

History of Aqua Vista

On July 15, 1926, Connecticut Light and Power Company's board of directors approved a plan that would be unique: the first large-scale operation of pumped storage facilities in the US. By creating the lake and pumping it full of water from the Housatonic River, then letting the water pour down an immense pipe, called a penstock, and into a turbine, the utility could produce electricity.

Within weeks, an army of 50 surveyors swarmed into the valley, and lawyers were hired to process the deeds transferring land held by some families since before the American Revolution into the hands of CL&P. The utility had the power of eminent domain and so the farmers sold their land -- \$2,356 for 53 acres (210,000 m²), \$3,000 for 34 acres (140,000 m²), \$100 for 3 acres (12,000 m²).

Starting in late July 1926, nearly 1400 men labored to create Connecticut's largest body of water. About 500 men from Maine and Canada hand-felled 4,500 acres (18 km²) of woodland, burning the lumber in massive bonfires - reminiscent of Indian campfires that once burned in the valley centuries earlier. Several dams were built. The largest, at the north end of the valley, measured 952 feet (290 m) wide and 100 feet (30 m) high upon completion.

On February 25, 1928, the first pumping operation began pouring water into the valley from the Housatonic. Engineers had planned on the Rocky River and its tributaries filling the valley one-fourth of the way, with the generating plant pumping the remaining three-fourths of the water out of the Housatonic. The valley filled quickly; on September 29, 1928, the water reached an elevation of 429 feet (131 m) above sea level, and Candlewood Lake was considered complete.

Even before the lake's filling was completed, it became apparent it would draw summer vacationers from as far away as New York City. Land prices on what would become the shoreline had already jumped to \$1,000 an acre; summer developments sprang up almost immediately.

Although it was almost called Lake Danbury, the new body of water ultimately got its name from New Milford's Candlewood Mountain - which was named after the Candlewood tree, whose sapling branches were sometimes used as candles by early settlers.

To this day Candlewood Lake serves as a relaxing getaway for city folk and a year-round home for others.