

Town History

Lake Luzerne, NY

Lake Luzerne, a picturesque town with a crystalline lake and a natural waterfall has within its naming a rich history that extends back before the French and Indian war and the American Revolution. Taking a look this far back has its valleys and hills occupied by American Indians (Mohawk, Abenaki, and Iroquois) to name a few. The Indian name for this certain tract of land that is Luzerne is unknown, but "the spot where the Sacandaga meets the Hudson and forms a large bay, which the townspeople called Phelps Bay, was called Ti-o-sa-ron-da, the meeting of the waters". This is where the Sacandaga and Hudson rivers lift up in a frenzied embrace before they join together and make their way South toward New York City. Located in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains, Luzerne has been called the "Gateway to the Adirondacks." The traveler on Route 9N passes several lakes which add much to the natural scenic beauty of the area. Lake Luzerne has been described as "a gem of pearl in a setting of emerald, and bearing on its tremulous bosom a solitary island, Ivy Isle, so small it seems to float." Next along the highway are three small lakes, Second, Third, and Fourth, all flowing into Lake Luzerne.

Luzerne was originally part of the "town of Queensbury tract beyond the mountain at its western edge (their west part of town), and the place called Westfield and now Fairfield was obligated to stand on its own feet and organize itself into a township. At the end of the war with England, Westfield became known as Fairfield, incorporated as a township on April 10, 1792 when the town of Queensbury relinquished their 'west' tract.

Description of Luzerne in the late 1700's

Luzerne village is located in a sandy, piney region, entirely free from miasma or malaria, and for this reason is highly recommended by physicians for all who are liable to pulmonary complaints. It has an elevation of between seven and eight hundred feet above tide-water, and about four hundred feet above Lake George. In the purity of its atmosphere it is unsurpassed. The difference in the moisture between this and the seashore is shown by the hydrometer to be twenty degrees. Children and others who have been brought here almost at the very point of death, have recovered, and shortly put on the full blush of vigorous health.

Kateri Tekakwitha

A shrine honoring Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, "Lily of the Mohawks," was recently dedicated in St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Lake Luzerne, NY. The Shrine was made possible through the generosity of Ida Hughes Atwell, and was given in memory of her husband, Richard D. Atwell and her sister, Bertha H. Shippee. It was blessed on Sunday, August 13th by the Rector, the Rev. Fr. Clayton S. Pratt. This Anglican Shrine of Blessed Katerie Tekakwitha is thought to be the only one in an Episcopal Church this side of the Mississippi river,

however, there is a shrine in the Episcopal Church of the Holy Apostles, Oneida, Wisconsin. The Shrine at Lake Luzerne was founded because blessed Kateri Tekawitha was born within what is now the Episcopal Diocese of Albany. She and her Christian companions, escaped from what is now the Auriesville-Fonda area. They boarded a canoe in the Mohawk river, and continued in the Sacandaga river to where it joins the Hudson river, landing at what is now Bay Road, Lake Luzerne.

After landing at Lake Luzerne she and her companions portaged to Lac du St. Sacrement (Lake George) walking through the forest where the village of Lake Luzerne now stands.

After disembarking from the upper end of Lake George, they portaged again to Lake Champlain, then to the Richelieu river and the St. Lawrence river and safety, at the Jesuit Mission of St. Francis Xavier of Caughnawaga.

Being mindful of Blessed Kateri Tekawitha's association with Lake Luzerne, this Shrine was given in thanksgiving for her heroic Christian witness, under the most harsh circumstances. We pray that her example of fortitude and holiness will inspire many to imitate her virtues, and that soon she will be numbered among heaven's saints.

The town was first settled shortly after the close of the French and Indian War. On August 14, 1767, a petition was filed on behalf of Edward and Ebenezer Jessup and others, asking for a grant of 4,100 acres of land (Jessup's Patent on which the hamlet of Lake Luzerne is now located). On April 10, 1792, land was taken from Queensbury, then a part of Washington County, and called Fairfield. It was not until April 6, 1808, that the name was changed to Luzerne, in honor of the Chevalier de la Luzerne, a French nobleman sent by his country to aid the Americans during the Revolutionary War. Names of this era include Orton, Fairchild, Dexter and Gillessp. An early settler in this community, which must include Hadley, just across the Hudson River, was Jeremy Rockwell, one of the framers of the State Constitution in 1821. He and his descendants had much to do with the history of both Hadley and Luzerne. Although a separate town in Saratoga County, Hadley has close business, social and historical ties with Luzerne.

When first settled, the area was an immense forest of virgin white and lumbering became the first industry. The settlement at Lake Luzerne grew slowly at first. In 1815 there were not more than six houses on both sides of the Hudson River. In 1833 there were thirty. Grist mills, saw mills and a distillery served the town. The "cold season" of 1816 hurt the people badly. Rye and corn were two dollars a bushel and pork fifty dollars a barrel. Many families went for a month at time without bread.

Leather was Luzerne's biggest business during the last half of the nineteenth century. A tannery had been in operation here for some years before the railroad was put through. In 1868 the firm of Thomas Garner and Company, whose

offices were in New York City, bought this tannery and immediately an era of expansion began. Thomas Garner's brother, Edward M. Garnar, came to Luzerne to manage the business. Buildings were put up on both sides of Main Street near Mill Street. The Garnar Company moved in at an opportune time for the railroad had been put through from Saratoga Springs in 1865, and the ease of heavy shipment by rail instead of by wagon was advantageous to the business. Fifty to seventy-five men were employed and in 1887 the Garnar Company bought the Bowman tannery in Stony Creek, where another twenty-five to thirty men worked. E. M. Garnar Jr. managed the Stony Creek tannery and later, when his father retired from the firm, managed the plants in both towns. The Garnar Company's business reached its peak in 1885 and then, after a time, it declined until 1905, when the tannery closed. The buildings were torn down in 1922-23, and all that remains as a monument to a once thriving business is a 100 foot-high brick smoke-stack.

Success was their undoing. Tanneries of the time used bark, and only the bark, of hemlock trees for tannic acid as a part of the chemical process to turn the hides of cows and other animals into various kinds of leather. In the days before restoration programs, Garnar's success partially assured failure. One tannery, owned by Henry Poor & Son, reported using 4,500 cords of hemlock per year and consumed about 12,000 animal hides, with a work force of only 40. The other tanneries were of comparable size.

Taken together, the demands of the three tanneries took their toll on the surrounding hemlock population, which was devastated by the 1920's. The Garner Leather Works became a historical footnote in 1909.

Hints of History

The museum contains some artifacts from the tannery, the Garner family and other local historical figures. Other than the chimney and museum, traces of the Garnar family can still be seen in Lake Luzerne.

In the same period when the tannery brought prosperity and growth to Luzerne, other industries developed. In 1878 a dam was built across the Hudson at Rockwell Falls by Marcus Gardiner and his father-in-law, Charles Rockwell. They erected a paper mill there, and through several changes in ownership the mill was a source of employment to seventy-five men. A creamery and cheese factory was in operation on Summit Street and there was also a shirt factory nearby. A toothpick and match factory was established across the river in Hadley. Lumbering continued throughout these years.

In 1869 Felix Fruitznier and Fred Roider were brought to Luzerne from Curtisville, Massachusetts, to operate the first pulp mill in the United States using American-made machinery. The mill was built on the outlet of Lake Luzerne by a German named Albrecht Pagenstecher. It still stands with some of the original machinery,

and was opened as a public museum on July 4, 1962, with George Roider, as caretaker.

The mill had an output of a carload of pulp a day and employed about ten men. Nearby was located an iron ore smelter that processed ore from a mine on Mt. Anthony in Hadley. Both of these sites, together with those of a gristmill and sawmill, are now included in the town-owned Pagenstecher Park. The deed to the gristmill included control of the outlet of Lake Luzerne.

The great log drives of this era drew in gypsies who would camp on the outskirts of the Hudson River where the logs would pile up in a wooden heap. The gypsies would cook, entertain, and provide shelter to the many men that would drive the logs. The children of the town would sit and watch as the gypsies would parade through town with a dancing bear, throwing homemade cookies out to all that would catch them.

While manufacturing was rising, there was another development. People were finding that this locality offered advantages as a summer resort. The famous Rockwell Hotel originally constructed in 1832, catered to many famous and wealthy people. The first Commodore Vanderbilt was a prominent guest occupying the same cottage for many years. The hotel accommodated about 150 people. The Wayside Inn was built on the site of the present Hadley-Luzerne Central School by B.C. Butler at about 1869. Constructed in the Swiss style with nine cottages, many of which still stand, it accommodated about 200 guests. A common sight in those days was the carriages of the Vanderbilts and the Astors.

The resort business, built to a peak around the turn of the century, has reached another peak, but the type of accommodations has changed. The hotels of yesteryear are all gone and in their stead are the dude ranches, motels and housekeeping units. The first Dude Ranch in the East was built here in 1935 by Earl Thomas Woodward, affectionately known as the "Baron of Bolton." An enterprising genial man, Earl advertised his business as Northwoods Dude Ranch with 10 horses and a weekly rate of \$26-\$30. Here you could find plenty of good food, comfortable beds, lots of activities and a young crowd. Earl Woodward had succeeded in bringing the West and all its cowboy, cowgirl flavor to the East in Lake Luzerne. Shortly after Earl turned another property in Lake Luzerne known as Checkerboard Farm into the Rocky Ridge Dude Ranch. He hired someone from Ohio to operate it, built cabins, brought in horses and advertised it as he had Northwoods Dude Ranch. After starting yet another dude ranch in Stony Creek called the Stony Creek Dude Ranch he opened the Hidden Valley Dude Ranch in 1939 on the former Howe farm sugarbush, bordering on Lake Vanare using the same format as he had done with the other ranches. Eventually Earl sold these ranches to owners that would run them for years after. In 1944 Earl Woodward sold property to Charles and Walter Isaccson and they built the successful Painted Pony Ranch that is still in operation today and is

celebrating their 52nd year of operation as one of the first Dude Ranches in the East.

Visit Painted Pony Ranch to find out more about this historical vacation spot and Painted Pony Rodeo to check out the exciting world of championship rodeos. Lynn Woods paints Woodward's success at Dude Ranches in the May/June 1997 issue of the Adirondacks as "local teenage boys dusted off their boots, bought ten gallon hats and called themselves wranglers, hoping for a job or a girl. The woods echoed with the whine of sawmills, and the train stations at Hadley and Stony Creek once again bustled on weekends. Whole families found summer employment - seven days a week, fourteen hours a day, at barely livable wages - as barn boys, laundresses, chambermaids, cooks and waiters. More than a few women from Brooklyn, Back Bay and Buffalo fell in love during their vacations, married and settled down in Stony Creek; Missoula, Montana; or Ocala, Florida - towns the cowboys call home."

On the western shore of Luzerne Lake, opposite to the Way-Side Hotel, was an ancient gathering place and fishing lodge of the Iroquois Indians. Quantities of flint arrow-heads, stone hammers and other implements of savage life, have, from time to time, been found here. This was set upon the great Sach-en-da-gua and Mague's trail, extending from Johnstown to Lake George, with a branch over the Luzerne Mountain to Fort Edward, and another down to Ka-che-bon-cook or Palmer's Falls.

Most of the industries of the previous century have disappeared and the buildings which housed them have been taken down. No longer does the town profit from the tannery, the paper mill or the glove-sewing shop. There are no more grist mills, harness shops or general stores so typical of life seventy-five to one hundred years ago. Of the old industries, logging and lumbering continue as major economic assets. The town's only manufacturing activity now is a small business making animal ear tags, leg bands and veterinarian's supplies. The Ketchum Manufacturing Company is one of the only three such firms in the United States, and its products are shipped on occasion all over the world.

The latest matter in the history of Luzerne is an act of legislature in 1963 which changed the name of the town from Luzerne to Lake Luzerne, conforming to the name of the principle village, whose name is known far and wide.

Sources:

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Meanwhile Back At The Ranch
from Adirondacks May/June 1997 Issue by Lynn Woods

Earl Thomas Woodward 1891-1954
By Carolyn Hart Towers - March 19, 1992

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