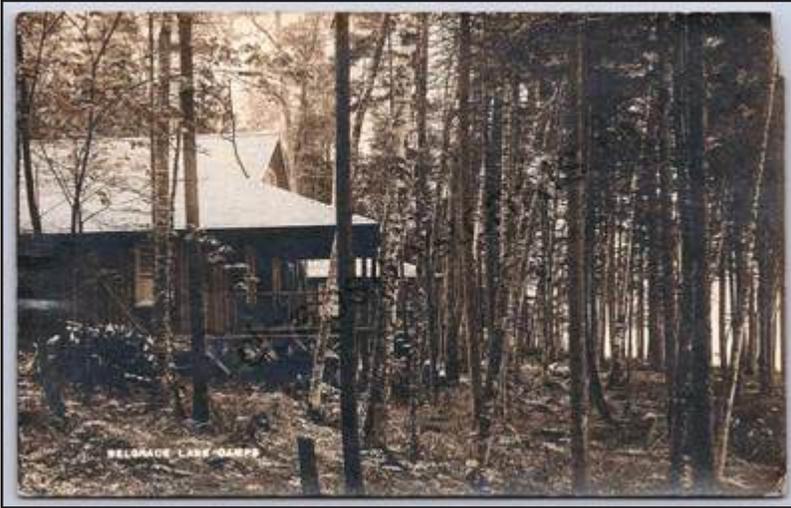


# A Century of Care: The Story Behind the Belgrade Lakes Association

By Chris Raleigh, BLA Board Member



Example of original Belgrade camps.

In the early 1900s, long before lake associations became commonplace, a small group of passionate lake lovers gathered on the shores of Great Pond. They weren't officials or policy experts—just summer residents, fishermen, and neighbors - drawn together by a shared sense of responsibility for the place they called their seasonal home.

With time they had begun to notice subtle changes in the water, the fish, and the land, and they saw a choice: stand by, or step in. They chose action.

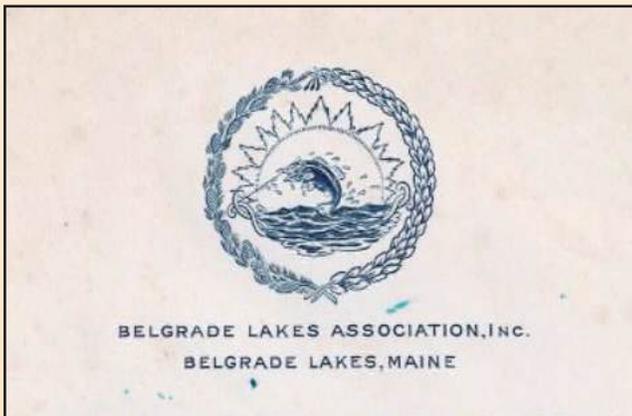
Around 1908, this informal group began meeting to discuss how best to protect

the Belgrade Lakes from the growing pressures of development and recreational use. What started as conversations turned into a collective vision: to ensure the health and beauty of these waters for generations to come.

That vision became official on **July 1, 1919**, when the group incorporated as the **Belgrade Great Pond Association**, now known as the **Belgrade Lakes Association (BLA)**. While many of the founding members hailed from New York City, their hearts were rooted in the Belgrades. They didn't just want to enjoy the lakes - they wanted to preserve them.



Recreation Hall - Belgrade Lake camps.



Original BLA logo c.1909

Leading this early effort were William P. Beaver, the Association's first president, James W. Myer as treasurer, and Robert R. Myer as secretary. Together, they built more than just an organization—they laid the foundation for us today with its community-wide commitment to stewardship.

From the very beginning, the Association's purpose was clearly stated and has stood the test of time. The original charter focused on safeguarding the lakes from pollution, encouraging safe boating and swimming, stocking fish, protecting wildlife, and preserv-

ing the shoreline and surrounding natural beauty. It wasn't about reacting to a specific problem - it was about creating a long-term vision for conservation and community engagement.

That vision quickly gained traction. By the end of its first year, the Association had grown to nearly 70 members - a powerful reflection of the community's support and shared concern. The example set by the Belgrade group soon caught the attention of lake communities across Maine, many of whom reached out for guidance on how to form similar associations of their own.

The Association's 1909 annual meeting, held at the Thwing Brothers Camps on Hoyt's Island, was more than a gathering - it was a moment of growth. Members voted on improvements to the Association's operations, made changes to the membership process, and found ways to keep people informed about evolving fishing laws. These decisions reflected a thoughtful, responsive approach to governance that continues today.

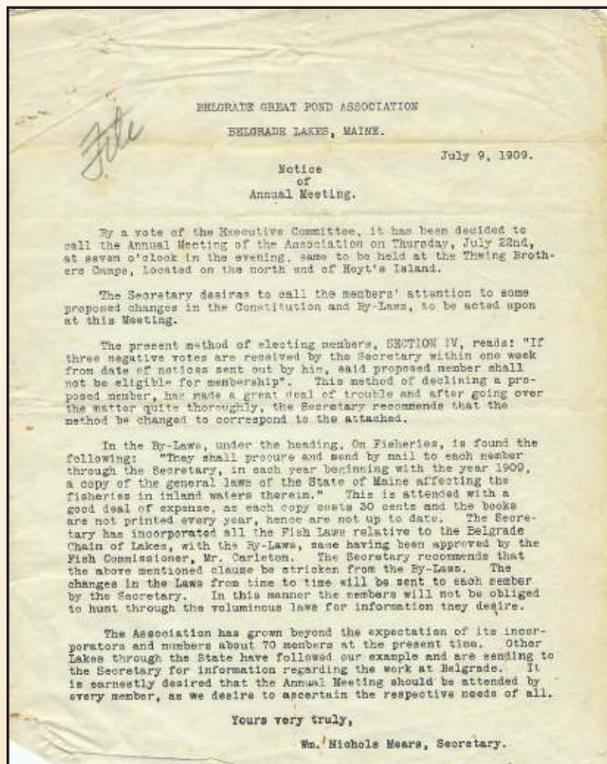
Incorporation in 1919 marked a new chapter. Establishing its headquarters in Rome, the Association formalized its legal standing,

further strengthening its long-term capacity for stewardship. While the

documents filed with the State of Maine reflected the formal language of the era, the purpose behind them was clear and heartfelt: to care for the lakes through civic-minded action and thoughtful leadership.

In the years that followed, the State of Maine recognized the Association's civic mission, exempting it from the reporting requirements typically expected of commercial entities. This acknowledgment affirmed the public service role the Association had come to play in the region.

That commitment didn't stop with the founding generation. Today, many members of the Belgrade Lakes Association are legacies whose families have contributed to lake stewardship for decades. One such example is long-serving Board member and former BLA President Polly Beatie, whose deep ties to the Association span generations. Her father, Wilson Parkhill became secretary-treasurer in 1926 and was either one or both



Annual meeting notice - 1909

when necessary until 1959. He also served as President of the BLA in the 1940s, bringing leadership honed through his 25 years as Headmaster of The Collegiate School, the nation's oldest secondary school, located in New York City. Polly's cousin, Franklin Coe, also served as President in the 1930s and played a key role in guiding the Association through a time of growing change. Coe, a prominent figure in publishing, was the former owner of Town & Country magazine before selling it to William Randolph Hearst, and later managed House Beautiful. Their shared commitment to the lakes helped

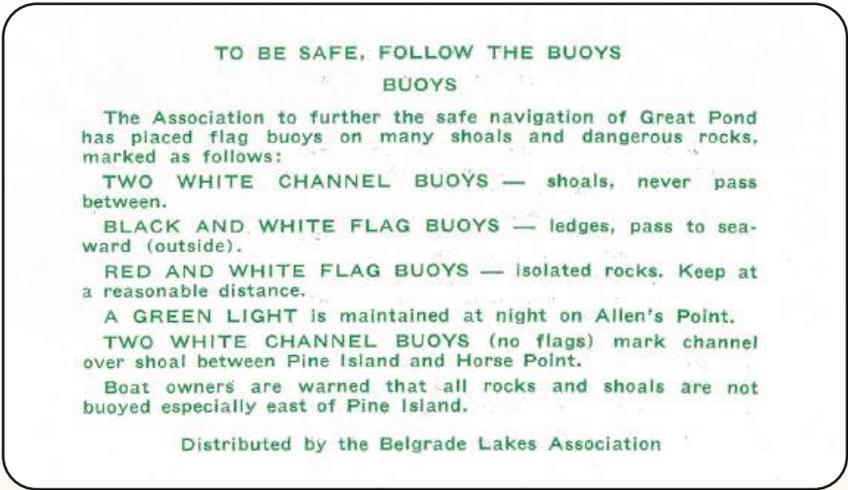


Official 1919 Embossing Stamp

shape the organization's direction and spirit, and their influence continues to be felt today.

More than 100 years later, the current Belgrade Lakes Association continues to carry forward the legacy of those early members with their commitment to community, conservation, and care that still drives the organization's work. Each initiative, each partnership, and each new generation of lake stewards builds on the strong foundation they created.

As we look back, we don't just honor their efforts - we are inspired by them. The challenges may have changed, but the mission remains the same: to protect and preserve the lakes we love for all who come after us.



Early BLA Buoy information card.

**THE BELGRADE**  
Belgrade Lakes Historic, Lakeside, Luxury Hotel  
*Across the street from this location, once stood one of Maine's most beautiful lake resorts.*

The grand hotel, designed by renowned Portland architect John Calvin Stevens, opened in 1900.

At this peaceful lake resort, the affluent, upper-middle class escaped the noise and pollution that plagued larger cities.

With the arrival of the railroad in 1849, Belgrade Lakes (then known as Belgrade Mills) quickly developed into a major tourist destination. Soon, an elegant, four story elm-shingled hotel was built, with a 400-foot veranda facing the lake. The luxurious hotel featured 90 rooms, 63 baths, a large dining hall, electricity in every room, a beauty parlor, and its own telegraph office. The resort also included 4 guest cottages, a nine-hole golf course, a tennis court, and 1,000 feet of shore frontage, complete with a boat house and a diving tower.

*On October 3, 1956, THE BELGRADE burned to the ground in a matter of hours.*

The beautifully manicured "Sunken Garden" was designed with European grandeur.

The 6<sup>th</sup> hole of the golf course and "The Elms" cottage (pictured above) were located right here, on what is now the Village Green.

Brochure cover (1909)

The Belgrade guests enjoyed many summertime activities such as fishing, boating, swimming, golf and tennis.

While sitting on the veranda, hotel guests were rewarded with spectacular views of Long Pond.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BELGRADE HOTEL AND THE HISTORY OF THE AREA, PLEASE VISIT THE BELGRADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.**

Photo of plaque that stands in the Village Green commemorating the Belgrade Hotel that once stood nearby.