Artistic Expression in the Belgrades;

A Preliminary Look at the History of Visual Art, Literature, and Music in the Belgrade Lakes Region of central Maine

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I. Introduction

One of the major components of a comprehensive historical study of the Belgrade region is examining the art related to the seven major lakes, thirteen municipalities and surrounding Maine landscape. Through my investigation of Belgrade artists and their associated artwork, as well as pieces of art influenced by the region, Belgrade artists and pieces of art influenza by this central Maine region, I have compiled an original historical narrative of art affiliated with this central Maine environment.

II. Woodcuts

The woodcutting shown here are from early settlements in Smithfield and illustrate the hardworking life of the short-lived homesteaders. License of ploughing fields, building fences, watering plants, pumping water, building furniture, stoking a fire, and reaping wheat illustrate the laborious workdays experienced by 19th century Mainer’s. This “do it yourself” attitude present in these wood carvings is also apparent in many paintings of the area as the artists look to embody the hard-working culture.

III. Sculptures

The sculptures associated with Belgrade’s Spring Garden speak much of their time and working life in a different location. After the pieces are created in their separate locations, the relevant sculptures like the (interested left) are shipped up to Spring Gallery where they are put on the market during the busy summer months.

IV. Stage Performances

Following the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, stage performances were a vital component of the entertainment scene. In 1963, a new summer recreation spot called Cascade Park was created in the Belgrade region that had theaters doing their chops. It was around this time that the Belgrades were beginning to blossom into a haven for peace-seeking Americans. Visitors were looking to unwind from the stresses of the working world and indulge in a bit of entertainment and leisure time. Cascade Park and its spacious open-air theatre offered exactly that, and went on to become a very successful enterprise for more than three decades.

III. E.B. White

Best known for his popular children stories Charlotte’s Web and Stuart Little, E.B. White occasionally published essays that reflected events of his past. One essay in particular chronicled a visit White made to his ideal boyhood vacation spot: a cottage on Great Pond. Titled “Once More to the Lake,” the essay recounts the feelings and emotions felt by White as he observes his son the lake for the first time, and typifies the life of an average Belgrade summer resident. White explains that his family was “escaping the city heat” during their summer travels to Great Pond. Fishing, swimming, and picking berries were the order of the day, followed by a relaxing evening under the expansive Maine sky and bright stars included in all of these activities was of course family time, a staple in White’s childhood visits and characteristic of many summer residents.

III. Ernest Thompson

Arguably the most famous piece of literature with a direct connection to the Belgrade Lakes region is Ernest Thompson’s play On Golden Pond. While the thematic element of family difficulties moves this play forward, the plethora of references to central Maine was of great interest to me. Based on Thompson’s childhood experiences and memories on Great Pond in the Belgrade region, On Golden Pond references many subjects typical of this picturesque community. Reminiscing about summer camps, picking fresh blueberries, listening to the Loons high-pitch mating call, and fishing off a dock at sunset are all activities present in Thompson’s play that epitomizes life on Great Pond.

IV. New England Music Camp

NEMC, located on the shore of Lake Messalonskee in Smithfield, offers high-quality and intensive musical education for children ages 11-18. Their goal is to not only help young people find joy in making and playing music, but also to “appreciate the splendor of Maine’s woodlands and lakes.” The warm, stimulating, and supportive community environment of the New England Music Camp enables campers to thrive in their specific musical discipline. Portrayed in both Ernest Thompson’s play and E.B. White’s essay, the idea of a tight-knit family of friends or relatives is a major component of life in the Belgrade.