

History of Swan Lake

Driving through the village of Swan Lake today, it is hard to believe that the Swan Lake of my childhood was a thriving, bustling community - so busy in the summer that it was necessary to have a policeman directing traffic!

Swan Lake, originally called Stevensville, was named after the Stevens brothers, who established a leather tannery on the outlet of the three and a half mile long lake. In 1848, at a meeting of those residents who lived near the tannery, Hiram Sandford, the oldest inhabitant, proposed the name Stevensville.

In the 1890's Stevensville was known for the many rooming houses in the area, mostly at local farmhouses.

Around 1895, Alden Swan moved to Stevensville and bought the lake and much of the land around it. In 1927 the name was changed to Swan Lake. Upon his death, his estate was purchased by Siegel and Kretchmer. The Siegels build the Commodore and the Stevensville. The Commodore was run by the Siegel family, and the Dinnerstein family purchased the Stevensville, which was the last hotel in Swan Lake to survive. The Dinnersteins built a magnificent golf course which continues to operate today.

Nearby, on a hill overlooking the village, the Bant and Roth families owned and operated the President Hotel which is now the site of Presidential Estates, lovely homes overlooking the smaller part of Swan Lake.

Across the lake from the Presidential was the Swan Lake Hotel, owned by The Levine family. In 1954, the main building burned (It was not caused by a fire in the elevator shaft as reported in a well-known book about the Catskills - there was no elevator in the hotel!), The Levines rebuilt the hotel and added what was to become over forty bungalows, as the area was quickly becoming the home of bungalow colonies, where wives, and children came to stay for the summer and husbands travelled from New York City on weekends.

Down the road was the Fieldstone, operated by Jack Levine (no relation to the Levines of the Swan Lake Hotel). On the outskirts of the village were many other hotels such as Paul's Hotel, which is now Daytop Village, the Swan Lake mansion, owned by the Stieger family, and numerous bungalow colonies.

During the height of the tourist era, Swan Lake itself had many successful stores and businesses. These included Evansky's Luncheonette and soda fountain, Bernsteins (a small department store), a fish store, and Katz's Bakery. At Turetsky's grocery, located across from the Swan Lake School, Mr. Turetsky made his own dill pickles. There was

the Far Gin Zach antique shop, Larry Gip's grocery store which later became Sol and Marion's Superette, Zolchonick's chicken plant and the Friendly Tavern. At Kilcoin's, Allie McCoyd thrilled tourists and hotel staff with his magic tricks. Kilcoin's is the only business of this era still open today. Evans' Landscape and Nursery Center later became the Red Barn Restaurant. There were several gas stations, a pharmacy and an ice cream store in the village, and other businesses.

The leather tannery, no longer operational, became a matzoh mill, producing matzoh and matzoh meal only before Passover for the many surrounding hotels,

and closing for the rest of the year.

For entertainment outside of the hotels was the Showboat, located on the lake across from the Rockland House (which later became the staff quarters for the Stevensville Lake Hotel). At the Showboat, guests could rollerskate, go bowling or boating, rent a horse, or eat Chinese food upstairs in the restaurant.

Today, homeowners, rather than tourists make up the bulk of Swan Lake's population. The hotels and bungalow colonies are long gone and there is no need for a policeman to direct traffic, but the sun setting over the lake looks the same now as it did then, and is probably one of the most beautiful sights in the county.

Nancy Sunshine

