

The End of the Logging Era

Irving Pond

The story of Irving Pond comes from several sources. Catherine Bryant Rowles interviewed descendants of two families who lived at Irving Pond, Mrs. Ellery Gilbert Aldridge and Mrs. Burt H. Koetteritz. Mrs. Aldridge was Elizabeth Irving, daughter of Chauncey Irving and granddaughter of James Irving, for whom the pond is named. Mrs. Koetteritz was Eva Peters and her father lumbered at Irving Pond around the turn of the century. Fay Gage, Alvarado Arnst, and Floyd Chappell also contributed background on Irving Pond.

About 1855, James Irving (1817-1883) came from Sammons ville with his wife Rosa A. Burns and young son William (1850-1935) to live at Wheelerville. He bought considerable acreage around Mill Pond and built the first dam, a wooden structure, on the Pond, creating behind it a handsome lake. New maps then referred to it as Irving Pond. On a knoll over-looking the pond he built a large two story house, and beside the pond he constructed a saw mill.

The Irving family lived at the pond for about seventeen years and all of the children except William, four boys and four girls, were born there. The children all attended Wheelerville School.

On winter nights, the family would gather around the piano and sing. The square piano was one of the first in Fulton County and was delivered on a wagon that carried logs.



James Irving, for whom Irving Pond was named, and his wife Rosa Burns. Irving lived at the pond between 1855 and 1872.



The Irving Pond mill and the top of the first dam.

The Irving pasture was located where the golf course is now. Mr. Irving continued lumbering throughout the early days when Wheelerville was a boom town, then moved to Johnstown in 1872, when his youngest son Chauncey, was seven years old. Chauncey lived to be 92 and it was his recollections of Irving Pond which were told to his daughter.

When James Irving moved to Johnstown, he ran a large farm in the north end of town. A street and a school are named for him, and he constructed many of the homes in the area.

James Irving is remembered as a tall man with broad shoulders and laughing eyes, and he was

always well dressed. He was a successful, honest and respected business man. His most successful logging years were during the Civil War. He always wore a silver cased watch with a beautiful ship engraved on the front and he even wore it when he fell in the pond and slid down the sluice, but the watch still runs today.

After James Irving moved away from the pond, a long, low building where shingles and broom handles were made, was built below the dam, on the north side of the creek. That building was reached by a suspension bridge.

The mill was run sporadically during the three decades after Mr. Irving left, although none of the lumbermen are identified with certainty. However, the last man to operate the mill was John Peters, whose daughter remembers living there. He moved to Irving Pond around 1901, and by then the hamlet of Wheelerville was almost deserted and most of the old houses were in disrepair. Mrs. Peters decided that she could put up with the old Irving house beside the pond, at least for a few years, and Mr. Peters made repairs to the mill.

Their daughter, Eva, remembers standing on a stool to wipe the piles of dishes, for the family boarded a number of lumber jacks in the big house. She also recalls walking to school and stopping on the way home to jump in the hay stored in the great barn which became Nick Stoner Inn.



The mill as it appeared when James Irving ran it.



*Lumber produced at the Irving Pond mill
in the 1870's.*

It was about that time that Alvarado Arnst used to walk to Irving Pond after school so that he could watch the men sawing lumber. He was fascinated by the two gang saws that could rip a board with one stroke and by the circular saw that could take two boards at one time.



The mill in disrepair.



*The Peters family, Carrie, John, Henry, Eva and Ruth shown with a son of James Irving
in the kitchen of the Irving homestead at the pond.*

Loggers lived as far into the wilderness as Fry's Flow, above Bellows Lake which was opened during the spring log runs in order to flood logs down to the mill to be sawed for lumber.

The Irving Pond saw mill was torn down between 1910 and 1912. Fay Gage helped dismantle it at the time work was to commence on the big new dam which was built for power.



H.S. Rowles with trout from Bellows Lake.



Irving Pond mill in disrepair.



Irving Pond dam with the abandoned mill behind it.

In the early part of this century, a few old deserted houses remained and Dwiggins, the cartoonist from Canada Lake, used to make charcoal drawings of his characters on the blue calcimine walls of the abandoned houses.

The houses disappeared a few years later and now all that remains are a few stone foundations around Irving Pond and along the road to Bellows Lake. Apple trees that grew in the Irving's side yard are the only obvious signs of the former inhabitants.

Generations have enjoyed the walk to the pond and a picnic beside its shores. It was considered a great place to swim until the town had to close the road because of modern abuses in the area.

Fishing is still supposed to be good at Bellows Lake, but no where near what it was at the turn of the century. Because water was regularly drawn down every summer at Irving Pond to keep the flow steady in Canada Lake, fishing was not good at the pond during the years the big dam was used for power. It has not yet recovered even though the water level has been constant for a half dozen years.

The low water in Irving Pond will be remembered by a generation of young people who delighted in walking around the muddy bottom of the empty lake, picking up newts and drift wood pieces, remains of the logging days



A picnic at Irving Pond with Mildred and Milton Wandel and Deputy Sheriff Delbert Willet, who was also a hunter and square dance caller.

Wheelerville Eclipse

When the tanneries closed, Wheelerville did not disappear, but there was no industry there for many years and little employment for its residents. In spite of that, it remained the focal point of other areas in the town and the town offices were located there.

The old town hall, whose records do not survive, was built when the tanneries flourished. When it burned all the town records were destroyed with it.

For many years, square dances were held in the old town hall. After the fire, both the town offices and the square dances were moved into a part of the old Wheelerville company store, which had been run by the Wheeler Claflin Company. Chris Groshans called square dances in both buildings, Catherine Bryant Rowles describes Wheelerville in the days when the dances were the summer's most important events.

"The little village seemed wide awake with Square Dances held every Wednesday and Saturday nights. From Canada Lake, the Carogas, and all parts around came natives and summer, people 'some by wagon, some by hayride and some afoot.'

"A group of us young girls (summer cottagers) at East Caroga Lake, could go to the dances when one of the girl's brother would take us. We rowed to the bridge, left our boats and gaily walked to Wheelerville. Music sounded far down the road and we heard the piano and the fiddler and Chris Groshans (who lived at Pine lake) calling for the Square Sets. Something about that music set our feet a-dancing! There were shiny kerosene chandeliers for light and a gay crowd filled the large room. Chris' 'Four more couples' started things going. We always liked to join a set with some of the natives who could steer us 'Allemande left' and 'Right straight back in the same old track and swing with the girl behind you.' And how the natives did swing you! Right off your feet with dresses flying.

"I still can hear Chris shouting, 'Get your nickels ready.' The floor was crowded and the rafters rang. It was a jolly evening...we could have danced all night but the dancing stopped at midnight. We walked home in the moonlight, five or six abreast singing down the road. Possibly a solitary old horse and buggy passed us. If there was no moon we had flash lights. A white mist always settled in the channel and the boat seats were wet with dew which we had to wipe off. We pushed out, cleared the channel



The Wheelerville dance hall and town hall was located near the present 9th hole of the golf course. It contained all of the town records which were destroyed when the hall burned.

and headed down the open lake for the green light at our dock.

"Sometimes we walked to the little church on Sunday mornings. But if it was hot and we were reluctant to go, the mother of one of the girl's used to say 'It isn't any farther to Wheelerville on Sunday morning than it is to the dance on Saturday night.'"

The Wheelerville school was the center of activity for the year round residents. In 1897, when S. Peter Cornell was the teacher and Joseph Sherman the trustee, there were 52 students from 22 local families. They represented almost the same list of families who had watched the growth of Wheelerville throughout the nineteenth century. The students included: John Sherman; Burton, Estella, Alanson, Nina, Grace, and George Morey; Willie, Annie, and Alvarado Arnst; Ella and Wilbur Oathout; Prosper Knight; Sidney and Hollis Hill; Hattie and Frank Groshans; Maud, James, Herbert, and Gordon Ballou; Louis, Annie, Irena, and Eddie Avery; Sadie Foster; Bessie, Florence, and Arthur Bona; and children from the Hinds, Sterling, Kiernan, DeLum, Walter, Gardner, Brown, Blancher, Seidl, Dorn, and Brumick families.

Wheelerville never had a doctor of its own. Dr. John Francis Burdick and Dr. Nelson Everest of Rockwood took care of many people in the town. Dr. George Brookins was born in the Town of Caroga and treated many patients there, although he, too, lived in Rockwood. His wife, Clara Sherman

Brookins attended Wheelerville School. Their daughter, Marjorie, married Howard Morey, who was for many years the Town Supervisor and she taught in the Wheelerville School for many years.

With the tannery gone and the buildings that housed the workers empty, many changes took place. The store remodeled for the town offices. When the minister's house burned next to the church, he moved into one of the tannery houses. Many of the other buildings were sold or moved and some were torn down.

Gertie and Arch Rathburn occupied one of the houses that had belonged to a Claflin employee. They ran it as a summer boarding house for school teachers, mostly from New York City. Later the State Engineers and Surveyors made their headquarters there. When the Holden Lumber



Dr. George Brookins in 1894.

Company opened a saw mill at Wheelerville the boarding house had an overflow of workers, and the boarding house operated all year. The building later became the Christmas Tree Lodge. Arch worked as the sawyer at the Green Lake Mill, first employed by the Durey Land and Lumber Company, then later by Breckwoldt.

The little red house on the hill has as interesting a story as any of the old tannery buildings. After it served as a boarding house for the tannery, it was rented for several years as a summer house. The Rowles family spent several years there. Harwood Rowles remembers being chased by a bull in the field beside the hill. He had been sent out to gather bracken to make smudge pots to keep the bugs away. When he ran home with the bull right behind, his mother astounded him by chasing the bull away with no more than a broom. Harwood's sister, Elizabeth, adds a few more notes to the summers spent at the red house which was surrounded by thirteen large pine trees.

"One day we found some old barrel staves at the foot of the hill. We discovered they made wonderful sleds, used on the pine needles. So we spent the morning sliding down hill. When we were called in for dinner, mother was dismayed to see 'three green children' come in. Those grass stains were not a welcome color on our gingham clothes. In fact many

stains lasted longer than the clothes.

"We had to carry drinking water (the well had not been used in many years). So there was a huge rain barrel at the end of the front porch. Clothes were washed at camp, then carried down to the stream from Irving Pond. There we had fun, helping to rinse the laundry. Also we had a beautiful swimming hole down there where you could slide over the rocks. That was fun.

"We often hiked up to Irving Pond. One guest loved to 'fish' for frogs legs. When he was in camp, we were treated to frogs legs for dinner.

"We had to shop at Hills' store, down a dusty road on a hill near Caroga Lake. It was fun to go there and talk with local people and buy sticks of candy. Sometimes we walked home by lamp light (a kerosene lantern).

"Then we played in 2 large barns that were filled with hay. We made tunnels in the hay. We jumped from the drive-in level into these huge mounds of hay.

"One large barn was taken down, board by board, peg by peg and moved to Gloversville. The other is now Nick Stoner Inn, a popular eating place."

Margaret Dennison Fincke, who now owns the red house on the hill, reports that its present restoration came about almost by chance.

"When Cyrus Durey gave to the Town of Caroga the property for the first 9 holes of the Golf Course,



The little red house on the hill surrounded by the thirteen huge pines.



The Holden Lumber Company and the mill pond.

he specifically reserved for himself the $\frac{3}{4}$ acre knoll with the old red house on it. At the time of his death he had not decided whether to use the property for himself or give it to the Town for a club house. Settlement of the estate was the responsibility of my father, Alfred Dennison, who was Cyrus Durey's lawyer. None of the heirs wanted the dilapidated dwelling. One day when my father and I were on the 9th tee, I jokingly said, "Why don't you buy that old house?" To my surprise he replied, "Maybe I will." When he looked over the place he immediately recognized its inherent charm and potential worth. He not only bought it in 1934, but began renovating it, carefully preserving its basic distinctiveness, and then gave it to me as a wedding present. It has been home to me ever since. As a minister's wife, living in church-owned manses for 40 years, I have always felt that Pine Knoll, as we named it because of the virgin pine trees on the property, is my true home. My husband and five sons share my feeling, and I am certain the house will remain in the family for many years to come. To own a landmark in the Town of Caroga adds to our feeling of "belonging."

The Holden Lumber Company bought land in Wheelerville from Cyrus Durey in 1918 and built a saw mill. The dam on Canada Lake inlet was rebuilt to create a larger mill pond. The buildings

stood where the fire house is today.

Fire destroyed most the mill records, but Fay Gage, who worked in many saw mills, remembers the Holden Mill well. The Holdens bought the rights to lumber on several different tracts and built lumber camps near them. There was one up at Bellows Lake. Fay remembers one year when Cy Durey did not have enough men for his mill at Canada Lake and Holden tried to hire Fay away from Durey, precipitating a dispute between the two competing lumbermen.

Milton Ballou relates that Sam Sandford was the foreman for the Wheelerville mill and oversaw the cutting. He lived in the big company house, now owned by the Busch family and had a reputation for his ability to clean bullheads. Sam Sandford also engineered the building of the mill and was assisted by William Lamphier, a millwright, Walter Frasier and Fred Marcellus.

Floyd Vandenburg was the bookkeeper for the mill and Rutherford Vandenburg was the boiler man, running the steam engine.

The mill had a ten year lease on the property, which was extended for one extra year, according to Floyd Chappell. Then that mill, too, ceased operating.

Pine Lake Lumbering Ceases

After the Wheeler Claflin Company stopped logging in the vicinity of Pine Lake, several lumbermen tried their hands at running the saw mill. But, like all the other mill towns, the old Pine Lake settlement gradually declined.

Coby Moore and Lucien Hillabrandt worked in the sawmill at Pine Lake, when the mill was still located near the small pond on Stoner Lake outlet. Marvin Hillabrandt lived in one of the mill houses whose cellar is still visible.

There was a hotel, the Deerland House, which was run by Coby Moore. The hotel, which burned in 1910, stood near the present home of Mrs. Wallace Crispin, daughter of Coby Moore. In the first decade of the twentieth century, many of the houses from the old logging community still stood and were being converted to summer homes. A group of men who included Bill Hillock and Earl Folmsbee used one of those buildings and called themselves the Ram-Pam Club. Camp Goodwill, the first cottage north of Pine Lake was another converted lumbering camp.



The Deerland House



Camp Goodwill was built as a home for one of the mill workers when the Wheeler Claflin sawmill was in operation.

Jo Brown, who had a very long, white, flowing beard, took in guests and served as a guide for fishing parties at Pine Lake. He kept boats at Good Luck Lake and Nine Corner Lake for the use of his guests. His grandson, George Hansen, spent much time there as a very young boy and later worked for his grandfather, bailing and taking care of boats. Mr. Hansen has supplied several vintage pictures of Jo Brown and his beard and some rather remarkable strings of fish.

The last major attempt to lumber in the Pine Lake area was made by Frank Sherman. His efforts were short lived. He built a dam at Pine Lake at the present dam site in 1908 and his saw mill burned in 1911. The loss of the mill caused him to go into bankruptcy, a step which turned out to be only a prelude to his successful venture with the dance hall at Caroga.



Pictures of Jo Brown with his family and guests.



The picture of the first camp on Mud Lake was taken around 1900. The camp was built by Coby Moore.



The child at the far right standing in front of the boat is George Hansen.



The Deerland House was the site of Lyman Avery's wedding in 1908. He and his bride Jennie are in the middle and Harriet Moore Crispin is the child in front of them. Big Jim Walsh plays the fiddle.

Mrs. Crispin lived at Pine Lake when the Sherman mill was in operation. Her father was at one time the Fire Chief in Johnstown and lived around the lakes almost all his life. He built the first camp on Mud Lake, before 1900.

While the mill was operating Mrs. Crispin remembers a strange three story structure near the shore of the lake. The lower level housed a blacksmith shop, the middle floor was the school for a time, and the top contained a water tower. Fears for the safety of the structure caused the school to be moved to a new building, which no longer exists, but on whose foundations the Hillock's house has been built.

Mrs. Crispin also remembers when the dam went out in 1913, for it washed out the bridge and prevented her from going to school. Pine Lake was originally only a shallow, muddy pond, and the restored dam is necessary to keep the water level high enough to create the half-mile long lake.

The Crispin home was called the Hunter home-
stead, for Bill Hunter lived there when he was the
warden on the Kane Mountain Fire Tower.



Sherman's Pine Lake sawmill with John and Leon Landers in the foreground.



The boarding house at Pine Lake.



Picture of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Horth and Francis at the head of Pine Lake taken in 1898.



A Sarka painting of the dam at Pine Lake.

Cyrus Durey acquired the big white house in which Milton Barnes had lived and which had been used for years as a boarding house. In 1918, Durey began to fix it up so that he could live in it. He arranged to have the road put through in 1926, taking its course away from the old mill site. He also seems to have acquired at the time of Frank Sherman's bankruptcy, much of Sherman's holdings in Great Lot 61 around Pine Lake. While Durey's company logged these lands, Durey never replaced the mill at Pine Lake, using instead the mill at Canada Lake.

With the destruction of Sherman's mill, lumbering ceased completely at Pine Lake. The community, too, might have disappeared if it were not for the Groshans and the building of the amusement park during the expanding decade of the twenties. 🌸



Cyrus Durey's home at Pine Lake.