

Collecting another view

I know I have written that collecting is a disease. However it might be well to take a deeper view. Those artefacts some call junk can open doors closed for centuries. They can take their possessors on voyages that can only be conjured up in an inquisitive mind. With the stone tool once the property of the Native American we might find ourselves in a bark longhouse. We watch as the smoke rises toward the sky from the fire pit and man's old ally fire warms the content of a pottery vessel. We are oblivious to those around us but we are there at least in our imaginations. Are we now in a frame of mind to guide us into more journeys into yesterday? Some of those journeys will be triumphs and others tragedies. Let's now examine some of those leftovers from yesterday called collectables. The iron axes, Jews harps, glass beads, and brass kettle fragments in the case over there conjer up a period in time possibly in the 1600s when European traders brought different utensils to the Native Americans; trade goods that would forever change the native way of life.



We will now take up that old French musket from where it sits silently in the corner. That old musket was made in far off France in the latter 1720s. Could it possibly have been used in the French and Indian War between France and England; a war that would determine the fate of our continent? This old flintlock musket was yet serviceable over 50 years later when another conflict was fought between might Great Britain as it was challenged by Mohawk Valley settlers striving to establish a new nation. Was it at Oriskany on August 6, 1777 in the bloody battle that Day?

Dear Father in Law
Mount Independence at Ticonderoga
March 7 1777

I profit by this good Opportunity to acquaint you that I am
Thank God yet well disposed in this Station, Hoping and wishing
that these may find you and your whole Family all in good
health. We have here no News yet of the Enemy's approach-
ing but we have neither Orders to march home, yet I hope
I hope that we shall be discharged or relieved within a month's
time since our Departure. We are actually building here a
Bridge of 1600. foot long from this Mount Independence
to Fort Ticonderoga over Lake Champlain. I enclose here
a letter to my wife, please to forward it as soon as possible.
I Salute you and Mother in Law, Brothers and Sisters
in Law, heartily and am always,
Yours, affectionate Son
and humble Servant
John Eisenlord

Let's now hold in our hands that letter that has another connection with Oriskany. In some way this letter written by a young militia officer on March 7, 1777 survived the destructive raids in following years at Stone Arabia where the letter was directed. The letter was penned at Mount Independence at Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain. John Eisenlord's handwriting was remarkable. The letter was written to his father in law, Peter Grems and originally contained another to his wife. Naturally John wanted to soon return to her and their children. Fate intervened and he did return to Stone Arabia only to give his life at Oriskany. This letter doubtless was one of the last pieces of memorabilia his children would preserve from their father.

Although we cannot hold in our hands those structures that remain from periods of time long before our own, they are here. Each minute piece of land has its story that it cannot relate. That is for those of us who cherish them to do. The fortified stone houses and great timber barns now called Dutch Barns call on us to preserve them. We have only scratched the surface of the American Revolutionary period here in our beautiful Mohawk Valley.

Just as time and civilization is always gaining ground we will take a like course with our inventory of collectibles. Hard times and good, press us forward. The second war with England in 1812 to 1814 and the Mexican War in the mid-1840s produced tangible reminders that have been preserved however we will now advance to that tragic event in American history, the Great Rebellion or Civil War from 1861 to 1865; a conflict that pitted Americans of the North against their brethren from the South. When the war was finally concluded the soldiers came home and hung up their uniforms, leather belts, and their guns to become collectables that filtered down to our generation.

That old leather rifle scabbard and the empty cartridge cases found on the little big horn battlefield reminds us of Custer's ill-fated expedition in an attempt to bring to an end the supremacy of the Plains Indians.





We progress through our chronology of memorabilia. That old blue cap that once was worn by a man the writer remembered who served in the Spanish American War in 1898 comes to mind. In a natural historical progression we come to World War I in 1918. Those two complete uniforms once worn by two Canajoharie brothers still remain to remind us of what was called "The war to end all wars." It is tragic that this was not to be, since as we write wars throughout the world still rage. Each conflict took lives on both sides. Those who return to this day still send or carry home the reminders of service often in far off lands. These are and will continue to be collectables to be packed away for future generations to remember father, son or grandfathers. We have now taken a succession of faltering steps from a bark longhouse to the 21st Century via collectables. You have now touched history in a unique way. Do you believe these milestones from the past should find a fitting place where future generations can view them? Their fate is in your hands.

Skip Barshied, Stone Arabia, November 27, 2013