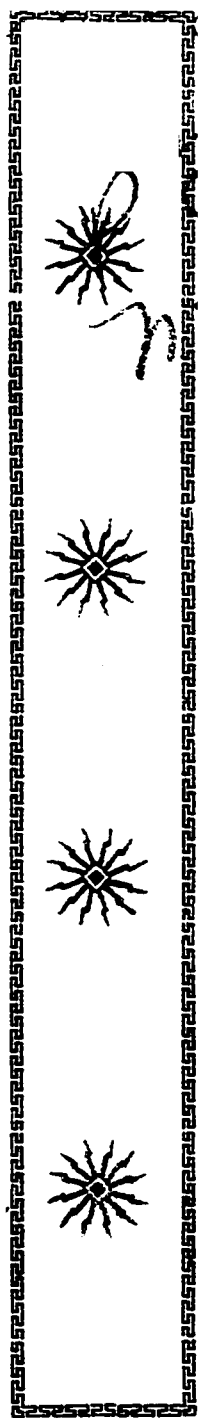


Souvenir Pioneer Day

Onondaga County Historical Association, held at
Baldwinsville, N. Y., Wednesday, June 6, 1900.



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Prepared from The Gazette's Account of the Event and Presented
with the Compliments of the Publishers.



THE annual outing of the Onondaga County Historical Association was held in Baldwinsville Wednesday afternoon and a most enjoyable event it was, at least their guests found it so, and the members also gave expression of their appreciation of the entertainment furnished.

The visitors arrived here about 2:30 o'clock, to the number of 125, and were met by some of the gentlemen of the reception committee and escorted to the M. E. church, where they were cordially received, and a brief social time enjoyed before the meeting was called to order.

At three o'clock Hon. Carroll E. Smith called the meeting to order and in a brief speech stated the object of the visit. Singing by Messrs. L. O. Stearns, L. R. Failing, C. H. Quereau and Howard Baxter followed, then prayer by Rev. J. V. Benham, singing again, then a splendid address of welcome by Dr. W. W. Perkins.

The genial doctor was in his happiest vein and was interrupted on several occasions by hearty applause. He spoke of the coming here early in the century of Dr. Baldwin and his worthy wife, where amid the whispering pines they laid the foundation of what is now not only a beautiful village but according to state statistics one of the most healthful spots within the borders of the Empire state. The speaker welcomed the vis-



itors to Baldwinsville, the birthplace and where grew to manhood the first mayor of Syracuse, Harvey Baldwin. He welcomed them to the former home of one who represented this congressional district twice in the House of Representatives, who at his death was president of the State Medical Society, and who now sleeps beside our beautiful river—Dr. Daniel T. Jones. This was also the home of that genial, large-hearted, scholarly gentleman, who organized the first military organization in the county, the Syracuse Citizens Corps, and as captain and colonel continued his membership until his death—Col. Isaac T. Minard. Here was the home of the boy who was the first soldier in the county to enroll his name in defense of the flag, in April, 1861, James C. Spaulding, now a U. S. deputy marshal in Syracuse. Here is the first soldiers' monument, in honor of our soldiers of all the wars, ever erected in our county. Here is owned the finest private collection of Indian relics, curios, and old agricultural and war implements in the state, and probably in the United States—the property of Otis M. Bigelow, president of the State Bank. The speaker would also have stated, had time permitted, that we have here the oldest charitable society in the United States, organized in 1817, yet full of vigor and with a substantial financial showing. Also that we have the first church—Grace Episcopal—to be lighted with electricity in the United States, and record of the fact is made in Washington.



At the conclusion of Dr. Perkins's remarks Hon. Carroll E. Smith responded in behalf of the association, saying some very interesting things about the object and work of the association, and some very nice things about his hosts.

Then came Rev. Dr. W. M. Beauchamp's talk, "Local Reminiscences." He recalled one whose presence would have given zest to the occasion, "the Hon. Wallace Tappan, honorable not alone from former official position, but honored everywhere and by all as one of the truest of men." He spoke of the changes of the ages, of the coming of unknown men here, and of the historic races who succeeded them. The place is called Stehahah by the Onondagas, *stones in the water*. We perpetuate this by our bridges and stone dam. Hiawatha's white canoe was followed by the white man in 1654, when LeMoyne looked up the Seneca river, often called Thiohero, *the river of rushes*. Others followed, searching the stream to its source, and at last came the founders of the village, early in the century. They looked on a scene of sylvan beauty. The French were the first to explore the river, and Cross lake appears on quite early maps. The Moravian missionaries visited Jack's Reef and the lake in August, 1753, and were shown two parts of a petrified Indian, to which fishermen offered tobacco, though he could not smoke. Old Bunt, the



Onondaga chief, ruled the fishery there, but it had been discovered by Ochshugore, who made his home there, and was the first resident on the river known by name. On their way down they stopped where we live, visiting Kaghswughtioni, or Red Head, a great Onondaga chief of that day, Aug. 27. They were the first white men whose visit here is recorded.

When independence was won, a great tide of travel passed up the river. Elkanah Watson went through here in 1791, and at Jones' point, on Cross lake, found "a multitude of names cut upon large beech trees." Improvements followed. The canal here was made in 1809, and is the oldest remaining west of Little Falls. Dr. Baldwin also had the state road laid out, and our veterans annually march where the soldiers of 1812 trod before them. Of our military record Dr. Beauchamp had something to say, as well as of early mills and lumber interests.

There were brief allusions to eccentric residents, and the story of two prominent men whose reconciliation was not to count if one of them got well. In our cemetery is an inscription reading "The mother of her country dies," and a few words on this, in memory of the early mothers of our village, brought to a close the excellent address, which was listened to with marked attention.



Charles B. Baldwin, editor of THE GAZETTE, then gave the experiences of one of the survivors of the Patriot War, first briefly stating the causes of the conflict. The paper here follows :

The War of 1812 left feelings of intense bitterness along our Canadian border. The homes of the American people had been destroyed, farms laid waste and many lives sacrificed. The hatred of English institutions was nourished at many firesides by the oft told tales of that bitter war to preserve our government, and the vengeful spirit of the sire found warm lodgment in the bosom of the son. So when some of the Canadians quietly expressed a desire for freedom, and union with our land of the free, they found sympathetic ears into which to pour their tale along the border line of New York state.

Canadian sympathizers instituted Hunter lodges, the implied and outwardly understood object being to organize for a great hunt in the woods and mountains of northern New York. This gave an excuse for the collection of arms and munitions, irregular drilling and other semi-military activities. Signs, grips and passwords were used, and the work of recruiting for the invasion of Canada went vigorously on, disaffected Canadians constantly sowing seed where the soil seemed likely to grow recruits.

In November, 1838, the expedition started out. It resulted in death or imprisonment for all, and many of those imprisoned were either hanged or sent to end their days in far-off Van Dieman's Land. Many went from our own county, and Sacket Harbor, Watertown and Ogdensburg and their immediate vicinities were largely represented. The expedition was com-



manded by Col. Van Schoultz, who was afterward executed, aged only thirty-one years. Col. Dorephus Abbey, of Pamela, and Col. Martin Woodruff, of Salina, this county, were also among those executed.

Among the survivors of that ill-starred expedition is William W. Stebbins, today an honored and well-known resident of this village, who has told me his story and is present with us as a testimonial that he who fights and doesn't run away may yet live long in the land. He has told me his story, for the first time given publicity in its entirety, and I shall be well repaid if I can make it as interesting to you in the telling as he did as he narrated the events to me. The most interesting feature I shall be compelled to omit, viz: the hearty laughter in which he indulged as he saw in retrospective view, with older eyes, what a foolish thing it was to undertake. Debarred by President Van Buren's proclamation from any hope of national protection, they were for a time outcasts, with little chance of deliverance from death or exile.

Here is the story as he told it to me. You will note that sometimes I use his language, and again my own.

Mr. Stebbins, youngest in a family of ten children, son of Rufus and Charlotte Stebbins, was born in the jail at Watertown, July 26, 1821, but I want to quickly explain that his father was the jailor at that time and that his early environment has not influenced his life aside from the particular expedition I am about to describe.

While William was very small his father moved across the river to Pamela, where he lived until he was about fourteen years of age, when he went to learn the harness maker's trade with his eldest brother at Brownville. While



patriots, who did not fully realize as yet the enormity of their task, the boats beat back out of the harbor and sailed across to Ogdensburg.

Here they remained until next day, when the steamer United States was again pressed into service and went on a tour of observation down the river to a point where stood a huge windmill with an immense stone tower. As they went down, the British boat, Experiment, fired repeatedly at the United States, the shells dropping uncomfortably close.

Mr. Stebbins and several other men were on board, and old "Bill" Johnson, a noted patriot, and whose name figures largely in the history of that suicidal undertaking, with a price set upon his head by the British government, came over to the steamer in a big lake rowboat, with ten strong oarsmen as his crew. He asked Col. Abbey if there was any tar on board the boat, his idea being to heat the boilers hot and with all possible speed run the Experiment down. Abbey resented the interference of the old river pirate, as he was called, and Johnson said if any of the boys desired to go ashore he would take them in his boat. Mr. Stebbins and four or five others were taken aboard and landed on Canadian soil. They were unarmed, and as they stood on the shore they could plainly see the little British gunboat keeping ahead of the United States, and as opportunity offered firing a shot.

The United States soon turned back and started for Ogdensburg, and then a ball from the Experiment went through the wheelhouse, killing the steersman. Shortly after, a flat boat came down the river from Ogdensburg, bringing several men and cannon.

At his earliest landing Mr. Stebbins says he was most cordially greeted



and entertained by the landlord of the hotel across the road from the windmill, he being a patriot sympathizer, and his wife a relative of a man now living in the town of Lysander. The men were given supper at the hotel and during the night the guns and munitions were brought ashore from the boats, or at least a portion of them. The United States government had boats out looking for them and it was rather ticklish business getting by the watchful river sentries.

The patriots during the day went into the windmill, also taking possession of two stone houses across the road. Mr. Stebbins and several strangers were placed on guard at nine p. m., remaining until one a. m., when they were relieved.

During the next day the patriots could plainly see the British troops gathering on the hillsides back from the river, and marching to and fro just back of the summit, with only the long line of glistening bayonets in sight.

To the seventeen-year-old boy, being a patriot didn't look as well as it did from the bench in the harness shop. But he was in for it, and seeing what he believed was his duty, tried to do it.

During the morning or forenoon, "Bill" Denio was ordered up to the top of the windmill by Colonel Abbey, to look out and report the situation. This was necessary, as the lower wall was three or four feet thick, built solid, and the door barricaded with stones. Denio went as ordered. He had a grim sense of humor and used it. About eighty or ninety rods away he saw a schoolhouse with a stone wall in front, facing the windmill. Looking closely, he saw a hat raised just above the wall. He didn't fire. Again the hat bobbed up serenely.



"Bill" was a good waiter. The hat came up again. This time there was a head in it and "Bill" fired. They found the body lying behind the wall later, with a bullet straight through the head.

All day long the British troops were in plain sight and the next morning Mr. Stebbins breakfasted with Colonel Van Schoultz. The landlord before mentioned had given the patriots a pig, and the breakfast consisted of hard-tack and raw pork. Colonel Van Schoultz remarked to Mr. Stebbins that it might be a long time before they got another meal, and it was. In fact, when next they were fed it was from a British menu.

Some time during the day—he had no means of keeping the time—but thinks it was about noon, the patriot army of about 250 marched out in battle array against the disciplined troops of the British. They went up from the shore to a stone wall about forty rods from the windmill. Here they gave the redcoats the hottest kind of a fire and the center of the British line parted, the right and left wings making flank movements to surround the little army. As the British right wing came around between the stone house and the windmill, Colonel Dundas, of their army, was killed and his troops fell back toward Prescott. The left wing came by the other stone house and, while suffering heavily, drove the patriots into the stone houses and into the windmill. From these buildings the yet undaunted patriots kept up a vigorous fire until all the British troops retreated.

George Kinney, aged about twenty, an early playmate and friend of Mr. Stebbins, had been shot through the body and was carried into one of the stone



houses. Here Mr Stebbins cared for him, and he was taken prisoner and later recovered.

After the British retreat there was a cessation of hostilities and both sides buried their dead. About this time the patriot cause looked like a losing one, even though temporary victory had crowned their efforts. Colonel Abbey, whose record doesn't shine forth resplendent, took off his sword and, going over to the enemy, gave himself up, begging hard that he be not immediately executed. Nextday, Mr. Stebbins thinks it was Thursday, a large force of British came down, and seeing we were helpless we surrendered, first asking to be taken as prisoners of war. This request was refused, and the little army gave up without stipulation.

After the surrender the patriots were formed into a hollow square for inspection and probably enumeration, and then formed in line and escorted to Prescott, put on board a boat and taken to Kingston. There were probably about 150 in the party at this time. The picnic spirit had sort of worn off, and yet the terrible position in which he found himself didn't worry the boy very much. A hungry, tired youngster wants food and rest, and doesn't consider much else. So Mr. Stebbins did not exactly worry about the future, unless it was as to the service of meals and a place to sleep.

At Kingston they put us in a line of twos, stretched a rope down between us, tying our inside hand to the rope. In this way we were marched all over town, where illuminations and triumphant displays made us feel as though there had been a picnic after all; but it had been the other fellow's picnic. After being paraded about the streets we were taken to the fort and there



locked up, five rooms being devoted to the use of the prisoners. We were fairly well fed, though the bill of fare lacked in some of the essentials of high living. The trial of the patriots began soon after, ten being tried at the time Mr. Stebbins was brought out. A man named Sweet, of this party, well known to Mr. Stebbins, admitted that he had fired at Colonel Dundas, thus sealing his own death warrant.

Mr. Stebbins had been coached by Mr. Anderson, and to his advice doubtless owed his life. When the boy was questioned he made up his mind it was lie or die, and he lied. He told the court he never fired a gun, but carried the officers' baggage. He hopes his living since has been along correct lines in atonement for his efforts at self-preservation. However, he was condemned to death just the same, despite the apparent mitigating circumstances. His death warrant was read to him by Sheriff McDonald, who stuttered in a way to prolong the agony almost beyond endurance. As it was, he had a narrow escape from exile to Van Dieman's land. Hon. Avery Skinner, father of State Superintendent of Public Instruction Charles R. Skinner, had married Mr. Stebbins' sister, and through his efforts the boy, with others, was sent home on the first British steamer that made the trip after the ice broke up in the spring.

There were about thirty in the party, and at Sacket Harbor they were feasted and given the honors due to returning heroes.

Arriving home, I was given a new suit of clothing, which, after five months and sixteen days in prison, was a welcome change. And land knows a bath wasn't a bad thing, either.



During the boy's absence his mother often wondered where he was, his unfortunate escapade having been kept from her. But one day she saw in a newspaper the names of those who had been condemned to death, among them that of her youngest born. She had been for some time in feeble health and the shock proved too much for her to bear, and when her boy came home once more she had gone out into the other country, sorrowing to the last for the lad she loved.

Some time after his return home a party of forty-six were reprieved and sent home, Mr. Stebbins being one to go after them with a team.

He says the saddest feature of his war experience was when, on January 4, 1839, he bade farewell to Mr. Anderson and saw him led away to the scaffold.

On his return home Mr. Stebbins again worked at his trade in Brownville, a year later going to Mohawk, where he worked as a collar maker for a Mr. Waffle, and was married there, coming to Baldwinsville about twenty-five years ago. He has been a good citizen, and those lies he told seem modest now when we consider what capable liars have arisen, even since Eli Perkins' time, particularly in these days of yellow journalism.

A fine sketch of the windmill and stone houses, prepared by Dr. Beauchamp, was shown for the benefit of those interested.

The exercises closed with a benediction by Rev. Edward A. McMaster, and the meeting adjourned until five o'clock, when supper was served by the ladies of the church, after which a ride up the river was



enjoyed. The association went home at a seasonable hour, and if they enjoyed their visit as well as did their entertainers they will want to come again.



