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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2017 / 12:21 PM



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Assembly Point, circa 1949

Historic Assembly Point

By Patricia & Robert Foulke

Tuesday, December 7, 2010 4

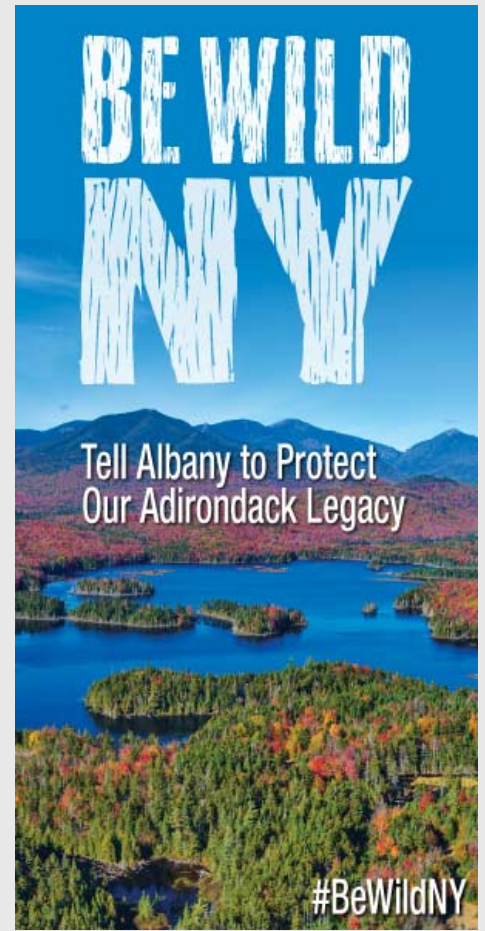
Over our thirty-six years of living on Dark Bay we have enjoyed alternating our fitness walks between the village shore, Cleverdale and Assembly Point. We wondered how "the Point" got its name and surmised that it might have had a Chautauqua history. It does.

The Chautauqua Movement, with roots in both 19th century revival meetings and secular education, began, flourished and waned for half a century between 1874 and 1924. Founded by John H. Vincent, a New Jersey minister who created a summer camp to train Sunday School teachers, it soon expanded on the shores of Lake Chautauqua to include a variety of subjects, ranging from literature and music to science, attracting prominent ministers and speakers from all over the country. By the turn of the 20th century there were 200 assembly grounds in 31 states.

Back in the 1950s we looked at buying a house in an assembly ground on the shores of Lake Minnetonka near Minneapolis that grew out of this movement. Why did people look for a beautiful setting on a lake for a stimulating educational and religious summer community? Why not?—the appeal is still potent. A reinvigorated Chautauqua that draws many from our region for weeklong themed courses still thrives, and you can visit another one that began as a ground for revival meetings at Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard.

Early Settlement

But West Point, as it was called through the military and colonial eras of the lake, had a long history before it became an assembly ground. Robert Ervien, father of Robert Ervien III, wrote the *History of Assembly Point on Lake George, N.Y.* in 1956, and he tells the tale in an engaging style that keeps the reader eager to continue. The full book is available online [here](#). Another book, *Assembly Point in the 20th Century* was written by Robert W. Adamson in 1999. W. Robert Holmes wrote a shorter summary, "Why is it Called "Assembly Point," found [here](#).



The Most of MIRROR MAGAZINE

There is little evidence of any military action on the point with one exception. General Montcalm and his men spent a night in 1757 across from Assembly Point in a bay behind Cannon Point (probably Orcutt Bay) on their way to attack Fort William Henry. When scouts from the fort spotted something unusual, they were pursued and fled to the opposite shore where the chase that ensued may have been on the Point. In 1776 Benjamin Franklin traveled through the lake on a mission to Canada and in 1783 George Washington headed north through the lake to visit Fort Ticonderoga, but there is no indication that either of them set foot on the point they were near.

Settlement was another matter because the British began promoting it by 1759. Granting land on the Point and Long Island came about through the religious persecution of a Scotch Presbyterian pastor in Northern Ireland. Thomas Clark was a very charismatic young preacher in County Monaghan. Others in the community who resented and feared his popularity jailed him on false charges, so eventually he decided to emigrate to America. Land was patented or granted to Clark's friend, Robert Harpur in 1764 and the Clark party left Ireland for America.

In 1765 a document was filed with the names of Robert Harpur and 86 others. The land in the patent application included the Point and Long Island.

British soldiers applied for military grants in 1767 and three future settlers on Assembly Point in the Robert Harpur Patent were among them.

Enter the land speculators, seeking the primary source of wealth in an expanding nation. Governor DeWitt Clinton and John North once owned the 200 acres of the Point. He considered the Point as a hunting ground, but it was also one of his many land investments. After the opening of the Erie Canal, Clinton sold his land to Benjamin Fuller, who called it "Cape God." Later James Harris and his wife Rosetta Fuller Harris built a home on the east side of the Point called Sunnyside and had enough land for a substantial farm.

The Assembly Era

The Sanford period lasted from 1870 to 1925. Drurie S. Sanford bought Long Island in 1871. The Sanfords built a two-story home as well as a music building including a photographic darkroom, a large barn and a farm house for their help. A photograph shows row boats that were used by the Sanfords and their help for conveyance to and from Long Island. Major F. Smith owned land at the north end of the Point in 1860.

In the mid-1870s George Lee, Thomas S. Coolidge and Jonathan M. Coolidge III remarked to their father, "Father! See that meadow on the Point over there. Would you believe it belongs to Warren's father, Major F. Smith? He feels he is too old to bring his sheep each summer from Harrisena for grazing, and he wants to sell. What would you think of our buying the meadow as a place to grow cedar trees for Warren Smith's paper mill at Ticonderoga?" Their father replied, "Great! And while you're about it why not buy 20 more acres bringing it up to 40 acres? Coincidentally, I recently ran into James Harris, owner of the Point's 100 acre farm and think he would like to sell the 20 acres north of the stone wall." The purchase was concluded. Major F. Smith built a cottage on the land and it belonged to our friend Lois Binley. We remember visiting her there.

By the 1880s camp meetings and assemblies were popular. A notice was published in *Stoddard's Lake George Guide* in 1887: "the Lake George Assembly will occupy the north end of Long Island for a series of Chautauquaian camp meetings, beginning in July and continuing through the greater part of August. It is intended to make this a permanent affair if a sufficient interest is shown. The use of that section of the island having been granted by the owner, Dr.D.S. Sanford for that purpose." But the location changed to West Point, across the channel from Long Island, and the name of the point became Assembly Point.

People arrived for services by boat to an old dock on the west side of the Point. Dr. Sanford built an auditorium to seat 200 people and called it the "Lectorium." He meant "the place where the things good for the bodies, minds and souls of men are intelligently considered. . . the word fits the place as the bark fits the trees that stand roundabout." By 1889 lots on the Point were for sale from \$40 to \$100 per lot, but they did not sell well.

The grounds included a Sunset Promenade on the west shore and a Sunrise Promenade on the east shore. Each was laid out between the shore and the fronts of the cottages. "Horses and vehicles are not allowed on them without special permission."

Current resident Bob Ervien added, "Assembly Point is special because you can walk and bicycle completely around it without traffic. In the old days my father and mother and one of the Adamson



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girls canoed around the Point. They pulled their canoe over the narrow section that used to be wetland with a shallow sandy bay on the west side.”

An old photograph shows where Sunrise and Sunset Promenades met at the north end of the Point. The poster on the bulletin board announces that Divine Services will be held in the Lectorium on Sunday, August 30. Similar posters were placed around the lake and the steamer *Island Queen* made trips before and after services for those desiring to attend. The little girl is carrying a stamped letter, which could indicate a walk to the Post Office on the Point. The office was not located at the north end of the Point until 1895 when the new dock was built there.

The Lake George Assembly was incorporated in 1890. A new dock was built to accommodate the *Horicon* and the *Ticonderoga*. A Lake George Assembly Post Office opened as well as a new boarding house, the Brooklyn.

Dr. Sanford wrote to Seneca Ray Stoddard “Assembly Point is marvelous. . . well adapted for a Kottage Kolony Klub of Kotented Kongenial Kottagers.” He also composed jingles: ”Really restful Rest Right Royally Realized. Rational refreshing repose amid romantic, refined, relaxing recuperation, at remarkable reduced rates.”

In 1889 T.S. Coolidge and Dr. Sanford traveled by launch from the Fort William Henry stables to the big dock on the east side of Assembly Point. Then they walked on Crossover Road and found the stone wall marking the southern border of the forty acres of Assembly land. Along that border Dr. Sanford built a farmhouse for a caretaker. We knew that house as the Granger house where we babysat our daughter with Ardella Granger. It has since been taken down and replaced by an attractive log cabin with striking round stone patio.

A free library, the Mountainside Library, dates from 1894 and has important connections with the Point. It is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Edward Eggleston of Joshua’s Rock, was one of its sponsors. A friend of ours, Allegra Ireland, was a descendant of Eggleston and we remember picnic lunches in her cottage on the shore.

Just as the original Chautauqua gradually declined in the early decades of the 20th century, so did most traces of the Assembly. The Lectorium was demolished by a tornado in 1923. Remaining cottages were gradually modified and enlarged, and new ones built on former Assembly lands from 1915 onwards. By 1940 the last original Assembly lot had been sold and owners had established a new association called “Otyokwa” (a Mohawk word for a gathering of the people) to control the inland lots and preserve them for common recreation or just keep them forever wild, as they are today. In this way, among others, the current Assembly Point Association preserves the communal spirit of the original Assembly.

Note: The authors thank Robert Ervien III for sharing his father’s book and photo prints from before 1895



Tags: [Assembly Point](#), [East Side](#), [Lake George](#), [Lake George History](#)

4 COMMENTS

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Judson Witham *July 27, 2012 at 7:12 pm*

As a young Boy I remember many nights camping between Rt 9L and the Sandy Bay on the East Side of the Point. Our Family had built and operated the Swamp Marina later renamed East Shores Harbour in the late 1960s. The Library at Dunham’s Bay and the Burnt Ridge are where most all my love for the East Side of the Lake took root. Assembly Point in the Fall and Winter/ Spring were our nearly private play ground. Myself and Siblings have skied and scuba’d and swam the Point at least a Million times. I am very partial to the West Side from Top of the World around the Pilot Knob up to the Narrows and on to Ticonderoga. There is a World of History yet to be written. More to come.

Judson Witham

Son of Swamp Fox

[Reply](#)

Judson Witham *July 27, 2012 at 7:18 pm*

A trip to the East Side would never be complete without a thorough understanding of one of the

greatest Men to have ever graced the shores of Lake George. Howard Mason is a legend in his own right. He and his Wife Rebba Mason were the most kind and generous and decent People you can ever imagine. May God always keep them in our memories. This is a fantastic window in to the real lives of East Side Lakers going back to the late 100s and through teh Early 1900s up to 1950s and 60s. Howard was a Great Man.

Judson Witham
Son of Swamp Fox

Reply

Judson Witham July 27, 2012 at 7:38 pm
Backward Glances by Howard Mason

http://books.google.com/books?id=ad_otO4VsV4C&pg=PA106&lpg=PA106&dq=Backward+Glances++Howard+Mason&source=bl&c

Reply

Judson Witham July 27, 2012 at 7:28 pm

Oh Boy now I'm getting into an area of History of the East Siders that may be of a little Sensitive Nature. You may have heard of the Nelson Boys and those Hillbillies Heaven Rangers ... The Green Mountain Boys. Well I am compelled to share the eloquent work of an unequivacable legend in his own time Scott McLaughlin and the East Side Gang (L)L. I absolutely must say ... Without hesitation, all Secert and Above Top Secert Classified Materials have been redacted. BARNES BUGGIES AND BB GUNS ... is a fantastic look into the real flavor of life over on the East Side. Geesh I love those East Side People.

Judson Witham
Son of Swamp Fox

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