A step back in time: Village of Salling saw boom, then bust

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The settlement of Salling

Bagley was located in section 21, on the northeast side of Otsego Lake, and in the 1890s underwent a name change to Salling. It is believed Bagley was named after an early governor, and Salling came by its name from the lumber company which ran logging operations in the area.

The village was located in the area of Wah Wah Soo and Point Comfort and spread from the Norden Heim hill area (now Marsh Ridge) to the northeast corner of Otsego Lake. The hill was originally named Grubbs Hill.

The village of Salling thrived until around 1915 when it disappeared after the surrounding forests had been logged off.

The village consisted of several rows of clapboard houses and tarpaper shacks. It was a vast sea of pine stumps and consisted of mills for sawing and planing lumber with Michigan Central Rail Road spur lines going to the various logging operations.

The settlers who called Salling home were of English, Irish, Scot, Danish, Dutch and Polish descent. French Canadians immigrated from Canada to Michigan and followed the lumber industry north as the mills moved farther into the Northern Michigan wilderness.

The Bagley Lumber Company operated a sawmill where the Geigler Cottages are now located. The huge sawdust pile which had been located on the shores of the lake washed into the water giving the north end of the lake a spongy black bottom.

One special industry in Salling was the harvesting of ice. In February the railroads built tracks onto the ice of Otsego Lake. The snow was scraped by teams of horses and then gang plows, set 2 feet apart, cut the ice to a depth of 8 inches.

Men then spudded the ice loose and chains pulled the blocks of ice from the water. The ice was then loaded onto railroad cars for transport to a storage building for use during the summer months.

A newspaper account related the events of the ice harvest in 1906: "The MCRR got through cutting ice at Otsego Lake Friday last. Close to 5,000 car loads were taken from there this season."

Prominent early points of interest in the village included the schoolhouse which was located at the corner of Old 27 and West Otsego Lake Drive. Boyer's sawmill stood on the edge of Otsego Lake and processed logs hauled across the ice on large sleighs and Jensen's log planing mill was to the north of the sawmill.

The village of Salling disappeared as the timber was logged off and by 1915 the town had vanished.

Bill Granlund is a retired Gaylord High School principal and an Otsego County historian.

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