

The History of Fossenvue, and the Queen's Castle

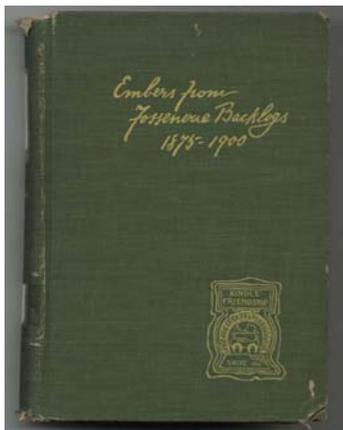
Fossenvue was the name of a summer camp on Caywood Point, on the eastern shores of Seneca Lake, New York, and it was a summer-time get-away for suffragettes and children of wealthy social reformers. It was the lakeside retreat, and few of its kind existed. It was started by women, which was not the norm, and was in existence from 1875 to the early 1900's.

Politically liberal young women attended, as well as men. The camp was unusual because these young women participated in outdoor recreational pursuits such as swimming, tennis, and archery, and they also engaged in theoretical, political and philosophical discussions. The outdoor recreation in itself, not to mention that it was alongside men, was not common practice for ladies of this social status during the late 1800's. They also read quotations at each meal, and discussed the sentiments of the day, all of which was largely considered taboo for women of that era. The fact that ladies dared to discuss politics and women's suffrage, let alone in the mixed company of men was unthinkable and pretty risqué for the time. The camp was considered quite radical, and it lasted for over a quarter of a century.

Fossenvue had many attendees and ties to Geneva, and Peterboro, New York. Elizabeth Smith Miller, later known as the "Queen of Fossenvue" and her family resided at Lochland Estate, on the shores of Seneca Lake in Geneva. The idea to create a summer camp was conceptualized at Lochland in July of 1875. Anne Fitzhugh Miller, Elizabeth's daughter, was 19 at the time. Miss Miller and her best friend Miss VerPlank asked Lydia Predmore, who was a member of the Political Equality Club and a friend of Anne's mother, Elizabeth, permission to camp at Faussetts Point. They eventually established a lease agreement with them, and utilized the point for several summers.

The original seven that started Fossenvue are as follows: Elizabeth Smith Miller, Ruth Leslie VerPlanck, Emily Dilworth Snyder, James Fowler, Anne Fitzhugh Miller, Anne Palfrey Bridge, and William Fitzhugh Miller. Fossenvue is an anagram of the phrase "Seven of Us". The group had a contest to re-arrange the letters of "seven of us" to name the camp. The prize – a cooking apron – was won by Elizabeth Smith Miller.

We know so much about Fossenvue because the group published a book in 1901 entitled Embers from Fossenvue backlogs 1875-1900 which contains poetry, songs, a few journal entries and photographs. They also left behind a handwritten journal with poetry, daily entries, newspaper clippings, letters, photographs and sketches from 1908.



They constructed several buildings at Fossenvue, and the building that remains today is known as the Queen's Castle. It was a birthday present for Elizabeth Smith Miller on her 77th birthday, which was September 20, 1899. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building is currently undergoing a roof restoration. The photograph was taken this summer, and shows the roof restoration in progress.

While under construction, several secrets were revealed! On the right hand corner of the stone fireplace mantle, Elizabeth Smith Miller had inscribed her initials (ESM) and the date (September 26, 1899), and the number "77". Years of dirt and nests had accumulated on the mantle, hiding this treasure until the contractor did a little tidying up inside. Near the roof rafters on the south wall, another inscription was found. It appeared to have been tapped into the wood with a small horizontal shaped object, something like a tiny screwdriver, and read "Other little children shall take my boats ashore." The writing was in script, and the person doing this intricate work would have had to have been up on a chair or step-ladder in order to do the inscription at that height. Did Elizabeth Smith Miller tap that into the wood during her last stay at Fossenvue? Was it a message that meant she wouldn't return, and that the next generation would have to carry on? Other inscriptions were found on the door frame, and they were the signatures of Elizabeth Smith Miller, Anne Fitzhugh Miller, and Ophelia King.

Kari Lusk of the Forest Service has given several presentations this year in Hector, NY, Peterboro, NY, Rutland, VT and Geneva, NY on the history of Caywood Point, Fossenvue, and the Queen's Castle. They are very interesting, filled with pictures, historic accounts, and poetry from the Embers of Fossenvue Backlogs 1875-1900, along with excerpts from the handwritten journal of 1908. She has drawn quite a crowd at each location, and she will continue to give presentations to the public throughout the upcoming year. Look for another upcoming presentation to be held late January at the Hector fire hall.

Contact: Kathleen Diehl—phone: 802-747-6709; email kdiehl@fs.fed.us.