

# A Step Back in Time: Trains played vital role in early 1900s

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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 recalls the train which ran between Gaylord and Wah Wah Soo.

The trains furnished much entertainment. Generations of children have listened from the beach to the train whistle at the end of the lake and then taken off at breakneck speed to beat it to the station.

The path was well worn and sandy at the end by the cottages. I learned to ride a bicycle on that path. The trick was to come bumping over the roots and remain seated without being thrown off by hitting the sand at the bottom of the path.

One year the train came from Gaylord each evening bringing husbands and fathers home from work around 7 p.m. Since Michigan was on Standard time in the early 1900s, it meant in late August it was pitch dark at that time. To a small girl, it was an exciting part of the day to join the women and children who went up the path swinging lighted lanterns, half afraid, while waiting for the huge engine huffing and puffing its way to a stop at the station.

There were no organized play activities for children such as one would find at a summer camp. I am surprised that we did not burn up the resort as I remember endless little furnaces we built for roasting potatoes.

One summer we spent what seemed to me like the whole summer preparing for a circus to be given by the children. There were many more boy than girls on the beach that year. Mrs. Kramer said she counted nine boys and Eleanor, in her backyard licking a candy dish.

I suspect the only reason the boys tolerated me tagging along was the fact my father was so good at coming forth with iron rings for the circus performers and diving rafts. My sister, two years younger than me, preferred playing with dolls. Later, Nana Taylor arrived as a companion for me and the boys became convinced that girls were useless and turned to more manly pursuits such as clearing a good path to the boathouse. I remember being upset they would not let me go with them.

One of the nightly chores was lighting a smudge pail to carry smoking leaves from room to room before we went to bed so the mosquitoes would escape out of the holes in the roof so our sleep would not be disturbed. You can imagine what a trial this nightly smudging was to an asthmatic child. I could have stood the mosquitoes better than the

smoke. Since there were so many swamps surrounding Wah Wah Soo, the mosquitoes were very bad in June until we learned to put oil in the swamps.

I dimly remember tagging along when Mr. Hazard came down to look at the cottage beyond Mitchell's, which was almost hidden by trees and weeds. I believe it was owned by the Jamiesons for a fishing shack and was only a small part of what it became after Mr. Hazard bought it.

Two colorful owners at Wah Wah Soo were Mr. Earl Bolton and Mr. Frank Dean. Mr. Bolton was one of the original owners and likely the first association president. He was a tall, gray-haired man of considerable dignity and given to much talking.

He had been in the state legislature and my father used to call him "your honor." He loved to roll words off his tongue with that sonorous bass voice of his. I remember his telling of one of the first automobile trips I had ever heard and his discussion of the word detour which was new to me.

I wonder if it did not come into common use only after the advent of the automobile. It was he who suggested the name of Wah Wah Soo which he said meant "walk on water."

Mr. Frank Dean was a tremendously large man. We used to think he weighed 300 pounds. He had been a United States Consul in Italy. To provincial Gaylord children this seemed an awesome title.

While he was in Italy, he lost a daughter to diphtheria. He blamed his Christian Science wife for not calling a doctor. He was so bitter he divorced his wife. He was probably the only person I knew in those days courageous enough to get a divorce.

He brought his Italian bride to Wah Wah Soo. She had large dark eyes and beautiful skin. Her face always comes to mind when thinking of a beautiful woman. While Mr. Dean was alive the couple spent their summers at the resort and after his death she married Mr. Davenport and lived year round at Wah Wah Soo until she died a few years ago.

Mr. Dean loved to gather the residents of Wah Wah Soo at his home and recite poetry. He was fond of the poetry of Ben King and did a very good show with his recitations.

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