

Lakes Region Profiles — War and peace on Lake Winnisquam

By Mary O'Neill

Two large forces of Native Americans, one comprised of a local alliance of Pennacook and Pequaket and the other of Mohawk warriors, came head to head in a terrible battle on a narrow isthmus protruding into the lake. The Mohawks had attacked the alliance, then feigning retreat had hidden themselves and their canoes behind the isthmus. They ambushed the other force and a fierce battle raged. The Mohawks completely annihilated their enemy (Rhode, "History of Belmont").

Looking out over peaceful and beautiful Lake Winnisquam on a sunny day, it is hard to imagine this as the setting of the famous 1685 battle. Even the lake's name is said to mean "pleasant waters," which seems to suit it perfectly. The isthmus of land referred to in the account was Mohawk Point, which is now Mohawk Island in the southern portion of the lake beyond the Winnisquam Bridge. The island is said to have been once connected to the mainland by the isthmus, which was submerged when the Lockmere dam was constructed and the lake level rose. If you look at a map of the area, it is easy to see the formation of the island having been connected to the Belmont side of the mainland.

Each of the bodies of water in the Lakes Region begins to take on a personality as you explore it. And Lake Winnisquam is no exception. The lake covers 4,264 acres and is the fourth largest lake in New Hampshire. The towns of Belmont, Sanbornton, Laconia, Tilton, and Meredith surround it. The maximum depth is around 150 feet and the average depth is 52 feet. Winnisquam is about 10.5 miles long by 1.5 miles wide and has a shoreline of approximately 28.2 miles. There are five islands: Pot, Three, Hog, Loon, and Mohawk, the scene of the legendary battle.

Winnisquam is an integral part of the Lakes Region's watershed. Merrymeeting Lake in New Durham flows into the Merrymeeting River and then Lake Winnepesaukee. Winnepesaukee flows into Paugus Bay through the Lakeport Dam and into Lake Opechee in Laconia. Opechee then runs through another dam in downtown Laconia and into Lake Winnisquam. Winnisquam leads into Silver Lake and through the Winnepesaukee River, which joins the Pemigewasset River in Franklin to form the Merrimack River. Eventually, the waters end up in the Atlantic. Like the other lakes in this region, Winnisquam is fed by natural springs, which help sustain the quality of the water. The freezing of the lakes during the winter months also regenerates the water before the spring and summer seasons.

On the shores of Winnisquam is expansive and scenic Ahern State Park. Walking trails lead through tall pines to the lake and there is a natural sandy beach for swimming. Public Bartlett Beach on Winnisquam Avenue in Laconia has a nice stretch of sand to relax and take in views of the hills of Sanbornton and Meredith. A State boat launch on Water Street in Laconia offers two ramps, a floating dock, and is handicap accessible. Several marinas dot the shoreline. Throughout the year there are a variety of activities aside from swimming, waterskiing, tubing, and wakeboarding. The sandbar by the Winnisquam Bridge is a popular spot to drop anchor and enjoy the sunshine. Every year on the 4th of July there is a boat parade that runs from Pot Island to Mohawk Island and back. Boats are decked out in all kinds of regalia – from pirate ships to water balloon slingshots – and each year a prize is awarded for the most creative display.

For those of you who refer to Winnisquam Bridge as Mosquito Bridge, have you ever wondered how it got its name? The first "Winnisquam Bridge" was a wooden structure built between 1840 and 1844. It was commonly known as Mosquito Bridge, apparently not because the area was mosquito infested but because the bump in the middle of the bridge resembled the back of a mosquito.

Winnisquam is an excellent fishing lake and one of the top destinations in the state for fishermen.

Tournaments are a common occurrence. The cool waters of this glacially-formed water body harbor a multitude of species. Clear waters, a rocky shoreline, and sandy bottoms attract small and largemouth bass. The state has also designated Winnisquam as a trout and salmon lake. These species reproduce naturally but are also stocked. In the summer, salmon and lake trout are usually found about 20 to 40 feet down under the thermocline, which is when warmer waters form a distinctive layer over colder layers of water. Native Americans called lake trout "namaycush," meaning, "dwellers of the deep." Winnisquam is also stocked with rainbow trout. Other species include white and yellow perch, cusk, horned pout, black crappie and occasionally pickerel. Gear and bait can be purchased at a variety of local shops including Winnisquam Market & Deli on Route 3 at the foot of Winnisquam Bridge and Martel's Bait & Sport on Winnisquam Avenue.

Many communities provide access to the lake. Waldron Bay in Meredith has about 3,500 feet of shoreline along Winnisquam. There are 61 individual homes on lots varying from 1 to 10 acres. The 344-acre community is surrounded by conservation land. Residents enjoy a private sugar-sand beach, large clubhouse, tennis court, canoe and windsurfer racks, and 21 boat slips. Wildwood Village in Laconia, designed by award-winning architect Claude Miquelle, offers 8 individual floor plans with designs ranging from 2 to 3 story townhouses to single level duplex homes with attached garages. Each home has rights to a private 350-foot natural sand beach framed by a landscaped setting encompassing a boat launch, canoe and kayak rack, picnic area, and moorings. Mallards Landing in Belmont comprises a collection of homes directly on the waterfront. The Lord Hampshire is tucked on the shoreline by Winnisquam Bridge and is a charming collection of privately owned lakefront cottages as well as motel lodgings and cabin rentals. The sandy beach and waterfront deck provide a lovely spot to watch boats drift by. Other residential areas and communities that offer lake access include Laconia's premier Shore Drive and Holman Street neighborhoods, with rights to a beautiful association beach. A multitude of other little associates are tucked along the lake frontage of the different towns.

The shores and surroundings of Winnisquam are an unforgettable place to live or visit. The lake, its islands, and its mountain views are nature's offerings to this striking playground. The next time you drive over "Mosquito Bridge," look to the south where the famous battle between warring Native American nations took place 330 years ago, and know that peace now reigns on Lake Winnisquam.

Please feel free to visit www.rocherealty.com to learn more about the Lakes Region and its real estate market. Mary O'Neill is a Realtor at Roche Realty Group in Meredith & Laconia, NH and can be reached at (603) 366-6306. rocherealty.com

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