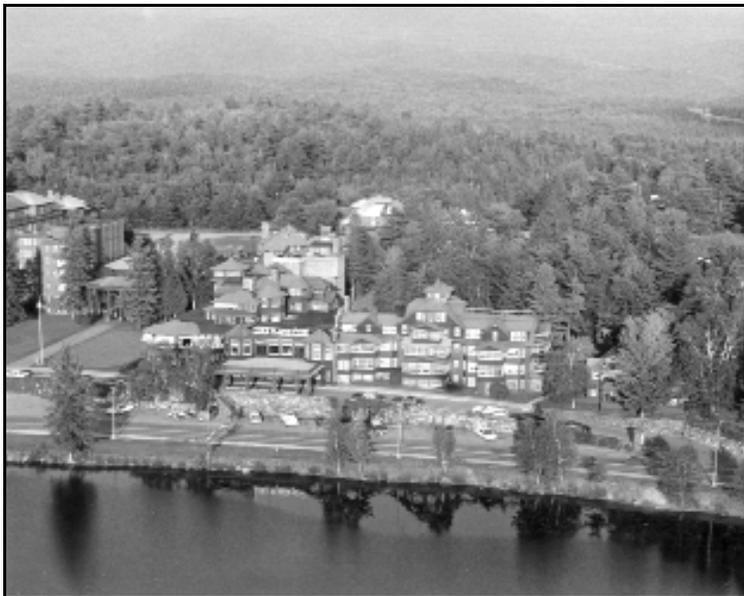


*The Lake
Placid Club
1890-2002*



EDITED BY LEE MANCHESTER

The Lake
Placid Club,
1890 to 2002

The Lake Placid Club, 1890 to 2002

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Foreword

Lee Manchester

No, it wasn't Ground Zero — but the former Lake Placid Club grounds sure looked like it the morning of Jan. 1, 2002.

That was the impression of several locals who came to Melvil Dewey's old "Morningside" of Mirror Lake that Tuesday morning to watch as a demolition ball started eating its way into the LPC's old Agora Suites and Auditorium.

The idea for this book was born that morning.

The article we ran in that week's Lake Placid News on the razing of that last, grand vestige of the old Club drew lots of attention. People asked, Why not do a series on the Lake Placid Club — how it started, how it flourished ... and how it died.

Well, maybe "died" isn't exactly the right word, since the Lussi family purchased part of it — they still operate the golf courses — and the "attached lodges" are now a private condo community.

But the story of the Lake Placid Club's rise and fall drew much interest as it appeared in serial form in the Lake Placid News and the Adirondack Daily Enterprise last winter — so much interest, in fact, that we were asked to compile those stories and publish them.

This is the book you asked for. Enjoy!

Lee Manchester
The Lake Placid News
January 2003

Lake Placid Club: The beginnings

Ned P. Rauch

At the end of the 19th century, a middle-aged librarian and his family opened a club for their peers in the burgeoning resort town of North Elba. By the end of the 20th century that club had soared with success and fallen in failure.

Melville Louis Kossuth Dewey — who later pressed his name into his simplified spelling mold, dropped his middle names to become just Melvil and invented the Dewey Decimal Classification System — founded what would come to be known as the Lake Placid Club in 1895.

Located on the eastern shore of Mirror Lake, the Club grew from a five-acre, 30-member summer retreat for educators and librarians into a year-round exclusive resort that, in the 1930s, comprised 10,000 acres, hundreds of buildings and thousands of members. By the time the Club closed its doors in the 1980s, there were few area residents who had not worked at the Club or known someone who did.

The Club played an essential role in bringing the 1932 Winter Olympics to Lake Placid. It founded the Lake Placid Boys School, which later became the Northwood School. And while its sprawling buildings dominated villagers' views of the eastern shore of Mirror Lake, the Club was, for much of its 85-year history, separate from the place from which it took its name — separated by rules, by customs and, at one point, by a fence.

The origins

Melvil Dewey, a Jefferson County-born librarian and innovator, first visited Lake Placid in 1890 with his wife Annie, searching for a place where they could restore their energy and ease their allergies. Three years later, the couple returned with their young son Godfrey and bought a large plot of land on what is now Hillcrest Avenue, overlooking the village. In 1894 Dewey began acquiring property on the eastern side — what he called the “Morningside” — of Mirror Lake. A year later, he leased a farm house called “Bonniblink” on a 5-acre parcel of land there. It was that property that, after years of additions and a re-christening as “Lakeside,” eventually blossomed

into the core of the Lake Placid Club. (Decades later, it would cede that honor to the Forest and Forest Tower complex.)

After evolving from the Placid Park Club into the Placid Club, the operation accepted its first group of members in June 1895. The 30 initial members, Godfrey Dewey reported in a speech given on the 60th anniversary of the Club's founding, "came predominantly from educational circles — college professors, teachers, preachers, writers, librarians, etc. — so much so that it (the Club) was sometimes referred to as a university in the wilderness."

This was in keeping with the objectives Melvil Dewey laid out when he conceived of and established the Club. A graduate of Amherst College, Dewey had become the chief librarian at Columbia College in New York City before serving as secretary of the Regents of the University of New York State and as the state's librarian. He founded the American Library Association and advocated spelling reform. His wife, Annie, was a librarian as well.

In starting the Club, the Deweys hoped to provide a place for like-minded people to relax, get healthy and share ideas.

A Lake Placid Club Handbook from 1901 reads: "Object: Cooperation among congenial people secures the privileges of an ideal summer home in ideal surroundings. It is organized and administered solely to give the greatest possible new health and strength for the coming year for time and money spent to secure 7 things: health, comfort and convenience, quiet and rest, congenial companionship, attractiv recreations, beautiful natural surroundings, and as moderate living expences as is consistent with high standards in each of the above aims."¹

And though it would be described as such at various times in the future, the Club was not a playground. Members had to adhere to a strict set of rules. "Club Customs," as described in a 1928 yearbook, included restrictions on noise (no noise between 10:30 p.m. and 8 a.m. or during quiet hours from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.), forbade women from smoking in public, and stated that the "prohibition law is strictly enforced. Social drinking in rooms is contrary to Club ideals and standards." The Club also banned formal attire, flashy jewelry and gambling.

Rules and regulations

On Aug. 8, 1921, the Lake Placid News reprinted an article that had first appeared in the New York Herald about 12 Club members

¹ In direct quotations from Lake Placid Club publications, we have preserved Melvil Dewey's peculiar spelling ("attractiv") and style standards (like representing all numbers, including small ones, with digits).

who had been kicked out for, as the News said, failing to “follow the warnings of the ‘avoid embarrassment slip.’ ” The Herald piece was sarcastic in tone and derisive of the Club, but the News used the piece to show how well-known the resort had become. Still, Melvil Dewey’s intolerance of such gaffs (the expulsions were alcohol-related) was made clear in the article.

“Not one vote was given for leniency or for the probation that was asked for,” Dewey is quoted as saying. “Strong and wealthy men begged for mercy when we caught them. But no mercy was shown.”

The Lake Placid Club was a private institution until the last years of its existence. In the early days, its members stayed at the Club for weeks, sometimes months at a time. It was not open to everybody and did not advertise for new members, though it continued to need new blood as it continued to grow. New members were recommended by current members and first had to spend time at the Club as guests or associates.

Members had to pay annual dues as well as fees for many of the services they used, including lodging. They could also buy “options” on Club properties in the form of stocks and, in return, were given first choice on lodging. It was from these fees that the Club generated most of its revenues.

Anyone hoping to become a member had to meet specific social requirements.

“As a private club it is possible to maintain standards impracticable for a hotel or other public resort,” the Club’s 1928 yearbook reads. “It admits as members and guests only those who believe cordially in its distinctive features. Families with children are particularly welcome. It excludes rigorously every person against whom there is social, race, moral or physical objection. The race objection does not bar foreigners of refinement, many of whom come to us each year.”

The text specifically bars “Hebrews” and states that “except as servants negroes are not admitted.” “Consumptives” and people with or recovering from tuberculosis were forbidden as well.

Despite the rules, despite its exclusivity, the Lake Placid Club thrived during the first half of the 20th century. After early financial stumblings, the Club’s membership began to soar. By the end of 1906, just 11 years after its founding, the Club had 646 members, according to “Lake Placid Club: An Illustrated History,” by David Ackerman. Eventually the Club would employ as many as 1,000 workers.

In his 60th anniversary speech, Godfrey Dewey said, “The success of the Club was instantaneous” and that “the rate of growth

from a ridiculed experiment to a world-famous institution was phenomenal.” According to his figures, 1930 saw 120,000 total guest stays and boasted a 1,500 high house count. The Club didn’t swell — it exploded.

In 1899 the Forest Cottage and Woodside Lodge were built. The following year, two more cottages were constructed, another was renovated and the Club was given its own post office. Also in 1900 the Club bought the Adirondack Lodge, the resort Henry Van Hoesenberg had built at Heart Lake. That purchase gave the Club 640 acres and 16 buildings, including what Van Hoesenberg once called “the largest and handsomest log building in the United States.” Three years later the lodge burned to the ground, not to be rebuilt until the 1920s.

As the Club began to establish itself several “financial crises,” as Godfrey Dewey referred to them, caused a reorganization in its administration. In the early 1920s the Club was overseen by three governing bodies that worked in unison: the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation, the Lake Placid Company and the Lake Placid Club.

Ackerman explained their functions thus: “The Foundation’s purpose was to do good things in the intellectual arena. Proceeds from the social Club’s membership dues and fees, as well as profits from accommodations, would flow to the Company, the sole owner of the Club properties. ... Dewey had transferred to the Foundation the entire voting stock of the Company on Oct. 31, 1924, together with most of his holdings of other Company securities. These transfers enabled the Foundation to influence, through election of Company directors, the policies and management of the institution as a whole.”

What those three organizations operated was nothing less than a self-sufficient village. In addition to the many cottages and clubhouses in which the members stayed, ate their meals and interacted, the Club owned acres of farm land on which it raised produce and livestock. It had its own printing press, saw mill, repair shop and power plant; a grocery store offered to members whatever food they would want, and the Club’s dairy and creamery are remembered by many to have provided delicious, fresh ice cream.

The 1920 handbook’s description of the estate claimed the Club owned “6000 acres of park, golf courses, forest and farms, on lakes Mirror, Placid and Hart and on 6 rivers ... and numerous mountain brooks. It owns 258 buildings, large and small, including 76 residence houses, 4 completely equipped central clubhouses and buildings for its 26 farms.”

The activities

On those 6,000 acres, members participated in everything from studying in the Club's 10,000-volume library to hiking. The Club offered lectures and music concerts and held conferences on various issues. There were regattas, swimming races and golf tournaments; dancing, pageants and field days.

Among the Club's most legendary annual events was the Iroquois Council Fire that took place around Labor Day.

"There are 15 fires in the forest, from 100 to 200 Indians in full costume," a 1920 account reads. "And when the council fire streams 100 feet skyward it shows under the forest trees over 1000 spectators."

After the 1904 season, when a number of members — including Godfrey Dewey and Van Hoevenberg — decided to stay on at the Club through the winter, the LPC extended its play throughout the year. Winter activities of ski jumping, skiing and skating became so popular, in fact, that Godfrey Dewey eventually led a successful campaign to bring the 1932 Winter Olympics to Lake Placid. And in 1938, the Club opened its own downhill ski park on Mount Whitney.

More expansion

Until 1930, which the Lake Placid-North Elba Historic Preservation Commission says was "the apex of Club development," the Club continued to grow and extend its reach. In 1923, the Agora Wing (which recently met its demise) was built onto the Forest complex. This addition gave the Club the Agora Theater, the Agora Suites and the Annie Dewey Memorial Chapel with its Tiffany stained-glass windows.

The Club also bought land and a camp on Placid Lake's Moose Island in 1921, prompting Dewey to push harder for a canal to be dug that would join Mirror and Placid lakes. That idea was not new. In Club Notes from July 1905, the writer exclaims, "The greatest improvement possible is probable for 1906," in reference to the canal. "There is no question of its almost unanimous approval, as every intelligent person sees that nothing would add more to our attractions." Apparently, others were not as taken with the idea; the lakes remain separate to this day.

Some expansions proved more enduring than others.

The Club bought a mansion on Saybrook Point in southern Connecticut in 1915. Dubbed Riverside Clubhouse, it opened in 1916 and served, as Ackerman said, as the "seashore branch" of the Club for 11 years before it was sold in 1927.

In 1923, Melvil Dewey bought the Cascade House, a large hotel on 1,190 acres between what are now known as Upper and Lower

Cascade Lakes. A year later, he gave the property to the Club, which opened it as the Cascade Clubhouse. By 1927, the Cascade site had closed.

Perhaps the Club's most ambitious development outside of the Adirondacks was its establishment of a winter resort in Florida. The Aug. 12, 1928, Lake Placid Club Notes tried to drum up excitement for the Club's new "Loj," as Dewey referred to it, in Lake Placid, Florida.

"The present Club is now 33 years old and many, specially its older members, ought to have the supreme benefits of subtropical sun and escape the terrors and dangers which in most parts of the north and west, winter inflicts on health," the Notes read, later pointing to Thomas Edison as an example of one who winters in the south.

That the second club was located in a town by the same name as the first was no coincidence. As Ackerman reported, the Florida state legislature changed the names of Lake Childs, on which the resort was built, to Lake Placid, and of Lake Stearns, the nearby town, to Lake June-in-Winter, at Dewey's insistence. By 1941, however, the Florida property was sold.

With the Club's early success and rapid growth, it veered from some of its original ideals. The educators and thinkers for whom it was supposed to provide a retreat were soon outnumbered by society's elite.

"Its unique standards," Godfrey Dewey said, "quickly attracted many families of culture and refinement whose ample means made moderate cost a secondary consideration, and whose demands for more and better facilities led naturally to a spiral of higher costs."

And while members and their families continued to visit the Club for generations, the length of their stays began to shrink, and the Club's high house count and acreage fell off from their peaks in 1930. The Depression and World War II, when the U.S. Army used the Club for 14 months as an "R and R" location for soldiers, exacerbated the situation.

In 1931, Melvil Dewey died. His first wife, Annie, had died in 1922. Godfrey Dewey said his father's death "deprived the Club of his unique and forceful genius," but the Club soldiered on for another 50 years and left a lasting impression on Lake Placid.

Inventing winter sport at the Lake Placid Club

By Ned P. Rauch

In his State of the State address in January 2002, Gov. George Pataki made one statement that was of particular importance to Lake Placid residents.

“There could be no better way to build upon New York’s proud Olympic legacy,” he said, “than to bring the Winter Games back to Lake Placid and the North Country.”

That proud legacy began in 1932 when Lake Placid hosted the third Winter Games. The Games returned to Lake Placid in 1980, and athletes hailing from Lake Placid have competed in every Winter Olympics since the first in 1924. Charles Jewtraw, a Lake Placid native and champion speedskater, won the very first gold medal ever awarded at a Winter Games.

But while the 1932 Games took place in the village, were funded to a large extent by the state of New York, and were enthusiastically supported by then-governor Franklin Roosevelt, they would not have occurred in Lake Placid if not for the members of an exclusive resort located on the eastern shore of Mirror Lake: the Lake Placid Club.

Indeed, it was Godfrey Dewey, son of Club founder Melvil Dewey, who many credit specifically with bringing the Games to the place that would come to be known as the Olympic Village. And it was the Lake Placid Club, and later its Sno Birds, that helped turn winter sports in general into the popular pastime they have become.

First winter

For the first decade of the Lake Placid Club’s existence, its members used it only as a summer retreat. But at the end of 1904, Melvil Dewey decided to try a bold experiment — bold because, according to some reports, he was ridiculed for thinking it would work.

He kept the Club open through the winter.

Exactly how many people stayed on for that first winter is not clear; one writer says there were eight, while a December 1954 issue of Placid Peeks, one of the Club’s many publications, puts the number at 30. The most commonly used figure is 10. By all accounts, Godfrey Dewey was there, as was Henry Van Hovenberg, whose

name would later be taken for the mountain on which Lake Placid's Olympic bobsled run was built.

In a speech marking the Club's 60th anniversary, Godfrey Dewey described that first winter as the "most significant step in the history of the Club. ... Winter opening was an immediate and assured success."

Quickly, the number of winter visits increased, and the Club grew accordingly, building more year-round clubhouses. The members spent those early winters skating on Mirror Lake and skiing and tobogganing on the golf course. Within a decade, Godfrey Dewey said, "the Club was fully established as the leading winter sports center in the United States."

Lake Placid Club members weren't the only people in the North Country turning on to winter sports. At about the same time in Saranac Lake, Winter Carnival was beginning its run as that village's most celebrated tradition. According to Jack Shea, the 1932 double-gold Olympian who died early in the morning of Jan. 22, 2002, after a car accident the afternoon before, Winter Carnival brought Saranac Lake's residents outdoors for athletic contests, including speedskating.

"The carnivals in Saranac Lake helped start winter sports in the Lake Placid area," Shea said, adding that Edmund Lamy of Saranac Lake, famous for his speedskating and barrel-jumping, was "one of the best athletes ever to come out of the North Country." Lamy's son Jim went on to become an Olympic bobsledder.

Still, the Club's influence on the growing popularity of winter sports cannot be denied. Art Devlin, another Lake Placid-born Olympian, put it this way: "The Lake Placid Club pioneered winter sports in America. Before the Club, there was no such thing."

As wintertime activity grew, ski jumping began to take hold in Lake Placid as the Club built a jumping tower on its golf course in 1916 and a more permanent structure at Intervale, site of the current jumps, in 1921.

Role of the Sno Birds

In 1920, the Club's most active winter sportsmen formed the Sno Birds, a group that oversaw all of the Club's wintertime activities and sponsored promising local athletes.

Their symbol, a white bird on a blue field, became synonymous with winter sports, and in 1923 Sno Bird President Charles B. Hobbs revealed how committed the group was to getting people outdoors in the winter.

“The Sno Birds have arranged an attractive program of winter events, specially designed to bring you all into close and intimate touch with our beautiful co-conspirator and her wonderful mountains and woods and valleys, and her sparkling sun and glistening ice and the pure exhilarating air.”

An article that appeared in a Nov. 10, 1921, issue of the Lake Placid News states less eloquently but perhaps more clearly the group’s mission:

“The direct purpose of the Sno Birds is to create in this country a winter resort that can offer all the advantages of world-famous winter resorts such as St. Moritz and Pontresina, Switzerland, and Chamonix, France.”

To that end, the group sponsored events all winter long. College Week, brought teams from schools including Princeton, Dartmouth, Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Colgate, Williams and Syracuse to Lake Placid to compete in skiing, skating and other sports. There were figure-skating meets, curling matches and ski-jumping competitions. In all, as former North Elba-Lake Placid Historian Mary MacKenzie noted in an article she wrote for Adirondack Life magazine in 1972, “It was nothing for them to conduct 80 formal competitions a winter, with 280 trophies and prizes awarded.”

After the Sno Birds’ formation the U.S. Eastern Amateur Ski Association developed, the result, MacKenzie wrote, of “informal meetings held at Saranac Lake and the Lake Placid Club.”

And in 1922, MacKenzie reported, just two years after the Sno Birds’ inaugural year and 18 years after the Club first opened for winter, a Swiss newspaper had called St. Moritz “the Lake Placid of Europe.”

Winter sports take off

Winter sports were catching on throughout the town as the Lake Placid Ski Club and later the Lake Placid Skating Club were born in the 1920s. According to Jack Shea, the popularity of winter sports at the Club and in the village began to feed off each other.

“The Lake Placid skating activities did as much for the Lake Placid Club as the Club did for the village,” he said, adding that 1919 saw the village’s first speedskating event. Ed Horton, of Saranac Lake, won it.

Then came Charles Jewtraw, the Lake Placid speedskater who won gold in the 1924 Olympic Winter Games in Chamonix, France. With the backing of Club member and Sno Bird founder Henry Uihlein and other members, Jewtraw became one of Lake Placid’s earliest sports stars.

“In those days, Charles Jewtraw was a town hero,” Shea remembers. “He was one of the best speedskaters in the U.S., and he encouraged all the young people in the community to speedskate. I followed his advice. ... Henry Uihlein, he was a great benefactor for Charlie Jewtraw. He traveled all over with him.”

All of this enthusiasm culminated in Lake Placid’s bid for the 1932 Winter Olympics. While visiting St. Moritz with the U.S. ski team during the 1928 Olympics, Godfrey Dewey carefully studied the way the Games were run. He returned with a plan to bring the next Winter Olympics to Lake Placid.

The village had nearly 30 years of experience in winter sports from which to draw, and nearly all the facilities necessary for hosting an Olympics. The state of New York had agreed to finance the construction of a bobsled run, and an indoor ice arena was built in 1930. With that, Dewey believed Lake Placid was ready.

In April 1929, the Lake Placid News reported the news that would forever affect Lake Placid’s future.

“Representatives of many lands will compete here in world’s premier winter sports event,” the headline ran. “Cablegram from Dr. Godfrey Dewey tells good news — Placid’s delegate at Lausanne successful in great effort.”

The article explained that Dewey had traveled to Lausanne, Switzerland, to “look after Lake Placid’s interests in the matter of the award (of a bid for the 1932 Winter Olympics), because of his intimate knowledge of the affair,” and had been named New York’s official delegate by then-Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Lake Placid’s Kiwanis Club and Chamber of Commerce were also involved in the bid process, but as Shea said, “Without Godfrey Dewey, it would not have been done.”

Post-Olympic growth

The Club’s involvement with the Games didn’t end with the bid award. Politicians wrangled over where the bobsled run should be built, considering Scarface Mountain near Ray Brook and Mount Jo overlooking Heart Lake. Dewey offered South Meadow Mountain, which the Club owned, as a potential site. The Club granted an easement to the state to build the bob run, rechristening the location Mount Van Hoevenberg.

With those Winter Games, Lake Placid transformed itself from a small mountain hamlet into the Olympic Village. Art Devlin, a Lake Placid native who served as sports director at the Club and was named to five Olympic teams as a ski jumper, said his fascination with the sport began with the 1932 Olympics. As an 8-year-old he

snuck into the Intervale ski-jumping site, climbed a tree and watched Norway's Birger Ruud win the gold medal.

"That's what started me on my ski jumping career, I was so impressed with what he did," he said.

Through the next two decades the Club continued to sponsor local athletes, host competitions and attract media attention, further establishing Lake Placid's reputation as a leader in winter sports.

"The New York papers would cover everything the Sno Birds did," Devlin said.

By 1938, the Club had carved downhill ski trails on Mount Whitney, giving Lake Placid its first commercial ski mountain, adding another dimension to the activities one could find in a Lake Placid winter.

The second time the Winter Olympics came to Lake Placid, the Club was not nearly as involved as it had been 50 years before. It served merely as a hotel for members of the International Olympic Committee, declaring bankruptcy less than a month after the Games' end. But by then the Club had already made its contribution to the Lake Placid sports legacy. In fact, at a 1929 dinner honoring Godfrey Dewey's success in securing the 1932 Games, it seemed that Lake Placid's residents were already well aware of the importance of what the Club had done.

James Shea, who had come to Lake Placid in 1884, said at that dinner, "Lake Placid has now become through the efforts of Dr. Dewey and those associated with him in getting the 1932 Olympic Winter Games the greatest playground in America."

Now, a century after the Club's first winter season, Lake Placid sees itself as the "Winter Sports Capital of the World." It is home to USA Hockey's Women's Team, the U.S. Bobsled Federation, the United States Luge Association, the U.S. Olympic Training Center and other national sports organizations. Along with Whiteface in Wilmington, Lake Placid plays host to an increasing number of World Cup events and continues to send athletes to the Olympics. In February 2002, Jack Shea's grandson, Jimmy, won a gold medal of his own in the Salt Lake City, Utah Games as a member of the U.S. Skeleton team, becoming the third generation of Sheas to compete in the Olympics. His father was an Olympic Nordic skier.

And though the Lake Placid Club and the Sno Birds no longer exist, talk about bringing the Winter Olympics back for a third time seems at this writing to be gaining momentum.

Working at the Lake Placid Club

Barbara A. Campbell

“Lake Placid Club, may I help you?”

Whether it was Mildred Kelly or Elsa Bombard at the switchboard, or Frances Silleck’s father greeting guests at the train station with Club horses and sleigh, the persona of the Club was the warm and welcoming nature of the people of Lake Placid and the Tri-Lakes area who worked there.

“I worked at the Club” could have been said by 1,100 people a year during peak seasons. It was said by Executive Chef Jimmy Sileo, who supervised 40 workers in the kitchen and saw to it there was prime rib five nights a week.

Art Devlin, who instructed ski jumping and water skied there, could say it, as did Cal Wilson, a bellman in brown uniform, and Leona Preston, a chambermaid in the Agora Suites. Linda Blair and Carol Brown learned about Club life (and what a kumquat was) as “rolls-and-relish girls.”

Hundreds of young men (and, yes, young women) caddied on the Club golf courses. Club employees worked at some 40 Club farms providing milk and cream for Club ice cream and debated whether French vanilla or maple walnut was the best flavor.

There were Club employees and those employed by the Lake Placid Company, those who leased space for concessions and services, and those who entertained guests, as did the Sinfonietta.

Employment at the Club ran in families. Dr. George Hart, Club physician, had been a houseman and caddie. His father worked in the Club store.

Virginia Gilmore’s grandfather, the Club buttermaker, went from farm to farm milking by hand all day during the flu epidemic. He was the only one who wasn’t sick, and cows have to be milked. Gilmore’s grandmother was a chambermaid, her mother and aunt worked on the switchboard, and her father did maintenance work at the Club from time to time.

Virginia herself played the Club organ for the last wedding in the Club chapel. The console of the organ was in the Agora Theater. From there she couldn’t see what was going on in the chapel, so she had a runner to tell her when organ music was needed.

Good food and then sports were central to Club life. The kitchen built a new loading dock with walk-in coolers and freezer in the late 1960s. Prime rib did not come “rub and ready” as it does now. Ray Donnellan would spend four hours a day on the butcher’s saw preparing the roasts for the roast cook. The saucier made Hollandaise sauce, gravies and soups. Three assistants helped the vegetable cook peel and chop potatoes, carrots, onions and celery for immediate use. Fry cooks worked primarily breakfast and lunch. The bake shop kept a pie man, bread man and pastry chef busy. Stewards and pot boys kept things washed.

The kitchen staff was peripatetic. There were great buffets, complete with ice carvings, at the Golf House every Sunday. Thursdays at the skeet field, lamb chops or chicken were charcoal broiled for dinner. Twelve-foot-long griddle irons were taken to Mount Whitney for pancakes outdoors in winter.

Kitchen staff that didn’t live at the Club could pay \$1 per meal to eat downstairs in “The Zoo.” Two hundred were fed there each meal. Chocolate bread pudding is especially remembered.

Robert Reynolds worked as a skeet referee on the five skeet fields and three trap fields. He did significant work at the Mount Whitney ski slope. Each year more work was done clearing rocks from the top of the slope by the T-bar. The main slope was the most challenging. He recalls teaching skiing at 50 below, and that was on a bright sunny day! The new ski lodge was built while he worked at Mount Whitney. At first the slopes were prepared by skiing up and sidestepping. Then there were rollers — drums with wooden slats — and finally two Thyacol Sprite snow cats.

Summers, Reynolds worked the waterfront and drove the ChrisCraft inboard for water skiers. At convention time he worked particularly on the Rotary Club Governors’ Assembly. The theater was set up with all the identifying cards perfectly lined up. There were three language interpreters’ booths.

In the 1940s and ’50s there would be 30 to 40 caddies, both town kids and Aveys (those who stayed at the Club). On a good day caddies would work three times, or just play golf themselves after 4 p.m. There were two courses: the Upper Course, where the Clubhouse is now, and the Lower Course.

Serge Lussi began caddying at age 11 and caddied for 5 years. He was a shag boy for golf pro Jim Searle. At the time, Lussi was so skinny his mother put towels under his T-shirt so the golf bag wouldn’t hurt so much. He started off on the short course, and as he got bigger he caddied the other courses. It was one of his nicest experiences.

Twelve workers at the powerhouse kept two steam engines running, heating the steam to an initial 250 pounds of pressure. Some of the cottages heated by the powerhouse were 1½ miles away. Bob Sweeney, the Club's chief engineer, followed the transitions from coal to oil to buying electricity from the town of North Elba.

"It was a hot job!" said Marjorie Stevens of her job in the laundry. A stand-up job was putting sheets, folded right side out, through the mangle. During a tennis tournament, the laundry did 3,500 towels a day. (A regular day was just doing the laundry for 1,200 guests!) The usual turnaround time on laundry and dry cleaning was two to three days, though it could be "Done Special" for that night or the next day at an additional charge of 25 percent.

There was a lot of activity in the laundry during the Lake Placid Horse Show at the end of June each year, when many guests wanted it "Done Special" to get rid of the horsey smells!

Expectations were high for Club carpenters. The Lake Placid Club Notes, its quarterly membership magazine, told members "on 3 days notice we will build a garage adjoining any cottage." Carpenters like Allan Lawrence did shop work making screens, doors, cabinets and doing remodeling. Summer work was at the top of the ski lift at Mount Whitney building ramps.

Employees at Club farms took pride in 1914 for winning dairy prizes in New York and Pennsylvania. In 1923 Club employees cared for 116 horses, 486 cattle, 9,000 chickens and 416 pigs on 40 farms. Fresh vegetables came from the farms for Club dining-room tables.

While Sinfonietta members made beautiful music in the Club, George Beauregard,² greenhouse superintendent, kept the public and private rooms filled with fresh flowers and timely arrangements. Mums and pompoms in five-inch pots graced each table in the dining room. There were lilies at Easter and piles of poinsettias at Christmas — just red and white ones, not marbled ones like today! Wreaths were made out of princess pine, and there were pine ropes for over doors. A 10- to 15-foot Christmas tree would be brought into the Agora Wing and decorated. Even Deo Colburn's moose head got a big wreath with pine cones on it.

The Club was a place of employment for local people that expanded their horizons and helped the young people to aspire to careers of college and beyond. The Club needed the skills of good, local workers and employed family member after family member

² George Beauregard was 96 years old at the time he was interviewed for this story on Aug. 16, 2001.

who came home to the Tri-Lakes area with the satisfaction of a job well done, good memories and good friends.

Club employees enjoy reliving the fun they had when they worked there. One such instance was when a punchbowl, to which rum had been added, burst by the switchboard.

Romances grew.

“It was like living in a college dorm,” said one former Lake Placid Club worker, “with no classes to study for.”

Lake Placid Club employees were hard-working, had fun and were good judges of character. They consistently say, “The Club was good to us, but they didn’t pay much!”

Now, more than 20 years after its closing, former LPC employees still say, “I miss working there. It was fun.

“Everybody worked there.”

Working at the Lake Placid Club: My experience

Dr. George Hart

Local resident Dr. George Hart worked at the Lake Placid Club in various capacities in the 1930s and '40s. Dr. Hart shared his memories of working at the Club.

The Lake Placid Club was a vital part of my upbringing and subsequent life.

You must think of Lake Placid as a tripartite community. There's the village, there's the Club, and there are the lake people. Each one of them is a separate entity, yet they are all interdependent.

My experience with the Club goes back to my childhood. It seems that the Club was always a part of my life.

The Club, as you know, was founded by Dr. Melvil Dewey as a place where librarians and intellectual people could come and rest from the cares of the world and the heat of the city. From that humble beginning it branched out to be one of the prestigious resorts in the world. After it developed in its summer mission it went on to become a world-famous winter resort.

My personal experience with the Club started when I was 9 years old, when I started as a caddie at the Lake Placid Club. Many of our local residents now were my colleagues then in the caddie effort at the Club.

Caddying at the Lake Placid Club was a pleasant experience, as I look back at it after some 70 years. I know some people today in Lake Placid with whom I caddied then, and we remember many famous people for whom we worked. Caddying at that time was tremendously different from what it is now. With the tip, we got \$1.25 for carrying clubs 18 holes. We thought that was pretty good money.

I also worked as a bell hop during my high school years.

From that position I went to college in 1934. That summer I became a houseman, which was doing general maintenance around the Club, cleaning up and starting fires. I also worked for a short time in the newsroom at the Lake Placid Club, at the end of the lounge in the Forest Hall part of the Club.

After that I went up to college at McGill University in Montreal and got my medical degree. In 1948 I was appointed medical director at the Lake Placid Club, and I stayed in that position until 1981, when the Club was finally closed.

I had many interesting, delightful and pleasant experiences in that position. My office was in the southern wing of the Club, which was called Lake Forest, and I had an occasion to take care of many people from the corporate world, and the entertainment world also.

I can remember early on in my Club experience, listening to John Philip Sousa and his band. I can remember listening to Albert Spaulding, the great violinist, and also Segetti. There was a time when Barry Goldwater, the presidential candidate, spoke at the Club, but that was more recently.

My early life centered around the Lake Placid Club. My father worked in a grocery store there for many years. In 1933 my father was appointed postmaster of the Lake Placid Club by President Roosevelt.

Our livelihood and interest early on centered a great deal around the Lake Placid Club. We've seen many famous people, corporate CEOs, I used to tend on: Dunheim, CEO of Hercules Powder Company, and Summer Simpson, head of one the big brass companies down in Connecticut. Other well-known corporate people, like James S. Kemper of the Kemper Insurance Company had a big suite there. People from the Timkin Company and U.S. Steel and so forth.

The Club was basically a summer resort. But, finally in the earlier 1920s, the winter resort aspect became prominent and skiing was introduced and reached its zenith. There were well-known skiing instructors in the early history of skiing.

The Club also had a toboggan chute, which started at the present site of the Lake Placid Club golf course and went down toward the northeast over to the burned-down Algonquin Clubhouse. It was long, well over a half to three-quarters of the run. Very thrilling.

Interesting stories abound about the activities of the Lake Placid Club. One centered around the ski jump built on the knoll between the 17th and 18th holes of the Lake Placid Club.

Melvil Dewey found out that his son Godfrey had gone down off the ski jump on his sled, and he called him into his office and said, "Son, is it true you went down this ski jump today? Why didn't you let Ski John³ do it? You might have killed yourself."

³ John Moorehead, head of ski activities at the Club at the time.

At this time, the Club was interesting, too. The Club was a self-contained entity, like a village all to itself. It had three or four farms in the outlying communities, from Jay to Averril Bolderwood out to Adirondack Loj. The Club owned the Adirondack Loj as another clubhouse in those years.

The Club also had the Cascade House, which was a hostelry situated between the two lakes — the upper and lower Cascade lakes.

The Club also had a creamery, dairy farms and a stable for horses.

It maintained a shop with a forge run by Pat McQueen, and a printing press that printed its own literature and books and daily menus.

It had a chapel, and it had chimes up at the bell tower over by the Forest Hall.

It was a village unto itself that was renowned all around the world.

At the height of the Club, as I remember the dates, it held 1,800 guests at one time.⁴ This was in the 1918-1920 era. All the cottages were filled and the rooms were filled.

It is too bad the Club has been razed by fire and demolition, but it has outlived its physical usefulness. The memory of the Club, however, will live long in the hearts and minds of the many people who worked there and loved it.

⁴ Other records show the Club's high guest count of 1,510 coming in 1925. See the table in Appendix 1.

Why did the Lake Placid Club close?

Peter Crowley

The closing ceremonies of the 1980 Winter Olympics were just three weeks in the past when the Lake Placid Resort Hotel — formerly known as the Lake Placid Club — filed for bankruptcy.

The 1,066-acre resort would reopen the next winter under new ownership and stumble on for four more controversial years, but it would never bounce back to prosperity.

The death blow, Club officials told the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, was the high cost of heating oil, but this was far from the sole cause of the resort's demise. It had been losing business more or less steadily at least since the 1932 Winter Olympics and possibly since the stock market crash of 1929.

Among the factors that led to the Club's sagging business were as follows:

- Declining and aging membership — Melvil Dewey had founded the Club as a retreat for librarians and intellectuals, and it had a harder time attracting young, new members after 1929;
- Land sales — The Club weakened its self-sufficiency by selling its farms, and it lessened its recreational opportunities by selling facilities like the Adirondack Loj;
- Changing vacation patterns — Instead of staying for whole seasons at a time, members began coming up for shorter periods of time after World War II;
- Reputation for racism — The Club's written policy of excluding Jews and blacks as members earned it bad press as the Civil Rights Movement heated up;
- The end of passenger rail service to Lake Placid in the 1960s — While no comprehensive historical record of the railroad closure's impact could be found, Club historian David Ackerman wrote that, in 1965, "It was predicted that Rotary International might cease their very profitable convention visits due to the loss of railroad access" ("Lake Placid Club: An Illustrated History, 1895-1980," p. 357).

The turning point

1929 began brightly for the Club. Spirits were spurred in the spring when Godfrey Dewey, founder Melvil's son, brought the third Olympic Winter Games home to Lake Placid from the International

Olympic Committee conference in Switzerland. Then, in August, the Club nearly set a house-count record with 1,461 guests in a single day.

That year, however, also, saw the stock-market crash in October. The Depression would not be felt in the North Country for another year or so, however, and Melvil Dewey finished the Club construction projects that had already been set into motion: the Forest East Suites and an Agora Suites addition.

The Club's growth, measured in size and new facilities, peaked in 1930 with about 370 buildings on 10,600 acres. There have been no large-scale building projects since: only a replacement golf house in 1951, an outdoor pool in 1966, and a staff dormitory and some timeshare condominiums in 1967.

Melvil Dewey died in 1931, and with him his aggressive economic optimism that had mirrored the nation's in the 1920s. So beloved was Dewey at the Club that within 10 months of his death, it had lost 183 members.

Like the nation, the Club would follow the 1929 crash into economic hardship, but unlike most of America it would not find prosperity restored after World War II.

WWII: Army invades Club

With World War II draining off many of the Club's male staff, members and guests, it would have been hard to run the resort if the U.S. Army hadn't taken it over in October 1944.

The Army used the Club as a place for troops to get rest and rehabilitation — especially those being redeployed in 1945 from the victorious European Theater to Asia and the Pacific. According to some local women, the 14 months of the Army's presence provided a great deal of fun for area girls, who came out to dances and other social activities at the Club.

The Army left in November 1945, and rebuilding years followed. Godfrey Dewey called 1946 "the most financially disastrous in the Club's history" (Ackerman, p. 349).

So began a 25-year struggle for power between Godfrey Dewey and the Club's governing boards: the Lake Placid Company and the Lake Placid Education Foundation. The younger Dewey wrote frequent, scathing critiques of board members' management over the years, but he was never given a place on the board himself.

Land sales

To cut losses, Club officials began selling off portions of the vast estate. By the late 1940s, the Club had sold more than half its

land, dropping to about 5,000 acres (Godfrey Dewey, “Sixty Years of the Lake Placid Club”).

“The Club sold off nearly all of its property outside the main estate between 1940 and 1970, which undoubtedly helped its finances but not its long-term prospects,” wrote architectural historian Janet Null for the Lake Placid-North Elba Historic Preservation Commission in a 1989 survey of the Club’s history.

In 1949, for instance, Club members Henry and Mildred Uihlein — whose family owned the Schlitz brewing company in Milwaukee, Wis. — bought the Club farms at Tablelands, Pynbrook, Knolls, Pointed Firs and Uplands (Lake Placid-North Elba Historic Preservation Commission). The loss of the farms reduced the Club’s ability to support itself.

In 1958, the Club sold the 700-acre Adirondack Loj property to the Adirondack Mountain Club, which had been leasing it for years. In the 1960s the Club sold numerous lots it owned in the village of Lake Placid and the Cobble Hill area.

New source of business

As a new way of bringing in business, Club officials began relying more and more on conventions. To attract conventioners, they further relaxed the Club’s famously puritanical rules, which had once banned alcohol and tobacco sales, drunkenness, smoking by women, formal dress, jazz music and any music or dancing past 10 p.m. In 1952, the Club applied to the state of New York for its first liquor license.

The conventions paid off — in the short term, at least. While annual guest days dropped from 105,000 to 85,000 between 1947 and 1955, according to Godfrey Dewey’s reckoning, there were 431,000 convention guest nights in 1955 as opposed to fewer than 31,000 eight years before.

Reputation for racism

Conventions started backing out as the Club’s reputation for racism drew growing criticism during the fledgling days of the Civil Rights Movement.

Discrimination against Jews and blacks was standard at many hotels and resorts in the first half of the 20th century, but most were more covert about it than the Lake Placid Club, which held onto Melvil Dewey’s written policies banning Jews and blacks until the 1970s. By the 1950s, the Club had begun allowing Jews as convention guests, but the fact that they were still not allowed as members prompted boycotts and made the Club a center of controversy.

Prompted by lawsuits from would-be members and urgings from B'nai B'rith, a Jewish anti-defamation league, the state Commission Against Discrimination began investigating the Club's membership practices in 1955. The media, including the Associated Press, covered the case closely. The state upheld the Club's right to discriminate in 1957, and B'nai B'rith withdrew its appeal in 1959.

The most public blow to the Lake Placid Club came in 1958, when the New York Conference of Mayors moved its annual gathering across Mirror Lake to the Olympic Arena after several Jewish mayors objected to the Club's discriminatory membership practices. Again, the media closely followed the drama, but it is perhaps indicative of the time that the AP failed to note that the Club excluded blacks as well as Jews.

More convention cancellations followed as the Civil Rights Movement got rolling, including the American Alumni Association and the New York Savings Bank gatherings in 1965.

The New York State Library Association followed suit and cancelled its 1969 conference, though earlier in the century Melvil Dewey had been the state's head librarian.

Changes in name and policy

A 1964 plan to revitalize the Club was only partly implemented, the outdoor pool, staff dormitory and "attached lodge" condos being the only new building projects. Godfrey Dewey savagely attacked this "Blueprint for a Bright Future," calling it instead "A Fantastic Blueprint for Bankruptcy" (Ackerman, p. 356-357).

In 1970, the Club — rather desperate for clientele — changed its name to the "Lake Placid Club House" and opened its facilities to the paying public of any race or creed for 10 months out of the year. July through Labor Day and Christmas through New Year's Day was still reserved for members only.

Membership continued to dwindle, and in December 1976 the Club House opened entirely to the public, leaving members with no special privileges at all. The facility changed its name again in 1977 to the "Lake Placid Club Resort." A year later, with the 1980 Winter Olympics looming, it abandoned all pretenses of being a "club" and became the "Lake Placid Resort Hotel."

The Resort Hotel was in such bad shape financially that it might have folded before the Games if the Lake Placid Olympic Organizing Committee had not given it a \$1 million lease agreement to provide housing for 479 IOC delegates and VIPs, according to Lake Placid attorney William Kissel, LPOOC's legal counsel at the time.

“I think the Olympic cash infusion clearly extended their life,” Kissel said of the Resort Hotel.

In anticipation of the Games, the Resort Hotel borrowed \$4.2 million from the Farmers National Bank of Malone with the stated purposes of renovating its buildings and making payroll.

Olympic embarrassment

If the 1932 Winter Olympics showed off the Lake Placid Club at its zenith, then the 1980 Games were its nadir.

In January 1980, the month before the Olympics, the Adirondack Daily Enterprise reported that the Resort Hotel had defaulted on its loan payments.

Adding to the embarrassment were a series of suspicious fires later in January, not to mention a state Health Department fine the month before for sanitary code violations in the Resort Hotel’s kitchen. Things weren’t looking good.

Whether the Club fared well during the Games depends on who you talk to. A 1989 survey of the Club by the Lake Placid-North Elba Historic Preservation Commission reported that “business from the Olympics fell far short of anticipated,” but according to Howard Riley of Saranac Lake, who would later become the Club’s last general manager, the Club was in fine form for the occasion.

“I think it went off beautifully as far as the Club was concerned,” said Riley, who during the Games was special assistant to the Olympic president. “The IOC loved it. The people loved it. It looked good. ... That was their last hurrah. As soon as the Games were over, that was when the hammer dropped.”

Immediately after the Olympics, the Resort Hotel laid off most of its staff. Three weeks later, in mid-March, it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, claiming \$6.7 million in debts.

By March 30, it had shut its doors. The high cost of heating oil was largely to blame, Resort Hotel officials told the Enterprise. The price of petroleum had spiked in the 1970s, and the Club’s buildings — with thousands of single-pane windows — were not efficient to heat. The Resort Hotel’s heating bill for the winter of 1979-80 had jumped to \$300,000, the Enterprise reported.

It would come out later that post-Olympic business at the Resort Hotel was dismal; the Resort Hotel had taken a \$215,000 operating loss in March alone, with 110 room nights filled out of 2,019 available — an occupancy rate of about 5 percent.

The Club’s closing hurt the Lake Placid community tax-wise; the Club’s property taxes had amounted to about 5 percent of the village’s and school’s general-fund revenues, the Enterprise reported.

The Swaim saga

Messanutton Village Inc., a large Virginia resort, bought the Club property in October 1980. Messanutton owner John R. Swaim saw “timeshare” condominiums — housing that people lease for a certain number of weeks per year — as the key to the Club’s financial recovery. Even though Swaim had taken out a \$13.5 million loan to buy the property, he started adding to the Club’s inventory of “attached lodge” townhouses, begun in 1967, before the deal was closed that November. At this writing in February 2002, some of these buildings are still incomplete.⁵

The Club reopened on Dec. 1, 1980. In January 1981, Swaim announced plans to invest \$20 million immediately and some \$160 million over the next 14 years to expand and promote the Club. It never happened.

In 1983, Swaim’s national timeshare web unraveled. In February of that year, two Swaim checks worth \$910,000 bounced when sent to help pay a \$3.6 million mortgage with a Minnesota bank — which went under as a result. Later that winter, a second bank — this one in Mississippi — folded because of Swaim loans, and a series of frauds were revealed in Florida. By March, Swaim had been jailed in Florida on grand-theft charges related to dozens of mortgages. Meanwhile, the New York attorney general’s office had stopped timeshare sales in Lake Placid to investigate complaints of deceptive sales practices.

In April 1983 Key Bank of Northern New York took over operations at the Club after deciding to foreclose on a \$4.25 million loan to Swaim; the bank claimed it was still owed \$3.5 million. Swaim appealed the foreclosure and later sued Key Bank for defamation, asking for more than \$725 million in damages.

In December 1983 Swaim’s First Federal Corp. of Virginia filed for bankruptcy. In February 1984, the Lake Placid Company, which he owned, did the same.

In June 1984 Swaim was convicted on one of 11 counts of fraud, for which he was later sentenced to serve 3 years in prison. He appealed unsuccessfully and entered the federal penitentiary in Atlanta in December 1985.

Riley started working for Swaim in early 1981 as manager of the Club’s news bureau. By the end of 1982, he was the general manager.

⁵ A 2001 deal between the Lake Placid Club Lodge Owners Association and Murnane Construction resulted in the completion of those buildings later in 2002.

“I was made captain of the Titanic after it hit the iceberg,” Riley joked in a 2002 interview, but he also expressed his affinity for Swaim.

“We were friends,” Riley said. “He was the nicest guy. He was nice to the employees; he was decent with salaries. ... I don’t think he set out to be a crook.

“He was honestly trying to make that go,” Riley said of Swaim and the Club. “The hotel, he remodeled it. ... It was going much better than it had been when it was the Club. ... It was cranking.”

Riley continued managing the Club after Key Bank took it over in 1983, hanging on until the Club closed for the last time in 1984. The golf courses, tennis courses and boathouse/restaurant were leased out, but the hotel was shut down, never to open again.

Who killed Gleneagles?

Peter Crowley

On the wall of his Lake Placid law office, Attorney James Brooks still keeps pictures of the proposed Gleneagles Hotel Lake Placid and its real-life Scottish counterpart.

Gleneagles had plans to build a luxury resort on the 1,066-acre former Lake Placid Club property. The new resort would have employed as many as 500 people. Like many area residents, Brooks — who represented the five-star resort in 1989 and 1990 — lays the blame for its failure entirely on the state Adirondack Park Agency and then-Governor Mario Cuomo.

“They did not want development, and they were given instructions to make sure that it didn’t happen,” Brooks said of the APA. “If (Gleneagles’) plan succeeded, it would bring ‘too many people’ to the Adirondacks, and they didn’t want that to happen.”

If, as Brooks says, the APA’s hundreds of requests for more information were just a ploy to make the Gleneagles people throw up their hands in frustration, it worked, because that’s what Gleneagles did. But was it the APA that killed Gleneagles?

Veteran APA staff members William Curran and Stephen Erman, who worked on the project, say no.

First of all, both men said, they never got marching orders from anyone, Cuomo or otherwise. Rather, Curran said, he felt more state pressure for the project than against it.

Secondly, Curran and Erman agreed, the Gleneagles permit application was full of holes — despite being four binders thick with thousands of pages — but they also agreed that the project itself would probably have been approved in the end. It might have been scaled down slightly, Erman said, because some condominiums had been proposed where land deeds restricted development, but otherwise he thought it could have been approvable.

Yet there is no question Erman, Curran and other APA staff picked apart the Gleneagles application with a very fine-toothed comb. They issued 321 requests for more information ranging from the environmental impacts of horse manure and golf-course pesticides to the resulting employment boom’s impacts on housing, day care and fire protection. Many of these requests had subcategories, arguably bringing the total number of questions to more than 600.

Why did the APA need to know all that stuff?

“The project was so big and ... so lavish, it really had the potential to remake Lake Placid,” Erman said.

The Gleneagles people kept working with APA staff for most of the next year, asking that the Club’s Mount Whitney Ski Area, golf courses, shooting range, boathouse/restaurant and equestrian area be exempt from review. They canceled the entire project after the APA exempted only Mount Whitney.

The group had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars for the best consultants available, Curran said. They were too well prepared to give up so easily, he suspected, if the exemptions were the only issue.

He said he has reason to believe, from a source he did not divulge, that the developers actually bailed out because their accountants second-guessed the project’s profit potential.

“They did all their planning correctly,” Curran said. “Their bean-counters ... really started to look into the future, and although we didn’t know this, they were trying to determine whether this project was worth their investment. Well, I guess we found out.”

Another possible reason for the withdrawal, according to Erman, is disagreement between the project’s two main investors: Guinness PLC, which owned Gleneagles Scotland and was interested mostly in the Lake Placid Resort Hotel, and U.S. Fidelity & Guaranty insurance, which was more interested in the condominiums.

The APA Board never got to decide whether Gleneagles was too big for the Adirondack Park, but Curran and Erman say the former Lake Placid Club property was and still is a good site for intense development. It has good drainage and few wetlands, they say, and most importantly it has been used as a resort since 1895.

“We will see a proposal at some point for development on that site, and I think this agency will react warmly to it,” Erman said. “This project (Gleneagles) had issues.”

But for Brooks, who once stayed at Gleneagles in Scotland and still gets an annual Christmas phone call from officials there, the chance for Club development was had, and the response was given: No.

“It breaks my heart every time I think about it,” Brooks said.

Lussis pick up pieces from post-Club whirlwind

Peter Crowley

When it comes to redeveloping the former Lake Placid Club property they bought in 1996, the Lussi family is moving slowly and cautiously.

Art Lussi, the family spokesman on anything relating to the Club property, said the family plans to eventually sell or lease the Club's central-hotel parcel to someone who could build an "upscale resort complex" — but there's no hurry.

"We've had numerous people come into the community with grandiose ideas," Lussi said. "We don't want to create these illusions that we're going to do that — until it happens."

This slow and steady approach was not how things happened with the Club for the 12 turbulent years before the Lussis bought it.

During those dozen years, from 1984 to 1996, Placid residents saw a lavish proposal come and go for a five-star luxury resort that might have invested \$200 million in the Club facilities, employed about 500 workers and brought some of the richest people in the world to the Olympic Village — the Gleneagles Hotel Lake Placid.

With many locals still sore about that missed opportunity, a series of arson fires broke out in many of the Club's key buildings in 1991, 1992 and 1995, leaving founder Melvil Dewey's once-exclusive all-seasons playground a mostly burnt-out ruin.

The aftermath begins

The Club closed its doors to overnight guests in 1984. Key Bank had taken it over the year before from John Swaim, who was convicted of fraud in 1984 and went to federal prison in 1985. The Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation claimed the Club from Key Bank with the intention of selling it.

Serge Lussi, Art's father, tried to buy the Club in 1987, but the FSLIC rejected his \$8.6 million offer even though it topped the bidding. The property was assessed at \$14.5 million at the time, and the FSLIC said it would not sell the property for less than \$10 million.

Gleneagles: The one that got away

Instead, the FSLIC sold the Club property for \$12 million to Daedalus Development of Toronto, a front for Irish brewer Guinness PLC and its partner, insurance giant U.S. Fidelity & Guaranty.

So began a key chapter in the history of development in the Adirondacks. In 1989, the new triumvirate of owners announced a lavish proposal to turn the defunct Club into the Gleneagles Hotel Lake Placid, modeled after the luxurious Guinness-owned hotel of the same name near the foot of the Scottish highlands.

Gleneagles' Scottish flagship advertised itself as the kind of resort where guests pulled up in Rolls Royces and put on tuxedos and formal dresses before dinner. Room rates at Gleneagles today range from \$250 to \$2,075 U.S. per night, not including meals and special amenities.

During the day, Gleneagles guests play golf on three Jack Nicklaus-designed courses, take master lessons in horseback riding or skeet shooting, and relax or work out in a spa/fitness club. Gleneagles Lake Placid would have contained these same facilities, plus the Mount Whitney Ski Area. Nicklaus himself came to Lake Placid to inspect the links.

But despite the enormous amount of cash available to its key investors, the partnership shattered during an in-depth review of the project proposal by the state's Adirondack Park Agency. Daedalus and Guinness abandoned the scheme, leaving USF&G holding the Club property, and began looking elsewhere for a project site. In 1991, they made the Gleneagles connection with The Equinox resort in Manchester, Vt.

Arson

It was then that the fires began.

A November 1991 article in the Lake Placid News said, "After the small Oct. 18 fire at the main clubhouse, Lake Placid police received threats of future fires on the Lake Placid Club property. One of the dozens of club cottages tucked in the woods between the main clubhouse and Theanog(u)en was found soaked (with gas) after the evening of Oct. 30."

On Nov. 5 of that year, a suspicious fire destroyed Theanoguen Lodge. One of the Club's largest buildings, Theanoguen was built in 1880. It was expanded after the Club bought it in 1911.

Smaller Club buildings were torched in April and August 1992.

Then, in October 1992, the wooden portion of the main clubhouse burned thoroughly. Because of fire damage and previous decay, USF&G asked for a permit to demolish the building. The structure came down in February 1993.

In early May 1995 an arson fire damaged the Larches building, and on May 19 another destroyed the Mount Whitney Ski Lodge. In October 1995 flames gutted Colden Cottage.

Although suspects were named over the years, no culprit was arrested. The only charges ever pressed were for one of the earliest of the Club fires, at a golf course maintenance building; state police charged two young men who played with gas and matches there.

In November 1995 state police released a sketch of a bearded suspect seen by local residents near the Colden Cottage blaze, but they never found him.

Interim deals

USF&G sold the 174-acre Mount Whitney property to Headwall LLC, a company owned by Dr. Howard W. Smith, who also owns nearby Camp Carolina.

The Lake Placid Club Lodges, formed by Swaim in 1981 as a timeshare operation to market the Club's "attached lodge" units, established itself as an independent entity during this time. This business now owns 35 timeshare condominium units on 49 acres of former Club land adjacent to the hotel parcel.

Murnane Construction of Plattsburgh also owns 15 timeshare condos it received in a trade with the Lodge Owners Association in exchange for rehabilitating the old paint shop/stables building, which the Lodge Owners Association now uses as an office.

Art Lussi says he often gets calls from people about the timeshares and has to explain that his family does not own them. Current owners' plans

The Lussis bought the Club for \$4.6 million — less than half of what it was worth when it went bankrupt in 1980.

"The plans when we purchased the Club in '96 were to clean up the place, tear down some of the decrepit old buildings and inject some money into some of the facilities that were operational: the golf course, the golf house, the beach," Art Lussi said.

The family has since arranged to irrigate the Club's three golf courses and subdivide and restore 12 cottages for individual sale. Five of those cottages have been sold at this writing in February 2002, and two more have sales pending, Lussi said.

The Club's six tennis courts and its beach on Mirror Lake are also operational in season for those who own Club cottages or stay in the adjacent condominiums. At this writing the Lussis are restoring

the LPC boathouse/restaurant, which was expected to reopen in the summer of 2002.⁶

The Lussis sold the Club's 41-acre skeet shooting range on River Road to movie actor James Tolkan and his wife, Parmalee.

What is now known as the "Lake Placid Resort" includes about 900 acres of the former Club as well as the Lussis' Holiday Inn hotel atop the Olympic Drive hill.

Now, according to Lussi, "Our intent is to hopefully attract an upscale resort complex, but we haven't been proactive in recruiting people here because we feel that it is our obligation to clean up the property first."

The most noticeable sweep began on New Year's Day 2002 when a wrecking crew began demolishing the 79-year-old Agora Wing. The theater, hotel and chapel were the last remnants of the Club's main complex, once known as "Morningside."

"There was no practical way to rehabilitate that building," Art Lussi said.

The Lussis planned to recycle the Agora's materials, sending the steel to a plant in either Albany or Montreal and having the concrete ground into crusher run for roads. Then they hoped to have the holes filled, have grass seed planted and leave "an attractive green space," in Art Lussi's words, to market to a developer.

⁶ The restored boathouse restaurant opened on schedule in mid-2002.

The Lake Placid Club legacy is all around us

Lee Manchester

The Lake Placid Club is dead.

Long live the Lake Placid Club!

Such a cheer could appropriately be raised each day of the year from a wide variety of venues still thriving throughout the Olympic Region.

The real vitality of the Lake Placid Club, its reason for being, passed on with its founder, Melvil Dewey, in 1931. From that time onward, the Club stopped growing. Most of the innovations in its operations and management developed by succeeding directors were, by and large, for the worse. The Club's March 1980 bankruptcy declaration was more like a coroner's post-mortem pronouncement than a death in itself, and the January 2002 demolition of the Agora Suites and Auditorium was little more than grave maintenance.

Yet the legacy of the Lake Placid Club is very much alive, all around us, and will continue to be so for many years to come.

Adirondack Loj

Today's Adirondack Loj, on the shore of tiny, picturesque Heart Lake, is a successor to the original three-story retreat, built by Henry Van Hoevenberg in 1878-80, capable of accommodating 60 guests. Mount Jo, the small peak situated behind the Loj, is named for Van Hoevenberg's one-time fiancée, Josephine Scofield.

In 1898, financial reversals forced Van Hoevenberg to give up the Loj. A Plattsburgh man ran it for a couple of years for the Bronx Investment Company until it was bought by Melvil Dewey on Sept. 5, 1900. Van Hoevenberg was returned to the Loj as its manager, and the Lake Placid Club promoted it as its "Forest Branch."

The Loj burned in a wildfire started on May 15, 1903, by workmen on the Lake Placid Club's neighboring Tablelands Farm. Van Hoevenberg moved to the LPC's Morningside campus, living in a building named "The Vanguard" for him and working as the Club's engineer for a number of years. He died at the Club in 1918.

It took a number of years for the LPC to raise the \$25,000 needed to rebuild the Adirondack Loj, but reconstruction finally began in the spring of 1928, and the new structure was completed by the end of that year. It could host about 24 guests.

For three years, the Adirondack Loj was operated by the Lake Placid Club itself. In 1932, a lease was drawn up for the Adirondack Loj Corporation, which operated the facility for 26 years. The corporation was owned by LPC member Frederick T. Kelsey, who was also closely affiliated with the newly created Adirondack Mountain Club.

Following Kelsey's death, the Adirondack Loj and its 700 surrounding acres — including Heart Lake and Mount Jo — were sold outright to ADK, which continues to maintain it as a year-round lodging facility and a base for outings into the Adirondack High Peaks.

Lake Placid Sinfonietta and Paul H. White Memorial Bandshell

In 1917, a group of seven musicians from the Boston Symphony Orchestra took up summer residence at the Lake Placid Club under the direction of BSO first violinist Daniel Kuntz. When Boston Symphony musicians became unable to continue their summer programs with the establishment of Tanglewood in 1937, Paul White was recruited to form the Lake Placid Club Sinfonietta.

White, conductor of the Rochester Civic Orchestra and professor at the Eastman School of Music, built a small orchestra of 16 musicians. When White retired in 1972, he was succeeded by Carl Eberl, Sinfonietta violist and White's former doctoral student.

Under Eberl's conductorship, the Sinfonietta began its free "Cushion Concerts" in the natural amphitheater at Lake Placid's Main Street Park. In 1976, the village of Lake Placid accepted a gift from Elizabeth Master, chairwoman of the LPC's Music Committee: a permanent bandshell for the park to replace the temporary one in use then. The park was renamed in honor of founding conductor Paul White.

The financially challenged Lake Placid Club terminated its sponsorship of the Sinfonietta at the end of the 1977 season. The recently established Lake Placid Center for Music, Drama and Art — later to be known simply as the Lake Placid Center for the Arts — was so impressed with the community's enthusiastic reception of the Cushion Concerts that it picked up the orchestra's sponsorship, dropping the word "Club" from its name.

The Sinfonietta and its Cushion Concert series in the Paul White Memorial Bandshell Park continue to be a staple of Lake Placid's summer cultural life.

The full story of the Lake Placid Sinfonietta is told in Chapter 11 of this book.

Northwood School

Since before 1908, the Lake Placid Boys School was housed in Lake Placid Club buildings. In that year the school was moved from two separate LPC cottages into the larger Mohawk building on the Club's property on the east shore of Mirror Lake, called the Morningside Estate.

It was not until 1925, however, that the school was officially acquired by the Lake Placid Education Foundation, an LPC branch. It was then renamed Northwood School, perhaps in anticipation of its move the following year.

The Lake Placid Club bought the Monte Mare Girls School property on the Northwood forest land, adjacent to the Club's main property, in 1926. The campus, consisting of 20 acres and a building for 50 pupils, was used in 1927 as an LPC residence before taking the Junior Section of the school into residence in the fall of 1928. A 52-room expansion in 1929 allowed the school's Senior Section to be moved onto campus as well.

Today, Northwood School operates as a private, co-educational senior high school (grades 9 through 12) at its campus in the forest just off the morningside of Mirror Lake. The school will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2005.

Morningside remains

Almost nothing remains today of Melvil Dewey's Morningside campus of the Lake Placid Club, though some remnants of both the M.D. days and the pre-bankruptcy Lake Placid Club Resort still survive on the eastern shore of Mirror Lake.

Though the Lake Placid Resort, now owned and operated by the Serge Lussi family, finally tore down the derelict remains of the LPC's main clubhouse in early 2002, that's not necessarily the last that will be seen of resort accommodations at Morningside. In fact, Lake Placid Resort manager Art Lussi said that the primary reason for demolishing the Agora Suites and Auditorium was to make the property more attractive to future resort developers, though no developers are currently planning to build on the site.

The Lussis have continued to operate the "new" Lake Placid Club Golfhouse at Morningside, built in 1951, with great success. The family has also rehabilitated a dozen of the surviving Lake Placid Club cottages that stand amidst the pines just north of the former Lake Forest site.

A longstanding dispute between the Lake Placid Club Lodge Owners Association, Essex County and the Lussi family was resolved in early 2001, allowing the LPCLOA to proceed with the

completion of a development project conceived by the Lake Placid Club in its waning years.

The time-share association that owned the 35 completed townhouse condominium units — styled “attached lodges” by the Club’s 1967 management — traded the “Plywood Building,” a dilapidated, half-finished, five-unit condo structure, and the poured foundations for two more condo buildings to Murnane Construction of Plattsburgh. In return, Murnane agreed to completely renovate a decaying Lake Placid Club turn-of-the-20th-century brick garage building for use by the LPCLOA as sales offices and a clubhouse.

Today, in addition to the refurbished garage, the Lake Placid Club’s old Morningside campus has two brand-new condo buildings, and the former eyesore known as the Plywood Building has been finished as a modern, attractive townhouse structure.

Winter sports, vacationing in Lake Placid

Perhaps the greatest legacy of the Lake Placid Club, however, is the very concept of winter as we know it in Lake Placid.

Before Melvil Dewey and company pioneered the idea of vacationing through the winter in the Adirondacks, buying snowshoes, skates and sleds and importing toboggans and Norwegian skis for outdoor play, the thought was considered somewhat mad.

The success of the Club’s winter season, the formation of the Lake Placid Skating Club, the LPC Sno Birds and the U.S. Eastern Amateur Ski Association, the erection of successive toboggan chutes and early ski jumps on the Club golf course and the first Intervale ski jump around 1920 all led to Godfrey Dewey’s successful 1929 bid in Lausanne for a Winter Olympiad in Lake Placid three years later.

Though only the landing hill and outrun survive at Intervale from the 1932 Olympic and earlier LPC jumps, the site is still used for competition and training, and the 60- and 90-meter jump towers used in Lake Placid’s 1980 Olympics (now 90 and 120 meters, respectively) rise above the spot where the Lake Placid Club built its first 35-meter jump.

An interesting historic sidebar, however, is the survival of one of the Club’s original jumps. Moved from its place on the gentle slopes of the LPC’s upper golf course, the wooden structure now serves as the village and township park district’s municipal toboggan chute, sending natives and visitors alike shooting out onto the southern Mirror Lake ice every winter.

Remembering the Lake Placid Club

Roland and Miriam Buxton

Our first visit to Lake Placid was when Roland returned from the Third Division 15th Infantry, which saw combat in Africa, Sicily and Italy.

Lake Placid Club had been taken over by the U.S. Army in mid-1944 as a rest and rehabilitation center for ground forces only.

Soldiers and wives were brought by train to Lake Placid and housed in all the outlying buildings belonging to the Lake Placid Club. Every two weeks, 200 soldiers arrived. The Northwood School was the processing center where their records were brought up to date. Their psychological and general health, including dental work, were paid in full, and military citations were checked. Some soldiers were re-assigned to non-combat stations, and others were sent back to the action.

The Lake Placid Club had lots of good, fresh food — there were bowls of fresh fruit placed around, and no C-rations. There were also free movies, dances, USO entertainment, dogsled rides, canoes to use and fishing equipment provided. There was also the Copacabana Club, where you brought your own liquor for a social time — mixers were provided.

The cadre was housed at the Hotel Marcy, and the town hall was shared by the M.P.s and town police. The town prospered with help from the soldiers and what was paid by the military. Also, many local people had employment.

We fell in love with the High Peaks region. Our youngest son graduated from John Jay High School in 1970; we moved to this area that December.

Col. Roland Buxton was assigned to the Lake Placid Club Cadre of Military Police from September 1944 to July 1945. He was one of the first soldiers to be discharged under the Army point system.

Miriam Buxton was a civilian employee for the Returnee Center at Northwood School. Her job was to prepare and make copies of the roster for each day (including name, rank and serial security number). Her office was the first place the returnees came to when they arrived.

The LPC: One big haunted house

Chris Morris

What did the Lake Placid Club mean to me?

As a 17-year-old high school student, the Lake Placid Club meant to me the same thing as it meant to many area youths: It was an old, haunted, abandoned building.

I do not intend to stereotype local teen-agers. I'm sure there are many who realize and respect the Lake Placid Club's historical importance. However, if you were to utter the words "Lake Placid Club" to five random kids off the street, you are quite likely to receive a response pertaining to it being haunted.

Legends and rumors spread quickly among middle school and high school students. Some kids will tell you that there was a murder at the Club a number of years ago; some will tell you about a crazy employee who locked himself in the cellar and starved to death. I have actually heard people say these things, but I tend to take statements of this nature with a grain of salt.

At any rate, on a night when a group of friends didn't have anything to do, a trek to the ruins of the Lake Placid Club wasn't out of the ordinary.

I have never been to this "haunted" place, but I know several people who have. Personal accounts of their trips sound ridiculous to me. One person told me that on a night when the temperature was nearly 80 degrees Fahrenheit, they could see their breath as they walked into a certain room.

Bloody footprints was one of my favorites.

I'm not one to call all of this silly or childish. My imagination easily gets the better of me if I'm walking alone at night. However, I do prefer to form my own opinions about subjects like ghosts and haunted houses.

What about the law? Technically, the Club is private property, and trespassing isn't allowed. Police have chased kids off the grounds and have made arrests in the past. Kids still go, despite this danger, and I think that is testimony to the Club's influence.

Now that the Club is gone, I feel like I may have missed out on a part of Tri-Lakes history. I'm jealous of my friends who did hike through the deserted building, even if I think their stories were a little

wild. It's something that I will never have the chance to do again, now that it is gone.

Just like our parents and grandparents told us the history of the Lake Placid Club and how it was a part of their lives, I think many of us now have that same opportunity. Although our history of the Club differs dramatically from our elders, we have something unique.

If you thought that your grandparents' stories about hockey games and curling matches were exciting, imagine how much your children will enjoy your thrilling stories about following bloody footprints into the dark, empty ruins of the Lake Placid Club.

The Lake Placid Club Sinfonietta (1982)

Alice Wareham

This story was written for the Adirondack Daily Enterprise in 1982, two decades before the January 2002 demolition of the Agora Suites. Because it tells such an important part of the Lake Placid Club story, and because it does not now appear anywhere else in print, we decided to include it here as our final chapter.

Five members of the Lake Placid Sinfonietta, created in 1939 by Eastman Music School's late Paul White, have united to save the conductor's 16-member summer symphony orchestra from extinction. After a winter of complex legal technicalities, they have established the nonprofit Lake Placid Sinfonietta Inc. and are approaching the \$35,000 budget required for a 1982 concert season.

The musicians include four of White's former students: Sinfonietta conductor Carl Eberl of the Idaho Falls Symphony Orchestra; concertmistress Dorothy Happel of the Greenwich Symphony, Connecticut; bassist Philip Albright, performance professor at Ball State University, Indiana; and David Van Hoesen, Eastman professor of bassoon.

The fifth Sinfonietta musician behind its recent incorporation — violinist John Huwiler, concertmaster of the Stamford Symphony, Connecticut — is a graduate of Yale Music School.

The Lake Placid Sinfonietta is unique in size, personnel and library. A heritage of the Lake Placid Club, it grew from 11 to 16 chairs under White and, briefly, to 20 musicians under Eberl. Sinfoniettaists are all artists in their own right with high standards and busy winter schedules. The \$35,000 budget to cover an 8-week season's full expenses reveals modest salaries for musicians of such stature, yet there is remarkably little turnover in personnel. Rochester Philharmonic's first oboist Robert Sprenkle was Sinfonietta oboist for 40 summers. Eberl, who joined as violist in 1962, is the most recent Sinfonietta addition of the above-mentioned five.

Sinfonietta musicians find inspiration in the challenge of serious classical programs with so few chairs. Their summers have become personal investments that yield steady musical growth, and programs regularly feature outstanding solo performances.

The key to the Sinfonietta's remarkable programs — which include works by Beethoven, Hayden, Schubert and Wagner — lies in a unique musical library of symphonic classics scored to the capabilities of two violins, a viola, cello, double bass, flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, tympani and piano. This library, now including more than 2,000 orchestrations, has been built up over a period of 65 years. Many of the scores, acquired in Europe before 1920, are irreplaceable. Today Sinfonietta members worry as much about their library's safety as their own, for there has never been money to duplicate the orchestrations.

The Sinfonietta is a legacy of the Lake Placid Club, originally funded through the LPC's Lake Placid Education Foundation. With the Club's impending demise, the Lake Placid Center for Music, Drama and Art [now the Lake Placid Center for the Arts] assumed sponsorship in 1978. In 1981, when the CMDA faced its own financial crisis, the Sinfonietta was forced to incorporate in its own right. While many of its performances are still held at the Art Center, the Sinfonietta includes box office receipts in its budget.

Sinfonietta origins

The Lake Placid Club commissioned White's Sinfonietta in 1939 to replace an 11-member Boston Symphony Ensemble that had given seven concerts a week at the Club during the summer months after World War I. Julius Theodorowicz, assistant conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted the Ensemble. Its program began in June, as soon as the Boston musicians' engagements permitted. Regularly featuring prominent guest soloists, the Ensemble's performance calendar extended through the original Adirondack Music Festival, which began at the Club in 1925. The two-day festival featured choirs from various Adirondack communities, and the Ensemble contributed with concerts each afternoon and evening.

The Tanglewood Music Festival, born in 1937, absorbed the full talents of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, forcing the departure of the Boston Ensemble from the Lake Placid Club. Left behind was a library including such treasures as the piano-conductor score of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Capriccio Espagnol" with a historic notation: "Performed September 1921, Lake Placid Club, Daniel Kuntz (guest conductor)."

Paul White, then associate conductor of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and the Eastman School Symphony, created the Lake Placid Club Sinfonietta with 10 Philharmonic musicians

and Ensemble pianist Carl Lamson, former accompanist to Fritz Kreisler, who continued to summer at Lake Placid.

For several pre-World War II years, using the existing music library, White conducted traditional concerts with occasional modest innovations. The war forced changes in personnel and, in 1945, a year of silence when the Lake Placid Club became an Army rest center.

Post-war growth

Regrouping the Sinfonietta in 1946, White began to place his own strong stamp on the small orchestra. He expanded the music library, himself editing the work of local composers Victor Herbert, an 1890s Placidian, and Bela Bartok, a 1940s resident of nearby Saranac Lake, scaling them to the Sinfonietta's proportions. White persuaded the Lake Placid Club Education Foundation to fund a bassoon in 1947, a third violin in 1948 and, in the early 1950s, a trumpet. The Sinfonietta, now numbering 15 members, grew into music that had required an orchestra of greater strength.

It was in the selection of musicians, however, that the conductor's greatest influence showed. No longer was the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra the Sinfonietta's sole source of talent. White began to recruit highly promising students from the Eastman and Julliard conservatories who would benefit artistically from symphonic experience with established musicians.

As these young musicians matured, Sinfonietta program personnel notes reflected an ever-increasing range of symphony orchestras and university faculties. Many musicians met over the summers in Lake Placid, married and returned to the Sinfonietta each year, bringing their families along to camp, hike and fish in the Adirondacks. Musically talented offspring often attended Meadowmount Music Camp in nearby Lewis township.

White created strong traditions for audience and musicians alike. Seasons concluded with Haydn's "Farewell Symphony" and a candlelight ceremony [and still do]. Afterward the conductor hosted musicians at a private champagne party where corks popped to the strains of Victor Herbert's "Champagne Polka." The Sinfonietta score, in White's script, is among its music library treasures.

Under Paul White the Sinfonietta became a family, with musicians' children occasionally growing up to fill chairs themselves. Among these have been the conductor's son-in-law, Milan Yancich, who played French horn, and later White's grandsons, Paul and Mark, timpanists. Gretchen Van Hoesen, principal harpist with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra since

1977, had early orchestra experience with the Sinfonietta, joining her father David, its bassoonist. Ann Alton has succeeded her mother Ardyth as first cellist.

When White retired in 1972 he named as his successor Sinfonietta violist and former Eastman doctoral student Carl Eberl. At the time Eberl was on the music faculty of Queens College, where he was primarily active as conductor of the College Orchestra and Choral Society.

Crisis years

Carl Eberl stepped to the podium in 1973 as the Lake Placid Club faced the crisis of steadily declining membership, leasing its buildings to the Lake Placid Resort Hotel. Sinfonietta programs, still funded by the Lake Placid Club Educational Foundation, were opened to the public without charge, and attendance increased dramatically. Music Committee Chairwoman Elizabeth Master persuaded the Foundation to underwrite a fourth violin, bringing the Sinfonietta to 16 members. Master also encouraged the new conductor to further expand the orchestra's library.

With Master's support, Eberl also persuaded the Lake Placid Village Board to allow weekly Sinfonietta concerts in Main Street Park on Mirror Lake. Dropping steeply from the street through two terraces to Mirror Lake, the park provides a natural amphitheater with excellent acoustics and a wonderful view across water to the Sentinel Mountain Range.

Bridge to the future

The following summer, the series opened in a makeshift shell at the waterside. Called "Cushion Concerts" as subtle advice to audiences to provide their own comfort, it featured programs of light classics that often starred local musical talent.

Cushion Concerts thrived. The village replaced the temporary plastic shell with an acoustically improved wooden shell and began to provide folding chairs for appreciative but uncushioned tourists. In 1976 the village accepted a permanent shell designed to suggest an Adirondack lean-to, the gift of Elizabeth Master in memory of the late Paul White.

The same years produced increasing frustration at the Resort Hotel, where developing convention business resulted in conventioners wandering in and out of the Agora Auditorium during concerts. A dance band in the adjacent Adirondack Room sometimes drowned out Sinfonietta pianissimo passages.

At the close of the 1977 season the Education Foundation terminated more than half a century of classical music performances at the Lake Placid Club.

Move to Art Center

Impressed by the community's enthusiastic reception of the Cushion Concerts, the recently established Center for Music, Drama and Art assumed sponsorship of the Sinfonietta. The orchestra dropped the word "Club" from its name along with its move to the Lake Placid Art Center. Eberl transferred the Sinfonietta's music library to the CMDA in 1978 after discovering that a broken water pipe had flooded the opposite side of the room at the Lake Placid Club where the collection had been housed for so many years.

Although the Club Music Committee disbanded, Elizabeth Master continued encouragement and financial support as CMDA audiences built up. Her death in January 1979, just before the opening of the Sinfonietta's 41st season, was a loss to the orchestra and to many of the musicians with whom she had established personal friendships.

Sinfonietta expansion

The popular Cushion Concerts continued. At CMDA, Eberl expanded the orchestra's musical dimensions, adding student chairs to bring the Sinfonietta to 20 members, expanding the music library's catalog of orchestrations and instituting post-concert wine and cheese receptions to introduce musicians and audience members to one another.

Returning after the 1980 Olympics, the conductor discovered a broken Plexiglas panel in the Paul White Memorial Shell. When Cushion Concert audiences learned Lake Placid had no maintenance budget, they donated nickels, dimes and quarters to replace the panel and buy several gallons of preservative to stain the shell floor.

A new decade

Post-Olympic economic difficulties abounded in Lake Placid, and the CMDA was no exception. Nettie Marie Jones, widow of W. Alton Jones, had established the Art Center, theater and art library in the 1970s to bring music, drama and art to the people of Lake Placid. Although the Sinfonietta often played to full houses and door receipts increased steadily, a \$7 maximum ticket fee fell far short of the \$20.90 individual cost for attendance at one of CMDA's 54 live events during the year. In 1981 the W. Alton Jones Foundation, one of the CMDA's major sources of funding, threatened to withdraw its support if the organization did not stabilize its financial base.

At the close of the 1981 summer season, CMDA President Charles Ritchie informed the Sinfonietta that the Center was terminating its sponsorship of the orchestra. He advised the musicians to incorporate on their own.

The directors of the CMDA voted on Oct. 29, 1981, to put the organization in the hands of the newly established Lake Placid Association for Music, Drama and Art, a nonprofit corporation. Under the organization's new bylaws, the Arts Center will be available to groups like the Sinfonietta who wish to use it for performances.

Funded by others for all 42 years of its existence, the Sinfonietta was shocked into facing the harsh realities of musical existence in the modern world. It was determined to survive.

Starting with Frances Brewster's contribution of a \$125 fee earned for her performance at the North Elba Historical Society's 1981 annual meeting, fund-raising efforts for the newly incorporated Sinfonietta have snowballed. The orchestra has programmed an 8-week summer season this year [1982] and has nearly met its \$35,000 budget.

Paul White willed a legacy of high musical standards to Sinfonietta artists and audiences alike. In forming and financing the Lake Placid Sinfonietta Inc., his summer family has matured to claim its inheritance.

Appendix 1

Lake Placid Club comparison figures: 1895-1950

YEAR	GUEST HIGH	NO. OF BLDG.S	ACRES	GROSS REVENUE	PLANT VALUE
1895	30	5		\$4,800	\$5,500
1905	496				
1906		160	6,100		
1907	646				
1908		190	6,500		
1913	902				
1914		258	6,000		\$1.4 M
1915			7,000		
1916	1,092				
1917			7,500		\$2.25 M
1923		356	9,600		
1925	1,510				
1927		360		\$4 M	\$2.8 M
1928			10,600		
1929	1,461				
Late '40s			5,000		5,000

Chronology of the Lake Placid Club

1890 — Melvil and Annie Dewey, seeking vacation spots where they could find relief from allergies, make their first visit to Lake Placid while vacationing in Keene.

1893 — Staying at the Grand View Hotel in Lake Placid, Dewey bought “Placid Hyts,” a nearly 63-acre tract starting on Hillcrest Avenue and running west across Placid Lake’s Outlet Brook. Additional acquisitions followed, including “Pines” and “Sunnyside” cottages.

1894 — Deweys takes up summer residence at Pines Cottage, a camp probably built by Annie Dewey’s sister Lydia Godfrey.

1895 — Placid Park Club established. Dewey leases the Bonniblink Hotel on May 16 for the summer, to become the Placid Club Casino. Thirty guests stayed that summer. First small golf course built.

1896 — Dewey buys Bonniblink in February. The Placid Club incorporated on May 19. Following expansions, Bonniblink was redubbed the Laksyd Clubhouse. (The non-winterized Lakeside was torn down in April 1946.)

1900 — Adirondack Loj, built 1878-80 by Henry Van Hoevenberg, bought by LPC from investment company that had taken it over from Van Hoevenberg in 1898; renamed Forest Branch of LPC, purchase included 16 buildings, 640 acres. LPC’s “Morningside” campus, on the eastern shore of Mirror Lake, is awarded its own post office.

1903 — Burning waste on neighboring LPC farm goes out of control, destroying Adirondack Loj; 1,000 acres of LPC property burned.

1904 — Edgewood Cottage is LPC’s first winter-ready cottage; with Wayside and Forest, Club opens for first winter season, with 10 guests. On Dec. 20, leaders of NYC’s Jewish community petition to have Dewey fired as state librarian because of LPC’s anti-Semitic membership policy.

1905 — Pressure forces Dewey’s resignation as state librarian in December. Shortly thereafter, Dewey family takes up permanent residence in Lake Placid.

1906 — Forest Hall completed and opened.

1907 — Placid Park Club reorganized as Lake Placid Club. Forest of Arden Theater (outdoor) opened, with 40-foot stage, benches for 640, seating for 300 more on slopes. Moose Island Camp built. Northwood, a forested 50-acre plot, purchased.

1908 — Lake Placid Boys School (later renamed Northwood School) moved from two cottages into the larger Mohawk building. LPC consolidates holdings at Morningside campus, sells village houses and lots, sells four farms and 400+ acres of land.

1912 — New toboggan tower built at Golf House.

1916 — Road around Mirror Lake completed by village, town governments.

1918 — Henry Van Hoevenberg, former Club engineer, dies in February.

1919 — First ski jump at Intervales built (35 meters).

1920 — Headmaster John Hopkins abandons Lake Placid Boys School; former master Herbert L. Malcolm takes over. Sno Birds founded, and first ski tournament held.

1921 — First “College Week” ski competitions.

1922 — Annie Godfrey Dewey dies Aug. 3. Lake Placid Club Education Foundation established; permanent charter granted five years later.

1923 — Agora East Wing and Auditorium opened; West Wing opens one year later. Cascade Lake Hotel and 1,440 acres, including the lakes themselves, are bought and given to the Lake Placid Company.

1924 — Melvil Dewey remarries; second wife is Mrs. Emily McKay Beal.

1925 — Lake Placid School acquired by Lake Placid Club Education Foundation and renamed Northwood School.

1926 — Monte Mare Girls School building acquired by LPC; became new Northwood home. Construction of new state highway around Cascade Clubhouse forces its closure for season; it never reopens.

1928 — Adirondack Loj rebuilt (current structure).

1929 — Godfrey Dewey secures 1932 Olympic Winter Games for Lake Placid. Suite of medical offices, personal care facilities opened in lower level of Lake Forest.

1930 — Forest East Suites opened, the last major addition to the Club’s facilities.

1931 — Melvil Dewey dies on Dec. 26.

1932 — Winter Olympic Games held in February. In 10 months following Melvil Dewey’s death, Club loses 183 members.

1936 — Guest numbers and fiscal results slide further downward.

1938 — Sam's Slide (or Slope) established on Mount Whitney.

1939 — Lake Placid Company begins voluntary reorganization.

1941 — \$200K borrowed to pay current debts. Annie Newman farm acquired by Henry Uihlein and named "Heaven Hill."

1943 — Company reorganization completed; LPC debt reorganized.

1944 — In late summer, Army announces takeover of Club and Northwood School facilities as a center for the redeployment of troops; shortly thereafter, Club manager Samuel Packer commits suicide.

1945 — LPC leases Mirror Lake Inn during summer; Army lease expires in November.

1946 — Laksyd demolition begins in April.

1947 — Replacement of Mount Whitney tow rope with T-bar further drains Lake Placid Company resources.

1949 — Uihleins purchase additional LPC farms as part of Heaven Hill operations.

1951 — New golfhouse replaces original structure. Modernization program started on all Agora, East Suites, Lake Forest rooms, Forest lounges and lobbies.

1958 — Adirondack Loj and 700 surrounding acres sold to Adirondack Mountain Club, which had leased the Loj and land for a number of years.

1962 — At Mount Whitney, new ski lodge built, Hovey ski trail opened, second T-bar installed. Old lodge moved to Intervale Farm.

1967 — Record year for Club, attributed to opening of Northway and Expo Canada in Montreal. Loan from W. Alton Jones for new golfhouse paid off. New lakehouse opened. Construction of new "attached lodges" — townhouse condominiums on the LPC Morningside campus — begun.

1969 — Total indebtedness of LPC from capital improvements: \$1.6 million.

1970 — Clubhouse opened for public lodging, with two weeks over winter holidays and July-August reserved for LPC members.

1972 — LPC dues increase from \$170 to \$350 for resident members, resulting in resignation of 300 members, causing \$40,000 loss in annual revenue. An analyst's proposal to return LPC's status to that of a private club is rejected.

1973 — Old dues schedule restored. Two studies show that LPC operated at a loss for 16 of previous 20 years.

1974 — Lake Placid wins bid for 1980 Winter Olympics; LPC is designated as headquarters for International Olympic Committee.

1977 — Club opens to public full time, year around as Lake Placid Resort Hotel. \$3.5 million refinancing package arranged, with an additional \$700,000 later.

1978 — \$600K spent on restoring facilities for Olympic use, with costs underwritten by occupants in lieu of rent and discounts on use of facilities for several years following 1980 Games.

1980 — Lake Placid Company defaults in January on a \$3.5 million loan. Bankruptcy filed five weeks after end of Olympic Games; Lake Placid Club closed.

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On the morning of January 1, 2002, the wrecking ball swung into the brick exterior of the Agora Wing, the last surviving vestige of the old Lake Placid Club.

As the Club came down, memories arose across the North Country of its former grandeur, its role in creating winter sport and two Olympic Winter Games, and its place as the employer of thousands of area residents.

People also recalled its long slide downhill, beginning during the Depression, and ending in 1980 in United States Bankruptcy Court.

This book retells the story of the Lake Placid Club, as it appeared in a series written for the Lake Placid News and the Adirondack Daily Enterprise.