

Community compiles history of the three lakes

By JESSICA LEIBMAN
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In the earlier days of Lewisboro, postcards were used to document the landscapes of the three lakes from year to year.
Photo Courtesy of Janet Andersen

In the early 1900s, when the ice industry was booming on Lake Waccabuc, on several occasions residents relocated their houses by pushing them across the frozen lake.

Janet Andersen, president of the Three Lakes Council, discovered this and many other interesting facts while researching "Reflections on Our Lakes: Three Lakes council 1970–2020."

Ms. Andersen said that as the Three Lakes Council was approaching its 50th anniversary in October 2020, she and a few other members began discussing a way to gather photos and stories from older members of the council and lake community. Initially, the idea was to present these historical highlights at the council's annual members meeting.

Three Lakes Council was formed in 1970 for the purpose of addressing lake interests that spanned the several lake associations and individuals who live in the watershed of Lake Waccabuc, Lake Oscaleta and Lake Rippowam. The council's 15 members focus on environmental stewardship, education and communication with the three lakes community.

"It was about exploring and finding out old stories that are just too good to have disappear," Ms. Andersen said.

However, Ms. Andersen's plans were quickly derailed by the pandemic, and she decided to take on the larger and more difficult task of self-publishing a small book for community members.

Ms. Andersen, the primary author of the book, said she began requesting information through the council's newsletters and emails. Unfortunately, her initial efforts were met with little response, she explained, so she turned to Jean Lewis for help. Ms. Lewis is secretary of the Three Lakes Council, and became co-author of the book.

Ms. Lewis received many rare photos from residents and naturalists, and interviewed several longtime residents about their memories of the lakes. Many of the photos she gathered for the book came from Janet Karl, whose family has lived on Lake Oscaleta for over 100 years, and from Fred and Tina Cowles.

Ms. Andersen said that other important contributors were Linda Broudy, who provided information and photos of Lake Waccabuc, and Lewisboro Town Historian Maureen Koehl.

Ms. Andersen said as part of her research, she gathered old postcards, spoke to the individual lake associations and even reviewed minutes from old Lake Waccabuc Association meetings that her aunt had attended.

As a young girl, she recalled her older cousins often talking about going to a swinging bridge with their friends, and recounted that she was too little to tag along. She said she never knew what her cousins were talking about or what the bridge looked like until she stumbled upon it while writing the book.

Other discoveries Ms. Andersen made from the gathered materials included how the lakes developed, particularly their man-made channel system. Ms. Andersen said that all three lakes are connected by these channels, which were dug just in the span of several months.

Ms. Andersen said that the task of self-publishing a book proved challenging. She said there were some changes she would have liked to make before publishing the book, but she felt it was time to finalize the project and proceed to printing it.

Ms. Andersen said she initially ordered 120 copies and questioned how receptive the community would be to the book. It turned out her worry was unfounded. She said the initial order sold out, along with an additional order of 60 copies. Then she placed a third order of 60 more.

Ms. Andersen noted that there are only approximately 360 families who live in the three lakes watershed, so she was very pleased with the response.

“People had such a good reaction that I forgot all the pain I went through,” Ms. Andersen joked.

Ms. Andersen said that since the book came out, she received a lot of enthusiastic feedback from other residents who have come forward to share their stories of growing up around the lakes. Even less frequent visitors have come forward with recollections, she said, adding that one woman recalled a visit from 1937.

“It just seemed like the stories had to be told and the pictures had to be shared,” Ms. Andersen said.

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