

HISTORY OF LAKE WINNISQUAM AND BLACK BROOK ROAD
From 1932 to 1994

Presented at the annual meeting of the
Lake Winnisquam Drive Association by
Edith C. Robertson

Four Sections: Development of Shoreline
Lake
History of the Association
Lore of the Lake

THE BEGINNING

Before 1932 there was no Black Brook Road, and there were less than a dozen camps on the entire stretch of the present road. These camps were built with lumber brought across the lake by a quaint, homemade steamboat--like the African Queen of Humphrey Bogart-Katherine Hepburn fame. This boat also transported people to their camps. There were no motor boats in that era--only rowboats and canoes.

On the opposite shore there was the county poor farm in Laconia located in the Blueberry Lane area (referred to today as the Gold Coast.) It abutted the State School for Retarded Children. Then came the Eastman Farm with 5000 feet of shoreline. The cows grazed in the field and drank from the lake. It was a peaceful, pastoral scene. In the early days, lakefront land was considered worthless, thus the state and county property occupied this now valuable land.

Around 1930, a local entrepreneur from Laconia had a dream of developing the shoreline into a second Weirs Beach. He purchased five farms that stretched along the shoreline. This was in the depth of the depression and farms could be purchased for \$500. Many farms were deserted, fully furnished, as families trekked to the cities to try to find work.

After acquiring the farms, this entrepreneur proceeded to blast a road along the shoreline. He left the boulders and stumps undisturbed, and it took about a half hour for a car to weave down to Lower Bay Road. At that time the dirt road extended almost to the Winnisquam Bridge (called Mosquito Bridge). This bridge at that time was a one-lane wooden one.

There were never more than two or three cars a day on Black Brook Road, which was one lane wide; and if they met, one car would have to back up to a spot where it could pull off the road. Then, as the cars passed each other, people would extend cheerful greetings to each other and thank profusely the one who had backed up. The entrepreneur had constructed a flimsy wooden bridge over Black Brook (near the fish hatchery). Passengers would usually leave their car and walk over the bridge while the driver would follow in the car, hoping he would not go through the bridge. The charge for the use of this bridge was \$5 per season.

When the "road" was completed, lots were marked out and three or four lots were sold. When the owners went in the lake for a swim, the entrepreneur would pop out of the woods, telling them that they were trespassing, and that if they would read the fine print in their deeds, they would find that he owned six feet in from the shoreline. He would offer to sell the six feet at a high price. Astounded campers eventually took him to court.

The early campers on the road were real "pioneers." There was no electric, telephone, or mail service. They coped with outdoor plumbing, kerosene lamps, and isolation. The men spent most of their time removing stumps and rocks from the road. After three weeks, the ice man refused to deliver more ice as he broke a spring every time he came over the road. People would put a large piece of ice, purchased in Winnisquam, on their bumpers; but only a small piece remained by the time they returned.

One of the first people to move to Black Brook Road was a Professor Helff from New York with his wife and two daughters, Virginia and Joann (Helff) Morin. Pat (Helff) Elliott was born a few years later in Laconia, so she is a true New Hampshire native. In these early days, the mailman left the mail in a community mailbox on Lower Bay Road, and all the campers would congregate around the mailbox while awaiting the mailman. It was there that I first saw Joann as a toddler.

By 1940, between the ongoing court cases and the depression, there were no buyers for the lots. Consequently the owner lost all his property, which was taken over by the Concord Savings Bank. In 1941, at the beginning of World War II, all building materials were appropriated by the Government for the war effort. Therefore, until after World War II, the lake was still pristine, peaceful, and unspoiled. Camp Waldron, a boys' camp, was in operation at that time. They had about five war canoes, holding about eight boys each. These canoes glided by quietly, Indian fashion, down the lake as the boys set off for an overnight camping spot.

The end of the War brought more activity along the shore. Electricity came through in 1947. With the convenience of inside plumbing, electric lights, and refrigerators, camps were then called COTTAGES,

Building began in earnest in the late fifties and early sixties, and we were delighted to have a wide black-topped road, telephone service, and mail service to our camps.

In the early 80's, because of a fast-moving upward economy, a boat craze developed. Lakeside property prices began to skyrocket and real estate taxes zoomed with the increased values of lakefront property. People wanted more use of their property. So began insulation, cathedral ceilings, sliding glass doors, dishwashers, etc. The "cottages" had now become SECOND HOMES.

THE LAKE

At first it was possible to drift out on the lake in a row boat and look down to the bottom of the lake at large fish and other marine life going by. The few fishermen had a bountiful supply of bass, pickerel, salmon, perch, hornpout, perch, etc. For bait, they placed minnow traps in the lake or caught helgremites or crawfish. One fisherman caught a bass with a clothespin! In the spring, Laconians would come to Black Brook road to smelt at night at the source of brooks. Using flashlights and nets, they could get a bucket of smelt in a short time.

The kingfisher, a bird that looks like a blue jay, was a common bird at that time. It would swoop down in the water to catch minnows. They broke the silence of the woodland on a quiet, summer day with their splashing in the water. The loons would gather on the lake in the fall in huge flocks, getting ready to migrate to ice-free water. There was an eagle's nest on Eagle Ledge, where the Bruni and Garner camps are today. Chipmunks would take peanuts from our hands.

When the ice man no longer came to the camps and driving to Winnisquam for ice was difficult, an enterprising man named Louis Felker, unemployed because of the depression, started a delivery to the camps on the lake by one of the first covered motor powered boats, called the Foxy. He carried ice, newspapers, milk, and vegetables supplied by local farmers. He would also take orders for items which he did not carry. When the war started, he obtained a war job at Scott and Williams. Then a Laconian, Domonique Paquette, who delivered food items to farmers on back roads with his grocery truck, added Black Brook Road to his route. He usually arrived about 9:00 p.m. He worked long and hard, and the campers appreciated this service.

In the 1950's motor boats began to appear. In the 1960's algae began to develop in the lake. After a few years the water actually turned green. People brave enough to venture into the water would come out of the water with a green coating covering them. Motor boats would churn up green foam behind their boats. Nothing was done to correct this problem until a camper at the lower end of the lake invited his friend, then Governor Powell, to the lake for a visit. Then things started to happen. It was discovered that treated sewage from the State School was acting as a fertilizer in the lake and causing the algae to develop. A camper in a scuba suit dove down and found the sewer outlet, and he filled the pipe with rocks. Soon the school experienced a plumbing problem which took plumbers a long time to locate.

Eventually it was decided to treat the lake with copper sulphate, and college students were hired to do the job. Five boats were spaced across the lake, and they dragged bags of copper sulphate

behind the boats. One day they decided they didn't want to "work," so they deposited all the copper sulphate in one spot and took off. Soon thereafter hundreds of dead fish drifted up the lake. The fish never really came back after that.

In the early days when the ice formed on the lake, boys from the State School would cross the lake and break into the camps, taking carving knives, rifles, and clothing. This annoyance continued for several years but was finally stopped.

LAKE WINNISQUAM DRIVE ASSOCIATION

When the entrepreneur developed the land, he renamed Black Brook Road (which then extended only to the fish hatchery) to Lake Winnisquam Drive. The natives refused to recognize the name change. When visitors arrived in the area looking for campers, they would ask for directions to Lake Winnisquam Drive. The natives replied that there was no road so named but that there was a Black Brook Road. This meant nothing to the visitors who then drove along all the back dirt roads in Sanbornton without ever finding their friends.

The campers organized in the 1930's to see what could be done about many problems confronting them. They named the association the Lake Winnisquam Drive Association, after the name of the road at that time. Most important was getting the town to take over the road. Each year a very small improvement was made. However, as with all dirt roads, the road would become "washboardy," and the ride was very rough. The natives would never scrape the road in the summer because their reasoning was that the "heavy" summer traffic would only ruin their work. So the road was never scraped until after Labor Day, when the campers had left!!! Eventually, we got our wide paved road which was a welcome improvement. The name of the road was changed back to Black Brook Road. The road was never plowed in winter until recent years when the now second homes were tenanted year-round. In the early years when we wanted to get into our camps in the spring, just after the snow had melted and in what was called "the mud season," we would have to leave our cars on Lower Bay Road and trudge in through the mud with our supplies. It was a fun challenge, however, walking along the road at night by flashlight while listening to the peepers' serenading along the way.

Through the efforts of the Association we were able to continually improve conditions over the years. We worked hard to get a better road, to get electricity, to fight the algae problem, to get telephone service, etc. The Association has served the Black Brook residents well. Eventually the Sanbornton Bay Association was formed and the campers at the lower end of the road joined that organization. Now the Association's challenge is milfoil, jet skis, indiscriminate cutting of trees, heavy boat traffic, and pending plans for a state park on the State School property with its planned boat ramp.

LORE

On Hallowe'en night in 1931, some youngsters located the dynamite which was to be used in making the road. They found a row boat, rowed out to Pot Island, stole some college banners, and set the dynamite to blow up the island. Then they rowed back to shore, setting the boat adrift. As a result of the blast, only one-fourth of the island remains today. Authorities thought the culprits had perished in the explosion; however, sometime later, they were caught through the banners which they had stolen.

There is a Victorian house on Loon Island, beyond the three islands, which was built by a prominent Laconia family by the name of Lougee. It was furnished elaborately, and the first day that the family moved in, their little five-year-old daughter waded into the water and disappeared. Although the lake was dragged for weeks, she was never recovered. The owners never returned to the island and never sold. For years the house was vacant.

A piece of shorefront at the head of the lake near the loon sanctuary was owned by a farmer who was indignant that the town was taxing him for what was then considered worthless shorefront. His complaints were unresolved, and in revenge, he willed his property to the town of Meredith. New Hampshire prides itself in having never broken a will, so the land remains unspoiled and unused today.

The beach area where the Osborne cottages are (near the fish hatchery), was an isolated beach which Sanbornton residents used. When the bank acquired all the property, this piece was offered to the town for \$5,000. The natives decided not to purchase it as they had "always used it at no cost."

The house just beyond the covered bridge property was one of the original camps, called Camp Comfort. (In those days each camp was given a name). It had been deserted in the 1930's so, twenty years later, the town sold it for back taxes in the amount of \$200. The buyer kept it for a few years, made repairs and improvements, and sold it for \$5,000--a huge profit in those days.

When Mr. Eastman, the farmer across the lake, passed away sometime in the late 1950's, his heirs divided the 5,000-foot shorefront into 50 lots at \$1,000 each--in those days a fantastic transaction.

In the 1930's there was an old gentleman in his eighties, named Grandfather Knowlton, who lived in the present Dowling house. I enjoyed sitting on the porch as a young girl, listening to his tales of prospecting for gold in the gold rush days. He would travel through the woods, live among the Indians, knew Buffalo Bill and Chief Two Sticks. Years later he visited a museum in the West where a piece of hair from Chief Two Sticks was on exhibit. Grand-

father spoke to the curator, told him it was not Chief Two Sticks' hair, and the exhibit was removed.

The hurricane of 1938 did extensive damage to the beautiful woods and they have never returned to their original beauty. Practically every tree was down. Professor Helff came from New York to check on damage to his camp. The only way he could get in was by hiring a man with a boat to take him across the lake to his property. One family, still at their camp, had a very difficult time getting out. The Leightons, realizing their plight, reached their camp by coming over the "mountain" in back, only to discover that they had left.

The man who owned the present L Camp, (called Camp Aloha in those days), was so discouraged when he saw all his trees down that he exclaimed that he was going to give the land back to the Indians. However, over the years he persevered and removed all the fallen trees and stumps. He personally planted all the pine trees that are there today.

There was a Girl Scout camp on Treasure Island in Lake Winnepesaukee. Following is one of the songs they sang at campfires:

Peace I ask of thee, oh, water,
Peace, peace, peace.
When I learn to live serenely,
Cares will cease.
From the hills I gather courage,
Vision of a day to be;
Strength to lead, a faith to follow,
All are given unto me.
Peace I ask of thee, oh, water,
Peace, peace, peace.

And so I give you my beloved lake. Take good care of it!

Edith C. Robertson