose from the ground (for I was sitting down with my child on my lap) and followed him. I walked that day twenty-two miles and carried my child. By the middle of the day I had neither shoe nor stockings on my feet; my shoes, being made of silk, did not last long, and my stockings I took off and threw away. On account of the fatigue of carrying my child and walking so far I was willing to lay down and die. The man would often say that he did not know but a party of Indians might be out scouting, and if so, we should fall a sacrifice to them. At first I was alarmed but my fatigue at length was so great that I told him I wished they might come and kill me and my child...

"I had nothing to eat or drink all that day except the water he gave me out of the brooks with his hat. We saw several houses, but the people had fled from them. About sunset we came to a house where we found a woman and seven children. Her husband had gone. I stayed there that night. The next day the man went with his cow into the camp to sell her for money. I sent by him to Mr. Fisher letting him know where I was. Mr. Fisher came to me that evening and the next day I went into the camp. I related to Mr. Fisher what had been done at home. He was much surprised at Williams' conduct — my furniture was sold at his house as tory property. We concluded to remain in the British army."

Betsey relates that she witnessed the battles at Stillwater and the death of General Fraser, (1777),

which occurred in the very house she was in; they then retreated to Saratoga and camped near the river so that the cannon fire from the other side would overshoot them, though they became a target when they dared to light a fire. It happened this way: with nothing but biscuits of hardtack and raw salt pork - "poor living for a nurse - I had my child at my breast, (he) being eleven months old" - she persuaded seven of the women to make up a purse with her amounting to a guinea, with which they bribed some of the wounded men to build a small fire in the cover of the woods.

"They went to work and built up a fire, hung on the kettle and put water in it, then we women put in what we pleased; we soon filled it with a variety (of what? we wonder); it began to boil; we all kept distance from the fire for fear of the cannon...they soon discovered our fire and saluted us with a cannon ball; it struck and broke our kettle to pieces and sent the provisions in the air. We met with no hurt, only losing our intended feast. The soldiers demanded their pay, which I paid; but as the disappointment was so great the rest declined paying anything...so for my folly I had to pay for all."

She says nothing about Donald's part in the fighting. In any event he managed to avoid capture and after the capitulation of Burgoyne, told her he must flee to Canada. She refused to go with him and returned to Hebron. Donald's first stop was at the British garrison on Diamond Island in Lake George, and there, to his surprise, he encountered his father-in-law. Some months before, Munro had been arrested and imprisoned with other Loyalists in the Fort at Albany, but escaped and hid, and after Saratoga was given a pass to go northward through the American lines. Upon meeting Fisher Munro inquired about Betsey and was informed of the birth of her son nearly a year before. He promptly sent Donald back to fetch them, "I was surprized," writes Betsey, "that my father should insist on my going to Canada, as I had never spoken a word to him since my marriage. To please him I went."

On reaching Lake George they found Munro had gone on to Ticonderoga. They caught up with him at Mt. Independence opposite the Fort, walking with General Powell. Betsey writes: "When we landed (from the ferry) he came and took me by the hand and kissed me, and, looking at my child, asked me if I had named him. I told him I had not; you must, he says, call him after me. He likewise told me he would see me in Montreal. The next day we all set off to cross Lake Champlain, and going to the northward found it very cold and stormy. We were eleven days on the lake in an open boat. It



snowed and rained every day; we slept on shore every night on the ground, as there were no inhabitants on that side of the Lake (the west side) in those days, for they had fled on account of the war. On the 22nd day of November we landed in Montreal. As the river St. Lawrence was almost frozen over we found it exceedingly cold."

Upon his arrival in Montreal Harry Munro was immediately appointed Deputy-Chaplain to the Fifty-Third and Thirty-First Regiments, as we know from General Powell's affidavit given the following spring; but Betsey's memoirs shed further light on his sojourn there. He boarded with a Scottish family, the John Thom(p)sons. For the first six weeks he was laid low with a severe cold and was sick most of the winter. Betsey went to see him every day to comb his hair and do other little services.

Now the plot thickens. Betsey's cunning and her quixotic memory are perhaps responsible for the confusion that follows. In February she says that her father gave her a deed for his land patent, warning her to say nothing about it to Fisher or anyone else during his lifetime. Now, since that deed was later proved a forgery and the three whose names appeared as witnesses disowned their signatures, at this point Betsey's account becomes partly suspect.

She continues by saying that on May 6 as her father was starting for Quebec on his way to England he came to tea and borrowed an unspecified amount of money for which he gave a note; that he also, upon hearing that Fisher intended to import goods the next year, offered to fill any order they might send him, but though they sent him an order, no goods ever came. She was never to see him again. He died in Edinburgh in 1801.

The Fishers soon bought a house, began importing goods and continued to prosper. In 1784 the New York legislature passed an act providing for the speedy sale of the Tory lands forfeited during

the war. "Several tracts," writes the historian Fitch, "amounting to about one thousand acres, had belonged to Donald Fisher, husband of the badly celebrated Betsey Munro." When word of this reached the Fishers, Betsey at any rate, decided that she should go seek advice from John Jay, recently returned from France with his family and nephew.



Portrait of Peter Jay Munro, attributed to T.C. Healy. Collection of the Van Cortlandt House Museum. Photo courtesy of the Frick Art Reference Library.

In her *Memoirs* Betsey notes that Peter was "studying law in Bedford with John Strang. He was then a lad of nineteen years of age -- I was happy to see him. The Jay family all treated me very well, even my stepmother seemed happy to see me....observed that she was sensible of her ill-conduct towards me when under her care...and begged my forgiveness." However, when she wrote her father to forgive Eve, he wrote back: "I never will write to Mrs. Munro for many reasons and I wish you not to make mention of her. I thought you had better spirit than to wish to correspond with your father's bitter enemies."

Betsey spent that winter, the winter of 1784-85, in New York City, where she doubtless consulted with Jay, though she does not mention what advice he gave. She says little of that time, though a letter

from Eve to Peter in March, 1785 reports: "I have not had a letter from your Sister yet, tho' I heard from Albany that She had arrived there the 25th of febr. and left it the 28th well provided for her journey to Montreal." That Betsey left Albany "well provided for her journey" suggests that she may have turned her trip to advantage by buying goods in New York and selling them in Albany. Betsey herself notes that she had with her a six year old black girl named Jane, a present from Eve.

In 1786 Munro wrote to Betsey asking her to obtain affidavits from three respectable men acquainted with his patent in support of his claim to the government. To support her father's claim she purports to have gone to Alexander Campbell, her once intended husband, his brother James, and to Alexander Fisher (Donald's half brother), who, before Judge Frazer of Montreal, appraised the two thousand acres at five dollars per acre. She received one more letter from her father, this one in February, 1787, in which he acknowledged the affidavits and said he had received compensation in three dividends, "desiring me to remember whose daughter I was, and at his death I should have something handsome."

The Fisher family increased until by 1787, she writes, "I was mother of five children, two sons and three daughters." The eldest daughter died in 1788 or 1789. Another probably died in infancy, as nothing is told of her. Of her husband, she says, "As Mr. Fisher advanced in years his temper grew peevish (and) he began to neglect his business, thinking he would do better buying and selling lands."

Accordingly, in March 1788, Fisher went to England and there bought some Washington County land from one David Milligan, then returned to the United States to live on his purchase. Betsey remained in Montreal and, to make ends meet, took in boarders. One of them, a young merchant, needing to go to Boston, and Betsey having, as she says, business in the States, they traveled together as far as Whitehall, where Donald Fisher met them and invited the merchant to spend a few days with them, which he did. But Donald soon became suspicious of his wife's relationship with the youth and, urged on by one of his McNaughton nephews, questioned him and finally had him swear before Justice Sheldon that he had "no criminal connection" with her during the passage on the lake or in her home.

"The 'squire got his dollar for administering the oath and returned home, leaving us to think what we pleased on this subject. The young man asked

Mr. Fisher if he was satisfied; Mr. Fisher said yes." He then proceeded on his journey to Boston. "And for what had passed, you and I must bid adieu to each other," she says to her husband. "It may be well conjectured how unhappy I felt on this occasion. I was bent on returning home as soon as possible, never to return more."

On her way home Betsey met with trouble of a different sort. She left Whitehall on a small barge with three other passengers and Captain Gilbert. They reached Burlington about sunset, went ashore and there "supped and spoke for lodgings." The captain, however, was determined that they should proceed on their way and ordered the passengers to be aboard by ten o'clock. She, being the only woman, at first refused, she says, but he insisted and they went aboard, expressing fears since a high wind had arisen.

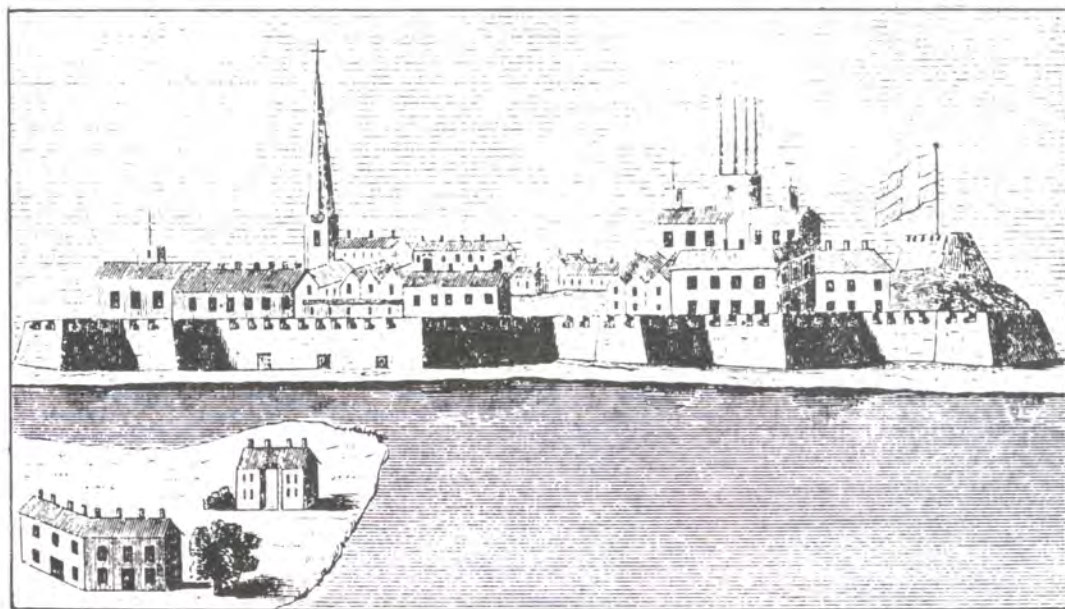
"The captain said, however, there was no danger. When we got into the bay, which is very wide, it was midnight and every one had to take his turn at the pump. The captain was drinking freely of his stock of liquor and so lost his way. At three o'clock in the morning we found ourselves at the lower end of the bay among the rocks, expecting at every instant to go to the bottom. At last we struck and immediately filled with water. By jumping overboard and getting on the rocks we were saved from being drowned. When day appeared we sat on a high rock and saw in the distance a canoe. We hoisted a signal of distress, which was my white pocket handkerchief, that being all we had left, having lost in the storm the whole of our baggage excepting a small box of papers belonging to a Captain Grant who was in Montreal, which drifted ashore.

"We were taken off the rock and put ashore five miles from Cumberland Head, where we had to go for breakfast. Wet and wearied as we were, those five miles we had to walk through a wood, and only a footpath. We reached there about ten o'clock in the morning and got some refreshments. The men went in search of another boat and I went to bed and slept till five o'clock in the evening. I then got up and went on board, when we sailed for St. Johns. The next day I took stage for Montreal."

Betsey was soon to return to Washington County for she had left her "weakly" daughter with Fisher, because she had not been fit for the earlier journey. "The ice being good and plenty of snow" she hired a sleigh and went for her, but found her very sick and after ten days she died.

Whenever Betsey parted from Donald Fisher there was sure to be trouble of some sort. This time he ordered the sleigh driver not to take her and, when she insisted, had them arrested about eight miles from his home. The man was charged with carrying off Fisher's wife and having Fisher's property with him, no doubt something that she claimed as hers. His bail was set at five hundred pounds, which she backed. She pleaded the case successfully and the matter was dismissed. The following day she returned to Montreal over the frozen lake, the driver still shaken from the experience, as he had been "almost frightened to death for fear he should loose (sic) his horses and sleigh."

The foregoing took place in the winter of 1789-90. The next winter Donald Fisher wrote asking Betsey to bring the children to visit him at his half-brother's at Caldwell Manor on Lake Champlain not far above the Canadian border. She did so and stayed a week, which she thought long



View of Montreal and its walls in 1760. Courtesy of Feinberg Library Special Collections, State University of New York at Plattsburgh.

enough, as his brother was a poor man. Donald, miffed at her decision to leave, sold her negro girl Jane, who would then be twelve or thirteen years of age, to one Joseph Mott for seventy pounds. Betsey hired a sleigh and set off with the children; but thinking of Jane on the way, she concocted a plan to turn the tables on him and get the girl back. Eight miles from the British lines (not the present border) was Duer's house (probably an inn), where they stopped for the night; but after the children were asleep in bed she confided in Mr. Duer and his wife, enlisting their sympathies for her cause. She placed in their care her children and her pocket-book with papers and money, except what she might need, and told them that if anything should happen to her they should send the children and property to her husband's nephew, Mr. (Alexander?) Fisher of Montreal. Borrowing a great-coat and fur cap from one Joseph Wiseman (perhaps a customer at the bar), she ordered her driver to get out the sleigh again and set off, as she says, "with a full intent to 'conquer or die!'"

It was about eight o'clock and, as the ice was good, they drove on the lake. She told the man what she was going to do and "desire him not to expose himself, as I should do as I thought proper;" in other words, he should stay out of sight until called for, whatever might occur. On passing Windmill Point (opposite Rouses Point) they saw the tavern there lit and occupied. Betsey had the driver wait on the ice while she made her way to the tavern, walked in, and ordered a glass of gin. Neither Donald nor Joseph Mott was there; she knew the company but was not recognized and easily drew out from them the latest gossip, namely, that Fisher had taken a wench from his wife and sold her to Mott and had gone to Mott's to stay till he should return to the States. Pleased at this information she went on and arrived at Mott's about two in the morning. As she tells the story:

"I then ordered the driver to turn the sleigh and be ready to start as soon as the girl got into it. I walked up to the house and knocked—no one answered. I took hold of a string, opened the door, and went in. Mr. Fisher was lying in bed, and the girl before the fire on the floor. When Jane saw me she got up and began to cry. I whispered to her to be quiet (but) Mr. Fisher awoke and got up, saying he well knew my business, but I should find myself mistaken. You want Jane, said he, but shall not have her, for I have sold her to Mr. Mott. I spoke very little. All the family got up while Jane was making the fire; I told her to jump into the sleigh; she took the hint and went out the door; seeing the sleigh she got in, when they went off and left me

setting by the fire."

Betsey's plan had only half succeeded, since she was left behind, and furthermore, "Hearing the sleigh make a noise on the ice and missing Jane, every one ran to the stable for a horse and galloped after it. They overtook the sleigh and brought it back to a tavern; they beat the man almost to death and made him a prisoner."

As this tavern was about two miles below Mott's Betsey saw them going by; she set out on foot and arrived there about daylight. She found the driver lying on a bench, battered but not incapacitated, and told him to stay awake until she should signal him. Then, as she relates it:



"I went into the bar-room where a large company had assembled to hear the news. When Mr. Fisher saw me he said, 'Well, madam, you thought you would get Jane but you shall not; I'll let you know that I am your master; and as for Mr. Gregor, he shall go to jail and lose his sleigh and horses.' I said little, but thought a great deal...."

"I saw they were all drinking very freely and Mr. Fisher by this time being under full sail I called for egg-nog, insisting on the company to drink, saying it was my treat, as I had lost and they had had a great deal of trouble with me all night. About eight o'clock in the morning they all felt fatigued and went to take a nap—No sleep was near me!"

When all were sound asleep Betsey beckoned the landlord outside and told him her story. She paid him two half-joes (which would be a little over seventeen dollars) for his compliance; he agreed and went to bed. She then alerted the driver, brought Jane down from the garret, and away they went in the sleigh. "We never stopped till we came to Mr. Duer's house at three o'clock in the afternoon. Mrs. Duer got tea for us. I paid her for her trouble, returned my borrowed coat and cap to Mr. Wiseman, took my children and proceeded on my journey to the Isle of Noah (Isle Aux Noix), where we spent that night, being then out of danger. I paid Mr. Gregor for his trouble and he returned home to his family. I was determined this should be my last visit to Mr. Fisher, unless I should go alone."

This was not quite the end, however, as Fisher sent to the Montreal authorities, who arrested Jane as she was on her way to a grocery to buy laundry starch. Young Henry saw this and followed them to the police station. There, while the officer left Jane unguarded and went upstairs to make his report, Henry told her to run home, which she did. Betsey sent her away to a safe house until she could arrange to get a new master for her. "A few days afterwards I sold her to one Simon Clark for thirty pounds and gave him a bill of sale for her," thus putting her beyond the reach of New York law.

Betsey tells of two other occasions when, despite their conflicts, she returned to live near Donald Fisher in Washington County. In 1791, relying, she says, on his promise of a good home, she sold the house in Montreal and took the children to Granville. At the end of a year she decided it was a mistake. As usual, Donald tried to prevent her leaving. "He and his sister's children took every thing from me, even my clothing, and I had to make my escape by night." She gives no details of this escape, however.

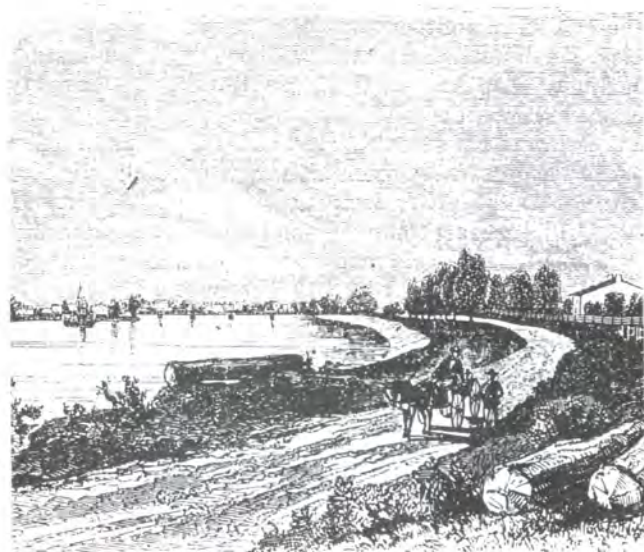
"When I returned to Canada," she continues, "I hired a house and took in work for a living. My eldest son (Henry) being now sixteen years of age and having all the education I could give him, I bound him to Mr. Isaac Todd, merchant, who took him to the country (the frontier country, now Manitoba, Michigan, and Wisconsin), where he is now married to his second wife and is father of five children. My youngest son (Alexander) continued at school, and my daughter (Elizabeth) I kept at home. I found I could not support myself and family in a city by industry and having lived a few years before in a state of affluence I could not bear the idea of staying in Montreal; and to return to Mr. Fisher I would not. I spent days and nights thinking what I should do and at last concluded to go to Hebron and live on my father's patent, as I thought I could do better in a country place.

"I left Montreal and went there the ninth of March, 1798. I made a bargain with Daniel Plumley for his house and farm for three hundred pounds; this was for his improvements, as I thought the soil was mine. The twenty-first of September following (1799) Mr. Fisher, after a few days of illness, departed this life. On his death-bed I visited him frequently; he seemed hurt to think he behaved to me in the manner I have related; he hoped I would forgive him. My daughter Eliza and myself lived together very happy." The foregoing tale of reconciliation is suspect, since Fisher had virtually cut her out of his September 1798 will and

did not change it except to insert between the lines, "I give to my Wife Elizabeth Twenty Shillings Lawfull Money."

Betsey made many mistakes in her life but none so serious as the one she made now. "In the year 1800 I decided to try the virtue of the deed I had in my possession for many years. I sent for a lawyer and took his advice, which was to serve writs of ejectment on two or three of the tenants and that would settle the validity of the title. I did so on tenants who held a lease from my brother Peter Jay Munro. On my brother's hearing what I had done he came up to Hebron with Samuel Young. He sent Mr. Young to ask me to come to speak with him. I told Young I would not - that if Mr. Munro had any business with me he might come to see me. He came and after sitting a few minutes, asked me what I had been about. I told him I wished to try titles with him. I gave him the deed to read. He asked me concerning the witnesses. I gave him every information in my power who they were and where they lived. The next day he came again and asked me many questions. A few days after this he made some proposals to me, which I rejected. I knew at the same time that my father had given him a quit-claim of the same property I held the deed of. He went away much displeased with me.

"After my brother parted with me he went to Albany, entered a complaint, and had me taken prisoner and carried to Albany jail, where I remained from the 27th of October till the 9th of March, at which time I was tried upon a charge of forgery -- and a man by the name of John Nira Smith, to my utter astonishment, swore that he saw that deed executed in Rupert in the State of

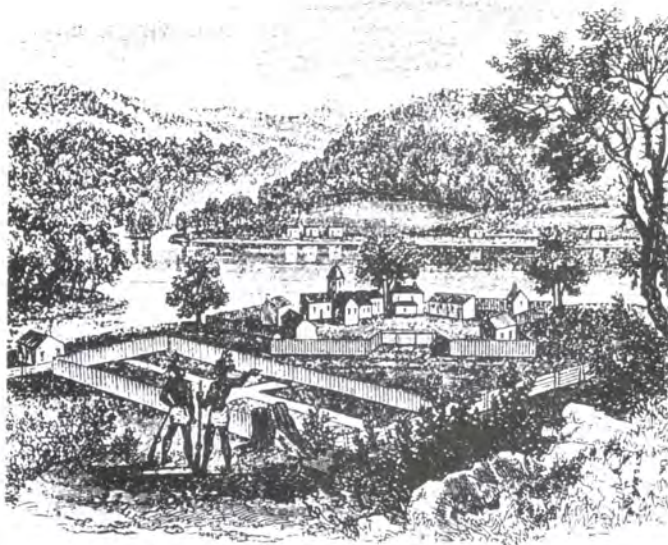


Vermont by Adonijah Crane. This evidence being so pointed, I was sentenced to the state's prison for life."

Daniel McDonald gave the historian Fitch a somewhat different version of the proof adduced against her claim, saying: "It was the 10th day of March 1801 that I started from here with a load of witnesses to attend the court in Albany for Peter Jay Munro. She (Betsey) was tried by Judge Lansing and the evidence of her guilt was conclusive. It proved that her deed was dated after her father left Canada. The two witnesses to the deed were both subpoenaed down from Canada and both swore that their names had been forged. But most conclusive of all was the water lines in the paper on which the deed was written. The date of the deed was some years previous to the date when the paper was manufactured." He adds:

"She had two sons and one daughter. Elizabeth the daughter I took to Canada A.D. 1802 by direction of Peter Jay Munro and left her with a Mrs. Thompson in Montreal. She was then eighteen years old; was fair-looking but not such a keen black-eyed person as her mother."

How Eliza had been living after her mother's arrest is nowhere told. Very likely Peter paid for her board in a respectable family, but she may have been shunned and miserable. We hope she was happily situated in Montreal, where her brother Alex doubtless assumed financial responsibility for her. He was by this time a fur trader, unmarried but with more than one Indian consort. Mrs. Thompson was possibly the same landlady with whom Harry Munro boarded when he was in Montreal.



Seal designating Rev. Harry Munro's land grant.
Collection of the author.

Betsey's *Memoir* continues: "In a few days (after the trial) I left Albany and came to the New-York state's prison (Newgate in New York City) and arrived on Friday, the nineteenth of March. Caring not for a life thus devoted I behaved very bad for a few days, for my wish was that they would punish me with death. On Monday the inspectors thought proper to put some confidence in me—they put women prisoners under my command. After I had received my orders from Thomas Eddy and John Murray I was desired by them to make choice of a room for myself and a person to attend me. My provisions were sent me from the head keeper's table (and) I had the privilege of walking in the yard and garden. I lived well and was used well in every respect; but still, in the solemn midnight hour, when all my family were asleep, instead of taking rest I would walk the lonely hall and view those dreary cells wherein I was confined from the world—and for what, I knew not. Often at such times did I read the history of Joseph in the Bible, it being so similar to mine.

"I enjoyed good health during my confinement which was from the nineteenth of March, 1801, till the third of June, 1806. Gov. Lewis then thought proper to sign a pardon and set me at liberty. ...I parted from my family with sorrow, because I was going to leave them in confinement...After delivering up everything I had in charge I went before the inspector, who gave me ten dollars. I am not mistress of language to express my feelings on going out of the gate.

"The day after my release I went to town to see my brother but he refused to speak to me. After two months I hired two rooms in the city and took in needle work of all kinds and worked late and early to get a living. I made out to live decently. I kept no help."

Betsey laments her misfortunes and the unfeeling behavior of her brother and her family and former friends, none but one of whom corresponded with her during her imprisonment. This was the Rev. Samuel Peters, a friend of her father, who came to

see her in prison and later wrote her a letter, the substance of which she gives as follows:

"The Rev. Harry Munro said in London, in 1778, that he had given to his daughter, Elizabeth Fisher, his patent right of two thousand acres of land in the county of Albany (now Washington), eastward of Saratoga, that being all in his power to give her, and he feared it would be confiscated, because she and her husband were royalists; but as to his son, he said he had a rich mother and the Jay family would take care that he should want for nothing."

Betsey returned to live in Hebron in 1808 or 1809, about the time her son Alexander went to New York to ask Peter Jay Munro for help in prosecuting the Fishers' claim to their deceased father's property, which had been confiscated and sold unlawfully, as it was not done in the time prescribed by law. Munro referred him to his cousin Peter Augustus Jay, who had been and may still have been his law partner, but who agreed to be his security for the costs of the suit.

Young Jay then accompanied Fisher to Hebron to see his mother. They went by steamboat as far as Catskill, which was as far as the Hudson was clear of ice, landed there in the morning and hired a wagon for the rest of the journey to Albany, arriving there at night.

On the way, as Fisher thought over what Munro had said, he felt more and more irked at what he considered an ultimatum. It was not that Fisher opposed the idea of his mother moving to Canada. Quite the contrary; but "tho he wishes the removal made, he above all things abhors the thought of making it," unless she were willing, which was extremely doubtful.

That day or the next Augustus Jay and Alexander Fisher met with Betsey at Hebron regarding the various parcels of land Donald Fisher had owned.

Jay and Fisher remained in Hebron about a week and engaged Donald McDonald to trace any and all papers relating to the Fisher properties. They then went together southward to Salem, probably to see General Williams. The next day Peter Augustus wrote to his wife: "I wrote to you a few days ago from Hebron. Having finished my Business there yesterday I bade goodbye to Mr. McDonald and came as far as this. Mr. Fisher parted with me this morning; he is going to Canada and seems to think of the Journey...of 1200 miles through wilderness on foot in the middle of winter, as lightly as I do of my Return to New York."

Later that winter of 1809-10 Betsey was indeed taken to Canada by a Mr. Hubbs, according to Asa Fitch. The route was probably the usual one, since



she then or later lived at the north end of Lake Champlain. He says: "She there (in Canada) married a second husband and lived at Missisquoi Bay, but after awhile parted from her husband. She then taught a school in Montreal and at length died in that city."

Missisquoi Bay is at the northern end of the lake just above the border and was an area with which she was familiar from her many trips to and from Montreal. It seems likely that in 1816 Betsey married on Abijah Cheesman, who kept an inn at St. Johns, and that she died in Montreal in 1830. While there are no school records for the period 1816-1830, she may well have taught in a Montreal High School where her brother-in-law, Finlay Fisher, was "in charge."

The reader's reaction to Betsey's story may well be one of amazement. This feisty woman's incredible energy, endurance and entrepreneurial determination surely sets her apart from others, even in an age when these qualities were basic necessities for survival in a harsh frontier environment.

In her memoirs there is no hint of flagging spirits except perhaps during her period of imprisonment. Even then she contrived to make the best of the situation and turn it to her own advantage. The life of Betsey Munro Fisher is indeed an epic chapter in our North Country history.

Mrs. Harriette Davis of Westport, N.Y. is a descendant of Peter Jay Munro, half brother of Elizabeth Munro Fisher of this article. Mrs. Davis is the recipient of the McMasters Prize given by the Clinton County Historical Association in 1985 for excellence in research and writing of local history.

THREE FOLK ARTISTS

Recorders of North Country Faces

by Virginia M. Burdick



In the 1830s and 1840s three untrained folk portraitists, Ruth W. Shute, Asahel L. Powers and Aaron D. Fletcher, journeyed from the New England states to Clinton and Essex Counties, New York seeking families who wanted their portraits painted.

Two earlier, fully trained artists had preceded them. From 1815 to 1820, Abraham G.D. Tuthill of Long Island, N.Y., painted likenesses of two prominent Plattsburgh families, the Platts and the Delords. In 1831, William Dunlap of New Jersey arrived in the village, which he described as "the rough and unpromising Plattsburgh." He, too, painted portraits of the town's aristocracy. The Platt likenesses may be seen at the Clinton County Museum and the Delords' at the Kent-Delord House Museum in Plattsburgh.

Unlike trained artists, who depicted the elite of their time, Mrs. Shute, Powers and Fletcher were typical of the itinerant folk artists who painted middle class people. These craftsmen, who flourished during the first half of the nineteenth century, began as painters of signs, coaches and

walls. As they became more skillful they traveled about doing portraits of merchants, farmers and other middle class folk. Thus they are referred to as folk artists.

The bodies painted by folk artists are likely to be linear and stiffly posed. The self-taught limners had trouble with perspective and human anatomy. But they had sharp eyes for design, color and facial expressions. Folk artists who saw English pictures with backgrounds of red drapery and the classic Greek columns occasionally used these devices for backgrounds in their portraits. Art historians no longer believe that folk artists painted human bodies and at a later time painted on heads of their customers.

Prior to their arrival in northeastern New York, Shute, Powers and Fletcher had roamed the countryside of their native states in search of patrons. But when New England farmers migrated to the Champlain Valley, these itinerant painters packed their bags and followed their friends and relatives. They arrived here on foot, horse, stagecoach and boat.

Ruth Whittier Shute was the first of the three folk artists to come to the Champlain Valley. She was born October 28, 1803 in Dover, New Hampshire. Her parents, Obadiah and Sarah Whittier, were members of the Religious Society of Friends and closely related to the Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier.

In 1827 Ruth married Dr. Samuel A. Shute of Byfield, Massachusetts. They settled in Weare, New Hampshire where Samuel practiced medicine. With Ruth as his partner, they supplemented his meager income by painting portraits. Paintings and drawings on which they collaborated were signed R.W. and S.A. Shute. From about 1829 through 1831, the years their daughters were born, only Samuel's signature appears on the likenesses that have been found.

After traveling throughout New England and leaving a trail of portraits and miniatures done in watercolor and oil, the Shutes journeyed to Champlain, New York. Here they presumably stayed with Samuel's relatives, the William Shute family. Four miles north of their farm was Dewey's Tavern where Dr. Shute could take the stagecoach to Montreal.

The proprietors of the tavern, Elias and Lovisa Dewey, may have been Ruth Shute's first customers in Clinton County. The Deweys had migrated from Connecticut to Champlain about 1798 and bought a tract of land one mile from the Canadian border. Their first home was a log cabin. Their second home, built a few years later, was a tavern, which became an important stagecoach stop.



Portrait of Lovisa Dewey and her grandson by Ruth W. Shute. Private collection.

During the War of 1812 British and American officers lodged at the tavern during war councils. When the Deweys became alarmed that British soldiers might destroy their property, Lovisa packed her saddlebags with food and money and, all alone, rode horseback through fifty miles of howling wilderness to Malone. There she purchased property for a possible refuge.

As the British army retreated from their defeat at Plattsburgh, September 11, 1814, they stopped at Dewey's Tavern. The family cared for the wounded and buried the dead in their fields.

This historic tavern, now a farm house, still stands at the corner of the Prospect Hill Road and route 276 in Champlain.

When Elias and Lovisa Dewey sat for their portraits, he was sixty-six years old and she was five years younger. They had twelve children and numerous grandchildren, one of whom is painted sitting in Lovisa's lap. Both Dewey paintings are oil on canvas and have a plain, somber background. In his portrait, the tavern keeper looks like a genial person as he sits relaxed, holding a pipe in his hand.

Lovisa's likeness is a charming and sensitive painting of a proud grandmother. She wears her best Sunday bonnet trimmed with eyelet embroidery and a black dress with a large white collar. Her arm has a firm hold around her little grandson. Like little boys of his time, he wears a dress. It is the same shade of red as the apple in his chubby fingers.

These portraits are not signed but are definitely the work of Ruth W. Shute.

To find other portrait commissions in Clinton County, Mrs. Shute put this advertisement in the *Plattsburgh Republican* of May 24, 1834:

Portrait Painting. Mrs. Shute would inform the Ladies and Gentlemen of Plattsburgh that she has taken a Room at John McKee's Hotel [later the Cumberland] where she will remain a short time...All who employ her may rest assured that a correct *likeness* of the original will be obtained. Ladies and Gentlemen are requested to call and examine the Paintings. Price from \$5.00 to \$10.00. Miniatures from \$5.00 to \$8.00.

Paul Marshall of Plattsburgh must have read Mrs. Shute's advertisement and liked the samples of her work, for Ruth spent the month of July 1834

painting portraits of his family of six. Each canvas is signed and dated.

As a boy Mr. Marshall came with his family from Hinesburg, Vermont to Beekmantown about 1790. Eventually he moved to Plattsburgh where he carried on a large mercantile business.

Of the six family portraits, only that of Marshall's daughter, Lucy Ann, still remains in Plattsburgh with a descendant. The artist painted the pretty eighteen-year-old girl sitting very straight in front of a red velvet curtain. Her dark dress with its low cut neck and huge sleeves is the height of fashion. The bouquet of roses in her hand was a prop commonly used by folk artists.

On January 30, 1836, Samuel Addison Shute, age thirty-two, died in Champlain after returning from Montreal. The cause of his death is unknown. The portraits from 1834 to 1836 have only Ruth's signature. We can but speculate that Samuel was in ill health during these years and went to Montreal seeking medical help.

Ruth Shute took her husband's body to Concord, New Hampshire for burial in a cemetery adjacent to St. Paul's School. The land had been owned by Samuel's father, Aaron Shute.

To support herself and her one surviving daughter, Mrs. Shute continued to paint in New Hampshire. In 1840 she married Alpha Tarbell of Moriah, New York. They settled in Kentucky where she had two daughters and continued to paint portraits. Ruth Shute Tarbell died in 1882 at the age of seventy-nine.



*Portrait of Lucy Ann Marshall by Ruth W. Shute.
Private collection.*

For many years the Shutes' initials and relationship puzzled art collectors. Finally in 1978, Helen Kellogg, a Connecticut folk art researcher, discovered the identity of Ruth and Samuel Shute. Presently, Mrs. Kellogg lists a total of 140 portraits painted by the Shutes during their twelve years as diligent, talented folk art painters.



With his arrival in Clinton County in 1840, Asahel L. Powers was the second folk artist to come here seeking patrons.

Asahel L(ynde) Powers, was born February 28, 1813 in Springfield, Vermont. Since his earliest known portrait is dated 1831, Powers must have started painting portraits by the time he was eighteen. His paintings of Vermont families during the 1830s record his untrained, exuberant style. He had problems with anatomy and perspective. But his portraits have colorful costumes, furniture and curtains as well as interesting accessories and props.

After traveling about Vermont for eight years and painting at least forty-five portraits, Asahel Powers migrated west to Franklin County, New York. His likenesses of Malone families are signed and dated 1839 and 1840.

Powers' itinerary brought him next to the adjoining Clinton County -- probably to the farm of his uncle, Major Powers. His uncle had come from Vermont and bought land on the Peru-Schuyler Falls Road. Among the artist's strongest, most mature works are his likenesses of his uncle's neighbors: Peter and Susan Weaver, Dr. Isaac and Abigail Patchin, and Elisha and Mary Arnold. All canvases are signed: "A.L. Powers/Painter/1840." The unsigned portrait of Jennette Elmore Everest of Peru is attributed to the artist.

According to Nina Fletcher Little, noted authority on Powers, the artist's portrait of Elisha Arnold is "one of his most remarkable character studies." The sitter looks at the viewer with sharp eyes and a shrewd expression. And shrewd he was. Suspecting that a tract of land near Clintonville, N.Y. contained valuable iron ore deposits, he purchased the land ostensibly for a sheep pasture. From the iron mines beneath the pastures Mr. Arnold became a wealthy man. On the reverse of the canvas Powers wrote "Fee recd," probably at the request of Mr. Arnold, a county judge, state senator, and astute business man.



Portrait of Abigail Patchin by Asahel L. Powers. Private collection.

The likeness of Dr. Patchin depicts a handsome man in his thirties seated in front of a Greek column. At the age of twenty he began the study of medicine with a Vermont doctor for fifty cents a day. Four years later he was practicing medicine in Schuyler Falls. In her portrait Mrs. Patchin, plump and pleasant looking, sits on a high backed couch and holds a purse in her hand. Her bright paisley shawl and lacy white collar provide a pleasing design against the dark background. Abigail bore her husband fourteen children.

During his stay in Peru, Powers gave painting lessons to seventeen-year-old Daniel Folger Bigelow, who lived on a nearby farm. Eventually Bigelow made his way to Chicago where he became known for his landscapes of the Adirondack mountains.

In Clinton County's northern towns Powers found patrons among prosperous farmers and merchants: Ezra L. Thurber of Rouses Point; a son of Matthew Saxe of Saxe's Landing, Chazy; and Abel and Maria Southwick Knapp of Mooers.

Abel Knapp came from Berlin, Vermont as a young man. After working in a store in Mooers he started his own business selling lumber, potash and pearl ash. In his portrait Mr. Knapp is holding a ledger. The painting of Maria depicts an attractive woman much younger-looking than her thirty-seven years. The Knapps had nine children.

The Knapp and Arnold portraits hang in the Clinton County Museum. Powers' other portraits remain with descendants of the sitters.

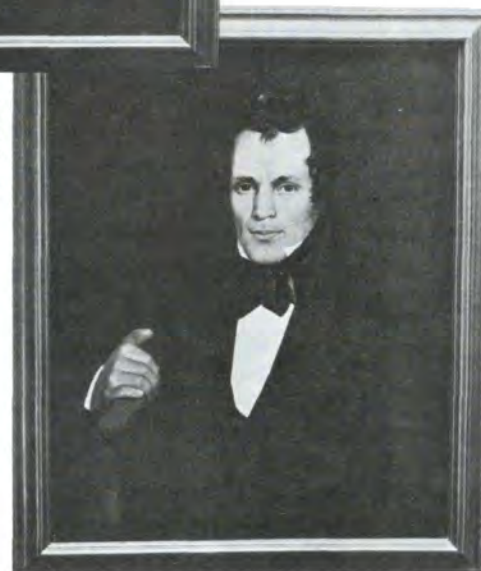
In 1841 Asahel Powers packed up his equipment and resumed his journey west to join his parents in Olney, Illinois. There, two years later, the artist died at the age of thirty.

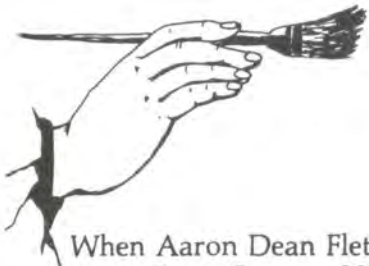
Asahel left no will, no painting equipment and only meager belongings. However, a search in the Clinton County Surrogate's files indicated that he left a wife here, Elizabeth M. Powers. A document dated December 25, 1844 names her as administratrix and directs her to return an inventory to the surrogate's office in three months listing all "goods, chattels and credits" of the deceased. Unfortunately the widow's inventory is missing.

Powers' Clinton County portraits were the last of sixty-five known canvases he painted during his brief ten years as a traveling folk artist. His work here represents his most academic and perceptive portraits, the height of his talent.



Portraits of Abel and Maria Knapp by Asahel L. Powers. Collection of the Clinton County Historical Museum.





When Aaron Dean Fletcher migrated from Vermont to Essex County, New York, he found a permanent home as well as portrait commissions. Unlike his fellow portraitists he never left the Champlain Valley except for brief periods of time.

On Parker Hill four miles south of Springfield, Vt. stands the Fletcher homestead built in 1790 by the artist's grandfather. Here, September 15, 1817, Aaron Dean was born to David and Sally Lovell Fletcher. He was the youngest of their ten boys and one girl.

According to a local historian Fletcher learned to play the violin as a child, and at thirteen played for dances in Springfield and in Charlestown, New Hampshire. He put the money he received for playing in the savings bank at Charlestown, where it remained until his death. Fletcher became an artist at an early age and went from house to house painting portraits, landscapes, or whatever came to hand. He was entirely self-taught and not only made his own canvases but also ground his own paints.

From about 1835 to 1840 Dean, as he was known, roamed the Vermont countryside painting likenesses of families in Springfield, Rockingham and Saxtons River. Like most beginners he had problems painting hands and shoulders. The features of the sitter were harshly outlined, but their costumes were carefully rendered. During the five years Fletcher worked in his native state he painted thirty-two known portraits. His likenesses of children are delightful.

The inscription on his portrait of Wendell Lansing, editor of the *Essex County Republican*, indicates that by 1840 Dean was working in Keeseville. Three of his brothers lived in the area, and the village was the center of a thriving iron industry.

Fletcher spent the remainder of his life between Keeseville and other parts of Chesterfield township painting the farmers and village folk of Essex and Clinton Counties. Although his style remained essentially the same, his modeling and colors became softer and more subtle.

Fletcher's financial arrangements with his customers are unknown. His prices were probably comparable to those of Horace Bundy, a Vermont folk artist who worked in Elizabethtown and Essex,

five years after Fletcher. According to an Essex family tradition, Bundy received \$10 for each portrait plus room and board for himself and his horse.

During his first fourteen years in his adopted state Fletcher painted about twenty-eight portraits, fewer than might be expected of a young artist in a burgeoning community. He must have known Asahel Powers, and perhaps competed with him for patrons from 1840 through 1841.

The most outstanding work of Dean's early years in Keeseville is the likeness of Mrs. David Hoag (nee Elizabeth Earle; 1769-1856). She was born of Quaker parents in Leicester, Massachusetts. In 1794 she married David Hoag and moved to Vermont. Nine years later they moved to Hallock Hill in the town of Ausable. According to family tradition she would ride horseback to New York City to attend the yearly meeting of Quaker women, carrying her baby with her.

In the portrait, Elizabeth Hoag calmly looks at us over her glasses as she sits in an armchair holding a Bible. Like other Quaker women of her day she wears a plain white bonnet and white kerchief. Without the slight smile about her mouth she would look quite stern. The canvas is inscribed on the back: Age 73/Feb. 1843/A.D. Fletcher/Pny.

In 1855 Dean Fletcher went to LaPorte, Indiana where he spent a year with his brother Peter and his family. While there he painted portraits of his relatives and a rare genre scene of a farmhouse and barns.

After returning to Keeseville, Fletcher did a posthumous portrait of eighteen-month-old Jasper Tousley, son of Keeseville's photographer, Horace Tousley. The family remembered the artist's habit of parading down the center of the street, never on the sidewalk, garbed in a long black cape and a high black hat.

The finest work of Dean's later years is his portrait of Rufus Prescott (1825-1901) of Keeseville. In the painting the artist used his customary plain background and waist-length figure. The sitter's face is skillfully delineated, revealing Mr. Prescott's sensitivity and strength of character. The portrait painted about 1860 is unsigned, but is confidently attributed to Fletcher.

As a boy Prescott came with his family from New Hampshire in 1830 to settle in Keeseville. His father, a cabinetmaker, died in 1842, leaving sixteen-year-old Rufus to care for the family of ten and their business. In 1850 Rufus married Amanda Weston by whom he had three daughters and a son. The *Essex County Republican* of the 1860s

advertised Prescott's prosperous business of making coffins, doors, blinds and furniture. The Prescott enterprise lasted through five generations.

Fletcher's likeness of six-year-old Mary Broadwell of Morrisonville was done in 1862 and is his last known dated portrait. The artist was then only forty-five years old. Since his arrival in Essex County in 1840 he had painted only thirty-six portraits in 22 years. The popularity of Keeseville's photographer, who produced likenesses cheaply and quickly, may account for the dearth of Fletcher's portraits after 1850.

During Dean's last years Edward Blaise took the aging artist to live with him on his farm three miles south of Keeseville. Mr. Blaise's youngest son, Andrew, in an interview ten years ago, remembered Fletcher as a tall, thin, kindly old man who entertained the family by playing dance tunes on his "fiddle."

Aaron Dean Fletcher died December 27, 1902 at the age of eighty-five. The cause of death is listed as "infirmities of age" and his occupation as "none." He is buried in Keeseville's Evergreen Cemetery beside his mother and brothers. He had

never married or had a home of his own.

To the amazement of his friends and relatives, the frugal Dean Fletcher left government bonds and bank accounts valued at \$7,800. His relatives inherited a small amount of his money. The Home for the Friendless in Plattsburgh was the residuary legatee and received over \$4,000 plus Dean's old violin.

During the years that these New England folk portraitists worked in Clinton and Essex Counties they painted a total of fifty-five known portraits of the pioneers of New York's northern frontier. Although Mrs. Shute, Powers and Fletcher were untrained, they left a legacy of canvases which captured the essence of our sturdy, industrious ancestors. These portraits are graphic memorials to the folk artists who left us pictorial records of the Champlain Valley's early history.

Virginia Mason Burdick has published in "Antiques Magazine" and other journals. Ready for publication is her book-length "Love and Duty", the women of the Kent-Delord House told in their own words.



Portrait of Rufus Prescott by Aaron Fletcher. Private Collection.



SOMETHING BLUE

by Helen W. Allan

On July 26, 1888 Dr. David Kellogg, M.D. of Plattsburgh sat down at his desk to write in his journal. A conscientious recorder of his daily professional and domestic activities, Dr. Kellogg made the following entry:

"Today I took my horse and buggy on board the steamer *Maquam* and went to Adams' Landing in the town of Grand Isle. I drove from there to Mr. Daniel Sampson's, who has quite a number of good Indian relics. He told me that he had a blue pitcher that had a picture of the battle of Plattsburgh on it. When I got there he could not find it, but would make further search for it and give it to me.

"I did see one pitcher, however, at the Rev. Dr. Fay's, a short distance from Mr. Sampson's. It has two pictures of the battle, one on each side, very much like my battle of Plattsburgh plate and saucer so far as the picture itself is concerned. My affection for Mrs. Fay would have been heightened had she given me the pitcher. Had I been in her place I would not have given it away."

With this entry Dr. Kellogg reveals not only his own interest in collecting - in this case, "old blue" china - but also a reference to the existence of Staffordshire china. The specific design he describes is one that is familiar to visitors to the Clinton County Historical Museum - "Commodore Macdonnough's Victory."

The scene represented on the museum's collection of Staffordshire china is copied from a pain-

ting by Hugh Reinagle of the 1814 Battle of Plattsburgh. An engraving of the same scene is also on view in the Lake Champlain gallery.

The origins of "old blue" are to be found during an 18th century period of evolution in Europe, when scientific invention and improved methods of communication resulted in an industrial explosion and mass production of commodities for the home.

In England Josiah Wedgwood pioneered the pottery industry's response to an increasing demand for domestic wares. For the first time, ordinary housewives would be able to buy earthenware dinner and tea sets, replacing pewter which had been the only material available to those who could not afford porcelain.

Transfer-printing, the method by which designs could be transferred from the copper engraving plate to tissue paper, and thence to pottery, was perfected during the second half of the 18th century. The English potteries, many of them located in Staffordshire, began to turn out enormous quantities of earthenware for domestic use. The number of designs they applied was equally large.

A treaty between Britain and America, signed in 1783, had opened the way for transatlantic trade. The War of 1812 caused a temporary interruption, but the market for manufacturers continued to expand. From 1815 on the English potteries took full advantage of the American market.

Blue Staffordshire was decorated with views of American landscapes, important buildings and heroic figures. Historical scenes and events were depicted, among them a naval battle on Lake

Champlain fought on September 11, 1814 between American and British fleets. Enoch Wood of Burslem, who produced "Commodore Macdonough's Victory", may also have been the first potter to introduce the startling deep blue which became so popular.

Collectors and admirers of Staffordshire blue

will doubtless concur with Dr. Kellogg's opinion that Mrs. Fay, the minister's wife, knew a good thing when she saw it.

Helen Allan, director and curator of the Clinton County Historical Museum, also edits North Country Notes.

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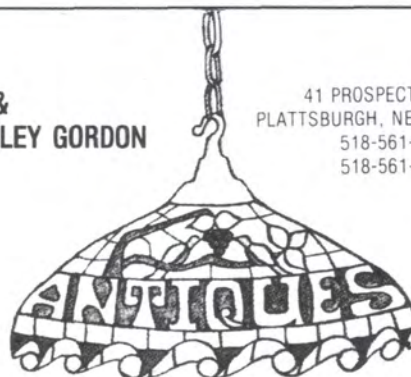
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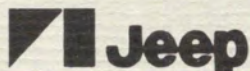
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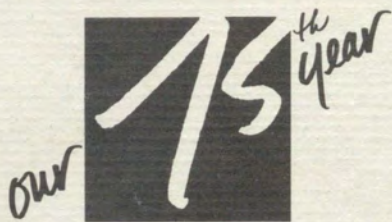


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