

Mariaville

The past 200 years have seen great changes in Mariaville. It went from a swampy mountain top with wet weather pools and small ponds to a beautiful small lake. Earlier it relied on fishing and trapping to sustain its inhabitants and now is a busy recreational area. Because men built dams for mills, families moved there to live. When the mills became outdated, some families stayed and others came just because of the good air and wide cool water.

A map made in 1795 shows the Great Mill Pond, long and narrow, not extending beyond the dam and the "Lake Maria Mills". There was a small pond there before James Duane acquired the land. In 1794, he rebuilt the dam and raised it. In the following spring the dam went out under a spring freshet (a spring thaw resulting from snow and ice melt). He rebuilt it again and made it still higher, which backed up the waters over the great meadows.

In 1830, Silas H. Marsh was responsible for the growth in the Mariaville area. He purchased land from the Duane family and built a store (now the Lakeside), a gristmill and a sawmill. For a time, Marsh was involved in the manufacture of axes but he allowed others to lease this business and eventually sold it. The gristmill he built had replaced an old gristmill that had been converted to a carding and fulling mill. Marsh was a Schenectady County Clerk as well as a New York state assemblyman. James Lasher bought Marsh's home and took over the mill and store sometime in the 1860's.

Opening the dam in the fall for the use of the many mills which used the water at that time of the year and spring freshets which filled the lake, sometimes disastrously, made the shoreline a changing one but the pond and its busy outlet was the center for a bustling community. In later years, ice cutting and harvesting was one of this community's important industries. After the ice was cut, an elevator loaded the ice blocks onto trucks for transport to one of the several icehouses located in Mariaville. Ice was packed in sawdust to preserve it. The ice eventually was shipped to Schenectady and used as a refrigerant in the summer.

Another important factor in the development of Mariaville was the Fort Hunter Plank Road. It may have run on the line of the old Mariaville Road and was probably the reason for the building of the causeway. By 1911, the plank road was long gone and New York State built a road in Mariaville. The lake became a recreational community with many camps being built on the lake shore. A dance hall was built in 1919 by Mr. Tucker who sold it two years later to Dominic Salamack. It became a real hot spot during Prohibition and

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scores of cars came into Mariaville when big bands were scheduled to perform there. People lived in camps during the summer months, abandoning their Schenectady homes during the hot weather. The men would continue to commute into their jobs—many employed by GE while the wives and children remained on the lake to enjoy the good weather and water.