

WALLACE MURRAY (1849-1933)

Although best known for his business career in Saranac Lake, Wallace Murray played an outsized role in his boyhood home of Keene. In Saranac Lake, Murray was known as both a successful hotelier and as an entrepreneur who first provided electric power to the Village of Saranac Lake. Then, after earning a considerable amount of money from his Saranac Lake enterprises, Murray turned his attentions and benevolence to helping his former home of Keene. In Keene, he built a power dam that provided electric power to the hamlet area. That same dam also powered a resurrected saw mill, and he let out contracts to local lumbermen to provide timber for this saw mill. Additionally, he bought up several unused farms and a struggling inn and then found individuals who could keep these entities going. Finally, Murray "completed the circle" by providing the land for the current Norton Cemetery where he chose to be buried.

Murray was apparently well-known throughout the area. His activities were frequently reported in newspapers from Ticonderoga to Elizabethtown to Malone. He was even occasionally mentioned in papers as distant as Fort Covington and Chateaugay. The "personals" section of these local papers often recorded just his mere presence in the town. He was described as "personable" and "popular", and one obituary referred to him as a "colorful citizen".¹ In news articles and on deeds he was variously identified as "capitalist" or "speculator". An article on Keene natives who had moved to Saranac Lake and helped make Saranac Lake, "...what it is ..." mentioned Murray with the statement, "...whose fame as a promoter is well-nigh worldwide."²

I first heard of Murray when I was researching my pieces for *Two Adirondack Hamlets in History: Keene and Keene Valley*, a book edited by Richard Plunz and published by the Keene Valley Library in 1999. One of my best sources was Anita Washburn (1899-1997) who then served as the town historian. As town historian, Washburn had worked with others of her generation to try and chronicle who had owned and who had lived in pretty much every house in Keene. She had put together a separate 'notebook' for each road with both the history and a photo of the house as it looked then (70s and 80s) along with older photos if available. This resource was very valuable in preparing the history of each house in the hamlet areas, which was one element of the "Two Hamlets..." book.

As a younger woman, Washburn had known both Murray himself and many of those he had helped. I thus became aware of the important role Murray had played in the history of the town. In the end, however, Wallace Murray only rated a few mentions in "Two Hamlets..." because many of his contributions to the town were outside of the hamlet areas. Years later, this history is an attempt to fill that gap in the history of the Town of Keene.

¹ Obituary, January 3, 1933 (paper unknown, but in files of the Adirondack Research Center at the Saranac Lake Free Library.)

² *Elizabethtown Post*, April 8, 1909.

One example of Murray's benevolence involved Anita Washburn's father-in-law, Willis Washburn, who had personally benefited from his generosity. In 1915, Anita Washburn's father-in-law, William (Willis) Washburn, had purchased the Owls Head Inn, a big hotel (also known as the Keene Center House) that once stood in the center of the town. Wallace Murray financed this purchase by taking a \$7,000 mortgage on the property from Washburn. Under the provisions of the mortgage, Washburn was to pay Murray \$500 plus interest (not specified) annually in May, the date of the mortgage³. I do not know whether this repayment schedule was "standard" for the day or whether it was generous.

According to Anita Washburn, however, Murray was never concerned that the mortgage payments were often not made. As a successful Saranac Lake hotelier, all Murray seemed to want was to see that the hotel was being operated. Additionally, a few weeks before the mortgage was signed, Murray appears to have helped William Washburn by buying the "Hotel Barn Lot" from Washburn. The deed for this purchase doesn't specify how much Murray paid for this 15/100 of an acre; but by 1915 a hotel didn't need a large 'barn lot' to house guest's horses, since by then most guests were arriving by 'horseless carriage'.

Because of the above kindness shown to William Washburn and many others over the years, Anita Washburn said Murray was known as 'The Father of the Town'. Having now looked at most, if not all, of Murray's real estate transactions in the Town of Keene, there are many questions I would have liked to be able to ask Anita Washburn. The dry, legal deed records rarely, if ever, indicate whether the motivation for the sale is benevolence, standard business, or malice, but she probably would have known some of the answers.

In addition to what I had learned from Anita Washburn, I have consulted a variety of other sources. I first looked through the copies of newspapers available online from "NYS Historic Newspapers", which can be searched for "key words". One limitation in this line of research was the fact that a fire in 1927 destroyed all of the earliest copies of the *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*. Even after 1927 there are gaps in what is available online and in the Adirondack Research Room at the Saranac Lake Free Library. Established in 1892, the *Enterprise* would have reported extensively on Murray's activities and accomplishments in Saranac Lake.

The second major area of research was the deed and mortgage records in the Essex County Clerk's Office, which are also now available online. These document what property Murray bought and sold, but often the actual selling price is not stated, limiting the ability to know whether the sale was at market value or at a price that helped out the buyer or the seller.

Wallace Murray was born in Brookfield, Vermont in 1849 (Ancestry.com says "1850") to Orren and Emily Murray. Wallace moved with the family to Keene when he was six.⁴ The reason for their move is not known, and there is no record of any property that they purchased subsequent to the move. There are, however, a few clues as to where at least some of Murray's

³ Mortgage Book 70, Page 172.

⁴ *Lake Placid News*, obituary, January 13, 1933.

family lived as well as indications that they were probably quite poor. The first clues are in an October, 1924 article that appeared in both the *Lake Placid News* and the *Ticonderoga Sentinel*. In that article Murray compared the damage done by some recent severe flooding with his memory of the great freshet of 1856. That 1856 flood did extensive damage in many parts of the Adirondacks; and the valley of the East Branch of the Ausable River was especially hard hit due to the partial collapse of the dam at the Lower Ausable Lake. More important to Murray than the town-wide damage was the loss of an uncle and aunt, Jefferson and Sally Murray and a sister, Delphine, in the flood. He said that they, "...made their home together on a farm along the east branch of the Ausable River." Murray reported that his sister's body was found one-half mile downstream, his aunt's body was three miles downstream, and the uncle's body was never found. Murray also reported that another uncle, Adam Howard and his family, narrowly escaped death when their house was flooded. Based on testimony by Orson Schofield (Old Mountain) Phelps, the house the Howards were living in was a short distance up Gulf Brook.⁵ Murray did not report where he was living at the time or how he survived.⁶ The only contemporary account came from the *Elizabethtown Post* that said, "A house containing a family of four [actually just three] individuals of the name 'Murray' was carried away and every individual drowned."⁷

The other clues come from *The Valley of the Ausable*, a compendium of the testimony regarding the claims made against the State of New York by citizens whose property had been damaged in the flood. The claims were based on the fact that the State had paid for the construction of the dam at the Lower Ausable Lake. There was, however, considerable testimony that indicated the flood damage on several of the tributaries was just as great as on the river itself. As a result, the State never paid any of the claims.

Testimony in *The Valley of the Ausable* by Horace Braman stated that, "Half or a quarter of a mile below the Keene village a house was carried off that night, containing three persons, Murray, a sick man, his sister, and a niece, all drowned."⁸ [Murray in 1924 said it was his 'aunt and uncle' so maybe the 'sister' was actually a wife.] Of the actual claims filed by those who owned property downstream of Keene center, only Russell Dart's claim included one of the losses as a, "...house, carried away." He put a value of \$125 dollars on that loss, and apparently only added that loss at a later date.⁹

Dart owned several lots starting at the bend in the river behind the Community Center, but it is most likely the Murray house was on the flat area later flooded by Hurricane Irene in 2011 and now occupied by Charlie Segard's garage. We don't know who else might have been living in this house, but even at 1856 prices a house worth \$125 and housing at least four (per *Elizabethtown Post* article) would indicate that the Murray family was quite poor at the time.

⁵ *Testimony in the Claims of the Citizens in the Valley of the Ausable*, page 50.

⁶ *Lake Placid News*, October 3, 1924.

⁷ *Elizabethtown Post*, October 3, 1856.

⁸ *Testimony in the Claims of the Citizens in the Valley of the Ausable*, Page 90.

⁹ *Testimony in the Claims of the Citizens in the Valley of the Ausable*, Page 160.

French's 1858 Map does show a house labeled "Murray" at the upper end of what is now Church St. It was located north of Cascade Brook on the west side of the road on property now (2022) owned by William and Leita Hamill. Deed records show that the property would have actually been owned by David and Perlina Hinds. This could be where the surviving Murrys moved to after the house next to the river had been swept away. Or, perhaps most of Wallace's family lived there even before the freshet, and poor Delphine just had the misfortune (helping with the sick uncle, perhaps) to be with her aunt and uncle on the fateful night. In any case, we don't see Wallace's family as being very successful in Keene as they never apparently owned any property in Keene. So, Wallace moved on.

At age 16, Murray left Keene for the then fast-growing settlement on the Saranac River that would later be incorporated as the Village of Saranac Lake. He started working as a lumberman and later took up guiding. As a guide, he would have likely benefitted from the many visitors inspired by the writings of William H. H. "Adirondack" Murray. Of course, he was no relation to "Adirondack" Murray, but perhaps his name helped him attract clients. He then moved on from guiding and opened a tavern at his house on Pine Street. But it was his ownership of the Riverside Inn, that he bought in 1888, that started his successful business career.



The Riverside Inn from Bloods Hill. The bridge is the one over the dam that makes Lake Flower

The Riverside Inn was located next to the Saranac River where Riverside Park and the bandshell are now located. The first hotel at this location (the third in Saranac Lake) was built by John Miller in 1860 and leased to Orlando Blood who had moved to Saranac Lake after selling a hotel (the present Elm Tree Inn) in Keene. In 1865, Blood was able to buy the hotel and 80 acres of land for \$2,115. Blood opened the hotel, known as "Blood's Hotel" under his ownership, on July 4, 1865 with a grand ball; and this hotel hosted many such events over the years. In 1883, Blood leased the hotel to Charles Kendall who, in 1886 sub-leased, the hotel to George Berkeley. In 1888, however, Berkeley was shot dead by a disgruntled patron. Murray was then able to buy the hotel from Orlando Blood.

Murray changed the name to the Riverside Inn, significantly expanded it, and operated it successfully, with Cyril Carpenter as manager. In 1899, Murray sold the inn to Corbett and Pine. The most significant event held at the Riverside Inn under Murray's ownership



The Riverside Inn from Main St, looking toward Lake Flower

was a grand ball held in 1894 in honor of NY Governor Roswell Flower. The main purpose of the ball was to persuade the governor, who attended the ball, to appropriate funds to clear the stumps that remained in the waters backed up by a dam that had been built by Pliny Miller in 1827¹⁰. Ultimately, \$9,000 was appropriated and the stumps were cleared. Miller's "Mill Pond" was renamed "Lake Flower" in 1910 in honor of the governor. The dam also flooded what is now Oseetah Lake, but was originally (and is still to some) "Miller's Pond".

In 1893, Murray married Charlotte Gilmore of Keene. She was a year older than he, and they never had any children. She died in 1922 after apparently suffering from several infirmities for an extended period before her death.

Murray's next venture was the 1894 formation of the Saranac Lake Electric Co. Along with Murray, the members of the corporation were Orlando Blood and Orville Morse. They purchased the mill dam (now the Lake Flower dam) from Branch and Callanan Lumber for \$5,500. After converting the dam to generate electricity, the company strung wires throughout the village. Soon the demand for electricity was great enough that their plant manager warned of overloading the generators. In 1905, the Paul Smith's Electric Light and Power Co. brought more powerful generators at Franklin Falls on line; and in 1907 Murray sold out to the Paul Smith's Electric Co. for \$125,000 - quite a sum in that era.¹¹

Even before selling out to Paul Smith's Electric Co., Murray worked with Paul Smith on other projects, including a fanciful plan for trolley lines linking Ausable Forks with Keene Valley, Lake Placid, and Saranac Lake.¹² To power these trolley lines, Murray by himself or with Smith bought the property surrounding The Flume in Wilmington, but never actually built a generator there. There was also a report in November 1901 that Paul Smith and Wallace Murray spent

¹⁰ Duquette, John. "From Blood's to Riverside, This Hotel Thrived", *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, April 29, 1989.

¹¹ Duquette, John, "Electric History of Saranac Lake", *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, October 31, 1986.

¹² *Elizabethtown Post*, April 11, 1901.

several days in Keene investigating whether Hulls Falls could be used for power.¹³ In the end, the only trolley line actually built was from Lake Clear Junction to Paul Smiths.

Murray also built several buildings in Saranac Lake, served twice as president of the village, and owned a publishing company in Saranac Lake. That venture had some success before ending up in a complicated bankruptcy proceeding. He was an active member of the Franklin County Agricultural Society, and owned several race horses that he raced at county fairs. Politically, he was a Democrat and a member of a group that pushed for women's suffrage.



The Murray 'Cottage' on Pine St.

Building on his success with electric power in Saranac Lake, Murray also started an electric company in Port Henry in 1906. Murray negotiated for water rights for hydro power, but also at least planned for a steam plant in the event of low water.¹⁴ This electric company was managed by Cyril Carpenter who had previously managed the Riverside Inn. In 1916, Murray sold the Port Henry company to a partnership from Rutland, Vermont. The article announcing this sale described Murray as, "...the pioneer in developing electrical energy in Northern New York and was successful in this undertaking in Port Henry. This is indicated by the fact that the sale price ran into the six figures."¹⁵

In Saranac Lake, Murray built a large, elaborate house near the Saranac River on Pine Street where he lived until his death in 1933. But now let's turn to what Murray did for Keene.

¹³ *Malone Farmer*, November 20, 1901.

¹⁴ *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, March 31, 1906.

¹⁵ *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, January 13, 1916.



Looking upriver from the bridge in Keene. Mill dam on the right and likely Murray's sawmill on the left given the pile of sawdust.

As early as 1880, Murray was buying property in Keene. He first bought land south of Cascade Brook about a mile up from Keene, and in 1883 bought property south of Alstead Hill Lane located about one-half mile up from the Bark Eater Inn.¹⁶ He soon sold the first lot, but retained the Alstead Hill lot while ultimately owning much of the property on Alstead Hill Lane. In two transactions in 1900 and 1901, Murray purchased land along the Ausable River just above Keene from Heman and Emma Nye and from Ermina Partridge Bell. The deed referenced earlier dams that had been on or near this property, and this would be the location of his power dam a few years later.¹⁷

The first report of progress on the power dam was in October, 1903 when the *Elizabethtown Post* reported that work was expected to be completed in two weeks. The article also noted and Heman Nye was in charge of the carpentry.¹⁸ This October article was followed by an enthusiastic article in December. Titled, "Wallace Murray's Operations in and around Keene Center", the article said that Murray was, "...indeed infusing new life into Keene Center." The article went on to describe the electric power plant that was almost ready to go plus a sawmill and planer with plans to acquire the machinery to make lath and clapboards. The source of the timber would be 10,000 logs that had been contracted to be cut on Lot 175, Essex Tract located near the present Gulf Brook Lean-to on the side of Hurricane Mt. The article named Albert Call and Emmet Parker as the ones who would hire the crews to do the logging. The December article describing the progress on the electric plant finished by saying, "It is good for Keene Center that Mr. Murray is making things lively at his old boyhood home."¹⁹

¹⁶ Deed Book 83, Page 241 and Deed Book 86, Page 211.

¹⁷ Deed Book 119, Page 169 and Deed Book 123, Page 54.

¹⁸ *Elizabethtown Post*, October, 29, 1903.

¹⁹ *Elizabethtown Post*, December 3, 1903.

Murray purchased Lot 175 in 1903 for \$4,000 from the trustee administering the bankruptcy estate of Orlando Beede, bankrupt. For some reason, that sale wasn't recorded until 1920. In 1909, Murray had to pay the State of New York \$37.00 to clear up some unpaid taxes - presumably taxes not paid by Beede when he owned the property.²⁰

But it wasn't until the next year that there was a reference to plans for an "Old Home Day" in Keene when Wallace Murray was finally ready to turn on the lights. That article went on to note that Murray had done much to build up Keene Center, including donating the land for the Keene Public Library.²¹

According to Anita Washburn, the electric service was limited to one light bulb in each room with power provided from 4 PM until midnight, unless there were special events that went on longer. These limitations were likely due to a combination of the fact that electric power was needed during the day to power the sawmill, and the somewhat limited amount of water in the Ausable River. The service ended in 1924 when power lines were finally run up the valley to Keene.

The start of electric service in Keene was followed in June, 1904 with an announcement of the incorporation of the Ausable Valley Light, Heat, and Power Company to operate in Keene, Jay, North Elba, and Wilmington. Capital stock of \$30,000 was to be raised by selling shares for \$50.²² There is no evidence that this venture ever provided power beyond what it provided in Keene, but this was typical of Murray to dream big, and often, but not always, make those dreams real.

Another dream of Murray's was to see if he could resurrect the iron mines that had been operated by W.F. and S.H. Weston. These mines were located in and around what is now Molly Nye Road on the west side of the river, one-half mile above Keene Center. When operating, these mines had provided employment for many until the ore deposits were depleted or just became too hard to extract. Murray apparently hoped to find new lodes of ore. To that end, he obtained options on several pieces of property for the purpose of prospecting for minerals.²³ This search apparently came up empty, because the mine never reopened.

The mine reopening didn't happen, but Murray continued to buy property in Keene Center. A newspaper reference said he bought the 'Derby place' on the west side of the river.²⁴ In 1906, Murray purchased a small lot with a structure on what is now the Mountain Health Center building from Sylvia Coppins for \$1,500.²⁵ This purchase, along with Murray's 1901

²⁰ Deed Book 165, Page 24.

²¹ *Elizabethtown Post*, May 26, 1904.

²² *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, June 16, 1904.

²³ Deed Book 139, Page 240. Deed Book 139, Page 482, and others.

²⁴ *Elizabethtown Post*, April 6, 1905.

²⁵ Deed Book 139, Page 485.

acquisition of the "Old Forge Lot" just to the south of his purchase consolidated his holdings on the east side of the river.

One small example of his benevolence was his 1910 purchase of the house just south of Dart Brook Rustic Goods from Susan Heald. Heald, Monroe Heald's second wife, had received this house in a divorce settlement from Monroe, who had built the 'castle' across the road. Monroe Heald was known as a somewhat miserable character who didn't speak directly to his first wife for many years before she died. He apparently lived in the castle, but continued to take his meals, which his wife cooked, in the house just to the south of the castle. Anyway, Murray bought the house from Susan Heald for \$200. She was by then living in Plattsburgh and clearly didn't need the house - she just needed the money. Murray then promptly sold it back to Monroe Heald for the same amount.²⁶



The 'modern house' Murray constructed on the former Phineas Norton Farm

In 1916, Wallace Murray and Frances L. Carpenter bought what was then still known as the "Phineas Norton Farm" from Lewis and Mary Shovan. By 1917, the *Elizabethtown Post* reported that Murray had put up a new silo, barn and modern house on the Phineas Norton property. The paper went on to say, "Wallace Murray, who was born and reared in Keene, has done much for his native town and deserves special mention."²⁷ In November 1920, Murray placed advertisements in both the *Elizabethtown Post* and the *Essex County Republican* for an auction of some livestock and 50 tons of hay.²⁸ There is no record of who was working the farm at the time. However, by 1925 the farm with its hundreds of acres was sold by Murray and Carpenter to Albert and Annabelle Jacques. The sale price was not specified in the deed, so we can't know exactly how generous Murray was in transferring this property. The Jacques actively farmed their land for nearly 30 years

²⁶ Deed Book 142, Pages 271 and 272.

²⁷ *Elizabethtown Post*, January 18, 1917.

²⁸ *Elizabethtown Post*, November 18, 1920 and *Essex County Republican*, November 19, 1920.

Excepted from the original 272 acres was a portion retained by Murray and Carpenter, part of which became Norton Cemetery.²⁹ The Jacques also added to Norton Cemetery when they sold the northern portion of the cemetery to the Town of Keene. The smaller southern portion retained by Murray in the sale to Jacques became part of Wallace Murray's estate. For many years afterwards, Francis L. Carpenter, and later her estate, were selling cemetery plots in the smaller southern portion where the oldest stones are located. The Essex County tax maps provide the deed reference for the Jacques sale to the Town, but there is no deed reference for the sale of the other portion.

This transaction with Shovan was the first transaction that included Frances Carpenter, wife of Cyril Carpenter, who had managed Murray's Riverside Inn. In the years to come, Frances Carpenter would have many dealings with Murray, and ended up inheriting much of his property at the time of his death. When I started to come across Carpenter's name in my earlier research, I asked Anita Washburn who Frances L. Carpenter was. Taking a deep breath, she replied, "Well, he always said she was his 'business partner'." Her tone of voice indicated that many believed their relationship involved more than just "business".

For the purposes of this historical sketch, I have no reason to try and divine their exact relationship. Murray's will divided his property into thirds with one-third going to Cyril Carpenter, one-third going to Frances, and one-third going to a niece, Lena Ramsey. Cyril Carpenter died shortly after Murray's death in 1933, so Frances ended up with the majority of Murray's property. Murray's will specified that his property should not be sold hastily in a 'distress sale', but should be offered at a fair price to maximize the proceeds.³⁰ However, first Cyril and later Frances Carpenter began disposing of Murray's Keene property, but in a seemingly benevolent manner to local residents in Keene. The price was not always given for each transaction, but those that did have a cost figure appeared low even by the standards of the 1930s in the depths of the Great Depression.

For instance, in 1933 Cyril Carpenter as trustee sold several lots on Alstead Hill Lane totaling 340 acres to Edgar Sanders for \$565. There were a few parcels excepted from these lots, but the total acreage conveyed was at least 200.³¹ In the end, it appears that Sanders was not able to hang onto these lots, because they ended up back in the estate of Frances L. Carpenter, which sold them to George and Donald Whitney in 1946.³² Wade and Tracy Whitney now live on Lot 34 where Alstead Hill Lane crosses Nichols Brook. Lot 37, at the end of the road, went from Whitney to the artist Jossie Bilan, and is now Ed and Teresa Palen' Rock and River Lodge and Guide Service.

Another seeming 'bargain' sale by Frances Carpenter from Murray's estate was the 1934 sale to Norman J. Edwards of the small lot that included the building that now houses the Mountain Health Center and the Post Office. Murray had acquired the property from Sylvia

²⁹ Deed Book 179, Page 140.

³⁰ Deed Book 205, Page 75.

³¹ Deed book 205, Page 560.

³² Deed Book 248, Page 279.

Coppins in 1906 for \$1,500, but the sale price was listed as only \$1,316. This lot is less than acre as it is bounded by Rt. 73, Hulls Falls Road, Dart Brook, and the river. The Edwards may have been leasing the building from Murray before the sale, because Anita Washburn's "Main Street Notebook" says that the Edwards had bought the property in 1924. At any rate, Norman and his wife, Myra, operated a restaurant on the main floor, accommodated guests on the second floor, and then had a bar in the basement after the repeal of Prohibition. After purchasing the property, the Edwards continued the business until Mr. Edwards died in 1947. The restaurant continued for a few more years, then became an antique store, a gift shop, and finally the current uses when the Mountain Health Center bought the property in 1982.

There were also newspaper reports on Murray's logging operations related to his sawmills in Keene and North Elba, indicating that his businesses were newsworthy for how they were helping the area. In 1901, the *Elizabethtown Post* noted that Murray had let a job to Harvey Willey to cut and deliver logs to his mill near Keene Center.³³ There were several other references over the intervening years, but in 1915 the *Ticonderoga Sentinel* reported that between Murray's mills in Keene and Lake Placid they would saw two million feet of lumber. The article also noted that the Lake Placid mill employed 15 people.³⁴

A later 1915 article on Murray's saw mill in Keene reported in early May that, "The flume leading from the dam to the powerhouse and sawmill of Wallace Murray had collapsed the other day and caused a loss of about \$4,000." The article went on to say that the wood flume with steel rods had been crushed by logs that had been piled above the flume. Murray immediately ordered a steel replacement, and that the mill was expected to be back in operation by June 1.³⁵ Presumably the mill was soon back in operation because a January 1916 article reported that Murray's mill was, "...more heavily stocked than usual." The article added that Albert Call would deliver 2,000 feet of lumber.³⁶ It should be noted that, in that era, it was the winter when the logs that had been cut throughout the year were moved to 'market' via sleighs on the snow rather than on wheeled carts.

The only additional information on the sawmill after 1916 was a 1937 article in *The Plattsburgh Daily Press* about a fire in the sawmill. The article noted that the sawmill was owned by a "Mrs. Carpenter of Saranac Lake", had been idle for several years, and that the fire was started by welding torches that were being used to dismantle the equipment in the mill.³⁷

³³ *Elizabethtown Post*, November 7, 1901.

³⁴ *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, April 22, 1915.

³⁵ *Essex County Republican*, May 7, 1915.

³⁶ *Adirondack Record*, January 28, 1916.

³⁷ *Plattsburgh Daily Press*, September 17, 1937.



The Owls Head Inn as it looked when Murray was involved with it.

Wallace's involvement with the Owls Head Inn is somewhat difficult to untangle. My research turned up a number of newspaper references to Murray's having purchased property, but no deed could be found that backed up this report. One example was a 1902 report that Murray had bought the Keene Center House. The short notice simply said, "Wallace Murray of Saranac Lake, capitalist, has purchased the Keene Center House. Mt. Murray formerly lived in Keene, and his many friends will wish him well in this business venture."³⁸ The deed by which William Washburn finally took title to the property in 1915 explains that in the 1902 transaction Ednah Weston, widow of Warren F. Weston agreed to the transfer, but died before performing the agreement. Since she died intestate (without a will), some time was required to formally transfer the property. When that finally happened, Murray gave up the rights that he had under the 1902 agreement.³⁹

What actually happened to the property after the 1902 agreement is not entirely clear. A 1904 newspaper account said that Harvey Willey and James Motisher were the new proprietors. They succeeded James Flaherty of Saranac Lake who had been the proprietor for the previous year. Willey was noted as being "...of Willey House fame...", and that he and Motisher would continue to operate that establishment while Motisher's younger brother, Charles, would be in direct charge of their new establishment. The article also noted that they were changing the name to "Owls Head Inn".⁴⁰

Perhaps Murray became the de-facto owner and operated the inn with a succession of 'proprietors' and finally William Washburn as manager before Washburn took title to the property. I could not find any record of when Washburn became the manager, but a 1913 news item reported that Wallace Murray and William Washburn had secured an option on the Riverside Inn in Keene Valley. This establishment was located just south of Keene Valley on the Ausable River, just north of the bridge to the Boardman cottage. The article stated they would

³⁸ *Elizabethtown Post*, May 29, 1902.

³⁹ Deed Book 152, Page 395.

⁴⁰ *Elizabethtown Post*, April 21, 1904.

improve the building, and it would be managed by Washburn, "...who also manages the Owls Head Inn in Keene."⁴¹ While this article provides some idea of the relationship between Murray and Washburn, it does not appear that Murray ever exercised his option to buy the Riverside Inn.

(The only sale of this property was from the estate of Patrick H. Hayes to Solomon Kelly in 1920. My father, who started coming to Keene Valley in 1919, and spent the winter of 1920-21 in the valley recalled the Riverside Inn in his piece in *Two Adirondack Hamlets in Adirondack History: Keene and Keene Valley*. "No history of Keene lumbering would be complete without mention of the Riverside Inn.... Here lumberjacks congregated when occasion gave them freedom seeking spirit relief, even, rumor has it, after the Eighteenth Amendment had been passed."⁴² The inn was torn down around 1930.)

Meanwhile in Keene, the Owls Head Inn, with William Washburn now the owner, continued to try and remain viable in a changing travel market. As mentioned earlier, Washburn was often unable to make his mortgage payments. Murray was apparently quite patient initially, but that patience didn't last as the property was back in his possession at the time of his death. Upon Murray's death in 1933, this property passed to Frances L. Carpenter who in 1934 sold it to Ruby Bush of Saranac Lake, taking a mortgage from Bush for \$4,000. In 1937 it went to Peter O'Geraghty for the surprising sum of \$11,000. In the end, in 1941 a bankruptcy referee's decision gave the property back to Frances L. Carpenter. In addition to Bush and O'Geraghty, the Scarborough Motor Guide was named in the bankruptcy proceedings. This inclusion of that final party would indicate a last-ditch effort to keep the place going in the age of easy automobile travel. Once Carpenter had regained possession, she sold it to Ray Totman and Harlan Hunkins, partners in Raeoil Fuel. The property ultimately passed to James and Marion Woodruff in 1946. They tore the old hotel down and built Woodruff's Motel and Cabins, thus demolishing the last surviving 'grand hotel' in the Town of Keene.⁴³

Less is known about the farmland that Murray purchased on Alstead Hill Lane. After his aforementioned 1883 purchase of the lot (Lot 32, Old Military Tract) located one-half mile above the Bark Eater Inn, he followed up with numerous other purchases starting in 1912. First was part of Lot 34, followed in 1913 with the rest of Lot 34 and most of Lot 33. In 1916, Murray rounded out his Alstead Hill Lane purchases with his acquisition of most of Lot 37, located at the current end of Alstead Hill Lane.⁴⁴

In 1922, the *Lake Placid News* reported that Essex County had appropriated \$1,000 to the Town of North Elba to improve what is now known at the Old Mountain Road section of the Jackrabbit Ski Trail. The article noted that there were, "Several valuable farms on this road, one of which belongs to Wallace Murray, who owns a lumber yard in this place." (This presumably refers to Murray's lumber yard in Lake Placid.) The article goes on to state that the grades are

⁴¹ *Ticonderoga Sentinel*, February 27, 1913.

⁴² Goodwin, James, in *Two Adirondack Hamlets....*, page 173.

⁴³ Deed Book 231, Page 323 - including references to numerous other deeds and mortgages.

⁴⁴ Deed Book 149, Pages 130 & 415, Deed Book 154, Page 193, Deed Book 156, Page 534.

more gradual and more free of snow than the Cascade Road, but that it is in "...rather bad condition."⁴⁵ (I would disagree with the statement about the 'more gradual grades', but it is much more sheltered from windblown snow than the Cascade Road.)

(Two hundred eighty-nine acres in the western portion of Lot 37 had come to Robert Nichols in 1900 from the State of New York. This was a sale that theoretically shouldn't have been allowed, given that all land owned by the State was considered Forest Preserve and was not supposed to be sold. Further research with the help of Dave Gibson, now of Adirondack Wild - Friends of the Forest Preserve, revealed that there was an obscure 1896 provision in the law, now long extinguished, that did permit such sales under certain conditions. Deed records show that Murray ultimately bought or possessed several other properties under this provision, but that most ultimately went back to Forest Preserve.)

With the purchases of Lot 37, Murray owned the majority of the land on the final mile and a half of Alstead Hill Lane plus a good half-mile beyond the currently drivable portion of the road. Detailing how each one of these parcels was ultimately sold - either by Murray or by one of his heirs - would not add that much to this historical sketch. It is worth noting, however, that Stephen Shackett and family ended up residing on the remaining portion of Lot 37, and that the piece of road past the junction with Bartlett Road was for many years known as Shackett Road. Stephen had long been employed by Frances L. Carpenter in Saranac Lake.

I could not find any record of how Murray's niece, Lena Ramsey, ultimately sold off the property she had likely received in her one-third share of Murray's estate. It is possible that all the property she received was in Franklin County, and their online records only go back to 1965. What can be determined is that, she, and later her heirs, continued to own the house on Lot 33, located south of Alstead Hill Lane at Nichols Brook. The lot was sold in the 1990s to Mark and Laura Page of Brooklyn, New York. They renovated the existing house, and continue to use it as a second home.

One other sale worth mentioning would be his 1924 sale of the Elm Tree Inn to William and Annabelle Roberts. Murray had bought the property in 1916. The Roberts apparently successfully operated the inn until they sold to Wilmot and Lorraine Purdy in 1946.⁴⁶

Finally, this history wouldn't seem complete without at least some mention of Frances L. Carpenter. She quietly disposed of many of Murray's properties, but some were still in her possession when she died in 1942. She was born in 1865 in Moers, New York to John and Jane Kiernan. (I could not determine where the "L" came from.) She married Cyril Carpenter in 1890, but they did not apparently have any children. Her obituary said that at the time of her death she owned extensive property including the "Murray Block" on Main and River streets.⁴⁷ This would have been the buildings across Main Street from Murray's Riverside Inn on the corner

⁴⁵ *Lake Placid News*, August 4, 1922.

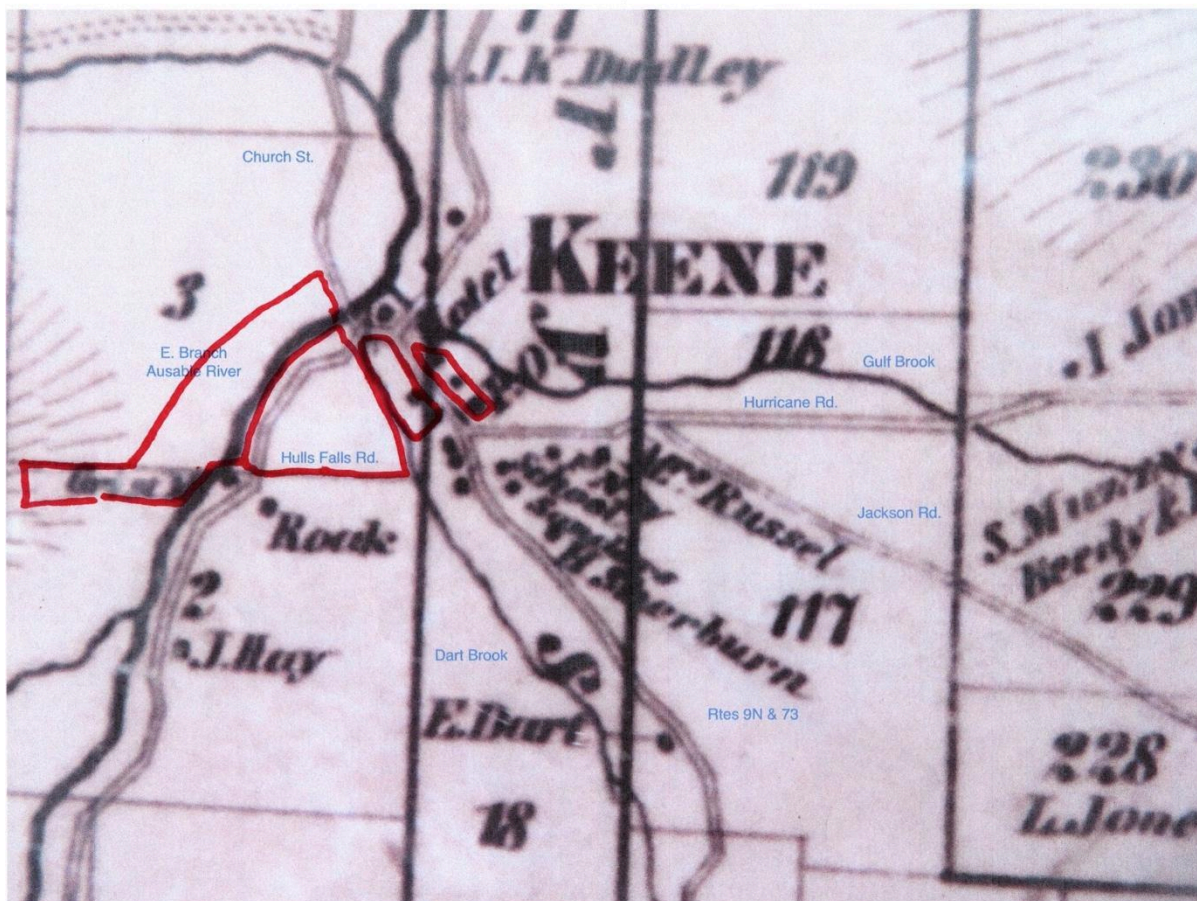
⁴⁶ Deed Book 179, Page 16.

⁴⁷ *Adirondack Record-Elizabethtown Post*, March 3, 1942

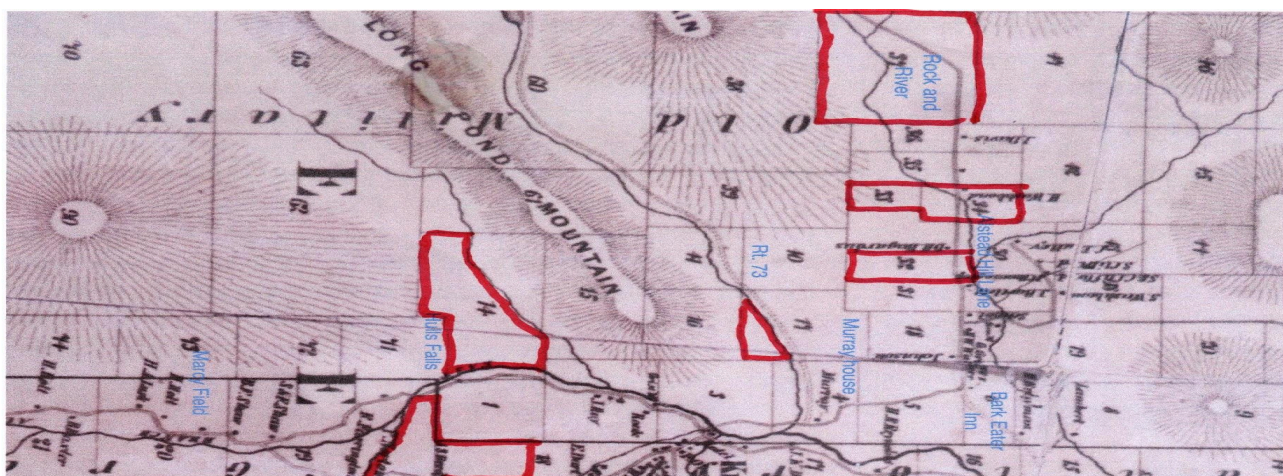
opposite the Harrietstown Town Hall. Some of the other property she inherited from Murray was along McKenzie Pond Road. Her name thus does live on in that the new(1985-2000) home development along that road is called "Carpenter Estates".

APPENDIX

1. Maps showing all of the property owned by Wallace Murray in the Town of Keene.
2. Photos of what remains of Murray's power plant and sawmill on the Ausable River.
3. Photos of the Murray family plot in Norton Cemetery plus a separate stone for Murray's wife, Charlotte.



Murray's properties along the Ausable River where his sawmill/power plant was located. Also shown are the Owls Head Inn, which he apparently owned at one point as well as the Elm Tree Inn and the "Hotel Barn Lot"



Murray' dam and sawmill/powerplant today

Intake structure from across the river

Trench that held the penstock that brought the water from the intake to the sawmill/power plant. The metal debris is of an old vehicle, not the original penstock, or flume..

Intake structure from upstream

Inside view of the intake structure showing the exit hole for the penstock (referred to as a "flume" in early newspaper account).



Penstock trench, looking upstream toward intake.



Penstock trench, looking upstream toward intake.

Concrete support for the penstock. Located just downhill of the trench, this is likely where the penstock entered the saw mill/ power plant. The Mountain Health Center is visible through the trees.

Field just up Hulls Falls Rd. from Mt. Health Center. Across from Peter and Carolyn Fish's house

MURRAY GRAVE SITES IN NORTON CEMETERY



and Murray



Detail of the seven family foot stones.

ENDNOTES