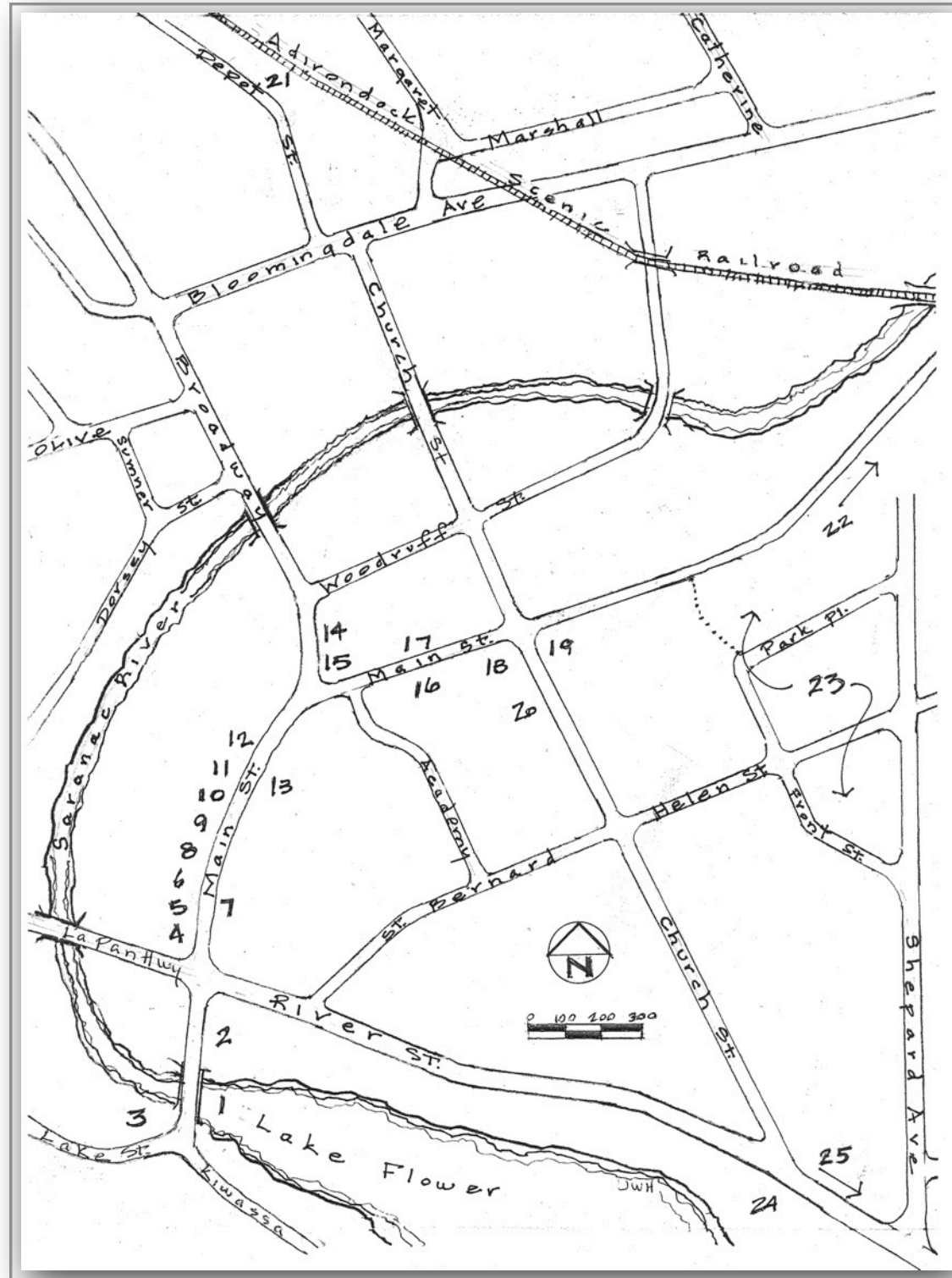


Historic Saranac Lake, New York



A Brief History of Saranac Lake

Set in a remote mountain valley, Saranac Lake offered land and seclusion to the pioneers who came to this area in the early 1800s to cut timber and farm. When guidebooks publicized Saranac Lake and the Adirondacks, wealthy city men came to hunt and fish, and hired local residents as skilled guides. Towards the end of the century, people began to come for their health, and a new industry was born.

In 1884, Dr. Edward L. Trudeau founded the first successful sanatorium in the U.S. for the treatment of tuberculosis, establishing a model of treatment based on the value of fresh air, rest, hygiene, good nutrition, and a positive outlook. Ten years later, Dr. Trudeau built the first laboratory in the country for the study of the TB germ. For seventy years, Saranac Lake was known as a world-wide center for scientific research and patient care until the discovery of TB-killing antibiotics in the 1950s.

The downtown business district grew quickly to cater to TB patients and their families. Taxi operators, laundries, furriers, and pharmacies were in demand. Specialties such as cure chairs and hot water bottles called stone pigs were marketed here.

The “cure” dominated Saranac Lake’s economy from 1884 to 1954, providing both employment and opportunities for entrepreneurs. The care of patients required many “cure cottages,” distinguished by porches, awnings, and overhanging trees. The construction industry boomed as a result. The vast majority of the town’s private sanatoria were run by women, providing a good livelihood for widows and unmarried women. Young people worked as tray boys and tray girls, carrying meals to the sicker, bedridden patients. By 1920 there were at least 166 cure cottages in Saranac Lake – and possibly many more.

With the advent of the antibiotic cure for TB, Saranac Lake faced the need to reinvent itself. A world famous research facility, two colleges, a regional hospital, and recreational opportunities gave new life to the bustling village. Historic preservation efforts identified the distinctive “cure cottages” and promoted their restoration. Saranac Lake continues to look to the future while respecting its past.

Walk back in time

A self-guided walking tour of
historic downtown Saranac Lake



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Produced in cooperation with the Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce. Map by James H. Hotaling.



Made possible, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature