

Wheelerville and Pine Lake

The Era of Logging and Tanning

Wheelerville's growth was the most spectacular of any community in the Town of Caroga. In 1860, French's Gazetteer of New York lists Newkirk Mills as the principal settlement in the town. By 1870, Wheelerville had not only appeared on the map, bearing the name of its leading industrialist, but it was a boom town that had grown up almost over night.

The days of the 1870's were exciting, fed by the seemingly limitless forests that surrounded Wheelerville. However, by the early 1880's, all this began to change. Hemlock had been stripped from the forests. The tanneries closed. The saw mills slowed almost to a halt. A few lumbermen continued in the 1890's, but in 1901, a county census listed only one incorporated taxable industry in the entire Town of Caroga, the Hudson River Telephone Company, which had a tax bill of \$6.26.

Logging continued into the early twentieth century, but never on the scale of the 1870's. That was the era in which the riches of the forests built a thriving mill town.

The Awakening Town

The small cross road community of McClellan Corners preceded Wheelerville. It was located less than a mile south of the mill site that was transformed into Wheelerville, and the memoirs of

Isaac Peckham Christiancy have already given us a glimpse of the corners in the 1820's with its half dozen farms nearby.

Cyrus Durey prepared a history of Caroga in which his hero, Nick Stoner, plays a large role. Durey states that Stoner purchased a part of the McClellan farm at the five corners and lived there from about 1810 to 1838, but no other proof of this has been found.

Canada Lake Inlet was such a suitable source of water and power that first Mr. Jefferson and then Thomas J. Potter had saw mills along the stream. There was a saw mill operating continuously at the site until it witnessed the birth of the huge tannery complex in the late 1860's.

Another saw mill was built by Robert Stewart at the outlet of Otter Lake in the 1820's and that mill was shown as still standing on the map of 1856.

In 1841, the State Legislature authorized that a road be laid out from Newkirk Mills to Piseco. Work was begun on the southern part in 1842, and northern parts of the road were still under construction in 1848. The road took at route due north from the Five Corners and after crossing the inlet of Canada Lake, it followed the lake shore west to Green Lake. The section south of the Stratford Road was completed by 1845 and accounts show that \$733.74 was expended for its construction. It can be surmised, but not proved,

that both the London Bridge and a bridge at Green Lake were built at this time.

The history prepared by Cyrus Durey reports that a school had been built on an acre of land at the southeast of McClellan Corners by 1831.

Isaac Peckham Christianity referred to a Foster who lived east of McClellan Corners. He was Titus Foster and his seven acre farm is now owned by direct descendants, Wesley and Henry.

In 1842, the Methodist Episcopal Society was organized in the area by Stephen Parks of Stump City (Gloversville). According to Frothingham's history, *"John Mead was chosen its first class leader, and in 1843, Samuel M. Foster, one of the members of the society became a licensed exhorter and served the little congregation in that capacity until 1850, at which time he was granted authority to preach, and continued in this service for many years."* The Reverend Fosters lived for many years in the northeastern corner of the intersection. Reverend Foster lived to be one hundred years old and died in 1906.

McClellan Corners became known as the Five Corners as other families moved in, but it remained the hub of the community.

The Sexton family moved into the homestead on the northwest of the intersection in 1838. Their son, Ralph, was only 11 at the time. By the 1850's he was a major landowner in the area and one of its political leaders, serving as Town Supervisor in 1858 and from 1860 to 1861. His wife was Lydia Gage, the daughter of Marvel Gage of North Bush. Sexton later moved, but held 14 different terms on the County Board of Supervisors, either from



*Early settlers on the Hohler Road
east of Five Corners.*

Caroga or from the Town of Ephratah.

There was a store in the northern angle of the intersection and a hotel came to the southwestern corner shortly after 1840. J.C. Zeyst was the proprietor of the Caroga Lake House, as the hotel was known from the 1850's to the 1870's.

Many of those who moved to the country around the Five Corners were of German origin, providing skills and crafts needed in the new community. An 1850 (sic. 1856) map shows several farms along the road west of the Five Corners. They belonged to H.H. Salsburgh, M. Carrel, D. Wait, and A.Y. Crocker.

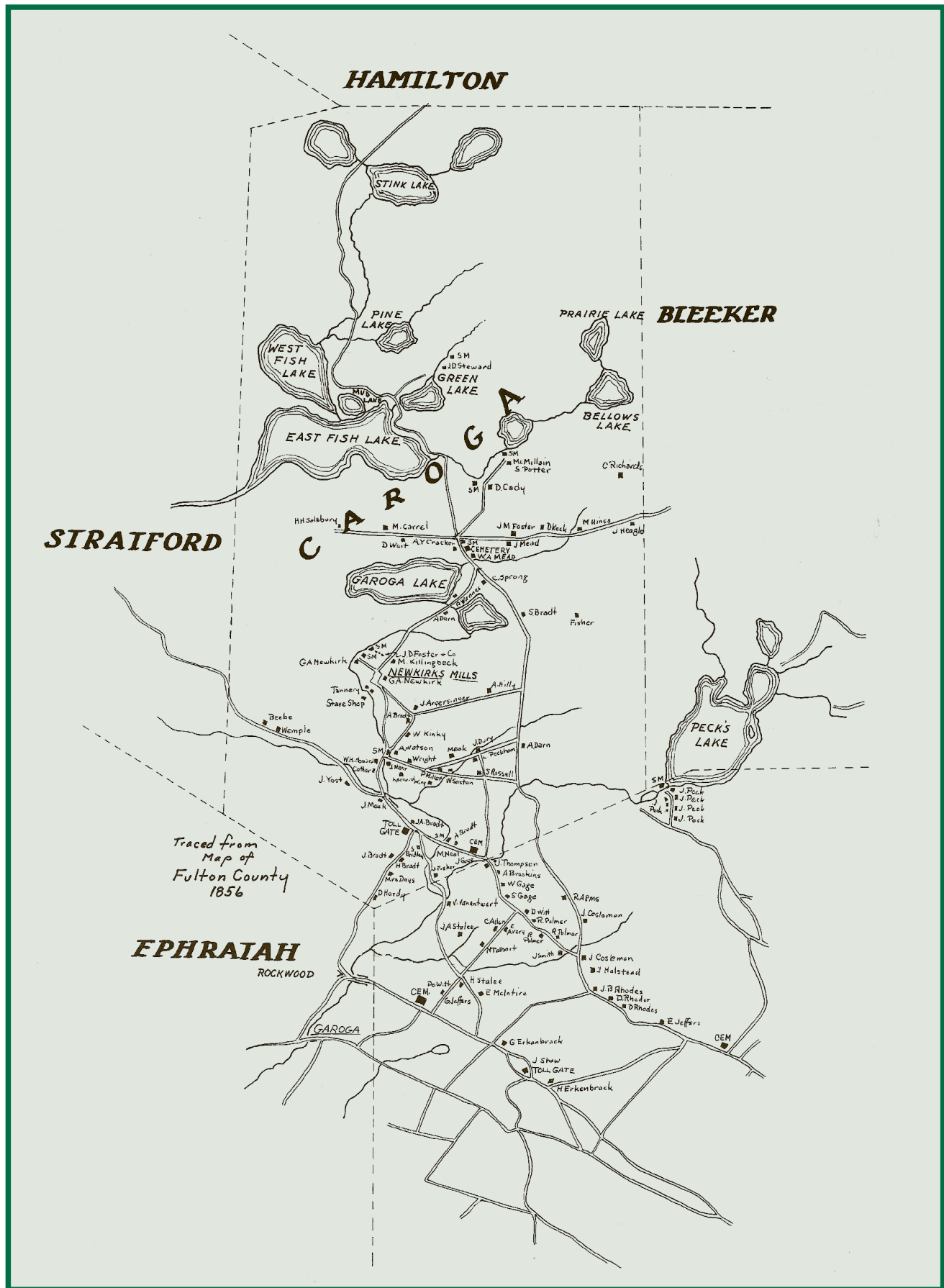
Two families moved into farms along the London Bridge Road. One was that of Eune Arnst, a farmer and shoemaker who emigrated from the German speaking north of Switzerland and who purchased 12 acres originally owned by James McClellan. Even before the Arnst family moved to their farm, Elizabeth Ballou had purchased a 77 acre farm in 1850, on the London Bridge Road.

Along the road to the northeast were the Vanderpools and Alanson Morey, who came to the settlement in 1847. Morey was a farmer and a blacksmith and served in many capacities in the town government.

In the 1850's the community was still small, but it had grown sufficiently to require a new school. In November, 1856, the Town of Caroga School District No. 4 purchased for "*ten dollars, lawfully money of the United States of America,*" a parcel of land from Joseph Moak and his wife.



Wheelerville map 1810





The Wheelerville School

The land was described as follows— *“beginning at the center of the highway, running north eight rods, bounded on the east by lands owned and occupied by Jos. Durey, on the north five rods by lands owned and occupied by Joesph Moak, on the west by lands owned and occupied by Joseph Moak, on the south five rods by public highway, containing one fourth of an acre of land for the purpose of a school site as long as it shall remain a district and the one not changed and if it should be dissolved or the site changed. It shall come back into the hands of said Joseph Moak or heirs.”*

The school was quickly built and although there have been many additions, the original rooms survive and are used today.

William Davidson Lee ran the Leesdale Tannery at the Canada Lake Inlet mill site, briefly in 1859. During the early 1860's Levi Wheeler and Platt Potter moved to the area and worked as tanners at the same mill site. The community north of Caroga was growing slowly.

The Wheeler Claflin Company

Then, in 1865, came the precipitous change, fired by a sudden burst of money from outside. William Claflin, who had enormous financial

reserves and a great need of leather to supply his shoe factories in the Boston area, formed a partnership with Jonathan W. Wheeler of North Becket County, in the Berkshires of Massachusetts. The Wheeler Claflin Company bought 20,000 acres in the Town of Caroga alone. This was two-thirds of the entire acreage of the township. Most of the land could be purchased for less than four dollars an acre, in the same era in which a worker in the tannery, could earn nearly two dollars a day.

In 1865, Wheeler Claflin's purchases had already inflated the local land market. A 35 acre parcel, adjacent to the mill site which they already owned, was acquired from Francis Fry for \$800. The land, south of the mill property, extended from London Bridge Road to the road between Caroga and the mill.

Claflin continued buying land, adding large tracts in 1868 near Piseco and in Arietta along the West Branch of the Sacandaga River.

Within a very short time during 1865, the company had erected huge barns and lofts to house the tannery. In an equally brief time, the mills began to change the surrounding settlements. A.Y. Crocker obtained a license for a tavern in 1866, which he operated at the Five Corners. He also constructed a race course in the flats near the lake which was used for horse racing in the 1870's.

In May, 1868, J.C. Zeyst, the proprietor of the Caroga Lake House, also at the Five Corners, started a new stage line. Stages were to leave from the Pine Lake Post Office, which was the official name for the post office in Wheelerville. They made the trip to Johnstown, passing through the village of Rockwood, and they left Caroga Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, returning the same day.

A plank road was constructed along the route of the Old State Road, from Green Lake to Pine Lake, then north past the Arietta Tannery. The road was built from lumber from the Pine Lake Mill and was 8 feet wide over solid ground and 12 feet wide through swamps and wet ground. It is not known whether Wheeler and Claflin or the town constructed the road. It was designed to make it possible for that company to ship skins and lumber to market, but a huge jump in the town's spending for roads in 1869 to \$750



The picture of the plank road in the vicinity of Pine Lake was taken in the 1870's by G.T. Copeland.

indicates the town must have paid for a good part of the cost of the road improvements.

Tanning

The tanning industry created many settlements similar to Wheelerville. During the Civil War, America's growing need for leather required an expanded tanning industry, which in turn called for large amounts of tannic acid to cure the leather. Tannin was derived from the bark of hemlock trees; and the cost of transporting the enormous amounts of bark or tanning liquor made from it was so great that it was easiest to build the tanning mills near the hemlock forests. There, too, large amounts of inexpensive lumber permitted the construction of huge mills which could be, and were, abandoned as the supplies of hemlock dwindled.

Wave after wave of tanning factories were built across the woods of the northeast, close to the rich hemlock forests. As those forests were depleted, the mills were erected farther and farther from the source of hides or the factories that turned the leather into shoes and boots. It did not take twenty years to exhaust the easily harvested hemlock bark in the Town of Caroga, and then the tanneries moved on. The same process continued across the Adirondacks

until late in the nineteenth century when synthetic chemicals were available for the leather industry. Then the industry that provided so many jobs in the wild interior mountain regions collapsed and most of the woods were left to grow in peace.

Lumbering complemented the tanning industry. After all, the tanners wanted no more than the peeled bark of the trees. It made sense for lumber mills to be placed near by, to saw the hemlocks into usable lumber.

The lumber mill at Pine Lake, owned also by the Wheeler Claflin Company and managed by Milton Barnes, served that purpose. However, not all the trees that were felled for bark were harvested. In the northern woods of the Town of Caroga, many fallen hemlock can still be found, with the bark replaced by mosses. The surviving logs attests to the durability of hemlock. The rapidity with which the tanners decided to move on to richer areas is proven by the number of piles of hemlock bark that still lie in the deep woods.

Logging continued after the tanners moved on. Pine and spruce were cut until all the soft-woods were exhausted. It was not until the early twentieth century that hardwoods from the town found a ready market.

For two decades, after 1860, the economy of the Town of Caroga was based on the combined need for leather and lumber. Before the impact of the name Wheeler, the official name of the entire district was Pine Lake, and the Pine Lake Post Office served the area for many years. In 1862, Ralph Sexton was postmaster and the post office was at the Five Corners. Later, the Pine Lake Post Office was move to Wheelerville, where David H. Bidwell was postmaster in 1874. Julius M. Cole succeeded him in 1880 and Addison H. Bidwell in 1881. All this time, in fact until 1912, the official address remained Pine Lake.

Pine Lake and Lumbering

A story from the *Gloversville Intelligencer* of October 20, 1870, describes a visit to Pine Lake and the huge new saw mills there.

PINE LAKE, WHEELERVILLE, AND THE TUNNICLIFFS

But few people are aware of the immense lumbering and tanning establishments which are in active operation in Fulton County. A week ago last Saturday we visited two of these—Messrs. Wheeler and Claflin, in the Town of Caroga.

The Pine Lake Saw-Mill is not far from the Hamilton County line, and five years ago the road to its present location was almost impassable, through swamps, trees, bushes, and stones. At about that time the owner of the tract (whose name we did not learn) was killed by the falling of a tree, and the property was purchased by Messrs. Wheeler and Claflin, in connection or partnership with Mr. Barnes. The latter gentleman, with eighteen or twenty men, then went to work with their axes and put up a log house among the large sized and very thickly growing trees, the stumps of which now remain so closely together that it requires careful driving to avoid or turn around amongst them. Building the house was but a play spell, compared with keeping possession of it. "Possession" is said to be "nine-tenths of law," and seventy-five millions of mosquitoes, assisted by twenty-five millions of black flies, were not to be frightened out of their hereditary rights and possessions by nineteen ordinary mortals, without a desperate and bloody flight. The new log-house was full of cracks in the side and roof. All night hosts of mosquitoes tuned their bagpipes and rushed to the fray. Lucifer himself never had a more numerous or sulphur-deserving army. Smudge fires were burned to keep them off and helped a little, though

Mr. Barnes assured us he would not spend another summer like that for five thousand dollars. How much the flies would ask we did not learn, for they had just gone into winter quarters for the season.

Mr. Barnes gave many interesting facts concerning the Lake, the woods, the roads, and the buildings. The Sawmill is put up in the most substantial manner. It is 106 feet long by 65 wide, and proportionately high, and suitable for doing an immense amount of work. A gang of 29 saws were, and are, tearing through two or three logs at one time; the logs are at first slabbed on two sides, down to the same thickness, but a circular saw, then placed on and between rollers that hold them firmly and shove them against the gang-saw. As soon as far enough along, more logs are placed at the end of these, and thus every 10 or 12 minutes 20 to 30 inch and a quarter boards are made.



Pine Lake around 1880.



Lumber from the William Claflin Pine Lake Mill and the rail line leading into the mill.

During the year between 1,000,000 and 1,500,000 feet of pine and hemlock lumber is run through, and furnishes to the farmers and other citizens of the county a large amount of team work during the winter. The lumber is mostly drawn to Fonda, though portions of it are purchased by Johnstown and Gloversville dealers. Incidentally, the question comes up, "why do they send to Canada for lumber, where there are immense quantities at hand?"

Large quantities of lath are made during the season. Perhaps all of the readers of the Gloversville Intelligencer have noticed the advertisement, "500,000 Good Lath For Sale By Wheeler & Claflin." We were shown large piles of broom-handles, sawed of suitable size and length, to be turned out into that very necessary article of household utility. An army "with banners," in our estimation, would not be near as terrible as an army of women numerous enough to make the "dust fly" with all these broom handles; there were 200,000 of them. To the mill a wooden railway, half a mile or more long, is used to bring in logs. It has a sad history; last season Mr. Barnes and his son, a young man of 22, were engaged on the car running in logs; a light rain fell, making the track slippery, and car could not be checked. They run off the track; Mr. Barnes was thrown about 50 feet, but

not injured. He turned and saw his son lying on the ground, but before he could reach him the immortal and priceless soul had fled. The story was a simple one, but it touched the heart, and the hope went heavenward: may He who gave, and Hath taken away, again unite these earthly ties and loves in that land wherein shall enter no sorrow.

From the mill we went to a large barn, 40 by 80, then to the Lake. Pine Lake is a mile or more long and about a half a mile wide. A dam has been constructed at the outlet for reservoir purposes; the water is clear and quite deep in some places. In a grove, near by, were seats and a speaker's stand, recently used for a Sabbath-school celebration. The mountains rear at hand are about 200 feet high of rather smooth ascent, and covered with large growth of timber. Messrs. Wheeler, Claflin, and Barnes, as we are informed, at an expense of about \$7 per rod. About five miles of "corduroy" road have also been built, and the common roads in every direction, greatly improved—all under the direction and at the expense of Messrs. Wheeler & Claflin.

Not having time to go further to the large tannery owned by the same gentlemen on the Sacondaga; in Hamilton County, we bade Mr. Barnes adieu and made a short call at the one at Wheelerville. 🍷



Pine Lake Mill and the old mill pond.



Pine Lake Mill before 1880.

The mills at Pine Lake were busy throughout the decade of the 1870's. In April 1875, the *Fonda Democrat* reported:

Messrs. Wheeler, Claflin & Co. have their tanneries well stocked with bark and are driving a lively business. Their tannery at Arietta is turning out daily 1,200 sides of leather, which is carted to Gloversville and shipped by railroad. The principal part it goes to Boston, the home of ex-Governor Claflin, who is at the head of this concern, the Morgan Lumber Company and various other interests.

An article at the same time gives some indication of events at Pine Lake.

DOINGS IN THE NORTH COUNTRY

The past winter has been more than an average favorable one for the lumbermen to lay in a stock of logs, and also for the tanners to stock their tanneries with bark.

Our townsman, Mr. Milton Barnes, has stocked his mill at Pine Lake with 15,000 logs, and is rapidly putting it in merchantable shape. Mr. B. has also but in his mill

a steam engine and boiler, which will render his mill independent of water power in a dry season.

In July of that year, the mill was enlarged.

Milton Barnes, Esq., is rushing business at Pine Lake Mill. Since putting in his new boiler and steam engine he has added a new gang of saws to his extensive mill. Teams are drawing away thousands of feet of lumber daily, yet his lumber piles are growing fast every week, and it is well worth a visit to see the working of his extensive establishment.

Pine Lake village bore little resemblance to its modern layout. The mill and houses were west of the present road. Before the dam on Pine Lake, the outlet of that lake met the outlet of Stoner Lakes near the point the latter now passes under the highway. The sawmill was downstream and there was only a small pond built on the streams to serve the mill. A village of workers homes was constructed east of the mill, where today there is only an open field.

As the mountains were stripped of their timber and tree tops left behind, fires became an increasing problem. Kane Mountain burned in 1877, and stumps from this fire can still be found.

Wheelerville and the Tannery

More than a rich supply of hemlock was necessary to the tanner. The old mill site beside Canada Lake Inlet was a natural one for a tannery. Not only were the surrounding woods rich in hemlock, but the stream supplied the all important source of water for the tanning process and it washed away wastes that were produced.

Since a mill had been at the site for nearly fifty years, roads had already been built. The Caroga and Fonda Plank road, completed in 1849, provided reasonably good transportation to the railroads and the canal in Fonda. The Claflin mills in Massachusetts could use all the cured leather provided, so the town was born.

The tanning sheds sprang up beside the stream. Huge barns and drying lofts were constructed from the cheap lumber from the Pine Lake Mills. A whole town was built around the tannery.

The biggest buildings housed the tannery itself. The bark and leaching sheds which were next to the creek were 425 and 350 feet long. Steam was pumped into the leaching sheds, and even the two drying barns, each about 350 feet long were heated. Another huge barn housed the

oxen and horses used to haul logs and bark. It was three stories high, built into a hillside, and housed oxen on the first floor and horses above. The lofts were filled with hay. That building still stands and is now the Nick Stoner Inn.

Bark from hemlock was peeled and dried until it became brittle then it was ground to a coarse dust. Huge vats, called leaches, 8 to 12 feet in diameter were filled with the ground hemlock bark and live steam was added to make the tanning liquor. It required about 11 cords of bark to fill a vat.

Skins were first cleaned and scraped with huge knives to free them of hair and flesh, a smelly business at best.

The rest of the tanning process is best described by the *Gloversville Intelligencer* reporter who visited Wheelerville to see the operation. His eyewitness account also dates from the spring of 1870.

At Wheelerville we noted quite a few items of interest—how sole leather was made so firm, smooth, and giving had always been a mystery to me, but upon entering one of the buildings after another it was made plain at once.



The Wheelerville Tannery in the 1870's.

A hose was attached to the steam boiler. The miller pressed the hides by moving the steam rapidly back and forth over the surface of the hides which were held by the workmen. By pressing upon a lever with his foot, as much pressure is applied to the leather as he judges necessary to make it a substantial and durable article. It seems the most dangerous work for brains or hands of any we have seen for a long time. The best step too far forward would bring the workman's skull against a shaft that moves back and forth with the power of forty sledge hammers; too close a movement with the hands would bring them under a roller that would destroy bone and muscle in a twinkling.

We enter the "Vat-building," four hundred and twenty-six feet long—containing two hundred vats, one hundred on a side; the great length of the building, four hundred and twenty-six feet, causes men at the other end to look small. Hides to be properly dressed, the workmen tell us, should lay in the liquor about six months; one hundred and twenty-five are placed in a vat—these multiplied by two hundred, the hides which may be in process at a time.

The vats are connected by pipes, so that the liquor can be changed from one to the other by simply

removing the fawcets. A steam force-pump is also so arranged that the fluid can be carried into a building adjoining, and again leached through the ground tan bark, then heated up by steam pipes, and returned to the "vat building," as we named it.

Between 6,000 and 7,000 cords of hemlock bark are used every year; it is ground up in machines that look very much like the "corn crackers" used in gristmills; from the grinding machines, an augur-like apparatus carries it into the upper story and to such leaches as may be desired. After being leached out, a passage is opened at the bottom of the leach, and water turned in from conveniently arranged conductors, and then valueless bark run out into the water flowing under the building; the buildings are all put up in a substantial manner, and as we looked at them and heard Mr. Levi Wheeler describe the varied use and conveniences of the steam engines, steam-pipes, water-pipes, store-rooms, dry-rooms, &c., we purposed to give them all a more than passing notice, but space will not permit, and we must content ourself with a sketch merely, though we make a few notes additional: In one of the drying rooms we were informed by Mr. Wheeler that there were 6,000 feet of steam pipe.



The road past the tannery in Wheelerville with the mill pond, drying sheds, the barn that became the Nick Stoner Inn, and the company store that spanned the roadway.

At the Wheelerville and Arietta tanneries, during the year, about 250 tons of leather are dressed; this is carried by teams to and from Fonda—Near Wheelerville, Messrs. Wheeler & Claflin have also a large sawmill at which they make between one and one and a half millions feet of boards during the year; this amount added to that made at Pine Lake—3,000,000 feet—together with lath, broom-handles, &c., will enable our readers to get something of a correct idea of the amount of freight which is being sent by teams to the Central Railroad. It is, however, but small compared with what would go if the road was better and nearer, or a railroad was built to connect with the Fonda, Johnstown, and Gloversville Railroad. There are millions of cords of fire-wood, slabs, and so on, that could be shipped or used for fuel.

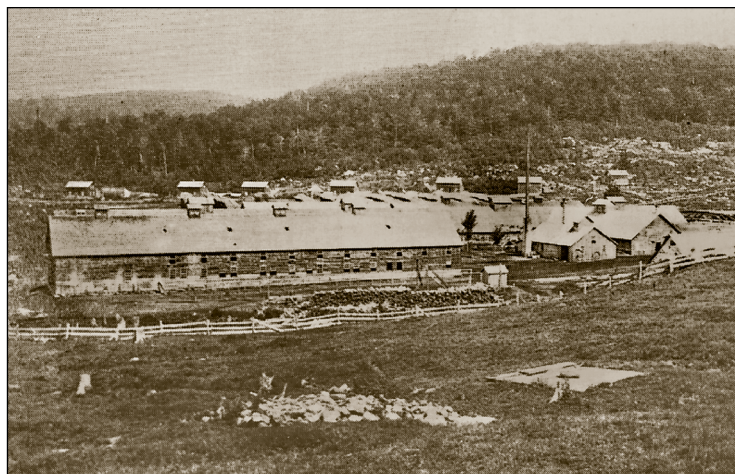
At each of the saw-mills mentioned, fires are kept burning all the time to get rid of waste wood that would accumulate otherwise.

Mr. Wheeler stated that a wagon-road could be built by the county over a comparatively level country, via Keck's saw mill, to Wheelerville; that this road would open up for settlement some very fair farming land, and altogether would only be ten miles long. Such a road would avoid all the bad hills, and be about five miles nearer than present routes. In view of the immense amount of freight, trade, and travel that would at once come this way, we think the matter is worthy of consideration of our citizens. Unquestionably, it would bring a large number of new, steady customers to the merchants of Johnstown and Gloversville.

There were those who considered the dream of a railroad a real possibility. *Frothingham's History* gives the following account of attempts to build a railroad to Canada Lake.

In 1865, several prominent men in the county interested themselves in a project to build a railroad from Fonda, through Johnstown and Gloversville to Caroga, terminating at a point near Canada Lake. An organization was effected, and Mr. Willard J. Heacock, who had been a leader in the movement, was elected president, and John Wells, treasurer. A survey made of a portion of the distance, and some stock subscribed.

In those days the New York Central burned great quantities of wood in their engines, and the projectors of the Canada Lake route cherished the expectation of reaching the timber district of the north and transporting to market a sufficient amount of lumber and fire wood to support the railroad. Before the matter had taken any definite form, however, it became apparent that coal would soon supersede wood as fuel



The tannery leaching sheds with workers' houses in the background

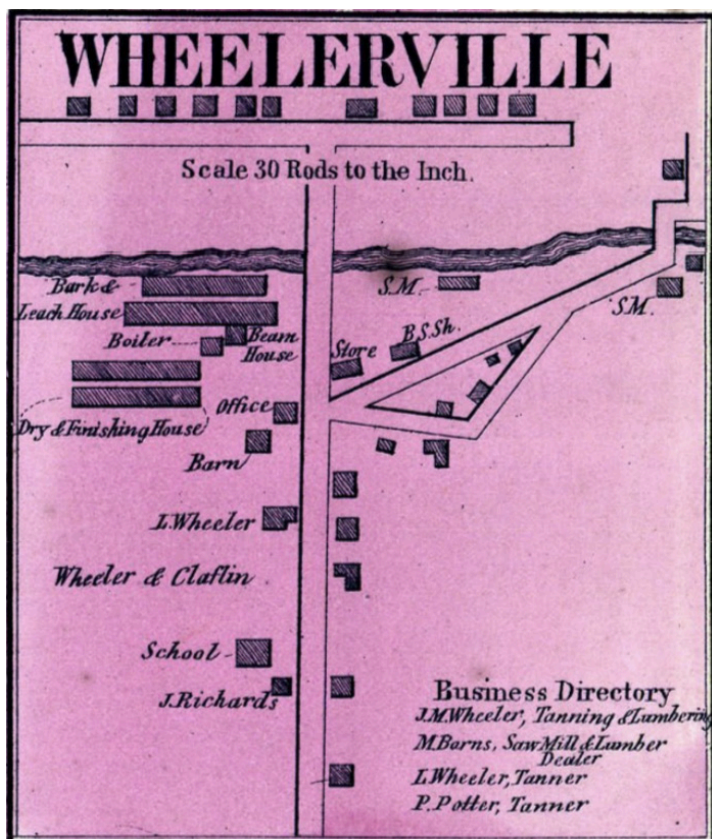
for locomotives and in that case the sparsely settled country in the northern part of the county would not furnish sufficient traffic to warrant the construction of a railroad. The want of sufficient means was also an important factor in the failure of the project.

The entire project was not abandoned, however, for the same group incorporated themselves in 1867 and began construction of the Fonda, Johnstown, and Gloversville Railroad. The first cars rolled over the line in November, 1870, bringing rail service ever closer to the lake. Shortly after the completion of the railroad, in 1874 and 1875, the Lee Claflin Company cut a road through the woods from Caroga Lake to Pecks Pond, where there was already a road leading to Gloversville. The road was planked to make it serviceable in all seasons.

The Wheeler Claflin Company built most of the settlement that surrounded the tannery. Boarding houses and homes for the workers were built. One boarding house was built up on the hill to the east of the tannery; and since lumber was so plentiful, its structure was framed with four by fours, so that it still stands. A dozen smaller houses were erected for the workers along two roads north of the mill.

The head tanner constructed for himself the largest house in the town, the big white building in which the Busch's live today. The elegance of this house was famous throughout the village, for it was the only residence with a bathtub. A foreman's home survives as the Christmas Tree Lodge.

The area grew so rapidly that the Methodist Episcopal Society was able to erect a church which was dedicated in 1872. It stood on the east side of the road, where today its foundations are visible on the edge of the golf course.



Wheelerville in 1868

Also on the east side of the road was a small building housing the blacksmith shop. Beside it, the company store was so large that its two sections spanned a driveway through which a team of horses could be driven so that wagons could be unloaded from both sides at once. The variety of materials carried in the store defies imagination. The inventory of the year 1884 listed goods valued at over six thousand dollars and a partial list of commodities boasts a strange mixture of prices. While kerosene was 30 cents a gallon, many other items were quite inexpensive. Everything could be purchased at the company store, harnesses, shoe laces, corset laces, hairpins, and candy; everything from garden seed to wagons and sleighs. One inventory survived because Fay Gage a North Bush resident who worked for many of the saw mills, rescued it from a trash fire.

The 1884 inventory of the store at Wheelerville is taken from the original record which belongs to Eva Peters Koeterritz. Her father was a lumberman at Irving Pond. She lived there for a few years when she was young and remembers that the store closed in 1893 or 1894.

Notes from the inventory follow:

Total value of stock	
Store fixtures	663.88
900 grain bags	90.00
1 large desk	40.00
stationery	83.38 including
1500 envelopes	1.28
11 school books	2.16
Showcase #1 valued at	38.79 contained
2 lather brushes @ .18	0.36
5 neckties at .38	1.90
Showcase #2 was valued at	43.39 contained
1 box thimbels @	0.75
The 1546.29 value of dry goods contained	
6 mouth organs at .50	3.00
1 great gross pants buttons @	1.00
3 collar buttons at .15	0.45
1 roll oil cloth curtain	
3 pairs of suspenders - .20	0.60
3 pr. garters @ .15	0.45
10 gross buttons	2.50
1330 yards calico at .06	79.80
3 skirts at .50	1.50
3 shawls at 1	3.00
100 cotton pants	1.15
1 ladies skirt	1.25
51 yards of sheeting at 5 ¾ cents	2.93
2 pants @ 2.00	4.00
The 162.49 of rubber goods contained	
12 prs rubbers at 33 cents	3.54
The 686.37 worth of Boots contained	
18 prs child's shoes at 1.20	21.60
4 prs. Slippers at .25	1.00
20 lav. kid shoes 2.00	40.00
The 696.43 worth of groceries contained	
400 cigars	10.80
2 bushels pears at 1.50	3.00
100 lbs gran sugar 7 cents	7.00
25 coffee 17 cents	4.25
36 cans baking powder 22 cents	7.92
100# corn beef at 8 cents	8.00
1 ½ keg pickles	4.87
90 gal vinegar 17 cents	15.30
410 # lard @ 9 ½ cents	39.80
57 # tea @ 25 cents	14.25
114# Jap Tea @ 30 cents	34.20
40# dry apples at 9 ½ cents	3.80
The 143.55 worth of household articles included chairs,	
3 bedsteads at 3.00	9.00
1 rocking chair	1.00
1 crib	1.50
1 springbed	4.00
The 187.71 worth of crockery included	
11 spittoons at .14	1.54
12 doz chimneys at 60 cents	7.20
144 gallon jars at .12 ½	18.00
3 looking glasses at 1.00	3.00
3 doz mugs at 36 cents	1.08
Canned goods were valued at 77.45	
Drugs at 131.32	
Flour and grain at 348.49	
The numerous items under hardware and woodware included many kinds of nails, dish kettles, scoops, screws....	561.35

Many of the men who worked at the mill were transients, men who boarded in the company houses and travelled from one tannery to the next in search of work. Some were town residents.

In September 1877, 83 men were employed, with the minimum salary being but 83 cents a day. The majority, 36 received 1.25 a day, while 13 received 1.50 and 6 men were paid at the enormous rate of 2.00 a day. The bookkeeper had to compute several wages at odd fractions, for

some men received 1.92 1/2 , some 1.16 2/3, or 1.83 1/3. Perhaps September was a slow month, because the average number of days worked was only 23 and one man worked 30 days. June was a busy month with 81 men employed and the employment was fairly stable all that summer.

An average of 60 men were employed in early 1876 and the number grew gradually into the low 80's, where it remained until the mid 1880's.

Some of the names listed in December, 1874, were F. Bullers, W. Bishop, M. Burke, E. W. Byron, W. Byron, L. Ballou, T.F. Conlan, W. Dockham, J. Dockham, T. Dillon, P. Downey, A. and J. Frank, P. Flynn, S. Furguson, C. Gallagher, G. Garner, J. Glennon, P. Garner, S. Hurd, D. Keohan, J. Keohan, M. Kilobec, W. Kenney, C. Lynch, T. Lynch, J. Lynch, A. Murphy, E. Mulhearn, J. Murrey, J. Meade, J. McCue, J. McKenna, John McKinnon, L. McGrath, P. Murphy, P. Meade, W. Richards, P. Rauch, D. Sweet, G. Sweet, W. Steamburgh, J. Shea, T. Smith, F. Wheeler, S. Wheeler, John Kilobec, W. Harkins, J. Hennessey, P. O'Brien.

The most graphic description of the lives of the workers in the tannery is included in a letter written by E.C. Kennedy on August 28, 1871. Mr. Kennedy was a law clerk to J. M. Carroll who was a lawyer, district attorney, and member of Congress.

I went to Caroga with Mr. Frasier last Friday to take evidence in a law suit –intending to return at night but as we made very good time we kept on to the lake from there to Wheeler and Claflin's tannery the largest one in the State. I guess it would cover four times the ground that Topnotch does. He employs over 400 men to run it and nearly as many more to team etc. They own over 30,000 acres of land and that is all woods but about 1000 to 3000 acres of cleared land. It extends within a few miles of Johnstown and a number of miles beyond the Canada Lake line. Well our law suit too till midnight so of course I, as well as Mr. Frasier, was tired enough to go to bed instead of riding 13 miles over the worst road I ever saw. As he had to be to Mayfield Corners by 8 o'clock the next morning we did not wait for breakfast but started before 5 o'clock after sleeping between 2 and 3 hours, for Mayfield Corners. Drove over twenty miles, got our breakfast, adjourned the suit, or they did it on the other side, and drove about 10 miles home again. If you want to see a wild country go northwest from Johnstown about 20 miles. They eat like a parcel of hogs only not quite as much ceremony, their dress are like hogs (nearly) but not quite as neat. Their education is not as good for all they know is to Swear and Drink. Fight and St--- (make it rhyme).



Workers at the Wheelerville Tannery beside the big barn.

This letter was in the possession of Ralph Reynolds who supplied many letters and old pictures for this history. Mr. Reynolds added one interesting footnote to the letter. It seems that while in Congress, Mr. Carroll was on the committee for post offices and post roads and devoted much time and labor to the preparation of bills abolishing the franking privilege, establishing the modern system of postal cards, and revising and codifying the postal laws. His clerk was most uncooperative, for the letter about the tannery was mailed using the congressional franking privilege.

While industry in the town was growing, all the logging and tanbarking and tanning had a dismal effect on the countryside. There were fires burning continually at the tannery and the mill. Mountain sides were stripped of their trees. Tree tops and even whole trunks of their trees were left on the forest floor in a terrible tumble to rot or cause forest fires. Worst of all, the acid wastes and spent bark from the tanneries were flushed back into the inlet of Canada Lake. A tannin color persisted in the lake for nearly a hundred years and the prevailing west wind washed the bark back up on the sand beach that had glistened at the eastern end of Canada Lake. The acid took such a toll of fish that everyone talked about the way the fishing had been ruined in Canada Lake. They complained about the "pollutin" and there were cries to shut the tannery.

The tanneries and saw mills provided jobs for early settlers who had found that the land was too poor to support farming, but many residents remained desperately poor. Town records of chattel mortgages tell of loans of less than fifty dollars, secured with a horse or a cow or a few household belongings. These loans sustained many families through the long winter months. Some of those who borrowed were blacksmiths and shoemakers and craftsmen whose services the community could use.

Oddly enough, all the industry did not increase the assessed valuation of property in the town. During the decade of the sixties, the value of property on the rolls actually decreased.

Taxes jumped, for a time unbelievably, and even though the principal cause of the tax increase was the Civil War, town taxes never returned to the low \$279 that they were in 1863.

By the end of the sixties town taxes were nearly two thousand dollars. It would appear that the residents, not the new industry, bore a disproportionate share of the tax increase.

It is difficult to imagine how the residents managed the tax increases of the years 1864 and 1865 when the town had to raise \$8100 to pay the bounty of \$300 for each man who served in the Union Army. Twenty-seven men were enlisted from the Town of Caroga.

The Men Who Built Wheelerville and Pine Lake

One of the most intriguing aspects of learning more of the tanneries and the saw mills has been trying to unravel the mystery of those enigmatic men who owned and ran the mills.

Of Mr. Wheeler, little is known. He came from Massachusetts and did stay in Wheelerville part of the time, even visiting the Joseph Sherman Hotel at Caroga. Apparently he was not a well man, for in July of 1875, the Gloversville newspaper reported that:

Mr. J.W. Wheeler is at Wheelerville on a visit. His health is much improved, and nothing would suit the people more than to see him restored to health and engaged in his old business with by gone vigor and energy.

By this date, his visits must have been more vacation than work, for, in 1872, the Lee Claflin Company bought out Wheeler's interests in the Wheeler-Claflin Company.

Milton Barnes managed the saw mill at Pine Lake for Wheeler and Claflin and continued in partnership with Claflin after the tanneries closed. Barnes was born in Fonda in 1825 and died at Sand Flats in 1889. He had a daughter and two sons, one of whom was killed in an accident on Kane Mountain.

For years, people in the Town of Caroga have referred to William Claflin as the ex-Governor of Massachusetts, and they knew little more of him than that. This man, whose fortunes so changed the town was most unusual. While his and his wife's signatures appear on several of the deeds for land his companies logged and tan-barked, it seems he could have spent very little time in the town.

His father was Lee Claflin of Milford, Massachusetts, an orphan who amassed quite a

fortune becoming a prosperous shoe manufacturer. William was born in 1818 and educated at the Milford Academy. He learned his father's business, and obviously inherited his father's business acumen as well as money.

In 1838, he organized a wholesale boot and shoe business in St. Louis. In 1845, he returned east and entered into business with his father under the firm name of Lee Claflin Company. He was a founder and for many years president of the Hide and Leather Regional Bank of Boston, and an organizer of two other banks.

His main interests seem to have been in politics. During those critical years of 1866 to 1869 when Wheelerville was growing into a boom town, Claflin was a Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts. From 1869 through 1871 he served as governor.

In politics, he was a leader with ideas and ideals. His feelings on slavery were so strong that he used his own funds to buy and free a slave in Missouri. According to the biographical sketch in the *Dictionary of American Biography*. "He was the first governor of Massachusetts to believe in the legal right of female suffrage and he was also an active

prohibitionist. While he was governor, legislative bills were enacted extending the rights of women, bettering the condition of criminals, establishing a bureau of statistics for labor, protecting destitute children, and regulating divorce. His messages were straightforward and business-like as one would expect from a businessman. As governor in 1871, he signed the charter of Boston University."

He was president of the board of trustees of Boston College and a trustee of Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, and the New England Conservatory. He served as a representative in the Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth Congresses.

The Canada Lake House

The one act of Governor Claflin that more than any other changed the Town of Caroga was his decision to build a hotel and create a summer resort. The hotel was a showplace, one of the largest in the north woods. It was built in 1866, a huge wooden structure, four and a half stories high. It was located on the north shore of Canada Lake, nestled, according to one report, up to "a miniature mountain that almost joins on to the rear of the house. Its rocks and bushes are apparently as wild as nature left them."

The hotel was called the Canada Lake House and there were accommodations for a hundred guests. Managed by W.R. Tunnicliff, it quickly became a popular place, since he filled the tables "with all necessary refreshments and luxuries."

The newspaper writer, whose descriptions of the saw mill at Pine Lake and the tannery at Wheelerville were printed in 1870, gives this account of his stay at the hotel.

We spent nearly three days in the town of Caroga, and made it our "headquarters" or "rendezvous" at the Canada Lake House. In accordance with the hospitable language and wishes of the landlord, W.R. Tunnicliff, we "made ourself at home," and "enjoyed ourself." In fact, we could not help doing both. The hotel is a five story building, within a few rods of the clear water of Canada Lake. There are twelve or fifteen row-boats, a sail-boat, and horses and carriages, always ready for the pleasure of guests. The house is convenient and pleasant—the table is well supplied with fresh trout and other fish, as well as fresh meat, fowls, &c.



In addition to hunting and fishing, for the indoor amusements of those who understand their mysteries, there is the bowling-alley, the billiard and ball-room. In brief, every thing combined to make it a pleasant place of resort, for either a long or short visitation. An invalid can hardly find a better and purer air. The weak and weary cannot find more desirable place in which to rest and recruit.

Mr. Tunnicliff received good notice from the press to help fill his hotel. In March of 1868 this note appeared in the *Johnstown Democrat*.

PINE LAKE VILLAGE—An enterprising gentleman, who occasionally writes us about “matters and things” in different parts of the county, gives the following account of a late visit to Messrs. Wheeler & Claflin’s new village.

I have just returned from the new Post Office at Pine Lake, in the town of Caroga. The energetic Mr. Tunnicliff has just raised the frame of his new Hotel. It is four-stories high and forty by eighty-six feet on the ground. And will, as you may justly suppose, amply accommodate a large number of guests, who will be attracted during the coming year to visit the lake and the hunting and fishing grounds in this vicinity. The hotel is only one-half mile from Wheeler & Claflin’s large Tannery,—Friend Tunnicliff will try to make everything pleasant for his guests, and is sure to succeed in doing so, as far as the good things of this world are concerned. Plenty of house room, lots of boats to sail on the lake, and an abundance of trout to supply his table. Tell the citizens of Gloversville that this is just the place to enjoy life, and leisure and to forget for a time all about Gloves, Mittens and work.

The first article appeared on December 23, 1868, and the second less than a month later, in January, 1869.

NEW-YEAR’S RIDE AND BALL.

The popular Landlord of the Canada Lake House, William Tunnicliff, requests us to say to the ‘Young, the fair, the gay, and in fact to all of our readers, that he is making every needed preparation to welcome them to his new and capacious Hotel, on Friday, Jan. 1st. As is usual at this popular place of resort, the tables will be spread with every thing that is tempting to the eye or appetite of the guests. And in the evening Cromwell’s Full Band will discourse music in the large slightly Hall, which commands a fine view of the lake and mountains in the vicinity. A large barn has just been completed, in which more than two hundred horses can be stabled. Mr. T. has now every needed facility, outdoors and in, for the public accommodation



The veranda of the Canada Lake House

—and all who go there on “New-Year’s,” or other occasions, may expect, and will enjoy a happy time.

ANOTHER THAW AT CANADA LAKE

We are tolerably sure that the ice remains firm and solid, “from shore to shore,” over the above Lake. But the Proprietor of the Lake House, Wm R. Tunnicliff, keeps things thawed out in his jurisdiction. In the first place, he knows how to keep a good table, and get together a good company, to provide good accommodations in-doors as well as out-doors. His messages are better than [President Andrew] Johnson’s speeches—they do not “swing around the circle,” though the persons receiving them are quite sure to do it. His last public manifesto reads, “Yourself and Lady are respectfully invited to attend a social party at the Canada Lake House, Wednesday evening, Jan. 15, 1869.” Crumwell, in person, will positively be present. Of course, “nuff sed.”

The resort was open year round, with the proprietor staging all sorts of exciting parties to entice visitors.

The next summer, Mr. Tunnicliff still made plans to attract guests, and perhaps used the lake’s first display of fireworks to do so. We have the following from the *Johnstown Democrat* of June 1869.

4th as is a 4th!

W.T. Tunnicliff, the popular Landlord of the Canada Lake House, advertises the public and invites everybody to visit that favorite place of resort. Mr. Tunnicliff’s Fourth will be held on Friday, and Friday Evening, July 2nd. Crumwell’s full band will be present to make the house lively,—Moreover, the Incomparable



*The long, low building on the left of the Canada Lake House was the bowling alley.
The huge pines on the hill behind the hotel were typical of the area's forests.*

Tunnick will superintend, assisted by the competent Mrs. T. You'll find them there on this occasion, "Wide-Awake" for the enjoyment of their guests. A fine display of Fireworks during the evening.

Perhaps Wheeler and Claflin should have kept their investments in logging and tanning. As the history of the town will bear out, building resorts is a risky business, and the first hotel was no exception. The popularity of the Canada Lake House waned after only a few years and for eight years it was managed by nearly as many landlords. The *Fonda Democrat* printed this north wood note in April 1875.

The ice in the Northern Lakes and Rivers still remains firm, and there is from one to two feet of snow still remaining in the woods.

The Canada Lake House has been opened and refitted up in the best style by Joseph Sherman, and he gives notice that he will keep a first class hotel. This is a delightful, cool and quiet resort, affording plenty of sport to fishermen and hunters, and no doubt Mr. Sherman will have his house well filled during the hot season.

Later that summer it was reported that the new management was a pronounced success. The obliging landlord was doing everything in his

power to make his guests comfortable. The fishing was good, there were good safe boats in the lake, and a bowling alley and billiard hall connected with the house to make it a "tip-top place for overworked citizens to go."

Even those improvements of Mr. Sherman's did not suffice. He managed the hotel between 1873 and 1877, then the hotel was closed for several seasons, reopening in 1883. In 1884, Vreeland Wemple became the proprietor. According to a report relayed by Robert Bedford, a Johnstown historian, "On the morning of August 24th at about nine o'clock one of the guests, Dr. S. Minster of New York City, was outside the hotel while almost everyone else was inside at breakfast. He discovered flames bursting from the roof and an hour later the entire hotel building, billiard rooms, a barn with accommodations for a hundred horses and various other outbuildings were destroyed with a loss estimate of \$40,000. It was thought the fire was caused by a defective flue in a basement fireplace. A building used as a bowling alley was saved by the strenuous efforts of the staff and guests. There were about thirty guests at the time and they were taken to the Alvord House in Gloversville, which itself was destroyed by fire fourteen years later."

The Arnsts

Of all the families who earn their living in the Wheelerville community, none has a record so complete as that of the village's shoemaker, Eune Arnst. He settled in the town when the tannery was new and his descendants still live and work in the area.

Eune Arnst came from the German speaking north of Switzerland and first settled "up under the hogback," in Bleeker. In April of 1861 he bought 20 acres from Charles Frederick Schwab from \$80.00, \$20.00 to be paid each year for four years, but with the stipulation that Arnst was "not to cut or waste any wood except for clearing and his own use and for the farm."

In 1869, Eune Arnst took title to the twelve acre farm on the London Bridge Road that the family

has occupied ever since. The major parcel of the land was purchased from Ralph Sexton and was described as being on the west side of the old State Road running from Caroga Lake to Canada Lake, containing twelve acres "as run out by Rilus Eastman." The deed tells us much of the early settlement. The road was described as running from "Nathan Oathouts to Canada Lake, past Andrew Fry's lot, and part of the property was measured along the road south from the the Fry's to Eune Arnst garden fence which was 10 or 12 feet from the house." So much for surveys. The spelling was just as curious, for the deed has the note that "the original deed gives the grantor's name as 'Eune Aunts' and the signature on the deed is 'Runiemutz Ernts' in German script."



Eune Arnst settled on London Bridge Road in 1869. He was the town's cobbler and barber. He also made shingles. In the picture there are clues to all of his trades.



Max Arnst, his wife, and his son, Alvarado, who contributed many tales of the early community.

The deed traces back to the original sale by James McClellan of parts of Great Lots 53 and 54, and the beginning point for one important survey is recorded as being 45.6 feet from a nail in a 12-inch maple on the westerly side of the State Highway 8.7 feet from a nail in a 15-inch cherry tree.

In 1829, McClellan sold the land to James C. Ott, who in turn deeded it to Siberia Ott, who in turn sold part of it to Garrett Newkirk.

Another section of the land which comprises the Arnst farm had been held by John Francisco and was willed to his son Daniel with the exception that his will provides that his *"wife could use the house and lot of land that had been his garden together with all household furniture, also pasture and hay sufficient to keep one cow, also wood cut into stove length and delivered to her door sufficient for two stoves burning."*

Eune farmed his twelve acres and made and repaired shoes for the community at Wheelerville. As with many of his neighbors, he took his turn as "Overseer of Highways" and in 1884 he was responsible for repairing the road from *"five point near Nathan Oathout, running north past Ballous,*

to the top of the hill beyond Green Lake Bridge to the Line between Claflin and Stewart to Stake and Stones." In 1886, as overseer of the same stretch of road it was his task to see that other residents supplied the labor to fix the road, the amount of work supplied was in relation to their lands' assessments. Eune Arnst was assessed 1 ½ days as was his son Max. Betsy and Merit Ballou were each assessed a day, and Andrew Fry had to work 2 days. Lewis Morey and the *"Hotel Lot of Wm. Claflin"* were each assessed 1 ½ days, and Lewis Ballou was assigned a day as was Wm. Claflin, as a non-resident landowner.

This system of keeping roads must have been most effective, for the Gloversville Paper in 1868, in an article describing the horrors of trying to *"dodge among some of the rugged pinnacles and ragged rocks, traveling over the lofty heights of Clip Hill,"* also reported that the roads *"to Caroga Lake, as a general thing are worthy of special praise. The men who make the turnpike roads where nature only furnished cobblestones for material are not drones."* However, late winter travel could prove impossible, as this account from 1875 demonstrates.

Just at the present time we could not conscientiously advise a trip up to this region on account of the wretched state of the roads. Our enterprising townsman, E.L. Kellogg, sent out a four horse team on Monday morning last, with a load of merchandise on wheels for his northern store at Arietta, the weight of which was only about 1800 pounds, not a heavy load for four horses. They arrived at the Staley swamp, eleven miles north of here, on Tuesday evening, at which point they were compelled to re-ship from wheels to a sleigh to get through—Fonda Democrat.

Besides cobbling, farming, and overseeing roads, Eune Arnst raised a family. His son Max was also path master, taking care of the road from Caroga to Canada Lake. To make ends meet, he held a great many other jobs. The list of his employers covers the business community in the 1880's and 1890's. He worked for the Tunnicliff hotel, for a saw mill at Irving Pond, and for the tannery for a while, as did almost everyone else in Wheelerville. When the tannery closed in the 1880's, Max had to look for other work so he went to the Fulton Hotel as a carpenter and painter.

His son, Alvarado remembers that their first house was little more than a shack, built across from the present Morey homestead. In one room there was a dinner table and a washstand. In the other room, a bedroom, the parents slept downstairs and the children slept up a three step landing in a sort of loft, on a pile of straw thick mattresses.

Max built the family farmhouse at the break of the hill. He purchased lumber from Barnes at Pine Lake, all A #1 Spruce, with no knots at 1 cent a board and completed the house in 1895 or 1896. He and his sons continued working for the summer residents, so we will defer the rest of the Arnst story to the chapter on summer people.

The Waning Years

WM. Claflin sold his two tanneries in Hamilton county in 1882 to a company that continued to run them. However, the supply of hemlock close to the Wheelerville tannery was so exhausted that the tannery had no immediate buyer and was closed by the mid 1880's. A small newspaper item of October 6, 1888 tells the fate of the tannery.

The machinery is all being removed from the Wheelerville tannery, and that business has come to a complete stop. It is rumored that the Dolgeville firm intends to establish a branch business there.

Frank Sherman's father helped dismantle the mill, which was moved to Olean, New York.

The sawmills continued and Claflin kept buying land. In 1881, he bought 1,350 acres of land near Wheelerville. The land had been owned by the St. Johnsville and East Canada Lumber Company, and David Hays held an \$8,000 mortgage on the property. On Mr. Hays' death, the mortgage was foreclosed and Claflin's agent, Wm. D. Byron was able to purchase it for only \$4,000.

Evidently, Mr. Claflin thought this small part of his land was exhausted and had no value, for he let his company go into arrears for the taxes on the parcel. The instant foreclosure rule for out of state residents forced an immediate tax sale from which the state acquired the land. The 1885 purchase was only one of many acquisitions of logged land that formed the basis of the Adirondack Forest Preserve.

Mr. J.M. Dudley, a prominent Johnstown lawyer, represented the firm of Lee Claflin and Son in their dealings in the Town of Caroga. A few letters of correspondence between the Claflin firm and Mr. Dudley give us insight into the continuing lumber business, and its many problems. The first letter was written in September, 1887, and the second in February, 1888.

J. M. Dudley from
Lee Claflin & Son

Sept. 25, 1877

Mr. Albert Peck claims to own lot #40 and has been trying to sell us the lot. He asks too much for it. He says if we do not purchase it, he intends putting a portable mill on the lot and saw the lumber. We have a reservoir on #39 above #40 and the stream from the reservoir runs across one corner of #40. We are lumbering on 38 and put our logs in the reservoir and run them down the stream to our mills. Can Peck prevent us from running logs down the streams, as we have done for years? Peck may have to get his lumber out by coming over our land down the road from Irving Mill past our store. This is a private road. Can we prevent him from going over our lands to get his lumber out? He seems disposed to try and force a bargain on us as it looks.

We would like information on these points by return mail. Mr. Follamsbee may have to call on you to issue warrant against trespassing on some of our land.

J.M Dudley from
Lee Claflin & Son

February 17, 1888

Mr. A.J. Peck makes a claim for some poles which he says were taken from his #40 some years ago.

He has made demands for some time. We did not admit the claim but finally wrote him we would give him \$75.00 to settle the matter. The stream we run logs down goes through his lot. He has threatened to annoy us. You say he cannot prevent us running logs down the stream.

Make him give us rights to run logs through his #40 either in stream or over the road which now crosses corner of his lot. Told him to call on you make him sign what papers you think necessary and give him a check or draft for \$75 and we will send you check when you notify us you have settled with him.

In spite of all the lumbering, the closing of the tannery caused Wheelerville to grow quieter and quieter. In 1893 the store was closed and the decision to close the store was so precipitous that merchandise was left on the shelves. Before the end of the decade, Wheelerville was described as a ghost town.

William Claflin's Hotel may not have been a great success, the tannery may have exhausted the supply of hemlock, and the saw mills may have proved less and less profitable; but, the potential of Canada Lake as a resort had been envisioned.

As the following letter to the lawyer Dudley explains, Mr. Claflin saw the potential in 1887 for the one industry, recreation, which survives in the town.



*1888 photo of Decker Cottage now owned
by the Willard family.*

From Lee Claflin & Son
High Street, Boston USA

March 5, 1887

Dear Sir

Yours concerning the sale of land on the lake shore has been received. It is our intention to have the lake shore surveyed and developed into cottage lots, in such a way that it will be an agreeable place for summer residents and tourists. How we shall dispose of the land we are not yet quite decided whether it will be best to sell or lease on a long term. We think the lakes and the country about have natural attractions enough about to draw summer residents and excursionists. And as population increases in the valleys, there is a demand for such a place to go in the summer months.

We shall of course wish to protect the land from any improper uses, and in whichever way we decide to dispose of it, shall want to make some conditions. We are disposed to cooperate with responsible parties in some plan of development if it can be made mutually satisfactory. Please inform as to what you think might be done and how many there are in your town who would be likely to want land for building purposes.

We hope to be able to look the land over this spring soon after the snow is gone and see what is the best thing to do. Please tell Mr. Decker and Mr. Hanson that as soon as we are decided on a plan of development, we will see them first as they have been good enough to make inquiries.

How about that R.R. company which is being organized to run from Fort Plain. Has it backing enough to go through? We have offered to give \$5,000 as soon as trains are running from Wheelerville to Fort Plain.

We would like to hear from you again on this subject. Yours truly, Lee Claflin, Esqr.

Mr. Decker got his lot on the north shore and on it built his first cottage in 1888. The picture on the left was taken that year. The camp now belongs to Thomas Willard.

Before continuing with the story of the development of Canada Lake, we will take a look at that natural wonder and some of its earliest visitors. 🌲