

The THOMPSON LAKE

OBSERVER

Winter 2005

Issue No. 138



*The Icemen Cometh, or Cutting Ice on Thompson Lake, 1942,
as shown in Lou Tucker's Photo.*

In This Issue...

Eurasian Milfoil pg. 3

Robinson Mfg. Co. pg. 6

Dues are Due pg. 7

Ice Out Contest pg. 8

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE WINTER 2005

As you read this message, I hope you are looking out at a beautiful white winter scene, a great improvement over last January, which we remember was so drab, with the lack of snow and the very cold temperatures. As I write this on November 19th, there's a bright blue sky and temperatures are in the 50's.

During the summer and fall we received and answered several letters concerning the lake level. Some complained that the Lake level was too high. Later letter writers complained that it was too low. TLEA does not control the lake level. Over the years we have had several discussions with the DEP and Maine Rivers, and Robinson Manufacturing. Basically, Robinson controls the dam which controls the lake level. It operates according to a formula agreed upon by all which endeavors to maintain the Lake at twelve inches below the top of the dam in the summer and at thirty inches below in the winter. The level is dropped beginning after Labor Day in order to prevent damage and erosion from spring run off.

This said, there are a number of variables. Rain, sun, and wind can change the level up to an inch and a half per day. In addition, the mill operates a sewage treatment plant requiring a certain flow, and there is a court ordered release of water from the lake to maintain the correct flow in the Little Androscoggin River. It is when there is too little rain, or too much, that the lake levels change from the norm. From my observations, Robinson has done a credible job maintaining the lake at acceptable levels. When researching the story about the mill, we stood on the dam and observed the flow and lake level. All was where it should be. (Should you have any complaints, we prefer you call either the TLEA office or one of the Presidents so that one voice communicates with Robinson Manufacturing.)

On another subject, TLEA is looking for new Board Members. We meet once a month except for December and February. Board members work on committees and/or serve as officers. The committee format spreads out the workload of the volunteers and makes the time requirements less strenuous. Won't you join us in our ongoing effort to preserve the natural beauty and quality of your Lake?

Tom Ray

EURASIAN MILFOIL FOUND IN MAINE

Eurasian milfoil has just been discovered in Maine, the last of the 48 lower states free of Eurasian milfoil. A December announcement by Dawn R. Gallagher, Commissioner of Maine's Department of Environmental Protection, announced that an infestation of Eurasian milfoil has been found in a gravel quarry in Scarborough. This is Maine's first confirmed case. Gallagher, announcing that "Maine is out front on this," outlined the DEP's rapid response plan. This includes drawing down the water in the gravel pit, a process which is already underway. Dredging and herbicide treatment will follow in the spring.

The gravel pit covers 28 acres and is privately owned. In addition to its aggressive efforts to eradicate the plant, the DEP is trying to determine how the Eurasian milfoil got there in the first place. The infestation is thought to be five years old. Biologists are surveying the quarry's outlet stream and nearby waters to determine whether the plant is isolated in this quarry.

Watermilfoil is a stubborn, fast-growing invasive plant that degrades water quality by displacing native plants, fish, and other aquatic species. The plant forms stems reaching twenty feet long that can cause fouling problems for swimmers or boaters in recreational lakes and ponds. The aquatic weed tolerates a wide range of environmental conditions, including low light levels, high or low nutrients, and freezing temperatures. For these reasons, Eurasian Watermilfoil can infest a lake much more aggressively than the Variable-leaf Milfoil already present in several locations on Thompson Lake.

Efforts to prevent, detect, and manage aquatic invasive plants are made possible by boater participation in the state's sticker program. During the past few summers TLEA has also maintained its own boat inspection program at three launch sites on Thompson.



*Mama loon feeding her chicks, off Sand Island, Summer 2004.
(Photo Holly Troy)*

MEMBERS TOUR YCC AND OTHER SITES

On the fine fall day of October 16, a dozen TLEA members took advantage of a chance to circumnavigate Thompson Lake in order to inspect the summer work performed by the Youth Conservation Corps. Led by YCC coordinator Jeff Hackett, the group visited sites in Oxford, Otisfield, Casco, and Poland.

The sites varied by type of problem alleviated and by size. Some involved small areas of lawn; another involved a private road in a lakeside neighborhood. In Oxford, for example, the group examined the front yard belonging to Chris and Marcia Pottle, overlooking the lake, where water had been running down the driveway, carrying sediment onto the road. In this case the YCC crew installed a box culvert to catch the runoff and then installed a rain garden to absorb the water coming from the box culvert. The result not only solves a bad erosion problem but also has added an attractive flower bed to the yard.

A larger problem existed in the Silvaqua area in Otisfield, where a gravel road near the lake was found to be carrying rainwater and creating large scours. Here the YCC discovered that a previously-installed razor bar meant to carry water across the road had filled with sediment. In this case the crew re-installed a rubber razor bar at a better angle to permit good flow and less build-up of sediment. They also created five swales on the side of the road to divert water away from the road and into a wooded area. According to Jeff, this particular spot will need careful monitoring and maintenance and may require more work in the future.

In addition to inspecting the YCC projects, the tour group was also able to look at two projects funded under the Thompson Lake Watershed Management Plan Implementation Grant. Unlike the YCC projects, these large-scale projects involved power equipment and machinery. One such area visited was Sand Island Lane in Otisfield. On page 5 Phoebe Hardesty of the Androscoggin Soil and Water Conservation District has explained the details of how and why a “plunge pool” was constructed. The day before the October 16 tour it had rained hard, so that water was plunging quite dramatically into the Sand Island plunge pool.

MILFOIL PROBLEMS, 1980

According to an article in the Lewiston *Sun Journal*, dated August 15, 1980, Fred Peterson, then President of TLEA, announced some good news and some bad news at the Annual Meeting held at Kamp Kohut. The good news was that the lake’s water clarity and quality were excellent. The bad news was that “water milfoil problem still plagues parts of Lake Thompson.” Two of those areas were, apparently, at the Heath in the southern end of the lake and near Sucker Brook in Otisfield Cove, areas where the problem persists today.

SAND ISLAND ROAD PROJECT IS INNOVATIVE DESIGN

At this problem spot on Otisfield's Sand Island Road, site conditions and maintenance planning called for a new-fashioned approach to installing plunge pools at culvert outlets. Engineering technician Scott McLaren of Androscoggin Valley SWCD felt that the "sump" portion of a catch basin might serve well as a device to trap sediments from the road. It could also allow for easier maintenance. A shortage of appropriately-sized angular rock was a further reason for installing these concrete basins.

All conservation practices associated with roads rely on good maintenance to make sure that they'll work right. These basins can be cleared in the traditional manner, with a backhoe. But they can also be very easily maintained by the most reliable and sometimes more timely means – "one smart human and a shovel."

This Sand Island Road project was co-funded by the Thompson Lake Watershed Management Project and the Sand Island Road Association.



Photo and story by Phoebe Hardesty.

ROBINSON MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Last year witnessed the closing of Robinson Manufacturing Company in Oxford. It was one of the oldest businesses in Maine, and one of the last woolen mills in the state. With its closing also ended a rich chapter of industrial development on the shore of Thompson Lake which we thought TLEA members might be interested in. Some of summary below was supplied by the Company's website; some is taken from Joan Madden and Margaret Slattery's *Thompson Lake Book*.

About 1836 John Hall erected a brick building at the outlet of Thompson Lake in Oxford, and incorporated it at the Oxford Woolen Manufacturing Company. Twenty years later Hall induced an Englishman named Joseph Robinson to bring his experience in English and European woolen mills to America. According to the company history, Robinson arrived in America "with only two copper pennies, the clothes on his back, and considerable knowledge of the woolen industry." After several years in Oxford, Robinson bought out Mr. Hall and incorporated the mill as Robinson Manufacturing Company.

Joseph Robinson's ownership had a dramatic effect on the configuration of Thompson Lake. Finding that the outlet stream from Thompson tended to dry up in the summer, Robinson decided to buy up the land around the mill, build a larger dam, and flood the area. This strategy enlarged Thompson Lake by about a mile and a half in length. This move increased the mill's production greatly. During the 1860s the Company prospered by supplying most of the blue woolen cloth used for uniforms for Union soldiers. A five-storey brick production building erected in 1867 burned eight years later but was replaced by a four-storey building.

Although Joseph Robinson died in 1895, the ownership of the mill remained in the family. In 1895 Albert and John Robinson added an L-shaped wing to the mill. In the 1930s the mill was electrified. In 1960 a two-storey brick building was erected to house the weaving operation and to store cloth, and in 1966 a smaller, one-storey building was built. Modernizing operations in the 1990s enabled the mill to remain competitive for a another decade.

The closing of the mill in 2004 has raised a number of concerns for TLEA, the Town of Oxford, and property owners in the Thompson Lake watershed. Some of these concerns center around water level, since Robinson still owns and controls the outlet dam. Other concerns involve the future use of the mill buildings and the disposition of the sizable amount of shorefront land Robinson owns. TLEA will stay involved as these matters are resolved and will keep its members informed.



Dam at Robinson Mill, showing John Robinson. (Photo, Tom Ray)

A MEMBERSHIP REPORT

In recent years, the number of TLEA household memberships has hovered around 400. That compares with a “long list” of about 1200 known property owners around the lake. Here are our numbers for the last five years, as of 12/11/04:

2000	416 including 24 new members
2001	410 including 18 new members
2002	399 including 18 new members
2003	396 including 13 new members
2004	395 including 24 new members

Membership contributions amounted to \$18,450 in 2004, with an additional \$955 in office support, for a total of \$19,405. The total was up from \$15,730 in 2003, and was almost 89% of unrestricted operating income for 2004. You, the members, are making it all happen!

2005 DUES ARE DUE!

Our fiscal year begins January 1. Please check the date to the right of your name on the mailing label, which indicates the year you last paid dues. We hope you'll let us know if our records are not in agreement with yours. Please fill out the enclosed envelope and send your check in today!

TLEA COLLEGE BOOK ALLOWANCE

TLEA once again is offering a \$500 book allowance to two qualified high school graduates. WE will be awarding these grants to students interested in environmental studies or related fields for the 2005-06 college year. The book allowances will not be deducted from any scholarship that the student might be awarded.

To qualify, a student should write a letter of application to TLEA which reflects 1) his or her college goals, and 2) his or her goals in future life. The guidance offices of local schools have a simple application form for this book allowance. Applications should be submitted by March 15, 2005, to: TLEA Scholarship Committee, P. O. Box 25, Oxford, ME 04270. The phone number and answering machine number is 539-4535.

ICE OUT CONTEST 50/50 PRIZE

Sponsored by

Thompson Lake Environmental Assoc.

Guess the date of "ice out" on Thompson Lake

Split the Total 50/50 with TLEA
Same dates - split the prize

Final Day for receipt of Guess – March 15, 2005
\$5.00 Each Guess

Send to:

Thompson Lake Environmental Association, P.O. Box 25, Oxford, ME 04270

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Date(s) _____

_____ dates @ \$5.00ea = \$ _____

PASTICE OUT DATES

1902 - April 17	1928 - April 21	1954 - April 20	1980 - April 12
1903 - April 4	1929 - April 23	1955 - April 17	1981 - March 29
1904 - April 30	1930 - April 14	1956 - May 2	1982 - April 28
1905 - April 23	1931 - April 12	1957 - April 17	1983 - April 10
1906 - April 23	1932 - April 21	1958 - April 19	1984 - April 21
1907 - April 30	1933 - April 24	1959 - April 23	1985 - April 11
1908 - April 25	1934 - April 23	1960 - April 25	1986 - April 12
1909 - April 20	1935 - April 23	1961 - May 1	1987 - April 10
1910 - April 5	1936 - April 13	1962 - April 23	1988 - April 11
1911 - April 28	1937 - April 27	1963 - April 20	1989 - April 28
1912 - April 23	1938 - April 17	1964 - April 27	1990 - April 14
1913 - April 18	1939 - May 6	1965 - April 29	1991 - April 9
1914 - April 23	1940 - May 7	1966 - April 22	1992 - April 10
1915 - April 15	1941 - April 15	1967 - April 28	1993 - April 23
1916 - April 19	1942 - April 18	1968 - April 16	1994 - April 24
1917 - April 28	1943 - April 26	1969 - April 20	1995 - April 13
1918 - April 24	1944 - April 29	1970 - April 28	1996 - April 15
1919 - April 12	1945 - April 3	1971 - May 3	1997 - April 23
1920 - April 25	1946 - April 6	1972 - May 6	1998 - April 9
1921 - April 3	1947 - April 16	1973 - April 20	1999 - April 6
1922 - April 17	1948 - April 9	1974 - April 16	2000 - April 8
1923 - April 24	1949 - April 10	1975 - April 13	2001 - May 1
1924 - April 19	1950 - April 24	1976 - April 16	2002 - April 2
1925 - April 10	1951 - April 10	1977 - April 19	2003 - April 27
1926 - May 3	1952 - April 20	1978 - May 1	2004 - April 19
1927 - April 17	1953 - April 6	1979 - April 23	



*Early December ice on Cobb Hill, Otisfield, overlooking Thompson.
(Photo, Bob Tracy)*

WET WEATHER REDUCES WATER CLARITY

Scott Williams, Aquatic Biologist

Quite a few casual observers have commented on how clear the water in Thompson Lake has been for the past few years. These observations have been documented through the annual water quality sampling and testing that TLEA conducts. Since the year 2000, the lake has been significantly clearer than the historical average for the past quarter century. Because this is true of many other Maine lakes, we suspect that the weather has had a large influence on this phenomenon. Much of Maine has experienced moderate to severe drought during the past few years. Less rain means less runoff. And runoff is the vehicle carrying pollutants like phosphorus from the watershed into the lake.

Drought conditions ended abruptly in 2004, as anyone who attempted to spend time on the lake last summer can attest. Overcast, drizzly weather was the norm from June through most of August. Those who pay close attention to the lake may have observed that Thompson was somewhat less clear last summer, compared to the previous three years. The lake was still slightly clearer than its historical average, but not nearly as spectacular as it was in 2003. The average water clarity (the distance that one could see down into the water from the surface) in 2004 was 9.4 meters (almost 31 feet), compared to 10.7 meters (about 35 feet) in 2003.

Even though the lake was somewhat less clear in 2004, the average concentration of phosphorus in the lake was slightly lower than the historical average, and the concentration of algae in the water was just about average (for Thompson). Additional details concerning the findings of the 2004 lake monitoring program will be available early in 2005 in the annual water quality report, available through TLEA.

One interesting observation from the 2004 field notes was the relatively high concentration of the blue-green algae *Gleotrichia* in Thompson. During the late summer you may have noticed many off-white specks floating in the water. *Gleotrichia* is sometimes described as having the appearance of tapioca. It occurs in varying concentrations in many Maine lakes, but it has recently gained notoriety in Great Pond in Belgrade, where the concentration has increased to nuisance levels. It does not appear to be a problem in Thompson, but we will continue to observe and monitor its presence.

All in all, Thompson Lake continues to be one of the cleanest and clearest lakes in the area. TLEA has closely monitored the lake for more than three decades, and many volunteers have made serious efforts to identify and fix pollution problems in the watershed in order to insure that the lake will remain healthy in the future. Special thanks are due to Bob Tracy who provided additional water clarity readings in 2004.

IN MEMORIAM



The history of Legendre Lane in West Poland adjacent to Camp Fernwood is framed by its cluster of summer camps established in the 50s and 60s by residents from Lewiston and Auburn. These camps remained in the ownership of the founding families, passing on to children who grew up spending their summers at the lake. Two of Legendre's prominent families have lost members since our last newsletter.

GERALD ("JERRY") PONTBRIAND, who died August 23 at Clover Manor in Auburn, operated the family-owned hardware business in New Auburn before retiring in 1980. He was an active sportsman throughout his life and especially enjoyed water sports at his lakeside cottage. Jerry leaves his wife Thelma, a daughter, five sons, and eight grandchildren.

RITA MARCOTTE died on November 13 in a Biddeford health care facility. In the Fifties, Rita and her husband Bert joined other Auburn neighbors in building a camp in West Poland. Here they spent fun-filled summers with their three children. Rita was widely regarded for her love of family and compassion for others. She especially enjoyed the four grandchildren who joined the growing family and who now take pride in camp traditions learned from their grandparents.

Late word was received of the sudden death of REGINALD ("REG") DEWS at his winter home in January of 2004. Reg was a native Mainer. He became an ardent educator, occupying various positions as elementary school teacher and principal. He was on the building committee of the Otisfield Community School and also served as school board chairman of School Administrative District 17. In addition, Reg was an ardent salmon fisherman. In 1974 he and his wife Duveen built a camp on the Parkway in Otisfield, and ten years later a full-time home on Loop Road. Both were active in supporting the activities and goals of TLEA. Reg is mourned by his wife, five children and their spouses, and eleven grandchildren.

HOWARD P. WHITTUM, of Bradenton, Florida, and Otisfield died on July 12 after a long battle with melanoma. His family was long connected with Otisfield. The earliest of his line, Simeon Whitham, a drummer at Bunker Hill, was one of the first settlers of Otisfield and is buried in a small cemetery on Scribner Hill. Howard served in the U.S. Navy and was employed as an insurance claims supervisor until his retirement in 1994. During summers on Whittum Lane in Otisfield, he especially enjoyed golf and gardening. His wife, Dolores, and two children survive him, as well as his sister, Edythe Puglia.

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