

THE TROUT LAKE STORY

Leah M. Noble, Town Historian - Edwards

In the southern corner of St. Lawrence County, in the Town of Hermon lies a miniature gem of a lake - Trout Lake. What it lacks in size, it makes up very generously in its clear spring water and picturesque setting. It is about 1 3/4 miles long and 1/2 mile wide, with a maximum depth of 90 feet. Nestled between low banks on the west side and steep, rocky banks on the east, Trout Lake wends its way leisurely northward as if it were reluctant to leave the peaceful surroundings. At long last, it surrenders to the narrow confines of Tanner Creek, then Elm Creek and eventually into the St. Lawrence River via the Grass River.

According to tradition, ^{ca. 1813/14} Trout Lake lay unseen and unexplored until about 1860, when Ezak Earl, a distant relative of Earl Bancroft, wandered lakeward in search of wolves. He was amazed to see before him the glassy sheet of water dotted with about a dozen islands.

The virgin timber attracted lumber men and in 1800, John Gardner, father of Brayton and Asa, was granted a 99 yr. lease of the land from the foot of the lake towards Fowler. Later he sold his rights to Dan Barnett & Moore of Potsdam. J. Gardner erected a sawmill at the outlet of the lake about 2 miles from his farm, now owned by Morrell at Podunk. About this time the Anthony Lumber Co. of Gouverneur was lumbering extensively at the foot of the lake. At one time 12 to 15 teams were used to haul the logs and lumber to Bigelow for shipment. A. S. Colton Co. operated a logging camp at the head of the lake with Jack Donahue camp boss. The lumber jack's pay was \$20 a month and board. If they did not work on rainy days, they lost that pay.

Poor management forced a Mr. Barber, Hermon, into bankruptcy and the Potsdam Co. took over his interest.

A disastrous storm in the form of a cyclone, May 14, 1884, curtailed some of the Anthony's activities, when many thousand feet of logs were jammed into Shanty Bay. This storm also destroyed a pontoon bridge across to the island.

More permanent roads followed the logging roads from Hermon, and about 1890 a road was built from Edwards at the foot of the lake. Where it joined the Porter Hill Road, a school house was built in 1902. For a number of years a very active church group held services here, with

Rev. Lee as minister.

So many pleasure seekers were attracted to this area that Asa Gardner built the Gardner Hotel which had a grand opening June 15, 1882. Later it was owned and operated by Mr. Ackerman and known as the Ackerman Hotel. The hotel was built back from the road in the "Huddle" on the land now occupied by the Aurelio cottage. On the lake shore, adjoining this property was built the Pavilion for outdoor enjoyment. Around 1903 fire destroyed both the hotel and pavilion, and a home across the road, and the woods nearby (May 20, 1903).

For several years picnickers from Edwards used a logging road which came out to Chub Lake (now Cedar Lake). By 1899, \$2,000 was appropriated by the Town of Edwards to construct a road to the head of the lake about 3 miles. Part way the road went through a swamp, which was covered with logs and ever after known as the "corduroy", about 1/4 mile. At the far end of the corduroy on the left was a farm house and barn. Around the bend was the Morrow farm house and barn on the left. Today all is overgrown with brush and foliage. Back of the Morrow home are big rocks known as the "Bread Rocks". On the farther side of the swamp at the head of the lake was a logging camp which Earl Bancroft bought in the early 1900's and remodeled it into a home, a cottage used for about 25 yr. by the Bancrofts. After that it was used as a restaurant, and at present is the home of Mrs. Grannis.

Around 1900, there was great activity in the building at the lake. Bill Grant from Edwards built a number of cottages for Earl Bancroft about a mile to the north on the lake. A logging camp was where the Manzolati home stands.

One of the first cottages was built for Mr. and Mrs. Bullis, from Canton. Their daughter married Mr. McMillian, who was an official in the Syracuse China Co. That cottage is now owned by Jack Graham.

About 1890, Asa Gardner's son, Pliny, built a home on the site of the Green cottage. Soon after building his home, Plin purchased a steamboat and charged 25¢ for a ride around the lake. It is not known where the boat came from but some conjecture that it was one owned by Bill Grant, who ran a steam boat on the Oswegatchie around 1873. It is regrettable that Plin wrote his book "American History" - merely copied - instead about Trout Lake lore which was second nature to him. Plin's father, Asa, was a Commissioner to Alaska and is buried there. Several years before Plin had his steamboat, Mr. Anthony

(1892) ran a steamboat on the lake and also took passengers around the lake, giving particular attention to the children.

Miss Elsie Evans of the Trout Lake area and a teacher in N.Y.C. was very active building and selling real estate at the lake, and for a while she spent her summers there (1930-1940).

When the road from Edwards was completed the lake was made more accessible and a daily stage carried many happy people to and from the lake. A Mr. Tonk Lanphear, a big bearlike man, drove a stage and pleased the riders with his dry wit. Mr. Hi (Hiram) Hall owned a livery stable on the west corner across from Sacred Heart Church and took parties to the lake summer or winter, and also rented outfits to those who wanted to do their own driving. Ice racing was very popular and often the hotel was filled to capacity. The Edwards Record newspaper printed weekly notices of the attractions which awaited lovers of outdoors and the N.Y.C.R.R. offered special trips to Trout Lake via Edwards.

Since 1900 the lake population has grown, especially in the last 5 years - from a few dozen cottages to over 100. Some of the cottages are all year round homes. Summer after summer, the Flints, Grimshaws, Kerseys, Spauldings, Tretts and Grahams - teachers in N.Y.C. relaxed and enjoyed the solitude and fishing at the lake. The Trout Lake Association (1955-1965) aimed to promote good fellowship and to maintain a high standard of safety for all cottagers and visitors to enjoy.

In 1962 the State purchased the Bancroft - Todd farm, consisting of 900 acres, planning some time in the future to develop the wood land and land bordering Trout Lake, into a State Park. This project would benefit many who do not own property at the lake and would be a very desirable place for swimming instruction. In the past this farm was known as the Land of the White Plume. The east side of the lake is quite rocky but several cottages have been built there, and at times the Boy Scouts have camped near the shore.

Several wooded islands add to the charm of the lake - Carpenter Island, now Adams, Griffin; Bell Isle; J.S. Brown Island (Jordan's) now Graham and others. At one time there was a *bridge?* from the Pavilion to Carpenter Island.

The bed of the lake is nearly funnel shaped branching out into shallow water and terminating in various

delightful beaches. Sailboats, canoes, row boats, motor boats accompanied by water skiers are often seen swinging in and out of the islands. In the numerous bays white and yellow pond lilies lift their beautiful heads proudly skyward. Pickerel weed, cardinal flower, and cat tails add to the beauty of the shore line. For years the patches of blueberries and strawberries have brought delight to anxious pickers and add to the jelly and jam shelves. All sorts of wild flowers march up and down in the nearby woods - rare lady slippers, ghostly Indian pipes, pitcher plant.

Since 1958, Mr. Rollin Brown has been operating a "Ham" radio station in their home at the head of the lake. He has had very interesting communications from many places in U.S.A. and Canada. His call number is WA2DFW.

It is hoped that the frequent restocking of trout will add greater sport to fishing. Large and small mouth bass, perch, rock bass, smelt, sunfish, and bullheads are quite plentiful. A few years ago, beavers took up housekeeping at the foot of the lake and did considerable damage until they were trapped and released farther away in the Adirondacks.

During migration, flocks of Canadian geese and ducks are seen as they wing their way northward. The silence of the evening is broken by the call of the whip-poor-will, thrush, owl and loon, as he gossips with his mate some distance away. Until recently the beautiful loon was a common sight as he played hide-and-seek in the water, but either because of its careless nesting habits, easy prey to predators, or thoughtless hunters their appearance is getting to be a rarity.

About 1950, Heinz Brodauf purchased a large piece of land in the northwest corner of the lake and cut it up into numerous lake front lots, nearly all of which are the sites of very pleasant and modern cottages.

Fortunately through the years there has been very few accidents or near accidents on the lake. July 1965, Mrs. Dorothy McCollum lost her life in a boat collision.

From time to time fire has done a great deal of damage to the woods as well as cottages. The "Fire Falls", across from the Manzolati home, has been burned over several times. About 1955, the home of "Hidie" Evans, owned by Warren and Anna Cousins, burned and left quite a vacant spot across from the Reed cottage. Two cottages (Reardon's) near the lake shore, east of Reed's, burned 1969.

About 1960, Mr. and Mrs. Bacon, Canton, built a Marina at the head of the lake and after running it for a couple of years, they sold it to Robt. Simons, a man, who employed Benny Gagnon to run it. From the Morrow home to the head of the lake was a plank road known as "Sidewalk Hill".

At one time, about 70 years ago, there was considerable talk of piping the water to Trout Lake to supplement the drinking water supply already afforded by wells (about 1880).