

The Road to the Lake

The distance between our home and our camp was about 10 miles. Coming out of Claremont on Chestnut Street there was a small grocery store where we often stopped to pick up a few groceries. We traveled along Chestnut Street extension until it became 2nd New Hampshire Turnpike toward Unity.

At the junction of 2nd New Hampshire Turnpike and County Farm Road there was a large apple orchard on the right and a cider mill on the left. In the Fall we would stop by to buy a gallon of cider. If there was hard cider, I didn't know it, but I'm sure somebody was making some. The pressed apples were simply dumped in the field next to the mill, and the smell of fermenting pulp wafted through the air. There might have been some intoxicated birds in the area. The orchard across the road was a good place to hunt partridge in the Fall and deer in the Winter.

People going to the Acworth side of the lake would turn right onto County Farm Road. Much of the land on the way to the lake was farm land or forest, but part way to the lake there was a large, abandoned collection of CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) barracks. Members of the CCC played a big part in clearing up after the hurricane of 1938. There was also an Elks Club picnic grounds nearby.

We stayed on the turnpike and climbed the steep hills that lead to Unity. As we crested the last hill, on the left was the home of Clifford Stone, the town's road commissioner, contractor, and issuer of fishing licenses. He also had a large blueberry patch where he allowed people to pick their own blueberries for a small price per quart.

Down the hill into the last gully past the chicken barn and up a last grade we came to Unity. On the left was Mica Mine Road which climbed the ridge of another hill. At the end of that was an old mica mine that produced insulators for things like electric toasters. When better insulators were found, demand for mica dropped, and the mine was abandoned.

Across the road from Mica Mine Road was a small general store which also supported a small post office and a local telephone switchboard. The mail for Unity denizens was carried from the Claremont Post Office to the store, where it was held for pickup by the public. The mail was brought from Claremont in a private auto by a postman named Frank. Frank had a phobia about driving back down the hill from Unity, so the store owner's wife would have to drive him back down the hill, followed by her husband in their car. At the bottom of the hill near the cider mill he would take control and drive back to the post office and the store owner and his wife would return to Unity.

There weren't many telephones in Unity at that time and even fewer around the lake. The telephone switchboard at the store was operated by the owner's wife. When someone wanted to make a call, they would lift their phone off its cradle, a light on the switchboard above the number of the caller would light up, and the operator would plug her headset into a matching jack on the board and ask, "Number Please?" Numbers were simple: 46 might be a private phone, 57 Ring 2 would be for a party line where the second party on the line would hear the ring. She would then make a manual connection to the number you requested. If you wanted to call out of town, you asked for "Long Distance Please" and the operator would connect you to a long distance operator at the central phone office to complete the call. If you remember Lilly Tomlin's comedy act, it was spot on. My dad didn't want to have a phone,

because he didn't want to receive any business calls, so if we needed to make a phone call, we had to row up to Dion's Store where there was a pay phone.

Driving further down the "main street" of Unity we passed the Town Hall on the right, the Unity store on the left, and the one room elementary school on the right. Then it was dirt roads on to North Shore Road with little in between except a couple of cabins occupied by loggers or hired hands.

At the intersection of the turnpike and North Shore Road there were three houses, one on each of three corners. The first one on the right was owned by a man named Sylvanas Crowell. Across from that house on the same side of the road was the town tax collector.

Sylvanas, better known around Claremont as "Unity", liked his drink. He did not own a car and would walk or hitchhike the ten miles to Claremont for his booze. He was the only person I ever saw who drank Sterno, strained through a dirty handkerchief. Several incidents of drivers returning to the lake in the evening recount how he would be found passed out on the long hill up to Unity. Sometimes they picked him up. When the drink wore off he could be seen sitting in a lawn chair reading The New York Times. Friends who resided in Unity said that when he was sober he was a very erudite intellectual.

Taking a right turn we headed toward Anderson Road, but sometimes we continued further on North Shore Road until we reached the Gibson farm. Sometimes my mother would buy a dozen eggs and sometimes we would dig up the ground behind their kitchen window for fish worms. (Their kitchen sink drained through a short pipe directly onto the ground out back, which created a very rich soil that supported luscious mud worms.)