

**“COMPLETE HISTORY
OF
FORESTPORT, NY
1950”**

**COMPILED BY
PATRICIA AVERY**

HISTORY OF FORESTPORT, NEW YORK

Patricia Avery
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INTRODUCTION

Twenty-six miles north of Griffiss Air Base at Rome, New York, the United States Air Force is building a radar tower. Its exact height is a military secret, but it is over 1200 feet high and is the highest structure of its kind in the world; second only to the Empire State Building. The tower is in Forestport and brings the town into prominence again. It hasn't been a very exciting town lately; once in awhile the paper prints that it is 45° below zero again (it went to 52° below five years ago) but usually there is very little happening and it is just like any other small town in New York State.

Forestport includes three main settlements; Otter Lake, Woodgate and what is called the village of Forestport although it isn't legally a village since its disincorporation in 1938. This history deals mainly with the village with only a few allusions to the other settlements because they are even younger than Forestport, each has less than a hundred inhabitants and they have both been small summer resorts since their earliest days.

This history is written to show that Forestport has not always been the quiet summer resort that it is today. By tracing the events since its founding in 1840, this paper shows Forestport as a small settlement in the wilderness, as a booming mill and lumbering town and finally as the town it is today.

PRELIMINARY HISTORY

Two hundred years ago the area known today as Oneida County was without a history. It was part of the land claimed by the Oneida Indians and the white man's civilization had not yet reached it. But in the fifty years that followed, the Americans began to penetrate the region.

The Revolutionary War battles at Fort Stanwix (Rome) and at Oriskany brought central New York into prominence. Men who had fought in the Revolution or who had traded with the Indians in the area returned on foot, in ox carts or up the Mohawk River in canoes to settle in what is now Oneida County. As the whole country was settled on a much larger scale, so was Oneida County; the people settled first in Whitestown (Whitesboro) and then moved north and west. The fact that Governor Clinton, General Marinus Willett, George Washington, William Floyd and Baron Von Steuben owned lands in the region influenced others to settle there.¹ The last area in the county to be settled was Forestport, which was then included in the town of Remsen.

The state constitution of 1777 forbade the purchase of Indian lands by individuals in order to reserve this right for the state alone. The "New York Genesee Land Company" was organized in 1787-1788 by eighty or ninety persons to evade this law by leasing all the lands of the Six Nations for 999 years. But in 1788 Governor George Clinton was authorized to

¹Daniel E. Wager, Oneida County History, Boston, 1896, p. 60.

disregard these contracts with the Indians and all the settlers in the Indian lands were driven from their homes, which were destroyed.²

In 1788 the government met at Fort Stanwix with Indian representatives and after much parleying, bought the lands from the Six Nations. A treaty known as the Oneida Reservation ceded Oneida County to the United States on Sept. 22, 1788.³ In 1801 the county, which included the area covered today by Jefferson, Lewis and Oneida Counties, was divided into twenty townships. By 1805, the three counties had been separated.⁴

Of the seven land patents granted in Oneida County by the government, parts of three of them are included in the town of Forestport. In 1761 Matthew Adgate, a member of the first constitutional convention and a member of the New York State assembly purchased by contract, 45,000 acres of land in the northern part of Oneida County for two shillings six pence per acre. His patent to what is known as the Adgates Western Tract was issued January 30, 1798 and was surveyed into lots west of the Black River by Benjamin Wright. This tract was later broken up into the Piquet, Gouverneur, Mill^e and Swanton, and Devereux Tracts.⁵

The Remsenburgh Patent, consisting of 48,000 acres, was granted December 28, 1787 to Henry Remsen, J. G. Klock, George Klock and John Van Sice upon their petitioning the legislature

²Wager, History, p. 66.

³Ibid., p. 69.

⁴Ibid., p. 117, 118.

⁵Ibid., p. 126.

that this area had been conveyed to them by a deed in 1766 which was recorded with the Secretary of State.⁶

Thomas Machin was granted a patent June, 1788 of 31,360 acres. Machin, who was born in England, came to New York in 1772. He was a skilled engineer and surveyor and assisted in placing a chain across the Hudson River to prevent British boats from passing West Point during the Revolution.⁷

The Woodhull Tract is apparently a later grant originally eight miles square, which constituted what was called a full township.⁸

⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 112, 113.

⁸ Samuel W. Durant, History of Oneida County (1667-1878), Philadelphia, Pa., c. 1880, p. 121.

WILLIAMSVILLE

In 1840 Truman Dale brought the first industry to the few settlements on the Black River where the towns of Remsen and Boonville met. He built a chair factory there, which was soon followed by Smith's saw mill on the west side of the river. Alfred Hough built the first house on the east side where the village is today.⁹ It was probably at this time that the settlement was called "Smith's Mill". Although there were a few people living there, a map made in 1845 shows the area as a wilderness with only a few houses at White Lake.

When the Black River Canal was started in 1836, plans were made to construct a feeder from the town now called Williamsville to channel water from the Black River into the canal at Boonville. The Erie Canal was expanded in 1847 and couldn't operate without water from the Black River so the Williamsville feeder was finished in 1848. A dam, replacing an older dam which formed a sawmill pond, was built at Williamsville and another dam was built at the outlet of North Lake, making two reservoirs to provide water for the canals. The feeder was sixty feet wide, and between six and seven feet deep.¹⁰

The feeder was very difficult to build because it was laid out on the face of steep sand hills fifty to seventy-five feet above the river and any heavy rains washed out the towpath so that much of the work had to be done more than once.

⁹Wagor, History, p. 443.

¹⁰Durant, History, p. 467.

Before the feeder had been built, the areas with the most settlement were Meekerville, Grantville and Woodhull. These were grown up around mills and tanneries but when the canal gave Williamsville an easy method of transportation, the people moved into the village. Today Grantville is just forests, Meekerville has one summer home and Woodhull has four houses.

The feeder greatly increased the land value of Williamsville and gave an ideal method for shipping products made at the mills. A saw mill was built on the new Stat Pond formed by the dam, there were two mills below the dam a mill for pressing bark about a half mile below this. Dr. Platt Williams built a large home (now owned by Thomas and Richard Kernan) on the Alder Creek Road and a mill a mile and a half down the canal from the town named for him. A two-story school building had been constructed which held classes during the summer and winter months with vacations in fall and spring. The school had one room on each floor and each room had a counter extending around the walls with benches placed at the counter so that the students sat with their backs to the teacher.

The first trip on the new feeder was a momentous occasion for the Williamsville residents. The canal boat, carrying Canal Commissioner Beach, was drawn by horses from Boonville to Williamsville on December 16, 1848. School was dismissed and Mr. Hall, the teacher, took all his pupils to the dock to see the boat.¹¹

The year 1851 began a decade of rapid growth in Williamsville. A hotel was opened by Anson Hayden, Loren Miller built

¹¹Thomas C. O'Donnell, Smubbing Posts, Boonville, N. Y., 1949, pp. 34, 35.

a store; a hub factory, grist mill and butter tub factory were built and lumbering and tanning became the chief industries. There were several mills on both sides of the river and state pond, on the Little and Big Woodhull Creeks and on some of the smaller streams near Woodgate by 1860.

In 1857 several of the townspeople organized a Lyceum for "mutual improvement and useful knowledge"¹² as the secretary's record states. They discussed such vital questions as "Which is the most injurious to society, the flatterer or the slanderer?", "Resolved: That the invention of the printing press has been of more benefit to mankind than the steam engine" and "Resolved: That a liar is worse than a thief in a community".¹² The lyceum lasted only two years so there probably wasn't much useful knowledge or too much improvement spread through the community.

A Catholic Church was built in 1858 near where the Catholic cemetery is today and a Methodist church soon followed. In 1857 an Episcopal church was built and when the Methodist church disbanded in the early 1920's, the Episcopalians bought that building so they could meet in the village. In 1897 the present Catholic church was built.

The Union Presbyterian Church of Alder Creek and Forestport, which was formed in 1839, united with the Utica Presbytery in 1866 and held services in the Methodist Church and in Temperance Hall until the present church building was built in 1879. The first pastor was William Cleveland, and when

¹²Minute book of the secretary of the Forestport Lyceum.

his brother, President Grover Cleveland brought his bride to Forestport for a visit, it was a highlight for the summer of the whole area. When telegrams began arriving for the president, Horace Dayton, who ran the telegraph office and also repaired clocks and did photography asked a small boy named Fred Graff to deliver them for him. In a letter written to his aunt, Mrs. John Neejer, in 1940, Mr. Graff tells that after delivering several telegrams and getting only "thin dimes" as tips, a man staying at the Sherman House sent him with a note to deliver to the president and told him to ask the president for a quarter. Mr. Cleveland gave the boy a silver dollar instead and this gave him the courage to collect on both ends for the rest of his deliveries.

While the settlement known officially as Williamsville (and unofficially as Punkeyville; taking the name of the small flies which invade the area every summer) was still a part of the town of Remsen, there was a rather involved system of voting. The people living on the west side of the river, which was included in the town of Boonville, voted in Boonville. The settlers on the east side voted in Remsen on alternate years and the Remsen residents in Williamsville on the other years. This made it very hard for the Williamsville residents who worked in the woods because they didn't have time to get to Remsen to vote before the polls closed. One year a group of citizens decided to take matters into their own hands so they sauntered into the polls at Remsen but instead of voting, snatched the ballot box and took it back to Williamsville to make it easier for the woodsmen.

This seemed to convince the Remsen people that something should be done about the voting system so in 1860 a committee was named to divide Remsen and Williamsville into two separate towns. James Mitchell and Charles Thomas of Remsen and William B. Jackson and Alfred Hough of Williamsville were paid \$1.50 a day to serve on the committee.¹³

In 1852 Anson Blake began buying land in Williamsville and continued buying it until he owned all the hills surrounding the village, some lots in the village itself and land for some distance on both sides of the river and west of the canal feeder. He married the daughter of Dr. Williams and acquired one-third interest in much of Williams's land. (He also bought other land in Oneida County and outside the county.) He purchased this land with the plan in mind of clearing it and raising corn and potatoes. Clearing this large area of its virgin timber gave work to the mills in Williamsville for several years and brought lumber crews from as far north as Ottawa but Blake soon found that the growing season was too short and the soil too sandy to raise corn so the Blake's Hills were left completely stripped of their timber and even today have only young trees in an area of much heavier forests. When Blake died, his land passed to his heirs and today is owned by New Forest Inc., a private company.¹⁴

Although many of the trees felled were made into lumber and the bark used for tanning, some of the largest trees, particularly spruce, were saved to make spars for ships.

¹³Old record books of the town of Remsen stored in the Town Clerk's Office.

¹⁴Letter written by Howard W. Taylor, member of New Forest Inc. to Christopher Magee.

The logs, usually from forty-five to sixty feet long, although some were as long as seventy-five feet, were tied together into rafts and piled up until they sank three feet, eight inches in the canal. A small shanty for the men and horses was built on one end of the raft and they were floated on the feeder to Boonville, then down the Black River Canal, the Erie and the Hudson River to New York where they sold for around \$15.¹⁵ One spar was so long and perfect that \$100 was offered to anyone who could find its equal, but one was never found. Piling from Williamsville for New York docks was also shipped down the canals. Many of the logs for both spars and piling were brought from the woods down the old dugway to the pond.

Hemlocks, some as old as five or six hundred years, were cut and the bark used in tanning. The logs that the bark was taken from were just left in the woods to rot and Alonzo Denton and Nathaniel Waterbury seized the opportunity to use the logs to make lumber. They built a saw mill, bought the Hough and Hurlburt store and had a lumber camp between Williamsville and North Lake.

Another man important in the growth of the village was Philip McGuire (called "Black Bill" to distinguish him from his red-haired cousin, "Red Phil"). He was an Irishman who came to Williamsville after working in Hawkinsville and Lyons Falls. He bought 350 acres of farm land and 7,000 acres of timber and became so successful that he purchased a tannery

¹⁵F. A. Spear, "When Forestport Was a Rip-Roarin' Forest Port", Observer-Dispatch Magazine, Utica, N. Y., June 4, 1939, pp. 3/4.

in 1871, built a grist mill in 1874, a pulp mill in 1888, in 1881 a feed mill, in 1889 a cheese factory and a large home and barn. He was contracted to build a dam in 1889 a mile and a half above the village for a consideration of \$45,000.¹⁶ This dam forms Kayuta Lake which is today lined with summer homes, but at that time was used as another reservoir for the Black River Canal. McGuire was also responsible for starting the shipment of spars and piles from Williamsville.

In 1867 Jonathan A. Hill, Maine, a general in the Civil War, and his partner, Thomas E. Proctor, Boston, built a tannery at Woodhull (then called Port Woodhull). This was the largest tannery in the state and had 420 vats which used 5,000 to 6,000 cords of hemlock bark a year. The raw hides were shipped into Williamsville and this tannery alone produced 25,000 hides annually to be boated back down the canal. In 1876 a side of sole leather produced at the Proctor and Hill tannery won first prize at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Hill also ran^r store, built several houses for his workers and ran the Blue Eagle boarding house (named after its coat of brilliant blue paint). When the tannery went out of business, Hill moved to other tannery interests in Athens, Pa. and sold his house and store to W. E. Albertson who built a pulp mill at Woodhull.¹⁷ The Woodhull Development Company which took over the area sold building lots and tore down the abandoned mills, so today only four houses remain.

¹⁶Wager, History, "Family Sketches", p. 17.

¹⁷Durant, History, p. 469.

FORESTPORT

The committee which was earning \$1.50 a day to divide Williamsville and Remsen must have been trying to make some easy money or else worked as most committees do, because it wasn't until November 24, 1869 that the town was finally erected from Remsen. The post office at Woodhull had been moved to Williamsville for convenience and Robert Grandall, the postmaster suggested the name be changed to Forestport since the canal had made the town a port in the forest. Everyone, including the United States post office department, agreed and when the town was formed it took the name of the post office. In 1870 Harry Weed was elected the first supervisor.¹⁸

Durant's history gives the population of Forestport in 1870 as 1276 and in 1875 as 1280. He states that Forestport had twenty-five log dwellings, the greatest number in the county and they were valued at \$2030 or about \$81 each. In 1877 the real estate value as fixed by the supervisors was \$373,951 and a year later the equalized valuation, real and personal of 48,478 was \$80,043.¹⁹

In April of 1869 the North Lake Dam went out and the thirty-three foot height of water washed out the Forestport dam, the bridges across the river and three mills. During the rebuilding Mr. Salvillian Traffern ran a ferry boat from

¹⁸Wager, History, pp. 142, 143.

¹⁹Durant, History, p. 217.

Denton's point to the site of the Seifert and Herrig mill. The boat was attached by ropes and pullies to a line and pulled back and forth across the pond by hand.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century found Forestport a booming lumber town with "no law north of Remsen." There were at least a dozen saloons within a two-mile limit, with a baseball bat behind each bar to provide law and order. The owner of one saloon, which was on the town line between Forestport and Boonville, used to move the bar from one end of the room to the other, depending upon which town had voted dry at the time. When a small part of Forestport, which was legally in the town of Boonville, was annexed to Forestport in 1890, the bar tender lost his advantage over the other saloons.

The whole area was centered around the canal feeder. Mills at White Lake and along the Woodhull Creeks had been abandoned and the people moved into the village. There were stores, blacksmith shops, a harness shop, a hub and spoke plant, hotels, and grist mills, feed mills, saw mills, tanneries, a chair factory, shingle mill, a jewelry store, churches and even a society of Good Templars with 160 members. An act of Legislature on May 23, 1867, authorized the construction of a railroad from Forestport to Bellingertown, with a spur to Grantville, which was built by Stephen Potter.²⁰ This was a wooden railroad and the lumber and hubs from the Grant mills were pulled on cars by horses down to a dock on the pond and loaded into canal boats. The boats were locked through from the

²⁰Wager, History, p. 201.

pond to the feeder. A canal boat could carry 65,000 feet of lumber and made a round trip to Albany in two weeks.²¹

Besides the McGuire mills in the village and the Proctor and Hill tannery at Woodhull, there were mills on the pond owned by W. R. Stanburgh, Syphert and Herrig, James Gallagher, George Farley, C. M. Bingham, and Hough and Hurlburt. Charles Hayes had a turning and planing mill at Woodhull and sold excelsior, Francis LaFountain ran a lumber mill on the Bear Creek, Enos Grandall had a mill at Bellingertown, Fred Brown operated a shingle mill on the Alder Creek Pond, the Weed Brothers had a mill on Pine Creek, Joseph Aho on Little Woodhull Creek, three miles above the village.

The largest mill in the town was built in the 1890's by the Forestport Lumber Company. This was organized to clear 21,000 acres of land in the North Lake area which was owned by the Adirondack League Club. The mill was run by Thomas O'Neil from Moira and his nephew George Ainsworth and drove five million feet of timber into the State Pond.²²

Lumber and wood products were not the only things shipped from the Forestport feeder. William Shanks won a bet by taking a load of ice on his canal boat to New York without its melting before he got there. Potatoes raised at Forestport were also shipped on the canal. Grain was brought in and ground at the grist and feed mills to use for all the horses connected with the canal and lumbering.

²¹Spear, "Rip-Roarin' Forest Port", p. 4.

²²Ibid., p. 3, 4.

THE BREAKS

Forestport seemed to be more prosperous than it could have ever hoped for. Within fifty years since the feeder had been constructed, the village had grown from a few houses in the wilderness to a thriving lumber town. Lumber, spars and other wood products were being shipped on fleets of canal boats to New York and the cities along the Hudson.

But there were a few men in the village who didn't think they were making enough money. So, on July 23, 1897, the first break in the canal appeared. The break, which was the worst ever to occur in the Black River Canal and one of the worst in state history, was about a mile and a half from the village, where the tow-path is seventy feet above the river. Seventeen hundred men worked day and night for thirty days to fill the hole which was six hundred feet wide and sixty feet deep.²¹ Mr. O'Donnell includes in his description of the work, an undated quotation from the Utica Herald:

"The first work done was the building of a sheet of piling; two rows fifty-three feet high were constructed across the cut. A half-arch core was then constructed, extending from one end of the break to the other. Sand and gravel were used in filling the core, and these were puddled, which consisted of mixing and pounding, which makes the earth more solid.

"The sand was secured near the break by an endless chain of teams. No team stopped to be loaded, as there were so many men at work that as the wagons passed by each one threw in a couple of shovel-fuls of sand and when the wagons reached the end

²¹Durant, History, p. 470/

of the line they were loaded. The sand was secured from two sandbanks, the gravel from a pit two miles from the break. There were 25⁰ teams at work, and each team drew six loads of gravel a day."²⁵

The men were paid \$1.65 a day, the teams 3¼¢ an hour and they got time and a half for Sundays. The entire cost of rebuilding was \$62,781.78.²⁶

The second break came on May 23, 1898 and closed the canal for twenty-one days. This one was four hundred feet wide and fifty feet deep and cost the state \$50,761.47 to repair.²⁷ Again the town was full of people, the stores, harness shop, and blacksmiths were busy and everyone had work. But the state began to be a little suspicious.

When the third break occurred on September 18 of the next year, the state sent Pinkerton men to investigate. Even though this was a smaller break; three hundred feet wide and between thirty and forty feet deep, it took seventeen days to repair and cost \$17,089.72.²⁸ After a series of arrests and trials, some of the town's most prominent members were convicted of causing the breaks to bring business to Forestport. Thirteen men were arrested; five of whom were jailed, three fined, three freed and two more freed for turning state's evidence.²⁹

The breaks did succeed in bringing business to Forestport, for these three years were among the most prosperous

²⁵O'Donnell, Snubbing Posts, pp. 90, 91.

²⁶Ibid., p. 91.

²⁷Durant, History, p. 470.

²⁸Durant, History, p. 470.

²⁹O'Donnell, Snubbing Posts, p. 91.

for the town. The boarding houses were full, the saloons and hotels were always busy and everyone was making money. But everyone was under suspicion. Every day a new man was arrested, called as a witness or at least suspected by his neighbors. It was rumored that there was a secret tunnel under River Street connecting Jim Riddolph's saloon run by Hugh "One-Eyed Mike" MacDonald and Doyle's saloon in case any of the men had to get together in an emergency. Several people have tried to find the tunnel; one woman became quite indignant a few years ago when a man wanted to dig up her sidewalk to search for the tunnel; but it has never been found.

THE FIRES

While Forestport was at the height of its prosperity, the village was destroyed three times by fire. The first fire started in April, 1891, in the barn of the Sherman House. The town had no fire company and the people were helpless. A strong wind blew the flames to the hotel, up both sides of School Street and down Division Street to the middle of the block. Here the houses were not so close together and bucket brigades and rugs soaked in water and laid on the roofs halted the fire. The same methods were used on the house across the street from the Sherman House to keep the flames from spreading down River Street. No one knew how the fire started but it was rumored that lumberjacks smoking in the barn had set fire to the hay. Others believed that a lumberjack who had lost money at cards set the fire for revenge against Gurly St. Mary, the proprietor.

This fire led the townspeople to organize a volunteer fire company with Charles Bingham as its chief. They built a firehouse near the river and this was used until the company was reorganized and incorporated and bought the present building in 1939. When a fire started in February, 1899, the company was far from adequate. At 2:30 in the morning, during one of the worst storms in years, the Getman house was discovered to be on fire. This was the largest hotel in town and was built entirely of wood, so the flames spread rapidly and were aided by a strong wind. The chemical and hand

pump of the fire company was too small to have any effect on the fire and the water in the hose soon froze so that the hose burst and the men were forced to resort to a bucket brigade. When the fire was finally checked, fourteen buildings on River Street and Woodhull Street had burned and the panic-stricken people from twenty-four others had carried their possessions into the streets. The Saturday Globe of Utica adds this sidelight to the account of the fire:

"When they the saloons and hotels were burning and people were racing here and there getting out household effects, one old fellow was yelling frantically to the passing teamsters, 'For God's sake help get this whisky out of the way. Here's two barrels of whisky worth \$150 and if you don't move them they're going to burn up.' But no one heeded his appeal. Some of the facetious and half-frozen fighters suggested that he cut a hole in each barrel and put a cup in each and he wouldn't require a team to move them."³⁰

For a second time the town rebuilt and as an added precaution, in 1903, incorporated the village, with John N. Heejer as first mayor, so a water system could be started. This would provide fire protection.

Before the water was permanently turned on, a third fire broke out in O'Connor's Hotel in 1906. This fire was much smaller; it burned seven buildings, including two hotels, a saloon, a barber shop and a store plus all the barns behind these buildings.

By this time the residents had moving out from their homes worked down to a system, although they did get confused

³⁰"Forestport Suffers", The Saturday Globe, Utica, N. Y., February 11, 1899.

trying to find their own belongings in the maze of furniture in the streets. Two women managed to carry out a new bathtub when they thought the fire threatened the house and it took four men to carry it in again.

Soon after this fire the waterworks were permanently installed at a cost of \$22,000.³¹ The main line from the reservoir to the village was laid with wooden pipe and much of it is still in use. The new water system, besides providing fire protection, also ended the annual typhoid fever epidemics. Dr. George Kilborn, the town doctor at the time, said that if it hadn't been for these epidemics, he would have starved to death when he first started his practice.

The waterworks were shortly followed by electricity provided by an electric light plant on the river, run by George Farley. The lights were provided during the winter, but when the water was diverted into the canal during the summer, there wasn't enough water going over the dam to run the lights. The electricity was provided from dusk until eleven o'clock, and the lights always blinked at 10:55 to give the residents time to light their lamps. If there was a dance or some other event in the evening, Mr. Farley could sometimes be persuaded to provide electricity for an extra hour or two. When the machinery began to get old, the lights went out frequently and someone always had to go and find "Wild Bill Miller", the only man in town who could fix them.

³¹Harry J. Gourley, "Forestport Will Get Next Visit from Jingle Man", Utica Observer-Dispatch, October 12, 1924, p. 1, Section IV.

After a number of years, the village bought the plant and created the Municipal Light Company with improved machinery. In 1924, Inlet bought the plant, and the whole town was provided with electricity by the Northern New York Utilities. The village was dissolved in 1938 and the town took over the waterworks and roads.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the early nineteen hundreds, the character of the town began to change. The traffic on the canal was dropping off and one by one the mills were closed. A few burned and were never rebuilt; others closed for lack of business. Several years before the last trip was made on the canal in 1922, the only boat coming up the feeder was the state scow. As the mills closed and the number of people in town decreased, several of the stores went out of business and, last of all, many of the saloons closed.

The small school house had been outgrown during the boom, especially after a ninth grade was added in 1897. A new school building was built around 1906 by Elmer Yeomans with five rooms. This was called the Forestport Union School and had ten grades. When this building burned in 1926 the problem arose of selecting a new site. The Woodhull school wanted to combine with the Forestport school but wanted the building in Woodhull. The Forestport people wanted it on the old site, but this had been condemned by the state because it was too close to the state highway. Finally they compromised and the present twelve-~~room~~^{grade} Forestport Central School was built in 1927, in Beechwood, half way between Forestport and Woodhull and including Forestport, Woodhull, Patterson, Powers, Kinkead, Kirkland and Bellingertown districts and the Drexel district which was added later. "Beechwood is also called Toggletown, after Eugene Hemstreet who repaired canal

boats and instead of always doing a thorough job, often just "toggled things up.") Forestport's school was the first central school in the county and one of the first in the state. It is the only school in the town except for a grade school with less than a dozen pupils at Woodgate.

Forestport formed a library in 1896 which was incorporated with the Public Library Bureau in 1897. A library building was built on land donated by the Blake estate, largely through the efforts of John D. Kernan, Utica. By 1920 the library association had become inactive and the building was idle except for the half which was rented as an apartment. In 1947 the American Legion bought the building and at present it is used by the legion, the legion auxiliary, the boy scouts and other community organizations.

The canal was the principal means of transportation for years, since the only roads around Forestport were dirt roads. The St. Lawrence Division of the New York Central passes three miles from Forestport and was used by passengers but freight was all carried on the canal. The Adirondack Division of the New York Central passes through Buffalohead, a settlement in Forestport two miles from the village, and when this was first used in 1893, the residents began traveling on this and supplies were brought on it for the town merchants. The roads were not improved in any way, except for corduroy on parts of logging roads and in a small section of road in Beechwood. People were assessed sections of road to maintain instead of paying a road tax. In 1913 a macadam road was put through the town as part of Route 28 through the Central Adirondacks.

This was soon followed by macadam roads throughout the village and town. A new section of road, with a bridge across the State Pond was built in 1939 and cuts the village off the main highway.

By the end of the first world war Forestport had settled down into the resort town that it is today. The canal was closed, the mills had all been abandoned and there was very little happening. However, the town has been in the news a few times since then. There was the time in 1935 when 104 village voters tied their choice of mayor, George Parsons, who had been mayor for sixteen years and Fred S. Liddle, who had tied twenty years before for supervisor, were the two that the voters couldn't decide on. They settled the vote at a village board meeting by drawing the name of Mr. Parsons from a hat.

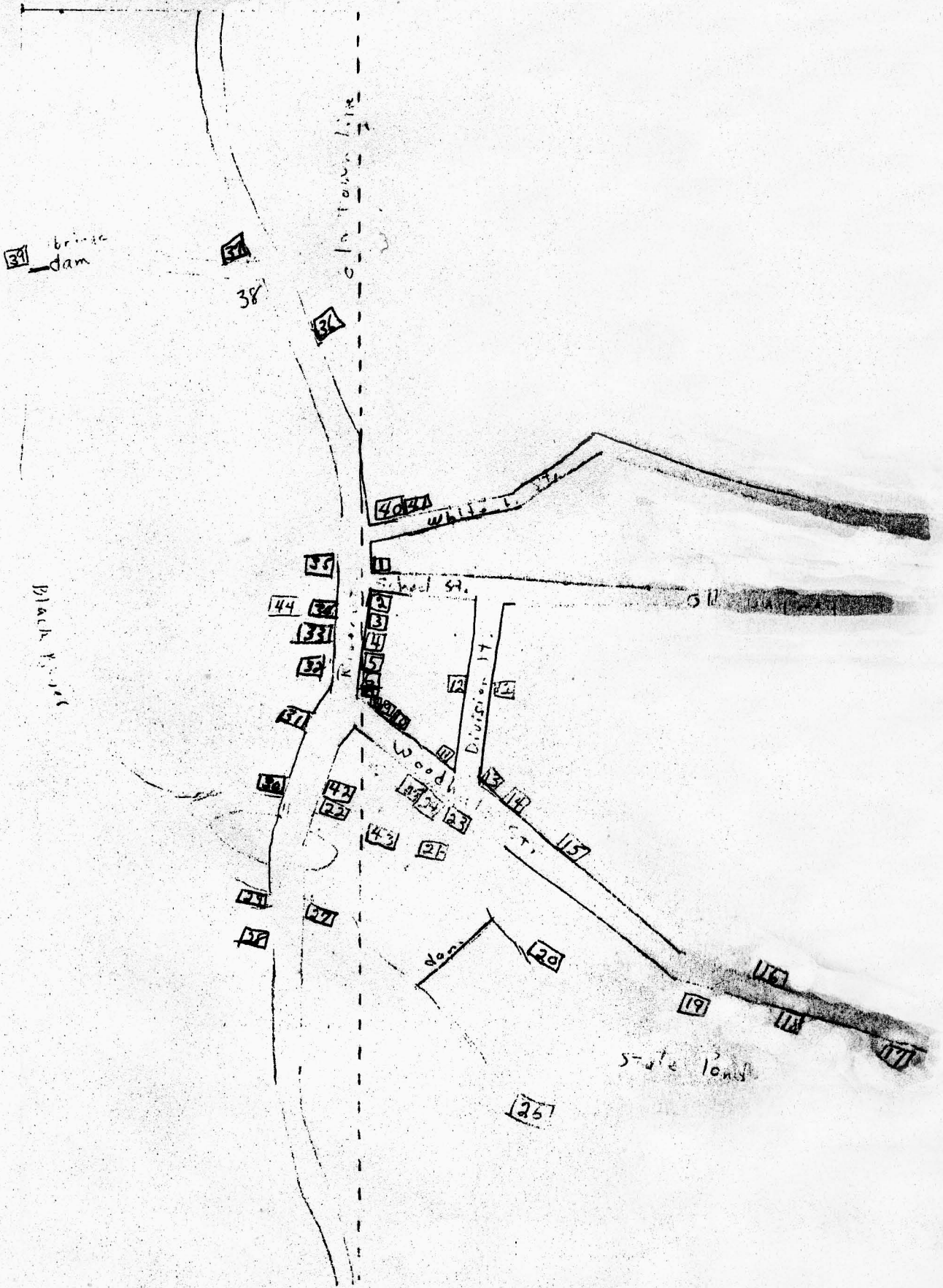
Four years later, the town was again having trouble with its politics. When John Coughlin, the supervisor, died in office, it seemed a simple enough process to appoint a successor. But the board couldn't agree on the two candidates suggested so they finally decided to choose a third person; Mrs. Laura LaFountain. Three members of the board voted for her and she swore in at Forestport. A few minutes later Fred Liddle, one of the previous candidates, appeared with a petition signed by three members of the board choosing him as supervisor. One member who had signed this petition several weeks earlier when Mr. Liddle had only one signature, thought the petition had been dropped and voted for Mrs. LaFountain, so when Mr. Liddle finally secured a third signature he swore

in at Utica, and Forestport had two supervisors. For six months the question was unsettled; both Mr. Liddle and Mrs. LaFountain were legally appointed and neither one would back out. Finally Mr. Liddle petitioned for a hearing in the county courts and Mrs. LaFountain was declared supervisor.

Like the rest of the country, Forestport sent its sons into the service and ~~the~~ many of its citizens into war plants during the wars. There were forty-five men in the services during the first war with one killed and a hundred and forty three men and women from the town in the second world war. There are five gold stars on the town's honor roll.

Today the 730 residents, as reported in the last census,³² are interested in watching the radar tower go up. It's the biggest thing that's happened in several years but the town isn't too excited. After all, it has lived through a lumbering boom, the notoriety of the breaks, the disaster of the fires and the transition into a quiet summer resort and a radar tower isn't too impressive after a history such as this.

³²Report of Examination, Town of Forestport, State of New York, Department of Audit and Control, Division of Municipal Affairs. 1950.



KEY TO MAP

FORESTPORT

1840 - c. 1910

1. Anson Hayden Hotel (built 1851), later Forest Hotel (M. M. Mabach, prop.) and later Sherman House
2. Western limit of first fire
3. American Hotel (Temperance Hall on Second Floor)
4. Hotel Albert
5. Getman House (1888)
6. Whiter Undertakers
7. Herbert Helmer grocery
8. Beynon saloon
9. George Buckley Hotel, later owned by Charles O'Connor.
10. Eastern limit of third fire
11. Present Catholic Church *PRESBYTERIAN*
12. Southern limit of first fire.
13. W. R. Stanburgh general store, sold to Forestport Lumber Company and later to Seifert and Harrig
14. S. F. Traffarn store, sold to Nichols
15. Old Methodist Church, present Episcopal Church
16. First Episcopal Church
17. James Gallagher saw mill
18. Syphert and Harrig sawmill (1895)
19. Denton and Waterbury lumber mill
20. Forestport Lumber Company
21. McGuire grist mill (1881), Farley and Cuppernull (1883), Farley (1884), later electric light plant.
22. Cephus Wicks blacksmith shop, later owned by George Parsons
23. Alfred Hough house--first house on east side of river.
24. Hough and Hurlburt store, later owned by Denton and Waterbury
25. Charles Bingham hardware and furniture store, present fire house
26. Denton and Waterbury mill, bought by James Gallagher
27. Stanburgh and Hovey steam mill (1883), burned 1888.
28. Isaac Darling blacksmith shop
29. Yale chair factory
30. Fire house and jail
31. William King blacksmith shop (also made sleighs and wagons)
32. John Utley and Son harness shop
33. Jim Randolph saloon
34. Boyce and Downing general store (c. 1896)
35. First school, present I. O. O. F. Hall
36. Catholic Church (1862)
37. McGuire cheese factory (1880's)
38. McGuire home
39. McGuire pulp mill (1888)
40. Library, present American Legion hall
41. Second school
42. McGuire feed mill (1874), later Bingham, then Stanburgh
43. Hough and Hurlburt feed mill, bought by Farley
44. Mill for pressing bark

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INTERVIEWS:

- Nellie R. Boyce, resident of Forestport for 71 years. Her father, Harvey Boyce ran a canal boat which Miss Boyce lived on as a child. He was also superintendent of canals at the time of the breaks.
- Anthony Coleman, resident for 63 years. He worked in Hill's tannery as a boy, worked as a lumberman and then as a guide.
- Robert Hunter, resident for 70 years. Mr. Hunter worked in the Forestport mills as a boy and later ran a canal boat.
- George Parsons, resident for 60 years. He ran a blacksmith shop and was mayor of the village of Forestport for about twenty years.
- Winifred Utley, resident for 68 years. She has been town clerk for seventeen years.

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 "Forestport Practically a Wilderness in the Year 1845"
 Gives a description of an early map.
 "Village of Forestport Virtually Destroyed by Fire of Fifty Years Ago"
 About the three big fires in Forestport.
 "Presbyterian Church History"
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A letter written by Howard Taylor, member of New Forest Inc., with information about Anson Blake, to Christopher Magee.

A letter written by Fred Graff, Utica, N. Y., to his aunt, Mrs. John H. Neejer describing President Cleveland's visit.

HISTORY OF FORESTPORT, NEW YORK

By PATRICIA AVERY ACKERT

May, 1970

INTRODUCTION

Forestport is celebrating its hundredth birthday in this year 1970. One hundred years which span the decades when Forestport was a lumbering and canal town, when local men fought wars which spanned the globe, when residents of the community watched their television screens to see men walk on the moon and later to see the astronauts from Apollo 13 land their space craft safely in the Pacific Ocean.

What was life here like in the beginning of Forestport's history?

Forestport includes three main settlements: Otter Lake, Woodgate and what is called the village of Forestport although it is not legally a village since its disincorporation in 1938. This history deals mainly with the village with only a few references to the other settlements because they are even younger than Forestport, each has less than 200 inhabitants and they have been small summer resorts since their earliest days.

This history is written to show that Forestport has not always been the quiet summer resort that it is today. By tracing the events since its founding in 1840 Forestport is shown as a small settlement in the wilderness, as a booming mill and lumbering town and finally as the town it is today.

PRELIMINARY HISTORY

Two hundred years ago the area known as Oneida County was without a history. It was part of the land claimed by the Oneida Indians and the white man's civilization had not yet reached it. In the fifty years that followed, the Americans began to penetrate the region.

The Revolutionary War battles at Fort Stanwix (Rome) and at Oriskany brought central New York State into prominence. Men who had fought in the Revolution or who had traded with the Indians in the area returned on foot, in ox carts or up the Mohawk River in canoes to settle in what is now Oneida County. As the whole country was settled on a much larger scale, so was Oneida County; the people settled first in Whitestown (Whitesboro) and then moved north and west. The fact that Governor Clinton, General Marinus Willett, George Washington, William Floyd and Baron Von Steuben owned lands in the region influenced other to settle there. The last area in the county to be settled was Forestport, which was then included in the Town of Remsen.

The state constitution of 1777 forbade the purchase of Indian lands by individuals in order to reserve this right for the state alone. The "New York Genesee Land Company" was organized in 1787-1788 by eighty or ninety persons to evade this law by leasing all the lands of the Six Nations for 999 years. But in 1788 Governor George Clinton was authorized to disregard these contracts with the Indians and all the settlers in the Indian lands were driven from their homes which were destroyed.

In 1788 the government at Fort Stanwix with Indian representatives and after some parleying bought the lands from the Six Nations. A treaty known as the Oneida Reservation ceded Oneida County to the United States on Sept. 22, 1788. In 1801 the territory which included the area covered today by Jefferson, Lewis and Oneida Counties, was divided into twenty townships. By 1805 the three counties had been separated.

Of the seven land patents granted in Oneida County by the government, parts of three of them are included in the Town of Forestport. In 1781 Matthew Adgate, a member of the first constitutional convention and a member of the New York State assembly, purchased by contract 45,000 acres of land in the northern part of Oneida County for two shillings six pence per acre. His patent to what is known as the Adgates Western Tract was issued January 30, 1798, and was surveyed into lots west of Black River by Benjamin Wright. This tract was later broken up into the Piquet, Gouverneur, Miller and Swanton, and Devereaux Tracts.

The Remsenburgh Patent, consisting of 48,000 acres, was granted December 28, 1787, to Henry Remsen, J. G. Klock, George Klock, and John Van Sice upon their petitioning the legislature that this area had been conveyed to them by a deed in 1766 which was recorded with the Secretary of State.

Thomas Machin was granted a patent June 1, 1788, of 31,360 acres. Machin, who was born in England, came to New York in 1772. He was a skilled engineer and surveyor and assisted in placing a chain across the Hudson River to prevent British ships from passing West Point during the Revolution.

The Woodhull Tract is apparently a later grant originally eight miles square, which constituted a full township.

WILLIAMSVILLE

In 1840 Truman Yale brought the first industry to the few settlers on the Black River where the towns of Remsen and Boonville met. He built a chair factory there, which was soon followed by Smith's saw mill on the west side of the river. Alfred Hough built the first house on the east side where the village is today. It was probably at this time that the settlement was called "Smith's Mill." Although there were a few people living there, a map made in 1845 shows the area as a wilderness with only a few houses at White Lake.

When the Black River Canal was started in 1836, plans were made to construct a feeder from the town now called Williamsville to channel water from the Black River into the canal at Boonville. The Erie Canal was expanded in 1847 and could not operate without water from the Black River so the Williamsville feeder was finished in 1848. A dam, replacing an older dam which formed a sawmill pond, was built at Williamsville and another dam was built at the outlet of North Lake, making two reservoirs to provide water for the canals. The feeder was sixty feet wide and between six and seven feet deep.

The feeder was very difficult to build because it was laid out on the face of steep sand hills fifty to seventy-five feet above the river and heavy rains washed out the townsite so that much of the work had to be done over the river.

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The feeder was very difficult to build because it was laid out on the face of steep sand hills fifty to seventy-five feet above the river and heavy rains washed out the towpath so that much of the work had to be done more than once.

Before the feeder had been built, the areas with the most settlement were Meekerville, Grantville and Woodhull. These were grown up around mills and tanneries but when the canal gave Williamsville an easy method of transportation the people moved into the village. Today Grantville is just forests. Meekerville has half a dozen summer homes and Woodhull an equal number of houses.

The feeder greatly increased the land value of Williamsville and gave an ideal method for shipping products made at the mills. A saw mill was built on the new State Road formed by the dam, there were two mills below the dam and a mill for pressing bark a half-mile below this. Dr. Platt Williams built a large home (now owned by Thomas and Richard Kernan) on the Alder Creek Road and a mill a mile and a half down the canal from the town named for him. A two-story school building had been constructed which held classes during the summer and winter months with vacations in the Fall and Spring. The school had one room on each floor and each room had a counter extending around the walls with benches placed at the counter so that the students sat with their backs to the teacher.

The first trip on the new feeder was a momentous occasion for the Williamsville residents. The canal boat, carrying Canal Commissioner Beach, was drawn by horses from Boonville to Williamsville on December 16, 1848. School was dismissed and Mr. Hall, the teacher, took all the pupils to the dock to see the boat.

The year 1851 began a decade of rapid growth in Williamsville. A hotel was opened by Anson Hayden, Loren Miller built a store, a hub factory, grist mill and butter tub factory were built and lumbering and tanning became the chief industries. There were several mills on both sides of the river and state pond, on Big and Little Woodhull Creeks, and on some of the smaller streams at Woodgate by 1860.

In 1857 several of the townspeople organized a Lyceum for "mutual improvement and useful knowledge" as the secretary's record states. They discussed such vital questions as "Which is the most injurious to society, the flatterer or the slandered" and "Resolved, that a liar is worse than a thief in a community." The Lyceum lasted only two years so there probably was not much useful knowledge or too much improvement spread through the community.

A Catholic Church was built in 1851 near where the Catholic Cemetery is today and a Methodist Church soon followed. In 1857, an Episcopal Church was built and when the Methodist Church disbanded in the early 1920's the Episcopalians bought that building so they could meet in the village. In 1897 the present Catholic Church was built.

The Union Presbyterian Church of Alder Creek and Forestport, which was formed in 1839, united with Utica Presbytery in 1866 and held services in the Methodist Church and in Temperance Hall until the present church was built in 1879. The first pastor was the Rev. William Cleveland, and when his brother, President Grover Cleveland, brought his bride to Forestport for a visit, it was the highlight of the summer for the whole area.

While the settlement known officially as Williamsville (and unofficially as Punkeyville, taking the name of the small flies that invade the area every summer) was still a part of the town of Remsen, there was rather an involved system of voting. The people living on the west side of the river voted in Boonville. The settlers on the east side voted in Remsen on alternate years and the Remsen residents in Williamsville on the other years. This made it very difficult for the Williamsville residents who worked in the woods to reach the Remsen polls before they closed. One year a group of citizens decided to take the matter into their own hands so they sauntered into the polling place at Remsen but instead of voting snatched the ballot box and took it back to Williamsville to make it easier for the woodsmen. This seemed to convince the Remsen people that something should be done about the voting system so in 1860 a committee was formed to divide Remsen and Williamsville into two separate towns. James Mitchell and Charles Thomas of Remsen with William B. Jackson and Alfred Hough of Williamsville were paid \$1.50 a day to serve on the committee.

In 1852 Anson Blake began buying land in Williamsville and continued buying it until he owned all the hills surrounding the village, some lots in the village itself, and land for some distance on both sides of the canal feeder. He married the daughter of Dr. Williams and thus acquired one third interest in much of Williams' land. He purchased this land with the idea of clearing it and raising corn and potatoes. Clearing this large area of virgin timber gave work to the mills and for several years brought lumber crews from as far north as Ottawa but Blake soon found that the growing season was too short and the soil too sandy to raise corn and the project was soon abandoned, leaving the hills stripped of timber. Even today they have only young trees in an area of much heavier forests.

Although many of the trees felled were made into lumber and the bark used for tanning leather, some of the largest trees, particularly spruce, were saved to make spars for ships. The logs, usually from forty-five to sixty feet long, were tied together into rafts and piled up until they sank three feet eight inches into the canal. A small shanty for the men and horses was built on one end of the raft and they were floated down the feeder to Boonville, then down the Black River Canal to the Erie, the Hudson and New York where they sold for \$15.15. One spar was so long and so perfect that \$100 was offered for another like it but one was never found. Piling for New York City docks was also shipped from Williamsville.

Hemlocks, some as old as five or six hundred years, were cut and the bark used for tanning. The logs from which the bark was taken were just left to rot. Alonzo Denton and Nathaniel Waterbury saw an opportunity here, built a sawmill, bought the Hough and Hulbert store and had a lumber camp between Williamsville and North Lake.

Another man important in the growth of the village was Philip McGuire (called "Black Phil" to distinguish him from his red-haired cousin, "Red Phil"). He was an Irishman who came to Williamsville after working in Hawkinsville and Lyons Falls. He bought 350 acres of farm land and 7,000 acres of timber and became so successful that he purchased a tannery in 1871, built a grist mill in 1874, a pulp mill in 1888, in 1881 a feed mill, in 1889 a cheese factory and a large house and barn. He was contracted to build a dam in 1889 a mile and a half above the village for a consideration of \$45,000. This dam forms Kayuta Lake which is lined with summer homes today but at that time served only as another reservoir for the canal.

In 1867 Jonathan A. Hill, a general in the Civil War, with his partner, Thomas E. Proctor, Boston, built a tannery at Woodhull. This was the largest tannery in the state and had 420 vats which used 5,000 to 6,000 cords of hemlock bark a year. The raw hides were shipped in and this tannery alone processed 25,000 hides annually to be boated down the canal. In 1876 a side of sole leather produced at the Proctor and Hill Tannery won first prize at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

Hill also ran a store, built several houses for his workers and ran the Blue Eagle boarding house. When the tannery went out of business Hill moved to other tannery interests in Athens, Pa., and sold his store and house to W. E. Albertson who built a pulp mill at Woodhull.

FORESTPORT

The committee which was earning \$1.50 a day to divide Williamsville and Remsen must have been trying to make some easy money or else worked as most committees do, because it was not until November 24, 1869, that the town was finally erected from Remsen. The post office at Woodhull had been moved to Williamsville for convenience, and Robert Crandall, the postmaster, suggested the name be changed to Forestport since the canal had made the town a port in the forest. Everyone, including the United States Post Office Department, agreed and when the town was formed it took the name of the postoffice.

On March 1, 1870, the first town meeting was held and the following officers were elected: supervisor, Harry Weed; town clerk, Charles E. Barber; justices of the peace, Daniel Nugent, Judson W. Rockwell; assessors, Stephen Millard, Thomas Ryan; commissioners of highways, Christopher Herring, John Bellinger; collector, Thomas J. Alliger; poormasters, Philip Studor, John Lindsay; constables, James H. Jackson, Henry Herring; Asaph Learned, William Elthorpe, George Thurston; inspectors of election, Giles C. Hovey, Edward Coughlin, Cephas Weeks; sealer of weights and measures, James McKenzie.

Durant's history gives the population of Forestport in 1870 as 1,276 and in 1875 as 1,280. He states that Forestport had twenty-five log dwellings, the greatest number in the county, and they were valued at \$2,030 or about \$81 each. In 1877 the real estate value as fixed by the supervisors was \$373,951.

In April of 1869 the North Lake Dam went out and the thirty-three foot height of water washed out the Forestport dam, the bridges across the river, and three mills. During the rebuilding Mr. Savillian Traffarn ran a ferry from Denton's Point to the site of Seifert and Herring mill. The boat was attached by ropes and pulleys to a line and pulled back and forth across the pond by hand.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century found Forestport a booming lumber town with "no law north of Remsen." There were at least a dozen saloons with a two-mile limit with a baseball bat behind each bar to provide law and order. The owner of one saloon, which was on the town line between Forestport and Boonville, used to move the bar from one end of the room to the other, depending on which town had voted dry at the time. When a small part of Forestport, which was legally in the town of Boonville, was annexed to Forestport in 1890 the bar tender lost his advantage over the other saloons.

The whole area was centered around the canal feeder. Mills at White Lake and along Woodhull Creeks had been abandoned and the people moved into the village. There were stores, blacksmith shops, a harness shop, a hub and spoke factory, hotels, grist mills, saw mills, tanneries, a chair factory, shingle mill, a jewelry store, churches and even a society of Good Templars with 160 members. An act of Legislature on May 23, 1867, authorized the construction of a railroad from Forestport to Bellingtontown, with a spur to Grantville, which was built by Stephen Potter. This was a wooden railroad and the lumber and hubs from the Grant mills were pulled on cars by horses to a dock on the pond and there loaded into canal boats. The boats were locked through from the pond to the feeder. A canal boat could carry 65,000 feet of lumber and made a round trip to Albany in two weeks.

Besides the McCabe mills in the village and the Proctor and Hill Tannery at

23, 1867, authorized the construction of a feeder canal with a spur to Grantville, which was built by Stephen Potter. This was a wooden railroad and the lumber and hubs from the Grant mills were pulled on cars by horses to a dock on the pond and there loaded into canal boats. The boats were locked through from the pond to the feeder. A canal boat could carry 65,000 feet of lumber and made a round trip to Albany in two weeks.

Besides the McGuire mills in the village and the Proctor and Hill Tannery at Woodhull, there were mills on the pond owned by W. R. Stanburgh, Seifart and Harrig, James Gallagher, George Farley, C. M. Bingham, and Hough and Hurlburt. Charles Hayes had a turning and planing mill at Woodhull and also sold excelsior. Francis LaFontaine ran a lumber mill on Bear Creek; Enos Crandall had a mill at Bellingertown, Fred Brown operated a shingle mill on Alder Creek Pond, the Weed brothers had a mill on Pine Creek and Joseph Ano ran a mill on Little Woodhull.

The largest mill in the town was built by the Forestport Lumber Company in the 1890's. This was organized to clear 21,000 acres of land in the North Lake area which was owned by the Adirondack League Club. The mill was operated by Thomas O'Neil from Moira and his nephew, George Ainsworth, and drove five million feet of timber into the state pond.

Lumber and wood products were not the only things shipped from the Forestport feeder. William Shanks won a bet by taking a load of ice on his boat to New York without its melting before he arrived. Potatoes were also shipped to the cities, Grain was brought in and ground at the grist mill to use for all the horses connected with the canal and lumbering.

THE BREAKS

Forestport seemed to be more prosperous than it could ever have hoped for. Within fifty years the village had grown from a few houses to a thriving lumber town.

However, there were a few men who were dissatisfied with the status quo. So on July 23, 1897, the first break in the canal appeared. The break was the worst ever to occur in the Black River Canal and one of the worst in state history. It was about a mile and a half from the village where the tow path is seventy feet above the river. Seventeen hundred men worked day and night for thirty days to fill the hole which was six hundred feet wide and sixty feet deep. The men were paid \$1.65 a day, the teams thirty-four cents an hour with time and a half for Sundays. The entire cost of rebuilding was \$62,781.78.

The second break came on May 23, 1898, and closed the canal for twenty-one days. This one was four hundred feet wide and fifty feet deep and cost the state \$50,764.47 to repair. Again the town was full of people, the stores, harness shop and blacksmith shops were busy and everyone had work. But the state began to be a little suspicious.

When the third break occurred on September 18 of the next year the state sent Pinkerton men to investigate. Even though this was a smaller break it took seventeen days to repair and cost \$17,089.72.

After a series of arrests and trials some of the town's prominent members were convicted of causing the breaks to bring business to the town. Thirteen men were arrested; five of whom were jailed, three fined, three freed with two more freed for turning state's evidence.

The breaks did succeed in bringing business for these years were among the most prosperous the town had ever known. The boarding houses were full, the saloons and hotels were always busy and everyone was making money.

But everyone was under suspicion. Every day someone new was arrested, called as a witness or at least suspected by his neighbors. It was rumored that there was a secret tunnel under River Street connecting Jim Rudolph's saloon with Doyle's Hotel in case any of the men had to get together in an emergency. The tunnel was never found and has gone into history as one of the legends of the town.

THE FIRES

While Forestport was at the height of its prosperity, the village was destroyed three times by fire. The first fire started in April, 1891, in the barn of the Sherman House. The town had no fire company and the people were helpless. A strong wind blew the flames to the hotel, up both sides of School Street and down Division Street to the middle of the block. Here the houses were not so close together and bucket brigades with rugs soaked in water and laid on the roofs halted the fire. The same methods were used on the house across the street from the Sherman House to keep the flames from spreading down River Street. No one knew how the fire started but it was rumored that lumberjacks smoking in the barn had set fire to the hay. Others believed that a lumberjack who had lost money at cards set the fire for revenge.

This fire led the townspeople to organize a volunteer fire company with Charles Bingham as its chief. They built a firehouse near the river which was used until the company was reorganized and bought the present building in 1939.

HISTORY OF FORESTPORT — (THREE)

When a fire started in February, 1899, the company was far from adequate. At 2:30 in the morning during one of the worst storms in years, fire broke out in the Getman House, the largest hotel in town. The chemical and hand pump was too small to have any effect on the fire and the water in the hose soon froze so that the men were forced to use a bucket brigade again. When the flames were finally checked, fourteen buildings on River and Woodhull Streets had burned and the panic-stricken residents from twenty-four others had carried their possessions into the street.

For a second time the town rebuilt and as an added precaution in 1903 incorporated the village so that a water system and fire protection could be provided. John H. Neejer was the first mayor.

Before the water was turned on permanently, a third fire broke out in O'Connor's Hotel in 1906. This fire was much smaller. It burned seven buildings, including two hotels, a saloon, barber shop and a store plus all the barns behind these buildings.

Soon after this fire the water system was permanently installed at a cost of \$22,000. The main line was laid with wooden pipe which was replaced not many years ago. Besides providing convenience and fire protection, the new water system ended the annual typhoid fever epidemic.

The water system was shortly followed by electricity provided by a plant owned and operated by George Farley. Power for this was provided by the river during the winter months and supplemented during the summer when the water was diverted into the canal. Electricity was furnished from dusk until eleven o'clock and the lights always blinked three times as a warning to those who stayed up beyond this hour to light their lamps.

Eventually the village bought the light plant and later contracted with the Northern New York Utilities Inc., now Niagara Mohawk Power Corp., to furnish electrical service. The old plant was sold to Inlet.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the early nineteen hundreds the character of the town began to change. The traffic on the canal was dropping off and one by one the mills closed. A few burned and were never replaced and others were closed for lack of business. The population also decreased, several stores went out of business, and saloons closed.

The small schoolhouse had been outgrown and in 1906 a new five-room school was built. This was called the Forestport Union School and offered ten grades. When this building burned in 1926 a central district was formed and a new building erected at Beechwood. This was the first central school in the county and one of the first in the state. A few years ago this district centralized with Boonville and West Leyden to form the Adirondack Central School and the new building on the Alder Creek Road was open in 1969 as a grade school.

A library was formed in 1896 and by 1920 had become inactive. The American Legion bought the building in 1947.

Forestport has the unique distinction of having had two supervisors at one time. When Supervisor John B. Coughlin died in office the Town Board could not agree on a successor so a third name, that of Mrs. Laura LaFountain, was proposed. A majority of the board agreed and she was duly sworn in. Fred S. Liddle then appeared with a petition signed by three board members and the fight was on. After much discussion and litigation Mrs. LaFountain was declared the legal supervisor.

Like the rest of the country, Forestport sent its sons into the service and many of its residents into war plants during the wars. There were forty-five men in service during the First World War and one hundred forty-three men and women in service during World War II. There were five gold stars on the town honor roll. Boys from here served in the Korean conflict and now they are serving in Viet Nam.

The town now has one industry, the Rome Specialty Company, which manufactures fishing tackle and has employed on an average of twenty persons.

In 1949 the Air Force constructed a loran tower northeast of Forestport and brought the town into prominence again.

During the last twenty-five years the character of the town has changed again and we are now a summer resort. Kayuta Lake is lined with camps as are White Lake and Otter Lake. Many summer residents are winterizing their camps and becoming year-round residents. Although they must commute to Utica or Rome to work, the roads are well plowed all winter and no one minds too much. Two trailer parks, "Fairwood-Evergreen" and "Christmas Tree Park," are receiving state-wide recognition.

Our air is not polluted — yet — our river is beautiful, the lakes and streams offer excellent fishing. As we enter the second century of our existence as a town it is with the hope that the past is only a prelude to the good life to follow.