



## VISIT OUR WEBSITE

### ***LWA 2020 Newsletter Regarding July 4th!***

*Because we are not mailing out our newsletter, which includes an envelope for your membership dues and donations, we are requesting that you pay your membership fee online and consider making a contribution which will enable us to continue with our mission of protecting our beautiful Lake.*

### **DONATE NOW**

*Dues are \$50 per family per year anything above is a much appreciated extra donation!*

*Or Send Your Check To: P. O. Box 2272, New Preston, CT 06777*



New Preston 4th of July Poster 1853 -  
Courtesy of Gunn Museum

***Solemnized without  
Pomp, Parade, or Frog  
Jumping Contests:  
Celebrating  
Independence on  
Waramaug in a Time of  
Uncertainty***

***by Christine  
Adams***

### **FLARES:**

The Association will provide flares for all families interested and will distribute them safely to you at tables situated at 9 Main Cafe, West Shore & Perkins Road, the lower parking lot at Lake Waramaug Country Club and in the driveway at the bottom of 211 North Shore. Tables will not be staffed but left with a donation jar on the honor system. Look for the tables starting this Saturday.

Currently, the world is facing an historic pandemic that has thrown our global community into a state of uncertainty as our health care officials grapple with how to contain the spread of the deadly Coronavirus, or COVID - 19. We are all facing disruptions in our personal, professional and family lives as we practice "social distancing", and in some cases, all-out quarantines. At times like these, when we as individuals are isolated from one another, it is important to find ways in which to connect as a community that are perhaps less physical, more symbolic, and what we hope will provide a pleasant distraction during these trying times.

Our plans to celebrate the Fourth of July with our traditional fireworks spectacular must be put on hold due to State permitting restrictions during the State of Emergency, although we are hoping to "fire away" on August 29th. We have made arrangements with Zambelli Fireworks to postpone for later in the summer, when we hope restrictions will have been lifted.

Yet now more than ever seems a poignant time to come together as best we can to celebrate our independence with special significance. Rimming the Lake with flares has been a longer-lived 4th of July commemoration within the Lake Community, and provides a way in which we can come together while apart, all the while creating something bright and beautiful during these dark times. The Association will provide flares for all families interested and will distribute them safely to you at tables situated at 9 Main Cafe in the Village, on West Shore Road at the intersection of Perkins Road, in the lower parking lot at The Lake Waramaug Country Club, and in the driveway at the bottom of 211 North Shore Road. For your safety, the tables will not be staffed, but left with a donations jar on the honor system.

Please note that we have recently learned that the chemical makeup of the old fashioned highway flares have proven to be environmentally unsound, and have therefore decided to transition to LED flares in the interests of the health of our Lake, as well as our members. As this information is new to us, we recognize that this year will be transitional, and welcome you to use up the flares we all have leftover from last year's celebration.

To learn more, please see: **[DOJ Evaluation of Chemical & Electric Flares](#)**

We hope you will help us while we transition to a safer tradition for all by sharing your thoughts on the aesthetics and efficacy of the LED flares, which can also be purchased on line at: **[Amazon.com](#)**

The Association has also hired a bagpiper, in the spirit of Richard Combs's Inn on Lake Waramaug, to entertain our constituents from the comfort of their own lakeside homes. Keep your eyes and ears peeled for the Task Force's pontoon boat, as they have graciously offered their skipper services for our celebration. The performance will begin at 8:00 PM.

Immediately following the bagpipes, at nine o'clock PM on Saturday July 4th, 2020, we will ignite our flares. Please have your cameras ready! And share your photographs, videos and thoughts about the new, battery-operated flares with us, at **[lakewaramaugassociation@gmail.com](mailto:lakewaramaugassociation@gmail.com)**.

In addition, we will join the Warren Congregational church at 2 PM on July Fourth in ringing bells, which we will also include in our package along with a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Please ring your bells anew at 9 PM!

Over the past several decades, our community has been fortunate for the generosity of many individuals who have hosted Fourth of July celebrations on the Lake. According to those long affiliated with the Hopkins Inn and Vineyards, the renowned artist Eric Sloane (1905 - 1985)\* was the first to fund a spectacle for lake residents and their guests from the vantage of the Hopkins Inn during the 1960s, although safety concerns grew during the 1970s and 80s, which curtailed the event.

More organized and sophisticated fireworks shows began when The Hamilton Family bought the Inn on Lake Waramaug in 1998, returning it to its former name, The Lakeview Inn. To commemorate that first Fourth of July, they hired the world-renowned George Zambelli, whose Fireworks Manufacturing Company began in Italy during the late 19th Century.

Zambelli also helped the Lakeview usher in the new Millennium, with fireworks that lit up our skies at midnight, January 1, 2000.

Beginning in 2001, the Lake Waramaug Association joined the Hamiltons to fund and present the Fireworks, making it a true community event. This arrangement continued through 2009, when the Hamiltons sold the Inn. In 2010, the Lake Waramaug Association took over all aspects of the show with the help and generous support of our constituency, and the hospitality of the families who occupy Randalls Point and surrounds, who allow us to continue to use the grounds as launching site. For the past few years, the Vance Family, living on the site of the former Inn on Lake Waramaug property, has graciously offered the fields above their property on the North Shore to serve as our firing site.

For as long as anyone on our shores can remember, the lighting of the flares was as much or even more anticipated event than the fireworks. In the 1980s, the Inn on Lake Waramaug sponsored a sky diver to signify our Lake community to light their flares; at once, all would strike our glorified matches, igniting a red-orange glow reflected in the lake like a mirror, sparks emitting from the tin plates that protected the grass in a brilliantly steady, quiet hiss. Smoke would unfurl a cloud above us and tickle our noses, a precursor to the fireworks shows, which in those days were home-grown, small, individualized affairs, that mostly frightened our dogs rather than wow the lake-dwelling crowd. As is often the case, the anticipation of nightfall was more exciting, more beautiful, more awe-inspiring than the actual event.

The flares are the true time-honored tradition of the Lake. The Bridgeport Post of July 2, 1971 advertised that our community would again "celebrate the Fourth of July with a 'Light Up the Lake Flare Up'...with 800 flares lining the shores ready to take off when the shot gun blast at 9 PM signifies the start of the 'Flare Up.' This year promises to be the largest in the history of this tradition. Flares are available for a nominal charge from Kelley's Store, The Inn, The Loomarwick and The Boulders. The evening is sponsored by the Lake Waramaug resort association."

The Association referenced here is likely the Eight Friendly Inns of Lake Waramaug, a consortium of our Inns actively in business at the time, and who worked in conjunction with one another when the Lake was an attraction for weekend guests and vacationers. And yet it has been reported that it was Eric Sloane who began the tradition. He dined often at the Hopkins Inn, and invited friends to join him on the Fourth for the flares and fireworks, for which he not only footed the bill, but ignited the pyrotechnics himself. The display, therefore, was decidedly home grown, consisting of fiery pinwheels tacked to the trees flanking the dining terrace, and small rockets ignited from Sloane's own table of guests.

The Inn on Lake Waramaug also hosted a Fourth of July festival, featuring ice sculpted from blocks harvested from the Lake the previous February by Jay Combs himself, and a frog jumping contest to "help keep frog jumping alive in Connecticut since the cancellation in 1979 of the annual frog-jumping contest at the Mark Twain Memorial in Hartford. Twain immortalized the sport in his tale 'The Celebrated Jumping Frogs of Calaveras County' and the Hartford event was once considered part of the Nation's Triple Crown of frog jumping." (Jack Ewing,

*The Hartford Courant*, July 3, 1989). The Inn Keeper and Chief Referee Kevin Kirshner, armed with a megaphone, implored contestants to not poke the amphibians in an effort to curtail cruelty inflicted on the animals. He also wielded the all-important tape measure.

Heather Allen, a former member of the LWA Board of Directors, reports other campy commemorations, amongst them "a flaming raft that was launched from the Inn's first beach, now the Blynn residence. A raft was loaded up with combustibles including wood, old furniture and the like, set on fire, and launched out into the Lake to burn" in the late 1950s.

On the North Shore, Sloane was also busy contributing to the Pomp of our nation's birthday. He reportedly bought a clock for the Warren Congregational Church, which until 1963 housed merely a faux, painted timepiece. Sloane was also instrumental in reviving a John Adams-recommended commemoration in Warren: ringing bells on Independence Day, which according to reports of the day, was heard on the shores of Waramaug, and whose residents and merry-makers contributed to the tolling. Our history books tell the tale of a chime that changed the world on July 8, 1776 when the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia invited the public to hear the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence by Colonel John Nixon, who later served under Washington at the Battle of Princeton. Prior to that in Colonial America, and prior to the winds of political change, the tolling of the bells was popular in commemorating the birthday of King George III.

Founding Father, John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail that the holiday "will be celebrated, by succeeding generations, as the great anniversary festival [that should include] pomp and parade...games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to another." Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration's author, remarkably died on the same day, the Fourth of July, 1826. Five years later, James Monroe also passed away on the Fourth, lending a somber undertone to the day, one that in 1776 marked the beginning of a national struggle, a war that was largely fought by citizen soldiers who sacrificed much, in some cases everything, for America.

We have found ourselves in another moment of national struggle, this time waging a defensive warfare against an unforgiving virus. Perhaps this Fourth of July will be spent more "independently" than what we'd normally prefer, avoiding those large festivals in a time of containment and worry. Let us commemorate the day, still, with bells, brilliantly lit with flares (and hopefully, August fireworks!) in the spirit of a community that will persevere and overcome the inevitable trials that befall them, and as a reminder of what brings us all together: a mutual love of Lake Waramaug, and the desire to protect and preserve her.

We invite you all to ring your bells at 2:00 PM, along with our neighbors in Warren, and at 9 PM, to light your flares and ring bells, along with your Waramaug-loving friends and families, to celebrate our collective strength and fortitude. Let our celebrations be happy, spent amongst those to whom we are closest and, most of all, safe.

Special thanks to the Gunn Historical Museum, the Warren Historical Society, Mary Harwood for her meticulous research, and all who agreed to be interviewed for this article.

Please consider offsetting the cost of the flares, bells and fireworks by making a donation to the Association. You can do so online by clicking here: <http://waramaugassoc.org>, or sending a check to: The Lake Waramaug Association, Inc., PO Box 2272, New Preston, CT. 06777.



July 4, 1987. Photo courtesy of Kate Adams



A parachutist wielding a lit flare jumps from his plane, July 4th, 1987. Photo courtesy of Kate Adams.