# Camp Canaras – Upper Saranac Lake, New York

**Summer 2015**

Situated on the west shore of the north basin of Upper Saranac Lake sits Camp Canaras, a modern use conference center that lives in the time warp of camps from 100 years ago. Camp Canaras (Saranac spelled backwards) has been Saint Lawrence University’s conference and alumni retreat for the past 50 years, however it was not always that way. Canaras is made up of three former Adirondack camps donated to the University during the 1960s.

Canaras, one of the largest camps in the north basin, consists of 1700+ feet of waterfront, 27 acres of land and 28 buildings, all but two built before the Depression. There are two wet boat houses, two dry boat houses, 14 sleeping cabins, 4 kitchens and 6 service buildings, plus the caretaker’s camp.

Before the American Civil War, the whole northern tier of New York State was bought and sold several times by land speculators. The lake became part of the water route though the Adirondacks when roads did not exist. By the mid-18th century, the Upper Saranac Lake watershed was clear-cut, logged by Christopher L Norton. Three decades later, reforestation had progressed enough for the Upper Saranac Association, then owned by Dr Samuel Ward, Thomas Blagden and others to purchase the 27,000+ acre watershed for redevelopment into seasonal camps. These investors also purchased Prospect House, later to become the Saranac Inn.

By 1895, the Upper Saranac Association commenced development of the land around the north basin – usually by leasing or selling waterfront properties to wealthy Saranac Inn guests from New York, Philadelphia and Washington, DC. These still existing camps line the east and west shores of the north basin. The Upper Saranac Association became the Upper Saranac Company. By 1920, the Saranac Inn had been sold to Harrington Mills and most of the saleable waterfront property owned by the Upper Saranac Company had also been sold. Between 1900 and 1930, the lake became the playground for the first American leisure class: wealthy northeast city folks who could afford to take vacations to fish, sail, play tennis, golf and hike in the mountains.

Around 1910, power boats were becoming the new fashionable sport for wealthy camp owners. Of course, once several new power boats were on the lake, owners had to prove they had the fastest boat. Power boat racing become popular, joining already established sailboat racing. Just imagine: the preferred design in those early years were 30+ foot, narrow wooden boats with monster 20 horsepower engines capable of speeding down the lake from Saranac Inn to the Wawbeek hotel at the maximum speed of 20 MPH!

Wealthy camp owners became so enamored with their new powerboats that they needed boathouses to store them out of the weather. One of the larger lakes in the Northeast, Upper Saranac Lake is also one of the first to develop the boat house as an integral part of a camp. Canaras has two boat houses: a four stall structure and a modern two stall building that replaced a lovely two stall Queen Ann Victorian structure that burned one early morning in the summer of 1970.

There are three distinct original camps that make up current camp Canaras. The oldest camp, known as Ne-Pah-Win was developed about 1898. The second was built in 1913 and originated the name Canaras. The third was first developed in 1915 and was called Camp Caduceus.

**Camp Ne-Pah-Win** was developed around 1898 by Dr. Samuel W Lambert, who leased rather than purchased the land from the Upper Saranac Association. As the Wawbeek Road (now Route 30) was built around 1980, this was a boat access only camp in the early years. Starting in the 1880s, Dr. Lambert redeveloped a hospital for women in New York City and, with financial help from J.P. Morgan, started the Columbia Teaching Hospital. He was the first dean of the college of physicians at what became Columbia Medical Center. While a busy doctor, Lambert was an avid trout fisherman and belonged to many fishing clubs in the northeast U.S.

By 1905, Cleveland H. Dodge was leasing the camp from the Upper Saranac Association. Cleveland H. Dodge was a very influential national figure during the Woodrow Wilson administration. Dodge and Wilson were classmates at Princeton. Dodge managed Wilson’s 1912 and 1916 presidential campaigns and was Wilson’s personal finance man. He was instrumental in starting Woodrow Wilson’s United War Works Campaign, where $190 million was raised in November 1918 to finance charities supporting WWI veterans returning from Europe. Dodge wrote a check to the cause for $1 million from his personal fortune. He was president of the National YMCA, and on the board of the American Red Cross and Princeton University. Lastly, Dodge was president of the Phelps Dodge Company, the family business he inherited from his father in the 1890s. The Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation continues to function as a conduit for support of New York area charities to this day. A building at Princeton is named in memory of him.

Dodge purchased a camp in Bradford County, Pennsylvania for the YMCA around 1908 called Ne-Pah-Win. It is thought he carried the name to his personal camp on Upper Saranac several years later. Ne-Pah-Win is a native term for ‘sleeping lake.”

The camp’s layout is typical of the era. The current Ne-Pah-Win lodge, the camp’s main lodge, contains both a great room and a dining area with a kitchen to the rear. This building was initially used by St Lawrence University as the dining room, but has since been subdivided into smaller sleeping rooms. Behind are outbuildings for ice, wood, and servants’ quarters.

The current Harding Cottage, probably the first camp owner’s cabin, includes a small parlor, bedroom and dressing room, probably with privy out back**.** Story has it that President Warren G. Harding overnighted here. He was an honorary VP of the Trudeau Institute and visited Saranac Lake in 1922. He may have known Robert Bentley (of Camp Canaras), so this may have been his overnight stop on that trip.

The current Jackson Lodge was constructed at a later date, probably by Dodge as the new owner’s cottage to replace Harding cottage on the far side of the main lodge. Jackson is built with a more alpine style common of the later 19-teens. Dodge’s brother-in-law Wainwright Parrish was an architect at Parrish and Sullivan of New York City. Parrish designed many buildings for Dodge, including the first New York City YMCA along with several churches and other structures in the North Country. As a later addition to the camp, it contains two large bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, along with a first floor bedroom and bath and a great room with many windows facing the lake.

Dodge was a competitive sailor (his sailing partner Sidney Colgate lived a few camps away), so his boat house is a dry one for storing sailing gear and includes a viewing gazebo on top.

Sometime in the early 1920s, Dodge built a new camp for his family and Camp Ne-Paw-Win was sold to Robert Bentley, owner of Camp Canaras next door.

**Camp Canaras** was built in 1913 by Robert Bentley of Youngstown, Ohio. He was president of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company and the Ohio Carbon Limestone Company. He was on the board of directors of several Ohio companies, including Republic Rubber. By 1920, he ran one of the biggest employers in Ohio and was active in Ohio Republican Politics (see possible Harding connection above).

Bentley held a huge party here in July 1913 for his grand opening of the camp, featuring with banquets, water activities and fireworks from the waterfront tea house that still exists today. While Bentley was from Ohio, most of his guests were from New York. The camp may have provided a good way for him to stay connected with the New York business crowd while enjoying his summers in the mountains. He later expanded the camp with the purchase of camp Ne-Pah-Win.

Bentley’s widow sold the camp to Helen Woodward Martinez de las Rivas in 1930. Helen, an heir to the Jell-O and General Foods fortune, married a loyalist in the Spanish revolution. She and her husband Luiz summered here and wintered in Palm Beach, Florida. He was involved in gun running with their yacht Helios and seemed to disappear in the late 1930s. Helen endowed Hauptman-Woodward Institute in Buffalo, NY in 1955 and the “R” wing at the University of Rochester Medical School. She was an avid golfer who built the LeRoy, NY Golf Club in 1935 and assumedly played the local Saranac Inn course often.

Between 1936 and 1965, when St Lawrence occupied the camp, Camp Canaras went through three owners. New York Attorney William E. Dana sold it to Laurence Rockefeller in 1946. Rockefeller donated it to Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York when he was on the board of directors there.

Like Ne-Pah-Win, Canaras had a main lodge, owner’s cabin, boat house, and service buildings. There are many original camp artifacts in the lodge’s great room. The kitchen was once located behind the dining room and a hall off the great room leads to 4 guest rooms. The large plate glass window in the dining room was considered special, as large sheets of glass came from fairly new technology in 1913.

Great camps had many outbuildings and this one is no exception. You passed the gate house and tennis court on the newly built Wawbeek Road when you drove in. Tennis was a popular new sport in 1913 America. Robert Bentley must have been enamored with big power boats. He built the waterfront boat house and a large two story, three stall garage long enough to store 30’ boats with servants’ quarters upstairs. Other outbuildings include a small stable (now used for storing firewood), a tool shop and an ice house, with its deep cement floor foundation.

Bentley cottage was the owner’s cottage, built directly behind the boat house. The cement lines we see today connecting the main lodge and boat house to Bentley cottage supported at least a wooden walk and, more common for the era, a covered walkway. It has been suggested that William Distin designed Camp Canaras and there are some early elements of his design concepts, however, no proof of his involvement has been found.

**Camp Caduceus** was developed by Charles J. Rhoads in 1915, when he purchased this land from the Upper Saranac Association. Charles was a Philadelphia banker and the first president of the Philadelphia Federal Reserve bank. He must have known Cleveland H. Dodge, owner of Camp Ne-Pah-Win next door, because Dodge was closely tied to President Woodrow Wilson who started the Federal Reserve System in 1913.

A graduate of Haverford College, Rhoads was president of Bryn Mawr College for years until his death in 1956. Rhoads sold the camp after only two years ownership to coordinate European reconstruction following WWI for President Wilson.

Horatio G. Lloyd purchased the camp in 1917. He was the president of the Philadelphia Commerce Trust Company and was credited for stopping the great financial panic of 1907. He became one of 11 senior partners with J.P. Morgan in New York. Working closely with Mr. Dodge next door, he chaired the Philadelphia branch of the United War Works Campaign.

Horatio G. Lloyd sold the camp in 1932 to Edward L Norton of Bell Labs (Nobel Prize winner), who sold it to Arthur Fagan, a newspaper publisher and real estate developer from New Jersey. Fagan suffered a fatal heart attack here after playing a round of tennis in 1946 at the age of 47. His widow Elizabeth sold Camp Caduceus along with next door Camp Sunrise to Dr. Harry C. W. S. deBrun. DeBrun was a well-known New York doctor who established many procedures for trauma patients at hospital emergency rooms. It is said he invited many of his patients to Camp Caduceus for grand late night parties in the boat house. His widow left the camp to St. Lawrence University after the college camp director saved Camp Caduceus from a potentially disastrous fire in 1968.

The Caduceus (the old drugstore medical symbol with a snake around a pole) represents the fields of science, mathematics and their application to life. The staff is said to be the axis or pole by which the ancient messenger gods travel between heaven and earth.

What is now the camp library was the Caduceus main lodge. The cabin next door (now called de Brun) would have been the owner’s cottage. Behind the main lodge are buildings once used for storage, maintenance and servants’ quarters. Owner’s cottages were separated from the main lodge for privacy from long term guests and separation from the building containing the kitchen for fire safety.

While modern alterations have changed the building’s layout somewhat, we can imagine the current library room with a stone fireplace and vaulted ceiling as a combination great room and dining area. The rear of the building would have been the kitchen and pantry. There is no commanding view of the lake from this room. Across the way is a very large 4 stall boat house with its upstairs great room. As power boats were well established by 1915, this small great room combined with the big one in the boat house indicates the two buildings were planned and built around the same time.

Camp Caduceus has two additional guest cabins now called Brown and Hoffman, probably built in the early 1920s. The architect for Camp Caduceus is unknown.

**Notes from the author:**

Larry Koch, son of Warren Koch and Dorothy Van Siclen Koch (SLU Class of 1949), first visited Canaras in 1969 as a teenager. After many of years of vacations at Canaras, Larry and his wife Patty now own a camp within sight of Canaras on Upper Saranac Lake.

Larry researched Camp Canaras over 18 months. This article is intended to be informative but not definitive. Conclusions have been made based on piecing together bits of information from various sources. The Twitter of the early 20th century was the social section of the New York Times and other newspapers. A property deeds search at the Franklin County court house provided ownership history for each camp. Google searches of the old owners, all VIPs of the early days, came up with loads of information. Lastly, old stories still told provide a fun historical perspective of the camp.