

A HISTORY OF SEKON AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Written expressly for the members of Sekon Association by Warren F. Longacker

I

THE SELIGMAN STORY The Making of American Fortunes

Those who have read Stephen Birmingham's book "Our Crowd" or perhaps other books about Upper Saranac Lake, probably know that Sekon was built by Isaac Newton Seligman shortly after the turn of the century (other sources date construction to the late 1890s). It was originally known as "Fish Rock Camp." The name "Sekon" was first used by Mladek Willy who bought Lewisohn's Prospect Point camp and operated it as a hotel until 1950 under the name "Sekon in The Pines." Willy, of course, was the last owner of our own Sekon before it was auctioned off by Charlie Vosburgh.

It is hardly possible to write any history of Sekon without telling a little of the Seligman story. Isaac Seligman was a star oarsman on the Columbia crew and he helped his college defeat both Harvard and Yale on Saratoga Lake. He was nicknamed "Ike."

Isaac's father, Joseph, was one of the first of the German Jews to migrate to the U.S. prior to the Civil War. Joseph had seven brothers and three sisters and he eventually brought all over here to help him in business. The first business was as Jewish foot peddlers, first in Pennsylvania and then in the South. This progressed to horses and wagons and next to stores in several cities around the country.

In 1841 four of the brothers left their Lancaster, Pennsylvania store and set out for New York City. Their mother had died in Germany and Joseph had now made enough money to bring the rest of his family, including his father, to America. When his father died in New York, Joseph became patriarch of the family. He made all the family decisions, established the firm of J.W. Seligman & Co. and actually controlled the lives of his brothers and sisters.

He sent brother James north to New York City to attend the wedding of a sister and to set up a New York store. James rented 5 William Street, right around the corner from Wall Street. The boys were on their way. Everything from then on seemed to turn to gold.

If there ever was a Horatio Alger example of from rags to riches, it would certainly apply to the Seligmans. Only in their case, it was from rag peddlers to international bankers. Joseph became a financial wizard. Before the days of the bulls and the bears, he became the "lion" of Wall Street.

The boys had the uncanny good fortune to meet and make friends with important people – people who would enter their lives at crucial moments later on. One of the most

important of these meetings happened in Watertown, New York, where Joseph had opened a store. Brother Jesse met 1st Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant. They played cards and became life-long friends.

All through the Civil War, Joseph backed the Union. By making contributions to the Union cause they were able to woo the Government's uniform contract. Then they had to sell millions of dollars of Union bonds. Joseph met President Lincoln. Over \$500 millions worth of bonds were sold. Within hours of Lee's surrender, Joseph called his brothers together to organize the international banking house of J & W Seligman.

The reconstruction period (the years following the civil War) was called the "Age of the Dinosaurs." Fortunes would be made on a scale never before imagined. Steel mills, steam engines, oil, telegraph lines, and of course, railroads were becoming huge industries and creating hundreds of millionaires.

By now dozens of other German Jews had passed through the golden door and entered the financial climate of New York City. "The "Crowd" began to grow. Some started as foot peddlers as the Seligmans. Some came from German ghettos and a few came from higher up the social ladder, but now they were peddling commercial notes and bonds – not trinkets. As the "Crowd" grew, there were intermarriages between the families and eventually all the families were related to all the other families through marriage. Ike Seligman's wife, Guta, was a Loeb. Maybe this intermarrying affected Guta, for her life was a blighted series of nervous breakdowns. Most of her married life was spent in sanitariums. A well-know picture taken in 1915 shows a group of 31 people sitting on the stone steps of Powell's camp. All were Seligmans and Loeb's gathered for Guta's birthday.

The German Jewish "Crowd" crystallized around such families as the Seligmans, Lehmans, Guggenheims, Sachs and Loeb's. After the Civil War, Fifth Avenue was the social hub of New York City. Most of the "grand" old families lived there, but no Jews were included in this society. This fact gnawed on Joseph Seligman. As he became older, he became more Americanized and he longed to be accepted by this gentile society. This longing to become more American caused the brothers to change their German first names to sound more like American names. Herman became Henry, etc. Joseph named his own sons: George Washington, Alfred Lincoln (even Abraham sounded too Jewish), Isaac Newton, etc.

By now the specter of anti-Semitism was growing on this country. It became very strong in the Adirondacks (more about his later), and because of this Joseph Seligman was barred from the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga by its manager, Judge Henry Hilton (no relation to Conrad Hilton, the later hotel tycoon.) Since Saratoga had become one of the social hubs of the country, this caused a national scandal.

The controversy over this simmered for months and in the end it killed old Joe Seligman. Joseph Seligman must have been a remarkable and amazing man. Almost half of Birmingham's "Our Crowd" is a veritable biography of Joseph Seligman.

Joseph's death opened the financial doors to other German Jewish bankers and now the "Crowd" grew and turned out more millionaires. They moved seasonally to vast "camps" in the Adirondacks (not the Catskills). To the Jersey Shore (not Newport), and to Palm Beach (not Miami). Because the Seligmans were first in so many things, and because of what happened to Joseph in Saratoga, it could have been they who started

these Jewish millionaires to build their great Adirondack camps. The word “camp” needs to be explained and will be in the next section.

After Joseph’s death, the house of Seligman began to decline. Jesse became the head of the New York firm but he was not the financial genius his brother Joseph was. When he died, his nephew Isaac Newton became head of the firm at age 39. It was strange, as the nineteenth century came to a close, that none of the second generation of Seligman sons had any interest or talent for banking. They became gentlemen of leisure, content to live on the fortunes of their fathers. This did not happen to other families of the “Crowd,” especially the Lehmans, who had competent sons. Some are still huge brokerage houses on Wall Street. The Seligmans, the true anchor of “The Crowd,” plus a few others passed out of “Our Crowd.”

The land at Sekon, according to the Abstract of Title, was purchased by “Ike” Seligman from Smith M. Weed and others in 1892 for \$3,500. The first deed lists it at approximately 42 acres. However, there were so many changes in deeds through the years, it would take an engineer or a licensed surveyor to study the Abstract with its chains and links, degrees, and measurements, to see who got what. Apparently pieces were deeded to others in the Seligman family, to relatives, and maybe even to friends. It could be that some land was added since the property was deeded to W. Mladek Willy by the Adirondack Lodge, Inc. on May 26, 1953,(with) the Abstract show(ing) approximately 80 acres. It does not show how many acres were deeded to Charles Vosburgh. George W. Seligman was Isaac’s brother, Guta, his wife, and Frances Hellman, his sister. James Loeb was Guta’s brother. Joseph L. Seligman was Joseph’s grandson. Edith C. Beer, whose name is (on) one of the deeds, was a Seligman relation.

A list of the previous owners (Schedule “A” of the Abstract) is added at the end of this history.

The buildings will be described under “The Great Camp” story. But before we look at those, it might be interesting to look at a little of the earlier history of the Adirondacks. It is because of this history that we are able to be here and it will show how this beautiful place got down to us. Wherever we walk in the Adirondacks, we step into history.

II THE ADIRONDACK STORY FROM THEN TO NOW

The mountains of the Adirondacks are part of the Laurentian Highlands of Canada, not the Appalachians. They are some of the oldest mountains on earth. In contrast, however, the actual history of the Adirondacks is fairly recent, by comparison.

The chief claimants to the area were the Mohawk Indians to the South, and the Algonquians to the North.

William Chapman White states that the French explorer, Jacques Cartier, came to the Indian village site of Montreal in 1536, and was the first white man to see the mountains of northern New York. However, he never set foot in the Adirondacks and I think Donaldson is more correct in giving that honor to Samuel de Champlain.

In 1609 Champlain sailed down the lake he named for himself with a band of Algonquian Indians. Somewhere near the head of the lake they ran into a party of

Iroquois. Since the two tribes were enemies, a fight followed in which Champlain killed two Iroquois chiefs with his arquebus. That shot, in the shadow of the Adirondacks, changed American history. The Iroquois forever after hated the French and joined the British, and the Algonquians the French, in subsequent wars. The waters of Lake Champlain and Lake George were red with blood for the next 175 years. Almost 200 years passed after Champlain before the Adirondacks were penetrated by white men.

Consensus has it that Indians never made the Adirondacks their permanent home. The winters were too severe for these long-house dwellers. However, there is evidence that they did make temporary settlements. They hunted and warred all through the region. One such settlement was at the lake end of Indian Carry, which led from the lower end of Upper Saranac Lake to the Stony Creek ponds and then to the Racquette River. Indians were supposed to have planted corn here (the south end of the Upper lake.) They named the Carry "The Eagle Nest Trail," the Stony Creek ponds "Wampum Waters," and the stream "Stream of the Snake."

A great part of the Adirondacks was initially unknown save to parties of warring Indians, Frenchmen, British, and Americans until the 1830s. However, great changes took place immediately before and after the American Revolution. Stanley found Dr. Livingston in darkest Africa before the average New Yorker knew anything about the wonderful wilderness lying almost at its back door.

After the French and Indian wars, the area was ready for settlement. Iron was discovered. Before the Revolution the unclaimed lands belonged to the Indians, but the British Crown saw to it that Indian title had to first pass to the Crown and then to the white men, thus giving the Crown the chance to collect large fees.

The State of New York appropriated a large part of what is now the Adirondacks when in 1779 the Legislature passed a law that declared that all land belonging to the Crown before 1776 was "forever to be vested in the people of this State." Five years later it began to sell it off.

Northern New York State now became divided into several immense parcels of land called Purchases and Tracts. The names of some of these purchases carry down to today, and perhaps to immortality. The first of these purchases was the Totten and Crossfield Purchase, which took place in 1772 when the land was still controlled by the Indians and the British.

The Indian deed was passed at Johnson Hall, Sir William Johnson presiding. Chiefs of the Mohawks and other tribes were present and Governor Tryon witnessed the deed. The tract contained at least 1,150,000 acres and the price was three pence per acre. That's what it took to get the land away from the Indians. To get it away from His Majesty George III cost considerably more. He received over \$40,000 for transferring to them land which cost him nothing. It was the last conference ever held by the Mohawks. Joseph Totten and Stephen Crossfield were Manhattan shipwrights and were probably no more than fronts for other interests, but their names will probably last forever. It was all for naught though, for the purchase was aborted by the Revolution. All these Tories, or loyalists, along with Sir William Johnson, had to flee to Canada. This huge triangle of land is now in the central Adirondacks and entirely within the Blue Line of the Park. The high peaks area is within it.

The second great purchase, The Macomb Purchase, was one of the largest real estate transactions that ever took place in New York State. The State conveyed to

Alexander Macomb and others nearly four million acres in northern New York at a price of 8 cents an acre. It spread over six counties: Lewis, Jefferson, Oswego, Herkimer, St. Lawrence and Franklin. The first three are outside the Adirondack Blue Line. Portions of the last three are within it. Surveyors divided this huge region into six "Great Tracts," numbered one through six. Great Tract number one is entirely in Franklin County. It is further divided into twenty-seven parts of from 30,000 to 32,000 acres called "Towns."

A "Town" in Adirondack terms is a geographical area of land – part of a county or Tract – not a village or hamlet.

The first patents were issued to Alexander Macomb in 1992, and only for Great Tracts IV, V and VI. Titles for the other Great Tracts were issued to other men at later dates.

According to DeSormo, four men were involved in the Macomb Purchase but only Macomb's name was used and it will probably be immortal. All four men were born in Ireland. One of the partners, William Constable, had several daughters. One was named Harriet (from which came the town name Harrietstown.)

Several large parcels were sold off in Great Tracts Five and Six, the western section of the Purchase. They were: The Boylston Tract, the Chassanis Tract, the Brantingham Tract, and the John Brown Tract. Only the last one is wholly within the Blue Line. This is the Old Forge, Fulton Chain, and Moose River area. Brown's tract has an extensive history which we will not go into here, except to say the purchaser, John Brown, was not the abolitionist buried at North Elba.

One more large tract of Northern New York was the "Old Military Tract", lying east of Macomb's Purchase. It contained 665 acres lying in Clinton, Franklin and Essex counties. It was set up by the State law around 1781, "an act for raising two regiments for the defense of this State on bounties of unappropriated lands." People still needed protection from the Indians. Some of it is within the blue Line of the Park. No part of the "Old Military Tract" was ever awarded by bounty claims and it was ultimately all sold by the State as wild lands.

Although the State made a number of grants or sales of comparatively smaller tracts, these three: Macomb's Purchase, Totten and Crossfield Purchase, and the Old Military Tracts were by far the most important divisions of Adirondack territory. How things have changed since then! Today, with this great concern for the environment, the State is trying to buy it all back.

Reams have been written on the history of these land purchases and many stories about them and the people involved have been published. I would like to include just two of those stories here.

William Constable was in Paris in 1792 during the French Revolution and he negotiated the sale of 630,000 acres in Macomb Purchase south of Great Tract Four to a Frenchman named Pierre Chassanis. Chassanis was the agent for a French land company that had ideas of creating a "New France." They intended to call it "Castorland" but money ran out and only 210,000 acres were sold. Not many Frenchmen bought land and settled there. In 1815, after Waterloo, Napoleon's older brother, Joseph Bonaparte, bought 100,000 acres in this area and built a hunting lodge. Neither project lasted and Bonaparte returned to France. Some roads were built and one of them was a gem. It led to the top of an impassable precipice and then continued at the bottom of it. That road had to be even more unique than our own Sekon Highway.

The second story concerns the Totten and Crossfield Purchase and is closer to our own area. The new owners, planning to subdivide the land, ordered a survey. The British surveyor, Archibald Campbell, had to hire a party of Indians to guide him through the wilderness. The best way he found to keep the Indians contented and to stay with him was to ply them with rum. He started from the northwest corner of the tract and went east. The line concerned here is the boundary between the Totten and Crossfield and the Macomb Purchases.

Edward H. Litchfield, a wealthy and retired lawyer from Brooklyn, acquired the south one-third of Township 25, Macomb's Purchase, Great Tract No. 1. Here he built Litchfield Park on 8,654 acres. In 1913 he completed the most pretentious and palatial residence in the Adirondacks: a French chateau style building of stone, steel and concrete, with walls from three to six feet thick. Some of the stone was taken from Mt. Morris. The fence along the south boundary of his preserve stood on the dividing line between Macomb's and Totten and Crossfield's. Litchfield brought suit against his neighbor to the south, George W. Sisson, claiming the north line of Totten and Crossfield's, being also Sisson's north line, was no less than one and a quarter miles too far north. Only a mile and a quarter! Litchfield claimed the Indians were drunk and placed the line too far north. The case came to trial in Plattsburg and Litchfield lost.

The dividing line between Macomb's Purchase and Totten and Crossfield's Purchase remains today as it was laid out over 200 years ago. Campbell's and the drunken Indians survey still stand up. Since the line forms the boundary of five counties, it is easy to see what a mess would have occurred if Litchfield had won.

By 1865 the wilderness was wide open, but there were men who did not like it that way. Hotels were rising everywhere. The woods were being cut down at an alarming rate. A conservation movement slowly arose spurred by the cry "Save the Adirondacks." Lumber interests fought any change and lumber stealing was rampant, even from State land. The fighting went on for years until in 1894 the "Forever Wild Clause," section 7 of article seven of the State Constitution was passed. This stopped the exploitation and saved the Adirondacks. Not a single attempt by prosperous individuals or well-funded corporations to conquer the Adirondacks has ever been truly successful. It seems that Mother Nature, with a few assists from dedicated and concerned people, protects one of the most unique areas of our country.

ADIRONDACK NAMES

Outside of the obvious English names, the others are either of French or Indian origin. It is easy to understand "Racquette," the French word for snowshoe and "Tahawus," the Indian name for cloud splitter. But most of the Indian names do get muddled.

Adirondacks: *Tree or bark eaters, used by the Mohawks in derision for their enemies the Algonquians*

Ampersand: *Several derivations, but probably amber-sand*

On-chi-ota: *Means rainbow*

Saranac: *Indian Origin, a moot question*

Wawbeek: *Means a rock*

Upper Saranac Lake: *“The lake of the silver sky” to the Indians*
Lower Saranac Lake: *“The lake of the clustered stars”*

Sekon: *I have been unable to find any reference to “Sekon.”*

Camp: *A camp in Adirondack parlance is anything from a tent to a palace erected in the woods. Guides built camps of bark and trees. Millionaires called their great structures camps. So did their architects. So we don't own houses or vacation homes in the Adirondacks. We own CAMPS.*

III

THE “GREAT CAMP STORY” The playgrounds of the very rich

By the turn of the century anti-Semitism had been growing steadily in our own country and in Germany. I have to think it was this and the Seligman-Hilton affair in Saratoga that helped give impetus to these Jewish millionaires to build their great Adirondack camps.

At Lake Placid, Melville Dewey (inventor of the Dewey decimal system for library books) built the Lake Placid Club, started in 1895. A definite anti-Semite, he graded his guests from class A to E to rate their qualifications to join the club. Jews were not accepted and this brought anti-Semitism into the Adirondacks that was real for many years. In the 1940's, after World War II, I still remember signs along Lake George on motels and cabins – “Gentiles Only.” As late as 1965, R. Peter Straus, a strategist in Senator Robert Kennedy's 1964 campaign, publicly criticized the Senator's brother-in-law, Stephen E. Smith, for staying at the Lake Placid Club, “which is known to discriminate against Jews.”

William West Durant was the premier builder of Adirondack “Great” camps. Although he built in the Racquette Lake area, he must have owned land all over the Park. When he sold off his land around Upper Saranac Lake in the 1890's the Jewish millionaires responded. The main architect on Upper Saranac Lake was William Coulter, who built many of these large camps. He was succeeded by the firm of William Distin.

We will start at Eagle Island on Gilpin Bay.

Levi P. Morton, a former Vice President of the U.S. and governor of New York, purchased Eagle Island and adjacent mainland property in 1898. Coulter designed a modest rustic lodge on the island and other buildings on the lake shore. The mainland camp was called “Pinebrook.” Coulter used the Swiss chalet style in Pinebrook, as in most of his camps. While Pinebrook was building, the property to the northeast was being developed by Miss Isabel Ballantine of New York City. She called her camp “Moss Ledge.”

Morton sold Pinebrook to Mitchell Levy in 1903. It was destroyed by fire in 1911 but was rebuilt. It was later owned by Carl Loeb (no relation to Guta). The Loebes gave the camp to Syracuse University in 1948 along with “Moss Ledge” which they had

purchased. After many years as a conference center, it was sold in the 1970's and is again a private camp. Eagle Island was later owned by the Graves family, who gave it to the Essex County, New Jersey Girl Scouts Council in 1937.

Adolph Lewisohn's camp at Prospect Point was designed and built by Coulter during 1903-04, again in the Swiss chalet style. Coulter's work and later additions by William Distin produced at least twenty-eight buildings ranging from four main lodges to boathouses and smaller service buildings. At the time it was the largest effort yet seen in the Adirondacks.

Old Adolph was a rare character. Short, round, myopic, he became the "Crowd's" first certifiable playboy. One of his granddaughters once said he resembled a turtle standing on its hind legs. He was an eccentric spendthrift who believed in spending his millions to enjoy himself. Once his son, Sam, said, "Father", you are spending your capital." He answered, "Who made it?"

To spend a month at his camp, he brought a staff of forty, including a major-domo, barber, caddie, chess and bridge coaches, singing teacher (he liked to sing) and two chauffeurs. Apparently he needed more bridge lessons for a typical game of bridge usually ended up on a Lewisohn contract, such as:

Lewisohn (dealer) – one club. West – two diamonds. North – two spades. East – five diamonds. Lewisohn – one club. The hand was played at one club.

Lewisohn made his fortune in copper mining. The Swiss Jews of the "Crowd," the Guggenheims, also made their fortunes in mining. Daniel Guggenheim and others built a great camp, "Knollwood," on Lower Saranac Lake, now owned by the Diocese of Ogdensburg of the Roman Catholic Church.

Several years after Lewisohn died at his camp of a heart attack in 1938, Mladek Willy, banquet manager of one of New York's foremost hotels, bought the property and operated it unsuccessfully as "Sekon in the Pines," as was mentioned earlier. In 1951 Mr. and Mrs. Blum of South Orange, New Jersey purchased it and ran it as "Camp Navarac," a summer camp for girls, until 1969. At that time Young Life, a non-denominational Christian organization, acquired the property.

One more paragraph about the Guggenheims: they eventually surpassed Lewisohn financially and as a family they made more money than even John D. Rockefeller. They got into silver, gold, tin and diamonds, as well as copper. All the mining giants of the country had their genesis in the "Goog" operations. Eventually there was a financial and mining battle between them and Lewisohn, which we will not go into here.

#Further up the lake and north of Gilpin Bay at Whitney Point a great camp was built by William A. Rockefeller over the period 1930-33. He called it "Camp Wonundra."

Although really not a part of Sekon's surroundings, due to its current activity, it might be interesting to look at a little of its story.

Rockefeller bought the property from the Blagden Construction Company. The Blagdons, at the very northern end of the lake at Lands End, operated one of the nation's most successful summer camps – La Jeunesse – for 38 years until 1954.

Wonundra was designed by William Distin and built with white pine logs from Canada. Since it was built much later than the other great camps, Wonundra closed the era of great camp building. Rockefeller sold the camp in 1969 to Briggs, McCoy, and Gillepsie, and for a while they called it "Camp Cork."

With the constant quaffing of champagne there, perhaps that name should have been kept. They sold the camp to Edward Carter of Onchiota. Today "The Point" is the most glamorous, trendy and expensive "hotel" on Upper Saranac Lake. I have been unable to check on its present owners.

Wenonah. Built for Julius Bache, New York stock broker, architect unknown, around 1915. Decidedly different from the other great camps, it was built in an eclectic style, from the Victorian to the Japanese, with red-tiled roofs and a Japanese teahouse. We all remember it as operated by Cousin Gracie as Sekon's gin mill.

Rustic Lodge. At the end of the lake and the lake end of Indian Carry. The original lodge was built by Jesse Corey, the pioneer settler on Upper Saranac Lake, in 1850. Corey operated it as a hotel and also hauled boats, canoes, and people over the Indian carry. The property was purchased by E.P and S.A. Swenson of New York in 1897. The present camp was built around 1931. The original buildings are gone. The Swensons built a nine-hole golf course here about where the Indians had planted corn. There were two garages, a barn, boathouse, and store on the property. Another structure here was a chapel, the Indian Carry chapel, built in 1898 by the Champlain Presbytery. Rustic Lodge, seasonally occupied by Roderick Swenson and his family, was sold in 1966 to Gregory Nowakoski and Bernard Nemeroff of New York.

Wawbeek. Although Wawbeek was a hotel and was not part of the Great Camp era built by the German Jewish millionaires, its history is important and a little of it should be mentioned. Its location was important because it controlled the lake end of the historic Sweeney carry leading to the Racquette, the main river route through the region. It became the bone of contention between competing logging interests from the earliest days. Capt. James H. Pierce and Col. Christopher Norton (the aggressive king of the Saranacs) fought over it.

Norton acted first. He erected a cabin on the lake end of Sweeney Carry -- the old Daniels cabin. At the Racquette River he ensconced Oliver Tromlee. Norton hired Oatman C. Coville to settle at the lake end. It didn't take long for Coville and his wife to realize they occupied a desirable and potentially profitable location. They bought forty acres from Norton and built a rough halfway house to accommodate the increasing flow of seasonal visitors. Tromlee did the same at his end. Tromlee's clearing is still there on the Racquette.

T. Edmund Krumholz and a man named Smith bought out Mrs. Coville after her husband's death and built the first Wawbeek Hotel, in its day one of the finest in the mountains. A picture of it in DeSormo's "Summers on the Saranacs" shows a handsome building, much larger than the second hotel. A stage ran daily to Tupper Lake (the railroad was running then), as well as a steamship route to Saranac Inn. But like all Adirondack hotels, its success was temporary. Short seasons, unfavorable weather, and

uncertain patronage. It was slated to go under the hammer and it was sold to A.J. Ginsberg of Tupper Lake. It was torn down for scrap in 1914.

The second Wawbeek hotel, a considerably smaller structure, was built by Ferris Meigs in the early 1920's. Another of the owner-managers was Raymond Charest whose tenure was 1947-1952. Harry Purchase, the head of Paul Smith's hotel management department, then bought it and operated it for thirteen years, 1952-65. He sold it to Mrs. Van Voorhis who resided during alternate seasons at "Birchholm" on Deer Island. She deeded it over to St. Lawrence University. On Saturday, March 1, 1980, only a few days after the Sports Illustrated contingent covering the winter Olympics checked out, it burned to the ground. This was the fate of most all the old Adirondack hotels.

Deer Island. Deer Island has seen a lot of history and since it is so close to Sekon we will look at a little of it. Originally part of Col. Norton's timber empire, it was later acquired by the Santa Clara lumber company run by the Meigs family. The Meigs owned a large camp on Big Wolf Lake and did not settle on Deer Island. The Ferrises, related to the Meigs, owned half of Deer Island, a part of which is now owned by Dr. Craig Potter and his wife. Alfred White bought the other half of the island from Meigs and built a camp named "Rest-Awhile." These last names are shown on the 1912 map.

A summer resident, Dr. L. Emmet Holt, a pioneer pediatrician, owned a camp on Panther Point. He introduced a college classmate, Edmund Lyon of Rochester, to Upper Saranac. Mr. and Mrs. Lyon were principle benefactors to a school for the deaf in Rochester. They were devoted friends of Helen Keller and Alexander Graham Bell.

After Mr. White's death the Lyons bought "Rest-A-While," and in 1917 with their three daughters – Elizabeth, Carolyn (May) and Linda (June) they took over the island home which Mrs. Lyon named "Birchholm." Later she bought an open-cabin Richardson cruiser – the familiar To-N-Fro. It was 50 years old in 1979. Six generations of the Lyon family have enjoyed Deer Island. The sixth generation is Linda Lyon Van Voorhis great-grandchildren – John and Michael Hayes.

The Island Chapel. I suppose we should not skip the Island Chapel in the account – unquestionably one of the most unique and picturesque places of worship in the nation. It has been in existence since 1889. It is not clear, but probably some of the early timber barons built it. The original sponsoring organization was the Champlain Presbytery.

The original church burned down in 1956. Another and more substantial structure was erected. Many people contributed money and labor to build it. The Farnham Yardley family donated the spruce logs. The Lyon twins, Mrs. Francis Remington and Mrs. John Van Voorhis, contributed time and substance. Many names we know on the lake today contributed to the effort. Mr. Remington fashioned the birch-bark cross. Auntie Grace Grabenstein furnished the hymnals. We all know of the many weddings that take place in the Island Chapel. There have been some famous ones as well as some baptisms.

And Finally -- SEKON. "Ike" Seligman's Fish Rock Camp was designed along the compound-grouping plan by William Coulter and built in the same period as

Lewishon's Prospect Point camp. It consisted of over twenty major structures, including six lodges, two boathouses, smaller cabins, staff quarters and support buildings.

A particularly striking feature used throughout SEKON is a roof called a "jerkenhead." The form, originating in South Germany, is seen on all the larger buildings and is a gable or projection over a bay window, or as a dormer roof. Diamond-paned windows and the wood shingled wooden walkways connecting some of the buildings are reminders of the rustic ambiance of the camp. The expanse of sloping lawn sweeping down to the lake in front of Powell's, Menke's and Cavanagh's gives Sekon a magnificent site, unlike almost any other camp on the lake. The copious use of cedar shingles and wainscoting would today cost a fortune to replace.

Some may remember that a section from Danker's "Honeymoon" camp down (to the north) was called CALUMET. It was still called this at the time of the auction.

There is no mention of the name neither in the Abstract of Title nor on Sylvester's survey maps. Map No. 2 does show George Seligman, 1905, and Edith Beer in 1938. The 1912 map of the lake does show CALUMET: Mrs. T. Hellman. She was Isaac's sister Frances who married Theodore Hellman. Apparently she was in with her brother George when that piece was deeded to him.

A Janice Hellman died and her cremated ashes were interred in a niche in a rock near the small brook on Burn's back lot. The urn was removed years ago, but the name Janice Hellman is still chiseled in the rock below the hole. The word "Calumet" means the ceremonial long-stemmed pipe of the Indians -- their peace pipe.

The story of Calumet and Janice Hellman has interested me ever since we've lived here, and I was determined to get the story for inclusion in this history, never dreaming what a project it would become. Auntie Grace Grabenstein, who owned the camp next to mine and worked at Sekon when Willy ran it as a hotel, first told me about Janice Hellman's burial but I never got the whole story from her.

It required considerable effort, many letters back and forth, and several phone calls for about two months, but it was very gratifying to receive nice replies to all the letters I wrote, which proves again the great appeal of the Adirondacks, plus the fact it brought back pleasant memories to all who answered.

Louis J. Simmons, who owned and edited the Tupper Lake Free Press for many years and has been town of Altamont historian for over 50 years, wrote that he remembers Fish Rock Camp well. He worked there in 1927 and said the Seligmans were nice people to work for and "class" people. He could offer nothing on the story I wanted but since Sekon was in the town of Harrietstown, he referred me to Edna C. Finn, the historian of that town.

Edna was interested in my project immediately and was very helpful. Although she, too, didn't know anything about Calumet or Janice Hellman, she checked deeds in Malone, tracked down Harry Purchase who lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and wrote to the Jewish Genealogical Society in New York City.

I then wrote to the author of "Our Crowd," Stephen Birmingham, who wrote me a nice letter, short and to the point. He cleared up one point: the Hellmans related to the Seligmans were no kin to the mayonnaise or baking powder people who also owned Calumet Farms, a famous stable of thoroughbred race horses in Lexington, Kentucky, as I first thought. This was a California family who spelled their name with two n's. He wrote that Geoffrey T. Hellman was a friend of his who helped him with "Our Crowd"

and who had an article published in a 1954 issue of "The New Yorker" called "Sorting out the Seligmans." And most important he gave me the name and address of Miss Rhoda Hellman in New York City.

Miss Rhoda sent me a lovely, hand-written letter in which she said that she is eighty-five years of age and the granddaughter of Frances Hellman, and not her daughter as Birmingham thought. She remembers the place well and seemed a little resentful that I called Calumet a small section of Fish Rock Camp. "Calumet and Fish Rock Camp were two independent properties," she wrote. The former (Calumet) was owned by her grandmother and the latter (Fish Rock) by her great uncle, Ike Seligman. I wonder if they were on good terms with one another since there was some friction among these families.

She described the property quite well saying there were two main camps at Calumet: one owned by her father, George S. Hellman and her aunt, Mrs. George L. Beer (Edith Hellman). The other was owned by her Uncle Edgar Hellman's family and her grandmother. I presume these would be the present Marshall and Kraus camps. Her description seems to indicate that this whole section from "Honeymoon" camp down to the end was Calumet. She said she heard the place was in "great disrepair" and she wondered if it still existed. She should see it now! She said there was also a tennis court there but I can't imagine where. She gave me a little information about Janice Hellman, but referred me to Mrs. Fred Stein in Harrison, New York, Janice Hellman's sister.

Mrs. Stein (Margaret Hellman) phoned me from Naples, Florida, where she was vacationing and added a little to Miss Rhoda's letter. She is eighty-seven and Rhoda's first cousin. Janice was her older sister who died in 1936 of cancer in Scarsdale, New York. They all loved Saranac Lake so much that she wanted to be buried there. Mrs. Stein thinks Fish Rock Camp was built in 1092 since the Seligmans stayed there in 1903. She also said that Calumet was independent of Fish Rock Camp and that her family is no relation of the "rich" two-n's Hellmanns. In the 1915 picture of the "Our Crowd" family on the stone steps of Powell's camp, Margaret is the little girl on the far right with the ribbon in her hair. How time does fly.

Harry Purchase wrote that he knew the Hellmans well and that they had dinner at Wawbeek during their last week at camp. This would bring us up to 1953, the year Willy bought the whole place.

Geoffrey T. Hellman's article from the 1954 issue of The New Yorker did not reach my library in time for inclusion in this. It is probably no more than a genealogy of the two families. The two Hellman ladies gave me the story I wanted.

This concludes my small history of SEKON and its surroundings,
except for one added page on the Auction.

THE AUCTION

SEKON was auctioned off Saturday, July 11, 1964, by Charles Vosburgh of Cortland, New York. The Saturday before this the property was open with Charlie and his sons in attendance so that the prospective buyers could inspect the buildings, contents, and land. Brochures were handed out.

It was a beautiful Adirondack day. A large tent had been set up in front of Cavanagh's. Cars from all over were parked all the way down Panther Mountain Road.

DeSormo states there were over a thousand people here. The morning session took the chant of a tobacco auction when all the furnishings were offered. Hotel equipment, furniture, stuffed animals, kitchen and dining stuff, blankets, and paintings all went.

It was quite a show and those who were there will never forget it. As the bidding became more spirited, so did the excitement. When one became excited after bidding on a building or a lot of his own, how could he pay attention to the rest? Even I must have gotten excited, for I remember my sons scolding me: “Dad, put your hand down. You just bid against yourself.”

In the summer of 1994, thirty years will have passed since the Auction. It is sad to note that not many of the original bidders are still alive. At least twenty-two of the first owners and their spouses have passed away.

But those who are here and their families can be grateful to Ike Seligman and Charlie Vosburgh for enabling us to own an Adirondack “camp” at a great bargain, on one of the most beautiful spots in the mountains.

The information for this history was garnered from the following books:

“Our Crowd” by Stephen Birmingham

“A History of the Adirondacks” two volumes by Alfred L. Donaldson

“Adirondack Country” by William Chapman White

“Heydays of the Adirondacks” by Maitland C. DeSormo

“Summers on the Saranacs” by Maitland C. DeSormo

“Great Camps of the Adirondacks” by Harvey H. Kaiser

And many thanks to the people mentioned who wrote replies to my queries or who phoned me with details of Calumet and Janice Hellman.

Any attempt to write a story about history is subject to error in both facts and dates. If any such are noted in this story, or if anyone can add anything, I shall be glad to hear from you. We can then add an addendum to this small history.

They are now calling the Adirondacks “Our Legacy for the Future.” We who live there know this to be true. We also know it is not necessary to describe the beauty of the Adirondacks or the Saranac region to anyone. It speaks for itself.

SCHEDULE “A”

(Previous owners of Sekon – From the Abstract of Title)

	From	To
Isaac N. Seligman	Aug. 31, 1892	Apr.18, 1907
George W. Seligman`	Oct, 28, 1894	June 8, 1911
Guta Seligman	Feb. 12, 1907	Dec.5, 1944
James Loeb	July 30, 1893	Mar. 30, 1907

George W. Seligman, Atty.) Joseph L. Seligman, Atty.) Harding Johnson, Atty.)	Dec. 23, 1926	Dec. 5, 1944
Mildred Carlotta Dellevie Charles Fleschner Franklin County Adirondack Lodge Inc. W. Mladek Willy Charles Vosburgh	Aug. 16, 1944 July 26, 1948 Sept. 16, 1951 Apr. 30, 1950 May 25, 1953 June 29, 1964	Aug. 16, 1948 June 24, 1952 Aug. 7, 1952 June 3, 1953 July 1, 1964 (July 11, 1964)

(NOTE: Warren Longacker, author of this history, is now deceased. His work, which was not copyrighted, is published here with the permission of his sons. It originally was self-published some time prior to 1994 as a small black and white pamphlet and distributed to Sekon owners of that time and subsequently to newcomers. It contained a cover photo of historic Sekon, a detailed map of the lake and a copy of an original Sekon auction brochure, which could not be reproduced here. Sekon Association is grateful to Warren Longacker for his lasting contribution to Sekon history and to his family for allowing us to share it.)