

that much of the lumber that helped to build the infant city of Rochester came up from the Hemlock valley by log raft, barge, and wagon. Many of the old buildings along St. Paul Street sport structural timbers nearly 18 inches square which may well trace their origin to Hemlock. The site of Hemlock was then known as Slab City, a name derived from the rough cut slabs of lumber which formed the first buildings and boardwalks.

A new plank toll road connecting Rochester and Hemlock was instrumental in opening up the Hemlock valley to recreational use. Completed in 1850, the plank road was actually paved with lumber so stage coaches could make the five-hour trip and return the same day. It was not long before hotels and cottages were built along Hemlock's shores. It would appear that the lumbermen had not stripped the forest completely to the shore. Early visitors to Hemlock's first resorts spoke in glowing terms of the primitive wilderness and sylvan shores.

But Hemlock was not to remain unspoiled. The very people who sought her sylvan shores for retreat from civilization would come to clear her shores for hotels, cottages, and roads. To the north, city planners would covet her pure waters as a reservoir for Rochester.

There were over 200 cottages on Hemlock Lake before there was a single one on Conesus Lake. With the development of the lakeshore, Slab City became the village of Hemlock Lake, then briefly Holden, and finally simply Hemlock.

Most of the hotels and cottages on Hemlock Lake were built in the latter half of the 19th century. The three story St. James Hotel opened in 1879 on the east shore of the lake. It was considered elegant for the time and had rooms for 60 guests.

Other hotels on Hemlock included the Jacques House, the Port House, the Half Way House, and the Hermitage. The Lake Shore House was famous for its dance hall and fine restaurant.

In 1860, George Watson, an experienced canal boat builder, built the first steam boat to sail on Hemlock. The 70 foot craft was built along the pattern of an Erie Canal barge and used a steam engine from a sawmill. Excursions on the lake became quite popular. Other steamers followed in the wake of the Watson with such names as the Seth Green, the Corabelle, the Mollie Teft, the Nellie, and the Camilla.

Increasing fire insurance rates and a cholera epidemic in 1852 were responsible for the growing city of Rochester first recognizing its need for a reliable water supply. After considering a number of alternatives, Hemlock

Lake was chosen on the basis of its purity and elevation. Pumping would not be necessary to deliver water to Rochester customers.

A private company was awarded the first contract for a conduit from Hemlock. Some wooden conduit was laid following the Civil War.



"Laying pipe in the Conduit of the Rochester Water Works"

The capacity of the first conduit was reached by 1885 when shortages began to appear. At the time, the Hemlock system was second only to Brooklyn in volume and quality of service.

The first decade of use of Hemlock Lake as a city water supply saw little change in the recreational and other uses of the lake. A sawmill was operating on the lake as late as 1883 and the hotels were in their heyday.

A second conduit from Hemlock was finally authorized in 1891. Concurrently with the increased dependence of the city on Hemlock Lake as a water supply, development of the shoreline was reaching a peak. The Plank Road had established Hemlock Lake as a popular and accessible resort. In 1895, work began on a railroad extension which would greatly increase access to the lake.

The extension of the Lehigh Railroad to the village of Hemlock was completed. The inauguration of passenger service to Hemlock was an important event. The popularity of Hemlock Lake as a resort brought four passenger trains each way daily from Rochester.

Then, even as now, as time passed along, more people were attracted in the summer months to this beautiful lake and it soon became a summer resort. People purchased lots on the lakeshore and erected summer homes or cottages.