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Peter Saily, c. 1806, by Charles B.J.F. de Saint-Memin



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This issue of *The Antiquarian* is dedicated to the memory of Allan S. Everest, former Editor, Past President, and great friend of the Association.

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French Colonial Policy in the Champlain Valley

by James R. Ciborski

The northward flowing Lake Champlain, Lac du St. Sacrament (Lake George), and the Richelieu River formed a warpath employed for centuries by native tribes. The Iroquois and their enemies used the waterway to wage war on each other, thereby making the Champlain Valley a no-man's land. When the French settled Canada, they bore the brunt of Iroquois raids from the valley on French villages and outposts along the St. Lawrence River.

The Champlain Valley also provided a thoroughfare creating increased contact between the vastly different, potentially hostile, cultures of French Canada and the Dutch and English firmly established on the Hudson. Cyrille Gelines describes "Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River [as] the superior invasion route - the one which was most convenient and best situated for an operation to conquer the French colony or to mount an invasion in the opposite direction."

With this in mind, it is surprising that the French moved so slowly in protecting their southern border by failing to occupy and fortify the Champlain Valley effectively. This failure was the result of a larger view of Canada on the part of the French and concern for the development of the diminishing fur trade.

In addition, throughout the 17th century, French occupation of the continent consisted of little more than a toehold on the St. Lawrence and a somewhat smaller presence in Acadia. By the time of the English conquest of 1763, the English outnumbered the French in North America by a huge margin, approximately 1,500,000 to 70,000. Although France's population and army were larger than England's, France never committed significant numbers of settlers or soldiers to North America,

instead, conserving these resources for European affairs and other ventures.

The King and his ministers did attempt to create a defensive network of fortifications to prevent the conquest of Québec and Montréal in the 1660's. However, French outposts were spread throughout the interior of North America; the Champlain Valley was but one piece of a much larger area. In fact, the Lake Champlain-Richelieu frontier - England's easiest invasion route into Canada - received the *least* protection.

Occupation of the area was hindered by the Iroquois and by the French desire to appease the powerful native confederation. No substantial fortifications were constructed here until shortly before the fall of New France.

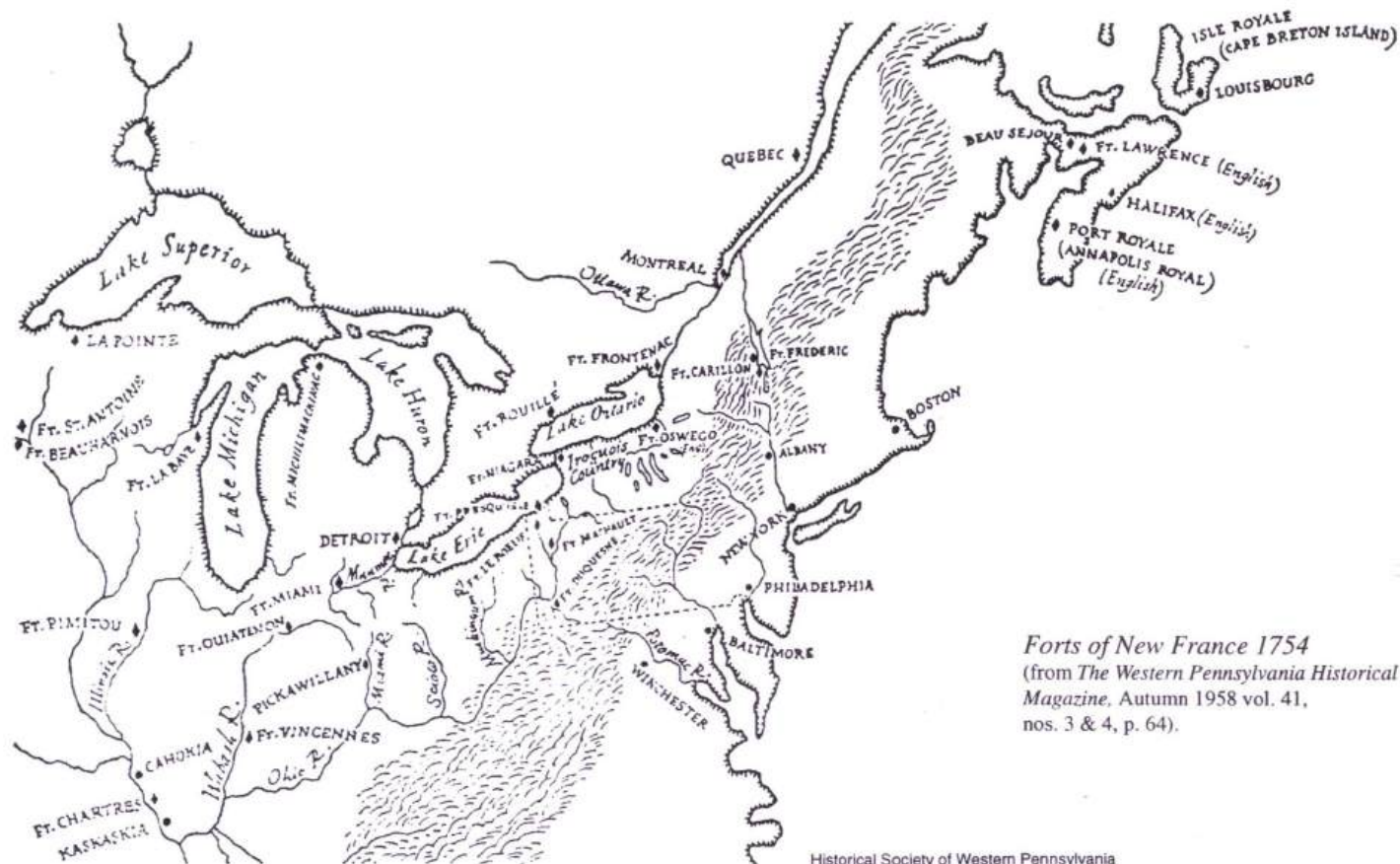
Other factors diverted French attention and resources from the Champlain-Richelieu corridor. In 1673 Fort Frontenac had been built at what is now Kingston on the east end of Lake Ontario. In 1701, in an attempt to resettle the Great Lakes Indians, consolidate the dwindling fur trade, and forestall any English plans for westward expansion, the French established Détroit as a fortified trading post to replace Michilimackinac. They hoped Détroit would become the colony's greatest trading center. Détroit's founder, La Mothe Cadillac, planned to locate 20 to 30 families and 200 skilled men by the second year of settlement. Although Détroit, with only 63 settlers in 1708, failed to grow at the expected rate, there were approximately 200 settlers there a few years later, compared with 21 settlers at Fort St. Frédéric at Crown Point on Lake Champlain in 1744. By 1741 the Détroit trade averaged between 150,000 and 200,000 livres each year. By 1750 the fort boasted

approximately 100 houses within its walls. In 1751 an English prisoner reported that as many as 400 traders operated there at a time. Frontenac and Détroit were two of the most important centers of the fur trade. Frontenac was the primary supply depot for the western country during most of the French regime. Francis Parkman describes Détroit as "The most important of all the Western passes. It was the key of the three upper lakes ... and it gave Canada her readiest access to the valley of the Mississippi. If the French held it, the English would be shut out from the Northwest; if, as seemed likely, the English should seize it, the Canadian fur trade would be ruined..."

In 1726 the French built Fort Niagara in the heart of Seneca territory as a means of halting, or at least reducing, the flow of furs to Albany. To do this the French had to control the Indians. Niagara would control access both to the north and to the west. There had also been rumors that the English planned to establish a trading post at Niagara to grab an even bigger share of the fur market. It was important for the French to beat them to the punch.

The same year the French began the construction of massive Fortress Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, one of their most costly efforts in North America. The fort was designed to protect Québec and the St. Lawrence River from attack by sea. King Louis and his ministers decided to concentrate the bulk of the colony's defense at this location - at the expense of a balanced defense network. Louisbourg became central to the entire French colonial undertaking, both for defense and as a base for the fishing industry. It also served as an agricultural settlement and as a base for missionary and fur trading activities and as a buffer between the commercial rivalry of Canada and New England.

On paper at least, it appeared in Paris that all of New France would be well protected with these forts located at strategic points. In actuality, however, only Louisbourg, Québec, and Montréal possessed genuinely strong fortifications, and, although only weakly fortified, Détroit, Frontenac, and Niagara were deemed more important than the Champlain-Richelieu Valley because of the western fur trade.



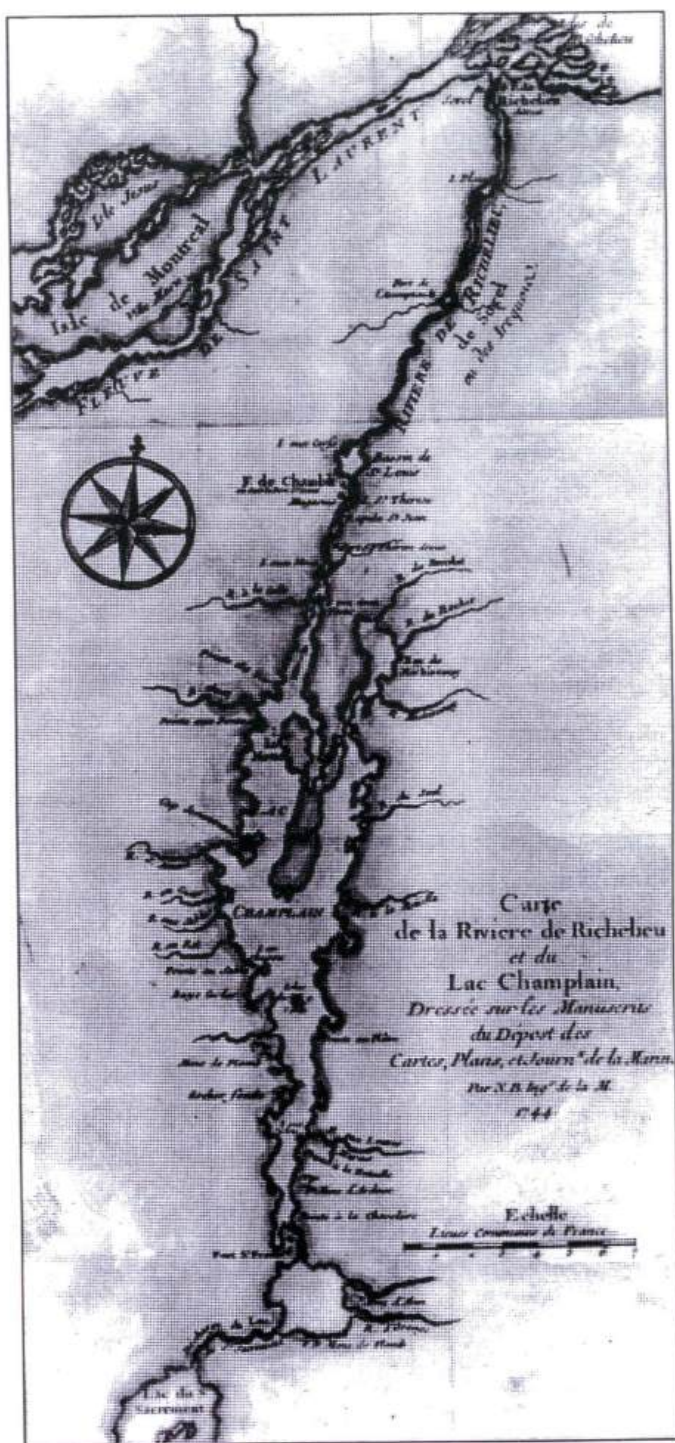
Forts of New France 1754
(from *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, Autumn 1958 vol. 41, nos. 3 & 4, p. 64).

Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Consequently, they received more attention than the southern frontier which was seen as lacking any resource of great value. After the fishing industry, the fur trade occupied most of France's attention in North America. While the almost total destruction of the beaver severely reduced the fur trade, it remained a major object of contention between France and England. The area around Lake Champlain was not a major fur bearing region or a collection point for furs gathered from the Indians. Its timber and reputed mineral wealth did not make it as important as the other key positions in New France.

From the beginning the French used Lake Champlain largely to attack their enemies. In fact, until substantial evidence is found to support the contention that the Dutch engaged in early trading on Lake Champlain sometime between 1612 and 1614, it appears the lake received little European attention until the 1660's when Iroquois attacks against Canada threatened to destroy the French colony. It was then France finally sent professional soldiers to carry the war to the Iroquois villages in the Mohawk Valley. The 1665-66 campaigns of the Carignan-Salières Regiment resulted in the construction of a chain of small forts, including Chambly on the Richelieu and Fort Ste. Anne, the first fort directly on the shores of Lake Champlain.

Ste. Anne pushed the southern frontier of the colony farther away from Montréal, but the tiny outpost was ineffective because of its island location. The new forts were not designed to protect the colony, only to serve as supply depots during the campaigns. It was too easy for the Iroquois raiding parties to bypass them and attack the French settlements. Once a peace treaty was signed with the Iroquois, the French quickly decided to abandon Fort Ste. Anne, thereby eliminating the considerable problem of resupplying it. Fort St. Jean, an intermediary fort built on the Richelieu between Ste. Anne and Chambly, was also abandoned. Chambly became the most important post on the southern frontier, and some settlement gradually increased around it and along the Richelieu, but it was sparse beyond this. Any serious thought of pushing settlement farther south was given up in the era of new-found peace.



Clinton County Historical Museum

1744 French map of the
Richelieu River and Lake Champlain

In 1684 the second French-Iroquois war began, and the remaining forts were totally inadequate to stop the Iroquois raids. By the late 1680's the Iroquois War had evolved into the North American phase of a conflict against the English, the War of the League

of Augsburg (1689-1697), the first of four long wars for North America. This once again turned the Champlain-Richelieu waterway into an invasion route for both raiding parties and small armies. The weakness of the remaining forts hampered French operations. Cyrille Gelin as again writes, "These forts were intended to support one another, and their absence greatly weakened New France's offensive strategy or at least made it more risky." War with the English prevented any thought of settling the Champlain Valley.

Nearly half a century of peace began in 1713 with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, ending the second English war (War of the Spanish Succession, 1701-1713), after which both European nations began jockeying for position in anticipation of the next conflict. In 1726 the English established a post at Oswego on the southern shore of Lake Ontario. The French protested its existence by claiming the land was theirs. Oswego threatened the French fur trade which already suffered from revenue lost to the English at Albany. The French feared the English would move to establish a similar post on Lake Champlain. Prompted in this manner, it was finally time for more serious French attention to the Champlain Valley. Yet, when it came at last, French effort to secure the lake was ineffectual.

A windmill had been built by Sieur François Foucault north of Point au Fer, and seigniories had been granted along both shores of Lake Champlain, but the entire area still remained largely unsettled. Although located south of Split Rock, the boundary between Canada and the English provinces since 1713, the French established a small stockaded fort in 1730 on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain at Pointe à la Chevelure. The lake narrows to river-width at this point, called Chimney Point by the English, making it an ideal location for stopping an English army advancing northward against Canada. For reasons unknown, the French moved to the west shore in 1731 and began building a much stronger fortification, later named St. Frédéric. From the beginning the French ministers, Hoquart and Beauharnois, planned to establish a large settlement to solidify their hold on the lake.

The move to the west shore actually negated the new fort's ability to guard the Crown Point Strait because of two major defects: St. Frédéric was built directly on the shore but was commanded by nearby high ground, and its cannon were prevented from controlling the narrow waterway because of a projection of land blocking the fort's view and field of fire to the south. In an attempt to alleviate this latter deficiency, a windmill armed with several pierriers (small swivel cannon) was located on this point in 1737. Other outworks were also built on the high ground around the fort.

To make things worse, the English openly knew of the fort's weaknesses and planned to make it one of their primary objectives.

Several eyewitness descriptions provide definitive proof of the fort's condition: "Fort St. Frederic is threatening to fall on all sides, in consequence of the walls being to [sic] weak to support the terraces. It could be located with more advantage near Carillon." "It is badly located, there being several heights which command it. Within musket range on these heights they have built a redoubt and defensive works of horizontal timbers, works badly made and more harmful than useful...." "The fort ought to have been built on the spot where the mill stands, and all those who come to see it, are immediately struck with the absurdity of its location. If it had been erected in the place of the mill, it would have commanded the river [Lake Champlain]."

When the long interlude of peace ended and open hostilities resumed in 1744, Fort St. Frédéric was not only weak and vulnerable, but still largely unsettled. The grand plans of the ministers had come to nought as a mere handful of settlers had been coaxed into locating on the exposed frontier. John H. G. Pell has disproved all theories that a substantial settlement grew up around St. Frédéric: "1741 marked a decade of formal military occupation of the Crown Point peninsula....we have in that ten-year period, seven French baptisms and eight French burials. There were also three marriages....we have four families noted at St. Frederic in the 1731-1741 period....we have to conclude that there was no civilian settlement at St. Frederic during the first ten years of its existence.

[By 1744] 21 inhabitants have settled at Fort St. Frederic....That the French regime hoped to expand it [St. Frédéric] to a civilian settlement is obvious. That they were unsuccessful is equally obvious.”

Luckily for Canada, the English proved no better at organizing a land invasion during the War of the Austrian Succession (1744-1748) than they had during the first two conflicts, and St. Frédéric survived without any major threat.

The brief interlude between the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War (the American theater encompassed 1754-1763) brought increased friction as France ventured into the Ohio Valley in direct competition with English traders. As both sides prepared for what turned into the final struggle for North America, France had done nothing further to ensure its tenuous hold on the Champlain Valley. With Fort St. Frédéric literally falling down and indefensible against anything other than a raiding party, something had to be done to stave off the inevitable English offensive which would place Montréal and the entire St. Lawrence valley at risk if St. Frédéric and the Richelieu Valley forts fell.

Hostilities commenced in Pennsylvania in 1754, and the following year both countries sent large professional armies to North America for the first time. Fort St. Frédéric was one of four major objectives of the English campaign of 1755. William Johnson led a force of provincials that advanced as far as the southern shore of Lac du St. Sacrement. Baron Dieskau's French, Canadian, and Indian forces advanced south from St. Frédéric and engaged Johnson in the Battle of Lake George. Even though the English were victorious, they built Fort William Henry on the south shore of Lake George instead of advancing against their objective. Consequently, the French were able to establish themselves at Ticonderoga, resulting in five years of guerrilla warfare in the Champlain Valley. The French began building Fort Carillon at Ticonderoga as a replacement for St. Frédéric. Although the site was highly defensible, they made the same mistake as at Crown Point and chose a point of land commanded by high ground.

While much stronger than St. Frédéric, Fort

Carillon contained many defects which made its defense no better than the fort it was designed to replace: “The ramparts are but thirteen or fourteen feet wide, and the platforms consequently so short....The roof overtops entirely the parapet....On two fronts... a half moon (ravelin) has been constructed so high that it entirely covers the embrasures of the curtains (main walls)....” “He [Michel Chartier de Lotbinière, engineer] has built this fort of horizontal timbers in a country where stone, limestone and sand are found in abundance....”

In July 1759, faced with an overwhelming English force, the French partially blew up both Fort Carillon and Fort St. Frédéric and withdrew into Canada.

As we have seen, there were several reasons why the Champlain Valley did not receive more attention in the form of strong fortifications and large settlement. Comparatively, the Champlain Valley must have been viewed by the French as a necessary encumbrance requiring just enough effort to prevent the English from taking over Canada. Thus the French were never motivated to establish strong fortifications or substantial settlements in the Champlain Valley. They only reacted when forced into action by their enemies. Such was the case in the 1660's when Louis sent the Carignan-Salières to halt the Iroquois ravages. In the 1730's as the Richelieu region became settled, it was possible to push farther south and establish Fort St. Frédéric. However, this was only done after the English had established Oswego and were expected to locate on Lake Champlain as well. Resupply remained a problem, and in the end the Lake Champlain forts were simply too little, too late. Cyrille Gelinat estimates that strong forts would have delayed the fall of New France for only one year. With French regular troop strength never exceeding 6,600 men in all of Canada, the outcome would have been no different. Failure to establish any significant naval presence on the lake was another severe limitation of French strength in the valley.

Even modern historians are sometimes fooled by appearances of strength. What Eccles describes as a “chain of forts down Lake Champlain....” consisted of only two forts - St. Frédéric and Carillon, both little stronger than the earlier “chain” along the

Richelieu terminating in Fort Ste. Anne. By the final years of the French regime, the southern frontier was defended by weak forts and very little settlement - an open invitation to invasion.

Because of its weakness, the Champlain Valley proved to be a boon for some French and Canadian officials and merchants in an entirely unexpected way. Illegal trade flourished throughout the period even though both French and English authorities frowned on the activity. The English paid higher prices and offered far superior trade goods which attracted French fur traders and merchants as well as the Indians. The problem was so serious that as early as 1716 the French levied a 500 livres fine against anyone possessing English goods. Even the War of the Spanish Succession did not stop smuggling operations, and after its end the years following 1713 saw a significant increase. After Chambly failed as a means of controlling this illegal activity, a French detachment was sent to Lake Champlain each year. Later, St. Frédéric's garrison performed this policing action. However, St. Frédéric was no more successful than Chambly had been in stopping the activity.

It is estimated that as many as one-half of Canadian furs may have gone to Albany instead of Canada during the War of the Spanish Succession. While the majority of this trade went to Albany via Oswego and the Mohawk River, steady smuggling operations filtered through the Champlain Valley as well. Christian Indians transported furs to Albany using the Richelieu-Champlain waterway, returning to Canada with their illegal merchandise or cash. Although officially condemned, this illegal commerce was a major factor in the overall profits of the Canadian trade.

At its height in the 17th century, the fur trade, more than any other factor, dictated what posts were important, and the southern frontier was not a region rich in furs. In addition, despite the official position to the contrary, smuggling was far too important to the Canadian economy to be disrupted by a large and controlling military presence on the lake. Consequently, action was not taken until very late, only when the English left the French no other choice. And, when it finally came, this action could not

withstand English numbers. Even though the Champlain-Richelieu waterway offered easy access to Canada for the English, France quickly realized it would be impossible to maintain a long supply line for any posts established to the south. Under the circumstances, the wisest course seemed to be to keep the defense of the southern frontiers close to Montréal - at Chambly. Thus, the French were forced from Lake Champlain forever.

JAMES R. CIBORSKI served as Plattsburgh Air Force Base Historian from 1982 until 1984 and as Clinton County Historian from 1993 until 1996. He is a graduate of SUNY Plattsburgh with a B.A. in History. In 1991 he retired from the Air Force and lives with his family in Peru, New York. He is a member of the Association Board of Directors. An annotated copy of a longer version of this paper may be consulted at the Clinton County Historical Association.

Peter Saily of Plattsburgh

by Jane E. Rupp

One cannot understand the early history of Plattsburgh and Clinton County without studying the life of Peter Saily. He left his native France in 1785 to become one of the pioneers in the Platts' new settlement in the North Country, an area he believed held great promise. In so doing, he abandoned the genteel life he knew in France for the hardships of frontier life in a strange country. His abilities and background made him a leader in the new community, but the political climate in a new land that was trying to define itself placed Saily and his family in danger. His courage and sense of civic responsibility helped determine the type of community Plattsburgh became.

Saily was born Pierre Maire on April 20, 1754. His father, Frederick Maire, owned iron forges in Lorraine, a province in France; his mother, Marie Sybille Neuilly, was the daughter of a civil servant. The family was of some standing in the community. Pierre received a professional education. As a young man, he served in a corps of young soldiers that formed Louis XVI's bodyguard.

In a letter to Saily's grandson, Peter Saily Palmer, Reuben H. Walworth recounted Saily's description of a winter hunting incident in France:

The boar was in a piece of woods and the ground was covered with a considerable body of snow. The party surrounded the wood and

then advanced into it on all sides, to ferret out the ferocious animal. Mr. Saily, being by himself in a part of the woods, discovered an immensely huge boar coming directly towards him, snorting and upon the full jump and very near to him. He immediately raised his gun and discharged it at the head of the infuriated animal and then turned and ran from him at his utmost speed. Presently the boar came up behind him and, thrusting his nose between his legs, raised him from the ground, tore his pantaloons with his tusks and pitched him some distance forward into the snow, where he lay quite still, while he heard a great commotion near him; which, after a time, ceased. Then, getting up, he found he had shot the boar between the eyes, and that the commotion he had heard, while he lay concealed in the snow, was the death struggle of the expiring animal.



Courtesy of Saily Warren

Peter Saily's 1784 passport issued in the name of the King of France.

When he married Marie Louise Eleonore Caillat on December 19, 1775, Pierre Maire was a partner in his father's failing iron forge. He was also serving as deputy of subsidies (a position related to taxes) in Larzicourt, his wife's home town. Responsibility for payment of heavy debts incurred by the failed iron business fell upon Pierre.

The burden of these debts led Saily to seek a new life for himself and his family in America. In 1784, he visited the United States to learn what opportunities were available. He arrived at Philadelphia on May 11 with the idea of establishing himself in the iron business. He visited iron works at Newark and then traveled through New York.

At this time, lands on the frontier were opening to settlement, and entrepreneurs like William Gilliland and the Platts purchased large tracts of land which they intended to subdivide and sell or lease to potential settlers.

Saily journeyed to Albany, the outpost for two main areas of settlement then opening in the state, the Mohawk Valley and the west shore of Lake Champlain. He explored the Mohawk Valley and would have purchased land there, but was unable to obtain satisfactory terms. Back in Albany, he met William Gilliland and traveled north with him to view lands Gilliland was offering for sale. Saily's journal relates his impressions of the land and people. He took note of the virgin forests and abundant fish and game. Hills and mountains suggested the presence of mineral resources. He noted potential mill sites along streams entering the lakes. Waterways also provided a means to float logs and transport goods to market. As he reached the areas of Willsborough (along the Boquet River), Janesborough (at the mouth of the Salmon River), and Cumberland Head, he observed what he believed were prime lands for cultivation of wheat.

Even though business prospects were uppermost in his mind, Saily did not fail to appreciate the natural beauty of the region:

In general I have never in my life seen anything which approaches in beauty the bor-

ders of Lake Champlain, although they are uninhabited. On the east side of the lake there is a very fine plain, ten leagues in width. The lake is as many miles wide at some places

and sometimes a great deal less. We can see for fifteen leagues along the length of the lake. If this section is ever inhabited, it will be the finest in the world. The best lands are sold from fifteen to eighteen francs per acre. I would not hesitate to purchase if I was not afraid that in the first war with the English the inhabitants of Lake Champlain would be their first victims.



Courtesy of Saily Warren

Marianne Adelaide Grellier, second wife of Peter Saily.

Saily overcame his misgivings and the following year returned to the Champlain Valley with his wife and three of their four children. A school friend and companion of Madame Maire, Marianne Adelaide Grellier, accompanied the family to the New World. The youngest child, Emilia, remained in France with relatives. She eventually was imprisoned in the Bastille by the Revolutionary government and did not join her family in the United States until she was about twenty years old.

Saily arrived in Plattsburgh in 1785. He had decided to forego his original plan to establish an iron business and, instead, became a fur trader as shown in a letter to a M. Audibert, merchant of L'Orient, France, in June 1785. Saily believed his new home to be:

a charming country, which offers the double advantage of a cash trade for merchandise with Canada and of collecting furs. I hope this location will place me in a position to transact matters of consequence with you. ...

I shall make each year two voyages to New York, one in September and the other in April, to receive the merchandise which shall arrive for me from Europe, and to make my returns, of which peltries will form the principal part.

He purchased 100 acres of land on Cumberland Head from Zephaniah Platt and spent the winter of 1785-86 there while his family remained in Albany. The following spring, the entire household journeyed to Skenesborough (now Whitehall), where they boarded the boat that carried them to their new home.

Sailly suffered a great personal loss soon after the family arrived at Cumberland Head. On December 23, 1786, Marie, his wife, died. Hers was the first death among the settlers of the Town of Plattsburgh. On June 8, 1789, Peter married Marianne Grellier, the friend who had accompanied the family to Plattsburgh. This is believed to have been the first wedding to take place in the town. He and Marianne had three children together.

Sailly soon recognized that to increase his business he would need to relocate from Cumberland Head to the growing village along the Saranac River. For several years Sailly and his family lived at the mouth of the Saranac, on the south bank, in a house he had bought from Jacob Ferris. About 1795, Sailly built a house, store-house, and ashery on the north bank of the river, on land he had purchased from Charles Platt. Although the original buildings no longer exist, Sailly's descendants have lived on the site ever since.

Peter Sailly prospered. He produced potash and dealt in timber, furs, and other goods. He established stores at Grand Isle and Missiquoi Bay, and, eventually, at Champlain (this store in partnership

with his son, Charles).

George S. Bixby in *Peter Sailly (1754-1826): A Pioneer of the Champlain Valley* compares Sailly's career with that of the well-known trader, John Jacob Astor:



Courtesy of Sailly Warren

Peter Sailly c. 1806 by Charles B.J.F. de Saint-Memin.

At Plattsburg the two men had personal and business relations, developing mutual respect and esteem. Astor frequently came to Plattsburg and stayed at Sailly's house and, it is related, would spend the night sleeping in front of Sailly's big open fire in the kitchen. ... The Indians with whom Astor traded ... also slept in the kitchen before the fire.

Peter Sailly became active in community affairs. Like most other Plattsburgh leaders, he was a Jeffersonian Republican.

He was an Associate Justice of the first Court of Session in Clinton County that convened in October 1788. Other local offices held by Sailly included Overseer of the Poor, Commissioner of Highways, School Commissioner, and Town Supervisor. He was elected to the State Legislature, serving in the 26th session of that body, held in 1803.

On April 2, 1804, he was appointed First Judge of the Clinton County Court of Common Pleas, but a memorandum written by Sailly to his children listing the various public offices he held states that he declined the judgeship. Sailly served New York's 11th District (Clinton, Essex, and Saratoga Counties) in the U. S. House of Representatives from 1805 to 1807.

Sailly's correspondence with his friend, Judge William Bailey, a Federalist, suggests an unwillingness on Sailly's part to acquiesce blindly to the dictates of local party leaders and a desire to work with Federalists when he felt it was appropriate. An

1802 letter states:

The news I brought of the reappointment of Mr. Graves was as pleasing to him and friends as it was disappointing to some of my political brothers who have received me with a frigid countenance, suspecting that I had said some good words in favour of Mr. Graves, perhaps with an intent to shew my gratitude to the federalists for a very flattering offer they had made me, of which I believe they have some knowledge.

Another letter to Bailey, written in 1806, suggests that Saily's influence had created resentment among members of his own party. He refused nomination for a second House term, opting instead to return to private life in Plattsburgh.

As Saily prospered by trading with Canada, Great Britain (which controlled Canada) and the United States became embroiled in disputes that culminated in the War of 1812. In response to British impressment of American sailors and other violations of American neutrality on the seas, Congress passed the Embargo Act in 1807 to use economic pressure to end the offensive British practices.

In the Champlain Valley, where economic well-being was dependent upon trade with Canada, and, by extension, Great Britain, the Embargo Act was honored mainly in the breach. Locally, there had been

no British harassment of American trade or traders.

Allan Everest remarks that, therefore, residents of the Champlain Valley "saw no reason to obey either the embargo or subsequent navigation laws designed to stop all commerce with the

British, whether in Canada or elsewhere." Trade with Canada actually increased — substantially — in the years following enactment of the

embargo. Customs Collector Melancton L. Woolsey, charged with enforcing the embargo, became the target of kidnappers. At President Jefferson's insistence, New York Governor Tompkins dispatched the militia under Benjamin Mooers to protect the Collector and help enforce the embargo.

In February, 1809, President Jefferson appointed Peter Saily to replace Woolsey as Customs Collector for the Champlain District, which included all the shores and waters of Lake Champlain and the rivers flowing into the lake from New York. Peter Saily Palmer states the appointment was accepted reluctantly because "armed opposition to the laws was hinted at; and in some quarters leading federalists openly alluded to secession." Saily established his main inspection station at Rouses Point and appointed twenty-two field inspectors.

Along the lake, Saily's efforts to curtail smuggling met with a measure of success due to the diligence of his inspectors and the occasional support of U. S. troops stationed in the area. In Franklin County, however, several factors combined to make enforcement of the embargo almost impossible. There were no roads through the forests that led to Lake Champlain, which was the only viable trade route to New York. Strict enforcement of the non-intercourse laws would mean that Franklin County residents would be virtually cut off from the world. This, of course, created a dangerous situation for Saily's field inspectors. The local militia could not be relied upon for support and no federal troops were stationed nearby. Also, there was the additional complication of dealing with the St. Regis Indians, who considered the embargo to be an infringement on their rights. On the eastern shore of Lake Champlain, lax enforcement by collectors in Vermont enabled smugglers to bypass New York ports.

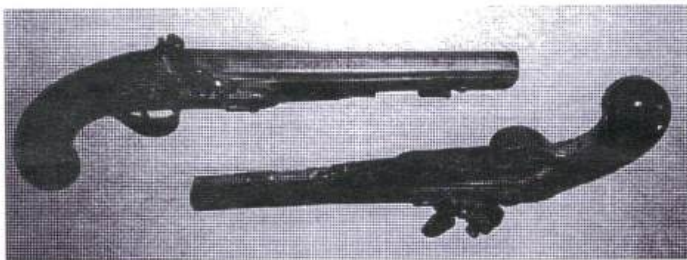
Recognizing that he had put himself and his family in danger by accepting this appointment, Saily kept loaded pistols nearby at all times. In January 1812, intruders broke into Saily's home at night in an apparent attempt to retake goods that Saily had seized and stored there. Saily, awakened by the noise, met the intruders with a pistol in each hand. He returned the intruders' fire, wounding two. Blood



Courtesy of Saily Warren

Belt presented by Indians to Peter Saily.

stains in the snow enabled authorities to trace the path of the intruders to another house in the village. One eventually escaped to Canada; Saily petitioned for his extradition, apparently without success. Although other threats were made against Saily, this was the only incident that resulted in violence.



Courtesy of Saily Warren

Peter Saily's pistols.

The United States declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812. A number of U.S. merchants had shipments of goods that were still in Canada at the outbreak of the war. Saily aided those merchants who voluntarily placed their goods under his control in bringing their merchandise into the country. Some individuals, however, tried to smuggle their goods into the U.S., and Saily instructed his inspectors to seize all smuggled property.

Saily's friend, John Jacob Astor, was one of those merchants who had property in Canada at the start of the war. Astor had loaned money to the U.S. Treasury. Upon instructions from Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin, Saily allowed Astor to import his furs from Canada. As he had done with other merchants, Saily required Astor to surrender the furs at the border. The goods were then placed in government storage in New York where the owner could claim them.

According to Bixby, Astor made a legal, above-board payment of \$500 to Saily to cover any claims that Saily might have against this and two subsequent shipments of furs from Canada. In 1816, a "malevolent steamboat man" seeking to have Saily removed from office used this payment as evidence against Saily.

In addition to his position as Controller of Customs, Saily also served as supply agent for U.S. troops stationed in Clinton County. Beginning in

1808, he was the local agent for Elbert Anderson, the government contractor for the region. Saily apparently found the responsibilities of this office to be quite demanding, as he dealt daily with government and military regulations and delays. In spring, 1813, he became frustrated with what he perceived to be conflicting directives from Anderson and the Secretary of War regarding payments for supplies for troops and Indians stationed at French Mills. On June 20, 1813, Saily ended his work as Anderson's assistant and became temporary Keeper of Public Stores in Plattsburgh. He received a permanent appointment to that position in December, 1813.

From the onset of war, Saily repeatedly appealed for military protection for the North Country. He wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury in July, 1812:

The British brig of war, the Prince Edward, is repairing at St. Johns. We have no force on this lake, nor a battery. The gun boats are out of repair. I am informed by a friend at Washington, that the invasion of Canada is not contemplated to take place very soon. We must, therefore, be here on the defensive. But the British have begun hostilities by taking our fort at Michilimackinac. They may continue where there is a prospect of success. I think the regular troops ought to be near the frontiers, instead of being placed at Albany. Our inhabitants are alarmed, and are moving off. There is not a single stand of arms in Vermont, nor a single man ordered to the protection of our frontier.

By June 1813 troops that had been stationed in Plattsburgh had been sent west. Saily, as Keeper of Public Stores (including military supplies), was in regular contact with the Army's Quartermaster General. He expressed his outrage at the city's vulnerability in a letter dated June 11:

A British flag of truce is said to have gone to Burlington by water.... They had reached Cumberland Head before they were discovered.... The British have therefore ascertained

the fact that there is not a picket guard, nor a single watch boat on the lake, to give notice of their arrival, nor is there a single gun properly placed to give the alarm in case of invasion. Every part of the lake may be sacked at the pleasure of the enemy, without, under the present state of things, the possibility of previous notice. If this is warlike, or military like, or General like conduct, I know nothing about it, but I am apt to think it a highly censurable neglect.

Sailly's fears were justified. Less than two months after this letter was written British troops under Lieutenant Colonel John Murray raided Plattsburgh, destroying the blockhouse, hospital, arsenal, armory, and Pike's Cantonment. The troops also plundered several private homes, including Sailly's. In a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury dated August 4, Sailly again expresses disbelief at the army's lack of action during the raid:

The reason why the property in my house, public and private, was not removed, is that I could not persuade myself that the American force, stationed at Burlington, of 4000 effective men, within twenty miles of this place, could be suffered to remain idle spectators of the destruction of the public property, and of this village, by comparatively a very small British force. Messengers were repeatedly sent to General Hampton, with a request that one regiment might be sent here, but to no effect. When all hope of succor had fled, it was too late to remove all, though the greatest part was secured. It seems that the policy acted upon in this quarter is that the people must defend themselves, or, if not able to do it effectually, must submit to the enemy.

Sailly was in an excellent position to observe British military activities during the war. He relayed this information to American naval and land commanders. In a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury dated December 21, 1813, Sailly warned:

"Unless therefore a great increase of our naval force on this lake takes place this winter, the British will blow us all out of the water in April next."

Meanwhile, the smuggling of supplies to the enemy continued. Sailly noted that sleigh shipments continued to make their way from Lake Magog to Lake Champlain and then to Canada. Smugglers found new ways to circumvent the law, as evidenced by the activities of John Banker, which Sailly reported to the Secretary of the Treasury:

I have had the honor to inform you ... that John Banker had a commission for privateering on this lake. He has brought in a boat with a parcel of goods owned by an American citizen, which he took without doubt with the owner's consent, at or near the boundary line. He landed at three different places within this district, but did not report himself or his captured goods to the collector. By this new method smuggling seems in some measure to be legalized. Such sham privateers, without other defence than three men and three muskets on board, do not go near the boundary line without the permission of the British armed boats, which is easily obtained by the American smugglers. This singular privateer fired lately a musket ball into a ferry boat to bring it to, at a distance of about 60 miles south of Canada. I have thought it my duty to inform you of this scheme, the deepest for smuggling that has ever been witnessed on this lake.

Sailly's report put an end to this type of smuggling on Lake Champlain.

Sir George Prevost, Governor General of Canada, was ordered to launch an offensive campaign against the U.S. before the end of 1814. Because of continued opposition to the war in Vermont and its continuing to be a major source of supplies for the British, he chose to move down the western shore of Lake Champlain. Some sixteen thousand troops, who had served with Wellington against Napoleon Bonaparte, arrived in Canada to take part in the offensive.

In a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury dated July 13, Saily reported on the massive buildup of British troops and suggested that they would most likely attack Plattsburgh, which at the time was defended by only five thousand regulars. Apparently, his letter had little effect on military decision-making, as four thousand U.S. troops were ordered to leave Plattsburgh just as the British began marching south in late August. Upon learning of the British advance, Peter Saily sent his family to Hampton, in Washington County, for safety. He remained in Plattsburgh tending the public stores until the British were about two miles from the village. Along with other civilians, Saily found refuge at the Quaker Union in the Town of Peru until the outcome of the battle was known.

Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough's victory over the British fleet in Plattsburgh Bay on September 11 caused Prevost to order his troops to return to Canada. Upon his return to Plattsburgh, Saily inventoried the supplies that had been entrusted to his care. In October, he reported to General Alexander Macomb "the distressing information ... that the supply of whiskey would not last more than thirty-five days."

Following the Battle of Plattsburgh smuggling of goods into Canada from the North Country increased. Danger of physical harm combined with uncertainties regarding the extent of inspectors' authority made it difficult for Saily to retain qualified customs inspectors during the latter days of the war. Soon after the war officially ended, many of the wartime restrictions on trade with Canada were lifted, but duties remained high enough to encourage smuggling. Saily continued his strict enforcement of the laws, which led to a request that the Whitehall area be taken from the District of Champlain. This request, which was denied, was instigated by steamboat owners who chafed under the restrictions imposed on their trade.

In 1815, Saily had recommended that Franklin County be transferred from his district to the jurisdiction of the Oswegatchie District. In 1816, citizens in Ogdensburg petitioned for this change, which was granted. By this time, however, Saily objected because of the great amount of smuggling activity being carried on through the St. Regis

Reservation.

The summer of 1816 was unusually cold, with snow flying in Plattsburgh and severe snowstorms in the region in early June. The cold weather was followed by a severe drought. Crops failed. As winter approached, residents had no alternative than to purchase grain from Canada. Saily allowed grain to enter the country duty-free and then reported his actions to Washington, arguing that his decision was necessary because "money is scarcer here than it has been since twenty five years, and a large portion of the inhabitants are much distressed for the want of bread, whilst the poorer and laboring class are absolutely destitute of the means of obtaining it, at the high price it sells for." His argument fell upon deaf ears; the Secretary of the Treasury's response ordered Saily to collect the duty on imported grain.

In March, 1817, a steamboat company was able to obtain passage of an act that allowed boats to submit to inspections in either the District of Champlain or the District of Vermont, at the discretion of the master. Vermont customs officers had continued their less strict enforcement of trade laws. As a result of the new law, virtually every ship entering the U.S. on Lake Champlain passed through the Vermont District, causing the Champlain District's revenues to plummet. Vermont's lax enforcement practices led to increased fraud. In 1819, the Secretary of the Treasury wrote to Saily urging him to remain vigilant to detect such fraud. Saily wrote to, and later met with, James Fisk, the newly-appointed Collector at Vermont, who proposed new, uniform regulations for both districts to correct the problem.

Saily was reappointed Collector of Customs in 1821 and 1825. In June, 1825, he wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury regarding the decrease in revenues collected in the Champlain District during the previous eight months. He attributed this to increases in duties and "the facility of bringing merchandise from New York, by the Champlain Canal." The result was a southward shift in the North Country's trading orientation. Saily, therefore, reduced the number of inspectors in his district. In 1826, at the age of seventy-two, Saily was still faithfully executing his duties as Collector of

Customs. His health was failing, but he was able to work until the day before his death.

In addition to being a conscientious public servant, Peter Saily was a public-spirited citizen who was involved in projects to enhance the quality of life in Plattsburgh. Although reared a Catholic, Saily never was actively involved in any church. Nevertheless, he contributed to construction of the Presbyterian Church in Plattsburgh and owned a pew there. In 1797, he participated in the formation of a library association. He was one of the many community leaders who established the Plattsburgh Academy in 1811. That same year, Saily and several other Jeffersonian Republicans were distressed by the Federalist leanings of the local newspaper. They established the *Plattsburgh Republican* to present their political views.

Saily's activities contributed to Plattsburgh's early reputation as a cultural oasis on the frontier. Bixby quotes the description of Plattsburgh in 1792 contained in Winterbotham's *America*: "Polite circles may here be found and the genteel traveler be entertained with the luxuries of a seaport, a tune on the harpsicord and a philosophical conversation."

The 1800 census indicates that Saily owned three of the fifty-eight slaves then residing in Clinton County. In 1808, he manumitted a female slave named Dean and her three children. He opposed extending slavery into newly-created territories and states. In an 1820 letter to Representative Ezra C. Gross, Saily referred to the recently-enacted Missouri Compromise, writing, "although slavery is to be admitted into that new state contrary to and in contempt of every republican principle, yet we have the satisfaction to know that yourself and almost every representative of the State have done their duty in opposing that wicked measure."

In 1825, a controversial murder trial rocked the village of Plattsburgh. Peggy Facto, who had confessed to murdering her baby, was sentenced to be hanged for her crime. The man named as her accomplice was acquitted. A number of local citizens, including Benjamin Mooers, who was Facto's former employer, and Peter Saily, petitioned Governor DeWitt Clinton for a pardon. Clinton wrote to Saily,

who had been a long-time Clinton supporter, to explain his decision to deny this request.

Peter Saily died at home on March 16, 1826. His epitaph in the Plattsburgh Riverside Cemetery reads:

In
Memory of
Peter Saily, Esqr.,
who died
on the 16th day of March,
1826,
aged LXXII years.
A native of Lorraine in France,
he adopted America as his country
in 1785.
The strength of his intellect, the
benevolence of his heart and the
spotless integrity of his life made
him esteemed as a citizen, respected
in various public offices and
beloved as a friend and relative.



Courtesy of Saily Warren

Front and back of an embroidered birchbark
wallet given to Peter Saily by Indians.

JANE E. RUPP, Director/Curator of our Association, holds a B.S. in Education from Ohio State University and an M.A. in History from Wright State University. An annotated copy of a longer version of this paper may be consulted at the Clinton County Historical Association.

William Swetland (1782-1864)

As Revealed by his Papers

by Michael S. Rubin

William Swetland spent the last thirty-five years of his life in the Kent-Delord House at 17 Cumberland Avenue in Plattsburgh, New York. When he died on New Year's Day, 1864, he was known to all who had lived and worked with him as "The Great Lawyer of Northern New York."

The house, which overlooks the Saranac River emptying into Lake Champlain, had been the home of Henry Delord, a native of France and prominent Plattsburgh merchant during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. During the War of 1812, Delord had sold a large quantity of goods to soldiers on credit. Because many soldiers went unpaid, after the war he found himself in debt. Henry Delord died in 1825 leaving his widow burdened with these debts. It is likely the debts played a major role in her decision to remarry in 1829. Her second husband was William Swetland, Esq., a widower with two young daughters. His papers, now in the Kent-Delord House Museum, reveal the complex life of an interesting personality, important in the history of Plattsburgh.

William Swetland had been born April 19, 1782, in Salisbury, a town in the northwest corner of Connecticut, the only child of Aaron and Mary (Chipman) Swetland. His mother died when he was



Courtesy of Clinton Lodge No. 155 F. & A. M., Plattsburgh, New York

Photograph of a portrait of William Swetland, present whereabouts of portrait unknown.

but five years old. Soon after his mother's death, his father remarried Lois Allen and with her produced a number of other children: Mary, Walton, Milton, Harmon, and Julia. All his life, Swetland referred to his half-siblings as his brothers and sisters. He also seems to have had positive feelings for his stepmother. In 1797 Aaron Swetland moved his growing family from Salisbury to Granville, New York.

William Swetland was a self-made man. He worked hard as a teacher and farm hand to earn enough money to attend Middlebury College. He began his studies at Middlebury in 1804. He took an interest in literature, a passion which held him for the rest of his life. He was both academically and socially successful. In his papers one finds a collection of invitations, the earliest to a commencement ball held at Stowell's Ball Room at 6 p.m., Wednesday, August 10, 1804; the latest in 1809, a year after his graduation.

He was called upon as an orator. Among his papers are three orations, the first an address at the Public Commencement of Middlebury College, August 19, 1807, on the question whether the Union should divide. Swetland spoke strongly from 40 pages of text to preserve the Union. December 20th the same year, at the Middlebury Court House "During the

Celebration of the Festival of St. John the Evangelist," he spoke before "The Most (Worshipful) Grand Master of the State of Vermont, and the Worshipped Master Wardens and Brethern of Union Lodge" of Masons. August 10, 1810, the day before commencement and two years after his own graduation, he addressed the Philomathesian Society of Middlebury College. He spoke on eloquence, "The praises of eloquence have been sung till the song has become familiar - the school boy can rehearse it ... It has been the constant idol of adoration by the novice in science, the poet in his moments of inspiration, the philosopher in his retirement, and the statesman at the helm of empires - But is it not matter of astonishment, indignation, and regret that what is so universally admired should be so generally neglected, so languidly and faintly pursued -..."

His papers also preserve some of his college work. Much of his writing deals with philosophy or human nature. One such exercise, dated February 26, 1808, discusses the human nature to praise mankind but to censure individual behavior. In another paper he addresses the issue of those "that do not subscribe to the Christian faith or do not believe in G-d." He suggests that even not to believe religion is no excuse for neglecting it, for religion benefits the community and therefore becomes the responsibility of all. Among his other papers focusing on religion is one on the *Martyrdom of St. Stephen*. He wrote that Stephen was hated by "certain sects of Jews," who spread lies of him and eventually captured him, but there is no evidence in Swetland's own life that he had any antisemitic feelings.

During the afternoon of his commencement, August 17, 1808, he both participated in a dialogue entitled *Votigen, or the Saxons in Britain* and delivered the Valedictory Address.

Upon graduation, Swetland returned to Granville where, during the next three years, he studied law under Zebulon R. Shepherd, after which he moved to Plattsburgh, where he was admitted to the bar in 1811. There is evidence in his papers that before this move, Swetland and Shepherd had had a dispute which caused them to part their ways.

During his years in Granville, Swetland's love

had blossomed for Henrietta Julia Kirtland, who became his first wife and the mother of his two children. She was the daughter of John and Lucy Kirtland. Her father had served in the Revolution and settled in Granville in the mid-1790s. Although unsuccessful in business, he had served as Granville's first postmaster and as its supervisor from 1806 until 1812. He also served two terms in the State Assembly and was active in school and church affairs. Kirtland's interests were clearly similar to young Swetland's.

The earliest letters from William to his "favorite girl" are dated 1805. He expressed hurt and bother if for any length of time she neglected to write to him. His letters and poems are numerous and sometimes lengthy. One poem reads:

*Ye sylvan Shades ye fair enchanting Seats
of peace and Guiltless love the soft Retreats
be all your flowery elegance display'd -
to charm with Natures pomp the virtuous Maid
let every prospect Wear a lively Grace -
clear as the blowing beauties of her face
Ye various plants your fragrant tribute bring
the painted product of the lovely spring
Ye whispering breezes and Refreshing gales
that flyt with downy Wings along the Vales
Take the Soft Music of Henrietta's Name
breathe it to every listning Grove and stream
let nature shew a pleasure unconfin'd
and speak the sence of W^s. feeling mind*

The number of letters increased as their wedding day approached. In 1811 William was seeking a new home for his life and work. In March he spent three weeks in Albany; after his return he contracted measles. Letters that month include passionate pleas begging her to write him more often. March 11th: "... I have come to a resolution to allow you but little time for any other employment than reading my letters ... and by the way you must answer them all ..." March 21st: "'One thing I know and one thing I do not know' I know that a certain practice of yours is very hostile to my wishes and happiness - But I do not know certainly but that you are perfectly justifiable ... The practice I refer to is your waiting for an answer to

every letter you write before you write another..."

In April he was still looking for a place to settle. He wrote from Wallingford, Connecticut, expressing little doubt he would succeed, but noting that the amount of success depended "a considerable degree upon the place I shall select..."

A few weeks later, on May 8th, William wrote Henrietta he had received the offer of a partnership in law from a Mr. Sperry in Plattsburgh; "It is my intention to accept it, and I am going to Plattsburgh within two or three days for that purpose, and with an expectation of remaining there." He expanded on the beauty of having a partnership and the advantages of living in Plattsburgh. He was excited the courts were all in the city which would cut down on traveling and consequently on expenses. He looked forward to returning to Granville in August to see "the only beloved object in my heart."

According to a brief notice in the *Plattsburgh Republican*, William Swetland married Henrietta Julia Kirtland in Granville on the 19th of November 1811. However, he returned to Plattsburgh without her.

May 15, 1812, he wrote to Henrietta from Plattsburgh that he was hard at work and very much exhausted from work on an important case to be presented in court the next day, "... a criminal case of no less importance to the supposed criminal than 10 years imprisonment in the state prison ..." He was not well. Headaches, fever, and fatigue for a short time had kept him from his work. He regretted he could not visit her soon in Granville, but to leave at this point would cause "injury" to the practice. "Of about 32 [cases] which were on the Calendar of the court we were concerned in 20 either for plaintiff or Defendants." On a personal note, he was very excited for his law partner, "Sperry is married!"

Five months later, November 6th, he again wrote his wife a sad letter pouring out his feelings of longing for her, of his difficult times of being in debt, and the news that he and Sperry had dissolved their partnership. "If ever husband needed the consolation of a wife I need it, if ever wife could give it you my dear can." Meanwhile, the War of 1812 had begun.

In another letter he ponders leaving Plattsburgh for good. After expressing his deep sorrow, he

explains the situation there:

... it was well ascertained that the troops in this place, intended to march for the Northward, and the general opinion was that they would attack Canada immediately ... I was firmly fully persuaded the enemy would follow them to this place. It therefore became a matter of importance for me to remain here to wait for events and if our troops should be beaten, to secure and remove our furniture and what little property we have here, before the enemy should arrive and destroy it ...

During these years Henrietta spent her time between Plattsburgh and Granville. She was a person of poor health and passed most of her days, when sick, with her parents, with whom William had a deep, loving relationship.

In September, 1812, he had written from Granville to Henrietta's brother George, who was studying law under him in Plattsburgh, that he had planned to return to Plattsburgh by steamboat, but could not bear to leave Henrietta who was still so ill. He pleaded with George, "My business is very much out of my mind, I perhaps do not recollect all that will want attention previous to my arrival ... am fearful you will not be able to support me 2 pay my debts - you must not let me become a bankrupt - if you can help it."

He had returned to Plattsburgh at the end of the month, only to find himself back in Granville in December attending to his wife. In a letter to his colleague, Reuben Walworth, in Plattsburgh he revealed his feelings for his country, "The present situation of our Country, + the bright days of glory + greatness which open for her in prospect are to me most cheering cordial ... from melancholy an otherwise weary hour." He asks Walworth (or J. Palmer, in his absence) to attend to a number of cases that he had pending in Plattsburgh. He did not enjoy asking such demanding favors, but he felt he had no choice until Henrietta made some progress. He promised to repay the otherwise uncalled for requests.

With the arrival of warm weather in the spring of 1816 came the hope that Henrietta would do better.

In his letter of April 5th, William told his father-in-law that he had been boarding at the home of Dr. Davidson for the past three weeks. He could no longer tolerate the home of J. J. Green, due mostly to "constantly fighting with the old woman."

In June, 1817, he wrote John Kirtland that Henrietta must plan on returning to Plattsburgh very soon and that he would be coming to Granville to bring her home.

September 11, 1817, William and Henrietta had their first child, a daughter, Lucy Ann Swetland.

During the second half of the summer of 1818, William Swetland and a number of colleagues took a tour of the country. Numerous lengthy letters to Henrietta in Plattsburgh describe his traveling. The first of the series is dated Philadelphia, August 18th. The letters that follow are from Washington City; Brownsville, Pennsylvania; Portsmouth (on the Ohio River); Louisville, Kentucky; and Edwardsville, Illinois. The letters end with one dated October 1st from St. Louis on the Mississippi. Toward the end of his tour, William comments increasingly of suffering from the heavy travel and how he is looking forward to returning home. He planned to arrive back in Plattsburgh in November.

This peaceful period ended three years later in tragedy. Henrietta died April 6, 1821, at the birth of their second child, a daughter named Henrietta, known to her family as Hetty. On April 20th, William wrote a detailed description of Henrietta's dying day to John and Lucy Kirtland, "My Dear Parents." He mentioned that during her pregnancy she had sensed something was not right. She had been convinced she felt different from her pregnancy with Lucy, although her spirits had been generally high. While the birth had been relatively easy, the afterbirth had not expelled properly. William had called upon the doctor, who did not think it necessary to remove the afterbirth so soon. A second doctor, Dr. Moore, was called and, though he did remove the afterbirth, it was too late. William had moved Henrietta to a cot and then to her bed. He had remained with her about twenty minutes before realizing that she was not breathing. The doctor was called and confirmed that she was dead. William closed his letter with the hope that John and Lucy

would come to visit him, for he very much needed to see them.

During the years of William's marriage with Henrietta, William's father had also experienced health problems. In May, 1813, William received a letter from his sister Mary Baker informing him that their father had been feeling very ill for some weeks. In March, 1814, his brother Walton wrote from Granville that their father had sold his farm for \$150 and was now discontent because he had no home or land to work. There was thought that their father might move west to Cincinnati, Cortland County, New York, where Mary lived and where he might be able to buy 60 to 80 acres, but Aaron Swetland was not optimistic.

In April, 1814, William wrote his stepmother about his father's coming to Plattsburgh. She replied that they had been concerned not hearing from William so long and that if he really wanted his father with him, he would have to discuss it with the whole family. "... about the time that he sold his farm here we hired Mr. Crawford to carry him to Plattsburgh; but as we could hear nothing from you, he finally gave up the idea of going." In July, 1814, Mary wrote their father was with her in a much better state of mind, having only one real concern, "... we are so far separated I shall never see William again."

Soon Aaron himself wrote that he was content, but had little hope of seeing William. He noted that of late William had not had it easy with the trials of war and the poor health of both his wife and himself. He begged William to write more often, mentioning that his sister Polly (Mary) believed he had forgotten her existence, for he never wrote her. Aaron signed the letter "your Affectionate [sic] Parent — Aaron Swetland." There are other letters in this vein until Aaron's death in March, 1819. Polly wrote that their father had done well until the very end when he had been consumed with a sudden, disabling headache. A doctor relieved him, but he seemed in a stupor. The next day the doctor diagnosed an inflammation of the brain, but his attentions had been useless. Their father "grew weaker and his breath shorten, tell [sic - until] about half past four Thursday afternoon he closed his eyes in death ..." On behalf of herself and

the rest of the family, Polly expressed a deep need for William to come out on a visit. She described that her own mother, Lois, was taking Aaron's death badly. "... you do not know what a pleasure it is to receive letters from you ...," but his own cares prevented William from taking the journey.

Swetland had always been active in community affairs. A clipping from the *Plattsburgh Republican* for December 11, 1812, announced an upcoming meeting of the Plattsburgh Academy proprietors with Benjamin Mooers, president, and William Swetland, secretary, a position he held for many years. The *Plattsburgh Republican* for March 12, 1813, noted William Swetland as one of two Masters of Chancery in the selection of the new Clinton County General Pleas Commission. The paper reported May 7, 1813, that "William Swetland and Ezekiel Lockwood, have been appointed Justices of the Peace for the county of Clinton." July 14th he was also mentioned as a commissioner of the Plattsburgh schools working on a committee to divide Plattsburgh into school districts. In late July, Justice Swetland, together with other judges - including Henry Delord - mandated that any property which any person might possess, which does not belong to them but came into their hands as a result of the British forces plundering the city, must immediately report and return said property to a Justice or risk legal consequences.

The *Plattsburgh Republican* reported October 1, 1814, a dinner was held in honor of the defeat of the British at Plattsburgh. William Swetland, a member of one of the organizing committees, offered a toast: "Plattsburgh Winter Quarters - Much too hot for Sir George [Prevost, the defeated British commander], which put him to the disagreeable necessity of retiring, somewhat in haste, to a colder climate," a rare example of Swetland's humor.

On March 2, 1816, the paper recorded the first of several meetings to create the Clinton County Bible Society, a major interest in the life of William Swetland. Judge Pliny Moore was appointed chairman, and William served as secretary. At the following meeting, March 5th, he was elected Recording and Corresponding Secretary. One of the last clippings from this period, dated March 29, 1817, reports

the election of Swetland as a commissioner of the common schools, a town office.

Despite his grief over the death of his wife, Swetland continued his active role in his new community. The Certificate of Organization for Trinity Episcopal Church in Plattsburgh, dated September 10, 1821, names Swetland among the first eight vestrymen, an office he held for many years despite the fact he did not declare his faith until 1840. Oddly, during the 1820s he also served on the board of the Presbyterian Church where the records note on the 19th day of April 1830 there would be an election to fill seats vacated by a number of men, including William Swetland. He was once again elected a vestryman at Trinity Church in 1831.

During the 1820s Swetland entered into a new partnership, this time with William F. Haile. The earliest document to mention the partnership is dated August 27, 1825, when Swetland promised to pay Haile \$40 from a client named Moore. The last document concerning the partnership is dated February 6, 1829.

After severing his connection with William Haile, Swetland entered three more partnerships, each matched with two documents among his papers, first a contract creating the partnership, then a settlement at its dissolution. Swetland began his next, and longest, partnership November 5, 1832. His new partner was George M. Beckwith from Lyme, Connecticut, twenty-three years younger than Swetland. Their office was located in a brick building owned by Mary B. Carter on Bridge Street where, during the 1840s, '50s, and '60s, he subleased space to other tenants. This partnership was dissolved July 11, 1846, by mutual agreement. Swetland retained the use of their office and immediately created a new firm with Lafayette H. Nutting. Nutting was to manage the affairs of the office. Four years later they dissolved their connection, and Swetland practiced alone for the next two years. His final partnership was with Henry C. Foote, a brief alliance during which Foote took most of the responsibilities "to do the office + other business ... except so much as William Swetland, may choose to do -." Two years later, in 1854, the partners separated, essentially the

conclusion of William's long career in the practice of law. The memorial published at his death by his colleagues states he practiced through 1857, but his papers after 1854 are very few. As he had anticipated in 1811, his career had been a success. At his death, his memorial honored him with Peter S. Palmer's phrase, "The Great Lawyer of Northern New York." Lemuel Stetson described him:

... a very superior office lawyer as well as an able and accomplished advocate. No detail was too much for him, and he executed everything with remarkable precision and accuracy. His legal reading was profound. As an office lawyer (if there was any difference) he excelled in the department of special pleading ... In open court he was great in the examination of a witness; and if he suspected prevarication he placed his eye upon the witness and never withdrew it till the witness proved his innocence or stood exposed.

William and Henrietta had lived on Oak Street. Among his papers are several documents concerning an Oak Street residence which as late as May 1, 1845, he leased to Elijah Chamberlin. The modest home was on the southern end and the last dwelling on the west side between Couch and Broad Streets. It was here William's wife died.

For many of his early years in Plattsburgh, Swetland had served on a number of boards and committees with Henry Delord. When Delord died in 1825, he left his widow Elizabeth to face the financial hardships of his unfortunate business affairs together with the care of their only child, a young daughter, Frances Henrietta, who was a few years

older than William's elder daughter, Lucy. William and Betsey had undoubtedly become friends over the years. Given their circumstances, it is no surprise that on June 5, 1829, they signed a prenuptial agreement

and were married the next day, a marriage of convenience during which there is ample evidence in the Swetland papers that the two partners came to love one another. It was agreed that William Swetland would gain use of Elizabeth's property until his death when it would pass to her daughter. Elizabeth would be entitled to one-third of his estate, and on her death his remaining property would go to his heirs. The couple were married by the Reverend Moses Chase of the Presbyterian Church and took up residence in the Delord house.

Elizabeth was a devoted member of the Presbyterian Church. She desperately wanted William to declare his faith to save his soul, a declaration he

was reluctant to make. Yet his interest in the affairs of the Episcopal church resumed. In 1832, due to a conflict between Elizabeth and the Reverend Chase and in order to encourage William to profess himself a church member, Elizabeth left the Presbyterian Church. She felt William would be more comfortable in the Episcopal Church and she should be with him. He had returned to Trinity Church in 1830. He served as a vestryman uninterruptedly from 1831 until 1841 and variously until 1853. It was not until 1840, however, that his name appears as a communicant. Soon after, Elizabeth wrote a letter to her granddaughter rejoicing that William had finally taken this action. In August, 1840, he was elected to serve as the first president of the newly-forming Clinton County Bible Society with a mission to spread the "word of life" throughout the community. On March 30, 1842, Swetland was elected a warden of Trinity



Clinton County Historical Museum

Elizabeth (Ketchum) (Delord) Swetland
(1784-1870) in the conservatory of the
Kent-Delord House, Plattsburgh, New York.

Church together with F. L. C. Saily. Once returned to the fold, he was active on many committees, worked on projects to enlarge the church, and had influence each time a new rector was chosen. From time to time he hosted committee meetings in his office. On several occasions he represented the church at annual Diocesan conventions. Usually he was chosen by election.

William's older daughter, Lucy, entered a new, private school in March 1828. Several months later, she was joined there by her sister Hetty. In its third year, the school was held at the "home of William Swetland." At that time, Elizabeth's daughter Frances attended as well.

William's marriage to Elizabeth was filled with both good and bad times. In March 1834 Elizabeth's daughter Frances Henrietta gave birth to a daughter of her own, Frances Delord Webb. Tragically, Frances Henrietta died three weeks later of childbed fever. Before her death, Frances Henrietta agreed with her husband, Henry Webb, and her mother that should she die, the baby should go to Plattsburgh. When the time came, William expressed that the decision was his wife's and he would not interfere or object. Little Frances remained with the Swetlands for four years, after which time, despite Elizabeth's objections, she was moved to Connecticut to be raised by Henry Webb's sisters.

During the 1830's Elizabeth occasionally traveled to Albany or Connecticut to visit little Frances, Henry, and the Webbs. She would always write back to William describing the visit. He stayed at home to tend to his work and, as implied in one letter of October 11, 1835, to tend the farm as well.

During little Frances's stay in Plattsburgh, she had developed a very close relationship with her grandmother and William. His first letter to her in Connecticut is dated May 25, 1841. He reveals his pleasure that she is learning to read and that he can now write to her; he announces he is sending her small gifts which he hopes she enjoys receiving from him. Later, William wrote to Frances that she is young and inexperienced. He invited her to take advantage of her life and grow up well. She continued to spend her summers in Plattsburgh. Little Frances also

became close to William's daughters, especially Hetty, inviting her to Hartford in 1848 to meet her family.

William's daughter, Lucy Ann, had rather hastily married John Ketchum in January, 1836. By January, 1837, she was expecting a child.

Hetty never married and spent much of the time either ill or in an unhappy state of mind. Only once, in 1853, was it ever even suggested that Hetty might one day find a family of her own. A gentleman guest, visiting the house to admire a portrait of William, became the focus of Hetty's attention. Elizabeth writes that she thinks the couple a good match, but nothing ever came of it.

Meanwhile, William's own health began to deteriorate. In the early 1840s he took a trip to Quogue, Long Island, and suffered an attack of some sort in Brooklyn while stopping there to visit his daughter Lucy. Even earlier William's declining health had been one reason Henry Webb cited for removing little Frances to Connecticut. William had denied it was a trouble to him, and there had been frequent letters discussing his condition. During the 1840s William suffered several of these attacks, one, in 1841, while he and Elizabeth were on a trip to Salisbury to visit some of Elizabeth's family and allow William to visit his mother's grave and the sites of his youth.

In Elizabeth's letter to her granddaughter describing the trip, we find the first mention of William's own grandchildren, Lucy's children. Willie and the younger child were suffering from "Hopping Cough," and "grandfather is at this moment engaged in putting up a new Cooking stove we purchased in Troy."

In an 1850 letter to Frances, Elizabeth puts it very simply, "Your grandfather for years has not had so good health." Yet William was far from inactive, as attested to by his papers. In 1840 his sole attempt to enter politics failed when he did not receive a nomination for a seat in Congress. In January, 1849, he again sat as chairman of a committee that wished to have a railroad built on the west side of Lake Champlain to connect Plattsburgh with Montreal and Whitehall. Unfortunately, it was not a successful

venture. In early March, 1854, Elizabeth wrote Frances that the Montreal directors had "sold their road to the St. Johns Company," a bad move to be regretted by the citizens of Montreal. William had visited Montreal, and Elizabeth felt the trip had been "too much for him." She described the 72 year old Swetland as "feeble." In April he resigned as the president and director of the rail company, due mostly to his poor health.

In 1849 Swetland had also become involved in the building of the Saranac Plank Road, built to decrease the cost of transportation. Among the Swetland papers there is a set of documents relating to its building and the persons investing in this road. Also among the many investments during the second half of his life, he owned interest in the local Dock Company and in the Marine Boardman Company.

Swetland maintained his long association with the Clinton County Masonic Lodge, which he had joined in 1815. In 1828 he had become Master of the lodge in an effort to save its existence during the wave of anti-Masonic feeling arising from a murder in western New York. The effort was not successful, and in 1832 the lodge surrendered its charter and died. Undaunted, Swetland was at the head of an effort to create a new lodge, the charter for which was granted in December, 1847. The new officers were "installed by dispensation from the Grand Lodge of the State of New York, by the Honorable Wm Swetland ..." He was made the first High Priest of the Plattsburgh Chapter, Royal Arch Masons, No. 39, serving in that office from 1851 through 1852.

In the Kent-Delord House in Plattsburgh is a daguerreotype of William Swetland taken in the early 1850s. It shows him, after over ten years of illness, an old man. Yet his strength endured for another decade. William Swetland died on New Year's Day, 1864. During that morning he began to show symptoms of congestion. He told his physician, "Doctor, this is all of earth. I am content." Sensing his end, he prayed for half an hour until death came to him at 7 p.m.. His "sleep" was described as "peaceful as an infant's."

In a letter to her husband, Frank Hall, written January 4th, William's step-granddaughter Frances

wrote, "Grandpa's funeral was attended yesterday. Grandmother has borne up wonderfully. As time moves on she will realize the loss more and more. In time she will need advice. She understands well her own interests. ... Since the funeral Hettie is much more composed ..."

The *Plattsburgh Sentinel* carried his obituary on January 14th 1864, commenting he "has for so many years occupied a prominent position in society ..." The Episcopal Church recorded in its minutes of Monday the 18th a memorial to William Swetland, pledging to remember him and their trust his soul would be delivered to "joy and felicity."

In 1865 a *Memorial of William Swetland* was published by the Bar of The County of Clinton. It describes William Swetland as a man of "great sensibility" and speaks of him with love and respect.

MICHAEL S. RUBIN received his bachelors degree in history from SUNY Plattsburgh in May 1997. During 1996 he served as an intern under Janet Garrell, Director of the Kent-Delord House Museum. He feels grateful to her and to many others for the help given him during his research, especially to Nancy Rathbun of Granville, New York. An annotated copy of this paper is available at the Clinton County Historical Association.

The Coming of the French-Canadians to Clinton County

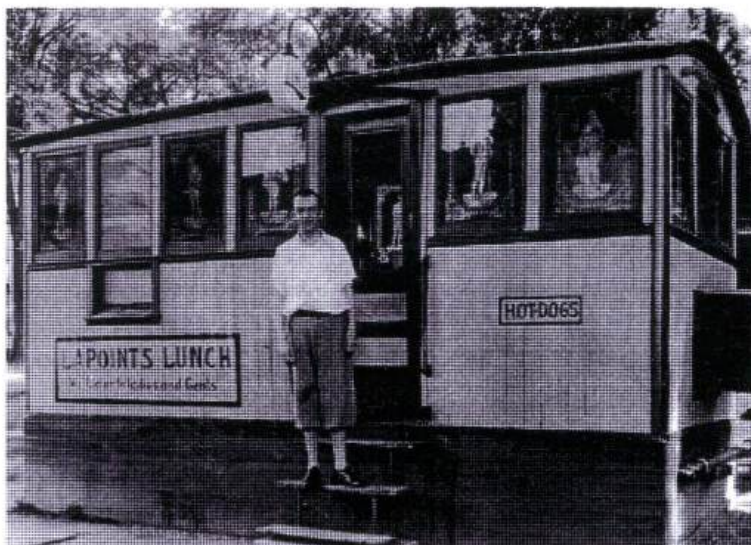
by Joseph-André Senécal (dit Laframboise)

According to the 1990 U.S. Census New Yorkers of French-Canadian ancestry make up the largest ethnic group in Clinton County. In 1990 the population of the county stood at 85,969. Of this group 7,843 persons did not report an ancestry. Among the ancestries reported, almost 33% specified a French or a French-Canadian ethnic provenance. This grouping is by far the largest, followed by reports of Irish (20.3%) and English backgrounds (14.5%).

The dominance of Franco-Americans in the ethnic make-up of Northern New York is not a latter-day phenomenon which might result from the recent decline of historically preponderant groups such as the Irish or the English. The available evidence strongly suggests that French-Canadian immigrants and their progeny have constituted the largest ethnic segment of the population in this part of New York since the beginning of the century and probably earlier, as early as the 1880s. Despite this ascendancy, the Franco-American presence has been underplayed by local historians whether they be Roman Catholic chroniclers cloistered in their Irish ethnic cubicles or lay scholars fascinated by the contributions of early Anglo-Saxon Protestant settlers and the looming role of their descendants in the professional, political, and economic life of the area.

Franco-New Yorkers have been a quiet, understated presence. Their destiny has yielded few flamboyant figures or captains of industry or pillars of institutions. Franco-Americans have furnished an inordinate number of journeymen and laborers, brick and nail makers, carters and stevedores, tanners and shoemakers, smiths and miners, lumberjacks and car-

penters. Franco-Americans have kept hotels, opened general stores and other places of small commerce. Thousands have tilled an ungrateful soil with patience. Thousands more (so many of them children and women) shortened their lives in the factories of Keeseville, the tanneries of Ellenburg, or the mines and smelting furnaces of the high country. In short, over time Franco-Americans



Clinton County Historical Museum

LaPoint's Lunch, Plattsburgh, New York, c. 1929

have represented the average men and women of Clinton County. It is they and others like them, Englishmen, Irishwomen, who have generated the wealth and the welfare of Northern New York.

The coming of the French-Canadians to the American Northeast is well known, particularly those aspects which deal with their presence in textile centers such as Manchester or Fall River and the founding of Little Canadas: ethnic ghettos where the French language and the Québec brand of conservative Roman Catholicism could survive, albeit precariously and forever dependent on massive influx

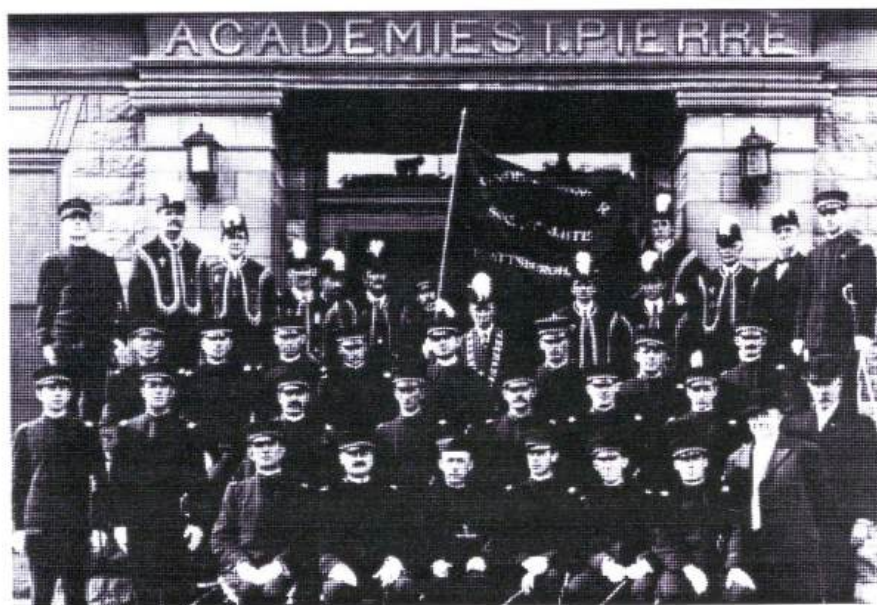
of new arrivals from impoverished French Canada. To some degree the story of the French-Canadians in New York State is similar to the New England saga, but in many respects it is original, a history which on the eve of the millennium remains largely uncharted or suggested rather than fully documented and assimilated.

Many early French-Canadian implantations in New York were precarious, and most of the outposts along the Erie Canal and west of Ogdensburg did not survive the century, at least not as integral French communities. The Franco-American presence became concentrated in Clinton and Essex Counties, in the Capital Region (primarily in Cohoes and Troy), and in Manhattan. Almost all the Franco-American centers supported a Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, as well as frameworks of a more religious character, to tap the zeal, not only of men, but of women and youths. This Franco-American network of communities strung along the Champlain-Hudson axis survived well into our century, and its decline and eventual disappearance was confirmed only with the new order ushered in by the Second World War.

The story of Franco-American Cohoes or Glens Falls could very well be used to supplement the illustrative value of representative Little Canadas such as those of Lowell, Massachusetts; Nashua, New Hampshire; Lewiston, Maine; or Central Falls, Rhode Island; but the same is not true for Franco-American

Plattsburgh, Chazy, or Champlain. The Franco-American presence in Clinton County became an important phenomenon much earlier, its nature was quite different from the characteristics of Little Canadas in Southern New England, where the impact of the Franco-American presence on the host communities was massive and determinant. The development of Franco-American institutions in Clinton County, when compared with the Franco-American evolution in Southern New England, must be seen as aberrant, for it failed to engender a professional elite which would play a major role in the social, cultural, and religious life of the county, a role which the relative numerical weight of the ethnic community anticipated.

The influx of French-Canadians into Northern New York was induced by geographical proximity, economic opportunities, and, periodically, political struggle or persecution. The area of the Province of Québec which borders the State of New York, a wedge delineated by the 45th parallel and the Saint Lawrence and Richelieu Rivers, was originally settled by English speakers who named many towns, hills, rivers: Hemmingford, Huntingdon, Hinchinbrook, the English River, Yankee Ridge, Covey Hill. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, as Loyalists and recent arrivals from Ireland, England, and the United States peopled Huntingdon County, the French population was hemmed in on the extreme north and



*St. Peter's St. Jean Baptiste Society,
Plattsburgh, New York*

Clinton County Historical Museum

east, in Chateaugay, Saint-Constant, or La Prairie, between the Saint Lawrence or the Upper-Richelieu and the new English settlements. However, the ethnic map of southwestern Quebec changed rapidly, and the English population, moving westward to better lands, abandoned recently claimed territory to hordes descending from the older *paroisses*. The foundation dates of most Roman Catholic parishes in the area attest to the phenomenon. And, no sooner were the French rooted in Lacolle, Hemmingford, Huntingdon, Ormstown, Franklin, Hinchinbrook, or Godmanchester (Saint-Anicet), than they continued southward. They streamed into Clinton County and further south and west propelled by navigational byways linking Montréal and New York and later by rail lines reaching to Ogdensburg and the west, to Albany and the Atlantic seaboard. By 1850, government commissions were documenting the failure of Lower Canada to provide adequate economic opportunities for its mushrooming French-speaking population. Despite vertiginous birth rates, the population of some Québec villages was hardly growing, as thousands were heading south to escape hard times and better their lot.

Many bachelors and families were attracted by Clinton County which, in the first half of the nineteenth century, was still a frontier environment. Lumber barons were decimating the forests of the Adirondacks. Sawmills west of Plattsburgh generated so much waste that in 1886 the sawdust carried away by the Saranac River created a reef large and high enough to ground the steamer *Vermont*. In 1880, Plattsburgh exported 128,562,231,000 board feet of lumber valued at \$1,490,990. In May 1886 alone, 25 million board feet of lumber traveled on the Saranac. In 1880, the iron mines and charcoal kilns of New York State, most of them in Clinton County, accounted for one-tenth of the iron mined in the United States. The labor requirements of mining and mineral processing, lumbering and wood transformation, transportation, farm work and seasonal harvesting (such as ice or blueberries) guaranteed jobs for the skilled and unskilled labor of Québec. Thousands descended before and after the Civil War.

Until enough filiations have been traced and confirmed, until the laws of scientific statistical inference can be applied, we can only crudely sketch the magnitude of the migration from Québec to Clinton County before 1900. Historians have enough documentation to confirm a significant Franco-American presence at the birth of Clinton County, from the closing days of the American Revolution to the 1820s. We have less reliable data to compute the relative weight of Franco-Americans in the total population for the four decades or so from 1830 to



Clinton County Historical Museum

St. Peter's Church, Plattsburgh, New York, c. 1880.

1870. This is in part due to the rapid assimilation of immigrants from Lower Canada, a process which often included a substantial alteration or name change and a switch to a Protestant denomination. We can trace with a high degree of certainty the French-Canadian filiation of many altered names: Freigner (Frenière), Shorbobo (Charbonneau), Wideawake (Léveillé), Bierjeon (Baillargeon), Belonga (Bélanger), Goodspeed (L'Arrivée), Langdo (Lanctôt), Rushlow (Rocheleau), Bosaler (Beausoleil), Paukett or Paicket (Paquette), Shelter (Labrie), Buttin (Boutin), Eburd (Hébert), etc. But how many name changes are hidden behind Yankee or Irish names? How many Bartons are Lafonds; Whites, Leblancs; Welles, Lafontaines or Dupuises; Butlers, Bouthillers; Garrets, Greniers; Chases, Chasses; Bassett, Besettes; Burbanks, Bourbeau;

Coughlins, Toussaints; Beachs, Dufresnes; Browns, Lebruns; Godhues, Gauthiers; Blows, Blouins; Mayos, Maheux; Hoods, Houdes; Osgoods, Beaubiens; Cummingses, Vienses; etc.?

The Franco-American percentage of the total population became large enough to be noticeable with the founding of some of the earliest Catholic parishes of Clinton County in the 1850s and 1860s. French-Canadian immigrants or their progeny were numerous enough to support their own Roman Catholic parishes in Plattsburgh (Saint-Pierre:1853), Keeseville (Saint-Jean-Baptiste:1853), Champlain (Saint-Marie:1859), Sciota (Saint-Louis:1869), Redford (L'Assomption-de-la-Bienheureuse-Vierge-Marie:1853), Centerville (Sainte-Anne:1872). These foundations were the first canonical erections since the establishment of the congregation of Saint-Joseph de Corbeau (Coopersville) in 1818. Missions which became parishes after 1870 had predominantly French-speaking congregations: Dannemora (St. Joseph:1853), Altona (Holy Angels:1870), Black Brook (St. Mathew:1849).

A comparison of the numbers from the *Almanach du Protecteur Canadien* of 1870, the first census of Franco-Americans, with the statistics of Father François-Xavier Chagnon's speech at the fourth Congress of French-Canadians in the United States at Albany in 1885 suggests that the Franco-American population of Clinton County grew vigorously during

those fifteen years. If we assign a mean of five persons for every family counted by the *Almanach's* agents in 1870, the growth is in the range of 30% almost everywhere. An exception: the town of Plattsburgh where the increase would be less than 500 persons. The Franco-American population of Clinton County grew moderately in the 1890s. If we continue to use the growth of parishes with a large Franco-American population as our gauge, we note consolidation at Altona and Dannemora and losses, particularly in Chazy where the creation of St. Joseph (1879) and Sacred Heart (1902) signaled the anglicification of communities which had been content to worship in the French church of Coopersville. By 1900 the Franco-American population of Clinton County had reached its peak, and the foundation of Notre-Dames-Victoires in Plattsburgh (1907) symbolized an apex rather than a plateau of growth. By 1900 the Franco-American population of Clinton County had coalesced into a social body whose characteristics would change little in the next half century.

The primary tasks of most immigrants had been to secure work and the basic necessities of life, but, wherever they could agglutinate into an embryonic community, they had sought also to recreate the parish structures which they had left behind. The distribution of French Canadian parishes and bilingual schools in the diocese of Ogdensburg corresponded more or less to the importance of relatively large population



Ecole St. Pierre (St. Peter's School), Plattsburgh, students and teachers.

Clinton County Historical Museum

centers such as Plattsburgh, Champlain, Keeseville, Redford, and Chazy (Coopersville). The *paroisse* was far more than an organization to deliver religious services. In the ideal form of the centers mentioned above (Saint-Joseph de Corbeau; Saint-Pierre de Plattsburgh; Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Keeseville; Sainte-Marie of Champlain; L'Assomption de Marie of Redford) the parish offered bilingual education at the primary level, and it supported a rich social and cultural life. Suzanne E. Moore recently provided a precious documentation of the role of the *pariosse* for the community of Saint Joseph of Coopersville.

The drive to set up independent French-speaking parishes was complicated in many parts of Clinton County by geography and demography and the strong ethnic identification of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. A small, widely dispersed and poor Roman Catholic population often meant that the French-Canadians could not establish a community of their own. Many centers of French-speaking Catholicism were attached as missions to established parishes and were obliged to live with an Irish population who, even when it represented a numerical minority, made the flowering of a French-speaking community all but impossible. Sainte-Anne of Centreville, Sainte-Philomène of Cherubusco (1878), Saint Louis of Sciota (1899) are examples of these transitional worlds where assimilation came early. When pastors could speak French, they often limited their ministry to scheduling a French Mass and conducting private matters such as confessions in French.

As they established themselves into coherent communities in the last quarter of the century, Franco-Americans began to exercise political power and to attend to their larger social responsibilities. In the political arena, however, they were very slow to get involved, and then they were content to play roles primarily at the local levels. French names as municipal officers and appointed officials crop up late, even in towns and villages where, early, the group made up a majority of the population. For a long time Franco-Americans limited their political action to a defense of their ethnic group. The earliest voices were progressive and liberal. In 1870, for a very brief season, Plattsburgh boasted a French newspaper,

L'Union Canadienne, which advocated the annexation of Canada and naturalization and education as the keys to integration into American society. The paper and the political club of the same name lasted the life of a meteor, and when Plattsburgh did support a French-language newspaper, from 1885 to 1891, it underwrote a sheet which advocated a conservative and ultramontane program. *Le National* was born in Glens Falls in 1880 as *Le Drapeau National* (1880-1881), then became *Le Guide de Peuple* (1881-1883). In the spring of 1883, the owner, Benjamin Lenthier, moved to Plattsburgh where the local edition of the sheet took on the name *Le National*. Editions continued to be published under various names for Glens Falls, Rutland, and eventually Burlington, Vermont. *Le National* survived as a New York paper until 1890 when Lenthier moved his main office to Lowell, Massachusetts. During seven years *Le National* of Plattsburgh was a major voice of ethnic politics which had a wide distribution in the Northeast. Democratic in allegiance, it sought to silence and purge the last liberal and progressive elements in the burgeoning Franco-American universe of New England and New York. The alliance between politics and religion and the subservience of state to church, so well represented by the editorial policies of *Le National*, explains in part the minor and circumscribed role that Franco-Americans played in the *res publica*. Other causes may be found in the translation to their new homes of the social hierarchy and economic cleavage found in Canada.

The lay elite of the Franco-Americans replicated the apex of the ethnic hierarchy of French-Canada, with the commercial and political power being relinquished to representatives of other ethnic groups, primarily individuals hailing from an Anglo-Saxon or Irish ascendancy. The community was content to develop an unassuming professional and petty commercial class which included the traditional triumvirate of priests, professional men (lawyers, doctors, pharmacists), intellectual workers (teachers, journalists, musicians), large contingents of small retailers (grocers, furniture salesmen), and tradesmen (blacksmiths, undertakers, shoemakers). The biographies of Joseph Henri LaRocque, M.D. and

Andrew George Senecal, both of Plattsburgh, offer classic profiles of this more-or-less invisible Franco-American professional elite.

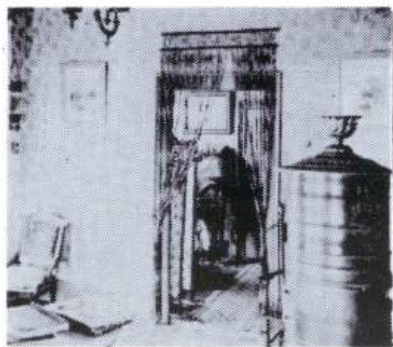
Andrew George Senecal was a third generation Franco-American. Born in Plattsburgh in 1865, his ancestors were among the founding families of Varennes, a prosperous village southeast of Montréal. His parents were Plattsburgh merchants, and he attended local non-parochial schools. He acquired his degree at the University of Ottawa, a classical college run by the Oblates, the same order which played such a large role in the religious affairs of the Franco-Americans of Clinton County. In 1890, he graduated from the Philadelphia Dental College. After returning to Plattsburgh, he built a lucrative patronage and became a prominent figure in the social and cultural life of the French and English-speaking worlds of his city. His father, Adrien Senécal, had married another Franco-American, Julie Labrecque of Keeseville. Doctor Senecal, a man who admitted only that he was of "French extraction" and that a migrating ancestor had "probably settled in Canada," married Henrietta A. Killmartin of New Orleans. While their children figure prominently in the *beau monde* of Plattsburgh, they also mark a time of transition when the transfer of allegiance from the ethnic group to the larger community was completed. A similar pattern can be observed in the vagaries of the La Rocque family.

Joseph Henri LaRocque (Joseph Henry LaRocque), a successful physician, was born in L'Acadie, another village on the Montréal Plain. He came from a well-connected family which included

major political as well as religious and professional figures in the province of Québec (sargeant-at-arms of the legislative assembly, bishops, nuns, curés, and doctors). The father of Joseph Henri had earned his M.D. at the University of Vermont before returning to practice in Canada. His uncles included a doctor at Malone and a dentist at Plattsburgh. After coming to Plattsburgh in 1878, Doctor Henry LaRocque formed a partnership with John C. Smith and ran a very successful drug store. Doctor LaRocque was active in local politics and became a pillar of the Franco-American community and its works. His children continued his tradition of gentility and philanthropy.

Other Franco-Americans in Clinton County bettered their lot and rose to prominence. As of yet, however, we know very little of this group. For example, it would be instructive to document the success of Alfred Guibord, a Plattsburgh banker in 1884, or of Albert Sharron (Charron?), the first mayor of Plattsburgh (1902).

The relative poverty of the Franco-American group also explains its subdued role in the larger community. As they created institutional structures and networks, Franco-Americans relied inordinately on the traditional abnegation of their Roman Catholic religious staff. For a long time much of the education of Plattsburgh youths and the medical care of most of its population depended on the *largesse* and the selflessness of the Oblates and the Grey Nuns. Significant infusion of funds from Canada bought land and subsidized teaching and nursing staff as well



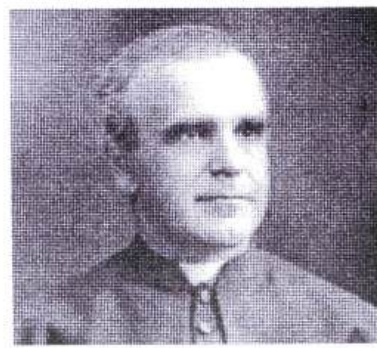
The Souvenir Industrial Edition of
Plattsburgh 1897

*Office of Dr. Andrew George Senecal,
corner of Margaret and Bridge Streets,
Plattsburgh, New York, c. 1897.*



The Souvenir Industrial Edition of
Plattsburgh 1897

Dr. Joseph Henri LaRocque.



Courtesy of The Assumption of Mary Parish,
Redford, New York

Reverend Édouard Charles Laramee

as the construction and administration of schools and hospitals. The Oblates played a looming role, not only as caretakers of the healthiest parishes in Clinton County, but also as the missionaries to a population of great misery and poverty. Most French-Canadian priests who immigrated to Clinton County, and the relatively few which the community sponsored from birth, were perfect witnesses to their congregations. Often simple and industrious, they equated success and ambition with fostering a sense of community and ministering to humble but proud congregations. Theirs was often a life of heroic self-denial. A few personalities stand out from this holy tapestry. A representative member of the Franco-American clergy might be Father Édouard-Charles Laramée (1857-1932). Born in Plattsburgh, he studied with the Jesuits in Montréal and at the Grand Seminary. From 1882 to 1896 he ministered to the poorest missions of the diocese of Ogdensburg. On April 25, 1896, he was appointed pastor of L'Assomption de Marie of Redford. During the next thirty-six years he promoted a true sense of community among his parishioners. He orchestrated the building of a more solid church, raised the funds to start a bilingual school, and oversaw the building of a parish hall. He was also responsible for the creation of several parish organizations, mutual associations, confraternities of good works for the poor, etc. A man of great learning, he wrote a history of his beloved parish and willed his books and documents to the Mallet Library of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

Although in the last fifty years Franco-Americans of Clinton County have surrendered their French language and divested themselves of many of the allegiances which set them apart, over time they have conquered poverty and prejudice and converted to the promises of education and political involvement. Yet, despite these transformations, Franco-Americans quietly continue to hold worldviews and ambitions which confirm their roots and their long love affair with traditions. Franco-Americans have a special relationship with the land, a strong commitment to the family and its immediate extensions. They continue to find meaning in spiritual values and to prefer contentment and small comfort to ambition and

the pursuit of power. Today, Franco-Americans continue to play a worthy and still largely unrecognized part in the prosperity and welfare of Clinton County.



Clinton County Historical Museum

J. Bourdo's Meat Market, 45 Champlain Street, Plattsburgh, New York, c. 1910.

JOSEPH-ANDRÉ SENÉCAL, PhD., a native of Québec, teaches in the Canadian Studies Program and in the Department of Romance Languages of the University of Vermont in Burlington. A more detailed copy of this paper may be consulted at the Clinton County Historical Association.

AFTERWORDS

Dr. Senécal notes in his article above that the three great ethnic groups of our county are the French, the Irish, and the Anglo-Saxon, in 1990 representing 33%, 20%, and 14% of our population respectively. *The Antiquarian* for 1997 celebrates the French presence in Clinton County as our 1996 *Antiquarian* recognized the Clinton County Irish. The French were the first Europeans to encounter the North Country, as reflected by Jim Ciborski's account of the French colonial policy in the Champlain Valley. Early settlers of prominence during the 18th century were such men as Peter Saily, whose story is told above by our Director Jane Rupp, and Henry Delord, who is touched on in Mike Rubin's article, men who came directly from France. By far, the most pervasive French influence in Clinton County has been from

the thousands of Canadians from Québec. Their settlement between the early 19th century and the 1940s is studied by Joseph-André Senécal. This long and continuing thread in our cultural fabric deserves the recognition we attempt to give it here.

We also wish to call attention to our writers, experienced historians such as Dr. Senécal, Jane Rupp, and James Ciborski, who are joined by university senior Michael Rubin making his début in print as a writer of history. *The Antiquarian* welcomes all voices with stories to tell of Clinton County's past - remote or as recent as yesterday. Our past is our prologue.

David Kendall Martin, Editor

FURTHER READING

FRENCH COLONIAL POLICY IN THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY

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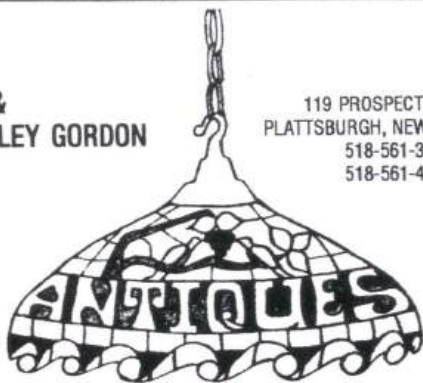
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Transcribed and Annotated by
FULLER ALLEN, J. D.

Edited by
DAVID KENDALL MARTIN, F. A. S. G.

with an Introduction by
BETTY J. BALDWIN, M. L. S.

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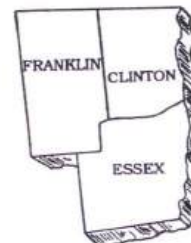
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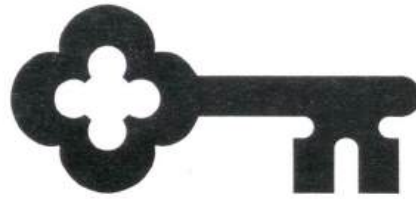
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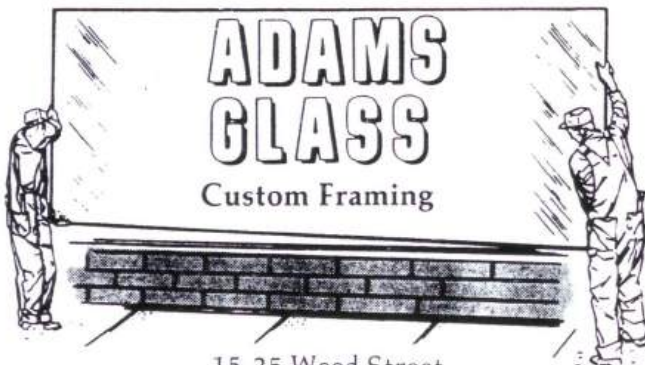
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