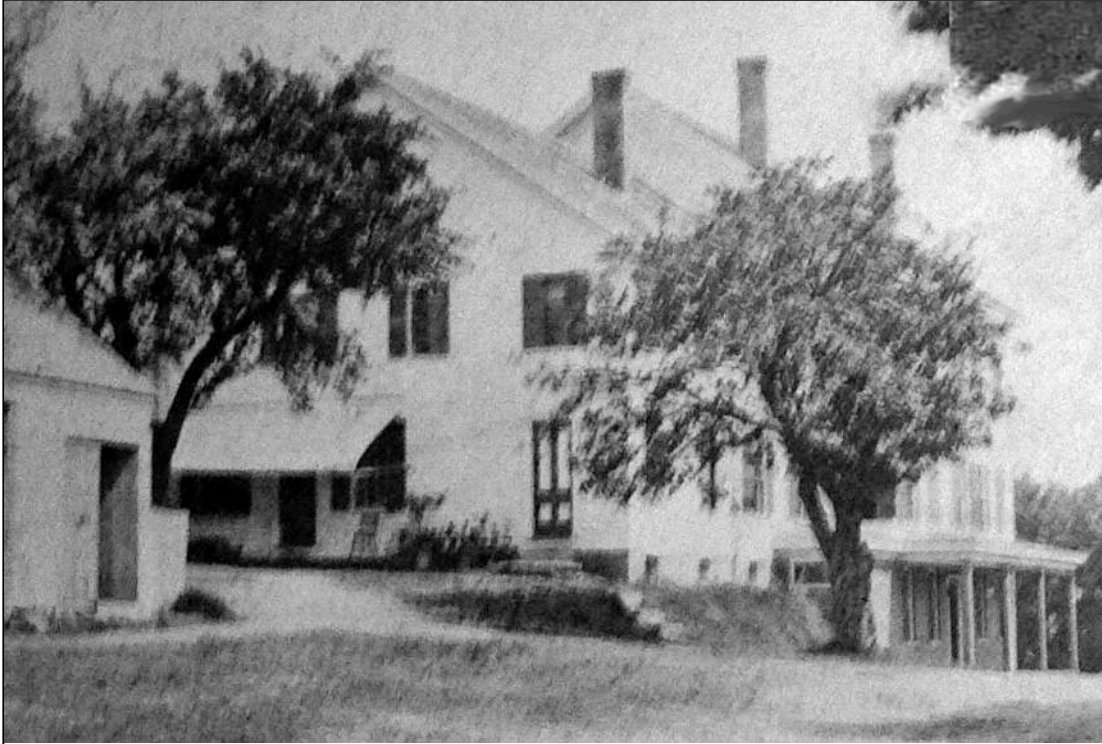


At south end of Chebacco Lake there were two hotels: Chebacco House, built in 1859, and Winnepoyken Hotel, built in 1888. Map, 2012, Google Maps

History of

Chebacco Lake

Part 1: Hotels



Chebacco House, built in 1859 by John Whipple of Boylston, was on a knoll between Beck's Pond and Chebacco Lake, which now is where there are two Hamilton streets, Veranda Circle and Villa Road.

Photo Hamilton Historical Society

Chebacco Lake Hotels

There was a time when Chebacco Lake was a highly regarded vacation destination. It was known for its pristine woodlands and virginal waters ... a place of solitude away from the clangorous, hectic and crowded large towns and cities of New England.

Chebacco is an Agawam Indian name, signifying that the lake is a "place where spirits dwell." On fall mornings, a low mist often covers the lake. Thus, its name is not surprising,¹⁶

For the adventurous vacationers of the 19th century, there were many campsites around the lake, where they could pitch a tent and get close to nature.

However, many people were not into the rustic life of tenting. They preferred to stay at a civilized place that afforded comfortable amenities.

At first, there was but one hotel by the lake... the Chebacco House (*see picture above*). Located near the south end of the lake, Chebacco House was built in 1859, by John Whipple of Boylston. He had purchased the land from the Edmund Knowlton estate. The hotel was on a hillock between the smaller Beck's Pond and Chebacco Lake.⁶

The main part of Chebacco House had 3 floors. At

the back, over-looking the lake, there was a covered porch. A 2-floor ell was at the side of the building. The number of rooms at the hotel may have been about 16. Rooms on the second floors overlooked the lake.

A large hotel staff, hired from the area, made a stay very comfortable.

A path from Essex Street led to hotel and to the east end of the lake. Today, this path consists of Chebacco Road and Villa Road.

For those coming from distant parts of the state and from other New England towns, there was rail service that passed through the center of Hamilton. When guests arrived at the depot, they called the hotel to have them picked up. From the depot, carriages took guests to Chebacco Road. Carriages, provided by local farmers, were available, at a small fee, for the final leg of the trip to the hotel.¹⁵

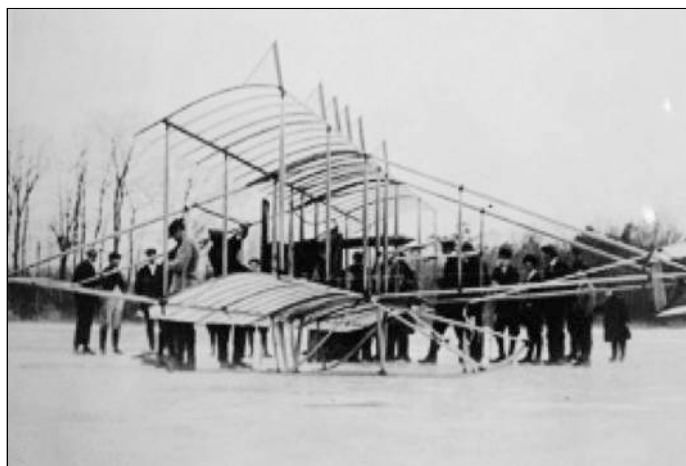
The Chebacco House had a large dining room (*see pictures*). One of the items featured on its menu was open-fire-roasted chicken ... where the whole chicken, on a rotating spit, was slowly cooked. The restaurant had a liquor license and kept an ample supply of fine wines.⁸



Featured dinner at the Chebacco House restaurant was its open-fire-roasted chicken dinner.
Photo, Hamilton Historic Society



Chebacco House had an elegant and large dining room, above and at right, where both those staying at the hotel and people from the general area dined.
Photo Hamilton Historical Society



Bi-plane took off from frozen lake and made a short flight about the lake. The oil mix that cooled and lubricated the bi-plane's engine was heated on the kitchen stove at the Villa Veranda. Photo, MA Aeronautical Historical Society

On weekends, the Chebacco House was especially crowded with vacationers and local residents, who were out for a fine meal. It was not unusual for well over a hundred people to be at the hotel.⁶

The hotel's elegant and large dining room also hosted many fine banquets. Of particular note were those hosted by Hamilton's Myopia Hunt Club.⁶

In the 1880s, Myopia Hunt Club held fox hunts across the country side, often dashing over the fields of local farmers. "The hard-headed farmers of Essex County," initially were very angry about the hunts; however, they were won-over when their families were invited to elegant, evening dinners at the Chebacco House, hosted by the Myopia Hunt Club.⁶

On the Chebacco House property, there were two barns. One barn had been transformed into a ling alley, the first in Hamilton.¹ The other barn burned in 1910, after having been struck by lightning.⁷

It became easier to reach the Chebacco House in 1872. The Boston & Maine Railroad built a branch that ran from the Hamilton-Wenham depot to Essex. Along the way, the line passed the north end of Chebacco Lake, where there was a station. You can still see the old railroad bed crossed School Street just down from the Legion.

A story goes that when a train neared the lake, it could be seen back at The Chebacco House. The kitchen then began preparing food for guests on the train.

The train line was not built to bring vacationers to the lake. It primarily was built to transport ice from the lake's three large ice companies.

The festivity of the hotel life was broken in August 1878, when a violent lightning storm passed through the region. It caused extensive damage to the Chebacco House. At the time, the hotel had 150 guests, as well as many employees: no one was killed. The hotel was quickly repaired.¹⁷

John Whipple died in 1885. He was 74. His sons, Alonzo and Samuel, continued the hotel business. Alonzo lived in a house that may have been the original farmhouse on the property.⁶

After only four years, the Whipple brothers, in 1889, sold the property to James Farley, Jr., and Charles Morse, Jr., of Beverly. They hired William Wedlock to operate the hotel. In June 1891, after only two years, the brothers sold the hotel to the Chebacco House Company of Boston.⁷

Around 1900, Frederick H. Prince acquired the Chebacco House and the property on the lake.¹⁷ The 994-acre Prince estate abutted the property, at the south end of the lake.

With deference to the porch over-looking the lake, Prince gave the hotel the Italian name Villa Veranda.⁶ Guests, if they so desired, could be served lunch on the veranda, that afforded a splendid view of Chebacco Lake and the surrounding environs. .

To bring guests from the railroad station at the north end of the lake and to his Princemere estate, Prince had a ferryboat built at the Elliott Shipyard in Ipswich.³

Prince had the farmhouse moved to the lakeshore, where it was remodeled to be a boathouse. He also had 30 miles of bridle paths created through the woods around the lake and nearby ponds.⁵

Another change made by Prince was the removal of the original road that ran along the east end of the lake and past the hotel. This probably was done to improve the view of the lake from the hotel's veranda.⁶

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, other than the harvesting of ice, winters were quiet around the lake. However, on Feb. 28, 1910, there was a lot of excitement.

On this day, the Villa Veranda's was involved in the first airplane flight in New England (see picture). A bi-plane, with skids took off from frozen lake and made a short flight about the lake. The water and castor oil mix that cooled and lubricated the bi-plane's engine was heated on the kitchen stove at the Villa Veranda.¹⁴

As the 19th century came to an end and the 20th century began, the interests of people for vacation destinations changed. The desire for excitement replaced that for tranquility, oceans replaced lakes.

Around 1910, the Villa Veranda closed. Its veranda was vacant. The hotel was not completely vacant. Adolph Johnson and his family lived there. He was the caretaker for the Prince estate.¹⁰

Frederick H. Prince, in 1926, traded a portion of his land that had a beachfront to the town for land the town owned. He also had the underbrush cleared and a roadway built from Chebacco Road to the shore of the lake. The park quickly became a favorite spot for picnics and campers. In 1946, the town brought sand from Crane's Beach to create a sandy beach at the park. (*The town closed Chebacco Beach in 1997.*)

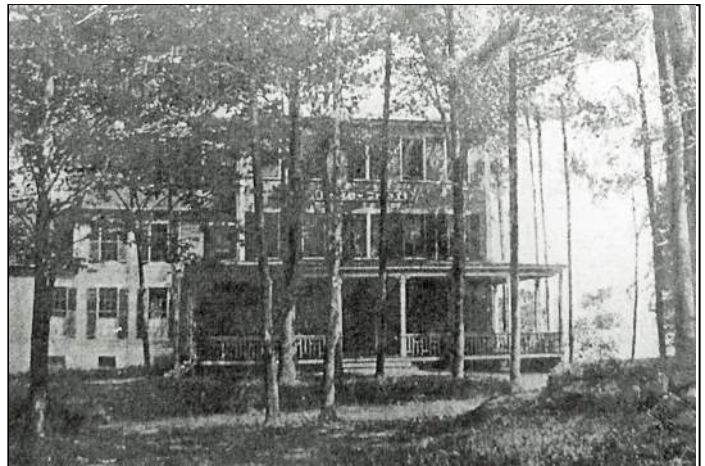
In 1950, the Prince estate sold the property, including the Villa Veranda, to Gordon College. For a short time, the house served as a dormitory for married students.⁷ In 1960, the hotel was torn down.⁷

The early success of the Chebacco House did not go unnoticed nor unchallenged. In 1888, competition came to the Chebacco Hotel.

Thomas Brown built a hotel (see picture) on a site that now is the Hamilton the boat ramp, on the lake's south-eastern shore.

Brown called his hostelryth the Winnepoyken Hotel.⁵ The name came from the 17th century Naumkeag Indian chief Winnepoyken.⁶ The English settlers called him Sagamore George.⁵

The 3-story hotel had a covered porch at the front and a 2-story ell to the left of the entrance. The back of the hotel faced directly onto the lake. Tall deciduous trees were around the other three sides of the hotel. In the ell, there was a large dining room.



Winnepoyken Hotel, built in 1888 by Thomas Brown, was named after local Indian chief. The site now is the Hamilton the boat ramp.
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society.



Lake Croft Inn, was new name for Wennepoyken Hotel that John Rauch bought in 1908. He refurbished, refurnished and expanded the building.
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

A LA CARTE SERVICE		
RELISHES AND HORS D'OEUVRES		
Plain Celery .....	.50	Grape Fruit Cocktail .. .50
Canape Caviar	1.00	Stuffed Celery
P. & C. Sardines .....	.75	Salted Peanuts
SOUPS		
Chicken Plain .....	.25	Beef Bouillon
Purée of Tomato .....	.30	Chicken Broth with rice .30
SHELL FISH		
Steamed Clams, dr but .50		Crabmeat Cocktail .... .75
Lobster Cocktail	1.25	Plain Boiled Lobster ..1.50
		Lobster a la Newburg ..2.50
STEAKS AND CHICKEN		
Tenderloin Steak (1)	1.75	Club Sirloin Steak a la Bordelaise
Tenderloin Steak (2)	3.00	(4 pers.)
Small Sirloin Steak (1)	2.00	Club Sirloin Steak, with Mushrooms
Sirloin Steak (2)	3.50	(4 pers.)
Extra Sirloin Steak (3 pers.)	5.00	Porterhouse Steak (3 pers.)
Half Chicken, Fried a la Maryland	1.75	Porterhouse Steak, Extra (4 pers.)
Supreme of Chicken, with Mushrooms ..	1.75	Half Chicken, Saute a la Creole
Fillet Mignon	2.00	Half Chicken, Saute a la Marengo
Club Sirloin Steak (4 pers.)	6.00	Half
Broiled Chicken	2.50	
DIVERSES		
Plain Omelette .....	.75	Ham Omelette
Jelly Omelette .....	.90	Cheese Omelette
Spanish Omelette	1.00	Fried Eggs, two
		Welsh Rarebit
		With Ham or Bacon ..1.00
		Scrambled Eggs
		Shirred Eggs, two

Lake Croft Inn's menu prices, compared to today's prices, are very low, but for the time they were high.



Lake Croft Inn's porch, which Rauch also called a veranda, was extended around the building and the dining room were quite elegant. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

While an initial success, the Winnepoyken Hotel saw tough times as the 20th century began. It was put up for sale. In 1908, John Rauch bought the tired hotel (see *picture*). He changed the name to the Lake Croft Inn.⁵ Nothing came be found as to why he called a hotel alongside Chebacco Lake the Lake Croft Inn.

Rauch refurbished, refurnished and expanded the building. The porch, also called a veranda, extended around the building and the dining room made quite elegant.⁹



All that remains of the Lake Croft is its stone septic tank, a corner of which can be seen next to the boat ramp. Photo, J. Hauck, 2013

Guest rooms at the Lake Croft Inn had large windows allowing views of the lake and surrounding woods. Sun rises must have been beautiful sights. An open front porch faced toward the nearby woods. To the left of the entrance, Rauch built a large sunroom.

Advertisements for the inn extolled the Lake Croft's roasted chicken dinners that the owner "had previously had made famous at the old Cooper tavern in Arlington."The advertisement also said "the roads are the best in the State for automobiling and driving." (*Really?*)¹⁵

The Lake Croft's menu prices, today, look very low ... like a porterhouse steak for three people being only \$6 and a broiled lobster for \$1.50.¹⁸ But, when compared to other menus of the time, the prices were on the high.

As was the case with the Vila Veranda, the Lake Croft Inn saw fewer people coming to the country for their vacation. Ocean side vacations were preferred. Another major factor affecting vacationers was WW1.

Lake Croft shut its doors about 1918. It remained vacant until a fire destroyed it in the 1940s. Now, all that remains of the once splendid Lake Croft Inn is its stone septic tank, a corner of which can be seen next to the boat ramp (see *picture at left*).

Many years later, an old Automobile Tourists Association metal sign that hung at the front of the hotel, was found near the boat ramp. The sign (see *picture, above*) is now at the Hamilton Historical Society.

In addition to the Chebacco House and the Winnepoyken House there was a hotel and inn, unnamed, that was torn down, when Frederick Prince bought the lands surrounding the Chebacco House.¹⁹

There also was a boarding house, at the north end of the lake, just off Western Ave, where workers at the ice harvesting companies roomed during the brief December to February ice cutting season.²⁰



The hotels are gone, but great walking trails remain around the lake. Photo, J. Hauck, 2013

References

- 1 - Lake History: The Hotels, Sue McLaughlin, 2007, and Keith L. Symmes, 2011.
- 2 - Here and There in New England and Canada, Moses Foster Sweetser, Passenger Dept. Boston & Maine Railroad, 1889
- 3 - Reported Sale of Chebacco House at Hamilton, Boston Evening Transcript, Apr. 24, 1900.
- 4 - Hamilton Historic Society document.
- 5 - History of Essex County, Massachusetts: With Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men, edited by Duane Hamilton Hurd, J. W. Lewis & Co., 1888.
- 6 - Changing Times, Janice P. Pulsifer, Hamilton Historic Society, 1976
- 7 - Hamilton's Lakeside Eating Places Once Flourishing - Now Almost Forgotten By All, Roger W. Hanners, January 1976.
- 8 - Chicken dinners at Chebacco Lake remembered, Michael H. Epstein, Salem News, Sep.22, 1976.
- 9 - Who's Who, Albert W. Dennis, Salem Press Co., Salem, MA 1908.
- 10 - Chronicle of a Country Town, Donald W. Beattie, Massachusetts American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 1976.
- 11 - Hamilton's Centennial, Boston Daily Globe, Jun. 18, 1893.
- 12 - Chebacco House, Boston Evening Transcript, Jun. 20, 1891.
- 13 - Chebacco House, Boston Evening Transcript, Aug. 16, 1890.
- 14 - Centennial celebrates New England's first manned flight. Steve Landwehr, Salem News, Feb. 25, 2010.
- 15 - Lake Croft Inn, flyer, 1909.
- 16 - Indian Place Names of New England, John C. Huden, NY Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1962.
- 17 - Hamilton Massachusetts, Myths, Legends & a Few Quirky Characters, Annette V. Janes, History Press, Charleston, SC 2008.
- 18 - Lake Croft Inn menu.
- 19 - A Pretty Spot in Essex Woods, unknown newspaper, Hamilton Historical Society.
- 20 - 1984 Ice house locations map, Hamilton Historical Society.
- 21 - 1928 Hamilton Annual Report
- 22 - 1946 Hamilton Annual Report
- 23 - 3 - Reported Sale of Chebacco House at Hamilton, Boston Evening Transcript, Apr. 24, 1900.

Jack E. Hauck, Oct., 2013; Updated, Apr. 15, 2015