

The Development of Lake Wangumbaug Properties, Bill Jobbagy- January 2008

Lake Wangumbaug was the primary attraction for the first English settlers in the very early 1700's. Families from the Connecticut River valley settled here and incorporated the town in 1712. The first land allocations were farms of 15 to 30 acres near and adjacent to the lake. A number of farms were created on Ripley Hill with a view to the lake, and more were created along today's Cross and South Streets adjacent to the lake. The first grist mill (1716) was established on the Mill Brook where the Teleflex Corporation facility is today. The millers house (Thomas Porter) stood in front of the now flea market on Lake Street. Properties surrounding the lake included about nine large farms which were active into the first part of the 1900's.

A pavilion was built on the lake around 1900 that sold ice cream and light fare in the summer as well as having a dock for touring boats. With the advent of the trolley to Willimantic in 1909, another building was built for recreational purposes. Both buildings stand today on Lake Street. As the automobile became more prevalent, the lake became an attraction for residents from Willimantic and Manchester as a place to spend weekends in the summer for fishing and relaxation. Many individuals saw the opportunity here, and either purchased many of the farms or divided their own farms into "lots" for sale to folks wishing to have a summer "place". Most of the original lots were 2,500 or 5,000 square feet with a right-of-way to a main road and to the lake. Lakeside "lots" were somewhat larger, maybe 10-15,000 square feet. Lots were sold with restrictions as to their development and waste removal, many would not allow the use of "intoxicating" beverages, and many had an annual fee (about four dollars) to be used for general maintenance of the area.

The first known recreational use of the lake properties was a cottage on the north island (off Standish Road) in the 1870's. There are deed records for Brigham Payne (1831-1911), owning the island. Brigham worked for a local cartridge manufacturer in the mid 1800's and was awarded a patent regarding a cartridge machine in 1865. He moved to Hartford and became a successful businessman, then in his later years moved to Rockville, but was summering on the island in the 1880's and '90's. (The Underwood family of Tolland owned the island for several decades in the early 1900's.) Following that, small cottages were built along today's Standish Road, Cheney Lane and Woodland Road around 1900 to 1909, when the number totaled about twenty-one. (That number would grow to 125 by 1924, and ~160 by 1934.)

As families began to afford automobiles in the 1920's and as the effects of the Great Depression began to wither in the 1930's, folks looked for recreational opportunities away from their primary homes. Connecticut's lakes provided for these past times, as they were convenient and affordable. The first recreational cottages were built mostly by residents of Windham (on the southeast side of the lake) and Manchester (the northeast side). Ownership expanded to families from Connecticut, New York and New Jersey (and further) as the realty companies advertised and offered lots to a wider audience. The original uses included simple tents and camp fires for fishing weekends and expanded to very small cottages with dug wells and rudimentary septic areas.

Beginning around 1910, and continuing for five decades, there was a virtual explosion of small-lot recreational development around the lake. The Lisicke Beach area was the old Clark farm until 1936 when it was sold to the Bevilles who ran a concession stand and rented boats for many years. Later, in 1961, it was sold to the town. The Cheney Lane area was the old Root farm to 1867, then sold to the Ayer family. They began selling lots on the lake about 1900. Waterfront Heights was the old Clark farm (northeast of Main Street) to 1936 then sold to Waterfront Realty and divided into 940 lots most 100 by 25 feet; southwest of Main Street was the old Austin farm to 1894, then sold to the Ayers, then to Waterfront realty in 1936 who divided the area into 507 lots. The old Clark house remains today overlooking the beach. The first cottage was built ca 1933.

Oak Grove was the old Austin farm to 1894 when a portion was purchased by the Ayers family (the remaining portion sold in 1936) and divided into 170 lots (northwest of Daly Road) and 230 lots (between the road and the lake). The first cottage appeared on the lake ca 1900. Bellevue was the Payne estate to 1868, and later sold to Daly, Rich and John Hand and divided into about 75 lots around 1930 when the first cottage was built. Waterfront Park was the old Tibbets farm until 1876, then various owners to 1919 when it was sold to James Fitzgerald and Waterfront Realty in 1934 when it was divided into 380 lots (west of Daly Road) and 700 lots between the road and the lake. The old Tibbets house

remains at the corner of South Street and Daly Road. The first cottages appeared ca1920. The Actors Colony was the Parker farm to 1868 and sold to the Beebes who maintained it to 1928 and then sold to the Hinkels who divided it into 806 lots of 100 x 25 feet. The first cottage was erected ca 1926.

Gerald Park (and Avery Shores) was the Rose farm in 1868 and sold to George Avery in 1896 and then to James Fitzgerald in 1920 and divided into 350 lots. Mr. Fitzgerald developed a few of the lots and sold the rest to the Loesers and the Hinkels. The first cottage appeared ca1912. Lakewood Heights was the old Dimock estate until 1936 when it was sold to Katie Newcombe (mother of Harry aka Hank Keene), and divided into about 235 lots mostly 60 by 120 feet, the first cottage appeared ca1948. Lakeview Terrace was the old Babcock/Prince estate until 1936 when it was sold to the Beerworts and then to the Lakeview Terrace association when it was divided into 300+ lots mostly 100 by 50 feet. The old Babcock house remains today and was, for a time in the 1940's and 50's, the Coventry Day School. The first cottage was built ca 1935. Waterfront Manor was the old Dimock estate until 1936 when it was sold to Orcutt & Bissel and then to Waterfront Manor and divided into 725 lots. The first cottage appeared ca1930. The old Dimock house remains today on Cross Street.

Hillcrest was the old Manning estate that included the south island until 1906 when it was sold to the Lake Wangumbaug Land Association (and some land later to the Buckleys in the 1940's) and divided into 215 lots mostly 65 by 130 feet. The first cottage was built ca 1914 though there were earlier homes on the lake. Hemlock Point was originally the Root farm to 1850 and then to various owners to 1945 when it was sold to Hemlock Point realty and divided into ~86 lots. The first cottage appeared ca1946.

The land encompassing the lake associations includes some 870 acres, mostly developed, and was at one time divided into a total of ~5,740 small lots. Homes number about 1,180 today, with an additional ~890 vacant lots, many only 2,500 square feet.

Biographical Sketches:

Frederick A. Ayer was born in 1857, the son of Wolcott and Lydia. He grew up on the family farm on Main Street. He was a woolen spinner for twenty years and retired in 1900. He began to develop lakeside land soon after, and at his death in 1935 owned two cottages and the old Austin house on Daly Road. His wife Lillian and partner Fred Lynch continued selling lots on the lake.

James Fitzgerald, a native of New Haven, born in 1876, was in vaudeville thirty-five years with an act known as the Musical Fitzgeralds. He retired from the stage in 1931 and operated a music store in Willimantic (Willimantic Music Company) until his death in 1953. He purchased a fair amount of land along the lake and west on South Street, developed some lots himself and sold many to fellow vaudevillians Hinkel and Loeser.

George Washington Hinkel died in 1959 leaving a son George and his wife and partner Ida Mae. George Sr. was also a vaudevillian with a deep bass voice, and was a radio performer. George was sponsored by a food company and his moniker was the "Singing Chef". He and his wife later opened a restaurant near his home on South Street, which became a popular entertainment and eating place in the 1940's. The restaurant has since burned to the ground.

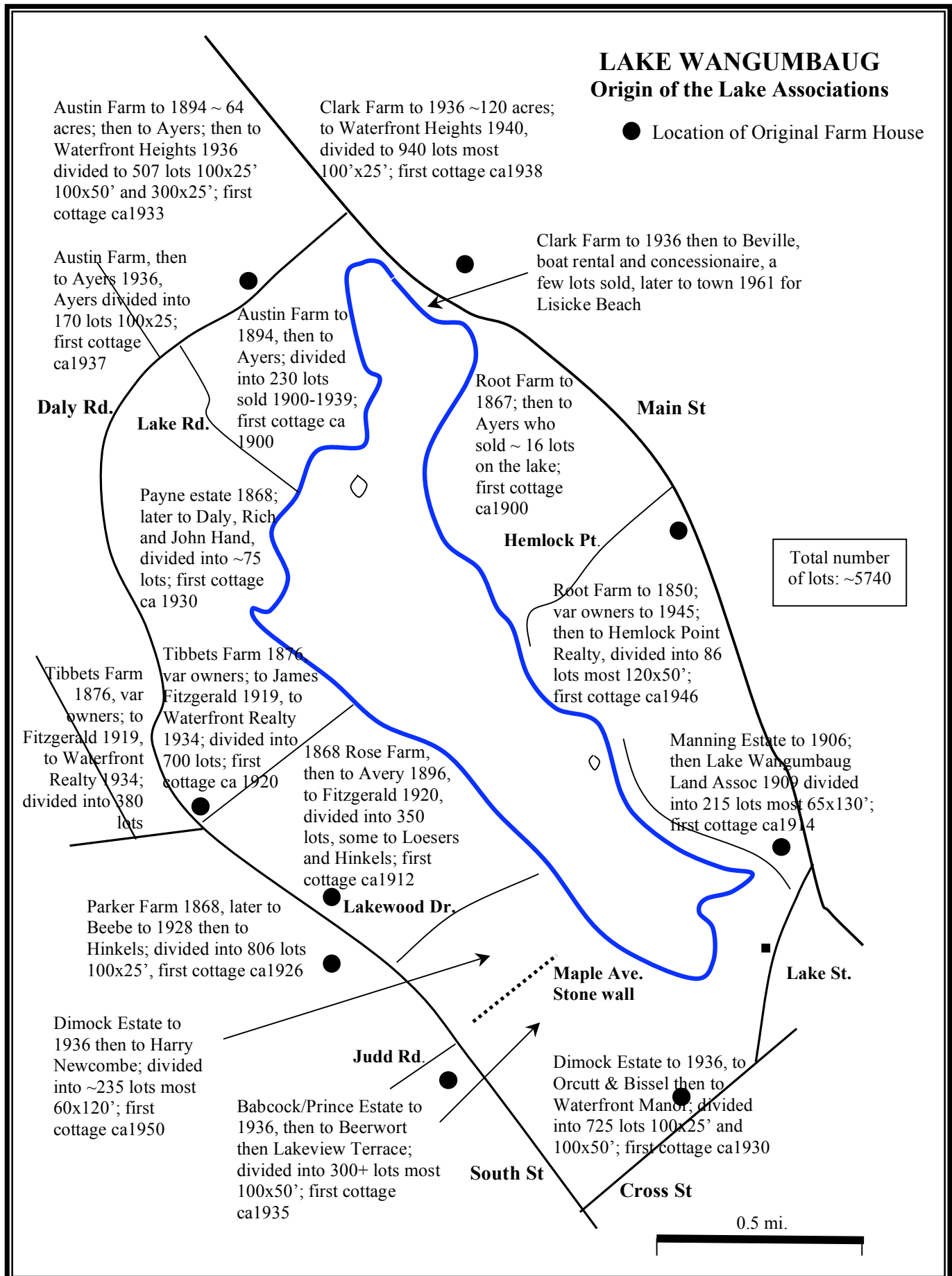
William Loeser (1882-1964) was a retired actor born in Patterson, New Jersey. He was active on the music hall stage for 46 years, and with his wife Mabel, formed a comedy team which played on Broadway, in London, and toured the United States. They retired to Coventry in 1939.

Harry Newcombe, aka Hank Keene, was born in Louisville, Kentucky and came from a family of the theater. He toured the country with his parents who were headliners in vaudeville and musical comedy. Hank started his radio career at WTIC in Hartford, writing and composing his own material. He has left a legacy of many songs popular in the 1930's. In 1936 he came to Coventry with his wife, Jean and mother, Katie, and lived in the old Johanna Hale house on South Street until it burned in 1948, and then built a "modern" ranch house across the street. Hank kept writing and producing music while developing Lakewood Heights. He retired to Florida in the late 1950's.

LAKE WANGUMBAUG

Origin of the Lake Associations

● Location of Original Farm House



Austin Farm to 1894 ~ 64 acres; then to Ayers; then to Waterfront Heights 1936 divided to 507 lots 100x25' 100x50' and 300x25'; first cottage ca1933

Clark Farm to 1936 ~120 acres; to Waterfront Heights 1940, divided to 940 lots most 100'x25'; first cottage ca1938

Austin Farm, then to Ayers 1936, Ayers divided into 170 lots 100x25; first cottage ca1937

Austin Farm to 1894, then to Ayers; divided into 230 lots sold 1900-1939; first cottage ca 1900

Clark Farm to 1936 then to Beville, boat rental and concessionaire, a few lots sold, later to town 1961 for Lisicke Beach

Root Farm to 1867; then to Ayers who sold ~ 16 lots on the lake; first cottage ca1900

Daly Rd.

Lake Rd.

Main St

Payne estate 1868; later to Daly, Rich and John Hand, divided into ~75 lots; first cottage ca 1930

Hemlock Pt.

Total number of lots: ~5740

Root Farm to 1850; var owners to 1945; then to Hemlock Point Realty, divided into 86 lots most 120x50'; first cottage ca1946

Tibbets Farm 1876, var owners; to James Fitzgerald 1919, to Waterfront Realty 1934; divided into 700 lots; first cottage ca 1920

Tibbets Farm 1876, var owners; to Fitzgerald 1919, to Waterfront Realty 1934; divided into 380 lots

1868 Rose Farm, then to Avery 1896, to Fitzgerald 1920, divided into 350 lots, some to Loesers and Hinkels; first cottage ca1912

Manning Estate to 1906; then Lake Wangumbaug Land Assoc 1909 divided into 215 lots most 65x130'; first cottage ca1914

Parker Farm 1868, later to Beebe to 1928 then to Hinkels; divided into 806 lots 100x25', first cottage ca1926

Lakewood Dr.

Maple Ave. Stone wall

Lake St.

Dimock Estate to 1936 then to Harry Newcombe; divided into ~235 lots most 60x120'; first cottage ca1950

Judd Rd.

Dimock Estate to 1936, to Orcutt & Bissel then to Waterfront Manor, divided into 725 lots 100x25' and 100x50'; first cottage ca1930

Babcock/Prince Estate to 1936, then to Beerwort then Lakeview Terrace; divided into 300+ lots most 100x50'; first cottage ca1935

South St

Cross St

0.5 mi.