

Stephens, Schotte: names synonymous with Waters

The Village of Waters was established in 1872, although, at that time, it was called Bradford or Bradford Lake. Within a few short years, Bradford was deserted only to spring forth again when an enterprising young man named Wright opened a lumber company and founded the Village of Wright. Eventually, the name was changed to Waters and remains the same to this day.

Waters flourished in the hands of the Wright-Wells Lumber Company. They proceeded to form a community by building their mills, and soon after, a general store and a hotel. While the mills were in operation, the village continued to grow but when nature exhausted her supply of wood, the mills closed. Without a source of income, the people moved on and again, the village dwindled, leaving a combined store and post office still functioning. The year now is 1890.

Along about 1891, a wealthy lumberman, Henry Stephens, Sr., felt that Waters still had potential and he decided to make it his home. He moved from Roscommon County and proceeded to rebuild the mills. With the mills in operation again, the population quickly grew to approximately 300. The prosperous years from 1891 to 1905 could not last and by 1917 there were 50 residents left in the village.

Waters' famous glass bottle fence cannot be left out of its history. The fence consisted of whiskey bottles of all kinds. It measured two city blocks long and had a wrought iron gate in the center. The crown of the fence, also in bottles, spelled out the name of Henry Stephens. There could not be a more fitting tribute to the tough, burly lumberman of that time. Mr. Stephens will long be remembered for this appropriate memorial to these men.

In 1927, Waters welcomed Mr. and Mrs. Remi Schotte to the village. They purchased 1,800 acres of land and began the task of rebuilding. They not only contributed to the community by putting their mill in operation; they went much further by donating land for the Waters Fire Department, a Post Office, and a park for children's playground. The Schottes' ingenuity also proved successful in operating their mill. By recovering sunken logs from the lake, they produced several types of lumber. Fred Cook's Department Store in Gaylord was constructed mostly with this lumber. This building is still standing.

The Heart Lake Club came to Water's in 1920, purchased the Stephen's dairy barn and refashioned it into a hotel. The depression closed its doors

for a few years. It saw life again but never for long. Fire destroyed the building in 1972.

Along with the hotel, the years took its toll on several of Waters' landmarks. The famous bottle

fence deteriorated, fire destroyed the Stephens' large home and the greater part of the original

buildings are gone.

Waters refuses to die. The year 1975 sees it thriving and growing.

Hidden Valley: community asset

In February of 1937, six ski enthusiasts from Detroit, including Don McLouth, Dave Wallace, Gordon Saunders, Lang Hubbard, Al MacCauley and Mike Murphy came to the Gaylord area in search of snow and hills sufficient to provide good skiing in Michigan.

They found snow and hills in Gaylord, and they also found a goodly number of businessmen, and an ambitious Chamber of Commerce whose members had high hopes for this town. The Detroit men met most often with Rean Mooney, Mel Freel and Louis Thren. All of these men lived long enough to see the dream of "skiing in Northern Michigan" come true.

The downstate gentlemen were able to get options on the large tract of hills and valley originally optioned by the Kiwanis Club for a county park. The result was the formation of the Otsego Ski Club, a private club with limited membership.

The first year there was one ski tow and one employe. Stanley Dennis chopped down the trees, cleared the brush and set up the one rope tow. Later

Mrs. Dennis became the first cook at the club in the log warming hut which is, essentially, the octagon shaped room in the main lodge at this time.

In 1947, John Debelack was brought to Gaylord on a three month vacation to supervise the expansion of the club. Hugh Keyes, of Bloomfield Hills, was the architect. The Alpine architecture, predominately Tyrolean, was 'borrowed' by those of the club members who had skied in Austria and Switzerland, and by John Debelack who was born in Austria.

In the very early years of the club, Don McClouth suggested that the merchants, when remodeling time came, might adopt the Alpine motif in their store fronts and decorations. This met with some slight response, but was revived in 1962. At this time,

Gordon Everett, a local businessman, at his own expense had an architect's drawing made of the 300 block on West Main Street, as it might appear in new "Alpine" dress. The drawing was displayed in the window of his store for many months. It caused much comment and eventually to the adoption of "The Alpine Village" motif. The bandwagon had started to roll!

The beauty of The Alpine Village is the outgrowth of the dream of Don McClouth who inspired other men and women to make of the place they live a thing of real beauty.

In addition to being a place of beauty and pleasure, the Otsego Ski Club, at Hidden Valley, is an economic asset to this community. It employs 140 during the open seasons,

with a permanent staff of forty. There are probably 70 residences in Gaylord which are used during the open seasons of the club, and every Hidden Valley guest is a potential customer in The Alpine Village. The annual payroll is between one-half and three-quarters of a million dollars.

Future club plans call for the expansion of cross-country skiing, the addition of a restaurant and beverage area at the pro shop, and the expansion, next spring, of Olund Lake Farms, northwest of Gaylord, for a year-round children's program.

Robert Hayes is the general manager of The Otsego Ski Club. Richard Gray has been with the club for 12 years, serving as comptroller for six of those years.

First hospital facility in 1920's

Until the early 1920's Gaylord was without any kind of hospital facilities. At that time Dr. Elmer and Dr. Ruey Ford established a two bed sanitarium over their drug store, simple operations were performed and babies were born there. Their store stood in the area now occupied by the west end of the Gaylord State Bank.

In 1927 Dr. Gordon McKillop established a 12 bed hospital on the second floor of the beautiful, big house which stood on the site of the present United States Post Office. The operating rooms and the x-ray facilities were on the second floor, with the doctors' offices occupying the first floor of the house. At this time, the McKillop

family made their home on South Elm Street.

This hospital served Gaylord and the area until 1936. Following that time patients were taken to the Grayling Hospital.

Impetus engendered by Dr. Richard Peckham and Frank Shipp, a local business man, was responsible for the start of what is now known as the Otsego County Memorial Hospital. Many benefits and other fund raising projects are held, and the city donated about six acres of land north on Old 27. Construction began in 1948.

During this same year the Otsego County Memorial Hospital Association was officially formed, and articles of

incorporation as a non-profit corporation were filed on March 4, 1948 with the Michigan Corporation and Securities Commission.

Dr. Frank Shipp was elected as the president of the hospital's first board of directors, and a construction committee consisting of Dr. McKillop, Dr. Peckham, Walter Noa, William Wedge, Ed Lynch and C.S. McReynolds was appointed.

The 34 bed hospital was opened in 1951 with Dr. Gordon McKillop as chief of staff. Dr. Richard Peckham took over in this capacity in 1958. McKillop, and Peckham, along with Robert S. Libke, M.D. were the only physicians on the hospital staff in 1951.



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