

Bidding adieu to 'the deserted village,' Part 2

by LEE MANCHESTER, Lake Placid News, March 31, 2006

ADIRONDAC — Next month, the Adirondack Park Agency is expected to okay the breakup of the 10,000-plus acre Tahawus Tract, in Newcomb, into three major chunks: one for the Forest Preserve, one for sustainable forestry, and one for historic preservation.

The 210-acre historic district includes the “ghost town” adjacent to the southern trailhead to the High Peaks. Of the 17 buildings now standing in the district, only two are currently slated for stabilization and restoration: an 1834 cottage, and an 1854 blast furnace left over from an important 19th century iron-mining operation.

The remaining structures in the historic district are what remains of

the Tahawus Club’s colony at the Upper Works, the northernmost of the two sites developed by the 19th century iron company. The club cottages, most of them built around 1900, have nowhere near the historic significance of the 1834 cottage or the stone blast furnace — but, taken together, they do tell a tale about an era in Adirondack history in a way that few other sites can.

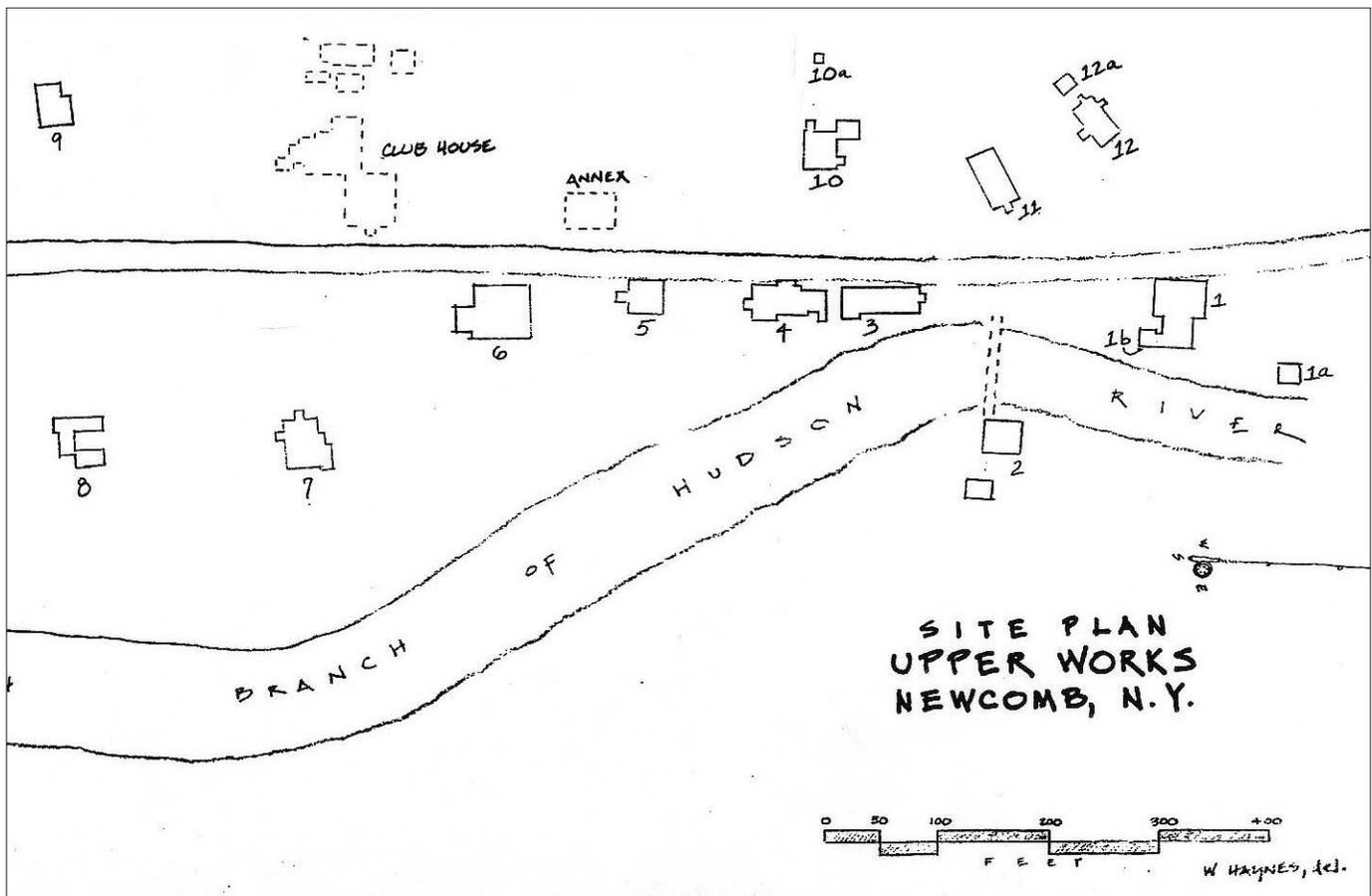
That’s why we’re telling the story of “the deserted village” left by the Tahawus Club — because it’s important, in its own way, and because it probably won’t be around for too many more years.

Last week, we walked through the history leading up to the establishment of the Tahawus Club.

This week, we’re going to walk through the little hamlet itself. We’ll start our tour from the Upper Works trailhead parking lot, at the north end of the village. We’ll work our way down the east (river) side of the street, then move back up the west side. For reference, you can look at the map and thumbnail photos of each building that we have included with this story.

Most of our information about these buildings comes from a March 1994 documentary report prepared for the Newcomb Historical Society by architectural historian Wesley Haynes, who was working at the time for the Preservation League of New York State.

Additional information came



from two excellent histories of the site prepared by Tahawus Club member Arthur Masten, who was not only married to the great-granddaughter of one of the founders of the iron works but was himself an officer of the holding company that owned the vast assets of the former works.

Only 125 copies of Masten's "The Story of Adirondac" were printed when the book was originally published in 1923. A 1968 reprinting by Syracuse University Press and the Adirondack Museum made the book far more widely available.

Masten's second history of the site, "Tahawus Club: 1898-1935," was published in extremely limited numbers just after the author's death.



1a. Pump house

Just north of the first cottage on the east side of the road, this pump house was installed by National Lead after 1947 to provide water from the Hudson River to Upper Works homes and fire hydrants.



1, 1b. Coe Cottage

The northernmost cottage on the east side of the street was built around 1899 by E. Holloway Coe. It was acquired in 1916 by novelist

Walter D. Edmonds, author of "Drums Along the Mohawk."

The southern portion of the Coe Cottage appears to have been built on the stone foundation and fully excavated basement left from one of the iron-mining era houses. The cottage had covered porches on the north and east sides, which have fallen apart. A veranda once ran around the south and west, but the widening and paving of the road through the village during the National Lead occupation eliminated those.

The roof of the Coe Cottage has collapsed almost completely, bringing the dormer built into the center of the west side of the roof down almost to eye level.

A small annex is built down the bank toward the river. Viewed from the side, the annex appears to be relatively sound — but you can see from street level that the annex's roof has collapsed.



2. Jennings Cottage

The next cottage is one that we can look at, but cannot visit. The Jennings Cottage is the only Tahawus Club structure that was built on the east bank of the Hudson. A small bridge used to connect the Jennings Cottage to the west bank and the main road into the Upper Works; all that is left of that bridge now are concrete supports on opposite sides of the river.

This two-story cottage was built around 1899 by Walter Jennings, a member of the Tahawus Club board.

A one-story annex was built sometime between 1906 and 1926.

As in 1994, when Wes Haynes published his study of the Tahawus Club buildings, the Jennings Cottage appears to be somewhat the worse for wear, but no major structural deficiencies are apparent from across the river.



3. W.R.K. Taylor Jr. Cottage

The next cottage to the south was built in 1932 by W.R.K. Taylor Jr., who appears to be a third-generation Tahawus Club colonist. It replaced a small cabin built between 1900 and 1920, which was used for a studio by a daughter of Alexander Taylor, the man who built the oldest of the surviving Tahawus Club cottages (#12) in the 1880s. The cabin stood on the north end of the present Taylor Jr. Cottage site. Most of the Tahawus Club cottages were subdivided into two separate living units after National Lead took over the village in 1947, but the Taylor Jr. Cottage was actually designed with two completely independent units.



4. Mrs. Taylor's Cottage (Lazy Lodge)

First built by William F. King in the 1890s, the cottage eventually known as Lazy Lodge was taken over by Alexander Taylor in 1906.

Over the next 4 years, Taylor expanded the cottage to its present size, after which he passed it on to W.R.K. Taylor Sr., the father of the man who built Cottage #3 next door more than two decades later, and perhaps the father of the woman who occupied the earlier cabin-studio that once stood on the Cottage #3 site. By 1935, Cottage #4 was known as Mrs. Taylor's Cottage, the occupant being the wife of W.R.K. Sr. and, perhaps, the mother of next-door neighbor W.R.K. Jr.



5. Abbott/Lockwood Cottage

Gordon Abbott built this cottage in 1899 during the small building boom that followed the transition in 1898 from the Adirondack Club to the Tahawus Club. Following a succession of occupants, at the end of the club days it became known as the Lockwood Cottage after its final owner, William A. Lockwood.



6. MacNaughton Cottage

6. MacNaughton Cottage

This is the only one of the surviving houses that will probably be preserved because of its relatively ancient lineage.

The MacNaughton Cottage was the first substantial dwelling at the McIntyre iron-mining plantation, built in 1834 for use by the site's owners and managers. The small, independent addition on the south end of the building was actually the McIntyre Bank, the first chartered bank in the Adirondacks. After the iron-mining operation closed down in 1858, the custodians of the "abandoned village" lived here, receiving any guests who happened to pass through.

When the Adirondack Club reoccupied the hamlet in 1878, this was the first building to be renovated for club use. James MacNaughton, president of the holding company that maintained title to the entire area, claimed the house for his own from 1894 until his death in 1905.

In 1901, MacNaughton played host to the family of then-Vice President Teddy Roosevelt. It was from the MacNaughton Cottage that TR left for his famous "midnight

ride to the presidency" on the night of President William McKinley's death.

After MacNaughton's passing, the cottage was occupied by architect Robert H. Robertson, who had designed the main lodge at neighboring Camp Santanoni for the family of Robert C. Pruyn. (Pruyn, by the way, was also a member of the Tahawus Club.)

By the end of the club colony's occupation in 1947, the house had become known as the Crocker Cottage, probably for George A. Crocker Jr., the son-in-law of Tahawus Club historian Arthur Masten.

The building has been "stabilized" by its current owners while they await a final plan for administering the historic district to be developed here.



7. Debevoise Cottage

Built in 1900 by George L. Nichols, this cottage was named at the end of the Tahawus Club occupancy for its third and final owner, Thomas M. Debevoise, who bought it in 1922. Over the last dozen years the roof of the Debevoise Cottage has completely collapsed, spelling its doom.

8. Bateson Cottage

One of the last additions to the Tahawus Club's Upper Works colony, the Bateson Cottage is also one of the buildings in the worst condition today. E. Farrar Bateson built this cottage in 1932 with three con-

nected, prefabricated camp buildings to form a U-shaped courtyard with its mouth facing north. The only building still standing is the east wing.



'Fire station'

Moving across the road you will find a shed, once painted red, with four deep, shallow shelves. The shed stands behind a fire hydrant. Used to store coiled fire hoses, this was the closest thing the tiny Upper Works colony had to a fire station during the National Lead occupation. It stands very close to the site where the old Adirondac schoolhouse and church once stood.



9. Williams Cottage

Up the hill behind the fire-hose cabinet stand the remains of the Williams Cottage, built in 1901 by

Dr. George E. Brewer. The roof has fallen in on the second-story floor over the last 12 years, and the south and east walls are slowly settling outward. It will not be long before this cottage is nothing more than a pile of early 20th century rubble.

Former clubhouse site

Moving northward on the west side of the street from the Williams Cottage, you will pass through the site of the former Tahawus Club clubhouse and annex. The two-story clubhouse — with its extensive kitchen wing to the rear, separate laundry building, and annex to the north — was the center of communal life during the Adirondack and Tahawus club periods of the Upper Work's history. The clubhouse was originally constructed as a boarding house for single men during the 19th century mining operation. National Lead bulldozed the whole group of buildings in the 1960s, for reasons unknown.



10. Savage Cottage

North of the former clubhouse site is the Savage Cottage. The origins of this two-story house are not entirely clear to the historians who have written about the Upper Works. It is located on or near the spot where the McIntyre mine's "store house" once stood. It is not clear, however, whether that earlier structure — either a company store for the iron-mining plantation, or a storage building for the company — had anything to do with the cottage standing there now. Built in two phases, the Savage Cottage's south wing is constructed in much the same way as were the other cottages

built around 1900, while the north wing's much lighter framing appears to have been built later. The last Tahawus Club owner of this cottage was Presbyterian minister Theodore T. Savage. The west end of the south-facing facade on the oldest wing has collapsed, bringing the interior down from the ceiling through the floor, though the rest of the cottage is still more or less intact. Behind the cottage stands a shingle-covered shed, probably built after 1923.



11. 'New' cottage

The next cottage north of the Savage Cottage is not described in either of Arthur Masten's histories, nor is it shown on a 1923 map of the Tahawus Club's Upper Works colony, meaning that it must have been built after 1935. National Lead, however, built no new structures at the Upper Works during its occupation, which started in 1947, meaning that it must have been built before then. From the outside, barring a few places where holes have been punched in the roof by falling trees, this cottage looks like it's in pretty good shape. Seen from the inside, however, you can tell that the entire structure is falling to the south, down the hillside, away from the massive fireplace and chimney.

12. Terry Cottage, and 'Lipstick Lodge' annex

The last cottage in the Upper Works' Tahawus Club colony, known as the Terry Cottage, is actu-

ally the oldest of the cottages put up by club members. It was built in the 1880s by Alexander Taylor, who later built Cottage #4 (Lazy Lodge) and an earlier cabin on the site of Cottage #3. Beginning in 1921, Cottage #12 was the summer home

of the John T. Terry Jr. family. In 1933, Terry built a two-room, birch-covered annex behind the main, two-story structure for use by his daughters. That annex, which became known as “Lipstick Lodge,” is in relatively good condition today, though

two of its supports appear to have collapsed. The foundation of the main house, however, has collapsed on both the east and west, and both ends of the building are gradually falling away to the sides of the central fireplace chimney.



Lipstick Lodge



Terry Cottage

Life at the Upper Works

Two former residents — one from the Tahawus Club era, one from the National Lead occupation — describe a little about growing up in Adirondac

by LEE MANCHESTER, Lake Placid News, March 31, 2006

ADIRONDAC — This week, we’ve given you a tour of the buildings still standing in the Upper Works ghost town on the Tahawus Tract.

What was life like for the people who lived in those buildings?

To answer that question, we have to ask, during which phase of the village’s life?

The “Upper Works” site at the end of county Route 25, in Newcomb township, has gone

through five distinct phases in its 180-year life.

From 1826 to 1858, it was a hamlet occupied by iron miners, forge workers and charcoal burners, first called McIntyre after the chief owner of the iron works, then Adirondac after a post office was established.

After the McIntyre iron works closed down in 1858, the village was abandoned for two decades, with only a caretaker and his family living on the site.

From 1878 until 1947, the Upper Works was home to a colony of summer homes built and occupied by members of a private club. First known as the Adirondack Club, it was renamed the Tahawus Club in 1898. The Tahawus Club was forced to abandon the Upper Works in 1947 and move to a site 11 miles south on Route 25, called the Lower Works.

For 16 years, from 1947 until 1963, the dozen or so buildings at the Upper Works were occupied by

the families of men working at the nearby titanium mine and mill, established just before World War II by the National Lead Company.

After National Lead “got out of the landlord business,” as one former resident put it, the Upper Works again became the “abandoned village” that had so fascinated early Adirondack travel writers in the mid-19th century.

Today, the site is part of a historic district that will be developed over the next few years by the Open Space Institute, which bought the surrounding 10,000-plus-acre Tahawus Tract from National Lead in 2003.

SHORTLY AFTER OSI’s purchase of the Tahawus Tract, the town of Newcomb invited several former Upper Works residents to come back and talk about the experience of growing up in that remote settlement.

Their reminiscences, shared during Newcomb’s annual Teddy Roosevelt Days celebration, were captured on a digital videocam by local-history enthusiast Ray Masters. We have transcribed portions of their recollections here.

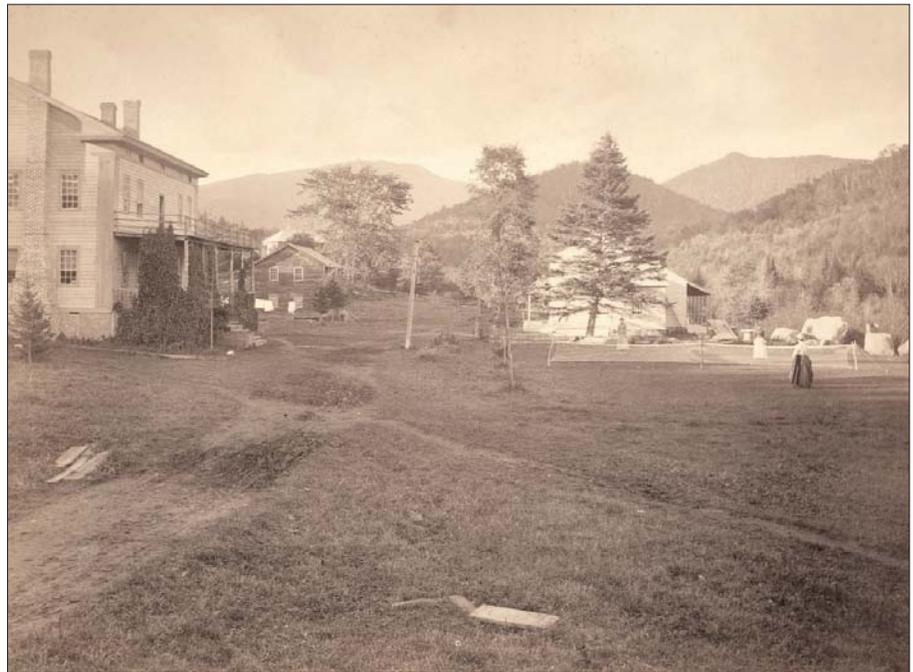
One of the guests, Anne Knox, spent her childhood summers at the Tahawus Club until the 1947 evacuation.

The other former resident, Gary Southworth, spent his school years living with his family in the National Lead Company’s miners’ village at the Upper Works.

Anne Knox, Tahawus Club era:

This is my 77th summer here. [Knox is now part of the Tahawus Club’s Lower Works colony.] I was brought here as a baby [in 1926] ...

It was basically about 4 or 5 different families. The members of the Club from the Lower Works, many of us are still from the original fami-



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Members of the Adirondack Club, predecessor of the Tahawus Club, play badminton on the lawn across from the Upper Works clubhouse, south of the MacNaughton Cottage, in this 1888 photo by Seneca Ray Stoddard.

lies.

Life here was rather rustic; it was a strange mix. We had no electricity. There were only kerosene lamps. We had wood stoves, but not the contemporary wood stoves ... they were not air-tight, and you had to keep feeding them all the time. My father was always afraid of fire. Fortunately, we didn’t have many.

We had one telephone. It was in the pump house, on the wall. It was the kind you picked up and you had to go like this [making a cranking motion with her hands].”

THE CENTER of Tahawus Club life at the Upper Works was the clubhouse, bulldozed by National Lead in the 1960s.

The clubhouse was a big, yellow, sort of typical Adirondack house, with a porch in the front, and we all used to eat there.

In 1930, there was a real shift for club members. There was one [Tahawus Club] member who used to go down to South Carolina, I think it was, during the winter to hunt.

There was a woman there, Miss Yeats, who ran the lodge. She had a full staff, and it was corn pone and all the Southern dishes. In the summer, she was unemployed, and this was just at the beginning of the Depression.

She was hired to come up here, and she brought her whole staff — which, quite unexpectedly for the Adirondacks, was all-Black. I think, probably, many of the people in the Adirondacks had never encountered a Black person before.

But we had this incredible clubhouse, with white tablecloths. Henry was the head waiter, and he wore a jacket every day. We sat down at the tables, and we were brought this incredibly good food — it wasn’t the normal Adirondack flapjacks and steaks. ...

THE KIDS had a wonderful time. [Looking around her,] this is where we would play kick the can. They fed us early, which was nice, because we didn’t have to sit and listen to boring grown-ups.



PHOTO COURTESY NYS DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

The Tahawus Club's Upper Works colony, ca. 1910. At far left, on west side of the street, is the clubhouse annex. Left to right on the east side of the street: Mrs. Taylor's Cottage (Lazy Lodge), the Abbott/Lockwood Cottage, the MacNaughton Cottage (center), and the Debevoise Cottage.

Our pleasures were simple. There was no radio, no television, nothing like that. We did a lot of games; each family would host an evening. We had acting games, where you had to act out things and people would guess. There was a lot of singing.

AND, SPEAKING of singing: Dr. Savage was a Presbyterian minister, and on Sundays, we would have a little service up on his porch [Cottage #10]. There was a pedal organ, a harmonium, which you could play on. The Terry girls [in the Lipstick Lodge, Cottage Annex 12A] were wonderful musicians, and they would play, and we would sing hymns and somebody would say a few words, and that would be IT.

It was really nice, sitting on that porch and looking out and thinking, 'I lift my eyes unto the hills whence cometh my help'. As a child, those things sort of dribble down into you in a wonderful kind of way.

WE HAD incredible swimming down there [she gestures behind her, toward the Hudson River], but we were not allowed to swim below the dam; I only discovered later that was because the sewage went out there. I

certainly don't think the APA would have approved of our sewage disposal plant!

There was wonderful swimming up there — and then, of course, we had Henderson Lake. We'd walk over to Henderson, and we'd swim there. ...

You felt you were miles from anywhere — and, of course, you were. At night, you could see all the stars, totally unpolluted by any light. It was an incredible place to be brought up. I'm just grateful that it's still here.

Gary Southworth, National Lead era:

We got here in 1947. My father had been a worker in the Baltimore ship yards; he was a skilled craftsman, a millwright and a pipefitter, and after the war he didn't have any problem finding a job here at National Lead Company.

Before we got the house here, he lived for a year in what they called the bunkhouse in Tahawus, and then he moved his family in here. We were one of the first families here.

I started school here. I was brought down to the little schoolhouse at the top of the hill in

Tahawus [the company town, built in the early 1940s, 4 miles away]. We had grades K through 3, and then we finished our schooling in Newcomb.

YOU PEOPLE happen to be sitting in a driveway that my brother and I shoveled many a, many a time.

Before we lived here, we lived across the road in a two-story house that you can hardly see from the road; it's one of the best-preserved ones.

IT'S AMUSING to hear this referred to as "Adirondac." We always knew it just as the Upper Works or the Club. I don't think we really understood why we called it that, except that others called it that. It wasn't really until years later that we began to realize the significance of the blast furnace and that this was once an industrial area.

WHEN WE came here, it was extremely wild. In fact, my mother was concerned ... We had several bear sightings, where bears came down through the community. Families here at venison, fished a lot — they were an important part of our diet.

My mother was a good cook, which was a good thing. We went out to the grocery store every two weeks, to North Creek, over treacherous roads. We brought back big bags of flour, and every Saturday my mother would bake 15, 20 loaves of bread and cookies and doughnuts and pies. We were never wanting for food, that was for sure.

QUESTION: What did you cook on?

GS: Electric stoves.

Question: How did you heat — because these houses were not insulated.

GS: Oh, I know! [Laughter] We had two wood stoves in this house, here, and my father would keep that stove in the living room burning very hot — a big cherry-red spot on the side of the stove — and another stove was in the kitchen. We cut our own wood each year. He cut maybe 25, 30 cords.

Up in that house [pointing across the road], we cut by hand. We started off with a two-man bucksaw.

We had a lot of chores to do, we

didn't just go gallivanting here — our parents kept us busy.

WHEN I LEFT to go to college, my family moved into Tahawus — it was a little more convenient. Some nights when I was in school, if I played sports — which I did, because I was in basketball — there were nights when the bus just wouldn't come back in here, because the road was too bad, and I would walk back in here after practice or a game.

ALL THESE houses, to me, had a family associated with it. The La Forests lived over there, and I could tell you many stories about the La Forest family. If you sat here on a summer day, you would hear Mrs. La Forest calling in her kids at least twice. Mrs. La Forest was an elderly French lady, and she had a unique call: She'd yell, "Mick-EY! MELVIN!" You could hear it all over town.

It was a very close-knit little community. These were good times for the families who lived here for 10 or 15 years.

I REMEMBER when we got television.

We weren't the first to get it; the Stracks, up on the hill, did. They were kind enough to let people come over there to watch, especially on a Saturday night. You'd find five or six families, we'd have a spaghetti dinner and watch television. We particularly liked wrestling; we didn't know that it was staged.

It was 1958 before we got our own television set. For a long time, all we had was an old metal radio that entertained us.

Getting a telephone was quite a novelty for us, as well.

I can remember when my mother got her first automatic washing machine in 1956, 1957 — coming home from school, sitting over there, watching this thing spinning and wondering how it was ever going to get the water out, because we did it all by hand. Before that, we had to hang out our clothes to dry at all times of year. We would bring in sheets like they were pieces of plywood.

Progress came very slowly here.