



Ripples

News and Notes from Chases Lake, NY

September, 2010 (No. 4)

William D. Hough (1879-1979)

Founder of the Chases Community

William D. Hough was the wisdom and the talent behind development of the Chases Lake community. Born March 16, 1879 in Boonville, NY, Bill lived to be just over 100 years old. His early local business ventures saw him first in the sand, stone and gravel business, followed by ownership of a Delco electrical contracting business. In 1922, at the age of 43, Hough purchased the tract of land - approximately 1500 acres - which included Chases Lake, and Hinchings and Parson's Ponds.

As the centerpiece of his holdings, he surveyed and developed the land surrounding Chases Lake. Naming these holdings "Lingerlong Estates," Hough began property sales in 1933. Central to keeping Chases environmentally protected, he authored the land and lake restrictions which appear in all Chases Lake deeds until today. Hough was dedicated to the preservation of this relatively shallow lake as evidenced by his insistence on no unnecessary cutting of trees as well as no motor boats. Too, he worked to preserve the visual "purity" of Chases through the restrictions which limit the external colors of its surrounding buildings. The land restrictions exclude commercial enterprises as well. Hough functioned as his own realtor, sometimes also providing personal mortgages. He provided plans for several of the rustic camps and cabins still in use at Chases. While Hough's original plans divided the shoreline into lots with fifty-foot frontages, many of the original owners purchased two or three adjacent lots; this has proved a boon to preserving clean lakewater.

As the one exception to his covenant against commercial enterprises on Chase's shores, Hough built and managed a public beach on the western shore. The Chase Lake Resort included a small store plus nine rustic cabins which were available for weekly rental. From the 1950's through the 1990's hundreds of North Country children learned to swim at school-sponsored summer programs at the Chase Lake Beach. This resort land, now on White Pine Lane, is privately owned today as are all of Chase's shores. The lake bottom continues to be held by the Association.

Ever the entrepreneur, Bill promoted the healing properties he believed were provided by the waters from Hinchings Pond. This small kettle lake, located a mile and a half southeast of Chases, is fifty feet deep and a mere eighteen acres in area. It is entirely spring fed, having no noticeable surface inlet or outlet. The waters



William D. Hough in His 96th Year

are exceptionally clear, a bright blue, though they sustain little wildlife. Folklore had it that the Mohawks traveling between the Mohawk and St. Lawrence Rivers made detours to this pond to utilize its therapeutic qualities. From it Mr. Hough sold thousands of gallons of water which he and others believed held curative powers. Written testimonials from grateful clients described successful treatment of ulcers, arthritis, cataracts, and several skin diseases. A Dr. William Wright at Marcy State Hospital, *(cont. on page 3)*

Hough, cont. from p. 1) Marcy, NY ordered several hundred gallons of Hinchings's water on several occasions in the 1930s. Case notes from Wright plus testimonials from other of Hough's customers document Hinchings's healing powers. Hough was adamant that no one swim in Hinchings's Pond but he did provide a notebook for visitors to sign and describe any experiences they had from drinking the water. Many locals referred to the Pond as Radium Lake, although no radioactivity was ever detected in unusual amounts.

Another area which Hough attempted to develop further attests to his creative business spirit. He was said to have learned from Native Americans of the absorptive bandaging qualities of dried sphagnum moss. Thus, during the 1930s he attempted to harvest peat moss (sphagnum) from a swampy area near Hinchings's. He had built a large "drying barn," 200-feet by 75-feet, in preparation for mining the peat moss. Unfortunately, upon laboratory analysis, the Hinchings's area moss was seen as unsuitable as an absorptive material and Hough was forced to abandon the project. The large hardwood barn is said to have rotted and sunk into the swamp it bordered. However, it needs be pointed out that many sphagnum moss species are of economic value worldwide for their ability to absorb all manner of liquids.

Among his noted relatives, Bill Hough claimed Franklin B. Hough, historian of Lewis County and, according to Mr. Hough, the first "environmentalist for the government." An aunt of Mr. Hough, Helen Hough, Bill identified as "President Lincoln's secretary" who wrote a Lincoln history for Scribner's magazine. (See *Boonville Herald* March 26, 1975.) Active as one of the five Chase's Lake Association Trustees all his life, Hough was a noted participant in all Annual Meetings and an honored guest at the Annual Picnics. He led a 1970 court action which resulted in affirmation of the inviolability of Chase's motorless status.

Mr. Hough's first wife, Cora, did not especially enjoy wilderness areas, and she rarely accompanied him on his almost-daily trips to Chase's. She enjoyed her life in the Boonville community, as did Bill each evening upon his return from Chase's Lake. Cora died in July, 1973. Bill married Esther Kitts in 1976. Esther had been a Chase's resident and Secretary to the Association for many years. Bill is buried in the Boonville Cemetery as are both Cora and Esther. Mr. Hough was survived by one nephew.

Those area residents who knew him, either directly or by reputation, continue to speak of him with admiration and respect - sprinkled with the seasonings of good humor. Dotted throughout this edition are a few of the stories contributed by "Ripples" readers. Further stories about this colorful entrepreneur and conservationist are always welcome. * * * * *