

The History of the Silver Lake Association (SLA) Chapter #1

This story is a series of chapters that contains information about the history of the Silver Lake Association. The story supports why this association is so important to the watershed community. The information also confirms how a group of inspired property owners volunteered to change the environment of the whole lake community. Being a volunteer myself for almost 30 years, what I discovered going through all the SLA archives was so intriguing, so captivating, I had to reveal this information to everyone who enjoys Silver Lake and the lake community activities.

This first chapter is about the history of Silver Lake itself. The chapters in the following issues of the Perry Herald, will be about the history of the Silver Lake Association starting from its inception in 1961 when it filed for a Certificate of Incorporation as the ***Silver Lake Cottage Owners Association, Inc. (SLCOA)***

The Silver Lake history will be noted so you can visualize the era of the Seneca Indians and the first settlers in the Silver Lake region and how important Silver Lake was to them. The goal is embracing the efforts of this volunteer organization. The information is being gathered from the recorded meeting minutes of the SLA, and from articles in available issues of the Silver Lake Directories and the Silver Lake Vacation Guides throughout the years. I hope you enjoy the history of an organization that, over the past 55+ years has been the caretaker of Silver Lake and its lake community.

The following passage is an abbreviated history about Silver Lake. The story was copied from a 1970 Silver Lake Directory which gave credit to a 1952 Silver Lake Directory published by J.N. Schenck.

Silver Lake, about 3 ½ miles long and from ½ to ¾ of a mile wide, so geologists tell us, was once the smallest and westernmost of a long array of former gorges excavated by water before the glacial period, then deepened and widened by the grinding ice and transformed into a lake when its original outlet was dammed up. Today it is about 4 miles west and several hundred feet above the Genesee River.

The Indian name, Ga-na'-yat applies particularly to the outlet of Silver Lake and in Seneca tongue means a sort of kvetching entanglement; the nearest word in English being "trap". Ga-na'-yat was the name of the old Indian fishing village located on both sides of the present road leading across the outlet, on the site of the present cemetery, between the cemetery and the lake and on the field side of the road.

The late Seneca Historian, Simeon Skye, related that it was this village of Ga-na'-yat where, long ago, three Seneca scouts remained overnight on their mission from Canandaigua Lake to locate better hunting grounds for their increasing population. They followed the sun west to the Tonawanda Creek where they built a raft or canoe and went down the Tonawanda, portaged at Indian Falls, and selected the site of the present Tonawanda Indian reservation.

The Indian legend of the Silver Lake monster, as has been related by old Seneca's and which largely inspired the enterprising Mr. Walker and Mr. Gillett to produce their serpent hoax, was not a serpent, but instead, a large animal resembling a giant blood-sucker. The legend is too long to relate here but it involves two Indian villages, one where the Country Club is on the west, and one on Walker Grounds on the east. Each was near the shore, but each moved back a considerable distance from the shore. These village locations are borne out by archaeological research and somewhat supports the truth of the legend.

To a certain extent this superstition should have been exploded around the year 1790, when Horatio Jones, colorful woodsman who had been captured when young by the Seneca's, safely swam across from the west side to fetch some canoes from the eastern shore. His bravery increased his prestige considerably for he was believed to bear a charmed life.

Historically, Silver Lake came into its own when Lt. Richard Bishop, a scout from Sullivan's 1779 invasion of the Genesee Valley, moved up the outlet into the present town of Perry almost to the east corporation line. Little did he realize that he was the soldier of the Revolution who came furthest west in New York State in any campaign. Later he became a resident of the town and is buried in Hope Cemetery. Turner, in his "Pioneer History of the Phelps and Gorham Purchase," says that Ebenezer Allan erected in 1792 on the outlet in what is now the county of Livingston, the first saw mill west of the Genesee River and from this mill came the first boards in all the upper valley of the Genesee. It was raised with the help of the Indians for the want of the white men in the region. This was the forerunner of many a wheel turned by the water of Silver Lake.

Samuel Gates, Perry's first permanent settler, in the spring of 1807, erected his cabin on the hill overlooking the northwest end of this body of water. Three years were to pass before the arrival of Amos Otis into the same area; his wife, Louisa Davison, was the first white child born in Genesee County. Early references to the lake call it "Little Lake" and describe it as a

“pretty sheet of water.” Levi Silver came to town from Vermont in 1815, after his brother-in-law, Capt, Peter Atwood, whose wife was Abigail Silver, had previously settled near what is now the lake. Mr. Silver, his wife, and nine children took up residence in the west part of Perry and there operated a noted inn called “Silver Inn.” By the early 1830’s, the body of water was recorded as Silver Lake, a name doubtless prompted from the name of these settlers and the beauty of the waters. To this hour, when light conditions are just right and the waters are calm, a silvery sheen spreads across its glasslike surface. Visitors often comment on its singular beauty at such times. Further, the fact that its outlet and inlet are so near one another has provoked interest.

From the very time of settlement Silver Lake continued a fishing spot. Bass, pickerel, muskellunge, whitefish, perch, and bullheads were taken out by means of nets, spears, or guns. Wagon loads were carted away. It has been said that the pioneers restocked with species from Lake Erie. About its shores were groves of trees which the landowners had permitted to remain although most of today’s larger trees were planted sixty or seventy years ago. These early groves attracted the hunter of squirrel and partridge, parties of children seeking spring flowers, picnickers, and in the autumn nutting parties seeking the chestnut, hickory, and butternut. Boat loads of pleasure seekers have piled in its waters for more than a century.