

A Short Story About Forest Lake and the Forest Lake Improvement Association

Once upon a time Forest Lake was the basin of a body of water covering much of Cheshire County. The water reached nearly to the tops of surrounding mountain peaks. Various runoffs drained the water until only the lake and the Ashuelot River and the brooks that fed them remained. Over the years the lake has had several names, including Temple's Pond, Frankln's Pond and Humphrey Pond, names provided by early landowners. It was renamed Forest Lake in 1883 to be more attractive to vacationers.

Social life around the lake was abundant in the 1800's and 1900's and included dances, roller skating parties, picnics and bowling. The facilities in and around the "the grove," which we now know as the town beach area, included a hotel, a store, carriage sheds, bowling alleys, a dance pavilion, several manufacturing operations such as a stave mill, a pail mill and a grist mill, a railroad platform across from the old Melvin Bridge and, of course, a number of cottages on the west side. Another popular entertainment was offered by an excursion boat which plied the lake, providing scenic rides. Until the 1900's there were no cottages on the east side of the lake, but they began to appear about 1918, starting on the ridge at the northeast end.

In 1938 a hurricane passed through the area and for many years after the timber lay piled in the north end of the lake awaiting the lumberyard saw; some is still submerged there.

In 1927 a flash flood washed out the dam at the northeast end of the lake and the Forest Lake Improvement Association was formed to repair and maintain the dam in order to control the lake water level. The Association continued as an informal lake control organization and social group, and in 1948 a "Voluntary Corporation" was chartered by the state "For the purpose of consolidating the interest of the several property holders around the border of Forest Lake in Winchester, New Hampshire, and also those owning adjacent property thereto, in a permanent organization for the improvement of the physical conditions of the lake and the better relationship of the people concerned." The activities of the Association have included fundraising flea markets and the Forest Lake Festival. The officers are President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and five board members. The Association continues its efforts to maintain lake water quality and the general lake environment, and has cooperated with the town and the town beach committee concerning beautification efforts aimed at providing an attractive ambiance. Members of the Association assist in collecting and sending specified water samples to the state and receive back much data to assist in water quality control.

The water level is maintained by the dam, and each year members lower the dam level in the fall so that property owners may make repairs to docks and waterfronts. In the spring the dam is raised again.

The Association is voluntary and depends on concerned landowners to pay annual dues and continue our environmental monitoring efforts for the good of all abutters. Meetings are typically held twice a year, in July and August. Timely notice is sent to all Forest Lakers. The by-laws, and a listing of names and addresses of all abutters and close neighbors, are available from the secretary.

Note: The source of much of the information in this article has been taken from Edith Atkins' book, "Walking Back Through Time" (1997).

David T. Brigham – June, 2000



FOREST LAKE POST CARD, CIRCA 1926

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