

THE WOODBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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HIGHLAND MILLS, NY 10930

(845) 928 6770

Open during the following times each week: Tues. 2-4pm; Thurs.

7-9pm; Sat. 10:30-12:30pm; or call for an appointment.

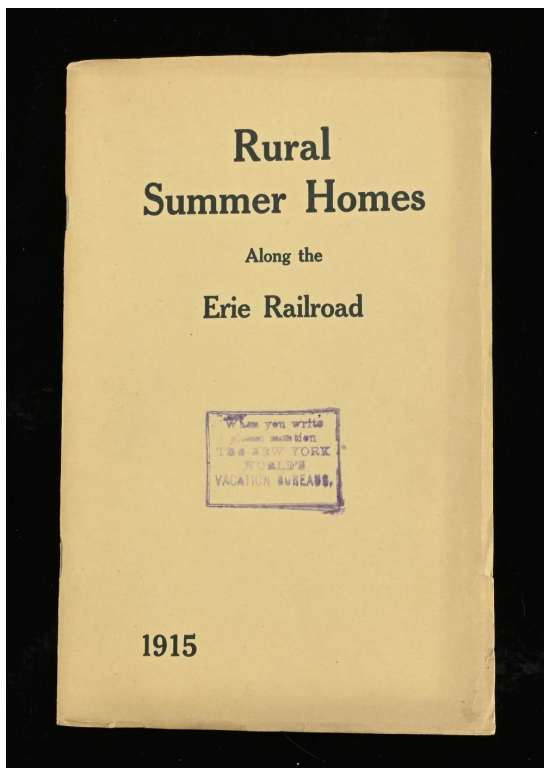
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Newsletter Editors: Alex Prizgintas, Leslie Rose, & Millicent Treloar.

SUMMERING IN WOODBURY DURING THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Millicent Treloar, Prior Research by Carmela Chase

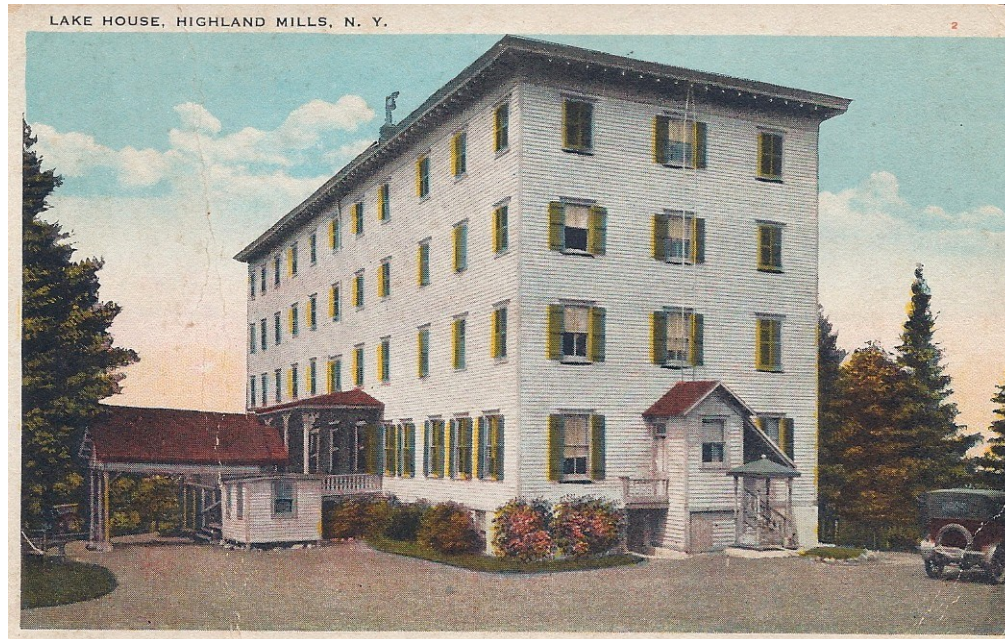
Contrary to some people's thoughts, Airbnb.com decidedly did not invent Bed and Breakfast establishments, "BnBs," a.k.a. B&Bs, or tourist short-term rentals of people's homes in the 21st century. Nor did Airbnb invent "platforms" to match vacationers with destination homeowners. The managers of much earlier companies, highly competitive for financing, helped to ignite these industries in the late 19th century as by-products of scaling-up their own business, railroads. Notably, no "disruption" of existing industries were part of the process.



Erie Railroad "Summer Homes"
Vacation Guide, Circa 1915.

The Erie Railroad was one of those corporations. Its main line (the 21st century's Heritage Trail) began functioning in Orange County in 1841. The railroad transported commercial goods such as milk and coal as well as passengers with stations along the line for embarkation (a networked platform infrastructure). Consequently, entrepreneurial residents near the stations enjoyed burgeoning prosperity as they started up a variety of passenger service businesses, such as lodgings, carriage transportation, tour guides, sundries, and food sources.

Though the relationship between the railroads and these local businesses was inherently existing, it quickly became a source of economic prosperity. In the decades of the late 19th century, the Erie and other local railroads created annual guidebooks (a platform for connecting users) that listed lodgings at passenger stops. Often titled as "Summer Homes" or "Vacation Guides," owners of farms and private homes with available rooms submitted applications for inclusion in the guidebook. Thus began the modern B&B and short-term rental trade.



Cromwell Lake House

Highland Mills, NY

In 1869, the Newburgh Shortcut of the Erie Railroad began operations between Vails Gate and Newburgh Junction at Turner's (today's Harriman) where it met up with the main line. The name "shortcut" implied its more direct connection to Newburgh compared to the Erie's older Newburgh Branch, which had been operating since 1850. While never known for many freight-carrying industries, the shortcut instead brought passenger traffic to the Hamlets of Central Valley, Highland Mills, and Woodbury Falls, as well as other municipalities up through the towns of Cornwall and New Windsor. Residents welcomed New York City "summer" travelers as they arrived on getaways to escape the city heat and partake of the peace and quiet and pure country air.

The 1888 guidebook edition, "Erie Railroad, Summer Homes," noted that the Shortcut passed through a portion of the Hudson Highlands. The booklet glowingly described the Highlands as the most beautiful and healthful country: "This range is cut with deep glens and valleys, and in its rocky crests it holds many a shimmering lake. Aside from the delightful scenery of the highland region and the historic [Revolutionary War -Ed.] interest attached to it, the experience of years has demonstrated the fact that the air which circulates among these hills and valleys is possessed of curative properties."

The guidebook provided a brief summary of train service to each of the passenger stops. It also described each municipality: population, churches, schools, and recreational activities. Swimming, fishing, boating, the like.

If you were planning a stay in any of these establishments, hiking and hunting drew guests to the Shortcut locales. The booklet also listed details about lodgings: names of establishments, proprietors, distances from the train station, costs for local transportation, the number of guest rooms, and rates for adults, children, and servants, livery facilities, and then Woodbury hamlets, you would pay a one-way train fare of \$1.45 from New York City. And, you could catch one of eight trains a day during the week to get you there. This is equivalent to just under

You had choices of places to stay to suit all budgets. If you wanted to relax at a large hotel with many amenities, you could pick the Summit Lake House in Central Valley with 52 rooms—argued to be one of the most luxurious establishments in Woodbury. While the hotel is long gone, its location today would be within the boundaries of Harriman State Park. It would set you back between \$10.50 and \$14 for adults* and \$7 for children and servants; “\$2 to \$3 per day,” \$5 for weekends. Or, you might want to stay in Highland Mills at the Cromwell Lake House. It had 70 rooms and cottages between \$8 and \$15 for adults; \$5 to \$8 for children; \$5 to \$7 for servants; about \$2.50 per day, and seasonal rates available. The adult rate is equal to about \$460 today.

Central Valley, Highland Mills, and Woodbury Falls all boasted an abundance of arrangements in people’s homes. Commonly, rates ranged between \$7 and \$12 for adults. You might be a guest at one of the better-known B&Bs (boarding houses and farms): in Central Valley (population 400), David Cornell, Mrs. George W. Weyant, Mrs. C.A. Noxon, or Maple Farm (10 in all); in Highland Mills (population 500), C.H. Townsend, Miss M. Cromwell, or Mrs. J.C. Cornell (8 in all); in Woodbury Falls (population 300), Maple Centre Farm, Mrs. M.R. Cornell, or George W. Hunter (6 in all).

*On a final note, clear delineation of weekly and daily rates and per/person or per/room rates, as we are accustomed to having today in the 21st century, do not appear in the 1888 Erie guide-book in the Woodbury Historical Society files. That 1888 book is missing pages at the beginning where such explanation would likely appear. However, the leading listed rates appear to be weekly, per person based on some instances of per day rates that are specified and some direct advertisements by similar hotels in neighboring communities close in time to 1888. For example, Mountain House in Monroe circa 1892 lists rates of \$2 to \$3 per day; \$8 to \$12 per week. Today, \$12 is equal to nearly \$400.



By the early 1920s, short-term B&B party rentals were available year-round, as advertised in this postcard advertisement from Brunner’s Lake View Inn of Highland Mills, NY.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, July 14th 2024. 2:00 PM: We are proud to announce the “soft opening” of the Gatehouse Museum & Historic Site for its first public event since 2019 by introducing local rail historian Ray Kelly to discuss the Wallkill Transit Company, an often overlooked aspect of local railroading history. A long-time member and officer of the Ontario & Western Railway Historical Society and a scholar of regional trolley lines, Ray's then-and-now program will allow attendees to view the former route and local impact of a railroad with few remaining traces today. This event will be held in the carriage house, located in the rear of the Gatehouse Historic Site. Due to the smaller size of this venue, we will be issuing RSVP notices and capping our audience at 30-40 attendees. **WHS members will get priority reservations before this event is open to the public, if you would like to attend, please call (845) 928-6770 or email woodbury1889@optonline.net.**

Saturday, July 27th 2024, 10:00-3:00: Opened in 1924, the historic Rushmore Memorial Library building served Highland Mills for more than fifty years until the construction of today's library building. **One hundred years after its completion, the Woodbury Historical Society invites you to an open house on Saturday, July 27th commemorating this anniversary.** On display will be more than one hundred years of history covering the Rushmore family, the history library building, and materials encouraging attendees to learn more about our region's rich local history.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

All I have to say is, WOW! The first showing of "Fifty Items that Tell the Story of Southeastern Orange County" was wildly successful, with over 250 in attendance. "History in Orange County is very much alive" according to Woodbury Historical Society president Alex Prizgintas, who recently hosted this event with ten historical societies. "Our goal was to come together to help define who we are as a community by bringing various artifacts that tell the story of Orange County." And come together they did! "I was impressed in how we created a chorus of like-minded agencies committed to preserving, presenting, and publishing our history." This first effort together was more of a "trial run" in getting others to invest in a shared vision. This year, we hosted ten historical societies. Next year, we would hope to see that number double. Eventually, the goal could be a dream of every community in Orange County coming together to celebrate our rich heritage. This excellent news is accompanied by some great donations to our collection, including two drums from the Hunter family that have been definitively tied to the Highland Mills Band through early photographs. Following this great find, we received a large donation from Larry Gobrecht, formerly of Mountainville, of early paperwork and postcards of Woodbury as well as multiple images of the town taken from airplane by Larry's father in 1953. All taken before the construction of the New York State Thruway, they are amazing views into the local past.

BEHIND THE IRON GATES: GATEHOUSE NEWS

As we enter the summer season, we are happy to report on several improvements from the Gatehouse Historic Site & Learning Center. Most notably, all of the walls on our first floor have been repainted which dramatically brightens the space for future exhibits. In addition, we are thankful to Felix Colon of Steam Masters Inc. who graciously donated his time to clean all of our carpets and linoleum floors. The difference from three years of disuse exceeded our expectations and we hope others who visit in the future will say the same. Heading into the summer, smaller jobs such as landscaping, window cleaning, and exhibit planning will continue. We are consistently looking for Woodbury Historical Society members to join our effort in getting The Gatehouse ready for the public. For those interested in this effort, please contact site chairperson Joanne Calore at jojo24.jb@gmail.com.



Right: “50 Items that Tell the Story of Southeastern Orange County,” held on April 28th, was a huge success for WHS. Including a total of ten organizations, more than 250 people attended.

Left: Members and officers from the Chester, Cornwall, Harriman, Highlands, Monroe, Tuxedo, Warwick, and Woodbury Historical Societies in addition to the Orange County Archaeological Chapter and the Orange County Genealogical Society gather to share local history on April 28th.



Right: 30 to 40 attendees joined us on May 19th to learn about local bees and native plants with Lisa Hintze, Richard Sullivan, and Dr. Anne Wibiralske.



Left: The Buildings and Grounds Department recently re-painted our New York State historic marker in preparation for the building's 100th anniversary in July.

