

2014: A Report on Events Leading to September in Plattsburgh NY

Recently a newsletter announced “What’s up for 2014? It’s The Big One For Plattsburgh”. Yes indeed 2014 is a big year for the Plattsburgh area. However, I would like to begin with the announcement of the 2014 state conference for Public Historians, for county, town and village historians. It is a three day conference being held on the 16th – 18th of March at the Gideon Putnam in Saratoga Springs, followed by a two day conference being held at the Holiday Inn in Plattsburgh on the 6th and 7th of June. At these conferences topics will include an introduction to Public Historians of the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga by way of a reception; and in Plattsburgh the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Plattsburgh in the War of 1812. On the evening of the 6th a reception is planned to be held at the War of 1812 Museum with three planned presentations to follow on the 7th.

In Saratoga the reception will be held at the New York State Military Museum to introduce the conference attendees to the mission of the museum which is to preserve, interpret and disseminate the story, history and records of New York State’s military forces and veterans. The collection is divided into the museum and the library/archives buildings.

The museum houses over 10,000 artifacts dating from the American Revolution to the Iraq-Afghanistan conflicts. The artifacts include uniforms, weapons, artillery pieces and art. A significant portion of the museum’s collection is from the Civil War. Notable artifacts from this conflict include Colonel Elmer Ellsworth’s uniform, the medical kit of Jubal Early’s surgeon, and the uniforms and bugle of Gustav Schurmann. The Museum also owns the largest collection of state battle flags in the country - some 2000, of which 800 have recently been conserved. An exhibit of the flag collection is maintained in the state capitol in Albany where the museum collection was originally housed. This year’s exhibit is the battle flags of the years of 1864-1865.

Toward the end of last year, an M4 Sherman Medium Tank, a very versatile World War II tank used to defeat the Axis powers, was shipped to Fort Drum for a major overhaul. It is to be displayed in front of the museum along with a 13-inch Seacoast Mortar, Model 1861, which used to fire 200 lb. cannon balls during the Civil War.

The first weekend in June will be further remembered for on that weekend the Kiwanis Breakfast Club’s “Dozer Day” will be held at the Airborne Speedway, Area museums will also be open free of charge, to include the opening of the Plattsburgh Air Force Museum. At all these events the passport may be marked for a number of prizes to be given at the end of the season by the Adirondack Coast Cultural Alliance (ACCA). Some confusion was experienced at the Fair Grounds last summer with what ACCA stood for.

This past October at the international summit of the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership (CVNHP), held in Montreal, the theme centered around enhancing cross-border communication and sharing ideas. Attendees from the area discovered that the Battle of Plattsburgh/War of 1812 is big in

Canada. It was remarked by several that they will be making a stop in Baltimore and then continuing onto Plattsburgh for the 200th anniversary commemoration ceremonies.

CVNHP is backed by the National Park Service and grants have come through to support a number of projects in the Champlain – Hudson corridor. The partnership covers eleven counties, both sides of Lake Champlain, for example including the Saratoga Battlefield. CVNHP grants funded in Schuylerville the restoration of the sword – surrender site and the trail from the cemetery through Victory Woods.

A project of Lakes to Locks Passage, Inc. is the developing of a series of thematic water routes along Lake Champlain and the Hudson-Hoosic River corridors with the production of digital interpretive materials and maps; and to produce PassagePort with audio and video narration through mobile apps. In the coming year a PassagePort trail of the Hessian forces advance on the Bennington area will be produced; another on Lake George and Stewart's backing of the entire General Burgoyne's campaign.

The 200th anniversary commemoration in Plattsburgh will be a 15 day event stretching from 31 August through 15 September with new features . On Saturday, 13 September, 1PM, Parade Day, the 42nd Infantry Division (Rainbow) Band will participate for the first time. Another new feature is an original musical program written by Doctor Rich Frost; a special memorial program at Riverside on 11 Sept (the actual 200th anniversary date); a special morning ceremony will be held on Crab Island (in some records the island is known as Hospital Island due to the number of wounded from the battle); and an evening program will be held at Clinton Community College, which includes a recreated 1814 hospital, a Jazz band concert and fireworks set off on Crab Island and viewed from Clinton Community College.

With the idea in mind to honor all participants in the battle, dignitaries from Britain and Canada as well as the United States will be invited, in hope that all three countries will be represented as Grand Marshalls in the parade. A fund raising campaign has been launched to commission nationally renowned artist Dean Mosher to create the definitive mural of the Battle of Plattsburgh. In a matter of days the "Cantonment Site" will also be featured in a spring 2014 documentary by WCNY, Central New York's Public Broadcasting Station. It is a documentary on the significance and preservation of the War of 1812 battlefields.

G. William Glidden, MAJOR (USA Retired)
Deputy Town of Plattsburgh Historian
Registered Historian, Assoc. of Public Historians
North Country Historian, Friends of the NYS Military Museum