

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAKE LASHAWAY

Imagine, if you can, 25,000 years ago when the last great glacier was melting and receding north from the Atlantic Coastal Plain. Elevations in the Brookfields were 600 – 1000 feet above sea level and as the Glacier cut valleys into the granite of a young continent, it's waters were gushing across New England from NH to the Atlantic.

As the Glacier receded relentlessly, a valley was created north-south with east-west tills blocking the valleys, eventually creating rivers like the Ware River. But with waters in our area revealing only the tops of hills over 600 feet as islands, gradually the north-south rivers cut through those glacial berms, filling the valleys with sediment trapping millions of gallons under the silt as aquifers. Cold springs still bubble up in the 5 Mile River watershed and in Lake Lashaway, remnants of this underwater pressure.

Great deposits of sand and fine gravel filled up about 300-400 feet of the great valley, creating large rivers flowing to Connecticut. Overlaid with stony topsoil, these layers are visible today in the several gravel pits up and down the 5 Mile River. By the 1600's, long before European settlers, the 5 Mile River bubbled up from the underground in Rutland, flowing to Dean's, Brooks, Lashaway, Quaboag and eventually down the Ware River. Land grants given by the English King in 1710-1750 opened the whole Brookfield area to settlement, despite several Indian battles. When East Brookfield separated itself from Brookfield, it became a prosperous mill and brick making area from all the layers of BLUE clay created as sediment thousands of years ago. With the 1827 damming of the 5 Mile River the pond formed, served to provide waterpower for homes and businesses.

Today's Lake Lashaway is the result of that damming the 5 Mile River on April 8, 1827 at the site of the Old Post Road (Rt. 9) in East Brookfield. Previous to that it was a small stream, meandering through an expansive meadow. In 1812, Jeduthan Stephens, a former LT. in the Revolutionary War and a prosperous local businessman, purchased the tract of several hundred acres and built the first dam of wooden tree trunks, caulked with tarred rope. Once the lake rose to a height of approximately 6 feet, water was diverted to provide power for various town industries, foundries, grist mills, local brick factories and running water for homes.

In 1848, after Stephen's death, it was named FURNACE POND. In 1898, LASHAWAY, derived from an old Indian name for the stream, meaning "Good Fishing." In the upper western end of the lake was an immense forest. As the lake was increased in height with new dams until 1926, these trees were cut off at ice level. In 1921, the last log dam was destroyed by a large wind/rainstorm (probably a hurricane). A cement dam replaced it until the Hurricane of 1938, when an 11-foot wall of water plunged over Rt. 9, washing out 200 feet of road, and breaking off half the dam. Repaired again, Lashaway Dam survived the Hurricane of 1954 and 55, but was completely refurbished in 1999, after the Lashaway Association took pictures of 1 ½ ft. "gouges" along the face of the dam. Using Gunnite, the front and back faces of the 45 ft. curved dam were repaired with rebar and resin.

In 1979, the Association began a 6-year battle to save the lake from being over-run by weeds. Over 70% of the water's surface showed massive growth. Sailing, boating, swimming and any recreational activities virtually stopped, and home values plummeted. Leading the charge was Robert Munyon, Assoc. President since 1965, who, through perseverance, guided homeowners and the town to obtain Federal, State, Local and Association funds of nearly \$300,000 to install a Drawdown facility, designed to save the nearly Eutrophic, environmentally impaired lake bottom from weeds.

Completed in 1985, a 48-inch circular culvert under Rt 9 is opened gradually to permit the 8-foot Drawdown annually, lowering the lake by about 800 million gallons. This exposes the shallowest areas where weeds are thickest, by drying and freezing them, saving thousands of dollars in chemical and harvesting treatments. It also exposed over 1,000 tree stumps left over from early tree cutting days, which were removed by Lake Volunteers beginning in 1986. The EPA called this project one of the 12 best Pollution free projects of its type in the U.S. Closer to home it allows owners to clean their waterfront property and beach areas and in Spring it protects the shoreline from erosion by heavy ice. Docks must be removed each year in case excess rain or snow melt run-off brings ice movements earlier than expected, despite Winter attempts to constantly control the levels. In 1986, the Lake Assoc. raised nearly \$50,000 to remove 5-6 feet of mucky silt from the North Cove nearest the boat ramp and Shore Rd. Bridge, accumulated from over 150 years of upstream washouts.

Today the Drawdown cost East Brookfield nothing to implement each fall beginning November 1 and ending after Spring Ice-Off. Property values of both towns quadrupled in several years, 85% of summer camps have been converted to year 'round homes and the towns' tax base has benefitted. There are over 156 homes on the lake, and another 40 or so are to the rear with rights-of-way. It has a wonderful public beach. The Lashaway Assoc. paid for and installed a 60-foot cement boat ramp in 1987. Safety Police Patrol was initiated by the Assoc. in 1990. Every homeowner directly benefits from the Drawdown. Lashaway's 300 acres of water is cleaner and clearer than most mud-bottomed lakes, filled with an excellent fish population and the quality of life offered here is nearly second to none. Over 300 boats of all descriptions circle the lake each month in season. Ice fishing tournaments, skating and snow mobiling make it "year 'round enjoyable." It's OUR GEM to PROTECT AND PRESERVE.

Pete Barstow