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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: This group of travelers eagerly awaits the train's arrival at the Chazy Lake depot, c. 1900. Courtesy of Special Collections, Feinberg Library, SUNY Plattsburgh.

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The Controlling of the Saranac River: Floods and Freshets 1830 – 1947

Picketts Corners, Saranac, Moffittsville

by Jan D. Couture

The Saranac River has a personality of its own; slow and lazy in the summer, proud when reflecting the autumn foliage, chilling and ice-clothed in winter, and fast-flowing and spirited in the spring. It is the melting snows of spring that awaken the river, forcing it to spread over its banks most often. There have been instances, however, when the Saranac and its tributaries totally stunned surrounding communities in the summer by changing, in a matter of minutes, into a roaring cauldron bringing havoc and death to the small towns of Picketts Corners, Saranac and Moffittsville.

Three towns owe their lives to this fickle river and its tributaries. From the time of the first Indian encampments near Cadyville, through the first settlers in 1785, to the first dams and industry in the early 1800s, the Saranac enabled this remote, uninhabited land to become an iron industrial center, a tourist attraction, a public highway and a recreation area.

There are two brooks in the Saranac area which flow into the Saranac River. Corners Brook, which travels through Picketts Corners, is a small stream. True Brook, which drains Moffittsville, is a larger, faster-flowing waterway.

True Brook has its headwaters near the base of Lyon Mountain and among anglers has a well-earned reputation for good trout fishing.

Realizing the potential for water power located along the brook, Sinegar Barnes purchased the area at its mouth in 1825 and built a sawmill; consequently, it was known as Barnes Brook for a short while. Several years later William True bought the property and by 1842 True Brook had acquired its present name.

A town sprang up where the brook and the river joined and was named Russia, a name granted because of the perceived isolation of the area.

In time, True Brook and the surrounding area became home to iron forges, carding mills (wool processing), a shingle mill, saw mills, a starch factory and the charcoal kilns needed for the forges built on the river's banks. The road, appropriately named True Brook, meanders beside the waterway and 100 years ago was a busy thoroughfare over which iron and charcoal were hauled to the river's forges. By 1870 Russia had been renamed Moffittsville to honor John Moffitt, who at the age of 18 was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery during the Civil War.

Moffitt was partial owner of one of the two iron forges in Russia, and ironically, never lived in the town which bears his name. Shortly thereafter, the little town of Moffittsville contained a blacksmith shop, a boot and shoe dealer, a general store, a grist mill, forges and



Courtesy of the author

Corners Brook, showing destruction and debris from the storm of July 12, 1947.

lumber dealers. All the villagers were justifiably proud that their tiny village could boast of its own music teacher. It was also home to the Bloomers' Union, organized to protect the forge workers, or bloomers, as they were called. When the iron industry crumbled, the last forge fire on the Saranac River was extinguished in October, 1892. Since then Moffittsville has become little more than a cluster of homes at the bottom of a hill (known as Russia Hill) along the Saranac River.

Corners Brook, which is smaller than True Brook, has its headwaters near the base of Johnson Mountain and courses through Picketts Corners. Originally called Hoppers Corners, the village was named after Lambert Hopper, who was one of the first Methodist ministers to settle and serve the religious needs of the people. His son John became a school teacher

and opened one of the first hotels in the region. The hotel at the Corners eventually became known as the Centennial House and provides living space for senior citizens today.

The village's name was changed to Picketts Corners after E. J. Pickett. Edmund Pickett, a Civil War veteran who served as an assemblyman for the congressional district, erected a general store which was operated by his family for more than 75 years. During these years Picketts Corners became the region's trading and cultural center. By the early 1900s there were 20 homes, a general store, a hardware store, a drug store, a milliner, a creamery, a blacksmith and wheelwright shop, a hotel, a barber shop and two large halls. Pickett's Hall housed the Grand Army Post, Women's Relief Corps, and the Saranac Band; while the Saranac Grange Hall held meetings for the Grange, the Saranac Creamery Association, and the Foresters.

The cultural affairs of Picketts Corners consisted of plays, operettas and open-air band concerts in a bandstand located in the small grassy plot where the Chazy Lake Road meets Ganong Drive, opposite the Pickett house. The Corners, as it was and still is called, was a naturally busy site since seven roads met in the center; even today six roads converge at this location, namely: Ganong Drive, Chazy Lake Road, Bowen Road, McCutcheon Drive, Picketts Corners Road and Route 3.

If Picketts Corners was the business and cultural hub of the area, then the village of the Saranac was the industrial center of the three towns. From the building of the first forges in 1826 by Baker, Hopper, Hull & Harvey, the "Hollow" hummed with purposeful activity. The iron forges dominated the town, and its population quickly grew to about 600 residents by the year 1880. A "four corners" with only a single street, Saranac Hollow did however, contain a church, academy, four stores, the iron forges, a rolling mill with the forges, and a grist mill.

The original inhabitants of the Hollow came from the area known today as "37." They looked down over their hill and christened the area

the "Devil's Half-Acre" owing to its desolation and swampy appearance. After the erection of the forges and other industry, the small hollow situated at the base of a hill received the name Saranac Hollow. Long-time residents usually refer to Saranac as the Hollow.

Since all three villages are on the river, they could not escape the forces that command the Saranac River. Each spring floods, or freshets, were to be reckoned with, and the people knew they could expect, if not a large flood, extremely high water during the months of March and April. In preparation for the possibility of sudden flooding, most residents made sure their culverts and ditches were open and clear before the onslaught of the winter snows. As the snow melted, they again made sure that excess water could be accommodated in the ditches. Breakwaters and built-up banks also provided protection from the rushing waters. In almost all instances, it was the families who took the necessary precautions against flooding to protect their homes and farmland.

The first recorded flooding of the Saranac River in the Saranac area occurred in 1830 in the form of a spring freshet which was felt all the way to Plattsburgh. The flooding was so severe that according to Hurd's *History of Clinton and Franklin Counties*, every bridge on the entire river was swept away except one—unfortunately, no one knows which one escaped the water's force. The entire valley was swept clean from its source to its mouth. It has been said that a barn with half a dozen sheep floated down the river and was deposited on the banks without the loss of a single sheep. Bystanders along the river were panic-stricken when they saw a cradle bobbing along the waves but were relieved to find it empty except for the bedding; apparently the mother snatched the child from the cradle just in the nick of time.

For the next 60 years dams were breached, fields and homes flooded, and bridges were under water nearly every year. Realizing that flooding was merely another factor in living near the Saranac River, the inhabitants built stronger dams and bridges, located their livestock on higher ground during periods of

high water, and built on higher ground when necessary.

The *Plattsburgh Republican* of March 11, 1892 reported "Freshet of last week caused considerable damage. There were two large washouts on the Plank Road near the Corners. They were 40 feet long and 10 feet deep and the width of the road. Mr. Kennelty had all ship-shape by Thursday last." It was imperative the roads be opened so the farmers could get their milk to market and so other industries could sell their wares. By 1892 a "shortcut" to the Saranac Lake region via present-day Route 3 had been completed, thereby making travel through Saranac less restrictive.

The summer of 1892 had been a wet season with 7.62 inches of rain recorded at Plattsburgh Barracks for the month of June. With the river and streams already full, the rains received during the day and night of July 14 and 15 put the waters over the banks. What



Hurd, *History of Clinton and Franklin Counties*

Edmund J. Pickett, a merchant and Assemblyman, for whom the village of Picketts Corners was named.

followed was called the greatest flood in 60 years.

The damage to Moffittsville and the Hollow was extensive. True Brook acted as a funnel as it drained the Lyon Mountain watershed, and the waterway quickly became a surging cauldron destroying nearly everything in its path. Ten bridges that crossed True Brook were destroyed. The dams at True's Mill and Pinkham's Mill collapsed, no doubt adding to the tremendous force of the water. A millstone from True's Mill was discovered nearly 500 feet from the dam and provided a good example of the force of the rushing brook. Near the mouth of True Brook stood a dam with H. A. Duncan's carding mill on one side and G. W. Goodale's starch factory on the other. The dam survived the onslaught of the churning waters, but when the waters receded the starch factory was beyond repair, while the carding mill sustained little damage and continued operating.

In the Hollow, the Saranac River cut through the George Bull farm, creating an entirely new course. Where this new route flowed, the river was very deep and wide, making the farm unrecognizable. It is thought where the river changed course, a small pond was left and young people skated there for many years.

The damage to the bridges of the Town of Saranac was extensive and the appropriated funds of \$5,000 were thought to be insufficient to cover the expenses. The ten bridges on the True Brook Road had to be replaced as quickly as possible since it was the route used to transport the iron ore from Standish and Lyon Mountain to the iron forges in Moffittsville and the Hollow.

The reaction of residents to past flooding was difficult to determine. The flood of 1892, however, was in the middle of the summer and definitely was not a common occurrence. Owners of mills and logs in the Saranac River were no doubt concerned, as were those who lived along the waterways and were suddenly forced to move perishables and livestock to higher and drier ground. A description of the flood of 1892 survives only in a brief article in the *Plattsburgh Republican* no local inhabitants or their descen-

dants recollect the event.

Only six years later, on March 15, 1898, the *Plattsburgh Press* reported that the rushing waters had struck yet again. In this freshet the bridge at Moffittsville was swept away and a sawmill damaged. The water at the Hollow was higher than at any time since 1830, and the Saranac River had changed its course once more. The month of March seemed to evoke the worst from the Saranac River, for on March 18, 1913, it carried away yet another bridge. The *Plattsburgh Sentinel* published the following account: "At Saranac the bridge between Moffittsville and the Hollow was carried away Saturday forenoon and the ice is now piled to a height of at least 10 feet above the top of the Moffittsville dam and it is feared that the structure has been crushed under the mass. The basement of the grist mill is filled with water and considerable damage has been done to this property. All the roads in the vicinity of the river are filled with ice and water and are impassable."

The Saranac did not vent its wrath again until the spring of 1928 when it stopped traffic on the road to Saranac Lake (Route 3) and covered the highway with two feet of water.

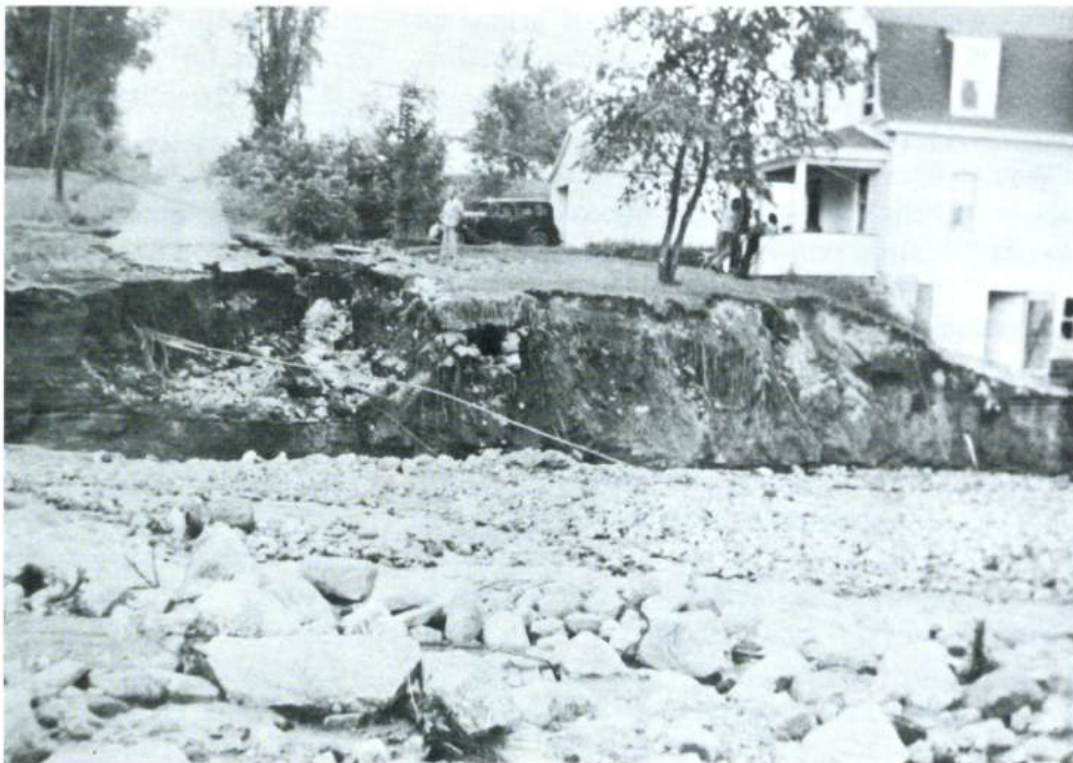
In 1947, almost 55 years to the day from the flood of 1892, the Saranac River and its waterways did the worst possible damage to the people of the valley—it took human lives.

Like the summer of 1892, the summer of 1947 had been a wet one, leaving the ground saturated and the brooks and river high. Because of these conditions, the potato and corn crops had been planted late but were now well-established, and the fall harvest looked promising. The hay crop, although late in cutting, was of high quality owing to the ample rain.

The weather forecast for July 12 and the weekend called for widely scattered showers with precipitation averaging a quarter to a half inch of rain. That afternoon, in the span of about an hour and a half, the Moffittsville, Hollow, and Corners areas saw such a storm that over 40 years later the most minute details are etched in the minds of the residents.

About 4:30 in the afternoon of July 12, what

*Washout of Corners
Brook Bridge on
Chazy Lake Road.
A bent I-beam
illustrates the force
of the flood.*



Courtesy of the author

appeared to be three storms came together near Lyon Mountain and caused a storm the likes of which have not been seen since. The torrential rains continued until 6:30 that evening. Within a short time all the brooks overflowed and discharged into the already swollen Saranac River. Brooks were created where none had existed, and roadways simply disappeared beneath the water.

At Parsons Corners, near the intersection of the Cannon and Chazy Lake Roads, Corners Brook washed out the road for several miles. At some points the roadbed was eroded to a depth of 30 feet. Photographs show an upright telephone pole resting on bedrock with seven or eight feet of embankment towering above the pole.

Picketts Corners, normally 30 feet above water, had homes undermined and huge boulders deposited on the highway. The deluge turned the Chazy Lake Road into a veritable river.

At Moffittsville, True Brook changed its course shortly before it emptied into the Saranac River and carried a large portion of the

roadway before the bridge into the raging river.

It was at Moffittsville that tragedy struck. Alex Lamkins, who continued to live near the site of the catastrophe and was in the upper fields bringing the cows down for milking when the storm hit, recalled the events as though they happened yesterday. Paul Ebere, the highway commissioner for the Town of Saranac, and Robert Lamkins, Alex's brother who also worked for the Town, asked Alex to go with them to see what damage had been done to the roads. Since Mr. Lamkins was also an employee of the Town of Saranac, he told Ebere and his brother he would join them when he was able to get the milk cows into the barn.

Robert Lamkins proceeded down the True Brook Road to Route 3 and Ebere followed in his own vehicle. In Ebere's car were his teenaged son Donald; Leo Lashway, a brother-in-law; and Lashway's eight-year-old son, Donald. As Robert Lamkins crossed the bridge, he felt it sway and motioned the Ebere car not to cross. Presumably, Paul Ebere did not see or understand because he proceeded across the bridge spanning the roaring brook. The weight of the

car proved to be too much for the bridge to handle for it collapsed at that moment, sending Eberé and his passengers into the surging waters of True Brook.

Donald Eberé was thrown free from the car and was pulled to safety by Robert Lamkins, Don Anson, and Doug True, who formed a human chain. Robert Lamkins still vividly remembers the tremendous pull of the river current on his body as he tried to grasp Eberé's hand and was afraid he might also follow the young man down the river. As Lamkin's and Eberé's hands connected both realized that had a split second more passed Eberé would have been swept downriver.

Paul Eberé and his relatives were unable to escape the car as it twisted end-over-end down the brook for 200 feet and under the bridge at Route 3 before traveling another 200 feet down the river. Roy Dupree, Harold Farrell and Harold Tedford managed to pull the car to shore and Paul Eberé from the wreck. The two Lashways had been thrown from the car and could not be rescued. For a full two hours Dr. Gilbert Ganong tried to resuscitate Eberé, but to no avail. In an ironic twist of fate, the Rev. Euclid Elie of Assumption of Mary Church in Redford was the last person to cross the bridge at Route 3 before the road was washed away. Father Elie believed it was his duty to administer the last rites of the Catholic Church, although he was strongly warned not to travel to Moffittsville because of the dangerous conditions.

It was feared that the visiting relatives from Troy would not be found until their bodies came to the first dam at Cadyville or even until the Saranac River emptied into Lake Champlain at Plattsburgh. A vigil was kept along the swollen river searching for the bodies of the father and son. Rich Donah, Ed Carron, Roy Dupraw, Don Anson, and William Birch discovered the body of Leo Lashway on the bank of the Saranac River near the Philip DuBray farm three miles from where True Brook empties into the Saranac River. When the men saw what appeared to be an arm or a leg beneath Lashway, they hoped that father and son were together and the heart-breaking search would be over. In the afternoon

of July 15, Trooper Ken Belmore was able to pull the body of Leo Lashway from the river. When it was found that the hoped-for body of young Donald was the leg bone of a cow the searchers realized they would have to keep at the work and broaden the search because the current was so strong.

On July 16, as Troopers Belmore and Burns were searching for Donald Lashway in their motorboat they found his body at Welsh's Corners (Cringle's). The Saranac River had taken him seven miles from the site of the accident.

The town of Moffittsville, Saranac and Picketts Corners were a mess. At least 50 miles of highway had to be reconditioned or rebuilt. The conservative estimate was that it would take at least half a million dollars to complete the repairs. Roadways severely damaged included ten miles on the Chazy Lake Road along with the Corners Road, Nashville Road, Douglas Road, Clark Hill Road, Bressette Road, No. 37, Will Ryan Road, Conners Road, Hugh Herron Road, Bucks Corners Road, Picketts Corners Road, Bowen Road and True Brook Road.

Crop damage was extensive. In an area noted for its potatoes, hardly a potato field was left standing. Thousands of tons of topsoil and subsoil were washed away. Some of the soil was deposited on the highways but most was washed down the river. The waters ran to Plattsburgh at flood level; "however, for the first time within the memory of many old-timers, it was a yellowish mud that flowed."

Fearing bankruptcy, Town Supervisor Robert Napper appealed to Albany for financial aid. It was denied because there was no provision in the State budget for such aid. Alex Lamkins, who became highway superintendent following Eberé's death, received something even better than money—materials and equipment. Had there been appropriations, it would have taken time which he did not have to purchase what was needed. Instead, the culverts and heavy machinery so desperately needed to put the villages along the Saranac River back into shape were delivered to the

area, and improvements began immediately.

The first priority was to get at least temporary roads to all the people as soon as possible. Mr. Lamkins knew how important it was to the farmers to get their milk out to market and their fields cleared. Lamkins praised the cooperation of the people of the area who freely gave their time, equipment and even some land to enable the town to get back on its feet again. The surrounding towns, including Dannemora and Plattsburgh, sent road crews and equipment at no cost to the Town of Saranac to help the cleanup. The cleanup, aided by inmates from the prison in Dannemora, used bulldozers to transfer the boulders and silt from the flooded areas to the washed-out places so the road could be graded and paved. This was a time-consuming job; however, within two weeks the temporary work had been completed, and by the New Year the roads were back to normal.

Since no one lived on the Corners Road, which ran between Picketts Corners and the Cannon Road, it was the only roadway in the town not repaired or replaced. True Brook Road was altered by forcing the brook back to its original course, and the area that was washed out was graded and paved. By changing the road in this manner, the need to replace the bridge which collapsed under Paul Ebere's vehicle was eliminated. The Nashville Road was rebuilt beside the washed-out road on land donated to the town by the Ryan and other adjoining families. A gully marks the old road and can still be clearly seen beside the Nashville Road near the Ryan farm. Ravines at Picketts Corners and at the corner of the Cannon Road and Chazy Lake Road provide testimony to the raging waters of that summer day.

The flash flood took everyone by complete surprise; most residents can recall minute details of that frightful day and when asked when the flooding occurred can immediately give the day, date, year and time of day. Almost all remember exactly what they were doing, where they were, and their feelings and impressions at the time.

Mrs. Lorena Weldon, who lived in the Centennial House all her life, was in the direct path

of the surging waters of Corners Brook. She recalls crossing the bridge at Picketts Corners shortly before the bridge there went out. As the rains continued to fall, an old dam on Corners Brook gave way and a wall of water enveloped the Corners. Mrs. Weldon remembers that the water rose to the kitchen windows some three feet from the ground, and that 100-pound bags of feed from Ryan's Feed Store appeared to float on top of the surging waters of Corners Brook.

Mrs. Weldon recalls her father, who had been proprietor of the Centennial House for many years, saying he "never thought I'd lose everything" after his barn with farm equipment and cutters inside were lost. Some pieces of farm machinery and equipment were never found, and what was found was sometimes under several feet of rubble and ruin. A photograph shows the barn with only the sides and roof left standing, so that the barn has the appearance of a covered bridge.

At the age of 16, Harold Ryan found the time to be both frightening and spine-tingling at his family's farm on the Nashville Road. As with most of the farmers, he was bringing the cows to be milked a little early because of the darkening sky and the impending storm. As he was out in the fields, he could see the storm clouds coming together overhead, and within minutes there was lightning on three sides and the rain came down, figuratively in buckets. Mr. Ryan's description of the rain pictures a person standing under a bucket full of water while it was upended time after time without stopping. This, he said, went on for a full 45 minutes before the rain decreased to a steady downpour. The air was so charged with electricity from the lightning that he could feel the charge in the air making his hair stand on end.

The farm itself was not heavily damaged. A boulder about eight to ten feet by four feet had lodged next to the barn and prevented the barn from being washed away. The silo, however, was almost down. The potato and corn crops were damaged and the family had to make do for the winter.

More than 40 years later, Harold Ryan can still hear the sounds of the rocks, some three

times the size of a basketball, crashing together, and the prickly charges from the lightning. What amazed Ryan most was the unbridled force of the water and the damage and destruction the storm brought in such a short time.

Margaret (Keysor) Lamkins, who was 16 and lived on the "Flats" then, spent the entire time on the Bowen Road bridge with her brother and sister. They were returning home from swimming and were stranded on the bridge with water swirling all around them. Although she was on a bridge in the center of the swirling river surrounded by thunder and lightning, she found it to be an exciting time and does not recall being scared in the least.

For Alex Lamkins, like Harold Ryan, the sound of the rocks and boulders smashing into one another is a sound he has never forgotten. He likens it to one continuous loud thunderclap. Lamkins described full-grown trees marching down the brook like soldiers going off to war only to drop and then reappear mutilated, a sight he

has never forgotten. The mangled trees backed up at the bridge combined with the force of the water caused the bridge to collapse and sent Eber and the Lashways to their deaths.

It came as a surprise to most of the people affected by this flash flood that the storm occurred in only a three- or four-mile radius of Saranac. One mile up the road from Harold Ryan, at the Wright farm, there was no damage and only showers. Dannemora had a hard rain but nothing extraordinary. Surprisingly, the area known as Hardscrabble on the opposite bank of the Saranac River received little rain and no damage to roads or fields. Until the full extent of the storm was known, everyone in the villages of Picketts Corners, Saranac and Moffitsville thought it was a storm throughout the North Country and were stunned to find it was so localized.

The high waters of the spring were not treated as an oddity by these people of the Saranac valley. Flooding meant going out and

clearing the flooded areas of fence posts, barbed wire, rocks and other debris; it was done by almost everyone every April and May. Some years the waters were higher than others and a road might be damaged, yet allowances were made for the river.

The Saranac River has taken many things from its people, but it has returned to them something much greater than they realize; for it has molded them into the people they are today.



Courtesy of the author

Bowen Road in Picketts Corners was washed down to the bedrock. The roadway was later filled to the original ground level with rubble from Picketts Corners.

Paul Ebere died in this demolished car. Thrown from the car, the bodies of Leo and Donald Lashway were found downstream. Donald Ebere was pulled from the river and survived.



Courtesy of the author

From the forces of the Saranac River the residents of Saranac, Picketts Corners, and Moffittsville have learned to take what they

were given, to give thanks for what they have, and to co-exist with their river. □

Jan Couture lives on True Brook Road in Saranac. She is a housewife, mother of two, honor graduate of SUNY Plattsburgh in 1990 and teacher in Saranac Central School. This essay won the first prize in the McMasters contest in 1991.

The Company Store of "S.P. Bowen & Co." At Clayburgh, N.Y., 1869

by Gordon Pollard

It was October 15, 1869, when the blind man was in the company store at Clayburgh. Ed Bradshaw paid him 25 cents. The next day the man was still there, and as Louis Gilbeau and eight other company workers came to make their small purchases at the store, each gave him two bits. The transactions were properly recorded in the store journal, along with Alex Elm's paper of tobacco and Ed Slaven's peck of apples. Joseph Bigwood, the ore separator for the company, felt a little more generous and gave the blind man \$1.00. Bigwood did make more money through his work than the others, and he was buying himself a new \$10.00 coat that day, so it probably seemed appropriate to offer a little more. Besides, Bigwood was still feeling good about the new sleigh and two buffalo robes he had bought three days before. They had cost him \$62.50, but they would be worth it once the snow covered the ground. In any case the blind man was leaving the next day, apparently never to return.

A week later, the store got a shipment of merchandise from J. Cavanagh & Co., including a dozen harmonicas. The long, hard work and approaching winter made the harmonicas a welcome diversion, and within three days they were all sold. Did Wal Dow, William Higgins, and Tom Tedford learn to play them well enough to harmonize on their Sundays off from making iron and charcoal? Surely they did.

Such are the stories that can be built from information that surfaced in June, 1990. A

store journal dating from July, 1869, to early January, 1870, was part of an estate that was being liquidated in Schuyler Falls. The journal, now residing in the Special Collections section of Feinberg Library at SUNY Plattsburgh, offers a rare insight into the operations of an early iron mining and ore processing settlement along the Saranac River, about 24 miles west of Plattsburgh.

Previous historical research by myself and a number of students, in connection with archaeological investigations in 1984, had revealed that the original settlement, still erroneously known as the "Caldwell" mine at Clayburgh, began to develop after iron ore was discovered at a sawmill site in 1840. This was the first iron deposit to have been found in the Saranac Valley. It was actually a Leander Cadwell, not Caldwell, who then owned the location, and mining began in 1841. The separated ore was initially taken to forges at Saranac Hollow seven miles down river for smelting into iron, but by 1844 four bloomery forges were erected at the mining site. By that time Cadwell was in partnership with D. L. Myers. In subsequent years the scale of operations varied, including as many as six forge fires, three water-driven hammers for shaping the semi-molten blooms into billets of high grade iron, and an employee force of nearly 100 men. As with many business ventures, the operations changed hands several times up until the early 1880s, at which point the

ore-processing equipment was dismantled and moved to a larger ore deposit at Standish, about 15 miles to the north. The Clayburgh settlement then dwindled rapidly in size and economic importance.

Shepard P. Bowen, in partnership with Andrew Williams, bought the Clayburgh iron works in 1863, and they jointly owned the operation until 1871, when Williams became the sole owner. Both men had been born and raised in Quebec Province, Canada, both were of Welsh descent, and both had been involved in a series of previous business ventures that included store operations, often in connection with the iron business. It was not unusual for both men to pursue more than one business venture at a time, and both became rich and powerful, both economically and politically, as their lives progressed. It is Bowen's name, as "S.P. Bowen & Co." that is stamped in gold on the spine of the 1869 journal from the company store at Clayburgh. A close examination of Beer's *Atlas of Clinton County*, also published in 1869, denotes both "S.P. Bowen & Co." and "Bowen & Williams" for the Clayburgh locality. "Bowen & Williams" is also indicated for the iron works at Williamsburgh, two miles to the east near Redford, which was also known as the "Redford Iron Ore Co." Another business name, "Bowen, Williams & Co.," is applied to charcoal kilns located four miles west of Clayburgh along the Cold Brook tributary of the Saranac, as well as to the store and iron works at Saranac Hollow, six and a half miles east of Clayburgh. S.P. Bowen & Co.'s store journal helps document and elucidate these connections.

The Store Journal

The journal contains several types of entries. Most common is the itemization of purchases by named individuals. Items are listed with the quantity being purchased and

the unit price. A transaction or account number was placed in the left column before the person's name, which facilitated recording the transaction in a separate ledger for accounting purposes. A second type of entry involves named individuals obtaining a cash advance or loan, usually around a dollar or so, from the store or from a specific person. These are often designated as a debit "For Cash," but can also be listed as Credit ("Cr") for the person making the loan. Up to 74 such entries could be made for a given month, and most are credited to either James Cowley or Joseph Dupraw. Cowley and Dupraw were undoubtedly the operators of the store.

A third type of entry, listed at the end of each month, is the wages paid to named workers. This includes a specification of the number of days worked that month (including fractions of a day), and the daily pay rate, almost always expressed in bits (eighths of a dollar). Also near the end of each month, often along with an individual's store purchases, are entries of house rent, charges for pasturage of cows and horses, and other debts such as horseshoeing and cord wood.

The forge at Clayburgh also had an account through the stores, and a summary of most of the expenditures associated with the forge's operation was entered at the end of each month. This includes monthly dollar totals for labor, bloomer iron production, forge repairs, ore separation, and company charcoal kiln production.

Credit entries for individuals and suppliers were made at any time, and included miscellaneous labor and cartage bills, and merchandise provided by other companies. In addition, "Bowen, Williams & Co.," probably the Saranac Hollow store, had a separate end-of-the-month entry which included things such as freight charges (between Saranac Hollow and Clayburgh?), amounts paid to suppliers, and the amount of finished iron being shipped out.

The journal was originally 780 pages long, and every page contained entries. Unfortunately, 272 of those pages (136 sheets), in sets of two to 18 adjacent sheets, had been cut out and discarded. This may have been done so that the book could more easily hold the numerous newspaper clippings that were in the journal when it was discovered. Most of the clippings dated to the 1920s. Even with so many pages missing, a wealth of data remained to give us an unusual glimpse of a mining town store, its patrons, and mining company operations in the second half of 1869.

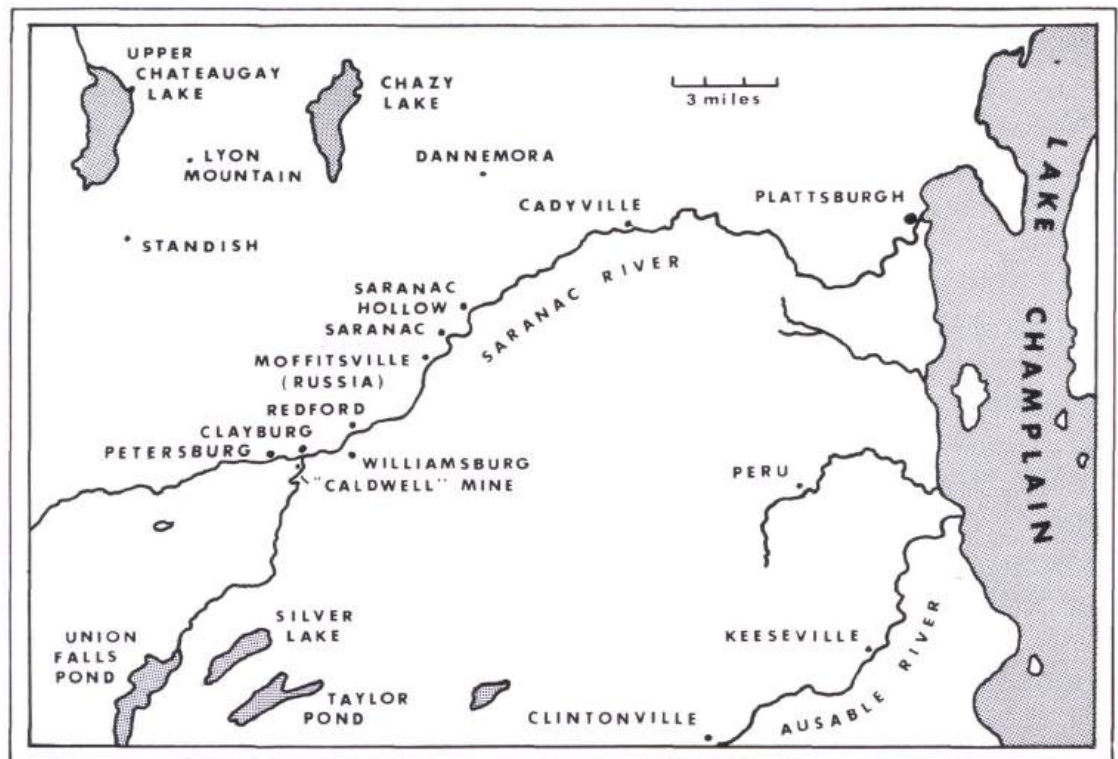
Store Items and Purchasing Patterns

A compilation of the merchandise purchased by individuals at the store resulted in a list of more than 300 different items. These have now been grouped into categories which show the unit price. The store offered everything from spices to furniture, but many items were rarely purchased. More than 25 businesses and individuals filled merchandise orders for the company store, including "Hartwells & Williams," another business venture of Andrew Williams that specialized in flour and feed at Plattsburgh.

The food that the Clayburgh company store sold almost never included fresh vegetables, except for potatoes. The most commonly bought staples were pork,

flour, a non-specific "provender" (which may have been a corn meal), butter, salt, sugar and tea. Pork, flour and provender were usually purchased in quantities over 10 pounds. Pork was obtained by the store in barrels from the Saranac Hollow store. Beef was rarely available and seemed to depend on a local cow being butchered. Fish was a common purchase, and oysters, when in season, were eagerly bought up by the keg and by the gallon. Another fairly common purchase was crackers and cheese. Eggs were rarely bought, and chicken never appeared in the journal.

Chewing tobacco, smoking tobacco and snuff were common purchases, and it was not unusual for a 10-cent plug of tobacco to be the only thing bought by someone on a given day. Alcoholic beverages are not among the store's offerings, but some of the frequently purchased bottles of elixir, bitters, pain



Courtesy of the author

Clayburgh and its relation to other settlements in the Saranac Valley. Petersburg and Williamsburg are now "ghost towns."

*Beehive-shaped
charcoal kilns
at Bellmont, near
Chateaugay Lake,
in the 1880s.
Similar kilns may
have served the
Clayburg iron
industry.*



Photo collection of Henry G. Rogers, copyright Elsa Voelcker

killers and cocaine may have provided a limited substitute.

While finished clothing was available and occasionally purchased, it was apparently rather expensive. The store thus did a brisk business in a wide range of cloth, trim and sewing needs. Some women's apparel was available, but very little was purchased in the six months covered by the journal.

The list of furniture and household items speaks for itself. All of the basic items that one might want were readily available, from fly paper to fishhooks, bureaux to bed straw. Tools, oils, nails, window glass, wood and even wallpaper were regularly stocked.

Once in a while, perhaps for himself, a laborer would buy a geography book, a speller, a reader or a writing book. Paper, pens and envelopes sold fairly often, and with the store also being the local post office, a three-cent postage stamp carried a letter out of the community.

Patrons, Employees, and Wages

In the entire store journal only two women were entered as the purchasers of goods. One was Mrs. E. L. Harrington, and the other was Mrs. Nancy Kelley, who appears to have worked with her husband Michael in

producing charcoal for the forges. Otherwise, all entries in the journal are against men. This does not mean that only men were patrons of the company store; wives of employees may have done much of the shopping, but had the charges listed against their husbands' names.

For the month of July a total of 50 laborers, jobs unspecified, were credited wages through the store. All were men, and about one-third had surnames which suggest French Canadian heritage. Daily wages ranged from four bits (50 cents) to as high as 24 bits (\$3.00). Such extremes were rare, however, and more than 60 percent of the laborers earned 11 or 12 bits a day (\$1.37, \$1.50). It was also not unusual for some men to work at two different pay rates during the month. The jobs performed could have included mining, lumbering, assisting in charcoal production and ore separation, loading, transport, etc. Thus, total monthly wages depended upon the number of days worked per month at a given rate. The greatest number of days worked by a "laborer" at Clayburgh in July, 1869, was by Ed Slaven who worked 27 days at 19 bits per day, for a total of \$64.12. The least earned was by the son of Peter Lafounte, who worked only 4.5 days at five bits a day, for a total of \$2.81.

Monthly laborer wages, however, usually fell between \$30 and \$50.

Besides laborers, there were workers with specialized jobs that were credited separately. One was Joseph Bigwood, who was in charge of ore separation. Bigwood was paid \$4.25 a ton for separating the ore, plus an extra amount for "labor in separating." For July, 1869, he separated just under 70 tons of ore for \$259.16, and received an additional \$140 for labor. For August, he separated more than 85 tons of ore. It is therefore not surprising that Bigwood was making purchases in the company store three to four times a week, while most laborers were coming in only once or twice a week.

Bloomers and hammer operators were also entered separately in the store journal. Bloomers were paid by the ton for the iron they produced in the forges. The least number of bloomers employed was in July, when there were eight. Each was paid \$5.00 per ton (for September through November it was \$5.50 per ton), with production usually ranging between six to 14 tons a month per person. This resulted in monthly wages falling between \$30 and \$80. By August there were nine bloomers and that number was maintained through December. They must have worked in staggered shifts, for other historical records suggest there were never more than six forge fires operating at Clayburgh, and one source suggests there were only four forges operating between 1863 and 1871.

Hammering the semi-molten iron into billets of almost pure iron which could be shipped elsewhere for working into final products was another specialized job. Normally there were two hammer operators at Clayburgh. James Slaven and William Wiggins were the hammerers from August through December, and each was paid \$2.75 per ton for his work. Each would normally work between 40 and 50 tons per month, resulting in monthly earnings of \$110 to \$140. Wiggins also had the job of "repairing" other iron with the massive triphammer he operated, which added \$35 to

\$40 to his income each month.

The forges demanded a constant supply of charcoal as a fuel for smelting the separated ore. The company had its own charcoal (referred to as "coal" in the journal) kilns at Clayburgh, plus others beside Cold Brook a few miles away. Thomas Tedford operated the Clayburgh kilns, and received 7¢ per bushel for the final product, plus 1.75¢ per bushel for burning the wood to produce it. It seems the Clayburgh kilns could produce between 8,000 and 11,000 bushels per month, valued at \$560 to \$770. In addition, Tedford would receive a monthly amount for "labor." Since Tedford probably had to pay others to cut and bring in the wood for the charcoal production, it is reasonable to assume that his actual monthly income was close to the labor amounts he received. This usually amounted to approximately \$170. In a slow month, such as December 1869, Tedford produced only 2,590 bushels of coal in the Clayburgh kilns (compared to 11,594 bushels at Cold Brook), and had to work hauling ore to bring his month's labor income to \$79.83.

Even with the company having its own charcoal kilns, other sources of charcoal were constantly being utilized. For July there were no fewer than 13 individuals who sold charcoal to the company through its store. The price paid depended upon the quality of the charcoal, and normally ranged from 4.25¢ to 7.5¢ per bushel. One lot of 470 bushels, from George Green and Palmer Sweeney, was so inferior that it was bought at one quarter of cent per bushel. Monthly totals for the quantity of charcoal taken in at Clayburgh ranged from 19,829 bushels (cost \$1,144.32) to 47,311 (cost \$2,920.81). More than \$11,000 was spent by S. P. Bowen & Co. in six months of 1869 for charcoal alone.

A final category of employment that was entered separately was freighting. The company regularly hired three individuals to do most of its cartage of iron, ore and merchandise. These were Alex Lamkins, Charles

*Iron forges of the
J. & J. Rogers Co.
in Jay, N.Y. At
least four such
forges operated in
Clayburgh in 1869.
Note charcoal
baskets in the
foreground.*



Photo collection of Henry G. Rogers, copyright Elsa Voelcker

Lamkins and A. Collins. They were normally paid \$1.00 per ton for hauling between Clayburgh and Saranac, and \$2.75 per ton between Clayburgh and Plattsburgh. Their wagons must have been of a size and strength to carry about a ton, for they sometimes were paid simply in terms of eight bits a load. A. Collins either worked very hard or had more than one wagon and team, for in November of 1869 he was paid for hauling 67 loads of ore from Williamsburgh, two miles from Clayburgh, at \$1.00 per load. The Williamsburgh mining operation was another of Bowen and Williams' joint business ventures, known as the Redford Iron Ore Co. The Clayburgh store journal reveals that from September to December of 1869, more than 288 tons of separated Williamsburgh ore, bought at \$10 a ton, were being taken to Clayburgh for smelting into iron.

An 1860 gazetteer of New York states there were iron works and 30 houses at Clayburgh. In the S.P. Bowen & Co. Journal, the number of individuals listed as renters at Clayburgh in July, 1869, is exactly 30. In November there were 29 renters, with 27 percent turn-over rate in the occupants between those months. Rents ranged from \$.75 to \$5.00 per month, with most rentals being \$1.50 to \$2.50.

The one \$5.00 rental was to James Cowley, inferred as being one of the operators of the company store. Fourteen employees of the S.P. Bowen & Co. operations each had a cow in June of 1869, and each had to pay \$1.25 a month to pasture it on Peter Trembley's land, a half mile south of Clayburgh. Only two people had a horse of their own to pasture, which cost an additional \$2.00 per month. Joseph Bigwood, the ore separator, not only had a horse, he was the only man to have two cows.

End View

The Clayburgh mining town never reached great size or notoriety. It was but one of many such bloomery-forge settlements that sprang up as a result of the high-grade iron ore that was discovered in the Adirondack-Lake Champlain region of upstate New York during the 19th century. The iron that such settlements produced was used both locally and afar, and in four months of 1869 the Clayburgh forges alone sent out more than 440 tons of iron billets, slated for Jersey City. Indeed, by the 1880s the Adirondacks were producing one-fourth of the iron in the entire United States.

The S.P. Bowen & Co. store journal gives us new and important data on the scale and organization of mid-nineteenth iron mining settlements in upstate New York. At the same time, with its names, dates, and personalized entries, we can create a perception of the individuals whose lives were bound to those times and places, and who can now be remembered.

Yes, Ed Slavin was pretty tight with his purchases at the company store in September 1869. But then, he had spent almost two months' wages for new furniture and a whole set of dinner and kitchenware the previous month, the biggest such purchases the store

had seen that year. The house he was renting was not fancy, costing only \$1.25 a month, but it would be fine with its new contents.

And now that it was December, Joseph Bigwood was getting the cutter he bought in October ready for its first test on the snow. Christmas wasn't far off, and on the eighth of December Bigwood bought a 20-cent bottle of "perfumery," the only one the store had sold in six months. The person for whom it was destined must have been very special. Let's hope they enjoyed the ride under those new buffalo robes. □

FOOD, SPICES

beef	10¢ – 14¢ lb.
pork	20¢ lb.
eggs	20¢ doz.
cheese	22¢ lb.
butter	35¢ – 40¢ lb.
sugar	18¢ – 20¢ lb.
potatoes	41¢ – 44¢ bu.
rice	16¢ – 18¢ lb.
molasses	88¢ – \$1 gal.
coffee	50¢ lb.
catsup	38¢ bottle
ginger	40¢ lb.

TOBACCO, MEDICINES, COSMETICS

snuff	\$ 1.25 lb.
tobacco plug	10¢ – 20¢
tobacco	\$ 1 lb.
pipe	50¢ – 75¢
cocaine	70¢ – \$1 bottle
camphor	25¢ bottle, 18¢ oz.
eye water	25¢ bottle
cologne	50¢ bottle
perfumery	20¢ bottle
tooth brush	19¢
cake soap	6¢, 15¢ ea.
razor	\$ 1.13

Excerpts of some of the 300 items offered for sale at the company store.

Dr. Gordon Pollard is a professor of anthropology at State University of New York at Plattsburgh. He dedicates this article, which was awarded second prize in the McMasters contest in 1991, to the students who helped bring the "Caldwell" mining settlement back to life: Marjorie Brown, Kim Holtyn, Mark Beauharnois, Dan Bancroft, Helene Melkunas, Matt Salzer, Lisa Brothers, and Sandy Loach.

A Railroad Comes To Clinton County

by Josie Treggett

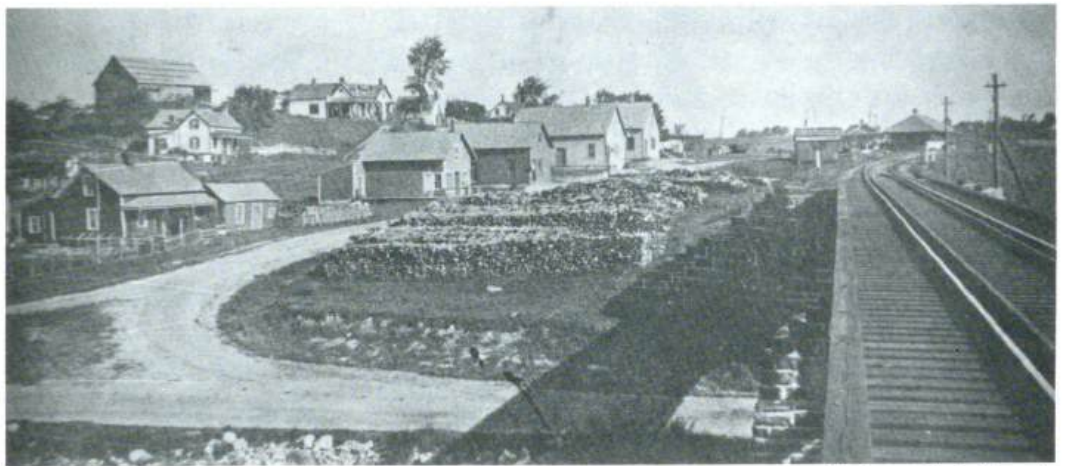
One of the greatest drawbacks to the development of the towns of Clinton County in the early 19th century was their isolation from the great southern and eastern markets. During the summer season the facilities for transportation by water were excellent on Lake Champlain. But the fact that for several months of the year the lake was closed by ice limited manufacturing and commercial enterprises. Although the county had roads, they were not good, and there was still a need for means of transportation which would be safe, dependable, fast and available at all times of the year. Railroads seemed to be the solution, for both passenger and freight traffic.

Following the completion of the Welland Canal in 1829, a large volume of traffic began to flow from Lake Erie into Lake Ontario. Agitation began for railroad connections to divert the traffic from going down-river to Montréal. This occurred at the time of a new mania. Just as canals had once been the craze, now everyone seemed to catch railroad fever. Small local railroads proliferated, some never finished and others joined into the later through lines. Many of the more visionary schemes never left the drawing boards.

One of the more fantastic proposals was a covered railroad which eastern capitalists advocated in 1837 to connect Boston

and Ogdensburg. Some of its proponents were convinced that a covered road was necessary into this frozen, snowy region. John McDuffie, civil engineer of Bradford, Vermont, believed it would cost less than the Erie Canal: "Less than three millions will build the whole railway, and the income of it in three years will cover it the whole distance." He proposed transporting the cars across Lake Champlain on the ice, drawn by horses; or if this proved unsatisfactory, keeping a channel for steamboats open with ice cutters.

But the actual pioneer of North Country railroads was the Northern Railroad, projected to run west from Lake Champlain to Ogdensburg. It would capture the commerce of Ontario and, by way of the Welland Canal, of the other Great Lakes. Yet even before Boston businessmen started to promote the idea, the people of the north had begun to realize the possibilities of such a line. It began to be discussed as early as 1829. Citizens of Montpelier, Vermont, met on February 17, 1830, to promote



Courtesy of Josie Treggett

An early photograph of Ellenburg Depot shows its close relationship to the railroad.

it; they thought that on the east side of the lake it could be made to connect with the new Central Vermont road, then being built. The advocates of the plan declared that trains might be operated over the proposed line at fifteen miles an hour and that an entire journey from Boston to Ogdensburg might be accomplished in 35 hours. Although many people believed it was a rash idea, many others were fascinated by it. In March a promotional meeting was held in Ogdensburg and a year later another at Malone.

The idea grew very slowly. Money was not easily raised. Many men were indifferent to the new idea of railroads. Not until fourteen years later did the New York Legislature authorize David C. Judson and Joseph Barnes of St. Lawrence County, S. C. Wead of Franklin County and others as Commissioners to distribute stock for the Northern Railroad. Two million dollars worth of stock were sold at 50 dollars a share. The date of the formal incorporation of the road was May 14, 1845. It had its first meeting at Ogdensburg in June 1845, at which time the officers were elected. Actual construction was begun in March 1848 at the deep cut just east of Ogdensburg.

While the Northern was being projected along the northern tier of the state, the citizens of Plattsburgh zealously worked to make their town the terminus on Lake Champlain. Their aspirations were initially encouraged by the capitalists of Boston, who were the prime movers in the enterprise. They took care that no point was designated for the eastern terminus on Lake Champlain. They even planned the line with a deep dip southward into Altona, as if it were headed for Plattsburgh. Consequently, Plattsburgh leaders subscribed \$50,000 in stock to the Northern Railroad, only to have the terminus at Rouses Point instead of their own town. In the long run the capitalists feared that a main line crossing from Cumberland Head to Grand Isle and Burlington would encourage a railroad southward on the east shore of the lake, thus diverting a part of the trade in the direction of New York City rather than Boston.

At the same time that work was started at the west end of the road, grading and the laying

of rail was begun at the Rouses Point end, so that in the fall of 1848 trains were in regular operation between Rouses Point and Centerville (Mooers Forks). A year later the road had been extended to Ellenburg and in June 1850 to Chateaugay. On October 1, 1850, trains ran into Malone. A month later the line was finished and open for its entire length of 117 miles. The first stations upon the road, in Clinton County, were Churubusco, Ellenburg Depot, Wood's Falls, Centerville (Mooers Forks), Mooers Junction, Champlain and Rouses Point. As towns grew up along its right of way, stations were opened at Clinton Mills, Dannemora Station, Forest, Irona and Aaronsburgh (Altona). Its original cost, including its equipment and fixtures, was placed at \$5,002,121.31.

In building the railroad, new achievements were reached in railroad engineering. The surface of the county is mostly level, but the Chateaugay, Salmon and other rivers, in the descent to the St. Lawrence, had worn deep and narrow valleys which afforded picturesque scenery, but which created obstacles of great magnitude in the construction of the railroad at such places as Chateaugay. To overcome the difficulty, it was decided to fill in the valley with earth, so as to create a level crossing for the railroad. To insure a channel for the river such that the embankment would not be washed away, a tunnel 300 feet long was made through the solid rock which bordered the valley, and permanent walls were erected to direct the stream through its new channel. The entire undertaking was completed after two years at a cost of \$130,000. The tunnel was begun in August 1848 and completed in five months. It was 25 feet wide and 22 feet high, while the retaining walls were 50 feet high. The embankment was more than 800 feet long and the top was 160 feet above the level of the river. It contained 500,000 cubic yards of earth.

This railroad faced many handicaps. First there was the dispute over building a bridge across the lake. This was of concern not only to the Northern Railroad, but also to the companies trying to open a line up the west side of the lake. The New York companies

In the early days of the railroad, the arrival of a train must have been an exciting event.



Courtesy of Josie Treggett

opposed construction of the bridge, feeling that without it their future line would secure more traffic. They also argued that it would interfere with lake navigation. On the other hand, the New England builders of the Northern were very anxious to build a bridge, for it would give them direct connection with the Great Lakes. They believed this route could compete successfully with the railroads and Erie Canal of central New York for freight from the west.

While the controversy over the bridge was going on, a powerful boat called the *Ethan Allen* was transporting passengers and freight between Alburg and Rouses Point. This boat had been built at Shelburne Harbor in 1847, at a cost of \$36,000. After running between Whitehall and Rouses Point for two years, it was sold to the Vermont Central Railroad Company to shuttle between the railroad terminals at Alburg and Rouses Point.

The people in favor of the bridge were finally successful in obtaining a favorable decision from the federal courts. The *Ethan Allen* was then sold to the Champlain Transportation Company and later was transferred to the Northern Transportation Company of Whitehall. The first bridge across the lake seems to have had a sort of scowboat with tracks across the top, which acted as a draw. The boat would be swung out of the way when it was necessary to open the channel for the passage of boats. Some arrangement was made to prevent high water from interfering with the operation of this floating draw.

A second difficulty resulted from the over-ambitious plans of its promoters. The railroad was built for a large volume of traffic. The builders were so sure of business that they placed its tracks upon the side of the right-of-way, rather than in the middle of it, so that it would not have to be moved when it came time to double-track the road. But the road was never double-tracked. For some years it prospered by providing a direct connection between the large lake steamers at Ogdensburg and the important port of Boston. The promoters built elaborate stone shops and a large covered depot at Malone. They also built 4,000 feet of wharfage and large warehouses upon the river bank at Ogdensburg.

Gradually the strength of the railroad began to fade. More direct and advantageous routes began to compete with it. Fewer and fewer steamers came to the Ogdensburg docks. The Northern Railroad underwent financial difficulties. It was reorganized several times. It became the Ogdensburg Railroad, then the Ogdensburg and Lake Champlain, then a branch of the Central Vermont and finally a branch of the Rutland Railroad.

The early trains in the North Country were varied and strange. There are records of cars drawn by horses at the rate of nine miles an hour. Some of the cars were made up of three compartments, with a platform running the entire length on the outside; this was used by the conductor in collecting tickets while the train was in motion. The early locomotives

usually proved to be more substantial than they looked. They all burned wood, menacing the cars, wooden bridges and passengers with sparks. Mr. George McGregor, a leading lumberman of Ellenburg, had a contract with the railroad to supply wood for the engines from Centerville to Churubusco. There was a wood yard every few miles because the engines could not carry enough fuel to last long. Mr. McGregor and his help sawed 40 cords of four-foot wood a day for the railroad.

The most common of the early rails were made with timber, to which were nailed long strips of iron mortised together at the ends. Hurd gives a good description of them:

"That was the day of strap rails, sometimes called the 'Black Snake Rail,' on account of its propensity to peel up from the wooden bed-piece to which it was nailed, and glide up the bottom of the car, propelled by the car-wheel, which would sometimes take a notion to run under instead of over it. So, in those days, it was no uncommon occurrence for a passenger to find his playful 'Black Snake Rail' crawling up his trouser leg as he sat in his seat in the car, or to feel it shooting through him longitudinally, impaling him like a fly on a pin."

Every train carried a sledgehammer to pound these rails back into place on the timbers. When this failed to loosen the 'snakehead,' the train had to be delayed until the iron could be sawed off. The Northern was built late enough to take advantage of modest improvements over the more primitive roadbeds. An inverted U-shaped rail was tried, but the common form assumed a T-shape. Bessemer's discovery of a process of making steel in the 1880s led to the use of steel rails. Not only did they prove cheaper, but they made possible the use of heavier, better-built cars. Improvement in the cars themselves was very slow in coming. When the companies were having difficulty securing capital for road construction and maintenance, they could not afford to spend money on elaborate cars. Very crude couplers were used, simply links of chain, or an odd assortment of iron bars and pins. Brakes were nearly as simple.

The construction of the Great Northern

Railroad along the northern border of Clinton County was a vital factor in the growth and prosperity of many of the towns. It served for years as practically the only means of obtaining raw materials as well as marketing the manufactured goods and agricultural produce of the surrounding area. Most of the products of the northern tier were sold in the markets of eastern New England.

Potatoes had formerly brought about 20¢ a bushel at the starch factory, but with the opening of the markets to the east the price increased, ranging from 25¢ to 50¢ a bushel. Dealers would compete with each other to get the potatoes. In the 1890s about 4,000 bushels a day were being loaded into railroad cars for market at Ellenburg Depot alone. As many as four or five cars were shipped at a time. The farmers would have their potatoes loaded at home the night before, then start for the railroad station very early in the morning. By mid-forenoon wagonloads of potatoes might be lined up for a quarter of a mile, waiting their turn to unload. Often teams that left home before daylight could not get unloaded before noon.

The cars were carefully prepared to carry the potatoes safely to market. On the floor and sides of the car, two-by-fours were attached, to which boards were nailed. Over the boards tar paper was fastened. No extra boards were placed on the ceiling. A tiny stove in the center of each car kept the potatoes warm and in good condition for market. Air space was provided by the built-in floor and walls. One man was hired to attend the fires in the potato cars. He would ride with them to Boston, or whatever city they had been consigned to, and then ride back to Ellenburg Depot by railroad coach. Mr. Clifton McGregor had his potatoes loaded at Dannemora Crossing, one mile south of Ellenburg Depot. He personally went with his own produce, had them unloaded and delivered to the customers with whom he had contracted.

Butter was made at local butter plants and shipped once a week, on Mondays, to the markets. The butter plants had a large storage room which kept the butter in good condition.

The ice would be cut each winter from the local millponds.

Lumbering was a big industry in the North Country. Large quantities of spruce were sold for pulp, much of which was shipped to a foundry in Swanton, Vermont. A local resident remembers that very often a captain of a Lake Champlain boat would come to Ellenburg to buy timber for masts. It might take several days to find a tree that was of the right dimensions. Some of them had to be 50 to 75 feet long. The mast would bring a dollar a foot. It was loaded on a flat car at Dannemora crossing. Often three cars were necessary to support one mast.

Dannemora Crossing was one mile south of Ellenburg Depot, and about ten miles from Dannemora. This station was of great importance to the prison at Dannemora. So inaccessible was it to the outside world that supplies were brought to Dannemora Crossing, then carried over a plank road to the prison. The iron ore and the nails manufactured at the prison were brought to the railroad for shipment. Local residents remember four-horse wagons loaded with food supplies being taken over the steep road to Dannemora.

Since the railroad was the chief link with the outside world, men of all ages would gather at the stations to watch the trains come in and see the incoming and outgoing passengers. There were six passenger trains a day. The mail train went west in the morning to Ogdensburg and returned to Alburg in the evening. The express

train went east in the morning from Ogdensburg to Alburg and returned in the evening. The local train went from Malone to Alburg and returned in the afternoon. People from the small towns could take the morning train to Malone and return in the evening. Picnic excursions were often organized to Vermont. The train would take people to St. Albans or Burlington in the morning and return them in the late evening. This was a big event for the inhabitants. For a long time the people in the northern tier used the hospitals at Burlington. It was much easier to get there by train than elsewhere by road. Later, many of them used the hospital at Ogdensburg. Even in the 1920s, it was not uncommon for people to go there to the hospital.

Several communities grew up around the station. Hotels, dwellings and stores were always close to the railroad. Local residents soon felt acquainted with the engineers, brakemen and other workers, who would wave as they went by. One lady who owned a hotel near the railroad at Ellenburg Depot had a reputation for baking excellent pastry. Some of the engineers would stop their trains nearby in order to run in for a pie or cake or whatever else was good.

A new track was completed to replace the old one in 1894, and its prosperous days lasted into the twentieth century. Thus for more than half a century it served the North Country well, until declining traffic forced it to be abandoned. □

Josie Treggett, formerly of Ellenburg and now of Plattsburgh, wrote this essay in the 1960s. It was published serially in "North Country Notes" in November and December, 1969.

Daniel Folger Bigelow

by Caroline Bigelow Gregorovius

Daniel Folger Bigelow, who was to become a nationally-known landscape painter, was born on a farm in Peru, New York in 1823. The old John Arnold home where he was raised is still standing. His parents were of Quaker descent. He was the son of Nathan Bigelow and his mother was Clarinda Folger Barker. She was a Folger from Nantucket and distantly related to Benjamin Franklin, whose mother was Abiah Folger. Daniel had three brothers and a sister.

The name of Folger is difficult to pinpoint. All of the family records say that Clarinda Folger Barker was Daniel Folger Bigelow's mother. They repeat that she was a cousin of Abiah Folger, Benjamin Franklin's mother. In that generation there were many Clarinda Folgers—mothers, daughters, aunts, sisters, cousins. The federal census of 1850 states that the "Clarinda Folger Barker, married to Nathan Bigelow" (Daniel Folger Bigelow's parents) was from Dutchess County, New York. There are, however, insufficient grounds to suppose that the Quaker records were in error. For example, Clarinda could have come from the Folgers of Nantucket before moving to Dutchess County, New York.

As a child, Daniel used to stand on a chair and study a painting on the wall. As a boy, between farm chores he would sit on a fence and look across Lake Champlain, watching the magnificent change of colors on Mt. Mansfield. His pencil sketches pleased his parents, but they did not take his talent seriously, believing it was an impractical way to make a living.

As a teenager, in order to earn money for paints, he gained a local reputation by designing leaves and folded hands for gravestones at



Courtesy of the author

Daniel Folger Bigelow at work in his studio.

a marble quarry. Some of the old tombstones in the local cemeteries of that era may contain his designs.

He also painted some portraits and thought they were "the worst." He did them only to obtain money for paints, but his first love was to record nature. He later stated that he had a "passionate love" for the colors of his native northern New York. As a young man he was fortunate to meet Asahel Powers, the itinerant folk artist and portrait painter. Asahel was the brother of the noted Vermont sculptor, Hiram Powers. Bigelow gave Asahel Powers credit for teaching him "the delicacy of colors."

When he was 20 years old, Bigelow went to New York City. There he saw the work of other artists for the first time and decided to make painting his life's work. At 35 years of age, Daniel Bigelow gave up farming in Peru and in 1858, with another artist, he established a studio in Chicago in the Crosby Opera House. This studio burned in the great Chicago fire of 1871.

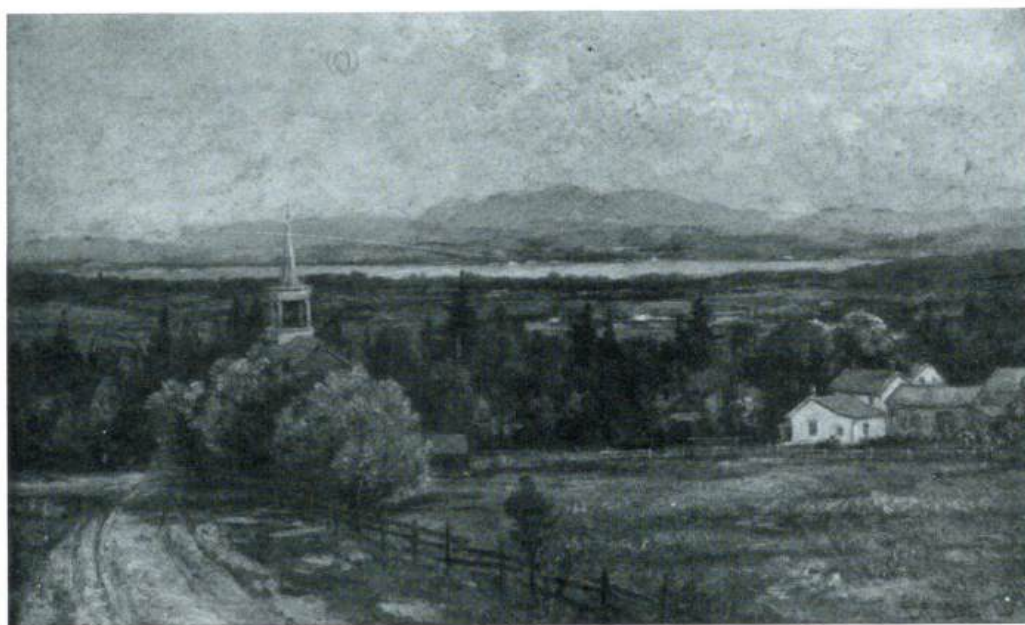
His western career began in Chicago, yet his painting was influenced by the Hudson River School of design in the East. His skillful brush would paint every leaf, twig and pebble. The colors were soft, misty and restful. His work was not startlingly imaginative but rather almost photographic. There is a harmony of color that is "beautifully therapeutic." The art correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* in the 1870s labeled his paintings "gems." Most of his landscapes have a lake, stream, pond or brook. Some of these early paintings were sold "off the wall" at exhibitions.

During the summer and autumn he would roam, sketching, through northern New York and New England. He would spend the winter in his Chicago studio working from his

sketches by first outlining the landscapes made during the summer and then painting the colors from memory. On the summer jaunts, he would lead classes of sketchers in New York and Vermont. When he returned to Chicago in the autumn he would sometimes take a sketching class to Wisconsin. He mixed his own pigments with mortar and pestle. Since painted dishes were popular in the Victorian era, Bigelow also spent some of his time painting beautiful china.

His studio was often empty because so many of his works were away on exhibition. He had as many as 20 to 22 paintings "hanging on the line" at one time. About 1887, he was asked to become a charter member of the Academy of Design, which developed into the Art Institute of Chicago. In his 80s he was honored at a banquet given by the Society of Artists for his services to art in Chicago.

One of the reasons for the popularity of his work in the Midwest was the interest of the new wealthy industrialists and railroad promoters who originally came from the East. They could afford to buy landscapes of New England and scenes of old homesteads back East.



*Schuyler Falls,
painted by Bigelow,
c. 1890.*

*Pictured against
the background of
the Champlain
Valley are the
Methodist Church
and the home of
Dr. E.A. Barnes.*

Clinton County Historical Museum (gift of James and Edna Hutchinson)

In the great Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893 Bigelow exhibited an autumn painting of Lake George. A landscape of the AuSable Valley with Whiteface Mountain in the background is now at the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, New York. This can be seen upon request if it is not on exhibit. According to the accession folder, the Whiteface landscape was discovered in Bennington, Vermont. It was restored by Gustav E. Kiliman of Boston, "lined with wax adhesive on aluminum and linen, cleaned, treated and resurfaced." It is dated 1895 and signed D. F. Bigelow.

Another signed painting, dated 1905, of the Barker farmhouse near Peru is owned by Virginia M. Burdick. On the back are historical notes which are as interesting as the painting itself. One of the notes reads: "The house to which Phoebe Ketchum Edgerton, maternal grandmother of Charlotte Barnes Bigelow (Daniel Folger Bigelow's wife), was carried on a bed from her home in Plattsburgh and remained during the battle of Plattsburgh." The other note reads: "For Nicholas Barker, painted by his cousin, Daniel Folger Bigelow, in the eighty-second year of his age,

June 1855-1905." The date reveals that the painting was a gift for the 50th wedding anniversary of Nicholas Barker and Hanna Irish, his wife.

Some of the other Bigelow paintings include, in Peru, an orchard, Davis Pond and Hilliard Brook (now Macomb Park); Whiteface Mountain from many angles; AuSable River near Clintonville, New York; Paradox Lake; Morning in the Berkshires; many views of Lake Champlain, and Lake Fairlee in Vermont. In the Midwest he painted Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Daniel Bigelow exhibited in a wide range of galleries. Among them were the National Academy of Design, World's Columbian Exposition, and the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876.

In 1865, at the age of 41 years, Bigelow married a Schuyler Falls girl 21 years his junior. Charlotte Barnes, born in 1844, was the oldest daughter of Dr. Melvin A. Barnes and the sister of Dr. Ethan Allen Barnes of Brinkerhoff Street in Plattsburgh. Mr. and Mrs. Bigelow had three children, all born in Chicago which became their permanent home. The oldest child was Folger Allen

*The Barker
homestead in Peru
was painted by
Bigelow in 1905.
History records
that Phoebe
Ketchum Edgerton
was carried there
on a bed to escape
the Battle of
Plattsburgh in
1814.*



Courtesy of Virginia Burdick

Bigelow. This son was accidentally shot by a friend in 1891 when he was only 23 years old. The son painted still-life pictures. At the time of his death, his peers said that if he had lived, he would have surpassed his father. Father and son had taught and painted together in their Chicago studio.

The only daughter, Florence Edgerton Bigelow, was born in 1871. She painted flowers with watercolors and exhibited in several galleries around the city. She taught art at Hyde Park High School in Chicago for more than 40 years. She died in 1951; the two older children never married. The third child, son Louis Barnes Bigelow, never painted; though he had four children, none followed art as a career. There are six grandchildren (no artists) and 12 great-grandchildren (as of 1990), with two possible artists emerging.

According to his wife, Daniel Bigelow was a fussy dresser, always wearing neat, clean, starched white shirts—not the typical artist in a soiled smock. It may have been a psychological compensation because his legs were short—not deformed like Toulouse-Lautrec's, but not of average length. His torso was of normal size, but his legs were too short for the

rest of his body.

The painter-artist had a great deal of complimentary "press" in his lifetime. His daughter kept a scrapbook of all of the newspaper clippings, from which much of this article is taken. One of the art critics in the 1870s wrote that he was a conscientious painter. Bigelow was never critical of his contemporaries. He was considered "a delightful man," with a mild manner and a kindly face.

Daniel Folger Bigelow painted up to the day he died. In his 80s his brush strokes were broader and there was not as much detail. His later subject-matter was the sand dunes of Lake Michigan since he was no longer able to travel to his beloved Adirondacks. The Peru painter died in his sleep in Chicago on July 14, 1910, after a 50-year career. The Adirondack artist had lived long enough to record on canvas the scenery and magnificent colors of his beautiful home country. □

Caroline Bigelow Gregorovius, a resident of Plattsburgh, is the granddaughter of the artist about whom she writes. This article about a noted native of Peru, New York, is dedicated to the Peru bicentennial of 1992.

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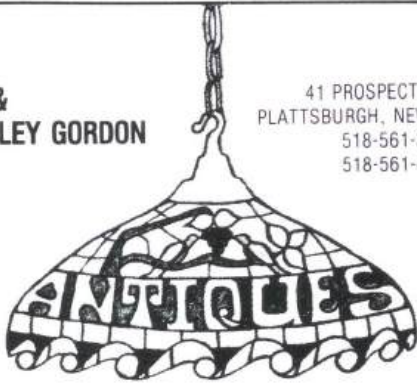
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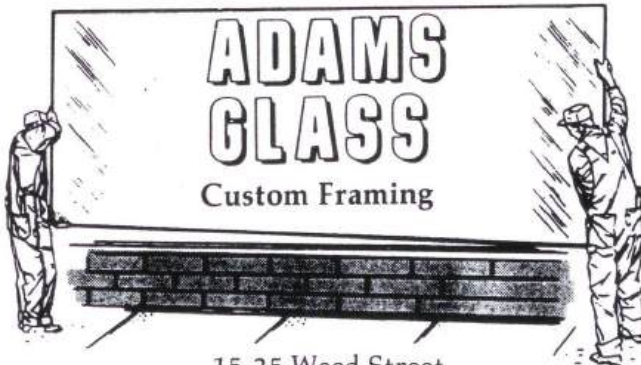
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