



Wanakena Historical
Association
PO Box 73
Wanakena, NY 13695

WHA Board of Trustees (2010)	
Allen Ditch (Pres.)	Sandy Conklin
Ron Capone (Treas.)	Rosalie Lea
Sue Smeby (Secty)	Janet Rhodes
Wayne Allen	Marsha Smith
Judy Benzel	John Steir- burg
Bill Gleason	Bruce Smeby
Polly Hamele	Maria Twyman
Judy Hastings	

Membership Information:
Current Membership:

Next Meeting
June 2 - 9:30 am



WANAKENA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Volume 3, Issue 1

Summer/Fall 2012

2012 PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST



At the September meeting it was decided to sponsor a photography contest this year. Make sure that you have your camera with you at all times to capture that prize winning snapshot! Entries must be received by August 15, 2012.

Categories: Pictures will be judged separately for children (17 or younger) and adults (18 and older). Pictures will be judged in two different categories, Nature (e.g., animals, plants, panoramas) and North Country Life (e.g., people, buildings, events, sports).

Entry Fee: is \$5.00 each for a single entry, \$10.00 for 3 entries, and \$20 for 10 pictures from the same photographer. Entry forms and photo entries should be emailed as an attachment to wanakena_ha@aol.com before August 15.

Rules: Photos must be in digital format (jpeg, png, tiff) and should be taken in the Adirondack Park in St. Lawrence County. Submitted photos become the property of the

Continued on pg 9

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Benson Mines & Wanakena—part 1</i>	2
<i>New Wanakena keepsake available</i>	5
<i>A Wanakena Memory</i>	6
<i>Wanakena Cemetery</i>	9
<i>Wanakena News</i>	10
<i>Membership Form</i>	11

Special points of interest:

- Next Meeting
June 2 at 9:30 am
Wanakena Church
- NEW Cat's Meow keepsake see pg 5
- **Sept 28-29**
Ranger School
100th Anniversary
"Forest Festival"

TREASURER'S REPORT: SEPT 2011

RON CAPONE, TREASURER

As reported by the treasurer on Sept 25:

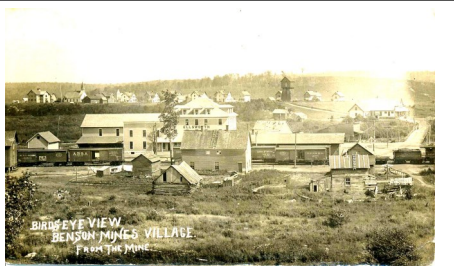
Balance May 21, 2011	\$ 11,164.35
Fund Drive, Dues, Sales	\$ 1,457.00
Expenses (e.g., postage, keepsakes)	<\$ 490.33 >
(Kiosk Upgrade)	< \$ 5,668.60 >
Balance Sept 25, 2011	\$6,462.42

BENSON MINES & WANAKENA: PART 1 OF 2 BY: SUSAN SMEBY

Circa 1810, surveyors for the Albany military road were working in the western part of the Town of Pierrepont, and found their compasses attracted by a rich source of magnetic iron ore. By 1840 it was referred to as the Chaumont Ore Body, or the Little River Iron Ore beds. Development of the ore beds waited on the founding of a company with strong leadership and resources, and the building of a railroad into the western Adirondacks. In March of 1883 both these requirements were met, with the incorporation of Magnetic Iron Ore Co., and the chartering of the Carthage & Adirondack RR. Magnetic Iron Ore was controlled by **Byron Benson**, a Pennsylvania oilman; Benson was



also president of the new C&A RR. The initial objective of both companies was to reach Jayville, a small mining and lumbering town about 29 miles from Carthage. By 1886 the C&A had extended its track past Harrisville to Jayville, and miners were busy extracting the iron ore from underground shafts; it was shipped directly by rail to furnaces in Pennsylvania. However, by 1888 the Jayville mines were abandoned; the lean ore made



Birdseye view of Benson Mines village from the mines. Lower village in foreground with Ellsworth Hotel center left, depot center right; upper village in background.

the expense of underground mining prohibitive. Magnetic Iron Ore then set its sights 12 miles beyond Jayville, to the Little River Iron Ore beds, a massive deposit of ore exposed on the surface of a 2-mile ridge, allowing for cheap open pit mining. In August of 1888, Magnetic Iron Ore executed a mortgage for \$600,000 with the Central Trust Company of NY, pledging its titles and rights to over 300,000 acres of northern NY land in 4 counties and 7 townships. The loan was to fund equipment, build a plant and develop the "Benson Mines" at Little River. Signing for Magnetic Iron Ore were President Thomas Fowler (also President of the NY, Ontario & Western Railway), and Secretary **William Benson**, Byron's 24 year old son. The C&A's Little River Extension to the new mine was completed in early 1889; tourist traffic was expected, but would take 15 more years to really thrive.

After 1889, Benson Mines became a substantial town, divided into an upper

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: ALLEN DITCH



We are very lucky that the Wanakena Historical Association includes many members who play an active role and are working to make our archives grow and become more available in the future. As of the May meeting we have 99 members who are up-to-date with their membership dues. Out of those ninety-nine, twenty-one are lifetime members. The trustees are very grateful for all that continue to support the organization, which allows us to ensure that the walking tour is maintained in good condition for friends, tourists, and school children to learn about the history and heritage of Wanakena.

The Trustees continue to explore the possibility of having a building to house some of the artifacts and memorabilia that are currently in storage, and available to view by appointment only. We continue to record and document our inventory so that it will be easier to locate pictures, postcards, documents, news clippings or artifacts. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at agditch@aol.com.

WHA MEMBERSHIP: JOIN OR RENEW TODAY

Your current membership status should be indicated on the mailing label. If your membership is expired or you have never formally joined, please complete the form below and send form and payment to: **Wanakena Historical Association, PO Box 73, Wanakena, NY 13695**. All gifts, above membership are tax deductible.

Annual Membership: Individual Membership: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year \$10 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 years \$25			
Family Membership: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 years \$60			
Contributing Member: <input type="checkbox"/> \$50			
Lifetime Membership: <input type="checkbox"/> \$100			
<input type="checkbox"/> New or <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal			
NAME:		Date:	
Address:		City:	State: Zip:
Phone:		E-mail:	
Prefer to receive correspondence by:		<input type="checkbox"/> E-Mail	<input type="checkbox"/> US Mail
<input type="checkbox"/> GIFT MEMBERSHIP for:			
NAME:		Date:	
Address:		City:	State: Zip:
Phone:		E-Mail:	
<i>Gift recipient will be notified by mail</i> <i>All GIFTS are tax-deductible</i>			

Born in Wanakena, Marion Blanche celebrates 105 years



On January 1, 2012 Marion K Branche, who was born in Wanakena in 1907, turned 105! I talked with Marion's daughter Jan Oliver, who relayed that her mother, a resident of Samaritan Keep Home, to be in good health and upbeat about getting older.

Marion's parents, Guy Sebastian Cyener and Jenny/Jane (Benson) Cyener lived and worked in Wanakena when the logging operations were at their peak. Marion's mother was from Pitcairn, while her father, moved to the area from Pleasantville PA as an engineer on the railroad that brought lumber to the Wanakena mills. Guy and Jenny were married on July 1, 1904. The brother of Marion's father, John (Jack) Melbourne Cyener continued to work in Wanakena after Marion's father died from an infection when she was only 1 1/2 years old. She, her mother, and sister then moved to Star Lake where she grew up. The family sold eggs and saved enough money for Marion and her sister to attend college. Marion's sister, Jane attended tailoring school in Watertown, while she attended what was to become the Rochester Institute of Technology for about a year and a half before marrying Elgin Branche on April 5, 1926. Marion has two daughters, Jan Oliver of Dexter and Gail Pfister of Watertown, five grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren, seven of whom have attended college.

— By Allen Ditch

WHA NEEDS YOUR PICTURES, POSTCARDS, FAMILY STORIES AND ARTIFACTS

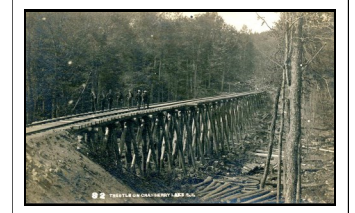
Before anymore of Wanakena's history is lost, now is the time to go through those boxes in the attic or garage. Although the WHA has an exciting collection, we just don't know what we don't have! In other words, please share your old keepsakes, pictures or postcards. We would love to hear your personal stories about your grandparents, or yourself! Send us a letter about why Wanakena is special to you, and we might publish your story in the next newsletter!

The WHA is a federally recognized tax exempt organization and donations are fully tax-deductible; and has a provisional charter from the NYS Board of Regents.

If you have items PLEASE, PLEASE consider sharing. You can donate, or let us make photographic or digital copies and we can return the original to you (although we would love to have originals for our forever archives).

Contact **Sue Smeby, Bill Gleason, or Allen Ditch.**

village with homes, a school, and two churches; the lower village had the large Ellsworth hotel, company store, depot, plus homes, stores and saloons lining the railroad tracks. The mines became the first in the world to commercially concentrate low grade iron ores, by using magnetism to separate iron from rock. Initially averaging 23% iron content, the final product contained 60%, and was the first magnetic iron concentrate to be used in blast furnaces. Although Magnetic Iron Ore considered its new venture at Little River a success, iron mining was subject to a wildly fluctuating market. The mines shipped a total of about 150,000 tons of high-grade concentrates from 1889 to 1893, when a general depression forced their closure. While the mines were idle, the village of Benson Mines was sustained by other ventures, mainly lumbering. Post Henderson company built a large sawmill at Benson Mines in 1898, followed by a network of logging railroads. Tourism began to grow, as the public realized that the NW Adirondacks and Cranberry Lake had become more accessible. Prior to 1889, Cranberry was usually reached by a 2-day road trip from Canton, via Monterey (Degrass), Clifton Falls, and the Tooley Pond road to the foot of the lake. Once the C&A RR reached Benson Mines, tourists could travel by rail to the mines, then a few miles by stagecoach to **Sternberg's Hotel** on the Oswegatchie Inlet. Those headed for the main Lake could walk 2 miles to the future site of Wanakena, and board a boat to Cranberry Lake village. By 1894 a road had been cut directly from Benson Mines to Cranberry Lake; this trip was shortened in 1897 when the C&A RR reached Newton Falls. Still, some visitors were content to remain



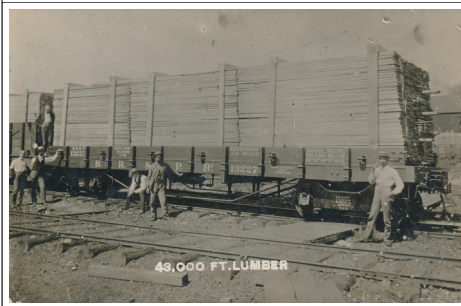
400 foot trestle on Cranberry Lake RR between Benson Mines and Wanakena.

at Benson Mines, where the **Ellsworth Hotel's** proprietor **Sylvester "Sam" Spain** was a popular chef and host, on a mission to bring fine dining and civility to the north woods. More adventurous out-of-towners could join local loggers and miners at the town's dozen saloons.

Magnetic Iron Ore worked the Benson Mines again in 1900, only to cease operations in 1901. But there was cause for optimism, with the arrival in town of **Leonard Wilson**, superintendent of Rich Lumber Co. Rich had logged over its woodlands in PA, and sent Wilson to purchase 16,000 acres on the SW side of Cranberry Lake. Wilson and his family boarded at Sternberg's Hotel, while he chose the site for a village and mills, and supervised construction at Wanakena. A connection to the nearest main line railroad in Benson Mines, 6 miles away, was essential; while a steam donkey engine pulled up stumps at

Wanakena, gangs of Swedish and Italian crews were laying track from the Mines, hewing ties along the way. The Cranberry Lake RR was completed in September 1902; the official date was May 1903, but the line was first kept busy freighting carloads of building materials and dismantled homes from Rich's previous location at Granere PA.

Once the large sawmill was built at Wanakena in 1903, followed by veneer, buggy whip, shoe last, barrel head, lath & chip mills, wood products were freighted out to Benson Mines and the C&A RR, whose depot was now a union station. The Cranberry Lake RR was notable



43,000 square feet of Wanakena lumber ready to roll.

for a 400' trestle, hastily constructed with timber; after several thrilling years it was filled in with iron ore tailings from the Mines, becoming the "Big Fill". The line was also known for using its 2 Shay geared logging locomotives to pull passenger cars, resulting in many postcard quips contrasting their low speed with the racket produced. In 1905 this was remedied when Rich Lumber bought a conventional rod locomotive for use between Wanakena and the Mines. That the Cranberry Lake RR carried passengers at all was a first for Rich. The company came prepared to build an industrial mill complex; whether Rich anticipated a tourist boom or it took them by surprise, the Benson Mines – Wanakena line benefited both towns. By 1905, with the RR carrying 18,000 to 20,000 passengers annually, they were prospering as a new gateway the Cranberry Lake region.

-- *To be continued* --
Fall / Winter newsletter



Among the mills in Wanakena.

remedied when Rich Lumber bought a conventional rod locomotive for use between Wanakena and the Mines. That the Cranberry Lake RR carried passengers at all was a first for Rich. The company came prepared to build an industrial mill complex; whether Rich anticipated a tourist boom or it took them by surprise, the Benson Mines – Wanakena line benefited both towns. By 1905, with the RR carrying 18,000 to 20,000 passengers annually, they were prospering as a new gateway the Cranberry Lake region.



Depot at Wanakena - Cranberry Lake RR engine, passengers and baggage cars.

Remembering Dick Narkewicz, MD

By: Allen Ditch



On February 21, 2012 Wanakena lost a good neighbor and friend when Dick Narkewicz passed away following a long battle with complications from cancer therapy. Born in Walpole, N.H. in 1934, he attended St. Michael's College in Winooski and received his MD from UVM in 1960. As a pediatrician he was a tireless advocate for children and was elected President of the American Academy of Pediatrics in 1989. He retired in 1997 to spend more time with his wife and family, as well as his many friends in Wanakena.

Dick and Carol could be seen every morning on their daily walk to get their mail and greet all of Wanakena on the porch of the Wanakena General Store. Dick made it one of his missions to help many in Wanakena who were diagnosed with serious medical problems; helping them to choose and/or understand sometimes scary and complicated treatment. Each of us can continue on our own life's journey with fond memories of Dick. Condolences to Carol, his wife of 56 years, their three children Michael Narkewicz, MD, of Golden, Colo., Brian Narkewicz of Rutland, and Karen Hoff, MD, of Albany, N.Y.; and their nine grandchildren.

A service is planned at the Wanakena cemetery for May 26, 2012.

2012 Photo Contest

Continued from page 1

Property of the Wanakena Historical Association and may be used in newsletters, displays, web pages and/or publications. Rules and entry forms can be requested by emailing wanakenaha@aol.com



Judging will be done by at least three judges who are avid, published photographers who will use defined criteria to review the entries and select the winners. Judges may add additional categories. Winners and photos selected for display will be revealed at the Sept 28-29 Forest Festival at the Ranger School in Wanakena.

Prizes: The planning committee is still researching possible prizes, with monetary awards dependent on the number of entries. Awards will be given for grand prize and 1st place in each category for both adults and children. All money received through entry fees will be disbursed to winners.

History of the Wanakena Cemetery

By Carol S. Cassidy



In the 1940's, J. Otto Hamele and the Town of Fine each agreed to donate ½ acre of land to establish a cemetery near the old town road and what is now called Main St. In the same decade, Otto and his wife, Ada, passed away and were the only interments in the cemetery for over 40 years.

As time passed, the Hamele family had all they could do to maintain their parents' grave site, let alone the entire acre, which became a forest of primarily cherry trees.

In the Spring of 1988, Polly & Keith Hamele (son of J Otto and Ada) asked a few Wanakena residents to help them form an association to reestablish the parcel as a public cemetery.

With the help of our regulating body, the N Y State Division of Cemeteries, we formed a not-for-profit corporation, with bylaws, rules & regulations, and a board of trustees. Supervised by Keith Hamele, the Towns of Clifton & Fine helped us clear the land.

After many weeks of hard work by the trustees and a few volunteers, the cemetery began to take shape, and we had our first interment in late summer 1988. This was Peter Decoteau, who at that time owned the Wanakena General Store.

In 1989, Chuck Cassidy designed, built and donated the cemetery name sign plus he and his wife, Carol, donated the flag pole and first flag.

The first trustees were Carol Cassidy, Pres., Rene' Reed, Treas., Karen Allen, Sec., Leona Decoteau, Polly Hamele, and Peter Cody. Carol Cassidy remained President for 21 yrs and is still a trustee. Rene' Reed has been Treasurer for 23 yrs and Polly Hamele is a trustee emeritus. We now have some new faces running the show and hopefully will always have volunteers to step up and be a trustee to help maintain the viability of the association and the cemetery.

The past 23 years the Wanakena cemetery has required a lot of hard work by the trustees and volunteers. A few of us have helped dig the full graves and also the cremated openings, donating the cost back to the cemetery association. Some grave openings were done in very inclement weather, but we were young enough and glad to do this at the time. Every year it is becoming more expensive to maintain the grounds, so the trustees welcome any donations of monies to help accomplish these tasks.

A bulletin showing the current trustees, and all lot and interment information is posted on the community bulletin board located on the Wanakena General Store porch. Anyone having any inquiries or interested in purchas-

OLD 1902 WANAKENA HOTEL 2012 KEEPSAKE AVAILABE

Rhody Lea and Virginia Peters diligently worked together and with the Cat's Meow Company to have another Wanakena historical keepsake available for sale this summer. As there are no color photos of the original hotel, long-term residents were surveyed to choose the exterior color of the hotel. The keepsake is a compilation of several postcards in our archives which depict the 1902 Hotel with guests enjoying the front porch.



Wanakena Hotel wooden keepsake to be sold in 2011 for \$20.00

On the reverse side is printed: "Wanakena Hotel, Built c. 1902 by the Rich Lumber Co. for \$75,000, the Wanakena Hotel was three stories high with fifty rooms. The East wing was enlarged in 1906. The hotel catered to summer vacationers from several areas of the northeast where people could access a train for the journey. It was demolished in the early 1960's."

The WHA is selling these for \$20 and will display them at scheduled summer events. Contact a Trustee (see list on address pg of newsletter) if you would like to purchase. You can order for delivery by US mail, but there will be an additional charge of \$4.00 for shipping and handling. Sorry but we can't accept credit at this time. Please send your request and check (\$24.00 for each) to:

WHA—Wanakena Hotel Offer

PO Box 73

Wanakena, NY 13695



Special Thanks!

- To Rhody Lea for donating the book, "Hotels & Churches in the Town of Fine" to the WHA archives.
- To Bill Gleason for the work of taking down and putting up the walking tour picture stations for the winter.
- To Sue Smeby, Carol Cassidy and Pam Lea-Media for contributing to the newsletter.
- To all the lifetime members who sent in a donation this year!



This morning, when I was walking “over the river and through the woods”, savoring the crisp fresh Spring air. I heard the mixed melodies of so many varieties of wildlife that were either returning to the still chilly river waters, or waking to new life from nests among the rushes snuggled here and there along the rivers path or hidden safely in the deep greens of the ever changing woods. I realized that there are few places quite like Wanakena ... this almost magical little village that has been treasured by 4 generations of my family.

For my children, when they were young, there were so many things they looked forward to while being able to spend time in Wanakena that we would begin the “are we there yet” game less than an hour into our long trips North! Our trips were never short, traveling to the North Country at one time or another from Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Tennessee and ultimately the longest driving distance, Florida. No matter the miles or time it took, as soon as we turned down that last one mile of road, we knew we were really “almost there” by the welcome glow of the “Golden Pines” named by my Mom and Dad when I was a little girl. Now of course, we all know that there are most certainly “official names” for the tall, top-heavy, golden-trunked pines on the left side of the road heading into the village, but it never mattered, not then and not now. They will always be the “Golden Pines” and a perfect reminder that you’ve almost arrived in Wanakena! It’s not so different with many other unique remembrances of our time here...special moments, sayings and places that one wouldn’t experience unless fortunate enough to have returned to Wanakena year after year while we all were growing up.

Each visit, once we arrived and unpacked, like many excited youngsters, my children wanted to do **everything** on the first morning after our long drive the day before! Usually as I was savoring my first quiet cup of morning coffee they would begin ...can we go.... hiking, biking, canoeing, fishing, camping, walk across the “Walking Bridge”, watch the river rush under the “Car Bridge”, catch pollywogs, feed the geese , pick berries, swim, look for the “eight o’clock beaver”. All in the very first morning, not wasting a moment of Wanakena time!!! Like my Grandfather Lea and Uncle George, I used to hope the first real day in Wanakena would be what they lovingly called a “soft day”, just a bit drizzly, kind of gray, not so great weather day, so that we all could unwind a wee bit before jumping into the 100 or so wonderful activities just waiting for us all here! Unfortunately for me, there never were too many “soft days” as we would begin our visit, but I was always extremely grateful that Mom and Dad would take on figuring out just what

was to be done first, and I could, for even just a couple of minutes, breath and then join in the wonderful adventures.

Even with such a long and grand list of “to dos”, and no matter what else they thought they wanted to do right away, there was always one favorite challenge calling to my children first and foremost. And that was who would be the first to catch “The King of New York”... bet you had no idea that as tiny as Wanakena is, it has a King!! We’re not talking about a King like in the UK or the King of Rock and Roll, oh no, it’s none of those. Instead this King is a very wily, very slippery, **very very** long legged bull frog who probably had seen **many** Springs and Summers come and go and was just out there lurking, so irresistible to my children that they would spend hours trying to guess where he might be hiding that particular year. And there was no bigger satisfaction than to be **the one** who discovered and captured him to bring back to our dock as ‘show and tell’ before sending him on his way back into the wild. The stories grew with each year and I was never sure whether the same poor giant frog was waiting year after year, but it was a pretty even competition between my children and an adventure they just loved to share! One particular year of this quirky family competition was just too funny for my Dad not to photograph, since it was almost hard to tell who was “taller”... my daughter Abi or “The King” with those very long dangling legs. If you look closely at the photograph you can see her brightly beaming pride as she held such a gigantic frog in her tiny little hands knowing that this year **she had won!!** We all had quite the laugh over the sight of a little girl and such a big frog!!



Abi with the King of New York!

As my children grew up and went off into the big world in their own unique directions, they continued to look forward to the times they could return to the pristine peace and quiet of this special place that holds so many treasured memories for our family. And even as grown as they have become, when they do get back, they still want to do **everything** the first day, they just don’t need Pa, Nana or Mom to help them get on their way to it!! As for “The King of New York”, I believe one of his slippery prodigy is still out there somewhere resting a bit easier now that two very curious young children are not poking around every nook and cranny trying to uncover his perfect hiding spot! Yes, some things do change, just not the wealth of memories passed from generation to generation on down through our family, lived and relived with heartfelt delight and gratitude for the times we all shared making those wonderful memories here in the little village of Wanakena.