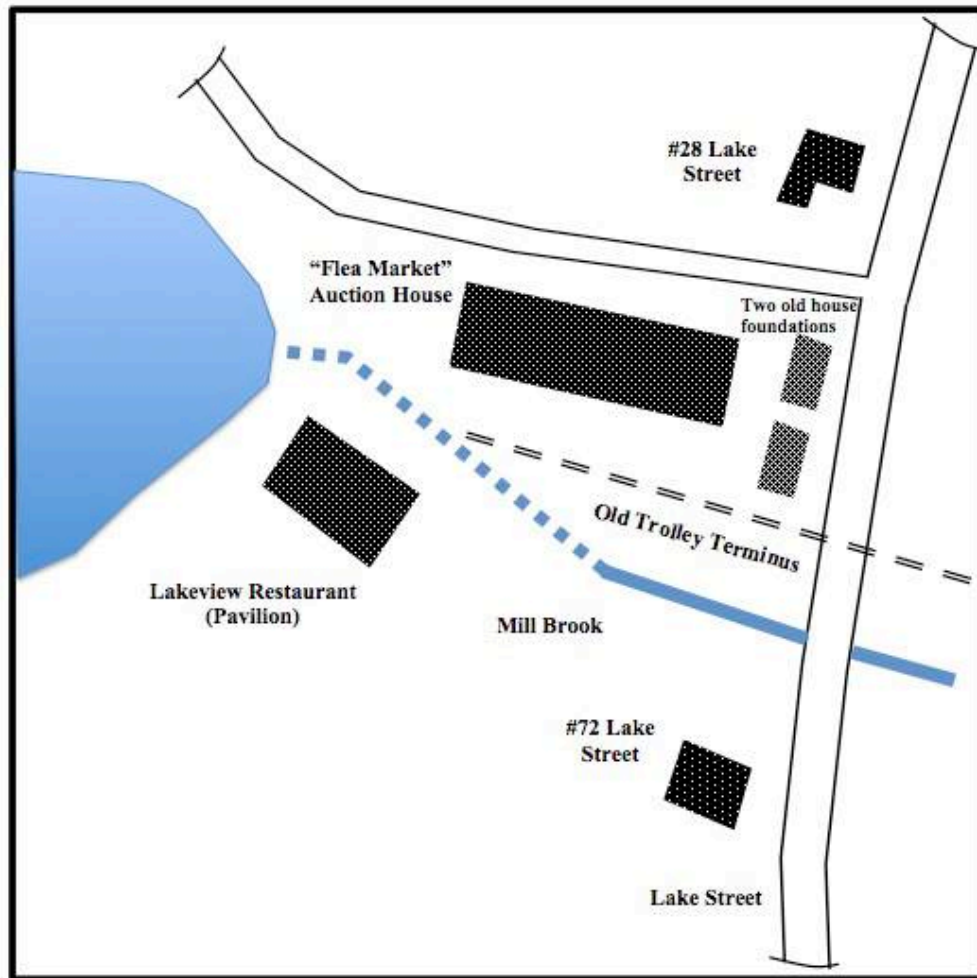


# A History of Lakeside Park, South Coventry, Connecticut

By Bill Jobbagy, July 2018

In the year 1900, the area now encompassed by the Lakeview Restaurant and the auction house on Lake Street was a quiet residential neighborhood with five homes on the west side of the street. The brook flowed between two of them and there was a simple gate house to control the flow of the brook for the mills downstream.

Most the homes were built many years ago by the mill owners whose factories were on the Mill Brook. One or two houses date to the late 1700's. Some were rented to mill employees. Two homes (in front of the auction house) were torn down about 45 years ago. (See adjacent 1868 map)



## The Pavilion (Restaurant)

In 1892 Eugene Tracy (a mill owner) purchased two acres between the cemetery and the brook with a small building on the site. His intentions for the site are not known, but he may have considered a small boat launch for touring. About 1900, the South Coventry Water Supply Company upgraded a crude piping system from the lake that ran south of the brook and continued into the Village on Main Street. The Company began serving several dozen customers in the Village for residential and mill with a gravity-powered water supply.

In 1904, Tracy leased the site to John Wadsworth for \$5 per month excepting a small boat house and a gate house of the water supply company. Wadsworth was engineer and a local resident. He occupied the site for about 6 years. He partnered with Mr. Edgar Brown for a time.

Wadsworth built a two story "pavilion" and purchased a 33' tour boat and built a small dock to board passengers. His pavilion contained a dance hall on the second floor as well as a lunch room and ice cream parlor. His father, Lemuel Wadsworth, and friend Louis Daniels leased the lunch room and dock for a time.



The trolley to downtown Willimantic opened 18 August 1909 and recreational traffic increased markedly in the warm months. The trolley terminus was at Lakeside Park. Hartford Courant- August 1909- Lakeside Park is in a fine grove of chestnut trees and the park has paths laid out to the boat landing. The pavilion is a two-story affair with ice cream parlors and a bowling alley on the first floor and a hall for dancing upstairs. Nearby is a merry-go-round and refreshment stands and lunch counters.

However on 27 August 1909 the Wadsworth pavilion suffered a serious accident where a section of the second floor dance hall collapsed. Fortunately there were no major injuries.



Lakeside Park Entrance and Merry-Go-Round



Trolley Terminus at the Lakeside Park Pavilion, ca 1915



The Pavilion ca 1915

Wadsworth was removed from his lease and Tracy then leased the pavilion in 1910 to Augustus Johnson who was a wholesale confectioner and had a store on Main Street in Willimantic. He tore down the existing pavilion and constructed a new building that was 500 sq. ft. larger and one story instead of two. The dance hall and other features were included in the building and a box ball bowling alley was planned for the future. Johnson also worked with the Connecticut Company (the trolley) to illuminate the park with the electricity used to power the trolleys.

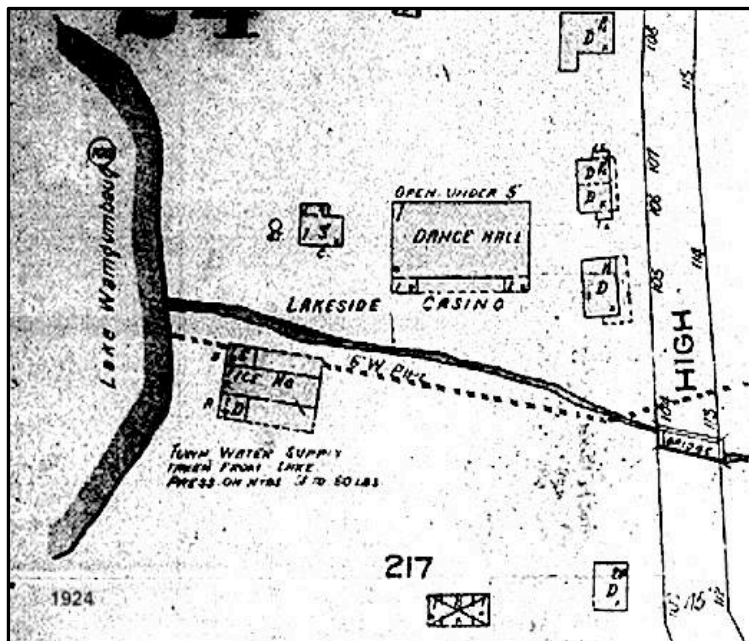
In May or June of 1916, the large dance pavilion and other buildings owned by Augustus Johnson were destroyed by fire. The loss was \$5,000. Mr. Johnson did not rebuild. (Hartford Courant 1916) A new dance pavilion had just been constructed at Wangumbaug Lake, one minute's walk from the trolley car terminus which linked Coventry with Willimantic. This was considered to be excellent news for Willimantic's young people who had regularly visited the old "Casino" dance pavilion in Coventry, which had succumbed to fire the previous summer. Lake Wangumbaug was often referred to in the early years of this century as "Willimantic's summer resort." (The Willimantic Chronicle- Spring 1917)

In 1922 the site was sold by Eugene Tracy to William Wolfe who was a local farmer and was employed for a time at the Connecticut Agricultural College. He built a small barn on the shore of the lake and used it for his boat delivery business. The "pavilion" was used as storage for the ice he harvested from the lake. He lived in the house on Lake Street just south of the Mill Brook. He maintained the ice business for more than 20 years. His wife, Faith, operated an ice cream parlor in the park for a time. He was also Captain of the Home Guard.



Wolfe's Boat House on the Lake with the Pavilion in the rear

Hartford Courant 3 Aug 1922 notes Wm. Wolfe owns a dock near the gate head of the lake which he has for the accommodation of cottagers who use it when they come after ice. Lou Daniels has a 16-passenger power launch used for sightseeing. Daniels has used the dock to load passengers and one time the launch took up all the room needed for the cottagers to back up their boat for ice. Wolfe told Daniels and his boat skipper William Clark to find another landing place. A tussle ensued and Clark was charged with breach of the peace.



1924 Map Of Lakeside Park

Wolfe sold to Anton Lassen in 1944. The “pavilion” was used for a restaurant since 1950 by the Sumara and Bagleys with significant upgrades made several years ago by the present owner of the Lakeview Restaurant.



Lakeside Bar & Grille ca2005



Lakeview Restaurant

## The "Casino" (Roller Rink- Auction House)

In 1909 one of the home owners on Lake Street near the brook sold his house and land to Daniel Killourey. Daniel was 50 years old and was the Chief of Police in Willimantic.

Hartford Courant 30 Aug 1909- Police Lieutenant Daniel Killourey of Willimantic will erect a large pavilion near the lake having a dance hall and trolley waiting room on the first floor and a second floor hall for movies. Traffic on the new trolley has been heavier than expected and another car will be put in operation.



Lakeside Casino ca 1910.

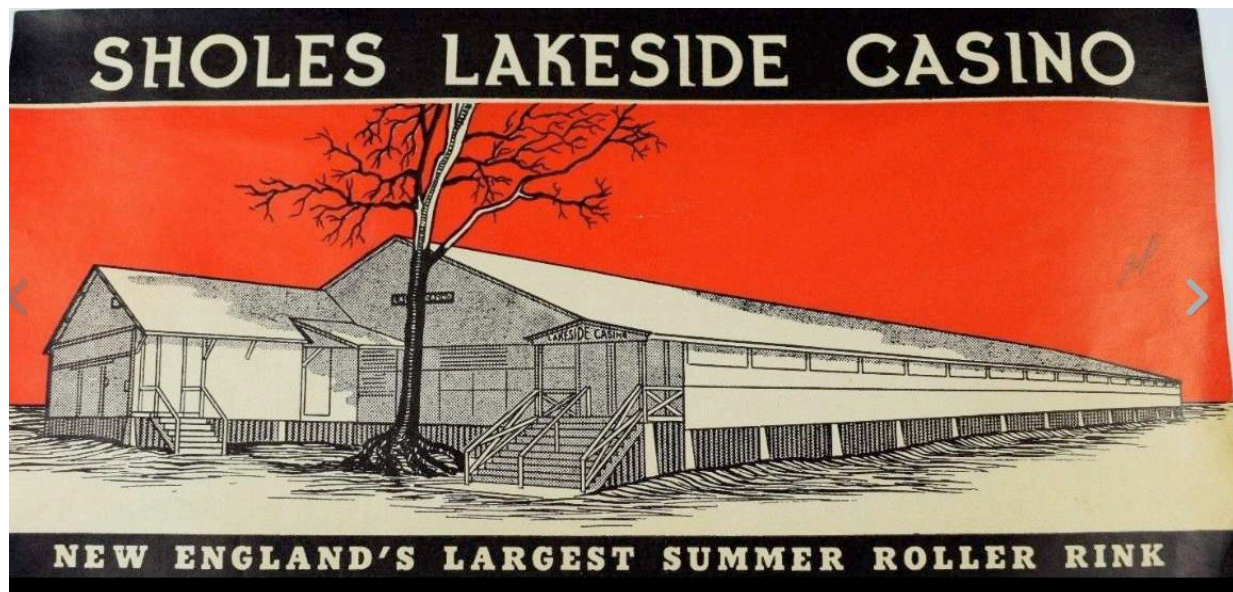
Daniel Killourey died in 1929 and the site became the property of his son John. In 1930 Daniel's estate gave the site to son John, 1936 foreclosed, 1936 to St. John Birch Society, 1938 to Lakeside Inc. who leased to Leo Sholes until 1965. The ownership has changed six times since then. (Lakeside Inc. was incorporated in Hartford in 1938, by Morris and Nellie Sholes of Pawtucket R.I. and Leonard Sholes of Hartford. Leonard came from Providence and one year earlier was involved with leasing a large building on Park Street in Hartford for roller skating and dancing. The Sholes family owned several large roller rinks in southern New England, the largest in Warwick R.I.)

The trolley stopped running in 1926 though there was a bus service to Willimantic for a short time. Automobiles were becoming affordable and popular which contributed to the trolley failure.



Lakeside Area in 1934.


The building was called “The Casino” for many years. The term casino then referred to “a public building for entertainment”. There was no gambling there. From the early 1930’s to WWII the “casino” was a very popular stop in the summer for nationally known bands. A 1938 ad indicates the casino had been enlarged to 10,000 sq. ft.





**IN PERSON**  
Presented by MCA

*Swing and Sway  
with*



**SAMMY KAYE**  
and His Orchestra

At the New  
**LAKESIDE CASINO**  
10,000 Square Feet  
South Coventry, Conn.

**FRIDAY, JULY 1**  
Admission 85c.

6 Miles From Willimantic  
26 Jun 1938

**Dorsey's Orchestra**  
At Lakeside Casino

28 May 1939



**JIMMIE DORSEY.**  
Father Charles Kelley, pastor of St. Mary's Church at South Coventry, Conn. is bringing Jimmy Dorsey and his famous radio and recording orchestra to Lakeside Casino in South Coventry for a one

**TONIGHT** 30 Jul 1938

By popular demand the return of  
**Gene Brodman**  
and his  
Connecticut Swing Collegians (15)  
at the new enlarged  
**Lakeside Casino**  
(10,000 sq. ft.)  
South Coventry, Conn.  
near Willimantic  
Admission 35c

Coming Sat., August 6  
**MAL HALLETT**

Roller Skating Mon., Tues., Thurs.,  
Fri., and Sunday aft. and eve.

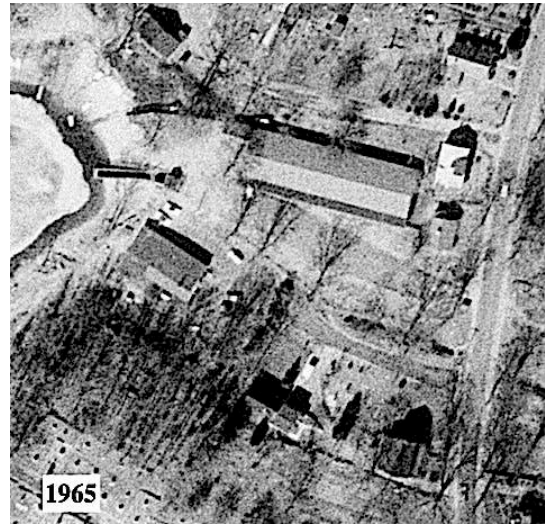
13 Jun 1941

**DANCE**

**LAKESIDE CASINO**  
SOUTH COVENTRY  
SATURDAY, JUNE 14  
**FREDDY MARSH**  
AND HIS ORCHESTRA  
Dancing—9 'til One  
**ROLLER SKATING**  
Every Evening Except Sat.  
Ladies' Night Every Monday



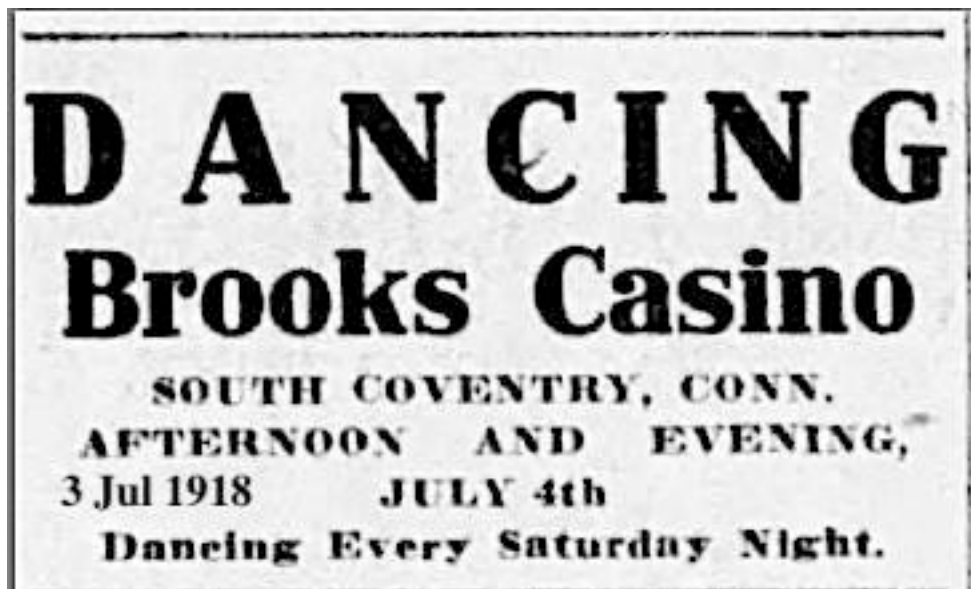
The Ice Cream Shop

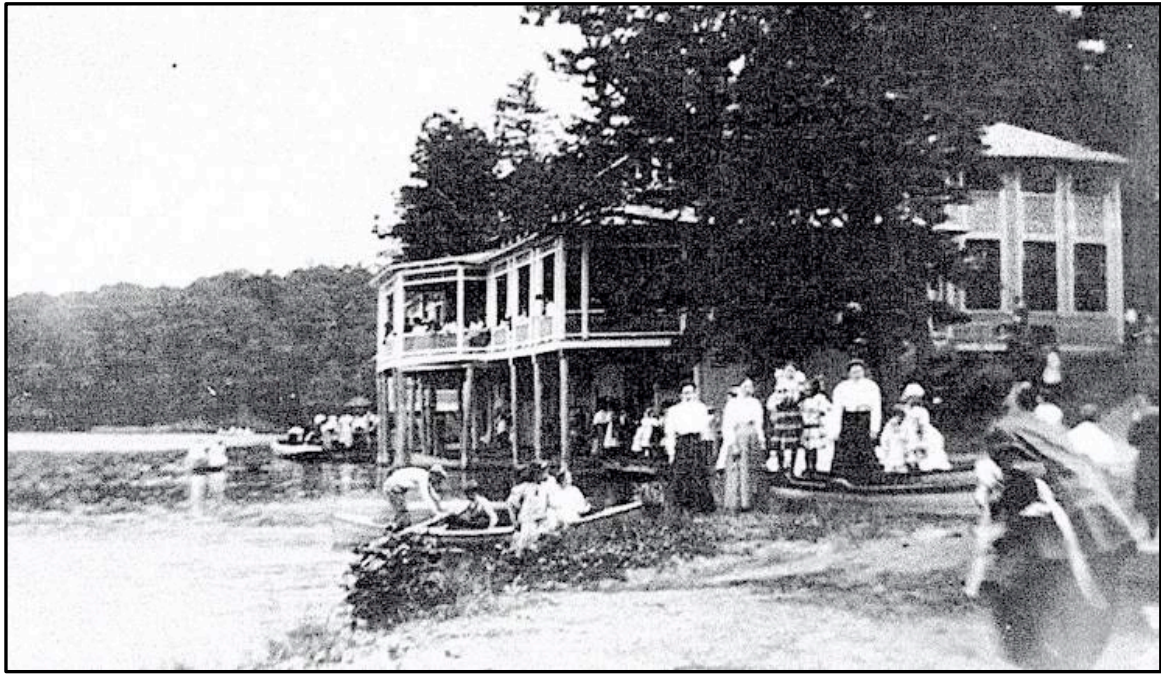


1965 Aerial photo of the Park

## Brooks Casino

Around 1915 George M. Brooks of Tolland, who was a caterer, was operating a restaurant at or near Lakeside Park. In 1917 he bought a tract of land on the shore of the lake several hundred yards northwest of Lakeside Park. He built a dance hall and restaurant on the shore. The dance hall was the scene of several fights in 1917 and 1918 and the sheriff arrested several young men. The "casino was put up for sale in May of 1925, though it operated until the 1930's when the Sholes removed to Florida. The site was sold in 1941.





The Brooks Casino ca1920