

An Ever-Changing Pokegama Lake

--by Ann Vach, published in the Pokegama Lake Association's "Update", December, 1999

When Elam Greeley built the Chengwatana Dam in 1848, it flooded thousands of acres, formed many small and large islands, a bay and a lake. Larger islands were named Mile Island, Town Island, Mission Island, Louise Island, Comfort Island, Nickerboin Bay and South (Pokegama) Lake.

Between Pokegama Lake and South Lake was a high peninsula, approximately 25 acres. The land had been cultivated since 1816 by trader, Thomas Connor. Jeremiah Russell, a government farmer (Russell papers; M.H.S. purchased the trading post and farm) in 1840. There were various owners between 1842 and 1891. When J. Dubell, wholesale dealer in leather and hides, purchased the farm he intended to build a cottage. (Whether he did so is in question.) He sold the farm to Iver Stumne on March 11, 1902. ^{That winter} ~~There~~ was a lot of snow. Dubell told Stumne that South Lake was all cultivated farmland. Within a few weeks, poor Stumne discovered the farmland was South Lake. Stumne built a small home. In November 1905 he sold Lots 3 & 4 to Dr. H. Longstreet Taylor (unmarried) who moved to the center of the Peninsula.

It was young Dr. Henry Longstreet Taylor's dream that the peninsula would be an ideal place for Tuberculosis patients, assuring a dust-free atmosphere because there was no road for those suffering with the beginnings of consumption. With a humble beginning, living in tents, and using Iver Stumne's home for an office, Dr. R. L. Wiseman, Taylor's assistant began treating TB patients.

The following year, cottages which had replaced some of the tents, could be transformed at will from the breeziest sunroom into the snuggest winter quarters. The flaps could be placed at any angle by pulley arrangements operated by the patient without leaving the bed. The cottages were equipped with wood-burning stoves, which were looked after by an attendant, and which provided a quick heat for comfortable dressing. In the spring of 1906, Dr. Taylor imported pine trees from Norway. Ninety-five seedlings were planted around the grounds. He knew pine trees provided oxygen in the air for his patients to breathe fresh air.

An Administrative Building was built in 1907, with guestrooms on the second floor. The business and medical offices, post office, laboratory, x-ray equipment, spacious club and dining rooms were all located on the ground floor. Large, long sun porches, with wicker

chairs, were a popular sitting place during the day. Under the building was a large cellar containing a steam-heating boiler and engine for the pumping of the water supply.

The medical fraternity knew well the importance of inspiring a love of outdoors among those whose life demanded it. The facilities at Pokegama Sanatorium were available for boating, sailing, fishing, bathing and other sports. This permitted patient's exercise, under careful supervision, which drew the patients outdoors and their cure was hastened by the lack of tedium. All these inducements for healthful living were available at the Sanatorium.

Launch rides, either around Lake Pokegama or five miles down the winding Snake River to Pine City or Cross Lake, were the favorite pastime. Lawn croquet, cards and other games could be played on the porches or in the Club Room by a large fireplace. Occasional lectures or musicals, parties, picnics, and sleigh rides were among diversions provided and all necessarily on a quiet order. Properly selected amusements, lectures and movies were provided at intervals. The newest addition to the entertainment armamentarium was modern radio equipment with a loud speaker horn over which concerts, sermons, speeches, news, etc. were received from most of the principal broadcasting stations in the United States and Canada. For the businessman, there were stock market quotations; for the baseball fan, daily scores. There was nothing more that kept people so in touch with the world as the radio. Religious services were held by Catholic and Protestant clergymen.

During harsh Minnesota winters, the patients were provided with sleeping bags and soon grew enthusiastic about sleeping outdoors, regardless of thermometers. The cold, dry, invigorating air was a splendid appetite producer. Provisions were made for personal comfort and the most congenial atmosphere possible. However, Dr. Taylor believed in a private sanatorium with a limited patient list.

Together with 15 individual cottages, a ten-bed infirmary was built on the ground floor, with a long southern porch for outdoor sleeping. It was a substantial building with steam heat and baths, the warm rooms being used for meals and any therapeutic measures which included diet, rest, exercise, tuberculin autogenous vaccines, pneumothoracic and other medical aids, as each case required. The equipment included the newest type x-ray for both stero-plate and fluoroscopic work.

The warmest summer seasons were the most trying time for tuberculosis patients. Restful quiet on shaded lawn chairs, always freshened by a lake breeze, was one advantage which was so difficult to find; but it was one of the important factors that determined Dr. Taylor's location of the Sanatorium.

Steamers from Pine City on the winding trail from Grasston transported all materials for the cottages, administration, and infirmary buildings. This trail or road from Grasston through the wooded area west of the Sanitarium, a corded road between Ron Kubesh and Lonnie Johnson, Rich Buchley and into Rick Nordall's. (There was no channel at that

time). Most of the road was through wooded areas from 1905 – 1918. (An icehouse was located where Lonnie Johnson's home is now.)

When Pine County was to make a road to join the Grasston Road, Dr. Taylor opposed. Road surveyed was to follow the lake. Dr. Taylor and his lawyer, Mr. King of Mora, objected believing dust stirred up would fill the air and be an intolerable nuisance to his patients. He threatened to sue for \$10,000 in damages. The road was not built as surveyed until 1918. It was like County Road No 7 is today, with a few changes made in 1953. Dr. Taylor predicted the engineer's stakes in the area would be covered by water in the spring or during high water. He was right. That is why that area was changed in 1953, and in 1961 the State purchased the area for a boat landing, which exists today on County Road 7.

In 1915, Dr. Taylor and his wife Ethelalberta purchased a large acreage west of the Sanatorium, built a huge barn, and acquired a large herd of Holstein cattle (tested yearly for Tuberculin). Livestock, poultry, and huge gardens supplied the table daily along with fresh milk, eggs, meats and an abundance of fruit and vegetables. Whatever other needs were obtained from the large Twin Cities' wholesale houses. A large root cellar was built for winter storage of fruit and vegetables. A walk-in cooler and freezer were built in the administration building for supplies.

Dr. Taylor built a doctor's residence, caretaker's home, and farm home for farm hands and living quarters for a cattle attendant. The Sanatorium employed a large number of workers. By 1917, the Sanatorium was mostly self-operated.

Eighty-five percent of the tuberculosis cases diagnosed in incipency and treated at the Sanatorium became thoroughly arrested, and if they lived as instructed after discharge, were eventually cured. Dr. Henry Longstreet Taylor was a nationally prominent specialist, his belief and fight against the white plague became known here and in Europe. He was noted as a valiant crusader and among his peers, he was known as "doctor of tents." In 1919 Dr. F.F. Callahan joined the medical staff at the Sanatorium.

By 1925 many changes had been made, including completion of a reception hospital; a 34 X 155-ft. three-story building constructed of fireproof materials. The Sund and Dunham architect firm from Minneapolis was in charge of the construction of the hospital. The building contract was awarded to Askov Construction Company of Askov, MN. The plumbing contract went to Albert Oman of Pine City. The Donaldson Company of Minneapolis installed heating. The Nobel Company of Minneapolis did electric work. Minneapolis Elevator Repair Company installed elevators and dumb waiters. Cost for construction of the newly equipped building, which was built so that another story could be added in the future, was approximately \$100,000.00.

The new Sanatorium Hospital opened its doors on May 1, 1925. Attending staff included H. Longstreet Taylor, M.D., Director, 814 Lowry Bldg., St. Paul, MN; F.F. Callahan, M.D., Resident Superintendent, Pokegama, Pine County, MN; Everett K. Geer, M.D., Examiner, 814 Lowry Bldg., St. Paul; Miss Reba Merrill, R.N., Superintendent of Nurses

and Head of Training School for Nurses, Pokegama, Pine County, MN. Consulting staff were: L.E. Daugherty, M.D., St. Paul; G.A. Allison, M.D. Assistant Professor of Roentgenology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; John F. Fulton, M.D., St. Paul, MN. Laboratories, St. Paul; John J. Sculley, D.D.S., Pine City, MN.

The hospital was constructed with terrazzo floors with a strip of noiseless cork tile in the center of the halls. Capacity of forty-five beds and sixteen single rooms, six double rooms with a bathroom between every two rooms, and four- bed wards with necessary toilet and nurses' duty rooms. Every bed had an electric call bell.

Staff included assistant nurses, laboratory technicians, accountant, purchasing agent and culinary and housekeeping departments. The chemical and bacteriological laboratory was equipped with all the necessary apparatuses of diagnostic work. The x-ray laboratory was completely equipped for stereo-roentgenography of chest and fluoroscopy. Regular routine x-rays were made. Gastrointestinal examinations could be made, conducted with the steroplate method, as well as fluoroscopy. The laboratory was equipped for x-ray and quartz lamp therapy. The equipment was the newest and most up-to-date of the period.

Those who chose to be in cottages were equipped with an electric call bell and an electrically heated blanket or pad when sleeping outdoors, on porches or in cottages. Patients were comfortable even in Minnesota's severest weather.

The medical offices were located on the ground floor, which included the physicians' consultation rooms. There was an office for the head nurse, a drug room, operating room, laboratory, x-ray room, a diet kitchen and storerooms for domestic departments.

Admission was secured by correspondence or personally at the office of the Pokegama Sanatorium or at an office at 814 Lowry Building in St. Paul. Patients were examined and made reservations for accommodations. Hopeless and far-advanced cases were not desired, in contrast with the early years, when the sanatorium accepted every case. During those early years, many patients died and the remains were sometimes not accepted by family. It is known there was cremation and ashes were scattered on the Sanatorium property. Reba Merrill's ashes were buried in Vach's back yard. A few other burials were done on the premises.

Rates required a deposit in advance. The patient maintained one-week charges. Rates varied from \$30 to \$50 a week, based on accommodation selected. Extras included an entrance examination, x-rays, Alpine Sun Lamp operations, drugs, and personal laundry and tray services.

Visitor's board and room cost \$3 per day. It was advisable that no children be allowed to visit, because of feared susceptibility to infection. A limited number of visitors could be accommodated at the Pokegama Sanatorium. Anyone who desired a room had to make reservations in advance. Hotel Agnes in Pine City could be reached in fifteen minutes by

automobile. Patients could not be disturbed during rest hours or after nine o'clock at night.

A Post Office was in the institution. The address was Pokegama, Pine City, Minnesota. Telephone connection had a Pine City exchange. Telegrams were telephoned from Pine City. Express and freight were sent by the Northern Pacific Railroad to Pine City with prompt delivery.

Several classes of nurses graduated from Pokegama Sanatorium. Miss Reba Merrill, head nurse, was killed in a car accident on August 12, 1929. She was cremated and her ashes buried in what would later be Vach's backyard. Dr. Henry Longstreet Taylor died January 2, 1932 at age 75. He devoted thirty-five years of his life in a fight against the dreaded disease Tuberculosis, also known as the "White Plague". Dr. Taylor held membership in a large number of organizations and was president of several of them. He published numerous articles on various phases of tuberculosis work. He spoke to small and large audiences throughout the states and abroad. From 1892 until his death, Dr. Taylor was most effective on tuberculosis control.

In 1940 Pokegama Sanatorium became a general hospital with fewer tuberculosis patients. The upper floor was used for tuberculosis patients.

In November 1941, a tragic incident happened at the Sanatorium when a young woman, having given birth to her first child, a son, walked out of the hospital in the evening, unknown to the nurses. Whether the young woman got lost or confused was not known. The staff believed she couldn't have walked far in her weakened condition, so the grounds were searched. When the search instituted by the hospital staff proved to be fruitless, help was called from Pine City and some 150 people combed the area, working until 3 a.m. Returning early the next morning, they began searching the wooded area. One of the searchers discovered the young woman's body, some twenty feet off shore. It was evident that the young woman had been dead for hours. It was not known whether she was confused by darkness and stumbled over the sharp incline into the water. Her records indicated a high blood pressure during and following the birth of her son, which may have been the cause. Tragic death of this young mother was a terrible shock to the grief-stricken husband, and to her relatives.

In 1942, Dr. F.F. Callahan resigned from the Pokegama Sanatorium position, which he held for 23 years as resident physician, later superintendent and medical director. While at Pokegama Sanatorium, Dr. Callahan and Dr. Taylor organized a splendid medical and surgical staff of consultants, mainly from St. Paul. All modern medical and surgical procedures were carried out at the Pokegama Sanatorium.

In 1943, Mrs. H. Longstreet Taylor's cottage was destroyed by fire. It was located at what is now the Larry Wagner home. The cottage was modern, fully equipped, and completely furnished. It is believed a grass fire crept to the cottage unnoticed. By the time the fire department arrived, the fire had engulfed the cottage and its contents.

As the County Sanatorium increased their capacity and clinical tuberculosis decreased in the state, the Pokegama Sanatorium found it difficult to compete with the tax-supported institutions from the standpoint of expense to the patient. Its patient body dwindled and on August 1, 1943, Pokegama Sanatorium closed its doors.

Over 38 years Pokegama Sanatorium had been operated for treatment of tuberculosis diseases, having been started by Dr. Henry Longstreet Taylor and R.E. Wiseman in 1905, and having gained a national and international reputation for the treatment of tuberculosis. Dr. F.F. Callahan, who came to the Sanatorium after World War I, is deserving of credit for the high success of the Sanatorium. The property was sold to The Redemptorist Fathers in 1944.

Several of the cottages remained on the grounds when I worked for Redemptorist Fathers from 1950 – 1967. At that time, bed linens, spreads, and pans were still there, neatly folded and placed on shelves. All beds and furniture in both the hospital and administration buildings remained in place, including wicker chairs and tables and operating tables, for example. Pine City was in need of a General Hospital. Why didn't Pine City buy the Sanatorium property?

In 1951, \$7,500 of Christmas Seal money was turned over to the University of Minnesota as the first annual grant for tuberculosis research. The research grant was to be given annually for at least three years and was to be known as the H. Longstreet Taylor Tuberculosis Research fund. Dr. Taylor, for whom the fund was named, was described as the Father of TB Prevention in Minnesota. Several firsts were credited to this pioneer tuberculosis doctor, who was a leading figure in Minnesota's tuberculosis programs from 1893 to his death in 1932. Coming to St. Paul in 1893 as a young doctor from Asheville, North Carolina, he began a fourteen-year Sanatorium crusade, which resulted in the opening of the state sanatorium at Walker in 1907. In 1894, he established a tent colony and in 1905 his own privately-operated Pokegama Sanatorium in Pine City. (Christmas Seal Headquarters, St. Paul – October 22, 1951. / Dr. H. Longstreet Taylor's address before the meeting of British Sanatorium Association in London, July 8, 1927.)

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