

A Step Back in Time: Otsego Lake resort living in the early 1900s remembered

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Editor's note: 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. Today Lyons shares his early memories of the resort.

Obviously I cannot comment on resort life in the early days and only hope Hazel Kramer Shipp or Eleanor Shipp Peterson may add some tidbits to this history.

I have been told the Hazard cottage which my father purchased in 1912 was built in order to attract young men and there were benches built along the sides of the porch so the Hazard girls could hold dances. Suffice it to say by 1912 the Hazard girls were married off or tired of the cottage and shortly after, the Mitchell girls in the cottage next door underwent the same fate.

Sometime between 1906 and 1912 a channel was built at the end of lots 16 through 34 and behind lot 34 a fairly large boathouse was constructed. Association members were able to keep their boats there and exit through the channel. A dike was made of logs to keep the sand from drifting into the channel.

Opposite the entrance to the lake near lot 23 and between lots 10 and 11 a large dock was constructed of heavy planking with large cement pillars as big around as 3 1/2 to 4 feet in diameter and 4 or 5 feet in depth. The pillars were designed to hold the dock against the ice during the winter and it was the custom in those days to run your boat from the boathouse out to the main dock where you would collect the family or visiting fishermen and take off to other parts of the lake for fishing or pleasure.

My own early recollections of life at Wah Wah Soo are obviously rather vague because I was between the ages of 3 and 5 between 1912 to 1915 but the things I can recall through a child's eyes it seemed to be an extremely happy, gregarious and friendly group of people who were generally accustomed to and kind to children and tolerated them with great equanimity.

Next door to our family on lot 35 was Dr. Taylor from Jackson, who apparently bought a lot from Mr. Morrison prior to 1912 and lived there with his wife and daughter, Nana, and son, Dodge, who were around 12 and 15 years old.

To a small child the early life of the original Gaylord residents seemed much more communal than it did after resorters came from the southern part of the state. There must have been differences among the adults and times when, due to such close living, they got on each others' nerves, but, we children were blissfully unaware of it.

In the early days the land directly behind the cottages was used as common property. There was a tennis court behind Bolton, Joughin and Carpenter's cottages. Looking back now I have to wonder it did not strike me as odd that people as old as my parents should want a tennis court. My father must have been around 33 years old.

In his autobiography my father wrote, "There were 12 Gaylord families living at the resort during the summer and we had a delightful time. Fishing was excellent, we had a fine bathing beach and nearly every evening there was a gathering of the clan at some of the cottages. I remember we celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary at the cottage and as a little present to me they stood me on my head and filled my pant legs with watermelon rinds. From this you can see that we were a very decorous crowd."

At another point in his autobiography my father noted he was president of the Wah Wah Soo Association for many years. I think the records will show when he was not president he served as secretary and Mr. or Mrs. Kramer was president.

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