A History of Taborton, NY

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[Believed to be a 1966 Junior High School project by local students]

[transcribed by John Losee from the original document]

Introduction

This booklet was written from two local history projects done by Diane Snyder and Geoffrey Hubbs with Joseph D'Entrone. This project was a term paper for seventh grade social studies and these two were written on the history of Taborton, N.Y. Since Taborton is not a defined area, we shall deal with the area on the map in this booklet. We've tried to include everything we could find on this area's history. We especially thank Mr. George Dobert for help with charcoal burning, and Miss. Heeran at the Junior High School for supplies. Miss. Heeran assigned the project and gave the finished projects to the library in the new Junior High School. When the school opens, the projects will be on display, and the public is invited to read them. We also thank everyone who we interviewed and who contributed to our reports.

Geoffrey Hubbs
and
Diane Snyder

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Map of Taborton

[hand drawn map that shows the area from Teal Rd. up Taborton Road, past both Bowman ponds, stretching as far as someplace beyond Kipple Rd.]

Geographic Information

The settlement or area of Taborton is located in the hills about twenty miles east of the Hudson River in the Taconic Range. Taborton is located in the Town of Sand Lake and is centered around Big Bowman and Little Bowman Ponds. Rensselaer County Highway 21 or Taborton Road runs through the community. Taborton proper is the area by the two ponds and has an elevation of 1,427 feet. The summit of the mountain is the Gipfel or Kipple which means top of the mountain in German. The Gipfel has an elevation of 1,850 feet and is Taborton's highest point. This area is largely woods and only the areas around the main roads are settled. The area is covered with large rocks on and in the ground and many large glaciers may have passed over this area. Cranberry Vly Creek runs into Little Bowman at the east end of the lake. Roads lead from Taborton to Berlin, Sand Lake, East Poestenkill, and Glass Lake.

Founding and Early Settlers

The earliest inhabitants of Taborton were the Stockbridge Indians who had a hunting village here. They were peaceful Indians, unlike the Iroquois. The village was here during the period of the Revolutionary War and legends tell that two Hessians escaped the Battle of Saratoga and hid in the village. They settled here at the conclusion of the war. In 1800, Timothy Bowerman lived in the lot where the church is and had about 20 acres of land cleared. Daniel Bowman was one of the original settlers and in 1827, he rented the land where the church is now. The area was called Bowman's Woods and the twin ponds were named after him. George Horton, Gideon Butts, and Richard Knowlson formed a lumber company and opened a sawmill. Then, Gideon Butts picked up a shipload of Hessians and promised them land if they helped clear it. In 1810, Stephen Van Rensselaer rented land to tenant farmers in Bowman's Woods. After this, Van Rensselaer paid little attention to this area and it was not involved in the anti-rent wars. Later, Taborton was called east Sand Lake and still later Georgetown. Around 1910, Reverend George Kern, of Zion's Church, was said to have named this area Taborton from a passage in the Bible. This was after Mt. Tabor and means "promised land". The Gipfel has been named the Kipple and so was the road nearby from mispronunciation.

Later History

The majority of Taborton's residents in the late 1800's were German and there was a great influx of immigrants from Germany in Taborton. Many of them worked as charcoal burners or farmers. In 1804, the Eastern Turnpike or Post Road was built between Glass Lake and Berlin. Taborton Road was not paved until about 1930, and only one mile from Sand Lake. The rest was paved in small spurts after this. Power lines came here along with telephones around 1940. Taborton formed its own fire district a few years ago and they formed a volunteer fire company. A fire house was built and now they have only one pumper. The Taborton House has always been a tavern and restaurant. It has been owned by Henry Gundrum, Peter Stock, Frederick Momrow, Mary Momrow, A.J. Leffler, Carl Reid, A.R. Wallis, and Wendall Stockholm is the present owner. There is a windmill on the north end of Big Bowman, which is at least 25 years old. It was used to pump water for a camp on the lake. The Taconic State Parkway was supposed to run just east of Little Bowman in Taborton. The turnpike's funds stopped the road construction between New York and Albany. This highway might have brought new business to the dying community of Taborton.

Joe Wagner

Joseph Wagner was probably Taborton's oldest resident. He was born in Syria, which is now Lebanon around 1858. Around 1888 he came to Taborton and came under the charge of the Goodermotes in Taborton. He worked for the family and inherited a horse and wagon from them. For years and years he peddled household furnishings, kitchen utensils, clothing, cutlery, and dressmaking sundries. He was known as "Joe the Peddler" and was named Wagner from the wagon he used. His route extended in a 15 or 20 mile radius from his home and covered Taborton almost completely. He lived in the Town of Berlin in a small house until he died on March 3, 1964 in Troy. He said he never knew his exact age, though he was said to be 106. In his later years, he couldn't read and he was also deaf. Mr. Wagner would be Taborton's oldest person and would have known a lot about this area's history.

Post Office

In the 1880's (around 1879) a fourth class Post Office came to Taborton. It was called the Lake View Post Office, Taborton, NY and is in the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Carr. It was run at first by Rev. Ewald of Zion's Church and was taken over by Conrad Malkmes, who lived where Carrs live now on Little Bowman Pond. His wife did most of the work in the Post Office, and she was succeeded by her daughter, Minnie, who was Mrs. Carr's sister. The mailman from Sand Lake used to ride on horseback to the house and drop the mail in a slot by the front door. The Post Office was in a small addition built on the side of the house, and is restored as it was long ago. The twenty-one Post boxes are still there and a mail slot. There was also a small store there. The people in Taborton had to come to the Post Office to get their mail as there was no rural delivery. The Taborton Post Office merged with Sand Lake in 1944 and now Taborton is served by Sand Lake's delivery. Many people say they miss the Post Office and that it made Taborton seem much busier.

Schools

Taborton did much in the late 1800's and early 1900's to educate its children. There were three one room schools in this area. One was the Lower Taborton School, the Little Red Schoolhouse, or Miller Hill School; District #9. These were all names for the school that is about a mile and a half from Sand Lake and is now a summer camp. The second school was on the shores on Little Bowman and was called the Taborton School. This building was built in 1847 and resembled a little red barn. Rev. Egli of Zion's Church taught here and Miss Ruth Ann Geiser was the last teacher. The last school is just over the Town of Berlin line on Timbers' property. The shell of the Upper Taborton School is all that remains and it was in operation at the same time the others were. The people we interviewed can remember going to either one of the three schools on the mountain. The Taborton School is now a camp and is across from Doberts near the church. The people of Taborton wanted their children to get a good education, so they built three schools for the small community. After the school was built in Sand Lake (Middle School) the three schools closed down and the children went to school in nearby Sand Lake or Averill Park.

Churches

There have been two churches in Taborton in its history. One is the present Zion's Evangelical and Reformed Church and the second was the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church was across from Kipple Road and the structure was torn down after poor attendance. The cemetery is still on the church grounds which are on Hoffay's property.

The Zion's Church is located on Little Bowman Pond with the Sunday School Hall, parsonage, and storage sheds. Here is a detailed account of its history:

On May 20, 1800, Timothy Bowerman lived on the lot and had twenty acres of land. On May 21, 1827, it was leased for two years to Daniel Bowman and he had to pay two loads of beech or maple wood as rent. On December 3, 1844, William P. Van Rensselaer and his wife sold the two lots to Richard knowlson, Gideon Butts, and George Horton (they formed the lumber company) for a sum of $900. George Horton and his wife bought the land completely and sold it to Henry Werger, John Werger, and Jacob Shipe who were trustees of the Evangelical Protestant Church of Sand Lake for a sum of $150. The land was to be used only for a meeting house for the church. George Horton, in 1866 sold an acre of the land to trustees of the German Evangelical Protestant Church Cemetery Association for a burial ground on the property. In January of 1852, Rev. G. Bochert of Columbia County visited this area and invited German-speaking residents to worship in the small log meeting house on the hillside between the two ponds. The first few services were poorly attended but the congregation grew rapidly and a meeting was held every two weeks. Henry Werger, John Werger, John Baur, Conrad Braun, Conrad Massenpflug, and Abraham Werger were elected to the board of Trustees. Seventy persons participated at the first Easter Service and Communion and six dollars was collected for necessary items. In 1878, Rev. F. H. Sydom became pastor, but resigned in one year. For the next three years, Rev. George Vetter was minister. On New Year's Day of 1882, a 300 pound bell was bought for $90, and a $70 organ was installed. In the summer of 1882, extensive repairs were made on the foundation, walls, and roof. In 1883, Pastor M. Goffeney came to the church and under his ministry the church joined the Evangelical Synod of North America and the parsonage was dedicated. After this, the pastors were Rev. J.G. Biegert and Pastor F. Ewald. During Pastor Ewald's ministry, a pulpit was dedicated, a large stove installed, and the cemetery was laid out in plots. The next pastors were Rev. Schmidt, Pastor Fleck, and Rev. Neumeister. In 1903, the wagon shed was constructed, and Rev. George Kern came to the church in October, 1907. Many improvements were made during his ministry and he was said to have named Taborton. The first English service was conducted in 1908, before this, they were all in German. In August 1917 Rev. J. Schoettle started the Young People's League, and English services were held frequently.

This is the end of the information compiled by Rev. Schoettle.

In 1919, Rev. Oscar Egli, a young minister just out of the seminary, came to Taborton as its pastor. He was also pastor of the church in East Poestenkill and East Berlin. He served for 27 years and taught in the Taborton School. In 1921 the Parish Hall was built; electricity installed, new glass windows, heating plants, a new organ, and an enlarging and renovation of the church. Rev. Egli died when attending a synod meeting in New York. Rev. E. Henzel of Albany became the next minister and was succeeded by Rev. Fuhrmann. The present minister is Rev. Ralph Heller.

The Taborton Picnic, for the Sunday School fund, has been held almost every year since English services began. The picnic is held each August on the church grounds. There are games and refreshments and you have a chance to sit and talk with your friends and neighbors.

Zion's Church was founded in 1852 and is the only church on the mountain, besides the Old Dutch Church in the Town of Berlin. People come from everywhere in the area to church on Sunday, the picnic, and other church events.

The Ku Klux Klan was in Taborton in the 1930's and burned wooden crosses near Little Bowman. They were against the Catholics and other immigration groups. For years the church has been the center of life on the mountain. Almost everyone went to church and the activities it sponsored. Even though the people lived away from their neighbors, at the church they got together and exchanged news.

Charcoal Burning

Charcoal making has been very important in Taborton since the period before the Civil War. The industry started in Germany and was also found in England and Scandinavia. At first, the charcoal was used mainly for the Burden Iron Works in Troy and this was one reason that the charcoal burners came to Taborton. It was also used in homes in the city, hotels, and local homes. It was used before the cheaper coals and oils were discovered. Now the charcoal is used for the little that is sold for picnic fires, etc.   The charcoal "Briquets" are only compressed soot and are not as good as full wood charcoal. In charcoal burning, the wood is charred or partially burned and then used for a fire and fuel later. Charcoal burning was the main source of income for people on the mountain and the peak of the industry was during the Civil War. The men sold it in Albany or Troy when they went to the city on Sunday night. They would pay their hotel bill and everything else in charcoal and the rest would be sold in the streets or door to door.

Charcoal burning was an art passed down from father to son. First, a site must be picked, cleared, and leveled. This will be for the kiln or pit where the wood is actually burned. Next, wood of all diameters is cut into three to four foot lengths and stacked upright on the site. (The kiln is also called a pit, because a pit was dug instead of a mound or kiln being built.) The wood was cut in winter when other farm work was at a standstill. Hardwoods such as beech, birch, maple, and oak make the best charcoal. (Mr. George Dobert on the Kipple uses the method described here and said that soft wood makes weak charcoal that does not burn well.) Green wood cannot be used and is dangerous to burn. Few charcoal burners would ever try to pass green wood as good charcoal. The stacked wood is covered with hay and ferns, and then sod and dirt. This keeps too much oxygen from getting into the fire and starting the wood on fire. If it does, the whole kiln might go up in flames, though more dirt piled on will stop the fire. The finished kiln is about twenty feet in diameter and about ten feet high. There is a ladder to get to the top of the kiln when it has to be capped and to add more dirt. The fire is lighted with dry kindling or old charcoal and must be watched constantly for about two weeks. The wood cannot catch on fire, for if it does the whole product is reduced to ashes. People in Sand Lake remember seeing a blaze on the mountain and hearing someone remark "There goes a charcoal pit". In the end, only 1/5 of the original wood is useful charcoal. The charcoal is then put in sacks to be sold. Mr. Dobert and Chris Snyder are the only charcoal burners left in Taborton and the area. When they close down their pits, the art will vanish from the hills.

The charcoal used to cost 5 cents a bushel to make and sold for 20 cents. After the Civil War, the price went up to 50 cents and $1.00 a bushel. One hundred bushels made up the wagonload which they took to town on Sunday night. A whole procession of wagons would go down the road to the city and they would return on Monday afternoon. The charcoal burners also cut firewood and Christmas trees when they got their wood. Mr. Dobert draws his wood on a horse-pulled wooden sled, the way he always has. Still, he has a chain saw to cut the large trees for lumber. The art of charcoal burning has been in Taborton for over one hundred years, and will disappear from these hills in a few years.

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[note - page 8 of the paper document contains a diagram showing how charcoal is made].

Farming and Agriculture

Farming was the most important occupation in Taborton, besides charcoal burning. The main crop was wild blueberries or huckleberries. The farmers planted corn, wheat, and other grains and had their own vegetable gardens. Apples and other fruits were grown occasionally, and cranberries used to grow in abundance near Cranberry Vly Creek. After a few floods, the cranberries died off. Now blueberries are the most important wild crop, though the drought has cut off the crop for the past few years. Blueberries were often called huckleberries by the people on the mountain, though huckleberries have only one seed. The whole family used to pick berries in the summer, and they were usually sold at roadside stands or tables for a small source of income. The rest were made into pies, jam, and canned. Now the standard price at the few stands that sell them is 50 cents a quart. The soil in Taborton was not very fertile and was full of rocks. The farmers had a hard time planting crops, and they still have to buy large quantities of lime to spread on the ground.

There were no large farms for business, most were to provide the family and neighbors with food. Most farmers had only one to ten cows and three or four horses. Up to fifty chickens were kept for meals and to sell eggs in the city. The cows were used only for the family's milk, not for dairy farms. Some families had a sheep or goat and maybe a team of oxen to pull the sled. The few farmers in Taborton today still use a horse-drawn sled for wood and horse-drawn plows. The families also raised their own pork and kept it in brine. They also made their own bread out of flour.

Occupations and Sources of Income

Since there were many small businesses in Taborton, we will list them like this:

- Firewood was cut by the farmer for himself, his neighbors, and to sell in the city.

- Many people had icehouses on their property. They cut ice off of the lake and packed it in sawdust in the buildings. They used the ice in their ice chests until refrigerators came about.

- Ferns were picked in the fall and packed by packers. They were then sold to florists for floral decorations. Andrew Snyder had one such business and hired fern pickers. They would put 25 ferns together and tie them up. They were paid 50 cents to $1.00 for 1000 picked ferns or 40 bunches. The fern packers kept them in storage and sold them to various florists in the city. Mrs. Walter Momrow still picks ferns for a florist in Albany. Princess pine and other small greens were also picked for the florists.

- Gold thread, a three-leaved plant was gathered and the roots ground for a bitter tonic, a mouthwash, or a gargle. The children used to pick these and they were another source of family income.

Lumbering and Sawmills

Lumbering was the most important industry in Taborton and came with the first settlers. George Horton, Gideon Butts, and Richard Knowlson formed a lumber company in the 1820's. There were four main sawmills in Taborton:

- One sawmill was in the Town of Berlin where D'Entrones live now. The owner of the mill lived where D'Entrones live now (in the same house) and there was a tavern and inn across the road. A "railroad" (road for rails or logs) ran to Berlin from the mill. There was a horse drawn train that carried logs from Spring Lake to this mill.

- Another sawmill, a steam-powered one, was across from the Taborton school, in back of Nellie Dobert's house.

- There was a third sawmill on the eastern end of Little Bowman Pond and had a rectangular saw that cut up and sown. Mr. Norman Lindeman owns the property now.

- The last sawmill was on Lindeman Road and was run by Anthony Valenti. He owned his home on the property and cut the wood from his property. He would also buy logs from other people and sawed lumber for building in Taborton. The forests of Taborton are still being used for lumber today, but the sawmills are no longer a part of Taborton.

Miscellaneous

The following are some facts which we forgot or that didn't fit anywhere else.

- There was a stone crushing operation near Eastern Turnpike. It was here in the 1930's and crushed stones from everywhere; stone fences, from fields, or they brought them from farmers. The stones were crushed to make gravel for the highways.

- Maple syrup was also collected for syrup and maple sugar. Some people still collect the syrup today and boil it down. Mrs. Manning near Big Bowman does this every year just as the pioneers did for their sugar and candy.

- Little Bowman had two dance pavilions; one was on the shores of the pond across from Carrs' house (it is now a camp) and the other was where Walk Road and Taborton Road meet on Lindeman's property. Fred Houser's band used to play here; On Saturday night the community residents danced, and on Wednesday nights it was reserved for boarders.

- The people went to work on the roads for the money they owed the town.

- The families, in caravans of wagons, went to Albany or Troy almost every Sunday night to sell their charcoal, eggs, lumber, and other goods, and to buy what they needed. They came back Monday afternoon.

- In 1883 (when church services were in German) the members' names were: Lindeman, Dise, Gundrum, Meyer, Schrumf, Brown, Wagner, Conrad, Lopp, Hoffman, etc.

- Almost 700 people are buried in the cemetery at Zion's church.

- Two icemen and active church members in the 1900's were Charles Hoffman and Adam Schuman.

We thank everyone who helped us collect information for our projects.

Conclusion

Taborton is no longer a busy community as it was in the past. The people who can remember Taborton as it was are few, as they have moved to the city or have passed away. The charcoal burners are almost gone and the icehouses have long since disappeared. The sawmills are no longer here and little lumbering is done. The blueberry pickers are a rare sight and little farming is done. The Post Office has closed, there is only one church, the schools are no longer in use, and the dance pavilion is gone. Many of the things that made up old Taborton have gone, while modern times move into the mountains. Some people have no indoor plumbing, but enjoy television and telephones. Taborton is losing its past business and importance and only a look back in local history can tell what Taborton was like fifty, one hundred, and one hundred fifty years ago.

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[Note: There was no bibliography with my copy.]