

Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

May 2022



Opening Days

Every May fishermen and women of the Northwoods, anxious to get on open water, cross their fingers that a warm spring will have taken the ice out on the lakes and left winter as just a cold memory.

It always seems to work out and so begins a new season of that time honored tradition.

In May of 1981 Three Lakes celebrated an event that resulted in another May opening day custom.

Three Lakes was formed as railroad companies and logging firms pushed north toward Canada to find supplies of mature white pine. When the Lakeshore Traffic Railroad Company purchased the first 120 acres from the United States government on July 15th 1881, it was the official beginning of Three Lakes. In 1980 the Chamber of Commerce, upon finding this information, officially recognized 1981 as the 100th birthday of Three Lakes and the Centennial Celebration planning began.

Many activities were planned including a boat parade, an antique car show, and a Centennial Presentation Dance.

The creation of a museum in Three Lakes was a product of a plan initiated by Sue Williams, Ruth Schwartz and Doris Goldsworthy after a suggestion was made at a November meeting that a museum could exhibit artifacts from the community's first 100 years. The idea was met with enthusiasm and the three women began organizing their thoughts on displays of memorabilia representing things of historical significance to Three Lakes past.

Next, all of these things would need a home.



In 1980 Dan Baseman photographed the last train coming into the Three Lakes station. The diesel engine blew a final salute to the onlookers and the era of the railroad that founded this community ended. The railroad line would now be abandoned and the depot that had served so many would be closed.

The following year however the depot would take on new life as the Centennial Museum when the Baseman's, owners of the building, graciously offered it to be used rent free.

After cleaning up the former railroad Depot, the group put its resourcefulness to work. The exhibits were on loan or had been donated by townspeople. The museum contained articles relating to the Narrow Gauge Railroad, farming, logging, households, blacksmithing, cranberry production, and photographs. Printed histories and Centennial displays were prepared by elementary students at the Three Lakes Elementary School.

The curators were volunteers whose only training had been their on the job experience in creating the space.



above- note
lumber yard
west of depot



left- Nettie Gorski
Schipper
Doris
Goldsworthy
The Chalet seen
in window

The first season of 1981 was a huge success. The newly created Three Lakes Historical Society found their accomplishments to be the incentive to continue to be custodians of the towns past. Looking to the future was going to bring more challenges though. In 1982 the Depot was for sale at a price out of their reach but determination brought them to a deal with the town for the Johnson family property. For forty years now that has been where the Museum has had their opening days every May.

New beginnings present new challenges, new opportunities. We welcome them! Now in our second decade, we can look back with pride at the accomplishments of the past — and roll up our sleeves to tackle the work ahead in restoring the Johnson house as a display representing early life in Three Lakes.

With many thanks to our loyal, dedicated, steady and dependable volunteers, we know we can continue to offer the quality which has attracted visitors from coast to coast to our museum. (Last year alone, we counted 3,270 visitors from 36 states and 11 foreign countries.)

Volunteers have done much more than show these visitors through the Johnson House and Museum. They have worked to raise money by baking countless cookies and cakes as well as potatoes and toppings; they have repaired porch steps, doors, sheds and their contents; they have weeded the garden; scrubbed and cleaned; typed and filed; served at fund raisers and special events — and the list goes on.

The challenge before us is to grow and create new interest, while preserving the spirit of Three Lakes, and the values that matter in a changing world.

The 1992 Historical Society newsletter from the Board of Directors was a thank you to the many volunteers whose hard work and dedication was the force behind the museum's success.

The last line is as poignant today as it was 30 years ago,

The challenge before us is to grow and create new interest, while preserving the spirit of Three Lakes, and the values that matter in a changing world

Come help preserve the spirit of Three Lakes

