

Addison Child, Childwold, and the Hotel

by Peter Collinge

Addison Child, the founder and namesake of Childwold, was born January 30, 1821 in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. Child was well educated, traveled extensively, and was involved in a number of large-scale business ventures with varying degrees of success. In 1856 he began the development of a subdivision in Swampscott, Massachusetts. This venture later ended in bankruptcy. In 1878, after purchasing approximately 15,000 acres in the region of the current Childwold and Massawepie, Child advertised through handbills in post offices throughout St. Lawrence County that he would sell small tracts of land suitable for farms at the low price of \$1 to \$3 per acre. He built himself a log house in 1878 in the center of the new settlement, built a thundershower sawmill on the outlet of Jock's Pond in 1879 to supply lumber for houses, and spent the next 10 years developing the hamlet of Childwold. In 1884 the first post office was established as "Childwood", apparently in error, which was corrected to "Childwold" on April 22 with Mr. Child as postmaster. ("Wold" means an upland or hilly area of open country.)

Addison Child was apparently held in high regard by the settlers, and by his many laborers on the hotel and on local roadbuilding, as a friend interested in their welfare. For example, during a diphtheria epidemic he opened his store and supplied medicines and provisions to the stricken families, along with paying doctor bills out of his own pocket. Child also donated the land and the lumber for the Childwold church.

Addison Child's masterpiece, the Childwold Park House (known as the Hotel Childwold after about 1900) was constructed in 1889 on Massawepie Lake in what is now the Camp Pioneer parade field. Child apparently hoped to profit from the fashionable Adirondack resort trade, and to provide jobs for the settlers of Childwold and another market for their crops. The hotel opened for its first season in 1890, with William F. Ingold from the famous "Magnolia" of Florida as its manager. On May 1, 1895, Ingold also became the first Massawepie postmaster. Later managers included Charles Leland in 1897, C.R. Eldridge in 1903, E. R. Champion, and Major Henry Dorr (who included stories of Massawepie in his 1921 book, *Mohawk Peter*).

The original red frame hotel building was three stories tall, with a central tower that rose an extra story, and was located on a rise 27 feet above the lake. Later, to increase capacity, an addition was constructed at the north end of the building. The addition included another four-story tower and a five-story belvedere toward the northern end rising 78 feet above the lake. That northern end of the hotel had piazzas on three sides, totaling 400 feet in length. The hotel office was located near the central 40'x60' Adirondack Room, which had a stone fireplace in the center and contained rustic "Adirondack" furniture. Much of this furniture was made by Billy Jones, who especially liked using birch with the bark showing. Near the Adirondack Room was the spacious Sun Room, and also the Telegraph/Main office which maintained 24-hour telegraph service for guests, many of whom wished to keep abreast of the stock market back in New York City. At the south end of the hotel was the main Dining Room and Kitchen, along with three separate dining rooms for nurses, porters, and servants. An annex to the east contained a laundry and storerooms, with a baseball field nearby.

The enlarged hotel building itself held approximately 250-300 guests in its 106 rooms. There was no electricity. Illumination was provided by hundreds of kerosene lamps, which were cleaned and filled in a special room on the second floor. A separate building held steam boilers which provided hot water for the operation.

In addition to the main hotel, there were eventually 18 cottages on the grounds, housing another 100 guests. Outbuildings to the north of the hotel included a bowling alley with billiards rooms on the second floor, and a casino with a polished maple floor for dancing and a stage for theatrical productions. Stables for horses and carriages were found at the eastern edge of the grounds, and two boathouses were located on Massawepie Lake below the hotel. A nine-hole golf course was located in the field between Massawepie Road and Catamount Pond. Across the road from the hotel, near the middle of the golf course, stood a three-story, 40-room Guide House. (Across Catamount Pond stood the much smaller Gale House (1890) summer resort, later known as the Gale Pond View House and the Gale Lake View House, and store (1889).)

The hotel quickly became successful, drawing wealthy guests from Boston and New York City, where a hotel office was maintained for some years at 320 Fifth Avenue. Among the notable hotel visitors were W. A. Goodyear and H. L. Firestone, the tire magnates, and M. and J. Guggenheim, sugar barons. There are unconfirmed reports that Presidents McKinley, T. Roosevelt, and Taft also visited.

Guests initially arrived by John Hurd's new Northern Adirondack Railroad to Childwold Station, which opened in 1889 at Pitchfork Pond near Tupper Lake, then traveled seven miles over a densely wooded road past Mount Matumbia and across the Raquette River near Sol's Island. In July, 1892, a different Childwold Station near Mt. Arab on Dr. Webb's new Adirondack and St. Lawrence Railway (later the Adirondack Division of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad) replaced the original stop. Trains ran daily, except Sunday, from Boston and New York City. Travelers then reached Massawepie over a carriage road, connecting with the current Massawepie Road (formerly Townline Road) near Horseshoe Pond. This carriage road has been used for 50 years by Scouts as the hiking trail to Mt. Arab.

In 1892, the hotel was open from June 1 to October, at a price of \$3 per day for room and board. A menu from August 13, 1903 shows such luncheon items as Fried Fresh Butterfish a la Vinagrette and Roast Leg of Mutton with Currant Jelly, while dinner entrees included Boiled Fresh Beef Tongue with Piquante Sauce and Spring Lamb Kidney Broiled, Brown Butter. All drinking water was from "our Crystal Spring," which apparently was located somewhere near the present Camp Mountaineer. A complete wine list was also offered. (The hotel's Wine Room and Smoking Room were near the central Adirondack Room.) Pete Buletti was the chef for many summers, and John Hawkins was headwaiter.

Addison Child died on January 23, 1898. Some accounts of the time indicate that his health was shattered by the strain of the development of Childwold and the hotel. The hotel's health lasted a bit longer, but not forever. With the decline of the U.S. economy after the "gay 90's", the hotel's fortunes gradually suffered along with many other Adirondack resorts. The hotel closed in 1909, with its luxurious furnishings and equipment still intact in the abandoned building.

Years later, in 1976, the name *Childwold* was used by author Joyce Carol Oates as the title of her book about an impoverished region. It is possible that Oates "borrowed" this Adirondack name which she may have seen during her time at Syracuse University. Not all of the residents may have appreciated the somewhat disturbing fictional depiction of life in Childwold. The real Childwold lives on along Route 3 at the western edge of the Town of Pierceland. (Pierceland celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2001, having been split in 1901 from the Town of Hopkinton.) Childwold still has its own post office, and a USGS map quadrangle named for it. Childwold today is best known for its historic church building, the Leather Artisan shop that ships worldwide, and the Thirsty Moose (formerly Dumas) Restaurant. In this case, reality is better than fiction!