

A Brief History of Caroga



“The destiny of the town lies in the beauty of its lakes and streams and mountains.

The potential for recreation is unbounded and unmatched within the Adirondacks. Since the land within the town is now largely owned by the State, as part of the Adirondack Forest Preserve, the future is relatively safe for the thousands who have found and will find that its summers are the best anywhere within our northern mountains.”

– Caroga: An Adirondack Town Recalls Its Past



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A Brief History of Caroga

Overview

Caroga is a rural town in Fulton County, New York, located in the northern foothills of the Mohawk Valley and entirely within Adirondack Park. As detailed in *Caroga: An Adirondack Town Recalls Its Past* (McMartin, 2023), both the community and the landscape give the Town of Caroga a distinctive, adaptive, and enduring character.

Covering a total area of 54.2 square miles, including 3.7 square miles of water (6.7% area), Caroga is renowned for its outdoor recreational assets and Adirondack natural landscapes, including scenic waterways, wild forests, glacial boulders, and ancient bedrock.

Unique geological features have long shaped Caroga's way of life, settlement patterns, and enduring economy.

- **Abundant Lakes:** The Town's 24 lakes are a community centerpiece, creating the character of a natural lake district and regional oasis. Life along local lakes and creeks flows seamlessly with water sports, such as paddling, boating, swimming, and fishing.
- **Wild Forests:** Surrounding downtown, protected Adirondack Forest Preserve lands of mixed coniferous-hardwoods provide wildlife habitats, recreational trails, and other outdoor adventures.
- **Mountain Terrains:** Ranging from low elevation sedimentary areas at 1,180 feet above sea level to high elevation billion-year-old bedrock at 2,185 feet on Kane Mountain overlook, 2,440 feet on Hogback ridge, and 2,600 feet near the northeastern county line, the varied Southern Adirondack terrains shaped by the last ice age offer a unique array of outdoor adventures.
- **Natural Assets:** Bedrock streams, mixed wetlands, and more than 20,000 acres of constitutionally-protected "Forever Wild" Adirondack Forest Preserve lands contribute naturally to water quality and ecosystem integrity.



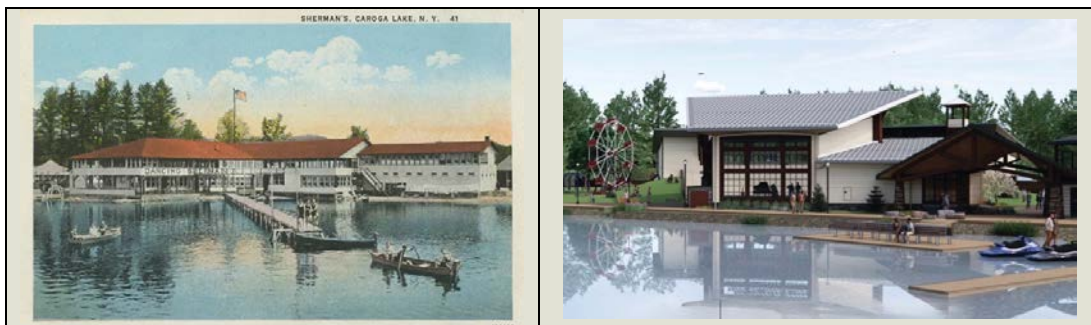
Summary of Historical Milestones

The Town of Caroga's modern character and way of life have been shaped by its enduring geography, history, and traditions. Situated at the threshold of the Mohawk Valley and entirely within the Adirondack Park, Caroga's granite cliffs, mountains, lakes, streams, and forests provide natural seclusion and accessible places where families, friends, and visitors have gathered across generations.

Caroga's history reflects a long and complex story of Indigenous settlement, colonial alliances, and community development. Before European settlements, fifteenth-century Haudenosaunee villages blossomed along Caroga Creek. During the colonial era, Covenant Chain alliances forged enduring relationships between Indigenous nations and European powers. Between 1738 and 1774, Sir William Johnson rose as a central figure in regional affairs. Conflicts leading to the American War of Independence transformed both political and cultural landscapes, culminating in the founding of the United States and the continued growth of the local community. Among Caroga's early residents was Major Nick Stoner, whose remarkable life remains an enduring part of the Town's history.

With current boundaries established in 1842, the Town's early economy grew from its abundant forests and waterways, supported by expanding industrial transportation networks, including the Fonda and Caroga Plank Road and Wheelerville Tannery, one of early America's largest sole leather factories. By the mid-nineteenth century, Caroga adapted to become one of the Adirondack's earliest planned resort communities, establishing traditions with recreation and hospitality that continue to shape the local way of life and annual events.

In 2026, Caroga is entering a new chapter with the renewal of Sherman's Park, Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course, Wheelerville Trails, and other outdoor recreational assets. As momentum grows, the Town continues to honor its past while building on the natural beauty, shared traditions, and community spirit that have cultivated the Adirondack Experience in Caroga for many generations.



Caroga's Historical Milestones

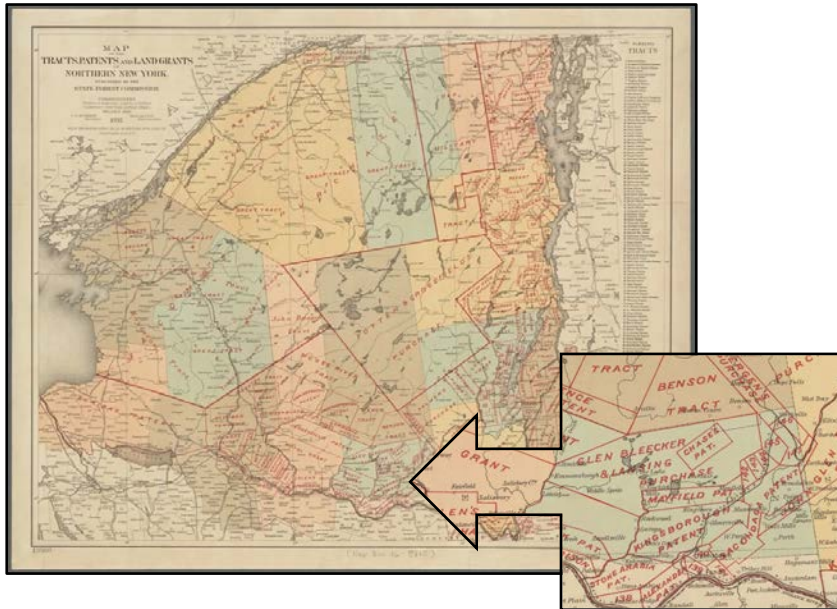
Early History



Summer Landscape
A.H. Wyant

On April 11, 1842, the New York State Legislature officially established and named the Town of Caroga from portions of Johnstown, Stratford, and Bleeker. The Town shares its name with Caroga Creek as well as East and West Caroga Lakes. The name also evokes Garoga Castle Hill, the palisaded longhouse village perched on a steep uplift plateau along the Caroga Creek directly north of the Mohawk River Noses gateway. With archeological excavations, the New York State Museum and Cornell Tree Ring Laboratory dated Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) Caroga Creek communities from 1478 to 1632 (Funk & Kuhn, 2003; Manning et al., 2021), showing local settlements more than 360 years before the Town of Caroga was formed in 1842.

Land Patents



Maps by <https://www.carogamuseum.org>

The above *Tracts, Patents, and Land Grants Map* shows the patchwork quilt of land patents granted during colonial and post-revolutionary periods. The enlarged section shows the Town of Caroga, including parts of the Kingsborough Patent (1753), Mayfield Patent (1770), Lott and Lows Patent (1761), and Glen, Bleeker, & Lansing Patent (1793). The Kingsborough and Mayfield Patents were part of the 170,000-acre baronial estate held in Tryon County by Sir William Johnson (1715-1774). In a July 29, 1754 letter to Albany's Goldsbro' Banyar, Johnson noted "*taking the Garoge Creek,*" asserting, "*I can't think your right will come so far back as to interfere with mine,*" and claiming Caroga Creek as his land patent boundary. **In other words, the north woods of Sir William Johnson's baronial estate are now the southern area in Caroga known as "North Bush."**

American Revolution

The American War of Independence transformed local lives and land ownership. Major land claims were ceded in the 1783 Treaty of Paris and the 1784 Haldimand Proclamation. *The Minute Book of the Committee of Safety of Tryon County: The Old New York Frontier* (reprinted in 1905) recorded local sacrifices for the Common Cause of Liberty, providing,

“Then there came in quick succession for eight long years, the raids of the Johnsons and Butlers with their Indian allies, the horrors of the fire-brand and the scalping-knife, the strife of border warfare, and the awful carnage of Oriskany... Of the inhabitants of the county two-thirds had been killed, and of the remainder 308 were widows and 2,000 fatherless children... 700 buildings had been burned and 150,000 bushels of wheat destroyed, while 12,000 farms lay uncultivated. Surely, ‘if blood be the prize’ of liberty, the patriots of Tryon County paid in full measure and running over” (p. xiii).



Family names on war lists remain common in Caroga and beyond. Among them, Nicholas (“Nick”) Stoner (1762-1853) was an ordinary local man who lived an extraordinary life as a soldier, patriot, and pioneer. In 1777, at age 15, he heeded General Nicholas Herkimer’s call to defend local homes from imminent British attack, enlisting as a fifer in Tryon’s militia, alongside his father, Henry, and brother, John. In August 1777, the family saw action as the relief force at the bloody Battle of Oriskany. They fought in Saratoga and other campaigns. Like many local families of the era, they sacrificed greatly. Henry was scalped and killed at home, and John later died in the War of 1812. As told in *Trappers of New York*, Nick became a legendary Adirondack guide and lived to an old age in Caroga. Several Caroga landmarks now bear his name, including the Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course, where his monument dedication in 1929 depicted him as deer-skin-clad “David” facing a giant foe. Two generations later in 1898, Nick Stoner’s granddaughter, Catherine Mills Gage, gave land for the North Bush Methodist Church, an early local symbol and gathering place.

Town of Caroga Established

At the turn of the 19th century, New York State organized its government and economy. In 1784, Tryon County was renamed Montgomery County. After ratification of the *U.S. Constitution* and *Bill of Rights*, the first federal census in 1790 recorded the total population of Montgomery County as 28,839 (including 4,905 free white men and 588 slaves). With so many soldiers lost, the 1790 census numbers show a post-war majority of women and children in Montgomery County as well as the Towns of Caughnawaga: 4,261 (1,128, 133) and Palatine: 3,404 (805, 192). Caughnawaga was divided to form Johnstown (1793) and later Bleeker (1831). Parts of Palatine became Stratford (1805) and Ephratah (1827). The Erie Canal opened with Grand Cannonade on October 26, 1825. Following the United States’ 1808 abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, New York marked the end of slavery and indentured servitude with Emancipation Day on July 5, 1827. A decade later in 1838, Montgomery County was divided to create Fulton County. In 1842, the Legislature divided parts of Johnstown, Bleeker, and Stratford to establish the Town of Caroga.

Newkirk Mills

In the early 19th century, settlements grew around Caroga Creek's water power. Reliable renewable water turned mill wheels and trip hammers to grind grain, saw lumber, and tan leather. Local industrialist Garret A. Newkirk (1804-1890) — Caroga's first Supervisor (1842) and State Assemblyman (1844) — ran major tanning and timber operations and chartered the plank road. His obituary called him *"one of the most prominent men of this vicinity... a man of more than usual ability and enterprise."* Chartered by Newkirk November 5, 1847, the Fonda and Caroga Plank Road Corporation built a toll road of 8-foot hemlock planks from the Erie Canal at Fonda to Newkirk Mills in Caroga. After reports touted plank roads' 100 to 200% profits, the Legislature enabled incorporation by charter and investments. From 1847 to 1854, more than 340 companies built 3,500 miles of roads in New York. Following the Panic of 1857, Newkirk sold his property and moved to Ohio. John Francisco (1812-1873) purchased his 2,000-acre estate — including the mansion, hotel, public house, sawmill, tannery, and store. He revitalized Newkirk and established a family legacy of local community leadership, continuing with his grandson Frank Sherman (1868-1955).



Photos from Caroga Museum

Wheelerville Tannery

Civil War sacrifices marked another transition era, with local men serving mostly in New York's 115th Infantry Regiment and Massachusetts' 54th Black Regiment. Private forest industry investments surged in Caroga. In 1865, the Wheeler-Claflin Company purchased 20,000 acres around the southern inlet of Canada Lake. Jonathan Wheeler (1817-1889) and William Claflin (1818-1905) built the Wheelerville Tannery, and at peak it became one of early America's largest hemlock bark tanneries for sole leather, before the 1893 US Leather Company "Big Sole Leather Trust." Wheelerville's industrial settlement had a mill, store, warehouses, barns, and housing. Claflin extended plank roads to Wheelerville to connect to waterways, rail lines, and markets in Fonda. In 1869, a productive plank road was added from Green Lake to Pine Lake and north into Arietta (deferring a riskier railroad venture). By 1890, Claflin alone owned about 90,000 acres, stretching from West Caroga Lake to beyond Stoner Lakes, making him the largest local private land owner of that era. An industrialist, Massachusetts Governor (1869-1872), and U.S. Congressman (1877-1881), William Claflin also was committed to educational philanthropy, funding land purchases for Claflin University in South Carolina and signing charters for Wellesley and Mount Holyoke Colleges. However, by the late 19th century, hemlock depletion, chemical innovation, and industrial consolidation led him to close the tannery. **The Wheelerville Tannery operated from the 1860s to 1888, leaving lasting economic, environmental, and social impacts, while laying the groundwork to plan for Caroga's future as an Adirondack destination.**

Adirondack Resort Community

In the mid-19th century, William Claflin and his local lawyer James M. Dudley (1813-1892) guided Caroga's transition from a forest-based industrial economy to a resort community. In the 1860s, Claflin invested \$500,000 to build the five-story Canada Lake House, an early luxury hotel on Canada Lake's north shore (now Kasson Drive). Until a fire, it operated from 1868 to 1884, under managers William R. Tunnicliff (1837-1873) and Joseph Sherman (1837-1903). Canada Lake House drew visitors seeking accommodations amid lakes and forests, reflecting New York's growing appreciation for nature and needs for stewardship. In letters dated from the 1880s, Claflin decided "*to have the lake shore surveyed and developed into cottage lots.*" In addition to clustered development, he reverted parcels to the State for forest conservation. In the same era, Verplanck Colvin in 1884 published his *State of New York Report on the Adirondacks and State Land Surveys*, followed by the 1894 *New York State Constitutional* protections of Adirondack Park Forest Preserve lands as "forever wild." **William Claflin led the early strategic vision of Caroga as one of New York's first planned Adirondack resort communities, and his investments built enduring opportunities for the local community, natural environment, and forest economy.**

Early Hotel Era

Consistent with Claflin's vision, Caroga's early hotel era began in the mid-19th century. In 1877, the first hotel on West Caroga Lake was built by Joseph Sherman (1837-1903) and Elizabeth Francisco Sherman (1843-1912), daughter of John Francisco of Newkirk Mills. On the present Sherman's parking lot, the first Sherman's Hotel was a refined family retreat with a parlor, bar, and dining room. The living room centered on a huge square piano. Their son, Frank Sherman (1868-1955), joined the business in 1894 and ran the hotel until it was tragically destroyed by fire in 1899. They lost everything. The family moved across the street, where Frank Sherman and George Fort reopened a store and boarding house. With resilience and grit, Frank also began cutting local lumber for a new venture. In 1921, Frank Sherman opened Sherman's Park and Dance Hall. In that era, activity also grew at the nearby Five Points intersection of the state highway with the Benson Road, Morey Road, and London Bridge Road. (Later, the Five Points site became the first Unger House Restaurant and Boarding House.) Also in the late 1890s, Ed Vrooman (1865-1931, a 7th generation lineal descendant of Adam Vrooman: 1649-1730) and his wife Cora Lasher Vrooman (1867-1953) built Vrooman's Lake View House. In the early 1900s, Vrooman's was West Caroga Lake's only hotel, shortly before cottages dotted the shoreline. Vrooman's also housed a post office, serving the Pine Lake mill workers to the north who built a community and boarding house in 1898. Vrooman's overlooked West Caroga Lake's sandy beach, with a water slide and other amusements. In 1904, fire destroyed Vrooman's Lake View House. Undeterred, Ed Vrooman bought Nate Oathout's farmhouse and renovated it as Vrooman's Hotel in 1907. Operating as a family restaurant and bar since 1908, Vrooman's is Caroga's oldest commercial gathering place.



Canada Lake Hotels and Steamboats

Canada Lake had multiple turn-of-the-century hotels. In 1888, James Young Fulton (1839-1918) constructed Fulton House on the southeast shore. The 3-story prohibition-era resort had stagecoach, livery stables, boathouses, kerosene lighting, and (by 1910) telephones. Guests enjoyed music, billiards, picnics, dinners, sailboats, rowboats, and steamboats. Romantic steamers — such as the *Kanaughta* and *Auskerada* — made daily summer trips to Stewart's Landing. Fulton House operated 26 years before it closed after a fire in 1914. In 1895, industrialist Alfred Dolge (1848-1922) acquired more than 4,500 acres around Canada Lake, forming the Caroga Land Company. He built roads, sawmills, and a dam. In 1897, Dolge promoted the Auskerada Park Club, but financial overextension and economic instability resulted in bankruptcy within a year. Overlapping in time was the Auskerada Hotel, built in 1892-93 by Albert Simmons (1843-1916) and Joseph Fitch Van Ness (1849-1916) on the site of Claflin's former Canada Lake House. Open year-round, the 5-story Auskerada Hotel offered stage and steamboat services, a post office, verandas, steam heat, electric lighting, fine dining, hall. Advertised as a healthful mountain retreat, it drew visitors seeking rest among the lakes and forests. Sold in 1916, the hotel later became the Allen Inn. After a fire, it was rebuilt as the Little Allen Inn and later renamed the Lakeside Motel, which continues to host overnight guests in the 21st century.



20th Century Land, Lumber, and Artists

In 1905, the Caroga Land and Lumber Company (later the Durey Land & Lumber Company in 1912) acquired Dolge's former holdings and developed Canada Lake cottage sites. The company was initially owned by Cyrus Durey (1864-1933), James Ireland (1850-1927), David Wells (1858-1928), and Frank Sherman (1868-1955). They also built a steam-powered sawmill that they operated and leased until a fire destroyed it in 1926. Durey was instrumental in constructing Stewart's Landing dam to stabilize the water level on Canada Lake, and he also influenced the construction of a state road from Pine Lake to Stratford to improve access to and from the west. **That same early 20th-century era saw the rise of a distinguished creative community at Canada Lake.** In 1905, illustrator Clare Victor "Dwig" Dwiggins (1874-1958) and his wife pianist Betsey Lindsay (1874-1947), built their "Dwigwam" near Sand Point and attracted fellow artists, writers, and filmmakers. Their community blended work and recreation, leaving lasting cultural imprints on Caroga. The Dwiggins sent their children — Phoebe Greenlake Dwiggins Ballard and Don Dwiggins — to the local school. Phoebe and her husband W.T. Ballard were pulp fiction writers. Property owners in Canada Lake's 20th century artist colony included Herbert (1891-1963) and Helen Asbury, Charles (1879-1960) and Grace Sarka, Paul (1885-1979) and Grace Bransom, Margaret Widdemer (1887-1978), and others. According to Phoebe Dwiggins Ballard, the Canada Lake artist colony famously kept the tradition of getting production out before turning their attention to playful lakeside gatherings and outdoor recreation.

Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course, Nick Stoner Inn, & Sherman's Park

(See <https://www.carogamuseum.org/nick-stoner-golf-course/> and <https://carogaarts.org>)

GOLF LINKS AT CANADA LAKE IN THE ADIRONDACK MTS., N. Y. 92



FIRST TEE, GOLF LINKS, CANADA LAKE, N. Y. ADIRONDACK MTS. 87



NICK STONER INN



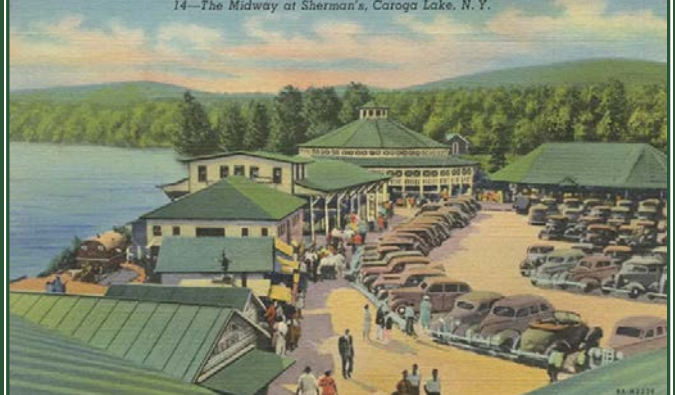
SHERMAN'S, CAROGA LAKE, N. Y. 41



STATE HIGHWAY AT SHERMANS, WEST CAROGA LAKE, N. Y. 45



14--The Midway at Sherman's, Caroga Lake, N. Y.



Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course

Caroga's municipal golf course is a local treasure and the oldest continuously operating course in the Adirondacks. In the 1920s, Caroga's local businessman and state official, Cyrus "Cy" Durey (1864-1933) transformed the former Wheelerville Tannery brownfield site into the Caroga Recreation Park and Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course. Working closely with Attorney Alfred Dennison (1880-1962) and a local advisory board, Durey promoted the area as a resort community. In 1925, Durey deeded 78 acres to the Town for use as a golf course and recreational grounds. The first 7 holes opened in 1927, a 9-hole course was operating by 1928, and the full 18 holes were completed in 1931. Tannery buildings were adapted for new uses, including the oxen barn as Nick Stoner Inn and the company store as the Golf Clubhouse and Town Hall. After a 2020 fire destroyed the Clubhouse, plans began to rebuild it. The Nick Stoner Inn is now privately owned by the Ward family, who draw crowds with special events and fine dining. The golf course was named for Major Nicholas Stoner, and a memorial statue of him by Joseph Polia was dedicated in 1929. Following that dedication, the names Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course and Nick Stoner Inn first appeared in 1930. In the 21st century, Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course and the town's surrounding parkland remain essential public recreation assets for the community and the region.

The Town's Golf Pros and Superintendents include: Fred Allen (1928-1929); Channing Floyd (1930-1945); Larry Vidulick (1945); Bob Ray (1946-1950); Guy Farina (1951-1984); Steve Jennings (1985-2020); and Steven Stedman (2021-present).

Sherman's Park

A renowned mid-20th-century destination for swing and big band music, Sherman's Park on West Caroga Lake has been a community centerpiece since opening in 1921. Founded by Frank Sherman (1868-1955) and operated with his sons Frank Jr. (1909-2002) and Floyd (1896-1976), the park began as a dance hall and bathing beach before expanding into an amusement park in 1929, with a shooting gallery, merry-go-round, airplane swing, sausage maze ride, and Custer cars. In 1932, Sherman's acquired the Loeff Carousel from The Utica Park, featuring hand-carved wooden animals, including the long-eared zebra now at the Knoebels Carousel Museum. Other attractions included the Big Eli Ferris wheel, bumper cars, games of chance, and original inventions by Frank Jr., sometimes called the "Walt Disney of the Adirondacks." Before World War II, the park's two-story pavilion and dance hall drew regional and national audiences. Local bands performed during the week, while weekend headliners included Frankie Carle, Jimmie Lunceford, and Fletcher Henderson. The Sherman family operated the park until 1970, when ownership passed to Bill Morris (1908-2000), Ron Morris (1932-2018), and Paul Volk (1927-2019). Through 1987, the Morris family modernized Sherman's with new rides, arcade games, food concessions, and a family restaurant. In the late 1980s, George Abdella (1943-2022) and his wife Ruth (1947-2018) acquired the property, restoring carousel elements and adding Adirondack stained-glass windows and perennial gardens. After an agreement with the Town of Caroga from 2015 to 2019, George Abdella, as president of Balboa Land Development, reacquired the park and donated Sherman's to Caroga Arts Collective in 2019. Today, Caroga Arts continues Sherman's legacy through year-round music performances, collaborative educational programs, and capital improvement projects. Visitors can also explore historic equipment and memorabilia donated by the daughters of Frank Sherman Jr. on display in the Sherman's Arcade and Workshop exhibits at the Caroga Museum.

Myhil

J. Myer Schine (1890-1971) and Hildegard Feldman Schine (1903-1994) named their Caroga summer retreat “Myhil,” blending their first names. They received the large forested tract from her parents as a wedding gift on August 30, 1925. Originally, the Shine’s Myhil estate extended from the shoreline of Irving Pond to the Five Points intersection of State Route 10 and County Routes 111 and 112. Set atop a pine knoll amid flowering shrubs, their classic Adirondack Great Camp reflected a natural rustic design that incorporated modern comforts and technologies. The estate comprised multiple buildings — including a large state-of-the-art movie theater — and welcomed many guests over the years, including Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra. The family pioneered America’s studio theater experience through distinctive atmospheric-style movie houses serving local communities. The Schine Theatre Circuit was headquartered at the Glove Theatre and Family Theatre (now Gloversville’s Schine Memorial Hall). At its peak, Schine was the largest independent theater chain in the United States. Hildegard Schine’s leadership in community development and collaborative arts initiatives remains a lasting source of inspiration. In the 21st century, brothers Bruce and Richard Veghte gifted a 10-acre corner parcel of Myhil at 1949 NY-10 to the Caroga Arts Collective, advancing a vision for an innovative home for the arts in Caroga. Members of the Schine family, including Renee Schine Crown (b.1929) and Lester Crown (b.1925), continue to carry forward the Myhil legacy. An artists’ lodge project also secured support from NYS Council on the Arts.

Kane Mountain Fire Tower

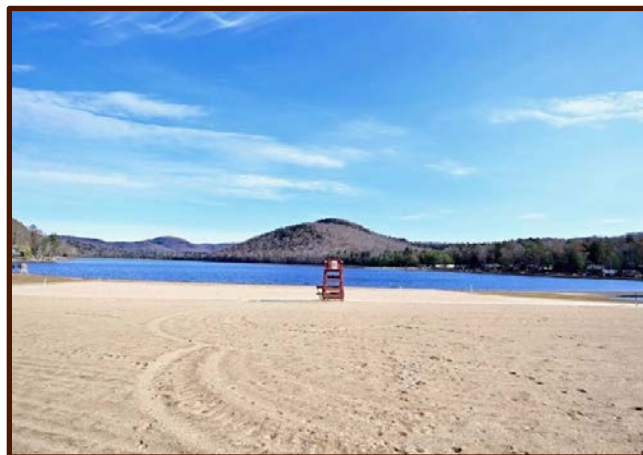
Kane Mountain has long been a popular destination for hikers, offering panoramic views of Adirondack forests and lakes from the Green Lake Road Trailhead. In response to forest fires in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, New York State expanded its fire detection system and began constructing steel fire towers. The Kane Mountain Fire Tower was built in 1925 by the Conservation Commission and became operational in 1926. The 60-foot Aermotor steel tower stands at the 2,185-foot summit of Kane Mountain on New York State Forest Preserve land in the Town of Caroga, accessible from NY-10 and Green Lake Road.



One of only 34 surviving Adirondack fire towers, it was listed on the National Historic Lookout Register in 1995 and on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. The National Register nomination noted the area’s exceptional public use for camping, hunting, and fishing, and the need for a nearby observation station to protect the surrounding forests, lands, and waterways. Restored through a partnership led by the Canada Lakes Conservation Association and Forest Fire Lookout Association and overseen by the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Kane Mountain Fire Tower remains a scenic and historical landmark. In 2025, the tower centennial was celebrated with collaborations among local organizations, state agencies, and community partners (see <https://www.carogamuseum.org/kane-mountain-fire-tower/> , <https://firelookout.org/lookouts/us/ny/>).

Pine Lake Park

The decades following the 1920s brought renewed vitality to Pine Lake. In 1925, Joseph Groshans (1872-1960) opened Groshan's Park and dance hall, featuring Saturday night square dances with country bands and callers. A picnic area, sand beach, water slide, and amusement park added to family fun. In 1961, Robert Lord purchased the 400-acre park. Lord renamed it Pine Lake Amusement Park, renovated the pavilion, and added a large campground near Kane Mountain.



William Brandau bought the property in 1975 and continued operations. In 1984, Donna Rush modernized the pavilion — renamed Adirondack Paradise — and attracted crowds with performances by country stars, including Tammy Wynette and Boxcar Willie. In 1990, the Houck and Ivancic families acquired it and enhanced the properties. Today, under the stewardship of Jeff Houck, Pine Lake Park continues its legacy as a scenic Adirondack family destination offering camping, swimming, picnics, takeout pizza, and catered special events, near the northern junction of NY-10 and NY-29A (see <https://www.pinelakepark.com/>). In addition, Southern Adirondack Pines Campground and Cabins has been owned and operated by Dave and Cherie Hockey since 2003. Seasonal camping at Pine Lake has a distinct community feel, with extended families returning decade after decade.

Campgrounds and Beaches

Caroga camping slows time and returns visitors to basics of fresh air, glowing sunlight, warm campfires, and outdoor adventure. Kane Mountain historical records provide,

"On account of the accessibility of the forests in the vicinity... and large number of lakes and ponds, there is probably no area of equal size anywhere in the Adirondacks that is more used by the public for camping, hunting, and fishing."

At 3043 State Highway 29A, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Caroga Lake Campground, one of the State's earliest, opened in July 1929 on East Caroga Lake and served 7,700 visitors the first year. After a one-day peak of 1,930 campers on August 3, 1930, the Civilian Conservation Corps improved the area with camping loops in 1933. Today, the State campground and day-use area operate May 15 to September 7, with modern camping facilities and a maximum capacity of 630 campers (105 sites) and 432 day-visitors (72 tables). Popular features include small-craft boat rentals and a sand beach (see <https://dec.ny.gov/places/caroga-lake-campground-and-day-use-area>). Recently, DEC has supported staff to maintain the public beach without providing lifeguards. DEC also operates the West Lake Fishing Access Site, located off State Route 10, one mile south of the Routes 29A-10 intersection at Pine Lake. Other local commercial camping and swimming options include Pine Lake Park and Southern Adirondack Pines on State Route 10 in northern Caroga. Royal View Pub and Campground also offers camping on State Route 10 in southern Caroga.

Caroga Recreation Park and Wheelerville Trails

During the past century, the Town of Caroga has assembled land for public recreation.

In 1925, Cyrus Durey (1864-1933) created the Caroga Recreation Park by donating land for the golf course and other recreational purposes. While facilities have changed over time, the golf course has been maintained continuously and expanded into an 18-hole course. In 1962, the Town added 200 acres through the NY Park and Recreation Land Acquisition Program, with 75% reimbursement. Long undeveloped, part of this land has become Wheelerville Trails, a premier mountain biking destination. Starting in 2017, Council Member Jeremy Manning secured Smart Growth feasibility and construction grants. As Trail Manager, he has guided development by trail designers Justin Vesp and Eli Glesmann. In 2026, Wheelerville Trails includes over 16 mountain bike trails across 150 acres for riders of all abilities. Drawing visitors from across the region, Wheelerville Trails and the annual Mountain Bike Festival support local businesses through adventure tourism. Riders praise the trails as world-class, well designed, and worth the trip. Projects are underway to connect trails to downtown and beyond, further linking recreation and business. Mountain biking is becoming an economic driver of revitalization, boosting lodging, dining, and retail activity, while complementing the Town's broader recreational offerings. In 2025, Caroga was invited to join Bike Borderlands, a Northern Forest Center initiative designed to strength rural communities through outdoor recreation and economic development (see <https://wheelervilletrails.com> ; <https://bikeborderland.com>).

Royal Mountain

Caroga's Royal Mountain Ski Area on NY-10 offers groomed ski trails in the winter, motocross racing in the summer, and outdoor adventure year-round. The ski area first opened in 1956, but foreclosure was imminent by 1970. Town officials considered purchasing the ski-tow, ultimately leaving the mountain's future to private investors. Enter 19-year-old ski racer Jim Blaise. For the next 50 years, Blaise ran Royal Mountain himself — grooming trails, loading lifts, flipping burgers, and serving coffee — without ever missing a day. *"Every dime I took in was reinvested in Royal Mountain,"* Blaise recalled. In 1990, he expanded the terrain by 40%, installed a double chair lift, and stayed committed to continual improvements. Over time, he added snowmaking and a groomed terrain park. With a vertical drop of 575 feet, Royal Mountain's trail layout and pitch provide both challenges and variety. In 2021, Jim Blaise sold Royal Mountain to Jake and Brooke Tennis, who continue to enhance Royal Mountain's guest experience. Today, the mountain features 19 alpine trails and 9 glades, with the longest run of 3,500 feet. Snowmaking covers 70 skiable acres, with aerial access provided by three double chair lifts and one carpet surface lift. Royal Mountain also offers a strong snow sport school program for skiers and snowboarders, including private and group lessons, as well as the 6-week *"Trailblaiser"* Program, designed to accommodate families of all levels throughout the season. The *"Kids on Snow"* Program further connects children and teens with special skiing opportunities coordinated through participating local school districts.

Lake Associations and Outdoor Recreation Clubs

Lake associations and fishing clubs have long protected the Town of Caroga's lakes, fisheries, and outdoor heritage while fostering connections and stewardship. The Town's earliest lake organizations — the East Canada Lake Protective Association and Point Breeze Club — were both established in 1890.



The Canada Lake Protective Association, founded in 1922, reorganizing as the nonprofit with the name Canada Lakes Conservation Association (CLCA) in 2015 to promote lake stewardship, protect the watershed, and support public education (for lake websites, see <https://www.canadalakesconservation.com/> and <https://www.wclainfo.com>).



Other early groups included the Caroga Lake Protective Association (1906) and East Caroga Lake Protective Association (1917). Nonprofit organizations were reformed in 1989 as West Caroga Lake Association (WCLA) and in 2015 as East Caroga Lake Environmental Association (ECLEA), similarly advancing water quality, habitat conservation, boating safety, and local community engagement.

The Canada Lake Store and Marine and the Caroga Lake Marina also serve the above lakes. Additional organizations address specific needs of the Town's other lakes. The Stoner Lakes Association began informally in the 1960s and then registered in 1999 as the Stoner Lake Fish and Game Club, focusing on improving fishing and social connections and then expanding into water-quality and habit restoration. Pine Lake groups have gathered through Pine Lake Park as well as Southern Adirondack Pines Campground and Cabins.

Fishing and wildlife conservation have also been advanced by Fulton County Fish and Game Club, which helped to establish a state fish hatchery on Durey Creek in 1925, and the Caroga Fish and Game Club, organized in the 1940s, which continues to support trout stocking, conservation, hunting, outdoor recreation, and public events.



<https://www.carogafgc.org>

Nick Stoner Trailers Snowmobile Club also improves trails and promotes the sport. Together, these community organizations have preserved Caroga's lakes, fisheries, wildlife, forests, trails, and outdoor heritage while fostering strong local traditions rooted in spirited volunteerism, environmental stewardship, and community connections.

Lakes Management Program

Caroga's Lakes Management Plan is a town-led effort to protect and enhance the water quality and ecological integrity of the Town's main lakes: East and West Caroga Lakes, Canada Lakes, Pine Lake, and Stoner Lakes (<https://townofcaroga.com/lakes/>). The program combines lake stewardship, water quality monitoring, invasive species control and prevention, and shoreline monitoring. Grant-funded initiatives include the Stewardship Program — featuring boater education, boat inspections, and boat wash station — along with the Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting (DASH) and ProcettaCOR Program — to control Eurasian watermilfoil in East and West Caroga Lakes. The Lakes Committee also provides community outreach, educational programs, and the Junior Stewards training program. Partnerships with state and county agencies, lake associations, and local residents help to sustain high water quality, prevent invasive species, and support responsible recreation. The program has also inspired creative community engagement: former lake steward, Geoff Saunders, now an award-winning musician, wrote *The Steward Song*, which has become a local festival favorite that encourages people of all ages to help protect our lakes in Caroga and the Adirondacks:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oe2wSaP9vvM>



Caroga Historical Association and Museum

With grassroots interest in preserving and sharing Caroga's past, the Caroga Historical Association and Museum was created in 1977. Interest grew from the town's bicentennial project: <https://www.carogamuseum.org/caroga-an-adirondack-town-recalls-its-past/>. Lena Durey (1910-1990) was elected the charter museum president, and Barbara McMartin (1931-2005) was the first museum director. In 1981, the Association purchased its current homestead museum at 145 London Bridge Road. The homestead features several 19th-century structures: the tanner's farmhouse, cobbler's shop, general store, ice house, pegged barn, and farm shed. In 2006, the museum opened a 30 x 40' replica of Sherman's Park Arcade, a popular regional attraction dating to the 1920s. After renovations, the arcade now houses Frank Sherman Jr. memorabilia and historic machines restored by Herb Griffin. Curated with narrative panels by Judy and Christianne Smith, the immersive arcade creates evokes memories of carefree days at West Caroga Lake. In 2023, the museum added the Frank Sherman Jr. Workshop, honoring his innovations and talents as an inventor. In 2008, W. Alec Reid (1926-2011) created the exhibit, "Adirondack Trappers," highlighting local frontiersmen Nick Stoner and "French Louie" Seymour. The Caroga Museum operates seasonally and is led by Douglas Purcell and Board of Trustees. Programs include the craft fair, heritage exhibits, art displays, and hands-on workshops. Community websites (see <https://carogamuseum.org>, <https://www.canadalakesconservation.com/lake-community/>), provide resources for the public and show community interest in local history. Today, the Caroga Museum serves as a valuable summer gathering place, celebrating Caroga's distinctive Adirondack Experience.

Caroga Historical Association and Museum

<https://www.carogamuseum.org/>



Homestead Museum



Pole Barn & Machinery



Peg Barn



Cobbler Shop



General Store



Ice House



Sherman's Arcade



Frank Sherman Jr. Workshop

Municipal Buildings

After Caroga's founding in 1842, the local government operated in various rented or shared spaces. In 1992, the former Wheelerville School was repurposed as the Town's municipal offices, including the Town Board meeting room, administrative offices, courtroom space, and community meeting areas. This adaptive reuse centralized the Town's local government functions at 1840 NY-10. The Town Hall is located adjacent to the Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course and Golf Clubhouse. In 2020, a tragic fire destroyed the Town's Golf Clubhouse, and planning is underway to replace this community gathering place as a restored recreation hub, tourism destination, and community asset. Plans are also underway to include future municipal office space. In addition, the Highway Garage is located next to the Clubhouse site. This building has been the base of operations for road maintenance and public works for decades. The Highway Garage houses equipment and supports Highway Department function, such as plowing, repairs, and infrastructure projects. Since the 2020 fire, planning has advanced the aim to replace and relocate the Highway Garage. In 2023, voters approved \$1 million in bonds for the Highway Garage project. **Together, these town building projects illustrate Caroga's adaptive reuse of public structures for community uses, maintenance of key recreational facilities (like the golf course), and continued investments in essential community center infrastructure.**

Wheelerville School

Caroga's school system grew from several one-room rural school houses, including the 1856 Wheelerville School at 1840 NY-10 near the former Wheelerville Tannery site. Over time, Wheelerville became the center of the Town's consolidated school district. By the 1980s, the school building no longer met space and modern classroom needs.



<https://sites.google.com/wufsk8.org/wheelerville/home>

After public meetings and a close referendum, plans were approved for a new school. Construction began in 1990, and the current school — located at 2417 NY-10, south of East Caroga Lake — officially opened in 1991. The original building was converted into the Town Hall municipal offices. Today, the Wheelerville Union Free School District operates a PK-8 school serving the Town of Caroga. As of 2025, approximately 160 students are served, including the high school students who attend Johnstown High School, located 12 miles south. Since the 1960s, a partnership between the school and the Town of Caroga has provided the Caroga Summer Youth Program for elementary-age children, featuring summer enrichment and outdoor recreation. While enrolled at Wheelerville, students have opportunities to earn high school credit in Spanish, Living Environment, and Algebra. **Wheelerville School's low student-to-teacher ratio allows flexibility to meet individual student needs while maintaining rigorous New York State academic standards.**

Town of Caroga, Fulton County, New York



Health, Fire, & Emergency Services

Caroga has reliable and accessible services for health, fire, and emergency services. Basic healthcare is available locally at Nathan Littauer Hospital's Caroga Lake Care Center at 1840 NY-10. In 2021, a new clinic facility opened, replacing leased space and expanding modern care services. EMS and ambulance transport are dispatched through the County's 911 system. Initial emergency responses and fire protection are provided by the Caroga Lake Volunteer Fire Company, founded in 1951. The Auxiliary formed the same year, with the mission to SHARE (Support, Honor, Assist, Represent, and Encourage the Fire Company). Town Supervisor Charles Putman (1913-1992) led the founding initiative. The first fire station was built in 1955 by volunteers with public donations, at a cost of less than \$5,000.00. In 2020, a new fire station opened at 3236 NY-29A to meet modern operational needs, and was made possible by fundraising, grants, and community contributions. Annual benefits include the summer Chicken BBQ and the winter Fire and Ice Fishing Tournament. The Fire Company serves a 100-square-mile area under official contracts with the Town of Caroga, Town of Bleecker, and Piseco Fire Company. Public planning for a Fire District began in 2025. About 30 dedicated volunteer firefighters — including teens, adults, and seniors — operate from a single station with modern fire and rescue equipment, united by a shared commitment to protect and serve the community.

Waste Management

Caroga's solid waste management and wastewater management rely on local programs and county partnerships. Residential solid waste pickup is done by the Highway Department and coordinated with the Caroga Transfer Station (221 Everson) and Fulton County Department of Solid Waste and Sanitary Landfill (847 Mud Road, Johnstown). Commercial users can get county permits. Residents participate in Fulton County's twice-monthly single-stream curbside recycling program, using designated bins for automatic side-loader trucks, and transfer stations have additional recycling drop-off options.

Caroga's wastewater management relies entirely on private, on-site septic systems, rather than a centralized sewer system. Water quality concerns dating to the 1960s prompted adoption of sanitary regulations and ongoing comprehensive wastewater planning. Current efforts include septic inspection requirements under the 2006 Sanitary Code and 2024 Short-Term Residential Rental Law. The Town is exploring the Environmental Facilities Corporation's Septic Replacement Fund Program, and officials completed feasibility studies for a municipal sewer system. Most recently, in 2021, Environmental Design Partnership, LLP (EDP) completed the *Preliminary Engineering Report for a Caroga Lake Wastewater Collection and Treatment System*. It detailed options for maintaining current systems, defining central sewer districts, identifying financing sources, surveying public support, and providing informational outreach. Given high costs and logistical challenges, wastewater management relies on septic systems and holding tanks, with ongoing focus on supporting local property owners, managing major lake systems, and protecting groundwater quality.

Hazard Mitigation

Caroga adopted the 2021 Fulton County Hazard Mitigation Plan in January 2021 to address long-term resilience, preparedness, and risks. As a participating jurisdiction, Caroga is eligible for federal funding for local projects that reduce hazards of disasters. The Plan supports integrating hazard mitigation into local planning and development decisions, including zoning, building code enforcement, critical infrastructure protection, and community education programs. Long-term resilience planning offers a framework to address multiple challenges, including fire, dam safety, and aquatic invasive species.

Black Fly Management

As an Adirondack community with many lakes and wetlands, Caroga has ideal habitats for black flies and mosquitos. An 1870 *Gloversville Intelligencer* article about Caroga noted,



"[S]eventy-five millions mosquitoes, assisted by twenty-five millions of black flies, were not to be frightened out of their hereditary rights... without a desperate and bloody fight... Lucifer himself never had a more numerous or sulphur-deserving army."

In the late 20th century, the Town's management evolved from broad insecticide spraying with DDT to targeted biological control with Bti (*Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis*). Growing environmental concerns and Adirondack Park Agency advocacy led the Town to seek a more safe and sustainable approach. In 1990, Supervisor Bruce Busch appointed a Black Fly Committee, who recommended a larval control program using Bti, a naturally occurring bacterium that specifically targets black fly larvae in flowing water. The Town then established a systemic program, including mapping streams, identifying breeding sites, monitoring larvae, and apply Bti only where needed. For many years, the Bti program was led by John Delesky, and then by Mike Kunath since 2023. The Bti program has operated for more than two decades, with local trained field technicians surveying over 50 square miles and more than 140 miles of mapped waterways each spring. Spring treatments from March to July use precise, low-dose Bti applications to larvae in stream. **Caroga's Bti Program has substantially reduced black fly and mosquito populations to the benefit of Caroga's residents and visitors while minimizing adverse ecological impacts.**

Broadband and Cellular Service

Like most rural Adirondack communities, Caroga's history of broadband and cellular service has been marked by persistent challenges, followed by recent progress. For decades, residents relied on slow dial-up internet, or limited DSL with telephone lines. Cellular coverage was inconsistent, because Caroga's rural mountainous forest terrain added difficulties for communications infrastructure. As internet service became essential for education, business, healthcare, and emergency communications, reliable cellular and broadband service emerged as major priorities, with residents identifying connectivity as one of Caroga's biggest infrastructure challenges. A telecommunications cell tower was installed in 2010 on Town land near the municipal golf course. Since then, wireless carriers gradually upgraded and expanded service. **In 2025 and 2026, broadband expansion accelerated, and fiber-optic infrastructure was installed throughout much of the Town.**

Roads and Bridges

Caroga's first roads in the late 1700s and early 1800s were rough wagon trails built to connect farms, mills, tanneries, and neighboring communities. As settlement expanded, local roads became essential for moving timber, leather, and forest products to market. During the mid-19th century, access increased with commercial plank road system. **In the early 20th century, improved roads supported Caroga's emergence as an Adirondack resort. In the 1930s, today's New York State Route 10 and Route 29A became the primary gateways through the Town, along with southern access via Routes 10A and 29 and eastern access via County Route 112.** In the 20th century, dirt roads were replaced with gravel and pavement, improved drainage, and upgraded bridges to accommodate heavier vehicles, school buses, and emergency services. Given the area's rugged terrain, steep slopes, wetlands, and cold winters, road maintenance has remained one of the Town's largest and most important public responsibilities. The Town owns local roads and bridges and coordinates with Fulton County and New York State, as appropriate. Priorities have slowly advanced public safety, pavement preservation, stormwater management, culvert installation, and bridge repairs. Recent initiatives have explored adopting Complete Streets approaches to enhance Town Center pedestrian and bicycle mobility and safety.

Housing

Before 2020, Caroga's housing included a mix of seasonal and year-round homes, ranging from premier Great Camps to modest cottages, while fires destroyed several apartment-style boarding houses. **By 2020, the Town contained 1,616 housing units. Since 1970, total housing has grown modestly, but year-round owner-occupied homes have more than doubled, reflecting shifts from a seasonal community to one with a growing permanent population.** Much of the housing stock dates to the early 1900s, when Caroga emerged as a popular Adirondack lakeside destination. Many historic camps have remained in the same families for generations, preserving longstanding traditions and community ties. Prior planning identified aging housing stock and a limited supply of affordable year-round housing for young families and the local workforce. Over time, demand from retirees, second-home owners, and remote workers has increased steadily, while the short-term vacation rental market has exploded. In response, the Town adopted a local Short-Term Rental Law (see https://townofcaroga.com/laws/law_2024_1.pdf), but provisions have not yet been incorporated into the *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* or *Zoning Ordinance*. Overall, Caroga's housing reflects both its historic character as an Adirondack resort community and its evolution toward greater year-round residency. Convenient access to population centers in Fulton County, the Mohawk Valley, and Capital Region continues to drive competing housing demands. Like the larger region, housing data highlight a longstanding shortage of "missing middle" housing — including duplexes, townhouses, cottage courts, and other small-scale medium-density housing types — that could better meet needs of working families, young professionals, and older adults while remaining compatible with historic Adirondack neighborhoods in the heart of Caroga.

The Adirondack Camp in American Architecture (Haynes & Jacobs, 2007)

<https://www.nps.history.com/publications/nhl/special-studies/adirondack-camps.pdf>

“The Adirondack camps are exceptionally valuable examples of historic American resort architecture. Distinctive to New York State, these resources are extraordinary illustrations of a type and style of architecture that developed in the Adirondack Mountains during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and had an influence on national trends and design and recreation.”



“Adirondack camps shared three characteristics that differentiated them from other American resort property types... First, each had a distinctive compound plan consisting of separate buildings for separate functions... resulting in an informal, often whimsical, and usually easily adaptable environment.”



“Second, the close integration of camp buildings with the existing natural features of their sites was unprecedented among American resort development in its time... In the earliest examples (1876-c1890), the siting of buildings was harmoniously subordinated to existing landscape features.”



“[T]hird, the Adirondack camp represented the first and fullest application of a rustic aesthetic in American buildings... An especially distinctive aspect of the type is the imaginative use of indigenous materials in its construction and/or decoration. Examples include stonework, log framing...and twisted branches.”



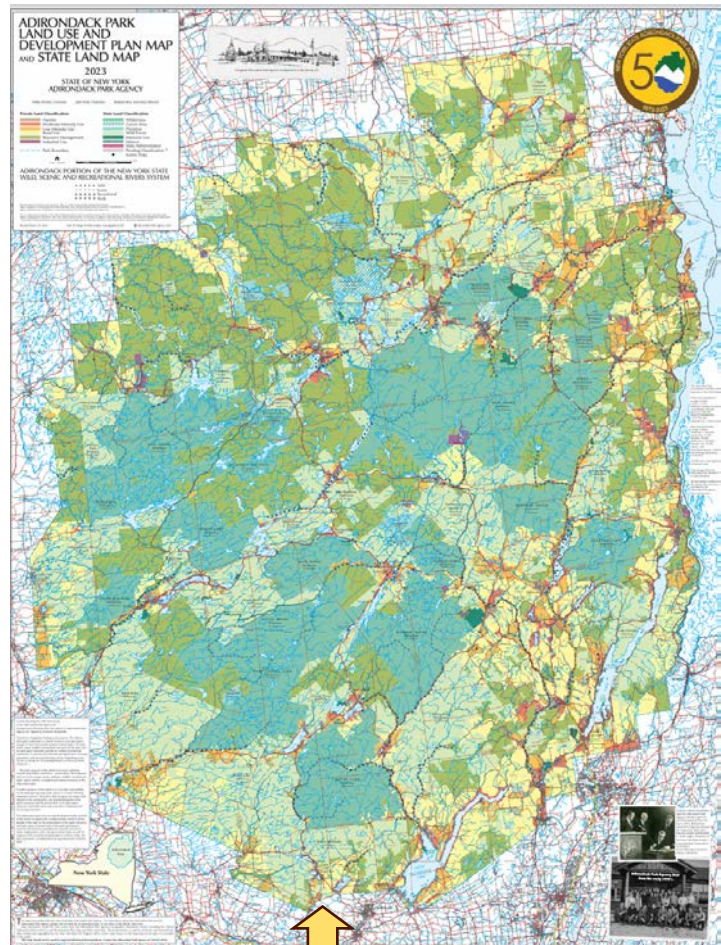
Expressions of a New Freedom: American Cottages and Camps

“Adirondack camps were built for dwellers that sought recreation, health, privacy, and/or freedom from social convention in the forest... The Adirondack camp was built to take advantage of outdoor life in healthy, non-urban environments. It was strongly influenced... and responsive to its natural setting. The Adirondack camp represented an extreme end of this spectrum in its rustic character, intense site integration, creative use of materials found on the site, and unusual compound planning characteristics... It drew inspiration from the established regional tradition of rustic, often ramshackle backwoods habitations built by local guides, trappers and loggers who were regarded in the latter half of the nineteenth century as the last generation of pioneers on a vanishing frontier.”

Adirondack Park Agency (APA) Act

Recognizing the value of protecting forested headwaters of New York's major watersheds, the Legislature created the Forest Preserve in 1885. In 1892, it established the Adirondack Park, combining public and private lands within a single park. Two years later in 1894, the *New York State Constitution's* "Forever Wild" clause permanently protected the Forest Preserve, which now totals nearly 3 million acres. In 1968, *The New York Times* called the Forest Preserve "*the most valuable tangible asset possessed by the State of New York.*"

For much of the 20th century, protection focused on public Forest Preserve lands, while private lands within the Adirondack Park Blue Line remained largely unregulated. Rapid development before and after World War II increasingly threatened to fragment forests and undermine the ecological integrity of the Park. In response, Governor Nelson Rockefeller's 1968 *Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks* recommended coordinated, park-wide land-use planning. The Legislature enacted the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) Act in 1971, creating the APA as an independent state agency responsible for long-range planning on both private and public lands within the Park.



In 1973, the APA adopted the *Adirondack Park Land Use and Development Plan*. This plan established private land use classifications (*Hamlet, Moderate Intensity, Low Intensity, Resource Management*) for private building density and land use. Caroga's Assemblyman Glenn Harris successfully ensured local discretion for land use and zoning within APA Hamlet Land Use Areas, to support vital community and economic development. **The APA Act became a national model for regional land-use planning. It also authorized Agency-Approved Local Land Use Plans (ALLUP), allowing participating municipalities to assume most land-use decision making authority consistent with APA standards. The APA approved Caroga's ALLUP planning and zoning program in 1980** (see <https://apa.ny.gov>). In addition, Forest Preserve lands are classified (*Wilderness, Wild Forest, Intensive Use*) to reinforce constitutional protections. The 2025 *Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan*, 2006 *Shaker Mountain Wild Forest Unit Management Plan*, and Draft *Ferris Lake Wild Forest Unit Management Plan* apply to Caroga's "Forever Wild" Forest Preserve lands.

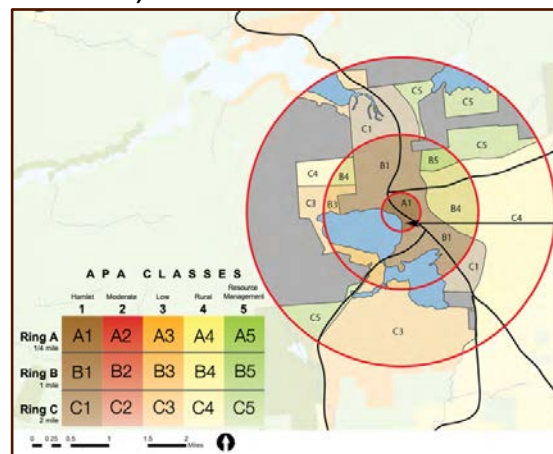
Downtown Revitalization and Neighborhood Renewal

In the early 21st century, Caroga's downtown revitalization and neighborhood renewal are guided by long-term planning and community-led reinvestments. The 2011 *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* introduced a vision for a walkable, mixed-use Town Center.

In 2013, the Town's *Hamlets of the Adirondacks 3: Phase 2 (H3P2)* planning project with Roger Trancik explored the Town Center vision using Growth Ring analyses and Smart Growth strategies, focusing on Sherman's Park on West Caroga Lake as an initial anchor for redevelopment in Town Center and the neighboring Wheelerville municipal area.

Beginning in 2012, the emergence of Caroga Arts, founded by local musician and entrepreneur Kyle Barrett Price, reactivated Sherman's Park as a Caroga destination through live concerts, artist residencies, and community programs, including the *Sherman's Revival Series* launched in 2017.

In 2019, local resident, businessman, and attorney George Abdella (1943-2022) donated Sherman's to Caroga Arts for community renewal and long-term stewardship. During the early 2020s, Caroga Arts' expanded events, educational programming, capital campaigns, and community partnerships advanced the mission to reimagine the Adirondack Experience through the power of the arts.



Building on Caroga's long history as an Adirondack destination for live music and outdoor recreation, state investments and local partnerships have sparked a new era of renewal. In 2026, major construction projects began with Caroga Arts' Lodge at Myhil and Amphitheater at Sherman's Park, supported by the New York State Council on the Arts, Empire State Development, and many community partners and donors. These locally-led, state-sponsored community investments strengthen Caroga's downtown revitalization, align with regional economic development, and enhance year-round quality of life.

The Town is also investing in building recreational trails and the Caroga Golf Clubhouse at the historic Nick Stoner Municipal Golf Course. This recreation hub, tourism destination, and community asset replaces the clubhouse destroyed by fire in 2020. With growing momentum in 2026, redevelopment of the *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* — funded by New York State Department of State and guided by robust community engagement and strategic Smart Growth principles — is also shaping revitalization, while preserving Caroga's unique character and natural assets, for generations to come.

A Half Century of Community Planning

"The character of development and intensity of land use should reflect a 'recreational community' growth pattern." This approach will preserve the small-town lifestyle and recreational potential valued by the Town and Planning Boards, while identifying areas for recreational development that align with municipal services.

—1978 *Town of Caroga Land Use Plan*



1971

In 1971, New York State passed the historic *Adirondack Park Agency (APA) Act*, followed by the 1973 *Adirondack Land Use and Development Plan*. Local Caroga businessman and State Assembly Whip Glenn Harris led deals to ensure home-rule modifications of land regulations in hamlets to meet economic and development needs of towns and residents.

1978

In 1978, the first *Town of Caroga Land Use Plan* was completed with State funding. Local resident volunteers collaborated with professional Fulton County planners to complete a community survey and special reports to guide the proposed *Plan*. The first *Town of Caroga Zoning Ordinance* that followed was adopted by the Town Board July 17, 1979.

1980

In 1980, the Adirondack Park Agency passed Caroga's Agency-Approved Local Land Use Plan (ALLUP). This transferred review and approval authority of a large class of local land development activities from the APA to local officials appointed by the Town of Caroga.

2002

In 2002, the revised *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* advanced the community's vision and goals to build on current assets. The *Plan* aimed to guide economic growth and development while preserving Caroga's environment, character, and life quality.

2011

In 2011, the Planning Board revised the *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan* with a new vision for Town Center, featuring dense mixed-use redevelopment beginning with Sherman's Park revitalization. This plan was adopted January 22, 2013, followed by a revised *Land Use Map* and *Zoning Ordinance* that went into effect January 1, 2019.

2013

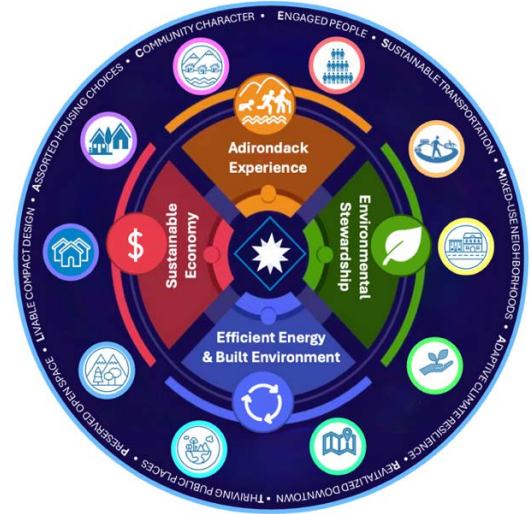
In 2013, the Town worked with Cornell Planner Roger Trancik on the *Hamlets of the Adirondacks H3P2 Planning Grant Project*, using Smart Growth principles to explore uses for the Sherman's Park community anchor. In December 2014, George Abdella donated Sherman's Park to the Town, and in 2019 he transferred it to Caroga Arts Collective.

2026

In 2026, Caroga was awarded a New York Department of State Smart Growth Community Planning Grant to redevelop the *Town of Caroga Comprehensive Plan*. Funding supports the Town's community-driven Smart Growth planning process to advance targeted reinvestments and to reclaim Caroga as a great destination and attractive place to live.

Caroga's Old Growth & Smart Future

Caroga's history demonstrates that Smart Growth is not a new framework imposed from outside the community. Rather, it is deeply rooted in more than a century of local experience adapting to changing economic, environmental, and community needs. In the twenty-first century, Caroga's approach naturally aligns with New York State's Smart Growth planning framework, because it reflects the enduring Adirondack tradition of protecting natural resources, strengthening economic opportunity, incorporating efficient innovations, and preserving the community experience and character for future generations.



The next step is to weave enduring strengths into a comprehensive vision for the future that positions Caroga to reemerge as New York State's North Star in the Mohawk Valley.

During the nineteenth century, Caroga's economy prospered through leather tanning and timber harvesting. As industrialization transformed the regional economy, visionary local leaders recognized that the Town's greatest long-term assets were not its mills, but its lakes, forests, and exceptional quality of life. Beginning in 1843, Caroga's tanning and forest product industries flourished through the Financial Panic of 1857 and the Civil War, supported by the Mohawk Valley's robust early production and transportation networks.

After the remarkable success of Claflin's Wheelerville Tannery, the Claflin family invested more than \$500,000 — approximately \$10 million in today's dollars — to construct the five-story Canada Lake House, an Adirondack resort that opened in 1868. Twenty years later, the family articulated a remarkably forward-looking vision. In an 1887 letter to their Johnstown attorney, J.M. Dudley, they proposed surveying and developing lakefront properties for seasonal residents, while preserving the surrounding majestic forests:

"We think the lakes and the country about have natural attractions enough about to draw summer residents and excursionists. And as population increases in the valleys, there is a demand for such a place to go" (McMartin, p. 50).

Rather than attempting to preserve an aging hemlock tanning economy as chemical innovations and banking trusts transformed the industry, the Claflin family chose to pivot. They redirected investment toward forest conservation, outdoor recreation, sustainable tourism, and economic opportunity. Guided by a clear long-term strategic vision, they helped establish Caroga's accessible Adirondack destination built upon shimmering lakes, expansive forests, and the enduring value of the Forever Wild Adirondack Forest Preserve.

Nearly a century later, local historian and Caroga resident Barbara McMartin reached much the same conclusion in the preface to *Caroga: An Adirondack Town Recalls Its Past*:

"From the vantage of this bicentennial year, the destiny of the town lies in the beauty of its lakes and streams and mountains. The potential for recreation is unbounded and unmatched within the Adirondacks" (p. iii).

McMartin observed industries come and go, but Caroga's enduring strengths remained in its natural landscape and its opportunities for recreation, tourism, and community life.

Those same lessons were part of Caroga's first *Land Use Plan* in 1978, which recommended:

"The character of development and intensity of land use should reflect a 'recreational community' growth pattern" (p. 5).

Together, these milestones reveal a consistent pattern of planning around enduring local assets. Long before "Smart Growth" entered planning vocabularies, Caroga was practicing its core principles by protecting natural resources, supporting recreation-based economic development, preserving community character, and planning for long-term sustainability.

Sherman's Park on West Caroga Lake offers another example of this practical tradition of natural adaptation. Over generations, the public space has evolved from a dance hall and amusement park into a performing arts destination, demonstrating that successful places remain relevant by responding to changing community needs while honoring local history.

Caroga's location within the Adirondack Park further reinforces this legacy. For more than a century, the Park has demonstrated that environmental conservation, private property, working landscapes, outdoor recreation, and vibrant communities can coexist. Living entirely within the Park has required ongoing collaboration, adaptation, and long-range planning — principles that closely parallel New York State's Smart Growth framework.

Viewed through this history, Smart Growth is not a rigid checklist but a practical planning process grounded in local values and informed decision-making. It encourages public engagement, coordinated investment, and thoughtful stewardship to revitalize downtown, strengthen public spaces, expand housing opportunities, improve mobility, make efficient use of existing infrastructure, and preserve the natural and cultural resources that naturally make Caroga the scenic place and engaged community that it is.

Caroga's comprehensive planning initiatives grow from the old roots of this long tradition. The process begins with local knowledge, draws upon an inventory of community assets, evaluates lessons of past experiences, and adapts to changing conditions. By strengthening outdoor recreation, housing choices, core infrastructure, environmental stewardship, and economic opportunity while preserving the Town's distinctive Adirondack Experience for all, the Plan can carry forward values that have guided Caroga for more than a century.

In this sense, Smart Growth in Caroga reflects both nature's old growth and the Town's smart future. Like an old-growth forest, Caroga's strengths are resilience, diversity, and abilities to renew itself across generations. The future depends not on giving up the past, but learning from it. By investing in lasting assets and adapting to changing circumstances, Caroga can renew the Town's Adirondack lakes, wild forests, gathering places, livable neighborhoods, and community spirit that have long shaped the local Adirondack Experience. By weaving together natural and enduring strengths into a shared vision in each generation, Caroga can continue to honor its Adirondack legacy while creating a resilient, attractive, and sustainable future for all. **That's Caroga's Old Growth and Smart Future.**

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