

## John and Peter Black A Lasting Legacy

Almost 100 years ago, a young man came to Saranac Lake seeking a cure for tuberculosis. Although he ultimately lost his battle with the disease, the care and friendship that nurtured him and his mother during their five year stay in the village is still remembered today.

It is a story that Historic Saranac Lake staff and volunteer docents often tell as visitors enter the library of the Saranac Laboratory Museum. A striking portrait hangs over the fireplace, and a plaque recently installed nearby reads, “John Baxter Black, 1896-1923, for whom this room was dedicated in 1928.”

The young man in the portrait graduated from Princeton in 1917 and volunteered for service in World War I. Like many fellow servicemen, he contracted TB and was sent to Saranac Lake, where he fought for his health for five years. After his tragic death at the age of 27, John’s parents, Frank and Jessie Black, built the library addition to the Saranac Laboratory in his memory.

One year after John Black died, his nephew and namesake was born. Growing up in the shadow that his uncle’s death cast over his family, John Baxter Black II developed a deep interest in his family history and a sense of responsibility to preserve it. He wrote a meticulously researched two-volume history of the family and the business empire built by his grandfather, the Ohio Brass Company.

In the 1980s, John Black II visited Saranac Lake, hoping to find traces of his family’s connection to the village. To his dismay, the Saranac Laboratory stood closed and on the verge of ruin, the portrait was gone, and it seemed that Saranac Lake had forgotten the story of John Baxter Black and the generous contributions of his parents to the community.

But all was not lost. In 1998 Historic Saranac Lake acquired the Saranac Laboratory and began its faithful restoration. The portrait was found and returned to its place over the fireplace. Seeking to uncover the story behind the young man in the portrait, Historic Saranac Lake staff conducted internet research and made the connection with his nephew in Mansfield, Ohio.

And so, in the spring of 2009, eighty-six years after John Black’s death, John Black II visited the restored Saranac Laboratory and John Black Room along with his younger brother Peter. The brothers enjoyed a three-day visit in Saranac Lake, hosted by staff and members of the board of Historic Saranac Lake.

Delighted with Historic Saranac Lake's success in restoring Dr. Trudeau's laboratory and preserving local history, John and Peter gave generously to support the organization's immediate needs. The brothers helped with capital improvements to the building and the installation of museum exhibits telling the story of WWI in Saranac Lake. They donated \$100,000 to retire the mortgage on the building and made the personal gift of a table that once belonged to their uncle. John and Peter made their most lasting gift to the organization with generous donations to the Historic Saranac Lake fund at the Adirondack Foundation.

Today, the legacy of the Black Family continues to be felt in Saranac Lake. Recent upgrades to the museum, including the restoration of the John Black Room library bookcases have been possible thanks to generous grants from the Richland County Foundation and the Robert and Esther Black Family Foundation and Fund.



Historic Saranac Lake Executive Director Amy Catania visited John Baxter Black's nephew and namesake in Mansfield, Ohio.