

Before the Scouts

An exhibit at the Ten Mile River Scout Museum delves into the past

By ANNEMARIE SCHUETZ

TEN MILE RIVER, NY — What existed in the Ten Mile River area before the Boy Scouts arrived?

David Malatzky can tell you.

The associate curator for the Ten Mile River Scout Museum has been researching and preparing an exhibit, titled “Before TMR,” that covers over a century of activity in the region before the Boy Scout Foundation of Greater New York took over in 1927.

Here are some snippets of history.

Lumbering up

At the dawn of the 19th century, the Ten Mile River area had trees—and the young United States needed wood for building.

“Men waited until the Delaware was at flood stage and floated logs downriver,” Malatzky said.

But trees are heavy, and smaller rivers were used to float the logs to the Delaware. Including the Ten Mile River.

You’d cut down your trees, get them to the sluice and just “slide those babies into the water,” he said.

Not that every tree went to New York City or Philly. Malatzky mentioned the Ten Mile River sawmill. “Logs became planks used for construction in the region too.”

Whether those logs stayed here or went elsewhere, the Ten Mile River was so important that an act naming it a public highway was passed by New York State’s senate and assembly in 1857. This way, “people couldn’t dam it,” he said.

Meanwhile, settlement had begun in earnest. It was more than loggers and associated businesses.

It was about the railroad.

‘What the Erie did’

The Erie changed everything.

The railroad came through the Delaware River region in the 1840s and ‘50s. As the tracks were being laid, the land was being stripped down; the trees were slowly vanishing. (Logging and rafting weren’t gone, not yet, but those who worried about such things could see the end looming.)

Farmers scrambled, trying to grow a living from the rocky soil. “The land wasn’t that good for agriculture,” Malatzky said. Say you wanted to try, though. To get here prior to the arrival of the railroad was a hike and then some. Pioneers made the trip, of course, but not in droves.

Once here, you could manage, milking cows and keeping chickens and selling what you had locally, but where would any necessary cash come from?

“By the 1880s, lumber was going and [to revive the economy], the goal was to get people here,” Malatzky said. So the area embraced tourism.



David Malatzky tells the story of the Ten Mile River region from before the advent of the Boy Scouts.



Image from Ten Mile River Scout Museum

The cover of an Erie Railroad guidebook to the region. Did the early Dutch settlers (or the Pilgrims; it’s a bit unclear) go fishing in the Upper Delaware? Probably not? But the Erie was very interested in drawing tourists to the region, and a big attraction was fishing. All the better if you can imply that early-20th century fishermen had their boots planted in a very long tradition.

income stream and rented out rooms in their homes. When that proved successful, they expanded those homes until the farmers or their wives became boardinghouse-keepers.

This nascent hospitality industry offered meals (with local produce, sometimes grown on the farm), and even if the homes never attained the status of Grossinger’s, the farmers/innkeepers often did all right, Malatzky said. Meanwhile their boarders walked, rested, ate, went out on boats to fish or just float along, and otherwise enjoyed a cooler, more comfortable summer than they might have endured in the city.

The exhibit offers detailed information on seven boardinghouses in the region.

One source for the researcher was postcards, many of which are part of the exhibit. “Hotels would issue dozens of postcards,” Malatzky said. “Businesses issued them.” Once, it was advertising; now it is documentation of a long-gone way of life.

Vanishing lake

One of those postcard-generating hotels was at Mount Hope Lake; lakes around here drew hotels like food drew flies.

In his researches, Malatzky found a postcard **—Page 15**

Where will people stay?

Milk from local cows and the eggs from local chickens (not to mention a bunch of other agricultural ideas tried out over the years) could be shipped by rail to the city.

But the idea dawned that the real driver of the Ten Mile River economy could be tourism. “New York City was not a good place to live in the summer,” Malatzky said. “So you take a train out here.”

In fact, the Erie published guides every year, outlining rural delights for the country-hungry. In the country, you could get out on the water and fish (Ten Mile River was “a key trout stream,” Malatzky said). You could go on long walks, breathe clean air.

But where would people stay? Farmers spotted another

SCOUTS → Page 14

from 1906 featuring the lake and its hotel. Trouble was, he knew of no Mount Hope Lake.

Of course names change. But figuring out which lake had once been Mount Hope was a bit harder, especially given the differences in the landscape almost 120 years can bring. (Trees, numbers of; buildings, there and gone.)

But it was finally identified. The old Mount Hope Lake was now Turnpike Lake, not far from the scout museum itself.

Once you see images of the two lakes together, of course, it's pretty obvious even given the changes over time. "You can't deny the evidence," Malatzky said.

"It's so beautiful," he continued. "You'd think you were in the Adirondacks."

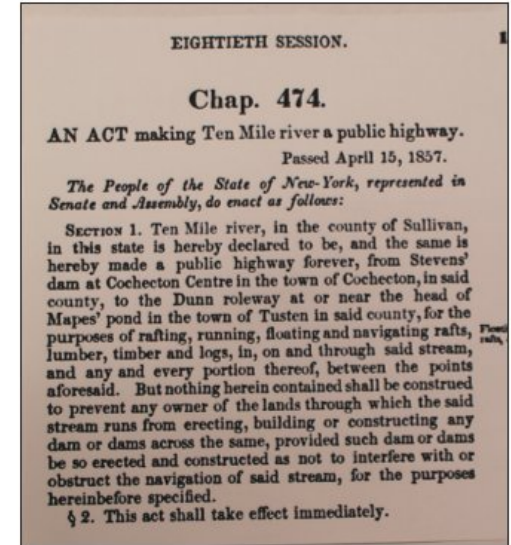
Mount Hope Lake, its hotel and Ten Mile River past, he means. But there's still plenty of beauty, despite the changes, in Ten Mile River present. "You can't get more real than this," Malatzky said.

Go see it

The exhibit Before TMR opened along with the Ten Mile River Scout Museum on July 9, and will remain in place through the season. Museum hours are Sundays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Tuesday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, 1:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.; and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. The museum is closed on Mondays.



Part of the Before TMR exhibit. You can experience the whole thing at the Ten Mile River Scout Museum; it opened for the summer on July 9.



RR photo by Joe Cooke
The Ten Mile River becomes a public highway.

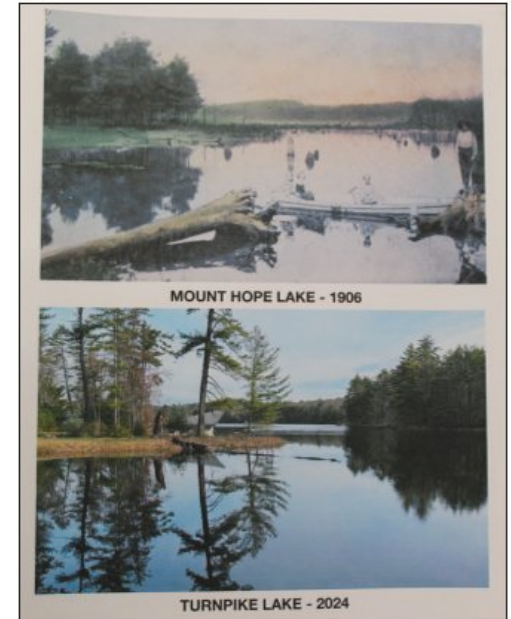


Image from Ten Mile River Scout Museum
Allow for the passage of time, and yes, Mount Hope Lake and Turnpike Lake look awfully alike.

Photo contributed by David Malatzky