

A Step Back in Time: Cottages, garages rise in early days of Wah Wah Soo

February 23, 2008 Submitted by Bill Granlund

In the 1960s Dr. Richard H. Lyons wrote an informative history of the Wah Wah Soo Resort Association which was established on the east side of Otsego Lake in 1903.

The Wah Wah Soo Pleasure Resort was recorded in the Land Office in Gaylord on Oct. 24, 1903 by Richard and Lillian Hartnell as proprietors.

At least three generations have enjoyed the pleasures of the Wah Wah Soo beaches and breezes but there is surprisingly little known about the early efforts of a group of pioneer resorters who established the beach and the association itself.

Though transactions of land are not in themselves of importance, the deeds and other legal documents may lead us to know who was on the land and owned it, and to some extent, possibly what they did with it.

Records indicate some of the earliest lots were sold by the Hartnells at Wah Wah Soo to D.K. Mitchell, A. Van Doran, H. Roberts and Slade, R. Kramer, W.L. Townsend, W.L. Morrison, Lou M. Joughlin, A.J. Shockley, F. Buell, Frank Shipp, N. Haight, James Hazard, James A. Quick and M. Bolton.

These were apparently the original purchasers of the land of Wah Wah Soo. To date I can find no record of how the Wah Wah Soo Association purchased the rest of the 40 acre plot of the southeastern section of Section 28 or how they purchased the other lots from the Hartnells.

There is an interesting document from Oct. 1, 1906, in which the first share of stock in what is now the Wah Wah Soo Resorting Association was issued to F.B. Bolton, with each share of stock worth \$25. Frank J. Shipp was the secretary-treasurer and the certificate was apparently returned to the Wah Wah Soo Association by Fred B. Bolton Feb. 17, 1941.

It would seem that by this time, October, 1906, the association was adequately formed and holding the lands. Alleys and streets were laid out with one street behind the major line of cottages on lots 11-16 named Mitchell Street, likely in honor of Mr. Mitchell who owned lots 15-18 and who at about that time built a moderately large cottage to house all of his daughters.

Sixty years later one might properly ask why these lots were so small. Each lot was approximately 40 feet in width and 60-70 feet in depth. The question could also be asked why people were clustered so closely together and, for that matter, why an association

was formed at all. The only answer that occurs to me is that people were somewhat more gregarious at that time and stayed close together for mutual protection since the countryside was rather wild and cottages could easily be plundered. The trip to Gaylord by train was a long one and in 1906, a trip by horse and buggy was made over extraordinarily poor sandy trails.

Possibly one of the reasons for forming the Wah Wah Soo Resort Association was to establish a station at which the train would stop and pick up passengers for Gaylord. In addition to establishing a station platform and waiting area at the railroad station, the association built a row of garages located behind lots 21-27 across from what was apparently a trail road which has persisted to the present paved highway.

Behind those garages were placed the outhouses and each cottage, according to its own convenience, had a one-hole to a three or four-hole outhouse fitted up in an appropriately grand or ignoble manner.

More Wah Wah Soo history will appear in future Step Back in Time installations.

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