

By Doris Townsend

VF-East Haven-Lake  
Saltonstall

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAKE SALTONSTALL

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.

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By  
Paul H. Stevens

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LAKE SALTON TALL

## LAKE SALTONSTALL

Lake Saltonstall, from its head, a half mile southwest of the point at which the town's of Branford and North Branford came together at the East Haven town line, is approximately four and one-half miles long and, in some areas, reaches depths up to 112 feet. The Branford-East Haven town line runs through the center of the lake. The lower reaches of the lake, which bend into Branford, are cut off, except for narrow channels, by the New Haven Railroad tracks and the Connecticut Turnpike, and ends at the dam at U.S. Route 1, the Old Post Road. This small lower overflow pond, which is all that can be seen from the Post Road is but a very small segment of the lake.

A pumping station was built early in the lake's ownership by the New Haven Water Company. By means of steam the pumps lifted water to a brick storage tower, long an East Haven landmark, visible many miles, situated atop the lower part of Saltonstall Ridge south of the railroad and Connecticut Turnpike "cut". From this tower, water flowed to an open reservoir atop Tuttle Hill at Grannis Corners and thence into the water mains served by the Water Co. As demands for water increase, the lake's spring fed supply was augmented in 1901 by diverting water from upper Farm River above the farm of Eugene Thompson, through a tunnel, some 3,000 ft. long bored under Saltonstall Mountain in Foxon. It is interesting to note that the Grannis Corner's reservoir had a capacity of six-million gallons.

High praise has come year after year for the purity and high quality of Saltonstall water. Enclosed on west and north by wooden ridges, high and steep, and on the east by wild and terrain uninhabited for some distance from its shores, Lake Saltonstall is especially free from pollution and contamination.

The Indian name for the "Great Pond" of the earliest East Haven settlers, was Lo-nO-tO-non-ket, or in their language, "Tear of the Great Spirit". It later became "Furnace Pond", when in 1655, an "iron works" was set up at the foot of the lake by John Winthrop, the second, who had begun a similar plant at Saugus, near Boston. Bog iron ore was dug from bogs in North Haven and hauled over rough trails by land, or in small boats by water, down Quinnipiac River, the harbor, the Sound and up East Haven or Stoney River to "Bog Mine Point" where the Farm River joined the Saltonstall outlet at the foot of the lake. In after years "Furnace Pond" became known as Saltonstall for Colonial Governor Gurden Saltonstall who built a dwelling on the Branford side at "Furnace Farm" in 1708.

The outlet of the lake was called by the Indians, "Tap-pam-kas-ie", or Little River, while their name for the East Haven "Farm" or "Stoney", River, as it is variously listed upon the maps, was "Tap-am-sha-sick" meaning Stoney River.

A grant of the mill privileges and water rights to the lake was made in 1681 to Samuel Hemingway and this descended through 150 years and five generations to John Hemingway. In 1831 the mill property and water rights passed into other hands, and in 1882, just 200 years since East Haven Village in a vote ratified by the Town of New Haven gave up its rights and title to the lake, all interests were transferred to the New Haven Water Company.

on the adjacent wooded ridge west and north of the lake. In the meantime, since around the middle of the 19th century, Mr. George H. Townsend had been buying up, piece after piece, lands as well as a good part of the land on the eastern side. His firm cut enormous quantities of ice, and built ice storage houses at the lake and at Red Rock, near the present Ferry Street bridge in Fair Haven. At one time as many as seven schooners in a day entered New Haven Harbor to transport Saltonstall ice to New York City. In 1851 the railroad was built across the lower end of the lake and, in the year following skating parties in winter and outings and picnics in summer, came in excursions from all parts of the state to enjoy the recreational facilities.

Also, for several years, Yale class crew races were rowed at Saltonstall on a two-mile course as crowds watched from the shore. An electric launch was brought here from the World's Fair in Chicago and to this was soon added a trailer. A steam launch Cygnet, followed, and another, the Swan, and a large barge, Governor Saltonstall, the latter with a capacity for 250 passengers, were soon transporting vacationers and pleasure-seekers to the various picnic grounds with sylvan names and seasonal attractions, scattered around the lake.

The New Haven Electric Company extended its trolley cars from Grannis Corner to East Haven Green and thence to Lake Saltonstall in 1894. A passenger station was provided near the Saltonstall boat landing. Trolley cars approached the lake by way of a trestle over Farm River at the foot of Deborah Lane.

With this influx of New Haveners by trolley car Lake Saltonstall became a typical and popular resort of the "Gay Nineties."

In June, 1895 Mr. Townsend disposed of his 700 acre lakeside holdings to Samuel H. Blatchley, ex-president of the former State Street Horse Railway Company, the latter at or about the same time deeding the lands and improvements with much apparatus at the lake fell off after announcement that the picnic grounds were to be closed. Soon the large boats were withdrawn. Fishing but by permit only, continued. Some 60 or more years afterward, the railroad "cut" through the ridge was enlarged to make way

of the extensive grounds to the New Haven Water Company. Business

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for the four-lane Connecticut Turnpike which was built across the lake, parallel with the railroad tracks in 1962. At about this time the public fishing privilege, by permit, was withdrawn.

Writers have, for generations, extolled the lake's natural beauty. Its charm has been compared to the picturesque scenery along New York State's Hudson River.

The western and northern ridge with its 250-foot high "Pond Rock", has for the past 60 years and more, been permitted to return to the primeval state in which the original settlers of East Haven found it in 1639 when New Haven was founded. Copperheads in 1969 still sun themselves on shale-rock slopes, deer, sometimes foxes leave their lairs on rugged heights on the Farm River side of the slope to raid hen-houses of suburban dwellings along High School and neighboring residential areas.

The legendary "Leather Man" of the 19th Century was reputed to have made overnight abode in a cave just above the railroad cut near a point called "Eagle's Craig, during his perennial peregrinations across Connecticut.

The view from the highest ridge above the lake was comparable to that from East or West Rocks in New Haven. Long Island in the far distance, 20 miles southward, Long Island Sound between and then, to west, New Haven Harbor, the city between its Sentinal peaks, the Quinnipiac River winding northward through the valley, and the Sleeping Giant beyond, with the Blue Hills and Meriden's West Peak, on the distant horizon.