

Chase's Lake

By Aline Alexander Newman



Editor's note: This week we introduce Aline Alexander Newman, who will be writing an occasional column about area place names.

When I was 10, my grandmother filled my head with tales of Chase's Lake. She said the lake had once belonged to her and told me all about its pine-shrouded shores, tangles of blueberry bushes, and warm sand beaches. So spectacular was fishing in those parts that her father and grandfather once landed 450 trout—in under two days!

For five generations, that wilderness paradise hosted family picnics, anniversary celebrations, and summer vacations. But by the time I was born, my grandmother had lost her birthright. I grew up in Utica and never once went there.

Fast-forward 52 years. My husband and I live in Turin. Joe Kelly invites me to write an occasional column for the Boonville Herald on the history of place names. So I decide to begin with my own family's story. But all I have are childhood memories. Are they even accurate?

Locals scoffed when I dared repeat them. "Nobody can own a lake," said one.

"Never heard of any Chases living here," said another.

Thus began days of research, and here's what I found. My great-great-great grandfather, Reuben Chase, was the first settler of the Town of Watson. He arrived on horseback, from Plainfield, Connecticut, in 1804—having followed a trail of marked trees. Reuben built his cabin 10 miles northeast of Lowville, at the outlet of a lake, in a forest teeming with panthers and wolves. From there he launched a lumber business.

Charles was the fourth of Reuben's 11 children, and he expanded the family's holdings. Probably his best buy was the 754 acres purchased at a tax sale, for \$76.25. By 1861, the Chases had erected a general store, sawmill and hotel. And their settlement was thriving. It was so popular that sportsmen came from New York City to hunt and fish. Charles even constructed a 15-mile-long access road across his land.

Newspapers referred to that as "Chase's New Road," the lake as "Chase's Lake," and a smaller lake to the east as "Upper Chase's." For many years, there was a "Chase's Lake" post office. At their peak, my family owned 3,008 acres of prime Adirondack wilderness, including both the upper and lower lakes, most of Hinchings Pond, and all the land in between.

But when Reuben died, in 1871, they sold the lower lake to Boonville banker LeRoy Crawford. In Crawford's quest for hemlock extract, used in tanning leather, he clear-cut the forest. The upper lake went to Charles's son Fred, who passed it down to his daughter—my grandmother.

Then, in 1920, a man came knocking. "The state intends to take your property by eminent domain!" he warned. "They're going to dam the lake for a hydroelectric project." Naive and afraid, my grandmother agreed to sell—to him—for \$2,500.

Did New York State ever really contemplate flooding Chase's? Or was my grandmother the victim of a scam artist? I'll probably never know. I do know she deeply regretted the deal. But now, at least, I've confirmed her story.

Aline Alexander Newman is a freelance writer who resides in Turin. Her byline has appeared in over 20 national publications, and she writes frequently for Guideposts and National Geographic Kids. A certified teacher, Aline enjoys speaking at conferences, teaching writing workshops, and making school vis-

The EARL COVEY

THE EARL COVEY STORY (Biography)

Re early times at Big Moose Lake and area -

Earl Covey's mother's family, THE CHASES, came from England before 1750. An ancestor named William Chase settled in R.I., etc. Descendants of William settled in Conn. In 1802, one of these, Reuben Chase, married Eunice Alexander, daughter of a captain in the Revolutionary War. The young couple sometime afterward moved to New York State. Possessed of considerable energy, Reuben was at various times a lay preacher in the Methodist church and a mail carrier on the first mail route from Utica to Sacketts Harbor. He was the builder of the first brick store building in Lowville, N.Y.

The next 2 generations of the Chase family lived at Chases Lake, which was named after Reuben's son Charles. The latter, with his eldest son, George Wellington Chase, did carpentry work and operated a small sawmill. They built several homes and a small hotel at Chases Lake. Wellington Chase, "an honest, kindly man," married his cousin Martha Chase. They had 5 children. The third child, Emma, had "gorgeous red hair," which she wore in thick braids.

In 1871 Roy Crawford began the manufacture of hemlock extract at Chases Lake. He purchased Chases sawmill, which he operated along with another mill on Independence Creek a few miles away. He used horses for lumbering and hauling and in order to keep them shod he had to have a blacksmith. Henry Covey from Croghan got the job (and later married Emma Chase)

Chase's Lake Has Had An Interesting History

Once a Hive of Industry It Has Suffered Many Vicissitudes and
Now Seems About to Come to Its Own As a Summer Re-
sort.

By CHARLES L. STILES

Resting on the rim of the Black river valley and nestling among the foothills of the western portion of the Adirondacks lies that beautiful body of water known as Chase's Lake.

This place at one time was one of the most celebrated summer resorts of the North Country and a half century or more ago, was much sought out by pleasure seekers. In its day it enjoyed a very liberal patronage, from people in nearly all walks of life, but now for a considerable length of time, has not been much before the public eye.

It is located in the eastern part of the town of Watson, Lewis county. James Watson, from whom the town derived its name, having settled there about the year 1800.

Benjamin Chase, an old time mill carrier, was the first man to conduct a sawmill there, this mill being built for him, by Isaac G. Puffer, one of the first settlers of that town.

Timothy Mills was the next man to settle there and his eldest daughter, Susan, was the first white child to be born in the town in 1814. At this time, the location was spoken of as going over to the mill, by people traveling that way.

In 1841, the late Charles Chase located there and the name was changed to Chase's Lake. He for several years with his brother, engaged in lumbering on quite an extensive scale, until 1848, when he removed there with his family, who in the intervening years had resided in Lowville, in a house located where the G. Aubrey Smith garage was built in recent years and now used temporarily for school purposes.

Mr. Chase bought this property in 1846 of the Watson heirs and the writer has in his possession the old contract, still in a good state of preservation.

In the spring of 1851, Mr. Chase purchased eight separate and distinct parcels of land, located in Watson's West Triangle and containing approximately 750 acres, adjacent to and embracing a large portion of the lake, but not that entire body of water.

This was land that reverted back to the state, for non-payment of taxes, and was purchased for the sum of \$76.24. This deed was signed by Philo C. Fuller, at the time state comptroller, and also by Phillip Phelps, deputy comptroller, and was recorded in the Lewis county clerk's office, May 31, 1851, and bears signature of Harrison Barnes, county clerk.

After conducting lumbering operations and a summer hotel for a long term of years, Mr. Chase disposed of this property in the spring of 1871, selling to Lewis, Crawford & Company, the transfer including all of the land described, but not all of the lake.

This firm erected a large factory the following summer, for the manufacture of an acid, extracted from hemlock bark and used for tanning purposes, beginning operations in the fall of that year. It continued the business, until the summer of 1898, having to close, owing to the supply of bark being exhausted.

They consumed on an average about 4000 cords of bark annually and made about 3,500 barrels of the finished product a year, which was hauled to Glenfield, about eight miles distant, on large heavy wagons, much heavier than the ordinary farm wagon, to which three mules were attached. The product was shipped from that point, over the line of the Black River railroad.

Mr. Crawford was for many years associated with the business interests of Chase's Lake, having conducted extensive lumber operations in conjunction with his extract works and was a large employer of labor. At one time he represented the county of Lewis in the state

ed several of the old cottages, using them for living quarters for their guests.

The old Crawford sawmill was located on the outlet of Chase's Lake and the lumber manufactured, was hauled about five miles to the westward and piled on the banks of Black river, near the Tucker's Corners schoolhouse, a short distance from the state dam, afterwards being shipped by canal boats. A wooden railroad was built by Crawford & Co., about 1875, extending about five miles to the east into the woods and was constructed mostly to facilitate the movement of hemlock bark, which was used in large quantities at that time.

In an old bill of lumber, dated in February, 1855, rough hemlock and 600 feet, pine clap-boards, 2x4 per 1,000 and cull pine lumber, suitable for fence boards, \$4 per thousand.

During the past summer, lumber was being hauled up past this old-time resort, selling at a price of \$55 per thousand, which shows quite a contrast to the prices of those early days. Besides the quality was inferior to the native grown pine.

Chase's Lake has a shore line of about five one-half miles. Although not surrounded by virgin forest, there is a nice growth of second growth pine timber on the north and east shores of the lake and the place cleared for a hotel site is in a fine location, being fronted by a splendid beach, suitable for bathing.

In recent years there is not much to attract the attention of the casual observer, or tourist passing through the little hamlet, but to one who knew the place during the time of activities there, there is the old Chase homestead, the splendid grove of pines, the old Crawford store, the blacksmith shop and a portion of the old extract factory building.

A couple of miles to the east, is located Chase's Upper Lake and on the north shore of this lake, in a small cottage, resides Henry Chase, the only surviving member of the family of the late Charles Chase, from whom the lake derived its name.

Nearby is a summer cottage, owned by Mrs. Nalle Chase Alexander of Utica, granddaughter of Mr. Chase and the three sons of Henry Chase make the fourth generation of this family, either one of which at some period of their lives spent a portion of it at this historic place.

Located only a short distance from these cottages on the outlet is a tiny little sawmill, run by an old fashioned overshot wheel and equipped with a small rip saw, for the resawing of lumber of small dimensions, also a small buzz-saw rig for cutting wood, this reminding the visitor of the primitive days of settlement.

Most of the land surrounding this small lake was purchased a few years since by the firm of Fenton & Dence, Inc., lumber dealers of Lowville, who cut off about all the marketable timber, which was mostly pine, and later had a large portion of the shore line surveyed into building lots, on which the past two or three years several cottages have been erected and no doubt more will be built the coming season.

A few miles farther on approached by a winding woods road, over hills and through narrow valleys, is located Stony Lake, on which is a summer resort conducted by M. M. Bailey, who enjoys a good patronage, through the tourist season his place catering especially to hunters, being splendidly located at almost the very edge of the hunting grounds.

About a quarter of a century ago, thousands of bushels of potatoes were grown in this locality, the soil being comparatively new at that time and potatoes grown on this

*Copy of article in old
scrap book owned by
Lewis County History Office*

"Mel" Bailey - River Rd - Beaches Bridge