

Along the Outlet of Keuka Lake

by

Frances Dumas

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The Penn Yan Waterfront

Part Two

The area between Lake Street and the Outlet has been a mixed residential and industrial neighborhood for a long time; since the very first settlement on the Outlet's banks, in fact.

When in 1794 David Wagener bought Lewis Birdsall's sawmill and dam—and incidentally the major part of what today constitutes the village of Penn Yan—he was presumably looking for a good site for a grist mill. He continued to operate the sawmill and began construction of a new gristmill on the outlet's south bank just below the dam. This mill was opened for business in 1796 and, with improvement, continued until its destruction by fire in 1913.

David Wagener built a home for himself and his family somewhere near his mill. It is said to have been located at first near where Abraham Wagener erected the Mansion House, and later moved several times. It was undoubtedly a log structure, perhaps augmented by sawn planks manufactured in his mill. He died in 1799 and left his property on the south bank to his younger son Melchior for the support of his mother.

In 1800, the census-taker found David Wagener's widow and his younger son in separate households on the south bank of the Outlet.

Melchior Wagener apparently lived near the south end of the milldam in a small square house that was later added to several times. It was painted white and dominated nineteenth-century photographs of the lower end of Main Street.

In 1812, Wagener gave up the growing competition with his brother and sold the property he had inherited from his father plus other lots he'd acquired to Jeremiah Jillett. In 1815 Jillett built a big house across the street from the old one. When Jillett died and his complicated estate was finally settled in 1847, his extensive property was divided among his numerous descendants.

The old house fell to the portion of one of Jeremiah's sons, Samuel Jillett; the adjacent lot settled on a daughter, Clarissa Jillett.

Before his death, in 1829, Jeremiah had sold the remainder of the parcel between the bridges to Erastus Page.

Neither Samuel nor Clarissa Jillett wasted any time selling their lots. The old house changed hands several times in a couple of years and was eventually sold to Amasa Tuell, who among other accomplishments ran a popular hotel and bar on Elm Street. The Tuell

family lived there, until long after Amasa's death, finally selling it to Delia Bullock of Barrington in 1879. It was rented out by several successive owners and was still standing as late as 1897.

Clarissa Jillett sold her lot to local harness-maker Abner Bridgeman, who built a house and lived there some years. The property had been subdivided so many times by 1865 that between his house and Mrs. Tuell's in that year lay two private dwellings, a cooperage and a carpenter shop.

The carpenter shop was owned and operated by English-born James Clatworthy, who built a double house on his lot that remained for nearly a century.

Down toward the Liberty Street end of the parcel stood at least two houses, one on the corner that belonged to the Darling family and another occupied in 1865 by John Anderson. This latter was a brick structure erected by Gilbert Baker, using native brick from the yard across Lake Street. This brickyard boasted a large pond formed by damming the creek that flowed into the Outlet behind Abner Bridgeman's, and provided material for most of the mid-century brick buildings in the village.

The cooperage was operated by several sets of partners starting with Darius Ogden and Barney Boardman (who was distilling brandy from apple juice further upstream) and finally ending with John S. and Morris F. Sheppard who ran it from 1869 until 1904.

It's difficult for modern shoppers to fully realize the importance of barrels to the nineteenth-century economy. Nearly everything that was shipped in bulk was packed into barrels and literally millions of them were built in the factories along the Outlet's banks. In 1870 this particular one, powered by a steam engine, used 400 cords of elm, 300 cords of basswood, 300 cords of oak and 20 cords of ash to produce a million staves, 200,000 heads and 20,000 complete barrels. By 1875 the gross annual earning had doubled to \$40,000. The Sheppard brothers employed eight men and two boys in their plant; M. B. Miller & Co.'s planing mill on the same premises manufactured sash and blinds with the help of fifteen men and four women.

The buildings were of course full of inflammable materials. The same year of 1875 saw a disastrous fire; another in 1884 not only consumed the large frame structure that contained the cooperage and planing mill but three small tenement houses across the street. Only two weeks after the fire John Sheppard was announcing his intention of rebuilding in a fireproof brick structure.

The Sheppards gradually accumulated several of the house lots along Lake Street and sold the whole parcel in 1909 to their nephew William M. Patteson. Patteson acquired more of the lots, and eventually built the large Walker Bin Co. plant around the former cooperage and planing mill.

In 1902 a new patent bin for the safe, clean display of bulk grocery goods was shown to Patteson by J. J. Walker of Philadelphia. By the time World War I started the company had salesmen in every large city in the country and brought more outside money into the

village than any other concern. At that time it employed more the 90 men and in addition provided a ready market for much of the locally-cut timber.

The substantial brick buildings at the plant's core became familiar to village residents and stood until the successor firm, Walkerbilt, moved to new quarters on North Avenue in 1970.

By that time the village of Penn Yan had acquired all but the corner lot on Liberty Street. This was sold to Garrett & Co. in 1918. By this time a large fruit storage warehouse had already replaced the Darling house and was being leased by local fruit brokers such as William N. Wise and McMath Brothers. The warehouse was replaced by a filling station in 1962.

Now all the buildings are gone except the restaurant that eventually replaced the Liberty Street filling station. The village acquired most of the parcel during the 1960's as part of its Urban Renewal program, sold the former site of Melchoir Wagener's house for a parking lot and added the abandoned railroad right of way to its holdings in the 1980's. The property is now part of the village's park system and the Outlet Trail passes along its entire length.

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<http://keukaoutlettrail.org/>

Or you can also contact us at: Friends of the Outlet, Inc., PO Box 65, Dresden, NY 14441. Please support the Trail and give generously to maintain and develop this beautiful historic and recreational Trail!