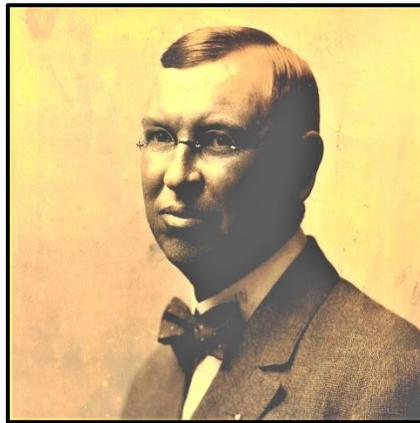


This Week in Saratoga County History

Creation of the Saratoga Battlefield

Submitted by Paul Perreault October 5, 2022

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George Slingerlands, First Superintendent, Saratoga Battlefield

Saturday, October 8, 1927, was a great day for a burglar in Ballston Spa. *The_Saratogian* newspaper announced that “Ballston Spa closed down shop this noon and went to the Saratoga Battlefield celebration. Scores of Ballstonians, many of them taking part in the pageant, went to the historic battlefield this morning, but the great exodus did not take place until early this afternoon. Stores, mills, offices and shops closed at noon and throughout the forenoon there was a hustle and bustle of people getting ready to go to the celebration.”

The early 1920s was a period of intense growth in the Rotary movement in Saratoga County. On May 1, 1922, the Ballston Spa Club was chartered, followed by the Mechanicville and Saratoga Springs Clubs in 1924. With the energy and enthusiasm of recent converts, they looked around for “big” projects to tackle to demonstrate their commitment to the ideals of Rotary. The upcoming sesquicentennial anniversary of the Battle of Saratoga, scheduled to take place in 1927, appealed to the “live wires” of the nearby Rotary Clubs who quickly became a part of a movement which included citizens of Vermont and New England (whose ancestors fought at the Battle of Bennington and Saratoga).

Two men; Adolph Ochs, owner of the *New York Times* and George O. Slingerlands, Mayor of Mechanicville and founding member of the Mechanicville Rotary Club soon emerged as the movement leaders. Because of Ochs' social status, he is often cited as being the prime mover in the effort, but this is what Ochs said of Slingerlands' role "My interest in the Battlefield of Saratoga is due to the enthusiasm, self-sacrifice and patriotism of Mayor George O. Slingerlands of Mechanicville. He is the man who brought me to the field".

On September 18 and 19, 1925, over 400 Rotarians and their wives from New York, Vermont and Massachusetts gathered at the site of the Battlefield, which at that time was privately owned. They passed a resolution calling on Rotarians to work for a sesquicentennial commemorative event and urged support for permanent recognition of the Battlefield by either the State or Federal government. Spurred on in large part by Slingerlands, this grassland campaign took root and blossomed.

In 1926, the State of New York approved the purchase of four farms and created a State Historic Preserve which became known as the Saratoga Battlefield. Slingerlands was appointed the first Superintendent. One of his first duties was to begin planning for the upcoming sesquicentennial celebration scheduled for October 8, 1927. Judging by the numbers involved, the celebration was a great success. An estimated crowd of 100,000 spectators and participants viewed the pageants and heard speeches from the governors of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Governor Al Smith, of New York. The 25,000 automobiles that tried to get to the event overwhelmed the primitive road system and many were still in long lines at the close of the day's program. Crowd control was handled by a 200-member contingent of State Troopers and logistics by units the New York National Guard.

The pageant was directed by Percy Burrell the "king" of pageants. Each of the 6,200 participants was provided with a four-page set of instructions which covered everything from the time and place of assembly to what to do about their costumes and such items as chewing gum, wrist watches and glasses – all prohibited.

The pageant started at 2 P.M. but was preceded by a 150-gun salute at 9 A.M., the dedication of the New Hampshire monument at 10 A.M. and speeches by the three governors at 11 A.M. The show was described as "(a) gigantic historical pageant depicting in dance, song, and drama the opening scenes of the American Revolution, and more particularly the striking events and episodes in the Battle of Saratoga." Participants included musicians, choristers, dancers, and volunteers costumed as soldiers, farmers, Indians, and women and children.

After the excitement of the sesquicentennial celebration, Superintendent Slingerlands began working toward including the Battlefield in the National Park System. Although he did not live to see it, (dying in 1932) in 1938, with the help of former Governor and later President Franklin Roosevelt, the Saratoga Battlefield became part of the National Park System, as it remains today.

