

History in Interview

No. 1

George Wiedman, owner of
the Elmheart Hotel at Manitou
Beach, Town of Greece, N.Y.

Interviewed by
George Caswell & Edwin Spelman
August 10, 1977

Historical Society of Greece, N.Y.



Caswell: "Ed Spelman and I are at the Elmheart Hotel interviewing Mr. George Wiedman. Mr. Wiedman you owned the Elmheart Hotel once at the end of the Manitou Trolley Line and can remember all about the old times in this area. So can you tell us a few things. For example, we would like to know your history. Where did you start and how did you happen to end up here?"

Wiedman: "My folks came here in 1903 from Rochester. They had a place on State & Allen Streets, a saloon and bowling alley, before we came here. My father's name was George and he and Michael O'Loughlin were partners. O'Loughlin died in '54, at the age of 86."

Caswell: "What was here in 1903? Was this hotel built?"

Wiedman: "It was built in 1892. Frederick Odenbach built it and lost it to Al Skinner's father. Skinner's father had a warranty deed to this property and Odenbach came in on a quit claim deed."

Question: "Is that the same Odenbach who had a place across the road?"

Wiedman: "Yeah, he went from here up there."

Caswell: "Did he build that other place?"

Wiedman: "No, that was built in 1888."

Caswell: "What was it originally?"

Wiedman: "Matthews and Servis built that. Manitou Hotel they

called it. Odenbach built this hotel but the Skinner family claimed it was on their property and there was a lawsuit. Odenbach won the first time around. Then Boris, a lawyer said the judge made an error and he took up Skinner's fight. The next time around, Skinner beat him and took over the hotel. An Elm tree decided the lawsuit - that's where it gets its name."

Question: "Mr. Wiedman, will you just tell us about things - as you remember the old days?"

Wiedman: "The trolleys came in 1892."

Question: "So it was already a good operating line, when you came."

Wiedman: "Yeah, and they quit in October."

Caswell: "What did you do all winter?"

Wiedman: "We would go back to the city. It was a summer business."

Question: "Tell us about that Pittsburgh group that used to come here? Eddie Ushold at the Grove House was telling us where the Colony Club went and everybody kicked them out until they finally got here. Remember those places?"

Wiedman: "No."

Question: "He said they were down at the old Crescent Beach Hotel but they only had them one year and didn't like the group."

Wiedman: "The Colony Club was at Odenbach's first and then moved down here. They wanted to get on the lakefront."

Question: "Mr. Wiedman has just shown us a picture of the Colony Club

taken by the famous "Stoney". (Photographer Albert Stone of the old HERALD and DEMOCRAT & CHRONICLE newspapers.) His collection is now being gone over by the Rochester Museum and many are being printed in the local papers in this year of 1977. Mr. Wiedman is telling us that the Pittsburgh Colony Club did bring their wives and the picture he is showing us includes the families, so there may be some confusion between this group and the one which Eddie Ushold said went to various places and they wouldn't accept them back. Tell us more about this Colony club-it came how many years?"

Wiedman: "They came here 20 years in the month of July and they quit in '31. That was the last year and about 125 people came and stayed four weeks. They came from Pittsburgh via the B & O" (Baltimore & Ohio R.R.) Heavy Equipment came up on that and then the trolley to here- a lot of them drove in their own cars. They had free dancing here every night."

Question: "In your hall out here?"

Wiedman: "No they had their own dance floor." (Mr. Wiedman shows a photograph which has a large sign with Pittsburgh Colony Club, Pittsburgh, PA on it and about 100 people, men, women and children, also another photograph of the dance hall. This is a covered open building 60 feet long, with screening for windows.) "They had free dancing with a

13 piece band. They brought their own bands."

Question: "This was just for the Colony Club members?"

Wiedman: "No, for everybody and people came from all around. In this picture you can see the tents in which they lived - a very orderly colony stretching for a long distance - 500' of tents."

Question: "Did they bring these tents, Mr. Wiedman?"

Wiedman: "Yes, they brought their tents and in this picture here - this was their dining room and their kitchen and the help slept up there and that was their storehouse when they broke camp....see those boxes there, Colony Club markings, each tent would have a box.** They put the tents out to dry them off, then put them in a box and stored them in this building there."

Caswell: "What is this building you are pointing to?"

Wiedman: "That was a double cottage. We tore that down after they quit."

Caswell: "And this cottage was only used by the Pittsburgh Colony Club right? Tell me, do you still hear from any of those old Colony Club members."

Wiedman: "No."

** One of these large boxes was found in an antique shop and bought by Bud Steeb, a society member.

Caswell: Mr. Wiedman is now showing us a photograph of the Elmheart at the end of the Manitou Trolley Line. It shows that the tracks ran along the breakwall ending in front of the Elmheart Hotel. He is also showing us another picture which has the name WEIDMAN AND O'LOUGHLIN which was the original name of this proprietorship. It shows two of the old cars and the people are disembarking in front of what is now the present Elmheart Hotel. The building has a lot of super structure with the name "The Elmheart" on an upper level and what looks like balconies and an observation tower. The picture shows ladies in their long dresses and the men and boys in their suspenders. Mr. Wiedman is just mentioning things that were here at Manitou Beach. "What were you saying about all the attractions?"

Wiedman: "We had a merry-go-round, shooting gallery, toboggan slide, bath house."

Caswell: "Were there any restaurants besides yours?"

Wiedman: "No."

Caswell: "Were there any other places to sleep and stay?"

Wiedman: "No." (Editors Note: The Manitou Hotel would have been in operation nearby, so this reply is strange.)

Caswell: "How many rooms did you have?"

Wiedman: "Twenty-five."

Caswell: "They are still here but you aren't using them?"

Wiedman: "No, we have not had a roomer since 1931."

Caswell: "Still got the furniture of those days?"

Wiedman: "Gave them away - all collector's items. Wash bowls, pictures...."

Caswell: "Did you have a pot under each bed?"

Wiedman: "Yeah, brass beds, commodes, cuspidors." George Gobel says you can hardly get them anymore."

Caswell: "We will record here a rather interesting point. Mr. Wiedman has been very adamant about lending the Historical Society any of his photographs. The reason is that he lent a number of them to a man who put out a book on the old Manitou Trolley and he did not return the photographs. (At this point, Ed Spelman is copying some of his photographs on the premises and also is going out to get the book from his car and have Mr. Wiedman identify the pictures which he lost. It is very possible that Ed may have bought those pictures, in which case duplicates can be made and given to Mr. Wiedman.) We have been talking to Mr. Wiedman, who mentioned that the cash register which he has is from 1896. Somebody has painted it green but it is probably solid brass. (Note: As part of the estate, this cash register is now in the possession of his heirs.)

Wiedman: "When we came here, Odenbach gave us one year...he said we would be back in Rochester (Dutchtown) in one year and we are still here and Odenbach quit in '41."

Brass Ring Tickets

Reis Brothers

WM. J. REIS & SONS

Proprietors

Caswell: (Mr. Wiedman is looking through the book and making remarks. He just remarked about the Steamer Rosalie and the Odenbach pier.) "And you had a small pier in front of your place, didn't you?"

Wiedman: "Yeah."

Caswell: "I know some of those big stone blocks are still there with the steps up them. Now what was that used for?"

Wiedman: "For fishermen."

Caswell: "In Ed's collection, we have found the old brochure which includes the Reis Brothers Merry-go-round and it says, Tickets 5 cents, 6 for 25 cents. Underneath it there are a couple ticket stubs, one for the Rochester Manitou Railroad Company and it says, SPECIAL EXCURSION RATES. Now I would like you to repeat what you were saying about when you worked on this, Mr. Wiedman".

Wiedman: "I got 25 cents a day. Al Skinner and I worked there for 25 cents a day and at the Pioneers Picnic we would get a \$1."

Caswell: "What did you do?"

Wiedman: "We were feeding the rings."

Question: "Tell me, where is that merry-go-round now?"

Wiedman: "It went to Wautoma Beach."

Caswell: "Is it still there or did they destroy it?"

Wiedman: "I think it's destroyed."

Caswell: ("Mr. Wiedman is saying it was an old merry-go-round, it had canvas sides and it was part of his job to roll the

canvas closures up and down and it had a steam engine on it"). "What kind of music arrangement did it have?

Mr. Wiedman says it was an organ and they just left it there with a canvas protecting it. Also Mr. Wiedman was just saying that the last run on the trolley line was made by Jack Kelley, a name well known to Manitou Trolley buffs. Ed Spelman has a little brochure here which has a map of the Division of Engineering in the city of Rochester, 1956 and it shows the monthly mean water level of Lake Ontario from 1913 to 1956. This map shows the stops on the old trolley line, the first being Ontario Beach which is misspelled and Charlotte, Island Cottage, Crescent Beach, Grandview Beach, Braddocks Heights, Manitou Beach. Looking at this map, we see that while the line then ended just beyond the Elmheart Hotel, which was stop 23, there was a proposed continuation, to Payne Beach, Lighthouse Beach, Davidson Beach and Hilton Beach and apparently beyond, where it goes off the map. The total length of the line as actually built was 7.25 mi with .45 of a mile for sidings, .24 of a mile for storage for a total of 7.94 mi. Of this 7 miles was considered the roadway and .94 of a mile is what they called "public." I also asked Mr. Wiedman about the use of highly explosive propane gas and he said that they did use propane. In the case of the Manchester Hotel at Ridge and Manitou, the explosion was caused when a man went out with an open lantern. He says that they got electricity in 1912."

Question: "Did you ever have any fires or any incidents of that nature?"

Wiedman: "In 1931, we had two fires...smoking in bed. We were on top of them both times. If we had been sleeping...we would have been burned out. We haven't had a roomer since.. we gave all the furniture away."

Caswell: "Did you ever have any famous individuals who stayed here, Mr. Wiedman."

Wiedman: "No."

Caswell: "But you did, I think, say that there were some famous bands that came here."

Wiedman: "We had Big Bands for 10 years."

Caswell: "Can you name some of them?"

Wiedman: "Krupa, Goodman, Les Brown, Ina Rae Hutton, Gilda Gray, Teagarden, Henry Bussey, Chick Webb, Ella Fitzgerald. Jimmy Lunceford outdrew them all - 6 times he was here."

Caswell: "And they played in the building outside here which was then - a dance hall? And later was what?"

Wiedman: "A boat storage. Everybody dressed up in those days and we had no police...now they would tear it apart."

Caswell: "When was that building built?"

Wiedman: "'32."

Caswell: "How long has it been empty?"

Wiedman: "We haven't had a dance since '69."

Caswell: "It is still in good condition....your hotel is in excellent condition also. Is that just because you have kept it

painted? Is it a well-built building?"

Wiedman: "It is well-built and we keep it up. We painted it last summer - two coats. That was in 1976."

Spelman: "Were you related to Andy Wiedman?"

Wiedman: "Yes. His Nephew."

Caswell: "While you were out, Ed, he mentioned his cousin, O'Loughlin.. you know that name, of course, very well."

Wiedman: "Wasn't he down at Summerville - ran a beer joint in Summerville.?"

Spelman: "Yeah. That's his."

Wiedman: "Silk and Mickey... its a Hippie Joint now."

Spelman: "I live about a mile east of there in what was a white canvas tent in 1912, when I went there."

Wiedman: "Zimmerman...A name I recall."

Spelman: "Yeah, he was president of the White City, Summerville and Windsor Beach Athletic Association."

Wiedman: "These places were boarded half way up and the rest was tent."

Spelman: "I know that."

Caswell: "Ed, maybe this is a good time for you to tell about your tent that became a house.. That's what it was, right?"

Spelman: "Yes, I lived in a white canvas tent. The area got its name, White City because there were all the white canvas tents. About the time of the first war the price of canvas went up very high, so we converted the tent to a cottage by covering the 2 x 4 framework that supported the tent...we

covered that with wood and put roll roofing paper over it."

Caswell: "What's the dimensions of your house?"

Spelman: "Sixteen feet wide and eighty-one feet long."

Caswell: "Sort of a forerunner of the trailer. Today those tents have become cottages. Have most of them actually been turned into cottages or are there a lot of empty spaces.?"

Spelman: "No, I'd say practically all of them are converted into cottages and most of them are used the year around...very few are not occupied in the winter...I don't think there is 1% not occupied in the winter."

Caswell: "You started to talk about the Rendezvous. What was that Mr. Wiedman."

Wiedman: "The Rendezvous was a dance hall at Summerville."

Spelman: "A man by the name of Kane rented the Hotel Windsor... probably about the time prohibition went into effect around 1919."

Wiedman: "That's where I first saw Lunceford. I brought him up here after that. Jimmy Lunceford, had a black band.. He died, suddenly, dropped dead."

Caswell: "You're talking about the old Rendezvous, wasn't that a very well know prohibition dive? There was one down there at Summerville. We went there as kids."

Wiedman: "You're thinking about Bengles. O'Loughlin was right across the street from it."

Caswell: "This Rendezvous was where?"

Wiedman: "On the Lakefront...corner of Third Street."

Spelman: "A fellow by the name of Kane came up here from Schenectady and tried to operate a 50 cent a piece dance at the Windsor and it didn't take very well. So he went down to Summer-ville and bought the old cottage on the lakefront on the corner of Third St. and tore the cottage down and built this dance hall that he called, "Kanes Dance Tavern" ..then later it got called "The Rendezvous." And then it became a roller skating rink, later Kodak rented it for a warehouse ..they stored a lot of material in there and then it wasn't long after that it was torn down."

Wiedman: "Pop's Inn on the Beach."

Spelman: "That was the old Rochester Yacht Club built in 1877 and Pop came here as near as I can estimate, about 1910."

Wiedman: "My cousin had a place on the lake near the Coast Guard and he had that place further up. It was O'Loughlin.. he had two places.. that's where that Italian fellow is now.. The Harbour Lounge. Married an Irish woman..he's an Italian. Some kind of cove."

Spelman: "Oh, Cove... that isn't quite the right name."

Wiedman: "Odenbach had Pearl...O'Loughlin had both places."

Spelman: "Yeah, Sam Gottry operated it as a restaurant for quite a while. He was the son of the Gottry Carting Company and he operated that as a restaurant."

Wiedman: "They had two fires while he was there. Yeah, it was some cove...still there an Italian name like Barbous Cove.."

Spelman: "Barbarians Cove"

Wiedman: "O'Loughlin had that place."

Spelman: "'Zegowicz Market - originally that was the name."

Caswell: "When you say market - a meat market?"

Spelman: "Meat market, grocery store and of course they sold gasoline. The grocery stores all sold gasoline, when I was a kid. There weren't any gas stations. There may have been a few downtown but out in the outskirts you went to the grocery store and bought gasoline."

Wiedman: "Was Barry Sexton in Charlotte?"

Spelman: "Yeah."

Wiedman: "He was famous for Charlotte suckers, popcorn, fritters. He was a Judge, too."

Spelman: "I didn't know that."

Wiedman: "He was a cripple. He had exclusive on all the concessions. He netted thirty thousand there one year. You'd get off the trolley and you could smell that popcorn."

Spelman: "Well, there was a girl who operated the place there, called Kappy Sexton's Place...Oh that was the daughter of Larry."

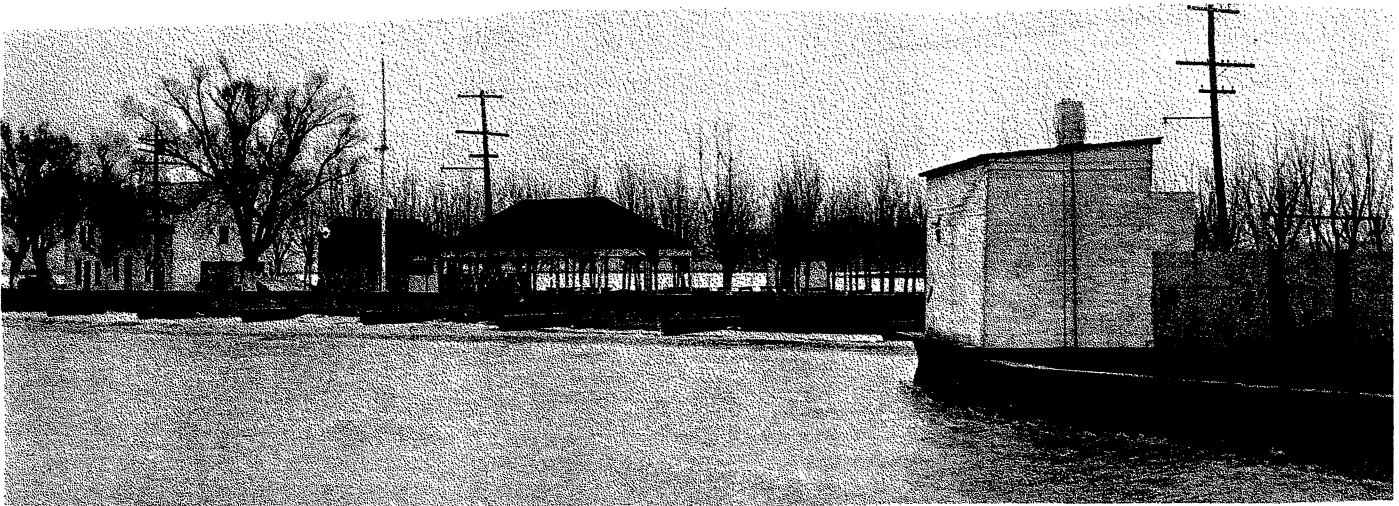
Caswell: "You're talking about down in Charlotte."

Wiedman: "It was like Coney Island. The trains would go in the park and let the passengers right out on the beach."

Caswell: "Mr. Wiedman has been talking about the old toboggan, which was here on Manitou Beach and how every Saturday night they had an ambulance at hand because there was so many accidents. There was a slide into the water and the picture shows Mr. Wiedman in front of it with his suspenders, short

hair and he said that the trouble was that this toboggan not only had rollers but it ran on a track and got up to speeds of 40 mph. Meanwhile, other people were coming back up with their toboggans so collisions were inevitable. He was saying that the trolley went a little ways past the hotel and there was a turn-around. There was a bumper there too so it couldn't go any farther and then they turned the trolley around and started back on the trestle to Charlotte filled with the drunks who had had a happy day at the Elmheart." Mr. Wiedman has a beautiful colorful postcard of the area in early days, - it is postmarked 1912. It shows a merry-go-round, the trolley on its way up to the turn-around and in the background the Odenbach Hotel. And on the roof is a very large painted sign "MANITOU". Mr. Wiedman says at night it was lighted up and could be seen for many miles. The ladies and gentlemen are parading along in front with their long dresses, the men in suspenders and bowler hats."

THE END



The Colony Club picnic pavilion and club house on the sand spit, Manitou Beach. Old Skinner Hotel left of pavilion.