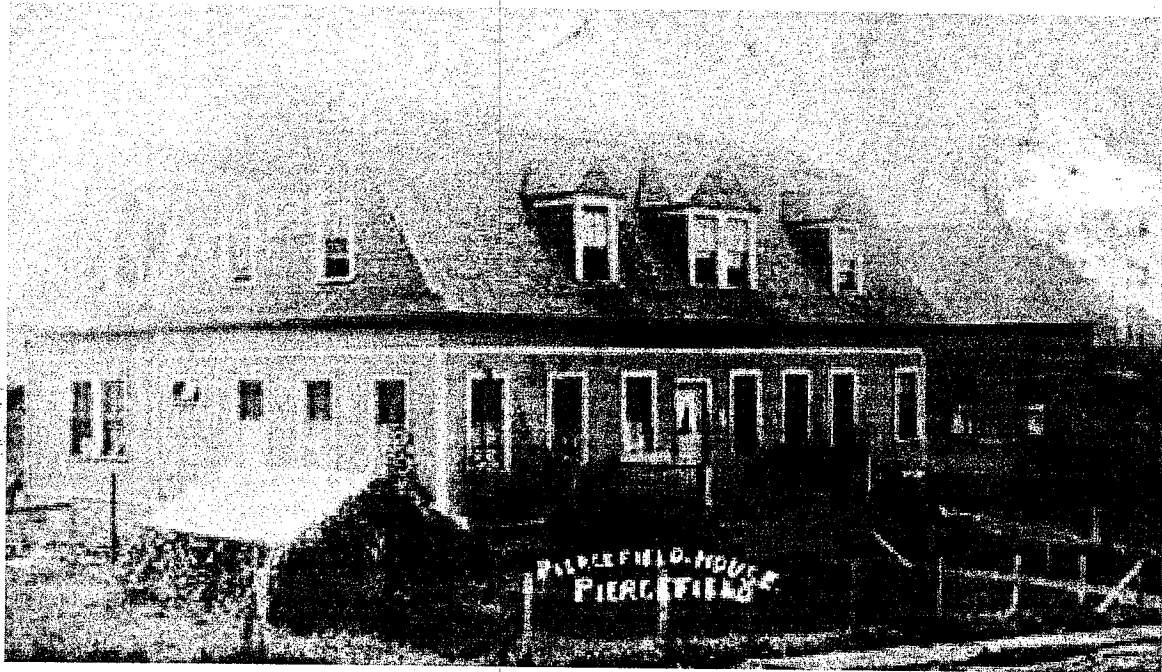


The St. Lawrence County Historical Association
QUARTERLY

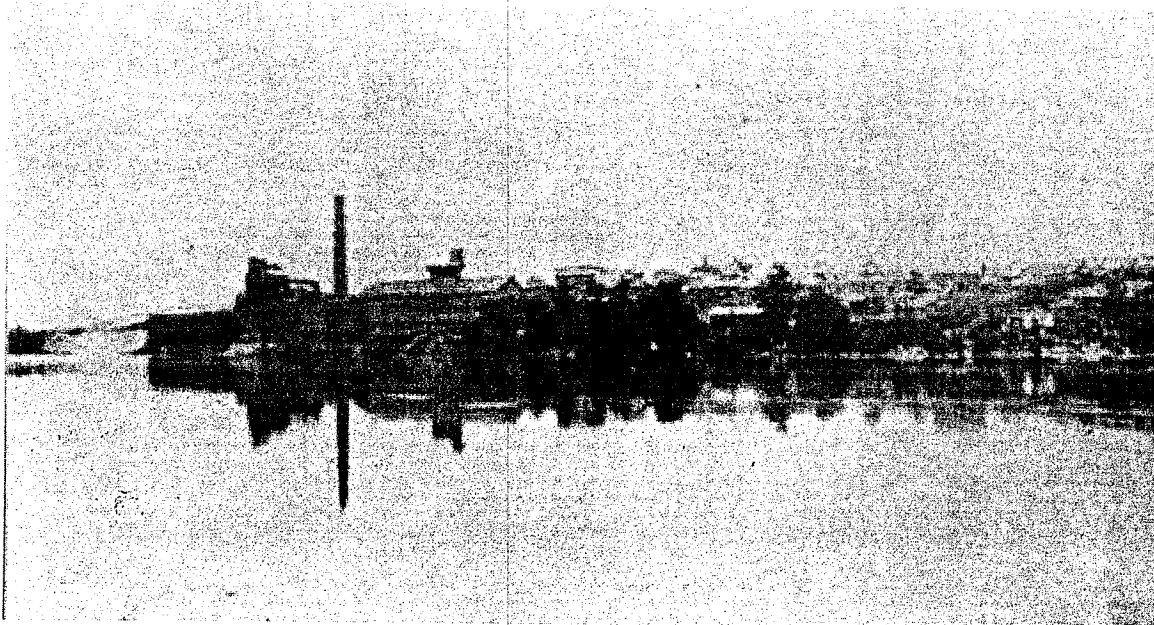
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When Piercefield was International Paper: A Memoir



The Birth and Death of the Piercefield Paper Mill, 1893- 1933

Clinton O. Webber

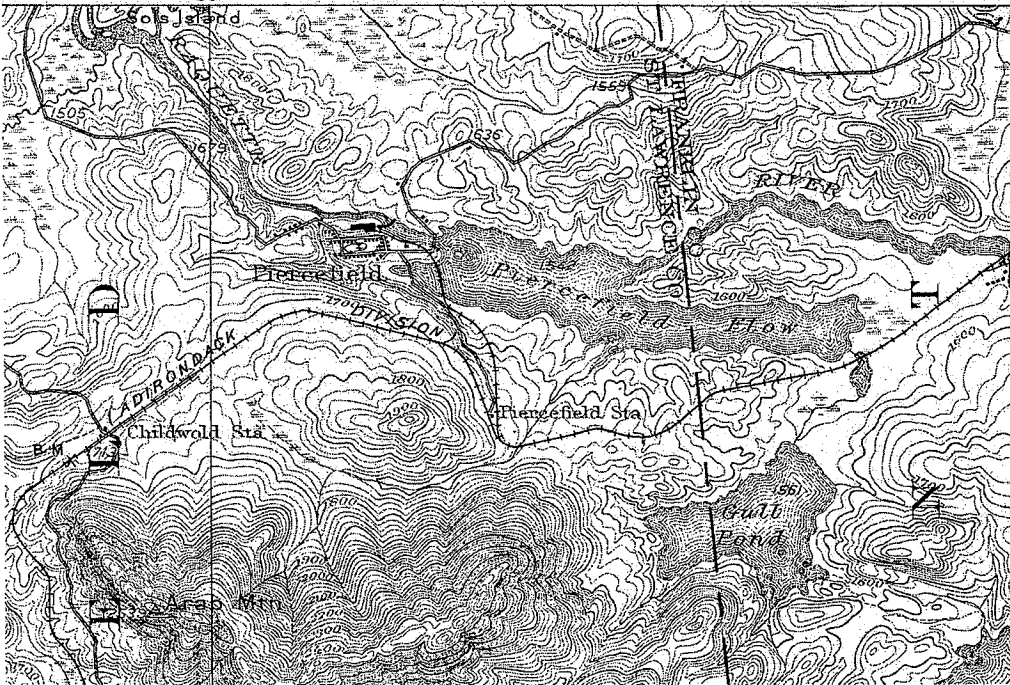
Clinton (1901-1986) came to Piercefield in 1918, on a free pass from his father, who worked on the railroad, and at the urging of an uncle who had preceded him. He worked in the paper plant from then until 1933 when he and his family were transferred to the Niagara Falls' plant.

This memoir was retyped and submitted by Piercefield Town Historian Haile North, who also helped us to digitize some photographs. The memoir was brought to the Quarterly's attention by Mary

Jane Watson, who found it in the course of her research on the history of the Raquette River. She also provided copies of photographs. David Martin helped to digitize some photographs. Clinton's son Colin, who resides in Piercefield, helped with biographical information, photographs, and advice. -eds.



The author, Clinton Orrison Webber, a longtime resident of early Piercefield, in 1933, and his wife Helen "Aline" R. McSween Webber. Photos courtesy Colin Webber.



Detail of St. Lawrence County topographic map, 1907. Note that both the highway and the railroad spur came right through the settlement. Photo courtesy SLCHA.

Introduction

This is a short history of Piercefield and some of its people. My sources include newspaper clippings and some items from the book, *Mostly Spruce and Hemlock* (Louis Simmons, 1976). I have also talked with some of the old-timers and recorded their stories. I also lived and worked in Piercefield and took an active part in the town and mill. I came to Piercefield in May 1918 at the age of 17, fresh out of high school in Winthrop, Maine. I married Aline McSween in 1922. We had four children by the time we were uprooted and transferred to Niagara Falls in March 1933.

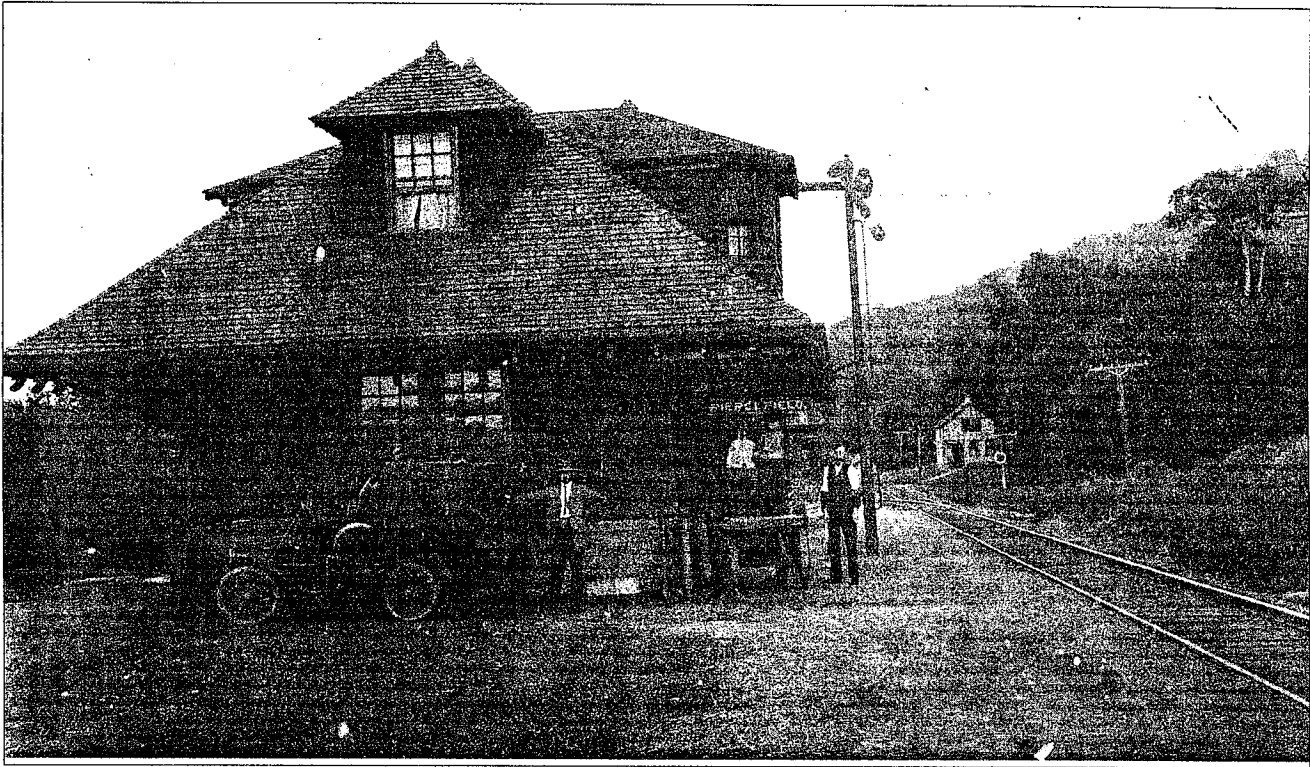
There is only one reason that Piercefield exists today—the paper mill. Before the mill the Raquette River flowed through a wilderness. There was no Piercefield Flow, just some rapids in a fast-running river through the forest. Without the mill, no roads or bridges were needed. Without the mill, Evariste LeBoeuf would never have built Beechwood Inn and there would have been no need of a bridge across the Raquette River near the head of Piercefield Rapids.

Beginnings

In 1890, the Raquette River flowed down west out of Big Tupper Lake undisturbed except for a small dam at Setting Pole Rapids, a mile or so below Raquette Pond on the Raquette River. The dam was built in the mid-1850s to aid in sluicing logs through the rapids and through what is now called Piercefield Flow. More rapids started just above the islands where the pumphouse is now and continued down to a flat area of land near the mouth of Dead Creek and the upper end of Sols Island. Here, the river divided and about 25% of the flow passed east of Sols Island, while the main part of the river flowed down some severe rapids on the west side of Sols Island. Both streams joined at the north end of Sols Island and with one other minor rapid came to Downey's Landing, where a stagecoach road had to ferry across the river from Usher Farm to Pitchfork Pond, to Gales Hotel and to Massawepie Lake and the Childwold Park House Hotel.

In 1893, when the Piercefield mill construction started, there was a railroad station in Conifer. From there a road went down across the present Conifer road straight

(Old Carriage Road)



The Piercefield train station, situated south of the settlement on the Adirondack Division of New York Central. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

through the woods, across Dead Creek to Massawepie Lake, bending right along a ridge near the lakeshore to Childwold Park Hotel. Rich sportsmen and their families came from all over to spend their vacations fishing, hunting and enjoying the luxuries provided by the Childwold Park House. From the Park House, the road continued on to the Gale Coach House where it connected with the coach road that came across the Usher Farm and the Raquette River at Downey's Landing. From the landing it continued through Childwold to Sevey's.

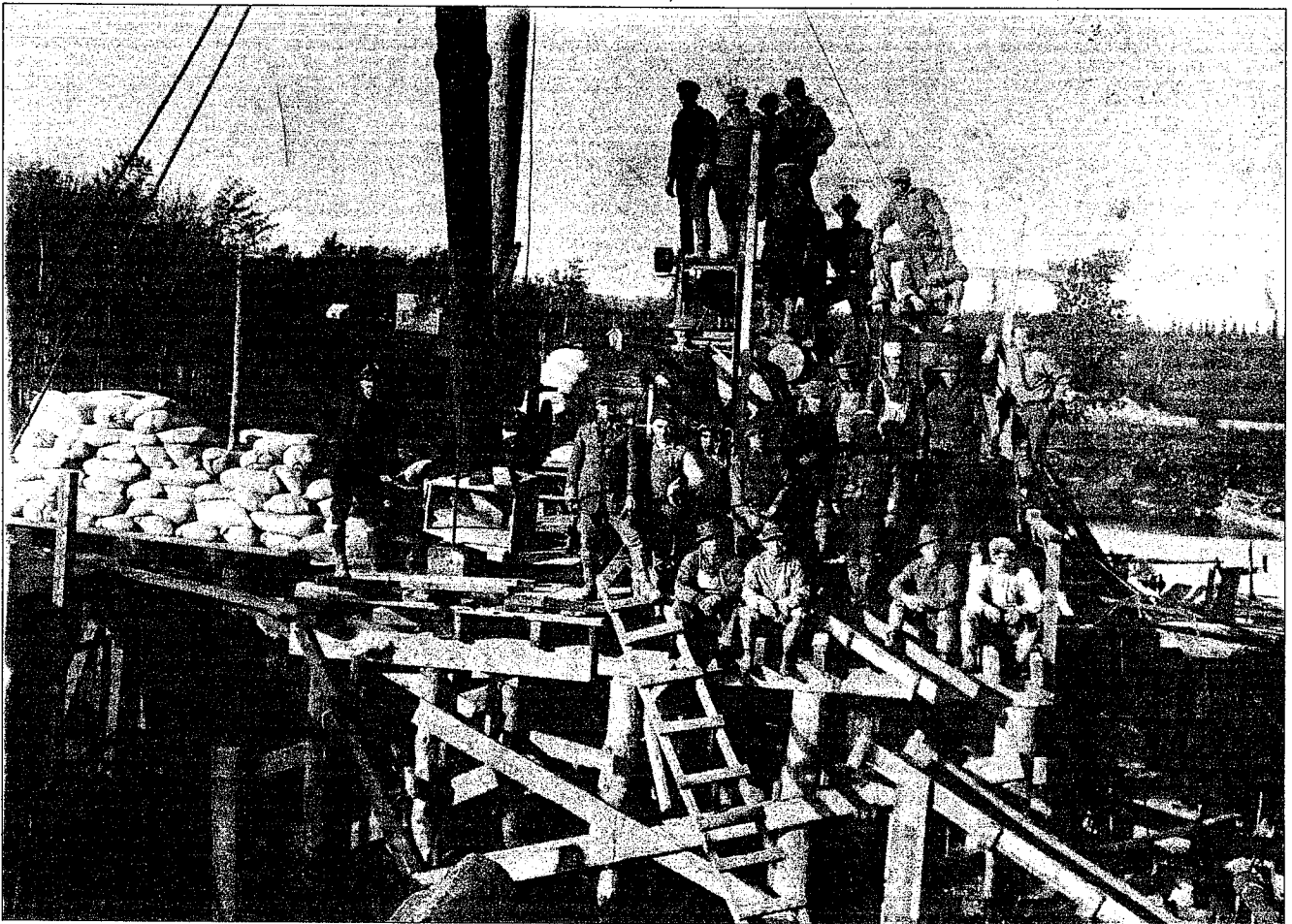
When Piercefield Mill was being built, there was no road from the Park House road near Conifer into Piercefield, or from Gales Hotel, or from Tupper Lake. None of the existing roads were near enough to the Piercefield Rapids to be of any use to Luke Usher, a banker from Potsdam, who put up the money to start building the mill.

All building materials came in by train, on a siding built at what later became the Piercefield Station. A road down to the mill

site was cut through the forest and across a swamp to the riverbank near where the bridge is now, then downriver along the bank to the site of the mill. All material was hauled by teams of horses recruited from lumbering operations. As the building material increased in volume and weight, a railroad spur was laid down to the construction site. A donkey steam engine was purchased and the railroad cars were hauled from the siding to the new paper mill around 1894.

Construction started from the river level and proceeded up the bank. When the grinder room and basement of the main mill were completed, construction started on the dam. Eventually the river level was raised about 18 feet at the wood room and a swampy area was flooded, to be known as Piercefield Flow.

In 1895, John Warren, who later designed the Warren Rewinder used for many years in the newsprint paper mills, came to Piercefield to help install the machinery that would soon be coming in. When he first came, he found three or four log shanties on the bank of the



Construction crew for the bridge across the Raquette in 1897. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

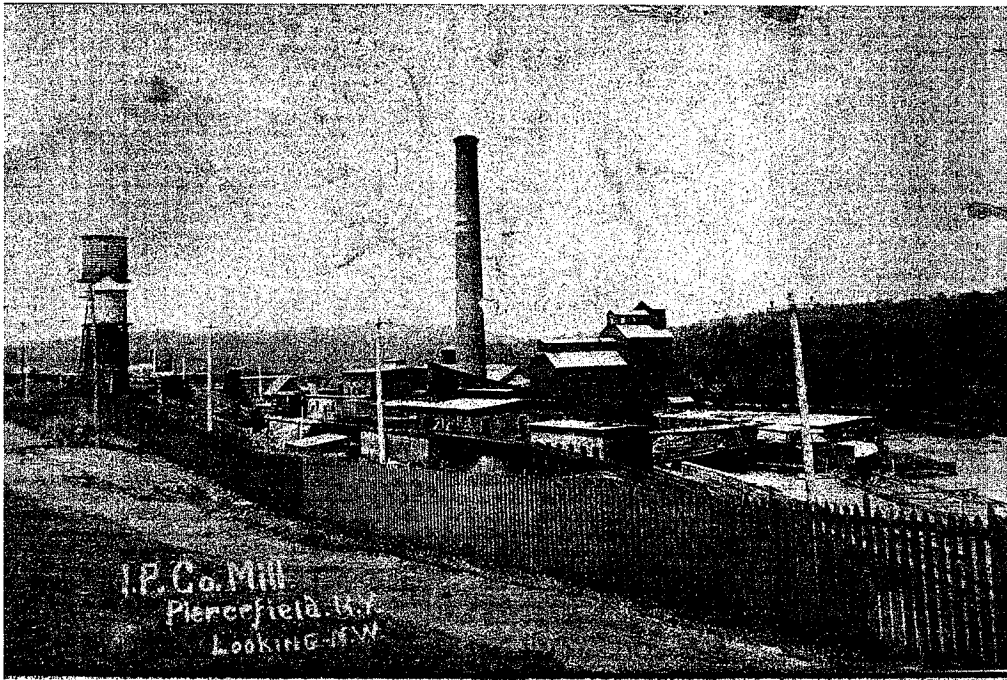
Raquette River. He took entire charge of the mill and made such a good showing that the capitalists backing it, after the financial failure of Luke Usher's bank in Potsdam, insisted that he stay on as superintendent.

When Warren left in February 1898, he left behind a thriving settlement. Evariste LeBoeuf built the Beechwood Inn in Piercefield in 1895. In 1896, St. Paul's Catholic Church was constructed and in 1897 the Presbyterian Church was built. Then in 1897, Piercefield and Tupper Lake were linked by road when a bridge across the Raquette at the current location was built.

Making Paper

In the early years, wood for making pulp for the paper machines was cheap, because it grew right up to the mill site and had to be cut to clear land so that the town could grow. There was a dense forest between the mill site and the railroad tracks, all downhill to the river and mill.

The softwood logs were hauled down to the present pumphouse location by teams of horses to what was then a sawmill and debarking machinery. The pulpwood was peeled in the woods, or put through the debarking machinery before going to the pulp mill, where it could then either go to the grinder room to be ground into "groundwood pulp" or to the chippers to be cooked in digesters, becoming "sulphite pulp."



The International Paper mill in Piercefield, looking north, with the Raquette River dam on the right and the settlement off-frame to the left. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

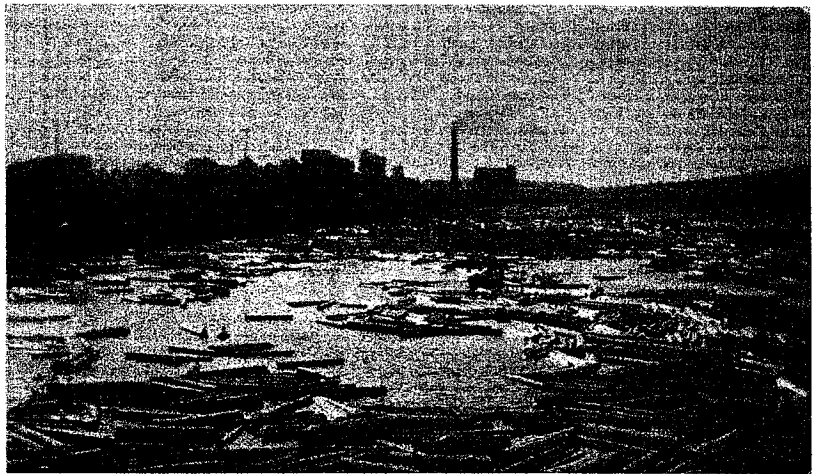
A conveyor built on a trestle carried the pulpwood from the sawmill to the grinder room of the pulp mill in the winter when logs could not be floated down the river.

This sawmill also cut rough building lumber from hardwood logs that were hauled to the mill. The mill could cut one-inch boards up to 12 inches wide. There was a carpenter shop on Waller Street where the lumber was shaped into framing, siding, flooring and even window sashes for the houses that the company was building. This included a boarding house, which later became a three-story hotel, complete with an enormous dining room, lobby and pool room.

The new mill was operating by the end of 1897, staffed mostly by unskilled labor and tramp papermakers. The art of making paper was in its infancy. The two paper machines in the mill were Fourdiners, named after the Frenchman who perfected this type of paper machine. It formed paper on a continuous wire screen. The first machines of

this kind were installed in Massachusetts about 1850. The name "tramp papermaker" came about because as men learned how to operate these machines, they traveled from one mill to another to earn higher wages possible because of the machines' speed and capability. Number one machine in Piercefield was 120 inches wide and before 1900 that was considered a wide machine, attracting many tramp papermakers.

The mill operated only two shifts back



Pulpwood logs floating north on the Raquette into the Piercefield mill in the background. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

then—a day shift from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and a night shift from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m., also called the graveyard shift. This changed around 1913 when the union came into the mill, leading to the creation of three shifts—7 a.m. to 3 p.m., 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. and 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. All foremen continued to work two shifts until after the strike of 1921.

In 1898, a new company formed—the International Paper Company. It purchased six existing paper mills: the Otis Mill with nine machines in Livermore Falls, Maine; the Rumford Mill with five machines in Rutherford, Maine; a five-machine mill in Ticonderoga, New York; a five-machine mill in Berlin, New Hampshire; a six-machine mill in Niagara Falls, New York; and the two-machine mill in Piercefield, with its extensive timber holdings.

Growth of the Community

Sometime before 1900, the company built the manager's house and three other houses, all on one side of Main Street. Across from the manager's house, on the corner, the company built a large store, two stories high. On the second floor there was a great hall, with a dance floor and a stage at one end. This hall was used for dances and parties until 1919, when the store was leased by John McConnell, the son-in-law



*The McConnell and Moynehan store in Piercefield.
Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.*

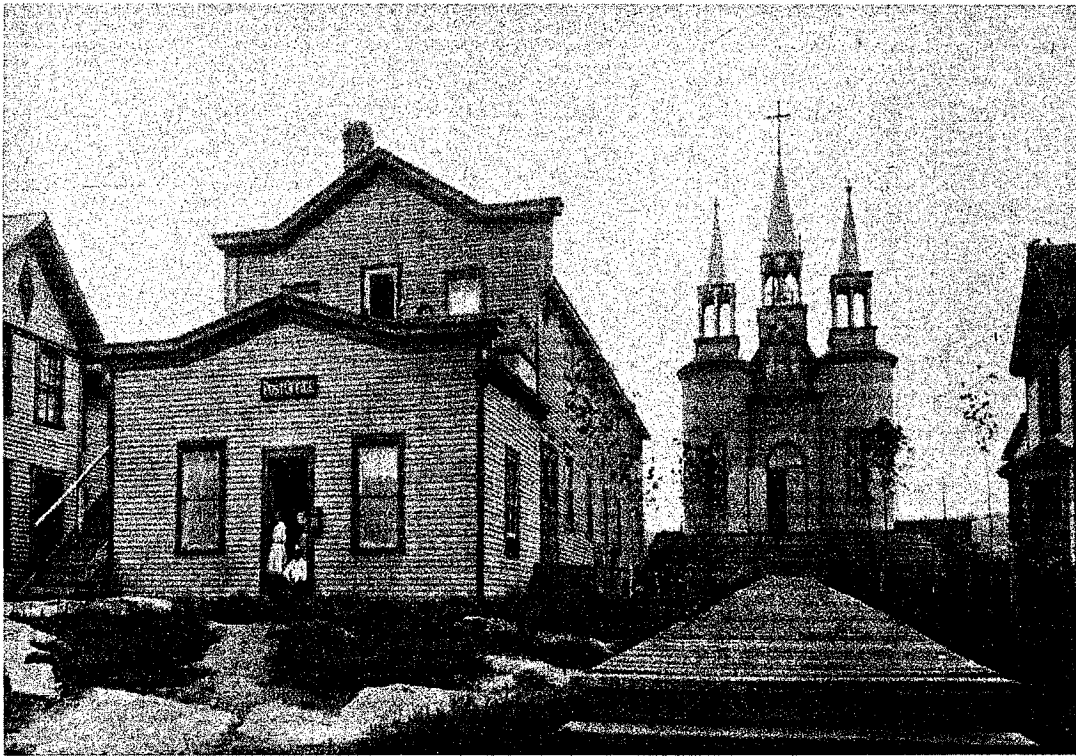
of the pioneer lumberman and landowner, Moynehan. McConnell had worked for Moynehan as bookkeeper when he married Moynehan's daughter. The store became known as McConnell & Moynehan. One of the early clerks in McConnell & Moynehan was Louis Thomas Fortune. He left the store in 1917 when he was 23 years old to clerk in Jacob Alpert's store in Tupper Lake. Thomas is the retired owner of the current Fortune's Hardware Store in Tupper Lake.

Mitch LaVasseur, the oldest son of a family of fourteen boys and one girl, was hired by the store about 1912. In addition to working in the store clerking and doing the heavy work, once a week Mitch would hitch up a team of horses to a flatbed rig and ride around town taking orders for the store, which he delivered the next day. McConnell & Moynehan was a real department store. It featured a ladies' department, a men's department, housewares, hardware, groceries, fresh meat cut to order, and a cream parlor. Although the store did not sell beer, it sold hops and malt to make homebrew.

Between 1910 and 1912, all the land between the village and the railroad tracks had been cleared of all trees and over half the town people could see the trains go by without leaving their homes.

The LaForests, a French-Canadian family, came to Piercefield with farming experience and five boys in their teens to help. They purchased a herd of milk cows and started delivering milk around town. At first, that was bulk milk for one's own container but later they had their own glass pint- and quart-bottles. For pasture, they fenced in a large part of the land between the town and the railroad tracks.

During his years in Piercefield, Mr. Warren took the lead in the building of a two-room schoolhouse and a very pretty church for the people of St. Paul's Parish. There was an ample-sized parish hall and rectory for the priest and his housekeeper. The church property was the only privately-owned land. The mill owned all the rest.



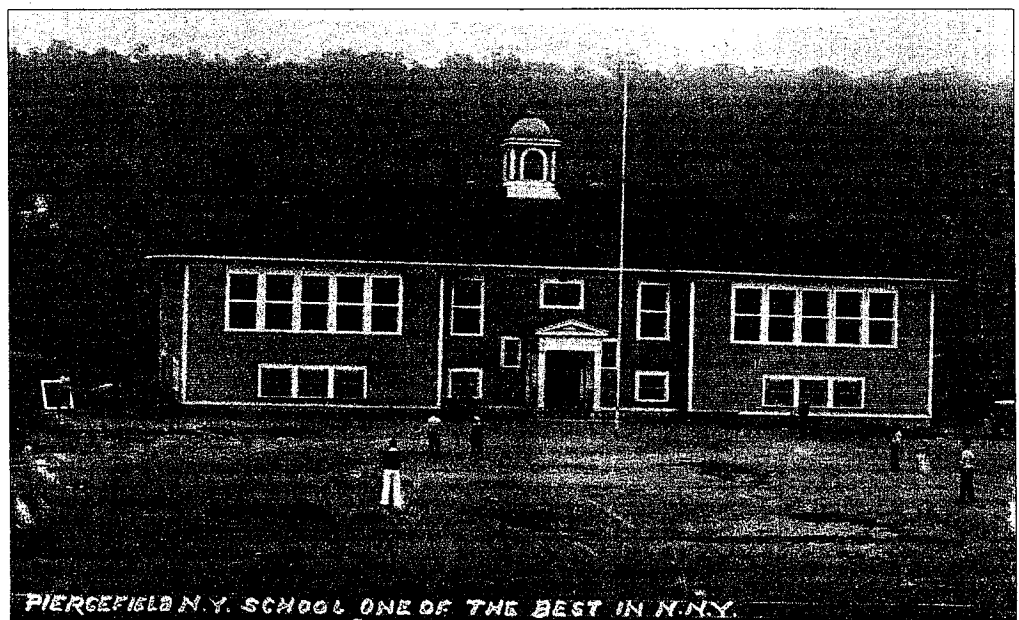
Piercefield's St. Paul's Church, with the parish hall and post office on the left. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

A post office was in the front of the parish hall, facing the street. Around 1911, Mr. Elmer Narrow rented the hall two nights a week to show movies, which were all one- and two-reels, silent with captions.

By August 28, 1914, there were over one hundred houses in Piercefield. The company

planned to erect ten or twelve more, overhaul the existing ones and the hotel, enlarge the mill office, and extend the water system to Porcupine Hill area where about a dozen houses had been built. Some on the hill were log houses from the early years. The company called a meeting to arrange the

This building now houses the Town Office, Town Clerk, Assessors, Youth Center and the Museum



Union School in Piercefield. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

finances to erect a new school. Several bank representatives attended to bid on the auction sale of a \$17,000 bond issue to cover the cost of the new school. Builder J. Howard Wert built the new school. He was also retained by the company to erect a new icehouse at McConnell & Moynehan Store and a new post office separate from the parish hall.

The new school was completed in 1915 and the dedication ceremonies were held on January 4, 1916. Attendance was estimated at 500 for the lengthy dedication, which featured Rev. Aaron W. Maddox and Rev. Charles DesRosier of Faust and A.J. Fields, Superintendent of Schools for St. Lawrence County. B.F. Mullen was principal at the Piercefield School, which served 200 pupils in 1916 and operated continuously until 1968.

After he built the school, Wert completed a huge icehouse attached to the store. It featured an entrance from the store into the cooler section, which was surrounded by cakes of ice cut in the river and buried in sawdust up to the second floor and over the top. It is said that the store carried sufficient stock to fill an order from a lumber camp for meat and staples as large as \$700.

A Piercefield boy, Earl Graves, was one of the mailmen. He drove a Ford Runabout, summer and winter, for several years. Until snow came, it had a normal gearshift and four wheels. When there was enough snow, he clamped skis on the front wheels and added two wheels on the back, one on each side ahead of the regular wheels, creating a tandem. Around each set of wheels, he installed a tractor tread belt to give better traction in deep snow. This rig could be considered the forerunner of the snowmobile.

In those days, the roads were not plowed, so people jacked up their cars, took off the tires, took out the batteries to store in a warm place, and waited for spring to arrive again.

Work During the Great War

Around 1915, the company decided it needed a town manager as well as a mill manager. Before that, a superintendent

spent all his time at the mill and no one paid much attention to the town or the mill office except when it was payday.

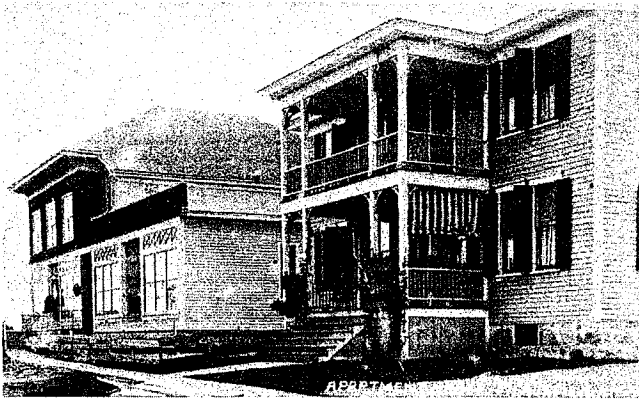
The company hired M.O. Woods, a graduate engineer with experience in budgets and finances, to direct various projects. Mr. Woods was probably the best thing that happened to Piercefield as a community and a mill. Right away he enlisted a college graduate from a small paper mill in West Virginia, Frank Leyden, to run the mill for him. Mr. Leyden treated the help as responsible employees, so there was less turnover of personnel in the operation of the paper machines. The employees felt more secure and the mill lost its "tramp papermaker" status.

In 1917, as the United States became involved in World War I, it called on all men between 18 and 31 to join the armed services. Following 4 to 6 weeks of training the recruits were shipped off to France. This caused a shortage of young men in the mill. Enlistments slowed because too many were joining the Navy. Because this was a land war, the government initiated a draft requiring all men to report to an induction center on their 18th birthdays. The mill stopped hiring young men.

Then came a call from France for qualified papermakers to replace their papermakers who had been sent to the Front. The response in the United States was good, increasing the shortage of qualified papermakers stateside.

Frank Leyden contacted his old mill in West Virginia and recruited some good help from there. Albert Roszysky, a machine tender, was one; he stayed with the International Paper Company and later became manager of their Camdon, Arkansas, mill. Dever Campbell, back tender, also stayed with the company to become assistant manager of their Bastrup Mill in Louisiana after the company acquired Southern Kraft.

M.O. Woods improved his office staff and hired some girls for clerks. One girl was Hilda Cohn from Faust, where her family owned a drug store. The company built a large two-story house next to the rectory, with a suite of rooms on the second floor for the office



The International Paper Company's boarding house is on the right. McConnell and Moynehan store is on the left. Photo courtesy Jon Kopp.

girls. They boarded with the occupants of the house, along with several other roomers living there. The teachers had their own section in the hotel separate from the other male roomers, as well as their own table in the dining room.

Early in 1918, mill manager M.O. Woods traveled to the company's New York office to advise the manager of manufacturing that if he expected to hire and keep good personnel in Piercefield, he needed to provide some social life and a place for it. He came back with a bundle of blueprints and an architect's drawing of a community building to be built

at the company's expense. It was built on the north side of Main Street, across from the rectory and just west of the entrance to the mill office. The basement floor, located below street level, would contain two bowling alleys, a restaurant, a barber shop and storage room. The second floor, at street level, would contain a town office, a superintendent's club room, a ladies' clubroom, and a two-bedroom suite with bath for visiting personnel from the New York office. The top floor was a spacious auditorium with a stage across one end and a balcony across the other end with a motion picture booth where the latest pictures could be shown. It would be the only all-brick building in town except for the mill. The community building was completed in 1919 and dedicated with stage show and two reels of movies, followed by a dance with a band.

The war ended on November 11, 1918, and the boys came back home. Those who had been working in the mill wanted their jobs back. The manager and foremen interviewed each and found a place for them, either in the same job or one comparable.

Cars and Booze

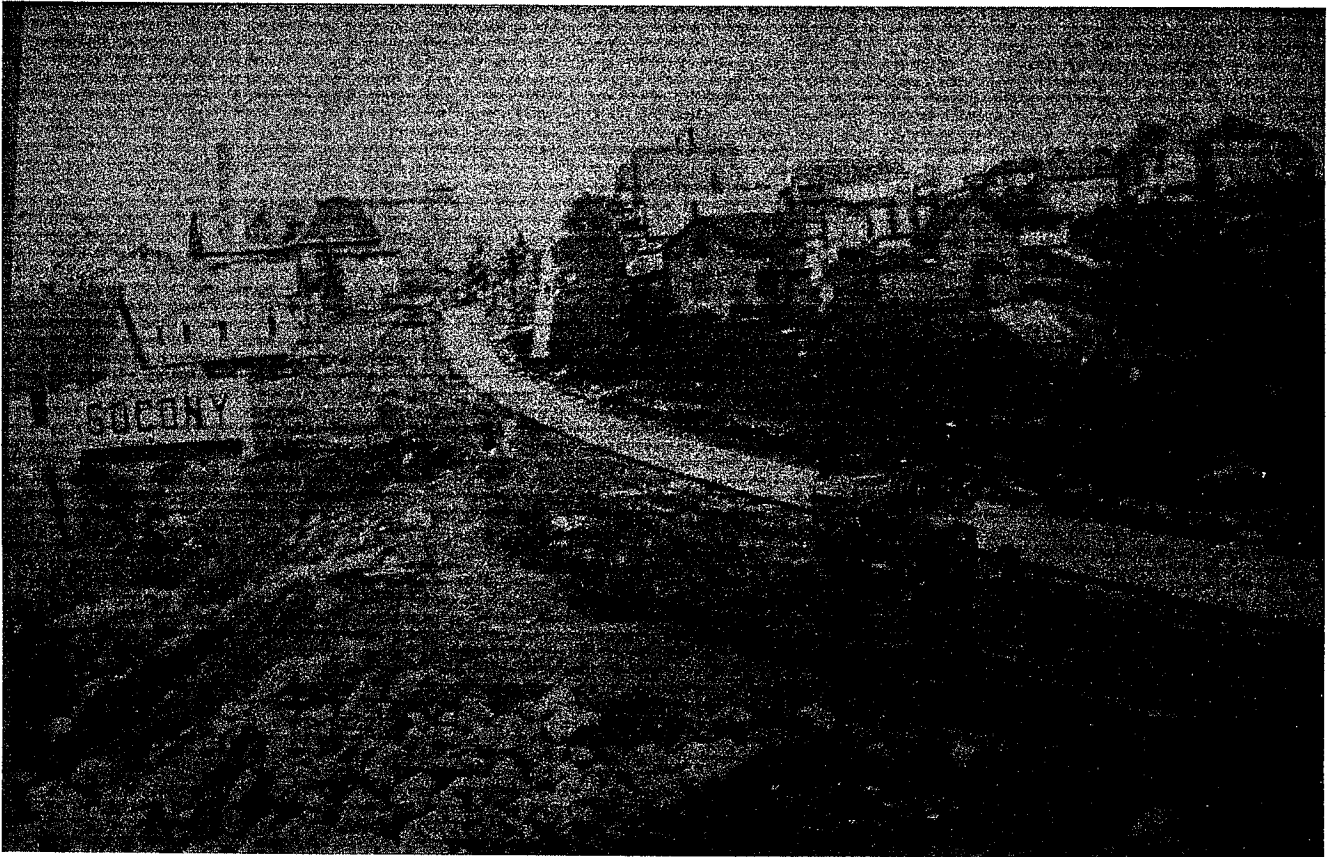
For some time, there had been a good dirt road across the river near the sawmill and to the left of the stone cut near the town dump,

This building was demolished years ago. Some of the bricks are on the walls of the museum.

Piercefield's community center. Today this building houses the highway department, museum, and town clerk's office. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.



Community Building, Piercefield, N. Y.



Main Street Piercefield looking south in 1910. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

through the woods over Raymond Hill into Faust, NY, now called Tupper Lake Junction. A few people were buying cars, mostly Fords and Chevrolets, plus the occasional Dodge and Oakland. In the summer of 1917 the mill's master mechanic, Charles Wilson, had six Chevrolet 490 touring cars shipped in by train. The 490 was the price of the car delivered, with no tax and prep fees. The cars were unloaded in the warehouse of the shipping department from a railroad car made for the autos. Mr. Wilson sold them all in less than a month. The dairyman, Mr. LaForest bought one; two of the mechanics working for Mr. Wilson each bought one. Gaspard McSween, the father of Edgar (Cigar) McSween bought one, and Arnie Audette, father of Charles Audette, bought one.

James Jardine, for many years owner of the livery stable in Piercefield, purchased the Beechwood Inn halfway to Tupper Lake, and

James Rodgers bought his livery business. The business consisted of two or three teams of workhorses, several driving horses, and a pair of French ponies that could haul a four-seat rig, called a Ping, which had both wheels for summer and two sets of runners for winter snow. Mr. Rodgers brought with him an Oakland six-cylinder touring car and a bus that could seat 12 persons. The bus was used to transport the Saturday night visitors to Tupper Lake for shopping and bar hopping—there were no bars in Piercefield until Edgar ("Cigar") McSween opened his in 1951. Rodgers had a 19 year-old son, Wilder—who was well-named when he was at the wheel of a car. Wilder was the only one in Piercefield or Tupper Lake who dared to drive James' Oakland at 35 miles per hour on the road to Tupper Lake. In 1918-1920 the roads were on the primitive side in the Adirondacks and an auto trip just about

anywhere was an adventure. Parties of five traveled to Montreal, a round-trip distance of 156 miles, taking seven hours, so they averaged 22 miles an hour.

On Friday, January 16, 1920, the whole United States, including Beechwood and all the bars in Tupper Lake, went legally dry, when Prohibition became effective under the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This slowed the Saturday night traffic to Tupper Lake for a while until several "blind-pig" places opened up, notably the Windsor Hotel. Before Prohibition, a glass of draft beer over the bar cost \$.50 and a shot of bar whiskey cost \$1.00. As soon as the rumrunners and bootleggers got organized and were able to get a load through from Canada, the price went to \$1.00 for a pint bottle of Molson beer and a shot of any kind of whiskey or gin cost \$1.25.

Union Activity

In spring of 1918, the union opened contract negotiations and demanded a dollar-an-hour increase across the board. The company agreed without much discussion and the raise went into effect on May 1. Then on June 1, the company surprised the union with a 10% cut in wages. The company for some years had declared an extra payday on the 15th of each month. They gave each employee 10% of their monthly earnings as a bonus pay. Since this was not in the union contract, starting June 1, the company simply discontinued paying the 10% bonus. The union protested—to no avail.

By 1919, the company realized that the union was getting restless and was planning big things for some time in the future. The company began to lay the groundwork to cope with whatever the union came up with. The visible changes were in personnel. Frank Leyden was promoted to mill manager and was sent to Franklin, New Hampshire, where it was thought he would be of best use to the company. It promoted Frank Schram, a machine tender on #1 machine and a returned veteran from World War I. Dominick

Martineau, the longtime hotel manager, quit and moved away, so another machine tender, John J. O'Connors, became hotel manager. They were good men and the company wanted to keep them, so they pulled them off the line, and thus out of the union.

During 1919 and 1920, Mr. Woods continued to improve the community by building more houses, larger and more modern. A park was built in front of the hotel, on the east side of the community building. This area was just a side hill sloping down to the mill, undeveloped except for a road used to bring in material when the community hall was built. The ground was leveled and sodded, and a gravel roadway constructed that could be used as a running track around the park. A monument was erected near the entrance with a brass cannon barrel on top and a bronze plate with all the names of the Piercefield boys who went overseas during World War I and a separate list of those who died in that conflict. The park became the center for the public observance of Memorial Day and the 4th of July.

The union became very active in social affairs. There were several parties in the Beechwood Inn in the big hall on the third floor with the wives invited. Harry VanOrnum was the president of the Piercefield local and he always made a speech at these affairs extolling the good that unity and union membership did for the workingman. In April 1921, a meeting was held in the union hall, which was located in the church hall because it was not company property. Some visiting top union men urged the workers to strike for higher wages. Over 90% of members voted to strike on Sunday, May 1, when the current contract terminated.

There were no contract talks scheduled with the company. The union said that the company must come to them if they wanted the 21 mills they owned to run again. In those days International Paper Company was reported to be the largest paper producer in the United States.

Saturday, April 30, the night before the



Aerial photograph of Piercefield, looking south, dated to the 1950s, judging from the automobiles. Remains of the International Paper mill and log boom anchors in the Raquette are still visible at left. The highway bridge to Tupper Lake is upper left. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

strike, this writer worked that last shift from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. The last of the paper stock came over the paper machine about 11:30 p.m. The rest of the night was all hard work shutting the mill down. We washed up the wet end of the machines, including the felts. Then we coated the steel rolls in the calendar stack and the rewinders with oil and grease to prevent rust. We washed out all the stock chests, ran a soda ash solution through the stock lines, and then went downstairs to run off all the belts on the drive shafts. The belts were tied up out of the way so they would not be harmed by water or wrapped around the drive shaft should anyone start the steam engine that ran the paper machines. The workers were told to shut everything down Sunday morning and walk out. The company

had its own plans.

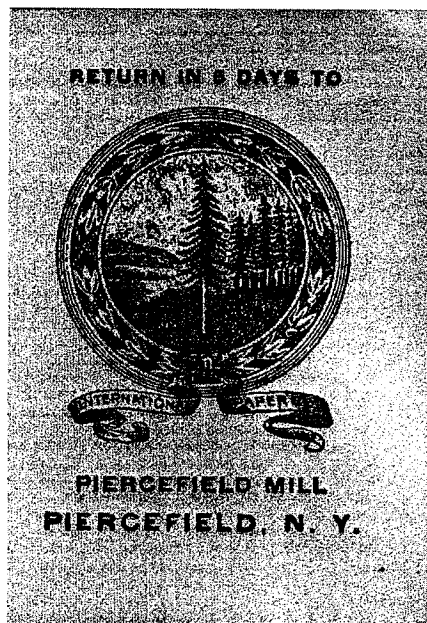
This strike was the first setback in Piercefield's short history as a paper mill town. The company never did try to negotiate with the union; they simply told their former employees that when they were ready to start up the mill, they would welcome them back. Meanwhile in Piercefield, the union told the single men with no family in town to get out and find other work because the union had just enough money to take care of the family men.

The company told the family men that did not intend to come back to work when the mill resumed operations to vacate the company houses in 30 days. Many did. Some moved their families to Tupper Lake, found work in the Newton Falls mill, and never returned.

Others moved as far as Niagara Falls to work in the mills there. Several found work in Canada. Tim Larkin, grandfather of James Larkin in Tupper Lake and a second hand on #2 paper machine, left his family in Tupper Lake and resumed his trade in a paper mill in Canada, not far from Niagara Falls, Ontario. Some of the men who went to Newton Falls were Gaspard McSween, mechanic; Alfred Mercer, uncle of Cigar McSween; Arnie (or Aime) Audette, millwright and father of Charles Audette, and several others.

Eli LaCounte moved his large family to Tupper Lake and never returned to Piercefield. Only one of his sons was old enough to work. In 1921 the eldest son and three of his brothers worked in Niagara Falls in the paper mills. One of his daughters stayed in Piercefield working in the hotel. She and her husband, Henry Vivier, managed the hotel after the death of John J. O'Connor. Many others moved away and some returned to Canada.

By the first of June most of those who believed in the union's cause had left Piercefield. During June some strange faces



Emblem of the International Paper Company. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

began showing up and most were staying in the hotel where the company paid their room and board. A few new families moved into the vacant houses in the last two weeks of June. Activity resumed in the mill. The union officers had all been forced to leave town. A notice posted in the hotel and the barbershop in the big hall announced that the mill would resume operations the next week after the 4th of July. The mill did start up then, and hiring resumed although a few jobs were on two shifts initially. As more men moved back, operations returned to normal.

The papermakers' union strike against the International Paper Company in 1921 was one of the worst mistakes a union ever made. In 1914 and 1917 during World War I, France had most of their young and middle-aged men on the front fighting to keep the German army from overrunning their country. It is impossible to run a country or carry on a war without paper. France was desperate for experienced men to operate their paper mills, so they recruited a lot of middle-aged papermakers who were past draft age in the United States and Canada. France's offer was a good one and many of the men responding were union members. By 1919, most of these men had returned home. Since they had been gone for more than a year, the union forced them to start over at the bottom. Not wanting to do that, they took jobs at non-union mills. When the 1921 strike occurred, the returnees saw their chance to get back at the union. They applied for work in droves at the striking IP mills and, contrary to what the union said, the IP mills were restarting with experienced men. The strike would be broken because of the union's actions toward the returning experienced papermakers, former union members. The papermakers' union did not get back into the IP mills until 1937.

IP was also constructing two big newsprint paper mills in Canada: one in Three Rivers, 90 miles northeast of Montreal on the St. Lawrence River, and the other in Gatineau, Quebec, just across the Ottawa River from Ottawa, Ontario. When the two new mills



Piercefield's International Hotel. Evolved from a boarding house, it contained a large lobby and dining room, and a pool room. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

started producing, IP was able to upgrade the small mills in the U.S. from newsprint to higher-grade white papers. The company transferred a lot of their foremen to the new mills including sulfite superintendent Pete Smith in Piercefield. Pete lived in the house now owned by Genevieve LaVasseur next door to the company hotel. Pete was replaced by Jim Clements, the ground wood foreman.

By spring 1922, Piercefield was back to normal. The local people found that the newcomers were not such a bad lot after all even if they were hired as strike breakers. Some of the former workers returned.

Amenities

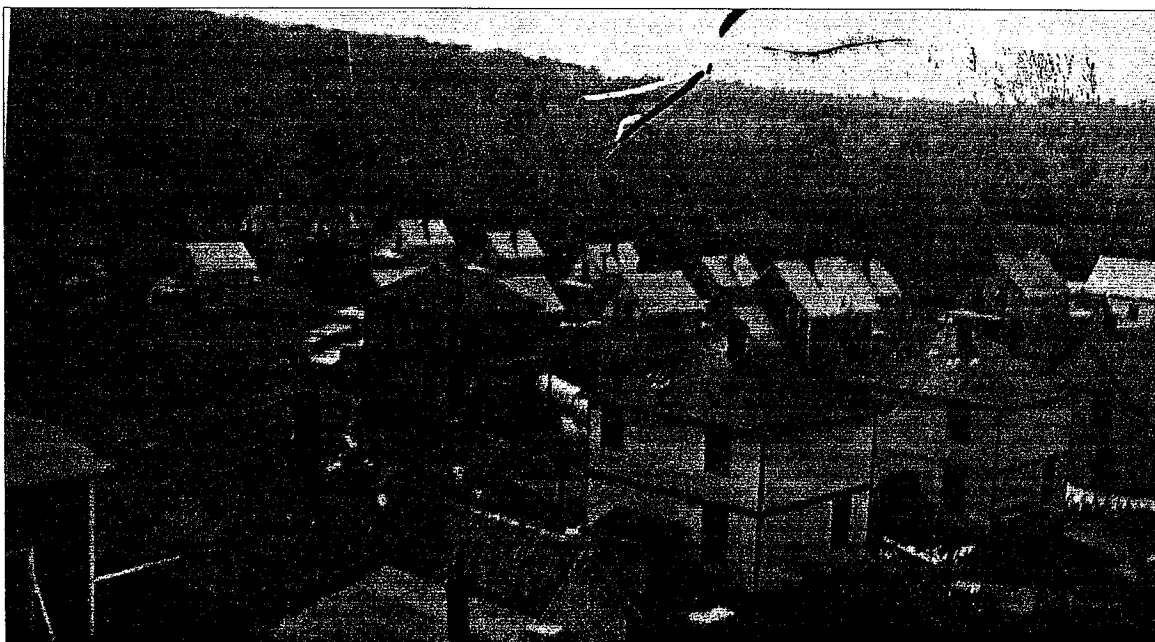
As things returned to normal, social life resumed. Bowling teams formed and tournaments were arranged. A few women tried their skill at bowling. The woman running the restaurant was an experienced bowler and willing to teach other women. The Salary Men's Club was active, as were their wives' club. Both were holding meetings once a week. A basketball court was installed in the hall and some of the younger men and high school boys had a competitive basketball team. It did not take much for an event to have a dance band brought in to play for a dance. Dances drew a good crowd from Tupper Lake, even in the winter.

Dr. Carter, the resident doctor with a room in the company hotel, was becoming too feeble to visit any patients outside. With the company's blessing, the manager, Mr. M.O. Woods, recruited Dr. Bury, a retired Army doctor, and put him on a salary. A married man had \$3.50 a week deducted from his pay envelope, and each single man had \$2.50 deducted from his pay envelope. Therefore, no one paid the doctor. The company built a small hospital next door to the big store. There were two consulting rooms and two bedrooms, each with two beds. The company hired a full-time registered nurse who had an apartment on the second floor of the hospital.

Up to this point, the company had built only two-story houses with kitchen, dining room and living room downstairs and three bedrooms upstairs. Since few houses had indoor plumbing, outhouses were prevalent. The company now upgraded the houses, even those on Porcupine Hill that had started as one-floor log cabins. Porcupine Hill now had 26 houses. Several large two-story, four-

bedroom houses were built around town and several one-story bungalows, followed by a row of six small bungalows built east of the manager's and superintendent's houses. Later, two good houses were built on the hill east of the schoolhouse, including one for Dr. Bury.

In 1923 things began to change in the mill. Since the Canadian mills were now producing newsprint, Piercefield started producing higher grades of paper. Two hydroelectric generators were installed under the ground wood room to make use of the water held back by the dam. A crew of electricians was brought in and slowly the huge steam engines were replaced with electric drive motors. The International Paper Company had become the International Power and Paper company. A power line for the hydro generators was brought in and the company installed electricity into many more of their houses besides those first ones on Main Street.



Company housing on Waller and Wood Streets shows a two-storey and a one-and-a-half storey residence design. Photo courtesy Piercefield Museum.

Equipment to bleach the sulphite was installed. Up until that time the mill had only used unbleached sulphite and ground wood. The ground wood production was seasonal and could only operate with high water periods, early spring and late fall.

When the ground wood mill was in operation, men worked two shifts, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and piled the surplus in back of the mill to tide the mill over when the river was too low to drive logs. This operation would be phased out when the bleached sulphite plant was in full operation. A limestone tower was built in back of the mill office. This was necessary in the making of bleach liquor from chlorine gas. This new operation brought some new faces to town. A chemist, a resident engineer, and an electrical engineer arrived with their families. Some stayed in the company suites temporarily.

In spring 1923, the road to Tupper Lake was almost impossible to drive on. There were many bad mud holes because the right-of-way was being graded and leveled in anticipation of paving with cement. The cement road ran right through town and around the hill along the riverbank. A new bridge was to be constructed across the river near the sawmill as well as a new bridge across Dead Creek, eliminating a bad curve in both places.

1925 saw more changes with the arrival of a mystery man. One early spring morning, a man came into the mill in street clothes, hung up his coat in the superintendent's office, walked out into the beater room and made himself useful working around a broken beater. He did not talk with or try to make friends with anyone in the mill. This went on every day all summer. Then in August the news leaked out that the mill would not start up again after the Labor Day shutdown and would be idle for about three months for a major upgrade of almost every department. The mystery man, Martin Manion, would be the new superintendent. Mart had been sent from the Niagara Falls mill because of his knowledge of book- and bond- paper grades,

which the Piercefield mill would make when it resumed operations. The long-time manager, M.O. Woods, would be leaving and the new manager would be Everett P. Engles, a much younger man with a degree in finance and business management but little papermaking experience.

The mill shut down September 5, 1925 for Labor Day and almost all of the men living in Piercefield were told to report for work assignment on the following Monday, September 14, at common law wages, except for the millwrights, machinists, carpenters, electricians and pipefitters, who would be paid the going rate for their trades. Some went to work for Domill Construction Company, which was installing a new roof on the machine room. The paper company needed to put everyone living in company houses to work so that they would not leave town and could pay their rents for the next three months.

Frank Schram, the former superintendent of the ground wood specialty, was sent to the Niagara Falls mill for a month to learn what he could about the new white book- and bond-grades. When the mill restarted he would be one of the night superintendents. There was construction work going on in every part of the mill, tearing down, rebuilding and installing new equipment. All the piping throughout the mill was replaced. The company made pipefitters out of a lot of men who had never done anything like it before. The #2 paper machine was completely rebuilt, two stacks of calendaring rolls were removed, a size press and afterdryers were added, a complete new set-end section built by Bagley Sewell Machine Foundry in Watertown. Their best erector, known as Windy Bill, was sent to install all the new machinery. He was not the easiest man to work for but he got the job done right. Finally, everything was put back together and the mill was painted and cleaned up.

About December 21, with crews assigned and the pulp mill in operation, the #2 machine was started. The first paper to come over looked very white in comparison to the

manila paper made before the changeover, but it was full of dirt specks and took several days to get it clean enough to put a grade number on it other than "job lot."

The #1 machine did not start up until after the first of the year, 1926. By this time there were some new faces coming into the mill, including Fighting Jack McGinners, an old papermaker from Massachusetts, and Frank Briggs, also an old-time papermaker. Both of these men were foremen hired to train the local papermakers to make bond and offset paper. When the size press was put in operation they needed a starch solution to surface coat the offset grade on both sides. William Tarbox and Mr. Benware and another man were taught to cook a starch solution to a constant consistency; Bill Tarbox was the best cook they had for this.

Sports, Stocks, and Signs of Trouble

The town was also changing in 1925. Everett P. Engles was a good mill manager and good for the town. He was young enough to enjoy relaxing with the residents. Also the new electric foreman, Donald Gimber, from the Niagara Falls mill, was a real sports fan. He organized baseball, basketball, and picnic field days. The new cement road had cut across the first ball ground on the other side of the river, west of the stone cut, so a new one had been leveled and cleaned up to make do where the lake sawmill was set up. This area was also used for the town field days and picnics. Several college baseball players were given part-time jobs at the mill with full pay as long as they played on the Piercefield baseball team.

The Newton Falls paper mill, the strongest competitor to the Piercefield team, also employed college baseball players. One time a road crew of convicts working on Route 56 between Sevey's and Hollywood sent a ball team to Piercefield on a Sunday and nearly everyone in town came out to see the game and have a fun afternoon.

Don Gimber also arranged to build a

skating rink in the winter and put in a lot of time working on it himself and supervising its use. Don was also a rifle marksman, having served in the Navy. He lived in the house on Main Street on the east side of the hotel. The house presently is next to Jen LaVasseur's house. One time after an electric storm, there was an electric short in a transfer switch on a transmission line tower directly in front of his house in the mill yard. Don sat on his front steps, took aim with his rifle, and shot the insulator holding the switch wire, cutting the current and putting out the fire.

The company had started an Employees' Mutual Benefit Association and Don was one of the first presidents. Through this organization, the company sold stock in the company through the payroll plan. Some of the Piercefield people, including Marselle Mere, Captain Mere's father, Arnie Audette, and Gaspard McSween, Edgar (Cigar) McSween's father, used the money they saved through this plan to buy their houses in 1943.

In 1927 E.P. Engles was fired and Mart Manion, the superintendent, was replaced. From 1930, the company changed managers and superintendents almost as often as the seasons, and sometimes more often. Buck Nolan came over from the Newton Falls paper mill to run the #1 machine and stayed about a year and a half. David Kraft came with Mart Manion, as a tour foreman. He gave up and went to Potsdam to work. Miles Kelly, also a tour foreman, and a good one, gave up in 1930. Miles was married to the sister of Tupper Lake Police Chief, Earl Trudeau. Frank Schramm had left to run a hotel in Norwood. John O'Connor, hotel manager since 1920, passed away while on vacation trip out west. His day clerk, Henry Vivier, became the new (and last) hotel manager after John's wife, Pearl O'Connor, settled their affairs and left town.

Some of the temporary mill managers were from a New York office and acted more like they were on vacation rather than taking their jobs seriously. Several superintendents

came and went. Although they were good men, they did not get any help from the managers and did not have a lot to say about the operation of the machines used to make paper.

In 1929, Charles Keelan came in as assistant mill manager. When Charlie hit town, then the mill was in big trouble. Keelan brought his own superintendent, a Mr. White, with him from the Fraser paper mill in Madawaska, Maine. White was not much of a papermaker but Keelan was friendly with his wife, so he stayed on until Keelan left. For almost a year Keelan ran the show with an iron hand. Anyone who differed with him was sent out in the street. Miles Kelly did not wait to be fired, he quit and wound up in Madawaska working for the Fraser Paper Company, where he worked up to superintendent of the bond paper machines. In his place Keelan set up a machine tender by the name of Ernest Benware. There were several men in the mill by the name of Benware, mostly related one way or another.

Ernie Benware was not the papermaker Miles Kelly was, but he did his best and he got along with Keelan, which the rest of the machine men who stayed through Keelan's one-year reign were barely able to do. In a way Keelan did not hold the men responsible for quality or quantity since he made changes in the pump strength and in the pulp freeness. Keelan, in a small paper mill town with not much nightlife, used to stroll around town with a toy bulldog on a leash. If he took a notion, he would go down into the machine room, dog and all.

The real reason Keelan left was his zeal in rebuilding the head box that put the stock on the wire where the paper was formed. When he asked the master mechanic Fred Collins to make the eleventh headbox for the #2 machine, Fred refused saying he had already made that particular one before. Keelan ordered Collins up to the office to meet with the mill manager and threatened to fire him if he refused to take orders. The manager

called the New York office and invited both men to tell their story to the manager of manufacturing there, which they did. Keelan was ordered to report to the New York office, and Piercefield never saw or heard of Mr. Keelan again. After his departure, better days came.

In 1930, the company decided they needed a permanent mill manager, so they sent Richard Buckley, Sr. to Piercefield, and with him came Earl Hobaugh from the Niagara Falls mill to serve as superintendent. They worked well together and made the men in the mill feel more relaxed and secure on the job and eager to make the mill pay.

One of the temporary mill managers had a telltale device installed on the paper machines to monitor their speed and operation and send that data to the manager's office on a recording chart that activated a buzzer when there was a break in the paper. It continued to buzz until the paper was returned to the reel. Richard Buckley had this removed since he had enough to do without listening to that buzzer and running down into the machine room to see what made it buzz.

Depression and Deactivation

On October 29, 1929, the New York Stock Exchange collapsed and brought on the Great Depression of the 1930s. This did not affect Piercefield until 1931. About then, orders for Adirondack Bond and printing grades of paper dropped off and the millwork dropped back to 3 or 4 days a week. The wages also dropped. Machine tenders' hourly rate of 1930 dropped to 67 cents an hour. By the middle of 1932, the night foreman salary dropped from \$52.00 per week to \$39.00 a week. Superintendent Earl Hobaugh did not talk.

The company did what it could to help the workers, without spending money. For the first time family men were allowed to cut firewood on the company woodlands and to buy coal at cost, about \$4 a ton. Also the waste wood from the box shop, previously

burned in the boiler room, was donated to the most needy families.

About the first of the year 1933, there was a lot of talk about closing down the mill. By the middle of February, it became a fact. A company representative stated that the grades of paper they had developed in Piercefield would be transferred to the Niagara Falls mill as soon as the latter's #4 machine was equipped with a size press and dryers and watermarking equipment were installed. This was to be completed by the first of March.

One of the reasons given for terminating operations in Piercefield was shipping costs. In the 1930s railroads were beginning to feel competition from trucking. There were no long hauls, and travel under 100 miles was faster by truck. This hurt branch railroads like the Adirondack Division, from Utica to Montreal, where freight was in small amounts easily carried by truck at any time of day or night.

Another reason given for Piercefield's termination was that the railroad cars had to be loaded with several destination points. This cost more because there was a law that the company that shipped must pay the freight on its product.

Niagara Falls mill, on the other hand, was right in the center of several customers that Piercefield had been shipping to. For example, Moore Business Forms had two large plants in Niagara Falls. It was only 20 miles to Buffalo, and a good market for bond.

The next two months were anxious times for most of the people working and living in Piercefield. The wood room and pump mill workers had no future in sight because there was no pulp mill in the Niagara mill for them

to go to: all its pulp came from International's paper mills in Canada.

Right after the announcement about 40 persons were told to start packing and making arrangements to move to Niagara Falls where they would be employed and housing found for them. The company owned 72 houses in the LaSalle section of Niagara, many of them empty. In Piercefield, there was a mad scramble for cartons and packing cases. The company provided most of these.

This has been not only a history of the International Paper company's mill in Piercefield, but also of the hamlet of Piercefield. For 40 years—from 1893 to 1933—Piercefield was a paper mill town, owned lock, stock, and barrel by the company. This memoir reveals that every move it made affected everyone who lived there, both in their pocketbooks and in their lifestyles. The company was like a father to everyone, controlling their every move.

The Piercefield mill never reopened. Clint ^{Webber} retired in 1965, after closing the Niagara Falls paper plant, and returned with his family to the Piercefield area, where they had vacationed in the summer for decades. -ed.