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Lake George scares seen as "bunk"

"Lake George scares" is the subject of the most recent issue of the "White Birch Runway" published by the Ticonderoga Fish and Game Club, Inc.

Written by Merrill Dolbeck, club president, the article repudiates recent charges that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's) are endangering both the fish of Lake George and the drinking water supply.

Dolbeck reviews the various "Lake George scares" that have swept the area in recent years. He begins with the United States Corps of Army Engineers, noting that they were talking over the lake and "making plans to cut a cross switch somewhere to the south of Mt. Defiance Range and thereby connect Lake George with Champlain." Dolbeck's account of the situation continues: "by developing a suitable locking system it would be quite possible to watch a flotilla of oil tankers and Bel boats tug their unpleasant loads from Champlain south through old Hessian and thence channeling to the Hudson somewhere in the vicinity of Ghost Falls and from there on and on as ex-president Franklin D. Roosevelt might have suggested soon to Shanghai."

"We have also endured the Lake George mercury scare. This one became a real bunk-breacher to the fishermen who were warned by the DEC and others not to dare eat any of the once famous Lake George trout because now they had become infamous and were suddenly found to be registering stable constants of deadly mercury. This became especially dangerous and highly concentrated in the larger fish. Lake trout we are told are among the longest lived in the fresh water fish world and since mercury is accumulative and builds up in fish bodies over the years; the older and larger the trout the more lethal they become. Indeed, someone has suggested that a real trophy trout if hung by the tail could be rigged as a mercury tape and might accordingly be used to determine temperature.

Then we had the "algal bloom." I guess that's what the experts finally decided it was to be called. I had written in the newsletter sometime before that I believed the "fishy" taste in Lake George water was probably due to some change in algae conditions within the lake. The water did taste and smell fishy - there was no argument there. I have lived on the shore of Lake George for over 50 years and during that time I drank barrels of this water which we pumped directly from the lake. I noticed this condition on two occasions during my lifetime and it has occurred notably late in the winter following a period of continued cloudy and sometimes rainy weather. Quantities of late heavy snow covering the ice increased the degree of darkness in the water below and also may have contributed to the Algal Bloom. I believe the resultant unusual growth or culture of some particular form of algae is thus stimulated. A very fishy taste and odor follows but fortunately after a few days the sun comes out, the weather clears and the disagreeable taste and odor disappears. Lake George water is once again as sweet and luscious as ever.

The Algal Bloom was sort of interlocked with the "Phosphate Boodoggle" and it's boycott. This scopy monster monopolized the headlines for a considerable length of time. Repetedly it is phosphate that fertilizes and stimulates the development of the Algal Bloom. I wish someone would explain to me just how this phosphate saturation came about so suddenly at the time of year when Lake George was comparatively deserted by the summer multitudes. Those responsible for most of the activities that would release such an unusual quantity into the Lake via dishwashers, laundries, etc. Most of the resorts and summer cottages

were closed. Leach beds and cesspools were still frozen beneath ice and snow. Oh well, I guess they might as well blame the poor old phosphates - something has to be blamed. I think however, when the atmospheric conditions once again create an algal bloom we will drink fishy water again for awhile - phosphates or not. Perhaps someone ought to test that fishy water, might even find it would have some very beneficial effect. May be that's where fish get their flavor.

And so it goes - one Lake George Scare after another - but again I say "Bunk!" I still drink my Lake George water and I love it. I'd also gladly eat any of those contaminated Lake George trout if I could get my hands on them! I also believe that these scares like the PCB and The Lake George - Champlain Navigational Dream all make good headlines for the press but they sure as hell won't sell much. Lake George shore line or Ticonderoga real estate to those people so needed to stimulate our tourist and residential economy.

One scare Dolbeck omitted from his column was on the presence of DDT in lake fish. Dolbeck said that during the late fifties and into the early sixties, notably 1959-1960, many sisco appeared dead on the surface of the lake during the winter. Dolbeck cited the death of other larger fish following the sisco die off. Bass did not die off. He said that because the bass was in hiber-

nation and did not eat the sisco, forage fish in the lake, they were spared from the disease that the siscos carried. The sisco die off and the consequent large fish die off was due in fact, Dolbeck says to a disease in the siscos.

We will all wait for the next "scare" to hit the lake. Perhaps fish and gamblers will be on top of those episodes also.