Gateway Village Signs

The Village of Skaneateles has a special greeting for all those entering and leaving the Village. These greetings are a bronze sign that reads "Skaneateles, Eastern Gateway to the Finger Lakes." They are mounted on ornamental metal posts with ornamental lights on either side, so that they can be seen at night.

These signs were erected in 1931, on the Corporate lines at East and West Genesee Street, Onondaga Street. There was once a set on the north line on Jordan Street, but are no longer there due to the ravages of time and a runaway automobile.

These signs were presented to the Village as a gift of the Village Municipal Board, headed at that time by George Tucker.
A Message from our Museum Director:

Hello everyone and Happy Summer!

By now you have heard that my husband and I welcomed a beautiful baby girl into this world. She is certainly keeping us on our toes and we are loving every minute of it - even our doggy loves her! Baby Nina has already filled the museum with her cries but also has kept our team in smiles with her little Goo Goo and Ga Ga noises.

Our Membership meeting closed up the June fiscal year and we said good bye and thank you to some long standing Board Members. We start our new year this July with many of the same faces but with hopes of having a few new ones join us! (Interested in Volunteering? Give us a call!)

By the time you are reading this, The 80th Lightening Regatta will have passed but we hope you were able to join us for our Open House! Coming Up, we will be giving tours during the Antique and Classic Boat Show so we hope to see you then! Be on the look out for our fall speaker series line up to be announced soon. Lastly, we have a number of new exhibits and new items in the gift shop so it is a great time to stop in.

To our Community @ large - Our Annual Fund Drive kicked off with a bang and we are half way to our goal - thank you!

~Sasha

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Mr. Tucker stated in his annual report for 1931 that the signs were paid for from earnings of the Village Electric Department.

The large bronze plates were designed by artist Gaylord Wiard. Mr. Wiard was a native of Batavia, New York, and a graduate of Syracuse University. In 1925 he married Margaret Tucker, George Tucker's daughter, and settled down in Skaneateles. Mrs. Wiard was an artist also, an illustrator of children's books and a portrait painter.

The December 3, 1931 issue of the Skaneateles Press said, "These ornamental tablets are a first class feature and in keeping with the proud position of Skaneateles among the villages in the area."

The gateway signs were featured on the cover of the 1948 "Tourist's Guide to Skaneateles" and more recently were the subject of a post card. In June of 2003, they were depicted on pins issued by the YMCA to those who participated in their Skaneateles Folks March.

When the Village and the Fire Department both celebrated their 175th Anniversary in 2008, they adopted the signs as their logo. At that time the signs were given a fresh coat of black paint and gold paint applied to the lettering.

They are also shown on the 2013 holiday ornaments issued annually by the Skaneateles Historical Society.

written by Jorge Batlle, Village Historian
Located on the southwest shore of Skaneateles Lake in Cayuga County (Glen Haven) was an island formation called an esker, a sand and gravel mound left by a stream from a retreating glacier. When the lake level was high, this area was surrounded by water. The island contained 'old growth' hemlock trees. One such tree was measured to be 150 feet tall, 39 inches in diameter and about 265 years old.

In 1847, Glen Haven became famous for its water cure. Hemlock Island was a favorite spot for guests of the Glen Haven Hotel described as a 'delightfully cool retreat - densely shaded by trees and furnished with tables and rustic seats for the benefit of picnic parties.' In 1902 artist John Barrow wrote "the Glen Haven Hotel in one form or another has had a prominent share in lake history...But I cannot help asking what it has done or what it ought to have done to save or restore the head of the lake? The woods below the hotel has never been thinned for two miles, where near the shore they were cleared for about a mile, spoiling one of the most delightful walks and roads around the lake. The really magnificent Hemlock Island has been greatly despoiled and none may now know what it was, but those who remember it." Barrow's painting of Hemlock Island is in the Barrow Art Gallery's collection.
In 1911, the City of Syracuse purchased for $40,000 the hotel and 150 acres of surrounding land, including Hemlock Island. This was to prevent development and contamination of the City's water supply. The hotel and outbuildings were demolished and removed. In 1913 students from the State College of Forestry took a tour of the island and noted "nearly every tree native to the State and all of the common and almost all of the rare plants of the State...can be found on the property." It was also noted that about 600,000 feet of timber could be harvested on the property.

In November of 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civil Works Administration (CWA) to use Federal money to create local construction jobs for projects for parks, roads, water mains and sewer systems. Syracuse needed lumber for a CWA project, and sent a crew of lumbermen to Hemlock Island in January of 1934. To save the City about $2,000, the trees on the island would be cut down and turned into shoring planks for sewer and water line trenches.

A story was run in the March 11, 1934 Syracuse Herald titled: Axes Toppling Virgin Forest for City's Use. It mentions that "seventy towering trees which gave Hemlock Island its name have fallen and the rest are marked to go." The story continues saying, "it is the only old growth forest between the Catskills and the Adirondacks..." Protests from Syracuse and Skaneateles cottage owners brought the cutting to an end. Also, the CWA funding ran out at the end of March. This may have saved a few trees, but the island's old growth forest was gone forever. Syracuse Mayor Rolland Marvin and City Engineer William Cronin can be credited with the loss, as from their offices they only thought of a way for Syracuse to save $2,000. However a Mayor's spokesperson said, "it was the decided pleas of the Skaneateles people that the remainder of the hemlock grove be preserved..."

Thank you to Jorge Batlle for two wonderful history bites!
ARCHIVES CORNER

The Society, through the efforts of many dedicated volunteers, has created and collected extensive archives for historical and genealogical research: an amazing resource which serves the community and visitors alike.

Researchers are available every Friday from 1 - 4 PM

Our researchers, which include our Town & Village Historian along with other experienced volunteers, help a variety of visitors just like you!

Members and Non - Members come in to research the history of their homes, their families, or other subjects of interest. Some are working on a personal project and many are completing projects for their work life.

We look forward to seeing you in our research room sometime soon!
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