

PUSHAW LAKE: AN HISTORICAL PROFILE by Winifred Collins

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If ordering from the author, please remit a check for \$15.95 plus \$3.35 shipping and handling, for a total of \$19.30.

Reviewed by Sandi Duchesne, GPLA President

Winifred “Winnie” Collins has finally completed her long-awaited history of the bygone days on Pushaw Lake. It incorporates years of volunteer research and writing by the GPLA History Committee, chaired first by the late Inez Boyd and then by Winnie herself. Readers can peruse dozens of excerpts from old newspapers, diaries, and historical documents that have been preserved in the archives of the Bangor and Old Town Public Libraries. For example, the entire second chapter is a reprint of an article written by one “W.H.C.” for a publication called Commerce (August 24, 1889). The writing style is quaintly archaic as one might expect, and his noble-savage references to the Penobscot Indians will make many modern-day readers wince. Nonetheless, W.H.C. paints a compelling portrait of Pushaw Lake and its many attractions, as seen through the eyes of an educated upper-middle-class gentleman in the late 1800s.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the book is the inclusion of what Winnie calls “memories” – first-person oral and written accounts by long-time seasonal and full-time residents, including herself and GPLA Past President Callie Ellis. These short essays reveal some of the social, cultural, and economic conditions that governed life on Pushaw Lake during the first half of the 20th century. Chapter 5 circumnavigates the lake and provides a little bit of history for each of the landings in Orono, Glenburn, Hudson, and Old Town, including whatever memories Winnie was able to collect for each landing. Some of the landings get only a sentence or two, while others go on for many pages. Not surprisingly, Gould Landing in Orono gets the best coverage since this is Winnie’s home base. There is no mention in the book of people or places on Little Pushaw Pond in Hudson, so that remains fertile ground for future research.

Another highlight of the book is a well-researched essay on the Niben Club, a private sporting retreat that catered to well-to-do Bangor-area “wheelmen” and “lady riders” (i.e., bicyclists) in the late 1890s and early 20th century. The Niben Club was built on the Villa Vaughn landing, where the Pushaw Lake Campground now stands, and offered many other recreational activities besides bicycling: boating, swimming, and lawn games in summer, ice-skating, snowshoeing, and ice-boating in winter, and music-making, dancing and card-playing year-round, plus a fine restaurant in the clubhouse. Stables were built to allow members to drive their families in horse-drawn carriages out to Pushaw Lake for weekend fun

and entertainment, while others preferred to “wheel” the 7.5 miles to the club from Bangor on a members-only bike path. Unfortunately, membership dwindled as the mass-produced automobile made long-distance weekend adventuring more affordable and convenient, and the Niben Club’s glory days ended forever with a fire in 1924. It is hard to believe that 100 years ago, Bangor could boast a well-maintained, off-road bicycle trail that ran all the way from Grove Street in Bangor to Villa Vaughn in Orono. Wouldn’t it be nice if we could bring that little bit of history back to life as a recreational resource for all area residents and visitors to enjoy!

Pushaw Lake: An Historical Profile would make a thoughtful gift for any newcomer to Pushaw Lake, and long-time lakesiders will no doubt smile with recognition as they read through some of the collected memories from days past. It’s the ideal small volume to tuck in your camp bookshelf this winter, then peruse at leisure on the back deck when warmer weather returns. Because of the way the book is organized, it is easy to read through the entire thing in an hour or two – but it’s also possible to take your time and skip around the chapters, reading a little bit here and a little bit there about whatever piques your interest, without having to reread to find your place. I know that I will be sharing my copy with out-of-town guests to help them appreciate my little corner of Pushaw Lake in a different way.