A Drink of History
By Benjamin Pomerance

YOU CAN'T get a drink anymore at 73 Bridge St.

The spot's been liquor-free for years, prohibition created by the passage of time. Rollicking songs and boastful tales no longer flow from the doorway of the most popular watering hole in town, the place that once entertained a president but was at its finest when populated by the local bacchanalian regulars. The good old days, as any of those regulars would tell you, are gone, over without a trace. After wetting the whistles of thousands of patrons, Israel Green's has run dry.

An old, cold, empty brick building is all that remains. It's not even a remnant, not really, hardly aged enough to recall the grand times at Plattsburgh's favorite tavern. For years, it's stood empty, largely ignored. Some people even suggest the place is dangerous, force-fed an overdose of negative energy by the oncoming traffic. So, take away the crumbling bricks. Get rid of the collapsing veranda, the weed-choked lot, the obvious neglect. Strip the present away, all the way down to nothing, and imagine a two-and-a-half-story clapboard structure rising in its place. Now add plenty of hot food, a bounty of adult beverages and, most importantly, an overflowing crowd that plans to stay long into the night. That's all the picture needs. Welcome to Israel Green's.

It was 1795 when Isaac "Israel" Green and his wife, Sarah, decided to open a tavern in Plattsburgh. The town was desperate for a good establishment, a place where you could get yourself a good meal and some spirits and perhaps a warm bed for the night. Originally from Long Island, the Green's perceived how successful a place of this sort could be when they moved to Plattsburgh from Dutchess County, and their Quaker background evidently did not stand in their way from opening a place where alcohol would be served in immense quantities. Even the land they found to build the place on was perfect — a sizable lot where Count Charles de Fredenburg had once erected his home in Plattsburgh's natal years. Before long, a sturdy frame house with a 9-foot square veranda was standing in that spot, a building with a hand-painted sign reading "Israel Green's Tavern" swinging out front. Israel Green parked himself on that veranda on his first day of operation, proclaiming the birth of his new hostelry, and waited for the customers to come.

They came in droves. Somehow, the Green's just had the magic recipe, the perfect blend of frivolity and formality that led everyone from area settlers to out-of-town visitors to Plattsburgh's first hotspot. Within a couple of years, Israel Green's Tavern had earned a reputation as the town's social center, the local place to see and be seen. When a gathering of any significance occurred, chances were it would be hosted at Israel Green's.

So, when the impossible happened on Lake Champlain, when the Americans managed to pull off one of history's greatest military upsets and toppled the British fleet in September 1814, the turning point of the War of 1812 simply had to be commemorated at Plattsburgh's favorite tavern. Leading local businessman Henry Delord headed a committee of 53 Plattsburgh citizens that organized a remarkable celebration dinner shortly after the Battle of Plattsburgh, an occasion at which Commodore Thomas Macdonough and General Alexander Macomb were among the guests of honor. Accounts of the affair suggest that it was a boisterous one. Eighty-five members of the American army and navy consumed 20 gallons of wine and two gallons of brandy during the evening. Colonel Melancthon Woolsey stood up in front of the other men and demanded that the sailors be given extra rum rations in honor of the occasion. Seventeen toasts were made by the officers as the party lasted into the following morning. Yet even in the midst of this frivolity, Macdonough refused to gloat over his victory. When the time came for him to offer a toast, he cheered neither himself nor his men. Instead, he asked the officers to raise their glasses in honor of the British officer George Downie, captain of the enemy flagship *Confiance*, who had been killed during the battle. Every man present rose and drank to Downie's bravery, a final unlikely tribute to the British commander.

After the Battle of Plattsburgh dinner, Israel Green's Tavern was more highly regarded than ever. Green himself had by now become one of Plattsburgh's most prominent citizens. As such, he was somewhat skeptical at first when a 30-year-old Army surgeon began courting one of his daughters, Deborah, in 1815. The man was only starting out in life, just opening his practice in Plattsburgh that June. As it turned out, though, Israel had no need to worry. William Beaumont proved to be not only a faithful husband to Deborah, but also emerged as one of the nation's premiere physicians. Often, Beaumont would spend hours in a makeshift research room he had rigged up in the attic of Israel Green's, puzzling over

mysteries of human physiology. Many of the discoveries he made, particularly those about human digestion, still fill medical textbooks today.

Green's proudest hour, however, was yet to come. In 1817, President James Monroe visited Plattsburgh, feted in style by the inhabitants of the town. On the dollar of the locals, Monroe enjoyed a lavish meal at Israel Green's, followed by another subsidized banquet along the Chateaugay Turnpike the following day. At this second repast, the president ate and drank so much that he had to return to Israel Green's to spend another night before moving on to his next stop. The total expense of Monroe's good times emptied Plattsburgh's coffers enough that the town's plans to purchase a new fire engine had to be scrapped for at least another year.

Israel Green's Tavern remained at the pinnacle of Plattsburgh's social life for 51 more years. Then, on a night in 1868, a fire of unknown origin burned the clapboard structure to the ground. Nobody was hurt, but the tavern was completely destroyed. All that could be saved were the windows, which remain in existence today in the arts and crafts building of a girl's camp in Lake Placid. The rest of Israel Green's, though, was gone forever.

A new building was built on the site, and a number of other businesses came and went as the years went by — most recently a meat packing house called O'Neil's. Yet O'Neil's closed their doors for good more than a decade ago, and the spot has been vacant ever since. Some people wonder if it will always remain empty. Linda Marie Hill, a Plattsburgh expert in spirituality and healing practices, said she was called by the O'Neil family to conduct a cleansing of 73 Bridge St. not long before it was vacated. Hill said she identified the energies of some spirits that had taken up residence in the building, and while she states the cleansing was successful, she also adds that the site's location could potentially limit its further use. "The traffic is always coming right at it," Hill explained. "Energetically, that's a tough place to be. All of that energy is always being smashed into it like waves all day long. That just makes it difficult to do a lot of things there."

So, the site where the Green family once welcomed guests still stands empty, devoid of revelers or any other form of human activity. The legacy of Israel Green's Tavern, however, has not been forgotten. Every autumn, as the community commemorates the anniversary of the Battle of Plattsburgh, Israel Green's returns to the town that embraced it. Customers may wear jeans instead of britches and the basement of Plattsburgh's Trinity Episcopal Church may be its temporary home, but the tavern spirit is as alive and well on this weekend as it was in the 1800s. On these two days only, visitors can experience the meals and merriment of Israel Green's and, perhaps, appreciate a people and a place of long ago, a tavern occupying a Bridge Street lot filled to the brim with people eager to take their drink of history.