

A description of Crystal Lake from...

## **King's Handbook of Newton**

by **M. F. Sweetser**

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Crystal Lake, or Baptist Pond, now forms one of the chief natural ornaments of Newton, and covers an area of thirty-three and a half shining acres of clear and limpid spring water, happily free from weeds and vegetation and aquatic plants. Its south bank is formed by the long railway embankment, which cuts off its lower bays; while on the west is the bit of woodland traversed by Lake Avenue, and all through which are inscriptions signifying that land may be purchased here, on application to a certain well-known real-estate agent. Along the remaining shores, and notably on the north, are groups of pretty villas, with pleasant rural surroundings, and looking out on the cheerful bright water. Down this side extends a substantial sea- (or pond-) wall, with a little esplanade; and off-shore are the moorings of the Baptist-Pond navy, which includes more than two-score boats, from the most perilous little craft with oars up to cat-boats and sloops that might safely make the runout to the Bermudas — in tranquil weather. There are also boats here for public hire; and in the one-mile circuit of the pond you may get a capital bit of exercise. On the Fourth of July there are prize scull-races here for boys and girls, tub-races, and other trials of skill and strength. At evening bonfires flame along the shores, and processions of illuminated boats move over the water, and every coigne of vantage in the neighborhood has its crowd of delighted spectators. But let not the frivolous Bostonian think that he can wantonly disport himself on these Baptist shores; for boldly inscribed tablets sternly warn him and his kind that " All persons committing the following offences will be prosecuted according to law. Bathing without a bathing-suit, discharging firearms, profane swearing, disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace."

A poetic writer says that "Sailing or rowing out here, and looking up the height, the scene is German or Italian in its bold and romantic character. The hues in the stone of the Institution chapel, and its architecture, embracing a heavy tower, give it, set upon the wooded hill, an air of age, and recall the castle sites on Como, or one of those still-inhabited religious habitations which rise upon the banks of the Danube."

Nature provided a comfortable outlet for the pond on the east side, near the old Wiswall farmstead; but about two centuries ago certain enterprising mill-owners dug a deep channel from its north side down to Smelt Brook, hoping thereby to augment the water-power on that busy little stream. Their schemes went all a-gley, however, and nought now remains of their hard work, except a nearly obliterated trench, near the Loring estate.

In 1871 Messrs. Rand, Hyde, Bishop, and six other gentlemen, forming the Newton Black-Bass Club, leased the pond from the Massachusetts Commissioners for Inland Fisheries for the term of twenty-five years, to be stocked with black bass from Plymouth, and protected by law against the casual hooks of the village youth. A hundred bass were put into these quiet waters, but they and their descendants were so wary that they enjoyed all the sport, and their would-be captors went home divers times with light and empty baskets. In 1877, therefore, three thousand land-locked salmon were added to the finny population, quite literally, for the bass came forth, with great joy, and devoured them, every one. A year later, the clubmen brought a few score of white perch, and set them loose in the pond; and their prickly backs sufficed for defence against the monopolistic bass, so that they increased and multiplied greatly.

In ancient times this Baptist sea bore the name of Wiswall's Pond, in remembrance of the first ruling elder of the church, who came here in the year 1654, and dwelt on the border of the pretty lakelet for nearly thirty years, until (in 1683) he was summoned to join the church above. A fair domain of a thousand acres " and a great pond " was granted by the General Court to John Haynes, Esq., as early as the year 1634. The next year he was chosen Governor of Massachusetts. In 1636 Haynes migrated to Connecticut, where he also served a year as Governor, and on his death in 1654 the pond estate went to his heirs.

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