

# Trudeauville

*Saranac Lake, as we know it, grew up around  
Dr. E.L. Trudeau's treatment of tuberculosis*

by Lee Manchester, Lake Placid News, July 23, 2004

Tuberculosis.  
Consumption.  
The White Plague.

The lung disease that terrorized America's big cities in the 19th century was, ironically, the driving force behind the development of Saranac Lake, "the little city in the Adirondacks."

Adirondack Architectural Heritage conducts a tour each summer that explains how the practice of Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau and his open-air method of treating tuberculosis shaped the growth of Saranac Lake. The tour is led by Mary Hotaling, executive director of Historic Saranac Lake.

The tour starts on a patio outside the Trudeau Institute, a medical research facility headquartered outside Saranac Lake. Founded in 1964 by E.L.'s grandson, Dr. Francis Trudeau Jr., the institute specializes in basic research on immunology.

On the Trudeau Institute patio rests a life-size bronze sculpture crafted in 1918 by Gutzon Borglum, the artist behind the monumental carvings on Stone Mountain and Mount Rushmore. In the sculpture a blanketed Trudeau reclines in a "cure chair" — for E.L. not only treated tuberculosis, he suffered from it.

The sculpture was made in 1918, less than 3 years after Trudeau's death. It was originally placed in a garden at the Trudeau Sanatorium, a sprawling hillside complex on the other side of Saranac Lake. Commissioned and paid for by Trudeau's patients, the inscription on the sculpture's large base reads, "Edward Trudeau: Those who have been healed in this place have put this monument here as a token of their grati-

tude."

"This is Dr. Trudeau," Hotaling said, introducing the statue, as she began the AARCH tour earlier this

month. "He came up here because he wanted to die in a place he loved.

"Every time he came here, he got a little better — and every time he went back to New York City, he got a little worse."

E.L. Trudeau, born in New York in 1848, probably contracted TB while caring for his older brother James in the mid-1860s. He was not diagnosed with tuberculosis himself, however, until 1873, when he was 25 years old — after he had finished medical school, married, and fathered two children.

That summer he and his wife



PHOTO BY LEE MANCHESTER

Mary Hotaling starts off a tour of Saranac Lake sites connected with the early treatment of tuberculosis next to a statue of TB-treatment pioneer Dr. E.L. Trudeau.

Charlotte came to Paul Smith's Hotel. There they spent each summer until finally moving to the Adirondacks full-time in November 1876, settling in Saranac Lake. At that time the village contained little more than a sawmill, a small hotel, a schoolhouse and a dozen guides' cottages.

"Maybe some of you have seen that illustration in Adirondack Murray's book," Hotaling said, referring to William Murray's landmark guide book, "Adventures in the Wilderness, or Camp Life in the Adirondacks.

"The book shows a little fellow who went into the woods all wasted," Hotaling continued, "but came out robust and strong. That's kind of what happened to Trudeau: He got better here."

In 1880, his health somewhat improved, Trudeau's interest in medicine revived. Two articles he read in 1882 turned his attention toward the treatment of tuberculosis. One described the first TB sanatorium in Europe, where patients were treated with mountain air, rest, and daily attendance by a physician.

The other paper described German scientist Robert Koch's discovery of the bacterium that caused tuberculosis.

These two journal articles set the course for Trudeau's dual career: part in tuberculosis treatment, part in TB research.

The article on the Brehmer Sanitarium led, according to the Trudeau Institute's biography of E.L., to "a plan to construct a few small cottages where working men and women could be taken in, at a little less than cost, for the sanatorium method of tuberculosis treatment.

"From the first, Trudeau decided to give his own services free. The rest of the funds needed, he planned to obtain from his wealthy patients at Paul Smith's."

### Cure cottages

In 1884 E.L. built the first "cure cottage," which came to be known as "Little Red." The two-bed cottage, which now stands on the grounds of the



PHOTO BY LEE MANCHESTER

"Little Red," the first tuberculosis "cure cottage" in North America, was built in 1884 by E.L. Trudeau. The cost was just \$350 — about \$7,000 in modern currency.

Trudeau Institute, originally stood on the campus of what was initially known as the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium.

The sanitarium was developed with two criteria in mind: it was not for terminal cases, and it was not for the utterly destitute.

"It was not for the dying, but the treatable," Hotaling said.

And, though patients were not required to pay for the entire cost of their own treatment, she added, "Trudeau founded the sanatorium for the working poor, who could pay a little bit."

Cottage by cottage, the sanitarium grew.

"It wasn't deliberate," Hotaling said, "but it turned out to be a good thing that the patients were separated, with only two or four together in a cottage, since TB is a communicable disease.

"The reason cottages were built, however, was not medical; it was because it was easier to build small cottages, each with the support of a single family."

Little Red was built at a cost of

\$350, which was donated to Trudeau by Mrs. William F. Jenks of Philadelphia. Being the first of the "cure cottages," it did not include two features common to later cottages: the "cure porch" for taking in the open air, and the "cure chair" that allowed tuberculosis patients to rest while seated upright on the porch.

Neither Little Red nor the other cure cottages included kitchen facilities. All the patients at the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium, being ambulatory, ate together in a central location.

### Union Depot

After visiting Little Red, the next stop on Hotaling's tour was Saranac Lake's Union Depot, a railroad station built in large part to accommodate the tuberculosis patients coming to be treated by Trudeau and his colleagues.

The depot, built 17 years after the first train came to Saranac Lake, operated until 1965, when commercial passenger service to the Adirondacks ended.

The depot's design was influenced by concerns about tuberculosis, Hotaling said. The high ceiling in the large lobby is ringed by windows.

Together with the central cupola, these design features serve to draw air from the depot up and out, constantly pulling fresh air into the building.

After the last train left Saranac Lake in 1965, the depot stood empty for decades until Historic Saranac Lake took up its restoration.

“We just got lucky,” Hotaling said. “We had a community development director who was familiar with ISTEA [pronounced like “ice tea”], and a village manager who was sympathetic to the project.”

The federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act provided much of the money Historic Saranac Lake needed to restore the depot, which re-opened in 1998. Two years later, the Adirondack Scenic Railroad revived rail travel in the area with its summer tourist trains between Saranac Lake and Lake Placid. Train enthusiasts hope to extend service to Tupper Lake before long.

### **Tuberculosis research**

The next stop on the Trudeauville tour was the Saranac Laboratory on Church Street, a building now owned by Historic Saranac Lake.

In addition to treating tuberculosis patients, you will recall, Dr. Trudeau was equally interested in conducting

medical research on the tubercle bacilli, which caused TB. An 1893 accident in Trudeau’s primitive home laboratory resulted in a fire that destroyed both lab and home. New York City colleagues of the doctor contributed funds to build a new lab around the corner from his home. That facility today forms the core of the building at 7 Church Street, across the way from the Church of St. Luke the Benevolent Physician, built by Trudeau in 1879.

“The building is a most substantial and dignified structure,” Trudeau wrote. “As nothing but cut stone, glazed brick, slate, steel and cement entered into its composition, it is absolutely fireproof. The inside is all finished in white glazed brick, and it looks absolutely indestructible — as if it were built not for time but for eternity.”

Trudeau’s Saranac Laboratory operated for more than 60 years. A one-story addition was built in 1928, containing a library and lecture room. A few years later, a second story was added to the entire structure, creating the building as we see it today.

From 1974 to 1988, the building served as the Trudeau House dormitory for Paul Smith’s College students participating in the Hotel and Restaurant program at the nearby Hotel Saranac. A

new dorm built in 1988 left Trudeau House vacant until the building was sold to Historic Saranac Lake in December 1998.

“It looked like it was in better shape when we got it,” Hotaling admitted to the tour group as they stood in the dusty, gutted interior of the former library.

The original laboratory has high ceilings, huge windows, and multiple chimneys for improved circulation to carry germs away from the research stations.

“It was the first building in the United States built specifically for the study of tuberculosis,” Hotaling said.

Much work remains to be done before the Saranac Laboratory can be reopened to the general public as a historic museum. The pace of the work will depend, to a great extent, on how quickly Historic Saranac Lake receives the contributions it needs to proceed.

### **Lodging patients**

“As you drive around Saranac Lake, you will see lots of houses with second- and third-floor sleeping porches,” Hotaling said. “Many of these were homes that boarded tuberculosis patients outside the sanitarium. Some of those porches were added on, but many were original.”

Hotaling took her tour group to visit one of these houses, located on the corner of Helen and Pine streets. A pair of second-story rooms — an interior bedroom, and an adjoining enclosed sleeping porch — had been turned into a private “cure cottage museum,” open to visitors by special arrangement.

In many ways the entire village of Saranac Lake was an extension of Trudeau’s sanitarium — a fact that led, in part, to the village’s incorporation in 1892, spearheaded by E.L. himself.

“I think it [the village incorporation] was specifically so he could get control over circumstances that affected patient care,” Hotaling said, describing a run-in the doctor had earlier in 1892 with a butcher who carelessly disposed of the wreckage of his presence.

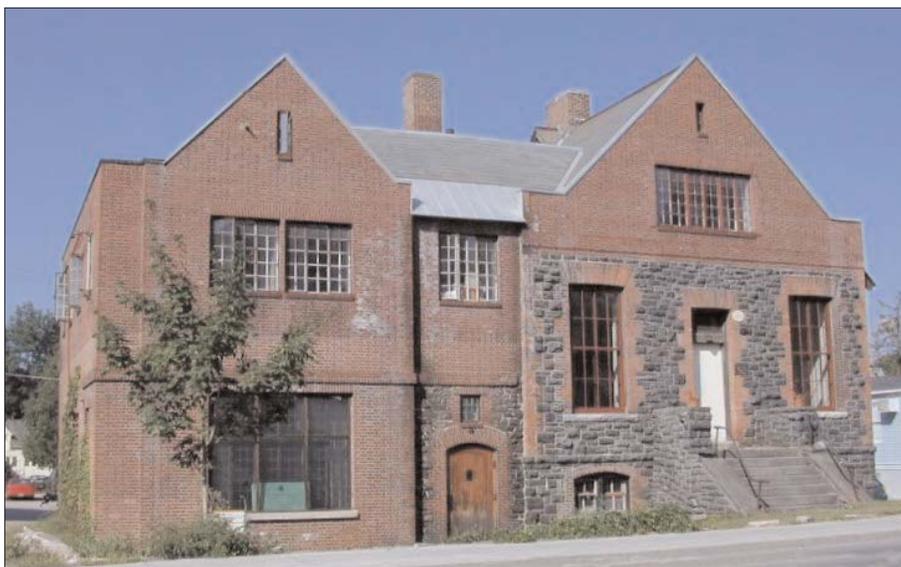


PHOTO COURTESY HISTORIC SARANAC LAKE

Saranac Laboratory, where E.L. Trudeau and his successors conducted scientific research on tuberculosis from 1894 to 1966. Funds are sought for its restoration.

## Trudeau Sanatorium

The penultimate stop on Hotaling's tour was the campus of the Trudeau Sanatorium itself, now headquarters to the American Management Association.

The first structure to capture one's eye upon passing through the gate is the Baker Chapel, built of rough stone in a variation of the Romanesque Revival style, designed by Lawrence Aspenwall and William Coulter. As beautiful a little building as it is, however, the chapel is no longer in use; its floor is rotten, and it is not safe to enter the sanctuary.

The large, handsome, central administration building, built in 1897 by Aspenwall and Coulter, is in current use. This was where all the patients from the surrounding cottages came to take their meals and showers.

Many of Trudeau's "cure cottages" also survive on the current AMA campus, transformed into small office buildings, though their signature "cure porches" have been awkwardly enclosed.

"They look like they're not supposed to look like that," said one tour guest of the odd little buildings.

A great many of the buildings most central to the sanatorium's operations have gone unused and unmaintained by AMA and are doing poorly, including the classical brick Mellon Library, the nurses' residence known as Reid House, the Ogden Mills School of Nursing, the occupational therapy workshop, and a residence for doctors afflicted with TB.

## Stevenson Cottage

The final stop on Hotaling's tour of Trudeau's Saranac Lake was a simple cottage at the end of Stevenson Lane where 19th century British author Robert Louis Stevenson wintered from October 1887 through April 1888.

Stevenson, suffering from tuberculosis, had come to Saranac Lake seeking treatment from Trudeau. While here he wrote "The Master of Ballantrae: A Winter's Tale" and "The Wrong Box."

The Stevenson Cottage, as it is

now known, is operated as a half museum, half shrine, by the Stevenson Society of America. The rooms occupied by Stevenson and his wife in 1887-88 are covered with displays depicting the author's life, and the furniture in those rooms is the same used by the Stevensons.

Stevenson's stay here, though brief, did much to draw the world's attention to what E.L. Trudeau was doing in Saranac Lake to treat consumptives like the famous author.

## More on Trudeauville

- "Cure Cottages of Saranac Lake: Architecture and History of a Pioneer Health Resort," by Philip L. Gallos. Saranac Lake: Historic Saranac Lake, 1985. Hardcover, coffee-table sized,

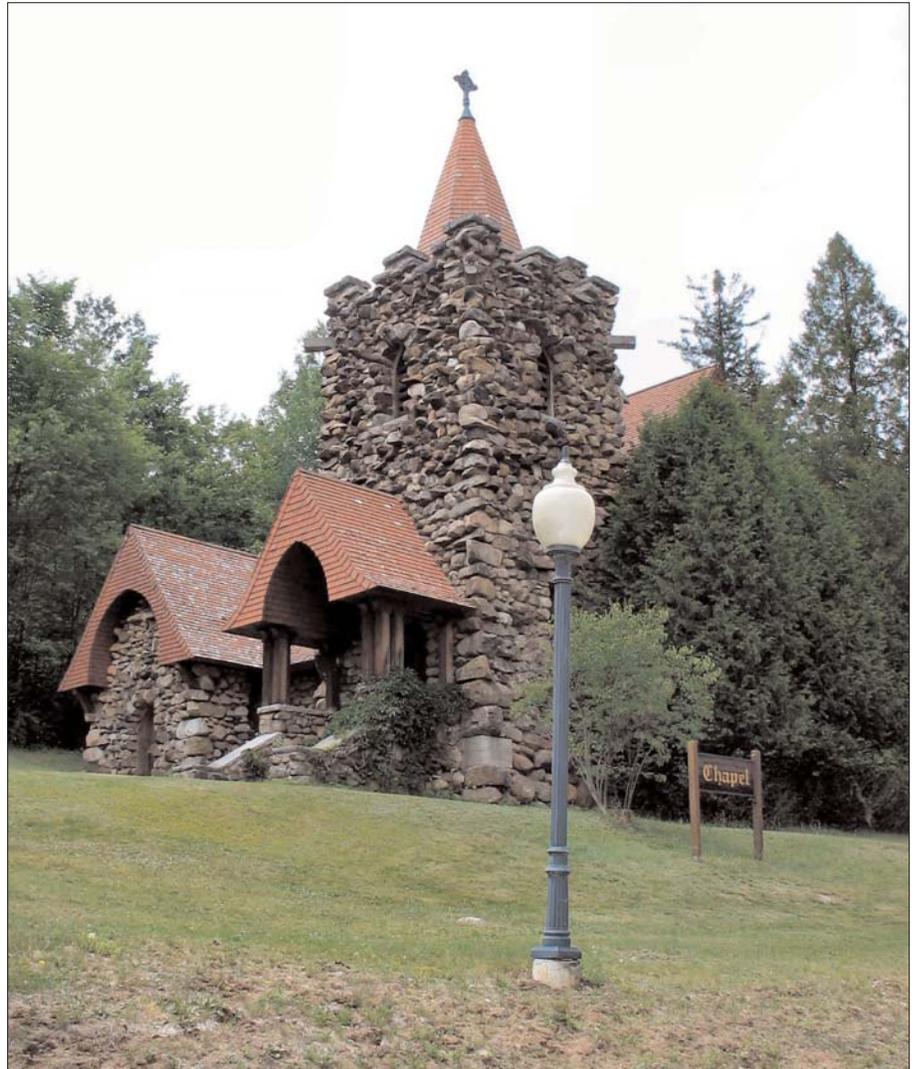
B&W illustrations, 186 pp., index, map, glossary. SRP \$37.50.

- "Portrait of Healing: Curing in the Woods," by Victorian E. Rinehart. Utica: North Country Books, 2002. Hardcover, coffee-table sized, B&W and color illustrations, 162 pp., index. SRP \$29.95.

## On the Web

- Visit the Web site for Historic Saranac Lake and find out how to contribute to the restoration of the Saranac Laboratory, at [www.historicsaranac-lake.org](http://www.historicsaranac-lake.org).

- Visit the Web site for Adirondack Architectural Heritage, the premier historic preservation organization of the Adirondacks, at [www.aarch.org](http://www.aarch.org).



The Baker Chapel, on the grounds of the former Trudeau Sanatorium.

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