

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAKE SALTONSTALL BY DORIS TOWNSHEND

Lake Saltonstall was first called Lonotonoquet by the Quinnipiac Indians , which meant "Tear of the Great Spirit." According to their legend when the Great Spirit of the Indians foretold the coming of foreigners who would invade and take over their land, the Great Spirit grieved as he sat on a cliff overlooking a valley. His tears fell into the valley below and created a lovely lake.

In Colonial days the lake was named for Governor Gurdon Saltonstall (1707-1724) whose mansion sat on a knoll on the east side near the highway to East Haven.

The lake was also called Furnace Pond because of the blast furnace and foundry, the first in Connecticut. Iron ore was carted from a bog in North Haven to the smelting furnace. Then the molten metal was transferred to the bloomery where it was shaped into blocks ready for the blacksmith. These ironworks were in operation for twenty-five years with many workers employed. Their houses around the site made quite a boisterous settlement.

In 1706 a grist mill was erected on the old furnace site for the grinding of wheat, corn and oats. This mill was in operation for 150 years until it burned down. A fulling mill was also built that ended up after 35 years of service as a grist mill and in 1839 a paper mill was inaugurated by the water.

In 1855 George Townsend, a shrewd Yankee of East Haven, acquired the lake and the surrounding land with all the buildings. He promptly stocked the lake with land-locked salmon, bass and other fish. He formed a retail ice company to harvest the winter's ice and sell it.

By 1890 Townsend had bought more land because his vision was to turn the lovely four mile long, one-half mile wide lake into a beautiful recreation area for the public. He sold all the mills, then proceeded to build a boarding dock at the foot of the lake for his excursion boat Cynet which took passengers to Glen Grove at the head of the lake. There the picnickers could eat their lunch or buy food and temperance drinks from Andrew Granniss, concessionaire. Afterwards the families could stroll the shaded pathways or play baseball, tennis, croquet on the nearby playing fields, or better still - go fishing.

Lake Saltonstall became a very popular destination in the summer with thousands taking advantage of the beautiful lake scenery and the wholesome activities. Extra excursion boats had to be added, the steamer Susie Saltonstall, the barge Governor Saltonstall and the launch Electra (straight from the Chicago's World Fair of 1893). In the winter the frozen lake was the scene of hundreds of skaters.

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Ever the entrepreneur, Townsend put out a booklet depicting the charms of Lake Saltonstall: "Fishing, Fowling, Foresting, Fox-hunting, Foot-ball, Base-ball, Boating, and Bowling, Parks for Picnic Purposes, Private Parties and Pedestrians."

All this enjoyment came to an abrupt end on June 24, 1895 when the New Haven Water Company bought the property from George Townsend for \$50,000 in order "to keep the water in a pure condition and prevent its contamination by being used for pleasure purposes."

The water company's edict sounded final. But that wasn't the death of Townsend's vision to allow the public to enjoy the lake and its environs. As the years went by a newly formed organization, the South Central Regional Water Authority, devised a plan to include the public. With a properly bought permit recreationists could rent a boat and fish in the stocked lake year round. Bikers and hikers could use the well-designated trails ; walkers could follow the interpretive nature trails.

Of course, there were prohibitions to be followed in order to protect the safety of the drinking water which was funneled to thousands of customers. But again people could have access to beautiful Lake Saltonstall as a quiet respite from the fast-pace of modern times.