

THE SILVER LAKE ASSOCIATION 1948 – 1963: A BRIEF HISTORY

A talk for the annual meeting of the
Silver Lake Association of Madison (SLAM)

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S.L.A. 1948 – 1963

The first Silver Lake Association was formed in 1948 and was active until 1963. In that last year, my mother Margaret Holmes, was the secretary, and, having no town hall archives in which to deposit the records of that first Silver Lake Association, she put them in a box in the attic of our family cottage – probably intending at some time to find a permanent home for the records. But, as happens, the records were forgotten, pushed to the back, and then last winter my sister Mary Holmes dug them out. For today's meeting I have made a brief summary from these archives of the remarkably diverse activities of that first Silver Lake Association.

A. Organization: Purpose – Membership – Finances

Let me set the scene for the association's formation. The population of Madison, New Hampshire, in 1950 was 512 individuals. Summer residents living around the lake or in the village numbered a few dozen. The school was one room in a small building where the current school stands. The library was a few shelves of books. There was no historical society yet. Although there was an Old Home Week Committee, a grange, and a Women's Club, the town as a governmental organization was quite small. Madison Corner had the church and the selectmen's small offices, but Silver Lake Village was the focus of the community. It had two general stores, an active sawmill, the grange hall (now the Town Hall building but then in its village location), the post office, maybe a hotel, and the railroad station with regular passenger and freight service.

The summer residents, many of whom came by train for the entire summer, joined up with year-round residents to form the first Silver Lake Association. They recognized work in the town that needed doing and stepped up to the plate. The purpose of this association was: "To promote the civic welfare and to cooperate with the local, state, and federal authorities in the development and preservation of the natural resources of the Silver Lake area.

In its second year, the association had 136 members, and it continued to grow!

Dues were one dollar per family. The treasurer never reported more than \$224 in the coffers, but the association was generous in its outlays – more on that later. When the original Silver Lake Association disbanded in 1963, the final monies, \$39.31, were given to the Memorial Hospital.

B. Meetings: Number – Entertainments

The association held three meetings each summer: two general membership meetings and a picnic. Before and after each gathering, there were entertainments. Some examples are:

- Movies on the newly purchased projector,
- Dancing,
- Community singing,
- A slideshow of the USA with “interesting comments on each slide”,
- A New Hampshire Fish & Game report on fishing prospects in the lake,
- A talk on forest conservation,
- Talks about trips to Africa (Janet Brown) and Russia (Prof. Qualey), and
- A hurricane expert’s talk the year two hurricanes hit the lake.

C. Officers & Committee Members 1949 – 1953

Before I proceed to the remarkably diverse activities, I want to show this slide of names of members who served as officers and on the many committees for the five years 1949 to 1953. I realize you probably may not be able to read the names, but the slide demonstrates the wide community involvement in this vibrant town association.

Slide:

Howard Wood	Hubert Slater	Al Smith
Marion Lyman	J. J. O’Brien	Malcolm Bail
Russell Skelton	Rev. Ray Grindy	Clarence Friend
Mrs. R. Skelton	Helen Knowles	Don Dewart
Mrs. A. Bisset	Mrs. Beso	Mrs. Booth
Robert Gray	Col. Beso	Randolph Churchill
Mrs. R. Francis	Mrs. Cargill	Mrs. Everett
Herb Bird	Dan Cargill	Carl Lundwall
P. J. Holmes	Harry Murdock	Mrs. Lundwall
Margaret Holmes	Alice Albee	Don Hayes
Irene Bryant	Larry Frunzi	Ruth Hakanson
Hazel Drew	George Chick	Margaret Lanery
Lee Drew	Prof. Brooks	Charlotte Hamilton
Betsy Goodwin	Eleanor Brooks	Eugene Watson
Herb Goodwin		
Capt. McCain	Ralph Connolly	

RECREATION : “To promote the civic welfare.”

A. Social Committee: Early purchases – Dances

The Social Committee was one of the most influential committees in the first Silver Lake Association. Its first purchase for the town was a piano for the grange hall in the village

(now the town hall). The piano was much used for the association's annual picnics and for the years of dances.

The second purchase was a movie projector which, by 1951, had been used by the association, the church, the grange, the Woman's Club, and the Young Peoples' group.

The major, ongoing efforts of the Social Committee were the weekly dances all summer – mostly square dances – held at the grange hall. The dances began in 1951 and continued with great success through 1961. In 1962 the Madison Grange took over running the dances.

I can remember vividly the music and laughter and swirl of bodies and stomping of feet. Dancers were of all ages. The hall got really hot and humid. You always brought your nickels for soda pop, and if you went outside to drink it, you tried hard not to notice the teenagers engaged in a spot of necking behind the fire escape.

Ralph Acker, Mrs. McNair, and P.J. Holmes (my grandfather) were generally the callers. The local musicians named in the archives were Mr. and Mrs. Hidden, Mr. Durgin, Frona Brooks, Erma Lyman, Eugene Watson, and Ralph Acker. They were paid ten dollars an evening, and Irene Bryant, the sheriff, was paid three dollars. (I doubt she investigated behind the fire escape.) In some years the music was from records, not live musicians. In 1958, an inquiry was made from outside the town about payment of copyright fees on the music used for the dances. The association decided not to respond – just to lay low – and there was no follow-up demand for payment.

B. Lake Activities: Swimming – Boat warden – Waterskiing – Town beach

The association from the beginning lent some support to the ongoing water safety swimming lessons in the village. By 1957, motor boating and water skiing had increased so much that the association asked the selectmen to put out more buoys to protect swimmers at the beaches at the village beach and the beach at the foot of the lake. Three years later, the dangers had mushroomed to the point that the association put an article on the town warrant for “marker buoys to completely outline and safeguard the four public beaches.”

The association also got involved in getting a boat warden to patrol the lake more frequently. Water-skiers, harassing fishermen and canoeists, swooped close to the beaches and monopolized the boat launch site. A North Conway ski club with fifty members would be on the lake from morning to night and wanted to build a ski jump on the lake.

Meanwhile use of the beaches increased with nonresident folks even caught doing laundry and camping overnight. The association stepped in with beach cleanup, and advocated restricting parking at the beaches to Madison residents and even fees for beach use.

C. Old Home Week: Bean Hole Supper – Field Day

Another beach involvement of the association was helping the town get a well dug for water at the foot of the lake beach. This effort grew out of The Bean Hole Supper.

In 1951 the town's Old Home Week Committee asked the Silver Lake Association to sponsor the first Bean Hole Supper. The Social Committee members wrote to the food editor of Boston's radio station WBZ for advice, and they received complete details of how the State of Maine ran such affairs. The first supper was a grand success, put on by the Drews, Gilmans, Chicks, Curriers, Holmes, Lundwalls, Dewarts, and the church minister Eugene Watson.

Three years later the attendance had grown to four hundred diners, so the association built picnic tables – some still used today. By 1957, the event had grown beyond the capacity of summer volunteers, and the Bean Hole Supper was turned over to the town's Old Home Week Committee.

The association had also sponsored, and continued to do so, the Old Home Week Field Day for kids with games such as three-legged races and burlap sack races — all with prizes —plus a pet parade!

FISHING & WATER LEVEL

A. Fishing: Stocking Silver Lake – Creel cards.

As soon as the first Silver Lake Association formed, a Fishing Committee got to work to see about improving the fishing in the lake. The lake was not then stocked with fish. The committee got the New Hampshire Fish & Game people to do a survey of the lake, and finally in 1951 a Fish & Game representative reported to the association that Silver Lake didn't have enough food for fish for the department to stock it! The committee – made up of avid fishermen – would not take a “no,” and in 1953 Fish & Game stocked Silver Lake with 15,000 lake trout fingerlings and 25,000 smelt and smelt eggs. The numbers in 1955 were 12,000 trout and three million smelt eggs. The increase in smelt eggs was done in the hopes of providing enough food for landlocked salmon eventually.

To help improve the fishing, lakeside owners were encouraged to leave bushes overhanging the lake shore to give young fish a place to hide. Also, fishermen were encouraged to call in creel counts to Irene Bryant, who doubled as our sheriff and telephone operator, for keeping fish caught tallies on cards.

B. Beaver dam / Blue Pond

Dynamiting the beaver dam in the river to Cooks Pond was discussed – not done.

And Blue Pond, in the chain of ponds beside the railroad track was stocked from the air!

C. Water Level of Silver Lake: First dams – 1923 Report – Town control

Although the town of Madison now controls the dam and, with some State restrictions, the water level of the lake, it was not always so.

A little history: The first dam was built in 1870. It was washed out and rebuilt in 1891 and again in 1911. The present dam was built in 1921. For much of that time up to 1956, first a paper mill and then the Central Maine Power Company controlled the dam and thus the lake level.

In 1923, an engineer for the Union Power Company of Lewiston, Maine, did an extensive study to determine the “natural water level” of Silver Lake. The engineer, Mr. Paul Bean, carefully explained in his report that the elevation of the sediment bar at the outlet of the lake – a bar you can easily see from the boat ramp and dam today – marks the natural level. Storms eroded and rebuilt this bar, and the presence of the dam after 1870 influenced that geologic process. Water stored behind the dam also changed the erosion potential around the entire lakeshore.

So Mr. Bean came up with a number to designate the “natural water level,” implanted a concrete post – with a copper cap on which is marked this baseline number – into the ground in the yard of the cottage just west of the dam, and the rest is history. Incidentally, our SLAM president Hersh Sosnoff has searched for this post so far without success.

So how did the Silver Lake Association get involved? Well, briefly, it worked with the power company and then with the town 1) to keep the lake at a steady high level all summer for recreation, 2) to keep the lake level steady during trout spawning times, 3) to set a published autumn draw-down date, and 4) to keep the water at a low winter level for shoreline protection.

BETTERING LIVES

A. Services: Telephone – RFD mail – Cottage cards

The minutes of meetings are peppered with ideas about making the summer residence experience more comfortable and convenient. I’ll enumerate the highlights.

In 1948, there was no telephone or mail service for lake residents, so various committees worked on getting both services established, an effort that took several years and some correspondence including with the Postmaster General of the United States.

In the mid-1950s the association produced for several years cards for each cottage that listed trash pick-up, contacts such as police and fire, local stores, other local services, and places to explore. When boating became a safety issue, the association distributed the State boating rules to every cottage.

B. Outreach to Community: Contributions – Cards

In its outreach to all Madison residents, this first Silver Lake Association contributed money to the church for its youth program, for new carpeting, and for a new fifty-states flag when Hawaii and Alaska became states. The association also contributed to the newly-formed Madison Historical Society, the Memorial Hospital, and the Red Cross.

And in a rather sporadic manner, get-well and condolence cards were sent to residents.

C. Town: Village dock

The association was also responsible for getting a town dock built at the village beach so that lake residents could park their boat when they went to town for groceries and mail.

D. The Bug Committee

One of the major tasks over seven years that the association undertook was to have spraying done by McSherry's of Conway for black flies, mosquitoes, and gypsy moths. This effort, the work of the Bug Committee, included contacting all residents, collecting money, and negotiating dates and extent of spraying. DDT was the spray used from 1954 to 1957, and Malthone was used through 1961. Aerial spraying was too costly and potentially harmful to the lake organisms, so the spraying was done by truck.

GETTING AROUND

A. Signs – Shore Drive – Name boards – Rt. 41

A Sign Committee formed in 1952. Its first task was to get the town to rename the roads called collectively then "Shore Drive" as "East Shore Drive" and "West Shore Drive." At that time there were signposts at the ends of these roads with residents' names posted. This committee dealt with changing the signposts as more people moved in — the meeting minutes indicate this was a repeatedly contentious problem. The last, handwritten minutes of the now defunct association in 1963 report that a new signpost had just been erected at the cost of one dollar per family name.

The committee was also instrumental in getting "Stop" signs and "Dead End" signs erected on the town roads around the lake, and it attempted to get the Plains Road — which had no number then — given a State number of 16A. Fortunately that effort failed because there were too many railroad crossings.

B. Railroad: Crossing lights – Silver Lake Station

This leads us to the railroad. The association tried, and failed to get railroad crossing light erected. But the major issue was the threatened closing of the Silver Lake Station. In

1956, the association exchanged a flurry of letter with the Boston and Maine Railroad, our representative in Congress, the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission, the Carroll County Independent, and the New Hampshire governor. The upshot was that the railroad company would remove the station agent but keep the station open for continued passenger and freight service. This was a huge relief for the many summer residents who counted on rail service for getting to and from Silver Lake and for shipping their luggage.

C. Roads: Surfaces – Safety – Moore’s Pond

In its role of working for the town, the association tackled, in various years:

- improving the conditions of the roads around the lake,
- lessening the curve just above the village (opposite the Knowles’s home), and
- getting a road over the railroad tracks to Moore’s Pond to open that area for homes.

D. Bridges: At the dam – Cooks Pond River

In the 1940s and 1950s, what is now the dam at the foot of the lake was the East Shore Drive bridge. A Bridge Committee formed in 1952 and repeatedly tried to get the town to straighten the road, which had two difficult curves right before and after the bridge, and then to build a new bridge. The big impediment, of course, was cost, and by 1957 the town declared the issue dead. Meanwhile the suggestion for a bridge over the Cooks Pond River to link East Shore Drive and Winter Road was tossed around. Fortunately that idea also died.

E. Madison Boulder

We’re almost there. Yet another issue that the first Silver Lake Association was heavily involved in was getting the State of New Hampshire to clean up and make more accessible to the public the Madison Boulder and its site. Correspondence over that task went on for years and years — but this talk is over.

The End.