

Fossenvue: Summers' Memories in the Late Eighteen Hundreds

One hundred twenty-nine years ago this July, a group of friends in Geneva looking for a good time for their summer vacation, hit upon the idea of camping. Seven of them boarded a Seneca Lake "Liner" at Geneva, and with their dog, a Wilson row boat, two tents, two oil stoves, cooking utensils, provisions, a supply of blankets and waterproofs, steamed off to the south. The friends selected Fassett's Point, one mile north of North Hector on the east shore, knowing it to be a familiar picnic area with an abundant spring, huge trees and level, grassy meadow. Elizabeth Smith Miller, daughter Anne Fitzhugh Miller and best friend, Ruth Lesley Ver Planck, Emily Dilworth Snyder, Anne Palfrey Bridge, James Fowler and William Fitzhugh Miller were the original campers. In a friendly competition Elizabeth Miller suggested Fossenvue, an anagram for the "seven of us" and won the prize of a cooking apron. This was the beginning of 26 years of camp-life for the founders, their children, and many friends and famous people. The camp operated one month of each year in 1875, 1881 through 1885, and 1890 through at least 1901.

Both Anne Miller and her mother Elizabeth were prominent figures in Geneva and leaders in the women's suffrage movement, as was Lydia Predmore, owner of Fausett's Point. Susan B. Anthony, a close friend of Elizabeth Miller, Anna Botsford Comstock and Louis Agassiz Fuertes and other notable individuals of the time, visited the camp. It was known for its gathering of the elite for recreational, creative and artistic activity, and its association with many prominent individuals from Cornell and Hobart William Smith Colleges. Visitors came by steamer and train or walked from the Lodi-Watkins road.

Daily activities at Fossenvue included swimming, lounging in water hammocks, lawn tennis, hiking and archery, composing, singing, sketching, discussing philosopher writer and artist, John Ruskin, then the rage and darling of Europe. The camp motto was "Kindle Friendship." Eating was out of doors under an open, striped tent, with plenty of fresh eggs, fish, fruit and vegetables from the nearby farms. Mrs. Miller was known for her superior cooking at home and at camp. The sentiment of the day was read and discussed, one at each meal and always one of Ruskin. Poems were read at dinner. One could row south to West Agamemnon, play the banjo, piano or just sit in the shade.

The lone surviving structure from the Fossenvue period is the "Queen's Castle," the only building constructed after 1881. The building was presented to Elizabeth Smith Miller on her 77th birthday, September 20, 1899, by her daughter, Anne and friends. The beautiful room seventeen feet square, with lofty raftered ceiling and high, massive fireplace, built of stone from Mr. Predmore's quarry and geodes from the lake shore, was brilliantly lighted by a fire of red cedar and with enchanting flames from ocean driftwood, a gift from our dear Frances Faulkner. Great praise was bestowed on Arthur Nash for his design in the building, and due recognition was given to the artisans who had so admirably carried out the plan of the architect. Seven being the magic number of the Camp, it was no small pleasure to find that the Castle was the result of the labor of seven men; that the work was begun on the seventh of the month, and was finished in seven days."

Mrs. Miller died in 1911, nearly 90 years old. Little is known about Camp Fossenvue and the property after 1901, its last year of operation as recorded in the privately published, *Embers*.

In 1924 the site was sold to the Elmira Council of Boy Scouts for Camp Seneca, which continued to operate into the 1980s. The U.S. Department of Agriculture purchased the property in 1996 adding to the Hector Ranger District, Finger Lakes National Forest, which is administered by the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont. The Lodi Historical Society, under the leadership of then president Harry Curtin, worked with the U.S. Forest Service to create an Existing Conditions Analysis and a Historical Review of the 1899 building. The Rural New York Grant Program funded the study in 1997. The Queen's Castle, Seneca County, New York, in recognition of its significance in American history and culture, was listed on the **State Register of Historic Places** on April 1, 1999, under provisions of the State Historic Preservation Act of 1980, and on the **National Register of Historic Places** on June 1, 1999, under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Faucetts Point, home of Fossenvue for more than 25 years, is now known as Caywood Point, and is public land owned by the U.S. Forest Service. To visit the Queen's Castle, park at the Caywood Point sign on route 414 just south of the old underpass, and walk down the path to the lake shore. It's a bit more than 1 mile. Or you could arrive by boat on the point waterfront. The forest has received a grant this summer to restore the elegant roof on the historic building. Rob VanVleet of Lodi was awarded the contract.

Notice the various spellings of Fassett, Faucett, Fawcett, or Faussett that have been in use over time. For more information about Fossenvue, contact Kari Lusk, Ranger, 607 546 4470 or klusk@fs.fed.us

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[Note: This is another in the series of monthly articles on the history of Seneca County published as part of the celebration of Seneca County's bicentennial year in 2004. This article was written by Carolyn Zogg, the president of the Lodi Historical Society.]