

Historic Buildings – The Second Hundred Years

Odd Fellows Hall

The Johnsburg Lodge #541 Independent Order of Odd Fellows in Wevertown was instituted on April 12, 1886, with eight members. In the days before Social Security, they collected weekly dues which became an insurance pool for members and provided pensions for widows and children if the breadwinner of the family died or was disabled. Many Odd Fellows lodges went bankrupt during the Great Depression, but Johnsburg Lodge No. 541 Independent Order of Odd Fellows in Wevertown lasted until 1969 when it was disbanded and the building was sold to the Town of Johnsburg.

The Odd Fellows met at J.M. Waddell's hotel for twenty-eight years, finally deciding to build their own meeting hall in May, 1913. The building was built next to the Eldridge store (currently Pearsall Realty) at the corner in Wevertown and was dedicated in July, 1914. It was moved to its present site in July 1931, making way for the highway from Wevertown to Wells. When the Odd Fellows disbanded, the building was purchased by the town and renamed the Wevertown Community Center. In 1983, the Center was dedicated to Ernest Noxon who had served as Town Clerk for 60 years beginning January 1, 1924.

Today the building is used by the community for meetings, theater productions, and wedding receptions. Presently, the second floor is home to the Johnsburg Historical Society.

Memorial Hall Now - Milda Burns Home

In 1902 Frank Hooper built a Memorial Hall in North River in Memory of his first wife, Lilla Sargent Hooper, who died 13 Aug 1900. The Blood Brothers from Ticonderoga did all the stone work, using a special design of beading on the stone. This Memorial Hall was used for social events of the community. In 1933 Frank Hooper and Fred Richards sold the hall to Charles and Estella Vanderburg. The Vanderburg's made it into a home and it burned in 1941. In 1944 it was rebuilt around the stone work. Eventually Estella Vanderburg sold the home to Harry Munger for a summer residence and in Dec 1949 Harry sold the house to Mr. and Mrs. James (Milda) Burns, who used it as their year-round residence. Milda is a well-known Town of Johnsburg historian who shares many tales of life growing up as a lumberman's daughter, even hosting a showing of her home in the summer of 2005 with descendants of the Blood brothers attending to celebrate the work of their ancestors.

Tannery Pond; The North Creek Tannery

The exact date of the building of North Creek Tannery is unknown, but it is identified in the 1850 census. Originally known as Sawyer and Mead tannery, after its builders, it was 350 feet long and cost \$25,000 to build. In 1850 it produced 24,000 sides of sole leather valued at \$90,000 from \$54,000 worth of hides. The process consumed 25,000 cords of bark which were purchased for \$3.00 a cord. The tannery employed sixteen workers. Housing was often

provided for the tannery workers and several of these houses still exist along NYS Route 28N, near the new Tannery Pond Community Center.

In addition to the tannery workers themselves, men were employed to go into the woods to cut hemlock and peel the bark. Teamsters were also employed to haul the bark to the tannery.

Tannin, used to cure the animal hides, can be extracted from the bark of certain trees - oak, chestnut, spruce, sumac and hemlock. The chief tannin-containing tree in the Adirondacks was hemlock, found in abundance in Warren County. By 1840 there were 20 tanneries in the Adirondacks and 1,414 in the New York State. By the 1870s, there were four in the Town of Johnsburg.

As early as 1832, there was a tannery on Mill Creek in the hamlet of Wevertown. That tannery building still exists, located across from T.C. Murphy Lumberyard on NYS Route 8. A few years later another tannery was built where Glen Creek empties into the Hudson. That tannery's cut-stone foundation can still be seen.

The completion of the Adirondack Railroad to North Creek in 1871 helped the North Creek Tannery. In 1880 the North Creek Tannery produced \$72,000 worth of tanned hide, many of which were presumably shipped out by rail.

The North Creek Tannery, with most of its operations in one building, burned in June of 1890. About this time there was also a general decline in tanning in the Adirondacks. Hemlock supplies were being depleted and new technologies and the use of chemicals were coming into use. Outside owners and financiers of the Adirondack tanneries were also affected by national business cycles. An 1891 map shows no buildings on the North Creek Tannery site, although a 1908 map indicated a sawmill which had been erected there.

The Tannery Pond Community Center

Elise and Woody Widlund, local residents and strong supporters of the town of Johnsburg, saw the need for a meeting place/community center after North Creek's Ski Bowl building burned. A building across from the TOJ's town hall, near the site of the original tannery building on North Creek, the former Alexander's (Bacon) garage became available in 1999 and the property was purchased by the Widlund's as a location for the possible community center. A structural report by engineers gave the existing garage building a life of only 20 years - far short of the expected usefulness of a community center. Thus a new structure was decided on. Aided by an advisory committee of local residents and the Glens Falls architectural firm of Joy, McCoola and Zilch, the Widlunds had the garage torn down, the area beautifully landscaped and a building designed to fit the location using a "plan focused on flexible community meeting areas, a design in keeping with the town character, a low maintenance structure, and a high efficiency heating & cooling system." Tannery Pond Community Center now has 11,000 square feet of multipurpose meeting rooms, large and small spaces, allowing for gatherings,

meetings, presentations, musicals, plays, trade shows, book sales; art displays, community education, community entertainment and community participation.

Tannery Pond Community Center was given to the Town of Johnsburg on June 30, 2002 by Elise and Woody. A Tannery Pond Community Center Association, a not-for-profit association, continues to assist in the management of the Tannery Pond Community Center.