Waters

Waters has been established as a village, deserted and re-established three times since it was founded in 1872. First called Bradford or Bradford Lake, it was then called Wright's after a lumbering firm, and finally Waters.

In 1877 the Wright-Wells Lumber Company operated mills, owned the hotel and general store; Waters was a prosperous, growing town for nearly ten years. As the surrounding forests were harvested, however, the residents moved away and by 1890 all that remained was a combined store and post office.

Henry Stephans, Sr., a lumberman from Roscommon County, moved his operations to Waters in 1891 and once again the village prospered. By 1905 the population had grown to 300, but by 1917 the residents had dwindled to 50.

About 1912 Henry Stephans, Jr., having inherited his father's fortune, decided to make Waters his permanent home and built a large two story frame house across from the depot with numerous outbuildings, including a large dairy barn. In 1914 he began work on the famous glass bottle fence, a unique memorial to the rough, hard-drinking lumberjacks. The shoulder high fence was two city blocks in length, had a wrought iron gate in the center, contained whiskey bottles of every then known brand and was finished off with letters two feet high that spelled out the owner's name. When Stephans left Waters in 1917 in failing health, the village again declined.

Mr. and Mrs. Remi Schotte bought 1,800 acres of land including the village of Waters in 1927. Mrs. Schotte, a native of the community, served as postmistress from 1930 to 1946. They donated land to the Waters Fire Department, to the Post Office, for a park and childrens playground. They also recovered sunken logs from the lake and produced several types of lumber in their mill. The building, still standing, which was once known as Fred Cook's Department Store in Gaylord was constructed mostly with this lumber.

Over the years vandals have destroyed most of the famed fence and the majority of the original buildings, including the Stephans house, have been destroyed by fire.

In the early 1920's the Heart Lake Club bought the old Stephans dairy barn and converted it into a hotel but it closed during the Depression. The hotel has opened its doors twice since for varying periods but time and the expressway have passed it by. The building was destroyed by fire in 1972.

Waters seems on the rise again as several recreation areas are being developed.

Stephen's barn in Waters