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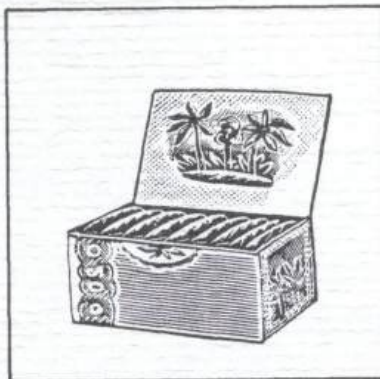


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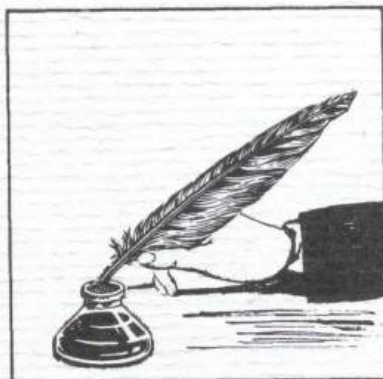
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LETTERS FROM A NORTH COUNTRY SOLDIER

by Marcia J. Moss

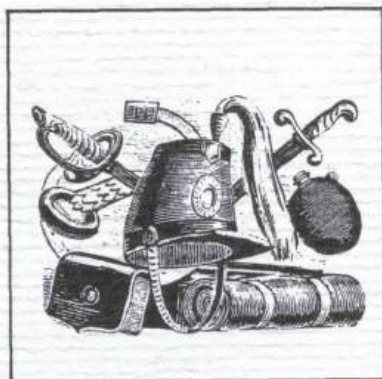
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Students at Champlain College, Plattsburgh, N.Y. c. 1950 (special collections, Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh).

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PLATTSBURGH: CIGAR MAKER OF THE NORTH COUNTRY



by Allan S. Everest

Did you know that Plattsburgh was once an important cigar-making center? That the village of 6,000 people, in full operation at the start of this century, harbored numerous concerns which made hundreds of thousands of cigars annually? Plus chewing tobacco as a by-product? Well, it did. Here were produced quality cigars that found a market across northern New York and into Vermont and New Hampshire. At one time or another, several of the addresses on the west side of Margaret Street between Brinkerhoff and Court were occupied by the makers of cigars. What a delightful aroma they must have created in the downtown area!

All of the tobacco leaf for this industry was imported, for none that was grown by local farmers was of sufficiently good quality. It was

already dried and cured when it arrived by train in 150-pound bundles. The leaf varied in color and mildness according to the quality of the cigar to be made from it. The ten-center required the best leaf available, while the two-for-five-cent smoke could be made from cheaper stuff.

The most desirable leaf was Sumatran, although it might originate in Cuba or the American South. It was light in color and mild. Connecticut leaf was broad, dark and somewhat stronger, but useful for the less expensive product. Each manufacturer needed a large storage space so as to have a ready supply of all varieties on hand.

The making of a cigar in Plattsburgh was carried on completely by hand, exotic though it sounds in today's machine-made civilization. A

cigar contained three components--the filler, a binder leaf which enclosed it, and an outside wrapper. A start was made with a tobacco leaf placed on a marble block. With a specially curved knife, a large part of the leaf's center was cut out to be used as the wrapper. The excess from this operation was broken up and used for filler. This material was rolled by hand so as to be contained within a binder leaf, which was sealed with a tasteless, odorless glue obtainable in large pots. However, descendants of the original makers remember that sometimes saliva was applied with the thumb. The content of the leaf itself provided the additional properties that made for a good sticking job.

This partly finished cigar was placed in a wooden mold and pressed for twenty-four hours to age it and to create a uniform size. When it was removed it received the outer or wrapper layer, again glued lightly in place. It was then ready for packing in specially made wooden boxes. Some cigars were sold on the premises, because the maker usually operated a retail outlet for all kinds of tobacco products and supplies.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the North Country received an influx of new immigrants. French-Canadians came in large numbers, most of them settling on farms of their own. The Irish, often by way of Canada, also began to find homes in northern New York.

An additional group came from one or another of the German states of the day. They or their parents were eager to leave home for primarily economic reasons--to escape from the hard times that gripped the German states in the 1850s. They lived and worked for a year or more in New York City before coming north. No one seems to know what brought the first families to

Plattsburgh instead of some other place, but the early arrivals became the founders of the Jewish Temple in Plattsburgh, one of only a few in the country at the time of its establishment in 1861. Its existence provided an additional magnet to draw other Germans in subsequent years.

They brought mercantile and manufacturing skills to Plattsburgh. Many of them are good examples of the American success story. Starting out with backpacks and traversing the county on foot to sell their goods, they graduated to horse and wagon before opening a retail outlet in the downtown area. Like their predecessors in other rural areas, the backpackers served an important economic function in this rural area by bringing goods to the consumers' front doors when facilities were lacking for isolated farmers to make shopping trips of their own.

Among the Germans who came to Plattsburgh, several of them embarked upon the manufacture of cigars. One of the earliest of these entrepreneurs was Isaias Scheier (1836-1915). Born in Germany, he emigrated to New York City in 1857, where he married Caroline Schiff. The next year he came to Plattsburgh, but returned to New York for a time. In 1863 he came back to establish the firm of I. Scheier at 73 Margaret Street, where he carried on operations for many years. This was known as the Scheier Building closely adjoining the Cumberland Hotel, and it was irreparably damaged when the hotel burned in 1978. There he ran a tobacco store, sold all kinds of beverages in the rear, and began the manufacture of cigars. He acted as his own travelling salesman across northern New York and Vermont.

Solomon, son of Isaias, was born in New York in 1860, and he came to Plattsburgh with his parents three years later. When he was old enough he became a partner with his father in "Scheier and Son." But in the 1890s he started his own business, the Park Cigar Store, at what was then 16 Brinkerhoff. It was a two-story building which probably predated the structure now occupied by the Booth Insurance Agency. There he operated a retail business, but also made such cigars as the ten-cent "Park" and the five-cent "Artisan" and "Park Pony." The operation remained relatively small but respected; it was terminated by his early death in 1901.

Another son of Isaias, Henry, was born in Plattsburgh in 1868. He also started in his

A late 19th c. cigar-cutting implement was called the "Royal Savage", a name reminiscent of Benedict Arnold's ship in the Battle of Valcour, 1776. Courtesy of Philip and Shirley Gordon.



father's business of making cigars in the Scheier Building. In 1891 he started his own enterprise in the same building; Isaias seems to have operated the retail and wholesale store while Henry carried on the making of cigars until the latter moved to 44 Margaret. Henry's early operation was known as "The Ingleside," which was also one of his ten-cent specialties, along with the typically-named "Flor De H," "Perfecto" and "Gladstone." In the five-cent category he turned out the "Golden Rule," "Trilby" and "Gladstone Junior." He used only the street floor and basement (1,800 square feet in all) in his work; the basement was used partly for storage of leaf bundles. Henry employed from eleven to fifteen skilled workers and turned out about 650,000 cigars a year at the turn of the century. He kept two salesmen on the road and did business across northern New York and adjoining New England. He married Rebecca, daughter of Isaac Merkel, and by 1899 he was in partnership with his brother-in-law, Abraham Merkel (Scheier and Merkel) at 57 Margaret Street, but probably not in the making of cigars. This was a short-lived venture because Abraham moved to Albany after two years. Henry's son Joel later entered into a partnership with his father as Henry Scheier and Son "in the wholesale tobacco and notion business." Henry lived until 1934, meanwhile having served as Alderman, County Supervisor, and President of the Board of Education.

Another of the pioneers in cigar-making was Julius Mendelsohn, who was born in Graudens, Prussia, now a part of Poland, in 1855. He migrated to New York City and at age 16, having completed his apprenticeship in cigar-making, he came to Plattsburgh. There he became the foreman in the factory of Isaias Scheier, and two years later he married the boss's daughter, Rosa. In 1892 he started his own business and developed a wide market. He operated first at 30 Margaret Street in the so-called F. B. Q. Cigar Factory. He held forth successively at 49-51 Margaret, 14 River (now Durkee), and 35-37 Bridge Street. He made "F. B. Q." cigars (Far Best Quality) and "P & M." In 1893 this operation became a partnership with Joseph Payette--Payette, Mendelsohn & Company--on Bridge Street, and employed thirty to forty people. Mr. Payette was a veteran of the iron industry, and their establishment, which stood where the parking lot is now located at Bridge and Durkee,



The interior of Levy Brothers' store on Margaret Street in Plattsburgh. Pictured on the left is William Levy. Marcus Levy is on the right, and an unidentified man, perhaps a customer, completes the group. Courtesy of William M. Levy, Sr.

also contained a large brewery. For cigars they produced "Special Five," "Little P & M," "Royal Savage" and "Exquisitor." At its peak it was turning out 1,200,000 cigars annually. But by the second quarter of the 20th century, as machinery began to cut down the need for workers, he operated at a loss in order to provide work for his old employees, many of them heads of families. The firm was still making cigars in Plattsburgh in the 1940s. Mr. Mendelsohn held a variety of public offices, including that of County Supervisor; he died in 1934.

Isaac Merkel (1845-1919) was born at Messel, a German town near Frankfurt. He emigrated in 1865 and worked briefly in New York City. The next year he came to Plattsburgh; within a year he married Janetta Kahner, daughter of Joseph Kahner of Germany, and within four years he began to manufacture cigars on Cornelia Street. In 1877 he took into partnership his brother-in-law, Lazarus Kahner, in the firm of Merkel and Kahner for the making of cigars. The partnership ended two years later, but Mr. Merkel continued in the wholesale and retail cigar and liquor business.

One of the most enduring concerns that made cigars was that created by the Levy brothers. William was born in Germany in 1859 and emigrated as a child with his parents. The family

came to Plattsburgh but at first young William worked for his brother-in-law, Nestor Berman. Mr. Berman (1847-1921) was born in Frankfurt, Germany. He was briefly in New York City, for two years in Plattsburgh, then by 1871 at Port Henry, where he established a retail business and married Harriet Levy of Plattsburgh. Back in Plattsburgh in 1882, William Levy opened a cigar-making business at 53 Margaret Street; this is now the building occupied by Beneficial Finance Company. His younger brother, Marcus, born in the United States, worked for William from the age of eleven years, at first making cigars and tending store, later as a travelling salesman. Eventually, William and Marcus formed a partnership as Levy Brothers.

They used all three floors and the basement of their building--the first for a retail outlet, the second mostly for storage and the third for the actual manufacture. Through an alley, the large bundles of leaf tobacco could be taken to the rear of the building and hoisted by pulley to the desired floor. They employed a large corps of skilled workers and by the turn of the century were producing a million cigars a year. Their leading five-cent product was the "Florence," while the higher-priced ones included the "W. M. L. Perfecto" and the "Flor de Palacia." William lived until 1924 and Marcus until 1934. An employee of the firm, Arthur Breyette, continued the Levy operation until after World War II. It is likely that his was the last operation of its kind in town.

Moses Wallach (later changed to Wallace), was born in Cassel, Germany and came to New York City in 1850. He moved to Plattsburgh in 1860 where he entered the dry-goods business, starting with the proverbial peddler's pack. Four years later he opened a store at 34-40 Margaret Street (site of Fishman's), where he made and sold cigars. He died in 1898.

As late as 1909, ten firms were making cigars in Plattsburgh. In addition to some of the ones already mentioned, there were Alonzo Fleming on River Street, Nelson Dandrow on Marion, Jacob Ochsner on Bridge, and Paul Lefebvre, J. A. Schiff and Floyd L. Smith, each with a Margaret Street address.

By the 1930s, the days of Plattsburgh's cigar-making industry were numbered. In 1934 alone, three of the pioneers--Julius Mendelsohn, Marcus Levy and Henry Scheier--passed from the scene. The next generation either couldn't or

didn't want to continue their parents' enterprises, some of them moving away or preferring the professions or straight retailing to manufacturing. Further, the depression years were a hazardous period in which to consider business ventures, while smoking habits had changed perceptibly away from the once-popular cigar to cigarettes and pipes. Anyway, mechanization of the production of cigars, as Julius Mendelsohn learned to his sorrow, priced the handmade product out of the market. And so, after three-quarters of a century, the making of cigars ceased to be a Plattsburgh occupation.

Allan S. Everest is a professor emeritus at SUNY Plattsburgh, having taught American history there for many years. He is also the author of ten books of North Country history.



Symbol of the business carried on at 53 Margaret Street, this 6 ft. high cigar-store Indian stood outside the Levy Bros. establishment. Clinton County Historical Museum.



LETTERS FROM A NORTH COUNTRY SOLDIER



by Marcia J. Moss

"Letters from a North-Country Soldier," transcribed by Marcia J. Moss, won the Emily McMasters prize for 1988. Five of the sixty-two letters in the collection are presented here, together with two introductory comments by the author. All of the letters are remarkable for the "revealing and sensitive chronicle of military life," says Miss Moss. "Initially this collection reveals William H. to be an observant, idealistic young man viewing the war as a brief sojourn necessary to protect the Union. As the months pass, the reality of war and its suffering becomes evident in his words or--in some cases--his lack of words." Four of the following letters are from William H. Trombly of Trombly's Bay, Chazy, to his parents, and one to them from a friend in his regiment. (Ed.)

On April 15, 1861, three days after the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter, President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 state militia volunteers to serve for three months to quell the disturbance. Lincoln's call was received in Plattsburgh on April 16. Pliny Moore (grandson of General Benjamin Mooers, militia commander at the Battle of Plattsburgh, War of 1812) met with Franklin Palmer that same evening to compose and distribute the following notice:

The citizens of Plattsburgh are requested to meet at the Court House, Wednesday evening, the 17th, to take into consideration the matter of immediate action in sustaining the Constitution and the laws of our country. Also for the purpose of forming a volunteer company in this town, to be attached to a regiment organized in this county. A general attendance is requested.

At this meeting, 35 men signed up immediately and withdrew to another room where they organized. This first Northern New York Company was mustered into state service on April 25, 1861 by Colonel Putnam Lawrence, a resident of the town of Chazy and member of the 23rd NYS Militia. The newspaper noted their April 26th departure for Albany amid chants of "It is sweet, it is sweet for one's country to die."

Throughout 1861 and 1862, volunteers, spurred by national enthusiasm and faith in a quick victory

enlisted in great numbers. Initially, as members of state militias their duties were limited to within state borders unless called upon by the President in time of emergency. As a result, most volunteers went directly into U.S. service, requiring the national government to provide for them from the date of their mustering. Townspeople also rallied to support the Union, possibly influenced by *Plattsburgh Republican* notes such as the following, dated May 16, 1861:

Every man whose business affairs will permit, should rally to the defense of his Country, and those who do not go, must see that the wives, the children and parents dependent upon them for support will be well cared for in their absence. It shall be done. Let the last dollar and the last loaf of bread be divided with families of those who go. . .

On the heels of Moore and Palmer, companies were organized by Captain Wood in Chazy and Captain Davis J. Rich in Champlain. Seventy-nine men aged 18 to 45 enlisted with Captain Rich and formed Company D of the 34th Regiment of the New York (Foot) Volunteers. The 62nd Private was 'WILLIAM HENRY TROMBLY Aged 21 from Chazy.' On June 15, 1861, the Company was mustered in for national service. (M.J.M.)



Little is known about this handsome hand-sewn banner made of yellow silk and superimposed with stars and eagle in dark blue. It may have been one of the flags presented to Captain Frank Palmer's company of Plattsburgh Volunteers when it went to war in the spring of 1861. Clinton County Historical Museum. **Photo on previous page:** Two weary color-bearers of the Sixteenth New York Volunteers hold the tattered remnants of flags made by Plattsburgh ladies. Courtesy of the Plattsburgh Public Library.

Camp Jackson, Barnstown, Montgomery Co.
Maryland

Monday morning Aug. the 26

...The last few days seems more like home than anny other time because we have a fresh breese and it is getting little cooler than it has been the Sun has been blazeing down upon us for a long time the largest trees wer scarecly anny protection against the rays that would stike down ~~a~~ upon us and in the midle of the ~~tents~~ days when it is warm it is imposible to stay in the tents as there is scarecly anny air and the think canvis is no protection at all but we have had a few cool days lately the nights though are as cold if not colder than in Chazy and when we are on guard in the night about twelve oclock there was two shells thrown from over the river at our pickets ~~on~~ that are stationed by the river side to guard the river the whole camp was routed and the regt formed and marched down on double quick time but when we got there there was nothing to be seen or heard we staid down about two hours and then came back to camp. one hundred men stationed on the river can stop five hundred from crossing for they have no large boats to cross in and we can shoot at them all the time they are crossing with great efect while their shotts could do no exacution on our side. we have nine miles of the river to guard in the nine miles there is 25 pickets and five men to a picket the pickets stais four days with out being relieved the pickets does not have to guard all night they take turns two men to time 3 hours of and three on

we have nice times when we are on picket and it dont rain we get all the corn and aples and peaches we want and some times the boys shoots a turkey or a goos the last time I was on picket I got poisoned but I am all most cured now I shall go again the last of this week. we have to kep aline guard all aroun our camp be sides the picket guard it takes thirty eight men for line guard. and our regt has nine miles and so on down the river and canal to guard another regt ~~taks~~ takes the nex nine miles and so on down the river

~~we~~ you wrote to me to be of good cheer and not to get discouraged. you perhaps think I am not satisfied here but with all the hard times that we have seen and mor we expect and yet I would not swop my place for anny other place I know of theres nothing like a soliders life for me. I alwais thought I should like it ~~a~~ when I read about war. now that I have experienced it a little of it my old

thoughts proves very true. as for that part you can make your self content for we have enough to eat here and we dont suffer for enny thing so you neet not borrough anny trouble on that account Never as yet have I wished for anny food from home to satisfy my hunger Neither have I ever been even for a moment sorry that I came here. I was very glad to hear that P Pa had given up drinking but why it is I cannot tell but I cannot bring my mind to rely on the subject it seems like the fresh blossom of the morning rose that it is soon to wither and die away. could I but beleive it he would stick to it, it would be the greatest comfort I could have while I am here alone to think that every thing went on well at home as I know it would if he was sober all the time but I am sorry to tell you that I can not. no it is imposible for me to beleive that he will not drink anny more untill I have had better ~~p~~proff of it when ~~than~~ the manny pledges in the past years has one after another all failed and I fear this on will soon follow!! perhaps I have not done right by expressing my mind but I can not help it

William Trombly



Camp Mc.Clellan. December the 5.-1861

Dear Father & Mother

I received you very kind letter from home last evening, and with much pleasure I persued its contents lerning "or at least hopeing" that you were enjoying all pleasures that a good home can aford, and it is with the same pleasure that I am seated here in this little tent "near the southern borders of Maryland" to attempt to reply to your most Joyfully received letter and also to let you know that I am enjoying a soldiers life to perfection. this is what many of the boys dont say but for my part I like it well and think that I never would get tired of it. this true we have some pretty tough times especialy when being on guard cold windy or rainy nights & when that we are relieved to have no other place to go than in a cold tent and wrap up with our blankets and ly in the bottom of the tent on the ground; or when on the march or when on picket at the river. but takeing all things in consideration we have pretty good times I do not find no falt at all. takeing it all together tis near so hard as to work on a farm or at least I dont find it so. some of the



A contemporary view of a New York regiment's encampment during the Civil War gives some idea of the conditions described so poignantly in the letters of William H. Trombly. From "Photographic History of the Civil War", Francis Trevelyan Miller, pub. 1911.

boys that never works anny find it hard here but as I said before I like it well.

There is nothing of anny importance ocured in camp, or along the lines of the potomac lately, so far as I know of, except yesterday there was eighteen of the rebel soldiers deserted and come across the river some of them enlisting in the Union ranks and some after swearing aleigence to the United Statts returned to their former homes in this state. They say that the rebl troops that are encamped across the river find it cold and cant stand it as we do. we may remain here half of the winter for all I know....

In Fathers last letter he seemed to express an Idea that we was fighting or at war with the South to free their slaves. ~~in this~~ --in this he is entirely mistaken. we are fightin to suport and uphold one of the best goverment in the world from a portion of its people who has grown angry and wild without a just cause, and has risen and orginised its self to rebel against our goverment and even ~~dared~~ dared to strike down those proud stripes & stars that their forefathers as well as ours fought & bled for and so victoriously carried through the old wars that freed our land from the British tyrants. And the time is

not far we all hope when our whole country shall be restored to peace and once more like brothers be united under the greate National Baner many of them is comeing back to thier senses and them that wont submit must be made to submit if we are successfull. but the slaves must stay where they are. you all know that the blame of this war restes equally as much on the Abolishmoates of the north as well as the fire eaters of the south and if it was not for the greate aid of the northern democratts to rally defence of their land ~~that thier northern brother comenced~~ where would they be at this present time but they had to row or sink with them but hear is the place for slaves they would starve at the north for no man men of the north would emply them I think some of the Abolitionst especialy would see them starve and freese to death before they would take them in and feed them. where they are they are well fed well clothed and well cared for, besides where they are and in time of peace they are a greate benifit to the whole Statte the nigroes work less and live a greate deal easier at the south than the white man that works for his living at the north. "but enough of this"

you wrote you was going to send me some

things among which are socks and drawers. When shall you learn or how many times must I write to you that we haveent the least need of anny thing in the line of clothing and more than that it will be a bother to us for I ~~will~~ would have to leave them behind or give them for little or nothing as I have all the cloths that I need and cary I have at present three new pair of socks three shirts two pair of drawyers and a pair of gloves for which I gave \$1.50 ~~cent~~ they I think will last me all winter mittens is of no use to a solder for he cannot ~~use~~ handle his rifle in the right way and we can get all the inside clothing we want here so I tell you once more not to send them to me. But anny thing to eat I wont refuse. two or three picles and such things to eat is what we like to get from home you said you was going to send some butter and cheese and cake that is what we like to get tis not clothing we want. Not that we are starving here I ask for these thing for we have plenty to eate here but I like to ~~get~~ eat things that come from home such as you sent before write soon and except this the best wishes of your son

William H Trombly



The Peninsula Campaign employed the largest military force ever to fight on the American continent. 113 three-deck steamers, 188 schooners and 88 barges made the trip down the Potomac and into Chesapeake Bay carrying:

121,500 men	44 batteries
14,592 animals	74 anbulances
1,150 wagons	tons of ammuniton

This army landed at Fortress Monroe in April 1862 intending to sweep up the peninsula between the York and James Rivers, seize Richmond in one stroke and scatter the Confederate Army into the Southwest.

A fine plan--except that, at this point, Federal Pinkerton agents convinced General McClellan (in charge of this Army of the Potomac) that he was outnumbered by 2 - 1. In fact, for the June 24, 1862 Seven Days Battle when only 75,000 Confederate troops fought, McClellan told Washington that he had been assailed by 200,000 troops.

Washington turned a deaf ear to requests for further reinforcements. In a melancholy state, McClellan wrote his wife, "I am sick and weary of all this business. I am tired of serving fools."

The Union, of course, held many people who felt that McClellan himself was the greatest fool. In the words of Newspaper Editor Horace Greeley:

Never before did an army so constantly, pressingly need to be reinforced--not by a corps, but by a leader; not by men, but by a man.
(M.J.M.)



Fair Oaks in front of Richmond Va.
June the 8 (1862)

Dear Father & Mother

Yours of the 29 reached me this afternoon I was glad to get a letter from home as I had not heard a word from home in over two weeks. I think it strange that my money hasent got there yet what money the other boys sent has all been received by thier friends. you didnt say whether you had received the adknnowledged receipt or not. it was R. H. King (?) pay master of this regt that caried all the money to Washington and put it in the office all them in this co that sent money say that it has been received.

I suppose you have heard of our fight ~~of~~ on the 31 of May we was just cleening our things for monthly inspection about two oclock in the afternoon when our division under gen Sedgwick received orders to march and leave every thing ~~behin~~ in camp except our ruber blanket and haversacks with one days rations we wer but few minuts before the three brigad comprising our division wer on the line of march at a quicl step we had to cross the Chicahomany creek on a new bridge that had just been built we marched eight milds through mud and water be fore reaching this place during which time we could hear the sharp report of artilery and sharp voleys of musketry when we reached the battlegound we was so tired that we could hardly breath or stand up. but we arived just in the nick of time for we had not been there five minuts when the thus far successful rebels mad an nother charge on one of our batteries it was now about half past six oclock our brigade was formed in line directly in front of where the enemy broke out as our regt suported the artilery we had to face the hardest of the fight but after fighting a while we made a charge with the bayonett at the same time makeing the ~~ar~~ air ring with a terifick yell and firing as we advanced for the first time during

the day the rebels wer compelled to fall back in disorder before the bristling bayonettts of the thirty fourth ~~NY~~ NY regt the Minesotta was to our right and the second N.Y.S.V. to our ~~right~~ left but we done the hardest of the fighting we chased them over fences and in to the woods folowing them up in hast but it became so dark we could see to do no more and we was ordered to retire to the edge of the woods which we did in good order there we lyed down in line on the wet ground and slept til morning I never slept so well in my life as I did that night I was so tired there was 98 wounded out of our regt and twentyseven killed. thirteen wounded and two killed from our Co Lieut Scott was wounded and had to leve before the close of battle but he stood by us and cheered us on as long as he could Since then the co is under comand of A Randon (?) the boys all like him well Capt Rich is discharged from the service many tears was shed on his last adress to the boys. our fight was on Saturday night and on Sunday morning the rebels made another atact but wer again repulsed by the noble Irish brigade

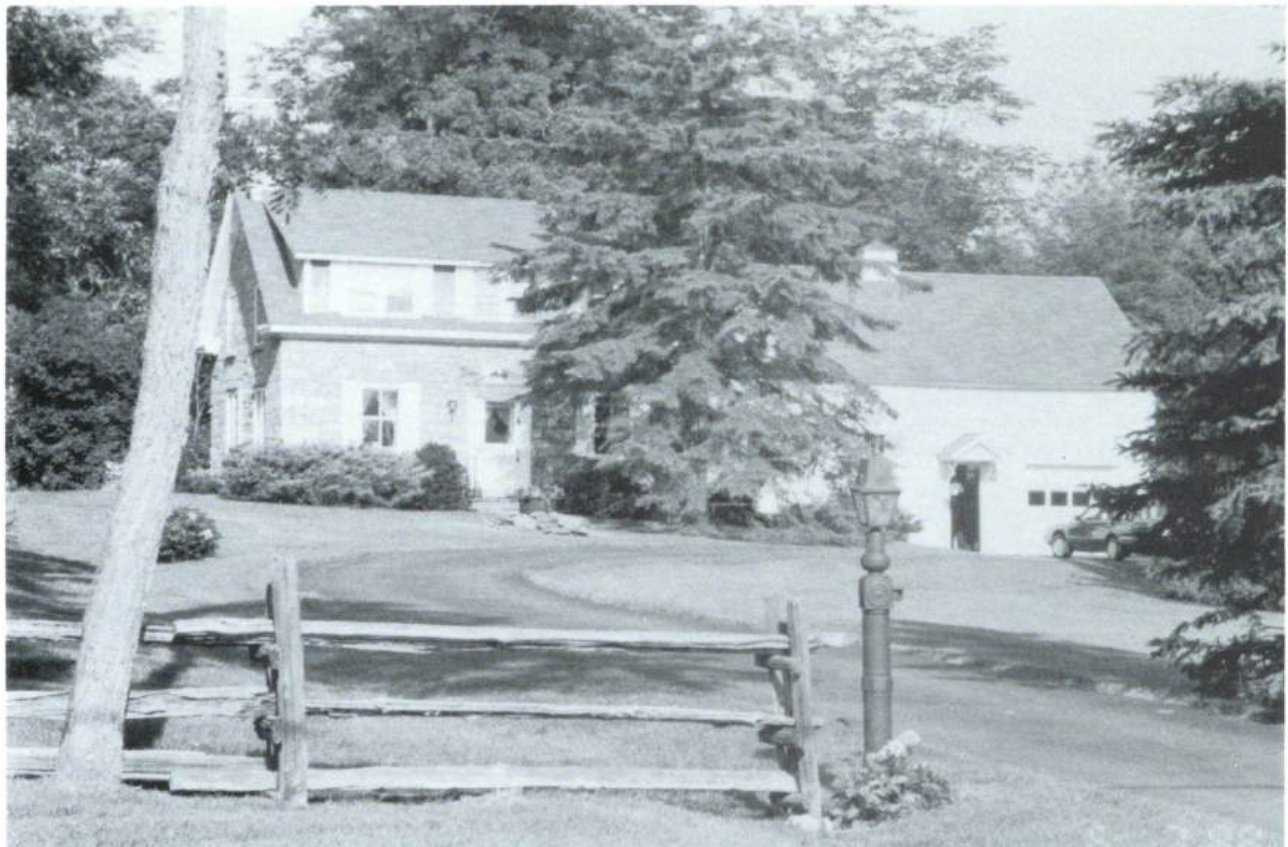
I went around in the woods on sunday is was awful to see the dead rebels and some of our men that had been killed we killed more of thiers than they did of ours. all I took was a canteen of a dead rebel as I had lost mine and a new catrage box as mine was nearly worn out the rebels had some good biscites in thier haver sacks and we ate them our knapsacks have come today and we are camped on the sam field 5 milds to Richmond



Head Quarters 34th Regiment
Near Snickers Gap V.A.
Nov 1st 1862

Lewis. M. Trombley Esq

Dear Sir I hasten to acknowledge th receipt of your Letter received at 9 oclock Last Evening. Making Enquiries about your Son William, H, Trombley, and in answer to your Enquiries Say that I am well acquainted with him and Know all



This is the home where William H. Trombly lived with his parents. The house was built about 1827 by an ancestor, Lewis Trombly, and it stands on the Lake Shore Road near Trombly's Bay, Chazy. Courtesy of Marcia J. Moss.

his History Since I came to the regiment he has Ben Sick Several Different Times but to my Knowledge at no Time so Bad as to Be Entitled to his Discharge he has ben Sick for the past 4 weeks of Diarrhoea and Camp Fever But on the whole not verry Sick yet he has Done no Duty in the regiment for that Length of Time he has all the Time Ben in the company with the Exception of a few Days of the time referred to and at Diffirent T-Times He wanted to Stop going and I Told him that he must continu to go until He got Entirely well and Through my influence he Did So, and it is Best for him, as we marched a pretty Hard Days march from Boleever Heights to this place Day Before yesterday /30th ultimo/ and Left him Behind at the Las camp where he will remain until he is fully able to march and in Fact there were maney with us on the march that was worse off than William but I was ~~as~~ Desireous to favour him as much as I could and consequently went to the Doctor and had him Excused from coming myself and as to his future health I have no fears yet We Little Know what a Day may Bring forth. he went with us to the Battle field of Antietam But fell out Before he got there and was not in the action and consequently was not wounded neither then nor at any other time, he came on the field after the Engagement During the Day and made very Good use of his Time picking up Some valuable Julrey Such as rings watch gold pencil &c &c which he Disposed of and got his pay for. he Told me on the 20th Last month that he had Sent home by Express Either 60 or 70 Dollars which amount I have forgotten and Suppose you have got it befor this time now as I have complied with your request Please Doe me the Favour of conveying to Mr Poter (?) & Ezra Flury & families my verry Best regards. Tell them I have Ben in 9 General actions and hardly got Touched as when I See So much Death and carnage I count the Slight wound as nothing that I received and I have Stood the fire until the Last man & when the colonel and all the men had given me up. I have /Walked/ and fired on all the Time for a Distance of over 1/4 of a mile all alone when the whole regiment was in front of me that full Distance and the rebels firing at me by the Hundred and the Balls passing Between my feet around my head Singing Like a Bee hive and came out all right and received a hearty greeting from our colonel and officers which I will furthe Explain to Mr P. Flury whn I write him in a few

Days as I intend. My regards to your Family and please accept Respects

R. McDonald (?)



2d Corps Hospital
Harpers Ferry Va,
Nov 21st 1862

My Dear Father and Mother -

A friend who is with me in the Hospital has Kindly offered to write for me, as I am yet to weak to write much myself.

I remained here when the Corps left as I was not able to do duty and have ben very sick with Diarrhoea, but am getting along as well as posible now and think I shall soon be well.

But Diarrhoea is very bad here and renders a person very weak. consequently it may be some time before I fully regain my strength.

I am very comfortably Situated and have good care. I am in a room of a brick House with a fire place in the room, and consequently fare much better than many others who have nothing but tents without fire

Some Ladies who are agents of the sanitary Commission are very kind to the patients and bring us in many delicacies which but for them we should not have. I recieved your kind letter of Nov 2d last Tuesday,- it went to the Regt and cousin Wm sent it to me. You do not speak of Claudious and Sarah - I should like ~~to~~ very much to have you write me all news you may have recieved from them, since they moved west.

I want to know how they like the country and allso give me thier Post Office address so that I can write to them the first opertunity.

I wish you to write amediately as there is some talk of moveing this Hospital, before the winter fairly setts in, & I should like to hear from you before we move, as ~~th~~ otherwise the letter may be delayed in reaching me,

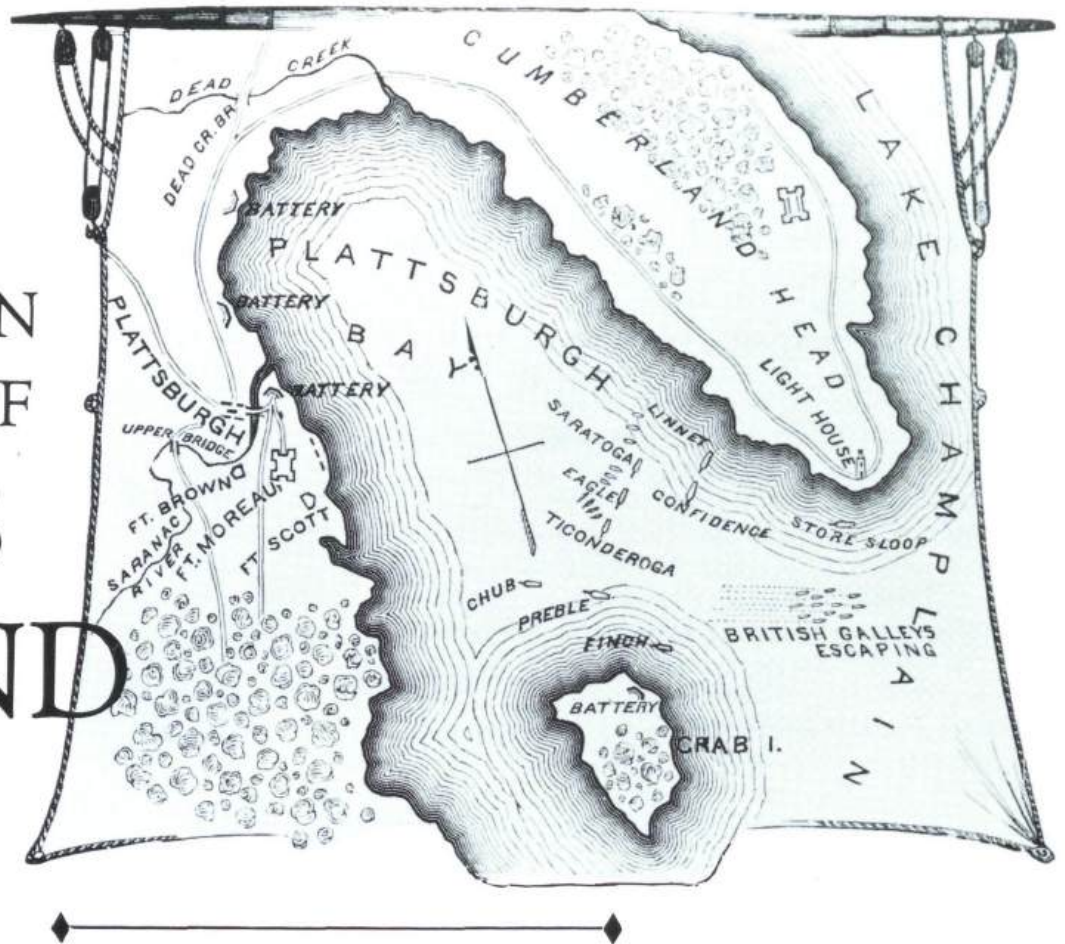
Good bye,

Your Affectionate Son
Wm H Trombly

P.S. give my love to all the little ones, and other friends.

(This was William's last letter; he died the next day. Ed.)

THE FORGOTTEN GRAVES OF CRAB ISLAND



by James G. Bailey

As the century drew to a close, a persistent campaign by Plattsburgh area citizens finally convinced the government to acquire Crab Island to protect and honor the still-unmarked graves of American and British sailors killed in the September 11, 1814 naval battle which helped to decide the outcome of the War of 1812.

Now, history students, comes the quiz. Which century closing--the 19th or the 20th?

Here is the story behind the paradoxical answer, "both."

Samuel de Champlain was the first white man to see Crab Island, on his July 1609 paddle up the lake to which he gave his name. It was either he or another of the subsequent French explorers, missionaries, and soldiers who gave the island its first name, St. Michael. This name appears on the more detailed French maps of the lake, though not on Champlain's own map.

Gradually the name Crab appeared on English maps, either replacing St. Michael or, as in Willsborough pioneer William Gilliland's journal of 1765, together with it. "The peculiar name...is evidently derived from the fact the limestone rocks around the shore swarm with a species of mollusk which a casual observer might easily mistake for crabs," notes the writer of a Sept. 22, 1877 *Plattsburgh Republican* article on the island.

The earliest record of visitation to Crab Island is a nine-page "Field Book and Maps of the Island of Valeur, Crab Island, and Schuyler's Island" by Jonas Addoms, pursuant to a warrant from the Surveyor General of New York State to Zephaniah Platt. The letters patent in the State Archives are dated Feb. 28, 1787. The island's transfer away from Platt does not seem to be recorded. But in Clinton County's deed book E is the record of sale made March 16, 1810 by William Bailey and Benjamin Mooers to Caleb

Nichols of "Crab Island, containing about 42 acres" for \$200.

Nichols was one of Plattsburgh's pioneer lawyers. His only son was mentally incompetent, so all his property eventually went to children of his brother. Nichols cleared part of the island and erected some sort of a shelter. This is inferred from a bill he made out against the U. S. Government "for rent to and damage done to Crab Island by Commodore Macdonough's fleet before Oct. 20, 1814." One line of his bill stands out: "Burying 150 men on the Island...\$150."

On the same date, August 27, 1814, that General Izard began his troops' departure from the northern frontier, lawyer Nichols rushed to the courthouse and officially recorded his four-year-old deed to Crab Island! Within a week the island had been commandeered as a temporary hospital site for the 700 soldiers sick with dysentery and typhus who had been gathered in Plattsburgh.

In 1816 Dr. James Mann, who had been in charge of the Plattsburgh hospital in 1814, published his medical experiences during the War of 1812: "Plattsburgh, Sept. 3, 1814: The sick and convalescents have been ordered to Burlington, but for want of transportation, are removing to Crab Island. More than 500 have already arrived...a barren, uninhabited spot." Then, "Crab Island, Sept. 10, 1814: We have received the wounded of the army, about 40." Mann is referring to casualties of the skirmishes at Culver Hill and Halsey's Corners, apparently. "400, with the assistance of Commodore Macdonough, have been sent to Burlington hospital from this place." On the morning of the naval battle, the last of the sick were removed from Crab Island to Burlington. But Dr. Mann and the hospital tents remained on the island, where they would shortly do grisly service.

The most numerous descriptions of the battle of Plattsburgh occur in Dr. David Kellogg's journals. Kellogg was a Plattsburgh physician who, beginning in 1886, interviewed old residents who had witnessed the events of 1814. Eighty-nine-year-old Simeon Doty of Ingraham told Kellogg he had gone to the island the day after the battle to help bury the dead. The hospital tents were south of the landing, which was at the north end of the island. "Inside the tents the scene was terrible. Shrieks from wounded soldiers undergoing operations at the

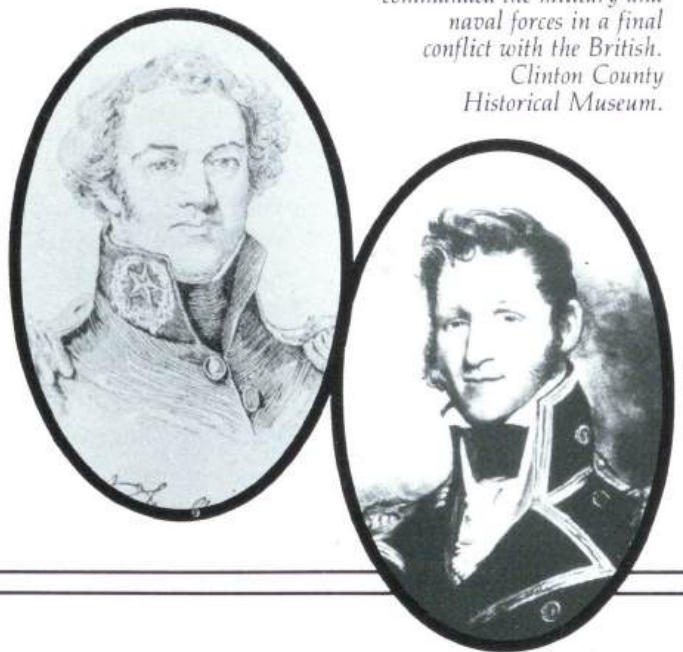
hands of the surgeon rent the air. Men were constantly carrying out the dead on rude biers made of poles to the burial ground south of the tents. These were trenches, ranging north to south into which the bodies, Americans and British together, were placed, some rolled in blankets, others only in their ordinary clothing, their heads placed to the west and their faces downward."

From Macdonough's reports we know the names of the Americans who were killed in the naval battle or who died shortly after in the hospital tents. The total was 52, including graves in Plattsburgh's Riverside Cemetery. In 1843 the Clinton County Military Association, with public donations, erected markers over the officers' graves for a September 11 anniversary observance. The burial trenches on Crab Island were never marked with headstones, for some reason. But those island burials were never doubted, until the present generation.

In 1857, just a few days after writing his will, Caleb Nichols died at age 89. By 1867 William P. Mooers had located all six scattered heirs and bought their shares of Nichols' Plattsburgh properties, including Crab Island. On Aug. 24, 1891 Mooers and his law partner, Smith Weed, sold Crab Island to the U. S. A. for \$500, a token compared to Mooers' \$9000 outlay twenty-four years earlier. There is no record of any military use ever being made of Crab Island after its federal purchase.

In fact, nothing was being done out there, complained the Aug. 31, 1901 *Republican*. A

*Heroes of the Battle of Plattsburgh, Sept. 11, 1814.
Brigadier General Alexander Macomb and
Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough
commanded the military and
naval forces in a final
conflict with the British.
Clinton County
Historical Museum.*



front-page story told of a visit to the island by a group from the Catholic Summer School of America, located at Cliff Haven, exactly one mile away by water. Only after much searching in the dense underbrush did they find traces of the burials. This is the last newspaper-recorded sighting of the Crab Island graves.

It would be five years before Congress acted, but this agitation did have effect on the local Plattsburgh military command. On Oct. 21, 1903 Colonel Adams of the Barracks supervised the erection of a 100-foot metal flag staff on the island. This still stands in 1988 at the south end, though in badly rusted condition. No trace of a date or any memorial plaque can be seen on its base.

On Dec. 4, 1905 Congressman Flack of Malone introduced HR 320, a bill to appropriate \$20,000 to enable the Secretary of War to establish Crab Island as "Macdonough National Memorial Park" with the erection there of a monument. HR 320 did not pass both houses, but on June 12, 1906 the 59th Congress passed an Army appropriation "to enable the Secretary of War to prepare the ground and suitably mark the graves of soldiers and sailors buried on Isle Saint Michel, commonly known as Crab Island (an appropriation of) the sum of \$20,000, or such portion thereof as may be necessary."

By June 21, 1907 the *Plattsburgh Sentinel* was reporting "the work of making a National Park out of Crab Island...is well underway, and J. J. Fitzpatrick, the contractor, has finished clearing the island and has nearly completed the caretaker's cottage." A later paragraph about the planned monument is significant. "Mr. Fitzpatrick's men are now attempting to locate the graves of the soldiers of the War of 1812 who are buried on the island." No subsequent newspaper story mentions finding the graves. The dedication of the monument took place Aug. 25, 1909 on the grounds of the Catholic Summer School.

In the concrete walk approaching the monument, under years of encroached sod, the writer found an embedded "J.J. Fitzpatrick" brass disc, indicating that this contractor built at least the monument's base. Recently acquired copies of documents dated 1908 show that the U.S. Army Quartermaster awarded the contract for construction of the obelisk to the Van Amringe Granite Company of Boston, Mass.

Eyewitness accounts indicate the hospital tents were on the north half of the island, and that the burials were south of the tents. But no account says how far south. In trips to the island over recent years, the writer has come upon six stone piles in the dense underbrush of the southeast quarter. They must be man-made and there is no trace of mortar to suggest they were foundation pillars. They line up in three north-south pairs, about 100 feet apart. Could these have been heaped up to mark the ends of three trenches? Someone else must have had the same idea, since the most southeastern pile, closest to the shore, has been excavated in years past. The 1877 *Republican* reporter had noted in his article that "one of the burial mounds has been opened as was shown by a large quantity of fresh earth thrown up."



Crab Island's obelisk provides a backdrop for a photograph of the Meserve family's outing. The picture was probably taken soon after the monument was unveiled. Clinton County Historical Museum.

This uncertainty as to the burial site is the compelling reason why the entire island must be considered an integral historic site, rather than just a quarter acre around the granite monument, as some have suggested.

With the \$20,000 of taxpayers' money was built a caretaker's cottage, a concrete wharf, graded paths all over the island, as well as the 50-foot granite obelisk with its four bronze plaques. A 1909 Barracks Quartermaster's map of "St. Michel or Crab Island" survives at P.A.F.B. It shows these improvements, but does not indicate a gravesite anywhere.

Cleared of its tangled underbrush, with its new monument and paths, the memorial park island was highly touted by the D & H Railroad Company in its guides of the era. The monument is pictured in the 1909 Champlain Tercentenary Report (before the plaques were mounted or the iron fence erected) and on postcards.

Unfortunately, it was all downhill from that time.

We can only guess that the frequent changes in command at the Barracks, with no written records of purpose or maintenance authority from the government, led to the neglect of "Macdonough National Military Park." Budgets must have been tight and priorities elsewhere during war years. The C. C. C. Camp at the Barracks did do some clearing of the overgrown paths on the island in the 1930s, one Plattsburgh resident recalls.

After World War II the entire 723-acre U. S. Military Reservation at Plattsburgh, including Crab Island, was deeded to New York. The state planned to operate Champlain College on the former reservation, a two-year institution especially for returned war veterans. But the deed contained a reversion clause, and in Sept. 1954, after local and congressional support was mustered for the locating here of an Air Force Base, the reversion clause was invoked and all property returned to federal ownership.

The newly created P.A.F.B. was not in the memorial park business, they decided, and sometime in 1965 the U. S. General Services Administration was so informed. But by this time in government bureaucratic history, there existed a National Park Service and a New York State Park system. Strangely, G. S. A. contacted neither.

The inventory report, which the writer obtained a year after his request, and only then after intervention by Congressman Martin and Senator Moynihan, omits any mention of the burials. G. S. A. files claim an inspection was made of the property by Mr. James Feenan, Realty Specialist, and Mr. James Kafes, Appraiser, on Jan. 5, 1966. Weather records of that date in Plattsburgh indicate complete overcast, a high temperature of 19, and winds of 20 mph—hardly ideal conditions for methodical investigation of the surface of a 40-acre island in Lake Champlain.

It is hard to believe that any appraiser would dare fail to note such common knowledge as the sailors' burial on the property. But of course it would have been awkward to advertise a U. S. veterans' burial ground as surplus, unwanted property. It is not illegal to sell burial grounds, but there are lengthy procedures to follow, which G. S. A. definitely did not. Feenan and Kafes' bare-bones inventory was quickly transformed into an official Notice of Surplus Determination. This document, dated Jan. 28, 1966, which went out to potential buyers, even omitted mention of the granite obelisk.

Local governments and agencies were offered first choice, but they had to provide a plan and budget for maintenance of the property. This haughty mandate from a government which had totally neglected the place for more than fifty years is ironic. The City of Plattsburgh, to its credit, at this time did accept title to the remains of Fort Brown on the bank of the Saranac River in the city. But Crab Island is not within city limits, another fact misrepresented in G. S. A. files.

Compared to the recent campaign, the press was practically silent in 1966. There were the required small-print legal ads, but the uninformed public made no outcry. Public bodies having declined to take title, daunted by the maintenance budget mandate of G. S. A., bidding was opened to the general public.

Bids were opened in the New York City office of G. S. A. on July 17, 1967. From the occasional *Press Republican* stories commencing July 19, one deduces the Administration's bid-processing was on a par with its inventory-taking. First there were 45 bids reported, then it was 55. The high bid was reported to be \$17,265 from a plumbing firm in Burlington, Vermont. The fact is that on Dec. 5, 1967 Edward Kline, Administrator of G.S.A., issued a quitclaim deed to Edward Troise of Glenside, Pa. for Crab Island for his high bid of \$40,200. This amount did not even cover the half-century costs of acquisition and park creation.

Not much happened for the next 18 years. One of the four plaques of the monument was spotted under water near the island's shore, was rescued by scuba divers and delivered to the P.A.F.B. museum, where it is now on exhibit. A July 1975 *Press-Republican* feature story lamented the sad condition of the so-called memorial.

Finally, in 1985 "For Sale" signs went up around the island and a city realtor was listing it—" \$150,000, would subdivide." Over the following winter a second plaque disappeared from the monument. Subsequent publicity about the island resulted in the voluntary relinquishing of the "souvenir" at a downstate home, and it is now in the custody of the Clinton County Historical Association.

In the spring of 1986 people, including the writer, met and formed an Ad Hoc Committee for a Public Crab Island. Dr. James Dawson, then president of C. C. H. A., and the writer were co-chairmen. Members represented such groups as American Legion, V. F. W., Champlain Islands Trust, C. C. H. A., and Lake Champlain Committee, as well as area municipal officials and other concerned citizens.

The committee discussed court action against G. S. A. to void the 1967 sale, but decided it would be more expedient to persuade New York State to purchase at the asking price. The office of Parks, Recreation, and Historical Preservation was the most appropriate state agency because of its charter to procure and protect historic sites. Initially, O. P. R. H. P. declined involvement. The Ad Hoc Committee made contact with governments and organizations throughout the Champlain Valley, asking them to adopt resolutions urging state purchase. Under this kind of pressure, O. P. R. H. P. began to react favorably.

Commissioner Lehman, who came up to Clinton County in June formally to open Point Au Roche State Park, was given a boat ride around Crab Island by committee members. By mid-summer, state appraisals had been made and money set aside, from the 1972 Environmental Bond Act, for the purchase.

But in late summer, Walter ("Roger") Jakubowski of Ventnor, N. J. entered the picture. Jakubowski, who had made his fortune on the Atlantic City boardwalks, was remembered as the purchaser of the former Post estate, Topridge, near Paul Smiths. He raised the offering price beyond what the appraisals would, by law, allow the state to pay. Mr. Troise, despite his 1975 vows that the historic aspects would be properly recognized, turned down the O. P. R. H. P. offer--reputedly well above the asking price--in favor of Mr. Jakubowski's \$190,000 bid.

News of "the second Battle of Plattsburgh Bay" had been spreading around the state and

beyond. Articles appeared in the *New York Times* and in Boston papers. Historians across the state wrote O. P. R. H. P. and the governor. N. B. C. considered sending a television crew to Plattsburgh, such was the media appeal of this story. So, the state entered negotiations with Jakubowski for its purchase.

At about the time of the September 1986 sale by Troise, the town of Plattsburgh took a crucial step. To close a loophole in its master plan--when adopted in the early 1960s the plan excluded all federal lands--the town board voted protective zoning regulations for Crab Island commensurate with its historic significance. Essentially, this ruled out extensive subdivision, the most lucrative possibility.

Reporters and state negotiators were unable to discover from Mr. Jakubowski exactly what his plans were for the historic site, although many rumors abounded. More petitions for state acquisition were collected at Veterans' Day that November. O. P. R. H. P. continued negotiations off and on through fall and winter 1986-87, rumored to include discussion of exchange of state land near Camp Topridge. But no agreement could be reached.

With the call for public stewardship of the sailors' graves remaining strong, the state began to mention the use of eminent domain, a forced sale at fair market price. A public hearing was scheduled for July 29, 1987 in Plattsburgh to allow comment on the issue. The turnout was large and overwhelmingly in favor of state ownership. It was not unanimous: Mr. Jakubowski was one of the speakers.

There is a reluctance of governments to invoke eminent domain, which explains the year-long hiatus after Troise's sale. The issue swinging public opinion in this case was the feeling that the federal government had bungled badly in allowing the veterans' graveyard to be classed as unwanted, surplus property.

With public opinion on record, the state moved to acquire by eminent domain. Once again, private appraisers were called in to suggest the fair market value. At 11 a.m. on Jan. 11, 1988--174½ years to the hour from Macdonough's victory--papers for state ownership of Crab Island were filed in the County Clerk's office. The court-set price was \$210,000, which afforded Mr. Jakubowski a \$20,000 profit.

Many people contributed their time and money in this two-year campaign; their reward is a feeling of achievement in reversing a twenty-year-old blunder. The local media, particularly the *Press-Republican*, were extremely helpful. The late Barney Fowler kept the embers alive in the *Albany Times-Union*, close to the feet that needed warming. Ultimate responsibility for the outcome, of course, rested with Commissioner Lehman and his deputy, Ivan Vamos.

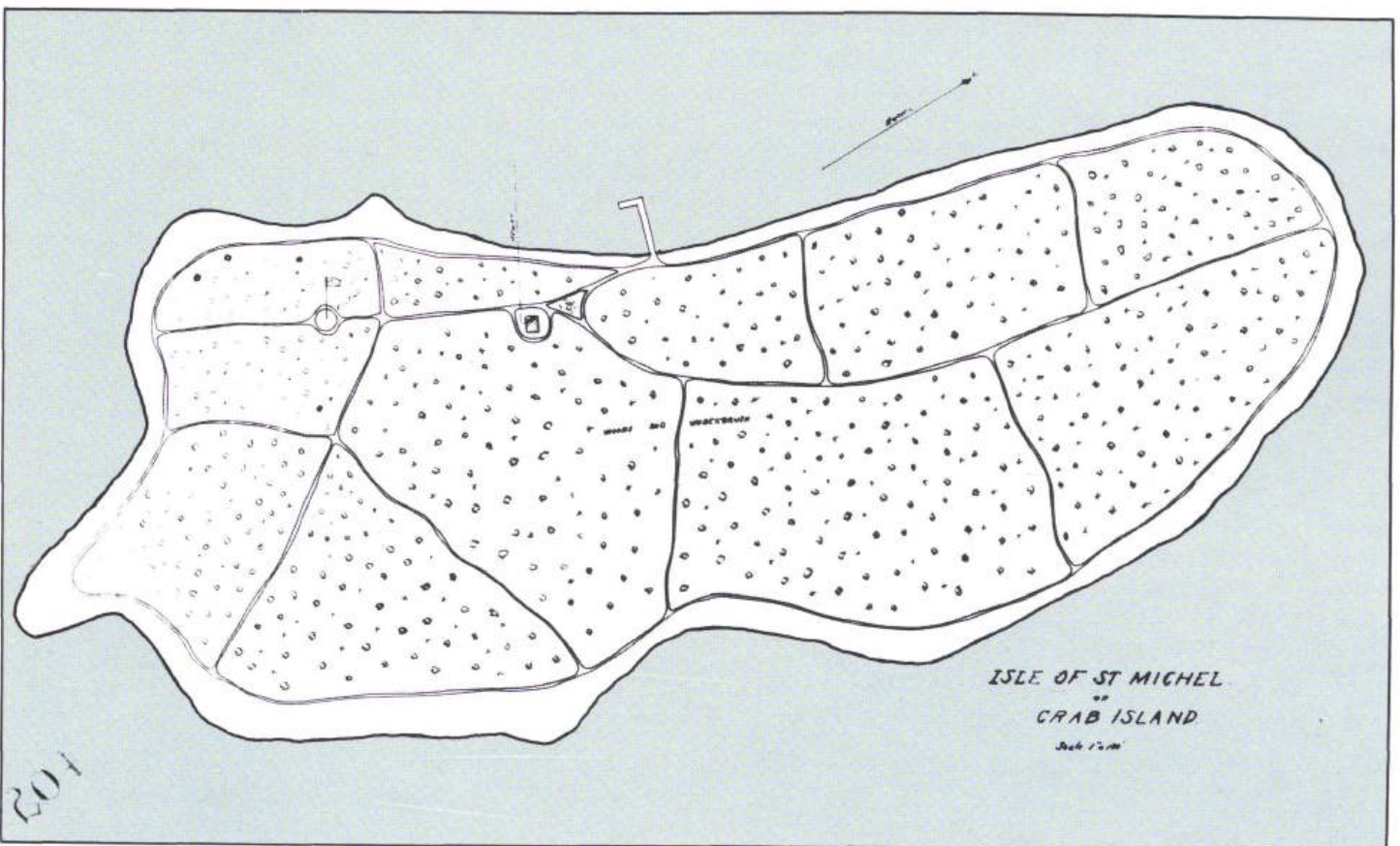
State plans have yet to be formulated for Crab Island, other than the arrangement for D. E. C. to provide daily surveillance via their Valcour Island boat patrol. With the record of vandalism, it is unlikely any significant structures will be built there. Paths around the island, perhaps a restoration of those shown on the 1909 map, will be made, with picnic sites, but with no overnight camping allowed, says D. E. C. Dodging the poison ivy will continue to be a required skill of visitors down the centuries.

The granite obelisk needs repointing, in addition to having its four plaques cleaned and

remounted. Signs to note the natural and historic features—e. g., the invalids' battery at the north tip—could be erected at a modest cost. But the most important need is for O. P. R. H. P. to send its archaeologist to pinpoint the burial trenches, and then to fence in and clearly mark the area. Veterans' groups would be willing to help with the marking.

The fact there is no marker anywhere on the island reading "Here are buried American and British sailors killed in the naval battle of Sept. 11, 1814 just off this island" is what let the federal surplus sale happen a generation ago. Without such a marker, who can predict there won't be, a century from now, a state surplus sale?

James Bailey is the Plattsburgh City Historian and a trustee of the Clinton County Historical Association. He has had careers as public school teacher and Essex County Historian.



A previously unpublished, hand-drawn map of Crab Island shows the proposed paths, flagstaff, caretaker's cottage and sewer line, but no monument. The map is undated. Courtesy of the Civil Engineering Office, PAFB.



CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE

— VS. —

THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

A Story of Community Values and Aspirations

by Janet M. C. Walmsley

From 1946 to 1953 there was a brief experiment in higher education in Plattsburgh that was known as Champlain College. It was abolished, after a brief but bitter struggle, to serve the needs of national defense. For a short while Champlain College was an innovative, unique institution, providing education not just for veterans, but for the entire northeast region of New York. Just as the college was beginning to flourish as a part of the State University system, it was sacrificed by the community for what would allegedly be financial and political gain. The story of the creation of Champlain College is a story of educational



trends and attitudes. Its eventual removal by the creation of Plattsburgh Air Force Base is another story of community values and goals set against the backdrop of America in the 1950s.

Champlain was one of three colleges known collectively as the Associated Colleges of Upper New York (ACUNY). They were called "emergency" or GI colleges, since they were created for the veterans of World War II. The emergency was the anticipated numbers of men and women who would be coming home, out of work and with no place to live. Concern was growing over what to do with the veterans well before the end of the war.

The concern was based in part on the experiences following the First World War, when unemployed and homeless veterans became increasingly militant and began to organize to demand better treatment and rewards for the sacrifices they had made during the war. The fear that the World War II veterans would be similarly dissatisfied and embittered led federal authorities to plan for reeducating and housing veterans at government expense. This is why the GI Bill was created. Under the Bill, the federal government would provide for tuition and living expenses; the states would be responsible for providing the college programs and facilities.

Unlike many states, New York did not have a system of public higher education. The consequence was that although New York had many fine private colleges and universities, it had next to no public facilities. The private colleges were either unwilling or unable to expand quickly enough, or to alter their programs sufficiently, to accommodate the expected influx of students.

There seemed to be no solution to this dilemma until the War Assets Administration turned its attention to demobilizing soon-to-be-surplus military installations. In New York, three facilities were in this category: Sampson Naval Training Center near Syracuse, Rhoads General Hospital in Utica, and the Plattsburgh Barracks. Initially these sites were envisioned as housing for veterans, but Governor Dewey quickly saw that they were ideally suited to the needs of GI Bill students.

Dewey's first hope was that the facilities would become extension campuses, to be controlled and organized by ten of the state's private colleges. But the difficulties which faced their

institutions included the physical distance between their campuses and the sites, especially to Plattsburgh, and parts of the charter outlined by Governor Dewey for the creation of the emergency colleges.

The proposed charter called for a "hybrid" institution. The veterans' colleges would not be totally private schools because they would be funded by the state. They would also not be public universities because they would be associated with and run by private colleges. The hybrid concept, with its emphasis on shared responsibility and limited scope, was the major obstacle that prevented acceptance of the program by the private colleges.

Because Governor Dewey supported the charter concept, he was forced to give up the idea of the private colleges executing the GI program. Instead, he created a large, free-standing project. The military properties were declared surplus in early May 1946, and on May 17, 1946 the Associated Colleges of Upper New York (ACUNY) were officially chartered. Champlain College, located at the former Plattsburgh Barracks, opened on September 23, 1946. The other two campuses, Mohawk at the former Rhoads General Hospital, and Sampson, at the former Naval Training Center, opened on October 16 and 23, 1946, respectively. They started without sufficient materials, books, beds, or blackboards, without full facilities, faculty or staff, but with as many students as they could possibly provide for.

The curricula the colleges would pursue included pre-engineering, liberal arts, and business administration. Emphasis was placed on the engineering and humanities courses. The intent was to prepare students for further study at a four-year institution, not to prepare them just for jobs in the business world. Of the first 1800 students at Champlain College, 40 percent were in engineering, 36 percent in the humanities, and the rest in business administration.

Of great significance for the school were the terms of the GI Bill and the ACUNY charter. Both programs prohibited discrimination in admissions on the basis of race, sex, or economic status. The non-discriminatory policy would later become one of the rallying points in the battle to save Champlain College. In May 1948, some 300 students graduated from Champlain, the first class to complete the two-year program. Applications from veterans began taper-

ing off at this time as the post-war emergency diminished. Non-veteran applications were on the rise, however. The diminished "emergency" resulted in the closure of Mohawk College in June 1948, and Sampson one year later. This left Champlain as the sole survivor, and there was only one year remaining in the initial four-year charter that had created ACUNY.

Simultaneous with the creation of ACUNY, Governor Dewey had also turned his attention to the need for a permanent public institution of higher education. He was responding to reports that the state was not providing education equally and without discrimination. These reports had originated in New York City, and had been substantiated by a commission ordered by Dewey and headed by Charles Evan Hughes. The result of these reports became the State University of New York (SUNY), a low-cost, non-discriminatory, public university system.

In 1950, when the ACUNY charter came to an end, Champlain College was made one of the two new liberal arts campuses of the State University; Harpur College in Endicott was the other. At the time the inclusion of Champlain in SUNY was hailed as making permanent this service for the largest region of the state not served by a major four-year college. The Plattsburgh State Teachers' College was not a part of SUNY at this time, as Governor Dewey had kept the normal schools, or teachers' colleges, and the

vocational or junior colleges, separate from SUNY.

Champlain College now developed what it called the Champlain Plan. The program was devised to provide "a broad cultural background" while providing for training in career fields. It amounted to a combination of liberal arts and vocational training. It was an innovative program, one that is reflected in today's educational ideas.

In the midst of this planning and growth at the college, other things were changing in Plattsburgh as well. The most significant appeared when the Air Force announced its intention to locate a bomber base in the northeast region. This announcement was made in 1950, and the initial Air Force investigation centered on Burlington, Vermont. At this point the city of Plattsburgh, represented by Mayor John J. Tyrell and a hastily assembled committee, went to work quickly to encourage the Air Force inspectors to visit Plattsburgh. The first inspection was a whirlwind tour in 1952.



Meanwhile, at Champlain College, enrollment figures were down in 1952. Only 862 students were enrolled, while the capacity was for 1800. But projections for the coming decade were excellent as the postwar "baby boom" children came of age. The promise of things to come was shown in the increased number of applications for admission for 1953, up 267 percent over the preceding year. Future hopes were dimmed, however, when the Air Force turned its attention to Plattsburgh.

The first site under consideration in the Plattsburgh area was the Municipal Airport. A second site was at Point Au Roche, about nine miles north of Plattsburgh, and a third was Champlain College, the site of the former Plattsburgh Barracks. Eventually this became the only site under consideration. Why it became such a stark choice, and who was responsible for the decision, the Air Force, the city, or others, are questions that remain unanswered. The conflict that developed around this decision has been described as the most divisive in Plattsburgh's

history. The conflict became an elemental one, reflecting the community's goals and values. One side supported both education and economic growth for the city; the other concentrated solely on the economic and political implications, at times seemingly in opposition to education. The political fight was carried into the arena of Cold War dramatics where terms such as national defense, democratic goals, and un-American were flung about by both sides in order to claim the "patriotic" position.

The pro-Air Force faction was formed early, with Mayor Tyrell leading the way. The Air Base Committee included the mayor, Corporation Counsel Allen Light, Chamber of Commerce President Carlos Austin, and Clyde Lewis, an attorney in Plattsburgh and former national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. It is possible that it was from this committee that the idea arose to reclaim the former Plattsburgh Barracks for use as the base. Mayor Tyrell and Clyde Lewis were probably the most vigorous proponents of the air base. Carlos Austin, and with him the Chamber of Commerce, would later leave the committee and join with the supporters of the college.

Part of the dilemma lay in the terms of the agreement under which the surplus Barracks property had been acquired by the state. The agreement provided the federal government the right to take back the property whenever a national emergency required. The recapture clause did state, however, that the property



Several photographs taken of Champlain College students were previously published in the Pictorial Magazine of Champlain College (undated) and DULAC, the college's 1952 yearbook. Special Collections, Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh.

would revert back to New York State once the emergency was past. The problem was that the term national emergency was not defined. In this instance, was the Korean conflict a national emergency? If so, the emergency would end when the war did, and the college could return after a relatively short interruption. But if the national emergency was defined as the tensions inherent in the Cold War, the air base would likely be a permanent installation, and the college would be gone for good.

Plattsburgh in 1952 was suffering economic hard times. Unemployment was high, young people were leaving to find work elsewhere, and the outlook for the future did not seem promising. The college offered an annual budget of \$2.0 million and employed some 250 townspeople. These figures had to be compared with the projected monthly payroll alone for the Air Force, a figure of \$2.3 million and employment of approximately 350 to 400 civilians, presumably from the community. These figures account for the Trades and Labor Assembly, representing the 23 locals and 4500 union members in Plattsburgh, being one of the earliest supporters of the air base. One of the first arguments put forth by base supporters was that, if you opposed the air base, you opposed Plattsburgh's growth.

The potential economic impact of the base on the community was virtually irrefutable, but opposition did arise. The Citizen's Committee for the Continuance of Champlain College was formed in late February 1952. It was created in reaction to the announcement at a semi-public meeting of the Common Council that the college would have to be sacrificed to bring the Air Force to Plattsburgh.

This Council session had been called to discuss a recent conference between city officials and representatives of the Air Force. The Air Force had requested the conference in a telegram dated February 1, 1952. In its request the Air Force stated that a major factor in the choice of location for the air base was the extent of support and cooperation it might be able to expect from the community. The only site mentioned in the telegram was the Municipal Airport. Following the meeting, the announcement was made that the college would have to go to make room for the base. There was no explanation of this sudden change of location, who suggested the college property, or why.

The Committee objected to the Barracks property as an air base for concrete reasons, which were spelled out in a booklet presented to the House Armed Services Committee. Titled "Analysis of Three Possible Air Base Sites," the Committee analyzed the requirements for military airfields, and in several key areas they demonstrated that the Barracks property was not appropriate. Geographically, the land in question lies within three natural boundaries--Lake Champlain, the Saranac River, and the Salmon River. Besides describing a finite size for potential expansion, these boundaries also restrict the size, orientation, and safety of the runway pattern. Since the two rivers lie some 60 feet below the road bed, and are located at either end of the only site long enough for runway construction, they create a hazard for landing and taking off. Additionally, man-made construction such as Route 9, Route 22, the Delaware and Hudson Railroad lines, and oil storage tanks, added to the dangers at the Barracks site. The prohibitive cost of relocating or removing any or all of these obstacles was carefully laid out.

The Citizens' Committee report caused the Air Force plans to be suspended until a re-examination of all three sites was completed. The restudy did not change the choice. Further attempts to change the location away from the college site would emphasize safety factors.

The Citizens' Committee contained dedicated and hard-working volunteers, yet the majority of its members remained virtually anonymous. The most public and influential members were Benjamin F. Feinberg and James A. Fitzpatrick. Feinberg had been a prominent state senator, a state judge, and was currently chairman of the Public Service Commission of New York. Fitzpatrick was then state assemblyman for this district. Other members were area businessmen, college officials, religious leaders, and former military members who felt that the area should support both the college and the air base.

Conspicuous by their absence were any supporters of Champlain College from the other local college, the State Teachers' College. They may have been among the anonymous members of the Citizens' Committee, but there is still no public statement of support to be found. One suggestion has been made that officers of the Teachers' College were waiting in the wings to see what the outcome might be. The existence of two state colleges in one small city was viewed in

some quarters as unlikely. PSTC may have been hoping that it would be the surviving school, and therefore the recipient of future state expenditures for education in the North Country.

The diversity and anonymity of the Citizens' Committee members combined with what was basically a compromise position to make its argument fundamentally weak in comparison to that of its opponents. It qualified its position by acknowledging that if a choice were forced between the college and losing the base, then the college would have to be sacrificed. Its members hoped and believed that it would not have to come to this "either-or" choice. On the other hand, air base supporters argued from an inflexible stance. For them it was the air base all the way, with no regard for what might be lost.

The attitude of the Citizens' Committee has to be evaluated in the light of the times. The Korean War was in process, as was the "Red Scare." State and federal governments were hunting out "reds" in their ranks, and support of national security and national defense was continually used as a measurement of patriotism. Any opposition to government defense programs was seen as "un-American."

Allegations of "un-American" took on a slightly different flavor in Plattsburgh than that of the "Red Menace" attacks of the McCarthyites on the national scene. The Citizens' Committee ran a full-page advertisement in the *Plattsburgh Press-Republican* which asked the question: "Should a College be the First Target on the Air Force?" The committee asked if this was "in Keeping With the American Tradition," pointing out that schools have "always stood on the first line of our national defense."

A few days later the air base committee responded with its own full-page advertisement. It asked: "Why, then, for reasons on national Defense, should anyone wish to criticize or try to interfere with the decisions of our Armed Forces?" The ad concluded: "How Can A Movement Of This Type Be Considered Un-American In This Case?"

Another irritation to air base supporters was a telegram sent by the Citizens' Committee. It went on February 29, 1952 to the Strategic Air Command and the Department of Defense, and it read: "It is reported the U. S. Air Force intends to erase a college in Plattsburgh to establish an Air Force Base. Please use your influence to stop this un-American move which would have seri-

ous national and international repercussions." This was the extent of overt "red-baiting" tactics, but its equating of education programs with patriotism and community goals of prosperity was a unique variation on the theme of American versus un-American activities.

At what was supposed to be the last commencement exercises for Champlain College, in 1952, State University President William S. Carlson identified Champlain's liberal arts program as "just as important if not as simply explained" as other programs carried on by the State University system "to aid national defense." Yet he referred directly to the coming of the air base, saying, "The advantages and needs of a bomber base are relatively easy to explain and defend." He concluded with the hope that Champlain College would be permitted to graduate many more "fine classes," but that there had been no final answer.

Speaking at the baccalaureate rites, Regents Chancellor John Platt Myers of Plattsburgh referred to "today's divided world" being a result of "basic differences in moral and spiritual concepts." He said, "These are times of materialism, of greed, and of lawlessness, at home and abroad; of dishonesty and immoral conduct in high places and low." He concluded by comparing culture to a moving stream, which as it rushes down through the ages is "at times, we must confess, muddled by tributary thoughts along the way."

Privately the accusations of un-American activities took on a more sinister tone. One member of the Citizens' Committee has said that he and others were followed, their telephones tapped, and their activities monitored, all in the name of national security. This is surprising in the light of the records of the two most public supporters of the college, Feinberg and Fitzpatrick. The latter was the originator of a loyalty oath for any public job, especially for teachers.

It seemed at the time of the commencement exercises of June 1952 that the college closure was foregone conclusion. Later in the same summer, though, the federal government announced that the college would have a one-year reprieve. The delay was forced upon the government because the funding and plans for the conversion of the facility would not be available until the coming spring. This breathed new life into the campaign to save the college. On the one hand an attempt was made to

continue the college by finding another location. On the other hand, a state-wide organization came into being to fight for the college's continued existence, whether in Plattsburgh or elsewhere.

The Citizens' Committee turned to finding a new location. Assemblyman Fitzpatrick tried to gain state funding for relocating the college at least somewhere in Clinton County if not in Plattsburgh. Other locations offered to accept the college, including Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, Saratoga Springs, and Sacketts Harbor.

At this time it was learned that Harpur College in Endicott was undergoing expansion and could possibly serve as the new home for Champlain. Since its founding Harpur had not been enlarged, but it was now slated to become a permanent campus. Fitzpatrick wondered if the State University was deliberately putting Harpur's growth ahead of the continuation of Champlain College. The Citizens' Committee executive secretary, Jerome Kovalcik, also charged that the state was trying to divert attention from the Champlain College issue by giving wide publicity to the building program at Harpur. The State University denied that this was the case. Its spokesman maintained that in the event Champlain was closed, any remaining students and faculty would be assisted in transferring within the SUNY system, but not specifically to Harpur College. In the end, however, Champlain College did move to Harpur, which eventually became the State University of New York at Binghamton.

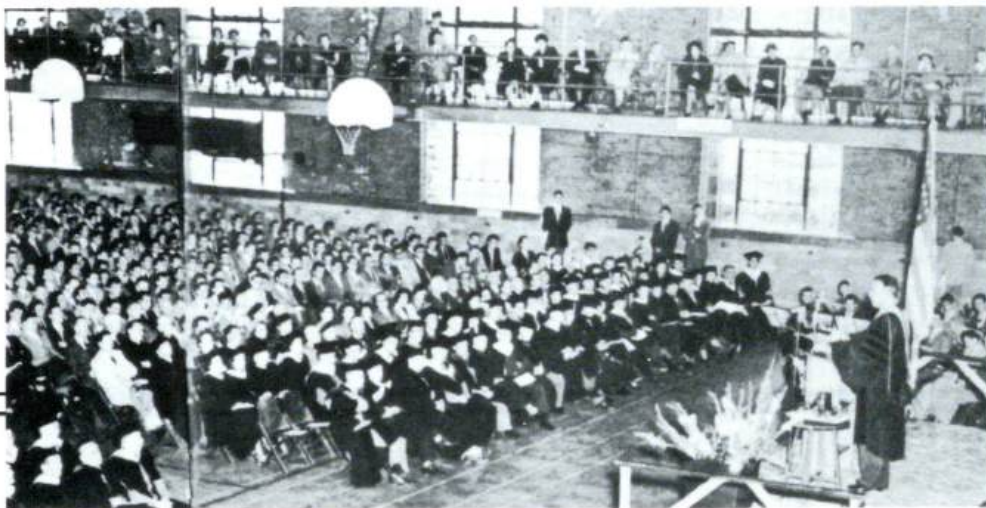
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The State University response to the question of Champlain College was relatively weak and slow in coming. In April 1952, State University President William S. Carlson sent a resolution to Secretary of the Air Force Thomas K. Finletter. It was intended to set forth the position of the State University Board of Trustees. It stated that taking the facilities of Champlain College would "place serious, if not permanent obstacles in the way of its preservation." The Board asked the Air Force, if possible, to select another site.

At the time of the announcement of the one-year reprieve, a state-wide committee was formed, the New York Citizens' Committee To Save Champlain College. It was made up of a long list of organizations, among them the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the United Parents Association, the Public Education Association, the League for Industrial Democracy, the American Veterans' Committee, the Champlain College Alumni Association, and three groups of Jewish affiliation.

The New York Citizens' Committee issued the following statement: "We have no desire to interfere with the necessary plans of the Air Force but we hope these plans will not entail the killing of so important an educational institution as Champlain College."



The Plattsburgh Barracks gymnasium is the setting for a late 1940s graduation ceremony. The photograph appeared in the Pictorial Magazine of Champlain College. Special Collections, Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh.

One plan that received widespread support at this time was put forth by Assemblyman Fitzpatrick. It called for dividing the college property, with one portion, approximately 90 per cent, going to the Air Force, while the college would keep the remainder. This would allow the college to continue classes, without housing for the students, until another location could be found or built.

There were other objections to an air base: the question of safety, the level of jet noise, and vague references to the social consequences of having "men in uniform" in town. The question we in the 1980s might expect to have seen debated, nuclear weapons, was not a subject of controversy.

Despite the efforts of various groups, and the apparently logical solution of making room for both institutions in Plattsburgh, the result was the abolition of the college and the establishment of the air base. The reasons are as elusive as the argument against the abolition of the college. There was a strong suggestion that Congressional budget restraints would not permit the construction of a new installation where an existing facility was available. This was certainly the attitude of Secretary of the Air Force Finletter.

Another explanation refers to the aura of prestige and history that is associated with "lovely old brick and stone buildings." The Air Force was a new service, struggling to present an

impression of legitimacy and permanence. What could lend a better flavor of tradition, in a tradition-bound field like the military, than the old brick buildings surrounding the oval parade ground of the Plattsburgh Barracks? The historic association between Plattsburgh and the military lends itself readily to the acceptance of the replacement of the college by the Air Force.

Champlain College was one of the birthplaces of public liberal arts education in New York. Its seven-year history was a period of educational innovation and experimentation. Despite its leadership role, it was sacrificed with barely a whimper of protest. There are no explanations why Fitzpatrick's last-ditch effort to save the college was rejected. The state failed actively to support the college. The city of Plattsburgh also failed to support something it had so shortly before hailed and claimed to want. Yet its existence was a period of promise and high expectations. The promise came to an end on June 14, 1953, when the last class graduated from Champlain College. The final commencement address charged the students with the responsibility of showing New York that the state and the city of Plattsburgh had been wrong to close the college.

Janet Walmsley is a graduate of the University of Maine, and is currently a graduate student in history at the State University in Plattsburgh.

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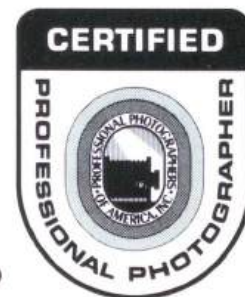
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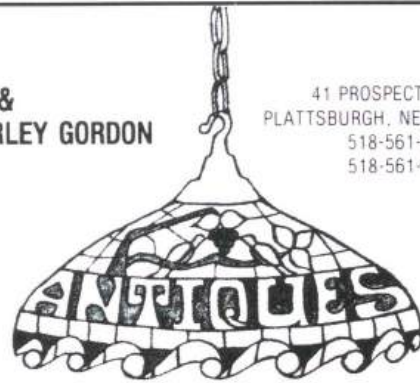
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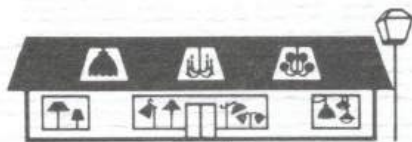
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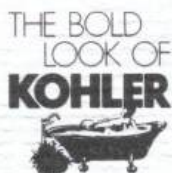
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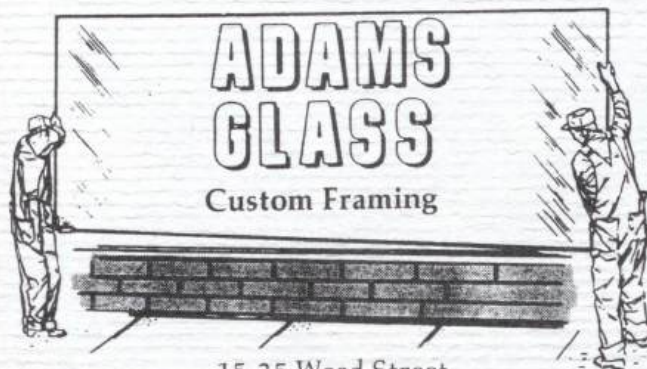


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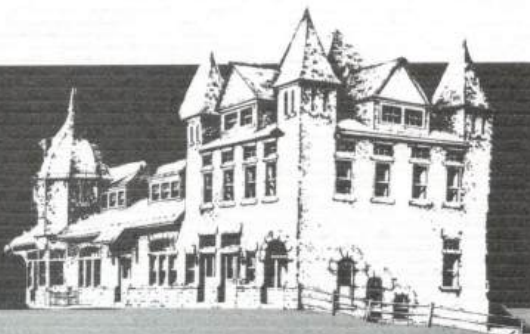


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