

## THE WORLD COMES KNOCKING: 1900-1940

An expressed isolationism coupled with decreasing notice of out-of-county news and issues was ironically coupled during the first half of the twentieth century with a rapidly increasing dependence on "foreign" markets for local agricultural and industrial products, huge new influxes of tourists and summer residents, and the two hammer blows of worldwide war.

Whether Yates County wanted it or not - and evidently it did not - stronger and stronger ties with the outside world were being forged all the time.

A short history of the Middlesex Valley school district written in 1938 to celebrate the dedication of the new central school has successive sections on the early twentieth century entitled: "The Golden Age;" "The Great War;" "From Depression to Depression;" and "The Crash." A not uneventful era.

The county continued to industrialize. In 1918, the three large basket factories in Penn Yan took in beech, maple and elm stock from Pennsylvania and the depleted local hills and turned out enough baskets to fill 500 railroad cars. Three hundred of these were filled with bushel baskets made by Barden & Robeson, who also produced diamond market baskets, celery baskets and apple and potato crates. Yates Lumber Co. produced 6,500,000 baskets of all kinds and Guile & Windnagle more than 7,000,000.

Other factories in Penn Yan and elsewhere produced paper, bus bodies, clothing, canned goods, fruit juice, vinegar and wine, boats, brass door hardware, electrical conduit, shoes and other items.

The twentieth century was ushered in by high farm prices and the introduction of new farm industries: the raising of beans for drying and field crops like cabbages and peas for processing; and large-scale fruit-drying. All over the county but particularly at markets and railheads new elevators, storehouses and other agricultural/industrial structures were being built; not to mention the processing facilities themselves, canneries, evaporators, sauerkraut factories and so on.

The shift to true dairy farming took place during the 1920s. An ad run by the Seneca Milk Products Co. relegates the traditional methods to the limbo of "old customs and out-of-date practices." The ad tells farmers they can't afford to continue separating cream or making butter "when the Milk Shipping Station pays you more for your milk.... We offer you a fixed market every day in the year, a bigger price than you can get by selling your cream alone, and we save you the drudgery of separating and butter making. ASK YOUR WIFE ABOUT IT."

The best market ever for dried apples stoked evaporator fires all over the region. The apples were dried, barrelled and shipped to Germany and to German immigrants in the United States, a market that was destroyed by our entry into World War I.

The years before the war saw rural mail delivery and telephone service introduced to remote areas. They also saw the almost complete depopulation of marginal hillside farms. The steep little fields that once grew rye and barley were now given over to sheep pasture.

The 1920s were not good times for farmers nationwide. The artificially high wartime price structures collapsed, taxes increased with higher demand for services, and the grange movement - reborn after the turn of the century - yielded to the new Farm Bureaus.

As farm production increased, ironically enough, farm population dropped sharply. New opportunities in towns and easier transportation brought a labor crisis on the nation's farms that was answered by more expensive and efficient machinery. As hill farms like those in Italy and Middlesex - unsuitable for mechanized farming - were abandoned, the population of villages with manufacturing jobs (like Penn Yan) increased and that of the county as a whole dropped to lows unmatched since the early settlement days. From a high in 1880 of 21,087 the number of people in Yates County fell in 1900 to 20,318, and in 1920 bottomed out at 16,641. Population levels would not break 20,000 again until the 1970s.

In 1915, the employment picture in a rural township like Barrington was intimately tied to farming. Of the town's 1017 people 314 were farmers or farm laborers, 299 were housewives, 162 were school-age children and 156 were either too young or too old to list an occupation. This left 86 people, fewer than one percent of the total, to make their livings as carpenters (9), teachers (14), highway labor (7), clerks (2), and machinery salesman, painter, superintendent of schools, preacher, barrel factory manager, baker and junkman (1 each). Almost all adult women were homemakers (which meant on a farm that they did a great deal of farmwork, particularly that part of it having to do with the animals). Seven of the teachers, one clerk, a hospital attendant and the barrel factory manager (Hester Rapalee, 42, head of her household) were women.

The same year in the fourth election district in Milo, a working-class residential area in Penn Yan and outside the village along the Keuka Lake Outlet, the employment picture was very different. The district had somewhat fewer people, 841, but an immensely more varied job market. More than 120 different jobs were listed on the census, with only 16 farmers and 12 farm laborers. Factory workers had jobs making paper, shoes, baskets, store fixtures, glass and chemicals. The railroad, state highways and the village streets occupied many laborers. Men worked as coopers, teamsters, barbers, chauffeurs, engineers, blacksmiths, harnessmakers, bus drivers, cigar makers and telephone linemen, among others. Women had their pick of about 30 occupations (besides the omnipresent housework); among them were telephone operators, nurses, dressmakers, basketmakers, bookkeepers, laundresses and store clerks. By this time, in other words, to the traditional female jobs having to do with food and clothing had been added those of the office and hospital. A few women were entrepreneurs; some dry goods stores, lunchrooms and grocery stores had female proprietors.

Polarization between village and rural populations was perhaps inevitable even in a small place like Yates County. In 1920 the *Penn Yan Democrat* endorsed the Grange movement's opposition to introducing the 44-hour week among industrial workers: It saw "no reason why its members should slave long hours, seven days a week, to supply cheap food to the other workers of the country, who enjoy short hours and unlimited opportunity for rest and pleasure."

By 1925 women's sphere had enlarged. The Michaels Stern clothing plant in Penn Yan not only hired many female workers but several "foreladies" are also recorded. Workers in other factories, particularly the food-processing plants, were largely female. Some post offices had postmistresses in charge, and there were a few female rural mail carriers. Women in Milo (the most industrialized town in the county) were linotype operators, doctors, newspaper editors, telegraphers, undertakers and musical producers (Julia Vail Cole, married to musician Frank A. Cole).

Perhaps the great moral crusade of the first half of the century was prohibition. The Women's Christian Temperance Union had a chapter in Penn Yan that worked tirelessly right through the whole period, first instituting and then defending the Great Experiment. By the time the Eighteenth Amendment went into effect, Yates County was already dry.

A vivid article in the *Penn Yan Democrat* describes the scene during the last days before the national amendment went into effect. The local wineries were almost literally giving away their inventory; and since Yates County residents were forbidden by law to buy alcoholic beverages, "while this saturnalia was at its height local people were handicapped." They had to watch while special trains from Rochester brought hundreds of thirsty strangers into town; "The Penn Yan-Geneva bus made special trips, motor coaches and horse-drawn vehicles were pressed into service and the big wine stock disappeared with great rapidity." Suitcases were filled with booty and borne away against the drought to come. "And that is how National Prohibition came to Penn Yan, the capital of the first all-dry County in this great Empire state."

Of course, even "the first all-dry County" slipped up occasionally. In May 1917 whiskey raids were made on Ettore Sciore's store and Hugo Bristol's meat market, both on East Elm Street in Penn Yan. Bristol was held in lieu of \$1000 bail for selling two bottles of illegal whiskey to Fred Corey of Potter. The *Chronicle* complained in 1921 about the by-then-chronic violation of the Eighteenth Amendment throughout the state. "We have nothing to do with the policy or wisdom of the law.... The honest enforcement of the law may lead to its modification, [while] the tolerated disobedience of it can only breed disorder and create contempt for all law."

Naturally, a grape-growing region provided many opportunities for evasion. John McMath later wrote how "a wartime measure went into effect which allowed each member of the family to to make 250 gallons of wine for home consumption. As many people of old country descent at that time had large families, they were able to make up quite a large amount..., which had the tendency to make bootleggers out of hundreds of people. With these people it was their custom to have wine with their meals that same as we do our tea and coffee because that is what they were used to for generations. This naturally created a big demand for bulk grapes."

The *Democrat*, with its largely "wet" foreign-born constituency, stressed stories of people blinded by drinking bad homemade booze and worried about the movement's effect on the local grape industry. The *Chronicle-Express*, descended from generations of liquor-reform papers, derided such backsliding and stoutly defended Prohibition until and even after its repeal. Local option kept the county basically dry for decades.

Both papers supported the right of women to vote, to the point where it was taken entirely for granted. A 1909 debate at Penn Yan Academy over equal suffrage was won by the girls. The presidential election of 1924 evoked the comment (presumably as an attempt to garner votes) from the *Penn Yan Democrat's* editorialist that "Republican championship of the woman voter was late, reluctant and unimportant." Mrs. George Welker was elected to the position of village trustee in Dresden in 1927 with less apparent comment than the efforts of the state to enforce observance of Daylight Savings Time over the strong - not to say hysterical - objections of organized farm groups.

Purveyors of patent medicines continued their shameless pursuit of the credulous. A 1909 endorsement for Doan's Kidney Pills from Mrs. C. W. Palmer of Liberty Street In Penn Yan read: "My back was so weak that I was only able to do the lightest work about the house. The kidney secretions were unnatural and caused me much inconvenience. I was languid, depressed and had but little ambition." The pills evidently fixed her right up. In 1917, ads promoting TSB Liverclean (manufactured by T. S. Burns, formerly of Penn Yan, now of Buffalo) claimed that "95 percent of all illnesses are caused by failure of the stomach, liver and kidneys to properly perform their function." Again, all that was needed was faithful adherence to the advertised regimen (and presumably a strong faith as well that it would work).

The War, the farm depression that followed it and the general depression that arrived at the end of the 1920s brought the world home even to remote rural areas; they were becoming less remote all the time.

The takeover of transportation by the internal-combustion engine (not to mention the revolution it engendered in farm machinery) changed the face of the county, even as it changed the face of the nation. It was said later that a horseless carriage was seen on Penn Yan's streets - and demonstrated at the fairgrounds to a curious public - as early as the 1880s. But the first car actually owned by a county resident was evidently the Maxwell bought in 1903 by Dr. A. T. Halstead of Rushville. An extant photograph shows him proudly at the wheel, his Gilbert Street home in the background.

Soon garages and filling stations began to appear in villages, hamlets and at crossroads. One by one blacksmith shops closed or were converted. Teamsters and harnessmakers stayed in business right through the period, but in smaller and smaller numbers. The state began a road improvement program in 1912 and continued to upgrade and pave the narrow rural highways. Penn Yan paved Jacob Street so salesmen arriving at the Northern Central's depot wouldn't immediately be confronted by the seas of mud which so characterized the nineteenth-century village. By the 1920s, Elm Street, Maiden Lane - known earlier only half-humorously as the "Slough of Despond" - Main and East Main were paved and others were added each year.

Used-car lots appeared immediately. In 1918 E. L. Geer's garage was advertising a "Once in a Lifetime Sale of Used Automobiles, including a number of late models.... Can use in payment any kind of Livestock or Liberty Bonds at par, or on time payment plan." Then there were establishments like Merrill Beach's Auto Livery in Penn Yan, with six state-licensed chauffeurs, flat rates to suburban points and a choice of open or enclosed cars.

The automobile brought problems as well. A 1917 editorial bemoaned "continual" violation of Penn Yan speed limits. "It is not unusual to see a car speeding at a 30 or 40 mile clip up or down Main Street. The wonder is someone has not been killed or maimed." In 1930 there were the sinister "Cross-Roads Dance Halls" to warn against: "We wonder if all rural people realize what a menace the country dance halls are to our farm and country village young people. We do not believe in being narrow minded. We have no objection to dancing when conducted in the right way and under the right auspices, but we have no hesitation in emphatically condemning the average country dance hall. Many of them sell booze, or at least make no effort to stop its use on their premises. No attempt either is made to close the places at decent hours; nor is there any proper supervision of the young people either on the floors while dancing, or about the darkened premises, or in the parked cars surrounding the place."

Hand-in-hand with faster and easier transportation was the growth in the tourist and recreation industry. During the latter part of the nineteenth century the great resort hotels flourished and some of the county's homes had been converted to summer dwellings for the out-of-county rich. The opening of the electric railroad in 1898 between Penn Yan and Branchport sent up the building rate along the trolley route and the lakeshore of the west branch at a skyrocket pace. Cottage City was developed in Middlesex and by the 1930s the east side of Keuka Lake was starting to fill up. Summer camps were started by the YMCA and other groups; the Country Club and the Keuka Yacht Club were in full bloom; and the Finger Lakes Association was advertising throughout the region to bring in tourists. Penn Yan was "a clean up-to-date town free of the liquor curse," ideal for retiring city folks.

Electricity was introduced into the villages and countryside during the '20s. A 1921 article describing the expansion of the Yates Electric Light & Power Co.'s generating power on the Keuka Lake Outlet asks, "How long, it is only to guess, will it be before all farm houses on the main lines will be able to do away with the tallow dip and kerosene lamp? Then the farmer can equip his home with electric driven machinery and the housewife will no more churn by hand, run her sewing machine by foot power or even wash dishes in the good old way. And who knows but the milking can be done by turning on a switch?"

New concrete highways in place of primeval mud made travel into the country easy for the first time. Recreational development accelerated, with the limited and precious lakefront bearing much of the burden.

The Crash of 1929 and the depression that followed it scarred Yates County as it did other places. The effects were not felt immediately, but by 1932, as one local commentator put it, the agricultural "price list was a cruel joke." Terrible weather finished off what the faltering economy missed; drought, Arctic cold (most of the county's apple trees were killed in 1934), floods in 1935 and the ice storm of 1936 must have left local farmers wondering how they'd offended heaven.

An ad run on 7 November 1929 - only a week after the Crash - by Baldwin's Bank put the blame squarely on the hyperinflated stock market: "Most of the people who lost in the recent Panic were those who ran into debt without an adequate cash reserve to protect themselves, and were then sold out in an

unwilling market." The solution was to increase the size of one's deposits.

By January 1929 *The Chronicle-Express* was bravely noting that farmers were bound to benefit from the "stock slump" because the farm labor and mortgage supply would increase, prices would drop and the demand for staple products would then rise. In May 1932 the local American Legion posts declared a "War on Depression," with members calling door to door: "There are many things which you have postponed doing, until a later date, which has caused the depression. You will be asked to DO IT NOW and put some unemployed person to work."

Of course the paper supported Hoover in that year's election on the "Why Swap Horses?" principle. FDR's election would be "a most dangerous experiment" - he was linked to "radical alliances, tariff reduction and a record of extravagance." A full page ad ran November 3, "Vote Safe, Vote Republican." Interestingly, the *Chronicle*, which hadn't had to criticize a president in a long time, completely dropped its locally-written editorial after the election.

At the same time, the first horseless farms appeared (though draft horses remained popular, especially during the Second World War, when rationing cut back on farm - and other - mechanization). Automation struck in other areas of modern life: "Ask your doctor about washday," advised *The Family Wash* on Penn Yan's Lake Street in 1932. "Family doctors know that a washtub often is the barrier to a woman's health and happiness. Why endure this strain on strength and vitality? Try the Laundry way. Just gather the soiled clothes ... telephone us ... and washday is over!"

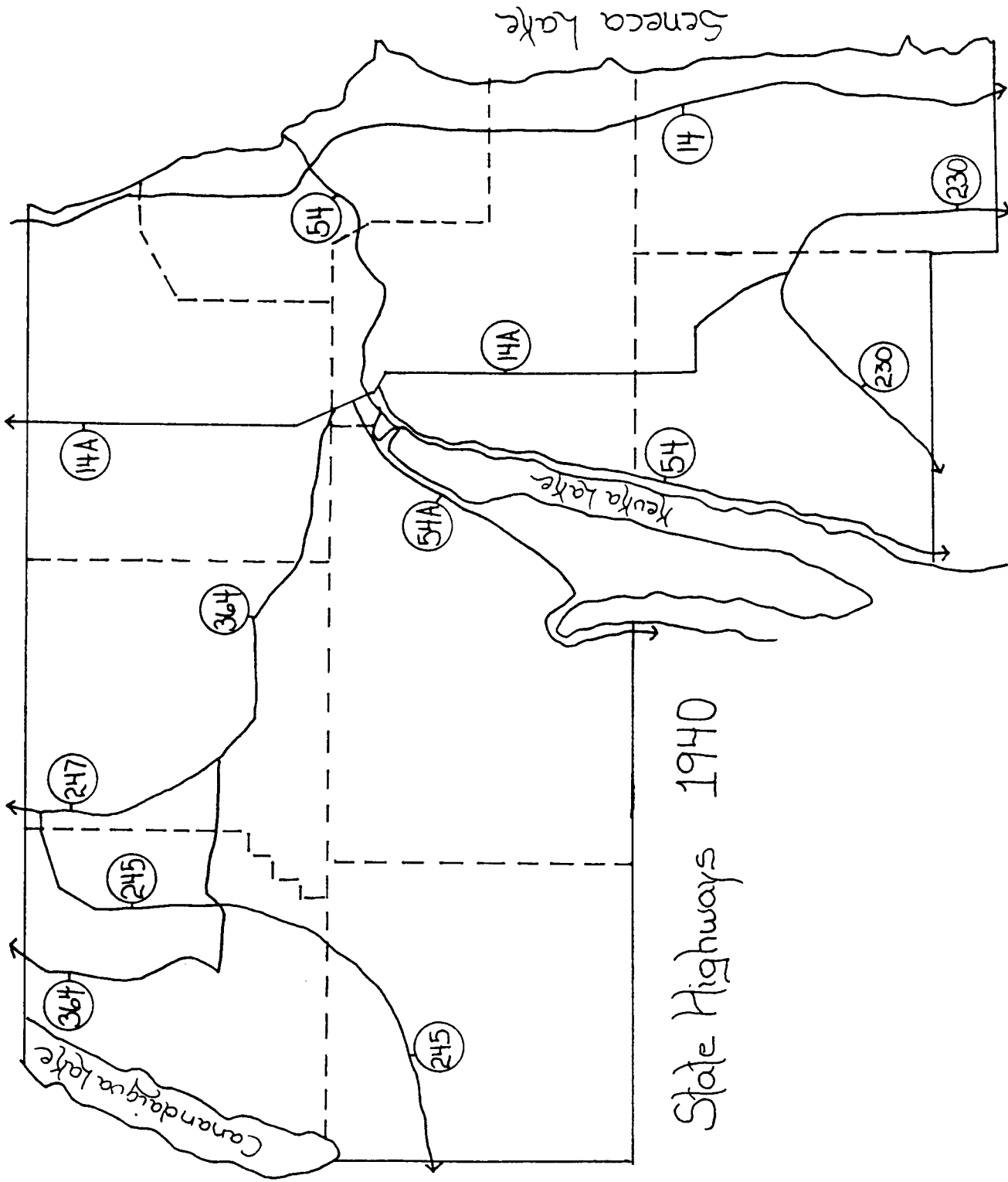
The end of the 1930s saw the first centralized school districts. The handsome school buildings erected in Dundee and in Middlesex near Rushville at that time are still in use. In 1920 New York was the 27th state to pass a law mandating eight-hour part-time schooling for children 14-16, many of whom, of course, were gainfully employed. *The Chronicle* expressed the hope that employers wouldn't dock the children's pay while they were in school, especially if they "found children in their employ not fitted for the struggle for a livelihood." In 1932, however, the paper opposed a new state unemployment plan that would have raised the minimum age for obtaining working papers, on the grounds that it would inevitably increase the number of children in school and hence the cost to the taxpayer of educating them.

The period saw the proliferation of the bungalow-style house, often very well-made and especially so in an area like Yates County where so many people were professional woodworkers.

Most other early-twentieth-century residential styles passed the county by. Some good examples of Tudor and Colonial Revival houses were built. Some public buildings that were erected at this time - the two central schools mentioned above, the (then) Junior High School in Penn Yan, Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hospital (though now obscured by ungainly additions) - have a pleasant monumental dignity.

The period as a whole was characterized by rapid technological change; and, oddly (considering the economic front and recurring war), a great deal of optimism. Perhaps it was a case of the present being so bleak that the future

couldn't help but be better; but it's hard to discern much self-pity in the contemporary analysis. Evidently most people still felt there wasn't much so very wrong that it couldn't eventually be put right.





The new century brought technological advance but the county's builders preferred for the most part to adhere to the older styles with which they felt comfortable. This building housed the new gas works in Penn Yan in 1899.

## BARRINGTON: 1900-1940

The gaudiest era in the town's history ended just after the turn of the century when the fourth and last Crystal Spring Hotel burned; its timbers were salvaged for building several cottages on Keuka Lake. A whole community had built up around the spa, including a church (which was the last building to survive; it was torn down in the early 1940s).

The industrial complex at Dogtown was still going strong, however; in 1909 the basket factory was operating night and day. In 1911 John C. Rapalee died and his wife Hetty Hamilton Rapalee took over - everyone called her "Hester," a pet name bestowed by her husband. Not only did she operate the extensive mills but she was the town's tax collector and the first woman in New York State to be elected to the position of town constable, in 1927. Mrs. Rapalee's first campaign for tax collector was against a local clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Hemmingway. The vote was a tie, broken just before the polls closed by Mrs. Rapalee's son. She served three terms and added the constable's job during her fourth, to make collecting taxes easier.

In 1907 the Barrington Grange reorganized (it had made an abortive start in the 1870s) and began holding meetings in the old Edward Powlison hotel building at Warsaw; this had been the Manassas Junction tavern, begun in 1860 and acquiring its martial name a couple of years later. The building was torn down in 1954, when the new Grange Hall was erected a little farther south.

The hamlet of Crosby was about at the end of its brief boom, which began when Joseph Crosby planted his vineyard and built a steamboat dock; peaked near the turn of the century with two basket factories, a feed mill, a blacksmith and repair shop, a feed store and a general store; and more or less declined after the sale of the Finton sawmill and basket factory to C. E. Guile, who moved the operation to Penn Yan. Railroad access to markets was much more important by then than the steamboats; and was about to be superseded in turn by the automobile.

The advent of paved roads and easy access by automobiles brought the tourist industry to Barrington in the form of summer homes built along the town's long lake frontage. When Route 54 was rerouted in the late 1930s it left much more developable land along the shore and this was exploited fully. A few of the summer places achieved distinction; "Willowood," owned by William Leffingwell of the Glen Springs Hotel in Watkins Glen, was visited by Theda Bara and Mary Pickford.

Camp Arey was founded by Professor Jonathan Arey as a natural science camp for boys and later was operated as a fresh air camp for girls. Residents still remember meeting the girls riding horses along the back roads; riding was one of the camp's featured pastimes. Still later Camp Arey was acquired along with an adjacent 1000 acres or so (including the spectacular waterfalls in Eggleston Glen) by the Rockefeller brothers as a retreat for their corporate executives.

At the end of the 1930s the state and county roads through the town were improved, but none of the town roads were paved, and a map made in 1939 shows many vacant and abandoned farms. The Methodist Church, moved in

1879 from its first location at Porter's Corners, was torn down in 1927, leaving only the old Baptist Church (now the Barrington Community Church). The town's sole remaining business was a gas station at Warsaw that was housed in the old Bull Run hotel building; Ray Warren was the owner, and also sold a small line of groceries. The town's residents voted in an upstairs room. The building burned in 1962.

Barrington was the home during this period of several "resorts." Frank and Augustus Meeks ran Orchard Park on Route 14A (now John Green Road) north of Porter's Corners. One of the town's first gas stations, plus groceries, a lunchroom, overnight cabins and a very popular dance hall were there. Delos Bellis had a grocery, billiard parlor and dance hall on Route 54 north of Bellis Hill Road. The Log Cabin Park was on Route 14A across from where the Windmill is now - groceries, gasoline, a machine shop and picnic area were among the offerings.



New structures were built for the increasingly large recreational tourist segment of the economy. Orchard Park in Barrington held several buildings, of which only this one (above) remains. The town's lakefront began to be built up as access improved. "Willowood" (below) on East Lake Road was owned by William Leffingwell of Watkins Glen.

BARRINGTON

1916

More than 300 of the town's 500 or so male residents were either farmers or farm laborers in 1915. Only 10 listed themselves as vineyardists, and it seems clear that the grape boom was receding as World War I approached.

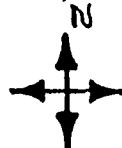
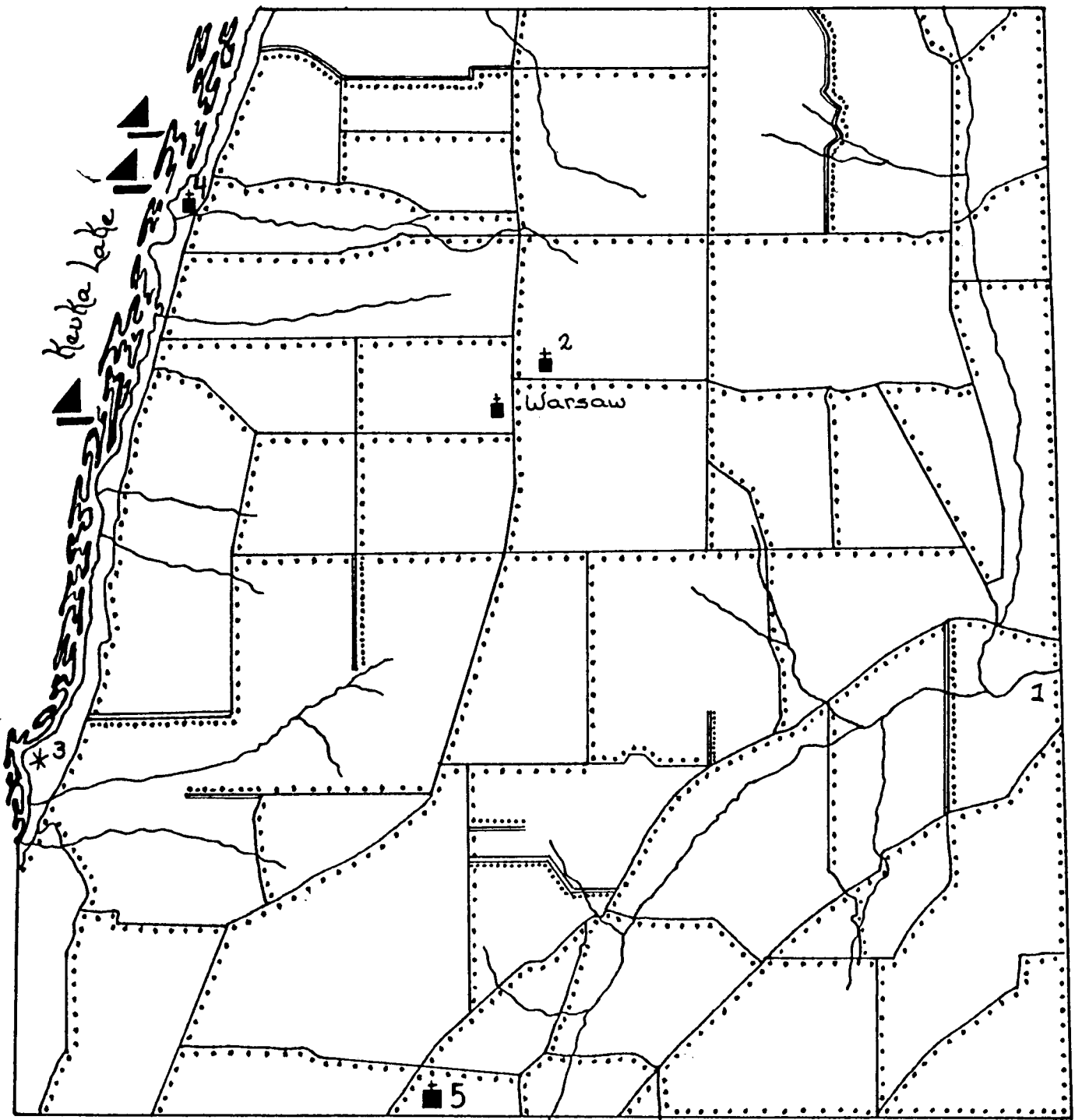
Almost all adult women listed their occupation as "housework." Annie Buckle was a farmer, and Hester Rapalee managed the family mills at Dogtown; both women were the heads of their respective households. Other women in the town made their livings as clerks, nurses, teachers, servants; there was also a single stenographer.

The town counted immigrants from ten different countries, though no more than a few came from each. Most were farmers and farm laborers, housewives and school children. The only exception was a Swedish-born junkman.

The industrial activity at Dogtown (1) reached its peak during the years before World War I, while Mrs. Rapalee was running the operation.

The Methodist chapel (2) had been moved to Warsaw from Porter's Corners by this time. It closed in 1927. The Baptist Church (now the Barrington Community Church) still holds services, as does the Crosby Church (4). The Crystal Spring church (5) was razed in the 1940s.

Camp Arey (3) was a natural science camp for boys on Eggleston Point. It's now a seasonal trailer park.



Barrington  
1916

⊠	churches
⋮	road
▲	landing
⋮⋮	Secondary Road