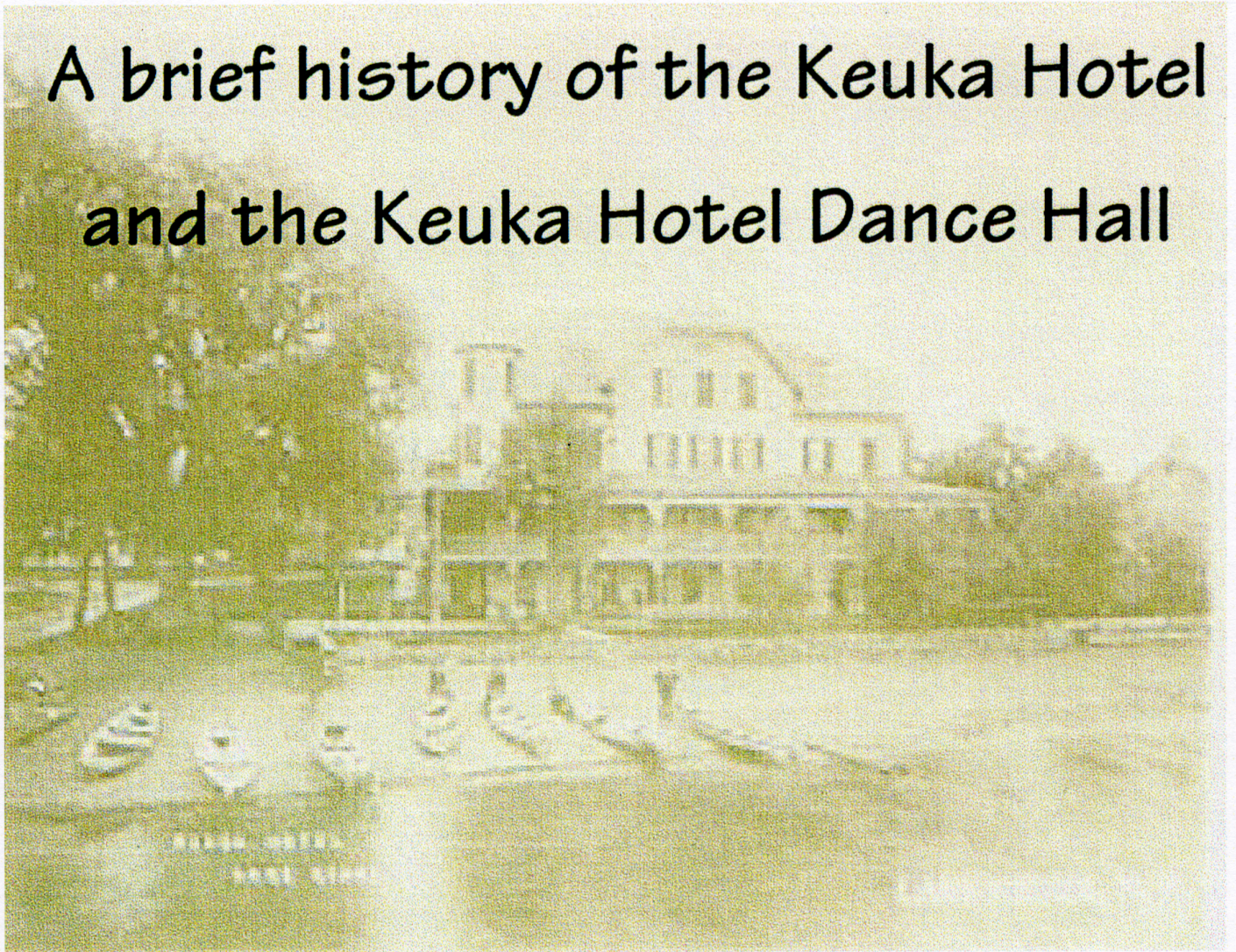


A brief history of the Keuka Hotel and the Keuka Hotel Dance Hall



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2001

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Introduction

I first became interested in the Keuka Hotel and Keuka Hotel Dance Hall in 1965 when, as a kid playing and fishing with friends, I discovered the abandoned Hotel. As an adult, I took up New England Contra Dancing and attended a dance weekend in Florida at the Gulfport Casino, which was built out over the water of Tampa Bay. It got me to thinking about the Keuka Hotel and associated Dance Hall. I thought it must have been a wonderful thing to attend a dance in a Dance Hall out over the waters of a lake, and I imagined on a warm summer's evening with the windows on the Dance Hall open to the warm evening breezes blowing through the building as dancers enjoyed themselves. This provoked my interest in the Keuka Hotel and Dance Hall.

Credits

Thanks both to John Lonergan, Town of Wayne Historian and Bob Canfield, a volunteer with Wayne Township. They gave me unlimited access to the Township's Keuka Hotel files. Bob and Susan Black edited the draft version of this booklet. Also, John Ormsby and Dick Sheerer, both of the Steuben County Historical Department who were most helpful in providing many of the photos and related information as well. Also, thanks to Rachel Brown of the Hammondsport Library who was most helpful in providing information as well as several photos for this booklet.

However there is usually one person who provides support, encouragement and acts as a listen board in any project of this type. Tom Packard of Virginia filled that void for me. I have to thank him for providing me information as well as various photos and postcards of the Keuka Hotel. His interest in this project and encouragement from beginning to end was an immeasurable help.

History of Dance Halls

My research into the history of Dance Halls, their location, types of dances conducted, and their period of operation (the first half of the 20th Century) results in a very short list. Bowen (1917) presents a strong case that the Dance Halls in Chicago were havens for children drinking, dancing too close to your partner and

unhealthy restroom facilities. She offers sample resolutions that could be passed by regulatory agencies to make the Dance Halls safer, but she does not inventory or mention any particular dance halls.

The only other reference to dance halls found was in the Hammondsport newspaper of July 4, 1940. The Keuka Grape Belt (1940) reports that a shooting at the Baker Dance Pavilion on Lake Salubria near Bath, NY, but does not list the reason for this shooting or whether a dance was in progress. The article states that one man shot another thorough the shoulder and was in favorable condition.

However the Keuka Hotel Dance Hall might not have experienced these types of problems for several reasons. First of all it was apparently a seasonal operation, open just during warm weather. Secondly, it was an isolated site, accessible in the early days only by horse-pulled carriages and steamboat. The attendees at the dances were probably hotel guests, older than the general population and may have been better behaved. One can only assume this though.

The only other dance hall I discovered in the literature was a reference to one in Watkins Glen, NY. The Penn Yan Chronicle-Express, Anonymous (1935) reports on the flood damage of July 1935 and mentions that the Reilly Brothers, musicians from Penn Yan who owned a dance hall, Glen Eden. It was located at the foot of Aunt Sarah's falls along the state road in Montour Falls. Although the 1935 flood did not damage the dance hall itself, the raging waters apparently carried the orchestra platform away.

Written history of the Keuka Hotel

Keuka, NY is located in Wayne Township, Steuben County, NY. It is situated on the east side of Keuka Lake, approximately half way between Hammondsport and Penn Yan, NY (**Figure 1**). The address of the Keuka Hotel was 1241 East Lake Road, out of Penn Yan, NY. Gleason (1971) reports that the hamlet of Keuka was originally named Oshkosh. When the Penn-Yan-Dresden Canal was opened, Keuka became a busy shipping port for grain and logs. Stands of white pine surrounded the region and were in great demand, especially for ship spears, as it was the day of clipper ships. Keuka Lake had 3 grain houses, two at the foot of Keuka Hill Road.

Gleason further reports that Keuka did not change much until the advent of automobiles in the 1890's. There were 2 hotels and a general store in Keuka. The resident James Washbourn responded to the change by selling small parcels of land adjacent to the existing James Benton Hotel. The plan called for the move of the Benton Hotel Building. Then he began construction of a new building, the Keuka Hotel, which was erected in 1893.

Anonymous (c.1895) describes several hotels including Grove Springs, the Ogoyago on the western shore near Bluff point, and the Keuka located on Keuka Lake. They then describe that the Keuka hotel is "kept by Washburn and Wright and is a far-famed fishing resort." They describe the hotel's location as nearest to fishing grounds in the lake and every season "the house is crowded with enthusiastic fisherman." The photo provided in the booklets shows a the Keuka Hotel as a large house (**Figure 2**). Anonymous (c. 1895) then states: "The place is home-like; the cuisine is unsurpassed. There is not quieter and better conduct place on the lake. There, the formalities of fashionable life may be discarded and genuine rest and recreation found."

In his book Steuben County History, Sherer (1996), includes a paragraph on the Hotel. He reports that James Washburn moved the Keuka House (mentioned above) to the Lake Road to live in while construction of the Keuka Hotel was in progress. Upon completion, the house was again moved to a spot south of the new hotel. This house was purchased in 1906 by Frank Switzer and became the Switzerland Inn.

In the early 1900's a Mr. A.J. Tracey owned the Keuka Hotel (Kresge 1974). Mr. Tracey would often walk across the street to visit Mrs. Young's cottage for free meals. Nelcoski (c. 1967) reports that Mrs. Young, a widow with two sons from Philadelphia, owned a summer cottage near the Keuka Hotel. During one of their many conversations, Mr. Tracey kidded Mrs. Young about the numerous free meals she served. He said that she ought to buy the Hotel and make them pay for their meals. Mrs. Young responded that "You draw up an option and I will." He walked over to his register, came back with a paper which she signed and that was it'. The purchase price was \$30,000.

In his article, Kresge (1974) states that when Mrs. Young took over the hotel in 1912, it was lit by kerosene. There was only one bathroom. Porcelain pitchers and washbasins stood on small tables in each room. Room and board

was \$5/day. Mrs. Young recalled cleaning at least 40 oil lamps a day before the hotel electrified with the public utilities in 1930. That would mean that light in the Keuka Hotel Dance Hall was provided by Kerosene for about 18 years.

During the succeeding years, fireplaces, bathrooms and a large kitchen were added. Mrs. Young also enclosed the open porches at the rear of the building and added dining spaces.

New York Governors Thomas E. Dewey and Franklin D. Roosevelt visited and perhaps were guests at the hotel, which was known for its tennis, croquet, badminton, swimming and sailing. At least 40 people were employed at the hotel during the summers, and were paid \$75/month, room and board.

Gleason (1971) further reports that in the 1940's he befriended a Mr. Curtis Kaufelt who was a frequent guest at the hotel. Mr. Kaufelt had played with a Corning orchestra several summers at the Keuka Hotel. His pay was \$5 per week plus keep. "Yes", he said, "I never enjoyed anything more. We played for lunch and dinner and a couple of dances per week. The rest of the time we spent boating and swimming and riding the steamers."

Apparently, slot or gambling machines were located at the Keuka Hotel. Gleason states, "The first nickel machine that I ever saw was at the Keuka Hotel. I was about 10 years old and it sort of fascinated me to see men put a nickel or two in and get a handful back. The temptation became so great that I resolved to try my luck; even though it meant a four mile hike home and back to get my savings, which were about 35 cents." He did not win anything and went home without his 35 cents.

In 1940, the Keuka Hotel was listed as a seaplane anchorage site (Sherer, 1996, **Figure 7**). That same year, New York State Route #54 was rebuilt as a 2-lane concrete highway by passing Keuka Landing on the east (Sherer, 1995 and The Keuka Grape Belt, 1940). By 1948, work was nearing completion on the north-south road between Penn Yan and Hammondsport. The Hotel operated until 1968 and Mrs. Young passed away in 1969. The Keuka Hotel was demolished in late 1974.

The "Original" and "Reconstructed" Keuka Hotel Dance Halls

The exact year of the construction of the Dance Hall is not clear. Nelcoski (c1967) reports in an interview with Mrs. Young, that it was about 1914 when she decided to make certain improvements. About the same time, Mrs. Young had a retaining wall constructed in front of the Hotel to protect it against high waters. She said the Dance Hall was constructed about the same time. This would mean that the Dance Hall was lit with kerosene for 14 years.

When the Keuka Hotel Dance Hall was constructed, it was built on piers driven into the water and apparently connected to the hotel by a canopied or enclosed walkway. It was oriented in an east-west direction, being located mostly over the Lake (**Figure 10**). Dances were held there in the warmer months. The Dance Hall had approximately 17 removable "wooden windows." These wooden windows probably were kept in place during non-operational times to keep rain, snow and intruders out. On dance occasions during acceptable weather, they were removed so dancers could see the lake and the surrounding hills. Figure 10 best illustrates the number of piers and the wooden windows.

The Dance Hall operated until July 1935 when a flood apparently ripped part of the Dance Hall away, soaked the dance floor wood and rendered it unrepairable. The decision was made to protect the Dance Hall from further freezing or high water damage by moving it closer to the shore and rotating 90 degrees, along a north-south axis (**Figures 13, 14 and 16**). Work commenced and the building was apparently "moved" to shore and the dance floor itself replaced. The refurbished Dance Hall was operated until the mid 1940's.

The hey day of the Dance Hall heard the "Big Band" era and Rudy Valley and Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians played there. It was also said that Hoagy Carmichael, composer of "Stardust" wrote the score for that popular number while playing in a band at the hotel. The Keuka Hotel Dance Hall was converted into a Roller Skating Rink when the sounds of the Big Bands were no longer popular and the jitterbug and roller-skating became the craze. In the summer, Sherer (1996) states that the bands were usually made up of college students, providing the music for thousands of dancers.

Although no actual dimensions were found, it seems that Dance Hall could have measured approximately 75 X 40 feet. Also the interior of the Dance Hall

was lined at least on two sides with bench like seating. These seats were separated from the dance floor by a short (3 foot tall) barrier as shown in **Figure 11**.

Steamboat and Railroad Transportation

Transportation to the Keuka Lake area were provided by the Erie, Fall Brook, Pine Creek, Northern Central and Bath and Hammondsport Railways (Anonymous, c. 1895) in the late 1800's. Once in the region, usually in Penn Yan or Hammondsport, transportation to hotels and other locations on the lake was often provided by steamboat. Again, Anonymous (c. 1895) listed the times the steamers left and returned to Hammondsport and Penn Yan.

The early 20th Century was the heyday of the steamboats as automobile transportation was still relatively new. The steamboats "Steuben", "Yates", and the "Mary Bell" docked daily at the "Keuka Landing" (Kresge, 1974). The "Mary Bell" name was changed to the "Penn Yan" later.

Advertisements

Printed materials, in the form of advertisements give additional insight to the Keuka Hotel. Keuka Hotel (c. 1905) brochure is titled "Keuka Hotel on Keuka Lake, A popular and delightful summer resort". The name of the Proprietor on the cover is listed as A.J. Tracey. The booklet measures approximately 5 x 7 inches. It contains 7 photos or illustrations and descriptions of the Keuka Lake wine interests, it railroad facilities, steamboat services and fishing opportunities. The second booklet (Keuka Hotel, c.1912) is almost exactly the same but lists B.M. Young as its proprietor.

Another information booklet (Keuka Hotel, c. 1920) is a very brief two sided flyer measuring 7 x 11 inches. It presents a small map of the Finger Lakes, 6 photos of the Keuka Hotel and Keuka Hotel Dance Hall as well as text extolling the positives of the Hotel. It is interesting to note that the flyer refers to the Dance Hall as the "Dance Casino". In other publications (see **Figure 13**), the Dance Hall is referred to as the "Pavilion." There are no publication dates on any of the three publications listed above.

In searching local newspaper and other publications, precious few ads are found. One appeared in the publication "Hammondsport...On Lake Keuka". There is no publisher information and no date is given. However from viewing the photographs and reading the text, a probable year would have been 1935. In that publication, the Keuka Hotel ad states in part "Your Vacation Is An Annual Investment. It Can Pay You The Biggest Dividends At The Keuka Hotel. Whether for the Day, the Week End or Longer. East Shore Drive on Lake Keuka, Opposite the Bluff. Dancing Every Night But Sunday"

However an advertisement in The Keuka Grape Belt (1931) details dance information further. In part it states, "Dancing every night except Sunday. Sat nights 9:00-1:00, \$1.50 per couple. Other nights 9:00 – 12:00, \$0.75 per couple."

Another publication distributed around Keuka Lake was the Lake Keuka Directory, which was published from at least 1949 – 1965, listing mailing address and telephone numbers. No advertisements for the Keuka Hotel were found in the Lake Keuka Directories of 1949, 1957, 1961 and 1965.

Other Dance or Dance-type Halls on Keuka Lake: The Keuka Yacht Club, the ARK and The Lakeside

The decade of the 1880's witnessed a more permanent establishment of Keuka Yacht Club (KYC) activity on the lake. With a new slate of officers headed by Commodore O. C. Knapp (recorded in a second "the original minutes of KYC" book July 18, 1880) annual regattas of some size and prestige were held. The KYC (from the KYC History as posted at www.keukayachtclub.com) states that first regatta, Friday August 20, 1880, at the Ark in Penn Yan, offered prizes of \$25 to \$3 for the five winning places. By 1884, for the fifth annual regatta, 20 yachts were registered for 2:00 PM races on Thursdays, July 17, 24, and 31.

The location of these regattas, known as the Ark, has served as the base for many of KYC's races during its hundred-plus years. Just beyond the outskirts of Penn Yan, about midway between Red Jacket Park and the golf course, the Ark is noted on all the hand-sketched maps of old. There are two versions of its naming. Alderman Gleason told that it was a very practical matter, as with the naming of Arkport: formerly a boatyard was established on that location, and

from that enterprise the reference to arks remained. William Reed Gordon, in "Keuka Lake Memories," proposes a second story. The Crooked Lake Steamboat Company in 1835 launched the first steamboat to ply Keuka's waters, The Keuka. She was a tunnel-hull boat, 80 feet overall, constructed at Hammondsport. Her wood-fired boilers turned a paddle wheel between the two hulls and attained an eight-knot speed in favorable conditions.

The Keuka was unfortunately put out of commission after about a decade's service by an intoxicated pilot driving her aground near the foot of the lake. She was subsequently towed to Penn Yan and dismantled. The pilot house was purchased by Calvin Carpenter for \$25 and used by him as the nucleus for a summer resort. This resort, attracting many generations of young people for picnics and courting, became known as the Ark by the presence of The Keuka's salvaged pilot house.

In any case, the Ark was something of a spa, with its everflowing sulphur water. A rustic booth was built over the gusher, with seats alongside. Many visitors drank the waters for a variety of ills; the fumes carried for a hundred yards downwind.

Also referred to as Bimini Springs, the Ark was a steamboat landing. Prior to 1897, in times of the Penn Yan harbor being iced over, this was their northernmost terminus. With the opening of the Penn Yan-Keuka Park-Branchport Electric Railway in 1897, however, the west side landing was favored for the transportation connections, and the Ark was used only when a signal was raised at the pier.

The Ark reached its peak of popularity around the turn of the century when a dance floor and many stalls for concessions catered to the summer trade. In time the structure over the water disintegrated and the land was sold for the use of a well-built cottage on the premises. Today a large old house with fieldstone fireplaces stands on this location. It is not known how long the dance floor lasted, how many dances were held there or other associated information.

Another location that had a roller skating rink was the Lakeside on the west side of the lake. The Lakeside Restaurant stands today (2001) in the same location about 6 miles north of Hammondsport.

Suggestions for further research

This booklet touches on the History of the Keuka Hotel and Dance Hall. As I mentioned earlier, there were at least two other Dance Halls on Keuka, the Lakeside and the ARK. Further research about their backgrounds would be helpful. Also, this leads to the question "were there dance Halls on any other of the Finger Lakes (Cayuga, Seneca, Canandaigua for example)? Also, there are no know photos of the interior of the Dance Hall during a dance or showing any bands playing. If photos exist, they could add significantly to the historical record.

Illustrations

As one can tell, over half of this booklet is composed of photos, postcards and other illustrations. These tell most of the history of the Keuka Hotel and Keuka Hotel Dance Hall. These illustrations, in chronological order show a progression from a "House" (**Figure 1**) to a Hotel (**Figure 2**) to a Hotel and Dance Hall (**Figure 6**), through winter ice problems (**Figures 8 and 9**) to abandonment (**Figure 16**). Note that only 3 of the 16 illustrations have people in them. Other photos with dancers or patrons of the Hotel would add greatly to the history of the Hotel and Dance Hall, especially for dance historians.

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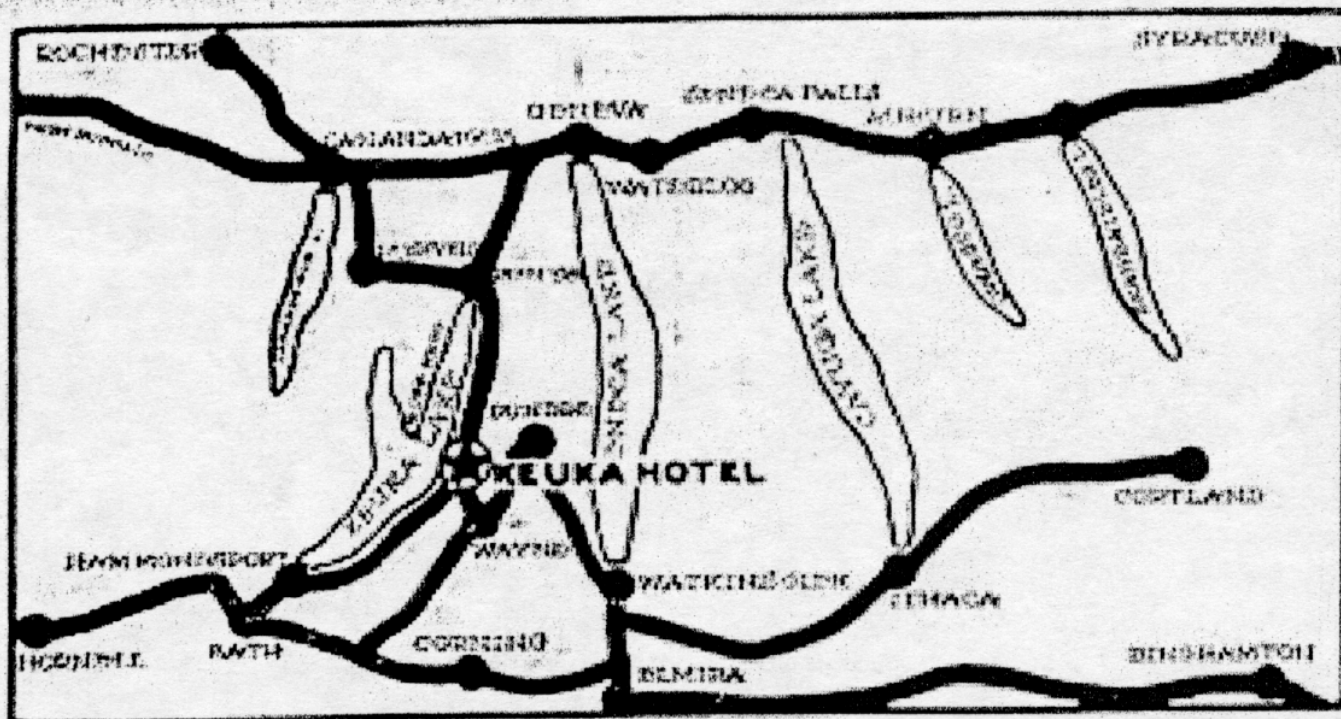


Figure 1. Map of the Finger Lakes Region of New York State, showing Seneca, Cayuga Keuka and other lakes. The cities of Elmira in the south and Rochester in the north are indicated. The star on the east side of Keuka Lake indicates the location of the Keuka Hotel. Source: The Keuka Hotel: An Ideal Summer Resort, c.1920. Provided by Tom Packard.



Figure 2. Photo of the "Keuka House" shows what looks like two buildings in the center of the photo. The building at the left was apparently the "Keuka House" and was eventually moved towards the south, remodeled and became the Switzerland Inn, a popular restaurant and establishment for over 100 years. At that time, the "House" was apparently a fishing "resort" and was "kept by Washburn & Wright", according to Anonymous (c.1895). The second building was apparently moved to the north and used as a cottage. The lot remaining was used to construct the Keuka Hotel. Photo from the book "Lake Keuka", Anonymous (c. 1895). Photo courtesy of the Hammondsport, NY Library.

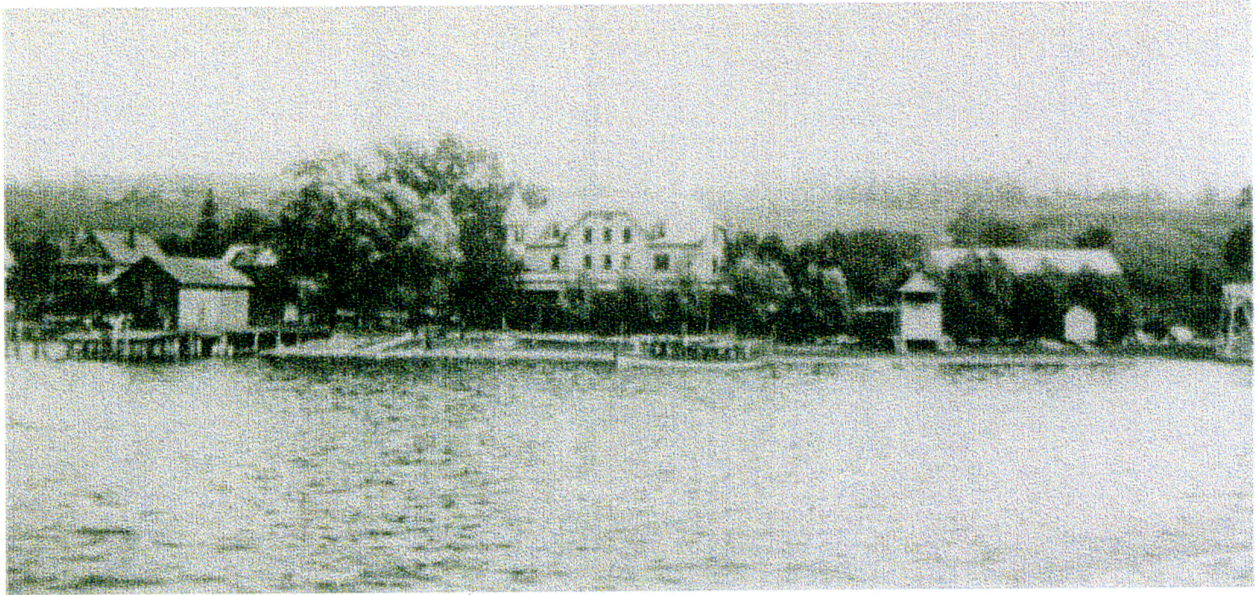


Figure 3 a and b. (a.) Black and white photo of the Keuka Hotel (top), taken from Keuka Lake, circa 1905. Shot shows the Boat Landing at the left, Hotel in the center and beach in the front and right. Note the Keuka Hotel Dance Hall had not yet been constructed at the time of the photo, and the trees in front of the Hotel are short. (b.) This photo was converted into a colorized postcard (bottom). Photo courtesy of the Hammondsport, NY Library.



Figure 4. Photo postcard of the Keuka Hotel Dock with the Steamer Steuben loading passengers at Keuka. Photo apparently taken from the shore in front of the Keuka Hotel. Postcard is dated 1908, so photo was probably taken c. 1906.

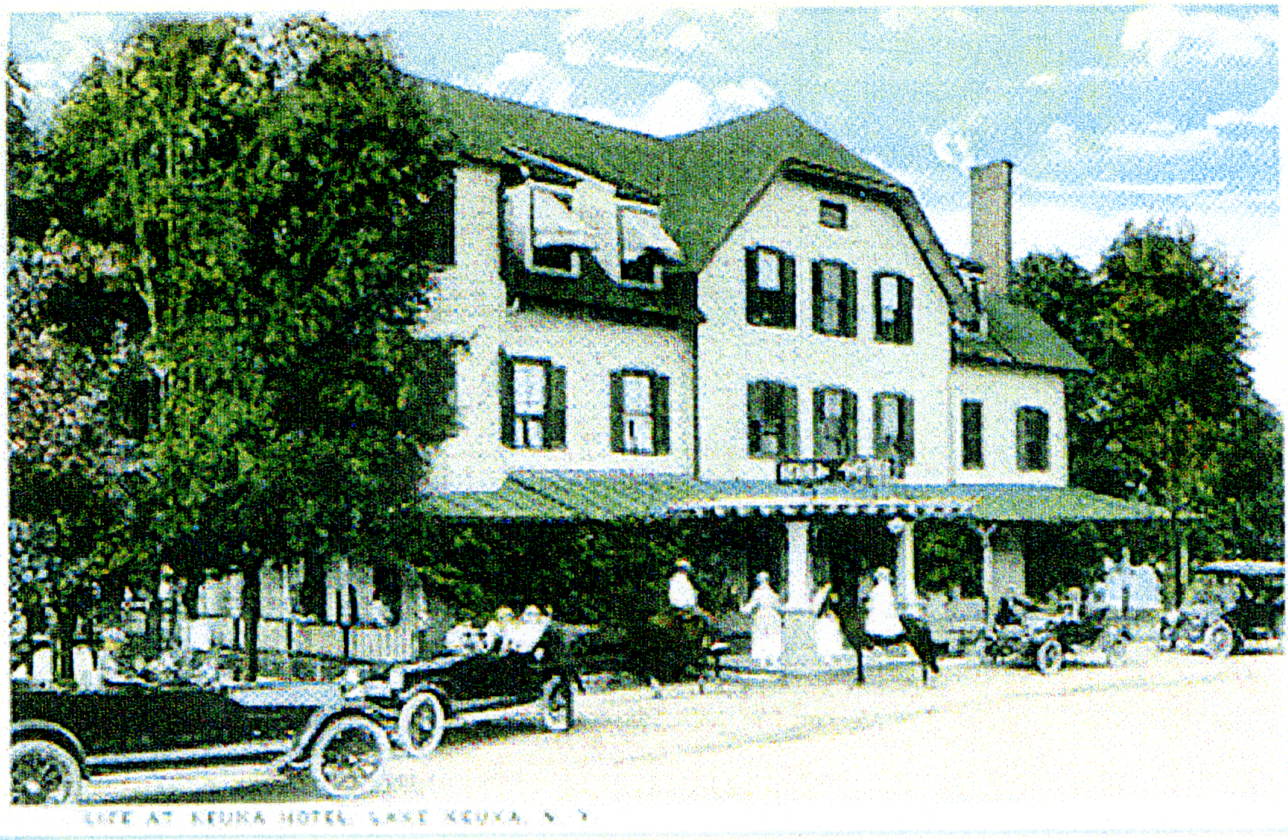


Figure 5. Colorized photo postcard of the East-facing side of the Keuka Hotel, that facing the road. Note a mix of both vehicles as well as horses apparently used in the transportation in and around the Hotel. Postcard is circa 1910. Note the shutters were open during the warmer months.

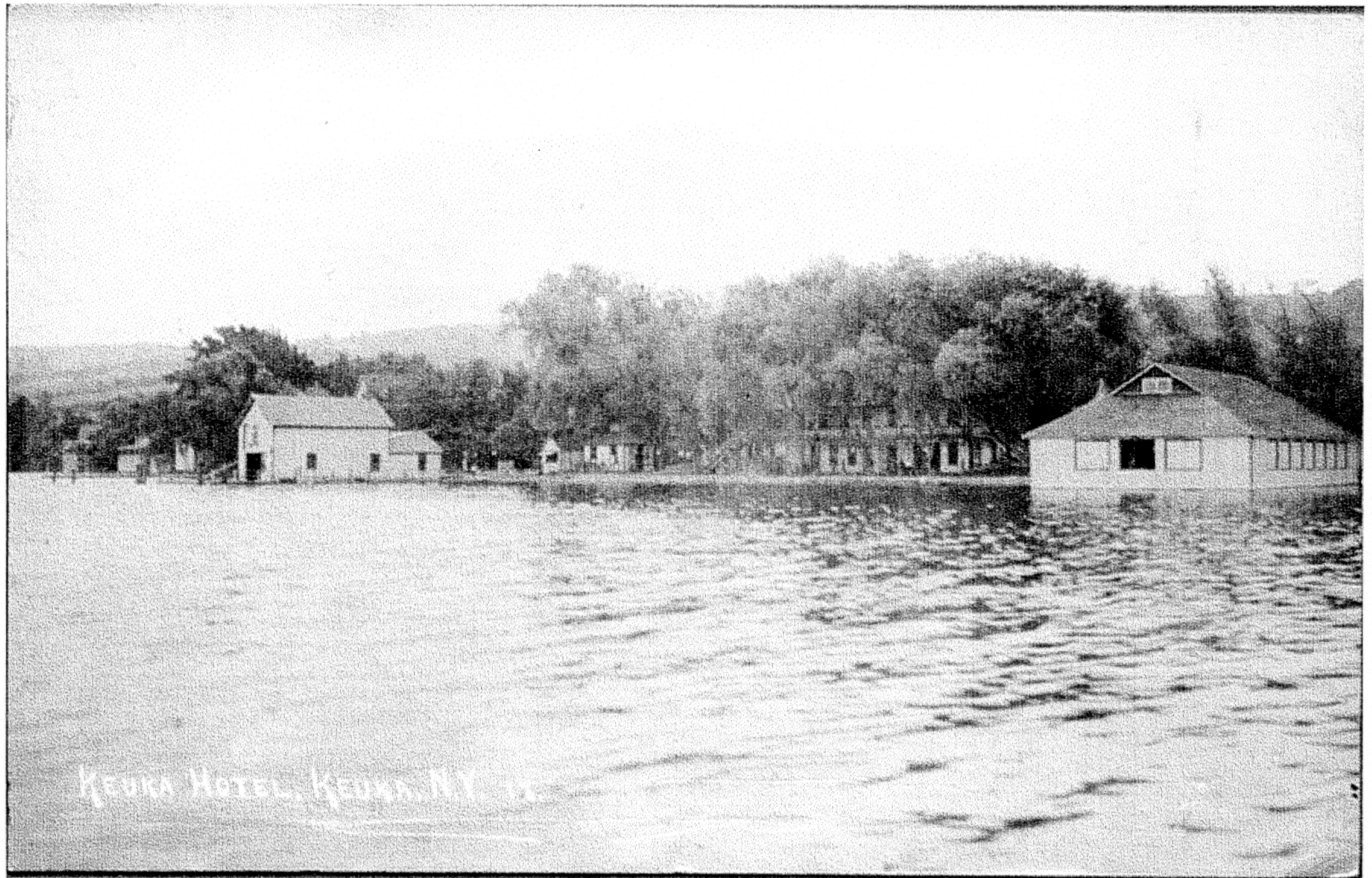


Figure 6. Black and white photo of the Keuka Hotel and Keuka Hotel Dance Hall taken from Keuka Lake. The Boat Landing is again on the left, the Hotel itself is partially obscured by trees in the center and the Dance Hall is on the right. Note that the Dance Hall is apparently oriented east-west, jutting out into the water. Also, one of the wooden windows apparently has been removed in the center of the west-facing wall of the Dance Hall. Finally, note that the water is very high, as none of the piling that the Dance Hall is constructed on are showing. Photo is circa 1930, courtesy of Tom Packard

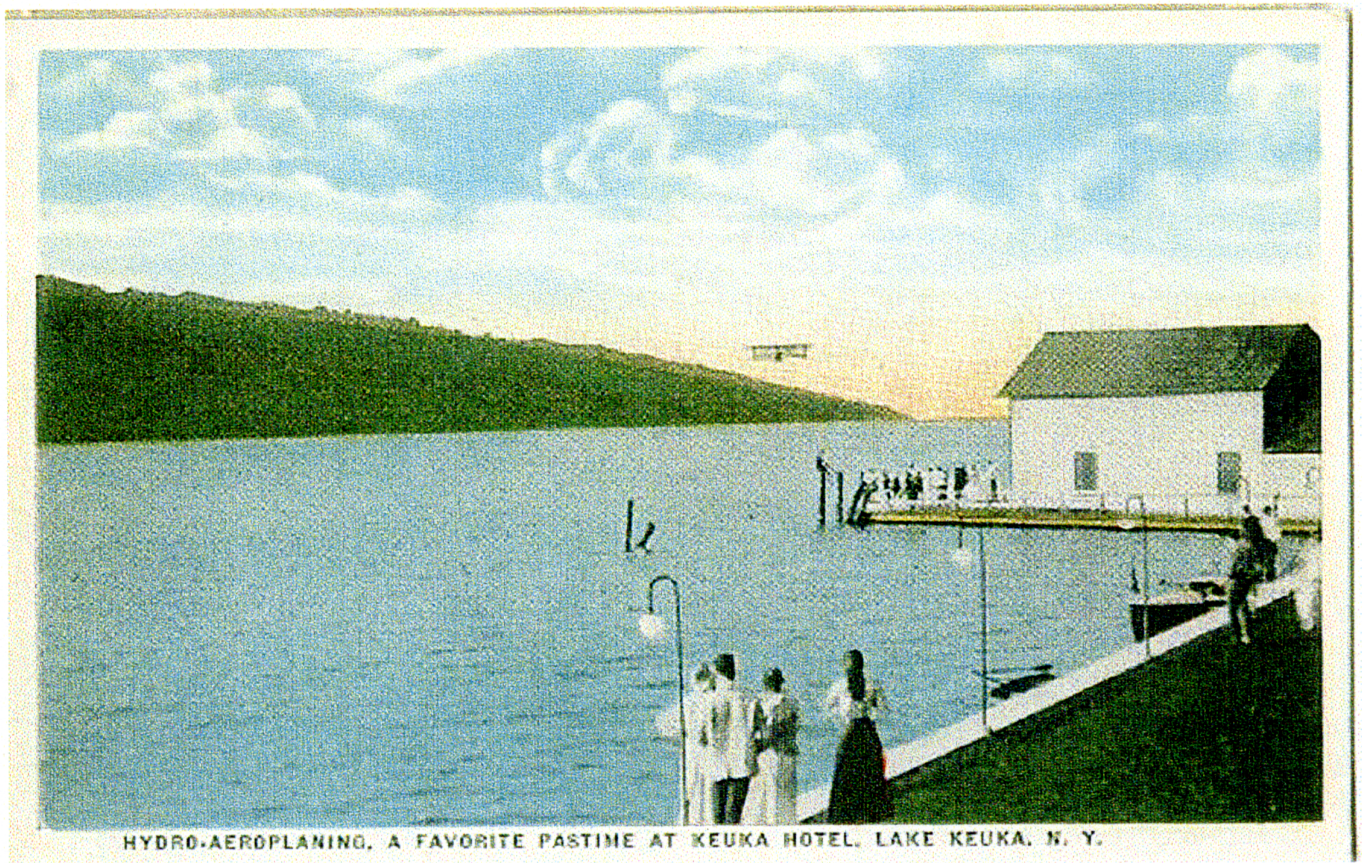


Figure 7. Colorized photo postcard showing people watching an aero plane on Keuka Lake. Photo is probably taken in front of the Keuka Hotel. Note the seawall in front of the card, an improvement made by the owner, Mrs. Young in about 1914. The Loading Dock, with no steamer present, is on the right of the photo. The card is postmarked 1923, so the photo was probably taken c. 1920.

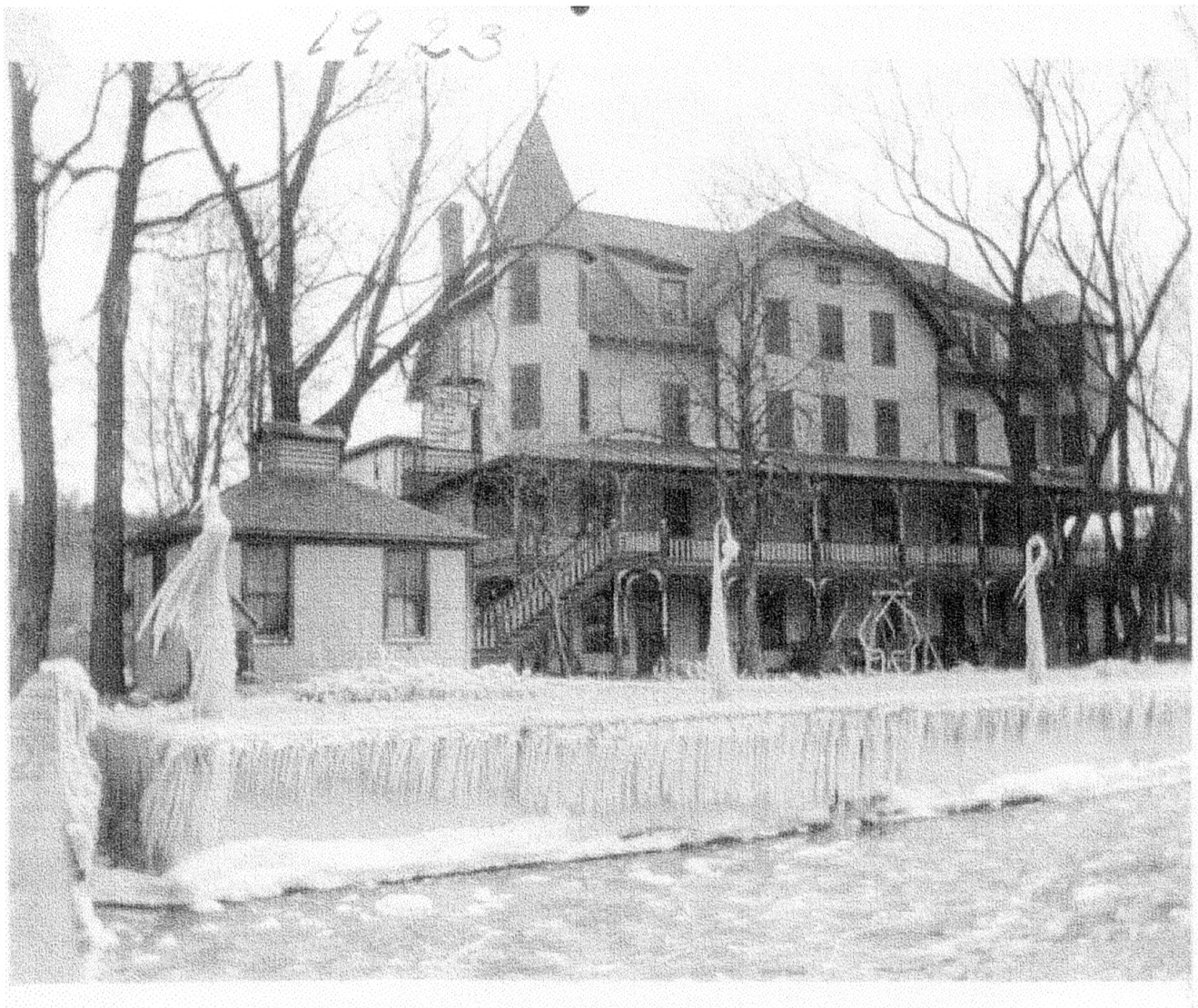


Figure 8. Black and white photo of Keuka Hotel during an ice storm in 1923. Photo shows the west facing side of the Hotel, that facing Keuka Lake. Note the shutters are closed on most of the windows to protect the building from the winter weather. Also, the ice has built up on the wall in front of the Hotel protecting it from high water. Courtesy of Wayne Township.



Figure 9. Photograph from 1923 showing ice surrounding the Keuka Dance Hall. Also, note the white vertical gusher in the center of the photo. This was the result of using dynamite to break up the ice which would in turn relieve pressure on the piers. Ice, if not broken up, would pressure the piers and would result in significant damage to the Dance Hall. Photo courtesy of Bob Canfield, Wayne Township.



Figure 10. Colorized photo postcard of the exterior of the Keuka Hotel Dance Hall, circa 1925. From a Keuka Lake Scenes fold-out booklet, similar to postcards, but approximately 7 two sided illustrations. Photo is looking north towards Penn Yan. Note the orientation of the Dance Hall is again East-West. Also, note certain wooden windows have been removed in order to gain visual access to the landscape.

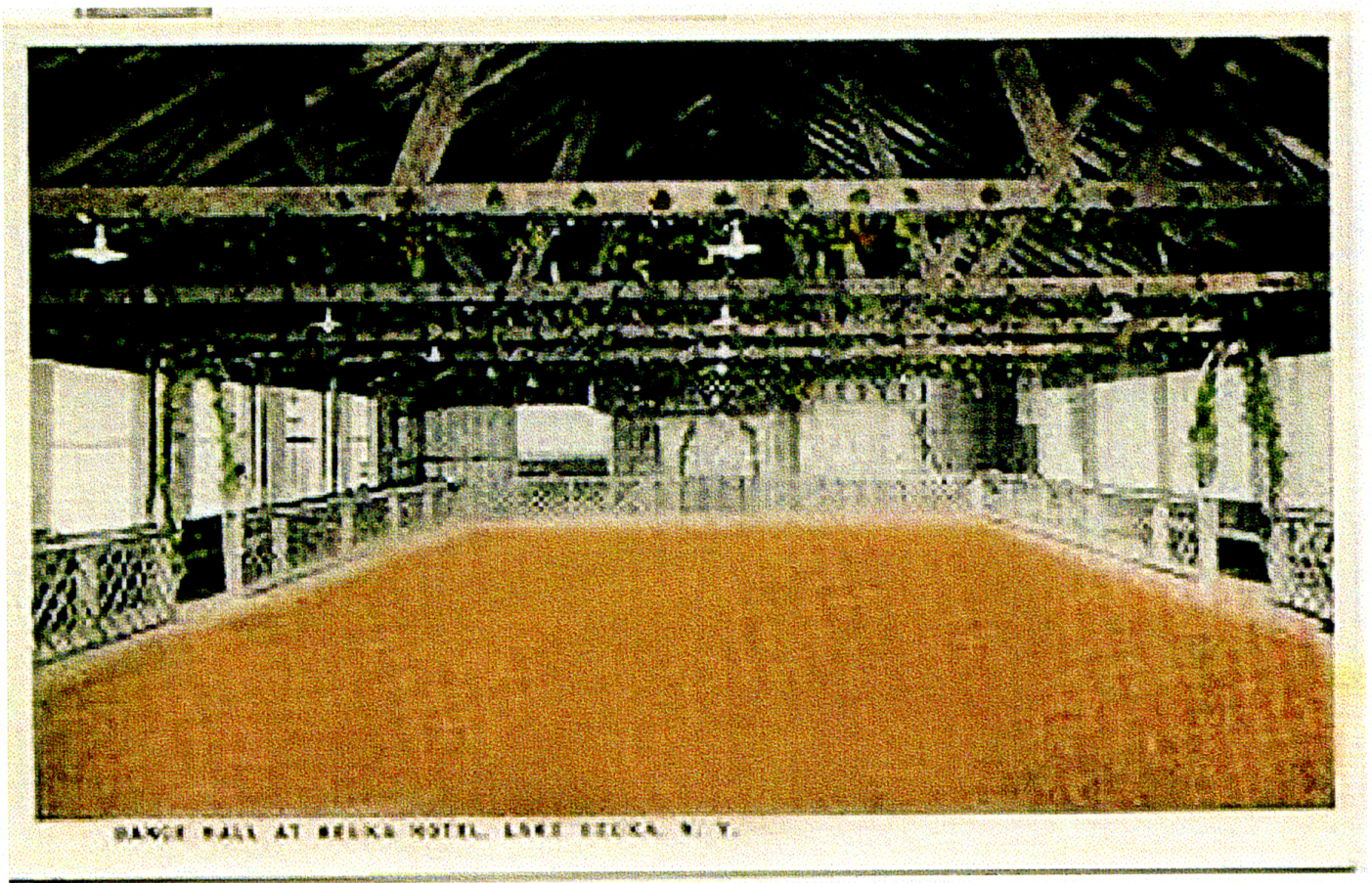


Figure 11. One of only two known illustration of the interior of the Keuka Hotel Dance Hall, circa 1930. This colorized photo postcard, the better quality of the two know illustrations, shows most of the wooden windows removed to have visual access to the surrounding landscape. However, in the colorization process, apparently all the surrounding landscapes were omitted or intentionally covered over. There are no known photos or illustration of dances in progress. Also, note that there are electric light fixtures in the ceiling beams indicating that the colorized photo postcard was taken after utilities were installed in about 1930. Reverse of this postcard states " 50286 - Printed for the Penn Yan Tobacco, Co., Penn Yan, NY."

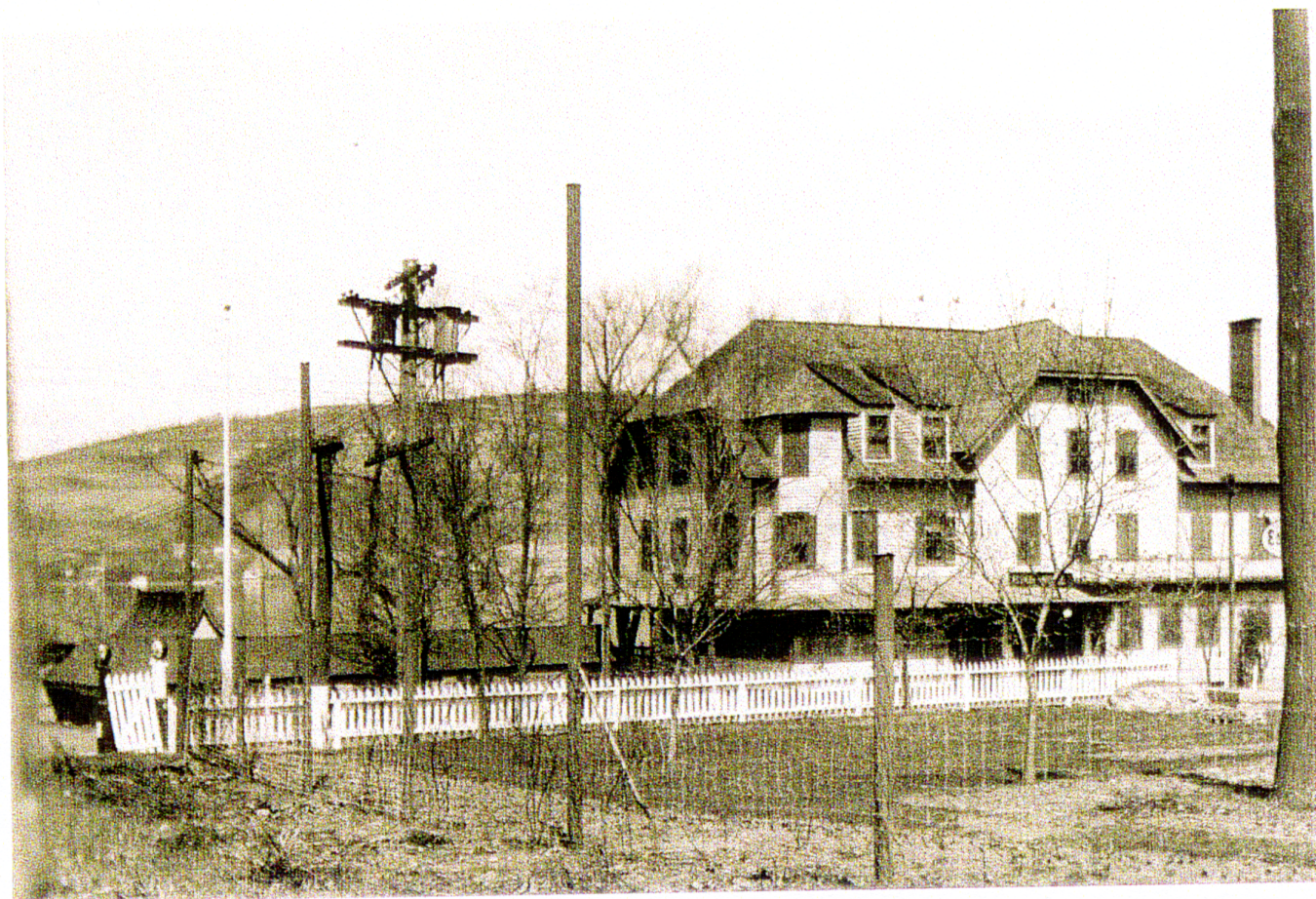


Figure 12. Photograph of the exterior of the Keuka hotel, taken c.1945. Note the shutters are still closed on the windows, indicating that it was probably autumn or spring. The Bluff Point is in the background. Photo is looking north/northwest. On the extreme right note the first two letters "ES", probably of the Esso Gas Station that was located there. Courtesy of the Steuben County Historian's Office.

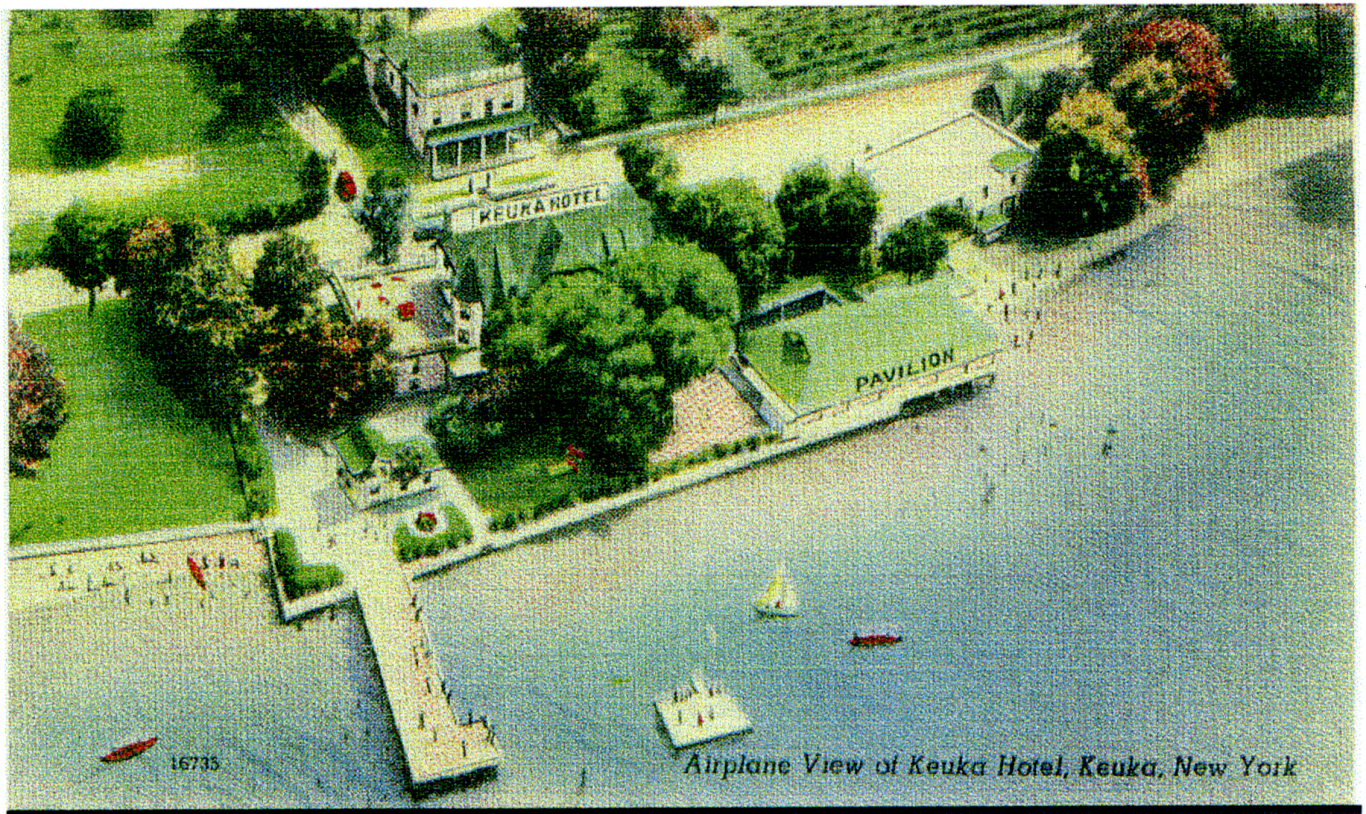


Figure 13. Aerial photo of the entire Keuka Hotel complex, including "refurbished" Keuka Hotel Dance Hall Pavilion on the right. The orientation of the Pavilion is north-south. Circa 1945. Note the Post Office across the street (to the east) and the long dock in the left portion of the card. The store was Sacketts and sold groceries as well as a Post Office.

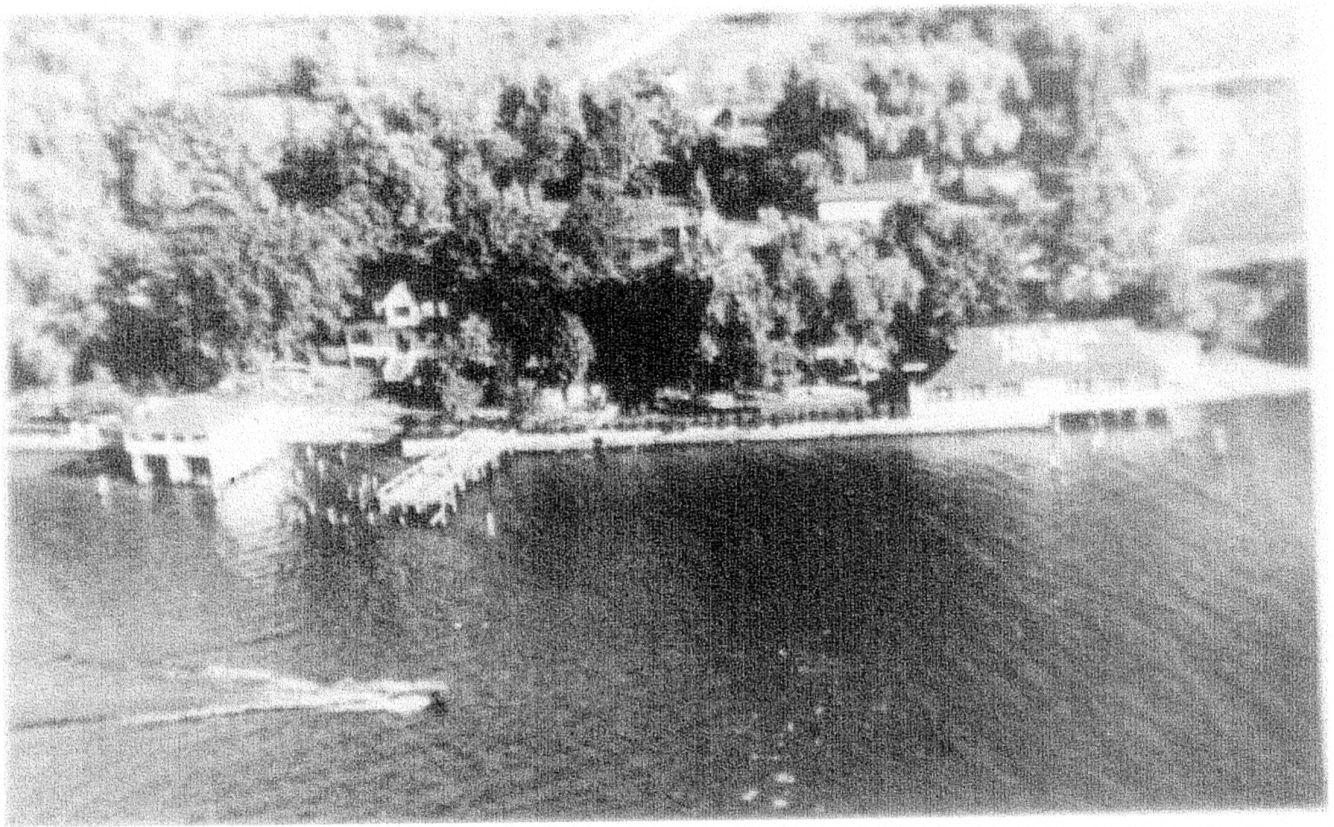


Figure 14. Aerial photo of the entire Keuka Hotel site, taken about 1960. The Keuka Hotel is in the center of the photograph and the words "Keuka Hotel" have been emblazoned on the roof of the Dance Hall Pavilion. Note the steamboat landing dock remains, but the building has been removed. Provided by the Steuben County Historian's Office.



Figure 15. Photo of the bar area of the Keuka Hotel, c 1950. This photo shows a mural/painting of the Bluff over the bar. The Bluff is the hill which separates the east and west branches of the northern portion of Keuka Lake. Sailboats also appear on the mural. Photo courtesy of the Steuben County Historian's Office.

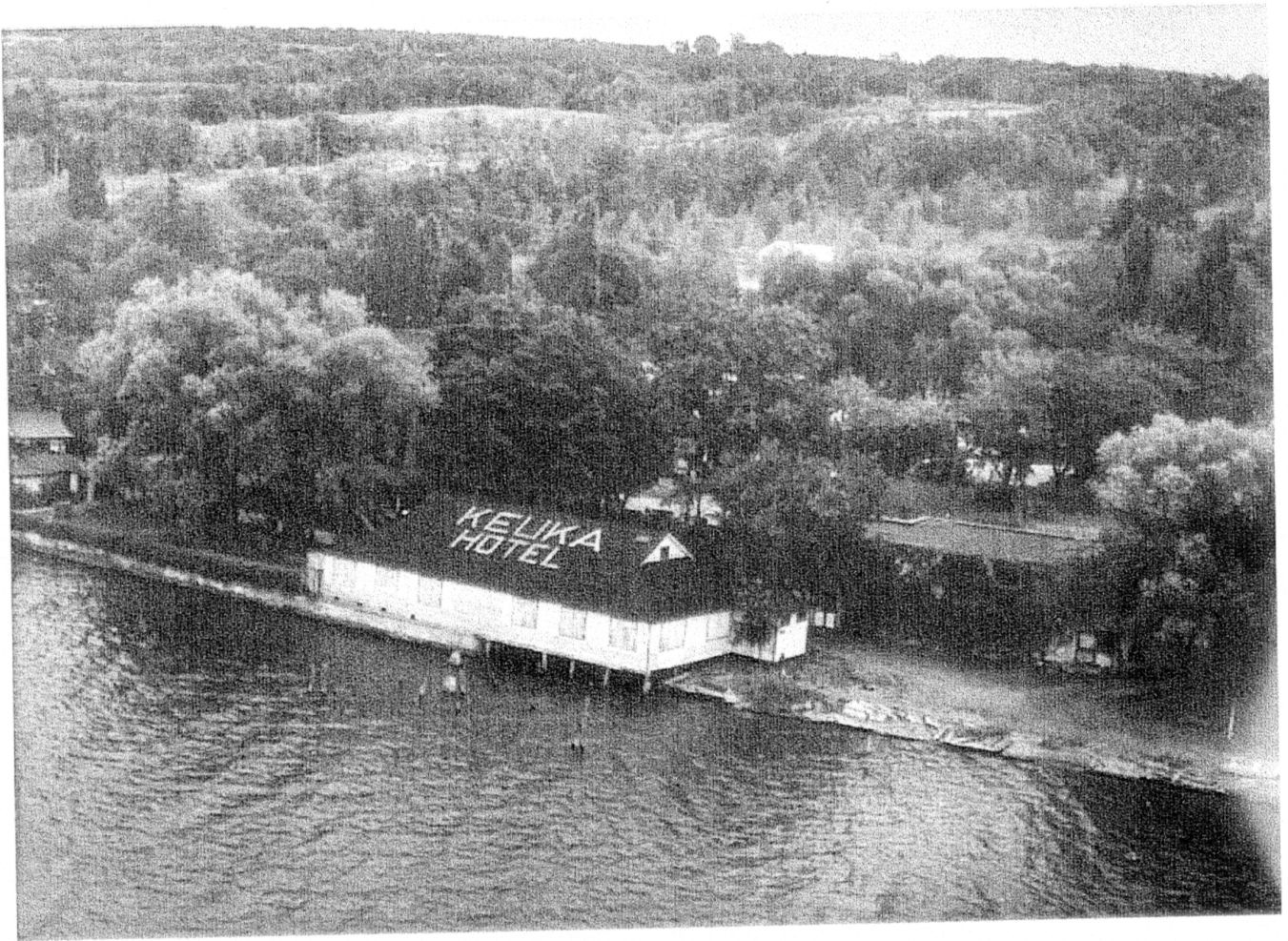


Figure 16. Aerial photograph of the Keuka Dance Hall Pavilion taken in about 1960. The words "Keuka Hotel" are emblazoned on the roof of the Dance Hall. The orientation of this "new" Pavilion is north south. This photo shows the Pavilion towards the end of its life as the outside is in need of repair and paint. Provided by the Steuben County Historian's Office.