

Lake Marie Cemetery

By Richard W. Schmitt and Jenny Weisburger

As you enter into the drive at 60 Haines Road, you will find yourself in the beautiful area of the Bedford Hills Memorial Park. The park contains all that a town park should – ball fields, a swimming pool, tennis courts, as well as a playground overlooking Lake Marie. Few people know, however, that tucked up on the hill near the entrance to the park is one of Bedford's historic burial grounds. In fact, quite a lot of interesting history can be found in this part of town.

Haines Road itself was originally part of an Indian Trail known as Amawauk Path that traversed from what are now Buxton and Babbitt Roads over to the Pines Bridge area. Looking back some 300 years, the Bedford West Purchase Maps of 1700-1738 indicate that the area was a “Cranberry [sic] Meadow”. A 1790 map drawn by Adam Douglas shows much of the land owned by Gilbert and Joseph Griffin. One of the Gilbert Griffins of this era and location was married to a “Marietta”, this is quite possibly the origin of the Lake Marie name.

The history of the park itself dates to 1946 when the Metcalfe Estate donated land to the town. This was supplemented with another parcel acquired from Westchester County. The Metcalfes originally had a summer estate overlooking Lake Marie. They were admirers of James Fenimore Cooper and named their home after him: hence, Lake Marie at one time was called Coopers Pond. The small stream running in and out of the lake was named Miery or Muddy Brook. It flowed down along where the Saw Mill Parkway is today, into the Cross River or Beaver Dam Brook in Katonah. The Rosafort Family also donated land for playing fields at the park.

Long before the park existed; a man named John Ferris (1753 – 1837) purchased land here sometime before 1800 and operated a large farm.

The Ferris Family had come to America from Leicestershire, England about 1634. They moved from Massachusetts to Connecticut and then spread throughout Westchester County and beyond. As was common at the time, Ferris designated a part of his property for a cemetery, and in 1834 buried his two-year-old grandson, also named John. Ferris himself is also interred here, a Revolutionary War veteran who is believed to have fought in the 1st Regiment, NY Line, and the 2nd Regiment of the Westchester County Militia.

The Ferris family name and descendants continue today in our area. The Ferris Family married into another old Bedford family named Dingee. Rebecca Ferris (1799-1865) married William S. Dingee (1804-1866) who purchased the yellow house at 73 Haines Road across from the lake on March 16, 1849. William Ferris (1786-1853) married Charlotte Dingee (1787-1853). These Dingees descend from John Dingee of Cherry Street who had his cattle earmark recorded in the Town of Bedford February 27, 1753. John descends from Robert Dingee who bought 22 acres of land on December 7, 1676 in Hempstead, Long Island. John Ferris's heirs eventually sold his farm except for the cemetery, now known as Lake Marie Cemetery and owned by the Town of Bedford. There are at least 25 members of the Ferris and Dingee family members interred here.

Sadly, the Lake Marie Cemetery had fallen into disrepair over the years due to vandalism, neglect, and the elements. Genealogist William Eardeley visited the cemetery in the early 1900's and noted in his book of cemetery inscriptions that the 'neglected' burial ground was in 'wretched condition'.

The Friends Group decided to make the clean-up of Lake Marie a priority. At weekly work sessions, members of the Friends unearthed buried stones, paired up broken headstone fragments with original bases, and used maps from 1932 to re-create the proper layout of the cemetery. The cemetery contains approximately 30 headstones, as well as several fieldstone grave markers that are not inscribed.

The cemetery was like a huge jigsaw puzzle that needed to be put together. With lots of hard work and close examination of stones, the pieces were gradually put into place.

Beside John Ferris, the Revolutionary soldier, there are four Civil War soldiers buried at Lake Marie Cemetery. One of these, Willard Weed, was only recently discovered. His grave marker has been missing for many generations.

Another intriguing headstone is that of Abby Jane Dingee (1843-1862). She was the first wife of William H. Dingee (1838-1922) who was the son of William S. Dingee (1804-1866).

There is a bullet hole straight through Abby Jane's headstone. It appears to have been fired from a westerly direction. If you were to look through the back of the stone through the hole, you could line up William S. Dingee's house on the opposite side of

Haines Road. Buried just behind Abby Jane is Rebecca Dingee, William S. Dingee's wife. One can only imagine what kind of stories could explain this scenario.

About \$4000 was spent by the Town of Bedford to repair damaged headstones at Lake Marie. The repairs were done by Colin Schermerhorn of CJ Stones, a Bedford local.

The Bedford Recreation & Parks crew removed a large stump in the middle of the cemetery. In June of 2012, a new sign was donated by the Bedford Hills Historical Museum. The historic cemetery is certainly worth a visit if you are in the Bedford Hills Memorial Park area.