

The second life of a historic building from the lost townsite of Horseshoe

The Horse Shoe Forestry Company ran a 50,000-tap maple operation in the late 1800s and 1900s with four syrup making plants

By Matthew M. Thomas

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Horseshoe Syrup House. Photo courtesy of Matthew M. Thomas.

At the turn of the last century, a bustling little village sprang up along the west shore of Horseshoe Lake in St. Lawrence County. Under the direction and financing of New York City millionaire Abbot Augustus Low, the town was built to facilitate the activities and house the workers of Low's Horse Shoe Forestry Company. The location of the town was carefully chosen as a place where the New York Central (NYC) Railroad ran adjacent to the western shore of spring-fed Horseshoe Lake and the Bog River. Being on the NYC railroad provided easy access to Tupper Lake to the north and other developing villages to the south, not to mention railroad connections to New York City.

Low began purchasing land around Horseshoe Lake in 1896 and by 1900 had amassed an estate of more than 40,000 contiguous acres. He wasted no time in establishing his footprint in the Adirondack forest and almost overnight erected dozens of buildings, including large and small houses, saw mills, a hotel and boarding houses, a small farm, a private railroad station and his own great camp, all electrified by their own power station and connected by miles of private railroad and illuminated.

A significant part of the Horse Shoe Forestry Company's business was a sprawling maple syrup and maple sugar making operation. In fact, the Horse Shoe Forestry Company's 50,000-tap maple operation, with its four separate syrup making plants, was known at the time to be the single largest maple syrup operation in the world. One of the Horse Shoe Forestry Company buildings associated with the maple business was a metal framed and metal sided warehouse-like structure known as the syrup house.

Thanks to a handful of historic photographs, we know exactly what the syrup house looked like and where it was located. Most notable is a photograph from 1901 taken by George W. Baldwin as part of a collection of images of the Horse Shoe Forestry Company maple syrup operation. The Horse Shoe Forestry Company went as far as trademarking these images and depositing an album of photos, along with titles of the images, in the Library of Congress, from which we learned that this building was called the syrup house.

This building was located at the heart of the Horseshoe town site with easy access to the private railroad and larger NYC railroad. The Horse Shoe Forestry Company used the building as a central storage location for maple sugar and syrup and for the processing and packaging of syrup, sugar and candy for their seasonal production. Many collectors of Adirondack antiques are aware of the unique and attractive embossed glass bottles and jars from the Horse Shoe Forestry Company.

It was in this building that they filled those bottles and jars with Horse Shoe maple products before shipping them out by railroad to be sold in New York City. A Plattsburgh

Evening News article from 1903 describing the Horse Shoe maple operation specifically notes that “the syrup manufactured at different points and taken to Horseshoe Pond (was) manufactured into sugar, put up into fancy packages and sold.” Another source noted that “in the summer months, thirty girls made sugar cakes, candies, etc.” It is almost certain that this activity took place in the syrup house at the Horseshoe townsite.

Sadly, in 1910, severe drought led to a catastrophic forest fire that destroyed the maple forest of the Horse Shoe Forestry Company. As a result, the maple syrup operation and other timber-related work were discontinued and the valuable industrial machinery and buildings were sold and relocated, including the syrup house. In later years, as the land and property in and around Horseshoe town site entered ownership of the State of New York and the Adirondack Park, the remaining structures were cleared from the former townsite and the land is now covered in a mix of young trees and bushes.

Thankfully, many of the buildings erected at Horseshoe were constructed of metal which prevented them from easily catching fire and burning in the 1910 fire. Some of the buildings, like the syrup house, were constructed with concrete floors and foundations, which remain in the woods at Horseshoe if you know where to look. In addition, the lattice-style metal trusses for the interior framing of the buildings also made it possible to easily dismantle, relocate and reconstruct these metal buildings. Despite this convenient feature, the fate of the large industrial buildings removed from the Horse Shoe Forestry Company property remained unknown—until now.



Cedar Street Studios. Photo courtesy of Matthew M. Thomas.

Quite by accident, it was recently discovered that the Horse Shoe Forestry Company syrup house had been relocated to Saranac Lake and is still standing and in use as the Cedar Street Studios. It turns out that around 1915, George L. Starks & Co. purchased the syrup house, dismantled it, and re-erected it in Saranac Lake a block off of Broadway at the intersection of Cedar Street and the two lines of the New York Central Railroad and the Delaware & Hudson Railroad. Situated on a short railroad siding, the metal building, with its shuttered windows, metal siding and a single round ventilator on the roof line, was rebuilt just as it appears at the Horseshoe townsite. Following the move to Saranac Lake, Starks & Co., previously named the Adirondack Hardware Company, used the building for the next 50 years as a storehouse and sales space for plumbing and other large metal hardware. For many years, the building was popularly known as Starks' Cedar Street warehouse. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Saranac Lake as well as railroad valuation maps dated to 1916, show the metal sided building labeled as a hardware company storehouse.

While the building has been modernized for current and future uses, the owners of the building have embraced and preserved the industrial appearance of both the interior and exterior of the building, with exposed metal vertical and horizontal trusses and beams. In fact, it is possible to see the corresponding codes that were painted on the

metal parts to facilitate dismantling and reassembly. Similarly, markings on the beams like the name PENCOYD tell us that heavy I-beams were produced at the Pencoyd foundry in Pennsylvania.

Following the closing of Starks Hardware in 1962, the building was sold to Manuel Kretis, a wood worker and maker of rustic wood novelties popular as souvenirs with area tourists. Kretis primarily used the Cedar Street building for storage as his main shop and house was located a block away on Broadway Street. After a March 1972 fire that destroyed his Broadway Street plant, Kretis went out of business and sold the Cedar Street building.

During the 1970s, the Cedar Street building was occupied by Vacation Home Services, LTD. who sold hardware and supplies for building and maintaining vacation properties, as well as forestry products like chainsaws, axes and hand saws. Under Vacation Home Services, the building was spruced up and given a new coat of paint, as well as the installation of a first-floor sales room in the front part of the building. Uses of the building in the 1980s and 1990s included Pat's television repair shop, Corrow's taxi service, a karate dojo and antique sales and storage. Initially given the address of 17 Cedar Street, the building was renumbered to 24 Cedar Street around 2003 as part of the updating of the 911 emergency response system. In 2023, the rails and ties of the adjacent abandoned NYC railroad was converted to recreational use and designated the Adirondack Rail Trail.



Beams in

Cedar Street Studios. Photo courtesy of Matthew M. Thomas.

In 2001, local artist Carol Vossler, purchased the building, painted it blue and renamed it BluSeed Studios, from which it began the process of becoming the studios, gallery and performing arts venue it is today. Initially, owned by Vossler, ownership and management of BluSeed Studios was later transferred to a non-profit who owned and operated the venue until 2025 when the financial struggles forced the nonprofit to dissolve and sell the building. New owner and local artist, Jazen Reuss, purchased the building and renamed it Cedar Street Studios with an eye to continuing its use as a studio, classroom and arts venue, while adding art supply retail sales.

It is remarkable how, after being dismantled and relocated to a town 25 miles away, the former syrup house building is easily recognizable and looks the same. It is these sorts of small discoveries that make it a pleasure to dive into and share the history of the Adirondack region. Moreover, the history of this building and its relocation along what is now the Adirondack Rail Trail make it a perfect candidate and location for the Adirondack Rail Trail Association and the Department of Environmental Conservation to support the placement of an interpretive sign to inform trail users about a component of the trail's original use as a railroad as well as tell the story of an interesting and important building in Saranac Lake.

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