



## *A Family Kind of Place*

*Lake St. Catherine's Appeal Spans the Generations*

ASK ANYBODY who knows Lake St. Catherine well, and they'll tell you there's an ineluctable magic about her water and shoreline that draws people across the miles, the seasons and the years.

"I can't tell you the number of times folks come to my door and tell me about the summers they spent as young campers on the lake," says Pat Endlich, co-owner of the Lake St. Catherine Inn, the lake's only hotel, "or how they came here as honeymooners, or because their grandparents had a cottage here. Even if they can't stay, they want to touch base with this part of their past."

St. Catherine's past is preserved and passed along by people like Doris White, who has been spending summers on this Rutland County lake since 1953, when her father built a cottage overlooking Hall's Bay, a watery nook on Cone's Point, the peninsula that juts in from the eastern shore. Her vast knowledge of life on the lake has earned her the title of unofficial historian, whether you want to know about the evolution of a certain cottage, the days of the grand resort hotels, or the families who settled the shores.

Of course, things have changed in White's 40-plus years here, but, she says

By NANCY BOARDMAN  
Photographed by  
JERRY LEBLOND







*The Oar House on Pine Point reflects the older resort tradition around the lake. Right, the pleasures of boats and water. Opposite page, keeping the lake clear of Eurasian milfoil is a full-time summer job.*

firmly, "It's still the family lake it was then." And she should know. Her daughter returns for summer stays, as does her granddaughter, who spends vacations between college years working down the lane at the Lake St. Catherine Inn.

Lying southwest of Rutland, near the New York State border, Lake St. Catherine is actually two lakes, in two towns. The large upper lake, roughly

five miles long, a mile and a half wide and covering 930 acres, belongs almost half and half to Poultney and its neighbor, Wells. It drains through a narrow channel into Little Pond, a shallow, much smaller body of water that's entirely in Wells. From the air, the two resemble an exclamation mark. Although the northern tip of the large lake begins as a lily pond, it soon becomes quite deep, averag-

ing about 32 feet but often reaching 65 feet. There are about 12 miles of shoreline, counting the many coves and peninsulas that dot its edges.

No one knows for sure how Lake St. Catherine got her name, but the accepted legend is that two Jesuit priests, going about their missionary work among the Native Americans who came to fish and hunt here, spent a "safe St. Catherine's

Night" on the lake's shores on a November 25th in the late 1700s.

Today, families and good neighbors prevail. Ginny Daring of Pawlet is one of a group of women who have spent summers here for 70 years. She recalls her first job as a society reporter for *The Lake St. Catherine Ripples*, a weekly published by the French teacher at Granville (New York) High School. "My job was to go door-to-door on the west side of the lake and collect all the news, which meant who was visiting whom, where they were from, how long they were staying, and how they were being entertained during their visit. There was no better way to meet everyone and find out what was going on." She used her grandfather's cottage as a base of operations then; now she and her siblings own the house and use it each summer with their grandchildren.

Loyalty to the lake is evident in the continual planning and concern of the Lake St. Catherine Association. Guided by the motto "respect and protect," the association's trustees work year 'round to ensure that residents are happy and the lake remains healthy.

The association's semianual newsletter brims with

notices of golf tournaments and sailboat races, the progress of the Junior Water Ski Club, and dates of annual get-togethers such as the big August barbecue. It acknowledges all the volunteers who manage the insect-control program, who teach the Boat Safety Course for mariners of all ages, and who implement the beautification program that nurtures humans and wildlife.

Even more important, perhaps, the newsletter is a way of educating and updating residents about keeping Lake St. Catherine clean, safe and lovely.

"We feel our mandate is to have a lake that's healthy and well managed," says former association president Phil Pope. "It will always take time, energy and expertise to protect this treasure. We can't take it for granted."

The association tests the water continually for clarity and cleanliness. Residents are gently reminded, via the newsletter, not to do their early-spring fertilizing too close to the shoreline, and to call any member of the water-quality committee if they spot muddy or silty runoff from house construction. "In this day and age, probably no Vermont lake is truly pristine," says new president Phil Alden, "but we're about as near as anyone gets."

One sure test of a lake's health is the quality of its fishing, and here Lake St. Catherine wins top honors. Rainbow and lake trout abound, as do yellow perch, northern pike, smelt, and large- and small-mouth bass. Drive past the lake in late winter and you'll see a community of ice shacks dotting the center, as hardy anglers brave frigid temperatures and bone-chilling



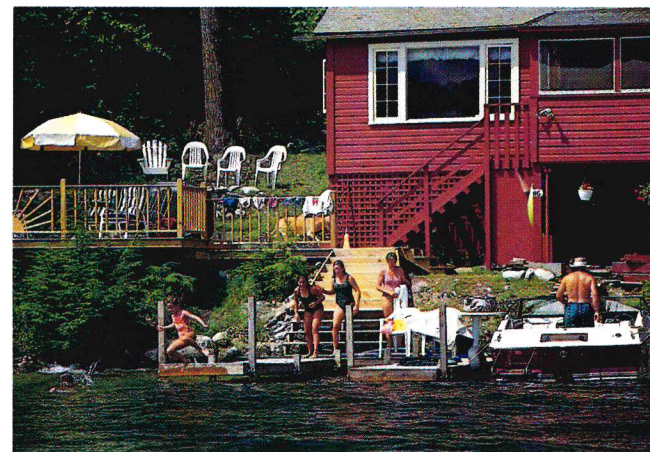
winds in pursuit of perch and pike.

Nature deserves the biggest thanks for the beauty and bounty that are Lake St. Catherine. Like her neighbors Bomoseen and Hortonia to the north, St. Catherine was born of glacial activity millions of years ago. It left her with densely wooded hills, above-average depth and a limestone bottom that neutralizes modern acid rain.

It all makes for a breathtaking vista — glittering blue water at the base of hills of green pine that thin out to reveal high, purple-tinged summits against an azure sky. Sitting on the porch of the Lake St. Catherine Inn, perched out over the water watching the sun set, you experience awesome majesty yet feel snugly secure.

That may well be what brings people here again and again. This is, above all, a quiet lake. Not only is the noise of parties or boats firmly discouraged, but commercial activity in general is slight. One hundred years ago, all sorts of industries hummed along the shore — a tannery, sawmill, gristmill, wagon shop, knitting mill, even a cheese factory. The railroad opened the lake up for summer tourism on a grand scale, spawning resort hotels, boarding houses, and enterprising excursion operators whose steamboats plied the waters.

Elsie Leslie Lyde, the





## Staying and Playing along Lake St. Catherine

Where once there were a slew of big resort hotels, only one remains, but it's a dandy. **The Lake St. Catherine Inn** (802-287-9347 or 800-626-LSCI) is quiet, homey, relaxed and family-friendly: 16 main-house guest rooms and another 19 in newer, larger quarters across the lawn. The reasonable rates include breakfast, dinner and all gratuities, plus the use of boats, fishing tips from prize-winning bass fisherman Ray Endlich, and the right to laze on the big back deck overlooking the water.

Lakeside cottages are available for weekly rental at **Lake St. Catherine Cottages** (802-773-2357), fully furnished, two or three bedrooms, ideal for families with small children; **Ferncliff Cottages** (802-287-5836), furnished, rowboats and a pontoon boat, clay-court tennis; and through **New England Lakeside Realty** (802-645-9001).

On Route 30 in Poultney, **Lake St. Catherine State Park** (802-287-9158) is among the state's most popular, though it never seems noisy or crowded. It has 60 camping sites (some with lean-tos), a public beach, nature trails, playground, boat rentals, public boat ramp, and first-class fishing, swimming and wind-surfing. Campers reserve early in the year and stay for at least four days.

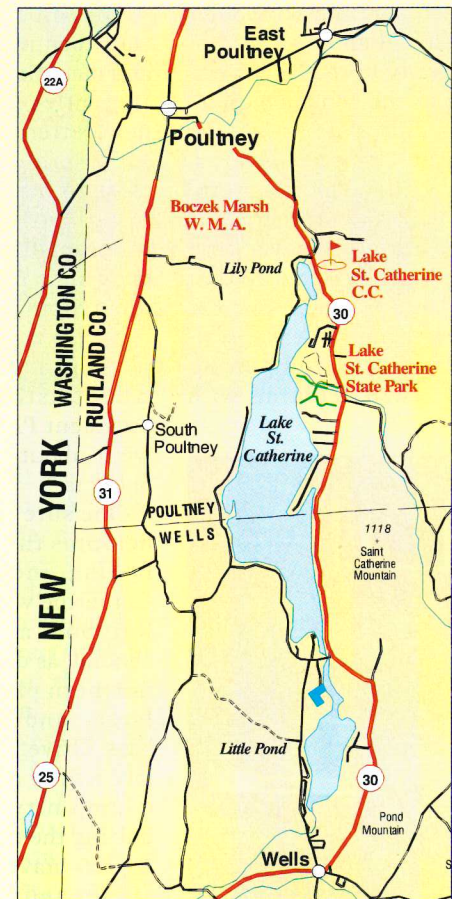
There is a public boat launch by the bridge that spans the channel between the two lakes. Next to it is the **Lake St. Catherine Marina** (802-645-9778); the other marina is **Sailing Winds** (802-287-9411), up Route 30 on the east side of the lake. Both rent all kinds of boats and sell boating equipment and accessories.

**The Lake St. Catherine Country Club** (802-287-9341) is open to the public as well as members, has an 18-hole golf course, and provides luncheons, snacks, and gorgeous views of the lake.

**Poultney** has tons to do, including band concerts, farmers' markets, rummage sales and a smorgasbord of church

suppers. East Poultney's town-wide flea market is an annual August treat. Poultney's Fourth of July extravaganza is justly renowned.

In **Granville**, just over the border from Wells, is the **Slate Valley Museum** (518-642-1417). Exhibits, tours and demonstrations pay tribute to the stone that once formed the economic, social and cultural bedrock of this 30-mile-long stretch of the Vermont-New York border. The **Pember Museum of Natural History** (518-642-1515) is a sophisticated collection of mammals, birds, eggs and nests, shells, minerals and other treasures that will enchant visitors of all ages. Off Route 22 in Hebron is the **Hebron Nature Preserve**, where walks, talks and more strenuous adventures take place on 125 acres of open fields, wetlands and forest.



Map by Northern Cartographic

American theater's first child star, spent the summers with her parents at "Road End." While her parents entertained such notables as Mark Twain, Elsie played with little Eleanor Roosevelt. There were two children's camps — Lake Arrowhead for Boys and its sister camp, Kamp Kinni-Kinnic. Kinni-Kinnic counted among its teenage campers Joan Rivers and, allegedly, Rosalind Russell. Today, the only camp is Catherine Capers, a girls' camp specializing in horsemanship. Kinni-Kinnic is a cluster of private homes; Camp Arrowhead became the site of Lake St. Catherine State Park in 1953.

The cottages, or "camps," that sprang up on the lake a century ago were simple affairs built by locals from Wells, Poultney or Granville, many of whom had connections with the then-booming slate industry. Other cottages were get-aways for residents of Albany or Troy, New York, who motored over for the entire summer. Today, about 85 per cent of the 600 homes that dot the shoreline belong to seasonal dwellers who journey from as far away as Texas and Michigan.

The "shorescape" has changed over the decades. Brand-new homes tend to look far more suburban than the original rustic retreats. Land is expensive, and many older cottages are expanding vertically, increasing living space and enhancing water views.

Still, there are many older homes that have managed the metamorphosis to bigger and better without losing their charm. And there are so many unusual houses — many never seen by fellow residents, let alone non-residents — that the Lake St. Catherine Association organizes occasional house tours. Traveling from dock



to dock by pontoon boat, participants visit such gems as "Bryn Bach," a contemporary camp that features a silo and decks off every room; "Pine Shadows," which began life as a Queen Anne cottage in 1908 and has grown to include a Greek Revival portico, Tuscan-style columns and a total of 63 windows and 42 doors inside and out; and "Sunset Glen," a Victorian confection also known as "the cottage that crossed the lake," which it did in 1948, when two motorized rowboats slowly tugged it from Horseshoe Bay to Cone's Point, a mile away.

This summer's biggest challenge to those overseeing the health of the lake continues to be the control of Eurasian water milfoil. From June until September, three huge harvesters — *Hungry Harvey*, *Harvey Junior* and *Millie Foil* — wrench out the noxious,

slimy green mat of weeds from both lakes. Residents are also on the alert for the possible invasion of the zebra mussel, a thumb-sized menace that is already in Lake Champlain.

In 1896, the prospectus for the now long-defunct Lake St. Catherine Hotel proclaimed "the Lake is ever changeful." The ensuing years clearly attest to that. Satellite dishes stand where privies once did, power-boaters use gasoline instead of steam, and the health of the water is threatened by enemies unimagined a century ago.

But drive slowly around Lake St. Catherine to see what hasn't changed. Cottages still go by old-timey names such as "Sagamore," "Vantage Point" and "Serenity." Children still fish with their grandfathers from wooden dinghies. Families still congregate from around the country for a



week so cousins can get to know each other and their parents can catch up on family news. Lake St. Catherine remains a clear, forest-framed mirror offering rest, rejuvenation and an ever-warm welcome to residents and wayfarers alike.

Writer Nancy Boardman reported on *Middletown Springs* in last summer's issue. She lives in Arlington.

*The board of directors of the Lake St. Catherine Association works to keep the lake healthy. Top, a summer house on Crescent Bay.*