

**“POSSESSION HOUSE”**

**AT THE SALMON RIVER**  
**ROUTE 9, TOWN OF PLATTSBURGH**  
**CLINTON COUNTY, NEW YORK**

**By: David C. Glenn**

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William Gilliland’s “Possession House” on the south bank of the Salmon River in the Friswell Patent at the south line of the future Town of Plattsburgh was the first permanent residential structure in what was to become Clinton County.

Substantiate of this claim is found in Gilliland’s original written journal titled *Willsborough Town=Book* hereinafter noted as his *Journal*.

On September 2, 1766, Will traveled south from Willsborough to meet a group coming north from Albany. This illustrious company, or congress as Will called them, included Governor Henry Moore of New York Province, General Guy Carleton the Governor of Quebec Province, Philip Schuyler, Robert Harper acting as astronomer, Charles Fredenburg, and others.

Will was invited to join the congress to survey and set the border of New York and Quebec Provinces. Fredenburg, who would later settle on the Saranac River in the future City of Plattsburgh, was on one of his first trips to the area to scout the property he intended to claim. He did not petition for land at Cumberland Bay until August 19, 1767.

Gilliland and Fredenburg argued about the extent of their respective land claims in the area causing Will to forewarn Fredenburg against trespassing on his lands opposite Valcour Island, which Will had purchased the previous year. Will left the party and headed across lake to Willsborough where he mustered his men on the 9th and headed north down lake to the Friswell Patent at the mouth of the Salmon River. They erected a “Possession House” on the south bank in three days completing it on September 13, 1776.

Since Fredenburg was still with the congress on the lake, Will’s “Possession House” must be the first structure erected by a European settler within the bounds of the Town of Plattsburgh and perhaps all of present Clinton County. It also predates La Framboise’s house in Chazy which was erected in 1768. Fredenburg actually built on his land at the mouth of the Saranac River in 1770, well after Gilliland’s “Possession House”.

Palmer, in his 1871 article in the *Plattsburgh Republican* titled *Northern New York Historical Society Papers* claimed the “Possession House” or 1766 cabin as he called it was never occupied thus implying Fredenburg was the first to build and live in the Plattsburgh area. No proof of this assertion has ever been furnished or found. It contradicted what Will was accomplishing down in Willsborough, the value settlers placed on housing on this frontier of civilization, and common sense since a vacant structure would have been destroyed by marauders or Indians.

Both Hurd's *History of Clinton and Franklin Counties* and *History of Lake Champlain 1609-1814* by Palmer note Fredenburg's nearest neighbors to the south as William Hay and Henry Cross at Friswell's Patent opposite Valcour Island. Hay and Cross must be living in the “Possession House” since there are no other structures between Fredenburg and Hay/Cross and the cabin is on the extreme southern edge of the Friswell Patent.

Will's “Possession House” stood until sometime between October 1776 and May of 1779 when the British burned all settlements in the Champlain Valley in the Revolutionary War period. Gilliland and both Hay and Cross moved out of the area to avoid the conflict.

William Gilliland's “Possession House” at the south bank of the Salmon River in the Town of Plattsburgh is the first permanent residence by a European settler in all of Clinton County, and it was occupied by his young tenant farmers, William Hay and Henry Cross.

In 2002 the Town of Plattsburgh erected a blue and yellow New York State historic marker to commemorate the site which reads as follows:

