



# Notes From the Past Thirty Years

## North Bush Methodist Church

The North Bush Methodist Church, chronicled in the first edition of this book, has flourished in large part because of the activities of the local chapter of the United Methodist Women, successor to the Women's Society of Service. The women provide bibles for Sunday School students entering the third grade, participate in the local Meals on Wheels program, and provide a Food Pantry for the town. The whole congregation holds numerous fund raising events for the church; the most popular and successful are the May and October Roast Beef Dinners, originally held in the church. Now they attract as many as 1,000 diners and the dinners have moved to the new town hall. The success is due to the teamwork of a large number of members of the community under the direction of Cora and Harry Hayner.

Reverend Joseph A. Beatty completed 30 years of service in 1986, longer than any other pastor in the Troy Conference. After a series of other pastors, the church now enjoys its first female pastor, Michelle Ruller.

## Postmasters

Millie Busch started as a postal clerk in 1959 under postmaster Edward Faber and succeeded him in

1971. She retired in 1989 after 30 years with the Postal Service and was succeeded by Emily King.

## No Gasoline in Town

During the oil embargo of 1973-74, Clayton Shutt's station, the only one in town, ran out of gas. People could not get to work. Logging operations were curtailed, and the town's plight was so severe that the story made the New York Times.

## Twenty-Five Years as Town Clerk

One person has served the town throughout the recent past. Diane MacGregor retired at the end of 1997 after serving since 1972 as Town Clerk. Her smiling and helpful ways were recognized at a party attended by nearly a hundred people from the town.

## Earthquake and Windstorm

A tremendous earthquake centered at Blue Mountain Lake shook the town on October 7, 1983. On July 19, 1995, at the end of a long, hot spell, a storm front with severe downdrafts swept across the Adirondacks from northwest to southeast. The most severe damage was in the northern Adirondacks, but the storm left a swath of fallen trees diagonally across parts of the town of Caroga and a power outage that lasted for up to four days.



## So Much Has Changed

Town government has become much more sophisticated in the past thirty years, a positive factor in the lives of the town's people. In 1968, under the direction of Supervisor Emma Krause, the town board appointed a planning board, which began to consider zoning for the town. Its efforts coincided with the adoption of the Adirondack Park Agency Act and Emma has always believed that the APA impeded the town's adoption of a zoning ordinance. With the help of the Fulton County Planning Office, the town studied its needs within the framework of the APA Act. The county planning board noted that year-round residents occupied only one in five dwellings in the town. The proportion of summer residents was and is higher in Caroga than in any other town in the County.

A 1975 survey of town residents showed support for designing a town zoning ordinance. Spurred by Emma Krause's foresight, the town had already established a sanitary code, and mobile home ordinance. It was a struggle, but the town adopted an APA approved Land Use Plan in June of 1978 and the Agency approved it the next year, the fifth town in the Park to have an approved plan. To this day, only fifteen of the Adirondack Park's 110 towns have such plans. The following year, the board adopted a Zoning Ordinance and simultaneously appointed a Zoning Board of Appeals. The town had taken charge of its growth and development.

Bruce Busch took office as supervisor in January of 1984. In 1989 the town adopted a local ordinance controlling septic systems. During Busch's ten years in office, the town offices moved from the building

shared with the clubhouse of the golf course to the old Wheelerville School, nearby Route 10. The school moved into the new building near the outlet of East Caroga Lake in 1991.

## Wheelerville School

In 1988 the Wheelerville Union Free School District Board of Education faced state mandates for larger and more modern classrooms. The 132-year old structure had been enlarged many times but was still inadequate. After the board decided to plan a new school, there was a series of public meetings that preceded a referendum vote held in December. The construction of a 40,000 square-foot building would be paid for by a bond issue of \$4.3 million. Superintendent James F. Izzo staunchly defended the need for a new school. Despite concerns that seventh and eighth grades might better be served in a merger with Johnstown, the referendum passed by a vote of 277 to 235.

Construction of the new school commenced on January 10, 1990 with a ground breaking ceremony at the site on Route 10, near the outlet of East Caroga Lake. On September 3, 1991, the Wheelerville Union Free School officially opened the doors of the new building, ironically not in Wheelerville any more.



## **The New Town Hall**

The Town of Caroga offices shared the old Claflin store building with the Nick Stoner Course Pro Shop until 1992. The space was very limited and inadequate for town business. After the new Wheelerville School was completed, the town acquired the old school building. Supervisor Bruce Busch appointed a use recommendation committee, which had been authorized by the town board. The committee, with Bill Fielding as chairman, included Cora Hayner, Phillips Boyd, Doreen Ford, Craig Foster, Linda Gilbert, and Robert Kane. As a result of their recommendations, the town office moved into the old Wheelerville School in June of 1992. The Town Clerk had regular office hours in the new building, which could also accommodate the office and computers of the town's assessors. Dick Shell retired from that office in 1996. There was an office for the code enforcement officer and in 1994, Don Walrath succeeded Robert Sprung in that job.

There is room for Town Board meetings and civic functions as well as for the town court. Howard Sherman constructed the town's handsome new court room in one of the old school rooms. Built with materials supplied by the town, Sherman's work is evident in the raised paneling and pine woodwork that created the justice's bench, the witness stand, and a jury box with a handicap ramp.

The Nick Stoner Senior Citizens and not-for-profit groups like the North Bush Church can all now use the enlarged space. The Town Board at the urging of Supervisor Surace voted funds to create offices in the town hall for the Town Clinic, which was moved from its small, original location.

## **Landfill Closing**

In 1989, under Supervisor Bruce Busch, the town began to consider how to close the local landfill as mandated by the state. The town board made plans to buy heavy equipment to do as much of the closing as possible. Original estimates for closing the landfill were \$1.3 million; the town actually spent \$660,000. Fritz Ann Surace became supervisor in January of 1994 and under her leadership the board supervised the completion of the landfill closing.

Along with the construction of the new county site, the county built and operates the transfer station near the old landfill.

**Dick Lefebvre** of Canada Lake was appointed a member of the Adirondack Park Agency in July of 1993. He believes his appointment has been an advantage to the town and helped its residents understand the way the Agency can have a positive affect on growth and development in the town.

He did such an excellent job as a member of the Agency that in February of 1998 Governor Pataki appointed him Chairman of the Agency.

## **Stewart's Landing Dam**

Although it is outside the town, the dam at Stewart's Landing has played a major role in the town by controlling the water level of Canada Lake. During the summer of 1990, the state breached the dam in order to repair the decaying concrete structure and install new flood gates. George Dieffenbacher researched the history of the dam for the 25th Anniversary of the Stewart's Landing Association and was able to discover new information and dates concerning the dam. He found evidence of an old stone dam built in the 1880's at the outlet of Lily Lake, near the border between the towns of Caroga and Stratford.

Later in the 19th century a dam was built in the narrows upstream from the present dam. James Stewart built a third dam to power his saw mill. It was located between the present dam and the narrows and machinery from it is visible when the dam is open. The Adirondack Power and Light Company, predecessor of Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation, built the present dam in 1923 and 1924 in order to generate electricity.

A pipeline that carried water to the Sprite Creek Hydro Electric Plant and the huge surge tower at the bottom of the hill have been removed. NIMO, which owned 500 feet along both sides of the outlet, put the land up for sale in the 1960s. The Oregon Mountain Corporation bought the property and divided the land along the north shore into lots for cottages. Eventually about sixty camps were built on the waterway.

Urged along by the newly formed Stewart's Landing Association and the Canada Lake Protective Association, Assemblyman Glenn Harris proposed a bill in 1972 that would place the dam in state ownership. Since then the dam and the water level in Canada Lake have been controlled by the Department of Environmental Conservation.



## Gone – But Not Forgotten

The First Irving Pond Dam was built to power a saw mill, shortly after 1855. Irving Pond was important as a water source for Canada Lake and the head for the power plant built five-miles downstream from the Stewart's Landing Dam.

In 1926, Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation erected a second dam at Irving Pond, about a hundred yards west of the first dam. It took crews as large as a hundred men and a small steam shovel three seasons to complete the huge rock and earthen dam that created the beautiful pond. It took only three weeks



*The 1926 dam*



of the township. Despite opposition to removing the dam and concern for the water source used to keep the golf course green, financial reality prevailed — it would be too expensive to replace the dam.

Today broad grass fields surround the pond, which has shrunk to a narrow, meandering stream, and the pond is but a memory. The water is so low that the foundation of the first Irving Dam is now visible beside the little hill that was once a sunken island in the pond.

in the fall of 1997 to demolish the dam, remove the pipe that provided a sluiceway, and cut away the iron plates that were buried deep within the dam.

Holes had pocked the dam and the Department of Environmental Conservation was concerned about potential flooding, especially given the pond's huge watershed that extends almost all the way to the north edge



*Irving Pond 1997*





### **Honors for Staff Sgt. Harold P. Witzke**

On July 4, 1991 the Town of Caroga had one of the largest and most extensive parades in memory, with over 5000 people attending the parade and the outstanding fireworks display presented after dark. The occasion was dedicated to the late Staff Sgt. Harold P. Witzke III, a Caroga native, who died in combat during Operation Desert Storm, which ejected Iraq from its unlawful occupation of Kuwait. The Town renamed Old State Road near the campsite for him and placed a plaque honoring him on the front lawn of the Wheelerville School. The parade committee raised over \$7,000 to endow a Sgt. Harold P. Witzke III scholarship fund for a selected Wheelerville student graduating from Johnstown High School.

The Operation Desert Storm committee which arranged the production, consisted of Tim, Carm, and Pat Best, Butch and Val Scribner, Bill Ferguson, Penny Ferguson, Bill Furman, Robert and Sharon Miller, and Larry and Mary Johnson.

### **End of an Era**

The death of Hildegard Schine in September, 1994, brings to an end an era of glittering vacations at the Schine family home, MyHill, near the old Five Corners in Caroga. Hildegard and her husband, J. Myer Schine, who created an empire of movie theaters and hotels, entertained many celebrities at their summer home. Hildegard, who had traveled all over the world and had homes in Boca Raton and New York City, thought MyHil was a beautiful refuge, where she truly felt at home. Two of her four children, who also enjoyed the lakes, died before her: Richard in 1988 and Doris Maxwell in 1986. G. David died in an airplane accident along with his wife and son in 1996, leaving only Renee, wife of Lester Crown in Chicago.





### **The Merry-Go-Round**

A colorful glow lights the night sky in Caroga. George Abdella purchased Sherman's at a bankruptcy auction in 1989 and began the refurbishing of the old merry-go-round. They arranged to replace a wooden bridge over Mead Creek and landscape the area around the creek and the merry-go-round. But the most wonderful thing they did was hire Adirondack Stained Glass to design and create the clerestory windows that surround the upper walls of the carousel. Now twenty-four, long, thin windows circle the merry-go-round. Pat Duell, the designer, filled each rectangle with twelve different animals. Horses with flowing manes, dragons, unicorns, and more swirl around the building. Bright-colored glass pieces are studded with glass globes and jewels that sparkle and enhance the sense of movement. The lighted merry-go-round and its park-like setting are a gem of restoration.

### **Kane Mountain**

An ad-hoc group of concerned citizens has taken on the task of maintaining the fire tower on Kane Mountain and keeping it open to the public. The group has replaced windows in the tower and kept the site clean so that it attracts more hikers than ever before.

### **Nick Stoner Golf Course**

In a column in the *Leader-Herald*, Phil Connolly recalled Guy Farina, who served as the club's pro for thirty-five years. Connolly remembers the camaraderie of such players as Dr. Kersten Barney, Hal Schumacher, Harry Doust, "Duke" Devendorf, "Fran" Smith, "Stub" Youker, "Bish" Connolly, and "Doc" Glenn. Connolly praised the course, "carved out of the mountain woods its beauty is just its nature, and yes, somewhat in 'the raw.' The change of seasons offers such a spectrum of different conditions so that on a mountain course, like Stoner, the variety is unending. Summer on the old course is sometimes breath-taking, with an unashamed lushness like a beautiful woman in full maturity."

The greens are better than a few years ago, and the setting is a constant, loved by all. Much of the credit for the success of the course goes to Guy Farina who became the club pro in 1949. Town records show that he was paid only \$180 a month in 1952. He and his wife Mildred were favorites of the community. Steve Jennings assisted Guy in the year before Guy's death, then took over as club pro in 1985. Butch Guy retired as greenskeeper in 1994. He was succeeded for a year by James Derrick, but since March of 1996, Steve Jennings has served as golf course pro, manager, and greenskeeper.



## Winter Sports

The town's snowmobile trails were integrated into the county's system and some trails are a part of the state-wide system that received funding for maintenance and grooming from the NYS Office of Parks and Recreation, which distributes funds from license fees. Besides sponsoring social activities, the Nick Stoner Trailers Snowmobile Club sponsors a Poker Run each year.

Ice Fishing is as popular as ever and numerous houses are erected on the lakes, especially West Caroga near Vrooman's, as soon as the ice is firm.

Almost forgotten are the wonderful toboggan runs built by Ward Nixon and others in 1938. The first, on the Green Lake side of Kane Mountain was too sunny, but the next year a run was constructed facing Pine Lake. Huge blocks of ice from the lake were hauled up the steep slopes to create the wild run. Nixon also had an ice skating rink beside Vrooman's Hotel. It was the scene of many winter carnivals and skating exhibitions.



*Bathing beauties on ice—Will and Debbie Brandow, Pat Best, and Debbie Scharpou.*



*Vrooman's toboggan run*



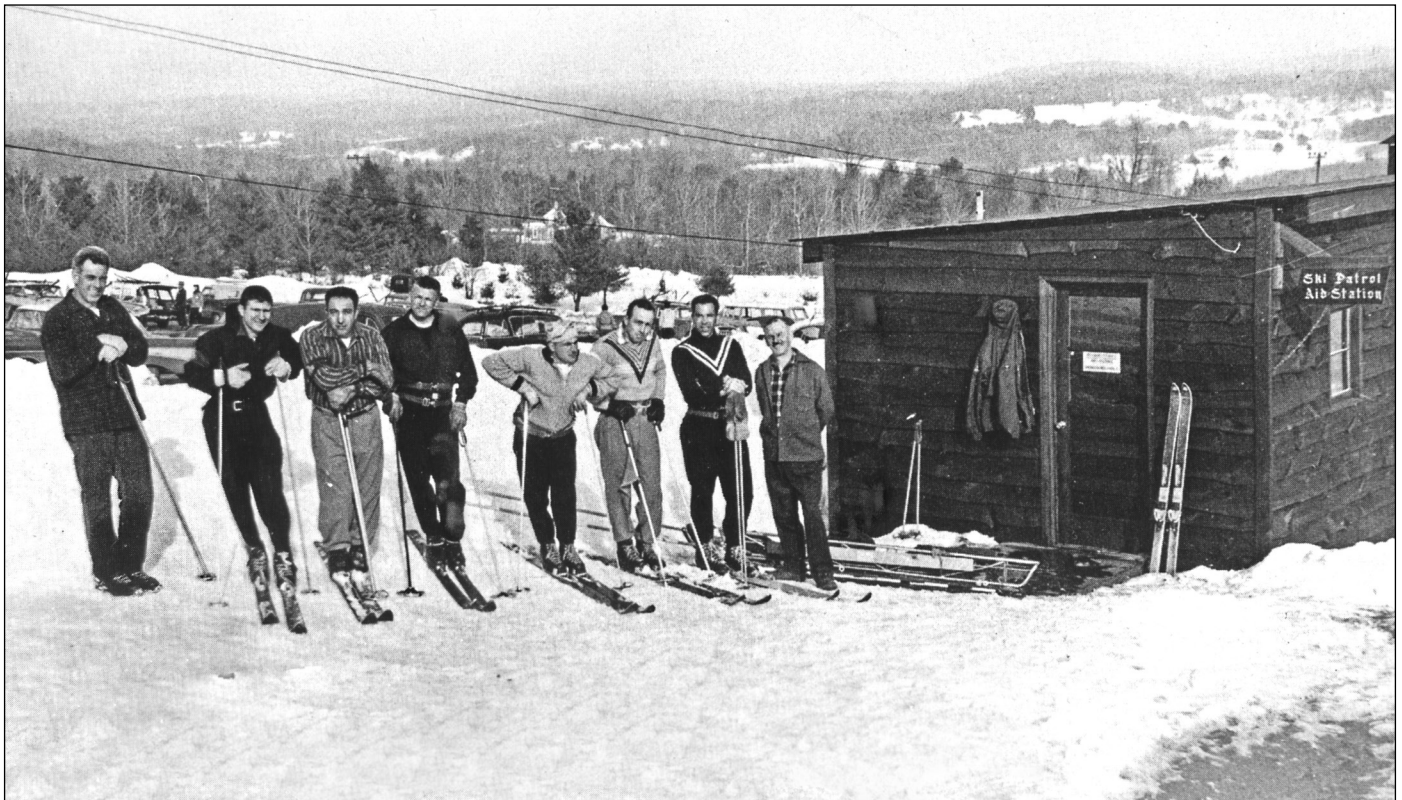
## Royal Mountain Ski Area

The ski slopes on Royal Mountain received scant mention in the 1976 edition of our history, but in the past twenty years the area has matured into a wonderful winter asset for the town. It began with Don Curtis and his son and Bob Olds skiing the mountain and realizing its potential and Skis and Poles Inc. was started. The group hoped to purchase the mountain from Howard Stock and move a rope tow from Gloversville to the mountain. Howard Stock's Sugar Road became "The Knight Run."

Fred Saunders purchased Skis and Poles Inc. in 1956 and the rope tow and the ski area took off. Kenneth Quackenbush, manager of Mad River Glen Ski Area in Vermont, planned the downhill trails, with the help of William (Doc) Charles of Johnstown. Howard Stock logged the slopes. These principals along with Jim Hayner, Stanley Bunner, and Robert Olds, donated time to install the tow and build the runs. Fred Saunders, an engineer on the New York State Thruway, took charge of the mountain after the Thruway was completed. Saunders had a camp at Canada Lake (he married Eleanor Ireland) and the couple were big supporters of the town.

In the summer of 1957 the Constam T-Bar was installed on the top of the mountain. Doc Charles managed the ski area in 1970. Fred Saunders died in 1971. Dr. Ernest G. Winston of Corinth owned the slopes for two years until it was sold at auction at the county court house. In 1972, Jim Blaise took over the ski slopes and Eleanor Saunders repurchased the mountain. Blaise was later able to purchase the mountain and he immediately made many improvements: a new T-bar on the small slope, more T-bars on the large slope, a new parking lot, more grooming equipment, electricity instead of gas engine power, a renovated and enlarged ski lodge. More recently a chair lift and snowmaking have been added to make this a fine local attraction. Still, to make ends meet the area needs to host motorcross and hill climb events for motorcyclists as it does every summer.

The longest season before snowmaking was in 1971 when the slopes did not close until April 18, although on May 9, 1966 a freak snow storm dumped 8 to 10 inches on the slopes and Curtis and Charles were able to climb up the Queen Trail and ski all the way to the bottom.



*Fred Saunders on the left and the Royal Mountain Ski Patrol, 1960.*





*Joe Brunetto, Ralph Sleazer, and Bill (Doc) Charles.*

### **Royal Mountain Ski Patrol**

Four avid skiers organized the ski patrol in 1956, Bill Charles, patrol leader, Ralph Sleezer, Joe Brunetto, and Joe Melita. The patrol won six first aid contests competing against patrols from central and northern New York.

The old skating shed from Knox Field in Johnstown became the patrol house on the top of Royal Mountain. It was named the Minnie Dole Chalet after the founder of the National Ski Patrol and the 10th Mountain Division. Members of the patrol had to take the shed apart and carry the wall up the steep slopes before they could reassemble it.

*FritzAnn Surace*



*Don and Gerd Curtis on the T-bar.*

### **Senior Citizens**

In October of 1979 a group of seniors from the town met at the fire house to organize the Nick Stoner Senior Citizen Club. The first officers were Richard Port, Eva Sweet, Peg Althiser, and Virginia Edick. From the beginning, the club has received help from the Fulton County Office of the Aging, which helps seniors with transportation and continues to offer programs and events for such groups throughout the county. Meetings held the first and third Tuesday of every month are open to every resident over 50 years of age.

Social activities are plentiful, with a Christmas party, mystery trips, and visits to the State Museum and the Assembly Chamber in Albany. Over the years the club has enjoyed dinners, participating in county-wide senior citizen jamborees, making crafts for fairs, planning picnics, and an 80 plus luncheon.

On the serious side the club has viewed movies on home safety and neighborhood security and had instruction in exercise and line dancing. The club created a shadow box with changing exhibits that was placed in the Fulton County Museum. Members started a letter-writing club with fifth grade students from the Wheelerville School.

In 1993 the club moved to new quarters in the Town Hall where the group continues to enjoy Christmas parties and dinners, including a tribute to retiring school principal Jim Izzo. With 117 members in 1997, the meetings grow and shrink with the seasons as many are snowbirds who winter in Florida, but the group remains an active force in the community.

### **The Caroga Clinic**

The Nick Stoner Senior Citizen's Club was instrumental in bringing a clinic to the town. The first Caroga Clinic was opened in a small building adjacent to the Nick Stoner Club House in 1985. Now the Town Board has provided space for the clinic in modern facilities within the Town Hall.

From the beginning Dr. John Glenn has been with the clinic, assisted at first by Mary Eaton and Anita Knapp. Mrs. Knapp is still on the staff and Pat Seeley is the receptionist.

*Kay Schmutz, Town Historian*





## Caroga Historical Association and Museum

While Barbara McMartin was visiting residents of the town to obtain information for the *Caroga* book, she discovered many treasures from the town's past. They seemed to call out for display in a museum. At the same time, Lena Durey, Town Historian, proposed creation of an historical association. In 1977 the Association was born with Lena as the first president. That same year Mike Steciak donated space in the old Unger Ice House for exhibits and the museum was born.

With the help of many volunteers, Barbara McMartin created new exhibits for many years. Many treasures were discovered in Emmeram Arnst's barn—a trove of artifacts that ranged from a ranking sled used for tanning to tools and wooden lasts from his grandfather's cobbler shop. Exhibits included old camping equipment, ice making, logging tools. The story of the Wheeler-Claflin Tannery was depicted in photographs, drawings, and artifacts. An exhibit of early camp life on Canada Lake featured a zinc-lined bath tub. A donation of cases from an old store sparked the creation of an exhibit recreating the old tannery company store, complete with authentic prices and lists of stock from the inventory Eva Peters Koetteritz had rescued.

Local workmen donated time and materials for lighting and stairs to the upper floor. That huge space was turned into a gallery for special exhibits. One year was devoted to the works of Paul Bransom, another to Charles Sarka's watercolors. All works were loaned

by residents and summer people. A huge quilt show drew entries from upstate—a magnificent collection of 89 quilts that filled the exhibit space. A collection of 19th century water color sketches included works by Rufus Grider and George Washington Waters.

The quilt show inspired Barbara McMartin to encourage residents to create a town quilt. Christine Burch helped supervise the quilting. Local artists Wally Crispin, Walt Short, Barbara, and others sketched scenes from the town and quilters interpreted the scenes in bright colors embellished with embroidery. The quilt was such a favorite and so many wanted to participate that a second quilt was designed. Both are now the centerpiece of the museum's exhibits.

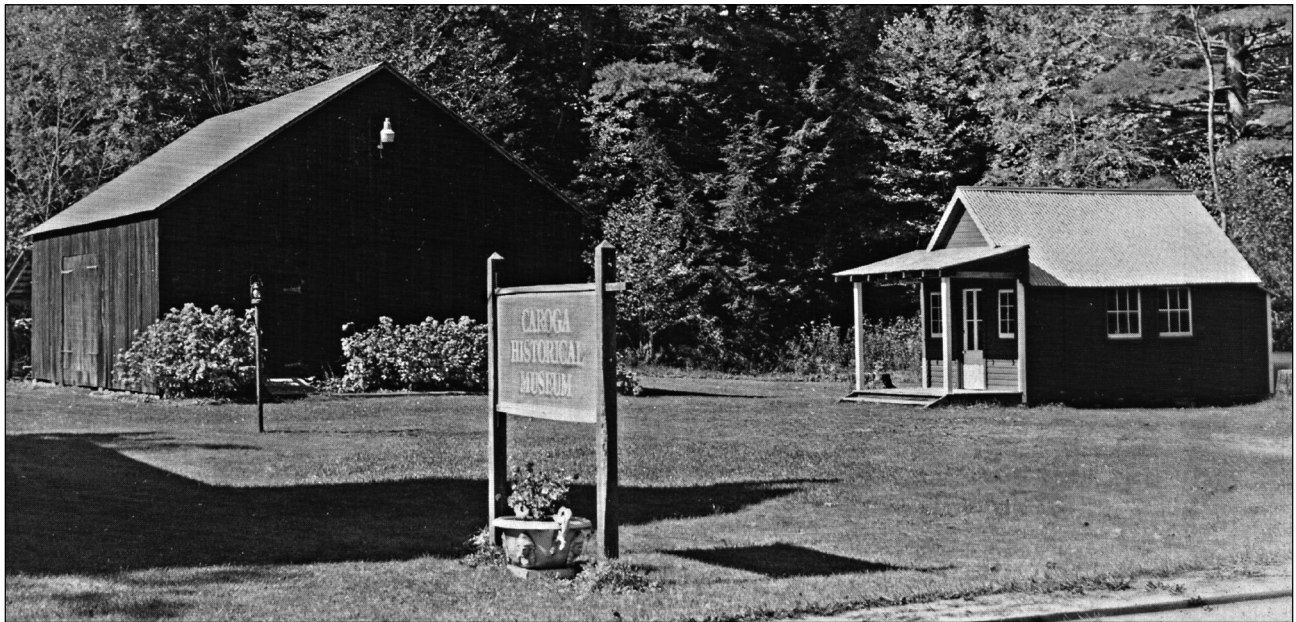
A series of historical programs was well attended. They included Francis B. Rosevear's talk on the survey point, a tribute to Charles Sarka attended by his niece from New York City, and a memorial service for Paul Bransom. The exhibits and programs drew over 3,000 people to the museum.

Volunteers did much of the work, but employees obtained under the Green Thumb program helped keep the museum running.

The historical association began looking for permanent quarters and found them in the William Arnst homestead which had been reassembled from an old tannery building. The building was purchased and funds were raised within two years to pay for it. The Historical Association continued to offer programs with talks by Emmett Stock, Dr. Palmer, Lew Decker, and others.

Association members contributed work for upkeep





at the Homestead and exhibits around the theme of a 19th century farmhouse. A child's room is full of charming toys. Susan Watkins was hired to help catalogue the museum's growing collection. Mary Tasheff helped create the museum's store. A separate building houses farm tools and the Arnst cobbler shop.

The most important addition to the Homestead Museum occurred in 1984 when volunteers relocated the historic barn to the site. The original peg barn was built in 1860 in the Town of Bleeker by the Rhinehart family. In 1902 Peter Stock purchased the barn to replace his that had burned and he moved the barn to the Stock farm at the eastern edge of the Town of Caroga.

Around 1925 a group led by Martha Kunkel was looking for a site for a Girl Scout Camp. The group rented the barn for several years until it could raise funds to buy the property. The farm site with its pond became the Fulton County Girl Scout Camp Kowaumkami. The barn served as the camp's dining room. Emmett Stock, who had inherited the property from his uncle continued as caretaker.

In 1984, Mary Tasheff learned of the availability of the barn from Martha Kunkel. Mary, representing the Historical Association, formed a committee and finally was able to arrange the donation of the barn to the Caroga Historical Association and Museum. A group of 26 volunteers from the town dismantled and reassembled the barn. It immediately began to serve as a meeting space in summer, a gallery for shows by local artists and photographers, and a place for permanent exhibits like the story of the tannery. Every summer

Mary arranged for a series of talks in the barns, "Tales short and tall" about the history of Caroga.

At President Lena Durey's urging, the town celebrated Nick Stoner Day and held walk-about to historic sites like Newkirks, cemeteries, and the tannery remains.

Emma Krause became president in 1986 and helped with fundraising. The Museum began to hold summertime craft fairs. Emma was succeeded by Kathy Hemmens and then by Mary Cleland, who started a program of visits by local schoolchildren. Mary also organized a series of craft workshops and musical evenings. Inger McDaniel became the backbone of the museum staff for many years.

In preparation for the research to revise the Caroga book, the book committee, with individuals from from the Association, organized three evenings of reminiscences and entertainments at the museum. Story tellers lovingly recalled school days at North Bush, romance on Nick Stoner Island, the eccentricities of Margaret Widdemer, and stories of other town characters. Tape recordings of these events will be the basis of oral history for the future. Pat Purtell drew huge, colorful maps of the town to serve as a backdrop for postcards and pictures.

Town Historian Lena Durey and her successor Kay Schmutz have accumulated notebooks and files of newspaper clippings that are now in the town office. Their work is a resource for all interested in the town's more recent history, with many more accounts of residents of the town than will fit in this history.

*From notes by Inger McDaniel,  
Barbara McMartin, and Mary Tasheff*



## Nights Out

(to the tune of the "Wiffenpoof Song")

*From the tables down at Orvilles, (Chicken Coop)  
To the bar up at the well, (Unger House)  
To the dear old Pine Point Inn (Kowalskis)  
We love so well  
Set the drunkards all assembled  
With their glasses raised on high  
And the magic of their singing  
Sounds like hell.*

Wheelerville High Class of 1954  
(submitted by Ralph Hayner Sr.)



As a tourist town, Caroga has a long history of hotels, restaurants, and bars, as this theme song of the class of 1954 attests. From the Auskerada to the speakeasies of the 1920's to the present day, Caroga has offered a lively night life. Many distinguished taverns, however, have closed their doors, and the good times are only memories. Among them were the Chicken Coop on Route 10, known for many a rousing evening in the '50's and '60's; the Christmas Tree on the Golf course, now closed despite its excellent view of shooting stars on warm August nights; Tommy DeMetre's tavern (formerly the Caroga Lake Hotel), bulldozed and burned in 1956 to enlarge Sherman's parking; and Nicholsons (subsequently Club 29, Danny's II, Denise's Restaurant, My Place, Lido Lounge, and finally its most spirited reincarnation "Crazy Horse" managed by Russ Insognia), presently shuttered despite its prime location next to the County Store in "downtown" Caroga Lake.

The Hut, Steve and Tony's, the Hollywood Skating Rink, Johnnys Tavern, Caroga Lake Manor, Steciaks, Timberline, and O'Donnells have all departed. In 1955 the original Unger House at Unger Corners burned to the ground. It was here that our former supervisor, Emma Brown Krause, remembers the time when she was a young girl and served dinner to the notorious Al Capone. Capone and his companions were on their way to the Champion prizefighters Gene Tunney's training camp in Speculator. Emma Krause also reports that the Albany gangster Legs Diamond spent a summer at a state senator's camp in Kirchen's Grove during the 1920's.

The Unger restaurant was quickly rebuilt in a new location (Rt. 29A & 10), where it is still in business, along with several new or rejuvenated night

spots that have taken the place of the old establishments. Bruce Yates built "Lakeaire" on land given to him by his father Burton Yates. During the 1950's and 1960's, it became one of the most popular bars in the tri-county area. There were bands every Friday and Saturday night and crowds overflowed into the parking lots on warm summer evenings. With his friend Barney Murdico helping out as bartender, they served many a cool beverage to the multitudes of "baby boomers" that had come of age. (18 was the legal drinking age at that time.)

Bob Medley and his wife Virginia had a vision of a motel and restaurant on top of the mountain above the "rock cut" on Route 10, overlooking Canada Lake. After much hard work, The Pinnacle opened. Patrons could enjoy a pleasant dinner while looking out at shimmering sunset colors reflected in the lake far below.

During the 1980's, Donna Rush bought the Pine Lake Park, refurbished the pavilion and booked many top flight country and western singers including Faron Young, Box Car Willie, Lynn Anderson, and Shelly West. Many times Donna sang a duet with the star of the evening, clearly fulfilling one of her lifetime dreams.

The barn at Unger Corners was converted from a gift shop to a rock n' roll dance hall by Pete Kanches and named The Jammer. It was very popular during the 1970's and 1980's and is currently featuring country music.

Shortly before his death, Hudson Hawley, a former foreign correspondent from Philadelphia had started to convert his stately home on Route 10 across from Mussey Road to a restaurant. This building, through the efforts of Don and Marge Murphy, Bill and Nancy Bennett, and the current owners Nick and Helen Hamalak became the

distinguished Maple Tree Knoll restaurant.

In 1972 Pat and Don Best bought Vrooman's Hotel. Don, experienced in construction had the idea of building a toboggan slide in the lot on the side of the hotel. Over the winter of 1974 he constructed a model using toothpicks and glue. Satisfied with the results he and his sons Tim and Jeff, along with many local volunteers built the slide which was finished in November 1975. It was 39 feet high, ten feet wide, 165' long, with a six-foot railing. It cost \$5,000 and with 13,000 board feet of lumber was enough to build three small homes it was reported. Unfortunately, insurance problems caused it to be dismantled just three years later.

Vroomans with its central location has always been a focal point of the town. The Best's have found many ways to encourage community participation including the pitch league, men's and women's pool leagues in the winter, and the men's and women's golf leagues in the summer. In addition they have taken a very active part in the county sponsored winter festival events such as the car races on the ice, outside volleyball, out-house races, and the chicken wing eating contest (the winner one year ate 121 wings in one hour to obtain the \$75 first prize).

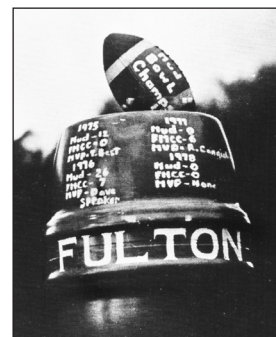
With the help of many local people, including Bill Fielding, Don Best also started a skating rink next to Vroomans; many people still miss it and hope that a way will be found to revive this worthwhile winter activity. Other winter activities include the sportsman weekend with an ice fishing contest and rabbit hunt, and the Cancer Society's Cross Country Skiing fund raiser at the

Nick Stoner Golf Course.

Summer also provides opportunities for light hearted activities such as the raft races (human propelled) and the bathtub races (outboard motors) at Pine Lake. The Pine Lake mud bowl was the high point of early fall activities from 1975-1984. A Caroga team was fielded against the best of Fulton Montgomery Community College's athletes. Of the ten annual games played, Caroga won eight, tied once, while FMCC won once. We generally supplied the referees. The games were held in a bog near the entrance to Pine Lake Park. On some occasions the mud was up to four feet deep which made the playing difficult to say the least. By the end of the contest it was difficult to determine the identity of the mud soaked, dirt encrusted jubilant players.

A new group is trying to reopen the old restaurant and dance hall at Sherman's, and only time will tell if this stellar attraction will succeed or join the many other establishments that have passed away.

*Bob Mahoney*



*Mud Bowl Team*



## Little Allen Inn

*Adapted from an article by William Ringle*

Had you been in a canoe at Canada Lake's east end fifty-four years ago the night breezes might have wafted some soaring sounds to you.

The source could have been the renowned soprano sax or clarinet of Sidney Bechet, the New Orleans pioneer who has a place in every serious jazz historian's pantheon of greats.

Or it could have been the tenor sax of Pete Brown, a mountain of a black man whose melodic improvisations "jumped every note."

Both played at a raffish road house, the Little Allen Inn, on the north shore. Today the building that housed the nightclub is the thoroughly respectable Lakeside Motel.

The Little Allen Inn's appeal wasn't limited to jazz fans. It specialized in floor shows that were, in the language of those times, "risqué" or "off color." "My mother wouldn't let me go to the Little Allen Inn," says Bonnie Yates Buchner, the present owner of the Lakeside Motel. But little, maybe nothing in its shows, would have been barred from today's PG movies or prime-time television.

Probably the most lurid feature that ever appeared on the Little Allen's bill was an actor (or maybe an actress) named Jean LaVerne who wore a costume that was half a white silk evening gown and half a tuxedo. It was his (or her) art, aided by some strategically placed spotlights, to portray a man seducing a woman on a park bench. In non-working hours, LaVerne didn't completely shed the stage person. On one side of his (her) head the hair was long, blond and coiffed Veronica Lake-style. The other side was topped in dark hair, cut short, male-style. This might not even provoke a second glance in a large city today, but it was regarded as highly bizarre in 1942.

You may wonder how a musician of Bechet's international stature (he was practically a national hero in France, where he died in 1959 at age 62) found his way to the Little Allen Inn.

One reason was that he had been in the area on and off for several years. His first local stand was in September, 1939, in the Log Cabin at Yost, on Route 5 east of Palatine Bridge, where he played most often. Today that empty building, forlorn and moldering, looks like an abandoned Klondike miners' dorm. His "Fonda Blues," among other records, memorializes that period. During that time he

made some of the frenetic Victor records that still thrill listeners. He also played at Saxie Marshall's, on the Johnstown-Fort Johnson Road.

Around that time, a columnist in "Downbeat" magazine, the musician's bible, called Bechet "the grand old man of American jazz." Indeed, he was called "Pops," and his local fans marveled at such vigor and passion in one so old. But another jazz authority wrote to remind "Downbeat" that though Bechet was certainly grand, he wasn't old. He was then forty-three!

This was an era when clarinetist Benny Goodman, "The King of Swing," was a national icon, closely followed by Artie Shaw, not to mention a half-dozen other famous clarinetists.

Pete Brown, who succeeded Bechet on the Little Allen's bandstand, as he had earlier at the Log Cabin, is one of those musicians, sadly, who is most frequently described in jazz histories with such phrases as "unappreciated," "underrated," "too often overlooked," or "given insufficient attention." Before coming to the lake he'd been a mainstay of the popular John Kirby orchestra and a number of combos composed of highly-regarded musicians on New York's 52nd Street.

Possibly the reason top-flight musicians like Bechet and Brown worked at the Little Allen Inn was that the owner, Ruth Allen Kathan, was herself an accomplished pianist and appreciated their talents. However, she seldom played piano herself, according to Art Gibbons of Gloversville, at that time a popular band leader in the northeast. "She booked some great female vocalists there," Gibbons said, "but I can't remember the names anymore."

The Depression, though waning, was probably another factor. Big bands were popular, but sustaining gigs for individuals and small combos were few and far between.

The Little Allen occupied the site of the lake's first hotel, the Canada Lake House. After it burned it was replaced by the Auskerada House, which burned in 1921. According to Lydon F. Maider, who has been coming to the lake since the 1920's, a popular dance hall operated there before the Little Allen opened its doors.

One reminder of the Little Allen days survives unseen at the Lakeside—a partly hidden wall painting depicting a Hawaiian beach scene, framed in palms, that used to be behind the bar at the nightclub. 