

Martha Reben was born in New York City on April 30, 1906. Her father was Jewish and her mother was of Irish heritage. Her mother died of tuberculosis when Martha was 6 years old. Martha later developed tuberculosis and suffered from it her entire life. Martha's father supported her financially throughout her life.

Martha came to Saranac Lake from New York City in 1927 as a tuberculosis patient and was treated at the Trudeau Sanatorium for three years prior to going out into the woods to live. Tuberculosis was considered untreatable until Edward Livingston Trudeau developed protocols for treatment. Martha underwent several surgeries resulting in her having use of only part of a lung. Her heart and blood vessels were also compromised leaving her with poor blood circulation.

In 1931, Martha responded to an ad in the paper from Outdoor Guide Fred Rice which read "Wanted: To get in touch with some invalid who is not improving, and who would like to go into the woods for the summer." Martha Reben & Fred Rice camped out almost every summer from 1931 to 1955 and then again in 1963. Living in the woods allowed Martha's health to slowly improve, but she continued to struggle with health problems for the remainder of her life. Martha lived to age 58. She died on January 7, 1964. Martha kept a journal over a twenty-year period, which she published in three books called The Healing Woods, The Way of the Wilderness and A Sharing of Joy. Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney paid Martha \$10,000 for the rights to make a film of The Healing Woods, but the film was never completed. With this money, Martha purchased a small rustic camp on the Saranac River near Bloomingdale.

Credit: Betsy Tisdale's "On Martha Reben."

Atwood Camp:

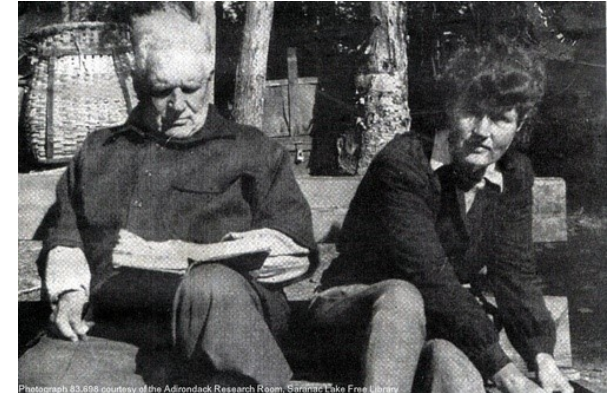
The areas where Martha camped were largely unpopulated. Hunters and fishermen were likely the most common people sighted. Some very lively neighbors included the Atwood's. From 1893 to 1975 private residents were allowed to build temporary camps on the Saranac Lakes. The only tent platform on Middle Saranac Lake was at site #65. It was built by John and Anna Atwood. Laurie Gorgas grew up spending her summers at a tent platform on Lower Saranac Lake and visited the Atwood's. She says that "Anna was a very interesting, independent and colorful woman. She frequently stayed alone with her shotgun in the cabin. I remember visiting with her at the cabin with my family when we were small. I still remember she served us fresh caught bass rolled in spicy finely crushed cornflakes and fried in butter- it was so good I never forgot it! Anna once was alone in the cabin one night when 3 males came knocking at the cabin door. Anna answered the door- shotgun in hand- and when they asked her for a drink of water, she told them "there is a big lake out there " and directed them to get a drink from the lake. They did not bother her again!"

Included in the photo below are Laurie, "Grandpa and Grandma Gorgas and Uncle Dave Gorgas on the roof. The other two girls were my cousins. I believe that's Anna on the steps."



Photo credit Chris Gorgas

"Healing Woods" Paddling History Tour



Author Martha Reben & Outdoor Guide Fred Rice.
Photo credit Historic Saranac Lake.

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Thanks to Fran Yardley, Laurie Gorgas & Historic Saranac Lake: localwiki.org

Weller Pond was the first campsite where Martha Reben spent her summers in the company of her guide Fred Rice. Starting in 1931 until 1941, Martha camped out at this site all summer long. The first two years they only spent a brief amount of time due to her frail health, but from 1933 on they spent 5-6 months at this site. Fred taught her everything she needed to know to be a "sportsman."

Martha grew to love the outdoors. In her books she describes the relationships she formed with the wild animals. She often carried the smaller animals in her pocket and adopted baby animals that had been separated from their mother. Martha enjoyed fishing. Even though Fred taught her to hunt, she avoided shooting any animals. It took twenty years for Martha to publish her books. The Healing Woods was a best seller, featured by the Family Book Club. The editor at Crowell shortened Martha's last name to "Reben" because of the climate of anti-Semitism in the 1950's when it was published.

During the other three seasons of the year Martha lived with Fred Rice and his wife Kate. She became part of their family. Fred was 31 years older and Kate was 45 years older than Martha. Fred outlived both of them.



Photo by R. Cilley

Rice Point, site 81 on Weller Pond is the second campsite where Martha Reben and her guide Fred Rice spent their summers from 1942 to 1955. The NY State Conservation Department built the lean-to on in memory of Martha.



Rice Point Lean-to built in memory of Martha Reben

Martha's Neighbors: Middle Saranac Lake (historically named Round Lake) has always been a popular recreational area. **Bartlett's Sportsmen's Home** was established on land that adjoined Middle & Upper Saranac Lake in 1854. The only two camps on Middle Saranac Lake were built in the early 1900's. Alfred Blunt Jenkins, a member of the **Saranac Club**, built the first camp in 1903 on Plymouth Rock on Middle Saranac Lake. Alfred was the great-grandfather of Jay Yardley who moved to the Adirondacks in 1968, with his wife Fran, to renovate & manage the **Bartlett Carry Club** until 1984.

Currently the club is a private cooperative of 9 shareholders owning the land where the original portage crossed to Upper Saranac Lake. At this site from 1854 to 1884, Virgil Bartlett and his wife Caroline operated **Bartlett's Sportsmen's Home**, with accommodations, food & guides for up to 50 guests. The Bartlett's were known for their hospitality, good food, cleanliness and comfort.



Bartlett's Sportsmen's Home, Saranac Lake Library

According to a map surveyed by E.M. Merrill April 1893, Curtis owned **Caper Point**. Daniel Parish Kingsford purchased the lot and built his camp in 1907. Daniel & his wife were part of NY high society. He was appointed by President Taft as the superintendent of the NY Assay Office, and later joined J.P. Morgan's banking firm. The camp consisted of about a dozen buildings, one of which was a child's playhouse. Each cabin had modern plumbing with running water, which was a unique feature. There was a lean-to on the eastern edge of the property. The original ice house and other buildings remain on the property today. Kingsford sold the entire camp to Harry Duso in the 1950's who subsequently subdivided the property into 18 parcels. The properties are currently owned by 7 families.

