

A Draft, Undocumented, and Woefully thus far only Partially Verified History of Glen Lake from Native American to 1950

by Paul Derby, Nov 5, 2003

Glen Lake has been known by many other names in the past. Some of those names include French Pond, Valentine's Pond, Moon's Pond, Big Pond, Great Lake, and Long Pond. It was named Glen Lake sometime after 1876 and before the turn of the next century. Archaeological evidence and military accounts from the French and Indians and Revolutionary Wars clearly reveal that Native Americans populated the areas around Glen Lake. At least one tribe of the Iroquois nations had a village at the outlet of the lake. The area was also noted for its fine hunting and fishing. Likewise, it is well established that the corridor along the north and west end (inlet) of the lake was a well-traveled route by Native Americans along their roaming hunting and seasonal routes between the Mohawk Valley and Canada. This route later became the military road for the French and Indian and especially the Revolutionary Wars. The section of the military road from Glens Falls to Lake George passed just to the west of Glen Lake, pretty much along what is now Route 9. There are smatterings of accounts in the military journals about the tranquil waters of our lake, and there may have been a small outpost along the road at what is now part of The Great Escape's east side parking lot. And of course, there is the famous Five Mile Run, so named to describe the danger of Indian attacks beginning at the brook that runs from Rush Pond to the inlet of Glen Lake and on to the north at Lake George.

The first non-native settlers at Glen Lake were most likely of the Benedict Brown family. About 1782 Benedict Brown settled near the outlet of Glen Lake. This is marked and noted on the first survey maps of the area made by Abraham Wing and those first Quaker settlers of our town. By 1783 it is documented in several sources that Valentine Brown, Benedict's son, had built a sawmill on the outlet stream of the lake. Waterpower was key to those early settlers, for they needed to cut lumber to make homes. Robert Moon built the second mill at the outlet, probably just down from Valentine's. In fact a son of Robert Moon married a daughter of Benedict Brown. This obviously connected the families to the land. Moonhill Road is named after those Moons and the road approximately marks their lands of the late 1700s. By 1808 there were six water powered mills along the outlet stream of Glen Lake.

The first half of the 19th century saw the lake used for lumbering, as was the case for most of the lakes and streams of the northeast. The water source and sawmills along the outlet made this a good place for the flourishing lumber industry. In fact, in the 1870s it appears a canal was started between Mud Pond (that little pond to the south and east between Glen Lake and Round Pond) and Glen Lake to bring more cut trees to the sawmills, but it was never finished. There is anecdotal evidence that most of the landscape around our lake was completely deforested by the mid to later 1800s. By the later half of the 1800s the lumber industry waned. It was now time for the next wave of lake residents.

In 1882 the Delaware and Hudson Railroad finished their line from Glens Falls to Lake George. The tracks passed along the northwest end of Round Pond and the west end of Glen Lake. The tracks ran along what is now Canterbury Lane. The train bridge is still there today. However, there is no evidence that the passenger train ever stopped at our lake, although it is known that the D&H harvested ice from the lake for its Saratoga Line in the first few decades of the 1900s. But it is also clear that the multitude of new American tourists that were coming to Lake George and the Adirondacks passed by our lake, and some took notice. By the turn of the century, or perhaps as early as 1890s, summer cabins were being built. By the first decade of the 1900s many camps and several small resorts and boarding houses appeared. This marked the beginning of the heyday of Glen Lake as a tourist community, and it coincided with the age of the Trolley line to our lake, 1901-1929. The Trolley line ran parallel to the train tracks, along what is now the bike path, and although briefly, “just long enough to throw off bags and baggage,” it did stop to drop off and pickup passengers. During this era news accounts and oral histories reveal a bustling, fun-filled summer resort area. There were several eating, drinking, and dancing establishments along the west shore. They included Vandenburg’s, which later became the Glen Lake Casino, Sumner Thomas’ Hotel, now unfortunately a dilapidated old house, the Oak Grove, also known as Houghtalings, which in the 1930s became Sullivans and now is known as the Docksider. Then a bit farther along the walking path that started from the trolley and meandered along the west shore came Riley’s, later the Glenmoore Lodge. After this came the Cabana, a fine restaurant, and finally Breen’s Tavern, now the spot of the Full Moon. This was a hopping time and it was rumored that during Prohibition folks would come from as far away as Albany and Montreal to Glen Lake’s illegal drinking establishments. Perhaps Glen Lake’s relative anonymity compared to our big sister Lake George has always allowed us a protected “good time” out of sight the authorities.

By 1929 the trolley had collapsed due to the coming of the automobiles and busses. But also the tourist trade ended due to The Great Depression. As well, a new community came to Glen Lake. Folks from around this area now came to fill the abandoned spaces and the cabins and cottages. Summer vacations were now for families. This became the era that can has been described as the “close-knit walking community.” As many have noted, a walking community is a talking community, and from the 1930s through the 1950s this appears to describe well the Glen Lake community. Families came for the whole or most of the summers, and everybody knew everybody else. The walking path that was created previously to traffic tourists and party seekers now became the connector of cabins and the link of community members. And the path expanded to virtually ring the shoreline. Along the path, people stopped and chatted and kids played together. Everyone, it seems, went to dances at Vandenburg’s and Sullivan’s on Friday and Saturday evenings. Then on Sunday, first at Vandenburg’s and later at Sullivan’s, Mass was held, and most folks, Catholic or not, would attend. After Mass many would walk the path to Mrs. Riley’s Boarding House (later Glenmoore Lodge) for dinner on the porch or in the dinning room. Even though much of the lake was difficult to get to during those times, because Glen Lake Road stopped at St. Mary’s Bay and access to the outlet end and the east shore required climbing a steep hill and plunge to the lake, families kept

coming and building camps. As many have described it, these were little cabins which consisted of sleeping places and an outhouse. But it is clear that the community thrived because people needed each other for companionship, remember there were no TVs, no malls, and road travel was poor, and for help building and watching over one another. Money was sparse but it seems life was good and people helped out.

After World War II, America and our lake community changed. Prosperity became the norm, and for the first time Americans had the means to become exclusive. Public space began to evolve into private space. By the end of the 1940s Glen Laker's values were mirroring the larger society. Now the privatization of our lives and our lake began. During this era from 1950 to 1975 much of the walking path was closed off and abandoned, and the reasons are clear. We no longer wanted folks on OUR property. Today the only clear artifacts of that path run in front of Prendeville's, Russo's and Touba's along the bay of the once White's Point and Sum Thomas'. With American prosperity came innovative technologies such as television and mass produced automobiles for every family, and soon for every adult. Folks did not have to stay on the lake to find food and fun. There were other options. People didn't have to go to Friday dances and Sunday dinners. Now one could watch TV or go to the cinema. And along with this came the emergent cultural value of privatization. At Glen Lake this meant the conversion of summer homes into year round residents. With prosperity came the want to show individual status, and the lake home became a symbol of wealth and prestige. Virtually everyone from the 1950s on has hugely expanded, reconfigured, or torn down and built anew their lake homes. We have gone from cabins to castles and our community has suffered.