

SWITZERLAND, VENICE, AND THE HILLS OF NEW JERSEY, HISTORIC RECREATION IN THE UPPER PASSAIC RIVER WATERSHED

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The proximity to large urban centers and numerous water bodies made the upper Passaic River watershed a popular recreation area. The Great Falls in Paterson have attracted sight seers since the American Revolution. The Morris Canal and early turnpikes brought tourists into the region in the years before the Civil War but the coming of the railroads in the 1870s that summer drastically increased the number of visitors. The 1870s to 1930s are regarded as the high point of tourism in the upper Passaic Watershed. A wide range of activities was available in this era, fishing, swimming, rowing, canoeing, and camping were common but there were also amusement parks, steamboats on the mountain lakes, rowing contests, bicycle trips, and even health resorts.

Visitors could be broadly divided into three categories, day trippers, short term vacationers, and summer boarders spending an entire season. This last category was common throughout the region. The town of Montclair was never noted as a resort destination yet in the late 1800s it hosted an estimated 400 summer boarders annually. The average summer boarder was often content with simple accommodations, plain food, and a quiet front porch. Other visitors wanted more elaborate facilities such as boat liveries, picnic pavilions, and live music.

The Mountain View section of Wayne Township was known as the "Venice of America" because of boating available on four rivers that converging on the site as well as the Morris Canal. Pompton Lakes was popular with cyclists because of its location at the junction of two railroads and relatively flat terrain. Located at the end of the trolley lines that ran through Great Notch, the Singac section of Little Falls became home to an amusement park. The largest and most popular resort destination was Greenwood Lake. Sometimes called the "Switzerland of the East" the lake became a popular destination in the first half of the 1800s thanks to the writing of the pioneer outdoor author Frank Forrester and the Hudson River School painter Jasper Cropsey. At the height of the resort era, 1870's to the early 1930's, Greenwood Lake was home to 21 hotels and boarding houses and several more were located in the nearby villages. Thousands of visitors came to the lake every summer. Both day trippers and vacationers used the train service and lake steamboats.

The summer visitors were an important source of income for the people of the region but there were inevitable tensions. Wayne Township was forced to ban the wearing of bathing suits after 10:00 pm in an effort to discourage the loud parties that spilled out onto the streets.

Winter sports never reached the popularity of summer vacations although a number of ski clubs were active.

The coming of the automobile and the loss of the railroad passenger trains lead to the decline of destination resorts such as Greenwood Lake. Air conditioning and increased opportunities for travel to more distant destinations put an end to the summer boarder.