



Varick's Brown Farm and Sunset Bay

By Bill Mulvey, Jr.

The northwest corner of the Town of Varick in Seneca County, NY has been a special place for generations. Its first history can be traced back to its designation as Military Lot 43 and land subsequently owned by the Dey, VanGieson, VanSickle, Brown and Smith families. My grandfather, Leo Mulvey, Sr., was the first to purchase a cottage lot on the Brown farm in 1924. At that time, the lakefront section of the farm on East Lake Road was known as the Grover Brown Cottage Lots and eventually Sunset Bay. This story has been based on family recollections, the Mulvey and Brown family friendship, a review of local history and by studying the deed transfers in the real estate abstracts.

The bay was part of a much larger tract of land occupied by the Cayuga and Seneca Tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy. The

Revolutionary War and its outcome had a large impact on land ownership in the region. A few years after the British surrendered in 1781, New York awarded land to Revolutionary War veterans after treaties were negotiated with Indian tribes. Nearly two million acres, stretching from the Syracuse area to Seneca Lake, were surveyed and allocated to soldiers in lot sizes determined by rank. Early accounts mention that Edmund Kelly drew Military Lot 43, the tract of land that would eventually include Sunset Bay and the Brown farm. He served in the Second New York Regiment. He sold 200 acres to Benjamin Dey. The New Jersey Dey and Varick families had arrived as early settlers.

The abstract of the land purchased by the Mulvey family shows decades of transfers, mortgages, subdivisions and boundary changes throughout the farm's history. Lot 43 had been owned by Mr. Dey for some time, and he sold 200 acres to Powlers VanGieson of New Jersey in 1815. The large

tract was divided among the VanGieson heirs when he passed away in 1840. In 1855 Garrett VanSickle purchased the farm. The VanSickle family moved into its new home with six children. The farm's abstract shows that Mr. VanSickle sold a strip of land to Lehigh Valley Railroad in 1890, eventually splitting Lot 43 into smaller sections because of the new railroad line. A railroad station was built on Lot 37, north of Yale Station Road, thus earning its name. By 1892, Varick Station was a stop on the Main Line, with passenger and freight service. The Yale Post Office was built as well.

Mr. VanSickle died in 1898 after 43 years on Lot 43. His family sold the land to Henry Pond in 1907. Eventually, Grover and Carrie Brown purchased the farm in 1917. The Browns operated a farm of 120 acres for three decades. The farm consisted of livestock, cow barns, outhouse, pump house, garage, silo, pasture, tenant house and 100 acres of cash crops.

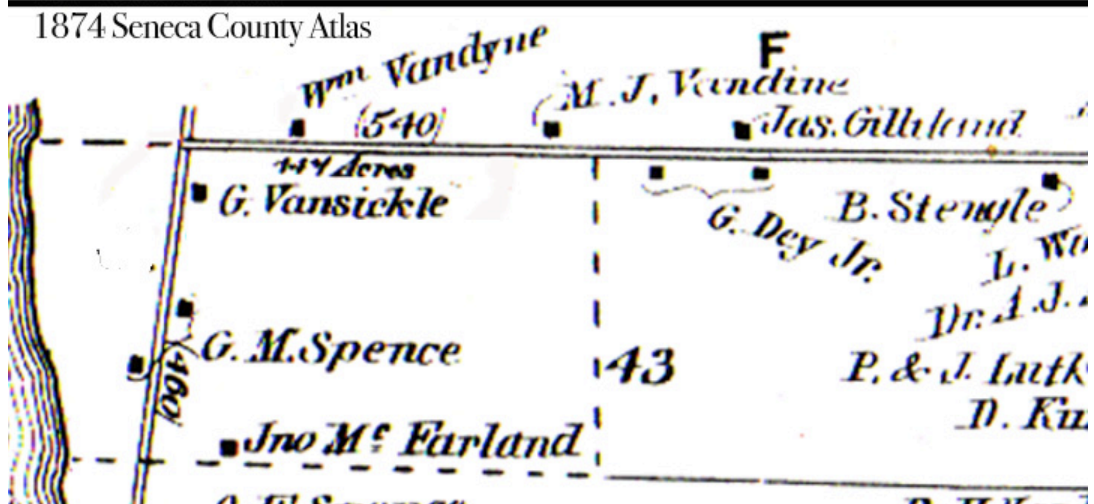
The Cottage Lots

In 1924, Grover Brown hired a surveyor to subdivide the lakefront into sixteen

lots, each approximately 75' wide and 80' deep. The first sale was to Leo Mulvey, Sr., who purchased two center lots in 1924. He chose those particular lots because of some stately elm trees that graced the property.



2008 Satellite View



1874 Seneca County Atlas

Over the next 20 years, the remaining lots were purchased by families, many from nearby Geneva, who built summer cottages. Few families owned automobiles when the bay was settled and East Lake Road was unpaved. Guests from Geneva reportedly used passenger service on the Lehigh Valley Railroad's Seneca Branch and hiked a mile to the lakefront from the 'Varick Station' on Yale Station Road. Gradually, more cottages were built. A common construction technique had been to frame the structures on wooden



Lots 1-16 on Sunset Bay. Settled in 1924, the lakefront land was sold by Grover Brown.

nail kegs filled with concrete and use the nails to build the typical one story structures. Some residences were winterized as year-round homes and remain so today.

The residents, along with the Browns, chose the name Sunset Bay and placed a used hot water tank to mark the entrance and listed the residents' names.

Children of the cottagers enjoyed playing in Mr. Brown's hay barn, driving his tractors, riding his horses and visiting the livestock, while avoiding the aggressive bull in the corral. Mr. and Mrs. Brown were gracious with their time and neighbors were welcome. His eyesight was failing due to an accident, and in spite of eventual blindness he was able to work the farm.

In the 1930's the bay was active with the Keeler/Taylor, Chadwick, Gerard, O'Malley, Mulvey, Wrigley, McMahon, Baumgartner and Gilbert families. In addition to the farm, other playtime attractions among the 'cottage kids' included the empty lots in the bay, and of course, Seneca Lake.

In the 1960's the twelve family names included Keeler, Nicit, Lewis, Mulvey, Wrigley, Bond, Currie, Stone, Pearlman,

Quigley, Shipos and Gilbert. Those same residences are currently owned by families named Brind, Wallace, Lewis/Oakleaf, Mulvey, Bollech, Bella, Nolan/Crawford, Stone, Hone, Quigley, Lynch/Tompkins and Gilbert/Doran.



When Howard Smith died in 2008, the farm was listed for sale, with the two fields east of the cottage lots listed apart from the main farm. In 2009, Jerry Wilks purchased the 100 acre Smith farm and built a home on its eastern boundary. In 2010, Jack and Bill Mulvey, Jr. purchased the 17 acres between the cottage lots and East Lake Road. In 2011 Anne Westcott, granddaughter of Leo Mulvey, Sr. purchased the farm's residence (formerly the VanGieson, VanSickle, Brown and Smith families' home) from Mr. Wilks with plans to restore it.

The Grover Brown Cottage Lots and the farmland of Lot 43 have meant a great deal to the families who have called them home.