

Herb Hutchins Part I – History of Gaylord

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Keywords

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Fourth of July

Gaylord circa 1900

Farming

Lumbering

Potato Crop

Railroad

Log Transportation

Road Signs

BCG&A Railroad

Roads

Fires

Herb Hutchins

Born in Frederick in 1888, family came back to their home in Gaylord that summer

Father employed at a general store near Otsego Lake

Father sold potatoes, 120 wagonloads, waited hours in line

Neighborhood boys hung around blacksmith shop on Main Street

Fourth of July

Young men started off the morning by setting off gunpowder stuck between anvils

Late morning parade with floats from businesses, lodges and factories – clowns, city band and pretty girls

Afternoon brought band concerts on street corners, sport competitions, water battle between the firemen

Gaylord circa 1900

Rallies held in Gaylord during Spanish-American war to stir up spirit

About a dozen volunteers for the military, some died of typhoid fever

Wood sidewalks and buildings until 1901 when brick became common

Fires burned several blocks at a time (one in 1897 and another in 1902 notably)

Rainstorm washed away opera house's first foundation, destroyed by fire in 1906, never rebuilt

Most village homes had a barn for the family horse, pigs and maybe car

Local hotels kept pigs to dispose of garbage

1895 ordinance prohibited pigs being kept without a floor in their pen

The three story Landshire Hotel burned in February 1903

One or two fires usually burned each night in early 1900s

Farming

Original farmers settled in Hayes and Elmira, most came from New York, Pennsylvania and Canada

Farmer took any land when offered the chance because they feared being left out

1890s – Influx of Polish families settled in Otsego County

Buggy rides through Hayes township to see grain crops, farm homes and barns considered a treat

Farming children left for work down south, so the elderly farmers gave up and moved

Lumbering

Otsego Lake Village founded by timber industry in 1873

Hardwood market strong in late 1800s and early 1900s

Hardwood used for timber, charcoal and tenpins

Farmers spent winters in lumber mills, selling their trees to pay their taxes

Few lumber mills but 20 to 30 companies had tracts of land between 1893 and 1933

Several small towns grew up around mills (Logan, Vanderbilt, Johannesburg, etc.)

South end of Otsego County at the northern tip of a great pine forest

1900 - Could drive from one end of county to the other and only see pine trees

Potato Crop

Most important market were potatoes because the climate was wonderful for them
At one point, 5 companies stored, sold and shipped potatoes through Otsego County
Early 1910s, Gaylord shipped most potatoes in Michigan at 600 train carloads
1890s - Chicago hotel advertised that they had Gaylord potatoes
Potato crews regularly employed 30 to 40 men during winter

Railroad

State of Michigan gave rights to Jackson Lansing Saginaw railway in 1873/4
JLS railway sold land off railroad tracks to prospective farmers and homesteaders
1874 - Railroad first reached Gaylord
Several branch lines met at Gaylord, usually starting from Bay City
Early 1910s - 14 passenger trains came to Gaylord daily

Log Transportation

Ausable, Manistec, Black, Sturgeon, Pigeon rivers transported logs
Dumped pine logs in Turtle Lake during winter then floated them downstream in spring
6 dams helped facilitate floating logs down the river, 3 in Otsego County
Log trains numerous in late 1900s and early 1910s, a train dispatched every 30 minutes

Road Signs

Otsego County Pioneer Association placed road signs (at time of interview)
Names dedicated to early prominent citizens and names used by lumberjacks back then
Shoeflag Corner, Chatmore's Corner (for a nearby camp), Wildcat Corner, Hemlock Corner

Story behind Hemlock Corner is that the easiest way to give a person directions to Elmira then was to go west on the wagon road and through the deep woods where they would turn right at the hemlock tree.

BCG&A Railroad

BCG&A railroad (Boyer City Gaylord & Alpena)
Opened in 1905 between Boyer City and Gaylord, Alpena route added in 1911
Closed in 1931 or 1932 due to disagreements among owners and citizens
Oil tanks traveled down the BCG&A

Roads

All roads were strictly dirt over rough country and hills, often very sandy

1910 - First improvement was made to fix a sandy road east of Gaylord. Farmers and local businessmen bought crushed limestone and laid it themselves to cover the mile long stretch.

Fires

Fires common because cut treetops were left behind, no fire response, lightning, dry spells
Sometimes the sky was so smoky that you couldn't see the sun for several days
Worst year was 1908 because no rain fell from June to September

1908 - People of Mets (local village) felt threatened by a large fire that fall. A train came to evacuate worried citizens. The train left Mets and derailed, throwing the passengers into a burning pile of cedar ties. Most were burnt to death but the fire didn't touch the village of Mets.

1912 - Lumberman formed an association, hired a fire warden and gradually became a firefighting group.

1891/2 - Tornado in Otsego County