

## **Chapter 15**

### **ACQUISITION OF THE LAKES BY ROCHESTER**

The lakes, especially Hemlock and Canadice have been a great attraction for summer visitors prior to the acquisition by the City of Rochester of all rights.

Hemlock Lake has its day, and a pleasant one it was, as a summer resort. Once there were 100 cottages and five hotels along her shores. Five steamboats traveled her waters.

Those were the days of the "Half Way House," "The Port House," (at the end of the lake) "The Lake Shore Hotel and Dance Hall," "The St. James," from which all lake tours started, and the three story "Jacques," at the northeastern edge, complete with spacious piazzas.

The first steamboat was the "Seth Green," launched in 1874 to the strains of the Lima Coronet Band. She was built in Buffalo; her length was 40 feet long, and a width of 8 feet. She had a six power engine and could carry 40 passengers. Pleasure seekers could find no more attractive spot than this beautiful Hemlock Lake, its clear water abounding in fish, its picturesque location among steep wooded hills amidst those ravines are living springs of clear cold water, presenting a refreshing picture, delightful to the eye of the tourist escaping from the close air of the cities during the summer (written in 1876).

Other passenger boats to succeed were the "Mollie Tefft," owned by a Rochester woman of that name; H. J. Wemett's "Cora Belle;" the "Nellie" (later renamed the A. Bronson) and the "Wave."

Once Canadice too had many cottages and was a picnic spot. In those days Peter Moose's place on the east shore was a popular rendezvous.

The pioneers were forthright men. Sometimes they took the law into their own hands. For instance there was a "dam was 1825." After the completion of the Erie Canal, dams were built in Western New York lakes as feeders for the Clinton Ditch. It turned out that the canal did not need them, but the dammed up water was very convenient for owners of saw mills at Hemlock Outlet. In the spring and fall, the water would back up into the swampy woods at the

head of the lake. In summer it dried up, leaving substances that were claimed to cause fevers.

The settlers at the head of the lake tired of that condition and demanded that the dam be removed. The mill owners were deaf to their demands. One summer's day, 200 farmers mobilized and came down to the foot of the lake with axes, crowbars, and ropes. They proceeded to dismantle the dam and gates. The Slab City mill owners protested, and then begged. The farmers yielded, the work of destruction was halted, and the "army" disbanded. The next year the settlers got permission from the State to remove there rest of the dam.

In 1866, A horde of settlers settled on the Springwater flats. After the landowners ousted them, a riotous time ensued, with barns burned and cattle slaughtered. Finally te two forced met in pitched battle. The land owners won and the squatters left for good.

This era ended when Rochester's need for Hemlock's water became more insistent, and eventually the city not only took the lake but also most of the land.

In 1855, the City of Rochester was unable to reach a decision between the two proposed systems, one to bring water from Lake Ontario, the other to bring it down from Hemlock Lake. An outbreak of numerous fires and the fear of renewed epidemics kept the issue alive. To reduce the first hazzard, the Common Council was voted in 1859 to lay conduit pipes to keep fire cisterns in the downtown district filled with river water, and it created a water works committee to recommend further action. Upon the recommendation of Engineer Daniel Marsh, the Hemlock Lake Plan was adopted as the most likely to prove satisfactory and adequate in the long run. The committee, accordingly invited bids, and accepted one from the Rochester Water Works Company and gave it a five year contract ti build a water conduit from Hemlock Lake to a reservoir near Mt. Hope, and to distribute water through pipes to be laid in city streets.

Daniel Marsh, who became the company's engineer, devised a plan for construction, but the onset of the Civil War, and the difficulty of raising the necessary funds delayed action until the summer of 1866 when a group of investors from Hartford acquired control of the Rochester company. The council renewed its contract for another five years, and the company proceeded to acquire rights of way, and to construct an open canal ditch 1800 feet long from the foot of

Hemlock Lake into a wooded conduit 24 inches in diameter that extended some sixteen miles to a reservoir near Henrietta. Its slow progress and mounting pressure to secure water for fire companies prompted the council committee to investigate alternate plans. Determined to head off the formation of a rival system, the water company offered to pump river water through its existing downtown pipes until the supply from Hemlock was available. The discovery of the brackish taste of the water brought through the log conduit forced the company into bankruptcy.

On January 22, 1876, the 28 mile Hemlock conduit was ready to deliver water to the reservoir in what 12 years later became Highland Park. Service to the first domestic customer commenced in September 1876. The Hemlock system was finally and more substantially constructed cost \$3,313,748.00 as reported by J. Nelson Tibbs, engineer in 1877. This expenditure included \$200,748.00 for the separate Holly system which pumped river water through 7.3 miles of pipes. The Hemlock system was much larger and was comprised in addition to the 28.5 miles of iron conduit from Hemlock Lake, with an estimated capacity of 9,000,000 gallons per day, of 2 large reservoirs, one in the Town of Rush and one in Highland Park. In 1877, 30 miles of pole line was constructed between Rochester and Hemlock Lake. It was then the longest telephone line in the world. As Mr. Bell's invention was new and unapproved, the line was equipped with Morse instruments, as well, just in case.

By 1893, the water needs of Rochester had prompted the authorization of the city to raise 1.5 million in bonds to build a new conduit to Hemlock Lake. As work progressed night and day on the new conduit, petitions multiplied for an extension of the distribution mains. Shortly after the completion of the conduits in 1894, the governor signed a bill authorizing the city to float an additional \$250,000.00 in bonds to finance an extension of the water services. At the same time a threat to develop a portion of the shore of Hemlock Lake as a resort focused attention on a proposal to buy the entire shoreline as a sanitary protection. After much debate, the city secured the passage in 1895 of a new bill authorizing the purchase under condemnation procedures, of the flood lands at the head of the lake and a strip extending along the shore 200 feet back from the high water mark in order to safeguard the lake from contamination. In a progress report

made May 1896, by Engineer Quickling, the commissioner appointed to buy up the Hemlock Lake shore, most the authorized sum had been expended on slightly less than half of the shore line.

Commissioner McClintock, an exceptionably able and notably independent man, never held any job for long, but he always managed to make a lasting contribution before he departed. He launched a campaign for the reforestation of the Hemlock Lake basin that “not one safeguarded its shores, but created a glorious pine forest for the delight of future generations.

City Engineer Fisher adopted the practice of the Board in instituting regular bi-monthly checks of the Hemlock Watershed to assure its safety. He soon extended this to include Canadice, which had been designated as a future source of additional water, and secured authorization for the gradual acquisition of this shore line. This policy was not vigorously pushed, since the need to tap Canadice water seemed so far distant.

In 1909, when the purchase of Canadice shore was undertaken in earnest, it was discovered that at least two city employees had joined with others in acquiring properties on the lake ostensibly for commercial development. The Democratic candidate for Congress, James S. Havens, who disclosed the scandal, forced Mayor Edgerton to discharge the two officials involved, and defeated the rival bid of Boss Aldridge for the seat in Congress. The only paper to feature the story was the Democratic Union and Advisor.

The construction of a conduit from Canadice to Hemlock Lake, authorized in 1912 and completed in slow stages in the next six years, provided an amply supply of excellent water and spurred the construction of a third conduit pipe, increasing the carrying capacity to an estimated 42 million gallons per day by 1918.

This article was written by a Rochesterian. Little information from the side of Canadice is documented. Our constant watchful eye must be on proposed legislation to have the property owned by Rochester exempt from taxes. Over the past 50 years, this has been suggested, and tried so many times.

Our lakes are beautiful, natural, and clean. Where else can you find such unspoiled

nature as lovely as in our Town of Canadice? We have a very unique town.