

newsletter

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Waterfall and Woodlands Lake Hotel complex, 1925. Courtesy of Westchester County Archives

Woodlands Lake Waterfall Area—Ardsley's Summer Joy For Over 150 Years!

By **THERESA DI STEFANO**

Woodlands Lake Waterfall area is located in V. Everit Macy Park alongside the Saw Mill River Parkway. For well over 150 years, Woodlands Lake Waterfall area has been a summer wonderland for Ardsley residents.

The lake is man-made and has a beautiful waterfall on its southern end. The waterfall now has a concrete bridge that crosses over it leading to The South County Trailway. At one time this concrete bridge was a wooden bridge that acted as

an access road that crossed over the waterfall from the Saw Mill River Road to a renowned resort area in the 1920's and 1930's. The waterfall was created by building a dam across the Saw Mill River. In the past, the water power created by this waterfall successfully powered saw mills and grist mills along the Saw Mill River during the latter part of the 18th Century and throughout all of the 19th Century. These mills processed various grains and produced a high percentage of the finished lumber for local construction. (*Greenburgh: A Glimpse Of Our Past Town Of Greenburgh Bicentennial 1788-1988*)

Woodlands Lake CONTINUED

The Woodlands Lake area was originally owned by Fredrick Philips, a royalist, and was part of Philips Manor. After the American Revolution, victorious patriot forces confiscated the land. Jonathan Odell, one of the many patriots, purchased the saw mill near the lake, plus one hundred acres of land running through the valley.



Left: The resort hotels had rowboats, canoes and foot pedal boats available for hotel guests and day excursionists who came by train or lived close by. Center: Ladies and gentlemen who are enjoying themselves by barbecuing some food during a day's outing. Right: When the circus came to town, it set itself up in the Woodlands Lake Waterfall area. (Courtesy of *Pictures of the Past Ardsley, N.Y.* by Patricia and Fred Arone.)

Then, in 1816, Joseph Howland purchased the mill, and the property became known as Howland's Mill and Howland's Mill Pond (now Woodlands Lake). Mr. Howland lived in a mansion near the pond. Thereafter, Woodlands Lake Waterfall and its surrounding area was owned by a number of financiers including Cyrus W. Field after the Civil War; and then J. P. Morgan who eventually sold, leased and donated many parcels of land from the former C. W. Field estate that he had acquired as partial settlement of debts owed to him by Cyrus Field. Eventually, in 1923 Westchester County purchased the Woodlands Lake Waterfall area and park from J.P. Morgan.

Meanwhile, during the late 1800's and early 1900's, Woodlands Lake Waterfall and its surrounding area, served as a popular resort area. As mentioned before, the original wooden bridge that crossed the Woodlands Lake Waterfall acted as an access road connecting the Saw Mill River Road to the Woodlands Lake Waterfall resorts



Families parked their cars under the shade trees for picnics in the Woodlands Lake Waterfalls area. A food van was near by with food supplies they did not bring with them. (Courtesy of *Pictures of the Past Ardsley, N.Y.* by Patricia and Fred Arone)

in this area. To arrive at the resort hotels, local residents coming from the Saw Mill River Road area would simply cross over the wooden bridge by foot, by bicycle or by a horse drawn buggy.

For those vacationers living far away, the "Put" Railroad Woodlands Station made arriving at the Woodlands Lake Waterfall resort areas easy. For the travelers coming from the city, they would simply disembark at the Woodlands Station and then use the original

wooden bridge that crossed over the Woodlands Lake Waterfall to arrive at the resort hotels and areas.

In the 1920's, the Woodlands Lake area was a place of fun: it hosted the circus when it came to town; it provided picnic areas where ladies and gentlemen could go for an outing and a barbecue; and it had a place where families could park their cars in the shade while they had a family picnic and had the accessibility of having a food van nearby to provide the food they could not supply for themselves. There was also a place where a baseball game could be played and watched. Then there was the wooden bridge over the waterfalls from which bathers could dive into the cooling waters or show off the latest bathing suit fashions.

In the 1930's, Howland's mansion was demolished when the Saw Mill River Parkway was constructed. It was at this time that the Woodlands Lake Hotel complex and the Reinhardt Hotel were located in the Woodlands Lake Waterfall area. The hotels had bowling lanes, rowboats, canoes and foot pedal boats for guests or day excursionists to enjoy. The Reinhardt Hotel, "was a popular weekend recreation spot for the German population of New York City. The sounds of "oom pah" bands could have been heard on many a Sunday afternoon. The hotel was also a favorite gambling spot until curtailed by the county sheriff." (*Pictures Of The Past, Ardsley, N.Y.* by Patricia and Fred N. Arone) It was also during the above time that a more substantial concrete and steel bridge replaced the original wooden bridge that crossed the waterfall. This new bridge now made it possible for automobiles to cross over the waterfalls and to arrive at the Woodlands Lake Waterfall resort hotels and areas. This concrete bridge continued to act as an access road between the hotels and resort areas and the Saw Mill River Road. Then when the Ardsley-Elmsford sections of the Saw Mill River Parkway were also opened in 1930, the little road over the Woodlands Lake Waterfall still provided a

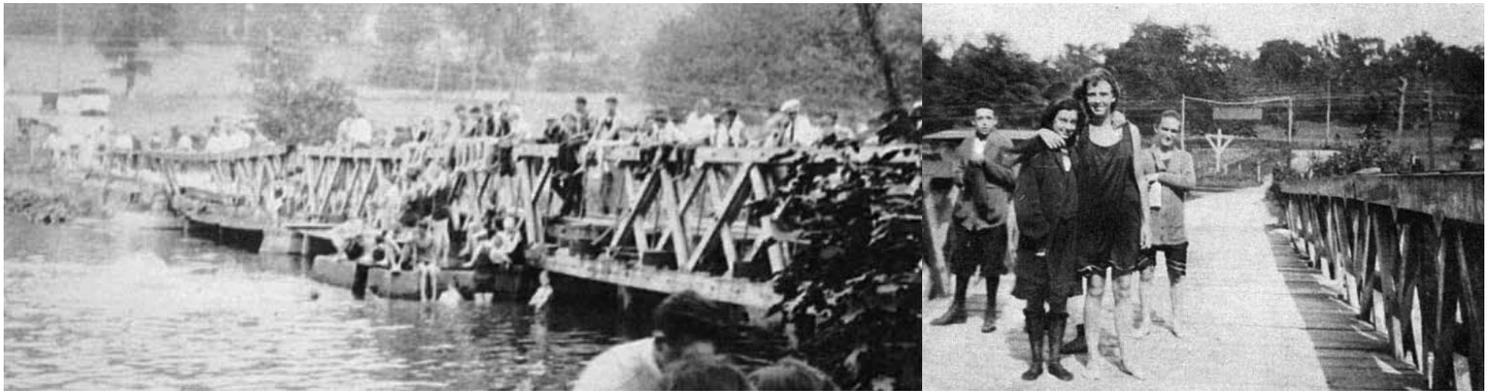
convenient connection between the Saw Mill River Parkway and the Saw Mill River Road. This waterfall crossover bridge was used until 1950 when The New York Thruway construction cut off the road and the bridge thereafter saw only fishermen and strollers.

Eventually, the Woodlands Lake Hotel complex and the Reinhardt Hotel were torn down. Later, the Woodlands Lake Waterfalls area was occupied by a number of restaurants including Leighton's Restaurant and then La Cantina. Unfortunately, because of traffic patterns making it difficult to enter and exit the park area, the restaurants have long since been closed down although a structure is still standing near the Woodlands Lake Waterfall.

Today, Woodlands Lake, its waterfall and the surrounding park areas can still be enjoyed. The "Old Put" railroad line is now the South County Trailway which is a bicycle and foot path that travels along the Old Put's railroad tracks, now paved over. The South County Trailway starts in the Bronx at Van Cortland Park and passes right by the eastern side of the Woodlands Lake Waterfall pretty much where the Woodlands Station used to be located. You can gain access to the South County Trailway by simply crossing over the Woodlands Lake Waterfall bridge. You can then either go south towards the Bronx or north where you can then connect with the North County Trailway.

Also, located right near the Woodlands Lake Waterfall is the Great Hunger Memorial Park that was unveiled on June 24, 2001 to commemorate the suffering of millions of Irish peasants who died in the potato famine and were forced to leave Ireland. It is a touching sculpture by Eamonn O'Doherty of Ireland which consists of a mother, father and three children standing near an overturned basket of potatoes ruined by a potato blight causing the many people of Ireland to starve to death.

Woodlands Lake Waterfall Park continues to this day to be a most beautiful place to have a picnic, to sit in the sun, to look at the sculpture, to walk on the South County Trailway, and most of all to visit the waterfall. Although it stands pretty much on its own, the Woodlands Lake Waterfall Park is part of the V. Everit Macy Park consisting of over 127 acres of land holding baseball fields, a pavilion with barbecue pits and a huge picnic area. V. Everit Macy Park can be entered off the Saw Mill River Road in Ardsley. The Woodlands Lake Waterfall Park can be entered by heading north on the Saw Mill River Parkway and then turning right when you reach the Great Hunger Memorial Park sign. Also to note, during the wintertime in the past, the lake was used to harvest ice, have ice carnivals and to ice skate. (Another story at another time.)



The wooden bridge was used to jump off into the Saw Mill River that passed below it, also used to show off the new bathing fashions. (Courtesy of *Pictures of the Past Ardsley, N.Y.* by Patricia and Fred Arone)

Spotlight Judge B. Wilbur McDowell

By **THERESA DI STEFANO**

The baseball season has begun in Ardsley and everyone will enjoy playing and watching baseball in McDowell Park. The B. Wilbur McDowell Memorial Park was dedicated to Judge B. Wilbur McDowell in 1956. Over the years, Judge McDowell served as Ardsley Police and Village Justice for 41 years and as Greenburgh Town Justice for 16 years. His cumulative number of years in elected public office was 65 years including two terms as Town Receiver of Taxes until he retired at age 82. He was also the president of the Board of Trustees of the Ardsley Methodist Church, and president of the Greenburgh Savings Bank and president of the Ardsley Lions Club. Judge McDowell was fondly referred to as an ideal citizen and Mr. Republican. He was known to be a charitable person toward people and causes that were needy and never had an unkind word for anyone. So, in 1956 it was no wonder that all gathered to honor such a great man by dedicating The B. Wilbur McDowell Memorial Park to Judge McDowell a man who so kindly and excellently served his community.



Judge B. Wilbur McDowell,
Courtesy of Ardsley Historical
Society

Sharing Memories The Saw Mill River

By FRANK YOZZO

“We swam at a spot where the water was five feet deep. We would make noise and beat the water with branches to scare away any snapping turtles that might be lurking about. We dried off in the sun and checked each other for leeches. One

day a reed of grass got between my toes and sliced me badly. I dressed and ran to Dr. Barbieri’s office where he medicated me. Years later, when he was called into the Navy, his wife went through his books and sent my parents a bill for \$2. Incidentally, Richard Allen eventually captured a

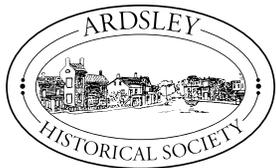
snapping turtle whose carapace measured almost 18 inches. It got him a few lines in the Yonkers Herald Statesmen.”

The Ardsley Historical Society wishes to thank Mr. Frank Yozzo for sharing one of his memories about the Saw Mill River.

The Ardsley Historical Society wants members to share their memories of past years. So please send us your memories of Ardsley. They can be found in a moment of time in your childhood or youth, young adulthood, or as an adult. They could be times before, during and after WWII. They could be memories before, during or after the construction of the New York State Thruway. It could simply be a picture of you as a baby somewhere in Ardsley and notes of what was happening at the time. Please just use your imagination and then share with us. We will then, with your permission, print these memories in upcoming newsletters. When you are ready, mail the memory and information to us at P.O. Box 523, Ardsley, NY 10502. If you have any questions, please call us at 693-6027. Thank you!

The Ardsley Historical Society Newsletter is published three times each year. The Society was established in 1982 and is chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, and disseminate the history of Ardsley to members and to the public. Archives are open to the public on Tuesdays from 10 am to 12 noon, or by appointment, at the Ardsley Public Library, 9 American Legion Drive. Our phone number is 693-6027.

Subscription to the Newsletter is included in membership dues. All articles, queries, and replies should be addressed to the editor, Theresa DiStefano. Although every attempt is made to maintain historical accuracy in the Newsletter, the editor and the Society assume no responsibility for errors. The editor also reserves the right to edit where necessary.



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