

History of Brandon

Brandon has a rich and varied history. In 1850, the Adirondacks were, as J.T. Headley described them, “an unbroken wilderness, crossed by no road, enlivened with no civilization, not a keel disturbing its waters, while bears, panthers, wolves, moose and deer were the only lords of the soil”. During the period of 1870 to 1895, logging companies followed rivers into this wilderness and the Adirondacks supplied the industrialized America with lumber, charcoal, tannin, paper pulp and other forest products. It was during this period that the village of Brandon was established in the heart of “Brandon”.

This sawmill community was served by both rail and road and a village of 1200 inhabitants thrived. The timber boom went bust around the same time (in 1884) that conservationists and moneyed large landowners managed to put a halt to logging on state land with the passage of the “Forever Wild” clause of the New York State constitution. Brandon went bust in 1898 when the sawmill closed. The last inhabitant of the village left in 1941.

In 1898, William Rockefeller purchased most of the land presently known as Brandon as well as surrounding property as a retreat from civilization. In the 1940s, the Ross family of Delaware purchased the property as a private park and secluded camp. Over their many years of ownership, they have been good stewards of the land. The family has managed the forest and property with care and developed one of the most spectacular trout fisheries in the northeast. Recognizing Brandon’s unique “natural, scenic, educational and aesthetic value” and wanting to ensure that the property remain protected for future generations, the Rosses donated one of the first conservation easements to the Nature Conservancy in 1978. This easement protects the character of the property while still allowing limited development.

Neil Surprenant wrote a book on Brandon entitled “Brandon” in 1982.