Ladies Delight, Maine's Land-Locked Lighthouse, Needs Help

By Jeremy D'Entremont

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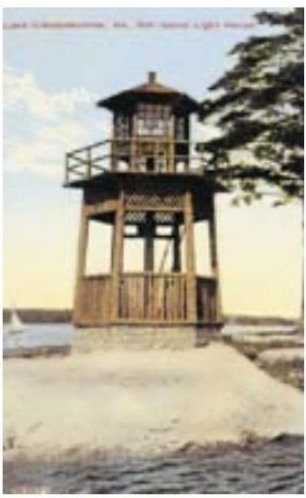
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Ladies Delight Lighthouse, Lake Cobbosseeconte, ...

Maine's Ladies Delight Lighthouse is a familiar and well-loved landmark to those who navigate near it, and it holds a special place as Maine's only lighthouse on a fresh water lake. Financial support is needed to help the lighthouse, which has developed a decided tilt.



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Ladies Delight Lighthouse, Lake Cobbosseeconte, ...
Photo by: Hugh M. Stephens

Maine's Lake Cobbosseecontee, commonly known as Cobbossee, is surrounded by the towns of Manchester, Winthrop, Monmouth, Litchfield and West Gardiner. Abenaki Indians fished in the nine-mile long lake long before the European settlers came. Some say the name Cobbosseecontee is Abenaki for "region of sturgeon." It has also been translated as "land of bountiful peace."



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Belle (or Bell) Island Lighthouse, Lake ...

In the late 1800s, the lake became a favorite summer place for the affluent from Boston and New York City's theatrical area who tended to stay in the few large inns, with people from Maine prefering smaller camps and cottages. A passenger launch took vacationers to their destinations on the lake. The complete circumnavigation of the lake took about five hours and there were no sanitary facilities on the boat. The passengers who were still aboard after five hours were extremely relieved to stop at a small island where the ladies would go ashore for a "rest." Hence the name "Ladies Delight," according to local legend.

The island is actually the central part of a large jagged reef in the lake, located about a mile south of Island Park in Winthrop. In an effort to keep the passenger launch and other boats from going aground on the reef, a lighthouse was built on Ladies Delight in 1908. It was designed by Frank Morse, a Boston marine architect.

The funds to construct the lighthouse were donated by Commodore Robinson of Boston, the Cobbosseecontee Yacht Club's first commodore. The land on which the light was built was donated by the commodore's wife of the Elliott/Briggs family. It had been her wedding gift from her grandfather.

The lighthouse was erected by the the yacht club with the help of two oxen. The builders could only transport one ox at a time because of the size of the barge they used. After taking the first ox to the island the workers returned to get the second one. In the meantime the first ox apparently grew lonely; as the workers returned to the island they saw it swimming back to the shore. The men finally succeeded in getting both oxen on the island, and the lighthouse was built over the course of the summer.

There were once two other lighthouses on Lake Cobbossecontee besides Ladies Delight. The Belle (or Bell) Island Lighthouse stood on the southwest tip of Belle Island from 1916 until 1938, when it was badly damaged by that year's great hurricane. It was built privately by Elliott family, owners of half the island.

Crow Island Lighthouse was a windmill-like tower with a kerosene light. Vestiges of both Belle Island Light and Crow Island Light remain.

Ladies Delight Light has always been maintained by members of the Cobbosseecontee Yacht Club. Its light source was originally kerosene lanterns. A volunteer keeper would go out each evening to trim the wicks, clean the globes and light the beacon. A system of grandfather clock weights was used to rotate a reflector.

The lantern has been blown off the lighthouse twice, and about 10 years ago it was changed from an iron to a wooden lantern housing. There is presently an osprey nest on top of the lighthouse. In three years, the osprey population on the lake has gone from zero to thirteen.

The tower is 16 feet high with its lantern adding another nine feet. It is equipped with a 75-watt light bulb intensified by a lens from a ship's anchor light. A wind-powered generator was used to power the light for a time in the 1930s. It now receives its power via a 3/4-mile cable from Manchester.

Volunteers of the Cobbosseecontee Yacht Club continue to maintain the lighthouse during the summer. The club also works to protect the water quality and ecosystem of the lake. In the mid-1980s, Hugh M. Stephens, Commodore of the Cobbosseecontee Yacht Club, became the keeper. Captain Stephens runs cruises on the lake by appointment.

Ladies Delight Island today is much smaller than it once was; a dam at the lake's outlet raised the water level by nine feet. There is a fundraising campaign underway to straighten the now-leaning lighthouse, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. The Kennebec Savings Bank has donated $5,000; a total of $20,000 is needed. You can email Captain Hugh Stephens at sos464@banet.net or call (207) 622-9409 if you'd like to help restore Maine's only fresh water land-locked lighthouse.