

EDITORIAL.

Changing Communities Need Quality of Life Laws Like the Village's

A few years ago, at the height of the Adirondack real estate boom, the Adirondack Park Agency sponsored a round-table discussion about the implications of that boom for Adirondack communities. The discussion touched upon the diminishing stock of affordable housing and its consequences for small towns: empty classrooms, thinning ranks of volunteer rescue squads and fire companies, vacant storefronts and darkened streets. As lakefront and country property was snapped up, homes in residential neighborhoods were acquired, to be occupied, if at all, only on weekends or holidays. Lake George Village officials have discovered another unanticipated consequence of absentee ownership: neglected property. Not only have houses been left untended, so, too, have commercial buildings that were purchased as investments. To address the problem, the Village Board of Trustees passed a series of laws that, Mayor Bob Blais said, "will make a big difference to our community." The laws also permit the fire chief to declare a building a fire hazard and order occupants to leave. According to Blais, investors have bought up old motels and boarding houses and transformed them into housing for summer workers. Many of those absentee investors, however, have failed to maintain the buildings according to the standards established in fire and safety codes, and their tenants have been placed in danger. The Village also approved a law that requires that "all vacant structures or vacant land be maintained in a clean, safe, secure and sanitary condition." It establishes clear standards for what constitutes "clean, safe, secure and sanitary conditions" and authorizes the Village to restore the property to those conditions at the owner's expense. It's unfortunate that laws such as these are necessary, but they are the predictable result of an inflated real estate market and, perhaps, the recent deflation of that market. As we report in this week's issue, those laws have helped the Village take action, and those Village's actions may prove to be useful models for other Adirondack communities, many of which may find themselves in similar circumstances.

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Adirondack Boats and Boating at Hall's Boat Corp.

By Buzz Lamb

Hallie Bond, curator at the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, spoke to a crowd of about 30 people at Hall's Marina in Lake George Village on July 13. Bond said her presentation would trace the procession of watercraft which rowed, paddled and sailed through the Adirondack region when travel by water was the best way of getting around.

Bond said that archeologists have discovered tools that suggest people were building dugout canoes in the Adirondacks as early as 3,000 B.C. According to Bond, the heavy dugouts made using the water as highways not an easy task so the Algonquin people perfected very lightweight canoes made of birch bark long before white men moved into the region.

Bond said the boat that became known as the Adirondack Guideboat descended from the flat-bottom bateau used by both the French and English in the colonial wars of the 18th Century.

"The Adirondack guideboats are easily distinguished from other boats in their construction. In their classic form, by about 1880, the boats were double-ended," she explained.

"Someone once said to me 'Hallie, all boats have two ends', she said with a laugh. "What I mean to say is that they are pointy at both ends with elliptical bottom boards instead of keels." Bond said that many small-craft historians feel the guideboat is the finest regional type of boat to have evolved in America.

Bond said the necessity of having a lightweight boat to portage between lakes and rivers led to the development of the 11-foot, 30 pound Rushton double-ended lap-stroke boat in 1877. Bond said that by 1880 Lake George had become so well known as a canoeing lake that 23 prominent canoeists met here and formed the American Canoe Association.

The Whitehall boat was one of the most popular types of rowing boats in the mid-19th Century. "Lake George builders adapted a form of the Whitehall which became a fixture on the Queen of



Whitehalls on Lake George. Photos courtesy of Adirondack Museum

American Lakes," she said. "Patrons of the great Lake George hotels used these boats between 1885 and 1926. One builder, F.R. Smith & Sons in Bolton Landing built over 600 of them."

According to Bond, the wood-canvas canoes developed in Maine in the 1870s were not used in the Adirondacks until after 1900, probably because of the popularity of the guideboats.

"The wood-canvas canoes were cheap, stable and durable," she said.

Bond said the automobile was by far the best means of getting around in the Adirondacks after good, hard-surfaced roads formed a new transportation network in the region by the 1920s. "Many people were now seeing the Adirondacks from the front seat of a car instead of the quarterdeck of a guideboat or a canoe," she lamented.

Bond said that by 1935 boats were no longer essential to life in the woods. "Most had become

yachts...boats built used primarily for pleasure," she said. "Within another generation these yachts were no longer even a mainstay of an Adirondack vacation and the traditional way of moving through the region, for commerce or pleasure, was almost obsolete."

At the end of her presentation, Bond was asked if she could estimate how many Adirondack guideboats are still operating. "I thought you were going to say how many were ever built," she said with a chuckle. "When I wrote the book, we came up with 600," she said.

When asked how many guides are out there using guideboats today, she answered, "I think there are only one or two guides operating with guideboats these days."

Bond said boats and boating have changed radically in the Adirondacks but visitors to the Adirondack Museum can get a glimpse of what makes, and has always made, this region unique.

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Since 1975, the **Adirondack Council** has shown the world how people and nature can thrive together in the Adirondack Park. We work not only to protect nature, but also to sustain communities in the region. The Council works for our members to voice their concerns when and where it counts. We educate, advocate, monitor and take legal action on behalf of this six-million-acre treasure.