

Waters

The community known today as Waters, Michigan was established in the 1870s when a lumbering operation was built at Bradford Lake in Otsego County. For a period of time, the post office which began in 1876 was named Bradford Lake and the railroad station was Wright's. The lumbering firm Wright, Wells and Company bought out the failed enterprise begun by a man whose last name was Bradford.

The town Bradford Lake was renamed Waters in 1885. It was about this same time that Wright, Wells and Company sold its lumber mill in Waters to Stephens Lumber Company located in Roscommon County. Three generations of the Stephens family expanded the lumbering business as well as the town of Waters. By 1899, Waters consisted of about 100 homes, a depot for the Michigan Central Railroad, post office, church, school, a general store, company office, boarding house, two saw mills, a planing mill, and logging operations in the near vicinity connected by 18 miles of railroad track with two locomotives. The lumber yards on Big and Little Bradford Lakes held large amounts of lumber at all times of the year and was extremely flammable. Two major fires occurred in early 1900s. The first fire took place in the summer of 1911 and destroyed 20,000,000 board feet of lumber valued at \$425,000. Stephens rebuilt but was out of business in less than 5 years probably due to having exhausted the supply of trees and having suffered a fire in 1914 that destroyed his office building.

It was also at this time that Henry (Tom) Stephens III, who had recently inherited the family fortune, decided to make Waters his home. Tom Stephens was responsible for the building of the bottle fence which was about 200 feet long and four feet high.

The fence was constructed in 1914-1916 using glass bottles and was located on the east side of U.S. 27 about where the Township Fire Department is today. The famous landmark deteriorated over time and was moved to the east of its original location and later was torn down. A replica was built in the 1970s but did not last long before being removed and buried behind the Township Fire Hall in 1996. A memorial to the bottle fence was put up in 2000 and is located on the north side of the Otsego Lake Township Hall.



Stephens also built the largest barn in Michigan in 1914. The barn was 165 foot across and 45 feet wide and 75 feet from the basement floor to the peak of the roof. It was capped with a cupola with a flag pole flying the pennant of the Otsego baseball team, another of Tom's projects. The barn later became the Heart Lake Club and then the Waters Inn. It was destroyed by fire in 1972 and was located on the east side of US 27 between Sandy Lane and Veterans Drive.



In 1927, Mr. and Mrs. Remi Schotte bought 1,800 acres including the town of Waters. By this time, most of the buildings had been removed. The Schottes re-established the post office in 1930 with Remi appointed to serve as post master. Members of the Schotte family held this position for nearly 30 years.

Through the years, the Schottes operated a tavern, dance hall, hardware store, restaurant, airport, deadhead salvage operation, and sawmill.

They later donated a number of parcels of land for community use such as the Otsego Lake Township Park and Fire Hall.

Photo to the right shows Edna (Verlinde) standing to the left, Remi seated, and their son Albert. Edna was born in Waters in 1896. Remi emigrated from Belgium in 1911. The couple married in 1914 in Grayling. In addition to their son Albert, the Schottes had two daughters: Marie and Martha.



Waters Claims To Fame

Did you know that the first U. S. Patent for the snow machine (predecessor of today's snowmobile) was awarded to Waters resident Ray H. Muscott on June 27, 1916?

Did you know Ty Cobb was hired by Henry (Tom) Stephens to play on his baseball team the Otsegos in 1914 and helped win the State Championship?

Did you know that the first airport in Otsego County was located in Waters?

Did you know Ski Village located on the north end of Waters was owned and operated by Al and Stephanie Almon from 1948-1957?

For more information about the history of Waters,
check out the Otsego County Historical Society's web page or read the book it published
"Waters, Michigan: The Town With the Bottle Fence"